

WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN RELATION TO TASK VARIETY AND TASK AUTONOMY: A STUDY OF BANK EMPLOYEES

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Abstract Work-life balance enables the employees to enjoy an optimal quality of life by integrating work and non-work in such a way that responsibilities and interests in both the spheres are met effectively. People with high work-life balance have been found to be more satisfied with their jobs and overall life. The objectives of the present research were to study the relationship between work-life balance, task variety and task autonomy, and compare the work-life balance of bank employees with varied levels of task variety and task autonomy. The sample comprised of 146 employees randomly selected from two private and two public sector banks in Chandigarh and periphery. Significant correlations were found between work-life balance and task variety and task autonomy. The employees with high task variety showed lesser interference of work with personal life, lesser personal life interference with work and higher overall work-life balance than the employees with low or average task variety. The employees with high task autonomy also showed higher work-life balance.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, there has been a substantial increase in the work demands which may be attributed to the highly competitive work environment and rapid advancement in the information technology. The employees have no option but to put in longer hours of work in order to meet the increasing expectations of the organisations. Advancement in technology has blurred the line between office and home, and with a laptop, employee is on call at the virtual office 24 hours a day (Thane, 2002). As a result, the time available for the family and other life activities is shrinking and employees are finding it difficult to simultaneously meet the demands of work, family and other spheres of life. Research shows that this imbalance is leading employees getting stressed and reporting many health problems like insomnia, high blood pressure, digestive disorders etc. The organisations, too, are facing the problems like, high absenteeism, low productivity, and high turnover. Hence it is in the interest of both the employees as well as organisations that the employees have “Work-Life Balance”. Kofodimos (1993) defined work-life balance as ‘a satisfying, healthy and productive life that includes work, play and love; that integrates range of life activities with attention to self and to personal and spiritual development; and that expresses a person’s unique wishes, interests and values. It contrasts with the imbalance of life dominated by work, focused on satisfying external requirements at the expense of inner development and in conflict with person’s true desires’. Clark(2000) defines work-life balance as “the satisfaction

and good functioning at both work and home with minimal role conflict”.

Work-life balance was initially conceived in terms of work-family conflict (Kahn *et al.*, 1964), work-family enhancement/facilitation (Grzywacz and Marks, 2000), or work-family balance (Kirchmeyer, 2000). Kahn *et al.*, (1964) defined role conflict as the “simultaneous occurrence of two (or more) sets of pressures such that compliance with one would make more difficult compliance with the other”. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), based on the work of Kahn *et al.* (1964), defined work-family conflict as: “a form of inter role conflict in which the role pressures from work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect. That is, participation in the work (family) role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (work) role.” Conflict between work and family has been found to be bi-directional (Frone *et al.*, 1992; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Most researchers make the distinction between work-family conflict, and family-work conflict. Work-to-family conflict occurs when experiences at work (e.g. inflexible work hours, work overload and other forms of job stress, frequent travel, unsupportive supervisor or organisation) interfere with family life. Family-to-work conflict occurs when experiences in the family (e.g. presence of young children, primary responsibility for children, elders’ care responsibilities, unsupportive family members) interfere with work life (Wikipedia, 2010). However, it has been seen that work and family may not always conflict and can also benefit each other, and that work-family conflict is distinct from positive spillover or work-family enhancement (Grzywacz and Marks, 2000).

Work-family balance has been defined as “the extent to which individuals are equally engaged in and equally satisfied with work and family roles” (Clark, 2000; Kirchmeyer, 2000). Work-family balance refers to the degree to which an individual is able to simultaneously balance the temporal demands of both paid work and family responsibilities, whereas work-family conflict represents incompatibilities between work and family responsibilities because of limited resources like time and energy (Gröpel, 2005).

In the recent years, it has been realised that life involves multiple domains and is not restricted to the domains of work and family only. This includes domains of work, leisure, family, friendships and social participation. A broad term thus emerged in literature to refer to work/non-work conflict and it is “Work-Life Balance”.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Fisher (2001), work-life balance comprises of four components. The first component is time, i.e., how much time is spent at work compared to how much time is spent engaged in other activities. The second component is related to behaviour, such as, work goal accomplishment, as work-life balance is based on ones’ belief that he/she is able to accomplish what he/she would like at work and in his personal life. Two additional issues or components are strain and energy. Guest (2002) gave a model outlining the causes, nature and consequences of a work-life balance and cited recent research to illustrate the various dimensions. According to the model, the determinants of work-life balance are located in the work and home contexts. Contextual determinants include demands of work, culture of work, demands of home and culture of home. Individual determinants include work orientation (i.e. the extent to which work (home) is a central life interest), personality, energy, personal control and coping, gender and age, life and career stage. According to Duxbury (2004), work-life balance involves three things: role overload, work to family interference and family to work interference. Role overload arises when a person is expected to accomplish more than what he is able to do in a particular time frame. Thus, it leads to the feeling of stress, fatigue and time crunch. Work to family interference occurs when work demands and responsibilities make it more difficult for an employee to fulfill family role responsibilities. Family to work interference occurs when family demands and responsibilities make it more difficult for an employee to fulfill work role responsibilities. Sandhu and Mehta (2006) studied a sample of 271 women executives from Punjab, and found that gender role attitude and spillover between work and family roles were the most important factors affecting their careers. It was also found that nature of organisation had a significant impact on work family conflict. Reddy *et al.* (2010) found that workplace characteristics like, number of

hours worked per week, amount and frequency of overtime, inflexible work schedule, unsupportive supervisor and inhospitable organisational culture increase the likelihood of experiencing work family conflict.

The task autonomy and task variety, are two job characteristics or work domain variables which have been found to impact the work-life balance. Task autonomy refers to the freedom an employee has to decide how to do the job. Job autonomy is a resource for the employees which may help in creating some flexibility to enable the employees to participate in the non work domain. More control over the work also may help the employees to cope with the stress created by various job demands. Task variety refers to the extent to which different skills are required to perform the job. A job with high variety usually provides an opportunity to employee to exercise his various skills and also protects the employee from stress due to monotonous work. Aryee (1992) found that task characteristics explained the most variance in job-parent conflict. Task autonomy was found to be a negative and significant predictor of all three types of conflict (job-spouse, job-parent and job-homemaker). Task variety was however found to be positively and significantly related to job-parent and job-homemaker conflicts. Voydanoff (2004) considered task autonomy to be a work resource, and found it to be positively related to work to family facilitation and negatively related to work to family conflict. Butler *et al.* (2005) found that higher levels of daily control at work were associated with decrease in daily level of work family conflict. Further, higher daily control and higher skill level at work were found to be associated with increase in daily levels of work family facilitation. Wesley and Muthuswamy (2005) examined the bidirectional construct of work-family conflict in the Indian context and found work-family conflict to be more prevalent than family-work conflict, thus indicating higher spillover of work to family. The study indicated that due to lack of autonomy, employees are unable to spend more time in the family, thus resulting in stronger work family conflict.

Thompson and Prottas (2006) used the data from US National Study of Changing Workforce (2002) to study the organisational factors which influence employees’ ability to balance work and family life. The results showed that employees with high level of job autonomy were more satisfied with job, family and life, experienced more positive spillover between job and home and experienced less work family conflict. Innstrand (2009) found that increasing autonomy in the job is likely to increase facilitation and reduce conflict between the two life domains. Sharma and Mehta (2010) studied the work-life balance issues with reference to sales managers in pharmaceutical sector and found that work life imbalance led to high rate of employee turnover. The investigation showed that pharmaceutical companies which had relaxed working environment, flexibility and autonomy in sales department, had most stable employees and fairly good financial yields. Ramana and Babu (2013) in a study

of 75 managers of select pharmaceutical companies, found that freedom of implementation of ideas and enrichment of job are positive drivers for work life balance. Bhargva and Baral(2009) conducted a study using a sample of 245 employees from manufacturing and information technology sector in India and found that job characteristics (autonomy, skill variety, task identity, task significance) were positively related to work- to- family enrichment.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the research were to:

- study the relationship between work-life balance, task variety and task autonomy.
- study the differences in the work-life balance of bank employees at varied levels of task variety and task autonomy.

SAMPLE

The sample consisted of randomly selected 146 employees from two private and two public sector banks in Chandigarh, Panchkula and Mohali.

TOOLS USED

Work-life balance was measured using a 15 item scale (Hayman,2005), measuring three dimensions of work-life balance, namely, work interference with personal

life(WIPL), personal life interference with work (PLIW), work/personal life enhancement (WPLE).Reliability for the scale, estimated using Cronbach alpha coefficient was .93 for WIPL, .85 for PLIW and .69 for WPLE. The respondents were asked to indicate the frequency with which they felt in a particular way during the past three months, using a seven point time related scale (e.g. 1=Not at all, 4=Sometimes and 7=All the time).Task variety was measured using a six item, Variety in Your Work Scale: Dutch Questionnaire on the Experience and Assessment of Work (VBBA; Van Valdhoven and Meijman, 1994). The alpha reliability coefficient for the scale was .77.Task autonomy was measured using an eleven item, Independence in Your Work Scale: Dutch Questionnaire on the Experience and Assessment of Work (VBBA; Van Veldhoven and Meijman, 1994). The alpha coefficient for the scale was .86.

PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

The demographic profile of the respondents was as follows:

64% of the respondents were males and 36% were females. The age of the respondents ranged between 19-58 years. About 57.5% of the respondents were married.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for work-life balance, its dimensions and the variables of task variety and task autonomy.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for work-life balance and its dimensions, task variety,task autonomy

Statistics	WIPL (N=146)	PLIW (N=146)	WPLE (N=146)	WLB Total (N=146)	Task Variety (N=146)	Task Autonomy (N=146)
Mean	32.45	21.25	18.90	72.61	13.56	28.25
Median	33.00	21.00	19.00	73.50	14.00	29.00
Std. Deviation	6.45	3.73	5.39	11.06	3.89	8.32
Minimum	15	12	4	46	3	8
Maximum	46	28	28	100	22	44

Significant correlations (Table 2) were found between work-life balance, task variety and task autonomy. WIPL was found to be significantly correlated with task variety. PLIW was found to be significantly correlated with both task variety and task autonomy. The results indicate that if employees have varied tasks to perform and are able to use variety of their skills, they might not feel the work to be burdensome

and interfering in their personal life. Similarly, when task autonomy is there, employees have freedom to decide how the work is to be done, have control over their work and thus are able to adjust and attend to family responsibilities in case of need and hence they may not feel that personal life is interfering with work . Thus the presence of task variety and autonomy leads to a better work-life balance.

Table 2: Correlations among work-life balance, task variety and task autonomy

	WIPL	PLIW	WPLE	WLB TOTAL	TV TOTAL	TA Total
WIPL ¹	1					
PLIW ¹	.298(**)	1				
WPLE	.345(**)	-.015	1			
WLB TOTAL	.852(**)	.503(**)	.684(**)	1		
TV TOTAL	.217(**)	.234(**)	.261(**)	.333(**)	1	
TA Total	.128	.220(**)	.063	.179(*)	.467(**)	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
 *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
¹ Higher score means lesser interference.

Work-life balance of bank employees at varied levels of task variety

As is evident from Table3, F values were found to be significant at all the dimensions of work-life balance, namely, WIPL (F = 6.63, p= .01), PLIW (F=6.33,p=.01),WPLE (F=3.66,p=.05) and on WLB Total (F=8.66,p=.01).The results indicate that there were significant differences among the employees with low, average and high task variety, on overall work-life balance and its three dimensions.

Table3: Work life balance of bank employees at varied levels of task variety

Work-Life Balance	Sources of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
WIPL	Between Groups	511.60	2	255.80	6.63**
	Within Groups	5514.57	143	38.56	
	Total	6026.16	145		
PLIW	Between Groups	163.87	2	81.93	6.33**
	Within Groups	1851.76	143	12.95	
	Total	2015.62	145		
WPLE	Between Groups	205.59	2	102.79	3.66*
	Within Groups	4013.07	143	28.06	
	Total	4218.66	145		
WLB TOTAL	Between Groups	1914.94	2	957.47	8.66**
	Within Groups	15811.81	143	110.57	
	Total	17726.75	145		

*p=.05, **p=.01

The t test (Table 4) further shows that there were significant differences in the mean scores of employees with low and high task variety, on the dimensions of WIPL($M_L = 30.63$, $M_H = 35.40$, $t = 3.18$, $p = .01$), PLIW ($M_L = 20.90$, $M_H = 22.95$, $t = 2.40$, $p = .05$), WPLE ($M_L = 16.98$, $M_H = 19.73$, $t = 2.19$, $p = .05$) and on WLB Total($M_L = 68.50$, $M_H = 78.08$, $t = 3.81$, $p = .01$).

Significant differences in the mean scores were found between the employees with average and high task variety

on the dimensions of WIPL($M_A = 31.77$, $M_H = 35.40$, $t = 3.27$, $p = .01$), PLIW ($M_A = 20.44$, $M_H = 22.95$, $t = 3.45$, $p = .01$) and on overall work-life balance ($M_A = 71.79$, $M_H = 78.08$, $t = 3.22$, $p = .01$). The employees with low and average task variety showed significant differences on the dimension of WPLE ($M_L = 16.98$, $M_A = 19.58$, $t = 2.43$, $p = .05$).

The results show that employees with high task variety, i.e., the employees who perform non-repetitive work involving varied skills tend to have lesser interference of work with personal life and lesser interference of personal life with work. Their work and personal life complement each other and hence such employees have a better work-life balance as compared to employees with low or average task variety.

Table 4: Significance of differences among mean scores on work-life balance of bank employees at varied levels of task variety

Work-Life Balance	TV	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Group differences	t-ratios
WIPL	Low	40	30.63	7.74	Low-average	.89
	Average	66	31.77	5.56	Low-high	3.18**
	High	40	35.40	5.49	Average-high	3.27**
	Total	146	32.45	6.45		
PLIW	Low	40	20.90	3.52	Low-average	.68
	Average	66	20.44	3.32	Low-high	2.40*
	High	40	22.95	4.09	Average-high	3.45**
	Total	146	21.25	3.73		
WPLE	Low	40	16.98	6.02	Low-average	2.43*
	Average	66	19.58	4.90	Low-high	2.19*
	High	40	19.73	5.16	Average-high	.15
	Total	146	18.90	5.39		
WLB Total	Low	40	68.50	12.33	Low-average	1.54
	Average	66	71.79	9.56	Low-high	3.81**
	High	40	78.08	10.05	Average-high	3.22**
	Total	146	72.61	11.06		

*p=.05, **p=.01

Work-life balance of bank employees at varied levels of task autonomy

Table 5 shows that there were significant differences among the bank employees at varied levels of task autonomy on the dimension of WIPL ($F=8.48$, $p=.05$) and on WLB Total ($F=8.78$, $p=.01$).

Table 5: Work-life balance of bank employees at varied levels of task autonomy

Work-Life Balance	Sources of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
WIPL	Between Groups	638.93	2	319.47	8.48**
	Within Groups	5387.23	143	37.67	
	Total	6026.16	145		
PLIW	Between Groups	78.05	2	39.02	2.88
	Within Groups	1937.58	143	13.55	
	Total	2015.62	145		
WPLE	Between Groups	126.84	2	63.42	2.22
	Within Groups	4091.81	143	28.61	
	Total	4218.66	145		
WLB TOTAL	Between Groups	1938.85	2	969.43	8.78**
	Within Groups	15787.90	143	110.41	
	Total	17726.75	145		

* $p=.05$, ** $p=.01$

Table 6 : Significance of differences among mean scores on Work-life balance of bank employees at varied levels of task autonomy

Work-Life Balance	TA	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Group differences	t-ratios
WIPL	Low	40	32.40	6.69	Low-average	1.43
	Average	66	30.56	6.23	Low-high	2.38*
	High	40	35.63	5.36	Average-high	4.27**
	Total	146	32.45	6.45		
PLIW	Low	40	20.53	3.92	Low-average	NA
	Average	66	21.00	3.39	Low-high	NA
	High	40	22.40	3.90	Average-high	NA
	Total	146	21.25	3.73		
WPLE	Low	40	18.58	5.79	Low-average	NA
	Average	66	18.20	4.94	Low-high	NA
	High	40	20.40	5.54	Average-high	NA
	Total	146	18.90	5.39		
WLB Total	Low	40	71.50	11.15	Low-average	.81
	Average	66	69.76	10.53	Low-high	2.95**
	High	40	78.43	9.79	Average-high	4.22**
	Total	146	72.61	11.06		

* $p=.05$, ** $p=.01$

Further, t-ratios were calculated to find out the significance of differences between means (Table 6). Significant differences were found between employees with low and high task autonomy on the dimension of WIPL ($M_L=321.40$, $M_H=35.63$, $t=2.38$, $p=.05$) and on WLB Total ($M_L=71.50$, $M_H=78.43$, $t=2.95$, $p=.01$).

Similarly, employees with average and high task autonomy also showed significant differences on the dimension of WIPL ($M_A=30.56$, $M_H=35.63$, $t=4.27$, $p=.01$) and on WLB Total ($M_A=69.76$, $M_H=78.43$, $t=4.22$, $p=.01$). The employees with high task autonomy were found to have higher mean scores on the dimension of WIPL and on WLB Total than the employees with low and average task autonomy. The results imply that the employees who have freedom to plan and execute their work tend to have lesser interference of work with personal life and high overall work life balance as compared to those who enjoy less autonomy.

CONCLUSION

Since work and home interface is permeable and experiences in one sphere affect the other, with both positive and negative experiences crossing the borders, it is extremely important for the organisations to realize the importance of work-life balance and provide employees with resources that may help them in achieving this balance. From the results, as discussed, it can be concluded that provision of greater autonomy to the employees can go a long way to enhance their work life balance and minimize the work interference in personal life. Again, greater task variety should be provided through assigning non routine and non repetitive task, job rotation or job enlargement, as well as involving the employees in creative problem solving, so that they enjoy an optimal quality of life with a good work-life balance and ability to take up and manage responsibilities at work and outside.

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