



A study on Work-life Balance of Indian expatriates with respect to the IT sector

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Abstract

Work-Life balance is an evolving aspect in global economy. Over the past two decades the issue work-family and work-life balance have received enormous attention from employers and employees mainly in IT industry. There are about 18 million Indian expatriates working in the UK, UAE and the US and the number is projected to increase year by year. This creates a need to explore work-life balance among expatriates. In this study, qualitative research method was used, and the data was collected using interview method as the instrument. Actual data was collected from five IT expatriates. The data was analyzed using content analysis. The findings revealed that workload and family support are main contributors to work-life conflict among expatriates while receiving better salaries, meeting new people and experiencing culture are the work-life enrichment factors. Expatriates use general adjustment and interaction to adjust better with their new environment. Hence, it is recommended for organizations to support expatriates through relevant activities to assist them to achieve work-life balance in a foreign country.

Key words: work-life balance, expatriates, general adjustment, job satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

Work-life balance issue is usually a challenge for expatriates and their families. A positive or negative outcome in work-life balance is related to the roles of partner and families as well (Caligiuri et al., 1998). According to Greenhaus and Buetell (1985) work-life conflict happens when there are internal conflicts happening due to pressure from work and family domains. Role overload and interference are two components in work-life conflict (Greenhaus & Buetell, 1985). First, role overload can happen when the prescribed activities of multiple roles are too vast to be performed systematically due to limited time and energy. Interference occurs when there are difficulties in fulfilling the requirements of multiple roles with the presence of conflicting demands. This happens due to work and family activities that must be performed at the same time but in different physical locations (Greenhaus & Beutell, 2000). Enrichment is experienced when there are positive affects across work and private life. Previous studies stated that positive experiences in one role will improve the quality of life in the other (Carlson et al., 2006). Enrichment may happen when for instance, the physical, social, capital and material resources acquired or developed in one role result in an improve performance and positively impact on another role (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Carlson et al., 2006). For example, a positive effect traversing from the personal life to the work domain could be found in a situation when an individual is enjoying a

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wonderful weekend with family and the positive mood being carried into a greater motivation to deal with the jobs and thus increase their effectiveness.

To successfully fulfil the foreign assignment, it is important for expatriates to adjust themselves to new cultural contexts (Huang, Chi, & Lawler, 2005). Thus, to be able to adapt well to the new environment, expatriates need to know general knowledge and importance of the new culture. For instance, the knowledge about the legal and economic systems, the rules of the foreign language, non-verbal communications as well as cultural values and religious beliefs will help the expatriates to study about the norms of the host nation and adjust better with the new environment. Adjustment is very important during expatriation because research has shown expatriates tend fail in their position if the expatriates do not adjust well to the host country (Caligiuri, 2000).

Objectives of the study:

1. To analyze work-life conflict in work and family domains in order to achieve work-life balance among IT expatriates,
2. To identify the work-life enrichment factors in work and family domains to achieve work-life balance among IT expatriates and
3. To ascertain the strategies to achieve work-life balance among IT expatriates.

Research Questions:

1. What are the work-life conflicts in work and family domains to achieve work-life balance among IT expatriates?
2. What are the work-life enrichment factors in work and family domains to achieve work-life balance among IT expatriates?
3. What are the strategies to achieve work-life balance among IT expatriates?

Information Technology (IT) Expatriates:

According to a Ministry of External Affairs report, there are 32 million NRIs and PIOs (inc. OCIs) residing outside India and overseas Indians comprise the world's largest overseas diaspora.^[41] Every year 2.5 million (25 lakhs) Indians migrate overseas, which is the highest annual number of migrants in the world.^[42] The IT sector overall employs 5 million people as of March 2022. In December 2022, Union Minister of State for Electronics and IT Rajeve Chandrasekhar, in a written reply to a question in Rajya Sabha informed that IT units registered with state-run Software Technology Parks of India (STPI) and Special Economic Zones have exported software worth Rs 11.59 lakh crore in 2021-22.^[43] There is a need to study the work-life balance impact on their work-life and family-life. . Many IT workers are frequently sent on 'onsite' assignments, which are considered to be a requisite of IT work (Upadhy 2009). The IT expatriates sent to client sites are crucial to their organisations, as they represent their employers. The pay and perks of IT professionals are encouraging. But the work life is highly complicated and highly demanding. There are many pulls and pressures during the work life. There are too many commitments and deadlines and there are too much of unpredictable peaks and troughs during the course of the working time. Managerial personnel have to work for long hours and in different shifts



to meet those deadlines. All these things make the work as a hectic activity and a strenuous one and creating enormous stress due to work-life conflict there by hampering performance, which is causing decline in productivity levels and also forcing them to leave organizations due to work-life problems. Many organizations of Information technology sector adopted work styles and organizational practices from developed countries in the west. Workers were expected to work $24/7 \times 365$ days of the year. To prevent such a work style from affecting worker health and productivity, workplaces offered services traditionally associated with the family and non-work domain within their premises such as gymnasiums, day-care facilities, laundry facilities and canteen facilities.

MATERIAL & METHOD

This study utilized the qualitative approach. By using this approach, it allowed the researcher to explore the area of perception and factors. This approach will also emphasize on the understanding of a subject, in this case, the respondents by exploring deeply and thoroughly on their words, reactions and records. Information is gathered from the respondents to be used to help the researcher to find out the result in order to achieve the objectives of this research. The biggest advantage of using qualitative approach is that it allows the researcher to dwell deeply into understanding the experiences of expatriates in achieving work life balance.

Population refers to a group of people, events or things that the researcher is desired to know in-depth their study (Sekaran, 2000). The population for this study is focused on Indian IT professionals working at a MNC in Birmingham. In qualitative research, there is no specific population and sample to be used. According to Taylor and Bogdan (1984), it is difficult to determine how many people should be interviewed in a qualitative research. It is acceptable to have a population between 5 to 25 samples (Creswell, 1998). They were chosen based on two criteria which were length of service and their work experience. Based on these criteria, the respondents who have worked as expatriates for a range of five to ten years were selected. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a technique at which a researcher samples a respondent with a purpose in mind. This technique helps in reaching the targeted sample quickly. The information obtained undergoes a pre-test to ensure it is met with the expectation of the researcher.

In this research, the main instrument in collecting data was interview method. This method helps us to gain unlimited data, the opportunity to learn and explore the topic in more depth, and researchers can be a flexible in certain circumstances when carrying out similar methods (Rusli, Hasbee, Azman, Sopian, & Nur, 2014). In this interview method, it consisted of four sections in which section A was demographic questions. Section B consisted of warming up questions in order to build rapport between interviewer and interviewee while situational questions were asked to bring the interviewee into the research topic. Section C questions were asked to answer the research objectives. For section D, a closing question was asked to give the interviewee the opportunity to ask the interviewer any doubts about the research. The interview sessions were recorded for the purpose of this study.

The five participants are basically IT project managers and Technical architects who had completed their expatriation assignment and returned back from Birmingham some months back. I got an opportunity to interact with them as my spouse happens to be an expatriate himself and his colleagues are my respondents. An appointment was made based on the suitability of both parties for the date, time and place to conduct the interview session. Before the interview session, the respondents were briefed about the research topic and the purpose of the study being conducted by the researcher. The researcher also tried to reach the balance between speaking and listening during this session. All the



information and important data that had been delivered by the informants were recorded. Information obtained from interviews with respondents represents the primary source while the secondary sources involved the use of documentary sources such as books which are related to the training method and the use of the internet as an information support.

In data analysis, it is divided into four parts which are secondary or relational analysis, primary analysis, content analysis and thematic analysis. In this research, the data was analyzed based on the interviews that were conducted by using content analysis. Content analysis is a method of categorization of verbal or non-verbal data for the purpose of classification, summarization and tabulation. In content analysis, deductive approaches were used where the researcher transcribed word by word (verbatim) from the respondent's content. There are five steps in conducting content analysis. First step was organizing the data.

At this stage, the researcher transcribed the data and classified them into two which are structure and familiarizing. Second step was identifying the framework. Next was sorting the data into a framework. The fourth step was using the framework for descriptive analysis. In content analysis, transcribing the data may take a long time where the researcher needed to listen carefully to the recording that was made and translate the conversation and then encode the information. The information obtained is used to explain the work-life balance among expatriates.

RESULTS

There are five respondents involved in this research. The respondents were all males who were working as expatriates at an IT MNC at Birmingham and returned back to India few months back. They are in age group of 40 – 55 years and are mostly in senior position with experience ranging between five till 15 years.

Table 1 shows the summary of the respondent demographics:

Informants	Age	Gender	Religion	Marital status	Position	Length of service
1	48	Male	Hindu	Married	Technical Architect	More than 5 years
2	49	Male	Islam	Married	Technical Architect	More than 5 years
3	51	Male	Hindu	Married	Senior IT Consultant	More than 10 years



4	50	Male	Christian	Married	Senior IT Project Manager	More than 15 years
5	48	Male	Islam	Married	IT Project Manager	More than 5 years

Table 2	Identification on Work-Life Conflict faced by the expatriates in Family and work domain			
No.	Questions	Domain	Findings	Respondent
1	Have you experienced any conflict in balancing your roles at work since you started working as an expatriate?	Work	Workload Different legislation	1,2,3,4,5 4
2	Have you experienced any conflict in balancing your roles at home since you started working as an expatriate?	Family	Spouse and family support Childrearing responsibilities	1,2,3,4,5 4,5

Table 3	Identification on Work-Life enrichment faced by the expatriates in Family and work domain			
No.	Questions	Domain	Findings	Respondent
1	Have you experienced any enrichment in balancing your roles at work since you started working as an expatriate?	Work	Better salary Career advancement	1,2 3,4,5
2	Have you experienced any enrichment in balancing your roles at home since you started working as an expatriate?	Family	New people and culture Better opportunities	1,2,3,4,5 4

Table No.4	Identification of strategies to achieve work-life balance		
No.	Questions	Findings	Respondent
1	In your opinion what are the strategies to achieve work-life balance among expatriates	General adjustment	2,3 1,4,5



		Interaction adjustment	
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DISCUSSION

From Table 2 above, in work domain, majority of the informants stated that workload is the main obstacle to achieve work-life balance. One of the informants mentioned that:

“ Sometimes it becomes too much, I have to sit up late nights and complete the project deadlines and next day I need to report office at sharp 9 am in the cold morning”

(Respondent1)

From this study, it shows that workload is one of the work-life conflict in expatriate's work domain. This finding is consistent with almost every study on work-life balance among expatriates (Shaffer et al., 2001), as long working hours and workload put a huge struggle on expatriates. In addition, the finding is also supported by a study by Shortland and Cummins (2007) where they stated that long working hours and lack of time for the family can cause physical or mental illness such as stress and emotional imbalance. The above finding is also similar with a survey by ORC Worldwide (2007), which aimed at finding out the main stressors for expatriates. Workload and long working hours are the key areas in influencing work-life balance abroad. Two-thirds of expatriates reported they experienced longer working hours on an international assignment due to a higher number of responsibilities to meet their own working standards, and dealing with different cultural standards as to be successful in their career. Hence, a substantial amount of time is spent on business travels, telephone and conference calls, or meetings held outside normal business hours. Therefore, the expatriates reported feeling pressurized to work overtime because of their additional responsibilities compared with their local colleagues. Consequently, more than half of the expatriates felt overworked and overwhelmed.

In addition, the need to balance work and family life for a person working in their home country is somewhat difficult. But, for expatriates, when their work involves a family relocating to another country and having to adapt to new culture and customs, the negative impact on work-family balance is significant. Therefore, majority of the informants stated that lack of support from spouses and families are the contributing factor in work-life conflict among expatriates. As one of the respondent stated that:

“You know, it is quite challenging, when you come to a new country... you make a valiant attempt to build a network...making new friends I mean. But I think it is more challenging when your family members are not there....without them it's difficult to function especially when you are staying more than 3 months actually alone...”

(Respondent1)

“I am lucky to have my spouse with me Yes, I think she is very supportive and that is why i am able to my hundred percent commitment”

(Respondent 2)

This finding is contradicting from the perspective of Segmentation theory, where it is suggested that both aspects of work and life are different entities and do not influence each other. Spouse support is one of the important predictors in determining the successfulness of the assignments (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2001). Cinamon (2006) stated that the low level of spousal support can raise a conflict in family



domain. Thus, in a way to achieve work-life balance, these two domains cannot be separated as it will influence each other.

Besides that, this study also found that different legislations also affect their work. One of the respondent stated that:

“I took a country specific additional driving license to drive my car to go to work since my office was in Solihull and it used to take me good 45 minutes by the bus .”

(Respondent 4)

This finding is similar with a previous study by Mäkelä and Suutari (2007). While working abroad, the work-life conflict was present due to different legislations, especially in the areas concerning maternity and annual leaves. This finding is consistent when one of their respondents decided to return to her home country due to birth of a baby. In short, workload and different legislations contribute to work-life conflict in work domain among expatriates.

In addition, it is found very challenging to balance work and family when the working expatriates travel with their children. If a woman expatriate travels with a child or children, living in a new country, and far away from parents, families and peers appear to present considerable problems. As one of our respondent said:

“Yes, I love my job. But since I travelled here with my wife and baby, we might experience tougher life compared to single expatriates.”

(Respondent 5)

Going on a foreign assignment is even much harder for expatriates with children. This goes hand in hand with Harris (2004) who has already stated that smaller children contribute more to a work family conflict than older ones.

“My 5 year old boy keeps on getting cold and fever often in this chilly climate. We have trouble visiting a GP (general practitioner) as they do not entertain without prior appointment which we don’t get it so easily here. While in India we used to rush to the nearest doctor as and when there was an emergency”

(Respondent 3)

For expatriates who have childrearing responsibilities, they find it difficult to find trustworthy childcare and good education. These two factors are often problematic for expatriates (Kollinger 2005a). As one of the respondent stated that,

“Hiring a nanny to look after my two year girl child is so costly ...finally my wife decided to give away her newly found job which she had just got in nearest post office.”

(Respondent 4)

In short, family and spouse are crucial and critical source of support for expatriates in dealing with work-related stress (Kraimer, Wayne & Jaworski 2001) to gain enrichment while expatriating. As defined by Morris and Madsen (2005), enrichment theory is referring to the degree to which experiences from skills, abilities and values (contributory sources) or mood and satisfaction (emotional sources) enrich the quality of the other domain. In short, if an expatriate enjoys their work, most probably they will gain the same satisfaction to family domain. In addition, Linehan and Scullion, (2001) highlighted



the importance of the spouse's support as well as the appreciation of the partner's career for a successful assignment and may therefore take pressure from the couple and reduce negative stress. In short, spouse and family support and childrearing responsibility contribute to work-life conflict in family domain among expatriates.

From Table 3 above, the positive effect on work and family domain were identified when expatriates experience a better lifestyle and salary, are able develop their skills through international work and have a wider opportunity to express themselves and find ease in their personal life. The process in developing a more competitive individual for their career is a positive opportunity for expatriates compared to if they had stayed in their home countries. From the above analysis, in work domain, the researcher found that better salary can be the factor of having work-life enrichment. One of the respondent mentioned that:

“A good pay packet of course is the best enrichment.”

(Respondent 3)

Based on Greenhaus and Powell model (2006), material resources such as better salary or gift, is one of the resources which can be classified as enrichment during expatriation. Besides, good quality housing, and opportunities to multitask are provided to an expatriate as solid resources in supporting expatriate's personal life spheres. The expatriates feel the benefit of being an expatriate is not only for themselves, but their families as well.

In short, better salaries and career advancement for expatriates and their family can be seen as indications of work-life enrichment during expatriation. Other than that, in family domain, these international assignments provide expatriates and their families with opportunities to meet new people and get to know new countries and cultures.

From Table 4 above, the researcher identified the strategies to achieve work-life balance among expatriates since it is not easy to start living in the new country. In order to enjoy the international assignments, expatriates need to handle the challenges well to make a better adjustment in their lifestyles. (Ward & Rana-Deuba, 2000; Zakaria, 2000). Drawing from Black et al. (1991) model, there are 3 models of adjustment which are general adjustment, interacting adjustment and work adjustment. General adjustment is the degree of comfort with non-work factors like housing environment, foods, language, transport, etc. Interaction adjustment is the comfort achieved when dealing with local nationals in both work and non-work situations. Shaffer and Harrison (2001) stated that the effective development in interacting with the host nations is coming from a good adjustment. This study is similar with the previous research done by Barhem (2008) in which there is a connection with expatriated behavioral competence in social interaction and language fluency to adapt better with local people.

UK is well-known for its diversity and because of this; most expatriates find it interesting to settle down in here. However, because there is a majority of Islam, non-Muslim expatriates may find it challenging to adapt with the Muslim practises. But, knowing there will be a cultural difference between UK and their home country, most of expatriates will ensure to respect the local customs and they find themselves be more sensitive towards the changes either in work or non-work environment.



Ethnic Group	1991 ^{[18][19]}		2001 ^[20]		2011 ^[21]		2021 ^[22]	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Asian or Asian British: Total	138,867	14.44	195,794	20.04	285,640	26.62	355,384	31
Asian or Asian British: Indian	51,075	5.31	55,749	5.71	64,621	6.02	66,519	5.8
Asian or Asian British: Pakistani	66,085	6.87	104,017	10.65	144,627	13.48	195,102	17.0
Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi	12,739	1.32	20,836	2.13	32,532	3.03	48,232	4.2
Asian or Asian British: Chinese [note 2]	3,315	0.34	5,106	0.52	12,712	1.18	12,487	1.1

Source: Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demography_of_Birmingham

Birmingham, England is an ethnically and culturally diverse city. The city is the core of the second most populous urban area^[1] in the United Kingdom after London and is the largest city proper. There were a large number of people living in Birmingham, who, according to the 2001 Population Census, said that they belonged to one of the four Asian ethnic groups; Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Asian 'Other'. This represents 19.5% of the population and 65.8% of the non-white population. As a percentage share of population, Birmingham was ranked at 11 (out of 354 English local authorities) for people belonging to one of the Asian ethnic groups. Outside of the London boroughs only Leicester (29.9%) and Blackburn with Darwen (20.6%) ranked higher at 3 and 10 respectively.

The proportion of people aged 15 years and under in Birmingham (34.1%) and England (28.7%) was far higher for Asian people than for their general population populations in Birmingham (23.4%) and England (20.2%). The proportion of people of working age (16 to pensionable age) in Birmingham was similar for Asian people (59.6%) and the general population (59.8%). Nationally the proportion was higher for Asian people at 64.6% compared with 61.5%. Locally at 6.3% and nationally at 6.7% the



proportion of people of pensionable age was significantly lower for Asian people than their general populations of Birmingham (16.7%) and England (18.4%).

The 2011 population census recorded that Birmingham had a Pakistani origin population of 140,000; with Small Heath and Alum Rock having the highest Pakistani population in Birmingham and Northfield, the lowest.^[26] The highest percentages of Muslims and Asians are found just east and south of the city centre. The neighbourhoods of Birmingham with the highest percentage of Muslim Asians are Sparkbrook, Sparkhill, Springfield, Small Heath, Saltley, Bordesley Green, Alum Rock, Washwood Heath, Ward End,

As Elashmawi (2001) stated, if an individual experiences problem to understand their own cultural values in effecting their behaviour, same cases will happen when they try to understand another person's behaviour. Thus, cultural clashes will happen. However, for informant 2, he found understanding Islamic religious restrictions is easier since he is a Muslim.

"I am a Muslim, and since there are a lot of mosque, activities for Muslim families and children it helps my family and me to adjust better here. There."

(Respondent 2)

"For Muslims across the globe these few weeks are a sacred time for worshipping AllahI feel just like home when celebrating Ramadan in Birmingham. Birmingham has a much higher Muslim share of its population share than the UK average. My family and I will go to nearby mosque at and performing the prayers. Same things we do at my country"

(Respondent 5)

Adaption to live in a foreign nation such as housing, health care, and education facilities are known as general adjustment (Black and Stephens 1989). Besides, based on Bartol and Martin's (2000) cross-cultural management theory, most cases of expatriation will take 6 to 12 months to be able to make a better adjustment in a new country setting. Thus, a study by Fish (2005)) stated that, in order for the expatriates to be better accepted by the local nations, they need to blend well with the cultural differences and applying it within the role of an expatriate and the structure of organization. This may help the expatriates to gain better acceptance by the local employees. Thus, an alternative to which these expatriates can prepare themselves with these adjustments is through orientation. Orientation is crucial in improving the skills and positive behavior to prevent cultural shock during performing the assignment among expatriates.

When an expat is relocated to a new environment, they will often face many challenges. A supportive orientation from the organization that explains the Brummies(Birmingham culture), languages, food, housing etc, can be a tremendous support system and best practices to help expatriates to adjust better to avoid pitfalls and misunderstanding. As one respondent said,

"Yes ... it is important to have orientation or cultural training but not individual families it is better to have a bigger platform like a group which will help us to adjust better. We are a bunch of five expatriates who have come together on this overseas project. Meeting and interacting with other expatriates family members is always a good idea I think"

(Respondent 2)



Richardson and McKenna (2002) further confirm that orientation from the host organization is important in showing the support from the organization itself. Orientation provides some free spaces for expatriates to make a better adjustment during their international assignment or if not, expatriates will tend to repatriate prematurely.

Theoretical and Managerial Implications:

The IT professionals have already been working in a Hybrid environment before even the onslaught of Corona induced Work-from-home culture. So flexi-work timings are a common place for them. While there are lot of things that can be done by the HR practitioners, few important areas need to be addressed:

- 1) Employee Assistance Programs which encompass Health and Wellness Policies which are already established at the Corporate level need to be extended and implemented at local level abroad.
- 2) Host country circumstances and cross-cultural training (CCT) particularly sequential CCT which encompasses pre-departure and post-arrival training can help tackle the work-life balance conflicts. Imparting cross-cultural training to spouse will help better general adjustment as well as interaction adjustment aspects and since family support is a work-enrichment factor, this training can add exponential value to it.
- 3) Indian IT expats need to be given the option of working from home in the host country location at least once in a week as when they go for technology transfer or project support to their host countries they are required to be present physically in the office daily. The problem encountered over here by the expatriates is that sometimes the office location and their apartment location is way too far away from each other. The expats have to rely on bus transport and sometimes the climate is too chilly for Indian expatriates to cope up with.
- 4) While many of the IT companies have a Global Mobility partner who helps in relocating the expat, some others pay accommodation expenses and the expats are expected to hunt for an accommodation and then eventually they end up having an apartment somewhere in the vicinity of a suburb which might be far from their host country office premises.
- 5) In case of a children accompanying an expat on an international project, the corporate policy should also include getting the employee registered with the NHS(National Health Services) hospital which can help them during medical emergencies.

CONCLUSION

This paper focussed primarily on information regarding the work- life balance among Indian IT expatriates in Birmingham city by using qualitative approach. The outcome of this research pinpoint towards the fact that the Indian IT expatriates in Birmingham face work-life conflict in handling workload and which can be resolved by getting the support from their spouse and family. A handsome pay packet and meeting new people and culture contribute to their work-life enrichment in work and family domain respectively. Moreover, expatriates found out that the use of general adjustment and interacting adjustment are helping them to adjust better in the new country which can be done through offering cross-cultural training not only to the employee but also the accompanying spouse. Thus, indispensable support and help from family, friends, organizations and HR practitioners are needed to facilitate expatriates to accomplish work-life balance in a foreign country.



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