

Work–life balance in Indian Context: A Conceptual Review

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Abstract: The present paper is an attempt to revisit the concept of work-life balance in Indian context. An effort is made to analyse and understand the work-life balance through literature review and conceptualize a framework of it. This paper highlights the progress of work-life interface as work-family affair to more comprehensive and evolutionary terms balancing family life through different means. Gone are those days when people simply needed more time for their families in order to have work -life balance. In Indian context workforce's work-life balance issue needs to be studied differently, as the Indians have some unique traits than that of western people. The efforts of Indian Government and companies towards work life balance are highlighted and the benefits of work life balance is acknowledged. 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)

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I. Introduction

In recent years the concept of work – life balance has gained immense popularity in India as employers have realized that employees work life, personal and family life make conflicting demands on each other. There are various factors which have enhanced the importance of work – life balance. Enhanced competition due to globalization have forced companies to adopt long working hour's culture leading to work pressure and intensification of work for employees. On the other hand breakdown of the old joint family structure and increase in number of working women in the market have majorly impacted the need for work – life balance policies in the Indian context. At the same time the social fabric of the nation has changed over the years and now we can witness a rise in the number of divorce cases and single parent's in almost all metro cities and small cities. In addition, there has been a rise in the number of working mothers and dual working couples in the economy in order to fulfil the demands of better life-style.

Primarily work – life balance is concerned with the working time of employees and how, long working hours impact the personal and family lives of employees. According to Green (2006) the total hours worked by households in comparison to increase in number of hours worked by an individual has given rise to work – life imbalance and people are feeling time constrained as they cannot balance their work and non-work activities. Work pressure often made employees anxious and they found themselves to worry and think about work situations even beyond working hours.

This creates stressful situations for the employees where they are not able to devote adequate time and energy to either work or their home and family life. In some cases the work as well as the home / family / personal lives of the employees take a beating as a result of their inability to manage work pressure with family or personal responsibilities.

The result of dissatisfaction emerging from the work – life conflicts can affect both the personal and professional lives of individuals. Professionally the end product of work – life conflicts can be very harmful to both the organizations as well as the individuals and can be manifested as reduction in productivity, reduced motivation and organizational commitment, increased level of absenteeism, job dissatisfaction etc. Personally the work – life conflict could be emotionally devastating as it often results in inferior relationships with spouse and other family members; expectations of the spouses are become very high in the form of demand due to which it become very difficult to balance work as well as family life. Thus work life dissatisfaction leads to serious health conditions and lifestyle related health problems.

Some of the commonly used initiatives are flexible working opportunities like telecommuting, flexible working hours, job sharing, compressed work week, shift work, split shifts and work from home opportunities. In addition to this many organizations provide financial benefits like health insurance, subsidized meals, pick up and drop facilities to and from office, medical facilities and gym for exercise, overtime payment and night shift

allowance. Recently few banks in India have started working hours option and compressed work weeks option to enable employees spend time with their family and take care of home responsibilities.

The government of India has enacted many Laws for work life balance for the employees ie Factory Act 1948 for health, safety, working condition , provision of paid leaves, provision of crèches and limited working hours .Maternity Benefit Act 1961 made provisions for 24 weeks maternity leaves and Childcare leaves for the working women in any organisation.

II. Objectives of the study

- (i) To study the evolution and development of Work Life Balance in India
- (ii) To study the reasons behind the need of work life balance practices in India.
- (iii) To find out the benefits of Work life Balance benefits to the employer and employees
- (iv) To study initiatives taken by Government of India and companies
- (v) To study about the factors affecting WLB

III. Research methodology

The research paper attempts to focus on the conceptual aspects drawing inputs from secondary data using referred journals, research studies, magazines, newspaper articles, Government statistics, websites and internet

IV. Review of Literature

The literature review is categorised under the following themes as

- i) Evolution of work-life balance/conflict studies,
- ii) Theory and concept of WLB,
- iii) Consequences of work-life balance/conflict,
- iv) Individual strategies and organisational strategies/policies for maintaining work-life balance.

Historical Background / Evolution of the concept of WLB :

The work-leisure dichotomy was invented in the mid-1800s, as a result of industrial capitalism. In anthropology, a definition of happiness is to have as little separation as possible "between your work and your play." The expression "Work–life balance" was first used in the **United Kingdom in the late 1970s**. In the United States, this phrase was first used in 1986. (Source : http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Work%E2%80%93life_balance) The history of work-life balance begins in the latter half of the **19th century** when reformers successfully campaigned against long factory hours and were able to demonstrate that reductions in working hours had no impact upon levels of output. During the early part of the 20th century the campaign to reduce working hours continued through a series of pioneering studies that demonstrated the relationship between time spent at work and the level of output was a complex one. During the **1960s and 1970s**, though the term work-life balance had yet to be coined, a number of factors can be identified that eventually gave rise to the current policy mix. These included:

- Health and safety at work;
- International competitiveness;
- Equality; and
- The flexible labour market.

During the **1960s** the debate was very much about the extent to which paid overtime was “manufactured”, as explained below. The analysis focused upon informal work group organization and the joint regulation of working practices, within a framework of collective bargaining. The approach was at the heart of the report of the Royal Commission on Trades Unions and Employers Associations in the late 1960s. The analysis built on the productivity bargaining experiences of the previous decade. Productivity bargaining recognized that groups of manual workers often exercised unilateral informal control over many aspects of their working practices. Case after case revealed that the control included the regulation of working hours where overtime was paid at premium rates. Long overtime hours were often not necessary but “manufactured” to boost earnings. The consequence was a low productivity culture, associated with low hourly rates of pay and long hours of work. The answer was to negotiate new productivity packages, which included major changes in work organization and working practices – including flexible patterns of work organization –increasing basic rates of pay and curtailing overtime working.

The **1970s** proved to be a turning point brought about by a wide range of factors, such as increased international competition, changes in technology, new forms of organization, increased female participation, as well as changing and more diverse working-time needs of individuals. It was during the 1970s that regulation also began to recognize the importance of equality with the introduction of the Equal Pay Act in 1976. Since then issues relating to social equity and justice have multiplied and become more prominent and explicit.

During the **1980s** the political focus was very much upon liberalizing the economy, including the labour market. At the heart of labour market reform was the introduction of more flexible patterns of work – frequently referred to as “atypical forms of employment”(increased temporary/fixed-term employment, *etc.*). This took place at a time of a major structural shift in the labour market with employment moving from the production to the service sector, which tended to favour female employment at the time. The introduction of more flexible forms of work was an important strand in improving labour supply because it potentially allowed groups of individuals otherwise unable to enter the labour market the opportunity to do so. It was only during the **1990s**, especially the latter half of the decade, that Government began to play a more interventionist role to give employees (and potential employees) certain rights with respect to establishing a work-life balance that suited them.

Most people think of only one notion relating work and life: the work-life balance notion. We need to know that the relationship has been evolving over time.

Concept of Work Life Balance

The term ‘work-life balance’ is most frequently used to describe the equilibrium between responsibilities at work and responsibilities outside paid work; having a work-life balance means that this equilibrium is in the right position for the individual concerned. There is no one-size-fits-all definition for work-life balance. For some people it means spending more time in paid work and less time at home, while for others it means ensuring that work in running the business does not encroach on time needed for other responsibilities.

Work-life balance is a form of metaphor; but a metaphor of what? In the English language “balance” is a complex word with a variety of meanings. As a noun, a balance is a set of scales, a weighing apparatus; it is also the regulating gear in clocks. If we use the scales, then balance occurs when there is “an equal distribution of weight or amount” but this presents problems for work-life balance since both sides may be very heavy or very light. Furthermore, the type of work-life balance sought by many may not imply equal weight on both sides. However balance also has a physical and psychological meaning as “stability of body or mind” so that suicide is sometimes officially recorded as taking one’s life “while the balance of the mind was disturbed”.

Work-life balance is a broad concept including proper prioritizing between career and ambition on one hand, compared with pleasure, leisure, family and spiritual development on the other. Work/Life Balance is a state of equilibrium in which the demands of both a person’s job and personal life are equal. Work-life balance is a concept that supports the efforts of employees to split their time and energy between work and the other important aspects of their lives. Work life balance is a daily effort to make time for family, friends, community participation, spirituality, personal growth, self-care, and other personal activities, in addition to the demands of the workplace.

Work Life Balance consists of the implementation of working arrangements and policies, which assist workers in combining employment with other aspects of their lives.

Work life imbalance needs to address the work - life imbalance in the lives of the women work force. The society over the years has recognized women's need to legal and financial independence. Women work force now constitutes a significant percentage of the total work force in any organization today.

The concept of work-life balance is based on the notion that paid work and personal life should be seen less as competing priorities than as complementary elements of a full life. The way to achieve this is to adopt an approach that is “conceptualized as a two way process involving a consideration of the needs of employees as well as those of employers.

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. The direction 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, & Uen 2005; 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 than 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), Loscocco (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), organisational 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

In general work – life balance of individuals can be understood from the number of hours of work put in by them. However always it is not so as many individuals consider autonomy in deciding their working hours, control and choice of work schedules and their being able to match their work patterns with their own life stage and specific life style as a major deciding factor for creating balance in their life. Therefore even though a

number of work – life initiatives are available for employees, their choice of the best initiative suitable for them varies over time, age, stages of career and other factors which may turn out to become significant at different phases of an individual's life.

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).

Statutory Provisions in India:

As per Baral and Bhargava (2011) apart from the initiatives and benefits adopted by the organizations there are certain statutory benefits allowed under the various acts of India which enables the employees to manage successfully their work – life balance. They are as follows:

- a) **As per The Factories Act, 1948** the working hours of adult workers should not exceed 48 hours a week or 9 hours per day.
- b) **As per The Factories Act, 1948** no women and adolescent workers are allowed to work in the evening and night from 7 pm to 6 am.
- c) **Workers as per The Factories Act, 1948** should be given one day in a week as weekly holiday so that they do not work for ten consecutive days. In situations where the worker has to work on a holiday, he or she will be entitled to a compensatory leave on some other day.
- d) **The Factories Act, 1948** also makes provisions for crèches in factories where more than thirty women employees are employed so that the mothers can take care of their young children and maintain a good work – life balance. e) The Factories Act, 1948, the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946 and Employee State Insurance Act. 1948 provides for different kinds of statutory benefits to the employees.
- e) **leave provisions for the employees.** These leaves are earned leaves, casual leaves, sick leaves and compensatory leaves.
- f) **The ESI Act, 1948** provides health coverage for employees who are earning below a specific income level. Cash benefits are paid for the period of sickness, cash benefits are also paid to women employees who have suffered miscarriage, have been sick due to pregnancy or miscarriage or have medically terminated their pregnancy.

BENEFITS of WLB to the employers:-

Followings are the benefits that are being researched by various academicians and researchers. Work-life balance practices

- Reduced staff turnover (Lobel&Kossek, 1996)
- Lower recruitment and training costs, due to decreased turnover
- Reduced absenteeism due to higher levels of well being
- Gaining a reputation as a good employer or an employer of choice
- Improved recruitment and retention rates(allen, 2001; Anderson, Coffey & Byerly,2002; Honeycut&Rosen 1997; Konard& Mangal,2002; Kosssek & Ozeki 1998

- Reduced stress levels amongst staff (Thompson & protas, 2006)
- Improved morale and job satisfaction
- Greater staff loyalty and commitment
- Improved productivity (Sands & Harpper, 2007)
- Reduced absenteeism (Dex & Scheibl, 1999; Lobel & Kossek, 1996; Osterman, 1995; Thompson, Beauvais & Lyness, 1999)

Benefits of WLB to Employees:

- Being effectively manage multiple responsibilities at work, home and in the society without any stress (Thomas & Ganster, 1995)
- Reduced stress levels and higher levels of well being (Thompson & protas, 2006)
- Increased focus, motivation and job satisfaction (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998) knowing that family and work commitments are being met.
- Increased job security from the knowledge that an organization understands and supports workers with family responsibilities
- Increased employee engagement (Susi S, Jawaharrani K,

V. Discussion

The review of literature indicates the growth and development of the concept of work-life balance. There are a 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 from family domain has helped to manage the work obligations. The skill, knowledge and experience have enriched the employee's role in the other domain.

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.

VI. Conclusion

From the literature review, we can conclude that our Government has provided only few work-life balance policies for the employees working in various sectors. Our Government needs to revise its policies from time to time so that its employees will be able to get the benefits out of it. Many Private sector industries are adapting new policies for their employee's benefits. But there is a long way to go for both the private and the public sector in this field to provide their employees a good work life balance policies.

VII. Scope for Future Research

The researchers have still grey areas to investigate in the understanding of the concept of work-life balance. Most studies have been done on women employees in various sectors. However, work-life balance refers to both the genders and in all the sectors. There is a lot of scope to investigate work-life balance in officers of Armed forces, Central Government and public sectors with the lenses of their spouses. There is a considerable need and scope to conduct empirical studies in various sectors mentioned and to identify the possible solutions to minimise the work-life conflict. However, another important dimension to consider the updating of Laws and introducing new laws addressing the current work-life balance challenges of today. That will help the workforce and the employers to balance the challenges faced by them.

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