

The Factors Impacting Work-Life Balance Amidst Covid-19

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Abstract

COVID-19 crisis has changed the way we work. Work-from-home, which was a possibility in some sectors, has become a compulsion for all, which has affected the work-life balance of working professionals. Depending on where the employees are working, the office hours have noticeably increased by one to five hours longer as this supplementary time is spent in conferences and follow-ups, or an endeavor to improve productivity, or just being unaware of the time as there is no clear boundary that exists between work and life now. During this unprecedented time, the augmented center of attention should be towards the welfare of the employees and the acknowledgment, recognition, and acceptance of the fact that work and personal/family needs will overlap. This paper intends to investigate the various factors impacting work-life balance during the lockdown imposed by the government in light of the coronavirus, which is spreading at a rapid pace. Key insights were obtained by conducting a factor analysis and extracting four main factors, which have been explained further below. Data was collected from 225 employees across India belonging to various sectors. The findings of this study can be a crucial contributor to organizations by taking inputs. Then this prescience will help organizations to be prepared during unforeseen events by further refining their policies to benefit their employees.

Keywords

Work-Life Balance, Work-Life Balance Policies, COVID-19, Workplace stress, Organization

Imprint

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Introduction

The sudden outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has affected millions worldwide and, at the same time, has brought the whole world to a standstill. With the unavailability of a vaccine that can bring the situation under control with immediate effect, health measures have been adopted and implemented by the world, including social distancing, closing workplaces (such as schools, offices, etc.), and quarantine [1]. The government of India has implemented nationwide lockdown measures and self-isolation policies to curb the spread of this disease. A “lockdown” refers to an emergency protocol that restricts the movement of individuals inside or outside of a specific area. In such situations, only essential services such as health care, groceries, pharmacies, etc., can continue to serve the people [2]. These measures have led to occupational and educational interference causing a psychological disturbance for many individuals. This paper aims to check the factors currently affecting the work-life balance of working professionals during these times.

Concept and importance

Work-life balance is established on an ideology that refers to understanding when to draw a line between personal and professional life. The construct of this concept is based on the ideology that paid efforts, and private lives should not be viewed as a competitive priority but rather as an element contributing towards a better quality of life. [3] The method to attain this is to embrace the viewpoint that is “conceptualized as a two-way process involving a consideration of employees’ needs and those of employers.” A flexible working environment helps boost the employee’s morale, level of job satisfaction, maintain a healthier lifestyle which will help in decreasing stress [4].

Due to the constant evolution of technology and innovation over the years (which include project management platforms, communication tools, adaptive Wi-Fi, etc.), it has led to employees constantly working without being able to disengage when required (especially amidst COVID-19, where work from home is the new normal). However, this seems to cause tension between professional and personal life. During such times, it is more crucial to balance as it has a significant impact on an individual’s physical and mental

well-being, which will lead to frequent burnouts followed by decreased productivity [5].

Work-life balance policies in India

Taking into account the comprehensive employee experience, organizations have started several initiatives. Household management responsibilities and employee assistance programs are considered an integral component of any organization's benefits programs or compensation packages. A few common family-friendly policies/work-life balance policies, as studied by Lazar et al., during normal circumstances are:

- **Flexible Working Hours:** The employee has to work for a definite number of core hours but can choose their timings.
- **Childcare Services:** On-site daycare, paid leaves, child care subsidies, etc., are a few ways to support employees, which in turn improves attendance and lowers the turnover rate.
- **Telework:** This is the work from a home arrangement that allowed employees to use different technologies to communicate with others. Currently, most employees have to practice this due to the pandemic.
- **Job Time:** This is an employment arrangement that involves the working of two people (on a part-time basis) to complete the job, which under normal circumstances is completed by one employee. This practice has helped majorly in reducing turnover because of the flexibility in work that it offers.
- **Paid Time Off (PTO):** This system allows employees with a pool of bankable hours supplied by the employer, which can be used for any personal purpose or requirement.

Need for study

In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, work arrangements have completely changed. The physical offices have been isolated, developing an alternate world where working from home has become normal. Now that the physical boundaries between home and office are blurry, one needs to know whether employees can disengage from work [6]. This study constitutes a descriptive study with cross-sectional analysis. The focus is to check the factors responsible for work-life balance while considering the challenges they faced during the lockdown (Phases 1 and 2). The aim is to study how precisely organizations execute the work-life balance policies and whether the employees are familiar or

acquainted with their entitlements. A new aspect that should also be considered is whether the organizations are taking measures to look into the health and safety of employees as this is a cause of distress for them since the onset of this disease [7]. Irrespective of this, the idea of work-life balance has found to be studied predominantly in Western countries. It should be noted that the beliefs, sentiments, attitudes, functioning, practices, and performance of employees in the western world are poles apart from developing economies, like India's, where families play a crucial role.

Literature Review

The term "work-family balance" was coined in the UK in the late 1970s to describe the concept of striking a balance between a professional's work life and his or her family life. Other factors, aside from family, have been discovered to contribute to this balance as time has passed [8]. [Eight] Fatigue/tiredness, frequent overtime work, as observed by Ahmad, proximity to the other half (spouse), involvement in household affairs, the impact of work demand, social participations, obscurity about rules, overload of work commitment, and low compensation, work role overload, work/person conflict, work/family conflict, and family/work conflict were identified and re-identified. As a result, the term "work-life balance" was coined, recognizing that people may be involved in roles other than family to achieve their various goals. This term's three essential elements can be interpreted in the following way [9]. [Nine] In layman's terms, "work" refers to any paid job, "life" refers to the pursuits and activities that an individual engages in outside of work, and "balance" refers to "an equal distribution of commitment toward work and life." "Work-life balance is defined as "satisfaction and good functioning at work and home, with a minimum of role conflict," as studied by Clark, which can also be defined as "global assessment that works and family resources are sufficient to meet work and family demands such that participation is effective in both domains." Apart from these, Kirchmeyer defined it as "achieving satisfying experiences in all life domains, and to do so requires well-distributed personal resources such as energy, time, and commitment across domains." [10] Kofodimos defined it as a "satisfying, healthy, and productive life that includes work, play, and love, that integrates a range of life activities with attention to self, personal, and spiritual development, and that expresses a person's unique wishes, in-

terests, and values.” “Work-life balance is experienced when demands from the domain of work are compatible with demands from other domains, such as family,” according to Pichler.

From an Indian perspective, as per Buddhapriya, the cause behind the imbalance of work and life is insufficient time available to cope up with official responsibilities along with family or personal commitments. She further explains that the task of being able to complete both duties is not tiring. However, it is stressful to manage, which leads to absence or skipping work, which eventually hinders the employee’s productivity [11]. It was also highlighted that it was more difficult for women to manage work-life balance, especially if they bear young children and do not have any daycare/ crèche facility to drop them to work without any guilt. Bhargava and Baral revealed that characteristics such as individual assessments, reassurance from boss or manager, and support from home have an encouraging effect on the family to work balance. On the other hand, factors such as identifying tasks, understanding the significance of tasks, variety in skill, and autonomy have a healthy contribution to family balance [12].

The fact was recognized by Doble and Supriya that employees admire and value the efforts taken by an organization towards helping them balance their lives. On these grounds, two aspects of understanding the office environment were evaluated: support from the manager or supervisor and support from colleague’s/ team members.

A crucial part of this research is the WLB policies that organizations adopt. Researchers have also observed that improving work-life balance policies directly impacts various factors such as productivity, individual welfare, morale, motivation, and reducing costs, and improving employee retention. Brough and O’Discroll made a similar observation. They have stated that work-life balance policies can be connected with increased employee satisfaction, employee dedication, and productivity, and decreasing turnover rates and levels of emotional and physical anxiety, which is a win-win situation for both parties, i.e., organization and employee. Other studies also indicate towards work-life balance policies creating a constructive and healthier work environment and minimizing stress [13]. As per Dulk, these policies have different effects and include statutory rights during an employee’s work-life arrangement along with the formal organizational rules which may vary, but the impact or re-

sults of these policies differ based on different aspects which are mentioned by Ackers, who explains that comparing policies is arduous due to ethnic mosaic in the employment policies, government direction, market circumstances, and industrial scenario.

Baral and Bhargava addressed the situations and obstacles for the constructive execution of workplace support policies. It was discovered that 1) family-friendly policies were a huge area of concern since the time of industrialization 2) Over the years, the span and range of actions had broadened and taken a more individualistic growth approach apart from the regular family welfare 3) these initiatives are more evident in services and it/software companies 4) the scope of work-life balance policies differs across companies [14]. The authors underline the fact that these initiatives offered in segments do not improve the situation in general. However, at the same time, there is no common program that is suitable to fit all.

A more recent perspective, Wong et al. investigated the stress level towards deficient work-life balance policies among the employees after WHO declared coronavirus as a global pandemic. The importance of workplace initiatives and health care policies was crucial during a time like this. The authors also implied towards employees’ mental health during this trying period as it may cause post-traumatic stress [15].

Methodologies

Measures

For this study, the variables measured by items have been deliberately selected and adopted from the preceding literature. The study of effect was done during the pandemic. The variables have been divided into four, namely, COVID-19 Response, Work-Place Support, Work-Life Satisfaction, Work-Life Interference, having 5, 5, 4, 5 items measured each. Some of these items have been adopted from Banu and Durai-pandian. All the mentioned items have been estimated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree) [16].

Sampling Technique

Since the population of working personnel is infinite, probability sampling was not possible. Therefore, due to time and geographical constraints, the convenience sampling technique (non-probability sampling) was used. The respondents of the research

are from India and belong to various sectors, including government, education, IT, etc.

Data Collection

Primary collection methods are being used to measure the impact of COVID-19 on work-life balance for analysis. A deliberate attempt was made to include respondents from different vocations, both public and private sector undertakings, and different age groups to improve the general ability of the results and reduce systematic bias in sampling. Forms were distributed online via e-mails and other social media platforms to collect responses. SPSS 19 was used to conduct the analysis. Cronbach's alpha was calculated, and exploratory factor analysis was performed to test the reliability [17].

A total of 225 responses were received. There was no missing data since all the questions were compulsory. Table 1 displays the demographic profile records of the respondents.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	N=225	Percentage
Gender		
Male	149	66.2
Female	76	33.8
Age		
Below 30	49	21.8
30-40	19	8.4
41-50	48	21.3
Above 50	109	48.4
Marital Status		
Married	168	74.7
Single	57	25.3
Number of dependents		
0	61	27.1
1	21	9.3
2	60	26.7
2+	83	36.9

Apart from this, 23.1% of respondents have worked at their current organization between 1 to 3 years, 12.9% have worked between 4 to 6 years, 4.9% have worked between 7 and 9 years, 4% have worked between 10 to 12 years, and 42.2% have worked over 12 years.

Data Analysis and Outcome

Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the research's reliability. Table 2 displays the outcome of the reliability test and descriptive analysis that had been performed. According to Taber, the range from 0.6 to

0.7 is considered acceptable, and the values ranging between 0.81 and 0.9 are considered good, according to Fisher. In our study, the value of the variables ranges from 0.636 to 0.898. The value for all 19 items was 0.844, which is considered way above the threshold value. Hence, we can conclude that all the measurable items in this study are reliable [18].

Table 2
Reliability and Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha Value (α)	Mean(M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
COVID-19 Response	.898	2.016	1.22
Work Place Support	.870	2.712	1.23
Work-Life Satisfaction	.818	2.215	1.36
Work-Life Interference	.636	2.88	1.25

The final result of each variable has been computed by considering the average value of the individual scores of the factors. As per the observations from the above table, Work-Life Interference has the highest mean indicating agreement towards the items that have been listed, which is followed by Work Place Support.

An exploratory factor analysis was performed on the items, resulting in four variables that will be discussed further. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sampling adequacy measure was used to establish and check the appropriateness of data for the factor analysis. Table 3 shows this statistic, which depicts the amount of variance for the variables included in this study:

Table 3
KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	.869
Bartlett's Test of Approx. Chi-Square	2375.461
Sphericity df	171
Sig.	.000

As can be seen, the KMO measure of sampling adequacy has a value of 0.869, which is higher than 0.6 (the adequate value), indicating that it is an acceptable value.

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity indicates that the values in question are significant and can be accepted to imply that non-zero correlations exist at a significant level of 0.000. This interpretation provides a solid foundation for moving forward with factor analysis [19].

Nineteen factors have been analyzed with the help of the Principal Component Analysis extraction method while using Kaiser Normalization and the Varimax rotation method. This investigation was conducted in an attempt to identify crucial and appropriate factors. The columns here represent each variable's factor loading for the concerned factor after rotation. The Table 4 shows the simplification importance of rotation. The four final variables that have been extracted for this study are COVID-19 Response, Work-Place Support, Work-Life Satisfaction, and Work-Life Interference [20]. The results of the factor loadings have been recorded in Table 4.

The extracted communalities were examined to determine whether the factor analysis was correct. All of the values were relatively high (greater than 0.5), implying that the data was appropriate.

The amount of variance explained by the factor is referred to as the eigenvalue. It demonstrates how much data a factor has gathered. According to the screening test, four factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 ranging from 1.304 to 7.149 have been identified, indicating the importance of each factor and its relative descriptive power. The factors "COVID-19

Response," "Workplace Support," and "Work-Life Interference" together account for more than half of the variance.

Figure 1 is the scree plot which displays the optimal number of retained factors for the final solution. It records the factors with an eigenvalue greater than 1.

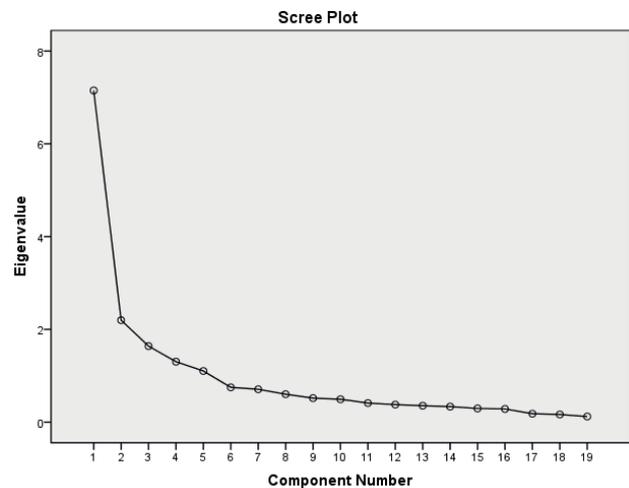


Figure 1. Screen plot which displays the optimal number of factors

Discussions

Let us look into the details of all the four factors that have been extracted in this study.

Table 4
Final Values of Factors

Final Factors	Factor Loading Value	Eigen Value	Variance Explained
FACTOR 1: Response to COVID-19 -19 The appropriate response to COVID-19 Confidence to overcome challenges faced by this pandemic Comfortable in addressing concerns Higher Authorities care about my health and safety Providing infrastructure support to work at home	.871 .855 .815 .794 .501	7.149	21.177%
FACTOR 2: Support at Work Place Management belief in healthy work-life practice An environment that is supportive of my family and personal commitments Management believes in happy people at work Employees awareness about work-life balance policies The manager is concerned about my welfare.	.805 .646 .808 .791 .632	2.198	17.944 %
FACTOR 3: Satisfaction of Work-life balance Balanced life gives me the ability to function effectively Happy with contributions towards home and family Satisfied with the way I divide my work and personal life Time to be able to achieve my personal and career goals satisfactorily	.600 .549 .735 .745	1.640	14.307 %
FACTOR 4: Interferences in work-life Workplace demands make life difficult. Work-related stress has resulted in physical ailments such as headaches, high blood pressure, and depression. Disconnecting from work is difficult for you. Due to the amount of work assigned to me I am frequently sleep-deprived. The number of hours I work is a source of concern for me.	.621 .639 .734 .656 .565	1.304	11.262 %
Total variance explained			64.691 %

COVID-19 Response

The first factor that has been extracted is the COVID-19 response. It looks into the concerns employees have, which are specific to the pandemic. Before the outbreak of the coronavirus, the working scenario was completely different. Employees followed the conventional way and had regular working hours, and physical presence was required in the offices. However, under the emerging circumstances, the situation has completely changed. To abide by health and safety measures, employees had to switch to remote working.

The pandemic was not a foreseen event. Organizations worldwide were puzzled, but since humans are prone to adjust to any situation they face, companies had to adopt suitable measures to tackle these issues. The aim should not be just to adopt the measures, but rather to instill confidence in the employees that they can rely on their organization under any condition. Hence, factor 1 records the sentiments and thoughts of the employees concerning the virus and how their company is handling this.

It was found that 55% of respondents think that their organization has taken appropriate measures in response to COVID-19, and 47% have confidence in the organization's ability to overcome the challenges.

Apart from this, 43% are comfortable communicating their concerns or making suggestions to higher authorities, and 51% agree that higher authorities care about their health and safety. Therefore, we can infer from this that the measures taken by organizations have a positive impact on the employees, which reduces a part of their stress. However, there is a large scope of improvement to cope better in this situation. Organizations should also try to provide infrastructural support during these times because, as per the current study, only 39% of respondents have received this assistance and are facing difficulties while working.

Workplace Support

The second factor extracted is Work-Place Support, which measures the support provided by organizations through work-life balance policies/practices. These practices are meant to improve the level of independence and freedom among employees regarding work coordination and integration. There is no standardized set of practices that are followed across organizations uniformly. Instead, they differ and are customized as per their norms.

An astonishing fact found during the study was that only 43% of the respondents were aware of their organization's work-life balance policies. Following this, it was noticed that 40% of the respondents think that their management believes in a healthy work-life practice, and 53% believe that the environment in which they work is supportive towards their personal and family commitments. Lastly, only 44% feel reassured that their manager or supervisor is genuinely concerned about their welfare.

All these parameters/aspects fall below 50% is alarming, which indicates that workplace support and practices need to be taken into consideration more seriously and not merely note the figures. Keeping in mind how crucial is the implementation of these policies; organizations must strive towards increasing awareness levels and extend a helping hand to support their employees.

Work-life satisfaction

The ongoing crisis has led most employees to work from home, which has created a blur between the time utilized for working and the time spent personally. Despite the reduction in commute time, these additional hours are also spent working. Therefore, this factor extracted looks into the current satisfaction in employee's lives while working remotely.

During this study, it was discovered that 42% of the respondents felt that a balanced life gives them the ability to function effectively. While 36% are happy with their contributions towards their families and home, 33% are satisfied with how they can separate work and personal life. Finally, 32% have the time to focus and attain their personal and career goals. All the above parameters fall below 50% yet again. Thus, we can state that even after working in the comfort of their homes, employees cannot achieve their desired satisfaction.

Work-Life Interference

There is a fine line between being dedicated, hard-working, and turning into a workaholic. When people engage too much in their work and let it affect their health, mind, family, and quality of work negatively, they tend to fall into the workaholic category. They lose track of time, skip meals, and remain unbothered by any other events in and around their lives. In times like these, employees should regulate their lifestyle and not go to unnecessary lengths to meet deadlines

and prove their efficiency. The last factor extracted looks into the interference employees have to face despite remote working.

Through this study, it has come to our notice that 58% of the respondents are concerned with the number of hours they work in a week. As per the current situation, 44% experience high stress from the demands from work, because of which 33% are suffering from physical ailments such as headaches, blood pressure, depression, etc. It has also been observed that 37% of the respondents, due to the amount of work they were loaded with, have often skipped meals, which indicate that they have to suffer from the negative impact of work-life imbalance. Focusing equally on mental health and balancing work is the only key to a successful work-life balance. Therefore, organizations should not burden their employees with high-load work and allow them to work at a more flexible pace.

Findings and Conclusion

After a thorough evaluation, the following findings and conclusions were made:

Work and personal life are not self-reliable worlds. Instead, they are co-dependent, which involves efficiently integrating the employer's requirements with the employee's requirements. Work-life balance practices intend to be employee-friendly and should include a beneficial community plan of action. Therefore, these practices must be implemented along with other equally powerful HR strategies. However, this also requires more practical research inputs to draft and implement better strategies for achieving a work-life balance of professionals.

It was observed that concerning Work-Life Balance, Personal factors, Company WLB Policies and Health and Safety of Employees were among the most crucial aspects for personnel, but companies and individuals need to strive harder towards achieving a finer work-life balance. It is pivotal for companies to consider the employees' psychological well-being by empathizing with them and forming customizable WLB Policies. From this research, we can conclude that the employee's job impacts their personal lives. However, there is no significant Work-Life Balance achieved amidst the pandemic, which is, therefore, creating havoc between professional and personal life.

Suggestions

The researcher has the following suggestions which may help to maintain work-life balance during this tough period-

- Draft weekly plans: - A plan will help you succeed in setting up boundaries between personal and work schedules, which should include setting a timeline for each goal you want to accomplish.
- Setting regular intervals: - Under normal circumstances, one allows themselves some leisure time by drinking tea/coffee or chatting with colleagues, etc. While working at home, one tends to get so engrossed in performing the assigned tasks that they may forget to disengage from work. Hence, it is important to assign breaks in one's calendar and spend time doing what makes one feel refreshed. They are efficient and productive once they resume working.
- Set up a customized workspace: - A company has a designated office or cubicle or some space for each employee to work in, but when the situation has transitioned to remote working, it is difficult to find your corner to work in, especially if you are a parent. Thus, it is important to assign a space exclusively for yourself by equipping it with all the tools you require to work, creating a division between work and liberty time.
- Self-Introspection: - These times are strenuous for everyone. Health experts have derived that this lockdown period has caused mental health turmoil on a large population scale. Therefore, one has to take care of themselves by trying activities, which will help to revitalize the body and the mind. Some of these activities could include yoga, meditation, or maybe just taking in some fresh air from your balcony.
- Set a deadline to end your working day: - Since one is working remotely, there are times when one may be tempted to work until they complete everything, but it is important to remember not to overburden yourself as it will eventually reduce productivity and lead to burnouts. Hence, set the alarm for a cut-off point and immediately disconnect from work then. For example- Keeping your laptop away after 6 pm and turning off your work notifications.

Limitations and Future Scope

Even though this subject has many research materials, there was still some lack of information as the study has never been conducted during such an uncommon circumstance. The survey for research was conducted during a specific period, i.e., during phases 1 and 2 of the lockdown with limited sample size.

Therefore, there is a possibility that the information might be generalized. This research was conducted only in metro cities. In the future, the research could be extended to tier II and non-metro cities; apart from this, the researcher suggests looking into the employees' mental well-being or psychological effects. Internal evaluations/assessments or company audit reports may also help in the future development of this study.

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Conflict of Interest: Suggestions

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