Work-Life Balance: Reflections and Interventions

Suleman Ahmer

CEO

Timelenders

"A human being should be able to change a diaper, plan an invasion, butcher a hog, [build] a ship, design a building, write a sonnet, balance accounts, build a wall, set a bone, comfort the dying, take orders, give orders, cooperate, act alone, solve equations, analyze a new problem, pitch manure, program a computer, cook a tasty meal, fight efficiently, die gallantly."

Robert Heinlein

Introduction

This paper was written to accompany Timelenders'[1] presentation on work-life balance for a company. Later on it was adapted for general readers. I have two audiences in mind:

- Timelenders family members who are defined as people who have taken our workshops: for all of you, this paper will serve as a write-up summarizing many of the concepts that we have shared with you especially in the Strategic Visions workshop. For members who have not taken our workshops for the past couple of years, this write-up will encompass some of the new insights and views that have developed recently. For members who have not done our Strategic Visions workshop, this would be a wonderful primer to one of the sections of the workshop.
- People who have not taken our workshops: for such individuals, this would serve as a wonderful introduction to how we approach the issue of balancing of one's life and would also serve as an introduction to Timelenders' and our vision. I would request our family members to circulate this document to their friends and acquaintances.

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[1] Please see Appendix A for a brief introduction of Timelenders on page 12.

For Timelenders' family members I would recommend that you download this document and put it in the folders that we have provided to you in the workshops.

A few tips for all of you: I would encourage you to first take a careful look at the quiz that appears on page 16. This will help you to focus on some of the potential answers when you read the paper. Once you have read the paper, I would request you to attempt the quiz and then grade yourself. A score of 8 or above indicates that you have understood the concepts well.

You can use the link on our webpage
http://www.timelenders.com/work_life_balance.htm

I pray to Allah (swt) that you find the information in the following pages useful.

Synopsis

Work life balance is a serious issue today as long hours at work are stealing quality hours from the time that we dedicate to our families and our personal pursuits. Globally, the corporate world is waking up to this reality and a myriad of interventions are being proposed and implemented.

At Timelenders we have developed and refined a framework based on the Islamic Ideology which we have taught to thousands of individuals over the past seven years as part of our Strategic Visions workshop with wonderful results. Few of the comments are attached[2]. The Islamic perspective of balancing of life is extremely elegant, sophisticated and differs with the dominant intervention paradigms originating in the West.

The paper is divided into the following sections:
- Introduction

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[2] Please see appendix B, page 13.

- Synopsis

- The main ideas with important definitions under the heading 'Crux of the Matter'.

- A step by step intervention strategy to bring about a balance in our lives

- A quiz to help you assess if you have grasped the key points adequately

- A few appendices of supporting documents

Crux of the Matter

Do you agree with the quote of Robert Heinlein mentioned in the beginning of the paper? Has this mindset not been a critical element of success since time immemorial? This has been true for thousands of years and it stands true today. To accept this is to also accept the fact that such a paradigm will introduce a need to balance between cooking a tasty meal and fighting efficiently; between cooperation and acting alone; between changing a diaper and dying gallantly. Hence, balancing different facets of our life of which work-life balance is a huge subset is a challenge which humanity has been facing and handling for ages. In history as of today, wars had to be fought and long trips had to be taken for trade which kept families apart for months on end; yet life went on.

Just as many things are defined more by their antithesis then their own precise definitions, work-life balance is being defined by work-life imbalance. After teaching this subject for over seven years to thousands of individuals, I find that there is a disagreement on how to exactly define work-life balance but there is a general agreement on the consequences of work-life imbalance of which the two main symptoms are:

- a disturbed family life where the understanding develops that we are not living up to the expectations or the norms

- neglect of self, the biggest manifestation of which is deteriorating health followed by a sense of lack of fulfillment and happiness

The moment any or both of these symptoms are detected, the dominant paradigm in the world today is to term it an issue of work-life balance or more precisely the result of work-life imbalance.

The corporate world's interest in work-life balance started from the West which led the world in rapid industrialization leading to massive urbanization of people, dislocation from traditional abodes of living and hence the breakdown of many centuries-old established structures that ensured balance in lives. The saying that 'it takes a village to raise a child[3]' is true but unfortunately difficult to apply in the current modernized/industrialized landscape. The consequences of work-life imbalance started affecting employees' performance at work and hence a history of corporate and workplace initiatives and interventions started to take shape[4].

As stated that the issue of having a balance in life is not new: societies throughout history have been addressing this matter and at times, very effectively. Just like all societies, Islam has also addressed this issue and the definition of balance in one's life and the ideas to achieve balance that Islam presents are highly elegant, sophisticated and versatile.

At Timelenders we have taken these definitions and ideas and converted them into an operational framework which is used for not only understanding the underlying concepts and paradigms but as a tool for restructuring our lives.

So instead of dwelling upon the different definitions of work-life balance, its modern (post-industrialization) history and the different interventions and remedies and their

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[3] "In 1996 Hilary Clinton made famous the ancient African Proverb "It takes a village to raise a child." The proverb is from Igbo and Yoruba regions of Nigeria and the basic meaning is that raising a child is a communal effort." Quoted from "Assessing 'it takes a village to raise a child' by Amelia Tibbett in www.helium.com.

[4] A comprehensive review of this history is beyond the scope of this paper but a plethora of books and material is available especially over the web.

evaluation[5], I would move on to define the concept of balancing one's life in Islam and the framework for achieving this balance.

The Framework

We all have different roles in our life; we are fathers, sons, breadwinners, husbands, wives, mothers, CEOs, bosses and members of social clubs[6]. If we look at ourselves from the paradigm of playing different roles in our life then the first sign that we understand of imbalance are situations similar to having someone who is a good businessman but a poor father or someone who is a good engineer but a poor wife.

Every society is built upon an ideology[7]. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines Ideology as 'the basic beliefs and guiding principles of a person or group.' This underlying ideology defines the basic paradigms of thought in the society. For example how we define success, failure, happiness, contentment, how the universe has come about and its functions are all driven by the underlying ideology of the society.

Ideologies are of two types:

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[5] Not that this academic enquiry is of little use, but more for the reason that it falls beyond the scope of this paper.

[6] Please see Appendix C, page 14: A sample list of different roles in life

[7] An introductory enquiry into history and philosophy will reveal this. I quote from Wikipedia in the section on 'Specialty Definition: Ideology': "Every society has an ideology that forms the basis of the "public opinion" or common sense, a basis that usually remains invisible to most people within the society. This prevailing ideology appears as "neutral", all others differ from the norm and are often seen as radical, no matter what the actual vision may be. The philosopher Michel Foucault first wrote about this concept of apparent ideological neutrality." We discuss this in depth in our Strategic Visions workshop and here for the sake of brevity the statement that 'every society is built on an ideology' will suffice.

Defined Ideology[8]: any ideology which has been clearly articulated and written is a defined ideology for example Communism, Hinduism, Social liberalism, Capitalism, Christianity. According to this broad definition[9], Islam is also an ideology.

Personal Ideology: the ideology which a person carries. Another articulation would be 'installed ideology'. This ideology could be identical to a defined ideology or could be combination of some defined ideologies and unique personal beliefs and assertions.

In all societies roles are of two types:

Mandated roles[10]: those roles in life which your ideology doesn't permit you to drop directly under any conditions. For example the roles of father, mother, son, brother etc. would be mandated roles in Islam.

Elective roles: those roles in life which your ideology permits you to drop directly under certain conditions. For example the roles of employee, friend, boss, colleague, student etc. would be elective roles in Islam.

All societies define 'minimum performance levels' in all roles that are present in the society and these 'minimum performance levels (MPLs)' are dictated by the dominant ideology on which the society is build. The MPLs then give rise to the legal system of the society which further defines what is allowed and what is prohibited. Since different

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[8] These definitions of ideologies are mine and are a result of the need to develop a framework. They are pretty commonsensical as opposed to things coming out of philosophical intricacies.

[9] I would like to caution at this time that I am using Ideology in a broad sense while acknowledging that there are some very technical definitions of ideology which if taken can make my statement pretty contentious. In other words, I am using the word ideology for lack of a better word as the word 'philosophy' is shadowed by far greater demons. In Arabic the word would be *Deen* which in its technical definition is right on the mark when we say that Islam is a *Deen* amongst others.

[10] Again the definitions of Mandated and Elective Roles are mine and have come about after years of struggling with the subject. Why these definitions were required to be articulated and the precise function that these definitions serve are covered again in our workshop and are beyond the scope of this presentation and paper.

societies are built upon different ideologies, it is natural that MPLs in different societies would differ. Also, since most societies' dominant ideologies are a mix of many defined ideologies and since with the passage of time not only does this mix fluctuate but also ideologies get redefined, it is but natural that MPLs are in a flux. A case in example is how the West has moved from ostracizing gays and lesbians in their societies to the current widespread acceptance of these individuals and the norms they represent.

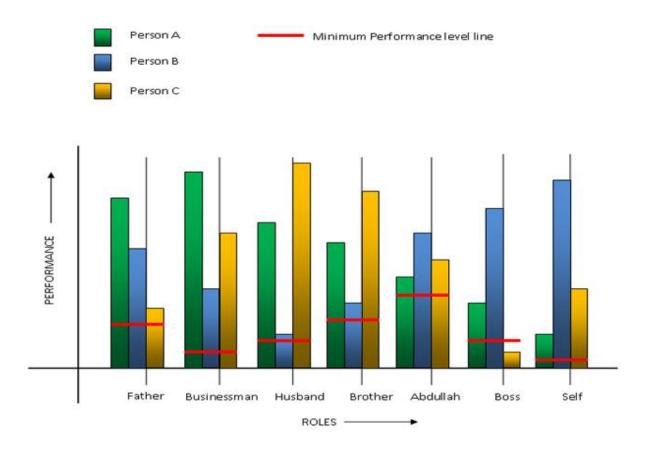The least flux we see is in societies which are based on religious ideologies.

Islam is the only exception as due to the preservation of Quran and Sunnah, the main sources of knowledge are preserved and are not in flux. This is one of the most important cornerstones of the 'balance-in-life framework' that we have developed.

The beauty of Islam is that it has given very precise MPLs for all possible roles in life. Not only are these MPLs defined, they are also not in a flux. So the MPLs which were put forward fourteen hundred years ago stand true and valid today.

With this backdrop, let me articulate the definition of balance in Islam:

"Our performance in any one of our roles, Mandated or Elective, must not fall below the 'minimum performance levels' dictated by Islam."

To understand this, please refer to the following diagram:

The Y-axis shows performance in different roles whereas the X-axis shows the different roles. The purpose of the bar graphs is to highlight that there are different standards of performance operating in each of the roles and are being applied consistently to the three individuals.

In each of the roles there is a red line that shows the minimum performance level (MPL) in that role. For example the MPL in the role of a neighbor in Islam is that it is unacceptable that we sleep with our stomachs full in the night whereas he is sleeping hungry[11].

Now if we look at the definition of balance presented above, you would see that persons A and B are balanced while person C has an imbalance in his roles since he is below the minimum performance level in his role as a boss.

[11] This is a gist of a hadith of the Prophet (sallalahualahiwassalam)

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So the conclusion is that as long as a person is above the red line in all of his roles, he is fine. Looking carefully at this we can immediately see the sophistication and versatility of the concept: this model can apply to anyone as people's situations are different and it can cater to all situations. For example, when a family has infants or toddlers, their demands on time are high. In this case they can bring down the performance in other roles and increase their performance here.

There are two types of resources:

Transferable resources: these are resources that can be transferred across different roles like money, time etc.

Non-transferable resources: these are resources which can't be transferred across roles like personal attention or activities where performance requires our presence. For example the two hours of time that the father gives to his child can't be compensated by two hours of time of the babysitter. Similarly, we can't have someone else jog or exercise on our behalf.

So person 'C' needs to improve his performance in his role of a boss by doing the following:

1. First see if he has any available resources in that particular role or general transferable resources which he has not fully deployed. If resources are available, then he should deploy them and bring his performance above the MPL being signified by the red line.
2. In the absence of available resources, he needs to take transferable resources from other roles and increase his performance in this role. This will naturally mean that his performance in some of his other roles will fall. He should ensure that this fall doesn't take him below the MPL in that particular role or roles.
3. Suppose any borrowing of resources from other roles will cause an imbalance as other MPLs will be violated then in this case, he has to take a good hard look at

the Elective Roles that he has and consider dropping one or more of them. This is where one of the functions of this classification becomes clear: when one considers dropping of a role, he must only consider this from the elective roles and not for the mandated roles.

There two important pitfalls that need to be avoided while attempting to create a balance.

The first is to clearly define the MPLs from the Islamic Ideology and not on personal whims and wishes or sometimes incredulous expectations from the society. Many norms in our society are considered as MPLs and the whole life becomes imbalanced when people try to meet those. The case that could be presented here are the norms which are operative in the society regarding marriage.

The second pitfall that has to be avoided is that to increase our performance in one role, we transfer resources from the other roles and call this sacrifice and rightly so. But sometimes an extreme is witnessed where we continue to drop performance to a point where we go below the minimum performance level and instead of understanding that this is wrong we continue to call it sacrifice. This is not sacrifice but a case of stupidity that in order to create a balance or aim for accomplishment in one role we have created an imbalance in our life. The most common example is how many people try to perform in their role of an employee or business owner at the cost of their health which comes under the role of self.

There could be multiple ways of distributing resources within roles and still have a balance. The question of how to create the most optimum distribution of resources can be answered by having clear long term visions in each of the roles that we have[12]

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[12] This subject is covered in detail in our Strategic Visions workshop

A step by step intervention for creating a balance in our life

In this section of this paper, let me highlight a step-by-step intervention for creating balance in our lives:

1. Make a list of all Mandated and Elective Roles in our life.
2. Research and find the MPLs in each of the roles: you are in for a many pleasant surprises as you would find that many MPLs are much below what you had in mind. Many of our participants have reported that after this realization they are leading much more peaceful and less stressed lives as they were trying to live up to unrealistic ideals. Of course to find these MPLs we would have to go to the relevant experts: for our health we would need to start with having a comprehensive health check-up and then meeting with a good doctor. In other roles we may have to meet with Islamic Scholars to take their advice.
3. Mark roles where we find that we are below the MPL and then develop a strategy to systematically improve our performance by:
    a. Deploying resources which are available in that role
    b. Deploying general transferable resources
    c. And in the absence of available resources, carefully taking resources from other roles, consciously lowering our performances in those roles while ensuring that the respective MPLs in those roles are not violated.
    d. And if this is not doable, seriously consider dropping some elective roles.
4. The above three steps will ensure that a balance is achieved in our lives. Lastly, to ensure that the distribution of resources is optimum, we would need to develop clear long term visions[13] in all roles and let these visions dictate as to how the resources are allocated.

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[13] This is the subject of our Strategic Visions workshop and the Vision Retreat. For details on these programs, please visit www.timelenders.com. Also, our manual for the Strategic Visions workshop is also available free at our website.

Appendix A

<u>About Timelenders</u>

Timelenders is a management consulting and training company. We strive to inspire individuals and organizations to take up worthy and powerful visions; we then assist them in the pursuit of such visions through training, individual counseling, corporate consulting and restructuring.

By training with us, you join the rapidly expanding Timlenders' family, which now comprises 7,000 members from over 45 nations.

We have provided services to nine Fortune 500 and 14 Forbes Global 2000 companies. Our clients also include regional giants, small and medium size businesses, the Government and the not-for-profit sector. Our clientele includes names such as Etisalat, Emaar, Nestle, Pfizer, Philips, Siemens, Telenor and Total.

Appendix B

Comments

"I am sure that today I will benefit from it [workshop] in improving my life, work and family."

Dr. Jamal Mohammad Al Kaabi

Manager

Health Authority-Abu Dhabi

"I feel immense pleasure to mention here that through my years of experience I thought what ever I am thinking to plan ahead in my personal or professional is going perfectly alright and it is in line with my thoughts of what I have planned but to my great surprise I have re-discovered my inner self that I have to re-align my entire commitment/vision both in this life and the life hereafter. Definitely Timelenders is doing a great job. It has changed the perspective of my life and true meaning of my life."

Mr. Jonathan Huang

Sr. IT Consultant

MOL Pakistan Oil & Gas Co.

Appendix C

<u>A Sample List of different roles in life</u>

¬   Son

¬   Father

¬   Husband

¬   Grandfather

¬   Grandson

¬   Daughter

¬   Niece

¬   Nephew

¬   Uncle

¬   Aunt

¬   Neighbor

¬   Cousin

¬   Boss

¬   Subordinate

¬   Mentor

¬   Colleague

¬   Friend

¬   Engineer

¬   Doctor

¬   Wife

¬   Rotarian

¬   Member of the Lion's Club

¬   Khateeb

¬   Member of the Yacht Club

¬   Muslim

¬   Hindu

Appendix D

<u>**Suleman Ahmer - The lead Facilitator**</u>

Suleman's interest in the power of visions to transform organizations has resulted in consulting work with groups in Pakistan, the UAE and the US. He has consulted with both local and multinational organizations. Suleman has taught the fundamentals of visions to thousands of individuals in Bahrain, Kuwait, Pakistan, the UAE and the US. Suleman founded Timerunners, Inc. in Chicago in 1999; Timelenders, Inc. in Boston and Karachi in 2002 and Timelenders FZE in the UAE in 2007. Through Timelenders, Suleman teaches courses such as Strategic Time Management and Strategic Visions. The list of companies trained includes global giants such as GSK, Nestle, Pfizer, Philips, Siemens, Total and Telenor.

Before founding Timelenders, Suleman was associated with two Chicago based multinationals. He has worked in the US and Canada, the Caspian region, the Middle East, Central Asia and Eastern Europe. He has traveled to over 25 countries. Suleman draws inspiration from his international management experience and his background in research.

Suleman is an award winning author and has three works: the essence of his travel experiences are captured in 'The Embattled Innocence' published in the US and his current focus is 'Strategic Time Management' and 'Strategic Visions'.
His articles on geopolitics and history have appeared in prestigious magazines in the US such as The Washington Post for Middle East Affairs. He has spoken on these topics at over 40 US universities including the Harvard University, MIT, Emory, the University of Pennsylvania and Rutgers.

Suleman is an engineering graduate of the University of Nebraska and has done research with the US Air Force and the US Navy in solid state physics.

Appendix E

Quiz on Work-Life Balance: Reflections and Interventions

1. The Islamic perspective of balancing of life is:
    a. Based on the Western corporate model
    b. Is in line with the modern trends today
    c. Differs with the dominant intervention paradigms originating in the West
    d. Very complicated

2. Balancing of different areas of our life:
    a. Is an age old challenge
    b. Is a challenge of the middle ages
    c. Is a challenge that came about after the Industrial revolution
    d. Is a challenge that comes about whenever someone faces a challenging mother-in-law

3. Contemporarily, work-life balance:
    a. Has a uniform, singular definition
    b. Has many definitions
    c. Has two definitions; one is Western and the other Islamic
    d. Does not need a definition as we have a feeling of what it is

4. Work-Life imbalance has two main symptoms; one is a disturbed family life and the other is:
    a. Poor health
    b. Poor relationship with the distant cousin's mother-in-law's, aunt's neighbor
    c. Neglect of self
    d. Frequent nightmares

5. We have quoted 'it takes a village to raise a child' because:
    a. It is an African quote
    b. It is the responsibility of the village to raise a child and not only of the parent
    c. In traditional set-ups, the responsibility of raising a child gets distributed to many people as people live together
    d. Parents were so busy that the people who lived around them had to get involved in raising of children
    e. Because people had so many children that the village had to step in and now it is not an issue thanks to fewer children
    f. It implies that we should have larger families only if we live in villages

6. Defined Ideology is an Ideology:
    a. Which one subscribes to
    b. Which one believes in
    c. Which has been clearly articulated and written
    d. Which is used by a person to define things like happiness, success, failure, etc.

7. Mandated roles are roles which your ideology doesn't permit you to drop under any conditions. (True/False)

8. Minimum Performance Levels are dictated by the dominant Ideology on which a society is based. (True/False)

9. All ideologies are in a state of flux. (True/False)

10. A person who distributes resources in different roles at random runs a risk of creating an imbalance in his different roles (True/False).