

Meaning of work-life balance and its application

What is work-life balance?

There is no agreed definition of work-life balance but it does appear that the 'right' balance for one person may differ from the next. Balance is achieved in different ways for different people and has a different purpose for people. Some people do it to balance their caring responsibilities for children with work, while others want more time to themselves, engaging in leisure activities.

Work-life balance, in its broadest sense, is defined as a satisfactory level of involvement or 'fit' between the multiple roles in a person's life (Hudson, 2005).

People's perception of work-life balance is very subjective, as reflected by various descriptions of work-life balance by employees:

- "A good balance is a **four-day workweek**. This allows me to get all the 'stuff' (groceries, laundry, cleaning) done in one day and still have two to do what I want."
- "If the dream job has **stress within in tolerable / manageable limits**, then I will have achieved a Work - Life balance."
- "For me, a good work-life balance means something simple: **to work to support my life, and not the other way around**. I don't want to use my life to support my work, I want to use my work so I can live my life in the way I want it. If I can do this, then I have good work-life balance"

Work-life balance for any one person is having the 'right' combination of participation in paid work (defined by hours and working conditions) and other aspects of their lives. This combination will change as people move through life and have changing responsibilities and commitments in their work and personal lives.

How can you achieve it?

Work-life balance policies can assist employees achieving a balance between their work and personal commitments that is right for them. However, availability of policies is not necessarily enough for these policies 'to work'. The policies need to be supported by the workplace culture, which reflects the beliefs, values and norms of the whole of the organisation from the CEO to staff members. Other important factors in the success of work-life balance policies include proper communication of commitment to the policies to existing and future employees, raising awareness of the policies, education of managers about the importance of policies, and training of managers on 'how to' implement these policies.

Who does it apply to?

Work-life balance policies and practices can assist all people, not just those with young children. They assist people who are responsible for the care of elderly parents, people who have study commitments, those older employees who simply want to ease themselves into retirement or people with other personal and lifestyle commitments.

Our work and personal lives change across the life span with associated responsibilities, and thus the need for work-life balance policies, changing all the time. One thing that an

increasing number of people might have in common in the future is their caring responsibilities for the elderly (e.g. parents and spouse) with the ageing of the population.