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INFLUENCING FACTORS OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE TRENDS IN WOMEN EMPLOYEE LIFE

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ABSTRACT

In organizations and on the home front, the challenge of work-life balance is rising to the top of many employers' and employees' consciousness. the challenge of work-life balance is rising to the highest of the many women employers' and employees' consciousness. In today's fast-paced society, human resource professionals seek options to positively impact rock bottom line of their companies, improve employee morale, retain women employees with valuable company knowledge, and keep step with workplace trends. this text provides human resource professionals with a historical perspective, data, and possible solutions for organizations and women employees alike to work/life balance. Three factors global competition, personal lives/family values, and an aging workforce present challenges that exacerbate work/life balance. this text offers the attitude that human resource professionals can assist their companies to maximize these factors by using work-life initiatives to realize a competitive advantage within the marketplace.

INTRODUCTION

Work-life balance is a concept including proper prioritizing between "work" (career and ambition) on the one hand and "lifestyle" (Health, pleasure, leisure, family and spiritual development/meditation) on the other. Related, though broader, terms include "lifestyle calm balance" and "lifestyle choices". In the traditional era, the women were confined to household work like cooking, washing, cleaning, taking care of children, etc. They were considered homemakers and were deprived of the right or opportunity to go outside the home. But now the story is different. Apart from the homemaker role, they also have a significant role to engage even outside the home.

Life is a balancing act, and in American society, it is safe to say that almost everyone is seeking work/life balance. But what exactly is work/life balance? We have all heard the term, and many of us complain that we don't have enough of it in our lives. Among men and women alike, the frustrating search for work/life balance is a frequent topic of conversation, usually translated into not enough time and/or support to do, to handle, to manage our work commitments or personal responsibilities.

The work-leisure dichotomy was invented in the mid 1800s. Paul Krasner reported that in anthropology, a definition of happiness is to have as little separation as possible "between your work and your play." The expression "Work–life balance" was first used in the United Kingdom in the late 1970s to describe the balance between an individual's work and personal life.[5] In the United States, this phrase was first used in 1986. Most recently, there has been a shift in the workplace as a result of advances in technology.

As Bowswell and Olson-Buchanan stated, "increasingly sophisticated and affordable technologies have made it more feasible for employees to keep contact with work." Employees have many methods, such as emails, computers and cell phones, which enable them to accomplish their work beyond the physical boundaries of their office. Employees may respond to an email or a voice mail after-hours or during the weekend, typically while not officially "on the job." Researchers have found that employees who consider their work roles to be an important component of their identities will be more likely to apply these communication technologies to work while in their non-work domain.

Generation Definitions

Baby Boomers are defined as people born between the years 1946 and 1964 (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). Major life events for this generation include the Vietnam War and the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Most Baby Boomers were raised by two parents and had a stay at home mother. Zemke et al. (2000) stated that the parents of this generation considered child rearing to be a symbol of what they had fought for through the depression and WWII rather than a biological necessity. They further stated that as a result, Baby Boomers were raised in the spotlight of the family. Economic conditions included a post World War II economic boom. Baby Boomers were repeatedly told how much their parents had sacrificed to create opportunities for their children and that they were expected to be more financially successful than their parents. The combination of the positive economic conditions, as well as the attention and encouragement from 3 parents, created an optimistic outlook among this generation. Gen X'ers are defined as people born between the years 1965 and 1980 (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). Major life events for these people include Watergate and the Challenger disaster. Although many X'ers were not born when Watergate occurred, the resulting loss of faith in the government continued throughout their formative years. This generation faced a tougher economy than the Baby Boomers and their family lives were not nearly as stable. This generation's Baby Boomer parents were more likely to be working parents than stay at home care takers. A social imperative to succeed financially, combined with a tougher economy that made it difficult to live on just one salary, resulted in more dual career families. In addition, divorce rates tripled during the birth years of this generation. This increase in parents working, particularly mothers, created the phenomenon of latchkey kids (Lancaster & Stillman; Kupperschmidt, 1998).These latchkey kids developed both a sense of self-reliance and a preference for freedom. This generation also witnessed major institutions exposed as corrupt, such as the government during the Watergate scandal.

According to Lancaster and Stillman, this generation has no heroes because, through the introduction of tabloid journalism and increased access to the media, they grew up seeing heroes being disgraced. This has created an innate cynicism and a tendency for them to rely more on themselves. Unlike their Baby Boomer parents who were given much, Gen X'ers learned early on that they needed to make their own opportunities and that achieving their goals may come at a Millennials are defined as people born between the years 1981 and 1999 (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). They are also referred to as Nexters, Generation Y, and Generation Why. It is not yet clear which events will be pivotal for this generation since the youngest members are only 8 years old. Major events that will most likely shape this generation are the 9/11

disaster and the Iraq war. Parents of this generation include both Baby Boomers and Gen X'ers.

According to Zemke et al. (2000), Baby Boomer parents of this generation are those that delayed childbearing to focus on their careers early on and now approach parenting with the same level of enthusiasm and drive to achieve that they had for their careers. Gen X'er parents are dedicated to making sure that their children do not experience the neglect that they felt. The result is that these parents take an active part in all areas of their children's lives, scheduling extra-curricular activities when they are young and advocating for older children at colleges and jobs. Unlike their predecessors the Gen X'ers, Millennials are the center of parental and societal attention (Zemke et al., 2000). This results in a more positive view of society and institutions which Murray (1997) claims they view as an extension of parental love and concern.

Changes to the work-life balance equation the health benefits of reducing stress through a balanced life, as well as the difficulty of achieving a balanced life, are well known (Quick et al., 2004). How does one define a balanced life, however? Fisher-McAuley, Stanton, Jolton, and Gavin (2003) describe work-life balance as competition for both time and energy between the different roles filled by an individual. Someone's life can be considered unbalanced 5 when the amount of time one works causes some sort of conflict or stress in other areas of life. The choices people make about their priorities can cause conflict with bosses, co-workers and/or family members.

Stress can also be due to spillover where a person is worrying about life issues while at work and worrying about work issues while at home. Stress can also come from feelings of guilt about the choices being made (Quick et al., 2004). Someone's work-life balance is primarily based on their own perception of balance. Throughout history people have worked hard to make a living and to survive in difficult economic times. So what has changed? There have been societal and technological changes since the 1950's that have impacted both sides of the work life balance equation. These changes include the loss of traditional gender roles that defined who was responsible for managing the "life" half of the equation. They also include technological and economic changes that have raised expectations of employees increasing the pressure on the "work" half of the equation. Managing life responsibilities. During the 1940's, and 1950's, men managed work and women managed life. Women took care of not only the housework, but also the emotional work of running the family (Moen, 1998). This division of labor minimized the impact on the family when a father needed to increase his focus on work.

If the children were ill or even if an elderly relative needed care, the work routine would not be disrupted because the wife would be responsible for those tasks (Moen, 1998). The roles of housekeeper and breadwinner were defined and assigned to specific individuals. In addition, the emotional roles of worrying about children and worrying about financial stability were also defined and 6 assigned. Each partner knew their role and their domain of control and could trust the other partner to handle their responsibilities. O'Toole and Lawler (2006) note that the biographies of CEOs over the past fifty years are examples of these traditional marriages where these men could rely on a stay at home wife to manage the family.

These CEOs are the ones currently determining work life balance policies for their employees. A major change that occurred in the 1960's and 1970's was the significant increase in women entering the labor force, as well as the significant increase in single parent homes. This blurred the gender boundaries that defined who is responsible for work issues and who is responsible for life issues (Quick et al., 2004;

Greenblatt, 2002). With the gender roles becoming less defined, there is the opportunity for more work life spillover. All employees, both male and female, now deal with aspects of homemaking and breadwinning. This can result in people experiencing more worry about life issues during work hours and because they feel guilty about the intrusion of their personal life on their work life, they may also begin to experience more worry about their job during life hours (Quick et al., 2004).

Generational differences managing life issues

Baby Boomers are the generation with the least amount of experience dealing with changing gender roles. It was during their working years that the gender boundaries began to fade. As the Baby Boomers entered the workplace, businesses had a template for a successful worker. He was male, he was committed to a long-term position at a company and he did not let his personal life interfere with work (Moen, 1998). This is not to say that he did not care for or worry about his family, but he was expected to put that aside for the sake of his career and he was both rewarded by his company and by 7 society for doing so (Moen, 1998; Williams & Cohen Cooper 2004). As Baby Boomer women entered the workplace, they also used the male template as a gauge for evaluating their own experience and so did everyone else, including their managers and coworkers (Moen, 1998). This template assumes that work life balance is achieved by having a wife at home to handle the "life" part of the equation.

This is unrealistic for women. The background of the Gen X'ers with respect to work life issues is quite different. These latchkey kids could be seen as the first victims of work life balance issues. They grew up with an acceptance of women in the workplace and an attitude about the sacrifices required for success. They saw their parents make sacrifices for work that were not always rewarded (Jurkiewicz, 2000). They came to view work as more of a means to an end and they do not believe they can have it all. They entered the work force expecting to have to face difficult choices with respect to work and life. This generation is less likely to put work at the center of their lives than Baby Boomers and more likely to choose not to advance their career when there is a negative trade-off with their personal life (American Business Collaboration, 2004). They also developed feelings of resentment due to the amount of time and energy their parents devoted to their jobs.

The Changing Workforce and Growing Corporate interests

A number of changes in workforce demographics have brought work-life balance issues to the attention of companies. The major change related to the need for family-friendly benefits is the number of women in the U.S. workforce, which has more than doubled since 1970. Additionally, more women are remaining in the workforce after marriage and after having children, increasing the number of dual-career households in America. Add to this a larger number of single women with children in the workforce in the past two decades, and there is increased demand for family-friendly work policies.

Although the trend toward work-life balance practices began with demands from mothers in the workforce, the push now is coming from all employees: fathers and mothers, single parents, and employees with responsibilities for caring for aged relatives, and even employees who just want more flexibility in their daily lives. Nine out of ten workers in America live in households with family members, and nearly half of all employees have caregiving responsibilities. Recognizing these changes, corporations are creating work environments that make it possible for employees to be both good workers and good caregivers. However, the corporate motive for work-life balance policies is more than altruism and a desire to help and support employees.

Employers have realized that it makes good business sense to provide such benefits. It helps with the recruitment and retention of employees by creating an atmosphere of loyalty to the corporation.

Programs and benefits that directly address work-life balance issues include:

• Dependent care (child-care and elder-care programs)
• Flexible or alternative work schedules (flex-time, compressed workweeks, telecommuting, job sharing, and part-time employment)
• Leaves (paid and unpaid family care leaves, maternity phase-back, and so on)

Corporate America's growing concern for family issues is evidenced by the number of business journals that identify and rank family-friendly corporations. Working Mother was the first periodical to write a lead story on family-friendly companies. This article has appeared annually since 1986 and is called "Best Companies for Working Mothers." It identifies the top 100 work-life sensitive companies, assessing compensation, opportunities for women, child-care benefits, flexibility in work, and other benefits such as paid maternity and paternity leave. Additionally, Business Week magazine ran its first major cover story on "Work & Family" in 1993 at the time the Family and Medical Leave Act was enacted., and in 1996 Business Week launched in a major cover story issue a biannual ranking of the "Best Companies for Work and Family." Finally, the third major business periodical to rank companies was Fortune. Their "The 100 Best Companies to Work for in America" was first published in January 1998. Evidence from their study indicated that family-friendly policies help the bottom line.

Types of Work/Life Balance Benefits Child and Dependent care Programs

In the last decade, there has been an increase in the number of day-care centers in America, and only about 28 percent of families with children had a parent who stayed home full time. This has prompted many organizations to either provide or subsidize daycare for employees. Additionally, some companies assist with child care for older children before and after school. This is an important concern of employees with school-age children because elementary school students typically spend 1,032 hours a year in school whereas full-time employees spend 2,025 hours per year at work. This leaves a 1,000-hour discrepancy. Employee concern about care before and after school is increasingly recognized as a drain on productivity and morale. Employers who provide this benefit report increased retention of employees who take advantage of it. The positive relationship between the availability of child-care centers and employees' performance was identified by a study done at the University of Michigan. Attitudes, recruitment and retention, and performance were all more positive when child-care centers were available. However, not all companies can provide onsite child-care or after-school programs. In these instances, the company can provide information about referral services and tax-free salary withholding for flexible spending accounts. Companies can also support community programs that provide care. Similar programs can be set up for elder care needs. Hewitt Associates determined in a 2003 study that 94 percent of large employers surveyed allowed employees to put aside pre-tax earnings for child care into flexible spending accounts that 13 percent of large corporations surveyed offered on-site or near-site child care, and 13 percent offered "backup emergency childcare" for when regular child care was temporarily unavailable.

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 and champion work/life programs. Be it employees whose family members and/or friends are called to serve their country, single mothers who are trying to raise their children and make a living, Generation X and Y employees who value their time, couples struggling to manage dual-career marriages, or companies losing critical knowledge when employees leave for other opportunities, work/life programs offer a win-win situation for employers and employees.

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