

WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN INDIA-THE KEY DRIVER OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract: In India the balance between the work-life and the professional life is a common talk. Personal and professional are the two roles played by a working individual. The employees have to play their role and handle their responsibility. Due to the work stress their dear ones like family, organization and society gets affected. In several professions there is considerably a high pressure of performance which in return leads to stress and other problems. The shrinking incomes, faltering economy and uncontrolled layoffs are some undeniable factors. A considerable factor is the lack of accommodation for the work-life balance, which in return can add to the stress load of the employees, especially for the working women's who are the primary caretakers of their family, children's and old dear ones. All of these factors lead to the stressed individuals in an organization which leads to the fatigue, these individuals prone to mistakes and injuries, and are more likely to be absent. Work and professional life are the two sides of the same coin. This exploratory research is an attempt to study the work-life balance issues. This paper will examine the literature on work-life balance policies and practices, Employee engagement and work-place culture in different industries in order to increase their productivity and retain them in the organization for a long period of time. This paper is an attempt against the highly increasing work load and working hours that is the primary demand of Indian organizations and expects in the course of time and what are the problems faced by the employees due to the pressure of work and what are the main problems they can be encountered. In India where family issues are the top priority but due to the adverse effect of the work-life of the employees they can't give enough time to his/her family.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, Work-Life Issues, Reasons for Balances, Benefits

I. INTRODUCTION

Work-life balance is an often-used term in all the sectors like BPO's, IT's, Hospitality etc. The question is 'what is the theoretical framework when we are looking at work-life balance?' Whenever we get the answer of this question it becomes easier for us to crack the problems. In today's work environment a better balance between work and life is increasingly desired by the workers. The desire for a better work-life balance has become one of the growing concerns in contemporary society. Therefore it is essential for organizations to incorporate work-life balance strategies with job design and employment policies. It is important to identify the benefits of work-life balance before designing and implementing any work life balance program. Examining the advantages of work-life balance can help organizations to realize the importance of incorporating work life balance strategies with their employment policies. Consequently they can design and implement effective work-life balance programs in their work environment. When the burden, obligations and responsibilities of work and family roles become incompatible, then a conflict between the work and personal life get aroused which in return make it complicated to complete one task at a time. The obligation to do a task can force the individual to neglect the other one. The work/life balance is about adjusting working patterns in such a way that employees can combine their work with their other responsibilities such as caring for children's or elder relatives.

In today's knowledge world employees are looking for the new opportunities to learn and improve their skills. They want the open valve for their imagination, creativity and ideas. The employees like the senior management interest in their wellbeing and they like to work for the organization with a reputation of a good employer. The organizations which

provide a workplace culture with the psychological conditions of meaningfulness (job enrichment, work role fit), safety (supportive managers and co-workers), and availability (resources available) are more likely to retain the employees. It is shown by the researches that the organizations get the engaged employees due to the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, availability and safety. Work-life balance is important for the employees' engagement and retention. By knowing the unique needs of diverse groups as well as by recognizing individual differences within these groups, HR can better understand the challenges of increased diversity in the organizations workforce (e.g., different generations, more females, and changing psychological conditions) and work towards designing and implementing work-life balance policies and practices to engage diverse employee groups. During this time of financial uncertainty the businesses are more concerned about increasing the employees' engagement. The tangible benefits can be achieved with the introduction of appropriate employment practices to help the employees to achieve a better work-life balance. The faltering downturn and job insecurity would bring increased job focus and engagement. The work life balance can made the employees to feel free and even lead to increased productivity, lower absenteeism and less stressed workforce and employees will remain engaged to the organization. This paper will examine how to promote good work-life balance in workplace and highlights its benefits in the business. It also explores the belief of employees' engagement and workplace culture. Although it will outlines the implementation of the work-life policies and practices adopted in the organizations for the employees' engagement.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A brief review of literature of studies conducted so far is given here. Adams et al. (1996) found that relationships between work and family can have an important effect on job and life satisfaction and the level of involvement the worker assigns to work and family roles is associated with this relationship. Duxbury and Higgins (2001) examined the effects of three types of work family conflict – role overload (having too much to do), work to family interference and family to work interference on the organizational performance and quality of life of employees. It was found that work-life conflict had a negative impact on organizational performance and on employees. Employees who are overloaded or whose work interfered with family (vice-versa) were highly stressed, experienced burnout, expressed dissatisfaction with life, and were in poor mental/ physical health.

Work schedule flexibility has been found to be negatively associated with work life balance / work family conflict. Higher the flexibility lower is the work family conflict. In other words, higher the work schedule flexibility, higher is the work life balance. Loscocco (1997) examined how people with considerable control over their work lives construct and experience work family connections. The data was collected through in-depth interviews of 30 self-employed people. The results showed that self-employed people had considerable control over their work lives and this helped them to curb the intrusion of work into family life. However, women emphasized the importance of flexibility more than men. Hammer et al. (1997) reported that higher levels of perceived work schedule flexibility were related to lower levels of work family conflict.

Macky and Boxall (2008) reported that employees working longer hours are more likely to report a greater imbalance in the work life relationship. The five high involvement variables (i.e. power to make decision and act autonomously, information provision, rewards, knowledge of the job and team working) were found to be negatively correlated to work life imbalance. It was also found that increasing the availability of work life balance policies for employees did not improve the relationships when pressure to work longer hours was higher, and employees felt greater work life imbalance.

Across industries, engagement is substantially higher in the non-profit sector than in every other sector looked at by Towers Perrin (2003). This would appear logical, given that people tend to be drawn to this sector through a sense of mission, rather than from any prospect of high pay or wealth accumulation. This finding is also consistent with the numerous definitions and views surrounding engagement, which identifies a 'passion for work' as being a key component factor (Truss *et al* 2006, Brim 2002 and Holbeche and Springett 2003). Indeed, the fact that the sector is traditionally not a high-paying one, relative to the others studied, emphasizes the fact that it is not possible to 'buy' engagement in the conventional sense by offering better than average monetary awards. Conversely, in another study comparing the public and private sectors, Truss *et al* (2006) found that group in the public sector had a more negative experience of work, they reported more bullying and harassment than those in the private sector, and were less satisfied with the opportunities they had to use their abilities. This reinforces the findings of previous studies and underlines the scale of the challenge facing

public sector managers in particular, and the negative impact that bullying and harassment have on employees and their levels of engagement (Emmott 2006).

According to Robinson (2006), employee engagement can be achieved through the creation of an organizational environment where positive emotions such as involvement and pride are encouraged, resulting in improved organizational performance, lower employee turnover and better health. Individuals adopt strategies such as accommodation, negotiation to enhance their work life balance or reduce work family conflict. Singh (2001) in his qualitative study used 'work/life border theory' to explore how British and Swedish managers dealt with competing commitments. A sample of 35 managers (18 Swedish, 17 British; 18 males and 17 females) ranging from directors to project managers, aged between 28 to 59 years, was taken and semi-structured interviews were held on site in UK and Sweden. The study showed a tension between managers' own needs for more balanced work lives and corporate attitudes to balance - seekers and career choices. Findings suggested that four kinds of strategies were used by the managers for maintaining work life balance. These included accommodating family terms, negotiating with the family, accommodating the organization and staggering commitments. The study showed that managers enact their work life balance strategies with both their employer and their family, particularly their partner, who also enacts boundaries between home and employer, so there are four parties to the negotiation or accommodation of needs. Some managers use their own views as reference points for dealing with subordinates' need for work life balance.

III. WORK-LIFE BALANCE POLICIES & PRACTICES

Work-life balance, in its broadest sense, is defined as a satisfactory level of involvement or 'fit' between the multiple roles in a person's life (Hudson, 2005). There is no one accepted definition of what constitutes a work-life balance practice, the term usually refers to one of the following: organizational support for dependent care, flexible work options, and family or personal leave (Estes & Michael, 2005). Hence these practices include flexible work hours (e.g., flextime, which permits workers to vary their start and finish times provided a certain number of hours is worked; compressed work week, in which employees work a full week's worth of hours in four days and take the fifth off), working from home, sharing a full-time job between two employees (job sharing), family leave programs (e.g., parental leave, adoption leave, compassionate leave), onsite childcare, and financial and/or informational assistance with childcare and eldercare services. Work-life balance policies can assist employees achieving a balance between their work and personal commitments that is right for them. The policies need to be supported by the workplace culture, which reflects the beliefs, values and norms of the whole of the organization from the CEO to staff members. Other important factors in the success of work life balance policies include proper communication of commitment to the policies to existing and future employees, raising awareness of the policies, education of managers about the importance of policies, and training of managers on 'how to' implement these policies.

3.1 Engaged Employees Are a Competitive Business Advantage

The most successful companies recognize that their employees are their most valuable asset. Employee engagement is not just a buzzword – it has a clear link to increased business success. Efficiency and productivity are prerequisites for success on a fiercely competitive market. Healthy, capable and engaged employees are a company's capital and a major competitive advantage. Linkage research (e.g., Treacy) received significant attention in the business community because of correlations between employee engagement and desirable business outcomes such as retention of talent, customer service, individual performance, team performance, business unit productivity, and even enterprise-level financial performance (e.g., Rucci et al, 1998 using data from Sears). Some of this work has been published in a diversity context (e.g., McKay, Avery, Morris et al., 2007). Directions of causality were discussed by Schneider and colleagues in 2003. The Corporate Executive Board surveyed 50,000 employees in 59 organizations worldwide. Employees with lower engagement are four times more likely to leave their jobs than those who are highly engaged. Even more important, moving from low to high engagement can result in a 21 percent increase in performance. "The key to engaging employees comes from targeting the right employees with the right programs. Companies that segment employees based on commitment and 'line of sight' can find the right drivers that will retain and motivate their most valuable employees. Programs that increase trust, empowerment and customer focus increase engagement and therefore provide a competitive advantage. Employee engagement has emerged as a critical driver of business success in today's competitive marketplace. Thus, to gain a competitive edge, organizations are turning to HR to set the agenda for employee engagement and commitment.

3.2 Workplace Culture Sets the Tone for Employee Engagement

Organizations that create cultures that value balance, and assist employees to achieve life balance will be rewarded with highly engaged employees. By developing more unified and compassionate workplace cultures, organizations will be more attractive to people of all generations. Such studies provide valuable insight and information to HR professionals to assess HR policies and programs for the multigenerational workplace. These multigenerational workplace policies and programs include the flexible working conditions, telecommuting, family leave, rewards and recognition, health care, training and development. In India, the concept of hierarchy has traditionally strongly influenced business decision, such as strategy, promotions and communications. Yet, in today's Indian workplace, older workers view hierarchy as more important than do people of the younger generation. Additionally, it should be noted that the concept of the Baby Boom generation exists only in the developed world, with other nations not having the concerns resulting from this large generation. For example, many countries (e.g., Latino Christian, Arab and African nations) did not have a significant reduction in fertility rates, nor did they embrace factors such as access to contraception, the changing role of women in society and more recent focus on work/life balance.

3.3 Work-Life Balance Policies & Practices Stimulating Employee Engagement in Industries

Over the last decade the evidence for the business benefits of work-life balance policies has been growing in volume and strength. The studies show strong links between work-life balance policies and reduced absenteeism, increased productivity and job satisfaction. Other benefits include improved recruitment and retention rates with associated cost savings, reduced sick leave usage, a reduction in worker stress and improvements in employee satisfaction and loyalty, greater flexibility for business operating hours, an improved corporate image. The Workplace Employee Relations Survey 1998 suggests that the workplaces that are doing best on a number of dimensions were those with 'high commitment management practices' well embedded in the labor process, and where a large proportion of employees feel committed to the organization. They defined high commitment management practices to include policies on communication with employees and family-friendly working practices.

IV. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the work-life balance study here is to understand the business benefits of improved work-life balance. The main objectives of the research are as follows:

- To study the work-life balance issues affecting the employees' life.
- To study the factors affecting the work-life issues.
- To determine the factors leading to work-life imbalance of the employees.
- To suggest the suitable measures for perfect equilibrium between effective work and life.

V. WORK-LIFE BALANCE PROBLEMS

For an employer it might be difficult to understand that whether he is supporting the employees to balance their work and life. There are some factors that show that the work/life balance is poor. Some of these factors are as:

- Employees are doing a lot of overtime as the youth is targeted as they are more energetic and young to do any task. In lieu of earning money they not get enough time to spend with family and it may lead to issues related to personal life even health may not support for a long period of time to spend on job.
- High rates of absenteeism or staff sickness.
- High levels of staff turnover.
- Employees taking a lot of time off to deal with 'emergencies' involving children or other dependents.
- High levels of employee stress.

Employees should be made to get recharge as they will be working for long hours they need break from hectic work schedule. Management should interact with people and understand what can be done to keep employees happy so that they can be part of organization for a long period of time. But should Corporate India meekly accept that? Could they not firmly and collectively send the message out that their executives are their wealth and should be better taken care of?

Initiatives like “work from home,” flexi-work, etc., have not been successful. People who choose that option have become marginalized and subtly excluded, with their career clearly nose-diving. This has forced most of them to give in and get back to the mainstream career force or make a tough priority decision. I have come across several “power women” who chose the work from home option. In a few months, they had to admit that it was killing their growth in the company.

There are certain health related issues which arise due to the work/ life imbalances and stress at workplace.

5.1 Health Problems

The consequences of stressful work are health related problems, which eventually leads to quitting of job or Quitting the industry. We witness high attrition rates of around 30-40% in this industry. Some of the health issues are:

1. Tension
2. Sleeplessness
3. Headaches
4. Eye-strain
5. Repetitive strain injury (RSI)
6. Voice loss, hearing problems and burn-out.

5.2 Detachment from the Family

Since the daytime is spent in sleep and recreational activities with friends. The employees are hardly able to give time for their families. Problems become more pronounced when they get married. Additional responsibilities of running a family demands more time and hence eventually people quit the industry. Most of the employees work on Indian holidays too, which causes frustration. Some employees even feel the need for inclusion in the family and the society. Hence it is important for family members to render support for their young sons and daughters and to help them with the stress that they are undergoing.

5.3 Discipline and Behavioral Issues

Call centers provide excellent working environment, free food and transportation. There is always situation where individual or group of youngsters tend to commit mistakes and abuse the freedom. The most common behavior cited is misuse of food, behave erratically in vans, and Smoke in public places, misuse of telephones and other resources of the company. The supervisors themselves reel under the pressure of performance and achieving targets. Hence do not give their time for finding solutions. The professional counselor can play a major role in educating the youngsters on discipline; provide advice to erring executives. Unacceptable behaviors cause disturbance to others and affects the overall productivity. Continuous education and counseling will help to mitigate such problems and it is possible to change the behavior by adopting a positive approach.

5.4 Personal Habits

The young executives tend to develop certain bad habits such as alcohol, smoking etc. It is not. It is uncommon to find women smoking and drinking alcohol in the organization which is definitely a Social stigma in the Indian societies. There are increased concerns about the habits of the employees among the parents, who are not finding it easy to talk to them about their habits, which in no way are welcomed by the Indian families. Solving such issues lies majorly in the hands of the employees and their employers. Employees can be made to attend counseling sessions of professional counselors. Conducting group Counseling, workshops, educative film shows, in order to create awareness on effects of bad habits. Such actions will enable individuals to realize the importance of good habits and they could seek one-to-one counseling sessions.

5.5 Depression

The gradual realization that there are limited scopes in developing a career owing to fewer growth opportunities is increasing the frustration levels in the organization. Coupled with growing mental fatigue and increasingly punishing physical environments, depression is the obvious end result. Some call centers have now devised different stress management programs mainly to counter depression.

5.6 Eyesight Problems

Globally call center employees are considered a high risk group for eye related problems. While the quality of monitors might impact these disorders, sitting continually without adequate breaks seems to be the truer reason. While this is already a problem in the IT industry, which some companies have overcome by use of anti-glare monitors.

5.7 Hearing Ailments

A call center job invokes taking calls throughout the shift, sitting with headphones. While quality of headphones does make a difference, it would not be appropriate to say that good quality of headphones can solve this problem; it is more to do with giving rest between calls.

5.8 Reasons of imbalance

There are various reasons for this imbalance and conflicts in the life of an employee. From individual career ambitions to pressure to cope up with family or work, the reasons can be situation and individual specific. The speed of advancement of information technology, the increasing competition in the talent supply market has led to a “performance-driven” culture creating pressures and expectations to performance more and better every time. Also, many a times, many people find it difficult to say “NO” to others especially their superiors. They usually end up over burdening themselves with work. The increasing responsibilities on the personal front with age can also create stress on personal and professional fronts.

5.9 Effects

Constant struggle and effort to maintain a balance between the work and personal life can have serious implications on the life of an individual. According to a survey, 81 per cent of the respondents have admitted that their jobs are affecting and creating stress in their personal lives. The pressures of the work or personal life can lead to stress. According to studies, it has been found to that such situation can take a toll on the person’s health both physiologically and psychologically. Heart ailments, cardiovascular problems, sleep disorders, depression, irritability, jumpiness, insecurity, poor concentration and even nervous breakdowns are becoming common among the victims of such imbalance. Pressure, stress or tension in work life can lead to bad social life and vice versa.

VI. SUGGESTIONS FOR EFFECTIVE WORK LIFE

There are no hard-and-fast rules on what constitutes an acceptable work/life balance - this will depend on the operational requirements of your business and the needs of your employees.

6.1 Flexible Working Practices

This includes part-time working, flexi-time, job sharing and home working. Self-roistering allows employees to choose which shifts to work. Certain employees have the right to request flexible working. For a full explanation of the types and advantages of flexible working, see our guide on flexible working - the law and best practice. You can also use our interactive tool to investigate what kind of flexible working will best suit your employees and employers.

6.2 Unpaid Career Breaks

The other policies that make it easier for employees to balance work and the rest of their lives include unpaid career breaks and paid sabbatical schemes. These are a cost-effective way to retain valued staff or reward those with long service. Allowing your employees extra days off work -whether paid or unpaid - can improve their work/life balance. Holiday purchase schemes enable employees to buy additional - usually limited holidays on top of their annual entitlement. You could consider giving employees maternity, paternity, adoption or parental leave in excess of the statutory minimum, e.g. higher pay or longer leave. These schemes give employees a measure of control over how their working lives are organized and foster greater employee loyalty and commitment.

6.3 Making the working environment more attractive

Improvements to the working environment can boost morale and help you retain valued staff. The typical techniques include: free exercise classes, a free/subsidized canteen, company days out, childcare vouchers, time-off for learning.

6.4 Time management

It is one of the best solutions which can help to reduce the imbalance between the personal and the work life of the employees. Prioritizing the tasks and planning the activities can help to take out some free time which can be utilized for other purposes. Taking some time out for hobbies and leisure activities, spending time with loved ones can help to beat the stress. The employees have to learn to say “no” if required. Sharing the responsibilities will help and don't commit for something which is practically impossible. Utilizing the flexible working hour's option of the organizations to get some free time.

VII. CONCLUSION

Work-life balance and employee engagement becomes a visible benchmark among high performing organizations that reap the economic and reputational benefits of being publicly recognized as a ‘best place to work’ or an ‘employer of choice’. Many Family-friendly organizations feel the need for work/ life balance which include recruitment and retention of valuable work force, reduced absenteeism, reduced employee stress, health benefits, job satisfaction, and better life balance. It has been suggested that an effectiveness of work-life balance policies and practices must incorporate the effects of workplace culture and supervisor support of employees’ efforts to balance work and family Responsibilities. Developing and maintaining a culture that enables and supports the opportunity to have a desired work life balance and to promote the benefits of the employee & organization. (Wheeler et al., 2006) agrees that a strong organizational culture increases employees’ intent to remain in the organization. Work-life balance must be supported and encouraged at all levels of the organization, including senior management, line managers and all staff. An organization which encourages work-life balance policies and practices will win the benefits of augmented employee engagement and also a positive outcome is dependent on a workplace culture that is supportive of using work-life initiatives. Some organizations are working on balancing the work-life of employees and measure to be taken to solve complexities of workers in workplace and how to solve this problem using time management and employees can manage their personal life and professional life smoothly. Today’s organizations are all about working with 24*7 and stress will be involved with work and mental stability will be a prime concern for employers so as how to make people work efficiently. The organizations has to organize special programs at the week-end by creating an attractive work environment through which people can get relaxed at least during week-end. The organizations should know what the reasons are for the birth of such imbalances.

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