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## Life in an Intelligent City: an Ethnomethodological Study of Global Expatriates' Work-Life Balance

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### Abstract

Discussions on intelligent cities are brewing in social science literature. Our study examined how global expatriates in Muscat, an intelligent city in the Sultanate of Oman, strike a work-life balance (WLB). The main theoretical pursuit of this ethnomethodological research examined the meanings which were in the practices of expatriates as they attempted in keeping an equilibrium between job/career and personal/family issues.

Eleven expatriates from Egypt, Jordan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Sudan, and United Kingdom shared their practices on their work-life interface while living and/or working in Muscat. The following themes surfaced from the analyses: Embracing Personal Excellence; Enhancing Partner's Social Engagement; Engaging in Community Development; Synchronizing Work-Family Affairs; Socializing with Others; Communicating in Home Country; and Finding Time for Relaxation. It is concluded that expatriates strike a WLB by practising socially (re)constructed realities.

**Keywords:** work-life balance, intelligent city, smart city, expatriate, ethnomethodology.

### 1. Introduction

People living in intelligent cities, more commonly known as smart cities, enjoy the comfort of the interface between infrastructural and technological developments. Their life is afforded with good internet connections, advanced communication systems, and efficient public transportation services, among others. The term "smart city" is used interchangeably with "intelligent city" in this paper, although the former appears more frequent than the latter. Since "intelligent city" is less cited in the literature than "smart city", we adopted the former in order to build the scanty literature on intelligent cities.

Intelligent cities are the current talk in social science researches, in particular, in the urban development community and city planners as well as in local governmental institutions and international organizations. The term "intelligent city" is being used in a prolific fashion by city officials and technology vendors, outshining the view on what it really takes to become a smart city (Van den Bergha, Viaene, 2016). Intelligent city advocates said that about half the world's population currently lives in cities, but by 2050 that number is projected to increase to 66 percent (Algaze et al., 2016). In the research literature, not many scholars have delved into the connection of all these conveniences into individuals' work and personal lives. How do people in intelligent cities live? What do they do in order to cope with the demands of work vis-à-vis their personal or family responsibilities? These are research questions that provided the impetus for our research.

Intelligent city is a concept that embraces most of the spaces where local governments operate, such as transportation, civic entrepreneurship, democratic transparency, clean energy, and services provision. One commonality emerges, which is the use of information technology (IT) as a transformative mechanism to make these areas "intelligent" (Almirall et al., 2016). In other words, the power of IT is utilized in order to spur growth and attractiveness of the so-called intelligent city. Without a doubt, expatriates play pivotal roles in the development of technologies

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and knowledge transfer in intelligent cities.

Quoting the works of Caragliu et al. (2009) and Khansari et al. (2013), Graniera and Kudo (2016) said that a city is “smart” when investments in human and social capital and traditional (transport) and modern (ICT) communication infrastructure fuel sustainable economic growth and a high quality of life. This is coupled with wise management of natural resources through participatory governance. Graniera and Kudo (2016) also highlighted the reflexive dimension of smart cities, noting that “the premise of a smart city is that by having the right information at the right time, citizens, service providers and city government alike will be able to make better decisions that result in increased quality of life for urban residents and the overall sustainability of the city” (Khansari et al., 2013; Graniera, Kudo, 2016: 66).

According to Townsend (2017), “cities are basically taking the long-term vision they have already developed about what they want their city to be and trying to figure out how technology can be in service of that vision” (p. 63). Intelligent cities represent contemporary thinking that could change everything about perspectives on lifestyles of, for instance, expatriates – how they live. The intelligent city’s level of interactivity may shrink the communities of modern urban environments, bringing expatriates and local citizens together with well-designed developments (Algaze et al., 2016).

Muscat, the capital city of the Sultanate of Oman, shares the vision and the aura of being an intelligent city. Muscat Governorate has six districts, known locally as “wilayats”. These districts include: Muscat, Muttrah, Bowshar, A’Seeb, Al Ameerat, and Quriyat. Muscat, with a population of 635,279 (Muscat Municipality, 2013), was positioned in our research as an intelligent city. This position fits the notion of smart cities of Jung (2016): “Essentially smart city efforts are to make cities work better.” Additionally, he clearly stated that the focus of smart city initiatives is on creating better cities for people to live, work and play. This philosophy is also reflected in Muscat as an intelligent city, which exhibits the following:

- all forms of infrastructure and data analytics;
- focus on knowledge creation;
- talent attraction and retention;
- digital inclusion for all people (irrespective of age, type and location);
- creating a collaborative innovation ecosystem;
- developing a focus on sustainability (environmental, economic and social);
- good governance, including seeking the best in public policy for its citizens;
- global marketing to attract investment and talent;
- citizen participation in the community’s planning and development;
- leadership development and collaboration capacities;
- security and safety concerns; and
- smart planning and urban design decisions about the physical form and layout of the community.

Gil-Garcia, Pardo, and Nam (2015) use interchangeably “smart city” with “intelligent city”, “digital city”, “knowledge city”, “information city”, “creative city”, and “urban innovation”. The commonality among them is their attempt to describe and design an integrative and comprehensive image of city development for today and the future. The concept of smart city is still emerging and defining it, is still a work in progress (Gil-Garcia et al., 2015).

## **2. Discussion and results**

### **Statement of the Problem**

Muscat Municipality is undergoing a major rehabilitation project to improve livability in Muttrah, preserve the diversity and make the city more tourist friendly. Our vision is to expand economic activities and promote a hassle free environment in the city of Muttrah. We are looking to enable new business opportunities, cater to tourists and shopkeepers and ease parking and traffic issues in the city... crucial to make Muttrah a ‘smart’ city in the future.

The above statements were echoed by Ali Al Shidhani, director of research center and ICT as quoted in Times of Oman (Hasan, 2017). As reported by Hasan (2017) in the same article, the said project is “a major boost in digital and public infrastructure to improve the living environment for residents and make it more tourist-friendly.” The news is among the many “intelligent city”

projects in Muscat available in the literature, which also reverberates as one of the key functions of intelligent cities as voiced out by experts in the preceding paragraphs: To attain sustainable economic growth and a high quality of life. The scenario in the report of Hasan (2017) also sets the tone and introduces the statement of the problem of this study. The research setting was in Muscat, the capital of the Sultanate of Oman, an intelligent city based on the foregoing conceptualizations. How is it to live in smart cities such as Muscat? Do residents in smart cities exhibit lifestyles that are distinctive to them only? How do their work interface with their family/personal life? The questions may be answered in a general tone but specific to the expatriates in Muscat does not reverberate in the literature.

Our research problem was situated in the meanings of practices of expatriates as regards their work-life balance while living and working in Muscat, or living in Muscat but working outside the city of Muscat or Muscat Governorate in general. In the broader literature, not many scholars have delved into the social impact of conveniences and developments brought about by intelligent or smart cities into individuals' work and personal lives. Shaffer and Joplin (2001) stressed clearly that "little attention has been given to the interface between the work and family domains for international assignees and the strains that occur when one domain interferes with the other" (p. 11). Kempena, Pangert, Hatstrup, Muellera, and Joens (2015) mentioned succinctly that "the success of expatriation depends so substantially on successfully managing work and private life concerns" (p. 7).

The notion of WLB surmises the importance of expatriate integration and adjustment, defined concisely as adjustment to the culture in general, to work, and to interacting with host country nationals (Shaffer & Joplin, 2001). As explained by Shaffer and Joplin (2001), expatriates who have become adjusted to their jobs and to interacting with host country nationals would be less likely to have to spend the extra time and energy on their jobs that would encroach on resources dedicated to family. In the words of Takeuchi, 2010, in Kempena et al., 2015 adjustment is defined as "the degree of fit or psychological comfort and familiarity that individuals feel with different aspects of foreign culture" (p. 2). Although adjustment and WLB are not exactly the same, the latter can be constituted by WLB as a potent element of a seamless interface between work and family. WLB can thus be construed as a state of psychological equilibrium or how individuals strike a balance on the interface of work and family affairs while on an expatriation assignment. It is not necessarily a literal "perfect balance" but seen in the metaphorical lens as attempts by individuals (expatriates in this research) on how they lead a private/family life vis-à-vis their roles and duties while overseas (Muscat, in this study).

Fischlmayr and Kollinger (2010) noted the "fragmented picture and limited perspectives" (p. 456) on studies related to WLB. Our study hopes to address the research gap in WLB among expatriates by understanding the interaction of city lifestyle and work-life issues among expatriates in Muscat, positioned as an intelligent city in this study. Likewise, the findings of our study would contribute to the thickening of discussions on smart cities, in particular, on their social impact on individuals who work for a living overseas. It would also contribute to the scholarship of ethnomethodology as a research method and how it could be embedded in the understanding of everyday life of expatriates in a bustling city.

### **Objective of the Study**

This study explored the expatriates' practices (i.e., what they actually do) as regards WLB. Specifically, it was an attempt to understand the epistemological meanings of expatriates' practices while living and working in Muscat or living in Muscat but working elsewhere.

### **Literature Review**

Studies on the social dimension of intelligent cities, in particular, on WLB of expatriates, seem to be silenced in the literature. As cited in the work of Fischlmayr and Kollinger (2010), WLB may be construed as satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with a minimum of role conflict, or the absence of unacceptable levels of conflict between work and non-work demands.

Expatriates can be catalysts of development of intelligent cities. Without a doubt, their knowledge and technical skills will be entrenched in projects and programs that promote a better quality of life and support economic and environmental sustainability. Salt (1997), Sakho (1999)

stressed that expatriates are important in the transfer of expertise and knowledge. Salt (1997) acknowledged the importance of expatriates: “We can think of the individual as a repository of expertise...and knowledge” (in Sakho, 1999: 21). Likewise, Gil-Garcia, Pardo, and Nam (2015) emphasized the importance of expatriates’ creativity, education, and knowledge in intelligent cities. Expatriates are resources that are valuable in knowledge transfer and skills enhancement. They have a wealth of technical know-how and experience that can spruce up work efficiency and operational effectiveness.

Dale (2005), Khokher, Beauregard (2014) studied work-life balance among Pakistani and Bangladeshi women living in the UK. They deduced that compared to their white counterparts, these ethnic minority women faced particular challenges in combining paid work and family responsibilities. While the cultural context of their workplaces was based on Western social and religious traditions, Dale (2005) also said that the women participating in the study were expected to observe south Asian customs at home, which included heavy caretaking duties for the household and both immediate and extended family members. Dale’s (2005) study is also useful in our research owing to female Asian expatriates who served as participants. It was insightful to know how Pakistani and Bangladeshi women deal with work-life issues as they struggle with everyday affairs in the UK.

Peltokorpi and Froese (2009) studied American and European organizational expatriates (OEs) and self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) in Japan. OEs are those on traditional transfers, who are sent by their home companies to international posts (Edstrom, Galbraith, 1977; Peltokorpi, Froese, 2009) while SIEs are those who themselves make the decision to move and work abroad (Vance, 2005; Peltokorpi, Froese, 2009). Among their findings and assertions were the following:

- Despite cultural differences between their home countries and Japan, the expatriates were relatively adjusted to work- and non-work-related aspects of their lives in Japan.
- Social interaction adjustment is a time-related process because those who have stayed longer in Japan tend to be more adjusted to interaction with Japanese.

The study of Peltokorpi and Froese (2009) also contributed to the theoretical groundwork of our research by providing ontological claims on the social interactions and adjustments of expatriates from the US and Europe assigned in Japan. Although their study provided an extended knowledge on OEs and SIEs, our research did not dissect and classify the notion of “expatriate” nor examine WLB of OEs and SIEs; rather, we were interested in the generic definition of expatriate, thus, we did not classify them the way Peltokorpi and Froese (2009) did.

Another relevant study on work-life balance was done by Shortland (2015) in the UK oil and gas industry. She examined how work-life balance was viewed in their host work location, whether they believed that they had an appropriate work-life balance. The expatriates interviewed reported the following:

- It was difficult to balance a demanding job with family life and having the ability to vary their hours of work either officially under policy or, more usually, unofficially by local arrangement when needed was highly valued (p. 1463).
- Flexible hours of work were popular with assignees on all types of assignments, but of greatest benefit to mothers and single women who had no one to deal with home-based issues (p. 1463).

The study of Shortland (2015) also provided a useful review in our study because of our similarity in the work setting. Oman’s oil and gas industry is a huge boost to, and a pillar of, the national economy. From a research perspective, our objective is related; for instance, expatriates in her study were asked if they had work-life balance and so in our research as well as the inclusion of women as participants.

Kempena et al. (2015) made a study of German expatriates working in development cooperation projects (e.g., peace building, poverty reduction, healthcare) in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. Findings showed that work-private life enrichment and private life-work enrichment will correlate substantially with job satisfaction, turnover intentions and accomplishment of role-related expectations. Their study underscores the importance of the work domain and the role of job design for expatriates, suggesting that by actively improving experiences in the work domain (e.g., through work integration, training, and socialization), expatriates may be better able to transfer resources toward managing the complexities surrounding the private life

domain while abroad. Moreover, their work showed that expatriate adjustment is challenging for both the expatriates and their partners/family. They suggested that by providing a supportive work environment, organizations can improve the degree to which the expatriate can manage complications arising outside of the work context (Kempena et al., 2015). The research of Kempena et al. (2015) introduced the nuances of “work-private life” enrichment and “private life-work” enrichment and how these forms of enrichment would interplay with certain organizational issues, such as job design and a supportive work environment. Our study, on the other hand, focused solely on the traditional concept of WLB as seen by the expatriates in Muscat.

A more closely related study is that of Fischlmayr and Kollinger (2010), who researched work-life balance (WLB) among Austrian female expatriates. Their qualitative analyses showed WLB being defined as “balance between professional and private life” (p. 467). It was also disclosed that in addition to home-related burdens, the participants designated (a) the organization of settling in the foreign country in the first weeks, (b) the adjustment to the foreign culture, (c) the missing social contacts and (d) the missing possibilities of working more flexibly as extra challenges abroad. The takeaway from Fischlmayr and Kollinger’s (2010) study was in terms of our similar conception of WLB as a sense of equilibrium between career/profession and private or personal/family life of expatriates. “Balance” seems to be a crucial element in the interface between work and family issues of skilled and professional staff while on an expatriation work. This may indicate a harmonious blend between work and family as well as a wholesome adjustment in a cross-cultural context of expatriation.

It appeared that expatriates’ WLB from a qualitative lens has not yet received dense attention in the qualitative research scholarship in the context of intelligent cities specific to Muscat setting. As explained by Lee, Chang, and Kim (2011), most work on work–family issues to date has been found substantially in the US and other Western countries that share key characteristics with regard to family and industrial structures. Our study hopes to bridge the research gap by providing theoretical underpinnings on the practices of expatriates on how to strike a balance between and work and family while living/working in smart-city Muscat.

## **Methodology**

### *Ethnomethodology as Analytical Frame*

Ethnomethodology originated from the work of Harold Garfinkel in the 1950’s and 1960’s (Marcon, Gopal, 2008), which “inquiries into just how people manage to make sense of the world, to know what is happening around them and what it is that they are doing” (Heritage, 1984; Segumpan, 2016: 71). Sharrock and Watson (1988), McKenzie 1997) made it clear: “ethnomethodology is interested in actions, activities and courses of action” (p. 60).

This was an ethnomethodological research which involved interpretive analysis or sense-making of what expatriates would do, or have been doing, in order to strike a work-life balance while living and working in Muscat or living in Muscat but working elsewhere (outside of Muscat Governorate). We situated our analysis of expatriates’ WLB in the ethnomethodological frame of study because we focused our analysis on expatriates’ practices or activities as they dealt with the interface of work and family life while in an intelligent or smart city; i.e., Muscat.

### *The Participants*

The participants of the study, chosen through purposeful sampling, included 11 expatriates from Egypt (1), Jordan (1), Malaysia (2), Pakistan (1), Philippines (3), Sudan (2), and United Kingdom (1). These expatriates, all of whom were part of our professional networks, were working in the following sectors: higher education (private and public), investment and real estate development, telecommunications, hospitality, and oil and gas. The youngest was 32 years and the most senior of them was 65. Table 1 presents the profile of the participants for the purpose of background information.

According to Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, and Hoagwood (2015), purposeful sampling is “widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest...in identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest” (p. 533).

**Table 1.** The Participants of the Study

No.	Country of Origin	Gender	Age	Job Sector	Family Presence in Muscat	Length of Stay in Muscat
1	Egypt	Male	Undisclosed*	Private Higher Education	Yes	14 years
2	Jordan	Male	41	Private Higher Education	No	4 years
3	Malaysia	Male	33	Investment & Real Estate Development	Yes	5 years
4	Malaysia	Female	61	Public Higher Education	No	6 months
5	Pakistan	Male	38	Telecomm	Yes	8 years
6	Philippines	Male	47	Private Higher Education	No	6 years
7	Philippines	Male	32	Hospitality	Yes	6 years, 10 months
8	Philippines	Female	50	Private Higher Education	Yes	7 years
9	Sudan	Male	49	Public Higher Education	Yes	1 year, 7 months
10	Sudan	Male	65	Public Higher Education	Yes	9 years
11	United Kingdom	Male	58	Oil and Gas	Yes	1 year, 6 months

\* A WhatsApp inquiry was made but he refused to divulge his age; privacy upheld.

Our participants were chosen purposefully based on these criteria: (a) role as expatriates (Omanis were excluded because they were considered non-expatriates), (b) place of work/residence (only those living and working in Muscat or living in Muscat but working somewhere in Oman were selected), and (c) willingness to participate; i.e., they were willing to share their everyday affairs (i.e., practices) on how they constructed or reconstructed their subjective realities regarding work-life balance.

In qualitative studies, Creswell (1998) recommends five to 25 participants and Morse (1994) suggests at least six. As mentioned, our sample included 11 expatriates, which jives with these recommendations. Beninger, Fry, Jago, Lepps, Nass, and Silvester (2014, in Segumpan, 2016) also explain that the aim of qualitative studies is to ensure range and diversity of coverage across key sampling criteria and thus, they do not aspire to generate a proportionately representative sample. Patton (2002) also emphasized that qualitative methods intend to achieve depth of understanding (Palinkas et al., 2015: 534). In our research, we were interested in the “deep understanding” of the phenomenon of WLB among expatriates in smart-city Muscat.

#### *Data Collection*

The data were collected during the last week of February until early March 2017 (around two weeks) using an open-ended questionnaire that requested the participants to express freely their views as regards their practices or courses of action in order to strike a balance between work and family life in Muscat. The questionnaire was sent to the participants’ electronic mails (e-mails) and/or attached as a document in social media (in particular, Facebook). Central to their narrative

creation, recollection, and reflexivity were the following research questions that were rephrased to the first-person pronoun “I” in order to create a subjective case: “As an expatriate, how do I live a life in Muscat?” “What lifestyles do I have?” “What do I do in order to cope with the demands of work vis-à-vis my personal or family responsibilities”?

Our use of narratives as data collection method was therefore in line with what Dahlstrom (2014) espoused:

Narratives are intrinsically persuasive. Because they describe a particular experience rather than general truths, narratives have no need to justify the accuracy of their claims; the story itself demonstrates the claim. Because narratives are able to provide values to real-world objects without argument, it is difficult to counter their claims (p. 13616).

As advocated by Lamnek (1995), Fischlmayr & Kollinger (2010), in narrative interviews, “the interviewees were just asked an opening question and were then encouraged to talk about their experiences and opinions in an open and fluid way... When confirmation or expansion of a point was needed further nonstandard questions were asked” (p. 466). We did a similar approach when we were confronted with narratives that had to be deconstructed due to their ambiguity, or in cases where follow-up questions had to be asked in order to thicken the discussion and probe further the intended meanings of the participants. Some of them were: “Tell me how do you manage your work and family responsibilities”. “What do you understand by “work-life balance?” “How do you find Muscat as a place to live or work?” Follow-up confabulations were carried out either through e-mails or in Facebook. Minor issues such as missing information (e.g., age and family presence in Muscat) were dealt with through telephone calls or WhatsApp.

#### *Data Analysis*

Themes were examined manually from the narratives. Our thematic analysis was guided by Braun and Clarke (2006), Segumpan (2016), especially as regards “identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p. 77). According to these authors, thematic analysis is “a method that minimally organizes and describes data set in rich detail” (Braun, Clarke, 2006; Segumpan, 2016: 78). Table 2 shows the steps which guided our thematic analysis. All throughout the analyses, we upheld the principle of bracketing, defined by Davidson (2102) as follows:

Bracketing by researchers of a priori interests and background information... produce unmotivated looking, and meticulous analytic attention to locally produced social phenomenon often only made visible in fine details of transcripts (p. 26).

In other words, we positioned a neutral stance on the phenomenon (WLB in this research) being studied. We suspended our own judgments or assumptions which could influence our interpretation of meanings that were supposed to be echoed by the participants (expatriates in this study) themselves.

Our data analysis was iterative. We had to read, re-read, and review several times codes and themes that surfaced to ensure that they were meaningful, not overlapping, and echoed participants’ authentic voices or viewpoints. Moreover, the analytical orientation of the research was inductive. We did not have theoretical framework prior to the start of the study because ethnomethodological research is one type of qualitative inquiry where the purpose is theory-building rather than theory-testing. In this study, we culled out the epistemological meanings constructed and reconstructed by the participants through their WLB practices, activities, and everyday affairs in smart-city Muscat, after which, we examined theoretical underpinnings that evolved from the said practices.

**Table 2.** Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description of the Process
1. Familiarizing with the data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes	Coding important features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic map of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes	On-going analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Source: Braun & Clarke (2006), Segumpan (2016, p. 78)

The data set combined all responses of all participants, which were then numbered for ease in referencing the data. Keywords/phrases were also identified, reviewed, examined, and then recoded to become the main themes of the study. After the iterative analyses of narratives, there were 182 key words/phrases identified, which were then deconstructed further and recoded until the themes for Practices of Work-Life Balance surfaced.

## 6. Findings and Discussion

### *Embracing Personal Excellence*

One of the themes that surfaced on how expatriates would strike a work-life balance (WLB) was Embracing Personal Excellence. As stated by the expatriates:

*I am open to new ideas and the experience will help me to understand the program better (lines 554-555).*

*I set my priorities from the most important things to the least, example: work/job comes first, as it was the main reason we're here... (lines 215-216).*

Based on the above remarks, a personal willingness to deal with work-life interface seems to be an important characteristic that expatriates need to develop as seen from their own lens. Another aspect of personal excellence could be related to how the participants manage their job-related efficiency.

*I try my best to increase my efficiency at work. Anything that I can delegate I will empower my managers and other team members to work on the first cut. I also try to skip meetings where I think somebody else can handle. Whilst this save my time, it also increase the morale of my subordinates as they feel like they are being trusted to work more independently and being able to do bigger and more complex tasks which are useful for their professional growth (lines 41-47).*

Embracing personal excellence also insinuates that expatriates had to frame a positive mindset regarding their everyday affairs in Muscat. Based on the analyses, it appears that a personal conviction and a positive mindset would be helpful to face the challenges of work and personal/family life as expressed in the views that follow:

*I'm an early riser and my energy by end of the day is often low due to my work intensity. At the same time my children sleep early and I have little time with them before we all go to bed. Thus I spend time with them more in the morning. Thus by the time I start my work, my 'credit' hour with family has already been fulfilled (lines 49-53).*

*With regards to work, ofcourse at first, its a little hard, adjusting with colleagues and customers. But nothing's hard if we are eager and put dedication to what we do (lines 182-184).*



*I also do not really see work as a 'mere job' because I love what I do and I get a real thrill performing my job. To me there is no need for a real distinction between work and pleasure as you can achieve both at the same time if your work has become your passion (lines 79-82).*

The practice of personal excellence seems to be “the right thing to do” as viewed in the expatriates’ lens because it is also noted elsewhere in the literature of expatriation studies, such as in the work of Peltokorpi and Froese (2009) who found out that, for instance, “Western expatriates often value open communication, individual accountability, and clear performance expectations and feedback” (p. 1102).

#### *Enhancing Partner’s Social Engagement*

Another theme that appeared was Enhancing Partner’s Social Engagement. This theme acknowledges the importance of a partner, such as a spouse, who knows how to take part in social activities that could push away boredom brought about by loneliness while the other spouse is at work. Sample quotes are as follows:

*Therefore, my wife being rather active and sociable, has organised herself with her friends to participate in meaningful and physically demanding activities such as tennis, badminton, Zumba, Aerobics on various days of the week. Concurrently, to keep the minds occupied, they also indulge in such activities as Quran reading and charitable events (lines 130-134).*

*Since of late my wife’s interest in photography has gone beyond just a hobby and we journey together to various beautiful place in Oman in pursuit of capturing the beauty of Oman in photographs. Oman has such a treasure trove of locations for any budding photographer (lines 136-139).*

*Although I spend long hours and weekends and holidays at work, I do my utmost best to make time for my wife to help her to achieve the things she strives to achieve such as her passion to take beautiful photographs of nature (lines 143-146).*

In our study, it appears that the spouses, especially the women, are those who need support in terms of meaningful activities that could fill the gap while their partners are at work. Similar to the study done by Konek and Kitch (1994), Fischlmayr & Kollinger (2010) although all of the interviewees are sure that work-life balance is an issue for both genders, they perceive an additional burden in reaching this balance for females. Some societal thinking patterns still see women as having the primary responsibility for child rearing, household and organizing external child care. Thus, the situation for female expatriates is more difficult than for their male counterparts. Fritz (2003), Fischlmayr & Kollinger (2010) has recognized that during different life stages, different aspects need to be considered and supported. A changing environment as in the case for expatriates, for example, requires more flexibility than other situations in life.

#### *Engaging in Community Development*

Engaging in Community Development also emerged as another theme that expatriates construed to be helpful in achieving a WLB. As seen from the “voices” below, the participants of our study had a natural flair for doing community development work.

*Outside of the college, I join some volunteering activities such as clean-up drive, marathon, extreme sports, etc. Just recently, I went to Indonesia with some officers from the organization I founded in the college to volunteer there (lines 300-303).*

*I like socializing and doing community service especially in matters related to religion (lines 68-69).*

*I had more time for family, friends and community service. I was an active and for a while president of the...Social Club (lines 347-348).*

This sense of community engagement could be a source of satisfaction that expatriates in our study could derive from. Through such engagement, they would be able to release the pressures from work and thus would feel relieved. It could also be a source of peer recognition. As regards the practice of community development among expatriates, the literature elsewhere seems muted, probably because “long working hours were the norm for expatriates” (Shortland, 2015: 1460).

#### *Synchronizing Work-Family Affairs*

In addition to the above themes, further analyses showed another theme: Synchronizing Work-Family Affairs. The need to harmonize and coordinate activities of the family was considered important by the expatriates. The views below show how important it was to involve the family members while accomplishing work-related duties.

*I have to get bath, eat my meals, go to the mosque, and I love working out. Instead of doing all of these daily routines together with my family. I try to have bath together with my children, going to the gym together with them, and go for a weekly brisk walking with the entire family. This way I can kill two birds with the same stone (lines 55-59).*

*I ensure that my whole family is involved. Thus my wife get to chat with her peers and my children get to play with their friends. It appear to be working for everyone (lines 69-71).*

The theme that emerged here points out the efforts of expatriates in order to strike a balance in their work concerns and personal/family responsibilities. According to Aryee, Srinivas and Tan (2005), Lee, Chang, & Kim (2011) participation in both family and work roles can positively enhance one's emotional response to work experiences, leading to higher satisfaction related to one's job. Fischlmayr and Kollinger (2010) also stated that "an accompanying spouse may give the required support and stability to the expatriate, and may therefore contribute to a positive work-life balance" (p. 469). To synchronize work-family affairs, therefore, could be the ideal approach in striking a work-life balance.

Lee, Chang, and Kim (2011) made an explanation from a cultural perspective. According to them, when people have positive affective experiences such as good relationship with family members, this good relationship provides individuals with not only positive psychological and emotional resources from family life. But, simultaneously, it also provides, under the collectivists' vague perception of the boundaries between separate role domains, feelings of the accountability for improved family welfare through more work, to keep this positive family relationship or to reward family members for their emotional support.

#### *Socializing with Others*

The theme Socializing with Others also surfaced from the analyses of data. Socialization with other people, such as friends, co-workers, and other expatriates came out to be another practice among the participants of the study. This practice tends to provide expatriates a platform to ventilate personal or work-related issues that need collegial advice. It is also seen as a way to forge better ties with other expatriates or with their own home country nationals. Sample quotes include the following:

*The main thing here is to work, have enough experience and continue on life. Life here in oman isn't all about stress and sacrifices, there comes sometimes when I have to go out with friends, have some coffee... (lines 165-168).*

*I mingle or socialize with other expats at work. It is better to spend more time exchanging pleasantries than sitting at your desk. I call it a productive conversation and an effective strategy to build rapport with colleagues (lines 269-271).*

*The little problems one might face in these respects are avoided in my case by...mixing most of the time with my country people (lines 413-416).*

*My social life is spent amongst friends and I will occasionally go out to restaurants, the opera house, and sightseeing (lines 614-615).*

Socializing with other people, as a practice of expatriates in our research, apparently afforded the expatriates with emotional sustenance to deal with work-life balance issues. As explained by Adelman (1988), Peltokorpi & Froese (2009) social ties when living in foreign countries are proposed to be an important part of adjustment because they provide emotional support for dealing with the associated stress and anxiety. Johnson and colleagues (2003), Peltokorpi & Froese (2009) also stated that expatriates are able to develop social relationships and receive the needed social support from a variety of sources, such as from other expatriates facing similar situations or from host country nationals.

#### *Communicating in Home Country*

Communication in Home Country was another theme that emerged from our study. This could be seen as one of the expatriates' coping mechanisms for battling homesickness with their family members who were in their home country. This practice also helped the participants to maintain open communication lines as well as provided them a sense of peace of mind, especially for those whose spouses and children were left in their home country.

*I always find time to chat and call them. Thanks to advance technology, my "homesickness" is quenched even a little (lines 181-182).*

*My weekdays are too spread between day and night classes, but I always make time to chat with my siblings, relatives, and friends through social media. It feels good to know that everyone in the family is alright back home (lines 295-297).*

*I have no family responsibility to distract me from my work. Though I think about them all the time, I know they are OK without me and we communicate all the time (lines 543-544).*

Having a close encounter with people (family, work counterparts, etc.) in the expatriates' home country could also be a way to release tension. In the present age of digital communication, time has been compressed by reducing the distance between different points in space, and the sense of space has led people to feel that local, national, and global space becomes obsolete (Harvey, 1990; Chen, 2012).

#### *Finding Time for Relaxation*

The practice of Finding Time for Relaxation also appeared in the analysis. One of the activities that expatriates would do was to engage in physical exercise (e.g., jogging and going to the gym) as well as sports (e.g., playing football) and watching movies. The narratives below echo the participants' voices as regards this theme:

*Lately, my work has kept me longer hours at work but we are now working on to get back to jogging in the evenings (lines 148-149).*

*Nowadays, we work out a lot. In fact, we just enrolled in a newly opened gym for a year trying to make our health a top priority (lines 286-287).*

*My lifestyles is normal. Managing the balance between work-life in some times is difficult but usually I spare the weekend for my family. During the normal week, I devote time i.e. two times per a week to play football (lines 503-505).*

*One of the enjoyable things we do is to occasionally go to the movies on a weekend depending on the movie of course. We tend to enjoy, adventure and romantic comedies (lines 151-153).*

In addition to the above modes of relaxation, travel was also another relaxation outlet of the participants. They felt that this was a rejuvenating and refreshing activity. Some of their remarks are given below:

*I take the time to travel to the local and select international destinations that I can afford. I do this to give myself a moment to relax, recharge my energy and go back to work feeling motivated and excited to share my colleagues the experience (lines 278-280).*

*We just spontaneously do and enjoy what little pleasures we can manage, and make sure we plan for out-of-the country travel at least once or twice a year. That way, returning back to work on a daily basis and the pressures that come with it becomes a lot easier and pleasurable (lines 258-262).*

The findings suggest that despite the hectic work schedules of the expatriates in our research, they would still squeeze time for leisure and relaxation. Time for enjoyment is mentioned discursively in the literature, for instance, Fritz (2003), Fischlmayr & Kollinger (2010) explains that without having a balanced leisure time with appropriate activities, a valuable part of life is missing. Sometimes, personal priorities do not fit into tight schedules and consequently, dissatisfaction due to missing quality in life might arise. Therefore, setting priorities and defining clear goals about leisure time is of high importance. Otherwise, personal imbalance is the consequence. In the worst case, this might lead to burnout symptoms Fritz (2003), Fischlmayr & Kollinger (2010).

### **3. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Our study was an attempt to understand the epistemological meanings attributed to WLB by the expatriates in intelligent-city Muscat. From the findings, managing or dealing with the interface between "work and life" seems to be an embodied, everyday affair of being an expatriate living and/or working in Muscat. In other words, expatriates strike a work-life balance by practising socially constructed and reconstructed realities. These took the forms of the following practices: embracing personal excellence (the practice of imbibing positive outlook and self-motivation), enhancing partner's social engagement (the practice of accommodating partner's social activities), engaging in community development (the practice of being involved in community service), synchronizing work-family affairs (the practice of harmonizing and coordinating family-related activities), socializing with others (the practice of mingling and

interacting with peers and friends), communicating in home country (the practice of keeping communication links with the home country), and finding time for relaxation (the practice of allocating time for leisure and entertainment).

Connecting the findings to the literature and our iterative and reflexive analyses, WLB could be seen as an issue for an individual to manage, rather than an organizational responsibility (Toth, 2005, Shortland, 2015). All participants in our research were self-initiated expatriates, which means that they came to Muscat to work on their own rather than were sent by their own companies or organizations. Without a doubt, expatriation presents clear and considerable WLB challenges, as Harris (2004), Shortland (2015) has also reported. In our study, the notion of WLB could be subsumed in a more general space of cross-cultural adjustment, defined by Black (1988), Peltokorpi & Froese (2009) and Takeuchi, Marinova, Lepak and Liu (2005), Peltokorpi & Froese, (2009) as: the degree to which expatriates are psychologically comfortable and familiar with different aspects of a foreign environment, and can be understood as the degree of ease or difficulty expatriates have with various issues related to life and work abroad (p. 1097).

We situated the said cross-cultural adjustment in the nexus of WLB literature by positioning Muscat as a smart city and by understanding how people (expatriates in our research) would strike a balance between their work and personal/family life. We approached our inductive (i.e., theory-building) work from the lens of ethnomethodology, a qualitative research method which may be silenced in Oman and in the Gulf in general as compared to the UK, Europe, US, and Australia, among others. Thus, our research made a modest contribution to its application, especially in understanding and in thickening discussions on how people in smart-city Muscat live or would strike a metaphorical balance between work and life.

In order to “increase our understanding on expatriate adjustment, additional research is needed” (Li, 2016: 16). In the context of intelligent or smart cities, it is recommended that the following researches be explored:

- WLB of organizational expatriates in Muscat, Sohar, Salalah and other intelligent cities in the Gulf, UK, and elsewhere;
- WLB of self-initiated and/or organizational expatriates using other traditions of qualitative research, such as phenomenology and ethnography;
- WLB of locals or residents (Omanis and otherwise) working in intelligent cities

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