

A Study of Work Life Balance with Special Reference to Indian Call Center Employees

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ABSTRACT

In today's fast paced times, 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.

This paper presents the results of a study undertaken to understand the work life balance issues among Indian call centre employees. A sample of 200 employees was taken from 10 call centers in Delhi and NCR. Primary data was collected through questionnaire survey and analyzed with the help of various statistical tools such as Z-test and Independent T test. The findings of the study may have further implications for industry and society.

Keywords: Work life balance, stress, burnout, job satisfaction

I. INTRODUCTION

The current global economy is significantly complex and interlinked. While China has emerged as the factory of the world, India has become the service hub. The IT-BPO industry in India has become a growth engine for the Indian economy, contributing substantially to increases in GDP, urban employment and exports, to achieve the vision of a 'young and resilient India'.

II. 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.

III. WORK-LIFE BALANCE

In 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.

IV. 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 well-being 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

Table 1: Position of Indian BPOs among the Worlds Fifty Best Managed BPO Vendors

1	IBM Global / Daksh*	26	Getronics
2	Accenture	27	Covansys
3	Hewlett Packard	28	Syntel
4	Mphasis*	29	Ceridian
5	Ernst & Young/Capgemini	30	Spherion
6	Wipro Spectramind*	31	ADP
7	ICICI OneSource*	32	i-flex*
8	eFunds Global Outsourcing	33	Tata Consultancy Services*
9	Convergys	34	General Electric
10	Affiliated Computer Systems	35	Siemens Business Services
11	Sutherland Technologies	36	Atos Origin Intl B.V.
12	Oracle	37	InfoCrossing
13	Hewitt/Exult	38	Datamatics
14	HCL Technologies*	39	Outsourced Partners Intl*
15	Xansa	40	TechBooks
16	CSC	41	IGate*
17	Unisys	42	Office Tiger
18	Keane	43	Perot
19	Satyam*	44	EDS
20	CGI	45	Patni Computer*
21	Cognizant*	46	Gevity HR
22	24/7 Customer*	47	Vcustomer*
23	Intelligroup*	48	SourceNet Solutions
24	Northrop Grumman IT	49	WNS Global
25	Infosys*	50	Deloitte

*Indian vendors.

V. SWOT ANALYSIS OF INDIAN ITES SECTOR

Strengths

- Highly skilled, English-speaking workforce
- Abundant manpower
- Cheaper workforce than their western counterparts. According to NASSCOM, the wage difference is as high as 70-80 percent when compared to their western parts.
- Lower attrition rates than in the west.
- Dedicated workforce.
- Round-the-clock advantage for western companies due to the huge time difference.
- Lower response time with efficient and effective service
- Operational excellence
- Conducive business environment

Weaknesses

- Recent months have seen a rise in the level of attrition rates among outsourcing workers who are quitting their jobs to pursue higher studies. Of late workers have shown a tendency not to pursue BPO as a full-time career.
- The cost of telecom and network infrastructure is much higher in India than in the US.
- Local infrastructure
- Political influence

Opportunities

- To work closely with associations like NASSCOM to portray India as the most favored BPO destination in the world.
- India can be branded as a quality outsourcing destination.

Threats

- The anti-outsourcing legislation in the US state of New Jersey. Three more states in the United States are planning legislation against outsourcing Connecticut, Missouri and Wisconsin.
- Workers in British Telecom have protested against outsourcing of work to Indian BPO companies.
- Other BPO destinations such as China, Philippines and South Africa could have an edge on the cost factor.

The major threat to the Indian BPO industry is generally seen as one of resistance in the developed world to jobs shifting to countries such as India. According to an Economic Times Intelligence Group study, ET Knowledge Series, call centers account for almost 65 to 70 percent of the Indian BPO industry in terms of revenues and numbers. And herein lays the problem, as most of the growth has been at the lower end of the skill pyramid.

Indeed, according to observers, dissatisfaction with the quality of manpower in India in relatively less-skilled services could result in an immediate flight of jobs should even a slight price differential happen. Examples quoted are shoe manufacturer Nike, which moved from South Korea to Malaysia and then to Indonesia. Recently, Lehman Brothers decided to take back its internal computer help desk, which had been outsourced to Indian IT major Wipro, due to dissatisfaction with the skills offered in India.

The writing is for all to see - that no resting place is permanent. Each is determined by cost effectiveness as well as a motivated workforce. India must guard its lead, which is the essence of globalization. These are some of the issues that need to be examined. The prescription is twofold - re-training call center executives adequately to retain the current business, as well as moving up the value chain in terms of the quality of jobs outsourced.

VI. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In view of the substantial contribution of the ITES-BPO industry in the global economy, a number of studies have been conducted and documented over the past few years. 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 UK 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 (Hackman and Oldham, 1975; Loher, Noe, Moeller and Fitzgerald, 1985) 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 (Landauer, 1997). 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; Low *et al.*, 2001). 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 (Department of Trade and Industry, 2002). The literature also suggests that lack of balance between work and non-work activities is related to reduce psychological and physical well-being (Sparks *et al.*, 1997; Frone *et al.*, 1997; Thomas and Ganster, 1995; Martens *et al.*, 1999).

A study by Hughes and Bozzoneles (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.

According to Okpara (2004), job satisfaction in the IT sector can be predicted from personal variables, but not all variables contribute to the same degree of satisfaction as in earlier studies (Bigic, 1998; Brief and Aldag, 1975; Weaver, 1977). The findings of this study did not reveal clear gender differences in overall job satisfaction.

Studies related to gender and job satisfaction have reported inconsistent results. Studies indicating higher job satisfaction among women argue that women, compared to men, have lower expectations of the benefits they could receive from the labor market (Clark, 1997). On the other hand, other studies have shown that professional men have more job satisfaction than professional women (Chiu, 1998).

A recent study by Mishra, Chandargi and Hirevenkanagoudar (2007) of agriculture extension officers corroborated this study where the male officers had greater job satisfaction than the female officers. When work does not permit women to take care of their family, they feel frustrated. They draw tighter boundaries between work and family. A study by Valentine (2001) showed men perceive greater job responsibility in comparison to women. Research also shows that younger workers are consistently less satisfied with their jobs than older workers (Hall, 1994; Schultz, 1973).

Sharma (2007) has linked employee retention with a successful marriage. In both the relations it is important to maintain trust and faith, proper communication, feedback and motivation. Batra (2006) has also emphasized upon taking human capital building and sustaining as a major challenge for most of the BPO companies and as per him the solution lies in People-Capability Maturity Model (People-CMM) developed by the Software Engineering Institute, USA.

VII. GAP ANALYSIS

Rapidly increasing attrition rates in Indian call centers have troubled the organizations in this sector and many researchers are working upon to find solutions for this problem. Various studies have been conducted in the past few years on job satisfaction and retention management in ITES industry. Some of them have focused upon creating awareness for high attrition rates in Indian ITES sector and few of them have suggested certain models or strategies to overcome this problem.

However, this problem is just a tip of the iceberg. The issue is a deeper one related to the overall Quality of Work Life and Work Life Balance in call centers. The few studies that have touched on this issue are also done basically in the western context. Their applicability in the Indian context needs to be explored.

Also, though a few studies have been conducted comparing gender differences in job satisfaction levels,

there is hardly any research on the different challenges faced by male and female employees with respect to work life balance in Indian call centers.

There is also a dearth of comprehensive studies linking odd working hours and work life balance in call centers.

After a comprehensive review of literature, it was found that there are very few studies which are addressing these very crucial issue pertaining to work life balance in call centers.

VIII. NEED OF THE PROPOSED STUDY

Human capital is the most crucial resource on which the ITES industry in India depends. Repetitive low-end jobs, physical and psychological problems and few career growth opportunities are some of the typical problems faced by the employees in BPO sector in general and call centers in particular.

Work is indeed important for people. However, the primary group of any person is family. He works to achieve a sense of job satisfaction as well as to satisfy personal and family needs. Lack of gratification of any of these needs will result in de-motivation and dismay. Also, high demands from the organization and the customers that one serves result in stress and burnout. In the light of the above review of literature, it seems relevant to examine the issues related to work life balance of employees serving in call centers.

A comprehensive review of literature also suggests that men generally have work as a central theme in their lives as compared to women. Their primary source of satisfaction is doing well in their jobs and progress in their careers. It seems relevant to study whether this observation is true or not with respect to Indian call centers through a comparative analysis of challenges faced by male and female employees with respect to work life balance.

The nature of job in call centers is such that it is difficult to strike a balance between work and life. The jobs are 24x7, thus people may find it difficult to balance work and family and to network with the community. In this context, the proposed study aims to do a comparative analysis of challenges faced by day and night shift employees with respect to work life balance.

The proposed study aims to examine all these issues in detail.

IX. OBJECTIVES OF THE PROPOSED STUDY

1. To examine the varied and often complex problems of employees working in call centers.
2. To study the effect of these problems on the work life balance of employees.

3. To do a comparative study of challenges faced by male and female employees.
4. To do a comparative study of challenges faced by day and night shift employee

X. HYPOTHESIS OF THE PROPOSED STUDY

Null hypotheses were framed and tested for significance to prove the objectives in a systematic manner. The null hypotheses were as follows:

Ho1: There is no significant impact of nature of job on work life balance with respect to call center employees.

Ho2: Male and female employees perceive different challenges with respect to work life balance.

Ho3: Day and night shift employees perceive different challenges with respect to work life balance.

XI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used **exploratory research** to examine the issues related to work life balance of employees working in call centers.

Sample Design

Sample Size= 200

10 call centers were selected from Delhi and National Capital Region using **Convenience Sampling**.⁽ⁱ⁾

20 respondents were selected from each of these 10 identified call centers using **Stratified Sampling** (Total no. of respondents=200). Out of the 20 respondents in each call centre, 3 respondents were from the managerial cadre (1 Team Leader, 1 Manager and 1 senior manager) and 17 from the Executive/ Advisor cadre.⁽ⁱⁱ⁾

Efforts were made to select equal number of male and female employees.

XII. TOOLS FOR DATA COLLECTION

Both primary and secondary data were used in the study.

PRIMARY DATA: To obtain the primary data, a survey was conducted among the call centre employees through a structured questionnaire. The respondents were asked to rate different items using a 5-point **Likert Scale** where 5 indicates Strongly Agree while 1 represents Strongly Disagree. The questionnaire covered questions related to the following issues:

(i) Physiological/ Health Issues: This covered questions pertaining to Sleeping Disorders, Digestive System Related disorders, Headaches, Eyestrain, Hearing problems, Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) and other related issues.

(ii) Psychological Issues: This covered questions pertaining to Stress and its probable causes, Depression, Broken relationships, Multiple Personality Disorders (MPD) etc.

(iii) Socio- Cultural Issues: This focused on Gender and Family, Impact on culture, Racial and Cultural abuse and Social Divisions.

(iv) Family Issues: This covered questions pertaining to spouse support, child care responsibilities and care of elderly.

(iv) HR issues: This section covered questions pertaining to Company Culture, Job Content. Training and Development prospects, Salary and Compensation, Appraisal System, Absenteeism and Turnover, Discipline and Behavior issues, Growth Prospects and Relationship with Superiors and Peers.

The questionnaire was administered through electronic mail and personal delivery. The reliability of the questionnaire was measured using **Cronbach's Alpha**, which shows an estimate of 0.7 thus assuring the data reliability.

SECONDARY DATA: Secondary sources were also used to understand and identify the challenges with respect to work-life balance and impact of globalization on Indian call centre employees.

Data Analysis

Data was entered and analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 13.0. Two different statistical tools applied to test the hypotheses were:

Z-test

was used to test **Ho1**

Independent sample t-test test was used for analysis of **Ho2** and **Ho3** because the data collected was further sampled as of two different populations i.e., female and male call centre employees (Ho2) and day and night shift employees (Ho3). Having met the test assumptions, it allows to significantly comparing the means of two sample groups to test the research hypotheses.

XIII. RESEARCH FINDINGS

(a) Ho1: There is no significant impact of nature of job on work life balance with respect to call center employees.

To test this hypothesis, z-test was used. On applying the formula of z-test, the null hypothesis was found to be rejected at 0.05 level of significance. The result of hypothesis testing by z-test is shown in table 2. It shows that there is significant impact of nature of job on work life balance of call center employees. They have to deal with demanding customers and solve their myriad problems. Some of them reported the feeling of getting 'sandwiched' between their personal and work demands.

Table2: Result of hypotheses testing (Ho1) by z-test

S. N.	Statement	Calculated value of z	Result
H01	No significant impact of nature of job on work-life balance with respect to call center employees.	2.212	H01 rejected

(b) **Ho2:** Male and female employees perceive different challenges with respect to work life balance

The mean value of female employees (4.12) is more than male employees (2.83). The difference in mean values is statistically significant. Thus we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a difference in the work life balance of male and female call centre employees.

(c) **Ho3:** Day and night shift employees perceive different challenges with respect to work life balance

Detailed analysis of the data revealed that employees working in day shift have more work life balance (3.26) in comparison to employees working in night shift (3.05). This difference is not significant as the significance level is $0.614 > \alpha 0.05$. Thus we do not reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is no difference in the work life balance of day and night shift call centre employees.

XIV. CONTRIBUTION/RATIONALE OF THE PROPOSED STUDY

- **Contribution to Employees:**
It is primarily the responsibility of an individual to balance work and life and initiate steps to reduce stress and burnout. The proposed study would help the individual employee to explore his/ her values, aspirations and goals to understand what does he/she expects from work and life and then develop the suitable ways of balancing work and life. It would help him to negotiate his roles within the organization and family. It would enable him to introspect on his job, ways of coping and relationship management. Also, in the context of impact of globalization over the long term sustainability of call centers, the employees would be motivated to learn and master alternative skills and competence.
- **Contribution to the Organization/ Firm:**
The study would be doing a meaningful contribution to the concerned organization as job satisfaction and work life balance are related to organizational performance. Firms that fail to secure a loyal base of workers constantly place an inexperienced group of non-cohesive units on the front lines of their organizations much to their detriment. This is

especially the case in service industries, where confused and disgruntled workers often create large numbers of dissatisfied customers.

Through its focus on work life balance as well as issues related to global sustainability, the study would also enable the organizations to address another major challenge- Talent Management. This would in turn help in reducing attrition rates and improve organizational productivity.

- **Contribution to the Industry:**
Considering the significant contribution made by call centers or the ITES industry in the global economy in general and the Indian economy in particular, a major concern that emerges is that usually, nobody has really taken it as a “career choice”. Working in call centers is still considered by many as a “Pass Time” or “Time Gap Employment”. If a mature industry has to evolve, the picture needs to be changed wherein it becomes the “Choice Industry” just like its software counterpart. The proposed study aims to contribute in this direction as well.
- **Contribution to Human Resource Management:**
HR activities should recognize career stages and assist employees with the development tasks they face at each stage. The proposed study would help the HR professionals in call centers in formulating suitable strategies to preserve their assets i.e. employees. It would enable them to guide the youngsters in structuring their careers as well as maintaining a fine balance between work and family.
- **Contribution to Government and Policy Makers:**
In view of the tremendous potential of the ITES industry towards the economic growth, employment generation and improved quality of living of a country, it becomes imperative for the government and policy makers to give this burning issue a serious thought as well as formulate suitable policies for the further growth of this sector.
- **Contribution to Body of Knowledge:**
The study aims to fill in the existing gap in research done in the ITES sector. It studied issues related to work life balance, gender differences as well as differences in day and night shifts. However, work life balance, job satisfaction, stress etc. are very broad issues and need to be explored in greater depth and in different contexts. They have multiple consequences both for the individual as well as the organization.
The study was conducted in call centers which is a high-tech service industry. However, it is not clear how these issues would be addressed in the manufacturing organizations. This is one area which could be the topic for further research.
One of the limitations of the proposed study could be that all respondents were from Delhi and neighboring areas, thus there may be a problem of generalization and bias. Similar researches can be undertaken nationally as well as internationally.

XV. 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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