

WORK LIFE BALANCE IS IT A DUAL HORSE RIDE

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***Abstract--**Unlike western nations, striking the perfect balance between work and personal life is still a distant dream in India. In the west, work-life balance is taken earnestly. With the steady rise in dual earning families this decade, achieving work-life balance is more of a struggle for a woman than a man in a conservative Indian family set up. Also, the steep increase in the number of single parent families in the society, has given a hard blow on work life balance. Changes in the organizational and personal front by utilizing modern technology can help in pursuing personal goals and maintaining an effective QWL (Quality of Work Life).*

***Key Words:** Work-life Balance, Gender, Indian family setup - Role of Women, Best Practices, Technology.*

I. INTRODUCTION

How closely does the famous adage “Money can’t buy happiness”, reflect reality? How many working professionals are indeed happy with the money they earn? Aren’t they sacrificing a major part of their valuable life, by running behind money and fame?

As per the World Happiness Report 2019, India’s ranking slipped down to 140, 7 points lower than the previous rank of 133. The other SAARC countries are way ahead of India, (Mahajan, Ishaan, 2019) despite their internal issues. One of the parameters which is included in calculating the Happiness Index is Work-life balance.

In the past two decades, the work environment has undergone immense changes. The contributing factors include globalization, competitive work culture, dual career families and many such.

The biggest peril in being a working professional is that, many of us are not able to have a good work-life equilibrium.

Although ‘work-life balance’ varies with every individual, the rationale is to have a basic rhythm despite the chaos. As per a survey by Monster.com, 60% of working Indians rate their work-life balance as average to terrible. This trend is quite apparent in metros.

In this article, let me walk through in detail, the best practices for maintaining a healthy work-life balance, ponder if work-life conflict is more predisposed towards the female gender, and how technology can help, with tips to mitigate stress and improve the happiness quotient.

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Prelude

As little kids, the most enjoyable part of the day used to be the after-school hours in the evening. My mother would be waiting for me with home-made delicacies; they were simple yet made with love and care for her lovable children. Above all, the welcoming warm smile she wore was the most fulfilling part. Then we would wait for the man of the house, my father to return from office. We would run towards the door and till now it is a mystery how we recognized his footsteps, howsoever soft he walked in. This nostalgic event haunts me even today in my busy schedule. With the ever-growing demands of modern life, work has become an integral part of everyone's life. On introspection, do I really do justice to my kid as a mother? Although the kid is the apple of my eye, is the factor of 'Being There' justified? Being a working mother, the demand to balance career and family is a dual horse ride.

Gender and WLB in India:

Even though work-life balance is an issue for both genders, the primary responsibility of keeping the home in order rests mainly with women (Adame, C. et al, 2016). As per Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions model, (Hofstede, Greet (2011)), India alleged as a masculine country, where obviously men are perceived as bread winners and women as home makers.

Moreover, the gender bias at work like inequality in pay, promotion and employment has a significant impact on the work life balance of women.

As per the May 2010 issue of Harvard Business Review article, 45% of Indian women who participated in the study believe that they are treated unfairly in the workplace. This is the highest percentage amongst the BRIC countries and the UAE. (Hewlett, Ann Sylvia & Rashid, Ripa, May 2010)

Men too face a competitive work culture in a routine office scenario, but the demands placed on a woman are more, as "Being There" in the moments that matter in family as well as work life pushes them to the brink. It demands a lot of juggling, without dropping the balls (Kang, K , Sonia et al, 2019). Women naturally struggle more because of the multitude of characters they need to play with lots of family commitments like childbearing, rearing which act as bottlenecks for women's career growth and work-life balance.

Although 85% of the Indian women who participated in the above cited study consider themselves ambitious, many end up compromising their professional life due to societal and family pressures.

If change begins in a micro level at home, as well as at the macro level across organizations pertaining to gender stereotypes / bias, the future will be promising and rewarding.

Introducing and endorsing employee centric policies, reducing pay gap and promoting women to break the glass ceiling will help in establishing a vivid pathway for the future generations.

To recapitulate, an agile work environment with flexibility is crucial to success.

Organizations do benefit adopting an employee centric approach

With the change in work environment due to globalization, the work force has also evolved a lot. Employees have stepped up from fulfilling the basic needs' zone to the self- actualization sphere. The millennial worker demands more than just hikes and promotions, as they have a wider vision of the changes occurring globally.

To cope-up with the demand of the modern workforce, Indian employers / organizations have to make a transition from a conventional mindset / work atmosphere with a futuristic outlook to attract a millennial employee. Embracing and even lionizing an employee as a holistic individual who has multiple roles to play will surely help in the long run. (Friedman, D. Stewart et al – HBR, 1998)

This approach has multiple benefits. To name a few - Strong organizational commitment

An employee's commitment towards the organization is the key in determining whether one will continue or discontinue the service. A highly committed employee drives himself and the organization to achieve the personal as well as organizational goals and values.(De-Luis-C. Pilar et al, 2004)- Trust building

Employees should be considered as internal customers. It is crucial to understand that, to win the market place the organization has to first win the work place. Trust helps in enhanced performance and makes the employee happier. Happy employees are the most productive employees.- Improved QLW and reduced occupational stress

While some amount of good stress or eustress is good for increasing productivity, chronic stress or distress can lead to many health hazards. It is considered as one of the major risks as it depletes both the physical and psychological energy levels, and also increases mental fatigue.

As per Hammer L.B., et al, work and personal life conflict is the major stressor for an employee, as anxieties from the home and personal space flip into work. As per a study conducted by Cohen, et al., chronic stress, can also cause conditions like hypertension and decrease in immune response, as there is a prolonged fight or flight response.

Helping the individual to overcome stress by assisting in balancing work and personal life will result in overall well being of the employee and reduce absenteeism due to illness. Fostering employee friendly work atmosphere and policies is vital in reducing the employee turnover.

The above strategies may help in branding the employer as employee-friendly which in turn interests the talent pool, in the current warfare of talent.

Best practices for striking a perfect work-life balance:

Stephen Covey's concept of prioritizing the tasks will help in managing the tasks at work effectively, paying back the much-needed family time.

Being busy and being productive are two different things. The key is not to prioritize what's on the schedule, but to schedule the priorities.

A few strategies suggested by Stephen Covey and the HBR which can be adopted at a personal level to mitigate the challenges at work and effectively manage the WLB and reduce stress.

Boundaries need to be set on the workload and time:

Learn to draw a clear line between work and family life. It might be tempting to work an extra hour to complete a project charter or address a business email, but reflecting whether the task is extra important than sharing the dinner table with family can help in making the right decision. Schedule a no screen time at a specific time of your night which can discipline your routine.

Prioritize and Learn to Say No:

Acquire the art of politely saying 'No'. Saying No to unproductive extra tasks can help in saving your time and focus on what is actually important. The 90-10 rule advocates 10% of your effective and impactful work will account for 90% of the final results. Prioritize the tasks and structure the work load in the quadrant of urgent, important, non-urgent and non-important.

Understanding the practicalities and defining your identity:

Time cannot be controlled, it can only be managed. Understanding the practicality that one cannot be 100% perfect in all aspects and visualizing a thought of '20 plus years from now' (Dowling, Daisy, HBR, July-August 2019) will help in reducing the overwhelming feel and having the sense of accomplishment in whatever you do. Encounter your urge for perfectionism.

'Recasting' yourself (Dowling, Daisy, HBR, July-August 2019) – This perspective helps in defining your identity. Identify yourself as what you want to be known, a doting mother, an ambitious marketing manager or both.

Communication is the human connection:

Candid, open and honest communication is the key to success. Informal conversations with your co-workers and even your boss can help in a personal connection and building a support network. Congenial work atmosphere in a team helps each other mutually in hours of need. Communicating that you need to step out for an hour for your child's parent's teachers meeting and at the end of the meeting, you will be completing the budget workings will help rather than just saying you will be out of office for an hour.

Also making your family members and children aware, about your nature of job and demands of work can reduce the over expectations and also help in sharing the responsibilities.

Health – Keep your vitality:

Health is defined as the complete well-being of an individual – physically, mentally and emotionally. The Happiness quotient of your life basically lies on your health. A healthy body is your precious possession, so take good care of it, as there is no replacement guaranteed. Rewire yourself by taking a vacation break from work, at least once a year with your family. Eat healthy, Be physically active, Rest adequately and practice gratitude. Be thankful for the best things which had happened to you. Practice mindfulness and tame your mind to remain calm. Health is the primary and most crucial aspect in managing your family and work as well, efficaciously.

Technology:

Some major breakthroughs in technology which is being adopted in the recent years and are used extensively are listed below:

Cloud Technology helps us coordinate, collaborate and innovate better across time zones in real time at our convenience.

Also, Technology with better environmental control helps in keeping our employees with a better sense of wellbeing.

Work & Personal Apps have simplified and revolutionized the way we conduct our lives helping us prioritize tasks.

Working from home / remote locations with the advent of VPN and paperless offices has definitely enabled us have better control on work-life balance.

Technology places all employees on the same platform and this uniformity is to everyone's advantage as it makes better sense for everyone involved.

Better and seamless connections brings in more transparency and accountability.

II. CONCLUSION

To sum up, it is high time the organizations in India identify and develop a mindfulness towards Work-Life Balance of employees as a compelling business case. The workplace has evolved, the scope of work is extending, the work schema should also transform to cope up with the changes and it is inevitable to succeed in the war for talent. Profound changes in technology have brought in a revolution in both personal and professional lives that they can't be undone. Technology is neither good nor bad and acts as a double-edged sword. When used in the right way it can help us control our lives, make ourselves more independent and when used otherwise allows us to be controlled and enslaved.

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