Importance of Work-Life Balance in Today's Information Age

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Abstract: Work-life balance has recently taken the attention of both researchers and executives. This subject interests almost everyone with a professional career. This widespread interest is partly due to its reflection on all the aspects of life. Over the recent years, it has been seen that studies of organizational efficiency and productivity highlight career in the expense of the other components of social life and thus causing a conflict between social and professional life. For those who think that the main objective in life is to work, their career becomes the core of their life. However, people have limited time and therefore have to perform many other activities other than their jobs. Without a balance between career and other aspects of life in terms of time, perspective and attitudes, many mishaps can be experienced in both. In this study, work-life balance is analysed in an organizational context. This study has the potential to enable the working people to consider their standpoint in terms of work-life balance and the executives to gain new perspectives in order to cope with such a problem. This study might also be an inspiration for academics in terms of certain empirical studies.

Key words: Work-life balance, work-family conflict, organization, family-friendly culture

INTRODUCTION

Considering the type of work in a classical sense, it is seen that career and private life are interwoven. After Industrial Revolution, businesses stopped being family organizations and gained a different identity. As a result of this differentiation, a lined was drawn between career and private life. Today's modern lifestyle is shaped mostly in a career-centred manner, which causes people to spend most of their time at work. Working people, therefore, have more interaction with their colleagues than their family members, relatives and friends.

We are used to hearing from that in professional life such complaints as "There is a lot of work to do, but no time" or "I have no time for myself". These kinds of complaints keep people from social activities. Because of over-workload, people have difficulty in allocating time for their own private lives, their families and their social environment. However, when the balance is damaged in life, this affects the work-life in the long run, because life is a whole; damage in one side will surely be reflected to the other sides.

Balance is as important for life as bread, water and air. Life on Earth, which, according to our current knowledge, is the only planet harbouring life, is based on an intricate and delicate balance. If one or a few of the components of life is more or less than necessary, deterioration will occur in the life form. All living systems, from the basic element to the most intricate one, have a balance. Our social life, as the most intricate system, is also based on a balance. The systems in social life are depended on one another (Aycan *et al.*, 2007). Seeing life as composed of just one element and concentrating on it will damage the balance.

Concern about integrated work-life balance emerged in the 1970s, when more women entered the work-place. This point the matter was seen as a women's problem and social problem. In the late 1980s human resource practitioners presented this area of employment policy as a potential business issue (Frame and Hartog, 2003). Social forces have altered the needs of both employees and employers. In the past, two-parent households typically supplied a male to the workforce and a female caregiver to the home. Today, the number of traditional two-parent households has decreased. Extended families are often too geographically dispersed to help with child and elder-care and the costs of preparing children for professional success and nursing infirm have increased sharply. As a result, employees' family-related financial, temporal and social burdens have increased dramatically (Greenblatt, 2002).

Therefore, today work-life balance has become the cynosure of wide disciplines ranging from psychology to sociology, from management of human resources to organizational behaviour. The reason for such interest is due to the fact that almost everyone has a problem of work-life balance.

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WHAT IS THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE?

The notion of work-life balance is sometimes considered as interwoven with work-family conflict. However, it can be argued that the latter is more limited in scope than the former because the focus in work-family conflict is more on the relations between work and family. In literature, not fulfilling the family responsibilities due to work demands is called work-family conflict, while business interruption due to family demands is called family-work conflict (Lowe, 2005; Lingard and Francis, 2005). Work-life balance, in addition to the relations between work and family functions, also involves other roles in other areas of life. In this study, due to its more extensive associations, the concept of work-life balance is preferred.

Work-life balance has been defined differently by different scholars. In order to broaden our perspectives, some definitions will be presented. Greenblatt (2002) defined work-life balance as the absence of unacceptable levels of conflict between work and nonwork demands. Clark (2000) defines work-life balance as satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict. Greenhaus *et al.* (2003) view work-life balance as a matter of degree, a continuum anchored at one end by extensive imbalance in favor of a particular role (for instance, family) through some relatively balanced state to extensive imbalance in favor of the other role (e.g., work) as the other anchor point. All the same, some of scholars conceptualize balance as independent of an individual's desire or values. Felstead *et al.* (2002) define work-life balance as the relationship between the institutional and cultural times and spaces of work and non-work in societies where income is predominantly generated and distributed through labor markets.

Aycan *et al.* (2007) confined the subject only with work and family and put forward the concept of "life balance" with a more whole perspective. Scholars defined life balance as fulfilling the demands satisfactorily in the three basic areas of life; namely, work, family and private. In this definition, unlike other definitions in the literature, "I" is included in life balance.

Work demands work hours, work intensity (the pace of work and proportion of working hours spent in work activity) and work pressures of any other kind (e.g. peaks in work load). Additional work hours subtract from home time, while high work intensity or work pressure may result in fatigue, anxiety or other adverse psycho-physiological consequences that can affect the quality of home and family life (White *et al.*, 2003). Family demands include such subjects as the roles of the individuals (e.g. mother, father, spouse, etc), family responsibilities (e.g.

childcare, house chores, etc), looking after the family members (e.g. looking after the old members, etc). Besides this, there are some other demands in work-life balance than family and work like relaxation, vacation, sports and personal development programs.

One of the indicators of work-life balance is where how much time is spent because every balance element requires a certain amount of time and when time, which is also limited, is not allocated wisely, conflicts occur. In addition, mental occupation is also important in work-life balance. When someone is concerned about family problems while at work or when someone is occupied with problems at work while being busy with his family, work-life balance is destroyed. Therefore, not only is balanced allocation of time to the roles in life required for work-life balance, but the allocated time should also be spend in high quality.

Work-life balance is not the allocation of time equally among work, family and personal demands. In literature, it is also emphasized that work-life balance is a subjective phenomenon that changes from person to person. In this regard, work-life balance should be regarded as allocating the available resources like time, thought and labour wisely among the elements of life. There isn't a universal scale for everyone regarding where how much resource will be allocated. While some adopt the philosophy of "working to live" and sees work as the objective, others consider "living to work" and situated work into the centre of life. Differentiation of the paradigms as such will also differentiate the roles and the resources allocated for these roles. The determinant of work-life balance is the fact that one thinks that he has done what has to be done in life and thus derives overall satisfaction from life with little regrets.

DETERMINANTS OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Many things in life are the determinants of work-life balance. The subjects in the literature that are related the most with work-life balance are grouped here.

Individual: An individual is the most important determinant of work-life balance. Two American cardiologists Rosenman and Friedman determined two different types of personality depending on heart disorders and individual behaviours: type A and B. Type A expresses someone who is more active, more work-oriented, more passionate and competitive, while type B is calm, patient, balanced and right minded (Rhodewalt *et al.*, 1984; Baltas and Baltas, 2000). It can be argued that since type A is more work-oriented, there will be a negative reflection of it to work-life balance.

Yet work holism, which is considered as an obsessive behavior, is another thing that destroys work-life balance. Work holism connotes over-addiction to work, being at work for a very long time, overworking and being busy with work at times out of work. When work holism is considered as "inconceivable interest in overworking", it is possible to define a workaholic as someone who isn't interested in any other subject than his job, works excessively and continues working without being aware that work holism damages his health, personal happiness and relations with others (Temel, 2006). Since life is not only about work, workaholics suffer from alienation, family problems and some health problems. Porter (1996) states that like alcoholics, workaholics neglect their families, friends, relations and other social responsibilities.

Family: The demands that one experiences in family life and that have effects on his life balance can be given as the demand of workload (e.g. shopping, house chores, childcare, etc) and time, role expectations in the family and support to be given to the spouse (Aycan *et al.*, 2007). It is also included in the literature that such variances as marriage, child-raising, caring of the elderly at home have effect on work-life balance since they demand more family responsibilities. One is an employee, a manager but also a parent, a spouse. Moreover, in countries like Turkey, where caretaking of the elderly is done within the family, those who work bear the function of a caregiver as well. Traditionally, in almost every country, most of the house chores are undertaken by women. The increasing responsibility in the family becomes especially more burden on the work-life balance of women.

Those who have to look after a child or the elderly might sometimes have to risk their career by shortening their working hours, which becomes a source of stress for them (Lowe, 2005). On the other hand, those without children or any elderly to look after at home experience less work-life imbalance.

Work and organization: Work environment is more effective in work-life imbalance than the family environment. The job and the institution one works in both have demands on his time, efforts and mental capacity. Among the efforts to increase organizational efficiency, one of the subjects managers focus on is to raise the organizational loyalty of the staff. In this context, hard workers are encouraged and given opportunities to advance. Organizations try to get the most of their staff without considering the other aspects of their private life. Such an organizational strategy provides the opportunity of promotion and other fringe benefits to the staff. In the long run, the staff might neglect their private life; therefore, the organization becomes an important factor on work-life balance.

Work-load might pose a time-pressure on an individual through excessive responsibilities at work that takes up the spare time which, otherwise, would be allocated for other interests. Furthermore, it causes stress and negative feelings that damage the factuality of the individual in his private life (Aycan *et al.*, 2007). Allocating more time for work may bring some extra income; however, this means sacrificing from the time for social and family roles. From the perspective of the organization, working hours and schedule are the most crucial points of work-life balance. Work hours and schedules can affect the mental health, physical health and well-being of employers. Long work hours (e.g. 10 h daily) and certain kind of shift schedules are known to cause elevated risk for a range of mental and physical health problems. Stress is one of the more commonly reported outcomes of long work hours and is recognized as a determinant of the employee health and productivity (Lowe, 2005).

Social environment: Another determinant of work-life balance is social environment. Especially in countries that stand out with their culturally collectivist characteristics, an individual also has responsibilities towards certain social groups in addition to himself and his family (Hofstede, 2001). Every social group such as relatives, friends and neighbors has demands on the individual. For example, an individual, just as he does with his family members, also has to spend time with the members of the social groups he belongs. As such, the size of one's social environment becomes a factor on work-life balance.

CONSEQUENCES OF WORK-LIFE IMBALANCE

By referring to the study of Greenhaus and Beutell, it is said that as a result of work-life imbalance, there are three types of conflict; namely, time-based, stress-based and behavior-based (Efeoglu, 2006; Aycan *et al.*, 2007). The time-based conflict is about what one's limited time is mostly allocated for. When individuals don't allocate this limited time equally among the demanding groups, a negative result occurs in those who haven't had enough time. Generally work take up most of the time, thus leaving little for the family and the other aspects of life.

The stress-based conflict occurs when one of the roles of the individual at work or in the family causes stress on the individual and this stress affects the other roles of the individual (Efeoglu, 2006). An example is someone who has had an argument with his colleagues at work and carries on this tension towards those out of work like family members and lets this tension interferes with his roles in the family.

The behavior-based stress occurs when the behaviors at work and out of work are dissonant and conflicting. For instance, when a manager who has to be strict and disciplined at work carries on with this behavior at home, he might experience problems with the family members (Aycan *et al.*, 2007). Conflicts due to work-life imbalance have personal, family and organizational implications.

Personal implications: Aycan *et al.* (2007) categorized the effects of life imbalance in three groups: psychological problems (stress, exhaustion, depressive feelings, loneliness and nervousness, feeling of guilt, lack of satisfaction, anxiety), psychosomatic problems (physical problems due to psychological problems) and dissatisfaction arising from lack of time allocated for the self.

According to Lowe (2005), work-life imbalance affects the overall well-being of the individual causing such problems as dissatisfaction from life, prolonged sadness, using drugs or alcohol and insomnia. In a study carried out on women, it is found that women who work longer hours, are exposed to more stress related to work and experience more work-family imbalance suffer from psychosomatic complains like stomach-ache, back-ache, headache, sleeping disorders more (Aycan *et al.*, 2007). Work-life imbalance not only has spiritual and physical but also social implications on the individual. Those who cannot perform their roles in life fully will inevitably be excluded and isolated from the social environment and thus be alienated.

Family implication: Organizations expect from the individual to allocate more time for their work while at the same time the family want him to perform his responsibilities duly. Those who can't sustain wok-life balance are bound to experience many problems in their families such as lower family satisfaction, decreased involvement in family roles, problems in the relations with children, parents, friends and social environment, family-related absenteeism and tardiness (Aycan *et al.*, 2007; Lowe, 2005; Hill *et al.*, 2003).

Organizational implications: Those whose demands of the family and one's social interests aren't met duly naturally prefer sacrificing his working hours, that is, they carry out their personal needs like picking the children up from school and taking a relative to doctor by leaving work before the end of office hours (Aycan *et al.*, 2007). When the work-life balance is damaged, the individual's problems out of work affect his performance at work. Previous studies show that those who cannot sustain work-life balance suffer from a fall in their job satisfaction and efficiency at work, intend to leave the organization and experience attendance problems. Studies also reveal that excessive working hours lead to work-family imbalance and cause negative consequences like increase in work accidents rather than boosting efficiency at work (Aycan *et al.*, 2007). The negative impact of work-life imbalance on the individual are directly reflected onto the organization because the individual's psychological and physical problems decrease his efficiency at work when he has to deal with his problems out of work by sacrificing his office hours.

THE RELATION OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE WITH CERTAIN VARIABLES

This study will focus on certain variables through which work-life balance show discrepancies. In the literature, it is emphasized that gender has a determining affect on work-life balance because women experience more work-family conflicts than men (Kocacik and Gokkaya, 2005; Ozen and Uzun, 2005; Aycan *et al.*, 2007). The professional roles of women clash with their family roles. Women think that due to their professional roles prevent them from performing their family roles effectively (Ozen and Uzun, 2005).

Family responsibilities are more of a burden on women because while men see the house as a haven to relax after work, the house seems to women as if the place where their second shift will start (Aycan *et al.*, 2007). Women split the latter into a number of sub-spheres relating to interpersonal roles (including domestic worker, mother and partner) and house-hold work (Warren, 2004). For instance, in Turkish culture, women are primarily expected to be good mothers, wives and house women (Kocacik and Gokkaya, 2005). Many of the working women, after their working hours have ended; have to perform their house women responsibilities at home such as cooking, cleaning and childcare. Such a woman will inevitably be absorbed in her housework even at work. Men, on the other hand, have little responsibility at home, but their mind is mostly busy with their job at home; they even bring work to their house sometimes. This, of course, leads to conflicts between the spouses.

An important variable in work-life balance is marital status; it is expected that a single working individual will suffer from the problems caused by work-family imbalance less than a married working one (Aycan *et al.*, 2007). Having the role of being a spouse along with the role of being an employee is an input to work-life balance. Another variable is the number of the children. As this number increases, childcare necessitates more time and energy for the family (Aycan *et al.*, 2007). Having an infant at home, especially in a nuclear family, increases work-life imbalance (Lowe, 2005).

Having a grandmother or/and a grandfather at home in a large family might have both positive and negative affect on work-life balance. A grandmother may give a hand to a working mother in sustaining work-life balance by helping the house-chores and looking after the children. However, on the other hand, if the elderly themselves are in need of caring, this will bring increasing demands on the working couple both.

The profession has a determining affect on work-life balance. Some professions are more sedentary and stress-free with stable office hours, whereas others with excessive working hours might be more stressful and busy. For example, it is very difficult for a doctor who can be called by his patients 24/7. Other than profession, the position might also be a burden on work-life balance because as one advances at work, his responsibilities will increase as well. According to Lowe (2005), managers and professionals experience more stress due to their bigger responsibilities than other groups. Such problems at work as conflicts and lack of coordination and communication among departments and colleagues have negative reflections on work-life balance. Work-loads and excessive working hours are two of the most important factors on work-life imbalance. It has been determined that long working hours has more effect on the family conflicts of managers and professionals.

WHAT CAN BE DONE FROM THE ORGANIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVE?

In order to decrease the negative consequences of work-family conflict on working individuals, family-friendly organizational culture and human resources applications have recently been in the agenda of executive. The components of this organizational strategy are flexible working hours, childcare and elderly-care schemes, home working or teleworking, job sharing opportunities (Frame and Hartog, 2003; Lockwood, 2003; White *et al.*, 2003; Ponzellini, 2006; Aycan *et al*, 2007; Maxwell, 2005). For example, an organization can open a day-care facility for its employees who have children or give them other related fringe benefits.

Family-friendly organizational strategies can be extended to other needs of the employees like vacation, relaxation, hobbies, etc. and thus form "life-friendly organizational culture" concept. Life-friendly organizational culture approaches a person as a whole and establishes a schedule that not only deals with his work but also other his needs, roles and responsibilities. This plan helps the individual to sustain his life balance. Within this frame, such attempts as supporting the

families of the employees, meeting their social needs with various activities, providing them with sports, recreation and relaxation activities are all in order to sustain work-life balance.

Supportive programs for the family life of employees in an organization contribute to providing work-life balance. Thanks to these programs, the employees will be encouraged, their attendance will be supported and their efficiency will increase (Lockwood, 2003). When organizations support their staff with family-friendly programs, they show that they care about the out-of-work responsibilities of their staff. This not only increases the loyalty of the employees to the organization but also increases their job-satisfaction. It is also a part of the social responsibilities of the organization towards its employees, their families and towards the society itself. this will benefit both the individual employee and the organization (Ozen, 2002).

Flexible working hours is one of the methods used to maintain work-life balance. For instance, employees with flexible time will have to fulfill a certain amount of time weekly. Those who have fulfilled this fixed amount of time can spend the spare amount for their own interests and responsibilities (Aycan *et al.*, 2007). Another organizational strategy used to maintain work-life balance is home-office which can be described as working at home away from the traditional office environment thanks to computer and information technologies (Naktiyok and Iscan, 2003). Especially for organizations where physical attendance is not required and information technologies are used for data processing, home officering provides employees considerable flexibilities.

When managers are sensitive to their employees' work-family interaction and the problems arising from this interaction, enormous gains can be achieved in terms of human resources management (Torun, 1996). Experts who can guide employees on work-life balance can be beneficial in organizations too. In the context of managing working life, there might be some initiatives governments can take in order to maintain work-life balance. Governments, for example, can pass new regulations for subjects like supporting working mothers, maternal vacation for both parents and providing opportunity for new mothers to milk their babies.

CONCLUSION

If one has managed to allocate the required time for every aspect of life duly and not to reflect the problems in one part of life to another, it means that he has been able to achieve work-family balance (Aycan *et al.*, 2007).

Life, as a whole, is composed of many other aspects along with work. Those who have achieved a balance among these aspects are sure to achieve the life balance, which does away with any imbalance. When one manages to maintain work-life balance, there will be positive reflections on the individual himself, on his family, on the organization and the society as well. Above all, he is a happy individual. The positive energy of a happy individual will spread to his family. Considering the effects of the family on one's personality and identity development, the physical, emotional and mental development of the children raised within the family can be said to be related to whether the parents have performed their responsibilities as parents duly or not. Those children who have graduated from the family institution successfully are a significant resource of input for the happiness and peace of social life. As a result, when an individual achieves work-life balance, this will spread to the whole society positively.

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