

A Review of Work-Life Balance Practices Prevalent in Public Sector Undertakings in India

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Abstract

Work-life balance has become an important issue in the twenty first century. Work and family life are two sides of the same coin as both are interconnected and interfere with each other. Increased work demands interfere with family life, and on the other hand, family demands interfere with the work-life of employees. Therefore, conflicts occur, which negatively affect an employee's performance at work as well as at home. Looking at the trend, organizations have increasingly started to take an active interest in implementing practices that enable employees to cope with the work-life balance issues. The study attempted to explore the work-life balance practices of selected public sector undertakings and their impact on organizational performance. The finding suggested that public sector organizations in India have realized that work-life balance practices are crucial for organizational performance.

Keywords : work-life balance practices, employee, performance, public sector

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Cut throat competition in the era of liberalization, privatization, and globalization has placed tremendous pressure on organizations. Today, they not only need to perform well, but are also required to sharpen their skills to gain a competitive advantage. Many multidimensional changes with respect to organizational culture, work place, working technologies, working standards, along with changes in social and family systems have taken place in the last few decades. This has led to phenomenal changes in the mindset of the workforce; they have become more demanding nowadays. The long working hours, work overload, overtime, long business tours steal more time of an employee, the time that was supposed to be spent with their families (Vittal, 2003).

Similarly, the traditional social and family systems of the people have also changed. The family life has also become more demanding as compared to earlier times as the conventional setup - of male members of the family going out to earn, the women managing the household, and the joint family system - has changed. Now, women go out to work and have careers and are also managing their existing family responsibilities like taking care of the children, taking care of parents, doing household chores, and so forth. Families are moving from villages to cities for employment, the joint families are dividing into nuclear families. People have no time for their elders, partners, and children. All these changes create conflicts between work and family life of an employee, which is called as the work-life imbalance (Laxmi & Gopinath, 2013).

The term "work-life balance" was coined in 1986. According to Fleetwood (2005), work-life balance is about people having a measure of control over when, where, and how they work. It does not mean an equal balance or

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scheduling an equal number of hours for each of our various work and personal activities. There is no perfect size of work-life balance because different persons have different priorities and values. Work-life balance includes achievement, enjoyment, and satisfaction in everyday life; whenever employees get all these things in life, it can be said that they have a proper work-life balance.

The pressurized demands at work leave little time for women employees to attend to their household and personal responsibilities, which distorts their work-life balance (Lakshmi & Gopinath, 2013). BPO employees, doctors, nurses, bank employees, top executives, and IT professionals often face work-life imbalance in their lives (Yadav & Dabhade, 2013).

Organizations cannot survive in the long run without the support of their employees because success, sustainability, and performance of an organization depends upon its employees. The role of human resources is universal, whether it is a public, private, or co-operative sector organization. Realizing the need of work-life balance, organizations have enacted and facilitated work-life balance practices. It is understood as a mechanism through which an employer helps its employees in achieving a better work-life balance, which also improves organizational performance. The present study attempts to understand the work-life balance practices adopted by public sector undertakings in India. We also emphasized on understanding the role of work-life balance practices in achieving organizational performance.

Importance of Work- Life Balance for Employees and Organizations

Work-life balance is not a problem, but it is an ongoing issue which needs to be managed by adopting positive work and family practices because it mutually benefits employees and employers. Married women employees and single parents face more challenges as compared to single counterparts and non-parents respectively (Herman & Gyllstrom, 1977).

Demographics variables such as age of children, number of children, marital status, and gender affect work-life balance. Employees have to perform multiple roles at work and at home. Therefore, it becomes difficult for an employee to harmonize both responsibilities and face work -family conflict. Proper work-life balance practices help employees to balance their work and personal life, which in turn reduces stress, tension, conflicts, and helps in attaining job satisfaction (Bruck, Allen, & Spector, 2002).

Due to increased market competition and a globalized economy, organizations have realized the need for good work- life balance practices to get maximum output from employees. If the employees are satisfied with their personal lives and at home, they are more likely to give their maximum contribution at the workplace. This will not only help employees to enhance their individual performance, but the organizational performance will also increase by many folds. A better blend between work and family life will enable employers to attract, motivate, and retain the talented employees (Chandrasekhar, Suma, Nair, & Anu, 2013).

Literature Review

Various studies have been conducted on work-life balance in the Indian as well as in the international context. Some important findings have been incorporated in this paper. Work-life balance is the maintenance of a balance between responsibilities at work and at home. The work - life conflict takes place if both the responsibilities are not fulfilled in a synchronized way.

Duggal and Tiwari (2012) conducted a study in Allahabad Bank (public sector bank) to identify the performance of employees and to examine the prevailing work-life balance practices. It was found that dissatisfaction and stress levels were high among employees due to long working hours and there was lack of work-life balance policies, therefore, the employees were unable to manage the competing demands between both roles and were faced with work-life conflict.

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) defined work-life conflict as a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect, that is, participation in the

work (family) role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (work) role. The competing demands of work and family have necessitated the need of work-life balance practices in organizations. Flexible working hours, part-time work, job sharing, tele-working, compressed work-week, dependents' benefits, and various leave policies are known as 'family-friendly policies' or 'work-life balance practices,' which are termed as institutionalized, structural, and procedural arrangements as well as formal and informal practices that enable employees to easily manage the demand of work and family life (Osterman, 1995).

The federal government introduced many work-life initiatives by developing a number of programs, policies, and practices like flexible schedules, part-time work, and childcare assistance (Saltzstein, Ting, & Saltzstein, 2001). Peggy (2007) examined the relationship of family-friendly policies on turnover and job satisfaction. The author found that family-friendly policies, including a five-day workweek, flextime policy, family leave policy, and employee assistance programs had a negative relationship with turnover ; moreover, job satisfaction was found to have a significant positive effect on a five-day workweek policy and employee assistance program. Work-life balance policies and family supportive cultures have been observed in France and Japan as well. There is a wide variety of work-life balance initiatives that are being incorporated by organizations for employees, which include flexible work hours, job sharing, parental leave, on-site child care facility, and telecommuting (Ueda, 2012).

Studies suggest that in the absence of work-life balance practices, employees' dissatisfaction increases. Nowadays, flexible working hours have become important at the workplaces. A lot of organizations have started offering flexible working hours, which contribute to higher organizational productivity and profitability. Flexible working hours also promote and facilitate greater work-life balance. Reduced stress and increased employee well-being are outcomes of work-life balance. It was found in a study that flexible working hours and work-life balance have a positive relationship with each other (Shagvaliyeva & Yazdanifard, 2014).

Chiang and Takeuchi (2008) examined the relationship of work-life balance policies with turnover rate of women employees, retention rate of talented employees, and job tenure. This study was done in Japan, and data were drawn from 2000, 2005, 2008 editions of Quarterly Female Employment Report of Japan. In the year 2000, the work- life balance practices in place were: maternity leave system within the statutory period (6 weeks before childbirth and 8 weeks after childbirth), full amount of maternity pay, child care leave benefits, family care leave benefits (total of 93 days), and flexi-time system. The survey in 2005 and 2008 editions just listed work-life balance practices including maternity leave system within the statutory period, full amount of maternity pay, and child care leave system. The study found a positive relationship between work-life balance practices and job tenure, retention, and turnover rate of women employees.

Arysri and Babu (2009) found a positive impact of flexi-time (as a work-life balance practice) on employee retention in the IT sector. Mohan, Prabha, and Mohanraj (2010) suggested that the flexi work arrangement helped employees to balance their work and personal lives better, thereby increasing their motivation and productivity. A phenomenal study conducted in ONGC explored the status of work-life balance of employees. The key finding of the research was that the employees of ONGC obtained a good work-life balance by making mutual adjustments. However, it was found that there was a need to further enhance work-life balance policies and customize them to individual needs by introducing effective supportive systems to reduce work-life conflicts (Singh, 2013).

Research Gap

From the literature review, it is evident that different studies have explored that dual career couples are increasing nowadays, as more women are entering into the workforce in India, therefore, they are believed to perform multiple roles throughout their lives. As a result, it has become difficult for them to manage both the work and personal life effectively. There are various studies on work-life balance practices practiced in public sector organizations, but none of the studies have compiled the work-life balance practices adopted by various public sector organizations in India. The previous studies conducted in this area lacked integration of the available

studies of public sector organizations, which brings forth the intricacies related to the subject at one place. Thus, the present paper attempted to collect and organize the findings of different research papers at one place so that researchers and practitioners can easily get acquainted with common work - life balance practices being followed in public sector undertakings in India.

Work-Life Balance Practices

Flexible Working Arrangement

- ⇒ **Part Time Working** : It is adopted when employees are contracted to work for anything less than the normal work hours. Part-time employees are found in hotels, restaurants, shops, warehouses, business and financial services, and agriculture.
- ⇒ **Flexible Working Hours (Flexi - Time)** : It permits employees to choose their starting and finishing times with a fixed number of working hours. This practice is mostly used for office based staff below managerial level in public and private sector organizations. Manufacturing companies are less likely to use this practice.
- ⇒ **Compressed Workweek** : In a compressed workweek, the employees work a full week's worth of hours in 4 days and take the 5th day off.
- ⇒ **Tele-Work** : It permits employees to work from home. This facility is mostly provided in the IT sector.
- ⇒ **Job Sharing** : It is a form of part - time working where employees can share their job tasks with another person. They share pay and benefits in proportion to the hours they spend helping each other. They may work spilt days, alternative week, or spilt week (Estes & Michael, 2005).

Leaves

It includes maternity/paternity leave, adoption leave, study leave, compassionate leave, dependency leave, onsite child care leave, travel leave, and so forth (Estes & Michael, 2005).

Work-Life Balance Practices in Public Sector Undertakings

There are many statutory and non statutory provisions that are being adopted in public sector organizations like fixed working hours, weekly rest, paid leaves, maternity benefits, child care leave, paternity leave, special leave, study leave, intervals for child feeding, facility crèches, and so forth.

- ⇒ **State Bank of India** : A study was conducted by Yadav and Dabhade (2013) in State Bank of India Bhopal (M.P) Head Office, which is under the control of the Central Government. It aimed to figure out the working environment of public sector banks for women employees and perceptions of work-life balance initiatives and its effect on their lives. Today's employees spend most of the time at work instead of home. Therefore, employees fail to fulfill the responsibilities of their home, and this creates a conflict between work and personal life. Hence, the banking sector realized the need for work-life balance and has created a supportive working environment for their employees.

It was identified that SBI offers work-life initiatives for their employees for managing both their responsibilities (work and life), that is, flexi work options, various types of leaves, job sharing, maternity leave, and paternity leave. SBI also organizes holiday camps and picnics for its employees so that they can cope with the problems of stress and tension.

⇒ **Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL)** : BHEL is one of the India's leading Navaratna public sector undertaking. It is the largest engineering and manufacturing enterprise of India in the energy sector. BHEL believes that manpower plays a pivotal role in actuating management plans, and the HR practices play a vital role in promoting work-life balance practices in an organization.

In BHEL, employees were found to be more satisfied with their jobs as they enjoyed maximum benefits from their organization like medical leave, maternity leave, and leave travel concession. In addition, counseling programs have also been initiated for the employees who are not regular at work due to family demands. These programs help the employees to cope with their conflicts (Nanthakumar, 2014). Sree and Devi (2013) found that BHEL employees were able to choose their starting and finishing working hours, and they had the option of taking time-off work for their family, whenever the need arose. The women took minimal support from their partners to balance their family and children as the organization provided flexible work timings for its employees. It was found that BHEL employees were quite satisfied with the work-life balance practices provided by the organization.

⇒ **National Thermal Power Corporation** : NTPC is among the best public sector undertakings to work for in India. It is the largest in India and is the world's sixth largest power generating company. Human resource development functions include recruitment, employee training & development, mentoring, comprehensive benefits, and work-life balance. Today's organizations value their employees as the most important resource among all other resources. Therefore, NTPC focuses on each employee's needs and tries to understand their workload at office and at home. Hence, the organization offers various facilities like flexible working hours and alternative work schedule.

Counseling programs have also been initiated for those employees who are not able to cope with issues arising from increased work and family demands. NTPC is committed to create a workplace culture and environment in which employees can balance career and personal priorities. The company offers a number of programs and practices flexible benefit plans, benefits for part-time employees, alternative work schedule, medical benefits, and child care leave. In addition, the work from home facility has also been implemented in the organization (Puri, 2012).

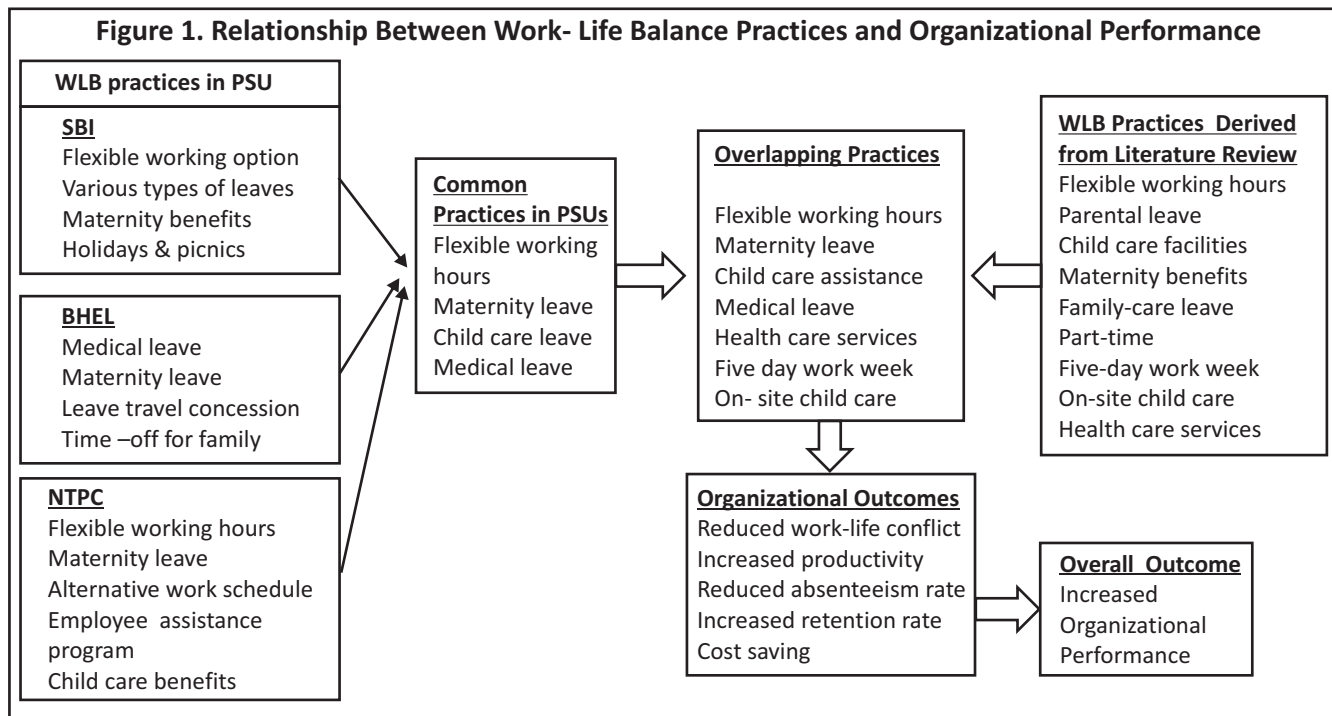
Relationship Between Work-Life Balance Practices and Organizational Performance

As is evident from the above discussion, it is seen that the public sector organizations are adopting work-life balance practices in the right spirit. These practices have proved to be successful not only for the employees, but also have a lot of benefits for the organization as well.

⇒ **Improved Productivity** : Organizations provide family-friendly policies that help employees to achieve a better balance between multiple roles. When employees are able to achieve proper work-life balance, their efficiency at work makes them more productive, which in turn increases productivity (Kar & Mishra, 2013).

⇒ **Reduced Absenteeism Rate** : Due to work pressures, employees are unable to devote time to family members, even in case of urgency. Hence, due to increased conflict, they have to remain absent from work to fulfill and take care of the needs of their family (Duxbury & Higgins, 2001). In this case, organizations need to support employees so that they can manage the competing demands of work and family by adopting suitable work-life balance practices, which can reduce the rate of absenteeism in their organization and can also lead to retaining the talented employees in the organization.

⇒ **Reduced Work- Life Conflict** : Effective work-life balance practices ensure harmonization of work and family responsibility. Employers need to adopt a flexible approach towards employees' problems and need to implement



work - life balance practices so that the employees can strike a proper balance between work and family demands (Gutek, Searle, & Kelpa, 1991).

⇒ **Cost Saving** : Due to increased competing demands of work and family, employees, especially women, tend to quit their jobs. It is quite expensive for a company to recruit a new employee and provide training so that he/she is ready for the job. Therefore, work-life balance practices not only help employers in retaining the talented employees, but also reduce the unexpected cost of attrition (Beauregard & Henry, 2009).

We can conclude from the analysis that practices that are implemented for bringing out a work - life balance result in increased productivity, reduced work - life conflict, reduced absenteeism, cost saving, and increased retention rate for the organizations. All these outcomes mutually lead to good organizational performance. The Figure 1 depicts the common work- life balance practices implemented by Indian public sector undertakings. From the existing literature, some common factors - which affect organizational performance - were identified. The model (Figure 1) integrates the work-life balance practices implemented by leading companies, as discussed in this paper.

Conclusion

This paper examined the work-life balance practices prevalent in public sector undertakings in India. It has been found that work-life balance practices have brought some benefits to both employees and employers in public sector undertakings. NTPC, BHEL, and SBI have implemented various common work-life balance practices like flexible work schedule, child care leave, medical benefits, maternity leave, and so forth for their employees. Organizations have realized that the employees are the most important resource because it is believed that the value of all other resources can further be enhanced with the help of human resources. Hence, organizations now focus on the needs of their employees and help them in balancing their work and personal life.

Managerial Implications

Our study has integrated the work-life balance practices prevalent in various public sector organizations in India with an aim of encouraging employees as well as management professionals to effectively contribute to their skills towards organizational performance, while being satisfied with their working environments. This study focuses upon the importance of work-life balance practices for the employees as well as organizations. These practices are helpful for the growth of organizations because they help employees to stay happy and satisfied with their work and personal lives. It is known that a satisfied employee is loyal and committed to the organization, which leads to increased overall organizational performance.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Future Research

This study is primarily based upon secondary data. An empirical study was not conducted to validate the findings of the study. Also, in this study, only a few public sector firms have been considered. Research practitioners and academicians may take a larger sample of public sector firms so as to get a broader overview of the work-life practices in place in these organizations and their implications for employees.

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