

## **MACRO AND MICRO HR CHALLENGES IN GLOBALLY DISTRIBUTED WORK**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Macro and micro HR issues confront organizations engaged in globally distributed work. These impact not only the work and organizational productivity but also the people delivering that work and, therefore, need to be addressed adequately for the benefit of all the stakeholders. There is paucity of empirical work on this emerging field; however, the paper includes results of a survey to identify hygiene factors and motivators which play a pivotal role in these organizations .

**Key words:** HR issues in BPOs/KPOs, Outsourcing, Cross cultural issues, Organizational factors and stress

Globally Distributed work is the outcome of outsourcing which is one of the management tools adopted by companies which are either faced with personnel shortage or have increased customer demands or have launched new products or services. In the present globally competitive environment outsourcing has emerged as a feasible option through which in-house operations/business processes are contracted to an outside agency. It is also a method to reduce operational costs and get access to superior technologies or more efficient personnel at reduced cost. Exercising this option a global company provides added value to its customers without taking the focus off its core business. Outsourcing may be of two types-onshore or offshore implying outsourcing from within the country or from other countries. By outsourcing non core activities the companies are able to concentrate on core competencies and thereby increase productivity and enhance job satisfaction of the employees. In case of off shore outsourcing the work is distributed by the company to one or many vendor companies in the same country or in many countries.

During 1970s outsourcing in the US was done to get the payroll processed outside and it extended to billing, accounting services and word processing. Whereas business process outsourcing (BPO) is more about volume and report; knowledge process outsourcing is driven by knowledge, skills and experience. However, during the past couple of years the outsourcing has extended from low end operations to high end knowledge work.

A number of challenges are faced which have been explained below. If the nature of work is mechanical and the requirements have been spelt out, the challenges are few but if the work requires greater people involvement then a number of challenges are faced by all concerned. India provides platform for outsourcing to many global companies particularly in the IT sector. The IT enabled services (ITES)-BPO segment contributes to 30% of the total ITES exports from India. HCL Technology BPO Services, IBM Daksh, WNS, Wipro BPO, EXLServices, Mphasis BPO (formerly m Source), Intelenet Global, ICICI One source, GTL, Progen, Datamatics Technologies, Hinduja TMT, Transworks, Tracmail are prominent Indian BPO companies based on revenue for the year 2004-05. The BPO industry in India is expected to touch 37% annual growth rate in the next five years according to National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM, 2006). The challenges have been discussed below.

### **MEETING CUSTOMER EXPECTATION THROUGH CALL CENTRES**

One of the forms of globally distributed work is telemarketing through highly sophisticated call centers established

across countries. Call centres are one of the capital intensive Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) at the same time are one of the most critical marketing and sales elements for an accomplished business. These have dedicated or shared staff who are engaged in customer relationship management, acquisition of new customers, interactive voice response, data collection, lead generation and customer analysis. Offshore telemarketing solutions include lead generation, debt collecting services, product promotion, customer satisfaction, research surveys and polling, appointment scheduling, telephone and web based business development etc.. Global companies that outsource telemarketing to India benefit from significantly lower costs, proven process quality, access to trained, computer literate persons with good communication and presentation skills. The call centres have gained considerable importance for a company as a marketing and customer retention platform. India is an important destination for telemarketing outsourcing having the largest English speaking population. Off-shore call centres which offer telemarketing services convert the potential clients into customers and the existing customers into long term customers.

Media reports that call centre professionals in India are well taken care of, get good salaries, promotions, shift changes and other incentives. The delegation from the US which visited call centres and firms in cities like Chennai, Mumbai, Bangalore and Hyderabad in 2005 remarked, "We are very much impressed by the welfare measures for the workers here".

Though the telemarketing agents are trained professionals who have good communication, sales and presentation skills, the challenge before the manager of call centre is to meet the customers' expectations from across the globe through the staff that have neither visited these countries nor are familiar with the work ethics there.

### **HIGH ATTRITION/LOW MOTIVATION IN KNOWLEDGE PROCESS OUTSOURCING (KPO)CENTRES**

The success of business process outsourcing has encouraged companies to outsource their high end knowledge work. It involves highly value added processes which are dependent on advanced knowledge, technical skills and relevant experience. It comprises software solution, E- business integration; IT enabled services, web solutions, customer relationship management, ERP and data warehousing, financial services, biotechnology, technology research, computer aided simulations, engineering design, business research and legal services. KPO has become an industry and India is one of the important destinations apart from Philippines, China and Eastern Europe in offshore outsourcing. "India and China are already the leading destinations for off-shoring" said Daniel Franklin, Editorial Director of the Economist Intelligence Unit.

Since the outsourcing is done from countries which have world class systems and quality and are talent rich; it helps the companies in these countries reduce cost of infrastructure and of hiring employees and focus on optimum use of competitive resources available across the globe. The disadvantage of the outsourcing is that the employees of the outsourcer company may feel insecure. But so far as the outsourcer company is concerned it gets the benefit of flexibility, technological agility and cost and competitive advantage.

Due to high volume, repetitive nature of work, high quality work within time deadlines, working for different time zones, employees at the outsourced company feel overstretched and quit jobs frequently. High attrition, continuous recruitment and development of employees due to high attrition are the major challenges faced by KPOs. There are hardly any published studies on this emerging phenomenon. But if media reports and web postings are to be relied on, it is due to young and ambitious people, joining these jobs to get global market exposure, who do not see career growth in the organization and develop dissatisfaction due to expectation mismatch.

Sharma et.al. (2006) attempted to collect data from employees of five KPOs in India regarding hygiene factors and motivators to explore the application of Motivation Hygiene Model in the KPO centres. The sample consisted of junior to middle level of management. 50 employees were approached online from each KPO but the responses received ranged from 24 – 44 employees from each KPO. The results have been analysed and summarized in table 1

**TABLE 1**

## Hygiene Factors and Motivators in KPOs

Type of company

Dissatisfiers Satisfiers Motivators Expectation of employees

KPO 1 Indiscriminate

recruitment

Appraisal process

Organizational

politics

Organisational

communication

Workplace ambience

Salary package

Employee stock option plan

Work life balance

programmes

Sports

Reward and

recognition

Mentoring

Training

Counseling

Healthy

competition

among coworkers

Brand of the

company

Flexi-timings

to plan work

-More employee

engagement

-Better mentoring

-Onsite

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opportunities

-Better reward &

recognition

-More attention to

junior employees

KPO2 Long working hours

Monotony

Frequent changes in

role description

Pressure on constant

learning

Sedentary lifestyle

Unavailable supplies

Non-functioning equipment

Workforce diversity

Equal opportunity

Open door policy

Strong Culture

Ethics

On the job

learning

Enriched

training

Appraisal biannual

instead of

annual

Project Manager

and mentor should

be the same person

Frequent team

events

HR to play a

dominant role

KPO 3 Volume of work Company Policy

Job security

Work culture

GrievanceRedressal System

-Family

focused prgms.

-Personal

development

programs.

-Opportunities

for competency

development

Ethics counselor

Professional

advancement

KPO 4 Less opportunities for

learning

Repetitive nature of

work

Good salary and perks

Mediclaime, gratuity

retirement and other

employee benefits

Informal work culture

High satisfaction

Work-life balance

Recreational

activities/forums

-Self

development

policy

(upgrading

qualification)

-Mentoring by

technical

experts

-Counseling

-CSR work

Challenging work

Opportunities for

learning & growth

KPO 5 Long working hours

High stress levels

Structure of team

Late night working

Lack of coordination

with the country of

outsourcing

Working over

weekends

Salary & perks

Flexible benefit plan

Flexi-timings

Recreation activities

Clubs & Sports

-Quarterly

performance

bonus

-Involvement

in team

formation

Goal oriented

efforts

-Mentoring

-Recognition

and rewards

- Product
- Challenging work
- Even distribution of work
- Discourage working over weekends
- Restructuring of indigenous management

## **DEVELOPMENT TRAINING -CAREER**

### **counseling**

A perusal of table 1 yields that employees in KPOs are satisfied with salary, perks, work culture, interpersonal relations which are hygiene factors. The dissatisfiers are also environment centred eg. long working hours, high volume of work, company policies of recruitment etc. which too are hygiene factors. On the other hand the motivators are work-centred eg. recognition and reward, enriched training, mentoring, opportunities for professional development etc. Thus the Motivation Hygiene model stands validated by the results of the study. Despite incentives being provided attrition rate is around 18-19% in some companies which is above the industry average.

## **CROSS CULTURAL ISSUES**

In the globally distributed work environment understanding cross cultural perspective is of prime importance. Countries differ in their culture; even a simple practices of greeting people, addressing them, exchanging business cards and communication patterns. Hofstede (1980) in his study of culture in forty countries, which was later extended to sixty countries, found significant cultural differences in work related attitudes. The study revealed significant differences in attitudes and behavior of the workforce and managerial staff belonging to different countries and these differences had persisted over a period of time.

Organizational culture is a cluster of meanings related to norms, roles, plans, ideals, and ideas that are created within the organization and are used by members to make a coherent sense of their organizational experiences (Feldman, 1988). Stress can arise both in the initials stages when the employee is a new recruit and is in the process of being socialized into the organizational culture, and also when there are organizational changes which inevitably affect the culture and climate. The organizational culture determines the attitudes of the employee towards his organization, work and coworkers. Though the culture of an organization is influenced by the social and national culture within which it is embedded, its immediate determinant is the organizational structure.

Hall (1976) has highlighted differences between high-context and low –context cultures. People belonging to high-context cultures depend heavily on the external situation and environment, and use non verbal clues for exchanging and interpreting communications. He has cited examples of languages such as Arabic, Japanese and Chinese in this regard where indirect style of communication is valued. However, in low-context cultures, external environment has low importance, explicit, direct and “blunt’ communication is valued and non verbal clues are ignored. Hofstede (1980) has identified the following four primary dimensions on which employees and managers differed.

## **INDIVIDUALISM**

Individualism (IDV) is marked by focus of people on themselves and to some extent, on their families. Collectivism distinguishes between in-group (comprising relatives, caste, and organisation) and other groups. There are nations

like the United States with individualistic culture and Japan where 'will' of the group determines members' beliefs and behaviours. A comparison of India and US on this dimension reveals a marked difference between the two cultures. This implies that Indian culture reinforces taking responsibility for extended family and fellow members of their group. This could be one of the reasons for effective team work in GDW.

## **POWER DISTANCE ORIENTATION**

This dimension refers to degree of inequality or equality among people and superior-subordinate relationship. In high Power Distance (PDI) societies the superior is inclined to increase the inequality of power between himself and his subordinates and the subordinate's endeavours to decrease that power distance. High power distance countries found by Hofstede are Philippines, Venezuela and India. The power distance dimension for India has a ranking of 77 compared to world average of 56.5. These scores indicate greater level of inequality in power in India. The work in a team is generally leader driven than driven by self management teams. Therefore, team leader plays an important role in GDW in India. Schein (1987) based on his work remarks "Organizational cultures are created by leaders, and one of the most decisive functions of leadership may well be the creation, the management and – if and when that becomes necessary – destruction of the culture". However, India's Long Term Orientation (LTO) has a rank of 61 as compared to world average of 48 which indicates that the culture of India has a high degree of perseverance and parsimony (Hofstede, 2006).

## **UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE**

Different cultures have varying levels of tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. A high ranking on this dimension indicates that the country is more rule-oriented and has low tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity and vice versa. Based on his study he has classified countries having high uncertainty avoidance such as Japan, Greece and low uncertainty avoidance viz., United States, Canada and New Zealand etc.

India has a ranking of 40 as against the world average of 65 (Hofstede, 2006). Thus India is a more adaptable and tolerant country, probably that could be one of the reasons for India's success in GDW.

## **MASCULINITY**

Masculinity (MAS) has been defined as the extent to which the dominant values in society emphasize relationships among people, concern for others and overall quality of life. It also deals with gender differentiation in the form of degree of reinforcement by the society for traditional masculine role models of male achievement and power and control. Japan and Australia were found to be highly masculine, the Scandinavian countries to be highly feminine and the United States as slightly masculine.

India has a ranking of 56 on this Hofstede dimension as compared to world average of 51 (Hofstede, 2006). This indicates that India has some gap between values of males and females. However, Indian IT sector has high representation of female employees.

To conclude, Hofstede has likened culture to a 'collective programming' of the minds of one group, which distinguishes it from other groups. Trompenaar (1996) based on his research on 8841 informants from business organizations in 43 countries has confirmed two dimensions viz., individualism/collectivism and power distance identified by Hofstede.

## **FIRM SIZE AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS**

A number of studies have been done to study the relationship between firm size and organizational effectiveness and culture. Large firms promote inertia and complacency (Hannand and Freeman, 1984) and resistance to adaptation and aversion to risk (Hitt et. al., 1990). Studies conducted to look at the role of organizational size in generating stress have not come up with conclusive and consistent evidence of the link between the two, though the assumption has been that greater formalization and bureaucratization in larger organizations would lead to greater stress (Kahn & Byosiere, 1992). Sutton and D'Aunno (1989) suggest that it is the reduction in organizational size that is perceived as a source of threat and generates anxiety.

Connell (2001) studied the influence of firm size on organizational culture and employee morale in six Australian workplaces and found that organization size affected a number of variables. Small firms were found to have positive

culture and high employee morale and consultative management style and organizational effectiveness. Many Indian knowledge corporations have set up separate units as BPO/KPO for efficient functioning in response to GDW.

These vendor companies continuously invest finance, time and, efforts in culture sensitization, cultural mentoring; however, it is a challenge considering the large number of employees, employee turnover and availability of competent trainers.

## **IMPACT OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND CLIMATE ON EMPLOYEE STRESS**

Organizational structure influences organizational culture, which in turn determines the work climate and this, decides what is experienced as stress by the employee and how he copes with it. 'Being in the organization' implies that the employee would have to adapt to and adopt the norms, goals and operating rules of the organization. The values implicit in the organizational structures and processes shape the emotional and cognitive relationship of employees with their work and workplace (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). Any major mismatch between the objectives and values of the individual and the organization would lead to a sense of not belonging and is a source of stress and burnout. In a study conducted across eight organizations (Schmitt, Colligan & Fitzgerald, 1980) to study the causative factors in the mass occurrence of stress symptoms showed the relatively much greater significance and consistency of the relationship between organizational factors and symptoms. The repetitive and hierarchical aspects of the machine bureaucracy promote obsessive-compulsive tendencies which might provoke burnout, whereas, the ill-defined open structure of a professional bureaucracy promotes neurotic tendencies which might lead to burnout (Winnubst, 1993). The professional bureaucracy typical of white collar managerial work leads to burnout because of stresses arising from the boundary spanning functions and resultant role problems and interpersonal conflicts.

## **PHYSICAL WORK ENVIRONMENT**

The GDW is not limited to telemarketing and software solutions but also extends to manufacturing. India is one of the major exporters of auto components to the US, Europe and Asia. The physical work environment comprising factors such as noise, lighting, vibration, temperature and ventilation, hygiene and physical hazards can be source of stress, and it is the subjective reactivity to these factors that is more important than the objective measures leading some to comment that 'stress is in the eye of the beholder' (Sutherland & Cooper, 2000). Every occupation has its own set of physical work environment stressors that heighten arousal, and the main psychosocial impact of these factors is that the accumulated physical frustration and tension lead to poor interpersonal relationships (Keenan & Kerr, 1951), affect motivation levels, and ultimately increase the susceptibility of the employees to other stressors (Smith et al., 1978).

The harmful influences are mediated by the personality characteristics and cause higher levels of anxiety, irritability, hostility and aggression leading to negative behavioral outcomes, and even cause non-auditory diseases such as cardiovascular disorders. Similarly, vibrations due to machines in factories, ventilation systems, and even in the living quarters as in offshore rigs, can be a source of psychological imbalance even if the employees assert that they get used to it (Sutherland & Cooper, 2000). The prevalence of this stressor is evident from the 1996 survey report of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions that 11 percent of workers are permanently exposed to vibration and 24 percent a quarter of time on their jobs.

Another physical factor that has drawn attention is poor lighting, the flicker of fluorescent lights, and the glare of bright lights which could lead to visual fatigue, tension and frustration. Even attempts by architects to solve this problem by creating windowless environment with artificial illumination has led to 90 percent employees expressing dissatisfaction with the absence of windows. Other potential sources of stressors are uncomfortable temperatures and humidity, and unclean and disorderly workplaces and restrooms. Even physical hazards and psychological trauma due to the dangers inherent in the job, and aggressive and violent clients in customer services can be sources of stress and fatigue that need to be addressed (Sutherland & Cooper, 2000).

## **APPRAISAL AND REWARD SYSTEMS**

The relative importance of performance and extraneous factors is implied in the formal appraisal and reward systems instituted within an organization and how they are perceived by the employees. Performance appraisals are also

instruments of employee control as they are used to determine individual merit and to reward or punish, thus providing direction to workplace activities. Organisations supplement the appraisal process with 360 degree feedback which is used as a development tool. (Sharma, 2004)

The appraisal and reward system is a key determinant of the employee's attitude towards his organization and his work. The systems should be seen as incorporating procedural justice (appraisal systems should be transparent and fair) and distributive justice (appropriate, adequate and fair differentials in rewards). Gabris & Ihrke (2001) found in their study of professional county government employees that if employees feel that there is lack of procedural and distributive justice in the appraisal and reward systems, there is a higher level of burnout. This negative correlation between procedural and distributive justice perceived in the appraisal and reward systems and emotional exhaustion was confirmed in a study conducted in an Australian public sector research organization (Michelle & Johnson, 2003). Burnout is also associated with the extent to which performance and rewards/punishments are linked in an organization; there is a higher possibility of burnout when contingent rewards are absent and non-contingent punishment is present (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993).

In the Indian IT industry many young executives feel demotivated and under-rewarded. Project allocation sometimes is based on availability of an employee rather than the skill set or competencies. "Due to huge scale recruitment . . . . some of the new employees are not at par with the usual standards which the older employees have set. This has led to general discontent in the employees who have developed the notion that they are being made to work with people who are not upto their caliber." (Sharma et.al., 2006).

## **EFFECT OF WORKLOAD, AUTONOMY AND CONTROL**

The GDW has a lot of impact on employees' workload, autonomy and control as they are expected to adhere to standards agreed with the outsourcing organization. The researches on these have been presented below. The power that an employee has to influence his own work activities, either in terms of timing or in terms of methods or both, so as to fulfill the super-ordinate objectives of the organization is referred to as control at work (Frese, 1989; Jackson et al., 1993). Lack of control of one's situation is both a causative and aggravating factor in burnout. The causal role of control was shown in an experimental study where it was found that the same level of noise caused more stress when there was no option of switching it off than when there was a choice to do so, even if that choice was not made use of and the noise not turned down (Glass, Reim & Singer, 1971). Several studies have established the association between lack of control or autonomy and cardiovascular diseases, anxiety, depression and emotional exhaustion (Ellis & Miller, 1993; Ganster & Fusilier, 1989; Schaufeli & Buunk, 1996).

Though there is paucity of researches on BPO/KPO industry several studies have explored the relation between job control and burnout and have found an association between the two, but these findings show some variations which are of practical significance. Rafferty et al. (2001) in their review of these studies point out though there is a consensus that job demands or workload is a stronger predictor of burnout than control is, and that the effect of job demands on burnout cannot be moderated through higher control, the findings about the association between control and the dimensions of burnout differ according to the way control has been defined. There have been varied conceptualizations of control – it has been seen as decision authority referring to the power the employees have to make decisions about their work, or as skill discretion referring to the ability and freedom of the worker to use a range of skills to perform his task, or as decision latitude which includes both decision authority and skill discretion. When control is defined as decision latitude, higher control is significantly associated with emotional exhaustion and lower control is associated with depersonalization and reduced accomplishment dimensions of burnout. The findings were inconsistent when control referred to just decision authority or skill discretion. The study (Rafferty, Friend & Landsbergis, 2001) that recognized the presence of these different aspects of control reported that skill discretion is more strongly related to burnout than is decision authority.

There is greater emotional exhaustion and depersonalization among employees with lower skill discretion than those with lower decision authority, whereas reduced personal accomplishment is reported with both low skill discretion and low decision authority.

## **WORKLOAD**

There is an optimal level of workload that brings out the best in an employee, and both under load and overload, either quantitative or qualitative, when out of the control of the employee, can be stressful. Both work under-load and

overload can result in negative emotions depending upon the discrepancy between the workload and the abilities and aspirations of the employee (Buunk et al., 1998). While qualitative under-load and qualitative overload both result in job dissatisfaction, the former is also associated with depression, irritation and psychosomatic symptoms and the latter with tension and low self-esteem (ILO, 1986).

Too little work or under-load can lead to apathy, boredom and low morale, or what has been termed 'rust out', which is a significant predictor of dissatisfaction, anxiety and depression (Cooper & Kelly, 1984). Although Maslach (1993) considers the view that

under load and monotonous work can lead to burnout to be erroneous. She believes emotional exhaustion presupposes overload and high arousal. Using the existential perspective (Pines, 1993) posits that even under load would lead to burnout when a person enters the job with high expectations as in the case of new recruits. Keenan and Newton (1985) in their study reported that engineers regarded the feeling of one's efforts having gone waste as the most stressful; and qualitative under load as the third-most stressful condition. Sharma (2002) in a study of antecedents of burnout among executives found role overload and self-role distance to be critical determinants of burnout among Indian executives.

Qualitative workload is a stressor particularly faced by managers (Cooper & Marshall, 1978). The review of burnout literature shows that emotional exhaustion dimension of burnout is strongly related to workload (Schaufeli and Enzmann, 1998) and this was further supported by a study of two samples of 245 bank employees and 362 teachers which showed that emotional exhaustion is primarily predicted by workload (Houkes et al., 2001).

Research from service organization, in an industrial setting with self-managed work teams, reported that so long as there is adequate time to complete the task, increased workload does not lead to burnout; instead, increased workload has a negative relationship with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization resulting in diminished burnout. This difference in findings could be because the work in industrial settings is impersonal and the positive factors associated with healthy teams may have modified the impact of increased workload by making it challenging and invigorating (Elloy, Terpening & Kohls, 2001).

## **WORK HOURS AND TIME PRESSURE**

Several studies indicate deadlines and time pressures to be major factors leading to burnout (Schaufeli and Enzmann (1998). Research suggests that the optimal working time for executives is between 35 and 45 hours per week (Cooper & Sutherland). The psychological problems are further exacerbated in employees engaged in shift work. Though qualitative overload results from the employee's feeling that he does not have the ability to perform the assigned task and quantitative overload arises from the feeling that the task cannot be completed in the allotted time (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993), managers, especially those with certain personality traits may react to any overload by working longer hours (Cooper & Marshall, 1978). Though organizational changes have increased the objective workload of managers, peer pressure and the need to visibly demonstrate commitment due to insecurity also force managers to work longer hours and result in the dysfunctional outcome of presenteeism, i.e. working such hours that one becomes ineffective (Cooper & Sutherland, 2000). The respondents did not experience a sense of achievement in working longer hours challenging the prevailing view that managers take a perverse pleasure in doing so (Krone, Tabacchi & Farber, 1989).

A meta-analytic review of the effect of hours of work on health found a significant positive correlation between the number of hours at work and psycho-physiological symptoms, the important factors mediating this relation being the type of job (mental work being more taxing), working environment, age (the older being more vulnerable), and most important of all, choice or the freedom to choose particular hours of work. (Sparks et al., 1997).

## **ROLE CONFLICT**

Role conflict arises when one is expected to work for incompatible goals which, in the management setting, could be in the form of demands to achieve very high production targets, and yet maintaining product quality without compromising safety standards. Role conflict has been found to cause absenteeism, job dissatisfaction, hypertension and even burnout. The adverse effects of role conflict are pronounced in people who have the personality trait of rigidity.

GDW sometimes involves people in marketing functions. People in market-oriented boundary-spanning positions such as those in sales and customer service are highly vulnerable to burnout as they face role conflict due to the often incompatible demands of the organization and the customers (Singh & Goolsby, 1994). This has also been found to be true of even experienced product managers who have to communicate across organizational and environmental boundaries (Lysonski, Singer & Wilemon, 1988) and employees torn between the competing demands of different work groups including management, coworkers and customers (Harris & Lee, 2004), all of whom end up suffering burnout as a result of role conflict.

## **ROLE AMBIGUITY**

Role ambiguity refers to the absence of clarity about one's role. The ambiguity arises because of lack of information about the scope of one's responsibilities, i.e. what exactly one is supposed to do and achieve in that position, about how one is supposed to go about fulfilling the responsibilities of the role, and absence of clarity about the behaviors that would be rewarded or punished. An employee can face role ambiguity when first inducted into a position or when changes are introduced in the organizational structure and processes (Ivancevich & Matteson, 1980). The stress arising due to role ambiguity leads to job dissatisfaction, low self confidence and self-esteem, depression and hypertension (Sutherland & Cooper, 2000).

Both role conflict and role ambiguity have been implicated in the etiology of job dissatisfaction across occupations (Sell, Brief & Schuler, 1981). Several studies suggest that it is especially role ambiguity that leads to burnout (Schaufeli & Buunk, 1996). This possibility is also borne out by the findings that role conflict is mainly related to irritation but role ambiguity is mainly related to anxiety (Dijkhuizen, 1980), and that role ambiguity, rather than role conflict, is a better predictor of job dissatisfaction and anxiety (Keenan & Newton, 1984). The latter finding is implied in the findings of a study that attempted to explore the relationship of the role ambiguity and role conflict stresses to job performance. The results revealed the existence of a negative relation between role ambiguity and job performance though this was moderated by job type and rating source, but no significant relation could be found between role conflict and job performance (Tubre & Collins, 1985). People in BPOs are sometimes not clear about their roles and experience stress and anxiety and quit jobs.

## **CAREER DEVELOPMENT STRESS**

The stressors involved in developing and maintaining a career are found to be those related to job insecurity and status incongruity. Job insecurity does not refer only to the risk of unemployment in the immediate future but also includes the fear of becoming obsolete and redundant, which has a strong influence on the employee's self-esteem. Status incongruity results when there is no career progression along expected lines and the employee has reached his career ceiling. (Cooper & Marshall, 1978).

People working on projects of GDW experience uncertainty as their job is dependent on requirement of a particular product/service for a specific period. Besides, the nature of work tends to be repetitive and not very creative and intellectually stimulating. Initially it might have been creative but with the passage of time this aspect fades away and the employees start feeling rusted due to lack of learning opportunities. High turnover in KPOs in India can be attributed to this and employees prefer to work for those companies which offer better learning and growth opportunities (Sharma, et.al.2006).

The problems of career progression faced by technical people, many of whom become managers eventually, has also been studied. People in technical or engineering positions have only two options midway through their career – either they could continue in the technical field of their expertise where avenues for further promotion are limited or they could get into managerial positions. For engineers, the mid-career option of management adds to prestige but also brings in its own set of stresses. The underutilization and further erosion of their technical skills in moving away from technical to management positions, and the inherent uncertainties involved in managing people (unlike managing machines) can be a major source of stress for technical people promoted to managerial cadre and it may lead to burnout (Hoyt & Gerloff, 1999).

Sharma (2005) found role stagnation followed by role expectation conflict and self role distance together explain 28 per cent of the variance in Burnout.

## SOCIAL SUPPORT

The significance of social networks in an individual's life cannot be disregarded given the basic fact that man is essentially a social animal. Most often, we define our life in the context of our relations with other people, and even our work life is not bereft of these very essential relations – it is these relations that form the core of social support. Social support has been defined as the information that leads individuals to believe that they are cared for and loved, esteemed and valued by others, and that they participate in a network of communication and mutual obligation (Cobb, 1996), or more succinctly as 'the resources provided by other persons' (Cohen & Syme, 1985).

In the KPO centres, due to large number of recruitments happening on an ongoing basis, junior employees do not get adequate attention from their seniors. "This leads to disillusionment in the lower ranks and is a major demotivator". (Sharma et al., 2006). Employees in knowledge industry are basically knowledge seekers and recommend that "the company can sponsor seats in prestigious Indian management institutes. This will bolster employee loyalty..." They recommend providing "onsite opportunity" to young employees to reduce attrition and poaching. The ideal organizational climate should have the right blend of openness and supportiveness that would inspire trust, faith and confidence among employees so that in the face of unmanageable demands at work, an employee need not feel overwhelmed and stressed out. One should be able to share his burden and find a solution to his problems, thereby preventing the downhill slide to burnout.

Bassi (2001) has suggested a framework for measuring human capital advantage which not only can measure the existing human capital in a organization but also be a guiding force for future human capital investments. She suggests that if the employees are satisfied with 'what they value' being met by the organization then this would lead to employee retention, which would promote customer satisfaction which in turn will result in customer retention and would consequently translate into enhanced profits for the organization.

## CONCLUSIONS

The evidence based paper has identified fifteen HR challenges that employees/organisations in the globally distributed work environment face. These challenges can be studied as per the requirement of a BPO/KPO so that appropriate strategies could be evolved to mitigate the m. Needless to say, people are at the centre of globally distributed work; therefore, harnessing their potential would needs to go hand in hand with developing their potential. This would lead to better employee engagement, decrease in attrition, better service, more customer satisfaction and improved business development. The adequate attention would help in making the GDW an effective business model incorporating interests of all the stakeholders.

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