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Strategies and Methodologies for Sustainable Work-Life Balance

by

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Introduction

The concept of corporate welfare has evolved over the past few years. Historically, welfare within the firms was perceived as an addition, such as the small benefits or voluntary assistance to the staff. Today, this is no longer true. Corporate welfare has become a significant component in the manner in which organizations operate and develop. It is not just a matter of making employees feel better, but also the matter of better performance of the company. When employees are encouraged, they tend to work more productively, stay more motivated, and remain loyal to their organization. This essay dwells on the issue of good practices in corporate welfare. The research is subdivided into three major sections with distinct objectives.

The first section is about the definition, development, and strategic position of good practices in corporate welfare. It starts by clarifying the meaning of corporate welfare today and the reason it has become so significant. Then it sets out the meaning of good practices and how they can be distinguished from best practices. Whereas best practices are commonly described as perfect examples that can be implemented in any organization, good practices are more tolerant and realistic. They are dependent on the situation, the scale of a company, and employee requirements. Nevertheless, most of the good practices have limited effect. They are not necessarily transformed into best practices. Therefore, this paper examines these boundaries and suggests a feasible framework to aid the companies towards better welfare strategies.

The second section of the paper is devoted to methodologies. In plain language, it discusses the manner of quantifying and assessing corporate welfare and good practices. This is not a very simple assignment since welfare is not merely a matter of figures. It encompasses various dimensions, including economic well-being, work-life balance, and social inclusion. Because of this reason, the paper adopts a multidimensional approach. It integrates various tools and models in order to have a broader view. Among the key aspects covered in this section is the BES structure, which considers well-being in a wide perspective, such as the quality of life and social aspects. The other important tool is the Welfare Index PMI, which is used to measure the welfare policies at the company level. Moreover, this part of the paper goes further to discuss the European systems that certify and benchmark good practices, including awards and standard templates.

The third section of the paper is devoted to the correlation between good practices and the work-life balance. One of the most significant spheres of corporate welfare nowadays is work-life balance. It means that the employees can balance their work and personal life in a healthy manner. Once this is

achieved, the employees tend to be more satisfied and more productive. In this section, the authors describe the ways in which good practices can enhance work-life balance. Stress reduction and better time organization can be provided to the employees, e.g., flexible working hours, the possibility to work remotely, and family support. How these ideas apply in practice is demonstrated using real case studies of Italian companies, including Nestle San Pellegrino, Maticmind, and Fincantieri.

Finally, this paper concludes by stating that good practices are a significant process in the evolution of good corporate welfare systems. They are not flawless, but they give great information as to what is successful in real life. Good practices should be included in a well-defined strategy, backed by appropriate assessment, and adjusted to the unique environment of a particular organization in order to be effective indeed. It is only through this that they can become best practices and generate long-term value for both the employees and the companies.

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Part One* Definitions, Evolution, and Strategic Implementation

1.1 Introduction: Context and Focus

Corporate welfare has now been a strategic management tool which directly affects the performance and competitiveness of the organization rather than a fringe benefit of employees. Increasingly organizations are beginning to realize that welfare activities are a strategic investment in human capital that can be measured in productivity, retention and reputation returns (Boxall and Purcell, 2016). Such change of strategy signifies the underlying transformation in the philosophies of human resource management through which the welfare of employees is now considered as a value-creating process within the context of sustainable competitive advantage (Guest, 2017). Work-family reconciliation has become one of the most critical welfare areas because it significantly enhances employee productivity by reducing role conflict reduction, high-potential retention tool, and a great reputational impact that will enable the acquisition of talents (Allen, 2022; Wayne et al., 2022; Collins and Stevens, 2002).

Although the strategic potential of welfare has been widely recognized, empirical evidence indicates significant implementation gaps, as many organizations provide welfare programs but only a small proportion integrate them into a coherent, strategically designed system (Bloom and Van Reenen, 2011). The given paper pays particular attention to the idea of good practices in corporate welfare by discussing their nature, history, and modern implementation to shed light on why some initiatives are effective and others just a mere gesture. Knowledge of good practices is important as it is one of the building blocks of effective welfare systems, as it shows what works in the context of organizations and is affordable to companies without resources to implement the extensive program.

1.2 Defining Good Practices in Corporate Welfare

Good practices in corporate welfare characterize specific, material activities to satisfy determinate demands of workers by responding to them with applied interventions, in contrast with generic package of benefits and informal arrangements. Brewster et al., in 2017, defined good practices as solutions that are situation specific, proved to be effective in certain organizational settings,

* This section is edited by Gabriele Di Cecca.

and therefore are grounded and showed to be useful as opposed to being idealistic on paper. Unlike standardized benefits, good practices are demographically sensitive to the specific employees in terms of work arrangements, organizational cultures and workers demographics such that they become applicable via systematic needs assessment and no longer managerial guess (Lewis and Humbert, 2001).

Good practices may be differentiated in relation to a number of key dimensions. Firstly, they are concrete and practical: these are practical resources, flexible plans, or support systems rather than idealistic rhetoric (Beauregard and Henry, 2009). Second, they show purposefulness in responding to specific needs of the employees, where the research has asserted that the successful work family programs focus on the specific pain points that employees consult (Kelly et al., 2014). Third, good practices are normally concerned with work-family reconciliation areas, which is associated with the prominence of work-life integration issues and proven effectiveness of family supportive policies (Kossek et al., 2011). The distinction between informal arrangements is also significant: good practices should be formalized in the form of policy documents, communication, and managerial training that would make sure that their application is consistent, converting personal adaptations into organizational opportunities (Den Dulk et al., 2013).

Common ones are flexible working arrangements (compressed workweeks, remote work options, or flex time systems); parental support measures (extended leave, gradual return work programs, or childcare facilities at the workplace); and benefits related to care (providing care to the elderly including employee assistance programs, flex spending accounts, or emergency back-up care plans) (Neal et al., 1993). These are some examples of how positive practices turn abstract welfare promises into working realities.

1.3 Historical Emergence of the Good Practices Concept

The term 'good practices' appeared in management literature in the late 1990s and early 2000s reflecting broader epistemological shifts toward evidence-based management and comparative organizational analysis. Dyer and Reeves, in 1995, were the first attempts to differentiate between theoretical prescriptions and empirically validated interventions and assert that scholarship must take practices that have been shown to be effective in real-life situations and not untested models. This empirical turn has occurred as researchers attempted to find out human resource practices that are linked with high performance beyond universal best practice assumptions to contingency based effectiveness models (Delery and Doty, 1996).

In the field of work-life balance scholarship in particular, the term became popular in the early 2000s with scholars noting the growth of policies concurrently with significant disparities in the quality and resulting policy

outcomes. Rapoport et al. emphasized the effect of the same policies on different outcomes based on the organizational culture, managerial support and implementation processes, and encouraged the implementation of the frameworks that would focus on the characteristics of the implementation process and the features of the policies. Kossek and Friede, in 2006, also showed that the ability of employees to have flexibility policies was absolutely dependent on workplace norms and attitudes of supervisors as well as the approval of peers as opposed to formal provisions.

Good practices terminology was popularized through the contributions of international organizations. In the late 1990s, The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions began an organized reporting of work-life balance practices in the European union member states, creating databases that proved to be effective in specific conditions (Eurofound, 2006). The International Labour Organization encouraged the identification of good practices as a means of knowledge transfer since they argued that knowledge transfer occurs through analyzing successful projects, and consideration of contextual limitations is necessary (ILO). The notion emerged to record useful interventions that do not have universalistic assertions, availing approachable models that may guide local adjustments as opposed to definite models (Paauwe and Boselie, 2005).

1.4 Evolution of the Good Practices Concept

Initially, good practices were treated as isolated examples of successful interventions, which are recorded to have a demonstration value and not strategic implementation. The initial studies of work-life balance paid much attention to finding successful programs in the organization pioneer as pieces of evidence that it is possible to implement (Friedman and Galinsky, 1992). This initial framing put good practices in the form of discrete measures, like on-site childcare or compressed workweeks, and did not focus on the analysis but described larger integration. Very little was done with measurement and generally, it was typically evaluated through adoption rates or a satisfaction survey as opposed to systematic outcome assessment (Perry-Smith and Blum, 2000). Instead of being a major component of the human capital strategy, exemplary practices used to be treated as an appendix by companies (Osterman).

The development of modern knowledge is suggestive of great development, strategic positioning in strategic human resource management systems. The contemporary studies are of the view that welfare practices must exhibit measurable outcomes that must be systematically quantified between ties existing between practices and employee and organizational measures (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). It is this result emphasis that has seen the development of advanced models of evaluation that explore how practices

impact productivity, retention and engagement through the mediating variables of perceived organizational support (McNall et al., 2010). More to the point, it is also important that even modern frameworks are becoming more closely centered on integration with organizational strategy and the practices adopted as internally consistent bundles and simultaneously and in-support of stated strategic priorities as opposed to fragmented policies (Becker and Huselid, 2006).

In the modern world, there has been the emergence of conformity between welfare practices and more broad-based Environmental, Social and Governance models as more stakeholders have gained interests in corporate social responsibility. Investors, customers and regulators are increasingly evaluating the issue of organizational social sustainability against how they treat their employees in terms of welfare practices as real evidence of commitment to social sustainability (Sharma et al., 2009). This external scrutiny has rendered good practices to cease being a matter of internal concern but a reputational asset which ought to be transparently reported (Amel-Zadeh and Serafeim, 2018). The re-conceptualization of welfare as an investment in human capital and, more and more, as a social and reputational capital, is a fundamental shift of organizational logic that determines the allocation of resources and positions of strategic location.

1.5 Distinguishing Good Practices from Best Practices

Good and best practices are significant to examine in terms of the maturity of the welfare system. Good practices are effective but fragmented initiatives with limited organizational coverage, lack of uniform implementation, and ineffective or no key performance measures. These are usually developed out of local experimentation and not having a centralized strategic planning, so availability becomes geographically or even departmentally varied (Kelly et al, 2014). At this level, organizations can provide good programs, like remote work, flexibility of working, parental leaves, and so on, but have no formal organization or coordinated structure to make sure that everyone has access. Notably, good practices are often highly dependent on individual managerial discretion, which makes them susceptible to personnel transitions and brings randomness depending on the attitudes of the supervisors (Behson, 2005).

By contrast, best practices are developed, welfare systems that are strategically combined, have well-developed systems of governance, deal with all employees, have systematic measures, and have proved to be scalable across organizational settings. Best-practice organizations incorporate welfare into their strategic plans and align the initiatives with the business objectives and allocate resources according to the expected returns (Huselid, 1995). These organizations also have strong governance structures such as having specified roles on the coordination of welfare, frequent review of policies and

consultation with stakeholders such that their practices are updated according to the needs (Guest and Conway, 2002). More importantly, the best practice systems involve advanced measurement systems that follow implementation fidelity and outcome attainment using systematic data collection and analysis (Wright and McMahan, 2011).

Realistic planning depends on the understanding of good practices as starting points of development, not their finishing point. Practice adoption research indicates that most organizations are seldom in a position to become best practicing organizations at the outset, but they tend to go through the stages of becoming more sophisticated (Rogers, 2003). Good practices play useful roles as points of entry to organizational learning, laboratories to evaluate the needs, and demonstrations of proof-of-concept to establish internal support to the expanded investment. The good-best continuum involves long-term dedication, methodological learning and ability building other than straightforward binary classification with best practice status coming about via years of refinement and integration in strategy.

1.6 Why Do Many Good Practices Remain Only Good Practices?

Many organizations that undertake good practices do not advance to the best practice level because of various interconnected impediments. First, most organizations do not have any strategic vision of the role of welfare in value creation because they view initiatives as separate reactions instead of part of the human capital strategy (Paauwe, 2009). In the absence of an explicit articulation of the way welfare contributes to the organizational goals, the companies will not be able to explain the reason to invest further in the context of resource limitations, which creates exposure to budget reductions as welfare is merely discretionary and not necessitated (Roche and Teague, 2012). Second, many organizations lack robust evaluation tools to demonstrate the value created by welfare initiatives or explore areas of improvement, and measurement gaps lead to a failure to create the distinction between effective and ineffective initiatives (Guest, 2017).

Third, there are limits on organizational capacity to develop welfare system development because of resource constraints (financial and human capital). To move into the realm of best practices, it is necessary to invest in the governance structures, technology platforms, training of the manager, and special individuals (Bloom and Van Reenen, 2011). Small and medium-sized enterprises have a problem meeting these demands, and human capital limitations are no longer about the number of employees but rather about the skills to design a program, managing change, analysing data, and engaging stakeholders (Ulrich and Dulebohn, 2015). Fourth, leadership commitment is inevitably weak and therefore welfare progress will not be achieved even when employees may be backing it, the symbolic

endorsement without resource assignment and responsibility system is a signal that welfare is peripheral to organizational activities (Hammer et al., 2009).

Lastly, organizational and cultural resistance can also be in the form of middle manager resistance, peer control and stigma and institutional resistance. Middle managers tend to object to family-friendly approaches by viewing them as a threat to productivity (Kossek et al., 2011), and the cultural resistance occurs when organizational norms favor face time, and individuals who use the practice are considered less committed (Lewis and Smithson, 2001). The early adopters perceive welfare as a learning process as well, or systematic investment in measurement infrastructure and gradual improvement, or laggard only makes superficial imitation, imitating what they can observe without commitment (Ansari et al., 2010). The significant effects of these barriers include: the fragmented welfare systems result in inequitable access that increases social stratification and the organizational failure to gain is the lost productivity gains and retention gains (Batt and Valcour, 2003).

1.7 Practical Framework for Welfare System of Advancement

The diagnostic tools should be realistic to organizations wishing to migrate to the best practices rather than the good practices. Structured assessment can be given by the following welfare maturity checklist: First, look at the question of welfare being an explicit company strategy with documented connections to business goals, which can be reflected in such aspects as inclusion in strategic planning documents, board-level monitoring and resource allocation as a form of investment (Becker and Gerhart, 2006). Second, ensure roles in welfare management are clearly spelled out at levels of executive oversight, operational coordination, manager implementation and employee participation with welfare strategy development and ongoing improvement thereof being assigned responsibilities (Guest and Conway, 2002).

Third, measure practice accessibility, determining whether all the qualified employees have realistic access to available practices or whether they do not utilize them due to informal barriers despite their formal availability (Lewis and Humbert, 2010). The idea of accessibility is covered by effective communication, simple processes, educating managers about it, scheduling the workload so that it can be used properly, and acceptance of utilizing the cultural norms that justify not stigmatize its use. Fourth, establish systematic employee feedback with feedback that is responsive, and that responds to real-life experiences and not managerial presumptions, and the mechanisms involve surveys, focus groups, and utilization tracking to both users and non-users (Kelly et al., 2014). Fifth, determine whether results are monitored on a systematic basis using quantitative metrics and qualitative assessment in tracking implementation as well as results.

Particular attention should be paid to key performance indicators. Take-up rate is a percentage of all eligible employees who are using available practices, which gives critical information regarding access to practices, their relevance, and support related to culture (Blair-Loy and Wharton, 2002). The perceived organizational support and work-life balance are measured as employee satisfaction based on validated surveys. The measures of retention and turnover would allow evaluating the impact of welfare on employee turnover decisions, and companies would measure the overall turnover rates, as well as regrettable turnover and compare the practice users with non-users (Griffeth and Hom, 2001). The measurement of absenteeism absorbs the possible effect of welfare in the form of decreased work-family conflict, where the general patterns and levels of absence are monitored (Goff et al., 1990). Strong validated scales like work-to-family conflict and the work-family enrichment are considered to measure the indicators of work-life balance which directly evaluate the theoretical goals of welfare (Carlson et al., 2000). This is an all-encompassing measurement technique that can help organizations move step by step on the basis of evidence-based improvement, strategic resource deployment, and value creation.

1.8 Final Framework

Through this analysis, the conceptual boundaries of good practices in corporate welfare have been delineated and set apart as being in contrast to generic benefits, informal arrangements and best practices as the history of its emergence and current evolution is followed. Good practices are culturally relevant interventions to meet targeted needs but are typified by minimal coverage and poor evaluation systems. The idea was developed in the late 1990s-early 2000s as the scholarship could be changed to more evidence-based practices that could be theoretically developed and then developed in terms of strategy and demonstrated results. The difference between good and best practices has proven to be quite crucial with most organizations never getting ahead because of a lack of strategic clarity, measurement, scarcity of resources, commitment by the leadership and organizational resistance. Both the welfare maturity framework and key performance indicators give a practical approach to organizations that want to head in the right direction that requires systematic assessment, governable management, equitable access, and monitoring of results, which lays the foundation for further analysis that evaluates welfare impacts and more advanced evaluation tools that can be used in developing an organization toward strategic maturity.

Part Two* Methodologies

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 A Multidimensional Approach

The identification and evaluation of good practices in corporate welfare and organizational well-being require a clear and structured methodological framework. Traditional economic indicators alone cannot fully explain the complexity of well-being today. For this reason, researchers increasingly rely on multidimensional approaches that consider objective conditions, personal perception, fairness, and sustainability. Well-being is no longer understood only in economic terms, but as a broader concept that includes quality of life, balance between work and personal time, and access to social resources.

2.1.2 Structure of the Methodological Framework

This research follows a layered methodological approach. It begins with the national framework that defines the well-being at a general level, then moves to enterprise-level measurement tools, European validation mechanisms, and finally to structured comparative case methods. The goal is not simply to collect examples of good practices, but to explain how they can be identified, evaluated, and compared in a consistent and transparent way.

2.2 Conceptual and Normative Foundations

2.2.1 The BES Framework

The main conceptual framework for this research is the BES (Benessere Equo e Sostenibile) framework developed by Istituto Nazionale per l'Analisi delle Politiche Pubbliche (INAPP). The BES shifts attention from economic growth to a broader understanding of well-being that includes social and personal dimensions (INAPP 2025). It is organized into twelve domains, such as health, education, work and work-life balance, economic conditions, social relationships, and subjective well-being (INAPP 2025). This structure reflects an important change in how public policies evaluate progress.

* This section is edited by Morena Traditi.

2.2.2 Work-Life Harmonization and Corporate Welfare

Two indicators are particularly relevant for this research: satisfaction with work and satisfaction with leisure time (INAPP 2025). These indicators help measure how individuals experience the relationship between professional responsibilities and personal life. The BES 2025 framework introduces the idea of harmonization between life spheres, moving away from the idea that work and private life are always in conflict (INAPP 2025). This perspective is especially useful when analyzing corporate welfare practices.

2.2.3 Methodological Contribution and Structural Limits

From a methodological point of view, the BES provides clear criteria and comparable indicators. Its multidimensional design allows researchers to evaluate well-being beyond purely economic measures and to connect social, economic, and personal dimensions within a single analytical framework (INAPP 2025). This makes it particularly useful as a reference model for defining what should be considered relevant when identifying good practices. The strength of the BES lies in its ability to offer standardized indicators that can be compared across territories and over time. It also introduces an explicit focus on equity and sustainability, which broadens the evaluative perspective and prevents a narrow interpretation of well-being. However, the BES primarily operates at a national or macro level. It measures general trends and social conditions rather than individual organizational initiatives. For this reason, while it provides valuable normative guidance, it cannot by itself determine whether a specific company practice qualifies as good practice. To move from general principles to concrete evaluation, additional enterprise-level instruments are necessary.

2.3 Enterprise-Level Measurement

2.3.1 The Welfare Index PMI: Structure and Areas

To move from general principles of well-being to the evaluation of concrete organizational practice, this research integrates the Welfare Index PMI. Established in 2016, the Welfare Index PMI represents one of the most structured attempts to measure corporate welfare among Italian and small and medium-sized enterprises (Welfare Index PMI 2024).

Unlike the BES, which operates at the national level, the Welfare Index PMI focuses directly on company behavior. It analyzes how enterprises design, implement, and manage welfare initiatives within their organizational structures. The index evaluates companies across 10 thematic areas, including work life balance, health and safety, inclusion policies, training and human capital development, support for families, and social responsibility toward the local communities (Welfare Index PMI 2024). This wide range of categories

reflects the understanding that corporate welfare is not limited to economic incentives but includes relational, organizational, and cultural dimensions.

2.3.2 The “W” Grading System and Analytical Implications

The methodological core of the Welfare Index PMI lies in its composite measurement model, structured around three dimensions: initiative intensity, managerial capacity and social impact (Welfare Index PMI 2024). Companies are assigned ratings corresponding to different “W” levels, which indicate increasing degrees of welfare maturity (Welfare Index PMI 2024). Lower levels reflect fragmented or limited initiatives, while higher levels correspond to structured systems embedded in corporate governance. The highest levels require evidence of continuity, managerial coordination, and the measurable social impact. The “W” grading system therefore functions as a graduated scale of evaluation. It distinguishes between symbolic welfare actions and strategically integrated welfare policies, strengthening analytical clarity.

2.3.3 Methodological Strengths and Limits

The Welfare Index PMI offers several methodological advantages. It introduces structured benchmarking, allows comparison across enterprises, and provides a relatively transparent scoring mechanism. At the same time, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The Index relies significantly on information provided by participating companies. Although structured questionnaires and documentation are used, the process still depends partially on self-reporting. This influences how initiatives are presented and interpreted. Furthermore, while the rating system improves comparability, it cannot fully capture qualitative differences between organizational cultures. The numerical score may not reflect the depth of employee experience or informal practices that are not easily measurable. For this reason, the Welfare Index PMI should be understood as a complementary instrument rather than a definitive measure of corporate well-being.

2.4 European and Comparative Validation Mechanisms

2.4.1 EU-OSHA Good Practice Awards

At the European level, the Healthy Workplaces Good Practice Awards represents a structured validation mechanism for occupational health and safety initiatives. Organized by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, the awards aim to identify and promote innovative and sustainable workplace practices (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work 2025). Unlike statistical measurement tools, this mechanism is based on recognition and a qualitative assessment. Organizations voluntarily submit their initiatives for evaluation, which introduces an element of self-selection.

The evaluation process is structured and multi-layered. First, National focal points conduct present preliminary assessments. Selected cases are then reviewed by a European jury according to explicit criteria, including innovation, sustainability, worker participation, and measurable improvements in a workplace condition (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work 2025). This multi-level scrutiny increases credibility and reduces the risk of purely symbolic recognition. The use of transparent criteria ensures that the selected practices meet defined standards rather than reflect subjective preferences. Main methodological contribution of this mechanism lies in institutional validation. Being recognized at European level gives the practices of visibility and legitimacy. However, unlike complex indices, the award system does not generate the standardized numerical comparison. It highlights excellence but does not create a continuous measurement to scale across all participating organizations. Additionally, the voluntary nature of participation means that only motivated organizations apply. This may exclude relevant to practices that remain undocumented. For this reason, recognition-based mechanisms should be considered complementary to measurement-based tools.

2.4.2 The European Training Foundation Methodology

A particularly significant methodological contribution comes from the European Training Foundation (ETF). The ETF emphasizes structured field research, standardized documentation formats, and cross-country validation procedures to ensure both comparability and policy relevance (European Training Foundation 2023). Its methodology combines stakeholder consultation, coordinated reporting, and institutional review. Practices are evaluated not only for effectiveness but also for transferability across governance contexts (European Training Foundation 2023). This integrated approach strengthens methodological rigor by linking case documentation to broader policy analysis. The ETF model therefore represents a more advanced comparative methodology, balancing contextual depth with procedural consistency.

2.4.3 Template-Based Comparative Documentation

Template-Based methodologies play a central role in ensuring structured comparability across different national contexts. Rather than relying on numerical scoring systems, these approaches use standardized reporting formats that guide the description and evaluation of each practice. The European Catalogue of Good Practices on “Aging and Employment” provides a clear methodological example. Participating countries submit cases using a shared template that requires detailed information about the institutional context, target population, objectives, implementation procedures, duration, funding sources, and measurable outcomes (Catalogue of EU Good Practices 2024).

Similarly, the guide *Promoting Work-Life Balance for Pregnant Employees and Working Parents* adopts coordinated documentation procedures across several European countries, including Belgium, Spain, and Poland (Institute for the Equality of Women and Men 2021). Each national partner collects practices according to predefined thematic categories, such as flexible working arrangements, parental leave schemes, and organizational support measures. These cases are then reviewed and categorized centrally to ensure consistency in evaluation (Institute for the Equality of Women and Men 2021). The methodology therefore combines decentralized data collection with centralized validation.

The strength of this approach lies in its ability to preserve qualitative details while maintaining procedural coherence. Practices remain embedded in their national and organizational contexts, but their documentation follows shared criteria that enable structured comparison.

A further structured approach to the identification of good practices concerns models specifically oriented towards the collection and evaluation of practices from a gender perspective (Pesce et al. 2013). This approach emphasizes the importance of predefined analytical criteria, contextual reconstruction, and transparency in the selection process. Rather than relying exclusively on outcome indicators, it highlights the need to examine the institutional environment, implementation mechanisms, and equity implications of each initiative. This perspective reinforces the importance of methodological clarity when identifying good practices, especially in areas where relational and social dynamics play a central role. By introducing gender-sensitive evaluation standards, it complements template-based methodologies and strengthens the normative dimension of comparative documentation.

2.5 Methodological Reflections

2.5.1 Standardization and Contextual Sensitivity

Across all examined methodologies, a tension emerges between standardization and contextual sensitivity. Indicator-based systems allow structured comparison but may oversimplify complex organizational realities. Template-based approaches preserve qualitative detail but limit statistical generalization.

2.5.2 Relational Dimensions and Psychological Safety

Organizational well-being is also shaped by relational dynamics that are difficult to quantify. Edmondson's research on psychological safety demonstrates that employee well-being and performance depend significantly on trust and openness within teams (Edmondson 1999). Her empirical methodology, based on field studies and survey instruments, shows

that perceived safety influences learning behavior and organizational effectiveness (Edmondson 1999). Relational dimensions are often underrepresented in composite indices and template-based evaluation. Quantitative tools may measure the presence of policies but fail to capture how employees actually experience them.

2.5.3 Temporal and Verification Limits

A further methodological limitation concerns the temporal dimension of evaluation. Most systems examined, including the Welfare Index PMI, European award mechanisms, and template-based catalogues, assess practices at a specific point in time. While sustainability is often included among evaluation criteria, long-term monitoring is rarely implemented systematically.

This logic means that the practices are evaluated based on the declared outcomes or short-term results rather than long-term data. As a result, it may be difficult to determine whether an initiative produces stable structural change or only temporary improvements. Another issue concerns the verification mechanisms. Many methodologies rely partially on information provided by participating organizations. Even when standardized templates and documentation procedures are used, independent assessments or external validation processes are limited (Institute for the Equality of Women and Men 2021).

In recognition-based systems such as the EU-OSHA awards, self-selection also plays a role. Organizations that apply are often those already confident in their initiatives. This may lead to a partial representation of the broader landscape of corporate practices. From a methodological perspective, these limitations do not invalidate the frameworks examined. However, they highlight the importance of integrating multiple sources of data and combining quantitative indicators with qualitative analysis. A comprehensive evaluation of good practices should ideally include long-term observation, external validation, and attention to informal organizational dynamics.

2.6 Final Methodological Considerations

The identification and evaluation of good practices in corporate welfare require an integrated methodological architecture. The BES provides a normative orientation at societal level. The Welfare Index PMI translates these principles into enterprise-level benchmarking through its structured “W” grading system. European validation mechanisms ensure institutional credibility, while the European Training Foundation and template-based methodologies promote structured cross-country comparison. Together, these approaches form a layered and complementary methodological structure. While each presents limitations, their integration allows for a more balanced and systematic identification of good practices in corporate welfare and organizational well-being.



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Part Three*

Good Practices and Work-Life Balance

3.1. Introduction

3.1.1. What is Work-Life Balance and the Origin of the Term

The meaning of Work-Life Balance is hard to determine since there is no single, universal definition for the concept. It is a social construct originated in the industrialized West which encompasses overlapping discourses among organizations and researchers (S. Lewis 2018). In the past, some scholars focused on Work-Family balance and Family-Friendly policies which implicitly concentrate on women and their family responsibilities. However, from the 1990s the increasing use of the term work-life balance has allowed for a more holistic approach. Rather than centering solely on work and family, it conveys the idea that human beings lead full lives composed not only of their careers and family responsibilities, but also of their personal interests, social relationships, leisure, and individual well-being. Moreover, this approach ensures that all individuals can benefit from work-life balance, not only women or those with family responsibilities. However, some believe the concept of work-life balance to be problematic, as it might imply the equal participation in work and non-work activities. This might undermine the various ways in which individuals can manage their time effectively (Ibid). Nonetheless, the concept of work-life balance is grounded on the premise that everyone is entitled to lead a full life, in which time and effort are allocated not only to professional careers but also to personal and family interests (A. Tariq et al. 2012), and not necessarily in an equal amount.

For the purpose of this paper, work-life balance is defined in accordance with The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) as the level of prioritization between an individual's work and personal life (Eurofound). Although the concept can be traced back to early labour regulations, namely the 1938 Fair Labour Standard Act which established minimum wage, overtime pay, recordkeeping, and youth employment standards (W. Lester 2024), it gained greater prominence during the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1980s.

Traditionally, women were expected to hold down their career ambitions to pursue the management of the family and the household. Nonetheless, the changing nature of the workforce and the increasing prevalence of dual-

* This section is edited by Veronica Girasole.

earning couples have led women to challenge these stereotypes and advocate for a more balanced life, one in which they are not required to sacrifice neither their professional aspirations nor their personal lives. The changing perception of the role of work from solely being a necessity for survival to an important source of personal and professional satisfaction has contributed to a broader change in societal values. Increasingly, both women and men have started placing greater importance on work-life balance, positioning it as the central concern for many companies and organizations (Ibid).

3.2 Work-Life Balance and Good Practices

The shift from the work-family balance approach to the work-life balance approach has led to increased interest among employees and employers in practices aimed at achieving this goal.

While employees have been showing a growing interest in practices that allow them to manage their time between work and non-work activities, employers have sought ways to implement such measures to enhance employees' well-being and performance (I. Lazar et al. 2010). The effects brought about by the implementation of such practices include increased employees' satisfaction, and stronger organizational commitment, while reducing stress levels and burnout. Furthermore, research shows that employees who exercise greater control over their work arrangements tend to suffer less stress-related ill-health, which has significant relevance on work-life balance (Ibid). As a result, employees who feel supported and empowered are also reportedly more loyal to their employers.

3.2.1 Employees' Well-Being and Enhanced Productivity

The improvements in employees' satisfaction and efficiency, along with the lower costs related to absenteeism and replacement of valued employees, some argue, contribute to enhance the company's productivity (S. Knezević et al. 2024). As a result of the effective implementation of good practices, higher quality of workers is attracted by the company (C. S. Meyer et al. 2001), and employees tend to be more efficient, motivated, and focused at work. This enhances the company's overall performance and creates a positive cycle where employees who can successfully manage their personal and professional lives contribute to the company's growth.

3.2.2 Female Participation and Gender Equality

However, effective good practices not only affect employee's well-being but also contribute to a more equitable society by impacting individuals beyond the workplace (Op.cit. S. Knezević et al.). Good practices aimed at fostering work-life balance also play a crucial role in increasing female participation in

the workforce and promoting and advancing gender equality. By enabling both men and women to pursue their careers and professional achievements, such practices support the equitable sharing of family responsibilities and challenge traditional gender stereotypes.

Consequently, the question of masculinity also appears to be shifting to a more pluralistic understanding (I. Crespi et al. 2018), encouraging fathers to engage more in a caregiving and collaborative relationship with women, while challenging the cultural norm of men being perceived solely as the primary breadwinner. Calling into question and achieving a change in traditional stereotypes and cultural norms that reinforce gender roles is not an easy task. Nonetheless, implementing good practices in the workplaces that promote gender equity represents a crucial first step toward achieving these goals.

3.2.3 Case studies: Nestlè San Pellegrino, Maticmind, and Fincantieri

In Italy, several companies have been able to implement effective good practices aimed at enhancing their employees' work-life balance through agreements with their labour unions. Nestlè San Pellegrino signed an agreement that was in force between 2024 and 2025 to introduce a 12-week paternity leave and 8 additional hours to family care to support employees caring for children and people with disabilities. Moreover, employees had access to general and specialist medical consultations (CISL 2024). Maticmind has also signed an agreement in December 2025, providing its employees with the possibility of choosing voluntarily a reduction of their working hours without any corresponding reduction to their salaries. Prior to its formal adoption, this measure had been piloted in June 2025 to assess its effectiveness, employees' response, and its organizational impact (Segreteria Nazionale Uilm 2026).

Lastly, Fincantieri, a global leader in the design, construction, and repair of cruise and military vessels, aims to make the corporation more inclusive and sustainable. Fincantieri places great emphasis on welfare programs and employees' well-being, and it has established a dedicated working group composed of corporate and union leaders focused on the field of work-life balance (G.M. Barro 2025). Therefore, the corporation has implemented various good practices to enhance its employees' work-life balance. After having conducted a survey, which received an overwhelmingly positive response from over 3,000 employees (Ibid), Fincantieri decided to establish two modern kindergartens, named "Fincantesimo," to support parents, and to meet both the needs of employees with children and the developmental needs of the children themselves. Moreover, they have implemented remote working, more flexible working hours, practices to support caregivers responsible for elderly family members or with disabilities. Additional measures include after-school activities, summer camps, vouchers for the purchase of schoolbooks, scholarships for employees' sons and daughters who have distinguished them

in their studies and who have decided to pursue degrees in naval, mechanic, electronic or computer engineering. By doing so, Fincantieri, with the support of labour unions and by carefully assessing employees' needs has provided them with efficient instruments that promote a healthier work-life balance, which in turn has benefitted the corporation itself and its reputation.

3.3 Limits and Challenges of Good Practices

As afore mentioned, when good practices are effectively implemented within a company they can yield extremely positive results, improving employees' quality of life and the overall company's performance. Nonetheless, at times, implementing such practices can be challenging, and they may fail to produce the expected outcome. This section of the paper will explore different variables that may compromise the effectiveness of good practices.

3.3.1 Good Practices as Marketing Strategies

At times, good practices are used by companies as marketing strategies to demonstrate their commitment and to consolidate their public image. However, when such practices are not effectively implemented or produce the opposite outcome to their expected one, employees are the once who ultimately bear the consequences. For instance, during the Covid-19 pandemic many companies introduced remote working to safeguard their employees' health while ensuring both the company and the employees' stability. Remote working was advertised by many as an arrangement that would have enhanced employee's productivity and flexibility, by affording them with greater control over their work and non-work activities (Segreterria Silpa 2022). Nonetheless, many have experienced higher levels of stress, often due to working beyond regular hours. Moreover, remote working has contributed to reinforcing existing inequalities in the distribution of family and domestic responsibilities. These effects have caused lower efficiency, concentration, and have ultimately led to employees' fatigue and burnout (E. Carraro et al. 2025).

3.3.2 Employers' Lack of Communication

Good practices designed to enhance work-life balance may also prove ineffective when companies and employers fail to appropriately communicate their existence, purpose, or accessibility to employees. For instance, a survey which included 945 employees across six different companies found that half of the respondents were unaware of the good practices provided by their employers (S. Yeandle et al. 2002). This lack of communication on the employers' part results in companies allocating resources to projects that ultimately remain unused by their employees, thereby reducing the overall effectiveness of good practices.



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Conclusion

This paper examines the historical emergence and evolution of good practices and their distinction from best practices, the framework within which they are identified and evaluated, and their practical application in promoting work-life balance. The analysis of work-life balance within corporate welfare confirms that good practices represent a necessary but insufficient condition for achieving sustainable organizational outcomes.

While they can generate clear benefits in terms of employee well-being, engagement, and productivity, their impact remains contingent upon proper alignment with employees' real needs, organizational culture, and effective implementation strategies. The evidence discussed shows that when these elements are missing, even well-designed initiatives risk becoming superficial or underutilized. The value of good practices lies in their potential to evolve into more structured and inclusive welfare systems. This requires organizations to move beyond symbolic adoption and instead foster active employee participation, clear communication, and cultural normalization of their use. Only through this shift can corporate welfare practices contribute to long-term organizational performance while genuinely improving employees' quality of life.

From a methodological perspective, this paper highlights the importance of adopting a multidimensional and integrated framework for the identification and evaluation of good practices. The analysis demonstrates that no single tool is sufficient to fully capture the complexity of corporate welfare. While the BES framework provides a normative understanding of well-being at a societal level, instruments such as the Welfare Index PMI allow for a more direct assessment of organizational practices. At the same time, European validation mechanisms and comparative methodologies contribute to enhancing the credibility and transferability of good practices across different contexts. However, these approaches also present significant limitations, particularly in their reliance on self-data, their difficulty in capturing qualitative and relational dimensions, and their limited capacity for long-term evaluation. For this reason, a comprehensive assessment of good practices requires the integration of quantitative indicators with qualitative analysis, as well as greater attention to contextual factors and employees' lived experiences. Only through such an integrated approach can corporate welfare practices be effectively understood, compared, and improved over time.

Nowadays, the importance employees place on work-life balance exemplifies a broader cultural and social shift in how work is perceived, not only as a necessity for survival, but also as a source of personal and professional satisfaction and an integral part of a fuller life. As a response, good practices

have emerged within corporate welfare as tangible measures designed to meet and satisfy employees' needs and demands. The case studies discussed in this paper demonstrate that, when implemented effectively, good practices can generate positive cycles of efficiency, loyalty, and engagement benefiting both the employees and the companies. However, their effectiveness is not always guaranteed.

The misalignment with employees' needs and demands, deeply embedded cultural expectations, a lack of clear communication, and the use of good practices as mere marketing strategies, can undermine and jeopardize their desired effect. Therefore, companies must adapt and evolve by designing strategies that allow employees to actively engage with the implementation of good practices and that foster a culture where their use is normalized and encouraged. By doing so, employers are able to create healthier and more equitable work environments and promote long-term individual and organizational productivity and growth. Ultimately, the effectiveness of corporate welfare does not depend on the good practices alone, but on their ability to become an integral part of organizational life.

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