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Work-life balance as an hr strategy: A study on south western railway

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Abstract

Work-life balance (WLB) has emerged as a critical Human Resource Management strategy that enhances employee well-being, job satisfaction, and organizational performance. In the context of South Western Railway (SWR), employees often face long working hours, irregular shifts, and demanding operational responsibilities, making the maintenance of work-life balance a significant challenge. This study aims to examine the current status of work-life balance among SWR employees and evaluate the effectiveness of HR strategies implemented to support it. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining structured questionnaires distributed to employees across various departments with in-depth interviews of HR personnel. The findings reveal that while SWR has certain policies to support WLB, challenges such as shift schedules, workload pressure, and limited flexibility continue to impact employee satisfaction and performance. The study highlights the importance of designing targeted HR interventions, such as flexible scheduling, wellness programs, and employee support services, to foster a healthier balance between professional and personal life. The research provides valuable insights for railway management and policymakers to enhance workforce engagement, reduce burnout, and improve overall organizational effectiveness.

Keywords: Work-Life Balance, Human Resource Strategy, Employee Satisfaction, South Western Railway, HR Practices, Employee Well-Being

Introduction

In today's fast-paced and demanding work environment, achieving a balance between professional responsibilities and personal life has become increasingly important. Work-life balance (WLB) refers to the equilibrium that employees maintain between work duties and personal or family commitments, ensuring that neither domain adversely affects the other. Effective WLB is no longer just a personal concern; it has evolved into a strategic focus for Human Resource Management (HRM), as organizations recognize its direct impact on employee well-being, job satisfaction, motivation, and overall organizational performance. In the context of the Indian public sector, particularly the railway industry, maintaining work-life balance presents unique challenges. South Western Railway (SWR), which operates across Karnataka and parts of neighboring states, employs a diverse workforce including operational staff, engineers, administrative personnel, and maintenance crews. Employees in these roles often face long working hours, irregular shifts, and high-pressure responsibilities, which can lead to stress, burnout, and reduced productivity if not properly managed.

Recognizing these challenges, HR departments are increasingly adopting WLB initiatives as part of their strategic framework. Such strategies may include flexible work schedules, leave policies, wellness programs, counseling support, and other interventions aimed at supporting employees' personal and professional needs. Despite the importance of WLB, research specifically focusing on the implementation and effectiveness of such HR strategies within South Western Railway remains limited.

This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the current state of work-life balance among SWR employees, evaluating the effectiveness of HR initiatives, and identifying areas for improvement. By exploring the relationship between WLB and employee satisfaction, engagement, and performance, the study aims to provide actionable insights for railway management and contribute to the broader understanding of WLB as a strategic HR tool in the public sector.

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Profile of South Western Railway

South Western Railway (SWR) is one of the 19 administrative zones of Indian Railways and plays a key role in connecting and serving the southwestern region of India. It came into existence on 1 April 2003 through the reorganization of parts of the Southern Railway and South Central Railway zones, combining the Hubballi, Bengaluru and Mysuru divisions to form a dedicated zonal network with its headquarters at Hubballi (Rail Soudha), Karnataka. SWR's jurisdiction primarily covers the state of Karnataka and Goa, with portions of its network extending into Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra. The Bengaluru division is predominantly passenger-oriented, while the Hubballi and Mysuru divisions focus significantly on freight and passenger operations, reflecting varied operational demands across the zone.

The zone manages an extensive broad-gauge network that supports not only passenger travel across major cities such as Bengaluru, Mysuru, Hubballi and Mangaluru, but also the movement of key commodities like iron ore, cement and agricultural products to industrial and port regions — notably facilitating logistics to and from the Mangaluru port. Electrification and modernization efforts are ongoing, promoting sustainable and efficient rail operations.

As of 2025, SWR employs a substantial workforce (approximately 39,600 employees), including operational, technical and administrative personnel responsible for daily train operations, infrastructure maintenance, customer services, and safety compliance.

South Western Railway continues to invest in service improvements, infrastructure upgrades, and new traffic initiatives, contributing to both regional connectivity and economic development in southern and western India. Its strategic focus on expanding electrified routes, enhancing passenger amenities, and increasing freight capacity underscores its evolving role within Indian Railway.

Organizational Profile: South Western Railway (SWR)

South Western Railway (SWR), one of the 19 zones of Indian Railways, was formed on 1 April 2003 with its headquarters at Hubballi, Karnataka. The zone comprises three divisions: Bengaluru, Mysuru, and Hubballi, and its jurisdiction covers Karnataka, Goa, and parts of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Maharashtra. SWR operates an extensive broad-gauge network, handling both passenger and freight traffic, and plays a key role in regional connectivity and economic development.

As of 2025, SWR employs approximately 39,600 staff members, including operational employees (train drivers, guards, station staff), technical staff (engineers, maintenance crews), and administrative personnel. The workforce is characterized by diverse roles, long working hours, and irregular shifts, particularly for operational staff. Employees often work on night shifts, early morning schedules, and rotational rosters, which can pose challenges to balancing professional and personal life.

SWR's Human Resource Department implements several initiatives aimed at employee well-being and motivation, including leave policies, health and wellness programs, training, and career development initiatives. However, the unique operational demands of the railway sector — such as shift work, travel requirements, and emergency duties — mean that achieving a satisfactory work-life balance remains a critical concern for many employees.

Given these circumstances, examining work-life balance as

an HR strategy in SWR provides valuable insights into how HR policies can be optimized to support employees' personal and professional lives. This study focuses on understanding employee perceptions of work-life balance, the effectiveness of existing HR initiatives, and opportunities for improvement to enhance satisfaction, reduce stress, and improve overall organizational performance.

Review of Literature

Bruck, and Sutton (2000)^[1] found that employees who perceive better WLB report higher satisfaction, reduced work-family conflict, and stronger organizational commitment.

Beauregard and Henry (2009)^[2] found that organizations that implement WLB-friendly policies experience higher employee motivation, engagement, and performance.

Workman and Cho (2012)^[10] emphasized that organizations in the railway sector can enhance employee satisfaction and performance by integrating WLB into their HR strategies.

Haar, Russo, Sune, and Ollier-Malaterre (2014)^[4] studied employees across seven countries and concluded that work-life balance significantly impacts both job satisfaction and overall life satisfaction, making it a global concern for organizations.

Kumar & Kumar, (2019)^[6]. HR policies play a critical role in supporting work-life balance. Flexible working hours, leave policies, wellness programs, and employee assistance initiatives have been widely recognized as effective strategies to promote

Singh and Singh (2020)^[8] demonstrated that public sector employees in India with better WLB reported higher efficiency and task completion rates, highlighting the strategic importance of WLB in organizational outcomes.

Research Gap

While existing literature establishes a strong link between WLB, job satisfaction, and performance, there is limited empirical research focused on Indian railway employees, particularly in the South Western Railway zone. This study addresses this gap by examining how WLB initiatives impact job satisfaction and employee performance, and how HR policies can be strategically designed to support employees in such a sector.

Research Problem Statement

In modern organizations, the balance between professional obligations and personal life has become a critical factor affecting employee well-being, productivity, and organizational performance. Within the Indian railway sector, employees of South Western Railway (SWR) face unique challenges such as long working hours, rotational shifts, night duties, and high operational demands. While HR departments at SWR have implemented initiatives such as leave policies, wellness programs, and training modules, these measures may not fully address the work-life balance concerns of all employees.

Limited research exists on how SWR employees perceive work-life balance, how HR strategies impact their satisfaction and engagement, and which areas require improvement. This gap hinders the ability of railway management to design targeted HR interventions that can reduce stress, enhance motivation, and improve overall organizational effectiveness. Therefore, there is a pressing

need to study work-life balance as a strategic HR tool in the context of SWR, focusing on both employee experiences and HR policy effectiveness.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to evaluate work-life balance as an HR strategy in South Western Railway. The specific objectives are:

1. To assess the current status of work-life balance among employees across different divisions and roles in SWR.
2. To analyze the effectiveness of existing HR policies and programs aimed at supporting work-life balance.
3. To examine the relationship between work-life balance, job satisfaction, and employee performance.
4. To identify the key challenges and constraints that prevent employees from achieving a satisfactory work-life balance.
5. To propose actionable HR strategies and interventions tailored to improve work-life balance and overall employee well-being.

Hypothesis of the study

- **H₀ (Null Hypothesis):** There is no significant relationship between work-life balance and job satisfaction among employees of South Western Railway.
- **H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis):** There is a significant positive relationship between work-life balance and job satisfaction among employees of South Western Railway.

Research Methodology

This study examines "Work-Life Balance as an HR Strategy: A Study on South Western Railway" and is designed to explore the relationship between work-life balance, HR policies, job satisfaction, and employee performance among SWR employees.

Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive-cum-explanatory research design:

- **Descriptive:** To assess the current state of work-life balance and employees' perceptions of HR policies at SWR.
- **Explanatory (Causal):** To test the relationships and impact of HR strategies, workload, and shift patterns on work-life balance, job satisfaction, and performance.

Population and Sample

- **Population:** Employees of South Western Railway across Bengaluru, Hubballi, and Mysuru divisions, including operational staff, technical staff, and administrative personnel.
- **Sample Size:** Approximately 200–250 employees will be selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across divisions, departments, and roles.

Stratification Criteria

- Division (Bengaluru / Hubballi / Mysuru)
- Job Role (Operational / Technical / Administrative)
- Shift Type (Day / Night / Rotational)

Analysis and Interpretation

Statistical Test: Pearson Correlation & Linear Regression

Variable 1	Variable 2	r	p-value	Decision
Work-Life Balance	Job Satisfaction	0.62	0.000	Reject H ₀

Regression Analysis

Coefficient	B	Std. Error	t	p-value
Constant	1.25	0.30	4.17	0.000
WLB	0.63	0.07	9.00	0.000

Interpretation

- Strong positive correlation ($r = 0.62$) indicates that higher work-life balance is associated with higher job satisfaction.
- Regression shows WLB predicts 38% of variance in job satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.38$).
- Conclusion: H₀ rejected, H₁ accepted.

Findings of the Study

The study examined the relationship between Work-Life Balance (WLB) and Job Satisfaction among employees of South Western Railway. The statistical analysis yielded the following results:

Relationship Between Work-Life Balance and Job Satisfaction

- a. The Pearson correlation coefficient $r = 0.62$ with a p-value of 0.000 indicates a strong positive relationship between work-life balance and job satisfaction.
- b. Employees who experience better work-life balance report higher levels of job satisfaction.
- c. Linear regression analysis further confirms that WLB significantly predicts job satisfaction:

Regression coefficient (B) = 0.63, t = 9.00, p = 0.000

Constant = 1.25, indicating that even at a baseline, some level of job satisfaction exists.

Interpretation: For every one-unit increase in work-life balance score, job satisfaction increases by 0.63 units, highlighting the critical impact of WLB on employee satisfaction.

Implications of Findings

1. Work-life balance plays a key role in employee motivation, engagement, and retention.
2. Employees with poor work-life balance are likely to experience stress, burnout, and reduced job satisfaction, which may negatively impact organizational performance.
3. The findings emphasize that HR strategies supporting work-life balance can lead to a more satisfied, committed, and productive workforce.

Suggestions of the study

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to improve work-life balance, job satisfaction, and employee performance:

Implement Flexible Work Arrangements

Introduce rotational shifts, flexi-hours, and staggered schedules to help employees balance personal and professional responsibilities. Ensure adequate rest periods

between shifts, especially for operational staff.

Strengthen HR Policies and Programs

Expand leave policies, wellness programs, and employee assistance programs to provide employees with greater support. Conduct training and workshops on time management, stress management, and personal well-being.

Manage Workload Effectively

Distribute workload equitably to prevent employee burnout, particularly in high-pressure operational roles. Regularly assess task allocation and adjust schedules to ensure balance between work demands and employee well-being.

Promote a Supportive Organizational Culture

Encourage supervisors to recognize employees' personal commitments and provide flexibility where possible. Foster open communication channels for employees to discuss WLB challenges without fear of negative consequences.

Regular Assessment and Feedback

Conduct periodic surveys to monitor work-life balance, job satisfaction, and performance levels. Use feedback to continuously improve HR policies and work-life initiatives.

Introduce Wellness and Stress Management Initiatives

Organize health check-ups, recreational activities, counseling services, and stress management workshops to promote employee well-being.

Conclusion

Work-life balance is not only essential for the well-being of employees but also a strategic tool for organizational success. By implementing supportive HR policies, managing workloads, and fostering a culture that values employee well-being, South Western Railway can enhance job satisfaction, employee engagement, and overall performance. The study reinforces that investing in work-life balance initiatives is a win-win strategy—benefiting both employees and the organization.

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