

WORK LIFE BALANCE – ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES

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Abstract

Work-life balance (WLB) has emerged as a critical issue in modern workplaces due to the increasing integration of professional and personal responsibilities. The present research study explores the antecedents and consequences of WLB from a conceptual perspective, analyzing its impact on employees, organizations, and society. The research identifies key factors influencing WLB, including individual traits, organizational policies, and cultural norms. It highlights the significant role of flexible work arrangements, leadership support, and societal expectations in shaping employees' experiences of balance. Additionally, the study discusses the consequences of WLB on mental and physical well-being, job satisfaction, employee retention, and overall organizational productivity. Findings suggest that organizations fostering supportive work environments experience higher employee engagement and reduced turnover rates. Furthermore, societal implications, such as gender inclusivity and economic contributions, are examined, emphasizing the necessity of policy interventions to enhance work-life equilibrium. By providing a comprehensive review of existing literature, the present research study contributes to the ongoing discourse on WLB and offers recommendations for organizations and policymakers to create sustainable and inclusive work environments.

Keywords: Work-life balance, employee well-being, organizational policies, flexible work arrangements, job satisfaction.

1. Introduction

There are so many debates that surround the concept of work life balance. From corporate firms to policy makers, everyone is endorsing the concept of work life balance for all working professionals. This is because work life balance, in recent times, has gained significant attention

because of its widespread positive implications on both the work and non-work domains of individuals. Managing the balance between professional and personal responsibilities has become more important as work and personal life become more intertwined due to globalization, technology improvements, and shifting societal ideals. The equilibrium between a person's job responsibilities and personal life, which includes self-care, leisure activities, and family time, is known as work-life balance. The productivity and well-being of an individual depends on maintaining this balance. This is so because; any individual needs to manage all the societal roles. Be it a father, mother, son or daughter. In certain societal cultures, especially like that in India, women are expected to meet the societal expectations more than their spouses or other male members in the family. The onus of managing the work and home domains is greater and more challenging for working women. While the job roles come with certain responsibilities and timelines, they can also be subjected to other demands at home like taking care of aging parents, parents-in-law, ailing child, their school responsibilities or other regular commitments to cooking, cleaning etc. Despite women contributing financially to the household incomes, their non-work domain roles still remain the same. While some have personal support systems at home, organizations are nowadays realizing the need for creating robust organizational support systems that can help especially the female employees to continue their professional careers.

Although it has been used in common parlance for several years, the concept of work-life balance was first used in 1986. It's interesting to note that work/life initiatives date back to the 1930s. An organization's policies and procedures are designed to help employees perform their jobs and their professions effectively while also giving them the freedom to deal with personal issues or family issues. Work and life balance is meant to be possible only when there is minimal role conflict and appropriate execution of the responsibilities both at work and at home. Conflict arises as a result of the demands from the work and non-work domains not being compatible, and people suffer from a lack of work life balance as a result. More emphasis is being placed on work life balance nowadays than in the past by those joining the workforce in today's times. Nevertheless, the degree to which the stability is being achieved for both the domains is still significantly below the desired level. This is so because, India is one of those countries that still has the highest number of working hours in a week, both officially and unofficially. In fact, researches call for introspection on the fact that young graduates are being dragged into situations where they have to work for progressively longer hours and so suffer an increasingly unsatisfactory balance between home and work.

Despite the widespread debates on the significance of work life balance, some countries are still lagging behind when it comes to providing greater benefits on this front. According to the global work life index released in 2024, while New Zealand topped the countries list, India performed dismally poor to be ranked at 48 in the world.

In the light of this background, this article examines the causes (or elements that lead to) and effects (or results) of work-life balance.

2. Importance of Work-Life Balance

The broad term “work-life balance” (WLB) encompasses a suitable balance between one’s goals and job and, on the other side, leisure, travel, and family life. Employees’ main concerns have constantly been long work hours and the strength and intensity of the task. At first, work-life balance was envisioned in terms of work-family conflict, which was defined as when two or more sets of pressures occur simultaneously and complying with one would make complying with the other more difficult (Kahn et al., 1964). Over time, the makeup of the work and family life domains has seen tremendous change.

Male and female employees nowadays deal with a wide range of everyday issues that might occasionally cause an imbalance between their personal and professional lives. According to Lobel (1991), work-family conflicts occur when fulfilling one duty is incompatible with fulfilling the other. Thus, a lack of work-life balance affects how well employees perform both at work and in their personal lives. A worker who has a better work-life balance can make a bigger contribution to the expansion and success of the company.

Some studies have stated that work life balance is nothing but individuals subjectively evaluating and gauging their balance between work and the other domains of their life (Guest 2002). This method contrasts with the popular beliefs that work life balance is equivalent to high role enrichment (Frone 2003), low role conflict (Duxbury and Higgins 2001), or an equal distribution of time and focus among the various roles that make up a person’s eco-system (Marks and MacDermid, 1996). Additionally, work life balance is not the same as other related constructs like work-family conflict (WFC), work-family balance (WFB), or work-family enrichment (WFE) that just concentrates on work and family roles. In fact, work life balance more closely reflects real-life experiences, where people typically participate in a variety of non-work activities and in a wider range of personal responsibilities (Hall et al. 2013).

Achieving work-life balance is crucial because it affects workers’ productivity, job satisfaction, well-being, and organizational dedication. An individual employee may experience stress, burnout, and decreased productivity if they have an imbalance, whether it is an overemphasis on work or personal life. On the other hand, when workers strike a healthy balance, they report greater mental and physical health, increased job satisfaction, and enhanced performance in both their personal and professional lives. The debates on well-being have also been fairly recent. The

working professionals, in the early years of industrialization, were expected to be available for their employers and work with much dedication for extended hours. The concept of vacations and time offs were rarely encouraged. The well-being concept and its impact on an employee's productivity and performance were rarely recognized.

The generational change in workforce has brought in a change in aspirations at the workplaces. This was unequivocally recognized by many employers and started to make attempts to accommodate the new found aspirations. The younger workforce is looking at life beyond the workplace by investing in upskilling opportunities, networking, higher education and other career growth prospects. Apart from this, they are also extensively investing in vacationing and other lifestyle aspirational fulfillments. All these desires and the strong need to balance out their work and life for these young workers is another significant rationale for work life balance realization within organizations.

3. Methodology

Through an analysis of its definitions, frameworks, and consequences in the modern workplace, this study attempts to investigate the idea of work-life balance (WLB) from a conceptual standpoint. A conceptual approach was determined to be the most appropriate strategy for this study since work-life balance is a dynamic notion that is influenced by several organizational, social, and cultural elements. The literature review, which serves as the basis for comprehending the present status of work-life balance research, is an essential component of any conceptual paper. Peer-reviewed books, journal articles, and other studies from related disciplines like human resource management, psychology, sociology, and organizational behavior were included in the review. Finding multiple definitions of work-life balance, as well as its causes, effects, and determinants in varied work environments, was part of the process.

The literature review was systematically executed using open-source databases like the Google Scholar, Science Direct, Scopus and other leading publication houses. This study has inputted the keywords such as work-life balance, well-being, employee support systems, working hours, organizational policies, and flexible work arrangements to extract the best possible results while examining the antecedents and consequences of the study's construct. This study has also successfully brought forth the various gaps in the existing body of literature by examining the intersectionality of work-life balance with the demographic aspects like gender and societal culture to comprehend their influence on the overall perceptions and experiences of balance.

The knowledge gained from the literature and conceptual analysis will be used to provide fresh directions for further study and real-world applications. The findings' ramifications for businesses,

legislators, and workers will also be discussed in the article, along with recommendations for improving work-life balance in real-world settings. By offering a thorough grasp of the idea of work-life balance, this study will advance the field's theoretical understanding and provide constructive recommendations on how people and organizations can deal with the difficulties of juggling work and personal obligations in a dynamically changing world.

3. The Antecedents of Work-Life Balance: Key Influences and Determining Factors

There are many factors or aspects that help individuals to maintain a healthy work life balance. They are known as the antecedents and can be categorized as intrinsic, organizational or societal. The intrinsic or personal factors pertain to individuals and can influence their preferences and choices towards work life balance. They generally comprise of the value system which an individual possesses, personality characteristics or attributes that shape the lives of individuals.

A person's personality is a significant factor in every life. Personality fundamentally determines how individuals manage their personal and professional lives. The traits or attributes which individuals possess influences their preferences and career choices. Prioritizing family or career essentially stems from a person's personality and the attributes are the antecedents to such choices. Characteristics like emotional stability and conscientiousness are linked to better work-life balance. Finding a balance between work and personal life is facilitated by conscientious people's proclivity for effective time management. That makes such people to also effectively manage the tasks within their job or work roles. Conversely, people with high neuroticism scores could be more stressed and find it difficult to strike a healthy work-life balance. Handling stress, be it work or at home, is important. People who are good at handling stress can give more time as well nurture important relations, both at work and home.

Another important factor in work-life balance is a person's stage of life. This is where the generational workforce and their personal commitments are debated extensively. Young workers who are generally unmarried and away from their families in a new city or country are believed to have a greater work life balance because of negligible responsibilities at home. Maintaining a balance between work and personal life may be more difficult for young married couples. This is quite challenging for those with small children or care giving responsibilities. On the other hand, those in their latter career years or close to superannuation might have fewer responsibilities as their children are grown up adults or have already settled down in their careers. Such individuals might find it easier to manage their personal and professional lives (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). People's objectives and work-life balance issues may change as they advance in their personal and professional lives. However what cannot be denied here is the way the gendered roles are defined by the societies and cultures irrespective of the life stage one is operating in. Wherever an onus is

placed on a particular gender to mandatorily perform certain duties, stress occurs because of the expectations associated with meeting those responsibilities. These responsibilities and expectations imposed upon individuals can intensify with varying life stages.

Work-life balance is also impacted by values and beliefs about life and work. For instance, people who place a higher priority on career success than on personal time may have a poor work-life balance, whereas people who value their own time and well-being may look for flexible work arrangements that enable them to better integrate their personal and professional lives (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998).

Apart from the individual or personal factors that influence a person's choices and preferences towards work life balance, the firm for which an individual works also plays a significant role in this direction. The organizational or firm associated factors are essentially associated with policies, practices and the organizational culture that defines significant aspects that can bring forth performance and satisfaction among the employees. Other critical factors that support the employees are the flexibility in work schedules, support from leadership and team members and having a robust organizational support system. These factors have shown a strong impact on work life balance experiences within organizations.

Off late workplace flexibility is considered important by the workers. During covid, while the firms were left with no option of engaging their workers in a work from office mode, it was the time when businesses acknowledged the fact that employees can remain productive and efficient with remote working as well. Post covid, many firms have holistically embraced the work from home and remote working options with such options becoming a decisive factor for many employees. This flexibility was especially beneficial as it allowed the firms to engage more women across demographic segments, young mothers as well as girls from traditional social backgrounds or from smaller towns and developing cities. Work flexibility also opened up greater opportunities for firms as their talent market got expanded and offered a greater supply of manpower than ever before.

Work flexibility is nowadays increasingly looked at as critical to work-life balance. Flexible work arrangements that are fundamentally offered tend to vary from organization to organization. Positive organizational cultures emphasize more of flexible work schedules as long as they do not compromise on productivity and efficiency. This is so because such cultures do not impose control on their employees. Schedule flexibility, such as the option to work from home or choose their own hours, enables workers to better balance their personal and professional commitments. Research indicates that the more is the work-life balance; more is the job satisfaction and employee retention (Hill et. al., 2001).

In other critical organizational factors, leadership is also considered significant to work life balance. A culture of work-life harmony can be fostered by leaders who are cognizant of and supportive of their employees' requirements for work-life balance. Employees' overall work-life balance is enhanced when managers are compassionate and meet their personal requirements, such as allowing leave for family obligations or modifying workloads (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). The role of leaders is increasingly debated upon as they nurture cultures that are either positive or negative for the employees. Positive cultures empathize with the employees' needs and help them to thrive through better performance and greater well-being. On the other hand, the negative cultures that are endorsed by certain leaders believe that their relation with their employees' is merely transactional and taking care of their mental well-being is not within their domain.

It is popularly believed that leaders create organizational cultures which are widely acknowledged as being crucial to shaping employees' attitudes and experiences in any firm. Good organizational cultures are considered to be positive and caring for their employees. They not just create environments for professional growth but also support the employee's personal well-being. Besides promoting productivity and performance, good work cultures allow a smooth integration of the work and life domains of the employees, thus supporting their work-life balance. Strong and constructive cultures have robust support systems that allow employees to take time off and prioritize their individual and family well-being. This also creates better work-life balance outcomes. A relaxed and satisfied employee who nurtures his relationships in life is more focused and passionate at work. On the other hand, there are cultures which believe that employees should be available for their organizations irrespective of their fixed work schedules. Work cultures that are demanding in terms of longer and unrestricted working hours impose high performance expectations on their employees. Such high performance and productivity outcomes come at a cost and in turn create an environment that encumbers employees' endeavors to sustain a healthy work life balance (Rothbard, 2001). Bad work cultures combined with poor leadership not only cause detrimental effects to their employees and within their organizations, they also contribute to long term negative implications in terms of decreased health, commitment to work and life, job satisfaction, life satisfaction, reduced passion and productivity and extending to even factors like attrition, decreased labor participation rates or migration.

Apart from the individual and organizational factors, there are other societal factors as well that tend to shape the work life balance experiences of individuals. It needs to be noted here that the societal factors that act as external forces on employees and societal members in general tend to vary from culture to culture. The societal factors are governed by certain norms that are idiosyncratic to each culture and manifest in the forms of cultural norms, gendered roles or policies at the regional and national level.

One of the most popular factors is the cultural norms and expectations that are imposed on individuals by every society in which they operate. These cultural norms and expectations are passed on, usually orally, from one generation to another generation and mandates individuals to adhere to those set norms and expectations so as to gain greater acceptance amongst their community. Cultural norms and expectations are set for various roles and responsibilities which include family, profession, food, attire and other lifestyle aspects as well. Cultural norms regarding work and family obligations have a big impact on work-life balance. Some cultures place a lot of pressure on people to put work before their personal lives, which makes it harder for them to maintain an effective balance between work and family. Other cultures, especially those with strong family values, place more weight on personal life, which could help workers balance their personal and professional obligations. Collectivistic societies where women are viewed as care givers are expected to prioritize their personal lives. In such societies, men are given the role of financial earners who are expected to monetarily support their families. However, with the growth in nuclear families, more emphasis on women's education and independence and growth in multicultural societies, women are no longer expected to stick to their traditional gendered roles. Societies are now allowing the blurring of the gendered roles. This is more so because of the realization that all genders are required to shoulder the personal and professional responsibilities irrespective of their traditionally defined roles (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011).

Despite the rapid changes and modernization of societies, it needs to be understood that work-life balance is significantly shaped by gender roles. The entire debate on work-life balance has seen light when the gender roles and responsibilities started getting blurred. Women in societies are customarily expected to provide the majority of care in many societies and countries. Till the time women were confined by the family and society to their primary roles, it was easier for the members within a family to manage their duties on the work front as well as family front. However, with the participation of women in the labor force saw a rise, the work life imbalances started to arise because women were still expected to fulfill their personal and family obligations. Societies have also conventionally made men experience social pressure to prioritize their job before their family time. This again made it more difficult for them to manage their work and other personal obligations which resulted in imbalances. Disparities in men's and women's work-life balance may be exacerbated by gender imbalance in care giving duties (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010).

At the core of these imbalances, are the policies that are implemented by various corporate firms as well as countries. Any organization that intends to increase the representation of all genders in its workforce, tends to formulate and implement policies that are favorable to its genders as well as to its varied demographic employee categories.

The ability of employees to balance their work and personal lives can be significantly impacted by national policies, such as paid maternity or parental leave, child care support system, and working hour regulations. Work-life balance is more common among workers in nations with generous leave policies and working parent support systems. Even organizations that liberally allow a work from home arrangement for young nursing mothers allows the women to not only balance their various duties, it also allows them to continue in their work. Scandinavian nations, for instance, with their robust social safety nets and progressive family policies, routinely report higher levels of work-life balance than nations with less comprehensive policies (Gornick & Meyers, 2003).

In countries like India, where the labor supply is huge and the private sector, despite the legal frameworks, still remains largely unregulated, there is no onus on the employers to offer supportive work environment. This usually is a cause of concern where an incessant labor supply is any time available to replace the existing workforce. Adding to the policy requisites, there are also sectoral variations in terms of hiring as well as offering the much needed support. The corporate firms also fail to adhere to the work week schedules in their quest for higher productivity and performance. Another distressing aspect to the debate is the lack of adequate public infrastructure that allows employees a faster and smoother commute to and fro. Popular surveys have stated that Indians average around one hour for one way commute to the workplace. This again varies from city to city and with peak and non-peak hours as well. This is in stark contrast to countries like Italy and Portugal which have commute times as low as 1 minute to 30 minutes. Research studies have also proved a strong linkage between traffic commute times and work life balance experienced by employees. With the linkage being established, many firms have started advocating either flexible work from home arrangements or a complete remote work option for their people (Echebiri et. al. 2024; Emre & De Spiegeleire 2021).

4. The Consequences of Work-Life Balance – The Conceptual Discussions and Underpinnings

Work-life balance's effects can be broadly divided into three categories. They are societal, organizational, and individual. The ability to strike a balance between work and personal life has a significant impact on society as a whole, as well as on the businesses where people work. The effects of work-life balance on mental health and general well-being are among its most important effects. Poor work-life balance is regularly linked to increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, according to research. In contrast, attaining a work-life balance leads to benefits including less stress, increased life satisfaction, and enhanced emotional health (Allen et. al. 2000). Realizing the need for providing good mental well-being for their employees, the corporate firms worldwide are now gradually shifting towards a four day work week. This will allow the employees to meet their personal goals and obligations as well as revitalize their energies through

an extended weekend. Research in this direction has strongly established this linkage (Travis 2009; Wadsworth and Facer, 2016).

Work-life balance is also believed to have an impact on physical health in addition to mental health. Burnout, exhaustion, and medical conditions like headaches, sleep disorders, and cardiovascular issues can result from a persistent work-life imbalance. Not catering enough time to pleasure and family creates stress and anxiety amongst individuals which are the root cause to many diseases. Workers who expressed a lack of work-life balance were more likely to suffer from bodily symptoms like illness and exhaustion. Conversely, workers who were able to strike a balance between their home and professional lives tended to report being in better physical health. A healthy body creates a healthy mind and allows a person to be more productive at work.

Job satisfaction also rises when work-life balance is achieved. According to Greenhaus and Allen (2011), workers who maintain a healthy work-life balance are more likely to express job satisfaction and are less likely to suffer from burnout or discontent. Additionally, as individuals who maintain a good balance are more motivated, creative, and productive at work. Work-life balance is foundational to job success.

Apart from the individual consequences, there are some significant organizational consequences that can be achieved through a good work life balance. Employees feel connected to those organizations and wish to continue their association wherever they have positive experiences and get sufficient time to cater to their personal and family needs. Such firms have higher employee retention rates and achieve higher performance outcomes because of greater work engagement levels.

Employee retention rates are typically better in companies that promote work-life balance. The likelihood of employees quitting their jobs in pursuit of better chances is lower when they believe that their personal needs are met. A study by Hill et al. (2001) found that workers are more likely to stick with their existing employers if they have access to flexible work arrangements because it allows them more time for rejuvenation and for connecting with their family members. Such arrangements are vital to those workers who are especially dealing with ailing or aged parents. Work life balance helps them to meet the medical needs of their family members.

Businesses that support work-life balance frequently also see improvements in terms of higher organizational performance. Workers are more attentive, involved, and productive when they are not overworked. On the other hand, companies that do not promote work-life balance may experience decreased performance, reduced morale, and increased work absenteeism. Businesses

that place a high priority on work-life balance have been found to have more positive corporate cultures and higher levels of overall productivity (Rothbard, 2001).

Employee engagement is another popular domain of research that has been connected with work life balance. Engaged employees are considered to be passionate and possess a greater amount of ownership than other employees. Engagement at work is believed to be directly affected by work-life balance. Workers are more likely to be engaged at work if they believe they can successfully balance work and personal life. This leads to meaningfulness at work as the worker can engage with full passion and energy and with no distractions because of certain personal commitments. Better performance and creative thinking is also found to be impacted through engaged employees' dedication, zeal, and motivation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

While majority of the research focuses on the benefits of work life balance for individuals and organizations, there are societal benefits as well with short term and long term implications. There are widespread debates on gender inclusivity, gender mainstreaming and financial empowerment of women. There are lot of personal, firm level and cultural enablers and disablers that impact female workforce participation. However, gender mainstreaming and equality is possible only when the society and organizations offer adequate possibilities for work-life balance. Policies that promote flexible work schedules, maternity leave, and childcare facilities are especially beneficial to women since they allow them to engage in the workforce more fairly. Work-life policies can therefore aid in minimizing gender differences in employment and career progression (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). Women can continue in their careers when such support systems are created at the family, societal and organizational level without take long term career breaks. Women in continued careers will also rise to occupy leadership positions in firms.

When support systems are created, work life balance promoting policies can also offer broader economic benefits. Higher output and economic growth are often the results of a more engaged and productive workforce. With the implementation of gender sensitive policies, higher economic output is also achieved through greater female participation. The economic output of women then gets transferred to the household level in terms of better education for the children and better healthcare facilities for the family members. Additionally, governments and companies can lower healthcare expenses associated with stress, burnout, and disease by promoting work-life balance, which enhances the society's physical and mental well-being.

5. Conclusion

Work-life balance is a multifaceted concept influenced by personal, organizational, and societal factors. As work and personal life become increasingly intertwined, the need for effective WLB strategies has become more critical than ever. This study highlights intrinsic factors such as

personality traits, life stages, and value systems, along with external influences like workplace policies, leadership support, and cultural norms, collectively determine an individual's ability to achieve a balanced life. Furthermore, the consequences of work-life balance extend beyond individuals to impact organizational productivity, employee engagement, and broader societal well-being.

Organizations that foster flexible work arrangements, supportive leadership, and positive workplace cultures experience higher employee retention and satisfaction, ultimately leading to enhanced business performance. At the societal level, progressive policies promoting gender inclusivity and work-life balance contribute to economic growth and social equity. However, challenges such as excessive working hours, rigid job expectations, and insufficient support systems continue to hinder the realization of a sustainable work-life balance, particularly in regions where workplace policies remain inadequate.

To address these challenges, organizations and policymakers must work collaboratively to implement holistic strategies that support work-life integration. Businesses should prioritize employee well-being by adopting flexible work arrangements, mental health initiatives, and family-friendly policies. Additionally, governments should introduce and enforce regulations that ensure equitable working conditions, fostering a more balanced and productive workforce.

Ultimately, achieving work-life balance is not just an individual responsibility but a collective effort that requires active participation from employers, employees, and policymakers. By embracing a more flexible and inclusive approach, organizations and societies can create an environment where individuals thrive both professionally and personally, leading to long-term benefits for all stakeholders.

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