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A Qualitative Study on Work-Life Balance in the IT Sector

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Abstract

In the corporate environment today, maintaining a balance between work and life is just as important, especially in the field of Information Technology (IT) where employees are often required to work long hours, to high standards, with tight deadlines and heavy workloads. The evolution of technologies, remote working, living in a digital world and increased pressure in the workplace has had a significant effect on the personal and professional lives of IT workers. This has made it hard for IT workers to achieve a better balance between work and personal responsibilities. The present study titled 'A Qualitative Study on Work-Life Balance in the IT Sector' aims to understand the perceptions, challenges and experiences of IT professionals in the context of work-life balance. The study adopts the qualitative research design because it aims to gain insights into employees' attitudes towards workload, stress, time management, family responsibilities and organizational support and their health as employees. In addition to secondary data available from books, journals, research articles, websites and published work related to work-life balance and employee welfare, primary data was obtained through casual interviews and open ended meetings with IT personnel. The study's conclusions show that IT workers' work-life balance is greatly impacted by lengthy workdays, a heavy workload, stress at work, and a lack of personal time. Everyone has to experience stress, fatigue, and conflicts with social and family life at work. Further, the study demonstrates the important role played by organizational support, flexible work arrangements, a positive work atmosphere, and time management skills in improving work-life balance and employee well-being. The study suggests one way to achieve this is by ensuring work-life balance – a measure that would lead to improved employee satisfaction, mental health, productivity, and organizational performance in the IT industry.

Keywords: Work-Life Balance, IT Employees, Employee Wellbeing, Job Stress, IT Sector.

Introduction

Prologue

In today's business environment the information technology (IT) industry has become one of the world's fastest-growing and most competitive industries. The IT industry has a significant influence on economic growth, technological innovations, digital transformation, and job creation. With the constant advancements in technology and the competition in the market, organizations in the IT business need personnel who can be extremely productive, consistent, and efficient at managing projects. As a result, IT professionals often have to handle heavy workloads, have deadlines to meet, have long working hours and have job pressure, which are all negative impacts on their personal and professional life (Guest, D. E. (2002)).

Work-life balance means the capacity of staff members to strike a balance of a good work and life. Involves proper handling of work duties, family responsibility, interpersonal relations, health and personal welfare. Having a healthy work-life balance is essential for maintaining mental calmness, physical health, satisfaction at work and overall quality of life. Work-life balance is of great concern to employees and companies as an imbalance between work and personal life can lead to stress, burnout, lack of productivity, employee dissatisfaction and poor employee wellness in recent years. The IT industry is particularly susceptible to the challenges of work-life balance due to the fact that workers are often required to work outside of the regular 9 to 5 office hours, do multiple projects simultaneously, go to virtual meetings, and constantly keep in touch with one another via digital communications technologies. The blur of personal vs professional life is more than ever because of the rise of work-from-home environment and remote work. Because of the high expectations of the job and the constant connectivity, many in the IT field find it difficult to handle their personal lives, social lives, family responsibilities and mental health. In such cases, the morale, emotional well-being of employees and organizational efficiency can all be affected.

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Work-life balance initiatives are being adopted by companies, and they are increasingly realizing how crucial it is to promote employee wellbeing, including flexible working hours, remote work options, wellness programs, employee support services, and supportive rules in the workplace (Clark, S. C. (2000)). But each individual work environment, managerial support and organizational culture influence the effectiveness of such work practices. This means that to enhance workplace wellbeing, and create a positive workplace culture, it is important to understand employees' attitudes and experiences around work-life balance.

Based on this, the present study with the title "A Qualitative Study on Work-Life Balance in the IT Sector" attempts to explore the perception, challenges and experiences of IT professionals in managing work-life balance. The primary aim of the research is to understand the issues of workload, stress management, time management, family responsibilities, organizational support, and employee's wellness. The study's conclusions may aid businesses and HR managers in creating workable plans and guidelines for boosting employee satisfaction and work-life balance in the IT industry.

Review of Literature

By incorporating lifestyle needs of workers into the workplace environment, companies can improve employee engagement, satisfaction, and respect at work, Johnson (2004) wrote. The survey indicated that the employees generally strive to improve their quality of life and not simply work for the sake of work. Employers therefore need to recognise that workers are in a constant juggling act between employment and work responsibilities and their personal and family responsibilities. The study went on to say that supportive employers can assist workers in effectively resolving work-life conflict that results from conflicting work and personal demands.

Work-life imbalance has a number of detrimental repercussions on employees, according to Kloppling (2011). According to the study, work-life imbalance leads to poor productivity, increased employee absenteeism, customer complaints, stress and unhealthy behaviors such as smoking and consuming excessive amounts of alcohol. The study shows that work-related stress and personal absence are a threat to employee wellbeing and work productivity.

Cullen and Farrelly (2005) studied several factors that can cause imbalance at work, such as government policies, organizational policies, cultural issues, and personal growth issues. The study suggests that a few organizational processes can facilitate or impede workers' abilities to balance work and home. The researchers stressed the significance of work-life balance rules that promote employee well-being and workplace productivity.

Lockwood (2003) defines work-life balance as management of responsibilities towards family, friends and work. The study emphasized the need for a healthy company culture and support of top leadership to make work-life programs successful. By

encouraging employee health and recognizing employees as individuals who have personal objectives outside the workplace, the researcher asserts that companies can increase their employee engagement, productivity, and job satisfaction.

Susi (2010) pointed out that a balance between work and life is very important to the satisfaction and retention of employees. Companies with work-life balance policies reported a reduction in work-family conflict, reduced employee stress, increased employee satisfaction and enhanced employee retention rates, according to the survey. A flexible working policy and supportive working culture was determined to play a strong role in the workers' willingness to remain in the organisation.

Felicity (2013) came to the conclusion that employees' performance at work and at home is positively impacted by work-life balance. The study also revealed that there is difference in the needs of work-life balance between male and female employees due to their different personal and professional obligations. The results suggest that companies should develop policies for their employees that are family-friendly and consider the needs of various family configurations.

Hamming and Bauer (2009) found that women expressed a greater need to balance their work and life than did men. The study reveals a sense of fulfillment in both the working and family life and a lack of balance in either has negative effects on emotional well-being and life satisfaction.

There has also been a strong correlation between work life balance and job satisfaction found in the organisational studies. According to Locke (2007), job satisfaction is a favorable emotional response brought on by an employee's work experiences. Similarly, Hill, Miller, Weiner and Colih (2000) described job satisfaction as the collection of feelings and ideas that employees have regarding their work. Research indicates that healthy work-life balance is associated with higher job satisfaction, organizational commitment and job performance among employees.

Kornhauser (2005) discovered a positive relationship between employee satisfaction and organizational productivity and employee happiness. According to the study, productivity, absenteeism, turnover, and organizational efficiency are all impacted by employee happiness. Likewise, Podsakoff et al. (2006) have shown that an employee's satisfaction with the task assigned to him/her is associated with better performance and better organizational outcomes.

The literature reviewed shows that work-life balance significantly influences employee wellness, mental health, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and productivity. Existing studies have highlighted the need for flexible policies, organizational support, workplace culture, and workload management to maintain work-life balance for employees. But, new technology demands and changing work cultures are continuing to cause stress, workload pressure and difficulties for workers in the

IT industry to manage work and family commitments. Thus, the current study will attempt to examine the experiences and challenge of work-life balance faced by IT professionals through a qualitative approach.

Study Area

Employees in the information technology (IT) industry are the subject of this study. The study includes the IT experts who are hired by a specific IT company and organization. Employees of various job roles, experience and professional backgrounds were considered to understand their experiences, perceptions of work life balance, workplace stress and workload management and personal wellbeing.

The Study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To understand and learn the concept, and significance of work-life balance of IT professionals.
- To find out the major challenges faced in IT regarding work-life balance.
- To explore employee's attitude towards stress, workload and organizational support for work life balance.

Research Methodology

The purpose of the current study is to gain a deeper understanding of the issues, attitudes and experiences that are faced by IT personnel when balancing work and personal life and to better understand the challenges that exist in this field. The exploratory qualitative research approach was used to gain a deeper understanding of the issues, attitudes and experiences faced by IT personnel when balancing work and personal life, and to better understand the challenges that exist in the field. The qualitative approach was adopted rather than just the numerical data because it offers greater depth of understanding around the emotional, opinion and stress responses, employee experiences and personal health.

The main objectives of the study are to examine the influence of workload, long working hours, remote working culture, organizational expectations, job pressure and personal responsibilities on the work-life balance of IT personnel. The qualitative method enables the

researcher to explore the reality of the experience and better understand the actual problems that employees face in meeting work/personal demands.

Research Design

This study is of qualitative research and descriptive type. This design helps to explore the attitudes, experiences, behavioral tendencies and opinions of employees towards work-life balance in the IT industry. The descriptive part of the research enables a comprehensive understanding of employee well-being, stress management and organization support systems.

Sample Size

The number of 50 IT personnel were selected from IT enterprises to interact qualitatively and collect data for the current study. The sample size was judged to be adequate to capture in-depth thoughts, experiences, perceptions of work-life balance, stress at work, workload management and wellbeing in the IT industry.

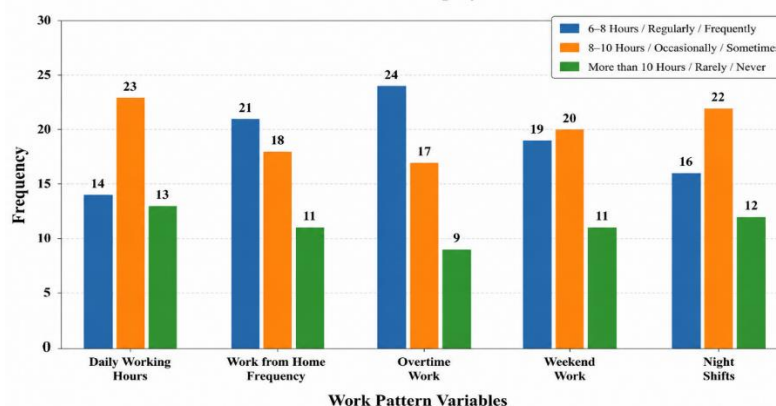
Analysis and Discussion

Work Pattern of IT Employees

The graphical depiction of the work habits of IT industry personnel is shown in Figure No. 1. Important elements of workers' working conditions, including daily working hours, the frequency of working from home, overtime, weekend work, and night shifts, are highlighted in the figure. In the IT sector, these elements have a big impact on workers' stress levels, personal wellbeing, work-life balance, and general job satisfaction.

A significant percentage of IT workers regularly put in long hours, according to the graphical analysis. Employees in the IT sector frequently put in long hours to fulfill professional obligations and project-related activities, as evidenced by the majority of respondents who fall into the category of working 8–10 hours per day. The graph also demonstrates how many workers work from home on a regular or sporadic basis. The IT industry's growing adoption of remote working methods offers flexibility, but it also makes it harder for workers to detach from work-related obligations because it blurs the line between personal and professional life.

Fig. No. 1: Clustered Multiple Bar Diagram Showing Work Pattern of IT Sector Employees



Source: Prepared by Researcher Based on Primary Data Collected from IT Employees.

Another interesting feature of the graph is the fact that IT workers often work overtime. Many respondents reported often working overtime, suggesting that employees are often required to go the extra mile to meet organisational goals and project deadlines. Many respondents also mentioned working on the weekends, which is indicative of the demanding nature of the IT sector. As they have to work every day, and have limited personal time, employees can feel more stressed, mentally exhausted and have more work pressure.

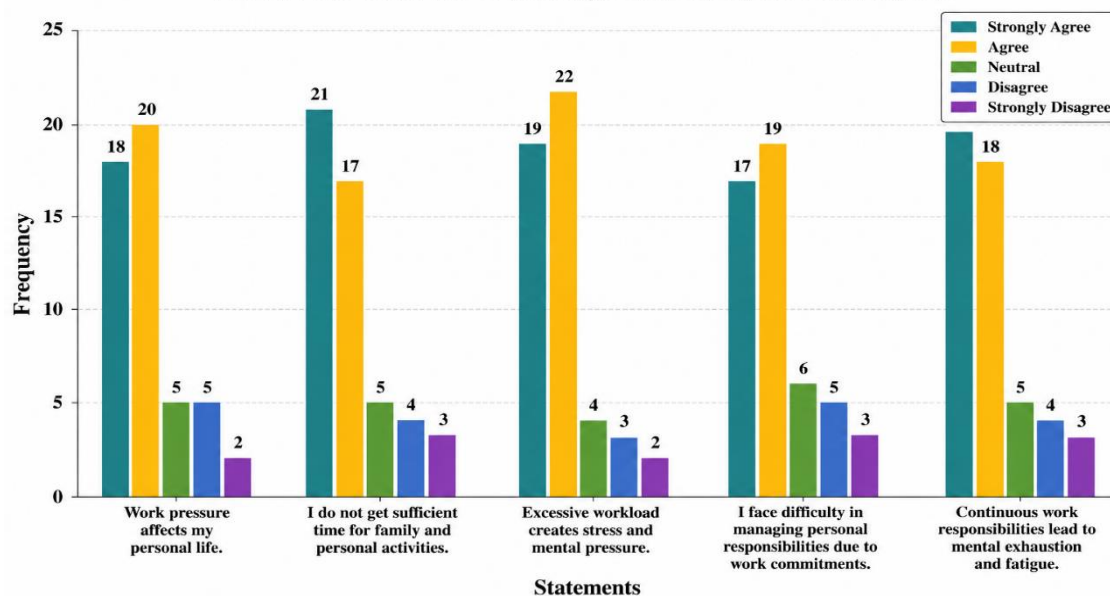
The analysis also shows that night shifts are typical in the IT industry, mostly because of international customer communications and worldwide business operations. Most of the respondents reported doing night shifts on a regular or occasional basis, which could potentially affect socializing, family and interpersonal relationships,

sleep hygiene, and physical wellness. Overall, it's clear from the graph that long hours, overtime, working remotely, working weekends and night shifts all affect the work-life balance of IT workers significantly, making it hard to find a balance between work and home life.

Efforts undertaken by IT workers to achieve Work-Life Balance – What do they face?

The major work-life balance problems of the IT employees are shown graphically in figure No.1. The graphic shows the attitude of employees towards the stress in the workplace, the lack of family time, workload stress, and the challenges of balancing work and personal life, as well as mental fatigue. These factors greatly influence worker's wellbeing, satisfaction, mental health and overall quality of life in the modern IT workplace.

Fig. No. 2: Clustered Multiple Bar Diagram Showing Work-Life Balance Challenges Faced by IT Employees



Source: Prepared by Researcher Based on Primary Data Collected from IT Employees.

The graph makes it abundantly evident that IT workers' personal lives are significantly impacted by work-related stress. Most respondents reported agreement or strong agreement that work pressures and/or professional demands had a negative effect on their social and personal well-being. Similarly, numerous employees reported that working long hours and having to work consistently means that they don't have enough time to take care of themselves or their families. In other words, it's a problem that IT employees often struggle with balancing their work and personal lives.

From the graphical study it is observed that the workers are suffering from a lot of stress and mental stress due to overburden. A significant number of the respondents were strongly supportive of the ideas that the working stress is heightened through continued work assignments, deadlines, being able to

do more than one thing at a time, and the expectations of the organization. Job demands also were reported as interfering with personal responsibilities, indicating that work demands often interfere with social contacts, domestic duties, and personal well-being. This imbalance can negatively impact mental health, relationships, and emotional well-being.

The image also highlights mental stress and fatigue among IT workers due to their continuous work demands. The majority of respondents strongly believed that: Physical fatigue and mental fatigue is a result of work engagement and lack of relaxation. Long-term work pressure and a lack of work-life balance may lower employee productivity, job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment, according to the research. Overall, the figure shows that the main obstacles to IT workers' work-life balance in the contemporary corporate

setting are work pressure, an excessive workload, a lack of personal time, and mental tiredness. Organizational Support and employee perceptions for employee satisfaction amongst IT employees

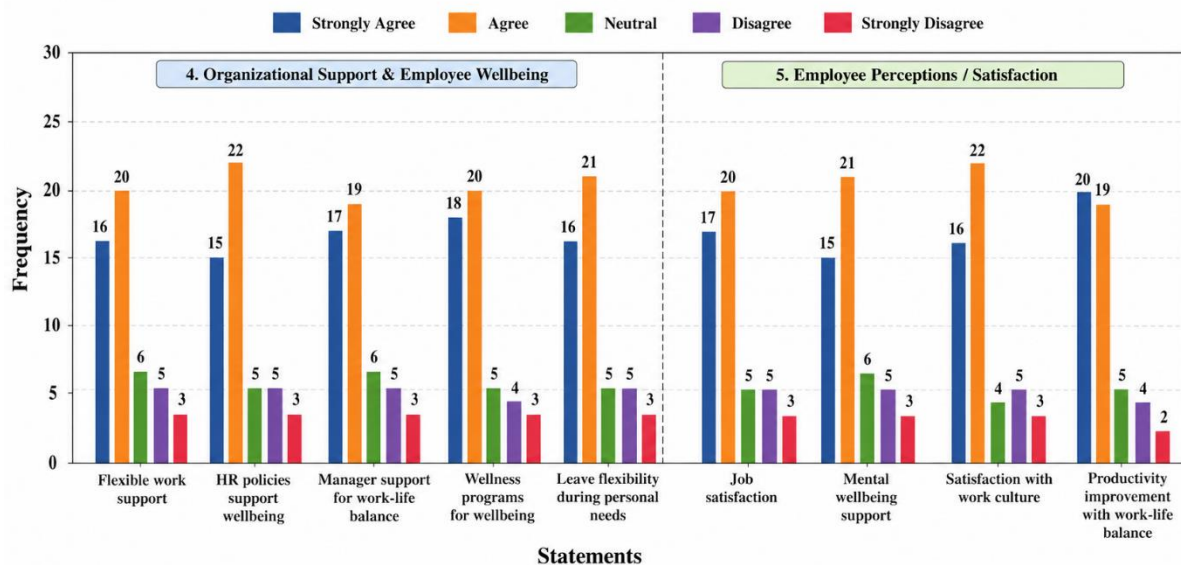
The organizational support systems and employee perspectives of work-life balance in the IT industry are shown graphically in Figure No. 3. The figure illustrates employee preferences about flexible work options, policies, managerial support, company wellness programs, leave options, employee satisfaction with their job, mental health, satisfaction with work environment, and productivity. These factors play a vital role in ensuring the well-being of employees and improving the overall productivity of the organization in today's IT landscape.

The majority of IT professionals are positive about the support that their organizations provide for work-life balance. A majority of respondents were either in agreement or strongly agreed that their

businesses have policies and flexible work arrangements that support employees to balance work and personal responsibilities. Positive views about managerial support and leave flexibility for personal needs were also voiced by employees. This indicates that employee stress reduction and work life balance are significantly improved when there are supportive policies in place.

Furthermore, the graphic analysis reveals a positive relationship between supportive workplace conditions and wellbeing practices and workers' job satisfaction and mental health. Several of the respondents agreed that wellness initiatives in the workplace help reduce stress and promote emotional balance. Further, staff reported being happy with their professional roles and organizational culture, suggesting that positive organizational environments promote employee engagement, motivation, and overall satisfaction with their jobs.

Fig. No. 3: Clustered Multiple Bar Diagram Showing Organizational Support and Employee Perceptions for Work-Life Balance among IT Employees



Source: Prepared by Researcher Based on Primary Data Collected from IT Employees.

The figure also emphasizes how employee productivity and work performance are positively impacted by a healthy work-life balance. A large number of respondents strongly agreed that having a healthy balance between work and personal life is beneficial for focus, productivity and work performance. The study found that businesses that promote flexibility, wellness, and a positive workplace are more likely to experience positive changes in employee satisfaction, productivity, and engagement. The overall graph indicates the significance of organizational support in maintaining a healthy work-life balance and enhancing employee well-being within the IT sector.

Key findings that are derived from the research.

The report reveals that for IT workers it is very hard to strike a balance between their personal and professional life. Long working hours, permanent workloads, overtime work, weekend work and night

shifts were found to have significant effects on the work-life balance of employees. Many employees reported that high deadlines and too much work stress have a negative effect on their social life, personal life and time with family. The findings reveal that mental tension and emotional fatigue are common issues among those working in the IT sphere, often resulting from work-related stressors and continuous work commitments.

The report also reveals that IT workers often find it difficult to balance their family responsibilities and are lacking in personal time. Most people reported that they lack the ability to maintain positive relationships with others and perform family responsibilities due to their workload and organizational needs. Employee wellness, emotional stability, and general quality of life are all impacted by an imbalance between work and personal life, as

seen by the employees' reports of mental exhaustion and stress brought on by constant job involvement.

The results also indicate that the ability to achieve a work-life balance among the IT workers is greatly affected by organizational support. Flexible work hours, HR policies, managerial support, wellness programs and leave policies all have positive effects on employee happiness and mental health. Many of the respondents indicated that a positive workplace culture and organizational support positively affects employee's motivation, productivity, and overall job satisfaction. Overall, the study concludes that maintaining a healthy work-life balance is essential for enhancing employee well-being, commitment, workplace performance, and long-term productivity in the IT sector. Here are some ideas for improving the work-life balance of IT workers:

The report recommends that IT companies put in place workplace policies to enable employees to strike a balance between their work and personal lives. Flexible working arrangements, combining working from home and in the office, reasonable workloads, and appropriate shift management are all ways to help reduce work pressure and improve employee welfare. Moreover, businesses need to ensure employees are not continuously overwhelmed by work and deadlines as this can have a negative effect on their physical and mental health.

The report further suggests that businesses should enhance their employee assistance programs through streamlined HR processes and offer managerial assistance. Planning wellness programmes, stress management seminars, counselling services and employee engagement events for regular periods should be scheduled to improve employees' mental health and emotional welfare. Supervisors and managers should ensure that they maintain communication with employees and have a positive work environment in which good work-life balance is encouraged.

The study also indicates that employees need to be encouraged to make the best use of their time and maintain clear boundaries between their work and personal lives. IT specialists must prioritise their health, relationships with their families, physical health and leisure activities to reduce stress and mental fatigue. Furthermore, companies should foster a healthy workplace that values a balance between work and life, job satisfaction, and employee health. It is generally understood that the creation of a balanced, productive and healthy working environment in the IT industry demands the collaboration of all parties – management, HR departments and employees.

Conclusion

The current study, "A Qualitative Study on Work-Life Balance in the IT Sector," emphasizes how crucial it is for workers in the contemporary IT sector to strike a balance between their personal and professional obligations. The fast pace of technological advancement, competitive working environment, constant connectivity and high expectations from the organization are making IT one

of the most challenging companies. This often causes stress, a high workload, long hours for workers and difficulties balancing work and family commitments.

The study's conclusions show that IT workers' work-life balance is greatly impacted by work pressure, overtime, weekend responsibilities, night shifts, and an excessive workload. Because of continued work commitments, many workers face stress, mental fatigue, not having enough time alone and difficulties balancing work and family responsibilities. All of these challenges negatively impact workers' overall quality of life, satisfaction with work, emotional health and happiness. The study also found that an unhealthy balance between work and life could also reduce employee productivity, motivation in the workplace, and organizational commitment.

The study also concludes that a positive work-life balance and improving employees' health and wellbeing is highly dependent on organisational support. Flexible working hours, employee-friendly policies, management support, wellness programs, and flexible leave are all factors that have a positive impact on employee mental health, job satisfaction and productivity. The job satisfaction and emotional well-being of workers in supportive work environments is generally higher.

Overall, the survey highlights how crucial it is for IT industry firms and people to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Organizations should have employee-focused policies and create positive work cultures to ensure high productivity and good health among employees. In the cutthroat IT sector, a good work-life balance promotes long-term organizational growth, efficiency, and sustainability in addition to enhancing employee happiness and mental health.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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