Work-life balance and burnout

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There is a lot of information (on the internet, books, and magazines) which relates to work-life balance. Work-life balance is about the balance between the personal life and working life. There are several factors which can result from having an imbalance, such as stress or absenteeism. People may be labelled or label themselves as workaholic, and many people might experience burnout as a result of overworking and increased stress. Burnout occurs when a person is very tired (emotionally exhausted) and has feelings of reduced personal accomplishment and/or control. The individual is likely to have a personal sense that they are not effective in working and fulfilling their responsibility at work (Maslach, 1982 cited in Demerouti & Nijmegen, 2001).

Organisations can help employees to cope with burnout by educating them about this factor, and offering some training in how to manage their stress and offering them some support to cope. An employer has to be considerate about maintaining the work-balance of employees; this is because an imbalance can directly affect the productivity, absenteeism and loyalty of the employee. There are several initiatives organisations can take into account when implementing a balance. This can be enforcing strict time limits of working hours and encouraging employees not to work after hours. Sometimes encouraging some employees to work from home and also educating them about how important work-life balance is in their lives can be done. Organisations can offer employees a choice of activities in terms of how they want to manage their time. For example, part-time work or casual work, choosing which days they want to take off and just creating an environment whereby employees are not encouraged to work after hours can help in the long-term. Anyone who is working can be affected by this work-life balance, and this can range from blue-collar workers to upper management.

It is important for organisations to be aware of individual factors affecting this balance and also be aware that this changes with time for the individual. It is a myth that staying long hours at work results in increased productivity. Many other factors are involved and these include perceived control over the work by the employee as well as their ability to effectively manage time. Whilst there will always be periods when the organisation needs "all hands on deck". This should only ever be

temporary. If your employees are always working late they will have little balance in their lives and, over time, will become less effective. If you need your people to continuously work late or at weekends this implies there is too much work for the number of people employed (assuming they have good time management skills!). It would be useful to consider employing more people and although this may cost initially, productivity gains and a happier workforce are likely to offset this cost in the longer term.

Reference

Demerouti, E., U, Nijmegen., (2001). The job demands-resources model of burnout. Journal of applied psychology, 86 (3), p. 499-512.