

A study on the Impact of ICT on Work Life Balance

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Abstract: Advancements in technology have resulted in more work pressures, thereby affecting the stress levels of the employees to a much larger extent. This has given rise to the novel concept of work life balance which simply denotes a balance to be accomplished between work and life domain of employees. As such researchers have felt a need to create and study a balance between work pressures and ordinary lives. The concept calls for a budding relationship between variables like satisfaction, productivity and health. The paper aims to highlight the role of ICT on the quality of work-life balance. While deliberating on the concept it has come to the fore that ICT have a far reaching impact on work life balance. Studies indicate that due to technological interventions employees are bound to be more productive, but have more stress levels as well. Technological innovations like telecommuting, flexitimes and work from anywhere have revolutionized the work quality and productivity but at the same time have intermingled with the family life.

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1. Introduction

The work pressure on today's employees to provide better services to customers has increased magnanimously. In the past century, employees had not experienced such pressures as today's employees has to deal with. This pressure to employees has come from two major sources a) concept of customer delight b) ever improving technology. Technological innovations are drastically shifting the way we live, work and use our creative skills. We have a complete new world order where people who are masters in technology rule the world. Some of many features which technology has brought to us are: i) Space rather than place ii) A new generation of human resource iii) A realization for environmental issues iv) High- speed internet and much more. A concept of smart work has set its foot where we have connected devices, smart applications and high-bandwidth networks.

1.1 Information & Communication Technology (ICT)

ICT ever since it has been applied in work has changed the balance of work and life for employees and employers alike. ICT has revolutionized the way work is done be it efficiency, accuracy, time and ease of contact. Technology has turned the today's world into a single hub where each one is contactable and sharing of nearly everything is possible. But, owing to all the benefits which technology has brought, it has snatched the human part of people in general and employees in particular. Today, employees are contactable even in their personal lives; similarly they are intruded when in office space. This has resulted in

work-life merge for most of 21st century employees. This has greatly put them under stress to satisfy both domains. The normal work time has extended due to virtual office concept. The virtual way of working owes to colossal upscale in technological advancements. The employees are contactable even without in office. This has greatly impacted his family and personal life.

1.2 Work-life balance

Work-life balance is understood and defined by number of researchers. But, there is no single common definition due to work-life balance being subjective and personal concept. Work-life balance historically is considered as personal issue (Emslie & Hunt, 2009). Work Life Balance is a person's control over the responsibilities between workplace, family, friends and self Thulasimani et al. (2010). As per Duxbury & Smart, (2011) the concept of work/life balance is changing rapidly: Work and home life are no longer two separate entities, placing competing demands on our resources but remaining distinct in terms of time and location.

Employers of today know that in order to attract and retain the best talent, there is no shortcut than implementing work-life balance policies. As with change in environment and value of employees, there has increased employees' desire for work-life balance & employers in realization of this are offering active work-life balance support (Thorntwaite, 2004). In order to pursue quality of life, employees are in conflict between personal life and work. The employees of today highly value companies or jobs where they can maintain balance between work and

life. A wide acceptance among researchers is that work-life balance is related to desirable outputs in both family and workplace area. (e.g., Harrington and Ladge, 2009)

2. ICT and Its Impact

The technological innovations influencing employees' work-life balance is at the heart of this conceptual study. The study has been divided into three sections with following objectives in mind:

- a) Role of mobile technology in the maintenance of work-life balance.
- b) Role of instant communication in the maintenance of work-life balance.
- c) Role of tele-commuting in the maintenance of work-life balance.

2.1 Mobile technology and work-life balance

Technology is becoming regular feature of one's life both in professional as well as personal. On positive side, technological advancements have greatly increased the speed of work and accuracy. An advantage perceived by workers is the potential for greater productivity and efficiency that using technology offers (Towers et al, 2006). The handheld gadgets provided by organization or personally owned have completely changed how employees prioritize work and home. A key advantage that emerges consistently is the flexibility mobile technology can offer, allowing workers to regulate the pace, location and time of day in which they conduct their work (Middleton, 2008). Japanese workers' total mobile technology (MT) usage (i.e., during office and non-office hours) had a positive impact on their work autonomy, which, in turn, led to greater work engagement Fujimoto et al (2016). Although, smart phones and other devices all have potential to be used for facilitating measures like flexibility, productivity and efficiency which greatly impacts employees skill and worth for the organization. However, on negative side, these handheld gadgets have at times lead to overload and easy to contact leading to stress and anxiety. Often, the two domains i.e. work and life get merged with improper use of mobile technology leading each domain unsatisfied. This takes shape in the conflict between persons personal and work life.

2.2 Instant Communication and Work-Life Balance

Advances in technology, in particular the wide spread use of mobile devices, have changed work practices and transformed our everyday lives. They have made us virtually present everywhere be at work or home. Communication technologies like emails and other social networking applications have kept us touch with each other. Communication via E-mail is considered one of efficient ways of collaboration, but the high volume can lead to effect on productivity and

network infrastructure of the firm (Burgess et al., 2006). Professional communication via email has less significant effect on work-life, whereas, communication via blackberries and smart phones have greater interference with work. Boswell et.al (2014) has revealed that employees with higher ambition and job involvement are likely to use communication technologies after working hours which is associated with work-life conflict.

2.3 Telecommuting and Work-Life Balance

For the welfare of employees, HR policies are designed to provide a cushion for employees to balance work and family. Some of the policies are flexible working hours, Part-time work, telecommuting and compressed work-sheet which have proven highly suitable to manage workers effort to balance family and work obligations. Telecommuting refers to a specific arrangement to work at home, reducing or eliminating the need to travel (commute) to work (Niles, 1976). Hislop et. al (2015) finds that for self-employed, home-working leads to spatial-temporal flexibility reducing their social isolation.

However, home-working can lead to perpetual contact where one is accessible at any time. Technology has blurred the traditional distinctions between work environments and buildings and many businesses have increasingly adopted a virtual approach to workspace Kay worth and Leidner (2000). The employees don't necessarily have to be physically present, they can do work virtually which has given rise to virtual offices. Flexibility in time and location are norm for millions of employees via use of compact electronic gadgets creating a "VIRTUAL OFFICE". Hill et al (1998) on IBM employees have found that virtual office lead to greater productivity, higher morale and increased flexibility although negative influence on teamwork.

3. The Downside of Technological Innovations

But there is another side of the coin, the raised expectations for both employees and employers in achieving goals and objectives and meeting often unreasonable deadlines may result in increased pressure on other employees within the organization. Towers et al. (2006) identified that technology use can lead to increased expectations from employers and colleagues, as well as an increase in workload, and a sense of 'never being off duty'. This may have an effect on employees' health, resulting in higher absenteeism, lower productivity, and higher turnover rates. There is incessant pressure on employees and employers alike to meet ever increasing expectations of work. There are challenging goals set for increasing the satisfaction of customers and meeting the expectations of various stakeholders especially

shareholders. This at times may result in stress and anxiety causing low morale for work and high rate of absenteeism.

However, in addition of facilitating new ways for combining work and personal life, these new technologies can also blur the boundary between the two domains. In recent years, tablets have become popular, first as leisure devices, and lately as business tools helping people to stay connected with work anywhere, anytime. Stawarz et al (2013) come up with findings that tablets use to blur the boundary between work and personal life leading to negative impacts work-life balance issues.

4. Discussion

Various studies have indicated that ICT's have greatly redefined the concept of work and workplace. On the positive side, the technological innovations such as telecommuting, tablets, handheld gadgets and instant communications tools have made employees fast, flexible and accessible. More employees are benefitting from organizational initiatives of telecommuting, flexitime, work-from anywhere and compressed worksheet. Employees are at instant touch with both work and family with newer technological gadgets. Specifically, home-working has greatly enhanced time-space flexibility. Even, the use of professional communication tools like emails have brought accessibility in sharing and collaboration of work.

However, it is observed that technological innovations have brought so much change the way work is performed especially mobile technology have brought stress, anxiety and conflict in work-life of employees. One cannot ignore the burden of raised expectations for both employees and employers. In achieving high goals and objectives along with meeting unreasonable deadlines results in increased pressure within the organization. This may have an effect on employees' health, higher absenteeism, lower productivity, and stress. Advancements in technology can therefore both help and hinder attempts to provide employees with the support they need in ensuring a healthy work environment.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

What studies seem to hint with related to influence of technology on work-life balance is that technology is here to stay. The employees have to get used with managing their work and life according to the technological gadgets. With all the benefits and ease, the technology brings with it in the form of flexibility of time, location, accessibility and instant communication. There seems to be a clear guidance for the employees and employers alike that technology has to be managed within the organization. At the

employee level, there has to be a segregation of work-time and home-time. Employees have to themselves see whether technology especially the mobile technology use is proper and wanted for in the work setting. Make a boundary between the time and interruption which one can allow in the work. Employees have to see to it that time spent in home or other personal engagements are not intruded by professional work.

The employers too, can't turn a blind eye, as they too have to set-in procedures to minimize the influence of work into employees' home. A proper policy directing use of technology within organization especially mobile technology is one of the steps. Also, organizations have responsibility to create and provide proper policies with related to technology impact within organization. An effort has to be put by organizations minimizing negative impact of technological innovations like tele-commuting, virtual office, instant communication. As studies have shown these technological innovations impact employees' work-load, stress, absenteeism, anxiety and importantly on work-life balance.

6. Scope for Future Research

Technological innovations will form part of our lives; be it professional or personal. There is scope of research in areas like social networking impact on work-life balance, rules within organizations governing use of mobile technology and anytime virtual accessibility of employees & its impact on work-life balance. Most studies have been empirical, there is scope for adopting intensive methods like case studies, focus groups and others to bring more practical solution for the organizations.

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