A Conceptual Study of Work Life Balance Among Employees

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Abstract:
In a society filled with conflicting responsibilities and commitments, work/life balance has become a predominant issue in the workplace. The balance between employees' lives as workers and their lives as family or community members is a topic that has received so much attention in recent years, both locally and internationally. Striking the right balance between work and life has become increasingly important to the organizations especially in attracting and retaining talent. This trend has increased due to increase in numbers of women in paid work, an ageing workforce, skill shortages and an increasingly mobile workforce. As the job market becomes more dynamic, businesses wanting to retain and hire top talent cannot afford to ignore the value that a reputation for affording a good work-life balance can bring. This initiative was aimed at encouraging employers to adopt flexible working arrangements such as job sharing, flexi-time, compressed hours and others, to help their employees to achieve a better balance between the demands of paid employment and those arising from their private life.

1. Introduction

The concept of work-life balance is based on the notion that paid work and personal life should be seen less as competing priorities than as complementary elements of a full life. The way to achieve this is to adopt an approach that is "conceptualized as a two way process involving a consideration of the needs of employees as well as those of employers" (Lewis, 2000: p.105). In order to engage employers in this process it is important to demonstrate the benefits that can be derived from employment policies and practices that support work-life balance, and the scope that exists for mitigating their negative effects on the management of the business. Work/Life Balance is a state of equilibrium in which the demands of both a person's job and personal life are equal. The term "work/life balance" was coined in 1986, although its usage in everyday language was sporadic for a number of years. Interestingly, work/life programs existed as early as the 1930s. Before World War II, the W.K. Kellogg Company created four six-hour shifts to replace the traditional three daily eight-hour shifts, and the new shifts resulted in increased employee morale and efficiency. Rosabeth Moss Kanter's seminal book (1977), In the 1980s and 1990s, companies began to offer work/life programs. While the first wave of these programs was primarily to support women with children, today's work/life programs are less gender-specific and recognize other commitments as well as those of the family. Employees in global communities also want flexibility and control over their work and personal lives. We live in

stressful times, and each of us deals with stress every day. A work/life balance survey conducted in 2002 by True Careers states that 70% of more than 1,500 respondents said they don't have a healthy balance between their personal and work lives. Increasing levels of stress can rapidly lead to low employee morale, poor productivity, and decreasing job satisfaction. Some of the specific symptoms that relate directly to productivity in the work environment are abuse of sick time, cheating, chronic absenteeism, distrust, embezzlement, organizational sabotage, tardiness, task avoidance, and violence in the workplace. Other serious repercussions are depression, alcohol and drug abuse, marital and financial problems, compulsive eating disorders, and employee burnout.

Work–life balance is a concept including proper prioritizing between "work" (career and ambition) and "lifestyle" (health, pleasure, leisure, family and spiritual development/meditation). Related, though broader, terms include "lifestyle calm balance" and "lifestyle choices".
Most recently, there has been a shift in the workplace as a result of advances in technology. As Bowswell and Olson-Buchanan stated, "increasingly sophisticated and affordable technologies have made it more feasible for employees to keep contact with work". Employees have many methods, such as emails, computers, and cell phones, which enable them to accomplish their work beyond the physical boundaries of their office. Employees may respond to an email or a voice mail after-hours or during the weekend, typically while not officially "on the job".

2. Status of work life balance in India
More business people in India declare that their work-life balance has improved, according to the Regus Work-Life Balance Index. Despite working harder than ever before, people are enjoying their jobs more, and the majority feels that they have enough time to spend at home or on personal pursuits. The Index calibrates job satisfaction indicators and respondents' views on their overall work-life balance with data on real-life practice such as working hours and commuting from a global survey of over 16,000 professionals in more than 80 countries. It registered a 15% rise in Indian work-life balance between 2010 and 2012.Key findings are: More than half of workers enjoy work more (80%) and are satisfied with the amount of time they spend at home or on personal pursuits (59%), a vast majority of workers (84%) state that they achieve more at work than in 2010 confirming the connection between a good work-life balance and productivity, and mo re than half (57%) of respondents say that businesses have tried to shorten employee commute times acknowledging the strain a lengthy journey in and out of work can have. A good work-life balance is essential for staff to live a healthy and happy life, but this index breaks new ground in showing that it is also necessary for business growth. This survey finally provides firm evidence connecting productivity with a better, more flexible lifestyle and sounds a call for all businesses to urgently look at their own working practices. (http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-08-26/mumbai/33401662_1_work-life-balance-business-growth-workers-report)

3. The component of work life balance
3.1 Self-Management
sufficiently managing one's self can be challenging, particularly in getting proper sleep, exercise, and nutrition. Self-management is the recognition that effectively using the spaces in our lives is vital, and that available resources, time, and life are finite. It means becoming captain of our own ship; no one is coming to steer for us.

3.2 Time Management
Effective time management involves making optimal use of your day and the supporting resources that can be summoned – you keep pace when your resources match your challenges. Time management is enhanced through appropriate goals and discerning what is both important

and urgent, versus important or urgent. It entails knowing what you do best and when, and assembling the appropriate tools to accomplish specific tasks.

3.3 Stress Management
By nature, societies tend to become more complex over time. In the face of increasing complexity, stress on the individual is inevitable. More people, distractions, and noise require each of us to become adept at maintaining tranquility and working ourselves out of pressure-filled situations. Most forms of multi-tasking ultimately increase our stress.

3.4 Change Management
In our fast-paced world, change is virtually the only constant. Continually adopting new methods and re-adapting others is vital to a successful career and a happy home life. Effective change management involves making periodic and concerted efforts to ensure that the volume and rate of change at work and at home does not overwhelm or defeat you.

3.5 Technology Management
Effectively managing technology means ensuring that technology serves you, rather than abuses you. Technology has always been with us, since the first walking stick, flint, spear, and wheel. Now, the rate of change is accelerating, brought on by vendors seeking expanding market share. Often there is no choice but to keep up with the technological Joneses, but you rule technology not vice versa.

3.6 Leisure Management
The most overlooked of the work-life balance supporting disciplines, leisure management acknowledges the importance of rest and relaxation- that one can't short-change leisure, and that "time off" is a vital component of the human experience. Curiously, too much of the same leisure activity, however enjoyable, can lead to monotony. Thus, effective leisure management requires varying one's activities.

4. Measures to provide better work life balance
There is a strong negative correlation between long working hours and satisfaction with work-life balance To improve employee loyalty and attract top talent businesses now have a huge variety of options to choose from ranging from offering flexible working hours, alternative locations for work, crèche facilities within the work-place, part-time working and job sharing.

These measures are actions or procedures that help workers reconcile their work and family responsibilities. These refer to work organization and working time (and location) arrangements; statutory and non-statutory leave; maternity protection arrangements; and workplace care facilities and arrangements.

Flexible working arrangements include flextime (where workers are present at their workplace for some part of the day or some days of the week), time banking (working long hours some days while working shorter hours the other days), compressed workweeks (same number of hours over fewer days, 4-day week, working 10 hours a day), staggered working hours (working starting and ending their shifts at different times), part time work, job sharing, homework, telecommuting, etc.

Statutory and non-statutory leave arrangements, those are important to work with family responsibilities, include
- Annual leave (allowing employee to decide the timing of leave and taking it in parts)
- Short leave for family emergencies

- Sick leave
- Maternity leave
- Paternity leave
- Parental leave
- Care's leave

Maternity protection arrangements include, other than maternity leave,

- Health protection measures for pregnant and breast-feeding mothers
- Leave in case of pregnancy related illness
- Provision of cash and medical benefits
- Employment protection and non-discrimination
- Allowing nursing breaks to breast-feeding mothers

Workplace care facilities and arrangements include:

- Company or on-site day care facilities
- Financing for off-site day care services (subsidies)
- Advice and referral services by employers
- Back-up emergency care services
- Workplace family room (where workers work productively while looking after their children)

5. Indicators for work-life balance

In order to measure work-life balance, some indicators have been developed and used by OECD. Some of these include:

- Long working hours over 50 hours a week; shows that work-life balance must be affected.
- Time available for personal care/leisure available through time-use surveys; less time availability for personal care indicates lower work-life balance.
- Employment of mothers with children of compulsory school age if higher numbers of women workers are employed, flexible work arrangements must have been provided.
- Commuting time longer commuting time means lower work-life balance.

On the other hand, ILO uses the following two legal indicators to measure whether workers are successfully combining work and family:

- Length of paternity leave
- Length of parental leave

Paternity leave is for the father around of time of birth of a child. Paternity leave is not found in any of the ILO conventions however it is becoming more of a norm in developed countries. Paternity leave is usually of short duration (1 day to two weeks) and is fully paid. ILO Recommendation 165 (concerning workers with family responsibilities) supports provision of Parental leave. It recommends that after exhausting paternity leave and maternity leave, either parent should be able to obtain leave of absence, i.e., parental leave for taking care of young children. As indicated above, parental leave is different from maternity or paternity leaves and either parent (father or mother) can take this leave. Parental leave is usually of longer duration however paid at lower rates (or sometimes unpaid). Although either parent can take this leave, take-up rate for fathers is much lower than that for mothers.

6. Various measures of work life balance
6.1 Parental leave

Parental leave is a right for parents to take time off work to look after a young child or make arrangements for the child's welfare. Parents can use it to spend more time with children and strike a better balance between their work and family commitments. This right is also open to staff who adopt children.

6.2 Part-timework
For staff who would like to work part-time, priorities other than work can assume more importance. Part-time workers reduce their working week for various reasons including attending to family (children and the elderly); pursuing personal hobbies; voluntary work; studying; and many others.

6.3 Family Leave
Staff may take leave for the serious illness or incapacity of immediate family on the provision of a medical certificate. Immediate family defined as spouse, registered non-marital partner, parent or child. Every staff member has a right to Family Leave, which cannot be refused or postponed.

6.4 Teleworking /e-working
Individual staff members may be authorized to carry out part of their activities from home on a regular basis over time. . In a Teleworking arrangement the employee works from a home office for some or all of the week. He or she maintains a presence in the office electronically via computer, telephone, fax and e-mail.

6.5 Unpaid leave
The company or institution should recognize that staff may at some point wish to take a break from their career to address other priorities. The authorization may be for personal or professional reasons. Unpaid Leave is not a right; consultation with the concern officer is required.

6.6 Time off to care for sick children
In the case of a sick child and on presentation of a medical certificate staff may take time off to look after the child. Time off is also authorized if a staff member is called by the crèche or school to fetch a sick child.

6.7 Working from home
In This practice staffs are allowed to take work at home doing some work from home. The main reason given for this practice was that it enabled them to work more productively. Staff can take work that requires a high degree of concentration. It will reduce travelling time.

6.8 Time off in lieu
There are occasions when both academic and non academic staffs have to work unsocial hours over and above their normal working hours or work at weekends in order to attend special events, conferences or travel outside. On these occasions time off in lieu could be taken in order to compensate for the over time.

6.9 Career Breaks
A career break is a period of unpaid leave from work of between six months and five years. the staff can take two career breaks during their career. A career break may be allowed for domestic reasons, including child care, education or travel abroad.

7. Other Special Leave Schemes
- **Marriage Leave**
  Staffs are allowed up to 5 days paid leave at the time of marriage subject to an overall total of 26 days between annual leave and marriage leave in a full year.
- **Bereavement Leave**
  Staffs are allowed 3 or 5 days paid leave on the death of an immediate relative.

- **Paternity Leave**
  A father is entitled to three days special leave with pay on the birth or adoption of his child. The leave may be taken up to four weeks after the birth of a child. In the case of adoption, the leave may be taken within four weeks of the date of placement.
- **Special leave for Domestic Circumstances**
  Unpaid leave to deal with domestic difficulties is also available. This includes special leave without pay to care for an ill spouse or children (up to 6 months); special leave without pay to travel abroad to visit an ill relative (up to 2 months); and special leave without pay to deal with other urgent domestic problems (up to 2 months).

8. Benefits of work life policy
Employers the benefits in the following way are:
- better use of resources and of the existing workforce
- employees feeling valued and a more motivated workforce
- a less stressful work environment
- attracting a wider pool of candidates for new posts
- increases in productivity
- reduced absenteeism, sickness and stress
- attracting a wider range of candidates such as part-time workers
- creating a reputation as employer of first choice
- retaining valued employees and recruiting new staff
- improvements in services.

For employees the benefits are:
- choice and control of working time, work organization and working lives
- better relations between management and staff improved self-esteem, health and confidence
- improved loyalty and commitment
- job satisfaction and a better working environment
- reduced stress and work pressure
- better balance between work and life outside work, including lifelong learning.

9. Conclusion
Work Life Balance means different things to different people and different things at different stages of life. However, any definition for anyone must include the problems of lack of time and exhaustion. Research indicates that failure to achieve the correct balance of effort and rest is linked to a feeling of lack of control over your workload, plus lack of energy to fulfill personal goals and commitments. If the balance is wrong, the result may include fatigue, poor performance and a poor quality of life. Governments all over the globe have become aware of the costs associated with a poor work-life balance, particularly as the downturn accentuated the negative sides of a frenetic pace of life which are stress, over-work, long hours and fear of unemployment.

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