

Factors Influencing Sabbatical Decision Making

Manjushree Ukey & Sasmita Palo

This study found that career progression and promotions are not linked to higher studies in the organizations. Many employees particularly at middle management level still want to avail it to pursue their aspirations and need for personal advancement. Recognition and respect from their professional counterparts and from society at large, job performance requirements and individual aspirations for higher education were the primary reasons to avail sabbaticals. Presence of hygiene factors such as maintenance of seniority, regular salary and retention of accommodation during sabbaticals prompted many employees to pursue higher studies by taking sabbaticals. Bureaucratic hurdles, family responsibilities, negative attitude of reporting managers are major deterrents that beat down the gusto of employees to apply for it.

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Introduction

The word sabbatical has its derivation from the word “Sabbath” and the literal dictionary meaning of it is ‘recurring period of rest’, ‘a leave usually taken every seventh year’. The concept of sabbatical can be traced back in the context of academics. It had started in the late 1880 in Harvard University in the form of incentive to attract potential faculty members. On the lines of Harvard University, other institutions like, Cornell University and Wellesley College brought such system in the middle 1880’s. Other universities like Columbia University adopted such a system in 1890 and Brown University in 1891 (Eells, 1962). Fifty US universities had introduced the system of sabbatical leave plans by early 20th century.

The term sabbatical has various connotations in today’s workplace. Sabbatical was the perk which was traditionally used by academics while people from other professions looked it upon in an envious manner. But businesses started adopting it as early as the 1960s, with fast-food giant McDonald’s Corp., computer chip maker Intel Corp., and some U.S. law firms being among the trailblazers (Elizabeth & Barbara, 2009). In mid

1990s, this idea came up with giving paid or un-paid leave of a month to a year to over-stressed employees of Silicon Valley (Trevor, 2007).

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Companies adopt sabbatical policy primarily to motivate their employees, re-energize them and maintaining positive attitude among them. In the survey conducted in 2000 by William M. Mercer, Inc. for Work/Life Initiatives, 15% of 450 large employers offered paid sabbaticals to their employees. Following the trend of giving sabbaticals, 100 companies which appeared in Fortune's list of 100 Best Companies to Work for in America provided sabbatical or similar type of leave. Now sabbaticals are the most popular amongst firms like computer, consultancy and law where people undergo lot of stress and burnout is at higher end (Elizabeth, 1996). Companies like Apple viewed sabbatical as a long term investment rather than a short term cost (Shelley, 1997). It offers six weeks paid sabbatical to its employee in every five years to relax and recharge themselves by staying away from the stressful work atmosphere. California-based Wells Fargo Bank has two types of sabbatical viz. the Volunteer Leave program and the Personal Growth Leave program. HSBC also has the policy of supporting its staff by allowing them to go on un-paid sabbatical up to the period of one year and they also give the priority to their employees who want to re-join the organi-

zation up to five years (David, 2012). Many health care executives are also taking positive steps of taking sabbaticals to get the knowledge of supporting industries such as banking, finance, information systems, marketing, and consulting (Andrew & Thomas, 2005).

A paid or unpaid sabbatical which can vary from a few weeks to a year can rejuvenate employees with vigour and energy. This vitality and energy can impact workplace in a positive manner when they return from sabbatical. The organizations that support their human capital in difficult times will see its reflections in the staff's loyalty (Kathleen, 2009). Sabbaticals also promote teamwork as people back each other in their extended absence. It gives time to employees for revitalization and also opportunities to other employees to have new challenges and opportunities for growth in their job (Kirk James et al., 2000). The organizations reported change in behavior of employees and more commitment to work after coming from such leave programs (Andrew & Thomas, 2005). Workplace sabbaticals are mostly driven by the need to learn new skills, higher educational aspirations, personal development, work-life balance, to participate in social cause, to take care of children etc. Many people, who have availed sabbaticals, all cited advantages such as increase in creativity, resilience in jobs, healthier life, more balance in their personal lives, and more connectivity to themselves as well as people around them. They integrate their experiences during sabbatical to day-to-day lives, thus making it the experience of their entire

life. They live with these experiences and enjoy what is called lifelong sabbaticals. The sabbatical period gives time to reflect on one's own life, space to relax mentally and physically and also enthusiasm to learn something new that person really enjoy in doing. It becomes life changing experience for persons who go on sabbaticals (Catherine, 2011).

The present study seeks to investigate the factors that encourage or discourage an employee from taking a sabbatical for higher education, and its policy implications for the organizations.

Research Methodology

The study was conducted in The Indian TransCo Board¹ based out of Mumbai. Mixed method approach was used to conduct the study. Data was collected in two phases during the period September 2014 to February 2015. In the first phase, a closed ended questionnaire was administered to 84 samples to elicit responses of employees on issues such as factors that motivate/d them to take sabbatical decision, their views on organizational sabbatical policy including its eligibility criteria, support and benefits extended to employees, hindrances, attitudes of different stakeholders before and after sabbatical etc. Samples were selected purposely. It included employees who are currently on sabbatical, have already availed sabbaticals, those who intend to take sabbaticals shortly and those who have left the organization af-

¹ Name of the organisation and respondents are changed to maintain anonymity.

ter availing the sabbatical. Two groups of employees i.e. top managerial employees and middle managerial employees were considered for the study. Both the groups of employees had engineering background and they were engaged in technical jobs in the organizations. In the second phase of the study, semi structured interviews were conducted with 15 respondents who have either already availed sabbaticals or currently on leave. Secondary data for the study was collected from various policy documents of TransCo.

Sabbatical Policy of the Case Organization

The Indian TransCo Board is the apex body of the Indian TransCo. It reports to the Parliament of India through the Minister of TransCo (India). Indian TransCo offers sabbatical up to two years for pursuing higher studies that have a direct and close connection with the sphere of the employee's duty. This period of two year can be availed at one time or multiple times, but the total period should not exceed two years in the entire service period of the employee. Sabbaticals can be given for various purposes such as: i) a training, a study tour or a course where TransCo employees may not attend regular academic or semi-academic courses, but the training or course is certified as a definite advantage to TransCo/ Government with respect to public interest and it is related to the duties of TransCo employees, ii) for studies that are related to framework of public administration, and iii) for the studies which may or may not have close connection with the work

of TransCo employees, but it would help in broadening the knowledge level and mind set of TransCo employees so that he/she can perform his/her duties better in order to work in collaboration with other branches of public service. TransCo also gives sabbaticals to a specialist or a technical person so that he/she can pursue a post-graduate course of study that is directly related to the sphere of his/her duties.

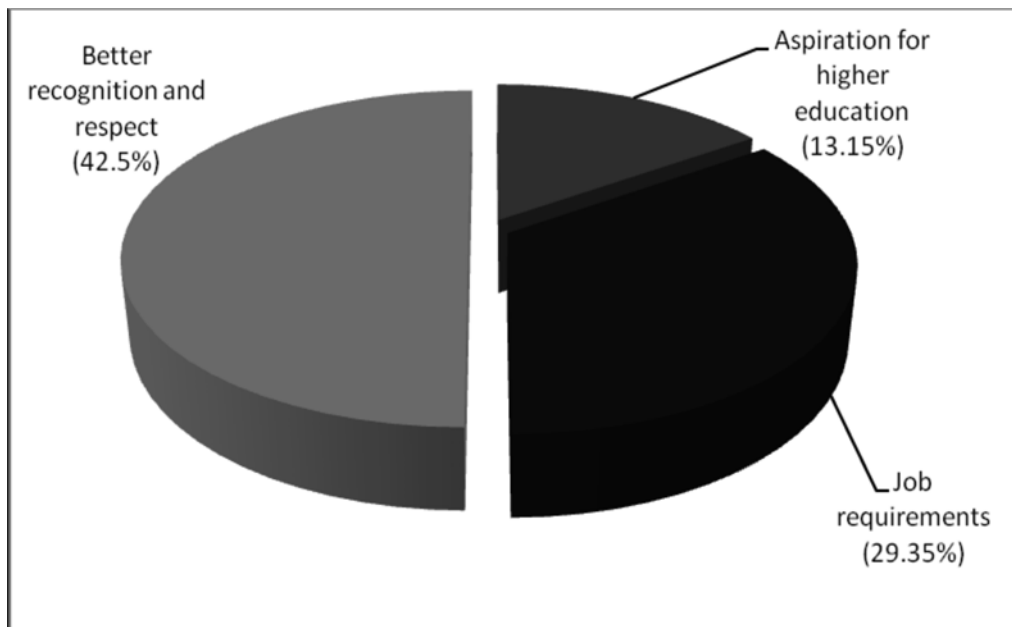
Motivation for Sabbatical

While having one on one interaction with the participants some interesting facts emerged and these were consistent with all the participants. All the participants knew it very well that there is no career progression in the organization even if they complete higher studies.

There were some intrinsic factors (motivators) that led to take the decisions of sabbatical. The study results presented in fig.1 indicate that personal advancement is ranked top by most respondents (69%) as the most important motivator for one to go for a sabbatical. When probed further, it was found that around 43% of the respondents were driven by recognition and respect from their professional counterparts and from society at large, 30% of them cited job performance requirements as the reason and 13% cited their individual aspirations for higher education as the motivating factor for them to avail sabbaticals.

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Fig. 1 Motivators for Individual Decision Relating to Sabbaticals



Shalabh, presently Head of Locomotive Manufacture at Central TransCo, said: “It was my dream to study at MIT. It is the best place on this planet for technology. I wanted nothing else in my life. I would give up everything else to study at MIT – to be able to roam in the same corridors as Nobel laureates and inventors. Even though I was doing very well – heading maintenance of largest passenger division in India – Mumbai, winning awards regularly in the TransCo. Still, My MIT dream kept haunting me.”

Swapan’s job on divisions of Northern TransCo involved dealing with unions and politicians and handling public complaints with respect to train facilities. Now he works as an academician in a reputed management institute in the country. Swapan recalled: “I had grown up in the midst of academicians, and I also wanted to grow up and teach. I was feeling stuck. This was not my calling. It was not all about the pay and perks or about free rail travel, bungalow and peons. I wanted to do what I feel I was born for.” The motivation for Swapan’s sabbatical was self –actualization to find his true calling in academics.

Ajay said: “I joined the organization out of sheer need for money. My father could not afford my siblings’ studies. He could not afford good medical treatment for my ailing mother. Being the eldest in the family it was my responsibility to support them. However, there was always an urge in me to study more and more. I used to feel restless when I saw my friends joined IIMs..... But gradually things changed in my life my sib-

lings got settledI applied for sabbatical and got it. I am happy now I did it at the right time.”

Most research participants wanted personal advancement and self-satisfaction out of sabbatical policy. All of them were working at senior positions when they left for higher studies. Going for higher studies came out of their own drive and initiative, and they were driven wholly by the higher level needs espoused by the Maslow’s theory of hierarchy of needs. Since they were working as senior officers, physiological and safety needs like need for money, security were not the issues. Their primary motivators were the need for self-esteem enhancement and serving their callings.

Role of Family

For the married respondents, constraints like family responsibility, relocation to a new place, financial burden for relocating especially if the higher education is to be taken up abroad, concerns for study of children were the major factors that governed their decision if to avail sabbaticals and if, yes, where to do so. Out of the 84 respondents, only one respondent stated that his family was indifferent to his decision to go on a sabbatical. 28.6% respondents felt that their families did not wholeheartedly support the decision to proceed on a sabbatical and 70.3% respondents felt that their families wholeheartedly supported their decision to go for a sabbatical.

Ajay said: “I got married. It was my wife who insisted me to pursue my

dream”. Prakash reminisces: “After getting married, my wife got me the application form for the CAT entrance examination. She supported in my aspiration for higher studies. I cracked the entrance examinations and got admission in IIM Calcutta. This involved relocation from Chennai to Calcutta. I wanted to take my wife along. Luckily, since I was newly married, there were no responsibilities of kids. I took her along to IIM Calcutta and stayed in family hostel”.

Location constraint is a major challenge encountered by many respondents. Anant Gadhave, presently heading the Diesel locomotive maintenance unit at Pune, said: “By the time I joined Indian TransCo, I had completed my M.Tech. degree from IIT, Bombay. I applied and got admitted to Doctoral programs in both India and US. But, my wife who is a doctor working at JJ Hospital couldn’t take a break from her duties. I was posted at Mumbai, so I decided to pursue my Doctoral studies at the Mechanical Engineering Department of IIT, Mumbai, since it did not involve any relocation for my family and I got to retain my TransCo quarter”.

Some of the respondents found out a way to resolve location challenges by taking a middle path. Shalabh said: “I could not have afforded taking my family along to Boston. I left for the US without taking my family. It was a small price to pay for fulfilling my MIT dream. After all, I waited so long for this. Now, I couldn’t have let it go”.

Swapan Gupta took his family along to Florida, where he pursued his four

year Doctoral program in Management. He says:, “We had been trying to have a child for some years. God blessed us. And soon after, this sabbatical came up at Florida. It was another dream coming true! But, I couldn’t bear the thought of leaving my wife and kid in India for four long rigorous years. All of us needed each other for emotional support and happiness. So I took them along! They were four great years.”

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Role of Peer Group

In addition to family, friends also play an important role in enabling an individual to take sabbatical decision by providing informal feedback regarding whether the decision might turn out to be a good one or not, information and knowledge about various programs and trends in higher education, and most importantly the much required emotional support to them. All the research participants equivocally advocated that friends have generally been supportive for the decisions of going for higher studies. Shalabh said: “Since all the aspirants are working in the same organi-

zation, they belong to same age group and many of them are friends with each other, there is a lot of informal discussions happened amongst us. During discussions, everyone was proud of the fact that their colleague and friend is an alumnus of MIT. This encouraged even officers of junior batches to try to get into MIT.”

While friends might not be stakeholders critical to the sabbatical decision of an individual, which is primarily guided by the individual’s organization and family factors, friends function as an important emotional support mechanism, which helps the individual to reinforce validation to her / his decision to take a sabbatical.

Shalabh said: “People under-estimate the value of friends as an emotional sup-

port to individuals. There is positive energy all around when we reminisce about our higher studies. Invariably, everybody agrees that that was the best period of their life. This encourages others in the friend circle to experience similar feelings. My friends within and outside TransCo supported my tough decision of going abroad for studies leaving my family in India.”

Organizational Factors

The hygiene factors which encourage employees’ sabbatical decision consist of the organizational sabbatical policy that lists out various benefits to be extended during the sabbatical. During the study, respondents were asked to rank various organizational policy related factors that influenced their sabbatical decision. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Ranking of Hygiene Factors by Respondents from Most Important (1) to Least Important (5)

Factors	Ranking					Mean Value	Overall Ranking
	1	2	3	4	5		
Reimbursement of fees	4	5	10	23	42	4.1	4
Retaining Accommodation	18	33	26	5	2	2.3	2
Salary Protection	8	22	31	22	1	2.8	3
Fast promotion/better Roles	2	3	6	34	39	4.3	5
Maintaining seniority	52	21	11	0	0	1.5	1

Note: N=84

The results indicate that retaining seniority in the organization plays an ex-

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tremely important role as 86.5% respondents ranked it either 1 or 2 most important factor. The mean rank of this hygiene factor is 1.5. The other important factors identified were retaining accommodation and continuation of salary. Reimbursement of fees and promise of role

\promotion were ranked last by the respondents.

Maintenance of Seniority

In any organization, seniority and performance are the most important things for employees because it decides their career progression in the organization. Since TransCo is a Government organization, the maintenance of seniority is much more important as compared to most private sector organizations. Anant said: “Ours is one of India’s oldest bureaucracies apart from the Civil Services. That’s why we have our separate budget too. Out of the five Ps of bureaucracy, four Ps as we all informally call them – Power, Position, Promotion and Posting, all are almost fully governed by seniority. The fifth P – Performance takes a back-seat to seniority when choosing amongst equals for a position at the top. Most fights for heading the Defence Services or TransCo go down as seniority fights – giving a lot of feed to CAT, courts and the newspapers.”

Being able to retain their original seniority is a very critical factor for employees applying for sabbatical because even a small loss of seniority can prevent them from getting the higher level position one covets. As one grows hierarchically in the organization, taking on higher positions and roles, the power, influence and importance of the officer increases not only within the organization but in society too. Every officer dreams of achieving that position and power.

Praveen said: “When one goes for a Master’s or Doctoral program, one puts in two to four years towards studies. If one loses seniority of two or four years, one’s career is considered finished as compared to colleagues of same seniority. It would be like a disciplinary action! I am sure the number of sabbaticals would come down to zero in case this happens”. Shalabh’s views were on similar lines as he said: “Being able to retain seniority is the over-riding factor because of which government officers proceed on sabbaticals and invest in acquiring knowledge. It differentiates not only you from your colleagues and batch-mates, but even your families – from being eligible for a Type IV quarter in Dadar to staying in Colaba or occupying Glenogle – the General Manager’s bungalow in Malabar Hill which is flanked by Varsha, the Chief Minister’s residence on one side and Birla House on the other” .

Thus seniority plays an enabling role in letting employees explore personal quest for knowledge in a hierarchy conscious bureaucratic organization.

Retaining Accommodation

Many TransCo employees have to leave their families back when they decide to relocate to pursue higher studies. Since the employees go on sabbatical for specified duration, it is not feasible for them to take their families and disturb children’s education at current locations. The Transo Board has a policy that employees can retain their organization provided accommodation during the period of sabbaticals. Anant said: “Many

TransCo employees have their children studying in Kendriya Vidyalaya, which is present across the country. However, since the pressure of competition and studies is so high, most parents do not want to disrupt the routine of children – be it their commute to school, coaching classes in the evening, extra-curricular activities or pursuing hobbies.”

The parental concerns in respect of disturbance to their children invariably leads to the employee seeking ways to retain his organization- provided accommodation at his place of posting. Swapan also added: “Children also have become more demanding! They are not convinced as to why their father wants to disturb their studies and friend circle, just because he also wants to study. They wonder why you want to study at this stage in life. It’s hard to convince them. The compromise is not to disturb their routine for the sake of your education”.

Anant said: “Our quarter retention policy is a boon. My daughter was not happy at Kendriya Vidyalaya in IIT Powai when I went there initially to fulfill the first semester residence requirements, because she was attached to her earlier school teacher and class-mates at Bombay Scottish. After a few months of trying, we were forced to move back for our daughter’s sake to the Matunga quarters, which I had retained, and started commuting myself daily to IIT. I was lucky I was in the same city for my studies.”

Prakash’s views were: “Its best to take a sabbatical before you have chil-

dren. It does matter irrespective of whether you are able to make them continue in your quarter or otherwise.”

Payment of Salary

TransCo employees get pay during the period of study leave in India and abroad as well. The pay does include basic and DA that the employee was getting before leaving for the sabbatical, however the pay does not include any other allowances. This is an important hygiene factor because employees have to bear financial responsibility of their family. And at the same time they have higher aspirations for personal advancements. Assurance of getting salaries during sabbatical brings hope for them to pursue their dream of achieving something for them. With this assurance, they can pay more attention to their studies instead of worrying about finances at home. Anant said: “One need not bother about financial problems if your salary keeps continuing and get credited every month. Luckily, I chose IIT Bombay so that I can relieve myself of the financial burden of eating out or staying in a hostel. Also, in IITs tuition fees are much lesser than IIMs or ISB.”

The TransCo pays study allowances to the employees who avail sabbatical for pursuing higher studies abroad. Swapan said: “If one plans studying abroad, it is important to plan finances first. Scholarships or research assistantships do help. It also helps your family While you are abroad, you continue to get your salary in India just like your other colleagues. This does not lead to any ineq-

uity as compared to your colleagues working in the organization.”

Employees look back to their organization positively as such policies helped them achieving something tangible in the form of a degree and financial security, and intangible benefits like sense of equity and mental comfort.

Impeding Factors

The factors that discourage an individual from taking a decision to go on a sabbatical were probed and results are captured in fig. 2. Most of the respondents found administrative procedures and family responsibilities the major

blockages in availing sabbaticals followed by unwillingness of the departmental heads, financial responsibilities and peer unwillingness. Many respondents were of the opinion that organizational policy for study leave is not friendly at all (fig. 3).

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Fig. 2 Percentage Distribution of Samples on Factors Impeding the Sabbatical Decision

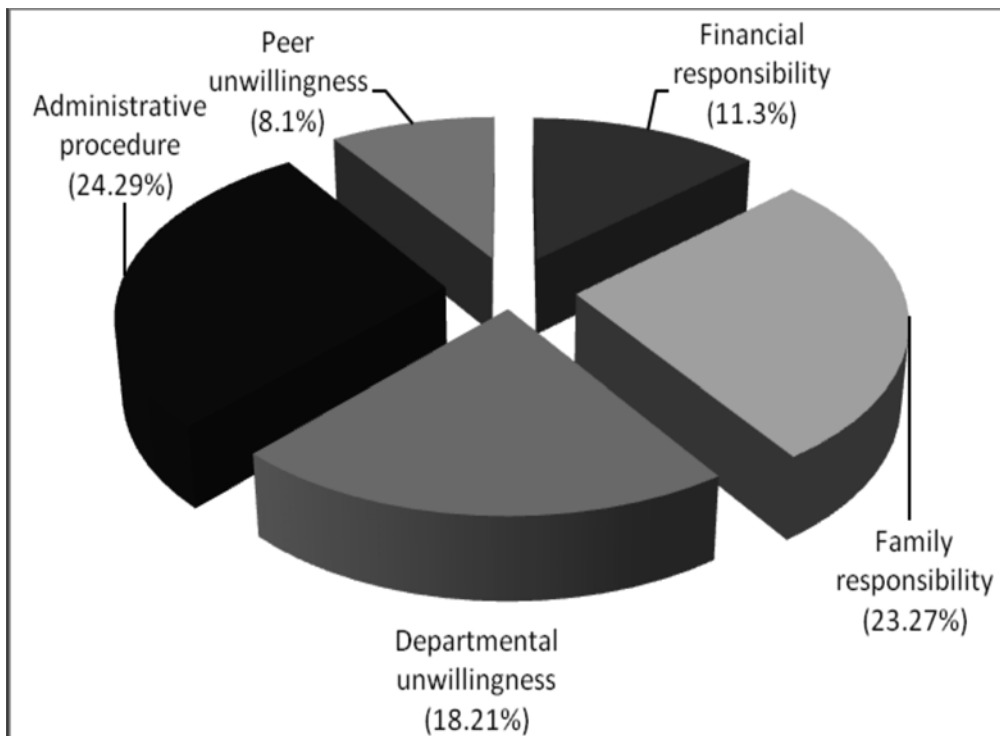
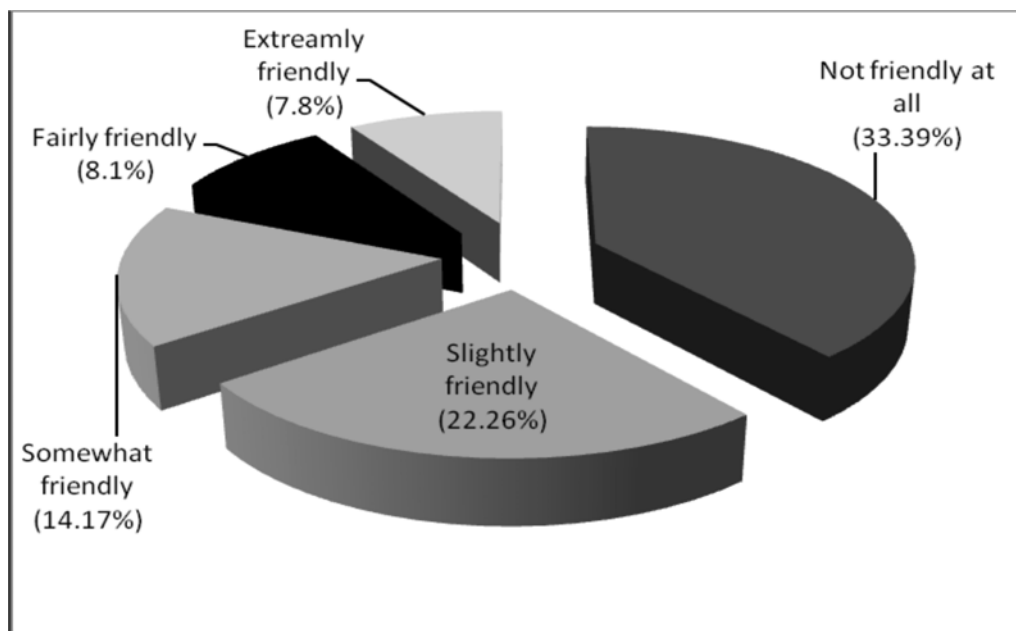


Fig. 3 Perception of Employees Regarding Friendliness of Organizational Sabbatical Policy



Lack of Organizational Initiatives

The organization is not making proactive efforts for sending the employees on sabbatical. Transco does not have any HR processes in place by which they can identify the employees for upgrading their skills and knowledge for the current role and responsibility as well as future responsibility. It is the employee who needs to take the initiatives. Anant was critical of this process as he said: “What was irritating was that despite rules framed by the Government for study leave which is being in existence for so many years, it was only up to me if I desired to study. Nobody asked me whether I wanted to study. Nobody asked me whether I was interested in a particular area of study. Surely, a big organization has many concerns, issues and problems to be researched. Nobody encouraged me to find

solution through research to a particular problem. When my thesis guide at IIT Bombay asked me to draw certain examples from TransCo, I was stunned. Nobody from TransCo had asked me before, even though it was highly relevant to TransCo.”

Shalabh concurred with him. He went on to add: “There was no mechanism which invited proposals from aspirants every year for sabbaticals. There has to be a defined process flow chart with a time-tabled schedule for considering sabbaticals. There were no brainstorming sessions, or research areas identified in which interested employees could be deputed on sabbaticals. We have a policy. Not a mechanism to back it up for making it fruitful.” This indicates lack of proactive efforts on part of the organization to institutionalize sabbaticals

despite existence of the Government policy. There are no HR initiatives taken to identify the employees to send for sabbaticals to meet current and future business challenges. Employees have to make their own efforts to find out about the institutions, details of the courses offered, and appear for the entrance examinations on their own. Many a times, it is incumbent upon them to prove relevance of the course to their individual growth so that their application for a sabbatical can be forwarded for approval. Swapan said: "The absence of a collaborative program is a pointer to lack of direction to the sabbatical policy. A collaborative program helps the organization not only build a relevant training program, but also helps in retaining talent by satisfying their aspirations for higher degrees."

Bureaucratic Hurdles

Once applied for sabbaticals, employees need to follow their applications right from the starting till the end. Swapan said: "While you process your application for necessary approvals, you first learn to become a peon yourself, moving file from one table to another and getting them cleared personally". There are multiple authorities involved in getting such sanctions for sabbaticals – executive department, HR department and Divisional head at the field unit, the Head of the executive department at headquarter, HR department at headquarter, Vigilance Department and Special Intelligence Department at Headquarter before being put up to the General Manager for sanction. Prakash said: "The long adminis-

trative procedures for getting the necessary approvals and sanctions are a matter of concern and provide a discouraging experience to those who desire to avail of a sabbatical. The entire process seems to be an ordeal that one has to go through and needs simplification. All the premier institutes have their own procedures of admission. So it becomes very difficult for the employees to deal both the processes simultaneously. Employees put their heart and soul for appearing the entrance exam and clearing it. But on the other side, HR processes of getting sanctions for sabbatical and fear of rejection of application at any stage can demotivate employees. And premier institutes like IIM and IITs want 'No objection certificate' before giving admission to the Employees. So employees find themselves in the trap of administrative procedures". Anant jokingly said: "The entire procedure for getting a No-objection Certificate or a sanction for study leave is tiring enough to make the euphoria of getting admitted to a premier institute evaporate and bring you down with a thud. In fact getting admission looks like child's play in comparison to the getting your study leave sanctioned! Every now and then somebody would bring up a new rule or a new procedure. Even the benefits to be given to individuals are interpreted differently by different people!"

Management Attitude towards Sabbaticals

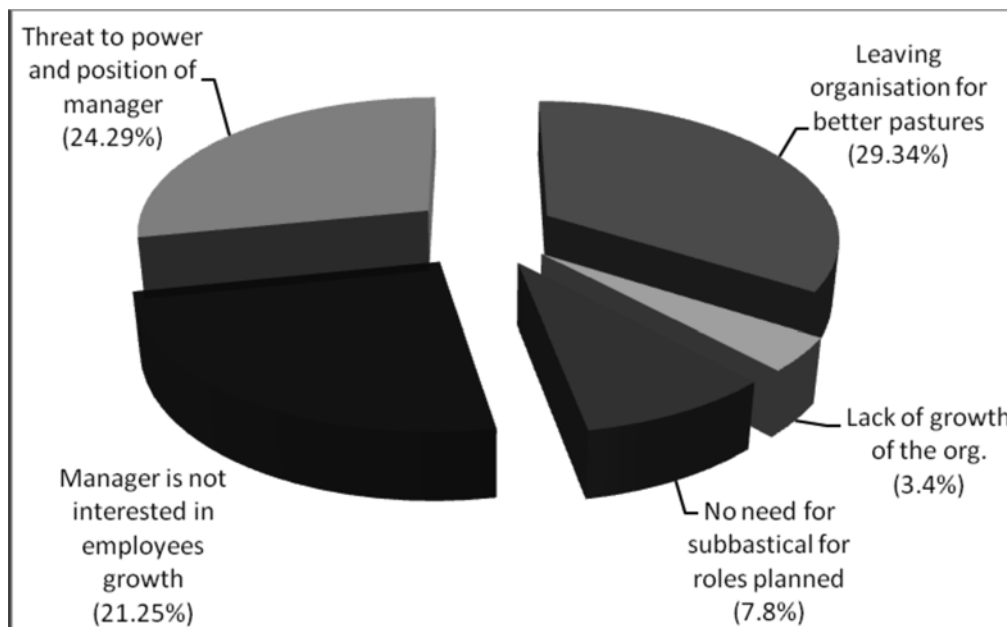
Since the application for sabbatical has to be processed through proper chan-

nel, the application first goes to the employees' reporting manager. Reporting managers do not want the employees to go for sabbaticals. All the respondents were of the view that there is lack of support by their immediate bosses towards their decision for pursuing higher studies. As indicated in fig. 4, approximately 1/3rd of the respondents stated that it is their manager's fear of them

leaving the organization for better pastures is the primary reason.

All the respondents were of the view that there is lack of support by their immediate bosses towards their decision for pursuing higher studies.

Fig. 4 Perception of Respondents (in %) Regarding Reasons for Negative Management Attitude Towards Individual's Decision for Sabbatical



Swapan said, "The first thing the Divisional Manager told me when I communicated him my intention to pursue a Doctoral program was – How long will you keep studying? You already have done your Master's. So what! You are doing the same job as anybody else. We don't need Doctor Sahibs. I think you should stop harboring such desires! If you wanted to do all this, why did you join the TransCo?" Swapan recalls that his

pleas to pursue research fell on deaf ears. He even went to the extent of saying: Sir, on the one hand, in every budget you announce that we are tying up with prestigious institutes for TransCo related research. You tell the Parliament setting up Chairs in IITs and IIMs. And on the other hand, you don't want TransCo officers to take steps in that direction. Isn't there a contradiction in public statements by TransCo ?"

Many Reporting Managers think about their short term gains, and feel that they might lose a resource which they took years to develop. Prakash recalled: "My manager nailed down how I was being groomed, guided and mentored by him and others so as to develop myself into what I am today. He spoke on various targets which are yet to be met!..... Leaving them in the lurch for some studies would affect the performance of the Division..... He made me feel guilty about my decision.....he made me and others feel how selfish I am. Later, when I stood my ground, he asked me if he could complete two projects ahead of schedule so that he could get them inaugurated by the General Manager just before the annual performance review in March."

Reporting Managers also feel that when employees take sabbatical, the entire responsibility for performance and execution of work would shift onto to them, and they would have to assign the work to other officers. This requires lot of efforts on part of the managers to mentor and guide other officers who may or may not be as efficient as the existing officers. Reporting Manager's unwillingness causes the delay in processing the application for sabbaticals.

Shalabh recollects when he decided to leave for higher studies at MIT, his immediate boss felt that his services were critical to Mumbai where he has been tasked to upgrade the passenger services. He recalls: "My Chief wrote a letter to the Dean of School of Engineering, MIT mentioning that Shalabh is

a very responsible officer and his duties are very critical for the TransCo at this juncture. He requested the Director to consider deferring his admission to the next year. Somehow, MIT agreed to defer my admission for the next year." However, TransCo did not agree to let him join MIT the next year also citing critical situation due to the Mumbai deluge in 2005. He lost his chance of joining MIT that year also. Shalabh reiterated, "I was disheartened by the decision of my boss, but being a responsible officer and subordinate, I chose not to go MIT. Imagine the frustration I had at postponing my dream of studying at MIT every year! However, I decided to apply afresh after a gap of a year. I had to go through the entire process of admission all over again. I got through! This time I decided irrespective of whatever happens, I will take up the admission in MIT. It was not about money. It was not about enjoying my study in the US. It was about fulfilling my dream. I was patient and did my bit for the TransCo also. Luckily, my bosses relieved me this time."

The study results indicate that 76.2% of respondents perceive the skip level managers or higher management to be indifferent to their aspirations to go for a sabbatical. This does not mean that the higher level managers are supportive of their decisions. Prakash said, "My file for permission for study leave was cleared in two minutes by the top management, simply because it bore many signatures. People come and go, that's what some senior officers say. Once my own boss pushed the file recommending my case upwards, the file moved in a routine man-

ner albeit with the delays associated with bureaucracy. Higher-ups did not seek to know my motives for going sabbatical. I was not called for any interview nor had to go to any higher level for any explaining to do.”

Signing of Bond

Another hurdle that emerged during the discourse with respondents is signing of bonds with TransCo before proceeding for sabbaticals. The bond is about serving TransCo after the completion of sabbatical leave period for a period of three years. If the TransCo employees who availed study leave quits service within three years of joining back to TransCo or does not return to TransCo after completion of study, then he/she shall be required to refund the following amount:

- i) The amount of salary, allowances, cost of fees and travelling allowance and other expenses, if any, incurred by TransCo during the period of study.
- ii) The cost incurred towards involvement of various authorities, government and other institutions for facilitating the study leave process to the TransCo.

The above amount should be refunded with interest that are being forced on government loans. Prakash got placed in an Indian conglomerate during his campus placement at IIM Calcutta. He was offered lateral position in the company with a good package. He decided to leave the TransCo immediately after his MBA.

He recalls: “I did not want to work in bureaucratic position anymore and even the salary package offered was quite high in the new organization. I went through all the administrative procedure of refunding the money back to the TransCo that I was getting while on sabbatical. That was the honorable way to go! I had to also pay interest over and above the salary I received.” But now after so many years, he does not find any difference in salary when he compares salary of his colleagues in TransCo. TransCo officers’ compensation is equally good as of private sector employees on similar positions. Government compensates the money portion of salary with the benefits provided to them.

Conclusion

The study results indicated that decision to take sabbatical is a very important one in an employee’s life. Various factors govern such decisions, and this decision is not taken in isolation. Rather various stakeholders like family, peers, subordinates, bosses, friends play important roles in the sabbatical decision-making. Employees are intrinsically motivated to go for sabbaticals for reasons like personal development, recognition and respect from their professional counterparts and from society at large, job performance requirements and individual aspirations for higher education. Even if the sabbatical policy does not permit career progression and salary increase, there are certain provisions associated with it such as seniority of employees which is maintained in their cadres, employees continue to get salaries, and they

can retain their organization-provided accommodation during the sabbatical. All these hygiene factors motivate them to avail the sabbaticals.

Sabbaticals are the result of individual efforts of the participants and not the proactive institutional mechanisms that exist in the organizations that identify and depute candidates for sabbaticals. Bureaucratic hurdles, family responsibilities, negative attitude of reporting managers are the three major deterrents for employees from availing sabbaticals. However enabling intrinsic factors in many cases outweigh the hamstrings in making sabbatical decisions.

Though research in US based organizations like Apple indicate that sabbatical leads to loyalty, the same was not evident in the present study. Many employees left their job after availing sabbaticals. During the interviews, it was revealed that most respondents are not likely to come back after the sabbatical. This indicates the need to make the right people to avail the sabbatical policy which can be done through a proactive HR policy and process. Organizational efforts towards promoting the sabbatical policy would be an interaction of communication, both formal and informal in the organization, and changing attitude of management towards sabbaticals. Organizations need come out with policy to identify and depute right candidates for sabbaticals, who would come back and deliver value to the organization, develop collaborative programs with institutions, and build up an organizational climate for learning and development.

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