

A Study on Work Life Balance with Special Reference to BPO Sector

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Abstract: - Work life and personal life are inter-connected and interdependent. Spending more time in office, dealing with clients and the pressure of job can interfere and affect the personal life, sometimes making it impossible to even complete the household chores. On the other hand, personal life can also be demanding if you have a kid or aging parents, financial problems or even problems in the life of a dear relative. It can lead to absenteeism from work, creating stress and lack of concentration at work. This paper is an attempt against the highly increasing work hours that Indian organizations seem to demand and expect in the course of time and what problems are faced by employees working in BPO's and how they can be encountered. The BPO industry is positive impact on the society by offering indirect employment and satisfies individual level benefit at large, but have adverse effect on work life of workforce where family issues become top priority to be resolved as employee can't give enough time to his/her family.

Index Terms: Work Life Balance, Balance between personal and professional lives, BPO, Problems faced by BPO Employees, Initiatives for BPO employees.

I. INTRODUCTION TO WORK LIFE BALANCE

The term "Work-Life Balance" was first used in U.S in the late 1970 to describe the balance between an individual's work and personal life. It was coined in 1986. Work life balance means to balance the work, life and family responsibilities of an individual. It is the part of human resource management which is receiving increasing attention from the organization, employee, policy maker, and employee representatives (Russell & Bowman, 2000). WLB is a concept that supports the efforts of employees to divide their time and energy between work and the other important aspects of their lives. In addition to the demands of the workplace, Work-life balance is a daily effort to make time for family, friends, community, spirituality, personal growth, self-care, and other personal activities. Work-life balance is supported by employers who institute procedures, policies, actions, and expectations that enable employees to pursue more balanced lives. The search of Work life balance reduces the stress employee experience. When the employees spend majority of their time on work-related activities they feel as if they are neglecting their other important components of lives which leads to stress, irritation and unhappiness etc. Because many employees experience a personal, professional, and monetary need to achieve, work-life balance is challenging. Employers

can help employees to Experience work-life balance by offering certain opportunities as flexible work schedules, paid time off (PTO) policies, responsible time and communication expectations, and company-sponsored family events and activities. Managers play an important role to employees who are looking for work-life balance. Managers who are pursuing work-life balance in their own lives provide support to other employees in their pursuit of work-life balance. They create a work environment in which work-life balance is expected, enabled, and supported and with the help of this they retain their outstanding employees to whom work-life balance is important. The term has three important components – 'work', 'life' and 'balance'. In simple terms, "work" is the activity or effort that we put to produce or accomplish something while "life" includes activities outside work. According to Skinner and Pocock (2008), 'life' activities which are outside the domain of paid work includes, family, friends and community. The term 'balance' too, itself has a variety of meanings.

Work-life balance has been defined differently by different scholars. In order to know more about work life balance, there are few definitions which will clear out the concept of work life balance.

Greenhaus (2002) defined work –life balance as satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict.

Felstead et al. (2002) defines work-life balance as the relationship between the institutional and cultural times and spaces of work and non-work in societies where income is predominantly generated and distributed through labor markets.

Aycan et al. (2007) defined the subject only with work and family and put forward the concept of "life balance" with a more whole perspective.

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) has defined WLB as inter-role conflict in which pressure from the work domain and family domain are mutually mismatched that is participating in one role makes it difficult for the employees to perform the responsibility of another role and due to this they have also claimed that work life conflict increases when people have to perform multiple roles, which leads to overload, interferences and stress.

In other way "Work life balance also means to balance the personal and professional life of an individual in such a way

so that it does not affect the individual's family life. The individual should know how to manage his family and office at the same time."

Work-life balance does not mean that there is an equal balance in units of time between work and life. WLB has important consequences for employee attitudes towards their organizations as well as for the lives of employees. A balance between work and life exist only when there is a proper functioning of work at home and in the office. Work life balance (WLB) is defined as a state of equilibrium in which the demands of both individual's job and personal life are equal" The concept of work-life balance is based on the fact that paid work and personal life should be seen less as competing priorities than as complementary elements of a full life. The way to achieve this is to adopt an approach that is "conceptualized as a two way process involving a consideration of the needs of employees as well as those of employers"(Lewis , 2000: p.105)

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Work life balance is described as people who control and manage see-saw of both life and career with achievement and satisfaction (Blunsdon et al 2006). It is the term used to describe those practices at workplace that acknowledge and aim to support the needs of employees in achieving a balance between demands of their family and work life. Work life balance means adjusting the pattern of work so that the employee can benefit from a better fit between their work and areas of their personal life and in long run hope to achieve sustainable development and profitability (Verma , 2007). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) has defined as inter-role conflict in which pressure from the work domain and family domain are mutually mismatched that is participation in one role made difficult for women employee to perform the responsibility of another role and they have also claimed that work life conflict increases when people have to perform multiple roles, which often lead to overloads and interferences.

Family, friendly work environment such as flexi time, shift working, etc has been portrayed as an important component of work life balance. Better work arrangement helped employees to obtain a better blend between work and non-work lives while providing organization with a means of recruiting, retaining and motivation their workforce (Bachmann, 2000; Schwartz,1994).

Morgan.L (2009) has identified the impact of work-life balance and family-friendly policies on employee's job satisfaction. It was suggested that these family-friendly policies helped organization to achieve a satisfactory balance between work and family. The employees with proper work-life balance contributed to job.

Thompson, (2002) classified work-life initiatives into five (5) categories namely, (1) Time-based strategies like flexi-time, telecommuting and job sharing; (2) Information-based

strategies like relocation assistance, elder care resources, company work/life balance intranet; (3) Money-based strategies like leave with pay, scholarships for dependents; (4) Direct services like onsite childcare, concierge services and takeout dinners; and (5) Culture-change strategies like training or focus on employees' performance not office face time.

R. Baral and S. Bhargava (2011) have analyzed that family-friendliness of employers in India have been reflected in various welfare provisions which has been a matter of concern for employers since industrialization. With time, the scope and coverage of such initiatives have broadened and have become more individual growth and family well-being oriented.

Jenkins (2000) observes that issues like child rearing, the need to balance multiple roles etc. have consequences on health and family relationships. Securely attached individuals experienced positive spill-over in both work and family.

Valcour and Hunter (2005), say that new trends like teleworking attempt to address work-family issues. In India too there is a rising trend towards teleworking.

According to Barden (2001), negative stress is becoming a major illness in the work environment, and it can debilitate employees and be costly to employers.

Rakesh Yadav ,(2011) analyzed that factors such as absence of personal life, physical strains, unscheduled work hours were affecting the attrition from HR perspective which could be minimized by giving extra break to employees who work continuously in night shift for five days, compensating workers with wellness programs and stress busters and aligning employees holidays with the clients' holidays.

III. OBJECTIVE

The objective of this paper is to understand the problems of BPO employees which they face in their daily lives and how it can affect organization, family and employee also. This paper also tries to find out the balance between their personal and professional lives.

IV. BALANCE BETWEEN PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIVES

To achieve a healthy work-life balance, it require to manage the personal and professional life in sustainable ways that keeps the energy flowing, minds and bodies healthy and our whole selves happy and content It means to give full attention to all of the things that enrich and fulfil the lives of employees including work and career, health and fitness, family and relationships, spirituality, community service, hobbies and passions, intellectual stimulation, rest and recreation.

1. Flexible working hours

Flexible timings should be there in the organization so that the employees can manage their personal and professional lives in a systematic manner. The employees should be provided with compressed work weeks and voluntary reduced working hours to balance their lives in a smoother way.

2. *Track Your Time*

The first step to achieve a balanced work life is to analyze your situation. Try to keep a time log of everything what you do for a week, which includes work-related and personal activities. This data will serve as an eye-opener, helping you understand how you are using - and where you are losing - your precious time.

3. *Determine Your Priorities*

Take out some time for you and reflect on what is most important to you, and then make a list of your top priorities at work and at home. Then analyze your time by asking yourself these following questions: What do I need to start doing? Stop doing? Continue doing? Do more of? Do less of? Do differently?

4. *Establish Boundaries*

On the first day itself set your limits on what you will and will not do both at work and at home and then clearly communicate these boundaries to your supervisor, partner, co-workers and family. For instance, commit not to work late on certain days unless there is a crisis or something very important. Additionally, plan your time in such a way that when you are at home you will not check or respond to work-related emails or voice mails.

5. *Nurture Your Family/Relationships*

Relationship with loved ones, family and friends is one of the greatest sources of inner satisfaction. If your job or career is damaging or destroying your personal relationships, both the areas will ultimately have to suffer. There are days when you will need to work overtime. This becomes problematic when these days become the rule, not the exception. By keeping your personal relationships as the most important priority, your productivity and effectiveness on the job will increase.

6. *Time Management*

Time management is one of the best solutions which can help to reduce the imbalance between the personal and professional work life of the employees. By prioritizing the tasks and planning the activities before only can help to take out some free time from the busy schedule and can be utilized for other purposes.

V. BUSINESS PROCESS OUTSOURCING

One of the most preferred destination in India is Outsourcing. Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) started in 1980, but services outsourced to India started in the 1990, followed by the emergence of IT companies. Indian BPO companies have

been increasingly contributing to the domestic economy over the years. It is also providing valuable contribution to the services sector (NASSCOM, 2011). Though cost reduction and availability of skilled English-speaking employees have been the important key growth drivers in the industry, many other factors such as service quality, access to talent and productivity have kept the Indian ITES BPO industry competitive in the global market. Some of the Human Resource related issues which are receiving considerable attention in the BPOs are organizational environment work conditions, management-labor relationships, work life balance and work force empowerment. Work-life balance is the stability which has been characterized by the balancing of an individual's life complexity and dynamism with environmental and personal resources such as family, profession, community, employer, geography, economics, information, personality, or values (Crooker et al, 2002). Work-life balance has become a subject of concern in view of the technological, demographic market and the organizational changes which are associated with it. Increasing demand of work-life balance have forced the BPO companies to take certain initiatives such as alternative work arrangements, leave policies, flexible working hours and benefits in lieu of family care responsibilities and employee and stress assistance programs. Such policies are known as 'work-life benefits and practices' (WLBPs). Studies suggest that WLBPs help to improve employee commitment, satisfaction, morale and performance which reduce the level and intensity of stress that employees experience during their work (Bruck, et al., 2002). The availability of technology has assists in the connectivity of people which has delineated the boundaries between work and personal life.

VI. BPO AND WORK LIFE BALANCE

With its 24/7 operations BPO companies has higher turnover rates as compared to other industries in the same sector. In a recent study, Hechanova (2008) explained that 1 of 2 call center representatives has turnover intent; this turnover intent is associated with age, job responsibilities, career commitment, satisfaction with pay, burnout, boss, promotion, firm management and promotions. Given the results of the research, she recommended that call centers and BPO companies should ensure to their employees effective rewards management system, help employees find the right fit and help them to rethink job design, as well as provide them with fun atmosphere and Employee Wellbeing Programs. Work-Life Balance in Philippine BPO organizations, are seen in these terms focusing on the extent to which benefits are not only commensurate and competitive but are also relevant to the needs of employees. Moreover, as BPO employees belong to fairly young age group, a supportive workplace and fun work environment is imperative to address the work-related stress (Hechanova, 2008). The availability of technology anywhere which aids in the connectivity of people 24/7 further delineates the boundaries between work and personal lives.

VII. PROBLEMS FACED BY BPO EMPLOYEES

1. Health Problems

The consequences of stressful work are related to health problems, which eventually leads to quitting of job or Quitting the industry. We witness high attrition rates of around 30-40% in this industry.

Some of the health issues are:

1. Tension
2. Sleeplessness
3. Headaches
4. Eye-strain
5. Repetitive strain injury (RSI)
6. Voice loss, hearing problems and burn-out.

2. Depression

The employees are gradually realizing that there are limited scopes in developing a career owing to lesser growth opportunities in the BPO industry is increasing the frustration levels in the employees. Coupled with growing mental fatigue and increasingly punishing physical environments, depression is the end result. Some BPO have now started different stress management programs mainly to counter depression.

3. Sleeping Disorders

One severe problem that is affecting the people working in Indian BPO is the sleeping disorder. Not only the fresher's, even the experience managers are unable to escape from this problem. There are some BPO which are providing innovative mechanisms like flexible shifts with sleeping arrangements in the office premises.

4. Digestive System Related Problems

Working for long hours and for odd hours without any sleep, and eating food supplied by caterers every day, has led to employees suffering from digestive disorders. Many BPO are now taking additional care to ensure their caterers supply hygienic food; besides stipulating strict conditions to maintain the quality of the food they serve.

5. Eyesight Problems

Globally BPO employees are considered at a high risk for eye related problems. The quality of monitors which they are using might impact these disorders and sitting continuous in front of these computers without adequate breaks seems to be the true reason. Though this is a major problem in the IT industry, there are some companies which have overcome with this problem by using anti-glare monitors.

6. Discipline and Behavioral Issues

BPO provide excellent working environment, free food and transportation to the employees. But there are individual or group of youngsters who tend to commit mistakes and abuse the freedom. The most common behavior cited is misuse of food, misbehaving in vans, and smoking in public places,

misuse of telephones and other resources of the company. The supervisors are busy under the pressure of performance and achieving targets. Hence do not get time for finding solution to these problems. The professional counselor can play a major role in educating the youngsters on discipline and not misusing anything and providing advice to erring executives. Unacceptable behaviors cause disturbance to other employees and affects the overall productivity. Continuous education and counseling will help to mitigate such problems and then only it is possible to change the behavior of the employees by adopting a positive approach.

7. Hearing Ailments

A BPO job is taking calls throughout the shift, sitting with headphones. While quality of headphones does make a difference, but it is not appropriate to say that good quality of headphones can solve this problem; it is more to do with giving rest between the calls to the employees so that they will feel relaxed.

8. Detachment from the Family

Since the daytime is spent in sleep and other recreational activities with friends and colleagues, employees are hardly able to give time to their families. These problems become more worsen when they get married. Additional responsibilities of running a family demand more time for the family and because of this people quit the industry. Employees have to work on Indian holidays too, which causes frustration to the employees and they start feeling that they are going away from their families. Hence it is important for the family members to provide support to their young sons and daughters and to help them to overcome with the stress that they are undergoing.

9. Monotonous work

Most people say that BPO work makes one dumb. BPO work is notoriously very boring and repetitive. At first, it will seem challenging but after sometime doing the same things and encountering the same scenarios over and over again, tends to become bored with your job. This is one of the reasons why some BPO agents change their job from one BPO to another.

10. Rest Days

For most BPO, rest days are not Saturdays and Sundays. This can lead to bring your morale down especially when you have a family or living with your family, and everyone is home and you're not. It is also uncommon for you to have split days off (e.g., Saturday and Monday, Tuesday and Thursday, etc.). This becomes a major problem for the BPO employees as they have accustomed for two consecutive offs.

11. Stress

BPO work is very stressful. Whether you are working for a customer service, sales, or technical service account, you will encounter heavy stress. This is the reason why BPO agents are

chain smokers. The stress from BPO work does not only come from the nature of the work, but it also comes from the culture of the customers they deal with. Because of this type of culture, most of the employees seem to be impolite and rude and this is natural.

12. Personal Habits

In today's scenario the young executives are developing certain bad habits such as drinking alcohol, smoking etc. Even women's are smoking and drinking alcohol in the BPO industry which is definitely a social stigma in the Indian societies. The parents are concerned about the bad habits of their children but are not finding it easy to talk to them about their habits. Solving such issues lies majorly in the hands of the employees and their employers. The company should conduct group counseling, workshops, educative film shows, in order to create awareness of bad habits to the employees and the employers. These types of actions will enable individuals to realize the importance of good habits and they could seek one-to-one counseling sessions.

VIII. INITIATIVES TAKEN FOR BPO EMPLOYEES

There are certain initiatives which have been taken for the BPO employees to manage their work life. With the help of these initiatives the BPO employees can work better and can try to manage their personal and professional lives in easy way. Some of the initiatives are:

1. Flexi time

The main objective of the flexi time is to provide opportunity to employees to work with flexible work schedules and set their plans accordingly. Flexible work policy is initiated by employees and has been approved by management to meet their business commitments while supporting employee personal life needs. The factors on which Flexi time is allowed to an employee include: Child or Parent care, Maternity, Health situation, Formal education program etc.

2. Employee referral scheme

In several companies employee referral scheme is implemented to encourage employees to refer their friends and relatives who are efficient in their work and has experience to work in the organization

3. Company Leased Accommodation:

Some of the BPO's provide shared accommodation for all the out station employees and also undertakes to pay their electricity/water bills as well as the Society charges for the shared accommodation. The purpose is to provide to the employees a comfortable work life balance.

4. Personal Health Care (Regular medical check-ups):

Some BPO'S provides the facility for extensive health check-up in the organization at certain intervals of time. For

employees who are above 40 years of age, the medical check-up is done once a year or in six months.

5. Employee Loans:

Most of the BPO companies provide loan facility to their employees on three different occasions: Firstly, employees are provided with financial assistance at the time of their wedding. Secondly, they are also provided with financial assistance in case of medical emergency and thirdly, for the new recruit who are provided with interest free loans to assist them in their initial settlement at the work location.

6. Educational Benefits:

Many BPO companies have the policy to provide educational benefits to their employees and hence reimburse the expenses incurred towards their tuition fees, examination fees, and purchase of books subject to pursuing MBA, and/or other management qualification at India's top most Business Schools.

7. Performance based incentives:

Many BPO companies have plans for, performance based incentive scheme. The parameters for calculation of this scheme is process performance i.e. speed, accuracy and productivity of each process. The incentive for Performance can be as much as 22% of the salary what they get..

8. Stress Management Programs:

Certain stress management programs are organized for the BPO employees to overcome their stress which they have got due to overnight shifts, family problems, etc.

IX. CONCLUSION

This sector is working on balancing the work-life of employees and certain initiatives have been taken to solve the complexities of workers in ITES and how to solve their problem using time management so that employees can manage their personal life and professional life smoothly. This sector is all about working with 24*7 and stress will be involved with work and mental stability will be a prime concern for employers so as how to make people work efficiently. The sector has to organize special program me at the week end by creating an attractive work environment through which people can get relaxed at least during week-end. The sector should know what the reasons are for the birth of such imbalances and should work on these reasons to give a good and better life its employees.

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