

**A Study done in order to Explore the
Relationship between Employee
Commitment, Organisational Flexibility
and Work-Life Balance in a Call Centre**

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Abstract

This research explores the relationship between the Work-life balance, Employee turnover and organisational flexibility in a call centre based out of Dublin. During these turbulent economic times it is of great importance for organisations to capitalise on its human resources. This research was done in order to find out whether an organisation could significantly increase employee commitment, which would increase organisational flexibility, by focusing on employee work-life needs based on age and gender.

The research was directed toward front-line call centre employees, who form part of a highly flexible organisation. Data was collected via online questionnaires. The research was done using predominantly quantitative methods, with minute qualitative aspects.

Through the research it was established that while work-life satisfaction levels were low and turnover intentions were high. There were no significant differences between satisfaction levels of employees belonging to different age groups or genders. The study recommended a gradual shift from the conventional mass production model, characterized by high employee turnover, to a more sophisticated mass customization model or to the high quality professional service model.

This research may prove to be of interest to line managers, team managers and HR managers within the organisation, to try and improve employee commitment through satisfaction of intrinsic needs of employees.

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Introduction

“Workplace flexibility has helped to improve overall employee flexibility and empowerment.” (Pollitt, 2002: 27 -28)

The aim of this research is to explore the relationship between employee turnover intention and work-life balance in a Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) organisation; in this case, a call centre. To begin with, it is important to understand what is meant by organisational flexibility and work-life balance. In terms of human resource management, the methods used by an organisation in order to fulfil its business goals and objectives, through effective use of its labour, is called organisational flexibility. This requires the employees of a said organisation to form a highly flexible work-force. Work-life balance on the other hand follows an employee’s perspective towards the job assigned to him by the organisation and the satisfaction he would like to derive out of it. It is important to note that both these concepts require the use of flexibility, the question is how? Here in lies the goal of this research. Establishing such a relationship, especially in a BPO organisation whose employees are required to form a highly flexible workforce, would prove of great use to the management, as a flexible workforce helps management utilize its human resources more effectively and maintain the set standards of performance goals (Marr Neely, 2004; Ohly, Sonnentag & Pluntke 2006). The aim of this research is to help identify areas of improvement related to job satisfaction in terms of work-life balance in various groups of employees. A few good uses of such information to HR professionals could help management in allocation of duties and responsibilities based on capabilities and preferences of employees belonging to a certain group; such a relationship would also help illuminate ways of decreasing employee turnover, a common characteristic among all BPO firms (Machado, et al., 2013). Finally, the findings of this research would also help determine the type of workers most suited for recruitment, in order to take up available jobs for the needed time

period, as per the organisation's requirements. This in turn would help decrease loss suffered due to employee turnover.

Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) firms, for the purpose of this research and the type of organisation being used to conduct this research on, may be defined as an outsourcing of the non-core, non-niche, ancillary business activities of a firm to a third party vendor who has domain expertise and a good reputation for on-time delivery of services at a pre-determined standard for a fee (Panda, 2012). Two of the main reasons firms choose to outsource their activities are, firstly to reduce costs and secondly to off load unimportant activities. A more rich description as to why an organisation benefits from outsourcing, given by Liner, Cole, M.I & Jacobson, (2002) is that, partnerships with an outsourcing vendor can be used to gain access to competitive skills, improve service levels, and increase the company's ability to respond to changing business needs. Therefore one may say that the very nature of the work performed by BPO organisations/call centres, requires the bulk of the workforce to be highly flexible.

Organisational flexibility in a broad sense is the ability of an organisation to accept and adapt to change brought about by the business environment in order to maintain a competitive advantage. It is important to understand that the term organisational flexibility includes use of a vast number of activities performed by an organisation in order to maintain a healthy business and competitive advantage (Lynch, 1989). With the help of John Atkinson's model named 'Flexible Firm', the definition organisational flexibility can be narrowed down to that of an organisation's use of its labour, in order to fulfil its changing business needs and develop sustained competitive advantage (Taylor, 2010). The BPO firm which is being used as a basis for this research is a call centre run by HCL Technologies Ltd, Dublin. This

company also operates in over 26 countries across the Americas, Europe, Asia Pacific, Middle East and Africa.

Work-life balance in layman terms may be said to be a comfortable state of equilibrium achieved between an employee's primary priorities at their job and their private lifestyle. Job related stress and fatigue often makes it a struggle for employees to meet productivity and also puts strain on relationships, both at their work-place and families (Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2004). Work-life balance provides employees with the flexibility of doing their work as per the organisation's requirements and fulfilling their own personal aspirations to their own advantage. Numerous studies have also proven that bad work life balance is a major factor responsible for employee turnover (Sang, Ison, Stephen G; Dainty and Andrew, 2009); (Burnett, et al., 2010); (Murthy & Guthrie, 2012); (McDonald, Townsend & Wharton, 2013).

Literature review

Introduction

“In today’s turbulent economic environment, a successful organisation is one that has a consistent and committed workforce.” (Chawla & Sondhi, 2011: 5-33)

Cole (2000) states that the cost of replacing an employee is equal to almost one-third of that of a new employee’s salary. Thus decreasing employee turnover and capitalising on this makes for an effective strategy for organisations to gain a competitive advantage.

An important detail that a reader should keep in mind is that for the purpose of this research, the words “employee turnover” and “employee turnover intent” have been used interchangeably through out this study. While it is understood that both these terms literally don’t mean the same: there are numerous studies such as; Medina (2012) and Kanwar, et al., (2012), where employee turnover intent and employee turnover have been used in the same way. Despite there being research such as Cohen, et al., (2015), which proves contrary to the statement made above. One may argue by saying employee turnover intent is an immediate sign of employees actually leaving. As Lambert, et al., (2001) state measuring turnover intention is the next best method, because it is the variable that consistently and immediately precedes actual employee turnover.

Evolution of Operator Services in today’s Call Centres (Discussion of few Call Centre Production Models)

With progress being made in the field of information technologies and marketing techniques, there has been advancement in the way services are delivered to customers over the last decade. While delivery of services during the bygone days was de-centralized and workers

from local labour markets were used to render these services, revolution in the field of information systems and marketing techniques have made numerous organisations use call centres as a means of disseminating remote servicing through technology, while maintaining centralized control (Rosemary & Moynihan, 2002). This part of the literature is to help identify the HR model used in most call centres.

The earliest model of production in call centres is the mass production model, where the goal is to increase production volumes and in turn decrease costs (Hounshell, 1985). To achieve that goal, organisations combined the use of automation through technology and a hierarchal organisation set up to maintain production, commonly referred to as ‘Taylorism’ (Bain, et al., 2002). In such firms, technology is used to automate the firm’s daily activities where possible. In other words technology is used to replace labour; and is seen as a cost to be minimized. Jobs in such firms are designed with reference to the principles devised by F.W Taylor or simply referred to as “principles of Taylorism”, where jobs are classified based on the specific task at hand and time and motion studies are used as a means of standardising work. Organisations which use such Taylorist principles aim to minimise the need of labour to have skills or discretion; and sets a standard time to complete a job. Learning is limited to repetition to make easy tasks more efficient; “practice makes perfect”. Such firms utilise human resource practices to induce effort by employees, based on fear of job loss and/or piece rate pay systems or in call centres, individual commission pay. This approach ignores the human element of workers and instead treats workers as replaceable parts.

However the use of mass production model in the services industry has remained uneven for two main reasons: first being the immaterial nature of services, which limits the use of mechanization and secondly continuous interactions with variables outside of the production

process, such as the consumer, who is not under the control of management. In clerical work, for example, machine pacing was not possible, but the application of Taylorist principles was effective in creating clerical typing pools with efficient, standardized output. In customer-contact work, however, variation in consumer preferences introduces uncertainty into the production process. As a result, service managers also use work rules and norms to standardize work behaviours. This has been referred to as “Routinization” by Leidner, (1993). Therefore it can be said that in order to streamline service production, firms have often relied less on the use of technology and more on the use of Taylorist principles and Routinization of employee behaviour at work.

Call centres, however, represent an exceptional case in which automation has spread into customer-contact work. For the purpose of understanding today’s call centres, an instructive case is the evolution of operator services in the large telephone companies such as AT&T and British Telecom. A hundred years ago, operator service jobs were considered high skilled jobs in the telephone industry. The natures of jobs were complex, requiring manual switching of cords, great amount of social interaction and also investigation of faulty telephone circuits. From 1900 onwards, AT&T adopted Taylorist principles to standardize work methods. It also developed personnel policies to control work behaviour, including the recruitment of white middle class women with a diploma or high school degree because they matched the characteristics of the middle and upper-class people who could afford telephones. Selection procedures required women to pass extensive entrance examinations; training covered rules of behaviour, speaking, and scripts; and intensive monitoring and discipline was reflected in the ratio of supervisors to workers, which was typically 1:6 (Schacht, 1985). From the 1920s on, however, the company began to mechanize operations, fragmenting 4 of once varied jobs. Mechanical switching made it possible for customers to dial their own local calls by the 1920s, and long distance calls by the 1950s. In the 1970s,

digital systems further eliminated operator work by letting customers use credit cards to direct dial long distance calls. Each new technological advance eliminated large numbers of operator jobs, while reducing the variety and complexity of the remaining jobs: eliminating the physical side of the job, reducing the types of calls, and eliminating the diagnostic work (Kohl, 1993). In the 1980s and 1990s, job fragmentation and displacement continued through the use of automated response and voice recognition systems (Kohl, 1993). In 2000, the typical telephone operator handles 1000 calls per day, a job cycle time of about 21 seconds per call, significantly lower than the average 60 second job cycle time of auto assembly workers. AT&T's mechanization strategy produced dramatic improvements in productivity, with operators constituting 60 percent of the telephone workforce in 1920, 44 percent in 1950, 14 percent in 1980 and 4 percent in 1996. Automation spread to back office jobs (clerical, data processing) over the course of the last century, but most customer contact operations resisted rationalization because of the variety and uncertainty introduced by the consumer.

Research in operations management in the 1960s and 1970s attempted to solve that problem by limiting customer variation through standardized options (Levitt, 1972) and (Chase, 1978) for instance, in fast food or retail sales operations (Leidner, 1993). Telephone operator call centres provide a model of efficiency that managers in today's diverse call centres seek to emulate. The goal is to apply industrial engineering techniques to more complex service and sales interactions in order to increase volumes and reduce call handling time. The dramatic spread of call centres over the last decade or so has occurred because of advances in front-office automation. Automatic call distribution and routing systems, voice recognition systems, and other innovations made it possible to consolidate local service and sales centres into remote, centralized distribution channels serving much wider geographic areas. Large centres achieve scale economies through greater labour flexibility and by spreading call loads

over larger numbers of workers. Although numerous authors such as (Leidner (1993), Santhanalakshmi, et al.,(2014) and Hobfoll & Shirom, (2001)) seem to bring out excessively negative aspects of call centers that make use of the mass production model, there are other authors such as (Ohly et al., (2006), Samani, et al., (2014) and Chong, et al., (2011)), who in their research have presented a lot of positive aspects as to how the mass production model instead of being a hinderance does promote employee creativity. This as a result also promotes job satisfaction (Shalley, et al., 2000). However, the reality of the situation is very different as management approach in call centres is predominately concerned with operational measures; one could say it is a production-line approach targeted towards efficiency . This is supported by research that reveals that although call centres monitor customer satisfaction and quality to varying degrees, they all rely heavily on task-focused management and measurement systems, which include performance objectives weighted towards numerical quotas and targets for efficiency and speed (Marr & Neely, 2004).

It is important to note that this research is to measure job satisfaction in terms of work-life balance. Work-life balance being the sole variable used to verify levels of employee satisfaction. Point in case being that it has not yet clearly been determined as to whether employees working in an organisation that employs the use of a mass production model, would show positive or negative satisfaction towards their job in terms of work-life balance.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is the professional service model, with the goal of providing quality service. In order to achieve this, technology is used as a complement to labour, the formal education and specialized skills of employees are very high, the design of work builds on the independent discretion of professional employees who collaborate as needed with other specialists to provide service and who are rewarded with high relative pay, benefits, and employment security. The professional model -- exemplified by lawyers, health care professionals, and others -- is based on the idea of building long term personal

relationships of trust between professionals and their clients, what management theorists refer to as relationship management (Gutek, 1995). Clients are willing to pay a price premium for quality, customized services. Variations of this model now cover a much wider range of service occupations, for example, high tech specialties and business Services. Recent interpretations of this model reject the idea of the individual professional working alone in favour of the idea that professional service depends on, and is embedded in, communities of practice – informal relationships between professionals that serve as a basis for learning, problem solving, and sharing of contextually specific implied knowledge (Brown & Duguid, 1991). In the context of customer service and sales operations, the professional model would include the use of college-educated account executives, who are dedicated representatives serving particular business clients. They provide high quality services through a combination of high general skills (formal education) coupled with firm specific skills (their deep tacit knowledge of the firm's products, work processes, and customer characteristics). They provide a complete range of services and generally draw on other teams of experts in their company to meet customers' demands. Thus, firm specific social capital is also valuable, which is defined by the personal relationships of trust among professionals in the firm and between professionals and their clients. Well known examples of organisations following this model are companies like Google and Facebook. Google for instance generates income by helping its clients advertise their products and services over the web in an effective way (Google, 2015). Customer support in Google is provided to publishers, who are their main clients. Even customer service jobs at Google require employees to have high educational credentials as can be confirmed from their job descriptions. The fact that relationships with customers are increasingly "multi-channel" (ability to use several different media to reach customers, such as mailings, online web-sites, "chats", and now emails or social networking: Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Viadeo, entails that the "call centres" are more and more called

"contact centres", and the activity could be named "customer relationship management" (Gallais, Gac & Insee, 2014). The competitive performance advantage for firms that adopt the professional model is that their services are valuable, rare, and hard to imitate (Barney, 1995). The longer a client stays with one provider, the more difficult it is to shift to another provider not only because of personal relations of trust, but because of the wide variety and complexity of services that are provided and the negotiating power and flexibility that come from long term relations.

Mass customization models between the mass production and professional service models are various hybrid models that may be generally classified as mass customization. The goal is to compete on quality and customization as well as price. To do so, firms would adopt some level of automation and process re-engineering found in mass production models coupled with some level of attention to service quality and customer loyalty found in the professional model. This approach may be a bit more economically viable than a classic mass production model because consumers in today's mass markets demand quality, customization, and innovation as well as reasonable prices (Pine, 1993). It is reasonable, then, to examine whether they produce better performance in call centres, which typically have been designed along a classic mass production model. If companies compete on the basis of quality, customization, and price, then call centre workers need the skills, discretion, and incentives to handle relatively complex interactions with customers. Although this part of the literature gives a summary of the various HR models an organisation can employ for the purpose of handling its human resources, it only gives reasons as to what advantages and dis-advantages each model poses for the organisation itself. The type of model being put to use doesn't in any way help gauge employee satisfaction levels. Even less so when trying to measure employee satisfactions levels in terms of the work-life balance, facilitated by the HR practices adopted by the company. The following literature will help highlight which

variables, when measured, would help illuminate employee satisfaction levels in terms of work life balance.

Organisational Flexibility in terms of use of labour in Call Centres

According to the model of flexibility by John Atkinson 1984 (see appendix 1), organisational flexibility may be divided into three categories of workers, namely: core workers, peripheral workers and subcontracted workers. Central to all these categories of workers is functional and numerical flexibility. Functional flexibility is a resourcing option through which organisations may use their core workers to perform tasks across various functions within the organisation or even take up those tasks that would normally be performed by a senior staff member. While on the other hand, numerical flexibility involves the use of resourcing options such as part-time employment, temporary contracts and subcontracting, in order to deploy workers where they are needed and when they are needed. According to the literature on organisational flexibility, a firm's work force may be deployed to perform various tasks as per the requirements of the organisations. This would help the firm to maintain a competitive advantage by adapting to changing business needs (Lynch, 1989). For instance, core workers, who are comprised of the full time and permanent staff of an organisation, as per the company's requirement, may be asked to perform various jobs across the board, this means that workers are required to be multi skilled, so that they may be deployed as and when and wherever they are required. Such type of flexibility is termed as "horizontal flexibility" (Taylor, 2010).

Outsourcing appears on the outer most circle of Atkinson's Model (1984). It refers to the process through which a firm hires a third party organisation to perform work that was earlier performed by the firm itself. This brings about numerous advantages for the organisation in

the form of reduction of costs and shifts their focus from unimportant activities (Liner, et al., 2002). Outsourcing as a means of achieving organisational flexibility is the main reason behind the creation of call centres. Such organisations have proved to be a great boon to organisations as they help increase cost savings and also promote efficiency, by helping organisations focus on their other core activities (Chou, et al., 2015). This advantage though is only from the point of view of the organisation outsourcing its work.

On the other hand, call centres are referred to as 'electronic sweat shops' and its employees as "battery hens" illustrated by the intense and stressful nature of their jobs (Santhanalakshmi, et al., 2014). Monotony, odd working hours and high levels of stress are a major concern for these organisations, as they decrease performance level of employees and also greatly increase turnover rates (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001). This paints an extremely bleak view of the job satisfaction levels of employees that form the highly flexible workforce of these call centres. While these are the working conditions described in such organisations, it is important to note that most research done on work-life balance of employees is based on either professional workers or managers (Dex & Bond, 2005). The literature available on employee turnover in call centres mainly focuses on employee job satisfaction as a whole. Meaning that most studies look at flexibility, monetary and non-monetary benefits, Training and Development and other such variables put together to be the determinants of employee satisfaction. While this view is true and also applies to all call centres, it is important to understand that for frontline employees' options such promotions and advancements are much fewer as compared to other employees in managerial positions within the organisation (Desai, (2010), Chung, et al., (2012)). Call centres have also been known to adapt their employees to the systems used by the company, instead of using technology to complement employee efforts (Human Resource Management International Digest, 2006). This is consistent with what Rosemary & Moynihan, (2002) said, about firms often relying less on

the use of technology and more on the use of Taylorist principles and Routinization of employee behaviour at work. In essence, most frontline employees who strive to deliver effective and efficient service do so through personal commitment (Wallace, Eagleson & Waldersee., 2000). Therefore one may clearly infer that it's not so much due to managerial intervention but due to personal efforts of an employee, that a call centre is able render a high level of customer service. Hence, it is at times taken for granted that employees are expected to maintain their personal commitment in order to meet organisational goals, without any decrease in levels of such personal commitment. Wallace, et al., (2000), in their research have termed this as the "sacrificial HR strategy".

Although the above mentioned literature seems to paint a very bleak picture of the conditions of employees in call centres, it is important to note that call centres have also provided jobs for a large number of people in the past few years, as new and improved telecommunication systems have made it possible for firms to address after sales customer issues more effectively (Batt, et al., 2004). Therefore requiring skilled labour to man jobs that use various systems to address issues ranging from billing to account management and dealing with problems related to products or services (Pontes & Kelly, 2000). This has been a great boon for countries such as India and the Philippines, where there is an abundance of educated and skilled English speaking labourers (Mukherjee & Maheshwar, 2014). Such call centers have provided a lot of job opportunities to a number of jobs in these vastly populated economies. It is important to note that the use of offshore outsourcing is obviously very different from one country to another, and depends on the ability to find operators abroad who have a good knowledge of the customer's language. For instance it may be possible possible for France (in the Senegal), but less possible in Germany, where offshore market is consequently very weak (Gallais, et al., 2014).

However, in Asian economies due to the sheer number of workers available to recruit from, call centres seem to pay less emphasis on retention of employees (Wallace, et al., 2000), as the pool of workers to recruit from is very large as compared to European and American labour markets. Hence such HR strategies and practices may prove to be effective in such economies due to the labour markets being loose in nature. Further more factors such as change in demographics of labour markets, quality of education in Asian Universities and also the changing role of women in the Asian labour market greatly affects the quality of workers available to recruit from (Hugo, 2008). For instance, Mukherjee & Maheshwar, (2014) also provide some perspective on the qualities of workers that form the labour markets in India. In their research they mention that nearly two million English speaking graduates are ready to work at up to 80 percent less salary than their western counterparts. The author Kobayashi-Hillary, (2005), in his book also mentions that India consists of a large talent pool of low cost English-speaking people which remains one of the most important advantages for its call centre industry. Another instance of such an economy would be the Philippines; Hechanova, (2013) says that the preference for the Philippines as a country for development of call centres can be attributed to the presence of a large pool of computer-literate college graduates with American English communication skills. However as compared to the HR strategies and practices used in India, call centres in the Philippines lure workers with high wages and financial incentives. Call centre workers earn more than double the legislated minimum wage.

The demographic and cultural trend of workers in the European and American labour markets is completely different as compared to their Asian counterparts. The latest news about the US labour markets states that a steady decrease in the number of jobless has resulted in the tightening of the labour markets (Euronews, 2015). Tight labour markets are where the jobs available are more than the number of workers available to fill these job openings, therefore

requiring companies to adopt HR strategies and practices that focus on employee retention. In Europe on the other hand, real earnings of the low-paid have generally been maintained, and have often increased. Wage flexibility comparable to the USA, it is argued, cannot be achieved in Europe, due to pervasive collective bargaining, minimum wage laws, and other forms of regulation. The consequence has been that employment growth has been restricted, and unemployment has risen substantially. However, the living standards of lower-paid workers in employment have been protected (Gregory, 2000). The most important development, thanks to unionization, has been an end to the arbitrary punishments and firings that marked the call centre, something that occurred soon after workers balloted for industrial action as the first step toward a strike (Brophy, 2010). A recent survey conducted by EY, (2013) reveals further trends of outsourcing in eight European countries, namely Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Finland, Norway, Netherlands and United Kingdom. It has been found that cost efficiency is still the main driver behind outsourcing. Cost reduction, quality and efficiency are the main objectives while outsourcing. In their survey it was found that organisations in Finland, Spain and the UK outsource services to external service providers more often than other countries. Among all other processes IT services in the automotive and telecommunications industry are the most outsourced. One may say that compared to the Asian labour markets: European labour markets display a much safer working environment for its employees in terms of legislation and protection of employees at work; jobs at call centres in Europe are much more stable.

Work Life Balance and its implications on Male and Female Workers

The concept of work-life balance began with the study of the reasons behind high employee turnover rates and the causes of stress for employees in the work place. The generally accepted definition of stress is the psychological and physical state that results when the resources of the individual are not sufficient to cope with the demands and pressures of the

situation (Michie, 2002). Though it is said that a certain amount of stress is good, as it stimulates people towards better performance (Irish Health 2014), this however, only happens when stress levels are manageable. High levels of stress cause burnout. Some of the effects of burnout are emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment, decreased enthusiasm about work, hopelessness (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001). Among the various factors that cause work related stress, long hours worked, work overload and pressure, and the effects of these on the personal lives of workers, are considered to be the main reasons (Michie, 2002). This also describes the working conditions prevalent at BPO firms (Santhanalakshmi, et al., 2014). This consequently are forcing organisations to take on initiatives that promote work-life balance for their employees, in order to decrease levels of stress.

Though initially the concept of work-life balance started as a means of decreasing stress levels in employees by helping them strike a balance between their work related obligations and personal commitments. Organisations these days use it as a means of attracting new and retaining existing employees. Organisations these days attract employees by incorporating leisure activities and facilities, in addition to providing flexible working arrangements that are said to support an effective work-life balance (Land & Taylor, 2010). Google, Facebook and Microsoft are examples of some such companies. As a result companies achieve utility through more intrinsic personal satisfaction of individual employees, who are motivated by subjective desires (Ransome, 2007). This supports the fact that organisations have made attempts to capitalize on the different values of workers from different generations, as well as employees on the two different sides of the gender spectrum. It is important to note that the organisations named and described above provide more of a customer contact relationship Service; rather than the traditional customer service job produced by the mass production model. To reiterate, the mass production model as compared to the mass customization

model is much more task focused and performance oriented (Rosemary & Moynihan, 2002; Santhanalakshmi, et al., 2014; Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001).

Another factor that is important to understand is that there is a difference between the physical and psychological needs of men and women. It is true that in most studies both men and women think of themselves as pragmatic workers (Emslie & Hunt, 2009). However, there are significant differences between the ways in which women and men perceive work-life balance. For instance, it has been found that women tend to think of flexible work timings in terms of balancing their priorities at home and at work, whereas men think of flexible work timings in terms of increasing their organisational commitment (Hofäcker & König, 2013). Another instance of difference in perception of work life balance between men and woman is discussed in (Emslie & Hunt, 2009), wherein, female workers (those who did not have any young children at home) discussed the various duties and responsibilities they need to juggle within their current lives, while male workers (in the same conditions as their female counterparts) confined these discussions to the past, when their children were young. A woman's expectations and responsibilities never ends throughout their work life. It can therefore be said that satisfaction levels with regard work-life balance may vary significantly, between men and women.

A Brief Review of the Characteristics/Values of Workers of different Generations

Baby Boomers consists of people born after the end of world war II between the years 1946 – 1964. One of the main reasons that were attributed to the sudden growth in birth rates was the desire for normalcy after 16 years of depression and war. They form a large part of the present working population, as there was a steep rise in the number of births during those

years, therefore creating a large pool of workers for the later years (A+E Network Corp., 2014). As stated in Appelbaum, et al., (2005), workers from this generation believed in a stable future throughout their working lives until retirement. In addition, the generation consisted of a struggling generation not used to the comforts of life as the new generation. They were minimalists so to say, happy and contented with the minimum they had and they did not aspire for more. It is also important to note that though a large pool of workers from this generation approach their retirement age, not all of them plan to retire. Financial obligations after retirement and the urge to pursue personal interests are among the few reasons behind why a great many workers from this segment have decided not to retire (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2006). In light of the articles above statements it can be said that work is the primary concern of workers belonging to this generation.

The next generation of workers following Baby Boomers, are termed as Generation X. Generation X consists of all those people born between the years 1964 – 1971. One of the main factors that affected the work ethics of this generation is the prevalent economic conditions during those times. That is to say, it was a period of downsizing, restructuring and reengineering (Tulgan, 1997). This meant entering the work force with a frame of reference that did not include job security, pensions and the traditional career model (Jurkiewicz, 2000). As Jurkiewicz(2000) says, starting a career in such conditions has made these workers fiercely independent. Having seen the loyalty of previous generations to their employers, being rewarded with down-sizing, layoffs, and dis- missals, this conception seems well supported. Therefore these workers prefer to manage as much of their own time as possible and do not normally believe in long term relations with institutions (Tulgan, 1997). They prefer focusing on short term relations which would bring faster returns and give them more time to spend on other activities.

The generation succeeding the workers of Generation X have been called Generation Y, by numerous authors. The time period that consists of these workers is between the years 1977-1982, to ending dates from 1994-2003 (Shih & Allen, 2007). Similar to generation X workers, Generation Y workers are also extremely independent and in addition to that, they also demand the freedom and flexibility to get the task done in their own way, at their own pace (Martin, 2005). The significance of this generation of workers is in the fact that this generation is the most influential generation, at least in terms of size and number, since the Baby Boomers (Shih & Allen, 2007).

Though the values and work ethics of workers from different generations may vary, one common desire that these entire workers share is the need and want for a good work life balance, this has been highlighted by numerous authors such as Sheahan, (2005), Kane, (2013) and Pasamar & Cabrera, (2013).

Flexible Working and other Work life Balance initiatives, as means of achieving Organisational Goals in BPO firms/Call centres

Flexible working is one of the work-life balance initiatives, along with leave and time off, child care facilities, health and well-being. Flexible working was initially designed as a way of addressing the needs of female and noncore workers (Kossek & Michel, 2010). The same can be seen in John Atkinson's model 1984, 'Flexible Firm' (see appendix 1). This was the old notion of flexible working. Technology has played a big role in the way organisations utilize flexible working in the present times. New innovations such as high speed internet and mobile telecommunications have increased the rate at which information can be transferred from one place to another, this has helped organisations to provide their customers with better

products and services, through improved service levels and reducing logistics costs (Lancioni, et al., 2000). Another result of this rapid development in technology is that companies are now also able to provide customer services 24 hours 7 days a week (Lancioni, et al., 2000) globally. Olmsted and Smith (1997), who have written several successful books on workplace flexibility, have come out with two definitions for workplace flexibility. The first definition is from an employer's perspective, which is:- "Flexibility is the ability of an organisation to adapt to various economic changes: expanding, contracting and reallocating labour as needed and improving services, in order to become more competitive, by increasing productivity and reducing costs." . The second definition is from an employee's point of view, which is:- "Flexibility means being able to adjust work time or workplace when personal needs are in conflict with their current schedule; being able to alter starting and quitting times occasionally; reducing paid work time for a while, so that they can attend to their studies, start a family or recover from burnout; attend non work related functions without being penalised." (Avery & Zabel, 2001). Therefore it can be said that flexible working is an important tool for both employees and organisations, as it helps organisations plan for the future, maintain efficiency levels and provide 24/7 customer services. It also caters for individual goals of employees; this can involve both personal, as well as work related goals. It has been found that the often heavily task-focused control systems require call centres to pursue supportive supervision in order to avoid employee burnout. In light of the statements above and those by (Rosemary & Moynihan, (2002); Santhanalakshmi, et al., (2014); Hobfoll & Shirom, (2001)) in the earlier part of the literature: one can say that due to the advantages in technology, service levels have significantly decreased and customers are provided with a variety of other services; however pressures on employees have increased in order to meet these high levels of service. To support this, research from Ireland suggests that

call centres would gain significant benefits by using a proactive and supportive managerial approach that incorporates empowerment (Marr & Neely, 2004).

There have also been various legislative measures set out by statutory bodies, for organisations to follow. These legislations were put into place for the purpose of helping employees achieve work-life balance. For instance in the UK a lightly regulated approach to help employees balance their work and domestic commitments. This approach has been welcomed by employers and they and the government also consider them to be successful (Hyman & Summers, 2004). It has been found that Irish call centre workers have seen an end to the arbitrary punishments and firings that marked the call centre (Brophy, 2010). This statement isn't entirely true as Hyman & Summers, (2004) in their research have identified seven points that serve as proof that this legislation has not improved work life balance. The first problem concerns unevenness of adoption across different sectors and organisations. The second is a lack of formalisation of policies at organisational level, with largely untrained line managers having discretion over policy application. Third, there is restricted employee voice over the introduction and implementation of policies. Fourth, policies are introduced primarily to meet business needs, rather than those of employees. Fifth, there is no evidence of reductions in working hours. Sixth, tangible and intangible work intrusions into domestic life have been identified. Finally, domestic responsibilities are still conducted primarily by women irrespective of their employment status.

Review of Research done on Employee satisfaction in Call centres, in the European and Irish context

To begin with it is important to note that there have been numerous research papers written on employee satisfaction in Europe. For instance, Bauer, (2004) gives evidence of high levels of employee satisfaction in High Performance Workplace Organizations (HPWOs). Research

done on the pharmacy profession in Northern Ireland by McCann, et al., (2009), suggests that stress levels among pharmacists are high and could prove to be dangerous for both, the pharmacists and their patients as well. Similar research done on nurses in the Republic of Ireland by Curtis, (2007) suggests low to moderate satisfaction levels of employees working in this industry. Byrne, et al., (2013), in their study of employee satisfaction in terms of burn out experienced among accounting and finance academics in Ireland, it was found that with regard to emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation but encounter a high degree of burnout with regard to personal accomplishment. A more recent study on employee satisfaction in Europe conducted by O'Shea, et al., (2014) on employees belonging to various organisations has revealed higher job satisfaction for those with a strong organizational mobility preference. Skill specialization was related to lower job satisfaction for those with a weak organizational mobility preference. Autonomy and skill specialization were positively related to career satisfaction for those who held a strong self-directed career attitude. While these research papers provide a generalized view of employee satisfaction levels of employees belonging to various industries, such generalizations may not provide a true picture of employee satisfaction levels in call centre employees. One of the main reasons behind this would be the nature of the work performed and the organisational set up of call centres. The research being done in this study is aimed at providing some insight and data about, employee satisfaction in terms of work-life balance, of workers in a call centre in Ireland.

Brophy, (2010) in her article states that during the first decade in the 21st Century one out of three jobs available in Ireland and the Netherlands was a call center job. The cost prices mentioned in the research done by (Gallais, et al., 2014), even though not conclusive, show that it is cheaper for companies in countries like France to outsource jobs offshore. There has been a great increase in out sourcing, due to the willingness of companies to refocus their

activities on their core business and the cost difference can be very significant: about 70 € per hour for an internal employee as against 25-28 € in an outsourced call centre, 15 € in a call centre located in the Maghreb and 10 € in Senegal. Using this as evidence and further support from the statements made by Hugo, (2008) Hechanova, (2013) and Kobayashi-Hillary, (2005), we can draw upon the conclusion that call center employees in Europe earn more and get far better benefits than their counter parts in Asian countries. Therefore tipping the balance of arguments in favour of the fact that as far as employee satisfaction levels in monetary terms is concerned, levels of employee satisfaction would be much greater in European countries like France, Germany and UK. In the research conducted by Marr & Neely, (2004), it has been found that call centers would benefit from using a proactive and supportive managerial approach that incorporates empowerment, however, they also state that in reality management mostly still focus on production and performance measures, instead of using a supportive managerial approach. Brophy, (2010) in his article mentions a conflict of call center employees and their employer. Such incidents can be taken as indicators of low satisfaction levels of employees working in call centres in Ireland. The literature discussed above adds counter weight to the generalized views that employees show low-moderate satisfaction levels, as presented in the literature discussed earlier, especially in call centres.

Conclusion

In light of the literature review above, having a flexible workforce is of great significance in order to achieve organisational flexibility. However, in order for a workforce to be flexible, employees are required to take up jobs as per organisation's requirements. These conditions may not always suit the needs of all the employees. Reasons may be attributed to personal health, to family commitments, odd working hours and traveling distances. Due to the nature

of the services offered by BPO firms and 24 hour Service levels, employees are required by the Organisations to work at odd times and sometimes for extended hours than they normally would. Such working conditions often lead to high levels of stress and also put great strain on their personal lives.

Research aim and objectives

Introduction

The aim of this research is to establish a clear relationship between Employee turnover intent (commitment) and Work-life Balance. The researcher believes that this may be achieved by: comparing the satisfaction levels of employees in terms of Work-life Balance based on age and gender, to Employee Turnover intention levels based on age and gender in the Customer Services Department of Call Centre D.

Sub-objective 1

To calculate present levels of Employee Turnover intention in the Customer Service Department of the Call Centre, for measuring present levels of employee commitment.

Sub-objective 2

To measure the Satisfaction levels of Male and Female Employees, with regard to Work-life Balance, after working in the Call Centre.

Sub-objective 3

To measure the satisfaction levels of Employees of different generations (in other words age), with regard to Work-life Balance, after working in the Call Centre.

Sub-objective 4

To gather employees views regarding Flexible working in order to have an Employee's perspective of work-life balance at present and also to find out their expectations.

The researcher hypothesizes that an organisation can induce commitment in its employees by focusing on employee work-life balance satisfaction levels, based on age and gender.

I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

Philippians 4:13

An organisation has been defined as an independent body with respect to the law. Since an employee as an independent person spends the bulk of his time working for an Organisation. The organisation provides its employees with instructions and various means of carrying out those instructions, in essence empowering the employee to perform the job. The hypothesis arrived at by the researcher is in light of the Bible proverb mentioned above and the statement made by Wallace, et al., (2000), that since most frontline employees who strive to deliver effective and efficient service do so through personal commitment. This as a result would help the organisation achieve greater employee commitment, through more intrinsic personal satisfaction of individual employees.

Research in most of the articles and journals published focus on the either professionals or managers in an organisation (Dex & Bond, 2005). Therefore the aim of this research is focused on employees working generic customer service jobs, offered by most call centres. One may say that generic is too broad a word, but various reports and surveys such as Gallais, Alain; Gac, Denis; Insee, France, (2014) and the survey by EY, (2013) confirm that Customer Services cover: activities such as Case Tracking, Subscription Change, Customer Account Modifications, Change of Address etc; which are offered in organisations from various industries.

As per the literature, BPO firms are the most infamous when it comes to high rates of employee turnover and are also extremely flexible in terms of using their labour. Therefore this research will be carried out on employees working in such an organisation. The Ultimate

aim of this research is to confirm if the high rates of turnover in the organisation could be attributed to employee satisfaction in terms of work-life balance. This will shed light on the current satisfaction levels of employees who are part of a highly flexible workforce, about their jobs in terms of Work-life Balance and the significance of Work-life Balance when talking about employee turnover in today's turbulent economic environment.

Significance

The research is to help the researcher understand how significant work-life balance is for an organisation to be flexible. A major part of research done on work-life balance is focused mainly on: professionals and other organisations which render professional services; and how they tackle issues related to work-life balance. On the other hand, Call centres demand great amount of flexibility and a high standard of performance from its employees. Therefore placing high pressure on employees to meet these performance goals. Customer services are an auxiliary service rendered by organisations to help improve customer satisfaction levels regarding the organisations products or services.

It is important to note that one of the most typical characteristics of mass produced services and products is the lack of customization. Therefore adding pressure on employees to increase customer satisfaction levels through their own efforts within the limits set by the terms and conditions of services rendered or products sold. All of this requires a great deal of personal commitment from employees. Work-life balance has proven to be a good way of predicting employee commitment towards an organisations goals and objectives. The researcher hopes to create a link between employee commitment and organisational flexibility in a call centre by linking satisfaction in terms of work-life balance and employee turnover. Which the researcher hopes to illuminate ways through which a firm may organise

its labour in such a way that it helps improve work-life balance, resulting in high organisational commitment among its employees.

Research Methodology

Introduction

The ultimate aim of this research is to determine if satisfaction levels of employees regarding work-life balance was improved based on their age and gender, their intentions to leave the job as per the current degree of work-life balance provided by the job would also decrease.

The purpose of this section is to provide some perspective on the various steps followed by the researcher, for the purpose of answering answer his research question, aims and objectives. To begin with, it was deemed important to determine what kind of data was required to answer the research questions and how this data is to be collected.

This part of the research is to draw up a framework of the research methodology and design followed by the researcher. This includes the philosophy followed by the researcher, the type of data to be collected and how this data is to be collected. The rationale behind the researcher selecting the means of data collection have also been mentioned. A few alternative means of data collection and research limitations have also been discussed.

Research Philosophy

According to all the literature mentioned above so far, it has been made clear that Work-life Balance is an important factor when measuring employee satisfaction. Also, jobs usually associated to having poor work-life balance are often associated to a high rate of employee turnover. A research philosophy determines the thought process followed by a researcher. Various authors such as Saunders, et al., (2009) and Quinlan, (2011), have out lined three major ways of thinking, namely epistemology, ontology and axiology. Ontology considers the nature of reality while epistemology considers what comprises acceptable knowledge in a

field of study (Saunders, et al., 2009). The researcher for the purpose of this research has adopted the philosophy of positivism in order to justify the aims and objectives of this research. This is supported by authors such as Orlikowski & Baroudi, (1991), who determined positivism to be the most appropriate research philosophy to be followed when doing research related to information systems. While there are numerous authors such as (Ågerfalk, (2010); G, (2008)), who suggest the use of a pragmatic research philosophy for these types of studies. It is important to understand that pragmatism involves the use of both qualitative and quantitative insights. Since this research only uses a survey as a means of collecting data, with only a single openended question for collection of qualitative insights. Most of the data collected is quantitative in nature. The researcher has reserved himself to the use of the positivist philosophy.

Research approach and strategy

In order to determine the research methodology and design to be employed for this research, the research has followed the research onion as devised by Saunders, et al., (2009) (see appendix 2 for diagram of “research onion”. According to the research onion, the next step in research methodology is to determine the research approach that the researcher is to take of when conducting his research. The onion names two main approaches namely deductive and inductive approaches. While Saunders, et al., (2009), place the deductive and inductive approaches under positivist and interpretivist philosophies. Authors such as Hyde, (2000); (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) have argued that both these approaches could work together mutually to the benefit of the researcher. However, for the purpose of this research, the researcher deems the deductive approach as most suitable. Since the data collected would

help the researcher verify or discredit what has been hypothesised in the research aims and objectives as mentioned earlier.

In order to conclude this research employee job satisfaction related data is required to be collected. Since the deductive approach is what the researcher has reserved to, according to the research onion, the most appropriate strategies to be used in such instances are experiments and surveys. While there is a varied view among authors as to which strategy is best suited for the type of research being conducted, the researcher in this case has selected the use of surveys. Again, it is important to note that a lot of journals emphasize that it's best if a researcher uses a singular research strategy, encouraging purity of method. However, there have also been numerous researchers who have successfully used different approaches which are both qualitative and quantitative to complement their research (Gable, 1994). Another important point to be noted was that the researcher was not granted official permission to conduct the research during working hours. This made it difficult conduct interviews and focus groups as the employees were required to take time out of their out of work hours to take part; and were mostly unwilling. Therefore, data for this research has been collected by means of a survey, done by distributing a questionnaire. The researcher has designed questionnaire in such a way so as to collect data in-order to measure employee satisfaction in terms of work-life balance and employee turnover intention. The questionnaire was administered to all the employees working in the customer services department of the call centre being researched.

Questionnaire design and distribution

Research done by Dex & Bond, (2005), employed the use of a Checkscale 10, where there were three responses to all the questions . This questionnaire was originally employed by

Daniels & McCarraher, (2000), after which Dex & Bond, (2005) re-employed for the purpose of their research. This gives credibility to the for its in further researches. Out of all the 10 questions, questions 2,7 and 8 apply to only those who have a partner or are part of a family, ie, those who aren't living alone. While it is understandable that a lot of employees, at present, might be living alone. An average score was given to the employees who didn't answer these questions, similar to what the authors who employed this questionnaire had done. This questionnaire was already used their survey, to collect data from various industries ranging from organisations that provided financial services to tele-communications. Therefore making it suitable to use in this research as well, since customer services form a crucial part of organisations in these industries (Rosemary & Moynihan, (2002): Gallais, Alain; Gac, Denis; Insee, France, (2014): EY, (2013)). See appendix 3 for the questionnaire. These questions are designed to reflect an employee's thoughts with regard to work-life balance. Table 4 (see appendix 4) shows how to interpret a participant's response to these questions.

For the purpose of measuring employee turnover intent, the questionnaire has also incorporated a few other questions used Paré & Tremblay, (2000), in their questionnaire to measure employee turnover intention among IT professionals in Montreal, Canada. Their questionnaire contained numerous questions about various aspects of the jobs in the organisation. However, for the purpose of this research, only those questions regarding worklife policies in the company are what have been used in the questionnaire circulated (see appendix 2). This was done to prevent employees' views regarding work-life balance being influenced by any other questions related to other factors used to determine employee satisfaction, such as salary, recognition practices, information sharing practices etc. As suggested by Huberman & Miles, (2002), qualitative research methods allow you to understand "the rationale or theory of underlying relationships revealed in the quantitative

data”, quantitative methods “identify relationships which may not have been salient already. Question 18 in the questionnaire was added as an open ended question in order to gather employee views regarding work-life balance at their present job. To reiterate, questions 1 – 10 were to measure employee satisfaction regarding work-life balance and questions 11 – 17 were to measure employee turnover intention (see appendix 2 for Questionnaire).

To begin with all the employees to be researched were invited to be part of the research through email. After the researcher received their approval, the questionnaire was sent out to those employees through email. The email contained a link, which when clicked on took participants onto an online survey page. Questionnaires were distributed to all the employees, to be completed and returned within a stipulated time period. Once all responses were received the data was collected from and sorted onto an MS Excel file and saved onto a cloud drive which was username and password protected.

Population, Sample size and Sampling techniques

Population has been defined by Bryman & Bell, (2011) as “universe of units from which the sample is to be selected”. As per the researcher, the entire population for the purpose of this research would be all those frontline employees working in call centres across the world, excluding those in managerial or administrative roles.

Sample size is basically the portion of the population on whom the research is about to be conducted. The sample size for the purpose of this research consists of employees working in the customer service department of a call centre based in Dublin. The participating employees include both male and female workers, and also workers belonging to different age groups (for the purpose of this research divided into “generations”). The sample was obtained by way of making an informal invitation to the employees during their lunch breaks.

(Saunders, et al., 2009) say that a minimum of 30 responses is enough to gather data for the purpose of analysis. Sampling techniques have been broadly classified into two categories namely, probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Non-probability sampling was best suited for this research. As the researcher was able to contact almost all the employees in the customer services department of the call centre, which totalled to a sample size of 43 employees. (Saunders, et al., 2009) state that non-probability sampling provides the researcher with a range of different techniques to choose samples centred on subjective data. The researcher reserved himself to the use of convenience sampling in this research, as not all the departments of the call centre were open for the purpose of this research. Furthermore, due to time, manpower and financial constraints the entire population also could not be fitted into this research.

Research procedure

A correlation was made between the data received through the questionnaires and the respective turnover rates of the department. This will reveal if there is a positive or negative correlation between the employee turnover rate of a department and the satisfaction levels of employees regarding work-life balance, in their respective departments. Rate of employee turnover for the purpose of this research was calculated using data collected employee responses to the questions 11 – 17, which were focused on employee turnover intention. Data compilation has been done based on the gender and age (workers will be classified into their respective generations based on this field). Data was then analysed using SPSS data analytics, which is a software specially developed for the purpose of statistical analysis. As stated by Huberman & Miles, (2002), qualitative research methods allow you to understand “the rationale or theory of underlying relationships revealed in the quantitative data”, quantitative

methods “identify relationships which may not have been salient already. Therefore, the responses to question 18 in the questionnaire were used to help the researcher draw out suitable recommendations. This in order to view flexible working through the perspective of employees and also find out what they expect. Thus adding minute, yet insightful qualitative data to the analysis.

Limitations

One of the most difficult issues faced by the researcher was that though invitations were accepted by the employees, the researcher had to constantly send reminders to ask them to fill the questionnaire out. The researcher fears that some of these responses might not reflect an employee’s true thoughts. As they might have considered responding to the questionnaire a burden as it had to be done during their personal time. The researcher feels that had he been granted official permission from the company, the employee responses would have been more accurate and insightful. Lastly, literature on call centres in Ireland and Europe mainly focus on employees in managerial and administrative positions. Another major issue faced by the researcher was accessibility. Due to the lack of accessibility the researcher was only able to focus on employees belonging to a certain department in the calls centre. Whereas if compared to the research done by Dex & Bond, (2005), their research included findings from numerous departments across various industries, therefore providing a more conclusive result. Lastly, the questions used to calculate employee turnover intention upon analysis gave a result of 0.287. In order to improve the reliability and consistency questions 12 and 14 were excluded; despite which the alpha value increased only to 0.68, which although was not greater than 0.70 (the accepted standard), was still used to calculate turnover intention.

Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to evaluate what the data collected through the questionnaire represents. This will help readers understand what the present levels of employee satisfaction are with regard to work-life balance. It will also describe the levels of turnover intention among employees, which will represent the level of employee commitment.

Figure (1) shown below describes the frequencies of male and female participants who answered the questionnaire.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	18	45.0	45.0	45.0
	Male	22	55.0	55.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Fig (1)

Figure (2) shown below describes the frequencies of participants belonging to different age groups presented in the questionnaire.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18 - 25	19	47.5	47.5	47.5
	25 - 50	18	45.0	45.0	92.5
	50 - 70	3	7.5	7.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

From the figures given above, one may infer that a total of 40 participants responded to the questionnaire; of which 18 participants were female, constituting 45% of the total sample size. The remaining 22 participants were male, constituting 55% of the sample size (see Figure1). The second figure describes the age groups that each individual participant falls under. Of the 40 participants; 19 belonged to the age group “18 - 25”, 18 belonged to the age group “25 - 50” and only 3 participants represented the age group of “50 - 70”.

For the purpose of calculating individual satisfaction scores, the following is a graphical representation of what one of the participant’s response looked like.

Employee satisfaction with regard to work-life balance

To begin with it was important to check the reliability of the data generated by the scales to measure work-life balance. For this purpose Cronbach’s Alpha has been used. As Cronbach’s Alpha would help measure survey items internal consistency and reliability (Lambert & Darcy, 2013). Questions 1 to 10 from the questionnaire, were to collect data regarding satisfaction levels of employees regarding work-life balance.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.782	10

Fig (3)

Figure (3) represents reliability of the scale used to measure work-life balance. While there is strong evidence that a Cronbach’s Alpha value greater than 0.95 is the best benchmark; it is generally accepted that a value greater than 0.70 is enough to prove that the scale being utilized is consistent and reliable.

Secondly it was also important to check for normality of distribution of satisfaction data among Males and Females .The following tables (4) and (5) display the results.

Descriptives				Statistic	Std. Error
Gender					
Comp_Satis_Variable	Female	Mean		26.1667	1.67303
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	22.6369	
			Upper Bound	29.6964	
		5% Trimmed Mean		26.2407	
		Median		27.0000	
		Variance		50.382	
		Std. Deviation		7.09805	
		Minimum		13.00	
		Maximum		38.00	
		Range		25.00	
	Interquartile Range		13.50		
	Skewness		-.275	.536	
	Kurtosis		-.735	1.038	
	Male	Mean		25.9545	1.10582
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	23.6549	
Upper Bound			28.2542		
5% Trimmed Mean		25.7828			
Median		25.5000			
Variance		26.903			
Std. Deviation		5.18677			
Minimum		19.00			
Maximum		36.00			
Range		17.00			
Interquartile Range		8.00			
Skewness		.463	.491		
Kurtosis		-.613	.953		

Table (4)

Tests of Normality							
Gender	Statistic	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.	
Comp_Satis_Variable	Female	.157	18	.200*	.951	18	.445
	Male	.133	22	.200*	.941	22	.209

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table (5)

Table (4) Displays a Z value for males, calculated at -0.513 and females at 0.942. Since both the values are between +/-1.96, we can say that the data is evenly distributed between males and females. Table (5) displays results of a Shapiro-Wilk test, where the Sig values were both above 0.05 at 0.445 and 0.209 respectively. Therefore we can assume that the data is normally approximately distributed.

Lastly, the same test for normality between satisfaction scores and age was conducted. Results have been displayed in tables (6) and (7)

Descriptives				Statistic	Std. Error
	Age				
Comp_Satis_Variable	18 - 25	Mean		25.4737	1.51478
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	22.2913	
			Upper Bound	28.6561	
	5% Trimmed Mean		25.3596		
	Median		26.0000		
	Variance		43.596		
	Std. Deviation		6.60276		
	Minimum		17.00		
	Maximum		36.00		
	Range		19.00		
	Interquartile Range		12.00		
	Skewness		.321	.524	
	Kurtosis		-1.076	1.014	
	25 - 50	25 - 50	Mean		26.0556
95% Confidence Interval for Mean			Lower Bound	23.5634	
			Upper Bound	28.5477	
5% Trimmed Mean			26.3951		
Median			26.0000		
Variance			25.114		
Std. Deviation			5.01142		
Minimum			13.00		
Maximum			33.00		
Range			20.00		
Interquartile Range			4.75		
Skewness			-.977	.536	
Kurtosis			1.333	1.038	
50 - 70		50 - 70	Mean		29.6667
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Lower Bound	7.1262	
			Upper Bound	52.2072	
	5% Trimmed Mean		.		
	Median		31.0000		
	Variance		82.333		
	Std. Deviation		9.07377		
	Minimum		20.00		
	Maximum		38.00		
	Range		18.00		
	Interquartile Range		.		
	Skewness		-.647	1.225	
	Kurtosis		.	.	

Table (6)

Table (7)

Tests of Normality

	Age	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Comp_Satis_Variable	18 - 25	.152	19	.200*	.913	19	.083
	25 - 50	.194	18	.071	.918	18	.121
	50 - 70	.225	3	.	.984	3	.756

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

From the results in table (6) and (7): the z scores and Sig values are within ± 1.96 and over .050 respectively. Therefore we can say that the data is normally distributed between age groups as well.

Since age groups are distributed normally, the researcher had decided to use parametric analysis for the correlations between Satisfaction scores regarding work-life balance and the age and gender groups.

Age

Tables (8) and (9) presented below depicts the results of an Independent Samples t-Test, between different ages and the composite employee satisfaction scores. This test was done to check if there was any significant difference between the satisfaction levels of employees belonging to different generations.

Table (8)

Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Comp_Satis_Variable

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1.457	2	37	.246

In order to ensure the reliability of results when carrying out parametric tests the two important requirements to satisfy are: normality and homogeneity of variance. Table (8) displays the result of a test of homogeneity of variance. It was found that the Sig value in this case was also more than 0.05, $0.246 > 0.05$ therefore homogeneity of variances is assured.

Table (9)

ANOVA

Comp_Satis_Variable

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	45.552	2	22.776	.612	.548
Within Groups	1376.348	37	37.199		
Total	1421.900	39			

Table (9) gives the results of a Single factor ANOVA to determine if there was a significant difference in satisfaction scores across age. The table displays a Sig value of 0.548. Which is greater than 0.05. Therefore there is no significant difference between satisfaction scores across age groups.

Gender

The following two tables shown below: namely, table (10) and table (11); depict the results of an Independent Samples t-Test, conducted to find out if there were any significant differences between the satisfaction scores of employees belonging to different genders.

Table (10)

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Comp_Satis_Variable	Female	18	26.1667	7.09805	1.67303
	Male	22	25.9545	5.18677	1.10582

The results of table (10) display the mean satisfaction scores of Female employees at 26.1667 and of Males at 25.9545. From this information we can conclude that both Males and Females have low levels of satisfaction regarding work-life balance.

Table (11)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Comp_Satis_Variable	Equal variances assumed	1.655	.206	.109	38	.914	.21212	1.94382	-3.72295	4.14719
	Equal variances not assumed			.106	30.401	.916	.21212	2.00546	-3.88131	4.30555

Table (11) displays the results of an Independent Samples t-Test. Where the Sig value calculated was at 0.206, which is clearly greater than 0.05, therefore we can assume that there are no significant differences in satisfaction scores of Female and Male employees.

Employee turnover intention

As described earlier, in-order to test the internal reliability and consistency of the scale to measure employee turnover intention, Cronbach's Alpha test was applied to questions 11 to 17. Table (12) shown below displays the initial results.

Table (12)

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.287	7

As mentioned earlier a Cronbach's alpha which is greater than 0.70 proves that a scale is reliable and consistent. However, in this case Cronbach's alpha was too low at 0.287. Therefore, the researcher conducted a Bi-variate analysis to find out which questions were displaying a strong negative correlation to other questions. Table (13), displayed below shows the results of the Bi-variate analysis.

Table (13)

	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17
Q11	1.000	-.113	.267	-.261	.265	.088	.261
Q12	-.113	1.000	-.174	.324	-.283	.002	-.341
Q13	.267	-.174	1.000	-.209	.184	.234	.515
Q14	-.261	.324	-.209	1.000	-.185	-.116	-.273
Q15	.265	-.283	.184	-.185	1.000	.522	.477
Q16	.088	.002	.234	-.116	.522	1.000	.292
Q17	.261	-.341	.515	-.273	.477	.292	1.000

From the information displayed in table (13), it was inferred that questions 12 and 14 displayed strong negative correlations with the other questions. Therefore the researcher

excluded these questions, the resulting Cronbach's Alpha has been displayed below in table (14).

Table (14)

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.680	.693	5

After excluding questions 12 and 14: the value of Cronbach's alpha displayed significant improvement increasing from 0.287 (see table(9)) to 0.680 as seen in table(14). Now although the general accepted standard is that of a value > 0.70 ; the researcher decided to use these questions to calculate employee turnover intentions as it was really difficult to get all the employees to respond to the survey in the first place.

Secondly, it was also important to conduct a test of normality to determine whether the researcher was to conduct a parametric or non-parametric statistical analysis on the figures on employee turnover intentions. Tables (15) and (16) display the results of the analysis.

Table (15)

Descriptives

Age			Statistic	Std. Error	
Comp_Turnover_score	18 - 25	Mean	13.4211	.90585	
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	11.5179	
			Upper Bound	15.3242	
	5% Trimmed Mean	13.5234			
	Median	13.0000			
	Variance	15.591			
	Std. Deviation	3.94850			
	Minimum	7.00			
	Maximum	18.00			
	Range	11.00			
	Interquartile Range	8.00			
	Skewness	-.230	.524		
	Kurtosis	-1.371	1.014		
	25 - 50	25 - 50	Mean	12.5000	.81349
95% Confidence Interval for Mean			Lower Bound	10.7837	
			Upper Bound	14.2163	
5% Trimmed Mean		12.6667			
Median		13.0000			
Variance		11.912			
Std. Deviation		3.45134			
Minimum		5.00			
Maximum		17.00			
Range		12.00			
Interquartile Range		4.75			
Skewness		-.623	.536		
Kurtosis		-.229	1.038		
50 - 70		50 - 70	Mean	14.3333	2.84800
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Lower Bound	2.0794	
			Upper Bound	26.5873	
	5% Trimmed Mean	.			
	Median	12.0000			
	Variance	24.333			
	Std. Deviation	4.93288			
	Minimum	11.00			
	Maximum	20.00			
	Range	9.00			
	Interquartile Range	.			
	Skewness	1.652	1.225		
	Kurtosis	.	.		

Table (16)

Tests of Normality

Age	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Comp_Turnover_score 18 - 25	.164	19	.191	.895	19	.040
25 - 50	.169	18	.189	.929	18	.186
50 - 70	.349	3	.	.832	3	.194

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table (15) through which the z values are computed for each age. This was done by dividing the skewness of the results of an age group by its standard deviation. For instance the z value for the ages 18 to 25 was at 1.352, which is within $-/+1.96$. Therefore, the information from

this table would suggest that the data is evenly distributed. However, the Sig value seen in table (16) shows a value of .040 under Shapiro-Wilks test, which is less than 0.050. Since the condition of normality is not satisfied in this case the researcher had to do a non-parametric analysis for difference between various age groups and turnover intentions..

The following tables (17) and (18) represent the results of a test of normality the variables of gender and turnover intention.

Table (17)

Descriptives				Statistic	Std. Error
		Gender			
Comp_Turnover_score	Female	Mean		13.5556	1.02970
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	11.3831	
			Upper Bound	15.7280	
		5% Trimmed Mean		13.6728	
		Median		14.5000	
		Variance		19.085	
		Std. Deviation		4.36863	
		Minimum		5.00	
		Maximum		20.00	
		Range		15.00	
		Interquartile Range		7.25	
		Skewness		-.519	.536
		Kurtosis		-.712	1.038
		Male	Mean		12.6818
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Lower Bound	11.2705	
			Upper Bound	14.0931	
	5% Trimmed Mean		12.6465		
	Median		13.0000		
	Variance		10.132		
	Std. Deviation		3.18309		
	Minimum		8.00		
	Maximum		18.00		
Range			10.00		
Interquartile Range		4.00			
Skewness		.134	.491		
Kurtosis		-.851	.953		

Table (18)

Tests of Normality

		Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Comp_Turnover_score	Female	.130	18	.200 [*]	.943	18	.330
	Male	.112	22	.200 [*]	.939	22	.187

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The information displayed in the above two tables clearly indicate z values within $-/+1.96$ and the Sig values are also greater 0.05, at 0.330 for Females and 0.187 for Males respectively satisfying that data is normally distributed between Female and Male employees and their turnover intention scores.

However, for making a decision on whether to conduct a parametric or non-parametric analysis on this data, it is important to conduct a test on equality of variances to satisfy the second requirement for parametric analysis. Table (19) shown below displays the result of the analysis.

Table (19)

Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Comp_Turnover_score

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
2.679	1	38	.110

The Sig value so calculated in Levene’s parametric variance test, gives a Sig value of 0.110. Since the value is greater than 0.050 homogeneity of variance is assured. Hence a parametric statistical analysis may be done on these variables.

Age

The following two tables, namely table (20) and table (21), display the results derived from a Kruskal-Wallis test, between different age groups and their respective employee turnover

intention scores. This test was done to check if there was significant difference between the turnover intention levels of employees belonging to different generations.

Table(20)

Ranks			
	Age	N	Mean Rank
Comp_Turnover_score	18 - 25	19	21.63
	25 - 50	18	18.97
	50 - 70	3	22.50
	Total	40	

Table (20) displays the mean ranks of the three different age groups, calculated for the purpose of statistical analysis. The Results of this analysis can be seen in table (21) below.

Table (21)

Test Statistics ^{a,b}	
	Comp_Turnover_score
Chi-Square	.578
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.749

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: Age

The Sig value displayed in table (21) was found to be more than 0.05, $0.749 > 0.05$. This means that there is no significant difference in turnover intentions of employees belonging to different age groups.

Gender

As seen from the analysis of tables (17), (18) and (19) it was ascertained that a parametric analysis could be conducted on the variable gender and turnover intention scores. Table (22) and (23) display the results of an Independent Samples t-Test.

Table (22)

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Comp_Turnover_score	Female	18	13.5556	4.36863	1.02970
	Male	22	12.6818	3.18309	.67864

The table above gives the Mean of the satisfaction scores of Females and Males along with their standard deviation. The mean falls in the lower score values between a minimum score of 5 and a maximum score of 25. In other words, on the Likert scale a score of 15 would symbolize “Sometimes”, but since the mean values are below, it may be inferred that employees show a strong turnover intention and are more likely to leave the organisation.

Table (23)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Comp_Turnover_score	Equal variances assumed	2.679	.110	.731	38	.469	.87374	1.19499	-1.54540	3.29288
	Equal variances not assumed			.709	30.342	.484	.87374	1.23322	-1.64364	3.39111

From table (23) the Sig value calculated is 0.110, which is greater than 0.050. conveying that there is no significant difference between the turnover intention rates of Female and Male employees.

Insights from employees

The researcher did not make the open ended question mandatory for participants to answer.

This is because in handwritten questionnaires participants may omit answering certain

questions. However when filling out a questionnaire online, if a mandatory question is left unanswered, the participant is prompted to answer the question. Submission of the questionnaire is only possible if the questionnaire is answered. As brought out in the research limitations earlier, it was extremely difficult to get employees to respond to those questionnaires in the first place. All this was done in-order to simplify the submission of questionnaires by the employees.

Due to this reason not many respondents answered the final question designed to collect qualitative insights. Therefore the researcher has considered one response for each employee belonging to a different age group and gender group. Following are the findings,

One of the participants belonging to the age group “50 to 70” a Female suggested: *“Should not judge on quantity of work done but should look at the quality”*.

A Male employee from the age group “18 to 25” responded saying: *“Get more staff into the organisation”*.

Two employees from the age group “25 to 50”, Male and Female respectively, responded saying:

“Provide Flexible working hours”.

The researcher understands that while the responses are not enough and also lack wording, he felt that these responses do in some way help draw ideas from the literature review. These have been discussed in the “Discussion and Recommendations” section of the research.

Discussion and Recommendations

Through this research the author has gained a number of insights into job aspects such as work-life balance, employee turnover and organisational flexibility. The research confirms what the literature on call centres state about call centre employees suffering from extremely low levels of work-life balance and generally low commitment levels. Despite having a more stable labour environment in Europe and Ireland as compared to those in other Asian countries, front-line employees in call centres still display the same low levels of satisfaction and commitment. One may now say that these characteristics are typical in call centres that employ the mass production model.

Although organisational flexibility is usually measured by quarterly and annual organisational performance statements, the author argues that these statements only provide for a quantitative means of deriving the degree of organisational flexibility. On the other hand as discussed in the literature review, organisations employing the mass production model seem to reject the fact that the diverse services that they provide are all rendered through employee effort and commitment.

Human Resource practices that use fear to induce effort by employees, greatly decreases employee commitment. In reality however, while on the production floor front-line employees are frequently asked to watch their numbers and call durations, constant stress is applied on them to improve their performance. Even a small drop in the performance leads to a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP); which eventually leads to an employee being let go, as employees say “PIPs seem to be a signal for them to get ready to leave.” This kind of a generalized view of calls centres have led to employees treating call centres as bus stops,

where employees use it to transit from one job to another. ‘Some place better’ is what most employees working in the call centre would say.

Suggestions from employees, such as “flexible work hours”, “should not only judge on quantity of work but should look at quality” reveal that employees are willing to commit to the job but aspire for organisational support and change. All these point towards the requirement of call centres to switch from the use of the mass production model to a mass customization model. This would help provide better work-life balance for its employees and also high quality services to its customers. The author has heard customer complaints about speaking to agents who did not have a clear idea of what the customer’s issues were. This can be attributed to the high rate of turnover prevalent in call centres, where experienced agents have decided to leave the organisation due to the stressful working conditions in the call centres. Such issues need to be addressed by management to improve quality of service rendered in the long run. While it is understandable that cost constraints make it difficult for companies to migrate from the mass production model, but a gradual progression to a different model is required to improve the quality of jobs offered, which would in turn improve the quality of services rendered.

The study of age and gender highlights a number of differences in work-life balance preferences of: Male and Female employees; and worker belonging to different generations, This research has revealed that in reality these differences do not have a huge impact on the satisfaction levels of employees regarding work-life balance and organisational commitment. At the end of the day: irrespective of the fact whether an employee is male or female, 18 years of age or 45 years; they all aspire for better work-life balance than what the job offers to them. Employee turnover intentions are also high in all employees, indicating extremely low levels of organisational commitment.

Conclusion

Conclusion

This research was undertaken to fulfil several objectives related to employee satisfaction, employee turnover intention and organisational flexibility. The author believes that this has been achieved. An in-depth study was done on work-life balance and organisational flexibility. Through this research the author has ascertained the following:

- Employee turnover intentions and satisfaction levels regarding work-life balance in call centres based out of Europe and Ireland show the same characteristics as those based in Asia and other parts of the world. Characteristics such as high turnover rates, low satisfaction levels and low levels of work-life balance are common.
- Employees are willing to commit to organisational goals but display low commitment due to lack of supportive management. Management tend to focus on performance measures and keep a keen eye for decrease in these numbers.
- There is no significant difference between how employees belonging to different genders or age groups view work-life balance offered by their jobs.
- Human resource practices focus on recruitment activities to replace loss of employees due to the high turnover rates.
- Organisational flexibility completely disregards effort by employees through great personal commitment.

The author was pleased to find out that a large number of employees were willing to work in these jobs. However, their levels of commitment were low due to great amounts of stress on their work-life balance, they felt that due to lack of support from management and inadequate work-life balance they were not able to display such commitment. The researcher was also

surprised to find out that Human Resource practices mainly focused on recruitment rather than retention of employees, a common practice followed by organisations which employ the conventional mass production model. The author feels that this trend needs to change to ensure better service is rendered to the customers which the organisation solicits.

Scope for further research

Firstly, the researcher has realised that there is a wide gap in the literature about front-line employees in call centres. While this research only focused on gender and age groups; the researcher felt that adding other factors such as culture and religion would help highlight difference in employee perceptions of work-life balance and turnover intentions. Secondly, getting responses from employees in other departments such as sales, customer retention and technical support would help illuminate various flexible workplace practices being used within each department and their degree of effectiveness. Lastly, the front line employees of call centres appear to be reconciled to the fact that their occupation is transitory, lack commitment, have less expectations from the organisation and hence are unresponsive. Further research in this area may help find way to bringing these low levels of commitment up.

Relevance

The area of study in this research is of great importance to employers and organisation as it would help them identify ways of increasing work-place flexibility, employee commitment and also employee retention. It is of great importance for such organisations to focus on retention activities instead of mainly recruitment. As tacit knowledge of experienced employees, regarding systems and procedures; is an important tool which organisations could use to their advantage, in-order to render high quality services.

Learning experiences

The author has gained much insight into what kind of HR practices are pursued in organisations that employ the use of the traditional mass production model. It has also helped in understanding the various shortcomings of this model. The researcher was able to identify numerous pain points that could enhance quality of services rendered by call centre employees and increase organisational flexibility through intrinsic satisfaction of employees regarding work-life balance.

The author hopes that the information drawn through this research would help management in call centres capitalized on the advantages of having a highly committed work-force.

Yohann Joseph

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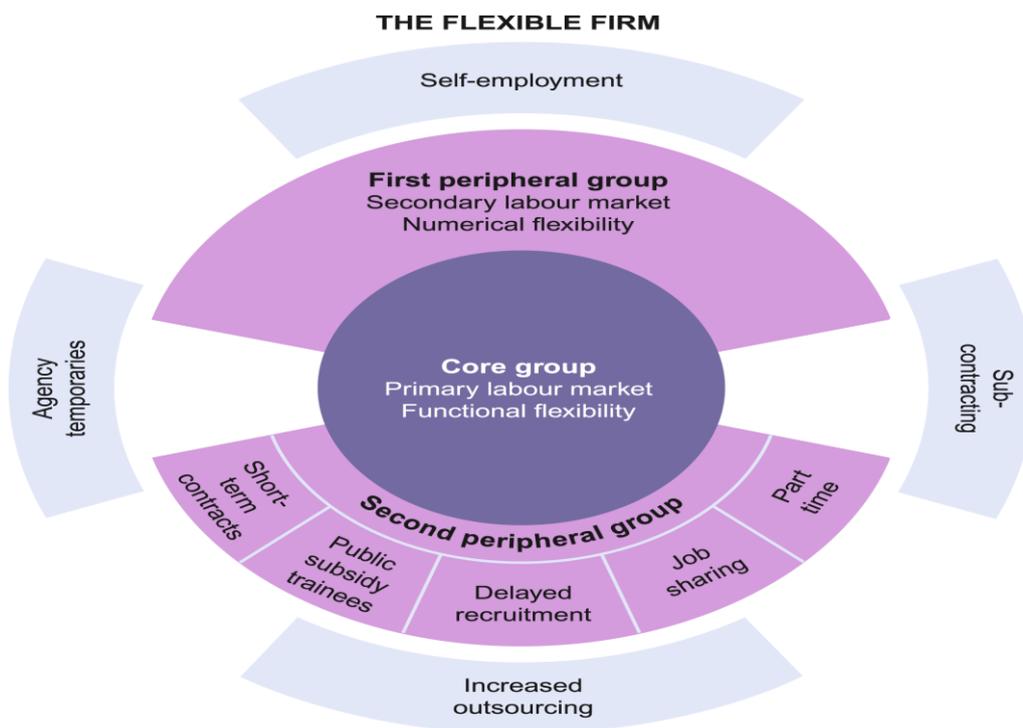
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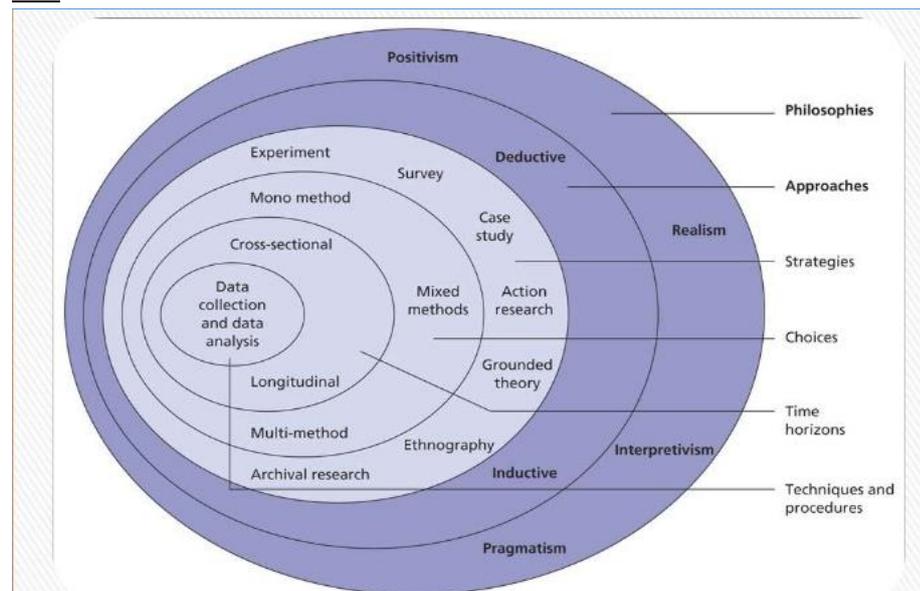
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Appendix

9.1



9.2



9.3

A survey on employees' thoughts on work-life balance.

This survey is for the intent of capturing an employees' thoughts regarding work-life balance in his present work and quantifying them into data. This data is then to be analysed for the purpose of statistical representation of employee satisfaction levels regarding work life balance in their present work place.

First we would like to ask a few general questions about you

How old are you?

18 - 25	25 - 50	50 - 70
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What is your Gender?

Male	Female
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Work through this checklist and assess whether your own life is balanced	A Strongly Agree	B Agree	C Sometimes	D Disagree	E Strongly disagree
Q1) At the moment, because the job demands it, I usually work long hours					
Q2) There isn't much time to socialise/relax with my partner/see family in the week					
Q3) I have to take work home most evenings					
Q4) I often work late or at weekends to deal with paperwork without interruptions					
Q5) Relaxing and forgetting about work issues is hard to do.					
Q6) I worry about the effect of work stress on my health					
Q7) My relationship with my partner is suffering because of the pressure or long hours of my work					

Q8) My family are missing out on my input, either because I don't see enough of them/am too tired					
Q9) Finding time for hobbies, leisure activities, or to maintain friendships and extended family relationships is difficult					
Q10) I would like to reduce my working hours and stress levels, but feel I have no control over the current situation					

Some of the following questions may seem similar to the ones answered previously. However, the purpose of these are to quantify employee turnover intention with regard to work-life balance among employees.

Q11) Managers allow generally enough time for the completion of projects so that employees can do good quality work with limited stress					
Q12) I often feel like there is too much work to do					
Q13) My organization provides work conditions (e.g., flexible schedules, child care facilities, telecommuting programs) which take into account the emergent needs of employees					
Q14) My work schedule is often in conflict with my personal life					
Q15) My job affects my role as a spouse and/or a parent					
Q16) My work has negative effects on my personal life					

This last question is to gain qualitative insights from employees

Can you suggest any viable suggestions that would help improve the present levels of work-life balance provided by your job?

9.4

Table 3 Guidelines for interpreting the responses to the Checklist

If you ticked all or mostly A's you may already be under considerable stress from your lack of work-life balance. Over time, your productivity could suffer along with relationships, your health and long-term employability. As an individual, start to address your own needs so that you become more effective. At work, try to promote better work-life balance to the advantage of the whole workplace.

If you ticked all or mostly B's you are not entirely happy with your work-life balance, but in a good position not to let the situation get out of control. By encouraging your organization to adopt a work-life strategy, you can help to create an enhanced working environment that will benefit you, the organization and colleagues at all levels.

If you ticked all or mostly C's you have set your own priorities in work-life balance, making them work for you. As well as the benefits to you and your family, is your organization getting more from you? Show leadership by encouraging a culture that respects work-life balance for all and takes into account the fact that individuals have differing demands at various stages of the lifecycle. When people have a sense of control over their work-life balance, they can be more productive and committed to their work and better prepared to manage the demands of today's rapidly