

Case Study: Does Corporate HR in India Need to Rethink Work-Life-Balance?

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ABSTRACT

In recent times, Infosys co-founder Narayana Murthy reignited a nation-wide debate on work-life balance by advocating a 70-hour workweek to enhance India's global competitiveness. He cited low productivity as a major obstacle. His remarks received major support from L&T CEO S. N. Subrahmanyam, who emphasized the need for long hours, especially for young professionals in core sectors. However, other business leaders offered contrasting views. Mahindra Group Chairman Anand Mahindra argued that inspiration and innovation, not extended hours, drive performance. Further, Adani Group Chairman Gautam Adani highlighted the importance of digital transformation, engagement, and work-life harmony over sheer time investment. The case consolidates findings from secondary sources and industry reports to glimpse into the mindset of the typical GenZ corporate soldier, who prefer a sustainable career to an overtly hustled work-life. Initially the case studies Gen Z as a legacy of the past generations and then provides insights on the global and Indian workplace, thus igniting questions on how an employer should design and execute policies that sustain talent from the GenZ worker who is likely to make up 74% of the workforce by 2030. The debate reflects a broader ideological divide between traditional hard work narratives and modern outcome-driven approaches. As India pursues its \$5 trillion economy goal, is the paradigm shifting from 'how much should we work?' to 'how should we work?'—raising critical questions on sustainable productivity, leadership philosophy, and employee well-being.

KEYWORDS: Talent Acquisition, Engagement, Productivity, Retention, Sustainability, Work-Life Balance

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

EVOLVING HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Work-life balance (WLB) in Indian corporates has emerged as a crucial issue; particularly with rapid digital transformation, hybrid work cultures, and rising employee expectations. WLB in Indian corporates also reflects evolving Human Resources (HR) maturity and governance responsibilities. Defined broadly, WLB refers to an individual's ability to align work commitments alongside personal life priorities. From the perspective of HR policies and corporate governance, Indian companies are increasingly integrating flexible work practices, mental health support, and wellness initiatives, but the implementation remains uneven across sectors. Progressive HR practices are now embracing flexible work hours, remote/hybrid working models, mental health leaves, and flexible sabbatical policies. From a corporate governance standpoint, companies that invest in WLB often witness better talent retention, improved morale, and increased productivity. Research has shown that employees with a healthy WLB are more engaged and innovative. (Ahmad, Saini, & Jawahar, 2022), (Friedman, Christensen, & DeGroot, 1998), (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000), (Heskett, 2004), (Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2021), (Wipro, 2024)

Work-life balance (WLB) is not an isolated HR objective but is deeply intertwined with several fundamental concepts in HRM. As organizations shift from traditional productivity-driven models to people-centric cultures, WLB becomes a strategic imperative, influencing talent acquisition, engagement, and long-term sustainability. WLB is an added HR dimension that has evolved as a matter of societal growth. Ever since the joint family structure has been on the decline with the rise of the nuclear family and even therein a fractal family with everyone occupied on his / her screen, WLB has never been such an important dimension as before. (Friedman, Christensen, & DeGroot, 1998), (Heskett, 2004), (Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2021), (Work and Life: The End of the Zero-Sum Game, 1998)

THE GENZ, THE MILLENNIAL AND THEIR PREDECESSORS

The concept WLB in corporate India has undergone significant transformation across Generations—shaped by socio-economic changes, technological evolution, and shifting cultural expectations. From the disciplined, duty-bound attitudes of Generation X to the flexibility-seeking Millennials (Generation Y), and now to the digitally native, well-being-focused Generation Z, WLB reflects an overall changing value system in Indian corporate life.

Era: 1946 – 1964: Loyalty and Regimentation

Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, entered the workforce during a time of post-war industrial expansion and economic growth. Their work ethic was largely shaped by values such as loyalty, discipline, and a strong sense of duty. For this Generation, work was central to identity and success was often measured by career progression, job security, and financial stability. Unlike later Generations, Baby Boomers were less focused on achieving a balanced lifestyle. They were known for long working hours, often sacrificing personal and family time in favour of professional responsibilities. The concept of WLB

was not a mainstream concern during their peak career years. Instead, their sense of fulfilment often came from dedication to their job, viewing personal sacrifices as necessary for professional advancement. However, as they moved toward retirement, many Baby Boomers began to reassess their priorities. Health, family time, and leisure gained importance, and flexible work options such as phased retirement or part-time roles became more appealing. Baby Boomers shaped the modern workplace through their strong work ethic, and although their approach to WLB evolved later in life. They laid the foundation for workplace discipline and structure still evident today.

Era: 1965 - 1980: Duty and Discipline

For Generation X, who entered the workforce in the 1980s and 1990s, WLB was not a priority—it was often an unspoken luxury. Shaped by a post-license-raj economy, job scarcity, and a culture of job loyalty, this generation focused on job security, promotions, and long-term stability. The government and Public Sector Undertakings were preferred as employers, with fixed hours but minimal emphasis on personal time or wellness. In private sector roles, long hours and hierarchical structures were common, especially in industries like manufacturing, infrastructure, and banking. WLB was often defined by personal compromise—weekends were sacrificed, and family life adjusted around work demands. The prevailing belief was that career success emancipated from personal sacrifice.

Era: 1981 - 1996: Balance, Flexibility, and Meaning

With economic liberalization since the mid-1990s, Generation Y or Millennials entered a rapidly globalizing workforce. They experienced the Information Technology (IT) and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) boom, leading to increased exposure to international work cultures. This Generation began valuing flexibility, career mobility, and the idea of balancing personal aspirations along with professional goals. Corporate India responded by gradually incorporating HR policies like flexible work hours, remote work options, and wellness initiatives. Companies like Infosys, Wipro, and TCS began experimenting with work-from-home pilots, even before COVID-19 erupted. Employee engagement surveys and HR analytics emerged to measure satisfaction and stress. Millennials sought meaning in work, not just a paycheck. This led to the growth of start-up culture, freelancing, and gig economy jobs. WLB became a recruitment and retention tool—especially in IT, Media, E-commerce, and Consulting among other sectors.

Era: 1997 – 2012: Digital Natives and Life-First Mindsets

Generation Z represent a paradigm shift. Entering the workforce post-2015, this Generation is digitally native, purpose-driven, and highly vocal about mental health and boundaries. For Generation Z, WLB is not negotiable—it is expected. Post-COVID-19, hybrid work, digital nomadism, and asynchronous work models have gained traction. Generation Z (GenZ) professionals value autonomy, mental well-being, and flexibility over traditional perks. Gen Z is brought up in a culture that normalizes gap years and prefer sustainable engagement at work to office rigour. As per Gallup Survey of 2025, the average working hours of GenZ is 2 hours less with no change in productivity. (Sachdev, 2025) They are willing to change jobs frequently if a role hampers their WLB. Companies have responded with policies such as four-day work weeks (experimented by a few start-ups), mental health days, and wellness allowances. Digital tools like Slack, Notion, and MS Teams are designed to optimize collaboration while preserving individual time. Engagement with GenZ can be sustained if the needs are met by the employers. Policies addressing

employee wellbeing and personal development opportunities are preferred by Gen Z employees. GenZ separates personal and professional lives and prioritize both separately. For them, the concept of work engagement is more than an utilization of time: it is a reflection of the societal value system. With shifting demographics, technological acceleration, and evolving cultural norms, the approach to work-life balance varies

From silent acceptance of long hours by Generation X, to active pursuit of WLB in Generation Y, and now the assertion of life-first priorities by GenZ, the idea of WLB in India has evolved from a passive aspiration to an active demand. Corporates that align with these changing expectations are more likely to attract and retain top talent, fostering a culture that blends performance with personal well-being. WLB has emerged as a critical pillar of employee well-being, organizational productivity, and sustainable economic growth. significantly across regions. (Sari, Rizal, & Kusuma, 2025), (Amith , Devadiga, & Vivek, 2023), (Fernandez, Landis, & Lee, 2023), (Greene, 2021), (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), (McRae, Aykens, Lowmaster, & Shepp, 2023), (Thilagavathy & Geetha , 2021)

THE CORPORATE VIEWPOINT

Mr Narayana Murthy of Infosys recently advocated a 70-hour work week, citing the need for greater national productivity and global competitiveness. However, Infosys expressed a leaning towards adequate WLB shortly after. Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and Infosys have introduced hybrid work frameworks post-COVID-19, supporting employee autonomy while maintaining productivity. Wipro's 'LiveWell' program has directly contributed to employee satisfaction and brand value. Mahindra Group, under Anand Mahindra's leadership, emphasizes employee well-being and discourages a culture of overwork, reflecting a values-driven governance model. On the other hand, industries like manufacturing, infrastructure, and retail, etc —where on-site presence is essential—still struggle with rigid work environments. These sectors often lack structured WLB policies, especially at mid- and lower-level employment. The automotive industry, for instance, has begun acknowledging WLB through shift rotations and wellness programs (e.g. Maruti Suzuki's family-inclusive employee programs), but with limited depth in execution. It may be also highlighted that production units need to operate shift duties 24x7 production in various industries like cement, public and private utilities, mining industries including aluminium, copper, iron and steel, etc. To offset such shifts companies, allow compensatory off and monetarily profit linked bonuses.

(Alex, 2025), (Bhati, 2025), (ET Online, 2025), (Khatalso, 2024), (Wipro, 2024), (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021)

Critics argue that policies restricting WLB may reduce long-term productivity, cause burnout, and hinders generation diversity in the workforce. A well-balanced workforce contributes not just to corporate success, but to national prosperity as well. Countries with high WLB indices tend to report higher GDP per capita, better health outcomes, and innovation. In India, where demographic dividends are high, ensuring work-life harmony could prevent brain drain and promote inclusive growth. Sectors such as IT, BFSI, and start-ups have embraced global HR practices, realizing that employee wellness correlates with sustained economic contribution. In contrast, gig economy platforms—despite enabling flexible work—often fail to offer social security and work boundaries, highlighting governance gaps. Striking the right balance

between performance expectations and human sustainability will be key to India's growth story in the decades ahead.

(Amith , Devadiga, & Vivek, 2023), (Thilagavathy & Geetha , 2021), (PERRIGINO, DUNFORD, & WILSON, 2018)

THE GLOBAL WORKPLACE

Europe: Policy-Driven Balance

Europe stands out globally for its mature approach to WLB, anchored in labour laws and social welfare systems. Scandinavian countries like Sweden, Denmark, and Norway offer some of the world's most progressive policies: parental leaves exceeding 12 months, capped working hours (35–40 hours/week), and widespread support for remote work and childcare. Western Europe (e.g., Germany, France, Netherlands) follows a strong regulatory model that includes mandatory vacation (typically 25–30 days per year), limits on overtime, and collective bargaining frameworks that encourage WLB. These policies have demonstrated long-term economic sustainability, with high productivity coexisting with shorter workweeks. Many potential employees join Europe based MNCs like Ericson, Philips, Capgemini just for their European rule driven policy of 40-hour week work.

United States & Canada: Flexibility Vs. Exhaustion

The U.S. represents a paradox, high job flexibility and innovation coexist with burn-out, owing to a lack of statutory support. The U.S. does not mandate paid parental leave at the federal level and has one of the highest average working hours among developed nations. However, many leading companies are voluntarily implementing flexible hours, mental wellness programs, and unlimited vacation policies to attract talent. In contrast, Canada offers a more balanced model, combining flexibility with government-backed policies such as up to 18 months of parental leave and labour standards that prevent overwork. Canadian employers are increasingly adopting hybrid work models, driven by post-pandemic workforce expectations.

Latin America: Cultural Emphasis on Family

In Latin American countries like Brazil, Chile, and Mexico, the cultural emphasis on family and community shapes WLB preferences. While many workers endure long hours and challenging urban commutes; governments and unions are pushing for reforms. Brazil and Chile have taken steps to reduce the statutory workweek to 40–45 hours and are piloting flexible work arrangements. Nonetheless, enforcement remains inconsistent, especially in the informal sector, which constitutes a large portion of the labour force. MNCs and urban start-ups are beginning to champion better WLB initiatives to attract talent.

ASEAN Region: Balancing Tradition and Modernity

In many ASEAN countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand, WLB off-late is gaining prominence amid rapid economic development and urbanization. While traditional values emphasize long working hours as a sign of diligence, younger generations are increasingly demanding flexibility, mental health support, and family time. Governments in Singapore and Malaysia have introduced policies promoting flexible work arrangements and paid family leave. However, implementation varies

significantly across industries, with white-collar sectors showing faster adaptability than blue-collar or informal sectors. Many companies in the ASEAN as well ANZ region advocates an 8am – 4pm work shifts which gives ample time for an employee to have time for personal pursuits. Lunchtime is fixed at 12:30 pm and breaks are official which lends to the freshness. In Japan and China (i.e. Shanghai) nap time is provided, showing a power nap results in boost in productivity

India: Caught Between Aspirations and Legacy Systems

India's workforce represents a complex challenge. On one hand, the nation is home to one of the youngest and most ambitious workforces in the world. On the other hand, deeply embedded work cultures rooted in long hours, hierarchical management, and job insecurity persist, especially in IT, manufacturing, and finance. Although the pandemic triggered a shift toward remote work and digital adoption, Indian companies largely lag in formalizing WLB policies. Most labour laws focus on wage protection and safety rather than holistic well-being. The private sector—especially in new-age industries like IT and E-commerce—has experimented with flexible hours, mental health support, and even 4-day workweek pilots. However, these remain limited to top-tier firms. Moreover, social expectations and infrastructural limitations (like lack of dependable childcare and long commutes) further complicate efforts to implement balance-oriented practices. The rise of conversations around burnout, mental health, and hybrid work models indicates a cultural shift, but progress is slow and uneven.

Globally, the importance of WLB is well-recognized, but the paths diverge due to policy frameworks, cultural expectations, and economic maturity. Europe and Canada offer structured, policy-driven models, while ASEAN and Latin America are balancing tradition with modern employee needs. The U.S. showcases innovation-led, employer-driven solutions with less regulatory backing. India, meanwhile, stands at a crossroads. The rising aspirations of Generation Z, growing awareness of mental well-being, and competitive talent markets offer an opportunity for businesses to reshape work cultures. For India to harness its demographic dividend and avoid workforce burnout, there is an urgent need for institutional support, progressive HR governance, and leadership that values sustainable productivity over presenteeism.

Economic Lens: The Law of Diminishing Marginal Productivity

The dichotomy around extending the standard 40-hour workweek to (60-70) hours — particularly in the context of India's growing economy and global competitiveness — has reignited discussions on productivity, WLB, and long-term economic well-being. From a business case perspective, the central question is whether such an increase in work hours leads to proportionate gains in output, or whether it crosses the threshold of diminishing returns, both economically and humanistically. Classical economics introduces the Law of Diminishing Marginal Productivity, which posits that after a certain point, adding more of one input (in this case, labour hours) while holding other inputs constant (such as capital, energy, cognitive capacity, or physical stamina) results in progressively smaller increases in output. In the context of human labour, numerous empirical studies globally (e.g., OECD data, ILO reports) indicate that productivity per hour begins to decline beyond 48 hours a week. Workers experience fatigue, burnout, reduced creativity, and declining mental and physical health — all of which hamper output quality and efficiency.

The Efficiency Frontier and Human Capital Theory

From the standpoint of Human Capital Theory, employees are not just inputs but assets whose value increases with investment in education, training, health, and balanced lifestyle. When work encroaches upon rest and family time, cognitive and emotional reserves are depleted, leading to absenteeism, presenteeism, and higher turnover. These hidden costs erode organizational efficiency over time, especially in knowledge-intensive and creative industries. Globally, countries with a high emphasis on WLB — such as Germany, Netherlands, and the Nordic nations — have consistently reported higher productivity per hour compared to countries with longer average workweeks such as South Korea or Mexico. This paradox underscores the importance of quality over quantity in labour input.

India’s Context and the Growth Dilemma

India’s evolving economy presents a unique challenge. With a large youthful workforce and aspirations to become a \$5 trillion economy, the temptation to increase work hours as a short-term growth lever is understandable. Industry leaders like Narayana Murthy and S.N. Subrahmanyam have argued that extended work hours are essential for catching up with global economic powers. However, such recommendations must be tempered with the realities of India’s mental health crisis, inadequate workplace safety nets, and the social importance of family and community life. Moreover, India faces a productivity paradox: while the working population is large, per capita productivity remains relatively low. Structural inefficiencies, poor managerial practices, lack of automation, and skill mismatches contribute more significantly to this problem than merely the quantum of hours worked.

An interesting point to note also is that “The Right to Disconnect Bill 2025” was introduced in Lok Sabha by a prominent Member of Parliament, wherein an individual would have the right to refuse a work-related call beyond office hours.

(State of the Global Workplace: Understanding Employees, Informing Leaders; 2025 Report, 2026), (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2020), (Sule, 2025)

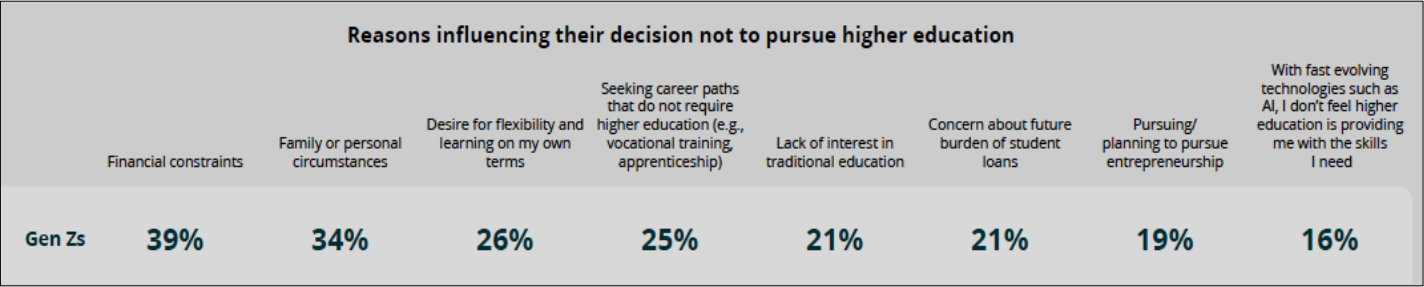
INDUSTRY REPORTS

It is to be noted that GenZ is surprisingly not contented about obtaining skills but reluctant about climbing the workplace echelons at the cost of their personal way of life, as is obvious from the following statistics, as depicted in Table 1 below. (2025 GenZ and Millennial Survey, 2026) The GenZ does not lack ambition but improves skills as per own choice

Sno	Question Asked	Options	GenZ	Millennial
1	How often do you work on skills that develop career	Once a week or more	70%	59%
		Couple of times a month to once a year	27%	36%
		Never	3%	5%
2	When do they take time to develop skills	On workdays outside working hours	34%	32%
		During working hours	30%	33%
		On their days off	33%	32%

Table 1: Source: (2025 GenZ and Millennial Survey, 2026)

The GenZ are conscious about the return on investment made on higher education and often cite financial constraints as reasons so as not to pursue higher education as a manner of skill development, as



shown in Figure 1 below: (2025 GenZ and Millennial Survey, 2026)

Figure 1: Source: (2025 GenZ and Millennial Survey, 2026)

GenZ are comfortable with Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools and more than 57% use the AI tools continually in work for data analysis (39%), content creation (37%), design and creativity (36%), project management (32%) and strategy (31%). 78% of GenZ believe that AI has significantly improved their work-life balance. However, 63% of GenZ have expressed concerns that AI is likely to eliminate the jobs of entry level workers. (2025 GenZ and Millennial Survey, 2026)

Career fluidity is a defining feature of the GenZ workforce, with 31% changing career path and employers within 2 years. However, they are not disloyal to their employer; they view job-hopping as a strategy to stabilize the most important work-life balance. The typical career goals of GenZ are depicted in Figure 2 below: (2025 GenZ and Millennial Survey, 2026)

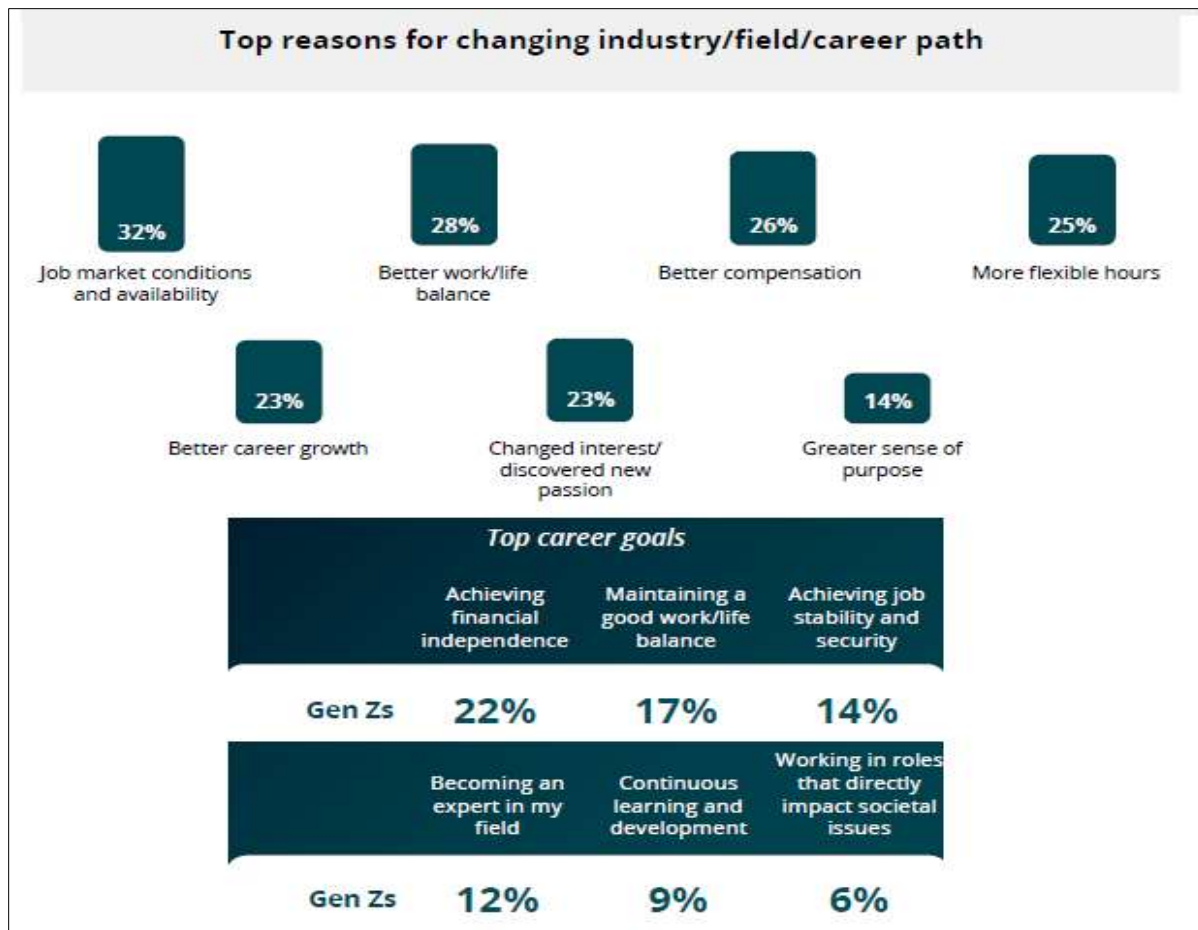


Figure 2: Source: (2025 GenZ and Millennial Survey, 2026)

A point to note would be that GenZ equate financial stability to wellbeing and mental peace. However, they seek work that provide meaning to life by aligning themselves to organizational values, as shown in Figure 3 below. Also, 37% of Gen Z have more than a single source of income. Also, it is realized that Gen Z have been born into significantly larger wealth than the previous generations. These facts allow for a depleted sense of desperation to earn wealth in the workplace.

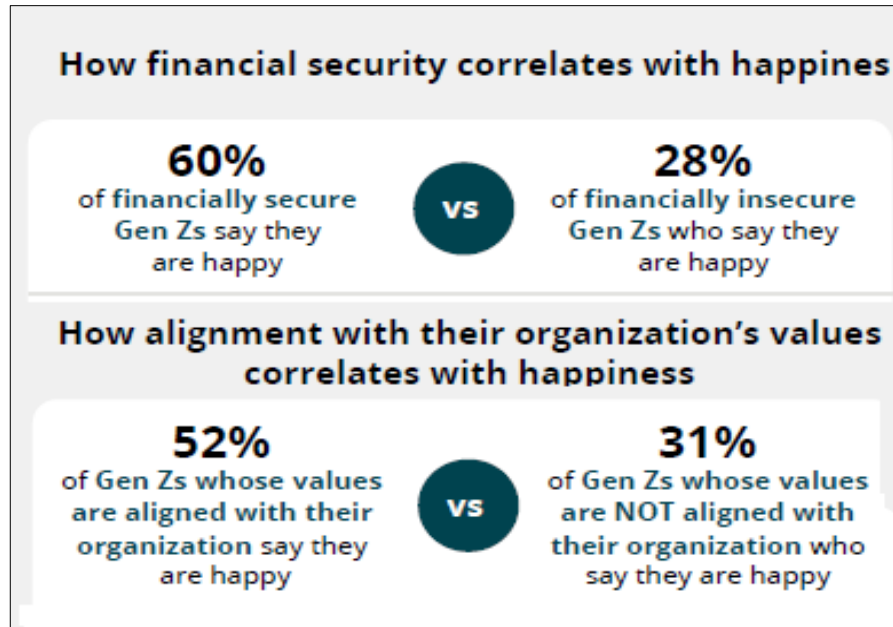


Figure 3: Source: (2025 GenZ and Millennial Survey, 2026)

For the previous generations, their work was the core of their sense of identity. However, GenZ perceives itself differently, as show in Figure 4 below:

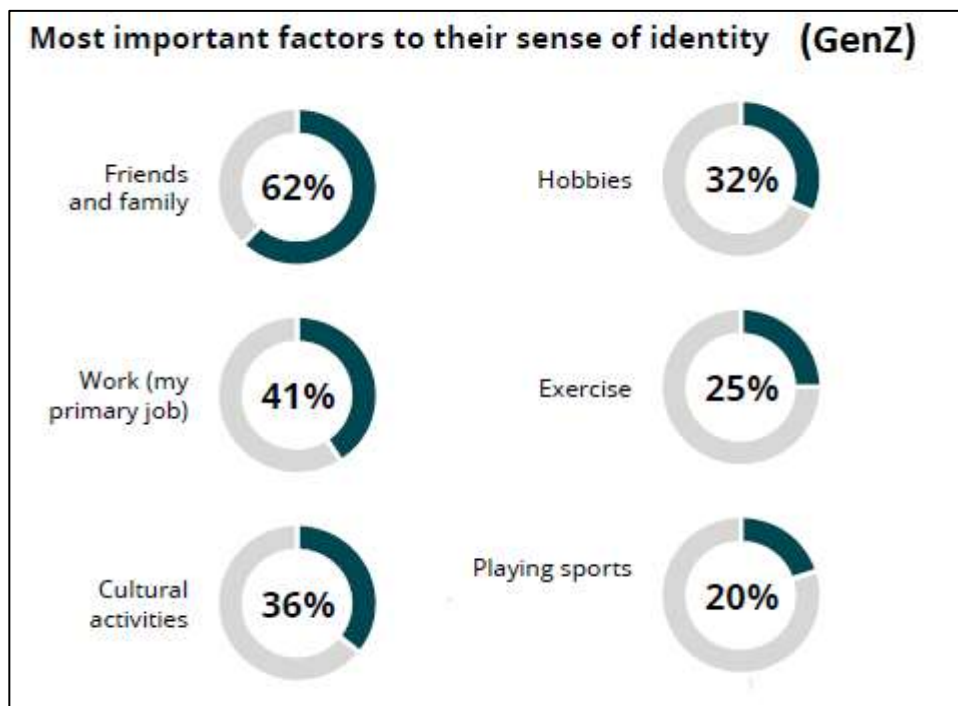


Figure 4: Source: (2025 GenZ and Millennial Survey, 2026)

GenZ who do not find their work meaningful, can suffer mental health issues and look for opportunities elsewhere. 41% of Gen Z rejected an employer as he did not align with their personal beliefs and 44% Gen Z left opportunities that lacked purpose. Conscious of the environment, they tend to evaluate an employer based on the concern for the environment and 48% of them would not be working for an employer who did not share these concerns. (2025 GenZ and Millennial Survey, 2026)

THE CONTEMPORARY WORKER VS THE WLB POLICIES

Talent Acquisition

Millennials are attracted by the WLB approach of the companies before they have even joined. Salesforce among others attracts millennials for its lenient work from home policies. Millennial would work for a company which allows adequate 'Me' time as well as weekend's off. Cases of attritions are linked if these conditions are violated.

Employee Engagement and Satisfaction

WLB is closely related to employee engagement—a critical HR concept that measures emotional commitment to an organization. Balanced employees are more engaged, less stressed, and more likely to contribute positively to the organization. Such HR initiatives include flexitime, remote work, and sabbaticals. IBM offers leave of absence, implying that leave is allowed up to 18 months with employment, but no salary and the employee may rejoin, furlough (trip or leave to hometown after prolonged absence owing to work) including hardship allowance for expatriates as well as commuted leaves directly contribute to work engagement metrics. For example, tech companies like Infosys and Accenture in India offer 'Wellness Weeks' and flexible working arrangements, leading to higher retention and morale.

Talent Management and Retention

In an increasingly competitive job environment, WLB is a significant factor in attracting and retaining top talent. HR policies that promote WLB are now central to employer branding strategies. Millennials and Generation Z employees prioritize companies with flexible and inclusive work cultures. Companies like Google India and HUL have designed comprehensive WLB programs as part of their talent retention strategy, integrating wellness into rewards frameworks.

Performance Management

Traditional performance management often emphasized long hours as a measure of commitment. However, modern HR practices emphasize outcomes over time spent. WLB friendly performance models focus on setting realistic goals, output-based KPIs, and periodic feedback rather than micro-management. HR plays a pivotal role in redefining success metrics to support employee well-being while maintaining productivity. Working hours are important from a billing point of view having implications of utilisation and client billing in certain industries. Yet an overdose of the same may lead to burnout, anxiety and even unwarranted death with recent reference to the case of EY⁵ which erupted to a huge social and political issue taken up by the Tech companies where long work hours are considered normal.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

WLB is a foundational support for DEI goals. Women, caregivers, and individuals with disabilities often require tailored work arrangements. HR practices promoting flexible hours, parental leave (including paternity), and work-from-home options help bridge systemic inequalities. For instance, Tata Steel offers a ‘Generation-neutral parental leave policy’, which not only supports WLB but reinforces inclusive practices.

Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)

WLB also intersects with the physical and mental health responsibilities of HR under occupational health frameworks. Rising levels of burnout, anxiety, and presenteeism have compelled companies to integrate mental wellness into their OHS policies. HR departments now include services like Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), counselling support, and regular wellness check-ins. Long working hours as demanded to meet deadlines and client deliverables often causing a (12–14) hours workday causing sleep deprivation leading to burnout, anxiety and fatalities referred by WHO.

Organizational Culture and Change Management

A culture that values WLB, signals a progressive and human-centric organization. Implementing WLB initiatives often involves change management, especially in legacy organizations. HR functions lead this transformation by training managers, modifying policies, and reinforcing values that respect personal boundaries and employee autonomy. WLB is not just a ‘perk’, but a core HR concept that links closely with engagement, performance, retention, health, and inclusion. As the workplace continues to evolve, HR’s role in designing and nurturing a balanced ecosystem will determine not only organizational success but also the holistic well-being of its workforce.

Behavioural Economics and Long-Term Output

Behavioural economics also contributes insight through decision fatigue, bounded rationality, and loss aversion. Extended work hours may lead to more mistakes, reduced decision quality, and higher costs of error. In sectors like healthcare, aviation, and IT, these consequences can be severe. Workers belonging to Generation Z – born between 1997 and 2012 – were most likely to rank WLB far above pay. Nearly, three-quarters or 74% of workers surveyed in this age group said work-life balance was their top priority, compared with pay i.e. 68%⁶. While the ambition to work longer may be fuelled by patriotic or competitive fervour, economic theory and global evidence caution against simplistic correlations between more hours and more output. A sustainable path forward would involve optimizing work structures, promoting flexible yet accountable working models, and investing in skill enhancement and technology — rather than merely extending hours at the cost of balance and wellbeing.

Long-Term Corporate and Economic Value Creation

In the evolving debate around WLB, a key question resurfacing in boardrooms and public discourse is whether extending work hours beyond the conventional 40-hour week contributes meaningfully to corporate and economic prosperity. This question has gained momentum in emerging economies like India, where leaders such as Infosys founder Narayana Murthy have advocated for a 70-hour workweek to accelerate national progress. However, when viewed through the lens of business viability, economic theory, workforce sustainability, and global best practices, the case for significantly longer working hours appears far more complex than the rhetoric suggests.

Economic Productivity and the Law of Diminishing Returns

A foundational concept in economics — the Law of Diminishing Marginal Productivity — directly challenges the assumption that more hours equal more output. In both manufacturing and knowledge-based sectors, studies have consistently shown that beyond 48 hours per week, each additional hour of work contributes less to output, and often, performance and creativity begin to decline. This is particularly pronounced in cognitive labour, where decision fatigue, burnout, and stress affect judgment, innovation, and long-term engagement. From a business perspective, this means companies that push for longer hours may see short-term gains in throughput or availability, but these are often offset by increased absenteeism, higher employee turnover, reduced quality of work, and the long-term costs of disengagement. Overwork, in effect, risks reducing human capital — the very engine of modern, innovation-led companies.

GLOBAL CORPORATE BENCHMARKS

Global productivity data reinforces this view. Countries such as Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands work fewer hours on average (typically 30–35 hours per week) but report among the highest productivity per hour and superior innovation indices. In contrast, nations with higher average weekly work hours, such as South Korea or Mexico, have lower productivity and higher levels of workplace-related stress and illness. Companies like Microsoft Japan, which piloted a 4-day workweek, reported a 40% productivity boost, suggesting that compressed, focused worktime may outperform extended hours. This supports the argument that corporate prosperity in high-performance economies is driven more by work efficiency, automation, and strategic talent management than by sheer volume of labour input.

THE INDIAN CORPORATE PERSPECTIVE

In India, where socio-economic aspirations and demographic dividends drive corporate ambition, the argument for longer working hours is often framed around the need to "catch up" with developed economies. However, Indian corporates already face systemic productivity challenges — such as skill mismatches, inefficient processes, and outdated managerial practices — that are unlikely to be resolved simply by increasing time at work. The younger workforce, especially millennials and Generation Z professionals, prioritize work-life integration, mental health, and career flexibility. Mandating extended hours risks alienating this vital segment of the talent pool and may inadvertently fuel brain drain or quiet quitting, undermining both corporate growth and national human capital development. (Allen, Johnson, Kiburz, & Shockley, 2012), (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), (Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2021)

THE WAY FORWARD

GenZ is projected to make 74% of the Global Workforce by 2030. (2025 GenZ and Millennial Survey, 2026) Sustainable prosperity — both at the corporate and economy level — hinges on fostering innovation, enhancing workforce capability, and maintaining a high level of employee engagement and well-being. Human Capital Theory asserts that long-term economic value is derived not just from labour input but from investments in employee health, learning, and satisfaction. Firms that prioritize balance are more likely to retain top talent, foster innovation, and build resilient teams capable of long-term growth. Does then the case for extending working hours beyond 40 hours per week considering marginal and short-term gains in specific industries or project-based work holds good or the broader corporate and economic dividends that lie in optimizing productivity per hour, nurturing talent, and designing workplaces that align business goals with human sustainability is a big question that corporate HR needs to answer?

(Ahamad, Saini, & Jawahar, 2022), (Amith , Devadiga, & Vivek, 2023), (Fernandez, Landis, & Lee, 2023), (McRae, Aykens, Lowmaster, & Shepp, 2023), (Thilagavathy & Geetha , 2021)

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TEACHING NOTE

1. Synopsis of the Case:

HR strategies are continuously evolving as are similar thinking across portals of many business organizations. This is because the emphasis seems to be shifting from duration of work – to amount of work – to quality of work output and simultaneously, also due to the shift in the behavioural attributes of generations of employees and employers, alike, due to evolving demographics and perception towards productivity. It may be additionally noted that we are presently in an era that is strongly digital and firmly within usage of Artificial Intelligence. Given such a predicament, would it be advisable for the Indian corporate to reconsider its stance from the traditional work-duration thinking to a contemporary productivity-output thinking.

2. Methodology and Scope

The case has been entirely compiled from secondary information from journal and newspaper articles, corporate observations and policy documents. The scope of the study may be extrapolated to the collection of primary data regarding the perceptions of the HR stakeholders of corporates. The case is also unrestricted to business sectors and domains but however does throw insight on the role of Gen Z and Millennial employee in an organization in South Asia.

3. Teaching Objectives

The case shall partner the current HR scholars into understanding the contemporary workforce of the Indian sub-continent by:

- Understanding the present perception of the Indian Corporate towards workplace productivity
- Assessing how the organization can best understand the contemporary Gen Z or Millennial worker for optimized productivity
- Identifying the role of the Indian HR vs their global counterparts

4. Target Audience

This case is intended for:

- Students at Master's Level
- Researchers in Policy Making

- HR of Indian Corporates

5. Teaching Strategy

The case would be best taught using a flipped classroom approach. Students may consult secondary data and discuss with peers to present the answers to queries using examples from the corporate sector.

6. Discussion Questions

- What are the key challenges in the achievement of work life balance among Gen Z and Millennial employees?
- What are the key attributes of the GenZ employee and how can the employer attract and retain such talent?
- Why is work life balance viewed differently across geographic sectors?
- Why is work life balance viewed differently across generations of people?
- What are the advantages of effective employee engagement?
- How will an organization strive to attract and retain talent using work life balance as a lever?
- How will an organization reduce anxiety and burnout in work life?

7. Insights

Evolving Perceptions of the Contemporary Worker: As literacy and digital-comfort levels increase, geographical boundaries blur and every person is increasingly aware of his rights and needs and global trends. It is thus Gen Z, and Millennials tend to display a shift in perspective towards the traditional rigour associated with sustained employment and they pay increased importance to lifestyle and health related activities alongside.

The concept of WLB in Corporate India: This is multifaceted. From the social point of view, it may be noted that family units are reducing in size, thus generating an increased individual need for support while yet reducing the individual need for enhanced requirement for income and material comforts, directly affecting WLB. Besides the Boomer and Gen X did display an innate and almost mechanical sense of commitment towards work requirements which has grown into the corporate leaders who belong to this generation and are seemingly myopic of global HR trends.

What is more important: duration of work or quality of output? Much has changed in the business field: Marketing concepts have moved on from production-based to customer-needs orientation and influencers rule promotions more than the earlier tendency to request celebrities to come on board. Also, facts such as the number of brand names launched, the fluctuating value of INR, and other trends have emphasized the need for quality over quantity. In such a scenario, how does it matter whether the quality is maintained by flexi work schedules or the rigour of rigid work timings.

Policy Decisions: Many corporates are moving towards an evaluated approach towards WLB of the employee. They have launched schemes and policies but their implementation in the regime of traditional leaders is typically greenwashed. The matter has also been discussed in Lok Sabha as the Right to Disconnect Bill No 51 has been presented.

7. Learning Objectives

- Analyse the impact of organizational policies towards WLB
- Evaluate the role of socio-cultural attributes shaping the work ethics of the contemporary worker
- Identify key burn-out indicators in the Indian Corporate and introduce practical interventions
- Assess business implications of WLB
- Develop policies that enable simultaneous growth in WLB and quality work output