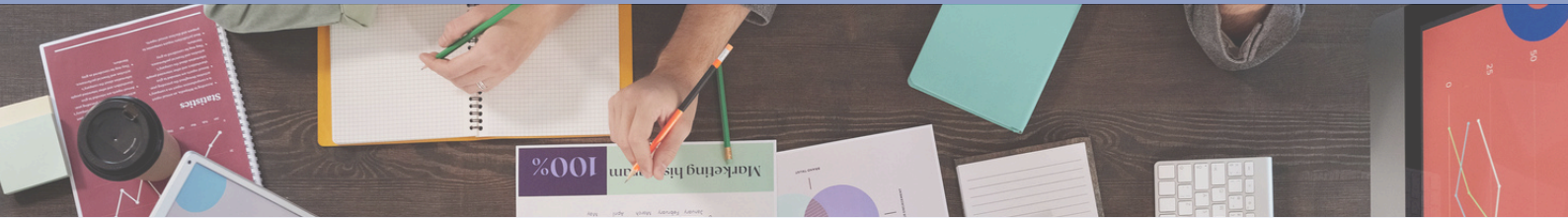


IntegrAGE

Curriculum



MODULE 6

Health and work-life balance

**Interreg
Danube Region**



Co-funded by
the European Union



IntegrAGE

INDEX

Summary	2
Glossary	2
Introduction to work-life balance	3
Mental and physical health	4
Impact of poor WLB on employees and organisations.....	5
Level of awareness	7
Promotion of WLB	9
Case study.....	10
Content evaluation	12

Summary

Module six focuses on the significance of Health and Work-Life Balance (further only „WLB“) and its impact on employees and organisations. **WLB is vital for maintaining employees' mental, emotional, and physical well-being while enabling companies to function efficiently.** The theoretical section discusses the importance of balancing professional and personal life, the adverse effects of poor WLB, and how it affects individuals and organisations, with a particular emphasis on the Danube Region. Health initiatives in this region, such as wellness programs, ergonomic workplace modifications, and mental health support, are highlighted. Workplace modifications for older employees and awareness about health and safety are also explored. A **case study presents** an example of a wellness program in a company, showcasing practical implementations that support WLB and improve overall employee health and productivity.

Glossary

1. **Burnout:** Physical or emotional exhaustion due to prolonged work-related stress.
2. **Employee assistance programs (EAP):** Work-based intervention programs designed to assist employees with personal problems that may affect their work performance.
3. **Stress management:** Techniques or strategies to control and reduce stress, improving personal and work outcomes.
4. **Preventive programs:** Programs designed to prevent risky behaviours and reduce workplace accidents, substance abuse, and other socio-pathological issues.
5. **Wellness programs:** Initiatives aimed at improving employees' physical and mental health through fitness programs and stress management.
6. **Work-Life Balance (WLB):** The equilibrium between work responsibilities and personal life, ensuring well-being.
7. **Workplace ergonomics:** Designing workplaces or tools to maximise efficiency and comfort, especially for ageing employees.

Introduction to work-life balance

Work-life balance (further only “WLB”) refers to the prioritisation between an individual’s work and personal life. A good WLB is achieved when an individual’s right to a fulfilled life inside and outside paid work is accepted and respected as the norm – to the mutual benefit of the individual, business and society.

The definition of WLB varies among many authors due to its heavily individualised nature, dependent on personal needs and perceptions of balance. **WLB is the amount of time you spend doing your job compared with the amount of time you spend with your family and doing things you enjoy** (e.g. family, hobbies, health). WLB is about creating a harmonious relationship between the time and energy spent on professional and personal activities¹.

According to EWCS, nearly one in five workers (18 %) in the EU reports a poor WLB; this percentage has remained stable since 2000². Enabling a better WLB for workers across the life course has been an EU policy goal for many years as it is central to ensuring that work is sustainable for all³. Simultaneously, new challenges and solutions are transforming the interface between work and life: an ageing population, technological change, higher employment rates and fewer weekly working hours.

“As employees grow older, the work-life balance often takes on a new meaning.”

“While career development and a high salary may have been the most important earlier in life, priorities can shift towards pursuing personal goals and taking care of relationships as retirement approaches.”

WLB depending on generations:

Views on WLB also vary depending on the generation to which a person belongs. **Baby Boomers** (1945 and 1960) grew up during a period of significant challenges and limitations following World War II. During this time, securing stable employment was a daunting task, leading this generation to highly

¹ Cambridge dictionary. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/work-life-balance>

² Eurofound (2018), Striking a balance: Reconciling work and life in the EU, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Available online [cited May 29, 2024]. Available from:

<https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/publications/2018/striking-balance-reconciling-work-and-life-eu>

³ <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/topic/work-life-balance>

valued work and employment opportunities. Stability in the workplace was their priority, and thus, work-life balance was not a major concern for them. Members of this generation tended to remain with one company for longer periods than subsequent generations. Many of them currently hold senior or directorial positions, which come with important levels of responsibility. As a result, statistics show that up to 80 % of Baby Boomers report experiencing moderate to high levels of stress.

Generation X prioritise achieving a healthier balance between their personal and professional lives. From our research in Comprehensive analysis of work-life balance factors for 55+ employees, we know that younger generations such as **Millennials** and **Generation Z** tend to prioritise flexibility, remote work options, and achieving a balance between their professional and personal lives. They seek employment opportunities, which allow them to maintain this equilibrium and offer a more liberated work environment. They value their leisure time⁴.

Mental and physical health

It is crucial to ensure that individuals can fulfil their professional responsibilities while maintaining **physical, emotional, and mental well-being in their personal lives**. A healthy WLB helps employees **manage stress, prevent burnout, and maintain productivity**. When employees can balance work and personal life, they tend to be more engaged, satisfied, and motivated. **Organisations that promote WLB often experience better staff retention, increased morale, and improved job performance**.

A better WLB is also linked to better mental well-being for workers and more engagement in the job, leading to a more productive workforce – ensuring benefits for workers and employers alike. And those with a better WLB tend to be more satisfied with their life and work, and happier overall⁵.

Research shows that better work-life balance can reduce stress and symptoms of depression. **Employees who effectively separate work from personal life report 40% lower levels of depressive symptoms and 60% lower levels of anxiety symptoms** compared to those who struggle with balance⁶.

⁴ Collective of Author (2024). Title of the work: Subtitle if applicable. Project name: A practical approach to support the healthy adaptation and integration of 55+ workforce into the labour market.

⁵ Eurofound (2018), Striking a balance: Reconciling work and life in the EU, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Available online [cited May 29, 2024]. Available from: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/publications/2018/striking-balance-reconciling-work-and-life-eu>

⁶ Allen, T. D., Herst, D. E. L., Bruck, C. S., & Sutton, M. (2000). Consequences associated with work-to-family conflict: A review and agenda for future research. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 5(2), 278-308.



Workplace adaptation: Adapting workplaces to the physical needs of employees with a focus on the elderly, creating ergonomic workplaces. Provide ergonomic equipment to prevent repetitive strain injuries. E.g. ergonomic furniture designed to reduce strain –adjustable desks, chairs with backrests, adjusting monitors to the appropriate height, pads, keyboard stands, wrist rests, and ergonomic mice.

Allow employees flexible working arrangements, including remote work options. To minimise physical strain and promote overall well-being, encourage employees to take regular breaks and exercise during the working day.

“Regularly evaluate ergonomic workplace settings and identify employees' physical needs and potential workplace modifications.”

Impact of poor WLB on employees and organisations

When **organisations do not promote healthy WLB**, they face negative repercussions that go beyond just the well-being of their employees, but it has the following impact on organisations as well:

- **High employee turnover:** Employees who consistently feel overwhelmed or undervalued are more likely to leave the company, seeking roles with better WLB options. High turnover rates increase recruitment and training costs.
- **Reduced productivity:** A workforce that is exhausted, stressed, or mentally unwell tends to produce lower-quality work and has less capacity for innovation or collaboration.

- **Absenteeism:** Poor WLB can result in frequent absenteeism as employees take more sick days to recover from stress or health-related issues. This further affects team dynamics and project deadlines.
- **Lower job satisfaction:** Without proper WLB initiatives, employee morale and job satisfaction decrease, leading to a lack of motivation and engagement, which can hurt the overall workplace culture.
- **Harmed reputation:** In today's competitive job market, organisations that fail to offer a healthy work environment risk damaging their reputation, making it harder to attract and retain top talent.



Older employees also face challenges in achieving a healthy WLB due to **financial needs, employer demands, limited labour market options, company culture, and peer pressure**. As employees age, their priorities and the obstacles they face evolve. Additionally, they may struggle with rapidly changing workplace demands and tasks, requiring more time to adapt to **new skill sets**. The use of digital tools and emerging technologies can be particularly challenging, leading to increased stress and workload. Older **employees are sometimes excluded from training programs** due to assumptions about their potential benefit or likelihood of staying with the company⁷.

⁷ Collective of Author (2024). Title of the work: Subtitle if applicable. Project name: A practical approach to support the healthy adaptation and integration of 55+ workforce into the labour market.

Level of awareness



The topic of mental health is being discussed more and more, and an increasing number of people are addressing their mental well-being.

Psychosocial risks and work-related stress at work are a consequence of problems in work design, organisation and management. They may also be associated with poor social relationships at work.

Psychosocial risks in the work environment may increase the risk of work **stress, burnout, and mental health problems**, such as **anxiety** and **depression**. Working conditions that lead to psychosocial risks include, for example, excessive workload, high or conflicting job demands, poor role clarity, low possibility of decision-making, poor leadership, job insecurity, ineffective communication, lack of support, and psychological and sexual harassment and violence (EU-OSHA, 2023a)⁸.

When employees cannot balance their work with their personal lives, they experience heightened levels of stress, fatigue, and ultimately burnout. Over time can lead to a range of mental and physical health problems. **Chronic stress can result in anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion, affecting the employee's ability to cope with work and personal responsibilities.**

Poor WLB is linked to serious health problems such as cardiovascular diseases, weakened immune systems, headaches, and musculoskeletal disorders. The constant pressure from work can reduce the time for self-care, exercise, and proper sleep, exacerbating these issues.

Employees who are physically or mentally unwell are less likely to be productive or engaged at work. Their focus and performance diminish as their well-being deteriorates. Increased stress and lack of time for social or family interactions can also strain personal relationships, leading to feelings of isolation.

⁸ European Agency for Safety and Health at Work. (n.d.). Good workplace practice: Supporting individuals experiencing mental health problems. https://osha.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/Good-workplace-practice-support-individuals-experiencing-mental-health-problems_EN.pdf

Awareness raising about health and safety

The main factors in reducing **injury and illness depend** on the sector but mostly they include⁹:

- Specialised training for human resources in potential risks and measures for the safe use of work tools.
- Educating workers on the prevention of possible static overload of the musculoskeletal system, insufficient cardiovascular training, and injury prevention.
- Providing high-quality personal protective equipment and systematic monitoring of its proper use.



- Raise awareness about ergonomics by conducting assessments of office setups and educating staff on proper posture, desk setup, and movement breaks to prevent injury from sedentary lifestyles.
- Adhering to the principles of "spine school," which involves conscious training in proper body loading and regular exercise, particularly for physical work involving lifting and carrying heavy loads¹⁰.

⁹ Priebežná správa č.16. Sektorovo riadenými inováciami k efektívnemu trhu práce v Slovenskej republike

¹⁰ GÚTH, A. 2015. Bolest' a škola chrbtice. Liečreh Gúth, Bratislava, 2015. 128 s ISBN 978-80-8893-235-2

- Promote regular health checkups, mental health screenings, and fitness programs. You could collaborate with health professionals to offer personalised advice on nutrition, physical activity, and stress reduction.
- Host educational seminars on the dangers of substance abuse (e.g., alcohol, drugs) and offer resources such as counselling services, helplines, and support groups.
- Display engaging visuals in common areas, highlighting tips on reducing workplace accidents and promoting good health practices. These visuals should focus on specific hazards and how to avoid them.

Promotion of WLB

Increase employee awareness of health and safety. Provide access to information resources that will improve health literacy – conduct online seminars and make available digital learning platforms on key health topics. Supporting employees to take responsibility for their health and healthy lifestyle. Implementation of regular workshops focused on self-care, your health, healthy eating habits and nutritional counselling.

Actions to be taken:

- Assess employees' ability to perform their work concerning their physical and mental health, skills, working conditions, and job requirements. (E.g. Work Ability Index).
- Financially support special health and WBL programs for employees.
- Collaborate with healthcare professionals to deliver evidence-based information tailored to the needs of older workers.
- Prioritise the prevention of musculoskeletal disorders through ergonomic interventions, training, and education on physical activity.
- Encourage employees to prioritise their physical and mental health for improved job performance and well-being.
- Prevent diseases caused by physical inactivity and overload of the static part of the musculoskeletal system.

- Provide **ergonomic furniture** designed to reduce strain. It is crucial to correctly select work aids (chairs, desks, cushions with an unstable surface), and work devices (computers with large screens)¹¹.

Suggestions for employees:

- Take advantage of supplementary health services and psychological counselling provided by the employer to support overall well-being.
- Take advantage of regular physical activity, healthy eating and adequate sleep for optimal performance at work and overall well-being.
- Follow best practices for ergonomic work environments to enhance comfort and productivity.
- Request **ergonomic assessments and adjustments** to your workstation to prevent physical strain and injury.

Case study about DELL

DELL Technologies



Country and Region: Slovak Republic

Sector: IT

Size and scope: large-sized business, 2000 and more employee

Website link: <https://www.dell.com/sk-sk/>

¹¹ GÚTH, A. 2015. Bolest' a škola chrbtice. Liečreh Gúth, Bratislava, 2015. 128 s ISBN 978-80-8893-235-2

About the company:

Dell Technologies designs, sells, repairs, and supports computers and related products and services. Its offerings include personal computers (PCs), servers, data storage devices, network switches, software, computer peripherals, HDTVs, cameras, printers, and electronics from other manufacturers. Dell is renowned for its supply chain management and e-commerce strategies, which involve direct sales to customers and delivering customised PCs tailored to their specific needs.

The challenge:

Improve the health and well-being of employees.

The solution:

Dell offers a comprehensive range of benefits to support work-life balance (WLB) and employee health, including:

- **Private Medical care:** Ensures employees have access to quality healthcare.
- **Meal Allowance:** Fully covered by the company, with options for a meal card or a financial contribution directly to the employee's account.
- **Multisport Card:** Grants access to various sports and fitness activities, such as gym sessions, sauna visits, or group exercises. Additionally, Dell provides an on-site fitness centre.
- **Health Days:** Allows employees to take additional time off to relax without requiring a medical certificate or sick note.
- **Short-Term Sickness Leave Allowance:** Offers automatic compensation of 80% of wage loss due to sick leave for up to 14 days.
- **MetLife Life & Disability Insurance:** Provides 24/7 worldwide coverage for all regular employees, without requiring health questionnaires or surcharges.
- **Long-Term Sickness Leave Allowance:** Offers financial support of up to 75% of an employee's average monthly salary during long-term illness, accident recovery, or hospital stays lasting over 30 days.
- **Well at Dell – Global Employee Assistance Program:** Offers live assistance worldwide, with free access to various support services for employees and their families, including financial, personal, psychological, parental, and relationship consultation services, available 24/7.

The impact:

Dell's employee benefits actively promote a healthy and balanced work-life by integrating various initiatives that focus on flexibility, health, and personal development:

1. **Enhanced work flexibility:** Dell's flexible work arrangements, including remote work options and adjustable hours, empower employees to effectively manage both professional and personal obligations, fostering a better work-life integration.
2. **Comprehensive health and wellness support:** Through initiatives such as private medical care, mental health programs, and fitness benefits, Dell encourages a holistic approach to employee well-being, addressing both physical and mental health.
3. **Robust family policies:** The company goes beyond standard legal requirements for maternity and paternity leave, providing parents with the opportunity to prioritize family time without sacrificing career development.
4. **Proactive sickness management:** By offering allowances for both short-term and long-term illnesses, Dell reduces financial stress during health-related absences, supports employees' recovery, and maintains a sense of security.
5. **Commitment to continuous learning:** Dell's educational and development programs allow employees to upskill and grow professionally, enhancing job satisfaction and career advancement opportunities.
6. **Diversity, inclusion, and accessibility:** The company's focus on fostering an inclusive workplace promotes a positive work culture, boosts employee morale, and strengthens a sense of belonging.

These initiatives showcase Dell's dedication to cultivating a work environment where employee well-being, personal growth, and inclusivity are prioritised, leading to higher employee satisfaction, engagement, and retention.

Content evaluation

1. What is the main benefit of a healthy work-life balance for employees?

- a) Increased stress
- b) Improved physical and mental well-being

- c) Longer working hours
- d) More time spent at work

2. Which of the following can lead to poor work-life balance?

- a) Clear boundaries between work and personal life
- b) Regular breaks and vacation
- c) Overworking and lack of time for family
- d) Flexible work hours

3. How can organisations support employees in maintaining a work-life balance?

- a) By encouraging long working hours
- b) By offering flexible work schedules
- c) By focusing only on business goals
- d) By limiting time off

4. Which of the following is a sign of burnout caused by poor work-life balance?

- a) Increased job satisfaction
- b) Physical exhaustion and emotional fatigue
- c) Greater productivity
- d) Stronger personal relationships

5. Why is it important for companies to promote work-life balance?

- a) It increases absenteeism
- b) It leads to higher employee turnover
- c) It boosts employee morale and productivity
- d) It discourages work commitment

6. What is one way an employee can improve their work-life balance?

- a) Working overtime regularly
- b) Prioritising personal tasks and setting boundaries

- c) Ignoring stress symptoms
- d) Bringing work home every day

7. How does poor work-life balance affect an organisation?

- a) Increased job satisfaction
- b) Higher employee retention
- c) Decreased productivity and higher turnover
- d) Improved team morale

8. What percentage of employees consider work-life balance a key factor when choosing a job?

- a) 10%
- b) 35%
- c) 55%
- d) 75%

9. What is a common strategy for managing work-related stress?

- a) Skipping breaks to finish work faster
- b) Delegating tasks and taking regular breaks
- c) Taking on more responsibilities
- d) Avoiding time off

10. Which of the following is an example of a work-life balance initiative?

- a) Increased mandatory overtime
- b) On-site childcare facilities
- c) Shorter vacation periods
- d) Longer working hours