

Work Life Balance Programmes in IT and ITES Industry

Navjot Kaur* and Parminder Walia**

* *School of Management Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala.*

** *#3148, Paradise Enclave, Sector 50-D, Chandigarh.*

INTRODUCTION

Many changes in the work place and in employee demographics in the past decade have led to an increased concern for the boundary between employee work and non-work lives (Hochschild, 1997). Due to 'long hours culture', '24/7 lifestyle', people hardly get anytime to pursue life's other interests.. Technology has blurred the line between office and home. The time available for the family and friends is decreasing. The entry of the women into the workforce in large numbers is yet another contributing factor. It is in this context that the notion of "work life balance" has come up. Greenblatt (2002) described work life balance as acceptable levels of conflict between work and non-work demands. This usually involves managing competing demands for resources. Lockwood (2003) defined the term from the viewpoint of employer, and of the employee. Employees view point: "It is the dilemma of managing work obligations and personal/family responsibilities". Employer's viewpoint: "It is the challenge of creating a supportive company culture where employees can focus on their jobs while at work". The work life balance is an issue that is being recognized as of strategic importance to organizations.

Today, the employees prefer the organizations that recognize their commitments both inside and outside the work place. A survey of 10,000 managers in Europe, US, Russia and Japan found that balancing the needs of work and personal life was the most or the second most important attribute in a job. The need for balance was placed higher than remuneration in almost every country (Gemini Consulting 1998). In a 1999 study of 2,510 graduating students from 11 countries

(including Japan and South Korea), PricewaterhouseCoopers (1999) found that work-life balance was their most important career goal. Another survey reported that 46% of managers would change jobs for a better quality of life, 30% would take a pay cut to improve their work life balance (Management Today, 1999). Organizations are now recognizing the changing needs of employees and realize that work and personal life are interdependent and employees personal issues can impact job performance. Hence, organizations are coming up with a number of work life programmes which aim at helping the employees achieve work life balance. According to Lobel (1999), work life programmes are initiatives adopted by organizations to help employees manage the interface between their paid work and other important life activities, including family. Newman and Mathews (1999) defined work life policies as arrangements to support employees faced with balancing the competing demands of work and family in today's fast paced complex environment.

NATURE OF WORK LIFE BALANCE PROGRAMMES

The work life balance programmes which the organizations introduce may be categorized as: Flexible leave arrangements, Flexible work arrangements, Childcare arrangements, Flexible location and other work life balance arrangements. These are discussed below.

Flexible Leave Arrangement

These include career breaks, part-year employment, marriage leave, parental leave, maternally leave, paternity leave, bereavement leave.

Flexible Work Arrangements

Flexible Working Hours

Flexible work hours enable employees to have greater flexibility in their attendance patterns by varying start and finishing times, length of breaks and length of working day.

Telecommuting

This is a work arrangement through which employees are able to perform their work using computer and other electronic equipment that connect them with their offices and can work from anywhere.

Compressed Work Week

It is an arrangement of work hours that allows employees to complete their task in a fewer days than the usual five day work week.

Job Sharing

Job sharing involves two or more people sharing one full time position so that each is working part time.

Part Time Work

When an employee is working less than full time hours for a job, they are considered a part time employee.

Child Care Arrangements

These include Vacation Child Care Program, Child Care Referral Services, Child care network, Work based child care (for nursing mothers), Family room (If care giver is unable to find alternate care for a child at short notice) and telephone access.

Flexible Location

E- Working (Home working , telecommuting, virtual teams)

Other Arrangements

Supervisory training in work family sensitivity, Employee Assistance Programmes (e.g. Seminars & workshops for balancing work and life, employee support groups), Employee Wellness programmes (e.g. Yoga, Stress management workshops etc.).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The organizations make a wide variety of work life arrangements to enhance the work life balance of employees. Kossek et al. (1994), Kirchmeyer (1995), Osterman, (1995), Galinsky and Johnson (1998), Konard and Mangel (2000), Guest (2002), Maxwell and McDougall (2004), Coughlan (2005), and Cieri et al. (2005) studied and identified different work life balance arrangements. These included: parental leave, paternity leave, maternity leave, adoption leave, sabbaticals, flexible work timings, job sharing, job splitting, flexi time, compressed working week, annual hours system, banking of hours, telecommuting, supervisory training in work family sensitivity, on site day care, emergency child care, elder care arrangements. A number of reasons have been cited for the provision of work life balance programmes by various organizations. Milliken et al. (1998) found that work family programmes were offered when work family issues were salient to senior human resource staff and thought likely to impact the organizations performance, if unaddressed. Work family programmes were offered by the organizations to implement high performance or high commitment work systems (Osterman, 1995), for keeping abreast of legislation, to consider the business case and the consideration of employee well being (Dex et al., 2001), to improve the recruitment of the best people and to improve retention of staff (Maxwell and Mc Dougall , 2004), to preserve their 'preferred employer' status and uphold the value of concern for employees (Chella, 2005). A number of studies have reported the benefits that accrue to the organizations that provide work life programmes/policies. Konard and Mangel (2000) found a strong relationship between provision of work life benefits and productivity in the firms employing

higher per centage of women and higher per centage of professionals. Dex and Scheible (2001) found that business benefits can follow from SME's adopting flexible working arrangements. Maxwell and McDougall (2004) reported that work life balance initiatives helped in management of stress and also improved performance. Thomas and Ganster (1995) reported that family supportive work policies and practices might produce significant benefits in terms of employees' attitudes and well being. Waddell and Carr (2007) cited a study of 1000 employed adults which revealed 91% of the participants agreed that workers are more likely to behave ethically at work when they have a good balance between their job and their personal life. Environments that support employees' work/life balance have been found to improve organizational commitment (Allen, 2001; Russel, 1993). A US survey has demonstrated the strong relationship between employee commitment and return to shareholders, finding that companies with highly committed employees had a 112% return to shareholders over three years, compared with a 76% return for companies with low employee commitment, and 90% for companies with average commitment (WorkUSA, 2000). Adopting flexible and work life balance oriented policies builds a positive perception about the employer. This leads to better relations with the employees, continued staff loyalty, motivation and commitment (Joshi, 2007).

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the research was to identify the various work life balance programmes being provided by the selected organizations, as opined by the employees.

SAMPLE

Sample consisted of randomly selected 308 employees from fourteen IT and ITES companies (operating in National Capital Region and/or Chandigarh), randomly selected from a list of top 50 IT and ITES companies (based on revenues) as given by Data Quest, 2008.

FINDINGS

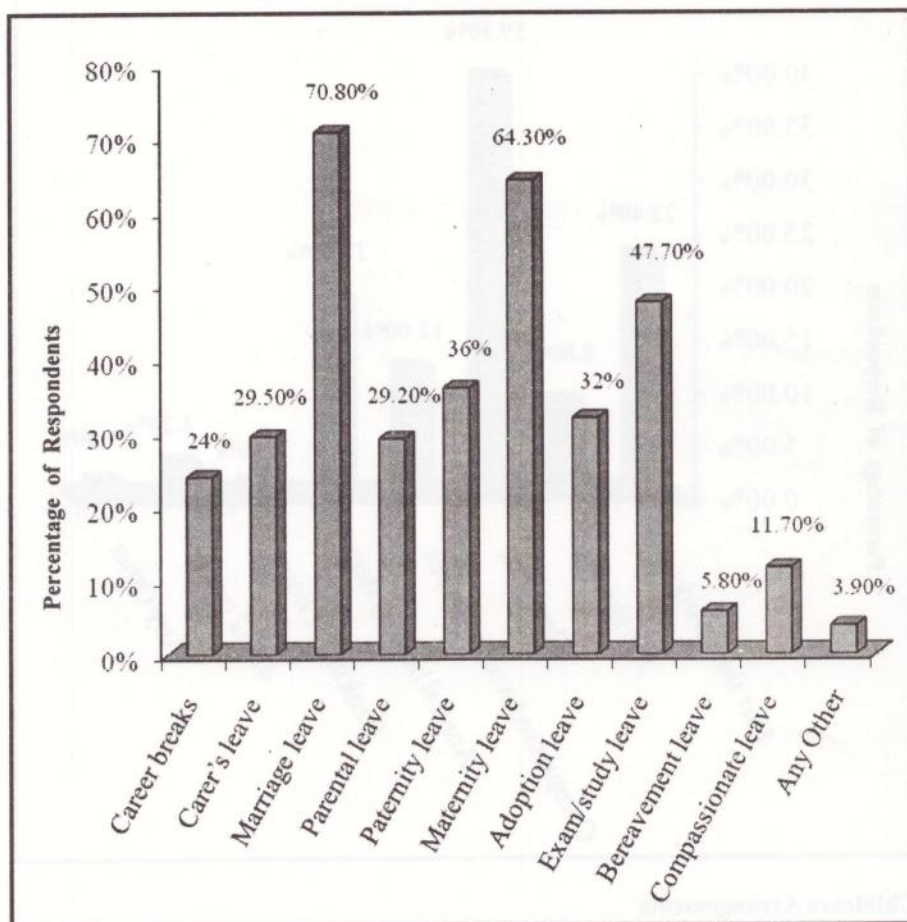
Figure 1.1 to 1.5 show various programmes of work life balance which were found to be operational in these selected organizations.

Flexible Leave Arrangements

Figure 1.1 shows the variety of flexible leave arrangements offered to employees in IT and ITES organizations. Working professionals opined that there were provisions for marriage leave (71%), maternity leave (64%), examination/study

leave (48%), parental leave and carer's leave (29%), compassionate leave (12%), paternity leave (36%), adoption leave (32%), career break (24%) and bereavement leave (6%) in their organizations. A small per centage of working professionals stated that in their respective organizations, there was a provision of fixed number of leaves and earned leave. From the responses of working professionals, it seems that they were not aware of the flexible leave arrangements provided by their respective organizations. There was a lot of variation among the responses of employees of a single organization. Most of them were aware only of the leave availed of or, intended to be availed of in near future.

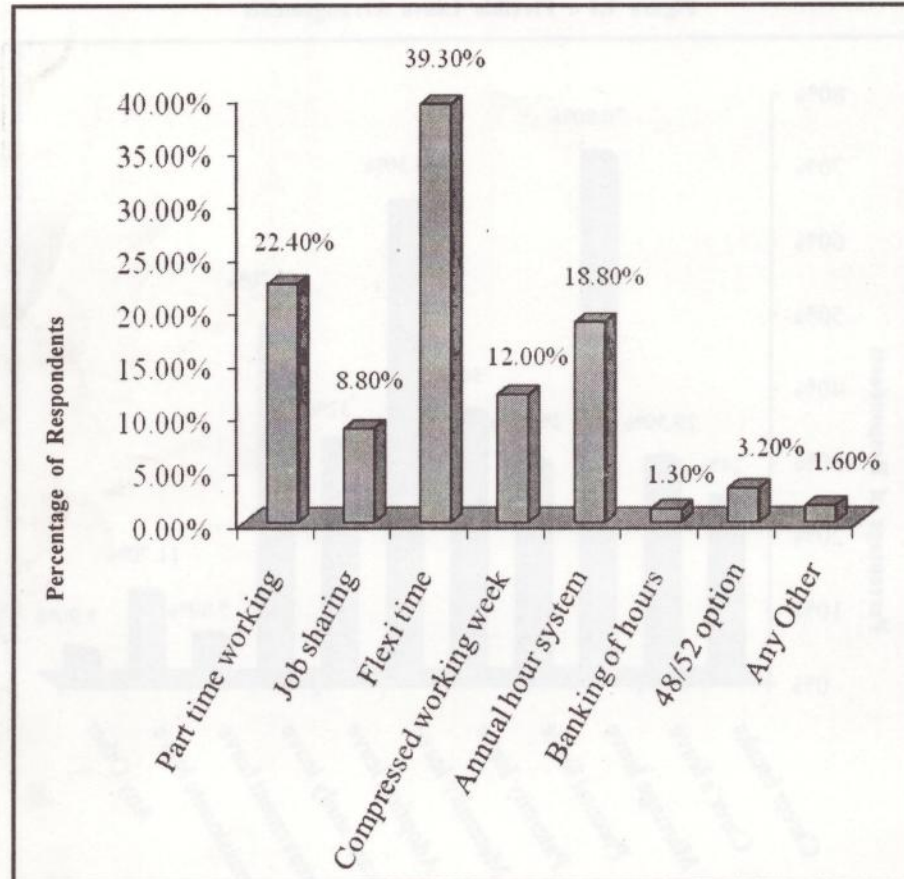
Figure 1.1 : Flexible Leave Arrangements



Flexible Work Arrangements

Figure 1.2 shows the flexible work arrangements provided by IT and ITES organizations to its employees. The variety of flexible work arrangements operational in the organizations, as per the working professionals, included flexi time (39%), part time working (22%), annual hour system (19%), compressed working week (12%) and job sharing (9%). A very low per centage of professionals (1%-3%) stated that other flexible arrangements including banking of hours and 48/52 option also existed in IT and ITES organizations.

Figure 1.2 : Flexible Work Arrangements

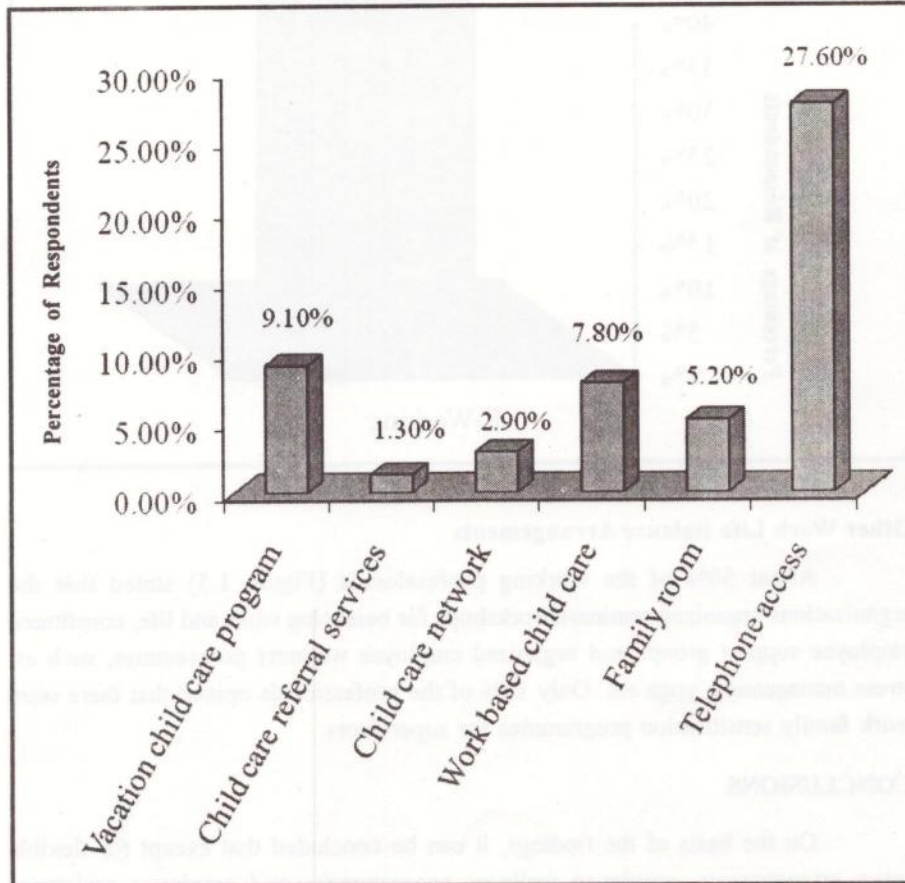


Childcare Arrangements

It is evident from the response of IT and ITES professionals (Figure 1.3) that the various childcare arrangements prevalent in IT and ITES organizations

included telephone access (28%), vacation childcare programmes (9%), work based child care (8%), family room (5%), childcare network (3%) and child care referral services (1%). From the findings it can be concluded that majority of organizations do not provide child care arrangements.

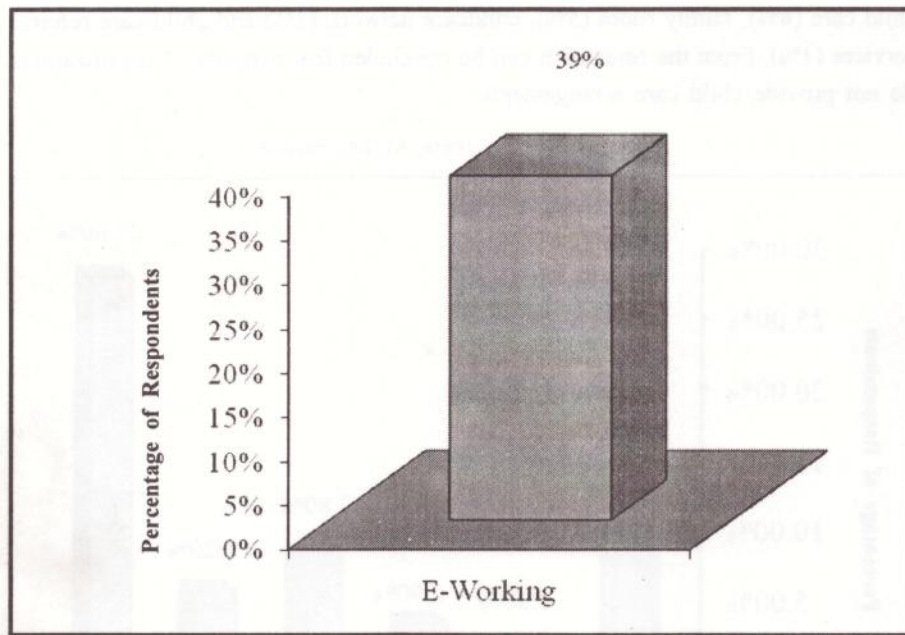
Figure 1.3 : Childcare Arrangements



Flexible Location

Only 39% (Figure 1.4) of the working professionals enjoyed the facility of e-working i.e. operating from home, telecommuting and virtual teams. Majority of the professionals thus had to operate from their respective offices in the IT and ITES organizations.

Figure 1.4 : Flexible Location



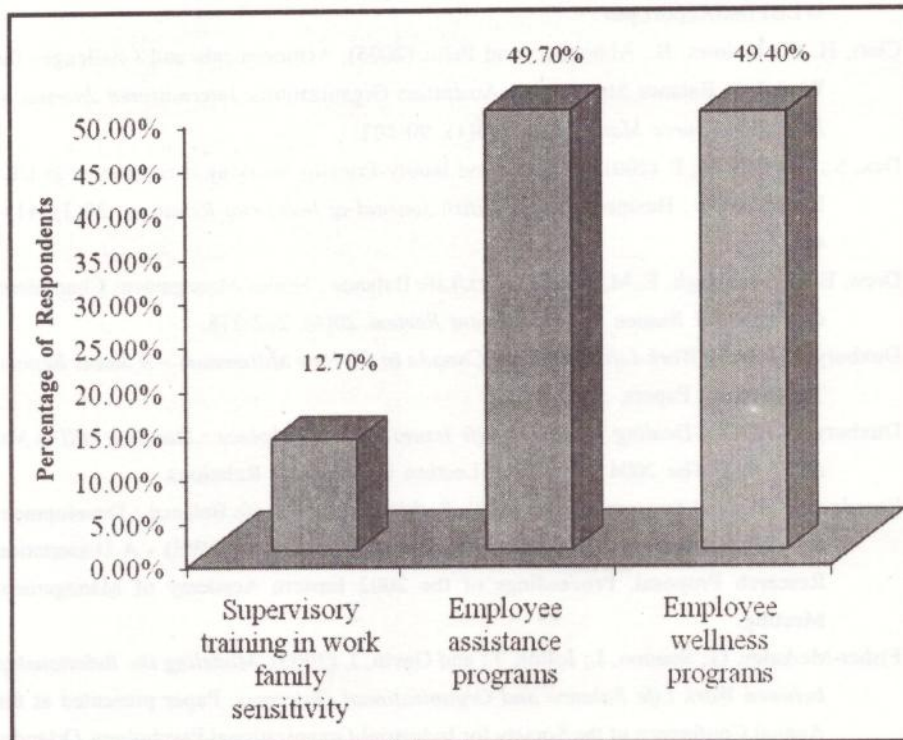
Other Work Life Balance Arrangements

About 50% of the working professionals (Figure 1.5) stated that the organizations organized seminars/workshops for balancing work and life, constituted employee support groups and organized employee wellness programmes, such as, stress management, yoga etc. Only 12% of the professionals opined that there were work family sensitization programmes for supervisors.

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the findings, it can be concluded that except for flexible leave arrangements, employee wellness programmes and employee assistance programmes, not many work life balance enhancement programmes / provisions are being made available by the IT and ITES industry. The working professionals are not aware of the existing programmes. There is a lot of scope for strengthening flexible work arrangements, childcare arrangements and work-family sensitization programmes for supervisors. Moreover, there is a need for an effective implementation

Figure 1.5 : Other Work Life Balance Arrangements



of these policies. Though policies and programmes are framed but are sometimes not properly communicated to the employees and being unaware, employees cannot utilize these programmes.

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