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## **A Study on Work-Life Balance, Life Satisfaction, and Employee Well-Being**

Dr.M.Nagabhaskar , Associate Professor, Department of MBA,  
Malla Reddy Engineering College(A),Main Campus, Hyderabad.

Ms.Dharani Bodhana, Assistant Professor, Department of MBA,  
Malla Reddy Engineering College(A),Main Campus, Hyderabad

Dr.BVL Sudheer. Chaluvadi, Associate Professor, Department of MBA,  
Malla Reddy Engineering College(A), Main Campus, Hyderabad

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### **Abstract:**

The purpose of this paper is to comprehensively study the developing concept of employee well being, their satisfaction and the balance between work and life of employee.. The paper reviews the concept of work life balance in both Indian and global context and analyses the practices of Indian Corporate related to work life balance. The researchers have tried to understand and explain the concept of employee wellbeing and its relationship with their job satisfaction and work life balance which enables the corporate to derive benefits related with higher retention and productivity ratios. Authors have done descriptive research while analyzing the data gathered through secondary sources and discussed their viewpoints. The key findings highlight that employees are an asset to an organization and the organizations which help their employees to achieve greater work life balance have more satisfied employees. This is a fairly original paper which discusses concept and practices related with work life balance.

### **Key Words:**

Employee Satisfaction, Work Life Balance, Employee Well Being, Flexi Timings, Compressed Work Hours and Tele Computing.

### **Introduction:**

Well-Being and Life satisfaction of an employee, as a concept has gained popularity and has become strategically important for the organizations globally in recent times. Just like the monetary benefits offered by the organization, the work-life balance programs have also become a desirable parameter for job seekers. The present workforce believes in examining the organization's effort in the context of their overall well-being and life satisfaction and this has become the determining factor for the firm's ability to attract, retain and manage talent. Thus, we see a paradigm shift from the situation when the well-being and life satisfaction was seen

as employee's concern. Today, the focus has shifted to looking at the life of an employee holistically as a means to enhancing organisational effectiveness and retention. Organizations are keen to adopt a more evolved perspective to create workplaces in such a way that it is desirable for both employee and employer. This is done through various work-life balance programs aimed at well-being and life satisfaction of an employee as it is reported to be directly affecting key organisational outcomes like productivity. Companies like Procter & Gamble provide allowances for a family vacation, option to telecommute once every week, recreational allowances – gym & club memberships, annual complete health check-ups and also personal diet, psychological consultation sessions with counselors as some of the mechanisms focused towards employee well-being and life satisfaction.

First, let us conceptually understand Well-Being and Life Satisfaction. Well-being in general is seen as life well lived. It is a broader concept which refers to overall individual's life both on and off job (Diener, 1984). It encompasses both the relative presence of positive emotional state and relative absence of negative emotions and is easily influenced by environmental events.

### **Conceptual Background:**

It helps to examine the concept of Quality of Work-Life at this juncture. Quality of Work Life (QWL) simply can be understood as the favourableness of the work environment for both the health of an organization and employee. In other words, it refers to the quality-of-life individual's lead at their work which refers to their economic, social or psychological aspects of work environment like working conditions, welfare facilities, growth and career prospects, empowerment, caring supervisor and job security to name a few. Thus, QWL is representative of such aspects of life of an individual at work which have an impact of his/her ability to perform other life roles such as that of a parent, spouse or sibling. It similarly assumes that the personal life also impacts QWL. It encourages organisational practices that emphasize mechanisms for reduction of stress and developing better labour management relationships and are seen to give a perception to its members about the organization being supportive and caring in the process ensuring that the employee is productive and stays longer with the organization. The genesis of this concept can be traced back to the 1950's when there were poor conditions of work and later on to the period of classical job design where employees

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Were assigned specialized tasks with narrow job responsibilities, repetitive in nature. However, this division of labour isolated the workers and monotonous nature of work also resulted in higher level of dissatisfaction. This resulted in a conflict where the workers wanted to change their conditions but the organization failed to respond positively. As the workers became more educated, aware and gained more exposure due to globalization, their expectations also changed. Thus, organizations had no choice but to respond to the changing needs of the employees, redesign jobs to incorporate attributes desired by them and also create work environment supportive of such changes further humanizing the work environment and improving the Quality of Life at Work (Newstrom,2008).The modern day approach to the Quality of Work-Life was simulated through organization's efforts to reduce turnover, absenteeism and increase organisational effectiveness, productivity to enable the organization to gain a competitive edge in the business environment. With growing focus on cost effectiveness and maximizing productivity, it has become imperative for organisations to maximize the efficiency of their workforce by motivating them to give their best and ensuring that they stick with the organization. More so as turnover has a huge cost linked to it which can be detrimental for the organization in the long run. Organisations know that productivity and performance suffers when employees are emotionally exhausted and unable to cope up with both work and family pressures.

### **A Global Perspective :**

The importance of this concept is further accentuated in the wake of the uncertainty looming in our current economic environment which has become an inevitable part of the business landscape. In past few decades, we have witnessed receding global boundaries with respect to the business environment resulting in significant changes in the workforce demographics. Today, organizations are multicultural, multigenerational, diverse, gender inclusive and internationally mobile. Globalization has been the prime reason for this changing nature of workforce as it has opened up new avenues and broadened horizon for people with diverse origin. There has also been a change in the nature of work. The traditional work model characterized by stability and long term commitment with an organization is replaced by a new short-term contract which reflects job insecurity and lack of loyalty towards the organization. Such environmental changes are seen to have a profound effect on both the socio-cultural and psychological aspects of the workforce. The changing business environment along with a high performance driven work culture has lead to rising occupational stress and impaired overall

well-being of the employee. It results in conflict between the employee's personal value system driven by an individual's culture and the societal value system dominating the workplace directly influences the well-being of the employee. In global organizations, employees experience loss of family cohesion due to constant travel or transfer and 24X7 work demands which is the requirement of the job. It is seen to have an adverse effect on the family life and priorities of an individual leading to unhappiness and dissatisfaction.

**The Indian Context Employee:** Well-Being and Life satisfaction as a concept has only recently received much attention in the Asian countries and specially India. While the concept of employee wellbeing and life satisfaction has been important in the west, it is a relatively recent development and is still evolving as a concept in India. Recently, Regus Work-Life Balance Index, conducted a global survey of over 16,000 professionals in more than 80 countries and registered a 15% rise in Indian work-life balance between 2010 and 2012 which in itself is an indication of the growing importance of the concept. (Times of India, Article Aug 2012). It has further gained momentum due to the significant technological, social and demographic changes in the Indian workforce.

Let's first look at the societal changes in the Indian workforce. Asian countries, particularly India has witnessed a momentous social change in the last two decades. The most important being a surge in the number of women stepping out in pursuit of work and becoming independent, financial contributors to their families.

The number of women taking up higher education and joining the Indian workforce has risen manifolds. Another noteworthy change has been their presence in the key senior managerial position and also as entrepreneurs. Thus, altering the traditional rigid gender roles where men were seen as sole earner responsible for work, finances and women were expected to take care of household responsibilities. However, today we see the rise of the new families of dual career couples. The traditional joint family structure is also giving way to the nuclear families which are being preferred by the younger generation. These societal changes have resulted in additional pressure on the individual's of managing both job and family. Thus, leading to emotional exhaustion and dissatisfaction with life. Equally important are the technological developments taking place in the Indian Business environment. It is quite evident from the recent developments that the Indian business environment has undergone substantial changes both in terms of the nature of work and the diversity of workforce, accentuating the need to redesign work schedules. The traditional 9 to 6 job is transformed into various shifts –early

morning or late night depending on whether the client is in US or Europe. The current workforce also deals with the pressure to multi-task, frequently travel or get transferred as it has become critical for the employees to remain mobile. The technological advancement has also lead to the 24X7 work environment with increasing the use of gadgets like laptops, tablets, smart phones through which an individual has the facility to remain connected through an email all through the day. This 24X7 intrusion due to the global nature of workplace in addition to high workload and time pressures has influenced the overall health and well-being of an employee.

In addition to this, there are certain demographic changes in the workforce. The present workforce mostly comprises of Gen-Years with aspirations and expectations different from the earlier generations. For instance, a recent study conducted has revealed that the generation Y gives preference to an employer with work-life balance programs while the earlier generations were not vocal about such expectations. Also, with an increasing number of women entering the workplace, organizations have become more sensitive towards family priorities of employees. For example, Quest Global has a tie up with various schools, day care centres across Bangalore and trained counsellor to provide psychological support in the best possible manner to female employees who join back after their maternity leave (TOI,2012) Thus, the organizations have started to acknowledge the need for programs to help employees and specially women balance both work and personal life. Research done in this context has also found that HR practices are antecedents of employee's perception of the organisational support and influences their commitment towards the organization along with their intention to stay longer.

**Work-Life Balance :**Walton (1985), a Harvard Business School professor popularized the framework of Quality of Work-Life, an important component of which was highlighted as integration of work and life space. He defined Work-Life Balance as a state of equilibrium in which the demands of both a person's job and personal life are equal. Theoretically, it can be understood in terms of Time Balance, Involvement balance and importantly Satisfaction balance. Time balance is about contributing equal time to work and family demands. Involvement balance refers to equal level of involvement at work and also in family while satisfaction derived from both work and life constitute satisfaction balance (Greenhaus et al,2003).

**Causes of imbalance in work-life:**

The idea of a comfortable and leisurely pace of life is passé. The technological and social developments globally have propelled people to run after material progress and social status from the very early stages of their life. The Gen-Y faces immense psychological pressures to excel in their career and an urge to create a better state of life leads them to experience work pressures from a very young age creating stress related problems, excessive use of alcohol and unhealthy lifestyles. They aspire for bigger roles and responsibilities very early in their career. Also due to the flatter organization structure with an opportunity to move faster, they tend to fall out of sync with their related life cycle roles. This is especially true for Type A personality individuals as is reflected in their behaviour at work which is characterized by aggression, competitiveness, higher standards and anxiety to deliver, impatience and constant self-created time pressures. Often they face unfavourable work environment, high work demands and find themselves in a state of unhappiness and dissatisfaction despite the rapid material and career progress that they make through giving their best in their respective organizations. This is also because they find it difficult to detach themselves during after work hours due to the perceived employer expectation of 24X7 accessibility to an employee as it is perceived to be an important factor reflecting the individual's commitment to the organization and is linked to better career advancement opportunities.

The study gives an evidence of the growing imbalance in our social environment. Other aspects like daily commute to the workplace and back, dealing with traffic jams, pressure to report on time, manage household duties due to increasing trend of dual career couples and nuclear families are some of the other challenges of modern life. As a fallout, there is psychological, emotional physical exhaustion which ultimately leads to anxiety, strained relationships and drained value systems. Lack of exercise, proper sleep and nutritious food further affects their overall well-being. At a deeper level, while individuals pursue such competitive life goals in search for happiness and contentment, however, it constantly eludes them. To revive oneself, it becomes crucial that the individuals must detach themselves from their work by not carrying out any work from home and even mentally switching off . It sounds rather difficult given the 24X7 work environment which has become a part of our life due to the advent of technology. If not managed well, life of individuals working in such an environment can lead them to become successful in their respective fields but unsuccessful in building a happy and healthy life eventually leading to loss of productivity.

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## **The Work-Life Balance programs:**

Contemporary Work-Life Balance practices in organizations are promoting the individualization of employment conditions through the numerous programs accessible to the employees depending on their specific requirements. Programs such as Flexi work arrangements which include part-time work, flexi-work hours and the option to telecommute. Today, they are being seen as valuable mechanisms to help employee balance their personal and professional life. Lets take a detailed look at each of the key mechanisms for work life balance .

**Flexi-time:** It is a practice found to give autonomy to the employees to choose their own working hours within a certain framework of the organization. It also gives an edge to the employers in their recruitment drives. It also benefits both the organisation and employee as the time can be utilized by the employees in enhancing their knowledge and learning new skills. Citi India offers flexible work arrangements through the programme 'Citi Work Strategies' (CWS). Flexi-work arrangement is defined by Lambert et al(2008) as “employer provided benefits that permit employees some control over when and where they work outside of the standard workday”. For example, many companies like Ernst & Young provides all employees laptops and technical support so that they can work from anywhere according to their planned work schedule.

**Compressed workweek:** PwC India from this financial year has announced the compressed work week arrangement where the employees can take Friday off provided they complete work week hours in 4 days. It is an arrangement of work hours that allows an employee to fulfill its job responsibilities in fewer days than the regular work week enabling them to focus on their family or pursue their life objectives in the remaining days. This can help in reducing turnover and absenteeism.

**Telecommuting:** It is a type of an arrangement where employees known as teleworkers are able to remain at home and perform their work using the technology which connects them to their office. It helps in reducing the cost associated when an employee works from office and also helps the employee in maintaining a balance with their family responsibilities. For instance, employees at IBM and Accenture enjoy work from home option and can also customize their working hours in alignment with their managers (Economic Times, 2012).

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**Part-time work:** It is an arrangement of reduced number of work hours where an employee can choose to work a portion of their time from anywhere apart from work location. (Mondy R.W,2008). KPMG was reported to provide their part-time workers same pay and career opportunities as full time workers as it helps them implement their reduced workload model successfully (Forbes, 2009). Some of the other initiatives include adopting family friendly policies like extended maternity leaves, paternity leaves, compensatory time off on certain occasions, elderly and childcare programs which are increasingly being adopted by the organisations in India especially IT&ITES sector. Other benefits like education Leave or Sabbatical to support employee's need for education are also in demand. Employees are allowed and encouraged to travel out of peak time, to work from locations closer to home or to spend more time with their families through work from home options.

### **Benefits and Challenges :**

The implementation of such work-life policies to enhance employee's well being and overall life satisfaction, has benefit for both the employee and the organization. Employees with access to such policies have reported better psychological well being as they feel they can control their work and family life. Employees who have more control over their work and life experience lower stress levels and reduced work-life conflict helping them to achieve psychological well-being and life satisfaction. Thus, there is an increased feeling of being empowered. It also provides for sufficient family time in which they can plan time well for personal priorities and also manage other life goals. For an organization, happier employees means higher productivity and a greater sense of commitment. Recent studies done in the area of work-life balance have reported that it has been seen to increase motivation, job satisfaction and employee commitment, the three predictors of employee retention which is of prime concern to the organization. It not only improves retention of the high-quality talent but also helps the organization to be seen as a good employer – „employer of choice“. Such policies of an organization which are focused towards improving well-being and life satisfaction of employees help in developing the perception of a supportive and caring employer. Thus, linking it to perceived organisational support which is crucial for employee retention.



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## Conclusion

The points outlined above direct our discussion towards a new outlook towards employee's health which is now seen as a state of physical, mental and social well-being, not just an absence of illness as also defined by World Health Organization. This gives a holistic approach to looking at the life of an individual rather than seeing them as mere machines to be used in return of the pay. The entire approach of looking at a worker has gone through a transformation.

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