Three Generations and their Work Life Balance:

Are we balancing Work and Life or Adjusting Life for Work?

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Abstract

 Work-Life balance is heavily research field especially in human resource management or organisational behaviour. Work-life balance is a broad concept including proper prioritizing between "work" (career and ambition) on one hand and "life" (pleasure, leisure, family and spiritual development) on the other.The need differs from generation (gen), culture, place, and individual perception as well. The purpose of this study is to investigate the perception of generations towards work life balance, while how organisations are implementing work life balance, and identifying conflicts of perceptions and finding out possible recommendation to maintain a better work life balance.

This research has employed mixed research methodology; quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Survey questionnaire was used to gather quantitative data to understand critical and common work-life-balance factors in Singapore by employing deductive methodology. Qualitative interviews were carried out using a case study of one of private higher education institutions in Singapore to examine context specific factors in the study employing inductive approach. The quantitative approach constitutes a total of 60 respondents for survey. Qualitative case study approach was focussed on interviews with 4 members from management levels and short personal interviews with 20 other levels employees.

Key findings of the survey are that the baby boomers and gen X need more flexibility in their work and their family life as compared to gen Y. The Employees also are unaware that the organisation's polices are established for the benefit of the employees. The case study recommendations would be based on the concept of Maslow's Hierarchy, Wheel of Life strategy and Vroom's Expectancy theory. The study concludes that the majority of employees and managers believe that organisation policies and facilities need to become more familiarised and transparent, and communication between the management and employees is to be improved. Creating changes in the process will pave way for better motivated and balanced employees in the organisation.

Key Words: Three generations; Work-life Balance; Wheel of life; Workplace.

1. Context and Issue

There has been a great challenge faced by business organisation today: a shift in employment relationship. Today employees are savvy, confident, upbeat, open minded, creative and independent and therefore tend to be more challenging to manage (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). There is a demand for greater work/life balance, workforce flexibility and good management of workforce diversity (Parry & Urwin, 2011). Communication and breakthrough discovery in medical sciences have enabled mankind to be more immune to diseases and can travel to any part of world within a matter of few days.

Focusing on generational diversity is crucial as it helps us to observe how the attitude of the generation is changing, their perception and work values. The magnitude of this kind of diversity is higher as almost each and every company across the globe has employees from at least two different generations (Bird, 2006; Chatrakul & Lewis, 2011). Catering to each generation specific need would be creating balance and satisfaction rather than increasing conflict and stress.

Singaporeans are presently searching for work environments that furnish them with an extraordinary harmony in the middle of work and individual life, Organizations in Singapore are no longer constrained by national borders; there is a great increase in foreign assignments and foreign talents. Being students, we chose to particularly find issues and to recommend for one of the higher education institutes in Singapore as it works with cultural diversity.

2. Setting Issue from Literature

There have been increasing complaints about the line between work and non-work time becoming blurred in recent years, resulting in conflicts in personal life and causing stress (Robbins, 2003). Major factors contributing to this difference include the creation of global organizations and usage of communication technology for work. These factors allow employees to be reached at any time or location, allowing them to work from literally anywhere and at whatever time required. This results in employees putting in more hours for work despite not being physically in the office (Robbins, 2003). Work –life balance has become increasingly important in today's generations. Gen Y's need for work life balance is greater as compared to other generations (Baby boomers & Gen Y) (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008). Work-Life balance is balance between one's family-personal life and one's work life. The need differs from generation, culture, place, and individual perception as well (Wong, Gardiner, Lang, & Coulon, 2008; Parry & Urwin, 2011). Google is an example of a company which caters top most priority in creating a work –life balance for its employees and everyone desires to work in such a company, so having a balance not only influences employees quality, productivity it also improves the good will and recruitment for the company. Work life balance has six components to go with: self-management, technology management, change management, stress management, leisure management and time management. If these component needs are met, it portrays a good work life balance (McDowell, 2004).

"Every generation needs a new revolution" this is an age old saying which has been proved true over the years. Every generation has a new perception, skill, attitude and goal towards the society. There has been a lot of literature in terms of the three generations and their attitude towards work life balance. Their differences influence decision making and work environment in organisations (Aidla, 2013). There are five generations in the workplace, Traditionalists (1922-1943), Baby Boomers (1944-1960), Gen X (1961-1980), Gen y (1981-

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2000), and Gen Z (2001 to present). Generation Z are those entering the workforce to do part time jobs after their schools and on summer vacation (Gardner, 1986).

Values and attitude differences of three generations at work place

The Baby Boomers were much more focused, had a better stable life in terms of finance and political environment. Things were changing for the better, more opportunities to education and rise in women empowerment led to predictive increase in productivity and innovation(Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). The gen X, on the other hand, saw the rise in education standards, and the work culture and process becoming more advanced. Gen X saw individuals with better communication and, organising skills (Aidla, 2013; Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008). This set of people is very loyal and hardworking who give more importance to recognition of their talents. The gen X values monetary compensation and position of work with high regard (Miller, 1981). Furthermore, Gen Y. the most technological advanced work force group is distracted, they need more job enrichment and work life balance. This generation prefers job rotation and change Company at least 4 times in their career. They are motivated by inner benefits rather than monetary compensation (Miller, 1981).

Age factor in Work Life Balance

Employees aged 35 to 44 were most likely to report that work-life balance had become more difficult to achieve. People who experienced bigger work life imbalance are more likely to be managers, and high income earners. And the imbalance is more pronounced among employees who work in large company, compare to medium and small size company. The older workers, and self-employed people find it easy to balance their work and personal life (Chatrakul & Lewis, 2011).

Work-Life Balance and Stress from work

In the literature survey it shows that employees believe some option can be help to achieve better work life balance. They are giving manageable workload (48%) flexible work hour (46%) and being able to choose the days they work (44%).Women (compared with men) are more inclined to prefer choosing their own work hours and days, and working a compressed work week. The most highly educated workers, as well as those who are not compensated for overtime hours they work, give higher priority to a manageable workload. Choosing work hours is considered particularly helpful by those 35 to 44 years of age, compared to other age groups. Employees who under age 35 view having an understanding manager as especially helpful in achieving work-life balance (Yu & Miller, 2005). According to the worker survey, most employees see their supervisors as moderately to very effective. However, the lowest ratings are for work-life balance

Contradictory Reports of recent years

As per the two Contradictory Newspaper reports, in 2012, 88% Singaporeans revealed they work beyond official hours and suffer depressing Work-Life balance {HR, 2012, Singaporeans suffer Depressing Work/Life balance}. Where as in 2013 according to Regus Work/Life balance index, Singapore improved its points to 128 and took the Third place as the best Work/Life balance in Asia (HR, 2013, Singapore offers third best work/life balace in asia).This Contradiction is something to think about the work-life balance of Singapore although extensive Regus Survey shows steady/modest improvement in work-life balance of Singapore the reality picture is quite different. There are questions raised to why this gap between reality and literature? Well our findings imply that this disparity is caused due to Singapore main work-life balance interference factor is left untreated. Regus Survey (http://www.regus.com.sg is conducted every year for 16,000 employees across the globe,

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the survey gets information on various factors which influence work life balance hard factors such as long working hours and soft factors as the work environment. Singapore would rank very high on soft factors and most of the hard factors such as holiday and flexibility policies.

The main underlying problem of management pressure indirectly on job performance, long working hours and work load are left insignificant and unrecognised. The problem to this day still lay uncared too. Although few HR do take initiatives to make sure the employees make use of their holidays of the year, the employees have so much work load and job reputation and feedback at stake that they cannot afford to take the vacation (Lowe, 2005). It can be referred to as an individual's need to have influence, knowledge and control over fulfilling his or her basic needs properly that is being able to adhere to sleep properly, have a healthy lifestyle and being able to utilise time effectively to maintain one's healthy self both physically and mentally. Baby boomers' need for self-management is mediocre, since they are more loyal towards work then self-maintenance. Generation X portrays a slighter bigger appetite for self-management as compared to baby boomers, and although still very much focused on career, Generation Y although very flexible and adaptable have the greatest need for self-management, They are self and social conscious and are continually working on improving themselves (Hansen, 2002).

3. Purpose of the Study

To analyse the responses of the three generations, towards Work-life balance and understand work-life implementation approaches by the top management across companies in Singapore to get a clear understanding of Singapore's contradiction on work life balance, and suggest strategies to the organisation taken for this study.

4. Methodology

The Research involves both primary and secondary methods of data collection. The primary research constitutes of a survey to employees of the organisation, the conceptual framework of the questionnaire is provided. It is focused on the stress, self, change, technology, time and leisure management of the individual and would be segregated based on their generation. The survey Case Study constitutes of well - established and diverse company. This company has employees of all generations. Keeping the Grounded Theory as a base, we undertake both Inductive and Deductive method of research approach, where the Deductive approach is associated with quantitative research through online Survey tool and Inductive approach associates with qualitative research approach. Personal interview with managers and senior employees were employed. The Second part of the primary research involves interviews mainly concentrated to understand the management's perspective and knowledge regarding the employee's work-life balance and generational issues in the company. The measures taken to tackle them and also the implemented course of action establish the work-life balance.

The Survey of the employees is segregated and plotted using the Questionpro system to gather the relevant figures and components for comparison and analysis of the data. The data is further scrutinised to find any distinctive difference or pattern in terms of the generation's attitude towards work-life balance. Survey results are then compared to the managements view, based on which suggestions and recommendations would be derived for the establishing of a better functioning system. Secondary Research Primarily involves Journal articles across the years to understand the work-life balance scope, the generations and their

differences, and to figure out the possible gaps in the previous researches and conflicts amongst them.

5. Outcome of the Survey Questionnaire

The interpretations and findings have been segregated as per the dimensions of the questionnaire.

Gender

As per the sample size being 55 employees of this organisation in total. The figure shows, 60% being male and 40% being females who answered the survey questionnaire

Age composition

Maximum number of employees working at the organisation are Generation Y having a percentage of around 70% , around 22% are Generation X who answered the survey, the least percentage ratio are the Baby Boomers around 10% working at school.

Work days

According to the survey results, maximum number of employees work for 5 days at the institution having the percentage of 80.

Work hours

The survey reveals that the maximum number of working hours by employees are 9-10 hours a day showing 30% employees work for a long time at school. Only 11% employees work for 7-8 hours, 26% work for 8-9 hours.

Satisfied with duration of work

As per the survey, around half of the employees are not happy with the work timings at school. Around 48% employees say they are not happy with their work timings and 52% say they are quite satisfied.

Salary satisfactions

According to the survey, 50% of the employees are not happy with the salary given to them.

Thoughts of work at leisure time

Almost 80% Baby boomers and 70% Gen X employees often thinks about the work when they are not actually at work, where as 65% Gen Y employees rarely or never think of their work once they are out of their work place

Child care and support

Majority of Gen X i.e. 40% employees were not happy with working hours as they could not take care of their children and were dependent on their parents. Gen Y were less as they dint have responsibilities of children.

Missing out on quality family time

Baby boomers (35%) often missed having quality time with their family and friends because of the pressure of work. Whereas 50% of Gen X sometimes miss out, and 25% of Gen Y rarely misses because of the pressure.

Depression due to work

Baby boomer (25%), Gen X (50%) and Gen Y (35%) accepted that they sometimes feel tiered or depressed because of work.

Facilities in the organisation to manage stress

Majority of employees (45%) said the management organises entertainment events for staff. Few others answered that management conducts Social dinners, Fitness club to come out of the stress.

Awareness and institution of work-life balance policies

The employees (33%) were not aware whether they had a policy for work-life balance and 43% knew that there is no such policy in specific for work-life balance. Furthermore, according to the survey results the figure shows around 62% of employees do not suffer from any stress related health issues, which show that the employees in the university are quite healthy. 17% suffers from frequent head aches and other 10% suffers from insomnia, anxiety, back and shoulder pains, disturbed sleep and depression.

Health and safety procedures at organisation

As the figure shows, most of the employees around 89% agree that institution follows health and safety procedures and only 11% feel that it does not. This shows that institution has health policies and safety policies for the staff.

Transparency in the organisation

The survey shows that 54% of the employees says that there is transparency but around 46% does not agree. This shows a negative perception on management and indication by the management decision-making and communication style towards its employees.

Dimensions in terms of personal values system

This part of the survey consisted of five sub-divisions which speak about the employee's general values and importance of different aspects of the work environment. The second subdivision is related to the respondents Self-Management dimension, Stress and Time Management is related to the third sub division. The fourth division touches the technology and change management aspect. The last division evaluates the attitude and view of the respondent towards other generations. The dimensions of the divisions were segregated into five scale that is for response.

Personal values

The dimension of the personal values in our survey were salary importance, increments, cooperation with other generations, loyalty, overtime, working environment, system of hierarchy preference and managers understanding towards employees (Smola & Sutton, 2002). Majority of the employees feel that their Salary is the most important dimension in their work around 37% agree to this. They also feel that increments and benefits are very important to keep them motivated to work around 41% agree to this. 54% like cooperating with other generation employees, 44% employees say that they love being loyal to the organisation and their respective managers, employees are quite neutral on working overtime for organisation and majority of employees around 52% strongly agree that its necessary for them to work in a friendly working environment. 44% employees agree to work in a structured system of hierarchy. 54% agree that there needs to be an understanding and empathy between managers and employees.

6. Findings

Generational Differences

Baby boomers, Gen X and Gen Y have different pattern groups with respect to time management, technology management, and interference of work in family time and working hours.

Time Management

Baby boomers are concerned with time management and prefer flexible timings and being task oriented , the next gen X is a little more stronger on this belief of flexibility about 70% strongly believe in the need of flexibility and time management. Gen Y is inclined to the neutral side with respect to their opinions regarding time management and 63% prefer to work more for future extra benefits.

Technology Management

Baby Boomers are not concerned much about technology, and not keen on being educated regarding the latest technology updates, gen X seems to more concerned about technology and proper training. Gen Y is again neutral and no specific pattern observed with respect to technology Management.

Interference of work in Family Time

According to the Survey Baby Boomers and Gen X almost 95% of them strongly felt that their work was interfering with their Quality life they share with their families. Their thoughts often wondered towards work even in their private time and suffer depression due to stress related to work. Whereas on the other hand Gen Y majority are of the view that work does not or rarely interferes in their family commitment and they do not as often think about work during their private time and not often stressed about work compared to the older generations

Work Time concerns

Baby Boomers and Gen X have concerns regarding the long working hours of the company whereas Gen Y is more concerned about the shifts in the work.

Work-Life Balance Concerns

Irrespective of the generation the major concern is that employees are unaware of work-life balance importance and if any policy has been implemented by the company. Survey shows that the work life balance policies are not affective as per the expectations and perception of the management. Less than 10% of the surveys knew about a work-life balance policies employed by the company.

Second concern is transparency; most of the individuals feel the lack of transparency and communication between employees and the management. This again supports the theory of the employees being unaware of the management's policy for the benefit of the employees.

Communication gap between departments

There are several departments at the university and employees do not mingle much with other departments which becomes an issue at school. Employees feel that if they face an emergency at work and they require help, they find it difficult to take help from the other department.

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Improper and insufficient salary increments

Few employees feel that the career progression at the university is slow and they do not apply importance at their working experience, rather they apply importance on their educational qualifications, which decreases the chances of promotions in their jobs thus resulting to not satisfying their salary income.

Too many processes to follow for approval:

If employees face problems or need approval from the top management they are finding it difficult, as they feel the process of gaining an approval for one situation takes a long time as they need to undergo many processes from people to people

Inadequate Bonus and benefits

Employees are only given bonuses as their increments but they feel they would require more kind of benefits from the top management to keep them going motivated towards the university and their work-style.

Congested cubical areas of staff

As per the observation at the university's work area for staff, the desks of employees are too congested leading to lack of privacy, which makes the teachers face problems while communicating with students and correcting examination papers or other confidential paperwork

Less attendance during events for staff

As per our interview with employees, 60 percent of the staff is not able to attend events happening at university. The university has come up with many social events such as Zumba, kickboxing, dinners, yoga activities. Only a 40 percent of attendance which is very less for such events and decreases the chance of interaction and collaboration between employees.

Stress due to Trimester concept

Employee need to accommodate trimesters a year so it is difficult and challenging to fit in the times to take leaves, because they have markings to do for the period and to prepare for the following studying period.

Work Time and leisure management

When life is busy due to long working hours and lack of leisure and all the energy is focused on work projects, it's all too easy to find employees 'Of balance' not paying enough attention to important areas of life. Most of the employees were found dis-satisfied with their working hours and working extra in the absence of their colleagues from the survey. Implementation of wheel of life needs software to form the survey for the employees.

Technology management issue

From our survey results, the Baby boomers are not too concerned about using the modern technology, whereas Gen X accepts using technology is time saving when given proper training to gain a good knowledge of the usage. Majority of the Gen Y do not require training as they have been educated about computers and other kinds of software's at their respective schools, which the previous generations lacked. By the survey, there is a problem faced by the employees in adapting to new technologies and new processes which the management implement in a short notice. Employees are not able to cope up with it in a short time. Due to this there is another issue which they face with the students and takes time for the management also to get the responses

Personal life

Baby boomers and Generation X are more involved with the responsibly of having a family consisting children and grandchildren, Generation Y is involved gaining progression in their careers and hence are more work oriented. The problem occurs here is related to time management and work life issues. According to the survey and observations employees do not concentrate on their personal life as they will be more involved in their work in order to earn benefits and more salary. This issue can be addressed on a regular time span so that employees' personal life stress is not affected the work.

Lack of transparency in the company

The survey has revealed that almost half the respondents agree that there is lack of transparency in the organisation which is bad for the secured feeling of the employees. Sudden notices and changes affect the stress and change management components of work Life Balance. This lack of transparency leads to communication gap between the management and employees. This organisational culture develops leads to communication gaps between departments, which would be discussed in the later part of the report.

Stress due to work-model

By the personal interview conducted there was an issue from the academic department which talks about the stress on a Lecturers' and tutors because of the trimester concept, as an individual alone cannot handle a single subject as in which he/she cannot apply for leave, because they have markings to do for the period and to prepare for the following studying period.

Less attendance during events for staff

As per our interview with employees, 60 percent of the staff is not able to attend events happening at university. The university has come up with many social events such as Zumba, kickboxing, dinners, yoga. There is only a 40 percent of attendance which is very less for such events and decreases the chance of interaction and collaboration between employees. This is a major issue under the efforts which organisation makes towards having a good Work-life balance addressing this is very important as the management releases a particular cost for the staff entertainment which has not been used properly, as most of the employees participation is nil.

Congested cubical areas of staff

As per the observation at the university's work area for staff, the desks of employees are too congested leading to lack of privacy, which makes the teachers face problems while communicating with students and correcting examination papers or other confidential paperwork. By having such a small space employees can face physical problems as well like back pain, less movement in body. This issue can be addressed when moving to the new campus as the equipment's and spacing can be offered keeping the issue in mind.

7. Recommendation

Work-Life Balance Concerns: According to the survey, the Baby boomers and Gen X are not aware of the policies on Work life balance, and about 10% of Gen Y is aware that their company has a policy for the same. As per the responses from employees, institution has no policy for Work-life Balance. But it is very important in today's date for the company/organizations to have a policy on Work-life balance as it shows how much the management care for their employees, and to achieve goodwill. Employees are not aware

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what the company offers them due to lack in communication and transparency between the management and employees. Problems raised in an employee's life should be acknowledged by the company and help them to resolve so that the stress in personal life will not affect their work life.

To solve Work-life Balance concerns the management can apply Spill over-Crossover model, which explains the positive and negative of work/family conflicts and family/work conflicts. The work roles when interfered with family roles because of increase in work overload and emotional demands, in turn affects negative behaviour of the employee as the demands at personal life also reaches a higher level at a point and the employee experiences higher level of exhaustion. Management should not only focus on interventions that mitigate family demands that conflicts with work roles like child care programs, alternative work schedules, but also on practices that impact working conditions like job demands and resources and how these influences family life.

8. Conclusion

 In conclusion, this research portrays that the institution is focusing only on expanding and gaining more volume of students, not on the needs of its employees. Considering the wheel of life as a strategy and implementing it in organisation will help organisation to give a right balance between employees work and life. Management should not only focus on interventions that mitigate family demands that conflicts with work roles like child care programs, alternative work schedules, but also on practices that impact working conditions like job demands and resources and how these influences family life. The future research must be carried forward by the authorities of the university to analyse the issues and to retain its employees as the organisation is moving to the new location, accommodating more students and employees. To establish itself as a niche brand of education in Singapore it should start focusing more on its employees so as to achieve new heights and standards.

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Work-Life Balance Working Group Newsletter, Volume 5, Spring 2014 (13)