

# **IMPACT OF MOBILE COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY ON THE WORK LIFE BALANCE OF WORKING WOMEN – A REVIEW OF DISCOURSES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Purpose**

Advent of mobile technology has changed the mode of communication. The boundary between work life and personal life is more permeable now. There is concern about blurred boundary between work life and family life. This study reviews available discourses to understand how the advent of mobile technology may have affected the work life balance of working women in general and particularly in the Information Technology sector in India.

### **Design/Methodology/Approach**

This is a review of literature on the topic of blurred boundary between work life and family life with the mobile technology and its impact on work life balance with special emphasis on the Indian society.

### **Findings**

The definitive way of mobile phone affecting work life balance remained controversial. While some studies have suggested that perpetual contact may lead work problems to invade the social spaces and times once reserved for family life, others have not been to identify similar effect. It appears from the review of the discourses that blurred boundary may not be necessarily always harmful. It is possible to maintain family life and work life at a different level with mobile communication technology.

### **Research Limitations/Implications**

Being a literature review the conclusions are based on discourse analysis. Original research based data is needed to identify the exact situation in the Indian context.

### **Practical/Social Implications**

This study identified the importance of understanding the dynamics of work life balance in the life of working woman due to mobile communication technology, which reflects on the areas of future research.

**Originality/Value**

This review paper sees from and connects three discrete viewpoints of work life balance, impact of mobile technology on work-life balance and work-life balance of working women.

**Keywords:** *Work life balance, mobile technology, blurred boundary, work life conflict, software professionals.*

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Work life balance was defined by Clark (2000) as “satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with minimum role conflict”. It is a perception of enriching integrity in personal time, family care, and work domain with minimum role conflict. It is a key factor for an individual’s psychological and social well-being. It is necessary to avoid significant role conflict to maintain self-esteem, and overall sense of harmony in life. (Clark, 2000; Ungerson and Yeandle, 2005; Clarke, 2004; Marks and MacDermid, 1996)

The role of women has significantly changed in last 50 years in developed and developing countries. Modern day women are working outside and at the same time taking the primary responsibilities of home and child care (Brewster and Padavic, 2000; Keene and Quadagno, 2004). They have to balance between multiple roles of their lives to achieve a meaningful life. It becomes a bigger challenge in developing countries like India where traditionally women are

regarded as the care givers for the family and mother to the children, expected to take care of the household activities. Socio-culturally they are considered as “the inferior gender”. (Sundaresan, 2014; Bharat, 2003) With the increasing availability of education, the traditional scenario changed and dual earner and nuclear families became prominent, especially in the urban scenario and information technology sector. Even with economic independence, they continued to be the primary care giver and adopted themselves in a dual role. As a result more and more Indian women are facing the challenge of balancing the family life and work life (Komarraju, 1997; Rajadhyaksha and Bhatnagar, 2000; Reddy et al., 2010).

Advent of mobile technology brought a new change for the employed woman in terms of work life balance. Fast and prompt communication, instant availability to both work and family life, resolved the border between family life and work life (Lee, 2009; Pauleen 2015). Mobile technology changed the way of

working in private sector. Modes of communication improved dramatically with the advancement of computer and mobile technology (Chamakiotis 2014). Employers are easily keeping in touch with employees who are away from office for work related issues which helps to increase the work productivity. This is especially important for a continuously active work force such as information technology. Previous studies have shown that software professionals are working under greater time pressure and more stress (Teagarden, Meyer and Jones, 2008; Scholarios and Marks, 2004). Moreover, the connection between mobile space and time is very complicated and not constant. These changes have affected individuals and social groups in different ways (Wajcman, Bittman and Brown, 2008).

Accessibility and availability basically depends upon social practice which is created by individual (Bittman 2009, Green 2002). As a result men and women may not have been affected in the same way by the use of mobile technology. Their role in family life and social life are not always similar and women are more involved with family care (Wajcman, Bittman and Brown, 2008). This article reflects on the impact of mobile technology on the work life balance of Indian working women with special

emphasis on the Information technology sector.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Work life Balance**

Post World War II developed countries noticed a flux in the role distribution of two genders. The reality of working women created new problems for family and work life dynamics, concept of role conflict was born. Sociologists were drawn to this issue early. In between 1960s to 1990s most of the literature focused on role conflicts and work life satisfaction. Women and their multiple roles in life were studied from different aspects including psychological distress, enhancing experience from different roles and overall behavioural pattern (Kahn, 1964; Hall, 1972; Marks, 1977; Moen and Kantor, 1979; Barnett and Baruch, 1985). Those initial works slowly transformed into the much concrete problem of modern day sociology; the work life balance.

Work life balance is one of the most important factors to achieve a satisfying life. Work family balance can be defined as equal time, satisfaction, and involvement in each of the work and

family spheres irrespective of job demands, family demands, family structure, financial pressures, etc., (Reiter, 2007). Greenhaus defined it by incorporating three components; time balance, involvement balance, and satisfaction balance in both hemispheres. Afterwards Marks and MacDermid (1996) described it as the “positive role balance” for the complete engagement in the performance of every role in one’s total role system with affection and care (Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw, 2003; Marks and MacDermid, 1996).

A modern day woman in her life carries many roles including some functional roles, defined by the society in India. Often they are related to socio cultural beliefs. Theoretically, most of the individuals, balance between six roles at various stages of their lives and career. Depending on the socio-cultural and socio-economic situation the impact of different functional roles would have variable degree of activities and importance. More interestingly, often it is not possible to completely separate the worlds of work and family life. They are basically two interactive worlds which can modify each other. The interaction of work life and family life can take many forms such as Work-life Conflict, Spillover, Facilitation, Compensation and

Segmentation (Super, 1980; Kopp And Ruzicka, 1993; Reddy et al., 2010; Biddle, 1986).

## 2.2 Spillover

Spillover is the process where experience of one role impacts the other role. It is understandable that each role would have definitive demand and would result in different experience (Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1992; Williams and Alliger, 1994). In Spillover, the experience of one world would shape or construct the other world depending on the learned experience. It can impact the other role in either positive or negative way. Often the origin of tension in the Spillover is essentially based on the fixed amount of time and energy of an individual.

As a result family or work may interfere with each other. Someone who is highly satisfied in work life would earn some confidence and positive experience which would be reflected on the family life. Negative energy from one world can also get transferred to the other world. Similarly, fatigue in work life can be displayed at home (Keene and Quadagno, 2004; Lambert, 1990; Voydanoff, 1988; Macewen and Barling, 1994).

### 2.3 Enrichment

It is related to the degree to which experiences from skills, abilities, values or mood and satisfaction from a certain domain can improve the quality of functionality in other domain (Morris and Madsen, 2007). Greenhaus and Powell (2006) defined enrichment as "the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in the other role." Works from Zedeck and Mosier (1990) also stated that good work outcomes lead and good life outcomes are directly related (Zedeck and Mosier, 1990; Greenhaus and Powell, 2006).

### 2.4 Compensation

Compensation is another psychosocial phenomenon where search of fulfilment is compensated either in family life or work life. It is of human nature to feel rewarded, to give positive feedback to life. When one world becomes unsatisfactory the other world becomes more rewarding from the psychosocial stand point. There is a similarity with the phenomena of spill over. The satisfaction from work life somehow helps them to maintain some functional level of satisfaction at family life. Here it is important to understand the difference

between compensation and enrichment. In compensation lack of satisfaction from one domain enhances the focus to other domain in search of positive feedback. Whereas in enrichment, skills and positive values one domain enrich the experience of other domain (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000; Zedeck and Mosier, 1990; Rothbard, 2001; Morris and Madsen, 2007)

### 2.5 Facilitation

Facilitation theory is related to transfer of available means such as skills, experience, resources and means to other domain for betterment. It happens when skills in one domain enhances the organizing capacity and authority in another domain. This portability of augmentation can include skills, experiences, resources and knowledge (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000).

### 2.6 Segmentation

Segmentation is the separation of the two worlds. There is no systematic relationship between the work and non-work life. The two roles do not influence each other. Earlier segmentation was viewed as a natural division but later research has identified the active psychosocial process which defines the boundary between two

worlds. It is like a management of keeping an impermeable boundary between work life and family. Research has shown typically men are more capable of compartmentalize work life and family life whereas women have the tendency to integrate both (Lambert, 1990; Andrews and Bailyn, 1993; Nippert-Eng, 1996).

## 2.7 Integration

Integration theory refers to the approach of flexible and permeable boundaries leading to enhancing family-life, work-life, and community-life domains (Clark, 2000). Integration theory incorporates community with knowledge regarding work and family. It is essentially a holistic approach to work life balance involving employers, workers and communities. It is essentially a holistic approach to work life balance involving employers, workers and communities. It is a joint approach where all parties share responsibilities to create greater combined results in all domains than solutions created in isolation (Morris and Madsen, 2007).

## 2.8 Work-life conflict

The transfer of experience from one world to another is one of the characteristic of human nature. Also different roles have

various demands and thus conflicts may arise. Simultaneous demands from different roles make it difficult to be compliant with both the roles at the same time, leading to conflict. It can be defined as the reciprocal tension between roles and their obligations. In his epic paper in 1985, Greenhaus identified time, stress and behaviour as the major sources of conflict (Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1992; Williams and Alliger, 1994; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Conflicts may lead to Spillover limiting individual's optimal capacity. In Family Spillover, family responsibilities or obligations interfere with the optimal functioning in the work place. Whereas Work Spillover brings work related emotions to family life and it can also limit time spent with family.

**2.8.1. Time based conflict:** Time being limited can be hard to manage effectively to meet the demands of different roles. Long working hours, irregular shift work, and inflexibility of work time has been identified as sources of conflict from work life. Similarly family life demanding major time may lead to conflict. Married person, couples with young children, spouses of highly functional professionals have been shown to go through time based conflict.

Based on habits and routines time based conflict can be dealt in two different ways. Some individuals prefer frequent interference of work life and family life to mitigate time based conflicts. On the other hand some individuals limit interruption for increased productivity (Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate, 2000; Jett and George, 2003) (Pleck, Staines and Lang, 1980; Keith and Schafer, 1980; Greenhaus and Kopelman, 1981).

**2.8.2. Strain based conflict:** Strain from one domain can lead to work life, non-work life conflict. Apart from long, inflexible work hours, physical and psychological demand of work, job burnout and interaction fatigue can lead to work-life conflict. A supportive spouse can act as a buffer to mitigate these conflicts. Whereas poor spouse support, husband-wife disagreement may create or enhance work-life conflict (Bartolomé and Evans, 1980; Holahan and Gilbert, 1979; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Keene and Quadagno, 2004; Lambert, 1990).

Essentially strain based conflict is developed from spillover. It is commonly coped with different strategies based on individual's behavioral characteristics. Some individuals prefer segmentation to avoid work related

strain invading family life. Whereas some prefers to discuss work life strains with family to gain social support and ameliorate the problem. (Jex et al., 2001; Carver, Scheier and Weintraub, 1989; Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate, 2000)

**2.8.3. Behaviour based conflict:**

Sometimes behavioural demand of the work and family may be conflicting. Work may demand certain aspects of personality which is not exactly the warmth and openness accepted at family. Switching between roles may work as a source of conflict (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985).

Work and family life interacts with each other in complex dynamics affecting individual's cognitive, psychological status and work output. Experience and skills from one domain usually do not limit themselves to a single domain and have the potential to cross borders. Positive or negative experience at work life and family life can be transferred to each other. Positive reinforcement or need fulfilment may lead to enhancement of learning capacity and energy (Edwards, 2008; Rothbard, 2001; Edwards and Rothbard, 2000; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985).

### 3. TRENDS IN THE CHANGING SITUATION OF WORKING WOMEN IN INDIA

Developed world noticed the change in the gender distribution of work force during and after World War II. Traditional male-breadwinner family structure rapidly changed and women started to engage themselves in paid work leading to reorganization of social demographics and economy (Brewster and Padavic, 2000, Gerson, 1998). Developing countries, such as India, has started to follow this trend of economic and socio demographic changes in the recent past (Rajadhyaksha, 2012).

Socio - cultural structure in India is very complex and highly influenced by religions and traditions. During the Vedic time, the Aryan civilization and afterwards during the era of Gandhar, Mouyra dynasty women had important social roles and similar opportunities like man. Many women scholars left significant mark in the fields of science and philosophy during that era. Afterwards, society became more patriarchal. They lost the educational opportunities and became the property of men. Women are supposed to take care of children, elder, and have to cook along with lots of other responsibilities at household

work or the care giver of the family (Ramu, 1987). Social situation of Indian women changed slowly. Pre independence rate of literacy among women was below 10%. After independence women literacy rate has slowly improved. Major difference in women literacy has been noticed in last 3 decades. From 24.8% in 1981 in increased to 65.46% in 2011 (Suguna, 2011; Awasthi, 2012). During the same period percentage of women in higher education or beyond secondary education increased from 27.2 to 37.6%. By 2011 percentage of Indian women in college or University level education continued to increase to 44.5% (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2014; Nath, 2014). Like education changes were noted in the Indian labour market. Between 1991 and 2001, India noticed a steady change in female employment in India.

Number of women working in the private sectors increased from 1991 to 88% by 2011 and 33% when compared to 2001 (Indian Labour Bureau, 2014). Keeping up with developed countries, number of female worker at work place steadily increased. Female workers in regular employment in urban India increased from 25.8% in 1983 to 33.3% in 2000. It is



projected to reach 361 per 1000 females in the year 2026 (McNay, Unni, & Cassen, 2004).

As women in Indian have come forward to join the work force, work life balance issues have become prominent and gained some attention in recent past. Work life balance is deeply associated with an individual's physical and psychosocial well-being (Reddy et al., 2010; Kopp, 1993; Delina and Raya, 2013; Sharma, 1999; Gill and Davidson, 2001). Role conflicts, organizational culture and work dynamics, personal resources, social support, work hours, coping strategies have been reported to influence work life balance in both national and international literature. Webster (2002) has previously shown that even with variation of family structures and female roles across countries, women are the primary provider for domestic and childcare responsibilities (Webster, 2002).

Specifically in a patriarchal society like India, family, child care, working hour duration, age and household activities are still the key roles for a woman. Indian women must balance in between many roles and their career and it is not an easy task. It has been shown that elderly woman do better with work life balance.

Child care including number of children and age of the kids play a crucial role (Reddy et al., 2010; Delina and Raya, 2013; Gill and Davidson, 2001). In general it has been shown that family matters a lot in the life of working Indian women. Even highly successful women would compromise her career for her family (Buddhapriya, 2009; Rajadhyaksha and Bhatnagar, 2000).

#### **4. IT SECTOR IN INDIA AND WOMEN EMPLOYMENT**

Globalization and liberalization brought new industries in the Indian market; especially Information Technology sector. India has the inherent advantage of time gap with most of the developed overseas countries leading to possible 24 hours continuous production capacity for them. Moreover, availability of English speaking cheap labour force and Government policies regarding tax reduction and development of software industry parks facilitated a rapid growth of IT industry. (Kumar, 2001).

There was steady job opportunity with benefits like less physically dependent work, time flexibility, safe comfortable indoor working environment,

comparatively high salaries with international mobility, gender neutral knowledge based skill requirement etc. With the rise in the higher education in India, many educated women were searching for suitable jobs and IT industries gave them the opportunity (Shanker, 2008; Upadhyaya and Vasavi, 2006; Bhattacharyya and Ghosh, 2012). Wide group of educated Indian women entered the professional sector. Information Technology and Software Industry accommodated highest number of women employees in the Indian market (Wakhlu, 2008). In 2007, 26.4% of total India-based work force was in the IT sector which increased from 24% in 2005 (Ali, 2006). NASSCOM-Mencher, 2009 report also reflected that 20 to 30 per cent of female engineering graduates are working in the IT industry compared to 5-8% in the 1980s (NASSCOM-Mencher, 2009). IT sector has become the lucrative destination for the young, educated, mostly urban, privileged, upper cast and middle class women for a better future (Shanker, 2008).

Information technology sector, as described earlier, has its own demands. It is a 24x7 functional industry and requires continuous high performance to keep up with the competition. Different aspects of IT sector job shapes lives of software professional in

a different way. Previous researches have shown how it can impact women's lives especially work life balance. Working hours can be flexible in IT sector but they can be long too. However, it appears that flexible work arrangements helps to integrate work and family responsibilities in time and space and can have a positive impact towards work life balance (Galinsky, Bond, & Friedman, 1993; Bachmann, 2000; Bharathi, Mala and Bhattacharya, 2015). Moreover as it is dependent on outsourced work, to finish project in time is an essential part of software industries. This can lead to unpredictable workloads and continuous time pressure. To meet clients and outside work travelling assignments can be the other part of IT jobs (Mathew, 2007). Moreover, software industry is essentially a knowledge based industry. It is important for the employee to be up-to-date. They often work with constant pressure of updating skills.

All of these can have a strong impact on the work family life balance of women in the IT sector (Adya, 2008; Scholarios and Marks, 2004; Mathew, 2007; Bharathi, Mala and Bhattacharya, 2015; Valk and Srinivasan, 2011). Software women professionals were found to be more

socially mobile. They are often required to take prompt decision and develop the capacity to take their own capacity. Their economic independence gives them the opportunity to have bargaining power at household (Kelkar, Shrestha and Veena, 2002; Kelkar and Nathan, 2002). Overall they achieve enhanced social status in terms of economic capital through high income, foreign travel, social capital by being a role model and having greater prospect of marriage, and symbolic capital through the prestige of their job (Clark and Sekher, 2007).

Even after fulfilling the work life expectations, Indian software professionals are maintaining their non-work life too which has its own demands. Valk and Srinivasan, 2011 identified some important aspects of the work-life balance for the software professionals such as familial influences on life choices, role responsibilities and negotiation, self-identity, work life challenges and coping strategies, organisational policies and practices and social support. Families still influence their life choices. Even though work and career is a prime factor of their self-identify, it can lead to work life conflict (White et al., 2003). Long work hours can cause fatigue and stress and limit their

family responsibilities (Fouad et al., 2008). Married women have acknowledged lack of energy and time to spend with family. They require social support, especially support from the spouse and needs participation of both partners at home (Roy, 2003). Sometimes ambition and deep involvement in their work may require sacrificing part of their family life (Parikh, 2001).

## **5. ADVENT OF MOBILE PHONE AND WORK LIFE BALANCE**

In last two decades India did not only noticed changes in terms of women education, employment and a changing society, but also technological advances came especially in the form of newer mode of communication such as World Wide Web and mobile phones, which changed the mode of communication forever. Mobile phone penetrated Indian society rapidly. It was introduced to Indian market in 1990s. Economic development already had resulted in a wide consumer market for mobile technology in India. Rate of subscription increased fast and currently mobile phone connections surpass the land phone connection and approaching a billion subscriptions (Rai, 2006; ITU 2015).

The advent of mobile technology restructured years old social tradition of communication. Both communication and distance required new definitions. In some studies mobile phone appeared to strengthen family bond, expand psychosocial neighbourhood and improve symbolic proximity. It also improves socio-cultural status of women. Phone helps women to mitigate fear, isolation, loneliness and empower them (Rakow, 1992; Wei, 2006). Previous studies reflected that mobile phone use was associated with decreased tolerance to wife beating, increased economic independence, mobility autonomy; essentially confirming a positive impact in the life of Indian women (Lee, 2009).

Mobile phone brought the capacity to be in contact with someone regardless of physical distance and generated the possibilities of 'constant touch', or 'perpetual contact'. It threatened resolution of the boundary between work life and family life. The traditional concept of a separate work and family life, which is essentially a year-long conscious practice of individual, is breaking down. The effect of this permeability can be alarming in terms of work life balance (Licoppe, 2004; Agar, 2013).

At the same time, mobile communication also has brought the opportunity to be connected with the family members, to synchronize family activities and improve the family bond (Ling, 2004; Wajcman, Bittman and Brown, 2008). The possibility of frequent permeability would affect the work-life balance. Work to non-work integration may lead to work-family conflict whereas non-work to work permeation/integration can mitigate work-family conflict (Olson-Buchanan and Boswell, 2006).

Previous studies have reported distinct differences in mobile phone use among men and women, different professionals, regarding the use of mobile phone in terms of work life balance. Some researchers have stressed on these aspects of mobile connection and suggested the beneficial effect of mobile technology to make relationships more sustainable and improve work life balance. There is also a gender difference in terms of use of mobile phone. Men appeared to use mobile more frequently for work related issues whereas women trend to call their family, children more often.

Women are utilizing mobile phone to manage and schedule family affairs. A

definitive association between mobile phone use and work-family Spillover have not been identified. It appeared that men are more likely to have work family Spillover and mobile phone did not necessarily acted as a work extension device (Wajcman, Bittman, & Brown, 2008). However, a study on Korean population of smartphone noticed flexibility and productivity provided by smartphones may induce work overload leading to work-family conflict. At the same time they noticed smartphone can actually decrease work load by increasing perceived better quality and increased productivity (Yun, Kettinger and Lee, 2012).

The definitive way of mobile phone affecting work life balance remained controversial. Some studies have suggested that perpetual contact may lead work problems to invade the social spaces and times once reserved for family life whereas others have not been to identify similar effect. But time intensification has been identified as a common measure (Chesley, 2005; Towers et al., 2006; Green, 2005; Bittman, Brown and Wajcman, 2009). The differences in the finding from various studies also suggest that socio-cultural aspects may play a role to determine how mobile phone would affect the work life balance of individuals. So far, study on the

use of mobile phone on Indian population is limited. Based on the necessity of round the clock availability, information technology or software technology was among the first industries to be highly dependent on the mobile technology. Unfortunately despite of some limited works on the work life balance in the IT sector of India, there is lack of literature on the impact of the mobile technology on the work life balance for software professionals.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Time has changed and women are progressing. They are not only the care giver of the family. They are actively working and competing with men in every field. They are taking responsibilities from work life and family life. To manage both of these life domains with fulfilment is challenging. Work life balance is a major issue for the modern day working women.

It is true that socio-cultural expectation can have significant impact on different work-life balance related strains and there would be some variation in the basic work life balance structure of Indian women when compared to other developed societies. At the same time some

responsibilities remain same irrespective of socio-demographic conditions (Webster, 2002). Role conflicts, organizational culture, social support all can influence work life balance. For Indian women, family and children plays a major role in their work life, career and thus influence their work life balance.

India has noticed remarkable growth in terms of women education, especially higher education and women employment. In the modern day knowledge based society many women are working on high demand academic and professional sectors. Rapid growth of Information Technology in India has absorbed many educated Indian women. Working in the software industry requires high level of intellectual and long working hour commitment and can be stressful. Moreover they are under continuous time pressure, need timely update of their skills and travel outside work hour on business purpose. In the Indian socio-cultural scenario all of these can add to work family conflict.

Along with progress on the socio economic status of Indian women, communication technology also has rapidly progressed in India. Mobile technology is an essential daily commodity. Previous definitions of

distance and separation have changed. Continuous touch or perpetual contact may have altered the yearlong practice of separating the work and family life. The boundary may be blurred now. But it is not essentially an ominous perspective. It has been shown actually mobile phone can help to integrate different parts of family life and manage life better. Same principal can be applied in the field of work life balance for Indian women. Mobile technology may have brought some certain benefits for the working women. Moreover, user dependency is an important aspect of utilization of mobile technology and brings the possibility of meaningful use to maintain a better work life balance.

In the end, it can be said, gender gap is abolishing in the participation at science and technology. Women are getting involved in knowledge-based society. More women are working in high intellectually dependent field like the IT sector. The availability of new technology has changed the mode of communication. Working under the blurred boundary with the advancement of mobile technology is a new concept and in depth studies are required to explore the scenario in the Indian context.

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