# Work-Life Balance: What Organizations Should do to Create Balance?

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**Abstract:** Ignoring personal, family and social aspects and increasing emphasis towards financial bottom lines has created an imbalance in the life of the workers at all levels. The result is stress in life, conflicts in family, social distortion, deteriorating performance and low productivity. To overcome this, work-life balance is necessary which is not a recommendation but a Divine order. This research is carried out to find out the answer to the simple question: what organizations should do to create balance? The results show that training and development, professional commitment and adherence to the core values, time management, clarity of vision, purpose and objectives, employee relationships and humanity, salary package and conducive work environment and innovation are the areas that organizations should focus and act upon to create WLB. These findings look generic but their ranking and priority is unique and hence may be of interest to many organizations.

**Key words:** Imbalance · Work-life Balance · Divine Order · Values · Performance

## INTRODUCTION

With increasing emphasis towards financial bottom lines, social justice, public trust, civic responsibilities and the criteria for success of individual life in this world and in hereafter are frequently put a side. Performance, quality and customer satisfaction are viewed in terms of their impact to financial and economic outcomes only. This has created an imbalance in the life of the workers. The result is the stress in life, family breakdown, social distortions and low performance of the organizations.

We all have different roles in our life; we are fathers, sons, breadwinners, husbands, wives, mothers, CEOs, bosses and members of social clubs etc. Imbalance is created when we perform well in one or more of our roles at the sacrifice of some other equally important roles like someone who is a good businessman but a poor father or someone who is a good engineer but a poor husband etc. Work-life balance (WLB) is achieved when an individual's right to a fulfilled life inside and outside paid work is accepted and respected as a norm to the mutual benefits of an individual, business and society.

Balance and success in life depends on how purposefully and strategically life is being understood and managed. This is possible only when an individual, organization or society have clearly identified their purpose and formulate and implement the strategies to create balance in mitigating risk and achieving success. Maintaining balance is not mere a recommendation but a Devine order. As clearly mentioned in Quran;

> And the heaven He raised and imposed the balance. That you not transgress within the balance. And establish weight in justice and do not make deficient the balance.

*(Quran: Surah Al Rahmaan, Verses 7-9).*

Also, the message from the Bible as reported by Rick Warren [1] is that "don't let the errors of evil people lead you down the wrong path and make you lose your balance". (2 peter 3:17 –CEV). Also according to Ephesions 5:16 (Ph), "live life with a due sense of responsibility, not as those who do not know the meaning of life but as those who do"

WBL is a matter of great concern today as long hours at work are stealing quality hours from the time that people dedicate to their families, society and their personal pursuits. The corporate world is waking up globally to this reality and a number of interventions are being proposed and implemented. WLB needs a broader

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perspective whereas, most of the interventions however, are either specific for catering work family balance or for catering the needs of female workers only.

The paper aims to explore the critical factors/areas where organizations must focus to create WLB for the success of both individuals and organizations. For this, a simple open ended question: "What organizations should do to create balance?" was asked from 75 participants of workshops conducted during 2010 through 2012. The responses are ranked, analyzed and summarized using content analysis and grounded theory approach. Although the respondents are from private schools only, the findings are generalized. These findings will help the organizations of all kinds in formulating and implementing their strategies for better performance and creating WLB.

**Review of Literature:** With the dawn of a new century and an emerging and exponentially accelerating force for global societal and organizational change, there is a dire need for a more holistic leadership that integrates the four fundamental arenas which define the essence of human existence—the body (physical), mind (logical/rational thought), heart (emotions, feelings) and spirit [2]. Man needs three things: to love, to be loved and to create love [3]. Fletcher [4], summarizes the writings of Peter Drucker and explained that profit is not the ultimate goal but the measure of efficiency. The purpose driven corporation gives priority to human beings who, as customers, as workers, as knowledge workers and as managers, form a human community which will be hierarchical but in which each and every person is necessary and valued; it develops leaders within the community; and it recognizes that it exists in a web of social relationships with duties to the state, local communities and the intermediary organizations of society. Christensen [5] emphasized that it is unfortunate in conventional thinking where a career in business means only buying, selling and investing in companies. Whereas, the deeper rewards come from developing people and helping in providing the social justice to the people in terms of respect, honor and creating WLB.

Management literature is full up with discussions about the need for individual, organizational and societal transformation [6-11]. These authors argue that the pace of change is increasing and individual, organizational and global transformation is required in order to keep pace with this change. Individual transformation is needed because managers and leaders must be proactive leaders, open to change and flexible enough to adapt to constantly shifting demands from their organizations.

Organizations must transform because of the shift to the global marketplace, increased competitiveness and the rapid acceleration of change. Societal transformation must occur because of environmental degradation, shifts in economic power, inequalities in distribution of wealth and unsolved social problems such as discrimination and illiteracy [12]. In order to justify investing in any transformational processes managers focus on the bottom-line effects of transforming their organizations, emphasizing increased performance, increased profits and reduced costs from transformation. It is the non-material, even spiritual qualities of transformation that may be the most profound for individuals, organizations and society [13]. Numerous recent researches have emphasized the dramatic increase in interest in incorporating spirituality into management theory, management development and management practice [14,15].

The employed worker in modern day mass production industry has no or minimal social status or function. Being socially isolated, productive work is not enough to solve the social problem of the industrial worker. Free society will endure only if the free government in the political sphere and free rule in socially constituted sphere balance and check each other [4]. The aim of work is to serve human beings and make life more human. Business management should contribute to this end, or at least, to avoid impeding it. The family has a primary importance for the flourishing of the person and society. As a consequence, the family is one of the most important terms of reference for shaping the ethical and social order of work. Work and family are intrinsically related to the dignity and flourishing of the person, as well as the improvement of society. Both are called to contribute to the fulfillment of the person. Society needs to choose to value quality of life and the development of the next generation to a greater extent than we do now [16].

WLB is defined in the literature as the 'individual's ability, irrespective of age and gender, to find a life rhythm that allows individuals to combine their work with other responsibilities, activities or aspirations' [17]. The imbalance or conflict, on the other hand, is defined in the WLB literature as 'an interference of work and family roles that creates tension or the direct result of incompatible pressures from an individual's work and family roles' [18]. Work and family interferences are a great source of psychological distress for employees, families and organizations [19]. According to Suleman Ahmer [20], there is a disagreement on how to exactly define work-life balance but there is a general agreement on the consequences of work-life imbalance. The symptoms of

this imbalance are: a disturbed family life where the understanding develops that people are not living up to the expectations or the norms; neglect of self, the biggest manifestation of which is deteriorating health followed by a sense of lack of fulfillment and happiness creating work performance issues.

WLB is about people having a measure of control over when, where and how they work. It is achieved when an individual's right to a fulfilled life inside and outside paid work is accepted and respected as a norm to the mutual benefits of an individual, business and society. WLB tends to apply that 'work' and 'life' are two distinct spheres of activity when the former is, clearly, part of the latter; that our lives are divided only between (paid) 'work' and some other, undifferentiated, activity called 'life' The outcomes of the good WLB policies include increased productivity; improved recruitment and retention; lower rates of absenteeism, reduced overheads; improved customer experience; a more motivated, satisfied and equitable workforce [21].

The language used to talk about combining paid work with other parts of life is crucial and oversimplification limits perceived responses, including actual range of policy developments and day-to-day practices. This often results in 'quick fix' solutions that leave the basic underpinnings of work–personal life problems untouched [22,23]. It is unclear that WLB refers to: an objective state of affairs, subjective experience, perception or feeling; an actuality or an aspiration; a discourse or a practice; a metaphor for flexible working; a metaphor for the gendered division of labor; or a metaphor for some other political agenda [21].

In the workplace it is often assumed that HR policies can provide flexibility and enhance 'choice' thereby solving WLB issues, without need for systemic change to cultures, structures and practices [24]. A focus on the implications of the changing nature of paid work in the global context and the neglect of social factors may help to move beyond the individualistic, gender and culture blind debates and policies. The concern should be broaden to consider the impact of the organization of work on the wider sphere of life beyond paid employment – for the individual, for communities, for society at large for social sustainability of working life [25].

WLB policies and culture is the key factor and employee performance can be increased by organizational support [26,27]. According to Cegarra-Leiva et al. [28], to increase employees' satisfaction and reduce their turnover intentions it is necessary to develop a culture that is positive and supportive of employees' WLB.

They emphasize that, mere availability of WLB practices does not guarantee positive attitudes on the part of employees as some studies [29,30] show that formal WLB policies have less impact on organizations and employees than informal organizational support for WLB. Another cause is likely to be that, irrespective of the availability of WLB practices, if values in the organization do not really support employees to achieve balance in their working and non-working lives, employees will not feel a supportive climate in the organization and, hence, no positive effect is likely to occur [28].

Today's organizations, both for profit and not-for-profit, have to balance an increasing array of conflicting forces and values. Stakeholder demands are diverse and numerous. No individual is in a job without conflicting demands for innovation and stability, for quality and efficiency, for goal clarity and flexibility, for short-term results and long-term effectiveness [31]. The question is how can organizations balance the external demands of the workplace with their own inner needs and values? If a collective sense of moral integrity and responsibility is not taken by those in leadership positions at all levels of society, then we shall see a continuing erosion and tearing of the social fabric in both for profit and not-for-profit organizations [32]. Frederick Herzberg, asserts that the powerful motivator in our lives isn't money; it's the opportunity to learn, grow in responsibilities, contribute to others and be recognized for achievements [5].

Little has been proposed from a normative perspective in providing values, principles or guidelines which might help and are at the root of a successful work-family policy and personal balance. An improper work-family (or generally WLB) relationship gives rise to inequalities and significant disorders which have been traced from medical, sociological, ethical and economical perspectives [16].

**Research Methodology:** The qualitative data was collected, through a questionnaire asking open ended questions, from the participants of workshops on "Strategic Vision and Strategic Time Management" conducted during 2010 through 2012. The respondents were teachers and management/owners of the private schools located in Abbottabad, a city known as city of schools in Pakistan. One of the questions was "What organizations should do to create balance?" A total of 75 questionnaires were distributed and 71 gave the response making 95% response rate. Of total participants, 69% are female respondents. Almost 76% of the respondents are having age more than 25 years and 64% having 16 years or more in education.

Table 1:

| Initial Coding | Focused Coding | Selected Examples from responses |
|---|---|---|
| Training Programs to create awareness | Training and Development | Organizations should conduct training programs to create awareness about importance of objectives to create balance in their lives |
| Workshops and Conferences | | |
| Training for personal effectiveness | | Besides professional training, religious training to understand, respect and love others should be provided through |
| Awareness creating programs | | workshops |
| Ethical and religious training | | |
| Character building | | |
| Honesty and justice with Profession | Professional Commitment and core values | Organizations should play their role. They should portray their image for which they were created. They should perform their duties by Hard work, sincerely, with commitment and loyalty |
| Hard work and equality | | |
| Interest in core job activities | | Organizations should be God fearing and do the right jobs. They should be hard working, honest and maintain |
| Responsible and Disciplined | | equality |
| Committed, determinant, cooperated and patience | | |
| Trust in workers | | |
| Flexibility in Behavior | | |
| Time Management | Time Management | Organizations should understand their important jobs and then prioritize them |
| Setting priorities | | Organizations must be in Q2 (Time quadrant of Important but Not urgent activities) rather than Q1 (important |
| Punctual | | and urgent activities) |
| Planning | | |
| Visionary, purposeful and goal oriented | Clarity of Vision, Purpose and Objectives | They (organizations) should have vision to give opportunities to the employees. They must accept emerging trends and set their priorities right |
| Determination of Objectives | | |
| Setting priorities according to objectives | | Objectives should be known and activities should be set according to the known objectives |
| Planning | | |
| Proper feedback system | | |
| Empower the employees | Employee Relationships and Humanity | Organizations should not undue burden their employees so that they can cope with their domestic problems easily and come out fresh on their work |
| Understand problems of employees | | |
| Hire loyal and honest people | | Organizations should respect humanity |
| Trust in workers | | Management should be God fearing |
| Do not overburden employees | | |
| Love and respect for humanity | | |
| Serving others | | |
| Ethical and God fearing | | |
| Just salary packages | Salary Package and Conducive Work Environment | Facilitate workers in equipments and pay them to fulfill their needs |
| Facilities | | They should provide holistic environment where individual can flourish without any obstacle |
| Conducive environment | | |
| Job assurance | | |
| Accept emerging trends | Innovation | Organizations must accept new and emerging trends and use technology |
| Use latest technology | | |

The contents of the responses are summarized, ranked and analyzed based on the concept of content analysis and grounded theory approach. Focused and initial coding technique [33] is adopted to develop the conceptual categories to explain the main findings. The process is used iteratively to refine the concepts and categorization (Table 1).

**Discussion and Analysis:** The findings are briefly explained below in order of their ranking. These findings can help organizations while developing strategies for long-term sustainability. The results shows that individuals suggested some fundamental and broader initiatives for creating balance in the life of individuals and hence in the life of organizations. Although, these findings are generally discussed in management literature but their ranking and priority is different and hence it may be of interest to many.

**Training and Development (T and D):** This is the highest ranked suggestion/recommendation for creating balance in organizational and personal life. Organizations should have continuous training programs for development of individuals. The training modules should be purposefully developed to cater the needs of organizational development through personal effectiveness. This must include the areas of interest such as organizational objectives, functions, processes as well as character building through spiritual, religious and ethical awareness. This will make the employees responsible, disciplined, honest and loyal to the organizations. The performance of individuals and that of organization will increase and will help in creating WLB.

**Professional Commitment and Adherence to the Core Values:** Core values represent the behavior and belief system of an organization. They are set of universal

principles and standards for choosing right course of action in day-to-day life of an organization. Values are not the exclusive property of any one group or institution. Organizations must demonstrate what they claim and the difference between their expressed statements and their action must be minimal. This can be achieved only when they demonstrate and promote hard work, honesty, sincerity, trust, discipline, determination and patience etc. This will lead to organizational effectiveness and balance in work and life.

**Time Management:** Time management is very important for the survival of an individual, organization and society. In modern competitive world, time management is the best medicine for a balanced life without any tension and work pressure. Time is one of the most precious resources. Its best utilization means to understand what is important and urgent and what is not important and not urgent. This can only be done when organizations are clear about their objectives, goals and the time-lines needed to achieve them. They must understand the tradeoffs between various important activities occurring simultaneously and only then they can prioritize and allocate proper resources to avoid unnecessary tension, delays and work pressure. The understanding of time quadrants and allocating activities accordingly will help organizations to prioritize and to do the right things at the right time. This will also help them to drop time wasting activities to save precious time for individuals and organizations. The individuals will have more time to tackle with work and family issues effectively.

**Clarity of Vision, Purpose and Objectives:** Vision answers the question, what an organization want to be in a distant future? It is the creation of the image and picture of the future while keeping in mind the past and the present. The purpose and objective define and explain the reason of being of an organization. Thus the clarity of vision, purpose and objectives is necessary to avoid imbalance in the day-to-day activities of an organization. This will help in developing strategies, setting of objectives, goals and activities and allocation of resources while keeping broad picture in mind without compromising on performance. This will enable the organizations to focus on relevant activities only and help them in avoiding unwanted activities causing work life imbalance.

**Employee Relationships and Humanity:** Understanding the problems of employees and responding for the solution decreases the tension between employers and employees. Relationships with employees can be improved by empowering them in their roles, having trust on them, not overburdening and by hiring honest, competent and loyal employees etc. This gives ownership to the employees for organizations. The employee relationship based on trust, love and harmony results in less absenteeism, low turnover and increased performance. Therefore, organizations must take care of their personal and social life constraints to create balance.

**Salary Package and Conducive Work Environment:** It is often misunderstood that monetary benefits are most important factor determining individual performance and satisfaction. Nevertheless salary is an important factor but not the most wanted one. Other factors are high in hierarchy when it was asked for creating balance. To that extant people want just and fair salary package. What people want more is to have conducive and friendly working environment, job assurance, God fearing attitude of employers and availability of time to fulfill their private and social life obligations.

**Innovation:** Innovation means to give freedom to employees to think in an unusual way and to put creative ideas into reality. This can be done when employees are empowered and trusted upon. This is possible when employees' feedback and creative ideas are welcomed and rewarded. The attitude to discourage and punish in case of unsuccessful innovation activity limit individual creativity and organizational innovation. Thus organization should have proper structure and system that cultivate individual innovation. The use of technology and the acceptance of the emerging trends help in innovation in processes and policies to facilitate the stakeholders of the organizations.

## CONCLUSION

Finding the right balance between work and life is the challenge for individuals and organizations both. This WLB is achieved when an individual's right to a fulfilled life inside and outside paid work is accepted and respected as a norm to the mutual benefits of an individual, business and society. Balance and success in life depends on how purposefully and strategically life is being understood and managed. This is possible only when an individual, organization or society have clearly identified their purpose and formulate and implement the strategies to create balance in mitigating risk and

achieving success. Maintaining balance is not mere a recommendation but a Devine order.

The results suggests that to create WLB; training and development, professional commitment and adherence to the core values, time management, clarity of vision, purpose and objectives, employee relationships and humanity, competitive and equity based salary package along with conducive work environment and innovation are the areas that organizations should work and act upon. WLB is beneficial for both employees and organizations. When there is a balance in life, the employees will be happy, satisfied and less stressed. They will perform better and work harder. Therefore, it is necessary for organizations to create balance for improved performance, increased productivity and sustainability in both short run and in the long run.

It is recommended that organizations must give greater value for training and development of employees. They should allocate more time to agree on vision and objectives system to translate the organizational vision into shared and common vision. This can be done while adherence to core values with positive reinforcement and compliance through reward system. They should adopt open door policy to build employee relationship based on trust, shared knowledge and acknowledgement of events and achievements of staff through proper communication strategy. Apart from salary proper, employment structure that includes employee friendly policies and providing conducive work environment, flexibility and work scheduling techniques must be their focus. Proper system to nurture innovations through rewards and appreciation for creative ideas can also help in this regard.

The findings discussed in the paper are based on qualitative data collected from respondents belong to education sector. Therefore, small sample size and concentrated to only one sector limit the generalization of empirical findings. It is not advisable to apply the concepts and make policies without taking into consideration organization, industry and geographical context. In future more holistic and broader opinion can be gathered by investigating different organizations operating in various industries in addition to validation of qualitative data through quantitative analysis harnessing the benefits of mixed method research.

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