# Turning the Tables: Types of Organizational Support in Work Life Balance of Women Employees

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## Abstract

Work-life balance is a term used for the idea that you need time for both work and other aspects of life, whether those are family-related or personal interests. Because of the social norms surrounding each gender role, and how the organization views its ideal worker, men and women handle the work–life balance differently. A married woman has more responsibility than man in taking care of young children and family. Majority of the studies done on the issue are attentive only on the role of employees work-life balance. Organizations play a large part in how their employees deal with work–life balance. Some companies have taken proactive measures in providing programs and initiatives to help their employees cope with work–life balance.The role of the employer has been a largely neglected subject and it warrants a critical reflection. The present paper discusses the role of organizational support in maintaining a healthy balance between personal and professional life of employees, especially female employees.

**Key words:** *Work Life Balance, Female employees, Organizational Support, Types of organizational supports.*

## Introduction

Globalization and economic reforms has provided tremendous opportunities for women and girls to have greater access to Employment, especially in the private sector.Private sector in India has become a major provider of the employment and the sector is becoming highly competitive. The consequence being, the employee feels impelled to put in longer hours to achieve and possibly exceed the employers' expectations in order to secure their job. It puts a lot of pressure on individuals' that leads to the problem of work -life conflict. Imbalance in work-life will create a lot of problem in terms of life satisfaction and workplace satisfaction. Many factors contribute to work-life imbalance. Single parent households, dual earning parents; parents working at different locations etc. are responsible in creating role conflict, which ultimately contributes to

imbalance between work and life.Women employees suffer more compared to their male counterparts due to their dual role in family and work place. A married woman has moreresponsibility than man in taking care of young children and family.Majority of the studies done on the issue are attentiveonly on the role of employees work-life balance. The role of the employer has been a largely neglected subject and it warrants a critical reflection.The present paper discusses the role of organizational support in maintaining a healthy balance between personal and professional life of employees, especially female employees.

## 1. Work-Life Balance-A Brief Review

The term work-life balance was first coined in 1986 for the workers neglecting their personal, family obligations to pursue corporate goals (Lockwood, 2003; Work Life Balance Center, 2007). Extensively cited in the popular press, the concept of "work-life balance" (sometimes referred to as work/family balance or work/non-work balance) has gained attention because the view of balance is actually an empowering strategy to deal with spill-over between the two domains (Greenhaus et al., 2003). Previously, the balance was viewed as the absence of conflict (Duxbury, Higgins, & Lee, 1994). Frone(2003) proposed that work/non-work balance was more than the mere lack of inter-role conflict or interference; it was the lack of inter-role conflict combined with work/non-work facilitation.

Work life balance studies truly started after the World War II era generation when women came into the workforce in Europe (Greenhouse & Powell, 2003).Work-life balance has been studied in the U.S. since the 1980s and in Europe, primarily the U.K. since the early 1970's (Frone, 2003; Smith & Gardner, 2007).A significant count of male members in the family joined the military. As a result, many women joined the work force. The traditional role of a woman was to be the housekeeper, a stay at home wife of a single income family while supporting her husband at home and raising the children. The paradigm shifted (Greenhaus, 1988). Women began entering businesses to share the workload. The women started working in factories and offices. Women became increasingly independent from the home and the family as this paradigm continued to change ( Greenhaus, 1988).

Work life balance describes the relationship between your work and the commitments in the rest of your life, and how they impact on one another.Despite the worldwide quest for Work-Life Balance, very few have found an acceptable definition of the concept.The term "balance" does not necessarily indicate that equal amounts of time and effort is dedicated to the demands of both responsibilities. What seems to be balanced for one may not be the same for another. Every individual has his or her own assessment of what work-life balance means and the required distribution of time needed for his or her personal life and career.If put in other words; there is no

ideal work life balance; everyone is different and the 'right' balance may alter over time as families grow older and personal commitments change.

Broadly speaking, Work-Life Balance is a concept that supports the efforts of employees to split their time and energy between work and the other important aspects of their lives. Work-life balance is a daily effort to make time for family, friends, community participation, spirituality, personal growth, self-care, and other personal activities, in addition to the demands of the workplace.Work life balance has become an issue with the changing society and culture (Pocock, 2003).The major factors influencing the Work Life Balance ofWomen professionals in India such as role conflict, lack of recognition, organizationalpolitics, gender discrimination, elderly and children care issues, quality of health, problems intime management and lack of proper social support( Mani,2013).

The pursuit of work-life balance doesn't have to be a lonely endeavor. There are things an employer can do to help all employees balance work with their other passions. In the past, organization cultures were based on the number of hours worked and taking as least amount of leave opted for. This forced individuals to make a choice between work and family, which caused conflict in one or both fronts. In other words, organization must provide the needed support for the employees to maintain work-life balance. Organizational support is important because providing support means that firms value the contribution of their employees and cares for their employee's wellbeing (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986).

Cappelli (2000) asserted that the attention from organizations have been increasing towards the concept of work-life balance (WLB) as a result to the need of attracting and retaining valued employees in a highly competitive labor market. Potential employees no longer remain fully satisfied with the remuneration and promotional aspects of a job. Increasingly, job seekers also want their potential workplace to recognize and support the balance between their personal and work lives. Organizations that help to enhance employee morale, commitment, satisfaction, and reduce sources of stress and problems at work, tend to improve their ability to recruit and retain talented and valued employees.McMillan et al., (2011) explored that work-life balance could then be viewed as a continuum with imbalance at one end and balance at the other for each role and also contain three components of balance corresponding to time balance, involvement balance, and satisfaction balance. This view of work-life balance may be salient to organizations interested in providing the flexibility and support necessary for employees to effectively balance life and work issues and ultimately contribute to the organization's competitive advantage and overall performance (McMillan et al., 2011).

Robbins and Judge (2011) recommend that organizations reach out to employees in an attempt to help them manage work/life conflicts; other scholars like Caproni (1997) argue that efforts to promote work/life balance may actually undermine individuals' quality of life. Caproni (1997) explained that this position is rooted in the language used to frame the constructs involved. Balance, according to Caproni (1997), is unattainable, and by focusing on an unattainable goal, the author believes individuals, both reject the acceptability of imbalance and create frustration when their work/life balance goals cannot be achieved.Generally those employees whohave better work- life balance contribute more towards the success of the organization.The organization can render better service to the customers by having productive andefficient employees.

## Types of Organizational Support

Organizational support was found to play an important role in the regulation and management of work-life balance.Organizations that did not understand the importance of work-life balance might abuse their employees' hard work and effort. On the other hand, organizations that care about the well-being of their employees would show support by implementing program and policies that emphasize on work-life balance (McCarthy et al., 2013). Organizations have increasingly beendeveloping formal policies that attempt to facilitate the work/life nexus.Work/life balance strategies enhance the autonomy of workers incoordinating and integrating the work and non-work aspects of their lives.Three broad types of work/life strategies have been created to helpemployees balance their work and non-work lives (Morgan & Milliken, 1992): 1) Flexible work options,2) Specialized leave policies and 3)Dependent-care benefits.

## 1. Flexible work options

Flexible working is a type of working arrangement which gives an employee the flexibility on how long, where and when the employees work. Thus, the flexibility can be in terms of working time, working location and the pattern of working. There are different ways of working flexibly among which the most common are Flextime, job sharing, working from home, Abbreviated Schedule or Part-Time Work, compressed Schedules,etc.

### a) Flextime

It is the most affordable flexible work option.It gives flexibility in arrival, departure and/or meal times. While there are no strict rules governing flextime, time flexibility usually is built into the beginning, middle or end of the day. These arrangements often include a designated time through the central portion of the day during which all staff are present, referred to as "the core work time" or "core hours." Core hours encourage continued connection between staff members and offer opportunities for group meetings and communications.

**b) Job Sharing**

A job share arrangement is a full-time job split between two individuals, each with responsibility for the success of the total job. Job sharing allows two staff members to share the responsibilities of one full-time position, typically with prorated salary and paid time off. Creative and innovative schedules can be designed to meet the needs of the job sharers and the department. Job-sharing arrangements can be 50/50, 60/40 or any similar combination. The schedules may also overlap as needed or desired.Successful job sharing arrangements usually place responsibility for a functional arrangement on the individuals sharing the job (job partners) rather than the supervisor. Both job partners should agree up front that if one of the job partners is not meeting the needs of the organization or decides to leave the job, the other will revert to a full-time schedule, permanently or until a replacement job partner is found within a reasonable time frame.

**c) Compressed Work Schedules**

A compressed work schedule allows an employee to work a traditional 35-40 hour workweek in less than five workdays. For example, a full-time employee could work four 10-hour days instead of five 8-hour days.Another popular option is a nine day/two week work arrangement, which allows for two weeks of work to be compressed into nine or nine and a half days of work. This is popular with staff members who want some flexibility in their schedule and do not mind extra time built into the beginning or end of the work day, but do not want the long days compressed work week require.

**d) Telecommuting**

Telecommuting is a work arrangement that enables a staff member to work at home from another off-site location for all or part of the regular workweek. Telecommuting may be appropriate for only some employees and jobs. It is not an organizational-wide benefit that is available to all employees, and in no way changes the standard policies, terms, and conditions of employment.Typically, a Telecommuting arrangement will specify the number of hours to be worked at home and the specific time in which this will occur (e.g. every Tuesday, the first Monday of the month, etc.). In cases where the department agrees to support some or all of the costs of an off-site office, the supervisor and staff member should discuss all applicable costs, including that of additional telephone lines, telephone use charges and Internet Service Provider (ISP) charges, as appropriate.Staff members working under a Telecommuting arrangement will come on-site for periodic meetings and interactions with the supervisor. Telecommuting does not connote the professional or management practice of working at home after hours to work on reports or presentations or to catch up on reading.

**e) Abbreviated Schedule or Part-Time Work**

Abbreviated schedule or part-time work is a regular arrangement consisting of a workweek that is less than the standard 40 hours per week. Abbreviated schedule and part-time work can attract and retain trained and experienced staff who cannot work full-time due to personal commitments.Staff members who work an abbreviated schedule are hired to regularly established positions for a period of at least nine months or for the academic year and are regularly scheduled to work at least 20 hours per week but less than 40 hours per week.Staff members who work a part-time schedule are hired to regularly established positions and are regularly scheduled to work less than 20 hours per week.

## 2. Specialized leave policies

Specialized leave policies include: a)Paid maternity leave, b)Paternity leave, c) Paid leave to care for sick family members and d), Sabbatical leave.

### a) Paid maternity leave

Paid maternity leave incentivizes labor market attachment for women both before and after birth. Paid leave, particularly when available prior to childbirth, had a significant effect on birth weight. The frequency of low birth rate decreases under these policies which likely contributes to the decrease in infant mortality rates as low birth weight is strongly correlated with infant death.Paid parental leave incentivizes childbirth, which affects the future workforce.There are also observable improvements in the mental health of mothers when they are able to return to work later.

### b) Paternity leave

Even though the mother's role as main parent has not changed, male parental leave is claimed by its supporters to transform the traditionally gendered father practices and to create a social morality in relation to partners and children.

### c) Paid leave to care for sick family members

A sick member of a family disrupts the work life balance of the employees. Paid leave to care for sick family members is another important step to be taken by the employer to help the female employee to maintain the work life balance.

### d) Sabbatical leave.

Sabbatical Leaves are extended absence from workplace by individuals for achieving life goals. This is a benefit provided by the organizations to its employees. Sabbatical Leaves may be paid or unpaid.Sabbatical Leaves give the perfect opportunity to spend time with friends and families thus improving personal relationships.This time can be utilized to learn new skills and brush up on the old ones. New trainings and

qualifications can be perused in this time.Away from the everyday gruelling routine, one has ample time to destress and relax.

## 3) Dependent-care benefits.

Dependent care benefits include; a)On site/near site company childcare, b) Program for emergency care of ill dependentsand c) Childcare programs during school vacation.

### a) On site/near site company childcare

On-site childcare enables the staff members spend less time away from work, enjoy unparalleled peace of mind, and apply better focus on the job. It has the benefits such as reduced absenteeism, reduced turnover, improved morale, higher productivity, greater quality of work etc.

### b) Program for emergency care of ill dependents

Medical emergencies can distort the work life balance of the employee. Formulation of specialized organizational policies would be helpful to keep the work life balance of the employees.

### c) Childcare programs during school vacation

School vacations are a big challenge to the working mothers. Organizations can help the working mothers by arranging special programmes for the children during the vacation. This would help to engage the children during the core hours of duty of the employee.

### Conclusion

Many employers now recognize that work life balance is a key issue and offer employees a range of flexible working options. Nevertheless take up of these options remains low.For future commercial sustainability, organisations need to ensure they notjust encourage but mandate a practical and workable work/life balancepolicy, benefiting and meeting the needs of both the organisation and itsemployees. And importantly, organisations not providing real opportunity foremployee work/life balance are opening themselves up to increasingnumbers of dissatisfied and unproductive employees and hence increasedattrition rates. Merely creating a work/life policy framework is not enough;fostering an organisational culture that supports the use of availablepolicies is also of great importance.

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