

Burnout in IT Companies

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Abstract

Job burnout is quite prominent in today's workforce. The modern workplace and the workers at all levels in organizations face the stress and burnouts because of the market and customer demands. Due to work Overload, role ambiguity, long-term exhaustion and high professional responsibilities the employees of the organizations are experiencing high levels of physical, emotional and intellectual exhaustion. In recent times, burnout has emerged as an important psychological disorder and researchers go as far as calling it as a civilization disorder.

The research paper is an attempt to understand the various factors like personal, work related and client-side pressures which have a direct impact on the employee burnout by administering the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory on the employees of selected IT/ITES organizations.

Key words: Burnout, Stress, Organizational culture

Introduction

The success of any organization is dependent on human resources and it is the basis of competitive advantage for the organizations. Neither money, nor technology or infrastructure can deliver excellence without the requisite human resource bank. Money cannot buy human resources – for this is one resource which develops and appreciates over time, while other resources depreciate. Thus, it is being realized globally that an organization can have competitive advantage by leveraging

its human resources.

Coordinating and managing human resources is very important for any organization to survive. Maintaining them effectively requires a lot of effort on the part of the organization. People in organizations cannot be regarded as human capital in reality until and unless their contribution to their organization can be measured with the same confidence as any other organizational asset.

Burnout is a state of physical, mental and emotional exhaustion that often results from a combination of a very high expectations and persistent situational stress. It describes a state of depletion of a person's resources, particularly energy due to excessive demands made on him / her and as a result, individual becomes impassive towards his / her work and other aspects of life. It has been found to have dysfunctional repercussions on the individual and adverse effects on the organization. It may reflect in a continued dissatisfaction with the situation, ranging from mild boredom to severe depression, irritation, exhaustion and physical ailment. The experience of high pressure and too few sources of satisfaction can develop into a feeling of exhaustion leading to burnout.

Job burnout is quite prominent in today's workforce. The modern workforce and the worker's at all levels –both the white and blue collar are experiencing the devastating

effects of burnout in epidemic proportions. Commonly it is seen more often because of outsourcing, restructuring and downsizing and this has been a common feature in the IT sector as well. Burnout shows and says more about the organization than about the employees. It is because of the fundamental changes at workplace and also frequent shifts in the nature of jobs performed by the employees. In the IT sector, the job-tasks have a direct impact on the emotional and physical energies of the employee and the technology and trend have made burnout a part of the vocational vocabulary.

Purpose

The purpose of research is to study the concept of Burnout amongst the people employed in IT industry, its reason and consequences and how it can be countered and also to make a comparative analysis of levels of burnout at different IT organizations using the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory.

Objectives of the Research

- To study the cycle of stress – burnout – attrition.
- Finding the causal relationship amongst the trio.
- To study the main players of IT/ITES industry, which is the most volatile industry in terms of attrition analysis.

Methodology

A. Fundamental Study (Secondary Data)

- 360° degree study of the main areas like - Stress, Burnout and Attrition and their causes, consequences, impact, effects etc. was done.
- To know more about the IT/ITES industry – its evolution, growth, strategies in recessionary times secondary data was analyzed.

- Reading the literature to ascertain how the past studies have been done and analyzing the trends.

B. Data Collection and Capturing (Primary Data)

- Collecting the data by using the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory questionnaire.
- Capturing the data from the sample size of 650 and tabulating the same in the excel sheet.
- Verification of the data entered to check upon any entry error

C. Analysis, Interpretations and Conclusions

- Data collected was be analyzed using MS – Excel to understand their impact in the quantitative and qualitative aspect.
- Based on the analysis, interpretations and conclusions was drawn.

Limitations of the Study

- The sample size may not have adequately represented the macro view as methodology followed was random sampling.
- Biased, incomplete and incorrect responses to questions while collecting the primary data as the study was more of an off – field primary study.

Literature Review

The study, “Stress not just burnout” by Bickford (2005), suggested that burnout prevails in majority of the workplaces and there must be adequate mental health support systems within the organizations to fight the same. Studies have revealed the seriousness of the burnout and high risk of heart attacks, depression, suicides and diabetes among the workers in the twenties and the need for the health policy for the IT

sectors. (O'Connor, and Khanna, 2007). Due to monotony of work, high pressure, night shifts, irate customers the health problems like insomnia, indigestion and depression are rampant and the BPO employees are aggressively seeking psychiatric help (Chakravorty, 2005). Researches in the area of causes of burnout have pointed out that the organizational politics has an influence on emotional exhaustion and depersonalization aspects and impact the personal accomplishment aspects of the burnout. (Advani et al., 2005) Researches have shown that work can be major contributor to stress (Davis and Newstorm, 1985). When there is too much pressure and too few sources of satisfaction, the feeling of exhaustion develops and leads to burnout. (Golembiewski and Munzenrider, 1988)

Concept of Burnout

Burnout is a job related stress syndrome that has three components:

- **Emotional exhaustion** – Lack of energy and the feeling that one's emotional resources have been used up at work. Commonly employees feel dreadful about going to work with beginning of every working day.
- **Depersonalization** – It is characterized as viewing co-workers and clients as dehumanized objects.
- **Feelings of diminished personal accomplishment** – Evaluating work performance negatively and feel a decline in job competence and achievement.

Burnout is a result of exhaustion due to overwork. It generally affects professionals that have more responsibilities related to people and who pursue objectives, which

are difficult to attain. The nature of Indian IT industry is prone to cause such exhaustion. Risky situations are those where there is a misfit between the tasks and the means allocated to accomplish them and if there is an ambiguity and / or role conflict. Burnout is strongly related to the context of job/ work. (Maslach et al. 2001)

Freudenberger (1974) defines burnout as "to fail, wear out, or become exhausted by making excessive demands on energy, strengths or resources". Maslach and Leiter (1997) says "burnout represents an erosion in values, dignity, spirit and will – an erosion of the human soul. It is a malady that spreads gradually and continuously over time, putting people into a downward spiral from which it's hard to recover". Burnout is categorized into two types:-

- **Physical Burnout** – is experienced with excessive physical exhaustion. It is most commonly reflected by injury or fatigue and is normally seen among sports persons.
- **Mental Burnout** – is an accumulated state where the nature of work which used to be exciting earlier no longer excites the person.

Burnout is described as a state of depletion of a person's resources and energy resulting in apathetic and impassive behavior towards others, having dysfunctional repercussions on the individual and adverse effects on organization. With technological advancements, workplaces have undergone drastic changes and many executives work in situations which require very little people contact, implying that the construct of executive burnout is qualitatively different and needs to be evolved for better understanding of this pivotal problem. The phenomenon of burnout, a debilitating

stress syndrome, was observed and studied in US and European countries in the 1980s when these countries faced globalization.

Burnout is becoming a major threat to the executives throughout the world and more so in a country like India where they are under pressure to produce higher and higher outputs with minimum inputs.

History of Burnout

Relating burnout to job attributes Freudenberger (1974–1975) was the first to describe it. Maslach (1976) followed him but early phenomenon of burnout become evident by the work of (Menzies, 1975) “case study in the functioning of social systems at defense at anxiety”. Freudenberger (1974) defined burnout stating it as feelings of failure and being worn out. He presented direct accounts of the process when he and others experienced emotional depletion, loss of motivation, and commitment (Freudenberger, 1975). Christina Maslach (1976) applied qualitative methods of interviewing to analyze the job demands with the coping strategies in the emotionally demanding areas. Maslach reviewed the literature from 1975 - 2000 and described the history of research in two phases:-

1. Pioneering Phase

Many themes emerged from these early interviews in the human services, suggesting that burnout has some identifiable regularity:-

Occupation of service is demanding component of depersonalization (cynicism) also emerged as people described how they tried to cope with emotional stress. Moderating one's compassion for clients by emotional distance from them (detached concern) was viewed as a way of protecting

oneself from intense emotional arousal that could interfere the functioning effectively on the job (Maslach et.al 2001:400)

2. Empirical Phase

In 1980's, the quantitative studies, dominant mode of investigating were on rage. Among this was Maslach's work to develop an inventory remains a pioneering one (Maslach and Jackson, 1981) which saw its 3rd edition within 15 years (Maslach, Jackson, Leiter, 1996).

Stages of burnout

There are three stages of burnout cycle which are as under:

I. Stress Arousal

At this stage the individual experience the first level of burnout at the physiological and psychological frontier. The symptoms are anxiety, sleep disorder, high blood pressure, concentration problems etc.

II. Energy Conservation

This is the second stage of Burnout where there is an attempt to compensate for stress. In case the strategies don't work there are symptoms of lethargy, procrastination, cynicism, resentment and excessive apathy.

III. Exhaustion

At this stage the realization of something wrong comes in an individual. There is a chronic mental and physical fatigue, acute depression and sadness that seeps in an individual. It is the final stage of the burnout cycle and the individual may experience the desire to drop out or have acute suicidal tendencies.

Copenhagen Burnout Inventory

The research used the Copenhagen

Burnout Inventory, which was developed as a longitudinal study of burnout in human service workers in Denmark (Kristensen et.al 2005). It comprises three components:-

Personal Burnout

- State of prolonged physical and psychological exhaustion.
- This aspect is measured by 6 statements in the C.B.I.

Work Burnout

- state of prolonged physical and psychological exhaustion, which is

perceived as related to the person’s work.

- This aspect is measured by 7 statements in the C.B.I.

Client Burnout

- state of prolonged physical and psychological exhaustion which is perceived as related to the person’s work with clients.
- This aspect is measured by 6 statements in the C.B.I.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Personal, Work and Client Burnout Component Wise

1.1 Personal Burnout Component Analysis

Statement	Almost Never (5)	Seldom (4)	Sometimes (3)	Often (2)	Always (1)
How often do you feel tired?	2	28	38	26	6
How often are you physically exhausted?	0	40	44	16	0
How often are you emotionally exhausted?	0	10	32	54	4
How often do you think: “I can’t take it anymore”?	0	40	34	24	2
How often do you feel worn out?	0	28	32	20	0
How often do you feel weak and susceptible to illness?	0	26	50	24	0

Analysis

- 26% of the respondents say that they often feel tired which is marginally lower than the respondents who seldom feels tired.
- 100% of the respondents are neither always physically exhausted nor almost never physically exhausted. 44% are sometimes physically exhausted.
- 54% of the respondents are often emotionally exhausted which indicates that people in IT industry are

tend to show more of emotional outbursts and jobs in this industry are more emotionally challenging and physical or mental challenging task.

- 2% of the respondents say that they have often thought of almost giving up because they can’t take in the job pressure and stress anymore.
- 50% of the respondents say that they sometimes feel weak and susceptible to illness because of high emotional challenging tasks.

1.2 Work Burnout Component Analysis

Statement	Almost Never (5)	Seldom (4)	Sometimes (3)	Often (2)	Always (1)
Is your work emotionally exhausting?	0	10	58	28	4
Do you feel burnout because of your work?	0	24	44	32	0
Does your work frustrate you?	2	32	44	20	2
Do you feel worn-out at the end of your working day?	4	38	44	14	0
Are you exhausted in the morning at the thought of another day at work?	0	30	48	22	0
Do you feel that every working hour is tiring for you?	2	32	36	24	6
Do you have enough energy for family and friends during leisure time?	2	24	50	24	0

Analysis

- 28% of the respondents say that their work is emotionally exhausting and 4% says that they always feel their work as emotionally challenging and exhausting.
- 100% of the respondents are neither always nor almost never felt burnout because of their work yet 44% felt burnout sometimes because of the work.
- 44% of the respondents felt frustrated

because of their work. This indicates that job of IT people involves monotonous as well as challenging tasks and calls for dynamic HR support functions.

- 50% of the respondents say that they sometimes and feel exhausted in the morning at the thought of another day at work which indicates the necessity of quality of work and environment of the organization.

1.3 Client Burnout Component Analysis

Statement	Almost Never (5)	Seldom (4)	Sometimes (3)	Often (2)	Always (1)
Do you find it hard to work with clients?	0	18	54	28	0
Do you find it frustrating to work with clients?	2	34	44	18	2
Does it drain your energy to work with clients?	2	26	38	30	4
Do you feel that you give more than you get back when you work with clients?	0	14	42	34	10
Are you tired of working with clients?	0	24	36	34	6
Do you sometimes wonder how long you will be able to continue working with clients?	0	18	48	24	10

Analysis

- 54% of the respondents say that they find hard to work with clients and 44% indicates that they sometimes get frustrated also which indicates the level of customization and understanding of customers requirement is very high in this industry.
- 34% of the respondents are agreeing that they give more to the clients than

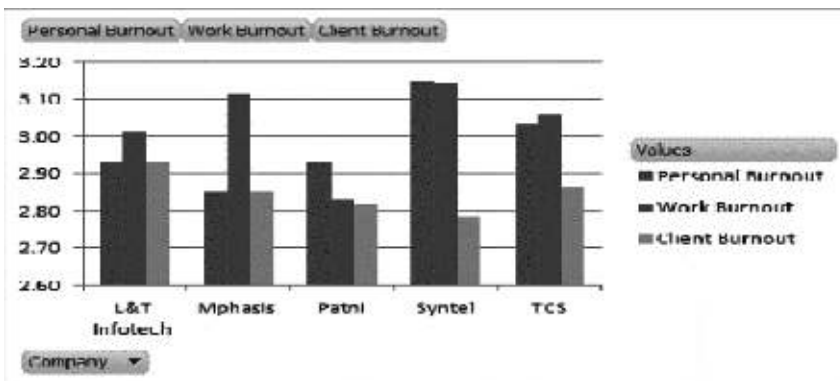
the clients giving back to them. This calls for dynamic HR compensation and benefits policy to retain the talent in the organization.

- 34% of the respondents felt that they are tired of working with clients. This indicates that monotony of the job and can be a main factor for high attrition level in Indian IT industry.

Findings: Generic and Specific

2.1 Personal, Work and Client Burnout Company wise

2.1.1 Generic Findings



Findings

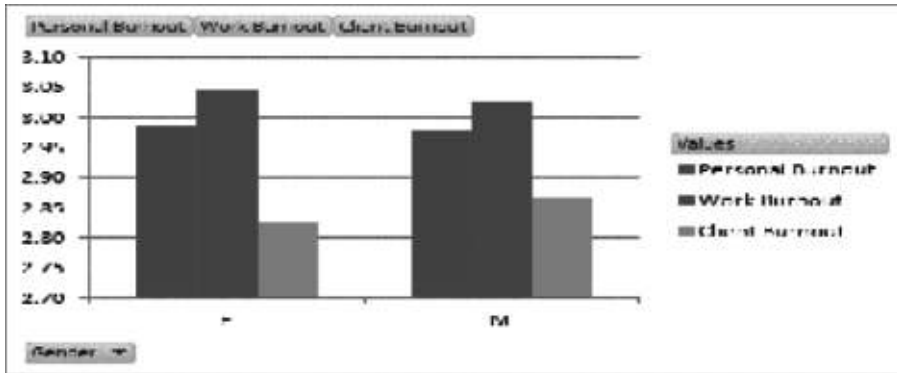
- Syntel shows the highest Personal and Work Burnout rate amongst all the 5 companies
- L&T Infotech indicates the highest Client Burnout amongst all the 5 companies

2.1.2 Specific Findings

	Personal Burnout	Work Burnout	Client Burnout
Highest	Syntel	Syntel	L&T Infotech
Lowest	Mphasis	Patni	Syntel

2.2 Personal, Work and Client Burnout Gender wise

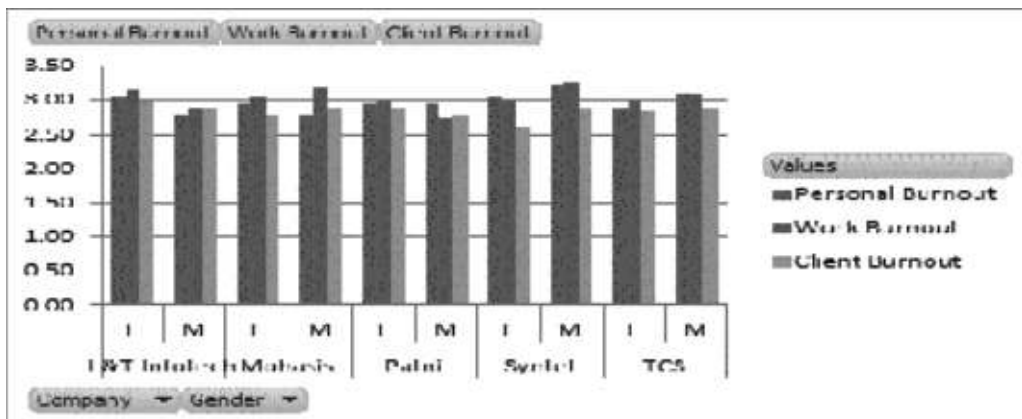
2.2.1 Generic Findings



Findings

- Females indicate more of a work burnout and are least effected by client burnout.
- Males indicate more of work burnout than other two categories but in each category they are show less tendency of burnout as compared to their female colleagues.

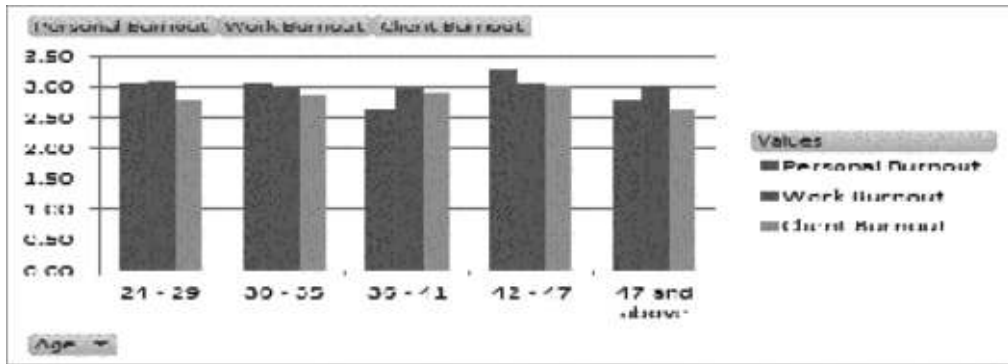
2.2.2 Specific Findings



		Personal Burnout	Work Burnout	Client Burnout
Male	Highest	Syntel	Syntel	L&T Infotech - Mphasis
	Lowest	Mphasis	Patni	Syntel
Female	Highest	L&T Infotech	L&T Infotech	L&T Infotech
	Lowest	TCS	Patni - Syntel - TCS	Syntel

2.3.3 Personal, Work and Client Burnout Age wise

2.3.1 Generic

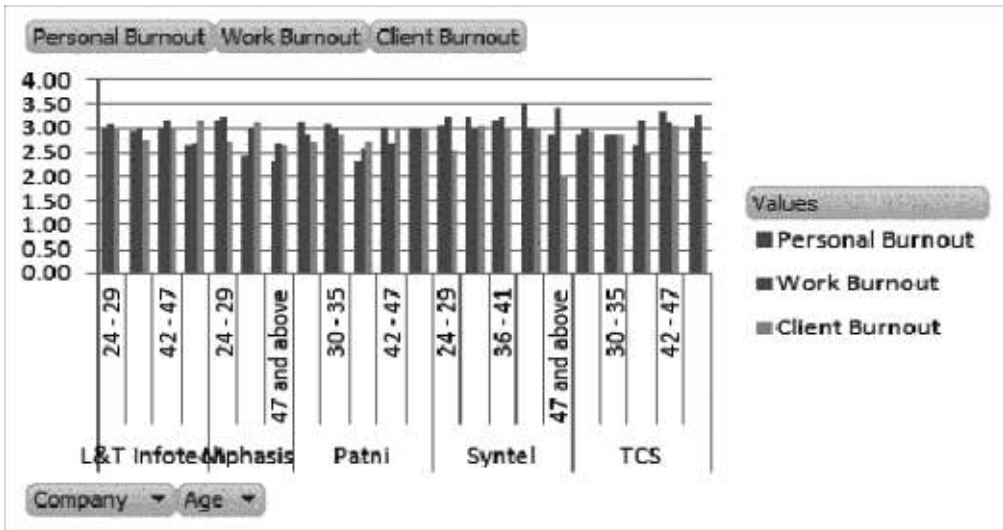


Findings

- Personal Burnout is highest amongst the age group of 42 – 47 because of their large involvement in more of analytical and conceptual part of doing the business
- Work Burnout is highest amongst the age group of 24 – 29 because of high involvement in learning the job and satisfying the first three basic needs of Maslow's Need Theory
- Client Burnout is highest amongst the age group of 42 – 47 because employees in this group are on the verge of being promoted to the top level of management and since IT industry in India is customer driven, they involve themselves to a very high extent to show their talent.

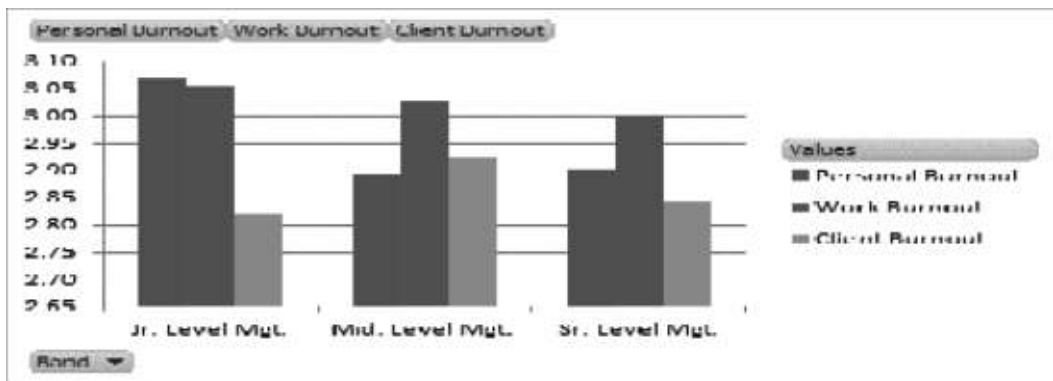
2.3.2 Specific Findings

		Personal Burnout	Work Burnout	Client Burnout
24 - 29	Highest	Mphasis	Mphasis - Syntel	L&T Infotech
	Lowest	TCS	Patni	Syntel
30 - 35	Highest	Syntel	L&T Infotech - Mphasis	Syntel
	Lowest	Mphasis	TCS	L&T Infotech
36 - 41	Highest	Syntel	TCS	Mphasis
	Lowest	Patni	Patni	Patni
42 - 47	Highest	Syntel	L&T Infotech	TCS
	Lowest	Patni	Patni - Mphasis	L&T Infotech - Patni - Syntel
> 47	Highest	TCS	TCS	L&T Infotech
	Lowest	Mphasis	L&T Infotech	Syntel



2.3.4 Personal, Work and Client Burnout Level of Mgt.wise

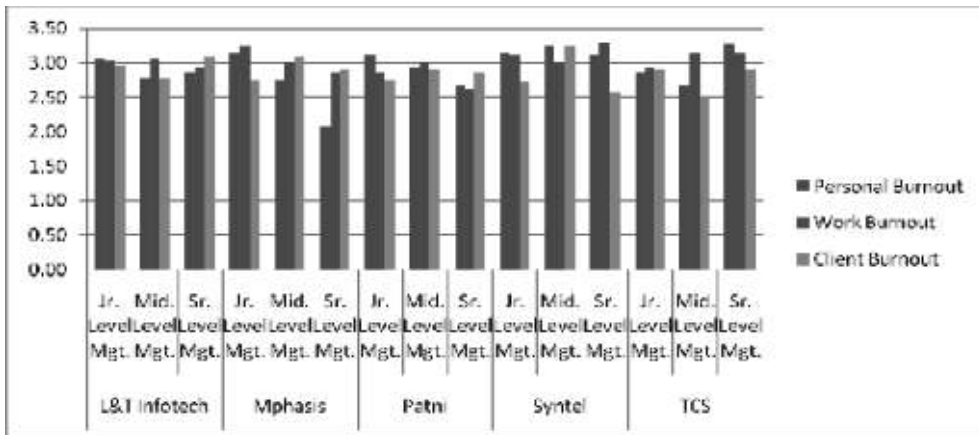
2.3.4.1 Generic Findings



Findings

- Personal Burnout is highest amongst the Junior Level of Management employees because of their high involvement in the work assigned. They also indicate the highest level of work burnout
- Client Burnout is highest amongst the Middle Level of Management employees because they see their chance of promotion with the increase their customer's level of satisfaction

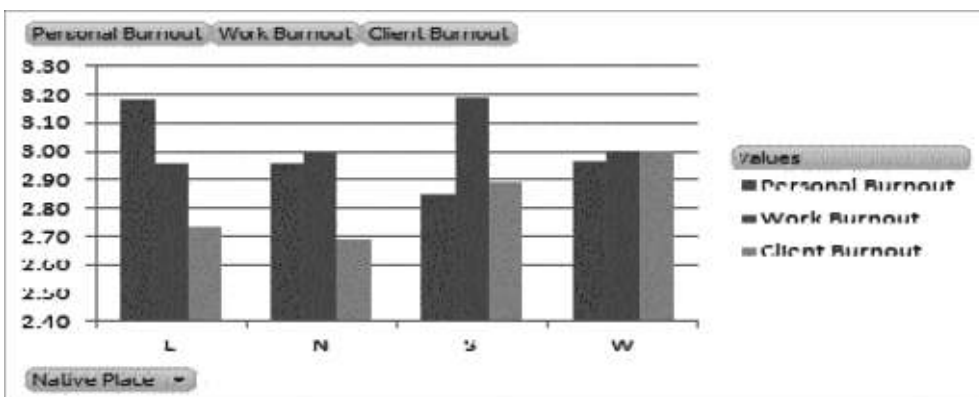
2.3.4 Specific Findings



		Personal Burnout	Work Burnout	Client Burnout
Jr. Level Mgt	Highest	Mphasis	Mphasis	L&T Infotech
	Lowest	TCS	Patni	Syntel
Mid. Level Mgt	Highest	Syntel	TCS	TCS
	Lowest	TCS	Mphasis - Patni - Syntel	Syntel
Sr. Level Mgt	Highest	TCS	Syntel	L&T Infotech
	Lowest	Mphasis	Patni	Syntel

2.3.5 Personal, Work and Client Burnout Employees Native Regionwise

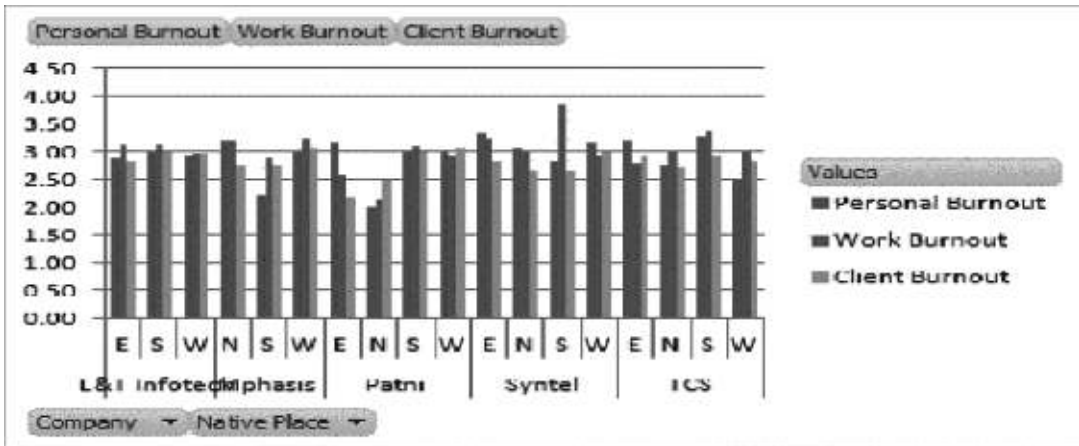
2.3.5.1 Generic Findings



Findings

- Employees who belong to Eastern region of India tend to feel more of a Personal Burnout.
- Employees who belong to Northern region of India tend to feel more of a Work Burnout.
- Employees who belong to Southern region of India tend to feel more of a Work Burnout but least of the personal burnout amongst employees from all the other three regions.
- Employees who belong to Western region of India tend to feel more of a Work Burnout and Client Burnout than personal burnout.

2.3.5.2 Specific Findings



		Personal Burnout	Work Burnout	Client Burout
East	Highest	Syntel	Syntel	TCS
	Lowest	L&T Infotech	Patni	Patni
West	Highest	Syntel	Mphasis	Mphasis
	Lowest	TCS	Patni	TCS
North	Highest	Mphasis	Mphasis	TCS
	Lowest	Patni	Patni	Patni
South	Highest	TCS	TCS	TCS
	Lowest	Mphasis	Mphasis	Mphasis

Conclusion and Recommendations

The data collected from the primary survey conducted has been analyzed in both generic way and in specific to the companies. Following points indicate some of the major conclusions drawn from the survey:

- Client Burnout shows the highest impact amongst the employees of all the companies which indicates the level of customization to the customer needs
- Since Syntel is not much into Client servicing, employees of that organization tends to feel burnout more by the Personal and Work factors
- Employees of Patni seems to be comparatively less affected by Burnout because of their dynamic HR policies
- Senior Management Team of L&T

Infotech and TCS seems to be affected more by Client and Personal burnout because of their high orientation towards work and client.

Recommendations

- Managing Diversity of Culture
- Challenging yet Non – Stressful Environment
- Equal Opportunity Employer
- Open Communication
- Trainings – Behavioral and Technical
- Team Building Exercises
- De – Stressing Activities

Annexure

Copenhagen Burnout Inventory

The following questions refer to you and your current job. Please indicate your responses on a scale of 1 to 5.

1 = Always or to a very high degree; 2 = Often or to a high degree; 3 = Sometimes or somewhat; 4 = Seldom or to a lower degree; 5 = Never/almost never or to a very low degree

S.N.	Item	1	2	3	4	5
1.	How often do you feel tired?					
2.	Do you feel worn out at the end of a day?					
3.	Do you find it hard to work with clients?					
4.	How often do you feel physically exhausted?					
5.	Are you exhausted in the morning at the thought of another day at work?					
6.	Does it drain your energy to work with clients?					
7.	How often do you feel emotionally exhausted?					
8.	Do you feel that working every hour is tiring for you?					
9.	Do you find it frustrating to work with clients?					
10.	How often do you think: "I can't take it anymore"?					
11.	Do you have enough energy for family and friends during leisure time?					

S.N.	Item	1	2	3	4	5
12.	Do you feel that you give more than you get back when you work with clients?					
13.	How often do you feel worn out?					
14.	Is your work emotionally exhausting?					
15.	Are you tired of working with clients?					
16.	How often do you feel weak and susceptible to illness?					
17.	Does your work frustrate you?					
18.	Do you sometimes wonder how long will you be able to continue working with clients?					
19.	Do you feel burnout because of your work?					

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