Organizational Role Efficacy in Indian BPO Industry with Reference to Women Human Resource

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Abstract—*The BPO industry in Indian has experienced exponential growth over the last few years. It has surfaced as the singular most popular industry offering entry to the corporate world at graduate level to students from both professionals as well as non professional education backgrounds. The work force of the BPO industry is comparatively young, and, a greater part is constituted by women human resource. However, as this highly paid industry offers a lucrative career option, job dissatisfaction amongst the employees, particularly women, who have an extra mile to go in establishing work life balance, than their male counterparts, is also on the rise. This results in a high attrition rate. In this research study, the HR issues unique to the BPO industry are examined from a sociological and human resource viewpoint, focusing upon role efficacy and organizational role stress experienced by the women employees in Indian BPO industry.*

Keywords- *Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), Human Resource, Role Efficacy, Organizational Role Stress*

1. INTRODUCTION

The 21st century with the concepts of borderless business and social worlds, developed nations, knowledge societies thriving on technological innovation after innovation and so on, is also a world of stress and anxiety, perpetuated from the speed and pressures in all walks of life. Decidedly, the society, home, or workplace would have different degrees in terms of intensity of stress. This most talked about word, from both sociological as well as business performance angles assumes contemporary significance like never before. All businesses the world over are striving to gain competitive advantage and several studies have already established the crucial role that the mental, physical and emotional health of their human resource, plays in this era of cut throat competition. In this regard, the BPO industry in India is no exception, in fact, being a service industry, it is more dependent on the performance of its human resource, which, in turn, depends on a lot of other factors. From amongst these, the present research study focuses upon role efficacy and organizational role stress experienced by the women employees in Indian BPO industry. The BPO industry in Indian has experienced exponential growth over the last few years. It has surfaced as the singular most popular industry offering entry to the corporate world at graduate level to students from both professionals as well as non professional education backgrounds. The work force of the BPO industry is comparatively young, and, a greater part is constituted by women human resource. However, as this highly paid industry offers a lucrative career

option, job dissatisfaction amongst the employees, particularly women, who have an extra mile to go in establishing work life balance, than their male counterparts, is also on the rise. This results in a high attrition rate. In this research study, the HR issues unique to the BPO industry are examined from a sociological and human resource viewpoint.

Being one of the fastest growing industries in India, the BPO industry has created the largest job pool in India, as in others parts of the world economies. The unique features of this industry are resultant from it being both, human resource intensive, as well as, technology intensive. The various BPO industries have their human resource strengths ranging from less than fifty to more than fifteen thousand employees at an average estimate. As per estimates of the National Association of Software and Service Companies, India (NASSOM), the largest association of Indian BPO organizations, more than 50% of this human resource strength is constituted by women employees.

Earlier stereotyped as home makers, who ventured into economic productivity more for time pass and recreational reasons, women today have emerged as bread winners and as significant economic providers to their families as their male counterparts. By taking up serious career pursuits, women have increased external and internal pressures to perform an ideal balancing act between personal and professional roles. This has resulted in elevated stress levels at both personal and professional fronts. This research study focusing on women employees of the highly demanding BPO industry, has been carried out on a sample of 240 women from Madhya Pradesh higher education institutions, who have been placed in different BPOs primarily in Bangalore, Pune and Noida/ Delhi in a span of last five years, with the objective of analytically understanding the relationship equations between organizational role stress and role efficacy. The sample was randomly selected and structured questionnaires complemented

by direct interview were used for data collection.

2. THE INDIAN BPO INDUSTRY

In simple terms, a business process is any workflow that is required to produce a desired outcome. Business Process Outsourcing has been stated as, the delegation of a business process or workflow to an outside service provider, who owns, administers and manages it according to a defined set of matrices as set forth in a contract, by Greaver (1999). As stated earlier, the business process outsourcing industry in India is experiencing burgeoning growth and provides entry level access to the corporate world to graduates and in some cases, even undergraduates with substantially appealing pay packets. A few relevant features regarding the performance of the Indian BPO industry as per the records of the National Association of Software and Service Companies, India, (NASSCOM), the Indian BPO industry grosses approximately 15 billion US dollars and caters to more than five million jobs at various levels of the organizational hierarchies. In the context of the Indian economy, revenue from the BPO industry has contributed to more than 1% GDP and about 5% of Indian exports over the last three financial years. The BPO industry, along with the technical job market has provided almost 50% of the total urban employment and amongst these, more than one third jobs are from the BPO kitty. Exhibiting a balanced regional growth, the BPO industry, is employing substantial numbers of its human resource from the tier 2 and tier 3 cities across the country. One of the most appealing features of our BPO industry from the academic view point, is, that, it is an education oriented industry in the context of its stress on enhanced capacity and quality of its human resource through extensive training and development, especially along international standards. Moreover, most of the big players in the domain, have tie-ups with reputed managements and technical institutes, there by promoting high education, while on company payroll.

Even though, the percentage of employment offered by BPO industry in India is quite low as compared to the overall service sector, it assumes significance as it registers noticeably high presence of Indian expertise in the International service sector, with India claiming 21% share of the International BPO market. The salary and incentives offered by the BPO companies are comparatively high for equivalent qualifications with the average of 2.5 lacs per annum at entry level, as compared with other Indian service sectors. Further, as relevant to this research study, the BPO organizations present gender diversity in equal measure to racial and regional diversities, with, over 40% of their human resource being constituted by women employees. Considering their natural characteristics, women are generally considered as ideal workforce in BPO industry as the involvement of making or receiving telephone calls is commonly seen as women's work. The requirement of delivering quality service over the telephone, requires skills associated with hegemonic feminity, such as being nice, making customers feel comfortable and dealing with tough customers (Steinberg and Figart, 1999, Leidner, 1999). However, the Indian BPO industry does not indulge in gender discrimination on this account and men and women employees are treated at par in terms of remuneration package.

Thus, the BPO industry does present a lucrative career option and emerges as a successful industry with highly favourable conditions for its human resources. However, there is a darker side to the picture too, shaded with human resource issues resulting in ever increasing rate of attrition and stress induced diseases amongst the employees with women seen to be more vulnerable than the male human resource. This research study revolves around the organizational roles the women workforce perform in the Indian BPO Industry and the level of stress they endure due to this role and effect on their role efficacy.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Holman, Batt and Holtgrewe (2007) stated that Business Process Outsourcing industry is one of the fastest growing industries, creating the highest number of jobs in economies across the world. According to Dormann and Zijlstra (2003), the BPO industry offers employment both for graduates who are repeating given scripts and for engineers, doctors, and qualified accountants who are offering advice on technical, medical and financial issues. Initial literature survey was done on BPO and call center industries, women employees, role efficacy and organizational role stress. Sayeed (1985) has written that personal attributes like age, gender and marital status and job demographics like experience and job type were found to have impact on role efficacy along with role stress. Sharma and Sharma (1984) attempted to relate role efficacy with job anxiety and tension. They found that there is a negative correlation between these two variables. Das (1984) found role efficacy as having moderating impact on purposeful job behavior and independent variables, such as organizational climate and role stress. Increased work -related tension was found to have overall negative relationship with role efficacy. Pestonjee (1992) said that role efficacy reduces role stress. Pareek (1983) pioneered research work on role stress by identifying as many as ten different types of organizational role stresses. Kahn et al found that Inter role conflict result in low job satisfaction and high job related tension. Levinson (1973) and Constandse (1972) stated that many middle aged, middle-management managers suffer from fear and disappointment and in silent seclusion of role isolation. Role erosion (RE) type of role stress increases in a role occupant when he/she feels that some functions which should properly belong to his/her role are transferred to/or performed by some other role. According to Beukel & Molleman, 2002, people do not enjoy the feeling of underutilized. Kahn and Quinn (1970) suggested some conditions under which role overload is likely to occur: (i) in the absence of role integration, (ii) in the absence

of role power, (ii) when large variations exist in expected output, and (iv) when duties cannot be delegated. Marchall and Cooper (1979) categorized overload into quantitative (having too much to do) and qualitative (work that is too difficult). Role isolation (RI): This type of role stress refers to the psychological distance between the occupant's role and other roles in the same role set. Kahn et al. (1964) and French and Caplan (1970) found that mistrust of coworkers is positively related to high role isolation and low job satisfaction. McMurray (1973) identified the executive neurosis: that is, an over-promoted manager who becomes grossly overworked in the attempt to keep the job attempts to hide the sense of insecurity and feelings of personal inadequacy. Kahn et al. (1964) found that people who suffered from role ambiguity experienced low job satisfaction, high job-related tension, a sense of futility, and low self-confidence. Kahn (1973) distinguished two components of role ambiguity, i.e. present ambiguity and future prospect ambiguity. Sen. (1981) studied the background variables in relation to role stress. They were age, sex, education, income, family type, marital status, residence, distance from residence to place of work, work experience etc. Some of the conclusions drawn from the studies were that role stagnation decreases as people advance in age, age is negatively related with role stress. He also pointed out that Women experience more role stress as compared to men. Achla Pareek and Manju Mehta (1999) said that Self role distance is seen more among gazette women officers. Sen. (1982) studied that there is a negative Correlation between Role Efficacy and Organizational Role Stress. Sayeed (1895) said that negative correlation prevails between Work load Tension and Role Efficacy.

4. ORGANIZATIONAL ROLE STRESS AND ROLE EFFICACY

The most aired word today, 'stress', has its origin in the Latin word 'Stringere'. It was popularly used in 17th Century to denote hardship, strain, adversity or affliction (Pestonjee, 1999). Though, the term is treated in life sciences in various ways, mostly related with the ill effects of stress and its coping strategies, it cannot be totally done away with. Earlier research studies and scholars have confirmed that certain stress level are essential for employee performance and help organizations to grow through healthy competition. Pestonjee (1992), has defined stress as, "a dynamic condition in which an employee is confronted with an opportunity, constraint, demand related to what he or she desires and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important." He has identified three significant domains of life where stress originates. The first is the 'Job and Organization' sector including work environment with policies, tasks, job roles, responsibilities, authorities, accountability, working hours and conditions, compensation, rewards, organizational hierarchy and so on. The second is the 'Social Sector' which includes social, political and cultural factors and the third is the 'Intra-psychic' sector which involves person oriented aspects of attitude, values, believes, aspiration, ambitions, mental/ emotional/physical health, abilities and so on. This research work demands our attention to focus on the stress originating in the job and organization sector and its inter play with that originating in the intra-psychic segment. In order to determine the relationship of organizational role stress and role efficacy through situational analysis of women employees, in Indian BPO industry, let us first understand the concept of role stress and then role efficacy.

Role has been defined by Pareek as a set of functions that an individual performs in response to expectation of others about the role, as also his/her own expectations. Pareek has also elaborated on the context of role stress and role efficacy. In an organizational role, stress is experienced by an individual when there are inherent problems in the performance of a role. Role efficacy can be understood as the potential effectiveness of an individual occupying a particular role in an organization. If an employee does not have this potential effectiveness to handle the role she/he is

occupying in an organization, problems in handling the role start cropping up and this gives rise to organizational role stress.

According to Katz and Kahn 1996, an organization can be defined as a system of roles. They have categorized role stress into three categories, viz-a-viz, role ambiguity, role conflict and role overload. Kahn's (1973) concept of conflict, ambiguity and overload have been expended upon by Pareek (1976) in his Organizational Role Stress Model by exploring their inter-role relationships. Considering the expectation of self and others from a position held by an employee and the multiplicity of problems in performance of an organizational role, stress becomes inevitable. According to Pareek (1993) the role systems of role space and role set are significant from an employee's point of view. Role Space may be defined as the dynamic inter relationship, both between the self and the various roles an individual occupies and also amongst these roles.

The Organizational Role Stress (ORS) scale, as administered by Pareek in 1983 was used to collect sample data. It is a five point scale indicating the extent of how true a particular response is for a particular role. The scores for each role stress range between a minimum score of 0 to a maximum score of 20 of this 50 item scale. A high score towards 20 indicates a high role stress being experienced in the particular segment. Role Space is constituted by Inter role distance (IRD), Role Stagnation (RS), and Self Role Distance (SRD) dimensions of the ORS scale. As discussed above, an employee's role in any organization in formalized by the expectations of other significant roles in addition to the individual employee's. Thus, Role Set can be understood as the pattern of relationship between the role being considered and other roles. It is constituted by Role Ambiguity (RA), Role Expectation Conflict (REC), Role Over Load (RO), Role Erosion (RE), Resource Inadequacy (RI), Personal Inadequacy (PI), and Role Isolation (RA) dimensions in the ORS scale. Inter-role distance (IRD) is

experienced when there is a conflict between organizational and non-organizational roles i.e. the employee not being able to balance time devoted to work place demands and those of personal and family. Role stagnation (RS) is the feeling of being stuck in the same role with little opportunity to learn and grow. Such a type of stress results in perception that there is no opportunity for the furthering or progress of one's career. Role expectation conflicts (REC) stress is generated by conflicting demands and expectations by different significant persons, i.e. superiors, subordinates and peers on a role occupant. Role erosion (RE) stress increases in a role occupant when he/she feels that some functions which should properly belong to his/her role are transferred to/or performed by some other role. This is consequential to feelings of worthlessness, low self esteem, low work motivation and so on. Role overload (RO) is when a role occupant feels that there are too many expectations from the significant roles in his/her role set. Role isolation (RI) stress refers to the psychological distance between the occupant's role and other roles in the same role set. Personal inadequacy (PI) arises when the role occupant feels that he/she does not have the necessary skills and training for effective performance of the functions expected from his/her role. Self-role distance (SRD) stress originates in the case of conflict between one's values and self-concepts with the requirements of the organizational role. Role ambiguity (RA) refers to the lack of clarity about the role objectives, other's expectations, and role responsibilities etc. Resource inadequacy (RIn) of stress is evident when the role occupant feels that he/she is not provided with adequate resources for performing the functions expected from his/her role i.e. inadequacy or non availability of resources needed for effective role performance.

Figure 1: Theoretical Structure of Pareek's (1976) ORS Model

As discussed above, it is evident that each individual employee has got his/her own role to perform and each organization has to ensure optimum performance from the role occupant's plan for his/her own role. This process of enriching one's role in an organization is called Role Efficacy, i.e. the potential effectiveness of any individual occupying a particular role in an organization.

The role efficacy scale has three main dimensions, viz-a-viz, Role Making, which involves the role occupant's efforts to customize his/her role to personal liking, Role Linking, which is the inter relationship in a role and Role Centering, the feeling of being central in the role. These three dimensions are further subdivided into ten dimensions to establish accuracy in assessing the potential effectiveness of an organizational role. These ten dimensions are formed by Integration, Pro activity, Creativity, Confrontation, Centrality, Influence, Growth, Inter Role Linkage, Helping relationship and Super ordination. Each of these dimensions is answered by two questions of the total 20 items in the Role Efficacy questionnaire. Each question is answered by one, from amongst three options, with the score varying with each option. values on a three point scale of 2 (high), 1 (medium), and -1 (low) are awarded to the answer. Thus, the actual score ranges from a minimum of 20x

(-1)= -20 to a maximum of 20x2=40. Thereafter, the scores are converted into index tables. To arrive at a Role Efficacy Index, -20 is converted into 0 and 40 into 100. Thus the minimum score of Role Efficacy Index is 0 and the maximum is 100. A score towards 100 is therefore considered to denote high Role Efficacy, while that towards 0, indicates a low Role Efficacy.

5. Research Methodology and Design

Due to the dual areas of equally significant commitments, i.e. the home and workplace, women employees perform under more pressure than their male colleagues. The situation is further compounded by the multiplicity of roles women have to perform, both at personal as well as the professional fronts. The professional role demands in the service industry are more than that of than any other industry. Thus, the women human resource of the BPO industry are more prone to personal as well as professional stress, thus perpetuating the significance of role clarity and role efficacy. The research methodology and design have been structured keeping in mind this research on analyzing the relationship between role efficacy and organizational role stress experienced by women employees in the BPO industry in India. The hypothesis formulated is that there is a negative correlation between Role Efficacy and Organizational Role Stress. The research design of this study is descriptive. For collection of data through a survey, questionnaires have been used either through one to one meeting or through emails. The BPOs situated at Pune, Delhi and Bangalore were selected for obtaining data through simple random sampling technique. Appropriate explanation was provided to the selected women employees hailing from different parts of Madhya Pradesh to fill the questionnaire. The primary data was thus collected for both role efficacy as well as roles stress, through tools i.e. Role Efficacy scale and Organizational Role Stress scale developed by Udai Pareek were used. The data collected was interpreted with the help of

SPSS statistical package. Correlation Analysis was used to determine the relation between role efficacy and organizational role stress. The results are presented in the table below:

Table 1 : Correlation Analysis between Role Efficacy and Organizational Role Stress

Correlations		
	Role Efficacy Index	
	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (1-tailed)
Inter Role Distance	-0.092	0.165
Role Ambiguity	-0.133	0.04**
Role Erosion	-0.119	0.070*
Role Expectation Conflict	-0.124	0.060*
Role Inadequacy	-0.124	0.060*
Role Isolation	-0.074	0.262
Role Overload	0.148	0.02**
Role Stagnation	-0.13	0.848
Self Role Distance	0.123	0.06*
Resource Inadequacy	-0.088	0.185
ORS mean score	-0.123	0.06**

Note : * -> 10% Significance Level

     ** -> 5% Significance level

As is evident from the table above, all the dimensions of Role Efficacy have a negative correlation with Organizational Role Stress dimensions. The Role Efficacy Index shows a significant negative correlation of -14.8% with the role stress dimensions especially in role overload and -13.3% at a 5% significance dimension level with role ambiguity.

6. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

It can be concluded that the women workforce of BPO organizations in Pune,

Bangalore and Delhi experience considerable levels of organizational role stress affecting role efficacy. The result analysis leads to the interpretation that when the role efficacy decreases amongst the women human resource of Indian BPOs, their organizational role stress level increases, in particular, the stress dimensions role overload and role ambiguity increase when these women employees experience less role efficacy. The women employees have to be more focused and need to experience more role clarity which reduces ambiguity. This is turn, helps the women employees to plan their performance in a particular role according to their liking which in turn results in enhanced role efficacy and thus, lower levels of organizational stress resulting in better contribution to the role and organizations goals. Also the mental strain experienced by women in BPOs is more than other similar occupations with existing physical demands of the job, but psychological and mental demands are predominant. The BPO companies can have focused training on integration of their women human resource with their roles and also enrich the role of women employees in accordance to their liking, which will go a long way in reducing attrition. Interventions such as reducing task monotony by appropriate job rotation and treating emotional exhaustion with help of occupational therapists, more support from superiors, and co-workers would result in low organizational role stress and thereby, enhanced role efficacy, thus contributing to an organization's competitive advantage through enhanced employee performance.

7. SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

An offshoot from the interactions and first hand observations during data collection for this research study, that loomed large is, that, the employees of the BPO industry, especially women, are experiencing low job satisfaction and health issues ranging from high stress levels to severe physical illness. The health problems faced by them and the effectiveness of physicians/occupational therapists suggestions to improving work

environment for employees deserve to be taken up as a separate study. The BPO industry's flexibility, variability, novelty, technological concentration, work intensity, and new sociological/economic networks with backdrop of globalization and liberalization, present challenging opportunities to researchers, not only in the field of Management, but across various disciplines. As aptly stated by Russel (2008), the BPO organizations have garnered attention both in their own right as a new means of organizing particular type of work and as an important axis point from which study of management practices may be initiated.

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