Shrinkhla Ek Shodhparak Vaicharik Patrika

Work-Life Balance - Perception and Attitude

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Abstract

The term, Work-life Balance has been round the corner in the work places in the developed countries in 1960s.It has gained emphasis relatively late in India post globalization in 1990s.Though globalization is the threshold for any country to venture into the international market in all sectors of business to pave the path for a better economy. Besides economy, it also creates employment in various sectors like manufacturing, banking with access to better education and more jobs. More job creation simultaneously leads to an improved economy and is associated with work force with busy work schedules. Along with improvement in various sectors, globalization brings forth competition. This competition demands more work from the employees. As a result, the employees work time increases to meet the demands of business causing burn out. Thus, it creates imbalance in the lives of employees giving rise to Work-life Conflict. The Work-life conflict is primary criteria for job satisfaction. Moreover, technology has bridged the gap between personal life and professional life through social media and mobile devices. Work-life balance is the condition where work interacts positively with all the other activities in life like family time, leisure, community participation. Work-life balance is beneficial for employers and employees.

Keywords: Work-life balance, Work-life Conflict, Burn out

Introduction

Work–life balance is a concept including proper prioritizing between "work" (career and amition) and "lifestyle" (health, pleasure, leisure, family and spiritual development/meditation).

The work–leisure dichotomy was invented in the mid-1801s. Paul Krassner remarked that anthropologists use a definition of happiness that is to have as little separation as possible "between your work and your play". The expression "work–life balance" was first used in the United Kingdom in the late 1970s to describe the balance between an individual's work and personal life. In the United States, this phrase was first used in 1986.

Research Objective

1. To identify and explore the current understanding of and attitude towards the issue of work-life balance amongst the employees and employers.
2. Identifying the key concerns including both positive and negative that emerge in the discussion
3. Understanding of current nature of work-life balance for employees in different sectors and current work place processes available to ensure work-life balance

Meaning of the term work-life balance

A comfortable state of equilibrium achieved between an employee's primary priorities of their employment position and their private style.Most psychologists would agree that the demands of an employee's career should not overwhelm the individual's ability to enjoy a satisfying personal life outside of the business environment.

Research Design

The research has utilised qualitative methods. This report is based upon eight focus groups, three mini groups and five in depth interviews.

The groups selected selected for the study were chosen to:

1. enable a particular focus on key audiences where there is more limited knowledge of perceptions and attitudes and
2. explore perceptions amongst groups who may have a distinctive relationship to the issue of work-life balance

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The groups undertaken are outlined in the following table

Demographics	No.of participants	Location
Females, Aged 25-40,Public Sector	Five	Cuttack
Females,Aged 40-60,Public Sector	Five	Cuttack
Females,Aged 25-40,Private sector	Five	Cuttack
Females Aged 24-40,Cooperative banks	Six	Cuttack
Females,Aged 40-60,Public sector	Six	Cuttack
Males,Aged 25-40,Public Sector	Six	Bhubaneswar
Males, Aged 25-40,Private sector	Six	Bhubaneswar
Males,Aged,40-60,Public sector	Six	Bhubaneswar
Males,Aged 40-60, Cooperative sector	Six	Bhubaneswar

The duration for each focus group was approximately two hours.

The five indepth interviews were conducted amongst Public sector,Private sector and Cooperative banks with about 50 employees.

Facilitators

One facilitator moderated each focus group.Three facilitators were used for this study to provide flexibility as regards the as the most appropriate to the participants being researched.

Research Analysis

Transcriptions of the focus group discussions were searched to identify key themes.

This qualitative research can be used to identify a range of issues and assess the intensity with which views are held.

Work-Life Balance-Views

Most of the participants could relate to the issue of work-life balance it was clearly not an issue that reflected on, unless prompted.

It was considered complex managing various aspects of life and assessment of work-life balance was seen to require stepping back and viewing life objectively.Most noted that it was easy to get caught up in the day-to-day details of living and for life to become out of balancing without realising it.

Most felt that people would not seriously look to address work-life balance issues in their life until some crisis had occurred.

Even though participants from different socio-economic background work-life imbalance was often seen to be forced upon them. Imbalance towards the working part of their life was often considered necessary to generate an income that just covered immediate outgoings. Many in this position felt trapped and unable to see how their circumstances would improve or how they could get ahead in life.

Work-Life Balance-Current

Most participants claimed that their work and life was out of balance. It was an issue that both employers and employees could personally relate to, although there was evidence of some disconnection between perceptions of work-life balance of the employee by employers.

Most employers felt that the work-life balance of employees was better than their own, while employees own rating of their work-life balance was more in line with that stated by employers for themselves.

While paid work was clearly a key contributor to any imbalance between work and life, there were also many factors outside the workplace that were also seen to impact on work-life balance.

There were numerous stories recounted of the impact work-life imbalance had on an individual's personal life. Participants tended to focus more intensely on the impacts outside the workplace, although for most there were a number of important issues relating to the impact on the workplace such as deterioration of work relationships, increased mistakes, lower quality work and decreased job satisfaction.

Although not working in paid employment, rural mothers at home felt that work-life balance was definitely an issue relevant to their situation. A major issue was the lack of differentiation between work and the rest of their life. With their workplace being the home, there was little refuge from work demands.

Intensifying their feeling of work-life imbalance was the perception that their input as stay at home mothers was not valued by Indian society.

Addressing Work-Life Balance

Most employees felt some reticent raising work-life balance issues with their employer. The issue was considered a grey area as it spanned both home and work life, and was also seen to be subdued as against discussing personal issues.

Participants recounted a number of ways they managed or coped with work-life balance issues. There was an emphasis on coping mechanisms outside the workplace, which points to a perception that managing work-life balance is the responsibility of the individual.

Work-Life Balance Initiatives

There was a strong belief amongst employers and employees that the implementation of work-life balance initiatives would have a positive and noticeable impact on the workplace. Overall, employers indicated reasonably strong support for initiatives that helped employees manage work and life commitments.

A key to support amongst employers was that employers could relate to the issue personally and could therefore understand the impact endemic work-life imbalance could have on the workplace.

Employers viewed the key benefits of implementation of work-life balance initiatives were retention of quality staff and being able to attract quality staff, both issues of concern in the current buoyant labour market.

Other perceived benefits were higher productivity, happier workplaces, more motivated staff, a closer relationship between staff and

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management, and a trickle down effect that would lead to happier communities.

Key barriers seen to hinder employers implementing work-life balance initiatives were: the perceived cost of implementing some initiatives, which was seen as an issue particularly important to smaller businesses having the time and resources to manage and implement the initiatives a lack of expertise and knowledge both in terms of the best initiatives to implement for their type of business and how to actually set-up particular initiatives.

Unprompted suggestions for work-life balance initiatives raised by employees included

More money, courses and counselling, social clubs, more time to take stock, child care facilities, additional staff to cover busy periods, more fulfilling work, and an employer that was understanding and supportive during times of stress.

Unprompted suggestions for work-life balance initiatives (additional to what were already offered by their organisation) raised by employers included:

Teaching employees life skills and third party support for smaller businesses.

Both employers and employees suggested flexible hours, disclosing company goals, and enhanced health care facilities as possible work-life balance initiatives.

Prompted suggestions for work-life balance initiatives that employees were most interested in included

Stress management programmes, communication on company objectives, working part-time, counselling and workload planning.From the prompted list of work-life balance initiatives a majority of employers claimed to already have the following in place, workload planning, working part-time, tailored contracts, and clear communication on company objectives. Of initiatives not yet in place, employers noted that they were most likely to consider offering stress management programmes and job sharing.

Key Roles

Responsibility for work-life balance was seen to primarily lie with the individual. The key role of the employer was seen to be in providing a good working environment.

While most employers did not want to see the Government legislate on work-life balance issues, there were a number of suggestions as to the role the Government could play.

Raise awareness and educate both employees and employers on the benefits of maintaining a healthy balance between life and work. Provide best practice and cost-benefit information on the various initiatives that could be put in place to address work-life balance issues. Be a positive role model as a major New Zealand employer.Provide subsidies to implement work-life balance initiatives. Provide independent work-life balance services that small businesses could access such as counselling and advice on how to set-up services.Provide tax breaks to alleviate the cost of implementing any services.

Defination of Work-Life Balance-Employees and Employers
Work-Life Balance Defination

Work-life balance was clearly an issue that resonated with participants, although the issue was not necessarily consciously evaluated. Participants often talked about the lack of time and pressures of modern life but this was more likely to be voiced as a consequence of modern life rather than a work-life balance that could be addressed.

Once raised, most participants could relate to the need to balance both work and other aspects of their life.

I think you have to become a whole person, like you need to concentrate on social, mental, work, just whatever. You need a balance. If you just devote all your time to work, then you're going to be neglecting the social aspects, the spiritual aspects, whatever different aspects of your life. Just be a whole person, be fulfilled in all different areas of your life. You need to find that balance. You do need to work I believe as well. There's lots of different aspects in your life and you can't overdo it with one. (Cuttack, Public sector, male)

There were three key components that participants felt needed to be in balance to achieve a healthy lifestyle, namely, paid work, unpaid work and personal time.

I think wellbeing springs to mind for me in terms of finding a balance between all three. There's always that. Between how much money you've got, how much time you've got and the third one is finding the ratio between the three so you can work all the time and not have enough time to enjoy your time, or you can have too much time and not enough money and opportunities to still keep you rested so I think it's finding the balance of the ratio of work to leisure and the overall sense of wellbeing. (Cuttack, Public sector, male)

What generally characterised work was a sense of responsibility towards the tasks involved. In the case of paid work there was also an element of financial gain and the acknowledgement that providing an income was generally a necessity. Personal time was made up of many parts, all of which had an important role in maintaining work-life balance. As personal time had less affiliated responsibilities it was often the part of the work-life balance equation that was most easily sacrificed.

The other thing is that at some stage with that work balance thing – it may not just be work, work, it could be not necessarily voluntary work but other activities outside which aren't family orientated – you suddenly realise that the family's growing up and you're not there. To me your family life or your home life is time with your family. Anything that isn't time with your family is work to me. That includes when you're coaching a sport, even though it's a hobby. Whether you go out and sit in a paddock somewhere painting a picture. [That's seen as work?] It's not to you. Yes, it's not to you but it's not family time. That's what you've got to look at. It's not necessarily work life and private life, but work life and family life. (Cuttack, male)

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All aspects of work-life balance were seen to have an element of personal goals and rewards involved. Paid work, unpaid work and personal time were all seen to contribute to some personal need, which varied from the perceived personal challenge involved to the sense of satisfaction in completing a task.

Unpaid work was generally considered to be home duties and activities that were task oriented and not purely leisure.

Personal time was seen to comprise of several elements, which all participants felt needed to be present in a person's life to achieve a proper balance.

Me-time

This was time participants felt needed to be spent purely on activities for themselves. Often the activities were solitary and people spoke of the activities such as pampering themselves that had an element of guilty pleasure about them.

Time to reflect/ reenergise

Participants spoke of the need for time to reflect and reenergize themselves.

Spiritual needs

A number noted that spiritual needs (not necessarily religion based) also needed to be fed to ensure a healthy balance.

Family time

For participants with families it was considered extremely important that quality time was spent with their children. It was considered necessary that time spent with their children was quality time rather than just time looking after their basic needs.
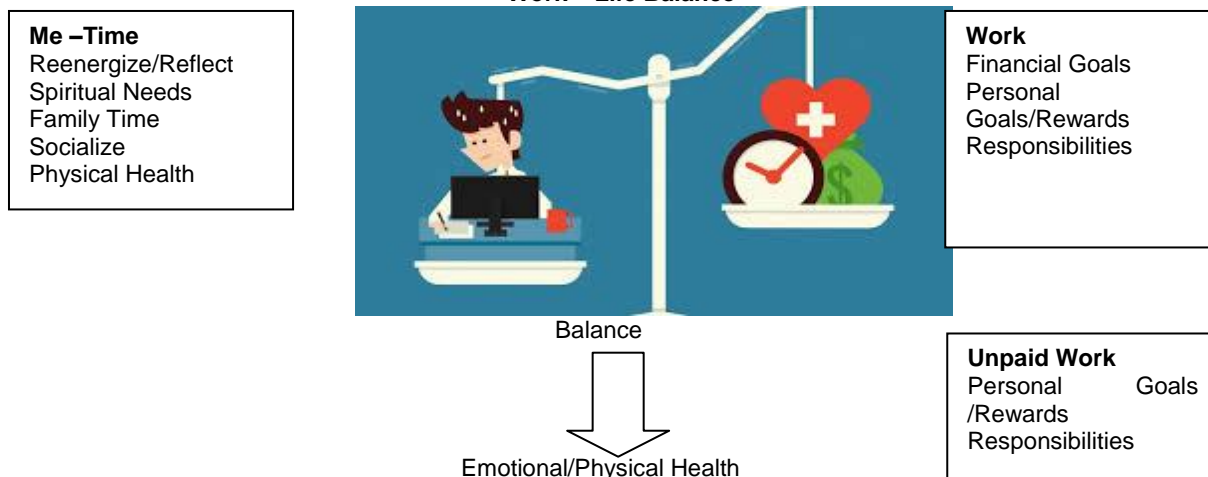
Partner time

Those in relationships acknowledged the need to nurture and spend time with their partners. This was seen as critical to maintain a healthy relationship.

Social time

Many noted that it was important to maintain social networks to keep a healthy balance.

Physical health

Many felt it necessary to have an exercise programme in place to maintain their physical health. Many also found exercise a time to refresh and reenergize themselves.

Work – Life Balance

Me –Time
Reenergize/Reflect
Spiritual Needs
Family Time
Socialize
Physical Health

Work
Financial Goals
Personal
Goals/Rewards
Responsibilities

Balance

Emotional/Physical Health

Unpaid Work
Personal   Goals
/Rewards
Responsibilities

Actual Work-life Balance

Most participants felt that their work and life was out of balance. It was an issue that both employees and employers could relate to, as most considered it relevant to their own situation.Quizzed on what an ideal work-life balance would be, most felt that equal weight on work and other aspects of their life would be the ideal. It was acknowledged however, that the ideal balance would differ from person to person with some people that gained a lot of personal fulfilment from their work viewing a much larger weighting towards work as ideal.In the groups participants took part in an exercise where they had to note their current work-life balance in rough percentage terms on a moving scale. On the same scale employers were also asked to note what they thought their average employee's work-life balance was.What was clear from this exercise was that there was a disconnect between perceptions of the work-life balance employers felt their employees faced and what employees viewed as the reality. While employees felt their work-life balance was weighted at

60 to 70 percent in favour of work, most employers felt that their employees work-life balance was more around the 50% mark.

Work-life Balance Issues

Outside work

There was discussion on what causes work and life to become out of balance. Impacts both outside and inside the workplace were raised by participants. While workplace issues were clearly significant, impacts outside work also played an important part in creating work-life imbalance.

The influences outside the workplace are discussed following.

Home duties

Many felt that uncompleted tasks around the home were a constant pressure. As many of these tasks were on-going, most noted that there was always some task left unfinished. As these duties were also unpaid work, they were more easily left if other pressing commitments arose. Some (mainly amongst female participants) noted that having an unsupportive partner could exacerbate the pressure to

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complete these home duties. Some male partners were seen to expect all home duties to be undertaken by the female partner, regardless of whether both were in paid employment.

Suggested Iniatiatives

All participants were asked for suggestions on initiatives employers could offer to help employees balance work-life balance. These suggestions were to be additional to what were already offered by their organisation.

Employee Suggestions

More Money

Many from low socio-economic and blue collar jobs felt that higher pay rates would make the most difference to their work-life balance. This was seen to enable those that worked regular overtime or more than one job to cut down on hours worked. For these participants the extra jobs or hours worked were seen as a necessity to bring in enough income to survive.

Courses and counselling

There was some interest in companies offering courses, mainly in the areas of team building and stress management.

Social clubs

Social clubs were seen as a good way to build a strong and committed team.

Allowing more time

Some employees would like more realistic timeframes and allocation of time just to think, clear their paperwork and take stock.

Additional staff

There were calls for more staff to cover identified peak work periods and on-call staff to cover unplanned absenteeism.

Childcare facilities

Offering childcare facilities was seen as an initiative that would encourage many mothers to return to the workforce as it made balancing childcare needs manageable.

More fulfilling work

Some employees felt that trying to meet the work goals of employees and provide work that was fulfilling would help work-life balance.

Employer Suggestions

Life skills

Some suggested providing education on life skills such as budgeting and saving. This was seen as particularly relevant to younger people and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Suggestions raised by both employees and employers

Flexible hours

Some employees were attracted to the idea or working flexible hours. Examples of this working successfully were raised, although it was acknowledged that this could not be offered by all employers due to the hours they had to operate.

Disclosing company goals

Open discussion on the future direction and goals of a company was seen to help work-life balance. This was seen to help people feel that they had some input into the direction of the company and to feel in more control of their destiny.

Health care

Given that health problems were seen as a likely outcome of work-life imbalance, free health checks were seen as a good initiative. This was considered to be another way to monitor whether staff were coping with their workloads.

On-site gyms were another suggestion to improve the health of workers and help alleviate stress.

Benefits of Implementation of Work-life Balance Initiatives

Both employers and employees acknowledged that there would be benefits from implementing work-life balance initiatives. A key reason employers showed quite strong belief in the measures was that employers could relate to the issue personally and could therefore understand the impact endemic work-life imbalance could have on the workplace.

The main benefits are outlined following.

Staff retention

Many of the work-life balance initiatives tested during the study and that employers currently had in place were seen to enhance the working environment, which in turn was seen to lead to greater staff retention and loyalty.

Retaining quality staff was seen as a key benefit by employers who acknowledged that a lack of skilled staff was a major problem in the current labour market.

Attracting quality staff

A reputation for looking after employees and offering some of the initiatives outlined was also seen to make it easier to attract quality staff. With unemployment low it was seen as becoming increasingly more difficult to attract high calibre staff.

Happier workforce/ workplace

The initiatives were seen to result in a happier and more harmonious workplace.

A happier workforce was seen to result in lower absenteeism.

More motivated

Staff were seen to be more motivated and to feel more connection with an organisation if the organisation was seen to care about them. Having no balance was seen to impact on the level of commitment and fulfilment that could be achieved from a job.

Conclusion

Both employees and employers are aware of the work-life balance and they strongly feel the need to bring in harmony in both their personal and professional lives. Employees however, feel the stress in managing personal and professional areas and look forward to areas like monetary compensation and childcare facilities, recruiting additional staff, flexible work hours, healthcare, etc. The employers would benefit by attracting quality staff and retention of employees and a motivated workforce.

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