

Work-Life Balance: An Overview

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ABSTRACT

In this review paper, the conceptualization of work-life balance is based on the perception-centered approach that considers work-life balance to be a holistic concept (Kosseket al, 2014) and it is the subjective assessment of balance between work and the life beyond work domain (Guest, 2002). There has been a struggle to agree on a common definition of work-life balance (Greenhaus& Allen, 2011) and most studies do not consider the individual's broader - wholesome lives and only focus on parts of it (Haar, Russo, Sune&Ollier-Malatre, 2014). In line with this approach, this paper focuses on the term work-life balance, as the term reflects the myriads of personal life situations and role involvement decisions that nowadays characterize the contemporary society. This paper has emphasized the role of examining work-life balance in high stress environment like police organizations, keeping in mind, the call for increasing awareness on work-life issues in developing countries as stressed by Joplin et al (2003) and further highlighted by Greenhaus and Allen (2011) as one of the least studied concepts of work-life research.

Keywords

Work-life balance, work pressures, models of Work-life balance.

Work-life balance became important as a research area when the workplace dynamics started to change due to the economic uncertainty which resulted in a fight for survival in the organization. Work-life balance involves how much control one feels over the number of hours put in to work in comparison to the number of hours one makes available beyond the boundaries of work. Reiter (2007) noted that most definitions of work-life balance are situational where the idea of work-life balance is subjective. The balance between work and life activities and how it is achieved changes from one individual to another as it depends on when one feels satisfied both with job and personal life. Thus, supporting the absolutist approach to defining work-life balance, the individual gives equal amount of time in every domain. It is the ability of the individual regardless

of age or gender, to find a balance that enables them to combine the responsibilities at work and non-work domains in line with the aspirations attached to these domains (Reiter, 2007).

Work-life balance is of utmost importance to government and policy makers as it is the individual who is the core to the healthy functioning of the society. Over the years, there has been an increased dependence on information technology which has led to information load on the working population. It is expected that employees extend the working hours and be willing to work on weekends. It is also expected that the employees be available all times and give prompt response to emails, phones beyond the working hours. This has added to the sources of pressure at workplace.

Our complex societies require a continuous negotiation between the boundaries of work and non-work-related times and places. It is not that work and non-work life are always at the opposite ends of an individual's life, in fact in most cases, there is no distinct dividing line between work and non-work times. For some people, the workplace is a social venue, where it helps them draw a positive self-worth for themselves. There are individuals for whom work is a welcome relief from the difficulties at home. If there is an absence of the sense of balance between demands of work life and personal life, it results in emotional and behavioral problems which make eventually lead to decreased productivity and problematic drinking. reference

There has is growing concern that as the hours of work are getting longer along with added pressures and demands of work, it is leaving very little time for quality time beyond work environment. Work-life balance is an amalgamation of a positive approach from both the individual and the organization to realize the importance of a balanced and satisfied work life and life beyond work boundaries. Employees with improved work-life balance in organizations that focus on efficient and effective performance can contribute more meaningfully towards organizational growth and subsequent success (Naithani, 2010).

Zedeck and Mosier (1990) and later O'Driscoll (1996) identified five basic models of work-life balance. They proposed the **SEGMENTATION** model, where the individual has two different domains in his life. One is work domain and the other is non-work domain. Since the individual has demarcated segments in life, they do not hamper the functioning and one segment has no influence on the other one in any way. The second model developed was **SPILLOVER**, which suggested that one domain can influence the other in either a positive or negative way. The work-life of an individual can influence family-life and similarly, family-life can affect work experiences. Such experiences of spillover are evident when the individual is either on flexible work schedules or has opted for work from home option. The third model developed was **COMPENSATION**, which suggested that the individual tries to compensate for what is missing in one domain by making up for it in the other domain. If the individual is not satisfied with the work environment and it is not stimulating, the individual might compensate by being involved in activities at school for children or be proactive in community work which will give recognition and appreciation. The fourth model proposed was the **INSTRUMENTAL** model, where activities in one sphere are instrumental and supportive in success in other spheres of life. A worker may take up a job which is boring and dull in order to fulfill the desires of the family, e.g., education. The fifth model developed was **CONFLICT** model which hypothesizes that when all spheres of life have high demands, the individual has to make difficult choices which could result in conflict and a possible overload.

Over the years, many models of work-life balance have been introduced, but the one proposed by Guest (2002) gives a comprehensive view of the concept by identifying the various determinants of work-life balance, the nature of balance and the subsequent consequences/impact of work-life balance. This model tries to incorporate the key issues in the analysis of work-life balance. The model explain that a demanding workplace can expect the individual to spend long and irregular hours at work and similarly, a demanding home can pressurize the individual regarding the commitments and obligations at home, community, etc. The existent work culture can also be determinant of work-life imbalance by not allowing the option of flexible time to the employees. An easy work culture will provide the employees occasional time off when required. The feeling of satisfaction that the individual is able to balance work and life beyond work also depends upon the environment at home. If the

individual has too many responsibilities at home and work is also demanding, this will put a lot of stress. Guest (2000), guided the attention to individual factors which contribute to the perceptions of work-life balance. He opined that the view of balance is based on the orientation of the individual and the extent to which the individual puts work or home life as a central interest along with various aspects of the personality. Adding further to the concept, the feeling of balance is viewed as being a subjective one and the objective indicators of work-life balance may not always align with the subjective indicators of work-life balance. It is highly possible that the individual who feels that life is balanced prefer work as a priority.

Work-life imbalance can be caused by the demands of work which may be either too low or too high. Some organizations let employees take time off for personal issues whereas others may demand long and irregular working hours. There are demands on individual towards the commitments and obligations outside work pertaining to childcare, elderly care or other social commitments that take away concentration from work.

Depending on the orientation towards the dimensions of work and life beyond work, a number of individual factors play determining role. Some individuals have work as the central aspect of life as the need for achievement and prosperity gets fulfilled. Today, the issue of work-life balance is a major concern for employees and equally important to employers. Technology has contributed to the issue of excessive work hours. Lapiere & Allen (2006) found positive correlation between work-family issues and tele-work. Work-life balance issues are not restricted to certain types of professions or by gender; they are experienced by both men and women across different stages of their careers. This makes it a universal issue (Darcy *et al*, 2012). It makes individuals struggle regardless of their sex, gender or marital status (Powell &Greenhaus, 2010).

Bird (2006) suggested that due to rising work pressure, work-life balance solutions were a prominent issue for executives and human resource professionals. Listing the factors that are affected by work-life imbalance – growth and profit impact, full engagement and customer service, talent acquisition, health care, it was suggested that apart from the organizations adopting policies for the benefit of work-life balance of the employees, the individual as managers or executives need to create own “balance”.

Determinants	Nature of the Balance	Consequences/Impact
A. Contextual Demands of work Culture of work Demands of home Culture of home B. Individual factors Work orientation Personality Energy Personal control & coping Gender Age, life & career stage	A. Subjective Balance- no emphasis Balance- home central Balance- work central Spill over of work to home Spill over of home to work B. Objective Hours of work "Free" time Family roles	Work satisfaction Life satisfaction Mental health / wellbeing Stress/ illness Behavior/performance at work Behavior/performance at home Impact on others at work Impact on others at home

Figure 1. Determinants, Nature & Consequence of Work-Life Balance

(Guest, 2002)

Work-life imbalance leads to increased turnover intentions and perceived job overload (Rainayee, 2012).and has been seen to be inversely related to productivity and attrition rate (Aryee et al, 1999; Glass & Estes, 1997), employee commitment and satisfaction (Swarnlatha&Rajalaxmi, 2015), lower psychological capital (Sen &Hooja, 2015) and employee psychological well-being (Construction Industry Institute Inc, 2005). It leads to various behavioral and emotional problems like anxiety, depression, guilt, and problematic drinking (Kalliath& Brough, 2008). According to data collected by work-life balance compendium (2001), the absence of employees had doubled in the past decade due to work-life conflict. The workers who experience high work-life imbalance missed twice as many workdays. It is an arduous task for employees in current corporate work environment to strike a balance between their personal and professional commitments. Keeping this in mind, Dasgupta & Arora (2011) concluded that work-life balance can be achieved by reducing occupational stress which will contribute to employee productivity and business growth. In the past decade, a lot of studies have been conducted to study the various approaches that individuals take to strike a balance between their work -life and life beyond work boundaries. The fact that modern world of work creates work-life imbalance with consequences for individual, families and organizations, positive relationship between life satisfaction and work-life balance; and family satisfaction and work-life balance has been reported by Devi & Rani (2012). The working of BPO sector in India highlights the

various health issues (sleeplessness, headache, stress, sense of exhaustion, lack of concentration & fatigue) that were the result of the nature of work and working hours even though employees enjoyed the benefits provided by company and the ability to spend more money in supporting family, there was hindrance in personal life (Chavan &Potdar, 2011).Similar studies conducted previously in Britain reported strong negative job-to-home spill over due to high performance practices and long working hours (White, Hill *et al*, 2003).

If individual reports balance in work life and life beyond work it will be associated with better performance at work as well as feeling of satisfaction, better general health and well-being. Any change in conflict and facilitation will subsequently bring changes in the perceptions of work-life balance (Grzywacz& Carlson, 2007). Use of emotion, appraisal and recognition of emotion has been found to be significantly impacting the negative effects of work-life balance (Rangrezi, 2010). Further, individuals who perceive their work-life to be balanced will experience a sense of harmony in life and optimal psychophysical conditions that enable them to meet the long-term demands of work and non-work roles (Greenhaus, Collins & Shaw, 2003) and will be more willing to foster and support innovative processes (James, 2011) along with energized exploration of different directions of their task (Amabile, 1983).

Macky and Boxall (2008) reported that even when organizations were offering work-life balance policies, the work pressures through high involvement variables like

power to make decision and act autonomously, information provision, rewards, knowledge of the job and team working still made employees feel a greater imbalance of work-life. Similar results highlighting the role of higher level of job skills was reported by Steiber (2009). It was found that both men and women felt that their job resulted in giving less time to engage in non-work-related activities. Various organizations have accepted the issue and have introduced innovative practices to help employees deal with the imbalance (Tenbrunsel, Brett, Maoz, Stroh, & Reilly, 1995). Initiatives such as flexible working hours, alternative work arrangements, leave policies and benefits, and employee assistance programs – collectively referred to as work-life benefits and practices (WLBP's) have been introduced (Morgan & Milliken, 1992; Osterman, 1995). More recent studies suggested the need for training opportunities and family friendly work policies (Deery, 2008).

These benefits and practices ease the interference of one domain which will help in meeting the demands of the other domain and eventually make the domains less opposed to each other (Kirchmeyer & Cohen, 1999). The WLBP's are beneficial for employees as they are able to give the employees increased control over time and place of work (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). These programs are a great contributor to the reducing stress levels of the employees (Thompson & Prottas, 2006). In context of the organizations, the WLBP interventions provide numerous benefits for the organization. The positive relationship between WLBP's and reduced absenteeism (Dex & Scheibl, 1999; Thompson *et al*, 1999), improved recruitment & retention (Allen, 2001; Anderson *et al*, 2002; Kosek & Ozeki, 1998) as well as increased productivity (Sands & Harper, 2007) leads to concluding the need for organizations to pursue towards the work-life balance of their employees. A work place culture that is supportive to the work-life balance initiatives promoted by the organization makes the base for increased productivity. Organizations need to adapt to people centric culture supported by work-life balance initiatives (Equal Employment Opportunities Trust, 2007). Employees, able to regulate emotions and made use of work-life balance programs, reported reduced feelings of risk towards position in the organization (Rangrezi, 2010). Strong recommendations suggesting implementation of human resource management policies to support employees for satisfactory work-life balance and the need for organizations to develop supportive culture which recognizes the contributions of individual employees have been made (Construction Industry Institute Inc, 2005).

CONCLUSION

A desirable work-life balance leads the individual towards feeling less apprehensive in their abilities to manage work and non-work commitments and hence make them less prone to thoughts that may lead to depleting their physical and mental resources (Rothbard, 2001). Further, individuals who perceive their work-life to be balanced will experience a sense of harmony in life and optimal psychophysical conditions that enable them to meet the long-term demands of work and non-work roles (Greenhaus, Collins & Shaw, 2003). There is need for the organizations to adapt positive practices and policies to counter the turnover intentions (Rainayee, 2012).

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