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WORK ORGANIZATION AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN THE IT SECTOR WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO CHENNAI CITY

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to contribute to existing literature on work-life balance in general and the IT Sector (IT) industry in the Chennai in particular. In light of the work organizations in IT and resulting outcome that employees in their daily efforts within the industry, the significance of the issue of work-life balance should be stressed. Moreover, the conflict between work demands vis-à-vis personal and family needs is needed to be This paper is an attempt to contribute to literature in three ways. First, it takes a critical look at the workplace setting and organization in IT. Second, the research examines the different benefits in IT companies and if employees perceive them to foster work-life balance. Lastly, it discusses the recommendations from the IT workers themselves in how to limit and alleviate the work-life disconnect and promote genuine work-life balance.

Keywords: Work life; Employees; Stress.

Introduction

IT Sector (IT) is a developing industry that is receiving significant attention from all other sectors such as government, business, as well as from the academe. IT is basically formulated to outsource processes to a third party that are not core to a company but are necessary in its everyday operations. India has the most number of IT companies in the world and consequently the most studies and researches made on this subject. Chennai also have its share of the IT industry, being the third IT center in the world. With the sustained growth of this industry, IT are now receiving considerable academic attention dealing with multiple aspects like work conditions, organizational environment and specific organization and work-related issues. Studies suggest that employee morale, satisfaction, and performance are improved among

employees who have received work/life programs such as onsite child care, time for elder care, opportunity to study, opportunities for telecommuting as these reduce the level and intensity of stress that employees experience (Bruck, et al., 2002; Harmon, 2001; Garvey, 2001; Gibson et al., 2006). Consequently, organizations are paying more attention to work and personal/family life-friendly programs, and are developing other benefits and activities that may help alleviate workplace stress and conflict between work-life. Thompson (2002) classified these work-life initiatives into five (5) categories namely, (1) Time-based strategies like flexi-time, telecommuting and job sharing; (2) Information-based strategies like relocation assistance, elder care resources, company work/life balance intranet; (3) Money-based strategies like leave with pay, scholarships for dependents; (4) Direct services like onsite childcare, concierge services and takeout dinners; and (5) Culture-change strategies like training or focus on employees' performance not office face time.

Review of Literature

Maintaining work-life balance has been the focus of industries' human resource practitioners amidst the demanding nature of work and the workers' personal endeavors in the age of information and technology. The fast-paced life, the instant accessibility of almost anything does not put the individual in a more lax state; instead it pushes the person to do more with the seemingly more time in his/her hands. The individual engages himself/herself with more activities in and out of the office than usual as this seems to be supported by the adoption of flexibility measures in the workplace. The availability of technology anywhere which aids in the connectivity of people 24/7 further delineates the boundaries between work and personal life. Work-life balance "is the stability characterized by the balancing of an individual's life complexity and dynamism with environmental and personal resources such as family, community, employer, profession, geography, information, economics, personality, or values" (Crooker et al, 2002: 389). The linkage of work and personal aspect of lives has always been emphasized (Bruck et al., 2002; Gibson, et al., 2006). Gibson et a. (2006: 197-198) offered two explanations regarding the interconnectedness of work and life in the organizational setting: (1) the compensation effect implies that employees tend to compensate for low work or personal life satisfaction by seeking contentment in the other domain; and (2) the spillover view that indicates that job satisfaction spills over into one's work life and vice versa.

Objectives

Against this background, the overarching goal of this study is to examine the work organization and work-life balance of selected IT workers in IT Sector. Specifically, the paper intended to address the following research problems:

1. What is the general work organization of IT?
2. What are the available benefits and programs for the IT employees? Do these existing benefits and programs promote work-life balance?
3. What is the IT workers' perception of their work-life balance condition in their respective organizations?
4. What do IT workers want to achieve in terms of work-life balance?

Scope and Limitation

As in all research, this study had its strength and limitations. One of its strength is the used of mixed method approach obtaining both qualitative and quantitative data. Moreover, unlike other studies, respondents and key informants came from different IT sectors with different positions and work roles. This research intended to ascertain the work-life balance conditions of selected IT workers in IT Sector. Given the limited time and the descriptive nature of the study, it did not include an in-depth review of the work-life balance in particular IT sector. This study does not claim to be a definitive text on the issue of work-life balance in IT in the Chennai.

Limitation of the Study

This is limited only to the sixty-three (63) survey respondents and three (3) key informants of the in-depth interview. In fact, for this study, the researchers found it difficult to gain permission from the Human Resource Department of the different IT; the seeming hesitance and not being open to research may stem from their implicit concern that the responses may be construed as official responses of their own organizations, as well as revealing existing benefits and programs may negate the human resource departments' competitive advantage over other companies especially with the growing problem of the inadequacy of a talent pool for the IT industry. Because the study focused on worker conditions, the researchers did not expand participation of administrators and executives in IT.

Methodology

Sources of data

Survey Questionnaire

A survey questionnaire was prepared for the purpose of the study. Following Thompson's (2002) work-life initiatives classification, the researchers prepared a questionnaire enumerating the different compensation and work-life benefits and programs. The questionnaire also delved into aspects recommended work-life benefits, programs and policies. Due

to limited time and the need for more respondents for the questionnaire, the researchers opted to utilize an online survey site; the researchers then emailed the link as well as posted it to social networking sites.

A total of sixty-three (63) respondents responded to the survey. The respondents came from ten (10) IT companies.

In-Depth Interviews

Interviews with three (3) IT workers were conducted to explore the research problem in detail. Building on the survey tool, a related interview guide delving into work organization, existing benefits, problems encountered, as well as long term plans.

Sampling Procedure

A purposive sampling procedure was used to select this study’s Key Informants in order to capture most information about the phenomenon under study (Silverman, 2007). The primary criteria for key informant and respondents’ selection are those who have worked for IT companies for the last six (6) months.

The researcher sought permission and approval from Human Resource Department of the IT; however, most of the human resource department heads declined and are not open to research. As sampling is primarily purposive and key informants were determined based on the established criteria as well as their availability and willingness to participate, to date there are sixty-three (63) survey respondents and three (3) key informants for the in-depth interview.

Results And Discussion

Socio-Demographic Profile Of Survey Respondents

Distribution of Respondents according to Gender and Civil Status

Table 1.0 Respondents according to Gender and Civil Status

GENDER	f	%	CIVIL STATUS	f	%
Male	15	23.81%	Single	40	63.49%
Female	47	74.60%	Married	21	33.33%
Not Specified	1	1.59%	Separated	1	1.59%
			Not Specified	1	1.59%
Total	63	100.00%	Total	63	100.00%

From the total of sixty-three (63) survey respondents, forty-seven (47) or 74.60% are females while only fifteen (15) are males.

On the other hand, the sampling population is dominated by single individuals with forty (40) respondents while there are twenty-one (21) who professed they are married.

Distribution of Respondents according to Years of Service

Table 2.0 Respondents according to Length of Service.

Years in Service	F	%
1 – 2	31	49.21%
3- 4	15	23.81%
5 – 6	12	19.05%
7 – above	3	4.76%
Not Specified	2	3.17%
Total	63	100.00%

Most of the respondents are new in the IT sector with an average of 1.2 years in service. The next most numbered years of service are between three to six years.

This phenomenon may further explain the high turnover rates in the IT industries (Hechanova, 2008), as the years of service implies the average length of stay in the industry. When interviewed, responses revealed that some opt to take a leave of absence from the industry altogether due to health and family related concerns; however, most respondents conveyed that those who are working in IT sometimes opt to transfer to other companies as these companies put a premium on their experience and consequently offer higher positions with higher remuneration packages.

Other Monetary Benefits Offered By It Companies

Table 3.0 in the next page presents other monetary benefits of IT companies. Most IT companies in the Chennai offer transportation allowance, meal allowance, night differential pays, performance incentive, overtime pay, attendance bonus and salary increase as additional monetary benefits for its employees.

However respondents deemed salary increase, overtime pay, and performance incentive as the top three (3) most important supplementary cash benefits further supporting Matsumoto’s (2000) pervious assertion of earning a living as utmost priority of most who are working.

Table 6.0 Other Monetary Benefits.

Monetary Benefits aside from Salary	% of Company who offers this benefit	Priority Rating
Salary Increase	97.30%	4.86
Performance Incentive	97.30%	4.67
Overtime Pay	100.00%	4.64
Year-End Bonus	91.89%	4.53
Night Differentials	97.30%	4.51
Attendance Bonus	86.49%	4.48
14th Month Pay	91.89%	4.44
Meal Allowance	100.00%	4.41
Mid-Year	83.78%	4.39
Transportation Allowance	100.00%	4.35
Tax Shield	91.89%	4.30
Clothing Allowance	94.59%	3.62
Communications Allowance	89.19%	3.56

Summary and Conclusions

This study delved into the work-life balance and work organization in the IT Sector. Specifically, the study would answer the following: (1) What is the general work organization of IT?; (2) What are the available benefits and programs for the IT employees?; (3) Do these existing benefits and programs promote work-life balance?; (4) What is the IT workers' perception of their work-life balance condition in their respective organizations?; and (5) What do IT workers want to achieve in terms of work-life balance? Results showed that most IT companies employ high-caliber compensation and benefits packages for its workers and may be perceived as pioneer in work-life balance advocacy. Money-based strategies they offer surpassed those of other sectors as this comprised of meal and transportation allowances, performance incentives and bonuses, salary increase, overtime and night differential pays, and other bonuses. Moreover, their non-monetary benefits in the form of leaves with pay, HMO and health programs, flexible schedules, off-setting, opportunity to negotiate part time work, bedroom or sleeping quarters, health programs, career leaves and breaks, study/training scholarship and subsidy, early retirement, club membership and cultural/religious leave.

With the existence of the different benefits and programs, respondents perceived that these are sufficient to foster work-life balance. HMO and health programs ranked highly as benefits that promote work-life balance, this may be ascribed to the health risks involved in IT settings as well as the importance of being healthy and health-related concerns to the employees. Paid paternity/maternity/career leaves and breaks, as well as flexible work schedules – like flextime and offsetting - are commonly considered as also important in promoting work-life balance as these may contribute to time spend with the family. Findings revealed that most of the respondents experienced difficulties in work-life balance. A thin demarcation in terms of percentage separates those who encounter problems in terms of their personal life against their workload and those who are not. Schedules for studies and family sometimes are impeded by work schedules. In terms of family life, majority of the respondents did not experience difficulty in adjusting their family life; still some admitted having difficulty in managing time with the family and the demands of their work. Majority of the IT employees expressed the need to increase their monthly salaries and other benefits. More than tangible work-life programs and policies, data disclosed that IT workers still are more focus on what they can get from their companies - like car plan, study/training scholarship, career breaks, exercise facilities, early retirement, and flexi time; this may imply that compensation and benefits are still seen as important to the IT setting as means to outweigh the demand of the workload and help alleviate the working conditions.

Recommendations

Finally, the existence of work-life balance programs, policies and initiatives at the organizational level is significant but not necessarily sufficient. Guidelines established at the governmental, industry and sector levels, as well as the ability of individuals to capitalize on existing work-life balance programs have to be connected. IT workers have to be knowledgeable about, and appreciative of, policies provided at the organization level, and should continue to protect their welfare. At the same time, there may be evidence that organizational climate and environment often curtail policy developments on the governmental level by being generally unsupportive of employees beyond their legally established rights. Consequently, accomplishing work-life balance is a complex issue that requires the interaction and cooperation of social actors at national, governmental, organizational, as well as the individual-worker level. Work-Life Balance in the IT industry, and the different IT sectors, will take on greater importance. What follows are initial thoughts for empirical investigations in the domain of Work-Life Balance in IT. Accomplishing this may necessitate interdisciplinary

collaboration, and an expansion of research methods such as large-scale surveys, multi-site case studies, cross-group analysis, and evaluation studies.

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