

## KEY CHALLENGES IN WORK LIFE BALANCE AND STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

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### ABSTRACT

*Due to globalization, environment at workplace has constantly been changing with changes in socio-cultural level. It has created an imbalance in work and personal lives of employees all over the world. Growing demands at job, fear of job loss, increasing stress levels due to the never-ending workday, increasing family expectations etc., have made work-life balance an impossible feat. It has affected the overall physical and psychological health of employees and deteriorated family-life. If employee and organization both make efforts to overcome this imbalance, it does not only benefit the employee, but also the organization. If work-life balance is introduced to the employee, the organization will face less absenteeism, unpunctuality and turnover of staff. Also, there will be increased retentivity of worthy employees, higher rate of loyalty of employees, devotion for the institution, better output and escalated reputation of the organization. Therefore, there is a necessity to bring about a flexible environment which would help employees to manage their work and family together. However, this paper attempts to put light on the strategic initiatives in Indian context that an individual can take and improve the balance between his/her work and life.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Globalization, Socio-Cultural Level, Psychological Health, Work-Life Balance.*

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### Introduction

People act in many roles viz., parents, siblings, spouse, son/daughter, neighbor, friend, employee, colleague and many others. Most of them try to bring out the best in every role and attempt to meet the demands that each role puts on them, even they are conflicting. This way work-life imbalance appears when the expectations imposed by many roles a person plays, clash with one another. The biggest problem faced by working professionals is their inability to balance the demands and pressure at work and on the family front. However, to achieve work-life balance could be a preference and aspiration of an employee; however, an employee is not entirely responsible to manage everything. Organizations too are considered to be the facilitators of work-life balance.

### Definition of Work

Work is doing something which requires mental or physical effort, in order to earn money or to achieve something. Activity is the chief essence of life and is critical for prosperity and well-being. Through the activities human beings harmonize with the environment. Sometimes activity is engaged in for its own sake; sometimes it is reflexive and often it is purposive with an end, object or purpose in view, activities which are done for purpose is work. With the progressing research work in education sector, the concept of work has procured a forward spin in the past couple of years. Work may also be explained as sphere of activities undertaken by individuals for number of reasons. To explain work in the view of science, the factor of responsibility, motive, adaptation, practice, attentiveness, drive, and mental capacity, and talent, self-reliant and adjusting behavior along with minor complexities must be introduced. Hence, work is activity directed toward the accomplishment of a set or purpose.

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### Work-Life Balance

According to Hudson (2005), work/life balance, in a wide sense, is defined as the distribution of a person's time and focus between work and family". Work-life balance helps employees of an organization to balance their personal and professional lives. Work-life balance inspires the employees to segregate the time according to the priorities and to get a grip by spending time with family, maintaining health, etc. as well as making a career. It is a key concern in the business world as it helps in motivating the employees and enhancing the faithfulness towards the organization. Work -Life balance is a control measurement of when, where and how the employees work. It is achieved all through when the interest of an individual for a fulfilled life inside and outside the waged employment is acknowledged and respected as a yardstick, to the mutual interest of the individual person, Line of Work and the community. It is a self-defined, self-determined contentment that an individual could achieve or can fix as an Aim that enables the person to organize effectively numerous tasks at work-place, at home, and in their society. It adds to physical, spiritual, family and community health, and achieve it without sorrow, stress or damaging impact. It is about "living contented all through and getting a control over a person's time so a person can achieve that" (HR Magazine, 2001)

### Advantages of Work Life Balance

When workers have control and possession over their own lives, they begin to have good association with the system management and are able to resolve work challenges at work and home challenges at home. Balanced employees tend to feel more motivated and less stressed out at work, which thereby increases company productivity and reduces employee turnover and absenteeism. An employee's contentment in their distinctive life and their capability to fulfill personal Allegiance greatly affects their outcome as an employee, which immensely benefits any organization. When employees maintain balance, the organization they work in, remains balanced. When stress is managed, a positive atmosphere is created which proves to help in protecting health physically and mentally. A joyful and calm employee becomes more positive and productive.

There are several advantages of work-life balance. Some of them are discussed below:

- Work-life balance increases the motivation of employees and helps them perform better at job.
- It helps persons to reduce their stress as they can spend enough time with their dear ones.
- Organizations can increase productivity from an employee who is stress free as compared to over-worked employee.
- Good lifestyles can be kept by having a Work-life balance. It includes a good diet, physical fitness etc.
- Self-motivated employees can help the organization to attain growth as they are more devoted to their job and careers.
- It leads to lower absenteeism and employee turnover.
- It helps to foster greater employee faithfulness, devotion and motivation.
- It creates a happier and less stressed workforce.
- It helps in developing better physical and intellectual health.
- It helps in making better choices about priorities.

### Impact of Work Life Imbalance

In the older times the balance between work and personal life were greatly maintained. Today, however, professional life is interfering with the personal life and to maintain a good work-life balance is not a simple task. Having an imbalance between work and personal life can have very damaging effects on one's health. An imbalance is basically an absence of well-defined and regularly enforced boundaries between personal life and Work-life. Not to have a good Work-life balance could end up leaving overexertion, nervousness and even depression.

Improper balance in Work-life can lead to some significant consequences such as:

- **Fatigue:** If a person is over tired, it reduces the capability to work efficiently and to have clarity in thinking. This can have an impact on one's professional reputation.
- **Health:** Long hours of work could be the reason of stress which may have negative effects on one's immunity.

- **Insufficient time for Family:** Long hours of work might make a person to skip crucial family moments. This can make one feel neglected and can damage relationships.
- **Exhaustion:** Failing to set up borderline between work and home life could result in suffering from physical and mental strain. As an outcome, the ability to think also suffers. One productivity decreases and the person likely fails in the execution.
- **Increased Expectations:** Working extra hours might lead to taking on extra responsibility. This can cause extra stress and challenges that one will have a really hard time facing.

#### Factors Affecting Work Life Balance

Role conflict, gender discrimination, children care issues, lack of recognition, health issues, time management issues, problems of social support etc. are some common factors which influences work-life balance of women in India. (Vijaya Mani 2013) These factors can be grouped in the following categories:

- **Individual related factors:** Individual variables that affect work-life balance include age, marital status, gender, emotional intelligence etc. A lot of studies have shown the impact of gender on work-life balance of an individual like, Williams and Alliger (1994) Higgins et al. (1994) Loscocco (1997) Grzwacz et al. (2007) Rajadhyaksha and Velgach(2009) etc. On the other hand, some authors reported that work -life balance is not affected by gender such as, Frone et al. (1992a) Milkie and Peltola (1999) Hill et al.(2001) Eagle et al (1997) and Wesley and Muthuswamy (2005). In the reference of literature review no definite results can be drawn with respect to gender discrimination in Work-life balance. However, on the basis of available literature studies which reported gender differences, it may be concluded that women employee experiences high work family conflict. Emotional intelligence has been found to directly relate to Work-life balance. (Carmeli 2003)
- **Family related factors:** these variables include children issues, spouse support, home responsibilities, parental responsibilities, spouse work hours etc. Studies were undertaken to examine the impact of these factors on work-life balance (Suchet and Barling 1986, Loerch et al.1989, Adams et al. 1996, Frone et al.1997, Aryee et al. 1999). Results revealed that women face less conflict between work and family if they get enough spouse support, ultimately results into highly balanced Work-life.
- **Work related factors:** A number of variables have been identified that have direct or indirect effect on work-life balance like, task autonomy, task variety, task complexity, number of working hours, role conflict, flexibility in work schedule etc. Role stressors pertaining to work include role conflict and role ambiguity. Their level of severity causes variability in strain and conflicts for both women and men. Task complexities and task autonomy were found to have more significant impact on Work-life balance in case of females as compared to males. According to Greenhaus et al. (1989), Voydanoff (2004) and Butler et al. (2005),task characteristics too, have impact on Work-life balance.
- **Survival Stress:** When there is a threat to survival or health, or some unpleasant or challenging event is experienced, it is called survival stress.
- **Internally generated stress:** It arises when an individual worries about events which are beyond her control, due to a tensed and hurried approach to life, or from problems in relationships caused by one's own behavior.
- **Fatigue and overwork:** Here, challenges in balancing Work-life occur from events and pressures at work and builds up over a long period of time. This can also occur in putting lots of efforts to accomplish too much in too little time or where you are not using effective time management strategies.

#### Strategic Initiatives to Cope Up with the challenges

- **Self-Management**

Managing one's self properly may not be easy, particularly for adjusting adequate sleeping hours, scheduling exercise, and following nutritious diet. Self-management is recognizing the effective use of spaces in our lives, and other available resources including time and effort. It allows us to become master of our own life; others have no control over it.

- **Time Management**

It involves making best possible use of our time and other supporting resources. Effective time management is ensured through deciding appropriate goals and identifying priorities. It helps in arranging appropriate tools to carry out specific tasks for achieving required results.

- **Stress Management**

Due to globalization and fast changing lifestyles, Societies are becoming more complex day by day resulting in increasing level of stress among individuals. Every one of us needs to become adept to work with more number of people, facing lot of distractions, and noise and learn to work out of pressure-filled situations. We can reduce stress by focusing on one thing at a time instead of being involved in multi-tasking.

- **Change Management**

Change is virtually the only constant in this fast-paced world. Continually experimenting with new methods and re-adapting others are essential for building a successful career and a joyful family life. Effective change management entails making intermittent and intensive efforts to match your progress with that of your immediate world and ensuring that the volume and rate of change at work and at home is not discomforting you and your family.

- **Leisure Management**

Among work-life balance supporting disciplines leisure management has not been given due importance. It recognizes the importance of rest and relaxation- that leisure, and "time off" are vital components of human life and help in increasing their productivity. Effective leisure management requires varying one's activities so that it would not be monotonous.

- **Social life**

Being a social animal, a human being needs to recharge and replenish their batteries constantly. In order to be relaxed, we should have a healthy and functional relationship outside work. It reduces the burden of work and lessens the stress associated with it. Spending noble time with the closed ones is one of the effective measures to reduce pressure.

### **Conclusion**

Maintaining a perfect balance between career and family has always been a challenge for working professionals. Daily routines have become more complex, which results into stress in the work or personal lives. It is not only the responsibility of the individual but employers too must make efforts for improving the situation. Balanced employees tend to feel more motivated and less stressed out at work, which thereby increases company productivity and reduces the number of conflicts among co-workers and management. Therefore, the kind of practices that have been discussed in the present paper should be exercised by employees to get rid of stress. However, more empirical research inputs are required to formulate and implement effective human resource strategies for better adaptation and work-life balance of Indian professionals in their respective job set-ups.

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