"WORK TO FAMILY CONFLICTS": A CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE IMPACTS OF PERFORMANCE PRESSURE ON THE FAMILY LIFE OF INDIAN SOFTWARE PROFESSIONALS

* Leena Francis
** Dr. Joseph Sebastian Thekedam

* Asst. Professor, School of Management, DiST & Part time Research Scholar, Bharathiar University
** Ph.D. (Management Studies), Ph.D. (Social Sciences), MBA, M.Ed., MA, PGDHRM, M. Phil,
St. Berchmans College, Changanacherry, Kerala – 686101

Abstract

The vital aspect for the growth of modern society in any county is the adequate changes that happen in the field of work and job design. Thus, advancements in work practices are always essential and indispensable. While there are many social and individual benefits to the changes in Indian professional domain, there are also problems and negative consequences that must be recognized and understood. Conflicts between work and family are probably as old as the history of private enterprise. This paper considers, from an Indian perspective, some of the new work practices in the IT sector and it negative impacts on the software professionals. The authors identify a range of issues which professionals and communities should be aware of and suggest some specific strategies and recommendations for minimizing these negative impacts.

Keywords: *work-life balance; flexible working arrangements; peer pressure; performance pressure; software professionals.*

Introduction

Information technology has made its base in every sphere of human activity, especially in the industrial sectors. The growth of I.T. industry and the introduction of corporate culture have made tremendous changes in the social, political and economic situation globally. The nature of work has gone through drastic changes over the last century and it is still changing at whirlwind speed. They have touched almost all professions, starting from an artist to a surgeon, or a commercial pilot to a sales executive. The I.T. Multi National Corporations with the concept of Outsourcing is the pioneer of these changes.

International Companies look for professionals with an ever-broader background and range of skills, not only technical knowledge, but communication and other interpersonal skills. In the early stages the performance pressure can `rev up` the body and enhance productivity. The fear of failure becomes a prominent issue in such situations. However, if this condition is allowed to go unchecked and the body is revved up further, the performance ultimately declines and the individual`s health and personal life collapses.

The studies show that the divorce rates are increasing at hundred-percentage rate and most of those splitting up are members of India's thriving, urban middle class whose lives have been transformed by I.T. boom. From 8,456 divorce cases in 2005-06 to 38,231 in 2011, the statistics from recent months indicate an increase in the number of broken families. Incidentally, Kerala accounts for 1.96 lakh of the nation's 23.43 lakh divorced or separated women. According to lawyers in the city, 30 percent of all divorces that happen in the city every year are among couples working in the IT sector. The major reasons can be put together as odd working hours, usually at night, the high job stress, egoistic attitude, professional rivalry between husband and wife, etc. This paper considers, from Indian perspective, the impacts of performance pressure on the family life of Software professionals.

I.T. INDUSTRY

Global I.T. industry

The global IT industry has grown over the years and has become one the prominent industrial sectors that had generated employment opportunities as well as revenues all over the world. The However the industry face challenges from competitors as well due to the changes in the economic conditions like the global financial crisis.

As per the reports form Gartner, Worldwide the I.T. spending is expected to be around 3.7 Trillion by the end of 2013 and to surpass 4 trillion by 2015. According to market researcher Data Monitor, the size of the worldwide software industry in 2008 was US$303.8 billion, an increase of 6.5% compared to 2007. Americans account for 42.6% of the global software market's value.

I.T. Industry in India

History of IT industry in India

The birth of Indian I.T. industry took place in 1968 in Mumbai with the establishment of Tata Group in partnership with Burroughs. Government protected the hardware industry through hightariff barriers and licensing. The high import duties exerted by Indian government in 1970s forced the companies like Wipro to manufacture homegrown PCs. SEEPZ, which was the first software export zone in India, emerged in the year 1973. In order to make software industry independent of the hardware industry, the government in 1986, formulated Software Policy, which further, liberalized the IT industry. 1991 was the time of economic reforms and by 1995 IT companies began to get into Y2K related services like porting and code cleanup business, programming which is dependant of manpower and IT business based on cost arbitrage. In 2000 with the breakdown of Dot-com and the economic recession in US, the outsourcing to India grew unprecidently. The Y2K problems demanded the software to be modified and made compatible. The shortage of technology professionals in U.S. during this period forced many IT companies to depend on India for resources. In course of time, India got the name of low cost destination for IT works with trivial profit margin. The customer poll conducted by Booz and Co shows that India is the most preferred location for Offshoring and that can be seen as one of the reasons for the growth IT industry in India. The major contribution from India in IT industries is with respect to the IT services including Project oriented services, IT outsourcing, Training & development etc.

The present scenario of Indian IT industry

The Indian IT industry is showing a progressive growth irrespective of the global render down in the year 2009. When the whole of the world witnessed the negative growth, Indian IT industry still managed to register a growth of 5.5%. The Indian IT industry encompasses reputable billion dollar firms as well as startups or the emerging players. In the last few years, Indian Information Technology (IT) industry has seen tremendous growth. Destinations such as Delhi, Kolkata, Bangalore, Pune, Hyderabad, Cochin and Chennai have evolved into global IT hubs. Several IT parks have come up at Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chennai, Pune, Cochin, Gurgaon etc.

IT industry has shown the way to two main facets, employment generation and revenue enhancement. IT / ITeS sectors has created both direct and indirect employment opportunities, of approximately 2.8 million and 8.9 respectively. The results of the Economic Survey 2011-12 shows that 7.96 lakh jobs are added in the IT /ITeS industries in a year. The employee base in the rural areas is expected to increase by over 10 times by 2013-14, compared to 5000 in 2009-10.

As per NASSCOM estimates, the revenue generation estimated by the IT / ITeS sectors, excluding hardware is USD 87.6 billion in 2011-12. (By Shailja Shah Purohit) IT/ITeS industry has led India's economic growth and this sector's contribution to the national GDP has risen from 1.2 per cent in 1997-98 to an estimated 7.5 per cent in 2011-12.

Performance Pressure

Performance pressure is a concept, which is analogous to work stress to some extent. The struggle of an employee to survive perfectly at the workplace is the major cause of performance pressures. The increased pressure may come from heavier workloads, extra responsibility and reduced leisure time. Some of the reasons and causes of performance pressures are discussed below.

Corporate Culture & transformation in Work life

The I.T. industry and the foreign collaborations has brought in tremendous changes in the nature of employment, work designs, reward management etc. Thus, it will not be exaggerating to say that the changes in the work patterns of booming industries like IT industry is radical. The cream of Indian population that contains the most dynamic, intelligent and significant strata of youth is employed in the IT sector. The barriers of backgrounds, monitory and external influences that posed hindrances to the growth of educated graduates of India in the past decades no longer affect the IT professionals.

On the other hand, the Indian work culture of eight hours job and sixteen hours of personal life is facing a great transformation into 24/7 work strategy. The IT sector identifies the Human resources as its major raw materials as well as machineries that ignite the tendency to give a mechanical face to them. There arise the chances of a decline in the humanitarian aspect of employment, where the candidates become mindless zombies that can be fueled with money and power. The individual and psychological side of the employees may loss its importance here. The corporate culture also has caused a change in the standard of living as well as values and principles of Indian professional groups.

IT industry is a segment, which offers the benefits like flexible working hours, work from home facility or flex place, compressed work week etc. Though these are the indicators of a good work environment sometimes it acts as a doubled edged sword.

Work from Home

The option to work from home is one of the newly introduced work patterns. Many employees accept the option of working from home with the expectation that they get more quality time with the family. To a great extent it creates more time with family and friends, higher support from the family, peaceful work atmosphere and more personal freedom. The temptation to engage in household matters, the Danger of being overlooked for promotion, the need for high self-discipline is often very strong in employees who choose to work from home.

On the other hand, work from home forces an employee to deal with more than one reporting authority and will has very less control over the type of work they accept. The management generally has a tendency to exert more demands on the work from home employees due to the fear of loss of control. Along with that, the lack of physical interaction with colleagues clearly does take a toll, apart from leaving the telecommuters clueless about changing office dynamics. If there is no proper reporting pattern the chances of taking the work leisurely at normal hours and being burnout at the finishing lines may also take place. Co-workers may become envious if they do not have the same flexibility, and may question work ethics and the quality of an employee's work. Situation either can become stressful for the employee and can undoubtedly have a negative impact on the work environment, leading to friction between team members.

Flexible Work Programs and Compressed Workweeks

The concept of flextime refers to a variety of flexible arrangements. Flexible work programs are work arrangements wherein employees are given greater scheduling freedom in how they fulfill the obligations of their positions. The most common of these programs is flextime, which gives workers far greater leeway in terms of the time when they begin and end work, provided they put in the total number of hours required by the employer. Other common flexible working arrangements involve telecommuting, job-sharing, and compressed workweeks. These facilities provide the employee with an opportunity to work in a way that suits their lives the most. However, it can result in greater planning time, workflow interruption, staff coverage issues and so on.

When alternate schedules are in place, it can be similar to working in a short-staffed situation. This causes extra stress on both management and employees as they become stretched to the limit to cover work that would not normally fall under their responsibilities. The difficulty of providing flexibility to all the jobs and the Conflicting requests by multiple employees make some requests difficult to accommodate which will be negatively reflected on the employee satisfaction and interpersonal relationships. Employees who opt for a flexible work schedule, which includes a compressed work week, may experience burnout from working long hours for consecutive days in a row. Burnout can slow down productivity in the workplace, leaving employees susceptible to errors, moody behavior towards co-workers and interfere with their ability to concentrate on tasks.

Time pressure and unrealistic targets

The make or break projects which demands high degree of perfection is the major contributor of unrealistic targets and time pressure. In IT industry, it is also common that the employees are provided with unrealistic targets that should be achieved with perfection. An ambitious employee will naturally be tempted even to work from home apart from the regular working hours. So the question of what is left for the family arises. The experience of projecting the self-performance during the time of performance appraisal will force the employee to meet even the unrealistic and demanding targets with the deadlines.

The system of raising tickets to denote time deadline leaves the employee stressed out and drained with the fear of breakdown. The major reason for the ticket becoming reason for stress is that, in most of the IT organizations the number tickets escalated will be directly related to the employee ratings and rewards. In such situations, the employees fail to spend quality time with their families. In the case of flexibility in work scheduling, the project completion and submission timings are quite crucial for the employee. In such situations, the balance between job requirements and demands of the family may be improbable.

Performance based rewards

Traditionally wages and pay have been determined through government regulation, minimum wage determination, negotiation with unions and the individual contract of employment. The factors or criteria, which have influenced pay and pay increases, include profit (but generally unrelated to individual or group performance), job evaluation, seniority, cost of living, manpower shortage or surplus, the negotiating strength of the parties and skills. Performance measures such as productivity or profit related to the performance of a group have been of less importance in determining pay increases.

Contrary to the traditional Experience Based Progression, the Corporate culture has brought in the model of Performance based Progression and Rewards, mainly practiced in the IT sector. Performance based rewards, either as monetary or as non monetary benefits motivates and retains key talents. .Thus linking Rewards and Performance increases efficiency but at the same time bestows heavy burden on the employees through increased pressure on performance parameters. Unhealthy and unreasonable pressure can actually leave an employee physically and emotionally drained. Positive changes can sometimes be as stressful as negative events, especially if the added performance demands directly reflect on the personal and professional wellbeing. The employees will be motivated to perform only the tasks, which will be measured in the appraisal and rewarded.

Peer Pressure

One of the major demerits of performance based progression is the intense pressure on the employees to perform at peak levels all the time. It may affect the interpersonal relationships and team work in the organization creating serious internal politics and detrimental completion. It becomes worst when the healthy competition turns out to unethical political games. The employees will be forced to give higher projection to their performance and may sometimes even be driven to degrade peer performance levels. Directly or indirectly, it affects the work environment and job security of the employees leaving them more stressed and upset.

Inside the workplace, the smashed up relationships or unhealthy competition generates an air of uneasiness. Thus, the chance of relaxing and enjoying the job becomes a question mark.

Impacts on the Family Life of Employees

Ray & Miller (1994), Thomas & Ganster(1995) and Warren & Johnson (1995) found that there is an association between family-friendly work environmental and other factors of interest including turnover, absenteeism, job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The performance pressure can force an employee to work late hours at office & take the work to home as well, can make an employee stressed about the amount of time that is spend at work, thinking or worrying about work even during personal hours, miss out the quality time with family and friends, not getting enough time for self, losing the temper at work etc. When this invasion into the personal life of employees persists it becomes a serious predicament. Climbing the career ladder may be the goal of many employees but each step, it appears, may have a detrimental effect on mental health and family well-being. Sometimes it is observed that the mental health of managers typically deteriorates after a job promotion, and in a way that goes beyond merely short-term change. It is also found that some people just do not cope in certain positions.

India is in the final stages of a change in the social settings, from 90% women being housewives to the 90% of women being employed. The studies show that the divorce rates are increasing at hundred-percentage rate and most of those splitting up are members of India's thriving, urban middle class whose lives have been transformed by India's boom. The employees in an attempt to project themselves as hard working employees will be forced to stretch their working hour's productivity even at the cost of their personal relationships and social life.

Divorces

The working environment of present scenario has changed drastically. The economic situation of the country has revolutionized and most of the companies face intense competition that creates extreme work pressure for the employees. This will in turn result in working all the nights, six nights a week. This can destroy a marriage irrespective of the professional life of the partners. Whether working from home or working a compressed schedule, employees often face issues with family, friends and co-workers who aren't entirely familiar with flexible work schedules. Friends and family may question whether the employee has a serious job.

There has been an unprecedented rise in divorce cases among Indian Techies over the past few years. From 8,456 divorce cases in 2005-06 to 38,231 in 2011, the statistics from recent months indicate an increase in the number of broken families. Incidentally, Kerala accounts for 1.96 lakh of the nation's 23.43 lakh divorced or separated women. According to lawyers in the city, 30 percent of all divorces that happen in the city every year are among couples working in the IT sector. The major reasons can be put together as odd working hours, usually at night, the high job stress, egoistic attitude, work pressure, professional rivalry between husband and wife etc.

The studies shows that around five years before there was one divorces in 1000 marriages but now the ratio has changed to 10 divorces in 1000 marriages. In 2006, Bangalore, the IT hub of India it was recorded that 1,246 cases of divorce were filed in the court that pertain to the IT sector exclusively. An alarming characteristic of divorces in IT industry is that, the divorces happen within 2 or 3 years of marriage and the spouses hack their partner's accounts (email as well as bank) to collect information against each other.

Ego & Competition

Traditionally it was considered that both husband and wife working in the same industry is obliging and it helps in accommodating each other. Now it has become one of the prominent reasons for divorce, since the egoistic attitude leads to treacherous competition. The antagonism at the work place may be taken to the family environment as well consequently resulting in unhappy relationships. The crisis within becomes worst if the when both the partners are employed and equally competent in the professional realm. A disagreement arising from sharing workload at home adds to the stress faced at work by the couple. Tensions often arise if the husband imagines that the women's career is temporary

or the women imagine that their husbands will lend a hand at home. Whether in traditional India or the emancipated West, men are still not comfortable with a strong, independent and modern woman. From both the sides the problem of ego and competition arises; the womanhood considering themselves independent and assuming their spouses to possess the male chauvinistic attitude. However, at the same time the male ego will not be willing to accept the changing role of woman in the society. IT professionals constituted a major part of these struggling couples.

Computer widows / Widower

Though the concept of computer widows or widower is attributed to the over usage of social networking sites or gaming, in a way it is connected to the work pressure on the employees. Spillover between work and family life can be regarded as negative (i.e., work-family conflict) or positive (work-family enhancement). The positive spill over like the financial security can lose its importance as a result of the bigger bang created by the negative spill over. Employees who have higher job involvement or job stress or spend more time at work have more work interference with their family life than family interference with their work.

The desire of the employees to hit the highest point with respect to performance may create grave harms within the family since individuals may carry their work and work related attributes in their head even during personal hours. In such instances, the performance intensification may involve more than working long hours to affecting the private moments. Thus, the main party who will be directly affected is the life partners of the software professionals. To some extent, in families it creates an environment where the people are physically present but mentally absent. When this invasion into the personal life of employees persists, it becomes a serious predicament and it creates grave issues in the relationships. In such cases, even when the families are not parted or separated the intimacy between partners may be missing. This may ultimately result in broken families, as both the parties will have reasonable justifications in their perspectives.

Conclusion

"Stressful job conditions and work-life imbalance are pieces of a more complex puzzle" (Craig Thompson). Researches illustrate both institutional and interpersonal supports in the workplace and society can help assuage work-family conflict. The conflict between family and work can happen mainly in two forms – work to family conflict and family to work conflict. Work-to-family conflict is "inter role conflict in which the general demands of, time devoted to, and strain created by the job interfere with performing family-related responsibilities" (Netemeyer et al., 1996, p. 401). Family to work conflict is the opposite of the same, where the demands and responsibilities of work negatively affecting the work domain.

The introduction of new work practices are always like a double-edged sword. The implementation such new practices should be done only with clear analysis of the humanitarian aspect of professionals. Bringing together the organizational strategies and individual principles of life together in a corporate culture is a challenging task. A value-based approach is necessary to implement positive organization climate that supports individual and family requirements. Otherwise, the imbalances in the lives of concerned employees will become a permanent one. Value-Based ethics includes moral commitment and ethical behavior of the employees as well as the management in accordance with a set of guiding principles.

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