

A Study on Stress Management among the Employees of ITES (BPO) – Companies

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Abstract

ITES, like other services, has become one of the highly competitive service sectors in India. The BPO organizations, since the beginning of this decade, have been facing greater challenges in terms of technological revolution, service diversification and global servicing. Stress is unavoidable on the part of the employees as the systems, procedures; techniques are getting complicated with the use of advance technology. Every employee cannot cope with such rapid changes taking place in the jobs. This will lead to arising of stress among employees. An attempt has been made through this research paper to know the reasons of stress among the BPO employees and the ways used by employees to cope with the stress generated at workplace. It is found that maximum number of employees in BPO remains in stress. Majority of the employees try to find solution to relieve them from stress. Also the measures are also suggested in the paper to overcome stress that affects their physical and mental health.

Key Words: workplace stress, social life, health, satisfaction, conflict

Stress refers to the strain from the conflict between our external environment and us, leading to emotional and physical pressure. In our fast paced world, it is impossible to live without stress, whether you are a student or a working adult. There is both positive and negative stress, depending on each individual's unique perception of the tension between the two forces. Stress bears deliberating effects on both the employees and the employer.(Khanka, p.319) Corporate India is finally waking upto the fact that a lot of human potential is being drained away because of stress and burn out.(Shekhar Bajaj)Workplace stress is the harmful physical and emotional response that occurs when there is a poor match between job demands and the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. These conditions may lead to poor work performance or even injury. Job stress is also associated with various biological reactions that may lead ultimately to compromised health.

Workplace Stress:

Workplace stress is the harmful physical and emotional response that occurs when there is a poor match between job demands and the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. These conditions may lead to poor work performance or even injury. Job stress is also associated with various biological reactions that may lead ultimately to compromised health, such as cardiovascular disease. Stress is a prevalent and costly problem in today's workplace. About one-third of workers report high levels of stress. One-quarter of employees view their jobs as the number one stressor in their lives. Three-quarters of employees believe the worker has more on-the-job stress than a generation ago.

Evidence also suggests that stress is the major cause of turnover in organizations.

Symptoms of Stress:

Absenteeism, escaping from work responsibilities, arriving late, leaving early, etc., deterioration in work performance, more of error prone work, memory loss, etc., cribbing, over-reacting, arguing, getting irritated, anxiety, etc., deteriorating health, more of accidents, etc. improper eating habits (over-eating or under-eating), excessive smoking and drinking, sleeplessness, etc.

Sources/Causes of Stress

Organizational factors- Discrimination in pay/salary structure, strict rules and regulations, Ineffective communication, Peer pressure, Goals conflicts/goals ambiguity, more of centralized and formal organization structure, Less promotional opportunities, Lack of employees participation in decision-making, Excessive control over the employees by the managers
 Individual factors- There are various expectations which the family members, peer, superior and subordinates have from the employee. Failure to understand such expectations or to convey such expectations lead to role ambiguity/role conflict which in turn causes employee stress. Other individual factors causing stress among employees are inherent personality traits such as being impatient, aggressive, rigid, feeling time pressure always, etc. Similarly, the family issues, personal financial problems, sudden career changes all lead to stress.
 Job concerning factors- Monotonous nature of job, Unsafe and unhealthy working conditions, Lack of confidentiality, Crowding
 Extra-organizational factors- In today's modern and technology savvy world, stress has increased. Inflation, technological change, social responsibilities and rapid social changes are other extra-organizational factors causing stress.

Stress Management:

Stress management is the need of the hour. However hard we try to go beyond a stress situation, life seems to find new ways of stressing us out and plaguing us with anxiety attacks. Moreover, be it our anxiety, mind-body exhaustion or our erring attitudes, we tend to overlook causes of stress and the conditions triggered by those. In such unsettling moments we often forget that stressors, if not escapable, are fairly manageable and treatable.

Strategies for Managing Stress

Organizational strategies for managing stress are encouraging more of organizational communication with the employees so that there is no role ambiguity/conflict. Effective communication can also change employee views. Managers can use better signs and symbols which are not misinterpreted by the employees; Encourage employees' participation in decision-making. This will reduce role stress; Grant the employees greater independence, meaningful and timely feedback, and greater responsibility; the organizational goals should be realistic, stimulating and particular. The employees must be given feedback on how well they are heading towards these goals; Encourage decentralization; Have a fair and just distribution of incentives and salary structure; Promote job rotation and job enrichment; Create a just and safe working environment; Have effective hiring and orientation procedure; Appreciate the employees on accomplishing and over-exceeding their targets; Individual strategies for managing stress are The employees should make a "to-do" list daily, prioritize the acts in the list and plan the acts accordingly. Take regular breaks during work to relax you. By effective time management, the employees can achieve their targets timely and can meet work pressures and, thus, avoid stress; Do hard work. Strive to achieve your goals but do not do it to the harm of family, health, or peer; indulge in physical exercises. It helps in effective blood circulation, keeps you fit, diverts mind from work pressures; encourage a healthy lifestyle. Take a regular sleep, have plenty of water, have healthy eating habits. Promote relaxation techniques such as yoga, listening music and meditation; the employees should have optimistic approach about their work. They should avoid connections with negative approach employees; the employees should have emotional intelligence at workplace. They should have self-awareness, self-confidence and self-control at workplace; the employees should build social support. They should have close connections with trustworthy peer who can listen to their problems and boost their confidence level. This social network will help the employees to overcome stress; Employee counseling is a very good strategy to overcome employee stress. Through counseling, employees can become aware of their strengths and how to develop those strengths; their weaknesses and how to eliminate them; and they can develop strategies for changing their behaviour. Employees are also given career counseling which helps in reducing their ambiguities with regard to career; Find a fun way to release stress, such as, cracking jokes, playing tennis, golf, etc. and Do not remain reoccupied with yourself. Turn your focus outwards. Help others. This will release some stress.

Objectives

- To study the causes of stress among employees.
- To analyze the level of stress on employees.
- To study the effects of stress on the health of employees.
- To study the effect of stress on productivity of an organization.
- To study the effect of over load on the stress level of BPO employees.
- To analyze the importance of interventional strategies at organizational level to manage stress among BPO employees.
- To study the role of stress in interpersonal relationship.
- To study effectiveness of stress management programme organized by the BPO.

Rationale:

BPO, like other services, has become one of the highly competitive sectors in India. The BPO organizations, since the beginning of this decade, have been facing greater challenges in terms of technological revolution, service diversification and global BPO. This will lead to arising of stress among employees. The researcher chose this topic as a study because human resources are the most vital resource of every organization. The HR of organizations particularly BPO should be at ease while working. Any kind of stress/pressure directly affects their performance as well as performance of the organization. As the competition is increasing day by day, employee stress is also increasing. Every employee wants the luxurious life, high income, promotion etc. So there will be lots of burden on them to achieve work related targets. This will increase the stress among the employees. Every organization has strong competition with each other hence wants greater productivity with proper utilization of resource, high sale and high profit. The purpose behind the study is to find out the key factors responsible for creating the level of stress. In addition to this the researcher also wants to study the cause of stress and propose remedies to control stress among employees.

Review of Literature:

Dayo Akintayo (2012) found that working environment is significantly related to workers' morale and also working environment is significantly correlated with perceived workers' productivity. Dr. K. Chandrasekhar (2011) found that environmental factors are conducive to work and he also found that factors that affect attitude of employees to work are interpersonal relationships control over environment, shift, emotional factors, job assignment, overtime duty, extended work. L.S. Kang and R.S. Sandhu (2011) in their article said that Stress is an individual's state of mind in an encounter of a demanding situation or any constraint in the organization which s/he feels harmful or threatening for her/himself. Stress emerges from various energy sapping conditions in the working environment. According to Pratibha Garg (2010) Job or

occupational stress is mismatch between the individual capabilities and organizational demands. Employees often experience stress because of work overload, an expected work pace, difficult work schedules, role conflict, uncertainty regarding job security, poor interpersonal relationships and unpleasant working conditions. This stress manifests in conflict, depression, headaches, hypertension, alcoholism and other conditions. The organizations do not only lose money by paying medical bills but there is a loss of productivity. R Neelamegam and S Asrafi (2010) in their article said that Stress is a general term applied to the pressures felt in life. Stress at work is almost inevitable in many jobs. It has become a major buzzword and a legitimate concern of the time. According to N Kathirvel (2009) Stress is the reaction that people take due to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them. It arises when they worry that they cannot cope. Stress is a demand made upon the adaptive capacities of the mind and body. Kulkarni (2006) in an article Burnout said that rapid change of the modern working life is associated with increasing demands of learning new skills, need to adopt to new types of work, pressure of higher productivity and quality of work, time pressure and hectic jobs are increasing stress among the workforce. Further he added that privatization and globalization have ignited mergers, acquisitions and precarious employment. Anne Marie Berg et al^{**} in a study in 2006 of Norwegian police said that the prevalence of subjective health complaints was relatively high and was mainly associated to job pressure and lack of support. Males showed more depressive symptoms than females. All stress factors on frequency were positively associated to the burnout dimensions depersonalization and emotional exhaustion except work injuries. Sharma, Khara and Khandekar (2006) Computer Related Health Problems among Information Technology Professionals in Delhi – A publication in Indian Journal of Community Medicine in January 2006 found more on visual stress and muscular skeletal symptoms, initially being mild and temporary and later with increasing years assuming more intense and permanent nature. It also found that computer related morbidity had become an important occupational health problem and of great concern. It suggested an immediate need for the concerned authorities to collaborate and enforce suitable preventive measures. Barhem et al (2004) define stress as an extraordinary state affecting individual human functions as an outcome of internal and external factors which differ qualitatively (having different types of stressors) and quantitatively (having different numbers of stressors) from individual performance, due to individual differences. Cobb (1975) has the opinion that, “The responsibility load creates severe stress among workers and managers.” If the individual manager cannot cope with the increased responsibilities it may lead to several physical and psychological disorders among them. Brook (1973) reported that qualitative changes in the job create adjustment problem among employees. The interpersonal relationships within the department and between the departments create qualitative difficulties within the organization to a great extent.

Research Design:

The study was of explanatory innature. The sample size is 50. It was collected from the employees of various nationalized BPO situated in Indore. Data was collected through self-structured questionnaire. Books, internet web sites, journals etc were used as a source of secondary data. MS-Excel was used to list and store the data. Percentage Analysis method was used to analyze and interpret results and achieves research objectives.

Findings and Conclusion:

Most of the employees fear with the fact that lack quality in their work puts stress on them. It is found that maximum number of employees in BPO remains in stress. 50% employees feel that they are overloaded with work. 44% employees feel tensed due to their non-achievement of their target of work. 38% employees accepted that they will obey the order of their boss by sacrificing their important domestic function. It indicates fear and stress among employees. 24% employees feel stress due to their family related problems. It means such employees feel greater level of stress as compared to other employees. Half of the employees accepted that there is conflict among the employees. It is a concern for top management. Only 48% employees feel that strategies used by BPO to manage stress of employees are effective. Majority of the employees try to find solution to relieve them from stress. 50% employees use YOGA or other ways to relieve them from stress. In spite of stress, majority of the employees balance in their social life.

Suggestions:

As most of the employees feel that they feel stress at work, BPO should take positive steps to make their employees free from stress so that they can work with optimum efficiency and effectiveness. Employees of the BPO should be made free from not only fear of quality of performance but also from other types of fear generating in their minds. Guidance and counseling, quality consciousness awareness programs, psychological support can be provided to employees. The concept of five day week working can be implemented in BPO so that the employees can give more time to themselves and their family and discharge other social responsibilities. BPO should arrange YOGA camp, meditation camp, entertaining programs etc. The working environment should be made clean and safer. There should be proper work division in all departments. There should be friendly environment from colleagues and especially boss. Employees should try for quality of performance rather than fear from it.

Limitations of Study:

The time period for carrying out the research was short as a result of which many facts have been left unexplored. Lack of time and other resources as it was not possible to conduct survey at large level. 50 employees responded positively. The study is limited to the employees of selected branches of nationalized BPO of Indore district and therefore the findings of the study cannot be extended to other areas. During collection of the data many employees were unwilling to fill the questionnaire due to lack of time. Respondents were having a feeling of wastage of time for them. Convenience sampling has been used in the study and it has its own limitations. Personal bias of the respondents might have crept in while answering a few questions. Results of the study may not be generalized.

Scope for Further Studies:

Area of present study can be increased from district level to state level, national level, as well as international level; Sample size can be increased; Other demographic details can be added in the future research and Various other statistical tests can be used for comprehensive analysis & findings.

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Appendix Summary of Analysis of Results

Sl No	Statement	Response In %		
		Yes	No	Can't Say
1	Are You Satisfied With The Performance You Give At Your Work?	100	-	-
2	Do You Fear About The Quality Of Your Performance?	74	20	6
3	Do You Work More Than 8 Hours?	86	14	-
4	Do You Worry About Your Colleagues' Opinion About You?	42	52	6
5	Do You Feel Stress Sometimes?	55	22	23
6	Is Workload The Reason Of Your Stress ?	50	42	8
7	Do You Discuss Your Problem With Your Spouse Or Friend Or Any Other Person Close To You?	68	25	7
8	Do You Get Tensed At Non Achievement Of Your Target?	44	12	44
9	Is There Any Effect Of Work On Your Health?	65	33	2
10	Do You Plan Your Work Before Doing?	85	5	10
11	You Have An Important Function At Your Home And If Your Boss Asks For Over Time, Will You Agree?	38	30	32
12	Is There Any Conflict Among Employees?	48	32	20
13	Is The Conflict Resolved In Time?	88	2	10
14	Do Employees Support Each Other?	84	8	8
15	Are The Strategies Effective That Are Used By Your BPO To Manage Stress Of Employees?	48	18	34
16	Is Your Social Life Balanced?	66	22	12
17	Are You Stressed Because Of Your Family Problem?	24	64	12
18	Do You Try To Find Any Solution For The Problem Of Your Stress?	82	10	8
19	(IF YES) Do You Practice Yoga Or Use Any Therapy For Reducing Stress?	50	44	6
20	Do You Regularly Spend Time On Entertainment?	65	25	10