

IMPACT OF COPING STRATEGIES ON WORK EFFICIENCY OF CALL CENTRE EMPLOYEES

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I. INTRODUCTION

Call centre is defined as any communications platform from which firms deliver services to customers via remote real-time contact. From the recent past, call centres have started performing a number of activities including e-mail response and customer interaction services. A call centre provides all these services to the local as well as the international customers through a wide telecom, web and database network (Ghazi, 2006). Human resources play a vital role in the successful functioning of these organizations. Their prime duty is to provide the customers with the needed information. So organizations recruit them with great care and spend a lot in training them also. But the news in the magazines and newspapers depict that the call centre employees are facing a lot of problems like excessive workload, unreachable targets, and pressurizing and abusive customers. Above all, continuous night shifts create biological imbalance in them and finally makes them stressful. So stress is an important problem encountered by the call centre employees.

Call centre workload results in work stress which adversely affects the work efficiency of call centre employees. To unleash the greater work efficiency of call centre employees, organizations can make effective steps as well as the individuals can also make. The call centre employees use to adopt some coping strategies to enhance their work efficiency. Therefore, the present paper tries to study the extent of adoption of coping strategies and their impact of work efficiency of call centre employees.

A. Objectives of the study

1. To assess the extent of coping strategies adopted by the call centre employees; and
2. To examine the impact of coping strategies on work efficiency of call centre employees.

B. Review of Literature

The Tamil Daily Dinamalar (2004) states that Burn Out Stress Syndrome (BOSS) affects young people in the computer field. It occurs due to increased depression which affects the well being of the individual. BOSS generally affects those working in call centers, BPO offices and those working on continuous night shifts. As these employees have to sit continuously for eight hours, they get back pain which is the primary symptom of BOSS. The other symptoms of BOSS are tiredness due to loss of sleep and results in mental depression followed by problems in respiratory system, digestive system and ultimately affects the biological clock.

So it becomes necessary to act according to the biological clock to make the body parts and organs function effectively.

Sheena (2005) in a study on work related problems across 26 occupations, six occupations were identified as having worse than average scores on three factors namely physical and psychological well being and job satisfaction. The occupations include ambulance workers, teachers, social services, customer services call centers, prison officers and police. The respondents of these occupations were having low levels of job satisfaction and most stressed regarding physical and psychological well being.

Harsimran (2007) confirmed that, even the BPO cabbies are under stress. It also states that, after senior level employees and agents, it is the turn of BPO cabbies to take the stress-busting sessions. The statement clearly shows that the employees of BPO sector are experiencing stress. The problem is very crucial and needs attention because most of the employees in the sector are youngsters. In other words, it is entirely run by youngsters. Ultimately it creates physical, psychological and behavioural deviations among them. It not only affects the individuals and the industry but the country on the whole.

G. Latha and N. Panchanatham (2010) in their paper found that most of the employees are youngsters and they are facing a lot of problems. They are working on continuous night shifts, which affect their biological balance. Apart from this, excessive workloads, unreachable targets and pressurizing customers are creating stress among the employees. This ultimately results in physical, psychological and behavioural deviations among them, which not only affects the employees and the organization, but, the country on the whole. This paper aims to identify the problems in the sector and the nature of the stress created by such problems. First hand information regarding the problems, the sources of stress and the experience on stress situations is collected from a project leader who has five years of experience. A questionnaire is circulated to measure the stress level of employees. It also identifies the various stressors prevailing among the employees. The impact of job satisfaction, feedback, working conditions, work family balance and workload in creating stress among the employees are analyzed.

C. Research Methodology

To achieve the objectives of the study, primary data were collected from 600 call centre employees belonging to various levels of management on a specially structured questionnaire through personal interview method. The data relate to the

existing work efficiency and adoption of various coping strategies by the call centre employees. The data were analyzed by applying the statistical tools like ANOVA, and regression analysis.

II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained by analyzing the data have been elaborated hereunder:

A. Existing work efficiency among call centre employees

The existing work efficiency was assessed by asking the employees their opinion in terms of frequency of performing various assignments. The weighted mean scores for each statement were worked out and compared between three categories with the help of Analysis of Variance. The results so obtained are presented in Table 1.

The issues related to work include as under:

S. No. Work Related Issues

- 1 I can complete the work in time by doing extra (hard) work in extra time to meet all role demands without any extra monetary award.
- 2 I work mistaken free by organizing and scheduling my plans carefully.
- 3 I have no problem in records keeping by engaging someone at work/home.
- 4 I am able to present the case properly to the boss by devoting full attention to each role when I am in it.
- 5 I have the ability to handle the customers' complaints properly by getting relative information in time.
- 6 I am properly utilizing my academic and technical qualification capability by rotating attention from one role to another.
- 7 I never lose my self-confidence by setting priorities in order of importance and schedule time around them.
- 8 My boss speaks high of my work because I never do the activities that conflict with other activities.
- 9 My work has been recognized by my company because I write the objectives in order to meet deadlines.
- 10 I am able to complete the project in time by getting help from my peers at work/family members at home.
- 11 I am able to complete multifarious responsibilities by following instructions of my seniors by integrating or combining role (e.g. combine work and family life in some days).

Among high level employees, it was observed that employees prefer to do their work related activities to attain work efficiency. On most of 11 parameters taken for the study, the weighted mean score was in the range of 3.71 to 4.85. The exception was noted in the parameters related to team work and work related to the peers. The score was as low as 2.06 in the case of attribute 10 as in the table 1.

The responses lead us to interpret that since most of the key executives are themselves responsible for the key result areas and are the ones who are setting the targets, deadlines for the projects and fixing the priorities so the high weighted mean scores are achieved from the responses.

Among medium level employees,

The results show that most of the executives feel comfortable on the attributes with the work being carried out by them as below

- My boss speaks high of my work because I never do the activities that conflict with other activities (4.49)
- I am properly utilizing my academic and technical qualification capability by rotating attention from one role to another (4.39)
- I work mistaken free by organizing and scheduling my plans carefully (4.29)
- I am able to present the case properly to the boss by devoting full attention to each role when I am in it (4.14)

The level of satisfaction among this group of employees was a bit low as compared to high level employees in the following attributes.

- My work has been recognized by my company because I write the objectives in order to meet deadlines (3.79)
- I have the ability to handle the customers' complaints properly by getting relative information in time (3.41)
- I can complete the work in time by doing extra (hard) work in extra time to meet all role demands without any extra monetary award (3.36)
- I am able to present the case properly to the boss by devoting full attention to each role when I am in it (3.19)

However the low score among the attributes as given below depict the stress among this group of employees

- I never lose my self-confidence by setting priorities in order of importance and schedule time around them (2.36)
- I am able to complete multifarious responsibilities by following instructions of my seniors by integrating or combining role (2.16)
- I am able to complete the project in time by getting help from my peers at work/family members at home (2.16).

The confidence level of majority of the employees is low and non completion of the project may be attributable to the low level of cooperation and help from peers and family members. Most employees of the category are also feeling stressed due to the multifarious activities being carried out by them.

Among low level employees, the relatively low scores among the following attributes may be the reasons of work related stress.

- I can complete the work in time by doing extra (hard) work in extra time to meet all role demands without any extra monetary award (2.42)
- I never lose my self-confidence by setting priorities in order of importance and schedule time around them (2.31)
- I am able to complete the project in time by getting help from my peers at work/family members at home (2.21) and
- I am able to complete multifarious responsibilities by following instructions of my seniors by integrating or combining role (2.11).

Table 1: Measuring existing work efficiency of respondents as frequency of work related issues

Work related Issues	High Level		Medium Level		Low Level		Overall		F-ratio
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
1	4.69	1.16	3.36	1.21	2.42	1.29	3.16	1.23	5.16**
2	4.18	1.02	4.29	1.12	4.32	1.18	4.29	1.13	1.23
3	3.98	0.89	4.14	0.91	4.17	0.98	4.13	0.93	1.54
4	4.11	0.71	3.19	0.74	3.21	0.78	3.30	0.75	4.77**
5	3.34	0.76	3.41	0.81	3.44	0.83	3.41	0.81	1.01
6	4.27	1.04	4.39	1.11	4.52	1.14	4.42	1.11	3.98*
7	4.16	0.68	2.36	0.72	2.31	0.76	2.54	0.73	5.14**
8	4.31	1.14	4.49	1.21	4.63	1.23	4.52	1.21	3.67*
9	4.85	0.74	3.79	0.76	3.62	0.79	3.84	0.77	4.11*
10	2.06	0.59	2.16	0.62	2.21	0.64	2.17	0.62	0.86
11	3.71	0.61	2.16	0.66	2.11	0.72	2.31	0.68	5.63**
Overall	3.97	0.85	3.43	0.90	3.36	0.94	3.46	0.91	1.45
% Efficiency	79.38		68.62		67.20		69.27		
Gap to be achieved (%)	20.62		31.38		32.80		30.73		

The analysis further revealed that frequency of work related issues was significantly and directly related with the level of employees on 'I can complete the work in time by doing extra (hard) work in extra time to meet all role demands without any extra monetary award', 'I am able to present the case properly to the boss by devoting full attention to each role when I am in it', 'I never lose my self-confidence by setting priorities in order of importance and schedule time around them', 'My work has been recognized by my company because I write the objectives in order to meet deadlines' and 'I am able to complete multifarious responsibilities by following instructions of my seniors by integrating or combining role'. The frequency of work efficiency related issues bore inverse and significant relationship with the level of employees on 'I am properly utilizing my academic and technical qualification capability by rotating attention from one role to another' and 'My boss speaks high of my work because I never do the activities that conflict with other activities'.

This overall work efficiency came to be 79.38 percent among high level employees, 68.62 percent among medium level employees and 67.20 percent among low level employees, while it was 69.27 on the overall situation. Though the work efficiency was significantly higher among high level employees as compared to that among medium and low level employees, but still there is scope to improve work efficiency to the extent of 20.62 percent among high level employees, 31.38 percent among medium level employees and 32.80 percent among low level employees.

III. COPING STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY THE CALL CENTRE EMPLOYEES

The call centre employees adopted several coping strategies to reduce stress and to enhance work efficiency. These coping strategies are of three types namely Type-I: Structural Role Redefinition; type-II: Personal Role Redefinition and Type-III: Reactive role Behaviour. These strategies are expressed in the following statements:

Type	Sr. No.	Statements
Type-I: Structural Role Redefinition	S1	Decide not to do certain activities that conflict with other activities
	S2	Get help from someone outside the family (e.g. home maintenance help or child care)
	S3	Engage in problem solving with family members to resolve conflicts
	S4	Get moral support from a member of the family
	S5	Integrate or combine roles (e.g., combine work and family life in some ways)
	S6	Negotiate or plan with members of your family, so their expectations of you are more in line with your own needs or requirements

Type-II: Personal Role Definition	S7	Set priorities in order of Importance and then Schedule time around them.
	S8	Partition and separate your roles. Devote full attention to each role when you are in it
	S9	Overlook or relax certain standards for how you do certain activities (let less important things slide a bit sometimes, such as dusting or lawn care)
	S10	Modify your attitudes toward certain roles or activities (e.g. coming to the conclusion that the quality of time spent with a spouse or children is more important than the quantity of time spent)
	S11	Rotate attention from one role to another. Handle each role in turn as it comes up
Type-III: Reactive Role Behaviour	S12	Plan, schedule, and organise carefully
	S13	Work hard to meet all role demands. Devote more time and energy so you can do everything expected of you
	S14	Try to get relevant information before making final Decision
	S15	Write down objective in order to meet deadlines

IV. STRUCTURAL ROLE REDEFINITION

Type-I coping strategies include to redefine the structural role in terms of conflicting activities, family, coworkers and society. The analysis given in Table 2 showed that among high level employees, the highest adoption was 4.50 (always) in case of getting moral support from a member of the family, followed by 4.12 (frequently) in case of engaging oneself in problem solving with someone at work, 3.97 (frequently) to take decision not to do certain activities that conflict with other activities and 3.63 (frequently) for getting help from someone outside the family and integrating or combining different roles. The adoption level of attempt to change societal definition of sex roles, work roles or family roles was the lowest to the tune of 3.06 (often).

Among medium level employees, the highest adoption was 3.43 (often) in case of getting moral support from a member of the family, followed by 3.17 (often) for getting help from someone outside the family, 3.06 (often) in case of engaging oneself in problem solving with someone at work, 3.01 (often) to take decision not to do certain activities that conflict with other activities and attempt to change societal definition of sex roles, work roles or family roles. The adoption level of was the lowest to the tune of 2.82 (often) for integrating or combining different roles.

Among low level employees, the highest adoption was 3.56 (frequently) in case of getting moral support from a member of the family, followed by 3.21 (often) for getting help from someone outside the family, 3.18 (often) in case of engaging oneself in problem solving with someone at work, 3.17 (often) to take decision not to do certain activities that conflict with other activities and 2.95 (often) for attempt to change societal definition of sex roles, work roles or family roles. The adoption level of was the lowest to the tune of 2.76 (often) for integrating or combining different roles.

The adoption level of coping strategies related to structural role redefinition was significantly higher among high level employees as compared to that among medium and low level employees. The overall level of coping strategies related to structural role redefinition was 3.82 (frequently)

among high level employees, 3.09 (often) among medium level employees and 3.14 (often) among low level employees. Therefore the analysis revealed that structural role redefining was significantly higher among high level employees as compared to that among medium and low level employees of call centres.

V. PERSONAL ROLE REDEFINITION

Personal role redefinition includes setting priorities, independence of various roles, relaxing work standards, changing attitude towards certain roles and rotation wise functioning. Table 2 showed that among high level employees, the highest level of adoption was 4.38 (frequently) in case of setting priorities in order of importance and then schedule time around them, 4.28 (frequently) on partitioning and separation of different roles in order to devote full attention to each role, 4.19 (frequently) to rotate attention from one role to another in order to handle each role in turn as it comes up and 3.76 (frequently) for modifying attitude towards certain roles or activities in order to prefer quality to quantity. The adoption level was the lowest to the tune of 2.71 (often) on overlooking or relaxing certain standards for how to do certain activities.

Among medium level employees, the highest level of adoption was 3.45 (often) in case of setting priorities in order of importance and then schedule time around them, 3.40 (often) on partitioning and separation of different roles in order to devote full attention to each role, 3.28 (often) to rotate attention from one role to another in order to handle each role in turn as it comes up and 3.04 (often) for modifying attitude towards certain roles or activities in order to prefer quality to quantity. The adoption level was the lowest to the tune of 2.70 (often) on overlooking or relaxing certain standards for how to do certain activities.

Among low level employees, the highest level of adoption was 3.49 (often) in case of setting priorities in order of importance and then schedule time around them, 3.41 (often) on partitioning and separation of different roles in order to devote full attention to each role, 3.19 (often) to rotate attention from one role to another in order to handle each role

in turn as it comes up and 2.90 (often) for modifying attitude towards certain roles or activities in order to prefer quality to quantity. The adoption level was the lowest to the tune of 2.59 (often) on overlooking or relaxing certain standards for how to do certain activities.

The analysis reaffirmed that the adoption level of personal role redefinition strategies was significantly higher among

high level employees as compared to that among medium and low level employees of call centres. Overall adoption level of coping strategies related to personal role redefinition was significantly highest of the order of 3.86 (frequently) among high level employees as compared to 3.17 (often) and 3.11 (often) among medium level and low level employees respectively.

Table 2: Adoption of coping strategies adopted by respondents for stress management to enhance efficiency

Coping strategies	High Level		Medium Level		Low Level		Overall		F-ratio
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Structural Role Redefinition									
1	3.97	1.11	3.01	1.39	3.17	1.33	3.17	1.37	5.49**
2	3.63	1.01	3.17	1.20	3.21	1.10	3.23	1.15	3.37*
3	4.12	0.87	3.06	1.13	3.18	1.07	3.22	1.13	4.57*
4	4.50	0.82	3.43	1.32	3.56	2.23	3.59	1.70	5.13**
5	3.63	1.11	2.82	1.26	2.76	1.23	2.89	1.26	4.19*
6	3.06	0.83	3.01	1.05	2.95	0.96	3.00	0.99	1.56
Sub-Total (A)	3.82	0.93	3.09	1.16	3.14	1.38	3.18	1.21	3.21*
Personal Role Definition									
7	4.38	0.79	3.45	1.16	3.49	1.05	3.56	1.12	6.14**
8	4.28	0.88	3.40	1.18	3.41	1.05	3.50	1.14	4.51*
9	2.71	1.04	2.70	1.17	2.59	1.08	2.66	1.12	1.85
10	3.76	1.04	3.04	1.16	2.90	1.11	3.07	1.15	6.21**
11	4.19	0.85	3.28	1.12	3.19	1.04	3.35	1.11	7.20**
Sub-Total (B)	3.86	0.86	3.17	1.12	3.11	1.02	3.23	1.06	4.78**
Reactive role Behaviour									
12	4.56	0.95	3.60	1.24	3.46	1.14	3.65	1.22	4.21*
13	4.41	1.04	3.62	1.26	3.57	1.12	3.68	1.21	5.06**
14	4.40	0.96	3.36	1.18	3.33	1.08	3.46	1.17	5.61**
15	4.57	0.95	3.38	1.12	3.45	1.02	3.53	1.13	6.14**
Sub-Total (C)	4.49	0.92	3.49	1.14	3.45	1.04	3.58	1.12	5.21**
Overall	4.01	0.60	3.22	0.84	3.21	0.72	3.30	0.82	6.45**

VI. REACTIVE ROLE BEHAVIOUR

The coping strategies related to reactive role behavior include the planning and organization, devotion of time, strengthening of information base and writing down the objectives. It is clear from Table 2 that among high level employees, the adoption level was highest of the order of 4.57 (always) in case of writing down the objectives in order to meet deadlines, followed by 4.56 (always) for planning, scheduling and organizing carefully. The adoption level was the lowest to the tune of 4.40 (often) on getting relevant information before making final decision and 4.41 (often) on working hard to meet all role demands by devoting more time and energy so as to do everything expected of the employees.

Among medium level employees, the adoption level was highest of the order of 3.62 (frequently) in case of working

hard to meet all role demands by devoting more time and energy so as to do everything expected of the employees, followed by 3.60 (frequently) for planning, scheduling and organizing carefully. The adoption level was the lowest to the tune of 3.36 (often) on getting relevant information before making final decision and 3.38 (often) on writing down the objectives in order to meet deadlines,

The adoption level of different coping strategies related to reactive role behavior was significantly higher among high level employees as compared to that among medium and low level employees. The overall level of adoption of coping strategies was 4.01 (frequently) among high level employees, which was significantly higher than 3.22 (often) among medium level employees and 3.21 (often) among low level employees. This may be due the less coping time with the

medium and low level employees than that with the high level employee as the workload and work stress is greater among medium and low level employees as compared to that among high level employees. This ought to be reversed in order to enhance work efficiency.

VII. IMPACT OF COPING STRATEGIES ON WORK EFFICIENCY

The impact of various coping strategies on work efficiency of call centre employees was assessed by employing the multiple backward step regression model. This model excludes the non-significant variables one by one after each step till the arrival of a combination of all the significant variables. The results of regression analysis have been presented in Table 3.

The analysis indicated that in the first run model, the magnitude of coefficient of multiple determination worked at 0.5621, which revealed that as much as 56.21 percent of the variation in the existing work efficiency of call centre employees could be explained by the 15 coping strategies included in the model. In this model 6 coping strategies came to be significant. The magnitude of multiple determination declined to 0.5148 in the final run model and 8 coping strategies turned to be significant. This indicated that the contribution of the 7 non-significant coping strategies was only 4.73 percent towards work efficiency.

The regression coefficients of all the coping strategies were found to be positive, indicating that the impact of all the coping strategies was positive on work efficiency. But all the regression coefficients were not significant.

Variables	1st run model		Final run model	
	β	t-value	β	t-value
Constant	1.2418		1.3167	
CP1	0.3758	3.67**	0.3814	3.71**
CP2	0.0438	1.14		
CP3	0.1129	1.09		
CP4	0.4213	3.58**	0.4238	3.64**
CP5	0.1322	1.34		
CP6	0.3251	3.29**	0.3304	3.42**
CP7	0.4134	4.67**	0.4164	4.74**
CP8	0.0945	1.41		
CP9	0.1008	1.09		
CP10	0.3898	2.42*	0.3914	2.49*
CP11	0.2117	1.89	0.2947	2.19*
CP12	0.1322	1.27		
CP13	0.1481	1.82	0.2158	2.21*
CP14	0.1138	1.18		
CP15	0.3958	3.68**	0.4007	3.76**
R-square	0.5621		0.5148	
F-ratio	52.63**		82.49**	

However, in the final run model, the coping strategies like deciding not to do certain activities that conflict with other activities (0.3814), getting moral support from a member of the family (0.4238), attempting to change societal definition of sex roles, work roles or family roles (0.3304), setting priorities in order of importance and then schedule time around them (0.4164), modifying attitude towards certain roles or activities in order to prefer quality to quantity (0.3914), rotation of attention from one role to another to handle each role in turn it comes up (0.2947), working hard to meet all role demands by devoting more time and energy so as to do everything expected (0.2158) and writing down objectives in order to meet deadlines (0.4007). Turned to be significant.

This revealed that the impact of these 8 coping strategies is significantly positive on work efficiency.

VIII. SUMMARY AND SUGGESTIONS

This overall existing work efficiency was 79.38 percent among high level employees, 68.62 percent among medium level employees and 67.20 percent among low level employees, while it was 69.27 on the overall situation. Though the existing work efficiency was significantly higher among high level employees as compared to that among medium and low level employees, but still there is scope to improve work efficiency to the extent of 20.62 percent among high level

employees, 31.38 percent among medium level employees and 32.80 percent among low level employees.

The adoption level of different coping strategies was significantly higher among high level employees as compared to that among medium and low level employees. This may be due the less coping time with the medium and low level employees than that with the high level employee as the workload and work stress is greater among medium and low level employees as compared to that among high level employees. This ought to be reversed in order to enhance work efficiency.

The impact of coping strategies was positive on work efficiency. This revealed that work efficiency can be enhanced by adopting coping strategies by the call centre employees. This can be done particularly in case of deciding not to do certain activities that conflict with other activities, getting moral support from a member of the family, attempting to change societal definition of sex roles, work roles or family roles, setting priorities in order of importance and then schedule time around them, modifying attitude towards certain

roles or activities in order to prefer quality to quantity, rotation of attention from one role to another to handle each role in turn it comes up, working hard to meet all role demands by devoting more time and energy so as to do everything expected and writing down objectives in order to meet deadlines. Both organizations and individuals can perform better by combining the efforts of both to generate an environment for adoption of coping strategies.

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