

## **An Analysis of The Work-Life Balance of The Sri Lankan Military Officers**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The requirement for human talent is growing faster than the number of people to fill the gap. With the job getting more attractive and challenging, employees are facing a new challenge of accomplishing the job-related goals whilst striking a balance in their personal life. The term Work-Life Balance comes into play in this context.

The families of the military officers without any doubt may expect their beloved parents, husbands/wives and sons/ daughters to be with them for longer periods than they used to be during the war period. At the same time the job front may have become more hectic as the peace time role of the military is to train them and be prepared for any contingency. The work-life balance of Sri Lankan military officers is an area which has not been explored into as per the literature available, even though there are many studies in the global and some in the Sri Lankan context. It is understood that even in the aftermath of the thirty year war, the military officers or men have not been able to strike the right work-life balance. The causes of such phenomena and the effects to the families of such officers deserve a deeper study.

The Government has entrusted many development works to the military looking at their past performances and dedication. Since the challenges in the military also remain at a reasonably higher level, the expected relief from the job front has not been found apparently. In this study it was identified that the Sri Lanka Military Officers, in general have problems in managing Work-Life Balance. In this study it was intended to enquire into the relationship between the Self, Family, Work and Society towards the work-Life balance of the Sri Lanka, Military officers. The findings it was revealed that the four pillars and the work life balance have a positive relationship. Officers who strike a balance between all four figures are enjoy a better work-life balance.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

**“It’s not the hours you put in your work that count, it’s the work that you put in the hours”**  
**Sam Ewing**

The requirement for human talent is growing faster than the number of people to fill the gap. This has become a real challenge in the job market. Getting the right person, training them, developing them and retaining them in the job are getting more challenging. On the other hand employees have got better options to move to new and attractive jobs. Human Resource professionals have understood that they need to pay right remuneration to attract and retain the employees.

With the job getting more attractive and challenging, the employees are facing a new challenge of accomplishing the job-related goals whilst striking a balance in their personal life. The term Work-Life Balance comes into play in this context. Work-Life Balance further refers to harmonious or satisfying arrangement between an individual's work obligations and his/her personal life. Studies on work-life balance often concentrate only on the two domains, work and family. At the same time work and family have often been considered as two sides of the same coin having a zero sum game.

It is a fact that life cannot be lived fully whilst meeting all the challenges of the job front to the fullest. There is no right or wrong answer for this. It is a person-specific thing and it is up to the employee to decide how best to you meet the expectations of the family whilst doing justice to ones job front.

According to a survey done by the Singapore National Employers' organization, for every dollar investment in work-life initiatives, organizations are able to reap a return of \$1.68 in terms of staff retention and increase in productivity. An organization that addresses the work-life issues of employees will increase employee satisfaction. For example, the option to work from home or to go to work at flexi-times that enable personal and family obligations to be fulfilled will go a long way, rather than having more money by working on fixed hours. With this fit, an employee needs not think about changing his job, even if the pay is not the best. More stayers, less labour turnover and less recruitment cost! Increasing

employee satisfaction reduces absenteeism and improves motivation at work, leading to higher productivity<sup>1</sup>.

### 1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

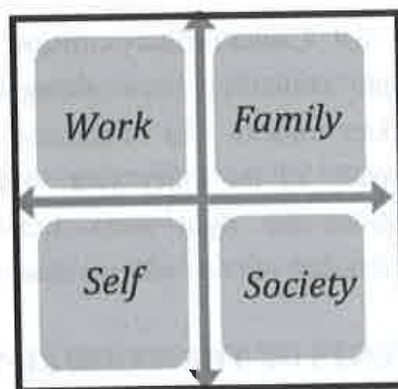
The families of the military officers without any doubt may expect their beloved parents, husbands/wives and sons/ daughters to be with them for longer periods than they used to be during the war period. At the same time the job front may have become more hectic as the peace time role of the military is to train them and be prepared for any contingency. Also it is the time for the military to "lick their wounds" - in other words to reorganize after fighting such a hectic battle with bigger losses of human and other militaryware too. At the same time the expectations of the government from the military have gone up. The Government has entrusted a lot of development works the military looking at their past performances. Since the expectations from the military have not been reduced, the expected relief from the job front for the military personnel has not been a reality.

The work-life balance of Sri Lankan military officers is an area which has not been explored into as per the literature available, even though there are many studies in the global and some in the Sri Lankan context. As discussed in the previous paragraph, it is understood that even in the aftermath of the thirty year war, the military officers or men

have not been able to strike the right work-life balance. The causes of such phenomenon and the effects to the families of such officers deserve a deeper study.

The work-life balance of the western world is different from that of the eastern world. The work-life balance of the military is totally a different paradigm. During the thirty year old war the work-life of the military personnel was a challenge for them where most of them were not able to get over it due to the superordinate goal they had to achieve. Now that the war is over and the country is returning to normalcy, there is much awareness and interest to build up the family link which the military personnel lost during the period of the three decade old war.

This could be examined from four angles *i.e.* work, family, self and society considering the possible impacts to life and work. Accordingly a relationship between work-life balance and work demands, work support<sup>2</sup>, work culture<sup>3</sup>, family demands, family culture, self demands and social demands, has been assumed and expected to be tested in this study.



**Fig 1. Factors affecting Work-Life Balance**

Source: Bird (2003)

## 1.2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

A research into the area of the work-life balance of Sri Lankan military officers would widen many horizons. In the first place it would add value to the families who have made supreme sacrifice by the way of extending their beloved father/husband to wage the war, then the military services to re-phrase the job styles of the military officers by looking at the research outcomes.

Moreover, in the wider context such a research would address a knowledge gap in the arena of military management as no research has been conducted into this area. At the same time it would invite other researchers to explore many other areas based on this study. Accordingly the research problem focussed here is stated as: “An Analysis of the work-life balance of the Sri Lankan Military Officers”

### **1.3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The families of the military officers without any doubt may expect their beloved parents, husbands/wives and sons/ daughters to be with them for longer periods than they used to be. At the same time the job front may have become more hectic as the peace time role of the military is to train them and be prepared for any contingency. At the same time the expectations of the government towards the military have gone up. The Government has entrusted the military many development works looking at their past performances and dedication. Since the things in the military side have also not been reduced, the expected relief from the job front has not been found apparently.

The work-life balance of Sri Lanka military officers is an area which has not been explored into as per the literature available, even though there are many studies in the global and some in the Sri Lankan context. As discussed in the previous paragraph, it is understood that even in the aftermath of the thirty year old war the military officers or men have not been able to strike the right work- life balance. The causes of such phenomenon and the effects on the families of such officers deserve a deeper study.

## **2. HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENTS OF THE WORK LIFE BALANCE**

There is a clear shift from a commodity-based economy to an intellectual economy with increasing percentages of organizations’ assets being intangible. The numbers of jobs that require human skills are growing faster than the number of people who can fill them. Hence attracting, engaging and retaining employees are becoming a top priority among the competitive strategies available for organizations across the world (Konrad & Mangel, 2000). Improved employee mobility, changing family and work models, and many other demographical changes have made organizations think of new strategies in attracting, engaging, and retaining employees. Human resources professionals have understood that packaging the right combination of compensation and benefits is an important driver of an enterprise’s ability to attract and retain the top talent that is the key to success in an increasingly competitive world (Wickramasinghe, 2010).

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2 explicit support

3 implicit support

Research on work-life balance reports, reduction in absenteeism (Balmforth & Gardner, 2006), increase in self-reported productivity (Forsyth & Polzer-Debruyne, 2007; Konrad & Mangel, 2000), and improvement in job satisfaction (Balmforth & Gardner, 2006; Equal Employment Opportunities Trust, 2007) as results of organizational work-life initiatives, supporting employee work-life balance. Even though satisfaction and engagement both often correlate positively to organizational outcomes, engagement is a direct antecedent of satisfaction, and necessary for more optimal satisfaction outcomes to emerge. The centrality of ongoing work role activities is another feature that differentiates engagement from other, more broadly framed constructs posited to be conceptually similar, such as job involvement and job commitment (Jones & Harter, 2005). The recognition that there is a relationship between the well-being of employees and their contribution at work is not a new or a revolutionary concept (Hacker & Doolen, 2003). As explained before, engagement is the harnessing of employees' selves to their work roles (by which they employ) and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances (Khan, 1990). If demands of life outside work are high and important for an individual, amount of physical, cognitive and emotional resources he or she can deploy at work become limited. According to Khan (1990), psychological availability is a measure of how ready a person is to engage in a given task despite deprivations experienced as members of the social system.

Thus, this study attempted to bridge the existing knowledge gap by empirically studying the impact of work-life balance on employee engagement, while looking at work-life balance beyond the traditional two domains of work and family.

## 2.1. DEFINITION OF THE CONCEPTS SELECTED FOR THE STUDY

2.1.1. **Organizational work-life support.** Organizational work-life support refers to the explicit support (policies and procedures) provided by organizations in helping employees achieve a better work-life (Guest, 2002).

2.1.2. **Leave.** Leave is the availability of paid and unpaid leave for family care, self and social requirement.

2.1.3. **Counseling and Wellness.** Under Counseling and Wellness, conducting of employee seminars about balancing work and family life is discussed.

2.1.4. **Benefits.** Company-sponsored benefits, facilities for education, personal development, sport & leisure activities, spiritual development and community activities.

2.1.5. **Organizational Work-Life Culture.** The shared assumptions, beliefs and values regarding the extent to which organizations value and support the integration of work and family lives, for employees (Thompson et. al.,1999).

2.1.6. **Family Demands.** Family demands refer to obligations and commitments of family, including parents, children, and spouse (Guest, 2002).

2.1.7. **Family Culture.** Family culture refers to expectations of those in the family environment on commitments and obligations (Guest, 2002).

2.1.8. **Self Demands.** Self demands refer to requirements of an individual for education, professional growth, health, sports, spiritual development and leisure activities.

2.1.9. **Social Demands.** Social demands refer to obligations and commitments of friends, community and other relevant parties beyond work, family and self.

2.1.10. **Employee Engagement.** Employee engagement is an individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work (Harter, et. al. 2002).

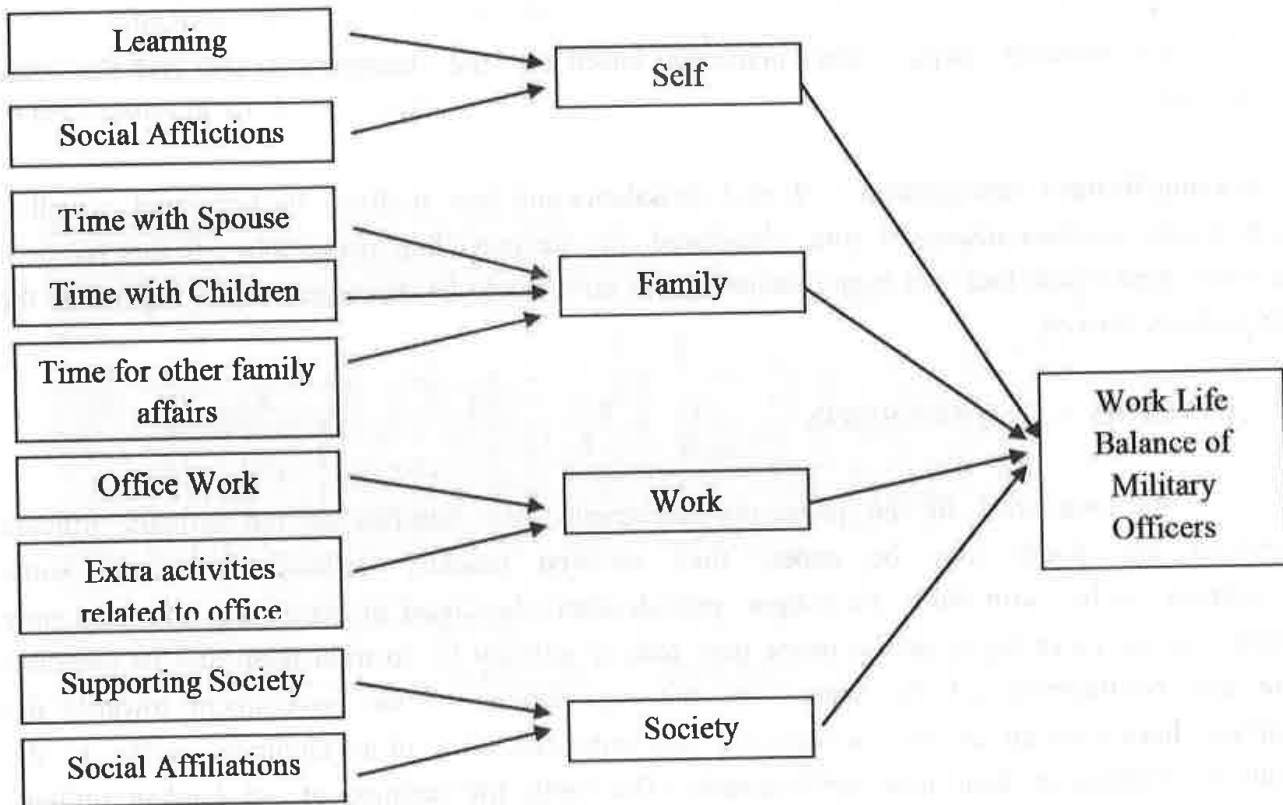
### 3. DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Depending on the objective of this study and the data required in meeting the Objectives, a qualitative study plan was implemented based on the positivistic paradigm.

#### 3.1. RESEARCH QUESTION

In this research, the researcher intends to explore the Work-life balance of the Sri Lanka Military officers after the 30 year war. In this regard, four aspects *i.e.* Self, Family, Work and Society and their effects on Work-Life Balance would be explored.

3.2. **Conceptualization of the problem.** Based on the four factors mentioned above, the following conceptualization was framed.



**Fig 2 – Conceptual frame work**

**3.3. Hypothesis:** A causal relationship between work-life balance and employee engagement exists such that a higher level of perceived work-life balance would result in a higher level of employee engagement.

**3.4. Scope and Limitations of the Study :** The scope of this study was limited to Sri Lankan military officers who were following the DSC&SC and their families. The sample was selected using convenience sampling to manage constraints such as time and movement from the college during the study times.

**3.5.Procedure:** During the course of study the researcher completed the research according to the following steps:

3.5.1. Literature Review was done using the current knowledge and previous researches

3.5.2. Questionnaires were administered using convenience sampling to the student officers of DSC&SC and some selected senior officers to avoid biases.

3.5.3. Questionnaires were administered to the ladies of the student officers with the assistance of the Ladies' club coordinator, but the response was poor. As such they were not considered totally other than for analysing and supporting the statements of the student officers due to inadequacy of the sample.

3.5.4. Data extracted from the questionnaires were analysed.

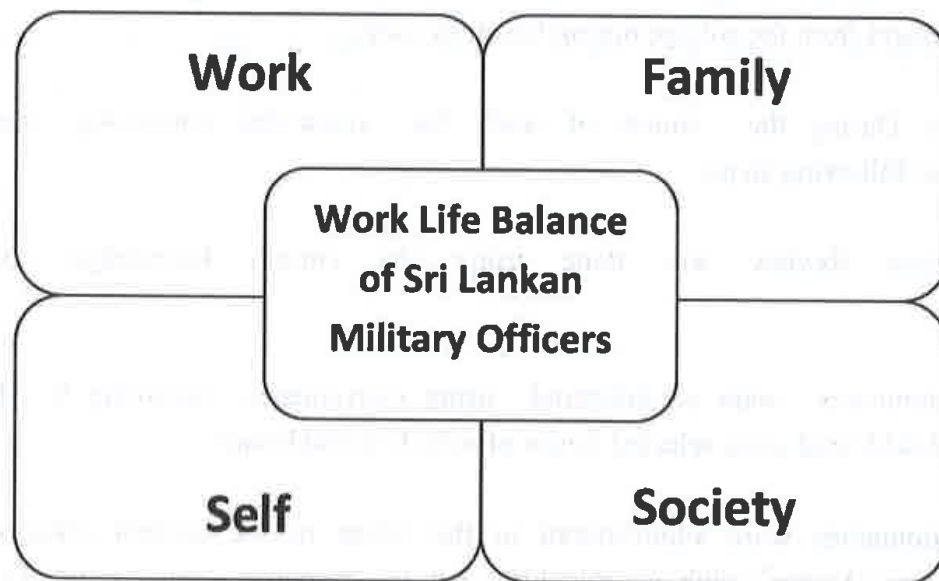
3.5.5. The research paper was prepared based on the literature review and the data extracted.

3.6. **Long-Range Consequences** : Work-Life Balance and how it affects the personnel as well as job fronts have been discussed and elaborated in the preceding paragraphs , In this research a virgin area which had not been touched up to now would be discussed to prove/disprove the hypothesis derived.

#### 4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, the families of the military officers without any doubt may be expect their beloved parents, husbands/wives and sons/daughters to be with them for longer periods than they used to. Also the job front may have become more hectic as the peace time role of military is to train them and be prepared for any contingency. At the same time the expectations of the government towards the military have gone up as the Government has entrusted a lot of development works to the military looking at their past performances. The work life balance of Sri Lankan military officers is an area which has not been explored into as per the literature available, even though there are many studies in the global and some in the Sri Lankan context.

The questionnaire was prepared to explore the insights towards the four basic pillars *i.e.* work, family, self and society. All such questionnaires were distributed to the officers of the Staff College and also some other senior officers to avoid biases. Further a special effort was taken to get all the questionnaires completed at a given time and to avoid any inter-exchange of ideas in order to extract accurate data.

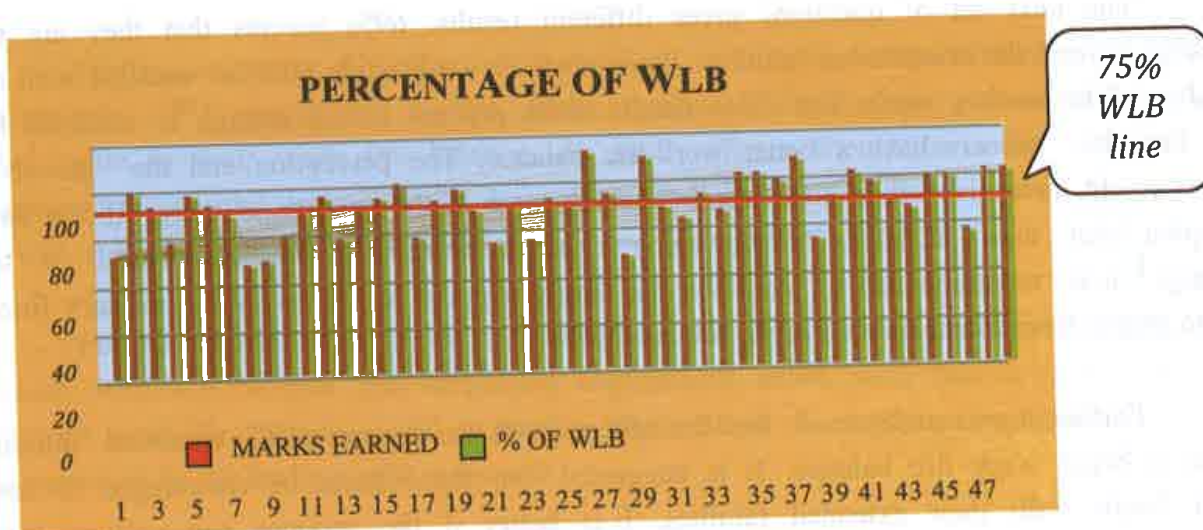


**Figure 3 – Four Pillars of Work-life balance Sri Lankan Military Officers**

**Source:** Own work of the researcher



The following table presents the “Level of Work Life Balance” based only on the questionnaires. Officers who are have <75% Work-Life Balance percentages are considered to have issues in Work Life Balance.



**Figure 4 – Work-Life Balance Summary**

The forging analysis as highlighted in the preceding chapter, reveals that the Sri Lankan Military Officers, in general have problems in managing Work-Life Balance and 66% of them and 75% their spouses accept this fact. Compared to the officers that do not have Work-Life Balance, these officers on average do lack proper leisure, sleep and suffer from more stress. Despite the difference in ages, size of the family, the officers/ spouses place a premium for free time. The researcher intends to make recommendations according to the findings discussed.

As per the findings and analysis in one of the previous paragraphs, it was revealed that only 25% of the officers enjoy more than 75% work-life balance. It shows the fact that 75% of officers are experience problems in work-life balance. These results contradict the answers given by the officers to the question “feel balanced”. 92% of the officers had responded as “they feel balanced”. It may be due to the cognitive biases and reluctance to accept the imbalance or may be due to wrong perceptions. Anyway the real results indicate an alarming situation. The general expectation was that the work-life balance of the military officers would be normalized in the aftermath of the war. But this proves that the situation is not so. As such more attention needs to be focused on this area and remedies to be found to provide a better work-life balance.

The next set of the questions gave the real results. As per the responses given, officers have proven that they are have problems in their work-life balance. The question areas were mostly towards time spent on work related work, time for self and families and the responses supported that the officers do not enjoy better work-life balance. It is recommended to train the officers to indulge in the office work in a more professional manner and how to

identify the Vital Few Vs Trivial Many. Further a comprehensive research needs to be done in this area to find out what are the underlying facts for the imbalance in work-life and to find a way out.

The next set of questions gives different results. 69% accepts that they are not working beyond the conditioned hours to keep up their work while 60% is satisfied with the number of hours they work. But these results alone are not strong enough to establish the fact that the officers have a better work-life balance. The perception and the perceived values might have given this misconception where most of the spouses of these officers have accepted that their husbands do not enjoy a better work-life balance. Based on the findings, it is recommended to continue the family support extended by the military forces and to extend more to enhance the work-life balance.

Further it was understood that the officers with the support of the extended families have a better work life balance. It is suggested that the officers be encouraged to have better bonds with their extended families. It is better if the services can arrange some programmes to enhance such bonds and probably to extend the medical and dental facilities to the extended families living with the officers.

Further, when analysing the effects of the flexible start/finish hours, time off for family exigencies, part time/reduced work hours, time off during school holidays and compressed working week/fortnight, officers gave mixed responses and a further research could be conducted to penetrate deeper in to this area in the future. Some officers could work in virtual office set up while the majority of them cannot. But it is better to do further studies into this area too to find out the best.

Further the responses on the effects of working hours, compulsory, weekend work, shift work and timing of work meetings/training on work life balance, more than 60% had responded positively whereas more officers had problems related to long working hours, week end work, Shift work etc. As such it is recommended that a system be implemented for the officers to avail themselves of their balance leave on a roster basis like the corporate sector practice.

While analysing the support from the supervisors, support from the colleagues, support from the team members, encouragement to use unpaid parental leave and seeing peer use of work/family policies, a mixture of responses were observed. But it was distinct that the support from colleagues and team members had affected the work life balance of the officers immensely. As such it is recommended that the team culture be enhanced throughout the three forces to have the same cohesion and fighting capability during a future threat.

While considering the effects of the negative attitude of the managers, colleagues and

team members, it was observed that the negative attitudes of managers, colleagues and team members had affected the work life balance of the officers at a level of 65% or more. As such it is recommended to implement training programmes on positive thinking and motivation to enhance the effects of positivity.

While considering the effect of technology, ability to bring children to the office and ubiquity, 79% agreed that laptops, Black Berries, iPads, Cellular phones and etc have added value to their work life balance. As such officers should be more educated and encouraged to use high technology in their office work so that they can be more effective and efficient while enjoying the power of ubiquity.

Further as discussed in the preceding chapter, hypothesis *i.e.* a causal relationship between work-life balance and employee engagement exists such that a higher level of perceived work-life balance would in result a higher level of employee engagement was supported by the findings of this research.

In this research it was intended to enquire into the relationship between the Self, Family, Work and Society towards the work Life balance of the Sri Lankan Military officers. The findings revealed that the four pillars and the work life balance have a positive relationship. Officers who strike a balance between all four figures enjoy a better work-life balance.

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