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## Unveiling Work-Life 'Balance' as 'Integration'

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*Abstract:*
*Work- life balance has already taken the attention of many researchers. This subject interests almost every professional, manager or employer. In today's business scenario, the pressure of work has been intensifying and there is growing feeling among employees that the demands of work begin to dominate life. Integration of work and family life is becoming a part of everyday's reality for majority of the employees. In this context, paper highlights that how work-life 'balance' emerged as 'integration' now-a-days. Additionally, it emphasized the key factors that how work invades ones personal life and also suggests the steps by which individuals can blend what they do personally and professionally in order to make both work.*

*Keywords: work-life balance, integration, work, family and individual*

## 1. Introduction

Climbing the organizational ladder often requires employees to work long hours and deal with difficult and complex issues. All the days in the job are not the same, some are fun-filled whereas, other days are tiring and stressful. A common dilemma for most of the people is how they manage all of the competing demands in work and life and avoid letting any negative effects of work spill over into their personal lives.

Changes in the social, political and economic fabric of societies have influenced and continue to influence both the nature of employment and its relationship to life outside work. The concept of work-life balance/integration is becoming more and more relevant in an ever dynamic working environment.

Researchers Jeffrey Greenhaus and Gary Powell reported that work and personal life should be allies and that participation in multiple roles such as parent, partner, friend, employee etc. can actually enhance physical and psychological well-being especially when all the roles are of high quality and managed together (Riordan, 2013).

However, the term work-life balance implies that one should dedicate an equal portion of time to his work and life. Balance also implies that two separate forces are involved, each pulling in a different direction. For the effectiveness in work-life system, measures can be taken to reconcile the two as much as possible, but at their cores these two entities will always be the separate ones. Integrating work into our lives and vice versa can enhance effectiveness and complement reconciliation.

Jack Welch, renowned former CEO of General Electric, famously stated that "there is no such thing as work-life balance." Instead, he explained, "There are work-life choices, and you make them, and they have consequences." It was revealed and explained in the article that apart from keeping the two domains i.e. work and life separate, one can bring them together for enjoying more success in personal and professional lives (Dewolf, 2014).

'Work-life integration' is the ability of people to recognise their personal values and goals, so that they can translate these into their professional environment or it is an outcome of people exercising control and choice in their life to meet life's challenges. It can be in terms of managing work responsibilities along with their personal and family needs. The domain of a person's life which requires integration will change based on the individual's life stages, which is very dynamic (Employer Alliance, 2014).

Now-a-days, the term 'work-life balance' has been reframed to 'work-life integration'. Experts believed that balance means 50/50, which is not realistic or that balance is impossible to maintain, making it unreasonable to put work and life in this context. Hence, the new phrase of 'work-life integration' sounds more realistic, better and more manageable (Wall, 2014).

In an article entitled 'why work-life integration trumps work-life balance', it was reported that work-life integration starts with analyzing what exactly works best for you. Further, it was recommended that every individual should make self-inventory of his/her work style. Individuals need to ask themselves where, when, and how-via email, in-person, or video conferencing etc. they can perform to their highest calibre. It was also quoted, the "anywhere worker" can be productive at any place while working in a café or brainstorming through a conference call on their mobile device anywhere in the world. These types of workers weave these considerations with professional priorities and lifestyle choices. The "anywhere worker" of today would say work-life balance is out of the window, and work-life integration is the future (Douglas, 2014).

Everyone is different and work-life integration allows people to work and live according to their own schedules and preferences. Employers benefit, too, because the work they need is still getting done.

## 2. Review of Literature
Globalization, new technologies and business restructuring are challenging long established patterns of paid work while imposing new burdens on families, individuals and households (Taylor, 2010).

Achieving balance between work and family commitments is a growing concern for contemporary employees and organizations. Kanter, R.M. (1977) quoted *"Juggling competing demands is tiring if not stressful and brings lower productivity, sickness, and absenteeism, thus work-life balance is an issue for all employees and all organizations."*

The study of work-life balance involves the examination of people's ability to manage simultaneously the multi-faceted demands of life. Although work-life balance has traditionally been assumed to involve the devotion of equal amounts of time to paid work and non-work roles but more recently the concept has been recognized as more complex and has been developed to incorporate additional components.

In fact '*India's largest work-place study, 2013*' suggested that the suffix in work-life 'balance' should be changed to 'integration' because for an individual today, there is significant overlap between personal and professional life. Moreover, it revealed that thinking of employee engagement cannot be just at a workplace. That's why there has to be a change in nomenclature (Mitra, 2013).

For an individual, work-life conflict is a demand in a form of inner role conflict in which the pressures of work creates incompatibility with other life domains, such as family in some respect, whereby, participation of one role creates difficulty for the participation in another one. (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985).

A study by the Work Institute of America (2001) entitled 'Holding a job, having a life: strategies for change' pointed out that employee-driven solutions helped reduce overtime, stress, workloads and increase flexibility, family and leisure time.

Thus, the companies have implemented work-life balance programs by recognizing that employee welfare affects the 'bottom line' of the business. A wide variety of practices are currently being used to help employees achieve work-life balance/integration. Finally, self-management is important; people need to control their own behaviour and expectations regarding work-life harmony.

## 3. Objectives
- To know how work invades one's personal life.
- To suggest steps that helps the individual to figure out one's own work-life integration.

### 3.1. How Work Invades One's Personal Life
There was a time when the boundaries between work and home were fairly clear but now-a-days, work is invading our personal life and balancing the work and life is no longer simple as it sounds because of the several reasons which are as follows:
- Global economy: Globalization is fading the concept of fixed working hours in an organization. People are compelled and feel pressured to work longer and produce more, just for protecting their jobs.
- International business: Work continues around the world 24 hours a day. People working in an international organization, might be on a call anytime round the clock for troubleshooting or consulting.
- Advanced communication technology: Today employees are more connected to the jobs beyond the boundaries of the traditional workday and workplace because of the advancement in communication technology. The more this boundary is blurred; consequently there will be higher work-to-life conflict.
- Longer hours: Employers commonly ask employees to work longer hours than they're scheduled. Especially for moving up on the career ladder, one needs to work extra and harder for exceeding the expectations.
- Changes in family roles: A married worker is typically a part of dual-career couples, which makes it difficult for finding time to meet commitments to family, friends and community.
- Many people think of work-life balance/integration only in the framework of what the company does for the individual. However, it is a two-way approach. The other side, which many individuals overlook, is what exactly the individuals are doing for themselves.

### 3.2. Steps to achieve Work-life Integration
There is no single formula for balancing work and family. It is the personal decision how one combines their career, friends, spouse, children or self into an integrated whole. The key is to develop creative solutions by keeping the things into perspective, that how individuals approach the challenges of balancing the responsibilities and joys of multiple roles. The following are few steps that will help the individuals to figure out one's own work life integration:

#### 3.2.1. Track Your Time
Analyzing your present situation is the beginning step in achieving a balanced life. Keep time logs for everything you do (for one week) including work-related and personal activities. It will help you to understand how you spend your time.

#### 3.2.2. Determine Your Priorities
Spend some time seriously reflecting on what is most important to you. Make a list of your top priorities at work and at home. Revisit your values and personal choices while listing.

### 3.2.3. Set Specific Goals
Take a list of your priorities, turn and implement them into concrete and measurable goals. Block time into your schedule especially for those activities which are very important or unavoidable.

### 3.2.4. Schedule carefully
Successful people plan their work carefully and then work their plan. Every individual has one life, so plan each day effectively. Put aside 10 to 20 minutes at the beginning of each day (or the night) to plan your tasks and activities for the day ahead.

### 3.2.5. Establish Boundaries
Set fair and realistic limits on what you will and will not do both at work and at home. Clearly communicate these boundaries to your supervisor, co-workers, partner and family. Alongside, respect your private time and find appropriate space for it.

### 3.2.6. Take Care of Your Health
Health is wealth. Your health should always be the top most priority. It is important to have sound health physically, mentally and emotionally, otherwise, both work-life and personal life will suffer. Pamper yourself, whenever required. Take care of yourself by incorporating healthy meals, exercises, sound sleep etc into your daily schedule.

### 3.2.7. Nurture Your Family/Relationships
Relationships with family, friends and loved ones are the greatest source of inner satisfaction. Everyone works to achieve a sense of gratification as well as to satisfy personal and family needs. Lack of gratification in any of the needs will result in dissatisfaction. Bolster your support system, recruit friends, family, neighbours, work colleagues etc. and ask for their support, whenever needed.

### 3.2.8. Make Time for You
Create time for yourself. As much as work, health, and relationships take priority in your life, it is also important to schedule time for your own replenishment. Indulge in some small pleasure daily. Taking some time off for yourself will not only revive you, but it will benefit your work and family as well. Explore various ways to relax yourself for relieving tension and minimizing stress.

### 3.2.9. Leave Work at Work
Do not over burden yourself with work. Sometimes, it is ok to say no. The mental health foundation also recommended that when work demands are too high, you must speak up. Develop a mental on-off switch between work and home. Set your boundaries and limits and try to confine activities in that sphere.

### 3.2.10. Exercise Your Options
Many forward-thinking companies today are creating policies and programs that help their employees to achieve work-life balance/integration. Find out what options are available in terms of flexi time, telecommuting, a job-sharing or part-time employment etc.

### 3.2.11. Work Smarter Not Harder
Using time more efficiently is an important skill that everyone needs to learn. Focus on your productive areas. Adopting the right combination of time-management practices or skills can cut down stress and saves lot of time. Avoid procrastination.

## 4. Conclusion
It is important for the individual to achieve an integrated life in order to manage both work and their private lives effectively. Work-life integration is vital for the individual as well as for the employers. It will help the individual to achieve their personal and professional goals as well the organization they are working for. It is primarily the responsibility of an individual to balance work and life and initiate steps to reduce stress and burnout. The organization can indeed facilitate the process. The individual has to explore his values, aspirations, and goals to understand what he expects from work and life and then develop the suitable ways for integrating work and life. He has to clarify his values and take ownership of his actions. He also has to negotiate his roles within the organization and family. The organizations, on the other hand, can initiate cutting edge work-life programmes to help the employees' mange their affairs more effectively.

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