

## **Work Life Balance: Issues and Challenges**

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### **Abstract**

The study of work/life balance involves the examination of people's ability to manage simultaneously the multi-faceted demands of life. Although work/life balance has traditionally been assumed to involve the devotion of equal amounts of time to paid work and non-work roles, more recently the concept has been recognized as more complex and has been developed to incorporate additional components. The paper aims at exploring the idea of work/life balance that incorporates the benefits that both employers and employees get. In addition, the study also provides a challenge to the assumptions that have been identified in previous studies that are linked to work life balance. This study uses both descriptive and evaluative research methods and outlines the cultural inhibitors that affect the implementation of flexible work arrangements and works towards providing practical strategies that are crucial in developing work life balance debates. An attempt has been made to explore the concept of work life balance and theories of work life balance. This paper describes the current status of work life balance in India and discusses various challenges faced in the contemporary settings and strategies adopted for motivating and retaining talent in the company.

*Key words:* - Work life Balance, Perception, Gender differences, Work life imbalance, Retention.

### **Introduction**

The term "work/life balance was coined in 1986, although its usage in everyday language was sporadic for a numbers of years. Interestingly, work/life balance programs existed as early as the 1930's. 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. 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." Researchers have found that employees who consider their work roles to be an important component of their identities will be more likely to apply these communication technologies to work while in their non-work domain. In a society filled with conflicting responsibilities and commitments, work/life balance has become a predominant issue in the workplace. Three major factors contribute to the interest in, and the importance of, serious consideration of work/life balance. These includes the; global competition, renewed interest in personal lives/ family values, and an aging workforce.

The study of work/life balance involves the examination of people's ability to manage simultaneously the multi-faceted demands of life. Although work/life balance has traditionally been assumed to involve the devotion of equal amounts of time to paid work and non-work roles, more recently the concept has been recognized as more complex and has been developed to incorporate additional components. A recent study explored and measured three aspects of work/life balance. Time balance, which concerns the amount of time given to work and non-work roles. Involvement balance, meaning the level of psychological involvement in, or commitment to, work and non-work roles. Satisfaction balance or the level of satisfaction with work and non-work roles. This model of work/life balance, with time, involvement and satisfaction components, enables a broader and more inclusive picture to emerge. For example, someone who works two days a week and spends the rest of the week with his or her family may be unbalanced in terms of time (i.e. equal measures of work and life), but may be equally committed to the work and non-work roles (balanced involvement) and may also be highly satisfied with the level of involvement in both work and family (balanced satisfaction).

There are four stakeholders in every individual's life these are identified as own personality, job, family and society. Thus, there is a need to provide equal importance to these stakeholders. For instance a workaholic who has no time to be happy and enjoy with the family is termed as a failed individual in life. In an encounter of such imbalance in an individual, then such a person lacks peace and harmony within his life which can have detrimental effects on work life of an individual. To avoid such situation one should always try to avoid this imbalance in life. The combined impact to employer and partner support leads to a greater reduction in conflict than does independent employer or partner support. Organizations are becoming more and more demanding in terms of output. The businesses are being operated in terms of volume and not in terms of values. This disturbs the balance between work and life

in employees' lives. The organizations are too exacting in their demands and because of the very high competition, they are able to dictate terms upon the individuals.

As the organizations are basically the profit driven entities they are rarely bothered about the personal life and work-satisfaction issues of the employees. Thus they are least concerned at their level with work life satisfaction. Organizations have the work force in plenitude and as far as the people are ready to work as three people instead of one, they don't bother about the consequences the employees may face with this stressful work atmosphere. Diversity and work/life initiatives can be found at the core of the new social contract being negotiated between employers and employees. The basic outline of the social contract, as it has emerged during the past several years, calls for workers to commit their best contributions and greatest energies to the job in return for interesting work, respectful treatment, developmental opportunities, and an environment that responds to individual needs. Where those provisions conflict (e.g., the degree of commitment and energy expected by employers versus the flexibility required by employees), the expertise of both diversity management and work/life professionals will be critical to find win-win solutions.

### **Theories Related To Work-Life Balance**

**Role Hypothesis:** this theory reflects on the role that a worker in a working scenario plays and how such role impacts on his relationship with his family. This theory analyzes various aspects of any given job viz. the rank, the number of work-hours, and the satisfaction derived and how these aspects impacts on family issues. This theory has been well explained in Gaugin's (1991) where it is argued that the perception of an employee on how these resources (rank, work-hours and satisfaction) are being provided is what determines the level of Work-life conflict; if the employees' perception is positive, the conflicts will be minimal. The vice versa is also correct. The main rationale behind this hypothesis is that the more the satisfaction derived from the work place, the more the life satisfaction and the less the work-life imbalances.

**Spillover theory:** basically, this theory looks on the effects of work experiences on family experiences. According to this theory, experiences at the work domain can transverse into the family domain (Fredriksen-Goldsen & Scharlach, 2001). According to this theory, negative work experiences viz. long working hours and stress translates impact negatively on the family domain; has negative spillovers on the family. On the other hand, good work experiences, for instance good remunerations, good working

conditions and short working hours impacts positively on the family domain; has positive spillovers on the family. It therefore goes without saying that good work experiences results to minimum work/life imbalances while bad work experiences results to intense work/life imbalances.

**Conflict theory:** this hypothesis holds that conflicts between work and life are inevitable given that the two domains are incompatible; differ in terms of responsibilities, demand, norms, expectations among other factors (Fredriksen-Goldsen & Scharlach, 2001). The theory concludes that ordinarily, any activity at the work place will create some forms of conflicts at home.

According to the findings of Job and Home Study (JHS), conducted in the year 2008 in America, more than 45% of the respondents; parents wished that they could afford more time to devote to their family. However, 30% felt that they were already devoting enough time to their families. The study further note that time is the major factor determining the level of work/life balance. It purports that due to the recent industrialization of nations in the world, people, especially business men have constantly found themselves at conflict with social aspects of life; especially on family matters.

On the other hand, negative spillover from work to non-work life such as emotional exhaustion, has been shown to adversely affect organizations in the form of low commitment and high turnover (Wright and Cropanzano, 1998). Most managers evaluate personnel practices to meet those needs with the hope of increasing employee loyalty toward the organization. In addition to this, many organizations have begun to take a role in developing quality of work-life programs. Job satisfaction has identified a number of factors like reward system in work, perceived quality of supervision, working conditions, and individual determinates such as status and seniority, age group, marital status, and years of experience that cause people to become satisfied or dissatisfied with their job (Mosadeghrad et al., 2008 ).

Previous researchers have found job insecurity to be negatively related to marital and family functioning (Larson et al., 1994). When work interferes with family life it also reduces the satisfaction from job and from life as a whole. According to Sang et al., (2007), there are significant evidences that those working in construction industry are at risk of poor health and well-being due to long working hours, job insecurity, poor work and life balance, low professional significance and temporary teams.

### **Young Generation Views on Work-Life Balance**

According to Kathleen Garson, Sociologist, young people "are searching for new ways to define care that do not force them to choose between spending time with their children and earning an income" and "are looking for definition of personal identity that do not pit their own development against creating committed ties to others". Young adults believe that parents should get involved and support the children both economically and emotionally, as well as share labor equally. Young people do not believe work-life balance is possible and think it is dangerous to build a life dependent on another when relationships are unpredictable. They are looking for partners to share the house work and family work together. Men and women believe that women should have jobs before considering marriage, for better life and to be happy in marriage. Young people do not think their mother's generations were unhappy. They also do not think they were powerless because they were economically dependent.

### **Changing Face of Family**

With the growing diversity of family structures represented in the workforce in the new millennium, it is important that human resource professionals better understand the interface of work and family relationships and the resulting impact in the workplace. Research by Parsuraman and Greenhouse (2002) documented that segments of the workforce may be subject to unique work/family pressures, yet often has few sources of support. The representation of these groups of individual with potentially difficult types of work/family pressures represents a major gap in work/family research and employers understanding of their needs.

### **Current Status of Work-Life Balance In India**

Intel India is committed to provide tools and work environment solutions to reduce work and personal life challenges, maximizing employee contributions and enhancing Intel's "Great Place to Work" value. Apart from providing five-day working and flexible working hours, it also provides certain benefits for employees and their families. Such benefits are:

- 1) Hospitalization Insurance Policy, which covers reimbursement of hospital expenses, incurred due to illness/injury where all employees and their nominated dependents (spouse, children) parents are covered.
- 2) Under Business Traveler Medical Plan, Intel provides medical coverage to full-time and part-time Indian employees, at no cost, while they travel on business outside of India for a period of up to 90 days.

3) Group Term Life Insurance ensures payment of a lump sum to the employee's legal heir in the event of the insured employee's death and Intel pays the whole 100% of the premium.

4) Intel India's Hospitalization Insurance covers maternity insurance for employees and their spouse from day one. In the case of pregnancy, Intel India allows each female employee a paid maternity leave of 84 days.

5) Under Annual Leave Time employees in their first two years with Intel, receive 15 working days of leave per calendar year.

The range of options includes flexible work schedules, compressed workweeks and alternate work schedules, telecommuting, home office, part-time employment, childcare assistance, resource and referral services and health and wellness benefits

*IBM* India offers its employees options such as flexible workweek schedules, working from home, part time employment, family counseling, and leave of absence programs.

*TATA* Group is one of India's oldest, largest and most respected business conglomerates. Generally known as the most people-focused company, *TATA* scores high on almost all the welfare parameters. Employees of different strata work in *TATA* and hence, the initiatives are tailored towards their unique needs and requirements. For example, since a larger proportion of workforce in manufacturing plants of *TATA* is illiterate and belongs to the lower strata of society, the company has introduced adult education programs and education about family planning as a part of welfare program for them. Crèche facility is provided where the percentage of female employees is more than 20. *TATA* group of companies has extended the domain of welfare practices to outside the workplace by involving their employees in social responsibilities like community development programs.

*TCS* provides the options to its employees to work flextime with certain mandatory hours of work and five-day working provisions. It conducts regular seminars on nutrition, better living and stress management. Realizing the impact of long working hours, extensive travel and desk-bound jobs.

*Zensar Technologies* provides child care arrangements such as crèche facility to its employees. It arranges "Pizza and Coke" an informal meeting where associates (they refer employees as "associates") can meet their seniors and discuss anything and everything. It has a facility called "Madat Online" a

24/7 service which is available for employees to take care of some of their personal day-to-day activities (e.g. dropping cheques , drawing cash, pay telephone bills and school fees of employees' children). It provides information services such as information regarding housing/education facilities for children. It organizes stress management programs, arranges social events such as family day and fun days at work regularly.

### **Perceptions of Work-Life Balance and Gender Differences**

The situations only increase the work-life balance stress experienced by many women employees. Research was conducted by the Kenexa Research Institute (KRI), and was evaluated how male and female workers perceive work-life balance and also concluded that women are more positive than men in how they perceive their company's efforts to help them balance work and life responsibilities. The report is based on the analysis of data drawn from a representative sample of 10,000 U.S. workers who were surveyed through Work Trends, KRI's annual survey of worker opinions. The results indicated a shift in women's perceptions about work-life balance. In the past, women often found it more difficult to maintain balance due to the competing pressures at work and demands at home. "The past two decades have witnessed a sharp decline in men's provider role, caused in part by growing female labor participation and in part by the weakening of men's absolute power due to increased rates of unemployment and underemployment" states sociologist Jiping Zou.

Work life imbalance also comes with a different social perspective- How to address the work - life imbalance in the lives of the women work force. The society over the years has recognized women's need to legal and financial independence. Women work force now constitutes a significant percentage of the total work force in any organization today. Gender equality and responsibility for caring however, are contested issues. The transition to motherhood still continues to have practical and emotional consequences. When women take break from their careers to fulfill their right to motherhood, it is considered unprofessional. Moreover, it also affects their professional stature when they return to work.

These tend to reinforce gender in-equalities at work place. As a result many women have to make the difficult choice between family and career. So if she has to make a trade-off sometimes, she must take it in her stride and balance it in the other spheres as soon as possible.

## **Consequences of Work-Life Imbalance**

Mental health is a balancing act that may be affected by four factors: the influence of unfavorable genes, by wounding **trauma**, by private pressures and most recently by the stress of working. Many people expose themselves to the so-called job stress, because the "hard worker" enjoys a very high social recognition. These aspects can be the cause of an imbalance in the areas of life. The psychological strain, which affects the health, increases due to the strong pressure of time, but also by the complexity of work, growing responsibilities, concern for long-term existential protection. The stresses and strains could lead to negative effects on the human **cardiovascular** and systems. The Joys of Parenthood Reconsidered, what was found is the opposite, that parents actually suffer worse mental and physical health than childless adults. Simon states that, "In America we lack institutional supports that would help ease the social and economic burdens associated with parenthood." Currently, paid work is becoming more invasive of our daily lives. The balancing of social (life) issues and work issues has become a very challenging task. Many empirical literatures have been brought forth seeking to analyze the imbalances between work and other social aspects (Reich, 2001). Apparently, researches have unanimously agreed on the fact that time a worker has to spend with his/her family depends on the number of hours that such worker has to work. With this regard, a negative correlation between the number of hours devoted to work and the number of hours devoted to family responsibilities has been noted (Hein, 2005). The increase in the global cost of living has necessitated an increase in work-hours to enable workers maintain a reasonable level of subsistence. This implies that less time is being devoted to family responsibilities due to economic constraints. In turn, this has triggered an imbalance between work and life (Hein, 2005). Hein (2005) notes that the longer the working hours in America, the more problems at work a worker may experience. He also notes that the problems encountered by workers at their work place affect their families since they may carry over such issues to their families. Such issues may include stress and fatigue which negatively impacts on social ties. He, therefore, concludes that the more the work hours, the more the work related problems and hence, the weaker the social ties between families. The problem is even more persistent in the Less Developed Countries (LDCs) where the working hours are ever rising.

An independent study suggests that longer work-hours impacts negatively on the psychological wellbeing of a worker which further increases the instances of work/family (life) conflict. The study notes that the number of work hours is positively correlated with the intensiveness of work-life conflicts



experienced by a family (Milliken & Dunn-Jensen, 2005). Empirical literatures have noted resources viz. money, flexibility and time as the root causes of work/life conflict. To this effect, several hypotheses; conflict theory, spill over theory and role theory, have been proposed to try to explain the causes of work/life imbalances. These causes are more often regarded as drivers (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000).

### **Challenges to Effective Utilization Of WLB Practices**

Although the benefits of WLBP have been widely cited in literature, it is seen that all employees do not avail these benefits.

1. *Family-supportive culture*: It has been argued that managers play an important role in the success of WLBP because they make implicit or explicit choices regarding the adoption of workplace practices and are therefore, in a position to actively encourage or discourage employees' efforts to balance their work and family lives (Thompson et al., 1999). When supervisors are supportive, employees are likely to take up available WLBP. The fear of negative career consequences also discourages employees to utilize WLBP such as working flextime. For example, an employee might hesitate to use the full period of maternity leave due to concerns of not being promoted.

2. *Congruence between individual needs and organization's solutions*: Sometimes such programs may look impressive but in reality they might not be of any help to employees who do not see any value in them. For example, hardly efforts are taken to understand the needs of employees and design the programs accordingly. Personal values may discourage employees from using WLBP. An ambitious employee may decide to concentrate on his/her career waiving the advantages of these programs (Glass & Finley, 2002).

3. *Diversity and work life balance*: While some of the companies may view diversity and work life balance as separate functions, the business case for managing diversity is, in large part, the same for work/life balance. Both diversity and work/life initiatives promote employee commitment, improve productivity, lower turnover, result in fewer employee relations challenges, and decrease the likelihood of unethical business practices. Diversity and work/life initiatives can be found at the core of the new social contract being negotiated between employers and employees." The basic outline of the social contract, as it has emerged during the past several years, calls for workers to commit their best

contributions and greatest energies to the job in return for interesting work, respectful treatment, developmental opportunities, and an environment that responds to individual needs. Where those provisions conflict, the expertise of both diversity management and work/life professionals will be critical to find win; win solutions.

### **Benefits of Work Life Balance**

At the organizational level, balanced nature of work enables increase in productivity and efficiency of employees. Employees become more creative and they derive more satisfaction from work. Better teamwork and communication offer a good working environment. This leads to enjoyment at work and increased passion for it. Stress levels are well in commitment levels from the employee increase thereby helping a commitment levels from the employee increase thereby helping an organization to inherently develop a strong value system.

Work life balance on an individual level can bring phenomenal changes in his life and can also heavily impact a society. A balanced work life is of advantage to an employee's health. Stress levels decline drastically to healthy levels. Individuals derive more value from their work and from life that leads to greater satisfaction and is also seen as a mode of self-actualization. The employee can better understand the nature of his work life balance as work life balance can vary among individuals. It is at this point of time that an employee starts resting immense trust in the organization and his commitment levels to the organization increase. On the social front, the individual gains when relationships improve. The individual can now willingly devote more time and energy to his social commitments, which is also vital for a happy life. Thus, work-life balance can bring a huge transformation at the organizational and individual levels. It helps an organization to inherently build a strong value system, which is attributed to the work life balance enjoyed at the employee level. Consequently, the organization does not have to impose a formulated framework of organizational values because they now become intrinsic to it. Work-life balance at the individual level enjoys its success in addressing to societal issues. It helps in healing a society off its problems such as increasing infertility among working people, increasing number of divorces and its adverse effect on children.

### **Strategies to Maintain Work-Life Balance:**

Organizations today have realized the importance of the employee-work-life balance and its importance in the efficiency of the employees. Organizations have adopted work-life balance, so that neither the work nor the employee's personal life work-life balances is affected.

1. The ideas like employees working from virtual offices in their homes are well established now and have been accepted with organizations world over.
2. Not only the employee can have total flexibility in their work, they are always close to their family.
3. In offices also, efforts are being made to provide friendly work atmosphere for the employees by providing all sorts of refreshments available for the employee.
4. The employees are given the freedom to have their own ways of doing the work. They are given the assignments with deadlines and they can have their own schedule as far as they are meeting the deadlines.
5. Some organizations have gone to the extent of providing family atmosphere for the employees by involving the families of the employees.
6. *Working hours:* The Factories Act, 1948 regulates the working hours of employees including leave, holidays, overtime, and employment of children, women and young persons. The working hours for an adult worker are prescribed not to exceed 48 hours in a week and 9 hours a day. This Act also restricts the working time of women employees and adolescents during evening that is 7 pm to 6 am. It provides for weekly holidays of one day so that the total workdays do not exceed 10 consecutive days.
7. *Crèches:* The Factories Act, 1948 also requires having crèches in factories employing more than 30 women workers to take care of their children (Sec. 40) which can be considered as a kind of WLBP since it helps women workers to better integrate their work and family demands.
8. *Leave Provisions:* Various kinds of leave provisions and benefits are available under Factories Act, 1948. These include,
  - 1) Earned Leave (the convenient leave sought by individual employee)

- 2) Casual Leave (leave for some family related purpose e.g. burials, weddings etc.)
- 3) Sick Leave (most times with doctors' recommendations)
- 4) Compensatory leave (compensated with leave with wages for the absence from duty against the work performed by worker on any other day than normal working day).

9. *Maternity Benefits*: Another much acclaimed benefit considered to be family-friendly is, maternity benefit provided to working women for certain periods before and after childbirth. In western countries much talked statutory provision for maternity benefit comes from the Family & Medical Leave Act (FMLA), 1993 which mandates that all "eligible" employees of a covered employer can take up to twelve weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave during any 12-month period to care for a newborn child or newly adopted child. Some of these benefits are also provided to working women in India under Maternity Benefit Act, 1961. The Act extends to the whole of India and is applicable to every factory, mines or plantation. Every woman shall be entitled to, and her employer shall be liable for, the payment of maternity benefit, which is the amount payable to her at the rate of the average daily wage for the period of her actual absence. As per this Act, any woman shall be entitled to maternity leave of 12 weeks in all whether taken before or after childbirth. A periodical cash benefit is payable to an insured woman employee, in case of confinement, miscarriage, medical termination of pregnancy, premature birth of a child, or sickness arising from pregnancy, miscarriage, etc., occurring or expected to occur in a benefit period. Medical bonus or expense in lieu of medical expenditure or confinement expenses (up to a certain limit) is paid to an insured woman and an insured person in respect of his wife, if confinement occurs at a place where necessary medical facilities under ESI scheme are not available.

## **Conclusion**

Work/life programs have the potential to significantly improve employee morale, reduce absenteeism, and retain organizational talent, particularly during challenging economic times. In today's global marketplace, as companies aim to reduce costs, it is the responsibility of the human resource professional to understand the critical issues of work/life balance and champion work/life programs. Be it employees whose family members and/or friends are called to serve their country, single mothers who are trying to raise their children and make a living, modern generation who value their personal time, couples struggling to manage dual-career marriages, or companies losing critical talent when employees

leave for other opportunities, work/life programs offer a win-win situation for employers and employees. This paper describes the theories related to work life balance such as Role Hypothesis, Spillover theory, Conflict Theory. Role Hypothesis theory reflects on the role that a worker in a working scenario plays and how such role impacts on his relationship with his family. According to Spillover Theory, negative work experiences viz. long working hours and stress translates impact negatively on the family domain; has negative spillovers on the family. On the other hand, good work experiences, for instance good remunerations, good working conditions and short working hours impacts positively on the family domain; has positive spillovers on the family. The Conflict theory concludes that ordinarily, any activity at the work place will create some forms of conflicts at home. This paper conclude the challenges faced by the employees while adopting work life balance practices in the company and the current status of work life balance in India. Different strategies adopted by the companies such as IBM, TATA, TCS and Zensar Technologies for motivating and retaining the employees have been highlighted.

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