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WORK LIFE INTEGRATION INSTEAD OF WORK LIFE BALANCE: A THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING

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ABSTRACT

Intersection point of life and work is quite is unworkable. Working smarter is stronger than working hard. Business world is changing day by day. Work load and work stress is increasing to meet up business deadline. Career growth and quality family life is becoming discordant for time constraint. Turnover and absenteeism is increasing in the work place and especially women and dual career couple are struggling and searching alternate path from corporate life to undergo sound family and social life. Work life integration is required for generating synergy and sustainable growth of organization and society.

KEYWORDS

working smarter, working hard, dual career couple, work-life-integration.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Employees are accustomed to work as per dead line of the company and supposed to strictly maintain the sign in and sign out following attendance requirement. They have little bit chance to think about their personal life as well utilize their potentials and quality work life. They are individually responsible to make the employer and family as happy one. There is a common traditional understanding is that competent employee can manage their work and family effectively and efficiently. Dual career couples are facing huge troubles to make an integration with professional life and personal life since they have very time on hand for family conversation, outing, caring and rearing children, children schooling and taking care of their education etc. Many people want to make a balance with work and life but fail since balance focus to compete with both elements. Priority of office work vs. priority of personal work is a dilemma and subject to gets importance considering socio economic aspects. Work life balance is an attempt to omit the competition through replacing collaboration.

2.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary aim of this study is to understand the implication of work life integration. The objectives of the study are:

1. To know the difference between work life balance and work life integration
2. To find out the reasons of work life integration
3. To know the successful plan for work life integration
4. To identify the challenges and way out of work life integration.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper is a theoretical understanding on work life balance and work life integration. Secondary data are used for data collection. A mixture of academic contexts, books, journals, different companies operational manual, companies' existing HR policy, exploratory reports are used as secondary data of the research.

4.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Work-life is the practice of providing initiatives designed to create a more flexible, supportive work environment, enabling employees to focus on work tasks while at work. It includes making the culture more supportive, adding programs to meet life event needs, ensuring that policies give employees as much control as possible over their lives, and using flexible work practices as a strategy to meet the dual agenda--the needs of both business and employees (Work & Family Connection, n.d.). According to Merriam-Webster.com the word "integrate" is defined as "to form, coordinate, or blend into a functioning or unified whole." Thereby concluding that work-life integration focuses on incorporating the different area's of one's life to create a whole picture.

Integration' means different things to different users, but ultimately it's about employers empowering people to choose flexible patterns of working that allow them to get the best out of their personal and professional lives (Paul Barrett). Morris and Susan (2017) stated that work life Integration is a solution representing a holistic strategy including effective and efficient coordination of efforts and energies among all stakeholders sharing interest and benefits from workers being able to fulfill their personal, work, family, and community obligations. Long-term difference in social mobility is suggested to be more crucial for style of life than social status attained at a given time (Wilensky, H. L.) Geraldine and Alma studied on qualitative interviews with 18 participants aged between 37 and 55 with at least one dependent child under the age of 18, in dual-earning/career households and found that a deep sense of motherhood was evident in that their children were their number one priority but career was of high importance as they sought stimulation, challenges, achievement and enrichment in their work. Now, in mid-career transition, the respondents seek more self-care time in an effort to find new meaning in the work, family and self equation. Burke (2004) said that the workplace plays a key role in supporting integration. Unfortunately, the creation of policies to facilitate this integration has fallen short. Instead, a more fundamental change of organizational culture is necessary. Julie and Wendy (2006) investigated through a field survey of university staff employees suggest that as highly identified roles are integrated into other domains, high role integration is related to less negative reactions to interruptions, and employees who integrate work into nonwork set fewer boundaries for using communication technologies during nonwork time and report higher work-life conflict. Bulger, Carrie, Matthews, Russell, Hoffman & Mark (2007) studied boundary management profiles of 332 workers in an investigation of the segmentation-integration continuum. Cluster analysis indicated consistent clusters of boundary management practices related to varying segmentation and integration of the work and personal life domains. But, the researchers suggested that the segmentation-integration continuum may be more complicated. Research outcome indicated relationships between boundary management practices and work-personal life interference and work-personal life enhancement. Less flexible and more permeable boundaries were related to more interference, while more flexible and more permeable boundaries were related to more enhancement. Ernst Kossek, E., & Ozeki, C. (1998) examined the relationship among work-family (w-f) conflict, policies, and job and life satisfaction. The meta-analytic results show that regardless of the type of measure used (bidirectional w-f conflict, work to family, family to work), a consistent negative relationship exists among all forms of w-f conflict and job-life satisfaction. This relationship was slightly less strong for family to work conflict. Although confidence intervals overlap, the relationship between job-life satisfaction and w-f conflict may be stronger for women than men.

5.0 WORK LIFE BALANCE VS. WORK LIFE INTEGRATION

Work-life balance is a concept including the proper prioritization between work (career and ambition) and lifestyle (health, pleasure, leisure, family). The work-leisure dichotomy was invented in the mid-1800s. Paul Krassner an American journalist, observed that anthropologists define happiness as having as little separation as possible between your work and your play (Wikipedia). According to business dictionary, work life balance is a comfortable state of equilibrium achieved between an employee's primary priorities of their employment position and their private lifestyle. Work life balance is a concept that supports the efforts of employees to split their time and energy between work and the other important aspects of their lives. Work-life balance is a daily effort to make time for family, friends, community participation, spirituality, personal growth, self-care, and other personal activities, in addition to the demands of the workplace. The pursuit of work-life balance reduces the stress employees experience. When they spend the majority of their days on work-related activities and feel as if they are neglecting the other important components of their lives, stress and unhappiness result. An employee who doesn't make time for self-care eventually damages their output and productivity. (Susan M. Heathfield-2018).

Work life integration is a connection between work and life. Work-life integration is a logical evolution from 'work-life balance'. Balance implied that work and life were in competition, but integration connotes the real-world experience where career-minded employees are committed to managing both work and family priorities simultaneously. After all, employees cannot truly leave work behind when they go home. Smartphones and cloud computing make it easier for employees to keep up with work priorities from anywhere, during the work day and after hours (AssureSoft). Work-life integration means that employees can complete personal tasks in the workplace, and similarly compete work tasks at home, or outside of the traditional 9-5 hours (chargespot).

The Executive Centre (Gigi Liu, Human Resources, October 2015) conducted a survey on "Work-Life Integration" among *200 business executives. Most of the business executives polled were based in Asia Pacific, and they mainly worked in the banking and finance, consulting, IT, technology and retail sectors. The aimed to gauge their attitudes and thoughts regarding the quality of their professional and personal lives, and how that quality might or might not have changed in meeting the challenges of work. According to the survey, 92 percent of them agreed to the global trend of work-life integration driven by the power of the Internet, mobile technology, video conferencing and email communications which allows people to work virtually anywhere with connectivity. 30 per cent of the respondents have experienced a decrease in the amount of leisure and personal time, mainly due to an increase in globalization and mobile technology, which requires many of them to be available outside of their normal working hours. Most of the respondents are so linked and even make them available during holiday. 91 per cent of them are either always available to respond to emails and can be contacted at any time during vacation or are sometimes available and can be contacted at specific times during vacation. 56 Percentage of respondents still very satisfied with their overall balance between work life and personal life attributable to the work-life programmes implemented by their companies and 80 per cent of the respondents said their companies offer flexible work arrangements and part-time schedules.

6.0 REASONS FOR WORK LIFE INTEGRATION INSTEAD OF WORK LIFE BALANCE

Work life balance indicates that an opposition scenario between work life as well as making a competition between work and life. Work/Life Integration instead is an approach that creates more synergies between all areas that define "life": work, home/family, community, personal well-being, and health (has.berkeley.edu/HR). Usually each and every companies focus on wealth maximization which tends to utilize maximize contribution from employees through few resources. Most of the cases working moms are delayed at office and busy in office hour for taking care of their children. Intra employee conflict raises comparing individual contribution. Some of them engaged in social networking sites to make their presence in the society in virtually since they fail to be present physically. Some cases employees are using their partial office hour for virtual networking. Work life integration requires to maximize the employees' contribution to the organization and to make citizenship behavior from them.

7.0 SUCCESSFUL WORK LIFE INTEGRATION PLAN

According to Stew Friedman (HBR2014), too many people believe that to achieve great things we must make brutal sacrifices, that to succeed in work we must focus single-mindedly, at the expense of everything else in life. Even those who reject the idea of a zero-sum game fall prey to a kind of binary thinking revealed by the term we use to describe the ideal lifestyle: "work/life balance." The idea that "work" competes with "life" ignores that "life" is actually the intersection and interaction of four major domains: work, home, community, and the private self.

An organization may make the successful work life integration plan firstly confirm the flexible working hours. It could be part time, job sharing, compressed working week, types of leave etc. Secondly, through allowing flexible working location like employees may work from home, mobile phone, telecommuting and any convenient geographical location. After that employees should see the visible career path, have a career break, job enrichment, paid and unpaid study leave, technical stipend, phased retirement opportunity. Finally job should be designed as permanent, casual, contract basis so that work load could be given considering benefits. Gigi Liu suggested that successful work life integration could be possible subject to ensuring work place as attractive place.

i. ASSESS EMPLOYEES' DIFFERENT WORK LIFE NEEDS

A work-life strategy is not a disengage approach as workforces across industries are comprehensive, with groups of various ages and cultural backgrounds, at different life stages and with diverse needs. Thus, a key aspect of planning work-life initiatives well is first to recognize the degree to which one manages potentially conflicting family and work responsibilities. This can take many forms and ranges from flexible work arrangements to family care leave to having on-site child care facilities. Conducting a regular company-wide survey can provide invaluable insights to help companies shape existing strategies and work-life programmes, and execute new and more relevant ones for employees. To be successful, work-life integration has to remain relevant to the changing needs of the business and employees (Gigi Liu, the executive centre).

ii. CULTIVATE A SUPPORTIVE AND TRUSTING ENVIRONMENT

To build sustainable work-life programmes, it is of vital importance to create a culture of trust and personal responsibility which should be a joint effort of the organization, managers and employees. The goal of the organization should be to help managers disassociate the notion of the "ideal worker" with face time in the office and cultivate a concept of "Work Smarter, Not Harder". Managers should be encouraged to stay focused on the results by setting clear performance targets for their employees, and measure their performance by these targets rather than hours clocked in the office. That way, job flexibility and outcome based performance management can act as powerful tools to help improve employee productivity and efficiency, and employees can feel at ease making use of flexible working arrangements and managing their time in an honest and reasonable manner (Gigi Liu, the executive centre).

iii. PROVIDE THE RIGHT TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGY

Leveraging rapid advancements in technology, working-on-the-go has become easier than ever before, and organizations need to provide the right business tools for employees to work wherever and whenever they can. With the right software and applications to allow live file sharing, mobile access, video chat and video conferencing, employees can stay connected and collaborative from both inside and outside the office. Overall, people are rethinking the traditional concept of work-life balance as two separate entities, and accepting the fact that work will interrupt some personal time, and some personal time will interrupt work. "True" balance will most likely never be found, but a harmony through work-life integration is attainable. Flexibility in work schedule, along with the ability to leverage mobile technology, is the preferred way to find a balance and is a trend that is becoming more popular at organizations and sought after by employees. "Work Smarter, Not Harder" makes real sense in the mature world of management that we all experience today (Gigi Liu, the executive centre).

8.0 CHALLENGES AND PROBABLE WAY OUT FOR WORK LIFE INTEGRATION

Organization seeks capitalization of their investment in the form of revenue maximization and reducing cost. To ensure work life integration, organization required to adopt cultural diversity, visible productivity, address to quantitative and qualitative issues clearly. Alec Sears noted stress, technology addiction, personal relationship issue, overtime, boundary crossing, too much information issue as problems work life integration. Different challenges and plausible way out of work life integration could be:

1. To launch and adopt a boundary less, flexible office hour, visible productivity would be difficult for demographic and cultural perspective which could be overcome through diversity into HR tools and process, proper training, dialogue and well-define the requirement and expectation of the company from employees,
2. Flexibility of working hours and working remotely may create over stress in professional life since working hours shall be 24x7. Employees may check their official email and communication at any moment of the day. This could be solved through self-control. People should think that technology does n't control anybody rather people control them.
3. Usually people check their cell phone with a tiny pause from moment to moment. To make a healthy professional and personal life, a standard tracking system of screen of cell phone, tablet, laptop etc. shall be developed.
4. Personal relationship issues may be hampered for over spending time. To overcome the said problem, professional make sure for proper attention while passing meeting, talking or any conversation with anybody. Silence of the cell phone and notification, practice of little self-control could be helpful.
5. Working off site may be higher working hours compared to usual annual working time which out of compensation. It may resolve to define the required working hours with additional compensation.
6. Setting up a boundary for work life is required for controlling personal quality time while vacation o holiday. It could be solved through set up rules and policy as well as announcement of specific available hours while communicate with opposite site.
7. Merging professional life with personal life could be serious problem. A person can maintain separate social networking profile for better quality life or personalize data and access to all.

9.0 CONCLUSION

Balance in work and life is impractical. Dual career couple is increasing day by day. Employees are suffering to meet up organizational deadline for project delivery against parenthood, motherhood, marital satisfaction, relationship stability, child care issue. Employees dissatisfaction and absenteeism is increasing and few women professional are rethinking to leave the job subject to financial comfort from their spouse. Mobile technology is upward trend and we can maximize the use of it through integrate the work and life since the ultimate target of employee is to deliver the result or outcome. Any work or project can be completed from any convenient location. Work and life integration could be achievable through offering flexible working arrangement, family care support, virtually working facility, health and well being support. Since Balance with work and life is unrealistic hence organization should focus on harmonious relationship with work and life to ensure stakeholders' comfort.

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