Work Life Balance: Comparative Study between a Public Organisation and a Private Organisation in Maun, Botswana

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to unearth the similarities and differences in Work Life balance systems in the private and public sector contexts. Work Life balance has been researched over time and most studies carried out were largely conceptual and not pragmatic. A number of studies carried out used secondary data to develop theoretical foundations (Stirgy & Lee, 2018; Aziz & Chang, 2013; Allen et al, 2013).

This study was carried out in Maun, Botswana and it included two organisations, one drawn from the public sector and the other from the private sector. The study utilised a qualitative design. The sampling method used was purposive and data was collected using the interview method. The overall manager and 10 employees in each of the two organisations were interviewed. The data collected was then analysed using content analysis and the responses were then developed into themes.

The study found that there were a number of similarities and differences between the public organisation and the private organisation in terms of Work Life balance. The study also found that the factors that either enhance or inhibit work life balance in both sectors were similar. The study noted that there is a trade-off between work demands and personal life demands and that there is an apparent inverse relationship between the two. The more attention and time given to work, the more the employee's personal life deteriorates and viceversa. The study confirmed what other authors found that when there is no balance between work and life, employees tend to absent themselves from work, perform poorly at work and in some cases resignations become rife.

The study further noted that both the public organisation and the private organisation do not have specific policies that address work life balance. They derive their actions from existing legislation such as the employment act, health and safety act inter alia. Interestingly, it was further noted that employees in the public organisation had more 'free-time' than those in the

private organisations. This is consistent with other studies that have been carried out where it was found that most Government owned organisations employ more than the required number of employees and most end up idling in the organisation. In the private organisation, the employer minimises costs by employing the least number of employees possible so as to maximise their profit. This tends to overload employees with work.

The researchers recommended that a quantitative study may need to be conducted in order to measure the extent to which Work and Life affect each other and how they influence other variables. It is also recommended that the two organisations should develop specific policies to address and enhance Work Life balance.

Keywords: Work-Life Balance, Public Organisation, Private Organisation

Introduction

Work-Life balance is a topic that has generated interest in academic and industry in recent years. Organisations over time have recognised the importance of developing systems that will ensure that employees are able to gain maximum mileage from their knowledge, skills and abilities, while maintaining a healthy social or 'out of work' life. The challenge for both employers and employees is ensuring that a balance is found between the demands of an employee's job and the demand s of their personal and social life.

This article endeavours to unearth the tenets of Work-Life balance in the context of a public organisation and a private organisation and provide recommendations on how the recommended sectors can increase productivity without compromising the welfare of employees. It is largely assumed that public organisation are rigid and characterised by bureaucratic red tape while the autonomy and independent ownership of private organisations seems to create more flexible organisation, thus by extension, Work-Life balance systems will be seen as more 'flexible' in private organisations than public organisations.

Discussion

Work-Life balance is the balance between an employee's personal life demands and that employee's work demands. Human Resources Asia (n.d.) stated that "Work-Life" balance is a concept that supports the efforts of employees to split their time and energy between work and the other important aspects of their lives. Work-life balance is a daily effort to make time for family, friends, community participation, spirituality, personal growth, self-care, and other personal activities (hrmasia.com)."

Greenhaus and Powell (2006) noted that Work-life balance is characterized by a high degree of role enrichment with a low degree of role conflict in work and non-work life domains.

Work-Life balance systems can be viewed as the programmes, initiatives and plans that organisations develop to systematically and effectively foster Work-Life balance in the lives of their employees. Personal interests include health, family and associations. There is an assumed conflict that exists between 'Work' and 'Life'. When one of these aspects is given more attention

than the other, then disequilibrium will obtain. There is an apparent inverse relationship between Work and Life and thus the need to seek balance. It is imperative to distinguish between a public organisation and a private organisation. A public organisation is one that created and managed by the Government whereas a private organisation is one which is owned and managed by individuals.

Employees are faced with many social issues outside of work revolving around family, friends, relations, religion which can affect their work either negatively or positively.

Torrington et al (2011) noted that between 2% and 5% of employees in the United Kingdom leave their jobs for family or personal reasons. In the United States, research carried out on women who left their jobs indicated that 33% quit their jobs in order to take care of their children (Hom and Griffeth, 1995).

Furthermore, Torrington et al (2011:217) asserted that, "one of the more reasons for significant voluntary resignations from jobs is the inability to juggle between the demands of the job and family."

The researchers carried out a study of two organisations operating in the public sector and private sector of Maun, Botswana. The researchers conducted a qualitative study which deployed the interview method in order to collect primary data. The study purposively sampled the organisations based on their size and market reach. Content analysis was used to extrapolate recurring themes and possible associations in the responses of the managers/proprietors of the two represented organisation. The two organisations are training providers offering courses at certificate and diploma levels. The targeted employees in this study were lecturers and administration staff. A total of 10 employees in each of the two organisations were further interviewed to gain an understanding of their experience concerning work-life balance in their institutions. Further, in order to minimise variations occasioned by sector and individual organisational differences, it was opined that organisations in the same industry but with different forms of ownership and management be selected.

The study specifically uncovered aspects of the organisation that either promoted or hindered work-life balance.

Results

The findings of the study were arranged according to themes that were built on the commonality in terms of responses.

i. **Policies and legislation**: It was found that both organisations did not have specific policies that address the balance between work and life. Isolated and often loose policies indirectly addressed the need for work-life balance. In the public organisation, employees were entitled to annual leave, maternity leave, compassionate leave, sick leave and study leave. These items are provided for in the Employment Act of Botswana. Organisations are obliged to make provisions for these requirements. These legal requirements ensure that employees are

able to take time off work and seek medical attention, go on vacation, study inter alia. The private institution did not provide any study leave.

ii. **Programmes and Initiatives:** There are programmes that organisations can adopt and initiate to enhance work-life balance.

Time management skills, stress management, emotional intelligence are among some of the trainings that can be organised to equip employees to face the demands of work and life (Byron, 2005; Bulger and Fisher, 2012). Some organisations have team building exercises and excursions for employees among others which they use to enrich roles of their workers. In this study, excursions and team building exercises were common in the public organisation rather than the private entity where these were not carried out. Soft skills training is commonly practised in the public organisation rather than the private organisation. This may be due to financial and time constraints for employees in the private organisation. Government funded institutions receive grants annually for such activities.

iii. **Job characteristics:** Time pressure in the private organisation was much higher than in the public organisation. All the employees in the private organisation complained about not having sufficient time to prepare for work and even consult with students. The only time they had was over the weekend and at times they are engaged to work over the weekend. There was minimal time pressure in the public organisation. This may be due to a large number of workers who share work responsibilities equitably thus freeing their time.

Employees in the public organisation reported less autonomy in decision making which hampered their work while those in the private organisation reported reasonable autonmy in decision.

There was no role ambiguity among employees in the public organisation compared to employees in the private organisation where 90% indicated that they have been asked to undertake duties outside their core mandate.

In terms of scheduling flexibility, it was high in the private organisation than in the public organisation.

iv. **Other Support systems:** Sirgy & Lee (2018) posited that other support programmes in an organisation include flexible work arrangement, part time work, childcare assistance, parenting resources, eldercare resources, health programs, family leave policy, other services, and social support at work. The organisations under study did not have provision for flexible working hours. They had fixed working hours with weekends off. The organisations did have child care facilities, elderly care inter alia. The organisations did however have social support programmes were employees contributed money for bereavements and weddings that affected their colleagues. Further, the two organisations had wellness days in their calendar though they did not have gym facilities to help employees stay healthy.

It is evident that the two organisations need to do more in order to minimise role conflict and enhance work life balance. There are a lot of similarities and differences between the public organisation and the private organisation in terms of their approach to work life balance. The two

organisations are prompted by law through the employment act to make provisions and considerations for the non-work life of an employee vis-à-vis their formal work duties. There are no deliberate policies and legislation in Botswana that specifically addresses work life balance. In an African context, even the availability of laws relating to health and safety or the employment act in general, do not promote role balance because of weak institutions that are meant to enforce such laws. Venter et al (2009) affirmed that many African states have made laws that seek to protect and recognise the rights of employees and employers however the major problem is the failure by many African countries to establish structures that will ensure that such laws are enforced.

Conclusion

The study revealed that in the public organisation, employees had ample time which could be used for other productive activities whereas at the private institution their time was fully occupied. It is therefore expected that employees in the private sector are likely to experience role conflict or work life imbalance compared to public sector employees. This is consistent with the prevailing situation where the private sector is usually not supported by the Government and has to struggle to generate finance. In public organisations, Government funds are disbursed at the beginning of the financial year and in most instances such funds are sufficient to run such organisation in a given year.

Organisations in both the public and private sector in Botswana, and most likely across the African continent do not have specific policies that address work life balance. Rather, their actions or activities in this area are prompted by existing labour laws.

It is worth recognising that the factors that enhance or inhibit work life balance in a public organisation are the same factors that affect work life balance in a private organisation. There is a trade-off between work roles and persona roles or work interests and personal interests. The more work demands are given precedence, the less time and impact an employee has on the personal lives vice versa. This was clearly evident in this study. There are two predictors of work life balance according to Sirgy & Lee (2018). These include organisational predictors and personal predictors. The current study documented the elements of the two predictors. Organisational predictors relate to the overall organisational architecture that enhances or diminishes work life balance whereas personal predictors would include psychogenic factors, education and experience inter alia. It follows that balance between work and life requires a tripartite effort including the organisation, the individual and the Government.

Recommendations

This study was limited to two organisations in Maun, Botswana. The samples drawn may not be sufficient to draw adequate conclusions on the public and private sector of Botswana. Moreover the study was limited to academic institutions of similar size and market reach. There is need to carry out this study on a larger scale to include many other organisations in the country.

Secondly, it may be worthwhile to conduct a quantitative study in order to ascertain the extent to which work suffers when life is altered by a particular percentage point. The extent of the

imbalance can be statistically estimated in order to help management and policy makers to know how they should act in a particular situation.

On the practical side, the Government of Botswana should develop and push for legislation that specifically addresses work life balance and empower existing watchdogs to monitor the implementation and enforcement of such laws. Organisations in the private sector can also take a proactive stance by developing programmes and building facilities that will enhance the welfare of employees while at the same time encouraging them to work harder for the benefit of their organisations.

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