“Influence of sense of coherence on work-life balance at the South African public service”

AUTHORS	Abe N. Ethel Ziska Fields https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5353-1807 http://www.researcherid.com/rid/D-1827-2012 Atiku O. Sulaiman

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Abe N. Ethel (South Africa), Fields Ziska (South Africa), Atiku Sulaiman Olusegun (South Africa)

Influence of sense of coherence on work-life balance at the South African public service

Abstract

The inability of workers to achieve balance between work and family responsibilities has led to heightened incidence of illnesses associated with stress. The main objective of this paper is to investigate the role of Sense of Coherence (SOC) on the achievement of work life balance by focusing on individual managers at a municipality in the South African public service. These individual managers often struggle with work-life balance (WLB) challenges like HIV/AIDS, relational tension, single parenthood, child and elder care, alcohol and substance abuse, debt and financial issues, absence of job autonomy, function vagueness/role conflict and job stress. A sequential transformative mixed methods research design is adopted. Data were collected using self-report questionnaire administered to 364 individual managers; additional eleven members of top management were interviewed. Quantitative data gathered are analyzed using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 to test the reliability and validity of the instrument as well as the bivariate association between the variables. NVIVO is used in organizing qualitative data for ease of content analysis. The findings indicate that SOC should be considered when designing strategies to address employee work-life needs. Furthermore, it confirmed that the presence of strong SOC does not lead to achievement of WLB.

Keywords: sense of coherence, work-life balance, wellness program, work-family demands.
JEL Classifications: J28, I31, M14.

Introduction

According to reports, South Africa recorded a consolidated loss in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from particularly heart problems, stroke and diabetes during the period between 2006 and 2015 (Abegunde, Mathers, Adam, Ortegon, & Strong, 2007; Hofman, 2014). The cost of these to the nation was an estimated USD 1.8 billion. Hofman (2014) reports that the implication of these to employers is increased absenteeism and high rate of employee turnover intentions as a result of death and or morbidity among the working population (Van Nuys et al., 2014). Scholars attribute the inability of workers to achieve balance between work and family responsibilities as being instrumental to heightened incidence of illnesses associated with stress (Yuile, Chang, Gudmundsson & Sawang, 2012).

An individual's ability to manage work and family stressors, and equally distribute personal resources could be largely dependent on the level of the individual's Sense of Coherence (SOC). Scholars have explored the positive interaction between work and family through terms like *enrichment, facilitation,* and *positive spillover* (Grzywacz & Butler, 2005; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; G.C. Hanson & Hammer, 2006). These studies focused on the work-family conflict perspective. Other aspects of work-life balance (WLB) have been researched into including workplace strategies implemented to help employees in coping with the challenges arising from the incompatible demands of life (Casper & Harris, 2008; Ezra & Deckman, 1996; McCarthy, Darcy & Grady, 2010).

This paper examines the role of SOC in assisting employees assess, comprehend and manage work-life in order to achieve WLB. SOC could be a factor that is acquired from infancy through adolescence to help individuals comprehend, manage and attach meaning to life situations and events (Antonovsky, 1993; Eriksson & Lindström, 2005, 2007). In line with Grawitch, Barber, and Justice's (2010) *personal resource allocation (PRA) approach* and Hobfoll's (2011) *Conservation of Resources theory (COR)*, this paper is conceptualized. PRA conceptualizes how individuals manage their personal resources in responding to work-life demands continuously by possibly utilising available interventions in the process. While COR focuses on understanding the way that individuals withstand the adverse effects of stress and manage their resources in addressing stressors.

According to Ferguson, Carlson, Zivnuska, and Whitten (2012), the relevant outcomes associated with work and family (e.g. satisfaction with family, job satisfaction, citizenship behavior, and performance at work and non-work spheres), linked to WLB make the concept important (Carlson, Grzywacz & Zivnuska, 2009). In the context of the foregoing, Trefalt, Drnovšek, Svetina-Nabergoj, and Adlešič (2013) report that researchers in the area of work-life are gradually growing in their appreciation of the importance that consequences of countrywide circumstance (e.g., apartheid) have on the experiences

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Abe N. Ethel, Ph.D., School of Management, IT & Governance, College of Law & Management Studies University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.
Fields Ziska, Ph.D., School of Management, IT & Governance, College of Law & Management Studies University of KwaZulu-Natal, Varsity Road, Westville Durban, South Africa.
Atiku Sulaiman Olusegun, Ph.D., School of Management, IT & Governance, College of Law & Management Studies University of KwaZulu-Natal, Varsity Road, Westville Durban, South Africa.

of individuals. This has led to the first assumption in this paper, that apartheid may have had adverse effect on the SOC of individuals born and raised during the era. The second assumption is that employees manage their work and family stressors based on the level of their SOC. This is in line with scholars' suggestion that individual employees use more of their personal resources (i.e. SOC) in coping with stressors although organizations adopt policies to assist them in managing these stressors (Garrosa, Rainho, Moreno-Jiménez & Monteiro, 2010; Moos, 2013; Xiao & Cooke, 2012).

Considering the foregoing, this paper aims to examine the influence of SOC on WLB among professional level employees at a municipality in the South African public service. This is based on the assumption that SOC could influence WLB positively.

1. Literature review

Previous literature on variables pertinent to the role of SOC on WLB are expounded and presented in this section.

1.1. Sense of Coherence (SOC). SOC as a concept was proposed by Antonovsky (1979, 1987a) as a buffering disposition that shields individuals from the unwanted results of life stressors (Eriksson & Lindström, 2006; Feldt, Leskinen, Kinnunen, & Ruoppila, 2003; Nielsen & Hansson, 2007; C.G. Richardson & Ratner, 2005). It is a pressure-managing ability which only starts working in the face of pressure (Togari, Yamazaki, Takayama, Yamaki, & Nakayama, 2008), but continued experience of stress lessens the strength of SOC among individuals.

SOC is a universal inclination of an individual to appraise the world through three dimensions namely: 1) meaningfulness (an interpretation of stressors as meaningful demands that deserve to be handled), 2) manageability (perception that the person has sufficient resources to manage the environment in which one finds him/herself) and 3) comprehensibility (a case of perceiving an environment as being explainable, organized and predictable) (Feldt et al., 2003; Kivimäki et al., 2002). Scholars agree that the three components of SOC are greatly interconnected (Antonovsky, 1987; Bishop, 1993; Feldt, Leskinen, Kinnunen, & Mauno, 2000; Feldt & Rasku, 1998; Gana & Garnier, 2001; Hart, Hittner, & Paras, 1991; Petrie & Brook, 1992). According to Feldt et al. (2003), an individual who ranks highly in all of the three dimensions of SOC, will be said to have strong SOC and enjoy wellness as well as good health.

Factors such as wealth, religious beliefs, peace and stability in the environment where an individual was nurtured have been identified as contributors to the source of strong or weak SOC (Antonovsky, 1979, 1987). Latendresse (2009), agrees with Antonovsky (1987), that a person's peculiar nature (i.e., ways of appraising stressor, coping abilities, and mannerisms) and situations of life (e.g., lack and support systems in the environment of an individual's upbringing) are responsible for strong or weak SOC.

Cederblad, Ruksachatkunakorn, Boripunkul, Intraprasert, and Höök (2003), report that people with high SOC are able to simplify and organize stressors with the belief and motivation that the relevant coping resources are accessible and could be easily mobilized to successfully manage the stressor. Diraz et al. (2003) confirm that a person having strong SOC has the ability and confidence to confront challenges and difficult situations with the assured expectation that everything would turn out right within reasonable prospect. Contrarily, persons with low SOC are unable to manage everyday challenges of life. Kinman (2008) reports that personnel with strong SOC showed more protection from the negative effects of work stressors than those with weaker SOC. This is further supported by Feldt's (1997) submission that personnel with high SOC indicated better protection from adverse effect of time and negative workplace environment (work-related stressors) and Albertsen, Nielsen, and Borg (2001), report that personnel with high SOC coped effectively better with work stressors. This paper assumes that high SOC may influence the achievement of WLB.

Lustig and Strauser (2002) submit that SOC was found to be the differentiating factor among fulfilled/competent employees and unfulfilled/incompetent employees. Kinman (2008) conducted a cross sectional study among 465 academics (60% male) in the United Kingdom and found prevalent low SOC among those academics, hence, no relationship exists between SOC and educational level (Larsson & Kallenberg, 1996; Nilsson, Holmgren, & Westman, 2000). Contrarily, SOC demonstrates high association to job-related mental and environmental factors, as well as common support, but, it is not associated with sociodemographic variables (Holmberg, Thelin, & Stiernström, 2004). Holmberg et al. (2004) report that the level of job training associated strongly to SOC with both male and female workers.

Critics of the SOC theory suggest that the concept is a feature associated with cultured and influential people in society (Geyer, 1997), even though some studies found weak constructive association with level of academic qualification (Callahan & Pincus, 1995; A. Richardson, Adner & Nordström, 2001). Another very critical factor in the definition of SOC is the assumption that it is a stable personality trait (Antonovsky, 1987; Antonovsky, Sagy, Adler & Visel, 1990; Sagy, Antonovsky & Adler, 1990).

Feldt et al. (2003) conducted a study to test the stability of SOC in a 5-year longitudinal study among two different age categories of a sample of 352 Finnish technical designers. It was found that age played no part in the constancy, degree of or average modification in SOC, meaning that SOC does not grow and stabilize in adulthood (Feldt et al., 2003). But Feldt et al. (2007) report that SOC was observed as showing better stability amidst respondents who were older than 30 years (constancy factor 0.81) than amidst those adults younger than 30 years (stability factor 0.70); supporting the notion that SOC is more stable in the course of maturity. In addition, Kinman (2008) reports that SOC fluctuated among employees in the occupational setting due to drastic change in workplace environment, interpersonal relationships, tasks and uncertainty about job security (Albertsen et al., 2001; Antonovsky, 1987; Carmel & Bernstein, 1989; Feldt et al., 2000).

However, SOC has not been researched in the context of WLB. Therefore, focusing on SOC to ascertain its influence on WLB is a novel perspective and may offer contribution to existing literature.

1.2. Work-life balance (WLB). Work-life balance has been a topical issue of debate across boardrooms, classrooms and the political arenas for a long time with most people wondering what 'balance' really is. Scholars have defined WLB from the role, involvement and stability, satisfaction and efficiency perspectives respectively (Clark, 2000; Crooker, Smith, & Tabak, 2002; Greenhaus & Allen, 2011; Marks & MacDermid, 1996). While others report that a universally recognized definition for the concept remains elusive (Guest, 2002; Kalliath & Brough, 2008).

Clark (2000) defines WLB as *satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home*. This suggests that employees have need to find ways of satisfactorily managing work and domestic aspects of their lives (Kossek & Ozeki, 1999; Sturges, 2012), in order to achieve WLB. Similarly, Kirchmeyer (2000) sees a balanced living as an achievement of satisfaction in every area of life, the attainment of which depends on individual endowments like time, vitality, and a sense of obligation to ensure equal distribution through all areas of life.

Greenhaus and Allen (2011) define WLB, as total assessment to determine the degree that a person's efficiency and fulfilment with work and life (family) align with the price that the person places on life within a given period of time. They further suggest that individuals appraise their efficiency in individual roles alongside in-built measures that ascertain accomplishment and satisfaction obtained from each role performance. This measure also establishes if the achieved efficiency and fulfilment is in line with the importance that the individual assigns to the role performed. This definition considers the person in the midst of work and life and the value that s/he assigns to life's overall roles played in the work and family domain. But Darcy, McCarthy, Hill, and Grady (2012) report that WLB is not a *one size fits all* concept; rather, it is a subjective concept that should be designed by the individual to suit his/her objectives of achieving satisfaction, involvement and time balance. However, this paper views WLB from the satisfaction perspective, by examining individual employee's satisfaction with work and family situations.

Research has shown that although WLB has been a subject of scholarly and political discussions (Felstead, Jewson, Phizacklea & Walters, 2002) in Europe and America since the 1960's and 1970's, it is comparatively new in the African context. However some studies on WLB have been conducted in South Africa among police officers, educators and mineworkers (Koekemoer & Mostert, 2010), call centre employees (Potgieter & Barnard, 2010) and MBA students (Muteswa & Ortlepp, 2011). There is a dearth of literature examining the influence of SOC on WLB, hence the novelty of this study among professional level employees in the South African public service.

2. Research methods

This section describes the methodology adopted in the study to pragmatically examine the influence of SOC on WLB at a municipality in the South African public service. The selected study design, sampling methods, survey instruments, and methods of data analysis using statistical tools, significantly influence the outcomes of the research.

2.1. Sampling. This paper adopts a sequential transformative mixed methods (Hanson, Creswell, Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005; Kroll & Neri, 2009) research design. The aim of mixed methods research is to harness the educational benefits, and minimize the weaknesses of both the qualitative and quantitative research in one study and across studies, and not to substitute any of these methods (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The population of this study includes all heads of units, managers, supervisors and coordinators at the municipality and the required sample was 364 in line with Wilson (2010). Data were collected using a self-report questionnaire (Casper, Eby, Bordeaux, Lockwood, & Lambert, 2007; Spector & Fox, 2003) administered to 370 individual managers while eleven members of top management staff were interviewed.

2.2. Measures. To measure SOC, the SOC-13 version of *Orientation to Life Questionnaire OLQ* designed by Antonovsky (1987) was used. An additional item

measuring meaningfulness was introduced into the OLQ. Participants responded on a 7-point semantic differential *scale* with dual anchoring sayings. The OLQ is a three dimensional scale with five items measuring *comprehensibility*. Responses ranged from 1 (Very often) to 7 (Very seldom or never). The second dimension measured *manageability* with responses ranging from 1 (Never happened) to 7 (Always happened). The third dimension of the scale measured *meaningfulness* and responses ranging from: 1 (very seldom or never) to 7 (Very often) (Feldt et al., 2003). One of the items measuring comprehensibility is, *do you have the feeling that you are in an unfamiliar situation and do not know what to do?* An example of items assessing manageability among others is *how often do you have feelings that you're not sure you can keep under control?* One of the items measuring meaningfulness is *how often do you have the feelings that there's little meaning in the things you do in your daily life?* Five items on the scale carry reversed scores in the negative word; the overall sum of the scores could range from 14 (weak SOC) to 98 (strong SOC). Higher scores of the taken mean indicate strong SOC (Kinman, 2008). According to Eriksson and Lindström (2005), the mean and standard deviation of the SOC-13 version of the OLQ reported in 127 studies were from 35.39 (SD 0.10) to 77.60 (SD 13.80) respectively. After the exploratory factor analysis in this paper, nine of the items were dropped for cross-loading. The Cronbach alpha coefficient of the OLQ in this study was 0.795.

WLB was assessed using a three dimensional scale with 12 items. The items examined satisfaction with family situation and satisfaction with job situation respectively. The scales were: Job involvement scale, family involvement scale and job satisfaction scale. Job involvement denotes the extent that an individual holds his/her job as being integral to his/her personality or *sense of identity* (Frone, Russell & Cooper, 1992; Kanungo, 1982). To assess this construct, 5 items adapted from a scale designed by Kanungo (1982) was used. Response to the items on this scale were based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The original scale was based on a 6-point agree/disagree Likert scale (Frone et al., 1992). The Cronbach alpha coefficient noted for the scale in this paper was an acceptable 0.794.

Family involvement was measured by altering the job involvement items to denote *spouse* (Frone et al., 1992), using Kanugo (1982a, 1982b) job involvement scale. This technique was successfully utilized in past work-family research (Frone & Rice, 1987). Items from the scale include *"the major satisfaction in my life comes from my family" and "I am very much involved in my role as a spouse"*. This scale was not recognized in the exploratory factor analysis as all the items were cross-loaded on other variables in the study. To ascertain satisfaction with family situation among respondents, descriptive statistics was engaged. The item *"The major satisfaction in my life comes from my family"* was examined.

Satisfaction with work situation was measured using a two item measure. The measure was adapted from a 2-item scale developed from the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) of this study. Response on the two item scale was based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Items from the scale include "*I perform tasks that are too easy or boring*". The scale's internal consistency was $\alpha = 0.938$. From the rule of the thumb, this level of internal consistency is acceptable (George & Mallery, 2003; Pallant, 2011).

3. Data collection and analysis

Open-ended questions were included in the survey instrument to enable respondents express their views. Subsequently, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted among 11 members of the top management. The collected quantitative data were analyzed using IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 to test for bivariate associations between the variables, as well as the validity and reliability of the evaluating measures. NVIVO was used in organizing the collected qualitative data for ease of content analysis.

Descriptive statistics was engaged in examining the connection between SOC and WLB as presented in Table 1. Table 2 shows the regression model (inferential statistics) while Table 3 and Figure 1 display the test result of SOC as illustrated in this section.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics: relationship between SOC and WLB

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Std. deviation
	1	2	3	4	5		
A) The major satisfaction in my life comes from my job	37 (12.05%)	78 (25.41%)	92 (29.97%)	71 (23.13%)	29 (9.45%)	2.93	1.16
B) The major satisfaction in my life comes from my family	8 (2.61%)	14 (4.56%)	35 (11.40%)	128 (41.69%)	122 (39.74%)	4.11	0.96
C) How often do you have the feeling that there's little meaning to the things you do in your daily life?					-	-	-

Very often 1	Usually often 2	Sometimes often 3	Neutral 4	Sometimes not often 5	Rarely often 6	Very seldom or never 7	-	-	-
6 (1.95%)	12 (3.91%)	25 (8.14%)	38 (12.38%)	66 (21.50%)	76 (24.76%)	84 (27.36%)	-	5.31	1.54

Emerged from the statistical analysis

Table 1 shows that most respondents (81.43%) of employees who strongly agreed and agreed respectively were satisfied with their family situations, but fewer respondents (32.58%) were satisfied with their work situations. Table 1 further shows that 73.62% of the respondents had high SOC since they attached meaning to their daily engagements. It could therefore be realistically concluded that high SOC had an association with satisfaction with family and did not associate with satisfaction with work at the municipality investigated. WLB is achieved when individuals achieve satisfaction with work and family simultaneously and not when satisfaction is loaded at one side of the continuum (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). Therefore, although the level of SOC seemed to be high at the municipality, yet, it was not associated positively with the achievement of WLB.

Table 2. Influence of SOC on WLB

Independent variables	R	R square	Adjusted R square	F	Beta	T	*p*-value
Sense of coherence	.05*	.00	.00	.74	.05	.86	.39
Constant						16.54	.00

$p > 0.05$
Emerged from the statistical analysis.

The result of the descriptive statistics was further subjected to regression analysis. The regression model in Table 2 shows an R square of .002 and adjusted R square of .001; indicating that the model SOC predicts 0.10% of the variations in WLB at the municipality in the South African public service. The standardized Beta and matching *p*-values for SOC (β = .049, $p > 0.05$) imply that there is no significant relationship between the independent variable, SOC and the dependent variable (WLB). These outcomes explain the achievement of the objective of this study by establishing that there is no statistical relationship between WLB and SOC at a municipality in the South African public service. This means that SOC played no influential role in the achievement of WLB at the municipality.

Table 3 displays the descriptive statistics on SOC. The mean SOC for the sample was 30.66 indicating that employees had strong SOC as reported by Kinman (2008) and Eriksson and Lindström (2005).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics on SOC

N	Valid missing	307 0
Mean		30.66
Median		32.00
Mode		32.00
Standard deviation		6.89
Variance		47.51
Sum		9414.00

Emerged from the statistical analysis.

To further clarify the result from Table 3, Figure 1 is a graphical presentation of the mean distribution of SOC among professional level employees at the municipality.

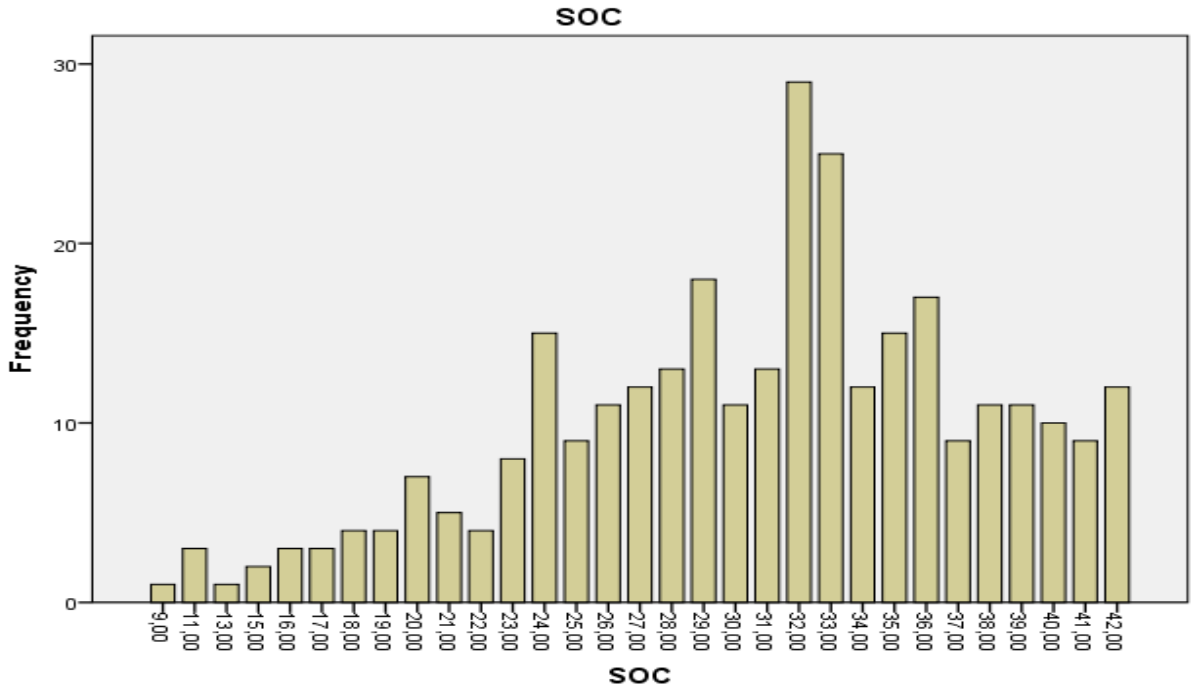

Fig. 1. Mean distribution of SOC among respondents

Emerged from the statistical analysis.

4. Findings of qualitative data

***SOC*:** Most employees attributed the strength of their SOC to their upbringing, religious beliefs, support and fitness. With respect to their responses to questions about the source of their coping abilities (SOC), some of their comments are as follows:

"Yes, I believe my upbringing in part is part of the reason for me being able to cope" (Respondent 009).

"I am capable of coping with work and life stressors. I have a strong spiritual foundation which helps me cope with the trials and tribulations of life" (Respondent 071).

"Nothing much stresses me at home. I have a great child and supportive partner" (Respondent 058).

Some other factors culled from responses to what constitutes adverse condition to employee SOC, include absence of autonomy, job stress, role ambiguity and conflict, influence of politics and politicians, work overload, bureaucratic structure of the organization and over-indulgence with meetings.

WLB: Employees demonstrated understanding of the concept of WLB through responses such as; satisfaction, subjectivity, effectiveness, time, involvement, and enjoyment, to the question *what do you understand by work-life balance?* Most respondents were of the opinion that balance is subjective and depends on the individual, while some felt that they needed to reclaim balance, deal with balance or leave the organization so as to achieve balance. Many employees thought that balance is not achievable because of numerous work stressors.

5. Discussion of findings

This paper explains the influence of SOC on WLB at a municipality. It highlights the findings of numerous scholars on these study areas as well as the findings of this paper among professional level employees at a municipality in the South African public service. The mean SOC among employees indicates that most employees had strong SOC in line with Kinman (2008), though majority of the employees were not satisfied with their work situation. This finding that professional level employees at the municipality had high SOC is opposite to the assumptions of Antonovsky (1987) and Latendresse (2009). The scholars assume that adverse environment of upbringing influences weak individual SOC. But the demographics of the sample of this study shows that majority of the employees were born and raised during the apartheid era in South Africa, when unfavorable circumstances prevailed in the society (Cameron, 2005).

On the other hand, this result could be an indication that even if the employees had weak SOC as a result of adverse conditions prevalent during their nurturing years, the weak individual SOC may have improved as a result of factors other than those present during their infant and adolescent years. This may support Feldt et al. (2003) and Feldt et al. (2007) findings that SOC could still be improved on after age 30.

Moreover, this finding does not support Antonovsky (1987) and this paper's assumption that high SOC would influence employee achievement of WLB. On the other hand, the findings support Antonovsky (1987) submission that individuals with high SOC would find their surroundings more *comprehensible*, *meaningful* and *manageable* and have a lower likelihood of assessing stimuli as stressful.

The Pearson's correlation coefficient between WLB and SOC reveals a non-significant association in the South African public service. The adjusted R square indicates that SOC was responsible for only 0.10% variations in WLB. The Beta value and *p*-value in the linear regression model confirmed that SOC did not statistically make any significant contribution to WLB in the South African public service. However, the finding that employees demonstrated high SOC but did not achieve WLB could mean that the SOC was dedicated to managing stressors and not achieving WLB in line with Hobfoll's (2011) *conservation of resources theory*. This finding is also in opposition to the findings of scholars in the literature. For instance, SOC was found to associate significantly and positively with job satisfaction (Kalimo & Vuori, 1990; Lustig & Strauser, 2002; Strümpfer, 1997; Strümpfer, Fritz & Page, 1991), but similar result is not obtained in this paper. The fact that the variables (i.e., SOC and WLB) are not significantly associated is suggestive of further investigation and supports James, Pitt-Catsouphes, McNamara, Snow, and Johnson (2015).

The qualitative data analyzed in this study provide vital explanation for the reasons why WLB did not interact with SOC at the municipality in the South African public service. Although employees were found to have reasonably high SOC, qualitative data shows that high work stressors were present in the municipal workplace. Literature reveals that continuous exposure to stressors reduces the strength of SOC among individuals (Wolff & Ratner, 1999), and is supported by Hobfoll's (2011) conservation of resources theory. As individuals assess their resources and the stressors, their decision to manage continued stressors could weaken the resolution to meaningfully seek ways of achieving WLB.

In addition, it is reported that the continued effect of adverse conditions like function vagueness, absence of autonomy, unfriendly work environment, job

stress (Guest, 2002; Jones, Burke, & Westman, 2013) and financial insufficiency could negatively impact the achievement of WLB. Impliedly, individual employees may have allocated much of the strong SOC to addressing work stressors rather than to achieving satisfaction with work and family situations. This supports Lyness and Judiesch (2008) and Kirchmeyer (2000).

Moreover, this paper examined WLB in the context of satisfaction with work and family situations (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007; Lyness & Judiesch, 2008), but most employees viewed WLB as: enjoyment, effectiveness (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011), stability (Crooker et al., 2002), time (Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 1999) and subjectivity (Darcy et al., 2012; Goodman, 2012). Other employees wished they could reclaim balance, while others indicated their intention to leave the organization and suggested that only then could balance be achieved. From these findings, it could be seen that the concept of WLB meant various things for individual employees. This may have had influence on the negative achievement of WLB in this paper and further confirms the view of scholars that defining WLB has been difficult (Darcy et al., 2012; Greenhaus & Powell, 2003; Guest, 2002), because the concept is subjective.

The outcome of the qualitative and quantitative data analysis in this paper confirms and highlights the importance on using mixed methods (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) in the present study. The limitations of quantitative data (i.e., non-significant association among SOC and WLB) are clarified through the qualitative data.

6. Limitations and recommendations for future research

This paper examined the influence of SOC on WLB among professional level employees at a municipality in the South African public service. Hence, care must be exercised in generalizing the findings to other categories of employees at the municipality as well as other municipalities in South Africa. Secondly, the paper limits WLB to satisfaction with work and satisfaction with family situations respectively, since there is no consensus among scholars on a generally accepted definition of the concept. This might have had an effect on the result of this paper since WLB is a subjective phenomenon viewed by individuals from subjective perspectives. Additionally, what constitutes balance for one person may be different for another person. Finally, a better definition of what constitutes balance to individuals and its implication on organizational policies addressing work-life needs of the employees may help in explaining the complicated matters surrounding achievement of WLB among individual employees.

Even though strong SOC was found among employees, the cross-sectional design of the paper and dependence on self-reporting survey instrument used may have impaired the tracking of causality. To obtain the direction of causality, therefore a longitudinal study to collect relevant data is recommended. The use of diaries to ascertain SOC's role in the achievement of WLB and possibly the work and family stressors that individuals contend with might be a suitable approach. This may take the study to a more thorough level of analysis. The possibility that achievement of WLB over time could be linked to SOC, might be verified through such an approach. Further studies could use matched data collected from spouses/partners, colleagues or superiors to corroborate self-reports from participants in order to make the findings generalizable to the broader Municipal population as was done in Ferguson et al. (2012).

7. Implications for practice

WLB is a world-wide issue, but the local environment, history, diversity, and mind-set should be considered in adopting and implementing suitable strategies to assist employees in achieving WLB. WLB is important according to Ferguson et al. (2012) because of the vital role it plays among the work and family domains.

The findings of this paper suggest that most professional employees at the municipality have strong SOC but did not achieve work-life balance. Qualitative data explain that employees were exposed to work stressors like function vagueness, job stress, role conflict, and absence of autonomy. Literature has shown that continued exposure to stressors reduces the strength of individuals' SOC (Wolff & Ratner, 1999). These work stressors could be addressed by the public service administration by readdressing the issues of organizational structure (i.e., by possibly dismantling bureaucracy), simplifying the work environment. Such simplification could be by the removal of complicated or ineffective arrangements and practices that hinder employee focus and performance and considering the use of simple and working technological solutions that provide support to employees as at when needed. There is also the need to ensure that the administration is committed to the simplification process.

While scholars have recommended ways of enhancing SOC through the implementation of strategies addressing work stressors from the source (Kinman,

2008), investigations on how to maintain strong SOC and channel same to the achievement of WLB has yet to be conducted by scholars. The findings of this study have both explored and highlighted the interface between WLB and individual SOC at a municipality. Together, these results indicate that the achievement of WLB is possible at the municipality since most employees have strong SOC. WLB could be achieved if the administration reduces work stressors and promotes WLB concept as useful and beneficial to employee wellness, job satisfaction and family satisfaction. The public service can promote a culture of balance among employees by adopting and fully supporting initiatives that enhance SOC and address WLB challenges. In addition, reducing function ambiguity and role conflict by clearly specifying job responsibilities and consistently adhering to the same may improve comprehensibility (Antonovsky, 1991). Creating and sustaining chances for personal development and greater involvement in decision-making by granting more control of job to employees could result in more meaningfulness and manageability with respect to the job (Kinman, 2008).

The findings of this paper have the potential of expanding the work-family literature for scholars in this area beyond looking at WLB from the behavioral to integrating the cognitive perspective. Additionally, by identifying work stressors and highlighting their influence of individual employee's SOC and achievement of WLB, the findings of this paper could meaningfully impact municipal and public service administration globally to simplify work environment, re-address the issue of organizational structure and implement effective work-life balance strategies.

Conclusion

The strength of this paper lies in the fact that it brings a peculiar perspective to the study of WLB by investigating the achievement of WLB from the influence of the individual's SOC that is by examining both the individual behavioral and cognitive dimensions. This paper was designed to investigate the influence of SOC on the achievement of WLB among professional level employees at a municipality in the South African public service. The *13-item version Orientation of Life Questionnaire* designed by Antonovsky (1987) was adapted to this paper by adding an additional item to measure SOC while WLB was determined from satisfaction with work and satisfaction with family situations. The findings of this paper were used in achieving its main objective, which was to ascertain if SOC played a role in the achievement of WLB among employees at a municipality in the South African public service. The result shows that there was no statistically significant relationship between SOC and WLB; hence SOC did not predict WLB among employees at the municipality. It was also found that employees had high levels of SOC. This result may not be surprising as it supports one of the theories underpinning the conceptualization of this study, which is the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 2001).

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