

Perspectives of Work-Life Balance

Eleftheria Charitou¹, Tryfon Ziatas¹, Miltiadis Chalikias¹

¹ University of West Attica, School of Business, Economics and Social Sciences,
Department of Business Administration, Egaleo, Greece

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the balancing of professional and personal life and its importance for an organization's profitability during a period of economic crisis. For this reason, a qualitative research was conducted collecting data using a semi-structured interview. The research sample consists of 100 energy services companies' employees from different hierarchical levels. According to the main research findings the negative consequences of the economic crisis, cause difficulties in achieving work-life balance, mainly due the limited time and the wage reforms.

Keywords. Work-life balance, job satisfaction, employee performance, economic crisis

1. Introduction

The constantly changing contemporary social and economic environment often leads people to handle with a wide range of roles on a daily basis (Tsitmideli et al., 2016). These roles are in many cases characterized as mutually exclusive. In this context, when the daily responsibilities and duties collide with each other, a person is led to undesirable situations such as the one characterized by an imbalance between the two major areas of human life, family and work.

This imbalance has been investigated many times, as it leads to undesirable behaviors and, therefore, needs a special attention. In particular, the imbalance between personal and professional life increases work-related stress levels and leads in decreased job satisfaction. The low levels of job satisfaction have a negative influence on employees' performance, which significantly reduces the effective operation of an organization.

The changes in the contemporary business environment which are primarily a result of the recent financial crisis, complicate even more the efforts to balance personal and professional roles.

In this paper, the balancing of professional and personal life and its importance for an organization's profitability during a period of economic crisis, will be examined.

2. Theoretical approach

2.1. The issue of work-life balance

There are several studies in the contemporary literature concerning the balance between work and personal life. Pocock (2005), notes that work-life balance is achieved when people ensure a level of control in terms of time, space and the way they work. Clark (2001), defined the balance between work and life as “the satisfaction an employee receives from personal life along with the job with the minimum conflict between these two sectors”. The main conclusion from this approach is that the attempt of balancing professional and personal life includes role conflicts and the possible consequences in a person’s welfare, such as stress, health problems, burnout and, decreasing effectiveness (Netemeyer et al., 1996).

2.2. Work-life imbalance negative implications

The imbalance between work and personal life leads to many negative consequences as already mentioned.

The first of the most important work-life imbalance negative implications concerns increased stress levels. Siegrist’s (1990) effort-reward imbalance model is one of the most well-known approaches concerning the consequences of work-life imbalance.

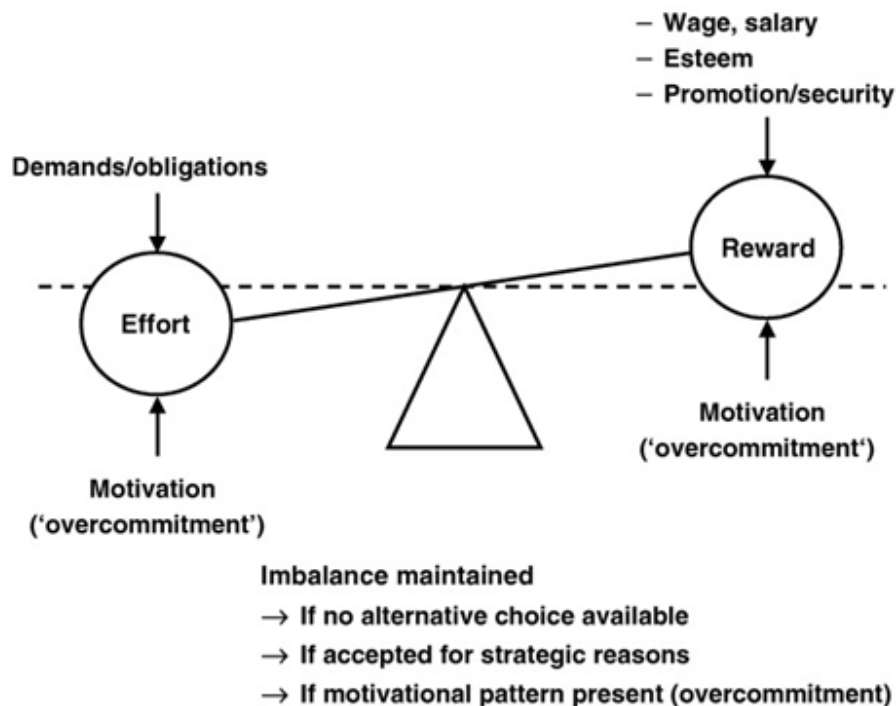


Figure 1. The effort-reward imbalance model (Source: Weyers et al., 2006)

According to the effort-reward imbalance model, when a person feels that there is a gap between work and life, a stressful situation that reduces performance and generates even more health problems may occur. It was identified that stress will be increased when there is an imbalance between the effort a person invests in work and the reward that gets back.

The second negative implication of the imbalance between work and life is the burnout. Maslach et al. (2001), define burnout as “an emotional state in which a person loses values and positive feelings, compassion and respect for others”. According to them, burnout is characterized by three dimensions as presented in the following diagram.

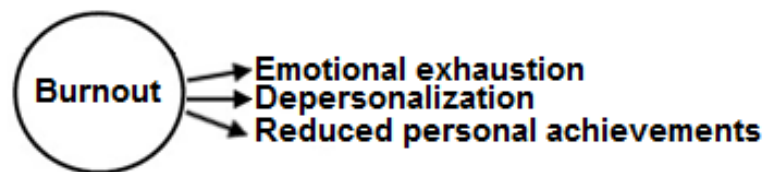


Figure 2. Burnout’s three dimensions.

The above negative effects, may exist in both work and personal life. In the case of working environment, a negative impact on professional obligations occurs either with systematic abstention or poor performance which may lead in a reduced organizational efficiency. In the second case, this of personal life, the main results of burnout lead in a negative attitude towards family members or friends and a lack of failure feeling as personal goals won’t be achieved.

Furthermore, as Brough et al. (2008) point out, the imbalance between personal and professional life directly affects social issues as it may lead in an increased age of people who decide to have kids; this may reduce fertility rates of the general population.

2.3. Positive effects of work-life balance

Regarding with the benefits of achieving work-life balance, various theoretical approaches have been formulated concerning both persons and organizations.

According to Bird (2004), work-life balance leads to a feeling of satisfaction and happiness which will prevent various health problems. Balance between work and life reduces the possibility of depersonalization and also the possibility of mental and health problems (Lingard et al., 2007; Hammig & Vauer, 2009). In addition, previous studies indicate that people who manage to balance work and personal life enjoy a relatively calm family life without tensions and problems with their relatives and friends. According to Chittenden and Ritchi (2011), the main benefits of balancing personal and professional life can help reduce feelings of frustration, failure and guilt.

As far as the benefits of work-life balance in organizational level are concerned, Grover and Crooker (1995), found that employees who managed to balance their work and personal lives were more efficient. Moreover, Parker and Wall (1998),

noticed that the organizational performance is significantly increased when employees balance their work and personal lives as they have an increased performance due their positive attitude in workplace.

In addition, the implementation of various programs from a business perspective which assist employees to balance their work and family lives leads in reduced role conflicts a person faces and eventually in job satisfaction, job commitment, as well as in increased productivity (Naithani, 2010). This underlines the need for initiatives from the side of organizations that will assist their employees in achieving work-life balance.

3. Research methodology

To achieve the purposes of the research a qualitative research was carried out. Data collection was conducted by using in-depth interviews. This technique is often used in social surveys and offers many opportunities for exploring interest issues (Drosos et.al a,b 2015). Semi-structured interviews were used and the questions were selected to be open-ended. Interviews were completed by personal contact with 100 employees of companies operating in energy services industry in Greece. The respondents were from all the hierarchical levels.

4. Research results

The interview carried out in the context of the qualitative research consists of two main sections.

The first section includes questions aimed to provide useful information for the investigation of the causes leading to work-life imbalance in an organization emphasizing on the economic crisis influence. To begin with, there is a moderate level of burnout recorded as all the answers are close to the scale “neither agree nor disagree”. The analysis of the question which examines the views on the extent to which work-life balance can be achieved during the current time of intense economic crisis, reveals that this is difficult and often even not feasible. The process of work-life balancing seems to be quite complicated, as each person has its own requirements. This condition greatly exacerbates by the effects of the economic crisis, as evidenced by the responses. The economic crisis leads in insecurity in the workplace, stress, and particularly working hours often without adequate remuneration. This results in less and less time available for family and personal life which eventually leads in an imbalance between the work and personal life according to a respondent. Age is positively correlated with work-life imbalance; thus younger employees seem to balance their personal and professional lives better than the older ones.

From the analysis of the responses to the second question which examines the categories of employees affected by the work-life imbalance, it is observed that the first differentiation is made between men and women. More particularly, women seem to face more frequently the problem, especially due to their role in society.

Working women, especially those who have kids, except for their job needs they have to care for the needs of their kids. Comparing employees of different hierarchical levels shows that the groups facing greater difficulties to balance their professional and personal lives are these of very low and these of very high hierarchical levels; as a senior executive stated “the two outliers”.

The responds to the third question which concerns the causes of work-life imbalance show that the vast information received by a person in the current era, the change of social roles, job insecurity, lifestyle, and the non-standard values ultimately lead to this condition.

The second section consists of questions designed to provide useful information for the investigation of the work-life imbalance consequences. The purpose of the fourth question is to examine the views on the ways a person expresses the lack of balance between professional and personal life. It is observed that employees who find it difficult to balance the two parts of their lives, often exhibit behaviors that are characterized by anger, frustration, and sadness and even depression sometimes.

The fifth question concerns the consequences of work-life imbalance. The most important consequences according to the respondents are stress, burnout and problems in the workplace and reduced efficiency. Furthermore employees facing this problem seek for another job. Regarding the impact at household level, responds seem to understand that excessive working hours limit the contacts with wives and kids which ultimately is responsible for many contemporary social problems such as the increased rate of divorces. Another important problem is this of social relations.

The sixth question examines the extent of techniques aiming to limit work-life imbalance phenomenon application. The responds to this question show that most of the employees asked do not know about such techniques.

Finally, the last question examined whether organizations nowadays apply techniques that for the benefit of their employees. According to the responses, although there is a good will from the part of the organizations and some executives recognize that various techniques can increase employee performance, the difficult economic situation does not allow many initiatives. Two of the responds depict clearly the current status: “there must be good will from some managers but when the pressure for the results comes, there is no initiative” and “in times of economic crisis, organizations implement practices that do not contribute in any way to limit the problem”.

5. Conclusions

Balancing personal and professional life is a very difficult process and it is often not feasible to achieve its objectives. The main problem seems to be employees' limited time for the needs of theirs family and their personal interests. Probably the main reason for the difficulty in work-life balance is the current economic crisis which affects most of the public or private organizations. Both changes in working

hours and continuous pressure from employers for greater performance increase the time employees pass in their workplace which leads to an inability to balance their work and personal life. These findings are consistent with the findings of other researchers (Naithani, 2010; Wirtz et al., 2011, Chalikias 2013) who also refer to the negative influence of the economic crisis and its impact on work-life balance.

Furthermore, the research findings revealed another factor that differentiates the degree of balancing between professional and personal life. This factor has to do with the hierarchical level to which an employee belongs. The most affected employees were those belonging to very low or very high levels of hierarchy.

In conclusion, changes in social roles, job insecurity, lifestyle, as well as non-constant values affect work-life balance.

Regarding the consequences of work-life imbalance it was found that these are the intense stress, anger or other negative behaviors, reduced job satisfaction, burnout and, even depression.

Work-life imbalance phenomenon has important negative consequences that directly affect employees' performance. It is important that organizations should seek in way for keeping their employees satisfied with their jobs as this will lead to organizations performance (Chalikias et.al., 2016; Skordoulis et al., 2014; Skordoulis et al., 2015). A way to keep employees satisfied is to assist them keeping a work-life balance. Due to the fact that age is correlated with work-life balance, a special attention should be given to millennial employees needs as they are the ones who will dominate the market for the following decades (Rouva et.al., 2016; Armira et al., 2016).

Based on the research results specific groups of employees face more difficulties in work-life balance. Therefore, organizations should pay more attention to these categories of persons through the implementation of appropriate programs. Specifically, there is the needed for changes of concerning working women, especially those having kids, and also employees who belong to very low or very high levels of hierarchy.

Based on the above conclusions and results there are several avenues for future research. In the future, the extent to which the personality affects the ways in which work-life balance is achieved could be analyzed. Furthermore, a future research should investigate employees in other industries as well.

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