

Assessing Work-Life Balance Among Indian Women Professionals

Deepak Chawla & Neena Sondhi

Work-Life Balance is an area of concern for organizations and individuals alike. An experiential survey of 75 school teachers and 75 BPO women professionals was carried out. Both the sectors were evaluated on six sub-scales – job autonomy, fairness of rewards, organizational commitment, work exhaustion, perceived work overload, work-family conflict. A composite and sector wise regression analysis demonstrated that organizational commitment, job autonomy and perceived work overload are strong contributors to a sense of balance for an employee. Indian professional is looking for supportive work places that help them manage their multiple roles. This would have a spillover effect on the commitment and low attrition rate and at the same time enhance an individual's Work-Life Balance.

Deepak Chawla (dchawla@imi.edu) and *Neena Sondhi* (neenasondhi@imi.edu) are Professors in International Management Institute, New Delhi 110016.

Introduction

The present world might be characterized by revolutionary innovations and accelerated growth and development in every possible field but the other side of the coin relates to the extended working-hours. Compounded to that are gadgets like the web enabled mobile technology which makes one accessible to the work environment 24X7. As a result, the one area of life which most individual's neglect is maintaining a balance between work and family.

Work-Life Balance refers to the effective management and synchronization between remunerative work and the other roles and responsibilities that are important to people as 'individualized' human beings and as a part of the society. Considerable research has highlighted the importance of Work-Life Balance for organizational performance (e.g. Druskat & Wheeler 2003, Durham, Knight & Locke 1997). Among the divers variables that have been studied, work autonomy, fairness of rewards, work-family conflict, family responsibility etc have assumed special importance and are consistent with the trend towards provid-

ing more autonomy to employees. Since Work -Life Balance is an important indicator of a professional's health and well being a number of researches have attempted to identify the predictors and antecedents of this construct.

Work-Family Conflict & Work- Life Balance

Families are cultural systems which try to maintain a sense of continuity and equilibrium and enhance each family member's growth.

One of the most significant of these predictors is likely to be the conflict arising out of the professional having to juggle multiple roles. The most important of them is familial roles. One of the earliest works on family and its organizational systems is by Minuchin (1974). He states that families are cultural systems which try to maintain a sense of continuity and equilibrium and enhance each family member's growth. Jarrod M. Haar (2004) explored work family and family work conflict as a predictor of turnover intention, and tested the moderating effects of perceived work family support from employers on these relationships. That work family conflict can encourage employees to consider leaving their organizations (Anderson, Coffey & Byerly 2002) also has been extensively studied and proven. This conflict would have a significant bearing on the Work- Life Balance of a professional. The resulting emotions and stress would lead the individuals to feel drained out because of

their familial pressures and inability to fulfill their work related roles. This led us to formulate the following hypothesis.

H1- Work family conflict will negatively influence Work-Life Balance among the working women. With the increase in work- family conflict, the chances of Work Life Balance reduce.

Work Exhaustion & Work-Life Balance

A related variable that is likely to impact a person's sense of well being and subsequently his/her Work Life Balance would be - burnout or work exhaustion. Moore (2000) has defined "Work exhaustion as the depletion of emotional and mental energy needed to meet the job demands."

Extensive research demonstrates that one of the prime causes of this exhaustion is the imbalance between work and personal lives. Innstrand et al. (2008) found that there was reciprocity of relation between work family interaction and exhaustion. This bi-directional – both predictor and consequence approach is in line with the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory as well. Hobfoll & Freedy (1993) have attempted to explain how burnout could be a key factor impacting the balance between work and personal lives. Frone & Yardley (1996) found that offering work place family supportive programs such as flexi time, child care assistance can be extremely helpful in reducing individual stress and help manage the work and family roles effectively.

Work related exhaustion that occurs in any organization would hamper employee's sense of well being and thus becomes an important antecedent of Work- Life Balance. Thus it was hypothesized that fatigue that a person felt as a consequence of her work role would have a detrimental impact on her work-life balance:

Work related exhaustion that occurs in any organization would hamper employee's sense of well being and thus becomes an important antecedent of Work- Life Balance.

H2- Work exhaustion will negatively influence Work- Life Balance among the working women. With the increase in work exhaustion, the Work Life Balance will also reduce.

Job Autonomy & Work Life Balance

Even though there are a number of job related variables that can impact a person's sense of well being, it was felt that the more a person is in control and has the freedom to perform the work assignment at his/her own pace and method the greater will be the Work Life Balance. This freedom to decide on the schedule and method of doing work has been defined as job autonomy (Bailey 1993). In fact Parasuraman & Alutto (1984) state that people who have better control over their work environment are less stressed and perceive their family life as more positive and happy as compared to those who

do not. Ahuja and Thatcher (2005) found that IT based jobs permitted more flexibility amongst the professionals and thus the employees could better balance the competing demands of work and personal lives. However, Batt and Valcour (2003) found no relationship between autonomy and work family conflict. Whitehouse, Baird and Hoskin (2008) have also suggested that senior staff and managers who have greater autonomy and decision discretion and more access to supportive resources are better able to achieve a positive Work-Life Balance.

Independence and the ability to manage ones work roles and responsibilities thus are significant in contributing to a person's sense of well being and subsequently to her Work-Life Balance. Thus it was hypothesized that:

H3- Job autonomy will enhance Work-Life Balance among the working women. With the increase in autonomy at the work place, the chances of achieving better Work-Life Balance increase.

Role Overload & Work- Life Balance

Even though organizations aim to be objective and humanistic when designing job roles, the employees might experience a sense of being overburdened in fulfilling the assigned responsibilities. Bacharach et al. (1991) state that role overload is the result of having too many things to do at one time. Carlson & Kacmar (2000) found evidence of role conflict and role overload as predictors of work and personal lives conflict.

In most work related literature the impact of unreasonable work load and deadlines has been extensively studied. However in this paper we are investigating the impact of the subjective perception of work overload, as the same work roles conceptualized in a genderless world as manageable become unreasonable for the women professionals handling significant “caring” responsibilities on the personal front. Gutek et al. (1988) also found a high interdependence between a woman manager’s employment demands and familial responsibilities. Rajadhakshya and Bhatnagar (2000) take the gender based socialization process to explain how societal structure influence men into taking work roles and women to identify and take on the caring family role. Aryee et al. (2005) also found this to be true and female professionals experienced a higher level of parental overload than men. Hence in this study the authors decided to investigate the impact of the perceived work load as a predictor of Work- Life Balance rather than looking at the actual work overload. This was hypothesized as:

H4- Perceived role overload will hamper Work- Life Balance among the working women. With the increase in perception of the workload at the work place, the chances of achieving better Work -Life Balance decrease.

Organizational Commitment & Work-Life Balance

Organizational commitment has been defined as “the strength of an individual’s identification and involvement in a par-

ticular organization” (Porter et al. 1974). However, this is one variable on which there might be reciprocity of effect that is whether the employee would be more sincere and loyal to an organization that supports and enhance his / her lifestyle (Schein 1996) or vice versa. The more “Supportive” organizations shape an implicit psychological contract (Rousseau 1995) between the organization and the individual. This aids and enhances his work / non work conflict and at the same time increases an individual’s sense of commitment. Alvesson (2002) calls this a social exchange, a mutual and fair exchange, where a supportive organization is perceived as “fair” and thus enhancing the desire to reciprocate to one’s employer through higher commitment. However, it is perceived that a mutually symbiotic relationship would enhance the organizational work culture and an individual’s sense of well being and reduced propensity to leave and lowered employee turnover. Thus another antecedent of Work Life Balance that was studied was organizational commitment and hypothesized as:

The more “Supportive” organizations shape an implicit psychological contract between the organization and the individual.

H5 - Organisational commitment will have a positive impact on the Work-Life Balance among the working women. With the increase in commitment to the work place, the chances of achieving better Work- Life Balance increase.

Fairness of Rewards & Work-Life Balance

Compensation and fairness of rewards is generally believed to be hygiene and a basic factor in today's work environment. However that in no way undermines the fact that in a transactional world of give and take it is the most immediate benefit that an employee receives as return for the expertise, effort and experience, they get to the work place (Equity Theory – Adams 1965). The perception of equity or inequity is an individual's evaluation of what are the effort put in by him and the return received as fair or unfair. Thus hygiene or otherwise, fairness of rewards is one of the most important reasons for a person's willingness to stay in the organization (Gupta & Shaw 1998). A number of studies have examined the relation of fairness of rewards with job satisfaction (Meyer et al. 2000, Ramaswami & Singh 2003), organizational commitment (Griffeth et al. 2000) and turnover intentions (De Coninck & Bachman 2005). However, the concept of fairness has rarely been seen as a direct predictor of Work- Life Balance. The paradox being that, even though the basis of rewards and benefits are to balance the individual effort with the organizational output, it is often ignored when one moves on to higher order needs. But in this paper, we would like to give this antecedent critical importance as almost all organizational HR policies initially are based on this basic need, when designing the employee benefit package. This gives rise to the following hypothesis:

H6 - Fairness of rewards will enhance the Work- Life Balance among the working women. With the increase in this perception of fairness, the Work- Life Balance is also likely to increase.

Scope & Framework of the Study

Work- Life Balance is an important consequence of the professional world for both men and women. However, in the present paper we are examining the nuances of the construct from the perspective of the women professional. It has been suggested that in examining the relationship between work and personal lives, gender is a significant moderating variable. Whitehouse et al. (2008) state that, even though women participation in the work force is widely accepted, majority of the caring responsibilities of the family lie with the fairer sex. Though the phenomenon has global relevance, the issue is more significant for a developing country like India.

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As a country surges towards development and enlightenment, its social structure becomes more open and progressive in providing equal opportunities to all members of the society. In India, this development has resulted in better opportunities for the Indian women in terms of education and employment opportunities.

Present study deals with not only pressures of being women and being a part of the family in contemporary India, but also with the pressure on organizations to attract and retain women in the work force. The changing socio-cultural balances in India and the increase in the number of working women, make the issue more relevant for the study.

Work-Life Balance has been studied from two perspectives. The first focuses on work related factors and their impact on family life, while the second perspective focuses on family focused factors and their effect on the work life. This study builds on integration of these two perspectives in investigating both work and family pressure in their influence on the performance of working women. Thus the intention was to cover the vast arena of professions that are most popular with Indian women professionals, by taking two segments that are on two ends of the profession continuum. The two distinct segments of working women selected for the study were school teachers and the BPO employees. The reason for choosing these strata are that the working women in these two strata's have altogether different demands which require different approaches to maintain healthy work and personal lives. School teachers have an early start and early end work day whereas it is diametrically opposite for the BPO workers. Teachers' job is a day job like that of a banker or Chartered Accountant, whereas the BPO workers' job is similar to the ones being performed by nurses, airlines staff and hotel employees.

Since the major thrust of the study was to assess the contribution of different parameters influencing the quality of Work-Life Balance among the identified working women professionals the two segments were assessed independently to understand the demands that the dual roles posed for the Indian women professionals. To execute this objective the set of hypotheses formulated (as indicated earlier) can be mathematically summarized as:

$$WLB = f (JA, WFC, OC, WE, PWL, FOR)$$

Where WLB	=	Work -Life Balance
JA	=	Job autonomy
WFC	=	Work family conflict
OC	=	Organizational commitment
WE	=	Work exhaustion
PWL	=	Perceived workload
FOR	=	Fairness of rewards

The above model states that Work-Life Balance is a function of job autonomy, work family conflict, organizational commitment, work exhaustion, perceived workload and fairness of rewards.

Research Methodology

The above stated objectives were pursued using a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. The samples were drawn from school teachers teaching class sixth and above and BPO execu-

tives. The selected sample had a minimum of two years of work experience. Quota sampling was used to draw school teachers and an equal number of BPO executives (that is 75 members from each population). The data was collected in the NCR (National Capital Region, India).

For the qualitative part of the research, unstructured interviews were conducted from a few school teachers and BPO executives. The outcome of these interviews helped in developing the research instrument for the study which was pilot tested. The instrument consisted of six sub-scales measuring job autonomy, work family conflict, organizational commitment, work exhaustion, perceived work load and fairness of reward, using a seven point Likert scale.

The Work Life Balance variable was measured by a single question, based on a five point interval scale.

Reliability & Validity Analysis

Before testing the hypothesis, the data obtained from the filled in questionnaires was subjected to both reliability and validity tests for both BPO executives and school teachers. The reliability of the scale was tested using Cronbach alpha and the results are given in Table 1. The alpha values for various scales except one are quite high and therefore could be used for further analysis. Thus it can be safely said that the designed instrument could be used with confidence to measure the constructs defined by the authors.

Table 1: Results of Reliability test using Cronbach Alpha

Scale	No. of Items in the Scale	BPO		School Teachers	
		No. of Respondents	Alpha	No. of Respondents	Alpha
Job Autonomy	4	75	.642	74	.690
Work Family Conflict	8	75	.779	74	.754
Work Exhaustion	7	75	.791	72	.480
Perceived Work Overload	7	69	.733	64	.740
Fairness of Rewards	6	75	.830	74	.870
Turnover Intention	5	75	.952	74	.860

(Note: The sample size for the reliability calculations is different for different scales as it is based on usable results for that particular scale.)

The confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to assess the validity of the scale both for school teachers and the BPO executives. The KMO and the Bartlett’s test of sphericity were found to be significant amongst both the respondent groups (KMO value=0.547;

Sig.=0.000; and KMO value=0.549 ; Sig.=0.000, respectively). Varimax rotation was carried out on the variables and the result revealed six factors (in both the sample groups) which were largely following the original sub scales designed by the authors. The variance explained

by the six reduced factors was 61.4% in the BPO and 63.6% in the school teacher samples. Thus the results were in line with the scales formulated.

Findings

Table 2 indicates the differences in the profiles of the BPO executives and school teachers. BPO executives were much younger than the school teachers, majority of the BPO executives are unmarried whereas majority of school teachers are married. The average duration of service with the present employer for the BPO executives is less than half of the school teachers. BPO executives had less experience as compared to the school teachers.

To assess the probable antecedents of Work -Life Balance the dependent variable was regressed on the independent variables. The regression model as formulated in the hypothesis section was estimated using ordinary least squares. The estimation was carried out for BPO executives and school teachers separately. The results are presented in Table

3. The results for BPO executives indicate that 49.2% of variations in Work-Life Balance are explained by set of six independent variables. The impact of perceived work load emerged to be statistically significant at 5% level. Further, it has a negative impact on Work- Life Balance. Thus if an individual believes that she is overburdened in her job and is not able to manage her other roles there is bound to be discomfort and will lead to a sense of disquiet and lead to a reduced Work-life balance. These results are in a similar direction to those found by Rajadhakshya and Bhatnagar (2000) and Aryee et al. (2005).

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All the hypothesized statements were also validated in the predicted direction. Thus an individual who enjoys more free-

Table 2: Profile of BPO Executives & School Teachers

Particulars	BPO Executives	School Teachers
Age group (%)	20 – 25 (61.3%) 26 – 30 (30%)	31 – 35 (26.7%) 41 – 45 (22.7%)
Married	33.33%	85.3%
Unmarried	66.37%	14.7%
Spouse in Service	26.7%	64%
Nuclear Families	78%	66.7%
Average Family Size	3 – 5 persons	3 – 5 persons
Self Income (per month) (%)	Rs.10,001 – Rs.25,000 (86.7%)	Rs.10,001 – Rs.25,000 (90.7%)
Average Time on Present Job	2.7 years	6.7 years
Total Work Experience	4.18 years	10.5 years

Table 3: Estimated Regression Equation Results for BPO Executives and School Teachers
(Dependent Variable: Work Life Balance)

S. No	Group	Estimated Coefficients and t ratios of							R ²	F
		Constant	JA	WFC	OC	WE	PWL	FOR		
1	BPO Executives	4.436 (5.159)*	.089 (0.12)	-.12 (-1.39)	.165 (1.56)	-.058 (0.65)	-.307 (-3.022)**	.101 (0.29)	0.492	10.984**
2.	School Teachers	1.265 (1.223)	.286 (3.572)**	-.178 (-1.686)	.400 (4.42)**	-.85 (-0.81)	.015 (.144)	.09 (1.84)	0.591	16.35**

Notes: - Figures in parenthesis denote t ratios, * means significant at 1%., ** means significant at 5%.

dom to carry out his job, is more committed to his organization and believes the organization is fair in compensating him/her, is more likely to have a better Work-Life Balance. This is similar to the findings by Alvesson (2002). Also if his job creates a work –non-work conflict for him then juggling the two roles and maintaining the balance becomes difficult. The results were based on the earlier theories and models and were mostly found to be true. The nature of the industry, i.e. the BPO sector, is such that it involves shift duties which are strenuous and taxing for the professionals thus managing the two responsibilities becomes difficult. The industry generally pays well and this is the reason for a positive relation between fairness of rewards and Work- Life Balance. However, it was found that the results were not statistically significant.

The regression results for school teachers indicate that all the relationships found were in the hypothesized directions except for the relationship between perceived work load and Work- Life Balance. This means all but one hypothesis were validated. The impact of variable

job autonomy and organizational commitment were found to be positive and statistically significant at five percent level. This means that with increase in job autonomy and organizational commitment, the Work- Life Balance increases. More job autonomy implies more control over the time available to the women to manage work / non-work tasks and this has been found to be an important variable in influencing Work- Life Balance. The positive relation between job autonomy and organizational commitment is similar to the findings by Ahuja & Thatcher (2005). There is a transmitting effect of organizational commitment as well. The more conducive an employee's work place, the more is her commitment to her work role and higher her feeling of well being and Work- Life Balance. Thus the psychological contract between the organization and individual becomes stronger (Rousseau 1995). The predictive ability of the independent variables was found to be strong and significant. (R² = 0.591). This indicates that the more proactive schools which value the contribution of a committed and contributing human resource will need to provide more autonomy and may need to look at for-

malizing supportive measures to enhance and sustain their employees' Work-Life Balance.

With increase in job autonomy and organizational commitment, the Work- Life Balance increases.

The overall fit of the regression model in all the cases is reasonably good, indicating that organizations in the tested sectors need to cognize themselves of the fact that there seems to be emerging a mandate for them. This is equally compelling, whether for the more taxing sectors like the BPO industry or the softer, more lax –school teaching profession. In order to sustain and better manage their respective human resource, the need of the hour would be more supportive and empathetic HR initiatives. Also looking at the difference in the impacting factors, it needs to be remembered that all industries cannot be painted by the same brush and the initiatives would need to be generic and yet industry specific .

Conclusions & Recommendations

It is our firm belief that Work-Life Balance has come of age. In fact, it can be considered as the key driver of an individual's career decision. Most organizations are cognizant of the fact and have taken proactive steps to "humanize" their HR policies and create an enabling environment.

The most significant factor to influence and enhance Work- Life Balance was organization commitment (These re-

sults were found for the school teacher sample results). Thus if an organisation is perceived as conducive and supportive for the employee multi-tasking , it essentially follows that it will also have a more dedicated work force (Rothbard, Dumas & Phillips 2001). The other two significant factors that emerged were job autonomy (school teacher segment) and perceived work load (for the BPO segment) with which there was a directly proportional and inversely proportional relationship, respectively. Work family conflict had a negative association and fairness of rewards had a positive relation with Work-Life Balance. However, the predictive ability was not found to be statistically significant. One of the reasons for this could be because the sample size was not comprehensive enough to cover all types of BPO's – KPO's, BPO's, hospitality, banks etc. or schools (e.g. Public, Private, junior vs middle vs senior schools). Another reason could be a captive Indian worker who despite the conflict and unfair compensations manages her Work Life Balance because of her own need and temperament of self-justification. She reconciles with all tasks and responsibilities at her work place and moves on effectively.

Thus the results highlighted some interesting and significant facts that organizations need to address:

- Organizations need to reconsider whether mere compensation and benefits are sufficient to attract and retain their workforce.
- Organizations need to be supportive and empathetic towards their employees multiple roles and responsibilities.

- Employee expectations today are more in terms of supportive work places that help manage time. However, the futuristic organizations might need to provide roles definitions that permit more control over work schedules and tasks.

Limitations & Suggestions for Further Research

Thus what we unearth are organizational and sectoral implications that are formidable and demanding, but extremely exciting and challenging as well. The limitation of the current study was that multiple sectors were not analyzed in the study, as what we looked at were two sectors that seemed to be diametrically opposed in terms of the demands made on the professionals. The study could be extended across multiple sectors to assess the significance of the findings. This would be extremely interesting as in case, there are some universal truths that one uncovers, then the factor could be appropriately addressed while designing the HR policies and in case of differences, the problems could be handled at the micro level. In the long run these imperatives would go a long way in reducing attrition rates and leading to a robust and healthy organizational world. And in times to come a perfectly Utopian world would be one that assists in helping the employees, the organizations and the society at large to maintain a work / non-work; professional / personal balance.

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