

WORK LIFE BALANCE STRATEGIES: EMERGED AS A STRATEGIC ISSUE FOR HRM AND A KEY ELEMENT OF AN ORGANIZATION'S EMPLOYEE RETENTION STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

Work life balance (WLB) is an issue increasingly recognised as of strategic importance to organizations and of significance to employees. Organization's need to attract and retain valued employees in a highly competitive labour market is a strong motivating factor for increased organizational awareness and action with regard to implementation and management of WLB strategies. These article reports explore the range and usage of WLB strategies in organizations, and identify the barriers to those strategies. It is evident that, while some progress has been made over the years, there remain substantial challenges for the implementation and management of WLB strategies.

Keywords: WorkLife, HRM, Retention Strategies, Organizations

1. INTRODUCTION

Companies that are bigger, more globalised and better managed provide a better work-life balance for their employees, according to the evidence of our research. What's more, tough product market competition improves management .An organization's need to attract and retain valued employees in a highly competitive labour market is a strong motivating factor for increased organizational awareness and action with regard to human resource policies and practices that address work/life balance. Work/life balance (WLB) is an important area of human resource management that is receiving increasing attention from government, researchers, management and employee representatives and the popular media.

Employers view the benefits or working conditions that they provide to help the employees balance the family and work domains as work life benefits (Bardoel, Tharenou, & Moss, 1998; Russell& Bowman, 2000). WLB strategies in an organizational setting include policies covering flexible arrangements, child and dependent care, and family and parental leave (Becker, B. and M. Huselid.,1998;Kramar, 1997).

In contrast, work/life conflict is defined as a form of inner role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and other life domains, such as family, are mutually incompatible in some respect, whereby participation in one role is made more difficult by the virtue of participation in the other (Greenhaus& Beutell, 1985). Initially the concept of work/life conflict was focused on the impact of family demands on work. It now extends to the impact work has on individual stress, relationships and family well being (Russell & Bowman, 2000). Work/life conflict may be characterized by a lack of it between employees and their life responsibilities, and the goals of the organization (Becker &Huselid,1998;Erwin& Iverson, 1994; Lewis & Cooper, 1995).

Work/life conflict may include issues such as difficulties faced related to child-rearing, other kinship responsibilities, or stressful life events (Hobson, Delunas & Kesic, 2001).

2. WORK/LIFE BALANCE AS A STRATEGIC HRM CONCERN

WLB has emerged as a strategic issue for HRM and a key element of an organization's employee retention strategies (Cappelli, 2000; Lewis & Cooper, 1995). It has been argued that organizations need to be aware of the changing needs of employees and provide flexible WLB strategies in order to retain their employees. Organizations that seek to increase employee morale, commitment and satisfaction, and reduce sources of stress and problems at work, will improve their ability to recruit and retain talented and valued employees (Cappelli, 2000).

3. THE CONTEXT FOR WORK/LIFE BALANCE STRATEGIES IN INDIAN ORGANIZATIONS

There is increasing awareness of the benefits of providing more flexible HR strategies (Grover & Crooker, 1995), reflecting increasing recognition of the fact that work and other life commitments cannot easily be separated. As organizations move towards more participative and flat structures where fewer employees are expected to manage increased workloads (Hall & Richter, 1988), the demands of the environment increase, and maintaining the balance between the demands of a career and life responsibilities becomes more difficult.

The importance of WLB has increased as a corollary of increasing workforce diversity (Bond, Galinsky & Swanberg, 1997). For example, The number of employees with responsibilities for the care of family members will continue to increase. Also, the increasing participation of women in the workforce creates increasing pressure for diversity management and WLB strategies. Although work/life, and particularly work/family, conflict is well-recognized as an issue for both sexes, it continues to place additional responsibilities on working women, as they have tended to experience the major responsibility for domestic matters (Abbott, De Cieri & Iverson, 1998; Borrill & Kidd, 1994; Judge, Boudreau & Bretz, 1994; Konrad & Mangel, 2000).

I argue that there is a need for organizations in the current business environment to adopt HR strategies and policies that accommodate the work/life needs of a diverse workforce (Cox & Blake, 1991; Robinson & Dechant, 1997), and WLB strategies are a key element of this. Each form of diversity may present particular challenges for management and employees, and create an imperative for flexible and inclusive management strategies (Dass & Parker, 1999; De Cieri & Olekalns, 2001; Joplin & Daus, 1997). The emergent challenge for Indian organizations is to develop the capability to attract, motivate and retain a highly skilled, flexible and adaptive workforce. This is particularly valuable at management and senior management levels, in order to develop the leadership skills necessary for organizations to survive. Any organization aiming to increase competitive advantage needs to develop an approach to HR and WLB strategies that cater for the diverse needs of the workforce.

Management strategies which endeavour to address the apparent lack of 'fit' between work demands and

the new diversity of workforce characteristics are emerging, although progress has been somewhat piecemeal (Spearritt & Edgar, 1994). There is an increasing body of literature which documents that HR strategies are influenced by contextual influences such as those outlined above (eg., Jackson & Schuler, 1995). The interests of the employee have become more central to management concerns as managers seek to avoid the loss of potential creativity and commitment and threats of litigation from not addressing

4. BARRIERS TO WORK/LIFE BALANCE STRATEGIES

Several barriers have been identified as creating major difficulties for the development and implementation of WLB strategies. Barriers may be defined as obstacles or hindrances to the implementation and on-going effectiveness of WLB strategies. The focus in this paper is on barriers that are attributable to the organizational environment. The extant literature has identified such barriers as including:

- An organizational culture which emphasizes and rewards long hours and high organizational Commitment (to the neglect of other life commitments);
- An isolated, hostile and unsupportive working environment for employees with life commitments External to the organization;
- Attitudes and resistance of supervisors and middle management;
- Preference of senior management involved in recruiting to dealing with people perceived as similar to themselves (homo-sociability); and
- Lack of communication and education about WLB strategies.

5. PURPOSE OF PAPER

The purpose of this paper is to examine the research and relevant empirical evidence on the related topics of work time, work schedules and work–life balance. I provide an overview of the main arguments and theories in the academic literature. I also present and assess the most current and relevant data that shed light on work-time and work–life issues, trying to fill gaps in the research. The report ends by identifying the key evidence-based patterns and trends that have implications for policy and practice.

Supriti Dubey, Ruchi Saxena & Neetu Bajpai¹ in their study titled “Work Life Balance : Can Women Be Both Bearer And Manager” stated Work-life balance is about people having measure of control over when, where and how they work. The core of work-life balance could also be summed as achievement with enjoying. Work-Life Balance can lead to a healthy synergy in the working environment of an organisation and its employees. A balanced life is one where we spread our energy and effort – emotional, intellectual, imaginative, spiritual and physical – between key areas of importance. Work-life 'imbalance' has over a period of time attracted concern because of increasing problems related to employee health, monotony at workplace, declining levels of productivity and efficiency at the employee level. This paper is an attempt to identify the impact of various personal factors like family support, proper health, diet, age on work life balance of working women. Further an attempt is made through sample survey (on women employee in public and private sector) to bring to the notice, employer's contribution is balancing women employees personal and professional life.

Various intramural and extramural factors like fair compensation, fringe benefits, Training programs and their quality, working environment (infrastructure, setting arrangement, ambience) and other schemes and their impact on work-life balance is also explored through this paper. The outcome of the paper will help organizations, becoming an ideal work place. which will give its employees freedom, flexi time and fun.

Simonetta Manfredi² in his study titled “Work-Life Balance: An audit of staff experience at Oxford Brookes University” stated This report presents the findings of a university-wide audit that was carried out to gain information on staff experience of work-life balance policies and practices at Brookes. The audit was conducted through a staff survey and a series of focus groups. The report also outlines the meaning of work-life balance in the context of employment relations and the importance of work-life balance for employers. The concept of work-life balance is based on the notion that paid work and personal life should be seen less as competing priorities than as complementary elements of a full life. It is important for employers to support work-life balance to comply with legal requirements that afford working parents the right to request to work flexibly, to promote equality of opportunities by ensuring that staffs with caring responsibilities are not disadvantaged in the workplace, and to widen access to paid work and career opportunities. There is also a strong business case in support of work-life balance. Evidence from independent research as well as from employers’ own assessments of flexible working practices shows that helping staff to strike a balance between paid work and personal life can lead to improved recruitment and retention, reduction of absenteeism, and an improved staff commitment and productivity.

Mrs. Rumi Dasgupta, Dr. Amishi Arora³, in their study titled “Analysis of work life balance (a study at the targeted corporate sectors in and around Nagpur with a small number of samples)” stated The nature, characteristics of Indian business scenario have been changing drastically due to globalization, liberalization, high degree of competitiveness and change in paradigms of the customers, work culture of the business organizations. The present research study deals with the work life balance of the corporate level employees in different corporate sectors in order to determine the level of their work life balance which is having very high importance on their total wellbeing and hence their productivity and entire business growth. Work-life balance is about people having a measure of control over when, where and how they work. It is achieved when an individual's right to a fulfilled life inside and outside paid work is accepted and respected as the norm, to the mutual benefit of the individual, business and society. Striking a balance between professional and personal commitments is a common dilemma for many of today's workers. Organizations believe in providing a balanced life for their employees as they know that today’s knowledge workers are less concerned about just financial security which earlier bound them to their employers. But they are definitely drawn towards employers who possess the brand of caring for their employees’ well-being—personal as well as professional. This kind of approaches have already entered in the Indian industries, some of them already started some measures for the balance in work as well as personal life.

K. Santhana Lakshmi, T. Ramachandran, and David Boohene⁴, in their study titled “Analysis of Work Life Balance of Female Nurses in Hospitals - Comparative Study between Government and Private

Hospital in Chennai, TN., and India” stated Career women are challenged by work and family commitment at the end of each day in Government and private hospital. Majority of women are working through-out week and 53% are struggling to achieve work-life balance. Women reported that their life has become a juggling act as they have to shoulder multiple responsibilities at work and home. Both government and private hospital management need to be conscious of this status of female nurses and periodically review their status. They can create supportive environment to help these women achieve work life balance. This article highlights the issues connected with work life balance of female nurses in government and private hospital and the factors that determine work life balance.

Soo Jung Jang⁵ in his study titled “Relationships among perceived work-life balance, resources, and the well-being of working parents” stated this two-part study utilizes quantitative and qualitative data to examine how working parents cope with work-life demands. The quantitative component of the study uses a secondary data set from the 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce (a nationally representative sample of working adults). The research design employs structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze the associations among the perceptions of workplace support, supervisory support, work-schedule flexibility, work-life balance, and personal well-being. In this study, employee well-being is an endogenous latent construct. Perceived workplace support and perceived supervisory support are latent exogenous constructs. The mediating variables are employees’ perceptions of the flexibility of their work schedules and the state of their work-life balance. For the qualitative component of the study, 27 in-depth interviews were conducted in New Jersey with working parents who had a chronically ill or disabled child. The two components of the study contribute to an understanding of the effects of formal and informal workplace supports in enhancing the well-being of employees with children in general and those with a chronically ill or disabled child in particular. The quantitative study is unique in its examination of work-schedule flexibility and work-life balance as mediating variables and furthers our understanding of which sets of workplace policies and supports are positively associated with employee well-being. Supplementing the quantitative data, the in-depth interviews provide an examination of how and why parents utilize such supports in dealing with the challenging situation of caring for a chronically ill or disabled child. This information will assist social workers in developing more effective intervention efforts in the workplace, with the ultimate goal of increasing employees’ quality of life. Specifically, the results of this study will help social workers who work within employee assistance programs to understand how company policies affect employees and how to more effectively intervene to support positive employee well-being and work-life balance. Finally, the findings will inform public policymakers as they continue to develop policies that positively affect employees and their work environment.

Sakthivel Rania, Kamalanabhanb & Selvarania⁶ in their study titled “Work / Life Balance Reflections on Employee Satisfaction” stated The aim of this research is to analyze the relationship between employee satisfaction and work/life balance. The construct used for this research consists of career opportunity, recognition, work tasks, payments, benefits, superior subordinate relationship, employee satisfaction, and work/life balance. The study was conducted on a total of 210 respondents working in IT organization. This

study makes a contribution to join two distinct research streams, namely employee satisfaction, and work/life balance. Findings suggest that high correlation exists between work task and employee satisfaction with a mediator variable namely work-life balance.

Judy De Villiers, Elize Kotze⁷, in their study titled “Work-Life Balance: A Study in the Petroleum Industry” stated A qualitative study was completed to discover how employees of a company in the petroleum industry define and experience the phenomenon of work-life balance, to identify the workplace determinants of work-life imbalance and to elicit some solutions for the problem. It was found that work-life balance is a personal issue that varies across time and situations and the underlying conflict experienced pertains to role overload and role interference. The most significant work-life conflict arises from complex workplace issues, including managing change, supervisory and technical competences, leadership, roles and accountabilities, and culture. Solutions to address the workplace issues, as well as the development of individual balance-enabling skills, are suggested.

6. THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study sought to explore the attitudes of employees from the organisation with respect to work-life issues. More specifically, the purpose of the study was to: (1) determine if supportive work practices (supportive organisational culture, supportive supervisors and work-life benefit programs) influenced employee work-life balance; (2) discover whether individual characteristics of employees would affect employee attitudes toward work-life issues; and (3) investigate levels of employee awareness and utilisation of the work-life benefits offered by the organisation. These objectives were accomplished, with some expected and unexpected findings. As expected, organisational culture was the attitudinal factor most associated with the outcome variable employee work-life balance. This finding supports much of the recent literature, which investigated the importance of organisational culture and more generally the supportiveness of the workplace in relation to employee wellbeing. However, the other workplace support variables measured (supervisory support and availability/utilisation of employee-friendly benefits) failed to show any association with levels of work-life balance.

Sample

There were 110 usable responses, yielding a response rate of 44% that consisted of 51 women and 59 men. The majority of participants were married/de facto (69%), with 31% without a partner. Almost half of all participants (46%) stated that they had a role as caregiver to children (with 20% stating that they were the primary caregiver and 26% stating that they had some responsibility for their care). Only 2% of the sample stated that they were primary caregivers to elderly relatives, and 17% had some responsibility for their care. A total of 44% of employees classified their role as being of the supervisory level and 56% as non-supervisory.

The Questionnaire

Employee levels of work-life balance were measured using 7- point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Participants were also given the option to write any additional comments relating to their sense of work-life balance.

While the average length of the workweek looks fairly stable in recent decades, the more telling pattern is one of work-hour polarization, as more worked longer hours (50 hours or more weekly) and more worked part-time (less than 45 hours weekly). For some workers, a dominant trend in the 2012 was a combination of growing work pressures and feelings of insecurity. It is unclear if these trends have persisted in the 21st century. But regardless, this research raises questions about the most accurate way to measure work effort, suggesting that work intensification involves more than longer work hours.

Typically, researchers have focused on work–family conflict rather than the broader and most positively framed concept of work–life balance. Work–family conflict is hypothesized to have causes, predictors, and risk factors that are found at the individual, family role, work role, and work environment levels of analysis.

Employers have introduced two approaches to addressing employees' work–family needs: substitute services of the family caregiver, and giving employees more control over their work time through leave provisions and flexibility over work schedules or location.

The following questions guided the research and analysis presented in this paper.

1. What are current practices regarding the organization of working time (including hours of work, overtime, flexible schedules, leaves of all kinds [maternal, parental, compassionate care, family responsibility, emergency leave, sick leave], vacations and holidays) and other work-time issues in Canadian workplaces – particularly sectors under federal jurisdiction?
2. How have these trends evolved in recent years, and is there evidence to assess whether current practices meet or exceed minimum legislated standards?
3. How have demographic trends, especially population aging and changing family structures, interacted with changes in the workplace relating to work time?
4. Does recent empirical research indicate problems regarding work–life balance specific to workers under federal jurisdiction?
5. Is there evidence of increasing work–life pressures and the need to accommodate evolving family structures?
6. What are the specific problems and possible solutions, especially those relevant to federally regulated industries?
7. What are innovative legislative and non-legislative solutions? What are the implications of any solution for workers, employers, the state, and the public?

TABLE 1. Scale particulars, including internal consistency alphas

Variable	Response scale	No. of Items	Mean (N=224)	Std Dev	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Employer policies and practices	7-point	20	4.43	0.83	.90
problems regarding work–life balance	7-point	11	4.08	1.32	.94
Increasing work–life pressures	7-point	12	5.18	0.67	.77
Work schedules and work time	5-point	9	3.44	0.64	.79
current practices regarding the organization	No scale	12	7.03	2.85	.79
Work–Family Conflict	No scale	12	1.07	1.53	.57

7. RESULTS

Descriptive statistics are provided in Table 1. The mean for problems regarding work–life balance was 4.08 on a scale of (1) low balance to (7) high balance, placing the mean near the mid15 point on the scale. Likewise, employees rated Employer policies and practices at moderate levels with respect to responsiveness to work-life issues. The mean for the Increasing work–life pressures was 5.18. The mean for the Work schedules and work time was 3.4 on a scale of 1 (low support) and (5) high support. The mean value for the current practices regarding the organization was approximately 7, out of the possible 13 benefits that were presented to the participant, and the Work–Family Conflict averaged 1.7 per employee.

Survey Results

It appears that there are a number of policies and practices that are being utilised when needed and offered:

- flexi time, i.e., choice in starting and ending work times (27% need and use this benefit);
- Compressed work week, i.e., working 4 x 10 hour days (8% need and use this benefit);
- Telecommuting i.e., working from home at least one day a week (15% need and use this benefit);
- Part-time work (25% need and use this benefit).
- In this workplace employees are encouraged to set limits - 32% disagree; 39% agree.
- In this workplace there is support for employees who want to switch to less demanding jobs - 35% disagree; 23% agree.
- To take work home at night and/or weekends (27%);
- To put their job before their family or personal life (25%);
- To work more than 48 hours a week to get ahead (36%) and
- To constantly put their jobs ahead of their family or personal life to be viewed favourably (31%).
- The majority of participants reported that they would prefer to work fewer hours than they currently do (60%);
- 37% reported being happy with the hours they work
- Only 2% reported that they would prefer to work more hours.

- 57% of respondents reported working more than 40 hours in a typical week and 21% reported working 36-40 hours a week.
- 40% reported spending between two and ten hours attending work related activities after work
- 63% spend between two and ten hours commuting to and from work, in a typical week.
- While 57% of the sample did not agree that home requires all of their attention,
- 45% felt that they have a lot of home demands
- 68% agreed that they have a lot of responsibility in their home life. In addition,
- 70% of participants felt they did not have enough time to get everything done at home
- 61% agreed that they often have obligations at home that compete with one another.
- 63% of the sample agreed that work requires all of their attention,
- 81% felt that they have a lot of work demands
- 87% agreed that they have a lot of responsibility at work. In addition,
- 65% of respondents felt that they often overextend themselves at work .
- 64% often feel rushed in their job.
- Employees were most aware of the company offering maternity leave (87%), followed by study assistance programs (82%), flexible hours (81%) and family/care's leave (79%). The most commonly used work-life benefit was flexible hours (64%), followed by family/care's leave (26%), study assistance programs (18%), and then home-based work (13%).

8. DISCUSSION

The strong association discovered between organisational culture and work-life balance has major implications for the organisation. It follows that organisations should endeavour to create a work-life friendly culture, as this has been demonstrated to predict improved levels of work-life balance. Work-life culture has proven to be an effective work practice for consideration by the organisation.

There are well-documented outcomes of work-family conflict when this construct is treated as a stressor. In terms of mental health, negative outcomes of work-family conflict include reduced general mental health and well-being, dissatisfaction with life, stress, psychosomatic symptoms, depression, general psychological distress, use of medication, alcohol consumption, substance abuse, clinical mood disorders, clinical anxiety disorders, and emotional exhaustion. Both work-to-family and family-to-work conflict predict poor physical health and concurrent multiple chronic health problems. These causal pathways are through mental health and health-related behaviours, and would be expected over longer time periods of exposure to work-family conflict. People experiencing work pressures may lack time to take care of themselves by eating properly, exercising, and getting enough sleep.

Work hours and schedules can affect the health and well-being of workers. Long work hours and certain kinds of shift schedules are known to create elevated risks for a range of mental and physical health

problems. Stress is one of the more commonly documented outcomes of long work hours, and is recognized as a determinant of employee health and productivity.

9. CONCLUSION

Overall, we argue that implementation of WLB strategies needs to be considered as a process involving effective implementation and communication to managers and employees, culture change to eliminate barriers, and the development of a 'track record' of recent achievements, to encourage future management commitment to this area.

Employees, as important organizational stakeholders, expect their employers to be responsive to their need to balance work, and life commitments (Kossek et al., 1994). Changes in current managerial attitudes to WLB strategies are requisite for innovative and inclusive behaviours and organizational cultures to be developed, to address the changing needs of the workforce and the pressures from multiple stakeholders which influence HR managers (Kossek et al., 1994). Building on this study, it may be fruitful for future research to explore the area of WLB strategies from the perspectives of other stakeholders. For example, we note that Voydanoff (2001) has recently provides an innovative framework for integrating community into the analysis of work and family.

An important area for future research relates to the evaluation and costing of WLB strategies within an organization. What are the costs of work/life conflict compared with the benefits of WLB strategies? The introduction and implementation of flexible policies will significantly change the culture of most organizations, but inevitably will involve long-term commitment by employers, and have associated costs.

The need to manage WLB has arisen out of the increasing diversity brought by changing demographics of the work force as well as changing social values and the globalisation of economies and markets (Jackson & Ruderman, 1995; Way, 1999). Several writers have argued that effective management of diverse human resources will provide a key differentiator for successful organizations (Joplin & Daus, 1997; Lepak & Snell, 1999; Robinson & Dechant, 1997). We suggest that the adoption of a wide range of WLB strategies, to deal with a variety of employee needs and demands, will have the potential for significant positive outcomes for the organization (Dowling & Fisher, 1997; Kossek et al., 1994, Yeung, Brockbank & Ulrich, 1996).

To retain competitive advantage employers are reliant on a committed and productive workforce (Pfeffer, 1994). WLB strategies with regard to matters such as temporal flexibility, leave benefits, and interpersonal relationships have the potential to reduce or increase stress on workers with life responsibilities. The provision of WLB strategies can provide a positive and direct impact on an employee's decision to remain with an employer (Macran, Joshi & Dex, 1996).

As the nature of the workforce continues to diversify it will become increasingly important for organisations to consider all the factors influencing their employees' ability to balance work and non-work commitments. This study provided much evidence that supportive work practices are strongly associated with levels of employee work-life balance. Specifically, it has become clear that organisations will have to consider organisational work-life culture and other factors beyond the availability of work-life programs if they are to effectively respond to employees changing needs.

Long-term exposure of workers to excessive work hours, evening and rotating shift schedules, and high levels of work-to-family interference elevates their risk of mental and physical health problems. Additionally, there are productivity and human resource costs to organizations in which these conditions prevail. Moreover, solutions to these potential problems must address workload and job demands, employee choice and flexibility in work hours and arrangements, organizational cultures, and the behaviours of managers at all levels.

The formation of appropriate WLB and HR strategies overall will be integral to the creation of flexible workplaces conducive to the attraction, motivation and retention of highly-valued employees. I argue that such strategies will enable employers and employees to meet the emerging challenges related to the need for balance between work and life.

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