



## Work- life: The balancing act

*"People with high work-life balance scores would be those who not only kept their working hours in proportion to their personal life, but who also enjoyed the time they spent in either pursuit"- David Lewis*

Hutch Essar (now Vodafone Essar) was often praised for its successful advertising campaign created by Ogilvy & Mather in 2003 featuring a pug named Cheeka following a boy around in unlikely places, with the tagline, "wherever you go, our network follows". The term work-life often flashes the same scene in my mind exemplifying its inseparability.

### Work-life balance

Work-life balance is rooted in our need to strike a healthy balance between our desires to participate fully in the labour market while giving the best of ourselves to our loved ones – which in essence, is between our job and personal responsibilities. The concept of the quality of work-life can be viewed as "the degree to which members of a work organisation are able to satisfy important personal needs through their experiences in the organization," according to the author Sutte. The term "work-life balance" first appeared in the late 1970s to describe the balance between an individual's work and personal life.

### Vital stats

The first enforceable hours' law in the United States was in 1874 when Massachusetts enacted a law which limited the amount of time that women and children could work each week. This limit was set at sixty hours per week. The average work hours changed depending on the world economic conditions. For example, during the Great Depression, the average number of hours for production workers in manufacturing in the US dropped to 34.6 each week.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates in a new study, "Working Time around the World: Trends in working hours, laws and policies in a global comparative perspective" that one in five workers around the world – or over 600 million people – are still working more than 48 hours a week, which is quite on the higher side.

A survey done by recruitment consultancy Robert Walters found that a flexible work-life balance is more important to Singaporeans than high pay. Contrarily, a survey commissioned by the NTUC Women's Development Secretariat (WDS) involving 200 top

private sector companies in Singapore has found one in three do not have flexible working schemes.

### **Calculating your work-life balance score**

A psychologist and stress expert claims to have devised the first mathematical formula for work-life balance. Commissioned by economic development agency Cornwall Enterprise, David Lewis's methodology takes into account the quality, as well as the amount, of time spent undertaking work and social pursuits. It also looks at perceived time flow, boredom, stress levels, commuting and relationships with family and colleagues to produce a comprehensive work-life balance score, out of a possible maximum of 100 points. Simply put, the formula is as follows:

$$\text{Work-life balance} = (\text{Working time} \times \text{quality of work}) \\ + \\ (\text{Personal time} \times \text{quality of personal life})$$

### **The balancing act**

The responsibility of creating work-life equilibrium does not only lie with the employers but also with each individual to clearly set the priorities and move ahead. Companies are beginning to realise the importance of helping employee better handle the pressures of their jobs as well as their families. Research by Kenexa Research Institute in 2007 showed that employees who were more favourable toward their organisation's efforts to support work-life balance also indicated a much lower intent to leave the organisation, greater pride in their organisation, a willingness to recommend it as a place to work and higher overall job satisfaction. The balancing act is a win-win proposition for all and is a business imperative.

At US computer maker Sun Microsystems, employees can work from home if their work is not linked to the office, a system that the company said enables it to attract talent throughout the world regardless of location. Banking giant HSBC provides crèche facilities, while investment bank Goldman Sachs offers financial assistance to an employee who is adopting a child; it also gives five days' immediate paid leave in the event of a family emergency. At SHRI, we have flexible work cultures. Practices like work-from-home, leave benefits etc. are quite common.

### **In conclusion**

It is really hard to compartmentalise one's life. There is osmosis of tensions one faces in one's professional environment to that in one's personal space and vice versa. Work-life balance does not mean an equal balance. Trying to schedule an equal number of hours for each of the various work and personal activities is usually unrewarding and unrealistic. Life is and should be more fluid than that.

There are perennial challenges to increase productivity, efficiency and profitability while balancing family time, civic involvement and activities conducive to a healthy lifestyle. The best individual work-life equilibrium will vary over time, depending on age, social

status, economic conditions, gender etc. There is no perfect one-size fits all balance. The desk-bound workplace is increasingly being replaced by the mobile workplace, and it is not uncommon for staff to work at odd hours to connect with clients located in other parts of the world.

In general, work-life programmes, policies and practices may fall under the following categories: Employee Support Schemes, Medical/Insurance Coverage for Family, Health and Wellness Programmes, Gift for Marriage/Birth, Family Relocation/Orientation, Family/Lactation Room, Elder Care Arrangements/Subsidies, Child Care Arrangements/Subsidies, Staff Feedback on Work-Life, Supervisors Trained on Work-Life, Designated Work-Life Officer/Team, Flexible Work Arrangements, Telecommuting, Job Sharing, Compressed Work Week, Leave Benefits etc.

As an anonymous author writes, “How much ever I wish to I never seem to attain that magic balance. Life for me is intense and I plan to explore it to the fullest. Work is fun and focus. Either I love the work I do or do the work I love. Period! And where there is love, fun and a sense of enjoyment, there seems a lack of caution, control and balance... Don’t you think so?”

### **Seven tips to maintaining work-life balance**

There are many factors for maintaining balance between our personal, professional and social lives. Though there is no perfect one-size fits all solution, the following tips may be useful.

1. Chalk out career and life paths.
2. Cultivate positive attitude. Introspect and map chosen paths with that of your ability. Take help of qualified counselors if you are unable to do so on your own.
3. Prioritise your tasks and activities. Plan and execute your tasks as per your schedule to avoid any stress.
4. Make optimal use of technology to bridge the gaps (*if any*)
5. Inculcate coping skills and pursue creative hobbies and interests to maintain the right balance between the work and life. A healthy mind is a booster to the balance.
6. Stay fit through regular exercise, maintain a healthy diet and ensure sufficient rest.
7. Change habits and lifestyle patterns where possible, to absorb new perspectives. This would help keep the mind active and alert which can enhance overall mental and physical well-being.

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