

Rawnak Afroze, 2019

Volume 5 Issue 1, pp. 623-639

Date of Publication: 20th April 2019

DOI-<https://dx.doi.org/10.20319/pijss.2019.51.623639>

This paper can be cited as: Afroze, R., (2019). *Work Life Balance of White Collar Employees in a Multinational Company and a Joint Venture in Bangladesh*. *PEOPLE: International Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(1), 623-639.

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WORK LIFE BALANCE OF WHITE COLLAR EMPLOYEES IN A MULTINATIONAL COMPANY AND A JOINT VENTURE IN BANGLADESH

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Abstract

This paper is based on Work Life Balance (WLB) in a Multinational corporation (MNC) and a Joint venture (JV) in Bangladesh. It focuses on the extent to which companies have implemented WLB policies for their executive employees, and the factors that inhibit and enhance these organizations' ability to implement WLB. The literature on WLB discourse has shown that WLB is still at its infancy in Bangladesh. Provision of WLB policies is relatively neglected in organizations in Bangladesh as compared to the other advanced countries. However, MNCs and JVs from developed economies are playing a crucial role in transferring best practices to their operations in developing countries. Therefore, a MNC and a JV were selected to pursue this research. The MNC was chosen from retailing and the JV from telecommunication, as these sectors are exposed to foreign business and currently, they make the most significant contribution towards GDP.

The research used semi-structured interviews and the findings showed that WLB provisions are unsatisfactory in foreign companies in Bangladesh, although respondents' reports showed that they are better than the Bangladeshi local companies. These foreign companies claim that there is hardly any scope for introducing extensive WLB policies in the Bangladeshi operations. They are more likely to adopt the local practices than the practices of their parent companies. Due to widespread job insecurity, employees are concerned about maintaining their jobs, and they do

not believe in demanding WLB. The only factors, which may contribute favorably towards the employees' WLB, are managerial support, good job autonomy and friendly working environment.

Keywords

Work Life Balance, White-Collar Employees, Multinational Companies, Joint Ventures, Telecommunication, Ready-Made Garments Industry, Bangladesh

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Work-life balance (WLB) discourse started in the west and the meaning of WLB and experience of work-life conflicts differ significantly across countries and cultures (Poelmans et al., 2005). Researchers, who are currently investigating the work-family issues in developing countries, suggest that findings in the Western context cannot be generalized in the developing countries (Coffey, et al., 2009). Bangladesh being a developing country is recently showing a great curiosity in improving WLB culture. Therefore, the notion of WLB being new to Bangladesh makes it a very interesting topic for research.

In Bangladesh's context, there have been some studies on employees' and employers' views on WLB in different company set-ups, for example, private sector companies and small, medium and large scale public or government organizations, but little is known about what happens in the MNCs and JVs in Bangladesh (Sharif and Akhter, 2011). It is valuable to explore how WLB issues are being tackled in these companies in Bangladesh for two major reasons. Firstly, MNCs and JVs play a crucial role in implementing progressive HR policies in developing countries (Rajadhyaksha, 2012). Secondly, MNCs and JVs in Bangladesh occupy the majority share in the market and are said to be dominating the market (Zabid, Siddique, Chakrabarty, Chowdhury and Shahnewaz, 2009).

Overall, a handful of organizations in Bangladesh are implementing WLB practices and most of the organizations are still not in favor of initiating WLB for their employees (Anam, 2008). The foreign companies are observed to improve employment culture in developing countries by implementing WLB practices, yet foreign companies have to adapt to the institutional context of the host country (Kwok and Tadesse, 2006). Therefore, MNCs and JVs in Bangladesh are promoting a WLB culture that is designed according to the needs of Bangladeshi workers and it is not a mere replication of their home countries' culture.

The studies on WLB among the factory workers in the ready-made garments (RMG) industry found that there are hardly any WLB practices operating there (Hossain, Sarker and Afroze, 2012). Studies have repeatedly shown that any improvement that has taken place in labour standards in this industry have been from the pressures of international buyers rather than

the employers' self-interest (Talukder, 2013). Telecommunications in Bangladesh is on the rise, with its aim towards developing a Digital Bangladesh and is currently being identified as one of the highest contributor towards GDP (Zabid, Siddique, Chakrabarty, Chowdhury and Shahnewaz, 2009). Studies on WLB in telecom MNCs have suggested that WLB culture is much more liberal and employee-friendly as compared to the other industries in Bangladesh (Sakib, 2018).

1.2 Problem Statement

This research will fill a gap in the existing literature by exploring WLB culture among executive level employees in a JV in telecommunications and will give a picture of how the WLB issues are being currently handled there. Moreover, as JVs are dominating the telecom industry in Bangladesh (Shaikh, Shah & Shaikh, 2018), this research will help to give a broad idea of the WLB culture within the telecom industry in Bangladesh, even though the aim of the research is not to generalize its findings.

The research will also investigate WLB culture among executives in a MNC within the RMG industry in Bangladesh. The intention is to shed light on the work life experiences of executives in Bangladesh; the focus on executives is intentional, their experiences may differ from the experiences of factory workers explored in previous studies (Hossain, Sarker and Afroze, 2012). This research will therefore attempt to explore the factors, which prevent and enhance foreign organizations' ability to implement WLB practices in Bangladesh.

1.3 Research Questions:

1. Are work-life balance practices effectively implemented in Multinational Companies and Joint Ventures in Bangladesh?
2. What are the factors that have enhanced and prevented the organizations' ability to implement work-life balance practices within this particular population?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Work Life Balance: Overview

Several researchers have proposed various definitions of WLB and not all these definitions are consistent with one another. Kirchmeyer (2000) viewed WLB as "achieving satisfying experiences in all life domains" (Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw, 2003: 512). Guest & Grote (2017) has defined WLB as subjectively and objectively. The objective indicators include actual hours of work and hours spent outside work. Subjective indicators include the states of balance and imbalance, balance may be achieved when equal time is allotted to both at home and at work and there is no conflict. In some cases, balance may also be achieved when work or home dominates by choice (Poulose & Sudarsan, 2018).

From the organizations' perspective, it seeks to attract and retain highly qualified and motivated employees and now, they realize that for employees to make a significant contribution at work, they need to manage their home life as well (Collins, 2007). As lives at work and at home tend to be interlinked, organizations have started providing a range of services to employees in the workplace. (Kossek & Groggins, 2015).

Studies are consistently showing that flexible working practices can achieve balance in work and family life. (Adisa, Mordi, and Osabutey, 2017). These flexible practices include flexibility in working time (flextime), where employees can choose their actual working hours, and flexibility in the location of work place or flexplace where employees are given some freedom as to where their work has to be done (Bach, 2005).

A research by Fleetwood (2007) suggests that certain flexible working practices enable a good WLB while some constrain it. Practices that are sought by employees and are referred to as employee-friendly, for example, job sharing, flexible start and finish times, voluntary part-time work, etc. help to obtain a good WLB for employees. Whereas, practices that are sought by employers are referred to as employer-friendly and include overtime, night / weekend shifts, etc. These practices are more likely to constrain a good WLB. Studies have shown that in reality organizational practices tend to be characterized by both employer-friendly and employee-friendly practices (Long, 2017). Hyman and Summers (2007) suggested that it is usually the employees making adjustments in their domestic lives than the employers effectively implementing policies.

2.2 Corporate Culture and WLB in Bangladesh

Bangladesh's labour force has increased from 1996 to 2008 (Unilever Report, 2016). Labour unions are usually considered as a mechanism of labour market rigidities, but unions represent only 4% of the total workforce that includes semi-skilled and unskilled workers. There is no form of employee representation for white-collar workers (Mujeri, 2008). Moreover, there is no specific country management style, like Japan or the USA.

Previous studies have shown that WLB practices are at its infancy in Bangladeshi companies. For example, only a few among the large companies, particularly foreign companies provide on-site childcare facilities. Therefore, it becomes difficult for working mothers to return to work after childbirth (Anam, 2008). The maternity leave given to women is 12 weeks and it is paid at 100%, but for the employees at executive levels, policies differ from company to company as they are not officially entitled by law. Moreover, the employee-friendly policies such as, flextime, flexplace arrangements, four day work week, personal leave days, etc. tend to be unheard of in most of the Bangladeshi companies (Anam, 2008).

2.3 Telecommunication and Ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh

The two sectors in Bangladesh that have been intensely exposed to foreign business are telecommunication in terms of foreign investment and subscription (Sharif and Akhter, 2011) and RMG industry as it is the largest export-oriented industry in Bangladesh (Kabeer and Mahmud, 2004).

Bangladesh Telecommunication Industry

The telecommunication industry has contributed almost 6.2 percent, equal to 13 billion towards Bangladesh's GDP. They have created significant jobs, which are estimated to be nearly 300,000 (Mannan, Mohiuddin, Chowdhury & Sarker, 2017). Therefore, this industry has become a mass market in Bangladesh. A research conducted by Sharif and Akhter (2011) on a telecom MNC in Bangladesh showed that MNCs provide higher salary, better benefits, and a relatively good work environment compared to local companies and thus, this have significantly lowered the possibility of voluntary turnover of employees. However, even though employees enjoy decent terms and conditions of employment in foreign companies in Bangladesh, conditions do not compare favorably with their counterparts in other advanced countries that operate high standard management practices (Sharif and Akhter, 2011) Currently, there are six mobile phone operators functioning in Bangladesh. Among them, four are JVs, one is a MNC and the other one is owned by the Government of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh. The leading telecommunication service provider is a JV (BTRC, 2018). Therefore, JVs are mainly ruling the telecom sector in Bangladesh. Thus, pursuing the research on a JV in telecommunication can help to give an overview of how WLB issues are being dealt with in this sector, even though the aim of the research is not to generalize its findings.

Bangladesh Ready-made Garment Industry

There has been a massive increase in the RMG industry in Bangladesh since the late 1970s. This industry grew "from around 50 factories employing a few thousand workers in the early 1980s to over 3,000 factories employing around 1.8 million workers by 2000" (Kabeer and Mahmud, 2004). Foreign companies in this export-oriented industry have been more successful than the domestic market-oriented ones as these companies take advantage of the low cost labour in Bangladesh and obtain a superior position in many of the overseas markets. Furthermore, there is lack of mutual understanding between the factory workers and their managers in this industry. The workers are paid very low wages, workers tend to be unfairly treated in terms of their employment rights and they face extreme challenges in balancing their work and home responsibilities (Hossain, Sarker and Afroze, 2012). Current studies have shown that the workers' situation is improving in this industry. Attempts are being made by the factory owners to improve the WLB of these workers by increasing the wage rates, providing free food, increasing

the number of working couples, etc. (Hossain, Sarker and Afroze, 2012). On the other hand, the situation among the executives in this industry regarding their demand for WLB and the WLB practices provided to them have still not been considerably investigated. This could be due to lack of any standard policies for the white-collar workers (Hoque & Masoom, 2008) and therefore, this gives freedom to the garment factories to implement their own management practices for the executives. Exploring WLB of the executives in this industry may add knowledge by uncovering the hidden picture of the executives' experiences and expectations of WLB.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Philosophical Positions

The ontological position taken by this research is constructionism. By adopting this ontological position this research will add knowledge through an understanding of the employees' views on WLB, such as, what they understand by WLB, their experiences and expectations of WLB practices in their company. The epistemological position taken by this research is interpretivism and through this position the researcher will engage in an empathic understanding of people's actions, (such as, the employees' experiences and expectations of WLB practices) and thus, it will help to understand the social world from their perspectives (Bryman, 2004). Based on these philosophical positions, this research has been qualitative in nature (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

3.2 Research Design

The design of this research is case study as the research was conducted in two separate companies and therefore, it comprises of two mini case studies.

3.3 Research Method

Semi-structured interviews were used as the researcher intended to get a detailed understanding of what the different employees understood by the term "Work-life balance" and their experiences and expectations of the companies (Marchington and Wilkinson, 2008).

The interviews were carried out face to face in the respective interviewees' cabins, each interview lasted about 40 minutes and only 3 interviews were conducted per day. All interviews were recorded and simultaneously notes were taken under the informed consent of the interviewees and followed by detailed transcription of interviews.

3.4 Research Sample

The research was conducted in two different companies; Company 1 is a medium sized joint venture (JV) in telecommunications and Company 2 is a wing of a multinational company (MNC) that deals with international sourcing in retailing. Company 1 has a good presence in

Bangladesh and it offers a wide variety of mobile services focusing on the needs of the Bangladeshi community. In terms of ownership, the company has a total number of six shareholders. The Bangladeshi partner of this JV is relatively a small shareholder. Company 2 is a sourcing office of an MNC that obtains clothing goods from various garments factories. The buyers have specific demands for products and the company meets these demands by placing orders with the local suppliers.

Due to the sensitive nature of WLB practices, the researcher had to use personal contacts to access to a MNC and a JV from a previously made list. Both companies requested complete anonymity. In sample selection, Company 1 provided a list of 10 employees to interview and in Company 2, a snowball sampling was used where recommendations of the existing participants were used to find more participants (Neuman, 2003). Company 2 provided permission to interview 4 employees. The sample included participants from different levels and departments ranging from junior officers to the HR director/managers.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted by following the code of ethics of the University of Warwick (The University of Warwick, 2009). Prior to the interviews, informed consent was obtained from the participants.

3.6 Research Opportunities and Limitations

Potentially this research can help the employers gauge the expectations and experiences of their employees in using the WLB practices of the company. It may help employers modify their WLB policies. Thus, the findings of this research may have practical relevance for the companies, in terms of restructuring the HR policies which may contribute towards better management of hiring and retaining employees. In terms of employees, this research may enable them to examine how they are balancing their work and family responsibilities and if there is an imbalance, identify the constraints they face in having a good WLB.

There are certain limitations of this research, for instance, the sample size is quite small. Such a small sample makes it difficult to formulate a complete outlook of the companies' WLB culture. Due to the anonymity of the companies, it restricts the researcher in presenting the findings in a detailed manner. WLB being a sensitive issue might have held back the employees in answering to questions more candidly.

4. Data Analysis Method - Thematic Analysis

4.1 Findings Part 1

a) Companies' position towards WLB

In the desk research, the Deputy General Manager (DGM) of HR from company 1 and the HR Director from company 2 provided the policies related to work life issues. In terms of leave regulations; company 1 has an annual leave for 25 days, sick leave for 9 days, hospitalization leave for 45 days, benevolent leave for 5 days, maternity leave for 4 months and paternity leave for 3 days. All these leave arrangements are fully paid and if employees exceed any leave then it is usually adjusted with their annual leave. If extra leave days cannot be accommodated in their annual leave then they are given leave without pay. In company 2, employees are entitled to full paid annual leave of 20 days, maternity leave of 4 months and paternity leave of 5 days. There is no fixed sick leave but after 2 days, employees have to submit a medical prescription showing that they were sick. Thus, in terms of leave regulations, employees in company 1 and 2 are being provided most of the essential ones.

Concerning other WLB policies, the HR DGM from company 1 indicated, *“the working hours and patterns of this company are pretty much standard. We try our best to make provisions for those facilities that will help our employees to work better. For instance, we are one of the few companies in Bangladesh to have a childcare center. This was set up in response to the demands of the female employees as we have a large number of them in the company. We have a free company transport for the employees coming to work and even drop back home. The company also provides health insurance for the employees, their spouses and children”*. On the other hand, the HR Director from company 2 stated, *“WLB isn’t just about having all employee friendly policies in place but it’s more like WLB has been established like a culture and how the managers in the companies deal with it”*. She mentioned that their WLB policies are quite clear and there is hardly any scope for modification. Moreover, their employees do not demand for extensive WLB provisions, for example, like a childcare center, as it is a small office and it is not possible to accommodate such provisions within its infrastructure.

In both company 1 and 2, there are no formal provisions for flexible working. It was reported by the Directors and employees that there were no informal flexible working practices in the two companies. However, company 1 does have more WLB provisions than company 2. The extent to which WLB is implemented in foreign companies in Bangladesh is unsatisfactory. Companies do not see the necessity of introducing extensive WLB policies in the operations. Moreover, these companies mention that they cannot afford them and their employees do not demand such facilities.

Regarding the interaction with their parent companies, the HR DGM said, *“We do not have a very close collaboration with our parent company but if we did then it would be easier to transform the culture here by implementing best HR practices as the parent company”*. Similarly, the HR Director from company 2 mentioned *“I have visited all the operations of this MNC, the*

WLB policies are not same everywhere. It differs from country to country. The nature of work is the same, so the work load is the same, but how they manage the work is different". Therefore, it can be implied that due to differences in management styles, employees' demands and overall organizational cultures, the extensive WLB policies, which are implemented in the foreign operations in advanced countries, may be absent in the operations in Bangladesh.

b) The Organizational Culture in Bangladesh

It was mentioned by the HR DGM of company 1 that overall, companies in Bangladesh are in a challenging situation under the current ongoing inflation. The foreign companies in Bangladesh are unable to provide good WLB provisions to the employees like their counterparts in other advanced countries. The HR DGM stated in his interview, *"Due to the current financial situation of the company, the employees' salaries and other compensations are not market compatible. As the inflation rate is double digit, the cost of living index is extremely high, and so, it is unlikely that the employees will be very satisfied with their current work opportunities. In this situation, the company cannot afford to go for employee benefits revised policies and provide them with a good increment. It's not so simple! We have to check and balance all the issues, such as, organizational business, market situation and employee satisfaction"*.

Regarding the notion of working hours, it was stated by the HR Director of company 2, *"As much as I want to believe that the line managers have a result-oriented approach it is not always the case. It is the mindset of the managers to think that employees who work for long are working harder than the ones who don't. Over and over again we discuss in the meetings that employees should be left from work as they finish their work and to discourage from creating a face-time oriented culture. It's more due to the working culture in Bangladesh and even more than that is the personal mindset of certain managers"*. These quotations show that face-time culture is an ongoing and an inevitable problem in the companies in Bangladesh and thus, employees are working longer hours and giving less time to their families.

A good and a friendly working environment can work favourably towards the employees' WLB. The HR DGM (company 1) mentioned in his interview, *"Our company celebrates all the local festivals and the international events such as, Women's Day, Mother's Day and Father's Day, etc. within the company. Such things really help to sustain friendly relationships between the employees and also between the management and the employees"*. Similarly, the HR Director (company 2) indicated, *"We have social events within the company when all of us go for dinners, organize picnics, we often go to Cox's Bazaar (sea beach) and Sri Mangal (hill station). Such gatherings help in team building and help employees to interact with each other on something that is not just work related"*. Therefore, it can be observed that the companies try to maintain a

friendly working environment for their employees and this may contribute positively towards the employees' work attitude.

From the interviews of the Directors in the two companies, it can be observed that they do not have a thorough understanding of WLB. They tend to view employees' WLB only through benefits and compensations offered by the companies. The Directors see WLB as a cost to the business and a benefit to the employees. WLB is something that is not only obtained through employee benefits and other compensations. As indicated by Moore (2007:386) "whether WLB is achieved can depend more on employee work attitudes than on employer WLB provisions".

4.2 Findings Part 2

a) Employees' Views and Experiences of WLB

After interviewing 12 employees, excluding the Directors (9 from company 1 and 3 from company 2), working at the executive levels, it was observed that they gave low importance to WLB provisions. For example, an employee said, "*Honestly, at this point of life, I just want to work very hard and try to get a higher pay and I really don't care about the other benefits. Later in life, when I have a family with children, I can start taking it a little easy*"-HR Executive in Recruitment and Training, male, 30 years (company 1). Another employee indicated, "*I have seen many of my colleagues from my department moved to banking. The workload may be more in banks, but banks do pay people very well, much better than telecom*"-Executive in Customer Care (Front Office), female, 31 years (company 1). Therefore, it can be implied that most employees seek for a better salary and WLB provisions or other workplace facilities are just a part of it.

It was also found that employees did not experience a good WLB in the companies. They were facing a difficult time in coping with work and home responsibilities. It was cited in an interview, "*Currently, I would say that I'm experiencing a very difficult WLB. My husband and I have to go to work every day so, I call my mother to come and help me to take care of my daughter when we are at work. I have a maidservant at home but I don't feel 100% safe to leave my child with her. Moreover, after a few years when my child starts to go to school, the situation will get even worse.*"-Merchandising Executive, female, 32 years (company 2). Another employee reported, "*I am not married so I do not face too many problems regarding spending too much time at work, but I do have relatives and there have been times when I could not attend some functions at home because I was at work. Besides, my friends are always complaining that I don't spend much time with them*"-Merchandising Executive, male, 24 years (company 2). Thus, it may be observed that male/female, married/unmarried and employees of different ages

experience difficulties in balancing their time between work and home, but their problems may not be of the same intensity.

In Bangladesh, weekend is considered Fridays-Saturdays, unlike most of the other countries where weekend is Saturdays-Sundays. In telecommunications, work has to go on during weekends too. It was found that in company 1, employees were subjected to roster duties. Under this, every month employees' weekends are shuffled but their weekends still comprise of 2 consecutive days, for example, it can be Saturday-Sunday or Tuesday-Wednesday, etc. Employees consider having different weekend days both advantageous and disadvantageous. For instance, an employee reported, "*When my husband and I have different weekends, it becomes very difficult to spend time with each other. Sometimes, I manage to negotiate with my line manager and get my weekends on Fridays-Saturdays like my husband's, but it's not possible every time. The only good thing about this is in terms of taking care of our baby; she gets 4 complete days with her parents when my husband and I have different weekends*"-Executive in Customer Care (Front Office).

On the other hand, in company 2, being a British MNC follows the weekend pattern of Britain; employees get Saturdays-Sundays off. An employee mentioned, "*Not having Fridays off is difficult for us as all my friends and family have Fridays off and they have get-togethers, which I'm unable to attend*"-Merchandising Executive. Another employee stated, "*Not having Fridays off does become difficult for us but people who work in this industry come with this mind-set that no matter what, this is the way work is done here. The major problem we had was regarding performing our Friday prayers (Jummah, at noon), but now the company has made arrangements for it. We now get a longer lunch break where employees accommodate their prayer timings in that*"-Finance Executive. Therefore, it may be observed that even though different working days are a problem for the employees, but they manage to cope with it. The management also makes arrangements for their employees when they feel it is really needed, but it is seldom.

b) Employees' capacity to demand WLB policies and the use of companies' WLB provisions

During the interviews when employees were asked about their capacity to demand WLB policies, then it was reported that employees usually do not request new WLB policies they desired and moreover, they have low expectations from the company. For instance, it was indicated by an employee, "*I don't think such suggestions are welcomed from us.*"- Corporate Communication Officer (company 1). Another employee reported, "*I do not think that the problem lies because of the lack of employees' demand. Most of the time the employees' demand*

will be ignored and it won't make a difference to the company's policies"-Merchandising Executive (company 2).

When employees were asked about their views on some form of employee representation, such as works councils for presenting their requests to the management then they had an unfavorable attitude towards it. For example, an employee mentioned, *"We don't have a works council and I don't think there is any need for one here. It is always better to address our problems individually. Communicating collectively can get very rowdy and hamper our relationship with the employer. However, our parent company has a works council and it works for them"*-Marketing Junior Executive (company 1). Therefore, the quotations above demonstrate that employees even in the foreign companies in Bangladesh tend to refrain from demanding change or suggesting new WLB policies.

Regarding the use of companies' WLB provisions, it was found that some employees make good use of it while some do not. For example, it was mentioned by an employee, *"The Company provides us with free transport for coming to work and even drop back home. I use it all the time and its quite convenient considering I stay so far"*-HR Officer (company 1). However, some employees do not get to use the free transport, for instance, an employee indicated, *"Sometimes we have to come to work either before the standard working hours or even leave the office late. During those times we have to manage our own transport. This is quite inconvenient and especially for me as I stay really far. There are other problems with the company bus, such as, it's always packed, we hardly get a proper place to sit and sometimes the AC doesn't work so, we have to sit in the heat"*-Senior Executive- Customer Care (Front Office), company 1. So, the provision of company's transport is an example that can potentially help the employees' WLB, such as getting home from work and getting to work from home conveniently but in reality it does not assist. It was also reported that the provision of a childcare center has been a great help for the employees in company 1. As an employee stated, *"Currently, I'm on my 4th month of my maternity leave. Since a couple of days I have started to come to work because of the extreme workload. The provision of a childcare center has made it very convenient for me to bring my newborn child to work. This way I can keep a constant check on my child even when I'm working"*-Executive-Customer Care. Therefore, many employees benefit from such workplace facilities while many do not.

c) Managerial Support

In these two companies, managerial support has been considered a crucial factor in perceiving the WLB culture. The employees in both the companies expressed great supportiveness by their line managers. It was mentioned by an employee, *"In our company many things depend on the line manager. For instance, when I was pregnant and if I wasn't feeling*

well or I had to leave from work early to go for my doctor's appointment then he used to let me go. He was very understanding and I got complete support from him"-Customer Care Executive (Front Office), company 1. Another employee cited, *"My manager is very helpful towards all of us in the team and he is very approachable. For example, once I had to go for a wedding in the afternoon but there was too much work to be completed. So, what I did was I finished how much work I could until 12pm and then I took 3 hours off and attended the wedding. After that I returned to the office and continued with my work. My manager was perfectly ok with this"*-Customer Care Executive (company 1).

In terms of the supervision by line managers, employees seemed quite satisfied. An employee mentioned, *"My line manager's supervision over my work is just the right amount. I do have some freedom to complete my work the way I wish to. I think my manager understands that in some work I will be more familiar with it because I deal with it from the root level. However, there have been instances through which I understood that my manager believes in a somewhat facetime-oriented culture. For instance, if he stays at work for long then he expects his employees to stay back. Besides, there is always something to work on, if not my work then my colleagues will have some work that I could work on"*-Merchandising Executive (company 2). Therefore, it can be seen that the employees are somewhat happy with the way their line manager treats them. If their managers initiate a facetime-oriented culture then they accept it and cope well with it. It can be observed that the employees have some autonomy over how they do their work.

d) Employees' Attitude towards their Job

Most employees did not complain about working extra hours beyond the standard working hours. An employee cited, *"The term 'overtime' is for the factory workers because they are entitled to the pay for working extra hours. We exceed our working hours only to complete our work for the day"*-HR Officer (company 1). Another employee compared his company to another MNC and said, *"There is one software MNC with whom we have a close connection. They discourage their employees to exceed their standard working hours by switching off all the lights sharp at 8pm. This practice works very well for them. We have tried adopting the same policy by switching off the lights and also turning off the lifts at sharp 8pm but it didn't work for us"*-Merchandising Executive (company 2). Therefore, it may be observed that employees feel a sense of responsibility to finish their work on time. It was found through the interviews that employees feel privileged to work in foreign companies as opposed to local companies. This prestige factor tends to outweigh other unfavorable factors.

5. Conclusion

The findings revealed that WLB approach is still very new to Bangladesh and employees of different ages, gender, marital status and hierarchical positions in the two foreign companies experienced a difficult WLB. In the opinion of the respondents, WLB provisions in the foreign companies in Bangladesh are not satisfactory but it is better than those of the local companies. White collar employees do not believe in presenting their interests collectively. Employees are under the belief that in the current situation of job crisis, employers are in a great position as they have a lot of options in choosing their employees. Therefore, employees refrain from demanding for desired WLB policies. In terms of working hours, it was observed that managers are creating a face-time oriented culture and employees complicit in this culture and are not demanding changes. All these factors may be collectively constraining a good WLB for the employees.

Conversely, findings have shown that the foreign organizations do have some of the WLB policies in place, but these facilities are not common among all the foreign companies. It was also observed that not all employees equally use these workplace facilities. Employees reported that they have good autonomy over the way they do their work. These factors may work favorably for the employees to cope with their work-family conflicts but the research showed that they did not as employees reported that they still experienced a poor WLB. The present research has demonstrated that there are more factors, which hinder than the ones that enable organizations' ability to effectively implement WLB practices. Moreover, the management claimed that there is hardly any scope to invest for further modifications in the companies' WLB provisions under the current period of high inflation. They suggested that these foreign operations in Bangladesh lack good collaboration with their parent companies and so, it hinders the transfer of progressive HR policies. Both Directors and employees in the two companies lacked a thorough understanding of WLB. They viewed employee benefits, compensations and employee-friendly practices as a way for employees to obtain a good WLB but in reality employees' WLB is not just about these.

The present research has been an attempt to expand the contemporary studies of WLB to the Bangladeshi context. Future WLB studies should focus on both foreign and Bangladeshi local companies and also include other sectors than the ones explored in this study. Future studies should focus more on home to work conflicts as this study mainly investigated work to home conflicts and they should also use both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to validate the findings of the present research.

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