

# Positive Psychology in the Workplace: The Effects of Job Autonomy and Emotional Well-Being on Perceived Work-Life Balance

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## Abstract

Positive psychology offers a unique theoretical platform from which to examine the management of human capital and employee relations in organizations. With the current shift in societal perceptions and attitudes towards work, positive psychology can help inform Human Resource practices on ways to make the workplace an environment that facilitates employee flourishing. This study focused on changes in perceptions of the work-life interface of employees, caused by changes in levels of job autonomy and emotional well-being. This study proposed that high levels of job autonomy and emotional well-being in participants would result in higher levels of perceived work-life balance, with both relationships being stronger for women as opposed to men. Data from the European Social Survey was used to examine these relationships and conduct regression and correlation analyses. The results yielded in this research show that individuals with higher levels of job autonomy reported less work-life balance, with this relationship being stronger for women as opposed to men. In turn, individuals with higher emotional well-being reported a higher work-life balance, with this relationship being stronger for men as opposed to women. Relying on this insight, Human Resource professionals should implement policies that promote employee well-being and they should be aware of blindly granting higher job autonomy to employees. Further research should be oriented towards a deeper examination of the concepts and relationships presented in the form of longitudinal and cross-national analyses.

**Key Words:** Positive psychology, work-life balance, work-family conflict, job autonomy, emotional well-being, subjective well-being.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Positive Psychology in the Workplace

Organizations and human resource professionals have become increasingly interested in ways to make the workplace a more sustainable and healthy environment where employees' full potential can be realized. This shift towards a more humane view of the workplace has led to growing interest and research on positive psychology, and the introduction of some of its principles into the workplace. The development of the science of positive psychology is aimed towards directing attention to human flourishing and building on human strengths in a way that allows individuals to lead a fulfilling and happy life (Russell, 2008). The goal is not simply returning to an individual's homeostasis, but also working towards a better quality of life. Positive psychology can be applied at many different levels, at the subjective level it deals with subjective experiences such as well-being, satisfaction, hope, flow and happiness. At the individual level, it deals with positive traits such as capacity for love, forgiveness, originality, spirituality, and wisdom. Lastly at the group level it regards civic virtues like responsibility, altruism, tolerance, and work ethic (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

Introducing positive psychology principles in the workplace is likely to affect the way in which work is perceived by managers and professionals, but also by employees working at the organization. Implementing such strategies in a work environment would entail a focus on employee growth, engagement and development among other things, by promoting employees' "soft skills", interpersonal qualities and personal attributes (Robles, 2012), coupled with creating an environment where such skills may develop further (Kyllonen, 2013). An important aspect of the work environment of employees that positive psychology principles target, is the degree of job autonomy given to employees.

## 1.2 Job Autonomy

Job autonomy has been defined as increased freedom and decision-making authority allowed to an employee in respect to his/her job (Leach, Wall & Jackson, 2003). By increasing job autonomy,

employees are able to decide to a greater extent, when and how the job gets done, for example employees with a higher job autonomy might be able to decide the time they start/finish work, or might be allowed to decide how their daily tasks are organized. At a greater level, employees that are granted more autonomy might be allowed to influence managerial decisions. This is very likely to impact their ability to manage their work and life commitments in a more balanced and sustainable manner. Previous research has shown that increased job autonomy is likely to reduce employee stress and family-to-work conflict, increase job satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, life satisfaction and employee well-being, and cause a positive work-to-life spillover effect (Parasuraman & Alutto, 1984; Parasuraman, Purohit, Godshalk, & Beutell, 1996; Thompson & Prottas, 2006; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Therefore, it is crucial to consider the effect of job autonomy on work-life balance, as a job that grants employees autonomy might also allow them to meet conflicting work and non-work demands in a better way.

### 1.3 Emotional well-being

A main pillar of positive psychology is the concept of subjective well-being, which deals with ideas of what constitutes a good and fulfilling life. As defined by Russell (2008), subjective well-being refers to people's subjective view of their life experience, including both emotional well-being and positive functioning. Emotional well-being is made up of life satisfaction, positive emotions and negative emotions. An individual with high emotional well-being is one that experiences high life satisfaction, high positive affect and low negative affect (Keyes & Magyar-Moe, 2003). Many psychologists and researchers have started to recognize the importance of employee well-being within an organization. Moreover, research has shown the emotional well-being of employees to greatly impact their work satisfaction, engagement, problem-solving skills and prosocial behavior at work (Judge & Locke, 1993; Lyubomirsky, King & Diener, 2005). An individual's emotional well-being is likely to impact the way in which one interacts with one's work and the quality of his/her life. Consequently, it is natural to assume that since one's work makes up an important aspect of one's life, the extent to which individuals perceive they are effectively balancing work and non-work commitments, may be affected by the emotional well-being of employees (Danna & Griffin, 1999). The use of emotional well-being in this study, as opposed to the more general concept of subjective well-being, is due to it being a much more

concrete concept that is easier to measure in individuals. Hence, the use of such a concept is expected to be more productive, since its specificity allows human resource professionals to find policies that target it, in attempts to improve the working environment for employees.

## 1.4 Work-Life Balance

In a society filled with conflicting responsibilities, where performance and achievement are highly valued, the balance between work and non-work aspects of life has become an increasingly predominant issue. Work-life balance has been a concept of widespread interest with both researchers and executives, due to phenomena that have brought this concern to the forefront of public discussion. These phenomena include, among others, increased global competition, renewed interest in employee well-being and personal life, and an aging workforce (Lockwood, 2003). Work-life balance is defined as the successful management of work obligations and personal/family responsibilities (Delecta, 2011). Today, work-life programs and workplace interventions are primarily aimed towards recognizing other non-work commitments and promoting the healthy balance of work/life to reduce burnout and increase employee well-being (Lockwood, 2003). In order to promote work-life balance, organizations can ensure the availability of family-friendly benefits and/or work-life initiatives for employees. These practices often allow the flexibility to address personal problems without compromising work responsibilities. They do this by establishing certain policies including flexible hours (permits workers to vary their start and finish times provided a certain number of hours is worked), working from home, family leave programs (parental leave, adoption leave, compassionate leave etc.), and assistance with childcare, among others (Beauregard & Henry, 2009).

Nowadays, work is being increasingly integrated into individual's lives and is no longer viewed as a separate life domain. Work has begun to be viewed as something that should aid in fulfilling individuals' lives by engaging in meaningful jobs that are compatible with one's personal goals and values, and less as "simply a job" to financially sustain other non-work life domains (Greenhaus, Collins & Shaw, 2003). Hence, it is crucial for organizations to understand how to promote a working environment where employees feel they are able to successfully balance work-life

demands, and promote a sustainable and healthy work culture in order to allow employees to develop their full potential.

### 1.5 Problem Statement and Conceptual Model

This research will examine the impact of job autonomy and emotional well-being (positive affect, negative affect and life satisfaction) on employees' perceptions of work-life balance. Furthermore, it will examine the possible moderating impact of gender on the relationship between emotional well-being and work-life balance, and job autonomy and work-life balance. Hence, the research question developed for this study is:

*To what extent do job autonomy and emotional well-being impact work-life balance and to what extent does gender moderate these relationships?*

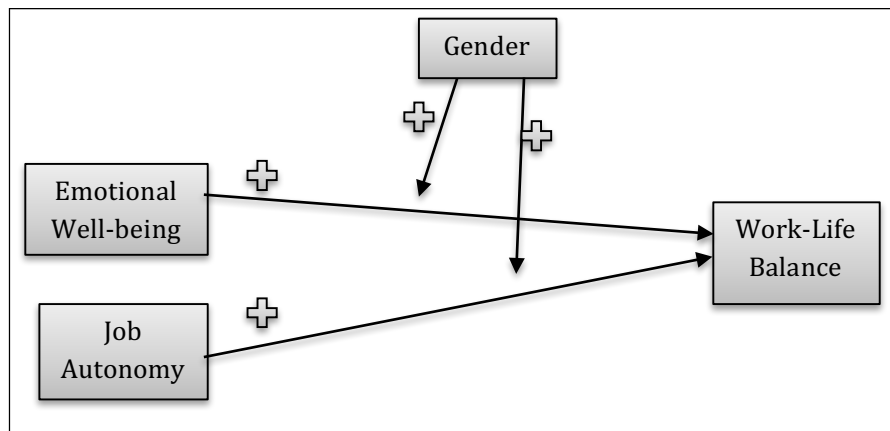


FIGURE 1. CONCEPTUAL MODEL

This general research questions, prompts several sub-questions to be addressed:

1. What is emotional well-being?
2. What is job autonomy?
3. What is work-life balance?
4. Does job autonomy impact work-life balance? If so how?
5. Does emotional well-being impact work-life balance? If so how?
6. Does gender have a moderating effect on the relationship between job autonomy and work-life balance? If so how?

7. Does gender have a moderating effect on the relationship between emotional well-being and work-life balance? If so how?

## 1.6 Scientific and Social Relevance

There is a demand for more information on how to make work more sustainable and positive for the lives of employees. This study aims to look at employee autonomy and emotional well-being as a way in which organizations can create a working environment where individuals are encouraged to build on their strengths and flourish. It is crucial for organizations to understand how to promote job autonomy and the emotional well-being of their employees, in order to encourage a more sustainable manner of working, one where work is able to coexist with other important aspects of individuals' lives. Additionally, due to the growing diversity of family structures currently represented in the modern workforce (Lockwood, 2003), it is necessary that human resource professionals gain a deeper understanding of the interface of work and family relationships and their impact in the workplace, to be able to effectively manage human capital within organizations. There is a need for studies to analyze the ways in which positive psychology concepts such as emotional well-being, may be implemented in the workplace and may impact not only the working life of employees, but also cause a ripple effect in other non-working domains of life. Thus, contributing to a society where institutions adopt a more humane approach to the workplace and facilitate human flourishing in a sustainable manner.

There is a substantial amount of research that has been done on job autonomy and its impact on employee engagement, satisfaction and motivation, and how it decreases turnover rates and employee burnout (Kim & Stoner, 2008; Kompaso & Sridevi, 2010; Galletta, Portoghese & Battistelli, 2011; Ahuja, Chudoba, Kacmar, McKnight & George, 2007; Dysvik & Kuvaas, 2011). Most of this research discusses the effects of job autonomy as a way to increase employee performance and commitment but there is a serious lack of research linking job autonomy directly with work-life balance. In addition, emotional well-being has scarcely been investigated in academic research as a construct of its own, without combining it under the umbrella term of subjective well-being. Therefore, it will be interesting to isolate this concept and see the effects of

emotionality and affect within the workplace, specifically on employees' perceived ability to effectively manage their work-life balance.

Likewise, work-life balance has been often discussed in academic papers from the perspective of organizations, as initiatives that companies have available or do not have available, and how those initiatives may cause spillover effects into employees' non-work aspects of life (Crouter, 1984; Sirgy, Efraty, Siegel & Lee, 2001; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Grzywacz, Almeida & McDonald, 2002; Ernst Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). It is for this reason that this research paper will be aimed at examining work-life balance from the perspective of the employee, as a level of satisfaction with the current managing of work-life demands and commitments. Furthermore, it will also examine how gender moderates the relationship between emotional well-being, job autonomy, and the perceived ability to balance work/life demands. All in all, the scientific relevance of this paper lies primarily in its uniqueness and ability to fill such research gaps. Furthermore, taking into account that positive psychology is a relatively up-and-coming field, research that examines the introduction of its principles, such as emotional well-being and autonomy in work environments and the implications that arise as a consequence, are of key scientific importance.

## 2. Theory and Hypotheses

### 2.1 Job Autonomy

An employee's ability to successfully manage their work and non-work commitments and demands can be expected to depend on the nature of their job, more specifically the autonomy that they are allowed in the managing of their tasks and the flexibility of their schedule. Job autonomy is defined as the degree of discretion employees have over important decisions in their work, such as the timing and methods of their tasks (Parker, Axtell & Turner, 2001). Job autonomy has been referred to as a work design feature or a resource that is given by organizations and managers, important for achieving certain employee outcomes such as job satisfaction, employee well-being and safety, employee motivation and employee engagement (Parker & Wall, 1998, Parker, Axtell & Turner, 2001; Prottas & Thompson, 2006). Job autonomy does not entail working in isolation or doing whatever the employee feels like doing, it has more to do with creating choice between boundaries and allowing employees to make certain decisions on their tasks and how they will accomplish them. Managers that grant a greater autonomy to their employees are ones that do not hover over every step of the process in achieving a goal, but rather outline the goal of a project and allow the employee to decide the best way to achieve it. Overall, the concept of job autonomy became of great interest when new research came to light discussing the relationship between intrinsic motivation, a motivation driven by internal rewards, and higher well-being, job satisfaction and employee engagement (Lawler & Hall, 1970; Hackman & Oldham, 1976;). Such research brought job autonomy to the forefront as a way in which to increase intrinsic motivation and achieve employee outcomes.

#### 2.1.2 The Self-determination Theory

Deci & Ryan (1975) developed the self-determination theory, a theory of human motivation which states that there are three basic psychological needs: relatedness, competence and autonomy, which are essential for promoting individuals' natural propensities for growth, social development integration and personal well-being. *Relatedness* refers to the universal need to interact, be connected to, and experience caring for others, whereas *competence* refers to the universal human need to experience mastery and seek control. Lastly, *autonomy* is the human need to act in

accordance with one's integrated self and be a causal agent in one's own life. According to this theory, such psychological needs need to be fostered. In addition to this general theorem, the self-determination theory has several sub-theories, one of which is the cognitive evaluation theory (CET). This sub-theory states that feelings of autonomy are necessary for the development of intrinsic motivation. This effect is due to the fact that autonomy encourages choice, acknowledgement of feelings and opportunities for self-direction, through the triggering of intrinsic motivation. This is opposed to deadlines, directives, pressure and imposed external goals, which tend to diminish intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Pertaining to intrinsic motivation and autonomy, cognitive evaluation theory would argue that social environments can facilitate or hinder intrinsic motivation by supporting or thwarting people's autonomy. Comparisons between people whose motivation is authentic and self-driven and those who are externally controlled, reveal that self-driven motivation leads to more engagement, interest, organizational commitment, enhanced performance, enhanced persistence and greater subjective well-being, among other effects (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009, Deci & Ryan, 1991; Meyer, Becker & Vandenberghe, 2004; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997; Schuck & Reio, 2014; Rothmann, 2008). This leads to the assumption that job autonomy is an important concept to keep in mind in work design processes due to its many benefits.

## 2.2 Emotional Well-Being

Emotional well-being is a concept used in positive psychology that together with positive functioning, psychological well-being and social well-being, makes up the overall subjective well-being of individuals. Emotional well-being is broken down into a threefold structure entailing life satisfaction, positive affect and negative affect (Keyes & Magyar-Moe, 2003). *Positive affect* and *negative affect* both pertain to the emotional aspects of the construct, whereas life satisfaction refers to the cognitive-judgmental aspects (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985). The concepts of positive and negative affect are measured based on the subjective experience of such emotions by individuals throughout a specific amount of time or in a specific situational context. Both of these concepts tend to be measured together, since the presence of positive emotions do not imply an absence of negative emotions. Thus, for someone to experience emotional well-being, both, a high number of instances where positive emotions were experienced and a low number of

instances where negative emotions were experienced, must be present (Keyes & Magar-Moe, 2003). Life satisfaction is somewhat of a more complex concept and consequently measuring it is more difficult. According to Shin and Johnson (1978) life satisfaction is defined as a global assessment of a person's perceived quality of life, hence it is dependent on comparisons made between one's circumstances with what is thought to be the satisfactory and appropriate standard (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985).

An individual's emotional experience at work is likely to have major implications for their work behavior and work-related attitudes, as well as their relations with other colleagues and employees (Danna & Griffin, 1999). However, these experiences are also very likely to cause spillover effects into other non-work domains, making emotional well-being a key variable to take into account when analyzing perceived work-life balance of employees. The recognition that an individual's work and personal lives are not separate entities but intertwined domains that have reciprocal effects on each other (Zedeck & Mosier, 1990), has gained popularity in academic research and resulted in emotionality in the workplace to be investigated at a much deeper level. Previous research has focused on well-being in relation to employee productivity and engagement and has found that employees with higher well-being tend to be more productive, make better quality decisions, experience less burnout and stress, increase their creativity and cognitive flexibility, have improved cooperation and collaboration and are less prone to absenteeism, among other consequences (Boyd, 1997; Price & Hooijberg, 1992; De Neve, Diener, Tay & Xuereb, 2013).

Although subjective well-being is the main concept used in the majority of the research in organizational psychology and by human resource management professionals, emotional well-being can be considered as equally deserving of attention. Subjective well-being also includes positive functioning, which entails many different areas of individual well-being, making it a very broad construct (Danna & Griffin, 1999). Emotional well-being provides an interesting, clear and more specific construct to research, which is expected to have very interesting effects on perceptions of work-life balance.

## 2.3 Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance is a broad term that encapsulates the balance between work and other non-work commitments in one's life (Tausig & Fenwick, 2001). While work is a crucial and rewarding aspect of individuals' lives, it is necessary to have the ability to balance work and non-work commitments accurately. Work-life balance is a subjective experience and as such differs from individual to individual, depending on their priorities and the life stage they find themselves, causing it to be subject to change overtime. Nonetheless, when an individual feels they are successfully managing work and non-work commitments in their lives, several benefits ensue such as reduced stress and turnover rates, and increased life satisfaction (Hobson, Delunas & Kesic, 2001). A positive work-life balance, entails for example, not worrying about work when an individual is outside of the workplace, or being able to have the necessary time and energy to devote to non-work activities and people outside of one's work.

Since work-life balance includes a wide spectrum of areas, most researchers tend to examine work-family balance, which is a more specific concept that includes what is regarded as the two main aspects of individuals' lives, work and family. Hence, work-family balance specifically looks at the balance between an individual's family life and work life, and how both domains affect each other. Unlike the majority of the academic literature on the subject, this research paper will use the broader concept of work-life balance, constituted by employees' perceived *work-family conflict* and perceived *work-life balance satisfaction*. Similar to life satisfaction, work-life balance satisfaction entails the comparison of an individual's perceived satisfaction with the current balance of work and other life demands, with what is perceived to be the satisfactory balance (Keyton, Fenner, Johnson & Hayward, 2007). Additionally, work-to-family conflict consists of the stress that arises from a perceived imbalance between work and family demands. Frone, Russell and Cooper (1992) further expanded the concept of the work-family interface by developing a model that included two types of work-family interference, work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict. According to their model, work-to-family conflict, or work-family conflict, is caused by work demands interfering with family demands and it is the most commonly experienced direction of conflict amongst individuals. Experiencing work-family conflict has been associated with lower employee well-being, decreased performance and productivity, burnout,

reduced life satisfaction, and high turnover rates (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kelly & Voydanoff, 1985; Portner, 1983; Russell & Cooper, 1992; Ahuja et al., 2007). All in all, the construct of work-life balance will be made up of employee perceptions regarding their satisfaction with their work-life balance and also perceptions of how much work demands conflict with their family life. This is done in an attempt to include more general perceptions of employee's work-life balance that are not limited to the family domain only.

## 2.4 Job autonomy and work-life balance

Despite the fact that most academic research tends to focus on the relationship between employee engagement and work-life balance, there has been a relative amount of research done on the direct link between job autonomy and work-life balance. Employees with higher job autonomy have been found to be more satisfied with their job, life and family in general, creating a positive work-to-family spillover effect and reducing work-to-family conflict (Thompson & Prottas, 2006). Similarly, employees that are given more decision latitude with regards to their jobs, experience less pressure at work and positive spillover between work and family (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). The flexibility of the job itself is also related to job autonomy, as flexible jobs often allow for employees to decide on the work schedules and the organization of the tasks. A study by Clark (2001) found that the flexibility of the work itself was associated with increased work satisfaction and increased family well-being. It follows that an employee who is given more autonomy to decide how to manage their workload, tasks and schedule pertaining to their job, is also likely to have a better opportunity to adjust those work demands in a way that leads to a more effective balance between work and other life domains.

There has been certain research that has argued for a different relationship between job autonomy and work-life balance. According to Batt & Valcour (2003), work design characteristics such as, increasing job autonomy and flexibility, explain differences in employees' control over managing work and family demands, but differences in work-to-family conflict, the extent to which one's work interferes with their family (Brockwood, 2002), are explained more by human resource incentives such as family-friendly policies (i.e. Daycare opportunities at work, payed leave, flexible time etc.). Similar results were found by Grzywacz, Almeida & McDonald (2002) and

Grzywacz & Butler (2005), who argued that work-to-family conflict was positively affected by job autonomy, however a bigger effect was found between job autonomy and work-to-family facilitation, defined as the extent to which an individual's participation in family is made easier by the skills, experiences, and opportunities gained by their work. They found that individuals with higher job autonomy and variety, reported higher work-to-family facilitation, concluding that job characteristics are more strongly associated with work-to-family facilitation.

Despite this, there is still copious amounts of research that suggest a solid relationship between job autonomy and work-to-family balance. Researchers suggest that employees that have a greater autonomy at work, experience lower work-family conflict and more control over managing the balance of the work-family interface. Control over work time was found to be positively associated with satisfaction with work-family balance, even with an increase in working hours. Results showed that when working hours were increased, employees with low autonomy experienced a decline in work-family balance, as opposed to employees with high control, who did not (Valcour, 2007). Similarly, Hill, Hawkins, Ferris & Weitzman (2001) found that given the same workload, individuals with higher perceived job flexibility experienced more work-family balance and were able to work longer hours before the workload negatively impacted their work-family balance. In addition, Karasek (1979) argued that autonomy within job demands and job resources leads to the development of new behavior patterns, inside and outside the workplace, such as a proper work-life management. Supporting positive job-related attitudes such as acting autonomously and making independent choices within one's work environment leads to a successful work-life balance (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). In addition, certain job characteristics such as autonomy and variety, produce positive load effects in the form of motivation, energy, new skills and attitudes that can be mobilized to promote functioning in other domains of life (Grzywacz & Butler, 2005; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Geurts & Demerouti, 2003). This means that the consequences of higher job autonomy are likely to cause positive effects that can be used in other non-work aspects, facilitating the individual's functioning in both domains and an effective management of work-life balance

All in all, based on the previous research, an employee's ability to successfully manage their work and family demands can be expected to depend on the autonomy that they are allowed in the

management of their tasks, decision/making processes and the flexibility of their work schedule. Thus, the following hypothesis was developed:

**Hypothesis 1:** *Individuals with higher job autonomy will experience more work-life balance.*

## 2.5 Emotional Well-Being and Work-Life Balance

The emotional well-being of employees is likely to impact their perceptions of satisfaction with their ability to manage work-life demands. As previously mentioned, increased emotional well-being in employees results in individuals with high life satisfaction, low stress levels and burnout, increased collaboration and cooperation and better-quality decisions. All of which, are likely to influence one's ability to manage conflicting demands and experience a positive spillover effect from work domains to other life domains (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). This positive relationship between emotional well-being and work-life balance is also suggested in the dual-process model of work-home interference (Bakker & Geurts, 2004), which states that while job demands such as workload and emotional demands, operate via exhaustion to create negative work-to-family spillover, job resources such as autonomy, possibilities for development and performance feedback, operate through flow (absorption in what one does) and the generation of positive emotions, to create positive work-family spillover. In a study conducted by Boles, Johnston, & Hair (1997), work-family conflict was found to be related to emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction, further cementing the view that the conflict between work and home domains are highly related to important workplace attitudes and perceptions. In their study, they suggest that work-family conflict should be included in models examining employee response to the effects of stress and emotions.

Emotional wellbeing is also beneficial after work-life imbalance occurs, in the form of coping. The most important function of coping is to manage emotions and the situations that provoked them, allowing employees to manage stress and distress (Muchinsky, 2000). Therefore, experiencing emotional well-being in the workplace will allow employees to deal with the distress and emotional exhaustion that results from work-life imbalance, possibly resulting in a more effective management of conflicting demands in the future. Overall, it can be expected that

emotional well-being will have a positive impact on the perceived work-life balance of employees. The evidence discussed provided the foundation for the second hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2:** *Individuals with higher emotional well-being will experience more work-life balance.*

## 2.6 The Moderating Effect of Gender

Research on the work-life interface often includes the domain of family life in juxtaposition with work domains. Recent scholarship has put a particular focus on the experiences of employed women and the balancing of their work and family roles that they seem to have to negotiate throughout their lives (Milkie & Peltola, 1999). Although much research has been done on the consequences and ways in which women balance work and family domains, few research has actually examined their perceptions of how successfully they are doing this, and compared it to men's perceptions of satisfaction with their work-life balance.

Expectations play a big part in the perception of balance between work and family domains. Work expectations and family expectations may dictate to what extent individuals feel like they successfully meet the demands of either areas of life, therefore affecting their overall satisfaction and perception with their work-life balance.

### 2.6.1 Role Theory and Emotional Well-Being

Role theory (Cooke & Rousseau, 1984) can be used to explain gender differences in work-family conflict. According to role theory, multiple roles lead to psychological distress in such a way that when family-roles interact with work-roles, or vice versa, they cause psychological strain. Consequently, involvement in nontraditional roles would be problematic for both men and women. In the case of women, family roles have been considered as their "main role" (Barnett & Baruch, 1987). Therefore, high work involvement and engagement, the nontraditional role, would cause increased perceived work-to-family conflict by arousing feelings of guilt for not "successfully" meeting family demands expected of their traditional family role (Duxbury & Higgins, 1991).

Along the same lines, men who are highly involved in family-life, their nontraditional role, are likely to be perceived by their colleagues as being less committed to their job and lead to perceived work-family conflict triggered by the feeling of unsuccessfully meeting their traditional work role (Duxbury & Higgins, 1991). Based on role theory, one could assume that women and men would differ in their perceptions of work-life balance.

As role theory states, engagement with the nontraditional role would cause increased work-to-family conflict. When it comes to emotional well-being in the workplace, it follows that women might have lower emotional well-being than men, due to their involvement in a non-traditional role arousing feelings of guilt, a negative emotion. Therefore, because men are considered to be in their traditional gender role as breadwinners, they are more likely to perceive their involvement in work, even if they experience negative emotions in the work environment, as acceptable and desired when discussing perceptions of their work-life balance. However, female employees that feel guilty or stressed due to their involvement in a nontraditional role, are likely to perceive their work-life balance as unsatisfactory. Experiencing such negative emotions could reduce positive spillover effects into other non-work domains and affect perceptions of work-family balance negatively. Nonetheless, since the relationship this research will measure is that of work-to-life balance, it is important to take into account that a possible effect of gender in work-to-family life of individuals, may not be significant in this research.

### 2.6.2 Role Theory and Job autonomy

Regarding job autonomy, gender could be a moderating factor in perception of work-life balance. Since women are seen as holding the more traditional role of managing the household, they might react different to more autonomy in their jobs as opposed to men. There has been a lot of research that has found no moderating effect of gender for the relationship between time flexibility and work-family balance and states that the relationship is positive for both men and women (Hill, Hawkins, Ferris & Weitzman, 2001). Other researchers have found that women experience more work-family conflict when longer work hours were involved (Maume & Houston, 2001). Similarly, when discussing family-to-work conflict women have been found to make more adjustments to their workloads, such as refusing overtime or assignments for the sake of family

(Keene & Reynolds, 2005). All of this suggests that varying degrees of job autonomy does partially affect women's management of their work-life domains. All in all, previous researchers are unclear about the effects of gender with regards to work-life balance, however most agree that job autonomy and emotional well-being have a positive effect on work-life balance, and both effects tend to be stronger for women. Based on the previous evidence, the following hypotheses are put forward:

**Hypothesis 3:** *The relationship between job autonomy and work-life balance satisfaction will be stronger for women than for men.*

**Hypothesis 4:** *The relationship between emotional well-being and work-life balance satisfaction will be stronger for women than for men.*

## 3. Methodology and Data

### 3.1 Empirical Setting and Sampling

In order to answer the research question, this paper relied on data taken from the European Social Survey (ESS). The ESS is a cross-national survey designed to research human attitudes and behaviors in European countries. It is conducted twice a year and contains quantitative data on a broad range of topics. From this dataset, information on the inter-relations between work, family and well-being were obtained and used for further analysis. The ESS was administered in respondents' household, via face-to-face interviews conducted by trained interviewers who used a standardized interviewing approach, asking questions exactly as they were written, and considering both cross-cultural and translation implications. More specifically, within the ESS, this research drew data taken from the fifth wave conducted in 2010. The dataset used focused on the themes of Family, work and well-being and included the following 27 European countries; Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine and the United Kingdom.

To ensure the data could be generalized to the population and in order to minimize the margin of error, each country was obliged to achieve a minimum effective sample size of 1500, and for countries with a smaller population, the number was reduced to 800. The ESS used cross-sectional, random probability sampling to ensure comparability. Furthermore, the data collected derived from male and female respondents that were 15 years of age or older, and resided within private households in the previously mentioned 27 European countries. Furthermore, measures were taken to assure the validity and reliability of the research. The ESS had several control mechanisms put in place, such as evaluating the comparability of its measurement instruments, assessing the socio-demographic sample composition using external benchmark data and assessing the process and output quality of the survey. Moreover, cross-national translations of the questionnaires were carefully taken into consideration by providing national teams with translation guidelines, quality checklists and quality assessments and ultimately all translated questionnaires were pre-tested to ensure equivalence.

## 3.2 Variables

To conduct the previously outlined research, certain variables of interest were included. Overall, this research contained two independent variables, one dependent variable and a moderating variable.

### Independent Variable: Job Autonomy

The perceived level of job autonomy of employees constituted one of the two independent variables in this research. Job autonomy included items relating to flexibility in working hours and task discretion (the control one has over how they complete their tasks). The items used to measure this concept included the question, "Please tell me how true each of the following statements is about your current job... I can decide the time I start and finish work.". The answers were collected via a Likert scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being "not at all true" and 4 being "very true". Furthermore, job autonomy was also measured by the questions, "how much does the management at your work allow/allowed you to decide how your own daily work is/was organized?", "how much does the management at your work allow/allowed you to choose/change the pace of your work?", and "how much does the management at your work allow/allowed you to influence policy decisions about activities of the organization?" with all the answers being collected on the same 0 to 10 Likert scale, with 0 being "no influence" and 10 being "I have/had complete control".

### Independent Variable: Emotional Well-Being

Emotional well-being was the second independent variable of this research and was measured by the sub-concepts of positive affect, negative affect and life satisfaction. Positive affect was measured by the ESS items asking the following questions, "How often over the last two weeks have you felt cheerful and in good spirits?", "how often in the last two weeks have you felt active and vigorous?" and "How often over the last two weeks have you felt calm and relaxed?", all of which were answered through the use of a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 6, with 1 being "all of the time" and 6 being "at no time". Likewise, negative affect was measured by the item of loneliness due to the lack of availability of other negative emotions in the dataset. It was measured by the question "how much of the time during the past week have you felt lonely?" answered on a scale from 1 to 4, with 1 being "none or almost none of the time" and 4 being "all or almost all of the time". The last sub-concept of emotional well-being, life satisfaction, was measured by the

question, "How satisfied are you with your life?" with answers ranging from 0, "extremely unhappy" to 10, "extremely happy".

#### Dependent Variable: Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance, the dependent variable of this research, was measured by two main sub-concepts, work-life balance satisfaction and work-family conflict. Work-life balance satisfaction was measured by the question "how satisfied are you with the balance between the time you spend on your paid work and the time you spend on other aspects of your life?", the answers were collected in a Likert scale from 0 to 10, with 0 being "extremely dissatisfied", and 10 being "extremely satisfied". Similarly, the sub-concept of work-to-family conflict was measured by the following three questions; "how often do you keep worrying about work problems when you are not working?", "how often do you find that your partner or family gets fed up with the pressure of your job?", "how often do you feel too tired after work to enjoy the things you would like to do at home?" and "how often do you find that your job prevents you from giving the time you want to your partner or family?". All of which were measured from a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 being "never" and 5 being "always".

#### Moderating Variable: Gender

This research included the use of the binary categorical variable of gender as a moderating variable for the relationship between emotional well-being and the perceived work-life balance of employees, and for the relationship between job autonomy and the perceived work-life balance of employees. It was measured by the item "sex", with answers being either 1, "male" or 2, "female". This question was part of the core of the questionnaire labeled as the socio-demographic profile of respondents.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Reliability and validity

In order to carry out this research and reject or accept the hypotheses, the SPSS software was used to manipulate the data. To successfully answer the research question, it was necessary to first create a reliable and valid scale for each variable, namely job autonomy, emotional well-being and work-life balance. To do so, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was done to test how well the selected items represented the number of constructs. The CFA yielded results that showed all items to be correlated to some degree. Furthermore, the correlations between items were not extremely high, suggesting no evidence of multicollinearity. Moreover, results showed a very high and meritorious Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy of 0.821 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Results from the analysis, more specifically the scree plot and pattern matrix (see table 4.1), also indicated that the thirteen items entered measured three constructs altogether, with five items mainly loading on construct one (emotional well-being), five items mainly loading on construct two (work-life balance), and four items mainly loading on construct three (job autonomy).

Furthermore, a reliability analysis was conducted with the aim of confirming that the items chosen from the ESS dataset to measure each variable, did in fact measure that construct. The correlations between the items in each variable proved to be relatively strong, with all of the reliability analyses resulting in a Cronbach's alpha higher than 0.7 (see table 4.2). In the case of the variable for job autonomy, the four items had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.77 ( $p < 0.05$ ). The Cronbach's alpha for the five items under the variable work-life balance was 0.76 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Lastly, for the five items under emotional well-being, the Cronbach's alpha was 0.81 ( $p < 0.05$ ). All in all, the findings from the confirmatory factor analysis and the reliability analysis ensure a desired level of consistency of measurement as well as of construct validity within the scales used.

Table 4.1

*Pattern Matrix*

Variables	Components		
	1	2	3
Have felt cheerful and in good spirits last 2 weeks	<b>.884</b>	-.039	.009
Have felt calm and relaxed last 2 weeks	<b>.804</b>	-.081	.087
Have felt active and vigorous last 2 weeks	<b>.801</b>	-.040	-.026
How much time during past week you felt lonely	<b>.637</b>	.027	-.056
How satisfied with life as a whole	<b>.603</b>	.134	.054
Worry about work problems when not working, how often	.044	-.334	<b>.555</b>
Too tired after work to enjoy things like do at home, how often	.057	.050	<b>.740</b>
Partner/family fed up with pressure of your job, how often	-.030	-.035	<b>.768</b>
Job prevents you from giving time to partner/family, how often	-.066	.031	<b>.863</b>
Satisfied with balance between time on job and time on other aspects	.108	.198	<b>.605</b>
Allowed to influence policy decisions about activities of organization	.077	<b>.796</b>	-.069
Allowed to decide how daily work is organized	.067	<b>.874</b>	-.010
Allowed to choose/change pace of work	.052	<b>.863</b>	.001
Current job: can decide time start/finish work	-.092	<b>.587</b>	.079

Note. The highest variable loadings are in bold. The extraction method used was a principal component analysis and the rotation method used was Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.

## 4.2. Creating Composite Variables

Once the reliability and validity of the items chosen were confirmed, and in order to complete a hierarchical regression analysis to answer the hypothesis posed previously, three composite variables were created, namely job autonomy, emotional well-being and work-life balance, by grouping certain ESS items together. Due to the fact that some of the items were skewed, and in an attempt to manage the skewness of the data, each item was divided into three cohorts; high, medium and low. The division of the data into these three cohorts was based on the cumulative percentages of each item, allocating most of the data in the "medium" category, and lesser in the "high" and "low" categories. Overall, this allowed the items to be more normally distributed and yield more normally distributed composite variables, necessary to run parametric statistical procedures (see appendix A). All in all, the scales for the new variables were based on the sum of the mean of each item that constituted that variable, ranging from 1 to 3. Moreover, in order to provide consistency in the data, scores for the three composite variables, were only calculated for respondents that had answered at least two out of all the items that made up the composite variable. As seen in table 4.2, the variables had a considerably large number of participants, with work-life balance (n= 23,944) averaging 2.076 (SD= 0.32), emotional well-being (n= 52,256) averaging 2.09 (SD= 0.39), and job autonomy (n= 46,479) averaging 1.90 (SD= 0.56). Overall, considering the three variables are measured on a one to three scale, the data on the means seems to be quite balanced, with most means averaging around 2.0.

Table 4.2

### *Descriptive Statistics*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha
Work-life balance	23944	2.0762	.31810	0.76*
Emotional Well-being	52256	2.0905	.38889	0.81*
Job autonomy	46479	1.9068	.55648	0.77*

\*  $p < 0.05$

Source: ESS, 2010

### 4.3. Regression analysis: work-life balance, Job autonomy and emotional well-being

A hierarchical linear regression analysis was conducted to predict individuals' work-life balance based on job autonomy and emotional well-being, and to examine the moderating effect of gender. This type of regression was used instead of the PROCESS macro tool, as it produced standardized coefficients, which were relevant to this research in order to be able to compare the effects of the predictors. Moreover, this hierarchical regression was used to examine the change in explained variance of work-life balance once the moderating effect was included. In the first model, work-life balance was regressed on emotional well-being and job autonomy, while the second model included the elements in model one and the two interaction effects of the moderating variable, gender. The sample size used in this regression was of 23,767 participants. A significant regression equation was found ( $F(2, 23814) = 935.08, p < 0.05$ ), with an  $R^2$  of 0.073 (see table 4.3). This suggests that job autonomy and emotional well-being account for 7.3% of the variance in the work-life balance of individuals. Although 7.3% does not seem like a big proportion of explained variance, it is statistically significant and the level of job autonomy and emotional well-being of individuals should be taken into account as possible causes for variance in levels of their work-life balance.

Table 4.3

*Model Summary<sup>b</sup>*

Model	N	R Square	df	Sig. F Change	F	Sig.
1	23,767	.073	23814	.000	935.077	.000 <sup>a</sup>

a. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional Well-Being, Job Autonomy

Source: ESS, 2010

b. Dependent Variable: Work-Life Balance

As can be seen in table 4.4, the relationship between job autonomy and work-life balance was a negative one, with a standardized beta coefficient of -0.116 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, for every unit increase in job autonomy, work-life balance would decrease by 0.116 standard deviations, keeping

everything else constant. Surprisingly, this finding leads us to reject the first hypothesis, that individuals with a higher job autonomy will experience more work-life balance, since there was a statistically significant negative relationship between job autonomy and work-life balance. On the other hand, the relationship between emotional well-being and work-life balance was a positive one, with a standard beta coefficient of 0.262 ( $p < 0.05$ ). The effect of emotional well-being on work-life balance was relatively high, with a unit increase in emotional well-being resulting in an increase of 0.262 standard deviations in work-life balance. Based on this, hypothesis number two is accepted, as individuals with higher emotional well-being experienced more work-life balance.

Table 4.4

*Coefficients<sup>a</sup>*

Model	Standardized Coefficients	
	Beta	Sig.
(Constant)		.000
Job autonomy	-.116	.000
Emotional well-being	.262	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Work-Life Balance

Source: ESS, 2010

The finding of job autonomy having a negative relationship with work-life balance contradicted the relationship outlined in the theory, as well as results from other academic research where researchers had argued for a positive relationship. Since this was an unexpected result, a bivariate correlation analysis was completed between the five items that made up work-life balance, and the four items that made up job autonomy in order to analyze their relationship at a more specific level (see table 4.5). As can be seen from the correlation table, it appears that certain items of job autonomy have a positive relationship with work-life balance while others have a negative relationship. Despite the mix of positive and negative correlations between items from both variables, there seem to be a few salient patterns in these correlations. Firstly, it can be seen that all the items from job autonomy have a positive relation to work-life balance satisfaction. That means that the more job autonomy one has, the more one will be satisfied with the balance between

time spent on their job and time spent on other aspects of life. Secondly, as can be seen in the table below, individuals with a higher job autonomy tend to worry more about work problems when they are not working, and their family/partner is more likely to be fed up with the pressures from their job. Lastly, another salient pattern is that individuals who can influence policy decisions about the activities of the organization, seem to have more work-family conflict but high work-life balance satisfaction.

Table 4.5

*Correlation Coefficients of Job Autonomy and Work-Life Balance Items*

Job Autonomy Items	Work-Life Balance Items				
	Work-Family Conflict			Work-life satisfaction	
	Partner/family not fed up with pressure of my job	Job doesn't prevent me from giving time to partner/family	No too tired after work to enjoy things I like at home.	Don't worry about work problems when not working	Satisfied with balance between time on job and time on other aspects
Current job: can decide time start/finish work	<b>-.036*</b>	.010	.020*	<b>-.106*</b>	.053*
I influence policy decisions about activities of organization	<b>-.080*</b>	<b>-.058*</b>	<b>-.013*</b>	<b>-.187*</b>	.036*
I choose/change pace of work	<b>-.039*</b>	<b>-.023*</b>	.005	<b>-.150*</b>	.082*
I decide how daily work is organized	<b>-.034*</b>	<b>-.017*</b>	.006	<b>-.164*</b>	.086*

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: ESS, 2010

The cross tabulation between the items that make up each of the two variables, revealed the existence of different relationships between certain aspects of job autonomy and work-life balance. These different relationships at a more specific level require more in-depth exploration and research. Nonetheless, these varied correlations between the individual items of both variables might be the reason why the overall relationship between job autonomy and work-life balance was unexpectedly negative. Further on in the discussion section, the possible theoretical explanations behind these relationships will be discussed, in an attempt to explain the unexpected outcome of the regression and uncover possible limitations in the creation of the variables that could have compromised the results.

#### 4.4. Regression analysis with the moderating effect of Gender

The second analysis focused on the moderation effect of gender on the relationship between emotional well-being and work-life balance. In order to evaluate the interaction effect of gender between emotional well-being and work-life balance, and job autonomy and work-life balance, two interaction variables were created. The variable “interaction” represented the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between emotional well-being and work-life balance. The variable “interaction2”, represented the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between job autonomy and work-life balance. As previously mentioned, the first model included emotional well-being and job autonomy and the second model included the predictors and the two interaction effects. Hence, by comparing these two models, one is able to see the change in explained variance and the effect of the moderating variable on both relationships.

As can be seen in table 4.6, the addition of gender as a moderator was statistically significant to the regression model, however its contribution to the explained variance in work-life balance was noticeably small. Introducing the moderating variable of gender to the regression model explained only an additional 0.9% of the variation in employee’s perceived work-life balance. Together, the predictors included in the model, job autonomy and emotional well-being, and the two interaction effects of gender, explained 8.2% of the variance in employee’s perceived work-life balance ( $F(23812) = 529.546, p < 0.05$ ).

Table 4.6

*Model Summary<sup>c</sup>*

Model	R Square	R Square Change	df2	Sig. F Change	F	Sig.
1	.073	.073	23814	.000	935.077	.000 <sup>a</sup>
2	.082	.009	23812	.000	529.546	.000 <sup>b</sup>

a. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional Well-Being, Job Autonomy      Source: ESS, 2010

b. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional Well-Being, Job Autonomy, interaction, interaction2

c. Dependent Variable: Work-Life Balance

\* N= 23,767

Table 4.7 demonstrates the regression coefficients for the interaction effects examined in the second model of the hierarchical regression. As can be seen in the table, both interaction effects, on the relationship between job autonomy and work-life balance, and the relationship between emotional well-being and work-life balance, were shown to be statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). Gender is shown to have a different interaction effect depending on the relationship it moderates. In the relationship between emotional well-being and perceived work-life balance, gender had a negative effect (Beta= -0.294), which despite being considerably small was still statistically significant. This implies that the relationship between emotional well-being and work-life balance is stronger for men than for women. Hence, it can be assumed that men's perceptions of work-life balance are more likely to be influenced by their emotional well-being, as opposed to women's. In addition, when moderating the relationship between job autonomy and work-life balance, gender had a positive interaction effect (Beta= 0.328). Again, this interaction effect was relatively small yet statistically significant and suggests that the relationship between job autonomy and work-life balance is stronger for women than for men. Therefore, work environments allowing for greater job autonomy are likely to affect women more than men in their perceptions of work-life balance.

Table 4.7

Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

	Standardized Coefficients	
	Beta	Sig.
interaction	-.294	.000 <sup>b</sup>
interaction2	.328	.000 <sup>c</sup>

a. Dependent Variable: Work-Life Balance

Source: ESS, 2010

b. Gender \* Emotional Well-being

c. Gender \* Job Autonomy

All in all, after examining the data from the hierarchical regression, only half of the four hypotheses posed at the beginning of this research can be accepted. Hypothesis one, suggesting a positive relationship between job autonomy and work-life balance is rejected, alongside hypothesis four which claimed that the relationship between emotional well-being and work-life balance would be stronger for women as opposed to men. Despite this, hypothesis two proposing a positive relation between emotional well-being and work-life balance is accepted, together with hypothesis three proposing that the relationship between job autonomy and perceived work-life balance would be stronger for women as opposed to men.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

### 5.1 Summary of the Findings

The aim of this research was to examine the impact of job autonomy and emotional well-being on employee's perceptions of their balance between work and other life domains. In addition, gender was considered a possible moderator to take into account in the way it could impact both of these relationships. In this manner, the study sought to answer the question, to what extent do job autonomy and emotional well-being impact work-life balance and to what extent is gender a moderator in those relationships? The assumption of this study was that both of these predictors would have a positive impact on the perceived work-life balance of individuals, and gender would be a significant moderator for both relationships, with women experiencing more work-life balance when high levels of emotional well-being and job autonomy were experienced. This assumption was broken down into four hypotheses, previously detailed, out of which the research conducted supported only hypothesis two and four.

Emotional well-being was found to have a considerably positive effect on work-life balance. Individuals that reported experiencing higher levels of emotional well-being at work (higher life satisfaction, more positive emotions and low negative emotions) also reported experiencing high levels of work-life balance. Based on this finding the second hypothesis was accepted. Additionally, this outcome was congruent with other academic literature presented in this study, which suggested that increased emotional well-being in employees would result in individuals with high life satisfaction, low stress levels and increased cooperation between coworkers. All of which, were argued to influence employee's ability to manage conflicting demands and experience a positive spillover effect from work domains to other life domains, resulting in individuals experiencing higher levels of work-life balance (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). Furthermore, the data reinforced the dual-process model of work-home interference (Bakker & Geurts, 2004), which maintains that certain job resources operate through "flow" (absorption in what one does) and the generation of positive emotions which in turn create positive work-family spillover.

Conversely, job autonomy was found to have a negative relationship with work-life balance. Therefore, the respondents that reported experiencing a higher job autonomy in their workplace also reported experiencing lower levels of work-life balance. Based on this finding, hypothesis one was rejected. In an attempt to examine the possible reasons why this outcome came about, a cross tabulation was completed between the individual items of each variable. This analysis exposed interesting correlations at a more in-depth level. Most of the items that made up job autonomy were found to have a negative correlation to work-life balance items that measured work-to-family conflict. On the contrary, the majority of job autonomy items were positively correlated with the item of work-life balance measuring work-family balance satisfaction. Therefore, this seems to imply that individuals who experience more job autonomy tend to experience more negative work-to-family spillover and worry more about work problems when they are not working, yet they seem to be satisfied with the balance between their work and other life domains. These conclusions conflicted with the academic literature presented in this study, with a majority of academic research and articles arguing for a positive relationship between levels of job autonomy and experiences of work-life balance.

Possible explanations for this unexpected relationship can be found in theories relating job autonomy with employee engagement. Ryan and Deci's cognitive evaluation theory (2000), claims that autonomy encourages the development of individual's intrinsic motivation. Moreover, other researchers have established a link between self-driven, intrinsic motivations and higher employee engagement and organizational commitment (Grzywacz & Butler, 2005; Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Geurts & Demerouti, 2003). This would explain that employees who are given more autonomy in the workplace, tend to be more engaged with their work and choose to invest such autonomy to further their tasks in the organization. Social Exchange theory argues that human relationships function in a reciprocal manner, by the use of a subjective cost-benefit analysis (Emerson, 1976). If we apply social exchange theory in the workplace, it can explain why when organizations offer certain resources, such as more autonomy, that benefit the employee, the employee is likely to reciprocate by investing more resources into their work and increasing their engagement (Saks, 2006). Ultimately this could be seen to create a higher work-to-family conflict since little time would be left to spend in family domains. Nonetheless, because employees would be satisfied with their commitment to the organization and their increased engagement, they might

still report high levels of work-life satisfaction. It needs to be kept in mind that the measurement of work-life balance is as perceived by the employees, based on self-reports, therefore distorted or biased experiences of satisfaction with their work-life balance could occur at the same time as negative work-to-family conflict is being experienced. Another possible reason for this negative relationship could be due to possible statistical limitations of the research, which will be discussed later on. However, it must be taken into account that grouping work-family conflict and work-life satisfaction, into one single variable of work-life balance might have had some undesired effects on the research, distorting the relationship of work-life balance and autonomy in the regression.

### 5.1.1 The Moderation Effect

Regarding the moderation effect of gender on both relationships, the interaction effects were distinct based on the relationship gender was moderating. When gender was moderating the relationship between job autonomy and work-life balance, the relationship was found to be stronger for females as opposed to males. This supported hypothesis number three which stated the relationship between job autonomy and work-life balance satisfaction would be stronger for women than for men. This relationship can be explained through role theory, where women are perceived as holding the more traditional role of managing the household and therefore may react different when given more autonomy in their jobs as opposed to men (Barnet & Baruch, 1987). Due to this perception of women as the managers of the household, they are seen as the ones who should be the first to make adjustments to their workload for the sake of the family (Keene & Reynolds, 2005). In a study conducted of small business owners in the USA (Loscocco. 1997), men saw their job autonomy as a symbol of control over their own work, whereas women saw it as an opportunity to achieve work-life balance. Loscocco concluded that men fulfil gender norms when they put their business first, whereas women fulfill their gender roles when they accommodate work to family life. Overall, it follows that when women are given more autonomy, they report experiencing more work-life balance, as opposed to men.

A surprising relationship emerged regarding the interaction effect of gender on the relationship between emotional well-being and work-life balance. Here, data indicated the relationship between emotional well-being and work-life balance to be stronger for men as opposed to women. Based

on these findings, hypothesis four, stating a stronger effect for women, was rejected. A possible explanation for this lies in the concept of affect intensity (AI). Affect intensity describes people's varying response intensity to identical emotional stimuli (Larsen & Diener, 1987). This concept explains why, despite the fact that women often report experiencing more negative emotions than men, they report similar levels of life satisfaction (Eaton & Kessler, 1981; Campbell, 1981; Gurin et al., 1960; Michalos, 1987). A study conducted by Fujita, Diener & Sandvik (1991), reported that findings of negative affect on women did not conflict with findings of equal happiness across gender. Moreover, they argued that women experience higher affect intensity regarding positive and negative emotions. Therefore, if they experience high levels of both negative and positive affect, it is possible that they also report much more distress than men, while also reporting equal levels of overall well-being. Overall, they argue that women's more intense positive emotions balance their higher negative affect.

Women's high affect intensity can shed some light on the reasons why emotional well-being would affect men's perceptions of work-life balance more than for women. Negative affect has been argued to cause a bigger impact than positive affect, one can assume this would be the same in the case of work-life balance perceptions, with the experience of negative affect impacting work-life balance more than experiencing positive affect. Hence, it could be argued that for men the relationship between emotional well-being and work-life balance is stronger than for women, in part because their affective intensity tends to be lower. Therefore, women are better able to manage their emotional experiences at work (Grandey, 2000), thus their emotional well-being can be expected to have a lower impact on their perceptions of work-life balance, as opposed to men.

## 5.2 Theoretical Limitations

Although this study has reached its aim, there were several limitations that need to be taken into account when discussing the results and implications of this research. Certain theoretical limitations were present in this study that need to be accounted for. Work-life balance is a highly complex concept that is affected by a large number of underlying mechanisms and factors, therefore it can be considered a limitation that this study focuses only on two external factors

related to the work environment. This limits the research by narrowing the knowledge and the insights that can be gained from the study. Regarding the variables that were used in this research, an important theoretical limitation could be attributed to the level of depth in which each concept was measured. When looking at job autonomy, a difference could have been made between time flexibility and task discretion in order to yield more specific and in-depth data. Although according to the factor analysis conducted in the beginning of the research, the items under job autonomy all had a high level of inter-correlation and coherence, there is some academic literature that makes a distinction between the two concepts (Thompson & Prottas, 2006; Gallie & Rusell, 2009; Hill, Hawkins, Ferris & Weitzman, 2001; Baral & Bhargava, 2010). Under the concept of emotional well-being, more items could have been designated to measure negative affect, in order to provide more wholesome and reliable data. Due to a lack of data this was not a possibility, since the dataset used for this research contained only one item that measured negative emotions in respondents.

Furthermore, given that this research was conducted internationally, this research paper fails to acknowledge local factors which could have implications on differences in perceptions of work-life balance. Conducting a cross-national study and their respective contextual factors (cultural perceptions of the workplace, socio-economic status, ideologies etc.) could influence individual perceptions of work-life balance and yield results worth investigating, as different cultures understand the work-life interface differently. For example, collectivist cultures place a lot of importance on social groups, such as family, above the individual. On the other hand, individualist cultures are known to place more importance on the individual as opposed to the social groups one is a part of (Bochner & Hesketh, 1994). Therefore, it could be expected that collectivist cultures experience more work-life balance conflict, since they tend to be more aware of the time they devote to family as opposed to work. However, in individualist cultures they could experience also a very high work-life imbalance, due to them placing more focus on work and devote less time to other social groups. Either way, examining cultural differences would definitely enrich the research.

All in all, a lack of resources and time constraints accounted for the size and simplicity of the research model. While researching all the possible internal and/or external mechanisms in place that could affect work-life balance is near impossible, further research should attempt to include more determinants of work-life balance as well as expand the concept of work-life balance in order

to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms that affect employees' perception of it. A way to further the understanding of the concept of work-life balance would be by integrating other life domains, such as the social environment of the individual. Another way in which this research could be made more exhaustive would be by introducing other moderators of work-life balance such as individual personality traits or the socio-economic level of the respondents. Individual personality traits, for example regarding neuroticism (tendency to experience negative emotions such as anxiety or depression) and conscientiousness (tendency to act dutifully and self-discipline), could have interesting effects on perceptions of work-life balance, as they are likely to affect how some individuals deal with work-life imbalance and emotionality at the workplace. Moreover, the socio-economic levels of individuals could be expected to affect perceptions of work-life balance, as it can be an indicator of the type of job an individual has. For example, someone with a high socio-economic level could be expected to have a high-paying, white-collar job which may allow for a greater job autonomy. On the contrary, someone with a low socio-economic level can be expected to hold a blue-collar job which may be more restricted, automated and allow for less job autonomy.

### 5.3 Methodological Limitations

There remain certain methodological and statistical limitations that merit attention. Firstly, the data collected by the European Social Survey was collected in 2010, eight years ago. This carries with it certain limitations regarding the contemporariness and accuracy of the data. Ideologies and attitudes regarding the workplace have been bound to change over such a time span. Although perceptions of what a satisfactory work-life balance is, may not have changed exponentially, throughout eight years, small changes between attitudes and conceptualizations of the work environment could have occurred. Consequently, the date of data collection must be taken into consideration as a possible limitation, more so due to the recent developments in organizational psychology and corporate culture, regarding new positive psychology ideologies permeating corporate culture and human resource strategies (Froman, 2010).

Further methodological limitations result from the use of self-reported data when filling out the ESS questionnaires. This constitutes a limitation as such data can rarely be independently verified,

and the data collected needs to be taken at face value. Furthermore, self-reports may be distorted by possible biases when reporting experiences of emotional well-being, work-life balance or even instances where job autonomy was granted by the organization. Such biases could include selective memory biases when remembering or not remembering experiences that occurred in the past, exaggerations or telescoping (recalling events that occurred at one time as if they occurred at another time) (Brutus, Aguinis & Wassmer, 2013).

In addition to self-report biases, other methodological limitations of this research include the scales used to measure the three main variables of job autonomy, emotional well-being and job autonomy. In the creation of these variables, extreme skewedness was exposed in the individual items which had to be corrected by sorting the items into three cohorts. This resulted in composite variables that were the aggregation of the means of all the items, and therefore ranged from 1 to 3, thus limiting the specificity of the available data extensively. Despite this required aggregation of the data into smaller scales being a significant limitation of this research, it is worth mentioning that the regression analysis was able to be conducted because this procedure allowed for a redistribution of the data into more normally distributed curves. Therefore, scaling down the data was a necessary evil in order to be able to conduct the desired parametric statistical analyses.

The previous theoretical and methodological limitations need to be acknowledged in order to accurately report the possible implications and contributions of this study. The realization that the scope and depth of discussions in this study may be compromised at certain levels, may help orient further research towards a deeper examination of the concepts and relationships presented. Moreover, future studies should aim towards examining the effects of other life domains on perceived work-life balance of employees, as well as account for work-family facilitation in addition to work-family conflict. Lastly, cross-national and longitudinal research on possible work-related determinants of work-life balance would be a major contribution to the field of human resource management, by providing information on the immediate and long-term effects of organizational interventions on the ability of employees to integrate work and family domains.

## 5.4 Theoretical Implications

This research was driven by an interest in positive psychology, a field of psychology that has recently gained more recognition in human resource management literature and organizational psychology. The research completed was an attempt to minimize the knowledge gap regarding existing conceptualizations of work-life balance and its possible predictors in academic research. In that sense, the theoretical implications of this study are its unique focus on the perceptions of work-life balance, taking into account not only the work-family interface but also including perceptions of overall work-life satisfaction of employees. It would be an overstatement to suggest that this research alone was able to offer an entirely new conceptualization of the work-life interface, or that it achieved to fully close the existing gap in current academic literature. Nonetheless, the significance of the findings need to be recognized as relevant, in that they contribute to furthering the existing academic literature on possible work-related predictors that affect perceptions of work-life balance in employees. Furthermore, it is important to consider the contribution of this research to existing academic literature that distinguishes gender effects on the work-family interface. There is a lack of research, particularly in recognizing gender differences in perceptions of work-life balance, as well as how gender can affect the way in which certain predictors affect perceptions of work-life balance. All things considered, the uniqueness of the variables used in this research and the significant findings stemming from it, make this study one that contributes to existing, yet not fully developed, literature regarding the work-life interface and aids in the furthering of existing knowledge.

It is also important to take into account the theoretical implication that the unexpected negative relationship between job autonomy and work-life balance has. As previously stated, this finding contradicts the majority of academic literature on the subject, which argues for a positive relationship of job autonomy to work-life balance. Solely on the basis of this finding one cannot reject the idea that a positive relation may exist between the two concepts, nonetheless it implies that maybe there are certain aspects of job autonomy that hinder work-life balance, thus more underlying effects could be taking place. The implication behind this finding is that it not only contributes to the minority of academic literature that argues for a negative relationship between job autonomy and work-life balance, but that it also calls for a re-examination of this relationship.

## 5.5 Practical Implications

Originally, a main aim of this study was also to explore relationships between employee autonomy and emotional well-being in order to extract significant findings that could inform human resource policies and organizational culture, in how to create a working environment where employees could be encouraged to build on their strengths and flourish as humans. Positive psychology offered a theoretical framework from which to examine underlying mechanisms that could be manipulated to produce more humane and sustainable workplaces for individuals, eventually resulting in organizations that were able to facilitate human thriving in a sustainable manner. This research found job autonomy to increase work-family conflict, especially among women, and found emotional well-being to increase work-life balance perceptions, especially among men. The significance of the findings in this study carry important practical implications, the main one being that the findings can be used to extend the understanding of human resource practices in creating such workplaces. A notable strength of this research that should be acknowledged is the extremely high number of participants that it included. The sample size of this research included a total of 23,767 respondents, which allowed for findings to be representative and generalizable to the European population. This makes the implications of this research that much more relevant and significant.

Based on these findings, human resource managers should focus on implement policies that increase the emotional well-being of employees in the workplace and control the type of job autonomy they grant employees, with flexible schedules being the type of autonomy that has a greater positive effect on employee's work-life balance. More attention should be given to human resource theories such as the social capital theory, focused on the importance of social interactions and relationships at work, and soft human resource models that promote positive organizational behavior (POB) as a way to increase resilience, optimism and positive affect of employees in the workplace (Youssef & Luthans, 2007; Avey, Luthans, Smith & Palmer, 2010). Furthermore, human resource professionals should be aware of practices that include high-commitment work systems and blindly boost autonomy, as they could be detrimental to the work-life balance of employees, causing high levels of work-family conflict (White, Hill, McGovern, Mills & Smeaton, 2003). Overall, it is important for organizations to comprehend the value of promoting sustainable

working habits and work-life balance, for example in the form of work-family friendly initiatives like offering flexible schedules, exercise access, childcare services, or team-building exercises at work (Buettner, Shattell & Reber, 2011).

## 5.6 Conclusion

The ongoing shift in societal perceptions of the workplace and attitudes towards work, necessitate a shift in the way organizations interact with their employees and the practices used by Human Resource specialist to manage human capital. The integration of positive psychology principles and theories in the workplace has been demonstrated to produce several positive effects on employees, affecting not only their job but also causing positive spillover effects into other life domains and ultimately promoting their flourishing and experience of a fulfilling life. By exploring factors in the work environment such as the level of job autonomy and emotional well-being of employees, findings can be utilized in the form of HR strategies to promote more humane and sustainable organizations that individuals want to be a part of.

This study demonstrates the importance for academic literature to focus on, and further develop research on the work-life interface of employees. Due to the growing diversity of family structures currently represented in the workforce (Lockwood, 2003), an understanding of work-life relationships and their impact is crucial for organizations to yield thriving employees. Moreover, the research conducted demonstrated the potential of positive psychology concepts, such as emotional well-being and autonomy, as tools that can be stimulated in order to increase employee flourishing. The theoretical and practical implications of the findings are substantial and contribute to the ever-growing literature on this subject. Nonetheless, further research is necessary in order to continue to explore the many benefits that may result from reorienting organizations to consider employee wellbeing and development.

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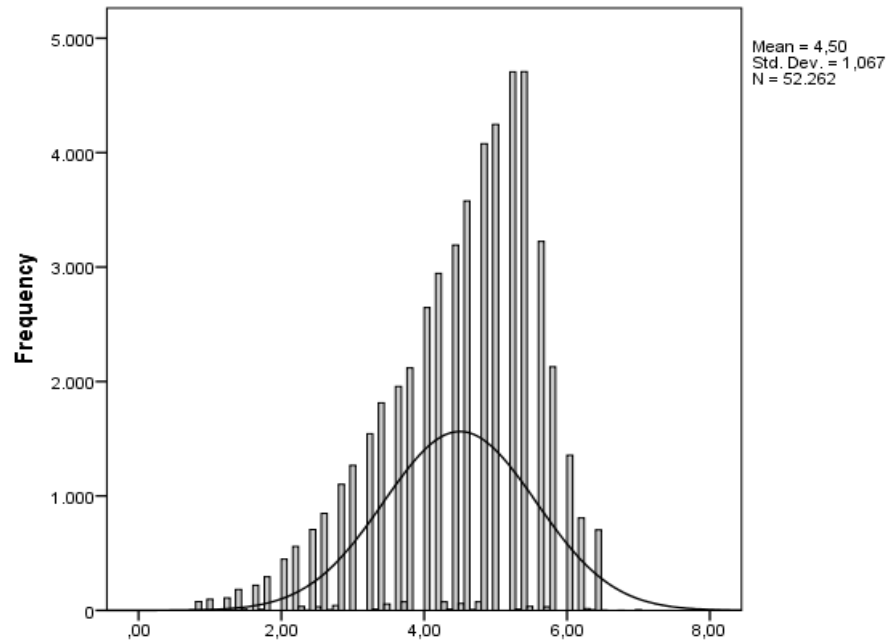
## Appendix A

### Graphs demonstrating the Correction of Item Skewness

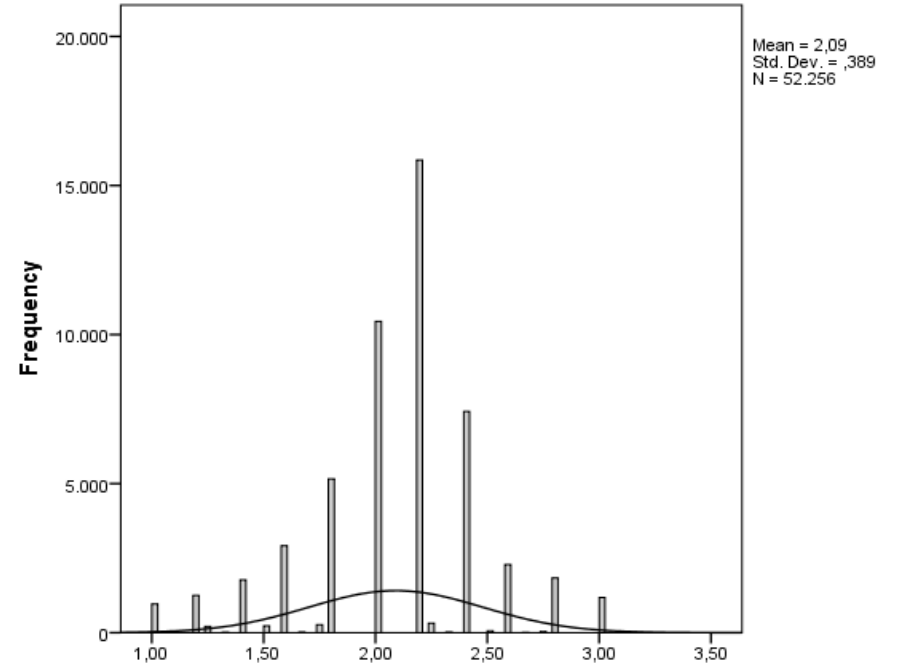
The following appendix contains six graphs of the standard distributions of all of the composite variables created in this research, along with the normal probability plot (P-P plot) of the standardized residuals involved in the regression analysis. The graphs on the left demonstrate the normal distribution of the variable if it had been created with the original uncorrected items. The graphs on the right demonstrate the normal distribution of the actual variable that was used, once all the items were corrected for skewness by putting them into cohorts (low, middle and high).

As can be seen from the normal distribution line of each graph, the second graphs for all three variables are shown to be more standardly distributed, proving that organizing the individual items into cohorts of three before creating the variables, resulted in more standardly distributed composite variables. It is important to mention that the amount of data was reduced by this procedure, however this was necessary in order to conduct the regression analysis. Lastly it is important to note that in the case of the variable for job autonomy, the items maintained certain skewness even after organizing its items into cohorts, resulting in the variable being skewed overall. However, because the distribution of the residuals was more or less standardly distributed with a slight skewness in the middle, as shown by the P-P plots, a regression analysis could be conducted.

## Emotional Well-being Variable

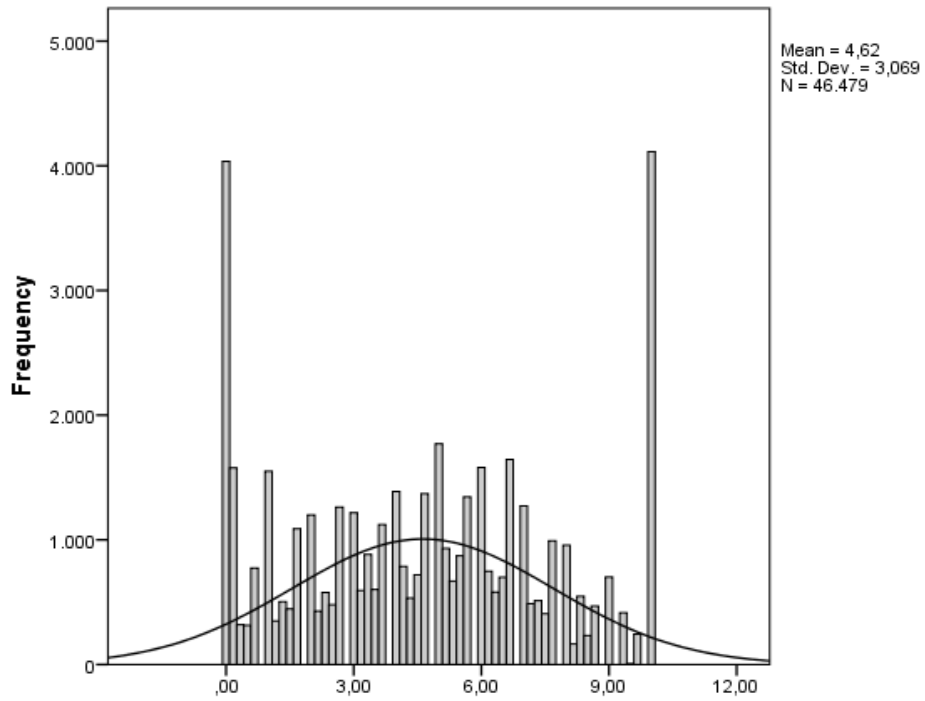


**Fig 2. Orginal EmotionalWB**

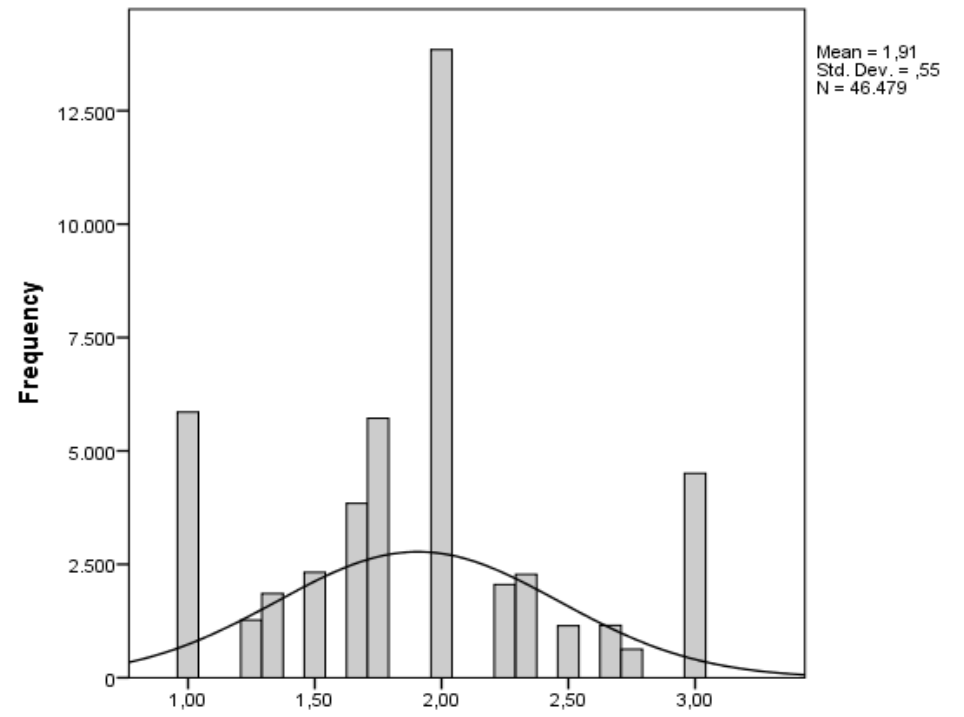


**Fig 3. EmotionalWB**

## Job Autonomy Variable

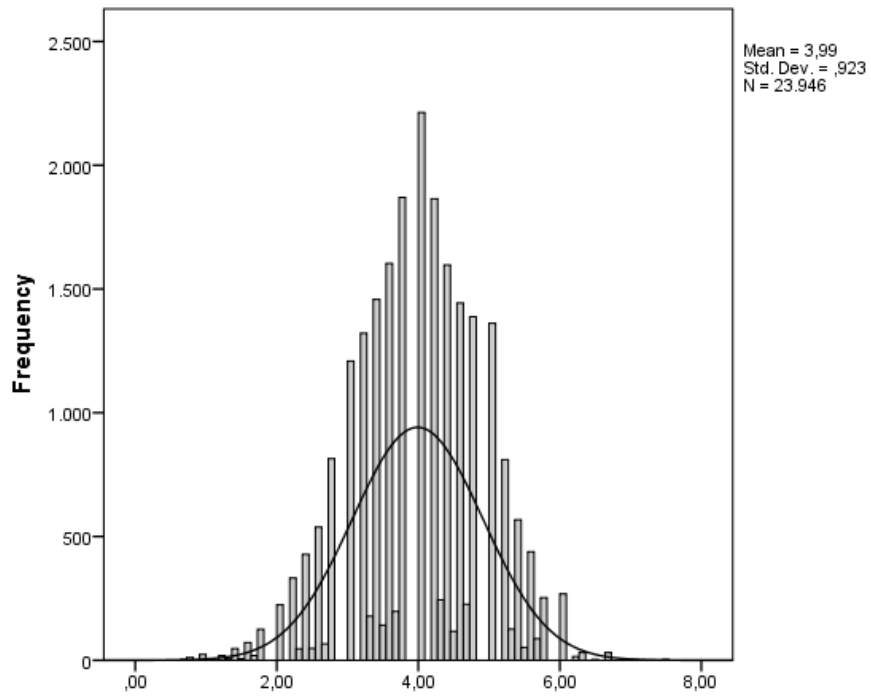


**Fig 4. Original Job Autonomy**

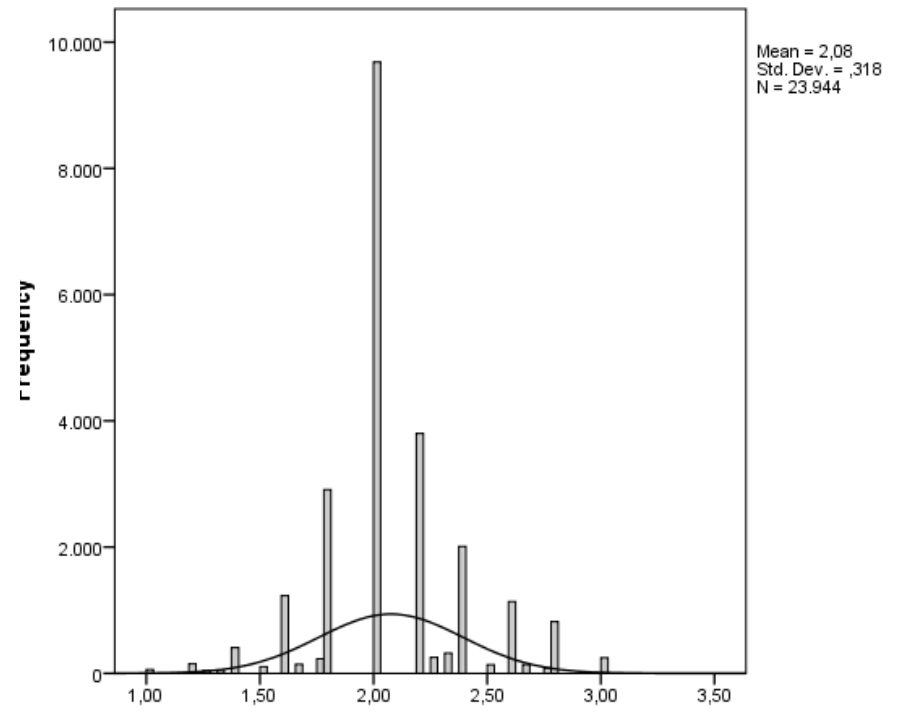


**Fig 5 jobAutonomy**

# Work-Life Balance

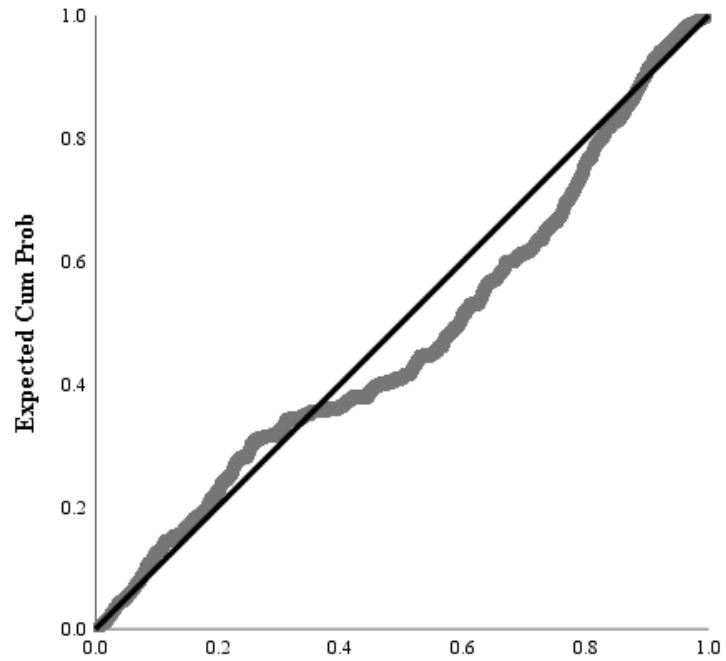


**Fig. 6 Original Work-Life balance**



**Fig. 7 Work-Life balance**

P-P Plots of the Linear Regression



**Fig. 8 Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual**