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HRM PRACTICES AND EMPLOYEE ATTRITION: A GENDER CENTRIC ANALYSIS OF INDIAN BPO INDUSTRY**AMIT MALHOTRA****ASST. PROFESSOR****VIDYA INSTITUTE OF CREATIVE TEACHING
MEERUT****ADITYA GAUTAM****GROUP DIRECTOR (MANAGEMENT PROGRAMMES)****VIDYA KNOWLEDGE PARK****MEERUT****ABSTRACT**

The BPO Industry in India has achieved impressive growth in its two decades of existence. This growth would not have been possible without the abundant availability of suitable manpower. Ironically, sustaining the manpower has proved to be the foremost challenge facing this industry. The high rate of employee attrition has resulted in monetary and performance related setbacks to the organizations. The HR managers have devoted considerable attention to fix the problem and in doing so, have devised many new HRM practices to reduce the attrition but it still remains an area of concern. The workforce in the Indian BPOs consists of males and females in nearly equal proportions. Studies have shown that the orientation and preferences of male & female differ in respect of professional matters. Furthermore, the reasons for attrition amongst gender have also been observed to be different. The paper aims at ascertaining whether or not the perception of male & female employees about the impact of HRM practices on attrition, is similar.

KEYWORDS

HRM practices, organizational culture, work environment, employee attrition, labour turnover, BPO industry.

INTRODUCTION

Attrition in a work environment refers to a reduction or decrease in the size or strength the work force, or a gradual reduction in labor occurring due to cause other than sacking of employees. It is usually measured with a metric called attrition rate, which simply measures the no of employees moving out of the company (voluntary resigning or laid off by the company). Attrition Rate is "the rate of shrinkage in size or number"

$$\text{Attrition Rate (in percentage)} = \frac{\text{No. of Separations in a Time Period}}{\text{Total No. of Employees in a time period}} \times 100$$

Attrition rate is the percentage of people leaving the organization, i.e., people left relative to total number of people who have worked for the organization during the time period under consideration.

Attrition can be known and unforeseen, when it is known attrition can be managed suitably, as the organization remains aware of such situation well in advance and takes required steps of direct recruitment or promotion on a timely basis. However, unforeseen attrition in organizations creates problems and adversely affects the production and financial status of the company. Usually organizations remain cautious of such conditions and take continuous feedback from their managers about the situation.

Human Resource Management is the process of recruitment, selection of employee, providing proper orientation and induction, providing proper training and the developing skills, assessment of employee (performance of appraisal), providing proper compensation and benefits, motivating, maintaining proper relations with labour and with trade unions, maintaining employee's safety, welfare and health by complying with labour laws of concerned state or country. The core purpose of the human resource management is to make efficient use of existing human resource in the organization. An effective HRM system should be such that it encourages an organizational climate of trust, autonomy, collaboration, communication and teamwork etc. It is important for an organization to have such systems that not only identify and recognize the top performers but also help the employees and organization to achieve sustainable growth. (Jain, S. and Gautam, A. 2016a)

The term Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) denotes an arrangement involving contracting of non-primary business activities and functions to a third-party provider. BPO services include payroll, human resources (HR), accounting and customer/call center relations. It is also referred to as Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES).

The outsourcing of services is done with a view to achieve cost reductions while improving service quality. This practice has gained worldwide acceptance cutting across various industrial sectors. BPO has become the obvious strategic choice of the companies looking at the visible profits of cost reduction while improving the quality of service, increasing shareholder value etc. (Shah and Sharma 2007).

India is now the world's favoured market for BPO companies, among other competitors, such as, Australia, China, Philippines and Ireland. The BPO boom in India is credited to cheap labor costs and India's huge talent pool of skilled, English-speaking professionals.

Besides this, Factors such as economy of scale, cost advantage, utilization improvement and superior competency have all lead to the growth of the Indian BPO industry. Business process outsourcing in India, which started around the mid- nineties has now grown manifold.

According to Mehta et al. (2006), of all the challenges posed to BPO organizations at various levels, attrition, absenteeism and motivating employees are the major ones that dominate at the middle level. The attrition rate in the industry has been reported to be 35% on an average, which is quite high for any industry.

Attrition in BPOs has had adverse effects on the organizations. Not only the organizations have to deal with disruptions in services due to unplanned exits but when more people leave an organization, the more it results in a drain on the company's resources for incurring recruitment expenses, training and orientation of new employees and the time spent on these issues. In addition to this, the high attrition rate also affects the productivity of the organization.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Joshi, R. (2004) on the basis of his study concludes that the main factors which cause high attrition in the BPO industry are (a) Unsatisfactory Monetary Rewards (b) Odd Working hours and (c) Monotony of the jobs. He further concluded that issues such as lack of clarity about expectations from employees make them unsuccessful, other issues are lack of clarity about performance based incentives & benefits, lack of feedback about performance and failure on the part of management to provide a framework within which the employee perceives he can succeed makes the situation more complex. He urged the HR to play a substantial not mere supportive role in shaping and implementing conducive HRM practices at both strategic and day-to-day levels. He further added that to be effective, HRM practices should firstly reflect organization wide commitments as to how it will manage and relate to its employees and secondly, such practices must actually be implemented.

Budhwar et al. (2006) conducted an exploratory study on the dynamics of HRM practices and systems in Indian BPOs, the study pointed out at the existence of formal, structured and rationalized HRM systems. It suggested that employee attrition issues were related to several factors which were primarily impacted by management practices. For instance, high turnover of employees could be attributed to their psychological situations which were dependent on the amount of stress a typical call centre agent would have to undergo. It was observed that a very less percentage of training and development time was spent on stress management sessions. Also, the emphasis on career development and training appeared to be somewhat less in the Indian BPOs as compared to their western counterparts. Further, it was found that communication and counseling related to managing stress within the organizations was lacking overall and more so in smaller call centres. Their research analyzed that one of the biggest problems related to attrition was growing stress that agents faced in a typical call centre environment.

According to Raman, R (2006) attrition in the BPO sector can be classified into two types i.e. "Drive Attrition" caused by factors associated with employers and secondly "Drag Attrition" caused by reasons associated with employees. "Drive Attrition" is caused due to employer's policies like terminating employees at the end of the contract period, retaining only most productive employees, lack of holidays and strict control on leave. "Drag Attrition" is caused due to perceptions and insecurities nursed by the employees such as low perceived value of their job, lack of recognition of work experience of BPO, outside the BPO industry, dearth of opportunities for career advancement, lack of time based promotions, odd working hours and health problems arising from it, disturbance in personal and social life resulting from it, desire to pursue higher education.

Shah, Hardik and Sharma, Vinay (2007) have explored the relationship between Job Satisfaction & Individual Performance in the context of a BPO unit and have concluded about job satisfaction and individual performance is that there is definitely a relationship, probably higher than the well-known but not as high as conventional wisdom assumed that "happy workers are productive workers." They further opined that learning to become, more aware of factors of dissatisfaction for BPO employees is the first major step towards managing them effectively. The study pointed out that Nature of Work, Working Conditions and Colleagues were the major source of dissatisfaction. Therefore, some interventions were suggested to minimize the problems which included allowing more flexibility and freedom to employees so as to reduce the job monotony. Offering clean attractive, well organized work place with attractive ambience so as to maintain the level of motivation to work, supportive and friendly behavior of immediate superior and promoting harmony between co-workers, selection of people friendly, customer oriented employees, organizing regular training updates, adopting fair & transparent performance appraisal system and monetary rewards for outstanding work. Shanthi and Bhargava, H. (2007) highlighted the troubling issues like stress, sleeplessness, and depression, fatigue and hearing ailments and stress for family members which cause distress among employees. Also, it was found that a number of factors like call-volume, work-timings, and repetitive processes contributed to stress. The authors also pointed that there is a significant change in life style of people working in BPOs. The young workforce (both male & female) tend to develop certain bad habits such as alcohol, smoking etc. also the spending patterns of such people have changed as the money is spent more on lifestyle products, and recreational activities. The authors concluded that since the job is stressful, better pay can temporarily satisfy the needs of the employee but once the employees face serious health problems it is likely they quit the industry.

Ananthraja, A. (2009) examined the factors responsible for employee turnover in business process outsourcing companies. The study suggests a high degree of correlation between employee turnover and some variables of job satisfaction vis-à-vis age, gender, marital status, native place and experiences. The researcher concluded that highest percentage of attrition is in voice – based process of Business Process Outsourcing industry. The researcher discussed some major factors responsible for attrition of employees which are - Business Related Factors (disliking the nature of work, lack of variety in work, mismatch of interest, proprietary technology does not add value to bio-data, possibilities of less interaction with end users); System - Related Factors (changing policies of company, lack of technical career advancement, lack of opportunity for continuous up-gradation of skills, delay in promotion, lack of transparency in appraisal and promotion policies, post-graduates are not given any additional benefits, unfair appraisals, unsure future, limited career growth opportunity); Personal Factors like marriage, moving with spouse, parents' health require moving to other city, not able to handle situation positively, wanted a job abroad, peer pressure, going to home town, want to work in new technologies were contributors to attrition.

Thite, Mohan and Russell, Bob (2010) made a comprehensive study on work organization, HR practices and employee retention in some leading Indian BPOs and found that these BPOs followed structured, formal and rational HR practices however, the rate of attrition was observed to be alarming. They observed that in BPO sector there is a situation of highly educated young people doing semi-skilled, low value jobs. Their analysis revealed that Employment Security is not considered by majority of the employees as a significant reason to stay in the job. Secondly, employees who considered their employment prospects to be good and the possible ease of job substitution showed more inclination to exit. Thirdly, chances of retention improved where employees are of the view that a significant portion of remuneration arises from performance related pay & incentives and are content with the administration of such system. Fourthly, if employees feel that their job-skill match is satisfactory coupled with this if they place a high value on realistic incentive schemes offered then prefer to stay in their current job compensation and benefits.

Sreerekha, K. R. and Kamalanabhan, T.J. (2012) conducted a comprehensive study on the factors causing employee attrition in BPOs in India. The study focused on the influence of the intervening variables such as organizational commitment on turnover intentions of employees. The study indicated that the antecedents of turnover were significantly associated with employee turnover intention mediated by organizational commitment. The study indicated that in a call center set up, work is highly formulated and tightly controlled and computer technology overrides management employee relations. The study suggested that management should set up an open channel of communication in line with the daily routines to enable employees to express their feelings, ideas and views. This can help the management in obtaining information regarding employee job satisfaction. Apart from this, management can also help employees to manage their stress especially among the front line representatives in call centers who experience high levels of stress while dealing with demanding clients.

Gupta, Vibha (2013) conducted an exploratory research to assess attrition control systems in case of IT-BPO sector. The research study probed into the reasons for quitting the job through telephonic interviews with former employees, the main reasons that surfaced were Offer of better remuneration, Night shifts and weekend work leading to dissatisfactory work-life balance, improper/inadequate training, lack of career prospects and deficient organizational culture.

Aranganathan, P. and Sivarethinamohan, R. (2013) identified nine factors responsible for attrition – Deprived Supervision, Low Career Growth, Poor Training and Un-favourable Working Conditions, Lack of skill variety, Good Salary expectations & Turnover Intentions, Low Self-fulfillment, Sub-Standard nature of the job, Dissatisfaction with colleagues and Lack of Authority.

Thamizharasi, K. and Uma Rani (2014) conducted a study on work stress and job performance evaluation of employees in BPOs. It was observed that every employee is expected to work for long hours, perform multiple jobs, available for 24 hours in seven days. These reasons give a mentally as well as physical problems to the employees. When these problems increase, then it gives anxiety & tension to the employees and ultimately the productivity of the employees decrease. Seven stress causing factors namely Salary, Job Task, Work Environment, Colleagues, Late Night Shift, Performance Targets and Work Load, were identified and their magnitude was analyzed. The study further revealed that female employees in BPOs suffer from higher stress as compared to their male colleagues. Specifically, women suffered higher stress due to late night shifts.

Bharathi, N. & Paramashivaiah, P. (2015) classified attrition in IT/ITES sector into voluntary and involuntary and assessed its impact on behavioural intentions. They concluded that Flexibility in work / time and Communication flow in the company are the environmental factors that require greatest attention for improvement. Coaching / mentoring by superiors and Career advancement are the training and development factors that require most attention for improvement. Employee empowerment (powers in decision-making) and Motivation Levels are the organizational culture and strategy variables that require most attention for improvement. Job Life span (job security) and Nature of job assignments are the job-specific variables that require the most attention for improvement.

Jain, S. and Gautam, A. & (2016b) have opined that Employees who feel valuable and satisfied at work are able to perform over and above their employer's expectations. The success of organizations does not only depend on the implementation of good strategies but also on the involvement of employees. Employees whose managers value their opinions perform as per potential especially when such employees know that their opinion counts. It can be appreciated that employees who feel valued & satisfied at workplace are likely to stay longer in their jobs.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of the present study is to examine whether or not there exists a similarity between the perceptions of male & female employees about the impact of various HRM practices on employee attrition.

HYPOTHESES

Considering the nature of study, and the relevant factors pertaining to HRM practices, following Null hypotheses were formulated:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between perception of male & female employees regarding impact of Recruitment and Selection policies on attrition in BPOs.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between perception of male & female employees regarding impact of Induction & Training programmes on attrition in BPOs.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference between perception of male & female employees regarding impact of Organizational Culture on attrition in BPOs.

H₀₄: There is no significant difference between perception of male & female employees regarding impact of Salary & Monetary Incentives on attrition in BPOs.

H₀₅: There is no significant difference between perception of male & female employees regarding impact of Health & Welfare Measures on attrition in BPOs.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of the fulfillment of the objective of the study, five research hypotheses have been formulated. The research design adopted for the study is descriptive approach wherein appropriate statistical techniques were used for both data collection and analysis.

For the stated purposes, primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire from a representative sample of employees using convenience sampling. The said data was mobilized from 400 employees that consisted of 252 males and 148 females belonging to the lower & middle cadres considering the fact that the problem of attrition is reported to be most prevalent in these cadres. The respondents were chosen from leading BPO companies located in NOIDA, Gurgaon and New Delhi of NCR chosen for the study in view of the geographical presence of majority of leading BPO organizations in the region.

The statistical analysis of data was carried out with the assistance of Microsoft Excel and statistical utilities available on internet.

A questionnaire containing 31 questions based on the attrition components/ factors related to HRM practices BPO organizations was used. The questionnaire consisted of survey questions pertaining to HRM practices namely Recruitment & Selection policies, Induction & Training Programmes, Organizational Culture, Salary & Monetary Incentives, Health & Welfare Measures. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree to statements relating to HRM practices undertaken by their organizations on a five-point Likert scale where 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree 3= Cannot Say, 4= Agree and 5= Strongly Agree

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The research used Cronbach's Alpha as a measure of internal consistency. Cronbach's Alpha is a reliability coefficient that indicates how well items in a set are positively correlated to one another. Table-1 gives a summary of the reliability test based on the Cronbach's alpha values for the five scales items in the survey instrument.

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF RELIABILITY TEST FROM EMPLOYEE RESPONSES ON SCALE ITEMS

Scale	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Recruitment & Selection (RS1-RS4)	04	0.7127
Induction & Training (IT 5-IT 9)	05	0.7574
Organizational Culture (OC10- OC19)	10	0.8232
Salary & Monetary Incentives (SM20 - SM 24)	05	0.7656
Health & Welfare Measures (HW25-HW31)	07	0.7472

An alpha of 0.7 or above is considered to be reliable as suggested by many Researchers this study the Cronbach's alpha coefficient values in respect of scales ranged from a low of 0.7127 to a high of 0.8232. Thus, with regard to the individual scale items in Table-1, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients obtained for the various scales are acceptable.

TESTING THE HYPOTHESES

Chi Square Test for Independence was used for testing individual hypothesis. The results of the analysis are as under:

- H₀₁:** There is no significant difference between perception of male & female employees regarding impact of Recruitment and Selection policies on attrition in BPOs.

The questionnaire contained 4 questions related to the Recruitment & Selection policies and their impact on reducing employee attrition. The responses are shown in Table-2 and analysis thereof using Chi-Square Test for Independence is also depicted.

The contingency tables shown hereinafter provide the information of the observed cell totals and the expected cell totals in brackets.

TABLE 2: RECRUITMENT & SELECTION AND EMPLOYEE ATTRITION

Results	Strongly Agree	Agree	Cannot Say	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Row Totals
Male	353 (321.93)	478 (488.88)	114 (115.29)	39 (53.55)	24 (28.35)	1008
Female	158 (189.07)	298 (287.12)	69 (67.71)	46 (31.45)	21 (16.65)	592
Column Totals	511	776	183	85	45	1600 (N)

The chi-square statistic is 21.2865. The *p*-value is .000278. The Degree of Freedom is 4. The result is significant at *p* < .05.

Interpretation: The Chi-Square value of 21.2865 with *P* = 0.000278 (*P* < .05, for 5% significance level) shows that there is a significant difference in expected and observed frequencies. Therefore, there is a significant difference in the perception of Male & Female employees regarding the impact of Recruitment & Selection policies on employee attrition. That means *H₀₁* regarding impact of Recruitment and Selection policies on attrition in BPOs stands rejected.

- H₀₂:** There is no significant difference between perception of male & female employees regarding impact of Induction & Training programmes on attrition in BPOs.

The questionnaire contained 5 questions related to the Induction & Training programmes and their impact on reducing employee attrition. The responses are shown in Table-3 and analysis thereof using Chi-Square Test for Independence is also depicted.

TABLE-3: INDUCTION & TRAINING PROGRAMMES AND EMPLOYEE ATTRITION

Results	Strongly Agree	Agree	Cannot Say	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Row Totals
Male	445 (442.89)	573 (587.79)	120 (107.73)	72 (76.23)	50 (45.36)	1260
Female	258 (260.11)	360 (345.21)	51 (63.27)	49 (44.77)	22 (26.64)	740
Column Totals	703	933	171	121	72	2000 (N)

The chi-square statistic is 6.7272. The *p*-value is .151026. The Degree of Freedom is 4. The result is not significant at *p* < .05.

Interpretation: The Chi-Square value of 6.7272 with *P* = 0.151026 (*P* < .05, for 5% significance level) does not show significant difference in expected and observed frequencies. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the perception of Male & Female employees regarding the impact of Induction & Training Programmes on employee attrition. That means the hypothesis *H₀₂* regarding impact of Induction & Training programmes on attrition in BPOs is accepted.

3. H_{03} : There is no significant difference between perception of male & female employees regarding impact of Organizational Culture on attrition in BPOs. The questionnaire contained 10 questions related to the Organizational Culture and its impact on reducing employee attrition. The responses are shown in Table-4 and analysis thereof using Chi-Square Test for Independence is also depicted.

TABLE 4: ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND EMPLOYEE ATTRITION

Results	Strongly Agree	Agree	Cannot Say	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Row Totals
Male	492 (509.04)	1390 (1378.44)	328 (330.12)	200 (191.52)	110 (110.88)	2520
Female	316 (298.96)	798 (809.56)	196 (193.88)	104 (112.48)	66 (65.12)	1480
Column Totals	808	2188	524	304	176	4000 (N)

The chi-square statistic is 2.8741. The p -value is .579106. The Degree of Freedom is 4. The result is not significant at $p < .05$.

Interpretation: The Chi-Square value of 2.8741 with $P = 0.579106$ ($P < .05$, for 5% significance level) does not show significant difference in expected and observed frequencies. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the perception of Male & Female employees regarding the impact of Organizational Culture on employee attrition. It means the hypothesis H_{03} regarding impact of Organizational Culture on attrition in BPOs is accepted.

4. H_{04} : There is no significant difference between perception of male & female employees regarding impact of Salary & Monetary Incentives on attrition in BPOs.

The questionnaire contained 5 questions related to the Salary & Monetary Incentives and their impact on reducing employee attrition. The responses are shown in Table-5 and analysis thereof using Chi-Square Test for Independence is also depicted.

TABLE 5: SALARY & MONETARY INCENTIVES AND EMPLOYEE ATTRITION

Results	Strongly Agree	Agree	Cannot Say	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Row Totals
Male	174 (178.29)	710 (710.64)	213 (207.27)	113 (116.55)	50 (47.25)	1260
Female	109 (104.71)	418 (417.36)	116 (121.73)	72 (68.45)	25 (27.75)	740
Column Totals	283	1128	329	185	75	2000 (N)

The chi-square statistic is 1.4335. The p -value is .838354. The Degree of Freedom is 4. The result is not significant at $p < .05$.

Interpretation: The Chi-Square value of 1.4335 with $P = 0.838354$ ($P < .05$, for 5% significance level) does not show significant difference in expected and observed frequencies. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the perception of Male & Female employees regarding the impact of Salary & Monetary Incentives on employee attrition. The hypothesis H_{04} regarding impact of Salary & Monetary Incentives on attrition in BPOs is accepted.

5. H_{05} : There is no significant difference between perception of male & female employees regarding impact of Health & Welfare Measures on attrition in BPOs. The questionnaire contained 7 questions related to the Health & Welfare Measures and their impact on reducing employee attrition. The responses are shown in Table 6 and analysis thereof using Chi-Square Test for Independence is also depicted.

TABLE 6: HEALTH & WELFARE MEASURE AND EMPLOYEE ATTRITION

Results	Strongly Agree	Agree	Cannot Say	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Row Totals
Male	560 (549.99)	789 (787.50)	152 (163.17)	194 (192.15)	69 (71.19)	1764
Female	313 (323.01)	461 (462.50)	107 (95.83)	111 (112.85)	44 (41.81)	1036
Column Totals	873	1250	259	305	113	2800 (N)

The chi-square statistic is 2.797. The p -value is .592355. The Degree of Freedom is 4. The result is not significant at $p < .05$.

Interpretation: The Chi-Square value of 2.797 with $P = 0.592355$ ($P < .05$, for 5% significance level) does not show significant difference in expected and observed frequencies. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the perception of Male & Female employees regarding the impact of Health & Welfare Measures on employee attrition. It shows that H_{05} regarding impact of Health & Welfare Measures on attrition in BPOs is accepted.

CONCLUSION

The results of the data analysis show that male and female employees in BPO industry are of the identical view about the impact of HRM practices pertaining to aspects such as Induction & Training Programmes, Organizational Culture, Salary & Monetary Incentives and Health & Welfare Measures on employee attrition in BPO sector. It implies that there is similarity in the perceptions of male and female BPO employees the about the fact that above mentioned aspects have a considerable bearing on employee attrition. In view of this, it can be argued that when HR managers deal with attrition, they must place more emphasis on HRM practices related to these aspects. However, the perception of male and female employees regarding Recruitment & Selection policies vis-à-vis employee attrition in BPO sector differs.

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