

Work-life balance and workplace health

Case duration (Min): **45-60**

Human Resource Management (HRM)

Work-life balance and workplace health

Worldwide

Case summary:

Explores work-life conflict and the importance of people in the organization.

Learning objectives:

Evaluate how and why organizations should tackle work-life balance with employees.

Case problem:

Should and how can organizations realise a competitive advantage by fostering a positive work environment whilst maintaining high performance expectations.

What can organizations do to help employees reduce work/life balance conflicts ?

First, if you are taking a taught management course then consult with your tutor and ensure that the case has not been scheduled into a teaching class or tutorial. If it has not:

1. Play/ read the media associated with the case. You may need to access the Internet and enter a URL to locate any video clips.
2. Attempt the Case study questions.

Consider attempting the case study as a group exercise; you could form a study group with fellow students.

3. Check the suggested answers - remember these are suggestions only and there are often many possible answers.

Discuss questions and answers with other students.

4. If you feel your answer(s) were weak then consider reading the relevant suggested readings again (also see the case study suggested references).

Title/ Media type	URL/ Media description
Workplace Angst.	http://feedroom.businessweek.com/?fr_story=FRsupt207515&rf=bm
Film	Improving the work-life balance.

NOTES:

Case study questions...

Action		Pre/During/After class
1	WORK VALUES - WORK CENTRALITY. We do not all approach work (attitude) in the same way. With reference to the concept of work centrality, discuss how people within and between national cultures might vary in their attitude to work.	During
2	CONSEQUENCES. What consequences may arise as a result of an employee's failure to achieve a satisfactory work-life balance?	During
3	WHO MAY EXPERIENCE A WORK/LIFE CONFLICT ? Who may experience a work/life conflict (– list examples) and why might such conflict become more common?	During
4	ATTAINING A WORK-LIFE BALANCE. Why should organizations provide opportunities for their workforce to achieve a better work-life balance? Discuss the arguments for organizations playing an active role in helping employees attain a Work-life balance.	During
5	WHAT CAN ORGANIZATIONS DO ? Drawing on the case film clip, text books and other resources, discuss what organizations can do to help employees reduce work/life conflicts (brainstorm a list of work-life initiatives)?	During

WORK CENTRALITY

the degree of general importance that working has in one's life at any given time

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Allocation of time and commitment between work and personal life, which reflects the personal needs of the employee.

STRESS

A source of tension and frustration which tends to arise when an individual feels that a certain situation should not exist.

Question/ Answer

1 WORK VALUES - WORK CENTRALITY.

We do not all approach work (attitude) in the same way. With reference to the concept of work centrality, discuss how people within and between national cultures might vary in their attitude to work.

Employees in certain countries expect to work longer hours, take shorter holidays and earn less money. Snir and Harpaz (2006) examined the 'workaholism' phenomenon (the individual's steady and considerable allocation of time to work). They examined Workaholism from a cross-national perspective, through representative samples of the labour force in Belgium, Israel, Japan, The Netherlands, and the USA. They found that the Japanese worked more hours per week than all other nationalities (the total weekly difference in work hours was considerable, and ranged from 4.50 to 8.23 hours). Respondents with a high level of work centrality worked more hours per week than did those with a low level of work centrality. The conceptualization of working long hours as a nation-level phenomenon is encountered in the literature mainly with regard to the Japanese and the Americans, as opposed to Western Europeans, who are 'known to enjoy the pleasures of the good life'. The emphasis placed on leisure by Western Europeans from the 1970s until recently, results in a reduction of work hours per employee. The reasons for working long hours in Japan are not just economic but also socio-cultural. To the Japanese, work is an end in itself – what one does if one is human. It is the process of carrying out obligations owed to society and to oneself as a social being. White-collar managers and skilled workers are like the samurai of old, who worked on behalf of their lords without question or complaint. In the Japanese culture, time logged at one's desk or workstation is often a symbolic statement of submission to managerial power and loyalty to the organization.

Work centrality is defined as the degree of general importance that working has in one's life at any given time. The work centrality concept is rooted in Weber's Protestant work ethic theory. In general, work is found to be of higher importance than other areas of life. It is usually deemed more important than leisure, community, and religion, and in several studies ranked second only to family. Research findings show work centrality to be positively related to important organizational variables such as job satisfaction, participation in decision making, and job tenure, and negatively related to the leisure ethic. Even nowadays, the dictum that work is a virtue and play is a sin still pervades in several industrial societies. The work ethic encourages people to work hard and graft for long hours. The finding that the Japanese work more hours per week than any other nationality is in accord with the fact that work centrality was found to be higher in Japan than in the other nations. Some workers in Japan are often asked to volunteer for overtime or work considerable unpaid extra time; such a request would not be well received in some European cultures. However, the typical number of hours worked-per-week in any given culture is not a static measure. Whilst the overall trend in Japan during the 1990s was towards shorter working hours, in Western Europe the opposite is true due to economic stagnation and competition from low-wage countries in the enlarged European Union and Asia.

2 CONSEQUENCES.

What consequences may arise as a result of an employee's failure to achieve a satisfactory work-life balance?

Conflict and Stress (an adverse reaction to pressure)- leading to secondary consequences such as absenteeism, lower productivity, departure from the company.

Work hours are, however, not always positively related to productivity. Moreover, there is a growing body of research on the negative effects of long work hours and overtime work on health and health-related behaviour. Hatstrup, Mueller, Joens (2007) made comparisons of value importance across nations and organisations and indicated substantial similarity. Studies have discriminated societal norms according to the degree that they emphasise work as a right to which everyone is entitled, versus a duty or obligation everyone owes to society. Work values refer to the goals or rewards people seek through their work. They are expressions of more general human values in the context of the work setting. The International manager should take account of Work centrality and other attitudes to work when seeking to encourage people to perform their jobs efficiently and effectively through a variety of motivational techniques.

3 WHO MAY EXPERIENCE A WORK/LIFE CONFLICT ?

Who may experience a work/life conflict (– list examples) and why might such conflict become more common?

Parents with dependent children or employees with caring responsibilities.
Employees with heavy workloads, travel demands etc.

Discuss the increasing diversity of the workforce.

4 **ATTAINING A WORK–LIFE BALANCE.**

Why should organizations provide opportunities for their workforce to achieve a better work-life balance? Discuss the arguments for organizations playing an active role in helping employees attain a Work–life balance.

Work–life balance - Allocation of time and commitment between work and personal life, which reflects the personal needs of the employee.

At a general level, students may note (drawing on RBV theory) that employees are the most important asset.

Payback may include increased morale, more effective employee, increased productivity, and better recruitment opportunity.

5 **WHAT CAN ORGANIZATIONS DO ?**

Drawing on the case film clip, text books and other resources, discuss what organizations can do to help employees reduce work/life conflicts (brainstorm a list of work-life initiatives)?

Strategies may be time-based, information-based, money based, direct services or culture-change strategies.

Child care (or vouchers), flexitime, job sharing, special leave, telecommuting, part-time employment, job redesign, on-site services (e.g. ATM) /shops, Gym etc.

BCG monitoring hours (red-zone/counselling); GE – work smarter culture and Renault.

Organizations have a social responsibility, a moral and ethical motivation.

Case study references

Cole, G A. and Kelly, P P. (2011) 'Management Theory and Practice', Ed. 7. Cengage EMEA.

Nelson, D L. and Quick, J C. (2009) 'ORGB', Ed. 1. South Western.