

Employee Attrition in Indian ITeS Call Centres: An Extensive Literature Review

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Abstract

Employee attrition has become a big challenge in number of industries, but it is a painful area for the management in ITeS call centres. Many researchers have contributed to arrest employee attrition in ITeS call centres but it has not been tackled yet. In fact, most of the ITeS call centres are still facing double digit attrition rate. The present paper is a review paper which endeavors to find out a number of key factors responsible for employee attrition. The present review paper has clubbed the factors into two broad categories causing employee attrition. These are known as internal and external factors. In fact, internal factors are mainly responsible for high employee attrition especially less salaries, poor career progression options, continuous monitoring, opaque appraisal systems, lack of proper training and development techniques, health problems. Immature career outlook, concentration of demand for talent in tier I cities and unpractical education system are the external factors causing employee attrition in ITeS call centers.

Keywords: Attrition; ITeS Call Centres; Human Resources, Attrition Rate

1. Introduction

Human assets are the most important drivers for the survival and growth of any organization. No doubt, available talent pool is the backbone for Indian outsourcing industry. Cost effective human capital is the most important resource on which Indian ITeS sector depends and of course location advantage is also playing an important role in this sector (Dasgupta, 2002). IT-BPM sector continues to be one of the largest employers in the country directly employing nearly 3 million professionals, adding over 1, 80,000 employees (NASSCOM, 2013). Therefore, it is of utmost importance to have the human resources for the success of an organization (Pfeffer, 1994).

In the 1970s and early 1990s, people were still talking about '*lifetime employment*' and a career within the same company only. Gone the days, when people believed in lifetime employment and a career within same company only. In the late 1990s, the trends were changed drastically. It happened because the companies across various industries restructured their operations and headcount was reduced. People then started thinking about owning their own careers. They started collecting experiences and skills in various jobs at various companies to enhance their ongoing employability. Employees started thinking for their own employability and personal gain rather than their employer's success (Bisht and Belwal, 2001) which has led to the problem of employee attrition.

The attrition rates (Figure 1.1) of various countries is shown below. This graphs shows that it has been rising over a period of time. In fact, it was 18% attrition in 2003 (Timesnews, 2003) and it had been increased to around 50% in 2006 (Sharma, 2006). Also, It had been forecasted that this industry is going to face shortage of employees around 2, 62, 000by 2012 (NASSCOM, 2006).

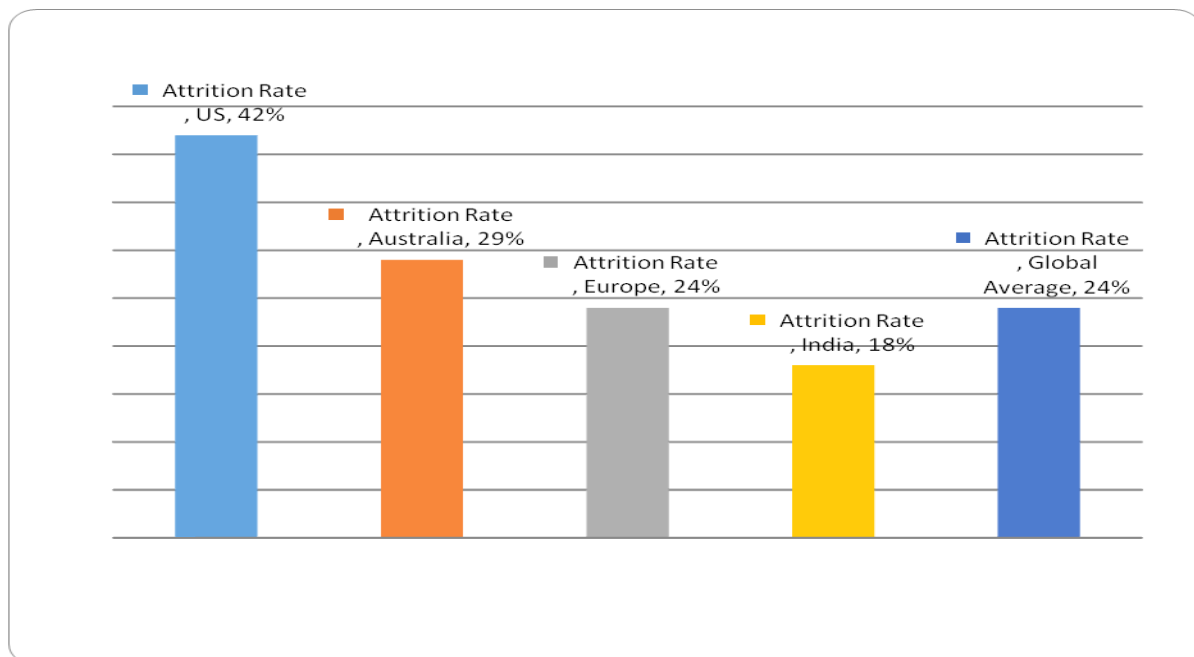


Figure 1.1: Attrition Rates of Different Countries (Timesnews, 2003)

The attrition rates of certain selected countries as shown and refer (Figure 1.2) shows that India had 40% employee attrition rate. It is higher than other selected countries (www.executiveboard.com, 2007).

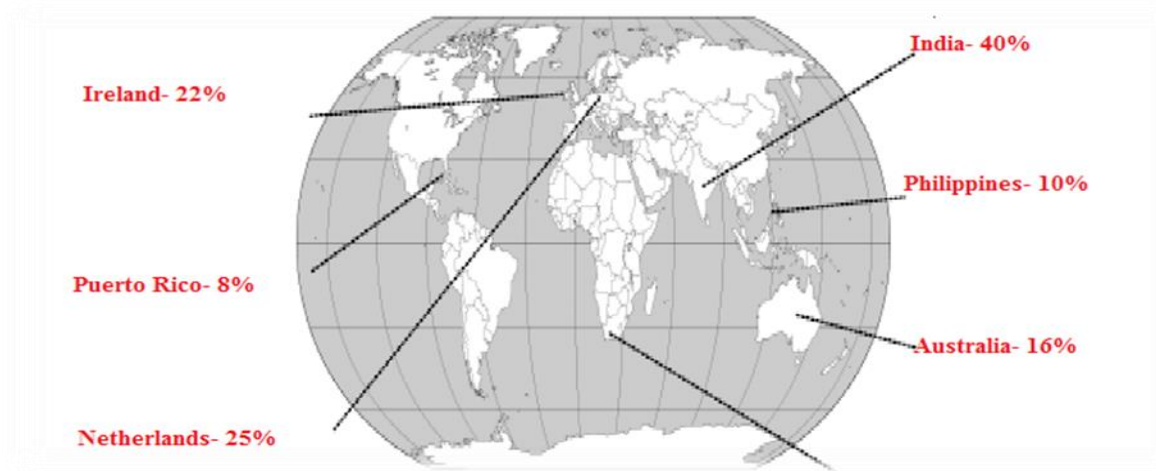


Figure 1.2: Call Center Turnover Rates in Selected Countries (www.executiveboard.com, 2007)

In India, the average attrition rate in the ITeS sector is approximately 30-35%. As far as attrition rate is concerned, the US has been facing more than India. In Fact, off shoring has been providing a support to US base companies (Trowbridge, 2007). The attrition rate in Australian call centers was 25% whereas the Indian ITeS call centers, it was 32.5% for the year 2006 (Penter, Pervan and Wreford, 2007).

On the other side, attrition is healthy if it is in limited number as it brings gains to the organization. Moreover, healthy employee attrition helps organizations to stay competitive in such a turbulent market. However, if employee attrition increases beyond a certain level, these gains then turn into big pains. The rising attrition rate has become a constant worry in ITeS call center industry in India.

Attrition can also be defined as “a reduction in the number of employees through retirement, resignation or death whereas attrition rate is the rate of shrinkage in size or number” (Sharma, 2006).

1.1 Types of Employee Attrition

Primarily attrition is having two types. One is known as drive and the other is called as drag attrition. When an employer sacks an employee due to any reason is called drive attrition whereas when an employee leaves himself/herself is called as drag attrition. Drive attrition is mainly caused due to dissatisfaction with the policies, culture and working environment. (Raman, 2006; Brooker, 2008). Recruiters explain that high attrition rates also increase the costs incurred on employees significantly (Prakash and Chowdhury, 2004; Sarkar, 2008). Looking at attrition rates of selected continents by employee role (Figure 1.3), it is quite obvious that Asia-Pacific is facing more than any other continent for the roles of an agent, and supervisor/team leader (www.executiveboard.com, 2007).

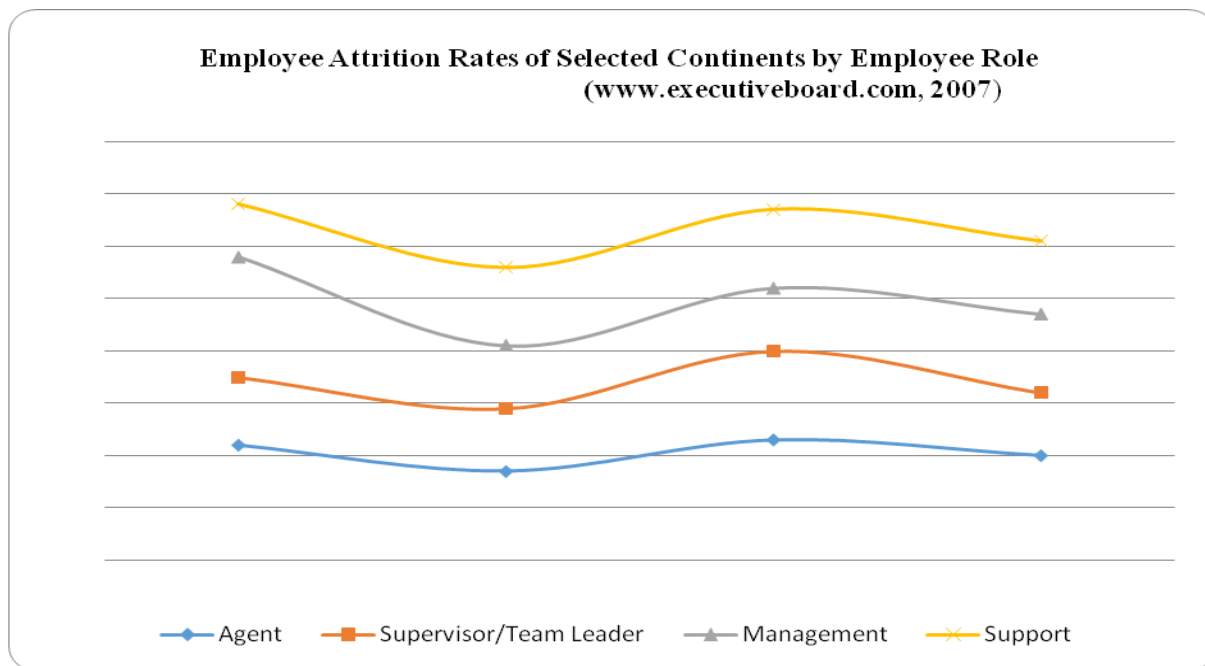


Figure 1.3: Employee Attrition Rates of Selected Continents by Employee Role
(www.executiveboard.com, 2007)

The problem of attrition really requires a great attention of HR professionals in a developing economy like India.

2. Review of Literature

The existing literature has depicted two different images for the human resource aspects of ITES call centers (Frenkel et al. 1998; Belt et al. 2000). There are some researchers who have come up with positive image and some of the scholar have shown a negative image. The call centers are having employees working as on team and employees are *'smiling down the phone'* (Taylor and Bain, 1999). Moreover, these employees talk to customers in a good regional accents. The employees in this particular industry like offices, good cafeteria and are having same wavelength friendship circles (Sharma, 2009).

The negative image is also named as the *'electronic sweatshop'* (Garson, 1998), *'panoptical wired cage'* (Knights and McCabe, 1998), *'assembly lines in the head'* (Taylor and Bain, 1999), and also as *'dark satanic mills'* (IDS, 1997). The negative image revolves around the fact that employees are really irritated working under continuous monitoring and control. These employees are really frustrated and they want to leave the industry.

The findings by most of the researchers have found that the negative image is actual reality working in an ITES-call centres. An extensive literature has been explored to get insights into depth for the reasons of it. Based on the extensive literature review, it has been found that this negative image is one of reasons for employee attrition in this particular industry.

A number of researchers and some other scholars have already tried to find the factors behind employee attrition. The main two major factors by clubbing different factors given by a number of researchers are internal and external factors.

Indian call center work involves employees providing voice-to-voice services to clients through toll-free numbers dialed primarily from US, Europe and Australia. They learn foreign accents, work at night to cater to the foreign clients and adjust to an altered social and family life (Mirchandani, 2004; Shome, 2006). A list of internal and external factors causing employee attrition is given below (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Factors Affecting Employee Attrition in ITeS Call Centres

I. Internal Factors		
S. No.	Internal Factors	Literature Survey
1	Higher salary and monetary considerations	Ramlall, 2003; Dataquest, 2004; Sharma, 2004; Dataquest, 2005; Mehta and Mehta, 2005; Budhwar et al. 2006; Dataquest, 2006; Goel and Thakur, 2006; Raman, 2006; Bhatnagar, 2007; Anantharaja, 2009; Dataquest, 2010; Pandey and Kaur, 2011; Goswami and Jha, 2012; Devi and Panchanatham, 2012; Suhasini and Babu, 2013; Narmadha, 2014; Shah, 2014; Rao and Subbarayudu, 2017; Rungta and Rao, 2018
2	De-skilled, boring and Monotonous work	Fernie and Metcalf, 1998; Taylor and Bain, 1999; Buchanan and Koch, 2000; Jasrotia, 2002; Deery and Kinnie, 2004; Goel and Thakur, 2006; Budhwar et al. 2006; R andP, 2013; Shah, 2014
3	Repetitive job requirements	Taylor and Bain, 1999; Kinnie et al. 2000; Budhwar et al. 2006; Goel and Thakur, 2006; R andP, 2013; Shah, 2014
4	Heavily monitored, controlled and scripted job	Batt, 1999; Taylor and Bain, 1999; Kinnie et al. 2000; Ramesh, 2004; Budhwar et al. 2006; Raman, 2006; Raman and Balasubramanian, 2006; Shah, 2014; Bharathi and Paramashivaiah, 2015;
5	Stressful job requirements	Batt, 1999; Kinnie et al. 2000; Ramesh, 2004; Mehta and Mehta, 2005; Budhwar et al. 2006; Raman, 2006; Sarkar, 2008; Rehman et al. 2011; Goswami and Jha, 2012
6	Lack of promotions and career advancement opportunities	Richardson, Belt and Marshall, 2000; Singh and Jayashankar, 2002; Ramlall, 2003; Sharma, 2004; Ramesh, 2004; Dataquest, 2004; Mehta and Mehta,

		2005; Dataquest, 2005; Dataquest, 2006; Goel and Thakur, 2006; Raman, 2006; Budhwar et al. 2006; Bhatnagar, 2007; Anantharaja, 2009; Dataquest, 2010; Pandey and Kaur, 2011; Goswami and Jha, 2012; Suhasini and Babu, 2013; Narmadha, 2014; Rao and Subbarayudu, 2017; Rungta and Rao, 2018
7	Health problems	Dataquest, 2004; Ramesh, 2004; Sharma, 2004; Dataquest, 2005; Mehta and Mehta, 2005; Budhwar et al. 2006; Dataquest, 2006; Raman, 2006; Raman and Balasubramanian, 2006; Pandey and Kaur, 2011; Devi and Panchanatham, 2012; Suhasini and Babu, 2013
8	Inadequate training and development techniques	Ramlall, 2003; Mehta and Mehta, 2005; Goel and Thakur, 2006; Raman and Balasubramanian, 2006; Bhatnagar, 2007; R and P, 2013;
9	Non- favorable job content and inadequate job enrichment	Mehta and Mehta, 2005; Dataquest, 2005; Dataquest, 2006; Budhwar et al. 2006
10	No personal life	Ramesh, 2004; Sharma, 2004; Dataquest, 2004; Dataquest, 2005; Dataquest, 2006; Raman, 2006; Suhasini and Babu, 2013
11	Not a good working environment	Goel and Thakur, 2006; Goswami and Jha, 2012; Devi and Panchanatham, 2012
12	Non-transparent appraisal systems	Budhwar et al. 2006; Sharma et al. 2006; Pandey and Kaur, 2011; Kaur and Gupta, 2012; Suhasini and Babu, 2013; Shah, 2014
13	client handling issues	Ramesh, 2004; Mehta and Mehta, 2005; Budhwar et al. 2006; Kaur and Gupta, 2012
14	Uneasy relationships with managers and peers	Ramlall, 2003; Sharma, 2004; Dataquest, 2005; Mehta and Mehta, 2005; Dataquest, 2006; Raman, 2006; Anantharaja, 2009; Pandey and Kaur, 2011; Goswami and Jha, 2012; R and P, 2013; Narmadha, 2014
15	Work load, targets and long working hours	Kinnie et al. 2000; Jasrotia, 2002; Shah, 2004; Mehta and Mehta, 2005; Goel and Thakur, 2006; Sharma, 2007; Shah, 2014; Rao and Subbarayudu, 2017
16	Shift timings	Dataquest, 2004; Dataquest, 2006; Goel and Thakur, 2006; Dataquest, 2010; Pandey and Kaur, 2011; Kaur and Gupta, 2012; Suhasini and Babu, 2013; Rao and Subbarayudu, 2017

17	Lack of challenge and opportunity	Ramlall, 2003; Budhwar et al. 2006; Shah, 2014
18	Lack of trust in senior management	Ramlall, 2003; Mehta and Mehta, 2005; Goswami and Jha, 2012
19	Long distance of commuting	Ramlall, 2003; Dataquest, 2004; Dataquest, 2005; Dataquest, 2006; Rao and Subbarayudu, 2017
20	Misguidance by the organization	Sharma, 2004; Dataquest, 2005; Dataquest, 2006; Dataquest, 2010
21	Higher education	Sharma, 2004 ; Dataquest, 2004; Dataquest, 2005; Budhwar et al. 2006 ; Dataquest, 2006 ; Raman, 2006; Dataquest, 2010
22	Dissatisfaction with the work culture/ cross cultural issues	Budhwar et al. 2006; Bhatnagar, 2007; Suhasini and Babu, 2013
23	Insufficient leave and no national holidays	Ramesh, 2004; Dataquest, 2004; Dataquest, 2005; Dataquest, 2006; Raman, 2006;Dataquest, 2010;Goswami and Jha, 2012
24	Non-conducive policies and procedures	Sharma, 2004; Dataquest, 2004; Dataquest, 2005; Dataquest, 2006; Dataquest, 2010;Kaur and Gupta, 2012; Suhasini and Babu, 2013; Rao and Subbarayudu, 2017
25	Marriage	Dataquest, 2004; Dataquest, 2005; Dataquest, 2006
26	Friends moving out	Dataquest, 2004; Dataquest, 2005; Dataquest, 2006
27	No flexible work schedules	Ramlall, 2003; Dataquest, 2006; Rehman et al. 2011; Devi and Panchanatham, 2012; Rao and Subbarayudu, 2017
28	Overall low job satisfaction	Ramlall, 2003; Sarkar, 2008; Pandey and Kaur, 2011; Narmadha, 2014; Rao and Subbarayudu, 2017
29	Social esteem and support	Sharma, 2007; Bhatnagar, 2007; Rehman et al. 2011
30	Night shifts	Budhwar et al. 2006; Kaur and Gupta, 2012
31	Lack of employee motivation	Mehta and Mehta, 2005; Gupta, 2013
32	Deficiencies in recruitment processes (mismatched resources and wrong deployment of resources)	Goel and Thakur, 2006; Goswami and Jha, 2012

33	Inadequate emphasis on teamwork	Ramlall, 2003; Rungta and Rao, 2018
34	Lack of social recognition	Ramlall, 2003; Pandey and Kaur, 2011
35	Lack of responsibility and ownership	Budhwar et al. 2006
36	Lack of role clarity	Goswami and Jha, 2012
37	Lack of work life balance	Rehman et al. 2011; Goswami and Jha, 2012
38	Lack of respect	Narmadha, 2014
39	Lack of job security	Shah, 2014
II. External Factors		
1	Strong demand and limited supply in the market	Goel and Thakur, 2006; Schwartz, 2007
2	Immature career outlook	Budhwar et al. 2006; Goel and Thakur, 2006
3	Concentration of demand for talent in tier I cities	Goel and Thakur, 2006
4	Unpractical education system	Raman and Balasubramanian, 2006; Pandey and Kaur, 2011

Conclusion

Managing attrition is becoming increasingly important nowadays. It is a constant worry for the management because it is adding to direct human resources cost. It increases manpower costs (related to recruitment, induction and training of new joinees) besides causing inconsistency in meeting the organizational deadlines (Siong et al. 2006). It has become an endemic problem in the Indian ITeS call centers.

Thus, based on the extensive literature, it is inferred that there is a need for taking a holistic approach towards the ever rising problem of employee attrition. Existing studies have mostly talked about environmental factors, job related factors, HRM systems, salary issues etc. But there is a need to give an integrated and comprehensive set of all the factors, having an impact on the employee attrition.

Therefore, the problem of employee attrition should be arrested as early as possible. The attrition rates are found to be between 25-40% (NASSCOM, 2013). In internal challenges, this particular industry has problems like absenteeism, absence of females at top positions, high stress levels, and above all is employee attrition. Since, the outsourcing industry being the country's most promising sector has been facing 60-70% employee turnover because the companies are still not investing sufficiently in workforce planning and architecture (NASSCOM, 2006). The ITeS call centers can arrest the attrition problem to a larger extent by working on the factors clubbed in

Table (2.1). At least, it is comparatively easier for the companies to rework on the internal factors and of course, problem of attrition is increasing badly due to mainly internal factors only.

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