U.S. Army War College

Maximizing Senior Leader Health and Wellbeing

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REFRAMING WORK-LIFE BALANCE FOR SENIOR MILITARY LEADERS

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"We had an opportunity to get that captain back [from Cobra Gold] to be there for the birth of his child. And that brigade commander would not let him go back. And I just thought that was a travesty."

-General James McConville[1]

The idea of work-life balance is as popular as it is elusive. As mobile technology and globalized information have blurred the lines between home and workspaces, many organizations have emphasized the need to attain balance, or work-life integration, because "balance" is rarely achieved. A familiar refrain heard among many professionals is to "Find your balance. Avoid bringing work home. Spend more time doing the things you love, with the ones you love." These sentiments hint at a point of harmony where individuals can place work into equilibrium with "all else," resulting in a long-awaited and fulfilling quality of life. Work-life balance, however, is neither a balancing act nor a function of delicately equalizing time throughout a day, month, year, or lifetime.

The goal of this chapter is to reframe the notion of work-life balance and provide recommendations that senior military leaders can use to improve the work-life interface for themselves and those they lead. This chapter reviews the challenging work environment that senior military leaders face and examines work-life balance through a lens of occupational health psychology. This viewpoint shows that work-life balance (referred to in this

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1. Haley Britzky, 15 October 2020. "The Army Chief of Staff Wants You to Have Work-Life Balance. Seriously," https://taskandpurpose.com/news/army-chief-mcconville-people-priority/.

chapter as the quality of the *work-life interface*) is a function of apportioning personal energy resources, not managing time. When individuals invest energy resources at work, they retain fewer of those resources to invest in other areas of life. This deficiency can lead to conflict.[2] This chapter presents findings from a survey of resident senior military leaders at the United States Army War College (USAWC). Recommendations are offered for senior military leaders to not only improve their own work-life integration, but also facilitate the work-life interface of their followers, positively affecting their families and loved ones.

The Nature of the Military Work Environment

According to anecdotal and quantitative research, most senior military leaders find that work creates rather than reduces tension and conflict at home.[3] It is rare to hear a senior military leader who is content with the way work combines with home life. This narrative is so consistent that it has become a cultural norm and an institutional expectation of military service. Spouses also grow frustrated at the often-unpredictable work schedules that cause senior military leaders to miss family events like dinner, date night, and children's activities. Dissatisfaction only compounds when those service members routinely arrive home cognitively and emotionally drained, unable to fully engage at home.

Why is this so often the case? There are clear benefits to military service, but why do the sacrifices routinely overshadow those benefits? What about the institution of military service makes it challenging to develop a healthy work-life interface? The following are six factors about military service that can impede a healthy work-life interface:

> 1) The lethal potential of military work elevates its importance and often gives it primacy over other areas of life.
>
> 2) The military is committed to caring for its people. As a result, leaders quickly adopt a mindset of 24-hour responsiveness.
>
> 3) The amount of work facing senior military leaders. Senior leaders have enormous responsibilities and obligations for those they lead.
>
> 4) Military senior leaders drive their organizations towards poorly defined readiness objectives. Performance standards for specific tasks are usually

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2. Stevan E. Hobfoll, Jonathon Halbesleben, Jean-Pierre Neveu, and Mina Westman, "Dynamic Self-Regulation and Multiple-Goal Pursuit Dynamic System: A System in Which the Elements Change over Time," *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior,* 5 (2018): 103-28, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-.

3. Andrew C. Steadman, "Reframing Work-Life Balance" (strategic research project, U.S. Army War College, PA, 2021).

clear, but unit readiness ratings often rest on the subjective assessments of commanders. This dynamic creates a culture where leaders push the pace of training and operations.

5) The "up or out" promotion system that weights a leader's success on predetermined performance periods. A leader's promotion potential rests on succeeding in command positions and key staff jobs.

6) The military has evolved a culture that espouses hard work and busyness as ends unto themselves, even regarding them as ritual badges of honor in the process of leader development.

Research Foundation for Work-life Interface

An important goal of this chapter is to clarify the often-conflicted concept of work-life interface and offer recommendations to improve it. This section examines the work-life interface through the lens of occupational health psychology, asking: *What does science say about work-life integration? How can research provide greater understanding and perspective for senior military leaders who feel out of balance?* Answering these questions can improve the way senior military leaders work and lead, but the first step is to let go of the idea that finding balance is a worthy aim to pursue at all.[4]

The Myth of Balance

The common notion of balance in work and life appears increasingly outdated and irrelevant. One early trace of balancing the day's activities emanated from 19th Century Welsh manufacturer, philanthropist, and social reformer Robert Owen. Owen was a champion of labor rights and coined the term, "Eight hours' labour, Eight hours' recreation, Eight hours' rest."[5] Owen's concept later fueled the labor rights movement in the United States and the phrase carried forward the implication that work, rest, and relaxation should be in equilibrium. By this time, the Industrial Revolution was changing the nature of work and non-work roles by separating the workplace from the home and introducing the concept of regulating work

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4. Wendy J. Casper, Hoda Vaziri, Julie Holliday Wayne, Sara DeHauw, and Jeffrey Greenhaus, "The Jingle-Jangle of Work–nonwork Balance: A Comprehensive and Meta-Analytic Review of Its Meaning and Measurement." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 103, no. 2 (2018): 182–214. doi:10.1037/apl0000259.supp (Supplemental).; Julie Holliday Wayne, Marcus M. Butts, Wendy J. Casper, and Tammy D. Allen. 2017. "In Search of Balance: A Conceptual and Empirical Integration of Multiple Meanings of Work–family Balance." *Personnel Psychology* 70 (1): 167–210. doi:10.1111/peps.12132.

5. Robert Owen, 1817, New Lanark, Scotland, retrieved from National Museum of Australia, online at https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/eight-hour-day, accessed April 5, 2021. Comment attributed to Robert Owen.

time.[6] This transition created the cultural notion of public and private life, along with temporal and physical boundaries that disrupted the interactions between parents and family members.[7]

During WWI and WWII, women were thrust into the workplace when men left for battle, and children went into some of the first day care centers. When men returned home, some women left the workplace while some stayed. In the latter half of the 20th Century, tension between work and non-work roles increased as women made up more of the workforce (29.6% to 45.2% from 1950 to 1990) and dual earner households became more prevalent.[8] Continued globalization and unbridled technological access to information all but erased the line between work and non-work activity, driving the "on demand" economy and the 24/7 "on call" culture that many workers face today.[9]

Seeing the connection between work environments and adverse health indicators, occupational health psychologists have focused their research efforts towards understanding the relationship between work and home (i.e., all non-work activities) since the 1980's.[10] Studies examined the relationships among the various domains of life (e.g., work, self, family, community, etc.) and how those interactions impact health, well-being, and productivity.[11] The intersection of roles related to the work and family domains is known as the work-family interface (WFI), but given the variety of identities leaders adopt, the term work-*life* interface (WLI) is more inclusive and appropriate to describe the relationship between work and everything else.[12] Further, the present chapter proposes that "work-life

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6. Nancy P. Rothbard and Ariane Ollier-Malaterre, "Boundary Management," in *The Oxford Handbook of Work and Family* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 109-122.

7. Rothbard and Ollier-Malaterre, 109-122.

8. United States Department of Labor, "Table 2. Families by Presence and Relationship of Employed Members and Family Type, 2018-2019 Annual Averages," Economic News Release, (April 21, 2020), http://www.bls.gov/news.release/famee.t02.htm, accessed April 5, 2021.

9. Tammy D. Allen and Angela Martin, "The Work-Family Interface: A Retrospective Look at 20 Years of Research in JOHP," *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* 22, no. 3 (2017): 259-272, https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp0000065.

10. Allen and Martin, 259-272.; Greenhaus, Jeffrey H., and Nicholas J. Beutell. 1985. "Sources and Conflict between Work and Family Roles." *The Academy of Management Review* 10 (1): 76–88. doi:10.2307/258214.

11. Leslie B. Hammer and Jacquelyn M. Brady "Worker Well-being and Work-life issues," in *Historical perspectives in industrial and organizational psychology* (2nd ed.)(New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor and Francis Group, 2021), 270-291.

12. This terminology is supported by terms used by Jenny Sok, Rob Blomme, and Debbie Tromp in "Positive and Negative Spillover from Work to Home: The Role of Organizational Culture and Supportive Arrangements," *British Journal of Management* 25, no. 3 (2014): 456-472, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12058.

well-being" is a perception of a positive work-life interface that contributes to the wellbeing of the individual.

The phrase work-life balance does appear as a distinct construct in the science literature, but most often in generic terms lacking measurable qualities.[13] One 2001 study defined work-life balance as "the degree to which an individual is able to simultaneously balance the temporal, emotional, and behavioral demands of both paid work and family responsibilities."[14] This study found that employees reported lower stress when they had more flexibility over location and timing in their jobs.[15] Other studies have mirrored this approach, reasoning that a person lacks work-life balance if work or other responsibilities cause them to experience stress. This conclusion, however, creates an unrealistic condition for achieving work-life balance and hints at an equilibrium to be pursued, all while providing no common scale for measuring one's progress toward that equilibrium. Herein lies the myth of balance.

Work-life Interface: Interference and Facilitation

Instead of viewing the relationship between work and home as a balance, researchers have instead found it more useful to understand how the various domains of life interact to affect one's ability to fulfill obligations, build healthy relationships, and sustain wellbeing. This section of the chapter addresses both the negative and positive ways work and home influence each other. Recent research suggests that demands (e.g., tension, stress, pain) in one area of life can easily spill over into other areas.[16] Work commitments may cause physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion that takes a toll on one's ability or desire to engage at home. Picture the service member who is too exhausted to play with their children after work or who is so obsessed with work that they are not mentally present during their child's dance recital or sporting event. This concept, known as work interference with family (WIF), affects individual wellbeing and popularized the pursuit of work-life balance.[17]

Conversely, stress in other areas of life can impact performance at work and is called family interference with work (FIW) or negative spillover.[18] Picture

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13. Allen and Martin, 259-272.

14. Jeffrey E. Hill et al., "Finding an Extra Day a Week: The Positive Influence of Perceived Job Flexibility on Work and Family Life Balance," in *Family Relations* 50, no. 1 (2001): 49, http://www.jstor.org/stable/585774.

15. Hill et al, 49-58.

16. Sok, Blomme, and Tromp, 456-472.

17. Eko Yi Liao et al., "A Resource-Based Perspective on Work-Family Conflict: Meta-Analytical Findings," *Career Development International* 24, no. 1 (2019): 37-73, https://doi.org/10.1108/CDI-12-2017-0236.

18. Liao et al., 37-73.

a service member distracted by thoughts of a sick family member during a meeting or when their poor sleep habits impacted work productivity. In many workplace cultures it is inappropriate to let personal matters interfere with work.[19] Consequently, workers may be less inclined to ask for help even if they are distracted or less productive.[20] The stigma persists despite the findings that employees are more engaged and experience lower stress when their supervisors provide flexibility and support in the face of FIW.[21] Family-supportive supervisor behaviors are essential in creating positive work climates leading to increased job satisfaction, lower turnover intentions, and improved work-life interface.[22]

Positive outcomes can also occur when life's domains intersect and enhance each other in a concept known as facilitation or positive spillover.[23] Family to work facilitation (FWF) might occur when a service member is inspired by their spouse to be more engaged at work or when a leader returns from leave reenergized and able to think more strategically. Conversely, work to family facilitation (WFF) occurs when life at work enables richer relationships at home. Picture a service member passing important lessons learned at work to their loved ones. Finally, facilitation and interference are interactive, concurrent, and multidirectional across life roles.[24] For example, personal life can facilitate performance at work despite work demands interfering with life at home.

Conservation of Resources Theory

Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, introduced in Chapter 7, provides a context for understanding work-life interference and facilitation. Although COR theory was initially developed as a framework for understanding the effects of traumatic stress, it also applies to work-related stress. In this context, an individual's resilience depends partly on the availability of psychological and behavioral resources.[25] Psychological resources "enable

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19. Leslie B. Hammer et al., "Development and Validation of a Multidimensional Measure of Family Supportive Supervisor Behaviors (FSSB)," *Journal of Management* 35, no. 4 (2009): 837-856, https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206308328510.

20. Hammer et al., 837-856.

21. Allen and Martin, 259-272.

22. Hammer et al., 837-856.

23. Elianne F. van Steenbergen, Naomi Ellemers, and Ab Mooijaart, "How Work and Family Can Facilitate Each Other: Distinct Types of Work-Family Facilitation and Outcomes for Women and Men," *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* 12, no. 3 (2007): 279-300, https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8998.12.3.279.

24. Steenbergen, Ellemers, and Mooijaart, 279-300.

25. Shoshi Chen, Mina Westman, and Stevan E. Hobfoll, "The Commerce and Crossover of Resources: Resource Conservation in the Service of Resilience," *Stress and Health: Journal of the International Society for the Investigation of Stress* 31, no. 2 (2015): 95-105, https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.2574.

people to maintain their mental health and well-being when faced with adversity, whereas the behavioral component enables people to remain effective at home and work, focus on relevant tasks and goals and carry them out."[26] Furthermore, "resilience refers to people remaining vigorous, committed and engaged in important life tasks, even amidst significant stressful circumstances."[27]

Leaders seeking a healthy and fulfilling work-life interface should gain two important insights from COR theory. First, personal resilience resources are finite, meaning that deep investment at work can deplete resources available for investment at home. This principle applies to cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and physical domains and explains why it feels like there is "nothing left in the tank" at the end of a difficult workday. Second, having more personal resources can improve one's reaction to stress and overall resilience.[28] For example, individuals who perceive stressful situations in less-threatening terms or have greater confidence in their ability to handle stressful situations are more likely to navigate stressful situations successfully and show resilience when life roles conflict.[29]

Recovery and Boundary Management

Recovery is the antidote when demands, work or otherwise, deplete cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and physical resources.[30] It has a compensatory effect with positive experiences in one domain offsetting negative experiences in another.[31] Recovery during the workday (e.g., breaks and rejuvenating distractions) can improve immediate work experiences while recovery activities like vacation, exercise, and relaxation can dampen the cumulative effect of resource drain that lead to work-related conflict.[32]

The frequency, duration, type, and quality of recovery activities matter.[33] The best recovery activities allow individuals to detach from work psychologically without producing new stress, inspiring them to think positively about work.[34] Recovery can lead to improved satisfaction at home,

26. Chen, Westman, and Hobfoll, 96.
27. Chen, Westman, and Hobfoll, 96.
28. Chen, Westman, and Hobfoll, 95-105.
29. Chen, Westman, and Hobfoll, 95-105.
30. Grandey and Krannitz, 81-94.
31. Sabine Sonnentag, Dana Unger, and Elisabeth Rothe, "Recovery and the Work-Home Interface," in *The Oxford Handbook of Work and Family* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 95-108.
32. Sonnentag, Unger, and Rothe, 95-108.
33. Sonnentag, Unger, and Rothe, 95-108.
34. Sonnentag, Unger, and Rothe, 95-108.

which, in turn, can increase involvement in the work domain, as well.[35] Proper recovery is especially important for senior military leaders who feel like they are "always on" and get limited opportunities to disengage from work. They should deliberately schedule recovery activities away from work that are psychologically restorative and allow them to be fully present in the recovery experience.

The challenge of psychologically detaching from work relies on boundary management, or "our mental models about the permeability of the relationship between multiple life roles, our preferences about how to manage those relationships, and our choices and constraints regarding how we enact those preferences."[36] Boundaries between life roles take many forms (i.e., cognitive, physical, emotional, spatial, temporal, etc.) and are increasingly important as technology blurs the line between work and non-work roles. Boundaries can be created by design or formed unintentionally through habit, but nonetheless they indicate one's highly individualized preference for segmenting or integrating life roles.[37]

Service members who prefer low work-to-home permeability might use a physical boundary such as changing out of uniform before leaving work, a behavioral boundary like ignoring work tasks while at home, and a social boundary that precludes friendships with work colleagues.[38] In contrast, others might prefer high home-to-work permeability and might display family pictures in the office, bring family members into the workplace, and may even complete home-related tasks during the workday. This strategy might offset the demands and stresses of work. Emplacing boundaries and distancing promote the psychological detachment needed for effective recovery.[39]

For many workers, however, there is no choice but to maintain a permeable boundary between work and home, especially for women. Primary caregivers who shoulder most of the home responsibilities experience unavoidable spillover into the workplace, often reducing their work engagement, productivity, and satisfaction.[40] As this chapter will propose, boundary management is the key to creating a healthy work-life interface that allows senior military leaders to conserve energy resources, reduce

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35. Sonnentag, Unger, and Rothe, 95-108.
36. Rothbard and Ollier-Malaterre, 109.
37. Rothbard and Ollier-Malaterre, 109-122.
38. Rothbard and Ollier-Malaterre, 109-122.
39. Rothbard and Ollier-Malaterre, 109-122.
40. Hannes Zacher and Heiko Schulz, "Employees' Eldercare Demands, Strain, and Perceived Support," *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 30, no. 2 (2015): 183-198, doi: http://dx.doi.org.usawc.idm.oclc.org/10.1108/JMP-06-2013-0157.

negative spillover, increase positive spillover, and mitigate work-related interference and conflict. In other words, boundary management enables recovery.

Organizational Boundary Management

Senior military leaders, with influence over people and processes, have the unique responsibility to establish and manage organizational boundaries that help their subordinates maintain healthy boundaries between work and home. Closely aligned with family supportive supervisor behaviors, organizational boundary management involves improving how workers integrate work and home through policies, hierarchies, rewards, and narratives (e.g., flexible work hours and the freedom to leave work for important home events).[41] Workers who feel they have more control over work-life integration tend to be more engaged at work and exhibit fewer stress indicators.[42] Leaders manage organizational boundaries to promote psychological detachment from work, leading to effective recovery for their subordinates. Similarly, effective organizational boundary management diminishes the pervasive assumption that the work identity is the central identity in a person's life.[43] The "hegemony of work" is entrenched in military culture, because the consequential nature of the military mission requires constant engagement and full-time availability.[44] In addition, military personnel may have a fear of missing out on important information.

Like many senior military leaders, General McConville recognized the collective tension in the Army surrounding work demands and the tendency for soldiers to miss key life events due to comparatively trivial work events. In an interview, he recalled that as a major, another fellow officer missed the birth of his child because he was participating in a training exercise in Thailand.[45] By denying the officer's request to fly back to Hawaii, the unit commander set an informal organizational boundary that segmented and subordinated this most sacred life event.

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41. Kimberly J. Wells, "Work-Family Initiatives from an Organizational Change Lens," in *The Oxford Handbook of Work and Family* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 215-228.

42. Hill et al, 49-58.

43. Wells, 215-228.

44. A. M. Ryan & E. E. Kossek, "Work-Life Policy Implementation: Breaking Down or Creating Barriers to Inclusiveness," *Human Resource Management*, 47, no. 2 (2008): 298, quoted in Kimberly J. Wells, "Work-Family Initiatives from an Organizational Change Lens," in *The Oxford Handbook of Work and Family* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 221.

45. Haley Britzky, "The Army Chief of Staff Wants You to Have Work-life Balance. Seriously," *Task & Purpose*, October 15, 2020, https://taskandpurpose.com/news/army-chief-mcconville-people-priority/.

Figure 1. "Work-Life Balance" by General James McConville[46]

The incident also shaped General McConville; he vowed never to let that happen on his watch.[47] In response, he developed the chart above to communicate his commitment and approach to honoring soldier familial roles. Notably, he valued immediate family births at the same level as war, implying that soldiers could miss part of an operational deployment to be present for the birth of a child. This approach exemplifies how strategic leaders can establish and publish organizational boundaries that integrate work and home life in a predictable and productive manner.

When supervisors like General McConville prioritize work-family integration, they remove a source of doubt and tension created when conflicting situations arise between work and family roles. Another powerful way senior military leaders can reduce work-life tension is to mandate that newly arriving members will not begin daily duty until they receive household goods and are settled in the home. By telling new servicemembers not to come to work until "pictures are hanging on the wall," leaders set an organizational boundary that removes tension and promotes personal responsibility for integrating work and home roles.

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46. Haley Britzky, "The Army Chief of Staff Wants You to Have Work-life Balance. Seriously," *Task & Purpose*, October 15, 2020, https://taskandpurpose.com/news/army-chief-mcconville-people-priority/.

47. Haley Britzky, "The Army Chief of Staff Wants You to Have Work-life Balance. Seriously," *Task & Purpose*, October 15, 2020, https://taskandpurpose.com/news/army-chief-mcconville-people-priority/.
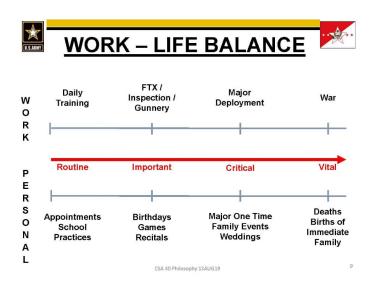
USAWC Work-life Interface Survey for Senior Military Leaders

To better understand how this environment affects the work-life interface for senior military leaders, the research team distributed a survey to resident students from the Academic Year 2021 U.S. Army War College cohort. A total of 108 out of 360 senior military leaders (response rate = 30%) participated in the voluntary survey. 14 were female, 94 were male. 98 of the respondents were married, with the remainder either currently divorced or single. 97 of the respondents had children.

The survey contained valid measures from prior research on the work-home interface, including perceptions of work-family balance[48] and the "different ways in which work and family roles can interfere and benefit each other." [49] The survey also contained question sets that were original and tailored for senior military leaders, including how senior military leaders had used boundaries to protect home life from work life. Respondents also shared examples of how work has impacted home life in both negative and positive ways and leader observations about organizational climates that either supported or inhibited the work-life interface. The comments (*N* = 397) added personal experience context to the data, as well as a sample glimpse into the feelings that fuel collective attitudes about military culture. The major themes of the survey are discussed below.

High Work to Home Interference

As seen in Table 1, The USAWC survey clearly shows that work has established primacy over the home dimension and that military leaders experience strong interference from work to home. This interference occurs when work causes senior military leaders to miss out on home activities, think about work while at home, and sacrifice personal engagement with people and matters at home. One active-duty U.S. senior military leader provided harsh personal context to the empirical finding that work regularly interferes with home life:

> My entire career I have avoided scheduling anything before 1900 during the week because I know that I will probably be late to even those activities. I have not been able to consistently attend a weekly activity that starts earlier than 1900 due to emerging work requirements. I have found that it is not worth the headache of explaining to my wife why I won't make it and instead just don't schedule such activities. I always try and schedule events on Friday night since I have the most success. My entire family's life revolves around my job and the fact that I will be working nights and

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48. Hill et al, 49.
49. Steenbergen, Ellemers, and Mooijaart, 279.

at least one day on the weekend. When I am home, I will be responding to calls and e-mails.

A different senior military leader commented, "In the last two years I have spent a total of 9 weeks with my family. I've lost count of the things I've missed." This experience is consistent with other response comments and supports the conclusion that senior military leaders are not satisfied with the primacy that work holds over all other activities.

Table 1: Survey Items for Work and Home Interfering with Each Other

Work interfering with home	% Agree/Strongly Agr.	% Disagree/Strongly Dis.
Have to miss activities at home due to work	79%	12%
The time I must devote to my job keeps me from responsibilities at home	74%	9%
When I am at home, I often think about things I need to do at work	83%	5%
I think about work-related problems at home	82%	6%
Home interfering with work		
Have to miss activities at work due to home responsibilities	9%	77%
Pre-occupied with home-related matters at work	15%	70%
Home responsibilities impede my concentration at work	14%	79%

These findings will likely come as no surprise to other senior military leaders who have spent years trying to manage work spillover into home life. Work to home interference is a cultural norm for senior military leaders, partly because of the six reasons mentioned above, but also because senior military leaders suffer from poor boundary management. In response to one question, 70% of senior military leaders agreed that they

implemented techniques or boundaries to protect their home life from their work life. However, implementing these techniques did not prevent most of these leaders from experience work to home interference. Additionally, one senior military leader's comment is representative of the common experience regarding the freedom to set boundaries, "There is no escaping the iPhone once one is issued. Anyone who tells his/her boss that they are turning off the iPhone at 1800 is committing professional suicide."

Low Home to Work Interference

Although leaders do not effectively employ boundaries to keep work from interfering with home life, the USAWC survey revealed that senior military leaders reported protecting work from home life. As seen in the bottom half of Table 1, home-related matters rarely spillover to reduce effectiveness or distract senior military leaders at work. This reporting suggests that several types of boundaries exist to prevent home to work spillover. Namely, temporal boundaries protect the time that senior military leaders commit to work activities; behavioral boundaries are strong enough to keep most senior military leaders at work and performing work roles, regardless of the home activities that may require attention; and cognitive boundaries fuel work-related mental activity at the expense of home-related thought.

These findings reinforce the conclusion that boundaries prevent home life from interfering with work, yet few boundaries exist to protect work from interfering with home. This imbalance is clear and can be a key source of frustration and conflict that affects work-life wellbeing, morale, and retention intentions. This aspect of senior military leader life not only reinforces the hegemonic nature of work, but importantly, may also negate some of the facilitative ways in which positive home experiences can improve work life. Given that only 13% of senior military leaders reported being satisfied with the frequency that work detracts from home activities, these barriers are not likely to be intentional.

Home Life as Recovery

A third finding from the USAWC survey is that the home domain is an important source of rejuvenation and recovery for senior military leaders. The home domain also inspires leaders to be more efficient at work so that they can spend more time at home. Of the surveyed senior military leaders, 72% reported that home activities inspire them to arrive at work in a good mood and 64% of respondents believed that the energy they regain at home helps them focus and concentrate at work. This tendency represents

time-based home to work facilitation, where home activities serve as a motivator to complete work requirements.[50]

Collectively, for the leaders surveyed, home life has a demonstrably facilitative effect on work performance. This facilitation likely stems from supportive home relationships and the tendency for home life to feel like a welcomed escape from work. It is reasonable, however, to consider how much more restorative the home life would be for senior military leaders if stronger boundaries existed to prevent work interference and negative spillover.

The Gap Between Messaging and Action

A fourth finding relates to a key frustration among senior military leaders: that there is a disconnect between what leaders say and what they do when it comes to work-life interface and organizational boundary management. Military leaders at every echelon emphasize the importance of maintaining a satisfying home life, but as the saying goes, the video does not match the audio. Anecdotal accounts, as well as empirical data and narrative statements from the USAWC survey, all support the assertion that military leaders are wholly unsuccessful in creating organizational climates that facilitate individual work-life wellbeing. For example, 70% of the leaders surveyed agreed with the statement that their leaders had emphasized the importance of harmony between work and home life, 93% agreed that they had personally encouraged their subordinates to have a healthy interface between work and home life, and 72% agreed they instituted policies or guidance to promote a health interface.

Taken together, the results show that the work-life interface is a common message across multiple echelons and that, in general, leaders acknowledge that work-life interface is an important aspect of overall personal satisfaction. Yet, these leadership actions and narratives are not effective. If they were, then senior military leaders would also report low work to home interference and a sense of freedom to emplace work to home boundaries. Clearly this is not the case, which is evident in narrative comments that senior military leaders provided:

> I don't regret the career, but I also think we need to be honest that a career as an Army officer is inherently unbalanced if you want to do well. I realize that is not the party line, but all the successful ones I have observed do not have that balance. In fact, it is the opposite, we negatively view the officer leaving at 1700 while everyone else is still working. This is not

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50. Steenbergen, Ellemers, and Mooijaart 279-300.

about techniques or efficiency, but this is a culture issue that we have where no one dares to say no.

The surveyed senior military leaders also sense hypocrisy when they hear the most senior officers emphasize the importance of work and home wellbeing by discouraging others from following their example. The following comment was a typical refrain in the survey comments:

Senior leaders seem to speak from a position of regret regarding work and life (I should have spent more time...don't make the same mistakes I did...). However, they forget that if they did not prioritize work in key positions of their junior years, they would not have been in position to contribute or solve the problem the organization needed.

Other respondents were more direct:

I would stop the same speech by every General, "Don't do what I did." Thanks…we all know that you put your career first and it worked out. Let's find examples of the O5s and O6s who put their family first and retired and were STILL SUCCESSFUL in life. Or, show the General whose spouse has maintained a career during his career that was not also in the military. Have senior leaders, even the most senior, demonstrate true work-life balance. Don't let the . . . . come tell us how he works 15 hours per day. That sets unrealistic expectations if the intent is for senior leaders to have work-life balance. None of us expect to work 8 hour days, but that example is a huge demotivator.

The "don't do what I did" narrative runs counter to the cultural reality that senior military leaders experience and for those who have the skills and desire to continue serving at higher ranks, the guidance is impossible to follow. Senior military leaders feel they will be less competitive if they curb work investment to protect their home lives.

Still others recognize that service intensity ebbs and flows and have accepted that they must try to recoup family time during low-intensity jobs, "I do believe that we all have to learn to take advantage of the time given in some lesser-time consuming jobs to be with family, because when you do move back into that next command position- the Army will get its time back." A final comment summarizes the collective lack of faith in the institution to create conditions for individual work-life wellbeing, "I have learned only within the past three years that I must take work-life balance in my own hands. I cannot leave it up to the Army -- or anyone else -- to "take care of my family."

As this comment and the USAWC survey data suggest, the work-life wellbeing narrative may be present, but the follow-through is absent. The result is that senior military leaders serve in organizational climates that inhibit boundaries and may threaten home life satisfaction. One perspective is that because of its mission, the military cannot avoid the high rate of operations, activity, tasks, and thus personal sacrifice that it demands today. If this is indeed true – if it is unreasonable to expect the military and its leaders to facilitate work-life wellbeing for individuals – then military leaders must erase the hypocrisy by adapting their messaging to align with this truth. On the other hand, if the military recognizes that work-life wellbeing is a critical component of individual wellness, then its leaders should follow General McConville's example and emplace organizational boundaries to reverse the hegemony that military work holds over home life. The next section will offer recommendations for leaders to employ for their organizations and in their personal lives.

Recommendations

In a perfect world, senior military leaders would fully understand and anticipate the demands of work and home, support boundaries to reduce fatigue, apportion energy expenditure to preserve personal resources, and remain attuned to their work-life interface while being mindful of the expectations and fulfillment of others. Senior military leaders would also experience more facilitation than interference among life roles and lead in ways that promote similar experiences for their followers.

Ultimately, intention is the most important aspect of managing the interface between work and home life. Senior military leaders will suffer unwanted negative spillover (most likely from work to home) if they do not understand their work-life interface and fail to establish boundaries to guide daily habits. This section offers three broad categories of recommendations that serve as a path to improving work-life interface while leading in ways that support work-life wellbeing for followers. Table 2 provides a summary of these recommendations. Specific recommendations from the respondents in the senior leader survey are also provided in this section. These recommendations, if followed, should improve the health, wellbeing, and performance of senior leaders and their followers.[51]

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51. Leslie B. Hammer, Jacquelyn M. Brady, and MacKenna L. Perry, "Training Supervisors to Support Veterans at Work: Effects on Supervisor Attitudes and Employee Sleep and Stress," *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology 93*, no. 2 (2020): 273–301. doi:10.1111/joop.12299.; Leslie B. Hammer, Jacquelyn M. Brady, Rebecca M. Brossoit, Cynthia D. Mohr, Todd E. Bodner, Tori L. Crain, and Krista J. Brockwood, "Effects of a Total Worker Health® Leadership Intervention on Employee Well-Being and Functional Impairment," *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 26, no. 6 (2021): 582–98. doi:10.1037/ocp0000312.

Table 2: Recommendations for Improving the Quality of the Work-Life Interface

Assess Work-Life Interface and Its Impact	1. Develop self-awareness regarding how work and home roles interact to affect significant others
Determine How to Address Relationships with Life Roles	1. Determine degree of segmentation, permeation, and integration you are comfortable with
	2. Set necessary boundaries based upon your decision
	3. Promote the work-home interface for those under your command by allowing leaders the freedom to set boundaries
Set Boundaries to Mitigate Negative Spillover	1. Emplace personal boundaries to mitigate negative spillover from work to home, including batching emails
	2. Limit the number of activities completed through email and time window for responding to emails
	3. Set limits on working hours for non-emergency tasks, including a target time to complete the workday
	4. If leaders must work at home, schedule blocks of time to engage in work and, if possible, isolate to an office

1. Assess Work-life Interface and Its Impacts

Senior military leaders would benefit from embarking on a period of reflection and discovery to promote self-awareness regarding the many ways that work and home roles interact to cause interference, conflict, strain, and decreased productivity. They can talk to spouses, children, close friends, and colleagues to appreciate the perspective of those in a senior military leader's orbit who must contend with excessive spillover and interference from their work. Senior military leaders may be surprised at the collateral temporal, emotional, and behavioral cost their work-life interface imposes on others, particularly loved ones.

2. Determine an Appropriate Mix of Segmentation, Permeation, and Integration Among Life Roles

With full input from loved ones, friends, and colleagues, some senior military leaders may decide that they are more productive when they segment home from work by limiting communication with family during the workday or by keeping family pictures and mementos out of the office. Other senior military leaders may experience fulfillment and rejuvenation from a permeable home to work interface, such as making workday calls to a spouse, displaying family photos, and occasionally bringing children to the office. This kind of positive home to work spillover is broadly accepted in military units. In another example of home to work permeability, some senior military leaders may feel that sharing facts about their personal lives makes them more relatable and empathetic in the eyes of their followers.

Senior military leaders must also determine an optimal amount of positive and negative work to home spillover. In the USARWC survey, some respondents conveyed that work does create many positive outcomes in home life, such as time management skills, behavior modulation, and a deeper appreciation for time off. Socializing with colleagues outside of work and attending unit social events are indicators of a permeable work to home interface. Someone who wishes to segment work from home, however, might commit to changing out of uniform before leaving work, storing all work equipment at the place of duty, and declining to discuss work matters at home. Given the all-encompassing nature of military work, this level of segmentation would be exceedingly difficult for senior military leaders to achieve.

Senior military leaders seeking less work to home permeability must weigh the obvious benefits against the risk that others will see them as less committed and less competitive or that they will miss out on important information. Facing what feels like an impossible dichotomy, senior military leaders too often do what their predecessors and mentors did and make the professionally-safe decision to sacrifice quality of life at home. If, however, a senior military leader serves in an organization that promotes work-life wellbeing, structures work activity with organizational boundary management, and gives individuals the freedom to emplace their own boundaries, then those leaders will likely be more engaged and less fatigued at work while enjoying more recovery and fulfillment at home.

3. Set Boundaries to Mitigate Spillover

Once they understand their life roles and decide how those dimensions should interact, senior military leaders can emplace personal boundaries to mitigate negative spillover from work to home. One major source of

this negative spillover is information communication technology (ICT)."[52] Overall, senior military leaders should shift from a reactive to a proactive mindset regarding ICTs. Senior military leaders should consider using "batching", where all notifications are turned off for all but the most valuable incoming information. Batching allows to focus on priority tasks and engage with ICTs during discrete, planned time blocks. This technique is associated with higher perceived productivity and results in fewer cognitive interruptions and, ostensibly, lower fatigue.[53]

Senior military leaders should seek to limit the number of activities completed through email use through personal and organizational boundaries. For example, they can discourage certain activities like meeting coordination, brainstorming, and casual conversations from occurring over email. They can also set expectations for email response times (e.g., "No email response required until the next business day.") or narrow the daily email engagement window (e.g., "I will not look at email after 1900."), which loosens the tether that binds individuals to their devices and inboxes. One senior military leader shared the benefits of implementing this recommendation in their experience in the USAWC survey:

> In one job, I outlawed downstream tasks/due outs after 1600 and nothing except emergencies (my decision point) were allowed via phone call after 1600 or requiring a response before 1000 the following morning. I also outlawed working past 1800. Any presence after that time required my approval... Not a surprise that work efficiency went up and very few people truly needed to work late.

An additional strategy for setting boundaries to prevent negative spillover is for senior military leaders to set a target time to complete the workday. Such a temporal benchmark is essential for putting parameters around work and promoting the mentality that daily work has an endpoint. This method also serves as a commitment to themselves and others, a promise that home life will reclaim priority in the senior military leader's day.

In addition to setting boundaries at work to prevent negative spillover, senior military leaders should establish boundaries to shape the way work integrates into home life. As the results of the USAWC survey show, most senior military leaders are unsatisfied with the amount of work they feel compelled to accomplish at home and regularly seek to reduce it.

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52. Julie B. Olson-Buchanan, Wendy R. Boswell, and Timothy J. Morgan, "The Role of Technology in Managing the Work and Nonwork Interface," *The Oxford Handbook of Work and Family* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 333.

53. Gloria Mark et al., 1717-1728.

Conceptually, they can adopt a highly segmented approach by committing to "keep work at work" and put aside ICTs at home, which promotes the sanctity of home life. When coupled with guidance that colleagues can call in case of emergencies, this method allows senior military leaders to psychologically detach from work.

For senior military leaders who cannot fully separate work from home or whose workload forces them to work at home, being mindful of boundaries can reduce the interference that work activity causes. Like the workday batching technique, senior military leaders can schedule blocks of time to engage in work and, if possible, may choose to isolate themselves to an office. This type of physical boundary not only reduces distraction but promotes role clarity, so they are less tempted to be present in two domains at once. Many senior military leaders emplace temporal boundaries by deciding to wake up in the early morning to do work. This preference may lead to effective segmentation but may be counterproductive if senior military leaders also sacrifice sleep quantity or quality. Of note, 81% of USAWC survey respondents reported that in the last five years they had compromised sleep quantity or quality because of work demands.

Conclusion

For senior military leaders, work life holds hegemonic primacy over other areas of life. Empirical data from the USAWC resident student population supports this reality.[54] Occupational psychology research shows that this interference can lead to strain, conflict, and lack of engagement.[55] As indicated in the USAWC student population, the impact of work to home interference indeed compromises work-life wellbeing and prompts senior military leaders to reconsider their intentions to continue serving. Work tasks regularly spill over into the home, disrupting relationships and engagement.[56] Home can also interfere with work, but research shows that this rarely occurs for senior military leaders.[57] Between life roles are boundaries whose permeability serve to segment or integrate the spillover effects of life roles.[58] For a senior military leader who is unsatisfied with the way work interferes with home life, it is a permeable boundary that fails to prevent that spillover. Conversely, a senior military leader who avoids discussing family at work has a strong home to work boundary, though others may feel facilitation when they integrate home life into work.

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54. Steadman, "Reframing Work-Life Balance."
55. Grandey and Krannitz, 81-94.
56. Grandey and Krannitz, 81-94.
57. Steadman, "Reframing Work-Life Balance."
58. Rothbard and Ollier-Malaterre, 109-122.

Therefore, to improve the work-life interface, senior military leaders must first understand how their life roles interact, as well as the extent to which work impacts themselves, their friends, and their loved ones. Spouses can provide great insight in this regard. Next, senior military leaders should determine what level of segmentation or integration they prefer among life roles. With a clear vision of life role interaction, they can set boundaries to reduce fatigue and prevent negative spillover. For senior military leaders who suffer work to home interference from phones, email, and chat, boundaries are crucial for reducing distraction and easing the "always on" mindset that has become a cultural norm. Senior military leaders must also employ policies that permit their subordinates to improve their own work-life wellbeing.

Most importantly, to stem the hegemony of work over home life, senior military leaders must imagine a new culture. They must pursue an environment where leaders are attuned to demands across all life roles and emplace appropriate boundaries to meet them. This vital example will, in turn, facilitate work-life wellbeing for their subordinates and allow them to do the same. This individual and organizational freedom to enable life roles outside of work does not currently exist for senior military leaders. With intention, however, it is a reality that leaders at every echelon can create.

Key Takeaways

- The idea of work-life balance for senior military leaders is a myth
- A survey of 108 USAWC students found widespread work to family interference and dissatisfaction with how work impacts family in the military
- USAWC students dislike the hypocrisy of senior leaders recommending work-life balance but not demonstrating it in their own careers
- The survey showed positive home experiences can facilitate work for senior leaders
- Senior leaders need to establish the level of permeability versus segmentation between their work and family roles

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