

EMPLOYEES' PERSPECTIVES ON CONTINUING MANAGEMENT EDUCATION (CME): A STUDY OF BPO INDUSTRY IN NOIDA

Dr. Kriti Priya,

Associate Professor
Symbiosis Centre for Management Studies, Noida,
Faculty of Management Studies
Symbiosis International University, Pune, India

Swati Singh,

Assistant Professor
Symbiosis Centre for Management Studies,
Noida,
Faculty of Management Studies
Symbiosis International University,
Pune, India

Preeti Bhaskar,

Assistant Professor
Symbiosis Centre for Management Studies,
Noida,
Faculty of Management Studies
Symbiosis International University,
Pune, India

ABSTRACT

The paper focusses on the importance of Continuing Education in 'Management' area (Continuing Management Education (CME)) for working professionals of NOIDA (India) based BPO companies. The study analyzes the role of three factors viz. 'Institutional characteristics', 'Institutional support', and 'Features of CME programme' in influencing the employees' choices of education providers (institutes/colleges) and CME programmes. The paper also analyzes the employees' perspectives on the impact of CME on their Career Development (CD) by considering two aspects of CD i.e. 'Personal growth' and 'Professional growth'. A systematic survey of the employees of 11 randomly selected NOIDA based BPOs have been conducted for collecting primary data through structured questionnaires. The collected data has been analyzed using quantitative techniques. The findings of the study indicate that all the factors (Institutional characteristics, Institutional support, and Features of CME programme) play an important role in the decision making of BPO employees regarding CME programmes. The results of the study also indicate that CME plays a significant role in the employees' 'Personal growth' as well as 'Professional growth'.

Keywords: Continuing education, management education, career development, professional growth, BPO.

INTRODUCTION:

Management education is very beneficial for working professionals as it teaches them to keep re-inventing themselves. It gives them the latest tools and weapons to deal with, resolve, and overcome every new situation. More than this, it inculcates in them the capacity to anticipate situations, so that they can be dealt with and overcome before they actually occur.

Since it is difficult for working professionals to go for full-time management education programmes due to time, money or other constraints, continuing management education (CME) programmes provide a comfortable option to them for upgrading their knowledge. CME enhances their professional qualifications in an increasingly competitive and rapidly changing market. Today, there are many education providers which are providing CME in India through various modes like part-time, distance learning and online learning. These education providers offer various CME programmes which are specially designed to meet the requirements of working professionals.

The BPO industry in India has been growing at a tremendous pace. In 2003-04, revenues for the industry were about USD 3.1 billion and in 2008-09 revenues are at nearly USD 13.6 billion. NASSCOM¹ estimates that by 2020, the BPO industry will be nearly USD 65 billion. BPO industry is a people-intensive industry, where management skills can propel the employees to leadership positions. This includes the ability to manage time, motivate teams, delegate and empower, conflict resolution and emotional quotient. In today's globalized economies, the environment is dynamic and picking up new skills is a key determinant of the success of employees as BPO professionals. Career growth of employees working with BPO industry is based on their performance and enhancement of skills (leadership and domain). In the early part of their careers, opportunities are largely in operations, but as they gain experience in the industry, there are opportunities at every stage in the lifecycle of a process, depending on their ability and skills².

CME can play a very important role for BPO employees in acquiring all the necessary skills viz. analytical skills, decision making skills, and ability to motivate teams. CME can provide both theoretical and practical occupational knowledge to them and can improve their problem-solving skills. CME can impart an attitude or disposition that encourages the BPO employees to find and use the best techniques available at any given time. Today, CME is more of a necessity for BPO employees than an option.

The present study attempts to investigate the perceptions of the employees of NOIDA based BPOs on CME. The study analyzes the factors influencing the employees' choices of education providers (institutes/colleges) and CME programmes. Further, the study also analyzes the employees' perceptions on the impact of CME on their career development (CD).

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT: IMPORTANCE OF CONTINUING EDUCATION:

Several studies have been done in the past which discuss the importance of continuing education in the areas of medicine, nursing, accountants, engineering and teaching. Kim and Nancy (1990) have studied how continuing education has become a necessity than an option in the corporate world to get promotions, high salaries and work satisfaction.

American association of college of Nursing³ has suggested vision for continuing education, the processes, values and outcomes of continuing education. The study also focusses on the competency of lifelong learning, inter-professional and team based continuing education, different methods and activities and achieving workplace learning.

Institute of certified management accountants⁴ has studied the continuing education requirements and rules. The study focuses on the knowledge of new concepts and techniques with their application in the

¹ <http://www.nasscom.in/building-career-bpo-industry-career-guide>

² <http://www.nasscom.in/building-career-bpo-industry-career-guide>

³ <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/education-resources/MacyReport.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.imanet.org/docs/default-source/cma-lib/continuing-education-requirements-and-rules.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

management accounting and financial management with experience. Walker et al. (2010) have explored the importance of continuing professional education for teachers. The authors have analyzed the impact of continuing professional education on the performance management of teachers. The study discusses various parameters by which teachers' performance can lead to better results through continuing further advancements in their respective fields.

Recently, CEEMET⁵ has studied the importance of continuing education and training in the metal, engineering and technology based industries of Europe.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE OF EDUCATION PROVIDERS AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES:

Various studies have been done on the analysis of factors which influence the learner's choice of education providers and educational programmes. Lay & Maguire (1981), Murphy (1981), Sevier (1986), and Keling (2006) have reported that the students value the reputation of a college while selecting an educational programme and it has been rated as an influential factor by students. College location has been identified as one of the major factors influencing the students' decision of an institute/college (Sevier (1986); Kohn et al. (1976); Absher & Crawford, 1996). Other important attributes affecting the student's choice of a programme for higher education are financial assistance offered by the university offering the programme and the programme fees (Yusof (2008); Jackson (1988); Litten (1982); Manski & Wise (1983)).

Absher & Crawford (1996) has stated that educational facilities such as classrooms, laboratories and libraries play an important role in student's selection of a college or university. As per the study done by Ming (2010), the independent variables that influence students' college choice decision have been identified as location, academic performance, college reputation, educational facilities, cost, availability of financial aid, employment opportunities, advertising, higher education institutions, representatives and campus visit. As per this study, institutional image and reputation has a tremendous effect on college choice. As per the study done by Noel-Levitz (2012), the factors influencing the choice of educational programmes among non-traditional students, are availability of evening and weekend courses and the general convenience of programmes. The other important factors include cost, financial aid, academic reputation, size of the institution, future employment opportunities, recommendations from family/friends/employer, campus location, and personalized attention prior to enrollment.

Based on the above literature review, three major factors have been identified which may influence the employees' choices of CME programmes viz. Institutional characteristics (characteristics of the institute/college offering CME programme), Institutional support (support provided by the institute/college offering CME programme) and Features of CME programme. 'Institutional characteristics' consist of Brand image of the Institute, Recognition of the Institute by statutory bodies and Tie-ups of the Institute with foreign Institutions. 'Institutional support' consists of Support services provided by the Institute (study material, online support, mentor etc.), Student friendly examination system, Easy installment plan for fee payment, Bank loan facility and Competence of faculty delivering the program. The attributes of 'Features of CME programme' are Contemporary program structure, Course contents, Specializations offered and Effective teaching methodology (using case-studies, role-plays, presentations, group discussions, etc.)

Following hypothesis are formulated for testing the significance of importance of these factors in influencing the employees' choices of CME programmes:

H1(a): Institutional characteristics are significantly important for selecting CME programmes

H1(b): Institutional support is significantly important for selecting CME programmes

H1(c): Features of CME program are significantly important for selecting CME programmes

⁵ http://www.ceemet.org/sites/default/files/ceemet-cet-position-january-2013-1_1.pdf

CAREER DEVELOPMENT:

‘Career’ is a multifaceted concept. It can be about meaning, sense of purpose and direction. It also includes ideas of progression and development both at work and at a personal level. Career development is a major tool for attracting, motivating and retaining good quality employees. One of the key practices which influence organizational performance is providing career opportunities to the employees (Purcell, J. et al., 2003) Tamkin and Hillage (1999) have studied the importance of career education in enhancing career skills. They have concluded that career skills are important for both employees and employers. Schien (1978) has categorized career development in two categories: internal career development and external career development. Internal career development indicates the employee’s concept of his/her own progression within an occupation or a career path whereas external career development refers to the objective categories used by society and organizations to describe the profession of steps through a given occupation. According to Patton and McMahon (2006), career development can be divided into two aspects: content and process. Similar to the internal career development, the content-oriented career development refers to employee intrinsic motivation in improving their works, such as interests and values (Patton & McMahon, 2006). On the other hand, the process-related career development is similar to the external career development which refers to interaction and change of career over time, such as position and status (Patton & McMahon, 2006).

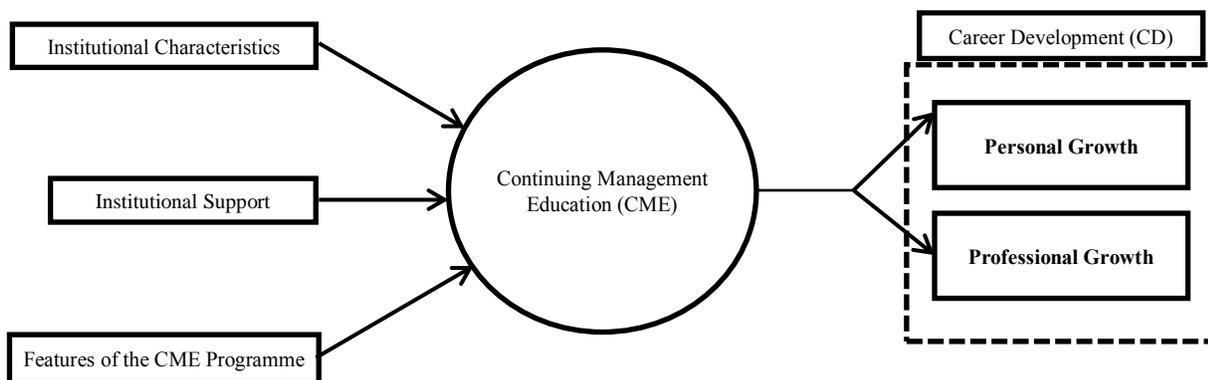
Based on the above literature review, two major CD indicators have been identified i.e. Personal growth and Professional growth. The attributes of ‘Personal growth’ have been identified as Personality development, Development of interpersonal skills and Development of technical skills. ‘Professional growth’ consists of Better external career opportunities, Job security, Salary increment and Promotion. Following hypothesis are formulated for testing the significance of impact of CME on career development from the employees’ perspectives:

H2(a): CME significantly impacts personal growth

H2(b): CME significantly impacts professional growth

The conceptual framework proposed in the study is presented in Fig. 1.

Figure 1: The conceptual framework



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This study involves descriptive research design in which quantitative research technique is used for analyzing the data. Survey method is used for collecting the primary data through questionnaires. The employees working with BPOs at following levels are the target respondents for the study: Associate, Senior Associate, Team Leader and Management Trainee. The study involves multi-stage sampling technique. At the first stage, simple random sampling technique is used to select the sample of BPOs. There are 27 BPOs operating in NOIDA (India) according to Dun & Bradstreet’s publication ‘India’s

Top ITes and BPO Companies 2011⁶. A sample of 11 BPOs has been drawn out of these 27 BPOs, using lottery method of simple random sampling procedure. At the second stage, stratified random sampling technique is applied for selecting the employees from these 11 BPOs. The employees are selected randomly from all the four levels i.e. Associate, Senior Associate, Team Leader, and Management Trainee. The distribution of the sample across BPOs and levels is shown in Table 1. From the table, it can be observed that 40 respondents are included in the sample from each of the 11 BPOs. This makes a final sample of 440 respondents. According to Dun & Bradstreet’s publication ‘**India’s Top ITes and BPO Companies 2011**’⁷, there are 1,00,000 employees working with BPOs in NOIDA. A sample size of 440 employees is adequate for a population size of 1,00,000. (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970).

Table 1: Sampling Distribution

S. No.	BPO Company	Associate	Senior Associate	Team Leader	Management Trainee	Total
1.	Altivolus Infotech Private Limited	20	10	5	5	40
2.	Aurelius Corporate Solutions Private Limited	20	10	5	5	40
3.	Caretel Infotech Limited	20	10	5	5	40
4.	Damco Solutions Private Limited	20	10	5	5	40
5.	DigiCall Teleservices Private Limited	20	10	5	5	40
6.	Exl Service.com (India) Private Limited	20	10	5	5	40
7.	Pioneer eServe Private Limited	20	10	5	5	40
8.	Pyramid IT Consulting Private Limited	20	10	5	5	40
9.	RMSI Private Limited	20	10	5	5	40
10.	Vcare Call Centers India Private Limited	20	10	5	5	40
11.	Vision KPO Solutions Private Limited	20	10	5	5	40
Total						440

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

SAMPLE PROFILE:

Table 2 shows the profile of 440 employees surveyed in 11 different BPOs of NOIDA on the basis of six variables (gender, age group, education level, work experience, designation and income group).

Table 2: Profile of the Respondents

Variable	Categories	Response (%)
Gender	Male	40
	Female	60
Age Group	Less than 20 years	35
	20 years to 25 years	32
	25 years to 30 years	31
	More than 30 years	2

⁶ http://www.dnb.co.in/ITes_BPO_2011/company_listing.asp?q=Locations&rgname=Noida

⁷ http://www.dnb.co.in/ITes_BPO_2011/company_listing.asp?q=Locations&rgname=Noida

Variable	Categories	Response (%)
Education Level	10 + 2	47
	Graduate	28
	Post Graduate	25
Work Experience	Less than 1 year	46
	1 year to 3 years	38
	3 years to 5 years	11
	More than 5 years	5
Designation	Associate	40
	Senior Associate	30
	Team Leader	25
	Management Trainee	5
Income Group	Less than Rs. 20,000	44
	Rs. 20,000 – Rs. 50,000	42
	Rs. 50,000 – Rs. 1,00,000	9
	More than Rs. 1,00,000	5

MEAN SCORES:

Table 3 presents mean scores of the factors influencing the employees’ choice of CME programmes.

Table 3: Mean Scores of the factors influencing the choice of CME programmes

Factor	Item Code	Item Description	Item Mean
Institutional Characteristics (Mean = 3.97)	IC1	Brand image of the Institute	4.04
	IC2	Recognition of the Institute by statutory bodies	4.10
	IC3	Tie-ups of the Institute with foreign Institutions	3.79
Institutional Support (Mean = 4.16)	IS1	Support services provided by the Institute (study material, online support, mentor etc.)	4.33
	IS2	Student friendly examination system	4.37
	IS3	Easy installment plan for fee payment	4.02
	IS4	Bank loan facility	3.85
	IS5	Competence of faculty delivering the program	4.22
Features of CME program (Mean = 4.20)	FCME1	Contemporary program structure	4.22
	FCME2	Course contents	4.16
	FCME3	Specializations offered	4.22
	FCME4	Effective teaching methodology (using case-studies, role-plays, presentations, group discussions, etc.)	4.20

Table 4 presents mean scores for the employees’ perceptions regarding the impact of CME on two dimensions of Career Development i.e. ‘Personal growth’ and ‘Professional growth’.

Table 4: Mean Scores for the impact of CME on CD

Dimension of Career Development	Item Code	Item Description	Item Mean
Personal Growth (Mean = 4.31)	PerG1	Personality development	4.27
	PerG2	Development of interpersonal skills	4.18
	PerG3	Development of technical skills	4.47
Professional Growth (Mean = 4.38)	ProfG1	Better external career opportunities	4.39
	ProfG2	Job security	4.25
	ProfG3	Salary increment	4.33
	ProfG4	Promotion	4.56

HYPOTHESIS TESTING:

EMPLOYEES’ PERSPECTIVE ON THE FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE OF CME PROGRAMMES:

The following hypotheses are formulated for testing the significance of importance of three factors i.e. Institutional characteristics, Institutional support and Features of CME programme in influencing the employees’ choices of CME programmes:

H1(a): Institutional characteristics are significantly important for selecting CME programmes

H1(b): Institutional support is significantly important for selecting CME programmes

H1(c): Features of CME program are significantly important for selecting CME programmes

The above hypotheses are tested using one-sample t-test and the results are presented in table 5. The results indicate that all the three factors play a significantly important role in selecting CME programmes from the employees’ perspective (t=57.04, t=61.86, t=67.89; p<.01). Hence all the three hypotheses i.e. H1 (a), H1(b) and H1(c) are accepted. Moreover it can be noticed from table 3 that as compared to ‘Institutional characteristics’ (mean score = 3.97), ‘Features of CME program’ (mean score = 4.20) and ‘Institutional support’ (mean score = 4.16) are more important factors, which influence the employees’ choice of CME programmes. Further, it can be observed that ‘Student friendly examination system’ (mean score = 4.37) and ‘Support services provided by the Institute (study material, online support, mentor etc.)’ (mean score = 4.33) are considered to be the most important features by the employees which affect their choice of CME programmes. It can also be seen that ‘Competence of faculty’, ‘Contemporary program structure’ and ‘Specializations offered’ are equally important (mean score = 4.22 each) for the employees while selecting a CME program.

Table 5: One-Sample t-test results for factors influencing the choice of CME programmes

	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
IC	57.040	439	.000*	3.97917	3.8388	4.1195
IS	61.867	439	.000*	4.16250	4.0271	4.2979
FCME	67.897	439	.000*	4.20833	4.0836	4.3330

(*p<.01)

EMPLOYEES’ PERSPECTIVE ON THE IMPACT OF CME ON CAREER DEVELOPMENT:

The following hypotheses are formulated for testing the significance of impact of CME on two dimensions of employees’ career development i.e. ‘Personal growth’ and ‘Professional growth’.

- H2(a):** CME significantly impacts personal growth
H2(b): CME significantly impacts professional growth

The above hypotheses are tested using one-sample t-test and the results are presented in table 6. The results indicate that from the employees’ perspective, CME significantly impacts both the dimensions of their career development. ($t=72.01$, $t=67.59$; $p<.01$). Hence both the hypotheses i.e. H2 (a) and H2(b) are accepted. Moreover it can be noticed from table 4 that employees consider the impact of CME to be more on their ‘professional growth’ (mean score = 4.38) than on the ‘personal growth’ (mean score = 4.31). In terms of ‘professional growth’, CME has the greatest impact on their ‘promotions’ (mean score = 4.56) followed by ‘better external career opportunities’ (mean score = 4.39). As far as ‘personal growth’ is concerned, CME has the greatest impact on the ‘development of technical skills’ (mean score = 4.47).

Table 6: One-Sample t-test results for impact of CME on various dimensions of CD

	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
PerG	72.014	439	.000*	4.31250	4.1920	4.4330
ProfG	67.599	439	.000*	4.38542	4.2549	4.5159

(* $p<.01$)

**CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS:
 CONCLUSIONS:**

On the basis of the study, it can be concluded that BPO employees consider ‘Features of CME programme’ and ‘Institutional support’ to be the most important factors, which influence their choice of education provider (institute/college) for pursuing a CME programme. Also, ‘Competence of faculty’, ‘Contemporary programme structure’ and ‘Specializations offered’ are very important features which they consider while selecting a CME programme for themselves. Also, they look for the support provided by the institute/college like student friendly examination system and other support services provided by the institute/college (e.g., study material, online support, mentor etc.), while choosing a CME programme. As far as the impact of CME on career development is concerned, the employees consider CME to be important for both the aspects of their career development i.e. personal growth and professional growth. In terms of professional growth, CME is very beneficial for their promotions and for better career opportunities. As far as personal growth is concerned, CME has the greatest impact on the development of their technical skills.

SUGGESTIONS:

On the basis of the conclusions of the study, following suggestions can be made for the Universities/Institutions offering CME programmes:

- It would be advantageous for the education providers to offer programmes in collaboration with foreign universities. Such tie-ups would facilitate better knowledge sharing and more awareness among working professionals on latest developments in management and technology, and the working professionals will be hugely benefited by way of knowledge and better job prospects.
- The course structure of CME programmes should be designed in such a manner that it can fulfill the industry requirements of the working professionals and can cater to their specific needs related to different functional areas viz. Marketing, Finance, IT, HR, Operations. The education providers can offer CME programmes with dual specialization. Such programmes will not only provide vast

knowledge to the working professionals regarding distinct streams but will also develop the ability among them so that they could perform different tasks simultaneously with equal efficiency.

- Since the working professionals are busy with their jobs, it is difficult for them to take out enough time for attending classes and studying for examinations. Hence, the education providers should provide excellent support services to them such as conducting classes and examinations as per their convenience, providing sufficient study material and online support.

LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE OF FURTHER RESEARCH:

- Lack of studies on CME in the BPO industry in India has deprived the researchers from the possible comparison among the studies and more insights.
- Because of the time and other resource constraints, this study limits itself to the geographic extent of NOIDA and a sample size of only 440 respondents. Future research needs to use more diversified random samples in order to check the generalizability of research findings.
- In this research, only three factors influencing the choice of education providers and CME programmes have been considered i.e. Institutional characteristics, Institutional support and Features of CME programme. However, there are others important factors such work considerations and employee's individual characteristics etc., which could influence the choice of CME programmes. These factors have not been discussed in this study. Thus further research needs to contain more desirable factors, in order to gain better insight. Further research would also need to include a broader set of career development indicators.

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