Chapter II

AN OVERVIEW OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Work life balance is a competition for both time and energy between the different roles filled by an individual at work place and home. The choices that the people make about their priorities can cause conflict with their bosses, co-workers and family members.1

People have to cope with more and more activities, interests and relationships outside work while trying to meet the increasing demands of the workplace. Work-life balance is about employers identifying their workforce how both the organisation and its employees can benefit from a different and more imaginative approach to working practices. This must be an approach that allows employees to achieve and maintain a better balance between their work and other aspects of their lives.

Similarly work-life balance is about employees identifying their personal needs and demands from family and finding an approach that allows them to tackle the demands from the job and maintain a better balance between work and life.
Managing individual roles

During the 1940’s, and 1950’s, men managed work and women managed life. Women took care of not only the housework, but also the emotional work of running the family. This division of labor minimized the impact on the family when a father needed to increase his focus on work. If the children were ill or even if an elderly dependant needed care, the work routine would not be disrupted because the wife would be responsible for those tasks.

Moen, P (1998) assumed the roles of housekeeper and breadwinner were defined and assigned to specific individuals. In addition, the emotional roles of worrying about children and worrying about financial stability were also defined and assigned. Each partner knew their role and their domain of control and could trust the other partner to handle their responsibilities.²

According to Greenblatt, E. (2002), a major change that occurred in the 1960’s and 1970’s was the significant increase in women entering the labor force, as well as the significant increase in single parent homes either separated or demise of the spouse.³ This have eventually disturbed the shape of work life balance.

This blurred the gender boundaries that defined who is responsible for work issues and who is responsible for life issues. With the gender roles becoming less defined, there is the opportunity for more work life spillover. All employees, both male and female, now deal with aspects of homemaking and breadwinning. This can result in people experiencing more worries about life issues during work hours and because they feel guilty about the intrusion of their personal life on their work life, they may also begin to experience more worry about their job during life hours.

2.2 MEANING OF WORK - LIFE BALANCE
According to Nancy R. Lockwood (2003), the meaning of work-life balance has chameleon characteristics. It means different things to different groups, and the meaning often depends on the context of the conversation and the speaker’s viewpoint.\(^4\)

Creating the right balance between work and home life will vary between different people and also at different stages of their lives. For some people, the issue is not having enough work, whether because they are unemployed, because they are working part time, or because they would like opportunities to work overtime. On the other hand, some people need more time for their life outside work, whether to raise children, to care for a sick, elderly or disabled person, to improve their own skills and knowledge, to volunteer for a community function or to pursue other interests.

Work-life balance from the employees’ viewpoint is the dilemma of managing work obligations and personal/family responsibilities.

Work/life balance from the employers’ viewpoint is the challenge of creating a supportive company culture where employees can focus on their jobs while at work.\(^5\)

2.3 MYTHS AND REALITY OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE

The biggest stumbling blocks to develop a workplace culture that acknowledges and values the importance of work-life balance are the common misconceptions held by the employees as well as the community.

Common Misconceptions\(^6\):

- *Working long hours results in high productivity.*
- *Striving for work-life balance does not equate with commitment to work.*
• *Work-life balance only benefits women with children.*

• Work-life balance is all about assisting people with parental responsibilities.

• Work-life balance is not as important to workers approaching retirement.

**Myth:** *Working long hours results in high productivity.*

**Reality:**

Performance should be assessed on the nature and quality of the work and not on the quantity of time served. Long working hours can negatively impact on the health, safety and overall well-being of employees and the productivity of the organisations that employ them.

Reduced working hours may provide the following benefits to the employees:

- more time to sleep and re-energize, thereby improving overall physical health,
- less stress and fatigue reduces the risk of accidents both within and outside the work environment
- more time available for family, social and community activities, hence greater self-esteem and confidence.

Reduced working hours may provide the following benefits to the employers:

- improved staff morale, organizational commitment and loyalty,
- reduced costs associated with Occupational Health & Safety,
- increased staff retention,
- decrease in staff absenteeism and attrition.

**Myth:** Striving for work-life balance does not equate with commitment to work.

**Reality:**

The assumption that paid work and family, social and community responsibilities and interests should be kept separate is not realistic. Tension caused by personal, cultural or community circumstances can lead to high absenteeism, poor concentration and reduced productivity at work. Conversely, tension in the workplace can also impact on personal, cultural and community activities and interests.

**Myth:** Work-life balance only benefits women with children.

**Reality**

While women remain the primary caregivers of dependent children, the desire by men to become more involved in the care of their children is increasing. Nuclear family culture and dual earning style forces either the father or mother to take care of their children. This suggests that more and more fathers also will be using flexible work arrangements in order to care of their children. Therefore the changing role of fathers means that men, as well as women, benefit from work-life balance.
Myth: Work-life balance is all about assisting people with parental responsibilities.

Reality:

Work-life balance encompasses a range of responsibilities and interests which include but are not limited to employees with parental responsibilities, such as caring responsibilities, individual/personal enrichment, cultural obligations.

Caring Responsibilities

Work-life balance is likely to impact on employees who have caring responsibilities for their aging parents, spouses, grandchildren or children with disabilities.

Personal/Individual Enrichment

If a person does not have family or caring responsibilities, it does not mean that work-life balance is irrelevant to him. Apart from caring responsibility, the people are well aware of self esteem and self worth. Hence, to enrich their individual image, they also concentrate in activities like engaging with community functions, undertaking volunteer work, sports activities, Cultural activities like dance, drama, music, and pursuing further studies.

Myth: Work-life balance is not as important to workers approaching retirement.

Reality:

In a highly competitive labour market, the changing value of older workers is therefore being recognised by many organisations exclusively for invaluable qualities like experience and historical knowledge of an organisation, a high level of commitment, dedication and loyalty which significantly impact on the
productivity of an organisation, organisational savvy and an understanding of workplace culture, the ability to mentor junior employees, increased flexibility to meet organisational needs.

Here comes the balance issue when an employee wish to enjoy the benefits of retirement while maintaining a reasonable level of income and meaningful activity. Remaining in the workforce can provide feelings of belonging, as well as a sense of accomplishment, appreciation and status. At the same time, the employees also want time to enjoy life outside work while being healthy enough to do so.

On the other hand grandparents are increasingly becoming primary caregivers of their grandchildren, and an aging population and a correspondingly aging workforce also means that you may become a grandparent while still performing paid work.

Therefore, work-life balance is as important to older workers as it is to younger workers.

2.4 COMPONENTS OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE

While studying about the components of work-life balance, it is found that can be split into three parts, the demographic profile, the work profile and the life profile. The factors that has to be considered on the demographic profile is termed as demographic factors, the factors that has to be considered on the work profile is termed as work factors and that has to be considered on the life profile is termed as life factors.
2.4.1 Demographic factors:

(i) Age
(ii) Gender
(iii) Geographic location
(iv) Educational qualification
(v) Income
(vi) Work experience
(vii) Marital status
(viii) Employment status of spouse, if applicable
(ix) Dependents
(x) Family style

2.4.2 Work Factors

(i) Work nature

It includes the working time, job nature, job satisfaction, role clarity, flexible working time, utilization of skills.

(ii) Working conditions

It includes work culture, relationship with superiors and fellow workers, job tenure, unbiased work environment.

(iii) Compensation plans

It includes annual pay, incentives, allowances, fringe benefits, increments, retirement benefits,

(iv) Career development

It includes career advancement, promotion, performance appraisal, employee training,

(v) Technology
It includes virtual office, work from home, on-line telephone calls, updating technological advancements.

2.4.3 Life Factors

(i) Health
It includes food habit, exercise, sleep, physical fitness, medical fitness, level of stress, usage of tobacco products / alcoholic drinks.

(ii) Family
It includes parents, siblings, spouse, marital life, children and activities associated with them.

(iii) Relationship
It includes social values, friends, and communal relationship.

(iv) Spiritual values
It includes religious worship, practicing yoga and meditation, religious beliefs and faiths, religious functions.

(v) Personal interest
It includes hobbies, personal likes, adventure, travel, self development, entertainment, amusement, arts and sports.

2.5 BENEFITS OF ACHIEVING PROPER WORK-LIFE BALANCE

The benefits of achieving proper work life balance are classified into three categories.

(i) Benefits to the individuals

(ii) Benefits to the organisation

(iii) Benefits to the society

2.5.1 Benefits to the individuals
Individuals who maintain a balance between work and other commitments or interests

- assists employees to remain in employment while dealing with other responsibilities;
- offers employees the chance to avail of new opportunities alongside their work responsibilities;
- are better able to manage multiple responsibilities without feeling guilty about sacrificing priorities at work or outside;
- are more likely to feel in control of their life because they have choices as opposed to feeling as if they are being forced to sacrifice work or other priorities;
- may feel more secure, happier – and thus motivated – working for an employer that supports their right to make choices between work and home life.

2.5.2 Benefits to the Organisation

The benefits for organisations that have strategies and support mechanisms in place to assist staff in managing their work-life balance are widely documented and include:

- enhances recruitment and retention of employees;
- builds workplace morale and productivity;
- the potential to attract high quality, innovative and productive staff in an increasingly competitive labour market
higher levels of staff morale, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, dedication and loyalty amongst existing employees resulting in retention of current employees whose skills, knowledge and talents are invaluable.

- reduced employment costs associated with recruitment, training, absenteeism and work related accidents.

- an enhanced public perception of the organisation as one that demonstrates an appreciation of flexibility in work to assist staff to manage their work-life balance.

2.5.3 Benefits to the Society

The links between individual and organisational benefits – and thus the social benefits – of effective work-life balance are clear:

- “Workers who are satisfied with their work-life balance are likely to be happier social citizens, parents, care takers and more productive workers. They may work longer and more productively over their lifetime, making a greater contribution, and their health – along with the health of their dependents and partners – may be better, reducing public health expenditure and generally increasing social well being”.

2.6 WORK-LIFE BALANCE POLICIES AND PRACTICES

The work-life balance is based on the concept that paid work and personal life should be seen as complementary elements of a full life. A work life balance policy will establish approaches to develop and implement flexible working arrangements to facilitate employees to combine their work with their family life.

A work life balance policy has to identify and set out the organization’s commitment to make flexible working arrangements necessary for work life balance
for all employees based on their needs assessment, ensure the workplace is free from discrimination of all types and ensure no inconvenience builds up to employees who avail work life balance policies, and design the work life balance policies such that there are no bias in implementing it.

2.7 STEPS TO ACHIEVE WORK LIFE BALANCE

Achieving a more enriched life in terms of a person’s family commitments, physical health, social, community and cultural life is about having some measure of control over when, where, and how a person works. Access to flexible work options and flexible leave entitlements are key methods by which employees can effectively manage their work-life balance.

2.7.1 Flexible Work Options

Flexible working arrangements allow for the best possible match between the industry’s operational requirements and the personal, family, social or community responsibilities and interests of employees. Flexible work options can be achieved through

- Part-time work
- Job sharing
- Flexi-time
- Flexible Location
2.7.2 Part-time Work

Part-time work for professional staff members entails working less than the standard weekly or fortnightly hours, for which all entitlements are paid on a pro-rata basis.

2.7.3 Job Sharing

Job sharing is a form of permanent part-time work in which a full-time position is divided between two or more people, each of whom shares responsibility for the entire workload. Each job sharer receives conditions of employment and entitlements on a pro-rata basis in proportion to the hours worked.

2.7.4 Flexi-time

Flexi-time is an arranged agreement between higher authorities and employees in which they mutually agree to vary their staff member’s commencing, ceasing and meal break times while still maintaining the total number of hours worked over a period.

It usually involves defining ‘core’ hours when all employees must be in work. Starting and finishing times are normally flexible. Another version of flexi-time is when time off in lieu accrued when a staff member works longer than stipulated time. These accrued hours can be used to reduce the work hours during other days within the week/fortnight.

2.7.5 Flexible Location

Innovative ways of working are no longer confined to a physical workplace. With the development of technology, many new methods are adopted. They are:

♦ E-working
The concept of e-working means working at a distance, or even a remote location and using technology to ease communications. It can also include a combination of e-working and office based work. It is well suited to performing information technology tasks and works well in certain situations where the employee has a high degree of autonomy.

♦ Virtual teams

A further development in this area is the putting together of teams of e-workers to work in a mutually supportive way. The members of the team may never meet and may not even be in the same country. This form of teamwork may be suitable in certain situations but the lack of personal interaction and human contact will render it inappropriate in situations where these factors are considered important.

♦ Working from Home

The employees may work from home with the help of technological advancement for a specified period of time, for a specific project or under certain conditions provided the arrangement is both appropriate and practicable.

Approval for a home based work arrangement is therefore considered on a project to project basis, having regard to the nature and requirements of the work.

Work duties that involve a high level of autonomy and independence are more appropriate for home based work.

2.7.6 Flexible Leave Entitlements
Flexible leave are those leave which are additional to the statutory leave entitled by the employees. Few of the flexible leave are:

2.7.7 Parental leave

Parental leave includes maternity and paternity leaves. Maternity leave is a statutory leave as per the laws of Indian Government. The level of awareness on paternity leave is very low among Indian IT employees. On the other hand, a number of employers are recognizing the importance of making some provision for such leave in employment contracts and practice.

2.7.8 Employment or career breaks

At a certain stage in working life of an employee, a break may be needed, may be, to devote more time to some other things or for personal development reasons. The facilitating of such breaks can assist in retaining a valued employee. A large number of organisations provide such breaks on either a formal or less structured basis.

2.7.9 Study leave

When undertaking a course of study an employee may need to take leave before exams or to complete assignments. For this purpose many employers grant leave in addition to the employees’ annual leave entitlement. This may be paid or unpaid.

2.7.10 Sabbaticals

This is a period of absence from work which may or may not be on full pay, and duration is normally related to length of service. Sabbaticals provide an opportunity for employees to take a break from their work, or engage in new activities.
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