WORK LIFE BALANCE: A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

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Abstract *The present paper is an attempt to revisit the concept of work-life balance. An effort is made to cover in a conceptual framework the vast knowledge of work-life balance. It highlights the progress of work-life interface as work-family affair to more comprehensive and evolutionary term as work-life balance. Specifically, the progress of work-life balance issues related to women employees has been emphasized. The recent issue in the work-life literature as work-life conflict is included. The role of colossal upscale of technological innovations impacting work-life balance is acknowledged. The antecedents, consequences and strategies affecting the work-life balance are touched. A futuristic view on the concept is put forward.*

Keywords: *Work-life balance (WLB), Work-life conflict (WLC), Work-life interference (WLI), Life-work interference (LWI)*

Introduction

The concept of work-life balance is growing in importance day by day in today's fast paced global world. The heightened debate of balance between work and personal life owes to i) high speed technological innovations, ii) considerable raise in expectations for both employees and employers, and iii) a realisation among employees for a fit between work and personal life which has got blurred due to mobile technologies. So, employees greatly value firms who see employees not just as physical input to generate output but accept their other roles. Such firms continuously adopt policies which facilitate balance of employees work role and personal role. The drivers for WLB can be attributed to changes in the demographic distribution of the labour force, technological advancement and the 24/7 opening hour culture in modern society (Beauregard & Henry, 2009**;** Kalliath & Brough, 2008**).**

The expression WLB was first used in the late 1970s to describe the balance between an individual's work and personal life. Work-life balance is a broad concept including proper prioritising between career and ambition on one hand, compared with pleasure, leisure, family and spiritual development on the other. Other terms that are used to refer to work-life balance include work-family balance, work-family conflict, and family friendly policies etc.Work-life balance is a much broader concept in comparison to work-family balance in the sense, that it encompasses multiple roles outside family life e.g. community, leisure and religious roles, that an individual engages in (Frone, 2003).

Work in context of WLB means a domain where monetary returns are expected for the efforts put in either working for somebody or self-employed. This domain expects and consumes a good amount of time, energy and involvement. In contrast, the life domain is more encompassing involving in its fold-family, friends, hobbies, religion, community etc. with whom a person is associated apart from work. This domain to be part of requires time, energy and involvement although not as binding as in work domain. The domain of life is non-paid domain rather it's the social attachment and obligations of a person. Balance in context of work-life balance is highly subjective concept which implies a satisfying relationship perceived by a person between domains of life and work. The more the balance, the more happier and productive a person is work in a straightforward way is conceived as paid employment and life is viewed as activities outside work (Guest, 2002).

WLB has progressed a lot since its realisation in the middle of twentieth century. It began with employees especially working women experiencing difficulties to balance the obligations of family and work assignments. With more working women joining workforce, policies were created to facilitate their effort of balancing work and family roles. With close of 21st century, the issue was no more restricted to women employees as more men and working couples found difficulty to fulfill both roles. The employees had experienced more expectations and interference owing to technology. They were contactable even during family hours leading to conflict and crossover of two domains. At the same time, the employees apart from family valued other components of life- entertainment, hobbies, friends, religion,

community etc. So, family was no more single domain, there had entered other groups which employees valued especially for unmarried and young individuals.

Researchers in human resources development have been continuously working on construct of work-life balance. Various studies have been conducted showing relationship of WLB with variables: job satisfaction, family satisfaction, life satisfaction, productivity, organisational performance, psychological well-being, organisational commitment, absenteeism, health, and stress. The researchers have come up with results taking WLB as independent variable and other variables as dependent variables. At times, the roles of moderators generally as demographics have been studied. Quite recently, there has been interest in finding association of technologies on the work-life balance of employees. Majority of studies have been done in west and other advanced countries with much to be researched in developing countries. In developing countries, employers have started to realise the long-term benefits of well-constructed work-life balance policies for employees.

Review of Literature

The literature review is categorised under the following themes as i) work-life balance/conflict studies, ii) consequences of work-life balance/conflict,and iii) individual strategies and organisational strategies/policies for maintaining work-life balance. The colossal increase in the technological innovations is acknowledged for 21st century employees who seems to be contactable even without in office.

Work-Life Conflict

Researchers at the turn of 21st century have focused attention on conflict arising in two domains.Now-a-days employees are facing competing demands between life (family) and work resulting in conflict between the two domains. Researchers are studying conflict related issues in work-life interaction as work-life conflict. The three variations of conflict as i) time-based conflict, (ii) strain-based conflict, and (iii) behaviour-based conflict have been identified Greenhaus and Beutell (1985). Most of the studies on the work-life conflict revealed that more interference of work with life (family) rather the latter. Thedirection of spillovers among employees have been studied indicating more work-interference with family (Gutek, Searle, & Klepa, 1991; Frone, Russell, & Cooper 1992; Frone, Yardley, & Markel, 1997; Hammer, Allen, & Grigsby,1997; Eagle, Miles, & Icenogle,1997; Hsieh, Pearson, Chang, & Uen2005; Wesley & Muthuswamy, 2005; Rajadhyaksha & Ramadoss, 2010).The conflict source is not only work domain but demands in life too can interfere with work. A two-directional relationship as work interference with family and family interference with work has now started to be researched **(**Duxbury, Higgins, and Mills, 1992). So, researchers are studying both conflict directions of work-life interaction as work-life interference (WLI) and life-work interference (LWI).

Work-Life Enrichment

At the same time, for some employees in certain cultures, the two domains seem not be at conflict rather are supporting. Generally in collectivistic cultures, the life domain especially family - the sibling and extended family helps in reducing and managing the family obligations. So, the support in family domain helps in managing the balance in work and life, termed as positive work-family spill-over (Grzywacz, Almeida, & McDonald, 2002; Crouter, 1984) or work-family enhancement (Barnett, 1998; Voydanoff, 2002). The researchers have begun to realise that one domain can support and enrich the other domain in the shape of work-life enrichment.The degree to which involvement at work or at home makes to gain experiences, skills and opportunities which facilitates discharging responsibilities in work or at home **(**Frone, 2003**).**However, some studies have revealed supporting roles between work and life (family) with no gender differences (Baral, 2010).

Gender

An important factor among demographics/individual related factors affecting work-life balance/conflict is gender. Most of the studies have indicated that a woman has more issues of work-life balance that man. A woman shares more of family responsibilities than males especially in eastern countries. The highly skewed load of family obligations makes difficult for women to balance work and family (Bird, 2006). Married women experience more work-life conflict than unmarried women. Mothers with younger children experience the highest work-life balance issues. Majority of scholars have come up with that family interferes more with work than the other-way round as seen in studies by Gutek *et al*. (1991), Williams and Alliger (1994), Higgins, Duxbury, and Lee (1994), Loscocoo (1997), Aryee, Luk, Leung, and Lo (1999), Grzywacz, Arcury, Marin, Carrillo, Burke, Coates, and Quandt (2007), Rajadhyaksha and Velgach (2009). However, some scholars have seen interference of family on work is not moderated by gender, indicating both genders have similar work-life balance issues (Hill, Hawkins, Ferris, & Weitzman, 2001; Wesley & Muthuswamy, 2005). Other demographic factors like age, marital status and personality type too have been researched to have influence on the work-life balance.

Family and Work Related Factors

The family and work related factors have been studied to have influence on one's work-life balance. Among the family factors, the important variables relationships studied which contribute on work-life balance; number of dependents, spousal support, partners work-hours and parental responsibilities. There are significant researchers highlighted that supportive family environment help in managing work-life balance. Family support especially the support from one's spouse creates less conflict in between work and family Frone *et al*. (1997). The environment in which employees work too have been the focus of work-life balance researchers. A relationship has been sought between variables i.e. work-hours, role conflict, task freedom, work-schedule flexibility etc. which have greatly impacted employees' work-life balance. Studies by Greenhaus, Parasuraman, Granrose, Rabinowitz, and Beutell (1989), Voydanoff (2004), Butler, Grzywacz, Bass, and Linney (2005) have revealed that with more employee friendly policies reduced episodes of conflict resulting in better work-life balance.

Outcome of Work-Life Balance

The consequences of work-life balance/conflict on important organisational efficiency measures like productivity, organisational commitment (OC), orgranisational citizenship (OCz), organisational performance, job satisfaction, intention to leave/quit, stress, health, life satisfaction, and career satisfaction have been studied. Considerable group of researchers have found positive relationship between work-life balance and variables of job satisfaction, OC, OCz, and productivity whereas negative relationships between work-life balance and variables viz intention to leave/quit, stress and health. Duxbury and Higgins (2001) found that employees who experience higher conflict in work-overload, family to work-interference and work-to-family interference had less organisational performance and low quality of life. Also, the stress levels, cases of burn-out and weak physical and mental health were high in those employees. However, the relationships were moderated by family and work-related variables experienced by an individual. The more supportive family and work environment, the better the work-life balance leading to higher rating of organisational efficiency measures for an individual. Bhargava and Baral (2009) found supportive family and work factors lead to enrichment leading to higher cases of job satisfaction, affective commitment and organisational citizenship behaviour.

Strategies of Individuals and Organisation Policies

Work-life balance/conflict researchers are coming up with evidences on strategies adopted by individuals and organisations to maintain personal affairs and work. The policies and initiatives regarding work-life balance by the organisations go a long-way to facilitate it. The individual strategies are in the shape of compromising/negotiating the family or work. The help from family members and colleagues at work are helpful to build and sustain balance between two domains. In order to manage work-family conflict, individuals mobilise support from family/work domain to reschedule activities (Powell & Greenhaus, 2006).

Organisations too are realising their role to enhance work-friendly policies. The pressure has increased on employees to deliver unmatched service 24x7 with ever-increasing competition. The employees as a result have been at work even after normal work-hours thanks to revolutionizing technology. Also, there is more diversity in organisations including increasing involvement of women workforce. A sizable proportion of women in the workforce especially at top execution position are attached with policies as job sharing, child care and flexi-time (Galinsky & Johnson,1998).As a result, the employees of today highly value firms providing suitable policies on wok-life balance. So many new innovative strategies/policies adopted from organisations include flex-timing, job sharing, telecommuting, compressed working week to maternity benefits, parental leave, paternity leave, onsite day care, emergency child care, elder care arrangements.

Organisations are providing policies parental leave, study leave, flexi-time, part time working, job sharing, emergency leave, and extra maternity leave in order to recruit and retain the best talent (Maxwell & McDougall, 2004). The work-life balance benefits not only employees but organisations too, reap benefits in the long-run. Organisations provide work-life balance policies due to legal requirements, the business benefits and employee well-being (Dex & Scheibl, 2001). Healthcare employees were seen to have lower work- family conflict, job dissatisfaction, depression and blood pressure because of supportive work-life balance practices-flexible scheduling and supportive supervisors (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). Organisations are benefitted too where employees perceive supportive work-life balance policies as improved their job satisfaction and reduced intention to leave (Forsyth & Polzer-Debruyne, 2007).

Technology and Work-Life Balance

Researchers have specially seen impact of technology on the work-life balance at the beginning of 21st century. Technological innovations have increased the pace and accuracy of work for employees. Mobile technologies bring flexibility to employees in the shape of controlling speed, location, and time of day (Towers, Duxbury, Higgins, & Thomas, 2006; Middleton, 2008). There is considerable number of studies indicating the technological innovations

have greatly increased the work-efficiency of workers. Technology provides potential for productivity and efficiency as perceived by employees (Towers *et al*., 2006).

But, on the negative side, technology has made employees contactable without in office. Technology has generated sense of feeling with employees as never being off from work due to increased expectations (Towers *et al*., 2006). Many studies have shown that stress, anxiety and psychological well-being has been greatly affected due to mobile technologies. The stress level within employees has increased due to feeling of being controlled with technology Green (2002) has lengthened work day, therefore impacting the family life (Hill *et al*., 1996).

So, researchers have come up with evidences where technological innovations have impacted work-life balance. Both positive as well as negative impacts of technology on the work-life balance have been researched. The positive effect on work-life balance has been in the shape of work efficiencies which have added resources in the work environment for employees. On the negative side, the workers stress and anxiety levels have increased affecting his physiological and psychological health.

Discussion

The review of literature indicates the progress in the concept of work-life balance. From mere issue of balance between family and work for women, it has seen involvement of males and other sub-groups. There is considerable number of studies highlighting conflict issues in the shape of work-life conflict. Both directions of work-life conflict have been studied.Research studies are focused to investigate conflicts in work and life (family) among groups viz. couples, single, and same sex couples. In certain cultures, supporting role fromfamily domain has helped to manage the work obligations. The skill, knowledge and experience have enriched the employee's role in the other domain.

The most important contributing factor which has brought work-life balance issue on the limelight is the colossal upscale of technological innovations. The boundary between work and life has got blurred result of virtual office and mobile technologies. So, employees have seen a merge of both boundaries. The important for employees is to differentiate between work time and personal time. The researchers are suggesting techniques such as yoga, gym and break time to manage work-life conflict emerged due to technological innovations.

A balanced work-life benefits not only employees but organisations too benefit. Since relationships have been seen between work-life balance and organisation effectiveness measures viz. productivity, organisational citizenship, organisational performance etc. which presses organisations to provide policies which enhance employee's work-life. The work-life balance/conflict is an issue which is valued highly by employees of today. They expect organisations to provide environment and policies which enhances their balance of personal life and work.

Conclusion

Work-life balance is relevant in today's technological world where expectations are rising from employees to adopt customer orientation. In the coming future, the issues of work-life balance/conflict are going to upscale due to lessening of boundaries between work and life (family). The work-life merge has already set its foot for employees where due to technology, time between personal life and work is difficult to segregate. The governments of nations are now realising value of highly motivated citizen who can be asset for the nation. There are various minimum statutory laws which direct organisations to provide certain minimum benefits to employees. It's high time for the nations to gear up to realize the full potential of their most valued resource in the shape as human resource.

Scope for Future Research

The researchers have still gray areas to investigate in the understanding of the concept of work-life balance. Most studies have been done in advanced countries especially US; there is scope to investigate work-life balance in culturally different area. Studies have been mostly done on broader groups like women; a more valid study can be done with focus on narrower group.

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