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An exploratory study on job and demographic attributes affecting employee satisfaction in the Indian BPO industry

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Abstract

Purpose – The business process outsourcing (BPO) industry in India has always been characterized by ungodly hours, monotonous job, low perceived value, dispirited efficiency resulting to high attrition level. Notwithstanding the ever rising attrition rate, it has become critical for the companies to satisfy their employees in order to retain them. The purpose of this paper is to determine what and how job-related and demographic variables are associated with employee satisfaction of the BPO employees.

Design/methodology/approach – Data collected from 500 middle level BPO employees was analyzed using SPSS 16.0. T-tests and Duncan's post hoc tests were done to compare the various dimensions of employee satisfaction across selected demographic variables such as gender, marital status, education, age and tenure. Correlation was done to find out the relationship between employee satisfaction and various job characteristics as well as demographic variables and finally, regression was done to find out the actual determinants of employee satisfaction.

Findings – There is difference of perception towards the job-related variables on the basis of gender, marital status, education, age, and tenure. Correlations revealed that interpersonal relationships, career progression, salary, company policies, working conditions, and authority have significant positive relationship with employee satisfaction and only accountability had a significant negative relationship with employee satisfaction. Regression revealed the significant determinants of employee satisfaction which were interpersonal relationships, career progression, salary, gender, accountability, and authority.

Research limitations/implications – The study exclusively used surveys to poll work-related satisfaction from the employees working only in BPO in India and considers only ten job-related variables and five demographic variables for the study.

Practical implications – The comprehensive study of employee satisfaction is helpful for both practitioners and academicians as it helps in disentangling the perceptions about employee satisfaction and also explains the variances among various groups of demographic characteristics. This will enable organizations to correctly gauge employee satisfaction based on the job-related and demographic characteristics.

Social implications – Now that the study has revealed the dimensions of employee satisfaction and the crucial determinants of satisfaction, each of these factors can be individually tackled to ensure employee retention.

Originality/value – The present study illuminates the existing theoretical foundations regarding employee satisfaction by exploring the detailed and ample responses provided by BPO employees in Indian industry; this can help practitioners to make robust managerial decisions.

Keywords India, Outsourcing, Process management, Employees behaviour, Job satisfaction, Business process outsourcing, Job-related variables, Demographic variables

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Business process outsourcing (BPO), in India, has become the mantra of employment, the buzz of present, and the promise of future! Where on one hand myriad of well-groomed youth on calls, fast money, and phenomenal lifestyles seem to flash the mind in an instant, on the other hand lopsided working hours, unimaginable attrition rate, stress and burnout exhibit its ugly side (Sengupta and Gupta, 2008). The last decade saw an upheaval in the growth and development of the Indian economy along with a radical change in the way businesses were done. Outsourcing the non-core processes in order to focus on the core ones is how the companies prefer to work now. BPO has become the evident strategic choice of the companies looking at the visible profits of cost reduction while improving the quality of service, increasing shareholder value, etc. (Shah and Sharma, 2007). Recently, India has become the most preferred destination for any company that wants to outsource its business processes, which can be attributed to three basic factors-cost, people and environment, where in India ranks first among a host of desirable nations in terms of employee cost, infrastructure cost, management cost and the tax structure and beats all its competitors on the people front. However, when it comes to environment (which includes country risk, infrastructure, cultural compatibility, proximity, etc.) India lags behind countries like Canada, Australia and Ireland.

There is a dismal side of the BPOs too, which revolves around the host of challenges, which includes shortage of competent managers for the middle and senior management; high attrition rates; opposition from the US politicians and the UK labor unions against shifting of the BPO operations by local companies to India. Referring to the paucity of mangers at the middle- and senior-level managers, it is found that they are poached by the new entrants to the industry. Reports say that large and established players face an attrition rate of 45 per cent against the industry average of 35 per cent. Of all the challenges posed to BPO organizations at various levels, attrition, absenteeism and dearth of motivation are the major ones that dominate at the middle level (Mehta *et al.*, 2006). It is also found that instead of revitalizing the organization, attrition created a phenomenon identified by Leonard Schlesinger and James Heskett as "the cycle of failure" (Bleuel, 2006). The cycle involves a chain of consequences beginning with employee dissatisfaction and ending with organizational inefficiency, poor service quality, high customer turnover and decreased profitability.

That brings us to the concept of employee satisfaction, which has been frequently researched by academicians to demonstrate a combination of employee feelings towards the different facets of job satisfaction such as the nature of the work itself, pay, promotion opportunities, and satisfaction with co-workers (Schermerhorn *et al.*, 2005). The importance of studying employee satisfaction can be attributed to the facts that job satisfaction is associated with increased productivity and organizational commitment, lower absenteeism and turnover, and ultimately, with increased organizational effectiveness (Ellickson and Logsdon, 2001). This paper aims to assess what all and in what manner job characteristics, specific to a BPO and demographic characteristics contribute to overall employee satisfaction.

Although many studies have been carried out on outsourced work environment on job attributes (Budhwar *et al.*, 2006; Ofreneo *et al.*, 2007; Walletwatch, 2003; Cacanas, 2004; Singh, 2005; Witt *et al.*, 2004; Rose and Wright, 2005; Houlihan, 2002) and also on demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and the level of education (Grebner *et al.*, 2003; Walsh and Deery, 2006), yet there appears to be scarcity of

direct empirical data on the influence of job attributes specific to a BPO and demographic characteristics on employee satisfaction in an ITES-BPO work and work environment, especially in Asia. The research question posed for the study is to see what all job characteristics specific to the BPO industry affect satisfaction among employees and how employee satisfaction differs by demographic characteristics of gender, marital status, education, age and tenure. The study explored ITES-BPO employees' satisfaction in terms of ten job-related characteristics namely challenges in the job, supervision, working conditions, salary, accountability, authority, recognition, career progression, and interpersonal relationships. It is expected that the findings of this study will contribute to the literature on Indian ITES-BPO industry and also encompass Asian ITES industry. Bearing in mind the costs associated with replacing employees, it is advisable for organizations to spend on employee retention programs and to start with, it will be rewarding to identify the specific job attributes that, if present, lead to employee satisfaction. This shall also enable us to develop strategies to enhance work and work environment. Hence, it is anticipated that the study would provide worthy information not only to academic community but also to practitioners that would facilitate them to make knowledgeable managerial decisions in India. In line with the objective, the rest of the paper describes the Indian BPO industry; reviews the theoretical background of the study; and elucidates the methodology adopted. Subsequently, the main findings are presented and discussed and finally conclusions and managerial implications of the findings and research areas are discussed for further inquiry and understanding.

Literature review
Indian context
India is the hottest destination for any company that wants to outsource its business processes. From a negligible size in early 2000 to a gigantic size today, the BPO sector has been growing at an unprecedented rate. In 2003, India accounted for 75 per cent of the total BPO offshore delivery value that was expected to increase by 55 per cent annually over the next five years (Neale, 2004). According to Scholl et al. (2003), India's revenue from BPO operations was expected to grow from approximately $1 billion in 2002 to $13.8 billion in 2007 and its share of supply was projected to be 57 per cent of the offshore BPO market. According to Nasscom, the Indian IT-BPO industry (including domestic market) recorded an overall growth of 28 per cent (currency adjusted), clocking revenues of $52 billion in FY07-08 up from $39.6 billion in FY06-07. 2008 was a year of revolution for the Indian IT-BPO sector as it began to re-engineer challenges posed by macro-economic environment, with the worldwide spending aggregate expected to reach nearly USD 1.6 trillion, a growth of 5.6 per cent over the previous year. The BPO exports are up by 30 per cent (in USD), registering revenues of $10.9 billion (Nasscom, 2009, 2003). Indian IT-BPO grew by 12 per cent in FY2009 to reach USD 71.7 billion in aggregate revenue. Software and services exports (includes exports of IT services, BPO, engineering services and R&D and software products) reached USD47 billion, contributing nearly 66 per cent to the overall IT-BPO revenue aggregate. IT-BPO exports (including hardware exports) reached USD47.3 billion in FY2009 as against USD40.9 billion in FY2008, a growth of 16 per cent. The flip side of the BPOs revolves around the host of challenges that they have been facing since their very inception and the biggest among these is employee attrition. Reports say that large and established players face an attrition rate of 45 per cent against the industry

average of 35 per cent. Employees leave for many reasons and one among them is the level of their satisfaction.

Theoretical framework

Employee satisfaction and job satisfaction. An interesting part of this study is the analysis of employee satisfaction on the basis of job and demographic characteristics. It is quite significant here to note that employee satisfaction is different from job satisfaction, wherein job satisfaction is a subset of employee satisfaction. Employee satisfaction gives the bigger picture and includes elements like:

- general satisfaction with work, consisting of the work conditions (Mozina, 1991; Miskell and Miskell, 1994), working time (Pierce and Newstrom, 1980; Ronan, 1981; Christensen and Staines, 1990) and reputation of the company (Mulej, 1986);

- employee relationships, consisting of relationships between employees (Mayer, 1991; Miskell and Miskell, 1994; Welsby, 2003) and also includes annual personal interviews with employees (Majcen, 2004);

- remuneration, benefits and organizational culture, these elements include salary (Hanneman and Schwab, 1985; Brecko, 2005), remuneration in the form of benefits and praise (Rosenbloom and Hallman, 1991), promotion (Mozina, 2002), education (Tsui *et al.*, 1997; Joy-Matthews *et al.*, 2007; Noe, 2008), permanency of the job (Maslow, 1997; McGregor, 2002) and the organizational climate and culture (Pinchot, 1985; Fiedler, 1993; Hisrich and Peters, 1995); and

- employee loyalty (Meyer and Allen, 1997; Tsui *et al.*, 1997; Varona, 2002).

Job satisfaction is more specific and is confined to the contents of job. It can be defined as "the degree to which people like their jobs" (Spector, 1997) or "a pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job as achieving or facilitating the achievement of one's job values" (Locke, 1976). Additionally, Williams (1995) found that employee benefits affect job satisfaction. Another difference can be attributed to the perspective, i.e. job satisfaction is more of an employee's perspective and employee satisfaction is more of the organization's perspective.

Job characteristics specific to BPO organizations. The BPO industry is typified by a host of job-related characteristics that is typical to it, some of which eventually become the reasons for employees' dissatisfaction from a typical BPO job – high stress levels (Mirchandani, 2004; Mehta *et al.*, 2006); monotonous nature of the job (Taylor and Bain, 2004, 2005, 2006; Budhwar *et al.*, 2006; Ofreneo *et al.*, 2007; Batt *et al.*, 2006), demand-supply disparity and lack of career growth potential on the professional front (Mehta *et al.*, 2006; Batt *et al.*, 2006); loss of identity (Mirchandani, 2004); mismatch with normal cycle, complete change of life style and lack of comfort on the personal front (Budhwar *et al.*, 2006). All such reasons lead to mounting dissatisfaction in BPO employees. Increased dissatisfaction leads to reduced motivation, which in turn results in diluted efficiency because of which employees are not able to give their expected output which eventually results in their leaving the job (Sengupta and Gupta, 2008).

To study the employee satisfaction, literature on job-related characteristics was reviewed. Based on the past literature, it can be said that employees working in outsourcing environment confront a varied work environment, which is highly controlled; closely monitored and strictly measured against targets though employees

are encouraged to take responsibility for both their team and their own performance (Budhwar *et al.*, 2006; Wickramsighe *et al.,* 2010). After much exhaustive analysis of past work, following job characteristics were chosen for the study.

Challenges in the job. Much of literature is available which states a BPO job is repetitive, less skilled, and less challenging (Taylor and Bain, 2006; Mehta *et al.*, 2006; Budhwar *et al.*, 2006; Mishra, 2007) and thus affects the attitude of the employees towards it (Mishra, 2007; Shah and Sharma, 2007; Sengupta and Gupta, 2008).

Supervision. In a study done by Russell and Thite (2008), it was found that BPO employees at the Indian sites feel that close supervision and restricted freedom make the supervision ineffective on the part of their team leads and often causes discontent among the employees. Style of supervision affects the attitude of an employee in the form of their satisfaction and performance (Aselage and Eisenberger, 2003; Mishra, 2007; Russell and Thite, 2008).

Working conditions. Working conditions is an important dimension of BPO job as it affects employee satisfaction, willingness to work and subsequently efficiency. Literature states that working conditions is not just limited to the physical environment conferred on the employees, it expands to job design, job control, task complexity and variety and even stressors (Clegg *et al.*, 1997; Parker and Wall, 1998; Semmer, 1998). Numerous studies have investigated effects of working conditions on strain, employee complaints (Kahn and Byosiere, 1992; Sonnentag and Frese, 2003), job satisfaction and affective commitment over time, and, in turn, enhance intentions to quit a job (Sonnentag and Frese, 2003).

Salary. Salary, a vital job-related characteristic, affects employees' liking towards a job, their satisfaction level and even their commitment to the organization (Siong *et al.*, 2006; Grebner *et al.*, 2003; Sharma and Jyoti, 2006; Kazemzadeh and Bashiri, 2005). Salary and promotions are related to company policies, which in turn affect employees' attitude towards work (Sharma and Jyoti, 2006).

Accountability, authority, recognition. These job-related characteristics often affect job satisfaction and employee motivation at workplace. It gets converted into an ingredient of self-esteem and hence affects employee self-fulfillment (Russell and Thite, 2008; Sengupta and Gupta, 2008; Mishra, 2007; Kazemzadeh and Bashiri, 2005; Sharma and Jyoti, 2006).

Career progression. Career progression is another critical job-related characteristic which affects employees' satisfaction and their willingness to stay with the organization (Siong *et al.*, 2006; Addae *et al.*, 2006).

Company policies. Policies matter to organizations and employees alike; they will shape employees' perceptions of fairness and justice, and hence, their commitment to the organization (Morris and Sherman, 1981). It is also stated organizational policy and work environment increases organizational commitment which in turn leads to employee commitment and satisfaction (Kamal and Hanif, 2009).

Interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal relationship in an organization is quite a binding factor and affects employee satisfaction to a large extent. Lack of it in a workplace often leads to social stressors (Grebner *et al.*, 2003; Dormann and Zapf, 2002; Semmer, 2007).

Thus, in the above context, ITES-BPO employees satisfaction towards ten job-related factors namely challenges in the job, supervision, working conditions, salary, accountability, authority, recognition, career progression, company policies

and interpersonal relationships will be investigated. A summary of these job-related factors and their literature source has been shown in Table I.

Demographic characteristics. When considering employee satisfaction, demographic variables should be considered to comprehend thoroughly the possible factors that lead to job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Demographic characteristics comprise factors that define individuals even before their entry into the work, like gender, age, marital status and education level as well as other factors related to their work experience, such as job level, shift work, and years of experience. The core assumption here is that given that the workforce of any organization is not demographically homogeneous, one expects employee satisfaction to differ across sub-groups (Fosam *et al.*, 1998). When capturing and capitalizing on individual capabilities, it is important to understand whether ITES-BPO employees' demographic characteristics influence their perceptions towards employment characteristics of the industry. After much of in-depth literature review, the following demographic factors have been considered for study.

Gender. Gender has always been an important factor in research. A number of researchers have examined the relationship between gender and job satisfaction (Goh *et al.*, 1991; Mason, 1995; Mottaz, 1986). However, the results of the many studies concerning the relationship between job satisfaction and the sex of the employees have been contradictory. Several studies have found women to be more satisfied than men (Bartol and Wortman, 1975; Clark, 1996, 1997; Murray and Atkinson, 1981; Sloane and Williams, 1996; Ward and Sloane, 1998). Others have found men to be more satisfied than women (Forgionne and Peeters, 1982; Hulin and Smith, 1964; Shapiro and Stem, 1975; Weaver, 1974). It is important to observe, however, that most of the studies in this area report no significant differences between the sexes in relation to job satisfaction, particularly when a number of other variables were statistically controlled (Brief *et al.*, 1977; Golembiewski, 1977; Mottaz, 1986; Smith and Plant, 1982; Weaver, 1978).

Age. Age affects employee satisfaction and this has been brought about by a number of studies (Ang *et al.*, 1993; Herbert and Burke, 1997; Oshagbemi, 1997; Rhodes, 1983). Numerous studies suggest that positive relationships exist between job

Job-related factors affecting employee satisfaction	Literature source
Challenges	Mishra (2007), Shah and Sharma (2007) and Sengupta and Gupta (2008)
Supervision	Aselage and Eisenberger (2003), Mishra (2007) and Russell and Thite (2008)
Working conditions	Clegg *et al.* (1997), Parker and Wall (1998), Semmer (1998), Kahn and Byosiere (1992) and Sonnentag and Frese (2003)
Salary	Siong *et al.* (2006), Grebner *et al.* (2003), Sharma and Jyoti (2006) and Kazemzadeh and Bashiri (2005)
Accountability	Russell and Thite (2008), Sengupta and Gupta (2008), Mishra (2007), Kazemzadeh and Bashiri (2005) and Sharma and Jyoti (2006)
Career progression	Siong *et al.* (2006) and Addae *et al.* (2006)
Authority	Russell and Thite (2008), Sengupta and Gupta (2008), Mishra (2007), Kazemzadeh and Bashiri (2005) and Sharma and Jyoti (2006)
Recognition	Russell and Thite (2008), Sengupta and Gupta (2008), Mishra (2007), Kazemzadeh and Bashiri (2005), Sharma and Jyoti (2006)
Interpersonal relationships	Grebner *et al.* (2003), Dormann and Zapf (2002) and Semmer (2007)
Company policies	Morris and Sherman (2003) and Sharma and Jyoti (2006)

Table I.
Summary of job-related factors and their literature source

satisfaction and age (Lee and Wilbur, 1985; Weaver, 1978), while others suggest a U-shaped relationship or insignificant relationships between age and overall job satisfaction (Herzberg *et al.*, 1957; Singh and Singh, 1980).

Education. A number of research studies found that employee satisfaction differ by the level of education (Guimaraes and Igbaria, 1992; Lee and Wilbur, 1985; Rogers, 1991). Studies have yielded contradictory findings (Bedeian *et al.*, 1992; King *et al.*, 1982; Lee and Wilbur, 1985). The level of education influences a person's work-related attitudes like satisfaction, motivation, participation presumably because an individual expects that rewards and responsibilities will change as the level of education increases (Churchill *et al.*, 1979). Further, Bilgic (1998) found that individuals with higher level of education seemed to be more concerned with productivity and have few negative feelings towards their work.

Tenure. Job tenure is the length of time an individual has worked in a specific position in an organization and it can make significant variations in an individual's work-related attitudes (Guimaraes and Igbaria, 1992; Lim and Teo, 1998). When an individual has been on the job for a long time, his/her investments in the job and organization may be greater than someone who has been on the job for a short period (Lim and Teo, 1998); this could influence an individual's intention to leave the organization, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Lim and Teo, 1998).

Marital status. Marital status has also shown varied results with respect to employee satisfaction. Fetsch and Kennington (1997) also found a relationship between marital status and job satisfaction levels. They found both divorced and married employees to be more satisfied with their jobs than agents who were never married, remarried, or widowed. Wickramasinghe and Kumara (2010) also found marital status to have a significant effect on working hours and thus employee attitude, where as Scott *et al.* (2005) found no significant relationships between marital status and the job satisfaction constructs.

A summary of these demographic factors and their literature source has been shown in Table II.

Research methodology

The research problem identified in this study is to assess what all job-related variables and demographic variables contribute to overall employee satisfaction and how. Employee satisfaction is the dependent variable studied in this research which

Demographic factors affecting employee satisfaction	Literature source
Gender	Chimanikire *et al.* (2007), Cano and Miller (1992), Castillo *et al.* (1999), Scott *et al.* (2005) and Hallock *et al.* (2004)
Marital status	Scott *et al.* (2005), Fetsch and Kennington (1997) and Wickramasinghe et al.
Education	Guimaraes and Igbaria (1992), Lee and Wilbur (1985), Rogers (1991), Churchill *et al.* (1979) and Bilgic (1998)
Age	Ang *et al.* (1993), Herbert and Burke (1997), Oshagbemi (1997), Rhodes (1983), Lee and Wilbur (1985), Weaver (1978), Herzberg *et al.* (1957) and Singh and Singh (1980)
Tenure	Guimaraes and Igbaria (1992) and Lim and Teo (1998)

Table II.
Summary of demographic factors and their literature source

is dependent on 15 independent variables, of which ten are related to job viz. challenges in the job, supervision, working conditions, salary, accountability, authority, recognition, career progression and interpersonal relationships and five are related to demographic viz. age, gender, marital status, education, and tenure. On the basis of the problem stated, the following objectives have been chalked out:

(1) to compare the selected ten job-related factors of employee satisfaction across the selected five demographic factors;

(2) to find out the correlation coefficients between employee satisfaction (dependent variable) and job-related factors and demographic factors (independent variables);

(3) to find out the determinants of employee satisfaction with respect to its job-related factors and demographic factors.

Based on the literature review and the dependent and independent variables taken, a conceptual framework of the research was drawn as shown in Figure 1. A framework is the key component of a social research and highlights the graphical representation of the hypothetical model developed and followed in a research.

Sampling and data collection
The general intent of this exploratory and descriptive study was to understand the fundamentals of employee satisfaction and explore its dimensions. The population for this study comprised of employees working in various BPOs in the National Capital Region of India, which is also a BPO hub. A sample size of 500 was chosen for this study. Simple random sampling technique was used to gather data from the respondents, because of which respondents diverged from every age group, gender, organization, marital status, etc. but were restricted only to low- and middle-level employees, where the attrition is highest. In a simple random sample of a given size, all such subsets of the frame are given an equal probability. This minimizes bias and simplifies analysis
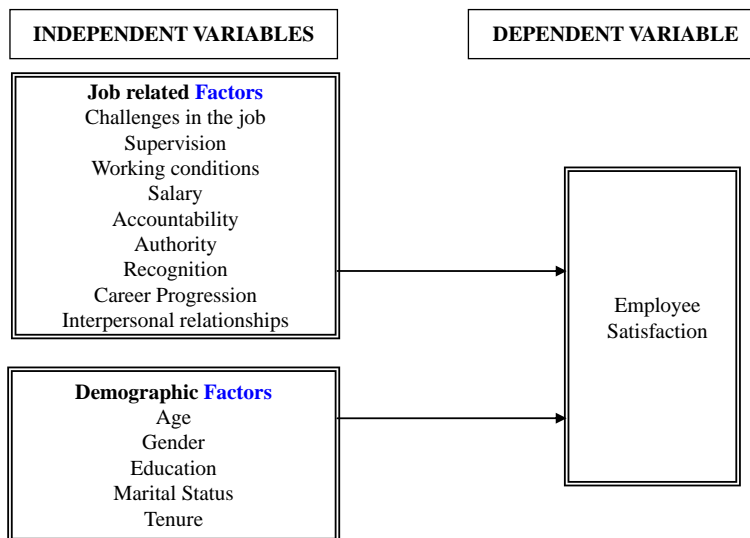
Figure 1.
Research model

of results. In particular, the variance between individual results within the sample is a good indicator of variance in the overall population, which makes it relatively easy to estimate the accuracy of results. With the unconditional assistance of various associates, data were collected comfortably from the respondents working in BPOs located in the NCR.

An instrument was intricately designed to tap the demographic variables including age, education, gender, marital status, and tenure of the respondents. It also gathered information about their level of satisfaction with job-related factors. The instrument aimed at knowing how much the respondents agree to the given statements about their current job. These statements were related to the ten job attributes selected for the study viz., challenges in the job, supervision, working conditions, salary, accountability, authority, recognition, career progression and interpersonal relationships. The basic idea was to measure the degree to which certain job characteristics were expected to be in their form and volume to satisfy the employees in order to sustain them. The instrument had 31 items in all, three items for each of the attributes thus making it 30 and one item asking their overall satisfaction level from their current job. These items were put on a five-point Likert scale, wherein the respondents were asked to rate the items between 5 and 1; 5 being "strongly agree" and 1 being "strongly disagree". Qualitative validity was tested through the theoretical study as well as through specialist comments. The Cronbach's α model, inter-item correlation and covariances was used and α-values over 0.65 were considered. The Cronbach's α of the entire instrument came as 0.85. The Cronbach's α-values for all these ten factors ranged from 0.65 to 0.828 indicating that the scale was internally consistent and reliable (Cronbach, 1951; Nunnally, 1978). The cronbach's α-value of the factors is as follow: challenges 0.729, supervision 0.658, working conditions 0.765, salary 0.828, accountability 0.697, career progression 0.728, authority 0.701, recognition 0.813, interpersonal relationships 0.793, and company policies 0.811. These job-related factors were also checked for their correlations and multicollinearity and they all were found to be positively correlated to one another, with their correlation coefficients ranging between 0.345 and 0.537, significant at 0.05 and 0.01 level. There was no case of multicollinearity.

Main data collection began in the month of January 2011 and went on till March 2011. Data were collected through an online survey. The instrument was uploaded on www.qualtrics.com and the link was sent to 700 employees working in BPOs in the NCR, of which 521 responded, thus making the response rate to be 74.4 per cent. In total, 500 fully completed instruments were considered for the study.

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 16.0 was religiously used for the statistical analyses. Coding of variables in a quantitative research is very critical for better interpretation of results. Therefore, age, gender, education, tenure, and marital status were all coded meticulously. Gender, education and marital status had only two categories, thus they were taken as dummy variables. Taking such variables as dummy variables eases the statistical operations to be done on them and helps in better assessment.

Findings and discussion
Personal profile of respondents
The first section of the instrument gathered information about the personal profile of the respondents which included age, gender, education, marital status, and tenure. Age and tenure had three categories each. In the age profile, 134 (26.8 per cent) respondents fell

in the age category of less than 25; 226 respondents (45.2 per cent) fell in the middle category, i.e. between 26 and 30; and 140 (28 per cent) of the respondents fell in the age category of more than 30. In the tenure profile, of the 500 respondents 30 per cent of the respondents were less than one year old in their present organization. About 51.6 per cent of the respondents were one to three years old in their current organization and only 18.4 per cent respondents were more than three years old in their current organizations. Gender, marital status and education had two categories only, wherein 272 were males (54.4 per cent) and 228 were females (45.6 per cent); 355 (71 per cent) were unmarried and 145 were married (29 per cent); and 244 respondents (48.8 per cent) were graduates and 256 (51.2 per cent) were post graduates.

Comparison of job-related factors of employee satisfaction across the selected demographic factors
Employee satisfaction is the individual employee's general attitude towards the job. It is also an employee's cognitive and affective evaluation of his or her job. Employee satisfaction was measured taking into account ten job-related factors viz. supervision, salary, recognition, interpersonal relationships, authority, challenges in work, working conditions, accountability, and company policies. These factors were then compared across the selected five demographic factors viz. gender, marital status, education, tenure, and age. *t*-test and Duncan's post hoc test was done to see whether these differences so computed were statistically significant. The findings are as follow.

Gender
Significant difference was found in the mean values of eight job-related factors of employee satisfaction as perceived by the male and female respondents. Factors like supervision, challenges, working conditions, salary, accountability, authority, and recognition had significant difference in the mean values. These factors attribute to the difference in perception of employee satisfaction between male and female employees.

As shown in Table III, the *t*-value was highest in case of challenges in work, and this factor was ranked higher by males than females. This means males perceive presence of challenges in the job bring them more satisfaction. Same was the case for supervision, working conditions, salary, and recognition. Males perceive these factors as more

Job-related factors of employee satisfaction	Male ($n = 272$)		Female ($n = 228$)		*t*-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Challenges	3.74	0.95	3.16	0.78	7.40**
Supervision	3.84	0.81	3.36	1.03	4.94**
Working conditions	3.75	0.81	3.47	0.91	3.63**
Salary	3.04	0.89	2.75	0.91	3.57**
Accountability	3.34	0.70	3.54	0.74	3.07**
Career progression	3.58	1.00	3.84	0.83	2.71**
Authority	3.56	1.08	3.77	0.78	2.44*
Recognition	3.46	0.73	3.31	0.96	1.97*
Interpersonal relationships	3.81	0.79	3.73	0.55	1.19 NS
Company policies	3.30	0.71	3.24	0.61	1.04 NS

Notes: Significant at: *0.05 and **0.01 levels

Table III.
Comparison of job-related factors of employee satisfaction between male and female respondents

important that contributes to their satisfaction. Factors like accountability and authority were ranked higher by females, which mean females derive more satisfaction from accountability and authority. Interpersonal relationships and company policies had no significant difference at all. The above finding suggests that there is a difference of perception between male and female employees and this is well supported with extensive literature from the past that talks about the differences between men and women in terms of their attitudes towards job-related factors of employee satisfaction (Wickramasinghe and Kumara, 2010; Arun and Arun, 2002; Lim and Teo, 1998). Several studies found that women have been marginalized in promotion, salary raises, assignments to challenging tasks, and access to authority (Guimaraes and Igbaria, 1992; Sumner and Niederman, 2004).

Marital status
Significant difference was found in the mean values of three factors of employee satisfaction as perceived by the married and unmarried respondents. Factors like challenges, accountability, and authority had significant difference in the mean values. In all these cases, married employees ranked the factors higher than the unmarried ones. It simply means challenges in the job; accountability and authority contribute to employee satisfaction more in case of married employees. Rest all other factors had insignificant differences. Previous literature shows that marital status has relationship with job satisfaction constructs (Andrews, 1990; Bowen *et al.*, 1994; Fetsch and Kennington, 1997; Griffin, 1984; Nestor and Leary, 2000) and that married employees rank working conditions more important for employee satisfaction (Wickramasinghe and Kumara, 2010) (Table IV).

Education
Significant difference was found in the mean values of seven factors of employee satisfaction as perceived by the graduate and post graduate respondents. Factors like working conditions, salary, supervision, accountability, authority, career progression and company policies had significant difference in the mean values. These factors attribute to the difference in perception of employee satisfaction between graduate and post graduate employees (Table V).

The *t*-value was highest in case of salary, and this factor was ranked higher by graduates than post graduates. This means decent salary in the job accounts for more

Job-related factors of employee satisfaction	Unmarried ($n = 355$) Mean	SD	Married ($n = 145$) Mean	SD	*t*-value
Challenges	3.35	0.90	3.77	0.91	4.62[*]
Accountability	3.36	0.76	3.61	0.60	3.47[*]
Authority	3.58	1.00	3.84	0.83	2.71[*]
Career progression	3.30	0.71	3.24	0.61	1.04 NS
Interpersonal relationships	3.74	0.71	3.87	0.65	1.92 NS
Recognition	3.44	0.82	3.28	0.90	1.86 NS
Salary	2.89	0.89	2.97	0.96	0.91 NS
Supervision	4.02	1.11	3.93	0.89	0.88 NS
Working conditions	3.64	0.78	3.59	1.06	0.54 NS
Company policies	3.26	0.61	3.29	0.79	0.52 NS

Note: Significant at: [*]0.01 level

Table IV.
Comparison of job-related factors of employee satisfaction between unmarried and married respondents

Job-related factors of employee satisfaction	Graduate ($n = 244$)		Post graduate ($n = 256$)		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t-value
Salary	3.18	0.70	2.65	1.00	6.86[*]
Working conditions	3.81	0.59	3.45	1.03	4.76[*]
Authority	3.47	1.19	3.83	0.62	4.3[*]
Career progression	3.36	0.76	3.61	0.60	3.47[*]
Supervision	3.15	0.87	3.39	0.78	2.85[*]
Accountability	3.34	0.68	3.52	0.76	2.83[*]
Company policies	3.34	0.73	3.21	0.59	2.23[*]
Recognition	3.35	0.81	3.44	0.88	1.21 NS
Challenges	3.43	0.67	3.52	1.11	1.04 NS
Interpersonal relationships	3.76	0.79	3.79	0.59	0.51 NS

Note: Significant at: [*]0.01 level

Table V.
Comparison of job-related
factors of employee
satisfaction between
graduate and post
graduate respondents

employee satisfaction in case of graduate employees. Graduate employees are driven by money more than nature of job, recognition, or other variables. Same was the case with working conditions and policies. Graduates ranked these two factors contributing to employee satisfaction than post graduates. Variables like supervision, accountability and authority were ranked higher by post graduates. These factors contributed to employee satisfaction in case of educated employees and the difference in the scores was also significant. However, there was no significant difference in case of recognition, challenges and interpersonal relations at all. This finding has congruence with other previous studies too (Guimaraes and Igbaria, 1992; Lee and Wilbur, 1985; Rogers, 1991; Bilgic, 1998).

Age
Duncan's post hoc test was applied to compare the job-related factors of employee satisfaction among three age groups. Significant difference was found in the mean values of seven job-related factors as perceived by respondents of the various age categories. Working conditions showed highly significant difference in mean and standard deviation values across the three age categories. Challenges in the job, supervision, authority, recognition, career progression and accountability were other significant factors. The table shows all the values of mean and standard deviation of the variables of employee satisfaction across the various age groups.

It can be seen that F-value was highest in case of working conditions and supervision. These factors were ranked highest by employees less than 25 years of age. Such young employees respond more to hygiene factors rather than motivational factors. Moreover, these employees are new to job and new to the work and hence respond well to effective supervision. Absence of pleasant working conditions or meaningful supervision may result in dissatisfaction from job. Similarly, accountability was also ranked higher by the same category of employees. Challenge and recognition in job was ranked higher by employees more than 35 years of age than other less-aged employees. It makes sense as such employees get triggered by presence of challenging tasks and recognition got from bosses in their job. Authority was ranked highest by the middle category of employees that is whose age is between 26 and 30. This is well supported with extensive literature from the past that talks about the differences between younger and older employees in terms of their attitudes towards job-related aforementioned variables of employee satisfaction (Lee and Wilbur, 1985; White and Spector, 1987; Rhodes, 1983; Kong *et al.*, 1993; Lewis, 1991).

Tenure

Duncan's post hoc test was applied to compare the job-related factors of employee satisfaction among three tenure groups. Significant difference was found in the mean values of a few factors as perceived by respondents of the various categories of tenure. Challenges, interpersonal relationships, company policies, authority, supervision, and working conditions showed significant differences in mean and standard deviation values. Salary, recognition and accountability did not have any significant difference in the mean values or standard deviations. Table VI shows all the values of mean and standard deviation of the variables of employee satisfaction across the various tenure groups.

It can be seen that *F*-value was highest in case of challenges. This factor was ranked highest by respondents with two to three years of job. It means such respondents have high satisfaction level when they perceive challenges in their job. This may be because with growing tenure in a particular job, one gets motivated to find challenging jobs, which fulfils their intrinsic needs. Interpersonal relationships, company policies, authority, and supervision were all ranked highest by respondents with two to three years of tenure and their difference with other groups was also significant. This shows that respondents who are around two years old in their organizations start responding to job characteristics like interpersonal relationships, policies, authority, etc. In case of career progression, respondents who were more than three years ranked it highest. There was significant difference between T1 (less than one year) and T2 (two to three years); and T1 and T3 (more than three years). This finding has also congruence with previous studies (Lim and Teo, 1998; Wickramasinghe and Kumara, 2010).

Correlation of employee satisfaction with job-related factors and demographic factors
After comparing ten job-related factors of employee satisfaction across five demographic factors; the next step was to find out the correlations between employee satisfaction and its independent variables, i.e. job-related factors and the demographic factors, the result of which is shown in Table VII.

It can be seen from Table VIII, that seven independent variables viz. interpersonal relationship, career progression, company policies, authority, working conditions, salary,

Job-related factors of employee satisfaction	T1 Mean	SD	T2 Mean	SD	T3 Mean	SD	T1 vs T2	T1 vs T3	T2 vs T3	*F*-value
Challenges	3.62	0.98	4.27	0.70	3.85	1.30	*		*	20.34**
Interpersonal relationships	3.39	0.84	3.74	0.55	3.61	0.58	*	*		12.33**
Company policies	2.83	0.49	3.07	0.51	2.99	0.52	*	*		10.01**
Career progression	3.19	0.79	3.57	0.91	3.59	1.00	*	*		9.25**
Authority	3.22	1.21	3.67	0.87	3.5	0.87	*	*		9.04**
Supervision	3.73	0.94	3.89	0.71	3.62	0.83			*	5.30**
Working conditions	3.42	0.50	3.30	0.90	3.16	1.11		*		2.83*
Salary	3	0.47	2.95	0.65	2.84	0.92				2.06 NS
Recognition	3.86	0.62	3.78	0.56	3.78	0.58				1.00 NS
Accountability	3.64	0.70	3.57	0.63	3.66	0.77				0.90 NS

Notes: Significant at: *0.05 and **0.01 levels; T1 = less than one year, T2 = two to three years and T3 = more than three years; Duncan's *post hoc* test

Table VI.
Comparisons of job-related factors of employee satisfaction among three tenure groups

Job-related factors of employee satisfaction	A1 (n = 134)		A2 (n = 226)		A3 (n = 140)		A1 vs A2	A1 vs A3	A2 vs A3	F-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
Working conditions	3.97	0.24	3.56	0.88	3.40	1.16	*	*		16.85**
Challenges	3.19	0.79	3.57	0.91	3.59	1.00	*	*		9.25**
Authority	3.43	1.38	3.82	0.70	3.60	0.77	*		*	7.74**
Career progression	3.62	0.94	3.73	0.71	3.89	0.83		*		5.30**
Recognition	3.48	1.04	3.26	0.76	3.52	0.76	*		*	4.97**
Supervision	2.88	1.11	2.82	0.98	2.43	1.01		*	*	8.41**
Accountability	3.54	0.82	3.34	0.68	3.48	0.68	*			3.52*
Interpersonal relationships	3.67	0.92	3.82	0.59	3.81	0.59				2.24 NS
Company policies	3.18	0.70	3.33	0.69	3.27	0.58				2.01 NS
Salary	2.98	0.58	2.92	0.99	2.83	1.01				1.12 NS

Notes: Significant at: *0.05 and **0.01 levels; A1 = less than 25, A2 = 26-30 and A3 = more than 30; Duncan's post hoc test

Table VII.
Comparisons of job-related factors of employee satisfaction among three age groups

	Employee satisfaction (dependent variable)
Job-related factors (independent variables)	
Interpersonal relationships	0.53*
Career progression	0.52*
Salary	0.50*
Company policies	0.47*
Working conditions	0.45*
Authority	0.41*
Accountability	−0.29*
Challenges	0.13 NS
Recognition	0.13 NS
Supervision	−0.068 NS
Demographic factors (independent variables)	
Age	−0.06 NS
Education (undergraduate = 0, graduate = 1)	−0.03 NS
Marital status (unmarried = 0, married = 1)	−0.05 NS
Gender (female = 0, male = 1)	−0.06 NS
Tenure	−0.11 NS

Note: Significant at: *0.01 level

Table VIII.
Correlation coefficients between dependent variable (employee satisfaction) and independent variables (job-related variables and demographic variables)

and accountability have significant correlations with employee satisfaction. All these variables are job-related factors. Of these, only accountability has a negative correlation. The highest correlation is with interpersonal relationships (0.53*), closely followed by career progression (0.52*), salary (0.50*), company policies (0.47*), working conditions (0.45*), authority (0.41*), and accountability (−0.29*). Surprisingly, none of the demographic factors have significant relationships with employee satisfaction.

Determinants of employee satisfaction

This section works out the regression model to find out the factors that actually contribute to employee satisfaction in a BPO organization. Correlation does not give a

true picture about the relationships between two variables. Regression analyzes and brings out the real factors that determine the dependent variable. This section considers the regression equation in the model and examines the strength of the independent variables in predicting the dependent variable. It is assumed that there is a linear relationship between the factors discussed above and their level of satisfaction in the organization. A stepwise regression analysis has been conducted with the dependent variable as employee satisfaction and the independent variables as ten job-related variables and five personal characteristics, i.e. gender, marital status, education, age, and tenure. These 15 variables were then put in the model as independent variables and employee satisfaction was put as the dependent variable. Only six variables out of 15 contributed significantly to the equation.

The equation, which emerged after four steps, was as follows. Table IX summarizes the determinants of the equation:

$$\mathbf{Y} = 1.78 + 0.34\mathbf{X}_1 + 0.25\mathbf{X}_2 + 0.27\mathbf{X}_3 + 0.18\mathbf{X}_4 - 0.33\mathbf{X}_5 + 0.27\mathbf{X}_6$$

where:

Y   – employee satisfaction;

X_1 – interpersonal relationships;

X_2 – salary;

X_3 – career progression;

X_4 – gender;

X_5 – accountability; and

X_6 – authority.

The value of multiple R is 0.76 and the value of R^2 is 0.58 in the equation. It states that 58 per cent of the employee satisfaction in a BPO is explained by these factors. About 58 per cent is a significant value that explains the satisfaction level of the employees based on the job and demographic characteristics. The rest 42 per cent can be attributed to various other factors which are scattered and individually contribute only little to employee satisfaction. In this equation, it has emerged that interpersonal relationships,

| | Dependent variable: employee satisfaction | | |
Independent variables	β	Simple r	t-value
Interpersonal relationships	0.3363	0.53[*]	9.69
Career progression	0.2503	0.52[*]	9.66
Salary	0.2747	0.50[*]	8.49
Gender (female = 0, male = 1)	0.1854	− 0.06 NS	7.86
Accountability	− 0.3358	− 0.29[*]	2.66
Authority	0.2718	0.41[*]	
Multiple $R = 0.76$			
$R^2 = 0.58$			

Note: Significant: at [*]0.01 level

Table IX.
Determinants of employee satisfaction with respect to its various job-related and demographic factors

career progression, salary, gender, accountability, and authority are the main determinants of employee satisfaction and explain 58 per cent of the variation in employee satisfaction. Of these determinants, only gender emerged as a significant determinant of employee satisfaction, despite having an insignificant correlation with it. Gender is a dummy variable, wherein female is coded as 0 and male as 1, which implies that satisfaction increases in case of female employees. Employee satisfaction in case of BPO industry is not much different from other industries. However, there are instances which differentiate this industry and make it less secure for qualified, educated, or even female employees. The equation further explains that highest determinant of employee satisfaction is interpersonal relationships, closely followed by career progression and salary. This finding here states that with more social interaction among the BPO employees, more clarity in career growth, increased salary, accountability and authority, a BPO employee will have more satisfaction from the job. It should be noted here that gender had insignificant correlation with satisfaction and yet it emerged as a determinant in the regression. Regression gives a true picture of the determinants, which correlation fails to project.

As it is known that a typical BPO is characterized by unusual working hours, young employees and a jovial work environment, thus interpersonal relationships play an instrumental role in deciding the level of employee satisfaction. It is positively correlated as higher the interaction among colleagues, higher is the employee satisfaction. Similarly, it is seen that employees look forward to promotions and growth in their tenure and also respond positively to it. Employees in a BPO also respond to monetary benefits quite strongly and positively. A BPO job does not require exigent education or skills. The employees who work here draw attractive salary for their work, which acts as a strong stimulant for them. It is thus directly responsible for their level of satisfaction. Authority has a significant positive correlation with employee satisfaction, and this can be explained by the fact that broader the span of control given to an employee, and more the empowerment, higher is the level of satisfaction for an employee. Accountability alone has a negative correlation and this was quite interesting to know that floor-level employees tend to like less of accountability towards their bosses. More accountability would mean giving answers and being answerable for every task. BPO job not much complex, thus employees want to have less accountability, more authority so that they can take decisions on their own.

Another interesting part of this regression model is the fact that few of the most important job characteristics in other industries have turned out insignificant in determining employee satisfaction in a BPO industry. Job attributes like challenges in the work, recognition, supervision, company policies, and working conditions did not come out as significant determinants of employee satisfaction. In an industry like that of a BPO, where the routine jobs, "high volume, low value, routinized" work (Taylor and Bain, 2005), offer no challenge in the skill, often frustrate the employees, leaving them agitated with the job and this becomes a reason for their quitting. Lack of challenges in the work is responsible for BPO employees quitting their job as this aspect does not really satisfy them (Sengupta and Gupta, 2011b). This factor leads to another. Owing to absence of challenge in the work, a BPO employee does not really get much appreciation or recognition for his work. Even if he does, the form and volume of such recognition is not enough for his satisfaction. Another reason may be that almost 70 per cent of the respondents emerged from the tenure group of more than one year. Recognition may

be a motivator for beginners. In case of employees who have spent more than two years in a BPO job, recognition does not really affect him. Company policies from the employees' perspective would largely mean the HR policies, basic amenities and facilities being provided by the organization. Such policies are quite robust and striking as the HR intends to retain its employees. The extent to which the organization is able to meet the requirements and expectations of the employees is directly linked with satisfaction, thus it had a positive correlation with satisfaction. Similarly, working conditions in the BPO context have been redefined and made conducive and stimulating for the employees who have to work here during odd hours too. However, company policies and working conditions are not significant in predicting employee satisfaction as these are more of hygiene factors, i.e. they dissatisfy employees when they are not present in their desired form and volume, but when present they do not really motivate (Sengupta and Gupta, 2011a).

None of the demographic characteristics except for gender came out significant in determining employee satisfaction. This is due to the fact that with the changing trends age, marital status, qualification, tenure does not make much difference in the employee satisfaction. BPO industry in India is quite a mixed industry, people from fairly different age groups or education band may be doing the same job at the same level. Since the jobs in this industry do not demand much education or age, the hierarchical levels seem mixed. Another interesting trend in the BPO culture is BPO employees getting married to their peers from the same organization or different organization but in the same BPO industry. This has brought about much of smoothness in the marital tiff, which earlier was a big issue and hence a source of major dissatisfaction of the employees, resulting in their quitting the job. Tenure also does not determine because it has been seen that with the increased tenure in the workplace employees tend to adjust their expectations, and hence it does not determine their employee satisfaction much.

Conclusions, limitations and further research
The study revealed the following important conclusions:

- Ten job-related variables were compared across five demographic characteristics of BPO employees and differences were recorded, which revealed that BPO employees do not respond to all the variables of employee satisfaction in the same manner. There is difference of perception towards these job-related variables on the basis of gender, marital status, education, age, and tenure.

- Correlations revealed that interpersonal relationships, career progression, salary, company policies, working conditions, and authority have significant positive relationship with employee satisfaction and only accountability had a significant negative relationship with employee satisfaction. Rest all job-related variables and demographic variables had no significant relationship with employee satisfaction.

- Regression analysis was done in order to find out the contribution of these factors to employee satisfaction. Of the 15 variables chosen to study the determinants of employee satisfaction, only six viz., interpersonal relationships, career progression, salary, gender, accountability, and authority emerged as significant ones. All of them positively and significantly contribute to employee satisfaction, except for accountability which has a negative correlation. About 58 per cent of employee satisfaction in a BPO firm is explained by these factors.

- Further exploration revealed that employees from different bands of age, marital status, gender, tenure or education derive satisfaction from their work for different reasons. Few variables are significant with specific personal characteristics, whereas few are not. This all-inclusive analysis of the variables of employee satisfaction gives a clear coherent picture in BPOs.

Stating about the implications, it can be said that previous literature on BPO that has been reviewed on outsourcing organizations represents a new work design. All most all previous research studies conducted on work-related factors in outsourcing organizations in India, Australia, Sri Lanka, etc. attempted to identify the most challenges and opportunities, HRM practices, work culture, important factors that influence employee perceptions towards organizational commitment, intentions to quit, etc. Specifically, there appears to be paucity of direct empirical data on BPO specific job attributes and its interplay with demographic attributes that predict employee satisfaction in this industry. Therefore, the paper contributes to the literature by bringing some much-needed diversity to the topic of how job-related factors make variations in the employee satisfaction based on demographic characteristics in the BPO employees in India. When self-reports accurately reflect an individual's level of satisfaction based on the various job-related characteristics and as long as the demographic profile of individuals is known, identifying strategies to improve the work culture of BPO in order to keep the employees satisfied and thus retain them, would not be difficult.

The growth of the Indian BPO industry has been accompanied by political, cultural, and social interventions under a wide framework of media and law. With news on lifestyle, social interaction, safety and security of the BPO employees pouring every now and then, it has become quite compulsive for the BPO organizations to ensure effective and judicious people management. The way BPO firms manage their people should be apparent in their HRM practices. The results here imply modifications in the existing HRM system; better use of opportunities; and strengthening the people-policies, which can consider the demographics of the employees while framing strategies to satisfy them. Employee satisfaction leads to employee retention and thus their satisfaction level can be further utilized to ensure prolonged and stronger organizational commitment by the employees. The findings imply the need of introducing adjustments and adaptations to people management strategies and practices by taking into account any discrepancies that exist according to demographic characteristics of employees.

This study was designed employing quantitative methodology with a sample confined to BPO employees in India. On the strong side of our study is the fact that we have covered the whole population of BPO firms operating in the country and selected a random sample of 500 employees who comprise them. Some limitations of this study, however, should be acknowledged. The study exclusively used surveys to poll work-related satisfaction from the employees working only in BPO in India and considers only ten job-related factors and five demographic factors for the study. Many other factors related to organizational culture, climate, personal orientation, etc. can be further added to expand the study. An important demographic that has not been taken in the study is number of jobs changed. Employee satisfaction can largely vary with this factor and in case of BPO, employees are generally tagged as "job hoppers", so this

can provide an interesting dimension to the study. Another limitation is the diversity of BPOs, that could not be controlled here. Some BPOs are purely call centers, few being inbound where employees are employed to answer incoming calls to provide information or handle business; others are outbound, and it is the role of the employees to make calls to solicit information or business. Other BPOs were captive in nature, which are set up by global companies in order to outsource their back-office operations from India. And rest others were Indian IT software companies that have added BPO to their service portfolio. There may be significant difference among such BPOs that need to be investigated further. And last of all, generalizability of the results may be limited because the research was conducted in BPO organizations in India alone. The findings may not hold true in other BPO destinations like Australia, Philippines, etc.

Referring to the future scope, first, the study can be expanded to a larger area in a sector like ITES, software, hardware, KPO, LPO, medical transcription industry, etc. which share the same characteristics as that of a BPO. Second, further studies could investigate other features – like social and cultural context within organizations and general society to understand how these features get factored in. Many more variables can be taken to get a more comprehensive picture. Finally, now that the study has revealed the variables of employee satisfaction and has also brought to us the crucial determinants of satisfaction, we can work out further to see how each of these factors can be individually tackled to ensure employee retention. Trading off employee retention with job characteristics is the need of the hour for companies in the developing nations. Future studies can also focus on areas beyond employee satisfaction like the emerging concept of employee happiness and employee delight.

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