

A STUDY OF WORK LIFE BALANCE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO INDIAN CALL CENTER EMPLOYEES

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ABSTRACT

The increasing prevalence of work-life conflicts and increasing concern about work-life issues present both a challenge and opportunity for Human Resource (HR) professionals. Though work-life balance was initially construed as the concern for working mothers, now it has been recognized as a vital issue for all classes of employees. The Indian call centre industry characterized by long and odd working hours, heavy work pressures, demanding clients and pressing deadlines always brings stress for its employees. If the organization is lacking a supportive work culture, employee retention may become a challenge. The work life balance issues among Indian call centre employees in Delhi and NCR.

KEYWORD: Work life balance, stress, industry, society, Delhi and NCR.

INTRODUCTION

The 'New Economy' is broadly defined by the extension of information and communication technology (ICT or IT), particularly the Internet, to economic activity an economy where IT and related investment and new organisation of production drive up the productivity growth to exceptional levels (Freeman, 2002). The New Economy, considered to be created by the new computer chip, was heralded as a new industrial revolution equivalent to the great inventions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as electricity and the internal combustion engine (Gordon, 2000). It was an evolution of the developed countries from an industrial/manufacturing-based wealth-

producing economy into a service sector asset-based economy. This was mainly possible because of the new technology and globalisation. Globalisation worked both ways—it helped to diffuse the new technology, while the new technology also helped to further fuel globalisation. The net result has been more integrated markets including production, services, finance and to some extent, labour, across the world. The developing countries are slowly drawn into the net of a globalised world, with varying intensities of the use of the technology, which gives rise to the term 'New Economy'. In any event, IT and globalisation have changed the way labour markets function in both the developed and developing worlds. The advent of IT has shifted the demand for labour to

workers with skills to complement the new technologies (Freeman, 2002).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Srikant and Tyagi (2007) in their study have placed India at a strategic place in outsourcing market but say that ever growing rate of attrition is a hurdle for this sector. As given by them, an average Indian call center employee works with a company for 11 months where as an average call center employee stays in a company for three years. Friedman and Greenhaus (2000) emphasized that the working adults learn to build networks of support at home, at work, and in the community. Family- friends firms have a significant impact on the lives and careers of business professionals who work in them (Friedman and Greenhaus, 2000).

Rosabeth Moss Kanter's seminal book (1977), *Work and Family in the United States: A Critical Review and agenda for Research and Policy*, brought the issue of work-life balance to the forefront of research in organization. Initially, the issue typically focused on support for women and children. But very soon it came to be considered as less gender specific. Past research has focused on job satisfaction as well as work-life balance from a dispositional (Arvey, Bouchard, Segal and Abraham, 1989; Ilies and Judge, 2003; Staw and Ross, 1985), situational perspective or inter-actionist perspective. All perspectives have received support in literature. A study was conducted by Landauer, 1997, with focus on work- life programs with a number of clients (e.g., DuPont, Johnson and Johnson, Hoechst Celanese, IBM and others). At DuPont, for

example, employees who used the company's work-life programs were 45% more likely to agree strongly that they will 'go the extra mile' and are least likely to feel overwhelmed and burnt out. Work-life balance primarily affects five key areas: employee time saved; employee retention; increased motivation and productivity; absenteeism; and decreased health care costs and stress- related illnesses (Parus, 2000). Karatepe, Osman, and Mehmet (2006) found that work-family conflict increased emotional exhaustion and decreased job satisfaction among the front-line bank employees; this finding is in consonance with past research (Boles et al. 1997; Boles and Babin, 1996; Hyman and Summers, 2004; Babakus et al., 1999;).

Work-family conflict and emotional exhaustion are among the two critical variables that have adverse effects on job outcomes of front-line employees (Babakus et al., 1999, Boles et al., 1997, Netemeyer et al., 2004). A survey revealed that the pressure on employees to work longer hours under inflexible work schedules is ever increasing. The literature also suggests that lack of balance between work and non-work activities is related to reduce psychological and physical well-being. A study by Hughes and Boziones (2007) on bus drivers indicated that work-life imbalance was not only a source of concern but also that it was the major source of dissatisfaction for the participants. Furthermore, the participants made a clear connection between problems with work-life balance and withdrawal behaviors, including turnover and non-genuine sick absence.

ITES-BPO INDUSTRY IN INDIA

According to NASSCOM Indian ITES-BPO industry 2012 report, the year 2011-12 characterized a landmark year as aggregate revenue for the Indian IT-BPO sector is estimated to cross USD 101 billion. Continuing as the bastion for the sector, exports accounted for ~USD 69 billion, growing by 16.3 percent over the last fiscal year. Despite challenges in the global market conditions, India sustained its growth trajectory. For FY2013, the export revenues are expected to grow by 11- 14 per cent while the domestic revenues will grow by 13- 16 percent. The IT-BPO sector continues to be one of the largest employers in the country directly employing ~2.8 million professionals, with over 230,000 jobs being added in FY2012.

During this period, a large share of revenue (approximately 42%) and employment (approximately 45%) is estimated to be generated in the customer care services such as Call Centers. (Source: NASSCOM, 2011- 12) India's fundamental advantages- abundant talent and cost- are sustainable over the long term. With a young demographic profile, where over 3.5 million graduates and postgraduates are added annually to the talent base, no other country offers a similar mix and scale of human resource. India enjoys a cost advantage of around 60-70% as compared to source markets. Additional productivity improvements and the development of tier 2/3 cities as future delivery centers, is expected to enhance India's cost competitiveness.

In the ITES sector, the Front Line Employees (FLEs) are the principle interface between service providers and customers in many firms and play a significant role in influencing customer satisfaction. The role demands routine, scripted interactions that are continuously and automatically distributed to them by the technology. These interactions occur under an extreme emotional demand of reconciling the need to maintain a friendly manner with customers with the strict job demands of meeting call centre quotas. Such conditions generate highly demanding, repetitive and stressful work roles as well as complex physiological, psychological and socio-cultural challenges for the employees.

HR PRACTICES AT BPOS

The prime objective of HRD is to unleash the unlimited potential of employees and to develop that potential by appropriate and systematic efforts (Selvi, 2012) HR department has begun to understand the issues faced by women now. Day care facilities for their kids, recreational activities, paid maternity leaves, provision for short leaves etc. have been initiated by the HR managers. Though these practices resolve this problem only at the face (Pathak and Sarin, 2011).Budhwaret. al.(2007) opine that almost all BPO units follow their written HR strategies. The objectives of the department remain

- a) accurate 'recruitment' wherein they look for people having excellent communication, technical and problem solving skills,

- b) providing 'fair compensation which depends on grade, previous work experience, skills of employees,
- c) conducting 'performance appraisal' on the basis of how well an employee performed,
- d) giving 'training' required for performing a job like soft skills, basic software knowledge etc. and
- e) ensuring 'retention' by addressing key problem areas of BPOs like bureaucratic work settings, monotonous jobs, lack of growth opportunities etc. Practices followed by HR departments in Indian BPOs are setting benchmark for even developed nations, as they keep improvising their performance appraisal and career development programs. MNCs in India are adopting similar talent retention strategies as that of their western counterparts (Stumpf, Doh and Tymon, 2010).

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

the highly competitive global scenario, society and organizations are filled with conflicting commitment and responsibilities. Hence, work-life balance has become an important issue at workplace. This is further fuelled by the renewed interest in the personal life and family values. Work-life balance is a state of equilibrium in which the demands of both a person's job and personal life are equal. Over the years, there is a growing perception that the quality of an employee's personal life and family life impacts work quality and that it makes business sense to promote work and family

integration (Lockwood, 2003). A conflict between work and family has real consequences and negatively affects the quality of family and career attainment of both men and women.

IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION

Globalization is a process of interaction and integration among the people, companies, and governments of different nations, a process driven by international trade and investment and aided by information technology. This process has effects on the environment, on culture, on political systems, on economic development and prosperity, and on human physical wellbeing in societies around the world. India has enormous opportunities emerging from globalization and consequent lowering of tariff barriers. Information Technology has given India formidable brand equity in the global markets. Indian BPO companies have a unique distinction of providing efficient business solutions with cost and quality as an advantage by using state of art technology. Through joint efforts of Government and the Industry, software development and IT enabled services have emerged as niche opportunities for India in the global context. The Government has been making continuous efforts to make India a front-runner in the age of Information revolution

CONCLUSION

Work-life programs have the potential to significantly improve employee morale, reduce absenteeism, and retain organizational knowledge particularly during the difficult economic times. In

today's global marketplace, as ITES firms aim to reduce cost, it is necessary to understand the critical issue of work-life balance and to champion work-life programs. This would offer a win-win situation for employers and employees.

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