

Work-life balance: Challenges

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Abstract

The term work-life balance implies the balance between times allocated for work versus time allocated for personal needs. Employees having greater satisfaction in life or job behave in a most favorable way as compared to an unsatisfied person; it may be at work or at home, and it leads to better productivity. Today's organizations understand this and taking a lot of measures to balance work-life balance, viz. a flexible working hour, work from home, professional development initiatives etc. Merely offering such benefits is not adequate to deal with work-life balance; it can be achieved through management commitment towards its effective implementation and maintaining a healthy organizational culture. This conceptual paper on work-life balance will give rays on the challenges in maintaining a healthy work-life balance in an organization. It will highlight the factors indicating poor work-life balance and give suggestions to improve the work-life balance of employees.

Keywords: Work-Life Balance, Stress Management, Employee Turnover, Time Management.

1. Introduction

When an individual lives a life inside and outside paid work that is respected and accepted by norms, and to the benefit of individual, organization, and society can be called as a satisfactory work-life balance ^[1]. Work-life balance not only depends on the working condition but also on personal circumstances, viz. spouse's working hour, number of dependants, children or old parents, etc. A recent survey of University staffs globally, held between October and November 2017, by Times Higher Education, revealed that majority of the employees are overworked and underpaid ^[2]. Work-life balance is reflecting in academic and policy debate as rising female participation in work, and also because of a rise in a combination of work and caring roles

Evaluation of the Concept :

The concept of working culture is changing continuously and in an uneven pattern of flux. There are very few documents to justify the working pattern before the Industrial Revolution.

Industrial Age is considered as the period from 1760 to 1840, changes in organizational culture began around 1760 characterized by replacement of hand tools with power-driven machines. ^[3]

World's first labor party "working man's party" was established in 1828. ^[4] The labor unions were developed to help workers in work-related issues like unfair wages, unsafe working condition, long working hour and employee management relation.

The concept of scientific management or classical management theory came into the picture in early 1990; emphasis was to in-

crease workers participation. ^[5] The key principles of classical theory includes: The management shall develop methods of doing each job. Selection of worker shall be based on their skills and abilities and work shall be scheduled in such a manner to eliminate interruptions. Incentives shall be provided to enhance productivity.

Democracy comes into the workplace in 1970's equal opportunity for both the sexes begin to arise. TQM was a big trend since 1980's; efforts were made to make work meaningful. Downsizing trends observed after 1990 with loss of loyalty to the organization. In 2000's we are questioning about "we live to work or work to live."

WORK-LIFE CONFLICT:

The conflict arises due to the incompatibility of work interface with family demand. The consequences of work-life conflict may be broadly categorized into three types ^[6].

1. Work-related outcomes: Absenteeism, performance, job satisfaction, turnover etc.
2. Non-work related outcomes: Marital, leisure, life situations, and family issues, and
3. Stress-related outcomes: Physical health, depression, work and family stress.

Recognizing Poor Work-Life Balance

Some of the key indicators of poor work-life balance include declining productivity; an employee engaged in excess overtime, the rate of absenteeism is high, high level of stress among employees, and employee turnover. Every organization is able to recognize issues pertaining to work-life balance, but due to some or other

reason, they neglect in short run as it has no immediate impact on the overall productivity of the organization.

Employee Turnover: According to Hay Group, the global management consulting firm, more than one in four employees (27%) will leave the organization within next two year ^[7]. The same study also revealed that 39% of employees didn't have a good balance between work and personal life. If the employee turnover shall be reduced to 10% for an organization having 10,000 employees, the organization can save \$17.5million per year, considering an average salary of \$35000.

Absenteeism: Organization with a higher level of absenteeism or sickness is a factor of poor work-life balance. According to a survey, a limited portion of unscheduled leave (34 percent) is for personal illness, other reasons include family issue (22 percent), personal needs (18 percent), stress and the entitlement rationale (13 percent) ^[8].

Stress: Survey by American Psychological Association says that 75-90% footfalls to hospitals are stress related ^[9]. Seventy percent managers think that work-related stress has a negative effect on personal life. As per British Heart Foundation, the chance of heart-related diseases due to stressful jobs is more than 70 percent in women and 50 percent in men.

Dealing with Work-Life Balance Challenges

Irrespective of nature of the job at work and life the challenges are different for different individuals, it may be because of various constraints viz., total working hour, a number of kids at home, old parents at home, age, sex and income level. Dealing with each aspect may be different but some common factors can be discussed that is ideal for everyone.

Work flexibility: Flexibility is not always mean variation in time and place of the job but also includes sharing of work, career breaks (longer leave), part-time working ^[10]. The flexible working hour is beneficial for employees and employers, greater employee productivity and higher organizations profit ^[11]. Flexibility can be in scheduling, in the location of work, in length of the work ^[12]. The different flexible arrangements can be used individually or combined ^[13]. An employer can opt for a flexible working hour to attract, recruit and retain highly skilled employees to the organization ^[14]. The flexible working hour has a different perception of men and women. A man finds flexibility as a way to fulfil the organizational commitment, while a woman utilizes flexible working hour to serve her family and for the demand of motherhood ^[15].

Organizational Climate: The way individuals represent their experience and explain about the workplace is an indicator of organizational climate ^[16]. There are six major dimensions of organizational climate viz. Clarity, Standards, Responsibility, Flexibility, Rewards, and Team Commitment ^[17] as specified in Table.1 below:

Table.1 six dimensions of climate

Dimension	Implies
Clarity	Knowledge of management expectations, and how those expectations are related to organizations goal.
Standard	The acceptable norms towards the attainment of objectives.
Responsibility	Feeling that you have authority delegated to you
Flexibility	Easily acceptance of new ideas.
Rewards	Recognition for good works.
Team Commitment	Feeling that everyone is working towards a common objective.

A positive climate motivates employees and increase productivity and decrease employee turnover [18].



Figure.1 The Impact of Organization Climate on Performance.

Positive and Negative Stress: Stress can impact your work life balance positively or negatively depends on its degree. High stress can reduce the performance whereas calculated stress can be proved to be a positive force. Calculated stress can stimulate the actions of the individuals to help to increase focus on work, therefore there is an optimal point on every stress curve as specified in Figure 2.

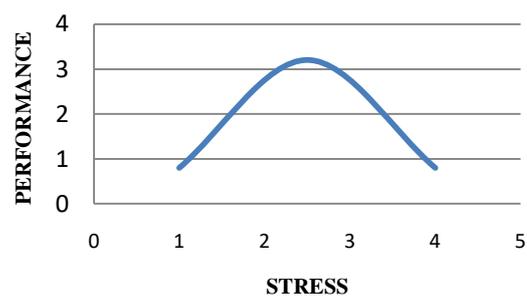


Fig.2 Stress Curve

Continuous human resource planning and utilization of employees are required to ensure parallel load among employees.

Time Management: If we classify our time into prime and nonprime time, only 20% of our time will fall in the bucket of prime time ^[19]. This 20% of our time produce the most creative and productive output. The rest nonprime time produces work of lower quality. Most creative and difficult task shall be prioritized in such a way that it will be executed in prime time. Most people suffer from imbalanced work life is because of inability in prioritizing of work; whether they are at the workplace or at home.

Personal or professional development: Balance can be achieved with experience; it is easier to accomplish with supports at the workplace, at home, and with some self-discipline measures. Professional development initiatives at workplace help employees to understand the key issues in work-life balance. Employers who understand this issue take strategic measures for grooming professionals and can build a productive workforce, healthy community and a strong economy.

Use of technology: With technological advancement, we are always accessible and work remotely. We are becoming more efficient. When technology has a greater advantage in term of productivity, it has disadvantages too. According to a survey by workplace trends 65% employees say that their superior expects them to be reachable outside the office ^[20]. According to another survey by Accenture, 77% of professionals believe technology enables employees to be more flexible in their work schedule ^[21].

Conclusion

Everyone gets benefited with the positive impact of good practices in work-life balance. Business will evidence improvement in employee retention, better service delivery, increase in production, low employee turnover. An individual can give adequate time for their family and can work in good spirit without negative stress. To attain work-life balance organization shall promote a healthy work culture inside the organization. Sometimes employees fail to maintain work-life balance because they are not aware of the root cause, employees practice poor work-life balance due to lack of awareness. Building an organizational culture that supports work-life balance is a long-term process and involve a change in work culture. It involves a shift in how people think about their work and their personal life, they understand the value of prime and nonprime time and plan their schedule accordingly.

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