

# Work Life Balance in The New Normal

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## **Introduction:**

In every challenge there is an opportunity... and Covid-19 is no exception. Instead of merely replicating office habits and practices in the home, we have a real opportunity to press pause, take the time to rethink work/life balance and design a healthier approach for a more energised and sustainable lifestyle. Up until now, personal and professional lives have been kept separate. Suddenly, work, home and life have collided under one roof! We must get better at having conversations around our priorities and availability – with ourselves, with our bosses/colleagues, and with our partner/family. Otherwise, assumptions and expectations about roles and responsibilities at work and home will cause resentment, stress/guilt and poor wellbeing

Between socializing, parenting, running errands, and working, the coronavirus has significantly altered the way we live our lives. For many people, the public health crisis has meant a sudden shift to remote work environments as officials stress the importance of social distancing. While there are certainly benefits to working from home, the transition can be difficult and finding balance within your life can become more complicated. If COVID-19 has left you feeling burnt out, overworked, and stressed, here are some ways you can manage your work-from-home environment to create a better work-life balance. what is work-life balance precisely? It is a term so frequently dropped into conversation that it can sound vague and open to interpretation. it means “feeling in control of how you balance the various demands of all aspects of life to enable wellbeing and avoid illness”. It should involve “happiness, fulfilment and job satisfaction”.

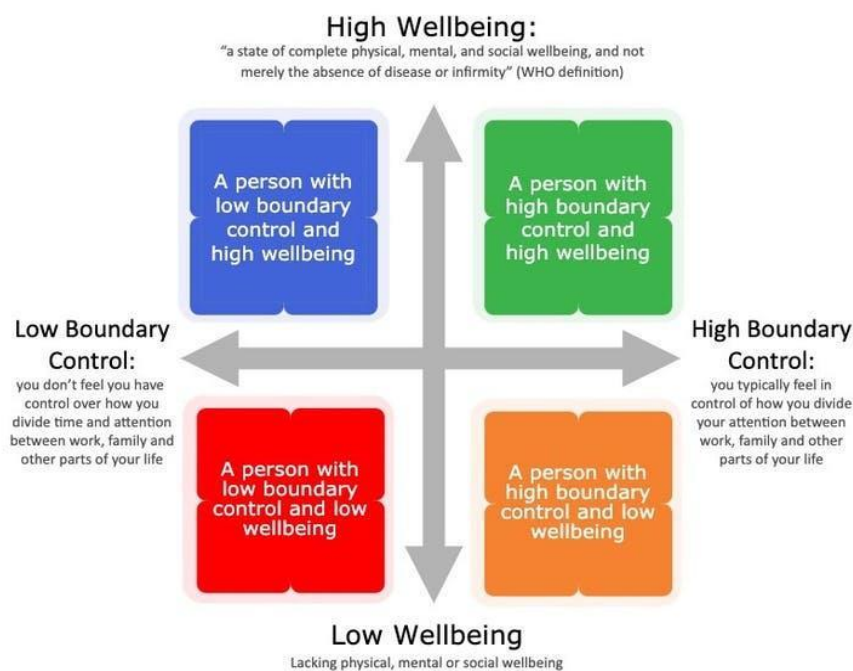
## **Work life balance:**

Work life balance (WLB) is an issue increasingly recognised as of strategic importance to organizations and of significance to employees. Organization’s need to attract and retain valued employees in a highly competitive labour market is a strong motivating factor for increased organizational awareness and action with regard to implementation and management of WLB strategies. These article reports explore the range and usage of WLB strategies in organizations, and identify the barriers to those strategies. It is evident that, while some progress has been made over

the years, there remain substantial challenges for the implementation and management of WLB strategies. It is an important area of human resource management that is receiving increasing attention from government, researchers, management and employee representatives and the popular media. Employers view the benefits or working conditions that they provide to help the employees balance the family and work domains as work life benefits (Bardoel, Tharenou, & Moss, 1998; Russell& Bowman, 2000). WLB strategies in an organizational setting include policies covering flexible arrangements, child and dependent care, and family and parental leave (Becker, B. and M. Huselid.,1998; Kramar, 1997).

**work/life conflict** is defined as a form of inner role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and other life domains, such as family, are mutually incompatible in some respect, whereby participation in one role is made more difficult by the virtue of participation in the other (Greenhaus& Beutell, 1985). Initially the concept of work/life conflict was focused on the impact of family demands on work. It now extends to the impact work has on individual stress, relationships and family wellbeing (Russell & Bowman, 2000). Work/life conflict may be characterized by a lack of it between employees and their life responsibilities, and the goals of the organization (Becker &Huselid,1998; Erwin& Iverson, 1994; Lewis & Cooper, 1995). Work/life conflict may include issues such as difficulties faced related to child-rearing, other kinship responsibilities, or stressful life events (Hobson, Delunas & Kesic, 2001).

### The Work-Life Balance Equilibrium



Anna L Cox & Dave Cook

**Barriers to Work/ Life Balance Strategies:**

Several barriers have been identified as creating major difficulties for the development and implementation of WLB strategies. Barriers may be defined as obstacles or hindrances to the implementation and on-going effectiveness of WLB strategies. Employees, as important organizational stakeholders, expect their employers to be responsive to their need to balance work, and life commitments (Kossek et al., 1994). The need to manage WLB has arisen out of the increasing diversity brought by changing demographics of the work force as well as changing social values and the globalisation of economies and markets (Jackson & Ruderman, 1995; Way, 1999). As organizations move towards more participative and flat structures where fewer employees are expected to manage increased workloads (Hall & Richter, 1988), the demands of the environment increase, and maintaining the balance between the demands of a career and life responsibilities becomes more difficult. Although work/life, and particularly work/family, conflict is well-recognized as an issue for both sexes, it continues to place additional responsibilities on working women, as they have tended to experience the major responsibility for domestic matters (Abbott, De Cieri & Iverson, 1998; Borrill & Kidd, 1994; Judge, Boudreau & Bretz, 1994; Konrad & Mangel, 2000).

**The Work life balancing barriers includes:**

- An organizational culture which emphasizes and rewards long hours and high organizational Commitment which lead to neglect of other life commitments;
- An isolated, hostile and unsupportive working environment for employees with life commitments External to the organization;
- Attitudes and resistance of supervisors and middle management peoples;
- Lack of communication and knowledge about various WLB strategies

Long-term exposure of workers to excessive work hours, evening and rotating shift schedules, and high levels of work-to-family interference elevates their risk of mental and physical health problems. Furthermore, one must not get exhausted in trying to make too many changes in their life, all at once. Let us take one step at a time towards achieving a work-life balance. As the famous Chinese proverb says, *"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."*

**Policies and Practices that are being used are:**

- Flexi time, i.e., choice in starting and ending work times;
- Compressed work week, i.e., working 4 x 10-hour days;
- Telecommuting i.e., working from home at least once in a week;
- Part-time work;
- Employees are encouraged to set limits of their own wish and convenience;
- There is support for employees to switch to less demanding jobs of their choice;
- To take work home at night and/or weekends;
- To put their job before their family or personal life;
- To work more than 48 hours a week to get ahead;
- To constantly put their jobs ahead of their family or personal life to be viewed favourably;
- To prefer happy with the hours of working and not to work more hours.
- Not prefer to spend more hours to work related activities after work
- They have a lot of home demands and lot of responsibility in their home life apart from professional life;
- They did not have enough time to get everything done at home;
- They often have obligations at home that compete with one another;
- Further they have a lot of responsibility at work;
- They often overextend themselves at work;
- They often feel rushed in their job.
- The most commonly used work-life benefit were flexible hours, family/care's leave, study assistance programs and home-based work.

**Stress factor:**

Stress is one of the more commonly documented outcomes of long work hours, and is recognized as a determinant of employee health and productivity. There are well-documented outcomes of work–family conflict when this construct is treated as a stressor. In terms of mental health, negative outcomes of work–family conflict include reduced general mental health and well-being, dissatisfaction with life, stress, psychosomatic symptoms, depression, general psychological distress, use of medication, alcohol consumption, substance abuse, clinical mood disorders, clinical anxiety disorders, and emotional exhaustion. Both work-to-family and family-to-work conflict predict poor physical health and concurrent multiple chronic health problems. These causal pathways are through mental health and health-related behaviours, and would be expected over longer time periods of exposure to work–family conflict. People experiencing work pressures may lack time to take care of themselves by eating properly, exercising, and getting enough sleep. Work hours and schedules

can affect the health and well-being of workers. Long work hours and certain kinds of shift schedules are known to create elevated risks for a range of mental and physical health problems. Organizations that seek to increase employee morale, commitment and satisfaction, and reduce sources of stress and problems at work, will improve their ability to recruit and retain talented and valued employees (Cappelli, 2000).

Few steps to ease out the stress of work from home are:

- A) Introducing 'Silent Hours' where no meetings will be scheduled
- B) Meditation or yoga sessions
- C) Doctors on call
- D) Increase focus on Mental health and well being
- E) Offering more flexibility in terms of working hours etc
- F) HR reaching out to employees and checking on their well beings  
& encouraging them to take mandatory leave.
- G) Sensitizing the line managers and supervisors to change their leadership approach.

#### Well-being factor:

If there ever was a time that employees were most vulnerable, it's now. The risk of the virus looms large even as corporations have announced the opening of their offices. Evidently, in a compromised situation of public health, expecting employees to return to work is one of the biggest reasons behind The Great Resignation. Employees have adjusted to the new normal of working from home –with greater time to spend with their family. The **reverse migration** of labour has meant that employees returned to their hometown, comfortably nestled in their homes, without the hassle of commute and traffic congestions of metropolitan cities, and started co-habiting spaces with their parents, children, or in-laws. The interconnectedness of family is not something employees are willing to give up now. As a result of which, there's a mindset shift for employees, which companies must be willing to accept and adopt the flex model of working.

Well-being has evolved to become mainstream. **It is now a boardroom strategy**. Companies that do not put a premium on well-being will be the ones to experience the exodus of mass attritions. Safety of employees has become supreme as companies are announcing a host of well-being initiatives. Well-being has moved up the **curve of strategic relevance** and become a unique selling proposition for organizations who took the lead in announcing multiple well-being programs. A well-being as a strategic lever of engagement got elevated to **8 dimensions of – physical, mental, emotional, financial, intellectual, occupational, environmental, and digital wellbeing**. Organizations

will begin viewing well-being from the focal lens of employees, their families, their unique needs based on the individual life phases, needs of the environment, and sustainability as predictors of employee retention. The days of occasional Yoga or meditation are obsolete, and well-being is here to stay in form of Employee Assistance Programs, wellness allowances, family care benefits for children, working mothers, pets and the elderly, mental health days off and online subscriptions of fitness apps.

**Work and Life should not be enemies:**

Four dimensions of wellbeing as a way to measure happiness as below.

**Resilience:** Our capacity to adapt, change, and respond to life's challenges. Resilience enables us to recover from setbacks, to grow, and to develop new capabilities.

**Thriving:** The meaning and significance we experience in our lives; our values, core beliefs, and sense of life purpose; and our experience of deep social connections.

**Authenticity:** Our sense of identity, which includes the beliefs we hold about who we are as human beings, our self-image and self-worth, and our sense of respect and dignity.

**Happiness:** The emotional dynamics and the subjective quality of our daily lives. Happiness is linked to enhanced health, creativity, decision-making, and adversity response.

**What can be done?**

While some of these points may seem trivia, but are very important, as these are in our hands and for us to take action upon.

1. Proper planning' is definitely helps the most to bring more efficiency in everyone.
2. Sticking to the plan decided with 'Discipline' is the key though.
3. Prioritizing" helps when the days are full of surprises.
4. Having a clear and 'defined' work time and sticking to it is very important.
5. Restricting' social media during work hours will definitely add to efficiency.
6. Periodically taking a little time away from work and home chores.
7. just do things for 'yourself', it will definitely reinvigorate you
8. Meeting family and friends in close and safe groups will brighten up your day.

**How to improve the healthy work-life balance:**

Despite the challenges, it's possible to stay healthy and positive. Here are a few ways to improve your work-life balance while managing the new remote pandemic environment.

**1. Be realistic about work-life balance**

In a perfect world, you would wake up, get ready for the day's work, sit in your home office, and once work is completed, shut down your devices, and start preparing dinner. However, this is not reality. There are days other work might require your attention – impromptu trips, family requirements, community work, etc. Since family comes first, you might have to reschedule work. Hence, it is best to have a realistic approach and not strive for a 'perfect' work-life balance, and unnecessarily put pressure on yourself

**2. Manage Your Expectations**

Although some might interpret the remote work setting as a chance to buckle down and use free time for maximum productivity, others might feel overwhelmed by the number of changes in such a short period of time. One of the first things you need to do is manage your expectations and give yourself understanding and forgiveness. "Approaching your new working environment and your ability to be productive with a little extra grace and patience will help you navigate the transition more smoothly. An optimism mind set is a major predictor of longevity.

**3. Track time to manage it better**

To better understand how you are spending time, keep a time log or tracker. Start maintaining it for a week, then gradually move to a monthly time tracker. This will help you organize office work as well as activities at home much better. You will be able to analyse how much time you are spending on which activity and plan and manage your work accordingly. Creating a designated workspace is essential to creating balance and making a clear divide between your work hours and your free time.

**4. Practice self-care**

In this era of a pandemic, the news has not been very positive and encouraging. Self-care can be difficult to prioritize amidst the chaos of work and family responsibilities in a disturbing circumstance, one must dedicate time to oneself. Whether it is watching a TV show, cooking/baking, or meditating, as long as you're doing something you enjoy. It is great because it relaxes your mind. Taking some "me" time will help you feel refreshed so that when it's crunch time at work, your energy levels are high. Eat better to sleep better. They are inextricably intertwined.

**5. Finish office-work in time**

It is easy to get drowned in work, especially while working from home one loses track of time. This eliminates whatever distinction one has between work and life, which is unhealthy. It is vital to have a mental switch to transition from work to home environment. This can be achieved with the assistance of a transitional activity, like music, a book, a TV program, an alarm, or anything that helps one relax. We, here at ITC Infotech, have an attendance schedule in our Info talk app, which prompts a reminder to end work, so we are aware that it is time to wrap up for the day. Although at times, we tend to go overboard, it still is a reminder that it is time to stop work for the day. This is an important feature to have in an employee-centric app.

### ***6. Ensure proper Communication***

Admittedly, these are unprecedented times. With everyone navigating this new normal, it can at times get overwhelming. In such situations, it is advisable to communicate with your manager openly, so you both can find ways to manage the workload because the last thing anyone needs is a stressed and burnt-out employee. And in an instance of personal stress, it is best to find a professional to discuss your issues with or talk to someone trustworthy. Proactive communication can help prevent messy situations and frustration down the road

### ***7. Reach Out for Help***

Lastly, don't be afraid to reach out for help! With the new normal making work-life balance a challenge for everyone, it's time we all start looking out for each other. Reach out to co-workers, family, friends, and other support systems who can help you make sense of the emotions you experience as you navigate the new normal. Cut your anxiety dramatically. Sometimes the best approach is to rethink how we think.

### ***8. Find new ways to exercise***

While it's still generally okay to go out for a run or bike ride, you may want to keep some things indoors, especially as the months turn colder. Invest in a yoga mat for home workouts, or search for cardio-heavy workout videos on YouTube. There are easy stretches and exercises you can do in a short amount of time that will help you stay healthy and keep you moving, which can be a major challenge when you work inside all day.

### **Conclusion:**

Looking for work-life balance can feel selfish but it's critically important to your Mental health, Physical health and even the work you do efficiently. Undeniably the future of work is leaning



towards **hybrid models** to allow for better work-life balances, finding and retaining top talent, and to lower the organization's overall cost, but every workplace is different and every employee is different. Whether you opt for a fully remote, in-office, or a hybrid structure in the future, organizations need to ensure they have the right tools in place to implement the change smoothly by a healthy Work life balance only.

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