A Review of Quality of Work Life Balance for Women Employees

A case study of working women in academics

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Abstract— **An integral part of our lives is our profession. Just as there is responsibility and opportunity in life, our careers are also guided by opportunities and responsibilities. We must ensure that these two factors don't work at cross purposes. Quality of life is something we all covet. Having said this, every profession affects life in general and every profession has a duty towards life.**

Times have changed. From the time the husband earned, and the wife stayed at home. To the time now when the husband earns and the wife earns too. But the wife still cooks and washes and runs the house. So, how does she balance her work with life at home?

Why Work Life Balance is Important to Women? Today's career women are continually challenged by the demands of full-time work and when the day is done at the office, they carry more of the responsibilities and commitments to home. The majority of women are working 40-45 hours per week and 53% are struggling to achieve work/life balance. Women reported that their lives were a juggling act that included multiple responsibilities at work, heavy meeting schedules, business trips, on top of managing the daily routine responsibilities of life and home. "Successfully achieving work/life balance will ultimately create a more satisfied workforce that contributes to productivity and success in the workplace.

This paper would highlight the various values, attitudes & beliefs of women regarding job anxiety in their formal work organizations & particularly balancing their work & personal life.

Keywords- women; work life balance; workplace; imbalance; Part-time; Term-time working ;Unpaid leave; Flexitime; Job share; Unpaid sabbaticals; Compressed week; Self-rostering; Work from home; Annual hours; Shift swapping.

INTRODUCTION

At this early stage in the twenty-first century there is increasing evidence that, for some, the value of work is changing. While the 1980s were characterized by the idea that 'lunch is for wimps', there has been a shift, perhaps encouraged by increasing work intensification and pressure, towards valuing a slower and gentler pace, which allows more room for personal interests, environment and family. In 2001, 41 per cent of managers in an Institute of Management survey felt that the quality of working life had got worse over the last three years (Institute of Management ,2001). In the 1990s the notion of 'downshifting' appeared, which has been described as swapping a life of total commitment to work and possible high rewards, for less demanding, or part-time work or self-employment, or a combination of the three. This notion has been considerably expanded to form a wide range of legitimate work options under the banner of work-life balance or work-life integration which is being supported by government initiatives and is a key issue, rather than a key practice, in organizations not only in the UK but across Europe, America and such Eastern countries as Japan.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

After the Much of the pressure for work-life balance policies originates from the changing demographic make-up of our potential workforce, changing social roles, the changing responsibilities of organisations and legislative pressure. Increasing numbers of women in the workforce wishing to combine family and work responsibilities is an obvious driver for what were initially called 'family-friendly' polices (Kodz et al. 2002) and which quickly became work-life balance policies. This legacy does cause some problems for the implementation of work-life balance as we discuss later. The ageing workforce is another demographic change which has raised the importance of work-life balance for employers. Older employees may wish to remain in work, but work fewer hours or different shift patterns.

- A recent study by the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) identified the large number of nurses, working very difficult shift patterns, over the age of 50 who were going to retire. Many of these nurses would have been prepared to stay on in work if they had access to shift patterns which allowed them a better work-life balance, or if they could work part-time at the same job level. Such is the level of concern that the government has sponsored a drive to improve work-life balance in the NHS (Mahoney 2002). In addition, the fact that people are living longer means that many employees or potential employees have caring responsibilities, not only for children, but also for elderly parents.

- In a tight labour market with a shortage of needed skills employers are forced into developing policies which can attract and retain groups of workers who might previously have left the organisation. Lloyds TSB, for example, felt that to attract and retain the workers that they needed, they needed to demonstrate that they were a progressive employer in terms of work-life balance policies.

• IRS (2002) found that the most popular reasons for employers to introduce work-life balance policies were recruitment and retention. The importance of this issue is underlined by the fact that the government is encouraging work-life balance, and began a campaign for this in 2000.

• A further influence is the need for employers to respond to what is now termed'a 24/7 society'. Noon and Blyton (1997) argue that individual working hours are being decoupled from operating hours, and that more flexibility is needed to cover round-the-clock peaks and troughs. They argue that this now applies to a much wider range of business areas than hotels, hospitals and continuous processes operations.

Holbeche and McCartney (2002) found that employees were experiencing anxiety, work overload, loss of control, pressure, long hours and insufficient personal time. Such experiences are likely to encourage a reassessment of values in workers, and there is also evidence that younger people entering the labour market are much less willing to sacrifice their personal lives for total commitment to work. Values and expectations appear to be changing.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The majority of women are working 40-45 hours per week and 53% are struggling to achieve work/life balance. Women reported that their lives were a juggling act that included multiple responsibilities at work, heavy meeting schedules, business trips, on top of managing the daily routine responsibilities of life and home. "Successfully achieving work/life balance will ultimately create a more satisfied workforce that contributes to productivity and success in the workplace.

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CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

What is Worklife Balance?

Define Work-life balance is the amount of time you spend at work with the amount of time you spend doing non-work. That is just one dimension of balance. The other dimension is satisfaction balance, which is about the quality of time. Sixty years of literature hasn't answered what makes an employee satisfied and motivated. This whole notion of satisfaction can be seen in the context of time balance or satisfaction balance.

'There just aren't enough hours in the day. I hold down a full time job. I help care for my grandchildren and my parents, who need more help every year. Time for me is pretty hard to come by.'

-Retail department store manager, New Delhi

'Working on my master's degree, teaching part time, being single mom, trying to stay active and physically fit, making time for family commitments…balance is almost impossible to maintain.'

-Instructor ,post secondary institution, Mumbai

Work life and personal life are inter-connected and interdependent. Spending more time in office, dealing with clients and the pressures of job can interfere and affect the personal life, sometimes making it impossible to even complete the household chores. On the other hand, personal life can also be demanding if you have a kid or aging parents, financial problems or even problems in the life of a dear relative. It can lead to absenteeism from work, creating stress and lack of concentration at work.

Let's first define what work-life balance is not.

Work-Life Balance does not mean an equal balance. Trying to schedule an equal number of hours for each of your various work and personal activities is usually unrewarding and unrealistic. Life is and should be more fluid than that.

Your best individual work-life balance will vary over time, often on a daily basis. The right balance for you today will probably be different for you tomorrow. The right balances for you when you are single will be different when you marry, or if you have children; when you start a new career versus when you are nearing retirement.

There is no perfect, one-size fits all, balance you should be striving for. The best work-life balance is different for each of us because we all have different priorities and different lives.

However, at the core of an effective work-life balance definition are two key everyday concepts that are relevant to each of us. They are daily Achievement and Enjoyment, ideas almost deceptive in their simplicity.

Engraining a fuller meaning of these two concepts takes us most of the way to defining a positive Work-Life Balance. Achievement and Enjoyment answer the big question "Why?" Why do you want a better income…a new house…the kids through college…to do a good job today…to come to work at all?

Most of us already have a good grasp on the meaning of Achievement. But let's explore the concept of Enjoyment a little more. As part of a relevant Work-Life Balance definition, enjoyment does not just mean "Ha-Ha" happiness. It means Pride, Satisfaction, Happiness, Celebration, Love, A Sense of Well Being …all the Joys of Living.

Achievement and Enjoyment are the front and back of the coin of value in life. You can't have one without the other, no more than you can have a coin with only one side. Trying to live a one sided life is why so many "Successful" people are not happy, or not nearly as happy as they should be.

You cannot get the full value from life without BOTH Achievement and Enjoyment. Focusing on Achievement and Enjoyment every day in life helps you avoid the "As Soon As Trap", the life dulling habit of planning on getting around to the joys of life and accomplishment "as soon as…."

My caffeine source is diet cola. But I'm a somewhat fussy diet cola drinker. I don't like cans or bottles, I like fountain. And there is a big difference in fountain drinks. So I know all the best fountains within a five-mile radius of my house and office. My favorite is a little convenience store near my home called Fitzgerald's.

Let's say I'm wandering into Fitzgerald's at 6 in the morning, in my pre-caffeinated state and the implausible happens. Some philosophical guy bumps into me, and says…. "Heh mister… what's your purpose in life?" Well even in that half-awake condition, I'd have an answer for him. I'd say, "You know, I just want to achieve something today and I want to enjoy something today. And if I do both of those things today, I'm going to have a pretty good day. And if I do both of those things every day, for the rest of my life… I'm going to have a pretty good life."

And I think that's true for all of us. Life will deliver the value and balance we desire …when we are achieving and enjoying something every single day…in all the important areas that make up our lives. As a result, a good working definition of Work-Life Balance is:

"Meaningful daily Achievement and Enjoyment in each of my four life quadrants: Work, Family, Friends and Self."

Reasons of Imbalance in Worklife.

There are various reasons for this imbalance and conflicts in the life of an employee. From individual career ambitions to pressure to cope up with family or work, the reasons can be situation and individual specific.

The speed of advancement of information technology, the increasing competition in the talent supply market has led to a "performance-driven" culture creating pressures and expectations to performance more and better every time. They usually end up over burdening themselves with work. The increasing responsibilities on the personal front with age can also create stress on personal and professional fronts.

A decade back, employees used to have fixed working hours or rather a 9 to 5 job from Monday to Friday. The boundary between the work and home has disappeared with time. But with globalization and people working across countries, the concept of fixed working hours is fading away. Instead of just 7 or 8 a day, people are spending as much as 12-16 hours every day in office.

Employees' longer working hours also put more pressure on families. Evidence suggests that long work hours create negative consequences for individuals and their families. People working longer hours are more likely to experience stress and conflict between work and family responsibilities, and often have poorer coping mechanisms to deal with these issues.

Consequences

The Work life conflict has resulted in:
- ☐ Increased absenteeism
- ☐ Increased employee turnover
- ☐ Reduced productivity
- ☐ Increased disability costs
- ☐ Reduced job satisfaction
- ☐ Increased managerial stress
- ☐ Impaired family/social relationship.

Current Scenario

- ☐ High job stress has doubled.
- ☐ High job satisfaction and employees loyality has dropped.
- ☐ Percentage of Indian working more than 50 hrs has grown from 10 percent to 25 percent.
- ☐ Most working Indians have dependents, whether children, aging parents or both.
- ☐ Absences due to work life conflict have doubled in the past decade.
- ☐ Workers with high work life conflict miss twice as many work days as those with moderate conflict and three times that of workers with a low conflict.
- ☐ One in three employees have turned down or choosen not to apply for a promotion because of work life conflict.
- ☐ The cost to recruit new staff person has been estimated at one to three times the annual salary of that position.

WAYS OF IMPROVING WORKLIFE BALANCE

This section presents a quick overview of work-life balance options that may be considered.

1. Flex the time

Flex-time arrangements are a broad category of work-life balance options that focus on the element of time:days,hours,start time and end time of the work. It includes:

- ☐ Alternative work schedules

Employees work a full day but can vary the start and end of the workday within defined guidelines.

- ☐ Compressed workweek

Employees work the full number of hours in their regularity scheduled workweek or cycle, but these hours are compressed into fewer days. For examples, an employee adding a certain number of minutes to each workday receives every third Friday off.

- ☐ Voluntary part-time/reduced hours

Voluntary part-time or reduced hours means employees choose to work less than full-time on a company's regular payroll. These arrangements may be temporary or permanent or may be set to accommodate the personal needs of employees.

- ☐ Phased-in retirement

Individuals retire gradually by reducing their hours over a period of time,often years,prior to retirement.The benefit is usually reserved for long service employees and is being negotiated in an increasing number of collective agreements. Plans can take many forms,including company paid,employee-paid or partial pension options.

2. Flex the place

Technological innovations have resulted in a wide range of working from home,from satellite offices or from remote locations,all collectively known as telework.

☐ Telecommuting

Telecommuting involves doing regular work from home. This arrangement may be permanaent or temporary, part time or full time or a set portion of the workweek. Telecommuting usually relies on communication technology like a telephone, fax machine or home computer linked to the main office.

3. Flex the job

May be the job itself needs to change,not just the time allocation. "Flexing the job"involves a basic reconsideration of how you define what a job and how you divide these tasks into different job categories.

☐ Job redesign

Job redesign focuses on changing the job responsibilities or processes significantly in order to achieve a more balanced set of responsibilities.Job redesign requires careful look at job tasks,expected results and how you measure success.

☐ Job sharing

Job sharing is a form of permanent part-time work where two people share the responsibilities, hours,salary,and benefit of one full-time job.The split may be equal(50-50)or another combination(e.g.60-40)or it may be alternate.

4. Flex the benefits

One size fits all benefits packages are not well suited to a diverse workforce.Offering a range of benefit options and flexibility in selecting the employee's preferred choices or the amount of coverage allows employees to create a personalized package tailored to meet individual needs and wants.

☐ Leaves

This is a very abroad category that includes a wide range of options for taking job protected time off from work,some of which are legally required,such as vacations and maternity leave.

☐ Dependent care

This category focuses on employees who support dependents,typically dependent children or elderly relatives.It includes a range of options such as on site child care,emergency child care or elder care,information and referral services or financial assistance for dependent care.

☐ Employee Assistance Programs

Employee Assistance Programs(EAPs)assist employees and family members with a range of personal concerns that may negatively affect employees job performance,including substance abuse,mental health issues,family,financial,or marital problems,and legal or emotional stress.

☐ Wellness programs

Wellness programs assist with and educate employees about achieving and maintaining good physical, mental, emotional and social health.

Other Ways

☐ Management and employees could be educated about the importance of work-life balance, the benefits provided by work-life balance policies and the role of workplace culture in inhibiting individual's usage of policies.

☐ Discussions between management and staff may increase understanding of mutual expectations and develop solutions to work-life balance issues for employees.

☐ Discussions between team members on how they can help each other with work-life balance should be encouraged. Communication within the workplace may increase understanding of work-life balance issues employees are dealing with on a daily basis.

☐ The organization should encourage employees across all levels of the organisation, including managerial staff, to access work-life balance policies.

☐ Managers could be encouraged to act as role models for employees by using the policies themselves. Active support by managers is necessary to change the workplace culture.

☐ Flexible use of time is an important element in creating a work-life balance. This does not mean working less, but giving employees more control over when and where they complete their work.

☐ Employers should judge employee's performance on their output, rather than the number of hours they spend at work. This is rewarding employees for performance, not face time.

Benefits of Worklife Balance Programme

Companies with high levels of employees satisfaction know that work-life balance options are not "perks".They are part of a business strategy that provides a solid return on investment for the company as well as the workforce. In recent surveys, companies across the world have reported that work-life balance programs have them to:

☐ Reinforce recruitment

Studies show work-life balance is one of the benefits employees are looking for in a job, providing a competitive edge in tight labour market.

☐ Raise retention

The majority companies reported improved retention as an outcome of work-life balance programs.

☐ Limit latecomers

Companies reported reduced instances of employees arriving late for work as a result of flex time options.

☐ Power up productivity

Companies reported significant gains in productivity after implementing work-life balance programs.

☐ Neutralize the naysaying

These strategies produce gains in employee satisfaction surveys,customer service evaluations and relationships among colleagues.

☐ Promote participation in training

Studies show employer support of work-life balance allows and encourages greater participation in training and education.
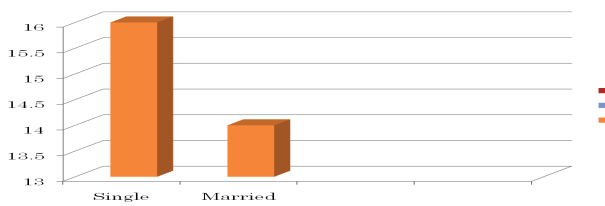
☐ Engage the emerging labour market

The majority of high school and university students name work-life balance as a personal goal.
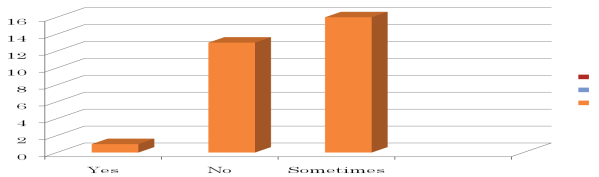
DISCUSSION

Conclusion Marital Status

Out of 30 samples taken in the case study, most of them were single.

Difficulty in balancing personal and professional life

From the survey it can be concluded that women occasionally find it difficult to balance work life with that of their personal one.

Family support towards professional life

From the data given below it can be said that in majority of the situations family is a great help in coping with work life stresses.
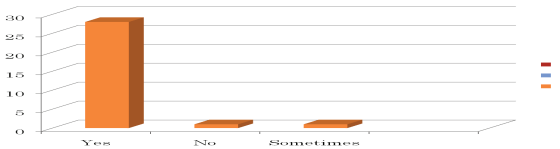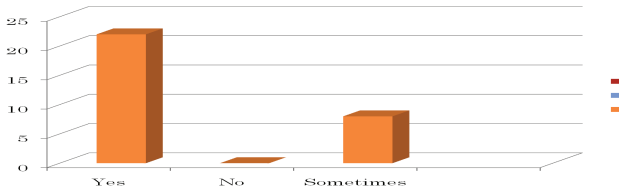

Co-workers support in professional life

The study conducted shows that co-workers do help in professional life.
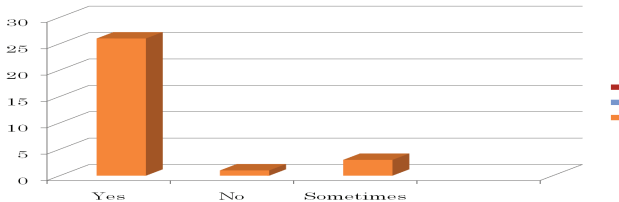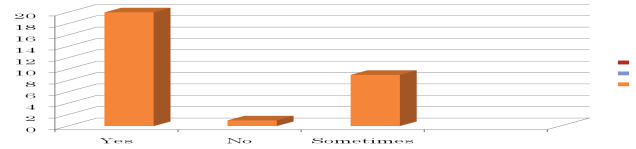

Supervisor/Senior Authority support in professional life

In most of the cases it has been observed that Supervisor/Senior Authority support in the overall development of an employee.
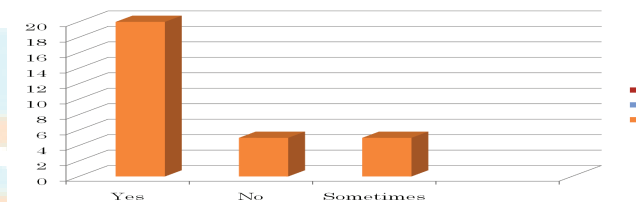

Gender discrimination at workplace

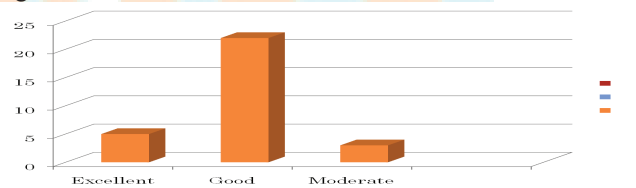Most of the employees feel that there is gender discrimination at workplace.

Convenient working hours

Women employees are mostly satisfied with the working hours though some of them do not find the working hours convenient.
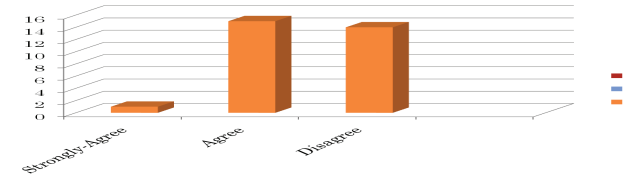

Rating of working environment

Women employees like the working environment of the organization.

Effect of personal life hindrances on work efficiency

Working women feel that personal life hindrances do affect their work efficiency and also a considerable number feel that no it doesn't.

Frequency of professional life stresses affecting your personal life

There are rare cases when frequency of professional life stresses affecting your personal life is high.
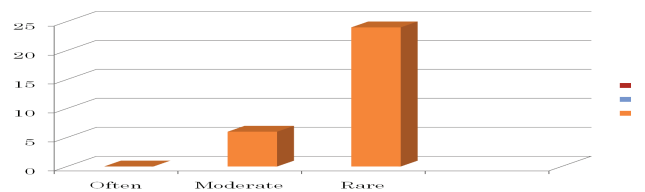
FINDINGS

1) It's a private issue

• Fact: The personal impact is undeniable: research links work life conflict to increased depression, marital problems, fatigue and stress-related illness. But it doesn't stop

there. these results translate into real problems for employers, such as increased absenteeism and reduced productivity.

2) It's parenting issue

• Work-life conflict is a growing concern for all Indians, not just those with children at home. An increasing number of non-parents report difficulty fitting in volunteer commitments, or educational, leisure or health pursuits.

3) It's a women's issue

• Recent trend has seen levels of work-life conflicts rise among men.In fact,men are likely than women to point to work pressures as the cause of the imbalance.

4) It's a stage in life

• Fact: The call for more work life balance comes from all sections of the population: the university student with part-time job, the female executive with small children and the seasoned employee easing into retirement. Work life balance is increasingly important to young people entering the labour market as well.

5) It's " fifty-fifty."

• Work life balance is rarely a partnership of equals.More often,it is a changing relationship-one part ,may dominate far a period of time,only to see the other part attracting more attention.Balance is also personally defined :what is balance to one person may be imbalance to another.

6) Work and life are separate domains

• Work and life issues are closely linked and changes in one almost always affect the other.

7) Technology will help

• Technology is a double-edged sword.While innovations such as cell phones,laptops,personal digitals assistants and wireless networks allow us to work anywhere,they also allow work to follow us anywhere.

8) Little can be done

• Companies have been able to show clear and measurable improvements in work-life balance by even the smallest of changes. Of course, there is no "magic bullet", but a willing manager or owner has plenty of tools and resources to

achieve better balance and through it, better business. Indian employers are seeing it this way, reporting increases in flexible work arrangements such as flex-time, job sharing, telework and compressed workweeks.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion for working women, getting caught in the work/life balance trap will continue to be an ongoing challenge. Careful planning and personal effort is the advice from those who have found balance in both career and home life. As one respondent summarized, "Plan, prioritize and schedule as efficiently as possible... and don't be afraid of hard work!" Work-life balance is a person's control over the conditions in their workplace. It is accomplished when an individual feels dually satisfied about their personal life and their paid occupation. It mutually benefits the individual, business and society when a person ' s personal life is balanced with his or her own job. The work-life balance strategy offers a variety of means to reduce stress levels and increase job satisfaction in the employee while enhancing business benefits for the employer. In our increasingly hectic world, the work-life strategy seeks to find a balance between work and play. A sentence that brings the idea of work life balance to the point is: "Work to live. Don't live to work."

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