

RESEARCH ARTICLE

An Analysis of Work-Life Balance (WLB) Situation of Employees and its Impact on Employee Productivity with Special Reference to the Indian Hotel Industry

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ABSTRACT:

In the recent years, the word productivity has gained popularity in the business world and it is no longer a secret that productivity is positively linked to the Work-Life Balance (WLB) situation of the concerned employees. Hotel industry is characterized by provision of services round the clock. Moreover, due to the seasonal nature of hotel business and high attrition rate in the industry, hotels face manpower shortage. This situation forces the employees to take up the extra load by working for long hours and sometimes their duties are stretched to 16 to 24 hours at a go. This factor has a great negative impact on the WLB situation of the employees since they do not get sufficient time for their personal and social commitments. They are thus trapped in scheduling conflicts and feel the pressure of multiple roles.

This study is aimed at analyzing the work-life balance situation of the Indian hotel employees and its impact on employee productivity. In an effort to do so, a survey in the form of a questionnaire and interviews was conducted from the sample comprising of 200 hotel employees from the management and the associates categories to understand their views on the subject. The responses received were represented graphically and analyzed using basic analytical tools.

The findings of his research suggest that the hotel industry is concerned about the issue related to WLB of its employees; however, the measures taken to improve the situation are not very effective. Employment practices pertaining to areas of WLB are rated as second most important on the basis of its ability to enhance employee productivity in hotels.

KEY WORDS: "Hotel Industry", "Work-life Balance (WLB)", "Employee Productivity", "Service Industry", "Work-Family conflict"

I. INTRODUCTION:

In the recent years, due to the cut throat competition in the corporate world, employees have been working like machines as they run against time to achieve stringent targets and strive hard to get an upper edge over their competitors.

The corporate life is become a rat race where everyone is running for life as if the world is coming to an end in the near future.

Success has become the only aim in life and all of us want to achieve it by hook or by crook, the Hotel industry is no exception to this. Although organizations want their employees to work like machines, it cannot happen in reality because employees are human beings with a set of emotions and thus they cannot be switched on or off as per the demand of the job. Moreover, like machines, employees cannot be expected to work with full efficiency, for long timings until they are switched off for the day. It is rightly said "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy". This saying holds good even at work places where the employees have to strike a right balance between work and social life.

When we relate this situation to the hotel industry, we realize that the employees working in hotels experience poor WLB thereby making the job more stressful and challenging. This situation not only hampers the social health of the employees, but also has a great impact on their efficiency and productivity at a large. In the recent years, the word productivity has gained popularity in the business world. The problem of scarcity has a deep rooted impact on the economies of each and every business unit. Almost all organizations, either reactively or proactively, have become serious on their productivity. In such a scenario, the hotel industry have realized that enhancing their employees' productivity goes a long way in success of their business operations and thus productivity has become a matter of great concern. Thus it is the need of the hour for the industry to focus on issues related to WLB situation of hotel employees that would consciously or subconsciously lead to enhancement of their productivity.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW:

1. Flora F.T. Chiang, (2010), investigated the relationships among job stressors, coping resources, and job stress. Data were collected from food service employees ($n = 255$) in the hotel and catering industry. The results demonstrated that high job demands coupled with low job control and the availability of work-life balance practices resulted in a higher level of stress.
2. Simon Chak-keung Wong, (2009), explored hotel employees' perception on work-life balance issues. In-depth interviews and self-administered questionnaires were used to collect the data. Factor analysis discovered seven factors: (1) enough time-off from work; (2) workplace support on work-life balance; (3) allegiance to work; (4) flexibility on work schedule; (5) life orientation; (6) voluntary reduction of contracted hours to cater for personal needs; and (7) upkeep the work and career—the determinants perceived by employees to attain "better" work-life balance in the dynamic hotel environment.
3. Margaret Deery, (2009), examined the key issues associated with work-life balance (WLB) with a particular focus on practices within the tourism industry. It provides an overview of the general literature and then the research that relates specifically to WLB in the tourism industry.
4. Indira Kandasamy, (2009), conducted a qualitative study in an attempt to identify QWL dimensions expected in the working environment of a hotel. 84 students and 64 employees from three hotel management institute and three hotel organization from Mangalore city in India participated through a purposeful sampling frame. Data were collected using interviews, focus group discussions and open-ended questionnaires, and analyzed in line with grounded theory method. The content analysis of the data yielded eight dimensions of QWL. Implications and limitations of this study along with areas for future research are discussed.
5. Vincent P. Magnini, (2009), synthesized pertinent WFC literature and explicates a series of measures for reducing WFC in hospitality firms. Future research directions are also identified.
6. Margaret Deery, (2008), provided an overview of the key employee turnover literature within the hospitality and tourism industry for those academics researching in this area, with specific attention given to the role of WLB issues in the turnover decision-making process. The paper also provides a theoretical and practical framework for industry to develop strategies for reduced employee turnover, with a focus on the role that balancing work and family plays in these strategies.
7. Jeanette N. Cleveland, (2007), explored the connections among work characteristics, work stress, and the work-family interface. Results of the multisource qualitative research suggest that long, unpredictable hours create individual and family-related stress. Furthermore, there is agreement among the three sources regarding the stressors and benefits associated with working in the hotel industry. Discussion of future research and practice is presented.
8. Rebecca Harris Mulvaney, (2007), reviewed what is known about the work-family interface in relation to hotel managers in an effort to identify ways to gain a strategic advantage in this competitive sector. It examined organizational-, individual-, and family-level outcomes of the interface, as well as the processes linking these components and moderators thought to impact these relationships. Conclusions focus on innovative practices implemented to address work-family concerns.
9. Liz Doherty, (2004), explored the effectiveness of work-life balance initiatives in helping women progress to senior management. The article shows that the business case which underpins diversity management and a voluntary approach to work-life balance may only deliver positive benefits to women when the labour market is tight, and, even then, the benefits for women in management are far from demonstrated. A stronger equal opportunities approach is also shown to be problematic as it draws attention to women's "difference" to men and their need for special treatment.
10. Philip Bohle, (2004), marked differences emerged between the reports of casual and full-time employees about working hours, work-life conflict and health. Casuals were more likely to work highly irregular hours over which they had little control. Long working hours, combined with low predictability and control, produced greater disruption to family and social lives and poorer work-life balance for casuals.
11. David E. Guest, (2002), reviewed aspects of contemporary theory and research on work-life balance. It starts by exploring why work-life balance has become an important topic for research and policy in some countries and after outlining traditional perspectives examines the concept of balance and its

implications for the study of the relation between work and the rest of life. A model outlining the causes, nature and consequences of a more or less acceptable work-life balance is presented and recent research is cited to illustrate the various dimensions.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To explore the Work-Life Balance (WLB) situation of employees in the hotel industry.
2. To identify the various aspects of WLB of hotel employees.
3. To analyze the impact of WLB on productivity of hotel employees.
4. To explore the measures followed by the hotel industry to enhance the WLB situation of its employees.

IV. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

1. This study is purely based on the information given by the employees and management of sample hotels.
2. The study is conducted in the current scenario and the opinions, perception and expectations of the respondents may differ with time.
3. The study does not differentiate respondents on basis of their demographic factors which may have an influence of their perception thereby identifying scope for further research.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Collection of Data:

The primary data required for the research was collected using the following techniques:

- Personal Interviews:

The researcher conducted personal interviews with employees and Human Resource managers of reputed hotel brands to explore the WLB situation in their organization.

- Questionnaire:

A questionnaire bearing straight forward and relevant questions was drafted and handed over to the sample to obtain their responses.

Sampling Techniques:

The population being “employees of hotels” is more or less homogeneous in nature since the characteristics and service conditions of the industry are almost similar in nature throughout the population. With due consideration to this fact, a sample comprising of 200 employees representing various hotels from five star to serviced apartments was selected on random basis to conduct the study.

Apart from the above mentioned tools the relevant secondary data for the research was collected from journals, books and internet.

VI. OBSERVATIONS, DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS:

Labor is the costliest and most critical semi-variable expense in the hospitality business. The most commonly used parameter to calculate the return on labour investment is evaluation of the “Labour Productivity” of the

organization. Amongst all the measures undertaken by organizations to enhance employee productivity, the measures pertaining to the human element are the most effective and efficient ones especially in the Hospitality Industry or any service industry at large. “Human Resource” plays a predominant role in the service delivery process and cannot be replaced with machines due to the characteristic human element of any service delivery process. The Human Resource Departments of hotels are well aware of this fact and thus are developing employee centric employment practices to attain higher levels of employee productivity. However, in spite of these efforts, the WLB situation of hotel employees is less discussed. The employees are expected to work for long hours, in varied shifts as the industry runs 24 / 7. It is a known fact that hotel industry is characterized with tremendous hard work and when the employees are working hard for long hours, obviously their efficiency levels drop down. Moreover, when they return home for a short while after long shifts, they are dead tired and most of their time is consumed in resting or relaxing. Thus they can hardly give time for their family which eventually leads to frustrations having a direct impact on their work. It is therefore important to address the issue of WLB of employees working in the hotel industry.

Work-life balance situation in the hotel industry:

The hospitality industry is characterized with long working hours in different shifts, hard work, unpredictable weekly offs etc. Thus the employees have a poor WLB with negligible social life. The average working hours of the hotel employees is 12-14 hours during which they are expected to be on their feet almost all the time. Moreover, due to seasonal variations in the business, the hotels operate with meager staff so as to keep the labour cost low especially during the off-peak season thereby increasing the workload and work timings of the existing employees. The operations in hotels are very dynamic and unpredictable in nature many a times to cope up with the same, employees have to work on their scheduled day offs at the cost of their plans with their families on such days. It is a known fact that during festive seasons the hotel business is in boom thus the employees are expected to be on their toes while their families are enjoying the festivals without them. Although, the industry has started realizing this fact, it has not been able to find a solution on the same. With a motive to lower the gravity of this problem, hotels have initiated the following measures:

- Additional Leaves / Holidays / Weekly offs
- Employee Leisure Clubs / Family Get togethers
- Fixed number of working hours per day

Factors affecting poor work-life balance of hotel employees:

- 24 X 7 Service Industry:

The hotel industry works round the clock. Thus the employees have to work in shifts. Sometimes the shifts timings are odd which discourages the employees to work in those shifts. Moreover, if an employee in a particular shift is on leave, his duty has to be conducted by someone

in the previous shift. In such a case, the person working in the previous shift, has to work for a double shift some times in triple shift at a stretch. This being a very common feature in the industry, employees in general have to work for long hours which have a great impact on their WLB. Many times they have to cancel their personal appointments due to unforeseen job circumstances.

- **Seasonal Business:**

Although the industry works round the clock, it faces peak and off peak seasons during the year depending upon the nature of hotel, its business and clientele. However, it is practically not possible for hotels to manipulate their number of employees based on its seasonal requirements. It is thus a common practice that hotels employ just enough employees on the basis of its average requirement. Thus during peak season they have tremendous shortfall of employees which sometimes are compensated by appointing labour on casual basis. However, casual labour cannot really substitute the existing employees for obvious reasons. Thus, the regular employees have to take the major chunk of the workload during peak seasons. These employees have to many a time work for long work hours ranging anything from 16 hours to 36 hours at a stretch. Moreover, during peak season getting their weekly offs also becomes very difficult and in such situations, employees work weeks together without a day off. Although, their missed weekly offs may be availed in future, it becomes very stressful and challenging for them. This obviously have a direct impact on their WLB situation.

- **Manpower shortage:**

As mentioned earlier, due to seasonal business, the industry works on less labour as compared to their requirement. In addition to that, the challenge of working with labour unions and other liabilities associated with employment, the industry is discouraged from employing more people during peak seasons. Thus the additional work load has to be absorbed with the existing employees creating a major imbalance in their family and social life.

- **High attrition rate:**

The industry is known for its high attrition rate. In certain cases, the attrition rate is as high as 25 to 30%. With such high rates of employee turnover, it is a major challenge for the HRD to fill the vacancies with appropriate talent. Sometimes it takes a long time to find an appropriate person due to which the existing employees have to feel the pressure of sharing the load of the left employee. Since it is an ongoing and recurring situation, there is a lot of uncertainty in the work timings of the employees. Moreover, the additional load and time encroaches their family and personal life by way of accumulated stress and limited time for personal life.

- **Uncertainty of work:**

The hotel industry being a part of the service industry is engaged in providing service to its guests. In doing so, the biggest challenge is to satisfy the varied demands of their

guests. The ever changing and unpredictable nature of these demands make the job of hotel employees more uncertain. Unlike other industries where ongoing task can be handed over to the employee in the next shift, in the hotel industry the employee cannot leave the guest service incomplete and cannot leave the work or handover to the next shift until and unless the guest is fully satisfied. In doing so, the employees sometimes have to work for extended hours. Thus uncertainty of work is the major factor responsible for the uncertain work timings of hotel employees which further hampers their WLB.

- **Hard work:**

The nature of work in hotels is very strenuous especially due to the continuous contact with the customers. The employees are expected to be on their toes, active and charming and fresh as ever when they are dealing with the guests. Irrespective of whether the employee has just reported on duty or whether he is continuing in the double shift, he is expected to wear a pleasing smile on his face and is not supposed to look overworked or tired even if he has been standing or running around throughout his shift. This being a very stressful task is the biggest challenge of the hotel employees and the problem does not end here. When this employee returns home he is dead tired and spends most of his time in relaxing or sleeping. Thus he barely manages to devote time for his family which further leads to frustration and disconnect from this family and social life.

- **Ever-changing and abnormal working shifts:**

It is rightly said that the hotel industry never sleeps. Thus in such a scenario, the employees have to work in varied shifts based on the requirements of their job. Since there are a few employees in every department, each one of them has to be ready to work in any shift and these shifts may change on a daily or weekly basis depending upon the nature and demand of work. Thus in most of the cases, the employee is never sure of his shift for following day and thus cannot plan for any personal commitments. Moreover, sometimes the shifts are abnormal like the evening, break and graveyard shifts when the employees are expected to travel back home at odd hours. Although, hotels provide home drops for ladies working in late shifts, such service is not available for men. Therefore sometimes employees staying far, prefer to wait back in the hotel till early morning which further reduces their break timings.

Aspects of work-life balance in hotel industry:

- **Scheduling Conflicts:**

The most important aspect of WLB of hotel employees is the scheduling conflicts. Common scheduling conflicts occur when two events compete for an employee's attention. This type of occurrence can be stressful for staff, and bad for productivity. Hotel employees often faces the problem since they are trapped in a situation where they are not able to find time for their personal life due to uncertain and long work timings. Moreover, due to changing shifts most of the time they do not get sufficient break between two shifts leading to stress and frustration which may end up with the

employee quitting his job. The following are the most common reasons for occurrence of scheduling conflicts.

- Busy work schedule
- Lack of time for personal life
- Social disconnect

- **Pressure of multiple roles:**

(Work – Family conflict and Family – Work conflict)

Work-home interference and work-family conflict have been defined as “a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible so that participation in one role [home] is made more difficult by participation in another role [work]” (Source - Greenhaus and Beutell, 195, p. 77).

Work-to-family conflict occurs when experiences at work interfere with family life, like extensive, irregular, or inflexible work hours, work overload and other forms of job stress, interpersonal conflict at work, extensive travel, career transitions, unsupportive supervisor or organization. Family-to-work conflict occurs when experiences in the family interfere with work life like presence of young children, primary responsibility for children, elder care responsibilities, interpersonal conflict within the family unit, unsupportive family members. For example, a parent may take time off from work in order to take care of a sick child. Work can conflict with one’s home and family life. However, workaholicism can lead to adverse effects on one’s relationship with his or her partner.

Impact of work-life balance on productivity of hotel employees:

When brains are fatigued and stressed, they get less done. They disengage. Studies show fatigued brains look exactly like ones that are sound asleep. Minds that are focused, organized, and energized get more done in less time. A report by the Corporate Executive Board, which represents 80% of the Fortune 500 companies, found that employees who feel they have good WLB work 21% harder than those who don’t.

Work-life policies increase effort by giving people the support to work in the most effective way—reducing stress, improving energy, increasing time management skills, improving morale and commitment, and making it easier to handle professional and personal responsibilities. More job satisfaction leads to more engagement and better results. This may be summarized that good WLB of employees have a great positive impact on their productivity.

Measures followed by the hotel industry to enhance the WLB situation of its employees:

The hotel industry has realized the importance of enhancing the WLB situation of its employees. Hotels are thus developing policies and taking measures in the following ways to address this issue.

- **Provision of additional weekly offs:**

Recently some hotels have introduced a system of giving 6 weekly offs in a month which means that the employees get a two day off in every alternate week. This practice is highly welcomed by the employees since they can devote more time for their family and friends.

- **Optimum work timings:**

Hotels are aware of the fact that long working hours is the biggest factor for poor WLB of its employees. To address this issue management of hotels are taking conscious measures to discourage prolonged working hours and working for back to back shifts. Supervisors are instructed to manage their task force effectively and assign optimum work timings to their employees. Most of the hotels especially the international chains have instructed their staff not to work beyond their stipulated duty timings and in unavoidable circumstances, the supervisor has to seek prior permission of the senior management to make his staff work beyond their work timing. This has put restrictions on unnecessary over time remuneration and the supervisors have become more cautious towards the timings of their subordinates.

- **Effective Training / Counseling:**

The industry focuses on effective Training as a tool to help their employees manage work stress and handle multiple roles effectively. Employees are encouraged to work smartly and to spend quality time rather than quantity time at work. Training also helps the employees in scheduling their time effectively. Employees are counseled on routine basis to create awareness about mental health and its importance in the long run.

- **Provision of flexible work timings:**

This practice is followed for employees working in departments whose workloads changes on a daily basis. Employees working in the banqueting departments have been given the liberty of working in flexible shifts depending on the schedule of the department. The role of this department is to cater to functions, corporate meetings / events. The timings for these events are not fixed and may vary on a daily basis. Thus if the employees working in this department have the option of working in flexible hours, they can make themselves available at varied timings when such events fall due. Thus they have the liberty of working in flexible timings thereby avoiding unnecessary staff during less busy hours of the day. However, this facility cannot be extended to all the employees for obvious reasons.

- **Organizing family get-togethers / spouse clubs:**

This is an important tool to address the issue of work – family conflict. When the family members are invited to the hotels on the occasion of get-togethers they get an opportunity to interact with families of other employees and get a feel of the work culture of their spouse. This practice goes a long way in bringing the employees closer to their families.

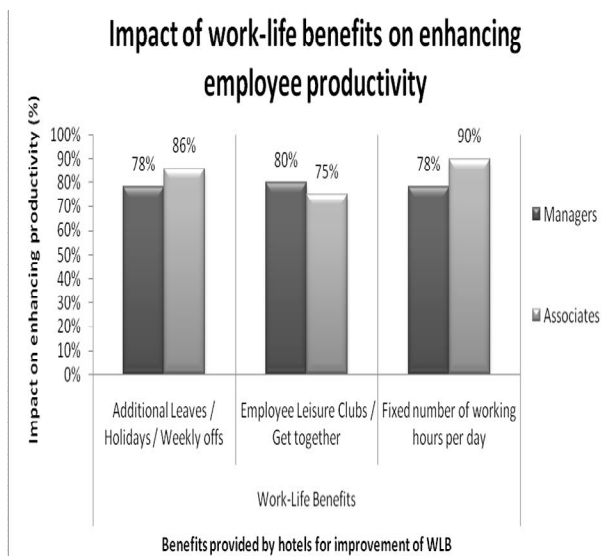


Figure 1 Areas on which the management should focus their employment practices based of its importance in boosting the employee productivity

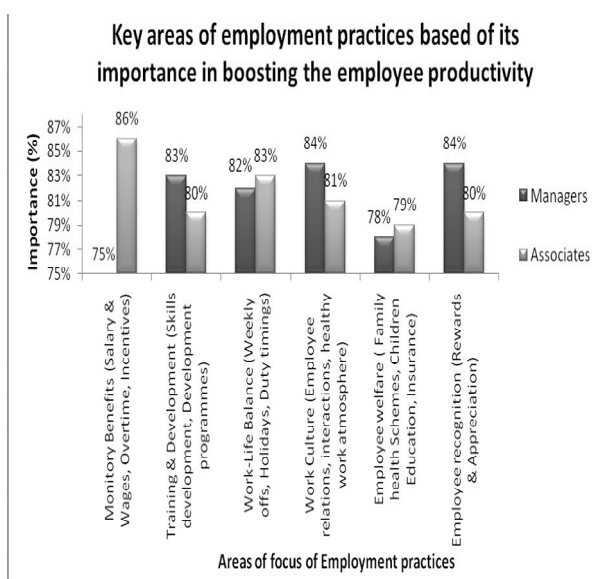


Figure 2 Employment practices pertaining to improve Work-life balance and its impact seen on enhancing employee productivity

VII. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the responses received by the employees of the hotel industry on the issues related to WLB in hotels, the following suggestions and recommendations can be made:

1. The management of hotels should analyze the issues related to the WLB of its employees and should design and implement policies to resolve the issue.

2. Management of hotels should focus on provision of employment practices pertaining to WLB that have a greater impact on enhancing productivity of its employees.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS:

The findings of the research can be concluded as under:

1. Long and strenuous working hours and shortage of manpower are the major factors responsible for poor WLB amongst hotel employees.
2. Scheduling conflicts and pressure of multiple roles are the major components of poor WLB of hotel employees.
3. The hotel industry is concerned about the issue related to WLB of its employees; however, the measures taken to improve the situation are not very effective.
4. Employment practices pertaining to areas of WLB are rated as second most important on the basis of its ability to enhance employee productivity in hotels.
5. Employees belonging to the 'Manager' category feel that Employee leisure clubs and family get-togethers are the most effective measures to improve WLB that would lead to better employee productivity.
6. Employees belonging to the 'Associate' category feel that additional leaves / holidays / weekly offs and fixed number of working hours are the most effective measures to improve WLB that would lead to better employee productivity.

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