

Work Exhaustion and its Impact on Employees' Organisational Commitment: Study of IT professionals

Parul Yadav¹ and Anshu Yadav¹

Abstract: *IT sector is one of the biggest sectors in our country and professionals in this field face challenges related to nature of their job and work demands. In order to fulfil these demands, they often get exhausted with their work which leads to decreased performance, effort, satisfaction, morale and commitment. Employees feel dis-associated with their work and tend to detach themselves from work and organisation. Current study determines the factors that contribute to work exhaustion the most and the impact of work exhaustion on the organisational commitment of employees in IT sector. This exploratory and causal study is conducted on a sample of 100 IT professionals. Data analysis was done using Microsoft Excel and SPSS and results showed that majority of IT professionals' have high levels of exhaustion due to over demanding job expectations, lack of recognition and rewards and organisation's structure. The correlation between work exhaustion and commitment was negative which means that due to increased work exhaustion, the level of commitment of employees falls down and the strength of this negative relation was strongest between work exhaustion and affective commitment which means that when the employees gets exhausted, they no longer desire to be in the organisation.*

Keywords: Work exhaustion, employee commitment, affective commitment

Introduction

In today's world information systems and technology is the backbone of an organization which not only helps them to grow but also give competitive advantage. Hence it is becoming important for organizations to retain their valuable technical employees so that all strategic goals can be met. The increasing use of technology has increased the scope and opportunities in this area but this expansion have not been able to absorb large number of people within it because supply of talent and professionals is still limited as compared to demand. This supply- demand gap in the IT market compounds staffing problems because if IT professionals are not satisfied in the current positions and they tend to find alternative employment opportunities for them. Exhausted employees make more errors during work; it increases the indecisiveness of employees and also results in irritation in employees at work. Simply put, work exhaustion is a negative evaluation and can affect performance of the employees. It can be related either to the work one needs to do or with the people a person works with. It begins when people are overloaded with work and hence responds negatively, and then they step back and start to put less effort in their jobs. There can be various reasons due to which an employee gets exhausted in organisations but in current study the following seven factors are taken into account: less control over work, lack of recognition, over-demanding job expectations, family (responsibility, health, illness tec.),

¹ Assistant Professor, (HR&OB), Amity Business School.

Corresponding author: Parul Yadav can be contacted at: pyadav2@amity.edu

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organisation structure (communication, perceived fairness etc.), miss-match in values of employees and organisation and poor job-fit.

With so many changes happening in IT world, the demands of customers and clients also change and there is a continuous need to fulfil those demands. So it is important for the organisations that their employees remain focused and attentive towards meeting the changing needs. To ensure this, the organisations have to ensure that employees remain committed with their work. Commitment can be simply stated as the psychological attachment of a person with the organization. Although IT companies commit their employees to pay big bucks, but then also something stops the employees from performing at their best potential. According to experts commitment always comes from within, anyone who takes a job just for getting employed will only have a need based commitment and individuals who are genuinely interested in the job and likes to work does not need any external force to motivate him and complete his work. But today, in reality, people are interested in jobs when they take up, are experts in their area, have good domain knowledge, are satisfied with their salaries but then also they lose commitment over time. Even though companies today are making a lot of effort for promoting a sense of belongingness among the people so that they connect themselves emotionally to their work and workplace (be it through incentives, appreciation, salary increases etc.) but then also most of the efforts fail because few of them address to the concerns and symptoms of work exhaustion. When employees get exhausted from their work, they start dis-associating themselves from their job, clients, environment, and organisation and hence lose commitment that they had initially when they joined the company.

Literature Review

Ahola et al (2012) investigated in his study that whether there is an association between work related exhaustion which an indicator of prolonged work stress and accelerated biological aging. The sample taken was of 2911 males and females of age group of 30-64 in France. They used Maslach Burnout Inventory to measure work exhaustion. The results concluded that with increased biological age work exhaustion increases. According to the research, work related stress occurs when an employee is not able to cope with or control the demands of work environment. In Europe this problem was very prevalent. Around 20% people faced it and it costed huge amounts to employers too. One of the possible mechanisms linked to work exhaustion was cellular aging. One of the variables in present study related to work exhaustion is 'job demands' which was taken from this study only.

Marmaya et al (2011) studied organisation commitment and job burnout among the Malaysian employees. The research stated that job burnout is expressed differently by different people. Also, its effect is different to different people as per varied working conditions. The rationale of the study was that by studying job burnout in different context, one can get deeper understanding of the phenomenon and can get an understanding about how its negative effects can be minimised on productivity of employees, their satisfaction and commitment. Out of all these factors, commitment influences job burnout to the maximum. They used a convenience sample of 50 people from various departments in Northport. The results showed that out of the three commitments, only affective commitment influenced job burnout and it was negatively related with job burnout. Also, people with high commitment had high level of stress.

Cooper & Payne (2008) studied the major causes of stress at workplace and they concluded that the major cause of stress is lack of appreciation at workplace. After that, the second source of stress includes job ambiguity and working hours. It happens due to excessive

workload on the employees and when the communication among the employees is very little which reduces the goal clarity among them. In the current study lack of appreciation is taken as one of the variables to study work exhaustion. Another source of stress in many organisations is when the management is inconsistent with their words and actions and it leads to insecurity among the employees and they feel that their job is at risk.

Golden (2006) posits despite of the growth of telework and other virtual works, there is not much knowledge about how it impacts organisation commitment and turnover intentions of employees. Author had drawn upon the model of conservation of resources as the theoretical framework and stated that telework impact was the result of two things that are: resource stockpiling and flexibility, as teleworkers were able to yield benefits related to work and personal life and were able to protect them from depletion of resources in the office. The author investigated the role of work exhaustion in determination of organisation commitment and turnover intentions. He used a sample of 393 professional teleworkers in an organisation and found that telework was positively related to organisation commitment but negatively with turnover intentions. Also, work exhaustion mediated relations between teleworking & commitment and turnover intentions.

Bosman & Buitendach (2005) investigated the relation between job insecurity, job burnout and organizational commitment of people in a financial institution. Sample of 146 was used and data was collected with the help of 3 questionnaires: job insecurity questionnaire, Maslach burnout inventory and organisational commitment questionnaire. Cross-sectional survey designed was used in the study. Results showed that job insecurity lead to work exhaustion, cynicism and decreased professional efficacy. Also, increased job insecurity showed decreased affective & normative commitment among employees.

Meyer et al. conducted meta- analyses in 2002 to determine relations between affective, continuance, and normative commitment in an organization. It was found that the three forms of commitment were related to each other, yet they were distinguishable from one another as well as from variables of the study- job satisfaction, occupational commitment and job involvement. It was also found that all three forms of commitment correlated negatively with the withdrawal cognition and turnover intentions of the employees. Affective commitment had the strongest and most significant correlation with organization related variables of: attendance, performance, and organizational citizenship behaviour and employee related variables of: stress and work-family conflicts. Normative commitment was also correlated with desirable outcomes, but very weakly. Continuance commitment was uncorrelated to the variables.

Ketchand and Strawser (2001) posits that organisational commitment had significant relationships with stress, and motivation. The results of the study examined that the relations between these variables have been equivocal. Also, a study by Mathieu and Zajac, in 1990 had found that individuals who had a high degree of organisational commitment experienced greater amounts of stress than those who are less committed because they strived to work for it at any cost and in any circumstances. Alternately, other researchers also argue that organizational commitment protects the employees from negative outcomes experienced at work.

Moore (2000) examined the concept of work exhaustion among IT professionals because the author observed that as IT grew, the organisations found it difficult to retain valuable staff. The people are less satisfied in current positions and hence they frequently switch jobs in IT sector. The variables used by the author to conduct this study were- role ambiguity and conflict, work overload, lack of autonomy and lack of rewards. Data of 270 people was collected from various industries across US. He used a structural equation modelling to show that work

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exhaustion partially mediated the effects of workplace factors on turnover intention. Finally by analysing data the author found that the IT professionals who had high work exhaustion had more intentions of leaving job and work overload was the major factor contributing to work exhaustion. Further it was found that there were two causes of work overload: insufficient staff and insufficient resources.

Moore also developed an attributional model of work exhaustion consequences in by integrating causal attribution research and the burnout & exhaustion literature in his paper. He used this model to suggest that those employees who experience work exhaustion not necessarily exhibit all of the job attitude and behaviour which may correlate with work exhaustion. Rather, they are likely to experience a subset of those which depends on their perceptions about cause of work exhaustion.

Research Methodology

Objectives of study

1. To determine the factor(s) that contributes to work exhaustion the most.
2. To investigate the impact of work exhaustion on commitment of employees.

This study is exploratory and causal. The main idea behind this type of study is to define the attitude and behaviour of IT professionals on a particular subject i.e. what causes work exhaustion among IT professionals and how does it impact the commitment of employees. Also, the purpose of this study is to describe the characteristics of employees i.e. their level of commitment and work exhaustion i.e. to estimate the percentage of people having low or high work exhaustion levels or strong or weak commitment..

Source used for data collection is-

1. Primary source: Questionnaires were used to gather information from employees about their exhaustion and commitment levels.
2. Secondary source: Some data was also gathered from existing sources of information on this topic like journals, articles, books, and thesis or research work published by various researchers (mentioned in the literature review).

A sample of 100 IT professionals was taken for study. Convenience sampling method was used to collect data.

Two questionnaires were used to collect information from employees: Work exhaustion questionnaire is a 24 questions instrument based on the 8 variables i.e less control over work, lack of recognition and rewards, over demanding job expectations, family responsibilities, relationship at work, organization structure, mismatch in values and poor job –fit. Commitment was determined using the Original Commitment Scale Items of Allen and Meyer, 1990. It is also a 24 questions instrument that measure all the three types of commitments mentioned in the theoretical framework. This questionnaire was used because it is a standardised tool. The scale used in both the questionnaires is Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree....strongly agree). The reliability of these questionnaires was found using Cronbach's Alpha.

MS Excel software was used for making bar graphs and for applying functions like 'sum'; 'if'; 'count if' on the data. Factor analysis was done on work exhaustion data to identify the factors that contribute most information in the data set.

Data Analysis

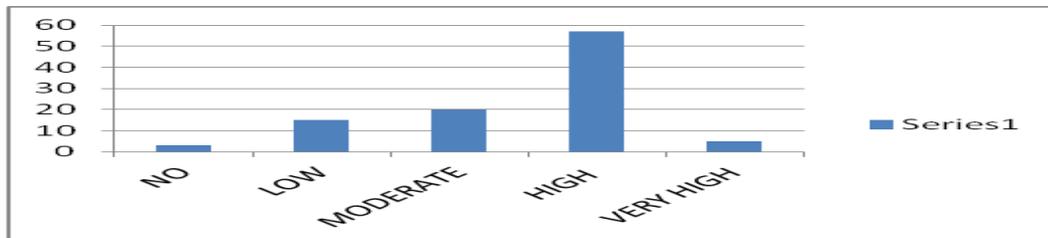


Fig 1. Level of work exhaustion of employees

The above chart shows that 62% of respondents suffer from high and very high levels of work exhaustion and the remaining 38% feel no, low or moderate work exhaustion. So this shows that majority of the sample under study is exhausted by their work.

Factors causing work exhaustion

This objective is analysed from two perspectives: through factor analysis and through bar graph
Factor Analysis

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.795
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	607.919
	df	28
	Sig.	.000

The value of KMO is 0.795 which is more than 0.5 and is closer to 1 which shows that the sample size is adequate to run the factor analysis. Also, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity shows that significance is 0.00 which is less than 0.01 and hence factor model is appropriate.

Communalities

	Initial	Extraction
control	1.000	.701
recognition	1.000	.839
job_expectations	1.000	.919
family	1.000	.582
relationships	1.000	.547
structure	1.000	.817
values	1.000	.811
job_fit	1.000	.703

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

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The communality value of all variables is more than 0.4 which shows that all variables are useful in our model and we have taken all appropriate variables in our study. A higher communality value shows that major portion of variability of a variable is explained by all the identified factors in the analysis which in this case is of over-demanding job expectations and lack of recognition.

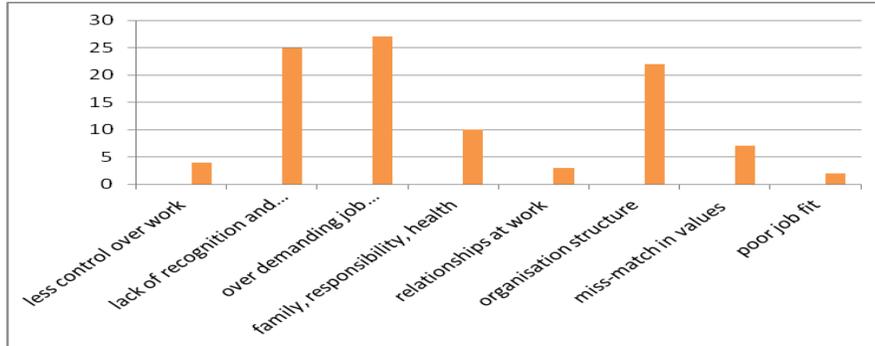


Fig.2 Factors causing work exhaustion

The above chart shows that over demanding job expectations contribute to work exhaustion to the extent of 27%, 25% is due to lack of recognition and rewards, 22% is contributed by organisation structure. The contribution of other factors like family, responsibility, health, miss-match in values of employee and organisation, less control over work, relationships at work, social support and poor job fit are 10%, 7%, 4%, 3% and 2% respectively.

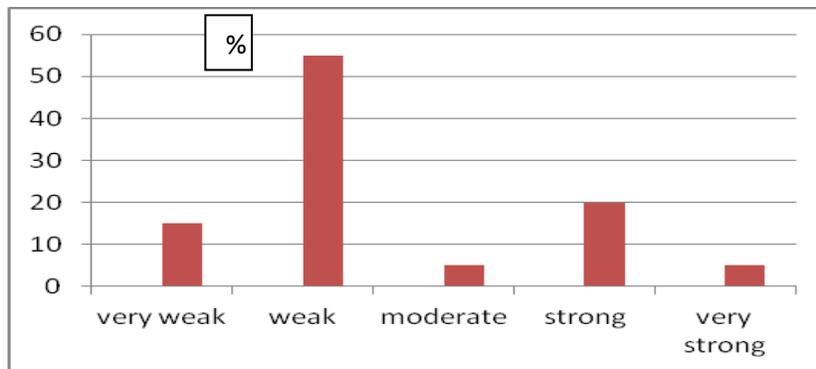


Fig.3 Level of commitment of employees

The above chart shows that 70% of respondents have a weak or very weak commitment towards their work and only 30% show moderate, strong or very strong commitment.

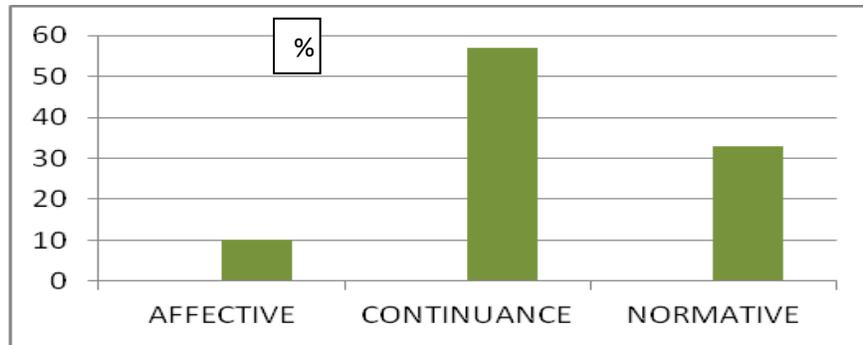


Fig. 4 Level of Commitment

The above graph shows that out of the three commitments, continuance commitment is strongest among the respondents-57%, then normative-33% and affective commitment is the weakest among employees-10%.

Correlation between work exhaustion and commitment

Correlations

		WE	COMM
WE	Pearson Correlation	1	-.175
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.022
	N	100	100
COM M	Pearson Correlation	-.175	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.022	
	N	100	100

The correlation between work exhaustion and commitment is -0.175 which means both the variables are negatively correlated with each other. The strength of this negative relation is 17% which is very weak but the relation is significant as $p(0.022) < 0.05$. p value is less than 0.05 signifies that there is less than 1 in 20 probability that an outcome occurred by chance and hence the result is statistically significant. N=100 which is the sample size.

Correlation between work exhaustion and affective commitment

Correlations

		WE	AC
WE	Pearson Correlation	1	-.424
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.034
	N	100	8
AC	Pearson Correlation	-.424	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.034	
	N	8	8

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The correlation between work exhaustion and affective commitment is -0.424 which means both the variables are negatively correlated with each other. The strength of this negative relation is 42% which is strong enough and the relation is significant as $p(0.034) < 0.05$. p value is less than 0.05 signifies that there is less than 1 in 20 probability that an outcome occurred by chance and hence the result is statistically significant. N=100 which is the sample size and 8 is the number of questions in the questionnaire for this type of commitment.

Correlation between work exhaustion and continuance commitment

Correlations

		WE	CC
WE	Pearson Correlation	1	-.063
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.007
	N	100	8
CC	Pearson Correlation	-.063	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.007	
	N	8	8

The correlation between work exhaustion and continuance commitment is -0.063 which means both the variables are negatively correlated with each other. The strength of this negative relation is 6% which is very weak but the relation is significant as $p(0.007) < 0.05$. p value is less than 0.05 signifies that there is less than 1 in 20 probability that an outcome occurred by chance and hence the result is statistically significant. N=100 which is the sample size and 8 is the number of questions in the questionnaire for this type of commitment.

Correlation between work exhaustion and normative commitment

Correlations

		WE	NC
WE	Pearson Correlation	1	-.302
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.015
	N	100	8
NC	Pearson Correlation	-.302	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.015	
	N	8	8

The correlation between work exhaustion and normative commitment is -0.302 which means both the variables are negatively correlated with each other. The strength of this negative relation is 30% which is not very strong but the relation is significant as $p(0.015) < 0.05$. p value is less than 0.05 signifies that there is less than 1 in 20 probability that an outcome occurred by

chance and hence the result is statistically significant. N=100 which is the sample size and 8 is the number of questions in the questionnaire for this type of commitment.

Regression was run between all the independent variables of work exhaustion under study and commitment as a dependent variable

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.326 ^a	.666	.028	.391

a. Predictors: (Constant), fit, structure, family, values, expectations, recognition, control, social

The above model summary of regression analysis shows that R=0.326 which means the correlation between the two variables is 32%. R square is 0.666 which means that 66% of commitment can be explained by different factors causing work exhaustion. R square shows the portion of variance accounted for by independent variables. Adjusted R square is considered as a better population estimate than R square as R square is a more optimistic estimate. Standard error of estimate is the standard deviation of expected value from the mean.

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.655	8	.207	1.352	.028 ^b
	Residual	13.921	91	.153		
	Total	15.576	99			

a. Dependent Variable: COMM

b. Predictors: (Constant), fit, structure, family, values, expectations, recognition, control, social

The ANOVA table shows that significance level is 0.028 which is less than 0.05 hence our overall model is significant. Degree of freedom for regression is the number of independent variables entered i.e. 8, for residual it is N-number of independent variables-1 i.e. 100-8-1= 91. Mean square= sum of squares/df. F=mean square regression/mean square residual.

Discussion

From the analysis of data, the following results can be drawn:

Majority of IT professionals feel exhausted from their work as 62% of them had high or very high levels of exhaustion. The factors that majorly contribute to this are: over demanding job expectations, lack of recognition and rewards and organisation's structure. Due to these three factors, employees feel exhausted in IT world.

Again, majority of IT professionals-70% showed a weak or very weak commitment towards their work and organisation and out of the three types of commitments, affective was the weakest followed by normative and continuance commitment. Continuance commitment was the

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strongest because employees feel that they need to be in the company as the leaving the organisation would do them a greater loss in terms of money, profession or social support.

The correlation between work exhaustion and commitment was negative which means that due to increased work exhaustion, the level of commitment of employees falls down. In this study, over demanding job expectations, lack of recognition and rewards and organisation's structure makes them less committed towards their work.

Conclusion

It can be said that majority of IT professionals are experiencing exhaustion from their work and hence their level of commitment towards their work is decreasing. These days jobs are not mundane and repetitive, they have become more innovative and challenging. This requires employees to think and perform according to the changing job expectations. At times these expectations can also become over demanding and when employees strive to understand and fulfil these expectations, they become exhausted from their work. Employees also try to do everything in a right manner at one time to meet the job expectations which again leads to stress and finally exhaustion. Lack of rewards and recognition also leads to exhaustion as when the employees feel that they are not properly rewarded or the current rewards and recognitions are not able to satisfy them, they drag themselves towards achieving 'more' of it and when they strive to get additional monetary and non-monetary benefits, they end up exhausting themselves. Organisation structure- communication, participation and perceived fairness is also a source of exhaustion of employees as inappropriate structure of organisation creates a gap between the thinking of employees and its own. Lack of communication creates confusion in the mind of employees and they end up messing the things, their less participation in the company makes them feel disoriented with it and incorrect perceptions of employees also exhaust them with whatever they do. These factors of work exhaustion are common in IT professionals because IT sector today is one of the major drivers of all industries across globe. They need to develop an optimum mix of employees and when this mix is not correct; the current employees in the organisation feel its consequences in terms of reduced morale and productivity.

In the current study, employees were found to have a strong continuance commitment in comparison to the other two because IT employees feel that they need to be in the company as the leaving the organisation would do them a greater loss in terms of money, profession or social support. Companies do not have the shortage of talent with them, they have the pool of fresh people who want to join them so if companies feel that any employee is not performing up to the mark or is dissatisfied in the role, they just replace them with a new one and it is very difficult for the laid off employees to start their career from a new place altogether again and again. So people feel it's better to be in the company and work for it rather than planning to switch job.

There are few employees in the range of 'very high' work exhaustion. But if the percentage of this increases in the future, they might reach at a burnout stage. So, future research can be conducted in this area to know why and when employees reach at job burnout stage and how the problem can be tackled then.

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