AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON WORK LIFE BALANCE (WLB) FOR ROLE PRIORITIZATION OF IT EMPLOYEES

Mrs. Madhu Ajith *
Ms. Vidya S. Patil **

Abstract : *A major change in 1990's with LPG Policy, opened the doors for globalization of business thus resulting into drastic changes like increasing number of MNC's, young talented educated manpower, dynamic labor market, diverse demographic profile of employees , dual career families, etc . Corresponding to these changes, organizations are demanding employees who are more flexible, productive and who can adjust to the corporate culture. Employee's expectations and perspectives towards work have also changed, as a result of new orientations like lifelong learning, personal and career development, balance between professional and personal life etc. have assumed importance. Thus, there is an increasing need for organizations to address these demands of employees by implementing innovative HR Practices. One such HR Practice that helps in meeting these demands is "Work Life Balance" (WLB), which helps in proper prioritization between work and life roles. Back home, the concern for WLB is gradually increasing as employees are not happy on carrying any organizational pressure. A study by American Management Association reveals that companies that support WLB practices are at the top and most preferred to work.*

In this article, an attempt has been made to understand the different roles of employees in IT sector and how WLB helps in meeting these roles. Further literature review, coupled with primary and secondary data is collected through questionnaire and various research findings using exploratory research.

Key words : *Work Life Balance (WLB), Employee Roles, life roles, Turbulences, Organizational Pressure.*

INTRODUCTION

During the past 20-30 years, immense changes are witnessed in the labor market like young talented manpower, dual career families, changes in diverse demographic profile of employees, free movement of manpower across national borders, etc., thus resulting in a shift from a breadwinners model, to a two income model, where both partners work. Another paradigm shift is between the employee and his job, thus resulting in shift in focus from compliance to commitment. Compliance is featured by a reactive behavior rather than proactive, commitment to profession on the other hand is an internal belief of employee having values, which are lucrative for the organization & thus requires more output from the employees.

On the other side, even organization should also provide flexibility in working by introducing non- standard work forms like flexi time, work from home, weekend work & shift work. This change in the past few decades has led to the emergence of a concept called "work-life balance"(WLB). The concept of "work life balance" that we use in this study, is defined, following Noon & Blyton

***Mrs. Madhu Ajith** - Lecturer, East Point College of Higher Education, Bangalore, E-mail : madhunakathe@gmail.com*
***Ms. Vidya S. Patil** - Lecturer, East Point College of Higher Education, Bangalore, E-mail : vidyap489@gmail.com*

(2007) as "the ability of Individuals to successfully combine work and private life, without the pressure of one of the other domain undermining the satisfaction of the other domain. WLB not only addresses the needs of employees whether professional or personal at the same time helps in proper prioritization between work and life".

Employees working in IT Companies are flooded with work and back home; there are various pending domestic responsibilities to be completed. Besides this, he or she has to take care of children, elderly parents and thereby have to play many other roles as a parent, spouse, son/daughter etc. and after most of employees face dilemma in making both ends meet to lead a quality life. In this paper, an attempt is made to understand how WLB helps in balancing the different roles to be played by employee and role prioritization. For future sustainability, organizations need to ensure they just not encourage but mandate a practical and workable work/life balance policy, benefiting and meeting the needs of both the organizations and their employees.

DEFINITION OF WORK -LIFE BALANCE (WLB)

Work - Life Balance(WLB), in its broadest sense, can be defined as satisfactory level of involvement or fit between the multiple roles in a person's life. The study of WLB involves the examination of people's ability to manage simultaneously the multifaceted demands of life. WLB is not a tight rope walk between organisational commitments and home demands at the same time, but it is about proper understanding your priorities both at professional and personal level. WLB is about making time for what we think and has no relation to how many hours an employee works in a week. Further, this concept has been developed to implement some additional components like time balance, where the concern is on time to work and non - work roles, balancing the involvement, the level of psychological involvement or commitment to work and non-work roles, satisfaction balance, the level of satisfaction with work and non - work roles etc. in broader perspective.

IMPORTANCE OF STUDY on WLB

Turbulences in the business environment like globalization, technological developments, competition etc have led to substantial increase in work, thereby building work pressure and many problems. Every individual has different roles to play and should be able to balance these roles; this challenge is addressed through WLB. WLB is of recent origin, and the research studies conducted are confined to factors affecting WLB, job satisfaction, stress management, employee engagement etc. the study is aimed at identification of different roles played by employees working in IT Sector, thus leading to role prioritization through WLB, thus focusing on optimum balance between work and life.

Besides this, it also benefits the organizations to improve employee retention rates, productivity & profitability, reduce stress & to provide improved & better work place.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Worldwide, there is an increasing concern for WLB over the last few decades & into the new millennium. Today's organizations are more employee-centric & give importance for human values, thus discovering new & innovative ways to help employees balance work & family & thereby creating conditions which help each employee in realizing his/her potential simultaneously to fulfill the job requirements and balance quality of life as well. Precisely, WLB as defined by Mitroff and Denton (1999) is the "basic feeling of being connected with one's complete self, others and the entire Universe". With the growth of the IT industries in India, western

values & culture have started seeping into the Indian organizations, where new HR practices are becoming order of the day.

Today's generation, which is highly talented, educated, sensitive & informative, have various roles to play. Thus, the study is intended to find out the different professional & personal roles of IT professionals. Further, this study aims to find out how an IT professionals prioritize their roles in order to have a better balance between work & family, considering these issues of an individual based on literature review the present study titled "An Empirical Study on WLB among IT Professionals for role identification and prioritization in Bangalore" has been undertaken. The ultimate goal of WLB is to provide a win-win situation for both employer and employees. Further, according to a survey conducted by National Life Insurance Company four out of ten employees state that their jobs are extremely or very stressful. Thus, an attempt is made to understand, through hypothesis, on "whether WLB policies helps the IT Professionals in managing stress".

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study is conducted for IT professionals, at Bangalore, Karnataka, India. Through this study, an attempt has been made to understand the different roles of IT professionals & prioritization. it also identifies the IT employees assessment about their organization from the perspective of WLB & how WLB is considered at their work place.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The work – leisure dichotomy was invented in the mid 1800's WLB is a concept that includes proper prioritization between work and life style. The expression 'WLB' was first used in the United Kingdom in the late 1970's to describe the balance between an individual's work and personal life. In United States, this phrase was first used in 1986. Work-life balance refers to people having enough time to have balance in their job and home life. The important findings of few studies in last 30 years is summarised here below:

- **Kinnunen and Mauno (2007)** examined the relationship among different family and work related variables and WLB / work family conflict.
- **Sandhu and Mehta (2006)** in a study of 271 women working in service sector in Punjab found that gender role attitude and spill over between work and family roles was the most important factor that affected the career of these women. It was also found that nature of organization and education had a significant impact on work family conflict.
- **Karakas and Lee, (2004)** explained WLB issues as spending good time with family members, getting free time to be able to relax for emotional wellbeing and health of family members, having good communication and support from the fellow colleagues, obtaining high quality child care and education; and being satisfied with the work load.
- **Frye and Breaugh (2004)** tested a model of antecedents (use of family friendly policies, supervisors support, number of hours worked, having child care responsibility) and consequences (job and family satisfaction) of work-family conflict and family work conflict. It was found that the number of work hours, the use of family-friendly policies and reporting to a supportive supervisor were predictive of work-family conflict. Family friendly policies and reporting to a supportive supervisor were found to have negative correlation with work-family conflict whereas hours worked

was positively related. With regard to family-work conflict, having child care responsibility and reporting to a supportive supervisor were predictive of such conflict. Child care responsibility showed a positive relation.

- **Guest (2001),** amongst others, takes the term work-life balance separately and analyses each of the concepts - balance, work and life others, takes the term work-life balance separately and analyses each of the concepts - balance, work and life – thus highlighting the complexities and dangers in the loose use of allegory.

- **Grzywacz and Marks (2000)** developed an expanded conceptualization of the work family interface and identified significant correlates of multiple dimensions of work family spillover. The study used the data from employed adults participating in the National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States (N = 1,986). The findings showed that work and family factors that facilitated development (decision latitude, family support) were associated with less negative and more positive spill over between work and family.

- **Adams et al. (1996)** found that relationships between work and family can have an important effect on job and life satisfaction and the level of involvement the worker assigns to work and family roles is associated with this relationship. Reduced related stress outcomes due to work-life balance practices have been observed in many research studies (Johnson, 1995). Work-life balance is an ordinary challenge throughout the industrialized world. Employees all over the world are facing challenges how to balance work and personal life (Ramachandra & Suman, 2007).

- Goodstein (1994) The demand from **organizations to attend** to the family responsibilities of employees has been increasing due to the rise in the number of single parent's households and dual earners. A few studies undertaken by Pleck et al. (1980), Aryee (1992), Grzywacz and Marks (2000), Saltzstein et al. (2001), Frye and Breaugh (2004), Luk and Shaffer (2005),

- **Aryee (1992)** examined the impact of five antecedent sets of work and family domain variables on three types of work-family conflict (job-spouse, job-parent and job-homemaker) and the impact of these types of work family conflict on well being and work outcome measures.

- **Pleck et al. (1980)** in a survey study of workers found that substantial minority of workers living in families experienced conflict between work and family life. Parents reported more conflict than other couples. Specific working conditions, such as excessive hours at work, scheduling and physically or psychologically demanding were associated with experiencing work family conflict, which in turn was related to diminished job satisfaction and contentment with life in general.

In addition to above findings, a number of researchers like Adams et al. (1996), Duxbury and Higgins (2001),Martins et al. (2002), Fisher-McAuley et al. (2003), Schieman et al. (2003), Ezzedeen and Swiercz (2002), Grzywacz and Bass (2003), Sandhu and Mehta (2006), Pal and Saksvik (2007), and Haar and Bardoel (2008) found that WLB /work family conflict affects job satisfaction, family satisfaction, life satisfaction, career satisfaction and job stress. It also implies that knowing these aspects, the organisations must take cognizant view to implement employee-&-

productivity friendly HR measures.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study is carried to meet the following objectives like

a) To understand the demographic profile of IT Professionals.

b) To identify the different roles of IT Professionals.

c) To examine whether WLB program helps the IT Professionals in prioritizing the roles, thereby have a better balance between work and family.

d) To assess the impact of WLB in reducing work related stress & its impact on WLB.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Revolution in IT has led to wide increase of software organizations thus providing lucrative jobs, and at the same time employees are finding it difficult to focus or balance between both professional and family life. The study adopted 'descriptive research' to understand and determine how WLB benefits the IT Professionals in meeting their professional and family roles. The main focus of research was on role identification which includes work, employee health, stress management, personal roles of an individual and prioritization.

Universe and Sample

The article presents the analysis of WLB of IT Professionals from various organizations, thus universe of the study was limited to IT Companies of Bangalore. The research is conducted for over 15 companies in Bangalore and a sample of 200 was considered for the study.

Data collection

Both primary and secondary data was used for the study, further a structured questionnaire was adopted for collecting primary data through direct and web based survey. The questionnaire consists of many closed ended questions mainly focusing on demographic profile of the employees, the different roles of an IT Professional, work and work related issues, factors that help in balancing work and family, stress, health and benefits to individual and organization through WLB.

Sampling frame: All organizations in the IT Industry was considered for the study.

Sampling Unit: The persons holding positions at senior ,middle and entry level like developer, testing, coding, administration were considered. The study is conducted for both genders and the sample includes both married and unmarried employees.

Sampling Method: Convenience sampling method was adopted for the purpose of the study.

Analytical Techniques:

The data collected was analyzed by making use of appropriate statistical techniques. Percentage method was used for analysing demographic profile of the respondents. Further to understand whether WLB helps in role prioritization and alignment of professional and personal roles adequate hypothesis was used and chi square test is performed to understand the relationship between WLB and role prioritization, stress management and self development/

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Analysis of Demographic Profile

In this study, the respondents are IT Professionals engaged in software development, testing, coding etc. The table 1 below presents the summary of demographic details of respondents.

Table 1 : Analysis of Demographic Profile of Respondents

Particulars	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	163	82%
	Female	37	18%
Age	Below 30 years	79	39%
	31-40 years	113	57%
	Above 40 years	8	4%
Marital Status	Single	79	39%
	Married	121	61%
Experience	1-5 years	88	44%
	6-10 years	85	42%
	11-15 years	23	12%
	Above 15 years	04	02%
Dependents	1	79	40%
	2	74	37%
	3	47	23%
	4 & Above		

(Source: Primary Data)

From the Table-1, it can be observed that the sample consists of 82% of male respondents and 18% of female respondents. Age of the respondents is bifurcated into three categories, 39% of the respondents are less than the age group of 30 years and 57% of the respondents belong to the age group of 31years to 40 years (hence 96% sample is young population) and remaining 4% of the respondents fall in the age group of more than 41 years. Marital status of the respondents shows that 39% of the respondents are single and 61% of the respondents are married. The sample consisting of 44% of the respondents have an experience of 1year to 5 years, 42% of the respondents have an experience of 6years to 10 years, 12% of the respondents have an experience of 11years to 15 years, 2% of the respondents have an experience above 15 years. Number of dependents infers that 40% of the respondents have only one dependent, 37% of the respondents have two dependents, 23% of the respondents have there dependents.

Testing of Hypothesis

Chi square test was adopted to know the relationship between role prioritization and WLB. This statement is checked by the following research hypothesis

H1: there is no significant effect of WLB programs on role prioritization.

H2: WLB program does not help in the knowledge up gradation of employees.

H3: WLB program does not help in managing stress or there is no significant association between WLB program and stress management.

In the current research, WLB was taken as a dependent variable, whereas different work and family related variables were taken as independent variables.

Table 2 : Chi Square Analysis for WLB & its independent variables

No association between	Degrees of freedom	Value		Outcome
		Table	Calculated	
WLB program & role prioritization	3	7.815	14.995	Rejected
WLB program & stress management	4	9.488	42.336	Rejected
WLB program & knowledge up gradation	1	3.841	4.76	Rejected

(Source: Primary Data)

HYPOTHESIS RELATED FINDINGS

It was found that WLB programs implemented by organizations had a considerable effect on role prioritization i.e. the employees were able to fulfil their professional and personal commitments at the same time, because of better WLB policies like laptop, VPN/Internet, cell phone, work from home, support from family members, colleagues, team members, managers etc it also benefited the employees in role prioritization. The relationship between WLB policies and role prioritization was significant.

WLB helps in employee knowledge up gradation as there was a significant association between WLB and employee self up gradation and this was analysed by using chi square test at 5% significance level, 4 degrees of freedom thus the null hypothesis stands rejected. WLB also leads to better stress management and this was tested by using variables like travelling time, depression, temper, work etc

OTHER MAJOR FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY ON WLB

In addition to the above findings, there are few other observation in this study & they are enumerated briefly here below:

- 51% of the employees live in joint family system.
- 87% of the employees do not work in shift system.
- 65% of the employees feel happy at the time they spend at work.
- 86% of the employees do not work late hours at office.
- 90% of the employees do not carry work to home.
- 77% of the employees do not take breaks in between work.
- 83% of the employees are of the opinion that work does not have a negative effect on personal life.

- Organizations have provided the following additional work provisions like telephone for personal use, health provisions and transportation.
- 76% of the employees opine that WLB policies should be customized according to individuals.
- Most of the employees consider better relationships between on-the-job and off-the-job, increased productivity are individuals benefit because of WLB policies provided.
- Most of the employees consider increase in productivity, accountability and commitment, improved morale and less organization stress are organizations benefits because of WLB policies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on above empirical study in 15 companies & 200 employees, it can be broadly inferred as follows:-

- There is a need to frame the 'WLB policies' according to individuals requirements.
- There is a need to communicate WLB policies to employees to increase awareness and improve knowledge, understanding of policies by making information accessible through intranet to all employees. It should also be made available through other information channels like written i.e. paper version or oral for those employees who do not have access to intranet, for potential job applicants.
- Even though employees are provided with provisions like work from home, laptops, internet, cell phone etc at the same time organizations should also concentrate on providing and encouraging provisions like bringing children to work place when required and family engagement programs this proves beneficial as employees can have a better balance between family and professional commitments.
- Organizations should ensure that formal policies of WLB are in tune with what employees require in this regard the responsibility of human resource department is to look into various policies of WLB and confine it according to employee and organization requirements as WLB has become a strategic issue.
- Yoga classes and mediation programs should be provided on a regular basis so that employees take the advantage of these facilities to improve their physical and mental strength and to manage stress in an effective manner .
- Employees should also concentrate on their health and should take special initiatives to maintain health at the same time. Organizations should also provide health care facilities like gym, yoga and meditation classes, which most IT companies are doing, but the usage has to be monitored & ensured.

MAJOR FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

Changes initiated through globalization in terms of technology, demographic profile, roles and responsibilities, young generation, intellectual jobs, career advancement and development etc have made organizations to move towards implementation of WLB policies and exclusively in IT Sector.

Further, this has aroused interest among academicians, researchers and organizations to understand and study about WLB policy in IT sector and at the same times how WLB benefits the employees for better role prioritization. Some of the major conclusions that can be made from the study are as follows:

1. Managing both professional and family life effectively and efficiently has become a major challenge for IT employees and also role prioritization. There is an increased concern and need for organizations to develop and implement effective WLB polices and encourage employees to make use of the available policies.

2. WLB benefits both employees and organizations resulting in improved morale, better relationships on and off the job, less organization stress, increased productivity, accountability and commitment, retain the best talent and motivate IT Employees to give their best.

3. WLB should be implemented at all levels in the organization.

4. There is a significant relationship between WLB and role prioritization.

5. WLB policies lead to better stress management, role prioritization & Knowledge up gradation.

It can be concluded saying that WLB policy provides a win- win situation for both organization and employees. Hence, the enhanced understanding of WLB as HR concept is critically important to both employers & employees, to ensure higher productivity & nurturing healthy & sustainable relationships in larger perspective.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The study was limited to organizations belonging to IT Sector only.
- The sample is limited to 200 employees.
- The outcome of the study cannot be generalized.
- The study was based on an assumption that information given by the respondents was considered as authentic.

SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- The study was conducted for IT sector only hence the study can be done for other sectors to generalize the outcome
- The study was conducted in Bangalore city only but can also be done across cities, industry sectors, different management cadres; hence cross-sectional research will become more useful.

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