Stress and organisational citizenship behaviours in Indian business process outsourcing organisations

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Abstract

This study investigates the direct effect of organisational stress (as measured through ASSET) on organisational citizenship behaviours (OCBs). A sample of 402 operators was taken from business process outsourcing (BPO) organisations located in northern India. The authors hypothesised that there is a negative relationship between organisational stress and OCBs. Results of multiple regression analysis showed that stress had significant negative impact on OCBs. The implications for managers are discussed.

Introduction

This paper is based on a study aimed at examining the strength of the relationship between organisational stress and organisational citizenship behaviours among operator level employees working in Indian business process outsourcing organisations (BPOs).

Evidence from the field suggests that the hours of work and working conditions in the BPO sector lead to the stress syndrome, which in turn contributes to a 25–30% attrition rate among BPOs. Most of the young people who join BPOs attracted by the salaries, find it hard to cope with the long and irregular working hours (Data Quest, 2004). A meta-analysis conducted by Lee and Ashford (1996) on job burnout showed that several of the job demands (e.g., role conflict, workload and role stress) were strongly associated with higher levels of stress and emotional exhaustion. Studies in the area of working hours and mental wellbeing highlight the adverse impact of working longer hours on personal happiness, job satisfaction, workplace accidents, irritability, exhaustion, depression and relationships (Giga, Jain, & Cooper, 2009; Green & Tsitsianis, 2005). According to Head, Martikainen, Kumari, Kuper, and Marmot (2002) there is a higher risk of employees suffering from a psychiatric disorder if they are required to work at a constant fast pace, or are regularly faced with conflicting priorities. With increasing evidence of the impact of organisational stress (through sickness absenteeism, rising compensation payments and employee dissatisfaction) on businesses, it is important to meet the challenge by dealing with specific
Organisational stress

According to Selye (1956), stress is a scientific concept which has suffered from the mixed blessing of being too well known and too little understood. Linden (2004) defines stress as a process in which stressors (demands) trigger and attempt at adaptation or resolution that results in individual distress if the organism is unsuccessful in satisfying the demand. Response to stress occurs at physiological, behavioural and cognitive levels. Stress is more than just acute subjective or physiological activation and has potentially most deleterious health effects when it becomes chronic (http://www.idsa.in/system/files/book_dixit_intro.pdf). Health and Safety Executive (2004) defines organisational stress in terms of the adverse reactions of people to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them. Studies have shown that workers suffering from stress exhibit decreased productivity, absenteeism, have a higher number of accidents, have lower morale and greater interpersonal conflict with colleagues and superiors (Cranwell & Abbey, 2005; Health and Safety Executive, 2004). By virtue of their demands, some jobs are highly stressful, such as operators in the call centre industry. Long hours of work, night shifts, high work targets and loss of identity are some of the concerns of the call centre industry in India. A survey report on call centre ailments by Data Quest (2004) shows a very high level of sleeping disorder, digestive system related disorder and depression as the top problems among call centre employees. In this study, stress is measured by using the organisational stress screening tool ASSET (Cartwright & Cooper, 2002).

Stress and organisational citizenship behaviours

Research studies linking stress with job performance and OCB (e.g., Bragger, Srednicki, Kutcher, Indovino, & Rosner, 2005) show that OCB was negatively related with work—family conflict. In another important study, Bolino and Turnley (2005) explored the relationship between a specific type of OCB—individual initiative—and role overload, job stress and work—family conflict. Results showed that individual initiative is associated with higher levels of employee role overload, job stress, and work—family conflict. Such a relationship was found to be stronger among women than among men. The construct of OCB was also linked with emotional exhaustion (Cropanzano, Rupp, & Byrne, 2003). Emotional exhaustion was found to be a significant predictor of OCB (OCBs beneficial to organisations), though organisational commitment mediated the relationship between emotional exhaustion and OCB. After including commitment, the effect of exhaustion was no longer significant.

Organisational role theory

An organisational role is a set of connected behaviours, rights and obligations as conceptualised by actors in an organisational situation. It is an expected behaviour in a given individual’s social status and social position (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Role). Further Levinson (1959) opines that role behaviour is what the manager does in response to the messages he or she has perceived and in response to his or
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