



Emerging Prominence of Work Life Balancing in HR Practice - A Management Perspective

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ABSTRACT

At present, we live in a society filled with conflicting responsibilities and commitments; work life balance has become a predominant issue in the workplace especially for the effective practice of human resource. Lack of work life balance thus impacts working individual's performance at workplace as well as in personal life. In the present economic situation, organisations are hard pressed for higher output and can face the recessionary challenges better if their workforce is more involved with work and workplace. Organisations, more than ever, need workers with enhanced work-life balance. A working person with improved work-life balance will contribute more profoundly towards organisational development and success. This paper offers the management perspective that human resource professionals can assist their companies by using work/life initiatives to gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace. It also discusses the prominence of work life balance of an employee and tries to provide some solutions to the contemporary global crises which demands for greater stability in the corporate world. This could appropriately be understood as the harmony between office and personal life that leads to effective practice HR in the organization.

Keywords: Work life balance, work life initiatives, work life conflicts, challenges, work life programmes

1. Introduction

Composition of work and family life spheres has considerably transformed over a period. Today's working man and woman face a broad set of daily challenges which many times form an imbalance between their working life and personal / family life. Lack of work-life balance thus impacts working individual's performance at workplace as well as in personal life. In the present economic situation, organisations are hard pressed for higher output and can face the recessionary challenges better if their workforce is more involved with work and workplace. Organisations, more than ever, need workers with enhanced work life balance. A working person with improved work-life balance will contribute more profoundly towards organisational development and success.

This paper offers the management perspective of HR practice that human resource professionals can assist their companies to capitalize on triple factors - global competition, individual and family values, and aging workforce - by using work/life initiatives to gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace. A complete analysis of diverse work-life balance theories and benefits of work life balance advantages is presented in this paper to justify further promotion of work life balance programmes at organizational level and of innovative ways to augment the organization's competitive advantage in the marketplace and work life balance challenges offering a win-win solution. It also discusses the prominence of work-life balance of an employee and tries to provide some solutions to the contemporary global crises which demands for greater stability in the corporate world. It reflects on the factors influencing work-life balance and on the solutions entailing wider scope for employers and employees to relate the same and attain optimum results and satisfaction in their lives. This could appropriately be understood as the harmony between office and personal life that leads to effective practice HR in the organization.

2. An Analysis of Work Life Balance from HR Perspective

Work Life balance is a state of attaining equilibrium in which the demands of work need and individual life need are balanced. These phrases and words serve as cultural signposts to explain where we are and where we are going. The term "work life balance" was coined in 1986, although its usage in everyday language was sporadic for several years. Importantly, work life programmes have occurred since 1930. Before World War II, the W.K. Kellogg Company formed four six-hour systems in shifts to substitute the conventional three daily eight-hour system in shifts, and the new shifts brought about improved worker morale and effectiveness.

2.1. Changing and Increasing Work Pressures

Two decades ago, employees were accustomed to having fixed working hours or rather morning 9 am to evening 5 pm from Monday to Friday. The boundary between the time spent at work and time spent at home has vanished with time. But with globalization and people working across the nations, the concept of fixed working hours is disappearing. There has been a change in the hours spent in office from 7 to 8 hours to 12-16 hours in a day.

The technological and scientific advancements such as e-mail, messaging and mobile phones which were used to connect them to their work being away from their office, have integrated their personal and work life. Now employees find themselves working from home. That has reduced the proximity of distance from office to home virtually.

Due to the pressing need of the organization the working hours of the employees have minimum time for themselves and to pursue his/her hobbies or other leisure activities. This type of working scenario deters the holistic progress of the person as an individual in terms of his/her personal, family and spiritual wellbeing. For example, people engaged in the hospital, BPO industry, especially IT professionals, are the few examples who are facing the brunt of the risk and hazard continuously.

2.2. Reasons of Imbalance

There are several reasons for this imbalance and conflicts in the life of a working person. The career ambitions of each person lead to pressure and inability to cope up with his/her family and work. This may happen due to individual reasons or situational reasons. The rapid advancement of information technology, the growing competition in the talent supply market has directed to a performance-focused culture generating pressures and expectations to perform more and better each time. By and large, many people feel that it is not easy to say no to others, particularly their higher officials. They frequently result in over burdening themselves with assigned tasks. The increasing demands and responsibilities on the personal life with age can also generate stress on personal and work life.

2.3. Effects

Continuous struggle and strenuous effort to sustain a balance between the work life and family life certainly bring forth serious implications on the individual life. As stated by a survey, 81 per cent of the study respondents have acknowledged that their work is affecting and creating stress in their private lives. The work-related pressures and family pressures may end up in stressful life situations. Another research study reveals that such circumstances can affect the physical and psychological health of each person. Heart related diseases, cardiac problems, insomnia, depression, irritability, nervousness, insecurity, lack of concentration and sudden breakdowns are becoming common among the victims who experienced imbalance in their lives. It is proved scientifically that work pressure, stressful work environment, work related tension in both work life and family life can lead to negative social life and vice versa.

2.4. Work Life Conflicts

- i. First, the advent of global organisations signifies that the world never sleeps. There is no limit or restriction for time or day to work on. For instance, thousands of EB workers are on duty somewhere. The need to consult with co-workers or clients eight or ten time zones away means many workers of global companies are attentive and alert for any call 24 hours a day.
- ii. Second, communication technology allows many technical and professional employees to do their work at home, in their cars, or on the beach in Tahiti but it also means that many may feel like they never really get away from the office.
- iii. Third, organizations are asking employees to put in longer hours. The last two decades, the average U.S. workweek increased from 43 to 47 hours; and the number of people involved increased to 50 or more hours a week, from 24 to 37 percent.
- iv. Finally, the rise of dual-career couples makes it difficult for married employees to find time to fulfill commitments to home, spouse, children, parents, and friends. At present, we find a large number of single-parent families and a workforce with dependent parents have even more noteworthy challenges in balancing the responsibilities of work life and family life.

Employees progressively identify that work infringes on their family life, and they are unhappy about it. Recent studies suggest that workers want occupations that give them flexibility in their work schedules so they can better manage work-life conflicts. In today's context, the demands of balancing work and life now surpasses job security as an employee's immediate priority. The future generation of workers may show similar concerns. The younger working generation says attaining a balance between personal life and work life is a primary career goal; they want a better family life as well as a secured job. Organisations that do not intend to support their people achieve a balanced work life and family life balance will find it increasingly hard to entice and retain the most capable and motivated workforce.

Hence, today's Daily HR tips are: Managers (particularly HR managers) need to design workplaces and jobs that can help workers deal with work life conflicts. This must be achieved through developing greater flexibility into paid time off (PTO) policies and introducing flexible work hours or work from home. In order to realize this goal, a special training programme can be conducted to change the mindset of many conservative supervisors. Organizations that help their employees to resolve work life conflicts are likely to retain the best and most motivated personnel. In the future, this helps the organizations to gain the greatest competitive advantage.

3. Emerging Prominence of Work Life Balancing in India

It is a great revolution in the area of human resource that India has witnessed in the recent times; it has drastically changed from being just a support function to being a strategic system in the development of commerce and industries. It has transformed itself being simply Personnel Management – maintaining records, worksheet and ensuring government and company statutory compliances, while doing the basic work data to retain employee satisfaction on an even keel to being a combined and integrated part of the business operating system.

In the 21st century, the function of Human Resource in India has given a new transformed model from being 'behind-the screen' function of supportive appendage to becoming the radical transformative system in corporate sector. The implication of globalization has made businesses realize people are the key to development, the only strategic resource that any company truly desires. This has led to enterprises regularly using their creative and innovative Human Resource practices as their USP (Unique Selling Proposition) to carry on with the times in the wake of a fast-moving and rapidly changing workforce. Corporates now identify that a highly engaged employee the key to success, across commercial sectors.

3.1. Benefits of Work Life Balancing in HR

Phenomenal progress of work life balance research and initiation of work life balance programmes at organisational level between 1950's and early years of 21st century has been due to a wide range of benefits initiated by companies for its employees. These welfare initiatives and employee benefits include social and psychological and also economic, and that is the main reason why global and proactive organisations have leveraged work life balance programmes to increase productivity and effectiveness, besides attaining higher degree of employee engagement. McDonald & Bradley (2005) recognized in their studies that there are initiatives of work life balance benefits by a set of employer and employee. The potential availability of talent pool, earlier rejoining of workers to company after maternity leave, lesser percentage of absenteeism, positive employer branding, improved work-related performance, better employee retention, reduced worker turnover, enhanced employee health and higher level of job satisfaction.

3.2. Total Life Planning

Total life planning is a recent and creative approach to work life benefits. It assists employees to evaluate significant aspects of their work life and family life and to understand how they are connected. Their goal is to motivate employees to examine their lives as a whole and assess relationships, emotional and physical wellbeing, careers, spirituality, and their financial condition. From these programmes, the employees of an organisation can easily measure their available choices to improve balance in their lives and form an individualized life plan. The most successful programmes set a goal-oriented environment with a meaningful and useful element for each person. The concept of total life planning denotes a paradigm shift in today's context. One of the key benefits is improved employee vitality, enthusiasm for job, and better efficiency. Total life planning programmes may be provided in conjunction with benefits such as health, life, and insurance facilities, or on a standalone basis. However, not all companies may wish to adopt total life planning, as it brings some topics into the workplace that have traditionally been treated privately.

3.3. Achieving Healthy Work Life Balance

A healthy work life balance is accomplished by establishing clear criteria for success that comprise work objectives, leisure plans, and aims for self-improvement. The organisations need to take an honest look at their priorities and set goals that they can work towards.

3.3.1. Succeeding at Work

The HR managers are expected to think deeply about their criteria for success at work. They must evaluate their criteria to get the job done at what sort of work relationships that they want. After a meaningful reflection, it is important to assess how this approach has impacted their work on the rest of their life. The HR managers must provide sufficient time for their employees to reflect upon how work enriches the whole of their life or has their family life become merely at rest from work. There should be a regular evaluation on how they know if they have been successful at work or not. Their criteria must be specific. It must correlate with the quality of their relationships with colleagues and with their family members. Finally, it must lead to their self-development and learning for the betterment of work life balance.

3.3.2. Identifying Roles

A role is very important either in family life or professional life, because it defines an area of responsibility, such as being a manager, parent, partner, or friend. The employees must define their roles in order to enjoy a healthy work life balance. They must be very careful not to neglect their most important roles. For instance, they must be aware that their roles as a parent may be damaged if they consistently prioritize their work over their family. Their roles as a husband or a wife can suffer if they spend too much time and energy on their career or their children. And friendships can be lost if they do not make the time to pick up the phone. It is advisable that they are clear and flexible in their roles.

3.3.3. *Succeeding in Life*

The employees must think about their life as a whole - their family, friends, leisure pursuits, personal development goals, and involvement in their community. They should know how significant a part that they want to play in the development of their children. They must consider their reasons to be successful in their friendships. They must identify their favorite leisure pursuits. They should know their personal development goals in order to realize that success is about all aspects of life, and not about work. The following practical tips may be helpful for the employees to achieve a healthy work life balance and to succeed in their personal and professional life.

- To make sure that their work is led by their criteria for success.
- To take their interests outside work seriously.
- To ask their friends and family what success means to them.
- To list, prioritize, and assess the important roles they play in their work life and in their family life.
- Time management is one of the best solutions which can help to reduce the imbalance between their personal life and their work life.
- To prioritize the tasks and plan the activities can help to take out some free time which can be utilized for other purposes.
- To take some time out for hobbies and leisure activities, spending time with loved ones can help to beat the stress.
- To learn to say no if it is needed.
- To share the responsibilities will support and refuse to commit for something which is practically impossible.
- To utilize the flexible working hours option of the organisations to get some free time.
- To have an optimistic approach and to start looking around the things, people, and environment positively. So many things to be grateful about and make a list of things they are thankful for all.

4. Conclusion

Work life balance of an employee is as significant for the employing organisation as it is for the individual employee. The individual employee's Work life balance when observed collectively for the total workforce of a company end up in a colossal impact on the qualitative and quantitative performance and effectiveness of a company. The enhanced work life balance achieved by employees with the support of the strategies executed by the employer tends to be more effective as their work engagement improves. In the present economic recession, a company which ignores issues related to employee work life balance will result in lower employee efficiency and in turn will find it harder to overcome the recessionary challenges.

The companies which are ignoring work life balance due to recessionary pressures need to understand the long-term relevance of employee engagement and productivity and need to continue promoting work life balance initiatives. Or else, recessionary pressures coupled with low level of employee engagement and low level of employee productivity will generate new challenges for medium and long-term organisational existence.

Work life programmes have the potential to meaningfully enhance employee morale, lessen absenteeism, and retain organizational knowledge, particularly during difficult economic periods. In today's global market place, as companies aim to reduce costs, it falls to the human resource professional to understand the critical issues of work life balance and champion work life programmes. It may be the employees whose family members or friends are invited to serve their state, single mothers who strive to bring up their children and make an active living, the employees who fall under Generation X and Y value their personal time, working couples struggling to manage dual career marriages, or companies losing critical knowledge when employees leave for other opportunities, work life programmes offer a win-win situation for employers and employees. Therefore, work life balance is an integral part of the overall well-being of an individual. The higher work-life balance, the better are life satisfaction, happiness, subjective health, and emotional well-being. A better and healthy work life balance is beneficial both the employee and business, making it worthy of one's time and investment.

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