

A 'balanced' life: work-life balance

[Business](#), [Work](#)



\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

\n \t

1. [Personal lives and family values to the forefront:](#) \n \t
2. [Stress and the Consequences for Employer and Employee:](#) \n \t
3. [Conclusion:](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

Introduction:

In a society filled with conflicting responsibilities and commitments, work-life balance has become a predominant issue in the workplace. Three major factors contribute to the interest in, and the importance of, serious consideration of work-life balance: global competition; renewed interest in personal lives/family values; and an aging workforce. Work-life balance (WLB) is an important area of human resource management that is receiving increasing attention from government, researchers and management and professionals seeking innovative ways to enhance their organisation's competitive advantage in the marketplace may find that WLB challenges offer a win-win solution.

Defining WLB has become a social issue all over the world. Blunsdon et al (2006, p. 1-16) defines Work-life balance as people who control or manage the see-saw of both life and career with achievement and satisfaction. It has also been defined that work and non-work activities (e. g. private holiday, seeing friends, sports) are compatible and in accordance with the promotion of an individual's life quality (Kalliath and Brough 2008, p. 323). Alan Felstad (2002 p. 56) defined work-life balance as: " The relationship between the <https://assignbuster.com/a-balanced-life-work-life-balance/>

institutional and cultural times and spaces of work and non-work societies where income is predominantly generated and distributed through labour markets”.

The meaning of WLB has different things to different groups, and the meaning often depends on the context of the conversation and the talker's viewpoint. The following are working definitions of terms used regarding work-life balance; some definitions overlap and some are continuing to develop. Work-family: a term more frequently used in the past than today. The current trend is to use titles that include the phrase work-life, giving a broader work-life connotation or labelling referring to specific areas of support (e. g., quality of life, flexible work options, life balance, etc.) Work-family conflict: the push and pull between work and family responsibilities.

The role of work has changed throughout the world due to economic conditions and social demands. With the frequent changes in the labour market, companies seek not only the differential to become more competitive, but also adaptations address the needs of the organisational environment. It is also recognised that work-life balance can lead indirectly to productivity gains through increased retention and helps organisations to respond to customer needs more effectively.

To balance work and leisure is an important issue for all employees and employers. The three main influencers on work-life balance is the government, unions and businesses. The linkage between work and family has been studied as far back as the 1960s (Gregory 2009). These initial studies mainly focused on women and work-family stress. Later other

concepts emerged. It was not until the 1970s the concept of “ work-life balance” occurred (McIntosh 2003).

The issue of WLB has developed out of demographic and social changes that have resulted in a more diverse, declining workforce, different family and work models. Supporting WLB is seen as a way of attracting and retaining the labour force needed to support economic well-being. In organisations and on the home front, the challenge of work-life balance is rising to the top of many employers' and employees' consciousness. In today's fast-paced society, human resource professionals seek options to positively impact the bottom line of their companies, improve employee morale, retain employees with valuable company knowledge, and keep pace with workplace trends. However, experience has shown that policy on flexible work practices needs to be supported by strategies to achieve effective implementation.

Personal lives and family values to the forefront:

The British work ethic remains intact, yet in recent years personal and family lives have become critical values that British are less willing to put on hold, put aside, or ignore, for the sake of work. The need for work-life balance has been clearly shown by the results of employee surveys, conducted by bodies such as The Work Foundation, which revealed that UK men now strive to be different from their fathers in their approach to home and family (over 60 per cent stating that they are more likely to feel guilty about neglecting domestic duties than their fathers did).

WLB from the employee viewpoint: the dilemma of managing work obligations and personal/family responsibilities. WLB from the employer

viewpoint: the challenge of creating a supportive company culture where employees can focus on their jobs while at work. Family-friendly benefits: benefits that offer employees the latitude to address their personal and family commitments, while at the same time not compromising their work responsibilities. Work-life programs: programs (often financial or time-related) established by an employer that offer employees options to address work and personal responsibilities. Work-life initiatives: policies and procedures established by an organisation with the goal to enable employees to get their jobs done and at the same time provide flexibility to handle personal/family concerns. Work-family culture: the extent to which an organisation's culture acknowledges and respects the family responsibilities and obligations of its employees and encourages management and employees to work together to meet their personal and work needs (Lockwood, 2003).

Stress and the Consequences for Employer and Employee:

We live in stressful times, and each of us deals with stress every day.

It is widely acknowledged that work-related stress can lead to increased sickness absence, higher labour turnover and early retirement. Indeed, between 2007 and 2008, an estimated 13.5 million working days were lost to stress-related absence (HSE research). Scientists agree that in moderate amounts stress can be benign, even beneficial, and most people are equipped to deal with it. However, increasing levels of stress can rapidly lead to low employee morale, poor productivity, and decreasing job satisfaction (Stranks, 2005). Some of the specific symptoms that relate directly to

productivity in the work environment are abuse of sick time, cheating, chronic absenteeism, distrust, organisational sabotage, tardiness, task avoidance, and violence in the workplace. Other serious repercussions are depression, alcohol and drug abuse, marital and financial problems, compulsive eating disorders, and employee burnout.

The policies available for the problem associated with WLB are important social issues. Governments and organisations designated various policies for workers as to the work-life balance. Family friendly policies are the most discussed issues regarding balancing work and life i. e. to fulfil both work and life obligations simultaneously (Strachan and Burgess 1998, p. 250-265). Gray and Tudball (2003 p. 269-291) proposed four types of family friendly policies: the first one is flexitime arrangements, such as permanent part-time works, and as the most discussed issue for workers in organisations, it allow workers to arrange the working day at different times, and it may also help employees to accomplish their work because they know they can be compensated as day offs (Brough et al 2008, p. 261) " It has gotten positive feedback from employees by implementing flexible work arrangements, including reduced and seasonal schedules as well as telecommuting options"(Deery 2008, p. 792). The second one is paid/unpaid leave arrangements, such as paid leave, and unpaid leave for sickness or cultural aspects; the third one is dependent care services, such as the assistance with child-care or age-care; and the last one is the access to information, resources or services such as workplace facilities and stress management (cited in Brough et al 2008, p. 261), and this have been identified as effective methods and it also appears that family-friendly policies help

organisations from preventing retention and could help organisations make profits (Melberg 2006, p. 337). Such family friendly policies have been implemented by many countries, for instance UK government has focused on those with children primarily by implementing Labour policies such as long time leave; childcare investigation; flexible working patterns (Lewis & Campbell 2007, p. 4-30).

Work-life balance is also a hot topic in the European Union. This has contributed to work-life balance policies for employees. In addition, the EU has promoted gender equality (through the introduction of 'gender mainstreaming'). This has to varying degrees, led to national legislation and collective agreements. Trade union is involved in the implementation of work-life balance policies. Trade unions have been considered to have an important role in improving the work-life balance for employees. For example, the UK's Women and Work Commission promoted the benefits of flexible working options (Women and Work Commission 2006). But concerning voices have stated that unions only are weakly committed because many of the issues raised are seen as "women issues", and unions are dominated by men (Dickens 1998). WLB measures is often about flexible working hours, which pose a challenge, since unions see this as a removal of collective and protective rights. Measures like this is usually employer led (Ackers 2002). Fleetwood (2007) argues that work-life balance agenda is employer-friendly measures disguised as employee-friendly measures.

Wood's institutional theory suggests that organisations adopt WLB policies depending on the extent to which they have to maintain a sense of social

legitimacy. This will vary according to industry, size, sector and ultimately their visibility as an individual organisation. The benefit they derive from such policies is to protect their reputation amongst suppliers, workers and customers. (Wood, S. 1999). An example of an organisation tackling this issue is Marks & Spencer (2003) developed a long-running strategy / Evolving a family-friendly strategy for a large and diverse workforce. The company has been committed to work-life practices for many years, valuing a balance between employee and customer needs. The company believes in continuously updating its policies and in creating innovative solutions for both customers and staff. In order to remain an employer of choice it needs to keep developing imaginative working practices. They also listed increased staff loyalty and commitment and reduced staff turnover thus reduced retraining costs which highlights another benefit for the company. Generally speaking it is safe to assume happy staffs, both in work and out, is much more likely to be well motivated hard working individuals which will lead to higher productivity.

The consequences of not adopting family friendly policies can be examined by looking at what is likely to come about if you don't. Staff can struggle with all kinds of issues also including a lack of psychological availability at work (Cooper and Williams, 1994), lower life satisfaction and detrimental effects to a parent's mood, parent-child interaction and children's behaviour (Judge, T. A. Boudreau, J. W. and Bretz, R. D. 1994). In terms of the future Sparrow and Cooper points out that it will be necessary to find a broader way to operationalize costs which will include wider social influences that will impact on organisations which will include family breakdown and various other

stressors. A good balance holds many benefits for both employers and employees and whilst there are barriers to be overcome there are many examples of organisations breaking through them. 'The challenge for organisations is to develop approaches to work-life balance that not only fit into the new world of legislation, but also both allow expression to the ethos of individualisation while fitting this into the new models of family that are emerging', (Sparrow and Cooper, 2003).

Conclusion:

Work-life programs have the potential to significantly improve employee morale, reduce absenteeism, and retain organizational knowledge, particularly during difficult economic times. In today's global marketplace, as companies aim to reduce costs, it falls to the human resource professional to understand the critical issues of work-life balance. By implementing proactive programs and initiatives that support employees, organisations can strengthen employee commitment and loyalty, resulting in higher productivity, improved customer satisfaction and healthier bottom lines. At the same time, management should not only consider how much to pay their employees and how long should they work for because of the law, they should really get involved and help the employees to balance their work life, the management should understand the employees needs and try to adjust the right work life balance for them. The best way to build up a balance is not just considering a balance between employees' needs and their work, it is also the best if the employees have a good relationship with the employer, and to create a better environment for the work force.

References and Bibliography

Ackers, P., 2002. ' Reframing Employee Relations: The Case for Neo-Pluralism', *Industrial Relations Journal*, 33, (1) pp. 2-19.

Arthur, M. M. and COOK. A., 2003. The relationship between work-family human resource practices and firm profitability: A multi-theoretical perspective. *Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management*, 22, pp. 219-252.

Baroness, M. P., 2006. *Women and Work Commission: Shaping a Fairer Future*. [online]. London: HMSO. Available from: <http://www.equalities.gov.uk/pdf/Shaping%20a%20Fairer%20Future%20report.pdf> [Accessed 5 April 2011].

Beardwell, I., Holden, L. and Claydon, T., 2004. *Human resource management: A contemporary approach*. 4th ed. Harlow: Pearson Education.

Blunsdon B. et al., 2006. *Work-life Integration: International Perspectives on the Balancing of Multiple Roles*. London: Palgrave, Macmillan. pp. 1-16.

BROUGH, P. et al., 2008. The ability of work – life balance policies to influence key social/organisational issues. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 46, pp. 261.

Clutterbuck, D., 2003. *Managing work-life balance: a guide for HR in achieving organization and individual change*. [online]. London: CIPD. Available from: <http://www.cipd.co.uk/NR/rdonlyres/EBAA2100-EF46-43EE-9C6D-16577DCBC6DE/0/flexwork1005.pdf>. [Accessed 4 April 2011].

Cooper, C., Dewe, P., O'Driscoll, M., 2001. Organizational Stress. London: Sage.

Cooper, C. L. and Williams, S., 1994. Creating healthy work organisations. Chichester: Wiley.

DEERY, M., 2008. Talent management, work-life balance and retention strategies. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 20, (7), pp. 792.

Dickens, L., 1998. What HRM means for gender equality. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 8 (1), pp. 23–40.

Gifford, J., 2007. Work-life balance. [online]. Brighton: IES. Available from: <http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/pdflibrary/op13.pdf> . [Accessed 4 April 2011].

FELSTAD, A. et al., 2002. Opportunities to work at home in the context of work-life balance. *Human resource management journal*, 12 (1), pp. 54-76.

FLEETWOOD, S., 2007. Why work-life balance now?. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 18 (3), pp. 387–400.

GRAY, M. and Tudball, J., 2003. Family-friendly work practices: Differences within and between workplaces. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 45, pp. 269-291.

GREGORY, A and MILNER, S., 2009. Trade Unions and Work-life Balance: Changing Times in France and the UK?. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 47, pp. 122.

HYMAN, J. and Summers, J., 2004. Lacking balance?: Work-life employment practices in the modern economy. *Personnel Review*, 33, (4), pp. 418- 429.

JUDGE, T. A., BOUDREAU, J. W. and BRETZ, R. D., 1994. Job and life attitudes of male executives. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. 79, (5), pp. 767-782.

Kalliath, T. and Brough, P., 2008. Work-life balance: A review of the meaning of the balance construct. *Journal of Management and Organization*, 14, pp. 323.

KERR, R., McHUGH, M. and McCrory, M., 2009. HSE Management Standards and stress-related work outcomes. [online]. UK: *Occupational Medicine*, 59, pp. 574-579. Available from: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/management-standards.pdf>. [Accessed 3 April 2011].

LEWIS, J. and CAMPBELL, M., 2007. UK Work/Family Balance Policies and Gender Equality, 1997–2005'. *Social Politics*, 14, pp. 4-30.

Lockwood, N. R., 2003. Work/life balance: challenges and solutions. [online]. UK: *HR Magazine Find articles.com*. Available from: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m3495/is_6_48/ai_102946878/ [Accessed 4 April 2011].

McIntosh, S., 2003. Work-Life Balance: How Life Coaching Can Help. *Business Information Review*, 20, pp. 181.

MELBERG, K., 2006. Family Well-Being between Work, Care and Welfare Politics the Case of Norway. *Marriage & Family Review*, 39, pp. 337.

Pedler, M. and Burgoyne, J. G., 2007. *A Managers Guide to Self Development*, 5th ed. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill.

SPARROW, P. R. and COOPER, C. L., 2003. *The employment relationship: key challenges for HR*. Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann.

STRANKS, J., 2005. *Stress at work: Management and prevention*. Oxford: Elsevier.

Roberts, K., 2007. Work-life balance- the sources of the contemporary problem and the probable outcomes. A review and interpretation of the evidence, *Employee Relations*, 29(4), pp. 334-351.

STRACHAN, G. and BURGESS, J., 1998. The family friendly workplace: Origins, meaning and application at Australian workplaces. *International Journal of Manpower*, 19(4), pp. 250-265.

The work foundation, 2011. *Employers and work-life balance*. [online]. London, UK: The work foundation. Available from: <http://www.theworkfoundation.com/difference/e4wlb.aspx>. [Accessed 5April 2011].

The work foundation, 2003. *M&S Case study*. [online]. London, UK: The work foundation. Available from: <http://www.theworkfoundation.com/Assets/Docs/M&S.pdf>. [Accessed 5April 2011].

TORRINGTON, D., HALL, L. and TAYLOR, S., 2008. Human Resources Management. 7th ed. Harlow: Pearson Education.

VISSER, F. and Williams. L., 2006. Work-life balance: Rhetoric versus reality?. [online]. UK: And independent report commissioned by UNISON. Available from: http://www.theworkfoundation.com/assets/docs/publications/155_unison.pdf. [Accessed 3April 2011].

WIKINSON. H., 2009. The recessionary cloud's silver lining Enforced flexible working could reduce employees' stress levels and give them more control over their work-life balance. [online]. UK: Guardian News. Available from: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/jun/24/recession-work-life-balance?INTCMP=SRCH>. [Accessed 3April 2011].

WOOD. S., 1999. Family Friendly management: testing the various perspectives. National Institute for Economic Research, 168, (2), pp. 99-116.