

Effect of Professional Attributes on Professional - Life Conflict : Gender as a Moderator in the Indian IT Industry

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Abstract

The paper perceived the moderating role of gender on professional attributes with professional - life conflict (PLC). The study was drawn with a sample of 319 techie employees working in different IT sectors across India. Professional attributes were found as important elements that influence PLC. Gender, as a moderator in this relationship, showed the influence of interaction with few professional attributes only. The findings in the study suggested that there was a relationship between professional attributes and PLC and they influenced PLC based on time, strain, and behavior. Irrespective of the gender (male/female) in the IT sector, it affected on the relationship between the attributes and conflict. The implications of the study were discussed and the need for further research was also highlighted in the study.

Keywords: attributes, conflict, gender, IT industry, life, professional, techie employees

JEL classification : D74, J44, M00, M54

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The Indian IT industry is the world's largest sourcing destination that accounts for approximately 67% of the market. There are around 3 million people who have direct employment and 10 million people who have indirect employment at the Indian IT sector. Most of the IT companies have the projects handled from developed countries such as the United States, UK, Germany, and France. With this reason, many employees have mismatch of working hours and working environment, which are according to the international timings and client requirements. Sometimes, the IT companies, in order to fetch their project targets, give tough deadlines to their employees. It encourages them to travel to different parts of India and the world usually depending on their hierarchical level. Therefore, it is understood that physical attendance in office depends on their task force (Kala, Jan, Subramani, & Banureka, 2017). It may lead to work extension, superior disputes, job ambiguity, and others. As the sector includes stringent targets, competitive nature, and work overtime, it ruins their roles. Therefore, there is a need to understand the relationship and influence of professional attributes on professional life conflict (PLC) (Lu, Du, & Brough, 2016).

Review of Literature

(1) Multidimensional Facets of PLC (Time-, Strain-, and Behavior-Based Conflicts) : There are two essential roles organized by every employee. They are professional and life roles (Ruppanner & Huffman, 2014). The increase of 24/7 knowledge economy, which is resourced by technical bloom, has made the work of techie employees easier

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to progress anywhere anytime with their job concerns (Kossek, Ruderman, Braddy, & Hannum, 2012). It has increased the participation of professional employees, irrespective of the gender, to focus on the IT workforce (Rustagi, 2010). Due to the increase in responsibilities, there is a rise of PLCs, leading to professional imbalances between men and women (Zacher, Jimmieson, & Winter, 2012).

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) identified three ways of PLC that are based on time, strain, and behavior. In extension to the study, Carlson, Kacmar, and Williams (1998) suggested hexagonal proportions of PLC by combining the dual directional and multiple proportional features of PLC : professional involvement with life (PIL) and life involvement with professional, and each having three proportions, that is, time, strain, and behavior forms of conflict.

Many researchers have identified that most of the employees have less control on their professional roles rather than on their personal life roles because professional attributes are identified as key elements that give rise to PLC (Higgins & Duxbury, 1992). Professional variables hold the capacity to affect the level of control over the employees with inconsistent position pressures and subsequently to the degree of PLC experienced (Saltzstein, Ting, & Saltzstein, 2001). As there is an increase in the number of employees in the workforce, there is also an increase in individual professional attributes, which lead to stress (Mittal, Singh, & Sharma, 2017). Minimizing stress may lead to a reduction in PLC (Kala et al., 2017). With a growing body of research, the professional attributes have bloomed (Oren & Levin, 2017). As a result, lists of possible attributes concerned with professional and personal lives are increasing in the present organizations (Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering, & Semmer, 2011).

Based on this, there is a need to look into the specific attributes that influence PLC :

(2) Identified Professional Attributes

(i) Job Ambiguity : Job ambiguity arises in employees due to working with non-work responsibilities, unclear job responsibilities, and obscure information about their job. Employees who undergo job ambiguity encounter with low level of job satisfaction, position stress, and lack of self-confidence (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). Job ambiguity influences employees' professional and PLC, leading to decrease in creativity (Tang & Chang, 2010). Therefore, it is understood that employees who have job ambiguity might have increased level of PLC.

(ii) Work Extension : With an increase in market demand, work extension seems to be a common issue among the techie employees (Altaf & Awan, 2011). Work extension arises when demand on time is greater than what an individual can handle to execute the work adequately or comfortably (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Employees who have heavy work extensions are unable to reduce their conflict (Karatepe, 2013). Therefore, employees who are handling work extensions would experience high level of PIL conflict due to limited time resources and high demand (Gutek, Searle, & Klepa, 1991).

(iii) Superior Dispute : Superior dispute is one of the major types of professional attributes in the work place. It rises due to the disagreements and incompatibility among group members regarding professional or personal issues or difference in opinions (Zhu, Yang, & Bai, 2016). Edwards and Rothbard (2000) suggested that disputes with superiors would increase conflicts in professional and personal life too.

(iv) Peer Relationship : A peer relationship is necessary in completing the tasks through sharing of knowledge and expertise and providing encouragement (Zhou & George, 2001). Peer relationship is related to the attitude and behavior of employees. It can be assumed that good peer's relationship will help in reducing conflicts (Shah & Shah, 2010). Under ambiguous conflicting, professional positions with limited autonomy and professional

burdens from higher level can be avoided with fair relationship with peers/colleagues (Beehr & McGrath, 1992). Therefore, peer's relationship influences PLC.

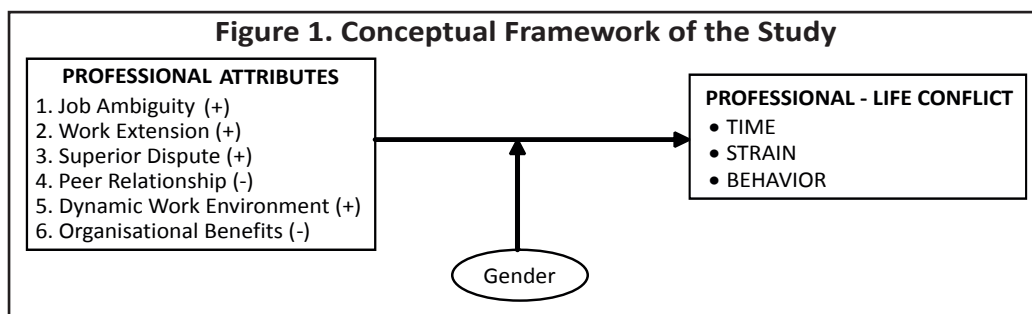
(v) Dynamic Work Environment : IT professionals are selected as a focus group in the study as they exhibit characteristics different from other professional employees (Armstrong, Riemenschneider, Allen, & Reid, 2007). IT professionals work in a dynamic work environment where continuous updating of skills is required (Lee, 2000). IT professionals suffer from extensive projects and aggressive time lines, which lead to a high level of conflicts (Messersmith, 2007). Although PLC is a common problem in every professional area, it is frequently encountered in the IT sector. It is mainly due to unrealistic deadlines for extensive projects and the expectation to be on call for 24 hours a day, seven days a week, which tightens their roles (Mathew & Panchanatham, 2009).

(vi) Organizational Benefits : If the work environment is favorable and the organization is providing supportive policies, it facilitates less PLC among the employees. Organizational benefits such as work flexibility, telecommuting, and option for part time work, provision of childcare facility, and flexibility in times of emergencies at home are some of the benefits that can decrease conflict (Doble & Supriya, 2010). Flexibility in work would reduce professional and personal life interferences, which in turn helps to spend more time with family (Byron, 2005).

(vii) Gender as a Moderator : The gender position theory suggests that the primary position for men is professional, while for women it is home or personal life (Rajadhyaksha et al., 2015). This could be the reason that men report higher level of PLC and women report high level of LPC. However, these differences may not be uniformly found always. Recently, researchers showed few evidences that there are minor changes in the preferences of men and women. Many women nowadays are giving high preference to their professional domain and careers ; whereas, men are showing active engagement in personal life responsibilities. These results would change the context of professional and personal life, highlighting the need to continue exploring gender differences both within and across the professional and nonprofessional domains. In explaining the effects of gender on the experiences of PLC, there is a need to ensure that most appropriate friendly benefits are to be offered for employees (Brough, O'Driscoll, & Kalliath, 2005 ; Brough, Timms, O'Driscoll, Kalliath, Siu, Sit, & Lo, 2015).

Gender position theory also proposes that gender operates as a moderator between the attributes and conflicts. Moreover, social enhancement is very essential for women than men since given that the personal life position is typically more salient for females (Rupert, Stevanovic, & Hartman, 2012). The extent of conflict for a male or female depends on the social enhancement given by higher level and personal life members (Blanch & Aluja, 2012).

The view of the concepts mentioned above in the study is shown in Figure 1 as the conceptual framework that is applied to analyze the study. It is an integrated research model that consists of the link between professional attributes and PLC with gender as a moderator that has been used and tested by many researchers.



Hypotheses

Therefore, based on relevant literatures, the following set of hypotheses can be raised :

- ⇒ **H₁** : Job ambiguity positively influences PLC for techie employees.
- ⇒ **H₂** : Work extension positively influences PLC for techie employees.
- ⇒ **H₃** : Superior dispute positively influences PLC for techie employees.
- ⇒ **H₄** : Peer relationship negatively influences PLC for techie employees.
- ⇒ **H₅** : Dynamic work environment positively influences PLC for techie employees.
- ⇒ **H₆** : Organizational benefits positively influences PLC for techie employees.
- ⇒ **H₇** : Gender associates the relationship between professional attributes and PLC for techie employees.

Methodology

(1) Data Collection and Sample : For this study, primary data based on 319 respondents working in IT sector organizations operating in India were used for testing the proposed hypotheses. A total of 650 questionnaires were distributed in the selected areas of the study. Out of these, 418 questionnaires were received. Among them, 99 were with uncompleted data and with errors. Therefore, finally, a total of 319 (49%) respondents were included in the study. The data were collected during the months of May and July 2019.

(2) Sample Characteristics : The characteristics considered for the study are age, income, education, experience, current organization experience, managerial level, gender, marital status, and number of children. Out of all respondents, majority of them belonged to the age between 20 and 30 years, that is, 46.4% and 39.5% of the respondents belonged to the age between 31 and 40 years. Regarding monthly income, majority of them, that is 32%, earned between ₹ 61,000 and ₹ 90,000. Out of the respondents, 53.6% of them were with master's degree and 32.2% of them had 6–10 years of experience. Coming to the current organization experience, 68% of them had the present organization experience, and 60.5% of the respondents belonged to the non managerial level. As far as gender is considered, 51% of them were males and 48.9% were females. Note that 73.7% of the respondents were married and 26.3% of the employees were unmarried. Out of the total respondents, only 52% of them had children.

(3) Measures of the Study

(i) Professional Attributes (Independent Variable) : Considering prior studies, six professional attributes were chosen as independent variables of the study. The measures considered for the study were taken originally from Carlson, Kacmar, and Williams (2000). To determine the extent of professional attributes, responses were measured based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly agree* (5) to *strongly disagree* (1). Sample of items are, “My supervisor is unfair to me,” “The benefits I receive are as good as what most of the other organizations offer.”

(ii) PLC (Dependent Variable) : Six dimensions of PLC as derived by Carlson et al. (2000), which include time, strain, and behavior based on PLC were used for further analysis of the study. The measurement is based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly agree* (5) to *strongly disagree* (1). Sample of items are, “Due to pressure at work, sometimes I come home too stressed and do not enjoy the things.” “The time I must devote to my job keeps me from participating equally in household responsibilities and activities.”

✍ **Moderate Variable** : The moderate variable that is used for this study is gender. There are only two sections in the gender column, that is, male = 1 and female = 2, given in the study.

✍ **Statistical Tools** : The statistical tools applied in the study are descriptive statistics, multiple regression, and correlation analysis for bringing out the results.

Analysis and Results

(1) Multiple Regression Analysis : Table 1 shows the output of multiple regression analysis, which is performed to analyze the hypotheses. Models 1–4 show the significant effect of professional attributes with PLC based on time, strain, and behavior.

The first attribute - job ambiguity is found to be positively significant with PLC ($b = 0.159, p \leq 0.00$, Table 1, Model 1). It is found to have significant positive effects on its dimensions based on time, strain, and behavior. Hence, it is understood that if job ambiguity is high, then the conflict is also high. Therefore, H_1 is accepted.

The second attribute is work extension. It is observed that work extension positively influences PLC ($b = 0.386, p \leq 0.00$, Table 1, Model 1) and its dimensions : time, strain, and behavior. It means if work of employees is extended beyond their working hours, then there is a scope for conflict to increase. Therefore, H_2 is accepted.

Another attribute, superior dispute is found to be positive and significant with PLC ($b = 0.113, p \leq 0.00$, Table 1, Model 1). It is also observed that superior dispute is significant with all the three dimensions, that is, time-, strain-, and behavior-based conflict. Hence, it is understood that if there is a dispute with superiors, then PLC increases. Therefore, H_3 is supported.

In case of peer relationship, it is observed that there is a negative relationship with PLC ($b = -0.053, p \leq 0.00$,

Table 1. Multi-Regression Analysis Predicting PLC

Predictors	PLC Model-1	Time-Based PLC Model-2	Strain-Based PLC Model-3	Behavior-Based PLC Model-4
DIRECT EFFECT				
Job Ambiguity	.159***	.117***	.423***	.566***
Work Extension	.386***	.083***	.304**	.037***
Superior Dispute	.113***	.132**	.356***	.533***
Peer Relationship	-.053**	.010	-.028***	-.051*
Dynamic Work Environment	.142***	.181*	.213**	-.079***
Organization Benefits	-.007	.086	-.059	.065
R^2	.819**	.715**	.716**	.770**
Gender	.589*	-.181	.373**	-.017
INTERACTION EFFECT				
Gender × Job Ambiguity	-.022	-.019	.092**	-.076**
Gender × Work Extension	.240**	.006	.213***	.317**
Gender × Superior Dispute	.005	.017	.113**	-.081**
Gender × Peer Relationship	-.164***	-.118**	-.224***	-.165**
Gender × Dynamic Work Environment	.033	-.010	.040	.015
Gender × Organization Benefits	-.047*	-.017	-.102*	-.065**
ΔR^2	.535**	.256**	.371**	.525**

Note. $N = 319$; *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, and * $p < .05$.

Table 1, Model 1). The analysis shows that in case of strain-based and behavior-based PLC, there is a significant and negative relationship, but not in case of time-based conflict. This means if there is a good peer relationship, then there will be low conflict. Therefore, H_4 is supported, but not in case of time-based PLC.

Then with regard to another attribute, dynamic work environment, it is observed that there is a positive relationship with PLC ($b = 0.142, p \leq 0.00$, Table 1, Model 1) and also with their three dimensions except with behavior-based conflicts. Hence, if the work environment is customized with the individual needs, it increases the conflicts in the IT industry due to its nature of work. Therefore, H_5 is accepted.

Further, with organizational benefits, there is a negative relationship, but this variable does not influence PLC ($b = -0.07, p \leq 0.385$, Table 1, Model 1). In addition, it is found that organizational benefits are not significant with the three dimensions : time, strain, and behavior. Therefore, it is understood that organizational benefits may not reflect the PLC of IT employees. Therefore, H_6 is not accepted.

Based on the above results, majority of the professional attributes influence PLC. This shows that there is a strong relationship between professional attributes and PLC.

(2) Gender as Moderator (Interaction Item Analysis) : Taking gender as an interaction item with the factors, Table 1 brings out the significant effect with PLC ($b = -0.589, p \leq 0.00$, Table 1, Model 1). The interaction effects are worked out by applying centrality of means suggested by Aiken and West (1991). From Table 1, it is observed that gender interaction with work extension, peer relationship, and organizational benefits (Table 1, Model 1) is found to have a significant affect and influences the relationship between the variables (James & Sudha, 2017). Therefore, it is understood that though gender associates with professional attributes and PLC, it is found (Table 1) that gender is not associated with all the professional attributes.

With regard to the three dimensions, time-, strain-, and behavior-based conflict, it is observed that gender interaction with professional attributes and time-based conflict is not found to be significant. However, in case of strain- and behavior-based conflicts, they are found to be significant. Therefore, it is understood that H_7 is partially supported by few variables as they are significant at $p < .05$ with interaction items.

Table 2 brings out the descriptive statistics that include mean, standard deviation, and correlation of the attributes and conflicts.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics (Mean and SD) and Correlation Between the Variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	3.944	.6924									
2	3.089	.7899	.138*								
3	2.637	.8086	-.201**	.360**							
4	3.468	.6726	.060	-.348**	-.251**						
5	3.243	.4163	.204**	.248**	.316**	.030					
6	3.235	.8639	-.089	.081	-.081	.189**	-.136*				
7	3.031	.5350	.255**	.725**	.443**	-.259**	.394**	-.023			
8	2.821	.6943	.200**	.463**	.375**	-.092	.348**	.024	.749**		
9	3.245	.8660	.354**	.526**	.446**	-.204**	.385**	-.117*	.760**	.424**	
10	2.910	.9261	.169**	.671**	.276**	-.251**	.249**	-.057	.777**	.463**	.493**

Note. 1, Job Ambiguity; 2, Work Exchange; 3, Superior Dispute; 4, Peer Relationship; 5, Work Environment; 6, Organizational Benefits; 7, Professional Life Conflict; 8, Time-Based Conflict; 9, Strain-Based Conflict; 10, Behavior-Based Conflict.

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Discussion

The study has examined the effect of professional attributes on professional - life conflict by testing across the three dimensions of conflict, that is, time, strain, and behavior among the IT employees in India. Another important aspect of the study is gender, which is considered as a moderator. Using multiple regressions on representative sample selected from IT employees, the study shows that professional attributes impact PLC. Each attribute is found to be a unique magnitude in relation to various forms of PLC. Unlike patterns of relationships, PLC has confirmed that various forms of PLC survive (Carmen & Margaret, 2001).

In considering with the results of each attribute, it is observed that job ambiguity has a strong relationship with PLC based on time, strain, and behavior (Dinger, Thatcher, & Stepina, 2010). It shows that the larger the ambiguity, the higher will be the conflict between them. However, there is a contrast in interaction with gender. It means that there is no gender effect in case of job ambiguity and the conflicts based on time, strain, and behavior (Batt & Valcour, 2003).

In another result, work extension is found to be significant with PLC based on time, strain, and behavior. IT employees are required to be on call as and when required. This might affect their professional and personal life roles, resulting in high level of conflict, and thereby decreasing the time to be spent on personal life. If the employees are to be given the choice of scheduling their time to work, it might reduce their disputes among their roles for IT professionals (Albertsen, Garde, Nielsen, Hansen, Lund, & Hvid, 2014).

The study also reveals that superior dispute affects PLC. Whenever there are disagreements, difference in opinions, or misunderstandings with superiors, it gives rise to dispute. Higher increase of dispute might increase the level of PLC among the employees since superiors will be nonsupportive. Superior support always helps in reducing professional-related concerns among employees, which would further encourage them to participate in personal life activities more efficiently (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000).

Another important result to be discussed is that there is a significant effect of peer relationship on PLC. It is also significant with the three dimensions such as time, strain, and behavior. For effective results in profession and to balance the demands in personal life, peer relationship is required (Batt & Valcour, 2003).

The results highlight that there is a significant effect of dynamic work environment on PLC and time-, strain-, and behavior-based PLC. Dynamic work environment can increase conflicts for techie employees. If companies implement friendly policies, they can create a good environment to work for employees and motivate them (Regy & Malini, 2019).

Another interesting finding is organizational benefits, which are negatively related but not significant with PLC and PLC based on time, strain, and behavior. However, according to Peters, Waltez, Demerouti, and Regt (2009), organizational benefits are a necessary part of the company to motivate employees toward the work role. Therefore, it would definitely influence the conflicts that are controversial to the statement.

Therefore, almost all attributes have a relationship with PLC and influence it. With regard to gender as a moderator, it does not show much impact toward the relationship between the variables. The gender effect is there on PLC based on strain and behavior, but not with time-based conflict. Further, by explaining the effect with the help of interactions effects in Table 1, it is observed that gender influences only a few attributes. Overall, the results show that gender affects the relationship between the attributes and conflicts, irrespective of male/female in the IT sector (Martin, Eddleston, & Veiga, 2002). This might be because in the IT profession, it is often imagined that hard-driving or successful employees are susceptible to the dispute between their profession and personal life roles.

Conclusion

The present study gives few noteworthy implications for IT organizations, policy makers, and HR managers as

many of the professional attributes considered for this study come under the control of the employees, the partner in the relationship, peers, superiors, and the organizational benefits. The findings, therefore, will be useful for decreasing professional conflicts in multiple levels. HR practitioners have to come behind real communication channels to bring out the positive/right/favorable attitude in employees in regard to the factors considered in the study since IT companies adopt these kinds of practices to bring benefits to employees and not to increase employees' PLC. Organizations should establish a fair environment where employees are encouraged and supported, thereby helping them to reduce the conflicts at various levels.

Using multiple regression analysis on a sample of 319 employees belonging to the IT sector in different companies in India, the current study has evaluated the effects of various professional attributes on PLC. Overall, the study concludes that the attributes of PLC considered for the study are important for techie employees.

Managerial Implications

The following are the few implications that can be brought out from the study :

- ✧ Managers should find ways to increase the job ambiguity, friendly policies/practices, and salary as these heighten job competency and decrease the professional conflict and personal life conflict.
- ✧ There is a need to maintain good relationship with superiors. Providing superior support to employees helps in implementing policy and benefits that stress out the significance of professional-life balance and confers opportunities for employees to use these benefits for reducing conflict.
- ✧ In addition to these, employees must be provided with a choice over weekly and daily professional schedules, use of vacations or leaves, and control the time of their personal life. The higher the organizations uplift the self-control in their employees, the less will be their conflicts.
- ✧ IT companies can continue to implement HR practices that can motivate the techie employees, ensure their professional well-being, and retain employees for a more number of years to work.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

Further research can be pursued on a larger representative sample to get more validated results. Another potential limitation of the study is that it has focused on the IT sector only. In future, broader research can be done including more facets on these dimensions by focusing more on the demographic impact of variables in the study. The study has particularly covered six attributes only. In regularity with the related literature, future researchers may also consider other applications as well. The study could be extended to cross cultures to have more generalized conclusions.

Although this research is limited to a small number of samples, the findings of the study are nevertheless very important. There is no doubt that this study is important in the countries like India to know about such issues, especially on such a considerable basis.

Author's Contribution

K. Thriveni Kumari contributed to the design and implementation of the research, to the analysis of the results, and to the writing of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The author certifies that she has no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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