

## Quotient at Work: Work Life Balance

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### Abstract

*Work and family life has been an issue of growing importance and the reconciliation of these are considered critical because of the overload of work and the imbalance of the two. Work-life balance can be explained as an individual's ability to meet their work and family commitments in a balanced way. Greenhaus (2002) defined work-life balance as satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict. Overwork creates ill health, both physically and mentally. Creation of more flexibility in working hours has reduced family pressures. Studies have shown that quality of work in the office is directly related to less stress in the family life. So a conducive environment is also essential for a better work in the work place. This study tries to find out the issues related to work and family and also tries to understand the factors that are important to define the quotient for work life balance.*

**Key words:** family, work, balance, time, conflict, women, men

### Introduction

An important challenge faced by most people who are working is to manage the demands of both work and personal life. This has increased the focus on the workplace policies so that the work and personal life can be balanced properly. In the recent past significant changes have happened in the nature of work, work timing, entry of more women folk into work and change in the composition of family unit. These changes have resulted in the growing importance of the concept of worklife balance. However specific parameters that can make a proper balance between life and work are yet to be explained satisfactorily. Many researchers have tried to define worklife balance in different ways according to the area chosen and based on the demand and availability of people either at home or in the office. The balance is not about equal amount of time spent at different places but the way in which responsibilities are fulfilled without creating conflict either at the work side or at the personal side. Figure 1 depicts the model for the collision between work and life.

Some of the aspects that bring about conflict with work and family are portrayed in Figure 2. The work related issues are mainly overloaded assignment and career progressions. Related to family issues some of the factors that affect are future of the children and the variations in the role of male and female members in the household activities. Work or career issues can be the overload and the confusion towards career advancement. The changing roles for men and women have complicated the management of work/personal life balance in recent decades.

### Time Factor

Duration of working time continues to be the key temporal concern for both male and female workers. Working time is an important issue where the number of holidays, working hours, break timings, reporting time etc. make the job flexible or rigid. The amount of time worker has to spend at the work place and the work carried back home can evaluate the extent of balance between work and family. Thus working time is a core issue within employment relations. Reductions in working time, incorporating campaigns for a shorter working day and the elimination of compulsory (and often unpaid) overtime, represented a crucial early focus for trade union organization

in countries such as Australia, the UK and the US (Burgess, 1975; Owen, 1979; Roedinger and Foner, 1989). Working hours in some countries (particularly recent industrializing economies) remain substantially higher than in their earlier developed counterparts (ILO, 2004: 748; OECD, 2005:255).

Working hours have become one of the main problems when women participation in labor markets increased and the imbalance set in the families. Some individuals find the balancing of work and non-work life very difficult. Hence, just as the employers' agenda over working time has broadened, so too for employees, have working time issues expanded to incorporate not only questions of duration but also the degree of control and choice they enjoy over their working time pattern, and the scope this provides to mesh successfully their lives inside and outside the workplace (Paul Blyton & Nicolas Bacon & Jack Fiorito & Edmund Heery 2008). In France, reductions have also resulted from political intervention and the controversial introduction of a statutory 35-hour week in 2000 (Bouffartigue and Bouteiller, 2001; Freyssinet, 1998) as a work-sharing attempt to safeguard and create employment. Elsewhere, the existence of long working hours is a feature of employment noted particularly in Australia, Canada and the US, with many reports suggesting a growing rather than diminishing prevalence of long work hours (Barrett et al., 2005:142; Bittman and Rice, 2001; Campbell, 2002; Duxbury and Higgins, 2006; Schor, 1991). In the UK, the widespread incidence of long working hours has become a focus of union concern over work hours, and in particular the amount of work performed as unpaid overtime (Heery, 2006: 44)

Reviewing over twenty health studies for example, Sparks et al. (1997: 401) highlight a 'small but significant' association between hours of work and various health symptoms including, among other things, greater sleep disturbance, and heightened levels of tension, stress and fatigue (Iskra-Golec et al., 1996). Long working hours and related shift patterns has affected the health of the workers. Health consciousness protects the individuals from the deterioration of health and the realization that they should not sacrifice their self-care. Daily, adults trade exercise for early meetings, grab fast food to eat at their desks in order to keep working, skip hours of sleep to prepare reports, eat at home late in the night when their families have gone to bed, cancel doctor appointments in lieu of missing work deadlines, and suffer from headaches and back pain in the absence of stress management (Mary Zeiss Stange & Carol K. Oyster & Jane E. Sloan, 2011).

In terms of weekend working, for example, a comparison of 16 countries in Europe and North America reported an average of around one-in-five workers usually working on Saturdays and a smaller proportion (approximately between one-in-six and one-in-ten) working on Sundays (Presser and Gornick, 2005). One means of implementing a broader definition of standard hours, as well as increasing employers' flexibility over the deployment of those hours, has been through the introduction of 'annualized hours' contracts which specify agreed annual, rather than weekly, hours of work (Arrowsmith and Sisson, 2000). Companies have adopted different working hours to suit the comfortableness of the worker.

Even improved financial stability within the family due to the growth of female employment has not brought a proper solution to the domestic obligation. Though in many families the male members have put aside some of their time to share child-care and other household chores it is found that the balance of work and life is not seen to be equal. Nevertheless, although participation in work and family roles can be beneficial, it is generally acknowledged that there is a point beyond which such commitments can become 'burdensome' and 'stressful' (Ruderman et al. 2002: 73).

### **Working Hours Conflicting Work-Life balance**

When working hours are more and not adjustable employees experience work to family conflict. Certainly the evidence indicates that dual earner couples and individuals with caring responsibilities, such as young children, large families and dependent elders, are more likely to experience work-family/life conflict (Roehling et al., 2003; Eby et al., 2005). It is also plausible that disparities in work and family role pressures might lead to gender differences in perceptions of work-family/life conflict. In some studies women report more work to family conflict than men, particularly when working longer hours (c.f. Gutek et al., 1991; Batt and Valcour, 2003). Generally, studies suggest that greater levels of work-family conflict are associated with stress at work and increased burnout (Allen et

al., 2000). Work-to-family conflict also appears to promote lower levels of life satisfaction, as well as physical and mental health complaints, including fatigue, nervous tension and depression (Allen et al., 2002: 293).

Work-family conflict has serious organizational consequences. There is also a tendency for individuals experiencing work to family conflict to display less organizational commitment and higher turnover (Allen et al., 2000). Similarly, employees who report higher levels of family to work conflict are more likely to be absent from work (Anderson et al., 2002). Still it is found that these do not encourage employees to take shorter work schedules due to financial commitment. Employees may only be inclined to seek shorter work schedules when they are well off financially (Reynolds, 2003). The 2006 Work-Life Balance Employee Survey (Hooker et al., 2007) shows that the practices most commonly taken up by employees were flexi time (49 per cent), working from home (44 per cent) and part-time work (38 per cent), although there had been little change in the overall proportions of employees working flexibly.

### Career Advancement

It is found that family-friendly provisions which are offered by the companies are not considered as benefits given to them by majority of the employees. They doubt that such benefits may hinder their career advancement if they availed these family friendly provisions. Another reason for the low utilization rates of family friendly programs is what Hochschild (1997) terms the impermeable "clay layer" of middle management. Her investigation of a Fortune 500 company indicated that while most employees perceived considerable support for work-life policies from senior management, they were far more skeptical of the stance of middle management. As Hochschild (1997: 32) rightly notes, much depends on whether middle managers view work-life policies as either an employee's 'privilege' or 'right'. Work-family/life programs may therefore be underutilized because managers are reluctant to allow their employees to participate or apply the policies inconsistently.

As Grover and Crooker (1995: 285) state, even the most family friendly workplace policies are at best useless, or worse, counterproductive, if the work climate does not support them. Not surprisingly, supportive work-family cultures, defined as the extent to which an organization supports and values the integration of employees 'work and family lives', are associated with greater utilization rates of work-family benefits (Thompson et al., 1999).

People's interpersonal relationships within workplaces also affect the ability of employees to manage their work and family demands. Social support from managers and co-workers appear to reduce the likelihood of employees experiencing work-family conflict, as do mentoring relationships (Anderson et al., 2002; Nielson et al., 2001).

According to Glass and Riley (1998:1427) organizations that want to minimize turnover among childbearing women need to attend to the interpersonal treatment of these workers, communicating their value to the workplace and making reasonable accommodations to the temporary disabilities of pregnancy. Not surprisingly, the traditional focus of work-life policies has been on employees with children or other care giving responsibilities. Hence, employees without family responsibilities can feel 'excluded' and thus inequitably treated. This can often occur as a consequence of the informal actions of managers, notably in the allocation of tasks and workloads. Nord et al. (2002) document, for instance, states that employees with children were able to choose their flexible schedules first, forcing single/nonparent employees to work around those schedules. Inevitably this often meant that employees without children were scheduled to work the later shifts, regardless of their own activities beyond the call of duty.

The 2006 British Work-Life Balance Survey asked employees whose co-workers had worked on one or more flexible arrangements if they faced any negative consequences because of their co-workers' arrangements (Hooker et al. 2007: 82, 192). Around one third of respondents reported negative consequences, with 15 per cent citing work-related outcomes, such as having to cover colleague's workload, increased workload, staff shortage etc. Communication problems, such as colleagues not being available for meetings and lack of interaction, were perceived to be the most negative effect of colleagues working from home. Another research suggests that male employees and parents of older children are most likely to view work-family policies unfavorably, primarily because such programs are less relevant to their needs (Parker and Allen, 2001). Firstly, formal procedures governing the

allocation of work assignments may be required to ensure that all employees are equitably treated, and in particular to inhibit employees without children being overloaded. Secondly, alternative work arrangements, such as flexi time and telecommuting, are likely to warrant changes in training, performance evaluation and compensation systems so that employees are appropriately developed and recognized for their organizational inputs. According to Nord et al. (2002: 236) it is important that organizations overcome tendencies to underutilize telecommuters or devalue the contributions or commitment of flexitime employees. Thirdly, career development and promotion systems may need to be reformulated in accordance with the goals of worklife programs, especially if employees take leave for personal development or family care, and are deployed on work assignments that are less demanding in terms of travel and client contact.

### Future prospects of Children

Evidence has shown that working long hours, or being at work outside standard hours, can have a negative effect on family life, as parents have less time available to spend with their children or, in attempting to create time for children, miss out on time spent as a couple (La Valle *et al.*, 2002). Given the suggestion that the length, frequency and nature of parental interactions can have a significant impact on children's cognitive and behavioral development (Lefebvre and Merrigan, 1998; Zicket *et al.*, 2001), this can be seen as a matter of particular urgency. And indeed, much of the legislation associated with New Labor's work-life balance agenda has focused specifically on families, including the right, introduced in 2003, for parents of children aged under six and disabled children under 18 to request flexible working hours from their employers.

A large number of empirical studies have yielded conflicting evidences regarding the impact of maternal employment on their children. Household duties such as house work and child-care-related obligations are factors that can create time-based pressure from the family realm (Baltes & Heydens-Gahir, 2003; Frone *et al.*, 1992a). The contributions of mothers in shaping the personality of their children cannot be ignored (Suneetha Hangal, Vijayalaxmi A. Aminabhavi 2007). The disadvantage starts in primary school and persists into early adulthood, with lower educational attainment, higher unemployment and greater likelihood of childbearing early in life (John Carvel 2003). Nanda and Monochas (1971) revealed that employment of mothers had negative influence on their children and they become less cooperative, less sympathetic and exhibited indifferent social behavior. It needs to be mentioned here that time spent on playing with children might have some impact on the development or overall well-being of children. (Sivakami Muthusamy 2006).

Marital and parental conflict can lead to interference with work roles (Byron, 2005). Those without children, time and stress at work may be less likely to cause dissatisfaction with other domains because there is less of a need to perform in those other domain. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) cited several sources (Pleck, Staines & Lang, 1980) indicating that individuals who are married and /or have children are more likely to experience conflict. A study of dual-career marriages, Perrone and Worthington (2001) found that combined income and social support were positively related to satisfaction with a dual-career lifestyle, which in turn was related to marital quality. Work-family facilitation, according to Frone (2003), is the extent to which participation at work (or home) is made easier by virtue of the experiences, skills and opportunities gained or developed at home (or work). The connection of children with their mothers at a young age will allow a close bond. This will make the communication between parent and child easier especially during the middle school and higher education. Early formal childcare can have a positive effect for children experiencing significant disadvantage whose parents are stressed or have poor parenting skills. But it may have more negative than positive effects for children from more advantageous backgrounds (Ruhm, 2000; Hill *et al.*, 2005; and Gregg *et al.*, 2005) whose parents are able to provide a safe and nurturing environment.

Evidence based on longitudinal data from the United Kingdom and the United States generally suggests that full-time maternal employment during the first year of a child's life is associated with poorer child outcomes, especially poorer cognitive outcomes (Brooks-Gunn *et al.*, 2002; Ermisch and Francesconi, 2000; Gregg *et al.*, 2005; and, Joshi *et al.*, 2009). as Compared with mothers who do not work (including "on leave") those in part-time employment, early (within 6 months) maternal employment on a full-time basis is negatively associated with breast feeding rates and duration (Hawkins *et al.*, 2007; Cooklin *et al.*, 2008). In addition, longer periods of breastfeeding

are more likely among women whose employers offer family-friendly or flexible work arrangements including part-time work (Hawkins et al., 2007). Breast feeding has multiple benefits for the healthy development of young children, in terms of nutritional benefits and protection against diseases, also after controlling for environmental factors that could be confounding this association (Quigley et al., 2007; Ladomenou et al., 2010; and, Liesbeth et al., 2010). However, a review of the role of breast feeding in promoting mother-child attachment is inconclusive (Jansen et al., 2008).

Available evidence shows that fathers want to spend time caring for and being with their children as in many countries an overwhelming proportion of fathers take time off work around childbirth (Moss, 2011 and O'Brien et al., 2007). Father involvement, in turn, is associated with numerous benefits, including better outcomes for children (Baxter and Smart, 2011; Cabrera et al., 2007; Lamb, 2010; OECD, 2012a; Sarkadi et al., 2008; and, WHO, 2007) and for fathers themselves (Baxter and Smart, 2011; Eggebben, 2001; Smith, 2011; and, WHO, 2007). Father's involvement was associated with some positive cognitive outcomes. The clearest and strongest association was observed in the United Kingdom, where children with highly involved fathers were faring better in terms of cognitive outcomes than children with less involved fathers Huerta, M. et al. (2013). Many OECD countries have introduced family-friendly policies to help parents find their preferred balance between parenting and employment. Moreover, in recent years, there has been increasing interest in developing policies to support fathers in contributing more to caring for young children. The underlying objectives behind these policies may differ across countries, but, in general, they aim to increase gender equality at home and at the workplace as well as to strengthen father-child relationships and thus improve child well-being outcomes (Rostgaard, 2002).

### **Role Change in the family structure**

Fathers of the twenty-first century are more involved in children's lives than before (Gauthier et al., 2004; Hook, 2006; Maume, 2010; O'Brien et al., 2007; and, United Nations, 2011). Although the timing and pace of change varies widely across countries, a change in the role of fathers is observed worldwide (O'Brien et al., 2007). Men are no longer expected to be exclusive breadwinners but are frequently expected to share the caring responsibilities with their partners. However, despite important progress, women still are the main caregivers. This is true even in the Scandinavian countries, who are the pioneers in supporting gender equality in the division of work inside and outside the household (Rostgaard, 2002).

Numerous factors have contributed to men's increased participation in housework and care activities, including: growing female employment; increased family diversity; changes in attitudes towards work and care; and, availability of family-friendly policies. O'Brien and Moss (2010) and Maume (2011) argue that the main determinant has been women's increased participation in paid work and their contribution to households' earnings. Today in most OECD countries the majority of couple families are dual earners (OECD, 2011). Thus, both mothers and fathers have had to find a new balance between work and family responsibilities. For instance, fathers who spend more time with their children have, on an average, more favorable labor market outcomes, earn more per hour and work fewer hours per week – than their peers who spend less time with their children (Smith, 2011); fathers who contribute more to housework and childcare experience a lower risk of divorce than fathers who contribute less (Sigle-Rushton, 2010); and, fathers who are more engaged with their children are more satisfied with their lives than their counterparts who engage less (Eggebeen, 2001).

### **Work life balance quotient**

Understanding the career issues and family issues it is clear that a favorable situation within the work place is essential for the organization and for the individual. Moreover, long work hours not only lead to work to family conflict but are also indirectly associated with increased depression and other stress-related health problems (Major et al., 2002). It is found that lack of adjustment of time is creating major troubles for the employees who are working in the company where balancing act of work and family life is collapsing. The term work-life balance is mostly interpreted as the compatibility and harmony of private life and the working life (Tucholka and Weese, 2007). So, generally it is considered as the balance between the issues at work and family.

Time is an important factor between overwork and worklife balance. The way in which the work is managed

and is adjusted with the family is critical for balancing work and family. There is a widely held view that the time demands and pressures of paid employment have escalated, with serious negative consequences for employees' family and social lives (Bunting, 2004). Long work hours also raise concerns regarding the impact on workers' health and safety. Contributing factor to growing work time diversity has been the spread of different patterns of part-time hours, including very short (eight hours per week or less) part-time schedules (Noon and Blyton, 2007: 102–3).

Furthermore, employees who perceive a supportive work-family culture report lower levels of work to family conflict and greater attachment to their organizations (Thompson et al., 1999: 409). Hence, a family-friendly work climate, as well as supportive managers and co-workers, positively influence people's decisions to utilize work-life programs, as well as their general work attitudes and behavior. Although US evidence (Berg et al., 2003; Osterman, 1995) suggests that high commitment management practices enhance both the availability of work-family benefits and people's perceptions of their work-life balance. People with high levels of work-family conflict tend to be less satisfied with their careers (Martins et al., 2002) and jobs in general (Allen et al., 2000).

From the studies conducted by researchers it is clear that time management is a crucial factor and how it is managed at work and family is in the hands of the employee. Another factor for effective worklife balance is a conducive work climate. Hence work life balance quotient is the division of time factor with the supportive work-family culture.

$$\text{WLB Quotient} = \frac{\text{Time Factor}}{\text{Work Climate}}$$

$$\text{Therefore, WLBQ} = \frac{\text{TF}}{\text{WC}}$$

Acceptance of this quotient can be strengthened by conducting a study empirically. This can be considered in the next level of research related to this topic.

## Conclusion

Today work life balance has become a very critical issue in business as the performance of employees is considered an important parameter to evaluate an individual. Work life balance is looked upon by an individual as a serious component before joining an organization similar to other factors like high income, job security, autonomy etc. Calculating the time required to complete an assignment and work climate factors will help to calculate the quotient of balance of work and life. Here weightage can be given to different components as explained in Figure 3. Thus work life balance quotient of a company can be calculated. Based on this, each company can be distinguished as good or bad, based on worklife balance. So a company planning to attract and retain their employees can improve the work life balance quotient for improving the quality of life at work and home.

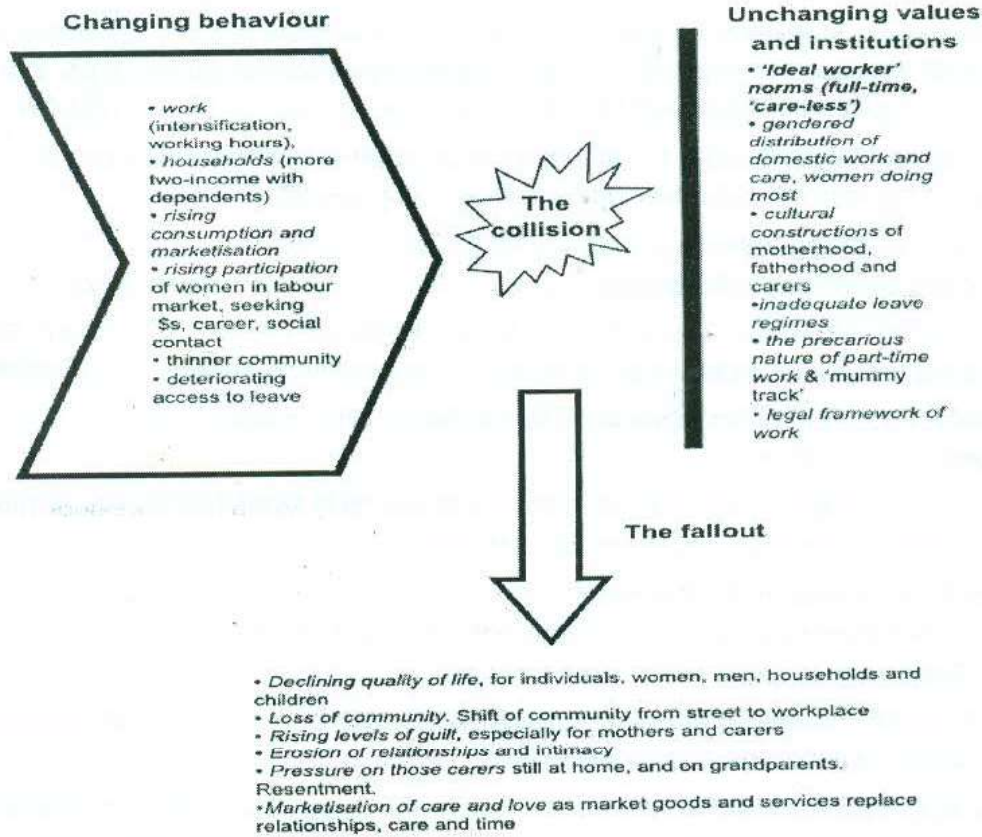
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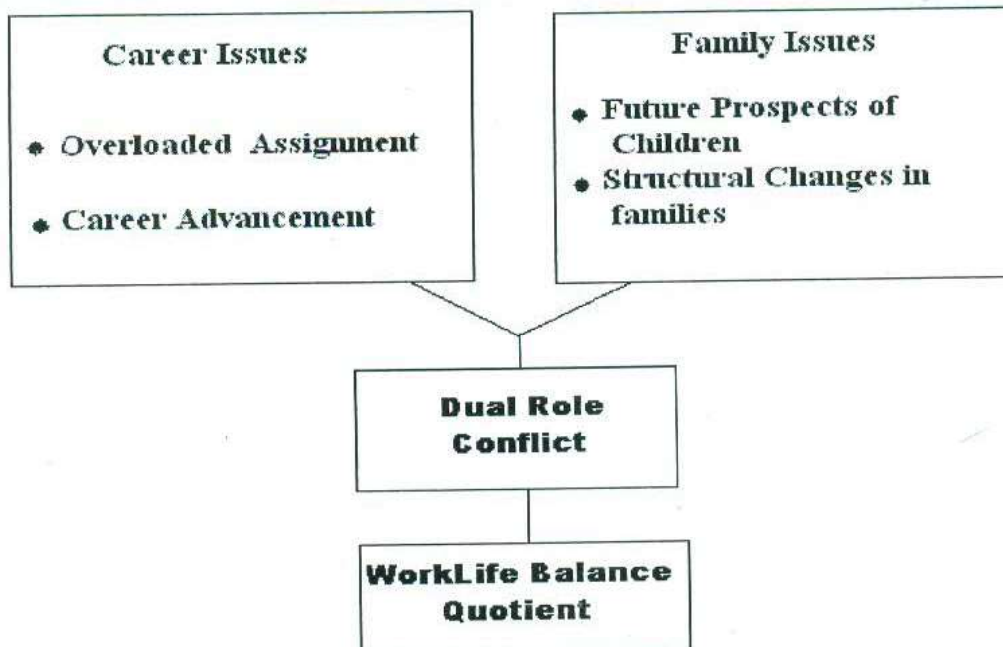
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Figure 1. Collision between work and life



Source: Pocock 2003

Figure 2. Different issues that create conflict and worklife balance quotient.



**Fig. 3: Important factors to define Work Life Quotient**

