

WORK LIFE BALANCE: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Monika Gulia

Assistant Professor, Gitarattan International
Business School

Pratistha

Assistant Professor, Delhi School of
Professional Studies & Research

Abstract:

Work life balance means attaining a proper balance between the job and personal life. If there is balance between these two, the employees will be more satisfied and will behave in a favourable manner. Changing demographics of workforce i.e. more participation of female employees in the organizations has made it more challenging for them to set their priorities between their jobs and personal lives. So there is a strong need to identify how to maintain this work life balance in order to smoothen the functioning of organizations. This is a descriptive research paper which includes secondary sources of data collection. This study focuses upon the understanding of managing work life balance and the various measures which will help in the attainment of the work life balance for the employees working in the organisations. This study will provide significant measures to help the organizations in adopting such work patterns which will enhance employee satisfaction by providing a balance between their jobs and lifestyle.

Keywords: Work Life Balance, Satisfaction, Lifestyle, Work Patterns, etc.

Introduction

Work life balance means attaining a proper balance between the job and personal life. A 'work life' balance refers to an employee's ability to maintain a healthy balance between their work roles, their personal responsibilities, and family life. Companies are increasingly recognizing the importance of helping their employees to achieve this balance as more staff is experiencing conflict between their work and personal roles. In today's age, many workers are seeing their personal responsibilities increase, from childcare and elderly care, to volunteer work, and family commitments. This comes at a time when their work responsibilities are also increasing, resulting in a conflict between personal and work commitments and an increase in stress.

Another factor which is contributing greatly to the difficulty in achieving a work life balance is the changing landscape in how and where employees are expected to work. As more and more companies embrace the technological age and move into globalization, work is no longer restricted to the workplace. Employees can work from almost any location with the use of laptops, tablets, and smart phones; and telecommuting

is on the increase. Employees can access work emails and assignments 24/7, meaning that they can also be accessible to employers and clients. Although there are multiple benefits to this flexible working pattern, it can run the risk of blurring the lines between work and personal life. Remote working also means that staff may now find that their typical work week is no longer restricted to the traditional 40 hours a week.

The result of a poor balance between work and personal life not only affects employees, but it also affects the companies that they work for. Employee stress can increase to the level of burnout, resulting in lower productivity at work, a higher potential for stress related health problems and absenteeism, with the associated costs related to these being passed on to the company. In addition to this, employees may also experience poor personal and co-worker relationships and reduced job satisfaction.

There are several ways in which companies can help to encourage a work life balance for their employees, both in the policies that they implement and in ensuring that managers actively

encourage employees to take advantage of these policies. Offering employees flexible working options helps employees design their work pattern to fit their personal commitments, ultimately reducing conflict between work and personal responsibilities. Flexible working options include allowing employees to work from home, adjust their working hours to meet personal commitments, use remote working, compressed work weeks, and job sharing. Managers should encourage staff to use annual leave and help employees to set boundaries by encouraging staff not respond to work related emails and calls during non-working hours. Some organizations are also implementing wellness programs, which include offering stress reduction and time management workshops, while others are creating wellness centers on the work site, helping to connect employees with physicians, mental health counselors, or on-site gyms.

An employee's satisfaction in their personal life and their ability to meet personal commitments greatly affects their success as a worker, which greatly benefits any company. Helping employees to achieve a good work life

balance increases work satisfaction, increases their loyalty to their employer, and helps employers to achieve career longevity. A company which recognizes these benefits and implements policies to promote a work life balance is one which will not only see an increase in the productivity of their workforce but which also sees increased retention of staff and reduction in costs associated with high turnover.

With this increasing industrialization and education, employment opportunities for women have also increased. Due to increasing economic conditions, it has become a necessity that both husband and wife need to work to have a normal life. In this fast growing and competitive world, as every possible opportunity for employment is increased, the organizations need to create a congenial atmosphere where employees can balance their professional and personal life. Only when an employer has a positive Work Life Balance (WLB) can be productive and give the best to the organization. Hence industries are working out schemes which can attract as well as retain their employees. A successful work-life balance helps in the attainment of personal goals. It helps in striking a balance between workplace, family and friends, community, hobbies, sleep and sport/exercise. If an organization integrates work-life balance, it will be a good tool to retain the employees and increase their quality of life. Today, work is widely viewed as a source of personal satisfaction. A good balance in work and life can play a phenomenal role in the attainment of personal and professional goals.

Genesis of Work-Life Conflict

With the gender divide bridged and gender stereotypes invalidated, work life conflict is emerging as one of the major distractions impacting employee efficiency. In days of yore when gender roles were implicitly defined, the male hunter provided for the family while

the gatherer woman stayed at home to tend the flock and warm the hearth. Advancement in technology triggered the transition of work from mechanical brawn-based to sophisticated brain based activity thereby breaking down barriers for entry of women into the workforce. With advancing technology we now see the last male bastion of soldiering also fall before woman power. A case in point is the US Navy opening its nuclear submarines to female crew members, and women in combat roles in the Canadian Army.

The flip side of the emancipation of women, however, has been its impact on the family. With both genders becoming 'hunters,' there is nobody at home to discharge the function of a fulltime wife. As a result, the home has pervaded the workplace and the phrase work-life conflict has gained currency. The symptoms have been further aggravated by the mobility of today's workforce and the resultant loss of extended family support structure. Add to that increasing instances of single parents and work-life conflict takes epidemic proportions.

Work-Life Conflict is, therefore, a clear and present danger and organizations that deny it do so at the peril of accepting suboptimal employee performance. Some organizations accept the existence of work-life conflict but dismiss it as a personal matter of the individual to juggle home and work. What they fail to appreciate is that the final impact will be felt on the organisational efficiency, productivity and suboptimal shareholder value.

Any organization that strives to be reckoned as 'a great place to work' needs to pay special attention to minimize and facilitate resolution work-life conflict of their employees. The challenge however is in knowing and doing things that facilitate and support work life balance without intruding into the personal lives of employees. The

HR department of such organizations is often stretched for creative solutions that are practical to implement, yet are effective in impact. Successful organizations in this space have taken work-life-balance to even higher levels by not merely restricting themselves to addressing domestic pressures on their employees but facilitating self actualization of these individuals.

Work Life Balance for Women Employees

Today's career women are continually challenged by the demands of full-time work and when the day is done at the office, they carry more of the responsibilities and commitments to home. The attitude of female workers has also changed. Women are growing more ambitious as they become key players in the world of work, contributing to major company successes. Majority of women work lives are a juggling act that included multiple responsibilities at work, heavy meeting schedules, and business trips, on top of managing the daily routine responsibilities of life at home. Traditionally the role of women used to be of cooking, cleaning etc. They were looked upon as a care giver or as home keeper and were denied access outside home. Today's women have made their mark in every field. Be it arts, literature, sports, corporate etc women are ready to take up challenges. People want to be able to have a good quality of life, an enjoyable work life and career progression, training and development, good health, affordable childcare or eldercare, further education, more money, time to travel, time with friends and family, time to do sports and hobbies.

Benefits of Work Life Balance

Many leading organizations in overseas countries such as IBM, Merrill Lynch, Pfizer and Accenture have introduced work-life programmes within their organizations to help their employees achieve an effective balance in their

work and family/personal life. These companies believe that it makes good business sense to provide such programmes to their employees due to the financial and non-monetary benefits that can be reaped.

In general, the implementation of family-friendly policies is associated with positive outcomes (Poelmans, 2001). Some of the benefits in the implementation of family friendly policies are associated with less work-family conflict (Goff, Mount & Jamison 1990), reduced turnover intention (Grover & Crooker, 1995) and reduced stress (Johnson, 1995). Efforts by managers to enhance organizational commitment are likely to have the additional benefit of helping workers cope better with the competing demands of work and family (Berg, Kalleberg & Appelbaum 2003).

In addition, many overseas studies have also shown that there is a symbiotic relationship between work and person/family life. It is understandable that employees who are able to effectively balance the demands of work and their personal/family life are motivated to give their best a work. In short, work-life strategy can align the corporate and individual goals to attain a win-win scenario for all by addressing the business needs of the organizations and the individual needs of the employees.

While the direct financial payback of Work-Life Programmes is difficult to quantify, there has been already ample research evidence gathered on experience of firms in reaping the intermediate benefits of Work-Life. These intermediate benefits, in turn, contribute to the better performance of companies. Major intermediate benefits are:

1. Reduced stress, absenteeism and health costs:

Employees today are generally more stressed which reduce performance levels. Absenteeism

due to family commitments and stress could be a major reason for low performance levels. Work-Life initiatives improve employee performance by reducing absenteeism, lateness, health care and sick-leave and hence their related costs. People who are free of worry about what is going on at home can be more productive at work.

2. Improved staff morale and engagement:

Work-Life helps employees lead a healthier and more balanced life by allowing them to better concentrate at work, improving the work environment by increasing motivation and job satisfaction. Other studies have shown that improved staff morale leads to more committed staff and better performance.

3. Improved customer satisfaction:

Better customer response is possible through telecommuting and the longer operating hours that can be arranged by giving employees flexibility. At the same time, more motivated employees who have their personal needs addressed are more likely to go the extra mile to keep customers happy. Turnover, and the subsequent need for re-establishment of relationship and rework, is also listed as a major factor contributing to the loss of customers.

4. Reduced costs:

Office rental and utilities savings due to telecommuting are the strongest quantitative researches to show the financial benefits of Work-Life Programmes.

5. Improved recruitment, retention and reduced turnover:

Work-Life initiatives give organisations a human face that

allows prospective employees to distinguish one employer from another. To attract employees and hold on to them, forward thinking companies are letting their employees know that they are just as concerned about their employees lives outside work and about helping them to manage their work and personal commitments and aspirations. Work-Life Programme's key advantage is therefore positive branding in recruitment and retention of talent. Employee referrals also increase.

Issues and challenges at workplace for Women

Finding an excellent explanation of work-life balance is challenging. Increase and generation define work-family balance, one type of work-life balance, as "the level to which an individual is able to concurrently balance the sequential, emotional, and behavioral difficulty of both remunerated work and family responsibilities." There are numerous challenges to work-life balance demanding to physicians' life. In tablets, people's life and happiness swing in the balance. Patients want to be seen in actual time in the office or hospital and hospitalized patients want to be minded for approximately the clock. Calming concern contributors are regularly organization-based and wanted to think about problems of employee link in the regularly small stages they are working with employees and families, where relationship building and link are essential. Employees, like many other professionals, are regularly likely to work 50 or more hours per week. Employees in academic product and productivity have mostly long work weeks.

HR Challenges in Balancing Work with Life

As organizations increasingly lean on the skills, knowledge and customer orientation of their employees to

gain competitive advantage, the HR departments are emphasizing more than ever before on employee motivation and measurement of parameters such as job involvement, job satisfaction and job engagement. It is being universally accepted that happy employees will be focused on their jobs leading to higher productivity and 'Great places to work' will attract and retain the best Human Capital and consequently maximize output. The entire arsenal of employee engagement initiatives ranging from lucrative compensation packages to employee-friendly policies and including periodic fun activities get deployed to ensure that employees love their work environment. It should therefore be a key management objective to insulate work from undue distractions and Work-Life-Conflict needs to be a key focus area.

Conclusion

For every organization, it is necessary to manage the work life balance for its employees. In fact, it requires the efforts from both the organization

and the individual employee. Every organization focuses on reducing the cost of products and maximizing the wealth which is only possible if the employees are satisfied. Satisfaction of employees depends upon how successfully they manage their work life and personal life. Thus, the application of work-life Balance strategies can help organizations in generating stress free environment for working people & therefore help organizations in the achievement of goals.

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