

FRUSTRATION AT THE WORKPLACE AND EMPLOYEE ATTITUDE: A STUDY ON IT PROFESSIONALS

Kamal Karamchandani¹, Dr V. K. Dubule²

¹Research Scholar, V.N.G.I.A.S.S., Nagpur, Rashtrasant Tukadoji Maharaj Nagpur University, ²Ex-Assnt Professor & HOD, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences, V.N.G.I.A.S.S., Nagpur

ABSTRACT

Information technology is the fastest growing industry today impacting all walks of life. With hordes of young and talented people joining it, the sector provides abundant opportunities for employees to fulfil their dreams. But the fast-paced growth in the industry and the demanding work culture does extract its own price. Frustration at work, being normal daily routine, could turn into a vicious spiral for both the employer and employee leading to low productivity, disengagement, burnout, aggressive behavior, and high attrition rate. This study investigates the relationship between frustration and employee attitude at the job in the IT industry. The study has looked at the interaction of the variables for both male and female employees. Further, since frustration finds an outlet in anger which may lead to aggression, the influence of the same on employee attitude was also examined.

For this ex-post facto research, a convenience sample of 390 respondents through the stratified sampling technique was chosen in 2019 from various IT firms in Hyderabad and Nagpur. Respondents were chosen from the age group 25-35 years. The data for analysis was collected through 2 test /scale viz. 1) Frustration Test by Prof.N.S. Chauhan and Dr. Govind Tiwari 2) Attitude Scale for Measuring Employee Attitude Towards Management by Dr. K D Kapoor and a personal information sheet. The statistical tool of Pearson Correlation was applied to ascertain the strength and direction of the relationship.

The results of the study confirmed that frustration significantly and negatively predicted attitude towards management of the employees. The attitude towards management of female employees was found to be slightly more and negatively related to frustration compared to their male counterparts but the difference is negligible. Hence no significant difference was found in the attitude of the two sexes due to frustration at the workplace. The study also looked at the influence of aggression on the employee attitude and the same was found to be significant.

Keyword: - Frustration, Employee Attitude, Aggression

1. INTRODUCTION

Life does not run smoothly for anyone. Each one of us has been in numerous situations where some more time, additional resources, or extended support may see us through an endeavor which matters a lot to us or someone close. But despite the best intentions, things do not materialise the way we visualise and are forced to watch with dismay as the desired objective remains beyond reach, yet so close. The helplessness and the realization of our inability to do things as per our own will may accentuate and exacerbate our behavioural response. This leads to a display of anger, a negative emotional state, pouring out as an emotional response to frustration that may lead to increased psychological arousal (Storms & Spector, 1987).

It is not that every time frustration wells up in an individual it would lead to aggression or anger (Miller,1941; Sears,1941). Perseverance in efforts to reach the desired goal by exploring various alternatives or withdrawing from the situation once the improbability of exerting effective influence dawns upon the individual are the other responses which can result from frustration (Spector,1978)

Frustration in general is spoken of and understood as a negative construct with the onus of the generation of the emotion and attendant feelings on the individual. It indicates a constricting scenario forbidding the materialising of expected outcomes despite sustained and concerted efforts to attain the desired results. But without actually realising it, an individual experiencing frustration may be forced to look for alternatives, succeed in their endeavor, or settle for next best. Kresh & Crutchfield (1948) have spoken about two types of behavioural outcomes of frustration viz. adaptive and maladaptive. An individual, working towards a certain goal, hits a wall but, looks at options to circumvent the problem or adjust, is adapting to the situation. On the other end of the spectrum is the individual who displays negative behavioural tendencies of regression, withdrawal, and aggression which are detrimental to him and/or others.

While these behavioural tendencies define tangible and visible metamorphosis of on the on-job frustration, this study is an attempt to focus on understanding the impact on the employee attitude of IT professionals. The last two decades really belong to information technology especially for a developing country like India. We have come a long way from the misplaced reluctance, fear and hatred towards anything related to computers. The misconception in the eighties that computers may take away jobs seems like fiction. The indispensability of information technology in our life is a hygiene fact today. IT sector currently is the highest employer of the country in the private sector with a manpower count of over 4 million and growing steadily.

The galloping growth and success of the IT sector worldwide is not devoid of the impact of tough and demanding work culture on the employees leading to pathological outcomes afflicting the mind and body equally. Here also the employees have to face obstacles which challenge their skills as a professional as well as a human being. The working conditions and environment in IT organisations creates innumerable transactions which are progenitor for employee frustration that may lead to better delivery of job output or may vitiate the atmosphere impacting employee morale and engagement. The employee attitude at the workplace, a sub-set of the overall attitude of an individual, is in turn gets expressed through the cognitive, affective, and behavioural disposition of the person.

2.FRUSTRATION AT THE WORKPLACE

The word “frustration” is derived from the Latin word *frustrationem* meaning a deception or a disappointment. As a subject of study in the organizational settings, it has not found the same popularity among the researchers over the decades as has anxiety and stress. In many of the studies on the latter two subjects, frustration has been conceptually juxtaposed either as a contributing element or as one of the multiple outcomes of the presence of either of the two constructs.

For an individual, work provides opportunities for the fulfillment of wants and needs while also being a gateway for earning name and fame. Though very few search for avenues to reach self-actualisation that may lead to doing what their heart desires. The proclivity of an employee is to constantly keep track of the progress at the job, personal development, or up-gradation concerning self-goals. In one of the earliest studies on frustration in organisations, Sirota (1959) looked at employee frustration arising due to promotional aspirations. This being an ego need, frustration due to blockage of the desired results, for whatever reason may lead to a breakdown of communication between the employee and the organisation. The researcher further posits that such a landscape provides a fertile ground for frustration to breed. The breakdown in communication may lead to the building of a psychological barrier blocking the employee from accessing or even seeking more information relevant to the predicament the individual is in. The author has concluded that the most frustrated employees are the ones who have the least knowledge of the organisation’s vision and mission. This may mean a failure to anticipate and pre-empt issues on the part of the organization as well as the individual wherein both stand to lose.

Frustration due to unfulfilled aspirations of promotion or on a holistic plane may have its genesis in the insecurity an employee may experience at the workplace. A wide spectrum of this particular aspect has been studied by Broek et al. (2014) on 451 respondents. The authors in their study have primarily looked at job insecurity leading to counterproductive work behavior (CWB). On the subject of job insecurity, the focus of the study is on its qualitative aspect i.e. the fear of devaluation of features and working conditions at the job rather than the job itself which is the quantitative aspect of the situation. The disposition of the employee engulfed by this aspect of insecurity is damaging not only for the organization but for the individual also through soaring of relationship with colleagues. As per the authors, such affective outpourings do not spring forth from the insecurity mindset but are preceded by frustration emanating out of roadblocks the employee encounters on way to establishing their own identity and efforts in co-creating synergistic affiliation within the organization. Pictorial representation of the same is given in **Figure 1**.

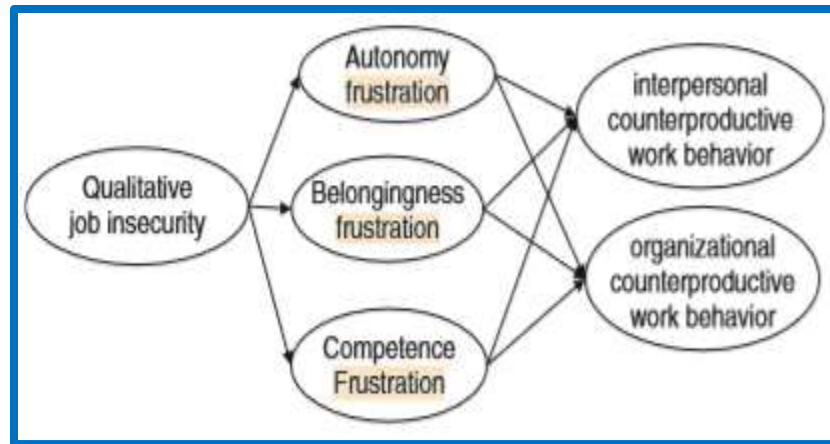


Figure 1: The Mediation model by Broek et al., 2014

Counterproductive work behavior could be one of the more damaging and avoidable situations. The instigation for the employees could be so high that to have a false sense of gain of control over their work situation it may lead them to resort to violence causing physical damage to property and people.

The most far-reaching study on frustration in the last 15 years has been done by Royal & Agnew (2011) as outlined in their book “The Enemy of Engagement”. The authors have approached the issue of employee frustration from a vantage point unlike any other in the studies done in the past. The authors have debunked the general perception that a frustrated employee is demotivated. On the contrary, such an employee is generally aligned with organizational objectives and considers himself an active collaborator and co-creator with the ability to make a difference to the organization. Only that the individual is held back due to skill mismatch or the barriers at the workplace. Such employees are engaged but continuous derailment of their efforts and inability to surmount barriers lead them to respond either of three ways as given below:

- Breakthrough- some employees would finally succeed in finding a way around the obstacles, achieve their desired objectives fully or to an extent, overcome their situational frustration, and move forward with greater motivation and engagement
- Breakdown-many employees would be so bogged down with the cognitive dissonance that to maintain an equilibrium they would lower their aspirations to appropriately adjust with the situation
- Breakaway-those who are neither able to overcome the impediments or adapt to the situation would leave the organisation

Employees in the 2nd and the 3rd category are a big jolt to the organization as not only there would be underutilisation of available skills but those breaking away may trigger further attrition.

Frustration at the workplace then can be defined as an emotion, a state of mind, that may be understood to arise due to situational constraints in the immediate work settings that block individuals from achieving valued work goals or attaining effective performance (Peters and O'Connor, 1980).

3.EMPLOYEE ATTITUDE

The effectiveness and efficiency of an employee is ascertained on various qualitative and quantitative parameters which majorly are productivity vs the desired level of output, teamwork, interpersonal relationships, and ability to innovate at the job with available resources. These factors in turn are influenced by employee engagement, job satisfaction, loyalty towards the organization, and a sense of ownership that the organizational climate engenders funneling down to create a certain defined disposition of the individual towards his/her work which can be termed as employee attitude. As per Thurstone (1928) “an attitude denotes the sum total of man’s inclinations and feelings, prejudice or bias, preconceived notions, ideas, fears, threats and other any specific topic” (p.531). The perception and understanding of the organizational climate and its impact, beneficial or adverse, on the employee in the capacity of an individual shapes up his beliefs and opinions about the organization. This evaluation of the

organizational culture vs own skills and aspirations could generate cognitive dissonance leading to frustration in the employee that could be beneficial or detrimental.

Behavioral reactions to organizational frustration include effects on job performance, absenteeism, turnover, organizational aggression, and interpersonal aggression. To the extent that these behaviors interfere with the organization's task performance, climate, or effectiveness, they may tangibly damage the organization (Spector, 1978).

Emotions are an inseparable part of our personality, of our life just as thoughts are, which precede it and behaviour is, which follows it and is a tangible visual expression of emotions. An individual is as much swayed by emotions in personal life as in the role of an employee. Spector & Fox (2002) in their paper on how emotions can sway employee perspectives impacting voluntary work behavior, posit that the workplace is a source of fulfillment of physical and psychological needs for an employee. Happenings at the place of work can trigger strong emotions in employees, consequent to the assessment of the environment being supportive of their aspirations or restrictive eliciting related positive or negative behaviours with far-reaching consequences on employee performance and engagement.

Employee engagement is defined by IES as “a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values. An engaged employee is aware of business context and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organisation. The organisation must work to develop and nurture engagement, which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee” (Robinson, Perryman, & Hayday, 2004). It is not as if an engaged employee never gets frustrated. It is how the frustration is channelized by the employee and handled within the ecosystem of the organization that reinforces the dispositional traits within the employee personality determining the level of engagement. Adhikari & Arora (2011) in a study on IT professionals (n=60) have analysed some specific personality traits which can help predict employee engagement. The authors identified three such traits viz. superego and control, tough poise, and independence. The findings by the authors are a bi-product of the situational context of their research having its own unique characteristics and limitations but it does provide a directional approach that can be researched further.

Engagement is but an aspect of the overall organizational climate which is an amalgamation of the shared perception of the employees comprising of individual psychological atmosphere, interpersonal relationships, employee motivation, behaviors, and beliefs. In an over 3 decades old study, Singh (1988) has studied the impact of frustration on various components of organizational climate. The author in a study on 250 subjects from various organisations identified 14 components of the OC out of which 9 were found to be significantly related to frustration and 4 components viz (a) inter personal help, (b) decentralized liberal, decision making, (c) formalization, and (d) autonomy and pressure were further seen to be correlated strongly with frustration. All four of these dimensions impinge directly on the working of the employee as an inherent part of the organisation contributing towards creating or reinforcing the beliefs and norms of the workplace which shape up the attitude of the individual.

4.SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The world has never seen the volatility and uncertainty that is being witnessed today. And there is going to be no respite from the unending idiosyncrasies of life. The fast-paced changes we see happening all around will gain more acceleration as we move forward in time. There seems to be no distinction between long term and short term aspects of life at the organisations especially related to planning, special projects, and technology. For the IT industry technology is an inseparable part of its existence. The skills needed by the personnel today could become wholly irrelevant a few months later putting extra pressure on the IT professionals to upgrade and groom themselves to adapt to dynamics of the job role and deliver as per the expectations.

The frustration-aggression theory may not apply to the IT industry from the perspective of counterproductive work behavior seeking an outlet through violence leading to unfortunate damage of property or physical manhandling of colleagues and other co-workers. No such case has been reported wherein employees of this sector are found to be allegedly involved. The behavior of IT professionals, under frustration, generally seems to be more in line with what Royal & Agnew (2011) and some other researchers to an extent have postulated. The IT industry is reeling under a high attrition rate of 20% which is further going north. Maybe in the COVID impacted scenario, a temporary one, the ground realities could be diametrically opposite with organisations going in for layoffs but, such a high attrition rate could also be a stark pointer towards the simmering discontent and antipathy among the employees for the organisation

Keeping the above in perspective, the present study is a humble attempt to gauge how frustration among employees in IT industry affects their attitude. This study also looks at the relationship between the dependent and the independent variables for both male and female employees. The study is significant as it gives an insight on the level and direction of the employees' attitude towards the management vis-à-vis the frustration they experience at the workplace. The concerned stakeholders can use the findings to formulate new methods and develop competencies to help employees to better channelize their frustration for optimum productivity and higher job satisfaction.

5.HYPOTHESES

1. There is a significant negative correlation between frustration among employees and their attitude towards management.
2. There is no significant difference between male and female employees concerning the impact of frustration on their attitude towards management.
3. Aggression borne out of frustration has no significant impact on employee attitude towards management.

6.OBJECTIVES

1. To study the influence of workplace frustration on employee attitude towards management.
2. To investigate the difference in the impact of workplace frustration on the attitude towards management of male and female employees.
3. To understand the level of aggression generated due to frustration and its impact on the employee attitude.

7.METHODOLOGY

Research Design: This is an Ex-post facto study wherein the impact of the IV is already existing

Sampling Technique: Purposive-strata sampling technique is used.

Sample Size: Data was collected through the above mentioned 2 nos scales / index and personal information sheet for a total of 390 IT professionals from various IT firms based at Hyderabad and Nagpur. Out of this 200 respondents are male and 190 are female. All employees are in the age group of 25-35 years and have worked in the current organization for at least a year.

Variables: Independent variable – Employee frustration

Dependent variable – Attitude towards Management

Tools Used

- Frustration Test (1972) by Prof N.S. Chauhan and Dr. Govind Tewari
- Attitude Scale towards Pro and Anti Management (1979) of Dr. K.D. Kapoor has been administered to measure and determine the Attitude towards Management.
- Personal Information sheet by the researcher

Statistical Tests: Pearson's Coefficient of Correlation

8.STATISTICAL ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Correlation coefficients were calculated to indicate the how the independent variable influences the dependent variable for total sample and separately for each gender. Correlation of score on aggression (part of the total score of the frustration test) and dependent variable was also calculated. The significance value at 95% confidence interval level ($p \leq 0.05$) has been chosen to reduce the probability of Type I error to the minimum (Tredoux & Durrheim 2009). The significance of r values has been considered on the basis of the $r(\text{critical})$ values in the Pearson Correlation table.

Gender break-up of respondents is as given below:

Table 1: Total no of respondents

CAT	NOS
MALE	200
FEMALE	190
TOT	390

A. The Pearson Correlation coefficient for Frustration and Attitude towards Management of the whole sample of 390 respondents is $-.262$ ($df\ 398, p < .05$) which is found to be $-ve$ and moderately significant as it is more than the r_{crit} (.0978) in absolute value. **Therefore, the first hypothesis is accepted.**

Holistic depiction of the of the relationship between the two variables for the sample size is as given in **Figure 2**. The X axis represents the score of 390 employees on the Frustration Test while the Y axis denotes the score obtained through the Attitude scale.

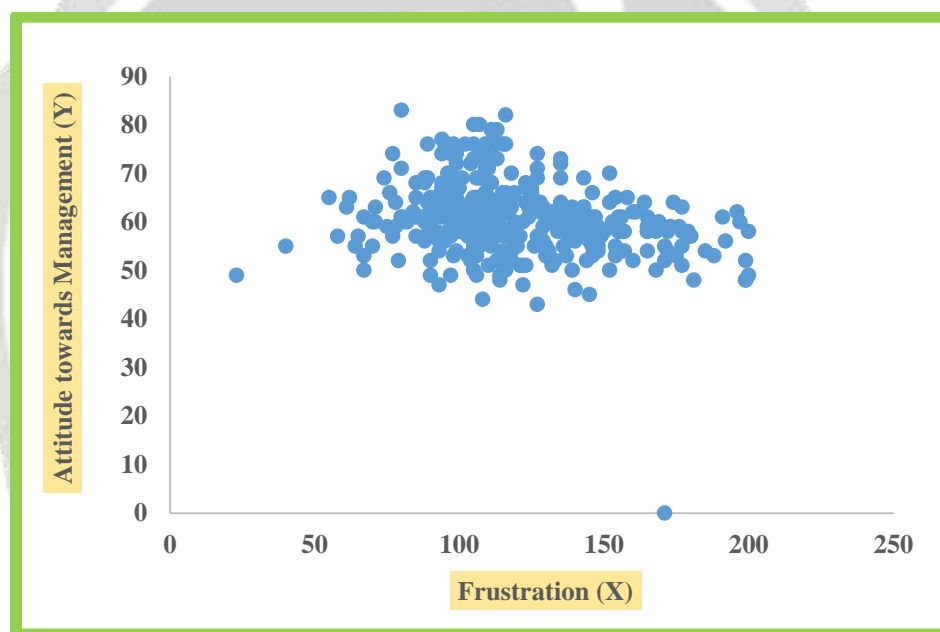


Figure 2: Negative correlation between Frustration and ATM for 390 employees

B. The respondents were segregated into gender groups on their scores on job anxiety as shown in **Table 2**:

Table 2: “ r ” values for male & female employees on Frustration & Attitude Scale

Gender	No of employees	$r_{observed}$	r_{crit}	Interpretation
Male	200	$-.196$.138	$-ve$ and slightly significant
Female	190	$-.289$.138	$-ve$ & moderately significant

The “ r ” value for male employees is less than that for female workers showing a slightly more significant negative relationship between the variables for the female employees. But the difference in the “ r ” values of the two sexes is not significantly high. **Hence, the second hypothesis is accepted.**

C. The Frustration test employed for the purpose of the current research also captures the level of aggression among the respondents. Score on aggression of the 390 respondent was correlated with that obtained through the attitude scale. The result is depicted in the below scatter plot:

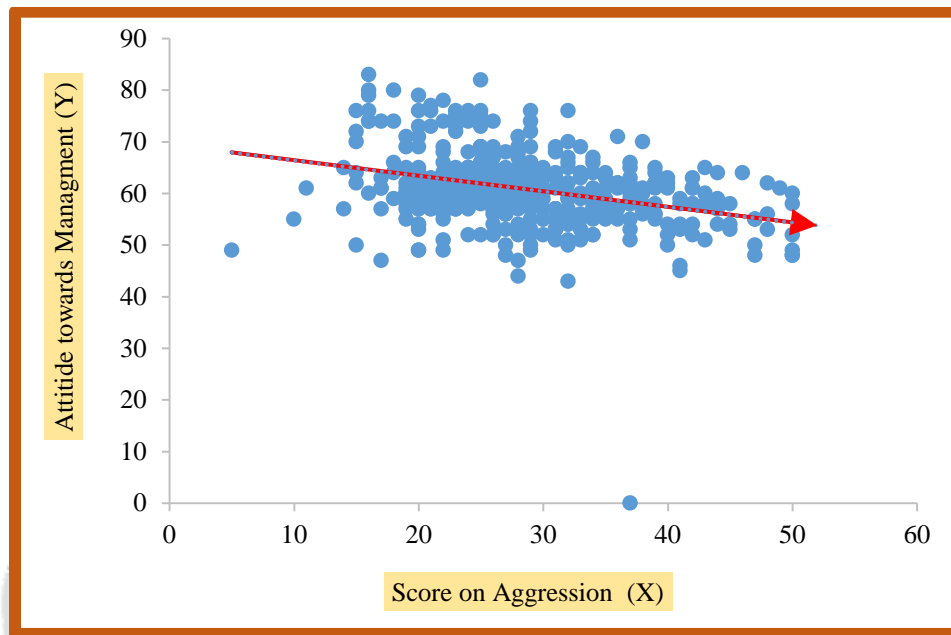


Figure 2: Negative correlation between Aggression and ATM for 390 employees

The Pearson Correlation coefficient for aggression and Attitude towards Management of the whole sample of 390 respondents is $-.33$ ($df\ 398, p < .05$) which is found to be $-ve$ and significant as it is more than the r_{crit} (.0978) in absolute value. Hence, hypothesis 3 is rejected.

9.DISCUSSION

Human resource is the most important “input capital” for any organization to achieve its defined vision and mission. Increasingly, organisations are adopting automated processes and systems especially, for manufacturing and production reducing the dependence on human intervention. Still, the success of any organization depends on its ability to attract, nurture and retain talent (Sharma, 2019).

The current study on 390 IT professionals has attempted to look at how frustration at the workplace forms and affects employee attitude towards the management. The study has also looked at the influence of gender on frustration and the outcome. Many researchers in the past have found frustration to be the prime source of triggering various reactions. Hence, this study also endeavoured to explore aggression which is understood to be one of the primary behavioural expressions of frustration.

From the scatter plot in Figure 2, it can be seen that frustration at the workplace is negatively correlated to employee attitude. The relationship for the particular sample is moderately significant since the value of obtained “ r ” is more than then “ r ” critical ($r = -.262, p < .05; r_{crit} = .0978$). This means that employee attitude to a certain extent does get influenced by the frustration they feel at the job. In the initial stage, frustration wells up in an employee as a passive conflict with a prominent behavioural expression that could be either or a mixture of avoidance, isolation, denial and self-centeredness (Andalib, Darun & Azizan, 2013). This the stage when there is a pulsating emotional build-up happening within the employee which occasionally gets manifested in irritation and impatience with the assigned job role and at times with colleagues.

In this study, a slight difference has been seen in the way the build-up of emotional swell leading to frustration is handled by the two sexes. Traditionally it has been believed and understood that women can handle their emotions better by internalizing it while it is the men who are more expressive in the display of their feelings. The “ r ” value

for female workers is slightly more than that for male employees showing that that frustration has affected them a bit more (*female employees* $r = -.262$; *male employees* $r = -.196$; $p < .05$; $r_{crit} = .138$). IT sector in the last decade or so has emerged as a preferred industry to work in for women due to various advantages of location, salary, working conditions, and comparable ease of execution of the job role. But the hard fact is that many women exit within the first five years due to various issues related to pay parity, promotional avenues, and gender discrimination among others (Gupta, 2019). In the current study, the intention to sever relationship with the organization could be the reason for a slightly higher level of frustration among the female employees. Still, gender does not influence the attitude towards management significantly as has been proved in earlier studies (David, Gidwani, Birthare & Singh, 2015; Syed & Tappin).

The last two decades have witnessed women shedding the traditional image and taking on the mantle of contribution to the society which is equivalent to that of men. In the current study, the female workers could be trying to prove their mettle but may not be getting the expected support leading to greater cognitive dissonance as compared to male workers (Chen, de la Mora, & Kemis, 2017). This particular predicament they find themselves in may also be triggering their exodus more than that of men (Syed & Tappin, 2019).

The “ r ” value of aggression is found to be $-.33$ ($df\ 398$, $p < .05$) which though –ve, is significant as it is more than the r_{crit} (.0978). The “ r ” value is high and needs further probing that is beyond the scope of the current study but following few related points are noteworthy. IT industry is the favoured destination of budding engineers today across the world and much more so in India. People join the sector with high ambition, aspirations and expectations. Along with this something else is also happening for the last few years that has not been highlighted in any study on IT sector so far nor its implications deliberated at any level – a lot of non-IT engineering graduates are opting to work in the industry rather than plan a career in sectors suitable to their core specialisation (Ashmita, 2019). Many of them could not get into the IT stream due to the merit but harbor the dream of making a career in this field. How well are these people adjusting to jobs that are not even remotely associated with their core specialization? How many of them succeed? Thousands of people join IT firms every year in India and thousands change jobs also. The attrition rate in major IT firms in India is more than 20% and growing (moneycontrol.com, 2019).

Frustration grows when the organizational climate poses barriers to individual aspirations or if the employee realises the misfit between his/her skills and the given job role. The high level of frustration is impacting the attitude of the employee towards the management in the current study. Being white-collar workers, the chances of aggression among IT professionals finding outlet through violence at work is remote. For them, violence could be expressed through a high level of disengagement and ultimately severance of the organizational relationship.

10.CONCLUSION

How relevant is this study for the IT sector? Surely, organisations, especially the more well-known ones must be already doing a lot of research internally to understand the undercurrents of employee thinking, feelings and opinions on various issues affecting them. But generally, the in-house surveys or data gathering exercises are not as elaborate and detailed like for instance this particular study. To a large extent, frustration drives people to innovate. The issue is whether they do so for their current employer with the attendant organizational climate that is seen as a major trigger for the frustration swell or attempt to find places where the environment is receptive to their aspirations and resonates with their emotions.

Organisations grow on the strength of their manpower while the employees deliver on the strength of their commitment to the organization which flows from how well the organizational objectives are aligned to individual aspirations. The attrition rate in the industry for women employees could be a matter of concern. Women comprise more than 31% of the workforce in the IT sector (Raghuram, Herman, Ben, & Sondhi, 2018). With such a formidable contribution to the employee strength that is growing every year, it behooves upon organisations to take appropriate steps for ensuring smoother assimilation of the fairer sex in the workforce. Gender discrimination, issues of pay parity with male workers, and limited avenues for growth in a supposedly male-dominated industry are some major challenges women face in performing to their potential (Chen, de la Mora, & Kemis, 2017; Gupta, 2019).

This puts focus on the aggression part of the frustration: the onus here, in my opinion, is more on the employee to handle this through various modes including seeking support from seniors and peers. Organisations at their end must be having and need to further strengthen the support systems to assist affected employees channelise their energy and emotions for the betterment of the organisation.

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