



Work Life Balance in the Health Care Sector

Kirti Shivakumar & Veena Pujar

KLS Institute of Management Education and Research, Belagavi, Karnataka, India

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Abstract

Today, more than ever before there is an increased concern about the impact and relationship of an employee's personal and professional life. The idea that families have a single male breadwinner has vanished and we can see a paradigm shift in the definition of family itself. Dual earner couples, single parents, commuter marriages and break down of the joint family concept in Asian countries have caused a great shift. The employee of today has several responsibilities', towards the family, towards the organisation, towards their social interest and towards society as well. In the entire cycle sometimes, employees forget or lose the responsibility they have towards themselves. However the organizational perspective of work life balance is varied. It is difficult to establish the right balance between work and family in the healthcare sector. This is because most services by nature are perishable and have to be utilised instantly, means that the employee has to be physically present to serve at any time the service is required. This paper is the outcome of an ongoing research conducted at ABC Health Care, a leading health care institution in Karnataka. The objective of this research was to understand the HR practices of the organisation with specific reference to Work Life Balance of employees. The paper looks into the various aspects of work life balance at ABC Health Care and suggests some practices which could aim at reducing the work-life conflict, thereby increasing work life balance.

Keywords: Work –Life Balance, Work- life conflict, Service Sector, Health Care Sector

JEL Classification: I11, M12

Paper Classification: Research Paper

Introduction

Today, than ever before, there is an increased concern about the relationship between work and family life and the impact each has on the other. Research about this area has begun way back in the early nineteenth century. The world of work – employment, the nature, the demands and employee-employer relations, has changed greatly over the years. This has seen a related change in the amount of time which an employee can exclusively devote to his family. Increased expectations of the job, the quantity of time at the workplace, rising competition, lifestyle and demographic factors, increased employment rate of women have all contributed to the growing need for a defined policy and well-designed policies to ensure balance in work and life. The concept of a single male breadwinner has changed and we can see a paradigm shift in the

definition of family itself. This shift has been defined by rise in the number of dual earner couples, single parents, commuter marriages and break down of the joint family concept in Asian countries.

While organisations are expecting employees to be more flexible and productive, employees too have exceeding expectations about their work life. The earlier concept of "lifetime employment" has vanished. It has been ravaged by uncertain and volatile economic conditions leading to unemployment and job insecurity. This has led to a change in the employees' perspectives and expectations about work. Work-life balance requires creating and nurturing a supportive and healthy work environment, which allows employees to maintain equilibrium balance between their work and personal responsibilities. This in turn leads to improved employee loyalty and productivity. The employee of today plays several roles as a parent, as a spouse, as a responsible son/daughter, as a conscious citizen along with his role at the workplace. These responsibilities consume a lot of his time and productive energy as well as commitment.

Initially work life balance was generally understood as an important issue for working mothers. Gradually there is a growing realisation that it concerns all employees, which can be observed in various literature available. (Bird, 2006, Bailyn et al, 1997). The employee of today has several responsibilities towards the family, towards the organisation, towards their social interest and towards society as well. In the entire cycle sometimes, employees forget or lose the responsibility they have towards themselves. However the organisational perspective of work life balance is very different.

It is difficult to establish the right balance between work and family in the healthcare sector. This is because most services by nature are perishable and have to be utilised instantly, means that the employee has to be physically present to serve at the time the service is required. For employees working in hospitals it is all the more difficult to get that balance right.

This paper is the outcome of an ongoing research conducted in ABC Healthcare a leading institution in the health care sector in Karnataka.

The objectives of this research are:

1. To understand the HR practices of the organisation with specific reference to Work Life Balance.
2. To explore the challenges faced by employees in a service organisation with regard to maintaining work life balance and give suggestions for the same.

The further stage of the research would involve using a tested instrument to measure work life balance in ABC Healthcare to enhance organizational effectiveness.

Work-life balance meaning and definition

- **Work:** Work is the physical and/or mental effort put in by the person to complete a task or to produce something. It signifies an activity which we do regularly and consistently, which results in an earning, which is usually in monetary terms. This monetary earning may be supplemented or complemented by non-monetary benefits also.
- **Life:** Life refers to the state of existence which is characterised by various drives and desires – the desire to grow, achieve and acquire. These drives and desires cause stress in life and have an impact on the work a person undertakes.

¹The name ABC Healthcare has been used, to protect the identity of the organisation.

“Work life balance” is almost vague and complex phenomenon, and therefore there is no universally accepted definition of the term. Greenhaus, H.J., Collins, M.K. & Shaw, D.J (2003) define work family balance as the “extent to which an individual is equally engaged in and equally satisfied with his or her work role and family role.” (p 510). This indicates that positive work life balance is said to exist when there is satisfaction at work and the employee can function productively because there are minimal conflicts in the roles the individual plays.

- According to Greenhaus et.al (2003), work life balance can be defined by the following vital and interrelated components:
 - o “Time balance” – balance between the time spent at work and home, a balance in the amount of time devoted by the employee to his professional and personal roles.
 - o “Involvement balance” - the proportionate level of emotional involvement of the employee to her professional and personal roles.
 - o “Satisfaction balance” - quantum of satisfaction felt by the individual as an employee and as a family member.
- Work-life balance indicates “the extent to which an employee experiences feeling fulfilled and having his or her needs met in both work and non-work facets of life”. (Alison Rife and Rosalie Hall, 2015, p 4). When the individual experiences better work life balance, he has a feeling of well-being, expresses greater job satisfaction resulting in positive work related behaviour like higher productivity, reduced absenteeism, and reduced attrition.

Work-life balance requires managing the demands of the workplace with the expectations from family, friends and one’s personal life. The employee of today wants more involvement and control in the responsibilities allotted to him so that he can manage his personal life in a better manner. A study published in the Business Information review indicates that in the quest for work life balance, employees look for various ways to manage their work and personal life so that they can prioritise their physiological and sociological demands. However the age of the employee, technological advances, workplace changes and ineffective management of organisations may act as barriers in such a prioritisation process.

What Do We Mean By Service Sector?

There are three traditional economic sectors – primary, secondary and tertiary. The primary sector includes areas like agriculture, mining, sericulture and fishing, the secondary sector refers to the sector where things are made or manufactured. The tertiary sector is that which focuses on services and not products. In today’s economy, services rendered by individuals are what set a business apart from others. (Bell, 1999), and serving customers innovatively is what enables an organisation to go ahead in the competition. (Michel, Brown, and Gallan, 2008). As Drucker (1988, p 196) says “The single most important thing to remember about any enterprise is that there are no results inside its walls. The result of a business is a satisfied customer.” Services therefore have a vital role to play in the economy as well as in organisations. In the ever increasing competition, services help companies innovate and differentiate. Some services are tangible, for example the service at a beauty parlour, a clinic, a surgery, because they deal with a procedure where the person is physically involved. Another category of services is when they are aimed at maintaining and supporting the sale of goods and products, for e.g. housekeeping services at a hospital, maintenance services at a mall, etc. The quality of services rendered becomes a source of differentiation and competitive advantage in a competitive market.

In India's GDP, the contribution of the services sector is very dominant, attracting substantial FDI, almost 51 percent. According to a report released by the Planning Commission, Government of India in March 2017, the Gross Value Added (GVA) for the year 2016-17, at current prices for Services sector is approximately at Rs. 737 trillion. The services sector according to various reports employs more than 3.7 million people².

Role of employees in the service sector

Services are experiential and therefore the success of the organisation depends greatly on the type of service rendered by the employees. If the service experience is positive, it is an indication that the behaviour of the employee has been up to the expectations of the customer. (Walz and Niehoff 2000). Because what the customer remembers about the organisations is his interaction with the employee, which becomes the foundation for what he perceives about the company. (Beaujean, Davidson, and Madge, 2006; Byrnes, 2005). In the same way, a poor experience of a customer with an employee, leads to negative perception of the company itself. (Byrnes, 2005). This demands excellent frontline people who not only give service but who are the service. According to Tony Alessandra, if a company only wants to survive, it may be able to do it by offering products of good quality at a reasonable price, but if it wants to grow ahead in the competition, it is service which will make it win the race. So it follows that the employee is the one who makes the difference. In many cases, in a service, there is just the employee and nothing else i.e. employee is the service e.g. hair cutting, physical trainers, legal services etc. In service oriented organisations like restaurants, hospitals, salons, etc., employees are the one who determine the quality of services rendered. There are several instances when people are ready to pay more for certain services like health care, personal care if the services are of proven good quality. Since proportion of tangible and intangible content varies in the service spectrum, it makes sense to invest in good employees, just as if one would make extra investment to get technology /equipment, etc.

Services are perishable, meaning they are delivered/produced and experienced /consumed simultaneously. The perception of the service is in the mind of the person who experiences it. Every customer remembers a visit to a restaurant, a vacation, a visit to the salon, where what made the difference was the employee and the good quality of the service. Invariably, customers would not repeat their business with an organisation where they have experienced poor service.

The health care sector is a knowledge based sector purely dependant on the service rendered by the doctors, nurses, therapists, lab technicians and even services rendered by housekeeping and other tertiary staff. According to Kabene, Orchard, Howard, Soriano and Leduc (2006), good human resource management practices in hospitals lead to a good service quality in the health care sector. The concern shown by a doctor and the quality of the service given by nurses and paramedical staff are the main factors leading to customer satisfaction in the health care sector. (Laohasirichaikul and others 2009, Korsah 2011). The health care sector requires their employees to be caring, emotionally intelligent and sensitive (Lanjananda&Patterson 2009) (Dhanda and Kurian 2012). Such behaviour cannot be expected in hospitals if the work life balance is poor. To nurture such behaviour, organisations must develop good HR practices.

Literature Survey

Much research had been done in the field of 'Work-life balance' and 'Work-life conflict'. The conceptual implication of these terms has been the focus of several papers. (Hayman, 2005;

²http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/india-s-services-sector-grew-10-a-year-in-2015-16-cii-report-116042001082_1.html, retrieved on 04/10/17

Moore, 2007; Pocock, 2005). Several terms are used interchangeably, usually implying the same meaning (Hill, Hawkins, Ferris, & Weitzman, 2001; Quick, Henley, & Quick, 2004; Reiter, 2007). One of the most common implications of the term work-life balance is the absence of conflict between professional roles and personal roles (Frone, 2003; Quick, et al., 2004).

Work-life conflict can be a serious problem having an adverse impact both on the professional and personal front. The fact that most individuals are continuously striving to balance their work and personal lives is the stark reality of today. In this ordeal to balance both, usually the impact of one or the other or the overlapping of one over the other leads to what is termed as a 'positive or negative spill over'. A lot of research has been conducted to analyse the concept of work life balance, the causes, the effect and the practices that organisations can implement to achieve the much required work life balance in an employee's life.

According to Stacey Johnson, long working hours and workplace stress can lead to several physical and medical complications in the employees' life causing obesity, substance addiction and depression. Employers have today understood that such work life conflict have an impact on the productivity of organisation because a stressed and over worked employee is low on commitment, discipline and performance.

Hayman J & Rasmussen E (2013) has made an important finding that work life balance is equally required for male employees as it is for female employees. Therefore organisational leaders and HR managers should include male employees while forming work life balance policies. Hence the interest and problems of the male employees should not be ignored.

Marafi H (2013) identified issues faced by employees in education sector when they have to work on weekends or take any special classes other than the scheduled ones. These employees experience negative work-life balance and health issues. This leads to family disturbance and ultimately leads to de-motivation and scope of turnover. However, if adequate compensation is provided and prior information is given this would help to reduce the negative effect on work life of employees.

Carlson, S.D., Kacmar, M.K. & Williams, J.L. have used the term 'Work-family conflict', which they explained as the resultant stress caused by the conflict of the demands from the work place and the family. Further Carlson and others found that such conflict is evident in two forms, the first form being the work to family conflict and the second is the family to work conflict. This results in conflicts in the form of time-based conflicts, the strain on the individual (physical and mental) as well as in the behavior of the individual.

In his research Moore (2007) has indicated that those employers who can provide supportive policies to create long term work life balance, can create a culture where employees are positive, productive and loyal.

In the words of Felstead et al. (2002) work-life balance has been defined as "the relationship between the institutional and cultural times and spaces of work and non-work in societies where income is predominantly generated and distributed through labor markets."

Aycan et al. (2007) restricted their explanation of work life balance to include only work and family and brought out the idea of 'life balance', which is more inclusive and wholesome in perspective.

In this paper the authors prefer to use the term 'Work-life balance', since it indicates the responsibilities at both work and home as well as the roles to be played in a person's personal as well as professional life.

Importance of Work Life Balance in Today's Scenario

For an employee, Work Life Balance would indicate an equilibrium between responsibilities at work and on his/her front. Work life Balance initiatives include those policies and plans of the organisation which allow flexibility of work in terms of hours spent physically at the work place, those strategies which enhance quality of work life and help the employee to manage work family conflict. Hence strategies which help people develop control over when, where and how they work can be called as Work Life Balance Strategies. Some of the common practices adopted by employees in this regard are flexible timings at work, work from home practices, crèche and day care facilities, special leave to take care of family needs, help and leave for geriatric care. Research has indicated that such policies have several positive outcomes on the work life of employees.

Many organisations view it as an effort which has to be made by the employee to balance his personal and professional life. The perspective is that the organisation has no role or no need to make any effort in this direction. Some go as far as to say that there is no meaning to this term, since work and family are two totally different issues. Some organisations hold a completely radical view that "work and personal life as competing priorities is a zero-sum game, in which a gain in one area means a loss in the other." (Friedman et al, 2000). Eventually organisations must understand that work-life balance aims at having and sustaining a healthy balance between the work an employee has to do and his personal responsibilities so that employees are not at conflict with either, leading to stronger employee loyalty and productivity. Work life conflict seems to be increasing because of the growing number of female employees in the work force, single parents, dual income families and an aging population. Globalization and rising unemployment has increased the seriousness of this conflict.

Thus, an ideal situation means a balance between these components. The efforts of an individual are directed towards achievement of an equilibrium between the amount of time he devotes to the work and personal roles, and the satisfaction he derives out of these roles. If it is very difficult for the individual to achieve this equilibrium and it ends up in a conflict, it indicates a poor work life balance. Employers are slowly accepting the fact that it is important to reduce the conflict between work and home demands.

Effects of Poor Work Life Balance on the Organisation

Research has proven that poor work life balance leads to:-

- Increasing issues related to time and punctuality starting from late coming, constant requests for leave, constant distraction when at work because of phone calls, etc., leading to low productivity and efficiency.
- The immediate spill over of poor punctuality is absenteeism and in some case could lead to the employee quitting his/her job.
- Due to the conflict in his personal and professional life, the employees performance gets affected which in turn has a cyclical effect: poor acceptance by the team, increased supervision, low morale and a feeling of being neglected by peers/colleagues.
- The reduced enthusiasm of the worker and as a consequence his creative streak, capacity to learn new things and innovate gets adversely affected.



- Employees who are not able to smoothly balance their work and family life often are viewed as a liability to the company.

The Figure 1 given below indicates the impact of poor work life balance on an individual which are categorised into three types of impact.

- Physical
- Psychological
- Behavioural

Figure 1: Impact of Work Life Balance on Individual

Physical	Psychological	Behavioural
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fatigue • Insomnia • Dizziness • Breathlessness • Hypertension • Headaches • Feeling of weakness • Obesity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depression • Boredom • Anxiety • Negativity • Lethargy • Suspicion • Indifference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overeating • Smoking , Alcoholism and other forms of substance dependence /abuse • Irritability, Anger • Impulsive Behaviour • Inability to manage self and interpersonal relations

Challenges in Maintaining Work Life Balance in Health Care Sector

Many doctors and nurses and paramedical staff are required to work long hours, night shifts and this causes a conflict between their personal and professional roles. The natures of work at hospitals demand that the doctors, nurses and paramedical staff are present at the workplace at odd hours. This also has a toll on the employee’s ability to take care of his own health; the employee is constantly juggling to ensure a balance between the care he gives to his patients and the care he gives to himself and his family. According to Sara Hedderwick, a consultant in infectious diseases at Belfast, there is no limit for what one wants to do to help patients get better, but to do that, health care professionals must ensure that they remain healthy too. Trying to achieve this fine balance between personal and professional commitments is very difficult, particularly for those who have families and dependants. This struggle often leads to stress in the employees life.

Hospitals today are managed like a business and are no longer dull and morose places. However this hasn’t taken away the critical importance of dedicated medical and paramedical professionals. Neither has it made any change in the stress that these category of employees face because of the long and unearthly hours’ they have to put in. This is especially true for the nursing staff.

Brief Profile of ABC Healthcare

ABC is a reputed educational society in Karnataka Starting with colleges in various fields, today it has institutions all over Karnataka, schools all over India, one school in the Middle

East, several engineering colleges and two medical colleges. ABC entered into the healthcare sector in 1986 and established a hospital in Karnataka. Starting with primary medical and health care, the hospital was able to fill the vacuum of affordable and professional health care in the region. Today, the hospital has grown into a thoroughly planned medical and research centre having 2200 beds. It has very aesthetically designed, state of the art infrastructure with scope for advanced diagnosis and treatment. Several patients from North Karnataka, who otherwise had to go all the way to Bengaluru or Mumbai for treatment, are now benefitted by this speciality centre. Attached to this huge hospital is a charity hospital, having 1000 beds, where health care is totally free. It has all facilities from basic to advanced in all fields like General Medicine, General Surgery, Orthopaedics, Ear Nose and Throat (ENT), Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Ophthalmology, Paediatrics, Dermatology, Chest Diseases, Psychiatry, etc. The hospital also has several super speciality centres for Heart Care (Cardiovascular, Cardiology and Thoracic Surgery), Child Care (Neo natal and Paediatric Surgery), Urology, Cancer Care (Oncology and Surgical Oncology), Fertility (Assisted Reproduction Centre) and so on.

Work Life Balance Practices at ABC Healthcare

The hospital employs around 550 people directly and around 250 through contractors, for housekeeping, and other allied services. 300 questionnaires were distributed to Doctors, Nurses, Paramedical Staff and Administrative who were on the rolls of the hospital. A total of 244 employees responded to the survey. (61 doctors, 63 nurses, 60 paramedical staff, and 60 administrative staff).

Findings related to Work Life Balance in the ABC Healthcare

- Most of the employees work for more than 6 days a week but not more than 12 hours a day.
- Most of the employees are of the opinion that they are rarely able to balance their personal and professional life.
- Most of them often think about their work even after their work, which causes a great deal of stress/tension at home.
- Approximately 40 percent of the staff expressed they are unable to spend enough time with family.
- Most of the staff agree that there should be flexible working hours and compensatory holidays so as to maintain work life balance.
- Most of them believe that if they had a healthy work life balance they could perform still better.
- More than 60 percent of the paramedical staff felt that better incentives/rewards for working longer hours would reduce the feeling of strain at work.
- While doctors work in shifts on 2 days a week, paramedical staffs are always on shifts. Clerical and administrative staffs work from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The clerical staff felt that it was better to have shifts, while the paramedical staff felt it was better to have fixed working hours (general shifts).
- According to the respondents, some of the common effects of poor work life balance were tensions and conflicts at home and workplace, fatigue, physical problems like headache and backache.

- There are absolutely no forms of or places for recreational or relaxing activities for employees at the work place.
- There was no evidence of any kind of training or development activities conducted for the paramedical, clerical and administrative staff.

Suggestions

1. Identify the departments where work is more stressful and develop healthy HR practices to reduce burnout and stress, for e.g. small rest breaks in between work, better changing rooms, water and coffee dispensers. Periodically the employees can have some fun at work activities – like solving puzzles, birthday celebrations and so on to feel more relaxed.
2. Though the concept of flexi-working hours may be very difficult in service organisations, it could be explored in certain departments.
3. Departments could be developed into self-managed teams, so that there would be a greater sense of belongingness to the team, generating a better team spirit. When employees require leave or an urgent few hours off, other employees could pitch in for them. This would not happen if teams are managed like traditional departments.
4. Regular health check-ups and short rejuvenating programmes for mental and physical health could go a long way in easing stress.
5. Celebrate important events of employees lives like anniversaries, graduation of children, academic success of kids at the workplace also so that, even if he has missed out an important event at home, he can make up for it by this celebration.
6. Incentivising extra hours put in by employees by a well-designed reward system.
7. In order to ensure the families of the employees are happy, an annual gathering with family must be organized .The company could involve the employees and their families in their CSR activities.

Conclusion

Corporatisation of health care services in our country has seen the growth of new jobs like Marketing Executives, Public Relations Officers, Medical Transcriptionists, etc. They have to compete with the hospitals which are started by corporates backed by global collaborations and partnerships. Hence, it is very important that organisations in the healthcare industry realise the implications that globalisation has had on the way business operates and that they must adapt practices to match the challenges induced by global change. The key to this lies in the effective management of human resources - developing them through interactive and interesting training and development interventions, incentivising extra effort and time through innovative schemes and employee engagement initiatives.

Good work life balance is directly related to work related attitude. Even if we ignore the benefits that healthy work life balance brings to the organisation, we cannot be blind to the fact that conflict in work and family life always results in a demotivated and stressed employee who would be less productive. Organisations must make available various resources like, better rest rooms, flexible work hours, since these have been directly linked to job satisfaction and organisational commitment for all employees who have family responsibilities. Organisations must invest and innovate to develop practices which make the employee feel engaged and to feel that he is a vital part of the organisation.

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Authors' Profile

Kirti Shivakumar has 25 years of experience in industry, consultancy, training, teaching and administration. She has held leadership positions in the industry as well as in academics. She was formerly Director, Academics at Global Business School, Belgaum and Dean Academics, MATS Belgaum. Currently she is a Professor at IMER, where she holds several important responsibilities as Students Events Coordinator, NBA Coordinator, IQAC Coordinator, NAAC Coordinator etc. She teaches HRM, Organization Behaviour and Strategic Management. She has authored eight case studies and several research papers which have been published in national and international publications. She is the recipient of a grant by MDI-CII-AICTE-UNDP for developing case studies in Corporate Social Responsibility and grants to develop case studies in Entrepreneurship by ISB Hyderabad. She received the Best Case Study award by Amity Business School at the Case Renvoi. As a trainer, she has conducted training programmes across all levels of management, for organizations like Dalmia Cement, Bajaj Electricals, West Coast Paper Mills, IOC, Lake View Hospital and Reliance Engineering. She is very passionate about contributing to the area of Women Empowerment through Entrepreneurship and conducts free mentoring/ training for small time women Entrepreneurs. Her concern about cyber security especially for young girls takes her all around North Karnataka where she conducts awareness sessions for students, teachers and parents.

Veena Pujar is a student of MBA IV Semester of KLSIMER. Her love for learning made her get back to formal education after a break of almost seven years. Her responsibilities as a mother have not prevented her from being the topper of the HR stream in all semesters. She has also presented papers at National & International Conferences.