

Perspective

A balanced work-life relationship helps boost employee performance

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Abstract: The current research note is written for personnel managers and MBA students, aiming to raise the awareness of work-life balance importance in the employee management policies. In the intersection of work and personal life, the work-life balance is the equilibrium between the two; more specifically, work-life balance explains the relationship and interaction between individual job and their private life. In the research note, we first introduce the concept and characteristics of work-life balance through relevant literature. We then argue the significance of incorporating work-life balance into employee management practices, as the concept of work-life balance helps managers appreciate individual differences and develop more human-oriented awareness in management. We encourage managers to adopt transformational leadership in their management, in which the concept of work-life balance should be embedded in the design and implementation of employee management policies. By giving more autonomy to the employees through the work-life balance policies and practices, employees are more likely to appreciate the work and make more contribution accordingly. Practitioner points are also recommended.

Keywords: autonomy; employee management; employee performance; work-life balance

1. Introduction to the research note

The current research note is written for the MBA students and personnel managers, aiming to introduce the latest knowledge of work-life balance (WLB) and offer suggestions in improving the efficacy of existing work-life balance policies and practices. The research note is like a summary-oriented article, rather than a full-length academic article or conventional investigation report. For the same reason, our research note does not follow the orthogonal layout, such as Introduction, Literature Review, Method, Findings and Discussion. Instead, we focus on highlights and findings of three cited journal articles (Itegboje and Chang, 2021; Kuo et al., 2024; Sani and Adisa, 2024) and, more importantly, we are keen to explain how managers may benefit from our viewpoints in their work-life policies and practices. By doing so, we may support personnel managers and HR practitioners in improving the efficacy of their employee management policies. Moreover, through the research findings (based on three cited journal articles), we are also keen to elaborate evidence-based insights to the ‘work-life balance’ literature. By doing so, we may support MBA students in acquiring the latest knowledge of ‘work-life balance’, which in turn enriches their business acumen in the field of ‘work-life balance management: challenges and constraints’.

Broadly speaking, ‘work-life balance (WLB)’ explains the intersection between one’s work and private life. In the workplace, more specifically, work often interferes with personal life, and personal life interferes with work too. These interferences jointly explain why the work-life interaction is bi-directional, in which work and life

are mutually affected. Until recently, researchers have found that work-life balance has a potential to stimulate employee performance, drawing the attention of personnel managers and management scholars. For instance, in our latest research project conducted in 2024 (Sani and Adisa, 2024), we analyze whether leadership style generates any impact on employees' use of WLB policies. Interestingly, we have discovered that managers may use transformational-leadership styles to establish strong reciprocal relationships between themselves and employees in terms of using WLB policies and practices. We have also found that more often than not, managers sanction the use of WLB policies and practices only as a reward for excellent performance or when they are completely sure the outcome will favor the organization.

Inspired by the aforementioned research findings, in the current research note, we will first clarify the concept of WLB and elaborate its diverse characteristics, laying a solid knowledge base for MBA students who study work-life balance and cognate themes. Next, based on the summary of literature reviews (cited from three journal articles), we are keen to propose practical suggestions to WLB policy makers and management authorities, helping improve the efficacy of their WLB practices. Finally, we will consolidate our WLB knowledge and recommend intervention strategies to personnel managers and HR practitioners, so employees and general workforce can benefit from our research note as well.

2. Work-life balance: Concept and characteristics

Scholars have proposed various views and theories to explain the concept and characteristics of work-life balance, such as spillover theory, conflict theory, border boundary theory, enrichment theory, facilitation theory, compensation theory and other cognate perspectives. These theories are all sound in their respective argument, and the evolution of theoretical framework has gradually enriched our understanding of WLB characteristics over the years. The nature and argument(s) of these theories are not the same, but they seem to share one thing in common; that is, the concept of work-life balance does not necessarily mean equal distribution of resources (for instance, energy and time) between work duties and non-work duties. WLB is not privacy-intrusive either. Rather, employees' work and non-work domains are often permeable and interconnected, which help explain the phenomenon of vague work-life membrane.

Following the same logic, it would be logical and ethically sound for managers to incorporate the concept of WLB into their employee management policies and practices. The rationale is: When WLB-driven policies and practices are well designed and implemented, employees are more likely to engage in a flexible work environment and benefit. Common WLB-driven practices include a variety of on-site schemes and off-side arrangement. Take 'flexible work arrangement' for example, in which employees with young children may benefit from flexible work arrangements, so they can do the school runs more effectively and without worrying of late penalty. Flexible work arrangement (fulltime vs. agency employees) has both advantages and disadvantages, so its design and implementation must be managed with caution (Iteboje and Chang, 2021). Another example is 'distancing work arrangement', in which employees with care duties may benefit from distancing work arrangements

(e.g., home, hospital and hospice), so they can maintain the care duties along with work duties more competently. Simply put, the concept of WLB considers individual needs and expectation. When WLB-driven practices are in place, the chance of conflicts between work and personal life is likely to dwindle.

3. Suggestions to the WLB policy makers and authorities

As aforementioned in Introduction, the application of WLB in employee management may help managers appreciate individual differences and develop more human-oriented policies and practices in management. Having said this, however, we sincerely advise managers not to use WLB practices only as a reward for meeting targets and for excellent performance. Our proposition is: If managers do so, their employees may experience incessant work-life conflict, leading to poor job engagement, deteriorated well-being, and less performance. Very likely, a toxic workplace environment will emerge, in which negative and antagonistic behaviors may flourish.

In the current research note, we would like to recommend ‘transformational leadership’ to the managers and HR practitioners, as such leadership style is crucial to the design and implementation of WLB-driven policies and practices (Sani and Adisa, 2024). Specifically, managers with transformational leadership style can help their employees to maintain the psychological equilibrium between work and personal life, because such leadership style not only appreciates employees’ work performance, but also considers the implications of non-work outcomes on individual performance. Managers who adopt transformational leadership style are more likely to understand their employee needs and accept employee expectations, which in turn helps create an amicable professional relationship between the two parties.

To help employees create a sound work-life balance, the practice of transformational leadership is suggested, in which managers should focus on transparent communication, listening and positive reinforcement in their managerial policies and practices, rather than the use of rewards and/or punishment (Kuo et al., 2024). Simply put, to ensure a healthy and supportive work environment, managers are encouraged to adopt transformational leadership in their management, in which the concept of work-life balance should be embedded in the design and implementation of employee management policies.

4. Conclusion and recommendation

Stimulating employee performance is never easy. To enhance the quality and quantity of performance, scholars and managers have proposed a variety of performance enhancements strategies but the actual efficacy of these strategies remain mixed. Inspired by the transformational leadership literature, we have consulted empirical research (Sani and Adisa, 2024), examining whether work-life balance (WLB) helps boost employee performance. In the analysis, we have found that managers’ transformational leadership style is crucial in managing employee performance. By adopting WLB-empowered policies and practices, strong reciprocal relationships between leaders and employees are more likely to emerge and develop. Following the same logic, desire to achieve work-life balance has often led many

employees to go the extra mile in carrying out their work duties, which in turn helps improve individual performance and attain organizational goals. That is, by giving more autonomy to the employees through the work-life balance policies and practices, both managers and employees win. Of course, their organizations benefit too!

To sum up, in the current research note, we have clarified the concept of WLB and elaborated its diverse characteristics, helping MBA students acquire the latest knowledge of work-life balance. Based on the integration of literature reviews (cited from three journal articles), we have offered practical suggestions to WLB policy makers and management authorities, helping improve the efficacy of their WLB practices. We have consolidated our WLB knowledge and recommend intervention strategies to personnel managers and HR practitioners, so employees and general workforce can benefit from our research note as well. Finally, we have prudently explained how the current research note has enriched the understanding of work-life balance and clarified its implication on employee management through four practitioner points. These are:

- Work and non-work domains are often permeable and interconnected.
- Good managers appreciate the implications of ‘work-life balance’ in employee management.
- Work-life balance should be incorporated into the employee management policies.
- A balanced work-life relationship helps boost job satisfaction and performance.

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