

A Study On Stress And Its Brunt On Employee's Work Life Balance With Special Reference To Vodafone Company (Telecom Sector)-Ekkaduthangal Site (Chennai)

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Abstract: *In today's fast paced times, the increasing prevalence of work-life conflicts and increasing concern about work-life issues present both a challenge and opportunity for Human Resource (HR) professionals. Though work-life balance was initially construed as the concern for working mothers, now it has been recognized as a vital issue for all classes of employees. In Indian telecom industry characterized by long and odd working hours, heavy work pressures, demanding clients and pressing deadlines always brings stress for its employees. If the organization is lacking a supportive work culture, employee retention may become a challenge. In a society filled with conflicting responsibilities and commitments, work-life balance has become a predominant issue at the workplace. Changes in the social, political and economic fabric of societies have influenced and continue to influence both the nature of employment and its relationship to life outside work. The concept of Work-life balance is becoming more and more relevant in an ever dynamic working environment. The effect of increased working hours is having a serious implication on the lifestyle of huge number of people, which ultimately affects their social and psychological well being. Stressful job conditions and long working hours are the major predictors of work-life conflict.*

Work-life balance (WLB) is an important area of human resource management that is receiving increased attention from government, researchers, professionals etc. Human resource professionals are seeking innovative ways to positively impact the bottom line of their companies, improve employee morale, retain employees with valuable company knowledge, and keep pace with workplace trends by providing work-life initiatives. This paper focuses on the impact of stress on the lives of employees, identifies the determinants to employees' work-life balance and also suggests the roles and responsibilities of key parties by providing suitable ways to employers for facilitating a better WLB options at the work-place.

I. Introduction

"No one can have everything and do everything at the same time". Psychologist - Oprah Winfrey

At present, work environment has become more stressful because of diverse role expectations, cut throat competition, globalization and technological innovations. Such changes have created several complications on both the domestic and professional fronts of the employees. The pressure of work has been intensifying and there is growing feeling among employees that the demands of work begin to dominate life and sense of work-life balance is felt. The challenge of integrating work and family life is a part of everyday reality for the majority of employees now-a-days.

"Work-life balance is a state of equilibrium in which the demands of both a person's job and personal life are equal" (Lockwood, 2003). It is the ability to effectively manage the juggling act between paid work and the other activities, that are important to people.

As Kodz et al., (2002) explained, the principle of work-life balance is that "there should be balance between an individual's work and his life outside work and this balance should be healthy". Further in 2003, Work Foundation defined the concept of work-life balance and highlighted that it is all about employees achieving a satisfactory equilibrium between work and non-work activities (i.e, parental responsibilities and wider caring duties, as well as other activities & interests). Changes in the social, political and economic fabric of societies have influenced and continue to influence both the nature of employment and its relationship to life outside work. The concept of Work-life balance is becoming more and more relevant in an ever dynamic working environment. WLB, from employee perspective, is the maintenance of responsibilities at work and at home. Employees view the benefits or working conditions as work-life benefits in which they help employees to balance the families and work domains (Bardoel, Tharenou, & Moss, 1998; Russell & Bowman, 2000). In contrast, work-life conflict is a demand in a form of inner role conflict, in which role pressures from the work and other life domains, such as family, are mutually incompatible in some respect, whereby participation in one role is made more difficult by the virtue of participation in the other (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Initially, the

concept of work-life conflict was focused on impact of family demands on work. It now extends to the impact; work has on individual stress, relationship and family well being (Russell & Bowman, 2000).

Today, the new age workforce comprises mostly of knowledge workers, who are techno-savvy, aware of market realities, are materially focused and have a higher propensity to switch jobs (Edris, 2004). The increasing emphasis on knowledge-based competitiveness in the current turbulent environment also accelerated the importance of human capital (Wan, Kok & Ong, 2002). Under a knowledge-based economy, the attraction and retention of a potential workforce is fast becoming a challenge to many employers (Work life solutions, 2010).

For this reason, WLB has emerged as a strategic issue for HRM and a key element of organization's employee retention strategies. Achieving a balance between work and personal life and responding to the needs and expectation of an employee, plays a crucial role in the employee retention. Companies can reach out to the employees by introducing raft of initiatives such as work from home, part-time working, telecommuting etc. Companies can put in place the work structures that can create these opportunities and create a very balanced professional-personal life for their employees.

II. Review Of Literature

We live in stressful times, and each of us deals with stress every day. Scientists agree that moderate amount of stress can be benign, even beneficial, and most people are equipped to deal with it. However, increasing levels of stress can rapidly lead to low employee morale, poor productivity, and decreasing job satisfaction (Stranks, 2005). Some of the specific symptoms that relate directly to productivity in the work environment are abuse of sick time, cheating, chronic absenteeism, distrust, organisational sabotage, tardiness, task avoidance, and violence in the workplace. Other serious repercussions are depression, alcohol and drug abuse, marital and financial problems, compulsive eating disorders, and employee burnout.

Stress in the workplace had emerged as a major issue for businesses and it has reached alarming proportions. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, 80 percent of workers experienced job stress (Despande, 2012).

Steven L. Sauter, chief of the Applied Psychology and Ergonomics Branch of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health in Cincinnati, Ohio, stated that recent studies showed that "the workplace has become the single greatest source of stress" (The CQ Researcher Online, 2013).

According to Coleman (1976), modern age has been called the „age of anxiety and stress“. Studies have projected that the stress results in a wider range of somatic and psychological patterns which is detrimental to the individual too (Cooper and Cartwright, 1994; and Edworthy, 2000).

Work-related stress can affect individuals when they feel an inability to cope or control demands placed within their work environment and can eventually contribute to the development of maladaptive behaviors such as drinking and smoking (Stansfield et al., 2000) and physical conditions such as depression, anxiety, nervousness, fatigue and heart disorders (European agency for Safety and Health at work, 2002).

Luminari Landmark Study (2004) found that people who worked under stressful conditions, which can include work-life conflicts or lack of social support, autonomy and control, were at least twice as likely to experience the mentioned physical and mental effects - heart and cardiovascular problems, anxiety, depression and demoralization, certain cancers, infectious diseases, conflicts injuries and back pain etc. as compared to other workers.

A research conducted by Ezzedeem and Swiercz (2002) explained that the "modern work has become knowledge based, fluid, and intellectual; overworked people think about work all of the time. For many people, work has become cognitively intrusive." It was revealed that employees were often preoccupied with work when not working, and when in the company of family and loved ones, experienced an inability to be meaningfully engaged in non-work spheres.

III. Objectives

To identify work life balance challenges faced by employees in telecom sector to identify the influence of imbalance Work-Life practices on organizational performance of telecom employees, and their social life to identify ways of enhancing proper Work-Life balance practices amongst employees of telecom companies To develop a conceptual framework for work life balance issues

IV. Challenges Faced By Telecom Sector Employees (Vodafone Company)

The telecom industry has been divided into two major segments, that is, fixed and wireless cellular services. In today's information age, the telecommunication industry has a vital role to play. Considered as the backbone of industrial and economic development, the industry has been aiding delivery of voice and data services at rapidly increasing speeds, and thus, has been revolution rising human communication. The telecom sector in India experienced a rapid growth over the past decade on account of regulatory liberalization, structural

reforms and competition, making telecom one of the major catalysts in India's growth story. How we consider telecom is the back bone of industrial sector, likewise, the employees is back bone of telecom sector. Because in this sector, the each and every work will be done by employees alone, not through by machine or some other equipments. Due to the case of doing major part of work by employees, they don't know how to balance the work as well as life. The foremost important challenge is faced by telecom employee is, short span of time limit and they don't know how to manage the project to complete within the stipulated time period. So, the management should suppose to explain the concept and they need to train the employees according to the project work in each and every time. So, it makes the employees to complete their project within the time period as well as the work also will be done without any error and employees also get out from their stress.

Second thing, if company presuming the employees for refreshment activity like team outing or weekend party etc., along with that they are giving the project completion deadline. So, again it may lead stress for the employees. Most of them are not interested for team outing due to the deadline task of the project. Again they stepping the stress factor.

If the project is assigned to an employee means, the management should suppose to give prior information about the project as well as where they need to go everything they need to intimate before itself, Most of the telecom sectors what they doing mean they are not giving any information to the employees before itself.

According To Mr.E.Dhananjayan (One Of The Leading Telecom Sector Employee), the company is assigning the project work in different site and in different area, sometimes, it may be in different location, like Hyderabad, Bangalore, Kerala, Bombay, Calcutta etc., but they won't give prior information to the employees about the site location before one month, they use to give information about the location and project work everything before two days only. So, in this case there is over stress for me, because I have kids and having some financial problem. Suddenly, if they insist me to go Bangalore for one month in the sense, I need some time to manage everything in my home as well as from work side. At least they need to tell before one week, the management is absolutely absent in this situation. And our higher official (reporting managers) will be in one location, we will be in another location. They don't know what is happening in this side, if any interrupt in the work is happened in the site means due to delay in supply of materials, labor problem, heavy rain, electricity problem etc., again it leads stress for me till the work over. In this situation the work get delays as well as I need to update and explain each and every thing to my higher official because he is in other end. So, in this case I am imbalanced.

V. Consequences Of An Imbalance

Mental health is a balancing act that may be affected by four factors: the influence of unfavorable genes, by wounding trauma, by private pressures and most recently by the stress of working. Many people expose themselves unsolicited to the so-called job stress, because the "hard worker" enjoys a very high social recognition. These aspects can be the cause of an imbalance in the areas of life. But there are also other reasons which can lead to such an imbalance.

Remarkable is, for example, the increase in non-occupational activities with obligation character, which include mainly house and garden work, maintenance and support of family members or volunteer activities. All this can contribute to the perception of a chronic lack of time. This time pressure is, amongst others, influenced by their own age, the age and number of children in the household, marital status, the profession and level of employment as well as the income level. The psychological strain, which in turn affects the health, increases due to the strong pressure of time, but also by the complexity of work, growing responsibilities, concern for long-term existential protection and more. The mentioned stresses and strains could lead in the long term to irreversible, physical signs of wear as well as to negative effects on the human cardiovascular and immune systems.

Prominent cultural beliefs that parenthood is the best avenue for a happy fulfilling life may not be justified. In, *The Joys of Parenthood Reconsidered*, what was found is the opposite, that parents actually suffer worse mental and physical health than childless adults. This is associated with the high costs of parenthood described in the article. Simon states that, "In America we lack institutional supports that would help ease the social and economic burdens associated with parenthood."

VI. Suggestions To Overcome Stress And To Have A Balanced Work Life

A number of recommendations, based on current thinking and empirical literature may assist readers to work towards making work-life balance both a strategic goal and a reality in their organizations.

- When possible, incorporate a work-from-home policy. Offering this benefit even a few days per year can make a difference.

- Make day care available to staff on-site or incorporate a benefit which would provide day care at a discounted rate.
- Consider high-performers and present family vacation packages in addition to, or in place of, monetary bonuses.
- Make yearly anniversaries with the company an extra paid time off day to encourage employees to celebrate their tenure. This day off will also serve as a reminder that their employer cares.
- Encourage employees to avoid checking their work e-mail and voice mail after the workday and on weekends, to separate work from their personal lives.
- Hold virtual meetings, so employees do not have to be on-site to attend.
- Encourage employees to take frequent breaks to rehydrate and go to the restroom (at least once every two hours). This may seem unnecessary to address, but many busy people forget to take time out of the day for their personal well being.
- While you may not be able to initiate all of these suggestions, even tackling a few will help employees see your organization's concern for true work-life balance in the workplace. Address these recommendations with your leadership team as soon as possible to tailor your approach and set your plan into action.

VII. Conclusion

“It's Hans Selye

“The main way to reduce stress in the workplace is by picking the right people” - Jesse Schell

In today fast moving world, peoples having more stress toward their job as well as with their life, stress playing major role in their day to day activities. It's not one day process to overcome and sought out everything in their life in order to reduce the stress. Proper training and managing ability is necessary in order to reduce the stress factor as well as to balance the proper life style. The organization can indeed facilitate the process. The individual has to explore his values, aspirations, and goals to understand what he expects from work and life and then develop the suitable ways of balancing work and life. Hence, he has to introspect on his job contents, ways of coping and relationship management. On the other hand, organization can initiate cutting edge work-life balance practices to help the employees“ manage their affairs more effectively. It can also train employees to understand the issues of work-life and stress management assistance programmes. Even with the availability of employee assistance programs in organization such as stress management and flexible work arrangements, the complex nature of stress still seems to influence the health and work-life balance negatively. So it is the responsibility of the employer and employee to contribute to the better work-life balance for fruitful productivity.

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