



Work-life balance crafting behaviours of managers from a gender perspective

A case study of a multinational corporation in the male-dominated automotive industry

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Abstract

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Purpose: The aim of this research is to explore managers' work-life balance (WLB) crafting behaviours within the male dominated automotive industry. The study adds to the literature by considering the individual's room for manoeuvring WLB crafting within the limits of the gendered organisation. To gain deeper knowledge regarding managers' WLB crafting, the following research questions have been explored: What difficulties do managers encounter in crafting WLB? How do managers craft WLB to combine work and private life? How is the gender regime of the workplace reflected in female and male managers' possibilities to achieve WLB?

Theory: The present study is constructed upon Connell's (2006) framework on how gender regimes are persistent within organisations, and Acker's (1990) concept of the abstract worker. To explore work-life balance crafting behaviours, Sturges's (2012) concept on relational, cognitive and physical crafting behaviours was applied.

Method: Qualitative research design was used for this study. Primary data was collected from 19 interviews, including 18 managers and one gatekeeper interview with an HRBP. Secondary data consisting of internal organisational documents were reviewed. The analysis was conducted following Braun & Clarke's (2006) 6-phase guide on thematic analysis.

Result: Three main findings were identified. First, the nature of the workplace can inhibit employees' opportunities to achieve WLB. Second, employees craft WLB in both the work- and private sphere. And third, the gender regime of the organisation and societal expectations on genders influence how women and men are able to achieve WLB. Whether the participants experienced satisfying WLB, was much in relation to how their WLB was crafted, by themselves and with support from people around them. Important properties in designing a desired WLB proved to be the ability to value and administer the time, both private time and work time, as well as receiving relational support. The way the participants thought about work also influenced their overall experience of WLB. Gender was considered "invisible", simultaneously with having an impact on the way employees act and interact within the organisation.

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List of Abbreviations

HRBP: Human Resources Business Partner

ILO: International Labour Organisation

MNC: Multinational corporation

SWB: Subjective well-being

WLB: Work-life balance

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1. Introduction

Work-life balance (WLB) is an important concept in this era, and something that many employees strive for. Findings in the literature, mostly from Western countries, show a clear link between work and personal life conflict (Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2016; Steiber, 2009). Balance in work and personal life can be described as employees' perceptions and evaluations of how they succeed in reconciling work and private life (Casper et al., 2018). For instance, time and effort spent on work can reduce the energy left for personal life responsibilities, and vice versa (Galea et al., 2013). To provide a balance between work and non-work spheres, employees appraise their work and private life situations based on their emotional and cognitive experiences (Casper et al., 2018). In other words, employees' evaluation of WLB forms their perception and impacts the commitment to their roles. Such reflections of emotional and cognitive experiences (Casper et al., 2018), display similarities with the employee techniques emphasised in Sturges's WLB crafting concept. In her qualitative study on how young professionals achieve WLB by using techniques such as managing their work space and work time, and building valuable relationships at work and at home, Sturges (2012) coined the term "WLB crafting". Based on this, WLB crafting focuses on the proactive behaviours individuals use to enable their desired WLB and emphasises individuals' agency in creating WLB (Sturges, 2012). However, individuals' balance between work and private life is not built in a vacuum but is contingent on surrounding circumstances, such as organisations' WLB initiatives (McDowell & Lindsey, 2014; Petrou & Bakker, 2016). With this in mind, managers have a crucial role in enforcing WLB initiatives and establishing proper checks and balances in the undertaking of such processes (Maxwell, 2005). Within MNCs, work-life management is considered to be particularly demanding (Bardoel, 2016). Therefore, managers working in international settings undoubtedly experience challenging working lives, which could entail difficulties in achieving WLB.

When organisations establish WLB initiatives, gender is an important aspect which needs to be taken into consideration (Lyness & Judiesch, 2014), since women and men might have different opportunities in achieving WLB (Lyness & Judiesch, 2014; Sturges, 2012). Hence, the gender influence on employees' ability to craft WLB is investigated further in this study by utilising gendered organisation concepts. As argued by Acker (1990), Connell (2006), and others (e.g. Lewis et al., 2007), organisations are gendered. The theory on gender regimes suggests that societal gender inequalities are reproduced within organisations (Acker, 1990; Connell, 2006). The concept of gendered organisations clarifies how societal gender inequalities are reproduced within organisations (Acker, 2006). For example, the way people interact with each other, the

underlying assumptions of what is considered to be female or male attributes as well as where within an organisation females and males work vertically as well as horizontally, and moreover which tasks females and males perform, are all examples how gender is being distinguished and differentiated (Acker, 1990; Connell, 2006).

Accordingly, the WLB crafting behaviours of managers at an MNC in the historically male-dominated automotive industry are explored in this study. Despite the existence of literature enfolding the gender aspect of WLB, previous research has failed to address whether the gendered nature of an organisation influences WLB crafting behaviours (Caringal-Go et al., 2021; Gravador & Teng-Calleja, 2018; Sturges, 2012). By drawing on the individual agency of managers to create WLB, but still acknowledging the context in which it takes place, the present study explores managers' WLB crafting behaviours within the surrounding circumstance of the gendered organisation. This study, in particular, addresses a gap in the research on how managers with busy work schedules employ behaviours such as adjusting the hours they work or the location where they work. While previous literature has focused predominantly on employer-centred solutions for WLB (Zheng et al., 2016), this study adds to the literature by considering the individual's room for manoeuvring WLB crafting within the limits of the gendered organisation.

1.1. Objectives and research questions

This study aimed to explore female and male managers' WLB crafting behaviours within the context of an organisation operating in the male-dominated automotive industry. The following research questions were explored:

- What difficulties do managers encounter in crafting WLB?
- How do managers craft WLB to combine work and private life?
- How is the gender regime of the workplace reflected in female and male managers' possibilities to achieve WLB?

2. Context and Research Setting

This chapter provides a scene of gender equality in the automotive industry and a presentation of the case organisation.

2.1. Gender equality in the automotive industry

Biswas et al. (2017) focus on gender relations in organisations, organisational social relations and the relations between society and organisations and highlight that the way in which industries are gendered varies over time and across cultures. As an example, the automotive industry is male-dominated, and existing literature demonstrates that the most important obstacle to women's advancement in masculine-based workplaces is stereotypes and prejudices (Lloyd & Mey, 2007). Consequently, women working in male-dominated industries do not meet their unique needs and desired WLB, often due to gendered corporate cultures (Martin & Barnard, 2013). Although unclear what such unique needs might be, they are often explained as physical and emotional support, which are argued to be essential to maintaining a harmonious corporate culture (Martin & Barnard, 2013).

According to a sectoral study of the future of work in the automotive industry by ILO (2020), the number of men employed in the sector in EU member states is three times higher than that of women. In addition, even fewer women are in management positions within the sector (ILO, 2020). A recent survey carried out with 200 women by Automotive News and Deloitte in 2018 and also cited by ILO (2020), presents the main difficulties in the participation of women in the automotive industry (Deloitte, 2019). According to the survey, 59% of women experience a lack of WLB, 46% lack flexible work schedules, and 39% lack advancement opportunities (Deloitte, 2019; ILO, 2020). A recent study stresses that females leading the automotive sector experience conflicting emotions that affect their expectations and perceptions in their work environment (Bullock, 2019). In other words, male-dominated organisations can lead to conflicting career and family responsibilities for women, therefore, gender diversity is becoming increasingly imperative in the automotive industry (Martin & Barnard, 2013).

2.2. The case organisation

Due to the confidentiality of the interviews and research data, the case organisation of the study will remain unknown. Therefore, internal documents were reviewed and an interview was conducted with one of the Human Resources Business Partners (HRBP), in order to gain sufficient information. Based on the provided internal documents, the case organisation is in a startup phase in the automotive industry, has its headquarters in Sweden and operates in seven different countries in the European region. Further, the organisation has 650 employees, including 213 managerial positions at different levels (93 female and 120 male managers).

According to the HRBP (personal communication, March 1, 2022) of the company, while there are more male managers than female managers in the company, the decision making power is evenly distributed among same-level managers. The company is aiming to reach a 50/50 gender split across all teams, including managerial levels, however, this goal is yet to be realised. Thus, in some cases, men may be over-represented in decision-making, but this is due to the ratio between women and men rather than the company culture (personal communication, March 1, 2022).

Furthermore, the HRBP (personal communication, March 1, 2022) noted that the organisation has a hierarchical structure with some flat structural features. The organisational chart is hierarchical, but opposed to traditional hierarchical features, the company has cross-functional communication and cooperation. The HRBP suggested that there may occur uncertainty as to how power is distributed due to flat cultural characteristics within the hierarchical structure. In this sense, due to the rapid growth of the company with many managers being new, there may be inconsistencies as to what leadership style to apply. Therefore, whether employees consider the company more hierarchical or flat could depend on where they are located in the organisation due to their distance from the management (personal communication, March 1, 2022).

The HRBP (personal communication, March 1, 2022) stated that men and women are promoted equally across the company and are subject to equal pay. Further, tasks are equally distributed between women and men. However, departments traditionally male-dominated, such as IT, are dominated by men, whereas traditionally female-dominated departments, such as Marketing and HR, are dominated by women. Employees in the same title perform the same tasks (personal communication, March 1, 2022).

Moreover, the HRBP (personal communication, March 1, 2022) emphasised that all employees have flexible working hours and stated that the company offers everyone the opportunity to work part-time. However, in some cases, especially in management positions, it is challenging to work part-time because of the high workload. Yet, employees have the authority to make their own decisions about their WLB. Further, employees can have time off work on their own national holidays regardless of their working country. All employees, except those who physically need to be on the spot to do their work, such as employees working in company stores, have the opportunity to work remotely. In regards to parental leave, the HRBP pointed out that regulations differ from country to country. In Sweden, there is long parental leave available for both parents, which is paid by the government, while in other countries the parental leave is

much shorter with different local terms. However, the company allows employees in all operating markets to take at least half a year off for any partner and this could be either paid, unpaid or partly paid according to local regulations (personal communication, March 1, 2022).

Additionally, the HRBP (personal communication, March 1, 2022) mentioned that the organisation is working to promote work-life balance, for example by offering a wellness allowance, which is quite common in Sweden, but the company offers it in all countries. Moreover, the company supports onsite activities and sports, for example running clubs. Still, the HRBP mentioned that this might not be enough since the company does not have specific policies or initiatives regarding demographic groups such as parents, singles or divided by age (personal communication, March 1, 2022).

3. Previous Research

This chapter offers a conceptual framework on different dimensions of WLB. Following, contemporary research on WLB in relation to gender, individual management and MNC's is presented. The chapter ends by presenting gender implications of organisational structure.

3.1. Conceptual framework of WLB

The phrase “work-family” was established when the number of women entering the labour market increased and men were no longer considered the prime breadwinners of the family (Barnett, 1999). Hence, the dilemma of balance between work and life is not new but has been a current topic ever since. However, the concept has changed over time, as has its terminology. The initial focus on work and family has evolved to include other parts of private life too, as well as to consider employees without family responsibilities (Lewis et al., 2007). In the 1960's WLB research focused on dual-earner families, followed by exploring stress in the workplace during the 1980's (Lewis et al., 2007). In the recent couple of years, the COVID-19 pandemic and its influence on working from home have been in the limelight when it comes to exploring WLB (Caringal-Go et al., 2021; Hjalmsdottir & Bjarnadottir, 2021). The WLB concept is not free from criticism. Lewis et al. (2007) argue that WLB literature tends to focus either on the individual's choice to find a balance between work and personal life or on organisational flexible work arrangements. Further, organisational WLB designs do not take limitations of individual agency, or the gendered aspects of work into consideration. Therefore, as proposed by Lewis et al. (2007), there needs to be a shift in the way in which WLB is approached. By broadening the

view to include complex dimensions of constraints, such as gender, and organisational culture and norms, the discourse on WLB would become more inclusive and comprehensive.

According to Maxwell (2005), WLB includes the organisational and individual approaches that compose the two parts of the business life creation. The organisational approach helps employees to establish a better WLB via overarching policies. The individual approach is established by employee support programs, such as offering flexible working hours and promoting health activities (Maxwell, 2005). Flexible working allows employees to have control over when and where they work (Chung & Van der Lippe, 2018). According to Glynn et al. (2002), the WLB concept has several dimensions that cover where employees work, how long employees work and the arrangement of employee work hours. In addition, WLB includes the development of people through training so that they can manage the balance better, providing support and breaks from work (Glynn et al., 2002).

Flexible work arrangements pose various challenges for employers and employees. The idea of flexible time is often referred to as the employee's own control over their work schedules (Chung & Van der Lippe, 2018). At the same, while flexible work arrangements might be desirable for the employee, they can cause instability for the employer (Jonsson, 2007). However, flexible work arrangements can also be in favour of the employer (Jonsson, 2007), since flexibility may require the ability of employees to change their work schedule and workplace according to the employer's particular circumstances (Chung & Van der Lippe, 2018). In such a case, organisational arrangements answering to an employer's desire for a flexible workforce might be causing instability for employees (Jonsson, 2007). According to Jonsson (2007), the word flexibility is strongly associated with positive values. However, as Jonsson (2007) argues, the term flexibility is not as single-tracked positive as it appears to be at first glance. Rather, flexibility is positive only when variability is desired. As suggested, flexibility and stability for somebody may result in negative consequences, instability or inflexibility for somebody else, depending on what is desired (Jonsson, 2007).

3.1.1. The transition between work and life spheres

Employees' WLB is constantly being challenged by the demands between the work and private life spheres (Clark, 2000). According to Barnett (1999), the spheres of work and private life can be either separated, overlapping or integrated. However, indifferent to how the spheres are related, common for them is the employer's attitude and approach towards work and private life.

Organisational policies can either be insensitive to employees' out of work commitments and needs, or employees might encounter penalties when employing the benefits offered. Difficulties in career advancement or being considered less committed to the company, especially for women, are examples of such penalties (Barnett, 1999). Barnett (1999) argues that organisations ought to invent policies aiming to acknowledge employees' private life in order to reconcile rhetoric and practice. That is, organisational policies should recognise employees out of work commitments and build the organisational structure and culture to meet these needs, only then can companies eliminate the cost of risking employees showing low morale, being absent unexplained or simply quitting their job and increasing the turnover rate. If organisations do not honour their employees' personal commitments, employees need to find strategies to balance the work and private life spheres.

Individuals separate the work and home spheres based on the different attributes of which they contain (Clark, 2000). According to Clark (2000), the work and home spheres are built out of dissimilar purposes and cultures. However, the contrast between an individual's work and home can vary in size, entailing that the transition between the two spheres can range from mild to severe (Clark, 2000). Individuals can adopt different strategies to deal with the transition of role identity between the work sphere and the private sphere (Ashforth et al., 2000). These strategies include either separating the work- and home roles or integrating them. Outlined as a continuum with high segmentation on one end and high integration on the other, Ashforth et al. (2000) describe the ways in which individuals act to balance the demands between home and work. By adopting high segmentation of roles, the separation between work and home is clearer, but the transition is harder. At the same time, a clear separation makes the boundaries between roles more inflexible and impermeable. High integration, on the contrary, alleviates the role transition between work and home but also weakens the boundaries between the two spheres. Spillover can be described as the way the work and home spheres affect each other. For instance, stress or negative emotions at work can be brought home to disturb family life, or the other way around. Nevertheless, positive emotions emerging in one sphere can affect the other sphere positively (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000).

3.2. Gendered aspects of WLB

The spheres of home and work have traditionally been gendered, signifying that home is a woman's domain while work is a man's domain. However, as argued by Lewis et al. (2007), while the WLB concept has evolved from focusing on working mothers, to be declared as

gender-neutral, the bottom line of gendered separated spheres has not ceased to exist. In contemporary work life, employees seem to experience an imbalance between work and non-work (Lewis et al., 2007). WLB is derived from role theory based on the fact that the different roles individuals take on may be incompatible or contradictory (Feeney & Stritch, 2017). WLB policies such as sick leave, on-site child care, flexible and remote working aim to achieve gender equality by reducing the unequal burden on women who take responsibility for their families (Feeney & Stritch, 2017). Accordingly, the expectations and demands of individuals in their private lives such as being a parent or a partner may conflict with the obligations of their roles as employees. As a consequence, mostly women who have a greater burden on family life and household confront the challenge of maintaining their work and private life roles (Feeney & Stritch, 2017). Further, studies show that gender matters in regard to which way women and men use, or are expected to use, flexible working hours. While women tend to use flexible hours to care for domestic issues, men tend to use flexible working hours to advance in their careers (Chung & van der Lippe, 2018). In terms of gender diversity, studies have reported that women are more likely than men to report high levels of role overload and stress at work (Maxwell, 2005). Thus, as outlined above, women and men may have different possibilities to achieve WLB due to the different roles and responsibilities in their lives.

Organisational policies aimed at addressing issues related to WLB are often intended to reduce conflicts between the private and working spheres for all employees (Wilkinson et al., 2018). However, the literature suggests that WLB policies might benefit or disadvantage employees in various ways depending on gender and marital status. While WLB policies were originally a response to women entering the labour market, nowadays, issues outside the family are of interest (Wilkinson et al., 2018). Single professionals are increasing in the labour market, but WLB policies seem to lack behind in this area (Wilkinson et al., 2017). Line managers often play a key role in implementing WLB practices, and although the practices are aimed to be gender-neutral, managers agree that the practices might favour mothers mostly (Maxwell, 2005). Single middle-aged managers and professionals without children experience that policies related to WLB and flexible work arrangements are designed for parents, and do not feel taken into consideration in regard to such policies. However, they also experience some fairness in relation to career advancement, in realising that colleagues' careers were plateauing after having children (Wilkinson et al., 2018).

Young women and men without children seem to agree that an egalitarian relationship is ideal,

however, institutional constraints and educational level limit these preferences. Moreover, organisational policies aimed at addressing WLB issues might be considered “women policies”, therefore, “gender-neutral” policies might work better to enhance gender-equal WLB, such as policies to reduce norms of overtime working (Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015). This goes hand in hand with research suggesting that WLB policies help parents to manage their responsibilities towards both employers and children. However, even though WLB policies have good intentions, in reality, they fail to address the circumstances that mothers in general shoulder the role of domestic caregiver, implying that WLB policies facilitate career advancement for fathers, on the cost of career advancement for mothers (Burnett et al., 2010). A recent study conducted in Iceland (Hjalmsdottir & Bjarnadottir, 2021), the world's most gender-equal country (The World Economic Forum, 2021), shows that working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic has been difficult for mothers. According to the study, WLB has been especially hard for mothers, experiencing increased responsibility for children as well as taking on a project leader role in the household. Alon et al. (2020) suggest in their research that women are more affected by the COVID-19 versus men in employment. Alon et al. (2020) also point out that with the COVID-19 crisis, the need for children to be looked after at home and to continue their education from home poses serious challenges, especially for single parents. Also, for parents raising their children together, the issue of each parent splitting their time both working from home and taking care of the children will depend on how flexible their working hours are. Further, they also highlight stand out forces that may promote gender equality, such as more flexible work arrangements and changes in social norms and role models (Alon et al., 2020).

Flexible working arrangements are often announced as a facilitator for WLB. Further, organisational and national contexts are of significant interest to flexible working, although this is often overlooked. According to Chung and Van der Lippe's (2018) study based on data on gender, class, and household arrangements collected in Europe and the USA, flexible working can be beneficial in achieving a preferable WLB. However, it is important to be aware of the gendered ways in which women and men use flexible work arrangements, since different uses of flexible work may have different implications for WLB (Chung & Van der Lippe, 2018).

Studies examining gender differences and cross-national variation in WLB show that WLB differs by gender and country context, with important implications for practical work-life implementations for global employers, such as adapting to structural and cultural aspects (Lyness & Judiesch, 2014). Based on a survey investigating more than 40,000 managers' self-ratings of

WLB across 36 countries, women experience lower WLB in countries with low egalitarian cultures. As for countries with high egalitarian cultures, there was not a significant difference between gender and self-reported WLB (Lyness & Judiesch, 2014). As for individual outcomes affected by WLB, it is suggested that in high gender-egalitarian countries, high WLB affects the individual's work and life more positively than in countries with low gender-egalitarian culture (Haar et al., 2014). In addition, recent research shows that the socio-cultural context is a major challenge for women's WLB due to gender-related inequalities (Kurowska, 2018; Uddin, 2021). Furthermore, there is also a need to explore whether women and men exhibit different crafting behaviours to achieve WLB because of different roles and responsibilities in their lives (Lyness & Judiesch, 2014; Sturges, 2012).

3.3. Individual managing of WLB and WLB crafting

Although previous literature has focused predominantly on employer-centred solutions for WLB (Zheng et al., 2016), an emerging strand of research has shown interest in addressing the question of what practises individuals actually perform to manage their WLB. By exploring which proactive behaviours UK police officers use to self-manage WLB, McDowell and Lindsey (2014) found that elicited self-management behaviours are contingent on the particular context of the workplace, emphasising that organisations need to establish WLB initiatives sensitive both to organisational support and constraints, and to individual competencies of the employees. This notion is supported by Allard et al.'s (2007) study on managerial fathers in Sweden, which shows that although having higher degrees of flextime than their subordinates, managerial fathers experience higher levels of work-to-family conflict, thus underlining that initiatives in regards to flexible working conditions must meet the employees' needs. Petrou and Bakker (2016) found that employees experiencing high-strain work employ proactive leisure crafting to balance out stress from work. This was especially true when employees experience autonomy regarding leisure crafting in the home sphere. The authors argue that organisations should be structured in a way that allows and encourages employees to craft leisure, and in return secure productivity with a motivated and healthy workforce.

The literature exploring WLB crafting is rather limited. Sturges (2012) introduced the concept of WLB crafting in her qualitative study looking into how young professionals achieve WLB by using techniques such as managing their workspace and work time, and building valuable relationships at work and at home. Gravador and Teng-Calleja (2018) investigated the relationship between WLB crafting behaviours, WLB and subjective well-being (SWB). Their

quantitative study found that protecting private time and working efficiently, both considered physical WLB crafting behaviours, significantly affect WLB. Behaviours that nurture relationships within the family, are considered relational crafting, however, significantly associated with SWB, but not with WLB, as assumed by Sturges (2012). The authors advise organisations to establish policies that endorse such behaviours (Gravador & Teng-Calleja, 2018). In a recent online survey conducted in the Philippines, Caringal-Go et al. (2021) found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, telecommuting employees lay emphasis on the importance of building collegial relationships virtually. Their study adds to the WLB crafting literature by proposing that WLB crafting techniques overlap, suggesting that physical and cognitive crafting merge when, for example, prioritising between work or family matters while working from home. In addition, the division between physical and relational crafting behaviour is blurred when people work from home, since the natural physical borders of a workplace are non-existent. Thus, families can bond even during official working hours. A gender perspective is portrayed in a recent interview study exploring copreneurs crafting of WLB (Dreyer & Busch, 2021). The study reveals that when couples are in business together, women still take on the majority of domestic responsibilities, while men use physical WLB crafting behaviour to separate themselves from the home and work uninterrupted. The study shows that work and private life are highly integrated for copreneurs, yet setting up microdomains, i.e. a space for personal recreation, within a macrodomain, e.g. work, is a way of obtaining WLB. The couples used relational crafting when utilising the benefits of microdomains, by acting as boundary keepers for each other, for example by blocking phone calls. Dreyer and Busch (2021) argue that their study is of value for dual-earner couples overall, considering the general working-from-home lifestyle now applicable for most people as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.4. Work-life balance in MNCs

Both cultural and structural factors matter when looking into WLB on an international level. Ollier-Malaterre and Foucreault (2016) argue that cultural aspects, such as values and norms regarding gender roles ideology and relationships, together with legal and economic structures set boundaries for WLB outcomes. Global WLB initiatives might also favour Western values while overlooking local (Bardoel, 2016). For companies operating in a multinational setting, it is important to be aware of both cultural and structural contexts when planning for policies, in order to balance regional constraints (Briscoe, Schuler & Tarique, 2012). To do this, three levels

need to be addressed - the societal, the organisational and the individual level. These levels integrate and together form the basis for how WLB policies are designed and implemented (Briscoe, Schuler & Tarique 2012). However, initiatives for establishing global WLB policies may lead to tensions between subsidiaries and the headquarters, indicating the importance of an open organisational culture (Bardoel, 2016). Yet, MNCs tend to distribute HR policies from the centre to the subsidiaries based on strategic and operational concerns (Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2016). While country-level WLB implementations are effective for both employers and employees, there is also a need for cross-country studies that can guide the work-life field comparatively (Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2016). To succeed with global WLB implementations, training of expatriates in local knowledge and of locals in the culture of MNCs might reduce tension (Bardoel, 2016).

3.5. Horizontal and vertical dimensions of gender in organisational structure

Existing literature shows that organisational structure has more than one sub-dimension and is subdivided based on the decision processes (Huang et al., 2010). In addition, organisational structure influences the behaviour of individuals and the transfer of knowledge between groups by regulating how the division of work is prioritised and coordinated in an organisation (Koohborfardhaghia & Altmann, 2017). According to Hao et al. (2012), organisational systems incorporate the natural formulation that includes the structure of centralisation versus flatness, which refers to the hierarchical order, such as layers of management and power. Besides that, organisations also have horizontal and vertical differentiation aspects that affect organisational performance. Accordingly, the nature of organisations concerns work division, differentiation, complexity, coordination mechanisms, communication, standardisation, and flexibility (Hao et al., 2012).

Flatness in an organisation can be characterised as a structural status with very few management hierarchies in command and orders (Huang et al., 2010). According to Koohborfardhaghia and Altmann (2017), in a traditional hierarchical system, there are key actors who have all the authority and information at the top management, however, flat organisational structures show flexible communication aspects. In a flat organisational structure, communication and coordination in diverse layers of the organisation get easier due to a less hierarchical atmosphere (Huang et al., 2010; Zhang, Zhao & Qi, 2014). This, in turn, influences how employees interact with each other (Zhang, Zhao & Qi, 2014). Reducing hierarchical layers profit to get more

flexibility to an organisation. Varied parties can smoothly take part in information sharing and interact without the long-lasting approval procedure, and that provides an effective decision-making process (Zhang, Zhao & Qi, 2014).

In addition to the fact that the structure within the organisation is less hierarchical, the distribution of gender equality within this structure is also important. According to Charles (2003), occupational sex segregation is a common determiner of gender equality, however, the way to comprehend this lies in rejecting the traditional notion and making a systematic distinction between two types of distribution inequality: horizontal and vertical segregation. In this context, a determination based on employment dispersion by gender refers to horizontal segregation, while vertical segregation refers to the occupational context with a measure of earnings or employee status (Charles, 2003). Based on this, Charles (2003) examines the structural and cultural factors of 10 different countries in her research to see the nature of gender segregation. The research results display that horizontal and vertical differentials constitute a large part of occupational gender inequality. Thus, the emerging complex horizontal and vertical dynamics reveal the need for in-depth research on multi-dimensional conceptualisations of gender segregation (Charles, 2003).

4. Theoretical Framework

The following chapter covers the theoretical framing to analyse WLB crafting in relation to gender equality. In order to better understand, we first provide the conceptual dimensions of WLB crafting consolidation, after that, Acker's (1990) concept of the abstract worker and Connell's (2006) theory on gendered organisations are presented.

4.1. Crafting to consolidate work-life balance

The concept of WLB crafting (Sturges, 2012) is an extension of job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) interpret employees as 'job crafters'. Crafting refers to the way in which employees can change and modify their work based on how they think about work, how they perform the work, as well as the relationship they have in the workplace. Thus, the job crafting concept is framed as self-initiated actions in which the limitations of the job are determined by professionals (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Similarly, WLB crafting consists of the behaviours and techniques employees use to shape their desired WLB, in both the work and private sphere (Sturges, 2012). According to Sturges (2012), employees benefit from

using WLB crafting behaviours since policies, work arrangements or workplace cultures might not always be aligned with the employees' preferences and wishes about WLB. By using WLB crafting, employees can shape their behaviours, to achieve a better fit between work and private life.

For instance, employees with a heavy workload lower the different dimensions of work actions, such as time management or work field, in order to avoid fatigue by doing job crafting. The job crafting typology of Wrześniewski and Dutton (2001) analyses employees' goal-oriented and proactive behaviours which shift the boundaries of work to manage jobs and identities (Gravador & Teng-Calleja, 2018; Sturges, 2012; Wrześniewski & Dutton, 2001). Wrześniewski and Dutton (2001) also emphasise that job crafting enables employees to change the job meanings and job identity. Based on their typology (Wrześniewski & Dutton, 2001), Sturges (2012) explored the different methods and techniques employees also use to handle their WLB.

According to Sturges (2012), individuals need to manage the linkage between work and non-work aspects in order to maintain WLB and there are several reasons for them to use their individual methods to achieve the balance (Sturges, 2012). First, employees need to integrate and benefit from corporate policies, such as part-time schedules, which can limit the hours they spend at work on the days they work to meet their undertakings. Further, organisational concepts and cultures may create difficulties for employees to reach WLB. In addition, line managers may be reluctant to use work-life policies because of the potential negative impact on employee performance. Last, corporate work-life policies may not match with the employee needs (Sturges, 2012).

Based on Sturges's (2012) launch of WLB crafting, Gravador and Teng-Calleja (2018) discovered that individuals' use of time management and their strategic actions at work assist the progress of WLB. Similarly, Dreyer and Busch (2021) investigated how couples working together in their own business craft a balance between work and personal life. In addition, to investigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of WLB crafting, Caringal-Go et al. (2021), conducted research among telecommuters. However, the research on WLB crafting is still scarce.

Previous research reveals that even as organisations implement WLB initiatives, employees are unsure of what they need and what policies are currently in place (Gravador & Teng-Calleja, 2018). Thus, employees tend to engage in goal-oriented behaviour to achieve their WLB by

trying to find solutions themselves. As mentioned earlier, WLB crafting relates to which techniques and practises individuals perform to design and manage their WLB (Sturges, 2012). WLB crafting can be divided into three categories. “Physical crafting”, such as the shaping of time management and location of, and distance to, work. Physical crafting also includes choosing a job or employer which suits an employee’s desires for WLB, or choosing to work from home instead of the office. “Cognitive crafting”, which relates to how employees conceptualise WLB, and priorities and compromises that might affect their definitions of a good WLB. This relates to how employees can change their mental image of WLB to justify working more. Last, “relational crafting”, which relates to how employees build and maintain relationships, at work as well as at home, to facilitate WLB. Employees can build their WLB by relying on relationships to supplement the WLB they desire to obtain (Sturges, 2012).

4.2. Theory on gendered organisations

Since women have traditionally been assigned to the home domain, and men to the work domain (Lewis et al., 2007), the specific qualities desired by an employer are often of male characteristics, such as the possibility of committing solely to work with no obligations at home (Acker, 1990). Meanwhile, while working, women and men are often assigned different positions and tasks because of the assumptions that women and men have different stereotypical features and skills (Connell, 2006). These structural ways of dividing women and men in the labour market, in addition to valuing stereotypical male characteristics higher than stereotypically female characteristics, form the basis of the gender regime, which explain patterns of subordination of women in organisations as well as in the surrounding society. According to Connell (2006), masculine organisational culture excludes women from opportunities and power, thus causing inequality between women and men. The concept of the “glass ceiling” is used to explain the understanding of gender as a fixed dichotomy of women and men (Connell, 2006). Based on this, women are subject to discrimination because of traditional stereotypes and prejudices. Thus, they face inequality in reaching higher positions (Connell, 2006).

According to Acker (1990), gender inequality is persistent and embedded in the structure of organisations. A job position, although considered gender-neutral, consists of many aspects which make them more suitable for stereotypical men. Employers prefer to hire employees who are loyal to their organisation and do not easily get distracted by other factors outside of work. This priority leaves out many women with care responsibilities for family members. As a result,

ideal employees are men for numerous employers. Acker (1990) denotes that the “abstract worker” (Acker, 1990, p 152), is a person without strong attachments to the private sphere, in other words, not someone burdened with domestic responsibilities. Hence, only the abstract worker, traditionally a man, can be fitted for the “abstract job” (Acker, 1990, p 149). Acker (1990) argues that by organisational logic, consideration does not need to be taken for the human, or body, filling the job position. The hypothetical abstract worker, therefore, is a worker who can focus solely on the work.

Connell (2006) offers a framework describing how gender regimes are persistent within organisations. First, the division of labour, which concerns how work tasks and occupations are being associated with, and constituted of, either the female or male gender. This does not only relate to existing work, but also considers how gendered division of labour is constantly emerging as new work unfolds. Connell (2006) argues that organisations can aim to degender the division of labour. This can be done by rearranging internal structures and roles, or by recruiting processes aiming to equate gender divisions of labour. Second, gender relations of power, which partly concerns the hierarchical order of power, where men have historically been on top making decisions, and the number of women have increased on the way to the bottom, filling less powerful positions. Traditionally, hierarchical organisations consist of many levels with decreasing power, top-down. However, flatter organisations also exist, where the total levels of management are reduced. A flat organisation can encourage and facilitate inclusion between managers and subordinates by promoting a more consultative way of managing. Third, emotions and human relations. This involves the dimension of emotions and emotional relationships within work. For example, within traditionally male-dominated work categories or levels of management, the increasing number of women may cause resistance or suspicion. Connell (2006, p 843) refers to this as “emotions of gender transition”, which signifies emotions surfacing as a result of increasing organisational gender equity. However, Connell (2006) argues, gender transition does not always entail these negative emotions. In some cases, a “depolarised workplace” (Connell, 2006, p 844) emerges. The depolarised workplace is characterised by reduced emotions of gender, however, they can still occur. Further, organisational relationships and loyalty to the organisation are reduced, and focus is rather placed on individual matters. While depolarised workplaces are more gender-equal, the positive attributes of gender equality can be diminished or unclear, since the focus is on what is *not* allowed to do in order to keep the workplace depolarised. And last, gender culture and symbolism, which relate to how women and men are separated based on cultural aspects and symbols. For example, as women are entering

previously male-dominated areas of work, men can feel constrained and inhibited in relation to stereotypical male behaviour, such as the use of sexist jargon. Hence, women's transition within labour is bound to make female and male culture and symbols meet. However, this "meeting" can also lead to gender neutrality, which is more suppression of gender than acknowledging it. However, incorporating gender neutrality in an organisation does not suggest that there are no presumed differences in regards to gender. Rather, women and men can be considered as having equal opportunities and responsibilities, but still be considered as being different in regards to gendered, personal characteristics. Incorporating gender neutrality merely suggests that gender is being formally deemphasised. As Connell (2006) argues, by suppressing and deemphasising gender, gender equity will be undermined. Rather, to reach gender equality, gender must be allowed to be existent, and gender inequalities must be made visible in order to be addressed and reflected upon. Hence, degendering is not the answer.

5. Methodology

The following sections explain the research design, sampling strategy, data selection and analytical strategy of the study. Additionally, ethical considerations are stated.

5.1. Research design

The aim of this research was to investigate managers' WLB crafting behaviours within the male-dominated automotive industry. In this manner, a case organisation was selected and qualitative research was used for in-depth knowledge. Thus, this study set out to deliver a deeply interpreted insight into the work-life situations by grasping what the informants sense and experience about WLB (Ritchie et al., 2003). In addition, this study focused not only to portray the practical aspects of WLB crafting, but to gain a deeper understanding of why managers craft WLB in the context of a particular organisation within a certain industry, and the potential limitations that this context contains. Hence, this study was conducted at a latent level, with the purpose of discerning the causes behind shown behaviours (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By looking at WLB crafting behaviours with the pre-understanding of gender regimes being embedded in organisations, this study draws on a constructionist framework with the perspective that human behaviour is produced and reproduced based on sociocultural conditions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

5.2. Sampling strategy

Purposive sampling was used when selecting the sample unit (Ritchie et al., 2003), based on the criterion of the informants' positions as managers. The target group was all the managers other than those on the board of management in the case company. In addition, our target managers were selected from all the levels and professions in the case organisation based on their titles as managers. Table 1 illustrates the details. To achieve relevant data, 18 individual interviews were conducted with the informants, divided between 7 female and 11 male managers aged between 27 to 62. The study was conducted in seven different European countries across all units of the case organisation, and the managers were located in various departments and in different operating countries. All participating managers worked in diverse professions and levels. Further, the managers had been working in the case organisation for at least nine months.

Table 1
Outline of the informants

Informant no	Gender	Age range	Expat/ Local	Duration of employment	Marital status	Children responsibility
Manager 1	Male	between 36 - 45	Local	between 9 months to 1 year	Married	Yes
Manager 2	Female	between 36 - 45	Expat	between 9 months to 1 year	Single with a partner	No
Manager 3	Female	between 27 - 35	Expat	between 9 months to 1 year	Single	No
Manager 4	Male	between 46 - 62	Local	over 2 years	Married	Yes
Manager 5	Male	between 27 - 35	Expat	between 9 months to 1 year	Single	No
Manager 6	Female	between 27 - 35	Local	between 9 months to 1 year	Single	No
Manager 7	Female	between 27 - 35	Local	between 9 months to 1 year	Married	No
Manager 8	Female	between 27 - 35	Expat	over 2 years	Single with a partner	No
Manager 9	Male	between 27 - 35	Local	between 1 to 2 years	Single	No
Manager 10	Female	between 27 - 35	Expat	between 1 to 2 years	Single with a partner	No
Manager 11	Male	between 27 - 35	Local	between 1 to 2 years	Single	No
Manager 12	Male	between 36 - 45	Local	between 1 to 2 years	Married	No
Manager 13	Female	between 27 - 35	Local	over 2 years	Single with a partner	No
Manager 14	Male	between 27 - 35	Local	between 1 to 2 years	Single	No
Manager 15	Male	between 27 - 35	Local	between 9 months to 1 year	Single	No
Manager 16	Male	between 36 - 45	Expat	between 9 months to 1 year	Single	No
Manager 17	Male	between 27 - 35	Expat	between 9 months to 1 year	Married	Yes
Manager 18	Male	between 27 - 35	Local	between 1 to 2 years	Married	Yes

5.3. Data collection strategy

As mentioned earlier, to get basic information about the case organisation, an interview was conducted with one of the HRBPs. Therefore, an interview guide (see Appendix 2) was created for the interview with the company's HRBP. The HRBP also acted as a gatekeeper to negotiate access to informants, and provided internal data. In this way, individuals from the target group were reached and solid data was obtained. In addition, another interview guide was created for the informant managers, taking into account the research questions and the aim of the study (see

Appendix 3). Before starting the interviews with managers, two test interviews were conducted with other professionals, and the interview guide was adjusted. After that, 120 managers were contacted via email, provided information about the study and invited to an interview. In this context, before the interviews began, the format and purpose of the interviews were explained. It was also stated that the interview data would remain confidential and only obtainable by the researchers (Lewis, 2003). Further, the informants were informed of free consent and confidentiality with a consent letter (see Appendix 1). Following that, primary data was collected through 18 semi-structured in-depth interviews with managers from different departments of the case organisation. The goal of the interviews was to gain an understanding of how the informants work to craft WLB, and how they experience the gendered nature of the organisation. Further, they were asked what gender they identify with, and what they considered a good WLB. Follow-up questions were asked when more detailed information was needed. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and 90 minutes. The collected data reached saturation when no new dimensions related to the theoretical categories were discovered (Charmaz, 2006).

5.4. Analytical strategy and coding

Thematic analysis, a widely-used qualitative research tool that can be conducted in diverse frameworks in social sciences, was used when analysing the data (Terry et al., 2017). The method permits the analysis of a wide range of research questions with theoretical independence (Terry et al., 2017). The analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-phase guide on thematic analysis. This method enabled us to identify, analyse, and report repeated patterns within collected data, whilst keeping flexibility and promoting deep, detailed data. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise that while thematic analysis stimulates themes and patterns to emerge from the data, accentuating the absence of involvement from the researcher to actively choose which themes should have precedence, it is important to recognise that researchers do make decisions out of their own judgement regarding what themes suit their theoretical framework and method of choice, which reflects the flexible nature of thematic analysis. The flexibility of thematic analysis does not, however, translate into inconsistency in regard to decisions around themes or prevalence of themes, it merely indicates the various ways in which the analysis can be applied to the data.

The six phases described in Braun and Clarke (2006) consist of detailed, yet flexible, guidelines on how to carry out the thematic analysis. During the first phase, the data was transcribed verbatim, including pauses and nonverbal audibles, such as “uh” “hmm” or coughings, as well as

careful punctuation to maintain accuracy of the meaning of the data. Moreover, the transcription process facilitated familiarisation with the data. The transcriptions were then re-read to generate ideas on what the data actually inhibited, and to uncover any interesting streams of meaning embedded in the data. The second phase consisted of producing initial codes from the data. During this phase, the transcriptions were carefully read to expose segments of raw data interesting for the analysis. To detect initial codes relevant for the questions aimed to be answered in this particular study, theory-driven coding was performed during this stage of the process. However, it was ensured that the coding was broad enough to capture any patterns that might be of interest for the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The coding followed the abductive approach used for this study, where the initial direction of the study was open to new aspects and possible changes by discovering new patterns (Charmaz, 2006). During this part of the process, it was decided to add focused coding (Charmaz, 2006) to the process, to facilitate sorting the data into themes. During the third and fourth phases of the process, the focused codes were gathered, reviewed, adjusted, and sorted into main themes and subthemes. The coding and sorting were performed in Microsoft Excel to facilitate an overview of the data. Table 2 displays the themes generated from the qualitative interviews with reference to how the managers choose to craft their WLB and how they consider the gendered nature of the organisations. During the fifth phase, the themes and sub themes were given names to capture the essence of their content. The sixth phase consisted of presenting the themes in the result chapter and analysing them with reference to theory, previous research, and the research questions.

Table 2
Themes generated from the qualitative interviews

Themes	Sub-themes
Challenges in priority setting	Priorities are hampered by high workload Work settings do not allow desired WLB
Arranging work to achieve sustainable WLB	Having autonomy to adjust work time Feeling recharged through activities Scheduling is prominent in organising time Setting boundaries and prioritising to value life and time
Interpretation of organisational culture	Perceiving availability for work Consideration of workplace conditions Desiring Swedish standard of WLB
Support through relationships	Relational support to achieve WLB Recharging through relationships Understanding at work and private spheres Having conversations help to release thoughts and balance work life
Organisational view on gender	Influences of country contexts Perceiving the gender equality approach of the organisation
Dynamics between women and men	Seeing individuals, not gender Beliefs that men and women behave differently
Gendered implications in achieving WLB	Experiencing gendered implications Perceiving WLB is different when having a family

Because of the international context of the organisation investigated, the possibility to interview employees face to face was limited. Therefore, interviews with all informants were conducted over the internet. Because COVID-19 posed difficulties in terms of physical meetings, and because employees often work from home, the design and location of the interviews were narrowed. When collecting data through in-depth interviews, establishing trust between researcher and informants is of utmost importance (Charmaz, 2006). Conducting interviews over the internet might complicate the establishing of trust, as it limits the intimate structure of face-to-face interviewing. However, in-depth interviews usually take place in a location decided by the informant (Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003), which is an advantage when conducting interviews over the internet, as the informants can choose the location where they feel most comfortable.

5.5. Trustworthiness

Within qualitative research in the social field, some researchers suggest that trustworthiness is a more appropriate criterion than reliability and validity for determining the quality of the study, since a social reality is unlikely composed of one single specific truth (Bryman, 2018). This study considers four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1994, as cited in Bryman, 2018).

The credibility of a study relates to how the researchers present the data in a form that reflects the informants' descriptions of their social reality, and how well the researchers reach a credible conclusion that is acceptable to others (Bryman, 2018). To create credibility, the study must be conducted with reference to established procedures, and the individuals who have described their social reality should confirm the researchers' interpretation (Bryman, 2018). The informants of this study have not been asked to read the transcripts of the interviews which limits the credibility of the gathered data. However, during the interviews, the researchers' interpretations have been verified by ensuring accuracy of informants' descriptions of their social reality.

Qualitative research is aiming to produce "thick descriptions" (Geertz 1973; as cited in Bryman, 2018 p 468) of the gathered data, i.e., to explore depth instead of breadth, as in quantitative research. Other researchers can then evaluate and determine the level of transferability based on the context of the study (Bryman, 2018). The scope of this study is within a particular organisation with a limited number of informants, and a specific culture has been explored, which limits the transferability to other contexts. However, by providing details about the

organisation, the sampling group (see table 1) and the interview guide (see appendix 3), it allows other researchers to determine if the study is transferable to other contexts.

To reach dependability, qualitative researchers ensure that the research process is permeated with transparency (Bryman, 2018). This study provides thorough descriptions of all stages of the research method. Further, during the process of conducting the study, several opportunities for auditing have been performed, both with peers and with supervisors, to enhance the dependability of the study.

Confirmability concerns the objectivity of the researchers. Although the researchers agree that complete objectivity within qualitative studies cannot be reached, the process of the study and the conclusions reached, must not be biased by the researchers' personal values and theoretical orientation. To ensure confirmability, no conscious influence was used when conducting the interviews or analysing the data.

5.6. Ethical Considerations

As preliminary mentioned, the case company and participating managers remain confidential. This means appropriate safeguards were in place throughout the research and data collection process to protect the privacy and information of informants and the case organisation from unauthorised access and use.

Further, Swedish Research Council ethics were carefully applied throughout the entire research process (Swedish Research Council, 2017). Also, the information given to the informants was provided by adhering to the Swedish Research Council ethics (see Appendix 1). In this matter, the informants were informed before the interview and a consent letter was sent to them, sharing the contact numbers and email addresses of the researchers. Therefore, it was essential that the interviews were conducted with the voluntary consent of the informants, that they could withdraw from the interview whenever they wanted and that questions they did not want to be answered were skipped. In addition, all the data collected via interviews and provided from the case organisation has been stored without public access to ensure that no information is disclosed (Swedish Research Council, 2017).

6. Results and Empirical Findings

This chapter presents information gathered from the 18 interviews conducted with male and female managers. The chapter begins with accentuating difficulties in achieving WLB, followed by descriptions of techniques the informants used to create WLB. Finally, different aspects of gender and equality are presented.

6.1. Challenges in priority setting

Various ways of encountering difficulties when trying to balance work and private life were described by the informants. These difficulties were mostly related to high workload and lack of structure within the organisation.

6.1.1. Priorities are hampered by high workload

According to the informants, as a consequence of demands from work, they sometimes had to decline spending time on matters, both at work and in private life. However, as opposed to being seen as a way of setting boundaries and prioritising, this was considered as having to decline matters the informants would have wanted to prioritise. Many informants experienced a high level of workload, which was experienced to have an influence on their ability to achieve WLB. For instance, managers experienced that they did not have the ability to prioritise and protect their private time when the demands from work were too substantial. Recharging by focusing on activities outside of work was mentioned as something the informants had to decline to engage in due to lack of time. The high workload was visible both in hours spent working and in getting interrupted during time off work by receiving emails from work.

If you just talk about work-life balance and not workloads, then yeah, the company is not setting the wrong expectation. But if you look at workload, I think sometimes there's too much expectation within the hours you get. So, it also influences your work-life balance (Male manager 14).

Even though the managers were aware of the onsite activities offered by the organisation, they were often mentioned together with the announcement that there was no time to take advantage of them. As mentioned by one manager “We have a time reserved for wellness and fitness. I never take it, because I normally never have time for that” (Female manager 2). Balancing expectations from colleagues was described as sometimes being difficult, drawing a line for when work interferes with personal preferences for WLB could be hard, as it was associated with

letting people down. As for private relationships, the informants explain that they had sometimes been absent from important events due to tiredness from work or high workload.

6.1.2. Work settings do not allow desired WLB

Further, the managers expressed that there was a lack of structure within the organisation which made it difficult to foresee the workload. As the informants perceived the organisation as unstructured, they experienced that they had difficulties in achieving the WLB they desired, due to not being able to plan their work and life. With unclear explanations of processes and last-minute changes, the managers got a feeling of not being in control of their WLB, and this was considered to generate emotional stress. The managers also experienced misalignment between the organisation's initiatives for WLB and the way that they could actually achieve WLB. It was a common understanding that the organisation had goodwill in encouraging people to enjoy a good WLB, but that this was not achieved in practice.

So if you really want to change it, then it should be rooted in the culture. It's more than just saying "make sure you have a good work-life balance" then you should set clear boundaries. It's like, "hey, you are not allowed to work after this hour. You can get the permission to work if you really need it, but you should be able to finish your job within 40 hours. And if you're not able to finish the job within 40 hours, either you have too much work or you don't plan well" (Male manager 11).

As shown, it was experienced that implementing a sufficient WLB among employees needed to be more than an organisational goal. If the employees did not have the possibility to integrate the initiatives set, they were considered a theory rather than a reality.

6.2. Arranging work to achieve sustainable WLB

The informants arranged their work and private time to make sure they were able to reach WLB. This was done by planning activities, scheduling and setting boundaries.

6.2.1. Having autonomy to adjust work time

Regardless of how many hours spent working, having the autonomy to decide where and when to work seems to influence the informants' perceptions of WLB. The managers have different preferences as to whether or not they chose to spend most of their working time at home or in the office. Many of the managers chose to work a majority of the time from home, in order to save time otherwise spent on travelling. By working from home, the informants expressed that they

could carry out some domestic tasks during the day, such as loading the washing machine, and by doing so freeing time or their actual free time. Some managers spent most of their working time at the office. Commuting to work was explained as a way of sorting through matters not related with work, with the purpose of leaving things belonging in the private sphere at home, and arriving at work with a clear head.

Commuting back and forth to work is good. Because then you have, in my case thirty minutes, to kind of say goodbye to the dogs, and the other ones at home and then, you can kind of use that thirty minutes driving or, so, and then you come out prepared for work. And during that kind of trip, I usually try to sort out the things which are not necessary to think about when I'm at work (Male manager 4).

Simultaneously, commuting from work was described as a method to switch from work mode to home mode and a way of taking the mind off of work. Some of the informants chose to spend most of their time at work, while conducting specifically challenging tasks at home where it is more quiet. One manager described that multitasking helped in combining high demands from work with getting a sense of autonomy over the work situation, such as occasionally conducting meetings in the car in a parking lot or doing easier administrative tasks while having the television on in the background.

I mix work and life together a bit. Sometimes when I'm doing administrative work, I will have the TV on in the background with, you know, Law and Order, The Simpsons or something that, you know, you don't need to pay attention to, but just kind of distracting. For me, background noise is important. So I kind of mix everything a bit together. So it's hard to separate a bit where the line between work-life is but it's a good balance anyways (Male manager 5).

As for autonomy in regards to when to perform work, having the flexibility of setting up the work schedule in coherence with private life matters was described as important in combining work and life. The informants expressed that the result and to deliver on time was important, but that the organisation did not give instructions as to how and when to conduct the work. By having freedom over how to distribute working hours, aligning work with private life commitments, such as going to doctor appointments, made it easier to achieve a balance between work and private life.

It's basically on me or on us, how we arrange our days. I could go home at any time if I want to and work from home or make a break or something. But I rather judge by the

tasks that are coming along. And, yeah, deal with it in the way that it's demanding. So if there's less work to do, I allow myself some free time while I can take a walk through the city here. It's beautiful right now (Male manager 1).

Having the possibility to take a short break during the day and relax the mind off of work, such as taking a walk during traditional office hours, was described as an important technique in recharging before returning to work.

6.2.2. Feeling recharged through activities

All informants considered recharging by doing activities outside of work as essential in achieving a good WLB. Engaging in non-work activities, such as learning new languages or taking a dance course, was interpreted as a way of staying motivated in life, and staying motivated was explained to help in balancing work and life

After work, it's usually the moment when I think I'm really done sitting for hours and hours. And often I would go for a really long walk or a run or go to the gym, or meet up with a friend in a park on some terrace (Female manager 7).

By doing sports or pursuing hobbies, the informants could relax their mind off of work and gather energy. This way of focusing on things outside of work was described as a way of self-care needed to deal with demands from work, as well as to gather energy to perform at work.

6.2.3. Scheduling is prominent in organising time

A prominent component in achieving WLB was described as putting time and effort into scheduling the time. When demands from work felt overwhelming, scheduling was emphasised as a way of helping with organising and prioritising tasks, which was explained as a way of structuring demands between work and private life, and thereby finding a balance.

I would say it's a matter of, I always go back to the organisation, you know, how you organise your day and prioritisation because, and it depends what is important for you as a person, because for me, because I was already in this situation, my health, it's the most important thing and nothing is more important than my health (Female manager 3).

By scheduling, the informants facilitated the distribution of different commitments in life, in order to fit their own personal needs. Although most managers noted the importance of scheduling, some had developed procedures on how and when to schedule their time, such as

always planning for the week ahead on a certain night. Furthermore, one manager stated that he was planning upcoming work weeks with a person outside of his work and private life sphere.

My Bible is the way I keep my schedule and my calendar. And I do think the only reason why it works, because I have somebody, I talk to about it externally. So that is sort of an accountability aspect that is needed. I would say planning and accountability is the best weapon against work-life balance. So, that you check in with somebody else who also has the same approach, and then you exchange how you actually did your week. And then the next week, you both know what you were supposed to be doing, and then you can evaluate how it's going. [...] So every Friday, like I said, when I do my calendar and my schedule, I try and also do that in a discussion with a sort of, not a friend, somebody who's not too close to me personally. And then this person does the same, and we evaluate and talk to each other about how this week went and what we were happy with and what not (Male manager 14).

By scheduling work as well as private life matters, the informants expressed how they gained a feeling of being in control of their time, and that this was imperative in establishing balance between work and private life.

6.2.4. Setting boundaries and prioritising to value life and time

By setting boundaries and prioritising the informants facilitated WLB by choosing where their energy and presence was most important. This was apparent in how they chose to attend to matters both at work and in private life. During work, blocking the lunch break in their schedule and declining meetings during an hour was a way of protecting time to have lunch. Further, choosing which meetings to attend or what projects to get involved with was explained as a way of sticking to what was considered most important, and avoid getting caught up in too much work.

If you don't know how to set the boundaries, then you can't really keep the balance. So I think it's really about setting boundaries, but also like, not saying no to everything, that's not what I mean, but it's more like being realistic on what you can do in one week. [...] So for me, a schedule keeping is key. Also blocking in time to work on projects instead of just having an open calendar. Let's say you have a full day with only one meeting, so your calendar is empty, but then you can still use your calendar to say, "I'm gonna work on this. I'm going to use 20 minutes to check my emails". I only check my emails three times a day for 20 minutes each, because if I keep reacting to emails, then I'm just gonna go crazy (Male manager 14).

By learning to separate between what to delegate and where it was important to be present, the informants found a way of limiting where they were at disposal. As one informant put it “don’t make yourself indispensable“ (Female manager 3). Not being indispensable was described as a way of ensuring that other employees carried on with their work without constantly being needed to attend. Outside of work, setting boundaries in regards to private life events was done when there could be a negative spillover on work if a particular event was attended, such as meeting friends during late hours.

6.3. Interpretation of organisational culture

How the informants considered themselves available for work, and how they interpreted organisational characteristics was reflected in how they made sense of their WLB.

6.3.1. Perceiving availability for work

The informants emphasised that how they considered themselves available for work influenced their overall perspective of how satisfied they were with their WLB. For example, by setting boundaries in regards to when to be available, as described earlier, the informants were given a feeling of deemphasising the importance of working hours, and rather emphasising the importance of time for their private life. This was visible in how by choosing to, for example, not answering emails during evenings, gave the informants a feeling of deciding for themselves how much time they would let work occupy their private sphere.

Um, and I then wonder, “why is he [the informant’s manager] sending an email at 11:00 PM?” So that gives me also a bit of a signal of, “should I then also be available at 11:00 PM and should I then also, then reply to him or maybe send an email after my working hours”. But I am not doing that. I decided not to do it, full stop, I’m not gonna do that. So, I think this is something that I just said to myself, if I start doing this, it will indeed send a message also to my manager that I am available (Female manager 7).

The informants had different experiences as to what extent the company demanded them to be available for work, still, there was a mutual understanding with reference to the importance of their own perception on when to be at disposal.

It's like “OK the company is gaining something with having me in its company, it's not that bad only I'm gaining something for being part of this company”. So you start to demand also from the company, that you get your time, that you get your space etc. So

it's also about changing your mindset, thinking that “OK I’m... the company also owes me to have my own space and to be happy and to be balanced”. It's not only that I owe the company something anytime that they need me to change the strategy or need me in this event, you know? (Female manager 2).

Further, by deciding how to be available for work, the informants gained a feeling of self-worth towards the organisation by establishing their own rules in relation to availability.

6.3.2. Consideration of workplace conditions

How the informants considered their availability for work was also in relation to how they considered the circumstances around their workplace. Many informants took into account the fact that the organisation is a startup, and this influenced how they perceived themselves as available. Since startups were often being equated with being a hectic, unorganised environment, the informants explained that the state of the organisation was the reason for the things sometimes being unstructured.

It's more about being part of something bigger, a movement, like a startup atmosphere, right? And I don't know, there's no fixed definition for that, but. If we imagine startups are an amazing projects, right? You're doing something completely new and have the chance of being part. And this doesn't follow a regular schedule, like for example, a typical nine to five job (Male manager 1).

The informants expressed that high workload or inconvenient working hours was a part of the deal when working in this kind of environment, and considered this a reason for being prepared to be working more, or being more available.

6.3.3. Desiring Swedish standards of WLB

The fact that the organisation has its headquarters in Sweden, influenced the way the informants considered how they could achieve and prioritise WLB. Swedes were often considered to value private time, and to have clear boundaries in relation to time spent at work. The organisation was considered “Swedish” in how WLB was addressed in regards to WLB initiatives, however cultural and structural differences between countries were described as sometimes hindering the WLB approach that the company intended. For example, southern Europeans were considered to work longer days, and some informants felt that such cultural aspects would override the expectations set by the company on how to balance work and life.

6.4. Support through relationships

Work- and private life relationships were considered helpful in reaching WLB. Relationships were important to the informants in easing their WLB, gaining energy from friends and family, being met with understanding, and having dialogues.

6.4.1. Relational support to achieve WLB

All informants described various ways of using relationships to facilitate their WLB, both at home and at work. In the home sphere, this was often by receiving support from partners in order to better balance demands from work. By having a partner who took care of domestic responsibilities, time was freed to spend more time working. Eating dinner with friends or at parents was mentioned as a way to reduce the time for cooking, and instead find time to nurture relationships. Partners and friends were also often described as needed to remind the informants to stop working and do other things. In this way, relationships helped the employees with setting boundaries and focusing on other aspects of life. As described above, relationships were expressed beneficial both in order to spend more time working, and in order to be able to attend private life events.

So what I'm also trying to do is then go to my parents and have some food there because then I don't need to cook. And then I also see them because I know I will be tired. But for me, that's also like relaxing just to be with my parents and explain because then I can talk. And when you're living alone, you cannot talk and you also need to have, like you need to have it out of your system. So, try to go to my parents on like the days that I will stop early. I also try to go to my friends and have a nice dinner and drink some wine (Female manager 6).

In the work sphere, relational support was described as being able to delegate tasks when experiencing too high workload. It was also explained that being able to leave tasks in the trust of colleagues when going on vacation was an important part of being able to enjoy time off of work. Many informants mentioned that, during vacations, colleagues reminded them to turn off the phone and to enjoy their vacation. The same thing occurred during sick leaves, where it was explained that colleagues reminded each other to stay in bed while being sick and not prioritise working. Further, being in a team and discussing work facilitated making mutual decisions about workload, such as postponing specific tasks, which also helped in creating an improved physical WLB. Overall, the informants experienced sufficient support from their closest manager, by

indicating that they were able to discuss their workload with their manager and receive additional resources when they needed it.

6.4.2. Recharging through relationships

The informants described that recharging by socialising with friends and family during their free time was a way to gather energy while maintaining their friendships. When prioritising spending time with important people in their life, they gained a sense of well-being and were able to take their minds off of work, thus enhancing their perception of having a good WLB.

Also, even a part of being with my friends, getting a drink in the evening is also some sort of mental wellbeing. It's not maybe very healthy, but it's quite a nice social aspect (Female manager 7).

By spending time with family and friends, the informants could choose to engage in relationships while also recharging through activities, such as eating out or going to the gym together, or to just gain energy by being in each other's presence.

6.4.3. Understanding at work and private spheres

Being surrounded by people at home and at work who understand WLB struggles was described as an important element in facilitating a balance between work and life. The informants explained that when family and friends showed understanding, such as expressing their concern over an unbalanced work situation, it was considered supportive and helpful. Further, if family and friends were having demanding jobs themselves and therefore were in a similar situation, gaining understanding helped when having to decline social gatherings, because of job schedules or being too tired to attend. In relation to being met with understanding at work, the informants explained it as important when colleagues were able to open up about their WLB struggles, and come to conclusions about how to deal with periods of high workload. One informant described that during an especially demanding period the team established an arrangement on how to divide the work between them in order for everyone to focus on where their expertise was most needed.

We could achieve that [the arrangement], because also, we build also in the meanwhile trust really, because nobody felt like you're trying to push work on me, but everybody was collaborative and had a feeling, "okay, we are in this together and I want to help you not to do things that don't really, are not really on your table" (Male manager 15).

While figuring out how to solve the situation together, closer relationships were built due to the way they gained an understanding of each other's work situation.

6.4.4. Having conversations help to release thoughts and balance work life

Further, the informants expressed that by having conversations about workload and occurrences at work, they could release thoughts of work that might be occupying their minds. This could be done through casual chats with friends and family. While talking about work, family and friends could help with pointing out that work is not the most important thing.

We basically went to each other. We complain to each other. We get it all out. And usually by the end of the call we both feel better for the next week. So for me it's getting it all out, that's the issue. I don't necessarily depend on friends or family for solutions or solving the problems. It's just having a source to get out the frustrations of the week, or day or whatever it is, and move on (Male manager 5).

Venting about work was considered a way of emptying the brain of bothering aspects of work, and thereafter letting them go. In addition, talking about private life matters at work was mentioned as important to be able to be present while being at work. For example, if something had occurred in the private sphere, by processing it with colleagues, it was easier to continue with the work day.

Do you have kids, do you- or anything, was there an accident in the traffic? Um, there are all those things on their mind, and that's for me, work-life balance is that everything comes together. And if it doesn't really come together, then you may have to talk with your employees or colleagues, that "you don't really look that good today. Can I help you with anything?" (Male manager 4).

As one informant mentioned, by checking in with colleagues and making sure everybody was allowed to express how they feel, this was a way of achieving a balance between private life and work.

6.5. Organisational view on gender

When asked about gender, the informants experienced that country-level contexts made a difference in how applicable the organisation's gender equality agenda was. Also, opinions on whether or not the organisation's gender equality approach was implemented varied.

6.5.1. Influences of country contexts

The informants expressed that they valued the way the organisation works to achieve gender equality. However, many informants felt that the context of the country in which they work added an extra dimension to whether or not the initiatives set by the organisation to reach gender equality were applicable. The informants experienced that differences in achieving gender equality were related to the structural settings in their country, such as to what extent paternity leave was available. Further, they experienced that the cultural behaviours as to whether fathers were expected to take advantage of parental leave mattered. Few of the informants were aware that the organisation offers six-month paternity leave, and the ones who did had experienced that it was not common knowledge among their colleagues. One manager described his colleagues' reactions upon discussing parental leave “Uh, what? I thought it was 10 days? I said: Yeah, but that's what you are forced to take” (Male manager 15).

6.5.2. Perceiving the gender equality approach of the organisation

Among the informants, it was well known that the organisations aim to reach gender equality in terms of gender ratio within the organisation. The organisation was often described as being groundbreaking in relation to other automotive brands, due to their gender equal orientation. It was also mentioned that the topic of gender equality was often emphasised by the management and that the organisation did a good job in prioritising gender equality. Many of the informants experienced that women and men have the same opportunities to advance within the organisation, and that the organisation has the same expectations on employees, regardless of gender. Further, many informants mentioned that they did not experience different expectations as to whether employees were parents or not.

I mean, diversity is very important for us as a company. So we do a lot of things to be able to make sure that if you're a mom, now, if you're working, you get the same opportunities that someone that has not kids, you know, that it's not like, “oh, you're a mommy”, you know, “you're gonna work less” (Female manager 3).

However, other informants experienced that the organisation's gender equal protocol was not as well balanced in practice as it was in theory. Some perceived that the gender equality approach was more an image than a reality, by describing that the management was male driven, and that like minded people, also male, were often recruited and promoted, which generated more men in powerful decision making positions. As one informant described “I mean, we talk about gender split. Uh, being 50/50 at [company name], but it's not really equal, like in terms of what role men

and women are in (Female manager 8). Some informants felt that even though the organisation had intentions of living by softer, more feminine values, such as having an open door policy, more masculine behaviours, such as taking up space and promoting oneself, were often appreciated as well as rewarded. Further, it was expressed that the organisation valued hard skills over soft skills. This was expressed by informants who experienced that since men are over-represented in the management, there was a lack of softer aspects in the ways the organisation was managed, which gave the feeling of a male character of management.

Some kind of little like boys' club task force [the management] that handles all the important stuff and like get shit done. And so I think, especially in those kinds of leadership roles where, that are more operational or that really require sales and those kinds of things. I think that, those managers take more space in this sort of internal, in the culture. Those are the ones that are noticed ... It becomes this quite harsh climate where it's the focus is only on business and making sure that the business tasks and things are fulfilled and very little on the, like people aspects of the organisation ... I think that's what leads me to say that it's more like a male characteristic kind of leadership because those softer aspects of leadership and making sure that people thrive and have a good work-life situation, or get the most out of their skills and so on. I mean, we don't really have time to prioritise that. So it becomes very like task-oriented leadership. I think that's what makes me feel that it's more male characteristic (Female manager 13).

Thus, some informants suggested that they would prefer more emphasis on softer values, and that the prominence of a business oriented leadership entailed that personal characteristics and needs in the balance between work and life were held back due to the harsh leadership style.

6.6. Dynamics between women and men

The informant described that women and men were not looked upon differently because of their gender, rather gender was often explained as almost invisible. At the same time, many informants explained that women and men acted and interacted differently.

6.6.1. Seeing individuals, not gender

Most informants experienced that women and men were treated equally among colleagues. It was expressed that people were seen as individuals first and foremost, and that gender was considered a secondary aspect, which was not of importance. Many informants explained that they did not see gender, they only saw the person.

I don't draw any of these lines in my mind to be honest. I think we are all individuals. We are all very different, right. And that's very good the way it is. I don't make it dependent on gender. And also whether it's the roles or the way we communicate (Male manager 1).

Most informants expressed that they did not see a separation based on gender, and that tasks were performed based on qualification and roles, rather than due to whether colleagues were female or male. It was expressed that women and men have the same possibilities to develop within the organisation, and that how someone chose to act is based on individual features, and is not associated with gender. Further, the informants explained that the way they talked and acted among each other was equivalent regardless of gender. They experienced that women and men discuss the same things, and that the atmosphere did not change as to whether the environment consisted of mostly women or men. The relationships between women and men were described as not being different from relationships where genders were the same.

6.6.2. Beliefs that women and men behave differently

However while experiencing that there was no difference as to how gender was seen within the organisation, the informants simultaneously expressed how they perceived women and men differently. It was expressed that the division between roles and departments were natural, since women and men have different interests in life. Some informants expressed that women were more expected to multitask, and a few informants experienced a tendency of women doing more administrative tasks, such as booking meetings and taking notes. Some informants noted that women and men usually make decisions together, but that men make fast decisions based on logic, while women took a longer time to make decisions because they communicated more, were more detail-oriented and had a broader perspective. Some experienced that decisions were mostly taken by men, since women did not have time to give input. Some informants reflected upon how women and men behave differently in meetings. It was noted that conversations were mostly driven by females, but when the majority was men, the men acted more competitive and dominated the discussion by using high voices. Further, some experienced that women were more responsible at work, and felt that this influenced male colleagues to act more responsible. It was also experienced that women and men had different ways of approaching work, even if they had the same work tasks.

They don't have different tasks in what they're assigned to do, but yes, they naturally gravitate towards the way they balance what they do. Women do spend more time on different tasks than the men, at least in the managers that I work with, the men seem to

focus more on data driven things, you know, information, logic based things. Whereas, the women focus more on the people management more. I think some people would call them more soft skills, but focusing more on feelings, I guess how they feel that the team is going, feel that things need to be improved. And they're not necessarily wrong... But I think it's what they choose to focus on. I do see a difference between the male and female managers, but what they're assigned to do though isn't any different (Male manager 5).

Some informants perceived clear distinctions between how women and men acted and interacted within the organisation. It was experienced that women and men had different ways of interacting together, as well as towards each other. Some male informants mentioned that men communicate differently with each other than with women, by explaining that men are more direct with each other than they are with women present, as they consider women to be more easily offended. Further, it was experienced that the atmosphere was less formal when only men were involved, that jokes were more often made and that the conversation could be ruder. Upon reflecting about how men behave towards women, it was sometimes experienced that men chose to act more respectful.

Maybe it would be a bit softer and maybe, less rude. Even though I think it's just in the way you give the message, maybe it might differ a little bit. But the message will still be said, so I think it's just, maybe, a little bit more in a polite way, but still, the message is given. I don't think that we try to protect women by not saying anything. Maybe it's a little bit more polite and less in [country], people in the automotive and the automotive industry are really seen as macho and with these bad jokes about a woman, et cetera, maybe you see, you feel that less when there are women [present] ... It's just a better way, maybe, to communicate. So I think, yeah, it's quite positive (Male manager 17).

As for female informants, it was sometimes experienced that the relationships between women were more supportive than intergender relationships. By having important bonds with female colleagues, the informants experienced that women could encourage each other, as well as be more honest with each other than in their relationships with men. Some informants expressed that female relationships were particularly important when there were strong bonds between men in their departments. By some informants, it was experienced that their male colleagues formed a close-knit group, which was looked after more by the management than the women in the department were.

He [the manager] was very sort of protective of the guys in our team ... Talked about the guys in our team, that "they're too busy with other things to help out, but maybe

[informant's name] can help out". And then, there are some of these things where I felt that, when the managers were guys, they were more sort of protective of the boys in their team. And then sometimes there was a bit of a vibe of like boys club feeling (Female manager 8).

A few women also experienced that men could behave badly without needing to deal with the consequences of their behaviour, since they were protected by close bonds with their male managers. Rather, some informants felt that women need to demonstrate more in relation to how they perform at work. This was experienced both in terms of being able to juggle more tasks at work, and the need to show more ambition to be able to reach higher positions.

However, most informants expressed that they appreciated working in gender mixed teams, and that they experienced that women and men can benefit from each other, due to their differences. When women and men worked together in gender equal teams, the informants experienced that gender had less influence on the environment, than when the majority was either female or male. Further, the informants described that they enjoyed working together when the gender balance was equal. It was mentioned that when being in gender mixed teams, the mutual understanding for each other increased.

6.7. Gendered implications in achieving WLB

Many informants experienced that women and men had different possibilities to reach WLB depending on gender. It was also anticipated that WLB would change when and if children would be involved.

6.7.1. Experiencing gendered implications

The techniques women and men practised to reach WLB described earlier were used by both women and men. However, women and men experienced that they had different possibilities in achieving WLB. Many informants experienced that the expectations on how much women could manage in a day exceeded expectations on men, since women traditionally were found in roles where they have to balance many different roles and demands. Further, some female informants reported that monthly period and pain could have an influence on how much energy they had at that time of the month, something that they did not feel an understanding for within the organisation. Other informants considered that there was more understanding for women to set boundaries or prioritise things other than work. Some informants experienced that the expectations on men to work long, hard and be focused on their careers were visible within the

organisation, as mentioned by one informant, “to set boundaries as a man, I don't really have an excuse, I can just say that I don't want it but no one would care” (Male manager 11). Many informants, however, considered it an advantage to be a man in relation to WLB, as men are not as traditionally bound to domestic housework as women, and therefore had less to juggle when trying to balance work and private life. Some informants also experienced that men got more help with WLB issues, as they were more prone to raise their voices and complain, whereas women were expected to handle the demands from work and life anyway.

6.7.2. Perceiving WLB is different when having family

The informants experienced that having a family would influence their ability to craft WLB in many ways. Some of the informants were fathers, and expressed that support at work as well as in the private sphere was of the essence to achieve WLB. This support was mostly mentioned as relational support to ease physical WLB, such as receiving understanding from colleagues when having to deal with family matters, or having support from a partner to share responsibilities regarding children. Further, some fathers explained that having children had required them to become better at scheduling and setting boundaries at work.

Since I have two kids... And also with the COVID situation, it changed quite a lot... Let's say when my kids are at home, I'm trying not to look at my phone... So I try to be very focused during the working hours. Let's say from eight until six in the evening. Even during lunch etc. I try to be as much efficient as possible. And then, after working hours to be really cut from work, even though it's not always easy, but that's at least my vision of things. That's how I try to keep the balance between a professional and private life (Male manager 17).

Most of the informants did not yet have children, and upon reflecting about having children, it was widely recognised that WLB would be much more difficult, especially for women. Many informants experienced that it was expected that mothers would be the main caretaker of future children, as they had seen this among colleagues and in society at large. Some women experienced that the local legislation and culture of their country would make it more difficult to continue working after having children, as they felt expectations from the organisation to continue working as they do now.

And then, with everything related to childcare, leaving things at the school, picking them up and whatever, or when the kid is sick and so on and you have to stay with them at home, more likely these are mothers, so female employees who are doing these things,

and they are still expected to work even with a sick child on their lap. So yeah, I see this, on that example to me, it's very clear (Female manager 10).

Although most informants perceived that WLB would be more difficult for mothers, some felt that among parents, it was more accepted for mothers than for fathers to justify leaving work to take care of children. Others experienced that it was easier for men to gain recognition of taking care of children, because mothers were expected to have multiple roles and take care of children in any case.

I think there is also this general standardisation of a woman needing to take care of the house, needing to cook, needing to take care of the kids. So, I have a feeling that when a woman talks about her private life or family related matters, it's like, "oh, a girl", "because it's a woman". So it's not looked at as something like, "oh, that's so cute and you're a caring parent". It's more like, "of course that's what you do, because that's your role"... When male managers talk about their family, everybody loves it. Everybody says, "oh, this is so wonderful! What a lovely father, what a lovely husband. He really loves his wife. He really loves his children. Oh, show us more photos". But if it was a woman doing all of that, it's a bit of a different situation (Female manager 7).

It was experienced that men had an unfair advantage in family responsibilities, since the standardised image of women was to tend to family obligations. Therefore, when men showed consideration to such responsibilities, they received extra attention.

7. Discussion and Analysis

This section interprets and discusses the empirical findings of the previous chapter, focusing on previous research and theories. To conceive the decisive aspects of the discussion and analysis process, we have depicted our main findings in terms of three categories. By answering the research questions, we explain what difficulties managers encounter and how they craft WLB. Thereafter, we describe how the gender regime in the case organisation influences female and male managers' WLB crafting behaviours.

7.1. What difficulties do managers encounter in crafting WLB?

By exploring how the informants craft their WLB, several elements making their crafting more difficult were distinguished. The results imply that informants experienced a high level of workload while having relatively limited organisational support to manage their WLB. Also, the results from informants show that lack of structure and unclear processes make it harder to

estimate the workload. Achieving WLB is contingent on both organisational and individual approaches (Maxwell, 2005), and the result suggests that the individual capacity was hindered due to work demands. Whether the managers experienced stress or lowered well-being due to high workload, was much in relation to how their WLB was crafted, by themselves as well as by support from people around them, both at home and at work. This goes in line with Lewis et al. (2007) argument that WLB is not related to purely organisational or individual approaches, but rather incorporates both. Some informants experienced that due to high workload, they needed to decline matters they would otherwise engage in, indicating negative spillover due to work demands (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). With reference to the flexibility of their schedules, it could be argued that the flexible working arrangements sometimes encompass a higher workload, such as receiving emails late at night, which could make the informant more inclined to decline matters. Thus, the flexible nature of the organisation might result in instability for the employees (Jonsson, 2007), in cases where the organisation's flexibility policy was insensitive to employees out of work commitments (Barnett, 1999).

7.2. How do managers craft WLB to combine work and private life?

According to Sturges (2012), employees craft their WLB by using physical, cognitive and relational crafting techniques. Based on the empirical material in this study, various crafting techniques have been identified with reference to Sturges's concept. However, while Sturges's crafting concept predominantly identifies WLB crafting behaviours within work-related contexts, the informants in this study described much of how they used techniques in their private life to achieve WLB. Therefore, this study adds to the concepts of physical, cognitive and relational crafting by identifying private life WLB crafting behaviours not previously emphasised by Sturges (2012). Based on the thematic analysis applied, physical crafting was interpreted as "arranging work to achieve sustainable WLB", cognitive crafting was understood as "interpretation of organisational culture", and relational crafting was viewed as "support through relationships".

The informants described a multitude of ways in how they craft WLB to combine work and private life, and different preferences as to how it was performed. Some preferred to work from home to be able to save time and easier attend to domestic duties, while some spent most of their working time in the office to leave private matters behind. This is in coherence with Ashforth et al.'s (2000) description of how individuals tend to either segregate or integrate work- and home roles. This way of having the autonomy to adjust work time and place of work demonstrated to

be important physical WLB crafting behaviours (Sturges, 2012). Further, it suggests that employees are more satisfied with their WLB when having agency in different dimensions of WLB (Glynn et al., 2002). With the autonomy to adjust work time, the informants experienced that flexibility in arranging their work programs according to their private life situations provided more room for physical crafting in the private sphere, such as recharging through private activities. This is in line with Petrou and Bakker's (2016) study indicating that employees experiencing high-tension work use proactive leisure crafting to offset work-related stress. Independence in adjusting work time also contributed in deciding how separated, overlapping or integrated (Barnett, 1999) the two spheres would be. In this way, organisational flexibility helped in crafting WLB, when the informants desired variability (Jonsson, 2007). Many informants used scheduling as a practice to facilitate demands from work and private life. By scheduling, the informants were better able to set boundaries and prioritise between the both spheres, which in turn enabled them to keep balance in work and private life. This is in coherence with Gravador and Teng-Calleja's (2018) finding that protecting private time and working efficiently influences WLB. Scheduling might also be a way for employees to facilitate the transition between work and private life since the contrast between the spheres can complicate the transition (Clark, 2000). Taking small breaks during work also helped in achieving WLB, much resembling the microdomains described by Dreyer and Busch (2021). However, this finding suggests utilising flexible work arrangements to create microdomains, rather than depending on boundary keepers. How the informants considered themselves available for work was related to their overall view of how happy they were with their WLB situation. The way employees evaluate their WLB is influenced by how they perceive their reconciling of work and private life (Casper et al., 2018). The results illustrate that cognitive WLB crafting (Sturges, 2012) was performed as the informants deemphasised the importance of work, in favour of emphasising private life matters. This finding supports Caringal-Go et al.'s (2021) idea that physical and cognitive WLB behaviours overlap since scheduling and setting boundaries were used as a practice to evaluate prioritizations. Further, by deciding how to be available to work, informants expressed that they gained a sense of self-worth towards the organisation by creating their own rules regarding availability. Thus, by allowing employees to prioritise and engage in the private sphere, the organisation might secure a more motivated and healthy workforce, as argued by Petrou and Bakker (2016). The results also suggest that the informants' perception of their availability for work was altered depending on how they evaluated the conditions in the workplace. By being under the impression that startups are associated with a high workload, many informants

expressed that this influenced how they considered themselves available for work. Such a cognitive WLB crafting behaviour is in accordance with Sturges's (2012) conception that employees compromise their definition of a good WLB. This also shows how cognitive and physical WLB crafting overlap (Caringal-Go et al., 2021), since informants prioritised work due to their conceptualisation of WLB in startups. Moreover, the fact that the organisation's headquarters is in Sweden seems to have influenced how the informants consider that they can reach and prioritise WLB. Ollier-Malaterre and Foucreault (2016) argue that country-level implementations are effective for both employers and employees, however, in order to reach this effectiveness, employees need to be educated in the MNC's desired culture (Bardoel, 2016). The informant's description of how they considered the organisation's WLB initiatives "Swedish", might indicate integration of the organisation's intended WLB culture. Nevertheless, as argued by Bardoel (2016), global WLB policies may entail tensions between subsidiaries and the headquarters, and it was also noted that cultural and structural differences between countries sometimes hindered the organisation's intended WLB approach. Difficulties in implementing global WLB policies might indicate that the organisation is not fully aware of societal and individual constraints in the countries where they operate (Briscoe et al., 2012).

The results describe myriad ways of utilising relational WLB crafting to facilitate physical WLB crafting (Sturges, 2012). Getting help and support in the private spheres was emphasised as essential in combining work and life. This is coherent with Gravador and Teng-Calleja's (2018) notion that different WLB crafting behaviours overlap. However, the findings of this study suggests that family relationships help in achieving WLB, as assumed by Sturges (2012), but in disagreement with Gravador and Teng-Calleja (2018) who did not present an association between nurturing family relationships and WLB, but with SWB. This might indicate that the informants experienced better WLB when their SWB was heightened. As displayed in the results, relational support in work-life was expressed as a way to facilitate WLB, both in relation to physical WLB crafting and to more cognitive aspects, such as reminding not to focus on work during time off work. Since many informants telecommuted, it is reasonable to believe that much of this support was conducted virtually. In that sense, as Caringal-Go et al. (2021) emphasise, building relationships online seems to be of importance in creating WLB. According to the results, being met with understanding in relation to struggles with WLB was considered valuable, both in the work- and private sphere. When friends and family voiced concern the informants considered it helpful in prioritising their private life over work. In the workplace, an understanding was shown in how colleagues helped each other in arranging the workload. This

finding further strengthens Caringal-Go et al.'s (2021) suggestion that the division between various WLB crafting behaviours is blurred. The results show that the informants used conversation as a way to balance demands in both spheres. By discussing work matters at home, and private matters at work, relational crafting was used to achieve WLB.

7.3. How is the gender regime of the workplace reflected in female and male managers' possibilities to achieve WLB?

The WLB crafting behaviours were similar among female and male managers. However, the gender regime in the organisations, as well as societal expectations on women and men, suggest that women and men have different possibilities to achieve desired WLB. Drawing on frameworks explaining how gender regimes are persistent within organisations (Acker, 1990; Connell, 2006), the present study explored how underlying gendered logics are reflected in women and men's room for manoeuvring in crafting WLB. Although the investigated organisation aims to reduce gender inequalities, women and men still experienced that their gender made a difference.

As described previously, most informants experienced a high level of workload and had a range of ways to craft their WLB in order not to be too overwhelmed by work. Acker's (1990) concept of the abstract worker suggests that the ideal for many organisations is to employ a person who does not have domestic obligations outside of the work sphere. Thus, as shown in the result, the informants experienced that the demands from work was high, which might indicate that the organisation is indeed preferring to have abstract workers as their employees. The investigated organisation has a goal of achieving gender equality, which was very often emphasised from the management. However, the result indicates that there might be conflicting demands as to whether the desire to employ abstract workers harmonises with the mission to achieve gender equality. Previous research suggests that organisational policies aiming to address gender equality sometimes achieve the opposite, something that is especially true when employees become parents (Burnett et al., 2010). Further, the implementation of flexible working hours, often aimed to ease WLB and to diminish gender inequalities, can on the contrary entail that women spend more time caring for domestic issues, while men use it to work more and achieve in their careers (Chung & Van der Lippe, 2018). By implementing policies to limit overtime (Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015), rather than delegating the responsibility for work time to employees by offering flexible working hours (Chung & van der Lippe, 2018), reaching gender equality might be enabled, as well as facilitating WLB for both women and men. Most of the informants

explained that expectations on women and men were different, partly because of expectations from the organisation, but also due to country level contexts. Such different expectations could suggest that the employees' room for manoeuvring in crafting WLB is also different. As shown in the result, most informants explained that women were expected to undertake more responsibilities. Traditionally, women balances more domestic demands than men do (Alon et al., 2020; Burnett et al., 2010; Chung & van der Lippe, 2018; Hjalmsdottir & Bjarnadottir, 2021), which could be an underlying reason as to why women were expected to engage in more roles than their male counterparts. As previous research has shown, women more often than men experience high levels of role overload and stress at work (Maxwell, 2005). Thus, the expectation on women to engage in multiple roles, in conjunction with preferring employees to be abstract workers, could entail that women would find it difficult to combine work and private life.

However, some informants perceived that women, especially mothers, would be able to craft WLB easier than men, since it was more accepted that women have multiple roles, and that they were therefore more justified to set boundaries. While this is in coherence with previous research declaring that women and men have different responsibilities (Chung & van der Lippe, 2018), it also suggests that the organisation's goal of reaching gender equality could be hampered. Since it could imply that men will have the possibility to work more and thus reach further in their careers, the gendered relations of power (Connell, 2006) might be further beneficial to men. According to Charles (2003), the gender division within the horizontal and vertical structure of an organisation constitutes much of gender inequalities. Even though the organisation had intentions of being more flat in its way of communication (Huang et al., 2010; Koohborfardhaghia & Altmann, 2017; Zhang, Zhao & Qi, 2014), such as having an open-door policy, it was still recognised that men in powerful positions made the most important decisions, which shows that the hierarchical structure of the organisation is constituted with men in top. Thus, the notion that women are more justified to set boundaries in relation to their WLB crafting, could be further nurturing to men, on the expense of women's career advancement. Additionally, some informants felt that men could behave badly without consequences, while women needed to demonstrate more at work in order to gain recognition. This suggests further difficulties in achieving gender equality with reference to gender relations of power (Connell, 2006).

Many informants experienced that women and men performed the same work within their

departments and that tasks were distributed due to qualifications rather than gender. It was expressed that women and men were divided between departments due to natural differences, as women and men were perceived to have different interests in life. However, the hierarchical structure may also be reflected in division of labour (Connell, 2006). With men in more powerful positions, women are inevitably found in subordinate positions. Some informants experienced that the male driven leadership style did not have room for softer values, such as achieving WLB and thriving in the workplace, which would have been preferred. This finding implies that the hierarchical structure influences the horizontal aspects of the organisation. As argued by Barnett (1999), employees' needs must be met if the organisation wishes to achieve a workforce with high morale. As it appears, the current circumstances prevented some employees from reaching their desired WLB, which might entail that their morale and dedication to work could be compromised. If so, employees' use cognitive WLB crafting to deemphasise the importance of work in order to achieve WLB. The results reveal that the division of tasks (Connell, 2006) was occasionally different between women and men, with women doing more multitasking and sometimes having a tendency to perform more administrative tasks. It was also noticed that women and men perform tasks differently due to gendered differences, as women chose to focus more on soft skill aspects, and men more on hard skills aspects of a certain task. As hard skills were considered more valued than soft skills, this further suggests an imbalance in how women and men were considered, thus implying a gender regime which disadvantages women (Acker, 1990; Connell, 2006).

The gendered division of labour (Connell, 2006) was mostly visible between departments. This might imply that the organisation has difficulties in reaching gender equality across all departments by recruitment, which could be due to the stereotypical male dominance of the automotive industry (ILO, 2020; Lloyd & Mey, 2007). Further, by being an MNC, the organisation faces the demands of structural and cultural context when recruiting. As argued by Biswas et al. (2017) gender, industry and nation are of importance when conducting cross-cultural research. Hence, there might be societal causes as to why the organisation has not yet reached gender equality across departments. The male dominance of the industry, in general, might also have implications for women's WLB. By not having unique needs met (Martin & Barnard, 2013), such as receiving understanding due to inconveniences during monthly periods, and feeling the need to perform at a higher level but still having the main domestic responsibilities, women's WLB may be reduced. Stereotypes and prejudice within male dominated workplaces are considered important obstacles for women in their work life (Martin & Barnard, 2013).

Further, women in the automotive industry often experience difficulties in reconciling their expectations and perceptions of work (Bullock, 2019; Martin & Barnard, 2013), which could suggest lower WLB for women. With expectations on women to have multiple roles and to demonstrate more, societal, regional and industrial contexts and constraints need to be taken into consideration when planning for, and implementing, WLB policies in order to outclass such expectations.

The informants were well aware of the organisation's goal of achieving gender equality, but perceived that this was somewhat hindered due to structural and cultural contexts within the country they work. This could imply that the organisation's initiatives to even out gender equality by offering parental leave and recruiting more women, is not sufficient in regards to adapting to country-level contexts. Rather, the informants experienced that structural frames and cultural expectations had a way of overriding the initiatives set by the organisation. As many informants expressed that women are the main caretaker of children due to country-level contexts, this could further diminish the goal of becoming a gender equal organisation. When operating in various cultural and structural contexts, MNCs must be aware of such circumstances (Briscoe et al., 2012; Kurowska 2018; Uddin, 2021). Since the organisation offers flexible working hours to facilitate WLB, it is possible that this would increase the gender relations of power (Connell, 2006), with reference to Chung & Van der Lippe's (2018) finding that women and men use flexible working hours differently. As described by Lyness and Judiesch (2014), the level of egalitarianism in the country influences how women perceive their WLB, which could imply that country level contexts in regard to parenting also matter in crafting WLB.

While the result indicates that the informants consider women and men to have different characteristics, these characteristics were often deemphasised by the notion of gender equality. By describing gender as something that is not important, something almost invisible that they did not see, it might be suggested that the organisation show signs of depolarisation (Connell, 2006). The reference to not seeing gender could indicate a lack of awareness in regards to gender. However, this lack of awareness was not very visible in how the informants expressed that they enjoyed working in gender mixed teams, rather, it was acknowledged when explaining how they perceived women and men to be considered within the organisation. This might suggest that the organisation's emphasis on gender equality may reduce the actual differences women and men face in life, rather than seeing to every individual's needs. With reference to WLB, the organisational initiatives to promote a good WLB for all its employees, might not be adequate

when women and men do not encounter the same expectations from society and at work. As argued by Lewis et al. (2007), for organisational WLB initiatives to be more inclusive and comprehensive, constraints such as gendered aspects need to be taken into consideration. In order to successfully implement gender equality and to give all employees the chance to achieve their desired WLB, the organisation must consider if degendering and depolarising is really the answer. Although the result does not demonstrate reduced organisational loyalty or unimportance of organisational relationships as a reaction of depolarisation, the way in which emotions of gender were reduced indicates that a central part of the organisation's gender equality agenda is to deemphasise the notion of gender differences. Hence, the depolarised workplace might have other nuances than those argued by Connell (2006), which could suggest limitations to the theory with regards to the nature of the organisation explored.

The informants experienced some differences in the way women and men act and interact. This was shown in decision making, in inter- and intra-gender relationships and in expectations on behaviours. As illustrated by Connell (2006), women and men are separated based on gendered cultures and symbols. Even though women have been a natural part of the labour market for decades (Barnett, 1999), it was still noticeable that women were expected to have more responsibilities in the domestic sphere and men were expected to have a breadwinner role. The organisation's WLB initiatives, although aiming to reduce gender inequalities, seem rather to promote gender neutrality, as country-level contexts and traditional societal expectations on women and men were not taken into consideration. Gender neutrality indicates that differences between genders is deemphasised by degendering the organisation. In this sense, there appears to be a contradiction between how the informants perceived gender as invisible, simultaneously with experiencing differences in how they behaved within their own gender and towards the other. Gender neutrality and having different perspectives on gender might cause inconvenience in women's and men's ability to achieve WLB. Some informants were not even aware of paternal leave, some experienced that women had to demonstrate more compared to men to gain recognition within the organisation. Hence, by attributing women and men different characteristics, without organisational WLB initiatives that endorse such differences, women and men may have different capacities in reaching WLB. In order to be applicable for all employees, WLB initiatives must take the individual's capabilities and needs into account (Allard et al., 2007; McDowell & Lindsey, 2014). It can be argued that the individual capability can be reduced, and the needs shaped, due to expectations based on gender.

8. Conclusion

The present study aimed to explore female and male managers' WLB crafting behaviours within the context of an organisation operating in the male-dominated auto-mobile industry. The present study identifies three main findings. First, the nature of the workplace can inhibit employees' opportunities to achieve WLB. Second, employees craft WLB in both the work- and private sphere. And third, the gender regime of the organisation and societal expectations on genders influence how women and men are able to achieve WLB. Three questions were explored to understand how managers combine work and private life. First, to uncover what difficulties managers encounter in crafting WLB. It was shown that most difficulties were associated with a high workload in combination with unclear structures within the organisation. Further, declining matters that would have been prioritised had it not been for a high workload was revealed as a difficulty. Second, to understand which WLB crafting behaviours managers use to achieve WLB. The results demonstrate a multitude of ways in which managers craft WLB in relation to physical, cognitive and relational WLB crafting (Sturges, 2012). It was distinguished that WLB crafting techniques overlapped and that both the work- and private spheres were domains for WLB crafting. Third, to grasp how the organisation's gender regime was reflected in how female and male managers are able to achieve WLB. It has been acknowledged that the inequalities between gender has not yet disappeared within the organisation, entailing that the gendered organisation is reflected in how women and men are able to craft their WLB. Although the organisation has a gender equality agenda, some gender inequalities still seemed to be persistent within the organisation. In accordance with Connell's (2006) interpretation of gender equality not being met by degendering, along with the informants' explanations of how they enjoyed working in gender mixed themes, it is concluded that gender equality is not reached by deemphasising gender, but rather to acknowledge it. By being aware of different expectations on women and men, the organisation will be able to reflect upon how women and men are subject to gender equality policies. Further, the importance of country level context also has to be considered when aiming to reach gender equality. As many countries do not have paid paternal leave, it is likely that only women will be away from work in the event of childbirth, followed by taking the main responsibility for children. Thus, it is important that the organisation is aware of the possible implications raising a family has on the employees' WLB. Additionally, it was recognised that women are expected to demonstrate more than their male counterparts, in both the work- and private sphere, which suggests that women may struggle more with crafting WLB, due to more extensive demands.

8.1. Contribution to the literature and suggestions for future research

This study contributes by filling important gaps in the field. The research on how managers craft WLB is under-explored, and although there is a large body of literature covering the gendered aspects of WLB, exploring WLB crafting behaviours is an emerging strand of research (Caringal-Go et al., 2021). This study contributes to the knowledge on WLB crafting (Sturges, 2012) by indicating that women and men perform similar WLB crafting behaviours. The present study suggests that starting a family will have implications for WLB crafting, but other aspects need also to be recognised, such as age, family constellation and individual preferences for WLB. However, employees' needs are likely to change during the course of their careers, therefore, future research on WLB crafting should also consider how employees are able to craft WLB during different phases of their life.

Thus, this research indicates that women and men have different opportunities to reach a satisfactory WLB. With the exception of a study investigating copreneurs crafting of WLB (Dreyer & Busch, 2021), to the best of our knowledge, previous research has overlooked the gendered aspects of WLB crafting behaviours, and no study investigates whether the gendered nature of an organisation influences WLB crafting behaviours (Caringal-Go et al., 2021; Gravador & Teng-Calleja, 2018; Sturges, 2012). As shown in this study, WLB crafting behaviours must be considered human, rather than gendered. This suggests that women and men do not have different opportunities to reach WLB because of how they craft, but because of organisational and societal expectations on women and men. Hence, this study contributes to the literature by presenting that female and male managers in a male dominated startup company perform WLB crafting similarly, but face different obstacles due to their gender. For future research aiming to integrate WLB crafting behaviours with the notion of gender regimes, it is essential to be aware of the different constraints women and men encounter when trying to balance work and life, in order to critically convey a fair image of how women and men can achieve WLB. Further, exploring other businesses and countries, or using a different research method, might generate different dimensions of WLB crafting.

This study contributes to the theoretical development of WLB crafting by combining Sturges's (2012) concept of WLB crafting behaviours with Connell's (2006) theory on gender regimes and Acker's (1990) concept of the abstract worker. By looking at WLB crafting behaviours through the lens of gendered organisations, our study emphasises the importance of bringing in a gender

perspective to the theoretical understanding of WLB crafting. Expectations on women and men have shown to influence the ability to achieve WLB, implying that the contextual environment in which women and men are situated sets limits to the opportunity to craft WLB. Therefore, by integrating a gender perspective to WLB crafting, the concept can develop to be more extensive.

8.2. Limitations of the study

The scope of this study was not broad enough to cover different WLB crafting behaviours in relation to country of origin and working country of the informants. Further, due to the international nature of the case organisation, some informants worked in a country other than their home country, and some informants were expats from other continents. Additionally, the time frame for this study and the number of informants interviewed limited the possibility of making a fair comparison between the informants' countries of origin and the informants' working countries. A limitation of the study is not to consider the national cultural aspects which are represented in MNCs, and therefore not addressing how the gender regime might influence WLB crafting behaviours due to national circumstances. As the informants in this study participated on a voluntary basis, it was not possible to choose the family status of the participants. Out of the 18 managers, four had children, and these were all men. The informants all described that mothers in general were expected to be the main caretaker of children. Since no mothers were interviewed, the result does not present any voice of mothers, which is considered a limitation for this study.

8.3. Practical implications

With the exception of flexible working hours and onsite activities, most WLB initiatives were aiming to ease WLB for families. In accordance with previous research, WLB policies often neglect individuals without children (Maxwell, 2005; Wilkinson et al., 2017, 2018). This study shows that employees anticipate their WLB to deteriorate when having children. Thus, it can be assumed that organisations must improve their WLB initiatives for families, especially with consideration to the country-level context. However, this study also suggests that employees experience difficulties in achieving WLB even without children being involved, which suggests that workload and structures at workplaces need to be managed, in order to keep and nurture the existing workforce, both presently and when they consider starting a family. It must also be noted that by allocating the responsibility to achieve WLB to the individual employee, organisations disclaim themselves from the responsibility to provide a workplace where the needs of all employees are considered. Therefore, organisational WLB initiatives must seek to

meet every employee's needs, and to implement cultures and norms that allow employees to craft WLB as they choose, simultaneously with considering constraints various employees might encounter. For instance, flexible working conditions might suit some employees, but be a stressor to others. Hence, when designing WLB initiatives, organisations must reflect upon the applicability for employees' different needs.

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Appendix 1

Letter of Consent

Information to the participants about the Master project of “Work-life balance crafting behaviours of managers from a gender perspective.”

The aim of this study is to explore female and male managers’ WLB crafting behaviours in the male-dominated automotive sector. The study is a student project and will result in a thesis within the Master Program in Strategic Human Resource Management and Labour Relations at the University of Gothenburg. The study is conducted independently by the students Cigdem Öztürk and Myri Westfal, under the supervision of Professor/Associate Professor Karin Allard. Please see further contact info below. The project adheres to the core ethical principles of the Swedish Research Council for research in social science research.

Please see the information below on research ethics for participants.

Data collection

All the research data will be collected and coded based on thematic analysis. The data collection consists of semi-structured in-depth interviews and observations with the managers. In addition, interviews will be recorded with the permission of the participants.

Voluntary participation and non-disclosure

Participation is voluntary and confidential. Participants can choose to cancel their participation at any time and have a right to withdraw from the study if they wish.

Unauthorised individuals will not have access to the material and participants involved in the project are covered by professional secrecy. Personal names are not registered, and participants will be given a pseudonym and exchanged for fake names when interviews are transcribed and analysed. This also applies to organisations that wish to be given a pseudonym. Participants decide when it is suitable to meet (potentially online) and participation takes place on research participants' terms.

Handling of collected material

Material such as interview recordings data and notes are kept locked away on password protected computers and are only available to authorised researchers. Some material like interview notes, will be transcribed to a computer. In the final thesis, extracts from interviews may be cited and given a pseudonym [e.g., a fake name]. The collected material and interview transcriptions will not be used for any purpose other than scientific research and for teaching purposes under the conditions described herein. In addition, interview files will be used for this project and/or a possible future related project after the conclusion of this project.

Results and publication

The results of the study will be published in the form of a Master thesis. Participants will be able to download the essay from GUPEA, <https://gupea.ub.gu.se/>. Participants are also welcome to attend the future presentation of the project.

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Appendix 2

Interview Guide for the HRBP

1. ***Could you tell us a little bit about the organisation?
 - a. How many people work in the organisation?
 - b. How many managerial levels are there?
 - i. How many managers at each level?
 - ii. Are there any positions that are filled unevenly by women or men?
 - c. In how many countries does the organisation operate?

***To alternative for question 1; could we use the internal documents that you sent us as a statistical reference in our thesis?

2. Could you tell us the company structure? What is the hierarchy at the organisation?
3. How is the leadership model? How is power distributed on the managerial levels at the organisation?
 - a. Is the power to make decisions distributed evenly between men and women?
 - b. Are either women or men overrepresented when it comes to decision making?
4. Do the managers and other employees have flexible work arrangements? If yes, explain/describe
 - a. For example, flexleave, flextime
5. Who has the authority to make decisions about WLB?
6. What kind of opportunities are given to managers to have WLB?
 - a. Do the managers have parental leave, the ability to work part-time, and child care availability?
 - i. Do these differ in different countries?
 - b. Do the managers have the possibility to telework (distance work/remote work)?
 - i. If so, does the possibility to telework differ between, for instance, gender, department, or country?
7. What kind of tasks do female and male managers within the organisation have?
 - a. Are there responsibilities or tasks that only men tend to have?
 - b. Are there responsibilities or tasks that only women tend to have?
 - c. And, do managers have the same titles if they perform the same tasks?

8. Do women and men get equally promoted across the company in various departments?
9. Are there salary differences between male and female managers depending on where in the organisation they work?
10. Is the organisation working to promote WLB?
 - a. If yes, how? Is this for both men and women or special groups?
 - i. Both in policies and practice?
11. Is the organisation working to promote gender equality across different departments and positions?
12. Is there anything we forgot to ask or you want to bring up related to this research?
13. Would it be OK for us to contact you again if we have any further questions?

Appendix 3

Interview Guide

The aim of this interview is to understand the work-life balance crafting behaviours of female and male managers in the male-dominated automotive industry. The interview begins with introducing the research objectives to the participants and takes approximately 45 minutes. Before starting the interview, participants get information on ethics, privacy, and consent letters. Based on their consent the researchers record the interview. Participants are also informed before and during the interview that they would remain anonymous, and the interview would be recorded.

In addition, we would like to highlight that you, during the interview, explain your experiences in a practical way by giving examples. We would also like to ask you to answer the questions in a practical way based by giving examples from the current organisation.

Before we start, is there anything you would like to ask about this interview?

Individual questions

1. Would you like to introduce yourself?
 - a. What is your age? And, what gender do you identify with?
 - b. What position do you have in this company?
 - c. What country are you based in? Are you an expat in the country you work in?
2. Could you describe your family life?
 - a. Do you have children? If yes, what are their ages?
 - b. What is your relationship status?

Work-life balance crafting questions

3. How do you combine work and life?
4. Could you explain what an ideal work-life balance would look like to you?
5. What do you do to reach the balance between work and life that you desire? For example, how do you combine demands from work and private life and the other way around?
 - a. Please give examples if there are potential challenges?

6. How do your relationships, either with partner/family/friends or colleagues, help when it comes to managing your WLB?
7. Could you describe a situation where your work was affected by your private life?
 - a. What did you do then?
8. Could you describe a situation when your private life was being affected by work?
 - a. What did you do then? Please tell us your experience.
9. Do you get the support you need to achieve work-life balance from colleagues, supervisor, HR?
 - a. What kind of support?
10. Have you experienced a lack of support from colleagues, supervisor, HR in a WLB-situation when you could have needed it?
 - a. What kind of support had you wished to get?
11. What is your impression about the company's expectations of your availability for work?
12. What is your impression about the company's expectations on how you should handle (and prioritise) work and personal life?

Questions regarding gender and WLB

13. What manager characteristics do you think that the company values? Female or male stereotypical qualities?
14. Do you think that being a female/male manager (if applicable: mother/father) affects how you personally combine work and private life? If yes, how?
 - a. For example, is it an advantage or a disadvantage when trying to balance work and private life? (If we need the participant to elaborate)
15. Do you experience that there are different expectations on women and men regarding how to manage WLB within the company?
 - a. In regards to flex time, parental leave, sick children etc?

Now, we are going to ask some questions about gender, and how gender is being looked upon in your work setting.

16. How do you experience the relationships between women and men at work within the organisation? For example, do men and women socialise along or across gender lines?

a. Between women and women? Between men and men?

17. In what ways do you think a person's gender is emphasised in the organisation, as to how people dress, talk, behave etc?

18. Which emotions have you experienced when women and men work together in this organisation? What about, between women and women? Between men and men?

19. Among managers, have you experienced that females and males have different work related tasks? If so, how?

20. Have you experienced that there are differences between genders in regards to, for example, room for manoeuvring and responsibilities within this organisation? If so, please describe.

Concluding questions

21. Based on the experience you have explained, what would you say is the most important point in relation to work-life balance?

22. Is there anything we forgot to ask or you want to bring up related to this research?

23. Would it be OK for us to contact you again if we have any further questions?

To conclude, we want to thank you for taking the time and sharing your experience with us.

Thanks again for participating!