

Nature of Business Process Outsourcing and its Relationship with Employees Vulnerability To Stress

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ABSTRACT

The multitude of ever evolving demands of a highly competitive work environment requires constant updating of knowledge and skills of employees in organisations to be able to function effectively. Coupled with this is the need to deal with uncertainties and ambiguity when one cannot rely on past experiences alone to tackle with the present problems. The resultant misfit between environmental demands and person's ability results in stress. However, there is an increasing realisation that stress cannot be avoided and hence the next best alternative would be to gear oneself to not only manage stress but also to make the most out of it for realising one's potential. Hence a better understanding of stress would be the first step towards coping with it effectively.

Keywords: Information Technology Enabled Services, Job Stress, Business Process Outsourcing, Domestic BPO and International BPO.

INTRODUCTION

The industrial revolution paved the way for the development of the joint-stock enterprise and large-scale business. The doctrine of free competition combined with the expansion of markets attracted a large number of producers into every field. Consequently, competition became increasingly acute. This slashed the profits of producers and made them think of the ways and means by which unhealthy and wasteful competition could be avoided. Co-operation appeared to be the only way out of this crisis. Industrial units, most of which functioned as joint stock companies, began to associate together for a variety of purposes – sometimes to regulate the output or prices, sometimes to pool their resources for organizing research and sometimes to explore certain new markets. In this way came

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into existence the, outsource or integration of business units that joined together in varying degrees for varying objects.

The IT (Information Technology) -IteS (Information Technology Enabled Services) industry has continued to perform its role as the most consistent growth driver for the economy. The IT sector currently employing 2.2 million professionals directly and another 8 million people indirectly accounts for over 5% of GDP (Gross Domestic Product). Further, a majority of the Fortune 500 and Global 2000 corporations are sourcing IT/ITeS from India. Banking, financial services, and insurance are the leading market verticals for Indian IT-ITeS providers, followed by high-technology and telecom. These sectors constitute nearly 60 per cent of the country's IT-ITeS exports, followed by manufacturing and retail at another 20 per cent of all such exports, with the remainder being accounted for by a mix of service lines, including healthcare, airlines, transport, utilities, and media.

TRENDS OF EMPLOYMENT IN ITES - BPO (BUSINESS PROCESS OUTSOURCING) INDUSTRY

IT-ITeS industry has created huge employment in India during the last decade. The total employment in this industry touched 2.21 million in 2008-09, as compared to 0.52 million in 2001-02. This represents a net addition of 1.68 million to the industry employee base since 2001-02. The indirect employment attributed by the sector is estimated to about 8.0 million in 2008-09. This translates to the creation of about 10.20 million job opportunities, attributed to the growth of this sector. IT-ITeS exports constitute the major source of employment in this industry and its share has increased over the years.

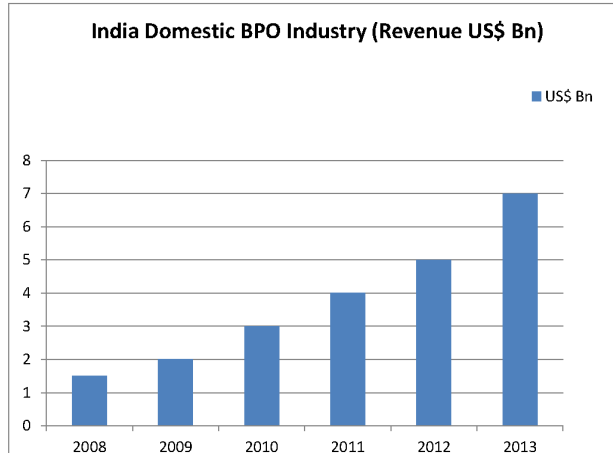
The rapid growth in India's IT-ITeS sector is in large part an outcome of the liberalization of trade and investment regulations in this industry. Duties on imports of IT products have been liberalized in the post-1991 period. Relaxation of controls on both inward and outward investments and foreign exchange along with fiscal incentives provided by the Central Government and State governments in the form of tax and subsidy measures have contributed to this growth. During 2009, a year that witnessed postponement in spending decisions from key industry verticals, the government sector in India provided the much-needed fillip to the IT industry. Not only did the government spending on ICT (Information and Communication Technology) products and solutions help rescue the

market, the stimulus/incentive programmes of the government helped a range of infrastructure solution providers deal with the slowdown and shore up performance. In particular, government sector IT spending in 2009 helped to grow services (16.6%) and software (36.8%), though hardware remained hit (-2.2%). The administrative reforms in the form of e-governance initiatives by the various Government agencies have given a big boost to this industry. The year 2010 has turned out to be a transitional year for IT deployments in the Indian Government sector with the focus shifting to automation of the back-end processes.

FUTURE OUTLOOK

Keeping in view the various issues, it is estimated that India’s domestic BPO market, with nearly 500 players, is set to grow at a CAGR of 33.3% to touch revenues of US\$ 6.82 billion by 2013, up from US\$ 1.62 billion recorded in 2008 (Figure 1).

Figure 1 : Indian Domestic BPO Industry, 2008-2013



Source: Data Quest, a Monthly Publication by Cyber Media, May 2010.

Finally, it may be concluded that there are wide opportunities and of course certain challenges likely to be faced by the industry. The basic advantages of India-vast and large skilled pool of human resources, quality and timely delivery, cost arbitrage and ability to take on more and more complex assignments are still valid. India can continue to command its leadership, successfully overcome increasing competition and generate millions of jobs for its youth.

NEED AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Addressing or managing stress within an organization is a process that deserves planning and commitment on the part of the management team and is not something that will happen overnight. Many companies make an effort to address specific elements related to this issue, but very few actually analyze every component to ensure a comprehensive approach for managing these aspects. In fact, many elements related to employee stress are often times overlooked. The theoretical, conceptual, and literature input makes clear that without satisfied and supportive employees, an organization cannot realize improvements in operations, customer service, or any other profit generating initiative. The costs of neglecting employees as valuable assets and an integral part of an organization's core strategy means losing talent and the competitive edge an organization may have.

Stress has become a common phenomenon of our daily work life. It is one of the most important factors influencing individual efficacy and satisfaction in modern day occupational settings. Stress results from a mismatch between the demands and pressures on the person on the one hand and his/her knowledge and abilities to handle the work on the other. Once stress exceeds a certain limit, it can cause burnout and detrimentally affect work performance. Burnout involves physical, emotional and intellectual fatigue. This generally translates into weakened stamina, emotional exhaustion and feelings of despair and helplessness, which in turn causes the appearance of a negative attitude. Such negative attitude develops towards oneself, as well as towards one's work, life and people. This section focuses on analyzing the extent of stress among the employees of the ITes-BPO Companies and then making a comparison of stress level existing in employees of Domestic and International BPO. In order to find out the reliability of the scale used for measuring the response Cronbach's Alpha has been calculated. The reliability estimate (Cronbach's Alpha) is 0.951, which is considered quite satisfactory.

CAUSES OF JOB STRESS

Traditionally the causes of workplace stress were very general and related to job demands, support of colleagues and management to opportunities for promotion and recognition of work within the organization. There are a few behavioural scientists who have defined the causes of stress in the workplace. According to them stress is a situation which is caused

by-feeling of helplessness and inability to influence a situation, the lack of adequate planning and management, work overload and work under load, lack of authority and clarity about organizational relationships, inadequate feedback on performance and inadequate recognition, and promotion concerns.

CONSEQUENCES OF JOB STRESS

The deteriorating effects of stress are multifaceted. Apart from its direct influence on performance high level of stress can also lead to other problems like physical ailments, behavioural and emotional disorders, organizational problems etc.

1. *Physical Problem due to stress:* Over the years, researchers have examined the impact that stress has on physical health. A high level of stress is accompanied by high blood pressure and high level of cholesterol and may even result in heart disease. Some other physical symptoms of job stress are: back pain, headache, neck pain, chest pain, ulcer, and excessive drinking.
2. *Psychological problems due to Job stress:* Psychological consequences of job stress relate to an individual's mental health and well-being. These include anxiety, depression, lack of interest in life, anger, irritability, and loss of sense of humour etc.
3. *Behavioural problems due to job stress:* Direct behaviours that may accompany high levels of stress include under eating or over eating, increase smoking and drinking, and drug abuse.
4. *Organizational Problems due to Job Stress:* Any of the Physical, Psychological, and behavioural problems faced by an employee can affect the organization. The major organizational symptoms of the same are: high absenteeism, high employee turnover, poor quality control, accident, and industrial relation problems.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Savery and Wingham(1991) in a study of directors of child care centers, reported that intrinsic motivators such as 'interesting and challenging work' and 'feeling of achievement' were important to their satisfaction in comparison with the 'salary'. Bharati et al. (1991) have investigated the conceptualization and measurement of occupational stress and the relationship with an effect on job satisfaction. The total sample consisted

of 90 clerical cadre employees of three different business and service organizations. The obtained data were analyzed using 't' test, chi square test, coefficient of correlation and Duncan's Range test. Occupational stress was found to be negatively correlated to job satisfaction- the greater the stress the lower the satisfaction. Hence it was concluded that occupational stress among employees negatively affects the level of job satisfaction.

Dhar and Arora (2001) made their investigation into the nature of relationship between convergent - divergent thinking, job satisfaction, experience and job stress. The job stress is a result of several factors. Change in life styles and breaking down of traditional value systems, work being increased; work deadlines and high level of competitiveness within and among organizations are among a few causes. Overall, the findings of the study provided considerable support for the conceptualization of relationship between job stress and employee satisfaction

Mehra Payal (2004) conducted a research with the primary objective to determine stress levels across age, profession, and type of job, and duration of work. Two questionnaires were devised to collect data in a scientific manner. Among the various findings of the study, the paper led to the very important perspective that profession and type of job definitely impact upon the work stress that an individual suffers from. Stress is not age specific it can occur to any individual irrespective of age. At the end the author also suggested five steps which will help an individual to reduce his/her stress level in specific and to the organisation in general.

Vanitha (2006) made a study to analyze the organizational commitment and stress among the IT (Information Technology) professionals. Differences between male and female IT professionals were also examined in this regard. Results, based on the study of various variables, revealed that organizational commitment and stress among IT professionals is high and that gender and experience of the professionals do not influence these factors.

Latha and Panchanatham (2010) in the paper concluded that the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector is one of the fastest growing sectors in the global scenario. The BPO sector is developing the young generation not only by providing employment opportunities but also by building confidence in them. Indian BPO companies are paying great attention in inducting and training the employees. But most of the employees are youngsters and they are facing a lot of problems. They are working on continuous night shifts, which affect their biological

balance. Apart from this, excessive workloads, unreachable targets and pressurizing customers are creating stress among the employees. This ultimately results in physical, psychological and behavioural deviations among them, which not only affects the employees and the organization, but, the country on the whole. This paper aims to identify the problems in the sector and the nature of the stress created by such problems. First hand information regarding the problems, the sources of stress and the experience on stress situations is collected from a project leader who has five years of experience. A questionnaire is circulated to measure the stress level of employees. It also identifies the various stressors prevailing among the employees. The impact of job satisfaction, feedback, working conditions, work family balance and workload in creating stress among the employees are analyzed. Some strategies for coping up with stress are also suggested.

Tamizharasi, (2012) made a study and extracted following implications : Business process outsourcing, the most flourishing Indian industry sector has emerged as India's most promising sector, and has been growing at a rate of 40-50 per cent since its inception. BPO is a very fast paced and a high momentum industry. BPO industry is expected to generate two million jobs by the year 2012. Taking advantage from the abundant skills and low cost benefits, large numbers of BPO companies have mushroomed in India in recent years, many of the well established IT companies have also started their BPO divisions. This study is concerned with the non viability of the BPO and the fact that the young generation of India is actually losing out in the BPO. In statistics and data mining, *k*-means clustering is a method of cluster analysis which aims to partition *n* observations into *k* clusters in which each observation belongs to the cluster with the nearest mean. This results into a partitioning of the data space into Voronoi cells.

Chavan and Potdar (2011) analysed both positive and negative impacts of the outsourcing industry on the society and the individuals in India. They have focused on the following few major aspects during this study: Health issues, societal issues, Personal issues, and Benefits offered, and strategies for work and work ethics. Based on a field survey, views of few employees and employers of this industry have been analyzed. Various health issues that came to light are stress, sleeplessness, and headache, fatigue, sense of exhaustion and lack of concentration, etc. It was also found that a number of factors like difficulty in personal life, physically tiring nature of work, better salary, lack of growth opportunity, in conducive policies and procedures could be some of the reasons for employees to leave the industry/

company. Majority of employees complained of headache and digestive disorders. Almost everyone stressed on having provision for power naps of 10-15 minutes. Employees accepted that they enjoy various facilities and benefits provided by the company like Provident Fund, Gratuity, Personal Accidental Insurance; Company leased accommodation, Recreational (like Cafeteria) and other facilities (like ATM, Gym etc), Corporate credit card, Educational Benefits, Performance based incentives, Regular get together and other cultural programs, Employee Referral Schemes and Maternity leave, etc.

Pathak and Sarin (2012) provide an overview of the challenges and opportunities faced by professional women in India. Changing social expectations both at work and at home have made this more complex. Paper highlights the coping strategies that can be selected to further continue corporate journey to gender inclusion and the advancement of women in the employee activity club, special telecast of a program in cafeteria, sports tournament, special Friday menu, special lunch arrangements & dinners of good performer of the month with CEO of the firm must be provided by the management to rejuvenate their employees' efficiency. Along with this emergency child care, a private room for nursing mothers and equipment to enable women employee to work from home and remote locations, provision of sick room is also useful. At every stage, a woman has to fulfill the responsibilities of her personal and professional responsibilities. Though her professional designation does not change for a long period but her personal life designations keeps on changing. Thus there are requirements of relaxing strategies which can help women to minimize stress from life and increase efficiency. IT-BPO companies must further refine their policies and processes to strongly influence the participation of women in key leading projects and must identify procedures that can be restructured to encourage participation of women in organizational decision making activities. Companies have to understand the requirement of managing stress among women to make the environment conducive which can retain skilled talented women. Management must provide continuous learning, mentoring, coaching, counseling, opportunities for self development, time management to handle their responsibility.

A very important perspective derived from the literature review is that the, profession and type of job definitely impact upon the work stress that an individual suffers from. Stress is not age specific it can occur to any individual irrespective of age. It is also observed that occupational stress among employees negatively affects the level of job satisfaction.

Results, based on the various studies also, revealed that organizational commitment and stress among IT professionals is high and that gender and experience of the professionals do not influence these factors.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

“The Truth is that outsourcing is no longer a choice but an absolute strategic necessity”, says chief of an ITES-BPO Company-Azim Premji. A study done by NASSCOM (National Association of Software and Service Companies)-McKinsey study ‘Indian IT Strategy Summit’ reveals that year -by- year the size of BPO industry in India is increasing because of the high business potential from the ITES-BPO Companies. The growing figure of the number of people employed from 23,000 in 1998-99 to 11, 00,000 in 2008-09, is indicative of the growth trends w.r.t to employment being provided by ITeS-BPO companies.

The literature review has indicated that a key business priority for organizations across the entire knowledge sector world-wide today, is to attract and retain talent to address exponential opportunities for growth that are coming their way. In the Information Technology Enabled Services-Business Process Outsourcing Industry, this is further accentuated by a combination of factors that include the type of work and work timings, a demand-supply gap in employable talent and their consequent mobility coupled with stringent performance criterion and specific characteristics/needs of the employable workforce. So even as an employing company focuses on meeting customer and stake-holder objectives and being globally ‘best in class’, it needs to also redouble its focus to understand the special needs /objectives of its knowledge employees and initiate action that address core issues.

HYPOTHESIS

H₀: The extent of *vulnerability* faced by employees due to stress does not vary across nature of BPO.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study is undertaken to study the *Employee vulnerability due to stress* from ITES-BPO Companies. In order to study this, the *descriptive* research design of investigation coupled with techniques of

various statistical techniques like ANOVA, and t-test was used. Seventeen items were used to measure the major effects of the work pressures in terms of behavioural and a health outcome for employees in ITES-BPO Companies. A 5-point likert scale (where Never= 1 and Almost Always= 5) was used to measure the vulnerability caused to employees of an ITES-BPO company. The Cronbach's Alpha (α) of these 17 statements was 0.951. The raw data was then exported to statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) Data Editor 16.0 for further analysis. In order to analyze the data accrued from this research, descriptive analysis, factor analysis along with correlation analysis, and t-test was used.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY AND SAMPLE SIZE

ITeS-BPO companies located at Delhi and NCR (National Capital Region) form the population for selecting the sample units. Hence, the survey was limited to Delhi and NCR. The target population of employees of ITeS-BPO companies included call-floor executives and operational managers at all levels but excluded back-end support staff from departments like Human Resources and administration. ITeS-BPO companies of each size i.e. small, medium and large were considered for this survey.

It can be seen in Table 1, the total sample size of 428 respondents comprises of about 80.4 percent of the respondents are working with an international BPO and 19.6 percent are working with domestic BPO.

Table 1 : Nature of the BPO-wise Classification of the Sample

<i>Size of the Company</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Cumulative Percentage</i>
Domestic BPO	84	19.6	19.6
International BPO	344	80.4	100.0
Total	428	100.0	

Source: Primary Data

NATURE OF BPOS-WISE COMPARISON OF DIMENSIONS OF VULNERABILITY TO STRESS

Stress and coping with stress have become important concerns in both research and organizational practices these days. It has been acknowledged that individual well being is influenced not only by the amount of stress an individual experiences but also how an individual copes with stress (Lakhwinder Singh Kang and Raghbir Singh, 2004).

Table 2: Nature of BPOs-wise Comparison of Dimensions of Vulnerability to Stress

<i>Vulnerability to various dimensions due to stress</i>	<i>Domestic bpo</i>		<i>International bpo</i>		<i>Overall</i>		<i>T-value</i>	<i>P-value</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D</i>		
Got tired very easily	2.92	1.220	2.65	1.186	2.70	1.196	1.836	.067
Have become short tempered.	2.86	1.309	2.50	1.219	2.57	1.244	2.388	.017
Smoke, drink or eat more than you should.	2.37	1.436	2.19	1.441	2.22	1.440	.996	.320
Feel mentally exhausted	2.88	1.461	2.34	1.201	2.44	1.273	3.483	.001
Have been bothered by shortness of breath	2.40	1.457	2.11	1.316	2.15	1.349	1.814	.070
Lack sound sleep at night	2.38	1.316	2.38	1.276	2.38	1.283	.024	.981
Are unable to respond despite having clear answer	2.43	1.356	2.28	1.281	2.31	1.296	.963	.336
Productivity has reduced.	2.36	1.368	2.08	1.303	2.13	1.319	1.747	.081
Feel restless during your daily routine.	2.71	1.247	2.42	1.247	2.48	1.251	1.914	.056
Find that you are becoming forgetful or indecisive	2.19	1.303	2.28	1.277	2.26	1.281	-.588	.557
Suffer from unexplained aches and gastric related problems.	2.48	1.303	2.26	1.283	2.30	1.288	1.392	.165
Want to be left alone.	2.88	1.357	2.34	1.299	2.45	1.327	3.396	.001
Have developed any particular physical or health problem	2.40	1.407	2.17	1.321	2.22	1.341	1.436	.152

Feel exhausted at the end of the day.	2.71	1.393	2.49	1.287	2.53	1.311	1.414	.158
Feel lonely	2.71	1.374	2.32	1.348	2.40	1.360	2.302	.022
Find yourself dreaming during your work.	2.38	1.488	2.21	1.337	2.24	1.369	1.026	.306
Find yourself becoming bored.	2.33	1.329	2.28	1.301	2.29	1.305	.325	.745

Note: i) All figures, except T-values and P-values are mean values, $df=1/426$.

The level of stress experienced by an employee may vary the nature of BPO in terms of market they operate which can be domestic or international. Existing studies have shown that working in domestic call centre is more stressful than international call centre or BPOs (Md.Ghazi Shahnawaz, 2007). Table 2 represents the mean scores of the two groups of respondents for vulnerability to stress in case of employees working with ITeS-BPO Company.

It is clear from the Table 2 that the mean score on the dimension 'got tired easily' is found to be the highest for both the two groups viz. 'Domestic BPO' (2.92) and 'International BPO' (2.65) as well as on overall basis (2.70). The lowest mean scores in case of Domestic BPO (2.19) is found to be with the statement 'find that you are becoming forgetful or indecisive'. For the other group i.e. International BPO and on overall level the lowest mean scores are obtained in case of the dimension 'productivity has reduced'.

The t-test has been performed to find out whether there exists any significant difference in the mean values of each of the dimensions of vulnerability faced by employees due to stress between 'Domestic BPOs' and 'International BPOs'. As shown by the results of the testing t-value is found to be significant on the dimensions viz. 'have become short tempered', 'feel mentally exhausted', 'want to be left alone', and 'feel lonely' at 5 per cent level of significance, $df=1/426$.

On each of these dimensions the mean values are found to be higher in case of the respondents working in a Domestic BPO than the International BPO. All these mean scores point out that respondents working in a Domestic BPO are more vulnerable in comparison to respondents working in an international BPO.

The t-value for each of the remaining dimensions of vulnerability caused to employees due to stress while working with ITeS-BPO Companies (see Table 2), has not been found significant at 5 per cent

level. It indicates that there is no significant difference between the mean values of two groups on each of the remaining dimensions of vulnerability to stress. Thus, across these two groups of respondent's i.e. one working with a Domestic BPO and the other being an employee of an International BPO shares almost same level of vulnerability due to stress.

CONCLUSION

Of all the dimensions the t-value is found significantly different in four statements that is 'have become short tempered', 'feel mentally exhausted', 'want to be left alone', and 'feel lonely' and are higher for employees working in Domestic BPO. It becomes imperative for Domestic BPO organization as well as an individual to overcome stress by resorting to certain coping measures, which may be are followed by employees working in International BPOs quite possibly must be happening with an existence of strong HR Department. Coping denotes the way of dealing with stress, or the effort to master conditions of harm, threat, or challenge when a routine or automatic response is not readily available (Lazarus, 1974). Over the years, many coping techniques have been advocated by researchers to manage stress. A few of the important techniques used at individual level are, critical analysis and recognition of problems, time management, physical exercises, yoga, meditation, maintain better family relationship, and trust in oneself. Batlivala (1990) concluded that there is no one best stress reducing technique and each person learns from his/her own personal experience how to transform stress into an asset. Thus, it can be said, that a wide variety of specific techniques and strategies, both organizational and individual, have been proposed to deal with stress. Hence it is very difficult to suggest a comprehensive or commonly used approach as each individual and organization looks for different coping strategies.

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