

Managing work life  
balance in  
contemporary  
workplaces  
management essay



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Recently, WLB (Work-life Balance) has been in demand for proper solutions on the employee's side. Consequently, WLB has become a very hot topic debated worldwide in boardrooms and government halls today. It is being focused as one of the most important issues that human resource professionals are paying attention managing it. The importance of managing WLB has been increasing over the past 2 decades (De Bruin & Dupuis, 2004). The several changes have occurred in some areas regarding to this issue. First of all, jobs are more complex and employees are receiving more pressure to achieve the expected performance within the shorter timeframe and fewer resources (Hosie, Forster & Servatos, 2004). Secondly, the demographic factors of the labour force have affected the changes of human resource management, such as gender, ethnicity, dual career couples, religion, and multi-generational workplaces. Finally, the nature of employment contract requires the organizations to manage their employee's welfare, job satisfaction, and stress more effectively (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

Regardless to the above statement, Purcell (2002) has mentioned that organizational interest towards WLB management has originated from evidence that there is an obvious linkage between firm performance and the way the firm manages people. This implies the opportunities of having good WLB management might be the future source of competitive advantage. However, it is not easy to initiate the good WLB management program as it needs to integrate employees' work effectively and minimise job dissatisfactions or any other conflicts (De Bruin et al, 2004). To achieve this, many western organizations have however adopted a unique set of policies,

for instance, on-site nursery, resting quarter, and fitness centre. This provides employees opportunities to fully perform their assigned works, at the same time, manage their personal lives effectively.

## **The current issues**

Knowing that WLB management is a crucial issue for every organization, there is a considerable argument on the effectiveness of WLB policies in bringing elasticity and eliminating job dissatisfaction in the modern workplace (Kirrane & Buckley, 2004). WLB literature, that has served its theoretical and practical usefulness, is then identified. Buzzanell et al, (2005) has further suggested that the WLB generally represents the conflicts in roles for married, professional, and managerial women. Meanwhile, other demographics are rarely referred by these conflicts.

Moreover, most organizations have inability to clearly explain the interaction of work and non-work roles that impact employees' working-life, stress and job satisfaction, for instance. Elloy and Smith (2004) has stated that because non-working roles of each employee are inherently unclear and complicated, organisations are then not capable to understand the proper way to react that impacts each individual. Spinks (2004) also added that organisations, however, could be unwilling to understand their employees and have instead created a 'one-size-fits-all' policy concerning that it simply enabled workforce to work longer rather than support their important non-work roles. Nevertheless, the insufficiency of current WLB policy has been emphasized by the study of Kiger (2005) which revealed that the participation rate in available WLB programs is actually less than 2%. This very low figure is

explained by Dex and Smith (2002) that there are two major factors leading <https://assignbuster.com/managing-work-life-balance-in-contemporary-workplaces-management-essay/>

this low figure. The first is the equality feeling. As numerous employees reporting that they wish not to be a special case asking for special treatment. In addition to this, the paper of Water et al (2006) also supported that the workplace culture reduced the willingness of Australian university staff to access WLB policy options. The second is because the ineffective WLB as it has been originated from one size fit all policy. Thus, it could not deliver satisfaction to employees and could not be practical in reality. Consequently, organisations, that do not study more on WLB approach, are increasing issues in attraction and retention of employees. The research has found that generation X and Y have placed higher importance on WLB than previous generations. They could be attracted and retained longer in the firm that provides flexibility in accordance with individual needs. As similar to the paper of Beck et al (2005), it shows an increment of women managers who are willing to leave firm and become consultant as it provides them more control on WLB.

As a result, the WLB literature, otherwise, revealed the limitation of its ability to provide a useful framework for both in theoretical and practical scheme (Hyman et al, 2004). Despite its name, the WLB literature remains concerning on work-family edge and fails to correctly discover the range of work and non-roles which affect an individual's satisfaction. To conquer these issues, Elloy et al (2003) suggests that an effective conceptualization of the WLB requires a holistic approach to HR management, which involves a better awareness of the worker's daily activities rather than only concern on their working hour. Its design and implementation should adopt the following four criteria. First of all, it must aim mainly on the integration of all human

resource activities with the firm's vision, goals and strategic planning. This would bring consistency between workforce's life context and organizational culture. Secondly, the implementation of policies must create a set of internal consistency of employment strategy providing flexibility, quality, and commitment as a milestone of the WLB's concept. Thirdly, the importance of human resources must be considered as well as the need to engage in practices. Both would reflect the understanding of the WLB concept. Thus, human resource approach is essential and is the fundamental to the connection between WLB objective and the success. Finally, the behavior of the line managers in employees' perspective should be taken into account as it affects the success of WLB's policies, such as recognition by employees that their superiors are committed to the achievement of a meaningful.

In conclusion, the point, which organization is capable to support the achievement and benefits associated with it, depends on two major concerns. The method that the WLB has been identified and formalized within human resource strategy and the way the managerial people react to workforce's requests for WLB requirement regarding to individual demand. For the formalization, firms should be worn of the degree to which WLB is being implemented, whether it has been regarded as a right, a right to request, or as a matter of management judgment. In terms of managerial responses, the organization is required to make a decision either to implement a hard human resource strategy or a commitment approach towards the request for the needed WLB policies. It is the connection between company's culture in rituals and practices are modeled by organizational leaders that set the tendency for employees' responses to

WLB policies. The accomplishment of a useful WLB policies concept has fundamentally failed in Australia with the given issues discussed above.

## **The link between organizational performance and work-life balance**

As the effectiveness of WLB management requires the comprehensive recognition from organization regarding the non-work roles which impact employee's working-lives, regardless whatever has been implemented in WLB in recent years, there is still insufficient learning model that could bring real practical and effective WLB policies to the organization in terms of definition and practice. With the aim to explore the contemporary WLB's boundaries, the organizational role theory perspective has been picked up to the adoption. It is suggested that the effective management of this isolated impact could be done by having human resource managers audit WLB impact and consider it as part of job evaluation process.

Interestingly, to state these WLB issues, there are two strategic options involving in key human resource policies, especially, in the job analysis, job design, and performance management process. Primarily, the implementation of a WLB impact audit system must be taken as part of job analysis function. Traditionally, the job analysis function serves to describe each position within an organisation in terms of its assignments, responsibilities, and chain of command. The requirement to complete the WLB concept is a concentration on the size of job, job's intensity, and the degree that the work impacts on each individual life via interfering communication system, mobile phones and e-mail technology, for instance.

Despite the fact that the focus on technical characteristics has served as a

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basis for defining a position aspect, it has been less successful in supporting a realistic job analysis regarding to the job's effect as commended in existing human resource literature (Buda et al, 2003). Thus, to make the better job analysis, the audition of WLB impact must attempt to outline in what way each job's position influences each employee's life and provide constructive basis for understanding of the position's requirements. Precisely, the audit focuses on both present positions and new positions yet to be filled.

Particularly, it is recommended that human resource managers implement a proactive attitude in managing their current and prospective workforce's expectations. Thus, they could eventually approach their roles in making effective WLB management.

Besides, the second strategic option is to assimilate the results of the WLB inspection into the continuing job evaluation function. This would place primary accountability for the operative enactment of WLB of workforce to their line manager. Managers therefore are able to debate the effect of execution the duties on WLB and another way round directly with each member of staff. In addition, the key performance indicator for managers would be their effectiveness and presentation in managing the WLB of workers. Organization must focus on eliminating the obstacles for employees in taking WLB options (Waters & Bardoel, 2006).

This WLB audit attached into the human resource key activities would provide benefits to organization in terms of increasing the possibility to reach the agreement on role taking and role agreement between organization and employees. Moreover, it reduces likelihood of the role conflict. Obviously, the connections between this WLB implementation and <https://assignbuster.com/managing-work-life-balance-in-contemporary-workplaces-management-essay/>

organizational performance are potentially strong. Firstly, it offers the organisation an opportunity to develop recruitment scheme by avoiding the role conflict. Secondly, it allows time and cost savings by putting prospective candidates to remove themselves from the recruitment process, if they are not satisfy with the work-roles conditions of a available position. Thirdly, it provides a systematic mechanism by monitoring WLB effectiveness during implementation on individual employees. Fourthly, the enactment of an inspection requires strategic correspondence between WLB policy and corporate strategy helps the organization obtains the feedback from individuals on the content of WLB as well as observes the cultural impact of human resource management policies. It therefore augments the likelihood of increasing human resource management policy's flexibility and it caters greater diversity towards personal demands of each individual. As a result, it is more appropriate to work-life balance and the performance of the organization would be improved eventually as all employees feel satisfied to this work place and perform their assigned responsibility willingly.

## **Practical examples**

Knowing that WLB management has never been simple to every organization, even the multinational corporations have been facing the issue since 1980. Throughout the decade, the U. S. government faced the challenge of major issue, as reflected by the pregnancy discrimination issue. There had been the recognition of needs of women employees and major innovative organizations began to modify workplace policies and job designs, Deloitte and IBM, for example. The modifications included employee assistance programs (EAPs), home-based work, and nursery service. These



policies were successfully implemented and satisfactory to employees of these two organizations. However, shortly afterwards, men also commenced to demand work-life attentions. Eventually, at the end of the decade, this issue had spread from women to men, parents, singles, and couples affecting organizations and cultures. The increment of WLB demand has resulted in initiating work-life solutions. The research of Buda et al (2003) indicated that new graduates were selecting their careers based on their own work-life control. Regrettably, even if many organizations tried to adopt WLB policies, their workforce and line managers were not fully applying them.

To sum up, as seen from the above cases, numbers of policies adopted in 1980s failed to influence real-world work-life-balance results. Americans still showed feeling of even higher overworked and lack of control on their personal lives. These unsatisfactory results notified the business section on the degree of difficulty in managing WLB as many of them had been unsuccessful in applying these policies. Consequently, the WLB challenge has not yet been conquered and successful. It requires more customized strategic option rather than the standard platform in solving this issue. This conclusion is also supported by Work-Life LCCB (Leadership Council of the Conference Board) as they stated that by observing from the past decade, an acquiring of high degree human capitals and work-life professionals illustrated that work-life balance policies have not yet succeeded their proposed results (Buda et al, 2003).