CHAPTER 8

RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 HR INTERVENTIONS FOR EMPLOYEE WORK-LIFE BALANCE

It may be the priority as well as desire of every individual employee to achieve work life balance; although, this is not a whole –sole responsibility of the employee. Work-life balance has become most significant issue and matter of pervasive concern to be considered by the employers (Tenbrunsel et. al., 1995). All the norms and conditions of work-place are are advocated and considered by the employers and who are also considered to be playing the role of a facilitator who would help the employees to combine the work and family of the employees. Researches show that whenever any kind of conflict from one domain demands the other, the requirements of the other realm may be met in a better way and would show to be lesser harmful to the first domain because of any management strategy (Kirchmeyer & Cohen, 1999). Organisations have designed many policies and practices in order to meet the changing requirements and demands of employee and to facilitate them to achieve work-life balance because of this philosophy and also because of the change in demographics as seen in the rate of change in participation of working women and working mothers, the rise in dual-career couples, and the increase in single-parent families (Goodstein, 1994; Morgan & Milliken, 1992; Osterman, 1995), organisations have crafted many policies and practices in order to address the changing needs and demands of employees and help them achieve better work-life balance. Such interventions which are meant to facilitate employees along with their families are known as family-friendly policies (FFPs) or work-life benefits and programmes (WLBPs). WLBPs are those regulatory, specially designed procedural arrangements along with formal and informal practices facilitates individual to manage the interference between work and family lives (Osterman, 1995). WLBPs may be categorized into three ways i.e. policies, benefits and services. Policies may be described as a formal and informal method which is used in order to handle employees’ work and leave schedules, along with part-time work, flexitime, and parental/family leave. Benefits may include different types of compensations given to the employees in order to protect them from loss of earnings, help in bearing medical expenses along with sponsoring. Some of the other benefits also include services such as on-site or near-
site childcare centres, housing and recreation facilities. Government mandated statutory policies may also be included in programmes and provisions of WLBPs, some of the popular provisions which an employer is liable to provide his/her employee are maternity leave benefit and equal pay for equal work, no discrimination at work place etc. as well as discretionary policies and benefits offered by various organisations such as flexitime, telecommuting and employee assistance programmes such as stress management programmes (Ingram & Simons, 1995; Osterman, 1995; Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000; Zedeck & Mosier, 1990). However, work family balance has been described as a parenting or dependent care issue. But, now a lot many organisations are now increasing their spectrum of the policies and practices in order to enhance employees’ participation in issues related with life roles and even personal developments. These WLBPs not only support but an enhanced recognition has been observed for those with apparent family need and responsibility (e.g., working mothers having child care responsibilities) but also for all the employees passing through different life stages who might have been experiencing work-life stresses regardless of their family status. Previously, considering WLBPs was assumed to be as practical response caused due to several reasons such as the increase in the proportion of women employees in the workforce, employees who have caring responsibilities along with the problems leading to absenteeism, turnover (Lambert, 2000). Nonetheless, organisations are said to be following ‘high commitment work systems’ (Osterman, 1995) who adopt such programmes which also ensure high levels of employee commitment and innovation. WLBPs are readily being accepted as strategic, innovative, crucial and progressive (Lambert, 2000; Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000, Tenbrunsel et al., 1995).

Benefits of WLBPs for employees and organisations-

I. Benefits of WLBPs for Employees: It has been observed that employee control over time and place has been raised higher due to WLBPs (Thomas & Ganster, 1995) and it also leads to the reduction in work-family interference (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998) and stress (Thompson & Prottas, 2006). Although there has been a strong support for WLBPs, despite this the precautionary examples suggest that in these benefits some policies may appear to be family-friendly may prove to be detrimental to the working conditions of employees. As for an instance, some work arrangements such as telecommuting and flexible work schedules are arrangements which may rather promote employees to work even more (Glass & Fujimoto, 1995).

II. Benefits of WLBPs for Organisations: Organisations also look forward for lots of benefits in providing WLBPs. In some research findings a strong positive relationship has been
observed between WLBPs and reduced absenteeism (Dex & Scheibl, 1999; Lobel & Kossek, 1996; Osterman, 1995; Thompson, Beauvais & Lyness, 1999), leads to increase in productivity (Sands & Harper, 2007), improvement in rate of recruitment and retention rates (Allen, 2001; Anderson, Coffey & Byerly, 2002; Honeycut & Rosen 1997; Konrad & Mangel, 2000; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). However, despite the empirical evidences showing the benefits, WLBPs are not so well established organisational practices (Lobel, 1999; Osterman, 1995).

8.2 A CONCEPTUAL MODEL: DETERMINANTS OF WORK LIFE BALANCE

Figure 8.2.1: A Conceptual model: Determinants of work-life balance

In order to comprehend the conceptual framework of the present study, an understanding of factors, which to contribute to work-life balance is extremely important. Different writers and experts discussed work life balance under the light of these factors. Depending on the review of literature and this research a model has been conceptualized which explains the factors which
lead to work-life balance. The main construct as defined in the research model consists of supportive work environment, flex- hours, flex working conditions, family friendly policies, safety, opportunities for personal growth and development. This study infers that there is a relationship between these factors and work life balance. Further, it is recommended that while designing work life balance programmes and policies for the employees of banking sector above model may be taken into consideration for more effective implementation of work-life balance programmes and policies.

8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

This section of the study endeavours to suggest different policies, practices and strategies that are needed to reduce work life imbalance. Although there is no “magic bullet” solution, the research findings suggest that there are a number of ways to reduce this work life conflict. This research report makes 25 recommendations which may be used by the employers, employees and families, and government in order achieve work life balance.

Recommendations for employers

1. Banking organisations should devote more resources in improving “people management” practices within the workplace. Friendly and supportive work environment has been observed to be instrumental in the research so friendly and supportive work environment should be fostered such practices should be encouraged in order to have a better work-life balance.

2. Employers should make initiatives to provide employees with enhanced control and flexibility regarding the time and place from where they work. Those employees who are provided with such control freedom of working with regard to the time and place of work tend to show lower levels of role overload, work to family and family to work interference.

3. More supportive work environments must created by the employers by increased employee participation. This would help in identifying and implementing the type of support needs, and also in conveying them about policies, programmes and benefits that may currently be available to them in a better way.

4. Employers should specially keep endeavouring to encourage employees so that they take up supports and facilities which are readily available and they should also ensure that
employees who are making use of such assistances should not feel that career may get jeopardize by making use of these benefits.

5. Employer should also endeavour to offer their employees with an explicit right which may be used by the employees to refuse overtime work. Providing employees with the ability to refuse overtime hours appears to be quite effective in reducing high role overload. This may reflect the increase ability such employees to more easily schedule time with the family or ran errands.

6. The transfer of the employees from full time work to part time work and vice versa should be made easier for employees by the employers. Pro-rated benefits must be introduced as a guarantee for part time workers it should also be ensured that they can easily swap to full time status by those who elect to work part time temporarily along with promise of protecting employee’s seniority while shifting from full to part time work and vice versa.

7. An appropriate support must be provided to those employees who are working in rotating shift. Employee participation must be invited and their suggestions must be welcomed from those who perform shift work while designing policies regarding shift work. Some of the popular policies practiced which were found to be effective include limiting split shifts, providing advanced notice in case of shift change and provisions regarding permission to employees in order to facilitate trade shifts amongst themselves.

8. Initiatives must be taken to raise the employee sense of control with the help of increased use of self directed teams and encouraging employee participation in a more useful way by involving them in decision making process. Also, the process of sharing of information between the management and employees should be increased and improved

9. Employers must check and examine employee workload concerns.

10. Employers must consider to offer ‘Employee and Family Assistance Programs’ in order to be employer of the choice.

11. Employers must clearly communicate to the employees that organization is committed to work-life balance in order to create more awareness, information, and to improve knowledge and understanding of policies by facilitating easy accessibility for all the employees. Further, it is also recommended there should be transparency the process of disseminating information related to current and future policies are provided in some user friendly version such as through Intranet and Internet. It should also be ensured that the same information are
also provided to the employees in a paper version so that the span and opportunity to accessibility is increased for both present employees as well as for the prospective job applicants.

12. It must be ensured by the employers that organizational policies which support work-life balance among the employees are implemented with fairness and consistency and in order to achieve greater fairness and consistency in implementing supporting WLB policies can be done by issuing guidelines which provide examples of good practice. Post-implementation monitoring of policies should also be ensured in order to achieve a satisfactory level of consistency in their application across the organization.

13. In order to ensure the success of work life balance approach it is very important to sought the views of those people who are directly concerned with the supervision with regard to work life issues. And they should also be encouraged to take responsibility of the process. The awareness regarding existing WLB programmes and policies may be done by conducting a series of focus groups with such people who have awareness and knowledge about existing WLB policies along with this aspects of work life balance may also be included in already existing management and employee development programmes’ proposal on equal opportunities and diversity.

14. Employees must be encouraged to take up leisure activities in which they can explore their talents as well as enjoy and in order to achieve this objective employer should organize training camps for those employees who like dancing, painting etc as so that they can identify their talents as well as enjoy as such exercises help employees to return back to work with more energy and enthusiasm.

15. Employers should organize family engagement programmes so that employees get the opportunity to meet each others’ family which sometimes proves beneficial as employees learn to balance his/her work & personal life by seeing other person balancing it and families also learn about the difficulties faced in the work places by their partner.

16. Employers must facilitate employees with Yoga classes & meditation facility on regular basis in order to enhance their physical & mental strength.
Recommendations for employees and their families

17. It must be ensured that whatever WLB programmes and policies are already existing in one’s organization are utilized by the employees and their families and they take full advantage of these support programmes and policies.

18. The issues related with work life balance must be raised in workplace discussions and within the community.

19. Employees must try in order to educate themselves on the ways how to deal with stress effectively.

20. Educational campaigns must be set in order to increase individual worker’s knowledge of work life balance issues and provide the fellow employees with the tools required for effectively dealing with work life interferences.

Recommendations for the Government

21. Government also ought to maintain consistency with regard to labour standards and conditions of work pertaining to work life balance. By providing basic facilities and common standards to the employees would give a head start to the organizations in develop. It is therefore suggested that government must take stronger steps and implements legislations which support work-life balance.

22. Government should strive first to be a model employer. As the Government is the biggest employer in the country, the central and the state governments should set a positive example in order to encourage practices related to work life balance. If the government owned organization first own up being seen as a model employer make the government stand at the morally higher platform to expect and request to implement work life balance supporting policies from other private sector employers.

23. In order to addresses the needs of children of all ages as well as elder care the government ought to develop and implement policies a national child and eldercare program, programs for dependents of working class with provisions such as unpaid leave, long leaves, job sharing, flexi-hours and flexi-work conditions etc.
24. Some special provisions must be introduced and make them easier to be availed by the employees who need to stay home to care for their children or elderly dependents or need to meet some emergency at the home front.

25. The government should endeavour to contribute to work life balance initiatives by promoting researches sanctioning research grants and provide funds for research in the area. It should also disseminate relevant information to key stakeholder for developing and offering appropriate educational programs that illustrate the consequences of imbalance long with educating employees and families on how to cope up with conflict.

8.4 CLOSING COMMENTS

The increasing interference between work and life obligations accounts for both an economic and social problem. Productivity is deterred, increasingly very high cost of production are being observed, taking a toll upon personal health and family well being is also at risk. There have been diverse range of the problems which have increased over the past few years. The work-life imbalance is experienced by both the employees of private and public sector banks and across the genders. This is a pervasive issue prevalent in our society. Individuals, families, employers and governments all can take actions in order to neutralize the stress caused as a consequence of work-life imbalance, and all the stakes will be benefitted with the action taken in this regard. Most of the actions are cost reducing in both the short and long term. Furthermore, it is an alarming situation which demands shift in attitudes of the employers; recognizing their employees as their family members and by coming forward with personal initiative in order to provide provisions and policies supporting work life balance among the employees. The prime responsibility of individuals working in banking sector is caring and nurturing for children, their elderly and other dependants. It is also expected people of working age to work and earn their own living. Supporting them in meeting all those responsibilities with the help of WLBPs is a positive sum game.