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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON ORGANISATIONAL CRISIS IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

Leading an organization through a crisis is a tough challenge for a manager. Crises may result from a natural disaster affecting the organisation's business continuity, human error affecting people of the organisation or some form of business crisis. To address the severity of such crisis situations, Information Technology (IT) industry was selected for the purpose of the study. Amongst the most prominent crisis that was found prevailing in IT industry was losing its executives with key skills. There was a time when an employee used to stay with one company for his or her entire career but in today's workforce, what remains constant are employees switching their job from one company to the other. In lieu of the current scenario, the main objective of the study attempts to identify the most prominent crisis prevailing in IT industry. To attain the primary objective of the study, the authors have identified two secondary objectives. The first one is to determine the frequency of occurrence of such crisis and secondly to determine the level of intensity of occurrence of such crisis.

KEYWORDS

HR crisis, IT industry, loss of key executives, Organisational Crisis.

INTRODUCTION

Buzzwords like globalization, accelerating rate of technological advancement, empowerment, downsizing and talent management reflects that the era of 21st century is faced by intense ups and downs. Regardless of the kind of business one is into, today's organizations are operating in an environment categorized by high turbulence and risk (Pandey & Pande, 2013). While it is continuously being discussed about how to combat this storm, it becomes extremely important on part of managers to find a way out of such turmoil.

A growing body of researchers have been using the term "crisis" on the basis of their discipline. Now there seems to be a good level of agreement in the management literature about the definition of a crisis. This broad consensus has been consolidated by Shrivastava, P., Mitroff, I., Miller, R., & Miglani, S. (1998). "Crisis is the moment, when company faces with difficulties and such situation becomes dangerous for further company's development". For the purpose of this study "Crisis" has been employed as a comprehensive term that facilitates managers to refer to a situation as a critical event that requires immediate attention. There are issues which come out as an important element when organizations face crises. These issues can be categorised in two ways. First, although the awareness regarding the effect of a crisis event is increasing, most organizations are still found, not fully prepared to handle the same when it occurs (Fegley & Victor, 2005). This may, partially explain why organizations fail to deal with crisis events which may further endanger the organisation's sustainability. The frequent occurrence of different organizational crises highlights the second main issue. This calls for Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals to have a better understanding of what defines a crisis and being aware of the nature and impact of crisis on organisation (Bohlander and Snell, 2010). Such understandings provide appropriate interventions that facilitate organizations in combating challenging times of crisis.

Organizational crises have been examined from multiple perspectives. From the psychological perspective, crises are highly uncertain and complex and this is caused due to the irrational response of organizational leaders and managers (Stubbart, 1987). From the social-political point of view, the cause of crisis is closely related to a breakdown in collective sense making (Turner, 1976) or due to the lack of followers' belief in leadership and cultural norms (Habermas, 1975; O'Connor, 1987). As a result, an organization may experience leadership crisis or employee turnover (Hurst, 1995). From the technological-structural perspective, crisis may result from the technologies that interact with managerial, structural, and other factors of an organization internally or externally (Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992).

Organisational crisis regardless of its type or magnitude has the potential to cause immense damage to the organisation. With respect to this, the present study tries to identify the most prominent organisational crises prevailing in IT industry by determining the frequency of occurrence of such crisis and secondly determining the level of intensity of occurrence of such crisis.

IT industry in India is undoubtedly one of the most dynamic sectors in India's economy. This industry has a major role in transforming India's image as a global player in providing world class technology solutions and business services. Being an employee centric industry, of all the factors of production, human factor stands as one of the vital factors that rule this industry. In lieu of the contribution that IT sector has made in the resilience of the economy, the primary objective of the study lies in identifying the most prominent crisis faced by IT industry in Delhi/NCR region, hub of industrial India.

After the introductory Section, Section 2 reviews some significant works in the field of crisis management, Section 3 details the objective for the research study; Section 4 describes the data and methodology; the statistical technique used for the study and findings of the study has been depicted in Section 5; discussion and conclusion of the study is shown in Section 6. Finally, Section 7 and 8 concludes with the scope for future research and managerial implications of the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW: BACKGROUND FOR THE RESEARCH

Contrary to a common and persistent belief, crises in present-day societies can no longer be considered as rare events (Rosenthal & Kouzmin, 1996). The range of crises in our society has increased (Hart & al., 2001; Quarantelli, 2001; Robert & Lajtha, 2002). Every organisation sooner or later experience some form of crisis. Warning signs thus become the essence of crisis management. Organisational leaders need to be aware of prospective problems and vulnerabilities that can creep into businesses and burst out into crises. Although it's not necessary that all vulnerability erupts into a crisis situation but the warning signs shouldn't be ignored.

All organisations sooner or later experience some form of crisis. Those which seem to be most vulnerable may include organisations that have lately experienced a crisis, organisations with financial difficulties, high-profile organisations with well-known personalities, organisations that are new/start-up businesses, organisations with high stress and unfavourable working conditions (Caponigro, 2000).

To have an in-depth understanding of crisis situations we have described crisis in four different forms:

CRISES STAGES

Like most human events, crises can be described in terms of stages. Stages enable planners to monitor risks, progress, target stakeholders, and take strategic action appropriate to the stage of occurrence of crisis situation (Meier, 2011). Fink stated that crisis can consist of up to four different stages. The first stage is the prodromal crisis stage which consists of warning symptoms; the second stage is the acute crisis stage in which symptoms demand immediate and on urgent

basis attention; the third stage is the chronic crisis stage of problems that exist for a considerable period of time; and the last stage is the crisis resolution stage that demands vital managerial decision (Kash and Darling 1998). Likewise, Mitroff (1994) proposed Five Stages of Crisis Management that comprises of Signal detection, probing and prevention, damage containment, recovery and learning.

CRISES EVENTS

Crisis has also been described in respect to relatively particular sequences of events and reactions. Mitroff (2005) identified seven types of major crises like Economic, Human resources, Informational, Physical (loss of key plants), Reputational, Psychopathic and Natural Crises.

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CRISIS

Further crises have classified on the basis of its occurrence within the organisation and those that may be external but would affect the organisation to a large extent. Milburn, Schuler & Watman (1983), Perrow (1984), Shrivastava (1987), Janis (1989), Marcus and Goodman (1991), Pearson & Clair (1998), Dowling (2002), Boin (et al., 2008) have to a large extent contributed to the theories of organisational crisis and have categorised it into Internal and External Crisis, as shown in Table 1.

CRISIS IN REFERENCE TO TIME CONSTRAINT

Crises, in the past have also been illustrated with reference to time constraint, such as-immediate, emerging and sustained. These may be associated to sudden high employee turnover, low product quality or involvement of natural events (Parsons, 1996). In every case, managers are called upon to effectively combat the situations by means of human resources, individual's knowledge and experience. Human resources thus become the most important asset for an organization to be competitive.

HR CRISIS AND ITS IMPACT ON ORGANISATION

A crisis situation calls for an immediate action which can only be taken in collaboration. Organisational leaders need to understand that there is always a human side to a crisis as people may get hurt physically or psychologically. One of the drawbacks in crisis management planning is that most of the focus and efforts are made on systems, operations, infrastructure and public relations. With people, coming in last on the list of these concerns often leave them with the feeling of being neglected. Ronez (2008) stated in his article that if an organisation doesn't have an adequate HR crisis plan in place, the effects on the workforce could be awful which may also result in loss of key staff and knowledge, absenteeism & high turnover, underperforming staff with lowered morale and lack of motivation, improving health benefits costs, HR-related legal concerns and costly litigations and damaged reputation of the organisation.

In order to combat these circumstances, an organisation needs to take timely measures such as immediate decisions, clear flow of information, leadership and reassurance, understanding and initializing psychological support for rapid return to normalcy.

Researchers have found that human resources crisis influence organizations differently. It may be caused by both internal and external factors. The internal factors include changes in the enterprise system, dissatisfaction with the job, mishandling of organizational managerial issues, and low development of the enterprise. The external factors are related to fierce competition in the market, government policy or some major accidents (Gao & Alas, 2010).

Zhou (2004) and Ye (2005) have highlighted four consequences emerging from a human resources crisis. First, it reduces the overall enterprise performance; second, it hinders communications between managers and employees; third, it causes absurd reactions; and fourth, it results in malevolent situations.

HR CRISES AND THE INDIAN IT INDUSTRY

The organization's human resources signify one of its major investments because human resources solely can impact the performance of both the employees and the organization. According to Ivancevich & Matteson (1993), issues related to human resources should be handled and dealt very carefully. Failing to do so, may result in crises, such as job dissatisfaction, poor morale, reduced commitment, lower work quality, burnout, poor judgment and ultimately employee leaving the organization. Today, with number of alternatives present in the labor market, it has become easy for an employee to leave his/her job and switch to another best alternative present. Nevertheless, having excess employees leaving their jobs for any reason may cause a huge effect on an organization's operation. Importantly, loss of key employees weakens a company's competitive advantage, as good teamwork and team workers cannot be duplicated.

IT sector, known for its "human capital" factor, is often characterized by overtime, after dark meetings, late-night works, on-call duty, and a continual state of rush or crisis (Branham, 2005). These situations have bred highly demanding and egoistic workforce who even at the slightest discomfort, leave the organization and join the best available option. Boyar et al. (2012) reported that the struggle for highly trained IT employees will possibly impact employee mobility and will intensify the opportunity to change jobs within India and globally. To withstand such pressures and survive in such an environment, organizations need to have a consistent and committed work force. Forgone are the days, when employees would stay with an employer for years. Today's high-tech employees do not go with the agenda of lifetime employment in one company. They desire for a challenging job and a stimulating pay-package. Sooner or later, they start looking for options in the market when they do not find their job satisfying them. Keeping a diverse set of employees satisfied is phenomenal for most of the software companies. A work situation where almost all companies have conceded the fact that their valued employees are going to leave them some or the other day, what raises a concern is the "time" when he/she thinks of leaving his/her company.

For the purpose of this study, we have selected IT professionals as a focus group. IT professionals have specialized and hard-to-replace skills which can severely impact an organization's competitive advantage. The in-depth literature review reveals that satisfying IT professionals is a troublesome task as they can easily find new opportunities due to the growing demand for IT professionals in different companies. Although, which factors are important for quitting decision of IT professionals still remains an ambiguous problem for companies as well as researchers.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

The primary objective of this research is to identify the most prominent crisis prevailing in IT industry in Delhi/NCR region.

SECONDARY OBJECTIVES

To achieve the primary objective of the study, the following secondary objectives have been identified:

- To determine the frequency of occurrence of crisis
- To determine the level of intensity of occurrence of such crisis

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to attain the objectives of the study, the data was collected from both the primary and secondary sources. The secondary data was collected from Journals, internet resources, magazines, etc. Based on an extensive review of the literature on crisis and different types of organisational crisis prevailing across industries, a list of open ended and closed ended questions were framed. These questions were used in the first part of primary survey which consisted of an in-depth interview with 30 industry experts from different departments of IT industries. The result was analyzed and based on further suggestions from the experts the instrument was then fine-tuned and finalized for the purpose of the study. Second part of the primary survey consisted of a sample of 110 IT professionals from different IT industries in Delhi/NCR region. In total 200 questionnaires were emailed, out of which 150 were received and 110 questionnaires were found to be usable. This gave a return rate of approximately 73%. All the questionnaires were sorted and the variables were thereafter coded. The questionnaires were analyzed using the SPSS statistical software (version 17.0).

RESULTS

PARTICIPANTS

Participants included a sample of 110 IT professionals working in Delhi/NCR. Sixty five percent of the participants were males and thirty five percent were females. Majority of the respondents i.e. 35% fell in age group of 25-30, 32% belonged to 31-35 age group and 21% to 36-40 age group. 45% of the respondent

who were a part of this survey had been in their present organisation for less than equal to 2 years and 48% of the respondents have been serving in their present organisation from 3 to 6 years. Seven percent held diploma degrees, 42% held graduate degrees, and 51% held masters' degrees.

MEASURE AND FINDINGS

Frequency of occurrence of crisis

The research is based on existing theoretical and empirical information about different organisational crisis. In addition to collecting demographic information, survey items have examined the types of crisis encountered by different IT companies. To know which crisis dominates the IT companies in particular, we have carried out a descriptive analysis to check the frequency of different organisational crisis.

Frequencies of crisis events encountered were obtained by asking participants to respond to the number of occurrences of different crises on a 5-point scale, from 1(never) to 5 (every time).

The responses from the IT professionals to the types and frequencies of crises encountered in their companies over the duration of their careers, from never to every time, are summarized in Table 2. The most commonly crisis events reported were loss of employees with key skills (scoring the highest mean 3.7455), mass absenteeism (mean 2.6364) and loss of employees due to sudden death (mean 1.7091). The least common crisis events included failure to IT infrastructure, key leadership position loss, false rumours, adapting to change, harassment related to caste, creed, etc., disclosing of company's information, slowdown, damaging to hardware/software, sexual harassment and lack of succession planning. To effectively explain the concept of "key" in the present context we did a comprehensive study of what exactly defines an employee being a "key" asset. Every corporation has at least one key executive or set of employees who make a substantial contribution to the operation, profitability and success of the business. Any individual who has critical intellectual information, sales relationships, bank relationships, product knowledge, and/or industry contacts that may adversely affect profits in the event of their absence, may be considered "key" (Financial Visions, Inc.).

Intensity of crisis occurring in the organisation

In scientific literature the most highlighted types of crisis are: natural (caused by nature), industrial, terrorist's attacks, economic, informational, financial, human resource and reputational (Mitroff, 2005). Every crisis has the equal capacity of turning a business upside down. To determine the level of intensity of each type of crisis events, a descriptive analysis was carried out on all the valid data to determine the mean intensity rating for the responses to all the statements in the questionnaire. Using the descriptive analysis on the basis of intensity scale, it was finally possible to identify and distinguish between most significant and insignificant crisis events pertaining to IT industry (Table 3).

Based on the results (Table 2 and Table 3) we get an overview of the most prominent crisis prevailing in IT industry. Loss of employees with key skills ranks highest on the mean intensity rating scale with a mean score of 4.0182 followed by mass absenteeism (2.6545). Disclosing of information had a minimum mean score of 1.4455 which is categorised as extremely low on the intensity scale. This shows that the type of crisis which is frequent and which also poses high severity in the IT industry is the loss of employees with key skills which ranked on the top on both the tables of the descriptive analysis. Although the rest eleven types of organisational crisis scored less on the mean, they cannot be ignored while considering the impact a crisis situation can have on an organisation. This study thus opens a roadway to understand how important it is to know about the risk associated with one's organisation and that if ignored for a long time this risk may lead to a chain of crisis events.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

We live in a century which is mainly dominated by human factors. In this human Age, the major engine of economic growth is human capital, the assets that walk in and out of the office every day. No matter how pleasant an employer-employee relationship is, ultimately the employee might leave. And for businesses, this may create a crisis, especially if the employee has been a key part of the team and the company hasn't planned for the departure.

A crisis may arise in many forms. This study explored the type of crises which is prominent in IT industry in Delhi/NCR. According to the findings of the study, loss of key executives, as one part of HR crises emerged as an evident threat to be prevailing in this sector. This study is in contribution with the work done by other researchers (Mitroff, 2005; Sher, 2006; Hilbert and Alas, 2009) where out of the three main Crises Economic, Reputational and HR crisis HR crisis was found to pose devastating impact on organisations.

Today almost every sector is aware that the economy is recovering. With a recovering economy come ample opportunities for employees, "especially key employees" to jump ship to another organization. Loss of key employees can occur in several ways. They can quit, they can retire, they can get sick, and they can move out of town, or sudden death – the possibilities are endless. But if employees quit often, employers would need to find out why people are leaving and what exactly could be done to make the organisation a better place to work.

The findings of the study shows that one such type of crisis that occur frequently and also has high level of intensity of its occurrence in IT industry is the loss of key employees. This meant that despite of the fact known to the management about the situation prevailing in their companies no strong measures have been identified or have been implemented to combat the severity of such situations. After having a clear glimpse of the state of affairs prevailing in the industry this study supports the work done by Sullivan in 2002 where he has mentioned that if one doesn't take time to plan for the loss of key employees and the worst happens, one might suffer an even more distressing ordeal. Backed by different reasons associated with a key employee leaving the organisation few major contributing factors are performance issues, lack of engagement, last minute absences or the employee becoming more vocal in expressing his/her dissatisfaction with their job, pay or benefits. If any of these warning signs crop up, it would be advantageous for the employee's manager/supervisor to take up the matter with the person to find out causes driving these behaviours.

All organisations, regardless of their size, have key people – people whose involvement have a significant impact on the bottom line. Departure of a key employee, especially if it is sudden, can hold-up the completion of projects or delivery of orders. The day-to-day accountability for keeping key people, however, falls on managers and line employees, who must know their powerful role in this talent battle. Human resource department, who is the designer of systemic retention processes, should start thinking strategically. They have got to see the big picture and then identify and point out the implications and real costs related to loss of key people in the organisation.

SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study has looked deeply into different types of Crisis. It has attempted to explore the particular type of Organisational Crisis prevailing in IT industry in Delhi/NCR. Loss of key employees came out as one of the prominent HR crisis existing in IT industry. For decades, HR crisis has synonymously been used as workforce crisis, attrition crisis or turnover crises. But there is lot more to be explored in this field as how HR and talent management professionals can assess the loss caused due to departure of key employees of the organisation. This opens up a pathway for the future research considering the findings of this study in IT industry. The study, however, does have its limits which became apparent when areas of future research were identified. The research catering to this field can be made more rigorous by increasing the same size and the results can then be generalised to overall IT industry by involving samples from other regions as well. This study may be extended to overall service sector, as it has been the most dynamic sector of the Indian Economy. A comparative analysis of the crisis prevailing across the industries in the service sector may prove helpful to the management in identifying crisis and thereby developing a strategic plan to combat such crisis. Future research may also look at and measure the specific effects depending on crisis type.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGERS

Managers specifically from IT industry need to take cognizance of the fact that the knowledge engrossed in the minds of people is difficult to put into words and is therefore not easy to retain. The loss of key employees, even in small numbers, can be distressing to a company. This raises a concern towards tracking not just overall attrition ratios, but also tracking the level of key performers leaving. Managers should consider retention as an integral part of business success and survival. Treating retention as an on-going priority may enable the manager to focus on hands-on measures to sustain long term commitment of key employees, rather than reacting after a surprise resignation is made.

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ANNEXURE

TABLE 1: TYPES OF ORGANISATIONAL CRISIS

S. No.	Internal	External
1	Bribery	Natural disaster that destroys corporate product or service headquarters
2	Information sabotage	Natural disaster that eliminates key organizational information base stakeholder
3	Workplace bombing	Environmental spill
4	Work-related homicide	Hostile takeover
5	Sabotage by insiders	Societal crises
6	Plant explosion	Terrorism
7	Sexual harassment	Sabotage
8	Computer breakdown	Executive kidnapping
9	Failure to adapt to change	Off-site product tampering
10	Rise in absenteeism	Markets deregulate
11	Communication breakdown	Labour strike

TABLE 2: TYPES AND FREQUENCIES OF CRISES EXPERIENCED BY IT INDUSTRY

Types of Organisational Crises	Mean	Std. Deviation	Frequency of Occurrence of Crisis (in %)				
			1	2	3	4	5
Loss of employees with key skills	3.7455	1.15287	6	6	25	31	32
Mass absenteeism	2.6364	.64577	1	41	54	2	2
Loss due to sudden death etc.	1.7091	.87099	53	27	16	4	0
Failure to IT infrastructure	1.6091	.73066	52	37	9	2	0
Key leadership positions loss	1.5727	.70981	56	32	12	0	0
False rumours	1.5273	.70005	59	29	12	0	0
Adapting to change	1.4364	.69767	65	28	4	3	0
Harassment (caste, creed, colour)	1.4273	.58198	62	34	4	0	0
Information disclose	1.4091	.68128	68	24	5	2	1
Slowdown	1.3909	.54344	64	34	2	0	0
Damaging to hardware/software	1.2727	.48669	74	24	1	1	0
Sexual harassment	1.2727	.52303	76	20	4	0	0
Lack of succession planning	1.2273	.48195	79	18	3	0	0

TABLE 3: ORGANISATIONAL CRISES ARRANGED IN HIGH TO LOW SEQUENCE OF INTENSITY

Types of Organisational Crisis	N	Min	Max	Intensity of crises	
				Mean	Std. Deviation
Loss of employees with key skills	110	1.00	5.00	4.0182	1.10031
Mass absenteeism	110	1.00	5.00	2.6545	0.65576
Loss due to sudden death, etc	110	1.00	4.00	1.8727	0.94925
Key leadership positions loss	110	1.00	5.00	1.8273	0.9941
Harassment (caste, creed, colour)	110	1.00	4.00	1.7727	0.84222
Failure to IT infrastructure	110	1.00	4.00	1.7	0.84103
Adapting to change	110	1.00	4.00	1.6545	0.91307
Damaging to hardware/software	110	1.00	4.00	1.5182	0.90596
Sexual harassment	110	1.00	4.00	1.4909	0.86465
Lack of succession planning	110	1.00	4.00	1.4727	0.90573
Slowdown in the business	110	1.00	4.00	1.4636	0.65912
False rumours	110	1.00	3.00	1.4545	0.61534
Information disclose	110	1.00	4.00	1.4455	0.78502

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