
Workers Work–life Balance Should Be a Human Resource Priority

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Abstract: Work and personal life are essentially two different scales of a spring balance and any adverse movement either at the workplace or in personal life would disturb the balance. Workers wouldn't like to sacrifice their personal life because of their job imperatives. Opportunity to have good functioning at workplace and a wholesome life at home provides a basic framework for work-life balance. However, work-life balance has always been fraught with challenges which have, of late, assumed significant proportions, and is considered to be the most pressing concern for the workers today. It has been observed that the population of working couples has been on the increase, and this has led to greater scope for work-life conflict for them. Organizations are realizing that the personal life of workers directly affects their productivity and quality of work. Therefore, organizations feel maintaining work-life balance of workers makes a strong business case. This underscores the need for the organizations to promote work-life balance measures to safeguard their business interests. The organizations are introducing flexi-time work schedules, compressed work weeks and telecommuting for maintaining work-life balance of the workers. Research has shown that if work-life balance dwindles, there could be negative consequences for individual workers and also for the organizations. On the other hand, work-life balance has many positives for the workers at the individual level and for the organization as a whole. HR in the organization has a central role in formulation of a customized work-life balance policy for the organization. In this paper, we have made an attempt to highlight why work-life balance policies should be promoted and form a core part of an organization's Human Resource policy in order to optimize their business interests. We have also touched upon certain recommendations and future direction of research on this subject.

Keywords: Work-life Balance, Human Resources, Worker, Organization

1. Introduction

The question that is often asked is whether we work to earn a living or live only to work. Perhaps, both are equally true. Scholars have opined that work and family are the two most important facets in the life of a working person [1]. An individual working for an organization would not like to sacrifice his whole life for work at the cost of his personal life. He would instead prefer to strike a fine balance between the two so as to lead a happy, healthy and a productive life.

The task of balancing work with personal life is one of the most pressing challenges for the workers [2]. Research has shown that workers who have work–life balance have higher level of job satisfaction and perform much better in their jobs. Such workers are also seen to be loyal and committed to their organizations [3].

Globally, organizations are implementing a variety of measures to increase their revenue and profitability, which includes downsizing, increasing working hours, and setting aggressive sales targets for the workers. This is resulting in placing more demand on the workers. The logic given for this is the need to stay afloat during tough economic times. As a consequence of this, the more time a worker devotes to work, the less time he has for family. This results in work-life conflict, and has negative ramifications for both the organization and the worker.

In this paper, we argue that helping workers achieve work–life balance should form a central component of the Human Resource policy of an organization, so as to get the best out from the workers without leaving them burnt-out.

2. Defining Work–life Balance

Work–life balance can be defined as “good functioning both at work and at home with minimum of role conflicts” [4]. Work–life balance is about getting the right balance between one’s job and one’s personal life. It is feeling comfortable with the work and non–work commitments.

3. Work–life Balance Practices

Organizations have observed that a worker’s personal life has a direct bearing on the productivity and quality of work; and therefore, there seems to be a strong business case to promote a culture of work–life balance [5]. The choices available with organizations to promote a culture of work–life balance are:

1. Flexi–time work schedule: It gives freedom to the workers to choose their own working hours within the guidelines stipulated by the organizations. This helps the workers to attend to their personal chores without having to take time off from work.
2. Compressed work week: Workers in a compressed work week work for four days instead of five days in a week. However, the workers would work for ten hours shift instead of eight hours each day. This scheme helps workers get an extra day off to attend to their personal chores.
3. Job–sharing: It is a system wherein a worker is allowed to share his job with some other worker, thereby reducing work hours. Under this arrangement, the wages and fringe benefits are proportionately reduced for each worker within the overall framework of the organization. This helps those workers who have extra personal responsibilities, and would need more time each day to attend to them.
4. Telecommuting: Workers with the help of modern information and communication technology can do their work from home without having to come to the office on a regular basis. Telecommuting allows workers to take care of family responsibilities without having to sacrifice their work demands.

4. The Consequences of Work–life Conflict

There is strong evidence that work–life conflict leads to several negative consequences for the workers, their families, their employers and the society at large [6].

The possible repercussions of work–life conflict for a worker could be:

1. Distress in their personal life.
2. Health disorders.
3. Lower level of job satisfaction.
4. Conflicts, which may lead to violence.
5. Alcohol and drug consumption.

Work–life conflict in a worker’s life may lead to the following negative consequences for the organization:

1. Increase in absenteeism rate.

2. Increase in attrition rate.
3. Reduced productivity.
4. Decay in the quality of work.

5. The Advantages of Work–life Balance

Maintaining a healthy work–life balance is a key ingredient of a good business strategy [7]. Work–life balance is a necessity for both the worker and the organization. This is a spring board for personal growth of the worker as well as for the business growth of the organization.

According to Iyayi, Fetus, et al [3], the benefits of policies promoting work–life balance for the workers are:

1. Happy and satisfied workers.
2. Reduction in the stress levels of the workers.

According to Iyayi, Fetus, et al [3], the benefits of policies promoting work–life balance for the organizations are:

1. Workers are highly motivated and give their best on the job performance.
2. Workers’ productivity level remains high.
3. Absenteeism rate remains low.
4. Attrition rate comes down.
5. The organization emerges as an employer of choice for the prospective workers.
6. It fosters good relationship between the organization and the workers.
7. It improves communication level between the workers and the organization.
8. Workers tend to be more loyal and committed to the organization.

6. The Role of HR in Maintaining a Healthy Work–life Balance Programme in the Organization

Globally, a large number of workers encounter work–life conflict in their daily life [5]. Workers are expected to sacrifice their family commitments to meet the demands of the organization. As a result, a large proportion of workers fail to achieve their career and personal goals in a satisfactory manner. There is a felt need amongst workers that the organizations should give priority to implementing a healthy work–life balance policy [8]. The organization need to ensure that the work–life balance policy forms a central part of its HR policy [3]. The work–life balance policy should be framed keeping in view a worker’s daily life in totality, and not in terms of work hours only [9].

HR needs to understand the imperatives of the organization to ascertain whether the work culture is conducive for supporting and implementing work–life balance initiatives for its workers [10]. This assessment will help to bring out the unique work–life balance needs of the workers. Workers at different stages may have different work–life balance needs. The insights gained from such an assessment would be helpful in formulating a customized work–life balance policy.

Implementation of a work–life balance policy necessarily requires the support of senior management in the organization. HR should, therefore, take them on board at the policy formulation stage itself. This would help in effective implementation of the work-life balance policy [11]. Managers in the organization should take a lead in using work-life balance measures available in the organization. This will dispel the fears of the subordinates that the usage of work-life balance measures will be seen negatively by their managers. This will help in promoting a healthy work-life balance culture in the organization [12].

The organization should give proper publicity to the work-life balance policy and also create awareness amongst the workers about the policy. This will facilitate workers to understand the beneficial effects of the policy, and thereby, increase usage of measures under the policy, and help in mitigating work-life conflict situations in the life of the workers [9].

7. Difficulties in Implementing the Work-life Balance Policy

It has been found that a very low percentage of workers actually make use of the work–life balance policy in the organizations [13]. The reasons cited for this are lack of information and proper understanding of the benefits accruing from the policy [9].

The reasons given for the low utilization of the work–life balance policy relates to the workers misconception that the users of the policy are unfairly treated at the time of reward allocation, progression opportunities, and salary increments [14].

Traditionally, working long hours was considered by the managers as “hard-working”. Majority of the workers would want to be seen as “hard-working”; and therefore, they hardly tend to utilize the benefits of the work–life balance policy provided by the organization [15].

It is seen that career ambitions discourage many workers from utilizing the work–life balance initiatives. Such workers focus only on work and sacrifice their personal life, which leads to their suffering from burn-out, with adverse consequences for both the workers and the organization [3].

Many a times, the work-life balance policy is formulated by the organization without properly researching the needs of their workers. In such a scenario, though the policy on work-life balance is in place, its users are hardly any. The reason observed was that the workers did not find any value in the measures framed under this policy, and therefore, as such, were reluctant to use it, thus, resulting in poor participation [16].

8. Recommendations

The organizations should talk to as many workers as possible to find out their work-life balance needs. This will enable organizations to design customized work-life balance programmes for their workers.

The organizations should provide more free time to the

workers so that they achieve work-life balance.

The organizations should allow workers to work in a flexible manner by adopting various strategies like flexi-time working, job sharing and compressed work week.

The organizations should provide workplace counseling and support to the workers on family related matters [17].

Every organization is different. Therefore, work-life balance initiatives should be so designed that they reflect the nature of job performed by the different group of workers [18].

Organizations should run work-life balance programme on a pilot basis before the roll out of a company wide programme [18].

Open communication with the workers on the work-life balance programme is necessary for its progressive improvement.

9. Conclusion

Any organization with a healthy and worker centric work–life balance policy offer a win–win proposition for the organization and its workers. A healthy and worker centric work–life balance policy nurtures a positive employer brand in the labour market. It also facilitates reduction in the stress level, increase in happiness, high motivational level and enhanced productivity amongst the workers. This eventually helps workers in achieving both their personal and professional goals in a satisfactory manner. The role of HR is to champion the cause of smooth implementation of work–life balance initiatives in the organization, and integrate them into the culture of the organization.

10. Future Research Direction

Organizations have started giving focused attention on the need for a potent work-life balance programme for their workers. This has led to introduction of many initiatives which are supposed to be worker-centric and family friendly. The future research on work-life balance should focus on specific industries and occupations that require long working hours, which leads to work-life conflict.

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