

14. Work-Life Balance: It's Causes and Consequences

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Abstract

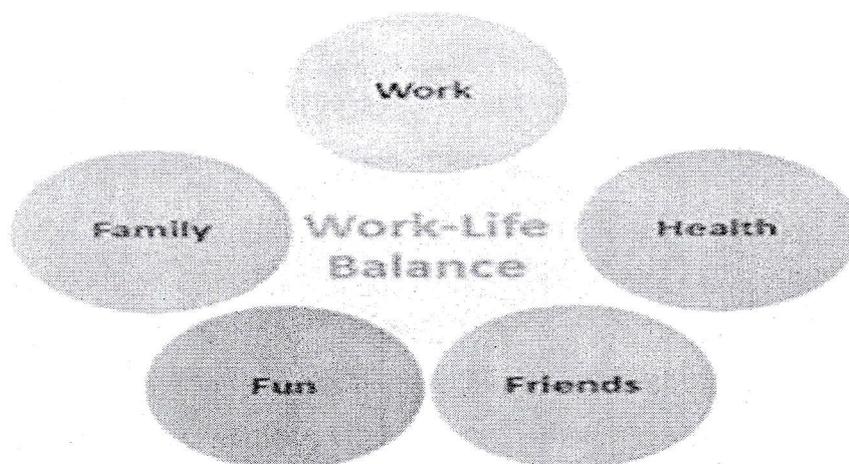
Work life balance is one of the key factors for the employees to achieve success. Extent to which one's perceived allocation of physical, mental, and emotional resources between the work and non-work domains matches one's expectations. Work Life Balance (WLB) promotes flexibility in performing work (work flexibility) and also it provides employees with sufficient non-work –related resources (eg: time, money). Organisations have devised various plans, policies, programs to help their employees to achieve the balance between their work commitments and family responsibilities. Certain policies are statutory while others are voluntarily implemented. The effectiveness of them depends on the extent of usage to the employees to achieve work life balance. The factors like overtime, travelling to work, meetings and training after the working hours impact the work life balance of the employees. Employee Work Life Balance (WLB) is a major driver in the organization that helps to achieve higher productivity. It is a healthy blend of both employee's work life and personal life. There are many factors influencing work-life balance of an employee in the organization.

Key words: Work life balance, work, life, work flexibility, employees, work commitment, organisation,

Introduction

Work-life balance was first anticipated by Johnson and Packer (1987) in their description of future changes in the work force Economic and work environment from the year 2000 and beyond. Work life balance is the interaction between the work and the other activities that includes family, community, leisure and personal development. It is about the right or the balanced combination of the individual's participation in the work and other aspects of their life and this combination doesn't remain the same it can be changed over the time. Work life balance is where the tensions between the work life and personal life is minimised by having a proper policies, systems, supportive management and provisions at work place and a good relations in personal life. Work-life balance is an important aspect of a healthy work environment.

Maintaining work-life balance helps reduce stress and helps burnout in the workplace. Work-Life Balance is the relationship between time and space of work & non-work in societies where income is predominantly generated and distributed through labor markets. Work-Life Balance is being aware of different demands on time and energy saving the ability to make choices in the allocation of time and energy knowing what values to apply.



Meaning of Work Life Balance

Work-life balance is the term used to describe the balance that an individual needs between time allocated for work and other aspects of life. Work-life balance refers to the level of prioritisation between personal and professional activities in an individual's life and the level to which activities related to their job are present in the home. It is careful synchronisation of an individual's varied pursuits that may include family, work, leisure, social obligations, health, career and spirituality.

The term work life balance (Work Life Balance) was coined in 1986 in 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 "family-work conflict" (FWC) and "work-family conflict" (WFC). The former is also referred to as work interferes with family" (WIF) while the latter is also known as "family interferes with work" (FIW). In other words, from the scarcity or zero-sum perspective, time devoted to work is construed as time taken away from one's family life.

Work life balance as an equation= mental resources + emotional resources + physical resources (including your time) =achieving your personal goals and fulfilling your responsibilities.

Objectives of the study

1. To study the importance and benefits of Work life Balance.
2. To study the causes of Work Life balance.
3. To study the consequences of work life imbalance
4. To study measures for improving work life balance.

Research methodology

The data for the research study is collected from the secondary sources. Use of e-journals, websites, e-books and personal observation method is done for the study purpose.

Scope and Importance of study

The issue is complex and difficult to tackle from an organization's perspective because it is different for every individual. The traditional definition of family is a husband who provides financial support, a wife who maintains the household. Cultural differences influence family decisions, and more and more families represent blended racial backgrounds but making work-life integration a way of corporate life is much more difficult. The change in workforce composition has been gradual, but steady.

1. **To maintain your mental health:** It's unfortunate that not all employers place enough importance on workplace. But the topic is really prevalent at the minute, as studies show the dangers and risks that could lead to a variety of issues, from stress-related illnesses to depression. Stress could be caused by a variety of things, from outrageous workloads (and no work-life balance) to simply not feeling valued for the hard work you do.
2. **To ensure your physical health and wellbeing:** As the old adage says: healthy body, healthy mind so a great way to maintain your mental health is to ensure that you are physically feeling healthy too. That includes regular exercise and eating healthy but also not overdoing it at work! Perhaps money can buy happiness in certain circumstances, but if you spend all of your time working or thinking about work then it's more than likely that it won't.
3. **It increases Productivity:** Studies reveal that those who maintain a steady work-life balance are much more productive than those who do not. A positive way of life automatically leads to amazing results. Become a more rounded Individual: If your life revolves around work, then you lose a lot of the other positive dimensions that make you

attractive to employers (and other people). Having interests outside of work will increase and improve your skills and make you a more rounded and interesting individual. You'll be able to share those experiences and knowledge with other people.

Causes of Work Life Imbalance

There are three moderators that are correlated with work-life imbalance are:

a) Gender b) Time spent at work c) family characteristics.

a) Gender differences: They could lead to a work-life imbalance due to the distinct perception of role identity. It has been demonstrated that men prioritize their work duties over their family duties to provide financial support for their families, whereas women prioritize their family life.

b) Spending long hours at work: Due to "inflexibility, shifting in work requirements, overtime or evening work duties" could lead to an imbalance between work and family duties. It has been demonstrated "that time spent at work positively correlate with both work interference with family and family interference with work, however, it was unrelated to cross-domain satisfaction" This could be due to the fact that satisfaction is a subjective measure. This being said, long hours could be interpreted positively or negatively depending on the individuals. Working long hours affect the family duties, but on the other side, there are financial benefits that accompany this action which negate the effect on family duties.

c) Family characteristics include single employers, married or cohabiting employers, parent employers, and dual-earning parents. Parents who are employed experience reduced family satisfaction due to their family duties or requirements. This is due to the fact that they are unable to successfully complete these family duties. In addition, parent workers value family-oriented activities; thus, working long hours reduces their ability to fulfil this identity, and, in return, reduces family satisfaction. As for the married and/ or dual-earning couples, it seems that "not only requires more time and effort at home but also is a resource for individuals to draw from, both instrumentally through higher income and emotionally through increased empathy and support."

d) Job Stress: In addition to these moderators that could lead to an imbalance, many people expose themselves to unsolicited job stress, because they enjoy high social recognition. This aspect can also be the cause of an imbalance in the areas of life. However, other occupational activities could also lead to such an imbalance, for example, unpaid labour such as

contribution to house and garden work, maintenance and support of family members or volunteer activities. All of these contribute to the perception of a chronic lack of time.

e) Lack of time: Lacking time leads to pressure, which is experienced differently based on the individual's age, the age and number of children in the household, marital status, the profession and level of employment and the income level. Strong pressure of time leads to increased psychological strain, which in turn affects health. Psychological strain is also affected by the complexity of work, the growing responsibilities, concerns for long-term existential protection and more. The mentioned stresses and strains could lead in the long term to irreversible, physical signs of wear as well as to negative effects on the human cardiovascular and immune systems.

f) Burden of excessive work: 67% of the respondents agree that they suffer from the burden of excessive work. Working women are often confronted with tasks involving children, home, in-laws, parents and their social circle. To add to this they must also take up multiple roles in their personal lives. With the increasing demands on the job, working women have to spend long hours of work and sometimes even carry their work home. Therefore majority of them are burdened with excessive work in both their personal and work spaces. This is a contributing factor to work life imbalance and may lead to conflict.

g) Interference of work with family life: Majority of the respondents agreed that work interfered with family life. This may be attributed to the fact that mostly work hours are not limited to 7 or 8 hours a day and the private sector employees spend 12-16 hours at work. This leaves them with very little time for family. As more than one half of the respondents are employed in the private sector, there may be interference of work with family life due to long hours spent in completing official work.

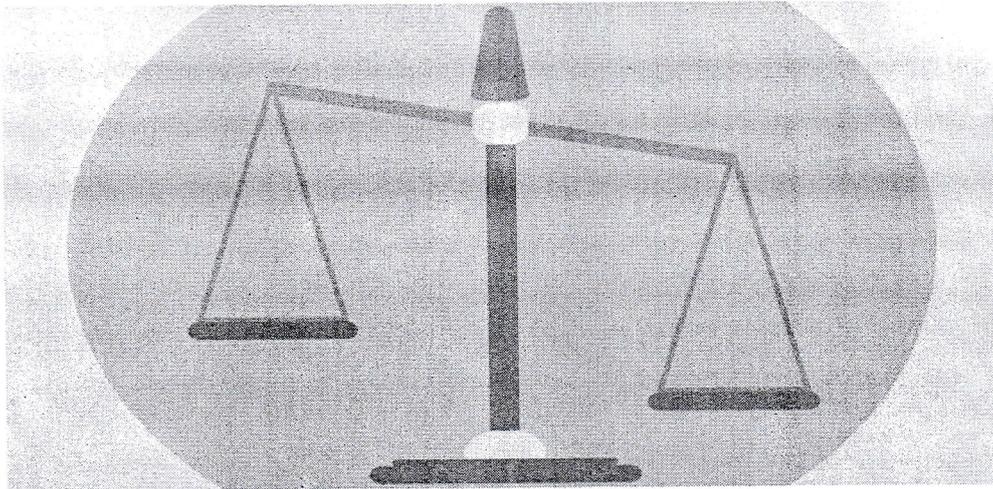
Consequences of Work Life Balance

This study states that if work life is not balanced properly it may lead to various serious consequences. The following are the various consequences of Work Life Balance.

- **Fatigue:** If you are over tired it reduces your ability to work productively and think clearly. This can take a toll on your professional reputation.
- **Health:** Long working hours can cause stress which may have adverse effects on one's immune system. Stress also puts one at risk of substance abuse.

- **No time for Family:** Working long hours or overtime might make you miss important family moments and events. This can leave you feeling left out and damage your relationships.
- **Increased Expectations:** Working extra hours might lead to you taking on extra responsibility. This can cause extra stress and challenges that one will have a really hard time facing.
- **Unethical Practices:** To handle the stress in the organisation and the family-related issues as well, employees tend to adopt unethical practices like boozing, smoking, drugs, improper relations, etc. Also there is a high probability that employees may resort to unfair means to get their work done ultimately by hook or crook.
- **Disturbed Families** -The worst hit people in the entire scenario are the families of the employees. Fighting with time to achieve the organizational targets, family is often overlooked. The number of broken families has gone up drastically. If the reasons are carefully observed, they are simple but affect the psychological being of the individual.
- **Decreased Performance** -Employees in the organization are never at peace. When they are at workplace, the personal issues are a concern and when they are at home, the professional issues are a concern. They try to balance both but in vain if there is no organizational support. Unknowingly, the employees get into a frustrated mode and cannot give their best to their profession.
- **Organization in Jeopardy** -It all starts with stress and ultimately the employee ability and performance is at crossroads. The output of this situation may be that the organization may not achieve its goals or the employee is no longer satisfied with the organization. In either case, the entire organization is in jeopardy. The role of HR in achieving work-life balance HR Managers therefore, need to take a strategic approach to the whole issue of work/life balance.
- **Hangover**-Working for long hours in the office, increases employee interaction. Like "Alice in Wonderland" employees tend to stay in their professional world (mentally) though they are physically at home. Not only this, the effect of professional anger is also carried on to their personal life. For example, if there is a conflict in the organization, the irritated behavior of the individual may reflect in the family thereby igniting many negative effects in the family.

Measure for improving work life imbalance



- Give employees information about what a healthy work-life balance should look like, the importance of ensuring you have this balance and how to achieve it.
- Allowing employees to work from home, instead of having to come into the office. If this is not suitable for your company or you have concerns, consider allowing employees to work from home one day a week, for example.
- Provide flexible working hours, for example, an employee must work a certain number of hours each week, but it is up to the employee how and when they work these hours throughout the week.
- Placing a restriction on work hours, for example, not allowing employees to work past a certain time or over a specific number of hours in a week. Some companies will even have a feature on their emails preventing new email from coming into the inbox during out-of-work hours.
- Focus on employee productivity instead of hours worked, for example, instead of making your staff work for eight hours, simply asks them to stay until the job is done.
- Make sure that employees all take regular breaks and follow the health and safety guidelines regarding breaks from computers etc. Even a short break will help an employee to feel replenished and more relaxed, while also giving them time to catch up on messages from family and friends.
- Look at the business and make sure that the company isn't putting too much work on the staff, make sure there are enough staff to share the workload and that you have reasonable expectations. Here it is a good idea to familiarise yourself with some of the

processes the staff members must go through, what may appear to be a five-minute job to management may be much lengthier

- Ensure management and supervisors also enjoy a healthy work-life balance, this will show employees that it is acceptable and will not be frowned upon.
- Give employees time off for things like charity or volunteer work, this will not only reflect positively on the company, but it will also give staff a feeling of satisfaction from helping others.
- Think about how much holiday time you give your employees and whether you can give them a few more days off each.
- For parents, look at what you can do to help with childcare costs. For example, a salary sacrifice arrangement for childcare vouchers will allow employees to take advantage of tax savings and reduce their childcare bill. Also, providing enhanced and equal benefits for maternity/paternity/shared parental leave will encourage all parents to balance their working life and parenthood regardless of their gender.
- Look at implementing a Health Cash plan, this will not only provide support for staff when they are unwell but also encourage a more pro-active approach to things like health checks ups, leading to fewer staff absences
- Provide additional services that you think might save your employee time and money and reduce their stress, for example:
 - A discount for a launderette/ dry cleaner
 - Free or discounted lunches and snacks
 - Gym/fitness classes
 - Massage/spa discounts/vouchers
 - Car support, including petrol allowance, repairs and maintenance allowance/discounts and car cleaning services discounts or vouchers.
 - Tax support, providing staff help with any tax concerns, or with filing tax returns etc.

Conclusions

Thus from the above study it can be concluded that managing work life balance in today's world is not impossible. Different measures can be used for improving work life balance. Once work-life balance has been defined and all its aspects analyzed, some

conclusions can be drawn. First of all, work-life balance is not a “one-size-fits-all” type of trend; rather it is a trend which is viewed differently by everyone because people have a unique perception of their achievements and enjoyments. Also, work-life balance is changing on a daily basis, and there is no universal formula on how to achieve a perfect balance between work and life. Rather, the work-life balance is focused more on how to achieve something in order to enjoy something. Work-life balance is all about providing employees with more flexibility when it comes to their working hours. Employees became able to manage their time working and ‘living’ which eventually results in greater productivity. There are different types of managing working hours and those are: compressed workweek, flextime, job-sharing, telecommuting and two-in-a-box. Even though, there are many benefits of work-life balance, there are few challenges that both employees and employers face. For example, employees deal with a so called work-life conflict which refers to an unbalanced time spent working and time spent for personal activities with family and friends. On the other hand, an organization or an employer has to deal with an issue of absence of employees.

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