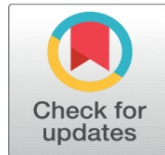
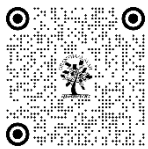


EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN STARTUP COMPANIES

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ABSTRACT

Work-life balance has emerged as a crucial determinant of employee well-being, satisfaction, and engagement in the modern workplace. For startup companies—where the pace of work is often intense, resources are limited, and employee roles are fluid—achieving and maintaining a healthy work-life balance becomes both a challenge and a strategic necessity. The significance of work-life balance lies in its capacity to directly influence employee morale, reduce burnout, and foster a culture of trust and loyalty. In recent years, the concept of work-life balance has gained immense relevance, particularly within dynamic and fast-paced organizational settings such as startups. This study seeks to investigate the relationship between work-life balance practices and levels of employee engagement, as perceived by Human Resource (HR) managers working in Ahmedabad-based startup companies. With a sample size of 128 HR managers selected through a random sampling technique, the research utilizes a structured close-ended questionnaire to collect data. The primary objectives of the study are twofold: first, to analyze the perception of HR managers regarding how work-life balance initiatives affect employee engagement, and second, to examine the association between the demographic profiles of HR managers and their perceptions. The findings of the study reveal a strong belief among HR managers that work-life balance initiatives—including flexible working hours and HR policies aligned with employee well-being—significantly contribute to improved employee engagement. These insights underline the growing need for startups to embed work-life balance strategies into their broader human resource practices to foster a more committed, productive, and motivated workforce.

Keywords: Work-Life Balance, Employee Engagement, Startup Companies, Human Resource Management, Flexible Working Hours, HR Policies

1. INTRODUCTION

Work-life balance refers to the equilibrium between personal life and professional responsibilities, ensuring that individuals can effectively manage both without one compromising the other. In today's fast-paced and highly demanding work environments, maintaining this balance has become increasingly important for both employees and employers. Organizations that promote work-life balance are not only safeguarding the mental and physical health of their workforce but are also creating a more productive and loyal employee base. The integration of flexible work schedules, remote working options, and wellness programs are among the many strategies used to help employees manage their dual responsibilities.

Employee engagement, on the other hand, is the emotional commitment an employee has towards their organization and its goals. Engaged employees are enthusiastic, dedicated, and motivated to contribute to their organization's success. They go beyond their job descriptions, demonstrate a sense of ownership, and are often proactive in problem-solving and innovation. Engagement is influenced by multiple factors including leadership quality, recognition, opportunities for growth, meaningful work, and importantly, the balance between professional and personal life.

The relationship between work-life balance and employee engagement is both profound and interdependent. When employees feel that their personal lives are respected and supported by their employers, they are more likely to reciprocate with higher levels of engagement and productivity. A supportive work environment that recognizes the importance of family time, hobbies, and mental health fosters trust and satisfaction, which in turn enhances commitment to work. Conversely, poor work-life balance can lead to stress, burnout, absenteeism, and eventually disengagement, all of which harm organizational performance.

Modern organizations are increasingly acknowledging the significance of aligning work-life balance with engagement strategies. Initiatives such as mental health days, family-friendly policies, hybrid work models, and employee wellness programs are proving to be effective in enhancing morale and commitment. Furthermore, transparent communication, empathetic leadership, and respect for boundaries have emerged as critical tools in building a culture of balance and engagement.

Overall, achieving a harmonious work-life balance is not just a personal goal for employees but a strategic imperative for organizations aiming to boost employee engagement. When organizations invest in the well-being of their workforce by supporting their life outside the workplace, they reap the benefits of a more motivated, loyal, and high-performing team. The synergy between work-life balance and employee engagement creates a sustainable work culture that drives both personal satisfaction and organizational success.

2. NEED OF THE STUDY

In the rapidly evolving business ecosystem of India, startup companies have emerged as dynamic drivers of innovation, employment, and economic growth. Ahmedabad, a key entrepreneurial hub in Gujarat, has witnessed a significant rise in startup ventures across various sectors. These startups, while characterized by innovation and agility, often operate under high-pressure environments with demanding workloads and extended working hours. Such work conditions can have a profound impact on employees' ability to maintain a healthy balance between their professional and personal lives.

Work-life balance is increasingly recognized as a crucial determinant of employee well-being, job satisfaction, and overall productivity. In the context of startup companies, where the line between work and personal life often blurs, the importance of maintaining this balance becomes even more significant. Employees who struggle to manage their work and personal responsibilities effectively may experience stress, fatigue, and disengagement from their professional roles. On the other hand, those who perceive a positive work-life balance are more likely to exhibit higher levels of commitment, motivation, and engagement with their work.

Employee engagement is a key factor in the success and sustainability of startups. Engaged employees are more productive, show greater initiative, and contribute actively to the achievement of organizational goals. For startups in Ahmedabad, which often operate with limited resources and rely heavily on a small, dedicated workforce, fostering employee engagement is critical. However, there is limited empirical research that specifically explores the role of work-life balance in shaping employee engagement within the startup ecosystem of this region.

The need for this study arises from the growing recognition that traditional approaches to employee management may not be entirely applicable or effective in startup environments. There is a pressing need to understand how work-life balance influences engagement levels among employees in these unique organizational settings. This research aims to bridge the knowledge gap by providing valuable insights into the interrelationship between work-life balance and employee engagement, with a particular focus on startup companies in Ahmedabad.

By examining this relationship, the study will not only contribute to academic literature but also offer practical recommendations for startup founders, human resource managers, and policy-makers. Understanding the impact of work-life balance on employee engagement can help startups in Ahmedabad design better workplace policies, improve employee retention, and build a more motivated and resilient workforce.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Xiaoli Sun (2024), In a study focusing on startups in Shanghai, Xiaoli Sun explored how work-life balance influences employee performance, with particular attention to the mediating roles of employee well-being and engagement. The research revealed that a positive work-life balance significantly enhances employee engagement, which in turn boosts

overall performance. The study emphasized that in the dynamic environment of startups, where employees often face high demands, maintaining a healthy work-life balance is crucial for sustaining engagement and productivity.

Mengistu Guliti Buba et al. (2024), Investigating the effects of work-life balance practices on job satisfaction, this study found that employees with a favourable perception of work-life balance reported higher job satisfaction levels. The research highlighted that job characteristics, such as autonomy and task variety, were significant predictors of job satisfaction. Interestingly, the study noted that supervisor support did not have a significant impact, suggesting that structural job elements might play a more vital role in influencing employee engagement.

Nadhiya and Sareena Umma (2022), Focusing on academics in Sri Lanka, this study examined the relationship between work-life balance and job satisfaction. The findings indicated that a balanced work-life significantly contributes to job satisfaction, which is a key component of employee engagement. The research underscored the importance of organizational support in facilitating work-life balance to enhance employee commitment and satisfaction.

Dwi Putri Larasati et al. (2019), This study explored the effects of work-life balance on employee engagement among the millennial generation in Indonesia. The results demonstrated that work-life balance accounted for 14.3% of the variance in employee engagement, indicating a moderate but significant impact. The research suggested that organizations focusing on the well-being of their employees' personal and professional lives could foster higher engagement levels, particularly among younger workers.

Shyamadanthi (2023), This study investigated the impact of work-life balance on employee performance, considering the mediating roles of affective commitment and job satisfaction. The research found that a balanced work-life significantly improves affective commitment and job satisfaction, which in turn enhance employee performance. The study highlighted the importance of organizational strategies that promote work-life balance to foster a committed and satisfied workforce.

Al-Khateeb and Al-Louzi (2020), In their exploratory study within Jordan's telecom and IT sectors, Al-Khateeb and Al-Louzi examined how work-life balance influences employee engagement and organizational performance. They found that effective work-life balance practices significantly enhance employee engagement, which in turn positively affects talent management and overall organizational performance. The study emphasized the necessity for organizations to implement supportive policies that promote a harmonious balance between professional and personal responsibilities.

Marecki (2024), Marecki's research at the SGH Warsaw School of Economics focused on the impact of work-life balance on employee productivity and well-being. The study revealed that employees who experience a satisfactory balance between work and personal life exhibit higher productivity levels and better overall well-being. The findings suggest that organizations prioritizing work-life balance initiatives can foster a more motivated and healthier workforce.

Stankevičienė et al. (2021), Investigating the mediating role of work-life balance, Stankevičienė and colleagues explored its effect on the relationship between work culture and employee well-being in Lithuanian organizations. Their study demonstrated that a supportive work culture positively influences employee well-being, with work-life balance serving as a crucial mediator. The research highlighted the importance of fostering a family-friendly culture to enhance employee satisfaction and engagement.

Jaharuddin and Zainol (2019), In Malaysia, Jaharuddin and Zainol examined the connection between work-life balance, job engagement, and turnover intention among executive employees. Their findings indicated that work-life conflicts negatively impact job engagement and increase turnover intentions. The study underscored the importance of organizational support in achieving work-life balance to enhance employee engagement and reduce turnover rates.

Saleem et al. (2024), Conducting research in Pakistan's private sector, Saleem and colleagues assessed the impact of work-life balance on turnover intention, considering job engagement as a mediating factor. The study found a positive relationship between work-life balance and job engagement, and a negative relationship between job engagement and turnover intention. However, job engagement did not mediate the relationship between work-life balance and turnover intention, suggesting the need for diverse strategies to enhance employee retention.

Fathima and Kumar (2023), Focusing on Chennai's IT sector, Fathima and Kumar explored the relationships between demographic profiles, work-life balance, employee engagement, and productivity. Their research revealed strong positive correlations between work-life balance, employee engagement, and productivity. The study emphasized the importance of demographic considerations in developing work-life balance policies to boost engagement and productivity.

Saxena (2019), Saxena's study examined the impact of work-life balance policies on employee engagement. The research indicated that employees who perceive a balance between their work and personal lives are more engaged and aligned with organizational goals. The study highlighted the role of flexible working hours and remote work options in enhancing employee engagement and organizational culture.

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4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- 1) To analyse the perception of the HR managers of startup companies towards impact of work-life balance on employee engagement.
- 2) To find out association between demographic profile of the HR managers of startup companies and their perception towards impact of work-life balance on employee engagement

5. SAMPLE SIZE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

For the purpose of this study, a total of 128 Human Resource (HR) managers from various Ahmedabad-based startup companies were selected as respondents. These HR professionals were chosen to provide insights into their perceptions regarding the impact of work-life balance on employee engagement within startup environments.

The primary data was collected using a structured close-ended questionnaire, specifically designed to gather relevant and focused responses.

The study employed the random sampling method, ensuring that every HR manager within the identified population had an equal opportunity of being selected.

This method was chosen to reduce selection bias and enhance the representativeness of the sample, thereby increasing the reliability and generalizability of the study's findings within the context of startup companies in Ahmedabad.

6. DATA ANALYSIS

- 1) H₀: HR managers do not believe that Work-life balance initiatives contribute to increased employee engagement in our organization.

One-Sample Test						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Test Value = 3	
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Work-life balance initiatives contribute to increased employee engagement in our organization.	6.208	127	.011	.386	.26	.51

INTERPRETATION

The significance level is 0.011, which is smaller than the threshold of 0.05 value. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis is supported, and the null hypothesis is rejected. As a result, we can say that HR managers believe that Work-life balance initiatives contribute to increased employee engagement in our organization.

- 2) H₀: HR managers do not believe that Flexible working hours have a positive impact on employee engagement.

One-Sample Test						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Test Value = 3	
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Flexible working hours have a positive impact on employee engagement.	-14.587	127	.009	-.736	-.84	-.64

INTERPRETATION

The significance level is 0.009, which is smaller than the threshold of 0.05 value. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis is supported, and the null hypothesis is rejected. As a result, we can say that HR managers believe that Flexible working hours have a positive impact on employee engagement.

- 3) H0: HR managers do not believe that HR policies related to work-life balance are aligned with our employee engagement goals.

One-Sample Test						
	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
HR policies related to work-life balance are aligned with our employee engagement goals.	-14.923	127	.040	-.734	-.83	-.64

INTERPRETATION

The significance level is 0.04, which is smaller than the threshold of 0.05 value. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis is supported, and the null hypothesis is rejected. As a result, we can say that HR managers believe that HR policies related to work-life balance are aligned with our employee engagement goals.

- 4) H0: There is no association between demographic profile of the HR managers of startup companies and their perception towards impact of work-life balance on employee engagement

Variable-1	Variable-2	Pearson Chi-Square	P Value	Decision
Gender	Work-life balance initiatives contribute to increased employee engagement in our organization	7.32	0.014	There is Significant Association
	Flexible working hours have a positive impact on employee engagement.	5.87	0.015	
	HR policies related to work-life balance are aligned with our employee engagement goals.	8.79	0.015	
Age	Work-life balance initiatives contribute to increased employee engagement in our organization	5.62	0.012	
	Flexible working hours have a positive impact on employee engagement.	4.86	0.003	
	HR policies related to work-life balance are aligned with our employee engagement goals.	8.91	0.005	
Education	Work-life balance initiatives contribute to increased employee engagement in our organization	2.46	0.008	
	Flexible working hours have a positive impact on employee engagement.	1.99	0.002	
	HR policies related to work-life balance are aligned with our employee engagement goals.	2.99	0.011	
Years of experience	Work-life balance initiatives contribute to increased employee engagement in our organization	3.42	0.002	
	Flexible working hours have a positive impact on employee engagement.	0.83	0.016	
	HR policies related to work-life balance are aligned with our employee engagement goals.	3.60	0.012	

7. CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to explore the perception of HR managers from startup companies based in Ahmedabad regarding the impact of work-life balance on employee engagement. The findings derived from the close-ended questionnaire indicate a clear and consistent consensus among HR professionals that work-life balance initiatives significantly enhance employee engagement in startup environments.

A majority of HR managers strongly agreed that work-life balance initiatives directly contribute to higher levels of employee engagement. This perception suggests that when employees are given the flexibility and support to manage their personal and professional responsibilities, they are more likely to feel valued and motivated in the workplace. HR professionals acknowledged that initiatives promoting work-life balance, such as wellness programs, paid time off, stress management workshops, and psychological support systems, positively influence employees' emotional connection to their work, resulting in increased involvement, commitment, and job satisfaction. In the context of startups, where employees often face long hours and high-pressure environments, the provision of a healthy work-life balance serves as a critical lever to maintain morale and prevent burnout.

The study found that HR managers firmly believe that flexible working hours—one of the most important components of work-life balance—have a substantial positive impact on employee engagement. This indicates a shift in mindset among HR professionals, who now recognize the changing expectations of the modern workforce, especially in startups that tend to attract younger and more dynamic employees. Flexibility in work timing enables employees to work at their peak productivity hours and manage personal obligations without compromising their professional responsibilities. Such autonomy fosters trust and responsibility, key drivers of engagement. It also aligns well with the culture of innovation and agility that startups strive to cultivate.

In addition to flexible scheduling, HR managers also emphasized that their organization's HR policies related to work-life balance are intentionally designed to support and enhance employee engagement. This alignment reflects a strategic approach where work-life balance is not seen as an isolated or supplementary policy, but as an integral part of the overall employee engagement framework. HR leaders understand that fostering an organizational culture that prioritizes employee well-being contributes to long-term commitment, lower attrition, better team collaboration, and overall improved organizational performance. This insight is particularly relevant for startups, where retaining talent and building strong employer branding are crucial for survival and growth.

Overall, the study reveals that HR managers in Ahmedabad-based startup companies recognize the vital role of work-life balance in enhancing employee engagement. They perceive that work-life balance initiatives, especially flexible working hours, have a direct and meaningful impact on how engaged employees feel with their roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, they affirm that HR policies are increasingly being aligned with work-life balance objectives to foster a more engaged, productive, and loyal workforce. These findings underscore the importance of integrating work-life balance as a core component of HR strategy in startup ecosystems and call for continuous innovation in people practices to maintain a sustainable and engaging work environment.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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