

## Leveraging human potential – work-life balance

**Abstract:** Getting work-life balance right and being flexible to make short-term changes is critical if workers are to have sustainable performance over time. Wellbeing is essential to sustained productivity of individuals and to the dynamics of healthy, efficient teams. This article provides some strategies for revisiting and reflecting upon what is important and making changes that are acceptable to managers all concerned

### Introduction

Most executives have demanding jobs so we have good excuses for being late for friends, children and spouses. We have good excuses for being distracted at home, and good excuses for not really being present in family life. Nothing changes unless we revalue, and not all of us want to. However, if things are not as you would wish, there is always scope for improvement if we apply a higher level of directed attention to all the issues.

In any event, it is worth questioning whether excessive time at work over the mid or long time is actually efficient – logic and experience suggests that persistently high levels of work-time increases errors and reduces efficacy. People who have gone from episodes of fire-fighting to persistent ‘fire-fighting mode’ are suffering from the Lock-in Syndrome. Once in the Syndrome, they typically do not have mental the clarity to see their situation objectively.

One of the problems about addressing attention to life-balance in the first place is also due to the effects of Lock-in Syndrome, or fire-fighting at the lesser level of issue. We get so focused that the rest of our needs (and that of others) get sidelined. To make changes we must take the time to investigate the issues properly, not short-cut the process by following existing patterns. For those that have desire and will to change, let’s look at an evaluation of life-balance and then strategies for making positive differences in the short and longer term.

### Where there is a Will, There is a Way

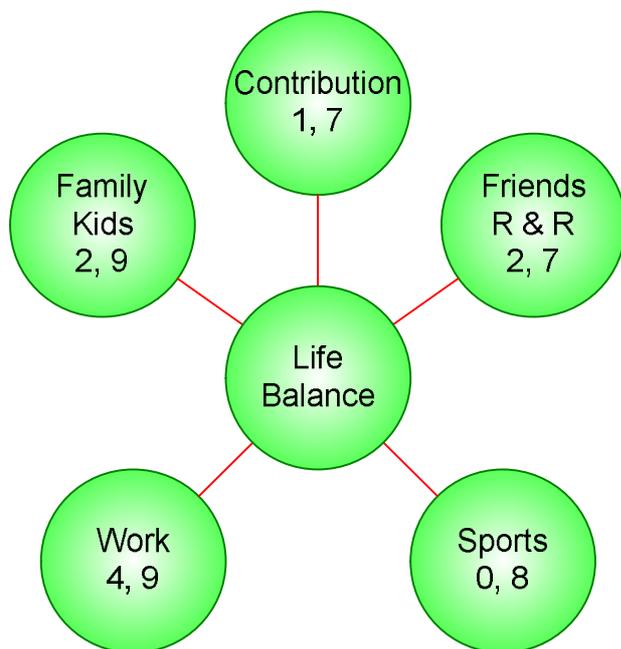
When we consider life-balance it is helpful to set up some areas for introspection. Here is a typical list:

- Friends
- Rest and holidays
- Eating out

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- Physical activity
- Health
- Wealth
- Appearance
- Hobbies
- Kids
- Family Life
- Partnership
- Personal Growth
- Faith activities
- Contribution to others
- Environment of home

A good first step is to identify what the position is now and what you might like it to be. In the example below, the executive has set down five main elements for consideration. In each, he has placed a ranking out of a possible ten, for 'my comfort rating with the current situation' and following that, his ranking for 'my desired comfort rating in two months'.

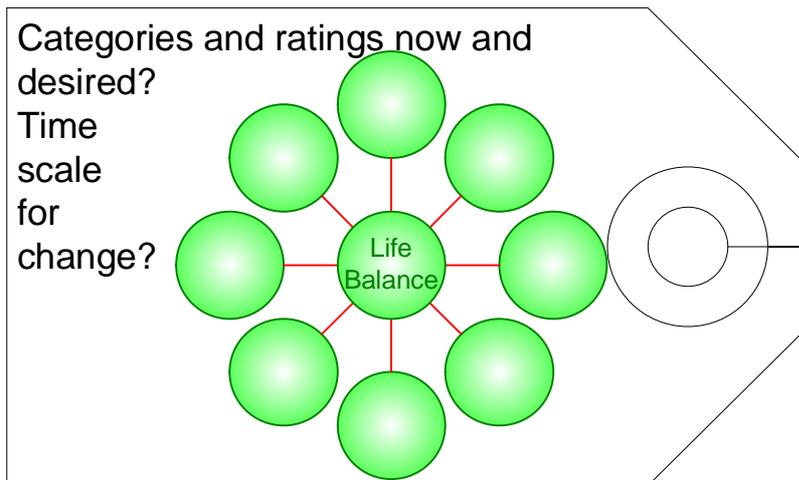


In every case there was scope for improvement, in some cases massive improvement – if only he could find the time. In questioning, I learned that his dissatisfaction with work was not due to lack of commitment or interest, just unhappiness that the rest of his life was a footnote to work. He was no longer involved in any sports although he had been a Karate Blue at University; he had put on weight. He

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had already missed too many of his children’s firsts: league matches, first classes and stage appearances. He had been involved in coaching under-twelve’s football but let that go. And most of his Rest & Recuperation time was ‘recovery time’ without social contact of any memorable value.

So, what are your categories and how would you rank your levels now and your desired levels, zero to ten?



## Finding Time

What time commitments have to change to make your objectives real? After juggling, invariably there are quite a number of hours to be found! Let’s investigate many of the factors that impact on your time and give attention to each – what can be saved? How? When can that be done? How much time do you want to save?

Core needs of my talent	
Tertiary needs that others should do	
Travel time to and from work	
Overseas engagements	
Inland travel	
Extra-curricular corporate activity	
Regular meetings	
Main office location	
Secondary office location	
Days working from home	
Booking uninterrupted space for thinking	
Management Skills of my reports	

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Training needs of my reports	
Support needs for my team	
Communication methods	
Reporting actually required (and formats)	
Other extraneous jobs and functions	
Sign-offs, checking	
Presentations – who creates and delivers	
Projects that could be off-loaded	
Training and support for delegation	
Who do I over-manage	
Add others	

Each change will need a time frame. And most changes will impact elsewhere, so you will need to consider, holistically, the impact of changes and communicate to those affected in a way that fits with the needs of the organization.

Most people begin to see multiple areas where they can reduce their time-efforts without negatively affecting their productivity. Often, restructuring some of these activities is more productive and also may help juniors to step up their abilities. People who fail in this are often neurotic, that is, feeling overly-responsible for the things that should not concern them. Sometimes their issue has to do with needing to feel in control or a drive to own and or be associated directly with all forward movement. These people often need outside help to gain perspective and or improve their sense of self-worth.

If you have not already done so, please calculate the expected savings in time and the extent of any gap by comparing the actual saving to the time you estimated you needed to find.

If there is still a gap, maybe ask yourself whether this compromise is acceptable in the short term? If it is not, then it may be worthwhile revisiting the list above. What other area of time can you identify that is not already in your list? Be tougher on yourself and go through again. Be cool and calculated.

When you have found more time, it is still important to then consider the holistic impacts of change before making commitments. It is a good idea to imagine what it is like now (to have made those decisions), informed those people and to be doing things differently. If that experience is a positive one, and holistically sound, then you have probably already made a commitment to those changes.

## To Tell or Not to Tell

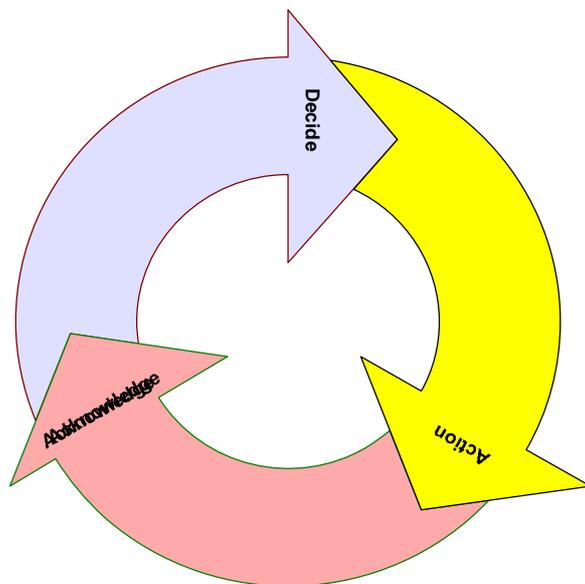
When you are making significant changes to your patterns of working it may be important to find appropriate expressions of those changes that the culture of work finds acceptable. If you couch that in terms of overall efficacy (for the organization) rather than personal needs, these changes may be more

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easily accepted. Sometimes people work with others in a culture of high-stress and long-hours and then the change may be unacceptable to the organization. In that case I know people who have incorporated their needs for self-reflection (including possible career-change!) into the unpaid time they spend at work. Some have set out folders and files that look work-based, others take-time out for activities that sound work-related. While I do not condone dishonesty at work, a culture that depreciates the sustainable health and efficacy of its people does not deserve their loyalty.

## Honoring Jobs Done

One of the reasons that managers get into unbalanced patterns of working is often due to the fact that they do not pause to consider their success. An essential trait of leaders is the ability to pause after most of their successes and then give personal credit for the job done. The Action Cycle looks like this:



This may sound a little sappy but it is important. Firstly, if we give ourselves realistic credit, we are then less needy for feedback from others. Secondly, if we do not pause for acknowledgement we are very likely to go into Lock-in Syndrome and move rapidly to the next decision. There are times for those behaviors but they have dangers as we have already seen. Let me express a true tale of a friend.

Robin was a high-achiever. He was the Marketing Director of one of the best known National monuments in the world. He wrote a regular column for a pre-eminent specialist journal on guns. He was a regular contributor to other journals. He had enjoyed a fine military career in a prestigious

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regiment known the world-over. He was also one of the funniest and most well-connected people I ever met. He was self-effacing and his achievements and background was only learned by others, quietly, over some years. He knew most of the first and second ranks of the British Royal family through his social standing. An evening with Robin meant that we would be laughing the whole time while he told jokes and stories and imitated famous people. We would cry with so much laughing and my jaw would ache. But Robin only knew how to do the first two things in the Action Cycle, decision and action. He was predisposed to be stoical, self-reliant and competent. The last time I saw Robin, I was driving on a stormy winter's day. He was walking along the sidewalk in his local town. A few days later Robin put on a heavy coat and waded into the River Thames, drowning himself. Tears fell again at his funeral service.

At its most extreme, lack of acknowledgement (and refusal to take seriously the compliments of others) can result in clinical depression. There are of course, shades of gray in the extent to which we self-acknowledge. The Action Cycle Model suggests that we should be doing some of it, some of the time at least! Acknowledgement helps create self-esteem and self-confidence and these then generate the potential for making bigger steps later on. Self-acknowledgement is one key in that journey.

## Conclusion

Work-life balance is often a subject looked at due to high stress, illness or when personal relationships are failing due to over-work and the psychological effects of persistent over-work. If we are to manage our lives and avoid these problems it is useful to review, perhaps once or twice each year and to make actions to change habits of both thinking and behaviour.

### *Author's Bio*

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