WORK LIFE BALANCE POLICIES & PRACTICES FOR WOMEN EMPLOYEES BY MAJOR INDIAN IT COMPANIES

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ABSTRACT: Work life balance is used to describe the balance between an individual's personal life and professional life. A healthy work-life balance assumes great significance for working women particularly in the current context in which both, the family and the workplace have posed several challenges and problems for women employees. The dynamics of the work environment have exerted enormous pressure on working women as they need to cope with virtually two full time jobs – one at the office and the other at home. Work-life balance has become a subject of concern for both research scholars and business leaders in view of the contemporary demographic, technological, market, and organisational changes associated with it. However, there has been little academic attempt to provide a holistic picture of work-life balance benefits and programmes (WLBPs) offered by various organizations in India. With the basis of extant literature, primary and secondary data, the present paper has made an effort to understand the current status of WLBPs in Indian organizations and to identify its future prospects. The paper has discussed the challenges for effective implementation of such policies, which can help HR managers to be cautious before introducing WLBPs in their respective organizations. Analysis of literature and available data suggests 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. Moreover, the range of WLBPs varies across organizations and there is still a long way to go when WLBPs will become strategic HR initiatives in most organizations.

Keywords: Work-Family Balance, Work-Life Balance, Working women, Work life balance practices.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Twenty first century organizations are characterized by persistent changes, uncertainties and excessive pressure to increase productivity. These changes disturb the balance in the lives of employees causing confusion and stress. This is also fuelled by extreme levels of competitiveness in the work sphere posing new challenges and problems to workers. Technological advancements and new inventions have impacted the socio cultural context by introducing multi-cultural life styles in Indian homes. Today work-life balance has become an increasingly pervasive concern for employers as well as employees. Demographic changes as seen in the increasing number of women in the workplace and dual career families have generated an increasingly diverse workforce and a greater need of employees to balance their work and non-work lives (Bharat, 2003). In response to these employers have innovative practices that allow employees to find greater work-life balance (Friedman, Christensen, & DeGroot, 1998). Increasing attrition rates and increasing demand for work life balance have forced organizations' to look beyond run of the mill HR interventions. As a result, initiatives such as flexible working hours, alternative work arrangements, leave policies and benefits in lieu of family care responsibilities and employee assistance programmes have become a significant part of most of the company benefit programmes and compensation packages. Such policies, practices and benefit programmes are generally referred as _family-friendly policies' (FFPs) or _work-life benefits and practices' (WLBPs) in literature (Kopelman et al., 2006; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). The significance and implications of such HR interventions are many. Research findings suggest that WLBPs not only help employees better manage their work and family roles, but also affect employee attitude and behaviors such as organisational commitment (Grover & Crooker, 1995), job satisfaction (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998) and intention to quit (Lobel & Kossek, 1996). Provision of WLBPs also contributes to organisational performance and effectiveness (Sands & Harper, 2007). However, employers'concern for employees'family lives is not a recent phenomenon. Employers have been providing various welfare measures

such as good working conditions, health, safety, and security provisions to employees since industrialization. These welfare practices became norms of most factories and organizations either as a result of employers'pragmatic concern for employees and their families or unions'conscious bargain for employee welfare.

1.1 WHAT IS WORK LIFE BALANCE?

Work-life balance refers to the level of prioritization between personal and professional activities in an individual's life and the level to which activities related to their job are present in the home.

According to Stewart Friedman - Professor of Management and Founding Director of Wharton School's Leadership Program and of its Work -Life Integration project - "a one size fits all; mentality in human resources management often perpetuates frustration among employees. It is not an uncommon problem in many HR areas, where, for the sake of equality, there's a standard policy implemented in a way that is universally acceptable, even though everyone's life is different and everyone needs different things in terms of how to integrate the different pieces. It's got to be customized". Friedman's research indicates that the solution lies in approaching the components of work, family, community and self as a comprehensive system.

1.2 WOMEN AND WORK LIFE BALANCE:

The phrase 'work-life balance' conjures up an image of a scale (something women are often at war with anyhow) with work on one side and family and/or other personal relationships on the other. In the middle is the woman with both arms extended trying to balance everything. The woman represents the stabilizer caught in the middle being divided her life into two parts - where she feels she should be and where society says she should be. But a woman is a whole being and the focus should be on her as a whole being and not on just two (important) aspects of her life. The 'this or that' definition of 'work-life' seeks to define women as servants in two entirely separate roles: workers or caretakers. Women *perform* these (and many other) roles but they should not be made to represent the embodiment of these roles.

Work-life balance has been sold to women as being the key to happiness by suggesting all we need to do is to simply find a way to better fill our roles without going crazy. The bottom line message being (unfairly) sold to women is that if we would only prioritize our work lives better we would have more time to spend with friends, family, and on ourselves. The trouble is, accomplishing more personal time requires a significant amount of work and the term 'balance' becomes moot.

1.3 IMPORTANCES OF WORK LIFE BALANCE TO WOMEN:

Today's working women are continually confronted by the demands of full-time work and when the day is done at the office & they carry more of the responsibilities and commitments at home. Women report that their lives are a juggling act that includes multiple responsibilities at work, heavy meeting schedules, business trips, on top of managing the daily routine responsibilities of life and home. "Successfully achieving work/life balance will ultimately create a more satisfied workforce that contributes to productivity and success in the workplace."

2. WORK-LIFE BALANCES PRACTICES:

2.1 Causes that enhanced the demand for WLB practices:

1. Increasing number of women in the work place

2. Dual career families

3. Need of employees to balance their work and non-work lives

4. Working mothers: - WLB was considered mainly an issue for working mothers in the 1960s & 1970s as they struggled with the demands of their jobs & raising children.

5. Single parent families: for single parents managing work & personal life (taking care of children & other dependents) becomes very difficult, which results in stress, absenteeism, poor health etc.

6. Employee health and well being: For good health and stress free life, many organizations are giving free health check up, healthy breakfast, yoga classes etc to their employees.

7. Legislation: - According to Indian Law every organization has to give basic benefits to their employees. Benefits include maternity benefit, 48 hrs of work in a week, crèches for children where 30 or more women are working, safety for women employee.

8. Public image of the organization: Organizations having good WLB practices have good image in the market & people want to join with the organization.

9. Cost benefit analysis: - researches prove that keeping new parents happy is cheaper than finding new employees, which can cost between 50 & 200% of TCO.

2.2 Work life balance practices can be categorized into:

1. Policies: cover the formal & informal ways by which employees' work & leave schedules are handled, including part time work, flexi time & parental or family leave.

2. Benefits: Benefits cover different forms of compensation that protect against loss of earnings, payment of medical expenses & sponsored vacation.

3. Services: Service includes onsite or near site childcare centers, medical facilities & counseling

3. STATUTORY WLB PRACTICES UNDER INDIAN LABOR LEGISLATION:

Statutory practices are the compulsory & minimum benefit (WLBPs) given to an employee under Indian labor law. Statutory benefits found under Indian labor legislation are

1. Factories Act, 1948: according to Factories Act, 1948, no adult worker shall be allowed to work in a factory for more than 48 hours in a week, 9hours in a day & on first day of the week. Every employee who has worked for a period of 240 days or more in a calendar year shall be allowed for leave with wages & it is calculated as one day leave for every 20 days of work performed by the employee. This Act also provides crèches, where 30 or more women are working.

2. Maternity benefit Act, 1961: According to Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, a working woman is allowed for a paid leave of 12 weeks, 6 weeks before delivery & 6 weeks after delivery. This is same for the case of miscarriage. This Act enables the working women financially stable during pregnancy. This Act also provides 2 nursing breaks per day.

3. Indian Penal Code, 1869, section 509(amended): sexual harassment in the work place: this Act provides protection to the working women in the work place.

4. WORK LIFE BALANCE IN MAJOR INDIAN IT COMPANIES IN INDIA:

4.1. Work Life Balance of INFOSYS Initiative taken:

They have allowed employees to „work from home" for 9 days in a month Infosys has made another set of changes to its HR policy, in an effort to remain attractive to its employees, arrest attrition and drive productivity. The country's second largest software exporter has allowed its employees can work 9 days in a month from their home, compared to 4 in the past. Infosys HR sent an internal email to all employees a few days ago. Recent input from the Owler community has increased Infosys' Work Life Balance Score. The Work Life Balance Score is now 62 on a 100 point scale. The Bangalore-based company now has a higher Work Life Balance Score than TCS, which has a score of 61. The network is designed to provide parenting counseling, demystify work life balance policies and give employees a platform to ask questions and discuss their views with others about their experiences as working parents. According to Mr. Narayana Murthy, Chief Mentor of Infosys" The initiative is to ensure that parents amongst Infoscians are in a position to contribute effectively to the growth of Infosys by helping them strike the best balance between work and life". The network has just been launched in India and will soon be expanded to the US, UK and Australia. Infosys is recognized as company to work in India, according to a survey done by employees by Business Today magazine in 2010.

4.2. Work Life Balance of TATA Consultancy Services:

Reaching for the sky has become a habit with Aarthi Subramanian, The first woman to be appointed to the board of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Ms Subramanian has banked on talent, diligence and resolves to find and fulfill her life's calling. And a sumptuous calling it has been. Appointed as executive director to the TCS board in March 2015, Ms Subramanian has operated in a variety of crucial positions at TCS and has worked in, besides India, Sweden, the United States and Canada. She opens up in this interview with Christ belle Noronha on the road that has brought her this far and the experiences that have enriched the journey. I like to call it work-life prioritization because I don't know if there is a balance. Besides, a company like TCS gives you the opportunities and flexibility to manage your constraints. TCS is a huge company and professional atmosphere is what we liked the most. Lot of activities related to social causes take place every now and then. Employee engagement activities is really amazing, such as work life balance. My job is quite challenging and interesting, good team work and job culture is another major factor that distinguishes TCS from other companies employees have worked with.

4.3. WIPRO:

Crèches, Paid holiday, Vacation, Maternity Benefit with extended leave of absence and sabbaticals are offered to every Wiproite. The various Corporate Social Responsibility campaigns under the 'Wipro Cares' initiative gives insights into the right diet, best exercises for the body and soul and a variety of tips to keep one fit. Wipro's focus is on both the emotional and physical wellness of the employee as a means to enable work life balance.

4.4. IBM:

At IBM, a mobile work environment allows employees the ability to enhance their effectiveness by providing tools to use at any location, be it a customer office, airport, IBM's mobility workstations or home. Employees in consultation with their managers can agree on a special working hours schedule which would assist the employees in balancing their responsibilities to work, family education and other personal needs. IBM ranks among the best companies for "Working Mother" for nineteen successive years (www-07.ibm.com). IBM also entails a partnership between IBM and 'Your Kids R Our Kids' a high quality pre-school and day care solution provider. High-quality learning programs are available to the young learners in the form of coupled education with fun. This child care centre has been started in Pune and offers: The Infant program; The Early Toddler/Toddler program; The Pre School program; The Nursery and Kindergarten program; The after School Program. The Pune child care centre operates from 8:00 am to 7:30 pm, five days a week twelve months a year. Well balanced and nutritious lunches, morning and afternoon snacks coordinated by a registered dietician are offered at the centre along with a certified in-house nurse and pediatrician who are available on call.

IBM's Global Work/Life Fund was formed in the year 2001 it is one of the first funds of its type to address such employee issues globally. While the fund addresses a variety of work/life issues, the primary focus is on dependent care programs that will help employees and their communities respond to the child and elder care responsibilities of working families. The fund is managed by cooperation with WFD, Inc., a leading consultant in work/life issues, based out of Boston, USA. IBM's Global Work/Life Fund has been recognized by NASSCOM as one of the most innovative offerings that address work/life needs in the IT/ITes industry. IBM won the Nasscom award in December last year for best childcare services in the Indian IT industry. Holiday camps are also undertaken where the children of IBM are fully occupied when the employees are at work and the kids are off school. Especially in the summer months there is a high participation rate among the children. Clearly, IBM positions itself as a child friendly employer.

4.5. CISCO:

It provides gamut of infrastructure to its employees. Laptops, data card for web access, broadband access at home are facilities provided to them to balance work/life. Cisco does not have a track on attendance and office times as the work is done globally. Employees end up participating in calls and meetings at home. Forums like Women's Action Network have been enabled to seek support and guidance for the employees to balance career and life. IT enabled services are instrumental in driving work life balance here.

4.6. HCL Technologies Ltd:

In the new age workplaces, work life balance is a key differentiator. With a maximum voting of 26%, work life balance is one of the best reasons employees prefer working for HCL. Work ambience is another prospect that attracts and retains employees. Almost 17% of the candidates reviewed this factor to be one of the reasons to work for HCL.

Workplace becomes a second home for employees as one spends maximum hours in the office. Approximately, 16% respondents say that they're fond of their co-workers and they create a comfortable workplace for them. The evolution of workplaces has led to a lot of changes in working norms. An employee friendly term always acts as one of the biases. Around 15% respondents voted for flexi hours that makes working smooth for the employees in HCL.

4.7. GOOGLE Pvt. Ltd.:

The concept of family-friendly has been imbibed in Google. Children are seen playing with Lego sets or eating in their staff canteen. It creates an atmosphere of freedom with a sense of empowerment for its employees. Employees are given maximum flexibility in terms of work and what they would like to do

4.8. HP:

Flexible work option is offered to all its employees, especially young mothers, working in HP which allows its employees to work part-time or flexible hours. A 60:40 ratio is planned among the local units where for every 60 employees who punch in their cards at office, 40 work from home. A better work-life balance is delivered to the employees while the organization saves on real estate, power consumption and office maintenance staff. HP offers flexible work options to help employees balance work and personal commitments. They also offer Flex time, Part time, Telework and Flex work. Self defense classes and mentoring programmes are also conducted for women.

4.9. ACCENTURE:

The work environment in Accenture enables one to collaborate with people and draw from experiences around the world. It not only enables one to work with dynamic people but also enables a healthy work life balance. Telecommuting initiative is one of the key tools for attracting and retaining employees, especially women employees. At Accenture, workshops on building effective networks and managing work/life balance are conducted. Accenture is also coordinating a webcast featuring stories from and about Accenture women worldwide. The webcast is accessible by all Accenture employees via an Intranet connection. "Vaahihi" a group was launched by Accenture in 2005 which address women's issues proactively. The company gives incentives including cash for referring women. (www. mtaram.com)

4.10. Tech Mahindra:

Work-life balance is an important consideration for software professionals to work in a company. However, work-life balance becomes the biggest reason why people want to work at Tech Mahindra are satisfied with the company's policies about this. Only 30% of respondents say that they have to work more than 10 hours a day, which is a pretty good stat as compared to other organizations. Over 83% of Tech Mahindra employees say that their co-workers are punctual. With smart and punctual colleagues and better work-life balance, the work environment is bound to be healthy. This is why employees see the work environment the third biggest reason to work at Tech Mahindra. Flexi work hours are one such good effort made by the company to help employees work more freely and enhance their productivity, making it the fifth-biggest reason for employees to retain at Tech Mahindra.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INDIAN ORGANIZATIONS ON WLB PRACTICES:

From the Indian research study Women in Management in the New Economic Environment: the Case of India, the following are recommendations for Indian organizations to promote a supportive workplace for women.

1. Develop policies that create a more women-friendly workplace environment.

2. Establish training programs for women, such as mentorships, career guidance and leadership development.

3. Promote awareness initiatives that highlight the value of women managers.

4. Make accommodations for women in areas such as need-based postings. That is, as done in civil services, have a policy to post both spouses to the same district or state.

5. Have a true commitment to hire and promote women and include women in the annual business strategy.

6. CONCLUSION:

Work life balance initiatives must address the issue of equity and fairness among employees by targeting numerous forms of care - childcare centers, family childcare, school-age and backup programs, and eldercare services. Employers can ensure that programs meet the dual needs of employers and communities by building on the existing dependent care infrastructure such as grandpa grandma crèches, elder care institutions, palliative care homes, community crèches, revival of cultural initiatives etc. Today most organizations have implemented intranets, virtual private networks and other knowledge management systems to stay in touch even if it means they have to work from home for non-work related purposes such as tending to a sick child or parents. Video conferencing to reduce travel and not scheduling work events during school holidays are other measures that can be adopted. The Indian employers can learn from the experiences of other countries who have worked on work life balance policies and initiatives. The negative fall outs of not implementing policies can also be observed. Cases in point include rising number of broken homes, crimes by adolescents and children stress and related diseases to name a few (Srivastava 2009). However, new initiatives must consider the nature of industry, profile of workforce, the local culture and environment etc. In the recent past, some proactive measures have been introduced in some organizations to increase work life balance.

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