Work-Life Balance
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Opening Questions:
How do we envision life and what place does work have within it?
What are the components of “life” in the idea of “work-life” balance?

Defining Key Terms
● “Balance”
  ○ “Equal distribution of weight or amount”
    ■ Both sides might be very heavy or very light and balance can be subjective
    ■ “Avoiding resource drain”
      ● One role does not drain more resources (time, energy) than desired or appropriate from another role
  ○ “Stability of body or mind”
    ■ Physical and psychological - observable by an outsider but subjective across individuals
  ○ “To equal or neutralize”
    ■ Humans can take steps to manage balance, assumption that it is within an individual’s power to achieve balance
● “Work”
  ○ Only paid work? If so, does this include extra work done during unpaid hours?
  ○ Does commute time count?
  ○ What about those who work from home?
● “Life”
  ○ Leisure time vs. free time: Planned/committed vs. unplanned
  ○ Family time, relationships and community
● Why is it a relevant topic of study now?
  ○ Advances in technology and the amount of information available
  ○ Need for speed: tight deadlines, demand of response time
  ○ Importance of customer service, leading to need for constant availability
  ○ Constancy of change and all it requires
  ○ Increase in the intensity of work

67% of women and 86% of men work more than 40 hours per week - Center for American Progress

74% of employees regard their work as a significant source of stress - American Psychological Association

22% of employees are expected to respond to work email even when they’re not at work, half of all employees check work email over the weekend - Pew Research Center
Traditional Models of Work-Life Balance

- **Segmentation Model**: Work and non-work lives are distinct and do not influence other
- **Spillover Model**: Work and non-work lives can influence other in either a positive or negative way
- **Compensation Model**: What is lacking in one area can be compensated for by the other
- **Instrumental Model**: Activities in one sphere facilitate success in the other
- **Conflict Model**: Difficult choices and conflict emerge as a result of high levels of demand in all spheres potentially causing role overload

Conservation Theory - “Individuals have a finite amount of resources with which to manage life demands, and the depletion of these resources across domains attributable to conflict increases employee strain. As such, demands in one domain could result in fewer resources remaining for the other domain, reducing employee satisfaction with the balance between these domains” (Hobfoll, 1989).

- Interventions to reduce this conflict would potentially benefit more greatly by targeting the nonwork life domain than the work domain (Grawitch, Maloney, Mooshegian, and Barber, 2013)

Discussion Questions:

- What are some potential negative social effects (in the home and community) of an imbalanced work-life commitment?
- What are some potential negative physical and mental health effects of an imbalanced work-life commitment?

Potential negative effects of imbalanced work/life commitment:

- Social: Home and Community
  - Increases in juvenile crime, drug abuse, reduction in concern for community and community participation, decrease in willingness to care for the elderly and disadvantaged (Guest, 2002)
  - Marital dissatisfaction, limited interactions with friends and family
  - Limiting activities that previously reduced stress
- Health: Physical and Mental
  - Decrease in positive eating habits, sleeping too much, insomnia
  - Emotional wellbeing: anxiety and depression which can lead to problems with concentration and organization, impacted relationships, the ability to accept constructive criticism in the workplace
  - “Those putting in an average of at least 11 hours per day at work were two and a half times more likely to experience depression than those who put in seven- or eight-hour workdays” - *PLoS ONE* by the Public Library of Science

Assisting a client as a career counselor:

- Seek to understand the relationship between work and identity. Work life can provide:
  - Sense of self-determination and self-worth
○ Means of social connection
○ Compensation
○ Benefits
○ Stability
○ Replacement for other areas of life that are lacking
○ Expression of interests and values
○ Intellectual stimulation

● Affirm client’s lived experiences at work. Don’t default to interpreting them as a representation of something else.

● Consider interventions:
  ○ Assessing relationship between client and his/her job
  ○ Separating self-worth from professional identity
  ○ Cultivating of skills: relaxation, anger management, assertiveness
  ○ Defining healthy lifestyle: sleep, exercise, nutrition
  ○ Creating boundaries and comfort with sacrifice
  ○ Accepting the limits of time and ability to produce within that fixed amount of time
  ○ Naming values and defining what is most important to the client; working on the acceptance of these in relation to subsequent sacrifices
  ○ Exploring ways to decrease stress: delegation, taking less work on, sharing responsibilities at home, limiting commitments, taking frequent breaks while at work, reducing time spent with gadgets (phone, tablet, laptop), reducing commute time or exploring a flexible work schedule, learning about time management tools (ex. email inbox management, calendar blocking, etc.)
  ○ Incorporating roleplay

References


**Additional Resources**


http://research.wayne.edu/seminars-training/docs/worklifequiz.pdf

http://hrweb.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/Balancing_Life_Roles.pdf


Stevens, S. N. M. (2011). *Understanding how employees unwind after work: Expanding the construct of “recovery.”* ProQuest Information & Learning, US.