

Nuances of Work Life Balance - Women in Employment

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Abstract: The feminization of paid employment is a global reality leading to women power growing exponentially in all business activities, at present. Women have always played a pivotal role in society and faced a no. of critical situations resulting in stress and strain. Thus, it is important to enable them to adjust and avoid all adversities faced at work and home. Given this background it is imperative that a study on understanding the nuances of work life balance (WLB) of women in employment needs to be undertaken in order to gain insights into the adjustments they will have to make & the conflicts they may undergo trying to balance their work and non-work responsibilities. Besides, the scenario of more women in employment and the awareness and changing landscape of WLB has led to generating a great deal of interest on the said subject.

WLB matters for all and more so, for women employees who constantly juggle family life and work life especially in the Indian context. Most women work not by choice or chance but by compulsions of survival and the need to make life more comfortable for themselves and their families and thus, achieving WLB is a necessity for working women to have a good quality of life. Women need to devote some time at least to all quadrants of their life and not neglect even one, be it family & friends, work & career or leisure and self-time. WLB is a genuine attempt made to schedule equal or more or less equal time for each of the various activities on the work & home front. Interestingly, WLB varies on a daily basis and from person to person and from time to time. Striking the right balance is easier said than done as there is no perfect one-size fits all to strive for in the WLB area.

The study attempts to understand the nuances of WLB of women in employment and the changing scenario regarding WL Bin organizations employing women. It is based on secondary data and utilizes the vast information available in Books, Journals, Magazines and Websites. The three sixty degree angle is utilized to obtain a multiple perspective on the subject and all inferences are drawn based on the secondary data. The present study is a precursor for the empirical investigation that the researcher plans to take up on the topic in the near future in order to arrive at all findings, first hand.

Key Words: Work Life Balance; Work Life Quadrants; Leisure Time & Self Time

I. INTRODUCTION

Work life balance is important for all employees but more so for women as they have dual roles to play in the modern society; one is the familial role and the other is the career focused role. Women are required to spread their energy and efforts among these two key areas of importance and as a family person she is the nurturer and care giver while

her career role calls her to be the bread winner and financially pitch in her mite to the family's repository. As is known, at present, burnout is common among working women in the big cities as a result of long hours of work without much rest or respite. A burnout occurs when one is not in control and cannot manage to strike a balance between one's personal and professional life. Many a time, what one does to attain pre-set goals, be it on the personal or the professional front, may not necessarily resonate with the person for various reasons resulting in a burnout. In the wake of frequent burnouts occurring in the lives of working women Work Life Balance (WLB) becomes an important aspect in order to create an equilibrium wherein both professional and personal life are in harmony.

II. WORK LIFE BALANCE MOVING TOWARDS WORK LIFE INTEGRATION

Today, life has become work and work has become life for many people, more so in the big cities. Invariably the demarcation between the two has almost disappeared or has been erased merging one with the other. Given this, the term Work Life Integration (WLI) is often used instead of Work Life Balance (WLB) at present because the term WLB evokes a "**Binary Opposition**" between work and life. The traditional image with reference to WLB creates a sense of competition between the two quadrants which is not what is aimed for... WLI, as an approach helps create synergies between all the areas that define "Life" be it home& family, career & work, leisure & self-time, community & social activities, health & wellness, personal care and so on. Interestingly, more and more organizations all across the globe have begun to realize this and hence are moving from the concept of Work Life Balance to Work Life Integration.

Women, Work and Family

The feminization of employment is one of the most impressive developments of modernization in the last few decades (Beck, 1986, Rubery et al., 1999). Women have proved their mettle in the areas of education and employment. With the trend of more employed women, came the issue of WLB because of the stress associated with full time employment of women. Unfortunately, work life balance stress is experienced mostly by women as they have to tend to family, care for children and elderly and handle domestic chores in addition to managing a career successfully leading

to physical and psychological strain on the personal and professional front. Most women feel that they have too much to do and that they have many tasks that they would have preferred to get rid of either at home or work. Typical tasks they would have preferred to be relieved of include tasks like cooking, cleaning and other routine household work, not necessarily because they find them boring, but because they see that this would give them more time for focusing on other priorities in a highly competitive work environment. Women in particular have reported stress related conflict between work and family according to the survey conducted by National Life Insurance Company (Clark C.S.) Interestingly, most women say that their jobs are highly stressful. As a result, long leave for rest and recovery and even giving up their jobs are very common amongst women employees, with loss of talent to the industry.

Women in Employment

More women work today than ever before, representing a worldwide increase of nearly 200 million women in employment. The upward trend in the service sector employment is also a dominant feature of the Indian economy. It offers equal opportunities for men as well as women and statistics suggest that more women are employed in services than men in majority of the other countries as well. During the last decade, the participation of women in the labor market, i.e., paid work has increased all over the world. The level of economic development, industrialization, demographic and cultural factors have all played a key role in determining the degree of feminization of the work force. Stronger participation of women in paid work is also driven by the changing aspirations of women in addition to the perceptions that have also changed with regard to women's role in society and their priorities in life, besides the fact that more and more women are seeking higher education than ever before.

The service sector is a source of employment for many women in developing countries with the health and education sectors relying heavily on female labor, both in low and high skilled work (Joeke 1995). New jobs are also being created in the information based industry and financial sector. Women in India, with domain expertise in verticals such as IT, Banking, and Hospitality are doing very well in this space. Women are taking advantage of the new employment opportunities offered in the service sector due to premium given to formal education and training. Interestingly, though the education level of women is on the rise, they are still under-represented in the science and technical areas. To achieve WLB, one must identify personal and career goals and constantly re-evaluate them to come up with more purposeful goals matching both, time & situations. WLB will impact one's work and home environment and if the right balance can be struck then it augurs well for the individual and the organization.

Impact of Work on Home and Home on Work for Women in Employment

A link between work and home and vice-versa has always been there although many believe that work and life are separate. Whatever the case, some kind of balance between the two spheres is required. *Life turns out to be imbalanced when a woman starts worrying about work issues at home and life & family issues at work.* The work hours in almost all sectors of the economy is an average of 9 hours, which makes it difficult for women to strike a balance between work, home and family. Many times, women feel that their work makes them too tired to do things that need attention at home and reduces the effort needed for home activities. Similarly responsibility at home reduces the efforts that can be devoted to important work matters in the organization. Personal and family problems can distract one at work resulting in stress and lack of sleep which can cause problems overall. Women have to tackle mobility issues, elderly and child care issues besides attending social calls and doing all the domestic chores with little or no support coming from other family members. In India, women are considered primary care givers and organizers of the home life sphere and thus, many women put their families ahead of their career, although work and career are a central part of their lives as much as home and family.

Stress and Women

It is common knowledge that women are busier and more stressed as compared to men as they have to juggle more roles and are in a constant rush most of the time. Is this just a perception or otherwise? Results of a study conducted by the researchers of the University of Arizona's school of family & consumer resources showed that indeed women show a higher level of distress than men and also react differently to stress and stress related factors. It is said that woman stress is frequent and constant. Stress can be caused by both work related factors and home or family related factors and many women experience difficulties juggling their work responsibilities with their home responsibilities. By implementing a WLB strategy employers can help to reduce stress and cope up, in their women employees. This can lead to a more motivated and loyal workforce, increased productivity, reduced absenteeism and turnover besides being good for public relations.

III. NEED FOR THE STUDY

Over the past two decades there has been a substantial increase in the no. of jobs for women seeking employment. Advancements in technology and an increasingly competitive work environment has paved way for focus on the impact of long work hours on the physical and mental health of employees particularly when women employees are taken into consideration. New standards are getting set for hours at work in order to move ahead. Little time is left to be divided up for nurturing relationships, spending quality time with kids and other family members, enjoying leisure time and sleep.

Increase in work hours means less time to spend with family, friends, community as well as pursuing activities that one

enjoys. The ***Alpha Time*** in one's life is very important as also taking time off to grow personally and spiritually. However healthy a woman employee is, working beyond one's capacity will lead to more harm than good in the long run and a dysfunctional biological system leads to several problems.

WLB is different for each woman because every woman will have a different set of priorities. In simple words, life is dynamic and takes its own twists and turns without any prior notice. However, at the core of one's life one must integrate all components of life in a way that fits their needs and provides them control over managing well the boundaries of work and personal life.

Objectives of the Study - The dual objectives of the research study are –

- To understand the nuances of WLB of Women in employment.
- To tap and analyze the different issues of WLB of Women in employment.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The Study is based on secondary data. Inferences are based on the various research papers, reports, websites and other resources available on the theme in question.

Review of reviews-

The new age women, who are in employment are professionals to the core. They are very much aware that they must commit to continuous learning and development and invest in requisite skill building activities in order to achieve success at the work place. Interestingly, women employees are also aware of the responsibilities on their shoulders at home and that of the family constituting elders and young children. The literature review emphatically suggests that WLB is important for majority of the women in employment and that they want to make the best of both worlds despite the hardships and challenges encountered and the highly competitive nature of the business environment.

The review also reveals that WLB can be a source of support to ensure productivity, commitment and loyalty to the organization besides health and wellness for the individual employee. A vital factor which has brought WLB issues under the spotlight is the huge scale of technological innovations leading to work and life differences that has blurred as a result of boundary less virtual organizations and the unique mobile technologies. Employees have seen flexible approaches to work without being physically present in office thus ensuring to some extent the WLB, but what needs to be understood is the way they are going to allocate time to each quadrant of their life and succeed in maintaining WLB.

V. THE GENESIS OF WORK LIFE BALANCE

WLB has entered everyday discourse as a way to articulate the conflicts and dilemmas raised by changing work patterns

and life choices. Many women employees are experiencing burnout due to overwork and stress. This condition is observed in almost all occupations irrespective of level of management. Employee assistance professionals state that there are many causes for this situation ranging from personal ambition to the pressure of family obligations to the accelerating pace of technology.

The term Work life Balance was initially used to explain unhealthy choices made by employees choosing to neglect important areas of their lives such as family, friends, hobbies and other leisure activities in favor of work-related goals and duties. Intense competition, heavy workload and a highly competitive work environment led to women employees drowning in work with little or no time to devote to other non-work activities. Less worth and value attached to non-work responsibilities, family and relationships led to promoting the overwork culture and workaholics who did not know how to relax. According to Madeleine Bunting in her book "Willing Slaves" – How the Overwork culture is ruling our lives: Americans working full-time have increased their work hours and are experiencing burn-out and increased stress. In nearly all occupations from blue-collar workers to the echelons of upper-management there is evidence of an unhealthy WLB.

What is Work/life balance? What does it really mean and does it mean the same to all?

According to Jim Bird, CEO of WLB.com - It is the meaningful achievement & enjoyment in everyday life.

Work Life Balance Defined

"Working practices that acknowledge and aim to support the needs of staff in achieving a balance between their homes and working lives" - Health Education Board For Scotland (HEBS) 2002

A balanced life is one where there is a spread of energy and efforts - emotional, intellectual, imaginative, spiritual and physical between key areas of importance in life. The neglect of one or more areas or anchor points, may threaten the vitality of the whole. WLB is a state of equilibrium in which the demands of both a person's job and personal life are in balance without affecting one another adversely.

A good working definition of WLB - Meaningful daily achievement and enjoyment in each of the life quadrants – Work, Family, Friends and Self-time. In simple words, WLB is a method of staying in balance every day and giving quality time to relationships – at work, at home with family & friends and most importantly to your own self.

Definitions overlap and with each passing day, the definition of WLB continues to evolve. Despite a world-wide quest for WLB, very few have found an acceptable definition of this concept. The meaning of WLB has "***Chameleon***" characteristics and means different things to different people and groups. There is no perfect one-size fits all - WLB. The best WLB is different for each individual because of different priorities and the life that each individual lives. The right

balance also varies time to time - when single, married, married with children and when one has started a new career or is in mid-career stage or on the verge of retirement.

Factors Influencing Work-life Balance

Over the past decade or two there have been considerable demographic changes which have influenced working patterns & practices, be it in the manufacturing or the service sector. Some of the key factors that influence WLB are as follows –

- Ever increasing no. of women taking up paid employment
- Women back to employment after childbirth.
- Increasing incidence of single parent families.
- Trend of late marriages & starting a family.
- Increasing childcare and eldercare responsibilities
- Long work hours and competitive work environment
- Increasing commute time.
- Technological advancements

Promoting Work Life Balance

Organizations can encourage WLB for their women employees, both in terms of the policies formulated and implemented, so as to enable managers take active steps and encourage women employees take advantage of all these WLB policies. Employees opting for flexible work schemes must be encouraged to plan out their work pattern to accommodate all personal commitments, thereby reducing conflict between professional and personal responsibilities. Management must encourage employees to utilize annual leave to go on vacations with family & friends and also help employees to set boundaries in case of work hours and non-work hours and not respond to work related discussions, mails & calls during non-working hours. Organizations must implement health & wellness programs for stress management etc. It can also help in connecting employees with physicians, mental health counselors and set up meditation centers, indoor sports units and on-site gyms to maintain health and fitness. Satisfaction in personal life and their ability to meet personal commitments greatly affects employee effectiveness at the work place and hence helping employees have good WLB becomes vital for employers. An organization that recognizes the benefits of good WLB policies and promotes it aggressively will surely enhance workforce productivity besides experiencing better employee retention rates and decrease in high costs associated with absenteeism and turnover.

VI. PRACTICES TO SUPPORT WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN ORGANIZATIONS

As of today, working women are wholly consumed by work and family & personal responsibilities with little or no time devoted to personal interests and self-time / self-care. Proactive employers across sectors offer a bouquet of initiatives to discourage workaholic and other detrimental behaviors which create imbalanced life styles in employees. Practices influencing WLB must integrate social practices,

family practices, ethnic practices and organizational practices to be termed healthy and forward looking. Organizations are recognizing the importance of WLB in an effort to increase productivity and creativity of their employees but also to help them lead “Meaningful” lives. WLB policies and working practices of organizations must include the following:

- Policies that encourage flexible and innovative working practices, wherever and whenever possible. Ex. Flexi-time, staggered hours, job sharing, term-time hours, compressed week/hours and part-time work.
- Leave facilities. Ex. Special leave for all kinds of emergencies
- Employee support services Ex. Employee counseling, Day care & Crèche facilities
- On Demand Vacation time to coincide with family vacations and Annual vacations; Leave travel concessions.
- Employee Training and Development. Ex. All Objectives and Appraisals must consider WLB initiatives undertaken by employee.
- Set up in-house gyms, sports units, yoga and meditation centers etc. to encourage employee health and wellness.
- Encourage social gatherings with families of employees to spend quality time as well as promote camaraderie amongst peers and their families.

Work Life Balance Outcomes

The consequences of WLB are very many and associated with numerous aspects such as firm productivity, loyalty & commitment, organizational citizenship, job performance & satisfaction, retention strategy, stress, health and wellness, life satisfaction and career progression. Research studies on WLB suggest positive relationship between WLB and job satisfaction and firm productivity whereas negative relationship exists between WLB and intention to quit the job/organization, stress related issues, health and wellness. However, all the relationships were moderated by family harmony and conducive work place. A supportive family and good work environment led to better WLB in turn enhancing organizational effectiveness and efficiency thus proving that WLB brings in beneficial outcomes for both employees and employers.

VII. KEY INFERENCES

. WLB matters for all employees but more so for women who are assigned to play multiple roles and juggle home & work responsibilities when in employment.

- WLB matters to all employees irrespective of marital status.
- WLB differs from person to person and time to time.
- The growing proportion of women in employment is a key factor in favor of WLB.
- The concept of family has since broadened in the last two decades to cover extended families, shared

parenting, multiple relationships and a range of social networks and communities.

- There is a growing demand to encounter and fulfill all WLB issues with flexible work approaches across a wide variety of jobs.
- Flexible work or home working is going to be the new mantra of the future.
- The WLB theory now integrates work with all other aspects of life including health & wellness with ample emphasis laid on self-time and leisure time.
- Organizational support is the key to achieving WLB for employees irrespective of gender.
- It is observed that the outcomes of WLB are of utmost benefit to both employees and organizations.
- WLB is key for employee engagement and as a retention strategy to retain talented employees for a long time
- Stress, burn-out and poor physical & mental health were high in employees lacking WLB.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The influx of women in paid employment jumpstarted a lot of research on the subject as to how women employees need to successfully manage home and hearth while pursuing full time employment. Women had to juggle between home and office and be productive at both places. At the present, organizations have become empathetic and begun to realize the importance of maintaining a healthy WLB for their women employees by creating women employee friendly climate & culture and also designing policies that support the WLB initiative. Women in general report experiencing poor WLB irrespective of the work they are involved in and the sector they are a part of WLB matters to all irrespective of gender but women need it much more as they play multiple roles in society with family, home & career orientation. WLB must signify striking a good balance in all work and non - work facets of life. By achieving the right work life balance women employees tend to enjoy better job and life satisfaction and exhibit favorable work behaviours such as lower turnover and absenteeism leading to better productivity in the organization.

A poor balance between work life and personal life affects employees and the organizations that they are employed in. Employee stress can lead to burnout, resulting in decline in productivity at the workplace besides many stress related health problems and absenteeism all of which can prove costly to the organization. In addition employees could also experience poor personal and peer relationships and lack of job satisfaction. Life goals change with time so also WLB

issues. Hence, one must identify personal and career goals and constantly keep reviewing and re-examining them. A good WLB strategy must be worked upon to facilitate both non-work and work aspects for all women employees. Peace, Happiness and Satisfaction will impact both work and home environment and thus, WLB is important to one and all, more so for women in employment.

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