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THE 21ST CENTURY
A BOOK OF READING

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Industrial Social Workers and the Promotion of Work-Life Balance of Employees

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Introduction

The change brought about by globalisation, deregulation, and increased competitive pressures has called for rationalisation by employers in order to look at how their members of staff have been able to balance their duty and family responsibilities without each other having negative impact on one another. In essence, the current interest of work organisations in work/life balance issue is attributable to global competition, renewed interest in personal lives/family issue and ageing workforce (Lockwood, 2003). These issues have drawn the attention to enable organisations to compete successfully in a world challenging competition for survival. The importance of work/life balance in the workplace with the competing demands is tiring and stressful culminating in lower productivity, sickness, and absenteeism. So, work/life balance is an issue for all employees and all organisations.

The perspectives as to the meaning and work-life-balance depend on the context of the conversation and the speaker's viewpoint. There are different terms used with overlapping

definitions yet meaning the same thing. According to Lockwood (2003), they include:

- Work/life: This refers to specific areas of support (e.g. quality of life, flexible work options, life balance, etc.).
- Work/family conflict: The push and pull between work and family responsibilities.
- Work/life balance from the employee viewpoint: The dilemma of managing work obligations and personal/family responsibilities.
- Work life/life balance from the employer viewpoint: The challenges of creating a supportive company culture were employees can focus on their jobs while at work.
- Family-friendly benefits: Benefits that offer employees the latitude to address their personal and family commitments, while at the same time not compromising their work responsibilities.
- Work/life programmes: Programmes (often official or time related) established by an employer that offer employees options to address work and personal responsibilities.
- Work/life initiatives: Policies and procedures established by an organisation with the goal to enable employees to get their jobs done and at the same time provide flexibility to handle personal/family concerns.

It is of note in literature that most discussed of the aforementioned terms that are used interchangeably are work-life conflict and work-life balance. This paper therefore examines both terms with a view to removing conflicting interpretation of terms and appropriate usage.

Work-family conflict

Work family conflict is a form of inter-role conflict which occurs when an individual has to face incompatible role pressures from

work and family (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). There are three forms of work family conflict, namely time, strain and behaviour-based conflicts. Time-based conflict refers to overlapping schedules and tasks. Strain-based conflicts indicate mental and emotional strain demands related to the roles, while behaviour-based conflict shows the conflicts of accepting individuals' behavioural patterns (Rantanen, Pulkkinen & Kinnunen, 2005; Ibrahim, Ohtsuka & Halik, 2009).

Researchers have shown that time based conflict include working hours (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998), work schedule and shift work (Greenhau &Beutell, 1985) as well as the responsibility for young children (Hill, 2005). Strain-based conflict arises from lack of a supportive work group and organisational culture (Hill, 2005), and low spouse support (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). On the whole, work family stressors have a relationship with job satisfaction and wellbeing, and unbalance work family relationships are severe work stressor that needs more attention by modern societies (Siu, Spector, Cooper & Lu, 2005; Spector, Cooper, Poelmans, Allen, Driscoll & Sanchez, 2004). Therefore, work-family balance, as a perceptual phenomenon, is characterised by a sense of having achieved a satisfactory resolution of the multiple demands of work and family domains (Bohan & Viveros-Long, 1981, Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Researchers have identified work-family conflict to be associated with a myriad of indicators of poor health and impaired welling including poor mental and physical health, less life satisfaction, higher levels of stress, higher levels of emotional exhaustion, less physical exercise, higher likelihood to engage in problem drinking, increased anxiety and depression levels, poor appetite and fatigue (Fone, Russell & Barnes, 1996; Allen, Herst, Bruck & Sutton, 2000; Rose, Hunt & Ayers, 2007). Levels of work-life conflict have also been associated with workaholism. Both enthusiastic workaholics and non-workaholics report higher levels of work-life conflict, but

enthusiastic workaholics have more life satisfaction and purpose in life (Bonebright, Clay & Ankenmann, 2000).

Furthermore, work-life conflict impact on organisational outcomes as a result of employees experiencing decreased employee job satisfaction, increased staff turnover and absenteeism, lower performance and increased job stress levels, and intention to leave the organisation (Rose, Hunt & Ayers, 2007). Not only does work-family conflict affect organisations, it can also affect individuals through a loss of pay and medical expenses. Adam, King and King (1996) found that higher levels of work-family conflict predicted lower levels of familial support, and higher levels of familial support predicted lower levels of work-family-conflict.

Work-life Balance

The concerns with work-family conflict have broadened work-life balance. In this current thinking, multiple work and life (not just family) roles are viewed as potentially benefiting, as well as harming, one another (Rife, Hamilton & Hall, 2015). When role conflicts do occur, they can involve time, effort, resources, behaviour, and they may originate both from work-to-family and family-to-work with different causes identified for each direction (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). Employees with work-life balance feel their lives are fulfilled both inside and outside of work (Byrne, 2005), and they experience minimal conflict between work and non-work roles. Those who achieve this balance tend to have higher levels of satisfaction with their jobs and life in general, as well as lower levels of stress and depression (Rife, Hamilton & Hall, 2015).

Work-life balance is a broad and complex phenomenon, lacking in a universal definition (Maxwell & McDougall, 2004; Greenhause, Collins & Shaw, 2003). However, the definition by Greenhause, Collins & Shaw, (2003) that work-life balance is the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in and equally

satisfied with – his or her work and family roles shows three components namely time balance, involvement balance and satisfaction balance. The time balance refers to equal time being given to both work and family roles; involvement balance refers to equal levels of psychological involvement in both work and family roles; and satisfaction while balance refers to equal levels of satisfaction in both work and family roles. Therefore, to achieve a work-life balance, these three components should be considered.

Also, work-life balance is the proper prioritising between 'work' (career and ambition) on one hand and 'life' (pleasure, leisure, family and spiritual development) on the other (Soin, 2011). Furthermore, Work/life balance has been looked at from the "cognitive intrusion of work" which is not just about finding 'physical time' to do all that is needed to be done, it is more importantly about 'cognitive space' that is necessary to process, organise, and respond to the thinking demands of life within a complex society (Ezzedeen & Swiercz, 2002). They found that the cognitive intrusion of work results in lower job satisfaction, less happiness, a greater incidence of work/life conflict, and more frequent burn out.

A new trend in the life of working family that is related to work-life balance is the increased focus on elder care. There is anticipation that eldercare will soon became a major issue in the coming years. In America, 13% of Americans are aged 65 or older and by 2030, 20% (about 70 million) will be over the age of 65. That the population in the age bracket of 85 and older is the fastest-growing segment of the older population, growing by 274% cover the last 25 years (Society for Human Resource Management, 2003). In addition, the Labour Project for Working Families (2002) states that 40% of people caring for elders also have childcare responsibilities. If this aspect is not fully taken care at workplace, there will arise the work/life conflict.

Theories relating to work-life balance

There are various theories that are related to work-life balance; however, this paper discusses the classical and contemporary approaches which are basis theories that will aid the understanding of work-life balance.

(A) *Classical Approach*

Role Theories: This has been taken as the foundation for work-life balance theory. It is generally agreed that work-life balance is important for an individual's psychological well-being, and that high self-esteem, satisfaction, and overall sense of harmony in life can be regarded as. indicators of a successful balance between -work and family roles (Clark, 2000; Clarke, Koch & Hill, 2004). The origins of research on work-life balance can be traced to studies of women having multiple roles.

Three approaches are considered under the role theory.

a. First, Barnett and Baruch (1985) found that positive role quality was related to low levels of role overload, role conflict and anxiety. They therefore defined role balance as a "rewards minus concerns", difference score which could range from positive to negative values.

b. Second, Tiedje, Wortman, Downey, Emmons, Biernat & Lang (1990) argued that women may perceive their work and family role in multiple, qualitatively different ways. Hence, they conclude that women perception can be on both the role conflict and enhancement hypotheses. The conflict hypothesis indicates that multiple role with infinite demands are likely to cause role strain and conflict for individuals because the resources they have to meet these demands are infinite and scarce (Goode, 1960). The enhancement hypothesis, in turn, states that multiple roles provide benefits in the form of privileges, status security, psychological energy and personal growth which expand

individual resources and facilitate role performance (Marks, 1977; Sierber, 1974).

With the distinctive recognition of role conflict and role enhancement by Tiedje et al (1990), it is possible to experience simultaneously either high conflict and low enhancement; high enhancement and low conflict, low conflict and low enhancement, or high conflict and high enhancement. They concluded that regardless of the level of enhancement, women who experience high role conflict were more depressed and less satisfied as parents than women belonging to the low conflict-high enhancement group.

The studies of Barnett and Baruch (1985) and Tiedje et al., (1990) showed that high rewards and enhancement combined with low concerns and conflict experienced across the roles in one's life is beneficial for an individual's well-being, and hence these experiences characterise role balance. Grant-Vallone and Donaldson (2001) affirm that roles theory is a useful theoretical framework to understand the balance of multiple roles played by men and women in their daily life.

c. Third, Marks and MacDermid (1996) visualised balance differently. According to them, role balance is not an outcome but rather "both a behavioural pattern of acting across roles in a certain way and a corresponding cognitive-affective pattern of organising one's inner life of multiple selves". According to them, there are two ways to engage multiple roles. It can be either positive or negative role balance. Positive role balance refers to the tendency to engage in every role with equally high effort, devotion, attention and care, whereas negative role balance refers to the tendency to engage in roles with apathy, cynicism, low effort and low attentiveness.

As a result of these behavioural and cognitive-affective tendencies, it is theorised that positive role balance will lead to role ease and

negative role balance will lead to role strain (Marks & MacDermid, 1996). The deduction is that role ease and strain correspond with role enhancement and conflict respectively. In the case of positive role balance, role conflict is either prevented or solved before acute problems of role management become chronic. This is achieved by addressing the demands of each role on time, with effort and attention. For individuals of who a negative role balance is typical, occasional incidents of role conflict are likely to accumulate due to their indifference towards role-related tasks and duties, creating an ongoing state of unfulfilled demands (Rantanen, Kinnunen, Mauno & Tillemann, 2011).

(B) *Contemporary Approach*

Contemporary views about work-life balance can be classified into the overall appraisal approach and the components approach of work-life balance (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007).

a. The overall appraisal approach refers to an individual's general assessment concerning the entirety of his or her life situation. Clark, (2000) defines work-family balance as satisfaction and good functioning at work and home, with a minimum of role conflict. Also, Clarke, Koch & Hill, (2004) saw it as equilibrium or maintaining overall sense of harmony in life. While, Voydanoff, (2005) defines it as global assessment that work and family resources are sufficient to meet work and family demands such that participation is effective in both domains. Therefore, when an overall appraisal approach is applied, work-life balance is typically assessed with general questions such as "all in all, how successful do you feel in balancing your work and personal/family life?" (Clarke, et al., 2004).

b. A components approach to work-life balance emphasises balance as a direct formative latent construct (Edward & Bagozzi, 2000), which means that work-family balance consists of multiple facets that precede balance and give meaning to it

(Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007). According to Greenhaus, et al., (2003), work-family balance consists of time balance, involvement balance, and satisfaction balance. Frone (2003) in turn, sees work-family balance to consist of work-family conflict and work-family facilitation.

The advantage of the components approach over the overall appraisal approach to work-life balance is that one can use conceptually based measures to balance that tap into the different aspect of work-life balance. These aspects form the overall evaluation of how well an individual is meeting role-related responsibilities (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007).

A further look at the work of Frone (2003) shows a four-fold taxonomy of work-family balance. The four-fold taxonomy is based on the notion of bi-directionality between work and family domains. This means that participation in the work role may interfere with or enhance the performance in the family role, and likewise, participation in the family role may interfere or enhance performance in the work role (Frone, Russell & Cooper, 1992; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000, Kirchmeyer, 1992). Thus, Frone (2003) measurable four components of work-life balance are work-to-family/nonwork conflict, family/nonwork-to-work conflict, work-to-family/nonwork enhancement, and family/nonwork-to-work enhancement.

Forms of practical advice for work-life balance
The resultant effects of work-life balance crisis of lower productivity increase in sicknesses, absenteeism, etc, and calls for the following practical advice to employers, management, supervisors, and employees for successful work-life balance.

1. **Parental leave:** This is a form of right for parents to take time off work to look after a young child or make arrangements for the child's welfare. Parents can use it to

spend more time with children and strike a better balance between their work and family commitments. Most organisations grant this to an eligible parent that has worked continuously for a year. At the end of parental leave, workers have the right to return to the same job, or, if that is not possible, to return to an equivalent or similar job.

2. **Part-time work:** Part time may be one way to reduce working hours and thereby improve work-life balance. Part-time workers reduce their working week for various reasons including attending to family (children and the elderly); pursuing personal hobbies; studying etc. There are, however, some potential built-in negatives e.g. risk of reduced career opportunities and increased workload; because the demands are not decreased correspondingly (Albertsen, Kauppinen, Grimsmo, Sorensen, Rafnsdottir & Tomasson, 2007).

3. **Flexible working hours:** Flexible working hours or self-rostering covers flexible start and finish times and a possibility for employees to request specific working hours on a regular basis. This will increase choice and control by the employee. For instance, a nurse working and studying in a higher institution concurrently can opt for permanent nigh duty so as to be able to attend lectures during the day for successful completion of the course. Working hours' flexibility has in several cases shown to increase work-life balance (Joyce, Pabayo, Critchley & Bambra, 2010). The flexible working hours schedules, rosters and leave arrangements should accommodate supervisors, managers and other staff family and personal responsibilities, without detriment or penalty. Flexible working arrangement will facilitate the reconciliation of work and family needs and let individuals to balance both responsibilities and thereby achieve quality of life. The concept of flexibility especially in

term of working time (flexitime) are often looked as effective ways to achieve positive spill over and are essential to achieve work-family balance (Hill, Hawkins, Ferris & Weitzman, 2001; Thornthwaite, 2004)

4. **Fully compensated reduced working hours:** The expected mandatory eight (8) hours of work, as stipulated by employment act, may be reduced to six (6) hours per day (exemplified in Sweden) with full range compensation. This has led to employees having more time for social activities, relaxation and between work-life balances (Albertsen, et al., 2007).

5. **Compressed workweeks:** Compressed work weeks imply work schedules with fewer, but longer work days. The number of worked hours per week is the same. It could be four 12-hours shifts with three or four days off. For example, in the nursing profession in Nigeria, a nurse works for seven (7)-days night and he/she is given corresponding seven (7)-days off duty. This gives more days without work, less commuting time, more time for relaxation and attending to family issues but also longer work days (Bambra, Whitehead, Sowden, Akers & Petticrew, 2008). Compressed workweeks are suitable for employees who do not need to deal with incoming work on a daily basis or there are several employees doing the same job. Organisation can reduce stress, employee absenteeism and turnover, thereby increase employee morale and loyalty.

6. **Access to childcare and eldercare arrangement:** Improving access to childcare with onsite childcare facilities (crèche facilities) and giving shift workers, who need access to childcare facilities, regular fixed shifts. In the case of a sick child and on presentation of a medical certificate, a member of staff may take time off to look after the child. Time off is also authorised if a staff member is called by the crèche or

school to fetch a sick child. Employees can be assisted to find suitable eldercare residential or day-care facilities within the community for elderly family members.

7. **Teleworking:** Individual staff members may be authorised to carry out part of their activities from home on regular basis overtime. The type of job can also influence the use of teleworking. Traditional teleworkers include sales representatives and delivery drivers. However some other occupations have bought into it with the advent of tele-conferencing in the 21st century. Employees will usually receive instructions and transact businesses by phone, computer or other forms of IT devices at home or in their vehicles. This system results in lower absence and turnover roles in the workplaces.

8. **Utilisation of Employee Assistance Programme (EAP):** Employee assistance programmes are intended to recognise the interaction between people's domestic and working lives and to offer confidential counselling to members of staff to address personal or other problems, including work-related stress that may be affecting their performance. Example of EAPs include provision of assistance in the area of personal issues, eldercare, childcare, parenting issues, substance abuse, job stress, balancing work and family, financial or legal issues etc. Therefore, EAPs is not just limited to counselling services only, it may include life skills programmes and fitness programmes.

Roles of Industrial social workers in the promotion of work-life balance among employees

Since the challenge of work/life balance in the workplace cannot be dislodged or erased, there is the need for the industrial social worker to educate management and work closely with employees for effective organisation, efficient job performance, high

productivity, and conflict free work environment. In these regards, the industrial social workers have to perform these roles:

1. **Ensure the existence of social support:** This can come from family members, spouses, friends and colleagues at work or even religious associates. It is established that the social support from family members, especially spouses, could lessen the detrimental outcomes of work family conflict (Voydanoff, 2002); family and colleagues support is an essential resource for alleviating interrole conflict. It has been found that a positive moderating effect of husband support on the relationship between parental demands and work family conflict exist (Matsui, Ohsawa and Onglatco, 1995). Similarly, Salami (2007) established the importance of social support in moderating the multiple role strain and psychological wellbeing among working mothers in Nigeria.

2. **Guarantee supervisor's support:** Supervisor support is a strong influence in work family conflict. This is achieved through friendly supportive technique training which is believed to increase employees' perception of organisational support and wellbeing (Brough & O'Driscoll, 2005). A supportive supervisor will easily understand and not pose problem to a subordinate who has unexpected family matters such as a child falling sick unexpectedly, elderly parent becoming sick or cancellation of child care arrangement (Brough & O'Driscoll, 2005). Supervisor considers giving flexibility to the employees dealing with uncertain demands, leads to decreased conflict and strain (Kelloway, Gottileb, & Bartham, 1999; Nielson, Carlson & Lankau, 2001).

3. **Establish family friendly policy:** The introduction of family friend policy in the workplace by employers is highly essential to stem the negative effect of work family conflict. Among the recommended practices are flexible working

arrangements (e.g. part time work), job sharing and teleworking. It has been found that past time workers reported lower levels of work family interference (Rijswijk, Bekker, Rutte & Croon, 2004). Also, organisations that provide employees' with greater control, flexibilities, reasonable workloads and supportive environment, employ good practices to promote work life balance (Lingard, Brown, Bradley, Bailey & Townsend, 2007). Provision of child care centres for nursing mother will reduce work life conflict. Government should encourage this policy through tax incentives to the organisation as done by Malaysian Government that offered tax deductions for employers unto provided child care centres near or at the workplace for their employees (Malaysia, 2001).

4. **Training of employees and management:** There is need to have training programmes for employees in order to avoid or reduce work family conflict. Employees should be trained and utilise such training. For instance, Salami (2007) confirmed that an active problem solving strategy could be utilised by working mothers to moderate the multiple role strains and psychological wellbeing nexus. Furthermore, such training should be on resilience and be able to work on the challenges in a competitive society as illustrated in Parenting at Work Programme in Malaysia (Malaysia, 2006). When managers and supervisors buy into the policies and training created to help balance work and life, they take advantage of them for the benefits of the company (Thornthwaite, 2004).

5. **Establishment of a "Care Room":** Industrial social workers should ensure the establishment of a 'care room' in the work place to assist employees when normal care arrangements have broken down or are not available due to a minor illness of the dependants. This is to serve as a stop-gap to take care

of the dependants. Provision of appropriate activities must be made by management in the room so as to occupy the family members to enable the employee to contribute to work productively without distractions.

Recommendations

Industrial social worker and management should ensure that the menu of work-life balance supports should be broad enough to meet the needs not only of parents with children, but also of singles and childless couples. This broad coverage will ensure that all categories of employee are covered by the scheme.

- Industrial social worker should provide assistance to employées, such as a work life balance advocate, to help employees negotiate and achieve greater access to flexible work arrangements and a better work life balance.
- Management should be made to provide organised opportunities for families and children to visit the workplace to see where the employee works. This will enable them to known and appreciate the type of work environment and responsibilities their bread winner goes through. It will greatly influence their behaviour towards the employee at home.
- Management should be educated by industrial social worker on the need to organise lunchtime presentations with guest speakers to talk about career planning, work life balance issues, flexible working practices, or a specific family issue such as single parenting, grand-parenting, and coping with difficult children, teenagers, drugs, ageing parents and children with disabilities.
- Employers should offer dependent care programmes that include help with childcare expenses and assistance with elder care.

- The industrial social worker should significantly increase the use of Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP) that is closely related to eldercare support and other family issues. The social worker should make employers/management see reason to balance work/life and make employees see to the leverage they enjoy and become beneficial to their work/balance conflict.
- Employers should expose applicants in their organisation to the practice of a culture of work-life balance such as flexible work hours, child-and elder-care provisions, paid maternity leave, leave/time off, education assistance, etc in order to attract new employees for the survival and sustenance of the organisation.

Conclusion

The introduction of work-life balance programmes will substantially improve organisations bottom line results and change individuals' lives for the better. Therefore, it can be concluded that when industrial social workers ensure that work/life programmes are properly situated in the workplace and efficiently utilised by employees, new employees will be attracted, old members of staff are retained, and there will be reduction in the rate of absenteeism, reduction in work-life conflicts, increase in job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and organisational citizenship behaviour for the sustainance and survival of both the organisation and the employees.

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