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Table of contents

Contents

Table of contents.....	2
Problem solving and Decision making.....	3
Introduction.....	3
Workplace problem.....	3
Alternative solutions to the problem.....	4
Decision making technique to evaluate decisions.....	6
Brainstorming.....	6
Cause and Effective technique.....	6
Implementation Plan.....	8
Communication of the plan to the stake holders.....	9
Monitoring and evaluation.....	9
Conclusion.....	10
References.....	10

Problem solving and Decision making

Introduction

Problem solving refers to the process of identifying the problem and what causes the problem as well as selecting alternative solutions to problem ensuring that the solutions are working through monitoring and evaluation (Adair, 2016). To solve the problems, decisions have to be made by gathering enough information about the alternative solutions and solving the problem step by step. (Morgan, 2017). Being a good decision maker requires one to have a number of skills including; active listening, analysis, research, creativity, communication, dependability, decision making and above all, team-building. (Adair, 2016). Therefore, this report explains “**WORK-LIFE IMBALANCE**” as a workplace problem and sets out the process, techniques and strategies that can be applied to solve the problem of work-life imbalance in a workplace. This report suggests several causes and alternative solutions to the problems, and techniques of solving this problem.

Workplace problem

Work-life imbalance is a workplace situation where the employees find it difficult to balance their professional life and personal life. In such a situation, there is no clear boundary between professional life and life outside work (Clouston, 20014). This is a workplace problem because if ignored, it may cause mental health issues to employees including; stress, depression, fatigue and anxiety among others. This is the reason why employees are pushing for personalized work that enables them to meet their work-life preferences, and where they have power over the working conditions (Wheatley, 2017). Away from affecting the employees negatively, work-life imbalance also has adverse effects on the organizations including; high absenteeism rates, increased office and administration costs, increased employee turnover, and low work morale in the workers all which lead to low productivity in the workplace (Cooper and Baird, 2015).

There are many factors that may indicate a work-life imbalance situation in a workplace and they include; Exhaustion of workers where the workers work for longer hours tirelessly. This could lead to both mental and physical exhaustion (Park et al., 2020). An increased level of stress among the employees also indicates work-life imbalance problem. This can be identified if employees start developing migraines and headache, depression, mood swings and fatigue (Park et al., 2020). Increase in number of absenteeism also indicates that people are finding it hard to balance their professional life and personal life.

Work-life imbalance in a work place can be triggered or caused by many factors including the following;

Inflexible working hours

Workers who have inflexible working hours are faced with a problem of work-life imbalance because there is no clear boundary between time for work and time for personal life (Mercer, Russel and Arnold, 2014). This means that the employee will spend more time working than those with flexible working hours which can be adjusted to fit one's personal life expectations at the same time meeting the work place obligations (Health Foundation, 2019).

Workaholics and perfectionists

Some employees are workaholics and they end up failing to balance their work life with their personal lives. Workaholics are those employees who spend most of their time at work even when they are supposed to off doing personal administrations and other activities away from work. (Cathy n.d). These people are usually referred to as perfectionists at work.

Increased responsibility at work and at home

There is a highly positive connection between over working and increased responsibility both at work and home. This is because responsibility at home requires a parent to work for longer hours so as to get more money. Also, an increase in expenses with less salary may lead an individual to work more hours in order to earn extra money causing a work-life imbalance (Andrews and Russel, 2012). In a similar way, increased work responsibility comes with increased work time which all leads to work-life imbalance.

Incompetent co-workers

In a work place like a care home, there must be teamwork where all the employees should be competent in their respective tasks. Workers that are not reliable may cause other workers to over work hence leading to work-life imbalance situation. In addition, bad staffing may also cause a work-life imbalance to the workers (McLeod, 2018).

Alternative solutions to the problem

Illustration showing the problem at the center and the alternative solutions to the problem



Work-life imbalance is a critical issue in a workplace and this is while both the management and employees should work together to solve this problem right from recruitment.

To begin with, at recruitment there should a clear job description explained by a supervisor. This will solve the problem right from recruitment because a clear description of who does what and when to do it eliminates issues of poor staffing that lead work-life imbalance. In addition, managers should recruit workers that are capable and competent so that there everyone in a workplace is not strained by tasks hence solving the problem of work-life imbalance (Clouston, 2014).

Managers should encourage team play in a workplace so that there is shared responsibility in completing tasks, and this avoids cases of stress, depression, fatigue, and burnout among

employees. (Park et al., 2020). This also encourages flexibility because team members can replace the absent one hence enabling each other to achieve a balanced life of work and home.

Employees are encouraged to apply for flexible working arrangement that enable them to meet their work-life preferences (Health Foundation, 2019). The working arrangements may include; part-time working, job sharing, flextime, working from home, mobile working, shift-swapping, taking time off, maternal and paternal leave, and compressed hours among others (Wheatley, 2017). With a flexible working arrangement, employees will be able to balance their professional life and personal life if they chose an arrangement that best fits their needs (Andrews and Russel, 2012).

Employees are also advised to adopt and acquire time management skills like and apply time management techniques like Pomodoro technique and Eisenhower technique to manage their time so that they avoid bad vices of working overtime due to poor management. This will help them to plan, prioritize, set goals, and meet their deadlines both at work and outside work which makes them employable. (Tinkler, Schriek and Maund, 2017).

Decision making technique to evaluate decisions

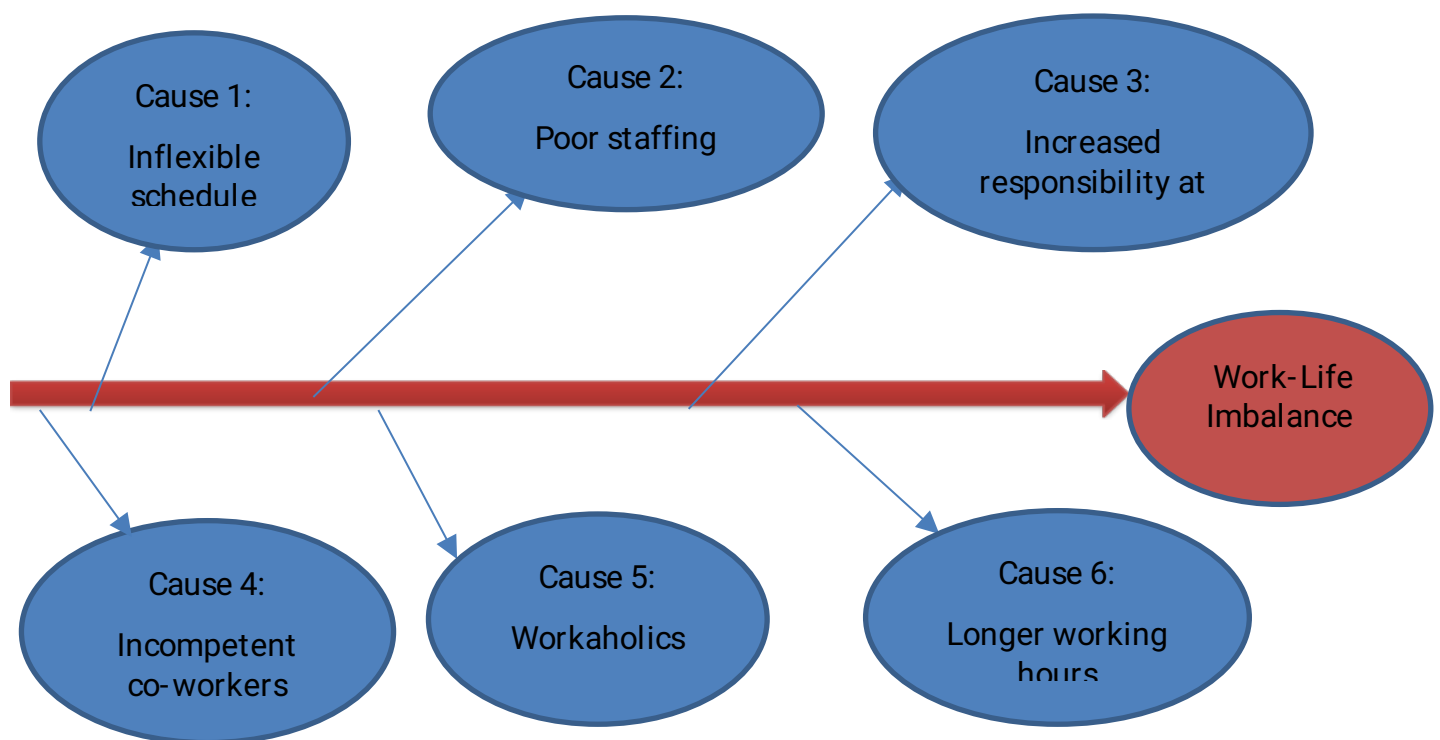
Brainstorming

According to (Evans, 2012) brainstorming in problem solving involves capturing the ideas, discussing and critiquing the idea, and finally, making a selection of what is the most appropriate idea(s). Therefore, the potential solution identified were arrived at through brainstorming by simply thinking about the problem at hand while putting myself at the centre of situation, and what I would have done to come up with solutions to work life imbalance. With brainstorming, one must have critical thinking skills in order to make a better evaluation of the possible solutions to the problem at hand (Adair, 2016).

Cause and Effective technique

Brainstorming technique gave rise to the cause of effect technique where different cause of work-life imbalance were evaluated for their effect on the organization and the stakeholders most especially the employees because for every effect, there is a cause according to Serrat (2017). The analysis of cause and effect through fishbone technique revealed that inflexible working schedule is the main cause of the problem.

Cause and Effect technique/ Fishbone technique



From the above evaluation of cause and effect, it is clear that inflexibility is the root cause of work-life imbalance in a workplace. Therefore, organizations like care homes should grant employees a right to request for flexible working arrangement so as to attain a balance between work and personal life. These following flexible working arrangements can be considered for implementation by care homes;

Part timing/reduced hours

Under this working arrangement, an employee may negotiate for fewer working hours either

on a temporary or permanent basis focusing on what arrangement best fits their situations at home (Mercer, Russel and Arnold, 2014). Employees with health problems and those with disabilities are usually encouraged to request part-time working arrangement since the workload is reduced.

Flex time

Flex time is encouraged because it allows employees to work full days but are allowed to vary their working depending on the situation at hand. This arrangement is good because an employee may choose to do something personal and then works more hours later in compensation of time used attending to personal issues away from work. (Youssef and Senbel 2018). With such an arrangement, the employees will be able to achieve their work-life preferences (Health Foundation, 2019).

Job sharing

Job sharing may solve the problem of work-life imbalance in a workplace like a care home because employees with similar job tasks may decide to share their tasks in a way that their benefits or pay maybe affected. (Cooper and Baird, 2015). This arrangement is encouraged in a care home because it helps workers to work together as a team which makes work easier and more efficient (Andrews and Russel, 2012).

Shift swapping

Employees who have similar job descriptions in the workplace should be given an opportunity to swap shifts with their colleagues whenever they have personal business to attend to even if they are supposed to be at work. This will enable the employees to achieve their work-life preferences (Youssef and Senbel 2018).

Leaves

Employees should have a right to acquire leaves throughout the year a period where they are not at work but without losing employment rights like salary. (Cooper and Baird, 2015). These leaves whether paid or unpaid are important for employees because they will get time for family, for health care, for education and for leisure which motivates them hence becoming more productive in a workplace

Implementation Plan

Having evaluated the effectiveness of all the solutions, an organization like a care home can put the achievable solutions into action as a way of implementing them. Since most of the care homes fall under the National Health Service, the care homes with a problem of work-life imbalance could bench on the NHS Long Term Plan of 2019.

Basing on the NHS Long Term Plan of 2019, other care homes and organizations can put all the solutions into action by allowing employees to discuss flexible working arrangement at recruitment instead of getting the job and then start complaining of inflexibility. When the flexible working arrangements are discussed at recruitment stage, it saves an organization a cost of recruiting again once employee get fed of inflexible and they leave for more flexible jobs. Once these solutions are put into consideration at recruitment stage, then the organization will have an opportunity to attract best talents since they demand for working environments they can control.

To avoid complains of exhaustion from workers, care homes should implement flexible working patterns by allowing them to have part-time arrangements, giving them leaves and even allowing them to job share and swap shifts. This is easy to implement because management should simply encourage team working and all these can be achieved since the relationship among the workers will be enhanced.

Due to the outbreak of Covid-19, flexible working like part-timing is now a new normal to avoid overcrowding in a work place. Therefore, this can be implemented by recruiting part-time workers to assist the full time workers so as to maintain the 24/7 working arrangement of care homes and hospitals. This can be done by benchmarking on the NHS Long Term Plan of 2019.

The flexible working arrangements can be achieved and put in action if the employees are sensitized that it is their right by law to request for the working arrangements flexible enough to best fit their needs at home and at work depending on what they want to achieve. Like the NHS, care homes should also implement Flexible retirement by giving older workers access to flexible forms of retirement, and this is highly achievable if implemented.

Communication of the plan to the stake holders

Once the decision to provide flexible working arrangements has been agreed upon by management, then stake holders like employees should know since the decision directly affects them by solving their problems of stress, depression, burnout, fatigue and absenteeism.

The problem will be communicated to employees through general meetings where they will be informed of the changes especially to those have greatly affected by the problem at hand. This meeting can be referred to as stake holder meeting where they are given a chance to comment and give recommendations in regards to the solutions presented to them.

In addition, the decision agreed upon can be communicated to the employees by use of online/virtual presentations because of the effects of Covid-19 without having to gather all

the employees in one place. Management may decide to communicate the decision through emails, direct phone calls, and newsletters especially those that can easily be adopted like shift swapping and job sharing.

For the general public and other stake holders, the decision can be communicated through summary reports and through organization websites by clearly stating what was decided and the grounds upon which the decision was made.

Monitoring and evaluation

To monitor the effectiveness of the solution adopted, management is encouraged to conduct online surveys where the most affected employees are allowed to comment and evaluate the effectiveness of the solution adopted. Also, management should request for feedback, of which the feedback should not be overlooked even if it a criticism as well as being open to discussion on matters regarding the solutions taken on.

Focus groups are also encouraged to evaluate the effectiveness of the decision with checklists to monitor and evaluate the progress.

Conclusion

For someone working in a health and social care sector like myself, it is very important to have a flexible working pattern because of the kind of work that is tiresome, stressing and sometimes complicated characterizing by doing personal hygiene for clients, helping them with daily activities, washing for them, cooking for them, feeding them, and helping them to go for their appointments among others. This kind of work can take a way a worker's personal life if he/she does not request for flexible working arrangement like part-timing, job sharing, shift swapping, flextime and compressed hours among others. A flexible working pattern will allow the worker to meet her/his professional goals as well as the personal needs. Organizations should also consider granting employees their constitutional right of requesting for flexible working arrangement so as to solve the problem of work-life balance.

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