Companies the world over are genuinely discovering the value of their people. Several companies are attempting to unravel the mystery of human resources... Each employee in the company is unique and has a role to play in the working of the organization, thereby making him/her important and valuable. The successful management of a company’s human resources is exciting, dynamic and challenging owing to the uniqueness and variety offered by them.

Managing a company’s human resources largely entails recruiting, retaining and retiring employees for the benefit of the organization. This is the first source of conflict.... the employees in a company are managed for the benefit of the company; the benefit to the employee hasn’t yet been addressed- that’s a “people problem”.

Now that the employee’s presence has been acknowledged and his/her needs and benefits have assumed importance....the company puts together a free lunch coupon, a festival bonus, a measly increment, etc., and claims the end of “people problems”, and, while strategists in the company gush at their employee engagement programmes, employees are still left wondering, “But this is not what I wanted!” or “Why did I get this?”

Let us begin all over again.

Any company/organization would desire profits and in the long run hope to achieve sustainable profitability. This profitability is dependent on two things that are interrelated - productivity and performance. The level of profits is directly proportional to productivity and performance. These two factors are largely (rather wholly) dependent on employees. To be able to perform and be more productive, employees have to be happy and satisfied.

It needs to be noted that every employee has two very broad areas of his/her being— personal life and professional work. Both of these are difficult to separate and form a source of conflict. It is the employees who constitute the enterprise, which is governed among many things by structure, systems and strategy. Depending on these, the company’s
human resources function. (Figure on next page)

The crux of this paper is to resolve the conflict that has arisen here—that of the balance between employees’ personal lives and professional work. Also the paper attempts to understand and resolve this issue from the perspective of an employer.

This dichotomous issue is more often known to employee and the enterprise as a work-life imbalance.

**WORK LIFE BALANCE**

“Work Life Balance is about people having a measure of control over when, where and how they work.” This balance is achieved when an individual’s right to a fulfilled life inside and outside paid work is accepted and respected as a norm, to the mutual benefit of the individual, business and society.

The key aspects of “Work Life Balance” solely from an employer’s viewpoint are numerous. They are of importance because providing an employee with a balanced work-life existence is for both the employer and employee – i.e. while the employee is satisfied and happy, the whole exercise must make business sense to the enterprise.
THE EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVE

Providing for a Work-Life balance is important to a company only because it promises employees would be highly effective while they are on the job. The tangible benefits accrued to the employer as a result of providing employees with a work-life balance are many and are dealt with in this paper.

All individuals have different requirements at different points in their life and therefore the concept of work-life balance assumes different meanings at each of these junctures in life. At a young age, while an employee would enjoy doing more work; as he/she begins a family life, time spent with family and at home also assumes importance. For an employer, it is important to track these requirements, so that what is offered to an employee is what an employee wants. This also is a lesson to the employer that, what works for an individual at one point in time need not be a motivator all the time.

The employer must also realize that ensuring a work life balance for the employees is a way to help them fulfill their responsibilities and their aspirations. These responsibilities and aspirations are defined with respect to professional and personal lives.

Providing for a work-life balance also provides for time sovereignty which is of utmost importance these days. Employees prefer to work flexible hours and like to work when they believe they are most productive.

Any employee who spends time in the workplace over what is necessary, does so only in three cases: when he/she has to work long enough to earn more; when he/she has enormous workload; or when the employee needs to demonstrate commitment. All of these are not ideal work situations and the employer must consider eliminating them.

THE EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVE

The employer’s view is focused on making maximum out of minimum. The company/organization always attempts to shift balance from inputs to outputs, i.e. the company will always try to ensure better inputs, like an environment and resources that enable a superior performance and therefore a better output.

An apt example of a company that appreciates the work-life balance is Tata Consultancy Services (TCS). At TCS, every employee across the company is sensitized to the existence of Life Spaces, all of which have equal importance. These life spaces are Organizational Life Space, Professional Life Space, Civic Life Space and Family Life Space. For
survival and growth, people must give all these life spaces their due of resources and time. A complete person would be one who has spent resources in each of these life spaces and has gained exponentially due to this. This is not to say that TCS focuses excessively on offering the employee everything he/she desires— the company’s idea is simply to appreciate the existence of the life spaces and ensuring maximum productivity when the employee occupies the Organizational Life Space.

The output that any organization desires may be broadly categorized into recruitment and retention issues and productivity issues. That is to say that a work life balance makes economic sense because it is able to provide for tangible benefits.

In terms of Recruitment and retention issues, the problems that are most often countered by the company could be any of the following:

- A young workforce that is looking for challenges on the job, and flexibility;
- The labour turnover cost which is extremely high because it includes the cost of recruitment and training; and
- A female workforce that is fast growing and have the requirements of flexibility so that they can manage their careers and families.

The other issue is that of Productivity and the rate at which it fluctuates, and the issue manifests itself as any of the following:

- Absenteeism, where people keep away from the workplace without prior notice;
- A culture of long hours;
- Stress levels amongst employees going up; and
- Low output and poor performance by the workforce.

Herzberg’s Two-Factor theory throws light on why a work life balance strategy would be successful in an organization. According to the theory there are two factors: Hygiene factors, also called maintenance factors which do not directly affect growth but prevent deterioration. A work life balance would serve as a base in which a company can keep its employees happy. Only when this is achieved can the employer provide its workforce with the Motivators, which lead to greater satisfaction.

Inspite of these, issues can be resolved by a well-crafted work life strategy. But each company needs to remember that its strategy must fit the business needs that the company has
at each point in time. This is to ensure effective solutions that can be implemented efficiently.

DEVELOPING WORK LIFE POLICIES THAT ARE RIGHT FOR BUSINESS

As an employer, Work Life Balance can be used in four different ways as a strategy for the organization. It is about using the Work Life Balance strategy in four different scenarios which an organization usually finds itself in.

Focus on Work Life Balance as a recruitment incentive:

When an organization is looking for fresh recruits or to attract new talent, it could sell to the aspirants the concept of flexible working patterns. Employees who value time sovereignty and flexibility in work options will be immediately attracted. Advertisements and all recruitment sources must mention these flexible benefits. The benefit to the company is that the recruitment pool is immediately broadened and there is choice among full time and part time employee options, contract labour, female work population, etc.,.

Focus on Work Life Balance as an employee retention incentive:

Every employer faces the problem of attrition—while some find it difficult to counter, some manage it extremely well. Providing for a Work Life Balance incentive has proved as a very effective way to hold onto the company’s talent. When the employee is unhappy with the job or is frustrated with the way things are going, a well planned incentive scheme goes a long way in mitigating the number of people leaving the organization. The best way to administer this would be to keep a continuous look out for the company’s pulse and find out what are the areas of dissatisfaction. Accordingly, a plan can be formulated and administered. While the attractive mix of work-life policies would be accentuating employee satisfaction and retention, it is important for the company to keep reinventing itself as an employer. A rejuvenated workforce is always a more productive and robust lot which is more prepared to meet the business challenges ahead.

Focus on Work Life Balance as an employee retention scheme at a time when morale is low:

When the business is facing tough challenges; or when the industry as a whole is in turmoil—employee morale is low. Countering this situation is tough, but rejuvenating and revitalizing the employees might be possible by offering them new options. The definite result would be
that the employees would understand that the organization is trying to make it easier for them. An appreciation of this effort would lead to a boost in confidence and no more erosion of morale. The idea is to give the employee the feeling that he is a valuable investment and that in the tough times; he/she is being counted upon.

Focus on Work Life Balance as a means of developing staff cooperation and commitment:

The idea is to create or tailor a work life strategy that includes all employees and is one that brings together a lot of people from across the organization together. While it exhibits to the employee the resources that the company is willing to invest in his/her family, the company also gains because of the informal bonds that are created. In addition to that, the benefits in the long run are consistent product quality and greater customer satisfaction.

ELEMENTS OF A WORK LIFE STRATEGY

The focus on Work Life Balance varies with the requirements of the company. The elements of a Work Life strategy are numerous and there can be innumerable combinations of putting them together to achieve a winning combination, which is employee-friendly and beneficial to the company. The wide choice can be broadly categorized as Flexibility in work timings, Personal work life policies, Leave options and Carer support. Some companies take their work life policies very seriously, like Texas Instruments which occasionally celebrates the Life in Balance month where employees spend time together, and the special invitees are spouses and children.

Flexible work timing is about allowing employees a flexible work schedule. It takes the form of compressed work weeks, part time working, job sharing and telecommuting. Employees are given the chance to determine how long they want to work and when they want to work, as long as they take care of their deliverables.

Personal work life policies are more focused towards individual employees, who might be dissatisfied with their work and want to have greater control over their work. Some of the options that they have are individualized development plans and appraisals, coaching and mentoring. At HCL Comnet, employees are offered skill upgradation programmes and opportunities to show their creative talent. This is coupled with a 360degree appraisal.

Leave options: In recent times, among the most challenging situations is
employees' requirement of leave. Employees' desire maternity and paternity leave, a sabbatical or even study leave.

Carer support is among the best options made available to employees. Such a provision helps employees to work in peace knowing that carer support is being offered to children and elders. At Sasken Technologies, employees' are provided with crèche and playground facilities.

IMPLEMENTING A WORK LIFE BALANCE STRATEGY

Planning and strategizing about what to do in each situation is fairly simple; the actual challenge is in implementing these. While getting down to implementation, for a company among the biggest issues that would crop up would be:

♦ Costs that the company will incur

♦ What benefits to offer and which employee is eligible for those benefits

♦ Management thinks it is an unnecessary exercise which has no utility

Countering these issues and effective implementation of the proposed strategy should follow a very systematic and detailed procedure. Outlined below is a procedure that attempts to take into account all the possible obstacles and overcome them.

♦ The core strategy must be carefully outlined and the objectives of the complete strategy must be determined. It must be followed by a complete benefit analysis of the exercise.

♦ There must be a fit between the strategy and the organizational culture and attitudes. The objectives of the work life policy must match the business demands.

♦ Proper communication channels must ensure that the new strategy must be communicated to all employees—and that the information in circulation is authentic and it must allow for transparency.

♦ The management must also be bought into the idea, because in the implementation of a strategy a top-down approach is very effective.

♦ Work must be reorganized because a work life policy once put into practice is a lot of change underway. A work redesign team should be set up to ensure that all new plans undergo a trial period and a review.

The employer and employee are going through testing times.
Mounting responsibilities and higher aspirations make it even tougher for both. Companies must strive to develop a special bond with its people, so that they will put in more into their jobs and contribute positively. The philosophy of work life balance for the people/employee of the company is a very progressive and encouraging concept. The success of the idea has been seen, but the test will be to implement a policy that is mutually beneficial to the employer and employee.

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