

The new work–life balance

Résumé

Avec le retour d'une possible récession, la pression professionnelle augmente. Les bénéfices de la réorganisation du travail post pandémie vont-ils disparaître ? Télétravail, équilibre, qualité de vie...

Le concept d'équilibre travail-vie a été un objectif de style de vie aspirant au 20ème siècle. Cependant, avec la pandémie, ce concept semble maintenant irréalisable. Une alternative est une vision basée sur les catégories "veux, devrais, et dois". Chaque décision que nous prenons débute par une phrase de ces catégories. En utilisant ce modèle, nous pouvons créer un graphique circulaire de notre vie pour évaluer si nous ressentons un équilibre. Les gens ont eu plus de temps pour réfléchir à la signification de la vie pendant le confinement, ce qui a incité beaucoup à quitter leurs emplois non rémunérateurs. Les employeurs font désormais plus d'efforts pour répondre aux désirs de leurs employés pour les aider à recruter et retenir.

Article

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August 29, 2022

The new work–life balance

The phrase seems increasingly outdated, given how much our work and our lives are now intertwined. It's time for a new framework.

by [Adam Bryant](#)

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Photograph by Peter Dazeley

If you look up the history of *work-life balance*, you'll find different takes on the concept's origins. Many people give credit to Robert Owen, a Welsh manufacturer and the "father of British Socialism," who decided that labor practices in the early 1800s were too demanding, and so started advocating for a balanced workday of "eight hours labor, eight hours recreation, eight hours rest."

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In the 20th century, work–life balance became more of an aspirational lifestyle goal. For anyone who has ever juggled a busy job and raising kids (not to mention taking care of a house), the notion of work–life balance always seemed like a distant dream: a stress-free mix of rewarding work and plenty of quality time for the family, exercise, and sleep. But that’s not how life works, and, in some ways, this idealized sense of balance created a mirage that only served to frustrate people who tried to attain it.

The pandemic seemed to render work–life balance a laughable concept. As white-collar workers set up workstations at home, there was no longer a separation of job and personal time or space. So we need something new, something more useful, to help us think about balance in our lives.

Here’s an alternative model. It starts with the idea that every moment falls into one of three categories: want, should, or need. It seems to me that every decision we make starts, implicitly or explicitly, with a sentence that begins “I want to...,” “I should...,” or “I need to...” (The last one includes its close cousin, “I have to....”) If you accept these buckets, you can then start creating a pie chart of your life based on this categorization.

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How much of your typical day, week, or month falls into each of those three categories? How much of your job is spent doing the things you want to do—ideally creating that state of flow in which your skills and talents are well-matched to the task at hand—versus the things you just muscle through because you should do them or need to do them.

There is no right mix, per se, and each individual’s outlook will change over time. When we are in our 20s, we can indulge in more of what we want to do. The same is true later in life, when personal interests can be prioritized. It’s those decades of our 30s, 40s, and 50s that can be particularly challenging—raising a family and building a career, which will include jobs that are stepping stones to more fulfilling roles. These chapters of life gave rise to the widely cited U-shaped happiness curve.

To me, that three-part pie chart is useful in determining whether we feel a sense of balance in our lives. And it also helps explain some of the meta-narratives of the moment, including the “great resignation” and the persistent desire of employees to work from home. All that time alone during pandemic lockdowns gave people time to consider the meaning of life and prompted many to quit unrewarding jobs. They decided to prioritize more of what they want, and commuting strikes many as more of a “should” than a “want.” And companies are making more of an effort to listen to their employees, too, conducting frequent pulse surveys. At the moment, employers are bending over backward to give employees what they want to help with recruitment and retention.

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The pendulum may be swinging back. As talk of recession heats up and companies come under pressure, CEOs are starting to sound like they want to revisit the want–should–need equation and remind people that work is called *work* for a reason.

Sundar Pichai, the CEO of Google’s parent company, [wrote a memo to employees](#) in July, stating that “moving forward, we need to be more entrepreneurial, working with greater urgency, sharper focus, and more hunger than we’ve shown on sunnier days.” This may not change the pie chart for some—often people want to show more initiative at work and feel thwarted. But it does signal a shifting mood at Google.

Mark Zuckerberg, the CEO of Meta, Facebook’s parent, [told employees](#) in late June that, in light of the challenges the company was facing, they would have to do more with fewer resources, and that low performers were not going to be tolerated. “I think some of you might decide that this place isn’t for you, and that self-selection is OK with me,” Mr. Zuckerberg said on the call. “Realistically, there are probably a bunch of people at the company who shouldn’t be here.”

The not-so-hidden message: work is about what you should do and what you need to do. The bosses are back in charge, and they’re less interested in what you want to do or whether you are feeling a sense of purpose in the work that the company is paying you to do.

We need a framework for assessing our relationship with work that is more practical and realistic in this post-pandemic world than a scale with work on one side and life on the other. In every job, there is always a mix of things that you like doing and things that you don’t like doing. Same with your personal life. What matters is how much of your time is spent doing things you want to do, should do, and need to do. That pie chart—however you fill it out—will provide a more accurate picture of the balance you need in order to feel a sense of happiness, contentment, satisfaction, and accomplishment.

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