Temporal Flexibility in Business Process Outsourcing Industry: Organization of Work/Non-Work around Time Zone Dependent Work Schedules in a Gendered Cultural Context

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Abstract

Offshoring business processes to low-cost locations around the globe has made temporal flexibility a pervasive feature in the work lives of young workers in global South countries like Sri Lanka as it requires them to work on a time zone dependent (TZD) basis. In an environment where great resignation has broadened the discourse on flexibility and work-life balance while pandemic-induced economic crisis urging the Asian businesses to return to purely physical pre–Covid-19 legacy processes, this article explores the under-researched social consequences of the organization of work and non-work lives around non-standard work schedules, and how Sri Lankan TZD workers experience and manage those consequences. Data was gathered from in-depth interviews with TZD workers in Sri Lanka. The findings reveal that TZD work reflects a temporal colonization of global South countries by the capital of Western countries. Though unexpected, interposed transitions are inevitable in TZD work, male and female TZD workers experience them differently due to the reinforcement of prevailing gender and cultural stereotypes in Sri Lanka. Despite significant social de-synchronization resulting from temporal colonization, TZD workers have rearticulated the way they produce their social life with a more 'inward' approach—facilitated by the homelike environment created at the workplace.

Keywords: Business process outsourcing, gender, non-standard work schedules, temporal flexibility, time zone dependent work, work/non-work balance.

Introduction

At a time when the whole world is struck by several waves of Covid-19, businesses are increasingly concerned about remote work arrangements, temporal flexibility of work, and the social consequences that come along with such new work arrangements. However, temporal flexibility and the resulting social consequences are not new phenomena for certain workers: one such group is time zone dependent (TZD) workers—often neglected from the scholarly attention—who are required to work non-standard work schedules due to the TZD nature of their work. One could argue that temporal flexibility and organization of work and non-work lives around non-standard work schedules is no longer an issue in work-from-home arrangements—the most dominant work model—due to Covid-19 pandemic outbreak. However, due to the pandemic-induced economic crisis in most of the Asian countries, businesses are motivating employees to return to purely physical pre–Covid-19 legacy processes.

Along with technological change, globalization and the changing nature of work, contemporary organizations are increasingly attempting to build distinctive competencies while outsourcing the non-core activities of their businesses. This practice took on a more global aspect with the 'second global shift', where many non-core business activities such as customer-facing (e.g., call centers, IT helpdesks) and back-office services (e.g., business services) were offshored from the global North to low-cost locations in the global South, such as Sri Lanka. The Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) companies in the global South, which have undertaken to perform the non-core business activities of the global North, provide their services according to the time zones of their service recipients' countries. Hence, the workers in BPO companies are required to work during non-standard working hours that are dependent on another entity in a far-away time zone to complete their immediate tasks (Carmel & Kojola, 2012).

The BPO industry increasingly contributes to the GDP of countries in the global South and provides many employment opportunities (Sedera et al., 2014). This trend is expected to further increase in the future due to flexible labor markets, advanced infrastructure quality, network readiness, and establishment of fully-fledged training institutes for BPO in global South countries (Global BPO trends, 2015). Therefore, working at non-standard work schedules is on the rise and is becoming ever more widespread. Despite the increasing expansion of the BPO industry in the global South and the vast contribution that it makes to global South economies, little attention has been given to its social consequences related to the social fabric of Southern countries, especially with reference to the organization of work and non-work lives around non-standard work schedules. Even the studies undertaken in other contexts, such as Australia and France, yield inconsistent results (Albertsen et al., 2008; Costa et al., 2006; Craig & Powell, 2011; Fagnani & Letablier, 2004; Girard, 2010; Tausig & Fenwick, 2001). Thus, the primary focus of this paper is to explore the social consequences of the organization of employees' work and non-work lives according to non-standard work schedules. Further, examining the gendered experiences of work and non-work amongst TZD work—i.e., non-standard work schedules—is important in a cultural context where the gendered division of labor is deeply rooted. Moreover, this is an area that has scarcely been studied in the existing literature.

According to NASSCOM-Hewitt survey, the attrition rate of Sri Lankan BPO companies is around 15% - 60% per annum—which is significantly high—and it is associated with a high

cost of attrition (Business Bliss Consultants FZE, 2018). It also shows that about 70% of the population of working age in Sri Lankan BPO organizations is neither happy nor satisfied working in BPO organizations and absenteeism have affected the performance of the organizations negatively. Results of the same survey as well as Silva (2014) suggest that maintaining work/life balance among TZD workers in Sri Lankan BPO companies is at high priority for employee retention in the industry. Wickramasinghe and Kumara (2010) also say that turnover in Sri Lankan BPO industry is high and most of the employees quit their jobs due to work/life balance related issues. Against this backdrop, this study intends to achieve the following objectives:

1. To explore the nature of temporal flexibilities in TZD work in Sri Lankan BPO organizations.
2. To inquire the social consequences of the organization of employees' work and non-work lives according to non-standard work schedules.
3. To unveil the gendered strategies adopted by male and female TZD workers when dealing with their TZD work schedules in the current cultural context.

The contribution of the current study to the extant literature is two-fold. Firstly, it addresses the empirical vacuum in relation to the social consequences of the organization of work and non-work lives of male and female TZD workers in the Sri Lankan BPO sector. Secondly, the study explores the strategies adopted by male and female TZD workers to deal with their work schedules, while identifying the impact of gender differences and perceived organizational climate on the efforts made by individual workers to balance work/non-work. Further, this study views the phenomenon of work and non-work balance in the vicinity of TZD work through Clark's work/family border theory which has not been the focus of any previous study as per the knowledge of the researcher.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. The next section presents a brief review of the literature which is followed by the methodology of the study. Subsequently, the findings of the study are presented drawing on interviews conducted with the participants. In conclusion, the implications of these findings are discussed.

Literature Review

TZD Work and Its Social Consequences

Along with technological change and globalization, many bureaucratic organizations have transformed into flexible organizations and have developed new work arrangements (Brown & Lauder, 2001 as cited in Girard, 2010). Consequently, the opportunity of having a standard work arrangement is lower in flexible organizations than in bureaucratic organizations, as well as in 'atypical' or non-standard work arrangements (Girard, 2010). Thus, working at non-standard work schedules is on the rise and is becoming ever more widespread.

Time is central in shaping the experience of work and non-work, as such, the changes in work time arrangements or temporal flexibility change the time available for an employee's leisure, family, and her/his social surroundings, and consequently have repercussions on the

whole of society (Costa et al., 2004). Time zone dependency also makes global South work hours compatible with the work hours of the service recipient's country, but incompatible with local standard work hours. Consequently, working at such non-standard work hours will impact on workers' biological patterns as well as on the nature of their relationships, creating various anomalous behavioral trends in organizations as well as in society. It also makes work/non-work balance a more challenging task for these workers. Previous studies on TZD work have researched its impact on health, proving that working at non-standard work hours—which stretch beyond the typical daylight periods and include night work—negatively affect TZD workers' medical and social well-being (Carmel & Kojola, 2012). These workers experience a high level of stress, anxiety, depression, sleeping problems and an increasing risk of suffering from cardiovascular disease (Bharat & Paul, 2016; Suri et al., 2007). Despite the increasing practice of offshoring with consequent TZD work, the study of social consequences of the organization of work and non-work lives is an area which has been relatively under-researched (Albertsen et al., 2008). The very few studies available in relation to non-standard work schedules have been conducted in various other geographical and sociocultural contexts, such as Australia and France (Albertsen et al., 2008; Craig & Powell, 2011; Fagnani & Letablier, 2004), and even they demonstrate inconclusive results.

On the one hand, some research studies illustrate that working according to non-standard schedules causes significant social de-synchronization (Bambra et al., 2008). In other words, working according to non-standard schedules makes it difficult for TZD workers to maintain a balance between work, domestic life, and social life (Costa et al., 2006; Fagnani & Letablier, 2004; Girard, 2010; Grosswald, 2004). Taylor and Bain (2005) show that it is a new form of colonization—temporal colonization—of global South by the global North. Working during afternoon shifts was found to be the most detrimental to the voluntary social activities of individuals (Skipper et al., 1990). On the other hand, some research points out that the effect of non-standard work schedules on work/non-work balance is positive. For example, working at non-standard hours enables parents, especially mothers, to engage in childcare on their own rather than outsourcing childcare; they could be at home when their school-aged children leave for school and when they return (Han, 2004 cited in Craig & Powell, 2011; Presser, 2000).

Against this backdrop, it is worthwhile inquiring how these employees, who are pressurized to work under flexible schedules, experience and manage their work/non-work balance, and how it has become a research-worthy area due to the continuous dynamics and trends emerging in society.

Organization of Work and Non-work Lives

Amongst various theoretical explanations of the phenomenon of organizing work and non-work lives—such as through structural functionalism theory, ecology systems theory, segmentation theory, compensation theory, resource drain theory, spill-over theory, work enrichment theory integration theory and overall appraisal theory—Clark's work/family border theory says that each individual's role takes place within a specific domain of life, either work or family, and that these domains are separated by borders that may be "bodily, temporal, or emotional" (Clark, 2000, p. 756). Individuals daily transit and cross the borders of the world of work and the world of family, shape those worlds and mold the borders between work and family

as per certain requirements and situations (Clark, 2000). In this context, it is important to inquire how these borders work for TZD workers amidst their temporally flexible work and concern for their non-work lives—not only child and/or elderly care responsibilities and household activities but also interacting with relatives and friends, leisure time activities, recreational activities, health, voluntary activities, community activities and personal developmental activities (Parkes & Langford, 2008; Rantanen et al., 2011).

To achieve a proper work/non-work balance in life, individuals use various cognitive and behavioral strategies (Haddon & Hede, 2009; Hall & Richter, 1989; Zheng et al., 2015). Nevertheless, existing academic literature has paid little attention to exploring how male and female TZD workers deploy strategies to manage their work/non-work balance amid their non-standard work schedules. It is particularly necessary to pay attention to how male and female TZD workers experience the 'border-crossing' and the work/non-work interface in a country like Sri Lanka, where gender stereotypes and cultural stereotypes about the roles of men and women abound in society which establishes that household as the woman's sphere and the workplace as the man's sphere (Eagly & Wood, 2012). These may cause differences in men's and women's experiences of the work/non-work interface (Emslie & Hunt, 2009). This situation is pervasive in Sri Lanka, as many Sri Lankans value traditional, cultural, community and religious activities and subscribe to the gendered division of household labor. However, in the present context, the gendered division of roles seems to be diluting due to changing value patterns and beliefs in society, especially owing to concerns regarding equality, equity, and diversity, which urge husbands to help their wives at home (Girard, 2010; Higgins et al., 1994). Hence, it is worth investigating these gendered dynamics in the field of work/non-work balance, as most prominent theories on work/non-work balance are gender-blind (Emslie & Hunt, 2009).

An individual's experience of the work/non-work interface as well as of the strategies adopted in managing the two domains are highly influenced by the way individuals perceive their organizational climate (Brough & Kalliath, 2009; Parkes & Langford, 2008), as perceptions on organizational climate could even worsen or improve the experience of the work/non-work interface and impede or facilitate the strategies used by men and women TZD workers (Chernyak-Hai & Tziner, 2016; Taylor et al., 2009 as cited in Brough & Kalliath, 2009). For example, employees seeking to attain a 'better' balance through changes in work hours and arrangements, moving to 'family-friendly' organizations, or more radical 'sea change' type shifts (Parkes & Langford, 2008), depict that perceived organizational climate cannot be ignored in the work/non-work balance dialogue. Especially in contemporary society, organizations and managers tend to assure their employees that their jobs as well as their lives outside work do matter to the organization, and thereby, to create an employee-oriented organizational climate to make the organization a pleasant place for its employees (Zheng et al., 2015). Therefore, the current study's investigation of Sri Lankan men and women TZD workers' experience of the organization of their work and non-work lives around non-standard work schedules and the strategies they adopt to maintain a balance between the two domains will be inclusive of their perceptions on organizational climate—mainly due to the dearth of existing literature on the subject, despite its importance.

Research Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research approach to gain deeper insights into the phenomenon. Under the main research approach, the case study strategy was used, employing multiple cases of individual TZD workers. The sample was drawn from four Sri Lankan BPO companies—largest in terms of employment—and includes call centers and chat support services, routinized back-office work (financial and banking services) and software development and maintenance (Information Technology Outsourcing-ITO) companies. Participants were selected based on the purposive judgmental sampling technique to include married male and female TZD workers with children and one manager from each of the companies. Married male and female TZD workers were the main data sources as they generally find work/non-work balance challenging. Participants' ages ranged from 27 to 43 with one or two children under the age of 12 and they belonged to the same stage in the family life cycle. All the names of the participants and the affiliations of the participants were pseudonymized to maintain anonymity and confidentiality of the participants and none of the pseudonyms allude to the true identities of the participants.

Data was gathered mainly through 15 semi-structured one-to-one interviews and four focus group interviews with participants. Interviews were conducted in English as well as in Sinhala, depending on the participants' preferences. Prior to the commencement of interviews, participants were informed about the purpose of the interviews, how data will be recorded, how anonymity and confidentiality will be managed and how the study will be disseminated and their consent to participate in the interviews was obtained. The gathered data was transcribed (and later translated when the interviews were conducted in Sinhala), cross-sectionally indexed and catalogued while reading the data 'literally, interpretively and reflexively' (Mason, 2002). Then, multi-vocal, convincing arguments were built up using the themes identified by the 'thematic analysis' method from the data gathered from empirical studies and the reviewed literature. Accordingly, a detailed account of the nature of the work domain and the non-work domain in TZD work was developed.

Results

BPO Industry and Colonization with Time

Though temporal flexibility and time zone dependency are the key characteristics of TZD work, during the interviews, it was evident that the need for such temporal flexibility—time zone dependency—was instituted merely to adhere to the work conditions of foreign service recipients rather than due to a real need for such flexibility after a careful deliberation of the nature of the services provided. Time zone dependency is inevitable when the work requires workers to maintain direct, voice-to-voice contact with their clients all the time, such as workers in distantiated customer-facing call centers and chat support services. However, workers engaged in routinized back-office work, like financial and banking services, do not need to maintain continuous, direct contact with their foreign clients, and these workers use remote communication technologies whenever required. Yet, those workers are also required to compulsorily engage in their jobs at the workplaces exactly during foreign clients' working hours. Mahesh, an associate anti-money laundering investigator at ASBC put it as follows.

... [M]y duty is to check whether there are any attempts at legalizing black money at any point in the customers' transaction processes and produce them [Hong Kong clients] a report on that. Though I can do it at any time from any place, as most of the time communication takes place via e-mail, still, I need to maintain communications during their [Hong Kong clients'] office time. That's the nature of the service agreement.

Even in instances when the work does not demand employees to be at work during foreign client servicing hours, these workers do not have the flexibility or freedom to adjust their work hours to be on par with Sri Lankan standard working hours.

However, in ITO organizations, mainly due to the creative nature of the work and the requirement of a high level of psychological effort to perform the work, workers are given some flexibility in adjusting their work hours and in determining the length of their work hours, at least to a certain extent. Even though the frequent discussions with the foreign clients (when designing the products and in providing them with real time guidance, if any problem occurs) demands ITO workers to be compulsorily available in their offices during 'high-level shifts', they could use the flexibility given to them in adjusting their arrival time and leaving time. They are also given the privilege of working from home in emergency situations. Dinethra, a software developer at Global IT, described this situation as follows.

There is nothing called staying 8 hours in the office. We are given tasks which would normally take 8 hours to perform. If we finish it, e.g., if I do a 4-hour task in 3 hours, it doesn't matter if I go home during the remaining hour …

However, it is noteworthy that this flexibility is not given to employees freely. In addition to developing software which runs on a 24/7 basis, workers are required to maintain this software and provide real time guidance to foreign users whenever they encounter a problem. Sahan, a systems engineer at Global IT, explained how his work demands that he is available for work all the time.

Clients' production sites should always be up and running. I always have to be alert in case there are system failures. Sometimes those happen at midnight and at dawn. Then, I need to fix those failures immediately. Technically, I need to be available throughout the 24 hours. … But I can do it from home. … Even if I go on a trip, I always carry my laptop and tablet. If any problem occurs, I need to attend to that. For that, I have to be always available and contactable …

Though on one hand, the flexibility to adjust their work hours is advantageous to employees, on the other hand, it creates a great deal of inflexibility for them as well. This inflexibility is two-fold. On the one hand, inflexibility lies in the bond and the gratitude that they have towards their work and the workplace which urges them to feel that it is their moral duty to work longer hours in return for the flexibility granted to them. Sudeshi, an operational analyst at AWS, described this situation as follows.

… In an extreme case, if we are not able to finish the work even after doing extra hours till around 10 p.m., we take that [work] home. … Since we have some flexibility, if we are asked to stay a little till night, we can't say no. We don't feel like saying no. We also try somehow to deliver the project. So that anyway for those of

us who work with some flexibility, we face more disadvantages than does a person who works at standard hours. Because it's not predictable.

On the other hand, inflexibility is the uncertainty or indefinite nature of the length of their work hours which is created by the flexibility given to them, which requires them to work longer hours on one day and allows them to leave early on another day. The work even demands that they work from home if the work cannot be finished during office hours. Thus, working from home sometimes involves the sacrifice of family time. Consequent to the flexibility they gain at work, employees are unable to plan their daily activities and build up a daily routine in their lives.

The Experiences of Male and Female TZD Workers and Frequent Psychological Boundary-crossing

The interviews with male and female TZD workers revealed that the incompatibility of their work schedules and free times with those of their family members has made it extremely challenging for TZD workers to allocate adequate time to their families. Male employees admitted that they do not have much time to engage with their family members due to incompatibility of schedules and thus, provision of financial support for the family had become their main task. Shalinda, a systems support analyst at AWS, put it as follows.

Actually, there is nothing much [that] I give my family other than financial support, the major contribution from me. I can be with them [family members] mostly on Saturdays only… when I don't have any other things to do.

However, female TZD workers highlighted that life is much more difficult for them than for men who work non-standard work schedules. Female workers pointed out that being a TZD worker does not exempt them from household responsibilities, even though male TZD workers enjoy such privileges. Thamali, a banking assistant at ASBC, said:

… nowadays, a wife cannot spend her time at home without doing a job. So, there is nothing to do even if we have to compromise certain things from family life. [I] balance both [work and family] as best as I can. As a woman, I cannot escape from that [responsibility].

Deeply rooted gender and cultural stereotypes demand that women are inherently responsible for household chores and child and elderly care. Therefore, though male TZD workers are in a position to justify their lack of family involvement due to existing gender roles, female TZD workers are always required to find alternative arrangements to take care of the family, such as seeking the support of extended families, compromising their biological needs and undertaking second shifts at home immediately after work.

When fulfilling responsibilities in each domain, individuals have to cross the boundaries (interposed transitions) between the two domains psychologically (Clark, 2000). Since they work during non-standard hours, this psychological boundary crossing applies more specifically to ITO workers due to the flexibility they have. Sahan described these transitions as follows.

… If any emergency occurs, I should keep my personal work for which I went [wedding] aside and should come back to a place where there is a signal and fix the problem. … Now we don't feel those that much. Naturally we have got used to that. Now it is not only a part of our job, but a part of our lives. Whatever the work we are going to do, the fact that 'if any emergency occurs' is always there in our minds and we should get ready for that before doing all the other work. …

These workers are required to be available for office work even when they are at home, with friends or attending any other functions in their non-work domain. When such emergencies happen, they need to drop what they are doing and attend to their work via communication technologies. From a managerial viewpoint, managers tend to argue that those are inevitable for IT workers if they are to earn higher salaries and advance their career. Miyuru, director of services at AWS, described it as follows.

In IT field, standard working hours is non-existing. … [T]here is nothing called working hours except in government organizations like ICTA and smaller scale companies. No global IT company has a concept as working hours. … In standard model, you work 9 a.m. – 5 p.m., go home and after that you have nothing to do. But that model is not applicable to IT jobs. … If you come to any position in the IT field, I mean in software engineering, you need to sacrifice to a certain extent.

However, this experience was not the same for female ITO workers. Female workers are less frequently contacted by work colleagues when they are at home. Female workers expressed their gratitude to their male work colleagues during the interviews for understanding the multiple roles they must play which include responsibility for household chores and child and elderly care, and for handling all the emergency situations which occur outside their work hours, themselves (male workers).

The Advent of Non-work Features into Work and Work Producing Social Life

Non-standard work schedules which are synchronized with different time zones—thus, incompatible with the work schedules and free times of their local counterparts—have caused TZD workers to limit their social affiliations/social life outside the organization (time with family, friends, relatives, neighbors, volunteer, community and religious activities). It makes them socially de-synchronized and alienated from others who are outside the organization. Many TZD workers have also limited the time they allocate to their personal developmental activities. Apart from undertaking educational activities, they are rarely ready to compromise their family time for physical and other intellectual developmental activities. This shows that the sacrifice is always made from the non-work domain and not from the work domain, which signifies the importance given to work and the superiority assigned to the work domain over the non-work domain.

Though TZD workers have limited social affiliations outside the organization, they tend to build strong social affiliations within the workplace with their work colleagues, beyond mere work collegiality. This takes place through the nature of their work, team building activities and organizational and/or employee-initiated community activities at the workplace. For example, Dinethra explained how the nature of their work helps in building strong friendships within the organization.

According to the nature of our work also, team bonding happens. Sometimes we do not have time to talk with each other. We have that much of work. But still, we get a collective feeling like "OK, the whole team is working today till night" … Doing night work is a major reason for our team bonding. If others have finished their work and if I have still not, the whole team helps me. When everyone finishes work only the whole team leaves the office. … Everybody has the feeling like 'all of us are in trouble' (laughing). So, by helping each other, everyone tries to finish off the given work or meet the given deadline. Since for the most part of time we are there with friends within the company itself, the bond increases with them even if we have more distant relationships with outside friends and relatives.

Furthermore, being required to work at non-standard work schedules means that employees are expected to work at times which are different from others' work times, which mainly involves night work. This leads to a sense of exclusion from outside society and a sense of inclusion among fellow workers in the organization. Thus, it creates a climate of caring, friendliness and warmth among organizational members. It also creates strong social bonds among work colleagues within the organization which strengthens the social synchronization process within the workplace.

Sri Lankan BPO companies often organize family-office events to help build team spirit among their workers and to take their work collegiality to an advanced level, providing an opportunity for employees' families to mingle and become family friends. Volga, a software developer at Global IT put it as:

… We always organize family-office events. We had a sports club. Though the name is like that, it is actually kind of a welfare club. From that annual trips, New Year celebrations, Christmas parties, Peduru parties, year-end parties are organized. Almost all are family events. Employees get to know the families of the employees and interact with them. The main aim is to allow the employee to bring the whole family there and enjoy. … So, beyond office friendships, employees associate each other's families. Then they go on trips together, likewise.

Besides, though TZD workers participate less in outside community and religious activities, they tend to fulfil those requirements within the organization (via organizational community activities) or with their work colleagues (via employee-initiated community activities). This, in turn, improves social affiliations within the organization itself, and these affiliations begin to go beyond mere work relationships.

This is further facilitated by the organizational climate present within the BPO organizations, which increasingly bestows non-work characteristics to the work domain. The climate in most Sri Lankan BPO companies is different from a conventional office climate and gives an outsider the impression that the place is not really an office, but more like a home, with home furniture and appliances and highly aesthetic decor. Also, various provisions such as a gym, play areas, rest areas, game zones, refrigerators, and kitchens as well as a relaxed dress code are unique features of Sri Lankan BPO companies. Sahan, whose work hours are from 03.30 a.m. to 11.30 a.m., expressed his feelings as follows.

… It's boring to be at home. My wife goes to work, and my son goes to school. So, no point of being at home. It's better to come here. If I did any other job, I might feel like taking leave to be at home freely even if nobody is there at home. Have a nice bath, eat the food I want, watch a film and sleep well, likewise. We can do

all those things in our office, even better than in our homes as more facilities are there in the office. And the other thing is, we have friends here and when the team works together, it is fun.

In most Sri Lankan BPO companies, space for personal developmental activities, such as physical exercise, are established within the organization—for example, by the provision of a gym—within the bodily boundaries of the work domain. Therefore, employees tend to pursue personal developmental activities at the workplace, sacrificing their family time. Focus group interview 04 participants shared their experiences as follows.

... [W]e can observe that most employees come earlier than their office time and go to the gym. There, employees talk about home matters and office matters. They plan their office work there. They work out while discussing those. …

Against this backdrop, it is evident TZD workers are willing to sacrifice some extra time for social affiliations and personal development activities within the workplace (e.g., spending additional time in play areas, using gym facilities) though they are not willing to sacrifice their family time for the same.

When organizations become more sophisticated by including various advanced features which were unavailable in the organization earlier but were available in the non-work domain, it makes the workplace an attractive place for workers, and the time they spend within the workplace becomes more pleasant. The homelike, relaxed environment at office helps employees to counteract the negativities associated with TZD work, such as the lack of time for family and friends, and lack of time for personal developmental activities. Rohan, director at Global IT, expounded it as:

… [W]hen we come here, we don't have to wear ties and shoes, be disciplined and conditioned like in a formal office. [T]here is no rule that I must work from my seat. I can work from the sofa, or I can work from the bean bag. I told you, sleeping is not something I need much of. It is like that because if I do so [don't sleep much at home] and come to office and if I feel sleepy during office hours, I have the confidence that I can sleep in the office. It is ensured by this environment.

It should be noted here that this sense of the non-work domain being created and provided by the work domain points to the permeation of non-work domain characteristics into the work domain.

Individual Strategies to Manage Work/Non-work Balance

Although TZD work produces social life with a more 'inward' oriented approach, they adopt various strategies to fulfil their responsibilities in each domain and manage their work/non-work balance. Support and shared responsibilities at home and at work, is one such strategy. When the male spouse undertakes non-standard work schedules, a major portion of the responsibilities at home are handled by the female spouse. Though men do help in household work, those chores are generally non-laborious, while most of the laborious work is done by the female spouse. Nevertheless, the gender roles at home remain the same when the female spouse undertakes a non-standard work schedule. Women do not generally receive much assistance from

their husbands. Instead, they seek assistance from their parents. Sangeeth, a systems support analyst at AWS shared the following:

Actually, I don't have any work at home. Wife and mother do all the work. Even out of that, mother does the most part of the work. Wife most of the time looks into children's things like schoolwork too. It's a great relief for me.

One other strategy TZD workers use is fine-tuning available times and non-available times with family members. They can thus take leave together in order to get all the family members together and available at common times. On a slightly different note, they also have the option to arrange the available time of one spouse with the non-available time of the other. It enables them to adjust their time so that either the mother or the father can undertake childcare activities, rather than outsourcing it to day care centers.

Secession or giving up of biological needs and career prospects is another way of coping with TZD work. TZD workers' biological patterns are different from that of their family members. However, to have family time and also to be in sync with foreign servicing hours, TZD workers stint on their biological needs, such as sleep. Sahan expressed his opinion on the above-mentioned subject, as follows.

Earlier, there was something like sacrificing sleeping time for work. But now I have got used to that and anyway now I am awake till about 12 a.m. Now, sleeping is not something which I badly need. Sometimes the body might want that, but I don't feel like I absolutely need it. …

Not only male workers but also female workers compromise their biological needs in undertaking second shifts at home after work. Further, female TZD workers most often tend to give up their careers or seek a change in their career paths so that they can be employed at standard work schedules, as they perceive that it gives them more time to spend with their families.

Negotiation is another coping strategy, where TZD workers negotiate on household work and on workstations/work shifts. The family is the more negotiable unit as individuals trust and depends on their relationships with family members; so, they first negotiate on household activities and responsibilities. TZD workers believe that even when they are not available for the family or accidently overlook their responsibilities, they could compensate for these omissions later. Focus group interview 02 pointed out:

... We know that even if we miss a family responsibility, we can manage that. Therefore, we are somewhat relaxed about that. But work-related responsibilities are our 'The Responsibilities'. We have a fear about that because whatever it is, we can't lose our job. You should be understanding. ... So, on [the] one hand, if we consider it with the sunk cost, this is not just a job to us. This is our life itself. Even if we negotiate or play with family responsibilities, we can't do so with work responsibilities. We can't take such a risk.

Therefore, negotiation mostly happens at household level and employees are not in a position to negotiate in the work domain, as unconditional availability is highly valued by employers (Hall & Richter, 1989). Also, employees are afraid to negotiate at work, as sometimes negotiation might be perceived as a sign of weakness or a lack of ability on the part of the

individual (Kailasapathy & Metz, 2012). Secondly, Sri Lankan BPO companies have different workstations serving various clients from different geographies with different time zones. Thus, female TZD workers negotiate, for the most part, on workstations—mostly with unmarried workers in terms of mutual exchanges—as their work shifts depend solely on the workstations that they are in or on the country that they serve. Female workers negotiate in a way in which they could best manage their household chores and child and elderly care. Thamali, a banking assistant at ASBC, elaborated on this point as follows.

Hmm… it's like this. Previously, before having the baby I worked [in the] 2 p.m.-10 p.m. [shift]. After having the baby, I was not able to work during that time. So, I negotiated with them [managers] to move on to another division. Since there was a vacancy there [in that division] there was no problem in that.

In coping with work/non-work balance, individuals use cognitive strategies, which means that they reinterpret their situation in line with their values and beliefs, leading to actively revising their expectations and scaling back within the work domain (Haddon & Hede, 2009). TZD workers also re-structure their cognition in order to accept the nature of their work. They condition their minds to accept their existing daily routines by reasoning; 1. This is the nature of their profession and the field that they are pursuing, e.g., the assumption that good career opportunities for IT professionals are available only in these BPO organizations where TZD work is normal and therefore, aiming for a different lifestyle is unrealistic. Some TZD workers have experienced only non-standard schedules, and not having prior experience of standard work schedules and the resulting ignorance about standard work schedules, also help them to adjust their expectations. 2. The need for them to build an identity as capable and committed work colleagues and to be accepted by their work groups and superiors. For example, Dinethra had this to say:

…That means we have tough deadlines. If we promise to give something of any kind, we need to give it. We do it even by working extra hours. Our mindset itself has adjusted like that. Those are more like 'Our' targets than the 'Company's' targets. It's like delivering the targets and promises of our team.

Accordingly, the expectations they have regarding their career growth urge them to accept the nature of their work, as hesitating to adapt to the prevailing situation curtails career growth in the long run. 3. The homelike work environment, better facilities at the workplace, training programmes conducted on entrepreneurship, inspiration and motivation at the workplace by employers, all boost the morale of employees and help them appreciate the positive aspects of work.

As another behavioral strategy, TZD workers engage in advance personal planning due to the incompatibility and uncertainty of their work schedules. Individual workers adopt various planning strategies such as time management, prioritizing and goal setting to manage work/non-work balance (Haddon & Hede, 2009). While planning their activities in advance to ensure their presence/availability at personal events, TZD workers could plan for their absence/unavailability from work/family /social and community events as well. This enables the other party to make alternative arrangements in advance. Hall and Richter (1989) also explain that through advance personal planning, individuals can negotiate in advance with their employers as well as with their

family/community members and explain how workers can actually prepare for those eventualities.

Having stay-at-home spouses who do not have work commitments is another strategy which helps TZD workers, especially male workers, to manage their work/non-work balance (Premeaux et al. as cited in Zheng et al., 2015).

Discussion

As far as the nature of TZD work is concerned, organization of work and non-work lives around non-standard work schedules signifies a new form of colonization, 'temporal colonization or colonization with time' (Adam, 2003; Taylor & Bain, 2005), as it results in synchronization of work shifts of workers in Southern BPO organizations with western customer servicing hours. Irrespective of considerations of the real need for such synchronization of work shifts and its suitability to other geographical contexts, Western clock time has been globalized and imposed as the unquestioned and unquestionable standard/norm (Adam, 2003). Nevertheless, as such colonization and subordination of Southern workers to the interests of Western capital is associated with the economic values and development of Southern countries, colonization with time is naturalized, taken for granted and unquestioned, and thus, unwilling employees will find it difficult, if not impossible, to make their protests heard and heeded (Adam, 2003).

In the case of ITO companies, a little flexibility is given to workers to adjust their work hours and to determine the length of their work hours which in turn results in an uncertainty or indefinite nature of a TZD worker's working hours. In lieu of the flexibility given to them, an unconditional availability is expected from them—to be available at any time whenever the work demands, regardless of whether they are in the office or not, or whether it is their family time, sleep time, leave period or holiday. This mirrors a blurred nature of work time and non-work time. As explained in Clark's work/family border theory (2000), work and non-work domains are separated by "bodily, temporal, or emotional" borders (Clark, 2000, p. 756). Thus, in the case of TZD work, the variations in timing of the work (different from the standard work hours of local counterparts) and in the number of hours worked (due to the opportunity given to flex some TZD workers' work hours) signify a flexibility in the temporal boundaries between the two domains, resulting in more time spent in the work domain (Clark, 2000). As Costa et al. (2004) suggest, temporal flexibility cannot be considered in isolation as it has the ability to alter the time available for an employee's leisure, social commitments, family, and her/his community service. This temporal flexibility could have adverse effects on workers' physical, mental, and emotional well-being (Shortland & Cummins, 2007). Against this backdrop, one could argue that this flexibility is required *of* them, rather than *for* them (Girard, 2010). Thus, being required to work at foreign servicing hours and to be available unconditionally—at any time of the day—makes the Sri Lankan BPO industry 'colonized' in terms of time.

The findings unveil that TZD workers are confronted with a significant social de-synchronization due to their non-standard work schedules (Bambra et al., 2008). They are socially alienated, which negatively affects their quality of social interactions (Dowling, 2007; Weeks, 2007; Wickramasinghe & Kumara, 2010). However, TZD workers have re-articulated the way in which they synchronize socially by taking a more 'inward' approach, mainly through the space

created for strong social affiliations within the workplace due to non-standard work times, sense of exclusion from the outside society and family-office events. They perceive that such activities help workers to balance their work and non-work lives and they are thankful to their employers for giving them a sense of the non-work domain.

This new form of social synchronization at the workplace is also facilitated by the homelike environment at work and the relaxed organizational climate, along with the provision of space for [traditional] non-work domain characteristics, such as spaces for gyms, play areas, rest areas, game zones, refrigerators, kitchens as well as the institution of a relaxed dress code. This homelike environment could be broadly identified under the dimension of welfare facilities in the organizational climate (Sharma, 1989). The provision of a homelike environment brings to the workplace most of the ambience of the non-work domain, inspiring such feelings as caring, friendliness, and a relaxed mind (which are ideally meant to belong to the private sphere as per rational bureaucracy introduced by Max Weber (Malachowski et al., 2012)), and makes employees feel as if they are in their homes and at work with their intimate friends. These feelings strengthen the bonds among work colleagues and strengthen the social synchronization process within the workplace. Use of non-work domain characteristics illustrates that TZD workers are not willing to sacrifice their family time for social affiliations and personal development activities outside the organization, they are willing to sacrifice some extra time for the same within the workplace. The reason for this is that they consider it a sacrifice when they exchange family time for social affiliations and personal development activities outside the organization. However, when the same activities are spatially located within organizational boundaries, they are not counted as a sacrifice but rather, as time spent at work as demanded by the work domain.

This provides evidence that most TZD workers utilize their working time and the spaces in the organizations to satisfy their non-work desires and needs, thereby helping them to counteract the negativity resulting from the social de-synchronization taking place outside the organization. However, Gregory and Milner (2009, p. 2) argue that such 'integration' or 'harmonization' of the work and non-work domains—while creating the image of a more positive organizational change—may result in the "contamination or domination of personal life by the demands of paid employment".

Therefore, TZD work is not a mere "means of social life" for TZD workers, but itself "produces their social lives" (Dowling, 2007, p. 124). These unique characteristics of TZD work and BPO companies help TZD workers to overcome the social alienation/de-synchronization which occurs due to their non-standard work schedules. The new life patterns and new identities created among TZD workers in BPO companies might even seduce employees to their workplaces from their homes (Dube et al., 2012). Henceforth, in the current context, managers tend to pay more attention to employees' non-work aspects—characteristics which were meant to belong to the non-work domain—as a strategy to attract employees to the workplace and make them more loyal to the organization. Consequently, one could argue that on the one hand, TZD workers are colonized in terms of time, and on the other hand, BPO companies try to trade off the same by providing their employees with a more homelike environment to make them feel that work is more interesting than whatever they have to do at home.

Since both work and non-work domains are 'greedy institutions demanding unfailing and continuous dedication' (Coser, 1974), individuals are required to attend to the responsibilities of both domains. The study reveals that men and women experience the fulfillment of their responsibilities differently. Due to non-standard work schedules in TZD work, more frequent interposed transitions take place across the psychological borders of the work domain and the non-work domain (Clark, 2000; Hall & Richter, 1989). In Sri Lankan culture, where the man is considered as the 'breadwinner' and work is considered as the man's sphere, the woman is generally considered as the 'homemaker' and the home is considered to be the woman's sphere. Therefore, men experience more frequent, unexpected, interposed transitions from the non-work to the work domain. This is more pronounced in ITO workers whose unconditional availability at work is expected due to the flexibility given to them in return. And the managers tend to naturalize such phenomena by establishing the notions, such as 'it is the nature of the industry' and 'characteristics of employees thriving at work' and 'ideal worker' norms (Fernando & Cohen, 2013).

Reinforcement of the socio-culturally formed gender role of women is evident as the female ITO workers do not experience frequent, unexpected, interposed transitions since male ITO workers make a great effort to distance the women from workplace matters when the latter are at home.

By contrast, women TZD workers experience more frequent, unexpected, interposed transitions from the work to the non-work domain, as many of their family members are available at home when they are at work. Studies on the work and non-work balance of women reveal that female workers working standard work shifts seem to be highly stressed towards the latter part of their work shifts (Hall & Richter, 1989) due to the awareness of the 'second shift' that they need to undertake at home after returning from their paid work (Craig & Powell, 2011; Girard, 2010). However, during the current study, it was identified that women TZD workers seem to be stressed most of the time during their work shifts, worrying about the care arrangements of their dependents who are at home while they are at work. This provides evidence for the fact that temporal flexibility is never a gender-neutral issue (Atkinson & Hall, 2009).

During work hours, women TZD workers transit frequently from one domain to the other, making it difficult for them to identify the domain in which they are. These flexible psychological boundaries challenge women TZD workers' capability to be available in the work domain both physically and psychologically. Clark (2000) identifies this situation as a 'borderland' which cannot be identified exclusively as either the work domain or the non-work domain; it is a blended mix of both, which is better termed a 'blending'.

Against this backdrop, TZD workers adopt different strategies to manage their work and non-work balance, including seeking support and shared responsibilities at home and at work (Haddon & Hede, (2009), [support from the] extended families (Kailasapathy & Metz, 2012), fine-tuning [non-]available times with their family members (Han, 2004 as cited in Craig & Powell, 2011), secession of biological needs (Girard, 2010) and career prospects, negotiation at home and at work (Haddon & Hede, 2009; Kailasapathy & Metz, 2012), cognitive strategies (Haddon & Hede, 2009), behavioral strategies (Hall & Richter, 1989) and the help of stay-at-home spouses (Premeaux et al. as cited in Zheng et al., 2015).

Experiences on coping with TZD work were also different among men and women workers. For example, when the female spouse is engaged in TZD work, she does not experience the same amount of support and sharing of household and childcare responsibilities as the male spouse does when he is engaged in TZD work. Instead, women TZD workers expect more support from their extended families than from their partners, whereas men TZD workers always receive more support from their partners. Thus, living with extended families and depending on the support they receive from the extended family is a common 'work-family arrangement' in Sri Lanka, and is used by most TZD workers, especially by female workers. The full-time employment and the income earned give female TZD workers the bargaining power to negotiate household work with their family members (Kailasapathy & Metz, 2012).

Though secession of future career prospects is also another coping strategy, it is most often the women who give up their careers or seek for a change in their careers since they are traditionally held responsible for household chores and childcare and the care of the elderly (Lewis, 2001; Lewis & Humbert, 2010). In a country where the male breadwinner role model is generally accepted, socio-cultural role expectations from women require them to shoulder primary responsibility for the family. Furthermore, women TZD workers rarely negotiate on household work, but often negotiate on workstations/work shifts so that they could manage their household responsibilities better. Craig and Powell (2011) also argue that non-standard work schedules provide an opportunity for working mothers to schedule their working hours around their partners' and their children's timetables. However, this is different for male employees as they tend to remain in the same workstation, mainly due to the friendships they have built within their respective workstations.

Conclusion and Practical Implications for Asian Business

With the new conceits of globalization, advancement of technology and increasing competition among businesses, working across different time zones (non-standard work schedules) is becoming increasingly widespread in Asian countries—the global hotspots for offshoring business processes. Despite its pervasiveness, high turnover in Asian BPO industry (Wickramasinghe & Kumara, 2010)—mainly due to TZD nature of work and associated work/non-work balance related issues—denotes that staff retention and motivation are the most crucial as well as challenging factors in the BPO industry (Silva, 2014).

As the economic aspects of an organization are not the sole parameter of its development, it is important for the practicing managers of Asian BPO organizations to have a thorough understanding of the desynchronized nature of TZD work and the family/social/biological issues that would arise due to non-standard work schedules. It helps the managers in being empathetic towards the employees by adopting various employee-friendly practices at workplace. For example, incorporating personal developmental activities in the work domain; promoting pleasant and friendly work environment at the workplace; fostering social affiliations among workers; allowing employees to have mutual exchanges in work arrangements where labor can be substituted; and organizing family-office events to raise the spouse's awareness about the nature of TZD work. Also, organizations could organize employee development programmes, such as on time management, sick childcare, parenting, etc., to

specific groups of employees with identified needs (e.g., mothers of young children) (Higgins et al., 1994).

Further, managers could legitimize the boundaries between the work domain and the non-work domain. In that regard, managers could pay attention to safeguarding the interfaces between the work domain and the non-work domain in order to facilitate smoother psychological transitions from one domain to the other. For example, managers could establish clear statements on the maximum number of hours an employee can be there within the workplace, establish a calling guide which specifies the times that the employee could be contacted outside the office (excluding commuting time to and from office as it allows time and space for the employees to psychologically transit to the next domain in a smoother manner in planned transitions), and properly staff the organization with adequate number of employees.

Whenever the nature of work does not require the employees to be available in the workplace exactly during foreign servicing hours, for example, in routinized back-office services where direct voice-to-voice contact does not need to be maintained, employees could be given some flexibility to adjust their working time on par with Sri Lankan standard working hours. Thereby, workers could manage their social lives and maintain regular biological patterns. Managers could negotiate with their service recipients on the working hours of their employees. However, flexibility should not be given in exchange for the employee's unconditional availability for office work even when they are at home.

Furthermore, in a post-Covid world where work-from-arrangements and hybrid work models are increasingly embraced, managers of Asian BPO organizations could even seek the possibility of having work-from-home arrangements whenever there is not any direct voice-to-voice contact with the foreign clients and there is not any requirement for all the employees to be at one place. It is even more important in a period when the great resignation creates ripple effects around the world, the tech-savvy millennials joining the world of work in the near future will seek for more freedom, flexibility, and work/non-work balance.

Due to the incompatible nature of the work schedules with the usual day-night behaviors in the local context, various biological problems may occur. Thus, when recruiting workers to organizations, managers should pay attention to the physical, biological, and mental fitness of the workers for the job. Furthermore, the organizations could conduct health clinics, and provide securities like medical insurance and vouchers/allowances for periodical health check-ups for the employees. These enable the managers to have not only a healthy but also a committed employee base due to the sense of being cared for and looked after by the organization.

Along with the nature of TZD work, there may be various issues and grievances at the workplaces. Inability to address or ignorance of such issues and grievances in a timely manner would lead to disastrous situations at work organizations. Thus, proper grievances handling mechanisms and mentoring mechanisms should be in place to assist workers in such problematic situations.

Management attitude and support is crucial in determining work/non-work balance. When employees perceive that their management has positive attitudes towards work/non-work

balance and is more supportive, employees are psychologically better-off. This would create a psychologically, socially as well as biologically healthy employee base that would drive the organization towards excellence. Further, such a climate at work enables employees to adopt certain strategies—for which management support is essential—in maintaining their work/non-work balance. For example, negotiations at the workplace, advance personal planning, and sharing work among team members.

As revealed by the study, one other reason for high employee turnover in the BPO industry is the absence of opportunities for career growth. Therefore, managers should rethink the structure of their organizations and establish proper career paths for the employees at BPO organizations.

On a final note, the future researchers in this area of study can inquire how other categories of employees who work according to non-standard schedules and compressed work weeks in Sri Lanka (such as those who provide essential services) organize their work and non-work lives around their work schedules. Future studies may also study the behavioral trends caused by TZD work among unmarried workers. Further, since future organizations will increasingly demand more and more flexibility from their employees, beyond studying how increasing pressure affects the organization of work and non-work lives of employees, it would be worthwhile to inquire how such situations might lead to misbehavior at work organization and the role of personal values in the midst of such pressure.

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