

The Practical Effects of Work-Life Balance in an Organization

Vol. 90

A PUBLICATION OF MADISON: A Global Leader in Social Recognition

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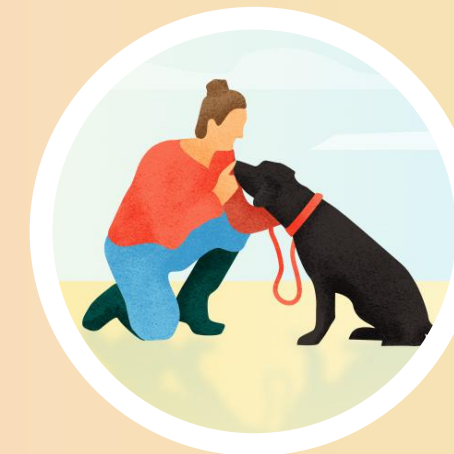
Providing a “comprehensive suite of options” to help employees achieve work-life balance results in a myriad of positive corollaries for companies, including a competitive advantage. Based on 10 years of research at 150 high-tech companies in the U.K. and Ireland, the findings by Dr. Al James, Newcastle University in the U.K., illustrate the importance to firms in successfully integrating employees’ work lives with their personal lives.

The need for work-life balance as a competitive edge is increasingly important in today’s tough labor market. That’s why many forward-thinking businesses have looked for innovative ways to help their employees achieve more balance.

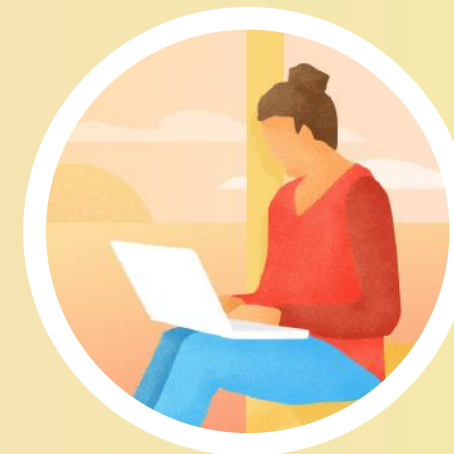
For example, Airbnb gives its employees \$2,000 a year to travel anywhere in the world, while Verizon has a Mobility at Work program to equip employees with the tools they need to work from home. Learn how your organization can reap the benefits of a workforce with a healthy work-life balance.



9AM



12PM



5PM

What is work-life balance? Is it really achievable?

Simply put, work-life balance is achieving an equilibrium between time or demands required to get a job done efficiently, and the time or demands required to get personal or family activities satisfied fully.

For those grappling with tight deadlines on a project, a long commute, child or elder-care issues and a perpetual sleep shortage, work-life balance seems as elusive as a winning lottery ticket. However, more companies are recognizing the need to make work-life balance more achievable - for employees’ sakes and their own.

More companies are offering a comprehensive suite of options that includes greater flexibility in working hours and aid with childcare alongside flexible hours and better onsite benefits.

Online job-search company Indeed analyzed reviews on more than 10 million companies to identify companies with the best work-life balance. The researchers found that the firms that stood out were more empathetic to employee balance issues and proactively worked to ensure employees have time for personal needs.

“Comments we have seen from employee reviews for these companies indicate ‘fair’ and ‘flexible’ work environments,” according to [Indeed’s SVP of HR Paul Wolfe](#). He noted companies achieve that balance when they empower managers to approve flexibility for their staff.

Indeed’s list of companies that are striving to put work and life in balance for their workers includes firms in transportation, real estate, consumer products, health care, aerospace and other industries. While they are all larger companies, the study shows that firms in any industry can strive for a workplace with balance.

Tangible effects of improving work-life balance (or imbalance) in an organization

Employees who feel a greater sense of control over their lives tend to have better relationships and results in the workplace and at home, too. Here are some of the ways companies benefit when they make work-life balance a priority:

Employee engagement improves.

Workers who feel their employer supports efforts for better integration between their personal and professional lives tend to feel more motivated and have fewer conflicts with either co-workers or management.

[James’ research showed](#) that when employees can take advantage of employer-sanctioned work-life balance

arrangements such as flexible hours, 94 percent feel less stressed while at work. Additionally, they found nearly 80 percent reported improved engagement with their job and being able to think more creatively at work.

Not surprisingly, the numbers were higher for workers with small children, who valued the company’s flexibility.

Competitive advantage and performance improvements.

[A report from Harvard Business Review and EY’s Beacon Institute](#) found that employers who successfully drive performance and profitability gain a competitive advantage.

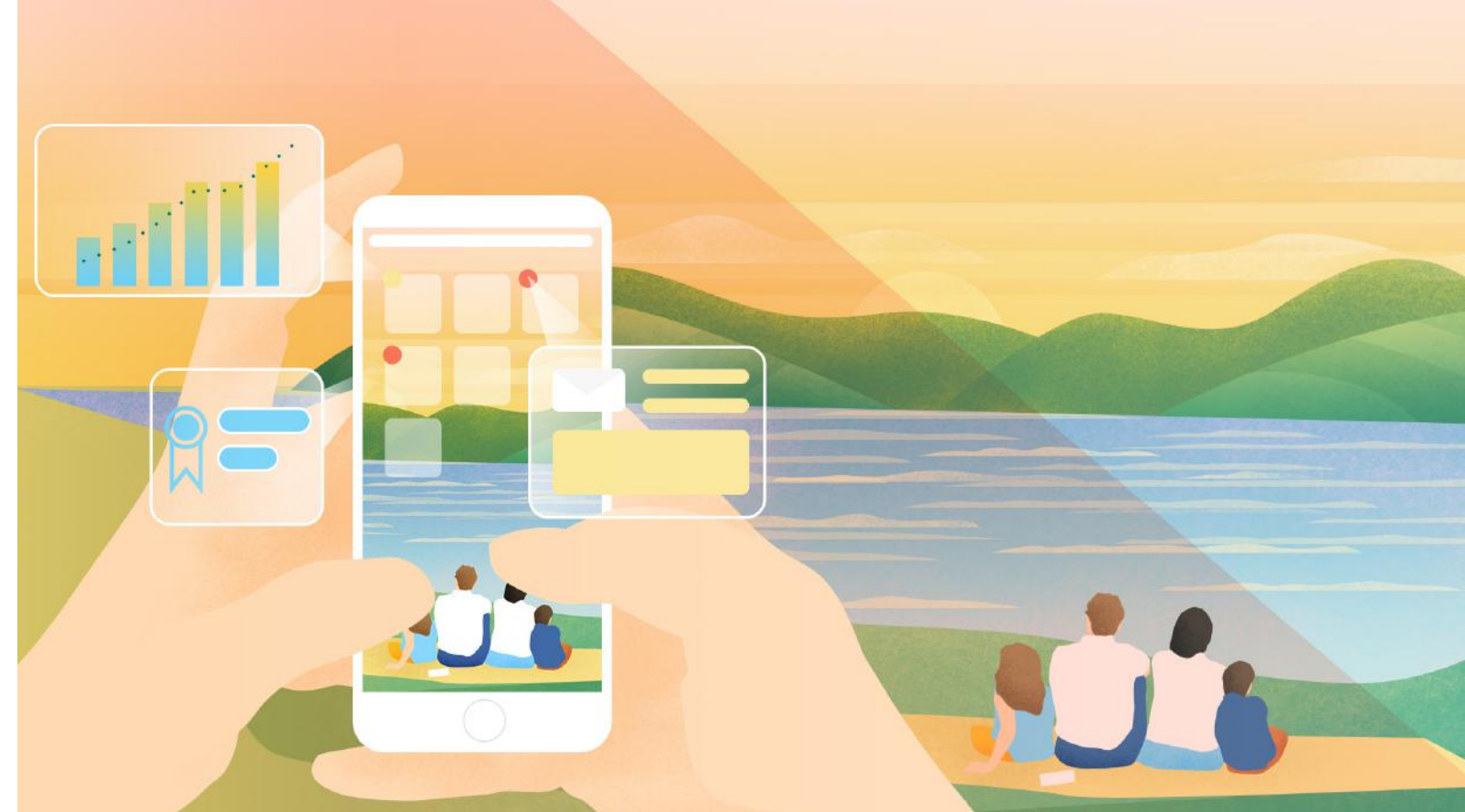
For years, that translated into managers emphasizing long hours, discouraging time off and believing that employees could not be trusted to work remotely. With the internet and smartphones, it became easier for people to get as much done (or more) outside the office as at their desk.

This eliminates the need for employees to spend work hours worrying about how they are going to juggle children’s demands or doctor appointments, so they can focus on work at work. [James’ study showed 61 percent](#) of the managers who implemented work-life balance initiatives saw improved performance,

which boosted the company’s overall performance.

Having a more satisfied and effective workforce because of flexible schedules and similar work-life options also gives a firm greater ability to meet customer demands outside of a normal workday, too. A business can use the flexible schedules to cover a longer work day without adding staff.

Increases in productivity. Many jobs have critical, peak periods when employees must work long, hard hours before a new product release, computer upgrade or big presentation. However, a company cannot sustain



that level of energy and working long hours indefinitely.

Employees burn out or permanently check out. They leave if long hours and extraordinary effort are the norms. Using work-life balance options to manage stress and mitigate burnout ensures productivity remains constant or even improves in non-peak times.

The Corporate Executive Board studied productivity and work-life balance for 50,000 workers worldwide. They found that people who think that they have positive work-life balance work 21 percent harder than those who feel they do not have good balance.

The employees did not have to take advantage of work-life integration options offered by their firm to show the increases in productivity. They valued that they can use the options if they needed them.

Higher employee retention. Happier, less stressed employees appreciate their employer's efforts to help them balance their lives and are less likely to change jobs. Another survey indicated that 89 percent of employers noted employee retention increased after their firms implemented flexible work arrangements.

A deeper recruiting pool.

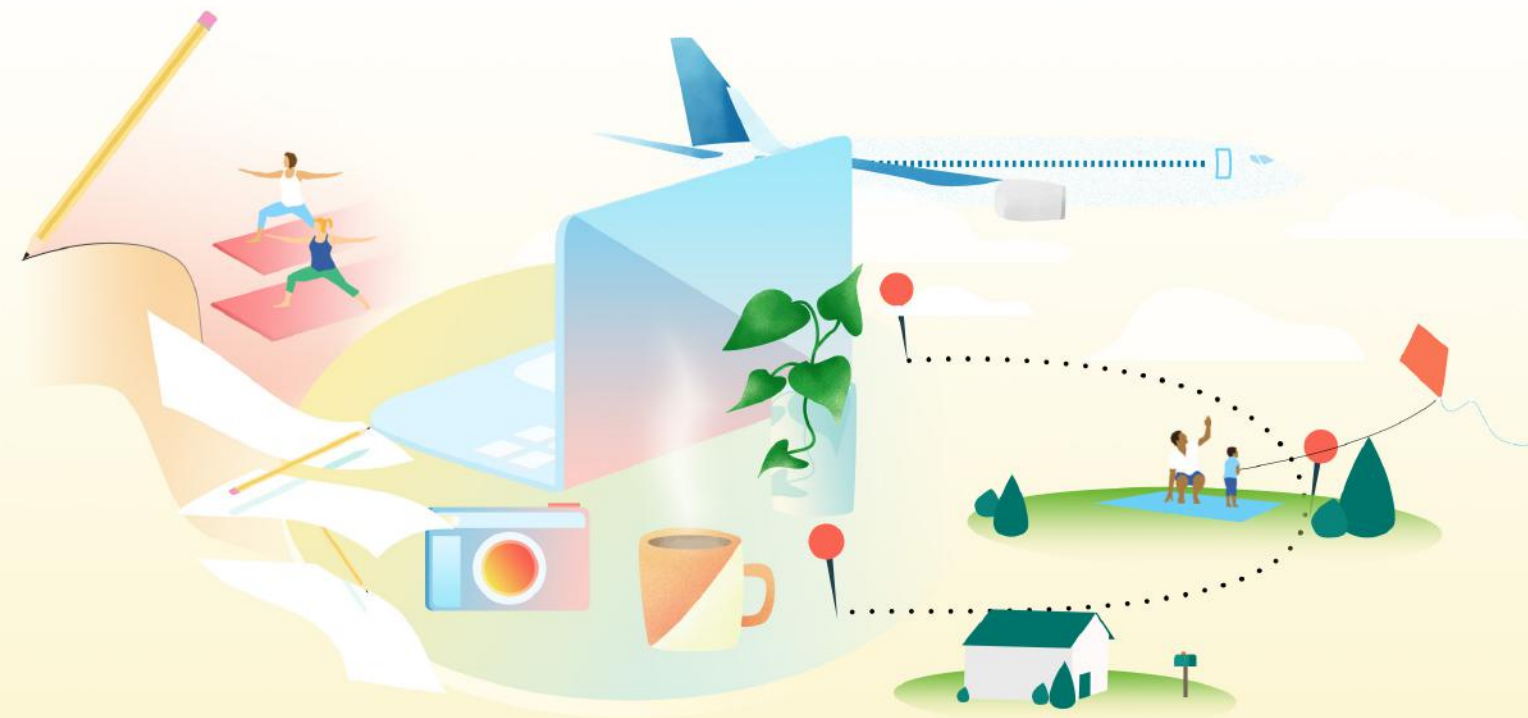
Organizations that make lists like Indeed's "Top-Rated Companies for Work-Life Balance" or develop a local reputation for encouraging work-life balance are more attractive to potential employees. Not only are retention rates boosted, but they become highly desired employers that draw a better pool of candidates for any job openings.

Lower medical costs and

absenteeism. People who feel torn between demands of work and life are going to suffer stress, which leads to all sorts of physical and mental health issues. Too much pressure at work can lead to medical conditions such as heart disease, asthma, obesity and diabetes, among others. It can also affect an employee's mental health.

Workers dealing with significant levels of stress (and the resulting health issues) take more sick days than other employees. Furthermore, insurance claims for stress-related industrial accidents cost nearly double those for non-stress related industrial accidents.

Achieving better balance between professional and personal lives makes for less stressed employees who are less likely to get sick, depressed or injured, and will be less likely to develop heart or digestive system problems.



What benefits or policies can a company offer to encourage work-life balance?

Work from home. Telecommuting, at least one day a week, is one of the most common work-life balance options. A Gallup survey of over 15,000 workers indicated that 43 percent spent at least some time working remotely in 2016.

Additionally, 77 percent of participants in a Robert Half survey said they would be more likely to take a position that permitted telecommuting at least part-

time. (It was 86 percent for those between 18 and 34, indicating that millennials clearly will expect it.)

Recognize your employees. When employees are recognized frequently and timely, they feel more motivated and energized to do their jobs. The positive feelings about one's work and company can mean the difference between dreading going to work vs. looking forward to it and seeing it as a

fulfilling part of one's life. Making social recognition a key part of your culture is essential in helping employees find the balance they seek and require.

A flexible schedule. A flexible schedule that allows employees to schedule their work hours based on personal needs or preferences is also common. Some employees might start early, like 7 a.m., so they can pick up children in the afternoon. Others might prefer to arrive at 11 a.m. so they can drop kids off or sleep in and then work late. Both scenarios would allow them to miss the rush-hour commuting hassle, too.

Four-day work-week or compressed schedule. Many companies experiment with alternative work schedules. These may consist of four 10-hour days and a three-day weekend or having everyone work Monday through Thursday for nine hours and take every other Friday off.

In-workplace dining. There are a variety of reasons companies provide meals or snack at work. They include compensating people for working late, lunch meetings, to cut time employees would spend going out to eat and as an incentive for employees.

While it can promote staff health, morale and team building, the downside here is making employees

feel they cannot take a break from work. Another issue deals with labor laws and requirements that hourly employees take meal breaks away from their work.

On-site childcare or even pet care.

Some employers with a workforce that has young children have opened day care centers on-site or contracted with local facilities. This eases issues with rushing to pick up children after work. A newer trend is allowing employees to bring in pets, particularly dogs.

The on-site canines serve as unofficial therapy animals, lowering workplace stress, encouraging employees to get up and take a “walking” break outside, and making it easier for someone to work late and not have to worry about letting their dog out at home.

Wellness benefits including on-site gyms, yoga classes and chair massages. One of the best ways to manage stress is exercise, but a massage is not a bad option either. Do not just offer wellness benefits; encourage their use. Employees should not feel stigmatized for taking a gym break.

Create a designated “quiet space.”

Establish a designated area in the building where employees can take a mental break when needed. Think internal oasis for someone having a bad day or needing to clear their mind.

To ensure solitude and tranquility, fill it with plants, cushy seats, soft music and a “no speaking” sign.

Take it outside. Have the team meet outside of the office occasionally to freshen things up. Whether they opt for a coffee shop or, on a beautiful day, a patio or park somewhere. The change of scenery and some sunshine can help.

Set expectations that time off is indeed time off. Today's employees have electronic leashes that connect them to the office and email 24/7 anywhere in the world. Set the expectation that paid time off is sacrosanct. Companies should not contact employees on vacation unless there truly is an emergency.

Encourage short breaks throughout the day. Sitting at a desk typing or staring at the computer screen all day is not healthy. Neither are other repetitive workplace tasks. Office workers should get up and move throughout the day or, if they are on their feet a lot, sit and put their feet up. Short breaks help people stay focused and more productive as the day goes on.



What companies are using work-life balance to their advantage?

The [Indeed list](#) included three real estate firms (Keller Williams, Coldwell Banker and Century 21). Cisco, Google and Dell were top tech firms in that analysis. Managed care giant Kaiser Permanente was also high on the list, which included Capital One, NIKE, Northrop Grumman, Pfizer Inc., American Express, Fidelity Investments, Lockheed Martin and Johnson & Johnson.

Here are some other firms that have generated press for their efforts to improve work-life equilibrium:



Airbnb dropped from the top spot of places to work at on Glassdoor at the end of 2016, but it is still way up the list of best-rated companies, according to satisfied employees. Airbnb embraced the balancing challenge by building a workplace that provides access to gym facilities, gourmet food and paid travel opportunities for employees to experience Airbnb first-hand.



Yelp employees love the fully stocked kitchens, discounted gym membership and access to information that really lets them get to know the city they work or live in. [On job search site Glassdoor](#), one reviewer noted, "Most people leave by 6, no expectation to work long hours for no reason (work-life balance is emphasized)." Others emphasized the culture and supporting work-life balance emphasis, too.



GEICO [actively supports its workers'](#) nonwork passions. GEICO encourages employees to start clubs and will sponsor them. They sponsor races around the country and will cover employees' registration fees. On job posting sites, however, many employees complain about lack of flexible work schedule or telecommuting options.

How can a company encourage work-life balance?

Prioritizing work-life balance and establishing a commitment to it should be a company-wide initiative, not something only certain people or departments enjoy. One can make adaptations in every type of position to ensure employees know the company really cares about their workers.

Naysayer managers need to understand that implementing the changes is sure to result in a more engaged workforce with lower turnover and increased productivity. The first place to start when it comes to work-life balance is by offering your employees flexibility.

The type of business may require opting for flexible hours or working remotely on occasion. However, allowing employees to be home during some traditional work hours goes a long way in demonstrating a commitment to achieving more balance.

The second critical thing is ensuring management supports the initiative thoroughly. Stakeholders must understand the importance and benefits of giving employees more flexibility in order for work-life balance to truly be embraced in an organization.

There will be some growing pains in implementing new work-life balance initiatives. However, the results are less stress for employees, improved workplace morale and enhanced relationships between employees and the company.