
TERRY GEORGE

FAQs

Q. What is work-life balance?

A. Work-life balance is about people having a measure of control over when, where and how they work, leading them to be able to enjoy an optimal quality of life. Work-life balance is achieved when an individual's right to a fulfilled life inside and outside paid work is accepted and respected as the norm, to the mutual benefit of the individual, business and society.

Q. Why should business care?

A. Work-life balance business benefits include:

- Increased productivity
- Improved recruitment and retention
- Lower rates of absenteeism
- Reduced overheads
- An improved customer experience
- A more motivated, satisfied and equitable workforce.

To put it in bottom line terms, employee costs are often at least 50 percent of a company's expenditure, with replacement involving very high costs depending on seniority and level of technical skill.

Q. Isn't work-life balance just for parents – particularly mothers?

A. No, it's an issue that's rising up the agenda for everyone. Surveys show that graduates value flexibility more than pay when looking at prospective employers.

Having greater control over time has a beneficial impact upon worker satisfaction. Workers who have more say over their working time feel less stressed and are more satisfied with and committed to their work.

Q. What about people who just love to work?

A. Work-life balance is not just for people who want to reduce their working hours. It's about responding to individual circumstances to help individuals fulfil their responsibilities and aspirations. Many people love their work and for them the perfect 'balance' is working very long hours. The ideal 'balance' can also vary at different stages of the life cycle. For example, in your twenties you might be quite happy to work long hours in exchange for breaks to go travelling or to pursue a hobby; a few years down the line you may want to reduce your hours or have greater flexibility in how and when you work to fit in extra study or family responsibilities.

Q. Doesn't the work-life balance debate just demonise the workplace?

A. No. Many people love their work and work long hours because that's how they want to spend their time. The work-life balance debate recognises that there are

different ways of working, and is trying to shift the idea that 'long hours' is the only way to demonstrate commitment. What the work-life balance debate is trying to do is to recognise that there are different ways of working, to show that 'long hours' does not necessarily mean you are the best at your job, and to enable people to work in different ways so that they can achieve their aspirations inside and outside paid work.

Q. Is work-life balance just a fashion?

A. No, demographics show that this is going to become an increasingly important issue. More and more women are entering the labour market, we have an ageing population and people are continuing to demand that their employers enable them to have a better work-life balance.

Q. Does it mean more work for managers?

A. Setting-up WLB schemes will require management time but there are many examples and case-studies now available to draw on to help the process. Once the initial period of change has occurred, most people find that WLB schemes operate smoothly.

Q. Will it cost more?

A. At the beginning there could be some additional costs, in relation to publicising available schemes, training and purchase of equipment. Again, these should be weighed against the potential benefits and savings and will depend on what scheme is implemented. The evidence is overwhelming that the introduction of flexible working reduces absenteeism, improves recruitment and retention, increases efficiency and saves money. Chances are that this will occur in your organisation too.

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Q. I manage front line staff so there needs to be cover at all times. Surely if they worked flexibly my business would suffer?

A. Flexible working should be balanced with business need. Often, by looking at things afresh, solutions can be achieved that suit everybody. But where that is not possible, organisations are entitled to refuse a request if it would be detrimental to the business or the colleagues of the individual.

In the case of front line staff a compressed working week, term time working, part time working, job share and flexi time are potential arrangements.

Q. Who will cover times when an employee isn't at work?

A. This depends very much on the arrangements you have in place. For example, Flexi Time could operate on a commitment-to-cover basis, where employees arrange time off amongst themselves to ensure there is continual cover. Arrangements such as compressed working are fixed in advance so you will be aware when an employee will not be at work. Other eventualities such as an illness

would apply, as with any other employee and in these situation flexible working may be particularly beneficial. If one job share partner is sick, for example, at least half the job is still done. Employees who are able to work flexibly are also more likely to help out with cover in such situations. Flexible arrangements can mean that you can extend the time your organisation is open for business.

Q. If one employee asks to work flexibly, will it cause a problem within my team?

A. All benefits should be offered on an equal basis. Provided requests are dealt with fairly and colleagues are not disadvantaged in any way, then conflict within a team should be minimal. Involve the whole team in determining what would work best.

Q. How do you supervise employees working at home?

A. The emphasis should be on the completion of tasks. Where a significant amount of home working is undertaken then performance measures should be agreed and then monitored.

Q. Don't home workers suffer from social isolation?

A. Where an employee is working at home special consideration should be given to communication. It is important that a worker does not feel isolated. Regular meetings, support groups and socials can all be useful. Make sure, though, that their private time remains private. It's a good idea to agree lines of communication from the outset, so that everyone knows what times an employee can be contacted.

Q. Are there too many distractions at home?

A. Some people may indeed find that they are unable to concentrate when they are working at home. For this reason it is advisable that home working is optional and not enforced. It is also recommended that a trial period is offered before an employee commits to home working. Time management training should be considered, to ensure that people are able to work at home effectively.

Q. I do not have any children – can I still expect to work flexibly?

A. Yes, Work-Life Balance is for everyone. With the shift in the age of our population many people may now be carers for elderly relatives instead of/as well as children. The encouragement of lifelong learning means that many more people now return to or continue to study once in employment and we all have activities and responsibilities outside of work. Flexible working may be beneficial in all of these situations and more.

Q. What if my circumstances change and I no longer need to work using the same flexible policy?

A. Working arrangements should remain open to future negotiation or amendments. Your terms and conditions of employment may have been altered so you will probably need to consult with your manager but organisations should be flexible to your requests.

Q. Doesn't a desire for work-life balance brand you as uncommitted and unmotivated?

A. This is one of the key issues that the work-life balance debate is seeking to tackle. In many workplaces there is an assumption that 'long hours working' is a

demonstration of commitment and quality. Organisations focusing upon clients may also feel the need to work long hours to ensure a high quality of service. However, this does not necessarily mean either the best job is done or that talent can flourish. The work-life debate is trying to shift the focus from inputs – time – to outputs. This is an ongoing process; many employees continue to worry that working flexibly will mean they do not progress as quickly in their career. Some organisations are gaining competitive advantage in the recruitment market from this by offering work-life balance and career progression to talented individuals – so change is starting to happen.