



Work Life Balance

Module 1 Lesson 1: Introduction to Work Life Balance

Introduction

Welcome to the course "Work Life Balance". Over these 3 lessons, we will define Work Life Balance, how to identify unhealthy Work Life Balance, the effects of unhealthy Work Life Balance, and how to redress the balance.

Defining Work Life Balance

So let's begin by first defining Work Life Balance.

Work Life Balance is the amount of time you spend doing your job compared with the amount of time you spend with your family and doing the things you enjoy.

A good Work Life Balance is where employees work no more than standard work days, take advantage of rest and eating breaks, and know in advance what days or shifts they are scheduled to work. This allows employees to plan time with family, and to plan pursuits and interests outside of work.

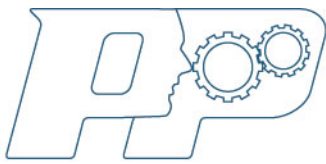
What is involved in Work Life Balance?

50 years ago, a worker finished work when he left the place of business, and had free time to pursue hobbies or spend time with family and friends. In today's connected world, it seems that we are available 24 hours per day. With smart devices and mobile phones, we can be connected by phone or email after our working day has finished, and we are tempted to respond to these calls and e-mails immediately. Technology also enables us to bring work home electronically. It's easy, therefore, to continue working even after we have left the office.

Work Life Balance refers to the need in all of us to have a balance in our lives. We perform better when we have some elements of work and some elements of activities we enjoy.

However due to a variety of factors, we can find ourselves in positions where we tip the scale towards working longer hours. While in the short term this does not present a problem, consistently working long hours can have a detrimental effect on us personally, and those around us.

Extended working hours can be the result of 2 sets of factors - internal factors and external factors. External factors are forces that come from outside of us, while internal factors are self-generated.



External factors may be for example:

- Being too busy at work
- Major changes to our job function
- Redundancy, downsizing or changing work practices
- Work pressures and deadlines
- Financial Pressures
- Unrealistic expectations

Internal factors may be:

- Ambition
- Negative Self Belief and Self Doubt
- Perfectionism
- Lack of assertiveness
- Fear

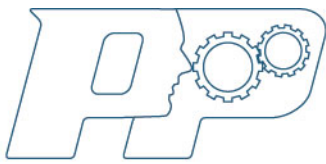
Let's explore these in more detail.

External Factors that affect Work Life Balance

Many companies have faced difficulties due to recession over the past 10 years. The market for products and services has been challenging, leading to increased competition and lower margins.

As a result, staff may not have been replaced when they leave, or there may have been redundancies. Due to resources issues it can be difficult to find replacement staff when colleagues are sick or on maternity leave. In most cases, the overall workload remains the same, even if colleagues are missing. Understaffing and lack of resources can lead to employees taking on additional duties or responsibilities, adding to their overall workload.

It can also be the case that some positions within a company are just extremely busy. Companies may also be working to increasingly challenging deadlines - for example when tendering for work or competing for new business.



Employees may respond to these factors by working longer and longer hours. Employees may also be under financial pressure to increase their income through earning bonuses or working overtime, which may influence their working hours. Unrealistic expectations of the skills, abilities and time constraints of employees from colleagues and managers can also increase workloads.

Internal Factors that may affect Work Life Balance

Employees may choose to work longer hours for a variety of reasons. If an employee wants to be promoted, they may work longer hours to increase their productivity and be noticed by their managers.

However, this is not the only reason why an employee may choose to work longer hours. Employees may have low self-esteem and self-doubt, in these circumstances, they may not value their contribution, and may assume that they are unvalued by their colleagues. They therefore work harder to increase their perceived value to the organisation.

Other employees may work additional hours to ensure their work meets their own exacting standards of perfection. Lack of assertiveness may cause some employees to say yes to every request from customers, colleagues and managers, thus increasing their workload. Fear of failure, fear of change or fear of losing their job can also drive employees to work longer hours.

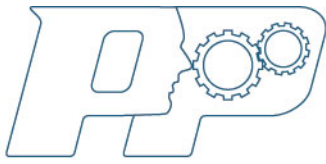
So, we now know what factors can affect Work Life Balance, how do we identify poor Work Life Balance?

Unhealthy Work Life Balance

There are several indicators of an unhealthy Work Life Balance that are easily identifiable.

- You feel unhappy about the amount of time you work
- You are neglecting certain aspects of your personal life
- Your personal relationships are suffering
- You feel miserable, sad and grumpy more often than you feel happy
- You suffer from anxiety and feel alienated
- Your health and fitness is deteriorating
- You work well in excess of a standard working week consistently

While someone with an unhealthy Work Life Balance may not experience all of these issues, these are common issues associated with an unhealthy Work Life Balance.



Summary

In this lesson, we defined Work Life Balance; we described what is involved in Work Life Balance, and described how to identify unhealthy Work Life Balance.

