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Work-life Balance and Gender Bias : A Contrarian View

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Abstract:

Work-life balance is usually associated with female employees. However it is an area of concern even for their male counterparts. This paper makes an attempt to understand the issues related to work-life balance for the men and various initiatives taken by organizations to seek work-life balance for their employees. Globalization and changing demographics have further posed greater challenges for work-life balance. Organizations develop employee friendly Work-Life Balance Programs as a solution to the problem of work-life balance amongst their employees. This in turn helps the organizations to enhance their productivity, improve the performance of their employees and also ensure employee retention. This paper is an endeavor to question the gender bias with reference to work-life balance as it is equally, if not more, important for the male employees.

Keywords : Work-life balance, gender bias, performance, productivity, best practices

Introduction

‘Work-life balance’ is a magical word all employees crave to achieve. It is the extent to which the employees feel the satisfaction of achieving the expectations at work as well as non-work (which would include, personal, domestic, social) dimensions of life. Work-life balance is not limited to women alone but it is very important for men too. Regardless of gender and marital status, both men and women struggle with work life balance (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). In addition, it is a matter of extreme importance for single parents and students too. Due to increased work pressure, many times, employees have to spend longer time spans at work or attending to work related issues, thus reducing time for family life. These days employees are committed to the organizations twenty four by seven. Not every position has longer hours of work, but timing for commuting, traffic, pollution, congestion all add to the stress level and waste of time. As a result work-life balance goes for a toss.

According to Grady et al. (2008) work-life balance is essential for the wellbeing of individuals, for the better performance of the organizations and effective functioning of the society. According to them, the term ‘work-life balance’ is more comprehensive and includes “family, community, recreation and personal time.” Eagle Hill (2014) survey results reveal that two-thirds of the employees surveyed (64%) considered work-life balance as an important factor for overall professional satisfaction; work-life balance ranked ahead of both job security (59%) and compensation (54%). The results suggest that for an employee work-life balance is more important than the salary concerns and job security.

Organizations must focus on efficient work and not merely clocking in more hours of work. Longer working hours do not ensure higher productivity. In fact at times not only productivity but also the morale of the employees may go down when they have to work for long hours.

Gender Bias

Work-life balance is usually associated; with a bias though, with female employees. Nonetheless even their male counterparts seek work-life balance. There are several things which an employee may like to engage in but is not able to because of his work related commitments. Work-life has become so demanding that even the male employees may not get time for self-care activities like regular exercise, jogging, going to gym and also for pursuing their hobbies like gardening, sports, music and so on. Moreover social commitments of an individual and the need to socialize also cannot be ignored. They may also have certain commitments towards community development, club membership, social service and so on, which may get side tracked due to the professional commitments at work-place.



Other life activities that need to be balanced with employment include study, travel, sports, voluntary work, personal development, leisure (Lazar et al, 2010). For every individual whether man or woman, it is important that his or her appetite for social, cultural aspects in life is fulfilled. In the absence of this his personality may not blossom to its best.

The family system has also undergone a major change these days. There has been a shift from joint family to nuclear family. Another important demographic change is DISK families i.e. Double Income Single Kid. In such families since husband and wife both are working, there is a greater need for men to actively participate in domestic chores and attend to domestic responsibilities. They may have to attend to child care, attending parent-teacher meetings, pick up/drop the child at day care, doctor's appointment and so on. At times men may also have to attend to eldercare.

Work-life balance is a greater challenge for single parents. Now-a-days there is an increase in the population of men who are single parents. Their commitments on the family front are much higher.

Many times when men fail to balance their work-life, their health is affected adversely. They invite life style diseases like obesity, depression, heart diseases, hypertension, etc. Some men may hit the bottle or resort to smoking when they have to work for longer hours, when the family life suffers and when they have no time for their hobbies and interests.

Best Practices

Companies like 'Google' ensure that the employees get all the basic facilities at work place itself like day care not only for the kids but also for the pets, canteen facility, laundry, gym, swimming pool, and the list goes on. Google organizes annually, 'bring your children to work' day. Similarly newly joined employees at Google can bring their parents to work on a designated day.

Several companies e.g. SAP, Intuit, Infosys provide paternity leave. Additionally for employees who wish to adopt a child, Intuit offers monetary incentive and adoption leave. This helps the new parents to bond with the child.

Godrej & Boyce provides colony for their employees, which saves lot of travelling time, which can be used productively by the employees to pursue their interests. Best practices followed at RMSI (a global IT company) include music band, photography club, painting, acting, movie making, guitar classes, zumba lessons, sports tournaments.

Company outings are a common feature in many organizations. This can be in the form of happy hours, family picnics, organizing treks, birthday celebrations, park days. Such initiatives help employees to release stress, know each other better and improve the interpersonal dynamics.

Under the 'work from home' policy of SAP, employees can work from home for four days in a month or one day a week. SAP takes pride in providing for its employees SAPlings, which is an in-house crèche catering to children in the age group of nine months to six years. In addition to day care, it also provides Montessori education and summer camps. It is thus seen that companies ensure that the employees are able to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

Flexi timing, part-time work, telecommuting, compressed work week, job sharing are effective ways of achieving work-life balance for the employees (Lazar, 2010). Daimler Chrysler in Germany promotes part-time work in leading positions in the company (Clarke, et al, 2004).

Many organizations also organize seminars and workshops to educate the employees of various ways in which they can achieve work-life balance. Motorola, allows employees to participate in their LIVESMART program. This program includes seminars on health and wellness, advice on commute management, etc. (Alexandra, 2015).

Conclusion

Work-life balance is a matter of concern at individual level, social level, and professional level and also from the organization's point of view. These days employees are committed to their organizations twenty four by seven. They seek work-life balance in order to have freedom to lead their life their way, without compromise on the quality and quantity of work at the workplace. Flexible



working options give employees an opportunity to work whenever and wherever as per their convenience. This is beneficial not only for women but also men. On one hand technology has facilitated flexible working thus freeing the employees from the typical nine-to-five working but on the other hand it has fettered employees to the organizations round the clock. One of the outcomes of poor work-life balance is attrition. Thus organizations must make efforts to implement work-life programs to keep their employees happy as it has a direct impact on their performance. Work-life balance was once viewed as women's issue. However it is an important concern for men too as it drives their career success, productivity, job performance, retention making it focal point for organizations.

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