

# **The benefits vis a vis challenges of work life balance (WLB): An exploration**

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## **Abstract**

In organizations and on the home front, the challenge of work-life balance is rising to the top of many employers' and employees' consciousness. Work-life balance is a vital issue in the field of human resource management and it has got an important bearing on the organizational growth and employee's positive perceptions. In today's fast-paced society, human resource professionals seek options to positively impact the bottom line of their companies, improve employee morale, retain employees with valuable company knowledge, and keep pace with workplace trends, Lockwood N. R. (2003). In the 1980s and 1990s, companies began to offer work-life programs. While the first wave of these programs was primarily to support women with children, today's work-life programs are less gender-specific and recognize other commitments as well as those of the family. With the advancement of technology and changing workplace dynamics, the line between one's work and personal life is narrowing rapidly, thus making the struggle between striking the right chord between office duties and family commitments a day-to-day affair for many people. Individuals experience more conflict between work and personal life as they continue to pursue the quality of life that they need (Casper et al., 2011). Thus, successfully balancing work and family life is one of the major challenges facing current individual workers, Halpern, 2005. The paper explores the benefits vis a vis challenges of work life balance facing the HR managers in a highly pressurized work environment.

**Key Words:** Human Resource Management, Work Life Balance, Work Environment, Family Commitment

## **Introduction**

The term "work/life balance" was coined in 1986, although its usage in everyday language was sporadic for a number of years. Interestingly, work-life programs existed as early as the 1930s. Before World War II, the W.K. Kellogg Company created four six-hour shifts to replace the traditional three daily eight-hour shifts, and the new shifts resulted in increased employee morale and efficiency.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter's seminal book (1977), *Work and Family in the United States: A Critical Review and Agenda for Research and Policy* brought the issue of work-life balance to the forefront of research and organizations. In the 1980s and 1990s, companies began to offer work-life programs. While the first wave of these programs was primarily to support women with children, today's work-life programs are less gender-specific and recognize other commitments as well as those of the family.

Work-Life Balance is a state of equilibrium in which the demands of both a person's job and personal life are equal. But, it does not exclusively mean an equal hour of balance between work and personal life. It is infact, a broad concept in the area of HRM which denotes prioritizing between career and ambition of the employees on one hand and their pleasure, leisure, family life and spiritual development on the other hand. Work life balance is about persons having a measure of control over when, where and how they work. It is achieved when an individual's right is fulfilled life inside and outside paid work is accepted and respected as a norm, to the mutual benefit of the individual, business and society. In a society filled with conflicting responsibilities and commitments, work-life balance has become a predominant issue in the workplace. Three major factors contribute to the interest in, and the importance of, serious consideration of work-life balance: 1) global competition; 2) renewed interest in personal lives/ family values; and 3) an aging workforce. Research suggests that forward-thinking human resource professionals seeking

innovative ways to augment their organization's competitive advantage in the marketplace may find that work-life balance challenges offer a win-win solution.

### **Benefits vis a vis challenges of Work Life Balance (WLB)**

Performance of employees and their job satisfaction are theoretically claimed to be affected very vitally by the Work Life Balance. More specifically WLB is said to help in reducing employee turnover rate, increasing loyalty & productivity of employees, reduced absenteeism and increased return on investment in training as employees stay longer with the organization. The work life balance strategy offers a variety of ways to reduce stress levels and to increase job satisfaction of the employees. A review of the literature, however, questions this purported link between work-life balance practices and organizational effectiveness. The majority of studies investigating the outcomes of work-life practices does not measure work-life conflict, and thus cannot support this proposed mediated relationship (Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005). The mechanisms by which the provision of work-life practices affects both employee behavior and organizational performance remain unclear and under-researched (Allen, 2001; Schutte & Eaton, 2004).

Effective work-life balance policies are valuable to businesses and organizations for a number of reasons, including:

- Reduced staff 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/satisfaction
- Greater staff loyalty and commitment
- Improved productivity
- Maintain a competitive edge
- Attracting high caliber recruits

At the same time work life initiatives taken by organizations benefits the employees in a great way.

A few benefits include:

- Quality of life improves
- Employees are better able to manage their time at home front and work front
- Leisure time available for the family
- Happy and satisfied at work
- Improved career progression

The fundamental principle of designing activities around the topic of work life balance is that work should be part of life. Companies have begun to realize how important the work-life balance is to the productivity and creativity of their employees. Research by Kenexa Research Institute in 2007 shows that those employees who were more favorable toward their organization's efforts to support work-life balance also indicated a much lower intent to leave the organization, greater pride in their organization, a willingness to recommend it as a place to work and higher overall job satisfaction. Employers can offer a range of different programs and initiatives, such as flexible working arrangements in the form of part time, casual and telecommuting work, day care centers, fun and games at work, team outing, health care centers, etc. More proactive employers can provide compulsory leave, strict maximum hours and foster an environment that encourages employees not to continue working after hours.

Employees tend to feel motivated when they feel that the organization is putting extra effort in providing a healthy balance between work and life. Motivated employees not only enhance the productivity but also help creating a positive work environment at office. Work life balance is a choice that an individual has to make. However, it is the organization that needs to take an initiative to help the employees.

Organizations face a lot of challenges before adopting and implementing the work life balance initiatives. Today, employees are not looking at their employer just for a job but they want the

company to take care for their work life balance and their well being. If a company addresses these needs, in addition to providing great career opportunities, they can be very successful in providing job satisfaction to the employees. Companies are adopting new means to ensure that their employees get enough time to enjoy their personal life and spend time with family. Before adopting such measures by the companies, it is very important for them to assess whether the company culture permits and supports the work life initiatives or not. For, organizations need an open and transparent atmosphere and support from the higher management. In addition, for the work environment to be ready for work/life benefits, it is helpful to have a “corporate culture that encourages employees to look at business in an entirely different way and supports and accepts employees as individuals with priorities beyond the workplace.”

The following points need an understanding before adopting and implementing the work life initiatives/programme and pose a challenge before management:

1. Objective behind the system of work life initiatives, which emphasizes its purpose and answers for whom of WLB.
2. Support for senior management.
3. Organizations readiness or company culture support for implementing the programme.
4. Transparent communication about the same to the managers, supervisors and workers to understand the impact/benefits of work life initiatives.
5. What is the ROI of such initiatives, how to calculate them or quantify the impact and benefits.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, it may be said that work-life balance is a vital issue in the field of human resource management and it has got an important bearing on the organizational growth and employee’s positive perceptions. The results of the study may be used by the researchers to undertake conclusive researches at a much broader scale.

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