

WORK-LIFE BALANCE : REVISITED

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The professional and personal lives of employees in a business organisation shall be viewed as complementary rather than competing priorities. For, in case the employees neglect their personal and family needs in favour of business targets, the resulting disturbances at their personal and family levels in effect spill over to the workplace in the form of a lower productive efficiency. Thus it becomes imperative on the part of management to ensure a proper 'work-life balance' for their employees. Despite initial hurdles, the potential benefits of such an approach are likely to far outweigh its costs thereby benefiting the employees, management as well as the organisations concerned

The Genesis of the Problem: How the Imbalance between Professional and Personal Lives came about?

Traditionally speaking, workplace and personal life of employees of an organisation were believed to be competing priorities in a zero-sum game in as much as a trade-off was supposed to exist between the objectives of the organisation on the one hand and the personal lives of its employees on the other. Accordingly, it was presumed that the employees of an organisation could fulfil their work-related goals only at the cost of their personal lives be it their family life, social life, recreation, leisure and the like.

It was this misplaced belief that led to a poor 'Work-Life Balance' on the part of employees in various companies and business organisations across various countries and no one even recognised it as a serious problem at least till the early 1980s. That is to say, with a view to meeting ever increasing business targets, the employees of different organisations developed a tendency of neglecting their family lives, ignoring their personal comfort & rest, and even went ahead with sacrificing their social interactions, friendships, hobbies etc.' Such a short-sighted approach in turn developed a very unhealthy corporate culture characterised by cut-throat competition and 'overwork' on the part of management as well as workers becoming the order of the day.

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It is worth noting that over time, family economy has changed from 'the household production economy' to 'the breadwinner/homemaker economy' and finally to 'the working family economy' (Moen & Yu, 2000). Moreover, the percentage of single parent households has increased (Bianchi & Raley, 2003) and at the same time the percentage of dual career couples has also increased (Jacobs, 2003). Against the backdrop of these developments in the society, a few organisations even experimented with employing the spouses of some of their existing employees so that they could spend more time together at the workplace itself instead of going to their respective homes. Evidently, under such a scenario, the conventional notions of "5 Days Week" or "9 to 5" as the working hours lost their meaning and relevance. And as (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996) observe, with a view to integrating the two segregate poles of work and life, for some employees work had become home and home had become work. This meant that workers were putting long time at work place to avoid family time (Horsechild, 1994).

In other words, guided by the materialistic objective of somehow fulfilling the highly ambitious business targets, the family priorities and values were totally relegated to the backseat. The situation worsened to such an extent that in the case of many school-going children, none of the parents used to be available to participate in the meetings of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) or attend other functions of the school. In quite a few cases, the concerned schools had to manage the PTA meetings with the Grandparents of the concerned students and accordingly organised and celebrated 'Grandparents Day' as the parents of such students were too busy to participate in any social gathering or function of the school of their children. As if to justify this emerging and degenerated way of life, new concepts like **DINKs** i.e., 'Double Income, No Kids' came into being and started gaining social acceptability!

Implications of not maintaining Work-Life Balance

Going by the Indian culture and traditions, such a lifestyle whereby people become extremely materialistic and target-oriented to such an extent that they even ignore their personal and social responsibilities in the quest for higher and higher levels of profits is not acceptable on any count. For, it is clearly mentioned in our ancient scriptures that every human being has to repay three types of indebtedness viz., Dev Rin (Divine Debt), Rishi Rin (Sages Debt) and Pitri Rin (Parental Debt). What this essentially implies is that in order to sustain life and with a view to ensuring the smooth conduct of society from generation to generation, it is the moral responsibility of each and every human being to preserve and enrich the existing reservoir of knowledge as well as natural and human

resources for the subsequent generations. Evidently, the newly emerging notions such as 'DINKs' and the underlying materialistic tendencies of neglecting family values and responsibilities in favour of some unrealistically set business targets at the workplace clearly contradict with our ancient culture, heritage and philosophy.

Further, on closer examination we find that the overworked schedules (Barnett, Gareis, & Brennan, 1999; Gareis, Barnett, & Brennan, 2003) at the workplace also hinder the personal and spiritual development of employees in as much as they are unable to devote requisite time for their enjoyment, hobbies, personality development and self-actualisation (Frone, 2003; Rice, Frone, & McFarlin, 1992).

Side-by-side, the families of such employees have to bear the opportunity cost of their stressful lifestyle in terms of lack of proper care of children & elderly (Burkett 2000; Young 1999) as also lesser time being spent with relatives and friends. All these developments create tensions in the families of the concerned employees thereby having a dampening effect on their efficiency at the workplace. That is to say, *the disturbances generated at the family level on account of a poor work-life balance in effect spill over to the workplace in the form of a lower productive efficiency of the concerned employees of an organisation*. Grzywacz, Almeida, & McDonald (2002) have discussed the concept of Work-Family Spill-over. In another relevant study Perry-Jenkins, Repetti, & Crouter (2000) found behaviour of children getting impacted by work-life conflict of parents.

Still another fallout of such an imbalance between the work and personal lives of employees is a sharp decline in *productive efficiency* on account of numerous *physical and psychological disorders* faced by them as for instance, stress, tension, exhaustion, lack of appetite, blood-pressure, backache, cervical, neuroskeletal diseases etc. (Noor, 2003). The rise in the number of dual-earning families resulted in increased work-family conflict (Marchese, Bassham, & Ryan, 2002), where work interferes with family life and family-work conflict, where the family life interferes with the work life. There has been negative effect of these conflicts like poor physical health, depression and incidence of hypertension as well as heart disease (Hayne et al., 1984).

Thus it is amply clear that when employees are unable to establish a proper balance between the requirements of their workplace and personal lives, not only they and their families but even their organisations have to bear the brunt of it. To put it differently, *when work is stretched beyond the capacities of employees, not only their families but even their companies are bound to pay the price for it!*

