SHIFTING PRIORITIES AND EXPECTATIONS IN THE NEW WORLD OF WORK. INSIGHTS FROM MILLENNIALS AND GENERATION Z

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Abstract. In the contemporary world of work and modern business, the well-being of a company is directly linked with the well-being of its employees, and in this context, the proactive promotion of work-life balance has become more important than ever because it meets the new ideal and is an ongoing challenge through the lens of the younger generation's age groups. By unpacking work-life balance into five drivers, the present paper aims to explore the recent trends, priorities, and expectations of the modern workforce. The target population was represented by two generations of employees, Millennials and Generation Z, and the research hypotheses were tested using structural equation in SmartPLS. The results of this research aim to enhance the current knowledge base, offering a distinct perspective along with significant findings for employers, managers, recruiters, policymakers, and other nodes of control who can gain insights regarding work-related priorities and expectations.

1. Introduction

Due to workforce demographic shifts in recent times, the priorities of modern-day employees have evolved. The lifestyle of people has also transformed in many ways because of their changing attitudes towards life and work. The increasing share of Generation Y (Gen Y)/ Millennials and the career beginnings of Generation Z (Gen Z) reshape the workforce and transform workplace culture and the work environment. Prior scholars explain that the priorities, needs, and expectations of contemporary employees have transformed because they have a distinct mentality and show different behavioral patterns in comparison to the older ones, placing a higher value on a healthy work-life balance (Robak, 2017; Goh & Lee, 2018; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2019; Dabija et al., 2022; Trifan & Pantea, 2023).

The interest in researching this concept is derived from the perceived benefits of putting it into practice. Previous studies have linked a healthy work-life balance (WLB) to job and life happiness, enhanced productivity, a higher commitment to the organization, higher career advancement, less absenteeism, and reduced turnover intentions (Allen et al., 2000; Bataineh, 2019; Rachmadini & Riyanto, 2020; Lamovšek et al., 2022; Păunescu et al., 2024b). Even though the significance of WLB and the associated benefits are well known, it still remains a huge challenge to apply it in real life. Facing these challenges, the concept of WLB must be

understood from the standpoint of the contemporary workforce in order to attract, motivate, and retain this particular target group.

The contemporary workplace requires an innovative perspective that embraces tactics that prioritize emotional and physical well-being, facilitate the establishment of boundaries, support alternative productivity assessment metrics, and empower employees to feel actively engaged in integrating their professional and personal lives. Against this backdrop, the present paper aims to explore the recent trends, priorities, and expectations of the modern workforce (Gen Y and Gen Z). Compared with the older generations, these newer generations seem to be aligned with the characteristics of their peers in other parts of the world and have work opportunities and experiences in the global work market. To effectively manage a new generation of individuals, it is essential to understand their work and life values, which reflect what is important to them in the environments where they work and live. Moreover, the well-being of a company is directly linked with the well-being of its employees, and in this context, understanding employees' new needs, priorities, and expectations is capital, creating both challenges and opportunities to rethink workplace culture and environment by developing policies and programs and creating positive relationships, which will develop a way of working where employees are supported and given the keys to promoting their own WLB.

The contribution of this study is supported by the significance of WLB in the contemporary world of work and modern business, as it represents a new ideal as well as an ongoing challenge for the modern workforce. In this context, this paper aims to enhance the current knowledge base by providing a distinct perspective along with significant findings for employers, managers, recruiters, and policymakers, who can gain insights regarding work-related priorities and expectations through the lens of the younger generation's age groups, which represent the future of the global workforce. To the best of our knowledge, in Romania, research on this topic is limited, especially in the context of gender and using a quantitative approach and PLS-SEM.

The study is structured as follows: Section 2 presents a review of the scientific literature and the hypotheses of the present study. Section 3 explains the methodology of this research, particularly the research sample, data collection process, and questionnaire measures. In Section 4, the results are reported. The paper ends with the present study's overall findings and implications, discusses the limitations of this approach, and offers avenues for future research.

2. Literature review and hypotheses

Despite the fact that labor is typically seen from an economic viewpoint as just one product that a person may sell or provide on the job market in order to produce commodities and services that would satisfy material desires, in reality, it goes much farther (Nam, 2014). Work provides humans with a sense of identity, determines their social standing, and also satisfies their desire for belonging. It is impossible to separate work from a person's life because it is the basis of their existence. Work should be integrated with other life domains because it is a component of life and is necessary for an employee's well-being. However, it is just one dimension of a person's life, and it must be understood that the time spent outside the workplace with family, also affects the employee's mental state and, ultimately, their behavior as well. In certain stages of life, it becomes difficult and stressful for an employee to manage a perfect balance between work, career, and family. Therefore, the consequence of this lack of balance starts to manifest itself in the form of poor performance, higher stress, burnout, absenteeism, turnover intentions, a reduced level of patience, a

guilty feeling, and a decreased quality of life (Johari et al., 2018; Kumara & Fasana, 2018; Bataineh, 2019; Rachmadini & Riyanto, 2020; Waworuntu et al., 2022; Trifan & Pantea, 2023; Sariraei et al., 2024).

This phenomenon of being unable to manage work and personal life is driving a growing interest in WLB research. Muasya (2016) and Felstead and Henseke (2017) explain the concept of WLB as the efficient functioning of both work life and personal/family life with the least amount of conflict. According to prior scholars, finding a way to a harmoniously coexist is a challenge that everyone faces at some point, regardless of age, gender, wealth, social economic status, or family structure (Smith, 2010; Ong & Jeyaraj, 2014; Muasya, 2016). Smith (2010) points out that to obtain full satisfaction in one's life, the WLB is absolutely crucial. Riyanto et al. (2019) explain that employees' WLB significantly boosts their contribution to organizational performance while also strengthening their commitment to their employer. Moreover, according to Walga (2018), those who have a better WLB usually also do a better job at the workplace. Furthermore, Koubova and Buchko (2013) and Lamovšek et al. (2022) demonstrate that a healthy WLB is also linked to job satisfaction and happiness in life, enhanced productivity, higher career advancement, less absenteeism, and reduced turnover intentions.

The importance of supporting WLB has risen in recent times, because it meets the needs, priorities, and expectations of the newer generation of employees (Allen et al., 2000; Lamovšek et al., 2022; Trifan & Pantea, 2023). Organizations need to bridge this gap by providing approval, support, significant actions, and a corporate cultural change that would quide individuals to choose their professional paths and enable company executives to integrate WLB considerations into workforce policies and procedures (Harrington & Ladge, 2009; Muasya, 2016). Organizations must also modify their internal policies and revise the manner in which they present employment offers and their organizational image to future employees (Păunescu et al., 2024a). As companies transform, it will be essential to rethink the employee experience and their well-being strategy in a more holistic and inclusive way.

In this context, it is important to understand WLB through the lens of Gen Y and Gen Z due to the fact that the workforce demographics have shifted over the past few years by reducing the presence of Baby Boomers and X-Gen employees, coupled with the increasing number of employees from Gen Y and the career beginnings of Gen Z (Solnet et al., 2016; Goh & Lee, 2018; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2019; Trifan & Pantea, 2023). Prior scholars explain that the younger generation has distinct beliefs and job aspirations, and their inclusion in the labor field has led to a significant transformation (Solnet et al., 2016; Goh & Lee, 2018; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2019; Tennakoon & Senarathne, 2020; de Boer & Bordoloi, 2022; Ivasciuc et al., 2022; Trifan & Pantea, 2023). According to Robak (2017) and Goh and Lee (2018), the beliefs they hold as well as the expectations they have, are influenced by the environment and values in which they were raised. This implies that living their whole live in similar environments, having similar attitudes and approaches toward work and personal life, and being influenced by technological advancements can all make them think, make decisions, and act in a similar way (Robak, 2017; Tennakoon & Senarathne, 2020).

To effectively manage a new generation of individuals, it is essential to understand their work and life values, which reflect what is important to them in the environments where they work and live. Because research on the factors influencing Y Gen and Z's work-life values is limited in Romania, more empirical research using various methods and contexts is required to advance the body of knowledge.

2.1. Work satisfaction

Work satisfaction is strongly linked to a number of attitudes and results at the workplace, especially WLB. Due to its favorable effects like organizational commitment and work engagement, organizations see work satisfaction as a crucial aspect of employee attitude (Walga, 2018). It is considered that employees will be more motivated to achieve optimal work results and have increased performance when experiencing higher levels of satisfaction (Waworuntu et al., 2022).

According to the existing literature, work satisfaction has a favorable influence on the work performance of employees (Susanty & Miradipta, 2013; Bataineh, 2019; Nurjanah & Indawati, 2021; Waworuntu et al., 2022). Scholars explain that work satisfaction is somehow connected to employees' emotions toward their workplace. In this line, prior scholars considered work satisfaction an emotional response of employees to their physical working conditions (Waworuntu et al., 2022; Wolor et al., 2020). Since the level of work satisfaction is directly linked to whether or not the employees expectations have been met, it is clear that lower work satisfaction has a direct link to the fact that workers expectations were not completely fulfilled (Bataineh, 2019; Wolor et al., 2020; Waworuntu et al., 2022). Prior scholars explain that employees who have positive feelings and emotions and lower stress levels at their workplaces and in their personal life have a tendency to be more satisfied with their work and ultimately experience work satisfaction (Duffy et al., 2016; Bataineh, 2019). This finding justifies and is in line with the outcomes of Nurjanah and Indawati (2021), which showed how the balance between work and family life can result in increased sensations of happiness due to the ability to balance obligations within the domestic and employment spheres of life, which ultimately makes them perceive higher job satisfaction. Employees who are unable to find an effective balance between self-respect and effort at the workplace face an uphill battle with workload control, fulfilling personal needs, and work obligations (Khallash & Kruse, 2012) that can ultimately result in poor performance, higher stress, burnout, absenteeism, turnover intentions, a reduced level of patience, a guilty feeling, and a decreased quality of life (Johari et al., 2018; Kumara & Fasana, 2018; Bataineh, 2019; Rachmadini & Riyanto, 2020; Waworuntu et al., 2022; Wan & Duffy, 2022).

The benefits of improved employee performance will be enjoyed by organizations that invest in opportunities that allow employees to properly manage family and career roles. In this line, Bataineh (2019) and Rachmadini and Riyanto (2020) explain that companies that provide enough opportunities for their employees to deal with their personal and professional duties are practically investing in their employees and will receive higher work engagement, greater commitment, and better work performance in return. Also, previous scholars have concluded that members of the young generations who have the potential to separate their personal time from work-related commitments are considered to be more productive in the workplace (Johari et al., 2018; Bataineh, 2019; Waworuntu et al., 2022). Using these arguments, we derive hypothesis 1:

Hypothesis 1 (H₁): *Work satisfaction influences in a positive way an individual's work-life balance.*

2.2. Work motivation

Motivation may be described as a psychosomatic process that directs an individual to behave in ways that satisfy his unfulfilled wants (Latham, 2012; Tennakoon & Senarathne, 2020;

Kocman & Weber, 2018). Work motivation has become a key area of concern within organizations. While some employees exhibit positive attitudes toward the workplace and have high levels of work motivation, others exhibit the opposite, leading to unfulfilled labor needs within the organization.

Several studies have found a strong association within work motivation and WLB (Hossain et al., 2018; Oktosatrio, 2018; Rahman, 2019; Tsvangirai & Chinyamurindi, 2019). According to a study by Oktosatrio (2018), when the public sector employees in Jakarta were examined, the WLB and the work motivation level of these workers were strongly correlated. Similarly, this point of view has been verified by a study by Tennakoon and Senarathne (2020), in which the employees working in the Sri Lanka public sector were examined. Also, prior research shows that highly motivated workers are more likely to be involved in their work, and they derive a sense of satisfaction from this (Tsvangirai & Chinyamurindi, 2019). Rahman (2019) demonstrated in her study how important it is for female bankers in Bangladesh to have a good WLB in order to increase work motivation, which ultimately leads to job satisfaction.

It is also believed that the success of a company also depends on the work motivation level, and this is one reason why managers must ensure employee work motivation (Tsvangirai & Chinyamurindi, 2019). Therefore, it is obvious that motivated workers also have the potential to obtain and maintain a healthy WLB. Based on the related empirical evidence, we assume that Gen Y and Z employees are powered by their work motivation to fulfill their balance between personal life and work goals. We have established the second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2 (H$_2$): *Work motivation influences in a positive way an individual's work-life balance.*

2.3. Flexibility and freedom

Scholars believe that, besides promoting the satisfaction and well-being of employees, organizations should encourage greater flexibility and freedom within the workplace. On the one hand, this helps employees fulfill their life and work goals; on the other hand, it helps the organization raise its productivity level. According to Hill et al. (2008), flexibility and freedom may be defined from two different perspectives. From an organizational perspective, a company's level of flexibility and freedom is characterized by its ability to adapt to changes in its environment. Employees perceive flexibility and freedom as the extent to which they can freely organize important aspects of their professional life, including work-related decisions like where, when, what, how long, and how they deliver their work.

In today's world, the concept of workplace flexibility and freedom is gaining a lot of recognition (Hill et al., 2008; Capnary et al., 2018). Younger generations demand a flexible and free workplace that gives them the chance and independence to go after their own goals (Wan & Duffy, 2022). They demand the freedom to choose when, where, what and how much they work, as well as to make decisions and act independently without constant supervision, and to freely express their ideas without negative consequences. They believe they work smarter than hard and live an easy life, which allows them to honor their personal and professional commitments and protect their interests outside of their work (Tennakoon & Senarathne, 2020). Both, Gen Z and Gen Y aspire to a perfect WLB and expect their companies and supervisors to provide them flexibility and freedom in the execution of their jobs. Hence, both flexibility and freedom are undoubtedly capable of affecting their jobs in a positive way and making those jobs more attractive (Hossain et al., 2018). All these characteristics are vital for

both generations when they are choosing their careers to pursue or when they are engaged in different sectors of the workplace. According to Tennakoon and Senarathne (2020), a flexible workplace is an important way to attract and keep key employees and get the business moving in the right direction. Also, if the work arrangements become more flexible and allow for greater freedom, employees will have a perception of psychological control, and this may lead to their WLB. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3 (H₃): *Feelings of workplace freedom and flexibility have a positive impact on an individual's work-life balance.*

2.4. Rating, feedback and support

According to Wisniewski et al. (2020), feedback can be defined as details given to a person about his or her performance or knowledge by another human after a thorough evaluation. Also Wisniewski et al. (2020) explain that the main scope of feedback is to minimize, reduce, or remove any variance between the present performance and the final target. In addition to feedback and support, employee rating is extremely important when dealing with workplace relationships because it acts as a performance assessment mechanism employed to categorize an employee's contributions, abilities, and overall performance, usually when deciding how to distribute increased wages and incentives (Meldgin et al., 2024). The upcoming generations or the younger employees have usually been present in cultures or environments that allow them to receive a lot of feedback, appreciation, support, praise, counsel, direction, advice, individual focus, and focus on the results of the whole process (Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008; Tennakoon & Senarathne, 2020). Therefore, they expect the same findings in the work culture and environment. Tennakoon and Senarathne (2020) explain that the best members of Gen Y are those who are independent and enterprising thinkers who value accountability. In exchange for their accomplishments, they only require praise, reward, and recognition.

In their study, Thompson and Gregory (2012) highlight that managers usually acquire parental-like responsibility when the younger generation arrives at the workplace. Also, previous scholars have shown that immediate feedback, such as gratification and rewards, is often expected by new generations when they perform well (Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008; Mas-Machuca et al., 2016; Naz et al., 2020; Davidavićiene et al., 2023). In this vein, mentoring programs have become commonplace at many organizations in order to allow these younger generations to develop their career pathways. Scholars such as Wisniewski et al. (2020) state that a higher level of counseling is critical to successfully working with the members of these younger generations. According to the Mas-Machuca et al. (2016) study, proper support from the supervisor and seniors has a positive effect on the WLB of their workers. It is also highlighted that immediate feedback from the manager's side, along with their support, is extremely important when dealing workplace relationships with younger employees (Naz et al., 2020; Jankelová et al., 2022). Therefore, feedback, rating and support are considered to be the upcoming determinants of a WLB for Millennials and Gen Z. Based on the above evidence, we anticipate that rating, feedback, and support will have a beneficial effect on WLB, and we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 4 (H₄): *Rating, feedback and support are positively related to work-life balance.*

2.5. Technological adaptation

In today's world, technology is used to such an extent that its involvement in the younger generation's life is evident and impacts all parts of their life, including their both personal and professional. There is no doubt that technology is evolving at a faster pace and has transformed and is still transforming the entire world (Pelau et al., 2021; Trifan & Pantea, 2023; Cuc et al., 2023). This technological transformation requires employees to possess the ability to embrace and their readiness to adapt to new settings, moving from traditional work practices to more innovative ones (Trifan & Pantea, 2023). According to Kumar and Velmurugan (2018), the more affordable and easily accessible technology becomes, the easier it will be for the employees to remain attached to their workplaces even after working hours, thus affecting their WLB. Prior scholars explain that accessibility and usability are two important characteristics of technology that will pressurize and stress the employees to not disconnect from their work even during their personal time (Aloulou et al., 2023; Maçada et al., 2022; Kotera & Correa Vione, 2020; Hossain et al., 2018).

According to prior scholars, Gen Z is a true digital native generation (Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2019), capable of handling technology with less difficulty as they were born in an era when it already existed (Goh & Lee, 2018; Wan & Duffy, 2022). They are highly competent when it comes to internet and social media usage because the members belonging to this new generation of employees were born and grew up in the period when some of the most intense changes were made in the digital world, with the arrival of the web, the internet, and smartphones. This generation is capable of verifying the information or data and can also immediately share the information they gather with their peers (Tennakoon & Senarathne, 2020). According to Kumar and Velmurugan (2018), technology can be used as a weapon, which provides individuals with the opportunity to influence how and to what extent they can control their boundaries between work and personal life. Also, the scholars consider that Gen Y may be resistant to or uninterested in technology, and as a result, they will struggle to maintain their position at the workplace and in the digital world (Kumar & Velmurugan, 2018; Trifan & Pantea, 2023). Using these arguments, the following hypothesis is derived:

Hypothesis 5 (H5): *Technological adaptation influences in a positive way an individual's work-life balance.*

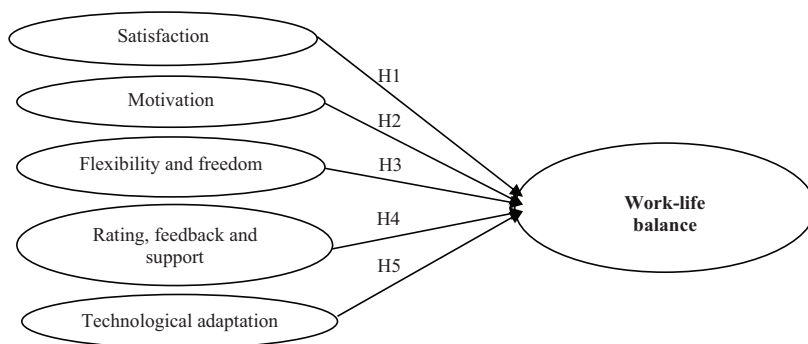The conceptual framework of the present study is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework (source: authors development)

3. Research methodology

This study is based on an online survey conducted in January 2023. The target population was represented by two Romanian generations of employees, namely Millennials/Gen Y and Gen Z. In our study, the Gen Y sample (N = 165) comprises those who have work experience and are dominating the workforce, and the Gen Z sample (N = 234) comprises those people who are just starting their careers or have already done so (Table 1). Using convenience sampling technique and a Google Form, questionnaires were distributed to employees from both the public and private sectors.

The questionnaire has two distinct parts: a series of questions about respondents' demographics and 37 items measured using a 5-point Likert-scale and developed in line with previous research. Some scale items have been revised to correspond with the purpose of this study. WLB was measured with six items, adopted and also adapted from previous research (Dex & Bond, 2005; Hossain et al., 2018; Tennakoon & Senarathne, 2020). The feeling of satisfaction and the feeling of freedom and flexibility were measured with five items each, adopted from Hossain et al. (2018); Tennakoon and Senarathne (2020) and Waworuntu et al. (2022). The four measuring items of motivation feeling and the nine measuring items of rating, feedback and support were taken from previous research on this topic (Hossain et al., 2018; Tennakoon & Senarathne, 2020; Waworuntu et al., 2022). Technological adaptation was measured with eight items adopted and also adapted from Tennakoon and Senarathne (2020). The research constructs are presented in Appendix.

Table 1. Respondents profile (source: authors development)

Demographics		Generation Y (N = 165)		Generation Z (N = 234)	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	114	69.1	162	69.2
	Male	51	30.9	72	30.8
Marital Status	Married	116	70.3	26	11,1
	Single	28	17.0	138	59.0
	Others	21	12.7	70	29.9
Children	None	58	35.1	217	92.7
	1	58	35.1	16	6.9
	2	46	27.9	0	0
	>=3	3	1.9	1	0,4
Work field	Information Technology	7	4.2	12	5.2
	Administration	16	9.7	27	11.5
	Industry	27	16.4	37	15.8
	Finance/Accounting	31	18.8	45	19.2
	Marketing	13	7.9	22	9.4
	Human Resources	7	4.2	5	2,1
	Consultancy	6	3.6	2	0.9
	Other	29	17.6	44	18.8
	Customer Service	10	6.1	16	6.8
	Education	19	11.5	24	10.3

Demographics		Generation Y (N = 165)		Generation Z (N = 234)	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Work Areas	Urban	125	75.8	203	86.8
	Rural	40	24.2	31	13.2
Work Time	Full-time	161	97.6	198	84.6
	Part-time	4	2.4	36	15.4
Work experience (years)	<1	8	4.8	82	35.1
	1–5	23	13.9	129	55.1
	6–10	42	25.5	21	8.9
	11–20	78	47.3	2	0.9
	>20	14	8.5	0	0
Income (Lei)	<2000	11	6.7	46	19.7
	2000–4000	85	51.5	144	61.5
	4000–6000	41	24.8	36	15.4
	6000–8000	11	6.7	5	2.1
	>8000	17	10.3	3	1.3

4. Research results

4.1. Measurement model

The measurement model is presented in Table 2, which reports the results of different tests. Following the standard criteria for selecting construct items, we have removed some items from the proposed constructs. We have not considered two items from the rating, feedback and support construct and one item from the technological adaptation construct because the values of the measurement tests were not satisfactory for these items. As shown in Table 2, the construct values for Skewness and Kurtosis are within –2 and +2, confirming the normality test. According to Harmon's one-factor analysis, a 23.58% variation of the first factor was found, which is below the 50% and indicates the absence of common method bias.

The reliability was analyzed using composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha analysis, both having values above 0.70 (Henseler & Sarstedt, 2013). Most items loadings are over 0.60, indicating convergent validity. Also, the average variance extracted is greater or close to 0.50 (Hair et al., 2021) and fulfills the standard criteria. According to prior scholars, the convergent validity is still adequate if the average variance extracted value is smaller than 0.50 but the composite reliability is higher than 0.60 (Hair et al., 2021; Khattak et al., 2021; Mehmood et al., 2018). Our smallest average variance extracted is 0.498 but the composite reliability is 0.767.

According to Table 3 and Table 4, the results obtained suggest adequate discriminant validity analysis. Table 5 shows the results of the Heterotrait-Monotrait test with values lower than the 0.85 threshold (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 2. The measurement of the model (source: authors development)

Construct	Item	Loading	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average variance extracted	Skewness	Kurtosis
Freedom and flexibility (F)	F.1	0.712	0.748	0.767	0.498	−.855	.697
	F.2	0.83					
	F.3	0.654					
	F.4	0.625					
	F.5	0.688					
Motivation (M)	M.1	0.88	0.849	0.884	0.682	−.751	.419
	M.2	0.849					
	M.3	0.797					
	M.4	0.773					
Rating, feedback and support (RFS)	RFS.1	0.788	0.845	0.862	0.523	−.657	−.051
	RFS.2	0.552					
	RFS.5	0.624					
	RFS.6	0.804					
	RFS.7	0.788					
	RFS.8	0.734					
	RFS.9	0.734					
Satisfaction (S)	S.1	0.833	0.875	0.890	0.666	−.748	−.379
	S.2	0.863					
	S.3	0.828					
	S.4	0.824					
	S.5	0.725					
Technological adaptation (T)	T.1	0.78	0.893	0.907	0.610	.483	1.496
	T.2	0.821					
	T.3	0.648					
	T.4	0.791					
	T.5	0.791					
	T.7	0.831					
	T.8	0.79					
Work-life balance (WLB)	WLB.1	0.813	0.865	0.863	0.590	−.641	0.109
	WLB.2	0.757					
	WLB.3	0.666					
	WLB.4	0.794					
	WLB.5	0.785					
	WLB.6	0.784					

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker criterion (source: authors development)

Construct	F	M	RFS	S	T	WLB
F	0.705					
M	0.322	0.826				
RFS	0.664	0.299	0.723			
S	0.323	0.115	0.319	0.816		
T	0.247	−0.169	0.293	0.267	0.781	
WLB	0.624	0.387	0.624	0.424	0.226	0.768

Table 4. Cross loadings (source: authors development)

	F	M	RFS	S	T	WLB
F.1	**0.712**	0.205	0.368	0.158	0.192	0.361
F.2	**0.83**	0.232	0.51	0.301	0.242	0.557
F.3	**0.654**	0.245	0.49	0.249	0.164	0.47
F.4	**0.625**	0.199	0.348	0.11	0.019	0.317
F.5	**0.688**	0.251	0.586	0.265	0.205	0.434
M.1	0.254	**0.88**	0.25	0.131	−0.121	0.397
M.2	0.239	**0.849**	0.202	0.093	−0.169	0.257
M.3	0.195	**0.797**	0.158	−0.003	−0.235	0.194
M.4	0.341	**0.773**	0.329	0.112	−0.088	0.35
RFS.1	0.588	0.244	**0.788**	0.275	0.169	0.527
RFS.2	0.351	0.228	**0.552**	0.128	0.083	0.327
RFS.5	0.418	0.222	**0.624**	0.187	0.118	0.351
RFS.6	0.464	0.269	**0.804**	0.228	0.18	0.545
RFS.7	0.478	0.13	**0.788**	0.256	0.386	0.447
RFS.8	0.475	0.234	**0.734**	0.259	0.214	0.432
RFS.9	0.558	0.197	**0.734**	0.255	0.303	0.475
S.1	0.225	0.14	0.256	**0.833**	0.142	0.365
S.2	0.321	0.079	0.262	**0.863**	0.293	0.396
S.3	0.257	0.105	0.254	**0.828**	0.17	0.316
S.4	0.247	0.084	0.245	**0.824**	0.275	0.38
S.5	0.274	0.056	0.31	**0.725**	0.195	0.237
T.1	0.23	−0.061	0.21	0.182	**0.78**	0.196
T.2	0.245	−0.121	0.255	0.228	**0.821**	0.214
T.3	0.135	−0.085	0.184	0.179	**0.648**	0.126
T.4	0.212	−0.142	0.207	0.241	**0.791**	0.165
T.5	0.132	−0.197	0.171	0.177	**0.791**	0.11
T.7	0.172	−0.187	0.284	0.208	**0.831**	0.197
T.8	0.183	−0.151	0.253	0.236	**0.79**	0.183
WLB.1	0.459	0.317	0.561	0.278	0.207	**0.813**
WLB.2	0.484	0.258	0.452	0.269	0.267	**0.757**
WLB.3	0.476	0.274	0.447	0.192	0.099	**0.666**

End of Table 4

	F	M	RFS	S	T	WLB
WLB.4	0.514	0.289	0.432	0.371	0.12	**0.794**
WLB.5	0.478	0.331	0.421	0.388	0.159	**0.785**
WLB.6	0.469	0.31	0.551	0.43	0.185	**0.784**

Table 5. Heterotrait-Monotrait (source: authors development)

Construct	F	M	RFS	S	T	WLB
F						
M	0.39					
RFS	0.818	0.339				
S	0.381	0.127	0.375			
T	0.287	0.216	0.329	0.296		
WLB	0.76	0.423	0.722	0.473	0.248	

Table 6 presents the results of the collinearity test, and the values less than 5 threshold (Hair et al., 2021) obtained for the variance inflation factor (VIF) do not indicate multicollinearity. The descriptive statistics and the VIF values between constructs are shown in Table 7.

Table 6. Variance inflation factor test (source: authors development)

Construct	Value	Construct	Value
F.1	1.673	S.1	2.307
F.2	1.847	S.2	2.425
F.3	1.324	S.3	2.227
F.4	1.389	S.4	2.105
F.5	1.346	S.5	1.655
M.1	2.106	T.1	2.106
M.2	2.858	T.2	2.239
M.3	2.509	T.3	1.781
M.4	1.444	T.4	2.46
RFS.1	1.877	T.5	2.442
RFS.2	1.345	T.7	3.237
RFS.5	1.467	T.8	2.633
RFS.6	1.975	WLB.1	2.356
RFS.7	2.108	WLB.2	2.049
RFS.8	1.867	WLB.3	1.564
RFS.9	1.745	WLB.4	2.097
		WLB.5	2.192
		WLB.6	1.979

Table 7. Descriptive statistics and VIF (source: authors development)

Construct	Min	Max	Mean	SD	VIF
WLB	1.17	5	3.6061	0.98212	
S	1.00	5	3.7920	0.94732	1.579
M	1.25	5	4.4041	0.64489	1.650
F	1.60	5	4.3624	0.59840	1.934
RFS	1.90	5	4.4810	0.57322	2.113
T	1.78	5	3.5057	0.63733	1.082

4.2. Hypotheses results

The structural equation modeling and program SmartPLS were used to evaluate the relations between the variables, where WLB is dependent and the independent variables are: freedom and flexibility; motivation; rating, feedback and support; satisfaction; and technological adaptation (Figure 2; Table 7). To assess the relationship, a bootstrapping process with 5,000 interactions was applied.
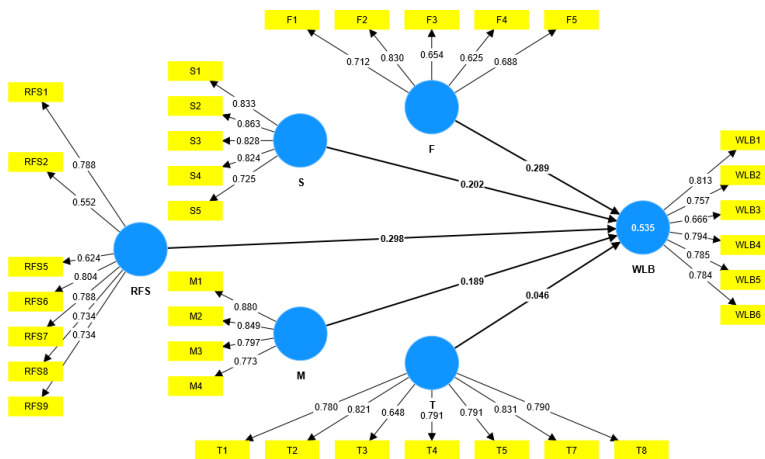
Figure 2. Measurement model (source: authors development)

Table 8. The path coefficients (source: authors development)

H	Paths	Path Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Decision
H (1)	S->WLB	0.202***	5.196	0.000	H (1)-Accepted
H (2)	M->WLB	0.189***	4.981	0.000	H (2)-Accepted
H (3)	F->WLB	0.289***	5.892	0.000	H (3)-Accepted
H (4)	RFS->WLB	0.298***	5.069	0.000	H (4)-Accepted
H (5)	T->WLB	0.046	1.333	0.182	H (5)-Not accepted
R^2	0.535				
Adj.R^2	0.529				

Notes: ***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05.

The results from Table 8, confirm a strong positive association of work satisfaction and WLB (β = 0.202; p = 0.000 < 0.001; t = 5.196). This finding supports our H_1 by concluding that a stronger feeling of satisfaction may result in a greater tendency toward WLB. Also, the results provide support to H_2 (β = 0.189; t = 4.981; p = 0.000< 0.001), and conclude that employees who are motivated to work achieve a healthier WLB. The study's findings highlight that the feeling of freedom and flexibility has a significant and positive impact on WLB (β = 0.289; t = 5.892; p = 0.000 < 0.001). So, our H_3 is accepted and well supported. Also, our findings indicate that the rating, feedback and support have a strong positive association with WLB (β = 0.289; t = 5.069; p = 0.000 < 0.001). Therefore, H_4 is accepted. Regarding H_5, the results indicate no significant connection between technological adaptation and WLB (β = 0.046; p = 0.182 > 0.05; t = 1.333). Therefore, H_5 is not supported. The reason for the insignificant relationship between these constructs can be attributed to the different perceptions of technological adaptation among generations (Y and Z).

Hypotheses testing for Gen Y and Z

According to prior research, every generation is shaped by its circumstances, having a distinct mentality and showing different behavioral patterns (Robak, 2017; Goh & Lee, 2018; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2019; Ivasciuc et al., 2022). Managers must understand the traits of Gen Y and Z, how these individuals operate, and what affects their WLB in order to boost the effectiveness of their organizations. Therefore, these issues require managerial and academic attention and are an ongoing challenge among scholars, employers, recruiters, and policymakers alike.

Regarding how they view interactions between work and family, Gen Y and other generations differ significantly from one another (Kumar & Velmurugan, 2018). For instance, Gen Z is more positive about its prospects and has more realistic expectations for their profession (Goh & Lee, 2018). Also, Gen Z is among the most demanding and distinctive groups, struggles to focus for long periods of time (Pulevska-Ivanovska et al., 2017) and is more reliant on technology than Gen Y is. So, among these generations, the understanding of WLB varies greatly.

Table 9 depicts the path analysis for two different generations of employees. The results show that the feeling of work satisfaction in the Y group (β = 0.111; p = 0.021) is statistically significant at 5% with f^2 value about 0.031, and the satisfaction coefficient in the Z group is significant at 1% (β = 0.529; p = 0.000) with f^2 value about 0.481. As to the connection between work motivation and WLB, the results reports positive coefficients for both Gen Y (β = 0.401) and Z (β = 0.111). However, the results for Gen Y and Z are significant at 1% (p = 0.000 < 0.001) and 5% (p = 0.012 < 0.05) respectively. Secondly, the effect size (f^2) measures whether an independent variable affects a dependent one. Hence, the f^2 value for Gen Y motivation (0.179) is greater than that of Gen Z (0.032) indicating that the feeling of motivation in individuals of Gen Y explains more variability in WLB in comparison to Gen Z. Table 9 further present findings regarding the impact of the feeling of freedom and flexibility on an individual's WLB, which is significantly different for Gen Y and Z. Our findings suggest that a sense of freedom and flexibility affects WLB positively and significantly for Gen Y (= 0.277; p = 0.001; t = 3.183), but negatively for Gen Z (β = −0.092; p = 0.001; t = −3.520). Further, we find a positive and significant link between the feelings of rating, feedback, and support and WLB for both generations of employees. The coefficient for Gen Y is significant at 5% (β = 0.151; p = 0.047) with f^2 value about 0.03, while for Gen Z, its coefficient is significant at 1% (β = 0.314; p = 0.000) with f^2 value about

0.168. These findings are different for the Y and Z Gen groups in terms of significance levels and f-square values. Our results suggest that ratings and feedback from supervisors or managers and organizational support have a significant effect on the WLB of Gen Z employees as compared to the Y Gen. Finally we find that the impact of technological adoption on WLB is different for Gen Y and Gen Z employees. As to Gen Y, the coefficient is significantly negative (β = −0.122; p = 0.027) suggesting that technological adoption may disturb the WLB of Gen Y. On the other hand, we find a positive and significant coefficient of technological adaptation (β = 0.097; p = 0.037) for Gen Z, indicating that the use of technology improves their WLB.

Table 9. Path analysis for Gen Y and Z (source: authors development)

H	Paths	Y Gen				Z Gen			
		Path Coefficient	t-value	p-value	f^2	Path Coefficient	t-value	p-value	f^2
H(1)	S -> WLB	0.111*	2.312	0.021	0.031	0.529***	10.481	0.000	0.481
H(2)	M -> WLB	0.401***	5.247	0.000	0.179	0.111*	2.509	0.012	0.032
H(3)	F -> WLB	0.277**	3.183	0.001	0.075	−0.092**	−3.520	0.001	0.022
H(4)	RFS-> WLB	0.151*	1.99	0.047	0.03	0.314***	6.166	0.000	0.168
H(5)	T -> WLB	−0.122*	−2.211	0.027	0.036	0.097*	2.108	0.037	0.025

Notes: ***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05.

4.3. Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to identify what is important for the younger generation of employees in the environments where they work and live. Initially, we utilized a full sample of respondents and found that feelings of freedom and flexibility, motivation, rating, feedback, support, and satisfaction had a positive and significant impact on WLB, while technological adoption had an insignificant relationship with WLB. Subsequently, we run PLS-SEM on the sub-sample of Gen Y and Z.

The results of the empirical analysis show that the feeling of satisfaction is a key motivator of WLB, but its impact is proven to be more pronounced for Gen Z. Our results confirm that WLB is connected with an individual's satisfaction level; hence, highly satisfied employees of Gen Z are more likely to be involved in their work. It is also thought that an individual's motivation and sense of fulfillment determine their level of success, both personally and professionally. This is the rationale behind managers' commitment to fostering a happy and satisfied workforce.

Similarly, we find a positive and significant impact of rating, feedback, and support on WLB for both generation groups; however, its significance and effect size is greater, explaining more variability in WLB for Gen Z. According to prior research, the upcoming generations or the younger employees have usually been present in cultures or environments that allow them to receive a lot of individualized feedback, appreciation, support, praise, counsel, direction, advice, individual focus, and focus on the results of the whole process (Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008; Tennakoon & Senarathne, 2020). Therefore, this new generation expects the same findings in the culture and work environment. For this reason, a number of companies have begun to develop mentorship programs to direct and advance the careers of younger generations (i.e., Z) (Wisniewski et al., 2020).

According to our findings, the feeling of freedom and flexibility is associated with WLB in the context of Gen Y, but this factor significantly and negatively influences individuals' WLB in the context of Gen Z. The possible reason for this finding could be that Gen Y prioritizes WLB and demands independence and flexibility in how they carry out their work. Younger generations like a flexible workplace that gives them the chance and independence to go after their own goals (Wan & Duffy, 2022).

Moreover, according to our study, the impact of feelings of motivation on WLB is more pronounced for Gen Y as compared to Gen Z. Our findings suggest that individuals from Gen Y have a high sense of self-worth and are ambitious, assertive, driven, dedicated, and highly self-motivated. Considering that this generation will dominate the workforce, it is crucial for organizations to comprehend this generation in the context of WLB. Understanding the differences in WLB motivation levels between the Y and Z Gen, is crucial for managing people towards the achievement of organizational and individual goals.

This study also provide evidence that technological adoption negatively influences the WLB of the older generation (Y), while it positively influences the WLB of the younger generation (Z). Our findings concluded that Z individuals find it simpler to cope with technological innovation. Younger generations anticipate that they have to work less as a result of technical innovation and the digital age, since they have grown more dependent on technology (Goh & Lee, 2018; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2019; Tennakoon & Senarathne, 2020; Wan & Duffy, 2022). On the other hand, the advancement of technology can make employees permanently connected to their jobs and negatively impact their private lives (Kotera & Correa Vione, 2020; Trifan & Pantea, 2023). Even with innovation and technological advancements at their fingertips, employees put forth more effort than usual to meet workplace requirements and this can be one possible reason for the negative relationship between technological adoption and WLB among Gen Y.

5. Conclusions

In the contemporary business environment, the well-being of a company is directly linked with the well-being of its employees, and in this context, a healthy WLB meets the new ideal and is an ongoing challenge for the younger workforce. The increasing share of Gen Y and the career beginnings of Gen Z are reshaping the workforce and transforming workplace culture and the work environment. In this context, the contemporary workplace requires an innovative perspective that embraces tactics that prioritize emotional and physical well-being, facilitate the establishment of boundaries, support alternative productivity assessment metrics, and empower employees to feel actively engaged in integrating their professional and personal life. As companies transform, the big challenge for current managers, supervisors, business owners, recruiters and other nodes of control within an organization is to bridge this gap by understanding the power that providing a more ideal work environment can have on the employees themselves and to rethink the employee experience and their well-being strategy in a more holistic and inclusive way.

To effectively manage a new generation of individuals, it is essential to understand their work and life values, which reflect what is important to them in the environments where they work and live. Moreover, the well-being of a company is directly linked with the well-being of its employees, and in this context, understanding employees' new needs, priorities, and expectations is capital, creating both challenges and opportunities to rethink workplace culture

and environment by developing policies and programs and creating positive relationships, which will develop a way of working where employees are supported and given the keys to promote their own WLB. Against this backdrop, the present paper examines different determinants of WLB in the context of Gen Y and Z.

Focusing on one factor more specifically, it can be deduced that providing younger employees with high levels of support and feedback can boost their WLB. Therefore, businesses need to adjust their work environment in order to be more open to and encourage collaboration between employees seeking feedback and mentors that can insightfully provide it in a meaningful manner. Another area that needs to be carefully monitored for variation is freedom and flexibility. The unique needs of Gen Y employees call for a less rigid workplace structure. However, this should not come at the cost or detriment of Gen Z employees, who might need a more organized schedule and environment. In modern times, technology is at the forefront of many business operations. Taking into account the differences between the generational groups, procedures regarding technological adaptation need to be flexible so that the best outcomes can be achieved for both generations. Moreover, while Gen Y may be more reluctant to adopt new innovations into the workplace, employers should analyze the cost and benefit that such a move would have on all workers within the organization, from the young to the old.

The findings derived from our study must take into account the following limitations and future research directions. First, the research sample size consists of Romanian employees who belong to Gen Z and Gen Y, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. In this regard, additional research can employ the study model and test it in the context of other countries. Future research could also investigate various methods that companies can use to understand employees' new needs, priorities, and expectations, as well as WLB as a whole. Such research would prove beneficial to all stakeholders within an organization, including investors, business managers, and employees. Another limitation of this research is the use of a quantitative method. In future studies, researchers can use the experimental method to provide a more accurate validation of the findings.

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Author contributions

Authors contributed equally to this work.

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APPENDIX

Research constructs (source: authors development)

Variable	Variable code	Items Code	Items
Work Life Balance Source: adapted from Hossain et al. (2018), Tennakoon and Senarathne (2020)	WLB	WLB1.	It is easy for me to balance the demands of my work with those of my personal life.
		WLB2.	When I'm out of work hours, I manage to detach myself from my work and feel good.
		WLB3.	In general, I think that the balance between my professional and personal life is a fair one.
		WLB4.	I consider myself a fulfilled person, both in my professional and personal life.
		WLB5.	I consider that the time I spend at work and the time I have available for personal activities is a balanced one.
		WLB6.	My professional life balances perfectly with my hobbies and time spent with loved ones.
The feeling of work satisfaction Source: adapted from Hossain et al. (2018), Tennakoon and Senarathne (2020), Waworuntu et al. (2022)	S	S1.	At work I consider myself treated as a person, not as a number.
		S2.	My job helps me feel fulfilled.
		S3.	I consider my work to be interesting.
		S4.	I believe that the work I do matches my personal skills and talents.
		S5.	I believe that the monetary rewards received are equivalent to the work performed.

End of the Appendix

Variable	Variable code	Items Code	Items
The feeling of work motivation Source: adapted from Hossain et al. (2018), Tennakoon and Senarathne (2020), Waworuntu et al. (2022)	M	M1.	Monetary rewards as well as prizes or bonuses offered at work are important to me.
		M2.	Professional development and training activities have a positive effect on me.
		M3.	The existence of a transparent career promotion system has a beneficial effect on me.
		M4.	I pay attention to my education, skills and abilities and personal and professional development activities have a beneficial effect on me.
The feeling of freedom and flexibility Source: adapted from Hossain et al. (2018), Tennakoon and Senarathne (2020), Waworuntu et al. (2022)	F	F1.	I appreciate having a flexible working schedule at my workplace.
		F2.	At work, I like to have freedom in carrying out tasks.
		F3.	I don't mind working more hours when needed.
		F4.	I appreciate that after completing more difficult work tasks, I can also have a small break.
		F5.	I like to make arrangements about working conditions that suit me.
Rating, feedback and support Source: adapted from Hossain et al. (2018), Tennakoon and Senarathne (2020), Waworuntu et al. (2022)	RFS	RFS1.	I can openly discuss various issues with a superior.
		RFS2.	I like to work with a superior who supports me.
		RFS3.	I believe it is important to get guidance, appreciation, constructive feedback and opportunities for advancement at work.
		RFS4.	I feel that a superior would understand me if I had a problem.
		RFS5.	I feel comfortable asking a question when I feel it is necessary.
		RFS6.	I could turn to a colleague if I had a problem.
		RFS7.	I consider it important that I can openly communicate my needs and expectations at work.
		RFS8.	The sense of community, open communication and peer support have a beneficial effect on me.
		RFS9.	I appreciate a superior who is willing to listen and respond by providing feedback or a solution when I am faced with a problem.
Technological adaptation Source: adapted from Tennakoon and Senarathne (2020)	T	T1.	Using technology helps me balance my work and life through better time management.
		T2.	I appreciate the implementation of new and innovative work methods.
		T3.	I find that using technology makes me happier.
		T4.	Because of technology, I can't disconnect from my work.
		T5.	I find that using technology makes me less stressed.
		T6.	Technology distracts me from my hobbies as well as time spent with friends and family.
		T7.	I find technology makes me feel lonely/isolated.
		T8.	I find that technology helps me stay motivated.