



IMPACT OF WORK LIFE BALANCE FEATURES IN A HOSPITAL SETTING

Syed J. Hyder*

Syeda A. Fatima**

Latha Krishnadas***

Abstract: *Turnover rates and motivation levels of employees have been increasing which is partially the result of increasing competitive pressures and higher productivity expectations. Improving employee retention is not only a difficult challenge to the management but also for the complete private hospital sector in Kuwait. This work examines the factors affecting the Quality of Work life at hospital before and after the adoption of Work Life Balance Features including Training to Senior Officials. The survey was conducted across the entire organization and covered all position categories. There were 321 responses out of a total of 720 employees.*

The main issues identified in the survey included work life balance policies, general wellness, stress, time management and work schedules. The need for the organization to recognize the importance of a work/life balance was mentioned throughout the survey. Flexible work arrangements for staff were cited in order to provide them greater ability to manage their work/life needs. Respondents noted that Supervisors and Managers need to be sensitive to work/life issues while developing policies for balancing work/life issues. Providing workshops on stress management and fitness/exercise will benefit employees who report a high level of interest in these subjects.

There was greater response to the survey from female employees and this indicates that work/life issues impact female employees to a greater extent, as women have traditionally taken on more of the caretaking responsibilities. The work life balance initiatives introduced are believed to result in gains and can affect the bottom line positively. The number of work life balance programs initiated in a Hospital in Kuwait post survey aims to reduce absenteeism, reduce turnover, increase productivity, reduce overtime costs and retain employees.

*HR Director, RAK White Cement Construction Company, RAK, UAE

**Associate Professor, Gulf Medical College, Ajman, UAE

***Professor, Khawarizmi International College, Abu Dhabi, UAE



1. INTRODUCTION

Work-life balance is the concept that a person can create a balance between their personal and professional lives. It is accomplished when an individual maintains a sense of achievement and enjoyment in the key areas of their personal life – family, friends, self – and their paid occupation.

Work-life balance does not mean devoting an equal number of hours to work and personal activities. Because the right work-life balance is different for everyone, individuals must learn how to discover and manage their own needs and unique work-life balance “equation.” By utilizing specific, learned tools, individuals effectively evaluate and improve each area of their lives on an ongoing basis - even as their own needs and priorities change [1].

WorkLifeBalance.com provides education, leadership, training and development for employees through out the world. It’s philosophy commitment to daily Achievement and Enjoyment for individuals both on and off the job. Training programs from Work Life Balance [1] have shown to increase employee satisfaction, job performance and productivity of the employees and on the other hand impact key business processes like customer service, loyalty there by improving the profitability and organizational performance.

As per the study conducted by Blair et al [2] Accordingly, this study investigates the relationships between unit organizational culture and several important job related variables for nurse retention in the labor and delivery units of seven hospitals. Data analysis shows that unit organizational culture does affect nurses' quality of work life factors and that human relation cultural values are positively related to organizational commitment, job involvement, empowerment, and job satisfaction, and negatively related to intent to turnover. These findings suggest that although increasing recruitment of nurses and improved compensation and benefits strategies may offset hospital nurses shortages in the short term, improving quality of work life may be a more practical and long term approach to improving hospital nurse retention.

Linda et al [3] compiled comments of the Canadian workers regarding how they feel about the stress they are facing in their daily lives as they seek to balance work and family. The views of the individuals reflects how the increased stress levels have affected the work environment in response to downsizing, globalization, competitive pressures and



technological change. These in turn have adversely affected their professional, personnel and family life's and also provides an insight into the problem for individuals and organizations as such.

Turnover rates for hospital nurses have been increasing in recent years, which is partially a result of increasing pressure on nurses from higher productivity expectations in a managed care environment as found in the article by Blair et al [4]. Improving nurse retention is a difficult challenge to managers since the bureaucratic culture, hierarchical structures, rules, and regulations, heavy emphasis on measurement of outcomes and costs, may not be the culture most conducive to enhancing nurses' job satisfaction and commitment. Accordingly, this study investigates the relationships between unit organizational culture and several important job-related variables for nurse retention in the labor and delivery units of seven hospitals. Data analysis shows that unit organizational culture does affect nurses' quality of work life factors and that human relation cultural values are positively related to organizational commitment, job involvement, empowerment, and job satisfaction, and negatively related to intent to turnover.

Managing Work-life Balance by David Clutterbuck [5] sets out the roadmap for moving an organisation towards a positive work-life culture. It lays down clear and practical advice for HR and line managers in order to engage employers, managers and employees in the process of controlling the inherent conflicts between the worlds of work and home. The work stresses the fact that Work-life balance is one of the most important issues facing employers and managers today. Employees at all levels are no longer willing to trade their quality of life in order to get a decent standard of living. Managers can no longer afford to ignore the costs that the long-hours culture imposes on their organisation. Overwork causes stress-related absenteeism, poor retention levels, low creativity, appalling customer service and unethical employee behaviour. Combine that with the risks of being sued by a stressed employee or a parent who wanted to work flexibly, and the business case for paying real attention to work-life issues has never been stronger.

E. Jeffrey et al [6] examine the influence of perceived flexibility in the timing and location of work on work-family balance. Data are from a 1996 International Business Machines (IBM) work and life issues survey in the United States for 6,451 respondents. Results indicate that perceived job flexibility is related to improved work-family balance after controlling for paid



work hours, unpaid domestic labor hours, gender, marital status, and occupational level. Perceived job flexibility appears to be beneficial both to individuals and to businesses. Given the same workload, individuals with perceived job flexibility have more favorable work-family balance. Likewise, employees with perceived job flexibility are able to work longer hours before workload negatively impacts their work-family balance.

Julia et al [7] conducted a study with an objective to determine the gender differences in job satisfaction, work life issues and burnout of US physicians using stratified sampling of physicians in primary and non-surgical care speciality. Survey contained 150 items assessing career satisfaction and multiple aspects of work life. Multiple linear regressions was performed to model dependent variables of global, career and speciality satisfaction with independent variables of income, time pressure and items over medical and workplace issues. The results indicate women had 1.6 times the odds of reporting burnout compared with men and the odds of burnout increasing by 12% to 15% for each additional 5 hours worked per week over 40 hours. Lack of workplace control predicted burnout in women but not in men. For those women with young children, odds of burnout were 40% less when support of colleagues, spouse, or significant other for balancing work and home issues was present. It was concluded that gender differences exist in both the experience and satisfaction with medical practice. Addressing these gender differences would optimize the participation of female physicians with the medical workforce.

2. WORK LIFE BALANCE INITIATIVES & POLICIES AT THE HOSPITAL

A variety of work life balance initiatives have been adopted at the Hospital after work life balance training. The types of arrangements available to particular individuals varying depending on the category, type of contract and nature of employment. The training has tremendous impact on productivity with focus on both personal and professional achievements as well as employment. It's been observed that there has been tremendous rise in the levels of loyalty, commitment and retention of employees after work life balance initiatives. Some of the work life balance features adopted or enhanced or upgraded includes:

- Flexible Employment Arrangements in the form of Phased Retirement, Accrued Days off, Work from home and Shift exchange.



- Flexible Leave Arrangements include Compensatory Day offs, Purchased Leave or Leave Encashment, Maternity Leave (increased from 40 to 70 days), Deceased Leave (for first relatives), Hajj Leave, Educational Leave, Short Leaves (for 2 hrs – thrice a month) and Accident Leaves (employee is entitled to full pay for the first six months and thereafter, half pay until he dies, or recovers, or is proved to be permanently disabled).
- Employee and his family are counselled by the Hospital Counsellor for resolving their personal, professional and social related issues.
- Employee Assistance Programs include provision of Tuition Fee reimbursement for employees who are pursuing higher degree or diploma programs, Compulsory continuous Medical Education for Physicians and Para-Medics. Regular provision of in-house Training Programs in the realm of Management, Soft Skills and Health Safety.
- Free Medical Insurance, Group life and Disability Insurance.

2.1. Identifying staff needs

The Hospital conducted a confidential survey of employees to identify staff needs in balancing their work and family/personal responsibilities, awareness of flexible work options, and the suitability of current working arrangements for them. The record of survey results are analysed so as to improve working arrangements. The identified barriers are also understood and addressed in implementing the work life balance strategies.

2.2. Retention and staff turnover

The Hospital started giving utmost importance in retaining loyal and committed employees.

- Managers and supervisors were to take greater responsibility in retaining staff, and are held accountable for staff turn-over in their work area.
- Managers and supervisors were to facilitate the needs of employees to discourage them from resigning to work elsewhere.
- Managers and supervisors to canvas alternative working options with staff who are resigning to see whether there are any other working arrangements that could be considered as a means of retaining them.
- Pre-exit interviews to be conducted by managers and supervisors before employees leave work that is to be conducted by Human Resources for analysis. Analysis to be



submitted to Higher Management for further review and amendment of policies or working conditions if required.

2.3. Training, development and support for managers

Training, development, support and information services are provided to managers and supervisors to assist them in regard to:

- Understanding the importance of providing flexible work arrangements for work life balance and the benefits these will bring to the Organization;
- Their responsibilities is to try and facilitate the needs of employees with regard to family responsibilities; and
- Implement and manage flexible rooster and working arrangements in the workplace.

2.4. Objectives of the Present Study

The main objectives of this study were to:

- Ascertain the demand for work-life balance practices
- Ascertain employees' views on flexible working hours/schedule
- Establish the extent to which work-life balance practices meets their needs including their views on the feasibility of their employer extending these arrangements
- Establish how, and to what extent, employees are informed of, and are involved in the development and implementation of the various work-life balance arrangements; including whether there are procedures in place for taking their views into account.
- Ascertain employees' views on the impact of work-life balance practices, including the impact on employee commitment, and the employment relations' climate.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodological perspective comprised of quantitative approach. A survey was conducted across the entire organization covering all job categories. There were 321 responses out of a total of 720 employees which comprised of 58 physicians (18%), 154 Nursing staff (48%), 38 paramedical staff (12%) and 71 support staff (22%). To enhance the quality of data, detailed interviews were conducted for key job positions.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Work-Life Balance

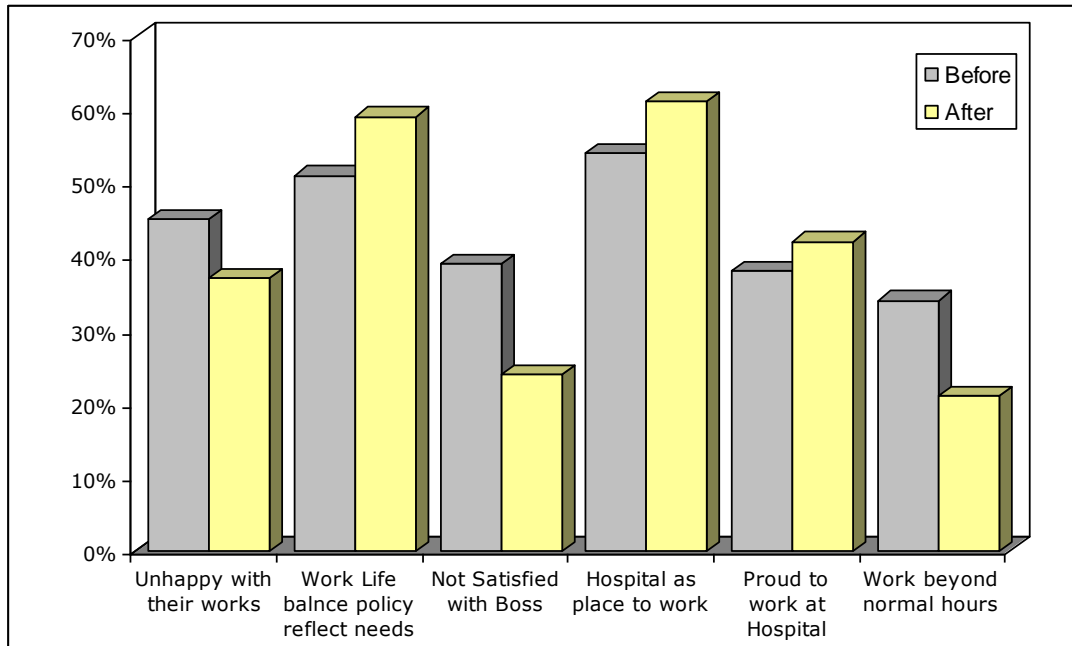


Figure 1: Assessing Features of Work life Balance

Most individuals surveyed at Hospital reported that they have difficulty finding a positive balance between their personal and professional lives.

- 45% / 37% of respondents to a recent survey said they were unhappy with their work/life balance and finds it extremely difficult to cope between work and life.
- 51%/59% of the respondents conveyed that the work-life balance policies at Hospital actually reflect their needs.
- 39% / 24% of the employees were not satisfied (or they don't trust) with their Boss attitude when the employees ask for their permission to be absent in order to address their personnel needs.
- 54% / 61% said that they would recommend Hospital as a place to work and 38% /42% conveyed that they are proud to work for the Hospital.

Survey indicates that factors such as high stress, ineffective time management, workplace stringent policies and poor leadership on the job are likely causes of this work-life imbalance.

Over three quarters (76%/ 40%) of staff who responded to the survey said that they had taken advantage of flexible working options. This included flexi-time; working reduced hours and job sharing. 34% / 21% of staff said they worked longer than their contracted hours in a working week.



4.2. Stress

The workload has increased tremendously when compared to few years back with increase in number of patients. Moreover with the Technology enhancement modern workers and leaders require not only a different skill set but a different mindset to cope with the stress. Following are the results from the survey:

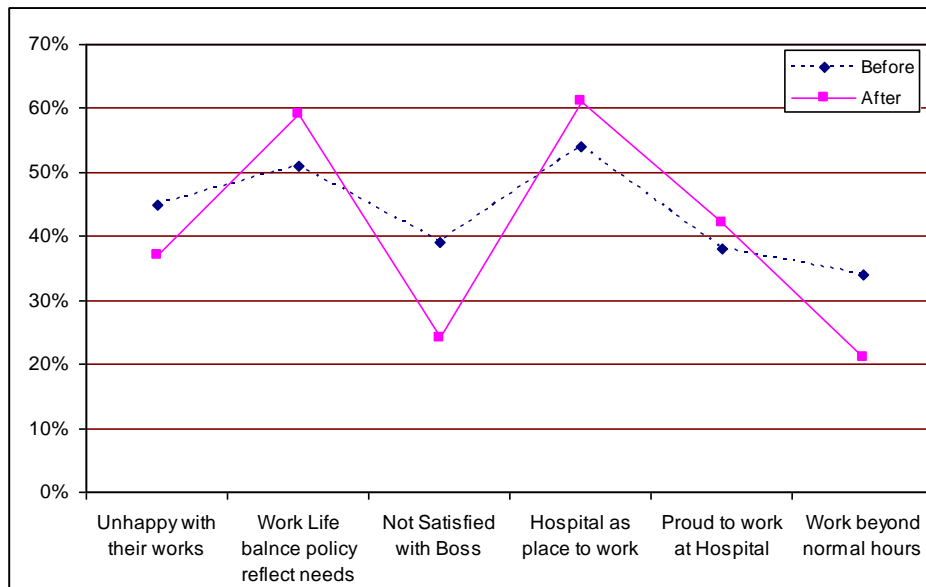


Figure 2: Assessing Stress Levels

- Nearly 35% / 29% of all workers feel overwhelmed by a growing number of job tasks and longer work hours.
- 51% / 47% of people claim to feel stress on the job, and nearly 25% / 19% say they need help managing Stress.
- More than two-thirds of the managers believe their stress level is higher today than three years ago and
- 39% / 24% of managers are in high stress.
- 60% / 22% cite Hospital as failing to provide them with the tools they need to manage stress.
- High levels of stress is having a negative impact on employee's health and is also significantly increase health care costs for the Hospital. Last year itself there have been five cases of work place injury as well as three cases of hearth attacks. Health costs are almost 30% greater for workers who report high levels of stress.

4.3. Time Management



Effective time management has become increasingly more important with the explosion of on and off the job choices and corresponding rise in stress levels. Poor time management is counter productive and proven to waste valuable employer dollars.

- The average worker admits to "waste" more than 2.09 / 1.25 hours a day, not counting lunch, on personal business, costing the Hospital an overwhelming amount that cannot even be estimated.
- 35%/ 29% of executives and managers keep a To Do list, yet less than 1% / 4% are able to complete it.

4.4. Flexible Timings

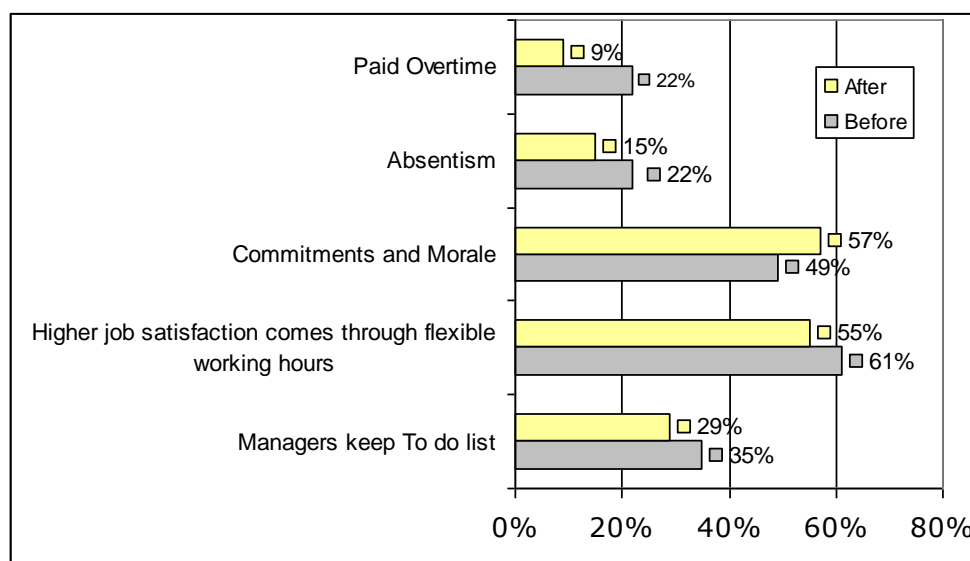


Figure 3: Impact on Job Satisfaction and Time Management by Employees

Flexible working hours should be extended across more levels or categories and not just limited to Nursing. Flexible working hours have met with a positive response:

- Around 61% / 55% of managers state that higher job satisfaction results from the introduction of flexible working time arrangements.
- Commitments and morale is increased by 49%/57%.
- Lower absenteeism (22%)/ 15% and a reduction in paid overtime (22%) / 9% are other positive effects mentioned by manager.

4.5. Reduction of working time

Nearly 100% of the employees felt that they should reduce from 48 hour week to 40 hour week. 95% of the employees were of the opinion that reduction in work days from 6 to 5 would improve the work-life balance of the employees.



4.6. Productivity Gains

- 60% / 70% of managers and employees report they are more productive after Work-Life skills training.
- 41% / 55% average productivity increase reported.
 - Problems and Challenges at the Organizational Level
- In this survey, 41% / 38% of the comments provided by employees dealt with problems and challenges at the organizational level that are identified as:
 - Heavy workloads – Downsizing, Unrealistic Expectation, Inability to plan to set priorities, Impact of Technology.
 - Cultures that do not support balance
 - The perception that one has to choose between career advancement and balance
 - The strategy of putting family ahead of work (even when children are young) hurts career advancement.
 - Career development activities often make it more difficult to meet family demands.
 - Time crunch negatively affects career advancement.
 - Career advancement often depends on relocation, which is difficult to do in families where both partners are working.
 - Lack of policies – No Policies, Policies not clear, No proper Implementation or Inequity in use of policies.
 - Fast Changes – Restructuring – Overwhelms Employees ability to cope – Increases workload and work stress.

5. FINANCIAL BENEFITS FROM WORK-LIFE BALANCE CULTURE AT THE HOSPITAL

<i>Savings Per Month</i>	<i>Amount (US Dollars)</i>
Turnover & Recruitment Savings	135,478
Reduced Labor Cost due to Productivity Gains	499,574
Reduced Overtime	16,729
Commitment and Raised Morale	285,471
Lower Absenteeism	2,045
Targeted Return Per Month	963,450
Savings	27%



It is very difficult to quantify the benefits of work life balance benefits quantitatively. It has been observed that effective work life balance features is not only good at retaining employees but also to prospective candidates to attract them and are often a deal maker. Effective work-life programs help forges a relationship between the Hospital as employer and employees that leads to mutual benefits. The survey conducted has shown to improve the Productivity Gains of **14%**, Commitments and Morale raised by **8%** and Lowered Absenteeism by **7%**. The total saving has been observed to be 27%.

These statistics are the average of opinions and backed up by anecdotal evidence so they are subjective in nature, it is important to note that the opinions and anecdotal evidence from both employees and management are strongly positive.

6. CONCLUSIONS FROM THE STUDY

- Work Balance goes with the mission of the Hospital which is “To be the employer of choice and...a great place to work...”. (Improves the image in the market thereby attracting more prospective employees).
- Improves productivity of employees thereby improving the performance and in turn improving the patient satisfaction & its profitability.
- Significantly increases loyalty, productivity, commitment and retention of key managers and employees.
- It has improved the Patient Safety whereby employees are committed to follow standard procedures and protocols while performing the work.
- Introducing organised systems of flexible working in order to assist employees in reconciling their work–life balance have reduced the number of sick leaves taken by them.
- Executives and managers have conveyed that work balance features improve not only their professional & official commitments but their personal lives.

It can be concluded from the survey that Work Life Balance Policies operational in the Hospital compliments with its Mission and Vision. It reflects employee needs and acknowledges positive work-life value and balance. The Work life balance training imparted to employees has shown positive results with enhanced productivity levels and reduced absenteeism rate. Survey has proven that the Hospital uses its work life balance policies to facilitate employee loyalty, commitment, retention and attract prospective candidates. Of



all the work life balance policies instituted, flexible working hours has received phenomenal positive acceptance thereby increasing employee satisfaction. In addition it has enabled employees to work out a perfect balance between their professional and personal life and has helped them achieve higher levels of accomplishment in both the spheres of professional and personal life.

7. REFERENCES

- [1]. Jim Bird; Work-Life Balance Doing it the Right and Avoid the Pitfalls, *Employment Relations Today – Wiley Periodicals Inc.*, 2006, Vol. 33, No. 3, pg 13-26.
- [2]. Blair D Gifford, Raymond F Zammuto, Eric A Goodman and Karen S Hill; The Relationship between Hospital Unit Culture and Nurses Quality of Work Life, *Journal of Healthcare Management*, Jan 2002, Vol. 47, No. 1, pg 13-26.
- [3]. Linda Duxbury, Christopher Higgins and Donna Coghill; Voices of Canadians: Seeking Work-Life Balance, 2003, ISBN 0-662-67059-0, <http://labour-travail.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/worklife/vcswlb-tcrctvp/tm.cfm>
- [4] Blair D Gifford, Raymond F Zammuto, Eric A Goodman and Karen S Hill; The Relationship between Hospital Unit Culture and Nurses Quality of Work Life, *Journal of Healthcare Management*, Jan 2002, Vol. 47, No. 1, pg 13-26.
- [5] David Clutterbuck; Managing Work-life Balance: A Guide for HR in Achieving Organisational and Individual Change, ISBN 0852929692, CIPD Publishers, 2003.
- [6] E. Jeffrey Hill, Alan J. Hawkins, Maria Ferris, Michelle Weitzman; Finding an Extra Day a Week: The Positive Influence of Perceived Job Flexibility on Work and Family Life Balance, *Family Relations*, Feb 2004, Vol. 50, No. 1, pg 49-58.
- [7] Julia E. Mc Murray, Mark Linzer, Thomas R. Konrad, Jeffrey Douglas, Richard Shugerman and Kathleen Nelson; The Work Lives of Women Physicians, *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, Jun 2004, Vol. 15, No. 6, pg 372-378.