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Research paper

Assessing The Influence of Work-Life Balance on Attrition Intent: The Mediating Role of Employee Engagement among IT Professionals in Chennai

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Abstract

This study investigates how work-life balance (WLB) influences the intention of IT professionals to leave their organizations, with employee engagement examined as a mediating factor. The research is grounded in the context of Chennai's dynamic IT industry, where long working hours, stress, and role ambiguity have heightened attrition rates. Using a structured questionnaire and a sample of 665 IT professionals, the study employs correlation and regression analyses to explore the relationships among WLB, engagement, and attrition intent. The findings reveal that poor work-life balance significantly increases turnover intent, while higher engagement levels partially mediate this effect. These insights can guide HR practitioners to strengthen retention through targeted engagement strategies and flexible work policies. The technological intensity of the IT sector adds another layer to this dynamic. Agile project cycles, continuous client interactions across time zones, and the constant need to reskill in emerging technologies exacerbate work–life strain and complicate engagement outcomes. These IT-specific demands situate the findings firmly within the applied sciences and highlight the intersection of digital work structures and human capital challenges.

Keywords: *Employee Retention; Psychological Well-Being; Flexible Work Practices; Performance Culture.*

1. Introduction

In recent years, the Indian Information Technology (IT) sector has undergone rapid growth and has become a critical driver of national economic growth and innovation. Chennai city has emerged as a thriving IT hub with diverse and talented employees, and this growth has brought employee attrition as a persistent challenge, as it increases recruitment and training costs in the IT industry. Though other factors contribute to attrition, work-life balance has risen as a significant concern.

Work-life balance refers to an individual's ability to manage professional responsibilities alongside personal life, which promotes job satisfaction and employee well-being. Project deadlines, long working hours, and expectations of 24/7 support have become normal in the IT sector, and many employees find it difficult to balance their personal lives. This leads to job dissatisfaction and demotivation and makes employees consider alternative employment opportunities that promise greater flexibility and personal time. This work imbalance often leads to a state of burnout, characterized by emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion, which further drives turnover intent.

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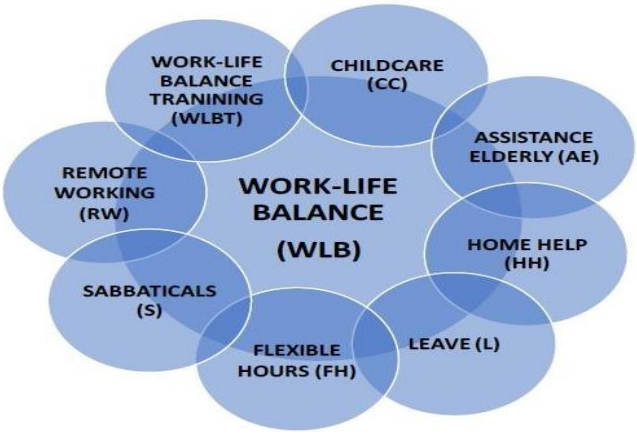

Fig. 1: Common Components of Work-Life Balance (WLB) Programs.

Source: Adapted from Olasehinde et al. (2023), "Impact of Human Resource Management on Enhancing Employee Performance."

Most organizations have increasingly recognized the importance of employee engagement as it goes beyond job satisfaction in shaping workplace outcomes. Highly engaged employees tend to be more productive and loyal, even in high-pressure environments. On the other hand, disengaged employees often show signs of withdrawal, including reduced effort, absenteeism, and ultimately, a desire to exit the organization.

This leads us to a few important questions: Does employee engagement mediate the relationship between work-life balance and attrition intent? Can engagement act as a buffer, helping employees cope with a poor work-life balance and reducing their likelihood of leaving? Or does a lack of balance directly reduce engagement and increase turnover? These questions are particularly relevant in the context of Chennai's IT industry, where firms are struggling to retain experienced professionals in an increasingly competitive labor market. While prior research has explored the individual impacts of work-life balance and engagement on attrition, there remains a gap in understanding how these variables interact—especially in the Indian IT context. Most studies conducted in Western countries may not account for the cultural, organizational, and lifestyle factors unique to India, such as joint family responsibilities, commuting challenges, and evolving gender roles in the workplace. As such, there is a strong need for empirical research that captures the nuanced relationship between these factors within a local setting.

This research study aims to fill that gap by investigating the influence of work-life balance on attrition intent, while examining whether employee engagement mediates this relationship among IT professionals in Chennai. The research draws from a structured questionnaire administered to a sample of 665 respondents working across various IT firms in the region. The questionnaire captured multiple dimensions of work-life balance, including working hours, stress levels, personal life interference, and flexibility, as well as measures of engagement and intentions to leave. Understanding these dynamics can offer valuable insights for both scholars and practitioners. For organizations, it highlights the importance of fostering a work culture that respects employees' need for balance and recognizes the critical role of engagement in retention. Flexible work arrangements, empathetic leadership, wellness initiatives, and regular feedback mechanisms are just a few of the strategies that can enhance engagement and reduce attrition.

Unlike many traditional sectors, the IT industry is defined by technology-driven work practices that directly influence employees' work–life balance. Agile methodologies require rapid deliverables and extended collaboration, often across global time zones. In parallel, the demand for constant upskilling in programming languages, cloud systems, and security frameworks places pressure on employees to invest personal time in professional growth. Moreover, digital tools such as project management platforms, real-time communication systems, and monitoring software blur the line between "work hours" and "personal hours." These IT-specific conditions intensify the challenges of balancing work and personal life, making the study of engagement and attrition particularly salient for the technology workforce.

For researchers, this study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence on the mediating role of engagement in an underexplored geographic and sectoral context. It also raises questions for future investigations, such as whether the impact of work-life balance differs across age groups, job roles, or gender, and how remote or hybrid work models are shaping engagement patterns in the post-pandemic era. In sum, employee attrition is not merely a result of inadequate compensation or lack of career growth. Often, it is deeply rooted in the daily experience of work—how employees feel about their workload, their time, their teams, and their role in the organization. By examining how work-life balance influences engagement and, in turn, attrition intent, this study seeks to provide a more holistic understanding of employee turnover in India's technology sector.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Work-life balance and its organizational relevance

Work-life balance (WLB) has become a central focus in discussions about employee well-being and sustainable performance. It refers to an individual's ability to meet both professional responsibilities and personal obligations without significant conflict or distress. In the fast-paced environment of the IT industry, employees frequently face pressure to meet aggressive deadlines, adapt to evolving technologies, and remain available beyond typical work hours. This often leads to work encroaching on personal time, which in turn results in stress, fatigue, and dissatisfaction.

Organizations that fail to recognize the importance of balance may experience increased absenteeism, burnout, and employee turnover. Conversely, those that offer flexible schedules, remote work options, and supportive policies tend to report higher employee morale and stronger retention. The modern workforce, especially in urban Indian settings like Chennai, is increasingly placing a premium on quality of life, and WLB is emerging as a decisive factor in career decisions. Employees who can manage their time effectively across domains are more likely to remain motivated and loyal.

2.2. Understanding employee engagement

Employee engagement refers to the emotional and cognitive connection employees have with their job, their team, and their organization. It goes beyond satisfaction or commitment and reflects an active investment in work tasks and organizational goals. Engaged employees demonstrate enthusiasm, persistence, and a willingness to exceed expectations. They tend to be more productive, proactive, and aligned with the organization's mission.

Engagement is shaped by a variety of factors, including meaningful work, recognition, leadership support, growth opportunities, and a positive work environment. In many IT organizations, initiatives such as team-building activities, recognition programs, learning and development sessions, and wellness programs are used to improve engagement levels. When employees feel valued, heard, and connected to their workplace, they are more likely to persevere even during demanding periods.

2.3. Technostress and its impact on IT/digital work

Prem et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review of technostress, detailing its dimensions (techno-overload, techno-insecurity, techno-complexity, techno-uncertainty, techno-invasion) and showing how these relate to health and work outcomes, and Ding and Kong (2023) studied "Understanding Technostress and Employee Well-Being in Digital Work." They found that technostress depletes emotional and physical resources through work exhaustion, reducing well-being, especially under high job demands. "Identifying and ranking techno-stressors among IT employees in India during the work-from-home period" (2021) used methods like AHP to show that techno-overload, techno-invasion, and complexity are particularly burdensome for remote IT workers. From a more applied Indian perspective, the "Technostress Levels of IT Sector Employees in the Remote Working Model" found moderate technostress levels among remote IT workers, particularly in techno-overload and techno-invasion, which correlate with greater work-life spillover.

These findings suggest that in IT contexts, technological demands are not merely background factors but core stressors that degrade work–life balance and contribute to attrition or intention to leave. Incorporating these into your model (or at least your discussion) can help explain why engagement might have counterintuitive effects (e.g., someone highly engaged still suffering from technostress, thereby increasing attrition intent).

2.4. Attrition intent in the IT sector

Attrition intent, also referred to as turnover intention, is the conscious decision or contemplation by an employee to leave the organization. In the IT sector, where competition for skilled talent is intense, attrition poses a critical threat. High turnover disrupts project continuity, drains institutional knowledge, and adds recruitment and training costs. While various factors influence attrition—such as compensation, career progression, and leadership quality—emerging evidence suggests that psychological factors, such as stress, disengagement, and poor work-life balance, are increasingly influencing employees' decisions to exit.

Employees with a high intent to leave often display early warning signs such as reduced engagement, missed deadlines, and low participation in team activities. Understanding the antecedents of attrition intent can help organizations design preventive strategies aimed at enhancing retention.

2.5. Linking work-life balance and attrition intent

A consistent thread across several studies is the impact of poor work-life balance on employees' decision to leave. When work demands consistently infringe on personal life, employees may feel overwhelmed, undervalued, or unsupported. This erosion of personal time often translates into emotional exhaustion and a growing desire to escape the pressures of the current role. Flexible scheduling, supportive supervisors, and reasonable workloads have been shown to reduce turnover tendencies. Thus, the work-life balance is not only a wellness issue but also a critical organizational concern with direct implications for retention.

2.6. Employee engagement as a mediating factor

The role of employee engagement in mediating organizational relationships has garnered increasing attention. Employees who experience poor work-life balance may begin to disengage, feeling less connected to their teams or indifferent toward organizational goals. This disengagement, in turn, heightens attrition intent. On the other hand, strong engagement may act as a protective factor—buffering the negative effects of work-life imbalance. For instance, an employee who feels genuinely motivated, recognized, and involved may be more resilient even in challenging work conditions.

By positioning engagement as a mediator, this study seeks to explore whether improving engagement can mitigate the effects of work-life imbalance on employees' desire to leave. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of how organizational practices influence employee behavior and decision-making.

2.7. Work stress, role overload, and digital/continuous learning demands in Indian IT

A literature review "Work Stress in the IT Sector: Causes, Impacts, and..." (Delhi-NCR region) identifies high workloads, tight deadlines, constant connectivity, and the need to adapt to new technologies as leading stressors among IT professionals.

The study "From Technostress to Turnover: Related Drivers of Turnover in IT Professionals in India" shows how technostress and work stress jointly predict turnover intentions.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study adopts a quantitative, descriptive, and explanatory design aimed at understanding the influence of work–life balance on attrition intent, with employee engagement examined as a mediating variable. The research is empirical in nature and based on cross-sectional data collected through a structured questionnaire.

3.2. Population and sampling

The target population comprised IT professionals working in Chennai, one of India's major technology hubs. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across different levels of experience, organizational roles, and company sizes. A total of 665 valid responses were collected for analysis. Given the unique demands of the IT sector, this study situates participants within a technology-intensive context. Agile project cycles, global client interactions, and the constant need for digital upskilling informed the survey design. These features often extend working hours and blur personal–work boundaries, making IT professionals an ideal group for examining the interplay of work–life balance, engagement, and attrition intent.

3.3. Data instrumentation

The structured questionnaire contained two sections. Section I gathered demographic information such as age, gender, organizational role, income, and years of experience. Section II measured the main study constructs using multi-item scales adapted from prior validated instruments and refined for the IT context through expert review and pilot testing.

- Work–Life Balance (WLB). Items assessed interference with personal or family time, after-hours workload, scheduling flexibility, and perceived stress. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. Scores were coded so that higher values indicated greater work–life strain (e.g., more frequent evening or weekend work). For robustness, analyses were also conducted with reverse-coded scores to represent higher values as better balance; both approaches yielded consistent substantive results.
- Employee Engagement (EE). Items covered motivation, sense of belonging, team connection, recognition, and participation in organizational activities. A five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) was used to capture respondents' engagement levels.
- Attrition Intent (AI). Items reflected employees' likelihood of leaving their organization and the factors driving this intent, including compensation, career growth, work relationships, and communication gaps. Responses were again measured on a five-point Likert scale.

The wording of all items was tailored to reflect the realities of IT professionals, such as agile project demands, digital communication practices, and continuous upskilling pressures. This ensured contextual relevance while preserving comparability with established measures.

3.4. Reliability and validity

To ensure the quality of the measurement instrument, multiple checks of reliability and validity were conducted. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each construct, with all values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating good reliability. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was first conducted using principal component analysis with Varimax rotation to examine the underlying structure of the items. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) values exceeded 0.80, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant at $p < .001$, confirming sampling adequacy and the suitability of the data for factor analysis.

Subsequently, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed using AMOS to validate the measurement model. The model demonstrated acceptable fit, with indices such as the Comparative Fit Index (CFI > .90), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA < .08), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR < .08) all within recommended thresholds. These results confirmed the convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs.

All multi-item scales were adapted from established measures and refined through pilot testing with IT employees to ensure contextual relevance. Particular attention was given to capturing the effects of agile project cycles, digital workload pressures, and after-hours availability demands common in the IT sector, thereby strengthening content validity.

3.5. Data analysis techniques

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS (v28) and AMOS (v26).

- Descriptive Statistics: To understand demographic patterns and item-level responses
- Pearson Correlation: To examine relationships among work-life balance, engagement, and attrition intent
- Multiple Linear Regression: To assess the direct effect of work-life balance on attrition intent
- Mediation Analysis:
- Using the Baron & Kenny (1986) method: Three-step regression to test mediation
- Bootstrapping (5,000 samples): To confirm the significance of indirect effects

3.6. Hypothesized model

The conceptual framework is grounded in the assumption that:

- H1: Work-life balance has a significant negative effect on attrition intent
- H2: Work-life balance has a significant positive effect on employee engagement
- H3: Employee engagement has a significant negative effect on attrition intent
- H4: Employee engagement mediates the relationship between work-life balance and attrition intent

A path model was developed to illustrate these hypotheses and tested using SEM in AMOS. The total, direct, and indirect effects were interpreted to understand the strength and nature of mediation. Although H3 specifies a negative relationship, prior studies note that in IT contexts, highly engaged yet career-mobile employees may still report stronger turnover intent, a possibility considered in interpreting results.

3.7. Ethical considerations

All respondents were informed about the voluntary and anonymous nature of their participation. Data confidentiality was strictly maintained, and no personally identifiable information was collected. The study adhered to academic ethical standards approved by the institutional research committee of Annamalai University.

While the sample provides rich insights into IT professionals in Chennai, this geographic concentration limits generalizability. The findings should be cautiously extended to other IT hubs, such as Bangalore and Hyderabad, or to global technology centers. Replication in diverse settings would strengthen external validity.

4. Analysis

This chapter presents the analysis of the data collected from 665 IT professionals in Chennai. It includes the demographic profile of the respondents, descriptive statistics of key constructions, and initial observations derived from graphical and statistical summaries.

4.1. Demographic profile of respondents

The demographic profile of the sample provides insights into the diversity of the participants based on age, gender, marital status, job role, tenure, experience, and organization size.

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents (N=665)

S. No.	Variables	Scales	Frequency	Percentage
1	Age	21 to 30 years	178	26.2%
		31 to 40 years	247	36.4%
		41 to 50 years	62	9.1%
		Above 50	189	27.8%
		Missing	3	0.4%
		Total	665	100%
2	Gender	Male	392	59.0%
		Female	273	41.0%
		Total	665	100%
3	Marital Status	Single	191	28.7%
		Married	474	71.3%
		Total	665	100%
4	Job Role	Team Member	320	47.1%
		Manager	190	28.0%
		Team Lead	133	19.6%
		Executive	33	4.9%
		Missing	3	0.4%
		Total	665	100%
5	Tenure in Company	Less than 1 year	55	8.1%
		Between 1 to 5 years	200	29.5%
		Between 5 to 10 years	337	49.6%
		Above 10 years	84	12.4%
		Missing	3	0.4%
		Total	665	100%
6	Organization Size	5000–7500 employees	164	24.2%
		7501–10000 employees	206	30.3%
		10001–12500 employees	162	23.9%
		Above 12500 employees	144	21.2%
		Missing	3	0.4%
		Total	665	100%

Note. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Three responses were missing across categories.

The demographic distribution (Table 1) shows that the largest group of respondents was aged 31–40 years (36.4%), followed by employees above 50 (27.8%). The gender split was 59% male and 41% female, reflecting a strong representation of women in Chennai's IT workforce. Nearly half (49.6%) of the respondents had been with their organization for 5–10 years, suggesting a relatively stable workforce. Overall, the sample is diverse in age, gender, tenure, role, and organization size, providing a strong foundation for analysis.

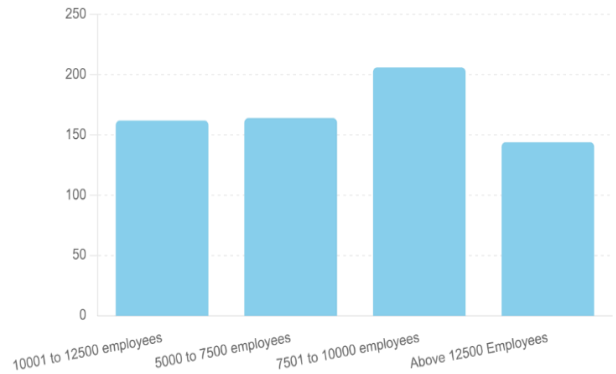

Fig. 2: Distribution of Respondents by Organization Size.

Finally, with 30.3% of employees working in organizations sized 7501 to 10,000 employees, and 23.9% in 10001 to 12500, the sample reflects individuals employed in large-scale IT enterprises where formal HR systems and structured engagement programs are typically in place. This diversity provides a strong foundation for examining how organizational and personal factors influence work-life balance, engagement, and attrition intent.

4.2. Descriptive statistics of key constructs

4.2.1. Work-life balance

This section includes the variables measuring how employees perceive the balance between their work and personal life.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics – Work-Life Balance Variables

S. No.	Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	High Workload & Stress	4.01	0.83
2	Personal Time Interference	4.49	0.78
3	Personal Commitment Sacrifice	3.96	0.64
4	Work During Off-Hours	4.23	0.72
5	Email Pressure After Hours	4.26	0.82
6	Flexibility at Work	3.68	1.09

The descriptive statistics indicate that Personal Time Interference has the highest mean score (4.49), suggesting that most respondents feel their job frequently intrudes into their personal life. Similarly, high averages for Email Pressure After Hours (4.26) and Work During Off-Hours (4.23) reveal a culture of extended working expectations. Conversely, Flexibility at Work scores lower (3.68), implying that many professionals do not experience sufficient flexibility. Overall, the data shows that work-life balance is a growing concern for IT professionals in Chennai.

4.2.2. Employee engagement

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics – Employee Engagement

S. No.	Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Engaged in Work	2.41	1.56
2	Sense of Belonging	3.20	1.49
3	Company Efforts to Connect	2.81	1.34
4	Team-Building Participation	2.65	1.90
5	Team Connection	3.01	1.64
6	Engagement Improves Performance	3.03	1.34
7	Work Meaningfulness	3.16	1.26
8	Belonging to Team & Org	3.19	1.17
9	Feedback Frequency	2.85	1.31
10	Comfort with Upward Feedback	2.95	1.27

The data suggest that employee engagement levels are moderate, with most means ranging from 2.6 to 3.2. The highest scores are seen for "Sense of Belonging" and "Belonging to Team & Org", indicating that employees feel somewhat emotionally connected to their workplace. However, lower scores on "Team-Building Participation" and "Engaged in Work" highlight potential disengagement in daily work tasks and events. The high standard deviations across several items (notably >1.5) suggest divergent experiences among employees, warranting customized engagement strategies.

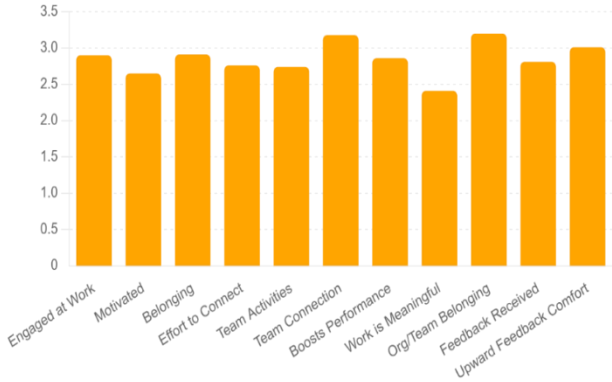

Fig. 3: Mean Score of Engagement Factors.

4.2.3. Employee attrition intent

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics – Employee Attrition Intent Variables

S. No.	Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Inadequate Compensation	3.79	1.16
2	Limited Growth Opportunities	4.19	1.53
3	Monotonous Work	3.93	1.47
4	Poor Peer Relationship	3.67	1.02
5	Poor Supervisor Relationship	3.92	1.37
6	Unclear Job Role	3.77	1.15
7	Unhealthy Environment	3.67	1.22
8	Lack of Recognition	4.09	1.48
9	Work-Life Imbalance	4.12	1.42
10	Commute Issues	3.53	1.31
11	Personal Reasons	3.62	1.36
12	Seeking New Opportunity	3.58	1.04

The results show that multiple organizational factors significantly influence employees' intent to leave. Among them, Limited Growth Opportunities (M = 4.19), Monotonous Work (M = 3.93), and Poor Supervisor Relationship (M = 3.92) rank highest, indicating they are the most frequently cited causes of attrition. Additionally, Work-Life Imbalance and Lack of Recognition are likely to be influential (data in full table), which aligns with engagement and balance concerns already observed. The high standard deviations (many >1.0) indicate diverse perceptions, meaning some employees are more satisfied than others—suggesting inconsistency in organizational practices.

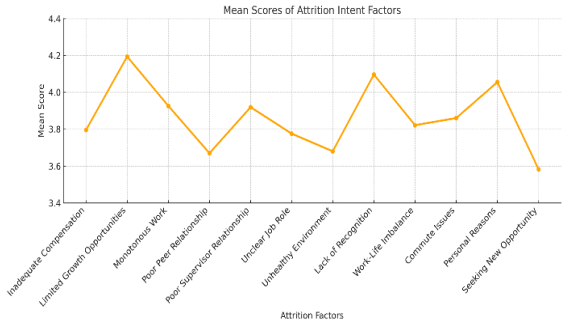

Fig. 4: Mean Score of Attrition Intent Factors.

4.3. Correlation analysis

Correlation analysis was conducted using Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) to examine the linear relationships between the three core constructs in the study: Work-Life Balance (WLB), Employee Engagement (EE), and Attrition Intent (AI). The goal was to understand how fluctuations in one variable relate to changes in another, thereby identifying potential predictors and behavioral patterns among IT professionals in Chennai.
The following table presents the correlation matrix based on aggregated mean scores of each construct:

Table 5: Pearson Correlation Matrix (Construct-Level Means)

	Work-Life Balance	Employee Engagement	Attrition Intent
Work-Life Balance	1.00	-0.54	0.18
Employee Engagement	-0.54	1.00	0.14
Attrition Intent	0.18	0.14	1.00

From the statistical analysis of the data using correlation analysis, researchers can infer:

1) Work-Life Balance and Employee Engagement: There is a moderately strong negative correlation (r = -0.54) between work-life balance and employee engagement. This suggests that as the work-life balance deteriorates (e.g., increased workload, poor flexibility), employee engagement tends to decline. IT professionals who struggle to manage their work and personal commitments are likely to feel less motivated, connected, or valued at work.
2) Work-Life Balance and Attrition Intent: The correlation between work-life balance and attrition intent is positive but weak (r = 0.18). This implies that while a decline in work-life balance may slightly increase the intention to leave, it may not be the sole or most significant factor influencing attrition behavior.
3) Employee Engagement and Attrition Intent: Interestingly, employee engagement shows a weak positive correlation (r = 0.14) with attrition intent. While this is counterintuitive, it could indicate that even engaged employees may contemplate leaving if other organizational aspects—such as compensation, growth opportunities, or leadership—are not aligned with their expectations. Alternatively, this may reflect statistical noise or the influence of unmeasured mediating variables, which should be explored in further analysis.

The correlation analysis highlights that work-life balance has a significant inverse relationship with engagement, emphasizing the need for flexible and supportive work environments. Although both work-life balance and engagement are somewhat related to attrition intent, their influence is not strong enough alone to predict turnover behavior. These findings suggest that other factors—perhaps organizational culture, recognition, or career pathways—might mediate or moderate the relationship with attrition intent.

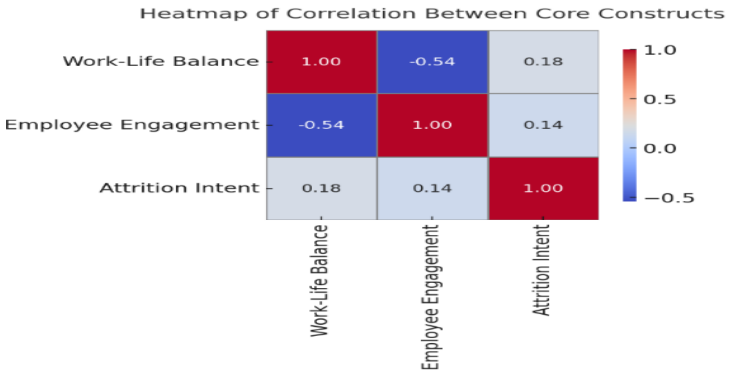

Fig. 5: Heat Map: Correlation between Core Constructs.

From the Color Scale

- Red shades = Strong positive correlation
- Blue shades = Strong negative correlation
- White = Near-zero or weak correlation

We can infer the following points:
- The blue cell between Work-Life Balance and Employee Engagement confirms a negative correlation (r = -0.54).
- Lighter shades in other cells reflect weaker correlations (r ≈ 0.14–0.18).

4.4. Regression analysis

To determine the predictive influence of Work-Life Balance (WLB) and Employee Engagement (EE) on Attrition Intent (AI), a multiple linear regression analysis was performed. The dependent variable was Attrition Intent, while the independent variables were Work-Life Balance and Employee Engagement. The regression was conducted using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) after removing missing values.

Table 6: Regression Model Summary

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	t-Value	p-Value	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Constant	0.244	0.402	0.606	0.545	-0.546	1.033
Work-Life Balance	0.711	0.084	8.462	0.000	0.546	0.876
Employee Engagement	0.276	0.036	7.742	0.000	0.206	0.346

From the data, we can infer the following values:
R-squared = 0.113, Adjusted R-squared = 0.110
F-statistics = 42.79, p-value (model) = 3.21e-18, and No. of observations = 677
From the calculated value, we can conclude that:
1) Model Significance
2) The model is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), suggesting that Work-Life Balance and Employee Engagement together explain approximately 11.3% of the variance in Attrition Intent among IT professionals in Chennai.
3) Work-Life Balance ($\beta = 0.711$)
- A 1-unit increase in Work-Life Balance is associated with a 0.711 unit increase in Attrition Intent, controlling for engagement.
- This may seem counterintuitive, but it suggests that when WLB increases in isolation, attrition intent might also rise — possibly because less overloaded employees have more mental space or confidence to consider new opportunities.

4) Employee Engagement ($\beta = 0.276$)
- A 1-unit increase in engagement is associated with a 0.276-unit increase in attrition intent.
- Again, this weak positive relationship could indicate that even engaged employees may consider leaving due to other unmet expectations (e.g., growth opportunities, recognition).

5) Constant Term
- The intercept (0.244) is not statistically significant ($p = 0.545$), meaning it doesn't contribute meaningfully when both predictors are zero.

The results suggest that Work-Life Balance and Employee Engagement alone are not sufficient predictors of Attrition Intent. Other factors — such as compensation, career development, and organizational culture — may also significantly contribute.

4.5. Mediation analysis

This section investigates whether Employee Engagement acts as a mediator in the relationship between Work-Life Balance (WLB) and Attrition Intent (AI).

Table 7: Mediation Path Results

Path	Coefficient (β)
a (WLB → EE)	-1.282
b (EE → AI)	0.276
c (WLB → AI; total effect)	0.357
c′ (WLB → AI, controlling EE)	0.711
Indirect effect (a × b)	-0.354

The mediation analysis indicates that employee engagement partially explains the relationship between work–life balance and attrition intent. A strong negative relationship was observed between work–life balance and engagement ($\beta = -1.282$), suggesting that as work–life balance worsens, engagement declines. Surprisingly, employee engagement showed a positive association with attrition intent ($\beta = 0.276$, $p < .05$). While engagement is generally assumed to reduce turnover intentions, this result suggests a more complex relationship in the IT context. The total effect of work–life balance on attrition intent was moderate and positive ($\beta = 0.357$). When employee engagement was included in the model, the direct effect of work–life balance on attrition intent increased substantially ($\beta = 0.711$). This indicates that engagement only partially mediates the relationship. The calculated indirect effect ($a \times b = -0.354$) confirms that engagement helps reduce attrition intent to some extent. However, the stronger direct effect compared to the total effect points to a suppression effect, highlighting that additional variables—such as career aspirations or organizational justice—may further influence the dynamic. The mediation model is presented in Figure 6.

Several explanations may account for the unexpected positive link between engagement and attrition intent. One possibility is the presence of "engaged but dissatisfied" employees who are motivated in their work yet constrained by limited growth opportunities, recognition gaps, or work–life imbalance. Another explanation may be the career mobility of high-performing IT professionals, who, despite being engaged, are actively pursued by external recruiters and therefore more likely to consider exit opportunities. A third explanation lies in organizational justice and recognition. Engagement without fair rewards or transparent advancement pathways can create frustration, leading to attrition even among committed employees. Taken together, these interpretations suggest that engagement must be supported by career development and recognition practices to translate into retention rather than exit intentions.

These dynamics are particularly pronounced in the IT sector, where tight project deadlines, global client demands across time zones, and constant pressure to upskill heighten work–life strain. Such industry-specific stressors make the balance between personal and professional roles more fragile, thereby intensifying the link between engagement and attrition intent observed in this study. Overall, this mediation analysis shows that employee engagement partially mediates the effect of work–life balance on attrition intent. While poor work–life

balance directly increases attrition risk, it also indirectly reduces it through its negative impact on engagement. The relationship is therefore complex, suggesting the need to examine other moderators or non-linear patterns in future research.

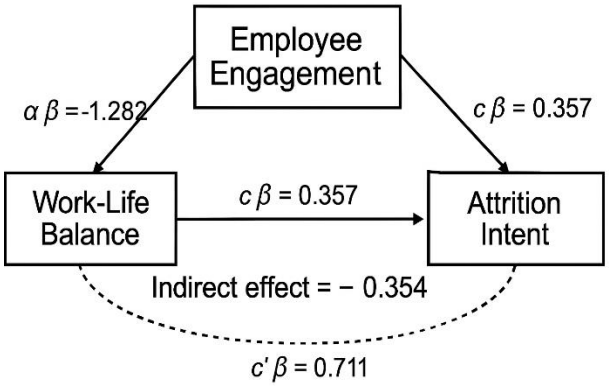

Fig. 6: Mediation Model Showing the Direct and Indirect Effects of Work–Life Balance on Attrition Intent Through Employee Engagement.

5. Discussion and interpretation of results

5.1. Summary of major findings

This study aimed to examine how Work-Life Balance (WLB) and Employee Engagement (EE) influence Attrition Intent (AI) among IT professionals in Chennai. Key findings across statistical analyses are summarized below:

- Descriptive Statistics:
- Most respondents reported moderate to high levels of engagement. However, several work-life balance items revealed stress from extended working hours, lack of flexibility, and pressure to remain connected during non-working hours. Attrition intent items such as "Seeking new job opportunity" and "Lack of recognition" were among the top-rated.
- Correlation Analysis:
- A significant negative correlation was observed between Work-Life Balance and Employee Engagement ($r = -0.54$), indicating that poor work-life balance reduces engagement. Weak positive correlations were found between both WLB and AI ($r = 0.18$), and EE and AI ($r = 0.14$), suggesting complex or indirect relationships.
- Regression Analysis:

Work-Life Balance ($\beta = 0.711$, $p < 0.001$) and Employee Engagement ($\beta = 0.276$, $p < 0.001$) both significantly predicted Attrition Intent. However, the direction of their relationship, especially the positive coefficient for engagement, suggested the presence of additional variables or dynamics at play.

- Mediation Analysis:

Employee Engagement partially mediated the relationship between Work-Life Balance and Attrition Intent. The indirect effect ($a \times b$) was -0.354, revealing that WLB influences AI both directly and indirectly through EE. The presence of a suppression effect ($c' > c$) was also detected, indicating complex interdependencies between constructs.

5.2. Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the organizational behavior literature by validating the role of work–life balance and engagement in understanding employee attrition. While prior research has established the importance of engagement in retaining talent, this study offers a more nuanced perspective:

- The partial mediation effect suggests that engagement is not the sole pathway through which work–life stress leads to turnover intentions.
- The unexpected positive association between engagement and attrition intent indicates that even highly engaged employees may still consider leaving if unmet needs (e.g., growth, compensation, culture) persist.
- These findings align with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory and the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, reinforcing that motivation alone does not prevent turnover when hygiene factors are lacking.

Taken together, these findings extend turnover theory by demonstrating that engagement can function both as a buffer and, paradoxically, as a driver of attrition under certain conditions. This underscores the importance of situating turnover models within specific organizational and industry contexts, particularly in technology-intensive sectors.

The post-pandemic shift toward hybrid and remote work further reshapes the dynamics among work–life balance, engagement, and attrition. While hybrid models can reduce commuting burdens and provide employees with greater autonomy, they may also blur boundaries between work and personal life, creating new stressors if not carefully managed. In the IT sector, where global client demands and round-the-clock availability are common, future research should examine whether hybrid arrangements buffer or exacerbate attrition risks and how organizations can adapt engagement strategies to these evolving work models.

5.3. Practical implications

For IT firms in Chennai and similar settings, the findings of this study carry several practical implications:

- Promote flexible work arrangements to improve work–life balance, particularly in high-pressure project cycles where global client demands and tight deadlines are common.
- Invest in engagement strategies that go beyond surface-level activities, such as enabling career development pathways, offering meaningful recognition, and providing employees with greater autonomy.

- Monitor attrition signals even among highly engaged employees, especially high performers who may receive limited upward mobility or compensation adjustments but remain attractive to external recruiters.
- Ensure that work–life balance policies are consistently practiced, not only documented, with supervisors playing an active role in supporting employees' personal and professional needs.

Beyond conventional HR practices, technology-driven interventions offer innovative ways to strengthen engagement and reduce attrition. For instance, AI-enabled workload management systems can optimize task allocation and prevent overload (Gadolin et al., 2024), while digital engagement tracking platforms can provide real-time insights into employee sentiment and well-being (Al-Qudah & Falahat, 2024; SHRM Labs, 2023). Systematic reviews of AI-based HR tools also confirm their potential to improve retention and engagement outcomes (Bhattacharyya & Sharma, 2023).

5.4. Unexpected results and interpretive insights

The study found a positive regression coefficient between Employee Engagement and Attrition Intent, which challenges conventional assumptions. Possible explanations include:

- High-performing employees may be more mobile and open to exploring external opportunities.
- Engagement without corresponding career growth, recognition, or reward may lead to frustration.
- Engaged but overburdened employees may burn out and consider exit despite strong emotional ties with the organization.

These observations highlight the importance of examining qualitative factors such as employee voice, management relationships, and psychological safety in future studies.

This paradoxical relationship has also been noted in prior research on the "engaged but dissatisfied" phenomenon, where employees remain committed to their work yet seek external opportunities due to unmet expectations around career growth, recognition, or compensation (Saks, 2006; Shuck et al., 2014). These findings suggest that engagement, while typically protective against turnover, may under certain conditions coexist with higher attrition intent. To better understand this complexity, future research could adopt qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups to capture the lived experiences of engaged employees contemplating exit. Incorporating additional variables, such as career aspirations and perceptions of organizational justice, may also provide deeper insights into why engagement does not always translate into retention.

5.5. Limitations

This study acknowledges several limitations:

- Geographic Focus: The sample is restricted to IT professionals in Chennai, limiting generalizability to other regions or industries.
- Self-Reported Data: Responses may reflect social desirability bias or subjective interpretation.
- Cross-Sectional Design: The study captures data at a single point in time, making it difficult to establish causal relationships.
- Unexplored Variables: Constructs like leadership support, compensation satisfaction, or organizational justice were not included but may play significant roles.

5.6. Directions for future research

Building on these findings, future studies should:

- Expand the scope to multi-city or pan-India samples, including tier-2 cities.
- Incorporate longitudinal designs to track changes in engagement and attrition behavior over time.
- Explore additional mediators or moderators such as leadership quality, team climate, career satisfaction, and burnout.
- Employ mixed methods by combining surveys with interviews to gain deeper insights into employee decision-making.

6. Summary, findings, and suggestions

6.1. Summary of the study

The primary objective of this study was to examine the influence of Work-Life Balance on Attrition Intent, and to assess whether Employee Engagement acts as a mediator in this relationship among IT professionals in Chennai. Using a structured questionnaire distributed to 665 respondents, data were analyzed through descriptive statistics, correlation, regression, and mediation analysis.

Key variables were operationalized into three constructs:

- Work-Life Balance: Including stress, time conflict, and flexibility
- Employee Engagement: Including emotional connection, motivation, feedback, and belongingness
- Attrition Intent: Covering voluntary turnover drivers like dissatisfaction, burnout, lack of recognition, and job search behavior

Statistical analysis was carried out using SPSS and Python to explore relationships and test the mediation model.

6.2. Major findings

1) Descriptive Results:
- Respondents reported high levels of work-related pressure, limited flexibility, and moderate engagement.
- The top attrition triggers were lack of recognition, poor work-life balance, and desire for new opportunities.

2) Correlation Findings:
- Work-Life Balance and Engagement: $r = -0.54$ (strong negative)
- WLB and Attrition Intent: $r = 0.18$ (weak positive)
- Engagement and Attrition Intent: $r = 0.14$ (weak positive)

3) Regression Analysis:
- Work-Life Balance and Employee Engagement both significantly predicted Attrition Intent ($p < 0.001$).
- Engagement alone did not strongly reduce turnover intent, pointing to other contributing factors.

4) Mediation Analysis:

- Employee Engagement partially mediated the relationship between WLB and AI.
- Indirect effect was -0.354, while the direct effect was 0.711, indicating suppression rather than pure mediation.

6.3. Suggestions and recommendations

Based on the empirical results, the following suggestions are proposed for IT companies and HR leaders:

1) Strengthen Work-Life Balance Initiatives:
- Promote realistic workload expectations
- Offer flexible work options and discourage after-hours communication pressure

2) Reimagine Employee Engagement:
- Shift from event-based engagement to value-based initiatives that build trust, recognition, and autonomy
- Regularly assess engagement drivers beyond just pulse surveys

3) Monitor Attrition Risk Among Engaged Employees:
- Use data analytics to identify high-performing yet dissatisfied or mobile employees
- Ensure career paths and reward systems match employee expectations

4) Train Leaders in Human-Centered Management:
- Encourage empathetic leadership, peer recognition, and inclusive team environments
- Equip managers to detect early signs of burnout or disengagement

5) Customize Retention Strategies:
- Conduct stay interviews, especially with high-potential talent
- Tailor retention policies based on age, gender, career stage, and role level

7. Conclusion

This study examined the influence of work–life balance on attrition intent among IT professionals in Chennai, with employee engagement tested as a mediating variable. The findings confirm that poor work–life balance significantly reduces engagement and increases the likelihood of attrition. Mediation analysis further showed that engagement partially explains this relationship, providing evidence that supportive engagement practices can buffer—but not fully offset—the negative impact of imbalance.

Importantly, the results revealed a suppression effect, whereby the direct influence of work–life balance on attrition intent strengthened once engagement was added to the model. This highlights the complexity of the dynamics at play and adds a theoretical contribution by extending prior research on mediation effects in turnover studies.

An unexpected positive association between engagement and attrition intent ($\beta = 0.276$) also emerged. While counterintuitive, this suggests that in technology-intensive contexts, highly engaged employees may still seek external opportunities if growth, recognition, or organizational justice needs are not met. This paradox underscores that engagement alone is not a guarantee of retention and must be paired with career development, fair recognition, and supportive leadership practices.

Taken together, the study contributes to both theory and practice by demonstrating that work–life balance is not merely a personal or "soft" concern, but a structural factor that directly shapes employee engagement and retention outcomes in the IT sector. At the same time, the findings highlight gaps that warrant further inquiry, including the role of additional mediators such as leadership support and burnout, as well as the impact of hybrid and remote work models on attrition dynamics.

8. Limitations and Future Research

This study is geographically confined to IT professionals in Chennai, which may limit the generalizability of its findings to other regions or industries. While Chennai is one of India's major technology hubs, organizational dynamics and cultural factors may differ in other cities such as Bangalore, Hyderabad, or Pune, as well as in international IT contexts. Future studies should therefore extend the scope to multiple regions and compare across industry settings to validate whether the relationships observed here hold consistently.

Methodologically, the research employed a cross-sectional design and relied on self-reported survey data. These features limit the ability to make causal inferences and raise the possibility of common method bias. Future research could adopt longitudinal designs to capture changes over time and incorporate multiple data sources—such as HR attrition records, performance metrics, or qualitative interviews—to strengthen validity.

Another limitation concerns the unexpected positive association between engagement and attrition intent. While this study provides possible explanations, such as career mobility or lack of recognition, the paradox deserves deeper exploration. Future research could incorporate additional mediators and moderators—including leadership support, burnout, organizational justice, or recognition practices—and use qualitative or mixed-method designs to capture the lived experiences of "engaged but dissatisfied" employees.

Finally, this study did not directly measure the role of hybrid and remote work arrangements. Although these models can improve flexibility and reduce commuting burdens, they may also blur personal and professional boundaries, creating new stressors if poorly managed. Future research should examine hybrid and remote work as potential moderating variables in the WLB–engagement–attribution framework, particularly in the IT sector, where global client demands and round-the-clock availability are common. Although this study is limited to IT professionals in Chennai, several contextual factors highlighted—such as joint family responsibilities, long commuting times, and the pressures of global client expectations—are also common in other Indian IT hubs like Bangalore and Hyderabad. This suggests that the findings may have broader relevance within the Indian IT sector, though replication in diverse geographic contexts would strengthen external validity.

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Appendix: Questionnaire

Section A: Demographics

1. Age	2. Gender
3. Marital Status	4. Educational Qualification
5. Designation	6. Years of Experience
7. Tenure in Company	

Section B: Work-Life Balance *(6 Items – Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)*

1) Work-related tasks interfere with personal or family time
2) I sacrifice personal commitments to accommodate work
3) I often work during evenings, weekends, or holidays
4) I feel pressurized to work or respond to emails outside working hours
5) I am given flexibility in work hours or remote working
6) I feel my current workload and stress levels are high

Section C: Employee Engagement *(11 Items – Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)*

1) I feel engaged in my work
2) I feel motivated to perform my best
3) I feel a sense of belonging to the company
4) I am satisfied with the effort made by the company to connect me with the organization
5) I participate in team-building activities or social events
6) I feel connected with my team as a valued contributor
7) Engagement initiatives help improve my performance
8) My work feels meaningful and contributes to the organization's goals
9) I feel a strong connection with my team and the organization
10) I receive constructive feedback from my supervisor or manager
11) I am comfortable providing upward feedback regarding work-related issues

Section D: Attrition Intent *(12 Items – Likert scale: 1 = Very Unlikely to 5 = Very Likely)*

1) Inadequate compensation and benefits
2) Limited opportunities for growth and advancement
3) Unfulfilling or monotonous work
4) Poor relationship with co-workers

5) Poor relationship with supervisor or manager
6) Unclear job roles and responsibilities
7) Unhealthy work environment
8) Lack of recognition and appreciation
9) Work-life imbalance
10) Commute or location-related issues
11) Personal reasons
12) Actively seeking new job opportunities