# Chapter 5

# Managing Time And Life Work Balance

## Guidance Note For Students

The activities that follow are designed to be used with HRM: An Integrated Approach. Read chapter five, which provides both the answers in easy to follow sections and guidance on other areas of the book that can help you with your studies.

**Learning Outcomes**

**After reading and completing the activities in this chapter you should be able to:**

1. **Understand the attitudes knowledge and skills required for successful time management.**
2. **Develop the skills to self-manage project schedules.**
3. **Critically evaluate the role of HR in improving employee life work balance.**
4. **Interpret the situation specific applications of LWB (life work balance) in modern organisational HR strategies.**
5. **Recognise the role of HR professionals in recommending improved working practices that enhance performance and reduce unnecessarily stressful workloads.**
6. **Undertake and interpret a self-evaluation on time management.**
7. **Critically evaluate an organisation's performance in time management and life work balance policies and practices. Present a case (Individually or as a team exercise) of the benefits to organisational performance, of a healthier employee life work balance HR strategy.**

==Note to Students:==

==Can You Tell Me All The Answers Please?==

In common with the vast majority of students, you want to do really well in your study programme. There are grades to attain and employers to impress…

You may like to believe that there are perfect answers that can give you perfect grades. Indeed, if this were an elementary mathematics handbook you would be correct. However, with people simple sums do not always produce neat solutions.

So, can I reassure you that I do not have all the answers to everything, and neither does anyone else! What I would encourage you to do is engage in discussions with your fellow students, read different writers ideas and listen to your lecturers. Your lecturers have invested many hours, years in doing what you are setting out to do so they are excellent guides to help you succeed. Learn to think for yourself and integrate ideas across disciplines and subject areas. Think outside the boxes.

==HRM In Action :== *Too Much Homework*

The British education system has probably sustained as much if not more enforced regulation and intervention than many other services. These reforms have arguably been in progress for many decades, but what has the increased employee 'homework' actually achieved?

Information from the Internet. 7th January 03

*One third of teachers want to quit.* London (Reuters) - A survey of 70,000 teachers in England has found that one third expect to quit the profession within five years because of a heavy workload, unruly pupils and government interference. More than half who took part in the survey, conducted for the Guardian newspaper and the General Teaching Council (GTC), said morale was worse than when they began teaching.  Whist the government has

addressed recruitment problems there wouldn't have a recruitment problem if more teachers were retained according to Carol Adams, chief executive of the GTC, an independent, professional body for teachers in England.  Adams also noted the teachers had told her organisation that if they could have a reduction of unnecessary paperwork and some time away from the classroom to refresh and update their subject knowledge they would stay in the profession. In the survey, teachers were asked to name three de-motivating factors. Some 56 per cent picked 'workload including unnecessary paperwork'; 35 percent pointed to the 'target-driven culture'; and 31 percent cited poor pupil behaviour and discipline. More than a third said they expected to have left teaching in five years' time. Of those, just over half planned to retire, with the rest hoping to find new jobs. The GTC, calculated that 28,500 teachers would leave within five years for a job outside education, almost as many as were recruited last year.

*Discussion questions*

1. Do you prefer to have some flexibility on how you do your work or to be closely monitored?

2. Discuss why excessive bureaucratic control and paper work can lead to de- motivation.

3. How might management and employees better organise policies and procedures to delete unnecessary 'red tape' (non-productive paper work)?

4. Do you think micro management (excessive management control and procedures) is a symptom of low trust? Discuss.

*==Practicing HRM:==* ***Work Efficiency Audit***

It can be helpful to analyse the key activities of any given job role to examine what is essential to its performance, what is desirable and which activities tend to add little or even detract from efficient performance. If you are/ have been employed, either full or part time/ paid/ voluntary work, it is helpful to produce an efficiency audit of the work you do/did. List the tasks you were required to complete in your job under one of the three headings below. Once you have made the lists estimate how much time was dedicated to each item. Cumulate your allocations to a total of 100 per cent of working time.

**Essential to job performance**

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**Desirable to job performance**

_____

_____

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**Unnecessary to job performance**

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_____

**Totals of time invested:**

| | |
|---|---|
| Essential to job performance | % |
| Desirable to job performance | % |
| Unnecessary to job performance | % |

**HRM In Action :** _Interview With a Senior Executive (1)_

One of the privileges of academic research is to interview senior managers and ask questions about what they really think happens in their organisational environment. The short extract that follows is taken from transcripts of an interview I conducted with the chairperson of a leading consultancy.

**Question.** Modern research has found that Britain has longer working hours than any other European country, but our productivity per working person is lower. How would you comment on that as a senior executive of a large organisation?

**Answer.** I think partly we don't invest in people [in Britain] although people will pay lip service to these situations. As a consequence they don't invest in training or rewarding people as long-term assets. Short term, people are used and that actually affects people's deep down motivation so ultimately their productivity suffers.

On the management side there's a macho thing, regardless of whether its productive or not, people seem to feel they've got to put the hours in and be go getters. I say to my people, if you find yourself working long hours all the time there are only two reasons why that happens. Either we have given you too much and you need more staff, or you cannot hold your job down. Now in your position you are expected to do whatever hours are necessary, but if it turns out that you are here till seven or eight o'clock every night then you and I need to have a chat because maybe you need training or I need to give you some additional resources. There may be times when it is necessary [to work long hours] but if its on going then there's a problem…its not good for people, and what's not good for them is ultimately it not going for us [the organisation]. It may be a short-term gain but has long-term consequences. The last point on the hours issue is that you cannot expect people to work ten hours a day and expect to get peak performance out of them. They end up doing the same amount of work but over a longer period.

*Discussion questions*

1. Why do you think managers 'pay lip service' to investing in people?
2. What connection does the interviewee make between short-term management and employee motivation?
3. Explain what you understand by 'a macho thing' regarding long working hours.
4. What kinds of training might help a person who is regularly working excessively long hours?
5. Why do you think people who work long hours are likely to be less productive than those who manage their time more efficiently?

In what ways might a working environment, which is 'not good for people' also, be detrimental to the organisation?

**HRM In Action :**  *Interview With a Senior Executive (2)*

Interview with a senior manager in the pharmaceuticals sector.

This was a particularly exciting study because the company, for which I had provided consultancy advice, had agreed to allow HR students access to conduct research for their team project. The company then decided to extend the research and had invited me in to discuss some of the HR issues. The initial study conducted by the HR students had indicated some dissatisfaction with HR and the company was following up the research with a larger qualitative staff survey. Initially the research focused on the European offices and would be extended worldwide within a few weeks of the interview below. The respondents requested that neither their names nor that of the organisation should be identified so details relating to corporate locations size and or names are not included or marked **xxxxx.** ( The protection of confidentiality  for research respondents is discussed in chapter 11)

**Question.**  Please tell me about your survey results.

**Answer.**   We surveyed **xxxx** hundreds of people in Europe electronically. There was quite a lot of commonality in the feedback. Training and development was the number one item.

**Question.**  Why do you think that was the case?

**Answer.**   We are a highly scientific organisation so there is a thirst for knowledge and education from an academic perspective. The perceptions were that there's a dessert in terms of training and development. But when you look at what training took place it's quite interesting that there was a lot of training, except it wasn't marketed particularly well, it wasn't targeted. Communications was another item, when we have an organisation over wide geography we sometimes have difficulties managing the boundaries between people.

Then the other issue was life work balance, which was interesting because it's a very generic heading. What does that mean? What can we do to tangibly impact the substance of that topic but also the perception of employees?

When you look around the place a couple of things mitigate against this topic [life work balance] because of [the nature of] our work. Increasingly we are studying the output of what we do rather the service our employees provide in time and materials. So we have moved from an input to an outcomes emphasis.

**Question.** How does this link into the life work balance?

**Answer.** When you are monitoring employee's hours the opportunities to flex their time is limited. But the outcomes based scenario lends itself to greater flexibility. If we sell what we are putting into the system that's limited flexibility, limited individual discretion, if you sell the output then you can flex that which you put in. If what we are measured on is a set of deliverables then our client shouldn't care how we do that. So what we try to do is to drill down and say, what can we tangibly, practically do to address this life work balance issue? We know there are environmental pressures for employees to perceive themselves in different roles. Thirty years ago it wasn't so much of an issue even though people worked longer hours on the whole and with less holidays. It was an entirely different socio-economic environment. Typically there was only one working spouse and now there are two. All these factors are put in front of our employees' daily: Are you working too many hours; as a working dad do you get enough time with your children? All of these things are really hitting working families. This isn't going to go away. We cannot have another survey where this [life work balance] goes un-addressed. We need to get to a point where we can do maybe three or four things tangibly, pan European, where we can demonstrate that we are taking the feedback seriously and that the result of those actions enables employees to address their work life balance issues. We have **xxxx** people in this organisation but we have immature processes for dealing with people. We haven't invested in the

people processes. And what our population is crying out for is some investment in the people processes. So that they can access training and development, they can apply some sense of personal self to their work. Whether that's taking some time off to play tennis or whether it's looking after or be with their child and that the company will foster either of those activities. Now the young twenty year old with no kids who works long hours can take some leave time off in a quieter period and that can mean going off to play tennis [tennis was given as an example of any social/ recreational activity] However, school holidays are predetermined so you don't have the flexibility when kids are off school or sick. I think in the family situation we need enabling policies because events [for employees with families] are outside their own discretion.

In terms of retention it is good [for employees] to know that when they get into the situation it's available to them. Its like sickness, with our permanent health plan, I suppose about .2% of our population ever comes into contact with it, but when they do they're glad that its there and then there's a knock on impact so that people know if they get into that situation its available.

**Question.** What do you really value as an organisation? What is it you want from people and what is it you think they want from you?

**Answer.** The valuing question is important because what we need to understand is beneath this generic heading of life work balance. What does it mean for you? What would you like [organisation's name] to do to facilitate more of or less of what is enabling you to feel your life is in balance? This could mean staff may like to have a concierge service available to take care of things such as family gifts, dry cleaning, car servicing.

*Discussion Questions:*

1. What does life work balance mean to you? Is it possible that it can mean different things depending on a person's particular situation?

2. The executive discussed a shift from monitoring inputs (hours worked, work plans submitted,) to outputs (what teams achieved). What are the advantages and disadvantages of focusing on inputs/ outputs?

3. If employees with family responsibilities can take time off, when necessary, is it also reasonable to encourage people without such responsibilities to take time to enjoy recreational activities?

4. How do you think a family friendly policy, or health care plan can be 'good' for retaining staff even if they don't have families or have a long-term illness?

5. To what extent, if at all, should an organisation take responsibility for helping employees manage their lives outside the workplace with services such as childcare, and taking '…care of things such as family gifts, dry cleaning, car servicing'?

6. What are the advantages to an organisation of having employees who feel that their, 'life is in balance'?

7. What kinds of employment 'benefits' are/ would be important in your choice to where to work?

### *Practicing HRM:* *Life Work Balance Questionnaire*

The questionnaire below can be used to research life work balance issues. Answer the questions as a seminar activity and discuss the results in a study group. If you are conducting primary research for a course seek permission to circulate the questionnaire to employees in the organisation.

Fill in the questionnaire using the following scale:  (1) strongly disagree; (2) moderately disagree; (3) slightly disagree; (4) neither agree nor disagree; (5) slightly agree; (6) moderately agree; (7) strongly agree.

**1.**  Life work balance issues are important to this organisation.
      **1      2      3      4      5      6      7**
**2.**  I am happy with the balance of work and personal interests I have been able to achieve as an employee of this organisation.
      **1      2      3      4      5      6      7**
**3.**  My career is the most important aspect of my life.
      **1      2      3      4      5      6      7**

**4.** I would prefer to have more time to follow interests outside the workplace.
   **1     2     3     4     5     6     7**

**5.** I am prepared to work long hours when it is necessary to get a job completed.
   **1     2     3     4     5     6     7**

**6.** I regularly work longer hours than specified in my contract.
   **1     2     3     4     5     6     7**

**7.** Work pressures have contributed to creating difficulties in my personal life.
   **1     2     3     4     5     6     7**

**8.** I think my colleagues are happy with their work life balance.
   **1     2     3     4     5     6     7**

**9.** My manager takes an active interest in helping me to achieve a sustainable work life balance.
   **1     2     3     4     5     6     7**

**10.** My immediate manager has been supportive of my participation in personal/ career development activities.
   **1     2     3     4     5     6     7**

**11.** The three main benefits of the life work balance policies of this organisation are:

i)

ii)

iii)

12. The three recommendations I would like to offer for the further development of the life work balance are:

i)

ii)

iii)

THANK YOU.

*Group Activity:* *Presenting the case for Life Work Balance*

Design a short presentation (either as a team or individually) on the benefits to organisational performance, of a healthier employee life work balance HR strategy. (For presentation skills see chapter 12).

*Chapter Summary*

The starting point for the development of more effective time management and the achievement of sustainable lifework balance is an evaluation of

current work priorities and tasks. By concentrating on the key tasks that add value to the organisation's performance, people can be encouraged to invest their working time more effectively. This approach requires management to recognise the investment value of employees enjoying a healthier balance between their work responsibilities and personal lives. Unfortunately, this can sometimes be a challenge in itself because organisations are subjected and subject themselves to unnecessary procedures, which may add little or no value to the progress of their work.  It is therefore important that HR professionals conduct audits into areas such as life work balance and engage in constructive dialogue with colleagues with reference to the selection of work priorities. Each person also has a responsibility to both themselves and their colleagues to recognise that it is not feasible to add more and more tasks to a job role without deleting or delegating some other elements of the work to others. HR professionals can therefore assist colleagues in re-evaluating work schedules and encourage them to direct time, energy and resources towards the most important tasks. In an increasingly diversified workplace managers should consider the differing life work balance requirements of their people. The one size fits all approach to benefits and work conditions is less flexible and therefore obstructive to people contributing effectively in the modern workplace environment.

# *Guidance Note For Students*

The references are a useful guide to seek out other sources for background reading and ideas for your course work. Universities and colleges expect you to read more than just the set text. Although HRM An Integrated Approach provides a complete course for you, it is important to recognise that there are many other opinions, ideas on HR and management in general. In your assignments and activities you will be expected to refer to a range of literature. Go to you Learning Resources Centre and read/ view academic literature and expand your knowledge of HR and Management.

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***Personal Notes On Chapter 5***

Notes for seminars

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