

What level of responsibility should an organisation take for helping its employees manage work and family interface? Discuss with examples.

In the modern business world, most organisations go through pivotal changes in the working environment that require more empowerment of workers and the need to have higher capabilities and a better range of skills to help sustain organisational growth. As a result, employees are frequently faced with the difficulty of performing to a high standard and the need to dedicate most of the day to a workplace environment, having to sacrifice demands in the personal and social aspects of their lives (Tummers and Bronkhorst, 2014). Balancing between organisation life, societal life and personal life are the three-dimensional aspects that together, make work-life balance (WLB) (Poulose and Sudarsan, 2014). The conceptual origins of WLB surfaced by the 1960s as Kahn et al. (1964) recognised work-family conflicts to be a considerable cause of stress for employees, which results in a fall in productivity.

Green and Tsitsianis (2005) acknowledged the decreased job satisfaction of the UK's generic working population, referring to more intense work exertion, more hours at work, imbalanced work-life and less self-governance as the reasons for the decline. Appropriately governing conflicts between work and life has become a significant issue for organisation and the individuals involved (Zhang et al., 2012). The results of this problem have caused deficient productivity, lower levels of commitment (Lambert et al., 2006), absenteeism (Vaananen et al. 2004), fatigue (Boyar et al., 2005) as well as increased turnover (Balmforth and Gardner, 2006).

Even though the concept of work-life balance is broadly conceived, a widely-accepted definition has shown to be problematic. Redmond et al., (2006, p. 15) defined work-life balance as the process of "striving to achieve greater balance between work and home responsibilities". Kalliath and Brough (2008, p.4) analysed different conceptions and suggested a more distinct definition, "work-life balance is the individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual's current life priorities". To add, Clark (2001, p.3) described work-life balance "as the satisfaction and good performance at work and home with a minimum of role conflict".

Presently, many organisations commit resources towards work-life dynamics to accommodate the structure of their organisations to the requirements of employees as well as reciprocation to legislation set by the government like protection for families, integration and gender equality (Kossek et al., 2010). Many companies show that they believe sustainable development is imperative in the management of their workforce, has proven to enhance organisation's performance (Peters and Heusinkveld, 2010). Reductions in absenteeism and lateness, along with an improvement of organisational commitment have all been credited as positive outcomes of organisations that apply HR policies which promote employee work-family balances (Hill et al., 2006; Lambert et al., 2006). Similarly, recruiting and retaining key figures in the pool of employees has emerged as a compelling factor in successful implementation of work-family balance initiatives (Johnson, 1995; Poelmans et al., 2003).

Although, studies have demonstrated focus on adopting and implementing formal policies and have gradually included the range of duties carried out by supervisors, peer support as well as organisational and national culture (Kelly et al., 2008). Studies have shown that support from supervisors or managers in an organisation are vital and positively relates to decreased levels of work-family conflict (Behson, 2005; Lapierre and Allen, 2006; Mauno et al., 2005), improved work-family balance (Hill, 2005), as well as work-family enrichment

(Carlson et al., 2011). Research reveals that support from supervisors causes employees to have a better perception of career and family success (Moen and Yu, 1999) and a better view of organizational support for creating harmony between family and work (Berg et al., 2003). Warner and Hausdorf (2009) analysed work-life balance problems amidst healthcare workers in Canada and his finding proved a positive relationship among supervisor support and reduced work-to-family conflict, along with improvements to levels of employee loyalty. Evidence from companies in Spain have shown the same correlation with work satisfaction, turnover intention and employee engagement (Roehling et al., 2001; Anderson et al., 2002; Shuck et al., 2011). This sort of support assists the progress of certain formal policies that an organisation could introduce or already have in place to coordinate the work, family and social domains of life in harmony (Blair-Loy and Wharton, 2002; Casper et al., 2004; Kelly and Kalev, 2006).

In some cases, more cultivation of work-life initiatives positively corresponds to increased work-life conflict. This verdict could signify that these policies fail to sufficiently relieve work-life conflicts because conflicts still occur in situations of provision working successfully. The policies alone might not be competent enough to make work-life balance better for employees and with an absence of a supportive work-life culture at firms, the possible advantages may not come to light for example, improved performance and employee retention. Lewis (2001) concluded that just administering formal policies will inadequately promote fundamental culture alterations needed that denounces the concept of an 'ideal worker'. Essentially, organisational change would need to be a component of a larger change in society as "organisational change does not take place in a vacuum, and wider social norms can and do impact on workplace cultures" (Lewis, 2001, p28).

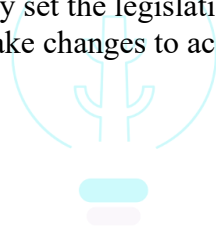
Nevertheless, it would be necessary for the government to put work-life balance legislation into place to protect employee rights. But, the more prevalent policy prescription from the government and practice proposed by employers is to offer more flexible working hours for employees, such as flexible hours and part-time jobs, rather than shorter working hours (Nickson et al., 2004). In the UK supermarket industry, work-family life is supported by offering employees term-time contracts where they do not have to work during the school holidays, job sharing, enhanced maternity and paternity leave, variable hour contract, career break schemes for a maximum five years, special leave of one year if needed and dependency leave (Nickson et al., 2004).

On the other hand, the UK government's reaction towards work-life balance entailed institution of legislation that introduced paid paternity leave, longer maternity leave with pay, unpaid parental leave as well as time off for dependants (Employment Relations Act, 1999) and rights to request flexible working patterns for working parents with children under six (DTI, 2000; Work and Parents Taskforce, 2001). To add, an essential to the government's initiatives involved inspiring businesses to apply these extensive work-life initiatives and offer flexible arrangements to workers out of free will. However, there are still organisations that try to enforce only the bare minimum to make a marginal change but ultimately to limit the future legal consequences of not abiding by these policies (Kossek et al., 2010).

Even so, strict laws have been a significant factor for flexible work practices to help employees. The European Union was organised to assist socially and economically orientated advancements (Kossek et al., 2010). Through laws it has actively encouraged equal treatment as well as the opportunities for working women mainly focussing on "the interrelationships between work, family and life" (Papalexandris and Kramar, 1997, p.5). Although, corporate

businesses implementing flexible working arrangements is contingent on gender ideologies, legislation, the social welfare system and family formation programs established in every nation part of the European Union (Straub, 2007; Den Dulk et al., 1996). Despite the variety of legal acts by the European Union instilled for evolution of family friendly employment practice, separate countries have different approaches to the way they implement the directives. A nation that undoubtedly supports work-life balance practice in Finland. Finnish laws allow unpaid time off work for working parents that have sick children with a four-day limit per instance. As well as this, the laws in Finland allow a ‘Daddy Month’ added on top of their entitled paternity leave (Kela, 2017). Inferred from Straub (2007), countries like the UK and Ireland are superior performers compared to Mediterranean countries like Portugal at advocating work-life balance practices more than they are legally required to.

Overall, increased working hours are consistent with unsuccessful work-life balance. The responsibility lies on the government as it has the best interest of both its people and organisations at heart, as it seeks to achieve a sustainable operation in the future. But, peer and organisational support in the workplace also aid workers in achieving a more tolerable, balanced equilibrium within their work and family lives. Work-life culture in organisations can be put in place by the employers through policies but it is still the government with a stronger hand to enforce these policies and make an impact. Flexible work practices are arguably the most significant way to achieve work-life balance but the government should be responsible for its provision but as they set the legislation. If they advocate these policies then businesses would be forced to make changes to accommodate employees’ family and social responsibilities with work.



A D A M S T U T O R S