Work–Life Synchronicity

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INTRODUCTION

The amount of time we spend connected to our phones and computers is staggering. In America 90% of adults own a cell phone, 42% own a tablet, and 63% are using their phones for internet access (Pew Internet Project, 2014). Mary Meeker's Internet Trends Report (2015) indicated that Americans looked at their phones approximately 150 times per day in 2013 and the report shows that Americans spent 5.6 hours per day on the internet by 2015. We are texting with loved ones, checking our game status in Words with Friends, and being distracted by photos of the newest baby on Instagram. We are taking voice memos, creating spreadsheets, and texting our boss. Our Facebook accounts not only share information about our recent family vacations, but we "like" a company's page or "share" an interesting grant project with our co-workers who are listed as "friends" (Facebook, 2015). On our phones we tap the blue email box on the screen and, millimeters away from our personal email account, we have access to our work email. Our LinkedIn app is a neighbor with our Pinterest app, quite literally adjoining our resume and professional network with our interests in recipes, hairstyles, and cool car concepts we are following. Technology and relational space is a portrait of modern day living. Life has never been more synchronized as when we hold the representation of our personal and professional selves in our hands.

Work-life synchronization, a process of integrating work time and home time, has emerged as a result of technology and society. Before the days of cell phones and internet we called the office of a manager or company leader and a secretary was traditionally positioned as the designated gatekeeper. The primary method of reaching into the work day was through another individual and only at the times the leader indicated availability. When the work day used to end at 5pm, calls to the home to discuss work during non-working time were less frequent. Social events, golf outings, and corporate dinners may have occurred outside of typical working hours, but those were outings scheduled and considered part of one's professional obligations. Today, people are no longer required to even dial a number to make contact with a leader while that person is at work, at home, or on a vacation across the globe. A disgruntled customer can email a complaint while we are eating lunch and a child can send a message to a parent during an important sales pitch. Texting, email, and social media allows people to connect at any time of the day or night, and potentially *all* day and night.

Technology also plays a significant role in how we communicate with and access to the outside world while at work. When leaders are facilitating a staff meeting, how many of the employees in the room are looking down at their phone or typing on a computer? Are staff taking meeting notes, or shopping on Amazon? Leaders need to not only be aware of their own work-life struggles, but also those of their employees. When constant admittance of distraction is the norm in the working environment leaders are faced with the issue of how to reconcile the needs of their workforce with the needs of their organization. One option is to ban all external communication, but how does that impact morale? When companies do not allow cell phones in the office are more employees taking extended bathroom breaks to sneak into their text messaging inbox? Leaders need to consider at what point policing communication becomes such an exertion of resources and effort that it is no longer worth the outcome. Corporate culture is in-

fluenced by a company's view and actions related to what is determined to be important to employees. Leaders should consider how they want to shape their values and how the lives of their employees are a part of their vision.

This issue of limitless accessibility leaves leaders with all sorts of questions and issues to address: Does "nine to five" exist anymore? If not, what is required to allow us the time and the head space to be effective in business, successful in leadership, participants in family life, and to explore personal interests? How does interacting with different spheres of our lives at the same time impact each area? How does synthesis impact productivity, feelings towards employment, and the quality of our relationships both personally and professionally? How does our own synchronicity influence the way in which we lead others and how we consider the work and home obligations of those that we are charged with managing and supervising? How did we get to a place where factoring in home life and work life time-management issues inside and outside the workplace is part of leadership, and more importantly, where do we go from here?

WORK-LIFE

Work may be viewed as activities that are direct job tasks required by an employer or those that are paid services provided directly by one person to another. Some people consider work as being paid for creating something of value or sharing ideas and consulting with others on strategies, personal beliefs, or interests. Others view work as a means to a paycheck and their feelings related to the task or environment is not particularly relevant for them. Work time usually includes completing assigned or developed job responsibilities and putting forth efforts towards reaching objectives and goals. Time at work is also spent interacting with colleagues, supervisors, and subordinates to manage the energy associated with completing duties, creating or interacting with the working environment, and meeting the obligations of managers. Efforts in the workplace that are less often included in the characterization of work, but that are beginning to have a stronger focus and consideration are career development and employment support activities. Career development pursuits might include shadowing a leader to learn about how managers operate in the organization, attending conferences or professional association meetings, participating on committees, or developing external community collaborations to forward ideas and change. These experiences help build relationships both inside and outside of an organization as they help with professional growth. The time needed for career support must be included in the tallying of work time even when not recognized by company leadership since it either requires substituting working time or home time for participation and completion.

Life is a challenging concept to classify and for purposes of this chapter it is being expressed as time not spent engaged in employment activities. Rest, health, personal care, education, and spirituality are usually pursuits that occur outside of work time and as part of life. Life can also be perceived as home time or energy and effort spent in the living environment and family relationships. Some will argue that work is an aspect of life, but in this examination life is being characterized separately than work as it is being related to the concepts "work-life balance" and "work-life synchronicity" which indicates differentiation. In this framework balance and synchronicity also require there be a distinction since balance demands two sections and the goal of synchronization is a "bringing together" which in itself compels delineation.

Work and life are both important aspects of living. Work, as the primary resource that provides financial security, also offers an environment for talents and abilities to emerge that can be utilized at home.

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