

Work Life Balance, Employee Engagement, Emotional Consonance/Dissonance & Turnover Intention

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This paper reviews the literature in the domain of Work-Life Balance. It accentuates the importance of broadening the current narrow focus which looks at balance, primarily between “work” and “family”. The paper proposes a conceptual model to be tested empirically. The construction of a robust scale for measurement of Work-Life Balance is emphasized. The proposed model focuses on the correlates of Work-Life Balance construct and its relationship with other variables such as employee engagement, emotional consonance/dissonance and turnover intention. Theoretical and practical implications of research in this domain are discussed with a focus on areas for future research.

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Work-Life Balance- Who is it for?

Work-Life balance is at the core of issues central to human resource development (HRD). Grzywacz and Carlson (2008) provide evidence to the effect that, implicitly or explicitly, work-family balance is at the core of HRD's major functions and that it may be a powerful leverage point for promoting individual and organizational effectiveness.

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Work-Life Balance (WLB) has been an issue of concern for the last few decades. The current context of globalization and the changing nature of work have provided the impetus for this topic. The current work scenario is marked by the fast pace of change, intense pressure, constant deadlines, changing demographics, increased use of technology and the co-existing virtual workplace. Juxtaposed with this, the

increase in average income and rise in living standards have individuals striving for better work atmosphere, improved family and personal life. Today is the time when employees want it all. It is not restricted to one domain of work or life but rather a rich synthesis of the two. "Generations X and Y are keeping the pressure on companies to devise flexible, innovative options that give high-performing employees more choice and control in managing the competing demands of work and family" (Klun 2008).

WLB metaphor is a social construct located within a particular period of time and originating in the western context. Research in this domain emerged at a time when the number of women entering the labor market grew and resulted in a focus on working mothers and dual earner families. Also, the stress and burnout associated with workplace changes in the 1980s and 1990s reflected debate around "work family conflict" (Lewis, Gambles & Rapaport 2007). A shift from "work family" and "family friendly" policies with their implicit focus on women, especially mothers, to "work life", the precursor of the more recent WLB discourse began in the 1990s (Lewis et al 2007). Nevertheless, much of the research in this domain still focuses on work and family.

Other terms that are used to refer to this domain include work-family balance, work-family conflict, work-family integration, and family friendly policies. All of these terms make the concept restrictive by their focus on only

women with families. Focus on single individuals and those without caring responsibilities (of children or elders) though present is extremely limited. Ransome (2007) introduced what he called "total responsibility burden" which includes "recreational labor". This acknowledges, the fact, that individuals need to express and satisfy their need for enjoyment and leisure. On the converse, outside formal, paid employment, there is unpaid work, like caring responsibilities, cooking, cleaning, etc. and leisure time is just a fantasy (Collins 2007).

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WLB is a much broader concept requiring attention not just of married, with children couples or working mothers but of working individuals at large, whether or not they are married, and whether or not they have family obligations. Intensification of work and technology that blurs the boundary between work and the rest of life provides challenges for one and all. Competitive and customer pressures have forced companies to rationalise and restructure, and as a consequence less people have to do more work (Poelmans, Kalliath & Brough 2008). WLB should not only mean a balance between work and family but between work and the rest of life activities. By relating WLB to career stage, Sturges (2008) includes

younger professionals without family responsibilities into the domain. It is an all encompassing issue that is pertinent for anyone requiring personal space. Seen this way, this concept has relevance to a larger audience. The narrow conceptualization of WLB portrays the individual as being torn between the demands of work and family. It loses touch with the very essence of being human. Human life is not just about necessity but also about choices and by acknowledging that individuals need to pursue their own desires and satisfy their needs, a subjective character of WLB is introduced which has its own intrinsic utility.

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According to Guest (2002), WLB has relevance for all individuals. He has delineated the domains of work and, as he calls it, “the rest of life”. Thus, the concept no longer remains in the purview of only the working individuals with families. The impetus for research on WLB has been stimulated by the arrival of Generation X, a cohort of workers who give greater priority to seeking balance between work and the rest of life (Guest 2002).

Definition of Work-Life Balance

“Work” and “Life” have fuzzy definitions in literature (Guest 2002) where work is paid employment and life is ev-

erything outside of the formal employment but is usually used to connote the realm of family or home life. The concept is ambiguous and is seen to derive from sexual/gender division of labor and this renders WLB its narrow focus (Ransome 2007). Kossek and Ozeki (1998) highlighted that WLB is equally important for both men and women, and that men are equally burdened by the work and family responsibilities. His conceptualization still remains narrow in that though the earlier rhetoric of WLB for working mothers has been criticized, it still remains in the purview of work and family.

Further, we need to understand what do we imply by “balance”? Is it an equal distribution of work and the rest of life? Is it possible to ensure that at all times there is an equal distribution? If it is, in what terms is the distribution? Is it a distribution of time, energy, emotions? According to Guest (2002), the term Work-Life Balance is in itself a misnomer. Given the fluid nature of needs and responsibilities and their changing nature at different life stages, the division of activity will neither be easy to measure nor equal, and therefore notions of negotiation, cooperation and compromise, reciprocity and complementarity might be better terms than balance (Ransome 2007). In speaking of a concept of WLB there seems to be an assumption that the scale of balance is tilting more towards the work sphere (that work predominates) and hence the need for a balance with life.

Is WLB a concept that can be objectively defined in terms of number of hours spent at work and with family or is it a felt state, an experience? If it is the latter, how stable is it? Does the feeling of there being a balance or not change dynamically day to day or is it more consistent? Does each individual not define his or her own optimum balance? A person can perfectly experience 'work-family balance', even though work 'weighs more' than family, and in a consistent way in the course of a whole lifetime. Each person experiences balance in a different way (Poelmans et al 2008, Muna & Mansour 2009). Moreover, one can have work-life conflict and yet still have WLB depending on how Work-Life Balance is defined (Poelmans et al 2008). The feeling of whether there is a balance or not is perceived by the individual. It may not be there in objective terms, if one is to consider the number of hours one is working or the involvement/preoccupation with work even when one is at home. Still, the individual may experience a WLB. Thus, it becomes that particular individual's perception or experience of a balance. Nobody else can define the balance for him/her.

Work family conflict is an intermediate state in a continuous process of creating harmony between work, family and personal life.

The importance given to work and family in one's life seems to be a crucial determinant of the experience of WLB. Work family conflict is an inter-

mediate state in a continuous process of creating harmony between work, family and personal life (Poelmans et al 2008). People strive for meaning and are then willing and capable of tolerating prolonged periods of imbalance and disharmony. Does this not mean that if people find meaning and fulfilment in their work, WLB takes a backseat and no longer remains a pertinent issue? In this sense then, centrality of work or of the rest of life will determine how one perceives one's WLB and where the scale will tilt.

Work Family Conflict & Work Family Enrichment

Further we find that the domains of "work" and of "life" seem to have a bearing on one another. Only recently has this view been expanded to include the positive spillover as well, which is called work family facilitation (Grzywacz et al 2007) or enrichment (Greenhaus & Powell 2006). Further, Friedman and Greenhaus (2000) focus on the conflict-enrichment dimension of family and work life. Conflict shows the incompatibility between the two whereas enrichment reflects the compatibility between them. The major finding of this research may be summarized as below:

Work-family conflict is an obstacle to achieving effectiveness and satisfaction in important life roles.

- i) Work-family conflict represents the extent to which work and family roles are incompatible and interfere

- with one another (Greenhaus & Beutell 1985).
- ii) There are two directions of work-family conflict: work-to-family conflict, in which work interferes with family life, and family-to-work conflict, in which family interferes with work life.
 - iii) Work-family conflict is an obstacle because when work interferes with family, satisfaction or effectiveness in family life is restricted, and when family interferes with work, satisfaction or effectiveness at work is restricted.
 - iv) Therefore, a work-family conflict perspective views work and family as “enemies” (Friedman & Greenhaus 2000).
- When it concerns Work family Enrichment, their findings were as under:
- i) Work-family conflict is an obstacle to achieving effectiveness and satisfaction in important life roles.
 - ii) Conversely, work-family enrichment facilitates the achievement of effectiveness and satisfaction in important life roles.
 - iii) Work-family enrichment refers to the extent to which experiences in one role improve effectiveness and positive feelings in the other role.
 - iv) There are two directions of work-family enrichment: work-to-family enrichment, in which work enriches family life, and family-to-work enrichment, in which family enriches work life.
 - v) Work-family enrichment is a facilitator because when work enriches family, satisfaction or effectiveness in family life is enhanced, and when family enriches work, satisfaction or effectiveness at work is enhanced.
 - vi) A work-family enrichment perspective views work and family as “allies” rather than “enemies.”
- In a similar vein, a meta analytic review done by Byron (2005) focused on work family conflict as seen in work interference with family (WIF) and family interference with work (FIW). It was found that those with high job involvement tended to have higher WIF than FIW whereas those high on family involvement tended to have the same FIW (and WIF) than those who were low on family involvement. Does this not point to the stronger role work plays in causing a detrimental effect on family? In another review of work family research between 1980 and 2002 it was found that there was an unfavorable relationship between work and family variables. Gender differences in the antecedents of WFC have also been reported unlike in the review done by Byron.
- Responsibility of the Organization or the Individual?**
- In the WLB discourse there are two overlapping yet distinct threads. One focuses on human agency and is at the individual level whereas the other focuses on what measures of workplace flexibility are provided by the organization. The critical question is whether WLB is

for the individual to achieve and maintain or is it the responsibility of the employer? In the former discourse, research has looked into WLB as a personal choice. In addition, values, worker type, role demand and conflict are some of the elements this domain has emphasized. In the second discourse, research has focused on the family friendly policies offered by organizations including flexible work arrangements. Recently it has been acknowledged and research has looked into the individual differences in the use of flexible work arrangements. Support from spouse at home and boss at the workplace have also been found important in achieving a WLB. Work Life Imbalance and its consequences on employee health, the home and workplace has also found place in the research in this domain.

The 10 best organizations, which Fortune (2009) quote, are the ones, where employees feel encouraged to balance their work and personal life.

In Fortune's 100 best companies to work for, each company was ranked on the basis of what it did towards "Work-Life Balance" of its employees. Three aspects within work life were surveyed; job sharing, compressed work week and telecommuting. The 10 best organizations, which Fortune (2009) quote, are the ones, where employees feel "encouraged to balance their work and personal life". The list of Fortune 500 companies with work life balance interventions are provided below :(<http://money.cnn.com/>

[magazines/fortune/bestcompanies/2009/benefits/work_life.html](http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/bestcompanies/2009/benefits/work_life.html))

1. SAS
2. Johnson Financial Group
3. Recreational Equipment
4. MITRE (Non-Profit-Research Arm, US, Govt)
5. Shared Technologies
6. Nugget Market
7. Wegman's Food Markets
8. Edward Jones
9. Campden Property Trust
10. Mattel

Mattel, for example, provides 13 paid holidays, two paid days to volunteer in schools, two onsite child-care centers, five paid days of parental leave (for new mothers and fathers), adoption assistance, half-days on Fridays all year long, and onsite toy stores that offer discounts, to their employees. Wegmans Food Markets rolls out free yoga classes at each of its stores.

Another case in point, is that of Accenture as detailed by Klun (2008). Accenture's own internal polling reveals that for a sizeable majority (83 percent) of its employees across all generations, the ability to manage worklife issues will impact their commitment to stay with the company. In a survey done internally, it was found that equally between genders, 32 percent have turned down a role in the past two years or considered leaving

because of WLB concerns. Accenture has developed an array of work-life initiatives to give employees the time and flexibility important to them. As Klun outlines, these initiatives include flexible work arrangements and programs such as:

- “Back-Up Dependent Care”, which makes in-home or center-based care available for any dependent when regular care arrangements break down.
- “Lifeworks”, a free and confidential resource that provides information on a broad range of topics—from online health coaching to ergonomics assessments—as well as access to experts in many areas, including legal and financial.
- “Future Leave” is among the most successful programs, “one that has given Gen X and Y employees and baby boomers alike the flexibility to address the personal and family issues they face at their particular stage of life while preserving promising or well-established careers”. It is a self-funded sabbatical of one to three months for any activity employees believe would enrich their lives, their families, or their communities. This program is now available for all US employees below the senior executive level who have been with the company for at least three years. The permanent program allows employees to take Future Leave every three years. On an average, 50 employees each quarter are away from their jobs on Future Leave sab-

baticals. Thus, Future Leave is one endeavour that provides employees with the flexibility to address various generational work-life issues and enables Accenture to retain the high performers.

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Deloitte, Cisco Systems, Juniper Networks and Accenture have the highest percentage of regular tele-commuters, those who work at home at least 20% of the time (<http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/bestcompanies/2009/benefits/telecommuting.html>). The percentage of regular telecommuters for Deloitte is 90, for Cisco Systems is 85, for Juniper Networks is 75 and for Accenture is 67.

Individual & Organizational Outcomes

Research by Parasuraman and Greenhaus (2002) documented that the segments of the workforce may be subject to unique work/family pressures, yet often have few sources of support. The under-representation of these groups of individuals with potentially difficult types of work/family pressures represents a major gap in work/family research and employers' understanding of their needs. Typically, studies have focused on employed men and women who

are married or living with a partner or those with children.

- From the employer and employee viewpoint, the changing nature of what constitutes family is one of the complications of today's society.
- As human resource professionals design policies and programs to address employee retention, job satisfaction, employee morale, and productivity, this research warrants serious consideration.

In the 2005 National Work/Life Benchmarking Study in US (Society for Human Resource Management 2006), it was found that:

- An average of 37% of staff in organisations responding to the study is using some form of flexible work option.
- 17% of organisations say they have seen an increase in turnover related to the lack of flexibility in the workplace.
- 70% say that their future priority is to provide guidelines for leaders to ensure decisions regarding each employee's access to work/life policies and programs are made fairly and equitable.

The most consistent turnover predictors in research have been job satisfaction (Mobley 1977, Price 1977, Spector 1977), organizational commitment (Huselid & Day 1991, Meyer & Allen

1991, Mowday, Porter & Steers 1982) and turnover intention (Griffeth, Hom & Gaertner 2000, Steel 2002, Tett & Meyer 1993). More recently researchers have investigated the impact of family life on work related behaviour, specifically turnover (Eby et al 2005, Greenhaus & Powell 2003). Yet little research has been conducted on impact of work life on the turnover process (Greenhaus et al 1997). Further Emotional Dissonance has been studied in the Indian context by Mishra and Bhatnagar (2009), but as a moderator to life and work satisfaction and its linkage with employee engagement and turnover intention it has not been investigated.

Earlier research has found WLB to be positively related to both organizational and individual outcomes such as giving the employees flexibility, information, and financial assistance can improve the organization's financial performance and raise employee satisfaction and labor productivity (Perry-Smith & Blum 2000, Konrad & Mangel 2000), employee-organizational commitment and attachment (Wang & Walumbwa 2007) and organizational citizenship behavior (Lambert 2000 cited in Wang & Verma 2009). Many employers continue to strive to create better WLB in order to:

- Increase employee commitment and engagement
- Improve retention
- Improve mental health and productivity (Gallinsky 2005).

Further, WLB is also expected to have a positive impact on employee engagement. Employee engagement, in fact, can make or break the business bottom line (Lockwood 2006). Martel (2003:30, 42) is of the opinion that, in order to obtain high performance in post-industrial, intangible work that demands innovation, flexibility, and speed, employers need to engage their employees. Engaging employees—especially by giving them participation, freedom, and trust—is the most comprehensive response to the ascendant post-industrial values of self-realization and self-actualization. Performance data of the best companies in the US, show that in all the practice areas discussed previously, objectives are more easily met when employees are engaged and more likely to fall short when they are not. SHRM Conference (2006) reported the result of a new global employee engagement study showing a dramatic difference in bottom-line results in organizations with highly engaged employees when compared to organizations whose employees had low engagement scores (Bhatnagar 2007: 645). Yet little research has been done on Employee Engagement as an outcome of WLB at the individual level.

Further, Rajyadaksha and Smita in 2004 indicated that, in the Indian context, there are very few research studies examining work and family from an organizational perspective. No attempt has been made to answer the question, why in spite of three decades of research on women's studies and working women have Indian organizations not evolved

family friendly measures for employees? Clearly to arrive at the answer will require more cross-disciplinary and perhaps even action research on work and family (Rajadhyaksha & Smita 2004). Also, as Delcampo and Hinrichs (2006) describe, national differences in orientations to self and family could be major differences that affect work-family relationships. They state that overwork is likely to be perceived as sacrificing family for one's own career in the US, but as sacrificing self for the family in China. Thus the experience of WLB can vary for individuals in different cultures.

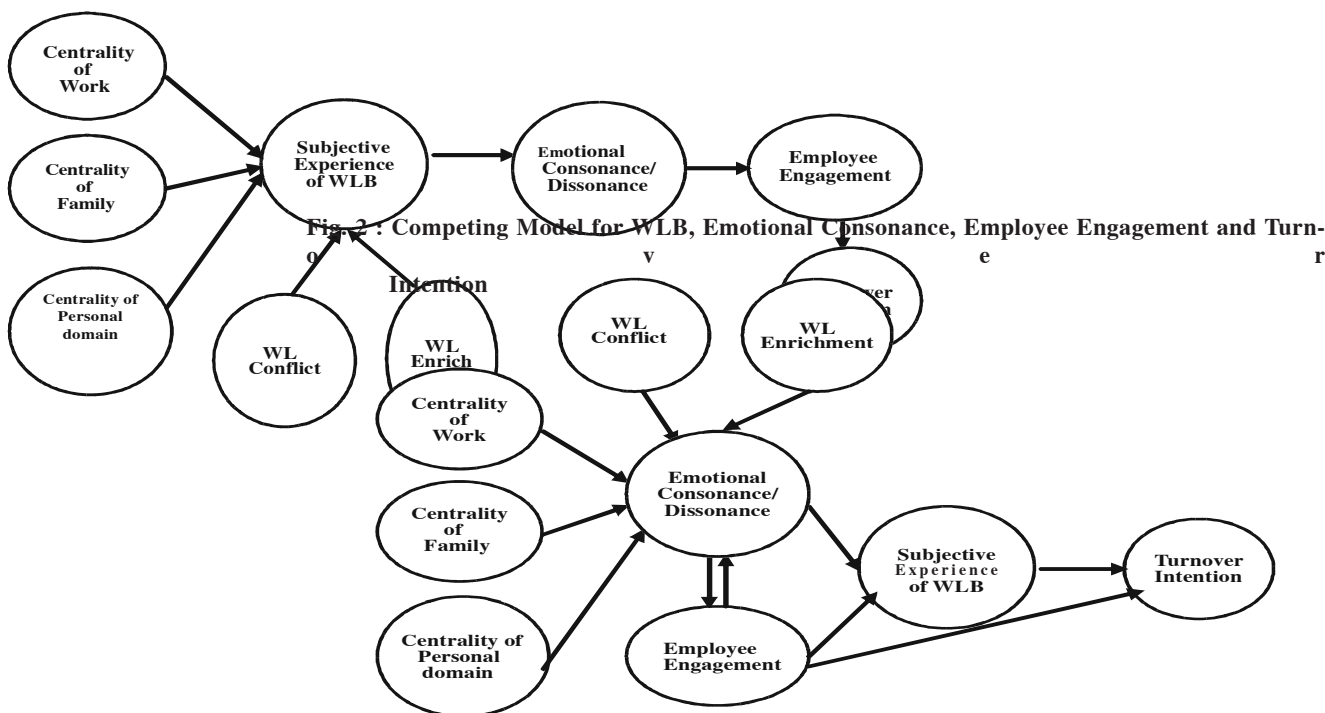
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Literature on WLB is vast, branching out in a number of themes. The definition of WLB lacks clarity; with some viewing it as a balance between work and family and others pressing for the domain of personal space to be included as well. Together, family and the aspect of personal space form the domain of "life". Blurring of the concept due to use of various terms like work family conflict, work family enrichment, work family integration, etc. needs to be dealt with as well. Who this issue is for, is another question that begs an answer. WLB studies have grown leaps and bounds in the last few years, yet currently there is no conceptually based scale for the measurement of work family balance directly (Grzywacz & Carlson 2007). A questionnaire to measure WLB (when seen as a balance between "work" and the

“rest of life”, including men and women, both single and married, with children and without) has now become critical. Role of one’s national culture in an experience of WLB may also be investigated. Looking at the gaps pointed out by literature, we propose the following model to be tested:

1. By developing a robust questionnaire on WLB, which would tie the various research strains found in the literature
2. To investigate the relationship between WLB, emotional consonance/dissonance, employee engagement and turnover intention of an individual (see figs. 1 & 2 for the proposed model).

Fig. 1: Model for WLB, Emotional Consonance, Employee Engagement and Turnover Intention



An individual will put effort in a domain depending on what is most central to him/her- his work, family or personal space. Thus, if work is central, the individual is likely to put more effort in this domain. How well that effort is rewarded in that particular domain and whether the reward is valued will determine whether there is a perceived WLB. That perception will in turn establish whether there is satisfaction with the overall life, including all three domains. So an individual may experience a WLB even when he spends long hours at work, is not able to devote enough time or energy to his family and has no time for himself. But because work holds a central place in his life, over and above the need to be with family, friends or indulge in recreational activities, and because he values the rewards he obtains from putting the effort in his work, he still experiences a WLB. In the same situation a person for whom family is most central, may experience work life imbalance. In other words, if an individual is happy with his work, there is a sense of WLB. Thus the study could entail testing the following propositions derived from the model above.

Proposition 1- Experience of WLB will have an impact of higher centrality of work value in an employee's life cycle.

Proposition 2- Experience of WL Imbalance will be impacted by high demands at work only when the centrality of family value is higher to an employee.

Proposition 3- Higher the need of the employee for personal space, family and work demands will lead to an experience of Work Life imbalance.

Proposition 4a) - Higher Work Life Balance leads to higher Employee Engagement mediated by emotional consonance.

Proposition 4b)- Emotional consonance leads to lower intention to quit mediated by Work Life Balance.

Proposition 5- High WLB will lead to High Employee Engagement, and low intention to quit.

Proposition 6- Higher the emotional consonance, higher is the Work Life Balance mediated by Employee Engagement.

Implications for Research

The model needs to be tested through a questionnaire on WLB to be developed in an Indian context, which captures all the variables highlighted in the model. Further future study need to investigate whether, WLB construct has an impact on intention to quit/intention to stay within the organization? This line of investigation will provide much needed insight in to addressing attrition related issues. It would also have implications on designing interventions for making the workplace a great place to work for. This research would have practical implications for HR interventions. HR interventions addressing WLB would be a source of employer value proposition and may in the long

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run provide organizations with a competitive advantage in the employer branding domain. WLB in the employee life, as provided by employer may over a period of time lead to a specific employer becoming an employer of choice. Practical implications lie in the field of HRD, where the interventions may be designed to ensure work and life balance which may lead to higher employee engagement and thus lower intention to quit the firm.

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