



Work Life Balance and Perception : a conceptual framework.

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Abstract

Work Life Balance in the last few decades have come to the centre stage and has become a hot topic pursued by researchers and human resources. Work life balance serves as a major attraction due to its deep impact on all aspects of a person's life. The fact is that work life balance in a practical aspect and it largely depends on individual perception. This paper addresses and tries to link work life balance and perception. This study brings forth a conceptual framework for understanding work life balance and acting accordingly. It throws light on how perception can play an important role in maintaining work life balance. This paper proposes various tactics that can be employed by employees to balance their work life. The work life balance depends on the ability of the person to build boundaries and to eliminate boundaries as per situation. Employees should change their perception that work and family life are always opposite and they carry conflicting values. It is also important that organization's need to correct their perception about the employees who use work life balance policies. It is the responsibility of society to treat both the genders with the same kind of sensitivity and caution.

Keywords: Boundary Tactics, Individual Perception, Organizational Perception, Perception, Work Life Balance.

1. Introduction

Work life balance is a major intervention of human resources in every firm. Work life balance has gained importance due to many reasons, namely competitiveness, the changing demographics, the increasing participation of women in the workforce, ever-changing technology and increasing number of dual income households. In earlier times, work life balance was considered as a concern of women who have entered the workforce. But now people recognise that when you have dual income households there becomes an extra obligation to take care of elders and kids at home and to manage and remain committed to both the domains equally.

In general terms, work life balance is defined as an individual's capability and ability to devote equal time and energy to work and non-work domains. In other words, it also means that it is important for an individual to lead a meaningful life without having an

opportunity cost. Greenhaus (2010), defines work life balance as activities which lead to satisfaction and smooth functioning in both the domains with minimum amount of conflicts in their roles. As Greenhaus has related work life balance to satisfaction, it makes the fact important that satisfaction is based on individual perception. Example- for one employee, getting a good salary can be a reason for satisfaction and for the other, satisfaction would mean recognition at workplace and lot of respect. Work life balance is hence directly related to perception.

2. Literature review

Shobitha Poulouse & Sudarsan N (2014), define that work life balance is all about getting fully engaged in the two domains and giving out the best performance, that is expected in each role. Work life balance also means contentment of an individual, after contributing in a particular role. This also implies that contentment is solely dependent on the perception of an employee.

Gulbahar, Amjad Ali, *et al.*, (2014) define work life balance and state that it is related to the priorities that a person chooses. The worst part is that most of the time work takes over family by long working hours and work intensification. The paper emphasizes that people who look for work life balance often quote, “we work to live and not live to work.” Parul Agarwal (2014), has established relationship between job satisfaction, work life balance and organizational performance. The author clearly identifies that men’s central theme in life as work and their satisfaction lies in the job they do and their career progress. Karthik R. (2013), in the paper has emphasized that individuals should adopt strategies which help them tackle work life issues. They should have good communication system in both spheres and have clarified the values that each sphere has in his life.

Work life balance issues has been pre-dominantly been always thought to be based on gender profile, Ramesh Kumar Miryala and Nagapriya Chiluka (2012), and it has been argued that workplace has always been associated with masculinity and domestic sphere is always meant for women, Mary Runte and Albert J Mills (2004). The research says that the times are changing and inclusion of women in workplace has made a lot of difference to the organization. The authors talk about the various legal aspects with respect to women and how women are trying to bridge the gap between work and home. The authors conclude that gender differences help us analyse the work life conflicts. Though the women have entered the workplace they are still more stressed by family obligations as well. Men’s contribution to the family has not changed even though women have started contributing at workplace. They say that the time frame of contribution in one domain can significantly play a very important role in work life balance. They say that time devoted on work can result in work suffering in the family commitment. According to Niharika Doble & M.V. Supriya (2010), it is important for the organizations to build a supportive work environment and to address work life balance issues on an individual basis.

Delecta P (2011), has beautifully linked work life balance with personality types. The author concluded that people with personality type A are active, they are much more work oriented and competitive. Type B people are calm, balanced and right minded. The author concluded that as type A is much more work oriented, they have negative work life balance. She says that workaholism is an obsession that can destroy

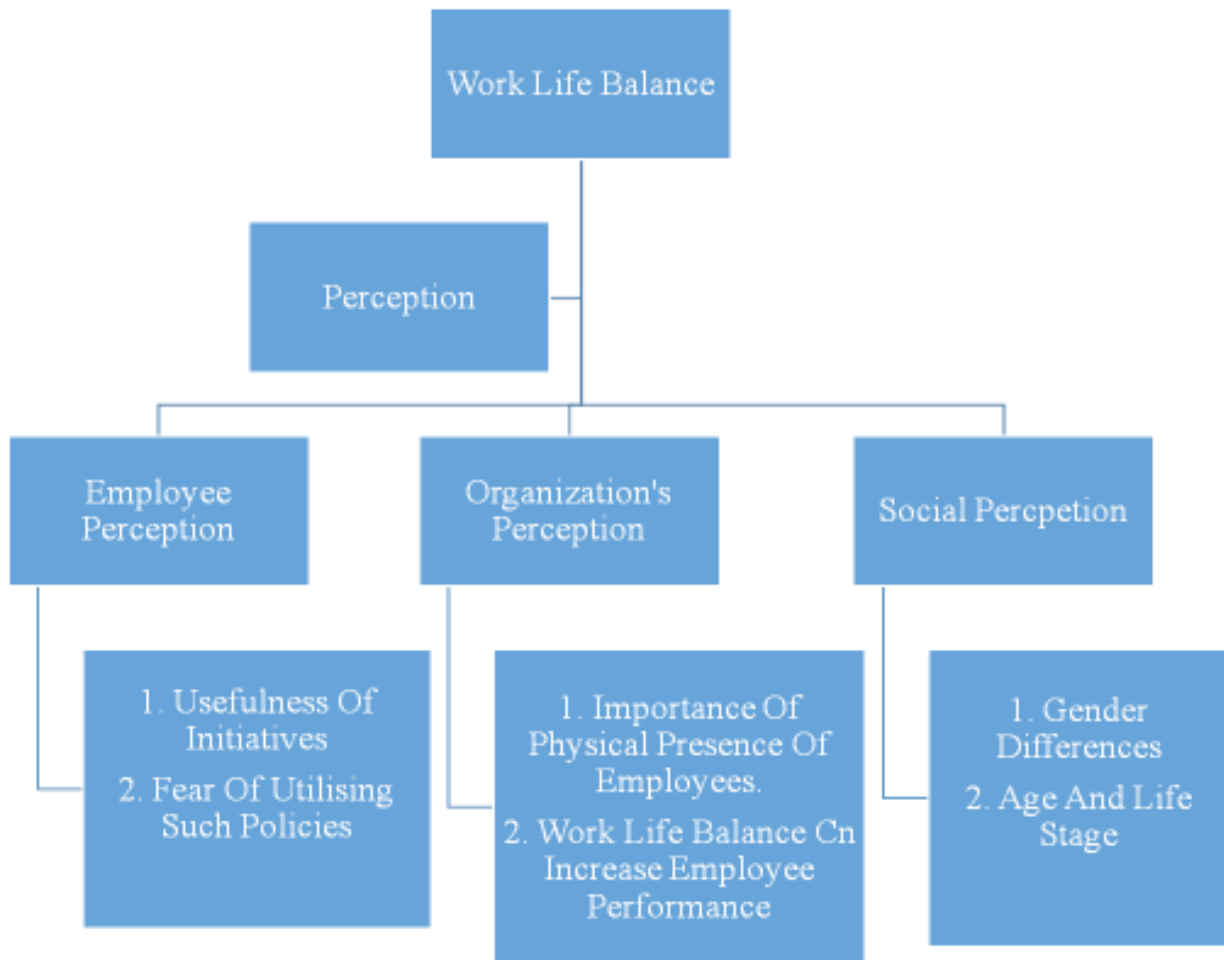
work life balance. The emphasis is that people who have children to look after many a times have to risk their careers by reducing their working hours. The author conclude that organizations expects employees to devote more time at work. The author actually expands the definition of work life balance into a broader perspective by emphasizing that work life balance is about allocating valuable resources like time, thought, labour wisely among work and non-work domain. Satinder Singh (2013), in his paper quotes that women and men generally have a different perception of life balance. For women it tends to be devoting more time to family and for men it is like pursuing their personal interests.” The author further goes on to say that the best measure of evaluating work life balance is to understand the perception of feeling right and good.

Niharika Doble & M.V. Supriya (2010), in their paper bring the bitter fact to the centre stage that now employees are expected to be fully engaged in their jobs. Organizations have also emphasized on the attitudes that a person exhibits when asked about being available for work and challenges at any point of time, during the selection procedures. Gunkel (2007), says that gender has a great impact on the home and work. The household chores are always considered to be the responsibility of the females irrespective of her employment status. In fact she carries the responsibility to devote her time and weekends for home work.

3. Conceptual framework

This framework talks about the perception which is existing in three different groups and is directly affecting the work life balance of employees and also the work life policies of the organization. These three groups have been identified as individual perception, organizational perception and social perception (as shown in figure i). When an individual has greater sense of control over work and family schedules he is much more mentally fit. This shows that individual’s perception can affect his work life balance. Organizations having correct attitudes and perception can have more committed employees and can expect better loyalty from its employees. Organizations won’t face problem of unreported absenteeism and turnovers. Society should realize that time has come to understand the fact that women should not be confined for family domains and respect their progress at workplace. The society should not hamper anyone’s career growth by having social norms.

**The Conceptual Framework
Figure - i**



4. Employee perception

Organizations till today struggle to help employees, balance their work and family life. They have done so by introducing several HR policies to make employees more flexible, by which they could improve their performance and commitment towards workplace. But many a times organizations fail to review the performance of such policies. They do not take feedback from employees regarding this policy. An important aspect which the organization fail to consider is employee’s perception of such policies.

A good example has been cited in the research paper by Rana Rashid Rehman and Ajmal Waheed (2012). The research concludes that work life conflict and balance are based on the perception of employees and their life stage. Many a times the organizations have good policies but they are not perceived well by the employees. For example a company offers maternity/paternity leave to its employees or work from

home policy, it may be noted that for singles and people who have already passed the child bearing age would perceive this policy as non-beneficial.

Another major perception that employees have regarding work life balance is the fear of utilising such policies. Dr. Lisa Bradley, *et al.*, have very categorically pointed out the need to study work life balance in different dimensions. They have emphasized that many organizations have work life balance policies, but an employee has to fulfil the time demand of the organization, before availing such facility. It is also important to study the perception of employees regarding the negative effect that is feared on their careers, when they use the work life balance policies.

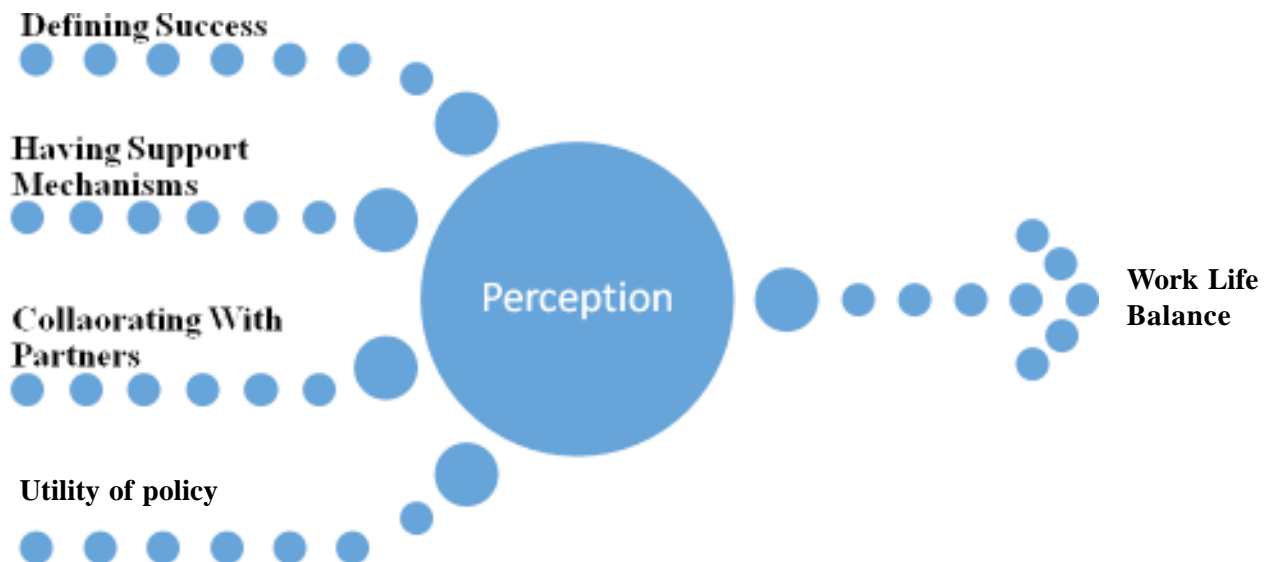
Boris Groysberg & Robin Abrahams (2014), talks that today’s workforce needs to deliberately choose their opportunities at work and at home instead of simply reacting to emergencies at work and at home. The authors have opened up a whole new area of study

as per the perception of workforce and how they look at work life balance. In accordance with their emphasis

it is concluded that executives follow 4 main themes in their life. They are as follows:-

Employees main theme of life

Figure: - ii



- Defining success for yourself.
- Building support network
- Utility of the policy
- Collaborating with your partner.

Irrespective of the profession the person is in, he/she has defined his/her success according to his/her perception.

It is an employee's perception about his/her ability to compartmentalize their life. This compartmentalization basically depends on how he/she thinks about the support mechanisms that surrounds the employees. In other words, his/her perception about the kind of support he/she gets from superiors, family, subordinates and organization as a whole. His work life balance also depends on perception about the occupation he/she is involved in. It is important to note that if a person is not in the occupation of his choice, it is very much likely that he might face a lot of work life balance issues.

4.1 Organizational perception

The organizations also suffer from negative perception by drawing conclusion and judging employees on the basis of the use of work life balance policies. The organizations need to extensively introspect, as how do they react when an employee prioritize his family in comparison to work.

Organizations gives a lot of importance and emphasis, the physical presence of employees at the workplace and make judgements regarding the commitment of employees when he/she is absent. Employees perceive that organizations do not reward those employees who use work life balance policies and hence they are deprived of salary hikes and promotions.

In an era, which is volatile the organizations need to realize how an employee can be engaged. The organizations want their employees to devote extra hours in order to remain competitive in the market. An employee who out performs and is very productive after working long hours is deemed to be happy is just a mere perception. The problem with the organizations is that they many a times misunderstand that employee who is performing well is satisfied and is having a great work life balance. It is important to note the fact that organizations have actually employed employer friendly policies, disguised in the face of employee friendly practices. Many a times organizations put in barriers like entitlement, eligibility criteria for using work life balance policies, which limits an employee and keeps him deprived of such welfare policies.

Shobitha Poulouse & Sudarsan N. (2014), has come forward with a conceptual review, which focusses on the eternal challenges which are faced by individuals to perform well at workplace and at the

same time remain equally committed at home. This also brings to light the overall well-being of individual. Most of the organizations survive in the false premise that employee's well-being can be measured based on the commitment he has for work. A person's perception of his well-being is equally important. So it is up-to an individual to consider himself as a balanced person and a contributor. Organizations are always of the view that employee well-being is measured based on the commitment he has for his work and which in turn depends on the organizational initiatives undertaken to achieve organizational commitment.

Shweta Belwal & Rakesh Belwal (2014), brings out an important fact that from the employer's perception of work life balance most of the employers have cited the benefits of WLB to be happiness at job, contribution to the organization, reduced stress levels, increased focus at work, induced saving, employee retention and a highly motivated work-force. Employers have seen the benefits of Work Life Balance initiatives as increased employee ownership, they feel attached to the place where they work. They conclude and express that when women receive empathetic treatment, they feel positive and they will work sincerely and their performance would increase.

4.2 Social perception

Work life balance apart from being dependent on perception of employees is also looked as an aspect of gender expectations, which are again subjected to perceptions. It has been time and again seen in the research that women expect more of these policies as compared to men. Men usually don't demand such policies frequently and they get adjusted well.

Till date men, consider themselves to be the bread earner of family as their success and their sole responsibility at home. They admit that they do not spend adequate time with their family, but they are ok with it. One of the professionals talks, "The 10 minutes I give to my kids at night is one million times greater than spending that 10 minutes at work". Women, who are working professionals have the perception that they are the role models for their children. It would be right to mention here that women are more strong and competent enough to balance work life as they want to portray themselves as role models. Women are more emotionally attached to families and many a times they leave their careers for families. They carry the guilt of not giving enough time to family and community, which in turn increases frustration, which leads to career breaks.

For female employees success is giving equal time

to work and at home and fulfilling all the duties. For some males success is when they are atleast aware of what is happening in the lives of their family members. For some success is giving emotional time and energy at both the spheres. It is important to note here that women look for personal achievement at workplace as compared to men. They do not emphasize and are not concerned about organizational achievement. Family plays an important role in life of women. When women are unable to devote time to her family she feels frustrated and unhappy. They are much stronger than men in building boundaries between work and family and strongly oppose the crossing of one domain to another. In various researches it has been observed that women seek for more options like part time work, available child care facilities and a lot of flexibility to meet the emergencies at home, to improve their work life balance and to have longevity of careers or without hampering their career growth.

5. Conclusion

The work life policy also takes into consideration the ability of an individual to engage in the efforts of building a boundary and dismantling it when required. Individuals actually keep different calendars and are involved in one domain at one time. There are many individuals who integrate both the domains by inviting friends at home and by keeping family pictures and frames on their tables at office. One solution can be that individual with his own preferences and environmental forces tries to create a boundary congruence. This boundary is a mental perception. Whenever there is a problem of congruence he experiences conflict and then every individual invokes certain tactics to reduce conflict.

The boundary wall that an employee tries to build in his mind is so thin that it falls on just the recurring thoughts of work. This has led to decrease in the quality of family life and dissatisfaction of contributing less to the family life. There is one more aspect that can be looked at, that is though men are more inclined towards work but then too, they feel that they could not contribute to their family life.

One domain has the capability that it can influence the other domain positively or negatively. This means that spill overs is not always negative. Eg- a promotion or harmony at workplace can actually affect the family life positively. This means that a person contributes quality time, energy and commitment in the other domain as well. Employees should dismantle the boundaries and then try to create balance by deriving

the satisfactions which cannot be derived in one sphere from the other sphere. Eg- if an employee finds his job unchallenging he would get key role in some activities outside work, which is challenging. The psychological conflict faced by an individual, when demands rises simultaneously in all the spheres, due to which he has to make difficult choices.

Hence it is always essential to understand that work life balance is dependent on perception and employees can themselves bring practical solutions. The concept of work life balance depends on the ability and capability of employees, to handle two important domains without affecting the other domain. It is up-to them on how they perceive and utilize the support mechanisms which exists. His perceived organizational support and spouse support to be successful in life.

The organizations should realise that employees

working in their firm are bounded with certain responsibilities and make the culture and environment conducive for the employees. The work life balance initiatives that they implement should be reviewed properly and understand that an organization has to work beyond their rules and regulations many a times so that their employees are happy. Organizations will have to introspect and emphasize on employee productivity rather than on the time an employee puts in.

The society is changing so as the social norms. It is important that irrespective of gender, employees must have a say in the kind of initiatives that employers employ to have work life balance policies. The society perception after all gets reflected in the organizational culture and the social culture. The society needs to change its mind-set that men are the bread earners and women are limited to the home domain.

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