



HR Interventions for Work Life Balance

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Abstract:

The Typical 1960s – 70s employee's workplace and hours were clearly specified, which is no longer true for a large segment of today's workforce. The major complain of today's workforce is the blurring of line between work and non work time, which creates personal conflict and stress. This is the era of a major shift in the technology, which leads the organizations towards the shift in the workplace. Before several decades employees showed up at work Monday through Saturday and did his or her job in eight or nine hours chunks, but today communication technology has let workplace invade their home, bedrooms and even social functions Addition to that due to globalization, the organizations are asking employees to put in longer hours. It is unusual for employees to work more than 45 hour a week, and some work much more than 50. Finally today's married employee is typically part of a dual-career couple, which makes it difficult for married employees to find the time to fulfill commitments to home, spouse, children, parents and friends. Employees increasingly recognize that work is squeezing out their personal lives. Recent studies suggest that employees want jobs that offer flexibility in their work schedules so that they can manage their work life conflict. Here through this paper I would enlighten some factors responsible for blurring the lines between employee work and personal lives. Our paper identifies the factors responsible for work/life conflicts and their effects. Our study also suggest some solutions to deal with these problem by having evidence from the organizations in India.

Keywords: *Work family Conflict, Work time, Work/Life Balancing, Workculture*

1. Introduction

Over the decades, the nature of benefits has changed drastically. Benefits offered in the early 1900s clearly differed from those offered today. The first personnel departments emphasized keeping workers 'Happy And Healthy', which made them responsible for administering the benefits like scheduled vacations, company picnics, and other social activities for workers. Later, around the late 1930s, the practice emerged of having employees complete a sign up card for some type of health insurance but unfortunately those days are long gone too. Federal legislation, labor unions and the changing workforce have all led to growth in benefit offerings. Today's organizational benefits are more widespread, more creative, and clearly more abundant and are designed to ensure value for each worker. Globalization demands competitiveness of the organizations and to remain competitive, the company need to attract highly qualified and talented employees. To do that, the companies have to offer what employees want. Just providing the higher salary cannot be the point of attracting the quality candidates but the companies has to provide other social benefits for their proper work and life balance. For example, recent studies suggest that employees want jobs that offer flexibility in work schedules. In addition, the next generation of employees is likely to have similar concern. A majority of university and college

students say that attaining a balance between personal life and work is a primary career goal. They want “a life” as well as a job! Organizations that fail to help their people achieve work/life balance will find it increasingly hard to attract and retain the most capable and motivated employees.

Even the highest of salaries and the most promising career opportunities are of little use if your private life suffers as a result of too much work. Nowadays, when applicants decide on where to work, one major consideration is whether companies encourage their employees to focus on their working and family life in equal measure.

Today work-life balance has become an increasingly pervasive concern for employers as well as employees and when work and life balance, everyone wins. Demographic changes as seen in the increasing number of women in the workplace and dual career families have generated an increasingly diverse workforce and a greater need of employees to balance their work and non-work lives. The researchers say that 1. The healthcare expenses are almost 50 % higher who report high level of stress, 2. People who experience work/life imbalance are three times more likely to suffer from heart problems, infections, injuries, mental health problems and back pain, and five times more likely to suffer from certain cancers, 3. Workers who have to take time off work because of stress, anxiety or a related disorder will be off the job for about 20 days

Work life balancing programs start with Growth of the welfare provisions. Government mandated welfare provisions as prescribed by labour legislations focuses on the facilitating factors to balance the work and life. But this is the high time to go beyond welfare provisions. This is the time to shift our focus from employee friendly to family friendly.

2. The Effects of Work-Life Conflict

Work life balance is one of the most important social policy issues in today's 'knowledge society'. Work-life balance is an issue for both parents . No employees can innovate, prevent mistakes and absences if there are problems in his personal life-may be child sick or parents hospitalized. With nuclear families increasing – this issue is getting critical, wherein both parents are working and how to take care of children and elders. There are numerous houses in India wherein a child is likely to be without an adult. Just watching movies, hanging on with video games will definitely lead to behaviour problems in future. NO one wants to put future generations in such conditions. Long work hours and highly stressful jobs not only hamper employees' ability to harmonize work and family life but also are associated with health risks, such as increased smoking and alcohol consumption, weight gain and depression. Work life conflict has been associated with numerous physical and mental health implications.

A recent global economic indicator survey conducted by Regus Group revealed significant increase of work-related stress during last two years in most of the countries. The highest increase was recorded where about 86% employees reported a rise in stress. On the other hand, Netherlands recorded the least but still 47%.India ranked comparatively higher, as 57% of its workers said stress increased. Also, occupational stress induced diseases could total a staggering loss of \$200 bn [approx. Rs 7,800tn] in next ten years.

3. Problems & Solutions

3.1 Working time and place

Before several decades, the workplace and hours were clearly specified. But today due to creation of global organization and communication technologies, employees work at any time and on any day, in fact many employees of global firms are “on call” 24 hours a day. Nowadays employers are in the habit of cutting costs. Flexi time is one such work-life balance practice that does not add

any cost to the employers but moreover it adds many benefits to the bottom line like improved retention, increased performance apart from reduction of employee stress.

Shell being one of the multinational companies believes and practices employee diversity and work-life balance. Employees are given options such as flexitime and work from home. Employees' perception about work-life balance is assessed every year in their Annual Global People Survey to see where the company stands and what should they do to help employees achieve a healthy work-life balance. It advocates video or teleconferences to reduce business related travel. It also organises midweek meetings to avoid weekend travel. It discourages overtime work and taking work home on weekends. Personal leaves cannot be carried over to next year and are not encashable so that employees will use personal leaves for self and family. These practices show the organization's concern for employee work-life balance.

3.2 Gender related problems in working time

Today's married employee is typically part of a '**Dual-Career Couple**', which makes it difficult for married employees to find the time to fulfill commitments to home, spouse, children, parents and friends. In the countries where the family care is still provided by women, work life balancing is at utmost priority. Rather the global companies concern with the higher and higher productivity, work and life always should be reflected together because of the closed dependency between the productive and the reproductive sphere. The assumption here is that societal development depends basically on social reproduction which means upbringing children, sociality, education, creation of cultural goods and much more.

The part time or the flexible working time can be one of the solutions to deal with such gender related issues and can be favorable both to the businesses as well as employees. It also can be a great tool to attract the qualified and competent female employees.

Infosys have launched "**Infosys Women's Inclusivity Network (IWIN)**" in 2003 to create a gender sensitive and inclusive work environment in the company. This network addresses the work/life balance and the developmental needs of their women employees. A special mentoring programme for women was launched in 2008.

3.2.1 Child Care

Employees' difficulties with childcare can undermine the competitive edge and success of organizations. Also child-care costs create labor market barriers for parents who want or need work. Finding available, affordable and high quality child care is a major concern for working parents. Employer supported child care refers to various strategies-onsite and offsite, emergency/backup care, subsidies and vouchers, resource and referral-offered to assist employees with their child care needs. Diverse strategies provide different benefits for employees. Employer-supported child care is an important business issue at intel; employer-sponsored child care is a win-win situation. It is good for their children who benefit easily from accessible, high quality care. For every dollar spend on child care three dollars are saved in absenteeism, turnover and work disruption caused by child care problems. Our programs not only help intel employees but also communities where they operate. Providing child care is one of the intel's ways to make it a great place to work at.

Infosys created "**Family Network Matters**" in 2008 to help employees with parenting and work/life balancing issues. Employees are given online expert counseling and provided referral services for daycare and information on schools for their children. The annual Petit Infoscion Day recognizes children of employees who have exhibited commendable performance in the area of academia and extracurricular activities.

3.2.2 Organizational Culture

It has been argued that the success of work life balancing programmes generally depends on the culture of the organization. Ultimately the management plays an important role in making all implicit or explicit choices regarding the adoption of workplaces practices, which make them enable to encourage or discourage employees efforts to balance their work and family lives. As the supportive management culture encourage the employees to take the benefits of such work/life balancing programs, the fear of negative consequences can discourage the employees to take the benefits out of it. The supportive culture alone is enough for grabbing the talented employees in the organization.

The TATA groups, the oldest and largest business conglomerates, known as most people focused company by having high rates in all the welfare parameters. To manage the workforce diversity, the initiatives are tailored to balance their work and life conflicts. They provide education programmes and education for family planning to their illiterate employees. To support their female employees they provide crèches facility. By providing the facilities of flexi-timings and by encouraging the formation of the program “Maitree” for the spouses of employees, TATA has develop the supportive culture for bringing the families of the employees together.

4. Individual Approach in Achieving Work-Life Balance

- **Keep a Log:** try and note all you work and activities for the week including working and non working activities. List out your priorities and tasks you like most. Discuss this with your employer.
- **Learn to say “no”:** Saying no is an art. Master this art by practicing it everyday and doing activities which you are capable of. Don’t carry the guilt of saying no, no man can manage everything, and it will provide you with time to do activities of your liking
- **Leave work at work:** Technology has invaded the drawing rooms and bedrooms of people as there are no boundaries. Turn your work mobile and laptops off. If to pick up the phone is required ask if you can talk tomorrow about it.
- **Manage your time:** organize household tasks efficiently. Its no point making a mess than tidying it up. Prepare a weekly calendar for household tasks to avoid panic.
- **Rethink your cleaning standards:** an unmade bed or sink of dirty dishes wont impact the quality of your life. Let go the urge of cleaning by self.
- **Nuture yourself:** Develop a hobby, walking, listening to music, reading. Pamper and spoil yourself after the hectic day.
- **Set aside one night each week for recreation:** Discover the activities you can do with your partner, family or friends. Make time for activities you enjoy, it will help rejuvenate you.
- **Protect your day off:** Try and relax at weekend by doing little work more on weekdays.
- **Sleep:** Never cut down your sleep. There is nothing more dangerous, stressful and harmful to your health and productivity by cutting your sleep.
- **Seek Help:** Don’t forget to ask help from doctors, psychologists, counselors or friends assistance whenever needed. Share your stress, hardship with your friends, family or partner who ever you feel comfortable with.

Creating work-life balance is not one shot deal but continuous, ongoing process to be practiced everyday till you master it.

5. Employers approach to work-life balance

- **Part Time:** not very popular in India but in foreign countries, where a person can take advantage of working lesser hours a week, so reduced work load and job responsibilities. Women with kids can avail this opportunity by working at time the kids are at school.

- Flexi time: Employers can provide “core hours” when an employee should be present and work around different start and finish times. They can also help increasing the time by few hours so that an extra day off can be provided at the weekend.
- Job Sharing: Again not popular in India. An employee can work for hours he is comfortable with and share the job with person for other hours comfortable to him. They can adjust time mutually.
- Working from home: this option is for normally software companies wherein employee can take work home and finish it. If somebody in your family is unwell, or you want a change this option is used.

The Economic Times and Great Place to Work Institute joined hands to find out the best workplaces; companies that cared for its employees and vice-versa. More than 500 companies signed up for this year's survey, of which 471 met the strict eligibility criteria. According to this survey Google, Intel technology and Makmytrip are the best companies to work. Following are some other organisations providing work life balancing programmes.

5.1 CLP India

Today, CLP is one of the largest foreign private power players and the biggest investor in the wind power sector in India. Whilst recognizing that different views individuals would have a different mix of an ideal work-life balance, CLP is committed to helping staff to maintain that balance, through reasonable contractual working hours and vacation entitlements, monitoring overtime to ensure that it is not excessive, and introducing flexible working hours where practicable. Reflecting the diverse cultures CLP introduces different programmes in different locations to support work-life balance.

For example:

- In China and India, CLP celebrates the local festivals to engage more closely with staff and their families
- In Australia and Hong Kong, CLP provide 5-day work week, flexi-hours and family leave to recognize commitments. They have also launched a number of initiatives, such as Workplace Stretching, Fitness/Health Management, Stop Smoking and a Healthy Diet, to encourage their employees to adopt a healthy lifestyle
- They have organized social, recreational and sports activities to provide after-work relaxation for employees and their families
- In Hong Kong, Australia and India, they offer confidential Employee Assistance Programme with professional counseling service to help employees address personal or work-related concerns

CLP has received significant external recognition for their ongoing commitment to work-life balance in Hong Kong, including:

- Asian Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Awards 2008 - CLP Quality Work Life (QWL) Programme - Building "a happy, healthy, committed and productive workforce"
- 2007 Hong Kong HR awards - Best Flexible Work Practices
- 2007 Hong Kong HR awards - Best Workplace Health Practices
- Total Caring Award 2006/2007

5.2 ITC India

ITC Infotech, Bangalore is India's first IT company to receive the prestigious Social Accountability [SA] 8000:2008 certificate. SA 8000 is widely accepted as the most viable and comprehensive international work place management system. This is yet another significant step

in their journey towards excellence and reflects our deep commitment to adopting global best practices at the work place. We believe in fostering a culture of work-life balance. So, employees are encouraged to participate in various recreational activities. To achieve this objective, a series of initiatives including but not limited to the following, have been put in place:

Fun activities like Cricket Tournament, music, dance and sports committees. Cultural Activities like Foundation Day, Talent Appreciation Nights, Summer camps for employee's children and Recreational Facilities like Gymnasium, squash court and billiards room.

ITC Infotech does not unlawfully discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, (including pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions) national origin, ancestry, age, medical condition, physical disability, mental disability, family care status, veteran status, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetics information, or any other basis prohibited by law. Gender inclusivity is taken care of by providing maternity benefits, late night transportation, round the clock security and many more. They try to enhance equal opportunities for men and women, and prevent/stop/redress sexual harassment at the workplace.

5.3 IBM India

Workforce flexibility is the global initiative to help IBMers to balance their working and personal life. With the vision to give well balanced working and personal life IBM is providing five flexible work options. 1) individualised work schedule 2) leave of absence 3) part time reduced work schedule 4) mobile/telecommuter 5) work at home.

IBM is providing flexibility in employees working hours and working place. The company is interested in getting the work done not concern with how, when and where their work gets done. Addressing 'dependant care' requirement is another key focus to enhance work force flexibility among IBMers. World wide IBM has launched a \$50 million Global Work/Life Fund (GWLF) to address strategic work/life challenges for IBMers worldwide, focusing on dependent care. In India IBM has a host of GWLF projects launched to support employees: workign to upskill employees' management of in- home care, parenting workshops for employees, holiday camps for employees' kids, creche locator services in multiple IBM locations, and the like.

6. Conclusion

As socio demographic and economic changes demands healthy work/life balance, the employers of today's organizations are pressurized to look beyond welfare practices. In spite of creating healthier, productive and motivated workforce and reducing work/life conflicts, many organizations in India have no stated formal work/life balancing programs. In Indian organizations, there is a long way to see the work/life balancing program as strategic initiatives.

Today's workplace was designed for males, as it was a male dominant society. The current scenario where women needs to equally participate in earning, its organizations responsibility to change its culture. The culture which supports and integrates work and family for harmonious living. So, Work life balance should be considered as a corporate social responsibility needing immediate attention.

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