

WORKLIFE BALANCE- CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

The degree to which an organization promotes a healthy congruence between the professional and personal lives of employees is largely a function of corporate culture and management styles. Work-life balance teaches ways to manage both the different spheres of life by reducing the gap between professional and personal life so much that the dividing line almost disappears. One of the principal observations of Work-life Balance is that when work becomes a hobby and co-workers become family, there would be sufficient time to give to both career and family.

Work-life balance is about the interaction between paid work and other activities, including unpaid work in families and the community, leisure, and personal development.

Work-life balance is about creating a productive work culture where the potential for tensions between work and other parts of people's lives is minimized. This means having appropriate employment provisions in place, and organizational systems and supportive management underpinning them.

Work-life balance for any one person is having the 'right' combination of participation in paid work (defined by hours and working conditions), and other aspects of their lives. This combination will not remain fixed, but may change over time.

INTRODUCTION

Conceptual Framework of work life balance:

Work-life balance is the optimal arrangement of an individual's on-the-job and private time to facilitate health and personal satisfaction without negatively impacting productivity and professional success.

Work-life balance is a concept including proper prioritizing between "work" (career and ambition) and "lifestyle" (health, pleasure, leisure, family and spiritual development/meditation). This is related to the idea of lifestyle choice.

- Striking a healthy work-life balance is a difficult challenge even in the best of times, but it is all the more daunting and necessary during times of economic stagnation and uncertainty.
- The Great Recession, with its subsequent cutbacks and layoffs, has left many employees putting in longer hours and working harder than ever. Worried for their jobs, workers are intent on proving they are an indispensable part of the team.
- Adding to the pressure, today's portable electronic devices have obliterated the line between work and home. Gone are the days when leaving the office or shop meant leaving our work behind. Today employees are available to their supervisors, coworkers, and customers around the clock.
- The coupling of increased workloads with technology that keeps us constantly connected to our jobs finds an increasing number of workers feeling overwhelmed, discouraged and depleted.
- In 2006 53% of employees felt they had a good work-life balance, according to a Corporate Executive Board (CEB) report. That number fell to 30% in the first quarter of 2009, the CEB reported. Many employees today are so busy making a living that they have no time to make a life.

- In contrast, numerous studies have shown the most productive employees are well-rounded professionals with full and well-balanced lives -- both in and out of the workplace. Likewise, the most successful companies are those that foster employee health and well-being while enhancing organizational performance and productivity.
- Today work-life balance ranks as one of the most important workplace attributes -- second only to compensation, and workers who feel they have a better work-life balance tend to work 21% harder than employees who feel overworked.

INDIVIDUAL STRATEGIES FOR WORK LIFE BALANCE:

1. Time Management

Analyzing employees' present situation is the beginning step in achieving a balanced life. Employees have to keep a time log of everything for one week, including work-related and personal activities. This data will serve as an eye-opener, helping employees understand how they are using and where they are losing their time.

2. Determine Priorities

Employees have to spend some time seriously reflecting on what is most important to them, and make a list of their top priorities at work and at home. Employees have to analyze time audit by asking them self these key questions: What, how and why. Employees need to understand what they need to do differently.

3. Set Appropriate Goals

Employees should take their list of priorities and turn them into concrete and measurable goals. Employees have to schedule their time for activities just like they would for an important meeting.

4. Plan & Schedule Scrupulously

Employees have to plan their work and then work on their plan of success .Whether paper or electronic, this is the vehicle by which employees can turn their priorities and goals into reality. Employees should set put 10 to 20 minutes at the beginning of each day (or the night before) to plan their tasks and activities for the day and evening ahead.

5. Establish Boundaries

Employees should communicate realistic limits to supervisor, coworkers, partner and family. For instance, Employees should commit to not working late on certain days unless there is a crisis. Employees should set aside a time at home during which they will not check or respond to work-related emails or voice mails.

6. Take Care of Physical and Mental Health

Employees' health should always be their No. 1 priority. Employees should be physically, mentally, and emotionally, prepared so that the work life and personal life to not effected. Employees should take care of themselves by eating healthy meals (especially breakfast), exercise at least three times per week and sleep a minimum of seven hours per night. While employees may not think they have time to do exercise and extra sleep to their busy schedule, these practices relieve stress, raise employee's energy level, increase their stamina, improve mental clarity, boost immune system, and make them happier, more engaged, and more

productive person. Additionally, refrain from the excessive use of alcohol, tobacco, or drugs to relieve stress. These substances only tend to keep the body in a stressed state and cause even more problems.

7. Nurture Family & Relationships

Relationships with family, friends, and loved ones are, by far, the greatest source of inner satisfaction. If job or career is damaging employees personal relationships, both areas will ultimately suffer. Sure there will be days when employees will need to work overtime. The issue becomes problematic when these days become the rule, not the exception. By making personal relationships a priority, employee's productivity and effectiveness on the job will actually increase.

8. Personal Time

As much as work, health, and relationships take priority in life, it is also important to schedule time for own renewal. Indulge in some small pleasure daily. Take at least 30 minutes of uninterrupted personal time. It will do wonders for well-being, and employees relationships and career will benefit too.

9. Leave Work at Work

Develop a mental on-off switch between work and home. It helps to establish a transitional activity between the two realms. This might consist of listening to music or recorded books during your evening commute, exercising at the fitness center, running errands, or keeping personal appointments. Scheduling such activities immediately following employees normal work hours also prevents them from spending that extra twenty minutes at the office which then turns into several hours.

10. Implement various Options

Many forward-thinking companies today are creating policies and programs that facilitate work-life balance. Find out what options business offers in terms of flex hours, telecommuting, a compressed work week, job-sharing, or part-time employment. Employees may find an arrangement that allows them to work more productively, while at the same time cutting stress and freeing-up valuable personal/family time.

11. Work Smarter Not Harder

Using time more efficiently is an important skill that everyone from the receptionist to the CEO can learn. Adopting the right combination of time-management practices can cut stress and save employees time up to an hour a day. This can include the use of technology to become more organized, grouping emails and voice messages.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR WORK LIFE BALANCE:

- **Special Arrangements:** Establish flexible time periods where employees can work extra hours during the week to receive a day off every other week, or a half day every week.
- **Paternity Leave:** Give male employees the option of working from home for a number of days. Few organisations have paternity leave for 10 days as part of their organizational policy.
- **A 30-Minutes-Exercise Per Week Policy:** Have a 30-minutes aerobic exercise per week after work to eliminate any stress-related conditions before going home.
- **Employee-Birthday-Off Policy:** Many organizations give employees the day off on their birthdays

to enjoy themselves with family and friends.

- **No-laptops-at-Home-Policy:** Most organisations do not allow employees to send their laptops home on weekends or at least on the last weekend of every month.
- **On the job training:** Set priorities for all work, Seminars on work life balance.
- **Make work more flexible:** Job sharing, Sponsoring employees' family oriented activities
- **Allow for time off from work:** A formal leave policy, allow employees to take leave for community service

IMPACT OF WORK LIFE BALANCE ON ORGANISATION:

Work life balance is the kind of harmony that a worker strikes between professional career and social engagements with the hope to achieve organizational productivity, while at the same time, satisfying social/family/communal commitments. Most HR departments have institutionalized systems and policies that ensure that employees enjoy family/social engagements in the midst of their hectic professional careers.

One of the key outcomes of a research conducted by HR practitioners showed that an effective worklife balance may contribute to meeting organizational goals. In effect, well-balanced social and professional lifestyles of hardworking employees produce desired company results and meet projected career goals. The rationale underpinning this hypothesis is that, once the employee is given ample time with their families and friends, they become more focused on their professional and career goals, thereby achieving set goals within their organisations. On the other hand, when companies pressure employees to become workaholics without spending some of their time with families and friends, organizational results may suffer

WRONG PERCEPTION ABOUT WORK LIFE BALANCE

- It is not soliciting for equal working hours for career and family lives
- It is not reducing the workload on employees
- There is no perfect, one-size-fits-all balance you should be striving for (Single and married employees require completely different work-life balance)
- The optimum work-life balance for an employee will not remain static but will vary over time
- It is not only for care givers or lactating mothers. (Everyone needs his/her personal or some family space, even managers and directors)

COMPANIES THAT FALL SHORT OF WORK LIFE BALANCE WILL EXPERIENCE THE FOLLOWING:

- High Staff Attrition and frustrated workforce
- Low productivity and less profits
- Poor morale among employees
- Stress-related conditions / diseases
- Divided attention over tasks at the workplace

BARRIERS TO ACHIEVE A WORK-LIFE BALANCE

- **Unsupportive work culture and work environment:** Employees using flexible working options feel they are being placed under the close observations by their colleagues and required to justify their use of the options.
- **Career decisions:** Some employees feel they are placing their career in jeopardy. They believe they could be or are overlooked for promotion, or that they might miss the challenging and interesting work.
- **Mismatch between policies and life stages:** Research tells us that younger people want choice and the freedom to exit and enter the paid workforce without fear of damaging career or promotional prospects (Corporate Leadership Council 2003b). Middle-aged sought to undertake pursuits outside the workplace in a manner that would not negatively impact on career and job opportunities. Similarly, people in the later phase of their working lives expressed the desire to be able to exit the workforce in a manner that matched their financial status and personal circumstances.
- **Job and work design:** Job and work design influence employees' ability to take up the flexible working options that may contribute to a better work-life balance. Often employees feel specialised work or the type of work a work unit/team undertakes is indicative of a person's ability to utilise work-life balance options. It was generally felt senior management believed flexible working arrangements were not compatible with 'core business'.
- **Role of the manager:** Supportive manager is the key to achieving work-life balance. If managers did not understand the available flexible working options and how to successfully implement them, then flexible working options tended to be unavailable for access by staff. The role of managers was implicit in employee's perception of their empowerment and autonomy.
- **Self-perceptions:** There is a distinct delineation between senior executives' views on their staff utilizing the policies and their own practices. The focus group of senior executives stated that while they did not believe they could use current policies due to levels of workload, time management and other constraints, it was important for less senior staff to access policies and initiatives.
- **Communication:** Effective communication by line managers, supervisors, and senior staff is a major driver of employees' level of satisfaction with work-life balance; absence of this also becomes a barrier.
- **Empowerment:** Empowerment is the key to attaining a work-life balance. Empowerment is embedded in an individual's knowledge, awareness and ability to effectively communicate and negotiate with managers and work teams. The participants identified that knowledge of the available options was critical to their ability to access and utilise the policies and initiatives that facilitate work-life balance.
- **Measuring effectiveness:** Shifting the focus from time in the office to the outputs/outcomes achieved was seen as a way of encouraging work-life balance and avoiding some of the costs

mentioned earlier. Facilitating flexibility within a workgroup was seen to be an added burden on the manager but, ultimately, a worthwhile exercise due to the benefits it provided.

- **Role models:** A dominant topic among participants was the senior managers' role in actively demonstrating their commitment to attaining and managing a satisfactory work life balance. Participants stated that the influence of senior management in supporting and actively using the policies was very important in setting the culture and practices of the organisation as a whole.

ORGANIZATIONAL EXAMPLES OF WORK LIFE BALANCE STRATEGIES:

1. RMSI

'People are respected and performance is nurtured'

RMSI, a global IT services company providing geospatial and software services to clients across the globe has surpassed Google, which has been topping the best employer charts for the past 5 years. In 2009, RMSI was ranked the best company to work for in India.

"A flexible work environment, high level of empowerment and accountability where each employee owns his area of domain/function, employees' involvement in company's business decisions, leadership development through mentoring and coaching, skills/competency development initiatives, corporate social responsibility program, multi-cultural exposure through onsite work opportunities are the big takeaways at RMSI"

Hailing RMSI's great work culture, Gagan Jyot, vice president, Human Resources, RMSI, says, "People are respected and valued, performance is nurtured, creativity and excellence are encouraged, leadership and teamwork are rewarded. The management team is simple, honest and highly approachable, which makes it easy for people to work together as one team and focus on the business and clients."

Rewarding environment

The work is intellectually stimulating as we help solve global problems and contribute to the world, she adds.

"Various reward and recognition programs ensure that innovation, creativity, leadership and team work is rewarded along with individual contributions. Fast track growth paths are created for high performers. Parenting, relationship counseling, child psychology workshops help build a bond with families of employees".

Healthcare and other benefits

With a strong focus on employee's health and overall well-being, lifestyle assessment checks, dental/medical/eye check ups, life-skill workshops, stress management through yoga, meditation, pranayama, healing, check-up camps, physiotherapy are undertaken.

Initiatives for women

"Besides a well defined 'Anti sexual harassment' policy which ensures safety and equal rights for women, other initiatives like self defense workshops, distribution of pepper sprays, sessions with women police officers and NGOs to create awareness about women safety and rights are organized.

The company also has focused health initiatives for women for breast and cervix cancer, thyroid tests, gynecological problems.

Women also have access to extended maternity leave, part time/flexible working hours, work from home options and option to take a short-term break in careers.

2. Google India

'Fitness and fun are woven into Google's history'

When it comes to facilities, working environment and benefits, work-life balance, very few companies can compete with Google.

The company makes sure the employees get the right environment to grow to their true potential.

With a creative and colourful ambience, offices are designed to promote fun-filled innovation as the company believes it is crucial for employees to think creatively and give their best.

"The employees have access to the best and brightest IT specialists to help get their jobs done. The TechStop is Google in-house tech support shop, it provides Google employees guidance with all hardware and software needs and problems at any time".

Access to best facilities

The employees at Google get to use the company's products to get work done, and beta-test products that haven't been released to the public yet.

Employees have access to fully equipped gyms across offices in India with trainers and customised health programs.

Employees can play table tennis, pool, football, air hockey and other games in the recreation area, or go to one of the several sleep pods for a quick nap.

Fun at work

"We have numerous special facilities which helps our employees maintain a work-life balance. Every week on Friday, Google hosts TGIF (Thank God It's Friday) after 4 p.m. where everyone mingles and works together. This gives an open platform to employees to collaborate more. Furthermore, Google encourages its employees to pursue their passion, be it in music or drama or some other form of art"

The company is strongly looking at removing bureaucratic delays and any policies that hinder speedy decisions.

"Each year, the company organises a 'bureaucracy buster' day where employees can suggest changes to minimise policies and reduce excessive guidelines," the spokesperson adds.

Women's initiatives

Women's empowerment is another focus area. Google offers academic scholarships to future leaders in technology and supporting employee resource groups like Women@Google.

3. Marriott Hotels India

'Taking care of our associates is at the heart of Marriott's core values'

Marriott calls its employees 'associates'. On their birthdays or anniversaries, the hotel employees are allowed a meal for six in any hotel or a stay to experience their own hospitality at its best.

"Taking care of our associates is at the heart of Marriott's core values, which reflects the company's work-life commitment. Marriott's history of taking care of its employees dated back to its early days, when its founder, JW Marriott, counselled the company's employees individually on their personal problems at his first hotel. He valued their presence, kept them posted about the latest happenings in Marriott and gave them excellent training. JW Marriott always ensured that employees who joined the company felt themselves a part of the Marriott family. He made managers responsible for the satisfaction of their subordinates,"

Apart from providing a competitive pay package, Marriott strives to give its employees a good work life.

The company values good leadership offers better growth opportunities, a friendly work environment and training facilities.

Open communication, trust among working teams, and a relentless focus on winning the right way are other key aspects.

What keeps employees happy

The hotels' discount policies, talent development program, international exposure, open door policy, cross department exposure, performance incentives and rewarding high performers boosts the morale of employees.

Access to a gym, recreation, discount on food and beverages, room stay, assignments locally and internationally, international placements and health insurance are other benefits.

4. American Express India

'Creating an inspiring workplace is a top priority'

Promoting talent, growth and positive relationship with employees makes American Express one of the best companies to work for in India.

"American Express takes great pride in fostering a work environment that encourages different backgrounds, talents and perspectives to thrive. Creating an inspiring workplace is a top priority for every leader at American Express," says an Amex spokesperson.

Promoting talent and growth

The 'People Leader Learning Path' has been greatly valued by leaders across levels and career stages.

This program provides prescriptive approach to development as per their career stage (i.e. new people leaders and tenured people leaders; first level People Leaders and Second level People leaders) and recommends learning in a sequential modular order for foundational & core essentials.

Regular people leader sessions on 'Employee Relations fundamentals' to help them maintain a positive ER (Employee Relations).

Rewards & Recognitions

The reward programs are extremely popular with employees and help to create a winning culture at American Express.

‘Reward Blue’ is a recognition program that enables leaders and employees to recognise each other – across business units, band levels everyday, and reward great work and effort.

Fun at work

Several fun-filled activities are organised to drive and inculcate a culture of gratitude and appreciation for each other in the organisation, the most recent being the Blue Bucket Challenge akin to the recently famed viral ice bucket challenge.

Gender diversity

Amex designed a unique gender diversity initiative in 2014 called ‘Reach Out’.

This program in collaboration with 4 other leading companies - PepsiCo, PwC and Tata Sons - to set a partnership which enables us to leverage each other’s Diversity & Inclusion (D&I).

The program provided a development platform for senior women leaders to ‘Share, Network and Learn’ from leaders and peers across these organizations, to enable greater career success.

Smart savings

Amex introduced a ‘Smart Savings’ program that enhances overall financial wellness of employees.

With access to online portal and onsite helpdesk, employees are educated and updated on their earnings and long term savings.

The convenience of having this information made employees save time and effort. It is a single stop solution to their short to long term financial needs.

5. SAP Labs India

SAP shows it cares for its employees

SAP Labs has a slew of initiatives to keep employees happy from flexible work options, healthcare policies and initiatives to help employees during a crisis as well.

Initiatives for women

Maternity Leave Policy: Women employees are entitled to twenty weeks of paid maternity leave with an additional sixteen weeks of extended maternity leave with loss of pay or a part time work option.

Women are offered with cab transportation during and post pregnancy.

Run Mummier: It is a maternity return program that focuses on ensuring the return of a female employee after her maternity leave as smooth as possible.

‘Part work from home’ after the birth of a child implies that male employees, apart from paternity leave, have the flexibility to work for four hours at office and the rest from home.

SAPlings in-house creche: This creche caters to 250 children in the age group of nine months to six years. Under this program children are provided with day care, Montessori education, summer camps as well as other activities.

Business Women Network: This is a forum which strives to foster a diverse workplace at SAP by inspiring women employees through the creation of role models and sharing of inspirational stories of successful women in leadership positions.

Work From Home Policy

Employees can work from home for four days in a month or one day a week.

Temporary Part Time Work

This benefit allows employees to work part-time for a maximum period of four months. One can work on 50, 60 or 80 percent of regular work load based on the agreement with the manager.

Care for Life

One of the most impactful initiatives has been an Employee Benevolent Fund called 'Care for Life Fund' which is a purely voluntary, employee funded and employee managed initiative, used to provide financial support to employees and their families in times of unexpected and unforeseen emergencies. The Care for Life Fund operates through a Trust and runs on a steady monthly contribution by members.

Other activities

SAP has 33 interest groups, each catering to specific activities like drama, music, art, dance etc to help employees pursue an interest of their choice.

CONCLUSION:

The process of achieving a healthy work-life balance is like becoming a professional athlete or training for a triathlon. It takes a concerted effort to get in shape and a continued effort to stay that way. But those who commit themselves to this quest reap enormous health and quality-of-life benefits. It is possible to have a successful professional career and a fulfilling personal life. Take control of your work. Be proactive with your time. Get a (balanced) life.

A balanced life style boosts the sense of responsibility and ownership, builds better relationship with management & builds confidence.

"Life is all about balance, too much or too little can kill.

The best way to balance life is by setting your boundaries in learning to say enough"

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