GLOBAL JOURNAL OF COMMERCE & MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE
(Published By: Global Institute for Research & Education)

www.gifre.org

FOCUSING ON EMPLOYEE WORK LIFE BALANCE: A STUDY OF GAS AUTHORITY OF INDIA LTD.

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Abstract

The Concept of Work life balance considers that work and personal life are two aspects of a person's life which are interdependent and complimentary and where involvement in one role domain can influence the functioning of the other role domain. It needs to be realized that today's workers have many competing responsibilities such as work, children, housework, volunteering, spouse and elderly parent care and this places stress on individuals, families and the communities in which they reside. An organization, to be a model employer, should take various steps to help employees lead a balanced life. This paper attempts to talk about the perceived Work-Life Balance of the Employees of GAIL (India) Limited and assess whether they are happy with the organization in this area.

Key words: Model employer, balanced life.

Introduction

Researches have proved time and again that in today's times, work-life balance is one of the most important driver of employee attraction and commitment. The best organizations in the modern world recognize that the most appreciated service they can provide their employees is the "gift of time" helping them to balance and harmonise their personal and professional life.

The work-leisure dichotomy was invented in the mid 1800s. In anthropology, a definition of happiness is to have as little separation as possible "between your work and your play." The expression "Work–life balance" was first used in the United Kingdom in the late 1970s to describe the balance between an individual's work and personal life. In the United States, this phrase was first used in 1986. Nowadays, employees are under too much stress. Steven L. Sauter, chief of the Applied Psychology and Ergonomics Branch of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health in Cincinnati, Ohio, states that recent studies show that "the workplace has become the single greatest source of stress". It has been suggested that today, it may be even more difficult to manage a balanced commitment. Organizations today face heightened competition on a worldwide basis, employees are experiencing increasing performance pressures, and hours spent at the workplace – for managers and professionals particularly – maybe increasing. High performance organizations have raised their expectations regarding time, energy and work commitment from employees (Ronald Burke, 2010).

Williams, J. & Boushey, H. (2010). Center for American Progress, Hastings College of the Law in their article 'The three faces of work-family' say that for many employees today—both males and females—their lives are becoming more consumed with a host of family and other personal responsibilities and interests. Therefore, in an effort to retain employees, it is increasingly important for organizations to recognize this balance. It has to be understood that work-life balance practices can influence organizational performance, including enhanced social exchange processes, increased cost savings, improved productivity, and reduced turnover. The impact of these processes may, however, be moderated by a number of factors, including national context, job level, and managerial support.

Work life Balance is an important part of life of an employee as well as for the organization because if employee will be happy & satisfied with his work & personal life it will lead to better work, good working environment as well as better level of productivity. If an employee's personal life & professional life will be balanced, it will lead to stress-less environment and better performance as stress affects the performance adversely. Work-life balance has implications for employee attitudes, behaviours, wellbeing as well as organizational effectiveness (Eby et al., 2005). This has forced organizations to introduce interventions to help employees manage the competing demands of work and family lives while being productive at the work place. Some of these interventions are: re-designing jobs to provide employees more autonomy and variety (job characteristics), providing benefits and policies such as flexitime (work-life benefits and policies), providing social support (supervisor support) and developing a family-friendly organizational culture (work-family culture). Literature has shown positive benefits of such interventions on job outcomes such as individual's degree of job satisfaction, level of commitment and engagement in organizational citizenship behaviours (Baral and Bhargava,2009).

Core of Work Life Balance

At the core of an effective work-life balance definition are two key everyday concepts that are relevant to each of us. They are daily **Achievement and Enjoyment**, ideas almost deceptive in their simplicity. Achievement and Enjoyment are the front and back of the coin of value in life. You can't have one without the other, no more than you can

have a coin with only one side. Trying to live a one sided life is why so many "Successful" people are not happy, or not nearly as happy as they should be. Thus it can be said that Work-life balance is a broad concept including proper prioritizing between career and ambition on one hand, compared with pleasure, leisure, family and spiritual development on the other. It is about people having a measure of control over when, where and how they work. It is achieved when an individual's right to a fulfilled life inside and outside paid work is accepted and respected as the norm, to the mutual benefit of the individual, business and society.

Companies that are bigger and more globalised and better managed, provide a better worklife balance for their employees. It's all about moderation. However, in a world, in which technologies give access around the clock, it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain a work-life balance. People everywhere are beginning to realize that there is more to life than just work. Work-personal life conflict occurs when the burden, obligations and responsibilities of work and family roles become incompatible. Obligation of one can force an individual to neglect the other.

About the Organisation

GAIL (India) Ltd was incorporated in August 1984 as a Central Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) under the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas (MoP&NG). After having started as a natural gas transmission company during the late eighties, GAIL has grown organically by building large network of Natural Gas Pipelines covering over 8500 Km with a capacity of around 160 MMSCMD; two LPG Pipelines covering around 1900 Km with a capacity of 3.8 MMTPA of LPG; seven gas processing plants for production of LPG and other Liquid Hydrocarbons, with a production capacity of 1.4 MMTPA; and a gas based integrated Petrochemical plant of 410,000 TPA polymer capacity which is further being expanded to a capacity of 900,000 TPA.

Keeping in mind the requirement of growth and consolidation as well as opportunities arising out of New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP) of Government of India, the company has integrated upstream into the business of Exploration & Production and currently has stakes in 27 E&P blocks including 2 blocks overseas (in Myanmar) and 1 CBM block. The company is a pioneer in City Gas Distribution (CGD) business in India, with Indraprastha Gas Limited (IGL) in Delhi and Mahanagar Gas Limited (MGL) in Mumbai being its biggest success stories. Besides IGL and MGL, GAIL has set up several JVs for CGD to supply gas to households, transport sector & commercial consumers in various cities. In 2008, GAIL incorporated a wholly owned subsidiary, GAIL Gas Ltd. to exclusively focus on city gas distribution business.

GAIL has been a leading public enterprise with a consistently excellent financial track record. GAIL has recently developed corporate growth strategy for the period 2011-20 and the same has been approved by the Board of Directors. GAIL aspires to become an integrated hydrocarbon major with significant upstream and downstream interests by 2020.

Objective of the Study

This study intended to find the present perceived work life balance of the employees of GAIL and analyse the scope for further improvements in the area. The study was conducted at the Delhi corporate office and primary data was collected from 100 employees of the organization by using a reliable structured questionnaire where the respondents were asked various questions which directly/indirectly affected their work life balance. The questionnaire was aimed at retrieving pertinent information regarding their work life & to know whether their work life is in any way affecting their private life as well as health. It was supplemented by having personal interactions with some of the employees.

The questions focused on aspects like the amount of time spent on work and with family, flexible work life arrangements, the stress being experienced and the factors promoting or hindering an optimal work life balance in the organization. The sampling technique used was convenience sampling and middle level managers constituted the sample used in the study. The data was analysed using a simple percentage analysis.

Major Findings

❖ The results of the survey were found to be quite encouraging as it was seen that the perceived work-life balance of the employees of GAIL was high. In general the employees are happy with the balance achieved between their personal life & professional commitments with 82% of the respondents feeling so. Most Employees have a 5 days of working week with majority working for 6-8 hours per day which gives them enough time on weekends as well as after work hours with their respective families.

❖ Majority of the employees (76%) felt that the work load allocated to them was optimal and did not lead to much stress and disturbance in their family life. While interacting with them it was found that they were quite happy with the transparent and open communication policy of the organization where they could talk freely to their superiors about their professional and personal concerns.

❖ Almost all of the respondents were found to be happy with the various Health programs & gym facilities provided to the employees to take care of their health and fitness.GAIL townships have facilities such as sports club, gym, swimming pool, library, etc. for their employees and their family members.

❖ Various Functions are being organized in the organization where the employees and their families are invited and they get a chance to socialize and spend quality time together. Many festivals and events are celebrated throughout the year such as Independence Day, Republic Day, GAIL Day, Diwali, Holi etc. which gives an opportunity to GAIL employees and their family members to socially interact with one another and develop a feeling of being part of one big GAIL family.A majority(85%) of the employees were very happy with such arrangements.

- ❖ Employees felt that the company promoted "Performance Oriented Culture" and laid adequate emphasis on providing work-life balance with 78% of the respondents replying in affermative. They believe that all the company efforts are focused at creating a workplace for the employees which is not only intellectually stimulating but also a lot of fun to work at.
- ❖ According to a majority (81%) of the respondents, Close working relationship with peers & superiors, collaborative & supportive working environment and informal work culture were some of the facets of GAIL which make it a very exciting company to work for.
- ❖ Majority of the respondents also feel that the organization provides generous social support system which not only takes care of the employees but also their families.
- ❖ The respondents also discussed about the various seminars and workshops which are being conducted to help employees deal with work related stress and making them cope better with stress related issues. They expressed their satisfaction with such regular endeavors by the organization.

Nevertheless, there was a feeling among the employees that the work- life balance can be further improved if the organization introduces features like Job sharing and Part time work. They also felt that the organization could introduce some specific parenting or family support programs in order to help employees with small kids or elderly people to look after. A section of respondents also felt that a flexitime policy and telecommuting facilities would help them cater better to their personal commitments along with the professional ones. The survey also hinted towards the need of developing a proper counseling system in the organization where the employees can get the requisite advice and support to enjoy a better and balanced life.

The respondents also felt that one major reason hampering their personal life and commitments was the frequent conduct of official Meetings and training programmes after the office hours. This concern was raised more by the female employees of the organization as they found their daily schedules highly disturbed because of this reason. They wanted the organization to take some steps to avoid this on a regular basis as they felt it could have an adverse effect on the morale of the workforce.

Conclusion

Overall, the survey brought about the fact that GAIL has been successful in helping its employees attain a proper work life balance. The organization firmly believes that only happy and engaged employees having a balanced life will go beyond the call of duty and walk that extra mile which is critical for realizing their mission and vision and the company's business strategy. They have been taking proactive steps towards the optimal achievement of employee work life balance but in order to develop a productive, engaged and competitive workforce, the organization needs to further strengthen it's human resource policies in this area.

It needs to be realized that today's workers have many competing responsibilities such as work, children, housework, volunteering, spouse and elderly parent care and this places stress on individuals, families and the communities in which they reside. An organization, to be a model employer, should take various steps to help employees lead a balanced life. There are a wide variety of practices currently being used to help employees achieve work-life balance. It is important to note that some work-life balance programs help employees handle stress and otherwise cope more effectively while other programs help to reduce the absolute stress levels by rebalancing work life.

Whatever the case may be, an effective work-life balance goes a long way in eveloping engaged human resources who can contribute their best to the development of an organization. It is true that there is no substitute for hard work, especially for the Indian professionals who are beginning to make a mark in the global business world. But, striking a balance between work and personal life is equally imperative. After all, one cannot be expected to make a living at the expense of the quality of life that all humans deserve.

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