Balancing Work-Life Demands of Students in a Graduate School Institution in Manila

Prof. Leonardo F. Cada, Jr., Ed. D.

Department, Business Administration
Far Eastern University – Manila
lcada@feu.edu.ph

Abstract

Work-life demands vary day after day. Life is not smooth as we think. Life alters works and vice-versa. Work-life balance is not stable for all individual. The purpose of this study is to enhance the individual awareness about the behaviors that are affecting the work-life balance of the graduate students in one of the higher educational institutions in Manila. Graduate students are not exempted from the issue of balancing work and life while studying.

The author as a Ph. D. student in the same graduate school institution personally conducted and administered the survey as well as the face-to-face interviews. The instrument used in this study is a self-assessment questionnaire consisted of forty-five (45) open-ended questions. The results revealed that all respondents were within the borderline range to constantly maintaining their work-life balance.

Key terms: work-life balance, graduate students, saturation, sufficiency, coping mechanisms.

Introduction

Greenhaus et al. (2003) defined work–life balance broadly as multiple role conflict thus: "Work–life/family balance reflects an individual's orientation across different life roles, an inter-role phenomenon." Awareness of the person about work life balance is his perception is what happens at work as well as at family.

The term 'work-life balance' was originally introduced in the middle of 1970s. It is referring to as the balance between work and personal life of an individual (Newman & Matthews, 1999 cited by Suryakumar and Suresh, 2018). According to Takrim et al. (2016) the key areas of significance where we extent our balanced life are the individual's emotional, intellectual, imaginative, spiritual and physical aspects. "The disregard of one or more anchor points may impend the strength of the entire balance life". The use of the word 'balance' according to Haddon et al. (2008) "has also caused problems, since balance suggests an equal investment in both the work and non-work spheres and the notion that when something is given to work (e.g., time and energy) it is seen as taking away from the home and vice versa."

By and large, if the employees are satisfied with their families as well as with their work it brings balance to both. However, as the roles and responsibilities have increased these will affect the balance, which in some cases either or both family and work are placed in trouble. Work–life balance is determined by an individual's multiple roles in everyday life. It may either adversely influence performance at work, at school and personal life. According to Hyman et al. (2003; cited by Vidal et al., 2012), when husband and wife are both working and there are dependent children to take care of the household is prompted by tension and complexity. This kind of situation is happening dramatically over the last decades.

Employees carry work and activities at home spending late night hours just to complete the tasks and requirements. According to Hughes and Bozionelos (2007) commitment to their organizations and their superiors' expectation, placed employees to work for long hours thereby sacrificing personal and family life.

Employees shall make every effort to achieve 'satisfaction and effective at work and at home, with a minimum of role conflict' (Clark, 2000); an equilibrium that is spirited to well-being, health, and performance (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009 cited by Michel et al 2014). Conversely, when non-work time is seized with work-related thoughts, emotions, and energy, employees may find it tough to achieve both their private and work roles (Carlson & Frone, 2003). Employees must sustain their office works to keep their duties at home. In some instances, when employees get home from work, they are often too exhausted to participate in activities at home. Conversely, because of work there were employees who enjoy their time at home more such that they often feel energized, making them feel more like participating in activities at home (Haddon et al. 2008). Henceforth, employees must put in their best efforts to attain good balance at work as well as in their families. According to Vair (2013), in organizing a quality of life, an individual shall take good strategies as well as choices between work and family because both are critically important and distinct with one another.

Worthy work-life balance is one cause that can affect levels of work-to family and family-to-work conflict for employees as well as obligation to the organization and turnover objectives (Smith and Gardner 2007). Families want to experience basic psychological needs at home like peace and happiness, which make homes conflict free. This home situation will have a domino effect in workplace where employees appreciate work in organizations. In most cases we find married employees trying to balance an equal number of hours of work with personal and family activities.

Life is not smooth as many will think. Work-life balance is not stable for all individual. Daily our work-life balance varies. Demands for an individual work-life balance today will probably be different tomorrow. There are factors outside work and life which affect the balance. Human as we are, have different priorities and we need to strive to maintain the balance. According to Duchene (2019) "constantly fighting to reach a perfect balance is, at worst, impossible and, at best, extremely difficult to maintain and can leave us feeling drained or even depressed."

Working and studying can be successfully combined; however, you need to build up skills that will allow you to be more effective in both areas. As such, it is important to learn how to manage and balance your time and how to discipline yourself as these two skills will help you keep focus on your work and become an effective employee.

A graduate student's life typically involves the following: study, work, personal and/or family life. Workloads vary between a full-time and a part time student. It can be expected from a for a full-time student, to have very less time left for work or personal life. And for those who are married, it includes parenting and marital responsibilities. All these duties and responsibilities of a graduate student can take up an ample amount of time every day. One of the major issues a graduate student face is how to balance work and life while studying. Some studies have suggested that combination of full-time studying and part-time working can have a detrimental effect in the physical and mental health of students (Hovdhaugen, 2015; Creed, French & Hood, 2015).

Research Elaborations

The purpose of this assessment instrument is to heighten the awareness of the behaviors that are affecting the work-life balance of the graduate students. In this study, selected samples were purposively chosen from a specific population of graduate students at the Institute of Graduate Studies of San Sebastian College – Recoletos, Manila. Graduates, who were enrolled in Master in Business Administration and Doctor of Philosophy in Management programs.

The instrument used in this study is the Questionnaire for Self-Assessing Your Work-Life Balance, which was developed by Neal Whitten (2015). The questionnaire is consisted of forty-five (45) open-ended questions. It is measured by a Likert scale with a range from 0 – 5. There are three scales of scoring. The first scale of scores is in the range 4.0 to 5.0, which denotes "Good." This means that the person is in finest balance. He or she must continue to focus on maintaining that balance. The next scale is in the range of 3.0 to 3.9, which means that the person is within the "Borderline" This range signals that the person's life balance is improving. He or she must continue to take action to keep the balance and take more improvements. The last scale represents the range of 0 to 2.9. A score in this range is considered "Poor" meaning "your life is out of balance". The person needs to take necessary and immediate actions to retake and move towards the desired balance. Delaying making the needed changes will only make things worse.

The author as a Ph. D. student in the same graduate school institution personally conducted and administered the survey as well as the face-to-face interviews. This study was conducted during the First Semester, Academic Year 2019-2020 and it is one of the major requirements for the Ph. D program.

The author has tried to reach the population as his sample size, but efforts did not pay-off. In his desire to get sufficiency of information he has formulated a three-question interview to at least twelve (12) prospects from the sample size. The three questions are: (1) How do you prioritize work over gamily demands and vice-versa? And (2) Do you follow certain standards, norms, or tradition in handling priorities between work and family demands? "Balancing work, life and studies do you have coping mechanism when you are hit with unbearable stress or burn-out? If yes, can you please state your coping mechanisms?"

The purpose of face-to-face interviews is to attain a bit of sufficiency and saturation of information. According to Seidman (2006, cited by Venette 2013)) sufficiency refers to the amount and range of participants needed to reflect the population, while saturation of information refers to the point where the data collection no longer reveals new information. Boyd (2001, cited by Venette) suggests that saturation can often be reached after interviewing two to ten participants.

Every research has its own limitations. These are factors, which are beyond the researcher's control. Results may be affected by any given limitations particularly how the results are interpreted. There are limitations which are not readily apparent at the star but may become apparent during the conduct of the research. Limitations are factors that give the reader a good sense of what and where the study is bounded by and how widely they can be generalized.

The following are the limitations of this study:

1. In this study, the sample size is small and unique. Results may not be generalizable beyond the specific population from which the sample was drawn.
2. Respondents may not be as candor as possible in their participations when taking the test. Results might not exactly reflect the opinions of all members of the included population.
3. Due to limited time and time constraint of the study, significant aspects in the instruments were not piloted and administered.

Results and Findings

To assure manageability of the collected data, the survey instrument solicited some personal information from the respondent. Below were the data assessments on the personal circumstances of the respondents:

Demographics	
Population	35 graduate school students (Doctorate and Masters programs across specializations)
Sample	23 or 66% (based on the retrieval rate of the questionnaire)
Gender	Male – 11 or 48%%
	Female – 12 or 52%
Civil status Note: There were twenty-six (26) percent among the respondent who have dependents living with them. Twenty-six (26) percent among the respondents who were married whose spouses were also employed.	Married – 7 or 30%
	Single – 16 or 70%
	Others: none
Currently employed	Male – 11 or 100%
	Female – 10 or 43%
Range of employment :	Most of the respondents were employed in private firms and who have longer than four (4) years but not more than fifteen (15) years in present employment.

Table 1: Demographics of the respondents

Results of the survey questionnaire have revealed that half or six (6) out of twelve (12) females and almost half or five (5) out of 11 males were "Good." Their lives are in finest balance, which means they consciously focus on maintaining that balance. The other half for both male and female were on the "Borderline."

According to Whitten (2015) since the questionnaire is self-perception based, subjectivity cannot be avoided. Taking the test is not a guarantee for the right formula of work-life balance. The results are not a true reflection of the person real-life experiences. However, there benefits that the test can offer. It can raise the awareness as regard the issues that disturb the work-life balance of the person. Such awareness may encourage the person to deal his or her work-life balance issues proactively.

Furthermore, taking the test periodically can monitor the improvements and therefore be able to set personal goals. Though not one hundred percent accurate, the test does represent numerical value whose change overtime reveals the effect of the person's changing behaviors and actions. The test results may infer behavior, which may be adopted and help to improve one's work-life balance.

As regard the results of the face-to-face interviews the findings were the following:

For the first question "How do you prioritize work over family demands and vice-versa?" All the male and female prospects answered the following positive notes: take family retreat/outing/picnic once a month; family occasions like birthdays must be celebrated; and school events of children must be attended. When in comes to conflict between work and family, respondents categorically stated that they arrived at a compromise and consensus.

For the second question, "Do you follow certain standards, norms, or tradition in handling priorities between work and family demands?" respondents have mentioned about Filipinos as closed families, there is always a tendency to observe and follow traditions such as going to mass every Sunday; visit relatives, especially the elder ones. According to them, they do not feel guilty if they follow traditions over their works.

For the last question, "Balancing work, life and studies do you have coping mechanism when you are hit with unbearable stress or burn-out? If yes, can you please state your coping mechanisms?"

Only eight (8) or sixty five percent (65%) out of the twelve prospects gave affirmative answers and the rest gave "No Comment" responses. Their coping mechanisms were the following:

➢ Take a family retreat or outing.
➢ Hang-out with old friends.
➢ Visit relatives in the provinces.
➢ Lavish myself with material things.
➢ Eat in a fine dining restaurant after "spa".
➢ Just stay home, watch movies on cable or read books.
➢ Ignore.

The answers above were not in order of importance.

Base on the results of the study, it can be adduced that respondents in balancing the two sides resort to stay and be with their families when demands at work are burdensome. It is undoubtedly real that balancing work-life demands of graduate students are complicated and difficult if not impossible. And to quote Duchene (2019) "to reach a perfect balance is, at worst, impossible and, at best, extremely difficult to maintain and can leave us feeling drained or even depressed." The eight prospects in this study have good recommendations which probably have worth and merit to try when an individual is feeling drained or depressed.

Conclusion

Graduate students alike are not exempted in the recurring demands of everyday life and work. There are so many things both in life and work which are demanding our attention and effort. Giving attention on these issues will help shape our outlook on our work and personal lives.

Regardless of the survey results, respondent-students whether employed or engaged in business find satisfaction in their work-life balance. A rating of "Poor" does not mean that a person is not satisfied with his or her work-life balance. Our works and our lives are interconnected, and we must be aware of the imbalances happening within.

This study would be more constructive in the future if larger sample can be employed to identify whether the findings in this study can be generalized. Coping mechanisms in abating work-life burnouts can also be a consideration for future studies.

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