



Doctor of Business Administration

The challenge of career progression and work-life balance in consulting business in Germany

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Edinburgh Napier University, for the award of Doctor of Business Administration

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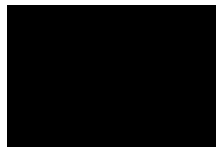
Declaration of authorship

I, Mara Jekosch, declare that this thesis titled, “The challenge of career progression and work-life balance in consulting business in Germany” and the work presented in it are my own. I confirm that:

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- Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed.
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- I have acknowledged all main sources of help.
- Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself.

Date: 10.08.2020

Signed:



'What would life be if we had no courage to attempt anything?'

(Vincent van Gogh)

Abstract

This thesis examines how individuals define and understand work-life balance and career progression in the consulting business sector in Germany. Since this client-focused work environment requires travel and long working weeks, employees face challenges that impact on their personal life and health. The thesis explores, through a series of qualitative interviews, how the research participants attempt to address and cope with work demands and how they seek to achieve a better balance between work and non-work activities (such as children, household, care of parents, hobbies) whilst being able progress in their chosen career.

The wider context of this paper is a triangle of consulting business, career progression and work-life balance. Demographic changes; competition for skilled workers, which is referred to as the 'war for talent', impact organisational success in a competitive business. Organisations need to respond to these changes through work-life practices and a supportive organisational culture if they are to attract and retain professionals. Based on 28 telephone interviews, the data indicates differences in employee perceptions of work-life balance and career progression. While time flexibility and work-life practices are often provided and named as key to managing work and non-work activities, participants describe an unspoken expectation to be present and work longer hours in order to progress up the career ladder. Participants propose ideas that could allow them to progress their career in balance with other non-work responsibilities. For this challenge, personal responsibility plays a central role. This thesis (Doctor of Business Administration) is valuable for employees to reflect on their own work-life balance and career and to adapt the ideas of participants to manage existing challenges. The results can equally be used by organisations to reframe work-life practices and culture to support their employees in better managing their work and non-work lives to retain and attract talent in a competitive business environment.

Key words: Career, work-life balance, consulting business, organisational support, compatibility, career culture, personal responsibility, war for talent.

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List of abbreviations

DBA	Doctor of Business Administration
EY	Ernst & Young
HR	Human Resources
IBM	International Business Machines
IT	Information Technology
PSF	Professional Service Firm
PwC	PricewaterhouseCoopers
TCS	Tata Consulting Services
UK	United Kingdom
WLB	Work-life balance

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Research context

Recent studies have argued about an emergence of professionals' demands for work-life balance (WLB) that questions the established concept of a career (Noury, Gand, & Sardas, 2017). As a consequence of permanent availability, and increases in pressure and intensity at work, the challenges of balancing working life and non-work life have become problematic for employees (Guest, 2002). The resulting imbalance can even lead to health issues (Singh, 2013), and without time to relax and recover, employees' performance is impacted (Meenakshi, Subrahmanyam C. V., & Ravichandran, 2013), which makes WLB an issue for employees and organisations. In addition, changes in demographics and social norms have influenced the way in which employees of the so-called 'generation Y'¹ approach work and careers (Clarke, 2015). For instance, because of longer work hours and the resulting WLB conflicts, employees prefer organisations that align with their work-life preferences (App & Büttgen, 2016). According to Maister (2007), professionals question the sense and value of the career journey. For organisations motivating their employees seems to be much more difficult than it used to be.

Considering the workforce crisis with the foreseeable labour shortage in Germany in 2030 (Strack et al., 2014), organisations must improve their working conditions to retain and attract professionals. According to Baran and Klos (2014), human capital is an organisation's most valuable asset – high-potential employees in particular are twice as valuable for organisations. Therefore, retention of the best professionals is critical for organisations to accomplish their goals (Downs, 2015).

¹ Generational cohorts (one classification): Traditionalist Generation: 1920s to the early 1940s, baby boomer generation: middle 1940s to early 1960s, generation X: middle 1960s to very early 1980s, generation Y: early 1980s to 1994, generation Z: 1995 and later (Martin & Ottemann, 2015).

The context for this research is the consulting sector, which is a subsector of professional service firms (PSFs), wherein further research was suggested to be undertaken (Cohen, 2015; Empson, Muzio, Broschak, & Hinings, 2015; Maister, 2007; von Nordenflycht, 2010). Consulting is a people business that depends on professionals (Richter, Dickmann, & Graubner, 2007), and high salaries attract a large number of qualified graduates (Laura Empson et al., 2015). Consulting careers following the professional path start with the recruitment of junior staff who have the potential to become new leaders (Cohen, 2015). Then, with the progression of their careers, they either receive an offer to become partners or must move out (von Nordenflycht, 2010). The speciality of this sector is the demand of face-to-face interaction to build a client relationship. This requires travel and to be onsite with the client (von Nordenflycht, Malhotra, & Morris, 2015), which leads to the observed conflict between business requirement of travelling to the client and family or other non-work responsibilities.

This thesis focuses on this conflict in the consulting sector with regard to career and WLB. This rather complex setting mirrors the observed phenomenon. The critical issue of whether achieving career goals is possible whilst balancing work and non-work responsibilities (Clarke, 2015) in the consulting sector consequently requires further research attention. Discovering and exploring the underlying causes and mechanism that have led to the observed situation form the integral part of this study.

1.2 Research aim, objectives and questions

The central aim of the major study in business consulting in Germany is to expand the academic knowledge within the industry sector of consulting around WLB and its compatibility with this chosen career. With these results, individuals and organisations can increase their understanding of individual WLB requirements at different life stages, paired with career ambitions and what is desired to bring both together. As a result of this study, practical guidelines for different roles within a consulting organisation are provided that can be used to offer specific WLB practices and to rethink and improve

organisational culture and managerial support for employees. Moreover, the results present the importance of personal responsibility within different life domains and demonstrate how individuals can influence organisational culture and situations in projects, as well as how they can reduce potential conflicts when work and non-work activities interfere with each other.

To achieve these aims, a critical literature review of academic resources is conducted to retrieve themes that underline the problem statement and to derive research questions. Furthermore, a research methodology is selected that helps to close the research gap and answer the research question. Finally, practical guidelines related to WLB and career are developed for different roles within organisations and for individuals.

The research questions from the literature review are:

RQ1: How do employees approach client relationship considering their work-life balance demand?

RQ2: Is there a common understanding of how employees define career?

RQ3: How do employees define and manage work-life balance?

RQ4: How does work-life balance impact career progression?

RQ5: How can organisations support work-life balance while employees progress their chosen career?

1.3 Research methodology

The purpose of this study is to conduct qualitative research to gather in-depth experiences and ideas from participants in the consulting sector. This research considered a critical realist philosophy approach, intending to understand the underlying causes of the compatibility of WLB and one's chosen career in the consulting business. The data of 28 semi-structured telephone interviews were transcribed, supported by the *transcribe* software

and analysed using the *MAXQDA* software. Despite the difficulty of conducting research within the consulting sector, according to Kriegesmann and Striewe (2009), the researcher of this study found volunteers. Various studies have suggested that the differences between face-to-face and telephone interviews are not as great as feared (Bryman, 2016). This, apart from the required flexibility for scheduling and rescheduling the interviews, was the crucial argument in the decision to opt for telephone interviews.

Furthermore, the member checking method was used to check the reasonability of the data analysis. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have stated that member check is an ideal way in which to validate a qualitative study. This approach was thus used to provide an indication of the appropriateness of the analysed results. The drafted findings chapter was sent to randomly selected participants who were asked to review and comment on the analysed data, which are presented at the end of the analysis chapter of this study.

1.4 Significance of the study

The aim of the study is to expand on previous research results and provide practical implications. This study is important for various reasons. First, it allows for an increased understanding of how employees reflect on and manage their WLB challenges. The related results were used to create guidelines for organisations to develop targeted interventions aimed at supporting employees to reach their critical goal of bringing professional and private life together. Second, all individuals who are faced with a conflict of work and non-work tasks, can benefit from the findings of this study and explore different ideas for WLB management, understand how they can influence organisational culture and learn about their personal responsibility. Third, as mutual responsibilities exist within an employee-employer relationship, everyone is asked to reflect on the status quo and, if required, improve communication, exchange experiences and influence a culture that allows one to make use of WLB measurements without negative consequences. Fourth, this study of the consulting sector can be used by organisations of other sectors and adapted accordingly.

1.5 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework, illustrated in Figure 1, presents the different themes and key words that provide the theoretical context of this study.

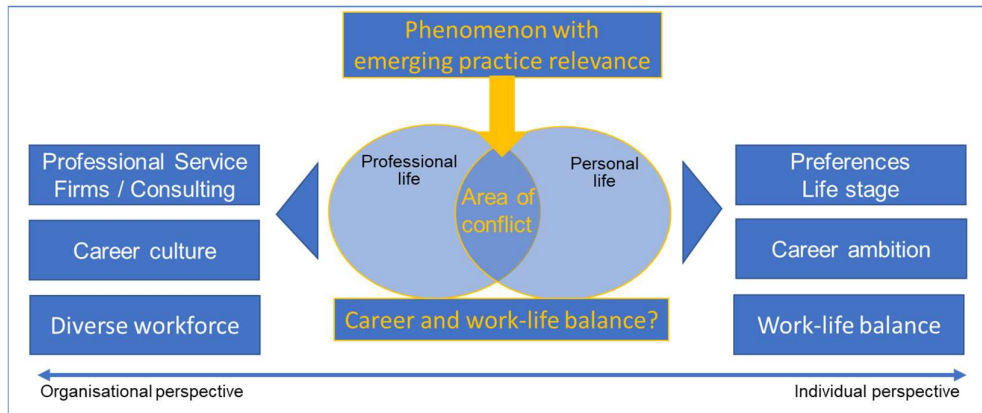


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

The elements of the framework are explained on a high level below.

Phenomenon. There is an increasing demand by employees to progress the chosen career in a competitive working environment whilst balancing work and non-work responsibilities. Otherwise employees may face exhaustion and an end to their career. As employer, consultancies depend on high skilled employees and have to react to retain and win professionals.

Professional service firms / consulting. Is an industry sector that has a world-wide economic contribution. Organisations offer a knowledge intensive-service to their clients.

Career Culture. Consulting has a defined career culture, often called up or out. Within a competitive working environment professional can advance their career to the partner level, receiving recognition and above average salaries. Without high performance, professional may be asked to leave the company.

Diverse workforce. Represents the different employees of an organisation. With such a variety of professionals, comes a variety of individual preferences into an organisation.

Preferences / life stage. Depending on the life stage and personal circumstances, employees focus on different preferences for their professional life and their private life.

Career ambition. Employees have different ideas and focus for their career. While career may be for one the continuous advancement, career for others may be a duty to receive a salary.

Work-life balance. Has various definitions in the literature. Especially what employees understand by balance varies and what they require to reach a balance between working life and non-working life differs.

Professional life. Presents the working life domain of an employee.

Personal life. Presents the private life domain (without working tasks).

Area of conflict. Explains the potential interference of working tasks with non-working task or in other words, the potential interference of personal life with professional life. When appointments of both domains overlap, a decision of prioritisation is required, or when one domain is focused, it impacts the other domain.

The conceptual framework includes a horizontal scale, which introduces the two perspectives.

Organisational perspective. Represents the view from the consulting organisation. This includes the sector context, challenges consultancies are faced with, requirements of a diverse workforce, defined career paths, career culture in consulting.

Individual perspective. Represents the focus of the employees in the consulting sector. This includes their individual preferences, their career ambitions, their understanding of WLB and what they request from organisations to support them to manage WLB challenges while progressing the chosen career.

1.6 Structure of the remainder of the study

Figure 1 presented the themes and key words for the remainder of the study. The second chapter focuses on the literature review, critically reviewing previous study findings related to the themes of consulting, career and WLB and discussing the theoretical background for this study. This concludes the analysis of the literature gaps, with the aim of partially filling them as part of the study results and derived research questions.

Chapter 3 explains the research methodology, including the research philosophy and the research design chosen for this study. This is followed by the data analysis that will explore the lived experiences of the employees in the consulting sector. These results are presented in chapter 4.

Thereafter, the findings are discussed in chapter 5, and the research questions are answered, with practical guidelines for both employees and organisations. The last chapter presents the conclusion, contribution to knowledge and practice, limitations of the study and recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2. Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This introduction contains a concise statement of the context of the research investigation and the scope of academic sources.

The literature review is organised around three major themes. First, professional service firms –specifically in the consulting sector– are described. Second, different views on the concept of a career are explored. This study explores what researchers have assumed about career definition, career patterns and career practices in the consulting sector. Third, the various ways in which WLB has been characterised in prior research are examined. Furthermore, an explanation is provided for how this theme gained the attention of researchers.

The focus of the literature review is on understanding conflict in the triangle of the consulting sector, career and WLB. This setting mirrors the complexity of the research context, intending to explore the potential underlying causes of the observed conflicts in WLB management while progressing one's chosen career in the consulting sector. The study attempts to create a link between these three themes, covering both organisational and individual perspectives on this topic.

This chapter concludes with a summary wherein critical gaps in knowledge are identified, leading to the derived research questions.

In the review, literature from different decades were related to career theory and WLB theory in various industries. In addition, the theme of PSFs, especially consulting, was part of the review. Furthermore, the focus for the integral part was on studies related to all three themes; however, the review of the literature included different studies of WLB, work-life conflict, work-life practices, work-life fit, career progression, consulting careers and the management of PSFs. Using the above-listed search terms, the following online library catalogues were searched: ProQuest, Sage Journals, Science Direct

and Wiley. In addition, the Library of Napier Edinburgh University, a local library in Lillienthal and Google Scholar were used to find and select articles for the literature review.

Sources for this review vary from ABI/INFORMGlobal with peer-reviewed articles, books of often-cited authors and static data of research companies to the content of web pages of PSFs. While some articles focused solely on a literature review and discussion, most selected articles included qualitative and/or quantitative methods to collect, analyse and discuss data.

The literature research was not limited to a specific period. Especially given the early original emergence of these topics and their development over years, academic literature from the 1970s onwards was reviewed. While digitalisation in recent decades has offered new opportunities for the way of working and for WLB practices with, for instance, remote work, most of the reviewed literature has focused on the current decade because this topic is of increasing interest in the literature.

2.2 Consulting

2.2.1 Professional service firms – broader context

The first theme of the literature review is consulting in the broader context of PSFs. This section provides the definition of a professional service and its importance for the economy. Then, the focus is narrowed to one subsector of PSFs, namely, consulting, with a discussion of the challenges in this sector and the emerging diverse workforce requirements that consulting organisations must deal with.

Organisations with professionals have been the subject of research since the 1960s (von Nordenflycht, 2010); however, specific research on PSFs has remained in the shadow of organisational research. Still, there is little agreement in research about the exact definition of a professional service (Laura Empson et al., 2015).

Professional service firms are companies in the tertiary sector. Their services require contact between the provider and the consumer. Service as a term includes a wide range of providers such as cleaning, law, auditing and consulting firms (Kaiser, Ringlstetter, Reindl, & Stolz, 2010). Professional service firms are extreme examples of knowledge intensity and models for an increasingly knowledge-based economy (von Nordenflycht, 2010). For this, PSFs employ highly skilled professionals who, with the specific knowledge, support clients with their complex client problems (Empson, 2007; Fu, Flood, Bosak, Morris, & O'Regan, 2013).

Professional service firms – importance to economics

In terms of revenue, the PSF sector can be compared with the global commercial banking sector. This sector has demonstrated constant growth and emerged as a significant sector in the global economy (Laura Empson et al., 2015). In 1997, seven subsectors of PSFs generated 75% of the sector's turnover: auditing companies, corporate law firms, consulting firms, recruitment agencies, investment banks, communications agencies and market research companies (Kaiser & Ringlstetter, 2011). In 2013, considering accountancy, management consulting, legal, architectural services, engineering services and advertising, this sector employed 18 million people and generated US\$2.5 trillion. Taking the UK as an example, 12% of available employees were employed in PSFs (Laura Empson et al., 2015). In 2016, nearly 2.2 million employees worked in the UK in financial services and PSFs (legal services, accounting services, management consultancy). The PSF sector contributes significantly to the UK's economic output (8%) with productive and valuable jobs in the workplace. This has contributed to improve the standard of living (Bardala & Maslakovic, 2016).

Despite the economic meaning of PSFs, there is a lack of aggregated data available for them. One reason is the little agreement in research about the exact definition of this sector. Many PSFs are not forced to disclose financial information (Laura Empson et al., 2015). Therefore, a comparison on other statistics is difficult.

Professional service firms – client relationships

Broschak (2015) has mentioned the modest research on client relationships, and he has emphasised the importance of client relationships for PSFs as strategic assets. Moreover, he states that client relationship is critical for the performance of PSFs. His research would have been even more relevant if he had explored the way in which consultants approach client relationships.

Professional service firms – economic goals

The management of a PSF is a balance between the requirements of the clients, demand of the workforce and organisational economic goals (Maister, 2007). Here, utilisation is a key performance indicator; it refers to the average chargeability of employees, which most firms appropriately and carefully monitor. This leads to revenue from invoices billed to the client (Maister, 2007). As contracts do not last forever, obtaining new signings with new businesses, new clients and new projects is important (James, 2017). Growth over years is driven by the need to guarantee high partner profit. Without this expansion, a lot of spirit in this profession will get lost, and impact the motivation (Maister, 2007). Apart from this, many PFSs focus on short-term profitability instead of increasing the entire profit potential of the organisation. Furthermore, some short-run elements are overmanaged, and many long-run issues are undermanaged. Future profitability depends on methods of measuring, reporting and managing needs while considering both short- and long-term facts (Maister, 2007).

The comprehension of these economic goals, the importance for the economy and constant growth rates conciliates a first thought regarding the pressure to succeed in this sector, which in turn impacts the pressure and expectation of performance on consultants who are employed in PSFs.

2.2.2 Definition of the consulting sector

This study does not focus on the entire PSF sector but was narrowed down to the segment of consulting. Nevertheless, recent changes within this sector were considered, such as the Big Four accounting companies, which

were originally more related to accounting than to consulting. For some years, these Big Four (Deloitte, PwC, Ernst & Young [EY] and KPMG) expanded their consulting divisions and profited from the boom in consulting. Moreover, Deloitte and PwC had larger revenues in those divisions than in their original accounting enterprise divisions (Froendhoff, 2018). These enterprise parts were thus included in this study.

Consulting – definition

Research in the consulting sector is of increasing interest (Kaiser et al., 2010). The consulting industry is a particularly attractive field for researchers with an interest in human resource management. Consulting, similarly to any professional service, is a working environment of interacting professionals. Thus, thriving consulting firms depend on the way how their employees are managed (Richter et al., 2007).

Consulting can be associated with advisory services. Over 200 diverse consulting areas exist because of various combinations of expertise and sectors (Consultancy.eu, 2019). Different definitions of consultancy or consulting can be found in the literature. Kubr (2002), an often-cited author for consulting studies, defines two approaches for consulting: first, a functional view of consulting and second, consulting as a professional service and its characteristics. Mas-Machuca & Martínez Costa (2012) declare knowledge and the use of knowledge as competitive advantage and define consulting companies as knowledge-intensive enterprises with knowledge as results of their professional services. On this account, consultants not only define solutions for their clients but improve organisational effectiveness (Turner, 1982) and can be provided by people in various positions (Kubr, 2002). Consulting work is project-related, and it includes several project phases. Furthermore, consulting firms require face-to-face interaction to build a client relationship. Depending on the knowledge of the client, the expectation and the degree of onsite consultation (hand-holding) are defined (von Nodenflycht et al., 2015).

Consulting – economics

As organisations find themselves in the middle of a digital and profound change, and they tend to obtain support from consulting companies to manage the resulting challenges. With the increasing demand of consulting support, the revenue in this sector has seen constant growth in recent years (BDU E.V., 2017).

Between 2011 and 2016, the global consulting market demonstrated growth with a total turnover of \$205 billion in 2011 to over \$250 billion in 2016. As a result, global consulting contributes to a large extent to the professional services industry (Consultancy.uk, 2019).

As mentioned above, the comparison of financial data in this sector seems difficult. For instance, The Statistics Portal (2016b) reported that for 2016, the worldwide consulting sector generated a revenue of US\$133 billion. However, another source reported the following data for 2018 globally, which, in comparison to the previous number, means more than doubling the revenue: Plunkett Research (2019) published revenue of 2018 as \$491 billion for global consulting industries, with a further growth of \$506 billion expected for 2019.

Despite the differences in numbers, which made their comparison difficult, all sources had in common the growth in this sector as well as the importance of consulting for the economy.

Consulting – segments

In the UK, consulting is divided into five segments (Consultancy.uk, 2019), as presented in Figure 2.

	Technology	HR	Financial Advisory	Operations	Strategy
Segment	20%	12%	28%	28%	12%

Figure 2: Segments of consulting in the UK

In contrast, following the definition of The Statistics Portal (2016b), management consulting consists of strategy, HR and operations. This simplifies the presentation of the consulting segments and limits them to information technology (IT), financial advisory and management consulting. These different enterprises offer a variety of services to support their clients and can be characterised as follows.

First, IT consultancies offer a service that advises their clients on the selection, implementation and maintenance of their technology in alignment of their business or process strategies. (Gartner®, 2017). Major technology companies are Accenture, IBM, T-Systems, Capgemini and NTT Data (Lünendonk, 2017). Furthermore, the technology consulting market reported revenue of US\$48 million worldwide in 2016 (The Statistics Portal, 2016). The top 10 IT consulting companies in Germany (Lünendonk, 2017) were defined as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Top 10 IT consulting companies in Germany

Ranking	Organisations	Revenue in Germany in Mio Euro	
		2016	2015
1	Accenture GmbH, Kronberg	1.750,0	1.550,0
2	IBM Global Business Services, Ehningen	1.380,0	1.380,0
3	T-Systems International GmbH, Frankfurt am Main	1.300,0	1.175,0
4	Capgemini, Berlin	795,0	700,0
5	NTT Data, Bielefeld/München	649,9	517,3
6	Atos IT Solutions and Services GmbH, München	615,0	590,0
7	msg systems AG, Ismaning	566,7	492,7
8	Arvato Systems GmbH, Gütersloh	379,4	373,1
9	Allgeier SE, München	370,0	343,8
10	Hewlett Packard Enterprise, Böblingen	360,0	350,0

Second, the definition of financial advisory leads to the big four accounting firms: Deloitte, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), KPMG, and Ernst & Young (EY). These four organisations represent the worldwide largest PSFs and undertake audits of firms in the public and private sector in the entire world. (Corporate Finance Institute®, 2017). Financial data of those four firms in

2016 were reported as follows in Table 2 (Corporate Finance Institute®, 2017):

Table 2: Financial data of the Big Four

Firm	Revenue in billion \$	Employees	Headquarters
Deloitte	36,8	244.400	USA
PwC	35,9	223.468	UK
EY	29,6	231.000	UK
KPMG	25,9	188.982	The Netherlands

Third, management consultancy supports and enables organisations to reach their business goals. This is done by advising organisations on problem solutions, opportunity identification, learning processes and change management (Kubr, 2002). Major strategy or management consulting companies are Accenture, Deloitte, KPMG, McKinsey, PricewaterhouseCoopers and Willis Towers Watson (Lünendonk, 2017). The global revenue in the management consulting market reached US\$132.6 billion in 2016. Moreover, according to BDU E.V. (2017), the management consulting firm market in Germany is worth over EUR 30 billion.

2.2.3 Challenges in consulting

This section attempts to critically identify and explain key challenges and issues for consulting beyond the simple definition.

The digitalisation, the influence of worldwide networks, concurrent communication and expanding market interactions have forced companies to engage with professional advisors to cover the gap between established processes and changes in the business environment. The market growth and transformation of the consulting sector in Germany have led to the belief that an increase of the knowledge intensity results in a larger relevance of the consulting business (Dötsch, 2016).

Additionally, consulting organisations faced the separation of the consulting sector into two fragments: a cheap commodity business and a high-value consulting business. Therefore, business models were required to address

both fragments for those organisations' clients, which challenged their pricing and brand architecture (Consultancy.uk, 2019).

James (2017) defines major challenges in consulting businesses, such as generating new business, retaining talent, being innovative, networking and catering to new skillsets (James, 2017). Furthermore, since a group of McKinsey consultants created the phrase 'War for Talent' in 1997 (Michaels, Handfield-Jones, & Axelrod, 2001), 'talent management' as a topic has received attention in the business world (Kalaiselvan & Naachimuthu, 2016). This can be linked the challenge of retaining talent and the turnover of IT professionals (James, 2017). Recommendations were provided to retain employees by studies. Nevertheless, the turnover of information technology professionals endures to be a problem. Thus, the demand for additional research on technology employees' turnover was stated by many (Lo, 2015).

These challenges, especially the need for professionals, are addressed in the next section, 2.2.4. In addition to the organisational perspective, this section explores the individual perspective, with the aim of gaining a broader understanding of the workforce requirements and trends that consulting organisations should consider attracting and retaining professionals.

2.2.4 Diverse workforce requirements

Diversity considers differences in age, race, religion, profession, sexual orientation, geographic origin, lifestyle, position and any other difference. Diversity management attempts to support the continued development of a diverse workforce to achieve maximum productivity. This includes creating a culture where all employees can be effective. Top management play an essential role in establishing workplace diversity as a company, aligned with business strategy (Sharma, 2016).

Why workforce diversity matters for organisations

Literature reveals the reasons for and value of workforce diversity. Research has demonstrated that such diversity might lead to opportunities not

achievable with a traditional employee mix (Hall & Parker, 1993). Study results in this area showed that organisations are aware of the advantages of workforce diversity (D'Netto & Sohal, 1999), such as employees with a range of backgrounds and experiences bringing a greater understanding of customers' points of view (Sharma, 2016). Other benefits are the enhancement of employee and organisational performance (D'Netto & Sohal, 1999) and the potential of productivity improvements with collaboration and teamwork when employees are comfortable expressing their opinions (Sharma, 2016). Furthermore, managing generational diversity by recognising different values, expectations and preferences can close gaps among employees of different races, gender, religions, colour or any other characteristic (Wood, 2005). These different backgrounds, experiences and skills lead to greater innovation and creativity (Sharma, 2016). Moreover, designing a workplace that enables communication and knowledge transfer between different generations (Bennett, Pitt, & Price, 2012) can enable a common learning from the past and preparation to create a better future (Wood, 2005). Finally, organisations must maintain a focus on best candidates, but with a wider and more heterogeneous pool (Graubner & Richter, 2003), to reap the benefits of diversity from this larger talent pool (Sharma, 2016).

Feminisation of the labour force

The traditional family structure consisted of a housewife, who took care of two to three children and the household, and a working single-earner husband. Men could concentrate on their jobs, which fit the defined career structures that assumed full dedication to work responsibilities (Burke, 1997). The rise of women in the workplace began in the 1960s and increased over the years; these 'working women' have influenced the way in which people work and live (Alter, 1982). New family structures consequently arose, while traditional family structures declined. Women with children became part of the workforce; however, organisations did not consider the implications on careers, family and work (Kanter, 1977). Furthermore, while the pioneering generation of women in leadership remained single and childless, women began to seek to attain both a personal life and a career

(Burke, 1997). A previous research discussion about whether having a family impacts careers came to the following preliminary answers: yes for women and no for men. As organisations expect full effort and commitment, women with children are less able to meet the requested dedication to the job. This creates a self-fulfilling perception that women have lower commitment and career aspirations (Burke, 1997).

Despite the increasing number of educated female professionals, they must often choose between a career and a family (Khallash & Kruse, 2012). The underrepresentation of women in top jobs may be because of their higher requests for WLB (Catherine Hakim, 2006) or because women view their career achievements as a journey of personal development with interesting work and WLB than as a means of obtaining a salary and status (Dries, Pepermans, & Kerpel, 2008). Other theorists have 'highlighted the structural barriers, which either exclude women or position them in strata or segments characterized by inferior rewards and status' (Sommerlad & Ashley, 2015).

Many professions in many countries achieve similar female and male entry rates. However, statistics indicate that women are assigned to lower job roles (Sommerlad & Ashley, 2015). While organisations are defining WLB for females in the consulting sector, the established WLB practices are still not sufficient, with the consequence that there is an opportunity to increase recognition and utilisation of highly qualified female consultants in the consulting business (Nissen & Termer, 2014). Moreover, improvements to the facilities that support women to participate in the workforce are required (Khallash & Kruse, 2012). This has been echoed by other researchers calling for further investigation to rework inequalities in this sector (Sommerlad & Ashley, 2015).

Generational diversity

Many authors have recommended research into generational diversity (Bennett et al., 2012; Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Dixon, Mercado, Knowles, Knowledge, & Generation, 2013; Knouse, 2011; Sharma, 2016; Wood,

2005). Research has labelled generations according to their attitude of work (Employee Benefits, 2017). However, these labels and the timeframe per generation cohort differ among authors. For instance, Cennamo & Gardner (2008) investigated the differentiation of employment values, fulfilment at work and the emotional dedication for an organisation for three generational cohorts in the workplace (baby boomers: 1946–1961, generation X: 1962–1979 and generation Y: 1980–2000).

According to the results of that study, values are significant for the guidance of behaviour and to increase the working motivation. Furthermore, values of an organisation should meet the needs of different employees. While the study proposed that the generational variety should not be generalised (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008), other researchers have found that different generational workplace values lead to attitudinal workplace preferences and an intention to join and stay within an organisation. Moreover, reward practices are critical to attract and retain the four above-mentioned generational groups (Martin & Ottemann, 2015). The authors' detailed literature review has offered a strategic bridge between workforce generations such as the traditionalist generation from the 1920s to the early 1940s, the baby boomer generation from the mid-1940s to the early 1960s, generation X from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s, generation Y from the early 1980s to 1994 and generation Z from 1995 onwards (Martin & Ottemann, 2015). These generations are explained in more detail next.

Taking the results of Baran and Klos (2014) into account, the need for generational specific workforce management exists. They have stated that there is an increasing awareness of the significance of human capital in the knowledge-based economy, and the successful management of organisational workforces requires development of their skills and use of their intellectual capabilities. Thus, there is a need to recognise that every human is an individual being, and this statement should initiate developing and improving human resource management models.

The practical implication of greater diversity in this sector is the attainment of business benefits by its adoption to enter new markets, improve management skills and increase problem-solving capabilities (Wilkins, 2007). According to Kaiser et al. (2010), no studies were published exploring the impact of WLB initiatives on WLB conflict in the consulting sector, even though the compatibility of work and non-work activities is problematic in this industry. Their empirical study includes the survey responses of 275 consultants in Germany. Results indicate a positive influence of WLB initiatives on the consulting sector. The use of those initiatives is strongly related to the direct manager and can impact one's personal career path (Kaiser et al., 2010).

With a broader understanding of consulting, embedded in the sector of PSFs, and the challenges in attracting and retaining professionals in a competitive environment, the subsequent section 2.3 explores the second major theme: career. Linking career and consulting will then lead to the argument of why WLB in this industry requires attention in academic research and practice.

2.3 Career

2.3.1 Definition of career

The term career can be understood as transitional, and it can be marked out as a continuous series of jobs along a defined path within an organisational boundary (Sun & Wang, 2011). On contrast, career success can be defined as the accumulation of advancements arising from work experiences (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999).

Hall (2002) has provided four different definitions of career. The first is career advancement, involving vertical moves in organisational hierarchies. The second is career as a profession, which includes all jobs that have a defined upwards career trajectory but excludes jobs where this is not the case. The third definition refers to career as a life sequence, including everyone who is employed, with a neutral view on careers. The fourth definition

of career is a life-long order of job-task experiences, with an individual, subjective view on career definition.

New forms of careers have emerged in the career literature (Sun & Wang, 2011). In the past four decades, career studies have been conducted and discussed. Frequent cited authors and their concepts are presented in Table 3. For instance, Hall (1976) has described human capacities and a rethinking of values. Kanter (1989) has proposed three career forms: bureaucratic, professional and entrepreneurial, Cliff Hakim (1994) has described the self-employed attitude, while Arthur & Rousseau (1996) have introduced the term 'boundaryless career'. With the Kaleidoscope career (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005) and dual career (Clarke, 2015), two additional approaches have been presented on career in the last two decades.

Table 3: Career studies

Author	Title	Year
Hall	Careers in organizations	1976
Arthur, Hall, Lawrence	Handbook of Career Theory	1989
Hakim	We are all self-employed	1994
Arthur, Rousseau	The boundaryless career – A new employment principle for a new organisational era	1996
Hall	Careers In and Out of Organizations	2002
Arthur, Khapova, Wilderom	Career success in a boundaryless career world	2005
Mainiero and Sullivan	Kaleidoscope Careers	2005
Cohen	Interplay of professional, bureaucratic, and entrepreneurial career forms in professional service firms	2015
Clarke	Dual careers: the new norm for Gen Y professionals?	2015

For a broader understanding of existing career patterns, the following section 2.3.2 presents further details of career patterns, explored during the literature review.

2.3.2 Career patterns

Bureaucratic, professional and entrepreneurial forms

Kanter (1989) has stated building a career can take three forms: a bureaucratic form, a professional form and an entrepreneurial form. Mixed career patterns as combinations of these three may exist. The bureaucratic form is defined as career progression up the hierarchy, with changing roles and

titles and seeking for higher ranks. Furthermore, while the professional career form is related to skill and valued knowledge, which determine status, the entrepreneurial career form can be understood as growth 'through the creation of new value or new organizational capacity' (Kanter, 1989, p516).

Boundaryless careers

Published in 1989, Arthur and Rousseau gained academic attention with their employment principle for a new organisational era. Their so called boundaryless career is defined as one career that is no longer constrained by organisational boundaries. With technical or general competencies that are transferable, people move between firms and progress their careers (Gunz, Evans, & Jalland, 2000).

The existing view on a career as continuous employment with an organisational career movement is increasingly changing to a more dynamic form of employment (Fletcher & Bailyn, 1996). As a result, the term 'boundaryless career' has emerged in the literature and is reflected in multiple career studies; however, it is discussed controversially. In a critical review by Gunz et al. (2000), the theory of a boundaryless career was relativised. Their review stated that career boundaries became more complex rather than are careers absolutely boundaryless. Guan, Arthur, Khapova, Hall and Lord (2019) have consolidated research results about boundarylessness and its implications on career success. They have concluded that boundaryless careers may have positive and negative impacts on personal career success, which is influenced by different factors.

Self-employed careers

A different perspective on career was introduced by (Cliff Hakim, 1994). He presented the new social contract, making the known employee-employer contract obsolete. With this the responsibility for employability moved from the employer to the employee. In return organisations have to offer interesting work within a culture of freedom and more self-control and training.

Cliff Hakim (1994) states that an organisation is not responsible for the employee. And employees are required to organise their lives. While organisations changed, he requests that employees have to adapt as well.

Dual careers vs. traditional couple careers

Recent demographic changes have led to dual-income households, which have changed the traditional career model of men and women across all generations. Hence, the dual career pattern is becoming the new norm (Clarke, 2015). This leads to question the differences in the career aspirations of the existing workforce generations.

Individual demands for WLB are emerging from professionals, and they are challenging traditional forms of careers (Noury et al., 2017). Dual-career couples commit to the constraints and limitations of career and family responsibilities but are willing to change career paths or employers to achieve job and life satisfaction. To retain professionals, organisations must thus change their structures and culture to enable dual-career couples to manage WLB effectively. Career patterns are less dominated by gender but related to employment values and splitted accountabilities for family tasks, and a new career pattern is thus evolving. Many authors have suggested that careers will converge, as couples will have to manage career and family responsibilities (Clarke, 2015).

Part-time careers

Searching for alternative work styles has been of public interest over decades. In 1982, JoAnne Alter published the first guide to a part-time career, explaining the rise of women in the workplace and that women who wished to combine working tasks and childcare were always looking for part-time jobs (Alter, 1982). However, after reviewing the literature related to part-time employees in leadership roles, gaps between desire and reality were discovered. According to Hipp and Stuth (2013), managers in Europe seldom work in part-time positions, and if they do, then the roles are limited to women. Furthermore, according to Jäggi and Mašek (2011), the demand by

men for part-time roles is undisputed. Men have criticised employers for remaining in their traditional roles and being cautious in their openness to new working models. Hence, offering part-time roles for leaders can contribute to a change in the organisational culture. With role models in leadership positions, part-time employment can be an ideal way to combine family and career in certain life stages (Hipp & Stuth, 2013).

2.3.3 Career practices in consulting

As the context for this study is a career in consulting, more details regarding career practices are presented in the next sections.

Roles and career paths in consulting

Consultancy can allow different paths along which to progress one's career to reach an executive level. For example, in IBM Global Business Services, there are many paths to the roles of Delivery Executive, Partner, Sales Executive and Distinguished Engineer. All of them have in common that the candidate must be an inspirational leader aligned with certain competencies and values (IBM GBS, 2016). The most popular and shared career path with other consultancies is the career trajectory to Partner (Kaiser & Ringlstetter, 2011). The Figure 3 presents three comparable hierarchies of consulting career paths. Names for roles and hierarchies are different but can be compared as such. In addition, this figure introduces the defined consulting hierarchies used for the present study.

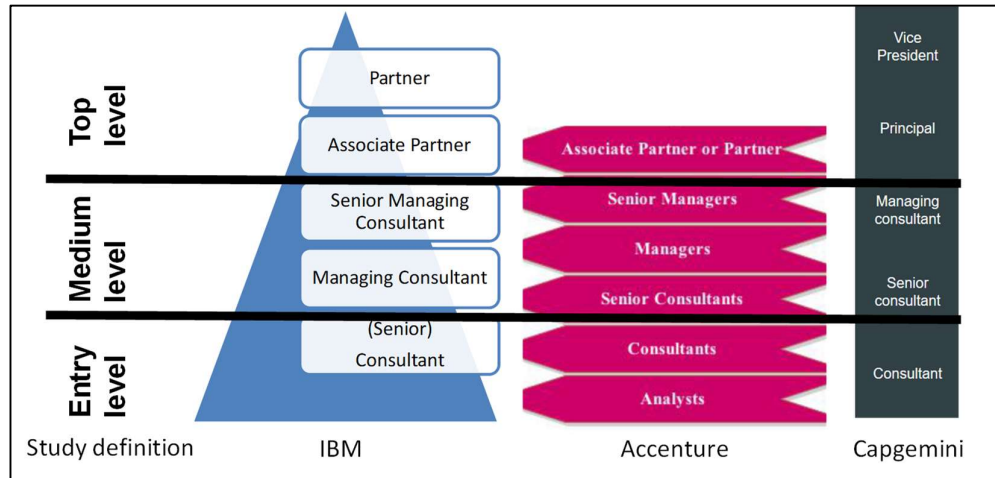


Figure 3: Consulting career levels and study definition²

Depending on the project type, different leverage ratios are required. A leverage ratio is the relation between partners, project managers and junior employees per hierarchy level. Market needs and project types influence this ratio. Moreover, balancing this ratio is important to avoid financial and quality risks (Kaiser & Ringlstetter, 2011).

The example of the responsibilities of a consulting partner from Bain and Company (2017) presents the complexity of this career level and role. It requires the partner to develop sustainable client relationships and build business success stories as his or her contribution to the growth of the company. A partner will collaborate with the top management of existing and potential clients, is accountable, defines innovative strategies and achieves results. Moreover, a partner plays a fundamental role in key internal processes such as training, recruitment, coaching and social corporate responsibility (Bain and Company, 2017). IBM defines a partner as a person who leads and develops the business while managing profitability. This role is a summary of sales, delivery, people leadership and subject matter expertise to establish and maintain a lasting and profitable client relationship (IBM GBS, 2016).

² Figure created from hierarchy structures of the references: 2017a, 2017b; IBM GBS, 2016).

Consulting career culture

General descriptions of careers in PSFs can be found in literature under 'up-or-out rules' (Graubner & Richter, 2003) and 'up-or-out promotion' (von Nordenflycht, 2010). High salaries in this sector attract a large number of qualified graduates (Laura Empson et al., 2015). Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, careers begin with the recruiting of junior staff who have the potential to become new leaders (Cohen, 2015). Then, with career progression, they either receive an offer to become partner or must move out (von Nordenflycht, 2010). Partners receive either high incentives by billing hours to the client or reduced bonuses because of low performance, in addition to being asked to leave the company (Mawdsley & Somaya, 2015). In the past, young professionals knew that they would become partners with hard work. This system no longer works, because the odds of reaching partnership are low, and more challenging partner requirements are common. Meanwhile, the closer a young professional gets to partner level, the less attractive it seems to be. Demanding clients, intensity and working hours are greater than ever, and the atmosphere in firms is competitive and less collegial than it used to be. Furthermore, reaching profitability results in harder work with less return for employees (Maister, 2007). This is because margins in this sector are under pressure, and the incentives have hence been reduced (Graubner & Richter, 2003).

The critical review of Cohen (2015), explains that career progression is often depended on a related client and the rules of the game, in other words the progression model towards the partner level is strongly institutionalised. However, the career structure is changing towards a more individualised engagements of Kanter's career patterns within and beyond organisational boundaries. Cohen concludes that despite the awareness that building a client base is essential for career progression, the middle and later career stages remain less researched and further research is required that addresses change in the sector of PSFs (Cohen, 2015). Important issues in her review remain undiscussed, for instance, whether there is an impact of non-work responsibilities on career progression or what is the impact for

organisations in times of war for talents when limiting their career structures to dedicated professionals.

One qualitative study explored the role of a consultant, which is challenging, and found that career progression negatively impacts personal life, including social network. In addition, group dynamics and judgment regarding how busy a person is requiring personal awareness of one's own energy level and limits. They require awareness from organisations (Kakabadse, Louchart, & Kakabadse, 2006).

A quantitative study in Germany, with 235 survey responses, exploring participation, fulfilment at work and tension among consultants presented findings that support the latter study results. They have demonstrated that 30% to 40% of their participants reported a continuous impact of high job expectations on personal well-being. Moreover, nearly 70% stated that they rarely had time for themselves, and 7 out of 10 participants commented that they did not have enough time for family and other important persons. Furthermore, the relationship between professional and personal life has been judged as being imbalanced (Kriegesmann & Striewe, 2009).

Much career research has been conducted, but only with limited attention to careers in PSFs. This critical reflection of a career in consulting demonstrates its impact on the personal life of employees. This leads to the third theme of this thesis: WLB. The general concept of WLP is explained first, followed by practical implications in the consulting sector.

2.4 Work-life balance

2.4.1 Definition of work-life balance

This section describes what WLB is and why this topic has emerged in human resource and organisational research.

The term WLB was devised in 1986, although WLB programs were offered already in the 1930s (Meenakshi et al., 2013). Since then, this topic has continually been of academic and individual interest, and many people have

conducted research about WLB (Adame-Sánchez, González-Cruz, & Martínez-Fuentes, 2016; Eikhof, Warhurst, & Haunschild, 2007; Goh, Ilies, & Schwind Wilson, 2015; Guest, 2002; Honigman, 2017; Khallash & Kruse, 2012).

Studies from 20 to 30 years ago explored additional factors that increase the complexity of knowledge about the interference of work with family (Clark, 2000). Recognising not only family responsibilities but different tasks of the personal life, such as eldercare, volunteering, sport, travel and more, the formerly known term 'work-family balance' was substituted by the term WLB (Lazăr, Osoian, & Rațiu, 2010).

The amount of research conducted is equal to the number of definitions of WLB. This is emphasised by the number of alternative terms for WLB that have been used. For instance, work-family balance (Mas-Machuca, Berbegal-Mirabent, & Alegre, 2016), work-life priority (Wellington & Spence, 2001), work-life conflict (Goh et al., 2015), work-life interference (Guest, 2002), work-family fit (McFadyen, Kerpelman, & Adler-Baeder, 2005), professional and personal life (Honigman, 2017) and work/family border (Clark, 2000) were used in the literature.

Previous studies have revealed that there is no common agreement about the definition of WLB (Kaiser et al., 2010; Lazăr et al., 2010), and Guest (2002) has pointed out that this definition is complex. For example, Clarke, Koch, & Hill, (2004) conclude that WLB is related to the symmetry between a) time and effort at work and b) personal tasks to balance one's life. Furthermore, Clark (2000) declares that, for her, balance is satisfaction and performance in the job and the non-working life, with limited dispute between these two roles. Khallash and Kruse (2012) mention that WLB expresses the requests of individuals, including those other than family duties, to reach a balance between work and non-working life. Other researchers define WLB as a term that explains structural measurements aimed at increasing an employee's experience of work and private spheres (Darcy, McCarthy, Hill, & Grady, 2012). Following Bird (2003), WLB is a significant

daily accomplishment and involves pleasure in all four life domains: work, family, friends And Self. While Nissen and Termer (2014) describe WLB as the compatibility of working and private life, contrary examples exist in recent social media, such as the call to stop striving for WLB (Brower, 2019). The latter is supported by the statement that WLB is not about equal balance between employment and non-work activities and that the balance of one day does not equal the balance of another day. Moreover, the variety of preferences and life choices influences the balance one desires, and this balance is therefore different (Bird, 2003).

Further research recommendation on this topic was proposed (Kaiser et al., 2010; Mas-Machuca et al., 2016; Powell & Greenhaus, 2006). Despite, the widely usage of the term WLB for research purposes, an agreed definition of this term was not found. Hence, it is recommended to carefully explain the meaning used in the undertaken research (Guest, 2002).

Following this recommendation, defining WLB for this study is left to the participants as part of the data collection process. Participants will be asked to define their understanding of WLB, which might reveal the variety of definitions among employees in the consulting sector and that organisations are in faced with.

2.4.2 Work-life balance studies

Recapturing the organisational culture of consulting companies, WLB became an interesting topic for research within this sector. Studies have been published relating this topic to PSFs, or even to the consulting industry (Kaiser et al., 2010). Multiple studies from three decades were reviewed as part of this literature review. They were related to WLB, often with different focuses on either woman, family conflict, WLB literature reviews or organisational support. The subsequent paragraphs present selected studies of WLB; some of them were found with a relation to the consulting environment.

An increasing body of literature has investigated the conflict or interference of work with life (Guest, 2002). Research in the past focused on the group

of working parents. An extension to other stakeholders was conducted by Darcy et al. (2012). The authors of this study have concluded that a tailored approach of WLB practices should be implemented, reflecting age and career stage demands, instead of one approach to fit all employees. They have emphasised the positive impact of managerial support on WLB (Darcy et al., 2012). These study results would have been even more interesting if further details of the participants had been presented (e.g., whether they were in part-time or full-time employment, whether they were caring for elderly individuals, whether they had children and what their career ambitions were) or if the study had a focus on a specific sector.

With the term 'work-family border', a theory explains how balance can be achieved by managing work and family domains while accepting the influence of each domain on the other one (Clark, 2000). Moreover, the sociologist Tracy Brower (2019) has argued that the division of work and life into two parts can be problematic. She has therefore suggested defining work as part of a full life to better achieve a connection between both.

Another challenge in managing WLB arose when the adoption of a dual career model increased in the working environment (Clarke, 2015). For couples as well as single parents, more non-work duties thus needed to be managed (Lazăr et al., 2010), and efforts concerning family were then related to both partners (Goh et al., 2015). However, in times of a society with competition, subjective resources are rarely handled gently. Given continued competition for positions and decreased intervals, the sustainable arrangement of physical and psychological powers is difficult to maintain (Neckel & Wagner, 2014). Following this critique, other studies have discussed balance and concluded that individual factors influence the personal expectation of WLB, such as priorities of interest (work/home), personal energy level, gender, life stage and career stage. Some employees can thus feel imbalanced, while others do not in similar situations (Guest, 2002).

The benefits of investing in WLB practices have been explored for organisations, employees and society (Lazăr et al., 2010). An empirical study with

a qualitative comparative analysis asked, 'Do firms implement WLB policies to benefit their workers or themselves?' As major findings, the authors presented that potential market-based benefits determine WLB policy implementation. Depending on the degree of performance, benefits make WLB policies more (Adame-Sánchez et al., 2016). This aligns with a quantitative study about family-friendly working environments and the function of organisational awareness. The authors have stated that employees experience higher work-life conflict, less job satisfaction and less commitment to an organisation if the organisation is less family supportive, and they have indicated the positive impact of the supervisor (Allen, 2001). This argument is strengthened by an empirical investigation concluding that WLB initiatives can support an employee's commitment in the consulting sector and enable compatibility of professional and private life. In addition, organisations can benefit from cost savings of reduced fluctuation. However, the use of those means can lead to career disadvantages and is influenced by the direct manager (Kaiser et al., 2010). Furthermore, little research has been conducted on the influence of WLB practices on career progression. Straub (2007) attempted to reduce this research gap and focused on the role of WLB practices in women's career advancement in Europe. Hence, no studies have been found comparing this with men's perspectives.

Nissen and Termer (2014) have presented that 95% of their participants (from 170 online surveys and 22 expert interviews) responded that they strive to balance working and private life. Yet, 59% stated that their working life does not permit such a balance.

The research conducted by Khallash and Kruse (2012) presents a scenario of future work and its effect on WLB. While in their scenario the optimists defined sustainable WLB as the cornerstone for employees, the pessimists argued that WLB ends for the majority. The authors have concluded by stating that the future is uncertain, and the future of WLB is consequently uncertain (Khallash & Kruse, 2012).

2.4.3 Organisational culture related to work-life balance

While the former section reviewed WLB studies in more general, this section focuses on organisational culture and how this is related to WLB for employees and organisations.

The term organisational culture can be defined as 'shared perceptions of organisational work practices' (Van Den Berg & Wilderom, 2004, p571) and is related to the interaction between employees with certain preferences (Wu, 2008). Studies emphasise the importance of organisational culture for WLB (G. A. Maxwell, 2005) and the higher commitment of employees to an organisation when the culture is supporting WLB. The role of the manager can be highlighted as integral part for creating a culture that is WLB supportive (J. Smith & Gardner, 2007).

However, within a high performing culture employees often make no use of offered WLB practices because they are afraid of a potential negative impact for their career (Correll, Kelly, O'Connor, & Williams, 2014). While working overtime is often seen as commitment to the organisation's success and personal career ambition, employees perform the extra hours and take less days off (Sindhar, 2018). Consequently, when employees perceive that within their working environment the organisational culture is not supportive, then flexible work arrangements can be available but are not used (J. Smith & Gardner, 2007).

As result of the pressure, employees feel their workplace is unhealthy (Sindhar, 2018). Study participants of Nissen & Termer (2014) rated their current circumstances as not optimal as overtime, private appointments only on weekends, and presence at the client site lead to limited WLB in the consulting profession. Thus, within the long-hour culture, managers need to explore possibilities to prevent burnout and to foster a healthy balance of working and non-working life (Sindhar, 2018) and the use of WLB practices without negative consequences (Correll et al., 2014). The theme health will be discussed in more detail the next section.

2.4.4 Health implications related to work-life balance

The permanent availability, and given the increase in pressure and intensity at work because of faster response requirements, the challenges of managing work and life with the imbalance of non-work life has become problematic for employees (Guest, 2002) and can lead to health issues (Singh, 2013). When continually focussing on working tasks, employees can experience stress and burnout (Meenakshi et al., 2013). Technology not only increased the number of working tasks. In addition, the total amount of processed information with different means has increased and employees report they can hardly manage these information amount anymore (Wolter, Bellmann, Arnold, & Steffes, 2016).

As a reaction on this issue, studies suggest that more flexibility to organise the working task can result in a more healthy WLB (Manasa & Showry, 2018). However, this flexibility requires the capabilities for self-management and working conditions that support a healthy behaviour instead of self-endangering behaviour (Krause et al., 2014). Taking into account the view of Neckel and Wagner (2014), the given flexibility can lead to self-exhaustion. The technological change even supports to be nonstop available (Humbert & Lewis, 2008). However, long-working days and stress can lead to physical and mental health risks, such as smoking and alcohol consumption, increasing weight and depression (Meenakshi et al., 2013).

To retain their professionals, organisations have to react on the issue of burnout and fatigue. Without time to relax and recover, employees' performance and career is impacted (Meenakshi et al., 2013) and can lead to less productivity and low employee satisfaction which impacts organisational success (Sindhar, 2018).

It can be expected that challenges for health will even increase (Wolter et al., 2016). Thus, from the organisational perspective, managers should encourage their employees to take time to recover (Meenakshi et al., 2013) and help their employees managing their WLB in a healthy way (Zheng, Molineux, Mirshekary, & Scarparo, 2015).

2.4.5 Work-life practices in consulting companies

According to Baran and Klos (2014), human capital is an organisation's most valuable asset. Furthermore, Qu and Zhao (2012) have emphasised that WLB is critical to be successful in the business of competition.

Consulting companies are innovative drivers for flexible working options, offering the opportunity to choose between onsite and remote activities (Mital, 2010). Researchers have observed that work-life practices have continued to emerge in the consulting sector. Implications on this subject have been presented by Kaiser et al. (2010). They have found the evaluation of WLB initiatives to be an interesting field for further research, and they have explored whether the use of the office Friday³ or home office support an increase in the compatibility of work and non-work activities. Moreover, they have recommended including additional attributes of participants in the study, such as job situation, partner, individual preferences and personal characteristics (Kaiser et al., 2010). One study has examined why companies implement WLB policies. The findings of this Spanish study present a potential relationship between WLB policy implementation and organisational performance (Adame-Sánchez et al., 2016).

The following paragraph provides a summary of WLB understanding and practices on the home pages of consulting companies (accessed June 2019). Most consulting companies have published their view of WLB, highlighted its importance and offered to support the professional and private life of their employees.

Deloitte emphasises employee satisfaction as the most important capital and employee engagement as a worldwide brand, and the company intends to make working there attractive and flexible (Deloitte, 2019). Furthermore, Accenture states its understanding of the importance of flexibility in the workplace to keep the balance between professional life and private life.

³ As consultants are often expected to work at the client site from Monday to Friday, innovative WLB policies offer an office day or home office – mostly on Fridays which reduces overnight stays in hotels per week (Schulz, 2019).

The organisation highlights the modern approach to decide where to work, with innovative communication to improve productivity in a healthy environment (Accenture, 2019). For the purpose of engagement and life before, during and after work, EY stresses its expectations for flexible working models. The company has published work and family initiatives and provides concrete WLB offerings under the headline of flexibility and performance (Ernst&Young, 2019). Direct benefits for the business are promoted by KPMG. Expectations set for ambition, drive and hard work are compensated with a healthy WLB using flexible working options. This organisation mentions that a promotion despite a reduction in hours is still possible and concludes that it is aware that offering this is ideal both for employees and for the business (KPMG, 2019). Searching WLB and IBM does not immediately lead to a result but to a broader focus on an inclusive workplace, doing the best work ever and the term 'work-life integration' (IBM, 2019). Multiple clicks were required to find WLB practices, and a fast comparison of practices with other companies hence seems difficult. The almost opposite regarding fast access of information can be recognised for SAP. As the first response, a Google search provided the following headline linked with WLB: SAP is one of the best employers worldwide, offering flexible work, gliding time, home office, time for voluntary service and fun at work in exchange for the best performance (SAP, 2019). BearingPoint intends to support the ambition to combine work, family, friends and personal interests as best as possible with different practices for stress management, health and family care (BearingPoint, 2019). No published initiatives were found for Tata Consulting Services (TCS).

Performance expectations in exchange for work-life practices were stated on almost all company home pages. It will be interesting to compare these published offerings with the study results.

The debate in the work-life literature evolved into a much more complex research area. Regardless of how the war for talent develops or how additional policies are implemented in organisations, working time, overtime,

and being absent from home will impact personal life. The review of research on WLB has illustrated the need for further attention to this topic in theory and in practice.

2.5 Summary

In conclusion to the literature review, each of the three themes is complex on its own. The negative consequences for career progression when making use of WLB practices within the consulting sector underpin the decision to bring these themes together and explore this complex area of conflict.

2.5.1 Organisational versus individual perspective

This study focuses on two perspectives on this topic. The first one is the perspective of organisations, which intend to be profitable and hence require the best professionals interacting with their clients. The second one is the individual perspective of employees, the people who have a professional and a private life and who may leave for employment opportunities where they can achieve their personal goals.

From the organisational perspective, managing PSFs is a balance between the clients' demands, the company's economic targets and the realities of the people marketplace (Mawdsley & Somaya, 2015). Balancing these often-conflicting demands and constraints creates a demanding challenge of managing a PSF (Maister, 2007). To meet the demanding client expectations, organisations must recruit the best talent they can find (Graubner & Richter, 2003). According to organisations, the ideal worker can arrange working commitments and personal desires accordingly (Bloom, 2016). However, the still existing traditional career structure and mindset may overlook candidates because they do not meet the consulting standards (Graubner & Richter, 2003). Moreover, a culture of long working hours makes retaining and attracting employees difficult. Young professionals will likely choose an employer and a career pathway that aligns with their career and work values (Clarke, 2015). Furthermore, technological innovation and organisational transformation have led businesses to forget the most valu-

able asset: human capital (Pucikova, Woolliscroft, & Cambal, 2018). Researchers have therefore investigated employees' commitment to the employer and have found that the following are important: first, satisfying employee needs to increase employee productivity and second, increasing competitiveness with a skilled workforce (App & Büttgen, 2016). Employers must react, otherwise they will have a shortage of talent (Berndtson, 2015). Thus, organisations are asked to rethink career management and to provide new opportunities for career progression to keep employees engaged (Angela, 2016).

From the employee or individual perspective, the boundaryless forms career within and beyond organisations offer the need but additionally possibilities to focus on personal needs. This introduced self-employed career development form by Cliff Hakim (1994), should have help employees to better integrate work and family. However, employees were faced to decide for either career or career rejection to focus on personal or family tasks (Fletcher & Bailyn, 1996). Today, professionals are still demanding WLB, which challenges traditional ideas of a career forms (Noury et al., 2017).

The critical issue for both perspectives is whether it is possible to achieve organisational goals and employee career goals while balancing work and non-work responsibilities. Fletcher & Bailyn (1996) presented studies that illustrated synergies for employers and employees without the separation of work and non-work life. A mutuality in the work-family domain can lead to 'truly innovative thinking, and heightened energy and motivation' (Fletcher & Bailyn, 1996, p262). It is worth noting their recommendation to recognise the costs of ignoring the boundaries between work and non-work and to focus on the benefits when professional life and personal life is connected.

2.5.2 Personal responsibility

Reflecting on what was said about the different life domains and the individuality of personal preferences for career and WLB leads to the following question: who should take care of the compatibility between professional and private life – the employer or the individual?

While organisations must find new ways to motivate their employees and add real value to their work (Graubner & Richter, 2003), the fear of negative consequences of flexible working is high. Especially managers are asked to support a fair judgement between full-time employees who decided to focus on work and full-time and mostly part-time professionals who want to or have to manage non-work responsibilities with the consequence of limited availability, limited mobility and limited capacity for overtime hours. Often part-timers have to perform above average to position themselves for higher job roles in a competitive environment (Vedder & Vedder, 2017). But the source of the resulting exhaustion is often not the request by managers but the personal desire to perform and deliver satisfying results and to consider professional activities as an essential part of self-fulfilment (Neckel & Wagner, 2014). Especially the latter statement shifts the focus from the organisational to the individual perspective.

Neckel and Wagner (2014) advice to being aware of subjective resources, personal capabilities and the ways in which private life and work can be balanced. Moreover, the ability of the ideal employee is 'to operate as an individual who reconnects work and family in ways that benefit both' (Fletcher & Bailyn, 1996, p265) to achieve well-being for oneself, families and society, and to have an effective and productive working environment Fletcher & Bailyn (1996).

Reaching these targets is still unsolved and requires further attention in theory and practice. Extending knowledge in this field is an essential part of the present study.

2.5.3 Research objectives

Searching for studies of WLB and career progression in consulting was not successful. The reviewed studies fail, however, to link WLB, career and the consulting context, which increased the researcher's interest and motivation for further research in this field. The aim is to provide ideas on how companies can support their employees to balance professional and private life to be attractive in a competitive workplace and successful in the long run. The

employee experiences are explored to uncover the underlying causes that may have led to the observed issues.

2.5.4 Literature gap analysis

The following five gaps in the literature were found and addressed:

G1: The lack of how consultants establish a client relationship in consulting when considering their WLB preferences.

Theory for client relationship was found in the literature. The questions remain unsolved how client relationship can be established with e.g. less travel to improve WLB or what do consultants define as important for presence time to establish and maintain a client relationship.

G2: The lack of a common definition of career.

There is a common agreement on the traditional career, which is different from the word 'karriere' in Germany. The experiences and discussed understanding can often be better explained with career progression (career ladder). This paper questions the individual career definition and compares it with the literature.

G3: The lack of both a common definition of WLB and an understanding of how employees in consulting manage their professional and personal life.

No study was found that have conducted interviews focusing on the employee perspective of WLB and career management, the influencing factors and personal circumstances. This study explores the related challenges and how employees on different career levels manage their WLB.

G4: The lack of answers to the following questions: does WLB impact career progression, and if yes, what is the impact in consulting?

All studies that were found have not researched the impact of WLB on career progression; they have only mentioned that there might be an impact on career when employees make use of WLB initiatives. However, dedicated research in the consulting sector was not found.

G5: The lack of qualitative studies of work and non-work life in consulting from the employee's perspective, asking what can support them to combine both parts of their life.

All studies that were found have only addressed WLB initiatives or practices and either how those can improve performance or what the effects are if they are offered. No study was found that has utilised a qualitative approach to examine career progression, for example, with alternative working models or in part-time roles in the consulting sector.

G6: The lack of understanding men's perspective of WLB and career in consulting.

Many studies were found regarding the glass ceiling in the information technology sector, or gender studies were found relating to women in leadership. According to Nissen and Termer (2014) and Straub (2007), WLB concerns not only women, but is crucial for men too. To their knowledge, no study is available that focuses on the WLB gender comparison in IT consulting. Within the literature review of this study, their statement can be confirmed, as information pertaining to men and their careers, men's family responsibilities and their implications on men's career in the consulting sector were not found in the literature.

2.5.5 Research questions

Based on the literature review, five research questions merit further investigation.

R1: How do employees approach client relationships, considering their work-life balance demands?

So far, no research was found that focuses on this research question. This first research question explores the experiences and expectations of participants regarding how a client relationship can be approached while considering WLB. This is the starting point for establishing context and gaining an understanding of the working environment and the requirements in the consulting sector.

R2: Is there a common understanding of how employees define career?

To reflect on the earlier review of the term career and to understand what makes a career in consulting special, the following are required: participants' definition of a career and a comparison of this definition with arguments found in the literature.

R3: How do employees define and manage work-life balance?

No agreement exists on the definition of WLB in the literature; however, this term is often used in journals, in newspapers and as part of current discussions in HR and the workplace. Therefore, it is interesting to gain an understanding of this term along with the challenges that participants are facing and the ways in which they manage their WLB.

R4: How does work-life balance impact career progression?

Relatively little research has linked WLB and career progression. This question thus examines the experiences of participants regarding how WLB can or does impact career progression in the consulting sector. As described in the literature review, a career in consulting follows a certain path and is underpinned by certain expectations. Therefore, it will be interesting to obtain the insights of participants.

R5: How can organisations support work-life balance while employees progress their chosen career?

This question warrants further investigation as it aims to identify practice-orientated guidelines, which indicate measurements for organisations and support employees to manage their WLB and chosen careers. Moreover, these guidelines could be used to raise awareness about existing issues in this area among managers and practitioners.

2.5.6 Conclusion

Inspired by the call for equality of part-time and full-time employees and change of career patterns, this literature review critically analysed three themes: WLB, career and the consulting sector. This complex area of conflict is likewise relevant for individuals and organisations.

Employees choose an employer in the consulting business and find themselves facing defined career paths, yearly evaluation against peers, limited promotion slots and expected delivery and sales performance. During their career journey, their preferences may change. Furthermore, depending on their personal circumstances, employees may be forced to leave the company or risk affecting their family lives. As organisations are faced with the war for talent as well as the challenges of retaining knowledge and establishing sustainable client relationships, they require attention to this topic to win and retain professionals.

Research into PSFs is, despite its significant contribution to economic growth, still in the developing stage, and important knowledge gaps remain. Thus, there is evidently much scope for research regarding the above questions. Especially the mentioned reduced willingness by consulting organisations to co-operate to conduct research in the sector (Kaiser et al., 2010), a qualitative study that investigates the experiences and ideas of participants from diverse organisational (career) levels in the consulting sector would be a useful contribution to knowledge and practice.

This literature review has limitations. It makes no claim to be comprehensive in covering all aspects related to consulting, career and WLB. Given the lack of journals including the triangle of these three themes in Germany, the journal sources reflect a wider geography, which can lead to different influencing factors of culture or leadership behaviour within other countries.

Chapter 3. Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This third chapter describes the academic context for the philosophical approach employed in this study. The chapter begins with an introduction to the philosophy, justifying its appropriateness to the specific question linked to the chosen data collection methods. This is followed by the research design, which considers ethical issues and the impact of the philosophy on the research results and chosen method.

3.2 Research philosophy

3.2.1 Overview

Research with a defined philosophical approach not only offers opportunities but restricts the research methods, techniques and analysis that can be used. Therefore, ontology and epistemology are essential and impact the practical research that is employed (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). This section attempts to justify the research philosophy – specifically the ontology, epistemology and axiology approach – underpinning this study.

For each view in theory, there is an understanding what is (ontology) and what it means to know (epistemology) (Crotty, 2015). The chosen research philosophy influences the way in which research questions are formulated and research is processed. Depending on the choice of, for instance, either objective or socially constructed approaches, the research design and collection of data will differ (Bryman, 2016).

3.2.2 Ontology

Ontology is about the nature of reality or being. It determines how the researcher sees the world of business and management and therewith influences the choice of what to conduct research on (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

Social ontology considers the nature of social entities – whether they are objective entities that have an external reality to social actors or whether these social entities are built up from the perceptions and actions of social actors. These positions are called objectivism and constructionism. Objectivism states that social phenomena exist independent of social actors (Bryman, 2016).

Positivism and constructionism argue on major issues regarding the nature of the objects of research and our knowledge thereof (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). These disagreements play an essential role in the ‘paradigm wars’ between qualitative and quantitative approaches (J. A. Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2010). A paradigm consists of beliefs that influence a scientist regarding the nature of the study and how the results are interpreted (Bryman, 2016). Paradigms are opposite to one another and claiming one approach means rejecting another. This leaves little chance to determine how they relate to one another (Barkin, 2011). Moreover, Guba and Lincoln (1994) state that, except for positivism, arguments about the different paradigms are ongoing, there is no agreed definition or implication, and other paradigms are still under revision and in the formative stage.

A positivist approach uses experiments to determine causality and statistics for generalising (Jakobsen, 2013). In this philosophical approach, which is primarily used by natural scientists, research is conducted without human influence under determined repeatable conditions to test a law-like, observable social reality (Saunders et al., 2019). These observable objects and events interact in a visible, controlled, regular way (Collins, 2010), and results can be measured, generalised and replicated. However, a criticism of this method is that the data collection and objective interpretation do not consider the fact that people interpret and influence the world (Bryman, 2016). The positivist approach seems to be impractical, insisting on invariable generalisations in social science (Tsang & Kwan, 1999). Following Bhaskar (1975), consistent regularities can only occur under certain condi-

tions (closed systems) but cannot be applied in the social world. In agreement with the latter, positivism can be excluded as a research approach for this study.

Exploring feminism, women speak in a different voice. Feminists believe that men and women view and to relate the world differently. (Crotty, 2015). Investigation on gender topics misses the wider picture of the social context where inequalities are embedded (Bryman, 2016). Even though considerations were made to include participants of different genders, the focus of this study is not on gender. The feminism approach is therefore not appropriate for this study.

The post-structuralist paradigm, which abandoned positivism, was developed in France in response to structuralism. Jacques Derrida declared that there is no split between subject and object; there cannot be a description of reality without the observer (Crotty, 2015). This method requires an extended period to observe participants behaviour and is therefore not useful for this study.

Critical realism concentrates on what we see and what we experience, acknowledging causalities of reality influencing observable events (Saunders et al., 2019). Critical realists believe that while the external world exists independently of human knowledge, this external world is knowable, and the knowledge that human beings develop about this external world can be used to change it to some extent (Bhaskar, 1975). First described by Roy Baskar, this philosophical approach is situated between positivism and post-modernism (Saunders et al., 2019). Critical realists attempt to establish an alternative to a stratified social ontology (Reed, 2009) and believe in an external, independent reality formed by underlying structures that are not observable. The stratified ontology of critical realists consists of three layers: the empirical layer (observed events or social phenomenon), the actual layer (events or non-events generated by the real layer) and the real layer (causalities and mechanisms influencing the actual and empirical layers) (Saunders et al., 2019). An interplay of these levels generates phenomena,

and over time, these entities may become stabilised and act as social structures and organisation (Reed, 2009).

Social events are a result of multi-level structures (Bhaskar, 2011). Therefore, research is conducted in two steps. Having experienced certain events in an open system, a mental process starts to uncover the underlying causes. This process is called retrodution (Saunders et al., 2019). In accordance with Bhaskar (2011), to uncover the social structures and understand the broader picture of the social world, critical realism is determined to be the philosophical approach for this study.

3.2.3 Epistemology

Epistemology explains the supposition about knowledge and the way this is explained to others (Saunders et al., 2019). In other words, epistemology explains what it means to know (Crotty, 2015). Researchers conduct their studies with different epistemologies, depending on their type of data and sources used. It is thus essential to consider how epistemology impacts the chosen methods as well as the strengths and limitations of the research findings (Saunders et al., 2019).

Epistemological relativism is used with an ontological critical realist approach. Here, knowledge is defined as a specific result developed over time, and social events do not exist independently but are socially constructed by humans. Quantitative methods with statistical correlations need enrichment by other methods to identify causalities and mechanisms to understand the social world (Saunders et al., 2019).

While positivists tend to prefer a deductive approach (what has happened), and interpretivists prefer an inductive approach (why something has happened), critical realists opt for an abductive approach, called a retroductive approach, which combines deductive and inductive research (Saunders et al., 2019). The identification of generative causal mechanisms enables changes that challenge and change the status. Including this reasoning makes the research neither inductive nor deductive (Bryman, 2016). Critical

realists tend to prefer retroductive research, which means starting with the observed event and continue to uncover potential structures. It involves the application of models to uncover the real unobservable mechanisms that cause the actual experiences of the individual (Reed, 2009). Furthermore, data collection is performed to explore an observed phenomenon, and themes emerge as a result of the analysis. These are located in a framework and tested with either existing or new collected data, with the aim of generating new theory or modifying existing knowledge (Saunders et al., 2019).

Qualitative research was chosen as the appropriate design for the thesis because it allows for the exploration of a phenomenon that is human nature. As suggested by Guba & Lincoln (1994), a qualitative researcher seeks to make sense of observed phenomena and the meaning people bring to these phenomena.

Interviewing is an acknowledged and common method of social research, underpinned by the critical realism approach (C. Smith & Elger, 2014). Taking this into account, the differences in conducting interviews with specific philosophical fortifications require consideration. While an active interview is carried out with a constructionist view, an ethnographic interview is conducted with a realist view and the theory-driven interview specific for the critical realist view (C. Smith & Elger, 2014). According to Pawson and Tilley, the latter focuses on the theory of the researcher rather than on the thoughts of the interviewee, who is required to confirm or refine the theory (C. Smith & Elger, 2014). The intent of this research is to bring in another perspective to the quantitative results in the literature and to collect data with a qualitative method to explore different perspectives of WLB and career progression in the consulting sector.

3.2.4 Axiology

Depending on the researcher's values, it is meaningful to demonstrate axiological skills, thereby explaining the decisions for the undertaken research

and methods. Acknowledging that the personal values of the researcher influence the research itself (Saunders et al., 2019), this section presents a personal statement of values related to the topic of the undertaken study.

The researcher has been employed in the consulting sector since 2004. Having observed issues related to career progression in different life stages and being personally faced with work-family conflict, the researcher has a personal interest in studying this topic to explore the ideas of other employees in this sector and to provide practical guidelines from an organisational perspective and from the individual perspective of the consultant. Underlining her motivation, the researcher can state the following:

- The compatibility of WLB and career progression is dependent on one's supporting system (e.g., organisation of nanny, cleaner, grandparents nearby).
- Especially in consulting, with high flexibility and travel demands, WLB is dependent on the project location (home town or elsewhere), the project contract (contracted onsite availabilities and security requirements) and the project manager supporting remote work.
- Many organisations offer work-life practices; however, there is a discrepancy between formal policies and lived reality.
- This topic is of high importance as the increasing interference of professional with private life is impacting work-life satisfaction and business performance and may even cause health issues.
- The researcher believes that by interviewing a diverse group of participants, results can be clustered to better outline practical guidelines.
- Being aware of potential efforts and time to find participants in the consulting sector, the researcher is optimistic about identifying a diverse group of candidates to carry out the data collection process.

As a social scientist, the researcher will construct a possible explanation for certain phenomena generated through an intellectual process (Reed, 2009)

to produce an understanding of how organisations can support their employees with their specific career contexts to manage their WLB challenges.

Considering the researcher's personal values and the personal experiences related to this topic, she is committed to undertaking the research in a valid way. Moreover, she seeks to reduce bias and conduct the research as objectively as possible (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.2.5 Limitations of the study using the critical realist approach

Conducting a study with the critical realist approach means acknowledging limitations. The study results cannot be interpreted as general facts, as they would be rejected with a critical realist perspective. However, the results might offer a suggestion for adaption of the results to other sectors, especially in other PSFs.

One limitation of qualitative studies is the small sample size. Interpretation, bias and the establishment of reliability are other limitations (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). In addition, using only qualitative data might lead to criticisms that this approach is difficult to replicate, that there are problems to generalise and that there is a lack of transparency (Bryman, 2016).

While a deductive approach seems to be a lower risk strategy as it involves a one-time data collection, the inductive and abductive (for critical realists: retroductive) approach requires more time (Saunders et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the retroductive approach is chosen for this study to provide an understanding of the observed phenomenon and the underlying structures and mechanisms that have caused its occurrence.

3.2.6 Impact on results and summary

The choice of the philosophical approach influences the use of certain research methods (Crotty, 2015; Saunders et al., 2019). Different ontologies were introduced in section Ontology3.2.2. furthermore, it was explained that critical realism has been chosen as appropriate philosophical stance for this study to extend and modify knowledge with causal explanations of an observed phenomenon.

Determining a philosophical approach has implications on the data collection, analysis of results and conclusion of a study. Using a qualitative approach with interviews can lead to surprising findings. In contrast to quantitative research results that tend to be measurable, reliable and replicable, the results of qualitative data collections and conclusions require an alternative evaluation (Bryman, 2016). Therefore, triangulation is used to determine the reliability of the results, which will be cross-checked with another method, for instance member checking (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Chapter 3.3 explains how this was done in this study.

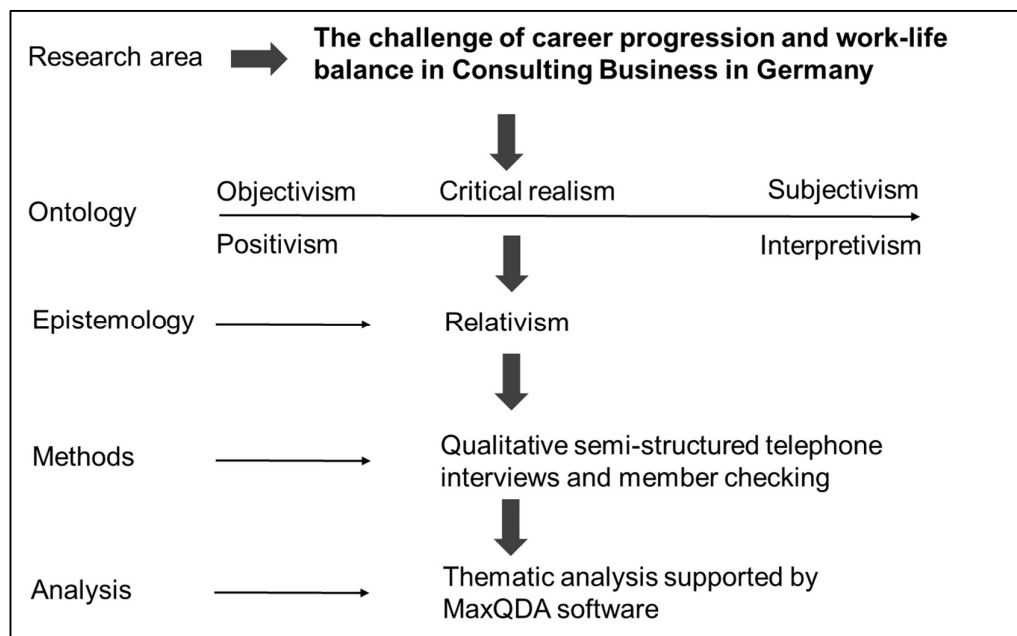


Figure 4: Ontology, epistemology, methods and analysis

The philosophical approach is visualised in Figure 4: Ontology, epistemology, methods. The methods used for data collection and analysis are explained in the subsequent sections.

3.3 Research design

3.3.1 Overview

The research philosophy has strong implications for the research design (Crotty, 2015; Edwards, O'Mahoney, & Vincent, 2014). As the aim of this

study is to explore WLB and career progression using a critical realist approach, gathering rich qualitative data through interviews was preferred. Opting for semi-structured interviews provided the opportunity to follow up with questions and thereby explore an in-depth qualitative view of the participants' perceptions, which are key to extend the existing academic knowledge.

Figure 5 illustrates an overview of the research design process.

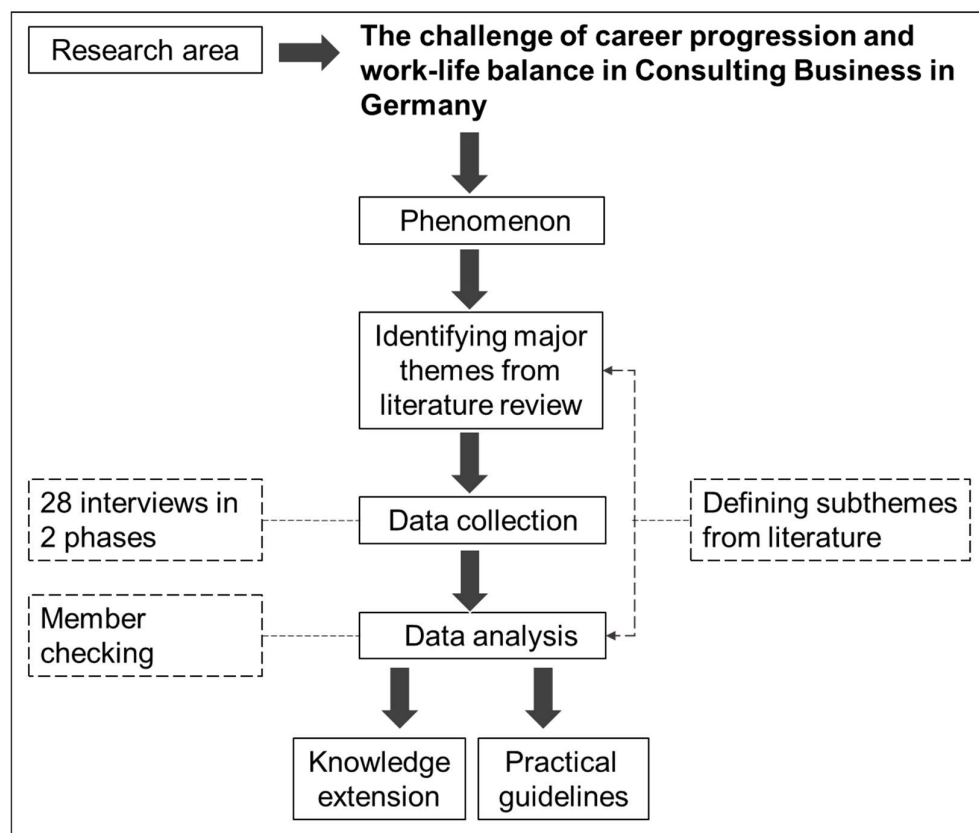


Figure 5: Research design

Inspired by a phenomenon in the consulting sector, two related themes were identified during the literature review: WLB and career. Then, with the chosen research methodology, data collection was conducted in two phases. The first was carried out with three interview participants in the pilot study, and the second phase took place with 25 interview participants for the main study. Using the member-checking method, the analysed findings of the col-

lected data were shared with participants, asking them to reflect and comment on those findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) define member checking as an ideal method to validate a qualitative study. Thus, through this approach, the thesis aims to provide an indication of appropriateness of the analysed results. Finally, practical guidelines are derived from the analysis for different roles in the consulting business, and knowledge of the existing literature is extended.

The next sections provide an explanation of this study's data collection, data analysis, development of practical guidelines and ethical issues.

3.3.2 Data collection

Conducting interviews is an often-chosen method in social sciences because of its exclusive ability to access data that would be difficult to gain by other research methods (Salazar, 1990). Interviewing, in particular, is attractive because of the benefits of cost savings and high flexibility (Bryman, 2016). This method, in comparison to focus groups (qualitative) or questionnaires (quantitative), was selected to collect data in a closed discussion. Anonymous and careful handling of data is another reason that focus groups were not found to be appropriate as a research method. Qualitative interviews can be conducted either as unstructured interviews – conversations with a limited number of questions – or semi-structured interviews, where specific questions or themes are defined, and similar questions are posed to all interviewees (Bryman, 2016). Various studies have suggested that the difference between face-to-face and telephone interviews is not as great as feared (Bryman, 2016) and data collection can include interviews with participants who are difficult to access face-to-face (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). Both are supporting arguments for the choice of telephone interviews. However, the limitation of telephone interviews with the lack of observation is acknowledged. Using this way of data collection may reduce the opportunity of the researcher to realise and react on visible body language such as emotions and distress during the interview (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004).

Considering the critical realist approach of this study, the benefits of cost savings and flexibility, semi-structured interviews via telephone were chosen to collect the qualitative data for both the pilot and the main studies. Data collection was divided into two parts; the purpose and rationale for each part are described below:

Part I: Pilot study – Interviews

The aim of the pilot study was to test the appropriateness of the proposed methods and make refinements from the pilot towards the main study, rather than to answer the research question. Three semi-structured interviews were conducted via telephone, and they were recorded, transcribed, coded and analysed. As part of the review with the supervisors, it was decided that, with a careful review of the wording of certain interview questions, the piloted research method could be utilised for the main study.

Part II: Main Study – Interviews

Over a 3-month period, the data collection for the main study was performed. For the main study, 25 telephone interviews were conducted. With only minor adjustments to the interview questions for better understanding, the three transcriptions of the pilot study were included in the analysis of the main study, resulting in a total data collection of 28 semi-structured interviews for the main study. As in the pilot study, these interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded and analysed.

Selection of participants

To reflect the challenges regarding WLB and career that an organisation faces with a diverse workforce, the researcher's intention behind participant selection was to identify a high variation in gender, consulting company, age, hierarchy level, children (yes or no) and part-time vs. full-time consultants. Knowing that this implies limitations of the study, which are discussed in the conclusion chapter, the aim was to gain data of a diverse workforce to better propose practical implications, both for consultants and organisations.

The interview participants were divided into three cohorts (consulting hierarchy): entry-level (e.g., dual master student, graduate from university, consultant); medium-level (e.g., manager, project manager) and top-level (e.g., associate partner, partner, vice president) participants. They were recruited from the wider network of the author or by recommendation of participants, considering the following eligibility criteria:

- a) belonging to one of the cohorts for a minimum of one year
- b) having a mixture of participants who have children or not
- c) having a mixture of gender and age
- d) having a mixture of consulting companies

While the pilot study included three participants from IBM, the main study extended the participant selection to the following consulting companies: Accenture, Adesso AG, BearingPoint, Deloitte, Ernst&Young, IBM, McKinsey, KPMG, PwC, SAP and Tata Consulting Services (TCS). The following three additional company types were part of the main study; however, to ensure their confidentiality, they are not listed by name: a specialist consulting company, an industrial company and a chemical company. The latter two included participants who left a consulting company because of the travel requirements and moved to an in-house consulting role.

Participants brought their consulting experiences from those companies. The big-four accounting companies, the major IT consulting companies as well as one strategy consulting company were included. Furthermore, it is important to mention that with a total of 28 interviews and 14 companies, in most cases there was only one or two participants per company. This means the sample is not a representation of a company but only individual perspectives. Therefore, no results were related to an organisation. This spectrum was chosen to outline a broader view of consulting employees and their view on WLB and career in this sector.

Thirty-two participants were asked to participate, and 28 were interviewed. One participant (entry level, male, children = yes) did not respond, and one

participant (top level, male, children = yes) did respond and asked for time to think about the study but did not come back. Moreover, two participants (one medium level, female, children = yes; one top level, male, children = yes) were invited and agreed to participate; however, the interviews did not take place as a result of calendar conflicts.

The roles of the participants are all related to consulting roles and vary from a master student in the second year assigned to consulting projects, a consultant, a senior consultant, an in-house consultant, a project manager, a senior project manager, a managing consultant, a senior managing consultant, a consulting communication leader, an associate partner, a partner, a director, a development lead, an IT architect and a vice president.

Nine participants were invited by recommendation of others; in these cases, the interviews were the first conversations between author and participant. The remaining 19 participants were selected from the wider network.

Twelve participants were female, five of whom had children. Furthermore, 16 men participated in the interviews, 10 of whom had children. The age of the participants was in the range between 26 and 50 years old.

A more detailed view is summarised in the Table 4. Every participant was coded with a number in the order of the interview invitation. The four marked participants were invited but did not participate in the study.

Table 4: Participant details

Participant	Level	Generation	Age	Gender	Contract hours	Children
P_01	Entry level	Millennial	26–30	Male	28	N
P_02	Medium level	Millennial	26–30	Female	36	N
P_03	Medium level	Generation X	41–45	Female	32	Y
P_04	Entry level	Millennial	26–30	Female	41	N
P_05	Entry level	Millennial	26–30	Female	41	N
P_06	Entry level	Millennial	31–35	Female	41	N
P_07	Entry level	Millennial	26–30	Male	41	N
P_08	Entry level	Millennial	26–30	Male	41	N
P_09	Entry level	Millennial	26–30	Female	28	N
P_10	Entry level	Millennial	26–30	Male	41	N
P_11	Entry level	Millennial	26–30	Male	28	N
P_12	Medium level	Generation X	41–45	Female	20	Y
P_13	Medium level	Millennial	31–35	Female	41	N
P_14	Medium level	Millennial	31–35	Male	40	Y
P_15	Medium level	Millennial	36–40	Male	41	Y
P_16	Entry level	Millennial	26–30	Male	40	N
P_17	Entry level	Millennial	26–30	Male	40	N
P_18	Entry level	Millennial	31–35	Male	40	Y
P_19	Medium level	Millennial	36–40	Female	25	Y
P_20	Medium level	Generation X	46–50	Female	32	Y
P_21	Medium level	Millennial	36–40	Male	35	Y
P_22	Medium level	Generation X	46–50	Female	41	N
P_23	Top level	Generation X	46–50	Male	40	N
P_24	Top level	Generation X	41–45	Female	40	Y
P_25	Medium level	Millennial	36–40	Male	40	N
P_26	Top level	Generation X	41–45	Male	40	Y
P_27	Top level	Generation X	41–45	Male	40	Y
P_28	Top level	Generation X	46–50	Male	40	Y
P_29	Top level	Generation X	41–45	Female	40	Y
P_30	Top level	Generation X	56–60	Male	40	Y
P_31	Top level	Generation X	51–55	Male	40	Y
P_32	Top level	Generation X	41–45	Male	40	Y

Recording

The interviews were recorded using the AT&T teleconferencing recording function. The total time of interviews was 18:36:59. The shortest interview lasted 28:47, and the longest was 58:45. Within a few days, the voice quality and completeness were checked. In addition, interview participants' names

and the interview recordings were encrypted and saved separately, and the records were deleted after the transcription.

Interview procedure

Prior to data collection, information was sent out to participants explaining the purpose of the research and seeking written approval in advance. The information included that the interview was being recorded, and this was repeated at the beginning of the interview.

Before recording commenced, the importance of confidentiality was stressed again. Participants were asked not to refer to any names of colleagues, but if names were accidentally mentioned, they were deleted during transcription. Furthermore, addressing participants by name during the interviews was avoided. To create a friendly atmosphere, the first set of questions was introduced as 'warm-up questions'.

Each interview took between 28 and 59 minutes. Only the recorded time was counted; the introduction, addressing of the participant information, explanation of confidentiality, agreement of record and final words, or even additional reflection after the official interview, were not part of the stated interview duration as they were not recorded.

The semi-structured interview was clustered into five parts, starting with the opening block using questions to warm up and delve into the topic, followed by three major themes: WLB, career and consulting client environment. These themes contained questions to better understand individual preferences, career ambitions and suggestions on how organisations could support them. In the closing part, participants were asked for any additional suggestions to be considered for this topic, and they were thanked for their time and effort. Finally, further steps of this research were explained, for instance that they may be one of those randomly selected participants to review and comment on the findings. More details of this method will be explained shortly.

Transcription

Even though Bryman (2016) recommends transcribing immediately after an interview, this recommendation was not appropriate for this study. As the time frame for the interviews was limited because of business pressure in the fourth quarter, it was important to be flexible with the interview appointments and conduct the interviews first. Nevertheless, the interview records were checked for voice quality and completeness within a few days of the interview appointments. This check ensured a focus on the data collection first and the transcription process thereafter. The repeated engagement with the transcriptions helped during the analysis phase to handle the data amount of 102,903 words in total. The transcription process was supported by the software *transcribe*, which offers different methods for transforming voice to text.

3.3.3 Data analysis

Following the approach for thematic analysis of Bryman (2016), who consolidated principles from different writers, the data analysis process for this thesis started in parallel with the transcription phase.

The progress was tracked with *Microsoft Excel*[™]. In addition, this excel file included recorded time and transcription words, and it was the basis for charts and tables that were used in the analysis chapter to present the data.

Table 5: Progress of data collection and analysis

Level	Participant asked	Invitation sent	Date Accepted	Interview done	Transcription done	Coding done
Top level	9	8	8	7	7	7
Medium level	11	11	11	10	10	10
Entry level	12	11	11	11	11	11
Grand Total	32	30	30	28	28	28

Coding and thematic analysis

The conducted thematic analysis was performed using the software *Maxqda* and *Microsoft Excel*TM. The latter was used to extract data from *Maxqda* to sort, translate and consolidate the coded data in tables for presentation in the chapter findings. The three major themes, namely, career, WLB and the consulting sector, which form the context of this study, provided the frame for the interviews. Additional themes emerged from interview transcription and were verified with the literature. A further consolidation was performed by reducing the number of codes from 45 to 27 by eliminating duplicates or merging sub-themes.

The consolidated list of codes, major themes and categories is presented in the Appendix G and illustrates the complexity and range of individuality.

Research validity and member checking

It is relevant to accept that the researcher's personality and manner of conducting interviews may influence the responses (Salazar, 1990). The researcher tried to remain as objective as possible. An illustration of this was continually reflected during the interview phase. The first set of interviews were limited to the interview questions, and further interviews included enquiry of statements for better understanding.

Insights into interview participants are significant for the interview process. If the event is important to the interviewees, then 'the reporting is likely to be more complete and accurate' (Salazar, 1990, p.569). The conduction of interviews (28), with 87.5% (acceptance to participate even 93.8%) resulting from the number of interview invitations (32), can be seen as a high interest in this research topic. The method used for interviewing improved the reliability of the results. The reason for this could be that participants felt safe in the environment, and many of them took the interview as an hour of reflection on their personal WLB and career. Participants thanked the researcher at the end of the interview for this reflective experience and opportunity to contribute to research and progress on this topic.

Some participants mentioned that they would have preferred the received the questions ahead of the interview. However, the intention was to obtain all results spontaneously. Furthermore, a method was used to check the reasonability of the data analysis. Member checking is explained as a phase in which 'the provisional report (case) is taken back to the site and subjected to the scrutiny of the persons who provided information' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 236). In this regard, participants were asked to review the analysed data. Using this approach allowed for an indication of appropriateness of the analysed results. The drafted findings chapter was sent to eight randomly selected participants, ensuring that two samples per hierarchy level reflected the findings. Their comments are presented in the summary of the analysis chapter. Three member checks proposed additional analysis, and they were added to the findings when the data set included the related information, for example the question from participant P_09: 'I wonder how many participants think full-time on-site time is required compared to how many think part-time is ok'. As the data was available, this information was added to the findings.

Presenting results

The intention of the original study was a comparative study of the three different consulting hierarchy levels, with representatives of each level participating in the study, followed by a comparison of the related results. During the analysis phase, and because it was mentioned by participants, it became clear that the life stage is more of a differentiator than the hierarchy level. Therefore, the original intention to present results per level has been rejected by the researcher. But the participant details (Table 4) include the level, so quotations can be related to a level for further data analysis.

The results provide the broad spectrum of experiences of all participants. While dominant views were summarised with a representative quote, single or contrary quotes were presented to illustrate the different perspectives of discussed themes. By extension, the reflective feedback of the member

checking method shows surprises about certain ideas and question the expectations within a high performing working environment.

3.3.4 Practical guidelines

Participants were explicitly asked to provide ideas and preferences regarding who or what would support them at the current, former and next career levels and what would support them to manage their WLB in the client environment. Ideas are listed in the findings section and presented as guidelines in the discussion chapter.

3.3.5 Ethical issues

There is substantial literature explaining the ethics of research (Giordano, O'Reilly, Taylor, & Dogra, 2007). Three essential ethical concerns should be considered when conducting a qualitative study: anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Sho-Ghi, & Cheraghi, 2014). Additionally, participants should be offered the possibility to cancel the participation for a research project at any time (Giordano et al., 2007).

The researcher is responsible for conducting the research in an ethical manner, compelled to save the identity of the study participants and to explain the process for the protection of private information in advance (Giordano et al., 2007). Following the guidelines of Sanjari et al. (2014), informed consent is essential for qualitative researchers. It incorporates the specification of data collection and usage, which was explained in the letter of consent.

This letter of consent was sent to all subjects as part of the interview invitation, and its understanding and approval were discussed at the beginning of the interviews. The confidentiality of interview recordings and transcriptions was ensured as records were saved and encrypted for the author's review only, and recordings were deleted directly after transcription. Anonymity was ensured as interviewees were not addressed by name in the interviews, nor in the transcripts. If names were used by accident, they were

deleted during the transcription process. Telephone interviews were considered to guarantee safety and flexibility. The participants' honesty and in-depths answers, paired with details of age, family status, children, role and hours of working contract, could lead to them being identified. Therefore, age is only presented in a range, and children are only shown as Boolean (yes or no). In addition, participants are presented using the notation 'P_xx' (xx = number of interview) in the subsequent chapters. Furthermore, the names of managers and colleagues (discussed by participants) were deleted from the transcripts, and the employer-participant connection is not presented in the participant information.

After the pilot study, the research request for the main study was reviewed and approved by the School Research Integrity Committee.

3.4 Summary

Determining an appropriate method for a qualitative study was argued in this chapter. Different methods and their limitations involving a philosophical stance, as well as the consideration of ethical issues, were discussed. Furthermore, the method of semi-structured interviews via telephone for data collection were explained, and the process for data analysis was introduced.

The high acceptance rate to participate in this study highlights the practical relevance of this topic. Apart from the hour of self-reflection, which some participants mentioned, they commented on their desire to contribute to progress on this topic. The open answers provided insight that is relevant for the undertaken research project. The subsequent chapters now present the findings derived from the interviews.

Chapter 4. Analysis

4.1 Introduction

A thorough analysis of the audio recordings and interview transcriptions provides findings that demonstrate a multifarious view of career and WLB in business consulting in Germany. The data findings led to the emergence of two perspectives with related themes that impact career progression and WLB. The first is the organisational perspective, presented as an organisational framework including organisational culture, support of the supervisor or manager and the availability of work-life practices. The second is the individual perspective, which mainly focussed on the personal responsibility, which in broader view include what is required as single, as a couple and the supporting system (child care, cleaner, family etcetera). These are examined in detail in this chapter.

This analysis starts with the presentation of results how consultants approach client relationships. Then, results of the theme career are analysed. This is followed by the definition of WLB, the way in which employees manage their WLB and the correlating challenges they are currently facing. Next, ideas are explained that support the better management of professional and personal life, and the chapter concludes with a summary. This chapter presents the findings of the data collection, and chapter 5 critically discusses the findings.

4.2 Consulting in a client environment

Consulting is strongly related with building and maintaining client relationships. Participants were asked how these relationships can be established and maintained considering WLB requirements.

A common view amongst interviewees was the presence of three influencing aspects that support client relationships: first, personal contact, achieved with on-site availability; second, effective collaboration with the

client and within the team and organisation, using the advantages of technical infrastructure; and finally, trust and honesty to establish and maintain client relationships. The next paragraphs explain the findings related to approaching client relationships.

Personal contact or on-site availability

The relevance of personal contact to establish and retain a client relationship was emphasised by all participants:

P_08: 'There is no way around it but to meet in person with the client.'

P_12: 'It is difficult to build up relationships if you do not see people.'

P_15: 'Consulting is a people business, which only works when people meet personally.'

However, participants held different opinions about the frequency of personal contact and the number of days in a week this contact is required to build a useful relationship; they believe that availability depends on the project phase. However, 25 participants emphasised that working remotely is essential and possible. Three participants commented that five days a week with the client is not contemporary, and four participants reflected a positive change in recent years. Finally, one participant explained the legal requirements for a public client and therewith restricted opportunities to work remotely.

P_25: 'A client relationship relates to being present. It is possible with less than four days a week. It will not work completely remotely.'

P_28: 'A client relationship does not depend on being present but on stable delivery and communication.'

The need for physical presence at the client site was considered as essential in critical project phases, for instance at the beginning of a project and before project milestones. Moreover, meetings not only on a professional

level but as well on a personal level, mutual sympathy and prime performance were expressed. A performing team on-site with the client was stated as important. Furthermore, others said they had positive experiences with planned and effective meetings during on-site days. Producing value then, from a business or home office, leads to trust, which allows for more remote work over time.

Effective collaboration using technical support

As part of this interview section, participants were asked what communication channels or tools could support the establishment of client relationships considering WLB. Participants commented that continuous communication with modern tools for collaboration is important.

P_24: 'Compared to our parents, we have much more means to produce value without being physically in the office.'

Participants proposed tools and technical infrastructure requirements they deemed to be important. The list below represents the results (an explanation of these technical tools is not considered further):

- Virtual office integration of client and consulting provider
- Video or telephone: WebEx, Skype and conference services
- Collaboration tools: Trello, Slack, digital whiteboards, scrum boards, Mural, Cycles and Sametime
- Optimal infrastructure and remote system access for client infrastructure
- Extended data packages and integrated sim cards in laptops or iPads

Nevertheless, one participant stated that despite these technical means, building a client relationship 'will be always easier if you are on-site' (P_11).

Trust and honesty

Either trust or honesty played an important role for client relationships for 15 participants. In numerous comments, participants commented on the need for trustful and honest communication with the client.

P_04: 'I believe honesty plays an important role.'

P_13: 'I have had the best experiences by being open and honest.'

This, in turn, was considered supportive in negotiating individual WLB requirements with clients.

P_07: 'Good results are essential. Therewith one buys the trust of the client.'

P_09: 'Honesty, trust and reliability are cornerstones for a client relationship.'

Two participants mentioned the correlation between trust and the family situation.

P_14: 'Build mutual understanding and trust, speak about family and hobbies. Clients will consider that one is not only a consultant but a private person.'

P27: 'Be authentic. Instead of feigning sickness to take care of my children. The client counterpart might be a father as well and will probably understand the situation very well.'

Building a client relationship in a consulting business was the starting point of this research. This section focused primarily on setting the stage for further findings. A study exploring only client relationships will achieve broader results and is recommended. In addition, further research related to the influence of trust on a consulting business would be interesting.

4.3 Career

4.3.1 Definition

To explore the related research question, participants were asked how they define career. A rather unexpected outcome was that only a small number of respondents explained career as ‘the typical ladder’ with increasing salary and responsibilities.

P_17: ‘Of course to climb the career ladder and not remain 4 years in one position. [...] I want to make a career to shape most of my private life according to my preferences.’

P_27: ‘It means to take over responsibility, get recognised and grow within an organisation.’

During the interviews, a few suggestions to define career related to personal development or individual self-determination and its target achievements or recognition.

P_29: ‘A career is something that shifts but is only a job. Career means to make development steps that are planned and achievable, and it has something to do with promotion and new roles.’

Two interviewees argued that a career is about a view of the large whole.

P_16: ‘To observe different departments, managerial and budget responsibility and therewith to work more holistically.’

One participant talked about creating value and change that impact organisations and people, while another emphasised making a difference as a leader and acting as a role model. In addition, three subjects felt that a career is about decision-making, while one explained a career as leading and coaching people.

P_26: ‘Career is to do things I like, with people I want to work with.’

One said that WLB must still be achievable on the next career levels. This was echoed in relation to leisure time:

P_02: 'If becoming a partner means having no spare time anymore, I would deny such a promotion, as I want to take over responsibilities not solely in my workplace.'

Acknowledging the different views on career, a consolidated definition is not appropriate.

4.3.2 Career ambitions and options

The career ambitions of those working or planning to work in part-time consulting roles were slightly different from those with a full-time contract. They argued in favour of either postponing their careers for further years, but desire to change a job role or to enrich working tasks. Two reported aiming to progress when career and work-life are compatible.

P_02: 'Self-determined and aligned with my personal life situation, making the next step in part-time, too.'

P_03: 'I do not know if this is a career step, moving sideward. It would be interesting to learn other tasks and round my profile.'

Some of those who intend to grow a family declared that they would move out of consultancy jobs and opt for local jobs without travel requirements.

P_05: 'Regular travel, as required in consulting, is no option when I grow a family.'

Two participants who already have children recently quit consulting and have taken offers for in-house consulting to better combine work and life.

P_21: 'My daughter has contributed to the decision to leave classic consulting.'

The negative impact on children was named twice, if both parents progress their careers.

P_03: 'Disregard prosperity! When both parents are working, then children often sit in front of the television or laptop the entire day.'

Another interviewee asked the following questions with frustration:

P_09: 'Is work-life balance with the next level more difficult because of increasing expectations? Does this make me happy then?'

One participant questioned why the next career step should be taken:

P_15: 'I cannot stand the stagnancy. I need challenges without being overburden.'

Three participants explained their career ambition with a logical equation and how to achieve this career target.

P_13: 'If I want to progress fast, I need many experiences. Experiences require time. To be faster than others, I require those experiences in a shorter time; thus, I need to more working hours.'

The following statement is a comment from a top-level participant relating to career opportunities after the partner level.

P_24: 'There are various opportunities: a global partner role, client partner role or general manager role.'

For the second theme, namely, career, the responses of the participants were surprisingly individual and had a different focus. Therefore, the need emerged to question what these different views of career mean for WLB and how different career definitions, preferences and priorities impact employees' WLB requirements.

Next, section 4.4 is related to presents the findings for the third theme, WLB.

4.4 Work-life balance

4.4.1 Definition

Participants were asked to respond to a set of questions aimed to obtain insights into the definition, management and challenges of WLB. In response to the question, 'How do employees define work-life balance?', some interviewees defined WLB as a balanced relation between working time and remaining time. Others said that it means having time for family and friends apart from their jobs and recovering fully during the weekend to powerfully approach new themes in the new working week. Another three participants stated the following:

P_05: 'It is a balance between leisure time and work that is healthy and does not end in burnout.'

P_10: 'That I have time for self-fulfilment despite my job.'

P_13: 'For me, it is really important that work is not work but creates fun and feels like leisure time.'

One participant remarked that working on Sundays is no issue if he or she is compensated in the form of two coherent days without work during the week. Another interviewee defined WLB as spending time with his or her husband and children, playing sport two to three times per week, and having the weekends be free from work. Another three mentioned the following:

P_15: 'That my vacation is my vacation.'

P_27: 'Good feeling for all parts of my life: work, family, myself.'

P_28: 'That I enjoy my work and my daughter does not call me uncle.'

The participants' different views about their WLB are acknowledged. Putting all views briefly together, the following could be a definition of WLB: Work-life balance is an individual, flexible combination of work (fun, enjoyment, luck, positive energy, flexibility, self-determination) and time for oneself

(sport, relaxation, health); family (children, spouses, parents); and friends (society) that benefits work and life, requires organisation and supports self-fulfilment.

The core issue of WLB is the potential area of conflict when one's professional life and personal life interfere with each other, leading to dissatisfaction regarding the impact of a potential imbalance. The responses of participant suggested to acknowledge different priorities in different life stages.

4.4.2 Work-life balance challenges

Various perspectives were expressed when participants explained their challenges regarding WLB. Within the data analysis, eight themes emerged from the data set that are summarised in the Table 6. Five of these themes were found in the literature reviewing WLB studies. The other four were defined according to repetitive participant discussion for this interview question.

Table 6: WLB challenges

Challenge	Description	Found in Literature
Dual career	Both partners in a couple want to progress career.	yes
Part-time work	Working part-time and its implications.	yes
Performance pressure	Pressure from peers and managers. Lack of skill to estimate efforts for tasks, thereby resulting in pressure.	yes
Travel	Travel in consulting and its implications on work-life balance.	yes
Compatibility	Combining both professional and private life.	yes
Private vs. business appointment	Deciding and prioritising between private and business appointments.	partly
Self-awareness to keep balance and energy level	Balancing individual tasks and health.	partly
The ability to say 'no'	Learning to say 'no' to tasks and appointments.	no ⁴

⁴ This was not found in the literature in the context of WLB, career and consulting.

The details of the above-mentioned challenges are described in the next sections, with information about which consulting hierarchies mentioned these themes.

Challenge: Dual career aspiration

This challenge was mentioned at all consulting levels. A dual career is an emerging theme in the literature, exploring a career model where both partners in a couple intend to build their careers while sharing non-work responsibilities.

P_05: 'Flexibility becomes more and more a topic for men as well, as women call for support when they work as well.'

P_15: 'Both have an expectation of professional fulfilment.'

P_21: 'Reducing my working hours, as well as my wife's hours, reduced the pressure.'

Challenge: Working part-time

The challenge of working part-time was mentioned at the medium level of consulting. Despite this theme only being mentioned by two participants, it was chosen as a separate challenge because it has been reflected as a major theme in the literature, and participants mentioned it in the section related to ideas with strong arguments.

P_03: 'My manager told me to search for a new job as he has no use for me in part-time.'

P_12: 'There is only little time overlap with colleagues, and part-time roles are not available.'

Working part-time in consulting requires further attention as this working constellation is closely related to WLB and the compatibility of work and family for those who have non-work responsibilities.

Challenge: Performance pressure

This challenge was mentioned at the medium and entry levels. One participant felt a personal sense of duty to perform. Another commented that one must perform and demonstrate performance.

P_02: 'There is a comparison with peers at year end, and I want to receive good feedback from both the client and my employer.'

One participant mentioned self-made performance pressure in the following statement:

P_22: 'I need to learn to continue the next day. 80% might fit as well.'

This type of critical reflection was made by another participant as well, arguing in favour of carefully considering other tasks when additional work comes along.

P_06: 'Starting a task without reflection of impact on other tasks.'

This was emphasised by another response, commenting on how to deal with unfinished work and its impact on stress levels.

P_10: 'If there is still work on Friday 6pm, I can decide to finish this within two hours or continue on Monday, which would stress me directly at the beginning of the week.'

Two participants from the entry level expressed the challenge of missing skills and the resulting pressure as the efforts to complete a task was not estimated correctly. They had no other challenges but the desire to produce valuable work for the company while facing the expectation to perform accordingly.

P_07: 'I have a lack of specific technical skill. So often it requires more time for tasks than I estimated.'

P_08: 'I have to compensate for the lack of experience and knowledge with higher working time. This will be improved over time with efficiency and leave those two hours every evening for personal time.'

Challenge: Travel

This theme was mentioned at all consulting hierarchy levels. Travel was mentioned from different perspectives by all participants, though not all considered it to be a challenge. One participant would simply love to travel less to be home more often, while another commented that a high amount of travel time is required between projects, boyfriend and family. Four participants reflected that travel time is often not accepted as working time even if there are formal regulations defining this.

P_09: 'Generally travel time should be working time.'

The expectation is that 40 hours per week should be invoiced to the client; however, travel time cannot be invoiced, and this results in overtime, which leads to challenges and demotivation.

One participant explained the issue that often the best price counts for travel instead of the best connection. This has an impact on private time, which is reduced, and the delivered quality.

P_26: 'Taking the "hero" flight at 6am and 10pm back home.'

P_28: 'Expecting that someone can work directly after a long-distance flight in economy class is not acceptable.'

Expense reimbursement was mentioned by different participants. Travelling every week requires regular expense reimbursement, otherwise this impacts one's personal bank account. In addition, stress was a topic if one was not reimbursed over a number of weeks, and sometimes the decision is between valuable tasks for the company or the administration of ex-

penses to fill one's bank account and feed the family. Others said that claiming expenses for travel can only be managed at the weekend, which impacts WLB.

P_10: 'I have time for travel reimbursement only at the weekend.'

Participants mentioned that work-life challenges could be reduced if travel could be discussed with the client and project managers. The theme of travel, especially ideas to reduce travel, is a major point of the idea discussion later in this chapter.

Challenge: Compatibility

The compatibility of work and non-work tasks or the organisation of one's personal life while facing the requirements at work was one of the major interview discussions by participants.

Entry-level participants reported that they have low energy levels on the weekend to meet friends or that they have to decide between relaxing and meeting friends or family, which leads to a disruption between all parties.

P_17: 'I felt disrupted. One does not satisfy anyone anymore.'

Medium-level participants mentioned the difficulty in relying on others who continuously support the household and children. One participant commented that others need to accept background voices during calls when appointments are in the afternoon.

P_19: 'Calls are possible at any time, but people have to deal with the fact that there are background voices.'

Another participant said that the employer and his child manage and significantly influence the WLB, and taking personal time impacts the effort for his wife, so 'only with agreement, I can take time for me' (P_21).

P_14: '60 hours a week impacts compatibility.'

Two comments were made by top-level participants, not as challenges, but rather as self-reflected statements. One said that keeping lunch time in mind requires more structure. Another said he prioritises private appointments and discusses alternatives with his client, which often works well.

Challenge: Private appointment vs. business appointment

Fifteen participants mentioned the interference of private life with business life and the resulting conflicting appointments, which indicates that this interference is an important challenge for WLB.

Entry-level participants expressed the desire to be home more to participate in private appointments, and they expressed their feelings when deciding this.

P_16: 'I feel I have to excuse myself to leave earlier and express that I put a higher priority on my life than on work.'

One participant said that during vacations, working efforts are limited to three mails a day and one call in a week. While one participant mentioned the conflict of deciding on priorities between private and business appointments, another participant felt that he can afford to take the time when a private appointment is more important. Two participants mentioned the negative impact of rescheduling doctor appointments when short-term changes from clients occurred and availability for the client was expected.

P_11: 'Repeated rescheduling of doctors' appointments and danger to be thrown out.'

Within the medium-level responses, one participant assessed the value of a business telephone conference vs. dinner with family. One participant admitted that it is an intense learning process to prioritise private appointments that are important for one's personal health. Others mentioned their issues regarding work and non-work appointments.

P_19: 'Everyone is screaming: project, family, friends.'

One participant reflected that the more important one is, the better the options to define appointments that fit to the schedule. The largest issue for one participant was satisfying all parties and still having time to breath in between instead of holding the baby while having a telephone conference. The challenge was the desire to make everything ideal and not planning enough time for oneself.

P_29: 'Private time does not simply mean time to relax but to pick up children, make dinner, care for the family.'

Prioritising private appointments was an intense learning process for one participant. Scheduling private meetings with friends in other towns works sometimes easily, and other times with more difficulty. One interviewee reflected that, too often, she sets the wrong priorities for business appointments.

P_02: 'I still set the wrong priorities and need to ask why my private appointment is less important than the business appointment.'

Challenge: Self-awareness of energy levels and keeping balance

This theme has various facets. One participant felt negatively about missing balance. Another argued that it is a relief to have only three days away from home. One argued that keeping the balance required much discipline 'to take a yoga course in the hotel room before starting with the project.' (P_09).

Another participant said that colleagues sometimes have young children and aging parents to take care of. They thus need to be sure to keep the balance.

P_29: 'The challenge is to pay attention to take the time and notice before getting sick or toppling.'

The lack of energy was part of the discussion by three participants.

P_16: 'Not enough energy for private events after a hard week.'

One participant said that being honest and taking the required time to recover are required, while another argued the impact on performance.

P_26: 'Authenticity can only be achieved if one is fresh and rested. This is important for further development.'

One participant mentioned that not losing priorities is important. Work and life require a balance, and neither one should be higher than the other.

P_09: 'I need to treat myself as important, stating that this is my time now; I take care of myself now.'

Challenge: Need to say no

The need to say no emerged from 12 participants. This theme is closely related to the theme of self-awareness and keeping balance. Participants reflected the 'need to learn to say no' (P_22) and 'not to feel guilty' (P_24).

P_02: 'It is a challenge to say no to a business task because of a private appointment.'

One participant spoke about the inner conflict he experiences when he says no, stating that it leaves a feeling of letting others stand in the rain. Another response was related to health issues.

P_17: 'I woke up at night and had heavy knee aches. Reflecting that it is time to say no.'

While one participant discussed the difficulty in making a cut when the solution seems close, another participant argued that clients expect an ideal result, even though one knows that the deadline cannot be met. Furthermore, two participants explained their self-awareness as follows:

P_12: 'I need to be strict and deny meetings in the afternoons.'

Eight clustered themes regarding WLB challenges emerged from the interviews. Most comments came from the overlap between professional and personal life, which leads to a lack of time for oneself. The broad variety of

challenges reflects employees' varying circumstances and priorities. Depending on family duties or other social responsibilities, the highest attention was given to the following two themes: 1) travel, along with its impact, and 2) the compatibility of one's private and professional life and decision-making between work and non-work appointments.

4.4.3 Work-life balance management

Analysing the responses to the question, 'How do you manage your work-life balance?', two themes, namely flexibility and having a structured approach (e.g., a plan), dominated the dataset, whereas the way in which participants managed their professional and personal life depended on their work-life stage and individual circumstances.

Four participants with children required high flexibility to react to situations (e.g., sickness, doctors' appointment, inflexible opening times of kindergarten) and mentioned that they desire tolerance and support from the employer to better handle the existing conflict between overlapping work and non-work activities. Others installed a supporting system with a nanny, home help or grandparents. For two participants, the following feedback from their families was useful: an expression of the participants' absence at home and the reminder that more balance between work and family was required. One participant reduced the weekly working hours to 20 hours and prioritised family over working. Another participant, working part-time, decided to spend more time with the children in the afternoon but continued working once they were in bed. Another commented on the consequence of overlapping work and family time and explained a different approach depending on the priority:

P_03: 'If appointments are scheduled in the afternoon, they are either postponed, made in parallel with background noises or considered as personally important. Then, children sit in front of the television.'

Participants without children seek flexibility to meet friends for lunch; to work different number of hours per week or to sleep longer and start later. Depending on their personal rhythm, they want to decide to work on weekends or not, or to work without mails and telephone conferences to better concentrate on business or technical requirement documents for clients.

P_05: 'I have no concrete management approach; I simply define what I want to do besides work and then take the time for that.'

Fifteen participants explained that they manage work and non-work tasks with a plan or with a structured approach.

P_24: 'I organise myself on weekends where I look at the week ahead. We distribute the tasks among the family, delegate a lot. I have a cleaner. I have a nanny.'

One participant argued that using a delivery service and delegating household tasks increases the time for family or oneself; however, this is a matter of money and a decision regarding priorities. The use of the Google family planner, which is synchronised with the company calendar, was mentioned four times. This helps to block the business calendar with private appointments to avoid schedule conflicts.

P_08: 'I have a hard cut. During the week I only work and concentrate on the client. The weekend remains for sport, friends and family.'

P_10: 'My girlfriend manages the weekend.'

One participant always switched his or her mobile onto 'do not disturb mode' between 9.30pm and 9am, while another communicated his or her availability. Two said that the abilities to say 'No' and to realistically estimate the effort required to complete a task before committing to a deadline are important in this business. While one participant preferred to document working hours and sometimes postpone breaks until the work was done, another subject used the morning for private tasks to avoid postponing them in case work was not finished in the evening.

P_14: 'I manage myself. My company offers work-life balance activities, but I make use of them by using the virtual infrastructure for remote work in my home office.'

P_25: 'My manager does not control my day-to-day business but expects results. How I achieve them is my responsibility.'

These responses from the interviews provide a substantial amount of evidence that the management of WLB is individual – in some cases without any approach, and in other cases with both flexibility and a structured approach to handle the tasks that occur. While a few participants organise their time and create areas in their lives that are protected from work, others tend to integrate work and non-work and are satisfied with this approach. A more detailed view on how participants strive to manage work and home in their daily lives cannot be provided, as the question aimed to provide a broad view. While participants could likely share numerous examples from their daily lives, this was not a question in the interview, nor is it the focus of the study.

4.4.4 Work-life balance satisfaction

Statistical analysis of potential correlation between variables were not included in the research design. Nevertheless, three charts are embedded in this paragraph to present the available quantitative data related to working hours and WLB satisfaction.

A part of the WLB theme was the question regarding contracted and actual working hours per week. A difference appears between contracted hours (20 to 41 hours per week) and actual hours (20 to 70 hours per week) emerged from the data collection. Figure 6 shows that 23 participants reported higher actual working hours, and 5 participants reported actual working hours equal to the contracted working hours.

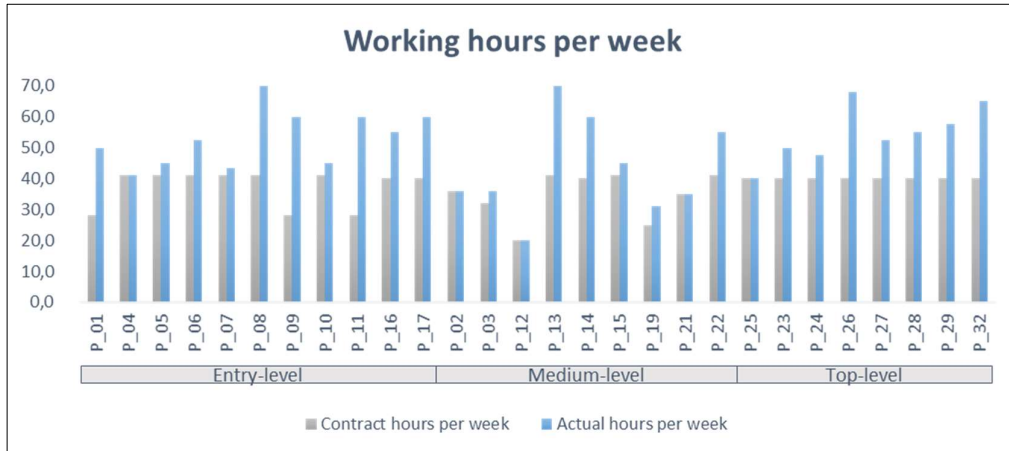


Figure 6: Contracted vs. actual working hours per week⁵

In addition to the working hours, interviewees were asked to rate their WLB satisfaction on a scale from 1 to 10 (1 = low satisfaction, 10 = high satisfaction). The result is presented in Figure 7. On a scale of 1 to 10, 22 participants rated their WLB satisfaction at 7 or higher. It appears that other variables than only actual working hours should be considered to analyse WLB satisfaction.

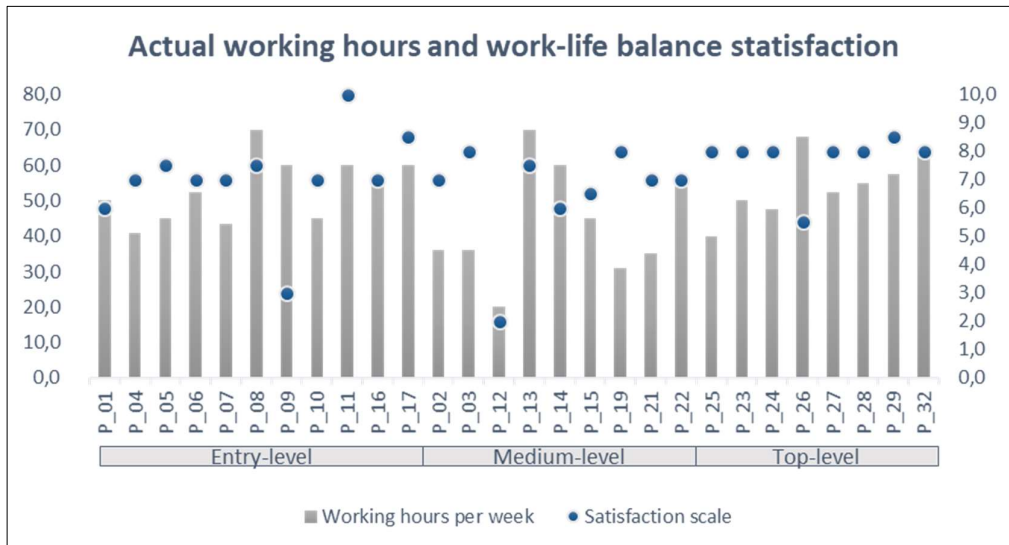


Figure 7: Actual working hours and work-life satisfaction⁶

⁵ Data was sorted by consulting hierarchy level (entry-medium-top), then by participant number.

⁶ Data was sorted by consulting hierarchy level (entry-medium-top), then by participant number.

The need to include other variables becomes even more clear with the chart of WLB satisfaction and the average overtime hours in Figure 8. For instance, participants P_09 and P_11 have the highest average overtime hours per week (60 actual hours vs. 28 contracted hours). While P_11 rated his work-life satisfaction with a score of 10, P_09 replied with 3.

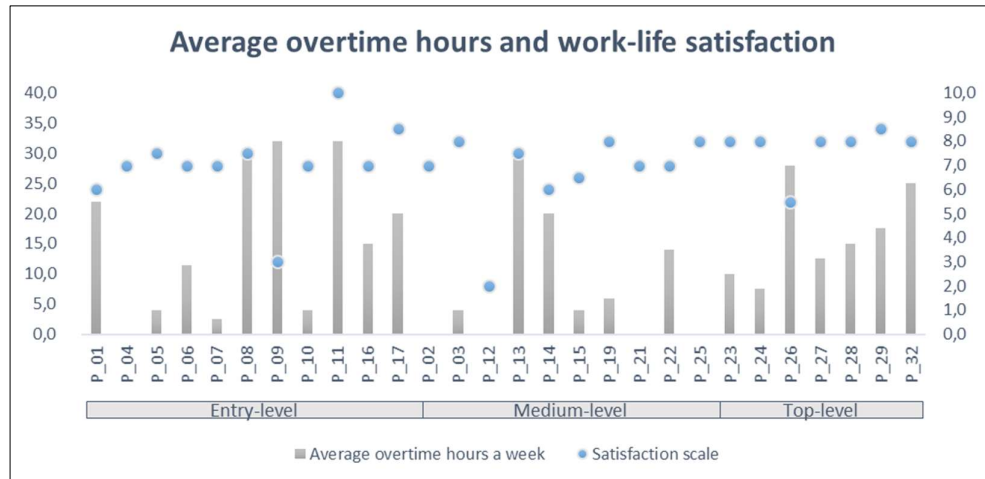


Figure 8: Average overtime hours and work-life satisfaction⁷

This comparison indicates the necessity of further influencing factors on work-life satisfaction. By chance, in this case, participants provided some details explaining their satisfaction rating. Participant P_09 recognised decreasing motivation as a result of the high amount of overtime every week. She explained that promising the client deliverables while not having the project team capacity to realise them was rather frustrating and only achievable by neglecting her WLB. Participant P_11, reporting the same amount of overtime (an average of 32 hours per week), rated his satisfaction at a 10, mentioning the opportunity to gain experience in different areas, a competent project team, daily jogging and high personal intrinsic motivation. Explanations such as these two were rarely provided by participants, and they are not focus of this study; therefore, they require attention in further research.

⁷ Data was sorted by consulting hierarchy level (entry-medium-top), then by participant number.

From the analysis of another example, again referring to the chart above, four participants from the medium level reported no overtime per week. While participant P_20, working 20 hours per week, rated her satisfaction at 2, the two participants P_02 and P_12, both in part-time positions, provided a rating of 7. Participant P_25, working full-time, rated satisfaction with a score of 8.

In an additional analysis in Table 7, presenting the consulting level and gender, the average WLB satisfaction calculation resulted in an average of 7.1 out of 10. Females from the entry level and both females and males from the medium level rated their WLB satisfaction below the 7.1 average.

Table 7: Level satisfaction by gender

Level	Gender	Participants	Average of satisfaction scale
Entry level	Female	4	6.1
	Male	7	7.6
Medium level	Female	6	6.6
	Male	4	6.9
Top level	Female	2	8.3
	Male	5	7.5
Grand Total		28	7.1

Analysing WLB satisfaction related to level and children, the Table 8 reflects the lowest satisfaction at the medium level with children. The highest average is found at the top level without children; however, this average is made up of only one participant's rating.

Table 8: Level satisfaction for participants with and without children

Level	Children	Participants	Average of satisfaction scale
Entry level	N	11	7.0
Medium level	N	4	7.4
	Y	6	6.3
Top level	N	1	8.0
	Y	6	7.7
Grand Total		28	7.1

The analysis of participants' responses to the question regarding how their satisfaction on the same scale from 1 to 10 will change at the next career level delivered surprising results. All seven participants from the top level, with an average satisfaction of 7.7, said this satisfaction rating would remain on the next career level. In contrast, of the 10 participants from the medium level, with an average satisfaction of 6.7, 3 replied that the rating would remain, and 7 stated that there would be a decline in satisfaction at the next career level. The 11 entry level participants, with an average satisfaction of 7.0, had the most diverse responses. Four of them, with an average satisfaction level of 5.9, expect an increase in work-life satisfaction at the next career level, while three said the satisfaction level will remain, and four participants responded that their satisfaction will decline at the next career level.

Including the variable of age in this analysis reveals that among the five ranges of 26–30, 31–35, 36–40, 41–45 and 46–50, at least one participant said that work-life satisfaction at the next career level will decline. An increase was reported only by participants in two age ranges: three participants aged 26–30 and one aged 31–35 by. Counting this together, 4 out of 28 participants thought their satisfaction, with an overall average of 7.1 among all participants, will increase.

Commenting on the question regarding what participants miss to rate their WLB satisfaction as 10 (1=not satisfied; 10=very satisfied with WLB), the surveyed yielded a variety of answers: financial independence, more sport, a happy family, never give the highest score in a rating, local project assignment, more leisure time, more engagement with family responsibilities, nothing, time for own hobbies, more resources on the project, less senseless travel, late night tasks that overlap private appointments or the ability to take a rest to recover.

Another question was, 'What would be the ideal working hours, if you had the choice?'. Twenty-five participants answered that the ideal working hours would be less than the actual hours (27 hours per week), and only three participants said the ideal hours would be the same as the actual hours.

Another view on this analysis in Table 9 is that 20 participants hold a full-time contract, and eight had a part-time contract.

Table 9: Ideal contract type

Contract type	Participants
Part-time ideally	15
Number of participants holding a part-time contract	7
Number of participants holding a full-time contract	8
Full-time ideally	13
Number of participants holding a part-time contract	1
Number of participants holding a full-time contract	12
Total	28

Regulated in § 2 Teilzeit- und Befristungsgesetz (paragraph two, law for part-time and terminability), a part-time employee is defined as someone who has fewer working hours than a full-time employee. According to (Staufenbiel Institut, 2019), in Germany, an employee on a full-time contract must work 37.5 hours or more. Therefore, for this study, 37 hours per week or less is considered as part-time and 37 and above is full-time. Comparing the actual with the ideal contract type illustrates that now 13 participants desire a full-time contract, and 15 want to work part-time (8 of whom held a full-time contract). A part-time contract seems to be a means to realise better WLB satisfaction for participants.

As this study aims to demonstrate that WLB is not only related to women, the gender variable is added to this analysis in Table 10, showing that 8 of 16 men seek to work part-time, with six of them holding a full-time contract.

Table 10: Ideal contract type with gender

Contract type	Gender		
	Female	Male	Total
Part-time ideally	7	8	15
Number of participants holding a part-time contract	5	2	7
Number of participants holding a full-time contract	2	6	8
Full-time ideally	5	8	13
Number of participants holding a part-time contract		1	1
Number of participants holding a full-time contract	5	7	12
Total	12	16	28

Adding the variable of consulting level in Table 11, leads to an even more surprising result about the distribution among participants. Those eight participants who hold a full-time contract, and who desire a part-time contract in an ideal world, can be found at all three levels.

Table 11: Ideal contract type by gender and level

Number of participants holding Contract type	Entry-level		Medium-level		Top-level		Total
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Part-time ideally	2	2	5	4			15
A part-time contract	1	1	4	1			7
A full-time contract	1	1	1	3		2	8
Full-time ideally	2	5	1		2	3	13
A part-time contract			1				1
A full-time contract	2	4	1		2	3	12
Total	4	7	6	4	2	5	28

Further research is recommended to qualify these correlations, additionally considering the individual situation of each person. The results in the interview block of WLB indicate that subjects define and manage WLB individually and, almost all participants experienced challenges with managing their WLB. Most of the participants desired fewer working hours as contracted hours or even preferring a part-time contract.

The next chapter moves on to present the findings about the compatibility of WLB and career. Ideas are revealed regarding how organisations can support employees to manage WLB while progressing the desired career and the role of the individual in this context.

4.5 Work-life balance and career progression

4.5.1 Compatibility of work-life balance and career progression

The related interview question regarding how WLB impacts career brings all above-mentioned themes together. The responses to this question are key for understanding the attitudes, barriers, fears and requirements of participants to make WLB compatible with their chose career progression. A wide range of responses emerged –the transcription of this interview question

alone delivered over 5,000 words. This highlights the varied and complex discussion of this topic with different perspectives.

For the purpose of reflecting the broad spectrum of responses, a special method was chosen for presenting results. Even though this presentation method is not common, it provides a useful empirical base and underlines how much data was gathered from all the interviews. The following list presents one comment by each of the 28 participants. This list is clustered by different starting sentences. Above all, it is important to note that while participants argued different perspectives, only one comment is reflected in the overview below. The original interview question was: 'How do you experience the impact of WLB and making career?'

The participant responses below were mapped to the follow up question in the interview: 'Is WLB compatible with career progression?'

Yes, ...

P_23: ... it is absolutely possible.

Yes, if ...

P_11: ... one sets personal standards and communicates them.

P_14: ... organisations provide prerequisites to support both.

P_19: ... there are no family duties.

P_32: ... working fewer hours is clear communicated.

Yes, but ...

P_09: ... there are only a few role models who manage both.

P_13: ... only if results and not working hours are measured.

P_24: ... it's not only a matter for woman. It is cultural and personal.

P_29: ... this is a personal decision of priorities and investment.

P_07: ... progress is faster and higher with more working hours.

P_05: ... it depends on the engagement and the personal ambition.

P_25: ... the higher the WLB, the slower the progression.

P_27: ... it requires a rethinking of organisations.

It is difficult ...

P_08: ... when only the personal WLB pattern counts.

P_17: ... if the priorities for WLB are higher than for career.

P_21: ... as tasks on a higher career level require more efforts.

P_28: ... with an inflexible attitude of rigid working hour limits.

No, it is not possible ...

P_04: ... to combine both. This means making high sacrifices.

P_03: ... as my husband is travelling, and it has an impact on children.

P_12: ... with part time, career progression stops.

If one wants to build a career ...

P_02: ... it needs long working hours and deferring WLB.

P_06: ... it requires more working time than with less career ambition.

P_22: ... it seems that long working hours are required.

P_10: ... only the 41 hours for the client are not enough.

Responses with other comments:

P_01: Without life, it's a barrier to make a career; you disturb yourself.

P_15: Certain satisfaction is needed for the next career steps.

P_16: Inefficient work makes no career. Time alone is no indicator.

P_26: Balance is needed for mental freshness to make decisions.

This list of single statements by participants is essential for the understanding of the complexity of this undertaken research. 28 different perspectives on the question, whether WLB and career is compatible, was extracted from the data collection. The related findings indicate a number of barriers that participants reflected when discussing career progression while having non-work responsibilities or other preferences. Next, further responses of the participants are presented in more detail to illustrate the differences between the expectation from the business or the team and the personal view.

Workload as such and its expected increase with career progress were associated with a negative impact on WLB.

P_07: 'I believe working time increases with increased responsibility.'

In addition, performance pressure or workload pressure emerged from the interviews as a barrier for compatibility.

P_04: 'I do not believe both are compatible because the pressure is too high. One has duties in private life and duties in business life. One then has the obligation to prioritise business higher, which impacts the balance for the private life.'

Moreover, a few participants stated that complete neglect of WLB, including neglecting one's family, was essential or the easiest way to progress up the career ladder.

P_09: 'I have often heard and seen that career only works at the expense of work-life balance.'

P_16: 'I believe neglecting work-life balance is the easiest way to support career.'

P_22: 'In many heads, much work is related to career progress.'

This stands in contrast to the opinion of one participant, who believes that while a career is possible with overtime, caring only for one's working life will not offer any possibilities.

P_01: 'It is important to remain a human being and not to transform into a machine.'

In the consulting sector, the 'extra mile' is a common term for overtime, meaning additional efforts as visible performance commitment. One participant said that taking over more responsibility for a team is an implicit acceptance of the extra mile.

P_06: 'Therefore, more time is applied if one wants to build a career.'

P_05: 'Those who engage with business tasks during leisure time have a career advantage.'

While one participant admitted taking little consideration for WLB to achieve more, another participant stated that the amount of time one wishes to spend at work should be a personal decision. Another comment was related to the need to be present to be successful.

P_29: 'It is a personal decision to accept the price of time investment or if other things are more important.'

P_27: 'It is easier to progress with more working time. Being present and available plays an important role for career.'

A more general understanding of the consulting job role was provided by two participants. They stated that one chooses consulting with an awareness of the high number of working hours.

P_25: 'One does not decide on consulting with the expectation of a nine-to-five job. Career is strongly related to working time.'

P_26: 'Can one make career in consulting with 38 hours working time in a week? No, I do not believe that.'

Other participants reflected the opposite, suggesting that the more one shapes WLB, the less career progression there is.

P_08: 'If one is deadlocked in his or her own work-life balance pattern, this is a barrier for career progression.'

P_16: 'I believe there is a direct correlation. If one reduces work-life balance ambitions, career is much easier to achieve.'

P_19: 'If one does not have any family responsibilities and therefore has more power for additional tasks, you can invest more in one's career.'

The most positive statements about compatibility of WLB and career were made by participants with no children.

P_23: 'It is just a question of approach. Quality can be even better in less working time.'

P_02: 'I believe it is possible, but one needs to be well organised, and it requires support by the manager and the client.'

In contrast, two participants with children experienced difficulties in receiving project assignments, which in turn impact on career progression. Furthermore, they mentioned the impact on their children.

P_12: 'I have not had a good experience, because I'm not getting the same roles that I used to be doing.'

P_03: 'If both progress career, children will suffer.'

This may be the reason one participant commented that he observed that employees with a part-time contract work overtime – often 40 hours and more – but 'get compensated only part-time, which does not make sense to me at all' (P_11).

Many responses were in agreement with the statement below, reflecting the conflict between a) the need for relaxation time to both gather new ideas and remain healthy and b) the need to experience a broader view with the expectation to progress one's career.

P_15: 'One requires satisfaction and self-awareness for sustainable career steps. Therefore work-life balance is important. Nevertheless, I believe prioritising leisure time is a barrier for the next career step.'

Concluding this section, is accompanied by disappointment. Even though a few participants suggest that with the support of a manager or the project team, and in agreement with the client, WLB is possible while building a career, the majority of participants responded that being present, working more than contracted, being more engaged, going the extra mile or even neglecting private life is positively related to career progression.

As the overall result of this interview question, two major themes that affect WLB and career progression emerged and dominated participants' responses. The first set of arguments is summarised as an organisational framework, and the second is named 'personal responsibility'. The next sections present the correlated findings.

4.5.2 Organisational framework

The organisational framework includes WLB practices and working models, organisational culture and leadership persons. The following sections present the findings of this sub-theme.

Supporting working models for work-life balance

Derived from the literature, WLB practices count for employer choice.

P_25: 'Granting less travel days to the junior generation makes the consulting job much more attractive.'

Participants were asked about the supporting working models relevant for them. However, many participants responded to this question with work-life practices instead. Therefore, the mentioned working models and work-life practices are summarised in the Table 12.

Table 12: Proposed work-life practices

Proposed work-life practices	Descriptions used from participant responses
Flexible working hours	Self-determined working flexibility within the legal regulations (e.g., starting at 10am, having a 2-hour lunch break or finishing at 3pm on one day and 8pm on another).
Sabbatical	Take off a certain number of months. Different models in each company.
Different working hour models	Part-time, full-time, specific days in a week
Job-sharing / Tandems	Two or more people sharing a role. This could be on-site/off-site or junior/senior, or each is working 2.5 days per week.
Yearly hours account	A yearly number of hours (e.g., 1,800 hours are defined. Once these hours are invoiced to the client, the rest of the year is vacation time).
Life working time accounts	Overtime can be collected over years and used for longer vacations or earlier retirement.
Unpaid vacation	Additional vacations can be requested and approved without payment.
Bonus compensation	Bonuses can be transformed into additional leisure time or vacations.
Overtime compensation	Overtime can be transformed into salaries, additional leisure time or vacations.
Salary configurator	(Vacation, overtime, part-time, local assignments)

One WLB practice from this list was not mentioned in the reviewed literature and is therefore worth explaining: the salary configurator, which was men-

tioned by one participant. This tool-based offering allows consultants to calculate their salary impact when they buy and sell vacations, reduce or increase working hours and contractually request only local project assignments. The number of employee contracts restricted to local projects is limited and has time restrictions. According to the participant view, the negative salary impact is agreed by employees; however, it supports them to have planning reliability for non-travel time and to better manage their work and non-work tasks. Within this tool, the option to sell and buy vacations was popular among the employees of this company.

Culture

Culture or organisational culture can be found extensively in literature. This term emerged from the interviews as a major influence factor for WLB and career. The consulting career culture was introduced in the literature review and provided a first indication of importance for the topic of WLB. The emergence of this theme supposes that WLB is not only about company policies but the culture of the workplace.

The majority of the participants shared the opinion that a career in consulting, in balance with personal life, is possible only under certain circumstances or with dedicated priorities. Working long hours, being present, being available 24/7 and working the 'extra hour' were named as expected criteria. Furthermore, interviewees mentioned a discrepancy between enterprise policy and experienced culture.

P_16: 'My employer offers part-time models, but the lived practice shows that part-timers have difficulties receiving exciting tasks because they are not flexible enough. If one works part-time, this implies surrendering career perspectives.'

P_29: 'If someone requested part-time and did not have cancer, then this person was done. Formally, it was possible, but this company was so old-school that career was immediately over, and you were no longer a promotion candidate.'

One participant suggested that if influence factors for work, such as project location and working hours, can be influenced personally, then career progression is possible. Some subjects complained that women in part-time roles are either not promoted or only promoted with the 'woman ticket'. Furthermore, one interviewee denied that it will be possible to build a career when working only 38 hours.

P_16: 'Deferring work-life balance is the easiest way to achieve career progression.'

One participant reflected on the moral and long-term effects of missing WLB in consulting. Working 40 hours when those hours are paid was defined as correct.

P_07: 'What happens if the employee is overworked till burnout? Who cares about the cost, and how does an ethical employer handle this situation – getting rid of this person, just take the next one and burn this one again?'

Some comments about group pressure and the unspoken expectation to deliver as much as possible were interesting. Impolite remarks about behaviour related to arriving and leaving can result in unpleasant feelings, as expressed by the following comments:

P_01: 'That others leave you with a feeling when you are finished, but others still have a lot to do.'

P_22: "'Today only a half day?', when leaving at 4pm. Or missing respect of vacation time, often with silly comments.'

P_05: 'If everyone leaves, you leave as well. If everyone stays, you stay as well.'

This was echoed by another candidate:

P_13: 'Everyone stays until 8pm or 9pm because it's courteous, no matter if it is meaningful or efficient; it is just group pressure.'

Moreover, the following comment was from a female participant with children:

P_24: 'Many, many people were completely baffled that you could be a working mom with three children travelling. They feel like your children would not be well behaved. This causes a lot of micro aggressions.'

Some participants mentioned that other colleagues experienced issues related to culture.

P_09: 'Work-life balance is named but not yet part of our culture.'

P_12: 'The colleague who had children understood that completely, but the colleagues who didn't have children couldn't understand how in winter every second week one of them was sick.'

P_15: 'Our dual career idea stopped as children require a high flexibility that impacts career ambitions. The major salary difference over time then led to the "classic" role separation. My performance is depending on my wife, who cares for the children.'

P_25: 'Career is based on performance, and performance requires time. Consulting requires rethinking, otherwise they will lose highly skilled employees when they grow a family.'

Many comments by participants indicate a desire for change. This change is related to acceptance and to having flexible models, not only on paper but lived as part of the culture, without an impact on career when employees request using flexible working models.

P_19: 'Acceptance of availabilities. If your environment schedules permanent appointments at 6pm or dinner, this does not help.'

P_26: 'An organisation can create a culture that reflects your life cycle.'

P_21: 'Honest consideration of employee satisfaction could be an organisational measurement to improve work-life balance.'

P_22: 'Culture follows slogans. Omit "Oh, she is leaving at 1 o' clock"; rather, "she is doing something great and will be motivated back tomorrow."'

P_27: 'Your environment needs to accept that you are not available for certain hours.'

This section represents the overall tone of the interviews and the desire for change, not only on paper but within the company culture.

Leadership persons or supervisors

A dependence on leadership persons (in the literature, the term supervisor was used in various studies) emerged from different comments during the interviews. Even if enterprise policies and law allowed part-time and flexible working, when it was practiced, the impact on career progress was dependent on the related leadership persons. Managers, mentors, project managers and partners were specified.

P_16: 'People with a clear demand for work-life balance got an additional task at 7pm for another two hours. This was an underlying expectation to perform even more.'

One interviewee requested improved communication and planning by project managers.

P_10: 'It was requested to be on-site Monday to Thursday. It was not discussed and reflected if this really made sense. It was just decided.'

A few participants said that the partner should negotiate contracts that consider the WLB of employees and not promise a five-day on-site week just to make the deal at the end of a quarter or buckle because a client requested this.

P_21: 'One could agree on reduced travel days. But this is dependent on the project manager. I believe the organisation would rather accept the client request than take the word for the employee.'

However, some positive experiences were reported that indicate the opposite of the above-mentioned response. A project leader received positive feedback when she raised WLB as a topic for reflection and discussion among the team.

P_09: 'The project colleagues made pressure, but I was aware my manager was supporting my part-time assignment.'

P_12: 'When you keep the employee engaged while giving them the opportunity to look after their family, you are going to receive someone who is really motivated. That makes a huge difference.'

4.5.3 Personal responsibility

Once an employee has chosen an employer and the organisational framework with work-life practices, a supporting culture and leadership, it is time for employees to take over personal responsibilities to manage the area of conflict.

Fifty-five percent of 28 participants mentioned personal responsibility to manage WLB challenges in the workplace. Personal responsibility is divided into three sub-themes: single, the other half or the couple and a supporting system.

Single responsibility

Participants' various comments that illustrated personal responsibility (oneself) are presented below and indicate an ownership behaviour.

P_08: 'We have flexible working hours; we have trust. Models and tools are available. Making use of them depends on oneself.'

P_17: 'It is one's personal responsibility to manage this.'

P_24: 'You are receiving a salary. What are you doing for the organisation? People take things for granted and create barriers mentally. If you start discussing your management with the clients, you realise that those barriers can be put down by managing expectations.'

P_27: 'It is individual with more self-determination than one believes.'

P_32: 'You need to take care of yourself. No one else will do this, especially regarding work-life balance and health.'

The other half or the couple

The following four responses were extracted regarding the personal responsibility of the other half or the couple, suggesting that the husband or wife plays an essential role in managing WLB and career progression.

P_09: 'You need the commitment of the family to make this possible.'

P_19: 'Shared responsibilities with my husband are supportive.'

P_27: 'There is a clear agreement with my wife: on Mondays I pick up the children.'

P_29: 'Most important is my husband, as he is interested in my balance.'

Supporting system

Finally, the supporting system, such as public facilities, friends, the wider family, a cleaner or a nanny, were found in the interview transcriptions.

P_23: 'We have a babysitter for our dogs, like a dog kindergarten.'

P_24: 'Best is starting with you not feeling guilty. Then getting the support system.'

P_29: 'Support is important to delegate tasks: cleaner, a nanny.'

The results presented in this chapter (4.5) indicate existing issues that affect employees' professional and personal lives and their career ambitions. The next chapter focuses on the findings that would support employees to better align their work and non-work activities.

4.6 Ideas that support work-life balance and career

4.6.1 Ideas for previous, current and next career levels

While the former chapters provided findings related to experiences, this chapter presents answers to the following questions: 'What would support you to manage work-life balance on your previous, current and next career level'. Regardless of the 'what' question word, participants provided a range of ideas on who could support their career progression and WLB at the previous, current and next career levels.

The most surprising aspect of the data is in the lack of a difference between those three career levels. Many participants argued that requirements do not depend on the career level but on different life stages and what supporting system is available.

P_29: 'I do not believe the hierarchy level is the difference but if you have a child or two and the age of your children. It is more the family situation than the level.'

Therefore, findings are consolidated regardless of the association to the previous, current or next career level. Furthermore, results suggest differences between participants with children and those without children. While the former desired acceptance for part-time, local projects; a supporting environment; and a supporting manager as most important, the latter were concerned about education, flexibility and health offerings.

The responses of all levels have in common that support is desired by other persons, especially the support of the manager is requested. This leadership person, as mentioned in the former chapter, plays an important role in

work-life management and career, even though the expectation varies among the participants.

The clustered table below is the result of participant preferences, presented as a cluster of ideas that could support the interviewees at their former, current and next career levels. The entire list includes almost 100 ideas and is therefore accessible in the appendix.

The Table 13 present a list of ideas that support WLB at previous, current and next career level. This list is clustered in categories such as culture, health offerings, persons and working models, and it briefly explains the ideas behind each category.

Table 13: Ideas for previous, current and next career level

Categories for WLB support	Summary of ideas
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer open communication about WLB practices. • Provide respect and acceptance of contracted hours (family-friendly mandatory calls, no expectation of week-end work). • Measure performance against targets not for being present at the client site.
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide remote training.
Health offerings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer sport opportunities at the office. • Financial participation for external sport activities
Increase of productivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People at client site should focus on value. • Reduction of senseless administrative tasks. • Establish a back office for travel, calendar and presentation preparation.
Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting manager who acts as role model. • Manager who creates an environment that is part-time and family-friendly.
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support by a variety of people (family, colleague, mentor, peer, friend, team). • Exchange with others, go out for dinner, spend leisure time together.
Personal responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand that its 'me' to decide how much work is necessary and possible. • Make use of offered WLB practices.
Project related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define and implement remote working opportunities and local projects. • Agree remote work as part of the contract with the client.
Promotion transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define and implement alternative promotion trajectories. • Communicate transparent promotion criteria.
Public facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have an eco system with flexible opening hours (doctors, shops, children activities).
Support for care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide cost coverage for care and support to find kindergarten.
Technical support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide tools that support WLB management. • Establish administration tools with less time to handle them.
Working models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be open for tandem, job-sharing, home office, flexible working, gliding time, part-time project assignments.

These ideas will be reflected in the practical guidelines that are discussed in the chapter 5. The next sections (4.6.2 and 4.6.3) explain the ideas that are related to the core of consulting: the client. This includes travelling to the client and alternatives as well as communication with the client.

4.6.2 Ideas to reduce travel to the client environment

The author emphasised client environment as an important theme for the semi-structured interviews. This section presents a more detailed view of the ideas listed above. Assessments relevant for further career steps are based on the results related to clients (sales, delivery and business development). Though some of these aspects were already addressed in the supporting idea chapter above, the details are important for guidelines in the discussion chapter. Despite travelling less, many participants considered working part-time or remotely in client engagement to be difficult, and the subjects proposed many ideas to address this issue.

Reducing on-site presence and work remote

Different ideas emerged from the interviews. Working remotely can be managed actively and be agreed with the client. For example, Monday or Tuesday could be for workshops and client meetings, and the rest of the week could be dedicated to solutioning in the local business office or home office.

P_23: 'For me, remote work plays a role as I can prepare and make calls calmly instead of having disturbing influences from outside.'

P_25: 'I believe it is not necessary to be on-site with the client Monday to Thursday every week. It has a high impact on work-life balance to agree on fixed on-site days like Tuesday to Thursday and that Monday and Friday are office or home office days.'

A useful action would be to better plan tasks that are to be performed in the client environment:

P_09: '... to reduce travel time to only two days a week.'

P_04: ‘... and use video conferences and travel every second week.’

For one subject, the following topic was key for WLB: the working location and the flexibility to work from home with tasks that contribute to value. Moreover, one comment mentioned that the misuse of a home office as a control is not provided and that it requires trust. Others said working remotely is a must in consulting, and clients are supporting it.

Part-time assignments

For one subject, working one day a week in consulting did not make sense. Others argued that part-time assignments need to be discussed with the client before signing the contract, which should request that part-time hours must be respected, since some consultants work only part-time.

P_03: ‘One could negotiate with the client from the beginning that there are highly qualified consultants as part of the project team who are only available 2–3 days. This would reduce travel costs.’

P_22: ‘Part-time employees work more efficiently. Creating awareness for mixed teams should be part of the contract negotiation.’

Local projects

Local projects can be defined as projects near the employee’s residence, where daily commuting to the client is possible. Another term is ‘home-sleep projects’ and can be compared to project assignments where overnight stays in hotels are required. Assigning clients that are close to a consultant’s residence seems to be a challenge. Therefore, a discussion with the individual about either relocation to clients or less travel can help. However, this depends on the individual situation.

P_10: ‘It would be great to assign consultants according to their home location to local projects.’

Sending an employee from Frankfurt to Berlin and one from Berlin to Frankfurt is often observed in projects. Participants stated that an organisation

could take better care to assign consultants to local projects, supported by tools that enable employees to better find and select local projects.

However, local projects might limit professional development if the topic does not fit the personal skill set or is not of personal interest. Participants said that local projects only make sense if the project solution is similar to the personal skill and interest.

P_32: 'It would help to receive the opportunity to be in charge of local clients instead, and a colleague from Munich does so for clients in Hamburg. It would help to build a regional client relationship.'

Project tandems

A tandem approach can be meaningful, and some participants mentioned it as helpful for WLB. In this working model, one person is on-site, while the other works remotely, and they rotate the client on-site times between them.

P_14: 'A tandem with a partner would help me manage my tasks and increase my work-life balance significantly'

Client travels

Inviting the client to travel to the business office was mentioned twice as an option to reduce travel for consultants.

P_02: 'We could offer the client to come to our office.'

4.6.3 Ideas for improved communication with the client

Almost all participants emphasised the importance of communication. They reported that open client communication is key to managing availability and meeting client expectations and that it would support employees in managing their work-life challenges. Apart from the positive impact of reduced travel costs, the benefits of higher effectiveness and employee motivation should be communicated to the client. Moreover, planned on-site availability should be aligned with the client's presence on site.

A few participants mentioned communication with the client – in other words, expectation management of part-time consultants, working models or WLB culture.

P_07: 'This is our understanding for successful collaboration. If you accept our service, you need to accept different working models.'

P_27: 'Active communication about work-life balance, mindfulness.'

P_28: 'I take care of this before closing the contract with the client.'

The request for critical reflection and discussion of a contract clause with 100% on-site availability was mentioned a number of times. Furthermore, participants requested that the organisation supports the importance to have an appropriate client environment with windows.

4.6.4 Ideas that indicate a call for help

The almost one hundred ideas provided during the data collection process demonstrates the potential for improvement and signals the request for support from consulting organisations to manage WLB and career progression. Moreover, participants proposed ideas that imply a call for 'help'. Even though participants did not say the word 'help', their choice of words (e.g., 'should', 'force', 'remind' and 'allow') was different when they explained the ideas, for instance support with technical restrictions:

P_01: 'No access to emails on weekends and a shutdown of the telephone, so the client cannot reach me when I have finishing time.'

P_04: 'A tool that reminds me to start with finishing time. A PC that shuts down with a warning 10 minutes in advance.'

In addition, reminders and pushes by others, such as managers, mentors and family, were proposed as supporting ideas.

P_11: 'A manager who forces me to determine goals and who proactively supports and coaches.'

P_04: 'Less pressure by the client. Regular feedback from my manager, who should remind me to take care of my health and that my work-life balance is important.'

P_05: 'Clear structure by project manager and project partner that allows private appointments. Support to manage childcare.'

P_13: 'Forced time management by the company.'

P_07: 'I believe the backing by the employer is important, and a clear separation of work and leisure time would help to manage my time.'

P_09: 'I desire that the organisation plans projects more realistically.'

P_14: 'The family should support.'

P_19: 'A husband who has 100% parental leave.'

P_09: 'Positive role models would be helpful. I want the commitment of my family.'

Other ideas were related to communication about the existence of policies and, more importantly, about experiences and advice on handling the challenges.

P_03: 'Someone to speak with to decide what is important and who supports the decision-making.'

P_11: 'Someone to share experiences.'

P_12: 'There has to be more communication about flexible working and what it means and how we can make it work.'

P_13: 'A mentor to speak about these topics. More communication and the feeling that it is allowed to speak about it.'

P_27: 'Discussion with peers.'

One participant expressed the desire not to be treated as a serf, which impacts her WLB significantly.

P_22: 'A general attitude that a consultant is not a serf.'

The following comment from P_17 in particular demonstrates that an awareness of personal responsibility exists, but there is still the request that someone else should pay attention and provide support to manage WLB. His comment creates the link to potential health issues resulting from overtime.

P_17: 'It is the personal responsibility to manage this, but it requires a manager with intuition who keeps an eye on overtime. Burnout has become an acute topic in society.'

These statements express the need for help and are discussed in chapter 5.3.1.

4.7 Summary of results and member-check feedback

This section intends to summarise the overall findings using the presentation of a derived conceptual model. In addition, the end of this section contains the feedback from participants who were randomly selected to review and comment on the findings (member-checking method).

Data collection was conducted through 28 semi-structured interviews with diverse participants from different consulting companies. Chapter 4 then presented the data analysis, and the focus of the discussion was on three themes: WLB and career in the context of consulting.

The results provide an understanding of the different perspectives of the participants on the themes of the present study. Dominant themes, such as travel, flexibility, communication, manager support, personal responsibility and culture emerged from responses. Nevertheless, single or contrary views were likewise included in this chapter. This underlines the individuality of employee preferences for career and WLB and shows the complexity for organisations to offer WLB practices and alternative career path accordingly.

By extension, the critical analysed feedback of the member checking method below, illustrates surprises about unrealistic ideas or expectations by employees for the competitive high performing working environment.

Conceptual model

The findings are summarised in a conceptual model visualised in Figure 9.

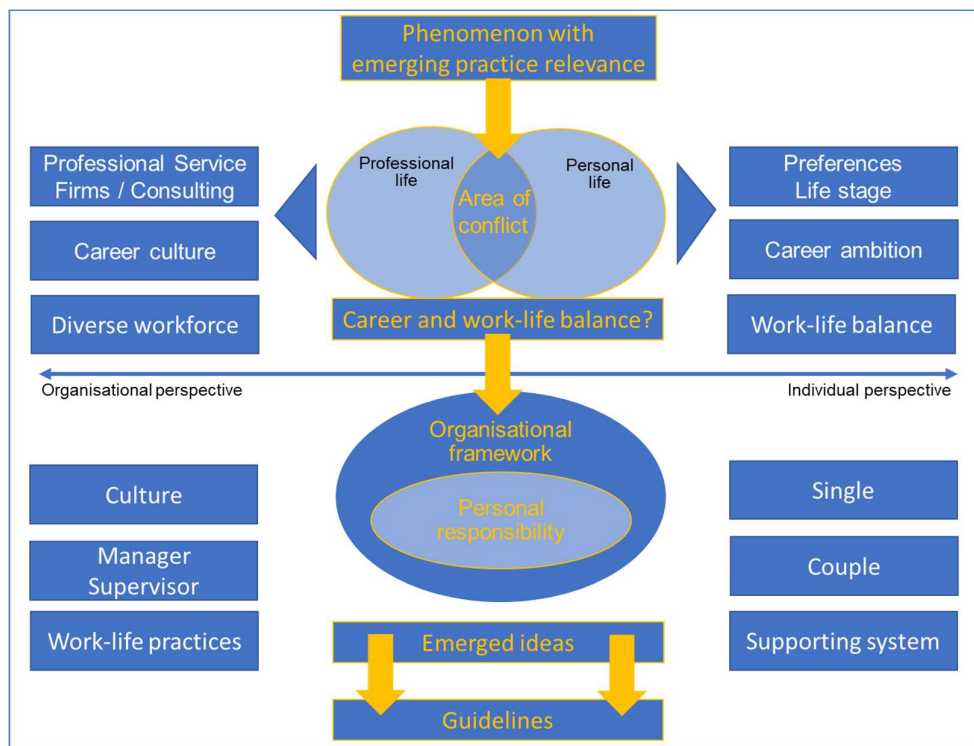


Figure 9: Conceptual model with findings

The results indicate that almost all subjects argued that an organisation can support WLB. Related ideas vary from a supporting manager and other persons to the availability of WLB practices and organisational culture, which, according to the study results, impacts most on how supported and accepted employees feel in relation to their chosen WLB and career ambition. These ideas are reflected in an overall organisational framework. Participants provided examples of what is expected or desired and what can be adapted or initiated to acknowledge non-job responsibilities.

There was a strong indication that individuals need to take over personal responsibility to manage the occurring challenges – visualised in the inner circle of the organisational framework. This includes the responsibility as an individual and an awareness of both the description of the consultant role and the associated expectations when deciding to work in this sector. Moreover, when opting for the dual career model, where both members of a couple progress their careers, both need to share family responsibilities. Finally, when not feeling guilty and when career ambition is clarified as a single person and within the partnership, the supporting system requires attention. This means establishing network of family, friends, paid care and cleaners to make the most of the limited time for family and, most importantly, oneself.

The ideas that emerged result in practical guidelines, separated according to different roles within the organisation and for the individuals. These guidelines are presented in chapter 5.

Participant feedback from member-checking method

The drafted analysis chapter was sent to a random sample of at least two participants per hierarchy level. They were asked to validate whether their view is reflected, if they believe something is missing, whether there had been any surprises and what their summary impression of the findings is. The following paragraphs now present the critical analysis of seven participant feedback's as part of the member-checking method to determine the appropriateness of the presented findings. The complete quotation of the feedback of each participant can be found in the Appendix D.

Six participants articulated that they felt reflected in the overall results. One participant discussed findings and provided either his agreement or commented the results with his perspective.

P_02: 'My viewpoint is completely recognised.'

P_09: 'I found myself represented in many comments.'

P_10: The findings 'reflect a lot of my own views and opinions.'

P_13: 'I feel very well reflected in your excerpt with my answers.'

P_27: 'I find myself as well as the WLB situation well reflected.'

P_28: 'I feel reflected in the results.'

P_02 requested details of the age of children to draw further conclusions for her personal efforts to get into a top-level position, as she discovered a discrepancy between having children, but working overtime hours and having a high workload. While participant P_09 questioned why projects are planned with endless overtime hours, participant P_10 was not surprised of the differences between contracted and worked hours but found interesting 'that the difference is not necessarily linked to the overall satisfaction' (P_10, 05.07.2019). Participant P_25 was surprised by the findings of part-time. He expects that 'part-time roles should be feasible in consultancy' (P_25, 17.07.2019) with an improved planning and management of part-time.

Client relationship was reflected by participant P_25. He mentioned 'that building trust is an important topic in building client relationships' (P_25, 17.07.2019).

The presented strategies of other participants to manage WLB challenges were reflected as 'worth trying' (P_10, 05.07.2019) or 'one aspect was a completely new twist for me' (P_13, 10.07.2019). Another participant replied that some proposed ideas seem unrealistic, especially in consulting. He said that 'consulting will stay a high-performance and mostly high-workload job' (P_25, 17.07.2019).

The aspect who is responsible was found interesting by participant P_09. She was surprised that responses indicated a self-focus. An opposite view was given by participant P_25. He said that 'employees need to demand their liberties that had been promised by the organisation' (P_25, 17.07.2019). This is echoed by participant P_27 who emphasised that everyone needs to take over personal responsibility for WLB 'by setting boundaries and communicating them clearly' (P_27, 25.08.2019). But he added

that organisations have to support this culture in a way that WLB is accepted and will not harm the personal career.

The theme career in consulting was mentioned by four participants. Participant P_25 wondered 'how diverse the understanding of careers' (P_25, 17.07.2019) was. Participant P_10 said that consulting organisations have career paths with defined goals and responsibilities related to a promotion. Therefore, 'it would be obvious to see this as a career' (P_10, 05.07.2019), which was not the case by the majority of the participants. Participant P_13 reflected her personal development between the interview and the analysis review. She recognised the positive impact of her change on a healthier life and that she can have private life, but she felt that this 'slows down my career, which leaves me in a personal conflict (P_13, 10.07.2019). Moreover, participant P_02 said that she is rethinking her career because of the top-level participant results, which say that WLB appears to be incompatible with career progression.

Additionally, the role of the manager played a role in the member checking feedback. Participant P_02 said that a manager must be a role model and in balance to lead others. This is echoed by participant P_25 who expects the managers to take over the responsibility to reduce the discrepancy of proclaimed and experienced culture. P_27 reflected that as most people struggle to set boundaries, organisations and their leaders must handle individual challenges, align them with cultural steps despite the pressure of financial success.

Furthermore, a few comments for the future were added in the feedbacks. Participant P_02 hopes that there will be a change in a way that skills and promotions are dependent on working hours. P_10 agrees that supporting working models increase the attractiveness of the consulting job but requested that those models should 'not only be offered but also actively supported and promoted so that people use them' (P_10, 05.07.2019). Another participant hopes that 'more new work minded persons will come into responsibility to agree on the contracts with the clients' (P_25, 17.07.2019).

He concluded that a critical mass is essential to no longer ignore part-time models and remote work.

Five participants provided an overall statement of the study findings.

P_09: 'I think it provided a very good overall view on WLB and career opportunities in the consulting industry.'

P_10: 'The overall findings are interesting.'

P_13: 'I like the diversity of the study. The graphics are well chosen, and the results are presented in a logical manner.'

P_27: 'Your study offers a great set of starting points to think about and work on as an organisation and leadership team.'

P_28: 'There were no surprises as the results confirm a lot of stereotypes. I liked reading the results a lot.'

In summary, these reflections confirm the appropriateness of the data analysis. Participants found themselves reflected in the study results, underlined or questioned findings and provided further comments. The member checking questions were asked in a way that allowed broad responses. This may be the reason why the feedback of the selected participants had a different focus and the intensity of written reflection varied among these participants.

Chapter 5 turns to the discussion of the findings that were outlined in chapter 4.

Chapter 5. Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to consolidate the analysis and discussion of the study results, reflecting the five research questions. The major findings are discussed in relation to theory and the research literature. Implications for future research as well as implications for organisations and employees in consulting are discussed.

5.2 Referring to research questions

5.2.1 Client relationships in consulting (RQ1)

RQ1: How do consultants approach client relationship management considering their work-life balance demand?

Personal contact, trust and honesty between clients and consultants was mentioned as important for a successful client relationship. Trust and honesty were not defined or explained by participants, thus would require further research to explore a potential different understanding.

To be successful in the long term, especially in long-running projects, participants argued, it is important to retain the project team, which includes supporting team members to manage work and non-work parts of their lives and to provide a platform to discuss personal requirements.

In agreement with Broschak (2015), client relationships are key for the success of professional service firms. He concluded that research regarding client relationships often does not receive sufficient attention or is even ignored in organisational research. Therefore, the researcher admits that this research question itself is worthy of a separate research project and requires further attention. This is supported by Kakabadse et al. (2006), who have stated that the consultant-client relationship is worth further research.

Addressing client relationships as part of the interviews was important because implementing ideas that support employees with their WLB might impact client relationships. As a result, these findings indicate how participants approach client relationships. The potential for improvements through reduced presence at the client site emerged from the interviews. The findings related to travel go beyond other studies and indicate the improvement potential to reduce being onsite with the client which can have a positive influence on the WLB for consultants. These findings enrich Kaiser et al.'s (2010) quantitative study in the consulting sector with qualitative participant views.

5.2.2 Common understanding of career (RQ2)

RQ2: Is there a common understanding of how employees define career?

The responses for career definition indicate that there is no common understanding of career among employees in the consulting sector. When asked about the definition of career, the understanding was different. This is underlined by the different quotes for this theme. Furthermore, only a few participants explained the career ladder, and there was a broad description of tasks and an explanation of value creation with responsibilities for tasks and people.

While Adams & Zanzi (2005) and Chudzikowski (2012) have explored the change in career trajectories in consulting, the findings of this study add knowledge about the qualitative statements of participants from different consulting hierarchies related to career ambition, career understanding and career progression.

Even though the interview question was only related to career, participants related it to WLB. They mentioned restrictions on career progression or even explained why they decided to focus on family, or they said that they left consulting because of career pressure and the expected workload at higher levels. This adds a qualitative analysis in the consulting sector to the study of Neckel and Wagner (2014), who have explored why the desire for

success, driven by motivation and restless engagement, can lead to a hazardous mix of self-fulfilment and self-exhaustion. Moreover, Kriegesmann and Striwe (2009) support these study findings, stating that the consulting culture, with its endless availability, requires one to apply most of one's lifetime to the professional domain.

In particular, current debates about career culture in consulting highlight the potential for change (Cohen, 2015; Nissen & Termer, 2014; Sommerlad & Ashley, 2015; Straub, 2007).

5.2.3 Definition and management of work-life balance (RQ3)

RQ3: How do employees define and manage work-life balance?

This research question was formulated in a broad way, so that diverse aspects of WLB could be discovered. Understanding the challenges and how employees manage their professional and personal lives was the main purpose of this question.

In accordance with the presented results, previous studies (Goh et al., 2015; Guest, 2002; Honigman, 2017; Kilber, Barclay, & Ohmer, 2014; Mas-Machuca et al., 2016; McFadyen et al., 2005; Wellington & Spence, 2001) have demonstrated that a common understanding of WLB does not exist, but alternative terms and different views of WLB do. The analysis demonstrates the range of different views and the complexity of the way in which WLB is viewed by respondents. However, the findings have in common that WLB is deemed to be important for all participants. Nevertheless, their understanding of WLB and methods of managing it differ.

Participants mentioned flexibility as a positive influence factor for WLB, stating that flexibility exists in the consultant sector. But acknowledging the view of Neckel and Wagner (2014), this flexibility can lead from self-fulfilment to self-exhaustion. Moreover, employees often make no use of flexible work policies because they are afraid of the consequences (Correll et al., 2014).

Eight of 28 participants reported a WLB satisfaction score of eight or above while mentioning working overtime – in some cases significantly, with an average of 60 working hours per week. Another participant with 20 hours was not satisfied as the job itself was not fulfilling. This finding is contrary to a previous study that has suggested that research has shown a relationship between working hours and perception of imbalance (Guest, 2002). This difference may be explained by the influence of one's personal situation, supporting environment and career ambitions. Work-life balance satisfaction itself may consequently not be influenced solely by workload, as also found by one study that arrived at similar results, stating that workload itself does not directly influence life satisfaction (Goh et al., 2015).

An in-depth view of WLB challenges in the consulting sector with the requirement of presence at the client site, and hence travelling during the week, has previously not been discussed in the literature. As this seems to be specific to each individual, the manager or supervisor within organisations plays an essential role in supporting employees to manage their tasks. These results reflect the findings of previous studies (Goh et al., 2015) that have found that the support of supervisors reduces the negative influence of a high workload on work-family conflict. A supporting argument was found in a cross-sector explorative study, namely, that organisational culture and managerial support have a positive impact on WLB (Darcy et al., 2012). This present study enriches the existing knowledge with detailed qualitative comments from consulting participants regarding their WLB and challenges in managing work and non-work activities.

5.2.4 Impact of work-life balance on career (RQ4)

RQ4: How does work-life balance impact career progression?

This research question brings together all themes, and it triggered a controversial discussion by participants during the interviews. While research into WLB is more related to an individual's private life, which can be impacted by, for instance, the domination of one's profession, this research question

aimed to understand the impact on one's professional life when an individual prioritises WLB.

The results of a study using surveys has suggested that almost 70% of the 235 participants do not have time for themselves, because of high workloads (Kriegesmann & Striewe, 2009). Offering flexibility to employees to achieve their targets leads to an extension and concentration of working time. What is promised as liberty crystallises as hesitant self-responsibility (Neckel & Wagner, 2014). The following sentence is thus of no surprise, and it provides an impression of the working culture in consulting: 'You are a good consultant if you work yourself into the ground.' (P_09). Similar results have been presented by Kriegesmann and Striewe (2009), who have found that 53% of project members and 62% of managers of their 235 survey participants are willing to work until exhaustion if necessary. But burning oneself out stands in contradiction to the expectation of high performance. Within a culture of support, this can be addressed and reflected with peers, mentors and the manager.

An important finding is that the majority of participants associate progression up the career ladder with increasing working hours per week, whereas 15 participants reported the ideal working contract to be a part-time one. The study results reflect those of Noury et al. (2017), who have stated that the desire for WLB is emerging from employees, and these demands challenge established ways of building a career. This leads to the consequence, stated by Clarke (2015), that young professionals will likely choose an employer and a career path that achieve an alignment between career and work. In accordance with scholars of WLB, she has suggested exploring how professional values of the next generation can be considered to support dual career families with their shared private and professional responsibilities.

As stated above, every individual's context is different, and life stages define the preferences for employment. To enable an open-minded view on career ambition, career progression and the way in which they are managed by

employees and their private environment, the study result of Muhr and Kirkegaard (2013) should be part of the discussion. They have contributed to literature by providing an understanding of those employees who focus only on work. The individuals they interviewed seemed to be addicted to work. But a life with purely a work focus is not accepted in society. Therefore, those consultants, are dreaming of a life outside with an off-work identity. Moreover, those individuals create the appearance of a complete person who has both a working and non-working life. The authors have argued that these fantasies are necessary to allow consultants to focus on nothing but their work. Their dreams should thus not be taken as non-commitment, but the opposite: their dedication to work, which seems to be possible and accepted only with statements about desiring something else (Muhr & Kirkegaard, 2013). Furthermore, similar aspects were not mentioned in the present findings; it is helpful to accept that employees opt for work only. However, it is worth considering the statements of Meenakshi et al. (2013), who have explained the consequences of long working hours and stress at work: for instance, physical and mental health implications.

The present study reveals the possibility that organisations can support their employees to achieve career goals while balancing work and non-work responsibilities. Most participants believed that this is possible under certain circumstances. Adding supporting ideas to this finding indicates opportunities to develop a workplace that attracts and retains professionals. However, despite the statement a decade ago that 'It's time the firms started acting as if they really believed it' (Maister, 2007, p.290), the difference between the proposed and lived culture, when employees make use of the offered WLB practices, is still significant. To date, in practice, the way in which a working day is structured or invoices are charged to the client has little impact on the professional culture itself (Sommerlad & Ashley, 2015). This aligns with Straub's (2007) multiple regression analysis, which has demonstrated that the existence of WLB practices enhance women's progression only in one case, namely, equivalent salary for maternity leave, and that all other WLB supporting means did not indicate a positive impact on the percentage of

women in top positions. Equivalent studies related to men were not found in the literature. This is in line with the observation of participant P_03; she reported that in many companies, WLB and family supporting structures are focused on women, even though this topic of supporting an employee regardless of gender or generation is relevant for everyone, either as an employee or as a manager. According to the study 'The New Male Mystique' by Meenakshi et al. (2013), men are experiencing a higher conflict between work and family responsibilities than women. Nevertheless, both men and women recognise the impact and consequences of doing it all in order to have it all.

In addition, in the present study, the findings demonstrate that the implications of dual career models, where both individuals seek to progress their careers, do not seem to have been implemented in the companies that participated in this study. According to participant P_15, leadership programmes, inclusion and debates about equality may have an effect on the future. He believes that many men do not want to be put in the role of the sole wage earner, and he hopes that the social change leads to higher acceptance of men taking care when a child is sick. Surprisingly, the findings of this study highlight the existence of work-life practices but still emphasise the difference between a) published words, such as company policies, and the presented image on company homepages and b) the lived reality.

Discussing the influence of a leadership person, as highlighted in the findings, role models and partners who support WLB are essential. However, as stated by Fortinberry and Murry (2016), leadership is not recognised as a career in professional service firms, and the following question consequently emerges: who is progressing the career in organisations? According to Fortinberry and Murry (2016), often those consultants made career who were successful in sales business rather those who are focussing on developing a team. From another view by Lazear (2004), the Peter principle states that employees receive a promotion up to their level of incompetence. To push this idea to the extreme, academics discuss narcissists, Machiavellians and psychopaths in leading positions. With regard to a workplace

environment that attracts narcissists, Machiavellians and psychopaths, as described by Externbrink and Keil (2018), consulting as a private sector, rapid career opportunities and status offer ideal conditions that satisfy those types of individuals' career preferences. Organisations are thus asked to define measurements to intervene and validate their recruitment, learning and development (Externbrink & Keil, 2018). In addition, they must address leaders' Machiavellianism and psychopathy, as these can be destructive for organisations and have effects on their employees (Volmer, Koch, & Göritz, 2016).

The change in culture, as called by (Allen, 2001; Darcy et al., 2012) decades ago, was not found in the study results. The findings indicate that the desires for the acceptance of part-time roles and for a cultural change remain mostly unsolved. Moreover, as proposed by study participants, adapting the consulting career culture requires accepting different working models, establishing alternative career models in part-time and full-time employment, publishing and communicating promotion criteria, and providing a family-friendly environment. These findings regarding the work-life impact on career are in agreement with Lazăr et al. (2010), who have recommended assessing performance results rather than 'face time' and creating a culture that enables WLB. This would enable employees with different strengths and capabilities to reach the top level of professional service firms.

5.2.5 Supporting ideas (RQ5)

R5: How can organisations support WLB while employees progress their chosen career?

From the viewpoint of an organisation, when supporting its employees, the expectation is for the company to receive an equivalent return in working value and commitment to the consulting job. Desiring high salaries on the one hand but having a limited willingness to travel on the other leads to a conflict between organisational expectation and individual preferences. Therefore, implementing ideas requires alignment with organisational survival and success; in other words, the client relationship, as an essential

success factor in consulting, still needs personal contact. Employers who offer culture and policies that bring both perspectives together might have an advantage.

The study findings strengthen the results of Meenakshi et al. (2013), who have focused on WLB only but have addressed practical guidelines for organisations and employees.

Referring to RQ2, if participants define, explain and manage their WLB with such a variety and with different weights and preferences in different life stages, it seems difficult for organisations to offer WLB practices that support all circumstances and constellations of their employees. Nevertheless, participants mentioned common needs (Table 13), indicating that not only offering WLB practices is important, but the organisational culture to make use of them. This is highlighted by the significant number of coded interview paragraphs mentioning a culture change that supports WLB and career – a culture of acceptance, trust and honesty – and a supporting manager. This result reflects the conclusion of Lazăr et al. (2010) that the way of thinking must change, the use of WLB practices must be accepted and open communication must be offered. Whereas his study does not include the explicit consideration of career progression, the study by Straub (2007) has at least included the impact of WLB practices for women's career progression. Further research is required to compare this women study with men's career advancement.

According to participant P_17, not only do large organisations such as IBM, Accenture, PwC and others need to move, but smaller companies must be aware that employees find attractive policies on web pages and will choose employers that fit best to their preferences. The researcher agrees with the statement from P_21 that an employer can and should support their employees managing their WLB. However, this does not guarantee successful retainment of employees. Nevertheless, the importance of offering a WLB supporting culture is acknowledged on the homepages of consulting companies (refer to chapter 0), and recognising some progress is encouraging.

Participant responses to the research questions provided a range of ideas, with distinct categories emerging, as presented in Table 13 above. This list of ideas contributes to literature, as no such list was found during the literature review. These ideas demonstrate the desire of employees to receive support, with an acknowledgement that personal responsibility is key. The related findings are complemented by practical guidelines.

5.3 Practical guidelines

5.3.1 Understanding what has changed

With the understanding of career, the challenges of WLB and the proposed ideas how organisations can support their employees, it is worth to explain what emerged as a key argument of this study: personal responsibility.

Maier (2019) describes how self-responsibility evolved in the last three decades from a collective responsibility with solidarity towards an individual form of self-responsibility. Figure 10 (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Clarke, 2015; Fletcher & Bailyn, 1996; Guest, 2002; Cliff Hakim, 1994; Lazăr et al., 2010; Maier, 2019; Neckel & Wagner, 2014) shows this transformation.

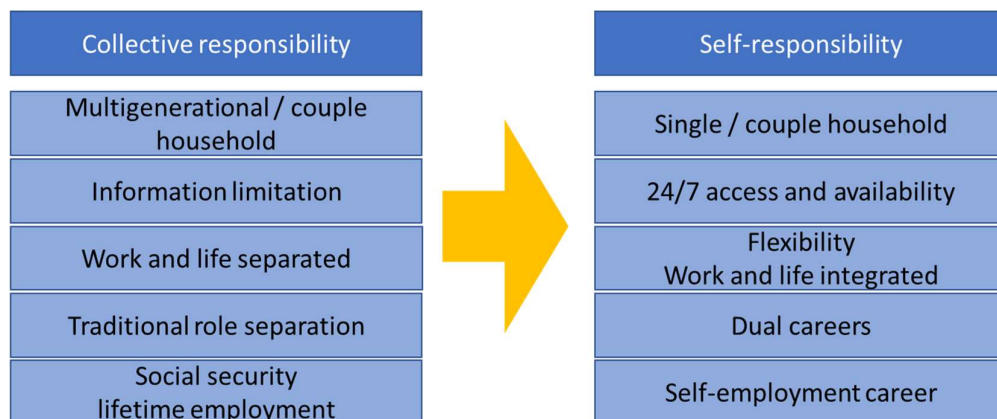


Figure 10: Self-responsibility: what has changed

Work and life were organised so that there were clear roles at home and role separation existed between work and life (Fletcher & Bailyn, 1996). Social security was provided (Maier, 2019), lifetime employment was the norm

(Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). In contrast, today, single household or dual careers leads to higher intensity of managing work and non-work activities (Clarke, 2015; Lazăr et al., 2010). Permanent availability (Guest, 2002) and the transformation towards being responsible for one's own employability (Cliff Hakim, 1994) leads into a new dimension of self-responsibility. Maier (2019) calls this 'hyperindividualistic', an individual capitalist, responsible for the managing of life in a profitable manner. But the responses of the interview participants of this study rather illustrate a 'call for help'.

The competitive environment forces employees to be concerned about their performance. However, aspiring professional self-fulfilment can lead to self-exhaustion caused by increased efforts to satisfy claims. The reason for this is the complexity of stress factors. Boundaries between private and professional life are constantly challenged, and intense time management and permanent availability are demanded. Thus, in all domains of life, a kind of self-responsiveness is expected that many no longer resonate with (Neckel & Wagner, 2014). Since there is often no differentiation between working life and private life, and as both domains interfere with each other, personal responsibility is required to create a balance between them. However, the working environment does not tolerate such a balance (Kriegesmann & Striwe, 2009). With the increasing complexity in all dimensions of life and interference from different life domains, individuals can experience burnout or excessive demands, pushed by continued efforts to reach a state of balance. Being overworked makes employees passive and emotionless, with no capacities, as competition forces them to invest their entire potential into work. (Neckel & Wagner, 2014).

Concluding these arguments, the complexity of life, the requirement for continuous decisions in all life domains increased. A common learning process is required for individuals, couples, society and organisations to understand what has changed and what the current requirements are in all parts of life as well as how one can subsequently remain healthy and 'satisfied' while fulfilling one's professional requirements – which for some individuals is an

essential part of their lives. With the understanding of what has changed over the years, organisations and individuals can bring attention to this topic, rethink policies, culture, communication and personal decision-making.

The next sections explain the implications of this understanding on organisations and individuals and provides ideas that address the demand to make work and non-work activities compatible.

5.3.2 Implications for organisations

According to the 28 participants interviewed, while organisations are providing WLB policies, the consulting culture may not support their usage without impacting employees' career advancements. The objective of the suggestions in this section is to assist consulting organisations and professional service firms to assess their current organisational culture and establish a family-friendly and WLB-supportive working environment. Employees from generations Y and Z will dominate the workplace in the upcoming years, requesting a change in the actual career and organisational culture.

Apart from social responsibility, which may affect employees' choice of employer, the pure existence of WLB policies is the first step towards cultural change. Moreover, it is necessary to create a culture that allows professionals to make use of flexible, part-time or tandem work and job sharing, and to assess their outcomes rather than their on-site presence. Innovative solutions provide opportunities that allow for remote work, which is a strong support to handle non-work duties and activities. In general, organisations should determine whether they can afford to lose talent, knowledge and certainly client relationships when employees need or decide to leave because of challenges in different life stages. This strategic decision of social responsibility and organisational culture will then have an impact on the leadership behaviour and guidelines within the organisation.

Focusing only on the homogeneity of full-time, fully flexible, career-prioritised employees will exclude employees. For instance, those employees with travel restrictions or part-time availability or all those that do not fit into

the role of an employee on a career trajectory towards partner, accepting overtime and full availability for the company. Once organisations seek to leverage the advantages of mixed and diverse teams, this would require a supportive environment and culture that enables employees to make work and life compatible and to deliver the best performance in those hours when employees can contribute to valuable tasks. This study thus proposes methods to improve working conditions, communication and an organisational culture of acceptance that would support employees in better combining work and life or even progressing with their careers. However, personal responsibility, which is a major discussion in section 5.3.3 (implications for consultants), contributes significantly to the overall change.

The next paragraphs present practical guidelines for different stakeholders within an organisation. The discussion is complemented by clustered ideas, which were provided by participants. These ideas are worth consideration and reflection to determine whether they already exist and if they can be improved or initially implemented.

Practical guidelines for IT departments

As requested by participants, a technical environment today is essential for efficient and remote work. Providing this is key to making use of the advantages of digitalisation, which in turn improves flexibility of time and place for employees. This includes fast internet, remote work infrastructure for all levels of client security requirements, notebooks, tablets and the latest mobile phones from the first day in the business.

Practical guidelines for Human Resources (HR)

The war for talent (Suder & Killius, 2011) – in other words, the competition for talent – will influence the decisions of HR management regarding the implementation of work-life policies. Being dependent on a highly skilled workforce, and considering the turnover rates because of travel duties, organisations should reflect on the advantages and benefits of not only offering those policies but creating a culture of acceptance, trust and honesty.

Human resources, as a supporting function, is advised to analyse the status quo and contribute to policies and guidelines provided to senior leadership and employees. Once a common understanding of the target culture is established, HR is responsible for providing clarity and transparency regarding the work-life practices and supporting employees to find information and make use of these offerings.

In addition, if agreed with senior leadership, HR can create an innovative compensation model and tool that recognises overtime, travel flexibility and outstanding performance in regard to client relationships, as well as a bonus models for additional business creation. The presented salary model in chapter 4.5.2 can be used for further details. HR measurements should offer opportunities to all employees. Therefore, compensation models, recognising high utilisation for clients or signing new deals, is worth consideration. Moreover, promotion procedures and decisions should not be dependent on the hours worked. This can allow employees with promotion potential to progress in part-time roles or with less travel.

Organisations can implement roles that create value for client work, even if it is remote work or involves reduced travel. To compensate this, a new model of compensation flexibility can be implemented. If travel is not possible over a certain period, this should have implications on compensation. Flexibility and mobility are part of the compensation model in consulting businesses. If an individual is not able or not willing to travel, this should be reflected in the reduction of a 'mobility bonus'. Additional bonus models can be established where an employee has influence on travel opportunities, decisions for local projects, working hours, the selling and buying of vacation days and internal jobs.

Practical guidelines for senior leadership

Senior leadership, consisting of general managers and their leadership team, who are primarily on the vice president and partner level, play an essential role in this topic. Acting as role models and leveraging talent according to their strengths regardless of their working contract, gender, race, age or level is key to establishing mixed teams and delivering the best performance and value to the client. Following P_27, this requires a mind change on the enterprise site, as not the volume in total and if someone works 10, 15 or 20 hours per day. Rather, the value of the performance is relevant.

Decisions made in this circle form the organisational culture and will impact turnover rate, employee commitment, enterprise performance and the degree to which employees feel supported in their organisation. The way in which this leadership team behaves will influence the way in which managers lead their employees.

Practical guidelines for managers

Referring to the conceptual model, personal responsibility is required to accomplish the organisational framework. However, organisations can advise here with mentors and managers, exchanging experiences, establishing connections to peers in the same situation or motivating staff to use the available policies. According to Neckel and Wagner (2014), managers are advised not to waste the resources of their employees to prevent organisational burnout. Nevertheless, employees still need to consider that there is mutual responsibility, and organisations can create a culture that allows flexibility and self-awareness with the topic of life cycles.

Practical guidelines for project managers

The project leader should act as a role model and supporter. Negotiations with clients and care for the team are their responsibility. Instead of staying in the office, which forces others – through group pressure and expectation – to stay as well, a project manager should lead by example. This is required to stop the influence of group pressure and to enable self-awareness regarding personal strengths, working abilities and personal bio-rhythm to

bring the best performance to the job. According to participant responses, group pressure damages motivation and power and ultimately leads to health issues. However, group pressure or group dynamics can have the opposite effect. With a culture of acceptance of personal strengths, bio-rhythm and other duties, employees feel recognised, which would lead to higher motivation, higher engagement and commitment and ultimately higher organisational performance.

Following the statement of participant P_11, working efficiently is important regardless of the amount of time one is present in the office or at the client site. Rather than considering and evaluating those with the best performance and presence, results should be evaluated in alignment with contracted hours and defined targets. Project managers may consequently ask themselves how they evaluate their practitioners and likely adapt their evaluation criteria.

5.3.3 Implications for consultants

Work-life balance seems to be highly individualistic. According to the participants of this study, employees choose an employer based on WLB culture and support. However, these preferences can change over time. An employer can be attractive for a while in certain life stages and become unattractive in later years when additional priorities arise in one's private life, even if the organisation offers WLB policies. While an organisation can and should support employees to make different areas of their personal life compatible with work, the employee is responsible for managing this.

The choice of profession and employer is the choice of an employee. The consultant role requires flexibility and travel, and the consulting sector is known for its appealing compensation model, which attracts employees. In return, valuable working performance and hence high flexibility and mobility, which are the major barriers to manage life outside work, are required. These expectations are well known, and a simple comparison to other professions can make this even clearer. A nurse cannot deny night shifts in a multiple shift environment. A teacher cannot take a vacation outside of the

hours scheduled by the school. In the same way, a consultant cannot refuse to travel in a client-related environment. If these expectations and the explained career culture do not fit the individual preferences and situation, then one has the choice to change the profession and the employer. Travelling is an essential part of this business. Nevertheless, the number of travel days per week, useful meetings and discussion about remote work are essential.

Practical guidelines for individuals

'It's not only what the organisation should do and others, it's what I should do with my other half. Start with you, not feeling guilty and then getting the support system, meaning other half, family. The company will be there and support you.' (P_024).

Acknowledging this participant's statement and what the majority of the participants said about personal responsibility, it is worth considering that it is 'me' who decides how much is necessary and possible. Individuals are not forced to work in the consulting sector, but they must take responsibility for their own careers. Different life stages may require adaption and acceptance by others. Furthermore, communicating personal travel possibilities in advance and challenging the necessity of travel can be helpful. Given that the consulting business is related to travel, creativity is required to define alternative ways of working if not being onsite with the client.

As the conflict between private appointments and business meetings was one major challenge at all levels, open communication by employees is required – providing self-initiated feedback to managers, project managers and those who set up the business meetings. Transparency with the client and the project team regarding one's personal availability, working hours, leaving hours and personal duties might support the acceptance of remote work and part-time availability. Only with awareness of the impact on indi-

viduals can one attempt to find a more appropriate time for important business meetings. Many examples exist demonstrating that this works in practice.

If there is an unspoken expectation of extra hours, one should speak about it. This communication likely does not happen. Project managers often expect quality work to be finished regardless of the required time. At this point, the term efficiency can be brought into focus in the discussion. One can reflect on one's own efficiency and improve it. With the awareness of an efficient and successful working day, leaving before others might be easier.

Making this a topic in team meetings or in face-to-face exchanges with project managers can be an essential contribution to increase awareness about the need for time for non-work duties, time for family and personal time to recover and relax. The latter in particular has become of increasing importance in recent years. Advised by Neckel and Wagner (2014), individuals can prevent health issues such as burnout by being aware of subjective resources, personal capabilities and the ways in which private life and work can be balanced.

Referring to the self-employed attitude by Cliff Hakim (1994), every employee is responsible for one's own career and for one's own life. Thus, managers can support their employees on their individual career journey. In return, employees are asked to reflect their personal preferences and career ambitions and communicate this accordingly. Moreover, employees decide for an employer but should admits circumstances that lead to change the job role or even the employer.

Practical guidelines for project teams

Analysing the participant responses about group pressure and group dynamics related to arrival time and leaving time, potential measurements in a project team can be considered.

The negative feelings associated with saying 'no' to short notice tasks; the difficulty of leaving earlier while others stay; managing one's household, children and family appointments can be exhausting. Everyone in a project team can question his or her own behaviour. Furthermore, accepting the offered flexibility in consulting leads to the opportunity to start and finish at different times or to employ flexible working models.

Open communication was requested by different participants. Therefore, an open discussion about group pressure, starting and leaving times, availability during vacation should be part of the team culture, and it should be addressed at the beginning of a project and again when team members request to discuss about related issues.

Ideas were related to colleagues who recognised the part-time capacity or who provided support through expertise and mutual learning sessions. In addition, colleagues join and invite others to partake in afterwork opportunities, so non-work activities during the projects were proposed. These can be initiated by everyone in the project. Furthermore, a network of peers seems to be an essential idea that should be leveraged. A culture of open exchange related to this and other topics can be supportive.

5.4 Critical realist approach

The purpose of this section is to draw conclusions from the chapter's analysis and discussion through the perspective of critical realism and to interpret if the critical realist philosophy with its ontology and epistemology had been the right choice for this study.

De facto, there are supporting arguments for this decision. Interviews from a critical realist perspective are a valuable social research approach, even though limitations are acknowledged. This approach helps in the exploration of thoughts and experiences of participants to reflect on different settings (C. Smith & Elger, 2014). The research design impact the conclusions that have rather provide relativist indications of different people (Crotty, 2015).

Furthermore, participants expressed their own perception but critically mentioned their experiences of the lived reality. This uncovered the discrepancy between promoted employee friendly culture and experienced working environment. Thus, the data analysis brought to light hidden structures that were identified for the existing lack of compatibility of WLB and chosen career progression.

- The traditional promotion elements of showing presence at the client, high working hours and permanent availability are still dominating decision for career advancement.
- Pressure by peers or project team members to extend the presence at the client or to make overtime hours is preventing a better WLB. This unspoken expectation of extra hours is caused by a subtle feeling rather by a communicated direction.
- The role of the manager is essential. Participants expect the manager to support WLB, but often fail to communicate their preferences. It therefore often depends on the personal perception and communication of the manager how consultants feel supported regarding WLB practices and any non-work responsibilities.
- The competitive culture prevents to discuss WLB demand and issues due to the fear of negative consequences for one's career.
- The importance of personal responsibility was proclaimed as key for the compatibility of WLB and career by many participants. Nevertheless, the member checking feedback showed surprises about the role of personal responsibility.
- Transforming from collective responsibility to managing individual benefits while loosening solidarity might overburden people. Shared responsibilities focus on individual capacities and advantages of healthy group dynamics are worth further reflection.

With the chosen research design of a qualitative study, the findings are not to be presented as general facts but provide an understanding of hidden mechanisms and structures behind the studied phenomenon. In summary,

the chosen research philosophy of critical realism suited well to the undertaken study.

5.5 Summary

This chapter discussed the study's findings. On the one hand, consulting offers personal development, career opportunities and above-average salaries; however, on the other hand, it requires flexibility and mobility. Individuals must decide whether they are willing to accept this trade-off. Furthermore, organisations must decide whether they can afford to lose talent in certain life stages or if they can either support individuals with alternative working models or improve travel efficiency and the project environment.

With the presented results, this research aimed to contribute to gaps in the literature and to provide guidelines for practice, which were derived from the data analysis. Table 14 presents the contribution of this study, related to the research questions and identified literature gaps. The analysis results of all five research questions RQ1-RQ5 addressed literature gaps which contributed to extend academic knowledge for the themes work-life balance, career and consulting.

Table 14: Research questions, literature gaps, contribution

Research question	Literature Gap	Contribution
Client relationships in consulting (RQ1)	G1	Criteria were explained that support to build a client relationship in a consulting environment but showed that showing presence is required five days a week.
Common understanding of career (RQ2)	G2	There was no common definition among the participants. The different views of career were explained.
Definition and management of work-life balance (RQ3)	G3, G6	There was no common definition among the participants. Different challenges to achieve a WLB and how those are managed were explained.
Impact of work-life balance on career (RQ4)	G4, G6	Focussing on WLB impacts career progression. Only with certain criteria participants agreed that career progression is still possible.
Supporting ideas (RQ5)	G5	Ideas from participants and summarised guidelines presented for different roles within an organisation and for individuals.

Furthermore, the practical guidelines, resulting from ideas that emerged from the interviewed were presented in detail in the analysis chapter and are summarised in the Table 15. It is divided into the two segments. First, the table shows the organisational framework and guidelines for different roles within the consulting organisation. Second, the table illustrates the guidelines for the role of a consultant and the role within a project team, where individuals contribute with personal responsibility. The summary view contributes to the thesis results in a way to separate potential actions per role on one page.

Table 15: Summary of practical guidelines per role

	Role	Guidelines
Organisational Framework	Technical department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a scalable and location independent working environment. • Offer an innovative technological infrastructure. • Provide secure remote access for all client security levels.
	Human Resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop WLB practices that allow individualised flexibility. • Support senior leadership with guidance for cultural change. • Define and implement alternative career trajectories. • Communicate transparent promotion criteria for all job roles.
	Senior Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on results instead of presence culture. • Act as role model. • Establish a culture of acceptance, trust and honesty.
	Manager / Supervisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage according to a culture of acceptance. • Support to make use of WLB practices. • Evaluation aligned with targets and contracted working hours.
	Project Manager / Account Partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish open communication for WLB relevant topics. • Negotiate contracts with clients that allow remote work. • Support part-time project assignments, project manager tandems.
Personal responsibility	Consultants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the importance of personal responsibility. • Request open communication to take over this responsibility. • Reflect and prioritise personal preferences for career and WLB. • Decide about personal family-career model. • Share responsibilities as couple accordingly. • Establish a supporting environment (employer offerings, family, friends, payed care service, cleaning).
	Project teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support open communication WLB demand and issues. • Accept different individual preferences. • Discuss necessity of presence times, if possible, initiate a change.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter contains the summary of this study, a reflection on the critical realist approach, the contribution to knowledge and practice, the limitations of this study and further suggested research. It brings together the main points and highlights the key arguments.

6.2 Summarising the study

The motivation behind this thesis was to explore an understanding of the themes career and WLB independently from each other and in relation to each other in the consulting sector.

Research methods were evaluated during the research design phase. As qualitative methods, ethnographic design was not selected, because of the high amount of effort required. Focus group discussion was not considered, as an honest and open discussion is required to receive honest individual responses by all participants. Furthermore, quantitative research results were partly available in other studies. Therefore, a qualitative approach with interviews, in particular semi-structured telephone interviews, was selected and found to be the most appropriate method for this study. Data collection and data analysis were based on these 28 interviews concluded with the member-checking method to test the appropriateness of the study findings.

The objective of this study was to present the different views of a diverse participant group from multiple hierarchy levels, with and without children and of different genders and ages to allow employees to learn from one another and to provide organisations with an in-depth view of the challenges their employees are facing and the ways in which they can support those employees. This led to practical guidelines for organisations and practitioners, separated according to roles, such as HR department, IT department, manager, project team and the individual.

Other studies have demonstrated a re-evaluation of the traditional career form in business consulting (Cohen, 2015) and the emerging demand for WLB (Bullinger & Treisch, 2015; Kaiser et al., 2010). In particular, managerial support as a major influence for organisation culture, plays an essential role for a positive WLB culture (Darcy et al., 2012). Furthermore, organisations are asked to provide working conditions that support self-management for the given flexibility (Krause et al., 2014). The presented research results underline those studies and add qualitative participant views that provide an in-depth view of personal circumstances, the request for support and ideas for organisations to fill this gap.

Furthermore, conclusions can be drawn from the data. First, the definition of a career was different among participants. Career ambitions were clearly stated, but career progression depends on the life stage and personal circumstances as well as on one's personal decision regarding the non-working life impact. Second, the definition of WLB was individual. Challenges in managing work and non-work activities varied and depended on non-work responsibilities and the supporting system to handle them. Third, travel was considered as the most hindering aspect for WLB, and a variety of suggestions were listed to reduce travel and communication with the client, which were significant improvements for WLB. Fourth, the ideal working hours were considerably less than the actual working hours, thus indicating discrepancies between desired working time and the lived reality with its impact on personal leisure time or time for family. Fifth, the compatibility of professional life and personal life was either denied or stated to be dependent on support by the organisation, family and a supporting system. Sixth, there is room for further progress in changing the mindset of clients to widen the options for project assignments regarding remote and part-time work. This should be supported and clearly communicated (as part of client contract negotiations). Seventh, the importance of an organisational framework emerged that includes WLB policies, a leadership person who supports it and, even more essential, the organisational culture that allows one to make

use of it without an impact on career progression. Moreover, personal responsibility emerged as the central point. While life has become much faster in the past decades, personal responsibility to decide, prioritise and negotiate has increased significantly, and employees are calling for help. Words such as force and push, and suggestions such as a system that restricts email and a phone that restricts client calls, are just a few examples that indicate the need for support. Organisations can – at least in the professional part of life – support their employees to reduce stress. Organisations can address WLB and stay healthy, and they can provide support through communication and experience exchange. According to Zheng et. al. (2015), organisations should enable and help their employees to use or create coping strategies.

The undertaken study has provided answers to all research question. Hence, it can be concluded that the research goals were achieved. Contribution to knowledge and practice will be explained in section 6.3. This study has explored the structures and mechanisms behind the compatibility of WLB and chosen career in the sector consulting in Germany and provided insights into individual perspectives that serves as understanding for further studies in this research area.

6.3 Contribution to knowledge and practice

This section explains how this study contributes to a) knowledge, addressing gaps in the literature, and b) practice, providing guidelines for both organisations and individuals.

Contribution to knowledge

The literature review illustrates the lack of a common understanding of both career and WLB; this was confirmed by the interviews results. The presented qualitative participant views provide an in-depth understanding of personal circumstances, and they can be taken as starting points for further research.

A gap in knowledge was discovered regarding managing WLB while progressing one's chosen career. An additional gap related to what can support employees to make personal and professional life more compatible. This study sought to expand upon the existing knowledge within the German consulting sector. The results of this study add to the knowledge presented by prior studies.

Further research in the field of PSFs is recommended because of the theoretical importance and the insights PSFs can evolve within the knowledge economy (Laura Empson et al., 2015). Despite PSFs are important in the global knowledge economy (Fu et al., 2013), only a few studies were found during the literature review.

Contribution to practice

Recapturing the phenomenon about the challenge for employees to organise work and non-working life in a competitive knowledge intensive sector, study results illustrated the important role of the manager, a WLB supportive organisational culture and the role of personal responsibility. Based on the study analysis a conceptual model was developed and presented in Figure 9. This is a major contribution to practice as this model helps to understand the context and can be used to explain the outcome of the study.

Proposed ideas by participants provided the basis for the practice-oriented guidelines on how to approach the complex area of conflict between professional and personal life and reflect these themes from individual and organisational perspective. Participants in this study emphasised the importance of this topic and expressed the desire for those guidelines that can be implemented in organisations. Thus, the results will be taken as basis to discuss implications with leaders and employees. This might lead to further improve the presented guidelines in the future. Moreover, the researcher will promote these guidelines in social media and in public discussion groups.

Additionally, this study benefits organisations that consider WLB practices and want to support their employees to make professional and private life more compatible, thereby enabling health, motivation and the retainment and gain of professionals in a competitive market. Furthermore, this study benefits employees not only in the consulting sector but probably to all employees as the pressures faced by employees with non-work responsibilities are a common experience.

Given the number of employees in the consulting sector in the world, and considering that generation Y employees will be the majority in the workplace in 2030, there is a high practice relevance to conduct research on how organisations can reinvent careers and create new ways to motivate, add real value and present new opportunities to their employees. For this, researchers can support employers adapting the benefits of diversity (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010). As PSFs are leading organisations, the results of studies can provide details regarding the realities of the contemporary knowledge-based economy (Laura Empson et al., 2015).

This topic is an actual theme in discussions about diversity related to women, career and WLB; however, it is no longer relevant only for women. Stress related to work-family balance is reported by men as well (Meenakshi et al., 2013). It is essential that pressure from different perspectives forces a change in the minds of people. A change in the mindset of clients is required in relation to this topic. Many clients still expect to see consultants onsite. Trust in remote work and an acknowledgement of quality using innovative working models would support an individual's ability to combine work and non-work activities.

Practice relevance for organisations

The overall findings of the present study have a number of practical implications that could help organisations understand their employees with respect to their career ambitions and progression as well as their demand for WLB. The research results can be used to develop targeted interventions

aimed at supporting employees to reach the critical goal of compatibility of work and non-work activities. Meenakshi et al. (2013) underline that organisations can implement coaching, work-life policies, manager support and communication of success stories. Moreover, WLB practices can support health and improvement of WLB (Manasa & Showry, 2018), which was argued by participants during the conducted interviews. Using the present study results would be a significant step to create an organisational framework that allows employees to use work-life practices for personal health, leisure time and family duties, and then creating an organisational culture of acceptance when making use of these practices.

This study can assist decision makers in organisations to support their employees to better take over their personal responsibility and to guide them along the required learning process to do so. If a person is no longer willing to travel at all, in a business where travel is part of the DNA, then an organisation should help this person to either move out or transition into a job role that does not require travelling. Furthermore, this sector with high travel time requirements should carefully consider alternatives with less travel; such alternatives are possible with digitalisation, which allow for remote work.

Practice relevance for employees

Considering what has changed over the past decades related to personal responsibility, it is worthwhile to reflect on one's own capabilities and opportunities to better balance work and non-working tasks.

Every individual has her and his own responsibility for the personal life and though for one's chosen career and if desired career progression within an organisation or beyond organisational boundaries. Employees can learn how peers manage their WLB challenges. As stated by two member checking feedback's, the strategies to manage WLB are worth reading, reflecting and trying. Reading the challenges of others may help to recognise personal daily challenges, identify new ideas and to initiate some developments towards a healthier working attitude. Employees are recommended to reflect

their WLB status quo, their career ambitions and their individual preferences for family, supporting environment, demand for personal tasks. This can be taken as basis for discussion as a couple, with the manager, supervisor and with peers. Awareness of personal status, articulation of requirements and acceptance of other preferences will be essential to better integrate or balance different life responsibilities.

A critical mass of employees is required to provide another push for change in this field. This change requires brave men and women to make further use of WLB policies and it requires managers who support an integration of both life domains. And every employee can contribute, by not only accepting other life models, working contract or career preferences but by supporting peers and creating a culture where diverse genders, skills, employment models, life preferences can benefit the entire team.

6.4 Limitations of the study

This section discusses the limitations of the conducted study. Furthermore, it provides a critical reflection and appraisal of how the methods and techniques employed in this study led to modifying the proposed method for the data collection and analysis. In conducting interviews with the philosophical view of a critical realist, the weaknesses and limitations of this method are recognised (C. Smith & Elger, 2014).

The present study makes no claim to be comprehensive in presenting all ideas for improvement in the consulting sector related to supporting employees and organisations to manage WLB and one's chosen career. Furthermore, there are limitations to the extent to which the results can be generalised. However, this study could be repeated in other segments of the professional service sector or beyond. The data collection was limited to the German consulting environment. Therefore, adapting the results to other markets requires a clear understanding of the local cultural and organisational context.

Another set of concerns is related to the role separation of the author: On the one hand, being a leader in a consulting company and personally facing multiple issues that were named by participants and, on the other hand, being a researcher for this topic. Stating this double role as a major challenge throughout the entire DBA journey supported critical writing and interaction with participants. Within the pilot study, a potential conflict became clear when all three participants referred to activities of the author, pushing for the compatibility of this topic. Therefore, the role separation between being a researcher and performing a role as a leader was made even more explicit to the participants. As a post-interview reflection, it can be stated that the author had to force herself not to intervene and comment on certain answers. The switch between these roles was successfully managed.

Furthermore, the reviewed literature was cross-country, as the triangle of WLB, career and professional service firms or consulting was rarely found. Most articles were published in the UK and the US, but seldom in Germany. Nevertheless, the interviews were limited to German participants, focusing on the experiences of consulting companies represented in the German market. The literature was related regardless of the sector, as studies of WLB and career in consulting and then in Germany were limited or not found. When available, articles related to PSFs were preferred.

The data collection for supporting ideas of WLB in the client environment was problematic in the pilot study because the question seemed to be difficult to understand. Further explanation was required for all subjects to guide them towards the intended question. This one question was divided into sub-questions in the main study to improve understanding.

The intended differentiation between the three hierarchy levels was considered only partly in some sections. During the data analysis phase, overlapping responses became visible and caused repetition. Further data collection is required for a more in-depth focus on how participants from different cohorts evaluate WLB and career progression.

The procedure to provide a kind of appropriateness of the findings needed clear reflection. Considering this limitation, the additional chosen method of member checking allowed for an appropriateness check presented by seven randomly selected participants (two per hierarchy level).

Furthermore, two issues with coding as part of the analysis occurred. The first issue was the amount of coding; an additional review of all coding was required to combine similar codes. The second issue was the data fragmentation as a result of single-sentence coding. An additional review of the coded sentences and sections helped to bring arguments back into context. The overview of all codes and sub-codes can be found in the appendix.

6.5 Recommendations for future research

This study explored experiences with WLB and its compatibility with career progression in the consulting sector in Germany. The listed recommendations reveal some promising areas for future research to expand the body of knowledge that was presented in this study.

Repeating the call by Laura Empson et al. (2015), research in the area of professional service firms is of further interest. This study can be replicated both in other markets and in other sectors to identify similar or different implications for practice and knowledge. The findings present a high level of individuality of responses, which indicates the complexity of this topic. Focusing research on different participant groups, such as only men with or without children, only executives, only women or only entry-level consultants, would provide a more in-depth understanding of each group.

Additional research is recommended to analyse how client relationships can be established and improved, using the advantages of digitalisation, to allow for reduced travel or on-site presence, both of which would help consultants to better combine work and non-work responsibilities.

Furthermore, the intensity of participant discussion in the interview regarding the question of how WLB impacts career was remarkable, emotional.

The number of transcription words for this question alone illustrates that further research might be interesting, such as exploring the role of the culture and the manager or project manager in career progression in part-time positions or when using flexible working options.

An additional research direction could be related to the team dynamics in projects, its impact on the WLB of the individuals and supporting ideas to reduce the pressure at this point.

Extending the knowledge about the transformation of self-responsibility from collective towards hyperindividualistic responsibility. What are the next steps and how can people benefit from solidarity and shared responsibilities rather than as individual capitalist handling everything on his or her own, facing exhaustion and probably isolation?

A gender study with a focus on the male-specific work-family conflict and implications on career in consulting would be worth conducting. The responses of male participants indicate that there is a need for change that would allow men to assume part-time roles and use flexible working options.

Another avenue for future research in this area could be to examine the implication of climate benefits with less travelling in the consulting sector. The following questions could be explored: How often do consultants travel, and what is the impact on our worldwide climate? What are the positive effects when using alternatives to travel or working remotely, and what are implications for daily business in the consulting sector?

Given the economic importance of consulting and professional service firms in general, this sector will likely gain further attention for research.

6.6 Final words

Work-life balance is highly individual, as are career progression and career ambition. Everyone is asked to reflect on his or her behaviour and its impact on organisational culture and acceptance or to act as a role model to ultimately create a working environment that support employees in all stages

of life, health or career. Organisations can provide support through policies and leadership, while an individual should choose an employer that aligns with his or her personal circumstances and preferences. In times of war for talent, this might force organisations to create alternative working models as solutions to work-life conflicts.

The most natural behaviour of human beings, namely, starting a family, can still lead to disadvantages in further professional development – regardless of gender. A new generation will dominate the workplace in the coming years and call for change. Organisations are reacting, and WLB and health have become the topics of focus in HR departments.

Management WLB is complex and changes from one life stage to another and from day to day and challenging oneself and others to better handle this complex situation of life requires decisions, support, power and courage. Taking personal responsibility for one's profession, family, support system, information consumption and time to relax emerged as being key to managing the different domains in life. The results demonstrate that employees are aware of self-responsiveness; however, they still necessitated help and proposed ideas for how organisations can support them. Thus, major statements of this study can be formulated:

1. Every individual is affected and asked to be aware of his or her own personal responsibility, WLB demand and career preferences and to communicate this accordingly.
2. Every organisation is affected and challenged by the variety of individual requirements. Thus, an organisation is asked to establish a communication and a culture of acceptance for different work and life models to support its employees in their professional life, thereby enabling compatibility with private life.
3. Both above points in balance can create the value to achieve organisational economic goals harmonised with individual work and life.

Personal words of the author

I took great pleasure in defining the topic, narrowing down the themes, interviewing participants and writing this thesis. I enjoyed the research journey from the start in 2016. These developed additional competences for my personality leveraged my strengths of leading, thinking and acting as a woman. Being in a male-dominated working environment, I am a personal supporter of mixed teams to bring diverse strengths together. This study further enabled my awareness of this essential topic that is relevant for everyone – for personal health, success and satisfaction. Organisations should enhance a workplace culture that allows for the evolvement of performance for clients while respecting individual preferences by finding alternative solutions, supported by technology and mutual client agreements. Everyone can feel encouraged to implement and test the proposed practical guidelines and actively address this topic. The potential is clear, and employees and organisations acting in concert can make it a reality.

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Appendix A: Interview questions

1) Opening block:

Please describe your current responsibilities / tasks.

What are your average working hours per week?

How do you compare this working amount with your peers?

What do you believe will change on the next career level?

2) Work-Life balance

What does work-life balance mean for you?

How do you manage your work-life balance?

What are challenges you are facing?

How many hours per week would you like to reduce your working time if possible?

On a scale from 1-10 (1 low, 10 very) ... how satisfied are you with your current work-life balance?

What do you believe will change on the next career level?

3) Career

How do you define career?

How do you experience the impact of work-life balance and making career?

At this point there will be a break and clear communication that this was the interview part for as is analysis and personal experiences and that we will continue to the hypothesis / idea part where participants can propose solutions.

What would support you to manage work-life balance on your current career level?

What would have helped you on your former career levels?

What do believe will help you on the next career level?

4) Client environment

How could your organisation support work-life balance in the client facing job regarding...

- a. Travel
- b. Communication channels/tools
- c. Working models

How would you approach client relationship management considering your work-life balance demand?

5) Closing part

What motivates you more?

Kicker table or celebrating parties?

Bonus miles for private use or home office opportunities?

Health offerings or less working tasks?

Anything you want to remark that I should consider?

Thank you for taking part.

Appendix B: Interview excerpt

Mara Jekosch: All right, so that leads us to the next question. What does work/life balance mean for you?

Participant: What does it mean? Well, the meaning is in the word. It's a balance of the work and the non-work activities and keeping your sanity in terms of making sure the non-work life part is also covered as much as the work. That's a balance. It's being a mom, being a spouse, being a daughter, you know, being myself with my own specific activities. Similarly, at work, you have your own role as well. You can be a coach. You can be a leader. You can be a seller. You can be various bubble of I would say roles and competencies. It's getting those, I would say, bubbles, juggling those bubbles as much as you can without, you know, feeling bad about it.

Mara Jekosch: How do you manage your work/life balance?

Participant: I organize myself on weekends where I look at the week ahead. Similarly, with my husband, we look at the big items privately to book, to do, to kind of take care of. We redistribute the task among the family or ourselves, delegate a lot. I have a cleaner. I have a nanny. We really share and take responsibility like homework and all this. Then I - we deprioritize a lot of tasks. Like, we don't go out too much because it's too much planning.

On the work side, it's a bit the same. It's having number one, having a clarity of what your role is. Number two, a defined strategy. Number three, a management system to kind of execute that strategy.

Appendix C: Interview excerpt

Mara Jekosch: What is your expectation?

Participant: I mean, I can only speak for what my experience was, but I found that it was a lot easier working with colleagues that knew my situation and understood that situation. They knew that my children are going to be my priority if, somebody has a head injury, or somebody hurts themselves, or somebody's sick and I am going to have to take them to the doctor, then they're going to be my priority.

Other colleagues who could completely understand that and understand that those things do happen in life. For me it was always easier, and even on the clients' side I had clients who, one man asked me how I am doing it at the moment, working part time with children, because his wife was just going back to work. We were all talking about these ideas on how we could make it work.

I just think there needs to be a bit more general understanding, and I must admit myself as well. Before I had children, I had no idea how it would be. I mean, I guess I had some idea, but you can't really understand it unless you talk to people, and you have this open communication.

I think there could be a bit more talking about that. The flexible working you know if people need to work from home there needs to be policies in place about this, but there needs to be this possibility. What the options are for the project as a consultant. You know, could we take tandem working as we discussed before, or is there specific project work that could be done a little bit in isolation in part time hours?

Appendix D: Member checking

P_02 commented as follows: 'My viewpoint is completely recognised and understood in the analysis part. A lot of the mentioned statements are comprehensible, and I have heard about some cases already. Nevertheless, I was shocked by the one statement that during vacation, the working efforts are limited to three mails a day and one call in a week. In my eyes, every employee must be a role model for their peers and employees, independent from their job level. Especially managers must be in balance to lead others: First take care of yourself and then help others. I found myself confirmed in my belief that the working hours increase by the job level. I was appalled that all top-level participants are generation X; no participant is working part time; no one works as stated in the contract; and except for one, they all have kids, but such a high workload. It would be helpful to get to know in which age their children are to draw further conclusions. Afterwards, I asked myself whether I really want to make further efforts to get into a top-level position. It is only feasible with a high number of working hours, but I want to take care of my kids. I completely miss role models. I hope there will be a turnaround that promotion and the proof of skills is not linked to working hours in the future, in addition to the realisation of the proposed ideas in the study. Moreover, I want to add another challenge based on my own experience: time management due to the high number of various tasks (project-related work, department support, administrative to-dos, trainings and people management tasks). I like all "Ideas that support career and work-life balance". My first impression was that the perspective differs from entry to top level. Top-level ideas are more related to how other persons can support them to support career and work-life balance. By contrast, entry-level points aim more at what they can undertake for a work-life balance, like mentoring and coaching.' (P_02, 12.07.2019).

P_09 responded as follows: 'I found reading the results of your interviews very interesting. The different aspects are very well structured. Especially

the aspect of WLB and who is responsible for it – the employee or the employer/leadership was very interesting. In general, it surprised me that a lot of the answers were very much self-focused: "I have to take care of my work-life balance", and, for example, the need for overtime was taken for granted rather than questioned. I mean this in terms of "Why are projects always planned in a way that they require endless overtime?" In general, I found myself represented in many comments, and I think it provided a very good overall view on work-life balance and career opportunities in the consulting industry.' (P_09, 28.06.2019).

P_10 argued, 'The findings focusing on consulting in a client environment closely capture the opinions I have and the experiences I had in the past in regard to client relationships. I found it surprising that most respondents do not see a consulting career as a series of milestones that come with increased payment and responsibility. Although I don't see a career entirely in that way either, most consulting firms have career paths or frameworks in place with specific goals that need to be achieved and certain fixed benefits and responsibilities that come with a promotion, so it would be obvious to see this as a career. More intuitive to me was the finding that consultants are ready to move to other positions with less travel time in case their situation in life changes (e.g., because of children). I guess most consultants reach a certain point in their career where they have to think about making such a decision. It was interesting to read about different strategies the respondents have to manage their time to achieve work-life-balance; some of those strategies are worth trying. Challenges were presented that I, and apparently most other consultants, can relate to. Also, the entry-level WLB challenges capture a lot of my experiences. In my opinion, the struggle with balance becomes a bit better with time on the job. You start to develop routines and to prioritise tasks differently with time. Regarding working hours, it was not surprising to see the differences between contracted and worked hours. However, it was interesting to see that the difference is not necessarily linked to the overall satisfaction. I agree that supporting working models makes the consulting job more attractive, but these models should not

only be offered but also actively supported and promoted so that people use them. The overall findings are interesting, and they reflect a lot of my own views and opinions.’ (P_10, 05.07.2019).

P_13 reflected: ‘I feel very well reflected in your excerpt with my answers. Reading the challenges of others makes me recognise some of my daily challenges. I can agree with comments that after a long-distance flight in economy, one cannot expect efficient work at the same time. As this interview was conducted half a year ago – at least, it feels like that – I personally have made some developments towards a healthier working attitude. But I strongly feel that this slows down my career, which leaves me in a personal conflict. On the other hand, it gives me the space and time to grow healthier, and for the first time after starting my studies, I feel my private life has a chance, too. To read my own comments and to see my recent developments in contrast is the biggest surprise personally. Apart from that, it is interesting to read the answers of others with their own perspective. One aspect was a completely new twist for me as one interviewee said that career is there to let you live your private preferences. Another interesting view was that WLB is the balance of work, family and yourself. I believe, at least for me, the "yourself" in the WLB is often missing. Overall, I like the diversity of the study with its participants and the mixture of questions around career and WLB. The graphics are well chosen, and the results are presented in a logical manner, which is easy to understand and digest. I am looking forward to reading the final version of the dissertation and its results.’ (P_13, 10.07.2019).

P_25 commented as follows: ‘I like the fact that building trust is an important topic in building client relationships. In my opinion, this is essential. Also, with on-site availability and technology support, I agree. Very interesting how diverse the understanding of careers is. The result regarding part-time is surprising. I expected that part-time roles should be feasible in consultancy as, in my opinion, they “only” need better planning and management. Not every role in a project requires full-time resources. Some of the proposed ideas seem unrealistic. Especially in a consultancy. Consulting will

stay a high-performance and mostly high-workload job. Regarding the results of performance pressure, I think this is not surprising; a consultancy is a “high performance” environment. It was interesting information/feedback that the difference between the expressed and the lived culture is that big. This sounds like a very old-school working culture. In summary, it is exciting to see that almost all participants of the study have an interest in a good work-life balance; but this is still difficult in the consulting sector. The discrepancy between proclaimed and experienced culture is significant. For this, I expect managers to take over the responsibility to change this lived culture. On the other side, employees need to demand their liberties that had been promised by the organisation. A critical mass might be required to no longer ignore part-time models and remote work. I hope that more “new work” minded persons will come into responsibility to agree on the contracts with the clients and will include more remote work.’ (P_25, 17.07.2019).

P_27 reflected, ‘Thanks for sharing your thesis results and the trust in my views. Reading your summary and the findings, I find myself as well as the WLB situation well reflected. I believe everyone needs to take responsibility for himself to create his own WLB by setting boundaries and communicating them clearly. Organisations need to support this culture and work to build the trust that your own WLB is accepted and will not harm your career. This is a dual challenge as most people struggle to set boundaries, and organisations (and their leadership) are still solely driven by financial success. In understanding this challenge and taking joint personal and cultural steps lies one of the big leadership challenges to tackle. Your study offers a great set of starting points to think about and work on as an organisation and leadership team. Thanks for letting me be part of this.’ (P_27, 25.08.2019).

P_28 responded, ‘Yes, I feel reflected in the results. Unfortunately, there were no surprises as the results confirm a lot of stereotypes. There is nothing missing from my point of view. I liked reading the results a lot, and the “salary calculator” was news to me.’ (P_28, 18.06.2019).

Appendix E: Analysis statistics of data collection

Metrics	Value
Total Number of interviews	28
Number of entry-level (consultants)	11
Number of middle-level (managers, project managers)	10
Number of top-level (associate partner and above)	7
Total time of interviews	18:36:59
Time of shortest interview	28:47
Time of longest interview	58:45
Avg. time of interview	39:54
Total number of transcription words	102.903
Avg. number of transcription words per interview	3.675

Appendix F: Ideas that support career and work-life balance

The tables below present the categories that emerged from the interviews, separated by consulting hierarchy levels.

Table 16: Entry level ideas that support career and work-life balance

Categories for work-life support	Ideas/preferences of participants
Health offerings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sport opportunities at work - Financial support for health offerings and fitness studio
Local projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local projects and my decision for projects - Other roles that do not require travel
Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognition of hard work and the personal sacrifice - Support to discuss with project manager about over time reduction - Role models who show they still have private life - Regular meetings and reminder that health is important - Prevention of too many overtime hours
Organisational culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environment where results are in sync with private appointments - Not a suggested expectation of over time = good employee - 40h contract and working 40 hours without disadvantages - Cut between work and life - No expectation that work on weekends is necessary - Communication to the client work-life culture is important
Person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coach to prevent burn out and provide tips - Colleagues who recognise the part-time capacity offered - Colleagues who support with expertise - Colleagues for afterwork opportunities - Friends who ask for a dinner or having a drink - Team and a positive dynamic that supports work-life balance - Project manager who is available for conversation - Peers and discussion how to handle issues - Mentor to exchange experiences - Boyfriend need to support in the household - Commitment of family and partner
Personal responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understanding that its "me" to decide how much is necessary - Self-reflection and communicate not to travel or to leaver earlier - Create a list of all tasks during the day to better structure it
Project plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A trustful project plan ahead that allows to plan private meetings - Realistic project plan with all efforts and resources to deliver this - Estimation that includes learning by doing efforts - Reduced onsite presents at the client site / more home office
Public facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Direct flights to my client. - Support to find a kindergarten
Support system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good travel tool - Good education opportunities (e.g. Learning Hub) - Controlled system that shuts down the lap top, remind me to stop - Easy time tracking system - Cut of telephone line, so the client does not reach me - Remote access to all tools - No access to email at the weekend
Working models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Home office opportunities - Flexible work - Freedom for rotation to other departments - Long-term vacation opportunities (overtime compensation as

Table 17: Middle level ideas that support career and work-life balance

Categories for work-life support	Ideas/preferences of participants
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open discussion about Work-life balance - More organisational communication about this topic - Recognition of results not for availability/presents - Failure are allowed and one can learn from it - Acceptance for part-time and family-friendly mandatory calls - Respect of contractual hours - Trust in employees
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training, Development offered by the organisation - Development and promotion despite part-time contract - Online training opportunities
Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Role model who does not demand more and more and more - Create an environment that is part-time and family friendly - Set targets for work-life balance - Coaching
Other support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opportunities to take the child on business travel - Cost coverage for children care - Be allowed to handle most with video conference - Support for smoking cessation, flu shot - Health offerings and cost take over
Person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Husband who makes 100% parental leave - Husband who supports in the household - Colleagues to talk about challenges - Team to delegate tasks - Team for evening activities during the week - Family who shows the mirror - Network of peers who discussion those issues - Mentor
Personal responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good structure and plan, good self-organisation - Rules at home (closed door = no children are allowed to enter...) - Switch off the mobile during vacation - More self-reflection of physical status and personal health higher than business
Project related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion with account partner - Project with remote working opportunities - Local projects assignments with little travel only - Senseful travel and onsite presents at client site - Project roles that fit to private circumstances/contract
Public facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support to find a kindergarten / enterprise kindergarten - Child care in other cities
Working models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Policies of flexible working and its communication - Home office opportunities - Job-sharing to for parents - Tandem opportunities in management positions - Improved onsite/remote presents at the client site - Part-time opportunities also in management positions - Gliding time

Table 18: Top level ideas that support career and work-life balance

Categories for work-life support	Ideas/preferences of participants
Increase of productivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Easier notebook exchange - Less senseless administrative tasks - Less interaction with the work council - Support system / back office for travel, calendar, presentation preparation - Reducing tasks for tools, admin, access, travel - Admin has no effect on scorecard
Increase time for valuable tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People at client site should focus on value instead of administration (travel, tool access, operational performance measurements, calendar)
Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Manager who supports work-life balance requirements - A workaholic who does not expect the same for it's employees - Manager with a reasonable risk taking approach
Openness / Acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acceptance that performance is not related to working hours - Change of old school behaviour / expectation acting equally
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family, wife, husband (open feedback) - A reliable motivated team - Delegation to the team and preparation by the team - Colleagues, peer who support and learn from each other - Mentoring, someone who discuss advantages and disadvantages
Public facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More flexible opening times of doctors, shops - Children activities not only in the afternoon - More flexibility of the eco system
Support system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cleaner - Nanny/Babysitter - Employer managed emergency service for children and parents
Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fast internet
Promotion transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transparent promotion criteria - Partner promotion should not only depend on numbers
Working models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working remotely - Flexible work - Working models that do not lead into a dead end. - Equal career paths (people management or sales strengths)

Appendix G: Analysis coding

List der Codes	Coding
Code system	1471
Consulting	0
Job Role	30
Relationship	28
Personal contact/be available onsite	37
Effective collaboration	31
Trust/honesty	29
Working hours per week	44
Working hours ideally	31
Working hours peers	37
Working hours next career level	43
Career	0
Career definition	40
Career ambition	34
WLB impact on career	58
Support WLB current career level	89
Support WLB former career level	20
Support WLB next career level	60
Work-Life Balance	0
WLB Definition	39
WLB Management	47
Flexibility	14
Structure/plan	19
Duties/responsibilities	21
WLB challenges	39
Dual career	7
Part-time	5
Travel	4
Performance pressure	12
Compatibly	14
Private vs. business appointment	26
Self-awareness to keep balance	18
Say 'No'	16
W/L satisfaction scale	31
What is missing towards 10?	22
W/L satisfaction scale next career level	29
Emerging Ideas	0
Culture	37
Society	8
Pressure/stress	15
Expectation	17
Acceptance	33
Leadership persons	27
Salary impact	7
Motivation	5
Recognition	7
Personal responsibility	38
Care for children	3
Impact on children	4
Perfectionism	2
Guilt/worries	6
Ideas for client environment	0
Travel	50
Part-time project assignment	16
Local projects	19
Working remote	41
Communication	61
Working models	45
Compatibility/flexibility	24
Closing question	32

Figure 11: Coding