

# Workers work–life balance should be a Human Resource priority

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## Abstract

Workers wouldn't like to sacrifice their personal lives because of their job imperatives. Work and personal life are essentially two different scales of a spring balance and any adverse movement either at the workplace or in personal life would disturb the balance. Work-life balance has always been fraught with challenges which have of late assumed significant proportions and is considered to be the most pressing concern for the workers today. It has been observed that the population of working couples has been on the increase and this has led to greater scope for work-life conflict for them. Organizations are realizing that the quality of the workers' personal lives has a direct bearing on their job performance. This underscores the need for the organizations to promote work-life balance measures to safeguard their business interests. In this paper, we have made an attempt to highlight why work-life balance policies should be promoted and form a core part of an organization's Human Resource policy to optimize their business interests.

**Keywords:** Work-life balance, Human Resources, Worker, Organization

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## Introduction

The question that is often asked is whether we work to earn a living or live only to work. Perhaps, both are equally true. Scholars have opined that work and family are the two most important facets in the life of a working person (Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw, 2003). An individual working for an organization would not like to sacrifice his whole life for work at the cost of his personal life. He would instead prefer to strike a fine balance between the two so as to lead a happy, healthy and a productive life.

The task of balancing work with personal life is one of the most pressing challenges for the workers (Valcour, 2007). Research has shown that workers who have work–life balance have higher level of job satisfaction and perform much better in their jobs. Such workers are also seen to be loyal and committed to their organizations (Rawlings, et al., 2012).

Globally, organizations are implementing a variety of measures to increase their revenue and profitability, which includes downsizing, increasing working hours, and setting aggressive sales targets for the workers. This

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is resulting in placing more demands on the workers. The logic given for this is the need to stay afloat during tough economic times. As a consequence of this, the more time a worker devotes to work, the less time he has for family. This results in work-life conflict, and has negative ramifications for both the organization and the worker.

In this paper, we argue that helping workers achieve work–life balance should form a central component of the Human Resource policy of an organization, so as to get the best out from the workers without leaving them burnt-out.

## Defining Work – Life Balance

Work–life balance can be defined as “good functioning

both at work and at home with minimum of role conflicts” (Clark, 2000, 751). Work–life balance is about getting the right balance between one's job and one's personal life. It is feeling comfortable with the work and non–work commitments.

### Work–life balance practices

Organizations have observed that a worker's personal life has a direct bearing on the productivity and quality of work; and therefore, there seems to be a strong business case to promote a culture of work-life balance (Lockwood, 2003). The choices available with organizations to promote a culture of work–life balance are:

- Flexi–time work schedule: It gives freedom to the workers to choose their own working hours within the guidelines stipulated by the organizations. This helps the workers to attend to their personal chores without having to take time off from work.
- Compressed work week: Workers in a compressed work week work for four days instead of five days in a week. However, the workers would work for ten hours shift instead of eight hours each day. This scheme helps workers get an extra day off to attend to their personal chores.
- Job–sharing: It is a system wherein a worker is allowed to share his job with some other worker, thereby reducing work hours. Under this arrangement, the wages and fringe benefits are proportionately reduced for each worker within the overall framework of the organization. This helps those workers who have extra personal responsibilities, and would need more time each day to attend to them.
- Telecommuting: Workers with the help of modern information and communication technology can do their work from home without having to come to the office on a regular basis. Telecommuting allows workers to take care of family responsibilities without having to sacrifice their work demands.

### The consequences of work–life conflict

There is strong evidence that work-life conflict leads to several negative consequences for the workers, their families, their employers and the society at large (Allen, Herst, Brucks and Sutton, 2000).

The possible repercussions of work–life conflict for a worker could be:

- Distress in their personal life.
- Health disorders.
- Lower level of job satisfaction.
- Conflicts, which may lead to violence.
- Alcohol and drug consumption.

Work-life conflict in a worker's life may lead to the following negative consequences for the organization:

- Increase in absenteeism rate.
- Increase in attrition rate.
- Reduced productivity.
- Decay in the quality of work.

### The advantages of work–life balance

Maintaining a healthy work–life balance is a key ingredient of a good business strategy (Lowe, 2006). Work-life balance is a necessity for both the worker and the organization. This is a springboard for personal growth of the worker as well as for the business growth of the organization.

According to Iyayi, Fetus, et al (2012), the benefits of policies promoting work–life balance for the workers are:

- Happy and satisfied workers.
- Reduction in the stress levels of the workers.

According to Iyayi, Fetus, et al (2012), the benefits of policies promoting work–life balance for the organizations are:

- Workers are highly motivated and give their best on the job performance.
- Workers' productivity level remains high.
- Absenteeism rate remains low.
- Attrition rate comes down.

- The organization emerges as an employer of choice for the prospective workers.
- It fosters good relationship between the organization and the workers.
- It improves communication level between the workers and the organization.
- Workers tend to be more loyal and committed to the organization.

### **The role HR in maintaining a healthy work-life balance programme in the organization**

Globally, a large number of workers encounter work–life conflict in their daily life (Lockwood, 2003). Workers are expected to sacrifice their family commitments to meet the demands of the organization. As a result, a large proportion of workers fail to achieve their career and personal goals in a satisfactory manner. There is a felt need amongst workers that the organizations should give priority to implementing a healthy work-life balance policy (Ojo, et al., 2011). The organizations need to ensure that the work-life balance policy forms a central part of its HR policy (Rawlings, et al., 2012). The work-life balance policy should be framed keeping in view a worker's daily life in totality, and not in terms of work hours only (Elloy and Smith, 2003).

HR needs to understand the imperatives of the organization to ascertain whether the work culture is conducive for supporting and implementing work–life balance initiatives for its workers (Reynolds, 1999). This assessment will help to bring out the unique work–life balance needs of the workers. Workers at different stages may have different work-life balance needs. The insights gained from such an assessment would be helpful in formulating a customized work–life balance policy.

Implementation of a work–life balance policy necessarily requires the support of senior management in the organization. HR should, therefore, take them on board at the policy formulation stage itself. This would help in effective implementation of the work-life balance policy (Parker, et al., 2006). Managers in the organization should take a lead in using work-life balance measures available in the organization. This will dispel the fears of the subordinates that the usage of work-life balance measures will be seen negatively by

their managers. This will help in promoting a healthy work-life balance culture in the organization (Baral and Bhargava, 2011).

The organization should give proper publicity to the work-life balance policy and also create awareness amongst the workers about the policy. This will facilitate workers to understand the beneficial effects of the policy, and thereby, increase usage of measures under the policy, and help in mitigating work-life conflict situations in the life of the workers (Ojo, et al., 2011).

### **Difficulties in implementing the work-life balance policy**

It has been found that a very low percentage of workers actually make use of the work–life balance policy in the organizations (Spinks, 2004). The reasons cited for this are lack of information and proper understanding of the benefits accruing from the policy (Ojo, et al., 2011).

The reason given for the low utilization of the work–life balance policy relates to the workers misconception that the users of the policy are unfairly treated at the time of reward allocation, progression opportunities, and salary increments (Dex and Smith, 2002).

Traditionally, working long hours was considered by the managers as “hard-working”. Majority of the workers would want to be seen as “hard-working”; and therefore, they hardly tend to utilize the benefits of the work–life balance policy provided by the organization (Blair–Loy and Wharton, 2002).

It is seen that career ambitions discourage many workers from utilizing the work–life balance initiatives. Such workers focus only on work and sacrifice their personal life, which leads to their suffering from burn-out, with adverse consequences for both the workers and the organization (Rawlings, 2012).

Many a times, the work-life balance policy is formulated by the organization without properly researching the needs of their workers. In such a scenario, though the policy on work-life balance is in place, its users are hardly any. The reason observed was that the workers did not find any value in the measures framed under this policy, and therefore, as such, were reluctant to use it, thus, resulting in poor participation (Dex and Smith,

2002).

## Conclusion

Any organization with a healthy and worker centric work–life balance policy offer a win–win proposition for the organization and its workers. A healthy and worker centric work–life balance policy nurtures a positive employer brand in the labour market. It also facilitates reduction in the stress level, increased happiness, high motivational level and enhanced productivity amongst the workers. This eventually helps workers in achieving both their personal and professional goals in a satisfactory manner. The role of HR is to champion the cause of smooth implementation of work–life balance initiatives in the organization, and integrate them into the culture of the organization.

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