Work-Life Balance as a Best Practice Model of Human Resource Management: A Win-Win Situational Tool for the Employees and Organizations

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Abstract *Organizations focus upon increased revenue generated by its employees, competitive workforce and employee dedication for achieving its strategic goals in order to meet the challenges of 21st century. However, in this era of hyper competition work life balance of employees' at all managerial levels has been affected enormously. This exploratory study deliberates upon a brief elaboration of work-life balance, its importance for the organizations and the various emerging practices/initiatives associated with it. The current research builds upon the considerable knowledge related to the theory and practices of Work-life balance from extensive Meta-analysis of literature. The findings reveal that work-life balance is both important for the organization and for its employees particularly in current dynamic organizational scenarios. It helps the organization to improve productivity, efficiency, competitiveness, morale and hence gain a competitive edge. Similarly employees are benefited from work-life balance initiatives through increased motivation to work, enhanced satisfaction, empowerment and ultimately more commitment to the organization.*

Keywords: *work life balance, organization*

1. Introduction

The greatest challenge to the Human Resource professionals today is to cost-effectively recruit, train and retain their employees and for the said reason organizations are cultivating a culture that supports work-life balance programs to help employees keep equilibrium in their professional and non-professional lives.
Work-life balance is defined as "*A state of equilibrium in which the demands of both a person's job and personal life are equal*" (The Word Spy, 2002). Work-life balance is based on the premise that everyone should have complete life in which a sufficient amount of time is given to the personal interests (such as continuing education, social/community work, sports, hobbies etc) and family interest *(Doherty & Manfredi,*

2006). According to Lockwood (2003), work-life balance has different meanings regarding the context in which it is used. There are different terms that are used regarding work-life balance, such as work/family, work/family conflict, family-friendly benefits, work/life programs, work/life initiatives and work/family culture. Radcliff Public Policy Center conducted a survey in 2001 in which "men and women with 82% and 85% having ages 20-39 rated family time at the top of the list of their work/life concerns."

Due to the constant changing economic conditions and demands of the society, work has changed its role all over the world. Previously, 'survival' and 'necessity' were related as the subjects of work. However today, in addition to be a necessity, work is seen as an important contributor to the 'personal satisfaction 'as well. Today work is one of the most important tools to provide personal and professional satisfaction as well as goal attainment which create the need of work-life programs and benefits in an organization (Joshi, et al., 2002). Work-life harmony is a broadest term than work-life balance. Work-life balance concentrates on one's personal mind set while work-life harmony helps to create synchronization within yourself and through which you can help others to create as well *(Anon, 2011).*

Similar concept is defined in emerging term of Work-life harmony. Work life harmony, according to Nicholls (2006), stresses on energy management despite of time management. Work-life harmony provides advantages to both employees and employers. Employees become more committed, energetic and enthusiastic with respect to their responsibilities for the professional and non-professional lives, and it also helps employees to maintain energy for sorting out their priorities of professional and personal lives in order to fulfill their responsibilities. If the employers encourage work-life harmony practices within the organizations, it will result in greater stability of staff, reduction in cost, increased productivity and more committed staff members.

Work-life balance has become a challenge for the organizations because of an increased need to improve the morale of the employees, maintaining and retaining them with a precious knowledge of the company and keeping up the speed with the current trends in the workplace. "*Three important factors that lead to the need to highlight the emerging issue of work-life balance are global competition, family values/personal lives and aging workforce*" *(Lockwood, 2003).*

This study elaborates work-life balance, how it can be a milestone in workplace harmony and an exploration of various practices that aid in workplace balance.

## 2. Work Life Balance as Progressive Strategy for Organizations

Work-life balance that people demand today is not different from what people wanted yesterday. The only difference lies in the demands of the society, as society has changed from what it was yesterday to what it is today. Today the trend has moved towards single parent and dual-working parents with increased domestic responsibilities. It is very critical for the organizations to attract and retain their best human capital in order to remain competitive. The best way to do so is to consider "what employees want?" Today the answer to this question is "work-life balance" which majority of the employees want without taking into consideration their age, gender, type of the job, race etc *(Miller, 2006).*

Businesses today are operating in an extreme competitive environment with an increased need to be more responsive and more efficient than their competitors. Additionally, employees today are pressurizing their employers for rewarding their employment with respect to their utilization of skills, rewarding their career and managing their lives outside the workplace. It compels the organizations to be more responsive and flexible for their workers. Organizations that are failing to consider these issues are facing the crucial problem of brain drain and are loosing their professional experts *(Dunne & Teg, 2007).*

Joshi et al (2002) emphasized that work-life balance is a two dimensional approach i.e. organizational approach and individual approach. Work-life balance was traditionally defined in the framework of organization as what organizations do for the individuals (organizational approach). The second dimension (individual approach) emphasizes the fact that what individuals do for themselves. In line with Joshi et al

(2002) Bird (2006) emphasized more on these two dimensional approach and named them as "The Two Legs of the Work-Life Strategy". He renamed the organizational approach as "system approach" (left leg)- how do organizations contribute to create better work-lives for their employees.

Fig 1. Work-Life Balance Model (A win-win situational tool for the employees and organizations)
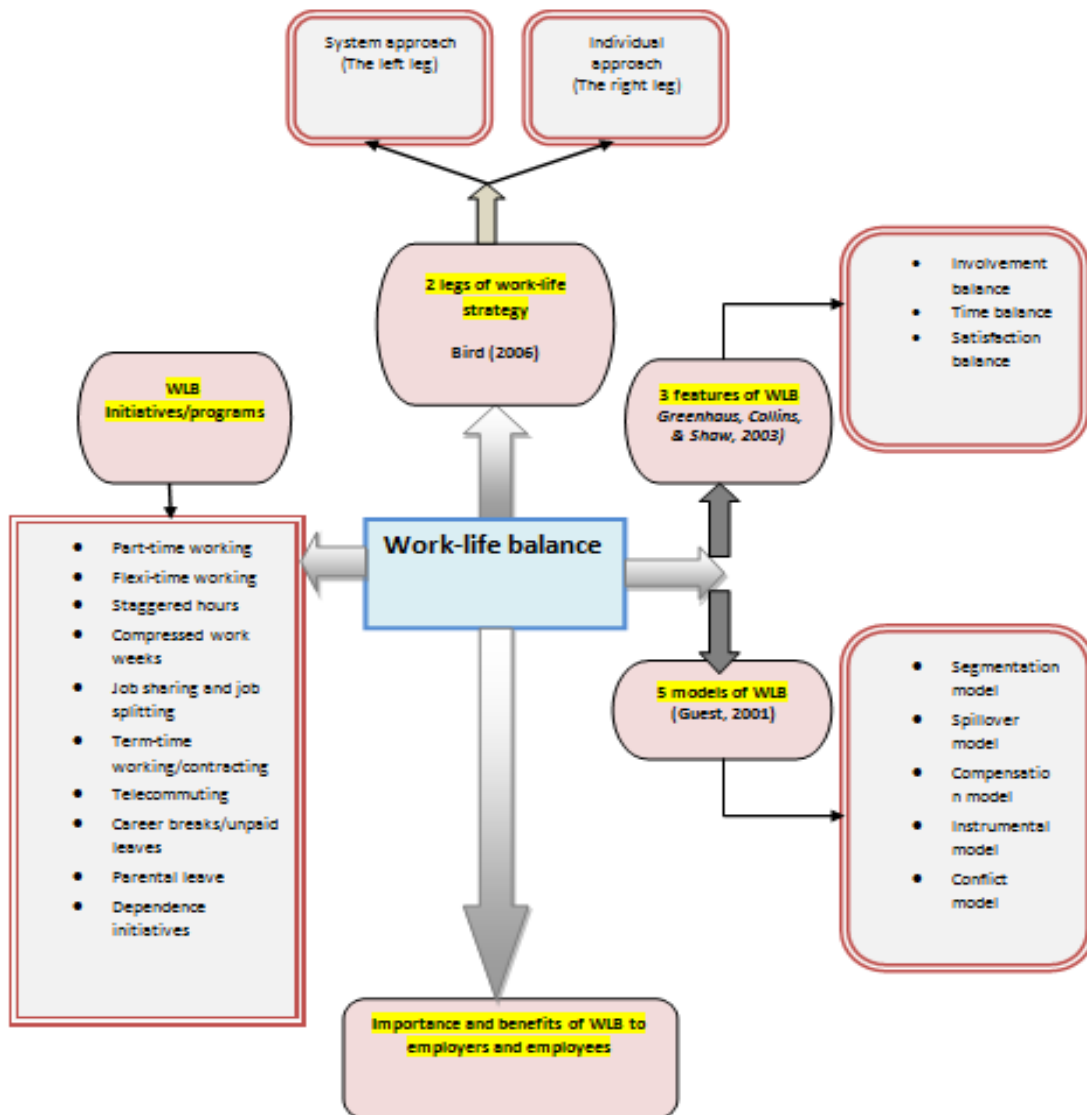
The individual approach (right leg) says that "how do the individuals themselves balance their work-lives". According to Bird (2006) if an organization has already implemented (employee assistance programs) EAP, flexible working hours, health insurance policies etc, it has already built a left leg. The major focus is then on the right leg the individual approach. Every employee has different work-life balance from every other employee with respect to their employment status e.g. a person who has a career start, will have a different work-life balance approach than the person who is being retired.

In a holistic sense work-life balance is the match that a person achieves in multiple facets of life. Work-life balance as the name indicates is to achieve a level of equilibrium, symmetry or stability which thus creates harmony and synchronization in a person's overall life *(Clarke, Koch, & Hill, 2004)*. Three features of work-life balance have been discovered by Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw (2003). Time balance is the first

one which emphasizes the time allotted to work and non-work part. The second is the involvement balance which emphasizes the degree to which one involves himself in work and non-work part; and the third is satisfaction balance which elaborates the degree to which one attaches his satisfaction to work and non-work part of life *(Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, 2003)*. According to Ahmer (2009), work-life imbalance itself defines work-life balance. According to him the two signs of work-life imbalance are:

- An upset family life where a belief develops that we are not living up to the mark/expectations
- Self-neglecting in addition to the declining health because of a feeling of lack of achievement and fulfillment.

Another way to look at work-life balance is through a continuum where the worker's state from balance working life is depressively extended to unbalance work life. It elaborated the one extreme is subsistence and the other extreme is hedonism. Fig 1 elaborates the continuum.

Fig 1. Balance/imbalance continuum *(Clutterbuck, 2003)*
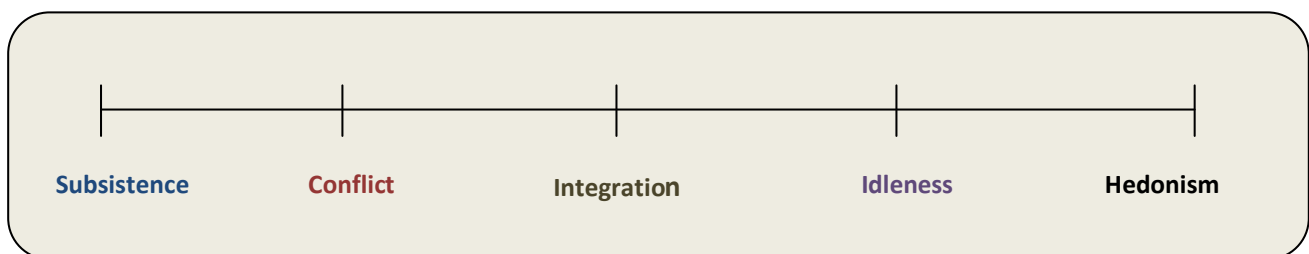
One extreme is *subsistence* that is characterized by working continuously for extended hours and have very little left from the resources to put in other facets of lives. Then is *conflict* state where people put a great effort to resolve contradictory demands. Third state is *integration* that is characterized by the attainment of less or more satisfaction in numerous aspects of lives. *Idleness* which is the fourth state of continuum is typified by inability or unwillingness to work. The other extreme end is *hedonism* where the individual does not feel any need to work and spends his time in non-work/unproductive activities *(Clutterbuck, 2003)*.

Guest (2001) and Zedeck & Mosier (1990) stressed that work-life balance can be conceptualized with the help of five evocative models. The *segmentation model* emphasizes that work and work-life outside are separate segments that are not interdependent on one another and one segment does not affect the other. The opposite of segmentation model is the *spillover model* that states that work and life outside work are interdependent. The *compensation model* elaborates that both segments compensate for each other for the things that are lacking in each. The fourth is the *instrumental model* which emphasizes that one segment stresses or highlights the other segment. The fifth is the *conflict model* that stresses that each segment has its own demands because of which individuals set preferences and as a result conflict arises.

Driscoll (1996) identified that for both employers and employees' work-life balance has various advantages and work-life imbalance has various disadvantages. Employees are drastically affected by the work-life imbalance; the results include poor mental health, poor physical health, stress, lack of job satisfaction etc. For employers the consequences of work-life imbalance include absenteeism, poor performance on the job, higher turnover of the staff, costs related to recruitment and training (Department of Trade and industry, 2001). Where as positive experiences with the work lead to personal and professional goal attainment, job satisfaction and hence improving quality of personal and professional life *(Spinks, 2004)*.

According to Bird (2006), CEO of work-life balance.com; work-life balance is all about achievement and enjoyment. The meaning of achievement is very well explored but enjoyment here means having satisfaction, pride and a feeling of well-being. He divided life in four quadrants as work, family, friends & community and self. He stressed that achievement and enjoyment should be felt in all of the four quadrants for a work-life

balance.

Work-life balance is very critical to the organizations with respect to their key objectives. Organizations are now aware of the importance that workers place to their work-family lives. Organizations are concerned to the work-life balance issues because of the impact it places on:

- Growth and profits- well implemented work-life programs enhance productivity, growth and increase return on investment.

- Complete involvement and services to the customers-work and life if balanced makes the employees committed to the organization as well as its key objectives and goals who in turn become more devoted, fully involved and engaged in order to satisfy the organization's customers.

- Competitive advantage-employees now place greater expectations from their employers for their work as well as family needs. Companies that professionally deal with the work-life balance issues and help in retaining their employees have a more committed and loyal workforce that can help the organization in generating a competitive advantage.

- Solution to health-care cost-a considerable amount of cost is incurred in improving employee's health by the organizations. Companies have become cautious and take proactive measures to help employees improve their own quality of life so that a healthier workplace is created *(Bird, 2006)*.

In line with Bird (2006) findings, Dunne & Teg (2007) elaborated more on the importance of work-life balance. According to them benefits to businesses from work-life balance are Increased efficiency and cost effectiveness from less downtime or reduced overheads (employees when work from their homes), attracting more talented skills (because business is capable to preserve skilled and talented workforce and also recruitment cost is reduced), increased morale of the staff, improved job satisfaction, greater ability to retain staff, increased employee commitment, improved competitiveness, and improved relations (employees, customers). Similarly, benefits of work-life balance to the employees are satisfaction to work, increased empowerment, control over the day to work, choice of the working time to work efficiently, stress reduction, increased motivation, more passion to work, and staff empowerment.

In addition to the above mentioned benefits, Bird (2006) emphasized some more benefits to the organization and the individual himself. To the organization, work-life balance helps in better teamwork and communication, increasing employee commitment and accountability and organizational stress mitigating. To the individual the benefits include placing balance between the work and family values, improved individual relationships and reduction in stress level.

The most powerful tool to motivate, recruit and retain staff seen by HR sector is dealing through work-life balance issues to create work-life harmony. Organizations need their employees to do their utmost efforts for the company. As it is two way process, employees should feel that the company is concerned to their needs and helps in managing their work and family lives equally. Every company should honor the needs of their employees by adjusting their patterns of work so that they can synchronize their work and non-work lives *(Dunne & Teg, 2007)*.

In order to help employees for creation of balance and equilibrium in their work and non-work lives, three extensive work/life strategies have been discovered i.e." flexible options for working, specialized leave policies and dependent care benefits" (Morgan & Milliken, 1992) (Ministerial Taskforce on work and family, 2002). These strategies include the work/life balance initiatives summarized as compressed workweeks, flexi time, job sharing, part time work, home telecommuting, work at home programs, shorter workdays for parents, paid maternity leave, bereavement leave, paid leave to care for sick family members, paternity leave, company referral system for childcare, on-site/near site company childcare, program for emergency care of ill dependants, re-entry scheme, childcare programs during school vacation, phased retirement, sabbatical leave, life skill programs, professional counseling, subsidized exercise for fitness centre, relocation assistance, and work and family resource kit or library *(Hudson, 2005)*. In addition to that according to Dunne & Teg (2007), for an effectual work-life balance initiatives can take various forms as job sharing, compressed

work weeks, part –time working etc. Joshi et al (2002) further emphasized common work-life initiatives/programs such as job sharing, employee assistance programs, in-house store/services, gym subsidies, vacations and concierge services. A survey of 3728 working employees conducted by Spherion in 2003 revealed that 96% of the respondents mentioned care of the employees' family concerns through flexi time options, and compressed work weeks etc. as attractive factors of their companies. This study also revealed that employees are 20% more expected to stay with their employers for the next five years who are been offered by work-life balance benefits and various initiatives *(Spherion, 2003)*.

According to Business link (2011), the more important practice of work-life balance programs is flexibility working options. Flexible working calls for flexibility in time (part-time etc) and flexibility in location to work (tele working etc). Most popular Flexible working types include:

Working part-time: workers are allowed to work less than the standard time, basic time or full-time. According to a report published by European Investment Bank Luxembourg (2005), part-time working is used by the employees to take time out of work for their family concerns, studying or hunting their personal hobbies.

Flexi-time working: which employees choose for themselves from a set standard of hours that is determined by their employers to work without restraint (Business link, 2011). Flexi-time is an arrangement in which organization gives its employees the autonomy of flexible working hours. Under this arrangement, there is a core period in a day which is mandatory for the employees to be present at and the rest is the flexi-time.
Organization get benefited from flexi-time arrangements with increased morale of the staff, reduced stress among employees, increased retention of the staff, and more efficient productivity. The employees are also benefited from flexi-time arrangements as they have more control over their work, can adjust easily to all the activities (work and non-work), better utilize their free time, avoidance of congestion, without taking time-off employees, and life outside work issues (flexi time planner). At a financial service company, it was surveyed that employees who had option of flexi-time and who had control over their work were having less burnout index than those who did not have (Corporate Voices for Working Families, 2011).

Staggered hours: also known as 'Rota working' is the arrangement in which start time, lunch time and finish times are different for different individuals *(Business link, 2011)*. Under this arrangement employees have fixed working hours in which they work however each employee has specific starting, ending and lunch/break times. It also helps in evading rush hour traffic *(The University of York-Human Resources, 2009)*. According to a report by International Labor Office Geneva (2004), staggered hours are an important tool to ease the problem of congestion. However, Workers have to be cautious in fixing beginning and ending time within recommended limits.

Compressed work weeks: Compressed workweeks play an important role in publishing, manufacturing and financial services industries. An important rationalization to implement compressed workweek arrangements is 'economic efficiency' *(Bencivenga, 1995)*. Compressed workweeks are the arrangements in which workers in fewer working days fulfill their allotted (standard) work load *(Business link, 2011)*. Compressed workweeks are aimed at creating a more flexible system in which employees can assimilate their personal and professional lives and get time to work through the issues of pursuing education, eldercare, commuting, and childcare etc. The most popular types of compressed workweek arrangements are 4/10 (which means four days with 10 hours per week); 9/10 (9 days and 80 hours per two weeks) *(UC Davis-Human Resources, 2010)*.

Job sharing and job splitting: According to Business link (2011), job sharing is an arrangement in which job is shared between two workers with pre decided hours to work for each other. When two employees divide

the full-time job between both of them, a job sharing arrangement is said to have taken place. According to the University of York-Human Resources (2009), all the facets of the job along with the pay package and benefits are shared. The various patters of job sharing are *Split week-with a five days week*, where each of the two employees works for two and a half days, *Split day-* an arrangement in which the day is divided between the two employees i.e. one works in the morning and the other works in the afternoon or vice versa, *Week overlapping-* both of the employees work for three days per week, in this way there is an overlapping of one day, and *Alternate weeks-*each partner works for the whole week and gets the same time off from the work. For a job sharing arrangement to be successful, every employee should have the potential to perform to his utmost. A properly implemented job sharing program can be a win-win situation for the company and the employees as employees will be more satisfied and a result of which will be more productive *(Javitch, 2006).* A successful job sharing program is the best way to avoid lay-offs *(Greenhouse, 2009).*

Term-time working/contracting: Under this arrangement employees work on permanent contracts and are allowed to take leave (either paid/unpaid) in the time of school holidays *(Business link, 2011).* Such time of arrangement is fruitful for the working parents who have school-going children so that they may get time to spend with their children at home *(The University of York-Human Resources, 2009).*

Tele commuting/tele working: It is an arrangement in which employees carry out complete or part of their work from homes instead of their offices, away from the premises of employer *(Business link, 2011).* Tele working is a work program that allows the employees to do job-relevant work at their home through a computer system away from usual working hours of the office *(Duxbury, Higgins, & Mills, 1992).* According to the report of European Investment Bank Luxembourg (2005), tele commuting enables staff members to accomplish their activities (pat or full) from homes regularly. Tele commuting allows white collar employees to link to the company's network in order to accomplish the work activities by sitting at homes. An important purpose of tele commuting is to make the schedules of the employees more flexible (Joshi, et al., 2002)*.*

Career breaks and unpaid leaves: This arrangement allows the employees to take specific time period off from work in order to work through the personal family issues. This program is an important way to retain employees who are useful for the organization. Unpaid leaves are short period leaves usually ranging from one day to three months. Career breaks are longer term leaves usually ranging from three months to twelve months *(The University of York-Human Resources, 2009).* In order to address the personal priorities, employees usually take unpaid leaves from their careers *(European Investment Bank, 2005).*
Other work-life initiatives/practices may include:

Parental leave: Companies using this work-life balance program allow the parents to take some time off from work in order to look after a young child or to manage action plans for his welfare. The advantage of this program for the employees is to keep a balance between their work and family life *(European Investment Bank, 2005).* Employees feel esteemed and cherished when their employers allow them for parental leave, as a result of which employees perform with more dedication and devotion to the employer. Hayward (2011) stressed that by this work life balance tool employee's withholding is enhanced and less cost is incurred on training and recruitment *(Hayward, 2011).*

Dependant care initiatives: This program includes dealing with elder care and child care issues. Eldercare is the most emerging issue in work-life balance. Emergency eldercare and eldercare referral services are the most popular eldercare programs offered by the companies (Lockwood, 2003). Emergency eldercare entails concern of the employees for their elders to look after them because employees themselves are unable to look after them (if they have to work overtime). In this situation employee's company makes several arrangements with any community center to provide services for the employee. The benefits of this program

are lower absenteeism rate, reduction in stress level of employees, more engagement in work *(HRSD, 2007).* Most of the companies also offer for emergency child-care services. Under this arrangement, if parents have to work overtime due to which they are unable to look after their child, the company makes arrangements with a community or private center to provide the service for the childcare. The other programs include providing financial aid to the employees for child-care and in-house child-care facilities (also known as workplace child-care) in which company makes the arrangement within or near the workplace where employees' children are looked after *(HRSD, 2007).* Other child-care programs for supporting employees include referral services and after school programs (Joshi, et al., 2002)*.*

Thus offering flexibility to the employees through work-life balance programs/initiatives detailed above results in a positive impact on the productivity, sales, profits per employee, job satisfaction, rate of retention and job commitment *(Corporate Voices for Working Families, 2011).* Hence, introducing, integrating and maintaining work-life balance initiatives or programs help in giving a boost to the organization. The more companies invest on the well being of their employees, the more enhanced employee's quality of life would be and the more positive return company would get on human resource investment.

3. Conclusion

Having burn-out and stressed employees are of no use to the organization and the key to make an organization successful lies in the satisfaction, commitment and deliberate involvement of the employees. For this purpose many companies have begun to introduce work-life balance programs in order to help the employees efficiently deal with their work professional and personal lives *(Roberts, 2005).* Due to the increasing intricacy in today's work and non-work lives, organizations have incorporated work-life balance initiatives to deal with the emerging issues as child-care, eldercare and many others *(Spinks, 2004).* However, the better implementation of these programs is dependent upon employers who have to be concerned and through proper communication identify the needs and concerns of the employees to help them in creating a balance in their professional and personal lives *(Hayward, 2011).*

Work-life balance is a tool that has been adopted by the most successful organizations such as HP, Apple, Microsoft and Shell *(Dunne & Teg, 2007).* Lockwood (2003) also stressed that a significant improvement is observed in the productivity, retention and commitment of employees, lower absenteeism rate and high morale environment. Hence work-life balance initiatives are the win-win situational tools for the employers and the employees as the organization's goals are accomplished and fulfilled successfully along with the personal needs of the employees.

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