Individual and Organizational Strategies to Balance Work-life with Indian Way

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Abstract

The current work scenario is marked by the fast pace of change, intense pressure, constant declines, changing demographics, increased use of technology has affected the lives of employees. Present workforce consists of many working fathers and mothers; whose aim is to find a balance between work and family roles is a matter of concern for them and the organizations. Work-life balance has implications for employee attitudes, behaviors, wellbeing as well as organizational effectiveness (Eby et al., 2005). So to frame formal work-life balance initiatives is the need of hour for the organizations and HR professionals. But there is dearth of these initiatives to be taken by the Indian employers in this direction and no particular efforts by the Indian government. (Singh Jagdeep (2013)

This paper reviews the literature in the domain of work-life balance and family friendly initiatives adopted by employers and employees. It is proposed that in absence of proper work-life policies, work-life interface can be decreased by informal family friendly initiatives and self management. It accentuates the importance of work-life balance and its impact on organization and employees. The paper proposes a conceptual model to be tested empirically. The proposed model focuses initiatives/ strategies adopted by the organizations and employees to balance their work and life interface.

Keywords: work-life balance, organizational effectiveness, work-life balance initiatives, work and life interface.
1. Introduction
All over the world the organizations are demanding more and more from their employees; parallel to this these are focusing more on the motivation and recognitions of the employees to enhance productivity. A healthy balance of work and family life is strategy that the new-age management is aiming at.

Present workforce consists of many working fathers and mothers; whose aim is to find a balance between work and family roles is a matter of concern for them and the organizations.

The current work scenario is marked by the fast pace of change, intense pressure, constant declines, changing demographics, increased use of technology and the co-exiting virtual workplace. Juxtaposed with this, the increase in average income and rise in living standards have individuals striving for better work atmosphere. (Tara Shankar & J Bhatanagar (2010)

In India, the demographic changes are seen in the forms of increasing number of women in the workforce (Census of India, 2001), breakage of joint family system and urbanization factors have made it essential for the new generation employees. Technological advancement is seen in increased reliance on and use of internet and telecommunication. As a result, many employees are taking work outside office, which has blurred the boundary between work and family (Cooper, 1998). Environmental changes are evidenced in increasing number of firms in the services sector (NASSCOM Newsl ine, 2008a), which require employees to work longer, frequently interact with customers and work across varied time zones. As a result, the distinct boundary between work and family has diluted.(Rupashree Baral & Shivganesh Bhargava 2008)

As cited by Rupashree Baral and Shivganesh Bhargava (2008), recently, scholars have made efforts to examine the positive impact of work-family interface referred as work-family enrichment (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006; Carlson et al., 2006), positive spillover (Allis and O’Driscoll, 2008; Hammer et al., 2005), work-family facilitation (Rotondo and Kincaid, 2008; Wayne et al., 2006; Balmforth and Gardner, 2006) or work-family synergy (Beutell and Wittig-Berman, 2008) on individual’s attitude and behaviour. Greenhaus and Powell (2006, p. 6).

After analyzing the overall scenario it is the need of hour to plan and practice policies and practices that can resolve the work-life conflict of the present generation X and Y. Though there is dearth of initiatives taken by Indian government and employers in this direction but this is hot topic in the western world and developed countries.

Now the question is, if there is dearth of initiatives from Indian government and from majority of the organizations in this field then what is the solution? Second, to balance work and life is only the liability of employers and government or an employee herself can take certain initiatives.
2. Family Friendly Initiatives to Resolve Work-life Interfaces

Today, women make up 40 percent of the global workforce, and they are becoming an increasingly important part of the world’s formal workforce as they shift from agricultural work to industry and service sector jobs. (International Labor Office, 2008) Family-friendly policies can help the women employees to balance the work and family responsibilities, yield benefits for themselves, for their families, and their employers.

Family-friendly policies can benefit employers also, can help them for retaining highly skilled employees who might otherwise seek more accommodating employers or leave the workforce entirely. Implementing of family-friendly policies can also decrease absenteeism, enhance productivity, and can improve employers’ attraction ability.

The Family-Friendly Workplace Model is best applied to companies that make a significant investment in training employees and/or must comply with national or international employment standards. With greater urbanization and the shift to work in the formal sector, the demand for companies to provide family-friendly benefits is likely to grow. The FFW Model helps businesses to easily analyze the relative costs and rewards of offering family-friendly benefits. Using the model enables businesses to reap the potential cost savings of family-friendly policies and contribute to improved health for employees, their families, and the broader community. (US Aid focus on India; http://ghiqc.usaid.gov)

3. Formal Organizational Initiatives

To frame formal work-life balance initiatives is the need of hour for the organizations and HR professionals. In the Asia Pacific countries particular concerns for families include the impact of people marrying older in life or not at all, rural urban migration and gender inequality in remuneration and career development. These socio demographic changes place pressure on firms to be proactive in addressing issues concerning work-life balance, including the provision of Family Friendly Workplace arrangements (Hall, L. & Liddicoat, L. (2005).

As given by Tara Shankar & Bhatnagar the 10 best organizations which Fortune (2009) quote, are the ones, where employees feel “encouraged to balance their work and personal life”. For example the company ‘Mattel’ provide 13 paid holidays, two paid days for volunteer in schools, two onsite child-care centers, five paid days of paternal leave (for new mothers and fathers) adoption assistance, half days on Fridays all year long and on site toy stores that offer discounts to their employees.

As cited by Fang-Tai Tseng (2012), that numerous studies have shown that working –hour reduction is a tough yet beneficial labour policy to both the employees and the employers (Bosch & Lehnorf 2001, Kramar 1993,MacInnes 2005, Perry-Smith & Blum 2000, Thornwaite 2004, Strachan & burgess1988, Solomon 1994.
Therefore the favored companies are those which have formal friendly initiatives to balance WLB. We can divide these initiatives into two parts viz a) Employees’ benefit policies and b) Work reorganization programs.

In the first category employees are made comfortable and helped to take care their dependents while doing their duty along with uninterrupted career. In Indian legislation the provisions crèche facility, feeding breaks, three months maternity leave and paternity leaves are provided. In many developed counties facilities like on-site child care and /or elder care, child care and /or elder care subsidies and /or referral services, paid family and medical leave, release time work to participate in school and community events; and limits on business travels (frequency and distance) are provided.

In second category provisions like restructuring of jobs and duties, telecommuting arrangements, part-time and job sharing opportunities and Flexible working scheduling programs are included.

In India only few MNCs and prominent ITES companies are providing the facilities of flexible location (telecommuting) and time facilities but these facilities are widely used in the developed counties.

Different types of formal friendly initiatives practiced are dependent care support (of child and aging relatives), On-site child care, Other child care assistance, Flexible work arrangements, Flexi time (i.e. flexible starting and quitting time), Telecommuting (part-time and full-time), Compressed work week, Job sharing, Shift flexibility, Part time work etc. etc. as per a SHRM survey it is found that top five formal friendly initiatives are:

- Dependent care flexible spending account (71 % respondents)
- Flexi-time (55% respondents)
- Family leave above required leave of Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) (39% respondents)
- Telecommuting on part time bases (34% respondents)
- Compressed work weeks (31% respondents)

4. Creating Family Friendly Supportive Work Culture

Only few organizations are opting formal friendly initiatives in India. In a study conducted by the author 72.7% respondents disagreed that they are provided the only facility ‘crèche’ by the Indian legislation for the working mothers. On the other side of the coin the informal support by the supervisors and colleagues is mostly practiced, which is a positive indication of supportive work culture.

According to social exchange theory, by offering informal family friendly culture the organizations demonstrate their efforts in favour of the wellbeing of their employees.

As cited by Deepak Chawla & Neena Sondhi (2011), the more ‘Supportive’ organizations shape an implicit psychological contract (Rousseau 1995) between the
organization and the individual. This aids and enhances his work/non work conflict and at the same time increases and individual’s sense of commitment.

Informal initiatives / support are the support given by family members, colleagues and supervisors to decrease the load and or stress of work-life interface and which is not part of written rules and regulations.

Linda Duxbury & Christopher Higgans, a business professor of University of Western Ontario has researched the role of mangers in allowing employees to successfully balance work-life needs. In the report, Supportive Managers: What Are they? Why Do They Matter? It is found “tremendous amount of inequity in organizations today as supervisors act as gatekeepers to many of the benefits offered by the firm…..employees who work for ‘supportive’ supervisors who trust and respect their employees and who base their decisions on circumstances rather than ‘the book’ report less stress and greater productivity ….in the report they said “ Employees with supportive managers are more likely to have high job satisfaction, high organizational commitment and lower level of job stress and life stress. (Stephenie Overman, HRFOCUS/July 1999)

So the answer of first question given in the introduction is that if there is dearth of formal family initiatives practiced by the organizations and no provision in Indian legislation then supportive work culture and informal family friendly initiatives can solve the work-life interface.

5. Personal Values, Beliefs and Life Style for Work-Life Enrichment
Second question is, to balance the work and life of employees is only liability of employers and government or an employee herself can take certain initiatives.

The critical question is whether Work Life Balance (WLB) is for the individuals to receive and maintain or it is the responsibility of the employer? In the former discourse, research has looked into WLB as a personal choice. In addition, values, worker type, role demand and conflict are some of the elements that domain has emphasized. In the second discourse, research has focused on family friendly policies offered by organizations including flexible work arrangement. (Tara Shankar & Jyotsna Bhatnagar 2010).

On one side, the current work scenario, intense pressure, constant declines, changing demographics has put pressure on the dual earning parents. And on the second side of the coin we are ourselves responsible for the present scenario. Urbanization and westernization have broken our joint family system. We are losing our values and beliefs of tolerance, adjustment and respect. In a study it has found by the author that the working mothers residing with her parents or with her husband’s parents have less stress of work life.

Most of the working couples are not practicing the preaching of our holly books and granths e.g. to got up early in the morning, take bath, meditate and start the day. Rather late night parties and life style has made this interface intense.
6. Spirituality and work-life
Sometimes the projected issues of life and work are because of our attitude towards life, behavior with others and mismanagement of our time.

A large volume of research shows that people who are more religious and spiritual have better mental health and adapt more quickly to health problems compared to those who are less religious and spiritual. These possible benefits to mental health and well-being have physiological consequences that impact physical health, affect the risk of disease, and influence response to treatment. (Harold G. Koenig 2012)

James E. Kennedy et al (2003) confirmed in their study that increased spirituality was positively associated with increased well-being, increased sense of meaning and purpose in life, and decreased tendency to become angry.

So, physical and mental wellness is directly proportional to our eating style, lifestyle, habits, attitude and spirituality.

7. Conclusion
Family-friendly policies adopted by the organizations can help the employees to decrease the work-family interface and yield benefits for themselves, their families and their employers. Though there is dearth of formal friendly initiatives practiced in the organizations in India, supportive work culture and informal friendly environment can benefit the employees and organizations.

Apart from this personal attitude, Indian values, beliefs, lifestyle, time management and spiritual inclination can make a difference and help the employees to balance their work and life efficiently.

References

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