



Does Work Life Balance Matter? An Exposition in the Present Era

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Abstract: *In terms of Indian context, the concern over work-life balance is gradually becoming a common talk. When employees go back to their homes, they should not carry any organizational stress with them. An individual has two roles to play- personal and professional; each role having different set of demands. When such role demands overlap, multiple problems are faced leading to losses for all concerned: the individual, the family, the organization and the society. Therefore, the aim of this article is to introduce the topic of work-life balance, to explain why it is of contemporary interest, to identify some of the key conceptual and empirical issues and to open up the topic for debate. The study is undertaken in order to understand the work life balance phenomenon in Indian perspective with emphasis on service industry. Finally conclusions and implications have been discussed.*

Keywords: *Work life balance, family obligations, work schedules, spill-over, Organization*

1. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Work life balance has become a prime concern in the Indian Organizations because of the contemporary demographic, technological, environmental changes and changes in the individual expectations and aspirations. In India, the demographic changes are seen in the forms of increasing number of women in the workforce (Census of India, 2001) and increasing number of nuclear as well as dual earner families (Bharat, 2003; Rajadhyaksha and Bhatnagar, 2000; Komarraju, 1997; Sekaran, 1992), which have put considerable pressure on both men and women to manage their work and family obligations. Technological advancement is seen in increased reliance on and use of internet and telecommunication. As a result, many employees are taking work outside office, which has blurred the boundary between work and family (Cooper, 1998). Environmental changes are evidenced in increasing number of firms in the services sector (NASSCOM Newslines, 2008a), which require employees to work longer, frequently interact with customers and work across varied time zones. As a result, the distinct boundary between work and family has diluted. According to Hewitt's Attrition and Retention Asia Pacific Study (Hewitt

Associates, 2006), the need for a balance between work and personal life has become an integral element of employee expectations from employers.

Work-life balance has implications for employee attitudes, behaviours, wellbeing as well as organizational effectiveness (Eby et al., 2005). This has forced organizations to introduce interventions to help employees manage the competing demands of work and family lives while being productive at the work place. Some of these interventions are: re-designing jobs to provide employees more autonomy and variety (job characteristics), providing benefits and policies such as flexitime (work-life benefits and policies), providing social support (supervisor support) and developing a family-friendly organizational culture (work-family culture). Literature has shown positive benefits of such interventions on job outcomes such as individual's degree of job satisfaction, level of commitment and engagement in organizational citizenship behaviours (OCB) (Kossek and Ozeki, 1998; Kopelman et al., 2006; Lambert, 2000; Thompson et al., 1999; Allen, 2001; Gordon et al., 2007; Thomas and Ganster, 1995; Hackman and Oldham, 1976; Meyer and Allen, 1997). However, these findings are evidenced mostly in Western literature. Since, in recent years, organizations in

India too have started introducing such interventions to deal with employee work-life balance issues (Poster, 2005), it is imperative to further examine the relationships between such interventions and job outcomes in India.

2. THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO WORK-LIFE BALANCE

In recent years, there has been an increased interest in work family interface in the human resource management literature, especially regarding the sources and outcomes of conflict between these two spheres. A number of studies have addressed this issue from different perspectives. Work Life Balance is a person's control over the responsibilities between their workplace, family, friends and self. A successful Work-life-balance strategy reduces stress levels and raises job satisfaction in the employee while increasing productivity and health care costs for the employer. (Merideth Ferguson et al; 2012) find out that work-family balance plays a mediating role in assisting social support's contribution to both job & family satisfaction. (Hua Jiang, 2012) indicated that, when employees' immediate supervisors respect their subordinates as individuals with unique characters and needs and treat the differently but fairly, employees perceive high levels of trust, commitment, satisfaction and control mutuality, moreover, employees when perceiving that they are treated fairly by their organizations develop quality relationships with their organization.

Increasing workloads have pressurized employees to demonstrate their commitment to work in more obvious ways (Ishaya&Ayman, 2008). Consequently, a larger part of them have tended to be present at their work place for longer periods of time, thereby reducing the time for which they are available at home. (ReimaraValk & Vasanthi Srinivasan, 2011) indicated that the multiple roles of women software professionals in India, the nature of the IT industry, and the socio economic context of India pose unique challenges for achieving the work-family balance. Nevertheless, the majority of women in their study were able to "have it all because of family support.

The recent past is a witness to changes in work schedules. A larger part of the IT sector is hence moving from a standard eight-hour a day to operating twenty four hours a day for seven days of

the week (Bharat 2008). Many employees need to work on Saturdays and Sundays too. Moreover, there is a changing pattern in the working hours which is quite different from the standard one, which normally operates from 9 am to 5 pm (Bharat 2009). While some employees work in the standard time some others need to be available for work that normally starts early in the evening and continues well through the night. Sometimes they need to even work beyond the normaleight hours (Rai 2009). Increasing workloads have pressurized employees to demonstrate their commitment to work in more obvious ways (Ishaya and Ayman 2008). Consequently, a larger part of them have tended to be present at their work place for longer periods of time, thereby reducing the time for which they are available at home. The internet and mobile phones have made it possible for the organizations to keep in constant touch with the employees both during the day and at night (Morgan 2003). This has further intensified the work demands on employees. Consequently, there are growing reports of stress and work imbalance (Bhagwagar 2009). These reviews highlight that there are work life balance issues that need to be addressed.

3. NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There is a substantial increase in work due to intense and competitive work environment. There is a lot of pressure built up on individuals leading to a number of problems. One should be able to create a balance between one's work life and personal life which is the core part in achieving a work-life balance. Work-life balance has come out to be such an important area that requires a lot of research which has just begun and the findings will be useful to the individual, the organization, and the society at large. Therefore, the challenge of balancing work and family has attracted significant scholarly attention. Globalization, downsizing, and flexible work patterns have left many employees with a feeling of increasing work demands and pressure, and a daily struggle to manage their work and family responsibilities (Burchell et al., 2002). With the wide-spread implementation of information and telecommunication technologies, work and family life have become increasingly intertwined, and can no longer be treated as independent domains (Lambert, 1990; Milliken and Dunn-Jensen, 2005; Valcour and Hunter, 2005).

How to balance work and family demands and achieve a satisfactory equilibrium between the two realms has become a central question for organizations and an important career value for many employees (Valcour, 2007).

Organizations are also giving utmost importance to work-life balance to get the best out of their employees. The younger generation suffers from various stresses related problems and in most cases the cause could be attributed to health. The cause of stress could be improper work life balance. This study is important in the present day context as that would facilitate to focus on optimum balance between work and life. Work-life balance policies can boost productivity and profitability of the organization. Work-life balance policies can also reduce stress and contribute favourably to a protected and improved workplace by combating fatigue, thus tumbling the possibility of adverse movements of employees in the workplace (Narayanan & Narayanan, 2012).

4. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The present study is undertaken in order to understand and explore the work life balance phenomenon in Indian perspective with emphasis on service industry. This would be beneficial in order to understand the implications of work life balance in Indian organizations.

5. WORK LIFE BALANCE THEORY- AMACRO LEVEL MODEL

To arrive to a summary of work-life balance discourse we can refer to Guest (2002), who presented a compilation of five individual theories to illustrate the association between work and life outside workplace. These are segmentation; spill-over; compensation; instrumental and conflict model. For the macro level model presented in this paper (Figure 1), theories of work-life balance have not been looked at separate entities, but rather as merging entities to present a broader meaning.

Every individual's life has multiple segments such as family, finances, social, self, spiritual, health and hobbies. In each of these life segments, an individual needs to devote certain period of time, energy and effort while major part of daily time, energy and effort is consumed in the work segment. Males and females play professional roles at work place and the difference in roles at workplace is primarily not gender dependent but is rather decided by the qualification, experience and designation of the employee. In contrast, male and female roles have traditionally and socially been gender defined in life segments. Though male participation in household work, especially in dual worker couples is increasing, yet a significant part of the household work (including childcare) is expected to be the domain of the female. This gender biased role differentiation at the family level creates different work-life balance pressures for males and females. Roles in other segments of life such as finances, social, self, spiritual, health and hobbies may primarily not be gender defined which has been presented in the two major segments of life and work in the proposed model.

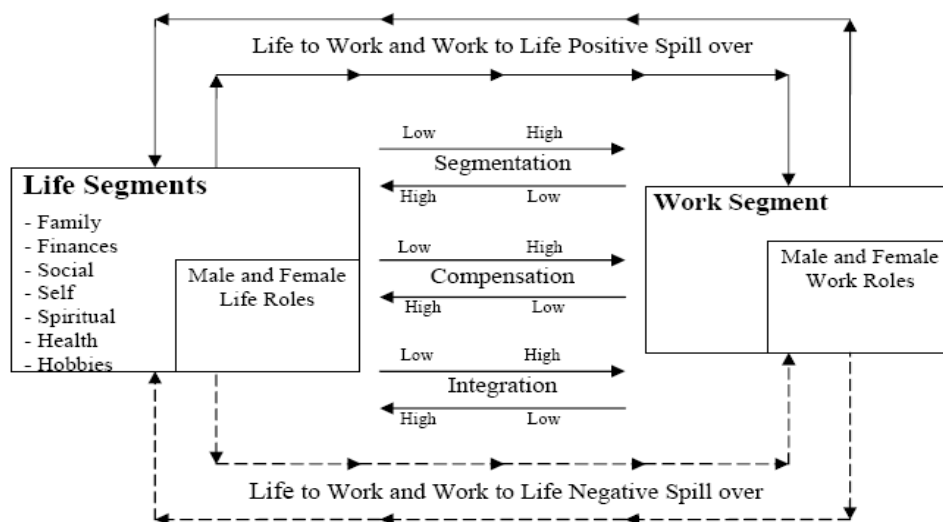


Figure 3. Work-life Balance - Macro level model

Figure: 1 Work-life Balance-Macro level model

Source: Naithani, 2010

Though life and work are two different segments, yet they are not fully segmented and at times they tend to get integrated. For women, it is not very easy to fully segment their work and childcare responsibilities as they are socially and traditionally expected to engage in both. Same might be the case with a single father who has no childcare facility and is equally engaged in work and family responsibilities. In a single earner family, the male head earner of the family, who has work responsibilities, also needs to take care of short-term and long-term savings and investments of the family on the basis of his/her short-term and long-term earnings. Not only are the work and family life segmented at times and integrated at times, they are also a source of compensation for each other, depending on a situation. Dissatisfaction in one aspect may influence a person to engage in an effort for higher satisfaction from other segment of life. This creates interdependence of work and life. Further, interdependence of work and life segments is influenced by the spill over (positive or negative) from one segment to the other. For example an employee (male or female) who is working long hours and is under physical and mental stress due to high intensity work will have his/her personal life segment of health affected by the work segment. It is a classic example of negative spill over from work to life. On the other hand a promotion or increment of an employee may positively influence his self and social segment. Looking at a macro level, high segmentation between work and family should bring in better work-life balance. For example an employee who can divide his time, energy and effort availability efficiently and effectively between the two segments will face lower work-life conflicts. But in today's over competitive world, which continuously demands more time for work and

career, high level of segmentation of work and family is not easy. In some cases individuals will be able to keep life segmented from work (life not encroaching on work time, energy and effort) or keep work segmented from life (work not encroaching on life time, energy and effort). High integration on the other hand brings out opposite results and might create high levels of work-life conflicts and imbalance. With increasing demands of time for work, integration of high levels between work and life is becoming a necessity.

While an individual is balancing between the continuum of segmenting and integrating between work and life, he/she will also attempt to compensate loss in one segment from results in another. An individual who has higher degree of work-life segmentation will have lesser opportunities to compensate for loss in one segment from gains in other segment. Where as a person who has high integration of work and life will have higher opportunities for compensation. While the processes of segmentation, integration and compensation are continuing (at different degrees) work and life will create their own individual outputs, which will be of positive and negative nature. These negative and positive outputs will tend to spill over from segment to another, especially when the work and life have higher degree of integration. According to the compiled model, segmentation, integration, compensation and spillover of different degrees create positive and negative influences in the work-life of an individual. Work-life balance thus is that stage where total sum of the influences is positive or where the total sum is not negative.

6. PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF WLB

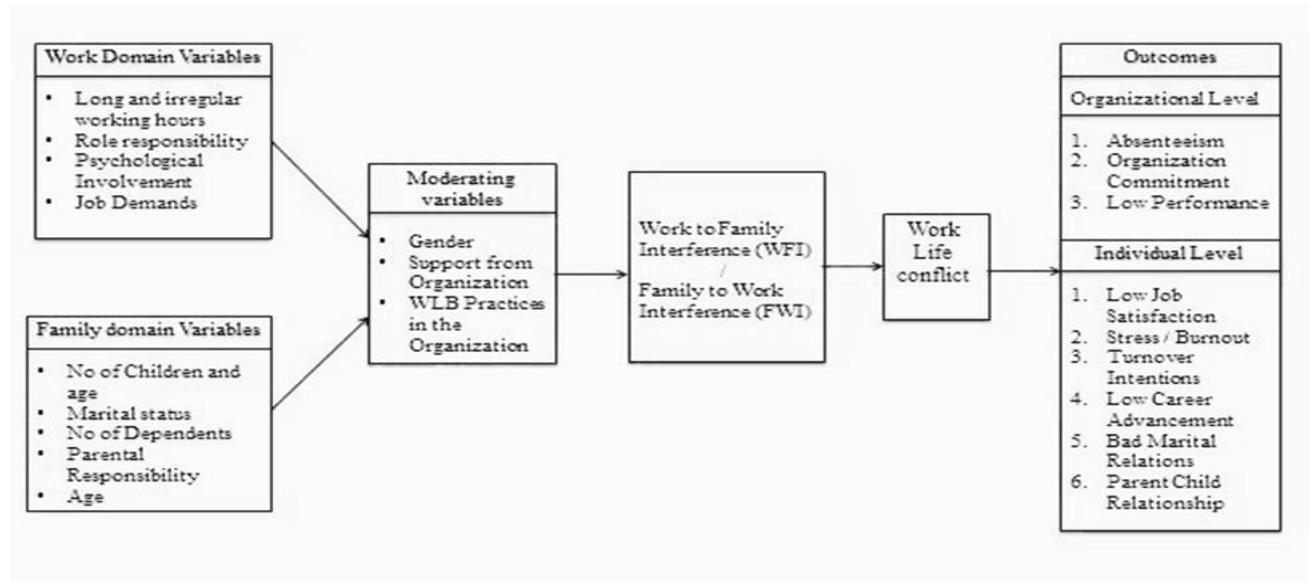


Figure 2: Relationship between WFI/FWI to Work Life conflict and its outcomes

The above proposed model (fig.-2) tries to explain the relationship of work to family interference and family to work interference with work life conflicts for an individual in the organization. However two things become very clear in the model. One, that there is some association between work domain variables and family domain variables on WFI and FWI. Also, the effect of moderating variables can also be seen in the framework. Two, regardless of effects on work life conflict, work life balance practices are often associated with improved organizational outcomes and individual outcomes. The model correlates to the concept of work life conflict and outcomes both at individual level and organizational level. It has been observed that when there is high amount has been observed that when work life conflict increases it creates the negative impact on job satisfaction and the employee tends to loose interest in working in the organization. Bruke, Allen and Spector (2002) framed the relationship between work life conflicts and job satisfaction. The relationship was formed by using two interfaces that is work to family and family to work and any discrepancy leads to job dissatisfaction. When employees are not satisfied with their job and are not able to balance between the two domains of work and family they tend to withdraw from their work related activities Greenhaus, Parsuraman and Collins (2001). Further Greenhaus et al. discussed about the level of stress that the employee possess in the organization leads

to work life conflict which then lead to quitting of the job. Batt and Valcour (2003) reported work interference with family to be significantly and positively related to turnover intentions, and employee perceptions of control over managing work and family to be significantly negatively related to turnover intentions. Turnover intentions are the direct outcome of work life conflict or WFI or FWI Boyar et al. (2003).

7. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

In the present era of stiff competition, work-life balance of an employee is as important for the employing organization as it is for individual employee. Work-life balance of an individual employee when viewed collectively for the total workforce of an organization results into a immense impact on the organizational performance. Employees who achieve improved work-life balance with the assistance of the policies implemented by the employing organization tend to be more productive as their work engagement enhances. There is an urge for the organizations to emphasis more on offering work-life balance initiatives in order to prove beneficial on employee's and employer's part.

The study is helpful to identify the individual, family, and work related variables related to work life balance. Thus the study may help the service

industry practitioners to: (a) understand the work life balance and its various dimensions; (b) understand the relationship between individual related variables; family related variables; and work life balance and design interventions for enhancing emotional intelligence of working professionals and also design support systems to enable the working professionals to shoulder their family responsibilities, and thus, reduce interference of family life in work; and (c) redesign work related variables such as task variety, task autonomy and work schedule flexibility so as to improve work life balance of working professionals. In addition to that the organizations would be able to formulate policies for recruitment, development and deployment of professionals, thus leading to better talent management and reduction in financial or medical costs.

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