ANTECEDENTS AND OUTCOMES WORK LIFE BALANCE: A STUDY (HRM)

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Abstract

With the ever increasing requirements of the work, employees are likely to develop conflict between their work and non-work activities. There is a large research literature that examines the causes of poor work-life outcomes. An important finding to make from this literature is that the majority of factors linked to poor work-life outcomes are amenable to change via policy and other interventions at government and organisational levels. This paper is an attempt to investigate the antecedents and outcomes of work life balance in the organisations. Moreover, the paper also discusses some benefits to business when introducing policies to underpin Work life balance issues

Keywords: conflict, antecedents, work-life outcomes ,outcome

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Introduction

The term "Work life balance" is a contested term, with many alterations suggested, such as "work life integration", Work life interface", Work life Masonic", Work life reconciliation", or Work life coordination"(Mc Pheron,2007). During the 1960s and 1970s, employers considered work-life mainly an issue for working mothers who struggled with the demands of their jobs and raising children. The 1990s solidified the recognition of work-life balance as a vital issue for everyone--women, men, parents and non-parents, singles, and couples (Jim, 2006). It is believed that balancing a successful career with a personal or family life can be challenging and impact on a person's satisfaction in their work and personal life's roles (Broers, 2005). Dundas (2008:7) argues that work-life balance is about effectively managing the juggling act between paid work and all other activities that are important to people such as family, community activities, voluntary work, personal development and leisure and recreation. The ability to balance between workplace's needs and personal life's needs is perceived as an important issue among workers globally and academics in higher education institutions were not excluded (Mohd Noor, et al , 2009). Research confirms that work-life imbalance is costly on both a personal and professional level. Duxbury and Higgins (2003) reported that "the effects of 'role overload' are costing Canadian businesses as much as $10-billion a year in overtime and contracting out required to complete the work of absent employees." These results are similar to previous Canadian research: "Burnout costs Canadian businesses an estimated $12 billion per year in health claims, lost productivity, and absenteeism, according to the Conference Board of Canada" (Isherwood & Cajic, 1998). For career management professionals and employers, then, it seems important to acknowledge and alleviate the damage caused by lack of work-life balance.

Antecedents of poor work-life outcomes

Multiple roles

It is generally agreed that work-life balance has become more difficult. Within the past decade or so, the global workplace has seen increased numbers of working women, dual-career and single parent families, and increased numbers of employees with eldercare responsibilities; a decrease in job security; and a blurring of work-family boundaries due to technological change (Brown, 2004; Duxbury & Higgins, 2001). Indeed, people hold various roles in their life, such as, for example,

the role of a student, worker, parent, or citizen. Each of these roles includes a line of expected behaviors. When formalized, these expected behaviors become norms. Roles can be defined as the sum of behaviors, rights, and obligations that one has to display in a given social situation (Šverko, et.al. 2007). In cases when the role expectations of these two domains were not compatible, most research has shown that two separate types of conflict can arise (Frone et .al 1992): conflict due to the disrupting interference of work to family life (work-to-family conflict) and conflict due to the disrupting interference of family to work life (family-to-work conflict). Individuals generally tend to fulfil expectations and satisfy norms, and therefore play roles. In some stages of life individuals play multiple roles at once, but all these roles are not equally important to them. Usually two or three roles are the most prominent (salient), while others are peripheral. Salient roles represent the essence of a person; they are the basis of personal identity and are essential for life satisfaction (Super, et .al. 1996). When they are held simultaneously, different roles interact and affect each other. Roles can support or complement each other, but can also be in mutual conflict and become a source of stress when the role demands are not compatible, or when they exceed the capabilities of an individual.

Family-supportive culture

It has been argued that managers play an important role in the success of WLBPs because they make implicit or explicit choices regarding the adoption of workplace practices and are therefore, in a position to actively encourage or discourage employees' efforts to balance their work and family lives (Thompson et al., 1999). When supervisors are supportive, employees are likely to take up available WLBPs. The fear of negative career consequences also discourages employees to utilize WLBPs such as working flexitime. Co-workers perceive employees who utilize WLBPs to be less committed and that significantly influence subsequent reward allocation, advancement opportunities and salary increases (Allen, 2001). For example, an employee might hesitate to use the full period of maternity leave due to concerns of not being promoted. Such perceptions suggest compelling reasons why WLBPs tend to be underutilized by employees. Another construct that is purported to influence the utilization of WLBPs is, the 'time demands' or norms concerning the number of hours, which employees are supposed to devote to work or work-related activities (Thompson et al., 1999) and because of the strong norms of 'face time' and workaholic hours (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002).

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Congruence between individual needs and organisation's solutions

Sometimes such programs may look impressive but in reality they might not be of any help to employees who do not see any value in them. For example, hardly efforts are taken to understand the needs of employees and design the programs accordingly. Personal values may discourage employees from using WLBPs. An ambitious employee may decide to concentrate on his/her career waiving the advantages of these programs (Glass & Finley, 2002). Incongruence between individual work and family values and organisational responsiveness towards work-family issues is certainly a challenge to effectiveness of WLBPs.

Work-family climate

The construct of work-family climate, or how supportive an organizational workgroup is of the integration of its employees' work and family lives, has been referred to as culture (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999; Warren & Johnson, 1995), organizational perceptions (Allen, 2001; Jahn, Thompson, & Kopelman, 2003), and climate (Adams, Woolf, Castro, & Adler, 2005; Anderson, Morgan, & Wilson, 2002; Hannigan, 2004). The climate of an organization focuses on each individual's perception they have of the work environment, and depending on their perceptions, this may influence (either improve or worsen) the outcomes of performance in the workplace (Bochner, 2003). There is increasing evidence that the ways employees perceive their work environment may influence their behavior in ways that support the objectives and the goals of the organization (Rosete, 2006). A supportive work-family climate is one in which organizations understand and support that a person's family is their first priority, even above the employee's work and the organization. Another dimension of the unsupportive work-family culture/climate in Thompson et al.'s definition is the perceived negative career consequences, implying that workers are indirectly penalized for utilizing work-life benefits.

Outcomes of work life imbalance

Literature suggests that the absence of work–family balance, typically defined in terms of elevated work–family conflict has been shown to affect important organizational outcomes, such as job satisfaction (Netemeyer et al., 1996), organizational commitment (Wiley, 1987), employee

turnover (Netemeyer et al., 1996), absenteeism and tardiness (Goff, Mount, & Jamison, 1990; Hammer, Bauer, & Grandey, 2003; Thomas & Ganster, 1995), and job performance (Aryee, 1992; Frone, Yardley, & Markel, 1997; Kossek, Colquitt, & Noe, 2001; Wayne, Musisca, & Fleeson, 2004).

Work life policies and job commitment

Friendly work life policies are required to reduce negative impacts of work life conflict which is defined by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) as an incompatibility between responsibilities from the work and family. Recently many researchers have attempted to highlight significance of work life policies. Family-friendly policies should cater for the specific 'family' circumstances of all employees (Lilley, 2004). In developed and developing countries, rising proportions of dual earner families, increased female labor force participation and the growing number of aged dependents means that a higher proportion of employees have family responsibilities (Hall & Liddicoat 2005). Despite experiencing work–life conflict, employees may maintain relatively high levels of organizational commitment provided that they perceive the procedures used to plan and implement organizational decisions are fair (Siegel et al, 2005). Spending more time at work can be an outcome of employee commitment as Lee & Hui (1999) argue, "work interference with family may be an indicator of how much devotion one has for work." Some researchers consider organizational policies a source of work life conflicts e.g. Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch & Topolnytsky (2002) argue that it is possible that having a sense of being "trapped" in an organization is both stressful for employees and a source of conflict in the home. Roehling, Roehling & Moen (2001) suggests "flexible-time benefits are associated with increased loyalty for men and women at all life stages. Dockel (2003), in his study on high technology employees, found that "work life policies have a strong and significant relationship with organizational commitment".

Work life balance and performance

Most of the research conducted in different countries shows that there is a negative relationship between personal life and employee performance. For instance Frone et al. (1997) examined the

impact of work-life conflict on performance and reported a momentous relationship, he used a self reported scale to measure job performance. Aryee (1992) reported that performance is related to job-parent conflict but not to job-spouse conflict in his study. Blackhurst, Brandt & Kalinowski (1998) have found that organizational commitment is negatively related to family life of the persons which leads to low performance and hence high work-life conflict. Jackson and Schuler (1985) and Aven (1988) wrote that the job affects personal life of employees and vise versa. It was said that in terms of commitment that work-life conflict affects it and ultimately the performance of employee is reduced. The same was investigated by Allen and Meyer (1990). Work to family conflict has negative impact on performance of people according to Lee and Hui (1999), when work affects the family the performance decreases but it is a good indicator of measuring dedication one has for his job. Work-family conflict is drastically associated with organizational commitment, and if an employee loses commitment then ultimately the performance is reduced as per Ali and Baloch (1999). Netemeyer, Maxham and Pullig (2005), in their study on customer service employees, customers and supervisors, found direct and indirect effects between work-family conflict and employee performance where the performances are rated by supervisor. Brandt, Krawczyk and Kalinowski (2008) found that there exists a conflict between life and job performance of employees. Relationship between work-family conflict and performance ratings given to men and women have also been studied by Butler and Skattebo (2004). The lower overall performance was found for men who experienced work-family conflict than men who did not, but no difference in overall performance ratings were given to women who experienced the work-life conflict and women who did not. Work-family conflict and job performance is tested by inadequate number of empirical studies, and many studies out of them have produced conflicting results concerning to the relationship between the two constructs i.e. work-life conflict and employee job performance (Allen et al, 2000). Since there are number of studies that tend to support the negative relationship between work-family conflict and job performance.

Work life balance and employee's turnover

Turnover intent is the cognitive process of thinking, planning, and desiring to leave a job (Mobley et. al, 1979). According to Mobley (1982); Steers and Mowday (1982); Black and

Stevens (1989) intention to stay is significantly negatively correlated with turnover. Mitchell, et al., (2000) posit that it is easier to measure turnover intent than voluntary turnover as administrative records may be unavailable, incomplete, or inaccurate. In their analysis of occupational turnover, Dalessio, Silverman, and Schuck (1986) stated: more attention should be given to the direct and indirect influences of variables on intention to quit as opposed to the actual act of turnover. From the employer"s standpoint, intention to quit may be a more important variable then the actual act of turnover. If the precursors to intention to quit are better understood, the employer could possibly institute changes to affect this intention. However, once an employee has quit, there is little the employer can do except assume the expense of hiring and training another employee. Work–life balance has been described as the self-perceived, satisfactory integration of personal time, family care, and work with a minimum of role conflict (Clark, 2000; Ungerson & Yeandle, 2005). An added source of stress in an employee"s life is the phenomenon of work-family conflict (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999). In the contemporary world, more families (with or without children) are required to earn a dual income in order to meet their financial commitments, so that both partners are breadwinners (Skinner & Pocock, 2008). In order to balance work and family commitments, an increasing number of contemporary women and men are finding themselves involved in work and family arrangements that were largely unknown to their parents" generation (Barnett & Rivers, 1996; Hoshschild, 1997).This could also be the leading factor in creating work-family conflict.

Work life balance and job stress &burnout

According to the Employee Assistance Professionals Association in Arlington, Virginia. 75-90 percent of physician visits are related to stress and, according to the American Institute of Stress, the cost to industry has been estimated at $200 billion-$300 billion a year. Steven L. Sauter, chief of the Applied Psychology and Ergonomics Branch of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health in Cincinnati, Ohio, states that recent studies show that "the workplace has become the single greatest source of stress"(Paul, 1963). It is clear that problems caused by stress have become a major concern to both employers and employees. Symptoms of stress are manifested both physiologically and psychologically. Persistent stress can result in cardiovascular disease, sexual health problems, a weaker immune system and frequent headaches, stiff muscles,

or backache. It can also result in poor coping skills, irritability, jumpiness, insecurity, exhaustion, and difficulty concentrating. Stress may also perpetuate or lead tobinge eating, smoking, and alcohol consumption. According to James Campbell Quick, a professor of organizational behavior at the University of Texas-Arlington, "The average tenure of presidents at land-grant universities in the past ten years has dropped from approximately seven to three-and-a-half years"(Boswell, 2007). The feeling that simply working hard is not enough anymore is acknowledged by many other American workers. "To get ahead, a seventy-hour work week is the new standard. What little time is left is often divvied up among relationships, kids, and sleep" (Barker, 1993). This increase in work hours over the past two decades means that less time will be spent with family, friends, and community as well as pursuing activities that one enjoys and taking the time to grow personally and spiritually. Some individuals are "burning out" (Maslach & Leiter, 2003). Burnout has been described as "a state of physical, mental and emotional exhaustion resulting from chronic, relentless stress" (Luban). Burnout symptoms include a general lack of enthusiasm, dissatisfaction, emotional exhaustion, inability to concentrate, and apathy. Burned-out individuals may feel as if they are working hard but accomplishing little. They may be more quick-tempered than usual and find that they have lost their sense of humour and ability to have fun.

Work life balance and social and economic costs (Pocock, 2007)

The 2002 OECD report which focused on work-family reconciliation in Australia, Denmark and the Netherlands noted that a good work-family balance results in families better able to stand the stresses of modern life, better child development outcomes, less public expenditure and higher fertility (or at least enabling families to have their desired number of children) (OECD 2002). International studies show that poor work-life outcomes are associated with significant health costs that occur across the labour market. In 2001, Canadian researchers estimated that the health costs in Canada of high work-life conflict, attributable to high role overload alone, amounted to over C$6 billion. A further cost of C$5 billion could be traced to high care-giver strain, $C2.8 billion to high work-family spillover and $C5 billion to family-work spillover (Duxbury & Higgins 2004). Recent research using data from the Canadian National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, found that children whose parents who work non-standard hours (evenings, nights or on weekends) were significantly more likely to have emotional and behavioural

problems compared to children of parents working standard weekday schedules (Strazdins et al. 2004). Data from the same survey also indicates that dual-earner parents working non-standard work hours were more likely to report depressive symptoms, worse family functioning and less effective parenting (Strazdins et al. 2006). US research using the National Survey of Families and Households has found that non-standard work schedules put workers at significantly increased risk of marital breakdown (Presser 2000). Presser concludes of her US studies that while there are sometimes positive effects that arise from working non-standard schedules, negative effects – especially upon marital quality and instability - are generally stronger (Presser 2003). These especially affect disadvantaged households and workers, given that they are more likely to work non-standard hours. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses of research studies have also supported this link between negative spillover between work and life and a range of negative consequences for individuals, employers, and the wider community.

The benefits to business when introducing policies to underpin work life balance issues

- Raise retention
- Power up productivity and profitability
- More motivated and less stressed employees
- Raised morale, motivation, commitment and engagement
- Reduced labour turnover and absenteeism
- Limit latecomers
- Improved recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce
- Neutralize the naysaying
- Promote participation in training
- Develop team spirit and solidarity among peers
- Mitigate fatigue and discourage labour unrest
- Reduce training & development cost and minimize overtime cost
- Aids in handling conflict, there by helping to prevent stress and tension
- Aids in developing leadership skill, loyalty, better attitudes, communication skill, helps in adjust to change, and other aspects that successful workers and managers usually display

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Conclusion

The organisational consequences of work-life balance satisfaction have become an important issue for every organization. The employees feel happy to work in the working environment that helps them to balance between the needs of their own life and the needs at the workplace. The literature indicates that work-life balance is correlated positively with job satisfaction, performance, good health and organisational commitment. Therefore, it shows that work-life balance has important impact on employee attitudes. So to retain their productive employee every organization should provide work life balance policies according to the needs of the employees.

Deery (2008) also strategies to assist in balancing work and family life which include:

- Providing flexible working hours such as roistered days off and family friendly starting and finishing times;

- Allowing flexible work arrangements such as job sharing and working at home;

- Providing training opportunities during work time;

- Providing adequate resources for staff so that they can undertake their jobs properly;

- Determining correct staffing levels so that staff are not overloaded;

- Allowing adequate breaks during the working day;

- Having provision for various types of leave such as carer's leave and 'time-out' sabbatical types of leave;

- Rewarding staff for completing their tasks, not merely for presenteeism;

- Staff functions that involve families;

- Providing, if possible, health and well-being opportunities such as access to gymnasiums or at least time to exercise; and

- Encouraging sound management practices.

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