

## Devising Tools and Techniques for improving Work-Life Balance of Marketing Field Force in Oil and Gas Sector in India

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### Keywords

India, Public Sector, Marketing field force, Work life balance

### Abstract

*The marketing field forces in OIL sector are considered to have the worst work life balance because of their immense job pressure and other issues related to the work environmental. An engagement survey conducted in the company under study, an Indian Public sector dealing with Oil and gas (termed as an OIL PSU in this study) reaffirmed the same. Taking it forward, the current study investigated the sales force perceptions of various amenities to be provided to them for improving work life balance of marketing Field force in the company under study.*

*The overall objective of this study is to identify, devise and delivery of Tools and Techniques to improve Work-Life balance of OIL PSU in India. Both qualitative as well as quantitative research is conducted to get the relevant data from officer cadre only. A questionnaire was constructed, tested, and administered to the 700 nos. of field officers posted all over India. A total of 106 nos. of valid responses were received. Factor analysis was used to arrive at the results.*

*Based on the findings from the field, customized WLB tools and techniques were delivered together with recommendations for future course of action. As the current research to provide the WLB tools is based on the voice of the employees, its success is imminent. Though, the current work entails all the limitations of survey based studies.*

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### The Introduction

India is the sixth largest consumer of oil in the world and the ninth largest crude oil importer. Its oil and gas sector contributes over 15% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Further, the oil consumption is projected to enhance by 4-5% per annum to 2015, indicating a demand of 4.01 million b/d. as stated in the website [investindia.gov.in](http://investindia.gov.in), (March 3, 2013), according to Fitch's 2012 Outlook: Indian Oil and Gas, "The 2012 outlook for both public and private sector Indian oil and gas companies is stable despite various challenges, including the increasing fuel subsidy burden on public sector companies (PSCs) and an uncertain global macroeconomic environment."

In addition, privatization has resulted in the new players in the market. To manage the business, these new players have been poaching the star performers from public sector companies. Compensation and Career progression policies of the private players are added attraction for the star performers of PSUs in this sector to join these new players. Engaging the talent has also been another important challenge for these companies.

To address the challenge of attrition and engagement, a prominent public sector company in Oil and Gas sector commissioned a companywide 'Engagement Survey' in 2008. The study was carried out of two objectives: (a) assessment of the level of employee engagement in the company; and (b) identification of the factors (drivers) that influence employee engagement. A representative sample of 1482 nos. of officers in Grade A (Officer) to Grade G (Deputy General

Manager), randomly drawn from all divisions / units were part of this survey. The status of the selected 14 drivers, covering all divisions of the company, with few exceptions, may, by and large, be classified as follows:

Well looked after	Scope for some Improvement	Need much Improvement
Benefits Stakeholders Job Content Co-Workers	Learning Organisation Communication Recognition Career Opportunity Leadership Learning and Development HR alignment	Decision making <b>Work-life Balance</b> Pay

**Table-1**

The survey team on engagement made recommendations for frequent social get-togethers of employees and their family. While ordering transfer of an employee, hardships to his family life need to be minimised. To enable employees to cope with work pressures, the company may provide necessary facilities/ options like flexi working hours, crèche, gym, recreation, etc.

As “Work-Life Balance” came out as one of the most talked about driver and the lowest-rated factor that needs much improvement across all the four regions in the country especially in the Marketing Division of the company under study, it motivated the authors to conduct the current study.

The current study has been conducted with a singular aim of addressing the work life issues of hundreds of marketing field force of the company positioned all across India. These sales forces are exposed to all adverse conditions being posted in different locations in various parts of the country including big cities and also small towns and villages which are still devoid of basic infrastructure and amenities like proper road, housing and other facilities for living a balanced life. In addition to sales, their job demands controlling diversion of subsidised LPG/ kerosene or fighting with local mafias engaged in adulteration. They have the job of a sales man with equal responsibility to act as an Inspector/ Investigator/ Controller.

The current study was conceptualized after exploring the issues related to Work life Balance through literature and semi-structured Interviews conducted on a sample of marketing sales force of the company under study.

## **Literature Review**

Work /life balance (WLB) is an area of human resource (HR) management that has achieved increased attention in the last decade as employers seek to attract and retain skilled employees in competitive labour markets (Barnett & Hall, 2001; Nord, Fox, Phoenix & Viano, 2002; De Cieri, Holmes, Abbott & Pettit 2005; Pocock 2005 as cited in McGraw and Heidtman, 2009). In the current technology aided work organizations, employees remain in communication with both work and family which has its own impact of continuous information and also overload issues. Demographic and social changes have also impacted the life of employees in the current scenario. Creating WLB opportunities has become an increasingly important element of HR management as more employees seek to achieve a better balance between work and non-

work activities, and employers seek to recruit and retain the best talent (Papalexandris & Kramar, 1997; De Cieri et al, 2005 as McGraw and Heidtman, 2009 ).

### Research Methodology

Semi structured Interviews of marketing sales force of the company conducted to explore the possible challenges faced by the marketing sales force, during this study, and further analysis helped us in listing out following live issues on personal/ family front based on which tools and techniques could be developed to improve work-life balance.

<p>Gets little physical support in case of safety threat during field working.</p> <p>Mobile phones/ E-mails keep him/her engaged with official job during personal (family) time even in odd hours.</p> <p>Seldom finds time for vacation with family and friends.</p> <p>Finds it difficult to manage personal finance/ investment portfolio</p>	<p>Face difficulties in getting his/ her child admitted in good schools during transfer</p> <p>Occasionally finds time for arranging provisions/ rations for family</p> <p>Can't think of part time/ evening classes to pursue higher educational programmes</p> <p>Does not find time to relax in a club or attend a health club.</p>	<p>In case of working couple, arranging day care centre (crèche) is a big problem.</p> <p>During transfer, finds difficulties in arranging complete transport solution.</p> <p>Personal hobby &amp; interest take a back seat.</p> <p>Mostly work under stress full condition</p> <p>Neglects his/ her own health and hardly ever go thru. regular basic medical check ups.</p>
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**Table-2**

Based on the preliminary information from the semi structured interview as well as the past data from 'Engagement survey' conducted by the company, the following design emerged to conduct this study;

### Objectives:

The overall objective of this study is to identify, devise and deliver the 'Tools and Techniques' to improve Work-Life balance of the marketing Field Force of the company (an Oil PSU) in India.

### Scope of the Study:

The project covers the officer cadre only of marketing field force of the company under study. The survey was opened to all such field officers in the marketing division (all four regions). A total of 106 nos. of valid responses, received from officers in Grade A to D, which constitute sample for this study.

### Sampling Plan:

Instead of selecting a representative sample out of a population, the study/ survey was made opened to all the 700 nos. of field officers posted all over India. The idea was to collect response from a wider population, be the officer posted in a Metro or small city with varied demographic profiles. Through this survey, it was also attempted to create awareness amongst the officers on WLB issues.

**Pilot Study:**

The 30-item questionnaire, consisting of 6 questions pertaining to demography and 24 questions pertaining to WLB measures, was pre tested with first 30 no. of samples received from the field.

**Reliability Test Result:**

No. of cases (N)	No. of Qs (items)	Std. ALPHA coefficient
30	30	0.9199

**Table-3**

Reliability was reported as 0.92. However a few minor suggestions were incorporated in the wordings of some questionnaires to make it better presentable/ understandable.

**Collection and Analysis of Data:**

All of the responses were received electronically. A total of 121 responses were received out of which 106 no. of responses were found to be valid for our study. The balance 15 nos. were filled incorrectly and thus were declared as invalid.

**Sample**

Division	Field Officer Strength	Sample Size (valid)	Percentage
Marketing	700	106	15

**Table-4****Sample Profile:**

Based on the background provided by the 106 no. of Field Officers who responded to the questionnaire, we have developed a brief profile of their demographic data which is described below:

Age of respondents (Yrs)	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 30	21	19.8
From 30 to 40	47	44.3
More than 40	38	35.9
Total	106	100

Functional Dept. (Sales)	Frequency	Percentage
Retail Sales	64	60.4
LPG Sales	21	19.8
Consumer Sales	16	15.1
Lube Sales	5	4.7
Total	106	100

Class of City	Frequency	Percentage
Metro	5	4.7
A-Class	8	7.5
B-Class	43	40.6
C-Class	50	47.2
Total	106	100

Marketing Region	Frequency	Percentage
ER	8	7.5
WR	20	18.9

NR	43	40.6
SR	35	33.0
Total	106	100

Years of Service with the company	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 5	24	22.6
From 5 to 10	32	30.2
More than 10	50	47.2
Total	106	100

Officer Grade	Frequency	Percentage
A	31	29.2
B	35	33
C	34	32.1
D	6	5.7
Total	106	100

Table-5

### Field Interviews

During the surveys informal discussions were also held with Seniors (executives in Grade - E, F, G), Peers (executives in Grade-D) and Sub-ordinates (Field executives in Grade-A, B, C) at different forums. Some of their major reactions and our findings are as follows:

#### With Seniors:

- Seniors compare their good old days of field working. In earlier times, there were no modern gadgets like Mobile, Lap Tops etc. Internet/ E-mails were only being heard about. Off late Pagers were introduced but short lived. Land line Telephone, Fax and India Post were the only mode of communication.
- No doubt, there were targets/ dead lines/ work pressures but, due to sluggish mode/ slow pace of communications immediate pressures were less felt by the field force. Proper Planning and Timely execution were very much rewarded. There was market monopoly and absolute no competition. Public awareness was quite low. Field forces were getting some breathing space in their field job to attend their personal commitments. In comparison to the current field working, their work-life was better balanced even if there were less recreational facilities for family members.
- Modern gadgets and advanced modes have now increased the pace of communications to many folds. They find their field force more under stress and also opined that it is high time to address work life issues in our organisation thru. WLB measures.

#### With Peers:

- Peer group have strong views on deteriorating work life of our field force
- More of a stressful atmosphere is being felt everywhere.
- The group was very much apprehensive that our organisation may lose to other industry or otherwise, some of our best-known creams/ talents/ experienced/ committed field forces who have failed to maintain a quality work life (QWL).

- At present, we may have a one digit attrition rate but, with the opening up of Global markets it may grow further. Best employees always look for greener pastures. With introducing WLB measures we can address his/ her personal needs and thus can retain them.

### **With Juniors:**

- While discussing about WLB, they were the most excited lot. Some of their reactions are worth mentioning. It is now reproduced in their languages.
- With the kind of stress in the field force, balancing the work & life is a must. Families need some of our time and attention. Some of the main reasons of not achieving work life balance by field officers are:
  - Conducting Field Officers reviews on weekends
  - Visit by senior officials on holidays/ weekends
  - Conducting training programs stretching from Monday morning to Saturday late night, forcing the officers to travel for both the weekends before and after the program
  - Asking for irrelevant reports again and again which usually has to be done as a home work during weekends or after returning from the filed work in late night
  - Lack of privacy as the home acts as office and any dealer or dealer's staff can butt in at any time during any day for submission of bills, request for some facilities or for the simple matter that the dealer is feeling bored
  - Writing the mobile number of filed officer in the RO enabling the field officer to work as a one man 24 X 7 call centre, always at service for any customer who calls even at oddest of hours.
  - We are exposed to tremendous pressures from all sides viz. Office (all levels), Dealers, Govt. Offices and Family, as both the partners and parents in the family are usually busy professionals.
  - We always remain on tenterhook because of surprise Investigation by Statutory authority, Vigilance, Govt. bodies and now a days, very much disturbed in answering RTI queries, which are mostly collected from the field only.
  - At field level the distinction i.e. works -life is more blurred and actually it ends up like work only. Better to provide office in one of the retail outlet at headquarters instead at house because it delinks personal & work life, family members get better privacy and efficiency might improve.

### **Analysis**

WLB survey: The quantitative data generated by the structured questionnaires with 30 questions and from 106 numbers of respondents received was treated with scientific Research Methodology (SPSS) both for Macro as well as microscopic analysis of data. The overall purpose of this analysis was to find out the widely acceptable measures which can be further customized to put in practice to improve WLB of our field force. The outcome is summarized in the table below

The Reliability coefficient for all the items ranges between 0.87 to 0.88. Hence, there is high degree of internal consistency in the survey questionnaires.

Ratings were assigned to variables under study on the basis of % of Mean scores and has been summarized in the following table-6

Sr. No.	Variable (Item)	Score Range	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Mean Score as % (*)	Ratings
1	Safety 'n' Support	1-5	4.71	0.65	94	<b>Very High</b>
2	Weekend Activities	1-5	4.52	0.99	90	
3	School tie up	1-5	4.50	1.06	90	
4	Working Hours	1-5	4.45	0.84	89	
5	WLB Policy	1-5	4.40	0.99	88	
6	Vacation	1-5	4.36	0.94	87	
7	Health Screening	1-5	4.27	1.16	85	
8	Communication	1-5	4.23	1.15	85	
9	Club/ Health Club tie up	1-5	4.20	0.93	84	<b>High</b>
10	Out bound programme	1-5	4.17	0.93	83	
11	Tpt. Solution	1-5	4.16	1.09	83	
12	WLB task force	1-5	4.11	1.04	82	
13	Flexi Working	1-5	4.09	1.19	82	
14	WLB awards	1-5	4.08	1.03	82	
15	Availing LTC	1-5	4.07	1.02	81	
16	Forced Break	1-5	4.00	1.02	80	
17	B'School tie up	1-5	3.98	1.15	80	<b>Low</b>
18	Stress buster/ life coaching	1-5	3.86	1.08	77	
19	Wealth Mgmt.	1-5	3.82	1.35	76	
20	Annual WLB Programme	1-5	3.78	1.2	76	<b>Very Low</b>
21	Insurance Co. Tie up	1-5	3.58	1.23	72	
22	Dept. Chain tie up	1-5	3.43	1.26	69	
23	Creche tie up	1-5	3.32	1.31	66	

(\*) Each mean score was converted to % w.r.t. its highest rating, that is, 5.

Table-6

### Factor Analysis :

Following factors emerged as the main contributors to wards Work Life Balance as perceived by the respondents in the survey conducted for the current study.

Rotated component Matrix	1	2	3	4	5	6
Out bound prog.(Sports, Yoga etc.)	0.751	0.201	0.16	0.2	-1.23E-02	1.08E-02
Communication (avoid during personal time)	0.729	7.61E-02	9.55E-02	6.58E-02	0.268	0.159
Health Screening	0.679	0.365	5.42E-02	4.21E-02	0.185	0.121
Weekend activities	0.657	0.161	0.158	-1.53E-02	0.356	0.325
Club/ Health club	0.540	0.151	0.343	0.461	5.08E-02	-0.145
Wealth Mgmt.tie up	0.463	0.358	0.206	-1.83E-02	0.385	0.125
Insurance co. tie up	0.201	0.789	0.191	0.147	0.136	-0.201
Dept. chain tie up	0.274	0.739	0.141	0.257	6.36E-02	-0.11
Creche tie up	0.194	0.669	0.147	1.62E-02	-9.37E-03	0.315
School tie up	0.299	0.657	8.53E-02	0.167	-0.225	6.91E-02
Stress buster/ life coaching tie up	0.323	0.539	0.139	-1.70E-02	-6.73E-02	0.441
B'School tie up	0.322	0.532	0.315	1.77E-02	-0.506	-9.22E-02
WLB task force	4.58E-02	0.204	0.760	0.107	0.243	0.133
WLB rewards	0.115	0.322	0.745	0.207	-0.115	-2.49E-02
WLB Policy	0.229	8.14E-02	0.744	0.138	0.257	0.126
Vacation with family and friends	0.183	-2.91E-02	0.403	0.397	0.185	0.23
LTC avail	-1.31E-02	7.07E-02	2.65E-02	0.726	2.16E-02	0.168
Family get together	0.118	0.409	0.174	0.618	0.316	1.73E-02
Safety 'n' Support	0.336	2.21E-02	0.334	0.581	-6.83E-02	-9.70E-02
Safe Tpt. Soln.	0.122	0.471	0.227	0.486	2.76E-02	0.164
Flexi working	0.135	0.232	0.171	8.30E-02	0.681	0.212
Working Hours	0.456	-0.101	0.269	0.148	8.40E-02	0.661
Forced Break	8.41E-02	0.11	1.56E-03	0.514	6.22E-02	0.652

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.



**Table 7**

**Emerging Factors:** based on the statistical analysis, following factors emerged as preferred options for work-life Balance as perceived by the respondents

Sr. No.	Component	Emerging Factors
1	Out bound prog.(Sports, Yoga etc.)	Restore Health, Reduce Stress (Mind and Body Balance)
2	Communication (avoid during personal time)	
3	Health Screening	
4	Weekend activities	
5	Club/ Health club	
6	School tie up	Educational ties
7	B-School tie up	
8	Vacation with family and friends	Perfect Getaways
9	LTC avail	
10	Safety 'n' Support	Safety Net
11	Safe Tpt. soln.	
12	Flexi working	Flexi timing
13	Working Hours	Extra Break
14	Forced Break	
15	WLB task force	WLB Strategy
16	WLB rewards	
17	WLB Policy	

**Table 8**

### **WLB TOOL DESIGN & DELIVERY**

The current study singularly aimed at devising 'Tools and Techniques for improving Work-Life Balance' of Marketing Field Force in Oil/Gas sector in India. As the result of both qualitative and quantitative research following tools and Techniques were recommended;

#### **1. Restore Health, Reduce Stress (RHRS):**

Outbound Programmes, Yoga, working with NGOs,

Out bound programme; Arranging at least one out bound programme in a year i.e. Adventurous Sport/ Yoga Session/ Working with an NGO as CSR initiatives / joining a Hobby club. etc. is recommended.

#### **2. Edu.ties:**

Facilitating tie up with leading local schools/ colleges for children and Business school tie ups for online/ distance education programme for executives are desired by the respondents as second most preferred choice by the respondents. A part of the fees towards such higher education can be reimbursed through WLB fund. Officers may be granted paid leave and may be rewarded on successful completion of the program. This will encourage them to take admission/ complete higher management studies where in both the employee as well as the organisation are the beneficiaries.

#### **3. Perfect Getaways:**

Vacation with family and friends, encouraging availing of LTC by executives for travel rather than encashing it and tie ups with leading national/ international tour operators are recommended.

#### 4. **Safety Net:**

Providing adequate support/ taking measures in case of any safety threat during field work is mandated for stress free work life. Company needs to provide forum/ platform wherein the field officer will come out freely with all such issues that pose a threat during his/ her field working. The WLB task force at Field/ State level may be mandated to raise the issue at an appropriate level whether with the local administration or with the higher management of the company and thus ensuring pro active measures with regard to safety and support to field force during hours of need. 'Safe Transport solutions' are required for daily to infrequent visits to workplace and site visits.

#### 5. **Flexi Timing**

Flexi working hours/ schedule depending on the nature of the work.

6. **Extra Break** to be compensated by leave, for productive and engaged work, and
7. **Forced brake** to be given to managers working in the field (sometime as travel leave with family) or counselling in case of unproductive outcomes are few recommendations in this context.

#### 8. **WLB strategy:**

Formation of WLB-Task Force consisting of officers at Field level supported by similar committees at State & Head Office level for facilitating / co-ordinating the WLB measures are recommended. This three tier structure needs to have clearly designed accountability and responsibilities, to ensure effective implementation of WLB fund. A need to strategise 'WLB Rewards and 'WLB Policy' also came up as strong factor during data analysis.

"Honouring the best rated Field Officer, Divisional/ Area Office & State Office Work-Life Balance achiever/ excellence award" for all level is highly recommended.

"Designing relevant Policy that will ensure Work-Life Balance at work place". Some important comments received during the study are:

- Top management's firm commitment is a must to nurture such initiatives.
- In the Mission statement Corporation must spell out its role in addressing WLB issues of its valued employees.
- This can be institutionalised through a relevant WLB policy where in all activities/ measures with regard to WLB shall be spelt out and firm guidelines be issued/ responsibility be fixed at different levels to ensure its strict compliance.
- "Work life Balance" Index (WLBI) calculated on the basis of feedback received from the subordinates should be made integrated part of EPMS of every executive.
- To start with, the WLB policy may address the work life issues of our field force. Later on, it may be replicated for all executives of the Corporation. However, customization is very much required as the work life issues varies from one functional group to the other.

#### 9. **WLB Fund**

During the survey ,a question asked was-If your company promotes a WLB fund for introducing the said measures to improve your work life balance, will you be a member of it and contribute (nominal fee) to such fund if needed? (question no. 30). The survey response was strongly positive. (mean score as % -95)

The above statistical analysis implies that we may plan for a WLB fund at Head Office level partly contributed by the field force (WLB members) and rest funded by the corporation. The WLB membership may also be kept open to other executives who may like to join and enjoy

the benefits of WLB measures. A WLB society may also be registered at HO level under society registration Act. Its objective is to manage the WLB fund i.e. its collection, investment, disbursement etc. The WLB task force shall be responsible to roll out various WLB measures across the field locations. Objectives of WLB fund may be listed as:

To implement Work-Life Strategies which will help Field force manage their work responsibilities alongside personal and family needs.

This can be further segregated as follows.

**Training**-To subsidise the cost of training WLB task force to implement work-life strategies.

**Consultancy** - To subsidise the cost of hiring a certified consultant to explore, develop and implement work-life strategies.

**Human Resource** - To subsidise the salary of out sourcing staff tasked with implementing the work-life strategies.

It can also be used to fund the following Support Schemes/ Work-Life Effectiveness Programme such as (1).Part funding expenditure on out bound programmes, (2).Funding tie ups with (3) Event management company, (4) Travel/ Tour operators, (5) Concierge & other Service Providers (6). Sponsoring events focused on strengthening employee relationships (e.g. family picnic/ get-togethers),(7). Counselling/ Life coaching services (e.g. for stress or personal issues) , (8).Innovative childcare or eldercare arrangements,(9). Personal recreation/ wellness (e.g. Club/ Health club membership),(10). Extending annual grants to NGOs, Voluntary Organisations, Schools under tie ups, (11). Part reimbursement of fees towards higher education, (12).Special incentive to WLB task force. (13).Funding WLB reward scheme and for (14).Recurring costs of Work-Life measures

## Discussions and Conclusions

This study was carried out with the objective of devising tools and techniques to improve work life balance of our marketing field force but has culminated in the understanding that 'WLB work culture' is essential for productive and engaged workforce. Top Management's commitment is essential for creating such a culture.

## Research limitations and direction for further research

The current study is carried out for a singular purpose of creating a framework for Work Life Balance for the Marketing Sales force of a public sector company in India. By virtue of its business, the company in this case has operations in the entire country, covering metro cities to rural villages in India. Therefore though it is a study carried out in a single company but has the potential to be replicated in other organizations. As the study is based on perceptions of the workforce, it has its own limitations. This study provides a beginning for further work in the area of employee's expectation based design of work Life Balance with an objective of higher productivity and engagement. It opens up the possibility of deeper level studies to assess the expectations of organizational members based on gender, age and other such variables.

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