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WORK LIFE BALANCE (WLB): A CHALLENGE FOR EMPLOYEES IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

India is growing at a fast pace. Everyone is in a hurry to succeed and earn money. This is leading to overtime, nuclear family, etc. Somewhere in this run we are sacrificing our family time. We have become like machines. Technology development has intertwined the personal and work life. This topic has always attracted my attention. I have seen and observed that how today we face challenge to maintain a balance between meeting and fulfilling our career demands and family needs. For me my mother and sister are good example. Even when I was working I used to find it hard to take out time for personal relations. Today even Indian companies also recognize these problems and have come up with various options for their employees. Thus this study aims to gain a greater understanding of employee's views towards work-life balance initiatives and identifying organizational factors that may be important for employees achieving a better balance between work and non-work life.

KEYWORDS

work life balance, Indian employees.

INTRODUCTION

India is growing at a fast pace. Everyone is in a hurry to succeed and earn money. This is leading to overtime, nuclear family, etc. Somewhere in this run we are sacrificing our family time. We have become like machines. Technology development has intertwined the personal and work life and this topic has always attracted my attention. Indian companies also recognize these problems and have come up with various options for their employees. Thus this study aims to gain a greater understanding of employee's views towards work-life balance initiatives and identifying organizational factors that may be important for employees achieving a better balance between work and non-work life.

FACTORS INFLUENCING WORK-LIFE BALANCE

- Increased number of women working – 70% in 2000 compared to 47% in 1959.
- Majority of women with dependent children working – 65% compared to 90% of men.
- Majority of women return to paid employment after childbirth.
- Increased incidence of one parent families (1 in 4).
- Increased life expectancy is resulting in an ageing population.
- Elderly relative responsibilities are on the increase – 6 million adults have care responsibilities of another adult.
- Trend for starting family later will result in some employees having both child care and elder-care responsibilities.
- Average age for first baby is 29 and birth rate is 1.7 children per woman.

NEED/IMPORTANCE OF WLB

1. **Changing Social Scene:** In today's world maintaining work-life balance is the greatest challenge employees' face. They have realized that their personal lives have an effect on their work life. Hence they are striving hard to maintain a balance between the two. Also the introduction of new softwares and enhancement in technology has shrunk the world in a small nutshell where connectivity has increased manifolds, pertaining to which maintaining a particular social life has become of utmost importance. Even, maintaining regularity in behaving social in nature is very important as it has become a driving factor for all organizations to monitor the technological presence of an individual. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, social recognition is considered to be one of the most important factors required for an individual to grow as well as sustain in an organization.

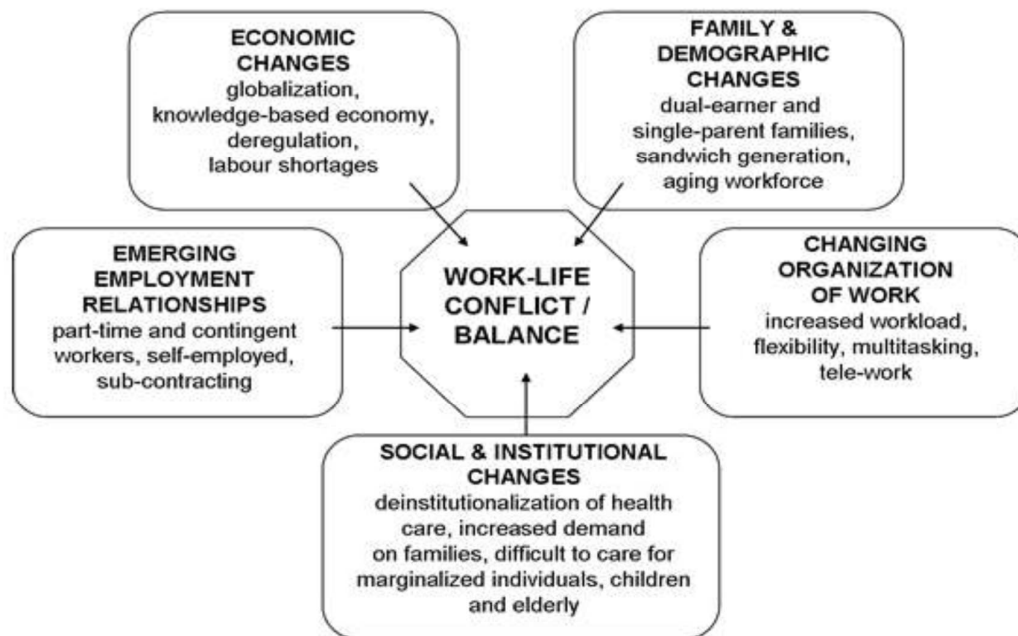
2. **Changing Work culture:** Today's work culture provides flexible work hours, focus on results and recognition of achievements. Also, performance evaluation is given utmost importance in every organization. Performance management refers to the evaluation of performance of an individual on set parameters, usually decided by the upper level management. Performance management can also be done by using various tools, called performance management systems, which help evaluate the performance of an individual promptly and with least errors. The changing work culture often leads to hindering of productivity which ultimately hampers the performance of an individual. Work culture also plays a pivotal role in the job satisfaction of an individual. Every individual needs a peaceful and friendly environment to carry out his job in a better and optimistic way.

3. **Increased Work time:** Due to the undefined time slot of working hours, it becomes extremely difficult for employees to maintain balance between their personal as well as professional lives. Priority is shifted to professional life than that of personal life which becomes hampering after a certain while. Especially for young professionals who want to lead a dynamic life consisting of job along with family and friends find it very difficult to balance both in the wake of achieving a fair position. This creates emotional imbalance and hence leads to frustration. If time is not properly set, productivity is hampered as well as, employee morale goes down. Only monetary motivation is not always important to hold back an employee. Such factors often lead to increased absenteeism. Absenteeism is a situation where an employee is on leave from his job, either due to genuine reasons such as sickness, ill health, or due to negative approach towards the organization. In both the cases, the organization suffers the low productivity that may have been cured from the employee's end.

4. **Dual Income Families:** The shift in attitudes, work styles and cultures has disturbed the work-life balance. Working mothers have major responsibilities of managing both home and workplace. This makes it all the more important to balance work and life. Therefore it is important to have a proper job design in every organization so as to maintain clarity in the working of an individual and to avoid clashes in between employees. Women workers have a major slot of employees who suffer from stress related diseases. To curb this number, organization should have sufficient motivating factors to keep such employees happily working. Also consideration of time, and creation of proper and peaceful environment is a vital factor to keep women employees working happily and stress-free.

FIG. 1

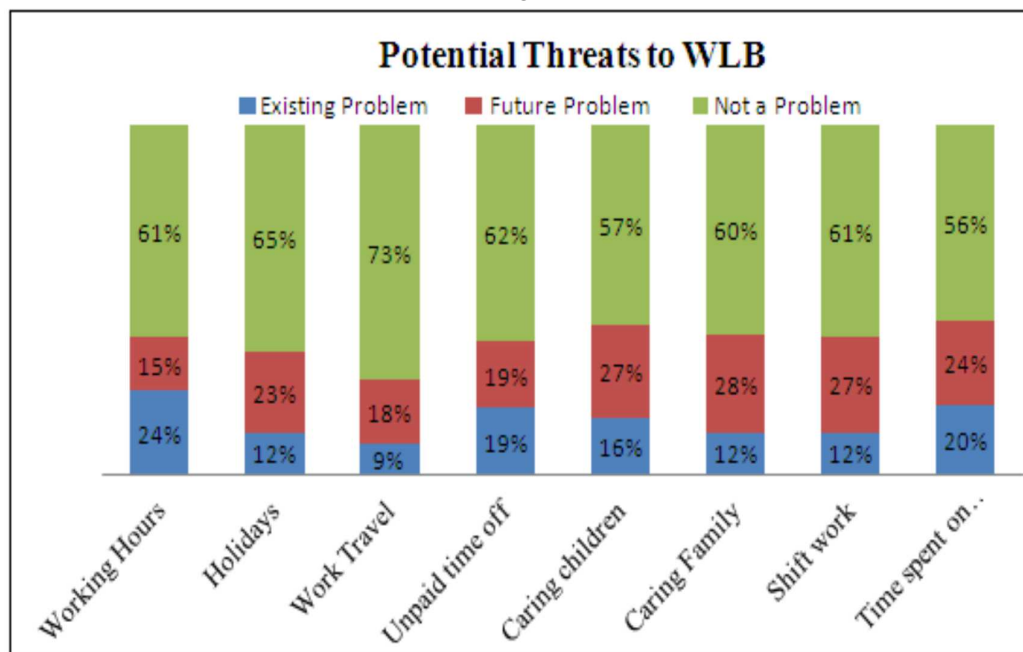
Why Is Work-Life Balance so Important in Today's World?



Thus looking at above factors and from study of one of the Indian refinery following factors were rate which can be potential threat to Work Life Balance (WLB)

1. **Economic changes:** In an organization various factors come together to form and increase overall productivity. The phase of globalization has brought in its wake a new era of industries and a fresh motivation for all individuals to grow and prosper. Also the enhancement in technology has brought nations closer pertaining to which distances have reduced and the array of market has increased. These new opportunities create cut throat competition and thus the overall impact can be seen on the work pressure created on employees. This ultimately results in increased time slots, less social networking and so on. Not to mention, the development of market has originated and developed a knowledge-based economy. Also globalization has brought in its wake the regulation and deregulation of money which has created a confusion and also increased work pressure for employees.
2. **Family & demographic changes:** With the changing environment, today's world possesses a huge number of capable and well deserved women employees who face a tough time to balance work life as well as personal life. Family issues also make it difficult for employees to concentrate on their work. Thus, motivation factors also come to a standstill when it comes to maintaining the balance between work life as well as personal life. The current scenario deals with families where earning daily bread is not the responsibility of a single person. It is now also supported by the woman of the house. Thus dual earning leads to adjustments in personal life and also creates time boundations in professional life. This sort of dual earning is a habit which leads to diversion of priorities and even people after attaining a certain age wish to continue working.
3. **Changing organization of work:** With increasing competition the workload also increases manifold. There are a number of workload theories which ultimately lead to the conclusion that increase in workload reduces productivity and also creates a distrust in the minds of employees. Employees relate the given workload to the remuneration paid to them. If there is even a little dissatisfaction in the mind of employees regarding the remuneration and workload offered, the attrition rate of the organization goes high. Few organizations expect their employees to be flexible. This sort of multitasking is injurious to the organization. As they say, jack of all trades, master of none, is the situation which any organization must work to avoid so that the quality of work is not hampered.
4. **Social & institutional changes:** With the increase in remuneration, the expectation of friends and family also increases. These expectations are difficult to meet with as the growing remuneration also brings along with it increased responsibilities. Nevertheless, employees demand fair remuneration not only to fulfill their daily needs, but also to provide themselves with the mental satisfaction of earning well at a proper position. Also the cultural and moral obligations of an individual are the priorities which cannot be neglected. In order to make sure that these obligations are met with properly, the employees need to change the routine of work quite often. India is a country with different dialects, caste and a number of occasions. It becomes a sort of duty of the employee to deal with these in a positive manner and also adhere to the cultural values as and when they arise.
5. **Emerging employment relationships:** It is very important for any individual to provide him with the basic facilities as well as peaceful environment. But at the same time it is also important for every individual to have a proper social circle. These factors help an employee sustain in the organization. Also, such factors help in employee retention. Employees who are appointed on different basis can also be considered to have a good rapport with those working on full time. Contract employees are also adding to the productivity of the organization and are also contributing to the organization to reach its minimum goal. In this case, the emerging employment relationships should be fostered and not be dragged into dirty politics which will result into clashes and also create a negative atmosphere.

FIG. 2

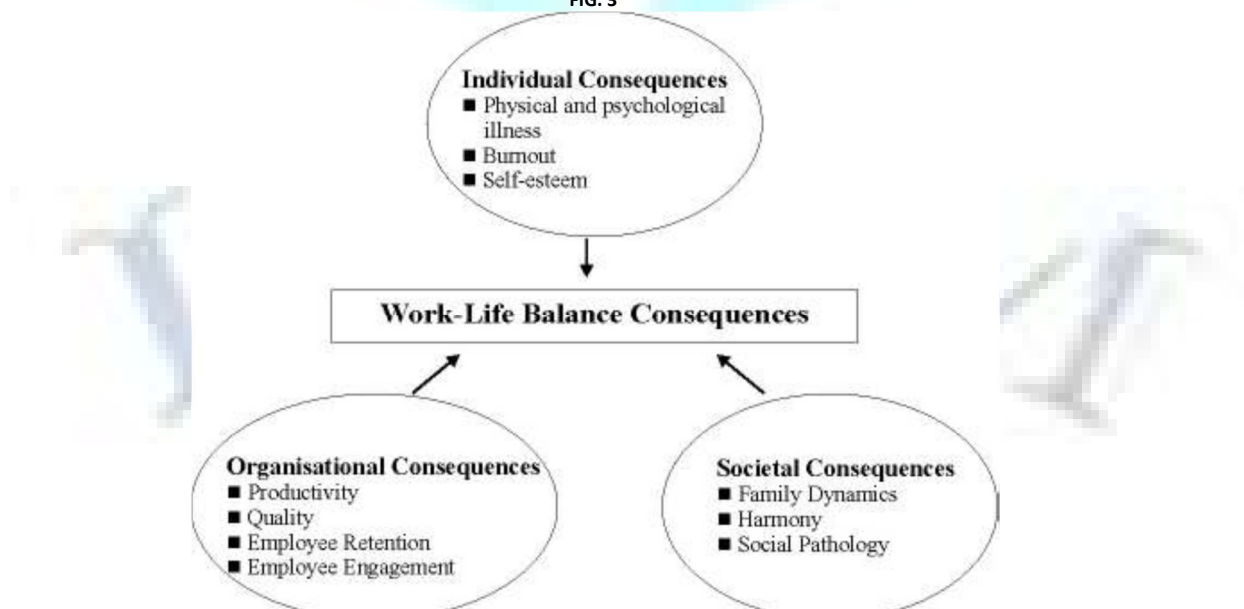


POTENTIAL THREATS TO WLB

1. Working hours: Working hours if increased, creates the question of priority, commitment and responsibility which ultimately leads to disturbance in family life. For 61% it is not a problem.
2. Holidays: An employee working in an organization is entitled to get leaves as and when required, either be it for health reasons or for any other personal reasons. If he is denied getting leaves, it creates dissatisfaction in the minds of employees.
3. Work travel: Only 9% is currently the problem for work travel and for 73% it is not a problem as there are too many conveyances available in today's scenario.
4. Unpaid time off: The remuneration to be paid to employees is on the basis of the work given to them. But if they do not get that remuneration either on time or for any extra work done, employees' willingness to work goes down.
5. Caring children: Children in any household are a prime responsibility to deal with because of which half of the concentration is diverted towards children and their daily duties.
6. Caring family: for 60% caring for family is not a problem. But for nuclear families it becomes very difficult as members are less in the family to care for and also look after each other.
7. Shift work: Shift work is a big problem especially for female workers as it is simply not possible to handle both equally perfectly.
8. Time spent on... : Many times, the pressure of workload is such that, personal likes come to a halt and are under looked by many as a result of which mind diverting factors are very little.

CONSEQUENCES OF IMPROPER WORK LIFE BALANCE

FIG. 3



1. **Individual consequences:** If work life balance is not properly maintained it may lead to stress related diseases and also psychological and physical illness. In certain cases, employees tend to take it over their ego which creates clashes and negation in the organisation.

2. **Organizational consequences:** In the advent of improper work life balance, the productivity of employee goes down. In order to complete the given work, employees often tend to complete the work and are ready to compromise in quality of the work hence delivered, thus creating a question on employee engagement. Also such factors make it difficult for an employee to sustain in the organization and thus employee retention becomes problematic.
3. **Societal consequences:** Family dynamics play a vital role in order to encourage an employee to work and move ahead in a positive way. Harmony at home and work place are very important to help an employee deliver quality work. At the same time, an individual also wants to be socially sound so as to maintain and foster his relationships with his peers, relatives and friends.

HOW DOES IT IMPACT YOU AS MANAGER?

As a manager understanding work life balance will help me to maintain a health work culture and increase employees' productivity. It will also help me to:

- reduced employees turnover rates
- becoming a good employer or an employer of choice
- increased return on investment in training as employees stay longer
- reduced absenteeism and sick leave
- improved morale or satisfaction
- greater employees loyalty and commitment
- improved productivity

CONCLUSION

From the information gathered it can drawn that there is a strong perception among the respondents that it is important to achieve balance between work & personal life and it enables people to work better. Employees expect that organization should be empathetic towards employees' needs by providing Work Life Balance policies & flexible working arrangements. It can influence employees' choice in terms of employment. From organization point of view it makes good business sense to support WLB not just to recruit & retain employees but also because employees' feel that WLB enables them to work better.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is a need to clearly communicate the organization commitment to WLB, to raise awareness and to improve knowledge and understanding of policies. It is therefore suggested that information on current and future policies be provided in a user-friendly version through the Intranet, within the context of the Equal Opportunity and Diversity website.
- Ensure fairness and consistence in the way organizational policies that support WLB are implemented. The implementation of policies should be monitored in order to achieve a satisfactory level of consistency in their application across the organization.
- Managers have a key role to play to ensure the success of a work-life balance approach. It is important that their views are sought with regard to work-life issues and that they are encouraged to take ownership of the process. This could be achieved by conducting a series of focus groups with them that could also serve as a forum for sharing ideas, concerns, information and good practice on work-life balance.
- For employees who like dancing, painting training camp can be organized for them as well as competitive programs can also be organized so that they can explore their talent as well as enjoy on weekends.
- Family engagement programs should be organized by the organization so that employees meet each other family which sometimes proves beneficial as employees learn to balance his/ her work & personal life by seeing other person balancing it.
- Yoga classes & meditation facility on regular basis should be provided for employees to increase their physical & mental strength.

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