



Work-life Balance in Indian ITES / BPO's

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ABSTRACT

*Work life and personal life are the two sides of the same coin. According to various work /life balance surveys, more than 60% of the respondent professionals surveyed said that are not able to find a balance between their personal and professional lives. The paper highlights how the Indian ITES are striving hard to balance the work-life of its employees and how employee balances the professional life and personal life in hectic work environment. They have to make tough choices even when their work and personal life is nowhere close to equilibrium. BPO's is all about working 24*7 and managing of personal relations and giving enough time to family has become greater concern for employees in the modern corporate world and employers also should think what should be done to keep employees free of family issues and concentrate on work. Traditionally creating and managing a balance between the work-life was considered to be a women's issue. But increasing work pressures, globalization and technological advancement have made it an issue with both the sexes, all professionals working across all levels and all industries throughout the world. Achieving "work-life balance" is not as simple as it sounds.*

Work life and personal life are inter-connected and interdependent. Spending more time in office, dealing with clients and the pressures 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 a yet another 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.

KEYWORDS: work-life issues, steps taken by the sector, Reasons for balances, Benefits.

Introduction

Work-life balance is an often-used term in the IT / BPO sector and also in the hospitality sector. The question is 'what is the theoretical framework when we are looking at work-life balance?' When this is understood, it is easier to crack the problem. Work-life balance is the amount of time you spend at work with the amount of time you spend doing non-work. That is just one dimension of balance. The other dimension is satisfaction balance, which is about the quality of time. Sixty years of literature hasn't answered what makes an employee satisfied and motivated. This whole notion of satisfaction can be seen in the context of time balance or satisfaction balance. "Work-life balance is an often-used term in the IT / BPO sector and also in the hospitality sector. We are a nation currently riding the knowledge economy wave. We have huge intellectual assets. We are using these assets to peddle knowledge. Should we not have the intelligence to realize that a relaxed and happy workforce would be more productive? Should we not realize that these "sweat-shops" cannot endure.

Work-personal life conflict occurs when the burden, obligations and responsibilities of work and family roles become incompatible? Obligation of one can force an individual to neglect the other. Work/life balance is about adjusting working patterns to allow employees to combine work with their other responsibilities such as caring for children or elderly relatives.

Introducing appropriate employment practices to help employees achieve a better work/life balance brings tangible benefits to your business. It can enable employees to feel more in control of their working life and lead to increased productivity, lower absenteeism and a happier, less stressed workforce. Certain employees have the right to request flexible working. Demographic changes, including an ageing population and smaller family structures, will increase the likelihood of your employees requesting flexible working arrangements. This guide examines how to promote good work/life balance in your workplace and highlights some of the benefits for your business.

Business benefits of improved work/life balance

Introducing employment policies that encourage a healthier work/life balance for your employees can bring real benefits to your business.

Flexible working and work/life balance policies will also foster a more

positive perception of you as an employer. This can lead to better relations with your employees and greater staff loyalty, commitment and motivation, reducing staff turnover and recruitment costs.

Allowing employees to work flexibly in order to encourage a better work/life balance can lead to improvements in health and well-being. For more information on the benefits that this can bring, see the page on the business benefits of promoting employee health and well-being in our guide on how to improve employee health and well-being.

However, the benefits of a work-life balance initiative are not confined to just the workforce. Work/life policies and flexible working practices can also help you:

- react to changing market conditions more effectively and meet customer demands - for example, shift work, part-time work and flexi-time can help you open longer without making your employees work longer hours
- meet seasonal peaks and troughs in your business
- boost your competitiveness
- become recognized as a business that people want to work for

Work/life balance problems

As an employer, you might find it hard to judge whether you are supporting your employees' need to balance their commitments at work with those at home.

Signs of poor work/life balance include:

- employees doing a lot of overtime- BPO Industry target much on youth and employing energetic graduates with normal course of work these employees are taking overtime to earn more but may not get time to spend time with family may lead to issues to relate to personal life even health may not support for a long period of time
- employees taking a lot of time off to deal with 'emergencies' involving children or other dependants
- high levels of employee stress
- high rates of absenteeism or staff sickness
- high levels of staff turnover

Employees should be made to get recharge as they will be working for long hours they need break from hectic work schedule Management should interact people and understand what can be

done to keep employees happy so that they can be part of organization for a long period of time. But should Corporate India meekly accept that? Could they not firmly and collectively send the message out that their executives are their wealth and should be better taken care of? Initiatives like “work from home,” flexi-work, etc., have not been successful. People who choose that option have become marginalized and subtly excluded, with their career clearly nose-diving.

This has forced most of them to give in and get back to the mainstream career force or make a tough priority decision. I have come across several “power women” who chose the work from home option. In a few months, they had to admit that it was killing their growth in the company.

Problems Of working with BPO's

I. Health Problems

The consequences of stressful work are health related 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.

II. Sleeping Disorders

One major severe ailment afflicting people working in Indian call centers is the sleeping disorder. Not only the fresher's, even the experienced managers are unable to escape it. Some call centers are looking at devising innovative mechanisms like flexible shifts with sleeping arrangements in the office premises.

III. Digestive System Related Problems

Working long hours and odd hours without any sleep, and eating food supplied by external caterers. Every day, has led to employees suffering from digestive disorders. Especially for the large number of girls working in the industry, the problem is even more severe. Many call centers 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.

IV. Depression

The gradual realization that there are limited scopes in developing a career owing to fewer growth opportunities is increasing the frustration levels in the BPO industry. Coupled with growing mental fatigue and increasingly punishing physical environments, depression is the obvious end result. Some call centers have now devised different stress management programs mainly to counter depression.

V. Eyesight Problems

Globally call center employees are considered a high risk group for eye related problems. While the quality of monitors might impact these disorders, sitting continually without adequate breaks seems to be the truer reason. While this is already a problem in the IT industry, which some companies have overcome by use of anti-glare monitors.

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VI. Hearing Ailments

A call center job invokes taking calls throughout the shift, sitting with headphones. While quality of headphones does make a difference, it would not be appropriate to say that good quality of headphones can solve this problem; it is more to do with giving rest between calls.

Cultural Shifts

Though on one side we learn to become as professional as western world executives some other disturbing issues are arising. One such

serious issue is the personal habits that have undergone a considerable change. The personal habits, discipline and behavioral issues and detachment with family have been discussed below.

VII. Personal Habits

The young executives tend to develop certain bad habits such as alcohol, smoking etc. It is not uncommon to find women smoking and drinking alcohol in the BPO setup which is definitely a

Social stigma in the Indian societies. There are increased concerns about the habits of the

Employees among the parents, who are not finding it easy to talk to them about their habits, which in no way are welcomed by the Indian families.

Solving such issues lies majorly in the hands of the employees and their employers. Employees can be made to attend counseling sessions of professional counselors. Conducting group

Counseling, workshops, educative film shows, in order to create awareness on effects of bad habits. Such actions will enable individuals to realize the importance of good habits and they could seek one-to-one counseling sessions.

VIII. Discipline and Behavioral Issues

Call centers provide excellent working environment, free food and transportation. There is always situation where individual or group of youngsters tend to commit mistakes and abuse the freedom. The most common behavior cited is misuse of food, behave erratically in vans, and Smoke in public places, misuse of telephones and other resources of the company. The supervisors themselves reel under the pressure of performance and achieving targets. Hence do not give their time for finding solutions. The professional counselor can play a major role in educating the youngsters on discipline; provide advice to erring executives. Unacceptable behaviors cause disturbance to others and affects the overall productivity. Continuous education and counseling will help to mitigate such problems and it is possible to change the behavior by adopting a positive approach.

IX. Detachment from the Family

Since the daytime is spent in sleep and recreational activities with friends. The employees are hardly able to give time for their families. Problems become more pronounced when they get Married. Additional responsibilities of running a family demands more time and hence eventually people quit the industry. Most of the employees work on Indian holidays too, which causes frustration. Some employees even feel the need for inclusion in the family and the society. Hence it is important for family members to render support for their young sons and daughters and to help them with the stress that they are undergoing.

Changing & increasing work pressures

A decade back, employees used to have fixed working hours or rather a 9 to 5 job from Monday to Friday. The boundary between the work and home has disappeared with time. But with globalization and people working across countries, the concept of fixed working hours is fading away. Instead of just 7 or 8 a day, people are spending as much as 12-16 hours every day in office.

The technological blessings like e-mail, text messaging and cell phones which were thought of as tools to connect them to their work being away from their workplace, have actually integrated their personal and professional lives. Now professionals find themselves working even when they are on vacations.

The ever-increasing working hours leave the individuals with less time for themselves and to pursue his hobbies or leisure activities. This hinders the growth of the person as an individual in terms of his personal and spiritual growth. Professionals working in the BPO industry, doctors and nurses and especially IT professionals are the few examples who are facing the brunt of the hazard constantly.

Reasons of imbalance:

There are various reasons for this imbalance and conflicts in the life of an employee. From individual career ambitions to pressure to cope up with family or work, the reasons can be situation and in-

dividual specific. The speed of advancement of information technology, the increasing competition in the talent supply market has led to a "performance-driven" culture creating pressures and expectations to performance more and better every time. Also, many a times, many people find it difficult to say "NO" to others especially their superiors. They usually end up over burdening themselves with work. The increasing responsibilities on the personal front with age can also create stress on personal and professional fronts.

Effects

Constant struggle and effort to maintain a balance between the work and personal life can have serious implications on the life of an individual. According to a survey, 81 per cent of the respondents have admitted that their jobs are affecting and creating stress in their personal lives. The pressures of the work or personal life can lead to stress. According to studies, it has been found that such situation can take a toll on the person's health both physiologically and psychologically. Heart ailments, cardiovascular problems, sleep disorders, depression, irritability, jumpiness, insecurity, poor concentration and even nervous breakdowns are becoming common among the victims of such imbalance. Pressure, stress or tension in work life can lead to bad social life and vice versa.

Way of balancing the work-life:

There are no hard-and-fast rules on what constitutes an acceptable work/life balance - this will depend on the operational requirements of your business and the needs of your employees.

Flexible working practices

This includes part-time working, flexi-time, job sharing and home working. Self-rostering allows employees to choose which shifts to work. Certain employees have the right to request flexible working. For a full explanation of the types and advantages of flexible working, see our guide on flexible working - the law and best practice. You can also use our interactive tool to investigate what kind of flexible working will best suit your employees and employers.

Other policies that make it easier for employees to balance work and the rest of their lives include unpaid career breaks and paid sabbatical schemes. These are a cost-effective way to retain valued staff or reward those with long service. Allowing your employees extra days off work - whether paid or unpaid - can improve their work/life balance. Holiday purchase schemes enable employees to buy additional - usually limited - holidays on top of their annual entitlement. You could consider giving

employees maternity, paternity, adoption or parental leave in excess of the statutory minimum, eg higher pay or longer leave.

These schemes give employees a measure of control over how their working lives are organized and foster greater employee loyalty and commitment.

Making the working environment more attractive

Improvements to the working environment can boost morale and help you retain valued staff. Typical techniques include:

- free exercise classes
- a free/subsidized canteen
- company days out
- childcare vouchers
- funding/time-off for learning

Solutions:

TIME MANAGEMENT is one of the best solutions which can help to reduce the imbalance between the personal and the work life of the employees. Prioritizing the tasks and planning the activities can help to take out some free time which can be utilized for other purposes.

- Taking some time out for hobbies and leisure activities, spending time with loved ones can help to beat the stress.
- Learn to say "no" if required.
- Sharing the responsibilities will help and don't commit for something which is practically impossible.
- Utilizing the flexible working hours option of the organizations to get some free time.

Conclusion:

The sector is working on balancing the work-life of employees and measure to be taken to solve complexities of workers in ITES and how to solve this problem using time management and 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 programme 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.

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