Chapter – 7

Work Life Programmes
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WORK LIFE PROGRAMMES

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Today, the employees prefer the organizations that recognize their commitments both inside and outside the workplace. A survey of 10,000 managers in Europe, US, Russia and Japan found that balancing the needs of work and personal life was the most or the second most important attribute in a job. The need for balance was placed higher than remuneration in almost every country (Gemini Consulting 1998). In a study of 2,510 graduating students from 11 countries (including Japan and South Korea), PricewaterhouseCoopers (1999) found that work-life balance was their most important career goal. Another survey reported that 46% of managers would change jobs for a better quality of life, 30% would take a pay cut to improve their work life balance (Management Today, 1999). Organizations are now recognizing the changing needs of employees and realize that work and personal life are interdependent and employees personal issues can impact job performance. Hence, organizations are coming up with a number of work life programmes which aim at helping the employees achieve work life balance.

According to Lobel (1999), work life programmes are initiatives adopted by organizations to help employees manage the interface between their paid work and other important life activities, including family. Newman and Mathews (1999) defined work life policies as arrangements to support employees faced with balancing the competing demands of work and family in today’s fast paced complex environment.
7.2 WORK LIFE PROGRAMMES

The different work life programmes/initiatives which the organizations provide include flexible work arrangements, flexible location, flexible leave arrangements, childcare arrangements and other work life balance arrangements e.g. employee assistance programmes.

7.2.1 Flexible Work Arrangements

(i) Flexible working hours

Also called flexible scheduling, this arrangement allows employees to work in a non traditional schedule to meet personal needs. It enables the employees to have greater flexibility in their attendance patterns by varying start and finishing times, length of breaks and length of working day. Some workers arrive at work late and leave late, others arrive early and leave early. Managers and employees agree on the schedule, which revolves around a set of core hours (a designated time through the central portion of the day during which all employees are present). For example, employees may be requested to work between 10am to 3.00pm and may be given an option to work additional hours either before or after this period in order to work the full day. These kinds of arrangements are beneficial to the workers having family responsibility (e.g. one can pick his child from school or from bus stop), to individuals who want to indulge in professional development (e.g. taking up training courses in the evenings), and to those who want to participate in community service. According to the study by Watson Wyatt Worldwide (2000), these flexible arrangements result in increased profitability and productivity due to the following reasons:
Short term abstentions are reduced because of greater control over schedules; tardiness is reduced since the workday begins when the employee arrives, morning coffee breaks are reduced due to staggered hours; employees are more likely to work during their most productive hours—mornings for early birds, evenings for night owls; workers are more focused on doing the job as opposed to spending time in the office.

(ii) Compressed work week

It is an arrangement of work hours that allow employees to complete their task in fewer days than the usual five-day work week. In this arrangement, a traditional 35-40 hour work week is condensed into fewer than five days of work. For example, instead of working eight hours for five days, employee can complete 40 hours by working 10 hours a day, for four days. A compressed workweek may improve coverage and allow space and equipment to be used more efficiently. When this option is used voluntarily, it has been shown to improve morale, reduce stress and make employees more satisfied with their work and personal lives (Seitel, 2010).

(iii) Job sharing

This arrangement divides the responsibilities of a full-time position between two part-time people. In other words, two part-time employees carry out the tasks associated with a single job. For job sharing to work successfully, the associates must be compatible and have good communication skills. Some examples of job sharing are: half or split days, i.e., one partner working in the morning and the other partner working in the afternoon, half or split weeks, i.e. one partner working for first half of
the week (Monday to Wednesday morning) and other working in the later half of the week, or it can be working on alternative weeks.

(iv) Part time work

This arrangement can be made available only when the responsibilities of a job can be decreased by giving an employee a smaller service area or fewer projects, or a section of the job can be split off and delegated to some other person. This kind of an arrangement helps the employee to meet both job and personal needs.

(v) Annual hours option

It is an arrangement between the employers and employees regarding total working hours per annum. So, when the fixed number of hours to be worked in a year are completed, the employee can use paid leave for the remainder of time. This kind of an option is useful in the areas where there are peak periods which require extended hours of work, and then have quieter times, when fewer employees are required.

(vi) 48/52 option

In this option, employee works for 48 weeks rather than 52 each year. Though the payment is made for all 52 weeks but at the rate of 48 week a year, and reduction in salary is spread across the year rather than at a specific time when one takes leave without pay.

(vii) Banking of hours

In this option, the employees can work long hours during the peak periods and bank these extra hours and can use them during the quiet periods.
(viii) **Phased return from leave**

In this arrangement, when an employee returns from leave (maternity, paternity, career break), he can start with a part time schedule with a gradual increase to full time schedule.

(ix) **Staggered/ Phased Retirement**

It is an arrangement of reducing the hours of work over a number of years or stepping down to less responsibility in preparation of retirement. It allows employees to keep away from abrupt change in lifestyle and move gracefully into retirement.

### 7.2.2 Flexible Location

(i) **Telecommuting**

This is a work arrangement in which the employee works from a home office or any alternate work location for either a portion of or all of the work week. They work using computers and other electronic equipment (e.g. phone, fax, pager) that connect them with their office and may go to their work location only for some quarterly or monthly meetings. As the workdays and commutes lengthen in many urban areas, staff members increasingly value the option to work at home or at customer's site as a way to offset these changes. Specific benefits that can be gained from this arrangement include: enhanced recruitment, uninterrupted time for creative, repetitive or highly detailed work, improved morale, commitment and productivity resulting from support for personal work style preferences, reduced absenteeism and lateness, improved transportation and parking challenges (Mrudula and Kashyap, 2004).
(ii) Work from home

This kind of an arrangement differs from the teleworking/telecommuting in that it does not require the employees to stay electronically connected to the work location during business hours. Work performed is generally done independently so does not require team interaction or consistent communication (Ross, n.d.).

7.2.3 Flexible Leave Arrangements

These include maternity leave, paternity leave, marriage leave, adoption leave, career breaks, and sabbaticals. Among maternity/paternity leave, the former is most popular and opted by almost all female employees. Young employees often exercise the option of taking a leave for marriage to spend time with their new companion. Sabbaticals are small breaks from the job which employees use to refresh themselves or to upgrade their skills, e.g. an organization may allow a sabbatical for 3 months, after every seven years of service. Career break is an unpaid leave arrangement during which the contract of the employees is suspended.

7.2.4 Childcare Arrangements

(i) Vacation childcare programmes

It refers to provision of childcare arrangement for employees during the school vacation. These programmes may either be work based, or may involve reimbursement of expenses to enroll the child in some school vacation program. This reduces the difficulties parents face in finding vacation care for the children and result in increased workplace satisfaction and efficiency.
(ii) Childcare referral services

Under this service, the employees are provided contact information for the children services close to the workplace, or sometimes the organization may tie up with some child care agencies to provide childcare services at subsidized rates.

(iii) Childcare Network

It is a list of carers who are available at a short notice for emergency childcare when parents cannot take a leave.

(iv) Work based childcare

It is a facility of childcare provided at the place of work especially useful to the nursing mothers or those with young children, to keep regular contact with their children during the day.

(v) Family Room

A family room may be provided at the workplace, which can be used if the care giver is unable to find alternative care for the child at a short notice. A computer facility in the room may enable the caregiver to continue working while in the room with the child.

7.2.5 Other Work Life Balance Arrangements

(i) Employees Assistance Programmes (EAP'S)

These programmes offer a resource and referral service for employees and family members, which includes short term counseling for personal or financial matters, establishing employees support groups and conducting seminars and workshops to help employees balance work and life.
(ii) **Employee Welfare Programmes**

These include provision of on site fitness centers, stress management, yoga sessions etc.

### 7.3 BENEFITS OF WORK LIFE PROGRAMMES/POLICIES

Work life programmes can affect business performance in number of ways:

- The employers can attract better recruits by offering work life balance policies alongside competitive remuneration packages.

- Work life polices can improve the 'employee experience' and hence help the organization to retain their staff. Turnover is a major issue in organizations because of the cost of hiring and training new personnel. So with work life policies, organization can save money on recruitment costs and also lose less on institutional knowledge.

- Work life balance programmes also minimize stress and reduce fatigue, which may lead to better physical and mental health of the employees, and also results in lower absenteeism.

- Work life policies can enhance productivity by reducing negative spillovers from family to work. Moreover, reduced stress and better health also leads to productivity gains.

- Environments that support employee's work life balance have been found to improve organization commitment and job satisfaction as the employees feel more connected with an organization if the organization cares for them.
• The organization which supports work life balance programmes/ policies often receive community recognition as "good corporate citizen" or "employers of choice". However, the extent to which the organizations are concerned about public approval or disapproval may vary according to their size and location in the business environment.

• The advantages of work life programmes are not limited to the workplace alone. Work life policies and flexible work practices can also help the organization to respond to the changing market conditions and customer demands more effectively. Flextime, part time work or shift work can be utilized to meet seasonal peaks and troughs in business or to keep establishments open for longer hours without making employees work for longer hours (Joshi, 2007).

A number of studies (as quoted earlier in Section 2.9 of Chapter 2) have reported the benefits that accrue to the organizations that provide work life programmes/ policies. Thomas and Ganster (1995) reported that family supportive work policies and practices might produce significant benefits in terms of employees’ attitudes and well being. Konrad and Mangel (2000) found a strong relationship between provision of work life benefits and productivity in the firms employing higher percentage of women and higher percentage of professionals. Environments that support employees’ work/life balance have been found to improve organizational commitment (Allen, 2001). A US survey has demonstrated the strong relationship between employee commitment and return to shareholders, finding that companies with highly committed employees had a 112% return to shareholders over three years, compared with a 76% return for companies with low employee commitment, and 90%
for companies with average commitment (Watson Wyatt Worldwide, 2000). Dex and Scheibl (2001) found that business benefits can follow from SME’s adopting flexible working arrangements. Maxwell and McDougall (2004) reported that work life balance initiatives helped in management of stress and also improved performance. Waddell and Carr (2007) cited a study of 1000 employed adults which revealed 91% of the participants agreed that workers are more likely to behave ethically at work when they have a good balance between their job and their personal life. Adopting flexible and work life balance oriented policies builds a positive perception about the employer. This leads to better relations with the employees, continued staff loyalty, motivation and commitment (Joshi, 2007). Figure 7.1 shows the benefits of improved work life balance to employees and employers.

**Fig. 7.1: Benefits of improved work/life balance.**

(Source: *The case for Work/Life Balance: Closing the gap between Policy and Practice, 20:20 Series | A Hudson initiative to help businesses compete and succeed in the future, 2005*).
To conclude, Naithani (2010) has classified the benefits of these work life balance initiatives into Quantitative and Qualitative benefits. Quantitative benefits include cost of absenteeism, health insurance premiums, diminished productivity, direct medical claims, staff turnover and recruitment and customer satisfaction. Some of the qualitative benefits include retaining valued employees, motivated workforce, attracting a wider range of candidates, reputation of employer of choice, reduced recruitment costs, maximized available labour, improved quality of applicants, happier life at work and at home, better work place relations, improved self-esteem and concentration, time for personal and family life, greater control of working life, better management of home and work, and supportive workplace that values staff.

7.4 BARRIERS TO WORK LIFE BALANCE PROGRAMMES

Though the organization are coming up with various work life policies but still there is a need for an effective implementation of these policies as there are a number of informal barriers for employees accessing these policies which contradicts the organizations formal policy and support. Some of these barriers are: poor communication of policies, high workloads, career repercussions, and influence of peers (Waters and Bardoel 2006).

Though policies and programmes are framed but are sometimes not properly communicated to the employees and being unaware, employees cannot utilize these programmes. Secondly, high workloads which might further pile up on taking offs is another major inhibitor for the employees. Many employees have a perception that the use of work family policies would have a negative impact on their career. They feel that use of such policies might be considered as their lack of commitment towards the job.
Sometimes the employees are reluctant to inflict extra work on other staff because it might cause resentment as they might be viewed as being a non-team player.

Hence, there is a need not only for work life policies but also to remove the barriers which inhibit the use of these policies in order to enable the workforce to have proper work life balance.

7.5 PROGRAMMES OF WORK LIFE BALANCE PROVIDED IN SELECTED ORGANIZATIONS

Figures 7.2 to 7.6 show various programmes of work life balance which are being provided in the selected IT and ITES organizations as per the working professionals included in the study.

7.5.1 Flexible Leave Arrangements

Figure 7.2 shows the variety of flexible leave arrangements offered to employees in IT and ITES organizations. Working professionals opined that there were provisions for marriage leave (71%), maternity leave (64%), examination/study leave (48%), parental leave and carer’s leave (29%), paternity leave (36%), adoption leave (32%), career break (24%), compassionate leave (12%), and bereavement leave (6%) in their organizations. A small percentage of working professionals stated that in their respective organizations, there was a provision of fixed number of leaves and earned leave. From the responses of working professionals, it seems that they were not aware of the flexible leave arrangements provided by their respective organizations. There was a lot of variation among the responses of employees of a single organization. Most
of them were aware only of the leave availed of or, intended to be availed of in near future.

Figure 7.3 shows the flexible work arrangements provided by IT and ITES organizations to its employees. The variety of flexible work arrangements operational

7.5.2 Flexible Work Arrangements
in the organizations, as per the working professionals, included flexi time (39%), part time working (22%), annual hour system (19%), compressed working week (12%) and job sharing (9%). A very low percentage of professionals (1%-3%) stated that other flexible arrangements including banking of hours and 48/52 option also existed in IT and ITES organizations.

**Figure 7.3**

**Flexible work arrangements**

7.5.3 Childcare Arrangements

It is evident from the response of IT and ITES professionals (Figure 7.4) that the various childcare arrangements prevalent in IT and ITES organizations included
telephone access (28%), vacation childcare programmes (9%), work based child care (8%), family room (5%), childcare network (3%) and child care referral services (1%). From the findings it can be concluded that majority of organizations do not provide child care arrangements.

7.5.4 Flexible Location

Only 39% (Figure 7.5) of the working professionals enjoyed the facility of e-working i.e. operating from home, telecommuting and virtual teams. Majority of the
professionals thus had to operate from their respective offices in the IT and ITES organizations.

**Figure 7.5**

### Flexible location

![Bar chart showing flexible location with 39%]

#### 7.5.5 Other Work Life Balance Arrangements

About 50% of the working professionals (Figure 7.6) stated that the organizations organized seminars/workshops for balancing work and life, constituted employee support groups and organized employee wellness programmes, such as, stress management, yoga etc. Only 12% of the professionals opined that there were work family sensitization programmes for supervisors.
On the basis of the findings, it can be concluded that except for flexible leave arrangements, flexi time, employee wellness programmes and employee assistance programmes, not many work life balance programmes/provisions are being made available by the IT and ITES organizations. Further, many working professionals are not aware of the existing programmes. There is a lot of scope for strengthening flexible work arrangements, childcare arrangements and work-family sensitization programmes for supervisors.
REFERENCES


