

Work life Balance: A Key Driver to Improve Organizational Performance

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Abstract

In a society filled with conflicting responsibilities and commitments, work life balance has become a predominant issue in the workplace. In organizations and on the home front, the challenge of work life balance is rising to the top of many employers' and employees' consciousness. 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. The purpose of this paper is to establish whether work-life balance initiatives and practices can be considered as strategic human resource management decisions that can translate into improved individual and organizational performance. This study shows the outcomes and the benefits of implementing work life balance practices not only for employees themselves, but also for their families, organizations and society. It also suggest 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.

Keywords:

Work life Balance; Organization; Employees

Introduction

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

Work-life balance, in its broadest sense, is defined as a satisfactory level of involvement or 'fit' between the multiple roles in a person's life (Hudson, 2005). There is no one accepted definition of what constitutes a work-life balance practice, the term usually refers to one of the following: organizational support for dependent care, flexible work options, and family or personal leave (Estes & Michael, 2005). Hence these practices include flexible work hours (e.g., flextime, which permits workers to vary their start and finish times provided a certain number of hours is worked; compressed work week, in which employees work a full week's worth of hours in four

days and take the fifth off), working from home (telework), sharing a full-time job between two employees (job sharing), family leave programs (e.g., parental leave, adoption leave, compassionate leave), onsite childcare, and financial and/or informational assistance with childcare and eldercare services.

Work life balance practices are deliberate organizational changes in programs or organizational culture that are designed to reduce work-life conflict and enable employees to be more effective at work and in other roles. The transition from viewing work-life balance practices solely as a means of accommodating individual employees with care giving responsibilities to recognizing their contribution to organizational performance and employee engagement is an important paradigm shift that is still very much 'in process.'

Defining Work Life Balance

Work life balance (acronym WLB) is the separation between work life and personal life of an employee in the organization. It is the boundary that one creates between the professional life, career advancement, personal life or any other segment that makes up the life of an individual. Apart from the career life these segments include family, personal growth, fitness and health, community relations and friendship. Finding the balance between career and personal life has always been a challenge for working people.

Some widely used definitions of work-family issues or work-family balance, found in the literature, are listed below:

“Work-family conflict is defined as a form of role conflict characterized by the incongruence between responsibilities of the home and workplace which are mutually incompatible”. (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985)

WLB is defined as “satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict” (Clark, 2000)

WLB is defined as “the absence of unacceptable level of conflicts between work and non-work demands. (Greenbatt, 2002)

Work life balance as “the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in – and equally satisfied with – his or her work role and family role” (Greenhaus et al, 2003,)

Work life balance is “the extent to which an individual’s effectiveness and satisfaction in work and family roles are compatible with the individual’s life priorities. (Greenhaus and Allen, 2006)

Work–family balance is defined “as accomplishment of role related expectations that are negotiated and shared between an individual and his or her role-related partners in the work and family domains” (Grzywacz and Carlson, 2007).

Literature Review

Life is a balancing act, and in American society, it is safe to say that almost everyone is seeking work life balance. But what exactly is work/life balance? We have all heard the term, and many of us complain that we don’t have enough of it in our lives. Among men and women alike, the frustrating search for work life balance is a frequent topic of conversation, usually translated into not enough time and/or support to do, to handle, to manage ... our work commitments or personal responsibilities. “Juggling competing demands is tiring if not stressful and brings lower productivity, sickness, and absenteeism, so work life balance is an issue for all employees and all organizations.

Purohit Manisha (2013) examined the organizational policies 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 study revealed the 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. 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. Employees of a little more than half of the participating companies (56.7%) worked in shifts. In this excluded all companies in the Information Technology (IT) sector but included all in the manufacturing sector and a few in the service sector.

Lazăr et al. (2010) studied whether work-life balance initiatives and practices can be considered as strategic human resource management decisions that can translate into improved individual and organizational performance. The study showed the outcomes and the benefits of implementing work life balance practices not only for employees themselves, but also for their families, organizations and society. It also revealed that work-life conflict has significant business costs associated with lack of engagement, absenteeism, turnover rates, low productivity and creativity or poor retention levels, there are some factors of organizational work-life culture that may compromise availability and use of these practices.

Susi and Jawaharrani (2010) examined employee engagement, explore work-place culture & work-life balance policies & practices followed in industries in order to promote employee engagement in their

organizations to increase their employees' productivity and retain them. The study found that highly engaged workforce is 50% more productive than an unengaged workforce. The majority of HR professionals (78%) feel employee engagement is important or extremely important to business success. Employee engagement has emerged as a critical driver of business success in today's competitive marketplace. Employee engagement is increasingly viewed as a "win-win" strategy for companies, employees, and their communities alike. In addition, work life balance is increasingly important for engagement and affects retention.

Lockwood Nancy R. (2003) explored the perspective that human resource professionals can assist their companies to capitalize on these factors by using work life initiatives to gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace. The study revealed that the 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. It also provide human resource professionals with an historical perspective, data and possible solutions for organizations and employees alike to work life balance. Three factors- global competition, personal lives/family values, and an aging workforce present challenges that exacerbate work life balance.

Thornpson (2002) 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, and supervisor support, work-life education inputs like workshops or seminars on work-life issues, counseling, Wellness programs, and 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.

Objectives of the study

- To understand the concept of work life balance.
- To study the relationship between work life balance and organization behavior.
- To study the benefits of work life balance policies to organization and employees.

Research Methodology

This study is descriptive by nature. Only the secondary data is used for the study.

Secondary data is collected from the relevant books, articles and internet. The results of a number of studies reviewed in this paper show the outcomes and the benefits of implementing work life balance practices not only for employees themselves, but also for their families, organizations and society.

Work-life Balance policies & practices

Work Life Balance: A state of equilibrium in which the demands of both a person's job and personal life are equal.

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.

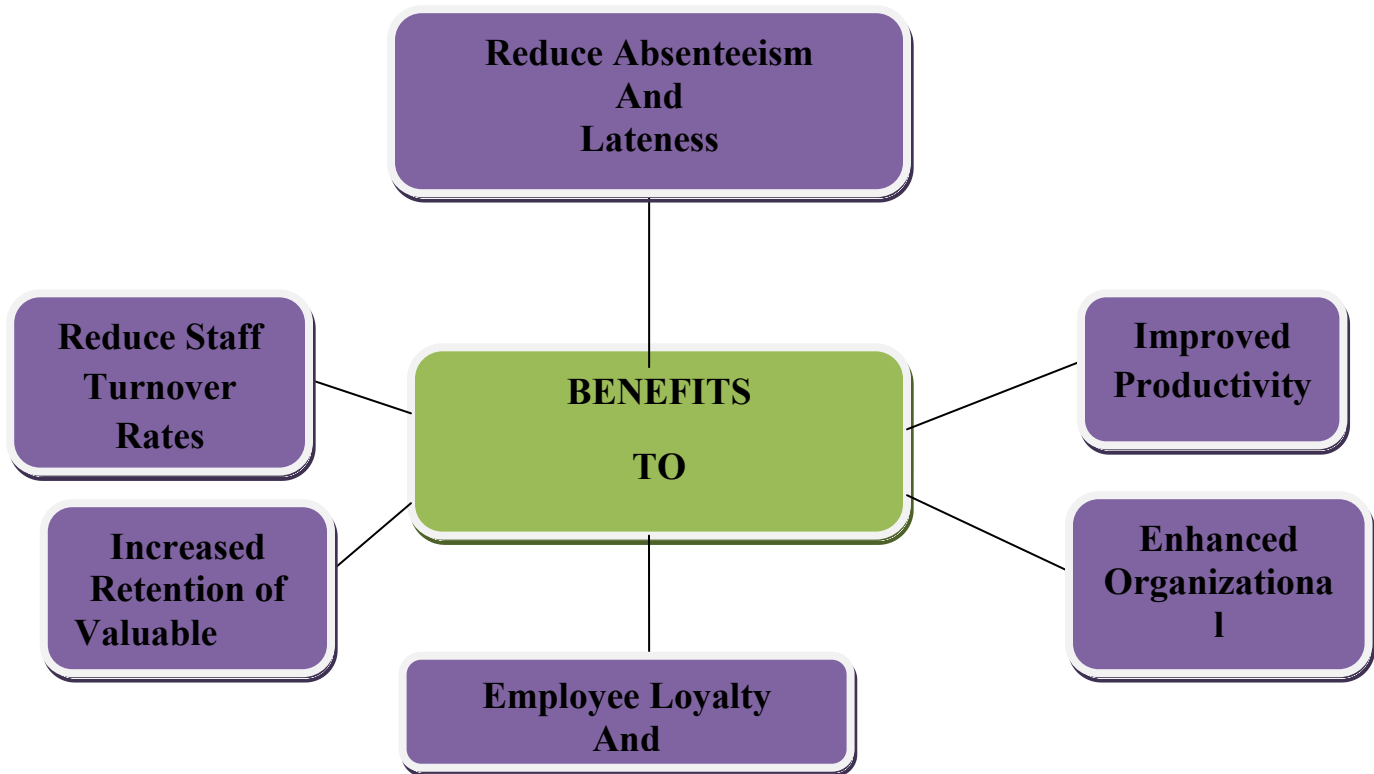
Various researches has indicated that those workers who have some form of control over their working environment tend to suffer less stress-related ill-health, with clear implications for the concept of work-life balance. According to Jim Bird, CEO of Worklifebalance.com (an international work-life balance and consulting company), and "Work-life balance is meaningful achievement and enjoyment in everyday life". Also he believes that to achieve better work-life balance, each individual needs to work smarter- to get more done in less time. The primary way companies can help facilitate work-life balance for their employees is through work-life practices, that are usually associated with flexible

working and reductions in working time or family-friendly policies. Even if many companies have extensive work-life programs, most have not yet changed their organizational cultures to support employees and managers who want to use work-life options.

Work-life balance policies can assist employees achieving a balance between their work and personal commitments that is right for them. The policies need to be supported by the workplace culture, which reflects the beliefs, values and norms of the whole of the organization from the CEO to staff members. Other important factors in the success of work life balance policies include proper communication of commitment to the policies to existing and future employees, raising awareness of the policies, education of managers about the importance of policies, and training of managers on 'how to' implement these policies.

Organizations' benefits of work-life balance policies

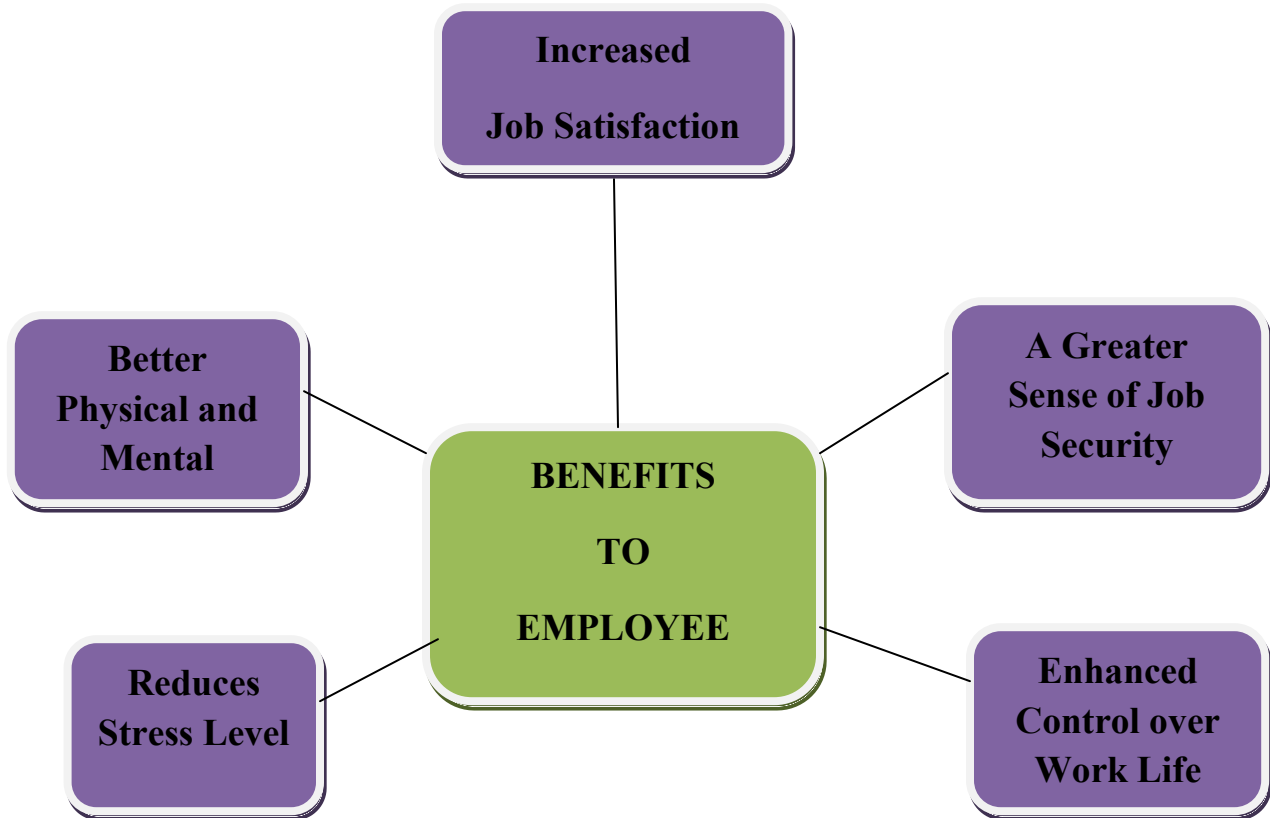
Organizations can implement various work-life balance initiatives that may assist employees to better balance their work and family responsibilities, gain improvements in well-being and provide organizational benefits. There are a large variety of family friendly policies which include but are not limited to the following: flexible working hours, job sharing, part-time work, compressed work weeks, parental leave, telecommuting, on-site child care facility, (Hartel et al 2007). In addition, employers may provide a range of benefits related to employees' health and well-being, including extended health insurance for the employee and dependents, personal days, and access to programs or services to encourage fitness and physical and mental health.



Employees' benefits of work-life balance policies

The effects of introducing work-life balance practices on employee attitudes and perceptions include job satisfaction, organizational commitment and job stress & turnover intention. All of these factors, in turn, affect job performance, direct and

indirect absenteeism costs, costs associated with the loss and replacement of valued employees, customer satisfaction, and organizational productivity; Although the formal evaluation of work-life practices is often difficult because of the problem of calculating the costs and benefits of different strategies, some companies have attempted to quantify the outcomes of specific policies.



Conclusion

Work-life balance is key driver of employees' satisfaction. 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.

Work life programs have the potential to significantly improve employee morale, reduce absenteeism, and retain organizational knowledge, particularly during difficult economic times. In today's global marketplace, as companies aim to reduce costs, it falls to the human resource professional to understand the critical issues of work/life balance and champion work/life

programs. Be it employees whose family members and/or friends are called to serve their country, single mothers who are trying to raise their children and make a living, Generation X and Y employees who value their personal time, couples struggling to manage dual-career marriages, or companies losing critical knowledge when employees leave for other opportunities, work life programs offer a win-win situation for employers and employees.

Suggestions

It has been suggested that an effectiveness of work-life balance policies and practices

must incorporate the effects of workplace culture and supervisor support of employees' efforts to balance work and family responsibilities. Developing and maintaining a culture that enables and supports the opportunity to have a desired work life balance and to promote the benefits of the employee & organization. (Wheeler et al., 2006) agrees that a strong organizational culture increases employees' intent to remain in the organization. Work-life balance must be supported and encouraged at all levels of the organization, including senior management, line managers and all staff.

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