

## **Work Life Balance: From Competitive Advantage to Social Responsibility**

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### **Abstract**

Work life balance or work life integration is not a new concept. It is a dynamic concept. With the change in society and increase in work force diversity organizations are becoming more concerned about their employees. Due to increasing awareness about employee rights, interventions of government and change in social set up and rising demands, employers are changing their human resource policies. Organizations are now started thinking about their employees in a socially responsible manner. To achieve targets and to compete in the market it is important to motivate and retain the productive and loyal employees in the organization. In this paper I tried to highlight why work life integration or work life balance is more important to an employer and what type of policies are adopted by the organizations in today's competitive world.

**Key words:** *work-life integration, social responsibility, competitive advantage, policies.*

### **Introduction**

For living a comfortable life and to fulfill day to day needs work is becoming more and more important for every professional/employee in today's dynamic and competitive world. But issues related to work and life is also becoming more complicated. As every professional has a life outside the organization and which is equally important for him/her. But increase in working hours, competitions, achieving targets for the company, attending to the needs of family and friends all creates a pressure on an employee. And some time it becomes difficult to manage every aspect of life. And then issues related to work life balance also arise.

But what is work life balance? It is creating a balance between each and every aspects of an employee's life i.e. work, family, friends, self and society. Work-life balance (WLB) is the relation between an individual's work and the rest of his/her life and how their commitment for different areas of life impacts each other. It is all about distributing your time between all the important aspects of life, means prioritizing your work.

### **Objective of the Paper**

To understand and highlight the work life balance issues from employee and employers point. Why work life balance is important and has become the responsibility of an employer. Is it a competitive advantage to survive or a corporate responsibility of the organization?

### **Methodology and Review of Literature**

The data is collected from secondary sources from various research papers and journals and specific websites and from organizations websites also.

The study was about work-life in an information technology industry. It also focused on the various work-life balance strategies implemented by various organizations and the employees (Deivasigamani, J. Dr. Shankar. G)

This paper focused on work life issues of married women and how they face problems in balancing their work and personal life irrespective of the work sector, age group, the number of children they have and their spouse's profession. The IT sector working professionals were found to have more difficulties in balancing work and family followed by academic sector working women and then health sector working women. (G. Delina, Dr. R. Prabhakara Raya)

Employee welfare is a dynamic concept and covers social, economic and other domains of an individual. The findings of this paper indicated that there are significant differences across industries in work-life responsiveness. There is unequal distribution of opportunities for work-life balance both within and across workplace. (Manisha Purohit)

While formulating appropriate policies for employees the relationship between demographic variables and work-life balance of employees are important inputs to address work-life balance issues. Work-life balance initiatives designed to help employees balance their work and personal lives are not only an option, but also a necessity for many employers today. (Kumari K Thriveni, Devi V Rama)

Today's employees give more priority to their life over work. As many organizations are still trying to motivate workers with an "assembly line mentality", there has been an increasing need for a new paradigm so that organizations can meet the genuine life-related demands of the workers. And smart employer understands it well that this is a need of the hour. (Sanghamitra Buddhapriya)

The study revealed that work demand has negative interferences in the family lives of employees and has wide differences across gender, nature of job and the level of management. The study confirms that a proper work-life balance will provide job satisfaction of employees which in turn will create organizational success and develop competitive advantage for IT organizations. (Prof. (Dr.) K. S. Chandrasekar, Mrs. Suma S.R, Mrs. Renjini S. Nair, Mrs. Anu S.R)

Modern organizations, especially educational institutions, should address the Work Life Balance related issues specifically of women and take a holistic approach to design and implement policies to support the teaching staff to manage their work life balance.(K. Santhana Lakshmi and S. Sujatha Gopinath)

**Work –Life Balance**

Work- life balance (WLB) is a comfortable equilibrium achieved by an employee between his/her official work and personal life. But to achieve this equilibrium is not an easy task. As employers want to maximize organizations turnover and employees are working to achieve set target in limited time on the expense of their health, family and friends. WLB concept is not new but it is becoming the part of almost every employee. It is becoming more and more complex in this competitive and technology loving world, where one can have access to anyone at any time. Now the concept of 9am -5pm job is blurred. Employees are carrying work with them in the form of technology everywhere i.e. after office hours. And now WLB is no longer limited between employee- work and family, as was considered early. It is not the duty of employee only to maintain a balanced life but employers are also taking active part ensuring balanced life for their employees.

**The Need of Work –Life Balance**

Due to increased working hour’s employees feel more stressed and exhausted after work. This leads to sleepiness, increase in fatigue, less time for recreation activities, for family, friends or society which leads to overall health reductions and depression. And in turn it leads to absenteeism, turnover, and reduction in capacity to work, strained relations in the office place.

Here WLB is important for both employer and employee. Because to achieve targets and better results and for the growth of the organization employers need competitive employees those who can work in dynamic environment i.e. knowledge workers. And employees would be happy to work for that employer who understands their problem, i.e. official or unofficial.

**WLB -importance:**

<b>For Employer</b>	<b>For Employee</b>
WLB reduces absenteeism	Employee will feel less stressed and exhausted and give better results with fewer mistakes.
Employees will feel less stressed and it will increase their working capacity	Increase in work capacity and productivity.
It will help to retain competitive employees.	More time for him/herself ,family and friends
It creates loyalty in employees for the organization.	More time to take community services
Improvement in image of employer in market which will help to attract more talent.	Overall improvement in health and low rate of absenteeism and turnover.
WLB initiatives raise the employee morale.	Better relations in office and outside.
Healthy human resources.	It will develop a sense of belongingness for the organization
Cost reduction e.g. health expenditure, training costs, other office expenses i.e. providing space, electricity and other facilities for overtime etc. to the employees.	Can better manage his/her career and personal growth.

### **WLB- A Competitive Advantage**

From the above discussion it is clear that WLB is really important for an employer also. Effective WLB initiatives or programmes leads to strong and healthy relationship between an employer and employee which is good for both the parties. More balanced and professionally satisfied employees are strength for any organization. As they will be more loyal and can work better in team work for the company. If a company is following effective methods for balancing the work of employees then definitely it will be an advantage over other organizations as employees would like to work with them and it's also an important marketing tool to take a competitive advantage over other organizations.

Earlier only some specific initiatives or programs were there for the employees e.g. insurance policies, child care leave for women, break time in office hours, casual dressings , play rooms etc. these are somewhat common activities taken by organizations. But now the scenario has changed. Due to increase in competition and globalization there is increase in variety of employees also from old, young, married and unmarried to women employees to students working part-time. To achieve better integration of these types of employees in the organizations employers are coming with some new and more creative WLB programs and with the change in competition level only loyal and motivated employees can help to survive for a company . Because no matter how good or effective management strategies are there to achieve organization's goals if employees are not productive or capable enough then organization won't be able to survive in long run. Now organizations are integrating the work and life of employees to have better results, to build a cohesive environment of personal and professional life they are following a modern approach i.e. **work –life integration**. A work culture which is supportive of employee's problems whether official or not leads to highly committed employees for the organizations which in turn leads to developing firm specific competencies and which results in firm specific competitive advantage.

### **WLB- A Social Responsibility**

Due to government interventions and human resource policies framed from time to time organizations are now treating their employees not as a resource to achieve their goals. Increase in number of working couples, working women, advancement of technology, change in demographic, economic and political environment has led to adoption of socially responsible approach by the organizations. These changes across the world have changed the thinking process of employers and employees also. There are numerous *social problems* which are related to imbalanced life, e.g. health issues, increase in age of marriage, infertility due to long and stress full working hours, lack of contact and proper communication with the near and dear ones, no proper care of children and elderly members at home , especially when both parents are working, discussion of home related problems or issues on the phone when employee should be doing office work, and sometimes taking incomplete office work to home. And at office strained relations with the colleagues, unethical practices, misbehavior and employee burnout are the consequences which an organization faces besides high turnover and absenteeism and low productivity. It means if employers are thinking that employees personal or social life is not their concern then they are on the wrong side. Because by not taking care of their employees needs maybe they lose on some very competitive and loyal employees in future to their competitors also.

Thus socially responsible enterprises are really important in today's changing work and social system. But this is expected from only those organizations which implements work- life integration or WLB policies. It is the employers who can restore the balance in their employee's lives but without interfering in their personal or social life. Now it is not necessary to work in office, employee can work whenever he/she is gets the time or when their mind is more productive and relaxed but subject to discipline and commitment to finish the work.

### **WLB – Is Both A Competitive Advantage and Social Responsibility**

It is clear that competitive advantage and social responsibility in WLB, both are intertwined. An employer cannot proceed with one without the other. Employees always have a strong influence on productivity and company's growth. That is why employees are really important to have a competitive advantage and strong image in the market. To have a competitive advantage employees creativity and capability must be properly utilized by the company. But it could be possible only when employers are ready to listen to their employees problems, to give them proper treatment. Today's employees are more aware about their rights and needs, all thanks to increase in education level, change in societal framework and which led to improvement in human resource policies followed by organizations. If they don't get proper treatment they will leave the organization for better opportunities elsewhere. That is

why employers should strategies their human resource policies in a more socially responsible manner. Moreover integration of work, society and family is important for any organization to move forward. WLB is very critical for organizations because it is working in a diverse workforce which has link with the society at a large. And this diverse workforce has their role and responsibility outside the organization which gets disturbed by the unfeasible demand or work pressure made by the employers on employees.

**WLB Practices**

Balanced employees feel less stressed and more motivated towards their work and can easily leave their personal work at home and official work at office. To achieve this balance companies are following various practices:

<b>Child care services for employees</b>	nearby daycare center, crèche facility, education for children at discount, maternity and paternity leaves, work from home facility after or before delivery of a child etc.
<b>Recreational activities</b>	happy hours, birthday or festival celebrations, picnics with employees and their families, paid vacations etc.
<b>Health services</b>	gym or exercise place in the office, quiet space for inner and mental peace, counselling sessions, short breaks in between work, full time doctors etc.
<b>Growth and development</b>	organize workshops, seminars or talks, management games, informal get together for team building, promote friendly work culture, promote community services.
<b>Personal growth</b>	promote flexible hours, telecommuting, time to take up hobbies like dance drama, paintings, music, writing etc. and break from work for further studies etc.
<b>Educational programson WLB</b>	organize educational programs on various WLB policies or practices adopted by the company and how it is going to benefit the employee, i.e. telecommuting, happy hours, flexible working hours, sessions on how to priorities work etc. and should take employees suggestions and feedback also.

Many companies are following these practices. To name a few:

**Yamaha Corporation** started child care leave and nursing in 1990 and 1992 when it wasn't a statutory requirement. It established the WLB Promotion Committee to promote work-family support system for its employees. Through its "Lump Acquisition of Paid Annual Leave" system it motivates its employees to fully utilize their leaves before it lapse. It introduced "All go homeat same time day" to reduce excessive work and overtime in August 2011, in which all employees leave their office at designated time. Apart from this it organizes seminars to educate and motivate employees for WLB.

**SAP Labs India**,the largest software vendors follows the policy of work from home once a week and take special care of its women employees by providing the facility of extended maternity leave and transportation services during and after pregnancy.Organizes dance, drama and music activates are organized forrecreational activities for its employees.

**Accenture India** started a policy in which employees donate their leaves to their colleagues, called "hours that help".

**Flipkart** allows paternity leave to its employees and after child is born for the first three months they are allowed to work from home and four hours at office.

**Google India**provides gym and health facilities, various games for recreation, sleeping pods for quick nap and for families it organizes 'bring your children to work' day annually.

**Godrej Consumer Products** organizes seminars, workshops etc. for two groups Godrej alliance for women and Godrej alliance for parents to address the problems faced by these groups.

**Wipro** runs an employee counselling and support system named “*Mitr*”. It enables employees to talk to counselors anytime about their personal or professional life; this facility is extended to families of employees free of cost. It also provides various health and wellness facilities i.e. flextime, half day work, health insurance for parents or in-laws also.

**Hindustan Unilever** has taken various WLB initiatives i.e. career break policy in which an employee can avail 5 years break from job for education, maternity or any other personal issues. Other facilities like day care, shopping center, pick and drop facilities for female employees, work from home, job sharing etc.

### **WLB- Problems and Suggestions**

Today almost everyone is concerned about work life balance or work life integration. But WLB is all about prioritizing your work and making a choice between all the options available to a person or an employee. An employee cannot take the risk of losing a job and an employer cannot ask its employees to leave the office and go for outings and picnic. There are some **problems** or **challenges** which are faced by the employer and employee both in taking work-life integration schemes or policies:

i. Employer and employees feel reluctant to take initiatives. There is a *fear of loss of control* and accountability on employees. Employees may take *undue advantage* of long paid leaves, work from home facility or telecommuting etc.

ii. It is termed as only big organizations can take initiatives because it *involves cost and time* to implement these policies.

iii. If objectives of WLB initiatives are *not clear* for whom it is taken than that will be total waste of time and cost.

iv. Work from home or telecommuting may get *hampered if not well connected* with the proper technology i.e. Internet, software's, telephone or mobile connectivity.

v. Long paid leaves may results in *detachment of employee* from other employees, project or with the organization due to long break from the work.

vi. Flextime and work from home does not go well when the task under hand is to be completed by team work. Because it is not necessary that every employee's work schedule will be equal.

vii. Organization cannot frame one time WLB policy as *every employees needs are different* on the basis of age, experience, marital status etc.

viii. If there is *lack of support from senior management and employees* than these policies cannot be implemented successfully.

ix. Most of the time these policies *remain on paper*. There should be proper implementation and communication with the concerned parties.

x. Most of the time WLB practices or policies are not targeted on important problems or organization or employees. And employees are not getting motivated to use these policies due to *lack of motivation, communication or awareness*. These policies remain on paper only.

xi. Last but not the least WLB or work life integration is *not well understood*. It is termed as women employees issue only due to marriage, in-laws, maternity and childcare etc. How, when and for whom to implement these WLB policies are not well understood by the employers and employees.

Here are some **suggestions** to overcome these problems or challengers:

i. An employer should understand that WLB is not a one-time approach it is a dynamic concept. Old policies of providing group insurance rise in pay, medical or transport facilities are not much effective today.

ii. As there is an increase in women employees, working couples, part time working students, organizations must change their policies accordingly.

iii. While framing policies organizations must be clear about certain things i.e. does its management policy or human resource policy really support WLB initiatives, does it has the supportive work culture, what genuine problems are actually faced by the employees and does these are actually effecting the productivity of the employees

iv. If policies are there but not communicated then organization must take effort to create awareness to motivate the employees. And if it is stilleffective then organization should take feedback and fill the loopholes and repackage the policies.



v. Organizations should draw a clear line of these policies so that employees don't take undue advantage and accountability and responsibility be maintained.

vi. Small organizations are not competent enough to provide high pay scales or other financial assistance but these can provide flexible work hours, job sharing or other non-financial incentives etc. to differentiate themselves from other organizations.

vii. Organization should conduct proper surveys and keep an eye on other organizations about what these organizations are doing to retain or motivate their employees and what WLB policies are implemented by them, if organization wants to be ahead of its competitor.

viii. If organization is following work from home or telecommuting policy then employees must be provided with proper connectivity at home also i.e. internet, secure and proper software's to complete assigned work from home.

ix. Organizations should promote a balanced and employee friendly work environment and promote a responsible and accountable work culture.

## Conclusion

It is clear that work life integration is important for any organization. To survive, to compete in today's globalized world it has to take care of its human resources. Any category of employee is important i.e. old for their experience, young for their activeness and fresh ideas, women for an holistic work culture and development and trainees or interns for future development of manpower pool. An organization has to design work life integration plans or human resource policies according to the need of every employee. So that talented and motivated employees could help the organization in economic or business crisis. Organizations which are concerned about the employee and society are also an advantage to a nation to build a healthy and motivated workforce for development and growth in the long run.

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