Work–Life Balance: Governance for the Life That Matters

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Views are personal and does not reflect the views of the organization I am employed.

Author: Roshan Neville Sequeira
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It has been more than three decades since I began my journey in the IT field. When I pause to look back, the first thought that always comes to mind is **work–life balance**.

Those were the days before the Internet was commercialized, when mobile phones and pagers were absent. Fax machines ruled the roost, and landlines were the primary channel of communication.

The global economy was far less integrated than what we see today. Fast-food chains did not display calorie charts, detective solutions were the order of the day, and predictive solutions were hardly spoken about. The word ***"instant"*** was rarely in use — reserved only for a few critical industries, unlike today where it defines almost every aspect of our lives.

So, What Changed?

Over the years, I've watched the world around me transform — not gradually, but at a pace that often feels relentless. The shifts have been sweeping:

1) **From Detective to Predictive**. What was once about finding causes after the fact has moved to being proactive, and now predictive — from solving problems to forecasting them.
2) **Instant Everything**. Instant food, instant fame, instant followers, instant likes, instant results — we've built a culture where waiting feels almost unnatural.
3) **Work–Life Balance Relegated**. The very balance I first recalled has been pushed to the background, often sacrificed at the altar of speed and competition.
4) **Medicines as Daily Companions**. Headaches, backaches, acidity — pills once reserved for rare occasions have become part of many people's everyday routine.
5) **Health Parameters Declining**. With rising work pressure comes rising blood pressure, diabetes, and other stress-induced ailments.
6) **Erosion of Patience**. Pleasantries remain, but they feel mechanical. Good mornings and good nights are often more ritual than heartfelt.
7) **Cutthroat Competition**. The margin of success has narrowed so much that even a fraction of a percentage point — 99.2 vs 99.3 — can decide a person's future.
8) **Coping as a Skill**. Institutes mushroom everywhere, offering yoga, stress management, new languages, new skills, new formulas for success.
9) **Self-Help Industry Boom**. "All you need to know" titles now fill bookstores, guiding us on everything from climbing the corporate ladder to boosting social media followers.

The Effects of These Changes – A GRC Perspective

The shifts we've seen over the decades are not just lifestyle adjustments — they ripple into governance, risk, and compliance domains, shaping how organizations and societies operate. Some key effects include:

Urban Mobility & Health Risks.
With more cars on the roads, governments spend significant time and resources on traffic management. Long commutes eat into personal time, reducing opportunities for relaxation and exercise, which in turn contributes to lifestyle diseases. From a GRC standpoint, this raises questions of governance over urban planning, public health risk management, and policies that encourage wellness.

Instant Food & Workforce Productivity.
The rise of instant and fast food has led to an increase in health-related concerns and more frequent clinic visits. For organizations, this translates into higher absenteeism and reduced productivity, creating compliance obligations around employee welfare, occupational health, and insurance coverage.

Environmental Impact & Sustainability Compliance.
The demand for speed, coupled with increased industrial and consumer activity, has worsened pollution and environmental degradation. This puts pressure on organizations to align with ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) reporting, carbon emission regulations, and sustainability mandates — areas where compliance is now under stricter global and local oversight.

The Service Economy & Safety Concerns.
The surge of door-to-door services — from food and medicine to healthcare — has transformed convenience into an expectation. Yet, delivery fleets racing against 30-minute promises raise road safety risks, labor rights concerns, and liability issues for organizations. Regulators increasingly expect companies to adopt responsible governance models that balance customer convenience with worker safety and societal well-being.

As service and technology industries continue to expand in this fast-paced, service-centered economy, a new set of intangible risks has emerged. These are not as visible as physical risks, yet they carry far-reaching consequences.

Legal systems struggle to define boundaries in this constantly shifting landscape. Legislators are forced to rethink how to frame laws that prevent misuse without stifling innovation. The grey areas are many — from data privacy to digital labor rights, from intellectual property in AI to accountability for algorithmic decisions.

Meanwhile, risk and compliance professionals find themselves racing against time. They are tasked with identifying risks, interpreting ambiguous regulations, and ensuring compliance in environments where clarity is often lacking. The result is a workforce that is overstretched, fatigued, and under constant pressure — trying to balance the need for organizational agility with the demand for governance and regulatory assurance.

Key Takeaways

Perhaps the real question is not just what changed — but what did we lose along the way?

Progress has given us speed, scale, and convenience. Yet in the race for instant everything, we may have quietly traded away balance, patience, and health. The real measure of success may not lie in titles, followers, or material achievements, but in the values and relationships that stand the test of time.

Two lines I once read capture this beautifully:

“My wife is my art, and my children are my works.”

“To the world you are someone, but to someone you are the world.”

From a GRC lens, this is a reminder that just as organizations must govern with purpose, manage risks with foresight, and ensure compliance with what truly matters, so must we in our personal lives. We need to govern our choices for the people who matter, manage the risks that threaten our well-being, and stay compliant with the values that define us.

In doing so, we don’t just build a life that is well managed — we build a life that is truly well lived.

Closing Thought

Work–life balance is a phrase we hear often today — in corporate handbooks, on glossy posters, and in HR campaigns. But is it a lived reality, or has it become a slogan that sounds sweet to the ears, checks the box of being **“employer-friendly,”** and adds a notch to corporate posturing?

The truth probably lies somewhere in between. The idea is noble and necessary — yet elusive in practice. Perhaps the real test is not whether companies can promise balance, but whether individuals and organizations together can create environments where balance is lived, not just pitched.