

Burnout in Relation to Motivational Needs of Workers in Business Process Outsourcing Industry

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Research seeks to determine the extent of depersonalization and personal accomplishment of Business Process Outsourcing industry workers with varying motivational needs. For the study Ray-Lynn "AO" Scale (Ray, 1974), Affiliative Tendency Scale (Mehrabian, 1976), and the Improved Directiveness Scale (Ray & Lovejoy, 1988) were used to measure the need for achievement, need for affiliation, and need for power respectively. Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) has been used to assess the level of burnout. Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry workers reported high level of depersonalization and medium levels of personal accomplishment. However, depersonalization and personal accomplishment varied with varying motivational needs. More importantly, both trends were found to be gender sensitive. Implications are drawn for the management of BPOs to assess the motivational needs of candidates during recruitment to prevent burnout.

Keywords: Depersonalization, personal accomplishments, need for power, need for affiliation, need for achievement, burnout, business process outsourcing industry

The Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry is one of the fastest growing industries in both the developed and developing countries. A large number of companies are providing outsourcing services with an International call centre facility set up in one country

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to take care of customers across the globe. Most of the business activities such as banking, insurance, travel, shopping, and payment of bills for supplies like water, electricity, and cooking gas are being carried out through BPOs (Bryar, Staples, & Dalrymple, 2002). The BPO industry is experiencing a phenomenal growth in India, employing approximately two million people. The industry generated revenue to the tune of Rs. 113,000 million and provided employment to over two million young men and women. These workers get monthly salaries ranging from Rs. 10, 000 to Rs. 15, 000, free food and transport, and other facilities (Bryar et al., 2002). It is very convenient to get a job in a BPO centre but most of workers quit within six months. Many of those who leave BPO centers do not leave for a competitor, but leave the industry as a whole. Productivity of the workers goes down after working for three to six months in high pressure environment.

The BPO centers count on using people up as quickly as possible so that they can be replaced with new workers before their productivity goes down or even before they attract the protection of provincial labour and employment laws. These educated intelligent BPO workers are often referred to as “cyber coolies”, performing repetitive tasks mindlessly. Critics brand BPO centers as “sweat shops” or “bright satanic offices” (Moss, Salzman, & Tilly, 2003). There is exploitation of labor behind the shiny exterior of the new business. According to Holman (2002), BPO centers are often described as “dark satanic mills of 21st century” and “human battery farms”. Besides inconvenient working hours, loss of identity created by “pseudonyms” to serve foreign customers, high degree of surveillance, the constant interaction with ‘faceless’ unknown people, lack of opportunities for promotion, and high pressure to meet unreasonable targets make the job of BPO centre workers extremely stressful.

Stress and its relationship to burnout have been of a great concern in all types of industries. But this is especially true for call handlers in BPOs who have to deal constantly with irate customers on phone. One of the biggest challenges for them is to remain resilient in face of anger and hostility of customers. This may lead to depersonalization which is characterized by a detached and emotional callousness. A worker in this phase will take a cool, distant attitude towards work and customers. Depersonalization is a stage where worker protects self from the onslaught of stress by “zooming out” emotionally and start treating customers impersonally. Depersonalization ultimately leads to diminished personal accomplishment and high levels of emotional exhaustion is characterized as viewing coworkers and clients as

objects, instead of human beings. Derry and Kinnie (2002) found that routine work of call handlers in BPO centers is associated with emotional exhaustion which means lack of energy and feeling that one's emotional resources have been used up and these workers finally become detached, cynical and callous, and their sense of personal accomplishment diminishes. According to Seshu (2003) long odd working hours, high work targets, and loss of identity are dark clouds that to negatively affects the performance of call centers industry in India. However, very little data is available on job burnout and other related problems in BPO centre.

Though burnout is a type of prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job, some of the personality and demographical variables are also antecedents of burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). The present study seeks to determine the level of burnout experienced by call handlers at the BPO centers in relation to their motivational needs. McClelland (1989) believes that three motivational needs i.e., need for achievement (nAch), need for affiliation (nAff), and need for power (nPow) can be related to these motivational needs. Intensity of these varies across people. Every person has a need for all three, but people differ in degree to which various needs motivate behavior. Workers with high nAch desire excellence and may want sense of important accomplishment. These people want to advance in career and expect immediate feedback, which is missing in BPO centre. Workers with high nAff like to be popular and desire friendly relations and interaction. These people prefer cooperation over competition and hate being alone at work. People with high need of affiliation, if work in BPOs, may feel suffocated as they deal with faceless human beings. As a result they may be assumed to show high levels of depersonalization and emotional exhaustion.

People exhibiting high nPow like to lead and desire prestige and job status. They enjoy competition, confrontation, and seek positions of leadership. Therefore, BPO may not be a suitable place for workers with high nPow because of constant surveillance and having no decision making power. Lack of autonomy may lead to a high level of occupational stress. Maslach and Jackson (1986) found that nurses felt powerless to change unsatisfactory situation as they were not able to make decisions which led to burnout.

Due to different socialization practices the nPow, nAch, and nAff may differ significantly in males and females. As the literature shows males tend to be higher on power and achievement and females on affiliation. Barnett, Doellgast, Kwon, Nipony, and Costa (2005) stated that women constitute 51% of the workforce in Indian BPO

centers. According to Swanson (2000), national surveys show that more employed women than men have reported stress and stress related illnesses. Almost 60% of the working women said that job stress was their number one problem, since there are gender specific stressors which affect women like discrimination at work place, sexual harassment, value conflicts with parents, and role conflict between work and family. These stressors may make women more susceptible to job burnout.

Call handlers are under constant pressure of meeting set targets, work under strict supervision and are actually in contact with clients through phone and thus, highly susceptible to stress. The nature of their job makes them ideal research subjects to examine burnout arising from job stress. Present study aims to find out relationship between three motivational needs i.e. need for power (nPow), need for achievement (nAch), and need for affiliation (nAff) and job burnout and compare the level of its prevalence in women with men working as call handlers in BPO centres.

Major hypotheses of present study are that (1) people with high nAch would score high on components of burnout, (2) people high on need for power would be high on depersonalization, and (3) the two components of job burnout would be higher among women as compared to men with similar motivational needs.

Method

Sample

Data was collected from Six BPO's. Response rate was forty six percent. Sample consisted of forty men and forty women. Their educational qualification was secondary school with minimum experience of two years as *call handler*. To study the extent of burnout, only those workers were included in sample who had a minimum of two years of experience of working in a BPO as call handler. Their ages ranged from 20 years to 30 years.

Instruments

Maslach Burnout Inventory Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) is composed of 22 items (that measure the frequency with which certain feelings are experienced, 0 means *the feeling is never experienced*, while 6 means *it is experienced every day*) was used to measure the extent of Job Burnout. This inventory

has 3 subscales to measure each of the three aspects of burnout, i.e. Emotional Exhaustion (9 items), Depersonalization (5 items), and Personal Accomplishment (8 items). The reliability of the total scale is .64 and those of subscales is .8, .5, and .7 respectively (Analysis in present article includes only depersonalization and personal accomplishment subscales.).

Ray-Lyn "AO" Scale *Ray-Lyn "AO" Scale* was used to measure the need for Achievement. This is a 28 items scale with a reliability of .81. It was developed by Ray in 1974.

Mehrabian Affiliative Tendency Scale The Mehrabian Affiliative Tendency Scale was used to measure need for Affiliation. It contains 26 items and subjects report the degree of their agreement or disagreement with each item using a 9 point agreement-disagreement scale. It was developed by Mehrabian in 1976.

Improved Directiveness Scale The Improved Directiveness Scale consists of fourteen items. It was used to measure the need for Power. It was developed by Ray and Lovejoy in 1988.

Procedure

Sampling frame comprised of regular, full time operating workers randomly selected from BPO centers like DELL, AIRTEL, IBM, EXEL, GENPAC, and ONVERGYS. Out of one hundred and eighty five questionnaires which were received back, only eighty usable.

The completed questionnaires were collected from the managers. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were protected as their names were not required on the questionnaires. Participants were asked to fill up their demographic profile but not to mention their names anywhere on the questionnaire. The administration of the scales required about half an hour per subject. It was sample of convenience from several BPO centers from various parts of the country like Delhi, Chandigarh, Mohali, Noida, Banglore, Hyderabad, and Kolkata.

Results

The principal result obtained by means of data analysis indicates that the BPO centers workers suffer high level of depersonalization. However, personal accomplishment was not so much lacking in

workers. The analysis shows that these three components of burnout vary with varying motivational needs of the workers. Analysis also showed that burnout is more among women than men with similar motivational needs working in BPO centers.

Table 1

Means and F values of Motivational Needs of Employees and Depersonalization (N = 80)

Effect	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>
Intercept	10215.20	491.5585
(1) nPow	26.45	1.2728
(2) nAch	3.20	.1540
(3) nAff	5.00	.2406
(4) Gender	20.00	.9624
nPow*nAch	14.45	.6953
nPow*nAff	1.25	.0602
nAch*nAff	39.20	1.8863
nPow*Gender	18.05	.8686
nAch*Gender	16.20	.7795
nAff*Gender	135.20	6.5059*
nPow* nAch* nAff	31.25	1.5038
nPow* nAch*Gender	.45	.0217
nPow*nAff*Gender	48.05	2.3122
nAch*nAff*Gender	.80	.0385
1*2*3*4	61.25	2.9474
Error	20.78	

df = 1, **p* < .05.

Table 1 reports relationship of depersonalization with variables as nPow, nAch, nAff, and gender. There are no statistically significant relationship as far as nPow and nAch is concerned, but the correlation between nAff and gender was found to be statistically significant.

Females with high nAff had higher depersonalization than females with low nAff. Male workers with high nAff were lower on depersonalization than their counterparts with low nAff. Overall gender wise comparison shows females with high nAff having higher depersonalization than males with high nAff. Male workers with high nAch were found to be low in personal accomplishment and males

with low nAch were high in personal accomplishment. The need for achievement in males is postulated as a desire to be successful in terms of promotion. Lack of opportunities for promotion can lead to low job satisfaction resulting in lack of accomplishment. However females with high nAch had high personal accomplishment and females with low nAch had low personal accomplishment, indicating at females may feel satisfied with short term achievement (see Table 2).

Table 2
Means and F values of Motivational Needs of Employees and Personal Accomplishment (N = 80)

Effect	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>
Intercept	33048.45	786.7508
(1) nPow	1.80	.0429
(2) nAch	24.20	.5761
(3) nAff	6.05	.1440
(4) Gender	18.05	.4297
nPow* nAch	48.05	1.1439
nPow* nAff	12.80	.3047
nAch* nAff	1.80	.0429
nPow*Gender	5.00	.1190
nAch*Gender	105.80	2.5187
nAff* Gender	140.45	3.3436
nPow* nAch* nAff	.45	.0107
nPow*nAch*Gender	14.45	.3440
nPow*nAff**Gender	.80	.0190
nAch*nAff *Gender	168.20	4.0042*
1*2*3*4	1.25	.0298
Error	42.01	

df = 1, **p* < .05.

Female workers with high nAff had a higher personal accomplishment; whereas male workers with high nAff had low personal accomplishment. Overall workers with high nAff have low personal accomplishment but personal accomplishment was found to be higher in workers with low nAff.

Gender was of course related to depersonalization and personal accomplishment. Females with high nAff had high score for Depersonalization as compared to males with high nAff. Male having high nAch, showed lower personal accomplishment than the male

workers with low nAch. But female workers with high nAch were high on personal accomplishment score as compared to female workers with low nAch. Male workers having high nAff had low scores in personal accomplishment than male workers with low nAff. But it was observed that personal accomplishment was higher in female workers with high nAff than females with low nAff.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Stress among BPO centers workers has been reported by many research studies. This job stress results into burnout. Present study suggests that extent of burnout varies with varying motivational needs of the workers. The extent of depersonalization varies in workers with different motivational needs and impact on personal accomplishment also varies as per motivational needs.

Although both men and women reported moderate burnout but depersonalization was significantly higher in women with high nAff than men with high nAff. HR managers should look at the motivational needs of people to be employed in BPO centers, especially females with high nAff and need for depersonalization. The study indicates that personal accomplishment is not a problem with female workers with high nAff but depersonalization is a significantly high need. They feel suffocated in BPO centers, as they hardly get a chance to interact with their co-workers and deal with faceless customers. This finding assumes added significance considering that females constitute 51% of the work force.

Interestingly, males workers with low nAff were high on personal accomplishment. While there is not much difference in the personal accomplishment of men with high and low nAch, the personal accomplishment differ vastly in case of females workers. Those with high nAch having a high personal accomplishment and those with a low nAch had low personal accomplishment.

One way to combat the problem of burnout is to identify the motivational needs of person before employing him or her. Barnett (1999) calls it *person-organization* fit or match between an individual's needs, values, and preferences and the characteristics of the work in organization. Chan, Mcbey, Basset, O'Donell, and Winter (2004) also say that the most effective way to prevent job-shifting is to ensure that they have the 'best fit' between employees and their job requirements from the day of onset of the employment. MNPS (Motivational Needs Profile system) of an individual can be prepared by one-on-one interviews. The profile can plot the motivational needs

of an individual, the need to do things well from beginning to end (nAch), the need to maintain close relations with others (nAff) and the need to exercise influence on others (nPow). Job Burnout not only affects the worker but has drastic impact on the organization in terms of job turnover. Some of the BPO centers have even reduced the working days for call handlers to only four days a week but it did not help much as far as the job stress is concerned (Narayanan, 2006). Worley, Dishner, Nancy, Knight, and Tollefson (2007) states that high job turnover rates lead to negative publicity of the organization, creates unsettled atmosphere for other employees and also adds to expenditure of recruiting hiring and training.

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