Work-life balance

All of us at some stage in our lives will face difficult or challenging times. Sometimes those challenges are work related; the effect of which can often be felt in all other aspects of your life. Recent reports by the Mental Health Foundation (2014) have reported that the increasingly demanding work culture in the UK is perhaps the biggest and most pressing challenge to the mental health of the general population.

Work related stress is estimated to cost Britain 10.4 million working days per year. One of the key ways to protect your mental health against the potential detrimental effects of work related stress is to ensure you have a healthy work-life balance. All of us are by now aware of the phrase ‘work-life balance’ but what does it mean and can it really be achieved.

The expression ‘work-life balance’ was first used in the UK in the late 1970s to describe the balance between an individual’s work and personal life. The Mental Health Foundation survey (2014) reported that:

- Over 40% of employees neglect other aspects of their life because of work.
- The more hours you spend at work, the more hours outside of work you are likely to spend thinking or worrying about work.
- 42% of women report unhappiness compared with 29% of men (which is probably a consequence of a woman’s competing life roles).
- Overall as a person’s weekly hours increase, so do their feelings of unhappiness.

The colleagues we work with and the culture we work in, have an impact and a contribution to make towards improvement of your work-life balance. Kasivisvanathan and Chekai in their article ‘The productive operating theatre and lean thinking systems’, put forward the idea that the philosophy of lean thinking can bring about improvements in productivity, patient safety and even staff well-being. This month’s article by Booth and Hall also reflects on how the implementation of TPOT in their workplace faced a number of challenges. What is clear is that their motivation and determination for change was resilient and ultimately successful.

‘Work smart, not long’ is one of the key actions identified by the Mental Health Foundation as one of the ways you can use to improve your work-life balance. This involves tight prioritisation i.e. allocate yourself a certain amount of time per activity and try not to get caught up in less productive events, such as unstructured meetings that can take up lots of time. This is akin to the idea of TPOT and is perhaps one positive way in which, how we organise our work can affect our work-life balance.

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Reference
Mental Health Foundation 2014 Work-life balance