
6C. Work Life Balance

Work-life balance is having enough time for work and enough to have a life, thus the work life balance. It is a concept including proper prioritizing between “work” (career and ambition) and “lifestyle” (health, pleasure, leisure, family and spiritual development/meditation). This concept arises as communication technologies advances. With new technologies, employees may respond to an email or a voice mail after-hours or during the weekend, typically while not officially on the job, they are more connected to the jobs beyond the boundaries of the traditional workday and workplace. The more this boundary is blurred, the employees may experience more work-to-life conflict when they spend more time at work and spare less time for themselves.

a. Cost of poor work-life balance:

- ✦ lead to physical illness, stress, depression and even mental illness which leads to absenteeism and poor performance
- ✦ cause tension to personal and family relationships
- ✦ increase faults or errors and lack of motivation

b. Benefits of work life balance:

For employees:

- ✦ may experience higher overall job satisfaction leading to a much lower staff turnover rate, a greater pride in their organization and a willingness to recommend it as a place to work
- ✦ may feel less stress at work which leads to improved attendance and better performance

For employers:

- ✦ lower staff turnover rate with sequential cost savings in health-care, new staff recruitment and training expenses
- ✦ high staff morale with high work efficiency
- ✦ enhance reputation as an “employer of choice”

c. Common work-life balance initiatives are:

- ✦ flexible work-hour arrangements or part-time working
- ✦ leave options, eg. birthday leave, sabbatical leave, unpaid leave
- ✦ work from home
- ✦ employee wellbeing and health & family support

d. Successful action to develop a successful work-life strategy is as much about the process of making changes as about the changes themselves. An action plan should include the following elements:

- ✦ identify business need - so as to demonstrate to business colleagues how having a work-life strategy will benefit both the business and the workforce as a whole.
- ✦ adapt policies to match operational needs - by looking at both employee and business priorities and considering for example impact on customers, back-up arrangements to cover absence and training needs. Don't simply copy-cat what other employers are doing.

- ❖ include measures for performance based on outcomes and results, not just on presence in the office alone.
- ❖ develop clear guidelines - as a basis for fair treatment and to help promote work-life balance policies to engage with line managers to gain commitment.
- ❖ lead from the top – identify a senior management champion and/or senior management role models who are using work-life balance benefits.
- ❖ communicate plans using a wide variety of methods to involve employees.
- ❖ monitor progress and draw lessons from experience – even piloting the practices in a section or division if necessary.

Employers who invest in the health and well-being of their employees by ensuring their managers are equipped with people management skills and providing work-life balance opportunities for employees, as well as support to help those with health problems to return to work sooner rather than later, will benefit from enhanced employee engagement and lower levels of absence and staff attrition.

6C.1 Family-friendly Employment Practices

Family-friendly employment practices have gained popularity amongst employers in recent years. The implementation of family-friendly employment practices is to help employees fulfill their work and family responsibilities simultaneously, thereby balancing their work and family lives. These employment practices will help organizations build positive corporate image, facilitate long term corporate development and help attract talents.

There is a wide range of family-friendly employment practices, which can be generalized into the following categories:

Category	Example
Grant special leave to meet employees' family needs	Marriage leave, paternity leave, compassionate leave, parental leave, special casual leave
Flexible work arrangements	Flexible work week, flexible working hours, home based work, job sharing
Provide living support	Child care service, counseling services on stress or emotional management for employees and their family members, medical protection, family recreational activities

Family-friendly employment practices are not exclusive for large enterprises, they can also be implemented by smaller employers just with a little more care and consideration and a stretch of imagination. Of course, the management must support and endorse the concept of family-friendly employment practices for the family-friendly culture to thrive in the company. During the planning process and prior to implementing each measure, employers have to communicate with their employees thoroughly to understand their genuine needs.

For more information on Family-friendly Employment Practices and case sharing by companies in Hong Kong, please refer to the following links:

<http://www.labour.gov.hk/eng/public/wcp/FamilyCasebook.pdf>

<http://www.gov.hk/en/residents/employment/recruitment/familyfriendly.htm>