

Original Research Article

Work-life balance and the Bhagavad Gita

K.S. Sivakumar*

Department of Sanskrit and Indian Culture, Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi Vuswa Mahavidyalaya (SCSVMV) Enathur, Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu, India

*Corresponding author, E-mail: sivakumar_ks07@yahoo.co.in

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ABSTRACT

The new normal world order, where the private and professional spheres of individuals are blurred and affected, warrants a revisit on individuals' work-life balance situation. The paper deliberates on enriching the psycho-physical dimension of individuals' work-life balance in the light of the Bhagavad Gita's spiritual perspectives. The methodology and discussion of the concept-based paper involves deducing and presenting: (a) the four factors that are vital/central to the work-life balance, namely, efficiency and satisfaction, priorities and time management, conflict and bonding, and control of multiple roles. (b) the appropriate spiritual perspectives of the Bhagavad Gita, and (c) the take-away for enriching the work-life balance. The spiritual perspectives of the Bhagavad Gita, that enriches all dimensions of work-life balance, has the potency to visualize a paradigm shift from work-life balance to a comprehensive work-life synthesis.

1. Introduction

The new normal world order, primarily influenced by the pandemic and its resultant uncertainty, impacts the private and professional domains of individuals. The physical, psychological and social aspects of individuals as well as business interests in the form of investment, production, distribution and consumption of goods and services, experience the challenges posed by the new normal. This situation, where the private and professional spheres of individuals are blurred and affected, warrants a revisit on individuals' work-life balance situation.

2. Work-life balance

Work-life balance may be understood as a conscious effort by individuals to effectively balance their 'work' (career/professional and its associated satisfaction) on the one hand, and 'life' (family/personal and its associated satisfaction) on the other. This 'balance' may be perceived as (a) balancing of multiple roles, (b) balance of equity among multiple roles, (c) balance of satisfaction among multiple roles, (d) balance of fulfillment of role salience among multiple roles, (e) balance of relationship between conflict and facilitation, and (f) balance of control among multiple roles. Let us briefly see the definitions under each perception.

(a) Work-life balance as a balance of multiple roles

The work-life balance may be perceived as individuals act of balancing multiple roles. According to Greenhuns, Collins and Shaw [1] 'Work-family balance reflects an individual's orientation across different life roles, an inter-role phenomenon'.

(b) Work-life balance as equity among multiple roles

The work-life balance may be perceived as equality among individuals' multiple life roles. In fact, Greenhuns,

Collins and Shaw [1] have also underlined this conception when they define work-life balance as 'the extent to which an individual is engaged in-and equally satisfied with-his or her work role and family role. We propose three components of work family-balance; time balance, involvement balance, and satisfaction balance'.

(c) Work-life balance as satisfaction among multiple roles

The work-life balance may be perceived as individuals' satisfaction with multiple roles. Kirchmeyer [2] defines work-life balance as 'achieving satisfying experiences in all life domains and to do so requires personal resources such as energy, time, and commitment to be well distributed across domains'.

(d) Work-life balance as fulfillment of role salience between multiple roles

The work-life balance may be perceived not only as individuals' satisfaction with multiple roles, but also the fulfillment of the varying importance (Salience) of multiple roles to them. Greenhaus and Allen [3] are of the opinion that work-life balance may be seen as the extent to which an individual's effectiveness and satisfaction in work and family roles are compatible with the individuals' life role priorities at a given point in time.

(e) Work-life balance as relationship between conflict and facilitation

The work-life balance may be perceived as a relationship between absence of conflict and presence of facilitation. Work-life conflict emerges due to the non-compatibility of demands that work and life place on individuals. In other words, the demand on work makes it difficult to fulfill the demands on life and vice versa. In the words of Frone [4] 'low levels of



inter-role conflict and high levels of inter-role facilitation represents work-family balance’.

(f) *Work-life balance as a control among multiple roles*

The work-life balance may be understood as the degree of control/autonomy that individuals perceive themselves to possess over their multiple role demands. According to Fleetwood [5] ‘Work-life balance is about people having a measure of control over when, where and how they work’.

3. Factors influencing work-life balance

From the foregone elucidation of the definitions, we may deduce the following important factors that are vital/central to the work-life balance. They are: (1) Efficiency and Satisfaction (2) Priorities and Time Management (3) Conflict and Bonding, and (4) Control of multiple roles. The above factors may be enriched for effective work-life balance.

4. Objective

The paper deliberates on enriching the psycho-physical dimension of individuals work-life balance in the light of the Bhagavad Gita’s spiritual perspectives. The Bhagavad Gita is a comprehensive spiritual manual that expounds the intra-personal dimensions of individuals.

5. Methodology

The method of the concept-based paper involves deducing and presenting: (a) the four factors that are vital/central to the work-life balance, (b) the appropriate spiritual perspectives of the Bhagavad Gita, and (c) the take-away for enriching the work-life balance.

6. Discussion

Let now proceed to discuss each of the four vital factors that enriches the work-life balance through empowering the individual.

(1) Efficiency and Satisfaction

Efficiency of individuals in work roles leads to enhanced productivity. Efficiency of individuals in non-work/private roles fulfills the expectations. It is common knowledge that individuals aspire satisfaction in whatever roles they perform, be it work or private/personal. Thus, efficiency and satisfaction happens to play a vital part in the work-life balance of individuals.

The Bhagavad Gita’s Spiritual Perspectives on Efficiency and Satisfaction

The Bhagavad Gita points out that in order to maintain a healthy physical body, individuals must consciously avoid extremes (complete indulgence or complete abstinence) regarding food and sleep, body postures as well as recreation and work.

According to the Bhagavad Gita, work/action must be performed as *Karmayoga*. The term ‘*Karma*’ refers to ‘duty/intention’ and ‘*Yoga*’ refers to ‘dexterity in action’. The Bhagavad Gita proclaims that any action/work must be performed as one’s own duty or on one’s own intention and not based on the results of that action/work performed.

Takeaways for Enriching Work-life Balance

Physical efficiency requires a healthy physical body. The Bhagavad Gita’s prescription for a healthy physical body, when inculcated, would enable individuals to choose a ‘middle path’ approach towards life in terms of factors such as work,

food, sleep and leisure. This would ensure physical efficiency in individuals, thereby enhancing work-life balance. It may be pointed out here that the middle-path approach is not only effective for managing individuals, but also organizations and society.

The Bhagavad Gita’s advocacy of *karmayoga* enables the following learning for individuals: Firstly, the term ‘*yoga*’ itself denotes performing any action in an efficient manner. This perception empowers individuals to perform any action, be it work roles or non-work/personal roles, with at most efficiency. Secondly, the term ‘*karma*’ denotes duty/intention in the performance of any action. This perception ensures that the satisfaction of individuals lies in performing any action based on duty/intention. Here, we may observe that satisfaction is not linked with the result of the action. It is common knowledge that satisfaction based on result brings in expectations, uncertainty, stress and so on. Therefore, when actions are performed based on duty/intention, there emerges a positive sense of responsibility, interest, efficiency and satisfaction, in individuals.

Thus, we are able to observe that the Bhagavad Gita’s spiritual perception of *karmayoga* empowers individuals with enhancing the vital factors of efficiency and satisfaction that would enrich the work-life balance.

(2) Priorities and Time Management

In the present fast-paced life style, where performance of work and non-work roles is a race against time, the notion of priorities takes centre-stage. Priority-setting is a skill that involves taking into consideration a number of factors and parameters. Similar is the case with time management. No doubt, priorities and time management plays a vital part in the work-life balance of individuals.

The Bhagavad Gita’s Spiritual Perspectives on Priorities and Time Management

While discussing the nature of mind, the Bhagavad Gita proclaims two techniques for individuals, namely, (a) a spirit of discrimination by renouncing (*vairagya*) the unwanted and holding-on to the important factors, and (b) the constant practice (*abhyasa*) of the same [6].

Takeaways for Enriching Work-life Balance

The Bhagavad Gita’s spiritual perspective of discriminating renunciation, when inculcated, would enable individuals to prioritize based on roles that are more important/urgent for them to achieve their life’s objectives (short and long run). This parameter may also be used to delegate and eliminate tasks. When roles are prioritized, the given time is optimally utilized.

It is a common adage that practice makes a man perfect. The Bhagavad Gita’s emphasize on the constant practice of the above technique would enable individuals to be more consistent in prioritizing their role schedules in order to achieve their objectives of life. It would assist them with more focus and stability.

Thus, we are able to observe that the Bhagavad Gita’s spiritual perception of discriminating renunciation and practice empowers individuals with enhancing the vital factors of priority and time management that would enrich the work-life balance.

(3) Conflict and Bonding

In the present scenario, characterized by work-from-home situation, individuals are increasingly called upon to address

the challenges posed by their multiple role engagement. This situation often leads to the emergence of work-life conflict. Work-life conflict occurs: (a) when family and personal responsibilities infringe upon work demands and (b) when work responsibilities infringe upon family/private demands/needs. Work-life conflict breaks the sense of bonding affecting both work as well as life domains of individuals. Thus, conflict and bonding are in inverse relationship and both the factors happens to play a vital part in the work-life balance of individuals.

The Bhagavad Gita's Spiritual Perspectives on Conflict and Bonding

The Bhagavad Gita states that individuals may attain a state of emotional stability - *sthitaprajna* [6] characterized by a strong mind, not shaken by adversity & duality, free from fear, has complete control over attachment or detachment, experiences peace and tranquility[6].

Further, the Bhagavad Gita proclaims that individuals may get established in a state of same sightedness (*samadarsana*) ie., seeing the Self (*atman*) as residing in all beings and all beings as residing in the Self [6].

Takeaways for Enriching Work-life Balance

The Bhagavad Gita's spiritual perspective of emotional stability, when inculcated, would enable individuals to have a great degree of control over their emotions, in all situations. A little reflection on the work-life conflict would show that conflicts at work or life roles are external to the individuals and therefore, they have limited influence over it. What is under the control of individuals is their internal emotional stability and its reflected attitude towards work-life conflicts. Therefore, individuals with emotional stability would adequately respond and mitigate the challenges of the external work-life conflict. This would also result in improving the social bonding among individuals

The Bhagavad Gita's perception of same sightedness would enable individuals to inculcate a strong sense of empathy towards others during the course of their work and non-work/personal roles. This virtue would not only mitigate work-life conflict, but also positively enhance social bonding among individuals.

Thus, we are able to observe that the Bhagavad Gita's spiritual perception of emotional stability and same sightedness empowers individuals with enhancing the vital factors of conflict mitigation and bonding that would enrich the work-life balance.

(4) Control of Multiple Roles

In the present-day world, a sense of control over multiple roles is an important skill to acquire and cherish for individuals. This is so because roles (both work and non-work/personal) have become more complex, dynamic and unexpected, demanding the complete attention and focus of individuals. In such a scenario, individuals possessing a sense of control over multiple roles is a highly positive feature that plays a vital part in the work-life balance of individuals.

The Bhagavad Gita's Spiritual Perspectives on the Control of Multiple Roles

The Bhagavad Gita points out the positives of controlling important intra-personal factors in individuals such as the senses, desires, anger and the mind[6].

Takeaways for Enriching Work-life Balance

The Bhagavad Gita's spiritual perspective of intra-personal factor-control, when inculcated, would enable individuals to possess a greater degree of control over their mind-set and emotions. A little reflection on the control of multiple roles would show that these roles (at work or life) are external to the individuals and therefore, they have limited influence over it. What is under the control of individuals is their internal mind-set and emotions and its reflected attitude towards multiple roles. Therefore, individuals with intra-personal factor-control would adequately respond and mitigate the challenges of the external multiple roles.

Thus, we are able to observe that the Bhagavad Gita's spiritual perception of controlling the intra-personal factors such as the senses, desire, anger and the mind empowers individuals to appropriately address issues emerging out of multiple roles. This would adequately enrich the work-life balance.

7. Conclusions

From the deliberations on the definitions of work-life balance, we are able to deduce the four factors that are central to the work-life balance, namely, efficiency and satisfaction, priorities and time management, conflict and bonding, and control of multiple roles.

We may state that a discussion on the concept of work-life balance, in the light of the spiritual perspectives of the Bhagavad Gita, brings out a number of vital intra-personal guidelines such as the middle-path approach and duty/intention based action, renunciation and its practice, emotional stability and same sightedness, control of the senses, desire, anger and the mind, for empowering individuals to comprehensively address the various issues involved in work-life balance.

We may observe that the spiritual perspectives of the Bhagavad Gita has the potency to not only enrich the individual's psycho-physical environment, but also the work/professional environment and the family/private life environment, of work-life balance.

Let us conclude by stating that the inputs from the spiritual perspectives of the Bhagavad Gita propel to visualize a journey/movement from the paradigm of work-life balance to a paradigm of a comprehensive and harmonious work-life synthesis.

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