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A study on work life balance as a function of demographic variables at an IT company in Bangalore

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ABSTRACT

In the world of intense economic challenges, striking a healthy balance of work and life outside the work offers potential for tremendous growth – Personal and Professional. The article is aimed at examining the WLB of software professionals that are impacted by the demographic variables like gender, age, marital status, managerial or on managerial level and salary level among employees of the company from IT sector. The empirical study also tries to understand weaker areas amongst the six components of WLB index that needs improvement. Review of literature followed by survey research using Work life balance scale by Udai Pareek. Based on the sample of 144 IT employees, it was found that gender has no impact on work life balance index. Marital status of an employee indicated to have impact on worklife balance, with unmarried employees having better WLB index. Age and managerial levels were found to have impact on WLB index. Salary level was found to have no impact on work life balance on the employees. The coping strategies provided in the study, tailor made for the specific situation can be adapted by many more IT companies operating in Bangalore. The findings of the study have major implications for formulating and implementing newer HR strategies and policies.

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Introduction

Any progressive organization needs to understand and strengthen the drivers of their business. Talented human resource is undoubtedly the most important factor of business that can make or mar an organization. It is very important for organizations to understand what ticks the employees and what stops them performing to their fullest potential. Work life balance of employees is a business imperative that sets apart a great organization from the rest.

Since last four decades, the labor market, employment, work and home life have undergone significant transformation as a result of factors such as changes in demographics, increased female participation in the labor market, increased levels of educational attainment, changes in the composition of households, the decline of traditional employment models and the rise of dual-earner families. The ripple effects of these changes can be seen in the nature of employment in the form of increased emphasis on flexibility, adaptability, team work and individual accountability. These changes necessitated the companies to take a harder look at the balance of work and personal life of employees. Work-life balance has become an important area of human resource management and is receiving increasing attention from government, researchers and management. Developed countries have established research centers for disciplines connected to work and family, like sociology, psychology, Organizational behavior etc. (Drago & Kashian, 2003). Developing countries like India has not yet picked up the trend, partially due to the gendered distribution of work and family roles (Bhalla & Kaur 2011)

An individual plays multiple roles in his life: employee, boss, subordinate, spouse, parent, child, sibling, friend and community member. All these roles can be clubbed under four quadrants Work, Family, Self and Friends and society. Demands and resources relating to all the four quadrants of life can have a

“Spillover effect”, affecting each other in an unproductive way. Work life balance is all about integrating demands and resources of all the quadrants without a dysfunctional conflict. Employers will majorly benefit if they try and get an insight into the type of work life balance their employees would need. Understanding the fact that interface between employees working life and personal life can be complex, varied and many a times very specific, acknowledging the same will go a long way in improved organizational performance.

IT sector in India:

India saw a big boom in information technology sector since late 1990s. The information technology sector deals with the design, development and management of both computer software and hardware applications. Today, it has grown to cover most aspects of computing and technology. The reason why it gained high importance is due to the improved accessibility, awareness and utility of technology. India was identified as one of the major countries for business process outsourcing due to relatively low economical labor cost. Many multinational companies set up their offices in India and the HR practices of the mother country was adopted with necessary changes. The significance gained by IT industry is due to the fact that it contributes largely towards global competitiveness, healthy GDP and defense capabilities of the nation. Economies of scale for the information technology industry are high. The marginal cost of each unit of additional software or hardware is insignificant compared to the value addition that results from it. (Economy watch 2010). This makes IT industry one of the major driver for growth and increased employment rates of any growing nation. As per the Nasscom report, by 2020, the sector would see a growth of 10 million direct employments and 20 million indirect employments. In the coming decade, there would be five million women employees and four million direct employees from Tier-II and Tier-III locations. (The Hindu,

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2010). Given that the IT sector in India is one of the progressive industries in India's service sector, it is imperative that this industry needs to utilize its major resource "Human resource" most effectively. IT sector in India is riddled with the problem of attrition. India Inc. is likely to see attrition rates as high as 31 per cent in the IT/ITeS sector, (TOI, 2012). IT companies are trying all the tricks in the book for retaining the talents of their company. Apart from economic reasons, the fall in attrition in 2011-12 was also due to the rise in retention and employee satisfaction programmes undertaken by IT firms. "Retention techniques, including job rotation, internal reshuffling of jobs, giving additional responsibilities, and, of course, wage hikes were other reasons for reduced attrition during this period," Surabhi Mathur Gandhi, senior vice-president (IT sourcing) at staffing firm TeamLease Services said (Business Today 2012)

National Association of Software and Services Companies (Nasscom), a representing body for IT and ITeS (IT-enabled Services) companies, has urged the industry to adopt a set of best practices that will promote ethical hiring and help industry address short-term challenges of attrition and talent management.

Addressing a press conference at an annual NASSCOM HR Summit 2010, Som Mittal, President, Nasscom, said India now became an epicenter for global best practices. With increased awareness on the importance of having employee friendly HR policies, more and more companies implementing varied policies under the umbrella of work life balance initiate.

What is Work life balance?

According to Clark (2000), WLB is the satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with minimum of role conflict. Work/life balance is a satisfactory level of 'fit' between the multiple roles in a person's life

"Work-life balance is the individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual's current life priorities" (Kalliath & Brough, 2008)

In the early 90's, work life balance was popularly known as "Work family conflict" and was widely researched and reported in organizational behavior literature. (Frone et al., 1992 and Williams and Alliger, 1994). In recent times, work life balance is understood as a healthy integration of work and family life activities and not the exact time spent on them.

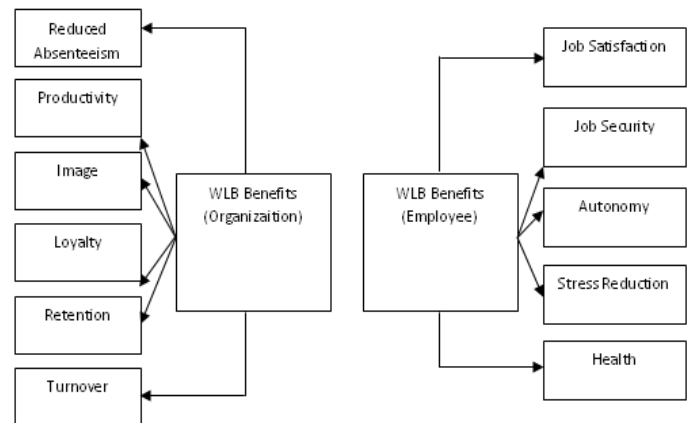
Work life balance: A business imperative:

According to a survey conducted by American Psychological Association, despite the fluctuations in economy, 67 percent of the employees surveyed will stay in a job if it allows them to focus on family and other needs outside of work. There seems to be a paradigm shift in the thinking of workforce. Majority of them are not willing to trade off their personal life for a high profile career. It is no more a zero sum game and gain in one area necessarily does not mean loss in the other area. According to an article in Harvard business review by Sinoway, Eric C (2012), consciously staggering the goals employees set for themselves may enable them to be equally successful in many dimensions of employee life over a period in time. Accenture conducted a mega survey in 2012 November, involving around 4000 employees of 33 countries and it was found that 52 percentage of the respondents turned down a job offer which affected their work life balance (Visser, A, 2013),

Programs and policies that facilitate work-life balance acknowledge that employees have responsibilities and lives outside of work and help individuals better manage these multiple demands. Conflict between work and other life responsibilities can diminish the quality of both work and home

life for employees, which in turn can affect organizational outcomes such as productivity, absenteeism, and turnover. Efforts to help employees improve work-life balance can improve morale, increase job satisfaction and strengthen employees' commitment to the organization. Additionally, the organization may reap benefits in terms of increased productivity and reduction in absenteeism and employee turnover.

A model of benefits of work life balance



Source: Lazar et al (2010).

Literature review:

Baral, R and Bhargava, S (2011a) studied the scope and coverage of work-life balance practices in some leading organizations in India. As per the study, Indian organizations need to consider work life balance as a strategic aspect of organizational performance. Guest (2002) has explored the reasons why work-life balance has become an important topic for research and policy in some countries. Lowry and Moskos, 2008, distinguished the activities under "Work" which forms paid employment from "Life", which are non-work leisure activities and family time. Work-life balance aims to improve conditions for all workers by altering work practices (Atkinson and Hall, 2009). Part-time working potentially create a "win-win" outcome for employer and employee (Lawrence and Corwin, 2003).

Increasing participation of women in technical, professional and managerial positions has also been accompanied by a steady growth in dual-earner families (Bharat, 2003; Komaraju, 1997; Rajadhyaksha and Bhatnagar, 2000; Sekaran, 1992). According to Baral R and Bargava S, (2011b), participation of women in the work force in gender neutral industries is improved by diversity and inclusiveness policy.

In a study conducted by Kapoor, Bhardwaj, and Pestonjee (1999), married women employees reported that they face difficulties in maintaining a balance between work and family and their careers suffer because of family responsibility

Guest (2002) argues that in the context of work and life, balance does not refer to an equal weighting of the two, but rather an acceptable, stable relationship.

Deborah Epstein Henry (2010) says technology is pushing people to want better work/life fit than in the past. Henry is the founder and president of Law & Reorder, a division of Flex-Time Lawyers, an international consulting firm based in Ardmore, Pa. She is also the author of the book

Research rationale:

IT sector employees, to a large extent do not have the traditional work life and family life distinction. Very often the employees work intrudes into family/personal life and vice versa. Growth in dual career households in India, coupled with increased number of nuclear families in India (Roy 2000) has

made work life integration a major challenge in India. Lack of government mandate with reference to WLB, unlike in UK, where legal compliance for WLB is mandatory has made work life balance a misnomer in India. In UK, Working Time Regulations (2007) and the Work-Life Balance Campaign have been in place for the last decade, while the Flexible Working Regulations have been enacted since 2003 (BERR, 2009). This kind of a legal mandate is not in place, which gives way for companies to use their discretion when it comes to work life balance activities.

Increased number of outsourced jobs in India created demand for catering to different clients at varied time zones (24/7 vs. 9 to 5), which threw the biological clock of BPO sector employees off balance. This has a direct link to the productivity & efficiency of IT and ITES employees, which has national relevance, considering the sector's contribution to India's GDP. Moreover IT employees work with more on computer interface, which reduces personal interaction with colleagues. This can cause dissatisfaction among employees, as social needs of employees are not met to an extent otherwise. One of the perils of high growth industry is high percentage of attrition. All the companies vie for the best talents and they lure their prospective employees with lucrative pay package, leading to high level of attrition, as much as 31 percentage. Providing right balance of work and life can check attrition to a large extent, as per the research of Carless & Wintle

Current work force in IT industry has a major chunk of generation Y employees, who are of less than 30 years of age. Their outlook towards work life balance is very different from gen X employees. They expect Work Life Balance to be an integral element in work place. According to Hewitt's Attrition and Retention Asia Pacific Study (HewittAssociates, 2006), the need for a balance between work and personal life has become an integral element of employee expectations from employers. Since the work life integration requirement varies between employees and as it also varies with same employee during different stages in employees work life cycle, it is necessary to have flexible work life balance policies at work place. Provision of a well balanced work and personal life can effectively reduce the number of dissatisfied and unproductive employees. Companies in Indian IT sector like Infosys and Wipro has employee wellness programs which help employees to cope with multidirectional pressure on employees from work and family life. Infosys has a wellness initiative named as HALE (Health Assessment Lifestyle Enrichment), which is an online portal concerned with helping employees to cope with stress related issues. The employees can also avail online counseling and expert opinion through this program. Wipro's wellness initiative called "Mitr" has a group of trained employees, who counsel their peers to handle stress effectively. Another interesting women empowerment initiative by TATA Motors plant in Pune is a group of cooperatives, managed and run by wives of employees known as "Grihini Udyog", which provide the company with varied items, as diversified as uniforms, spices, bags, eatables etc.

Suitable work life balance policies adopted in organizations were found to have profound influence on organizational performance. According to Lazar et al (2010), extending work life initiatives and practices to the employees and their families has positive influence on the organization.

Methodology of research:

The research is an exploratory study to understand the work life balance concerns in IT companies in Bangalore. The study

attempts to identify the work life balance of IT employees from varied demographic perspectives.

Objectives of the study:

The study aims at finding out whether WLB varies with demographic variables like gender, age, marital status, managerial or technical level & salary level among employees of IT sector. The study also tries to find out which of the six components of Work Life Balance of employees need improvement.

Effect of independent variables like Age, Gender, Marital status, Managerial/ Technical level and salary range on WLB total score was the core of the study.

Respondents profile:

The respondents are employees of a mid-size IT firm in Bangalore. A total of 144 respondents took part in survey research, of which 30 were managerial level employees and 114 were non managerial level employees. Majority of the employees belonged to the income group of 7 to 10 lakhs per annum. Almost 70 percentage of respondents belonged to 25 - 30 age group. Male and female respondents were equal in number.

Procedure followed in the research:

The study was conducted between September 2010 and January 2012. The company considered for research is a midsize IT firm in Bangalore. For getting reliable response from the employees, researcher interacted with the employees in the form of a half day session on challenges of work life and how to improve work life balance. After the session, the questionnaires were distributed and the employees returned the filled in response sheets. For the employees who could not attend the session, the questionnaire was e-mailed to improve the response rate. A total of 250 questionnaires were distributed and 144 responses were used for the research analysis. (Response rate: 56%). For measuring work life balance, 36 items questionnaire of Udai Pareek (Pareek, U and Purohit, S, 2010), which was standardized for Indian conditions was used. The total WLB score is formed of six components: Social needs: Items 1, 7, 13, 19, 25, and 31. Personal needs : Items 2,8,14,20,26,32, Time management : Items 3,9,15,21, 27,33, Team work : Items 4,10,16,22,28,34, Compensation & benefit : Items 5,11,17,23,29,35, Work : Items 6,12,18,24,30,36. Out of 36 questions, 18 questions were reverse scored to ensure that the responses are consistent and correct. Five point Likert scale varying from 0 to 4 (Not true.....to definitely true) was used in the questionnaire. 6 questions were used to measure each of the components of Work life balance index. Cumulative score of 6 questions of each factor of work life balance is multiplied by 4.17 to arrive at the Work life balance, which ranges from 0 to 100.

Personal interview was conducted with the HR manager of the firm to understand the types of work life balance measures taken by the company.

Hypothesis

Hypotheses were set keeping in mind the objectives of the research. To understand the influence of demographic variables on Work life balance, 5 hypotheses were set. H1 posited that work life balance index between genders do not vary significantly. H2 proposes that there is no significant difference in WLB between married and unmarried employees. H3 states that there is no significant difference in WLB between senior managerial level and lower managerial level employees. According to hypothesis H4, WLB index does not vary according to age. Hypothesis 5 states that WLB index do not vary significantly between salary levels of employees.

Data analysis:

Data was analyzed using SPSS. Data was analyzed in two stages. Data analysis was done to check the reliability of the questionnaire. Internal consistency of the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach alpha, which for the study was found to be .79. This is considered acceptable reliability as per the standard (above .0.7), set by Nunnally. Hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Results of the study:

Student t test (independent, two tailed) was conducted to ascertain the difference in gender affects work life balance. Test results showed that there is no gender difference in work life balance index. ($t=0.917$; $p=0.360$). To test H2, Student t test was used and the test revealed that unmarried employees have significantly higher work life balance index in comparison to married employees. ($t=2.418$; $p=0.016^*$). ANNOVa was used to find out whether different r managerial level impacted work life balance, ANOVA was used. The P value was found significant ($P=0.041^*$), indicating that senior managerial employees have better work life balance than lower managerial level employees. To test H4, ANOVA and Tukey post hoc were used to find out which of the age category will show significant difference in work life balance. The test revealed that WLB balance is significantly high for the age group 36 to 40 years than 30 to 35 age group ($P= 0.012^*$). ANOVA test was used to ascertain whether salary level has any impact on work life balance. Insignificant P value ($P= 0.411$) shows that salary levels does not have significant impact on WLB index.

Findings of the study and discussion:

The study indicates that Work life balance do not differ between genders. Both male and female employees did not show significantly different scores in work life balance. This is in line with the findings of study conducted by Malik et al (2010). This is also supported by another study by Chaudhry A L., Malik M I., Ahmad I (2011), which says there is no gender difference in work family conflict. This finding is also supported by findings of Frone et al (1992 a), Eagle et al(1997), Milkie and Peltola (1999), Hill et al(2001) and Wesley and Muthuswamy (2005)

Unmarried employees seem to balance work and life in a better way. This finding is in line with the study of Caligiuri, P.M and Tung, R.L (1999), where it was concluded that unmarried employees generally experience less work / family conflict. To help the married employees, better employee assistance programs (EAP) can be formulated, keeping in mind specific challenges that could be more difficult for married employees.

Age affects work life balance. Employees of age group 36 to 40 years showed better balance in work and life, in comparison to employees of lower age groups. This follows the logical theory that work life balance requirement vary at different stages in life of an employee. This finding is supported by the study conducted by Williams K J and Alliger G M(1994), which says there is a negative correlation between age and work life conflict.

Senior managers seem to have better work life balance than rank and file employees' and this could be due to the fact that they have more resources at their disposal, which helps them in balancing work and life.

Salary as variable did not have any significant impact on work life balance of employees.

Table 1 shows the WLB index scores of the six components of work life balance of employees of the IT Company. These six components represents work related and person related factors of work life balance.

Table 1: Work life balance index

WLB parameter	Score on 100
Comp & Ben	72
Team Work	66
Work	63
Time Management	52
Social Needs	48
Personal Needs	46

Overall WLB index is found to be 57.8. This indicates that employees are not having a very healthy work life balance.

Teamwork score is 66 %. This means that employees meet the expectation of team members. The score for *Compensation & Benefit* is 72 %. This shows that compensation & benefit provided by the company meets their financial requirements. The score for the component *Work* is 63%. This indicated that right kind of work is provided to right person. In other words, placement is done meticulously by the company by matching the employee competence with the job profile. The score for *Personal need* is 46% .This is an indicator that employees feel that they are not able to take care of their health and needs of family members. The score for *Social need* is 58%. This again throws light on the fact that employees are not able to attend social gatherings and they are not able to spend enough time with friends. Lastly, the score for *Time management* is found to be 52% .This shows that employees are compromising their time on some activities for completion of other activities of perceived importance. Employees feel that they meet the deadlines and schedules at work at the cost of their families' time.

Suggestions for improving work life balance of employees

From the survey as well from interaction with employees, it was found that employees' requirements are very different from one another and their perception about work life balance is also very diverse. This indicates the necessity to change the work life management approach of "One size fits all ". Tailor made work life balance practices should be adopted by companies rather than blindly going by industry best practices. Having said that, it is still a good idea to have a database of best practice examples and use the most feasible ones after modifying it to the company's requirement.

Many times employees reach a dead end of communication when certain sensitive matters connected to organization is involved. Hence there is a need to open up more channels of communication for speedy access to useful information. Providing a congenial atmosphere at work where employees can interact informally, like creating a casual space for chatting and unwinding with colleagues, (try to avoid frequent usage of "Since the study....")

Since the study indicates that the employees are pressurized against time due to working longer hours in the organization, company should adopt a system of measuring the employee performance by output, not by hours. This will set a healthy trend of task completion as well as sense of confidence and satisfaction among employees. Since autonomy in job is one of the high level motivators, job redesigning to provide more autonomy to employees may give employees more sense of flexibility.

Findings show that employees are not able to devote enough time to take care of their personal health. The company should consider spreading health consciousness in the form of awareness campaign on health issues, healthy diet and importance of regular exercise. Regular health check provision can be done at the office. Alternately, executive health check up vouchers could be given, where employees can utilize the

services of the health centres with which company has tied up with.

Since female employees scored lower in personal need, some child care facility like a tie up with the daycare centre or preschool near the office premise can be done for improving the quality of work life of employees. Partnering with nearby child care providers will ensure uninterrupted and quality performance from young mothers.

Employees travel on foreign assignments and most of the times feel helpless when it comes to the care of elders in the family, during their expat assignment. Provision of elder care, especially for employees who often travel abroad can be done to combat this problem. Since time management is found to be one of the challenges faced by employees, help can be provided in the form of provision of a service agency for taking care of routine activities like bill payments, insurance payment etc.

Commuting to work is considered a big negative by many employees and therefore provision of better transportation facility will help the employees to deal with conflicts and work delays due to long and difficult commutes. Official car pooling scheme could also be considered by the company.

Since women employees scored poor in team work, more women oriented programs will help in improving camaraderie among women. Even though commitment is considered as one of the virtues in the work place, HR team should watch out for signs of over commitment and over involvement among employees, as this will only lead to burn out and finally underproductive employees.

Involving family members of the employees in annual day celebrations or such events can help the family members to get better insight into the employees' workplace demands, thereby reducing friction at home.

Provision of psychological counselor in the office will help the employees to cope with personal as well as professional issues. Many companies have identified the benefit of having a counselor in their work place. Access to psychological help at work can work wonders for the mental health of employees.

Lastly, it is understood that flexibility is the key to work life balance. Telecommuting and flexible work arrangements can tremendously reduce work conflicts, stress and work interruptions and improve the work life balance of employees, resulting in increased productivity.

Conclusion and recommendations:

The study shows a little skewed Work Life Balance towards more work and less personal aspects of employees. Employees are compromising on their personal time for completion of office related task which disturbs the work life balance.

Revisiting the HR policies to have tailor-made and more employee friendly practices with an accent towards taking care of personal and social needs will be helpful to the organization in the long run. Research studies suggest that work life balance may vary at different stages in life cycle of an individual's career life. Hence organizations are expected to have flexible and open minded approach for ensuring the right balance.

Having a good set of work life balance policy is not good enough. The HR department of the company should bring awareness among the employees on the available policies and importance of availing them for more conducive work.

There definitely is an institutional gap when it comes to work life balance in India. Government of India should take a cue from the UK, where work life balance is a mandate and is enforced in the form of working time regulation, Work life balance campaign 2007 etc. China is another developing country which pays a lot of emphasis to work life balance. In Hong

Kong, China, Work Life Balance week is celebrated and it has become the need of the hour for the Indian government to come up with some mandate for improved WLB of employees, which ultimately will benefit the organization.

Ultimately, it should be understood by the employee that imbalance in work and life is a natural phenomenon and it will vary during different periods of the professional life. The tradeoff between work and family should be analyzed thoroughly and expected benefits of concentrating on one should be evaluated against the cost of doing the other. Employees need to understand the priority at each point in their life and choose the right mixture of work and life activities for better work life integration.

Limitation of the study and scope for future research:

The study relies on the responses of the sample of employees of the IT sector company. Since the sample size is limited to 144 respondent from a single IT company from Bangalore, findings of the study cannot be generalized and applied to all the IT firms. Besides, the study focuses on a typical work set of IT industry. A comparative study can be done in future, involving different work set up as in the case of health care sector and hospitality sector. Since the study was undertaken in an Indian IT company, a comparative study with a multinational company could be conducted in future to understand how well foreign company work life balance policies are accepted by Indian employees. Future study can also incorporate organizations perspective of work life balance, as the current study revolves around employee perspective of work life balance.

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