Topics in Human Resources Balancing Work and Life: Individual and Organizational Perspectives

Cynthia Thompson ♦ University: Zicklin School of Business, Baruch College ♦ Discipline: Management

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Required Texts:


4. Shellenbarger, S. Work & Family column, Section B, Wall Street Journal. Sue Shellenbarger's column appears almost every Wednesday, just in time for class. Please read the column each Wednesday that it appears, and be prepared to discuss it.

5. Additional readings will be available at the Graduate Student Resource Center.

Purpose and Description of Course:

As we approach the 21st century, radical changes are occurring in the workplace and in the interrelationships among employees, their families, employers, and the community. Important changes impacting work-family relationships include:

1) increasing demographic and cultural diversity of the workforce,
2) growing prevalence of dual-earner couples, single-parent families, and families with responsibility for elder care,
3) greater emphasis on lifestyle balance by employed men and women,
4) advances in computer and telecommunications technology,
5) corporate downsizing,
6) legislative initiatives on work-family policies. This course will examine the implications of these changes for employees, their families, and employers. More specifically, the goals of the course are to:

Discuss and debate the critical challenges facing individuals, families, and employers in managing work and family

Review the current state of research and practice on work-family issues

Determine what major U.S. companies and unions are doing to address employee work-family concerns

Learn how to evaluate work-life programs, using an action research model

Develop managerial skills for helping employees balance work/life demands

Develop a personal work/life plan
Course Requirements:

1) Exams. There will be two exams in this class. The first exam consists of essay questions that ask you to apply course concepts. Exam questions will be drawn from lectures, readings, cases, exercises, and in-class discussions. The second exam is a case analysis, and is due the day of the final. It should be typed, double spaced, with 1" margins all around. Each exam is worth 20% of your grade.

2) Self-Assessment Paper. After completing the self-assessment exercises in the Kofodimos book, you will be asked to develop a "Life Priorities and Development Plan." The paper will help you synthesize what you have learned about your personal work and life priorities, and will help you develop career and life goals or plans consistent with your values and desire to lead a balanced life. Suggested length for the paper is 4 to 6 pages. Specific guidelines for the paper are on page 3. This paper is worth 20% of your grade. Note: If you have recently completed a self-assessment paper for me in another course, please see me for an alternative assignment.

3) Group Project: Groups of three students each will be asked to work together on one of the following options. The group project is worth 30% of your grade.

   a. Organizational Analysis of Work-Life Culture. You are asked to analyze the work-life culture of an organization. Students should meet with someone from Human Resources to determine what benefits are available; interview at least six employees about their perceptions of the work-family culture; and administer the Work-Family Culture questionnaire (to be distributed) to 20 or more employees of the company. In the written report, students should briefly describe research on work-family culture, then describe the specifics of the company's culture studied, including an analysis of the questionnaire results. Students will present their findings to the class. In addition, results should be summarized in a paper no longer than 12 pages.

   b. Traditional Research Paper Plus Interviews. Groups can choose to study one of the topics listed below. Your group may choose to review and critique the literature, and make recommendations to a fictitious company re your chosen topic, or you may develop a research proposal that includes a literature review, hypotheses, and method section. For either option, you are required to interview an expert on the topic (e.g., union officer, HR representative) or someone who represents the "problem" or "solution" (e.g., stay-at-home dad, an employee who is job sharing, someone who appears to be successfully coping with a dual-career lifestyle). At least six individuals should be interviewed.

   Possible Topics for Research Paper (Option b):
   How Unions Help (or Hinder) Work-Life Balance
   Part-time Employment as a Solution: Pros and Cons
   Strategies for Coping with Work-Life Conflict
   Importance of Social Support
   Eldercare
   Gender Differences in Work/Family Conflict
   Class, Race, and Ethnicity Effects on Work and Family Balance
   Family Impact of Relocating
   Work-Life Initiatives Abroad
   Effect of Day-care on Children
   Advantages of Balancing Multiple Roles

   Note: Each group will be asked to develop a "process contract" that specifies how you plan to
tackle the project. The process contract should spell out the answers to the following questions: What information do you need to get? Where will you get it? What are some key sources? Who will do what? When and where will you meet? The key to a successful group experience is to set goals, assign responsibilities, and review each other's work. You may want to specify these in the contract. The contract should be typed and no more than two pages. Every team member should sign the contract. The contract is due by September 22.

4) In addition, students will be asked to complete a "performance evaluation" on each group member at the end of the semester. Using a behaviorally-anchored rating scale, you will anonymously rate each member on performance dimensions such as quality of work, quantity of work, knowledge, and dependability.

5) Participation and Miscellaneous Assignments. This class will be conducted using a seminar and discussion format. It follows that class participation is essential to the success of our discussions and small-group exercises. To help you prepare to actively participate in the class, please read the assignment and be ready to discuss the material. In addition, you may be asked to complete short assignments occasionally. This portion of your grade is worth 10%.

Life Priorities and Development Plan

This assignment asks you to think about and analyze your life priorities, and formalize a plan for developing the skills you need to reach your career and life goals. Please read Chapters 1-4 in the Kofodimos book, and complete the self-assessment exercises in each chapter. Your paper should include the following sections:

SECTION I: LIFE VISION STATEMENT

Write your responses to the seven questions on p.92, in two pages or less. Your responses to these questions should flow from previous exercises in the book. As part of your personal definition of success (question 7), list four to six "life aspirations." These aspirations can be special accomplishments, relationships, events, or ways of living that you would like to see happen in your life (e.g., live a long, healthy, vital life; build a world-class research group that develops disease-curing drugs).

SECTION II: APPROACH TO LIVING

For each life aspiration listed in Section I, describe a corresponding "approach to living" that will be required in order to carry out these aspirations (see Exercise 4.2, p.93). That is, describe what attitudes and behaviors will enable you to move toward and live with these aspirations (e.g., take time for physical self; be more collaborative with other teams and listen to others' input).

SECTION III: KEY LIFE PRIORITIES OR GOALS

Then, list your key life priorities or goals that will help you fulfill your life aspirations (e.g., bicycle three times a week; focus career development within the technology function and look for broader and more varied responsibilities there). Be as specific as possible when describing your priorities, and try to attach a time frame for pursuing and/or accomplishing your priorities or goals. In addition, describe what support you will seek to help you maintain your priorities (e.g., Workaholics Anonymous), and describe any obstacles you may have to overcome (e.g., organizational culture is not supportive of balance) and how you hope to overcome them.
SECTION IV: LEADING A BALANCED LIFE

Finally, comment on whether and how your plan will allow you to live a well-balanced life, however you define it.

Suggested Length for Paper: 4-6 pages

Seminar on Balancing Work and Life
Readings and Assignments
Prof. Thompson

Historical Background and Overview (Sept. 8, 15)
Historical Overview of the Relationship between Work and Family
Historical Overview of Work-Life Research
Today's Work-Life Balancing Act

Required Readings:
Noble, B.P. "Coming Soon: Get a Life 101?" (NYT article, attached)
Bailyn: Chap. 1, Introduction: The World We Live In

Optional Readings:

Organizations of the Future are Here: The Changing Employment Relationship (Sept. 22)

Required Readings (see Ancona reference in the syllabus above):
Ancona et al. "Managing a Changing Workforce in Turbulent Times" (pp. 8-21)
Sherman. S. "A Brave New Darwinian Workplace"
Bailyn, L. "SMR Forum: Patterned Chaos in Human Resource Management"
Fierman, J. "The Contingency Workforce"
Smith, L. "Burned-Out Bosses"
Filipczak, B. "Telecommuting: A Better Way to Work?"
Scordato, C., & Harris, J. "Workplace Flexibility"
Verspej, M. A. "The New Workweek"

Activity:
Read and prepare "The Case of the Part-time Partner" (HBR case in Ancona module)
Would you vote to make Julie partner? Why or why not?
Would you vote to make Tim partner? Why or why not?

Work-Family Conflict: Definitions, Causes, and Consequences (Sept. 29)
(a/k/a, the Scarcity Model of Multiple Roles)

Required Readings:
Optional Readings:

Balancing Act: Managerial and Organizational Approaches
Work/Life Programs: A Sampling of Current Programs (Oct. 6)

Guest Speaker: Dennis Marcel, Ernst & Young, Office for Retention (postponed)

Readings:
Top 100 Companies for Working Mothers. In Working Mother, October 1998. (excerpts)
Bailyn, L. (1993). Chap. 4, Family as an Emerging Issue for Organizations

Optional:
Galinsky, E., Friedman, D.E., & Hernandez, C.A. (1991). The Corporate Reference Guide to Family-Friendly Programs and Policies. New York: Families and Work Institute. (excerpts) (This study is a bit dated but is still a classic. It was one of the first attempts to document what American companies are doing to facilitate balance.)

Assignment:
Check out the following websites.

www.workingwoman.com
www.ey.com/people/wharton.asp

Work and Family as a Business Imperative (Oct. 20)
Barriers to Addressing the Problem
Managerial Competencies for Facilitating Work-Life Balance

Required Readings:
Optional Readings:

Activity:
Develop list of managerial competencies for helping employees balance work and family

Balancing Work and Family: Costs and Benefits (The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly) (Oct. 27)

Readings:

Optional:

Activity:
Scenario: The CEO of your company has reluctantly agreed to hear your committee's arguments for implementing work/family programs. She is skeptical of the benefits of such programs, and is concerned about the costs. She's also uncomfortable "interfering with" employees' family lives.

Task:
In groups, make an outline of key points you would make in a presentation to the CEO. Please note that the company is also in the process of downsizing. Choose a spokesperson to present your key points.

November 3: Midterm

Balancing Act: Managerial and Organizational Approaches
b. Implementing Work-Family Programs: Assessing Needs (Nov. 10, Part 1)

Required Reading:
c. Evaluating the Effectiveness of Work/Life Programs (Nov. 10, Part 2)

Required Readings:

Optional Readings:

Balancing Act: Personal Considerations (Nov. 17)

Required Readings:

Activities:
1. Complete exercises in the above chapters.
2. Develop a list of personal competencies necessary for balancing work and family

November 24: No class

Balancing Act: Managerial and Organizational Approaches
d. Organizational Culture: Moving to Stage III (Dec. 1)

Required Readings:
Bailyn, L. (1993). Chap. 5, Rethinking Time and Autonomy; Chap. 6, Rethinking Commitment and Equity; Chap. 7, Pathways to Change; Chap. 8, Envisioning the Future
Optional Reading:

Activities:
Organizational Analysis: Work-Family Culture in Local Organizations (Group Presentations, Option 1)

December 8: Group Presentations, Option 2

Additional References

Unions (these citations may be incomplete)
BNA Special Report #20 on Work and Family and Unions (August 1989)
Dorothy Cobble (ed.) Women and Unions, ILR Press, NY 1993. (article by Cowell)

Careerism vs. Fatherhood: Are They Compatible?

Pregnant and Working

What about the Children?
Alternative Views

Further Readings of Interest