

Role of organizations and individual stress management techniques to combat stress among employees working in ITES Sector

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Abstract

Stress is the individual's general feeling or unease or upset in response to a traumatic life event and the accumulation of others, concomitant problems or change. Many factors contribute to the occupational stress like role in the job, relationship at work, organizational structure and climate and other non-work pressures. These results to various types of consequences like physiological, psychological, behavioral and emotional. This is detrimental to the organization in the long run. To combat stress organization and individual employees they follow their own mechanism/methods. In the present study an effort is made to find out the role of organizations and individual stress management techniques to combat stress among employees working for ITES sector.

Key words: ITES –Information technology enabled services, CCA's - call center agents, EAP – Employee assistance programme.

Introduction: Occupational stress is everywhere in the corporate world. It can occur for everyone in any position in any industry. Stress can affect high level agents, middle level managers and lower level employees. The various stress related problems like coronary heart disease, hyper tension, diabetics, gastro intestinal disorders, peptic ulcer, asthma, migraine, alcoholism, drug addiction, depression etc, are accountable for poor health. These problems are further affecting organizational performance adversely by contributing to poor productivity, low employee turnover and low level of job satisfaction.

About ITES Industry: India is the world's largest sourcing destination for the Information Technology (IT) industry, accounting for approximately 52 per cent of the US \$ 124-130 billion market. The industry employs around 10 million Indians and continues to contribute significantly to the social economic transformation in the country. The IT Industry has not only transformed India's Image in the global platform, but has also fuelled economic growth by energizing the higher education sector especially in engineering and computer science. India's cost competitiveness in providing IT services, which is approximately 3-4 times cheaper than the US, continues to be the unique selling proposition (USP) in the global sourcing market.

From the literature and other studies conducted on ITES employees, it was found that, majority of the employees working for ITES sector are within the age group of 21-30 years, less than 2 years of work experience, graduates, unmarried, works for 9-10 hours in a day, three different shifts in a week. Their work is time bound and has to work on tight deadlines to meet targets.

Importance of the study & methodology:

Organizations take all the measures right from job design to providing the best work place ambience to its employees. For ITES organizations the existence and growth is completely depend up on their employees. But stress is implied in the jobs of employees working for ITES companies. No organization want to create stressful environment to their employees will fully, but because of the nature of the work, stress will become part o f their job. To the executives working for ITES companies stress arises in the form of role overload, role ambiguity, role conflict, intrinsic improvement, unprofitability (Dr.M.V.S. 2012). It is on the part of the organizations to take some measures to alleviate work stress. The study is literature based study with the objectives of finding out which are the measures taken by various organizations to combat stress among the employees working for ITES firms and the individual stress management techniques employees follow to combat stress.

Role of Organizations to Combat Stress among ITES employees

In order to relieve the employees from stress, various ITES organizations have taken initiatives, starting from redesigning of their work to providing facilities at the work centers with which employees can alleviate stress.

Workplace Ambience

Workplace ambience in call centers is described as an employer concern for employee well-being. Collegial atmosphere of the organization is promoted to energize and destress employees so that they can relate to the workplace and their performance can be maximized. The only thing that concerns to the employer organization is meeting client requirements in order to maintain competitive advantages. Work and fun are to be balanced to create a productive docile workforce.

Fun activities held during work days are scheduled such that they never interfere with task requirements. Usually, fun activities are held either during breaks or before or after the shift. During the shift, such activities are held only when call volumes are low. Similar programmes during weekly and public or festival holidays are conducted with several purposes in mind. While such activities form part of the identity regulation-socio-ideological control programme, they were means of understanding employees better. Using this information to organizational advantage of assessing employees' commitment to work and to the employer organization. Such activities are working towards strengthening this end of facilitating team development, destressing the employees and thereby reducing turnover intentions. Fun activities include various games involving employees from various teams like musical chairs etc. Some organizations take the employees for trekking during the holidays. All the fun activities and outing of employees will be during holidays or when the call volumes are very low. Several organizations conduct EAPs (Employee Assistance program's) to their Executives.

Many other organizations offer EAP like Counseling. Through counseling employees overcome from personal and organizational stressors and adopt more effective coping mechanisms. Most EAPs are programs that counsel employees on any work or personal problems. In several call centers EAPs help CCAs to tackle arrogant and abusive customers. Family problems often represent the largest percentage of EAP referrals, although this varies with organization to organization. EAPs can be one of the most effective stress management interventions where the counseling helps employees to understand the stressors, acquire stress management skills and practice those stress management skills.

Organizational leisure activities are generally planned during week end and public holidays involving employee's families. This is considered as a measure to boost employee's and increases their commitment towards the organization. Ng C and Mitter (2005) observed that quite often such type of programmes involving agents' families will enhance the family loyalty to the organization, so that indirectly agents' commitment could be strengthened, their performance could be improved and the chances of attrition could be stalled.

Open door policy

Employer organizations in communications to Executives, downplayed bureaucratic structures & processes and emphasized integration. The orientation was particularly associated with superior-subordinate interactions and grievance handling processes. Agents assured that they were free to approach any superior in the organization to address their problem. Through this, agent's reliance on the much publicized open door policy, employee commitment to the organization will increase. Employee's through this policy are able to express their problems and grievances which cause stress in their job and can share with their managers and are finding amicable solutions to the problems. Most of the organizations, even after implementing the open door policy, insist certain procedures to escalate these problems. They request the ITES employees to first discuss the problem with their immediate supervisors/team leaders and among themselves. Still if the problem persists, then it should be addressed to the higher level officials, avoiding miss understanding among the immediate supervisors and team leaders.

Development of Communal rituals

Management of various call centers has developed communal rituals which celebrate the pleasures of customer contact, indicating that it is worth putting up with some pain in order to get some gains. In addition, management also understood the relevance of communities of coping where employees sought support from each other to deal with the strain of irate customers (Korczyński, 2003). But as Noon and Blyton (1997:140) caution, these groups serve as a curious mixture of, consent and resistance to work. By helping agents to survive, the tension of their work, these communities preserve the social order of the workplace and reduce employee turnover, facilitating management requirements. At the same time, they can develop into strong informal subcultures that provide resistance and make workplace relations difficult for management to control.

Individual Stress Coping Mechanism

Employees find their own ways (especially in call centers) of resisting the pervasive controls employed by the organizations. Sturdy and Fineman (2001) have suggested that as of now, resistance among call center agents is most likely to be covert, individual and temporary. Resistance takes on various forms. There are agents who learn to anticipate when they will be monitored and adjust their performance accordingly, who hang onto calls after callers disconnect to get breaks, who exploit supervisory inconsistencies (Bain and Taylor, 2000) and who keep calls short to meet difficult duration and volume targets by providing partial answers or cutting customers off (Knights and McCabe, 1998). Many of the techniques noted in observational studies of specific call centers are examples of ways in which agents have learnt to exploit the loopholes in their particular set of information systems. Thus techniques used in one centre would not work in another – in one example agents had to manually disconnect calls and had a special category of calls that were expected to take longer and had higher time limits. If such a call turned out to be short, agents could extend it without affecting their call duration statistics unduly. The effectiveness of the strategy is thus dependent on a combination of technology and task-specific performance criteria. According to CCAs this is one type of stress reduction mechanism.

‘Making fun of a management style is a form of resistance’ (Mulholland, 2002:299). This creative and subversive humor represents a form of employee resistance against the totalizing systems of surveillance and control, demonstrating divergence and dissent from managerially defined norms of behavior has been brought out by Taylor and Bain (2003) while humor provides relief from stressful routines and makes work interesting, it goes beyond coping to provide a shared sense of self and a group identity and differentiation.

Conclusion: In today’s complex world every organization is fighting for their share in the market, in that process many organizations are least bothered about their employees well being. They want their objectives to be accomplished and task fulfilled. These results to employee work stress. It is not sufficient enough on the part of the organizations by taking stress relieving measures, they should also see that qualitative work culture should be provided to the employees through which employees feel happy in their job and get satisfied in their jobs.

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