Work-life Balance: Does Leadership Matter?

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Table 1. Participant Descriptors

No.	Pseudonyms/Age	Gender	Marital status	Industry	Positions
1	John (42)	Male	Single	Banking	Manager
2	Jane (38)	Female	Divorced	Insurance	Manager
3	Tayler (28)	Female	Single	Banking	Employee
4	Flora (40)	Female	Divorced	Banking	Manager
5	Boris (42)	Male	Single	Information technology	Manager
6	Cynthia (32)	Female	Single	Insurance	Employee
7	Patricia (45)	Female	Divorced	Information technology	Manager
8	Richards (42)	Male	Single	Banking	Manager
9	Muhammad (43)	Male	Married	Information technology	Manager
10	Lola (32)	Female	Single	Insurance	Employee
11	Dino (38)	Male	Married	Information technology	10
12	Damijo (30)	Male	Single	Insurance	Employee
13	Ella (37)	Female	Married	Banking	Employee
14	Bridget (45)	Female	Divorced	Banking	Manager
15	Victoria (39)	Female	Single	Information technology	Manager
16	Diliara (37)	Female	Single	Insurance	Employee
17	Patrick (39)	Male	Married	Insurance	Employee
18	Henry (35)	Male	Single	Banking	Employee
19	Tom (44)	Male	Married	Insurance	Manager
20	Mufu (33)	Male	Single	Information technology	Employee
21	Judith (39)	Female	Single	Banking	Manager
22	Daniel (43)	Male	Married	Information technology	Manager
23	Afeez (40)	Male	Single	Banking	Manager
24	Cathrina (30)	Female	Single	Banking	Employee
25	Biola (40)	Female	Single	Insurance	Manager
26	Nicholas (40)	Male	Married	Banking	Manager
27	Nicky (38)	Female	Married	Information technology	Manager
28	Molly (36)	Female	Married	Banking	Manager
29	Moyo (29)	Female	Single	Banking	Employee
30	Steve (45)	Male	Married	Insurance	Manager
31	Bintu (41)	Female	Married	Banking	Manager
32	Abdullahi (43)	Male	Single	Information technology	Manager

Table 2. Emerging Themes with Indicative Quotations

Research inquiry	Emerging themes	Indicative quotes	Theoretical Agregate
The impact of leadership on employees' usage of work-life balance policies and practices	Transactional leadership and work-life balance	Work first. If work is satisfactorily done, then I don't have a problem with my employees using WLB policies and practices (Nicky, 38 years old, manager). I normally let them use some WLB policies and practices as a reward for good performance or when we achieve our targets (Nicholas, 40 years old, manager). It is a sort of a give-and-take thing. I achieve my targets, then my manger lets me use WLB policies and practices. With my manager, you need to give excellent performance to be permitted to use WLB policies and practices (Moyo, 29 years old, employee).	Transactional leadership/social exchange theory
	Transformational leadership and work-life balance	I think it is part of my duty as a leader to look after the wellbeing of my employees. I do that in many ways, including letting them use WLB policies and practices, which helps them balance their work and familial responsibilities. The good thing is that they always give excellent performance and loyalty in return (Molly, 36 years old, manager). I love to develop, motivate, and inspire my workers. I show them that I care not only about work but also about how they deal with their non-work duties. So, I let them use various WLB policies and practices that we have here. In return, they are loyal, innovative, and committed to their work (Steve, 45 years old, manager).	Transformational leadership/social exchange theory
	Reciprocal behaviour and work-life balance	My employees know that they will first produce innovative, impressive, and excellent performance if they want the reward of using WLB policies and practices. That is how it works here…it is give and take (Bintu, 41 years old). I found that they are more productive whenever they are able to balance their work and non-work lives. So, I let them use [WLB policies and practices] so they can continue to be productive. It is a sort of exchange thing (Abdullahi, 43 years old, manager).	Social exchange theory

<center>**Work-life Balance: Does Leadership Matter?**</center>

Abstract

Purpose – The extant literature on work-life balance has generally overlooked the interrelationship between leadership and work-life balance. Does leadership have any impact on employees' use of work-life balance policies and practices? To answer this question, this article considers social exchange theory as well as transformational and transactional leadership in an investigation of the impact of leadership on work-life balance.

Methodology – The study employs qualitative data from 32 semi-structured interviews to achieve the study's objectives.

Findings – The research reveals that leadership does matter in work-life balance. The study findings reveal that both the transactional and transformational leadership styles result in the establishment of strong reciprocal relationships between leaders and employees in terms of using work-life balance policies and practices. Managers only sanction the use of work-life balance policies and practices only as a reward for excellent performance or when they are completely sure the outcome will favour the organisation. The study concludes that the desire to achieve work-life balance has often led many employees to go the extra mile in carrying out their work duties, which is rewarded with an approval to use work-life balance policies and practices. These non-contractual exchanges emphasise reciprocity and are based on trust.

Research limitations – The extent to which the findings of this research can be generalised is constrained by the size and nature of the research sample.

Practical Implications – Many managers are transactional leaders, and they purposefully allow their employees to use work-life balance policies and practices only as a reward for meeting targets and for excellent performance. This means that employees who fall short of the required targets and expected performance are not permitted to use work-life balance policies and practices. This finding implies that such employees experience incessant work-family conflict, which may have negative implications for their work engagement, overall wellbeing, and work performance.

Originality/value – This study demonstrates that leadership is relevant to work-life balance. It shows that transformational leadership is supportive of work-life balance, as it considers employees' work performance and non-work outcomes. The results and practical implications of this study aid our understanding of the non-contractual exchanges involved in manager-

employee relationships, which is crucial for ensuring employees' achievement of work-life balance and for organisations to achieve their goals.

Keywords: Work-life balance, leadership, transactional and transformational leadership, social exchange theory, Nigeria

Introduction

This study investigates the impact of leadership on work-life balance (WLB). The concepts of WLB and leadership have not been well aligned in the extant literature, even though both concepts examine the management of employees (Kossek et al., 2023). In generally, the two concepts have been widely researched, but independently – they are largely treated as separate topics. While researchers of leadership focus on work in terms of conceptualising leadership styles and ignore the influence of the non-work domain on leaders and subordinates, researchers of WLB have largely overlooked leadership theory and styles when studying employees' achievement of WLB. Consequently, scholars and practitioners are constantly confronted with the challenge of updating knowledge on leadership and WLB with specific consideration of the impact of leadership on WLB in the context of the changing nature of employees' work and non-work lives.

Leadership studies have traditionally focused on 'who leaders are' (traits) and 'what leaders do' (behaviours) (Den Hartog and Koopman, 2001, p. 168), which has led to a definition of leadership as a pattern of behaviours of an individual who is trying to influence others (Northouse, 2013). Leaders' behaviours are often channelled towards influencing subordinates' attitudes and performance in terms of accomplishing tasks (see Dinh et al., 2014; Lord et al., 2017). However, leadership studies have largely ignored the non-work domain; in particular, the impact of leaders on employees' non-work lives, which typically affect work, and the impact of leaders' non-work lives on their own leadership styles and approaches (Hammond et al., 2017; Kossek et al., 2023).

Conversely, WLB continues to attract attention from people of all walks of life. It acknowledges that most employees are engaged in multiple roles – they are employees, friends, spouses, mothers, caregivers, and religious and community members (Brough et al., 2020). All these roles require time and energy to fulfil. Therefore, WLB is the extent to which employees satisfactorily engage in and are equally satisfied with their work and non-work roles (Adisa et al., 2019; Greenhaus et al., 2003). The key to achieving WLB is a framework of a range of flexible work arrangements in the form of organisational policies and procedures (Maxwell and McDougall, 2004). These flexible work arrangements are deliberate organisational practices, programmes, or cultures that are aimed at reducing work-life conflict and enabling employees to be more productive at work and more effective in their other non-work roles (Osoian et al., 2011). Nevertheless, research on WLB ignored leadership theory and styles, which potentially have a huge impact on employees' achievement of WLB. Thus, integrating the topics of leadership and WLB is crucial for addressing an important knowledge gap. The overall objective of this study is to do so by examining the impact of leadership styles on employees' WLB. It uses transformational and transactional leadership styles to highlight the unique connections between the literature on leadership and WLB, and it offers novel insights on both topics. The article is organised as follows. The next section is a brief discussion on WLB and leadership in the chosen research context. Thereafter, an outline of the conceptual framework is given, which is followed by an explanation of the research methodology. The findings and their implications are then presented and discussed. The final section concludes the study with recommended directions for future research and an outline of the limitations of the study.

Work-life Balance in Brief

An important aspect of human resource management and employee relations is WLB, a topic which continues to attract attention and interest from all stakeholders, including employees,

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employers, policymakers, academics, and trade unions across the globe. This perhaps is due to employees' need and desire to fulfil their work and non-work obligations. While it is critical that employees dutifully attend to their work responsibilities, they also have personal interests, including familial duties, which must be attended to and balanced with work (Adkins and Premeaux, 2019). Employees' personal interests include but are not limited to familial duties, education, volunteer work, religious observance, sport, leisure, caregiving responsibilities, and social activities. Even though some paradigms suggest that the work and non-work domains are separate entities (see Adam, 1995; Edwards and Rothbard, 2000), Kanter (1977) challenges this notion, arguing that employees' work and non-work domains are permeable and interconnected. The terms used to articulate WLB and the themes that underpin conceptualisations thereof vary (Brough, 2020). For example, one approach bases WLB on role conflict and role enrichment (Aryee et al., 2005; Frone, 2003). This approach defines WLB as an absence of work-family conflict with high levels of work-family enrichment (Duxbury and Higgins 2001; O'Driscoll et al. 2006). Other approaches to WLB focus on the notion of equal distribution of resources to work and non-work roles. Kirchmeyer (2000) suggests that WLB is achieved when an individual's time, energy, and commitment are evenly distributed across life roles. However, Osoian et al. (2011) contends that the word 'balance' in the term WLB does not mean equal distribution of resources (energy and time) to work and non-work duties. Kesting and Harris (2009) assert, however, that it means allowing employees some degree of flexibility and control over when, where, and how they do their daily work. In other words, WLB is the extent to which employees engage in and are equally satisfied with their work and non-work role (see Greenhaus et al., 2003).

Researchers find that a lack of WLB can affect important employment and workplace issues, such as employee turnover, stress, job satisfaction, and productivity (Bloom and Van Reenen, 2006; Frone et al., 1992; Parasuraman et al., 1996; Parris et al., 2008; Thomas and Ganster,

1995; Veiga et al., 2004). However, other researchers confirm that WLB policies can significantly reduce issues of lateness, absenteeism, stress, and work-family conflict as well as increase productivity, morale, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment (Poelmans and Sahibzada, 2004; Poelmans et al., 2005; Lapierre et al., 2008). The above assertions highlight the importance of WLB to employees and employers as well as for continuous survival of organisations. But what is the impact of leadership in employees' achievement of WLB? Kossek et al. (2023) point out that extant studies on leadership and WLB are not sufficiently integrated for determining the impact of leadership on WLB, but both constructs examine the management of employees. This article aims to align the literature on WLB and leadership to fully understand the impact of leadership on WLB.

Leadership in Context

A comprehensive review of the literature on leadership over a period of more than two decades (Bass, 1990; Rost, 1991; Yukl, 1989) focuses on how leadership affects followers' attitudinal and performance variables. There are many academic ideas and opinions about leadership – the subject is one of the most studied and yet least understood phenomena (Mendenhall et al., 2008). The term 'leadership' means different things to different people, and there is no universal definition of the term. Leadership involves making choices and important decisions on behalf of management that must be duly obeyed and followed by every member of the organisation (Kouzes and Posner, 2003). Grint (2001) and Northouse (2013) emphasise a pattern of behaviours of an individual trying to influence subordinates' hearts and minds to accomplish organisational objectives. Such behaviours 'are perceived by others' and are meant 'to influence the activities of people' (Hersey and Blanchard, 1981, p. 34). Similarly, many researchers such as Byrne et al. (2014), Collins and Jackson (2015), and Kaluza et al. (2020), emphasise the importance of leaders' behaviours in influencing others. These definitions highlight how the behaviours of leaders impact employees' work experiences, effectiveness,

and performance (Dinh et al., 2014; Lord et al., 2017). Nevertheless, 'leadership studies have often neglected the non-work realm, specifically the influence of leaders on subordinates' nonwork lives' (Kossek et al., 2023, p. 182). Consequently, research on the impact of leadership on employees' use of WLB policies and practices is surprisingly scarce (Michel et al., 2014). This study therefore considers the transformational and transactional leadership styles in its examination of the impact of leadership on WLB.

Transformational leadership is about influencing subordinates (Bass, 1985; Northouse, 2013). It generates an awareness and acceptance of the purpose and mission of the group, and subordinates are motivated to do their very best to achieve organisational goals (Giri and Santra, 2010; Yukl, 2012). Transformational leaders stimulate subordinates to see problems in different dimensions and assist them in developing and achieving their full potential (García-Morales et al., 2012; O'Reilly and Chatman, 2020). Meta-analytical evidence has shown that transformational leadership is positively related to leaders' effectiveness and to followers' satisfaction with leaders, job satisfaction, job performance, and organisational citizenship (DeGroot et al., 2000; Judge and Piccolo, 2004; Lowe et al., 1996). The most distinguishable attributes of transformational leaders are that they provide a clear vision for their subordinates; often challenge the status quo; mobilise support through their words and actions; and inspire their followers to think outside the box to achieve collective goals (O'Reilly and Chatman, 2020; Wang et al., 2017).

Transactional leadership differs substantially from transformational leadership. Transactional leadership is concerned more with progress and development (Stone et al., 2004). It is often an influencing process whereby leaders supervise their followers through contractual obligations that focus on reward and punishment for performance standards (Xirasagar, 2008; Young et al., 2021). In transactional leadership, a leader offers rewards for excellent performance and behaviours and/or threatens punishment for half-hearted or poor performance (Zagorsek et al.,

2009). This style of leadership is based on bureaucratic authority, which focuses on task completion (Tracey and Hinkin, 1998) and pursues a cost-benefit, economic exchange with subordinates (Sarros and Santora, 2001). This means that followers' material, psychological, and financial needs are satisfied in return for excellence and good work performance. Transactional leadership is about contingent and organisational rewards (Brown and Dodd, 1999; Hilton et al., 2021), and it is found to be practicable in a stable organisation (Bass, 1990).

Other leadership styles include the *laissez-faire* approach*,* which is defined as avoidance and abdication of one's responsibilities (Hinkin and Schriesheim, 2008; Skogstad et al., 2014), authentic leadership, which focuses on the self-awareness, self-development, and self-regulated positive behaviours of a leader (Walumbwa et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2014); and servant leadership, which fundamentally focuses on the idea of the leaders serving the needs of their followers (Bouzari and Karatepe, 2017; Van Dierendonck, 2011). Rather than reviewing all these leadership approaches, this article focuses on transformational and transactional leadership styles to examine the impact of leadership on WLB. It also aims to establish the conceptual link between leadership style and WLB, a consideration that has been hitherto scarce in the literature.

Methodology

Given the dearth of relevant research on the topic, we deem it important to employ an exploratory research design providing detailed insights into the intersection between leadership styles and WLB. Therefore, we employed a qualitative research design based on the elements of grounded theory – purposive sampling, constant comparison, data saturation, and substantive coding (Corbin and Strauss, 1990; Strauss and Corbin, 1998) – to understand the impact of leadership on WLB. The qualitative research approach helps provide in-depth insights into a topic and initiates an integration between literature and evidence (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The qualitative approach favours a more human-centred approach that seeks

an understanding of how individuals make sense of the world around them by asking people directly what they think is important about the understudied topic or issue (Saunders et al., 2019). Furthermore, we adopt the interpretivist philosophy, which encourages ideas that embrace a view of reality as it is socially constructed or given meaning by actors' interpretations of events (Bryman, 2016). Essentially, interpretivism allows us to understand the impact of leadership on WLB. It also allows us to discern the relationships between leadership styles and WLB – from the subjective experiences of the participants.

Data collection

The data for the study was collected by means of semi-structured interviews based on 'duets' of managers and their employees. Semi-structured interviews ensure a certain degree of consistency in the interview questions and allow important but unanticipated issues to emerge (Myers, 2008). We used the purposive sampling approach, which is primarily based on the defined characteristics of the research participants – managers and their subordinates (employees) (Patton, 2015). We applied a snowballing strategy to recruit the key participants through our personal networks and recommendations (Saunders et al., 2019). The dataset consists of 32 interviews with workers (managers and subordinates) in the cities of Lagos, Ibadan, Ilorin, and Abuja in Nigeria. The participants were interviewed at different times, and the identities of all interviewees have been kept confidential in order to fulfil our promise of anonymity to them. The interviews were primarily conducted at the participants' workplaces in appropriate areas chosen by the participants. Each participant was asked to complete a short form to gather biographical data about them, capture contextual factors like their age, marital status, the nature of their work, their position at work, and some basic information about their employment (see Table 1). The interviews were conducted in the English language and lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. All the interviews were audio-recorded and were manually transcribed based on the recommendations of Kvale (1996) and Rapley (2004). The interview

questions covered the primary research areas: 1. How often do you allow your employees to use WLB policies? 2. When do you allow your employees to use WLB policies and practices? Our aim was to discover whether leadership is relevant to employees' usage of WLB policies, and if it is, which leadership approach is most supportive of WLB. Data saturation was achieved after the 28th interview, following which we conducted four additional interviews. The additional data did not add substantial information; hence, the data collection process was ended (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Silverman, 2000).

Insert Table 1 about here.

Data analysis

We considered content analysis of the descriptive and factual elements of the interviews as the most appropriate means of addressing the research questions. The central premise of content analysis is that the relevant text is grouped into meaningful themes, which are then grouped together into categories based on similarities between them (Weber, 1990). This approach enabled us to make inferences from the text and identify themes among all the interviews. Furthermore, a literal coding procedure was employed. This process enabled us to use the participants' own words to generate descriptive codes (Hesse-Biber, 2010). Coding was undertaken in an inductive manner in order to reduce oversight and missed opportunities during the analysis. In other words, each piece of information was not labelled based on a predetermined list of labels (often called a 'codebook' [Patton, 2002]). After labelling all the data themes, the labels were gathered based on their similarities. This was undertaken in order to easily identify similar labels for each of the research questions and emerging themes (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The major themes were then finalised after meticulously viewing and reworking the themes while continually reviewing the data. Table 2 presents the themes and indicative quotations. To achieve inter-rater reliability, we shared notes regularly during both the data collection and data analyses in order to discuss the emergent categories, and multiple

rounds of discussions took place between us (the researchers), during which the codes and categories were agreed.

Insert Table 2 about here.

Findings

This study examines the impact of leadership on WLB – in particular, which leadership style or approach is most supportive of WLB. Following the data analysis, three main themes emerged. The first theme, 'transactional leadership and WLB', shows that many managers used this leadership approach, and it is often based on reciprocal behaviour. The second theme, 'transformational leadership and WLB' reveals how this leadership style encourages workers to use WLB policies in order to achieve organisational goals. The third theme, 'reciprocal behaviour and WLB', shows that many employees are willing to go the extra mile in discharging their duties if their managers show leadership and help them fulfil their non-work responsibilities. Ultimately, we identified similarities and variations in the leadership styles and WLB experiences of all the participants' accounts.

Transactional Leadership and Work-life Balance

Sarros and Santora (2001) explain that transactional leaders 'pursue a cost-benefit, economic exchange with followers' (p. 388). This means that leaders reward their subordinates if organisational objectives are met and punish them if they are not met – a core tenet of the transactional leadership style (Abdelwahed et al., 2023). In this research, the participants (managers) strongly identify with the transactional leadership style in relation to WLB. In other words, the managers' priority is to achieve organisational goals, and they will allow their subordinates to use WLB policies and practices only if they have met their targets or if such use will help achieve organisational goals. For example, one participant commented:

> As long as my workers meet their targets, I am happy to reward them with approval
> to use any WLB policies or practices they desire. I have done this a couple of times
> (John, 42 years old, manager).

Other participants also allow their workers to use WLB policies and practices only when they are sure that using them will be cost effective and will help to achieve organisational goals:

> I normally allow my workers to use certain WLB policies if those policies are cost-
> effective and if [such use] will help the organisation achieve its goals. I'm sorry I
> have turned down many requests to use some WLB policies, because they did not
> fulfil these conditions (Jane, 38 years old, manager).

The excerpts above show that a transactional leader cannot be described as what Kossek et al. (2023) refer to as a 'work-life supportive leader' because of their 'give-and-take' nature (p. 183). Transactional leaders are task oriented, and results focused, and they are only willing to support employees' use of WLB policies and practices if it helps them achieve organisational goals. Many participants (employees) also commented on how their managers accede to their use of WLB policies and practices only when organisational goals are met. For example:

> My manager sometimes let me use WLB policies…as a reward for meeting my
> targets…She often says no if my targets are not met (Tayler, 28 years old,
> employee).

This excerpt evidences the core principle of transactional leadership: that it is a cost-benefit exchange between leaders and followers (Young et al., 2021). The transaction involves something of value between what the leader has or has control over and what the follower wants in return for their services (Yukl and Van Fleet, 1992). In this case, the transaction involves employees meeting their targets and achieving organisational goals in exchange for using WLB policies and practices. These findings also demonstrate the core tenets of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). The exchange reported by the participants is bidirectional –

something is given, and something is returned. Reciprocity is evident in the leader-follower relationship, as demonstrated by the participants.

Transformational Leadership and Work-life Balance

Individualised consideration is one of the key aspects of transformational leadership (Bass, 1985, 1990). It involves providing required support that will help followers both in the work and non-work domains (Hammond et al., 2015). While transformational leaders prioritise work and the achievement of organisational goals by setting performance expectations that challenge followers to go beyond their limits (Kossek et al., 2023), they also care about employees' non-work life by 'taking employees' private lives, their values, and goals into account' (Syrek et al., 2013, p. 255). Transformational leaders inspire and motivate their followers through various support mechanisms (Young et al., 2021). Our analysis shows that many managers support their employees in balancing their work and non-work responsibilities in order to motivate them, which has a positive impact on organisational productivity. One participant commented:

> I tested two approaches to management (one is allowing my staff to use WLB policies, and the other is preventing them from doing so), and I found that the former is very promising and productive. I found that staff are happy and highly motivated when I allow them to use WLB policies…Ultimately, we always surpass our targets and achieve our goals seamlessly. So, I support them in using WLB policies and practices (Flora, 40 years old, manager).

Another participant perceives WLB policies and practices as important tools that a manager can use to inspire, influence, and motivate employees to achieve organisational goals.

> Personally, I consider WLB policies and practices as important tools at my disposal. I have used them to inspire, influence, and motivate my employees to achieve organisational goals…and trust me, it's working wonders (Boris, 42 years old, manager).

This leadership style somewhat aligns with the approach knowns as leader-member exchange – a relational approach to leadership that focuses on the quality of a supervisor-subordinate relationship in which leaders value subordinates and help them to achieve WLB (Major and Lauzun, 2010: Tummers and Bronkhorst, 2014). Another participant commented on the kind of impetus she experiences when she's allowed to use WLB policies and practices.

> My manager allows me to benefit from flexible working hours, annualised working hours, and other WLB policies – these policies help me balance my work and family responsibilities. This motivates me a lot, and I always go the extra mile to achieve my goals. I want to do more to appreciate my manager (Cynthia, 32, years old, employee).

Within the broader spectrum of supportive leadership and in line with the findings of Wang and Walumbwa (2007), transformational leadership provides the necessary support for employees to achieve WLB. The findings further show that transformational leadership motivates and stimulates employees to surpass their expected levels of performance (Gumusluoglu and Ilsev, 2009; Jung and Wickrama, 2008). Transformational leadership is more supportive of WLB than transactional leadership because it provides employees with the support that they need to achieve a desirable balance between their work and non-work lives. In other words, a transformational leader can be described as a work-life supportive leader, defined by Kossek et al. (2023) as a 'leadership characteristic when leaders 1. prioritize actions to provide active support for employees' needs and preferences for managing work, family, and personal life roles; and 2. are experienced by subordinates as exhibiting such behaviours' (p.186). These findings show how a transformational leader can leverage individualised consideration (Bass, 1985, 1990) to create a win-win situation in an organisation – a situation in which the organisation achieves its goal (a win) and employees also achieve WLB (another win).

Reciprocal Behaviour and Work-life balance

Our data analysis revealed patterns of reciprocal behaviour associated with transactional and transformational leadership styles in relation to managers allowing employees to use WLB policies and practices. Reciprocal behaviour tends to create a relationship of 'give and take' between managers and employees, which is one of the basic tenets of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). Many managers, specifically, in Nigeria, accede to allowing their employees to use WLB policies and practices only if doing so will help in the achievement of organisational goals. One participant said:

> I'm always open to doing anything that will help the company grow. If using WLB will help the company grow, then yes. Otherwise, I won't allow it (Patricia, 45 years old, manager).

Another manager reported allowing employees to use WLB policies and practices as a reward for excellent performance in terms of meeting and surpassing targets, which is directly connected to the core tenets of transactional leadership, which offers reward for excellent performance and punishment for poor performance (see Xirasagar, 2008; Zagorsek et al., 2009).

> Sometimes, I do let my employees use WLB policies and practices as a reward for their performance. For example, Juliet was allowed some flexibility in terms of when she starts and finishes work, because she has consistently met her targets for six months. So, the flexibility was granted as a reward for her diligence and achievement. This privilege is not open to everybody – it is a reward only for excellent performance (Richard, 42 years old, manager).

The accounts of other participants who appeared to be transformational leaders are replete with examples of this give-and-take relationship. One participant said:

> I consider it necessary to allow my employees to use certain WLB policies and practices, because it is important for their development, engagement, and healthy state of mind, which, in turn, will benefit the organisation. The simple exchange

> logic there is that: I allow them to use WLB policies and practices, and they give
> me their loyalty and excellent performance in return (Muhammad, 43 years old,
> manager).

Here, the participant appears to be a transformational leader, yet he highlights reciprocal behaviour in relation to using WLB policies and practices. All the employee participants also accede to the fact that their managers allow them to use WLB policies and practices either as a reward for excellent performance or if allowing the use thereof will help the organisation achieve its goals. Furthermore, the employee participants tend to go above and beyond the call of duty when their managers help them achieve WLB. One participant commented:

> My manager is a nice person. She always cares about my familial responsibilities
> and lets me use some of the WLB policies available here…and those policies have
> been my saving grace in terms of fulfilling my familial duties. That is why I often
> go the extra mile in discharging my work duties. I always give my very best to
> make sure I pay her back. As you know, [from the person to] whom much is given,
> much is expected (Lola, 32 years old, employee).

The key insight here is that on the one hand, both transactional and transformational leaders give WLB policies and practices in return for loyalty and excellent performance, which helps organisations to achieve their objectives. On the other hand, employees who are allowed to use WLB policies and practices reciprocate this gesture. This is the expectation of reciprocity (Blau, 1964; Yang, 2012). Positive expectations and a state of psychological indebtedness are both antecedents to and consequences of social exchange (Molm et al., 2000; Tsai and Kang, 2019).

Discussion and Conclusion

This study uses social exchange theory to examine the impacts of leadership on WLB. The findings suggest that both transactional and transformational leadership styles involve strong reciprocal relationships between managers and employees and are relevant in employees' use of WLB policies and practices. A key tenet of social exchange theory is that people form and

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maintain relationships with people on whom they are dependent for rewards and that repeated

exchanges are integral to social (rather than economic) exchanges (Emerson, 1972a, 1972b).

This 'give-and-take' behaviour provides an understanding of the impact of leadership on

employees' ability to use WLB policies and practices. Furthermore, this study responds to the

call in the extant literature on this topic to align work-life and leadership literature, an issue

that has, to date, largely been overlooked (see Kossek et al., 2023). We crafted our discussion

around transactional and transformational leadership styles, which allowed us to examine

leadership from different approaches in relation to employees' usage of WLB policies and

practices. Thus, we found that many participants (managers) consent to their employees using

WLB policies and practices only as a reward for excellent performance and loyalty to the

organisation. This finding demonstrates transactional leadership in which a leader

fundamentally encourages exchanging rewards for effectiveness, excellent performance, and

achievement of work task (Abdelwahed et al., 2023; Fernando et al., 2020). The findings also

evince the reciprocity principle of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano and

Mitchell, 2005), which is predicated on rewards (Lee and Cadogan, 2009), and the principle of

cost-benefit exchange between leaders and followers (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005; Lee and

Cadogan, 2009). Furthermore, the study findings highlight the participants' characteristics of

transformational leadership or what Kossek et al. (2023) describes as a 'work-life supportive

leadership' (p. 183), such as helping employees to achieve WLB through different WLB

policies and practices. This approach consequently motivates and stimulates employees to put

in their best efforts at work and surpass their expected levels of performance. Thus,

theoretically, while transformational or work-life supportive leadership prioritises work

outcomes, it is concerned with and benefits all broader non-work outcomes, such as an increase

in life satisfaction and psychological detachment (Kossek et al., 2023; Syrek et al., 2013). This

approach also manifests in the principle of social exchange theory in that managers provide

work-life support leadership, and employees return the gesture with a positive work attitude and excellent performance. Social exchange theory proposes that employees tend to respond to their leaders (managers) with extra-role behaviours – they feel a sense of duty to recompensate their leaders with better attitudes and behaviours when they feel their leaders have invested in them or helped them (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005; Hsu et al., 2019; Karatepe, 2015). Therefore, the desire to achieve WLB leads many employees to go above and beyond the call of duty to perform to a high standard, which, in return, is rewarded with approval to use WLB policies and practices. These non-contractual exchanges emphasise reciprocity and are based on trust (Blau, 1986; Homans, 1961; Hsu et al., 2019; Kim and Qu, 2020). The findings of the present study demonstrate that social exchange theory goes beyond monetary rewards – it extends to helping employees achieve their non-work outcomes (WLB by extension), which is predicated on work-life support leadership.

The present study makes two important contributions to the extant literature. First, the separation of leadership and work-life literature has prevented leadership and work-life theories from appropriately capturing contemporary employment experiences and holding back their scholarly development (Kossek et al., 2023). The present study integrates the two concepts in order to advance understanding of leadership and WLB, thus enabling employers and employees to understand the impacts of transactional and transformational leadership styles on WLB. It also helps employees to understand the intricacy of the non-contractual exchanges that may help them achieve WLB. Second, the present study explained the dynamics between behaviour, performance, and rewards between leaders (managers) and employees through the lens of social exchange theory (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). It extended our understanding of the exchanges between leaders and followers and the logical interconnectivity between leadership and WLB. In conclusion, our study has demonstrated that leadership style is relevant in employees' use of WLB policies and practices. Transformational leadership (Houle et al.,

2020; Zhou et al., 2020) is far more supportive of WLB than transactional leadership, which is exclusively task-oriented and is less concerned with employees' non-work outcomes (Ozcan and Ozturk, 2020). In sum, these findings integrate the extant literature on leadership and WLB and highlight the importance of leadership in WLB matters. Additionally, the findings suggest that employees need to understand the reciprocal behaviour and the non-contractual exchanges involved in leader-follower relationships. This understanding is important for creating a healthy workplace atmosphere and ultimately for achieving individual employee and organisational goals.

Implications, Limitations, and an Agenda for Future Research

The results of this research outlined some theoretical and practical implications for WLB, leadership, and social exchange theory. The study integrated these three concepts, thus enhancing our understanding of and the discussion on work-life supportive leadership and the relevant reciprocal interdependence. Such integration may help in strengthening these fields in new directions and to respond to the calls for stymied theoretical development (see Casper et al., 2018; Lemoine et al., 2019). Furthermore, Kossek et al. (2023) argue that integrating the leadership and WLB fields is crucial for addressing important practical and conceptual challenges. The results presented in this study therefore covered the gaps in the literature. The findings also have implications for practice, revealing that many managers are transactional leaders, and they purposefully allow their employees to use WLB policies and practices only as a reward for meeting targets and for excellent performance. In essence, this means that employees who fall short of the required targets and expected performance are not allowed to use WLB policies and practices. It implies that such employees are likely to experience incessant work-life conflict, which undoubtedly may have further negative implications for their work engagement, overall wellbeing, and work performance. The segregation of employees as either high or low-performing employees may also cause a toxic workplace

environment in which negative and antagonistic behaviours flourish. Despite the important contributions of the present study, it does have some limitations, many of which lend themselves to directions for future research. From a methodological point of view, the extent to which the findings of this research can be generalised is constrained by the small sample size. Therefore, future research may collect quantitative data to examine the impact of leadership on WLB in order to get a sense of the scale and generalisability of the results herein. Furthermore, this study has used Nigeria as the research context, which may further impede the generalisability of the results. It will be fruitful for future research to replicate the study in different contexts. Finally, future research might seek to use other leadership styles beside transactional and transformational leadership styles. We hope that our study will open exciting new research opportunities in the fields of leadership and WLB, specifically in the global South. The integration of the two constructs will help reinvigorate these fields of study and provide greater theoretical development and clarity.

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