

An Empirical Study on the Status of Work - Life Balance in Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC)

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Abstract

Discussion on work-life balance is presently much in demand and both employers and employees are giving it the much needed importance. Much of the growing amount of research into work-life balance reflects the widespread interest in the topic. This study explores the status of work-life balance in Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC). In order to gain different perspectives on work-life balance in ONGC, the research design comprises of interviews with employees of ONGC, Ahmedabad Asset covering each level of employees - from staff to senior managerial level employees working with various departments with varying work schedules and covering both the genders - male and female employees. The key findings of the research are that the employees of ONGC had obtained a good work-life balance by making mutual adjustments. However, there is a need to develop work-life balance policies customized to individual needs with effective supportive system to reduce work-life conflicts.

Keywords: work-life balance, work-life programs, work-family stress, work-life conflict, work-home satisfaction, work-life balance policies, workplace

JEL Classification: I31, I38, J53, M50

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Work-life balance has come to the forefront of policy discourse in developed countries in recent years, and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC) has taken it as an HR objective for implementation as ONGC is one of the flagship companies of India and is doing business on a global level with rapid technological changes for exploration of oil and gas. ONGC has adopted progressive policies in scientific planning, acquisition, utilization, training, and motivation of the team where everybody matters, every soul counts. ONGC has a unique distinction of being a company with in-house service capabilities in all activity areas of exploration and production of oil and gas and related oil-field services. This was made possible by the men and women behind the machine (the employees), and over 18,000 technically-competent experienced scientists and engineers, mostly from distinguished Universities / Institutions of India and abroad form the core of the executive profile. They include geologists, geophysicists, geo-chemists, drilling engineers, reservoir engineers, petroleum engineers, production engineers, engineering and technical service providers, financial and human resource experts, and IT professionals (ONGC, n.d.). To perform exploration and for production activities, a number of employees, irrespective of their position, right from the staff level, senior technocrats to senior managerial level executives are required to be on job 24x7, and being employed in such a demanding job, their work-life balance is an area of serious concern. Hence, the present study was undertaken with an aim to ascertain whether ONGC employees were capable of balancing their work and family life, and to examine the ways adopted by the employees to balance their work and life effectively.

According to Kastner (2011), "Even the highest of salaries and the most promising career opportunities are of little use if your private life suffers as a result of too much work." Nowadays, when applicants decide on where to work, one major consideration is whether companies encourage their employees to focus on their work and family life in equal measure, and now-a-days, even reputed recruitment consultants and advertising companies have undertaken a conceptual approach towards work-life balance as revealed in an advertisement Dream Big (2012) that was published in a leading daily (Dream Big, The Times of India, 2012).

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Most companies view work and personal life as competing priorities in a zero-sum game, in which a gain in one area means a loss in the other. From this traditional perspective, companies have to decide how their employees' work and personal lives should intersect and often view work-life programs as just so much social welfare and are trying a new track to collaborate for achieving work and personal objectives to everyone's benefit. However, this may be guided by three principles; the first one is informing their employees about business priorities, the second one is to recognize and support their employees as a whole by celebrating their roles outside the office, and the third is to continually experiment with the way work gets done. Moreover, conflicts between work and personal priorities can actually be catalysts for identifying inefficiencies at the workplace (Harvard Business Review, 2000, p.1). As quoted in the Human Resources column of Company Overview on ONGC's website, as on March 31, 2012, ONGC had 32909 employees (ONGCb, n.d.). An ageing workforce and employees' coping with the demands towards self-reliance is the top most concern of the company.

'Work- life balance' is defined as the satisfaction and good balance between professional and personal life, with a minimum role conflict (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004). However, this study aimed to ascertain whether ONGC employees had a minimum role conflict as far as work-life balance was concerned. From the 1960s, studies have proliferated on the linkages between work and family roles, originally concerned mainly with women and work-family stress. New concepts emerged, such as work-family conflict, work-family accommodation, work-family compensation, work-family segmentation, work-family enrichment, work-family expansion and, of course, work-life balances (Gregory & Milner, 2009). The concept of work-life balance is based on the individuals who are equally involved in and are equally satisfied with their work role and family role, and by giving equal priority to both roles, the work-life conflict, which raises mutually incompatible pressures from both ends, could be resolved. The work-life balance can be defined as "the relationship between the institutional and cultural times and spaces of work and non-work in societies where income is predominantly generated and distributed through labour markets"(Gregory & Milner, 2009). Work-life balance practices in the organizations are ,therefore, those that, intentionally or otherwise, increase the flexibility and autonomy of the employees in negotiating their attention and presence in the workplace. Whereas, work-life balance policies exist where such practices are intentionally designed and implemented. ONGC, in its HR objectives, promotes work life balance to integrate their employees' family into the organizational fabric (ONGCb, n.d.).

Effective work-life balance programs help to form a symbiotic relationship between employers and employees, which leads to mutual benefits, as when employees who balance the demands on their time are more satisfied and content, this leads to real benefits for the employer in terms of lowered turnover rate, a stronger team spirit, loyalty to the employer, and of course, overall productivity gains. A lower turnover rate leads to reduction in new employee training and associated costs. ONGC is quite conscious about the work-life balance among employees, but a lot still needs to be done in this regard.

Literature Review

Most of the studies on work-life balance measure individual appraisals regarding the level of satisfaction or success with the balance between work and family life (Voydanoff, 2005). However, balancing overall work and family life is an important area of concern for ONGC, it being a global fortune company. Organizational climate changes is one of the ideas to facilitate better work-life balance for employees and harnessing its esteemed values for adopting cultural revitalization (Callan, 2008).

Since exploration and production activities are inter-related in various departments within ONGC, a proper feeling of togetherness is directly related to the departmental achievements, which further affects the employees working in various departments with respect to their role and responsibilities. Miller (1978) emphasized that earlier, work life used to begin at the age 16 and ended at age 70; it now begins at 20 and ends at 62 for most of the working persons. Restrained effects of the increase in average length of life over the last 80 years may be associated with certain changes in work- life history, and due to work pressures, as more people are reaching their old age with health issues, they are unable to enjoy the leisure time of the retirement years. Lewis, Smithson, and Brannen (1999) and Milkie and Peltola (1999) stated that changing views on marriage and relationships also affect work-life balance, and now, many women feel that it is more important to acquire skills and qualifications rather than getting married, whereas it is seen

that happier marriages are related to a greater sense of success in balancing work and family. The present study examines whether married woman employees of ONGC were able to or were not able to balance their work and family life. Working women face well-documented conflicts resulting from their continuing role as primary caretakers for their homes, children, and/or elderly parents (Higgins, Duxbury, and Irving, 1992; Hochschild & Machung, 1989; Kelley & Voydanoff, 1985). Moreover, research (Hochschild & Machung, 1989; Thompson & Walker, 1989) has revealed that women shoulder greater responsibility for children and other family members, and they experience interruptions more often than men, and are more likely to be responsible for common household problems. According to Milkie and Peltola (1999), one will feel less successful in achieving their own work-family balance if one's spouse has to do smaller portion of the housework. Kiecolt (2003) found that, on an average, women and men with high work-home satisfaction work as many hours per week as those who find work a haven where they can get away from family responsibilities. However, work conflict is a greater source of work-family conflict (Higgins & Duxbury, 1992); however, workplace freedom (Banks & Milestone, 2011) and satisfaction creates confidence, loyalty, and ultimately improves the productivity of the employees (Tietjen & Myers, 1998).

Bundhun (2009) quoted in the article "Checking the Work-Life Balance" that "Dr. Marmenout says work-life balance is not simply about equally dividing the time spent on one's work and personal life, but establishing a harmony that reflects an individual's priorities." Employees must draw a firm line between their home and work lives and should be confident that the line is in the right place (Harvard Business Review, 2000). It is worth to quote that if hard-work is the key to success, then work-life balance is the metal which makes that key. Buddeberg-Fischer, Stamm, Buddeberg, and Klaghofer (2008) stressed that a well-balanced integration of professional and private life is an essential goal for the new generation. Moreover, informal arrangements and managerial discretion are important in realizing work and care balance (Burgess, Henderson, & Strachan, 2007).

Methodology

This research comprised of semi-structured interviews with ONGC employees (male and female officers and staff) of different levels working at different locations of ONGC, Ahmedabad Asset, and also covered different working patterns - day shift, rotating shift, to 14 days on/ off pattern. Each participant was selected for an interview in such a way that the study could cover the total theme of the study. In total, 50 semi structured interviews were conducted during November 2012 - January 2013, each lasting between 20 to 45 minutes. The interview questions posed to the participants were derived from an extensive review of the work-life literature and empirical evidence from HR periodicals. These questions were designed to cover the necessary issues, but were framed in an open reporting of their own perspectives. As a result, the informants were free to pursue those matters they considered important. The collected information was analyzed using simple percentage analysis.

Results and Analysis

Demographic profile of ONGC employees who were interviewed for the study has been enlisted in the Table 1, which shows that out of the total respondents, 92 % respondents were male and 8% of the respondents were female employees covering varying age groups, from 20- 60 years. However, maximum number of the respondents fell in the age group of 40-50 years, having 20-30 years of work experience with ONGC. Moreover, 96% of the respondents were married and only 18% of the respondents belonged to dual earning families.

The Table 1 reveals that 90% of the interviewed employees had children, and majority of the respondents spent 3-4 hours a day with their children. 78 % of the employees said that their spouse took care of the children (Table 2), whereas 34% of the respondents took care of old family members, and spent less than 02 hours a day with them. It was observed that the respondents believed that one of the important determinants to maintain the work- life balance was their mutual adjustment to avoid work-life conflicts and the Table 11 reveals that 98% of ONGC employees were of the opinion that if they had a good work- life balance, ONGC would be more prosperous in terms of its achievements. 84 % of the respondents said that they were able to balance their work and family life, as reflected in the Table 3 and Figure 1. However, a mixed response was received for this question, as 52% of the respondents said that they experienced stress while balancing their work- personal life due to the feeling of tiredness /depression because of

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Gender							Age (In Years)			
Male	Female	Category					20-30	30- 40	40-50	50-60
92%	8%	Officer		Staff			4	2	26	18
Marital Status		36		14			Experience(In Years)			
Married	Unmarried						0-10	10-20	20-30	30-40
96%	4%	Work Schedule					10%	6%	52%	32%
Having Children		Day Shift	Afternoon Shift	Night Shift	Rotating Shift	On-Off Shift of 14 days	Partner Employed			
Yes	No	78%	0%	0%	20%	2%	Yes	No		
90%	10%						18%	82%		

Source: Field Survey

Table 2. Employees' Perception Towards Family Life

Time spent with children				
Less than 02 hours	2-3 hours	3-4 hours	4-5 hours	More than 5 hours
14%	30%	35%	9%	11%
Being an employed man/woman who is helping to take care of children				
Spouse	In-laws	Parents	Servants	Crèche/ day care centre
78%	2%	16%	4%	0%
Do you take care of				
Dependent adults	Older Family members	Adults with disabilities	Children with disabilities	None
26%	34%	0%	4%	36%
Time spent with them				
Less than 02 hours	2-3 hours	3-4 hours	4-5 hours	More than 5 hours
57%	20%	10%	10%	3%

Source: Field Survey

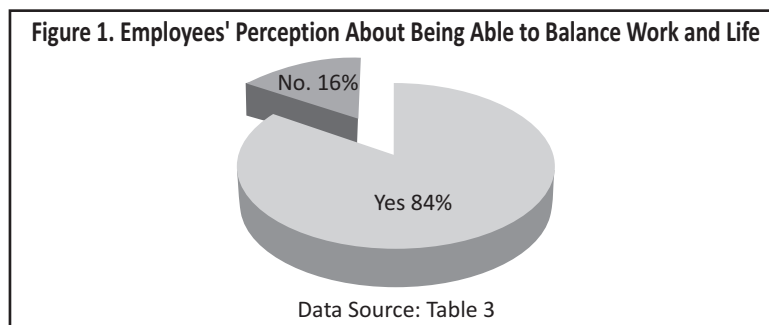


Table 3. Perception Towards Work- Life Balance

Generally able to balance Work-Life	Yes	No
	84%	16%

Source: Field Survey

Table 4. Employees' Feelings About the Time Spent at Work

Feelings about the amount of time spent at work	Extremely happy	Happy	Indifferent	Unhappy	Extremely unhappy
	18%	66%	10%	2%	4%

Source: Field Survey

work (Figure 2). However, 84% of the employees felt happy to spend time at work (Table 4) in spite of various factors that affected work and family commitments (Table 6). While discussing the issue, I observed that there is a mixed feeling among ONGC employees regarding the work-life balance. They respondents felt that the organization is under staffed, and the officers have to work below their level to cope up with the work load. Considering the age group of the available working manpower, it was observed that there is a huge gap in terms of age among the employees, which can lead to compatibility issues. For the present study itself, it was observed that 88% of the respondents were above 40 years of age, and 60% of the respondents were around 50 years of age (see Table 1).

When work and family life are inseparable, it becomes difficult disconnecting from work to relax and to have spare

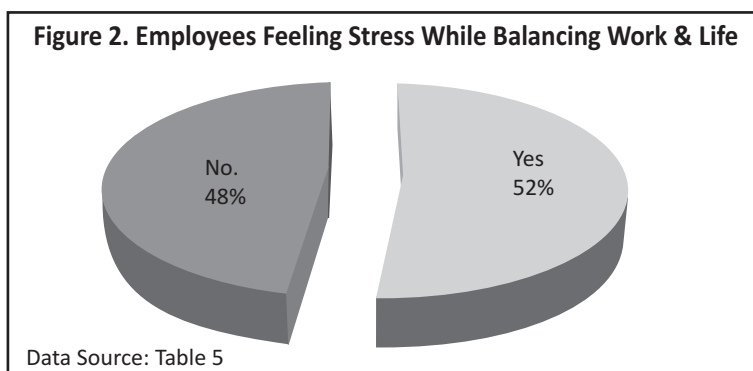


Table 5. Perception of Employees Towards Work and Life

Perception of Employees	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
Worried about work during off-duty period.	18%	18%	28%	23%	13%
Missing quality time with family due to work pressure.	30%	30%	28%	12%	0%
Tired or depressed because of work.	38%	14%	38%	8%	2%
Too much work on Job takes away personal interests.	42%	2%	38%	14%	4%
Disliked by family/friends for being preoccupied with work at home.	54%	10%	26%	8%	2%
Superior and peers dislike being preoccupied with personal life while at work.	68%	14%	12%	4%	2%
Tired at work because of personal work at home.	74%	10%	10%	4%	2%
Personal life takes up time which otherwise, one may spend at work.	70%	10%	14%	4%	2%
Personal life interferes with getting to work on time .	66%	12%	18%	2%	2%
Do you feel stressed trying to balance your work and family life ?	48%	10%	26%	10%	6%

Source: Field Survey

Table 6. Factors Affecting Work and Family Commitments

Long Working hours	25%
Shift Work	21%
Compulsory overtime	4%
Meeting/ Training after office hours	25%
Other	25%

Source: Field Survey

Table 7. Do you Spend Time Working Out?

Yes	64%
No	36%

Source: Field Survey

Table 8. Preferred Places to Workout

ONGC dispensary	4%
Residence	34%
Nearby Gym	16%
Walking	36%
Other	10%

Source: Field Survey

Table 9. Tools for Managing Stress Arising From Work

Yoga	22%
Meditation	24%
Entertainment	46%
Dance	8%
Music	17%
Shopping	6%

Source: Field Survey

time for family and other activities, however, spending time with family and indulging in activities that one enjoys are important for happiness, fulfillment, and personal growth. As revealed during the survey and reflected in the Table 2, 74% of respondents spent 2-5 hours with their children, and 64% of the respondents had set aside a scheduled time to workout, out of which, 36% usually preferred to go for walks as revealed in the Tables 7 and 8 respectively. One of the respondents said that he preferred to take walks with his spouse to talk and discuss their family grievances, which, if left unattended, caused a great amount of stress. A senior ONGC woman executive, a 57 years old mother of two and a member of a dual earner family said, "I achieve my career goals with integrity and honesty. However, my top priority is the well-being of my children and partner. My self-care plan includes daily yoga and to take the blessings of my elders by caring for them in the morning from 5:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. and in the evening from 6:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. With a few hiccups, I generally feel that I have been able to balance my work and life pretty well in ONGC." Another employee, a 45 years old father of two and an executive of ONGC said, "I chose a pleasant balance between my work and home life with mutual adjustment, as I always wish to give priority to my work and adjust my home life accordingly, as I feel that I am a boss at home but not at work."

We all have to perform many tasks and have responsibilities to fulfill, whether it is of our liking or not, but to have a balance in work and family life, one should at least indulge in one activity which one likes, and I found that 92% of the ONGC employees managed their work-stress through yoga, meditation, and entertainment (Table 9). Leisure activities definitely help to beat stress. To alleviate stress, ONGC also offers stress management training programs to its employees.

"The 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce" conducted by Families and Work Institute revealed that 66% of the American families in 1977 had dual earners, but during the recent decades, there has been an increase in dual-income households' and by 2002, it rose to 78% (Chick, 2004). This study revealed that only 18% of the employees had dual income families, and were able to balance their work-life commitments as they had no hindrance from work-side and also had no hindrances from the family side as someone in the family stayed at home to take care

Table 10. Hindrances Affecting Work and Family Commitments

Frequently travelling away from home	27%
Negative attitude of peers and colleagues at work place	8%
Negative attitude of Supervisors	14%
Negative attitude of family members	6%
No Hindrance	45%

Source: Field Survey

of the children, the elderly, and the family in general. The Table 2 reveals that only 4% of the respondents were dependent on servants to take care of their family as there is no day-care center within the organization.

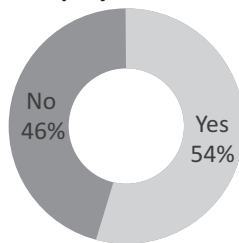
It was revealed that negative attitude of peers, colleagues, and seniors, and even the negative attitude of family members is a time robber that eats up the time as revealed in the Table 10. 8% of the ONGC employees felt that their time was being eaten up by the negative attitude of their peers and colleagues, 14% time robber variant was due to the negative attitude of the seniors, whereas only 6% of the respondents felt that their time was being eaten up due to the negative attitude of family members. Although, there was a mix response on support from ONGC to promote better balance of work and family life issues in reducing work-family conflicts, 54% of the respondents believed that ONGC supports employees for reducing work- family conflicts and provided health care facilities to all employees (Table 11). However, to promote better work-life balance, 92% of the respondents wished to have a separate customized policy for work-life balance for individual needs as revealed in the Table 12. In-spite of various factors that affect work and family commitments, as revealed in the Table 6, 66% of the employees felt happy about the amount of time spent at work, and 18% of the employees felt extremely happy about the amount of time spent at work as they felt no hindrance in balancing work and family commitments as revealed in the Table 10. Most of the employees were of the opinion that their organization ONGC was the best organization to work for.

Table 11. Factors Influencing Work-Life Balance

Factors Influencing Work-Life Balance	Yes	No
Provision of Telephone for personal use	80%	20%
Mentoring services for employees	36%	64%
Health Programmes	62%	38%
Parenting or family support programmes	18%	82%
Relocation facilities and choices	38%	62%
Exercise facilities	42%	58%
Transportation facilities	40%	60%
Involvement of family members in work-achievement functions	58%	42%
Support to employees to promote better balance on work and family life issues in reducing work-family conflicts	54%	46%
Employees feel that good work-life balance would bring more prosperity in terms of ONGC achievements	98%	2%
Periodical Medical Examination	100%	0%

Source: Field Survey

Figure 3. ONGC Supports Employees in Reducing Work-Family Conflicts



Data Source: Table 11

Table 12. Formulation of Work-Life Balance Policies According to Individual Needs

Need of Customized Work-Life Balance Policies	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Requirement of customized work-life balance policies as per individual needs	30%	62%	4%	4%	0%

Source: Field Survey

Discussion

For decades, work - life balance has been a very important issue for society, and even now, when most of us are quick enough to connect with what matters the most, still, there is a gap and sometimes, an enormous gap between what we say matters most and the way we actually spend our time (Merrill, A.R. & Merrill, R.,2003). In ONGC, there are several departments where every employee is responsible to handle various job prospects for their collective output, that is, exploration of oil and gas. Many employees are highly dedicated to their work that they give very little time to their families resulting in work-family conflict. However, it is possible to be successful, while at the same time maintaining a balance between one's personal and professional lives (Butterworth, 2006, p.16).

It was observed that most of the employees were happy and worked sincerely. However, there is a need for a supportive system to address the work-life conflicts, as there was a mixed response regarding the same - 54% of the respondents were of the opinion that ONGC supported its employees to promote better work-life balance, however, 46% of the respondents did not agree with this statement (Figure 3). Since exploration and production of oil and gas involves activities that are continuous in nature, the work force, right from the staff level to senior engineers/managers are engaged 24x7 in some of the departments (like Drilling & Cementing Services, Well Logging Services, Well Stimulation Services, Well Services, Fire Safety Services, Security Services, and even monitoring the Health, Safety and Environment to cope with and maintain the quality standards under ISO 9001:2008, ISO 14001:2004, and ISO 18001:2007), and they felt that whenever there is a call during odd hours, it gave them an impression that it is a call from work. 23% of the employees said that even during holidays, they were unable to mentally disconnect from work, and often worried about work as revealed in the Table 5. While discussing this issue, the respondents said that they had to chalk-out plans for the next operation which they were supposed to carry out ; they had to oversee what is going on at the drilling site ; it is important to line up the responsibilities for the successive departments, and so on. Hence, mentally also, they had to plan their future course of work. However, the Table 5 reveals that 60% of the respondents never/ rarely missed out on any quality time with family because of work pressure.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show that in general, the employees at ONGC had a good work-life balance, but a lot more needs to be done in line with the present scenario of globalization, as now, organizations have realized the importance of work-life balance, and as per the National Exploration and Licensing Policy of India (NELP), the organizations which offer a suitable environment that is conducive for work-life balance will be able to grab the talent and will be able to retain the employees. The present study also suggests that there is a need to have a customized work-life balance policy considering the age group of the present working force. In addition, it is believed that rigorous research must be continued to provide the necessary independent perspectives in the direction of potential solutions.

Managerial Implications

This research study would help the management of ONGC and all other public sector undertakings for implementation of work- life balance policies/programmes/practices in a broader prospect to gain ultimate enhancement regarding effectiveness of employees' efficiency through a significance approach towards the work-life balance and would also help the employees to reduce their stress level.

Limitations of the Study

- 1) The sample size was limited.
- 2) Due to time constraints, only 50 respondents were interviewed for 20-45 minutes. Hence, there may be a need to cover more employees to have a realistic approach towards the findings.

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