



## Work-life balance: Balancing career demands with personal and family needs

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### Abstract

Professional life and personal life are the two sides of the same coin. Traditionally, creating and managing a balance between the work-life was considered to be a woman's issue. But, increasing work pressures, globalization and technological advancement have made it an issue for both the genders, all professionals working across all levels and all industries throughout the world. Achieving work-life balance is not as simple as it sounds. Work-life balance became a widely debated issue now-a-days. Basically, it involves balancing career demands with personal and family needs. It requires a trade off between success in career and success as a spouse and parent. It is a swap about what you keep and what you give up.

**Keywords:** cognitive intrusion, family-friendly policies, flexible working practices, personal and professional life, work-life balance

### Introduction

The phrase work-life balance was coined in 1986 in the US and until 1999 remained on the fringes of corporate usage and public dissemination. Post 2000, work-life balance has gone mainstream, with hundreds of Internet sites, including those of mega corporations, helping spread its usage. There has even been legislation enacted in many countries making work-life balance crucial to the functioning of a corporation. If a person works too much sacrificing quality family time. He might reach the top of the corporate ladder quickly, but the achievement and material gain will not commensurate the price. He's forced to pay in the long run. On the other hand, being in this competitive world, one has to prioritise one's business or professional career to financially support one's family, as well as maintain a steady growth curve.

While more and more employees are attempting to strike a balance between work and family, thanks to the information blitzkrieg on the subject, there are still myriad ways for technology to intrude on personal time.

According to various work-life balance surveys, more than 60% of the respondent professionals surveyed said that they are not able to find a balance between their personal and professional lives. Work and personal lives change across the life span with associated responsibilities varying all the time and thus the need for work-life balance policies. Work-life balance is about adjusting working patterns to allow employees to combine work with their other responsibilities such as caring for children or aged relatives. Introducing appropriate employment practices to help employees achieve a better work-life balance brings touchable benefits to the business. It makes the employees feel more in control of their working life which would lead to improved productivity, lower absenteeism and a happier, less stressed work ambience.

### The Cognitive Intrusion of work

Awareness of the work-life balance trends will place the human resource professional in a position to better alert management and work closely with employees. A study reveals that employees are often preoccupied with work when not working, and when in the company of family and

loved ones experience an inability to be meaningfully engaged in non-work spheres. Ezzedeem opines that modern work has become knowledge based, fluid, and intellectual; overworked people think about work all of time. For many people work has become cognitively intrusive. To understand work-life balance, Professor Swiercz and Doctoral Candidate Ezzedeem of The George Washington University, developed and tested a cognitive approach the Cognitive Intrusion of Work. In simple terms, this means that work-life balance is not just about finding physical time to do all that needs to be done. Instead, and more importantly, it is about the cognitive space necessary to process, organize, and respond to the thinking demands of life within a complex society. Ezzedeem and Swiercz found that the cognitive intrusion of work results in lower job satisfaction, less happiness, a greater incidence of work-life conflict, and more frequent burnout. Furthermore, their findings challenge long-held assumptions about the role of personality, gender, family status and age with regard to work-life balance. They found that the experience of intrusion transcends demographics and personality and is embedded in its place in the design of the job and the organizational culture of the employer.

### Effective Work-Life Balance Policies are Valuable

Effective work-life balance policies are valuable to businesses and organisations for a number of reasons like reduces staff turnover rates, becoming a good employer or an employer of choice, increased return on investment in training as employees stay longer, reduced absenteeism and sick leave, improved morale or satisfaction, greater staff loyalty and commitment, improved productivity. However, the benefits of a work-life balance initiative are not confined to just the workforce. Work-life policies and flexible working practices can also help employee to

- React to changing market conditions more effectively and meet customer demands without making employees to work for longer hours,
- Meet seasonal peaks and troughs in business,
- Boost competitiveness as well as

- Become recognised as a business that people want to work for.

### Factors Influencing Work-Life Balance

Over the past generation there have been considerable demographic changes which have influenced working practices, examples of this include:

- Increased number of women working-70 % in 2020 compared to 47% in 1959.
- Majority of women with dependent children working-65% compared to 90% of men.
- Majority of women return to paid employment after childbirth.
- Increased incidence of one parent families (1 in 4)
- Increased life expectancy is resulting in an ageing population,
- Elderly relative responsibilities are on the increase -6 million adults have care responsibilities for another adult.
- Trend for starting family later will result in some employees having both childcare and eldercare responsibilities.
- Average age for first body is 29 and birth rate is 1.7 children per woman.

### Working Couples Satisfied with Work-Life Balance

Working couples in India appear to manage the work-life tightrope well if a survey by staffing major Team Lease in an indicator. The survey found working couples are satisfied with their lives and work-life balance.

Although 54% of respondents feel they were weekend parents, the overall satisfaction index of married working couples was 87%, with Pune leading at 96% and Bangalore at 79%. The study polled 425 executives with and without kids in Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Pune and Hyderabad.

Among other findings, 34% felt two careers substantially increase the chances of a divorce while 32% felt it was not possible for women to pursue their career with the same velocity after a child break. Nearly 77% of the men polled said they shared child-rearing responsibilities with their spouse while 52% were not willing to follow their spouse to other cities for their career.

Participants in all cities, except New Delhi, agreed that working in odd shifts hours impacted marital relationships.

### Suggestions for Achieving Work-Life Balance

E-mail, voicemail, mobile phones and laptops allow employees to take their work home. Many do this on a regular basis, which means they may be away from the office but are connected by the umbilical cord of technology to the server. It is agreeable that sometimes one cannot have helped but take one's work home. But, one should not make it a habit.

There is no use blaming the organisation or globalisation or 24x7 operations. There is no point blaming the industry; someone else did the estimates and I have ended up doing 70 hours/week.

It is up to you to strike the balance. Work-life balance is in the interests of both the employee and the employer. It does not mean an equal balance. It is not constant but varies overtime. Some guidelines for achieving work-life balance are give hereunder:

- Learn to say no if it affects your schedules,
- Don't carry your office at home,

- Distress yourself,
- Be a child,
- Share the load,
- Reduce speed,
- Don't postpone,
- Take care of your health,
- Have a positive outlook and
- Take charge.

Jack Welch has suggested the following guidelines for achieving work-life balance:

- Keep your head in whatever game you are at- Be focused on where you are and when you are with. In other words, compartmentalise.
- Have the mettle to say no to requests and demands outside your chosen work-life balance, plan-saying no is hard especially for business people who have gotten ahead because they have said yes so often. If you say yes to everything, you cannot get balance.
- Make sure your work-life balance plan does not leave you out.

A better Work-Life Balance survey can help to improve and promote work-life balance;

### In Organisations

- Identifying areas to improve policy development and execution
- Improve consciousness and transform work place culture
- Other forms of flexible working situation like part-time functioning, job sharing, flexible time, shift working, compacted hours, residence working, career breaks.

### For Individuals

- Prioritize what needs to be done, work out what to work and evaluate how balanced one is
- Identify what is stopping them and change job and work environment
- Work with experts and discuss and share their goals with others and focus on outcome- not tasks or activities.

### Conclusion

Most people struggle hard to get a decent degree and get a good job. Once they get a job it becomes the centre of their lives. In the struggle to go ahead in career, they often neglect their families. They lose health and happiness to get money in youth and lose money to regain health.

Work-life balance became a widely debated issue during 1990s and in 2001. Today, no CEO or company can ignore it in view of dual-career couples, single parents, nuclear families and extreme levels of stress.

Basically work-life balance involves balancing career demands with personal and family needs. It is a debate about how much we allow work to consume us. It requires a trade off between success in career and success as a spouse and parent. It is a swap about what you keep and what you give up.

The companies and organisations should be aware of the obvious impact that family-friendly policies can ultimately have in creating a happier and more productive business. Improvements in people management practices, especially work time and work location flexibility, and the development of supportive managers, contribute to increased work-life balance.

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