

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

STUDENT NAME

NAME OF THE INSTITUTE

## INTRODUCTION

Both flexible working and work–life balance are important contemporary agendas within organizations and could have both positive and negative consequences.

Many organizations use to look ways for reducing their costs and streamlining their operations. Many companies are trying to have a check so that they could look at ways of reducing payrolls as company's payroll is typically its biggest cost base. Most of the companies are formulating strategies to avoid redundancies within their organizations. As such, there is a renewed interest in workforce flexibility and how this could provide employees with more personal time and reduce costs for employers.

In the situations when organizations have to perform staff cut, some staff use to see this as the opportunity to hone and develop new skills and demonstrate their capacity and capability for career progression. Hence, it is important to understand the concept of work-life balance as it means differently for different people. Also, it depends on the level of the hierarchy of organizations of which they are part of, i.e., an employer and an employee have different perspectives on the flexibility in work and in the work-life balance.

Other employees find the increased workload to be stressful and also consider it as detrimental to the balance in their work and life. People are becoming more stressed and their health and wellbeing may be at more risk, especially in those organizations, where job security is threatened and/or employees use to carry extra workload. Generally, people use to work for longer duration in workplaces where workload is higher.

**Q- Do you agree with Juliet Bourke that the use of flexibility has moved away from its original paradigm?**

**Ans-** Earlier there was a war for talent acquisition, now employers are reluctant for this investment to be shown the door in some business sectors. Instead of that, they are now focusing on reduced work week, part time work and work arrangements with increased flexibility such that they could retain their staff. So, some employers are now doing inevitable reductions in staff as this leads to an opportunity to redesign their roles and new ways of doing jobs could be found out and employees could simultaneously maintain their work-life balance by working more flexibly.

Juliet Bourke is not entirely comfortable with where the “reshaped” argument for flexibility is heading. While workplace flexibility could reduce overheads and boost productivity, she is concerned that the point of workplace flexibility has shifted - and not for the better.

According to Bourke, flexibility is now about getting of more out of fewer people instead of the previous paradigm and she is afraid of the unintended consequences of this line of thinking. This was presented by her during the launch of a website ([www.workplaceflexibility.com.au](http://www.workplaceflexibility.com.au)) which is used to assist companies in developing flexible work practices.

Also, employers could visualize the economic crisis as the time of using flexibility as an opportunity in nasty ways. They might reduce the working hours of employees when they are not needed and could put an extra workload on other staff which have to work longer, which would lead to an increased workload. So, flexibility could not ensure that it is the win-win situation for employee and employer both in most of the situations.

Although, only benefit that was requested universally - both vertically and horizontally across organizations to support work/life balance - was flexibility. In some organizations, for accommodating new requirements, business should develop sustained solutions for flexible working and utilize job redesign.

There might be situations in which demand from clients could decrease as a result of downturn. In response to this decrease, people could reduce work hours through flexible work arrangements and could improve their work life balance. A key element of this strategy includes comprehensive programs for employee flexibility and employee assistance and it would help to develop a diverse, adaptive and high-performing workforce able to meet current and future business needs. Voluntary flexible work and leave options could be provided to avoid redundancies and wages and salaries could be paid accordingly. But, in some organizations, whether there is a strong culture around work/life balance or not, redundancies are inevitable. However, where executives have seen and recognized the benefits that accrue from work/life strategies, it is more likely that senior managers and leaders would explore alternative ways to work as a way to reduce costs and minimize redundancies. Executives know that they need staff that are engaged and committed if they are to continue to be profitable. A culture delivers higher levels of employee engagement if it is supportive of work/life balance for its employees. Flexibility is also about more effective and efficient ways of working for all employees, regardless of whether they work part or full-time (Martin, 2015).

Whereas, in case of natural attrition, redeployment and flexible work practices, most of the reductions come, whenever the downturn is there and employees have to remain agile in such situations. In future duration, economy might pick up and the talent acquisition could be again in

demand. Also, employees have a sense that they should have to work harder and sometimes longer in a downturn. But, sometimes there is huge impact on engagement, which is pivotal to discretionary effort and productivity. It's hard to have an engaged workforce if they're resentful. Even in the short term, that drive to get more out of less is not always productive. So at a time when you need high levels of engagement, you could find yourself operating a business with low levels of engagement.

As corporations look to increase sales and save on costs to ensure profitability, there's an expectation that people would do what needs to be done - and that's to get the results. This would impact on people and the amount of time required doing this. This trend is especially prevalent in multinationals, which have regional offices. As companies are teleconferencing more to save on travel costs, this requires employees to be on call more often across different time zones (Richmond, 2013).

Unless structural efficiencies are put in place and job roles redesigned following a redundancy program, companies could hamstring themselves as they seek to do more with less. While it is well established that talented employees are significantly more productive and profitable, there could be a fine line between stretch goals and burnout even for talented performers.

So, we could say that flexibility has moved from its original paradigm to an extent which is necessary and inevitable. Pros and cons are associated with it, and proper management could lead to a proper efficient workforce who has work-life balance.

**Q- Discuss the implications of excessive working hours on the performance of employees and managers.**

**Ans-** Different employee may have to work in different ways for completion of their tasks and responsibilities in an organization. Depending on the requirements, excessive working hours could be subdivided into various categories. Some of them are mentioned as following:

- Extended hours per day
- Overtime
- Extended commute time
- Overtime or extended hours

Generally, there is negative impact on the employee's performance as well as on the people associated with them that comprises of their families, the employer and the community (Greenhaus, 2012). There have been many indications in researches that long working hours have more complex relationship with risk, as long working hours may influence by the variety of factors including job, employee control, employee performance, non-work responsibilities and social life abnormalities. Some of the negative impacts of long working hours include sleeplessness, less time for the family and other personal life responsibilities. These aspects have adverse effects on human body, like fatigue, negative attitude, turbulences, and uneasiness that leads to poor performance activities. Pitiabile performance negatively influences the employer as, increased production cost and cheap quality of goods and services (Wheatley, 2012). Similarly, community is also affected by such worker through their retarded approach to life, people around him, and environment by unintentional medial errors, automobile accidents, and industrial mishaps. Extend working hours, especially in those workers who work for 24-hours shifts at times, result in decline in alertness, attention and constant concentration resulting medical

errors and poor diagnosis of diseases. It's revealed that employees exhibited substantial deterioration in alertness in longer work shifts. Long hours work and usage of mobile phone causes the stress and neck nerves got stretched due to long sitting (Currie, 2011). This results in overall degradation of business and also the performance of employee.

So, if workers tend to work for longer durations, there are many ill effects on their performance as well as health and they may also feel demotivated to work if they are not provided with proper incentives. To decrease their detachment towards work in these kinds of situations, they should be properly assessed and higher authority should try to make them understand their responsibilities and importance towards the organizations. And if required, their suggestions should be considered and their grievances should be heard and proper plan-of-action should be done for its regulation, otherwise they may tend to lose their efficiency and could not perform well (Hobson, 2011). Also, they should understand that in case of economic imbalance and negative movement of their organization in terms of revenues, recognition, production, etc., being the part and parcels of their organization, they have attached responsibilities to make the work successful and achieve the goals of their organization (Tranby, 2011).

Also, managers need to perform certain activities in order to encourage employees to work for excessive hours. Some of his/her tasks involve the following:

- Manager must lead from the front to encourage worker to finish the work in time, for this every work must be realistically time bounded.
- Time management training and techniques must be delivered to these workers.
- Truly important activities must be clearly separated from ordinary and worthless activities. This leads to proper recognition of the vital tasks of the complete work.

- Encourage open effective communication horizontally and vertically in an organization.
- Managers should have a clear vision and develop objectives accordingly with mutual consensus of the employees. Furthermore, he should empower all employees and give them confidence to achieve stated goals. By this way, employees feel themselves attached.
- Managers need to express satisfaction when desired level of performance are achieved and reward all performers equitably to keep the employees motivated to perform better.
- For effective managerial operation, a manager needs to be vigilant, responsible and effective decisionmaker. Managers should avoid biasness in assigning key tasks to his/her teams otherwise it may develop resentment in other employees.
- Managers should use management tools for effective and efficient activities perform by their teams. This would lead to effective utilization of the work contributions.
- Alternative strategies should be designed for employees working late hours for having effective productivity in performance and also their grievances must be properly handled.
- Managers should encourage employees to avail their leaves to minimize stress.

So, in case there is requirement to make employees work for excessive hours, he needs to be motivated well by catering to his psychological as well as other requirements through proper incentives, promotions, extra wages etc. This way, they could involve themselves and work for the betterment of their organization by feeling that it is their responsibility as well to work for their organization (Jones, 2013). Therefore, the performance of the employees and managers need to be properly recognized and they have to increase their efficiency as well as effectiveness during the excessive working hours for the betterment of their organization and achieving business goals.



**Q- Discuss ways in which employers could facilitate work- life balance during an economic downturn.**

**Ans-** Today, the work-life benefits have switched from company cars, significant bonuses, and other perks to psychological requirements catering such as employee fitness centers and dry-cleaning services. Many corporations could no longer afford the monetary compensation they were handing out a decade earlier. Managing the remaining workforce after layoffs is vital, which could be done through these benefits along with the traditional programs such as insurance and retirement plans (Hofäcker, 2013). When the struggling economy turns around, the remaining employees would be responsible for bringing their respective companies back to their original benchmark, and back to a competitive force.

Pressures from an increasingly competitive work environment are leading to conflicting priorities for employers and governments creating considerable stresses for employees trying to juggle work with family responsibilities. Also, sometimes financial strains have led to cuts in existing policies or postponement and cancellations to previously announced changes by the employers which could further lead to resentment in the employees. Heightened work-load and worries about job security could lead to stress and health problems (Lewis, 2014).

For maintaining the zeal of workers in their work, employers should take effective steps such as they should make them clear that they could collectively come out of the downturn and would be least affected. They should be made aware of the positive impacts of the flexible working hours. They should know that organizations need them but do not have enough resources in the time of downturn, so they must cooperate and work together for the betterment of the organization with for efficiency and effectiveness and as soon as the organization comes out of economic

misbalance, they would again have to work for lesser hours and they would be provided with the incentives and perks accordingly. This would lead to a motivated workforce and they would tend to work for their organization with comparatively more contentment (Milner, 2013).

During time of economic downturn, proper allocation of every single resource must be done, let it be capital, space, human or time. Employers must encourage worker to finish the work in time, and provide a time structure in which work should get fulfilled. This would lead to greater efficiency in achieving the deadlines of the work. For this, employees should be provided appropriate knowledge regarding time management and getting related results. Time and other resources' wastage must be negligible and margin for non-judicious use must not be there. This proper utilization has to be ensured by employers during downturn. Every work consists of several subparts which needs to be properly defined as which tasks are more important and which ones are less important. This could lead to proper focus on the important tasks and more resources could be utilized on more important tasks, i.e., resource allocation should be directly proportional to the importance measure of the tasks (Anderson, 2013).

Also, due to higher work, grievances associated with them increase. For counter balancing it, an open and effective communication must be ensured in an organization in all levels and within all levels. This would lead to proper harmony in the workforce and proper team work is required in case of any downturn so that most optimal output could be gained and motivation level in the heads and hearts of employees are ensured. By developing objectives by mutual cooperation of employees, employers could lead to a greater feeling of attachment in employees towards their organization, which would further lead to better performance by the employees as a sense of commitment towards their organization. Furthermore, he should empower all employees and give them confidence to achieve stated goals. Even in the economic problems, employers need to

express satisfaction when desired level of performance are achieved and reward all performers equitably to keep the employees motivated to perform better, otherwise if rewards are not provided, it would lead to the consequence of less rendering of services in future by the employees (Abendroth, 2011).

Employers should not be partial towards a particular set of employees and must be vigilant and responsible. They should avoid biasness in assigning key tasks to their teams otherwise it may develop resentment in other employees. Proper decision making would lead to effective utilization of the work contributions.

Conclusively, by adopting these methodologies, employers could facilitate work- life balance during an economic downturn.

## CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, now-a-days, in the organizations, the hours and times people work is changing and this rapid change requires flexibility to be imbibed in the working environment to suffice the requirements such as customers' expectations to have goods and services available outside traditional working hours, organizations' expectations to match their business needs with the way their employees work, individuals' expectations to achieve a better balance between work and home life. But simultaneously, there are various negative impacts of flexible working methodology also as every coin have two sides. For regulation of these negative consequences, proper management and framework should be there. Employers and employees should work in accordance to the organization's goals and also their personal lives should not be at stake such as proper work-life balance is ensured (Skinner, 2011).

If work-life balance is there and also, all the responsibilities are taken proper care, then there is win-win situation for both- the employees and the employers. Also, in situations such as economic downturn, proper judicious utilization of human resources must be done such as there is little or no grievances in the workforce and also, the work could be done in an effective and efficient way.

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