Aligning Employer and Employee Perspectives on Successful and Sustainable Work and Life Balance

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Work-life balance perceptions vary between what employers believe they offer and what employees believe they receive. Work-life balance strategies continue to evolve to support employer engagement and possible retention, commitment, and contributions to the organizational culture. Organizational leaders must employ strategies to harness the influence of workers to promote organizational growth and development. Innovations to growth and to remain competitive are linked to aligning the perceptions by stakeholders. Being flexible to employee needs contributes to the level of organizational competitiveness. While employers desire to retain the best and the brightest employees to support organizational growth, they also want to ensure they are meeting the employees' needs with their work and life balance. The transformational journey begins with a mindset of providing workers what they need to experience success and value within the organization. Within post pandemic organizations, employers are being challenged to encourage and provide opportunities for greater work-life balance for employees. Employees are weighing the options and benefits they are provided as they adjust to new policies, procedures, and benefits packages.

Introduction

The Career Optimism Index 2022 data support initiatives that are desired by employees but are not always being met by employers; however, employers believe that providing more than what employees acknowledge they receive. With over 4 million people walking away from their jobs monthly without having a job to transition into, employers are pursuing innovative ways to align the needs of employees with those of the organization to give them a compelling reason to remain with their organization (SHRM Conference, 2022). Adding value to the employee workforce contributes to the organizations' sustainability. Leaders have learned that people are their most significant asset and not their monetary profits or status. Genuine concerns about the employees serve as a reflection on how the employers are concerned about the organization. The process of employers helping to provide work-life balance gains momentum when the organization becomes known for its concerns and value adding actions to attract, retain and spearhead the performance of employees. Positive responses from employees and industry increases the organizations' brand.

Employees desire to see the proof and be recognized for identifying what they need now versus later in their careers. The employees value more time with family, remote working, upskilling and cross skilling to meet the demands of the evolving global workforce, and safely responding to world events. The heightened sense of awareness is attributed the world's reactions to COVID-19. Work-life balance has different meanings. Clarifying how employers and employees respond to the meaning may enhance awareness of the needs and possibilities to manage time and benefits more effectively from both viewpoints (Turliuc & Buliga, 2014). Work-life balance trends continue to emerge industry-wide. The lack of balance impacts the life of the organization and the life of the employees. Everyone has the same number of hours in each day; however, their levels of responsibility and life activities may differ between employers and employees. Creating life-work balance takes time, energy, planning and opportunity to execute. Organizations cannot afford to not respond to emerging employee needs for work-life balance. Workplace stress and burnout prior to the pandemic cost the exceeded $500 billion dollars annually and 550 million lost workdays (U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2021).

What Organizations Offer Employees

Notably, there is no one way to manage people and organizations. Human resources managers of organizations generally oversee the areas of employee well-being and work-life balance. Work-life balance for employees is reflected in the integration of managing the demands of work or career initiatives and personal life activities. Employers may contribute to this phenomenon. Within the organization, employers may intentionally and positively provide actions or resources to reduce stress for employees, monitor the demands and responsibilities of employees' work environment, and ensure the employees roles are clearly defined. These actions may help employees to experience flexibility in their daily life to balance work and personal life choices. Some employers involve their employees in the decision-making process to ensure each understands

the other's needs. Some organizational leaders rely upon the experts in human resources to show them the most accepted and effective options to consider as an organization. Employers are under the impression they do more than what the employees say they do. The chasm can widen levels of distrust. The boundaries require redefining and clarification. Flexible workplaces are being offered to support the employees' work schedules and opportunities to minimize and eliminate the imbalances in perceived benefits and high absenteeism and employee turnover. Employers are more focused on retention due to the mass exodus of employees leaving their jobs monthly. Seeing the services and benefits the organization provides as being appreciated and utilized is important to organizations.

What Employees Want from Organizations

Employees indicate they need employer support in helping them to make decisions to commit to stay with organizations based upon the employer's concern for their welfare beyond the working environment. Career Optimism Index 2022 indicated that although employers believe they are providing sufficient mental health services, the employees do not maximize the use of those services for reasons that may not be positive to the employers. Employees want to be a part of the planning process on matters that impact them directly. According to the results of the Career Optimism Index 2022, employees also want employers to improve their position on the areas of compensation, training, advocacy, mental health, and job security. Expressing their needs is detrimental to the success of any program and benefits presented by employers. Self-care is sought after by employers to support personal growth outside of the organization and to maintain the employer's wellbeing. Employees anticipate the employers responding to the need for diversity, equity, inclusion, a sense of belonging, and their general well-fare (U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2021). When work-life balance is achieved within an organization, the employees stay with the organization longer and generate buy-in of the expectations and visions of the organization. They are engaged in the organization's culture and contribute to its growth. The employees must also prioritize benefits that are most crucial to receive. Receiving services that are needed, accessible and cost effective are important to employers.

Perspectives Matter

Aligned perspectives impact the bottom lines within the organization in support of organizational growth and employee development. The following areas may result in misalignment of perceptions: profits and losses by the organization, sustainability, competitiveness with other organizations, retention of the best qualified employees, work-life balance for employees, vertical and horizontal trust, job satisfaction, employee productivity, a pipeline of skilled and trained workers, and social responsibility. When organizations offer benefits and services the employees do not see as a benefit or enough of a benefit to influence the employees' work or life balance, this becomes problematic. Employees do not see the upskilling opportunities as the same level as employers says are offered. When there is a problem, some employees leave the organization and take their chances finding other employment without having career positions available to them when they leave (Career Optimism Index, 2022; SHRM Conference, 2022). Some employees stay with the organization; however, they look for opportunities to leave. Some employees will stay even if there is a problem for several reasons to include the problems are the same universally. When employees receive what they need, they commit to remaining with an organization. The nature of work has evolved worldwide, just as people have evolved. What mattered five years ago may no longer have relevance in today's economy and environment.

Alignment of Perspectives

The greatest opportunity to align perspectives is manifested when the employers give employees the opportunity to share their insight into the problem and possible solutions. This requires active listening and responding by the employers and employees. Employers also want the opportunity to be heard and to see their organizations grow with the support of trained employees who also care about the organizations' success and

sustainability. They are looking for commitment and consistency. Organizational leaders and managers should have the appropriate training to help them develop policies, procedures and plans to support the diverse needs of the employees. Leaders have an obligation to reflect the values of the organization and how the employees are valued within the organization. Understandably, organizational needs differ. The employees have different needs, and one size does not fit them all. When there is alignment between the majority of the needs and how they may be managed, there is a meeting of the minds. Speaking the same or similar language increases awareness of the problems and provides opportunities to begin to resolve issues and create more acceptable benefits packages and solutions to work-life balance. Patience becomes a prized virtue for both the leaders and the employees.

Conclusion

The organization has a level of social responsibility that must be met to promote the growth of the employee and the organization. The policies are created and implemented to help employees have work-balance aligned with the expectations. Work-life balance requires routine review and reflection by all stakeholders. The needs may vary at different life stages of the employee and organizational stages of the employer. Considerations should be given by both the employer and the employee on what is most important to sustain and retain employees to complete the mission of the organization. Time should be spent defining the areas where there is a significant divide in understanding between the employer and employee in the areas of opportunities for upskilling, tools for growth, mental health support, career stressors, reskilling and other pertinent work-life balance areas. Prioritizing the needs of both should be presented and upheld. Showing value of employees presents an opportunity for the organization to establish employee assistance groups or affinity groups to present the employees' needs in open discussion to managers. Employees should also be open to dialogue to contribute to the growth of the organization. It becomes a give and take between the two stakeholders. Topics that are growing in acceptance and expectations of meeting employee needs post pandemic include flexible schedules, remote working, or hybrids to this idea, cost effective and full health care for employees and their family, upskilling, cross skilling, optimizing productivity, and effective mental health services that are nonjudgmental (SHRM Conference, 2022), to name a few. The follow-up to listening to each other, is taking action.

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