Strategies to Attain Faculty Work-Life Balance

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ABSTRACT

Background: Achieving work-life balance can be a challenge for academic faculty members. The multifaceted demands and expectations of the role can affect faculty satisfaction and the ability to attain work-life balance. The ever-changing trends in higher education, including technology and online education modalities provide additional factors that can inhibit faculty satisfaction and work-life balance.
Aims: This paper explores barriers to achieving work-life balance such as cognitive dissonance, emotional dissonance and burnout. Understanding barriers is essential to developing strategies to promote work-life balance.
Methods: An integrated review of the literature on life balance of academic faculty in all disciplines using multiple online databases.
Conclusion: Strategies, organized around mentoring and self-care, include promoting physical health, connecting socially, and practicing mindfulness as a cognitive approach can help counteract work-place stressors and help in achieving work-life balance.

Faculty morale, academic pressures, campus climate and culture, working conditions, support services, collegial relationships, and promotion and tenure processes are all elements of faculty work-life in higher education. Achieving work-life balance can be a challenge for senior and mid-career faculty members, but also for newly hired and non-tenure track faculty as well. New faculty members often lack preparation and training in the academic role. Although they possess discipline-specific knowledge, skills and scholarship, they are ill-prepared for the demands of teaching, advising, scholarship and academic citizenship. Many new faculty need significant support in teaching and learning practices, mentoring into the role, and help assimilating into the institutional climate and culture (Richardson & Alsup, 2015). Non-tenure track faculty often carry heavier teaching assignments and have less job security or advancement opportunities (Ott & Cisneros, 2015). Tenure-track faculty must navigate the complex and unfamiliar process of promotion and tenure. Once tenure is achieved, mid-career faculty are expected to assume more leadership roles and service responsibilities and this leading to greater job dissatisfaction (Mamiseishvili, Miller, & Lee, 2016; Topp, Hershberger, & Bratt, 2017). These elements can impact faculty satisfaction and ability to attain work-life balance. Faculty need to identify and utilize skills and tools to not only survive but thrive in the world of higher education.

This article explores trends in higher education impacting faculty satisfaction and the goal is to provide tools and strategies to enhance work-life balance.

TRENDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Academia is changing from the institutions of higher learning a decade ago. Student demographics are more diverse, and teaching-learning practices are being transformed by technology. These factors can facilitate or inhibit faculty satisfaction and work-life balance. Results from a 2015 Gallup survey of faculty workplace engagement showed that faculty who reported a negative campus climate and hostile work environment experience lower faculty morale, more job dissatisfaction and less faculty engagement; which is a predictor of faculty attrition (Jaschik & Lederman, 2015). Another area of concern is the growth in non-tenure track (NTT) faculty. Based on an analysis of the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) national dataset, NTT faculty are becoming the majority in higher education (Ott & Cisneros, 2015). This leads to structural inequities within academic institutions. NTT faculty are less satisfied and report being treated like second-class citizens (Kezar, 2013). NTT faculty experience heavier workloads, less autonomy or opportunities for advancement, hierarchical inequality and job insecurity (Ott & Cisneros, 2015).

Job stress is noted for tenure-track faculty and midcareer tenured faculty as well. A 2013 - 2014 national survey of undergraduate faculty, noted similar issues with work-life integration, lack of support for developing research agendas and teaching skills, lack of collaboration, and uncertainty regarding tenure, reappointment and promotion processes, role expectations and lack of a collegial relationships (Eagan et al., 2014). These factors are likely to hinder faculty success and job satisfaction. Predictors of faculty success include realistic role expectations, work-life balance, and a positive collegial environment (Stupnisky, Weaver-Hightower, & Kartoshkina, 2015). Factors that incentivize or disincentivize job satisfaction with the academic role include the amount of time devoted to different elements of the job, quality of students and facilities and available support services and resources (Touranguea, Wong, Saari, & Patterson, 2013). Since faculty are a major resource within academic institutions, this level of dissatisfaction and lack of engagement is concerning and needs to be addressed (Curnalia & Mermer, 2018)

Student Demographics

Demographics of college students are shifting away from the traditional 18-24-year-old profile to include older, nontraditional, diverse and first-generation student learners. Schools are experiencing a flattening, and in some cases, declining enrollment. Nationally, college enrollment from 2010 - 2015 decreased by 5% and the number of part-time students increased by 15%. High school graduates are expected to decline over the next decade (Carter et al., 2012). As a result, we are seeing more institutional commitment to student equity and inclusion of first generation, nontraditional, low income and minority students (Bransberger & Michelau, 2016; Hainline, Gaines, Long Feather, Padilla, & Terry, 2010).

Technology and Online Education

One of the most pervasive trends on college campuses today is the integration of technology in the classroom and tremendous growth in distance education (Allen & Seaman, 2014). Nationwide, undergraduate enrollment has decreased from 17.3 million in 2014 to 17 million in 2015. During that same time, enrollment in distance education

courses increased from 27.7% to 29% and enrollment in exclusively online programs increased from 12.1% to 12.3% (McFarland et al., 2017; Snyder, De Brey, & Dillow, 2018). While technology is revolutionizing higher education, faculty attitudes toward and motivation to engage in online education merits further discussion.

As the number of online courses and student demands for quality tech-savvy instruction increases, faculty are required to learn new teaching pedagogies and learning platforms for this shifting education paradigm (Carter et al., 2012; Edwards, Perry, & Janzen, 2011). Online teaching is often an expectation for non-tenure track and adjunct faculty and yet faculty receive inadequate preparation, training and technological support (Seirup, Tirotta, & Blue, 2016). Faculty perceptions of online courses range from being dehumanizing, inferior, frustrating, difficult, time-intensive and not effective to offering flexibility, unlimited opportunities and increasing access to education (Chiasson, Terras, & Smart, 2015; Merillat & Scheibmeir, 2016; Panda & Mishra, 2007). Most concerning is the numerous studies reporting faculty experiences and perceptions of teaching online as much more time and labor intensive for both course development and instruction time (Allen & Seaman, 2009; Chiasson et al., 2015: Merillat & Scheibmeir, 2016). This is an additional barrier for attaining work-life balance.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Understanding life balance is essential for addressing the ability of an educator to survive and thrive under the pressure of multi-faceted academic demands. These demands may limit a faculty members ability to spend time on needs they deem important to them, thus limiting the potential to achieve life balance. The demands on academic faculty lead to high stress, which may affect the achievement of balance between work and life roles (Eagan et al., 2014). According to Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2017), faculty believe life balance may not be attainable and is always in a state of flux.

Life Balance

The terms life balance and work-life balance are used broadly and with slightly varied definitions in the literature. Based on a comprehensive literature synthesis on the conceptual definition of work-life balance, Casper, Vaziri, Wayne, DeHauw, and Greenhaus (2018) concluded that work-life balance is a self-appraisal of how well one combines work with non-work roles. Similarly, Greenhaus & Allen (2011) define life balance as a multi-modal approach derived from a sense of effectiveness and satisfaction in multiple life roles. Work-life balance can be further defined as a transition toward flexible and fluid boundaries between one's work and life outside of the workplace (Sorenson, 2017), which correlates with the life balance definition most applicable to educators, the ability to manage external pressure from a competitive work environment with leisure and or family (Khallash & Kruse, 2012).

Life Balance in Academic Faculty

Faculty responsibilities include teaching, advising, research, and service. The wide range of roles inherent in the work of academic faculty from all disciplines, can affect the ability to find a balance. On average, faculty work over 56 hours per week (Steinberg, 2017). Faculty members often work beyond required loads due to the demands of university and of research requirements. Bentley & Kyvik (2013) studied faculty work hours in 13 countries. Faculty in the United States spend an average of 17.6 hours per week solely on the research component of their workload. Additionally, the demands of ever-changing technology, increasing diversity of students, and the tightening fiscal resources for

higher education, are just a few of the changes which affect the faculty role and ability to achieve and maintain life balance (Curnalia & Mermer, 2018).

Wilton and Ross (2017) looked at work-life balance for academic faculty by exploring challenges of balancing career demands and family in a small, undergraduate, teaching intensive campus in Canada. The participants of the study comprised 36% of the total faculty and 54% of the faculty with children employed at the campus. Three major themes emerged from the qualitative interviews: Flexibility, sacrifice, and insecurity. Issues identified by participants as problematic, such as tenure and promotion, faculty evaluations, and the focus on research are foundational to academia. Although the theme of flexibility was positive in the participant's reports regarding working hours and choice of research, the flexibility to work from home and work after hours contributed to the perception that the work is never really completed. The theme of insecurity included the pre-tenure process and a general lack of clear expectations in academia. Participants highlighted a "cutthroat culture that is very competitive and not fostering successful family life" (Wilton & Ross, 2017, p. 80). This competitive culture added to the burden of sacrifice. The researchers noted that all participants felt they had made sacrifices, especially related to research and work-related travel. In this study, female participants reported more sacrifice and less balance than the male faculty members, although the difficulty in obtaining an acceptable work-life balance existed for both genders (Wilton & Ross, 2017). Additional burdens for women in academia have been noted on other studies as well (Gardner, 2012; Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2014) particularly related to the competitive nature of faculty in the STEM disciplines (Ruder, Plaza, Warner, & Bothwell, 2018) and faculty incivility in nursing and other health sciences (Griffin & Clark, 2014; Peters, 2014; Wright & Hill, 2015).

In a study designed to examine faculty work and family conflict, Fox, Fonseca, and Bao (2010) surveyed 765 science and engineering faculty from nine Research I labeled universities. The findings included a bidirectional conflict of work and family. Faculty respondents noted that work interfered with family more than family interfering with work. Specifically, 76.7% of the respondents reported that work interfered with family life. There was a slight gender difference, although as with Wilton and Ross's (2017) research, both genders reported that work interfered with family at a high rate. The female respondents had a mean level of conflict of work with family of 3.19 compared to a mean of 2.89 for the male respondents. The study also found that faculty with a senior rank increases the likelihood of family to work interference, but decreases the work to family conflict, potentially because the research competition decreases as faculty reach senior rank. Fox et al. (2010) also found that the specific faculty field of teaching has no effect on reported levels of work family interference. However, the competitive climate of research and the perception of the level of competition was highly indicative of work to family conflict, indicating that faculty members have a difficult time managing pressure from the competitive work environment with family, decreasing the ability to achieve life balance.

The high stress of academia and its relation to work-life balanced was also discussed by Yordy (2018). The study evaluated data from the 2013 - 2014 Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) Faculty Survey of 10, 019 full time faculty teaching at universities across the United States. The study sought to determine if high levels of career related stress affected faculty members' work-life balance by analyzing the relationship of career related stress and achievement of a healthy work-life balance. The results found that six variables significantly predicted the inability to attain a healthy work-life balance for faculty. The lack of personal time, self-imposed high expectations, committee work, research/publishing demands, institutional procedures, and colleagues create stress that influences work-life balance in faculty.

BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Researchers have examined the constructs of cognitive and emotional dissonances to explain and describe the discord leading to job satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Emotional experiences, burnout and job satisfaction play a critical role in turnover (Lee & Chelladurai, 2017). Employees who display emotions that are incongruent with feelings as educators do, experience the emotional exhaustion component of job burnout (Kenworthy, Fay, Frame, & Petree, 2018). Cognitive and emotional dissonances have been used to explain and describe the personal discord that leads to job dissatisfaction (Davies, Van der Heijden, & Flynn, 2017). This can contribute to the belief among academics that life balance is not possible in the role.

Cognitive Dissonance

Tensions between job demands, perceived level of control, climate and culture of the work environment can lead to incongruity and discord (Karanika-Murray, Michaelides, & Wood, 2017). Festinger's (1957) historic work on cognitive dissonance explained that people, "attempt to establish internal harmony, consistency, or congruity among their opinions, attitudes, knowledge and values" (p. 260). Festinger further states that cognitive dissonance causes psychological discomfort leading to motivation and the reduction of dissonance, in other words, inconsistencies of competing forces. An example of cognitive dissonance applied to academic faculty whose various roles include teaching, research, service, and publishing, all of which compete for time with the family.

The research on academic faculty regarding cognitive dissonance is sparse. A study by Fontenot, Hawkins, and Weiss (2012), concluded that nurse practitioner faculty experience cognitive dissonance because of the competing forces of job expectations versus how they are rewarded. For example, the participants reported the number of hours they work is not reflected in the salary they receive as compared to working in practice. In addition, this study identified the inconsistences between the expectations of faculty and administration. In a study of 734 academic scientists in the United Kingdom, Lam (2010) noted a growing discord between role expectations for scientists between their traditional academic roles and desires to be innovative researchers contributing to industry. In business schools, researchers have found that published school rankings against competitors or national benchmarks and scientific journal rankings for faculty publications can create tension between faculty and administration resulting in cognitive dissonance (Kodeih & Greenwood, 2013; Malsch & Tessier, 2014)

Emotional Dissonance

Hochschild (2012), a social scientist, explained that emotional dissonance occurs when one must display organizational emotions even if they genuinely feel other emotions. Studies have concluded emotional dissonance leads to stress, burnout and negative health consequences (Cheung & Cheung, 2013; Cheung & Tang, 2012). Cheung and Tang's study supported previous research relating emotional dissonance to burnout. They identified three dimensions of burnout which includes emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment.

Cheung and Tang (2012) examined the relationship of emotional dissonance and work-family interference. They concluded that there was a positive correlation between strain-based work-family interference and emotional dissonance. Strain-based work-family interference occurs when the demands in one role intrudes into and interferes with participating in another role, depleting personal resources (Nohe, Meier, Sonntag, & Michel, 2015). Finally, Cheung and Tang (2012), reported that employees experiencing high levels of emotional dissonance tend to

experience more negative emotions leading to dissatisfaction with work and interfering with family relationships. As Cheung & Tang (2012) note, emotional dissonance is bound to affect the family relationships which leads to family conflicts and added stress levels.

Burnout

Padilla and Thompson (2016) surveyed university faculty ($N = 1,439$) examining job satisfaction. Some of the factors leading to burnout among faculty are long working hours, demanding job duties including research, service, teaching, and grant preparation. They concluded that 27% of their participants reported they often experienced burnout. The main reasons faculty experienced burnout was the number of required hours worked led to decreased hours with family, loss of leisure activities, and less quality sleep. These studies have demonstrated that individuals who experience cognitive and emotional dissonance are at risk for elevated stress levels and burnout. The person's perception of the experience as stressful triggers a host of neurochemical changes in the body. Chronic activation of this stress response can lead to maladaptation, accelerated aging, and a host of health consequences including high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease (Tiedt, 2015).

STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING WORK-LIFE BALANCE

When burnout becomes a threat or reality, faculty should employ strategies to promote self-care, enhance resilience and restore faculty vitality for their work. As previously defined, life balance includes a multi-modal approach to well-being. It involves the management of roles, stress, cognition and emotion to successfully adapt to life's challenges. Similarly, Tabibnia and Radecki (2018) have broadly defined resilience as the ability to successfully adapt to adversity. Planning strategies, stress, cognitions, and emotions are all regulated by the brain. Neuroscience research includes empirical evidence for techniques and strategies that cause long-term psychological or physical health benefits by boosting neuroplasticity, well-being, and resilience in adults (Tabibnia & Radecki, 2018). Employee resilience training is organized around physical health, connecting socially, and cognitive approaches, which help to create a balanced lifestyle leading to achieving work-life balance as a whole (Robertson, Cooper, Sarkar, & Curran, 2015).

Self-Care Strategies

Physical Health. Sleep, exercise, and diet are elements of physical health that improves emotional well-being and resilience. For example, skipping just one night of sleep leads to neurological changes that compromise the brain's ability to execute tasks and regulate emotion, leading to more impulsive reactions to negative experiences (Anderson & Platten, 2011). Developing a routine of healthy sleep habits requires addressing multiple practices or lifestyle habits that interfere with sleep. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2018) lists the following essential health sleep habits:

- Keep a consistent sleep schedule, getting up and going to bed at the same time every day, even on weekends and vacations.
- Establish a relaxing bedtime routine (e.g., warm shower, herbal tea, small snack, decrease exposure to bright light by turning off electronic devices at least 30 minutes before bed).
- Avoid consuming alcohol before bedtime and caffeine late afternoon or evening.
- Avoid going to bed unless you are sleepy.

- If you are not asleep after 20 minutes, get out of bed.
- Limit daytime napping.
- Avoid consuming a large meal before bedtime.
- Keep the bedroom cool, comfortable, quiet and relaxing.
- Control cognitions or thoughts that worry you by employing relaxation techniques like guided imagery or breathing.

There are many positive effects of regular exercise on our physical health including the lowering of heart disease risk, expanding lung capacity, reducing excess weight, reducing risk of falls or fractures, and other physical improvements (Childs & De Witt, 2014). Athletes, however, have long reported a boost in mood with vigorous exercise. Nagahara and Tuszynski (2011), found that physical exercise is responsible for releasing brain-derived neurotrophic factor. This protein is responsible for connectivity, neural plasticity and neurogenesis in multiple brain regions which play a critical role in memory and learning but also regulating stress. It is important to note that all exercise is not created equal. Specifically, aerobic exercise supports neuronal growth in the hippocampus which lends itself to enhanced mood and resilience (Cotman, Berchtold, & Christie, 2007). The Global Council on Brain Health (2016) recommends the following:

- 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity each week as well as two or more days of muscle-strengthening activities.
- Evaluating your current activities and exercises and doing more, particularly if it's outdoors (unless you are already extremely active).
- Use the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Try new physical exercise and activities that you think you will enjoy.
- Challenge yourself a little bit more over time.
- Stay motivated and consider doing physical activities with other people.
- Try to keep moving throughout the day
- Be patient and persistent.

Diet is another component of physical health that can contribute to overall well-being. Broad dietary strategies for building greater resilience to stress include dietary caloric restriction while maintaining specific nutrition patterns (Redman & Ravussin, 2011). These strategies improve brain-derived neurotrophic factor production and therefore decrease inflammation, oxidative damage and dysfunctional proteins. The improved brain derived neurotrophic factor production results in improved mood and cognition as well as delayed aging and its associated diseases (Longo & Mattson, 2014). According to Sarris et al. (2015), the Mediterranean diet has the strongest data for supporting brain health. This diet consists primarily of vegetables, fruits, seafood, whole grains, lean meats, nuts, olive oil, and moderate consumption of red wine.

Connecting Socially. Positive social connectedness can have long-term effects on the central nervous system (Hari, Henriksson, Malinen, & Parkkonen, 2015). Chronic social isolation has shown to increase stress and hypothalamic-pituitary axis activation which can lead to brain cell loss in the medial prefrontal cortex and abnormal cell growth in the amygdala. In turn, these are the brain structures that regulate mood and decision-making (Hari et

al., 2015). In a study by Sherman, Cheng, Fingerman, and Schnyer (2015), perceived social support was correlated with positive brain changes in the medial prefrontal cortex and amygdala. In addition, social support has long been associated with lower risk for depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and stress-related medical conditions (Pietromonaco & Collins, 2017).

Expressing gratitude can have long term effects on subjective well-being. In a study by Kini, Wong, McInnis, Gabana, & Brown (2016), engaging in an exercise of writing a letter of gratitude had lasting effects on the medial prefrontal cortex three months later. This has implications for emotion regulation, social reward, and empathy. In addition, daily journaling of gratitude for two weeks increased life-satisfaction and reduced anxiety (Kerr, O'Donovan, & Pepping, 2015).

Cognitive Training. The way in which one experiences events or situations is guided by our thoughts about these events. Resilience is strongly associated with the ability to monitor for automatic negative thoughts and replace them with positive ones (McRae, Ciesielski, & Gross, 2012). This is called cognitive reappraisal or reframing. By replacing negative thoughts with positive ones, (e.g., like viewing a lengthy traffic jam as an opportunity to listen to a podcast) we can modulate the associated negative emotion and decrease stress.

The act of identifying or labeling our emotions can reduce the impact of negative emotion. Putting feelings into words (e.g., I am angry) can have lasting benefits by reducing autonomic or physiological responses when thinking of the event (Tabibnia, Leiberman, & Craske, 2008). Using language to express emotion can lead to deeper appraisal of the emotion and thoughts related to the emotion. This paves the way for deeper cognitive reframing and emotional regulation and boosting resilience and well-being.

Mindfulness is another strategy for cognitive training and increasing the sense of well-being. It is commonly described as the act purposefully paying attention to the present moment without judgment (Crane, Brewer, Feldman, & Kabat-Zinn, 2017). Mindfulness practices have been associated with the improvement of attention, positive emotion and sense of well-being, and improved relationship quality (Gu, Strauss, Bond, & Kavanagh, 2015). Neurological changes because of mindfulness practice include structural and functional changes in the prefrontal cortex and amygdala suggesting improved emotional regulation (Guendelman, Medeiros, & Rampes, 2017).

Literature supports mindfulness meditation such as focused breathing, the body scan, and loving-kindness compassion practices as a means of reducing anxiety and depression, and improving focus, attention, and emotion regulation (Davis & Hayes, 2011). Resilience building strategies are interactive and have an additive effect. Practicing and employing multiple strategies strengthens important neural pathways that increase the likelihood of stress resilience. While one strategy may have mild to moderate effect, they each are important in supporting the scaffold of building stress resilience (Southwick & Charney, 2012).

Work-Place Strategies

The workplace culture is one of the most important factors surrounding an employee's commitment and engagement to the job (Brunges & Foley-Brinza, 2014). In the academic setting, it is crucial to have a positive and collegial environment (Stupnisky, Weaver-Hightower, & Kartoshkina, 2015) to decrease the incidence of burnout. The ideal working environment is one that is not only safe, but free of incivility, and full of collaboration (Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015). An environment that fosters collegiality and community-building, open communication, and mutual respect may assist faculty in finding the ideal balance in their work and life roles.

Faculty development and mentoring are critical for successful adaptation to the academic role as well as important to faculty satisfaction. New faculty may be ill prepared for classroom or online instruction and are likely to be unfamiliar with instructional or pedagogical methods (Clinefelter, 2012). Faculty development should include an orientation to the institution with clear delineation of expectations for teaching, service, and scholarship. Additionally, the organization should provide a variety of training opportunities to promote teaching-self efficacy and skill development (Stupnisky, Weaver-Hightower, & Kartoshkina, 2015). Role development and mentorship is utilized to promote faculty retention and satisfaction (National League for Nursing, 2018). These methods are used to foster a positive work environment.

Both novice and mid-career faculty benefits from mentoring relationships. For new faculty, mentoring is a formal, structured process with clear goals and expectations using appropriately matched mentor-mentee pairs. This dyad helps the new faculty member assimilate to the new academic environment and build connections across the organization. Helping the new faculty member socialize into his/her role provides a sense of legitimacy to the mentee (Potter & Tolson, 2014). Some institutions use multiple mentors to address different needs such as orientation, career planning, developing teaching skills, or research and scholarship. Senior faculty can be sought out for career guidance and support from within the organization but would not necessarily need to be discipline-specific, whereas a research-mentor should be someone within a shared discipline skilled in research and scholarship. They provide networking opportunities, guidance for developing a research trajectory, and advice on scholarly dissemination (Feldman, Arean, Marshall, Lovett, & O'Sullivan, 2010). Mid-career faculty mentoring can be either formal or informal. It tends to be more fluid based on the mentee's needs; often focusing on leadership development, innovations, and strategies to prevent burnout and keep the passion for teaching alive (Feldman et al., 2010).

The mentoring model is not without challenges. There is a lack of incentive or recognition for the senior faculty members to assume a mentoring role. Additionally, with the trend in higher education to hire more non-tenure track faculty, there are insufficient numbers of experienced faculty to provide mentoring, or they become burdened by the sheer number of new faculty needing support which fuels their own workload burden (Barrett, Mazerolle, & Nottingham, 2017; Potter & Tolson, 2014).

SUMMARY

Academic faculty have a wide range of roles inherent in their work, independent of rank or tenure that affect the ability to achieve and maintain work-life balance. Cognitive and emotional dissonance create a risk for elevated stress levels and burnout among faculty members. In addition, the stressful triggers also create neurochemical changes in the body that can lead to health issues beyond the inability to experience a balanced life. Committing to self-care and workplace strategies can strengthen stress resilience and improve faculty satisfaction and the ability to attain work-life balance.

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