

Work-life Balance in the Roles of Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Thai Navy

Lcdr. Kantima Charapinyo*

บทคัดย่อ

การสร้างสมดุลระหว่างชีวิตและการทำงานถือเป็นหนทางของการพัฒนาความสามารถของมนุษย์โดยจะต้องพัฒนาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างงานและการดำเนินชีวิตของคนในแต่ละองค์กร ในงานวิจัยนี้ได้ชี้ให้เห็นถึงการสร้างสมดุลระหว่างชีวิตและการทำงานของผู้บัญชาการทหารเรือไทย ทั้งในปัจจุบันและในอดีตในรอบสิบปีที่ผ่านมา รวมทั้งสิ้นเจ็ดท่านด้วยกัน ผลการวิจัยได้สะท้อนให้เห็นถึง ปัจจัยภายในและภายนอกของการสร้างสมดุลระหว่างชีวิตและการทำงาน ในการศึกษาพบว่า ปัจจัยภายในของการสร้างสมดุลระหว่างชีวิตและการทำงานเกิดจากสัมพันธภาพ และความเข้าใจ ภายในครอบครัวของผู้บัญชาการทหารเรือ ส่วนปัจจัยภายนอกเกี่ยวข้องกับการบริหารงานและบริหารเวลา ในทำนองเดียวกันงานวิจัยยังได้กล่าวถึงกลยุทธ์ โครงสร้างที่ช่วยสนับสนุนรวมถึงกลไกการปรับตัวที่ ผู้บัญชาการทหารเรือแต่ละท่านได้ใช้เพื่อให้เกิดความสมดุลของชีวิตและการทำงาน ผลการวิจัยหลักพบว่า トラบใดก็ตามที่พวกท่านเหล่านั้น มีความรู้สึกว่ามันเพียงพอใจ ในการจัดการงานและชีวิตส่วนตัว ให้เหมาะสมกับความต้องการของตนเอง โดยไม่มีความเครียดหรือความขัดแย้งเกิดขึ้นภายในครอบครัว โดยไม่จำเป็นต้องใช้เวลาเท่ากันในเรื่องของงานและกิจกรรมอย่างอื่นนอกเหนือจากภาระงานได้ถือว่า ท่านมีการสร้างสมดุลในชีวิตส่วนตัวและชีวิตการทำงานให้เกิดขึ้นแล้ว

คำสำคัญ: การสร้างสมดุลระหว่างชีวิตการทำงานและชีวิตส่วนตัว, ผู้บัญชาการทหารเรือไทย, โครงสร้างสนับสนุน, กลยุทธ์, กลไกการปรับตัว

*นิสิตปริญญาเอก (Ph.D.) สาขาการพัฒนทรัพยากรมนุษย์ (HRD) หลักสูตรนานาชาติ คณะศึกษาศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยบูรพา
ชลบุรี

Abstract

Work-life balance (WLB) is generally seen as the way to develop one's human capacity by improving the relationship between work and life. In this research, WLB issues faced by seven Commander-in-Chiefs (C-in-Cs) of the RTN in the past ten years were investigated. The results were interpreted as both internal and external conceptualizations of WLB. The study found that the internal concept of WLB was the understanding within the family of the C-in-C. Meanwhile, the external concepts were how the C-in-Cs managed their work and time. In addition, the study revealed strategies, support structures, and coping mechanisms that C-in-Cs used to achieve WLB. A major finding of this study was that, as long as they feel satisfied with their work and life, and do not have any stress or conflict with their families, C-in-Cs do not have to spend equal time between work and non-work activities in order to achieve WLB.

Keywords: Work-life balance, Commander-in-Chief, Support structure, Strategy, Coping mechanism

Introduction

Work-life balance (WLB) involves ways to develop the human capacity by improving the relationship between work and life of persons who work in complex organizations. It becomes an important issue for many people, especially for those in leadership roles. Debates about WLB often occur without any clear and consistent definition of what is meant by WLB (Guest, 2001), who stated that the type of WLB sought by many people may not imply equal weight on both "work" and "life" sides, and balance also has a physical and psychological meaning as "stability of body or mind". Many studies found that WLB is an important variable in job/life adaptation. For example, Scholarios (2004) indicated that WLB has important consequences for employee attitudes towards their organizations, as well as for their lives. According to Voydanoff (2002) family support may be a mechanism that is effective in

reducing work - family conflict (WFC). In other words, family support may increase WFC. Individual factors such as work orientation, personality, energy, personal control and coping, gender, age, life and career stage, also affect perceptions of WLB. In addition, the outcomes of WLB can be related to personal satisfaction and well-being, to objective indicators of behavior and performance at work and at home. They also impact on colleagues, family and friends.

Nonetheless, Jones, Burke & Westman (2006) maintained that the terms are frequently operationalized as self-ratings of general perceptions of balance between roles. The blurring of boundaries between work and non-work domains suggests that individuals find it difficult to make specific distinctions between work and non-work roles. Nonetheless, in this research, "work" refers to an activity in which one exerts effort to perform

a role for which money is paid. Meanwhile, “life” or “non-work” refers to all personal roles apart from the work role, including the family role, home and non-home roles, and the role of leisure.

In the Royal Thai Navy (RTN), there are only a few research studies concerning WLB of naval personnel. Considering the fact that the missions and responsibilities of the RTN are quite different from the other armed services, to balance work and life roles is very difficult to manage, especially for those naval personnel who often spend large amounts of time at sea. In addition, with economic pressures forcing people, including mothers, to enter the paid workforce, naval personnel are faced with the need to balance the demanding pressures of both home and work. In recent years, working time has expanded in various ways, including significant numbers of people taking work home with them after the normal working day. A person who wants to achieve in his/her career the highest position in the RTN or at least to be promoted to as high a position as possible, may find it difficult to balance the demands of his/her job and his/her family, as well as other activities.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to investigate WLB issues faced by Commander-in-Chiefs (C-in-Cs) of the RTN. The major objective of this research was to examine how C-in-Cs of the RTN in the past 10 years balanced their work and personal

lives. The research also investigated similarities and differences in the ways that individual C-in-Cs of the RTN combined work and other activities. In addition, the study examined strategies, support structures, and coping mechanisms used to achieve WLB, as well as sought insight into the nature of the responsibilities of C-in-Cs of the RTN and the multiple roles they play both at work and away from work.

Methodology

Participants and Procedure

The population for the interviews consisted of seven C-in-Cs of the RTN in the past 10 years, as well as their wives and at least one children for each family. For this research’s purpose, a family includes only husband, wife and their children. Based on an extensive literature review, research questions were constructed to serve as guidelines for data collection, analysis and interpretation. Semi-structured interviews played a significant role for data collection and analysis. Each in-depth interview occupied approximately two hours. The notes were organized, categorized, and interpreted according to the categories.

The research questions were closely integrated with the study’s objectives and the literature review. Thus, the interview questions, as the main research methodology for data collection in this study, were based on the research questions and research objectives respectively.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the data by employing the following steps: data collecting, coding and organizing the data, rearranging the data into categories, evaluating the data, and writing the report. The data, collected from archival records, document collection, in-depth interviews, and observation, were coded and re-coded in the second step. The data were carefully read, reread, and then organized before being manually coded. Coding is organizing the raw data into meaningful categories, and was the crucial process of content analysis in this qualitative research, which described the “units of meaning”. All data were coded based on the research questions.

The coding of raw data was a continuous process throughout the analysis. By coding and re-coding, new linkages among the data were conceptualized and examined. As each interview was completed, the resultant data raised new questions that led to re-examination of existing data. The data were coded and recoded until they were distilled into the emergent categories or themes. The data were then evaluated in order to make sure that all the research questions were answered. All the data, which had been categorized, were drawn together in order to explain how C-in-Cs balanced their work and life.

Research Findings

The findings of this research, which demonstrated similarities and differences in the way C-in-Cs of the RTN combined work and non-work

activities to achieve WLB, were divided according to how they were expressed: internally or externally. Internal conceptualization of WLB – based upon the findings of this research – was basically the understanding of the heavy work responsibilities of a C-in-C within the family. External conceptualization for successful WLB included strategies for managing work and managing time.

Internal Conceptualization of Work-life Balance

Jones, Burke & Westman (2006) explained that WLB meanings are frequently operationalized as self-ratings of general perceptions of balance between roles. By analyzing all interviewees' views, this study proposed an internal conceptualization of WLB in the form of understanding within their family. All of the interviewed C-in-Cs stressed the importance of understanding within their families as the highest priority to maintain WLB. One C-in-C expressed this feeling as follows: *“If we understand each other, our family life will be more balanced... We live together as if we are friends, just like brother and sister.”* (Interview C-in-C, 2009)

However, some C-in-Cs of the RTN demonstrated that they did not experience work-life balance all the time. In those cases, the C-in-Cs of the RTN had to give reasons to their families in order to understand why it must be done in that way in order to get the balance back. As one C-in-C said: *“...an acceptance of each other's roles*

could help reduce conflict within a family...Give [my wife] a reason.” (Interview C-in-C, 2009)

Overall, the internal conceptualization, as explained by the interviewed C-in-Cs of the RTN, reflects the meanings of WLB as to how people view themselves, as Blaire-Loy (2003) and Merrill & Merrill (2003) explained.

External Conceptualization of WLB

According to the findings, external conceptualization of WLB can be divided into two main categories: managing work and managing time.

Managing work

To manage work, all of the interviewed C-in-Cs of the RTN accepted that their work was best managed by having efficient staff officers, and giving authorization. Meanwhile, three out of seven interviewed C-in-Cs stressed that setting priorities is one of the important methods to manage work. One C-in-C said: *“I made priorities and important of my works. I had my staffs in the office...They knew which works were the first or second priorities according to my policy.” (Interview C-in-C, 2009)*

In addition, three out of seven interviewed C-in-Cs also asked their subordinates to do non-work roles in order to have more time to manage their work, as in the following example: *“As a C-in-C of the RTN, I had tons of works to do and to think about. Little things that my subordinates could do, I’d let them do, even though sometimes*

it’s my personal stuffs. So, I’d have more time to consider my job.” (Interview C-in-C, 2009)

Managing Time

Three main strategies were employed to manage their time:

1. Schedule Management

All of the interviewed C-in-Cs of the RTN used a unified calendar as the most essential tool to perform duties and activities. It is reviewed every day for two purposes. Firstly, it was used for informing C-in-Cs what they were going to do on that day. Secondly, in case of another duty with a higher priority and being necessary to replace the previous duty, C-in-Cs would re-schedule these plans and manage their work As C4 said: *“I could plan my duty and personal time on the unified schedule. With this schedule, I’ll know when I have personal time or when I can spend time with my family and friends.” (Interview C-in-C, 2009)*

C-in-Cs of the RTN managed these times for non-work roles in two ways. Firstly, they managed their personal and family time in the unified calendar by keeping those times free from all work and activities or not scheduling anything else in advance. Secondly, they adjusted those times when there was no duty in the calendar. This willingness to schedule work-roles and non-work roles, including personal time and family time, over the blank schedule demonstrated how the C-in-Cs of the RTN balanced work and life in their daily life. In addition, three out of seven interviewed C-in-Cs also used a “To Do” list in order not to forget the

huge amount of work or phone calls that needed to be completed each day.

2. Flexible Time

Four out of the seven interviewed C-in-Cs of the RTN tended to view work and personal time as having fluid boundaries, and applied flexible time to balance work and life. For example C4 stated: “...*While I was playing golf, I sometimes had to do my job by talking with my staff officers.*” (Interview C-in-C, 2009)

This finding was also consistent with that of Galinsky & Johnson (1998), who found that flexibility in the timing and location of work are two characteristics that are repeatedly seen as a way to achieve WLB.

3. Time for non-work roles

All interviewed C-in-Cs of the RTN spent time with their families as a means of creating balance. Meanwhile, five out of the seven interviewed C-in-Cs spent time for sport, and two out of seven interviewed C-in-C said that they spent time with friends.

Support structure

In this study, support structure is referred to as a mechanism within the organization or family that can help increase the WLB of C-in-Cs. By analyzing the data, support structures were divided into two categories: organization support and family support.

For organization support, as the RTN is a military organization, its personnel is required to have discipline. Discipline helps C-in-Cs in managing their personnel within the RTN. As a

result, it helped C-in-Cs manage their work easily. For family support, the study revealed that the roles of the C-in-C's wives and families were very important for balancing their work and life. All C-in-Cs' wives had to perform various roles alongside their husbands. All of the interviewed C-in-Cs did not allow their wives to become involved with their direct work. Four out of the seven interviewed C-in-C's of the RTN did not have to take care of housework themselves. They allowed their wives take care of it. Meanwhile, the other three said that they had a servant to take care of housework. In addition, all of the interviewed C-in-Cs accepted that they had warm families. Meanwhile, children's roles could also help the C-in-Cs balance their work and life. None of their children caused problems within their families. As C4 stated: “*Family is very important. I could work hard without any worry back home because I have a wife which is a good wife and a good mom. My children also never do anything that makes me worry. So, I don't have to worry about my family, and I can work hard.*” (Interview C-in-C, 2009)

Strategies and Coping Mechanisms to Balance Work and Life

1. Strategies

The interviewed C-in-Cs of the RTN employed various strategies to enhance WLB, including applying leadership, taking responsibility, building and maintaining a good relationship with other organizations, and maintaining work boundaries. By applying leadership, C-in-Cs of the

RTN managed their work effectively and efficiently. As a result, they were able to manage work more easily, as well as managing their lives better. All of the interviewees showed that they possessed the key element of knowledge. However, they also focused on other aspects of leadership attributes apart from knowledge, including justice, endurance, enthusiasm, decisiveness, integrity, discipline, and sacrifice. In addition, the results showed that the way they exercised leadership depended on the preference and circumstances of each C-in-C. In addition, all of the interviewees agreed that they had to take responsibility for the decisions they had made. Moreover, all of them accepted that they had to have a good relationship with other concerned organizations, and that maintaining boundaries around their work was important.

2. Coping Mechanisms

Coping mechanisms were used to release stress in the short term. They consisted of six methods, including doing meditation, holding consciousness, employing the middle path way, having a sense of humor, leaving work temporarily, and playing sports. Nonetheless, they did not claim to implement consistently these strategies and coping mechanisms all the time or at the same time.

Finally, the data revealed that C-in-Cs of the RTN did not have to spend equal time between work and non-work activities in order to achieve WLB. As long as they felt satisfied with their work and life, and did not have any stress or conflict with their families, they considered that they achieved WLB.

Discussion

The study of WLB in the roles of C-in-Cs demonstrated how C-in-Cs balanced their work and lives. The results demonstrated that the C-in-Cs' missions and roles had taken time out of their non-work roles. As a result, C-in-Cs had less time with their families. Nonetheless, their families' understanding was a key to make their lives balanced. In addition, each of the C-in-Cs had both similar and different concepts to balance work and lives by managing work and time. The study also sought to identify support structures, strategies and coping mechanisms that individual C-in-Cs used to achieve WLB. The findings showed that organization support and family support helped C-in-Cs in managing WLB. Meanwhile, the interviewed C-in-Cs applied both similar and different strategies and coping mechanisms. Nonetheless, they did not claim to apply these coping mechanisms all the time or at the same time. They applied them when they felt stress or when they wanted to on a regular basis.

Finally, these findings of how seven recent C-in-Cs achieved WLB in the role of C-in-C are highly valuable for the RTN, as well as for policymakers in the fields of leadership and WLB. This was the first time that access has been granted by the seven C-in-Cs of the RTN in the past 10 years, in order to understand how C-in-Cs thought about WLB, to understand what concepts they had about WLB, how to manage work and time, and how to apply strategies and coping mechanisms to balance work and life. The successful future C-in-C has to be flexible enough to adapt to ever

changing situations. Just as defining balance is a very individual process for each C-in-C, strategies for achieving WLB need to be suitable for addressing personal challenges.

A major finding of this study was that C-in-Cs do not have to spend equal time between work and non-work activities in order to achieve WLB. As long as they felt satisfied with their work and life, and did not have any stress or conflict with their families, they generally achieved WLB. This study is not intended to provide a comprehensive list of definitive findings. Rather, it is a useful starting point to develop the RTN's personnel strategies within its unique circumstances. Because each C-in-C's situation was both similar and different, there were no "one size fits all" strategies and coping mechanisms to achieve WLB.

For future research, it is clear that there is still a lot of work to be done in the study of WLB in the role of C-in-C. While a good deal of valuable information was drawn from this study, a greater number of participants would have provided more understanding of how the highest commanders of the RTN manage their WLB. Also, it would have been beneficial to have interviewed the colleagues of the participants. The conversations with only their families offered a limited perspective of their WLB situation. A future study might include their colleagues and classmates being interviewed, investigating the myriad of factors that might impact on their situation as leaders over a period of time.

Another consideration is the fact that this study focused only on role conflicts in terms of

time and stress. The limitations of this study left many factors that would have had an impact on their role unexplored. Future studies could probe into how work and life impact on each other in other aspects, such as succession planning. In addition, this study was conducted to investigate WLB in the role of a C-in-C of the RTN. The situation might be different for other Armed Forces or for other senior officers in the RTN. Future studies could be conducted for those senior officers, such as Deputy C-in-C, Assistant C-in-C, or Commander of the fleet. The results may help the RTN's personnel understand how to manage work and life, and provide guidelines and an inspiration for them to achieve the highest possible position in the future.

References

- Blair-Loy, M. (2003). *Competing devotions: Career and family among women executives*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Galinsky, E. & Johnson, A. A. (1998). *Reframing the business case for work-life Initiatives*. New York: Families and Work Institute.
- Guest, D. E. (2001). *Perspectives on the study of work-life balance*. A discussion paper prepared for the 2001 European Network of Work and Organizational Psychology (ENOP) Symposium, Paris.
- Jones, F., Burke, R. J. & Westman. (2006). *Work-life balance: A psychological perspective*. New York: Psychology Press.
- Merrill, A. R. & Merrill, R. R. (2003). *Life Matters(?): Creating a dynamic balance of work, family, time, and money*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Scholarios, D. (2004). Work-life balance and the software worker, *Human Resource Management Journal*, 14(2).
- Voydanoff, P. (2002). Linkages between work and family: An integrative model. *Journal of Family Issues*, 23, 138 - 164.

