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**EMPLOYEE ATTRITION AND RETENTION IN BPO FIRMS IN GURGAON****ANJU THAPLIYAL****ASST. PROFESSOR****ADVANCE INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY****DEHRADUN****ABSTRACT**

*Business Process Outsourcing is presently a strategic choice and a viable option for achieving cost-effectiveness. With an average annual GDP growth rate of around 7 percent, India is one of the world's most promising and fastest growing economy with long-term market potential. India has also emerged as one of the leading BPO destination of the world. According to NASSCOM, the ITES-BPO segment is expected to grow by 44.4 percent during 2004-05. In the BPO segment, India has maintained its lead as the best outsourcing destination for the U.S. and European companies. The NIC-2020 Project report foresees China and India as new major global players who are likely to transform the geopolitical landscape. Employee turnover is a serious concern in outsourcing based organizations. When employees leave an organization, they carry with them invaluable tacit knowledge which is often the source of competitive advantage for the business. In a rapidly growing sector like the Indian software industry employee turnover poses risk and challenges for organizations. This research paper explores the reasons for high attrition and the factors influencing the satisfaction of employees in BPO firm in Gurgaon.*

**KEYWORDS**

business process outsourcing, employee turnover, knowledge, outsourcing, satisfaction.

**INTRODUCTION**

Over the past decade, the Indian IT-BPO sector has become the country's premier growth engine, crossing significant milestones in terms of revenue growth, employment generation and value creation, in addition to becoming the global brand ambassador for India.

According to data gathered by United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 2005) it ranks first amongst outsourcing countries. Outsourcing has been hailed as "India's most promising sector" - a euphoria that is supported by impressive growth rates. The Indian outsourcing industry accounts for at least 10% of global outsourcing industry (Barnes, 2005). One major threat to growth has emerged in the form of increasing competition from other low-cost outsourcing destinations such as China, Ireland, Poland, Brazil, Mexico, Philippines and Czech Republic (Kelly & Poole, 2006). Another serious factor is the withdrawal of tax exemptions by the Indian government in March 2010-11 (Sharma, 2009), which will render the Indian outsourcing industry uncompetitive with regard to global competitors. The industry also faces a lot of resistance from Western countries like US and UK since outsourcing appears to have an impact on local employment (Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 2006). Finally, employee turnover has turned out to be the *Achilles' heel* for many call centers because attrition has a heavy impact on a call center's financial bottom line. In India, despite 'rather lucrative pay packets', attrition levels have reached alarming proportions and annual attrition figures stand at almost 50 - 60% (www.nasscom.in). NASSCOM has helped lobby the government for favorable policies in showcasing the industry to client companies and countries, and in interacting with overseas business interests to secure market access for Indian companies (Chanda, 2008). There are some successful companies like Infosys, Wipro, Satyam, TCS, and HCL Technologies, which have the highest revenue growth rates year after year. Study has shown that rate of attrition of highly successful companies such as Infosys is 17.1%, that of Wipro it is 16% that of Satyam it is nearly 18% and of TCS it is around 11.8%. These figures are really alarming and so, this has added to the functions of the HR department a new function - Talent Management (Joshi, Agarwal, 2011). India accounted for 3.4 percent of global IT spending in 2003-04 (RBI bulletin, March 2005). In spite of the salaries and facilities being high (especially for a graduate who starts his / her career with a BPO company) the average attrition rate is very high in this industry. Reasons for the attrition can be categorized into two broad classifications. The first as "Drive Attrition" which caused due to employer's policy / policies of terminating the employee at the end of the contract period for employment, the second as "Drag Attrition" is basically due to the host of insecurities and vulnerabilities associated with the taking up a career with a BPO company (Singh & Jayashankar, 2002).

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

While employment in the BPO sector has meant that young adults are reaching their career milestones and financial goals much earlier than before, surveys and anecdotal evidence show that workers in the BPO sector experience high levels of stress as a result of working in closely monitored environments with pressure to meet ambitious performance targets. Strict deadlines and ambitious targets have also resulted in employee "burnout". Repetitive tasks, such as responding to telephone calls more than 100 times a shift have resulted in absenteeism and attrition among many young employees (Sharma, n.d.2009). A growing number of employees also experience physical and emotional problems such as panic attacks, depression, relationship problems, alcoholism and sleeping and eating disorders (Phukan, 2006; e-sat survey, 2005). Moreover, as many BPOs provide services to countries overseas, employees in the sector are trained to understand the culture and accent of these countries; in some cases, employees are required to use a different name, speak in a foreign accent and adopt a different persona at work, which may result in anxiety and related disorders (Pradhan and Abraham, 2005). Yet, tempering the strategic advantages and the optimistic forecasts that accompany them (Friedman, 2005; Sheshabalaya, 2005) are sobering challenges that have appeared alongside the outsourcing phenomenon. According to a global call-center report (Holman et al., 2007), Indian call centers have the highest employee turnover of 40% against a global average of 20%. High attrition plus rapid employment growth translates into very low levels of employee tenure and indeed 60% of the Indian call centre workforce is estimated to have less than one year of seniority at work. Other, more recent benchmarking analysis (Wallace, 2009) reports that while India had the second lowest average full-time customer service agent annual salary (US\$3334) just ahead of China, it had the greatest level of call centre agent attrition (38%) and lowest average employee tenure (11 months) in the Asia Pacific region.

Dash et al. (2008) report that the factors perceived as motivating by the ITES-BPO employees, others include- the chances of promotion and the opportunities for professional growth. The reason of high growth opportunity has emerged to be the most important reason for the employees to join the BPO jobs in a few studies (Chhabra, 2004; Budhwar et al., 2006). Ironically, the reason of having no growth opportunities/lack of promotion has also emerged as the most important reason for the BPO employees to leave the BPO jobs in many of the studies (Tiga & Kumar, 2006; Chakravorthy, 2006; Vashista, 2006; Ramachandran, 2006; Mishra, 2008; Sharma, 2010). The employees are not ready to accept BPO job as a long-term career and they are taking these jobs as a stop-gap arrangement to pass time (Prakash & Chowdhury, 2005; Chatterjee, 2005; Priyadarshini, 2007). The reports appearing in newspapers and magazines claim that the mind-numbing, repetitive tasks which the employees perform in the middle of the night will have adverse effects on their health without providing long-term career options (Sengupta et al., 2007). The society refrains youngsters from establishing their careers in this industry because it is considered as 'low-brow' (Pillai, 2006). Joshi (2010) reports that the reason of good career progression in 'other companies' has been quoted by the BPO employees as one of the prime reasons as to why people leave BPO jobs. In the opinion of Babu (2004), the BPO work does not provide any scope for skill up-gradation. Ramachandran (2006) stresses that the strategies like providing educational support, providing multi-dimensional/cross-training, creating promotional/lateral opportunities for the employees.

**NEED OF THE STUDY**

No systematic and comprehensive work has been found that collaborates all the facets viz. attrition, retention, employee motivation, involvement etc. to combat the most smoldering problem of the BPO sector i.e. attrition. Need for study is stated in two points viz. firstly, attrition is a burning problem for the BPO industry



in India, especially because it fails to tap the full utilization of the human resources and wastes much of its time, money and resources due to this; and secondly, to study the factors influencing the satisfaction of employees in BPO firm and this has to be dealt with if India has to remain a global leader in this sector.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Attrition has its costs and complexities, and HR managers keep coming up with innovative retention strategies in order to curtail these. But these strategies are not proving to be very successful as India still has the highest average rate of attrition in the sector globally which can be detrimental to the prospects of the sector in future. This study aims to look at the problem of attrition in the sector and analyze reasons thereof. This will help the HR professionals to understand whether the employees are leaving the company or the sector altogether and the causes behind that.

## OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

1. To analyze the reasons for high attrition in the BPO sector in Gurgaon.
2. To study the factors influencing the satisfaction of employees in BPO firm in Gurgaon.

## HYPOTHESIS TESTING

H<sub>1</sub>: Employee retention is not influenced by retention strategies of BPO firms.

H<sub>2</sub>: Attrition rate is not influenced by the satisfaction level of the employees in the BPO firms.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

**RESEARCH DESIGN:** The research design for the article paper is been classified into four subsections. They are:

- A. Sample Selection and Size
- B. Sampling Procedure
- C. Data Collection and
- D. Analytical Tools.

**SAMPLE SELECTION AND SIZE:** The population for the study comprised of employees working in various BPOs in the Gurgaon. For the study, BPO firms in the Gurgaon were approached and those willing to allow their employees to be a part of the survey were included. The respondents were the employees who spend majority of their working time providing voice-based customer services, had a minimum of three months job tenure and are in non-supervisory roles. A sample size of 100 was taken for the study.

**SAMPLING PROCEDURE:** Simple random sampling technique was used for collecting data from the respondents so that they belong to heterogeneous age groups, gender, organization, marital status etc. A cross sectional study will be made to determine how employee retention depends upon various factors including career development, supervision support, working environment and work life balance.

**DATA COLLECTION:** The data was collected through the primary source. Employees were given questionnaires to be filled by them. The questionnaire consisted of close-ended questions. It was intricately designed to tap the demographic variables including age, gender, education, marital status, and tenure of the respondents. Information was gathered about the factors responsible for attrition, the factors that can be employed to retain the employees in a BPO firm, their overall level of satisfaction, involvement, life interest and work compatibility etc.

Major sources of secondary data was be various research articles, annual reports, books and magazines, journals, web sites related to the industry.

**ANALYTICAL TOOLS:** The data so collected was properly analyzed and edited to get meaningful information. Ms - excel software and pie-diagram has been used to analyze the data collected from 105 properly filled & returned by the respondents.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

### DATA ANALYSIS

- (1) Majority of the respondents were male which showed the gender inequality in this sector.

**TABLE 1: CLASSIFICATION OF RESPONDENTS ON THE BASIS OF GENDER**

CODE	RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
1	MALE	80	76
2	FEMALE	25	24
		105	

Source: Survey data

- (2) Only 24% of the respondents were married.

**TABLE 2: CLASSIFICATION ON THE BASIS OF MARITAL STATUS**

CODE	RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
1	MARRIED	25	24
2	UNMARRIED	80	76
		105	

Source: Survey data

- (3) Majority (56%) of the respondents had a salary of Rs.15000 or above.

**TABLE 3: CLASSIFICATION ON THE BASIS OF SALARY**

CODE	RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
1	<10000	10	10
2	10100-15000	25	24
3	15100-20000	35	33
4	20001-25000	15	14
5	>25000	10	19
		105	

Source: Survey data

- (4) Majority (67%) of the respondents is only graduates and only 10% of the respondents are post graduates or more.

**TABLE 4: CLASSIFICATION ON THE BASIS OF EDUCATION**

CODE	RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
1	UG	25	24
2	GRAD	70	67
3	PG & Others	10	10
		105	

*Source: Survey data*

(5) Majority (57%) of the respondents belong to a family where more than one member is earning.

**TABLE 5: CLASSIFICATION ON THE BASIS OF NUMBER OF PERSONS EARNING IN THE FAMILY**

CODE	RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
1	ONE MEMBER	45	43
2	> 1 MEMBER	60	57
		105	100

*Source: Survey data*

(6) Majority of the respondents have either one or two dependents only (total 86%) which represent a small family to support and to take care of.

**TABLE 6: CLASSIFICATION ON THE BASIS OF NUMBER OF DEPENDENTS**

CODE	RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
1	ONE	50	48
2	TWO	40	38
3	MORE THAN TWO	15	14
		105	

*Source: Survey data*

(7) Majority of the respondents are Customer Care Representatives which represents the lowest level of employees in BPOs.

**TABLE 7: CLASSIFICATION ON THE BASIS OF DESIGNATION**

CODE	RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
1	CUSTOMER CARE REPRESENTATIVE	100	95
2	TEAM LEADER	5	5
3	TRAINER	0	0
4	MANAGER	0	0
		105	

*Source: Survey data*

(8) Majority of the respondents i.e. 66% (33% + 33%) has stayed in the organization for less than 5 years only.

**TABLE 8: CLASSIFICATION ON THE BASIS OF ASSOCIATION WITH THE ORGANIZATION**

CODE	RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
1	<1 YEAR	10	10
2	1-2 YEARS	35	33
3	2-5 YEARS	35	33
4	>5 YEARS	25	24
		105	

*Source: Survey data*

(9) Respondents (38%) seem to be somewhat satisfied with their organization.

**TABLE 9: CLASSIFICATION ON THE BASIS OF SATISFACTION WITH THE COMPANY**

CODE	RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
1	Highly Dissatisfied	0	0
2	Not Satisfied	20	19
3	Satisfied	20	19
4	Somewhat Satisfied	40	38
5	Highly Satisfied	25	24
		105	

*Source: Survey data*

(10) Majority of the respondents (10%+ 10%+62%=82%) are not going to stay longer than 3 years at the maximum.

**TABLE 10: CLASSIFICATION ON THE BASIS OF PLANNED STAY OF EMPLOYEES WITH THE COMPANY**

CODE	RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
1	NEXT 6 MONTHS	10	10
2	NEXT 1 YEAR	10	10
3	NEXT 3 YEARS	65	62
4	NEXT 5 YEARS	20	18
		105	100

*Source: Survey data***TESTING HYPOTHESIS H1**

**H1:** Employee retention was taken as dependent variable and Stress at workplace, lesser opportunities for growth, supervision support, working environment, and compensation package and work life balance would be independent variables.

**A. DO YOU AGREE THAT THE FOLLOWING FACTORS COULD BE THE REASON FOR ATTRITION AMONG EMPLOYEES**

		Mean	Rank
1	The work schedule is very stressful	3.67	1
2	There are not enough opportunities for growth	3.29	2
3	The supervisors are not supportive	3.10	3
4	The compensation package is not satisfying	3.05	4
5	People are not happy in the firm	3.05	4
6	Employees are under continuous pressure for quality of service	2.95	5
7	Employees don't feel motivated on the job	2.90	6
8	Targets are unrealistic	2.86	7
9	Enough respect and recognition is not given to the employees	2.81	8
10	Employees are not able to manage the work life balance on their job	2.81	8
11	There are not enough training efforts made by the firm	2.71	9
12	It is not considered to be a life long career	2.33	10

Source: Survey Data

**Hypothesis 1** was proved to be true, number one factor was stress at workplace, second lesser opportunities for growth and third was supervisors are not supportive were the major factors for employee attrition in the BPO firms.

**B. RANKING-COMPANY'S EFFORT TO REMOVE FACTORS OF ATTRITION**

		Mean	Rank
1	Poor mentoring	2.67	1
2	Achievement not recognized	2.67	1
3	Lack of motivation	2.52	2
4	Power & Politics	2.38	3
5	Lack of skill variety	2.38	3
6	Irregular working hours	2.29	4
7	Dissatisfaction with colleagues	2.24	5
8	Low career growth	2.19	6

Source: Survey Data

**Hypothesis 1** was proved to be true, poor-mentoring, unrecognized achievement and lack of motivation was responsible for high rate of attrition.

**TESTING HYPOTHESIS H2:**

**H2:** Employee satisfaction as the dependent variable and independent variables will be 'having a clearly established career path; viewing BPO firm as a long term career option, flexible timing, lesser stress, and better incentives.

**A. DO YOU AGREE THAT THE FOLLOWING FACTORS AFFECT JOB SATISFACTION LEVEL OF EMPLOYEES**

		Mean	Rank
1	Your work is monotonous	3.52	1
2	You are working in a closely monitored environment	3.52	1
3	You feel depressed because of your work and family life	3.33	2
4	Your work is not challenging	3.24	3
5	Proper mentoring is not available	3.24	3
6	Your colleagues are not happy in their jobs	3.24	3
7	You don't feel satisfied with your salary and compensation package	3.00	4
8	Your team leader has a negative influence on you	3.00	4
9	You are not expecting to stay in this organization for long	3.00	4
10	You have irregular working hours	2.90	5
11	You feel your work & achievements are not recognized	2.76	6
12	Your job makes it difficult to realize your financial goals	2.76	6
13	Your job has resulted in sleeping and eating disorders	2.71	7
14	You do not see yourself in this industry for long time to come	2.52	8

Source: Survey Data

**Hypothesis 2** was proved to be true, following factors affected job satisfaction level of employees - monotonous work and stress related to close monitoring at job were ranked one.

**FINDINGS**

Majority of the respondents were male and unmarried and had salary of Rs.15000 or above. Most of the respondents were graduates and had entered this sector for quick money. Highest attrition was noticed in the lowest level represented by Customer Care Representatives. Employees were somewhat satisfied and were to stay for 3 years maximum. Stress at workplace and lesser opportunities for growth were main reasons for high attrition. Monotonous work and stress at job are the major factors for job dissatisfaction in employees. Proper mentoring and recognition of achievements could remove or decrease the rate of attrition in BPO firms in Gurgaon region.

**RECOMMENDATIONS/SUGGESTIONS**

The government needs to continue nurturing this industry with incentives and a simplified tax structure that will promote investments, and also will need to drive the domestic industry by spending on e-Governance projects. Stress at workplace, lesser opportunities, monotonous work and stress related to close monitoring at job should be handled more sensitively by the HR department in BPO firms. Proper mentoring and recognition of achievements could decrease the rate of attrition in BPO firms.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The nature of job in a typical BPO company is psychologically very stressful. Listing out the reasons for non-retaining of human capital are:- stress at workplace, lack of growth opportunity, lack of time based promotion, the supervisors are not supportive, poor mentoring, unrecognized achievement, monotonous work and

stress related to close monitoring at job. The HR professionals need to redesign the HR policies for the industry without comprising on the cost competitiveness of the Indian BPO industry, to retain the employees in the organizations and India's position as the low cost destination for business process outsourcing worldwide.

### SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Ironically, in spite of the tremendous growth potential of the sector, attrition rate and the manpower crisis is dampening the growth of the sector. Another problem being faced by the BPO industry is "Poaching". Poaching refers to taking away the experienced professionals by competitors by offering them better salary, benefits than the competitor. This study is limited to few variables and to BPO's in Gurgaon (NCR) only. Further study can be taken up with other variables influencing employee attrition rate in BPO's in India.

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### APPENDIX/ANNEXURE

#### QUESTIONNAIRE

##### EMPLOYEE ATTRITION AND RETENTION IN BPO FIRMS IN GURGAON

Researcher: Ms. Anju Thapliyal

Dear Respondents,

The present study is an attempt to understand the trends in employee attrition and retention in BPO firms in the Gurgaon region. Information provided by you will be kept strictly confidential.

##### 1. Personal Information

Name	:	.....		
Age	:	.....years		
Sex	:	Male	<input type="checkbox"/>	Female <input type="checkbox"/>
Marital Status	:	Married	<input type="checkbox"/>	Unmarried <input type="checkbox"/>
Monthly Gross Salary	:			

- Less than 10,000 ☐
- 10,100 to 15,000 ☐
- 15,100 to 20,000 ☐
- 20,001 to 25,000 ☐
- 25,000 or more ☐

**EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION**

- Under graduate ☐
- Graduate ☐
- Post-graduate and others ☐

**FAMILY SIZE**

- Two members ☐
- Four members ☐
- Five member or more ☐

**NUMBER OF PERSONS EARNING IN THE FAMILY**

- One member ☐
- More than one member ☐

**NUMBER OF DEPENDENTS**

- One ☐
- Two ☐
- More than two ☐

**2. DESIGNATION**

- Customer Care Representative ☐
- Team Leader ☐
- Trainer ☐
- Manager ☐

**3. HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH THIS ORGANIZATION**

- Less than one year ☐
- One - two years ☐
- Two - five years ☐
- Five years or more ☐

**4. HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE COMPANY**

- Highly satisfied ☐
- Somewhat satisfied ☐
- Satisfied ☐
- Not satisfied ☐
- Highly dissatisfied ☐

**5. HOW LONG DO YOU SEE YOURSELF WORKING WITH THIS FIRM**

- Next 6 months ☐
- Next 1 year ☐
- Next 3 years ☐
- Next 5 years ☐

**6. Do you agree that the following factors could be the reason for employees leaving job in your firm: (Rate your answer on a scale of 1 to 5)**  
**(5 – Strongly Agree, 4 – Agree, 3 – Indifferent, 2 – Slightly Disagree, 1 – Absolutely Disagree)**

S.NO.	FACTORS	5	4	3	2	1
1	The work schedule is very stressful					
2	There are not enough opportunities for growth					
3	Employees are under continuous pressure for quality of service					
4	Targets are unrealistic					
5	Enough respect and recognition is not given to the employees					
6	It is not considered to be a life long career					
7	Employees are not able to manage the work life balance on their job					
8	The compensation package is not satisfying					
9	Employees don't feel motivated on the job					
10	There are not enough training efforts made by the firm					
11	The supervisors are not supportive					
12	People are not happy in the firm					

7. Do you think that the following factors affect job satisfaction level of employees adversely: (Rate your answer in a scale of 1 to 5)

(5 – Strongly Agree, 4 – Agree, 3 – Indifferent, 2 – Slightly Disagree, 1 – Absolutely Disagree)

S.NO	FACTORS	5	4	3	2	1
1	Your work is monotonous					
2	Proper mentoring is not available					
3	Your colleagues are not happy in their jobs					
4	You are not expecting to stay in this organization for long					
5	You do not see yourself in this industry for long time to come					
6	Your work is not challenging					
7	You have irregular working hours					
8	You feel your work & achievements are not recognized					
9	Your job makes it difficult to realize your financial goals					
10	You are working in a closely monitored environment					
11	Your job has resulted in sleeping and eating disorders					
12	Your team leader has a negative influence on you					
13	You feel depressed because of your work and family life					
14	You don't feel satisfied with your salary and compensation package					

8. How do you personally rate the company's efforts to remove the following factors from among the employees of the organization using retention strategies:

FACTORS	Very good	Good	Average	Poor
Lack of motivation				
Poor mentoring				
Power & Politics				
Dissatisfaction with colleagues				
Low career growth				
Lack of skill variety				
Irregular working hours				
Achievement not recognized				

9. Any suggestion you would like to provide to your firm for improving retention of employees.

10. What suggestion you would like to give for improving employees' satisfaction on job in your firm.

THANK YOU

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