

WORK-LIFE BALANCE-TECHNOLOGY A BOON OR BANE (A Non-empirical study from Indian Industry perspective)

***Dr.Sailaja Vasakarla**

Assistant Professor, SKIM, SK University, Ananthapuramu.

Email: sailuvasakarala@gmail.com

Abstract

Work-life balance is the term which is much talked since from a decade by the business organisations. It is all about the idea that organisations are to be managed by the human beings and they need time for both work and other aspects of life. These may be the family-related aspects or aspects relating to their personal interests. Employees' aspire for quality of work life. Organisations with best work life balance strategies are possessing high employer brand image. Prior to and during the industrial revolution both the employers and trade unions felt the need for a day break in a week. In those days most of the work was conducted manually by the workers and once the worker leaves the workplace they also have to leave the work at work site itself. Hence they were really able to rest and keep themselves away from work related tensions and pressures. The recent technological advancements are making the employees to strike a proper balance between the work and the life. The wide spread of information technologies, internet technologies and mobile technologies are playing vital role in the work-life balance of an employee through the options like work from home, flexi time etc., Thus technology is no doubt a boon for an employee. But these technological changes made it possible for workers to be connected with work 24/7 through the devices like smart phones, remote working technology etc thus not enabling the employee to genuinely rest. In this way the technology is also becoming bane for an employee. In this backdrop the present paper has been developed. It aims to present the significance of work-life balance. It further presents how technology is a boon in work and personal life of an employee and how the same is also a bane for the employee. Finally an attempt is made to present innovative work-life balance practices of Indian Industry.

Key words: Work-life balance, Quality of work life, Social networks, Technology, Employer Branding

1. INTRODUCTION:

Work-life balance is the term which is much talked since from a decade by the business organisations. It is all about the idea that organisations are to be managed by the human beings and they need time for both work and other aspects of life. These may be the family-related aspects or aspects relating to their personal interests. Employees' aspire for quality of work life. Organisations with best work life balance strategies are possessing high employer brand image. Prior to and during the industrial revolution both the employers and trade unions felt the need for a day break in a week. In those days most of the work was conducted manually by the workers and once the worker leaves the workplace they also have to leave the work at work site itself. Hence they were really able to rest and keep themselves away from work related tensions and pressures. The recent technological advancements are making the employees to strike a proper balance between the work and the life. The wide spread of information technologies, internet technologies and mobile technologies are playing vital role in the work-life balance of an employee through the options like work from home, flexi time etc., Thus technology is no doubt a boon for an employee. But these technological changes made it possible for workers to be connected with work 24/7 through the devices like smart phones, remote working technology etc thus not enabling the employee to genuinely rest. In this way the technology is also becoming bane for an employee.

1.1. Role of Technology in work-Life balance:

Today no industry in the economy is unaffected by the technological advancements. These technological upgradations are increasing the efficiency of the employees and playing a vital role in balancing work and family. These technological advancements are helping women employees to perform their jobs in those circumstances when the family responsibilities are coming in the way of their career progression. Hence there is an immense role of technology in striking a balance between work and family life of men and women in the organisations. There is no doubt that technology has changed the way the people work.

1.2. Technology as a tool of work-life balance: Technology is no doubt a key to unlock the issues relating to the employee work-life balance. It can play a crucial role in employee work-life balance in the following variety of situations:

1.2.1. Changing Business Environment: Today's business organisations need to be highly dynamic and so as to be in the race they have to catch the pace of their competitors. In order to be a step ahead of the competitors they need to work constantly, energetically. Thus they need multi-taskers who can do several jobs with all perfections at a time and all the time. In such circumstances the technological devices like smart phones, internets, laptops enable the employees to do multiple tasks with perfection and without any prejudice to the work-life balance. The flexi- time and flexi-work and work from home are few such measures that are made possible through these advanced technologies.

1.2.2. Dual Career couples: The emergence of professional women at workplace in India, just like in other countries, is leading to a noticeable increase in dual career couples who try to manage work and non-work domains simultaneously. Dual career couples have many challenges in their work domain like in pursuit and enhancement of two careers, each of them have to devote much time and energy for their career progression. At the same time there are many challenges which sprout from the non-work domain such as multiple-role commitments from the family which may be emotional, cognitive, and financial resources of members and also be in terms of time and energy for personally meaningful pursuits such as leisure, self care, community work, social, aesthetic, spiritual interests, etc. This profound increase in the number of professionally-trained dual career couples at the workplace is creating a pressure on employing organizations the necessity to identify the needs of such couples to balance their work and non-work lives. The technology has a great role to play in such circumstances. These days there is an ease for making employees virtually connected with the organisations and the task is finished without any prejudice to the family commitments. Thus organisations are able to attract and retain the talent which is a key human resource management challenge for organizations today. The advanced technologies help in understanding and addressing the special needs of dual career couples thus providing a competitive edge to retain talent by the organisations.

1.2.3. Juggling roles of working women: In many research studies it is found that in India, for working women "Family priorities" fall ahead than their career progression. But today this reason is no longer be seen as a barrier against women pursuing their careers effectively. Many progressive companies are sensitive to women's issues and have started establishing policies and support systems to help women balance life and work priorities. This is no doubt a good sign. Many forward-looking organizations have started respecting the latent potential of women and have made radical changes in their HR policies to encourage them and provide them with a more conducive work environment and have established sufficient infrastructure for the e-mobility of women employees. Initiatives of big giants like Tata's giving pregnant women to work from home and stay connected with the work virtually not physically. Likewise Infosys, Wipro, and many others have also introduced flexi-timings.

1.2.4. Increasing Nuclear Family system: In India joint family system is slowly disappearing due to many reasons and nuclear family set ups are increasing. This is one such issue which is

affecting the work-life balance activities of an employee. In a family where both wife and husband are working many issues like child care or daily domestic works will come in the way of their work like attending parent-teacher meetings of children, taking children to the hospitals when they are sick, in such circumstances the e-mobility of employee helps in attending the non –work domain issues and work domain activities at a time.

1.3. Technology a hindrance for work-life balance: A Canadian researcher Linda Duxbury identified that electronic tools like smart phones, mobiles, laptops the expectations of being available anytime, anywhere. No doubt it has increased the ability of people to work from home and outside of regular hours, but at the same time it has increased the expectation that they will do so and thus complicated the work-life balance struggle. The following are the major reasons for understanding technology as a time thief.

1.3.1. Increasing expectations of employer: With the ease of technology the employer expectations are pushed even further. They not only expect people to be available in the office working hours with hectic work schedules and lengthy meetings throughout the day but also make it necessary to respond to their overflowing inboxes with notes that take forever to sort through.

1.3.2. To be first in the race: It is also seen in these days that people use their smart phones, check their e-mails and respond to them even after the office hours thus permitting the work to intervene into their personal lives too. They do this because they are compelled to do so and because they want to be first in the race otherwise their colleagues seem to be writing and replying more than they do. Thus it is very clear that they are not responding out of their interest in the work.

1.3.3. Changing work culture: The evolving world of increasing technology led to a positive work environment which enables the quick thinking multi-taskers who use the internet as an external brain. Thus organisations are trying to bring in the updated and upgraded technologies so their multi taskers can outperform with the effective use of such technologies. These changes in the belief systems of the organisations are bringing tremendous changes in the work culture and thus these days technology enabled work culture is more seen the organisations. But the organisations fail to understand that this would in fact create a negative work environment where the need for instant gratification outweighs the ability for thoughtful reflection and deep thinking ability of employees and they can't detach themselves from work during non-work hours, hence resulting in negative repercussions for work-life balance.

1.4. Innovative work-life balance practices: Innovations in work-life balance practices with positive use of technology is the need of the hour. The technology plays a vital role in redesigning the conventional work -life balance practices. The following are the few such practices:

1.4.1. Flexible Working Arrangements: Flexible working arrangements (FWA) are important in enabling both men and women to manage their work-life balance. They include a broad range of such flexible work practices such as

- part-time and part-year employment on a temporary or on-going basis;
- alternative working hours for employees like compressing working hours into a mix of longer and shorter days or into fewer days per week or fortnight;
- flexible hours options such as flexi-time and rostered days off;
- flexible workload arrangements

1.4.2. Parental leave for non-primary caregivers: An employee who is the non-primary caregiver may be given unbroken period of atleast 15 days leave.

1.4.3. Work from home arrangements: Work from home is one best option to the employee either men or women who find it difficult to come to the office due to the non work domain reasons. The employees are given required technological support systems which facilitate him to attend his/her duties just like in the workplace. Performance of work-from-home staff is appraised in the same way as office-based staff.

Home-based staff comes into the office once a month for meetings, briefings about company developments and training.

1.4.4. Appropriate use of technology support systems: When the technology is used as a tool to help rather than something to respond, it provides a best solution to all work-life balance issues of employees. Hence employers have recognized that there are advantages in terms of productivity and creativity to letting people switch off from work. They clearly understood that the fact the availability of employee 24/7 for the work leads to negative results. Thus they are resorting to following actions.

- Volkswagen (Germany) deactivates emails during non-work hours and employees can only receive email a half hour before and a half hour after the work day.
- Organisations can set priorities for the emails sent by them by clearly specifying urgency of reply /response or the mail is simply for the information to the employee or it needs no reply particularly from that employee etc.
- Many organisations are setting up a system that could to restrict email traffic to smart phones after hours, thus reducing the pressure people feel to respond. For example, the software could specify that only emails coded as “immediate response needed” or emails from specific addresses would be sent to the smart phone after hours; all others would be waiting in the inbox until the employee next turns on the computer.

CONCLUSION:

The technology is a boon and at the same time is becoming a bane for employee work life balance. People are using technology as a support system and successfully justifying their roles in work domain and non-work domains too. Few others are also facing great difficulty due to this technology since they need to be hyper-responsive to their emails and smart phone messages etc. Hence organisations too have realized the facts and are initiating such measures to use technology in a constructive way by considering it as a tool for work life balance not a time thief.

References:

- Anne Bardoel, “Tool or time thief? Technology and the work-life balance” *The Conversation* July 30, 2012 1.46pm
- Ashok Bhatia, “The Balancing Act: Juggling Roles and More”, *Vikalpa*, Volume 34, No 4, October – December, 2009, pg. 99
- Catherine McMahon & Barbara Pocock, “Doing things differently: Case Studies of Work-Life Innovation in Six Australian Workplaces”, Published by the Centre for Work + Life University of South Australia
- Jennifer J. Deal, “How Technology Can Help Work/Life Balance”, *Wall street journal*, Updated Oct. 27, 2014 12:38 a.m. ET
- Linda Duxbury, “Time thieves and space invaders: technology, work and the organization”, www.emeraldinsights.com accessed on 5-12-2016