Work-Life Balance in 21st Century: Challenges and Solutions

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Abstract

The highly competitive globalized environment results in increase in job pressure which lead to distract work life balances among the employees. Employee job satisfaction and retention linked not only with financial constraints. Apart from that there is consequent intention in leaving the organization was employees struggle between their work and life. Through experiencing greater work-life balance, individuals report feeling better in general (e.g., greater job and life satisfaction) and tend to behave in favorable ways (e.g., lower turnover and absenteeism).

Historically, the influx of women in the workplace jumpstarted research into how female employees could successfully care for families while working, but today work-life balance is discussed with respect to multiple affected groups (e.g., men, single parents). In the modern era of technology and convenience, organizations have begun to provide their employees with helpful ways to balance their work and non-work roles through benefits like flexible work hours, telecommuting, and so on. However, offering these benefits is not enough; the organization and management must stand behind its promotion of healthy work-life balance for employees by creating a culture as such and designing policies that support this initiative. Otherwise, employees feel pressure to continuously work, which can be perpetuated by mobile devices and constant accessibility of the internet that allows employees to transport a workstation wherever they go.

This research paper explores the work life balance practices and its impact towards employee job satisfaction and perception on work life balance. It delivers an analysis of the antecedents to work-life conflict and family-work conflict among the employees, as well as the resolutions that organizations may gadget to proliferate the work-life balance among employees.

Keywords: Work-life balance, Job satisfaction, Individual approach, Workplace challenges

Introduction

Throughout their lives, people play many roles: parents, siblings, spouse, son/daughter, friend, employee, colleague and the list go on. Most people try to handle all these roles completely and are able to cope with the demands that each role puts on them, even when these roles seemingly clash. However, work-life conflict occurs when the time and energy demands imposed by the many roles a person plays, become incompatible with one another. The biggest problem faced by working professionals is the inability to balance the demands and pressure at work and demands and pressure at home front. There are two major issues that need to be understand to resolve the work-life imbalance happening among

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today's professionals: *Role overload* i.e. having too much to do and too little time to do it in limited time frame and *Role interference* i.e. when incompatible demands make it difficult, if not impossible, for employees to perform all their roles well. Role interference in turn consists of two factors i.e. work to family interference , where work gets the way of family life and family to work interference where family demands (such as child or elder care etc.) affects work.[1]

However, achieving work-life balance may be a priority and desire of an individual employee; but, it is not his or her sole responsibility to be a lone fighter. Employers being the advocates of setting norms and conditions at workplace are considered to be the facilitators of work-life balance in Digital Era. Having a well balanced work life will result in a happy, well motivated, committed employee and the sign of a poor work life balance include high stress, overtime, absenteeism and staff turnover. Career success today is defined not only in terms of promotions and lucrative assignments but also the ability to balance between work and personal life. In this regard helping employees to have a healthy work-life balance has become a challenge for employers and human resource professionals.

Over the past twenty-five years, there has been a substantial increase in work which is felt to be due, in part, by information technology and by an intense, competitive work environment. Long term loyalty have been twisted by a performance culture that expects more and more from their employees yet offers little security in return. This is also encouraged by prevailing consumerist culture and expanding horizons of the social changes in Indian influenced by western culture gives more importance to earnings and life style and the low value to parenting.

Over the past decade, rises in levels of absenteeism, poor health, cardiovascular disease, sexual health problems, a weaker immune system and frequent headaches, stiff muscles, or backache, poor coping skills, irritability, jumpiness, insecurity, exhaustion, and difficulty concentrating. There are also increase in the level to binge eating, smoking, and alcohol consumption. They are all evidence of an unhealthy work life balance. According to a recent study for the Center for Work-Life Policy, 1.7 million people consider their jobs and their work hours excessive because of globalization.

What is work-Life balance?

There is no definite definition of work life balance. It differs according to the individual perception. Followings are some definition given by researchers.

- Work-life balance, in its broadest sense, is defined as a satisfactory level of involvement or 'fit' between the multiple roles in a person's life (Hudson, 2005).

- WLBPs are those institutionalized structural and procedural arrangements, as well as formal and informal practices that make it easier for individuals to manage the often-conflicting worlds of work and family lives (Osterman, 1995).

- WLBPs are increasingly being considered as strategic, innovative, crucial and progressive (Lambert, 2000; Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000, Tenbrunsel et al., 1995).

- Gibson et a. (2006: 197-198) offered two explanations regarding the interconnectedness of work and life in the organizational setting: (1) the compensation effect implies that employees tend to compensate for low work or personal life satisfaction by seeking contentment in the other domain; and (2) the spillover view that indicates that job satisfaction spills over into one's work life and vice versa.

- According to Johnson (2005) the employees' age, lifestyle, and environment play important role in one's perception of work-life balance.

Work-life balance suggests the meaning as "bringing equilibrium or stability of both life and work". Moreover, this gives rise to the need to recognize that balance can have both an objective and subjective meaning and measurement, that it will vary according to circumstances and that it will also vary across individuals.

- Need and importance of the study /Why it needs to be studied?
- Women with young ones are the fastest growing segment of the work force.
- Eighty-five percent (85%) of all workers have family care responsibilities.
- New challenges from the globalization have disturbed the Indian life style.

Work life balance practices can be categorized into-

1. Policies: cover the formal & informal ways by which employees' work & leave schedules are handled, including part time work, flexi time & parental or family leave.
2. Benefits: Benefits cover different forms of compensation that protect against loss of earnings, payment of medical expenses & sponsored vacation.
3. Services: Service include onsite or near site childcare centers, medical facilities & counseling

The specific expression "work-family balance" was first used in UK in late 1970s to define an individual's stability between work life and personal life. Work-life balance has always been a concern of those interested in the quality of working life and its relation to broader quality of life. The pressures of work, for those in work, have been intensifying in recent decades. Factors such as

- the advances in information technology and information load
- the need for speed of response
- the importance attached to quality of customer service

Work-life balance policies can assist employees achieving a balance between their work and personal commitments that is right for them. The policies need to be supported by the workplace culture, which reflects the beliefs, values and norms of the whole of the organization from the CEO to staff members. Other important factors in the success of work life balance policies include proper communication of commitment to the policies to existing and future employees, raising awareness of the policies, education of managers about the importance of policies, and training of managers on how to implement these policies.

Research Objectives

The main objective of the work-life balance study here is to understand the business benefits of improved work-life balance. The main objectives of the research are as follows:

- To study the work-life balance issues affecting the employees' life.
- To suggest the suitable measure for perfect equilibrium between effective work and life. .
- To study the benefits of work-life balance practices to employers and employees.
- To determine Strategic HR initiatives for achieving work-life balance.

Work-Life Balance Problems

For an employer it might be difficult to understand that whether he is supporting the employees to balance their work and life. There are some factors that show that the work/life balance is poor. Some of these factors are as:

- Employees are doing a lot of overtime as the youth is targeted as they are more energetic and young to do any task. In lieu of earning money they not get enough time to spend with family and it may lead to issues related to personal life even health may not support for a long period of time to spend on job.
- High rates of absenteeism or staff sickness.
- High levels of staff turnover.
- Employees taking a lot of time off to deal with "emergencies" involving children or other dependents.
- High levels of employee stress.

Employees should be made to get recharge as they will be working for long hours they need break from hectic work schedule. Management should interact with people and understand what can be done to keep employees happy so that they can be part of organization for a long period of time. But should

Corporate India meekly accept that? Could they not firmly and collectively send the message out that their executives are their wealth and should be better taken care of? Initiatives like "work from home," flexi-work, etc., have not been successful. People who choose that option have become marginalized and subtly excluded, with their career clearly nose-diving. This has forced most of them to give in and get back to the mainstream career force or make a tough priority decision. I have come across several "power women" who chose the work from home option. In a few months, they had to admit that it was killing their growth in the company.

There are certain health related issues which are arises due to the work/ life imbalances and stress at workplace.

a. Health Problems

The consequences of stressful work are health related problems, which eventually leads to quitting of job or Quitting the industry. I witness high attrition rates of around 30-40% in this industry. Some of the health issues are:

1. Tension
2. Sleeplessness
3. Headaches
4. Eye-strain
5. Repetitive strain injury (RSI)
6. Voice loss, hearing problems and burn-out.

b. Detachment from the Family

The employees are hardly able to give time for their families. Problems become more pronounced when they get married. Additional responsibilities of running a family demands more time and hence eventually people quit the industry. Most of the employees work on Indian holidays too, which causes frustration. Some employees even feel the need for inclusion in the family and the society. Hence it is important for family members to render support for their young sons and daughters and to help them with the stress that they are undergoing.

c. Depression

The gradual realization that there are limited scopes in developing a career owing to fewer growth opportunities is increasing the frustration levels in the organization. Coupled with growing mental fatigue and increasingly punishing physical environments, depression is the obvious end result. Some companies have now devised different stress management programs mainly to counter depression.

Reasons of imbalance: There are various reasons for this imbalance and conflicts in the life of an employee. From individual career ambitions to pressure to cope up with family or work, the reasons can be situation and individual specific. The speed of advancement of information technology, the increasing competition in the talent supply market has led to a "performance-driven" culture creating pressures and expectations to performance more and better every time. Also, many a times, many people find it difficult to say "NO" to others especially their superiors. They usually end up over burdening themselves with work. The increasing responsibilities on the personal front with age can also create stress on personal and professional fronts.

Ways to bring Work-Life balance (WLB)

Today, an employee is not looking at their employer just a job but they want the company to care for their work life balance and their well being. Employees tend to feel motivated when they feel that the organization is putting extra effort in providing a healthy balance between work and life. Motivated employees not only enhance the productivity but also help creating a positive work environment at office. Some organizations have initiatives to provide timely assistance to the employees in a crisis situation rising out of financial or personal problems. Flexible work options is one of the key tools for attracting and retaining employees especially women employees. Our employees have the flexibility to exercise a need based work from option as it helps them more in maintaining balance between work and home. This benefits includes

increased productivity, lower attrition, less number of leaves taken, cost savings on infrastructure and of course an extremely happy workforce. If a company addresses these needs, in addition to providing great career opportunities, they can be very successful in providing job satisfaction to the employee.

1. **Pay:** WLB policies must be built around an equitable pay programs. So that in future more workers may want to participate in the profits of the firm.

2. **Benefits:** Since workers are now better organized, educated and vociferous, they demand more from the employers all over the world-apart from the pay-in the form of social security and welfare benefits as matter of right which were once considered as part of the bargaining process.

3. **Job Security:** Conditions in the work environment must be created by the employer which will give freedom to all the employees and free from fear of losing their jobs. A system must be created in such away which creates healthy working conditions with optimum financial security.

4. **Alternative Work Schedules:** With a view to tackle job boredom, modern organizations have been experimenting with several forms of alternate work schedules such as four-day work week, flexi-time and part-time work. Compressed work week is a work schedule made between the number of hours worked per day, and the number of days worked per week, 10 hours each day or three days, 12 hours each day are examples of the QWL schedule. In India this is being implemented by a few companies successfully.

5. **Participation and Democracy:** The Quality of Work life department implements programs and practices that encourage a positive and productive work experience at organization. QWL services address the key areas of Work-Life Balance such as Flexible working options, Flextime, Flexi place, compressed work schedules, job-sharing, staff recognition and awards, health and wellness workshops. Change and competition have dramatically increased the

work demands in the environments. At the same time, these pressures have impacted the entire Indian organizations workforce.

These are some points stressed as essential to improve the QWL in Indian organizations. Let us see how company's carried QWL programs to overcome crisis faced by members of organization. Some of the key area of work life balance is discussed below:

a. **Flexible work options:** Flexible work options respond to significant changes at work and home during the past few decades. Some flexible work options are:

i. **Flextime:** The most requested, easiest to manage and the most affordable FWO is flextime which offers flexibility in arrival, departure and/or lunch times, typically with a designated core-time during which all staff are present. The Flextime in many companies enhances recruitment, reduces stress through the ability to better balance work and personal responsibilities, reduces paid absences and tardiness, reduces turnover, where individuals faces a recurring, unresolvable conflict between work and a personal responsibility. Flextime may offer a solution that enables the individual to solve the problem at hand.

ii. **Flex place:** This arrangement allows for a portion of the job to be performed off-site, on a regular, recurring basis. The majority of work time is spent at the office and the off-site work typically is done at home. It may be the most complicated flexible work option to arrange since it generally requires electronic equipment and technological support. Based on operational needs, a Flex place arrangement is most appropriate for work with clearly defined tasks, measurable work activity, and the individual's presence is not required in the work place. The advantages are can improve the morale, productivity, commitment and retention is possible.

b. **Compressed Work schedules:** Compressed Work schedules have been promoted as a way to extend service hours, reduce shift turnover, or maximize an investment in expensive equipment

or high-priced office space. Additionally, these arrangements have supported time off during summer months in order to offer employees more week-end leisure time. More recently, these arrangements have been seen as a way to comply with corporate support for reduced traffic and pollution. A traditional 35-40 hour work week is condensed into fewer than five days of work. This option is more easily applied to non-exempt (weekly paid) staff for whom maximum work hours are identified, but it is not ruled out for monthly paid staff who may work more than 40 hours during the work week.

c. **Part - time work:** Is a regular arrangement for between 17.5 and 28 hours a week. This is different from a temporary work assignment where an employee is expected to have a temporary, non-recurring relationship to the workplace and does not receive paid time off.

d. **Job Sharing:** The time can be split evenly or unevenly depending upon the demands of the job or the needs of the sharing team. The company allows two staff members to share the responsibilities of one full-time position. Each staff member shares a specific proportion of a full-time position. Creative and innovative schedules can be designed to meet the needs of the job sharers and the office. A Job Share arrangement is different from a Part-time position which has a workload that can be managed within 17.5 to 28 hours a week. Working in a shared job also differs from a Part Time arrangement in the following ways:

e. **Opportunity for career growth:** The work should provide career opportunities for development of new abilities and expansion of existing skills on a continuous basis.

f. **Balance of work and personal life:** There should be proper balance between work life and personal life of workers. The demands of work such as late hours, frequent travel, and quick transfers are both psychologically and socially very costly and detrimental to QWL.

g. **Social relevance of work:** Work should not be a source of material and psychological satisfaction but a means of social welfare. An organization that has a greater concern for social causes like pollution, consumer protection, national integration, employment, etc., can improve the QWL.

h. **Social intergration in work force:** The worker should be made to feel a sense of identity with the organization and develop a feeling of self-esteem, Openness, trust, sense of community feeling, scope for upward mobility, equitable treatment are essential for this purpose.

i. **Constitutionalization in work organization:** QWL provides constitutional protection to the workers. Management action can be challenged. Constitutional protection is provided to workers on such matters like free speech, equity and due process.

Benefits to the Employers and Employees

1. **Benefits to the employers: -** Followings are the benefits that are being researched by various academicians and researchers.

Work-life balance practices-

- reduced staff turnover
- lower recruitment and training costs, due to decreased turnover
- reduced absenteeism due to higher levels of well being
- gaining a reputation as a good employer or an employer of choice
- Improved recruitment and retention rates
- reduced stress levels amongst staff
- improved morale and job satisfaction
- greater staff loyalty and commitment
- improved productivity
- reduced absenteeism

2. **Employees Benefits: -**

- being effectively manage multiple responsibilities at work, home and in the society without any stress

- reduced stress levels and higher levels of well being

- control over time management in meeting work life commitments

- autonomy to make decisions regarding work life balance

- Increased focus, motivation and job satisfaction, knowing that family and work commitments are being met.

- Increased job security from the knowledge that an organization understands and supports workers with family responsibilities

- Increased employee engagement

- Increased employee commitment

Strategic HR Initiatives for Achieving Work-Life Balance

Achieving work-life balance is a pride possession of a professional; however this is not a sole responsibility of him. Employers being the advocates of setting the norms and conditions at workplace are considered to be the facilitators of employee work-life balance. Osterman, (1995) has stated work-life balance programs as, "institutionalized structural and procedural arrangements, as well as formal and informal practices that makes it easier for individuals to manage conflicting worlds of work and family lives". Employers can plan their work-life balance programs in three major categories: policies, benefits and services. Policies cover the formal and informal ways by which employee's work and leave schedules are handled, including part-time work, flexi-time and parental/family leave. Benefits cover forms of compensation that protect against loss of earnings, payment of medical expenses and sponsoring a vacation. Services include on-site or near-site childcare centers, medical facilities and counseling. They have stated that, keeping the changing scenario in mind, present day organizations are just not restricting themselves to the mandatory welfare practices stipulated by law, but they are becoming more conscious towards the need and growth of their employees, their families

and society as a whole. Analysis of interview with some of the Indian HR managers working in manufacturing, IT and Telecom sectors in India have said that the MNCs have come up with initiatives to offer provisions such as flexi-time, paid paternity leave, childcare facilities and tools such as video conferencing to reduce commuting to office. At the same time, there are a handful of establishment's inspite of recognizing the productive benefits about work-life balance programs have not taken any formal initiatives. The slow and differential HR policy response in India as compared to western countries can be attributed to the political ideologies, slow pace of change in socio-demographic structure, attitude of employers and lack of empirical studies showing the impact of such initiative in organizational performance. Nevertheless, the range of work-life balance programs varies across organizations and adoption and effective utilization of such provisions are contingent on many cultural, organizational and individual factors. There is still a long way to go when work-life balance programs will become strategic HR initiatives in most organizations.

Conclusion

Work-life balance and employee engagement becomes a visible benchmark among high performing organizations that reap the economic and reputational benefits of being publicly recognized as a "best place to work" or an "employer of choice". Understanding the work and personal life are not two independent spheres of life and that the debate on work life integration involves employers and working families and understanding their available work-life options. Building an organizational culture that supports through changing the way people think and talk about their work-life balance so that using flexible working options and other work-life initiatives becomes accepted and normal for everyone regardless of their gender, seniority within the organization or personal commitments.

An organization which encourages work-life balance policies and practices will win the benefits of augmented employee engagement and also a positive outcome is dependent on a workplace

culture that is supportive of using work-life initiatives. Some organizations are working on balancing the work-life of employees and measure to be taken to solve complexities of workers in workplace and how to solve this problem using time management and employees can manage their personal life and professional life smoothly. Today's organizations are all about working with 24*7 and stress will be involved with work and mental stability will be a prime concern for employers so as how to make people work efficiently.

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