



A STUDY REPORT ON WORK LIFE BALANCE IN INDIAN COMPANIES

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ABSTRACT

There is a growing consciousness in today's workplaces that employees do not give up their lives just for the reason that they work. Work and life remain the two most significant domains in the life of an employed person. Nevertheless, the challenge of balancing work and non-work demands is one of today's central apprehensions for both employees and organisations. With the increasing diversity of family structures characterized in today's workforce, particularly with the growing standards of dual-career families, the significance of managing an employee's work-life balance have increased over the past 20 years. Employers are realizing that the quality of an employee's personal and family life impacts work quality and that there are concrete business reasons to promote work and non-work integration as the work life balance provides the balanced relationship among work life and personal life. It had been realized that family life should not be strained by working hours, including business travel, transfers, vacations etc. Work life balance shows the direct relation with the job satisfaction and productivity in the organization. When an individual is thus employed in an organisation, he does not give up his life in exchange for work rather he attempts to maintain a balance between them. This balance is necessary for a healthy life. For many employees, the day is not over when they go home. Often, a second day of work starts at home and for most working mothers, they come home to the second shift (assuming the inescapable role of a wife and a mother). The challenge of balancing work and family (non-work) demands is one of today's central concerns for both individuals and organisations. People who have better balance have a greater job satisfaction and perform better in their position. They have a bigger loyalty and a higher level of trust. In many of today's workplaces, employers are cutting cost mainly through lay-offs and are placing more demands on the lean staff left behind. The excuse is to stay afloat in the wake of a global economic recession. The implication however, is that the more time and energy employees give to work, the less they have to give to the other important aspects of their lives, thus creating a work-life balance problem with its attendant negative consequences for both the employee and the organisation. This paper serves as a base for understanding the actual nuances of work and work-life balance and sheds the light over its importance for both the employers and the employees. It focuses over the emerging needs for its effective and timely implementation. In this paper, the researcher contend that assisting employees to achieve a work-life balance should be a critical part of HR policy and strategy, if it is to truly get the best from the organisations people without leaving them unsatisfied, burnt-out and unfulfilled.

KEYWORDS: Work life Balance, job satisfaction, employee, organization.

INTRODUCTION

Life is like a game and an individual has to play with work, family, health, friends and spirit. Work is like a rubber ball. If dropped it will bounce back but the other four aspects family, health, friends and spirit are made of glass. Assuming one of these are dropped they will be irrevocably scuffed, marked, nicked, damaged, or even shattered. They will never be the same. Work-Life balance is about people having a measure of control over when, where and how they work. It is achieved when an individual's right to a fulfilled life inside and outside paid work is accepted and respected as the norm, to the mutual benefit of the individual, business and society. The fact that employees in huge buildings of prospering Indian firms take home huge pay every month, can paint a rosy picture of their lives in anyone's mind. However, when we take a closer look, we see another reality that is not so bright. In reality, the lives of these individuals are marked by pressures, hectic schedules, and extremely long hours at work which takes a toll on their health, and also relationships at home and social engagements. Therefore, one must understand the importance of both work & life and should strive to balance them.

Work-Life Balance-Meaning

Work-life balance is a broad concept including proper prioritizing between "work" (career and ambition) on one hand and "life" (Health, pleasure, leisure, family and spiritual development) on the other. Related, though broader, terms include "lifestyle balance" and "life balance". It is all about people feeling

satisfied with the way they divide their time and energy between paid work and all the other things they need and want to do. It is a critical issue for people:

- With caring responsibilities, including for children, older people and partners with long-term illnesses or disabilities
- With responsibilities in their community, culture or church
- Studying
- With health issues or disabilities of their own
- Who want to stay fit and healthy
- Who are passionate about other interests or sports

LITERATURE REVIEW

- Burke (2002) observes that both women and men prefer working in organisations that support work-life balance. Men appeared to benefit more than women. Men feel more satisfied when they achieve more on the job even at the cost of ignoring the family. On the other hand, women stress that work and family are both equally important and both are the sources of their satisfaction. For them the former is more important. When work does not permit women to take care of their family, they feel unhappy, disappointed and frustrated. They draw tight boundaries between work and family and they do not like one crossing the others.
- Summer and Knight (2001), securely attached individuals experienced positive spill over in both work and family.
- Clark (2000) defines balance as "satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict".

- In the UK, Green (2001) among others has shown that intensification of work has reached a point where there is very little slack in the working day. Typical examples include the jobs of those working in call centers where incoming calls are placed in a queue and where there is a pre-determined response time and pattern. The annual CIPD surveys have identified that one of the areas where workers believe the organization is least likely to keep its promises concerns the demands on their time. In the same surveys, subjective reports of effort show, typically, that about 30 per cent say “I am working as hard as I can and could not imagine being able to work any harder”. A further 45 per cent say “I am working very hard” and most of the rest say “I am working quite hard”. Invariably, less than 5 per cent will admit to “not working particularly hard”. In other words, people are feeling the pressure.

Work Life Balance- a Progressive Approach

Work-life balance that people demand today is not different from what people wanted yesterday. The only difference lies in the demands of the society, as society has changed from what it was yesterday to what it is today. Today the trend has moved towards single parent and dual-working parents with increased domestic responsibilities. It has become very critical for the organizations to attract and retain their best human capital in order to remain competitive. The best way to do so is to consider “what employees want?” Today the answer to this question is “work-life balance” which majority of the employees

want without taking into consideration their age, gender, type of the job, race etc (Miller, 2006). Businesses today are operating in an extreme competitive environment with an increased need to be more responsive and more efficient than their competitors. Additionally, employees today are pressurizing their employers for rewarding their employment with respect to their utilization of skills, rewarding their career and managing their lives outside the workplace. It compels the organizations to be more responsive and flexible for their workers. Organizations that are failing to consider these issues are facing the crucial problem of brain drain and are losing their professional experts (Dunne & Teg, 2007).

Joshi et al (2002) emphasized that work-life balance is a two dimensional approach i.e. organizational approach and individual approach. Work-life balance was traditionally defined in the framework of organization as what organizations do for the individuals (organizational approach). The second dimension (individual approach) emphasizes the fact that what individuals do for them. In line with Joshi et al (2002) Bird (2006) emphasized more on these two dimensional approach and named them as “The Two Legs of the Work-Life Strategy”. He renamed the organizational approach as “system approach” (left leg) - how do organizations contribute to create better work-lives for their employees. The individual approach (right leg) says that “how do the individuals themselves balance their work-lives”. According to Bird (2006) if an organization has already implemented

(employee assistance programs) EAP, flexible working hours, health insurance policies etc, it has already built a left leg. The major focus is then on the right leg the individual approach. Every employee has different work-life balance from every other employee with respect to their employment status e.g. a person who has a career start, will have a different work-life balance approach than the person who is being retired.

According to Bird (2006), CEO of work-life balance.com; work-life balance is all about achievement and enjoyment. The meaning of achievement is very well explored but enjoyment here means having satisfaction, pride and a feeling of well-being. He divided life in four quadrants as work, family, friends & community and self. He stressed that achievement and enjoyment should be felt in all of the four quadrants for a work-life balance.

Work Life Balance Issues- in relation to both Men and Women

Working men and women each have work-life balance issues. But how these issues play out often differs along gender lines. Men often act as though their jobs come first. Women typically put family first. Men sacrifice time at home for career advancement and more take-home pay. Women sacrifice career advancement and higher pay for time spent with family. Women feel guilty leaving work early to get home in time for dinner and men feel guilty about staying at work late and missing dinner. And occasionally rolls are reversed where women feel guilty about wanting to go to work and men feeling guilty about wanting to stay home. How can working

couples possibly achieve work life balance when there are so many impediments to doing so? And what can couples do when they disagree about what their own roles and their spouse's roles should be in respect to raising children and earning a living? And what do couples do to meet their own needs for exercise, social interaction, alone time and having fun? And what about single and married people who have no kids? Shouldn't they be included in discussions of work-life balance too?

Need of the hour

Peter Ellwood, chairman of a unique U.K.-based advocacy group, believes that work life balance is more crucial at this point in time than ever before. Globalization, demographics, and societal changes have changed or forced business to transform the way they operate. Thus there emerges a need where the organization must frame an adequate policy for Work-Life Balance in consideration with the issues of both male and female employees. Strategies dealing with work-life balance are a valuable tool in this transformation. They offer a win-win situation, engaging employees on the basis that there is 'something in it for them' too, and humanizing the process of change.

Work-life Balance Options

As a step taken in the direction of attaining the mutual benefits for both the employees and the organization, employers had realized that the quality of an employee's personal and family life has a great impact over their work quality and thus there are concrete business reasons to promote work and non-work integration. As Vleems (2005)

notes, when organisations decide to facilitate their employees' work-life balance, they choose from a wide array of options that include:

(a) Flexi-Time

Flexi-time is an arrangement in which organization gives its employees the autonomy of flexible working hours. Under this arrangement, there is a core period in a day which is mandatory for the employees to be present at and the rest is the flexi-time. Organization get benefited from flexi-time arrangements with increased morale of the staff, reduced stress among employees, increased retention of the staff, and more efficient productivity. The employees are also benefited from flexi-time arrangements as they have more control over their work, can adjust easily to all the activities (work and non-work), better utilize their free time, avoidance of congestion, without taking time-off employees, and life outside work issues (flexi time planner). At a financial service company, it was surveyed that employees who had option of flexi-time and who had control over their work were having less burnout

(B) Compressed working hours

This is a system of a four day working week. An employee can work his total number of agreed hours over a shorter period. For example, an employee can work his or her hours over four days in a week instead of five, and thus, gains a day for himself. Compressed workweeks are aimed at creating a more flexible system in which employees can assimilate their personal and professional lives and get time to work through the issues of

pursuing education, eldercare, commuting, and childcare, etc.

(c) Job-sharing

Job-sharing is a system where two people share a job. They both have the same job, but split the hours, so that each employee has a part-time position. Apart from splitting the hours, they also split the payments, holidays and benefits. The idea is to afford employees ample time to attend to non-work activities so as to be able to achieve a good measure of work-life balance. A properly implemented job sharing program can be a win-win situation for the company and the employees as employees will be more satisfied and a result of which will be more productive.

(d) Breaks from work

By taking breaks from work once in a while, the right balance between work and life can be achieved. These breaks should not only be about maternity, paternity and parental leave, but also time off for career breaks and sabbaticals.

(e) Self-roster

Employees can roster their hours the way they want to. The organisation checks every day the number of staff and skills required and lets the employees then decide which of hours they would like to work. Employees are thus able to schedule their time conveniently between work and non-work activities.

(f) Tele-working

Employees, with the aid of modern communication technology carry out their jobs without necessarily having to be at the office. Often, they can work from home or in satellite

offices (telecentres) rented by the organisation close to where they live. Teleworking allows employees to attend to family or non-work issues so long as it does not affect their output or the quality.

(g) Child care

People with families do not have the luxury to stay at home anymore and take care of the children. The trend is towards dual-earning families as life has become too expensive to let a potential money-maker stay at home. Thus, the demand for child care options as a means of helping employees achieve work-life balance is becoming increasingly important (Vlems, 2005). Some popular child care options include Crèche, Day-nursery, After school child care, Teen care, Host parent care, and Leader-at-home.

Work Life Balance in selected Companies

1. IBM

Maintaining the essential work life balance has become a business imperative, and is mostly not very easy to achieve. That's where IBM's employee-friendly policies come into picture. Be it flexible work arrangements or child care services, the IBM recognize that these have a positive impact on employee productivity & retention, and therefore are looked upon as a business imperative. Complementing these policies are Well-being services, which spans several areas ranging from Influenza Vaccination to Emotional Well-being programs. Not surprisingly IBM is well known in the industry for its work life balance, and for the nineteenth year in succession, has featured in the 'best companies' list of various magazines, including Working Mother.

2. Shell

Like many companies Shell gives flexi time and work from home benefits to its employees. Every year the company conducts Global People Survey which gauges the employee's perceptions on the company's status on how far the work life balance is achieved and what are the steps needed. Working overtime and on weekends is discouraged in Shell and one striking factor is that leaves cannot be en-cashed or carry forwarded. The HR executives in the company put focused efforts to frequently update the various work life balance programs.

3. CAMPBELL

Their approach to work/life balance illustrates a key aspect of the Campbell Promise – “Campbell Valuing People.”

They understand the pressures and challenges facing employees when trying to balance work with personal interests and responsibilities. They also understand that their employees are better able to meet the demands of the business when their own personal needs are being met.

When it comes to work/life balance, a “one-size-fits-all” approach simply won't do. Their programs are designed to recognize that not all employees are the same and that employees' needs may change over time. Depending on an employee's role and location, here is a sampling of the types of work/life programs and benefits that may be available:

- Flexible work arrangements (e.g., telecommuting, flex-time, job-share, reduced or compressed workweek)

- Summer hours – employees work extra time Monday-Thursday and head out early on Fridays
- On-site full-time childcare plus backup care, school's out and summer program.
- On-site seminars, fairs and workshops on such topics as stress, nutrition and safety
- Company store and cafeteria
- Credit Union with ATM
- On-site dry cleaning services
- Fitness facilities including personal training and group exercise classes, plus discount memberships on a network of commercial fitness centers
- Paid personal days, vacation days, holidays and sick days
- Tuition reimbursement

The consequences of employee work-life imbalance

There is compelling evidence that work-life imbalance portends grave consequences for employees, their organisations, and society (Allen, Herst, Bruck and Sutton, 2000; Lockwood, 2003; Vlems, 2004; Mordi and Ojo, 2011). Conflicts, particularly between work and family, significantly affect quality of family life and career attainment for both men and women. Personal and societal consequences of work-life imbalance, according to Hobson, Delunas and Kesic (2001) include:

- Increased level of stress and stress-related illness -
- Lower-life satisfaction
- Higher rates of family strife, violence, and divorce
- Rising incidence of substance abuse

- Growing problems with parenting and supervision of children and adolescents
- Escalating rates of juvenile delinquency and violence

The continuous inability of employees to balance work and life responsibilities according to Hobson, Delunas and Kesic (2001) can have the following organisational consequences:

- Higher rates of absenteeism and turnover
- Reduced productivity
- Decreased job satisfaction
- Lower levels of organisational commitment and loyalty
- Rising healthcare cost.

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 perform 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.

Solutions

Many experts have given different solutions to this problem: Time management is one of the best solutions which can help to reduce the

imbalance between the personal and the work life of the employees.

Prioritizing the tasks and planning the activities can help to take out some free time which can be utilized for other purposes.

- Taking some time out for hobbies and leisure activities, spending time with loved ones can help to beat the stress.
- Learn to say "no" if required.
- Sharing the responsibilities will help and don't commit for something which is practically impossible.
- Utilizing the flexible working hours option of the organisations to get some free time.

The benefits of work-life balance

Positive work-life outcomes for employees are key ingredients of a successful business strategy (Lowe, 2006). Work-life balance is an ongoing quest for the individual employee, but this should now also become a concern for the employers because of the double-throng benefits of employee work-life balance. Where the right balance is found and sustained, both the employee and the employer gains.

Benefits for the employee

Many factors improve where the employee is able to find the right balance. Some of these factors, according to Vlems (2005) include:

- Improved employees' happiness. Employees would be happier when they are able to balance their work and life demands. The advantages of many organisations come from happy employees.
- Improved relations with management. Perceived support of management towards employees' work-life balance fosters a good

relationship between the workforce and management which itself improves effective communication within the company.

- Improved employees' self-esteem, health, concentration, and confidence. One UK study reports that more than forty percent of employees are neglecting other aspects of their life because of work, which may increase their vulnerability to mental health problems (Mental Health Foundation, 2012).
- Employee loyalty and commitment. These increases with opportunities for work-life balance. Employees are more likely to stay with an organisation when there are opportunities for achieving work-life balance.
- Tasks are managed better, there is increased motivation, and there is reduction in the level of stress among employees.

Benefits for the employer

Generally, the following factors, as Vlems (2005) notes, improve for the employer:

- Maximised available labour. The workforce will be very motivated and so the employer can benefit from maximised available labour. Every employee will give their very best during the working hours.
- The balance makes employees feel valuable. Implementing work-life balance programmes gives an impression that the organisation cares about the employees. Thus, they will feel more valuable and work harder as a result.
- The work environment will be less stressful; which means, less stress related illnesses and decreased health care costs.
- The presence of work-life balance programmes in an organisation makes it

attractive to a wider range of candidates when it comes to recruitment.

- The workforce will be more loyal and motivated, absenteeism will be reduced, and productivity will increase because of the maximised available labour.

Establishing effective work-life balance programmes: challenges and the critical role of HR

Work-life Balance programmes (WLBPs) are those institutionalized and procedural arrangements, as well as formal and informal practices that make it easier for employees to manage the often conflicting worlds of work and non-work (Osterman, 1995). With the growing diversity of family structures represented in today's workforce, particularly with the growing norm of dual-career families, the importance of managing an employee's work-life balance have increased markedly over the past 20 years (De Bruin and Dupius, 2004) and it has thus become imperative that the human resource professional understands the interface between work and non-work relationships and the resulting impact in the workforce (Lockwood, 2003). The idea is to attempt to increase the flexibility by which employees can enact both their work and non-work roles without jeopardy. The adoption of work-life programmes and policies are being considered as a part of high commitment work systems' (Osterman, 1995) required for ensuring high levels of employee commitment and innovation.

The critical role of HR in establishing effective Work-life balance programmes

In order to establish a deep rooted and effective work-life balance programme, the role of HR becomes more critical. They must develop a deep understanding of people and their roles, so as to create a work environment that is friendly, motivating and productive. HR should champion an effective conceptualization of work-life balance that requires a holistic approach to human resource management, implying a greater awareness of the total context of worker's daily lives, and not just those hours they spend at work. Firstly; before establishing work-life balance initiatives, HR must begin by appraising the culture of the organisation to ascertain if it is open and ready to support work-life balance programmes. This could be done with the help of formal employee survey assessment, aiming to bring out the peculiar work-life balance needs of different employees in the organization. Secondly; establishing effective work-life balance programmes requires the support of senior management, managers, and supervisors. Senior management, managers and supervisors must be seen to support the achievement of effective work-life balance if there is to be an up-take' of work-life balance opportunities by employees. As an advocate of the employee, HR must obtain a commitment from senior management to make work-life balance initiatives work in their organisation. Thirdly; HR must find means of effectively communicating available work-life balance programmes to all employees in the organisation. Communication about work-life

balance is essential. Poor communication has been found to be a factor affecting the low usage of work-life balance programmes in many organisations. It is not enough for organisations to offer a rich menu of work-life balance benefits, the desired effect is unlikely to occur if the employees do not know about the programmes or understand them

CONCLUSION

Having burn-out and stressed employees are of no use to the organization and the key to make an organization successful lies in the satisfaction, commitment and deliberate involvement of the employees. For this purpose many companies have begun to introduce work-life balance programs in order to help the employees efficiently deal with their work professional and personal lives. Work/life programs have the potential to significantly improve employee morale, reduce absenteeism, and retain organizational knowledge, particularly during difficult economic times. In today's global marketplace, as companies aim to reduce costs, it falls to the human resource professional to understand the critical issues of work/life balance and champion work/life programs. Be it employees whose family members and/or friends are called to serve their country, single mothers who are trying to raise their children and make a living,

Generation X and Y employees who value their personal time, couples struggling to manage dual-career marriages, or companies losing critical knowledge when employees leave for other opportunities, work/life programs offer a win-win situation for employers and employees.

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