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INTERVIEW

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Myth or a reality?**

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The cultural inheritance

How can organizations ensure its culture transcends
time and still retains its original flavour

Best of Both worlds

Taking a cue from what Indra Nooyi recently quote, "Women can't have it all", this HR Roundtable explores the challenges women employees face when it comes to achieving the perfect balance between career and personal responsibilities.

BY SANNITA CHAKRABORTY SAHA

Our expert panelists Anita Sinai Guha, Regional Delivery Manager - Americas, ANZ, ASEAN, Korea, & Japan, IBM Learning, Padma Rajeshwari Nandi, Senior Director, Head - Learning & Talent Development, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories, Aparna Sharma, Country Head- HR, Lafarge, and Manika Awasthi Menon, Director- People Success, Sapient India, and Dr. Sujaya Banerjee, Chief Learning Officer, Essar Group discuss integral aspects of maintaining work-life balance, ponder on how to strike an equilibrium and making the right work-life choices.

Work/life balance is at best an elusive ideal and at worst a complete myth". Do you agree with this statement? Please elaborate.

ANITA SINAI GUHA: I disagree. It is possible to achieve a work/life balance though I admit it is challenging to maintain that balance for a significant period of time. I find it helpful to re-phrase work-life balance to work-life integration and will use a metaphor of 'dance' to describe the process of finding harmony. Let me elaborate.

Balance brings to mind the metaphor of a weighing scale - even a small change on one side can make the scale unsteady; out of balance. The dance metaphor, on the other hand, is more aligned to the way our work and life can successfully integrate. I may be doing the waltz and the music changes to jive. How do I respond to that change? Perhaps, there is some dissonance as I try to become accustomed to the new rhythm but

once I get it, I will adapt if I want to continue to glide on the dance floor. Now, the music changes to the fox trot and then to disco, and I must be ready to adapt again!

Work and life will continue to throw surprises at us - a client shows up unexpectedly, my daughter gets sick, a Bandh is declared - these are the changes in the music. They will create some temporary dissonance. However, if I can leverage my support system to adapt to the new rhythm, I can achieve work-life integration. It is not an elusive ideal but something that can be tangibly achieved with the help of a good support system and a new frame of reference. I, for one, am enjoying the dance!

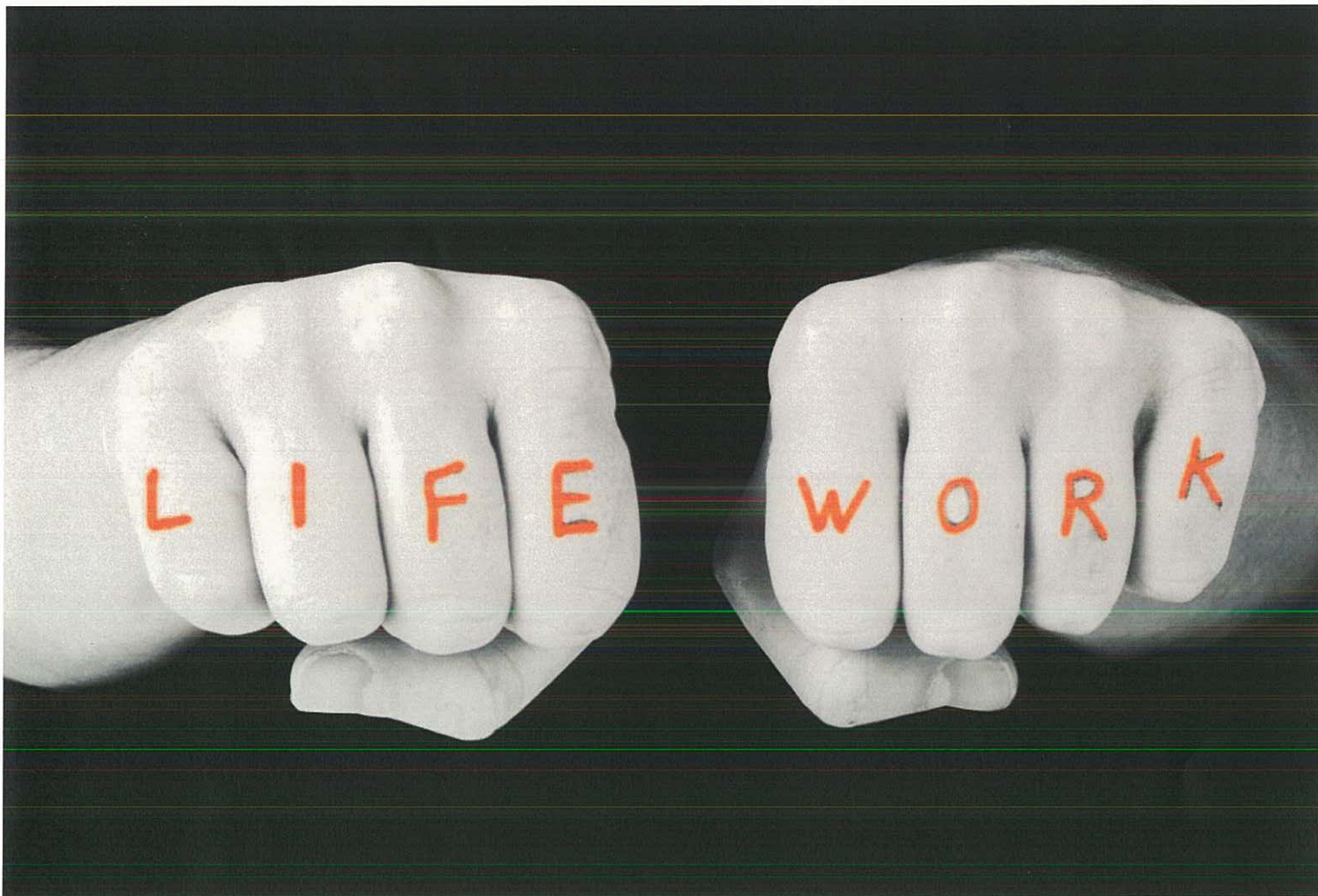
PADMA RAJESHWARI NANDI: This statement resonates with me. Work-life balance is only a myth, reality is all about work-life choices. If one wants to reach the top positions in corporate world or anywhere

close to it, he or she will necessarily have to make some choices. Consider an important meeting or official travel clashing with your child's Parent Teacher Meeting or concert? These things unfortunately tend to clash more often than we want them to. Which one to skip - is a matter of choice - not a matter of work-life balance. Take another example; you are eagerly awaiting a long-planned vacation with your family. An emergency situation at your factory demands your presence. You can choose to delegate it to someone (with the risk of things taking a worse turn) and go ahead with your vacation.

and life stress will keep on growing and increased expectations and choices around us push us to lead a "good life" It's time that we move from Work Life Balance to Work-Life Integration.

Something that I have learnt from the millennial generation is the concept of YOLO (You Live Only Once). Instead of blaming someone else for your plight, take control of your life and make choices around it - thereafter own the consequences. Be happy☺☺☺, this life is only for once!!!

MANIKA AWASTHI MENON: I don't think Work Life Balance is a myth. People assume



Or choose to stay back at work and cancel your leave. Whatever choice you make, it has an implication - either on work or personal life.

APARNA SHARMA: The way to look at Work-Life Balance is not from a tradeoff point but from a point of "Choices You Make". Work

that work life balance is the same as minimal working hours which is not correct. It is about what matters to you in your personal and professional life. People have work life balance issues when they are unable to maintain a balance and create time for things that matter to them. Having clarity on what

HR ROUNDTABLE ►►

you are driving towards is important. I believe, it is in your control- because it is you who is on the driving seat. Once you prioritize what is important to you, you need to juggle and prioritize different things in your day to make it happen.

DR. SUJAYA BANERJEE: I believe work/life needs to be defined for each individual because of which the Americans say 'work-life balance is YOUR problem - not the Employers'. I would say individuals must prioritize for themselves that constitutes commitment and gratification as professionals or personally, pursue what works for them. Work-life balance can be achieved but needs to be worked on constantly. It's a matter of choices - often work in life if there is passion and calling.

PANELISTS



ANITA SINAI GUHA, Regional Delivery Manager - Americas, ANZ, ASEAN, Korea, & Japan, Global Segment Leader for First & Upline Managers, IBM Learning, is a graduate from Harvard University. She has 20 years of experience in training, organizational development, learning and knowledge management fields. Her global experience spans a range of industries including the public sector, pharmaceutical, shipping, beverages and IT.



PADMA RAJESHWARI NANDI, Senior Director & Head - L&D, Dr Reddy's Laboratories Ltd. Over the past 20 years (15 years out of which have been dedicated to talent development), Padma has enabled organizations and individuals build capability across frontline, managerial and leadership levels. Prior to joining Dr. Reddy's, she has worked with Infosys and Larsen & Toubro, among other large organizations.



APARNA SHARMA, Country Head-Human Resources at Lafarge India, is at the helm of Human Resources function for Lafarge, a French multinational. She persistently and passionately values freedom, authentic relationships and realization of potential of people. With 17 years of experience, she has worked in different roles in the HR function in organizations like Monsanto, Novartis, UCB & Deutsche Bank.



MANIKA AWASTHI MENON, Director- People Strategy, Sapient, India. She has close to 14 years of experience across several domains in Human Resources in a global context spanning Business Unit Level HR partnership, Setting up and running HR Shared Service Centers' (for employee life cycle processes, policies and compliance), HR functional expertise and Corporate level HR.



DR. SUJAYA BANERJEE, Chief Talent Officer at Essar, has been a Human Resources professional for over 24 years and has transformed the HR functions in several leading organizations during her career. She is a passionate HR professional having set up world class Performance and Talent Management programs through her assignments at ADNOC.

Top organization heads such as Indra Nooyi, President-Pepsi Co, Sandra Peterson, Bayer CropScience CEO have talked of sacrifice and trade-offs in their personal life to make it to the top in their career. Do you think that life-work balance is still a raw nerve to press in the corporate world?

ANITA SINAI GUHA: I agree that we can't have it all. There are sacrifices and compromises that need to be made throughout our lives as we prioritize different aspects of our work and personal life. Organizations need to recognize this and provide support to employees to help them integrate work and life so that they can retain engaged employees.

PADMA RAJESHWARI NANDI: Trade-offs and sacrifices are a part and parcel of achieving professional success. People talk about drawing a line in order to maintain work-life balance, but essentially it's all about making choices. Consider the example of a young mother with a high stress job and long working hours. One lady decides to move to part-time working so that she gets enough time to spend with her child, and also stay in touch with work. Another lady decides to put her child in a day care facility that offers support for extended hours. And a third lady sends her child away to her mother - staying in another city - so that she can focus on her work and the child is also well taken care of. Needless to say, there are pros and cons, trade-offs and sacrifices made in each decision. But, it's a personal choice that one makes. More importantly, there is nothing right or wrong about any of the decisions.

APARNA SHARMA: Most of the times, the greatest barriers we face are the ones we create for ourselves.

This might sound strange but how many of us actually believe we are capable of scaling big heights. How many of us stop and actually ask ourselves: Am I capable of going the distance even if I am the only one who believes? This is not the glass ceiling of the corporate world. This is the glass ceiling of our minds.

From a corporate perspective, women still face gender pay gap. We still encounter gender stereotypes. There is a common belief that men worldwide desire top jobs more often than women. Is there an "aspiration deficit" among women? According to popular belief, women do not negotiate or hard bargain as well as men.

MANIKA AWASTHI MENON: I personally

don't think it is a raw nerve as I don't think having a work life balance is about reduced working hours but it is about spreading your work in a day in a way that allows you to pursue other priorities that are important to you while balancing your work priorities. Having seen enough people, putting in crazy hours and ultimately burning out or realizing that their personal life is suffering to the extent where they need a sabbatical or a change in role, I believe if you have clarity on what your life priorities are, you need to be able to have the determination to work towards them. As an example, I see enough people- both men and women who take out time to ensure they are there for important school functions and on those particular days they do call out their boundaries and leverage the flexible opportunities offered by the organization.

Having personally experienced this, I believe organizations are more and more open and sensitive to ensuring that people have a well-balanced life. It is absolutely acceptable at Sapient to hear both men and women ask for flexible time to make time for things which help people drive towards a balanced life.

How can women employees use such trade-offs and sacrifices as an element of strength to overcome prejudice at the workplace?

ANITA SINAI GUHA: Globally, the responsibility of housework and childcare continues to fall predominantly on the shoulders of women so we need to create a good support system to manage these. In India, many of us have the luxury of being able to afford housework support (maids/cooks) and full or part time in-home care (nannies/ayahs). Some of us are lucky to be living close to or with extended families - in laws, parents, cousins - and they can also assist.

However, our world is in a state of flux - nuclear families are increasingly more common than joint families; reliable and affordable domestic servants are becoming harder to find; also, many of us have an added responsibility of elder care in addition to child care. The day care / crèche service / elder care industry is not regulated enough in our country to be even 50% reliable. Meanwhile, expectations at work seem to only increase over time with longer hours, greater complexity and increasing competition as the new normal.

Many companies are beginning to appreciate the challenges and, in their effort

to retain women employees and to encourage them to embrace more leadership roles, they are making special efforts to introduce programs to support and empower women in their organizations. At

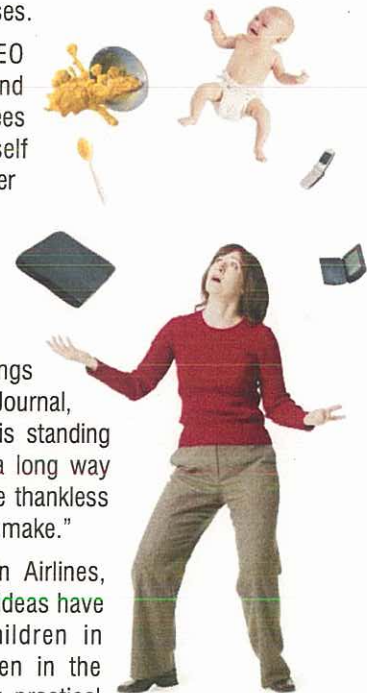
Did you know?

The term 'Work-life Balance' was first coined in 1986 in reaction to the unhealthy choices that many Americans were making in favour of the work place, as they opted to neglect family, friends and leisure activities in the pursuit of corporate/work goals.

A provocative front-page article in the New York Times took a critical look at Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg's new book, *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*, and the accompanying publicity campaign, generating wide-ranging responses.

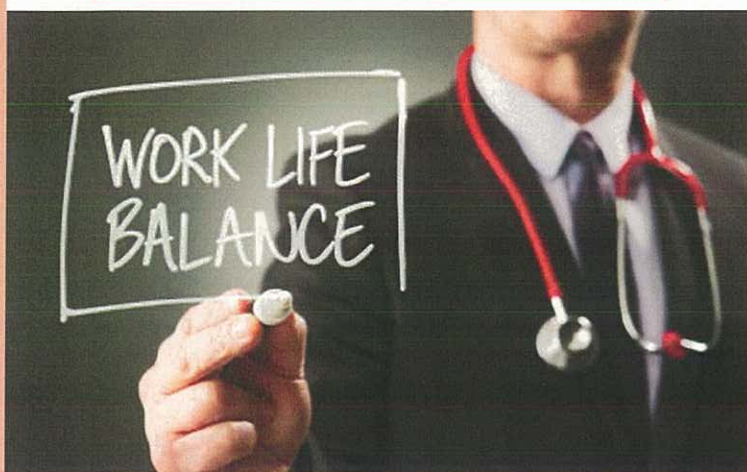
In February 2013, Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer announced the end of telecommuting for its employees as of June 2013. Mayer herself returned to work two weeks after giving birth. Some business analysts and former company employees applauded the decision, but others are less sanguine. One Yahoo worker, quoted in Kara Swisher's "All Things D" blog from the Wall Street Journal, said, "When a working mother is standing behind this, you know we are a long way from a culture that will honor the thankless sacrifices that women too often make."

Richard Branson, CEO of Virgin Airlines, has noted that some of his best ideas have come from engaging his children in conversations about work. Even in the busiest of schedules, the most practical and effective way we can live is by aligning our personal priorities of work, family, health, and well-being. Such realignment can bring huge gains in emotional and physical energy, not to mention greater clarity and focus at work.



IBM, we have a host of programs to attract, develop and retain women and these have gone a long way to improve the work culture for all employees and to create a more inclusive environment for women. Some of the initiatives include flexible work options, special leadership training targeted for women, day care service support, education for managers and our recruitment staff

Research shows...



► Caring for others remains primarily a female responsibility. While the percentage of women in the workforce has risen from 43.3% in 1970 to 58.6% in 2010, women continue to also work as the primary caretakers of children, ill or disabled family members or aging parents. According to a 2009 report from the National Alliance for Caregiving, between 59% and 75% of those caring for at least one ill or disabled relative are women. Nearly two out of three family caregivers are employed outside the home and nearly half live in households earning less than \$44,100 (twice the federal poverty level for a family of four in 2009.) Research shows that couples who didn't fit the perceived norm of a male breadwinner and the female caretaker were judged harshly.

► The report, "The Persistence of Male Power and Prestige in the Professions: Report on the Professions of Law, Medicine, and Science & Engineering," found that even professional women in prestigious positions lag behind men, who still wield considerable clout in the office. Women, however, continue to be well-represented in the lower ranks of the service industry.

► A 2011 study published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, "Evidence That Gendered Wording in Job Advertisements Exists and Sustains Gender Inequality," demonstrated that study participants responded to the language in job postings differently depending on their gender. The researchers, citing the "social dominance theory," suggest that such responses can be used to discourage women to enter male-dominant occupations, and vice versa.

about the value of gender diversity, and more.

PADMA RAJESHWARI NANDI: I don't think such sacrifices or trade-offs should be used to overcome prejudice at workplace. Suppose, I skip my child's sports day in order to take up an official travel, can I flaunt it to highlight my commitment to work? Some women may tend to; but I would personally recommend

against it. One should remember that it's not a challenge unique to women. Another male colleague, may have done a similar sacrifice multiple times. And there is no reason to assume that fathers love their children any less than mothers and do not miss important events in their children's lives. Women employees can better overcome prejudice at work by demonstrating high level of commitment and dedication to work. And ensure that work does not suffer due to personal reasons.

Aparna Sharma: Be strategic. Thinking through a response rather than reacting in anger will benefit you more in the long run. Get some perspective on your experience. A friend or mentor can help you sort out what's worth fighting against and what you're better off ignoring. Use your anger constructively. Instead of lashing out, turn that energy into something positive. Adopt a beginner's mind in a new situation. Just because your ideas were ignored last time, don't start assuming the same thing will happen. Being defensive will create new problems and won't solve the old one. Change what you can.

MANIKA AWASTHI MENON: The word sacrifice makes it seem like a lose-lose situation but the way I view sacrifice is when you are making time for a greater good which doesn't tie into your personal interests. Women can use such experiences at the workplace as this can help them make decisions which may benefit a team but may not suit each individual. By doing this, they can help the team focus on the greater good for the team and look beyond personal interests. This helps each individual learn the essence of working in a team and aligning to team goals.

DR. SUJAYA BANERJEE: Managing conflicting priorities, guilt, feeling torn - are all part of managing a career and home. One needs to constantly evaluate and make decisions on priorities to get focussed and achieved goals. In my experience, I have rarely ever compromised on work deliveries or refused a stretch assignment or timelines during my career. In fact, I am the prime candidate for any challenging assignment at my workplace. As a result I find the organization rallies around you when you have a compelling personal situation. One can't make a habit with personal challenges though; else a working female can lose credibility easily and may not get counted on for delivering important jobs/projects.

To be Continued...