



WORK-LIFE TRADEOFFS: GENDER, WELL-BEING, & CAREER SUCCESS

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THE DIFFICULTY OF HAVING IT ALL

The antiquated rhetoric of “having it all” disregards the basis of every economic relationship: the idea of *tradeoffs*. All of us are dealing with the constrained optimization that is life, attempting to maximize our utility based on parameters like career, kids, relationships, etc., doing our best to allocate the resource of time. Due to the scarcity of this resource, therefore, none of us can “have it all,” and those who claim to are most likely lying.

– Sharon Pochter, Cornell University Professor of Economics, as quoted in *Lean In*



WORK-LIFE TRADEOFFS DEFINED



- ❑ We develop a scale to measure *work-life tradeoffs*
- ❑ *Trade-offs* are work and personal-life decisions made to better fulfill roles, responsibilities, or aspirations in the alternative domain.
- ❑ Involve **sacrifices** in either the work or personal-life domain to benefit the other domain.
- ❑ *Major tradeoffs* are more *formal* and *permanent*, have greater or more long-term consequences
- ❑ *Minor tradeoffs* are less formal, more *temporary*, have more short-term effects, and are enacted more frequently.

SAMPLE

Participants who worked at least 30 hours per week in the United States were recruited on Amazon Mechanical Turk.

- ❑ N = 300
- ❑ 48% were women
- ❑ 51% were married
- ❑ 80% were White
- ❑ Age: $M = 38.8$ years-old
- ❑ Work Experience: $M = 15.9$ years of work experience
- ❑ Participants worked in all 24 O*Net job families.

WORK-LIFE TRADEOFFS SCALE {MAJOR}



Items	Mean	SD
Major Work Compromising Tradeoffs		
Refused relocation/moving	.36	.78
Refused a promotion or other opportunity to take on more or new responsibilities	.37	.77
Telecommuted on a formal/permanent basis	.51	.97
Taken a formal leave of absence from a job	.54	.97
Switched to a different job that was less demanding or more flexible	.67	1.00
Given up or delayed professional development opportunities/education	.68	1.06
Chosen to be unemployed for a period of time	.70	1.00
Taken a job closer to home	.72	.94
Decided to let your job or career be "secondary" to your spouse/partner's for a period of time	.74	1.15
Reduced working hours	.74	1.14
Major Personal-Life Compromising Tradeoffs		
Decided to have fewer children	.12	.33
Decided not to have children	.13	.34
Delayed or changed the timing of having children	.17	.37
Chosen to live apart from your spouse and/or children for a period of time	.19	.56
Moved to a new city, state, or country for a job	.41	.85
Decided to end or not seek out a romantic relationship	.49	1.06

WORK-LIFE TRADEOFFS {MINOR}

Items	Mean	SD
Minor Work Compromising Tradeoffs		
Refused, missed, or limited business travel	1.31	.74
Chosen to telecommute temporarily	1.87	1.35
Rearranged your work schedule to a non-standard arrangement	2.09	1.29
Refused or limited networking	2.13	1.19
Taken a day or part of a day off	2.38	.80
Minor Personal-Life Compromising Tradeoffs		
Been unable to stay home with or care for a sick family member	1.55	.79
Missed a family occasion, holiday, or event	1.82	.88
Traveled out of town for work	1.88	1.01
Spent less time with children	2.14	1.10
Spent less time with parents, siblings, or extended family members	2.28	1.51
Limited community involvement or volunteer activities	2.34	1.40
Spent less time with a spouse/partner	2.40	1.13
Limited social time with people outside of family	2.50	1.24
Been unable to do regular chores at home	2.66	1.21
Spent less time exercising or engaging in physical activity	2.81	1.33
Limited sleep	2.85	1.34
Limited personal time	2.91	1.24
Extended work hours	2.95	1.17
Spent less time on food preparation in favor of quicker, less healthy options	3.06	1.31



DIFFERENCES BY GENDER & PARENTAL STATUS

	Men		Women		Parents		Non-Parents	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Major WCT	.57	.67	.75	.79	.76	.75	.51	.67
Minor WCT	2.00	.74	2.07	.86	2.18	.82	1.85	.76
Major PLCT	.28	.38	.22	.38	.18	.31	.36	.45
Minor PLCT	2.58	.82	2.37	.83	2.50	.84	2.45	.81

❖ Gender:

- ❖ Women made *more* Major Work Compromising Tradeoffs
- ❖ Men made more Minor Personal Life Compromising Tradeoffs
- ❖ Fathers reported significantly more Major Personal Life Compromising Tradeoffs as compared to mothers (fathers: $M = .24$, $SD = .30$; mothers: $M = .14$, $SD = .30$, $t = 2.12$, $p < .05$).

❖ Parental status:

- ❖ Parents made significantly more major and minor Work Compromising Tradeoffs

IN PARTICULAR...{MAJOR WORK TRADEOFFS}

- To fulfill family or personal-life roles/responsibilities, women more frequently...
 - Chose to be unemployed for a period of time
 - Refused a promotion
 - Reduced work hours
 - Let their careers be “secondary” to a spouse/partner’s
- Major Work Tradeoffs were associated with lower career success
 - Lower job satisfaction
 - Lower salary



IN PARTICULAR...{MINOR PERSONAL-LIFE TRADEOFFS}

- To fulfill work role/responsibilities or career aspirations, men more frequently...
 - Missed a family occasion, holiday, or event
 - Extended work hours
 - Spent less time with parents, siblings, or extended family
 - Traveled out of town for work
 - Spent less time exercising
- Minor Personal-Life Tradeoffs were associated with lower well-being and career success
 - More stress
 - Lower spouse/partner & life satisfaction
 - Lower job & career satisfaction

TRADEOFFS & EMOTIONS

- ❑ Higher levels of *negative* emotions overall (i.e., guilt, sadness, anger, shame, and regret) associated with Personal-Life rather than Work Tradeoffs (t-tests: $p < .01$)
- ❑ Higher levels of *positive* emotions (i.e., pride, happiness, and energy) associated with Work rather than Personal-Life Tradeoffs (t-tests, $p < .01$)
- ❑ Women reported feeling more grateful for their Work Tradeoffs (men: $M = 2.73$; women: $M = 3.10$; $t = 2.41$, $p < .05$)

IN SUMMARY...

- ❑ Minor Personal-Life Tradeoffs were most consequential for well-being
- ❑ Women may be making more Major Work Tradeoffs to avoid having to make frequent Minor Personal-Life Tradeoffs...
 - ❑ But at the expense of their careers
- ❑ How can we design work to minimize Personal-Life Tradeoffs?
 - ❑ Can flexible work practices reduce Personal-Life Tradeoffs?
 - ❑ Need to “normalize” flexible work practices to minimize career penalties



APPENDIX

TRADEOFFS & WELL-BEING

	Stress				Family Satisfaction				Spouse/Partner Satisfaction			Life Satisfaction				
Constant	2.57	**	2.40	**	4.95	**	5.11	**	5.48	**	5.78	**	3.59	**	4.37	**
Age	-.01	**	-.01	**	.01		.01		.00		.00		.00		.01	
Gender	.01		.06		.09		-.04		-.26		-.30	+	.02		-.15	
Education	-.03		-.04	+	.03		.05		.02		.03		.09		.14	*
Career aspirations	-.08	**	-.09	**	.09		.09		.12		.15	+	.30	**	.32	**
Major WCTs	.05				-.07				-.11				-.11			
Minor WCTs	.09	*			-.14				-.10				-.03			
Major PLCTs			.03				-.76	**			-.50	+			-.57	*
Minor PLCTs			.18	**			-.16				-.24	*			-.43	**
R²	.11		.16		.02		.08		.04		.07		.08		.18	

Note. Coefficients are unstandardized. WCT = Work Compromising Tradeoff; PLCT = Personal-Life Compromising Tradeoff.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

TRADEOFFS & CAREER SUCCESS

	Job Satisfaction				Career Satisfaction				Job Performance				Salary			
Constant	2.05	**	3.09	**	2.53	**	2.87	**	6.41	**	6.38	**	-1.00		-0.71	
Age	.03	**	.03	**	.00		.00		.01	+	.01		.01		.00	
Gender	.12		.04		-.05		-.12		-.01		-.02		-.34		-.44	+
Education	.05		.07		.09	*	.11	*	.11	*	.11	*	.58	**	.59	**
Career aspirations	.46	**	.46	**	.22	**	.24	**	.17	**	.16	**	.41	*	.42	**
Major WCTs	-.30	*			-.14				-.19				-.48	*		
Minor WCTs	.18				-.04				-.01				.08			
Major PLCTs			-.09				-.18				-.45	*			-.06	
Minor PLCTs			-.34	**			-.22	**			.08				-.15	
R²	.16		.18		.14		.18		.07		.07		.23		.23	

Note. Coefficients are unstandardized. WCT = Work Compromising Tradeoff; PLCT = Personal-Life Compromising Tradeoff.

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