Research Paper

Balancing Career and Life: a Study with Special Reference to Women Employees in Kerala
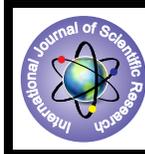
Management

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ABSTRACT
Work life balance is a broad concept which is closely related and derived from the research of Job satisfaction as explained and researched by Farnaz Namin-Hedayati PhD from Innovent Consulting a boutique consulting and work-life solutions firm in Orlando, Florida Today's workers have many competing responsibilities such as work, children, housework, volunteering, spouse and elderly parent care and this places stress on individuals, families and the communities in which they reside. Work-life conflict is a serious problem that impacts workers, their employers and communities. This paper examines the work life balance of women employees working in Cochin in Kerala

Introduction

Work-life balance is about creating and maintaining supportive and healthy work environments, which will enable employees to have balance between work and personal responsibilities and thus strengthen employee loyalty and productivity. Numerous studies have been conducted on work-life balance. According to a major Canadian study conducted by Lowe (2005), one in four employees experience high levels of conflict between work and family, based on work-to-family interference and caregiver strain. If role overload is included, then close to sixty percent of employees surveyed experience work-family conflict. Of all the job factors that influence work-life conflict, the amount of time spent at work is the strongest and most consistent predictor. The higher levels of work-to-family conflict reported by managers or professionals often are a function of their longer work hours. Other reasons include, job security, support from one's supervisor, support from co-workers, work demands or overload, work-role conflict, work-role ambiguity, job dissatisfaction, and extensive use of communication technology that blurs the boundaries between home and work.

Today's workers have many competing responsibilities such as work, children, housework, volunteering, spouse and elderly parent care and this places stress on individuals, families and the communities in which they reside. Work-life conflict is a serious problem that impacts workers, their employers and communities. It seems that this problem is increasing over time due to high female labour force participation rates, increasing numbers of single parent families, the predominance of the dual-earner family and emerging trends such as elder care. It is further exasperated with globalization, an aging population, and historically low unemployment.

Review of Literature

Work life balance is a broad concept which is closely related and derived from the research of Job satisfaction as explained and researched by Farnaz Namin-Hedayati PhD from Innovent Consulting a boutique consulting and work-life solutions firm in Orlando, Florida. Within the research of Job Satisfaction, Hackman and Oldham's Job Characteristics Model had found that there are both intrinsic and extrinsic factors which affected perceptions of job satisfaction within individuals. Intrinsic factors referred to job characteristics specifically. However, the extrinsic factors referred to the social and cultural norms the individual holding the job operated by. Hence, Work—life balance was considered one of the inputs of this extrinsic factor. The most researched area of work-life balance and its bi-directional relationship component referring to life-work balance was introduced

by Netemeyer et al., which also described the multi-dimensionality of work-life balance (time, strain behavior). One can say that Work—life balance is the proper prioritizing between "work" (career and ambition) on one hand and "life" (pleasure, leisure, family and spiritual development) on the other. Related, though broader, terms include "lifestyle balance" and "life balance". This is fine, as long as it is clear that there is a large individual component in that. Meaning, each individual's needs, experiences, and goals, define the balance and there is not a one size fits all solution.

History

The expression was first used in the late 1970s to describe the balance between an individual's work and personal life. In the United States, this phrase was first used in 1986. Over the past twenty-five years, there has been a substantial increase in work which is felt to be due, in part, by information technology and by an intense, competitive work environment. Many Americans are experiencing burnout due to overwork and increased stress. This condition is seen in nearly all occupations from blue collar workers to upper management. Over the past decade, a rise in work place violence, an increase in levels of absenteeism as well as rising workers' compensation claims are all evidence of an unhealthy work life balance

Work statistics

According to a survey conducted by the National Life Insurance Company in 2004, four out of ten employees state that their jobs are "very" or "extremely" stressful. Those in high stress jobs are three times more likely than others to suffer from stress-related medical conditions and are twice as likely to quit. The study states that women, in particular, report stress related to the conflict between work and family.

Stress and work-life balance

The number of stress-related disability claims by American employees has doubled according to the Employee Assistance Professionals Association in Arlington, Virginia. Seventy-five to ninety percent of physician visits are related to stress and, according to the American Institute of Stress, the cost to industry has been estimated at $200 billion-$300 billion a year. Steven L. Sauter, chief of the Applied Psychology and Ergonomics Branch of the National Institute for occupational Safety and Health in Cincinnati, Ohio, states that recent studies show that "the workplace has become the single greatest source of stress". Michael Feuerstein, professor of clinical psychology at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences at Bethesda Naval Hospital states, "We're seeing a greater increase in work-related

neuro-skeletal disorders from a combination of stress and ergonomic stressors".

Work-life balance concerns of men and women alike
Similar discrimination is experienced by men who take time off or reduce working hours for taking care of the family. For many employees today both male and female their lives are becoming more consumed with a host of family and other personal responsibilities and interests. Therefore, in an effort to retain employees, it is increasingly important for organizations to recognize this balance.

Work-life balance issues and their influence on children
An increasing number of young children are being raised by a childcare provider or another person other than a parent; older children are more likely today to come home to an empty house and spend time with video games, television and the internet with less guidance to offset or control the messages coming from these sources.

Responsibility of the employer
Companies have begun to realize how important the work-life balance is to the productivity and creativity of their employees. Research by Kenexa Research Institute in 2007 shows that those employees who were more favorable toward their organization's efforts to support work-life balance also indicated a much lower intent to leave the organization, greater pride in their organization, a willingness to recommend it as a place to work and higher overall job satisfaction.

Employers can offer a range of different programs and initiatives, such as flexible working arrangements in the form of part time, casual and telecommuting work. More proactive employers can provide compulsory leave, strict maximum hours and foster an environment that encourages employees not to continue working after hours.

It is generally only highly skilled workers that can enjoy such benefits as written in their contracts, although many professional fields would not go so far as to discourage workaholic behaviour. Unskilled workers will almost always have to rely on bare minimum legal requirements. The legal requirements are low in many countries, in particular, the United States. In contrast, the European Union has gone quite far in assuring a legal work-life balance framework, for example pertaining to parental leave and the non-discrimination of part-time workers.

Reasons for Imbalance
There are various reasons for this imbalance and conflicts in the life of an employee. From individual career ambitions to pressure to cope up with family or work, the reasons can be situation and individual specific. The speed of advancement of information technology, the increasing competition in the talent supply market has led to a "performance-driven" culture creating pressures and expectations to performance more and better every time. Also, many a times, many people find it difficult to say "NO" to others especially their superiors. They usually end up over burdening themselves with work. The increasing responsibilities on the personal front with age can also create stress on personal and professional fronts.

Problems of imbalance in Work Life
Constant struggle and effort to maintain a balance between the work and personal life can have serious implications on the life of an individual. According to a survey, 81 per cent of the respondents have admitted that their jobs are affecting and creating stress in their personal lives. The pressures of the work or personal life can lead to stress. According to studies, it has been found to that such situation can take a toll on the person's health both physiologically and psychologically. Heart ailments,

cardiovascular problems, sleep disorders, depression, irritability, jumpiness, insecurity, poor concentration and even nervous breakdowns are becoming common among the victims of such imbalance. Pressure, stress or tension in work life can lead to bad social life and vice versa

Methodology
The research on work life balance of women employees was done among women employed in IT companies in Cochin. Specific objectives were to find the level of work life balance of the women employees, to find the work related issues affecting women employees, to find the life related issues affecting women, to examine the issues of dual role conflict among the women employees and to find the alternative ways for improving work life balance in the organization.. The researcher adopted descriptive research design. Simple random sampling was the sampling method used by the researcher. Lottery method was sampling technique. The sample size was sixty respondents. Closed ended questionnaire were used for collecting data.

Response rate
Questioners were distributed to 60 women employees selected from IT companies in Cochin. Utmost care was taken to obtain the questioners get filled without delay to avoid bias in response. The researchers were successful in 52 cases. While eight respondents asked for a week time to fill it up. Three of them gave the filled up questionnaire within a week without further pressure. While two others submitted after a second reminder. Three others were reluctant to respond to researchers' further calls and hence they were rejected. Out of sixty selected candidates fifty seven responded promptly and hence the response rate is ninety five percent.

Findings
The major findings are explained below

Level of work life balance of women employees
It is found that sixty one percent of the respondents responded work life balance is fair. Seventy three percent of the respondents rated their job satisfaction as fair. Eighty two percent of the respondents responded that they are moderately satisfied in managing children. It is found that forty percent of the respondents agree that they are living an ideal life

Work related issues affecting women employees
It is found that forty nine percent of the respondents responded that their problems are least known to manager. Fifty nine percent of the respondents responded that they are not compensated for the extra hours. Fifty eight percent of the respondents feel that sometimes they spend more time at work than they like.

Life related issues affecting women employees
It is found that fifty one percent of the respondents responded that they frequently find time to spend with family and friend. Forty two percent of the respondents frequently have given up their enjoyable activities. Forty three percent of the respondents agree that they are living an ideal.

Issue of dual role conflict among the women professionals IT
It is found that sixty three percent of the respondents responded that effects of work pressure on family life are rare. Sixty four percent of the respondents responded as their work is not getting affected because of problems in family life. Sixty two percent of the respondents responded as their work is not getting affected because of problems in family life thirty three percent of the respondents agreed of underplaying one role while managing both the roles.

Alternative ways for improving work life balance in the organization

It is found that sixty one percent of the respondents responded that flexible hours are the work policy followed in the organization. Forty one percent of the respondents gave the suggestion of working from home.

Conclusion

The work life balance is one of the most crucial objectives for the modern corporate world to target. Work pressure is unavoidable but it can be reduced using various work policies, yoga and meditation. Work life balance is more challenging for women employees and mainly married women. These were motivating factors which prompted researcher to take this topic. From the research it found out that work life balance of women employees is fair

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