

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WORK LIFE BALANCE IN VARIOUS INDUSTRIAL SECTORS IN PUNE REGION

MANISHA PUROHIT

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
GLOBAL BUSINESS SCHOOL & RESEARCH CENTRE
DR. D.Y. PATIL VIDYAPEETH,PUNE

ABSTRACT

Work–life balance is a concept including proper prioritizing between "workaholics" (career and ambition) on the one hand and "lifestyle" (Health, pleasure, leisure, family and spiritual development) on the other. It is the term used to describe practices in achieving a balance between the demands of employees' family (life) and work lives. The increasing prevalence of work life conflicts and increasing concern about work life issues in the corporate arena present both a challenge and opportunity for Human Resource (HR) Professionals. Work-life balance initiatives designed to help employees balance their work and personal lives are not only an option, but also a necessity for many employers today. There is a need for organizations to adopt human resource strategies and policies that accommodate the work-life needs of a diverse workforce in the current business environment. This paper presents the results of the study on organizational polices and provisions regarding work-life balance of the employees, which was carried out among a cross-section of leading corporate entities in Pune representing equally the four industrial sectors, namely, Manufacturing, Information technology, Educational and Banking sector. The results reveal the commonalities and differences in work-life balance provisions across the four sectors.

KEYWORDS: Work life balance, WLB initiatives, Human resource strategies, Business Environment, Organizational Policies, Conflicts.

INTRODUCTION

Work-life balance is the term used to describe those practices at workplace that acknowledge and aim to support the needs of employees in achieving a balance between the demands of their family (life) and work lives. The work foundation, earlier known as the Industrial Society, believes that 'Work-life balance is about people having a measure of control over when, where and how they work. It is achieved when an individual's right to a fulfilled life inside and outside paid work is accepted and respected as the norm, to the mutual benefit of the individual, business and society'. The concept of work-family (life) balance has emerged from the acknowledgement that an individual's work-life and personal/family life may exert conflicting demands on each other.

Work-life balance is an important area of Human Resource Management (HRM) that is receiving increasing attention from government, researchers, management and employee representatives

.Factors contributing to the interest in work-life balance issues are global competition, renewed interest in personal lives/family values and an aging workforce (Lockwood, 2003). Sverko et al (2002) attribute the growing relevance of work-life balance in industrialized societies to changing technology, changing values and changing demographic trends. Other factors include increasing complexity of work and family roles, the increased prevalence of dual income households and the expanded number of women entering the workforce.

In the present scenario, a vast majority of people seem to be working longer and harder than ever before and as consequences are finding it ever more difficult to achieve a much desired WL. In particular, technological, structural and demographic changes brought about in employment, together with greater than ever demand for more multiskilled and flexible 'knowledge workers' are being allied with negative experiences of work such as involuntary contingent work and role overload. These experiences have been correlated directly and indirectly to the quality of family life, psychological well-being, and health.

A balance between work and life is supposed to exist when there is a proper functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict. Therefore, the incompatibility between the demands from the work and non work domain give rise to conflict and consequently, people experience a lack of WLB. There is confirmation of the fact that people entering the workforce today are laying emphasis on the importance of WLB more than their predecessors. In spite of this, the extent to which this balance is being achieved is far less than what is desired. In fact, the researchers bring to mind that graduates are being drawn into situations where they have to work for progressively longer hours and so experience an increasingly unsatisfactory balance between home life and work life.

From the prospective of employees, WLB is the maintenance of a balance between responsibilities at work and at home. Work life initiatives are those strategies, policies, programs and practices initiated and maintained in workplaces to address flexibility, quality of work life and work family conflict. In other words, WLB is about people having a measure of control over when, where and how they work. Strategies of WLB in organizations include policies covering flexible work arrangements, child and dependent care and family and parental leave. Several studies have shown the benefits associated with the provision of work life in organizations.

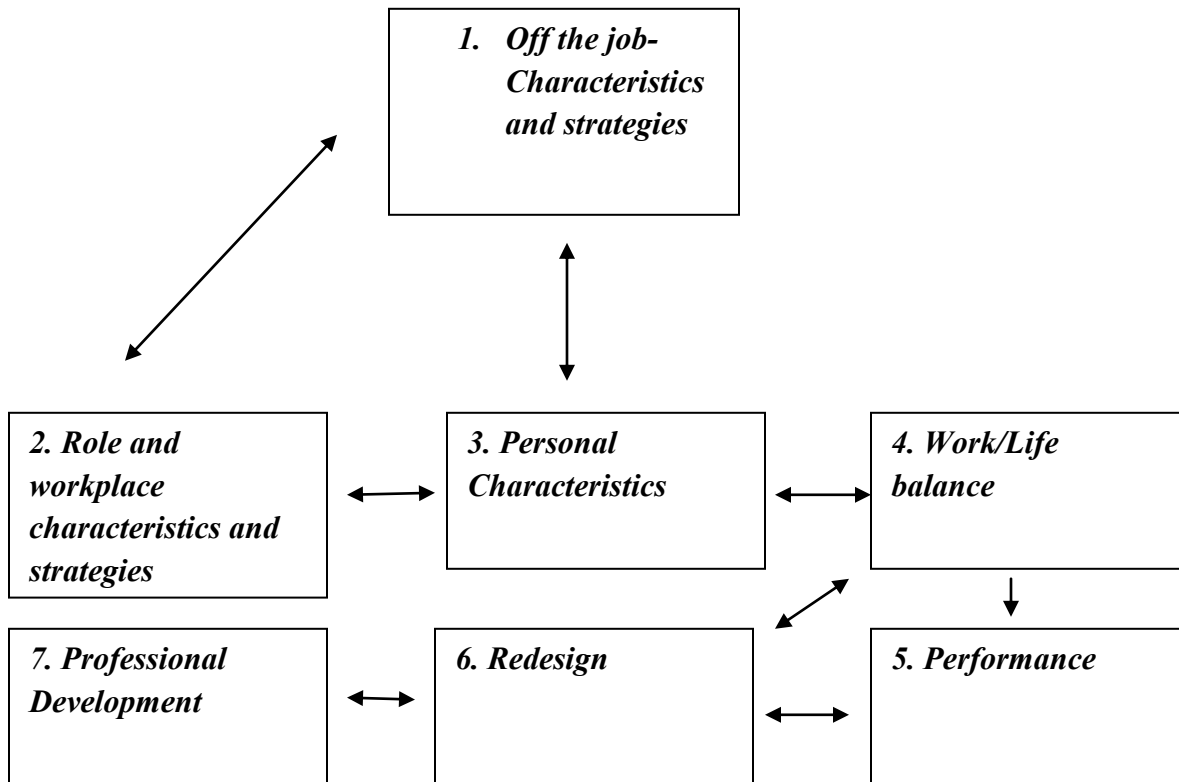
Though work-life balance was initially construed as the concern for working mothers, it has been recognized as a vital issue for all classes of employees (Bird, 2006). Despite increased interest in work-life issues, the organizational philosophy towards work-life concerns is varied. Many organizations still see them as individual not organizational concerns. Some organizations resonate the sentiment 'work is work and family is family—and basically, the two do not mix' (Bailyn et al, 1997). Other organizations view work and personal life as competing priorities in a zero-sum game, in which a gain in one area means a loss in the other (Friedman et al, 2000). Hence, it would be interesting to study organizational perspectives on work-life balance.

Objectives:

The aim of the study is :

- 1) To understand the perceptions of organizations with respect to Work Life Balance .
- 2) To trace the sector wise differences in the organizational initiatives for work life balance.
- 3) To analyze gender-wise issues.
- 4) To put forth suggestions to enhance work life balance quotient of organizations.

Conceptual Framework



The framework focuses on the proximal issues (work characteristics, non work characteristics and personal characteristics) relating to work life balance, as the title of the study suggests. The model allows for a considerations of work life issues in a workplace and professional effectiveness program (Swanberg, 2002), in relation to personal effectiveness and well being.

Literature Review

It is of great interest to note that although the term 'work-family balance' has been widely adopted, yet a formal definition of this term has remained elusive. It is also acknowledged that there is a recent shift in terminology used to refer to this phenomenon, with many organizations using the term 'WLB' so as to include employees who are not parents, but who desire balance for non-work activities such as sports, study, and travel (Kalliath and Brough, 2008). 'Work-family balance' reflects an individual's orientation across different life roles, an inter role phenomenon' (Greenhaus et al., 2003).

Greenhaus et al. (2003) have delved into the multiple roles definition of WLB with a focus on equality of time or satisfaction across an individual's multiple life roles. WLB was therefore defined as "the extent to which an individual is engaged in—and equally satisfied with—his or her work role and family role consisting three components of work family-balance, time balance, involvement and satisfaction balance (Greenhaus et al., 2003)." Kirchmeyer (2000) defined WLB as "achieving satisfying experiences in all life domains and to do so requires personal resources such as energy, time and commitment to be well distributed across domains." To sum it all, Kalliath and Brough (2008) have put forward their own definition of WLB and defined it: "WLB is the individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual's current life priorities."

The demands and pressure of work and family may give rise to work-life balance issues to an individual. Freedman and Greenhaus^{***} reveal that women in workforce have increased considerably, however women face a lot of issues and challenges. They are still seen as the primary caretakers of the home and family, even if they work just as much as men. Work role is often seen as secondary to family roles. Not just men but women also hold themselves and other women to the homemaker standard. Women spend more time on housework, child care and family responsibilities. Women used to spend almost 24 percent of their time on housework in 1966 to 30 percent of housework in 2005. However women miss more work for child care. 20 percent of women take care of both children and elders. Greenhaus and Beutell[^] defined work-family conflict as 'a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the two domains, that is, work and family, are mutually non-compatible so that meeting demands in one domain makes it difficult to meet demands in the other'. That is, participation in the work role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family and vice versa. The major concern in this most widely used definition of work-family conflict is that role conflicts cause due to problems of role participation and emotional intelligence. Hence, difference in values, social relationships and requirements between work and family do not constitute conflict per se.

Thompson (2002) has classified the work-life initiatives as time-based strategies, information-based strategies, money-based strategies, direct services and culture change services. Time-based strategies include programs or policies like flexi time, compressed weeks, compulsory power-offs, job sharing, part-time work, leave for new parents, phased return to work following childbirth, telecommuting, compulsory vacations and breaks and so on. Information-based strategies refer to programs or policies on Intranet resources on work-life balance, resource and referral service, relocation assistance, dependent care resources, work-life brochure and so on. Examples of money-based strategies are vouchers or subsidy for childcare, flexible spending accounts, adoption assistance, discounts for childcare tuition, leave with pay and so on. Direct services are those programs or policies like on-site or near-site dependent care, emergency back-up care, lactation rooms and support, help line, concierge services, after-school and school holiday activities and so on. Culture-change services include programs or policies like training for

managers and supervisors to help employees deal with work-life conflicts. Pro-work-life balance culture initiatives include family-friendly policies, inclusive atmosphere, supervisor support, work-life education inputs like workshops or seminars on work-life issues, counseling, Wellness programs, fitness initiatives and so on. Thus, a work-life balance friendly culture is a productive work culture where the potential for tensions between work and other parts of employees' lives is minimized. This means having appropriate employment provisions in place, and organizational systems and supportive management underpinning them.

The rationale for providing work-life balance provisions is varied. Osterman (1995) identified three main reasons why organizations provide family-friendly practices: practical responses, links to internal labor markets, and high commitment work systems. Wood *et al* (2003) found that adoption of family-friendly practices was best explained by organizational adaptation, a combination of institutional pressures as well as competitive forces, local and technological factors, situational conditions, and managerial values, knowledge, and perceptions regarding work and family programs. The benefits of work-life balance initiatives, for employers, are better talent attraction, enhanced productivity, better talent engagement, reduced work stress, reduced absenteeism, reduced costs, better motivation, employer branding, talent retention and efficient work practices (Department of Labor, New Zealand, 2003, Byrne, 2005; Pocock, 2005; and McPherson, 2007). Implementation of work-life balance provisions involve cost that the management of the concerned organization should be willing to bear. The costs of implementing work-life balance policies are: (i) direct costs of policies (example, paying for subsidies), (ii) costs of staff and space (for instance, cost of childcare takers, space for childcare facilities), (iii) cost of equipment (for example, information and communication technology to facilitate work from home), (iv) cost of work-life balance policy formulation and implementation, (v) disruption costs (for instance, an employee availing leave), and (vi) temporary reduction in productivity from disruption (Department of Labor, New Zealand, 2003).

Further, there are challenges to the implementation of the work-life balance provisions. These barriers to implementing work-life policies include cost, management of initiatives, lack of knowledge, and raising expectations. Pitt-Catsoupes *et al.* (2007) have stated that the effectiveness of work-life balance policies and programs of the employers could be enhanced by assessing the extent of employees' demands for work life integration, the availability of needed resources, and the effectiveness of adaptive strategies and tactics that employees could use at home, at work, and in the community to fulfill their work and personal responsibilities.

Research Methodology

This study seeks to compare and contrast the organizational perspectives on work-life balance initiatives of companies from industrial sectors, namely, Manufacturing, Information technology, Educational and Banking sector. The data for this study was collected from primary sources that are the employees of the respective organizations. All leading organizations in Pune falling under the purview of the four sectors namely, Manufacturing, Information technology, Educational and Banking sector constituted the Universe. Stratified random sampling was adopted to collect data from two companies in each sector. Thus the sample size will be 30. A structured, self-administered questionnaire was used as the tool of data collection A Questionnaire was prepared to collect data from the respondents on the basis of self-report. The tool was developed based on extensive survey of the research literature and inputs received from the field personnel. The tool is used to collect the data comprised of five parts and traced the profile of the respondents, the profile of the organization, organizational policies on work life balance and views on work life balance. The questionnaire had both open ended and close ended items.

Findings

The results of this study on organizational responses to work-life balance requirements of the employees are presented under four sections, namely, profile of the respondents, profile of the participating organization, policies on work-life balance and provisions for work-life balance,

Profile of the respondents

Almost three-fourth (70%) of the respondents was aged between 25 and 30 years.

All the respondents had professional qualifications in human resource management. A little more than half of the respondents (53.3%) were designated as 'Senior executive —HR' while only a little more than one-fourth of the respondents (26.6%) were of managerial cadre and above. Most of the respondents (76.7%) had between two and four years of experience in the present company. The years of experience in the company ranged from 2 to 15 years.

Profile of the participating organizations

All the companies targeted for the study were good companies of Pune. In the manufacturing sector, the companies were drawn from various verticals like heavy engineering (10.0%), automobile and allied products (10.0%) and others. All companies in the IT wing dealt with software development and consulting. The companies drawn from the services sector were from various businesses like insurance, finance, business process outsourcing and so on. Thus a wide variety of companies were covered in the survey. Employees of a little more than half of the participating companies (56.7%) worked in shifts. This excluded all companies in the Information Technology (IT) sector but included all in the manufacturing sector and a few in the service sector. More than half of the companies (including all IT companies) (53.3%) had their employees work off-site. Less than half of the participating companies (43.3%) had employees with special needs on their company rolls.

Policies on work-life balance

Only some companies (30%) had work-life balance policies as part of the policies concerning employees out of hardly companies had similar policies across all operations around the globe. These are companies with international exposure Linkages (as in the case of most software and services companies).

Employee well-being initiatives (including those to promote work-life balance of the employees) were predominantly mooted through HR and welfare department (72.7%). A few companies had employee engagement teams to work on these work-life balance initiatives. As regards the three-tier model of adequate availability, equal accessibility and wide use of work-life initiatives in organizations as suggested by Budd and Mumford (2006), three-fifth of the respondents (60%) contended that work-life balance initiatives were adequately available in their organizations. A little more than half of the respondents (56.7%) felt that it was made accessible to all employees. Only half of the respondents felt that these work-life balance initiatives were actually made use of by the employees.

Organizational provisions for work-life balance

The organizational provisions for work-life balance were traced in terms of time-based strategies, money-based strategies and direct services. The findings are presented below,

Time-Based Strategies

Flexi time in terms of flexible working hours was practiced in most of the IT companies (80%) compared to other companies (20%) in the services sector and no company in the manufacturing sector. The two service companies that provided flexi time option belonged to the insurance industry.

'Work from home' options were not very popular. They were absent in the services and the manufacturing sectors. However, two-fifth (40%) of the companies in the IT sector offered them as a policy and the other IT companies do the same on case-to-case basis. While none of the organizations had provisions for compressed work weeks or job sharing or part-time work, only three IT companies had provision for career breaks. All companies had provision for maternity leave. In India, maternity leave is prescribed by the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961.

Provision of paternity leave was not very widely prevalent. Most manufacturing and services companies (60% each) did not have such provisions. Provision of adoption leave was even rarer compared to paternity leave. Great majority of manufacturing and services companies (90% each) did not have such provisions.

Compensatory off/leave was commonly available. Two-fifth (40%) of the companies did not have the option of sabbaticals for its employees. Half the IT companies compared to less than one-third (30.0%) of the manufacturing companies and two-fifth (40%) of the services companies had the provision of phased return to work (following child birth) programs.

Money-Based Strategies

Provision of financial planning services was more prevalent in the IT sector (80%) compared to manufacturing and services sector (40% each). Most companies provided assistance for tax planning. Non-taxable financial benefits were more prevalent in the services sector (80%) compared to IT sector (70%) and manufacturing sector (60%). Assistance for retirement planning was more prevalent in the manufacturing sector (80%) compared to IT sector (50%) and services sector (40%). All companies provided employees discounts/subsidies like meal subsidies or vouchers and so on. Less than one-third (30%) of the companies on the whole provided general insurance facilities.

All companies provided medical insurance coverage to the employees. It must be remembered that the quantum, coverage could vary. A few companies provided life insurance as well. Only a little more than one-third (36.7%) of the companies offered tuition fee reimbursements. Only a little more than one-third (36.7%) of the companies offered scholarships for the employees' children. Only one-third (33.3%) of the companies extended educational loan facilities to its employees' wards. Financial support for dependent care was provided.

Direct services

The various direct services extended by organizations are Consideration of employee's spouse/family member for Employment, On-site medical Assistance, Recreation facilities for employees at the work place.

Half the companies in the IT sector did consider the employee's spouse/ family member for employment in the organization to fulfill any human resource requirement, only one-fifth (20%) of the companies in the manufacturing sector and one-tenth (10%) of the companies in the services sector did so.

A great majority of the companies in the IT sector (80%) offered fee/discounted on-site health and fitness facilities compared to three-fifth (60%) of the manufacturing companies surveyed and half the services companies studied. Very few companies (33.33%) had the provision of free/discounted off-site health and fitness facilities.

Most companies had on-site medical assistance. Almost three-fourth (70%) of the companies surveyed had recreation facilities for employees at the work place. This was more predominant in IT followed by manufacturing companies. Almost three-fifth (56.7%) of the companies surveyed had sports or activity clubs for the employees. Only three service companies had such a facility compared to seven manufacturing and IT companies. Less than one-fourth (23.3%) of the companies surveyed had outdoor exercise facilities.

DISCUSSION

The issue of work-life balance provisions for the employees leaves many questions to be answered. Most important of them all is what is the responsibility of the employer and where does the employer's responsibility end? Obligation between the employer and employee, meaning an exchange of compensation for skills and time? Government-run organizations are a forerunner in this regard. Along with large government organizations, integrated townships with facilities for schools, hospitals, stores and so on are promoted. This is a good practice that could be emulated by other organizations.

The organizational outlook on human resources to a large extent influences the work-life balance quotient of organizations. For the latter organizations, a range of 'high involvement work practice' (such as cross-training, employee participation programs and group based incentives, but not flexible working practices) was associated with high staff retention and the organization's positive financial performance. Work-life balance initiatives could make more of an impact in those organizations oriented towards a 'people as asset' strategy.

The provision of work-life balance initiatives depends on various factors—the organizational philosophy, the profile of the organization, profile of the employees, the nature of business and so on. It is evident that sector specific nuances exist. For example, flexible working practices are absent in manufacturing companies while it is common in IT companies.

Further, most of the services are provided as employee welfare or well-being provisions rather than work-life balance provisions. Employee welfare is a totality concept and caters to social, economic and other domains of an individual. Consequently, though there may be many overlapping provisions coming under the purview of work-life balance and employee welfare, the awareness with respect to work-life balance per se is a grey area. The findings indicated that significant differences existed across industries in

work-life responsiveness. Thus on the whole, there is inequality in the distribution of opportunities for work-life balance both within and across workplace.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study has brought to light the policies of the organization for work-life balance of its employees and also the provisions for the same. Pune Industry's realities with respect to work-life balance are segmentation of work and life domains of employees, inequality in work-life balance responsiveness of the employers and lack of recognition for work-life orientation of organizations are a pointer. These concern need to be addressed.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on the results of the study, the following suggestions are presented: The provision of work-life initiatives in a time of global economic slowdown needs a vibrant HR team that will innovate on existing practices and make them more user friendly and cost-effective too. Organizations can provide practical interventions rather than merely money-based strategies. Example, organizations could facilitate swapping of shift routines that will help facilitate work-life concerns of the employees. Employees need to be more aware of their work-life priorities and strive for its attainment.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of work-life programs has both individual and organizational benefits. Effective work-life programs facilitate a symbiotic relationship between the employee and employer for mutual benefits. Employees who are better able to balance the demands on their time are more satisfied and content. In turn they are able to perform better. Such provisions also aid in employer branding and are emerging as retention factors.

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