

A Study of Work-Life Balance amongst Expatriates Globally

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ABSTRACT

The paper of expats work life balance focuses on the defining the key terms, the factors that results in poor work life balance and the problems that arise out of them. This paper attempts to study this and how work life balance can be at least improved if not optimized. A critical aspect of work-life balance is the amount of time a person spends at work. Long work hours may result in poor personal health, jeopardize safety and increase stress. A few factors have been considered important in context with expatriates. Ignoring this work life balance can actually result in reduced loyalty and commitment to their organizations and ultimately their intention to stay.

Key Words: Culture, Expats, language, Stress, Work life balance

INTRODUCTION

An Expatriate is a person who lives outside their native country to survive or make a living for himself or his family. In the process of survival is where one fails in what we describe today as work life balance. Life in today's scenario is very challenging, competitive and demanding. Most of us are today a part of this vicious cycle unassumingly accepting and believing it to be a way of life. Several studies have statistically proven that a poor work life balance has resulted in health issues leading to death. Again, we need to understand that work life balance is effectively not giving equal time to work and life, but it is giving the necessary time that balances the individual mental state and satisfies the emotional needs of his dependents. Achieving this has become the epitome of challenges even for a person living in his native. In the case of an expatriate its worst and has the least scope for work life balance especially when you live in fear in another part of the world with no emotions being shared with close family members. This paper attempts to study this and how work life balance can be at least improved if not optimized.

GLOBAL SENARIO

Bahrain and Oman ranked among the top 10 countries that provides the best work life balance for expats, according to Inter Nations Expat Insider 2017 rankings. Oman with 67% of expats satisfied with their work-life balance, and 70% of them satisfied with working hours was ranked 9th in the world. Average full-time working hours in Oman were 43.5 hours.

The ranking was based on 13,000 expats from 188 countries. It shows that those who are the most satisfied with their work-life balance do not necessarily work lesser hours such as expats in the Czech Republic who work more time than the global average.

InterNations, the largest global network and information site for people who live and work abroad, stated in its ranking that expats who are working full time spend an average of 44.3 hours a week at work, about three in five of them are satisfied with their work-life balance (60%) as well as their working hours (61%).

Denmark, which has the shortest working week out of the featured countries topped the ranking, followed by Bahrain, then Norway, the Czech Republic, New Zealand, Sweden, Costa Rica, the Netherlands, Oman and Malta.

The ranking shows that expats who are living in countries with a great work-life balance are often highly educated such as in Denmark and Sweden, those holding a PhD in these countries are 12% which is twice the global average

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) a unique forum where 34 democracies with market economies work with each other, as well as with more than 70 non-member economies to promote economic growth, prosperity, and sustainable development. A critical aspect of work-life balance is the amount of time a person spends at work. Evidence suggests that long work hours may result in poor personal health, jeopardize safety and increase stress. 1 in every 8 employees in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development works 50 hours or more per week. Turkey is by far the country with the highest proportion of people working very long hours, with 34%, followed by Mexico with nearly 30% and Israel and New Zealand both with 15% of employees. Overall, more men work very long hours; the percentage of male employees working very long hours across Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries is over 16%, compared with nearly 8% for women. Furthermore, the more they work, the less time they have to spend on other activities, such as

personal care or leisure. The amount and quality of free time is essential for a person's overall well-being and can bring additional physical and mental health benefits. A full-time worker in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries dedicates 62% of the day on average, or close to 15 hours, to personal care and leisure socializing with friends and family, hobbies, games, computer and television use, etc. Fewer hours in paid work for women do not necessarily result in greater leisure time, as time devoted to leisure is roughly the same for men and women across the 20 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries studied.

FACTORS THAT AFFECT WORK LIFE BALANCE

While we seek to understand a broader concept of work life balance there are numerous factors that acts as a detrimental factor in achieving an optimum work life balance. Essentially a few factors have been considered important in context with expatriates based on the findings from the study's survey.

1. Working hours or duration.

Two-thirds of the expatriates surveyed work longer hours abroad than they did at home. Their average work in terms of the number of hours had an increase of 13.4 hours per week.

2. International assignments.

Assignment given at work needs to be accomplished and it could be in any part of the world.

3. Poor work-life balance policies.

Only 21 percent say that their organizations had either a formal or an informal policy on work-life balance without a policy the company is basically directionless.

4. Cultural and language.

Coping with language and cultural difficulties resulted in major pressures causing stress.

5. Stress.

Despite survey data showing that women's average workweek increased 13 hours, over half of the women (54 percent) did take their full vacation entitlement.

REASONS THAT RESULTS IN POOR WORK LIFE BALANCE

1. Nearly two-thirds of the expatriates surveyed work longer hours abroad than they did at home. Expatriates worked on average an increase of 13.4 hours per week. Survey respondents cited several contributing factors, such as the volume of work, lack of local support, cost pressures to perform well and business travel.
2. International assignments clearly intrude into family life. Expatriates' families voiced dissatisfaction with assignees' travel schedules, long hours at work, and the limited support given to families during periods of separation. Nearly 5 percent reported that their families returned home earlier than anticipated, and of that number, 30 percent cited the work and travel schedules of the expatriate as the reason.
3. Absence of work life balance policies have resulted in 44 percent reporting to having the option of working flexible hours or taking compensatory time off for working long hours; however, two-thirds believe their organizations expect them to work outside of normal hours. Over half (55%) did not take all their annual leave entitlement.
4. Cultural and language differences create specific stress issues for expatriates. Despite being offered language training and half reporting being offered cultural training, significant proportions of expatriates did not complete their training. For some this was due to time pressures and travel schedules, but for a significant majority this was due to lack of interest on their part.
5. Female expatriates have higher levels of work-related stress than their male counterparts only 50 percent felt overworked and 54 percent felt overwhelmed. However, over half of the women (54 percent) did take their full vacation entitlement. Family separation appeared to be less of an issue for women expatriates: only 10 percent reported that their families returned home because of their work or travel commitments and only 3 percent reported a permanent, early return of their families. Yet, female expatriates reported higher levels of work-related stress than their male counterparts in the domestic workplace and as expatriates.
6. Expatriates and HR staff have contradicting views regarding work-life balance policies and practices. A different picture emerges when data from the 2005 HR survey (The 2005 HR survey was conducted by ORC Worldwide in conjunction with the Association for

HR Managers in International Organizations (AHRMIO); its focus was international work-life balance policies in respect of their impact on HR personnel in their homeland location) is compared with the 2007 expatriate survey. Many HR personnel in the home country reported that organizational work-life balance policies had affected the workplace positively and had made a difference to organizational performance and to them personally. Expatriates, on the other hand, believe completely the opposite, stating that such policies had not had a positive effect on the workplace, performance, or themselves personally.

CONCLUSION

Expatriates' negative views of their organization's work-life balance policies are clearly of great significance. The psychological contract between employers and employees—the unspoken perceptions of reciprocity and fairness that affect expatriates' willingness to perform beyond their contractual requirements and to engage positively with their organizations—is potentially in jeopardy, affecting their loyalty and commitment to their organizations and ultimately their intention to stay.

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