

Work Life Balance: An imperative balance

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Abstract

Work is central to our lives. It provides us with a sense of achievement, recognition and above all a means of income to meet out our basic and material needs. Balancing work and home life is a growing concern for both employers and employees. Work-life and personal life are two sides of the same coin. Striking a balance between work and life is critical for an employee to achieve his personal and professional goals. At the same time its impact is very significant for the organizations since the employee's attitude, loyalty to the organization and productivity are directly dependent on how well one balances one's time between two lives. Global competition, growing consumerism, rapid advances in technology and changes in family as an institution are together impinging and impacting the 'time-money squeeze' between family caring responsibilities and demands of work. This paper will mainly outline the concept, literature review, practices of WLB and challenges to effectiveness of practices & prospects for WLB.

1. Introduction

The term "work-life balance" (WLB) was coined in 1986 to response to the growing concerns by individuals and organizations alike that work can impinge upon the quality of family life and vice-versa, thus giving rise to the concepts of "work-family conflict" (WFC) and "family-work conflict" (FWC). The former is also referred to as "work interferes with family" (WIF) while the latter is also known as "family interferes with work" (FIW). There are 24 hours in a day that can be divided into three important activities: work, family, and rest and recuperation. In a 24*7 cut-throat competitive work environment, the amount of time devoted to work can take its toll on one's family.

2. Implications of imbalance

For Employees

"Imagine life as a game in which you are juggling some five balls in the air. You name them-work, family, health, Friends and spirit-and you're keepings all of these in the air. You will soon or one day understands that work is a rubber ball. If you drop it, it will bounce back. But the other four balls-Family, Health, Friends and spirit – are made of glass. If you drop one of these; they will be irrevocably scuffed, marked, nicked, damaged or even shattered. They will never be the same. You must understand that and strive for balance in your life." (Bryan Dyson, CEO of Coca Cola)

- Toll on the person's health both physiologically and psychologically leading to: Heart ailments, cardiovascular problems, sleep disorders, depression, irritability, jumpiness, insecurity, poor concentration and even nervous breakdown
- Lack of concentration, low productivity, lesser quality of work, conflicts at workplace

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- Affected Family life
- Strained social Life
- Financial Problems due to ill health, poor management of personal finance issues

For Employers

“Companies today cannot afford to ignore the issue of work/life balance. Providing employees the flexibility to address personal commitments, without compromising the needs of the business, can make the difference between a good working environment and a great one.” (Diane Domeyer)

- Need to manage increased expectations of employees without compromising on business needs
- Face problems like: absenteeism, less productivity, low quality of work, employee turnover, failure to attract best talent
- Management time increasingly spent on: counseling, motivation, conflict management etc.,
- More investment on additional resources.

3. Literature review

The literature on work family balance is quite varied. Family-friendly work environment, such as flexi time, timework, etc. has been portrayed as an important component of an individual worker's preferences towards work time. It has been suggested that such work arrangements seek to help employees' obtain a better blend between their work and non-work lives while providing organizations with a means of recruiting, retaining and motivating their work force. (Schwartz, 1994)

In response to the demographic shifts, market changes, talent attrition and changing needs and demands of employees, organizations are applying employee-friendly strategies for attaining superior performance. Today, organizations are forced to look beyond mundane human resources (HR) interventions and execute initiatives such as flexible working hours, alternative work arrangements, leave policies in lieu of family care responsibilities and employee assistance programs. These initiatives are referred to as ‘family-friendly policies’ or ‘work-life balance practices’ (WLBP) in literature (Grover and Crooker, 1995).

Caroni (1997) unlike her peers takes a different stand on work life balance. Appreciative of scholars and practitioners who are trying to promote balance between work and life, she argues that much of the work in the field has been built on a language and logic based on traditional models of bureaucratic organizations which further aggravates the problem. She cites certain problems in the prevalent literature: first, the overarching goal oriented approach to life that assumes people have great deal of choice and control over their lives, and second, the sole focus on individual (and neglect of structural and relational) level of analysis.

Drolet & Morissette (1997) analyzed the Survey of Work Arrangements (SWA) dataset conducted by Statistics Canada and demonstrated that in the aggregate, for each Canadian who chose to reduce his/her working hours, there were four Canadians who would like to work more hours. Another interesting finding was that older, well-educated workers had relatively low unemployment rates and exhibited greatest propensity to desire shorter hours, than did young workers with low levels of education who faced high unemployment rates yet rarely desired fewer hours.

Senekal et al. (2001) analyzed a sample of 786 French Canadians and demonstrated that for both men and women low levels of motivation towards work and family led to family alienation. This alienation then predicted work-family conflict, which lead to emotional exhaustion.

A poll by the members of society for Human Resource Management indicated that professionals viewed flexible workplace schedules as a day to employee retention and placed this working condition in the top three ways for achieving employee retention (Burke & Collinson, 2004). Duxbury & Higgins (2003) in their seminal report on work-life conflict demonstrated that the respondents with high levels of work to family interference reported; lower levels of commitment, lower levels of job satisfaction and high levels of job stress and the high intent to turnover of any of the respondents in the study. Despite these findings, in most workplaces, family friendly work arrangements and services still remain limited. Comfort et al. (2003) analyzed the data collected from new Workplace and Employee Survey (WES) and showed that only 2 to 7 percent of workers analyzed reported having child or elder care services available to them at the workplace. They also demonstrated that access to such arrangements varied considerably by gender, type of benefit, and job characteristics. Gender differences in access to flexi time were interestingly in direction opposite to that which could be expected – women reported lower flexitime participation rates than men; 44% of men reported a flexitime arrangement, as compared to only 36% of women. Also, women acknowledged part time tele work as a means of providing increased access to flexitime or telework schedule, as compared to men for whom part time work was unrelated to flexibility in work time or place. This finding rendered support to their claim that part-time work facilitates work-family integration for women. With regards to job characteristics, managers and professionals had a higher level of access to all four work arrangements (child care, elder care, flexitime, and telework) than did employees in virtually all other occupations.

Whatever may be the case, work-life balance seems to have dual benefits for both the employing organization and its employees. Employers benefit by decreased absenteeism, increased retention, increased job satisfaction and employee commitment; while employees benefit with decreased stress related illnesses, decreased health care costs, lower role stressors and less interference of work in family life.

The Government of India also has special provisions for paternity leave and for coordinating transfers when wife and husband work for the same employer. In addition, progressive employers adopt family friendly policies in the form of job sharing, part time work and short paid and long unpaid leave for child care, etc. at the community level, there are some initiatives for the provision of common services like crèche, etc. as women's participation to the workforce increases, work-family conflicts pertaining to care of children and the elderly, the growing incidence of divorce (Hindu Business Line, 19 June 2006) and parenting have emerged as major concerns among employees. Rappoport, Lewis and Gambles (2004) reported that the workplace response "tend(s) to be based on the US model to support people to be able to work more rather than less." This is possibly due to the influence of Multinational Corporations' policies on inclusive workforce and family friendly workplaces. Most Indians still seem to consider WLB as an issue for the "haves" and less so for the "have-nots" where work tends to take precedence over family. Some companies have publicized their being a family friendly workplace as a recruitment tool, rather than facilitating women to advance in the workplace.

Work is central to our lives. It provides us with a sense of achievement, recognition and above all a means of income to fulfill our basic and material needs. Globalization and rapid technological changes demand more of workers. This is because the world of work is changing-

such as development of new technology, more and more women entering the workforce, resulting, in part, in two-earner families and above all a clash of work and personal life. These are some of the challenges faced by today's workers. Most workers juggle their personal and work-life every single day, between children and work, and between other family and community responsibilities.

Factors influencing the work-life balance can be either demographic, such as aging workforce; labor market trends such as flexible work arrangements; health and wellness initiatives by employers; and other factors such as child care costs. Such factors are then said to have important implications for the well-being of all stakeholders, employees, employers, unions, governments, families, communities and the economy.

4. Work-life Balance practices in Indian Organizations

As a part of an ongoing project on WLBPs and organizational performance (Bhargava and Baral, 2009), Baral (2009) conducted a systematic study to examine the scope and coverage of work-life balance practices in some of the leading organizations in India. Based on review of literature, empirical study and analyses of reports of newspaper articles, it was observed that organizations in India have to do much more than what they are doing at present to treat WLBPs as strategic aspect of organizational performance. Organizations do offer many benefits and policies from flexible work arrangements to stress management programs in the name of work-life balance activities. However, these policies and practices many a times are not integral parts of their policy handbooks and vary extensively in terms of their scope, in knowledge centric organizations like IT and ITES sectors, where women workforce participation is relatively higher, statutory policies such as maternity leave and benefits are common, while practices such as flexi-time, work from home and part-time work are still sporadic, since these practices are discretionary in nature.

Commonly offered statutory benefits across most organizations are leave plans such as maternity and paternity leaves with/without pay. Flexible work arrangements such as flexi-time, part-time work and telecommuting are yet to become strategic interventions in organizations, though these practices are prevalent in IT organizations to some extent. Health and Life Insurance coverage and reimbursement of medical expenses for employees and their families although are included as a part of compensation package, their scope and extent vary significantly from organization to organization. Stress management workshops and training program on work-life balance are being conducted by organizations as a part of welfare provisions but are not regular practices in most of the organizations.

Comparative analysis of the responses of senior HR managers and employees of each organization on the availability of WLBPs showed remarkable difference in their responses. It was found that although, organizations had quite a few work-life balance initiatives their employees did not perceive so. This finding suggests that HR managers have to put extra efforts to properly and effectively communicate about the availability of various WLBPs in their respective organizations to their employees.

5. Select Best Practices at individual companies

There is more innovation conceiving work-life balance policies and practices in IT and IT enabled services-be they multinational or Indian companies – because of the preponderance of gender balance and resultant increased awareness and concern about family responsibilities. Their employee referral programmers encourage spouses, relatives and friends to opt for a job in

the company. Interestingly, as Wipro's website puts it, the emphasis is on 'work balance towards life' several companies focus on life after work and put in place several programmers to connect even, or especially, the younger workforce without family responsibilities. In contrast, in the Indian public sector the emphases is predominantly on employee and family welfare through statutory and non-statutory benefits while many private sector companies in India are generally paternalistic in India are generally paternalistic in their approach. The following are the best practices of some selected companies.

- a) Accenture:** 60% of staff involved in flexi work or telecommuting
- b) Eli Lilly:** 50% of staff telecommute, encourage flexi work
- c) Johnson and Johnson:** enhanced paternal leave
- d) IBM's** mobility program, launched in 2003, enables employees to access information and perform work from anywhere and at anytime. It gives employees an opportunity to enhance their effectiveness by providing tools to use at any location, whether it is a customer office, airport, IBM mobility workstations or home.
- e) Infosys's** Health Assessment and Lifestyle Enhancement (HALE) initiative focuses on enhancing the emotional value-add of employees by optimizing their health, quality of life and work environment. It has created world class gyms, swimming pools, aerobics centers, tennis courts, etc.
- f) Microsoft's** work life balance programs include: flexible work arrangements, grocery services, adoption assistance, backup child-care, child-care assistance, commuting and public transportation assistance, dinners-to-go program, disease management program, dry cleaning and laundry service, employee affinity groups, employee development courses employer-sponsored discount programs, ergonomics program, financial planning, fitness benefits, legal assistance, long-term care for extended family members, maternity and paternity leave program, new mothers' rooms; on-campus convenience shopping, on-line parenting resources and seminars, resources and referrals for counseling and education, school programs, smoking cessation program, tuition assistance program, and weight management program.
- g) Nokia** development a tool, Nokia E71, a sleek mobile device that is designed for Life-in-balance: It empowers work and leisure connections in a stylish way and its work play mode allows users to easily switch between personal and work home screens to access one's favourite functions when one wants them most. It development a complete list of "Get your (Work) Life in Balance" check list (www.nokia-americas-press.com/lifebalance).
- h) Tata Consultancy Services (TCS)** started Maitree which was started with an objective to strengthen the relationship between employees and their families as well as to provide a platform to encourage the hidden aspiration and talents through cracking quizzes to conquering tall peaks, from shaking a leg to bending it like Beckham. It also conducts workshops on theatre, yoga, flower arrangement, chocolate making, and a host of others that allow employees to learn and know about things they always wanted to. Maître provides everyone at TCS the opportunity to establish relationships that extend beyond work and thereby, help build bonds that makes work so much more fun.
- i) Tech Mahindra's** Josh program enables people to enjoy with parties, picnics, yoga and salsa classes, musical events, sporting events, quizzes, adventures and social activities, etc.

Managers have to take the challenge of WLB seriously as it affects their professional success and personal well-being. They also need to hone certain skills that conducive to better

WLB. Some of these skills are: time management, delegation, coping with stress, negotiation, caring, listening, empathy, trust, etc. these skills are helpful for managing things both in work and family domains.

6. Challenges to Effectiveness of Work-life Balance Practices

Organizations and policy makers need to understand the key challenges before introducing new WLBPs or implementing existing ones.

- Unsupportive organizational culture is the major impediment for the effectiveness of WLBPs (Thompson, Beauvais and Lines, 199). Managerial or supervisory support is one of the major components of organizational culture that facilitates integration of employee work-life balance. Employees will avail WLBPs when they perceive their supervisor as supportive of their work-family integration efforts. Employers, co-workers or colleagues may perceive that those who avail WLBPs such as flexi-time or leave for family reasons are not committed to their work and this perception may significantly influence their career progression. Implicit or explicit time demands at the work place or norms concerning the numbers of hours, which employees are supposed to devote to work or work-related activities, are also impediments to utilization of WLBPs should be supported by supportive organizational culture that values integration of work and family.
- Organizations that assert work-life balance issue as typical woman's issue actually forget to accommodate the needs of fathers of singles with elder care responsibilities. In practice, WLBPs revolve around facilitating working conditions of women only because most men do not utilize them because of competitive business environment pressures and family as well as societal values which emphasize on men's career and bread earner role.
- Many work-life balance programs frequently glitter without substance. Efforts must be taken to understand the needs of employees and design the programs accordingly. In India, people consider work as a source of earning and social status and they put considerable hours at work and efforts to succeed in their career as well as to prove themselves at the workplace. Simultaneously, they consider family as the social institution that provides not only emotional support but stands with them in crisis. Most Indians value family ties and work hard to provide better living to their family members. The meaning of family is not confined to spouse, parents and children. People still feel that they are part of extended families. Hence, ignorance to employee specific needs may hinder the effectiveness of WLBPs.
- Interviews with HR executives further revealed that the nature of job and difficulty in cost benefit analysis of such practices are the major reasons behind limited implementation of WLBPs such as flexible work arrangements. Preventing employees to misuse the provisions such as flexi-time is also one of the concerns raised by them.

7. Prospects for Indian Organizations

Comparing with the past, today, one can see a noticeable difference in Indian Organizations, vision, philosophy, leadership styles and people oriented HR interventions. Consequently, Indian organizations have started getting respect globally. HR practitioners are striving to experiment the existing policies and exploring other innovative policies, schemes and interventions to motivate and involve large number of employees. However, managing employee work-life balance has still not become a core strategic facet of people management practices in Indian organizations, which have the competitive advantage in terms of young talents in

comparison to the West. This demands attention of policy makers to tap available talent for superior performance.

A careful scrutiny of the literature on compensation and reward management clearly shows that our salary structure and reward management clearly shows that our salary structure and reward system are at par with other high performing organizations across the globe. But, most of the incentives, schemes, rewards, and facilities are crafted around jobs and organizations. This is because of the assumption that people can and will be motivated if their performance is recognized and they looked after by organizations.

Contemporary challenges emerging from services organizations such as BPOs have made 24/7 working hours a reality. It has also put tremendous pressure on HR professionals to rethink their approach for utilizing the talent of such people without compromising on their non-work related commitments. Increasing number of women in the workforce and increase in dual career couples have put immense pressure on working couples to juggle between work and family responsibilities while being productive at work. Such trends have made work-life balance a pertinent strategic issue to be seriously and urgently considered by employers in India to attract and retain talent. Considering organization as an open system, one has to consider external influences on the system's functioning and therefore, assumption of employers that work and family are two separate spheres needs correction. There is evidence that work and family are no longer two separate role domains rather are interdependent and have positive influence on each other (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006).

In a research study (Baral, 2009) on 730 managerial employees from various organizations in India; it is clearly found that family significantly contributes to work in terms of enhancing performance and positive emotions at the workplace. The findings indicate that one of the important determinants of work-life balance is availability of WLBPs. When an organization offers its employees policies, practices, benefits and services to help them integrate their work and family responsibilities, they feel committed to the organization and indulge themselves in organizational citizenship behaviors.

It is time to acknowledge and realize that WLBPs are of value to all, which attract prospective employees and are tools for employee retention and motivation (Galinsky, Friedman and Hernandez, 1991). One should also keep in mind that new generation employees evaluate their career progress not only in terms of lucrative job assignments but also in terms of their ability to maintain healthy balance between their work and non-work life.

The workforce of today is markedly different from the workforce of past decades. As such, it is important that government policies and employment laws reflect the current economy and labor force. The prototypical worker of past generations, held a full-time permanent job with one company for his or her (though only in recent decades have women really entered full-swing into the workforce) career. As has been previously discussed, people today tend to be much more mobile. It has somewhat become the norm for people to work for several different organizations throughout their working lives. Workers are becoming less tied to a single firm as there is an increase in self-employment, contract work, temporary work, mid-life career changes or educational endeavors and relocation to other provinces, states and even countries.

The necessity of portable benefits is not the only item that should be on the governmental agenda. As this report has repeatedly stated, work/family balance is one of the major issues for the workforce.

With more and more employees changing jobs and working in temporary and contract positions, benefits must be portable so that the individuals are no longer tied to one firm. In

addition to simply providing family-friendly work policies, organizations need to ensure that the availability of these programs is uniform for all employees. Finally, as has been previously mentioned, employees must fight for a voice at work. The impetus is on working families to stand up for their rights to be an integral part of the organizations in which they work and to have their opinions heard.

8. Corrective measures to ensure better WLB

By Employees

“Most people struggle with life balance simply because they haven’t paid the price to decide what is really important to them”. Stephen Covey

“Have regular hours for work and play; make each day both useful and pleasant, and prove that you understand the worth of time by employing it well. Then youth will be delightful, old age will bring few regrets, and life will become a beautiful success.” Louisa May Alcott, American author.

“While all aspects of our life are important, without a balance, you become addicted and like all addictions you lose.” Catherine Pulsifer, from Balance of life

- Time management thru task prioritization and activity planning
- Negotiate and use facilities like: work-sharing, job rotation, delegation, flexi timing, tele-commuting, work from home, onsite childcare, eldercare assistance, online wellness assistance.
- Usage of gadgets and domestic help at home to do routine jobs like: washing, cleaning etc., which helps in spending quality time with family
- Indulging in some creative hobby, voluntary service which helps to de-stress
- Continue education in the subject of interest either part-time/online
- Seeking information and help required from management from time to time

By Employers

“Simply pushing harder within the old boundaries will not do.” Karl Weick.

Optimum combination of process, social and technical approaches that will maximize performance while creating a high quality of work-life climate for employees

- Regular and direct communication with workers to make them understand business priorities and encourage them to be equally clear about their personal priorities.
- Help employees in their pursuit of balancing personal commitments and organizational duties by providing them necessary support and resources as far as feasible like:
- Flexible time options, childcare centers near workplace, eldercare assistance, facilities/training for health and fitness, work from home option
- Counseling/guidance wherever required on matters like: relationship problems, workplace conflicts
- Training/education on topics like: health, hygiene, stress management, time management, parenting, personal finance, usage of technology/gadgets, children’s education, retirement planning etc.

9. Conclusion

Work-life and personal-life are two sides of the same coin. Striking a balance between work and life is critical for an employee to achieve his personal and professional goals. At the same time its impact is very significant for the organizations since the employee's attitude, loyalty to the organization and productivity are directly dependent on how well one balances one's time between these two lives. WLB is one of the most important concerns of people in the modern era. Indian organizations find themselves on a cross-road. A few organizations have also addressed the challenges of WLB and evolved relevant policies and practices. If organizations fail to address the WLB issues and concerns of employees, there will be a flight of talented people. Moreover, they will not be able to get optimum productivity from them. As the people factor has emerged as a vital driver of competitiveness in the knowledge economy, the WLB practice can play a significant role in the engagement, motivation and retention of people. Although WLB is a multi-faceted phenomenon, it is highly individual-oriented. Values indeed affect WLB in an important way. Hence value clarification at the individual level is desirable to strike a balance between work and life.

Some organizations offer WLB programmers rather than transforming their way of thinking about the need to help employees balance between work and family. They indeed vary widely in their WLB policies and practices. The argument is backed by Pfeffer and Sutton's (2000) one-fourth situation about the "knowing and doing" gap. However, only about half of those who believe really do something about it. Finally, as there is no defined degree WLB, each person has to decide his own degree of WLB, own it and act on it. Society and organizations can play a facilitating role in enhancing WLB.

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