

A Study on Technology as an Aid in Balancing Work Life Stress.

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Abstract

The concepts of work life balance and work life integration assume great significance today especially in light of the advances in technology. Work life integration refers to the synergies between the various facets of an individual's life creating a whole picture whereas balance refers to the even distribution of work and personal commitments in the life of the individual. Technology has ensured that the individual is now available 24/7 with no breaks or boundaries. It has also redefined the workplace in terms of new norms of work and work culture. As technology becomes increasingly interwoven with human life, there is also an underlying stress created as a result of being constantly online. This paper attempts to reinterpret the definition of work life integration, analyse the different measures undertaken by organizations to enhance work life integration of the employee and the impact that technology has on such decisions. As technology disrupts the traditional workplace, the paper also attempts to identify technology-induced stress at the workplace and measures that could be undertaken to mitigate such stress.

Keywords: *Work Life Integration, Technology, Employee productivity, Work Environment, Work Culture.*

Introduction

Before the advent of industrialisation, manufacturing was undertaken by individual cottage owners. For centuries, goods including food, clothing, equipment and weaponry among others were manufactured by hand or using animals.

In the 18th century, Industry 1.0 saw the use of steam-powered machines aid employees and production. The production now shifted to organizations involving owners, managers, employees and customers. Industry 2.0 at the beginning of the 20th century saw the introduction of electricity- powered mechanisation to drastically increase production. This was also the time of management focus on employee efficiency at the workplace. As mass production of goods became rampant; work-study, division of labour and increased specialisation as advocated by Frederick Taylor became commonplace. Industry 3.0, during the last few decades of the 20th century saw the invention of transistors and integrated circuits and their introduction into the automation process. This period also saw the development and integration of software systems into the mechanization process in organizations.

The 21st century saw the incorporation of cutting-edge technology including artificial intelligence, robotics, Internet-of-Things, augmented reality and other cognitive technologies as part of Industry 4.0. As technology evolved and entered the production space, it also began to impact the employee at the workplace.

Need for Research on Work Life Balance:

There is consistent need for more research on work-life balance as employees get saturated and burnt out due to the mix of workload and technology. Research is mainly focussed on the behaviour of individuals, psychology, productivity, efficiency, emotional well-being and related matters. As technology gets integrated into personal and professional lives through increased use of internet, laptops, smartphones, artificial intelligence, robotics, machine learning and related areas, it is important to study the resulting impact on the psychological well-being on the individual. This paper carries forward the work being done in this field with finding lacunas in use of existing technologies and trying to resolve them through high end advances in technology.

The digital world has blurred the boundaries between personal and professional lives of employees. On one hand, technology allows for remote work, flexible office hours, access to data through cloud computing which allows for the “work-from-anywhere” option; on the other hand the 24/7 connectivity also contributes to increased levels of work stress, work-related anxiety and depression. It is expected that automation including robotics and artificial intelligence would make many existing jobs redundant while creating new jobs requiring enhanced or different skills; further requiring employees to constantly reskill and upskill themselves.

Scope of Study:

The study revolves around two domains - Human Resources and Science and Technology. The HR Function in every organisation has acquired great relevance in modern times revolving around the growing school of thought that treating employees well will lead to higher productivity, efficiency, morale and motivation. Technology has paid an important role in this revolution of thought as the Internet revolution and aided devices revolutionised the way people interact, communicate, understand and learn.

The study further aims to research the integration of the two domains – Human Resources and Science & Technology. Employees are the source of competitive advantage to any organization. While products, processes and promotional strategies can be imitated, the skills and commitment of the workforce is difficult to replicate. The advances in technology have changed the way individuals perceive their workplace and contribution to the organization. The VUCA world has seen increased instances of gig working from employees preferring to work with multiple stakeholders rather than restrict to a single organization. This further necessitates the creation of new work templates and hierarchies to assimilate new forms of work.

Importance of Study:

The study encompasses the role of technology in organizations and the need for HR policies and functions to incorporate the changing work landscape. The study justifies the use of technology as a major contributor to organizational work while playing an important role as HR domains endeavour for work-life balance. As artificial intelligence and machine learning are taking roots with IOT and evolving the way various organisations function, the paper aims to study the role of technology in enhancing human resource capabilities and its impact on the organization as well as employee well-being. As automation, artificial intelligence and robotics become game changers in the increasingly competitive corporate environment; its role in contributing to employee wellness also needs to be determined.

Research Objectives:

1. To study benefits of Work Life Balance of Employees
2. To suggest new measures to enhance the feel good factor among employees.
3. To find out lacunas in present HR practices and how Technology can help to plug such gaps
4. To suggest implementation of technology in grey areas
5. To study the impact of technology on current HR practices

Review of Literature:

Kagermann et al. have proposed that Industry 4.0 involves the use of innovative mechanisms to stimulate production across entities. It is expected that businesses will develop global network of production systems, supply chain and warehousing in the form of a Cyber-Physical Systems (CPS). Schumacher et al. have suggested that technological advances as Industry 4.0 would in time create a highly networked and responsive value chain by integrating man, machines and processes across organizational boundaries.

As production processes changed over time, so did the administration of human resources in the organization. Human resources are an integral part of any organization. It is an irreplaceable asset which is the source of competitive advantage for any firm. Armstrong (2006) defines HRM as the strategic and logical approach to managing the people in the organization. In early times, HRM was referred to as Personnel Management, with individuals in the department involved in transactional aspects such as payroll administration

Tubey et al. have proposed that as mechanisation entered the production process, jobs became monotonous as focus was on division of labour and specialisation. The Scientific Management school of thought focussed on monetary transactions as a strategy to increase productivity. The Human relations movement encouraged management to consider satisfaction of the employee's needs as a means to improve productivity. From the 1970s onwards the term "human resources" came to define the employees in the organization. HR strategies became more employee-centric and the workplace as a formal and rigid place of work began to change. As global competition increased, human resources management

evolved with further new ideas of human capital management based on ethical awareness of the organization's stakeholders.

As technology evolved and blurred the boundaries between professional and personal life, the idea of work-life balance and work-life integration became real issues in the management of the human assets in the organization. Historically work and life were treated as two distinct spheres. However, technological incorporation into work life meant that often work spilled into the personal life domain. Generational changes and technology shifts have created a 24/7 connectivity and availability which have impacted the work life divide.

It is undisputable that technology is changing the way individuals manage their professional and personal lives. The younger generation (Millennials) are more tech savvy and have a predilection to using technology in both spheres. While the older generation may be less inclined to uninhibited use of technology, it is obvious that all employees are available after work through technology.

Contemporary HR practices have tried to focus their policies and programmes on ensuring a work-life balance among their employees. As diversity and complexity of the work environment increased, organizations devised creative approaches to deal with issues that did not exist in the past (Kossek and Lambert).

Research Methodology

The investigation is based on a qualitative study of two case studies based on practices of Motorola. The nature of research is exploratory. SWOT Analysis of a particular Case is used in discussion and analysis part of the research article.

Mode of Data Collection:

Various Cases on work stress management using technological aids

Motorola had introduced many different avenues in order to ease the working life of their employees. One of the systems introduced includes job share programme. Job sharing involves two employees sharing a full-time job between them, splitting equally the number of hours worked. The idea was disseminated when Motorola introduced shift working wherein operators work seven 12-hour shifts over a two-week period, on the basis of four days one week, and three days the next.

The arrangement provided employees the flexibility to handle the commitments of their family life without compromising the requirements at the workplace. The Motorola management assessed the feedback of the job share policy through employee feedback and annual review sessions. One of the key areas highlighted was the ability of the organization to retain its key talent and bring down recruitment costs. The retention of key talent, in turn, helped the organization to achieve their performance targets while remaining competitive in

the global environment. Open communication between the management and the employees over work -life balance policies was the key to implementation success.

As business strategies evolve and technological innovations get incorporated into the workplace, the future of the traditional work, worker and workplace will be disrupted. Industrial Internet of Things, smart machines using artificial intelligence, robotic production processes will necessitate a skilled and agile workforce. This requirement of talent pool will necessitate organizations change the traditional ways of operating to rigid policies and procedures. Instead organizations will be required to bring in diversity in their talent pool, often involving gig workers. As communication technology evolves, remote work will be the new norm. Organizations therefore will have to re-innovate workspaces and policies to fuse the workforce requirements to changing business and competitive trends.

Berg-Beckhoff et al. highlighted that technological changes have consistently influenced our communication, learning, interaction and work. As technology contributed to improved productivity and easing of difficult and strenuous work, it also required employees to adapt to changes including changes in work speed, multi-tasking, and knowledge enhancement. The constantly changing requirements at the workplace and over-exposure to information increased the individual stress levels often causing anxiety and frustration that potentially lead to burnout over time.

Many organizations across the world including Motorola, Deloitte, Infosys, HCL, TCS, Microsoft, Apple, Google among others have consistently incorporated practices to help employees better integrate their professional and personal lives.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

“Case study series on Work- Life Balance in Large Organisations ” by Gill Maxwell of Society for Human Resource Management .

The Case called “Job Sharing at Motorola” is taken as an Example for doing a SWOT Analysis of how Motorola changed its HR practices for reducing Work Life Stress. The other Case study included is that of Deloitte where the Technological Approach in Work Life Balance is discussed.

SWOT Analysis:

Motorola:

Strengths:

- Motorola as a Tech driven Company
- The strength of Brand Name
- Treating Employees as assets
- IOT used for better Efficiency
- Technology used for better Effectiveness

Weaknesses:

- The Waning Market Share due to heavy Competition
- Saturation in USA and European Markets
- Work Culture of Developing Countries
- Motorola Caught Sleeping when Nokia and Samsung were doing more R & D

Opportunities:

- Emerging Markets
- Young and Tech Driven Employees
- Ability to cope up with Emerging Technologies in Developing Countries
- New and Unexplored Markets

Threats:

- High Competition in home Ground in USA
- High end Tech driven workforce in Companies like Samsung , Dell , Microsoft , Google
- Challenges in New Markets
- Mentality of workforce to resist evolution and change.

Deloitte:

Strengths

- Operational Excellence
- Streamlining processes
- Enhanced customer value creation
- Data driven

Weaknesses

- Increasing levels of disruptive technologies
- Risks of new technologies

Opportunities

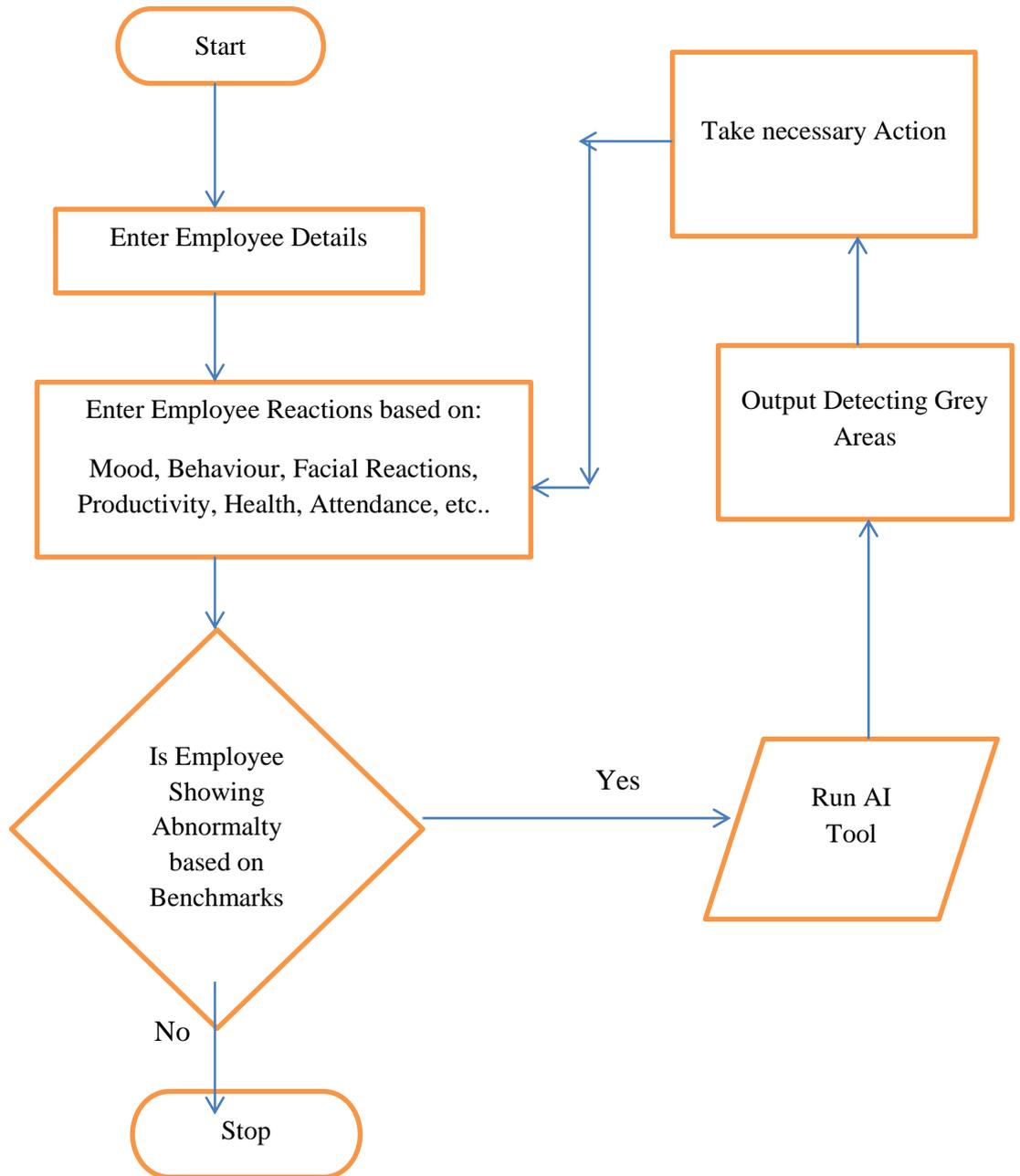
- Changing skill levels of workforce
- Changing workplace trends

Threats

- Innovation and Disruption
- Blurring of professional and personal lives

When Can AI play a Role ?

The AI Logic to Check Employee Stress Levels



Findings:

- Developed markets have a faster rate of adapting to technology and better HR practices
- Employees health and effectiveness has shown a positive trend due to less stress when favourable practices are introduced
- Pressure situations are low and freedom of employees to think out of box has done wonders in Competitive Market

- Innovations and New Technology Development
- Competition is not hindering market share to a large Extent
- Employees happiness index has increased
- Low Labour Turnover
- Better Talent is retained

Suggestions:

- Invest in Employees
- Give better and quality time for TAT of Employees
- Use higher end technology in work from home cases
- Have interaction with Psych Analysis of employees from the HR Team
- Treat Employees as assets
- Provide better Monetary Awards for Performers

Conclusion:

From the above study it is clear that Employees Efficiency and Effectiveness will increase in the long run with the right practices to integrate work and personal life. Adapting technology will require employees to believe in their abilities and innovative HR practices incorporating technology at the workplace can strengthen such skills. Talent management and talent retention will move on an upward trajectory with the right balance of technology and policies. Technology has added a new dimension to work life balance which will impact the multi-generation workforce in the organization.

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