

Research on Work-Life Balance of Female Employees

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Abstract: Nowadays, the pace of work and life is accelerating rapidly, accompanied by significant changes in work content and family structure. Enterprises and employees are encountering various pressures and conflicts. Female employees, in particular, are experiencing increasing pressure in both social labor and family affairs, resulting in ongoing conflicts between work and life. Achieving a balance between these two domains is crucial for female employees. This article aims to analyze the influencing factors of work-life balance for female employees and to propose useful strategies to help them improve it.

Keywords: Work-life balance; Work-life conflict; Female employees

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1. Introduction

With the continuous development and progress of society, significant changes have occurred in people's family structures, work methods, values, and other aspects. The traditional Chinese family model of "men leading the outside and women leading the inside" is gradually fading, replaced by more dual-income families. While Chinese women are increasingly participating in paid labor, there has been no corresponding reduction in their unpaid workload within their families ^[1]. These changes have brought immense pressures on work and life balance, presenting a new challenge for individuals. Work-family conflict, a type of role conflict, emerges when the demands of work clash with those of personal life ^[2]. With mounting work pressures, balancing work and personal life has become a pressing issue for many female employees in China. Therefore, studying the work-life balance of women holds practical significance.

On one hand, work pressures are escalating; on the other hand, women's non-work lives are becoming more diverse. Non-work life extends beyond family obligations alone. Balancing work and personal life stands as a crucial theme in modern human resource management. Achieving a balance between employees' social and familial roles has become a societal concern. Female employees juggle distinct roles in both work and personal life. For them, work and personal life are not isolated but intricately intertwined. Hence, female employees must strive to realize their self-worth while also fulfilling the societal expectations of being a virtuous wife and

mother, which poses a particularly challenging test in achieving work-life balance.

This article aims to briefly outline the influencing factors of work-life balance for female employees and propose relevant strategies to assist them in achieving a better work-life balance.

2. Overview of the connotation of work-life balance

The concept of “work-family conflict” was first proposed by scholars in the late 1970s. By the late 1990s, scholars began recognizing that non-work obligations extended beyond the family sphere, leading to the emergence of the concept of “work-life balance.” Marks and MacDermid defined “work-life balance” as role equilibrium, indicating individuals’ capacity to find a harmonious midpoint among multiple roles and effectively manage various responsibilities ^[3]. Role equilibrium entails fulfilling the demands of different roles within one’s role group and collaborating with role partners to excel in diverse responsibilities. Clark characterized “work-life balance” as achieving a satisfactory state of equilibrium with minimal role conflict ^[4]. Duxbury and Higgins argued that “work-life balance” represents a state of equilibrium where the demands of an individual’s work and personal life are in harmony ^[5]. Greenhaus *et al.* delineated work-family balance into three components: time balance, involving an equitable allocation of time to work and family roles; involvement balance, maintaining a similar level of psychological engagement in both work and family roles; satisfaction balance, attaining comparable levels of fulfillment in both work and family roles ^[6].

3. The influencing factors of work-life balance

The factors influencing work-life balance stem from multiple dimensions, yet they can generally be categorized into two main aspects: external and internal factors.

3.1. External factors affecting work-life balance

Work-life balance is inherently intertwined with human development and is intricately linked to economic, political, and social conditions, reflecting the zeitgeist of a particular era. Previous research has identified external factors such as socioeconomic, political, and sociocultural influences. Sociocultural aspects, in particular, are multifaceted and are often intertwined with political and economic dynamics. Consequently, notable cultural disparities exist, especially between Eastern and Western cultures.

Confucian culture, for instance, holds significant sway in Chinese society, profoundly shaping individual mindsets and behaviors. Within Confucian philosophy, the notion of “entering the world” suggests that individuals should devote considerable energy to their work to fulfill their life values. Consequently, in such cultural contexts, individuals tend to allocate a greater proportion of their time and energy to work, often at the expense of family commitments.

3.2. Internal factors influencing work-family balance

The internal impact of work and family relationships can be analyzed from three dimensions: individual, family, and organizational.

At the individual level, each person possesses unique psychological characteristics and personalities, which influence their approach to work-family relationships. Factors such as values, norms, and personality traits play significant roles in this regard. For instance, optimistic individuals tend to employ more coping strategies to balance work and family obligations amidst life and work pressures. When both work and family functions are harmonious, individuals tend to experience a satisfactory psychological state, fostering a sense of organizational

identification and balanced participation in work and family roles, thus achieving a highly satisfying work-family equilibrium.

On the family front, the rise of nuclear families has made female employees the primary caregivers for household chores. With reduced assistance from older generations, female employees dedicate more time to household duties and caregiving responsibilities, bearing the primary burden of family care. Strong family support significantly mitigates work-family conflicts. Particularly, understanding and supportive spouses enable female employees to maintain positive emotions and engagement in their work. Conversely, a lack of family communication and support heightens role pressures, leading to negative emotions and hindering work-life balance. Insufficient support from family members, limited sharing of family responsibilities by spouses, and economic strains within the family all impede the work-life balance of female employees.

From an organizational perspective, employees must navigate intense workplace competition while grappling with significant family obligations. When confronted with high work pressures and limited support resources, achieving work-life balance becomes challenging for female employees^[7]. A positive organizational culture, coupled with support from supervisors and colleagues, proves pivotal for the work-life balance of female employees. A supportive working environment fosters positive emotions, enhances work attitudes, and alleviates work-life conflicts among employees.

4. Practical implications for improving work-life balance among female employees

Implementing practical strategies to enhance work-life balance can empower employees with greater autonomy and flexibility, enabling them to navigate work-life conflicts more effectively and fulfill their roles in both work and life domains.

4.1. Maintain a positive and optimistic psychological state

Aryee's research indicates a significant positive correlation between individual optimism and work-family balance. Additionally, overall personality traits show a positive correlation with work-family promotion and a negative correlation with work-family conflict^[8]. From a personal standpoint, female employees should cultivate a positive and optimistic mindset and develop skills in self-emotional management. Engaging in effective negotiations with partners to share childcare and household responsibilities equally can alleviate pressure on female employees, thereby promoting their work-life balance^[9]. During periods of heightened work pressure, actively seeking support from the organization and colleagues, and fostering open communication with family members, can enhance understanding and support. Female employees should also engage in effective career planning, acquire time management skills, and establish reasonable boundaries between work and non-work life.

4.2. Increase diversity in work-life integration methods

The effectiveness of work-life balance strategies hinges on employees' ability to coordinate and integrate work and non-work domains. Enterprises can support this by offering options such as part-time or flexible working hours, enabling employees to blend work and non-work activities in diverse ways. Policies such as rehire options, leave arrangements, and parental leave can empower employees to customize their work-life boundaries. Employers should prioritize improving employment and childcare conditions, especially for female employees who are more likely to seek part-time employment due to caregiving responsibilities^[10].

4.3. Provide organizational support and foster a positive work environment

The work-life balance of employees significantly impacts their psychological and physical well-being. Organizations should prioritize providing humanistic care for female employees, offering institutional support to help them manage non-work responsibilities. Efforts to promote gender equity in the labor market and within families are essential ^[1], as are initiatives to facilitate work-life balance. Organizations can establish effective channels for psychological counseling and cultivate a supportive atmosphere among employees. Strategically assigning work tasks can help alleviate employee stress. Furthermore, investing in employee training and education can enhance their skills and efficiency in the workplace.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the work-life balance of female employees is influenced by various internal and external factors, including the social environment, personal attributes, and organizational dynamics. To enhance the work-life balance of female employees, effective measures should be taken at both individual and organizational levels. Female employees can cultivate a positive psychological state, engage in open communication with both their organization and family members, and strive to improve their professional skills. Meanwhile, organizations should adopt a people-oriented management philosophy, offer effective and flexible work arrangements, and prioritize the psychological and physical well-being of female employees.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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