Investigating Factors Creating Job Stress With special focus on call centre employees

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Abstract - This study investigated the reasons of Stress in relation to their job experience in call centre. The objective of this article is to investigate the sources of stress among the employees in relation to their job experience. Target population is 500 call centre employees. A stratified random sampling technique used. Data is collected using both close ended questionnaires, 20 stress related items are included in questionnaire. The findings of the study reveal the sources of stress in call centres. This study also recommended few techniques to overcome with it. It's the researchers wish that this article will benefit both the call centres and their employees to reduce the level of stress.

Keywords: Call Centres, Sources of Stress, remedies to reduce stress.
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INTRODUCTION

An organization is a social unit of people that is structured and managed to meet a need or to pursue collective goals. All organizations have a management structure that determines relationships between the different activities and the members, and subdivides and assigns roles, responsibilities, and authority to carry out different tasks. Organizations are open systems--they affect and are affected by their environment.

Stress has existed throughout the evolution. Millions of trials and errors in the life process have brought men to this stage. Coping with events to survive has led men to invent extraordinary technologies, beginning with a piece of sharpened stone.

The word 'stress' is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as "a state of affair involving demand on physical or mental energy". A condition or circumstance (not always adverse), which can disturb the normal physical and mental health of an individual. 'Stress' is 'relative' in nature. Extreme stress conditions, psychologists say, are detrimental to human health but in moderation stress is normal and, in many cases, proves useful. Stress, nonetheless, is synonymous with negative conditions. Today, with the rapid diversification of human activity, we come face to face with numerous causes of stress and the symptoms of stress and depression.

When an individual is assigned an organizational role, he strives to be effective. For this he not only respond to other' expectation from the job, but also creates such expectations for himself/herself. In this process, some individual perceives abundance of resources in the organization as well as in them; they feel elevated in utilizing organizational and personal resources. On the other hand, some other individuals in the same job may perceive inadequacy, both in organizational and personal resources, for meeting the expectations of their role. The various roles may create stress because they are in conflict with each other, or with the employee's own needs, values, motives or abilities. Stress may affect individuals differently even though they may be dealing with identical problems because they differ in their abilities, motives, needs and the personality as a whole. The managers from the top level, down to the first line supervisors experience stress, but of a varying nature and they respond in a different manner.

Call centre industry in general exhibit certain unique characteristics of its own which make it different from other industries. An office set up to handle a large volume of telephone calls, esp. for taking orders and providing customer services.

A **call centre** is a centralized office used for the purpose of receiving or transmitting a large volume of requests by telephone. An inbound call centre is operated by a company to administer incoming product support or information inquiries from consumers. Outbound call centres are operated for telemarketing, solicitation of charitable or political donations and debt collection. In addition to a call centre, collective handling of letters, faxes, live chat, and e-mails at one location is known as a **contact centre**. A call centre is operated through an extensive open workspace for call centre agents, with work stations that include a computer for each agent, a telephone set/headset connected to a telecom switch, and one or more supervisor stations.

Call centre staff are often organized into a multi-tier support system for more efficient handling of calls. The first tier consists of operators, who initially answer calls and provide general information. If a caller requires more assistance, the call is forwarded to the second tier (in the appropriate department depending on the nature of the call). In some cases, there are three or more tiers of support staff. Typically the third tier of support is formed of product engineers/developers or highly skilled technical support staff for the product.

The call centre employees have criticisms regarding various things like; Close scrutiny by management (e.g. frequent random call monitoring), Low compensation (pay and bonuses), Restrictive working practices (some operators are required to follow a pre-written script), High stress: a common problem associated with front-end jobs where employees deal directly with customers, Repetitive job task, Poor working conditions (e.g. poor facilities, poor maintenance and cleaning, cramped working conditions, management interference, lack of privacy and noisy), Impaired vision and hearing problems, Rude and abusive customers

LITERATURE REVIEW

Armour (2003) and Slobogin (2001) studied that stress is created as people try to balance their work and family responsibilities. As both are equally important and when a person has to choose one of them, they get confused and come under stress.

Brown (2001) studied that organizations should invest in wellness programs. These programs focus on the employees' total physical and mental conditions and generated good returns and benefits to the organization.

Sekaran (1989) studied that characteristics of the job can be designed to match the individual needs, personality characteristics and expectations associated with the job. The issue of job design is important because the ways in which jobs are structured designed and controlled have direct impact on employee's performance, their job involvement and job satisfaction.

Mohsin (2013) has highlighted the various factors that cause stress for call center employees. He explained as the industry matures, certain human resource policies have evolved to overcome these issues. Many organizations have increased rest periods and have started providing training to their employees to manage rude and abusive customers. He analyzed that as the turnover rate increases, the organizations in the industry have increasingly realized that they have to come up with practical solutions to overcome these issues, otherwise, they will not only lose employees but business also.

Sharma, M., Raina, R.L., Sharma, R., Tiwari, A.K., (2001) studied the job stress of call center employees at Uttarakhand and highlighted the hidden stressors among them. The study concluded that the work situation has the prospective where talents are rewarded, societal association is formed and significant professional ambitions are met. This study also recommended strategies to reduce stress at organizational levels.

Hwang and Wang (2011) explored organizational employee perceptions of Human Resource Management ethical issues by measuring employee perceptions of HRM systems, job satisfaction and organizational loyalty following the privatization of the telecommunication industry in Taiwan. The findings reveal that changes in the management environment of the telecommunication industry have resulted in adjustments and transformations of employee perception regarding HRM ethical issues and actions. The study also found that job satisfaction is positively related to organization loyalty.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

"To find out the factors that generate Job stress in the call centers and suggest techniques to overcome it."

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- Research Design: Exploratory Research
- Sample Size: 500
- Sampling Technique: Convenience method of probability technique.
- Study Area: Rajasthan
- Data Type: Primary
- Research Instrument: Questionnaire (Reliability tested using Cronbach alpha, found to be 0.84 at 1% level of significance).

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The data collected from respondents on four point Likert's scale related to various stress factors is tabulated in Excel. The data is shown below:

Agreements of respondents on 1 to 6 stress questions of the questionnaire

Agreement	Better job is done if given more time	Not satisfied with job	Frequent arguments with colleagues	Feel little control over work	Nature of work is Repetitive	Feel overloaded with deadlines or work
Strongly Agree	240 (52.86)	192 (42.29)	181 (39.87)	246 (54.18)	254 (55.95)	229 (50.44)
Agree	144 (31.72)	177 (38.99)	205 (45.15)	155 (34.14)	140 (30.84)	184 (40.53)
Disagree	48 (10.57)	64 (14.10)	40 (8.81)	26 (5.73)	28 (6.17)	35 (7.71)

Strongly Agree	22 (4.84)	21 (4.62)	28 (6.17)	27 (5.95)	32 (7.05)	6 (1.32)
TOTAL	**454 (100)**	**454 (100)**	**454 (100)**	**454 (100)**	**454 (100)**	**454 (100)**

Agreement	Number of holidays are less	Unaware about opportunities exist for me	Call Volume is Very High	Feel Discriminated	Job interfere with family & social life	Job no longer challenges me
Strongly Agree	111 (24.45)	168 (37.00)	95 (20.92)	51 (11.23)	215 (47.36)	196 (43.17)
Agree	182 (40.09)	152 (33.48)	181 (39.87)	178 (39.21)	211 (46.47)	172 (37.88)
Disagree	132 (29.07)	105 (23.13)	115 (25.33)	190 (41.85)	24 (5.29)	59 (12.99)
Strongly Agree	29 (6.39)	29 (6.39)	63 (13.88)	35 (7.71)	4 (0.88)	27 (5.95)
TOTAL	**454 (100)**	**454 (100)**	**454 (100)**	**454 (100)**	**454 (100)**	**454 (100)**

Agreement	Worried about job security	Feel Disturbed	Usually Required to do overtime	Get angry and irritated easily	Unclear about job responsibility
Strongly Agree	**192 (42.29)**	**88 (19.38)**	**76 (16.74)**	**186 (40.97)**	**102 (22.47)**
Agree	**215 (47.36)**	**139 (30.62)**	**170 (37.44)**	**172 (37.88)**	**146 (32.16)**
Disagree	**35 (7.71)**	**208 (45.81)**	**154 (33.92)**	**71 (15.64)**	**137 (30.18)**
Strongly Agree	**12 (2.64)**	**19 (4.18)**	**54 (11.89)**	**25 (5.50)**	**69 (15.20)**
TOTAL	**454 (100)**	**454 (100)**	**454 (100)**	**454 (100)**	**454 (100)**

Agreement	Not fully qualified for job	Not accepted and liked at workplace	Quantity of work affect quality of work
Strongly Agree	78 (17.18)	68 (14.98)	228 (50.22)
Agree	96 (21.14)	95 (20.92)	185 (40.75)
Disagree	179 (39.43)	204 (44.93)	29 (6.39)
Strongly Agree	101 (22.25)	87 (19.16)	12 (2.64)
TOTAL	**454 (100)**	**454 (100)**	**454 (100)**

Bracket represents percentage

These tables (5.6, 5.7, 5.8, and 5.9) represent the distribution of whole sample among all the stress questions and from this it is can be interpreted that some stress items creates more stress than others like 50.22% respondents are strongly agree with the fact that "quantity of work effect quality of work" similarly (52.86%) of them feel that they can perform better if more time given to them to handle the customer on phone. 47.36% of respondents are very much concern about job security and 40.97 % says that they become angry and irritated very easily or frequently. 47.36% respondents are strongly agree with the stress item " job interferes family and social life", 43.17% says that their job no longer challenge them as they have to either receive or dial the calls throughout the day. 54.18% respondents are agree with the fact that they feel little control over work. 50.44% of them are strongly agree with the stress item "feel overloaded with deadlines and work", even 42.29% of them are also strongly agree with the statement that they are not satisfied with their job. So, these all are the main stress items in the call centre, according to survey. Other stress factors included in survey were also found creating stress but of moderate level which motivate the employees to increase their performance and productivity.

FINDINGS

On the basis of data collected from respondents, the following factors originated as a source of job stress among call centre employees:

- **Time Boundation:** Call centre employees have a time limit in which they have to complete their call to resolve the query of the caller on the telephone, if they exceed the time, it create an impact on their performance rating, because of this time limitation in solving the customer problem, employee feels strained and even not able to respond the customer properly.

- **Job Satisfaction**: Job satisfaction is very important to make an employee happy and motivates him to work more efficiently and effectively, if there is no satisfaction an employee feel demotivated and doesn't like to work, which will cause stress. In call centre, working environment is good but there are many factors like; low salary, slow appraisal, monthly performance reports, low chances of career growth, no utilization of academic and technical skills etc. which make these employees dissatisfied with their work and this directly leads them to stress.

- **Repetitive Nature of work:** In call centre, work of a customer care executive is either to make promotional calls for different companies to customers or to receive the telephonic call and resolve the query, this make them feel bored and apathetic and this non-stop continuously dialing or receiving the calls make them feel stressed.

- **Heavy Work Pressure/ high call volume:** The volume of calls are very high in the call centre and employees are given daily targets of receiving and dialing the calls, the breaks are very small and time bounded, even to go to washroom they need to request their colleagues to sit on their place and receive the calls. There is hardly any relief between two calls. This level of work pressure also generates stress among the call centre employees.

- **Fewer Holidays**: There are very few holidays for call centre employees as these companies provide support services to various companies; they need to work 365 days and hence their employees also. Sometimes they have to work on Indian festivals also and if a person is working in international call centre then he will be able to take holidays according to the country for which his company is working.

- **Job Interfering with Family and Social Life:** As discussed above, employees working in call centre have less number of holidays, high work pressure, many times required to do overtime and this interfere their family and social life, which generates stress because every human is a social person, he needs acceptance, love and affection from society.

- **Job Insecurity:** High work pressure, high supervision and frequent performance rating, makes this job insecure because a single wrong handling of call can make them loose the job. This insecurity generates high level of job stress among call centre employees.

- **Lots of Overtime:** In call centre as work pressure is very high, even working on holidays, most of the time they are required to do overtime, though companies inspire overtime with incentives, this is a major reason for stress in employees. Overtime, along with long working hours, is turning out to be a strong combination of stress among call centre employees.

- **High Supervision:** Customer care executives in call centre are monitored very closely by their supervisor, their small breaks even for washroom, and way of conversation on calls every minute activity of employees is observed, which can easily irritate any person, hence high degree of supervision also generates high level of job stress.

SUGGESTIONS AS PER FINDINGS

On the basis of the findings and discussion presented above, suggestions to reduce job stress are as follow:

- **Meditation:** meditation is another type of strategy that reduces the tension to cope with work- life balance. It helps to prioritize the work or activities that a person has to do in multitasking. Proper prioritizing helps to reduce the stress.

- **Time Management:** it helps an employee to do the activities at proper time in good quality. Every person whether a male or female has to perform different roles, which are equally important. To maintain quality in different roles, everyone has to maintain a good time management. Therefore, it helps a person to list the important activities and fix different times for each activity according to its importance

- **Recreations:** recreation is the most important strategy that is used to reduce the stress. Occasional family outings could help strengthen family relationship. This is also applicable at the workplace. A trip with the colleagues in the office will help to decrease the tension existing in the work atmospheres.

- **Length and Frequency of Breaks**: time and frequency of breaks should be adequate, so that employee can feel relaxed.

- **Full time Counselor**: As study shows that employees working in call centre are under high job stress, so, these companies should hire a full time counselor who can help employees to make a balance between mental and physical rhythm and can counsel them the ways through which employee can reduce stress.

- **Increase Number of Holidays:** It is very important to balance between professional and social life, and that is possible only when a person would get time for it. Call centre companies must give holidays on Indian festivals and try to compensate their overtime in terms of extra leave for them, so that employee will not mind to do overtime.
- Ensure all employees know about job stress and train them to identify the symptoms of stress themselves.
- Provide training for workers covering behaviour management and telephone call handling skills to deal with difficult customer behaviour.
- Frequently evaluate workload, demand and overtime.
- Allow the employee to choose their own method, pattern to handle the call and pace of work.
- **Performance Linked with Rewards**: As there are weekly or frequent performance judgements, the performance the employees must be linked with some reward. Reward could be monitory or just small gifts or praise in front of whole staff. It increases the morale of employee and motivates him to do perform better.
- **Employee Involvement:** Involve the employees in risk assessment process, for example in identification of causes of work-place stress and suggestions to resolve them. Even involve them in change management process also.
- **Goal Setting:** Individual perform better when they have specific and challenging goals and they receive feedback on how well they are performing to reach those goals. Goal settings reduce stress and provide motivation. It reduces employee frustration and stress.
- **Collateral Programmes:** These types of programmes are specifically created to help employees deal with stress like health promotion plans, career development programmes, stress handling programmes, counselling etc.
- **Job Enrichment:** A major source of stress is the monotonous and disinteresting job. Through more rational designing of jobs, job can be enriched. Improving job contents like responsibility, recognition, opportunity for achievement, chances for advancement or changing core job features such as skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, feeling sense of responsibility and utilising maximum capability at work, reduces job stress.

CONCLUSION

This research endeavor allows for a greater understanding of the complexity of the topic. Stress is still a major issue of concern in BPO industry. Research findings shows that there are several reasons of stress due to imbalance between the demands of the surrounding and the individual's abilities, this misfit can be corrected, as per the circumstances, either by adjusting outside stresses to fit the individual or by creating the individual's ability to cope, or both. Since stress is a multifaceted phenomenon, no single solution is available. Furthermore, each stress case is different from other and it is impossible to provide a unique solution for its management. In general, and irrespective of its differences, most of the researchers conclude that the ideal solution to resolve stress is to prevent its occurrence.

The attrition rate of this industry can be reduced with the help of proper stress management techniques. As the industry provides lots of employment opportunities to our young literate generation, focus should be on urgent basis, some suggestions are also provided in this thesis also to motivate and to reduce stress of the call centre employees.

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