# IS THE TIME RIPE FOR THE RIGHT TO DISCONNECT IN THE INDIAN IT INDUSTRY?

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*Abstract*: The current workplace as we know and experience, is increasingly marred and thus characterized by long working hours, stress, exhaustion, unrealistic targets, and a lack of motivation contributing to widespread mental health issues and dissatisfaction among employees. Also, familial expectations, economic pressures, cultural norms, peer pressure, and inadequate policies have decisively contributed to an imbalanced work-life dynamic, particularly affecting millennials and Gen Z who are rejecting the Hustle Culture and redefining the meaning of work. These challenges have been further exacerbated by the fast-paced start-up culture and technological advancements such as AI, which threaten job security in the IT and ITeS industry. Women especially are at the receiving end finding it difficult to manage professional and personal responsibilities with terms like "Mass resignation, Quiet quitting, lazy girl job, No Purpose work, Rage applying, Enculturation, Online fatigue" becoming a frenzy.

*THE TIME OF INDIA: MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES COST INDIAN FIRMS $14 BILLION A YEAR, SAYS DELOITTE*

*BY PTI, SEP 08, 2022*

Despite various efforts, work-life balance remains unattainable as companies expect constant availability, making it impossible to disconnect, especially with remote work. This case study investigates the root causes of this imbalance, focusing on employees in the IT and ITeS industry. Through a comprehensive literature review, qualitative analysis of existing data, and comparative case studies, it proposes a paradigm shift towards a "life-work balance" model. By analyzing societal, cultural, and economic factors influencing "work-life balance" and evaluating the effectiveness of existing policies, this case study emphasizes the potential of the "Right to Disconnect" legislation to achieve a healthier, more productive work environment and provides actionable insights and

recommendations for collective change among employers, employees, society, and government.

*Key Words*: **work-life balance, life-work balance, right to disconnect, work from home, stress, gen Z, IT, ITeS**

*Introduction to the Case: The Context:* Imagine yourself as a dedicated employee committed to the organization for over three years, who, over time, has proven to be an asset to the organization. The organization offered you a job, but through sheer hard work and perseverance, you turned it into a career. A career, albeit short, but an illustrious one. A job that not only gave you learning but also earning opportunities through varied tasks, assignments, projects, etc., entailing exposure to different domains, departments, profiles, and challenges in the form of steep targets and tight deadlines. You have achieved the status of an "Ideal Employee" for others to follow, and working long hours, often without breaks, became the norm for you, often brushing off any health, family, or relationship responsibilities that came along the way. Hence, the organization's expectations have also been on the rise. As the saying goes, "What you allow is what will continue," fits aptly in this situation.

Despite putting in long hours of 10–12 each day off late, you've noticed a visible decline in productivity and efficiency. What was once a walk in the park has now turned into a struggle to find a balance between your personal and professional lives, leading to questions about where things might be going wrong. Is it a lack of focus? Weaning away of drive and motivation. Is it the company's policies, your role, your manager's expectations, or perhaps the demands of your family seeking quality time with you? Or do you blame yourself for this imbalance?

Amidst these challenges, with no solution in sight and no respite in the workplace situation, the possibility of a reprieve could be in the form of the "Right to Disconnect," as the conventional mindset and approach to "work-life balance" have proven insufficient, particularly evident in sectors like IT and ITeS (Customer support, back-office support, business process outsourcing (BPO) using information technology(IT) with extended unpaid (in most cases)working hours, across time zones, and serving foreign clients, becoming the norm resulting in low work-life balance score when pit against global standards. This imbalance not only affects individuals' well-being but also impacts productivity, personal life (individual and familial), and societal harmony.

*THE ECONOMICS TIMES: 8 IN 10 COMPANIES INCREASED SPEND ON EMPLOYEE WELL BEING IN 2023 VIS -A-VIS 2019: AON STUDY*

*BY PRACHI VERMA, JULY 19, 2023*

*But first, let's look at the Origins of Work-Life Balance*.

The concept of work-life balance, dating back to the late 1800s, started with concerns for worker welfare. Initiatives such as labor reforms aimed at limiting work hours, especially for vulnerable groups like women and children, marked the early stages of this concept's development. Further, the 20th century witnessed impending progress with the standardization of workweeks within the manufacturing industry with the advent of movements like Women's Liberation, shedding light on the plight and challenges of balancing work and family responsibilities.

By the late 20th century, the term "work-life balance" gained prominence, initially focusing on balancing work demands with familial responsibilities, often assuming and demanding a heavier burden on women. However, this concept has evolved into a more encompassing and holistic approach, taking in overall well-being, mental health, leisure, and life satisfaction for all employees, reflecting changing societal values and workforce dynamics that need to be on par with each other.

*What generally happens? And that's where the fault lies, and you wonder why?*
On average, a young graduate starts job hunting around 22-23. By this point, "life" has significantly influenced his personality, attitude, and aspirations. The concept of work-life balance enters the picture, shifting the focus from "life," which typically occupies around 2/3rd of one's time, to "work," which consumes 1/3rd of the 24-hour day. This shift results in work being prioritized, rewarded, and initially creeping into more time, gradually encroaching on the "life" aspect. This imbalance can disrupt work and personal life if not managed properly, leading to various challenges.

*To gain a more comprehensive understanding, let's delve into various significant perspectives.*
*Perspective 1: Work-Life Balance in Developed vs Developing Countries.*
The so-called developed countries with strong economic indicators and a stronger currency, such as per capita income, higher level of industrialization, and a better standard of living, along with non-economic factors like the Human Development Index measuring education, health, and literacy levels, and lastly, advanced technological infrastructure coupled with a lesser population, fare much better and at times even embarrass other countries with their famous and revered "Happiness Index". They can speak about being happy while working, whereas, in the case of the Developing economy, they seem to be staring down the barrel with a weaker currency, often import-driven and a climate-dependent agrarian economy. This situation is certainly improving with more emphasis on services, and technology, and fostering a startup ecosystem paving the way for a level playing field by producing products and offering services for the world. However, what drags them down is their overwhelming population which lacks basic infrastructure like housing, sanitation, education, and healthcare, coupled with bigger challenges such as unemployment, inflation, and an education system that focuses on rote learning, meant for producing factory workers. When faced with such circumstances, they cannot afford to think about being happy at work, especially when having a paying job is considered a luxury. Trying to find a balance between work and life seems like "otherworldly stuff". The perspective on work-life balance in developing countries, for developed countries, presents a stark and contrasting picture, characterized by economic growth and the associated challenges of maintaining a healthy equilibrium between work and personal life.
The fact is, developed countries are where the basic physiological and safety needs are well met, and now they can afford and hence demand their employers and governments to do their bit to further their needs for love, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization by providing them with time, space, and resources. As discussed above, this is unfathomable by an average MNC employee in a developing country who hails from a middle-class family and has fought through ranks and competition with a lack of resources, facing challenges at every step in their long and arduous academic journey. Now, having secured a job, whether they like it or not, living hand to mouth, just one step away from bankruptcy, they must continue this way for most of their life.

*BASED ON THE CURRENT DEMAND, WE ESTIMATE THAT THE POTENTIAL MARKET SIZE OF THE INDIAN MENTAL HEALTH CARE INDUSTRY IS ~$3BILLION*

*SOURCE: BLUME VENTURES*
*DATE: 11TH OCT 2022*

*Perspective 2: Scenario in these Developing countries which over time became IT back Office to Developed Countries.*
The developing countries that were set up as back offices for the developed world bore the brunt. Sure,

this arrangement came in with money, jobs, and some degree of prosperity in these countries in the form of Direct and Indirect Employment.

However, employees, beginning with India, the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Costa Rica, acquired perpetual availability and plugged-in syndrome. The pressure to live up to the demands of the client, with no visible physical distinction between work and home, sustained this state of perpetual availability. This has truly become a recipe for stress and burnout—"always on.". Although the IT sector itself was booming, the increase in demand for digital solutions was at the cost of other industries devastated by the pandemic. Border closures and travel restrictions on people hampered global interconnectedness, coupled with job insecurity and salary cuts, thus, health concerns overwhelmingly. These fears, coupled with the high level of demand for remote work in the IT sector, have indeed resulted in a severe work-life imbalance. Video-conferencing platforms like Zoom became lifelines but ended up blurring the lines between work and home, creating an atmosphere where personal space was continuously invaded by professional demands, further taking work-life balance down the drain.

### Perspective 3: Work from Home: The Inception

The pandemic was a crisis of a different kind: it shook every walk of life. With lockdowns and social distancing in the fray, businesses hurried to evolve, and the working-from-home or WFH phenomenon was there. While WFH offered a solution for ensuring business continuity, especially in the crucial IT and ITES sectors of developing countries like India, it also had a hidden cost accrued in the erosion of work-life balance and the rise of stress. The physical demarcations between work and personal life were clear before the pandemic. The home was for rest, and the office provided the bounded space for work. The pandemic, however, broke down these walls. Suddenly, workers were thrown into the vortex of always being connected, with their homes turning into offices. This seamless blend kept the businesses running and blurred the lines between work and personal time.

### Summation of the Context with data through the table.

| Country | Developed / Developing | Right to Disconnect (Yes/No) | Literacy Levels (Adult) | Global Happiness Index Rank (2023) | Per Capital Income (USD) | GDP (USD Billion) | Average Working Hours (IT Industry) | Global Hunger Index Ranking (2022) | Technolo--gical Advance-ment |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| France | Developed | Yes | 99.10% | 20 | 48,338 | 2,932 | 35 | 18.2 (Low) | Very High |
| Italy | Developed | Yes | 98.20% | 46 | 35,930 | 2,093 | 36 | 12.1 (Low) | Very High |
| Spain | Developed | Yes | 98.40% | 31 | 31,180 | 1,423 | 37 | 5.6 (Very Low) | Very High |
| Belgium | Developed | Yes (Government Workers) | 99.20% | 4 | 52,190 | 549 | 38 | 5.5 (Very Low) | Very High |
| Ireland | Developed | Yes | 99.10% | 5 | 83,210 | 532 | 35 | 4.1 (Very Low) | Very High |
| Portugal | Developed | Yes | 98.60% | 11 | 23,310 | 245 | 39 | 10.9 (Moderate) | High |

| | | (Companies > 10 Employees) | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Australia | Developed | Yes | 99.10% | 16 | 58,020 | 1,930 | 39 | 5.0 (Very Low) | Very High |
| Singapore | Developed | No | 97.00% | 27 | 87,050 | 372 | 45 | 5.0 (Very Low) | Very High |
| Bangladesh | Developing | No | 73.90% | 107 | 2,590 | 469 | 48 | 28.1 (Serious) | Medium |
| Vietnam | Developing | No | 97.00% | 79 | 3,640 | 489 | 48 | 6.7 (Moderate) | Medium-High |
| Brazil | Developing | No | 91.30% | 40 | 10,120 | 1,877 | 40 | 19.1 (Moderate) | Medium-High |
| India | Developing | No | 73.50% | 146 | 2,960 | 3,285 | 47 | 22.5 (Serious) | Medium-High |
| China | Developing | No | 96.80% | 72 | 12,550 | 18,770 | 47 | 5.3 (Low) | High |

### Significance of the table above for Right to Disconnect

The table is crucial for understanding how different countries, both developed and developing, approach the Right to Disconnect legislation. It highlights disparities in work-life balance policies, average working hours, technological advancement, and socio-economic indicators. This data is essential for businesses and policymakers to assess the impact of work-life balance regulations on productivity, employee well-being, and long-term economic sustainability.

***Analyzing the table reveals a clear trend****: Right to Disconnect laws are significantly more common in developed economies. This likely stems from factors like higher per capita income, lower working hours, and stronger technological infrastructure, which can create a more favorable environment for prioritizing work-life balance through legal protections. Conversely, developing countries often face challenges in implementing such laws due to factors like economic priorities, cultural norms, and resource limitations.*

*THE ECONOMIC TIMES: 64% OF THE GEN Z IN INDIA WANTS TO WORK FOR ORGANIZATIONS WITH FLEXIBLE WORK OPTIONS, REVELS RPG GROUP RESEARCH*

*BY RICHA BHATTACHARYYA, UPDATED: JUL 14,2023, 02:25:00 PM IST*

### At this point, a few questions are worth having a look at vis a vis "Right to Disconnect"

1. How can HR balance maintaining a strong workforce while being sensitive to employees' work-life balance?
2. What methods can be used to foster effective teamwork and communication in a remote work environment?
3. What initiatives can ensure a caring work culture that prioritizes employee mental health?
4. How can integrate work-life balance initiatives and the Right to Disconnect legislation into strategic long-term planning benefit management and reduce costs?
5. How can companies make this a part of their policy document?
6.

### Now, we shall try to enlist all the possible reasons as "Contributions" for this work-life Imbalance

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### Contributory Factors: A Holistic Approach

IT and ITeS professionals at almost every other level or designation in private and public sectors are forced to work for extended hours under the nude threat of missing deadlines and achieving the set results in competitive environments. This increases manifold, resulting in a work-life imbalance that directly cuts into personal time and thereby affects personal well-being. Several studies point out that India stands below the global standards of work-life balance, which becomes an indicator of the need for pressing intervention to bring about quality of life-enhancement among employees.

*Work-life balance, however, is way much more than the summation of long working hours and a low balance score. While, as mentioned above, a host of other reasons may cause an imbalance, some of these include:*

1. ***Mismatch Between Career Choice and Passion***: Very often persons will be faced with dilemmas whereby the choice of career path may not lead them toward their passions or interests.
2. ***Economic Background and Education Level***: It might be influenced by the economic background and education level of the family and the individual. Rarely can women juggle and maintain balance given the expectations and responsibilities cast upon them by society.

*CNBC TV18: BURNOUT GRIPS INDIAN INC WITH GEN Z WORST HIT: A NEW STUDY BY SLACK FOUND THAT 54% OF INDIAN KNOWLEDGE WORKERS EXPERENCE BURNOUT AND NEALTYG 66% ARE PLANNING A JOB SWITCH, WHILE 73% OF THE GEN Z ENGAGE IN QUITE QUITTING AT THE WORKPLACE.*

*NOV 14, 2022, 3:42: 38 PM IST, BY NISTHA PANDEY*

3. ***Maslow Hierarchy of Needs***: Maslow's hierarchy of needs contributes to millennial and Generation Z attitudes, behaviors, and claims for work-life balance. As one advances in his career, the priority in a person's needs changes which in turn affects their work-life balance.
4. ***Peer Judgment and Workplace Culture***: Peer judgment and workplace culture also have an impact on work-life balance. The hard work culture, in particular, societal norms, familial values, personal work ethics, dedication, and the competitive job market are socializing factors that instill reluctance to take breaks or leave for home on time.
5. ***No Regulations, AI Advancements***: Unlike some countries in the world, India does not have very strong regulations that ensure a cap on work hours or guarantee paid time off. The advancement and implementation of AI can create fears of redundancy within the workforce, as evident from the fact that 82% of those who responded to the survey conducted by ed-tech start-up Hero Vired are concerned about job security amidst AI progress.

*GEN Z ARE LOOKING TO WORK FOR COMPANIES PRIORITISING ENVIORMWENT AND SUSTAINABLITY*
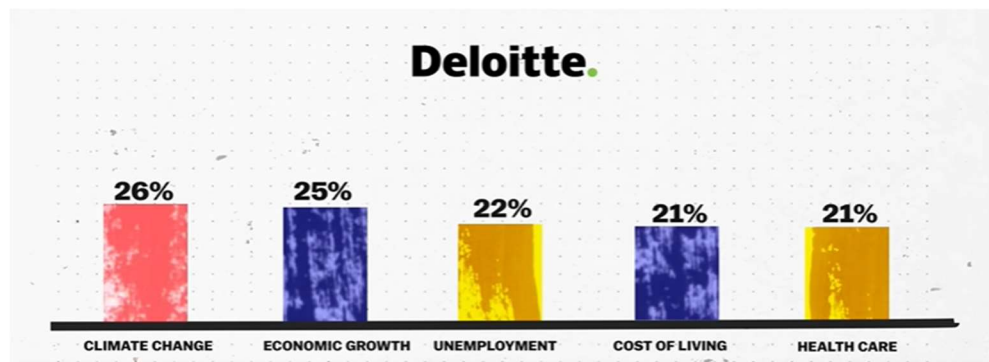
*By Deloitte*

6.  ***WFH and Hybrid Models***: Despite the ease brought about by WFH and hybrid models, they have given people the delusion that employees are constantly available and "ON," thus destroying work-personal life boundaries.
7.  ***Skilling and Upskilling Challenges***: Skilling and upskilling challenges for those in working populations affect promotion and job security prospects and add to the general narrative of "educated unemployed" in this VUCA world.
8.  ***Age of a Company***: This can also be influenced by whether a company is established or just a start-up, with there being different cultures and expectations within the organization.

These are complex challenges that require a multidimensional approach—integrating policy interventions with organizational support, individual empowerment, and societal awareness. These could be achieved through campaigns on access to education, skill development programs, work culture interventions propagating inclusiveness at workplaces, and the adoption of technology primarily in improving the work-life balance and well-being of the Indian workforce.

*LINKEDIN: ACCORDING TO A LINKEDIN SURVEY,88 PERCENT OF GEN Z PROFESSIONALS IN INDIA ARE CONSIDERING A JOB SWITCH IN 2023*

*BY AJMAL HASSAN, NOV 18,2023*

***The Way Forward: From Work-Life Balance to Life-Work Balance through "Right to Disconnect"***
A perceptual and implementational life-work balance that shifts priorities toward life over work is the call of the hour; this could be catalysed by the proposed "Right to Disconnect" Bill in India. The moot question is, can such legislation promote life-work balance and raise a more efficient and productive workforce, especially when Gen Z employees are increasing in the job market?

Building on the multifaceted challenges and acknowledging them, addressing the contributory factors comprehensively, a new paradigm in work-life balance can be countered in India. The result should be that of enabling the working community to grow in all facets—personal and professional—for a resilient workforce that also turns out to be sustainable
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## Case for Discussion

The case brings out the inability of young Indian professionals to have a proper work-life balance. It is the case of Rahul, a 25-year-old MBA degree holder who carries on his shoulders a huge burden of education loan availed by him. His story typifies the aspirations and struggles of young Indians in particular, who want to make it big in life but work in very demanding environments.

### 1. *Background and context*

Rahul's journey began in a rural Maharashtra village. The reason is he witnessed his father struggling with challenges in agriculture owing to droughts.

Though admiring Cricket and wanting to be a cricketer, he soon releases that it wasn't meant to be. The simple reason is regular resources and a dearth of infrastructure in his area. Hence, he takes education in his stride and works very hard through his school and College level. Further, he took CAT and secured a seat in the coveted Pune Institute of Management. He did an internship in his 2nd year and secured a job at 24 Sevens, a SaaS-based IT start-up in the realm of sales and marketing at Pune. All this came at a price, as his father had to take an education loan of 20 lacs which made Rahul determined to succeed in his job.

### 2. *Company Culture of Ambition and Rahul's Quest*

The culture at 24 Seven was all about fast growth and increasing short-term gains, no matter what it took on the employee's side. The concept of "meeting and exceeding the targets" became the mantra, and along with that came the highly pressured and stressful environment to perform and deliver for the employees constantly. This work culture was neither supported by par for the welfare of the employee nor by resources, consequently burning them out and exhausting them.

Rahul's roles and responsibilities at 24-Seven extended beyond serving domestic clients. He took on the tasks of managing international clients living in time zones whereby he had to work till late at night and sit on Zoom calls in the middle of the night. His schedule was hectic, as one would need to put in 12-15 hours of work on their average days to meet steep deadlines.

Despite the best efforts, striking a balance started taking a toll on Rahul's personal life. He couldn't visit his home on Diwali, which is a very important festival and is celebrated elaborately at his place. No leave was allowed from work. He had been in this cycle of working with no breaks, and no time for relaxation, and it started affecting Rahul's health.

*RESUME BUILDER: 74% OF MANAGERS SAY THAT GEN Z IS THE MOST CHALLENGING GENERATION TO WORK WITH*

*APRIL 17,2023*

## 1 in 3 managers who find GenZ difficult prefer to hire Millennials

Of respondents who say GenZ is the most difficult generation to work with, 34% say they prefer to work with Millennials, 30% with GenX, and 4% with Baby Boomers.

For those who prefer Millennials, the top reasons are they believe this group is the most productive (44%) and have the best technological skills (42%).

Other managers prefer GenX because they feel they are the most honest (46%) and productive (42%).
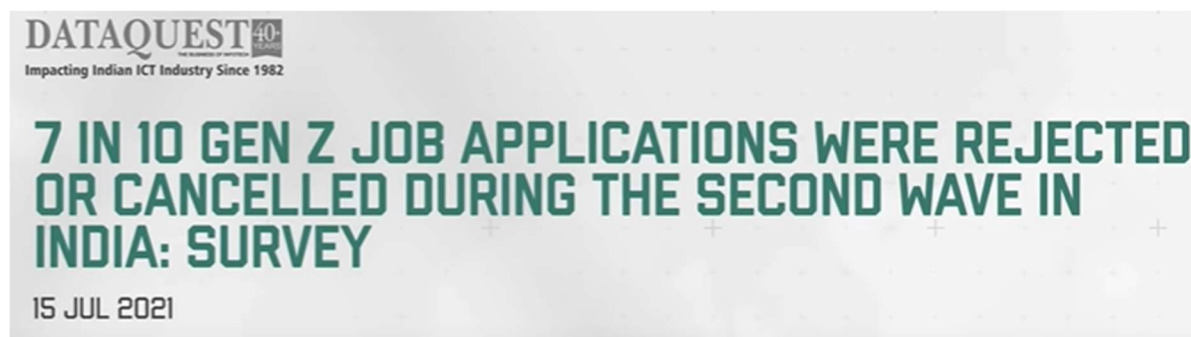


**Generations Managers Prefer to Hire From**

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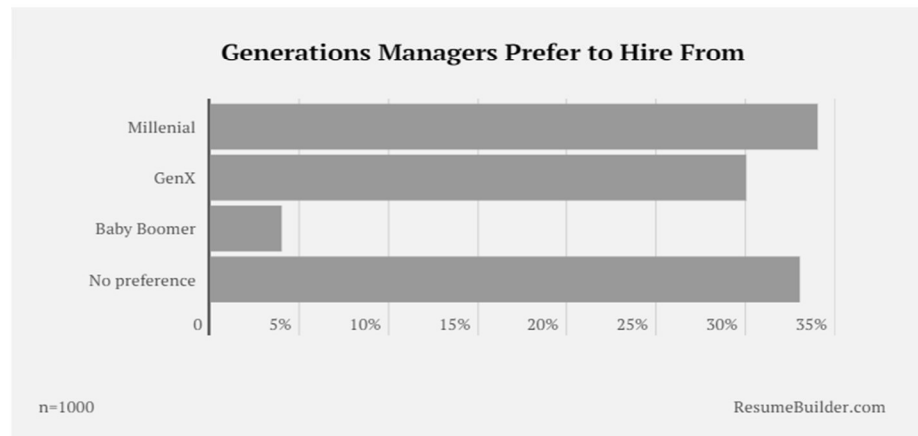
ResumeBuilder.com

*ResumeBuilder.com*

### 3. *Challenges in Rapid Growth*

Soon his dedication and hard work were acknowledged and appreciated, and he was given a well-deserved promotion within one year of joining. Then, the promotion, aligned with the ongoing uni-dimensional growth strategies of the company, raised multiple challenges. From being a sales executive at the time of joining, to a senior sales executive within a year, obviously with an increased package but bigger targets and responsibilities, this change marked the challenges of scaling in an aggressively competing market, thus making Rahul's job more pressurizing in terms of meeting the increasing demand without compromising on quality.

### 4. *Evolution of Company Culture: Transition Towards IPO*

With 24 Seven gunning for an IPO in the coming year, the company's priorities further underwent a very visible shift. Aggressive meeting of targets, meeting investor expectations, serving existing clients, and onboarding new clients overshadowed the focus on initiatives that earlier highlighted employee well-being and team camaraderie. Fun Fridays and team outings, once part of the company culture, started taking a backseat to zero in better on the goals that would get them to their desired financial milestones supporting IPO ambitions. This was a defining point in the company culture and a very real representation of what happens in most startups when it assumes rapid growth coupled with financial success.

DATAQUEST 40+
Impacting Indian ICT Industry Since 1982

## 7 IN 10 GEN Z JOB APPLICATIONS WERE REJECTED OR CANCELLED DURING THE SECOND WAVE IN INDIA: SURVEY

15 JUL 2021

*DATAQUEST*

*15 JUL 2021*

### 5. *Toll on Employee Well-being in a High-growth Startup*
The aggressive expansion trajectory and target-driven culture therefore grossly declined the employee's well-being, including that of Rahul himself and his colleagues. Long working hours, tough schedules, and pressures to perform at peak levels became the norm—pointing to the challenges of sustaining work-life balance in a high-pressure startup environment.

### 5.1 *The price one pays for success*
This dedication repaid a large part of his father's loan, proving he could do something under pressure. The cost to his health and work-life balance were critical concerns.

### 5.2 *The Duality of Dreams and Reality*

Gradually, as the ruthless realities began to unfold-more so in the IT sector, particularly in sales and marketing, the optimism waned for Rahul. Demanding targets, continuous pressure, and extensive traveling caused a complete breakdown of work-life balance and physical and mental exhaustion.

### 5.3 *Not-so-pleasant realization*: It is only while reading about the Right to Disconnect policy forwarded by a friend in Australia that Rahul realizes the absence of such regulations back home in India. Now, his dilemma has turned sharper. The need for policies that allow a healthy work-life balance and employee well-being has been brought home.

### 5.4 *A Difficult Situation*
Rahul is torn between maintaining a sacrificing life, which is essential for career development, and prioritizing his health when he knows that it will lead to poverty. The dilemma becomes even more difficult for Rahul to make the right decision in the long run because no policies support it.

### 6. *Main Concerns Indicated*
6.1 *Work-life Imbalance*: The non-negotiable stressful working environment at 24 Seven points out how to work building dreams may directly clash with personal satisfaction.
6.2. *Organisational Culture*: At the expense of employee health and work-life balance, this firm's culture is characterized by rapid growth and high performance-oriented demands.

6.3 *Health and Well-being*: Rahul has grown to be a successful manager whose success seems to have come at a cost to his health, hence sees the need for a supportive work environment and policies such as the Right to Disconnect.

6.4 *Policy and Regulation*: The absence of any law or enforceable work-life balance policy in India underlines the requirement for regulatory frameworks concerned with the welfare of employees.

In contrast, the story of Rahul weaves in with the challenges of work-life balance, evolving company culture, and how things worked out in the context of a SaaS-based startup setting. It opens many lines of discourse on how young professionals are complex, how organizational culture is a determinant for employee wellbeing and policies that would support regulatory frameworks for much healthier work environments.

*Conclusion*

The "Right to Disconnect" movement is gaining immense momentum across the world, with several countries legislating to protect employee well-being from the encroachment of work and to safeguard a healthy balance between work and life or the achievement of a life-work balance. While the IT sector is a powerhouse in India, the culture of long working hours and constant availability that often goes along with it has a serious toll on employee well-being. This young, ambitious IT professional reflects the plight of many people who belong to this sector.

The Right to Disconnect has huge potential for a sea change in work-life balance within India, where employees would take back control over time and have an exactly equal stake in well-being. The right to disconnect draws lines, nurtures a culture of respect for personal time, and benefits both the employee and employer.

*Right to Disconnect: The actual Bill: The Right to Disconnect Bill, 2018: The Right to Disconnect Bill, 2018, introduced by Shrimati Supriya Sule, M.P., seeks to establish an Employees' Welfare Authority to confer the right on every employee to disconnect from work-related telephone calls and emails beyond work hours and on holidays. This includes the right to refuse to answer calls and emails outside work hours and for all matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.*

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(This includes all the references used in the above youtube video link dated Mar 1, 2024 on Aevy TV titled What Is Wrong With Indian Gen-Z? | Explained With Data. Those references have also been mentioned separately in the above case study) accessed on 15th July 2024 at 8:45 PM IST.