

REVIEW ARTICLE

A Review on Career Development Initiatives for Outsourced Employees

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Abstract: Today the concept of temporariness has extensively crept into the employee-employer relationship, in organizations. Yet, the expectation from employees, in terms of outcomes, like performance and productivity, would be much similar as on-roll employees. Keeping in mind this temporary relationship, the current paper, through review of literature, has identified initiatives for career sustainability of outsourced employees. The paper is based on content analysis of 155 research papers. Through an extensive review of literature, career development initiatives by client organization and the outcome variables at individual and organization level, have been identified. It was found that out of all the career development initiatives, mentoring of temporary employees was least cited in literature, as compared with other variables. Based on the findings, the paper suggested a research framework which could be used as a base for further studies in human resource practices, leading to sustainable careers of outsourced employees.

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JEL Classification: M12, M14.

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Introduction

Career is an integral part of every person's life, irrespective of the nature of employment they are in. Yet, in an increasingly global and changing socio-economic environment, traditional views on careers, featuring long-term job security and steady career progression within the same company no longer holds [1]. The use of temporary employees is increasingly becoming a permanent feature of the modern workforce. As the business environment has been changing, the employment contracts have become more complicated.

Nowadays, most of the organizations are increasingly being confronted with the challenge of having to manage employees with different status [2]. Based on both strategic and cost/benefit consideration, most organizations are of the opinions that since these employees have lower value and less uniqueness, their human resource management practices should be simple, carrying lower investment in their development. Currently, this issue has gained importance, as the nature of

temporary work and workforce has experienced a remarkable change. In the past, organizations employed temporary employees to undertake low skilled, clerical jobs, but nowadays these employees are also found in higher level professional and technical occupations. It has become clear that the companies now hire these employees as a part of their competitive sustainability strategy. Consequently, the decision to manage outsourced employees with no or lower investment, could be a bad option [3].

Temporary agency work represents a special kind of tripartite (involving three parties) employment relationship, wherein the employee is connected with two firms i.e. the principal employer (third part agency) and the immediate employer (client organization). The temporary employees form part of the client organization (where they work) and share employment contract with the agency [4]. With the shift in business scenario, the quest for flexibility, cost reduction and adaptability, have made organizations more dependent on outside resources [5].

It is evident from the fact that India has become the third largest economy, employing 74% of its workforce from a third-party staffing agency (Global Workforce Index, 2017). While the dependency on temporary employees is growing, they are subject to more unstable work arrangements, carrying higher risk of unemployment, skill deficiency due to lack of training, lack of career progression and growth prospects [6].

Researchers have often reported outsider's treatment at workplace, job insecurity, demotivation, low morale, low development and mental problems resulting in loss of mental well-being among temporary employees [7,8]. Simultaneously, career development is currently one of the most discussed topics in human resource management'. The existing literature has studies representing the connectedness between 'career development' and engagement [9], 'career development' and job-performance [10], 'career development' and professional knowledge creation [11].

An in-depth review of literature shows that most of the studies on career development have been conducted in the context of regular/permanent employees. Whereas, in today's work environment there is an increased dependency on outsourced employees but fewer studies could be found on career development initiatives for third-party agency employees. While in the changing business environment, the employment relationships could be changing, according to the psychological contract defined by Rousseau [12], the relation between an employer and employee depends on the extent to which their mutual expectations have been met by each other.

Koh and Yer [13] demonstrated the mutual investment relationship between outsourced employees and their managers, wherein the managers invest in training and fringe benefits expecting the outsourced employees to accept challenging work assignments. Thus, with the rising global competition, expectations in terms of productivity, quality, output etc., for every employee (irrespective of the employment relationship), is much higher than ever before. As the employer-employee relationship has evolved over a period of time, accordingly initiatives and strategies are formulated, for optimal output.

Investing in competency enhancement of outsourced employees is often questionable, due to their limited tenure with the client organization. But it is in this context that some intervention is required. Only when a system believes in-outsourced employees developing more satisfying careers, it will put in efforts towards building their talents and competencies.

Moreover, from a sustainability perspective, it is crucial for an organization to consider not only the short-term outcomes of career development but also the outcomes in the long run. Keeping the above in mind, the objective of this paper was to identify, through review of literature, the career development initiatives that could be undertaken by client organizations, for outsourced employees. Using a qualitative research methodology, this paper also suggests a framework for sustainability of careers of outsourced employees, which could result in favorable outcomes at the individual as well as organizational levels.

Literature Review

The literature on manpower outsourcing in India has its roots, way back fifty years from now, when companies used to outsource workers for semi-skilled jobs, for a temporary duration, stated in the contract of employment [14]. But gradually, by the beginning of 21st century, the trend of outsourcing manpower shifted from worker category to executive employees [15]. While more people at management levels are being outsourced, it is pertinent to understand careers in that context. Hall's (2002) defined career as the individually perceived sequence of attitude and behavior. Investment in outsourced employees' careers comes up with a number of paradoxes.

Treating these employees almost as though they are permanent seems impossible, as this would defeat the organization's main purpose of reducing cost and increasing flexibility [16]. At the same time, treating outsourced employees (also referred as temporary) too well, organizations may risk the permanent staff developing an unproductive attitude and behaviors [17]. Owing to the temporary nature of their jobs, client organizations are reluctant to invest in them as this may transfer strategic risk to the firm.

An additional attraction could be that there is no obligation on the part of the employer to offer them permanent jobs. These employees are not seen as a means for investment, due to lack of long-term contract with the client organization [18].

At the same time, because they receive less compensation and fewer benefits, compared to permanent employees, it could impede their motivation and commitment [3,19]. The triangular employment relationship, which outsourced employees share with client organization and third party organization, is often associated with behavioral and attitudinal problems that result in two-sided ambiguities, in terms of loyalty, commitment, or career advancement [7].

In an empirical study conducted by Koh and Yer [13] on 191 outsourced employees, across 7 employment agencies in Singapore, it was found that temporary employees, under the mutual investment relationship (where both employer as well as the employee invest in each other), have better job performance, a higher level of affective commitment to the agency, improved overall job satisfaction, higher perception of fairness, higher perception of work options and lower turnover intentions.

However, client organizations overlook the efforts of the outsourced employees and undermine their value. But, if an organization values their role and identity, like their permanent counterparts, they are likely to be assets for organizations [20, 17]. Helping outsourced employees in their career development, would involve recognizing them as a vital part of the organization and developing them into more capable employees [21]. Hence, the proposition that investments by organizations, in outsourced employees' career development, would be fruitful. In order to achieve the objectives of this paper, a detailed analysis of literature was done, based on which a research framework was proposed.

Research Methodology

Recognizing that literature review is important for summarizing, analyzing and synthesizing studies on a particular topic, this study was based on the method proposed by Torraco [22]. Hence, the first step was searching and choosing relevant research articles related to outsourced employees and

their careers. In the current study, in order to ensure proper selection of research papers, the guidelines provided by Callahan [23] were adhered to, which addressed the following questions: a) where the research papers were discovered b) when the search was performed c) who implemented the search, d) how the articles were discovered, e) how many articles appeared and how many of them were chosen, and f) why the articles were finally chosen.

Data synthesis and analysis was done using qualitative data analysis software. Today, qualitative software packages offer a range of functions that serve as a source for analyzing qualitative data. There is a number of qualitative data analysis software like NVivo, Ethnography, QDA Miner which are equally efficient.

For the purpose of current research, content analysis was conducted using Qualitative Data Miner (QDA Miner). It is software developed by Provalis Research in 1989. Though, not very common, it has been used in a number of qualitative studies to conduct text mining [24, 15, 25-27]. This software package is used for coding, memoing, retrieving and analyzing small and large collections of documents and images. Its integration with Sim Stat, a statistical data analysis tool, and Word Stat, a quantitative content analysis and text mining software, gives flexibility for analyzing text and relating its content to structured information including numerical and categorical data.

However, in the present study, further, in order to ensure reliability of the results, along with the software, the analysis was done manually. To conduct content analysis, a systematic literature review process is required to be done. This process consists of a series of structured steps for locating literature [28]. For the current study, content analysis was conducted in 5 steps suggested by Torraco [22].

- **Identification of Data Sources-** To gain insight into the research topic, the research papers were searched in the databases of Sage Publications, Taylor and Francis, Pro-quest, EBSCO, Google Scholar, PsycINFO, using the keywords like "career", "career development initiatives". To ensure comprehensiveness, the keywords like "outsourced employees,

leased employees, non-permanent employees, temporary employees” were used alternatively, to be able to identify the most relevant articles. To study the current trend in outsourced employment, only the research papers published in past 10 years were considered.

The initial search yielded 195 matching research papers. For the purpose of the current study, only the articles which discussed the careers of outsourced employees were chosen. Ultimately, 155 research papers, out of the total 195, were considered for carrying out this study. More specifically, the present study identified the relevance of career development for outsourced employees and how client organization could contribute to it. This step was followed by analysis of the collected data.

- **Data Condensation, Codification and Memoing:** Following the literature review, the large data was condensed in order to simplify it. Condensation is the process of

- shortening the large text while preserving the core meaning. To bring clarity to the condensed data and organize it into key topics, codes were assigned on the basis of the content in them (Table 1). Codes are labels that describe the content of the unit. Codes might arise from research question, topic literature, and/or interview and data collection protocols [29].

During this stage, careful consideration had to be given to the number of codes and size of research papers because the papers are already conceptualized, so creating a number of codes would make it meaningless [30]. For the current study, 4 codes containing 6 sub-codes were generated, based on the theme of the paper i.e. career development initiatives for outsourced employees. This step helped in sorting the literature smoothly, on the basis of key words like “sustainable career”, “career development”, “career development initiatives and outcomes”, in the context of outsourced employees. Table 1 represents the classification framework for codes and sub codes, generated to simplify the literature review.

Table 1: Classification framework for codes and sub codes generated

Code	Sub Codes	No. of Sub codes	Rationale
1. Career Development	i) Meaning ii) Evolution iii) Importance	3	Investigating the uniformity and clarity in defining the concept of career development.
2. Career development of Outsourced employees	iv) Relevance	1	Finding the relevance of investing in career development of outsourced employees.
3. Career development initiatives for outsourced employees	v) Career Development Initiatives	1	Finding the sustainable career development initiatives which organizations undertake/ recommend for outsourced employees.
4. Career development Outcomes	vi) Outcomes for outsourced employee and client organization	1	Finding the outcomes of the career development initiatives for career development of outsourced employees and accordingly its outcomes for client and outsourced employees.

Source: Primary

The classification done in Table 1 represents the codes and sub codes, generated in the process of content analysis. It also represents the rationale behind development of these codes and sub codes. This was followed by data memoing. This serves as useful transition points in analysis and help to build the foundation for final written material about user's project [29]. Memos can be written about individual data document, any section or text, about any independent topic that arise in the course of action. For this study, memoing was done to cluster the coded findings together, so that the findings can be easily retrieved and made transparent (Word stat 7: User's manual, n.d.). Additionally, the retrieved data was cross verified by carefully scrutinizing all the research papers.

• **Data Classification and Extraction:**

Thirdly, data classification was conducted. The keywords were classified in the descending order of frequency (of their occurrences) using Term Frequency-Inverted Document Frequency (TF-IDF) in text mining. This function calculates the percentage of frequency of the words in one research paper, to the total number of papers under study. This is often done to assign weights to the information retrieved in text mining technique. Based on this, QDA miner automatically provided an algorithm to extract keywords with high occurrences. In the present study, it helped in extracting keywords which had maximum occurrences in all the papers and helped in identification of the career development initiatives with maximum

frequency. A total of five career development initiatives could be extracted, which had maximum TF-IDF value.

- **Data Clustering:** After finding the frequency of keywords, data clustering was done. This step included clustering the keywords (obtained in step 3) on the basis of their attributes. Keywords with similar attributes (relatable) formed a cluster. For the purpose of this paper, clustering of data helped to identify the major categories. This was done so that the words with similar features could be extracted and their nature could be observed carefully. However, only those clusters which were relevant in the context of the present study, was tabulated in Table 2.

Verifiability of the Study

The results were verified manually, by conducting an in-depth review of each and every paper, based on the codes and sub-codes generated. The results, thus, obtained through the software, were found consistent with the findings obtained through manual calculations.

Results and Discussion

All the above steps resulted in the formation of a number of categories. Each category was homogeneous within itself, as similar keywords were grouped in it, but heterogeneous between one another (as each category was different from the other). Out of these, the categories which were relevant have been tabulated for the present study.

Table 2: Representation of categories of variables extracted for the present study

S. No	Keywords	Eigen Values	% Variance	Frequency	TF-IDF	No of Cases	% of Cases
1	Developmental <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring • Performance Appraisal; Feedback • Employee Development • Internal Job Posting 	15.34	2.42	759	98.41 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •19.4% •36.3% •24.1% 20.1%	136	87.74%
2	Challenging Assignments	6.41	1.54	944	57.48	142	91.61%
3	Training	3.16	1.45	1449	41.81	151	97.42%
4	Organizational outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Productivity • Profitability 	4.23	1.59	852	49.06 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •29.3% •29.1% 	140	90.32%

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance 				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20.7% • 20.9% 		
5	Qualitative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement 	4.03	1.63	1118	47.94 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 76.7% 	147	94.84%
6	Subjective; Creative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creativity 	3.333	1.61	1103	42 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 82.4% 	148	95.48%
7	Psychological Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Well-being 	2.42	1.11	1011	40.13 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 69.1% 	143	92.25%

Source: Primary

Table 2, represents the categories, along with the variables, which have been extracted. In this table, “cases” refer to the number of research papers reviewed. To increase understandability, percentages of cases have been calculated out of total 155 cases.

All extracted categories are arranged in descending order of their Eigen values. The Eigen value of each category indicates the uniqueness of the variables under it. A category with Eigen value greater than 1 is considered to be good and acceptable [31]. In this study, 7 categories (clusters) had their Eigen values greater than 1. The TF-IDF values of each individual keyword have been tabulated.

Based on literature review, the extracted categories were further classified under two variables i.e. career development initiatives and the outcome variables; for outsourced employees and the client organization.

Analysis of Results

Based on the above findings in Table 2, the following emerged as the career development initiatives, which client organizations could possibly undertake, for outsourced employees, leading to their career sustainability as well as yielding better results for the organization.

Training

For outsourced employees, this would mean providing training to them, along with the permanent employees, to upgrade their skills and make them more employable. This initiative was found to be included in the category of “Career Development”. It was found that out of the total 155 papers, 151 papers (Table 2) mentioned “Training” as an important career development initiative, suggested by organizations, for outsourced employees.

Among all the identified initiatives, this initiative held the maximum TD-IDF weight. This means, it has the maximum frequency within a research paper, as well as, across all the research papers.

Internal Job Posting

Internal job posting refers to the initiative of posting jobs internally and offering it to the internal staff, before making it public. By providing job security to a temporary employee, would make him more responsible and committed to the organization, he is working with. An empirical study by Chambel, Castanheira and Sobral [7] conducted on 1227 outsourced workers working in two IT firms found a positive link between commitment of outsourced employees and their perception of absorption by the client company. In the current study, this initiative held a TF-IDF of 29.35% and was sub categorized into variable “Developmental” (Table 2). This variable explained 1.59% of variance, out of which, 0.8% is explained by this sub variable “Internal job posting”. This shows the relevance of this sub variable, for the studies on outsourced employees.

Performance Appraisal and Feedback

In the present study, “performance appraisal” and “feedback” got automatically clubbed into “Developmental” and together with other sub variables, explained 2.42% of the variance. Out of the total variance of 2.42%, this sub variable individually explained 0.45 % variance. The finding supports a previous study [32] on 1169 temporary workers working in the manufacturing, education and retail sectors in Sweden, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, UK, Spain and Israel. Their study reported that continuous, constructive appraisal and feedback, motivates employees to improve their performance.

Challenging Assignments

In the current study, this initiative was mentioned in 91.4% of the total papers, that means around 142 papers have identified this initiative. This initiative held an Eigen value of 6.41, which was far greater than the minimum acceptable limit of 1. This contributes to their personal as well as professional development. They can try to match their skills, interests and capabilities with internal opportunities through planned programs like providing challenging assignments or projects to them [33, 11]. It is possible that providing challenging assignments could help the outsourced employees to learn and grow, thus, the relevance of this variable.

Mentoring

Through content analysis, it was found that the TF-IDF of this variable was 19.4%, which is comparatively lower than the rest of the variables. But this variable was clubbed under “Developmental” during extraction which means that the variable is important, though it is under-represented or less discussed in literature. This variable held an Eigen value of 15.34, which shows the great relevance of this initiative especially in the context of outsourced employees, where the employment contract is of a shorter duration. Slattery et al [34].

Found that short-term co-guiding by senior or experienced permanent employees helped the outsourced employees overcome the fear, anxiety and stress. The present study found that among all the identified initiatives, “mentoring” has been least mentioned. It is evident from literature that there is lack of empirical studies on mentoring of outsourced employees though it could contribute a lot towards career development. As derived from literature, the above career development initiatives could contribute towards the sustainability of careers of outsourced employees. After identifying these initiatives, from among the reviewed papers, the study tried to find out their contribution at two levels i.e. outcomes at individual level and outcomes at organization level.

Outcomes of Career Development Initiatives

In the current study, it was found that 148 papers, out of the total 155 papers, discussed about the outcomes of career development

initiatives, for outsourced employees. However, from among these papers, only 6 outcome variables could be extracted, which held an Eigen value greater than 1.

Individual Outcomes

In the current study, the individual level outcome refers to the positive consequences or benefits of career development initiatives for outsourced employees. The outcomes are stated as under:

Employee Development

This outcome has been sub categorized into “Developmental”. Out of 148 papers which discussed about the outcomes of investing in outsourced employees, 136 papers suggested employee development (Table 2). The TF-IDF value of this variable is 44.3%. This represents the importance of the variable. Client sponsored initiatives would enhance outsourced employee’s knowledge and skills, contributing to their development. Investment in career development of the outsourced employees is beneficial to them in their present jobs as well as in subsequent jobs throughout their careers. Here, employee development can be in the form of better communication, leadership enhancement, idea development, better understanding of self and others.

Mental Well-being

According to World Health Organization [35], mental well-being is a “state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope up with normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make contribution to community”. This includes the ability to fight stress, resilience, face insecurity and enhance self-confidence. Career development initiatives have been found to improve the mental health of the outsourced employees in conditions like stress, depression, poor mental health, resulting from job insecurity and non-permanent nature of job [36, 3, 37]. In the current study, this variable was automatically clubbed under “Psychological”. This outcome has been mentioned in 143 cases of the total 155 cases, which makes up to 92.2% of the total papers. It shows the relevance of mental health as a variable in the context of outsourced employees.

Researchers have mentioned that most of the times outsourced employees are given

outsider's treatment, in the organization, which deprives them of their social needs. These results in anger, stress and burnout among these employees [38-40]. Career development initiatives by the client organization could be useful in alleviating such negative outcomes.

Creativity

Having creative employees helps an organization to survive and sustain amidst the competition. It was found that this variable was mentioned 1011 times and was mentioned in 95.48% of the total papers. The TF-IDF of this variable is 82.4% (Table 2). This shows the importance of the variable in the context of outsourced employees. However, only theoretical papers on this variable could be located, no empirical paper could be traced, which studied creativity of outsourced employees. This shows a dearth of quantitative studies on it. This finding supports the work of previous researchers, that outsourced employees may be reluctant to exhibit their creativity at the client's place, due to many organizational challenges like alienation, lack of interaction, less communication with other employees and personal factors like limited skills and insecurity [7, 20].

When organizations take initiatives like training, coaching, appraisal & providing feedback, these could contribute towards increasing their knowledge, widening their insights as well as creative thinking. In today's competitive environment, new idea generation is the need of the hour, for all organizations.

Engagement

Engagement means physical, emotional and mental involvement in the work that influences the employee's willingness to learn and perform at work [41]. There was 1118 occurrences of this variable. This shows that majority of the papers have identified engagement as a sustainable outcome for outsourced employees. Initiatives like training, performance appraisals, feedback and internal job posting for outsourced employees, could be identified as motivators for enhancing their engagement, while working for the client organization. This supports a previous study conducted by Davis [21] on 297 BPO employees in Sydney,

Melbourne and Brisbane, which found a direct link between career development and employee engagement. When organizations undertake career development initiatives for their employees, it increases their engagement and they work with more vigor and dedication [42].

Organizational Outcomes

In the current study, the "organizational level outcomes" refer to the outcomes of career development initiatives for the client organization. The outcomes are stated as under:

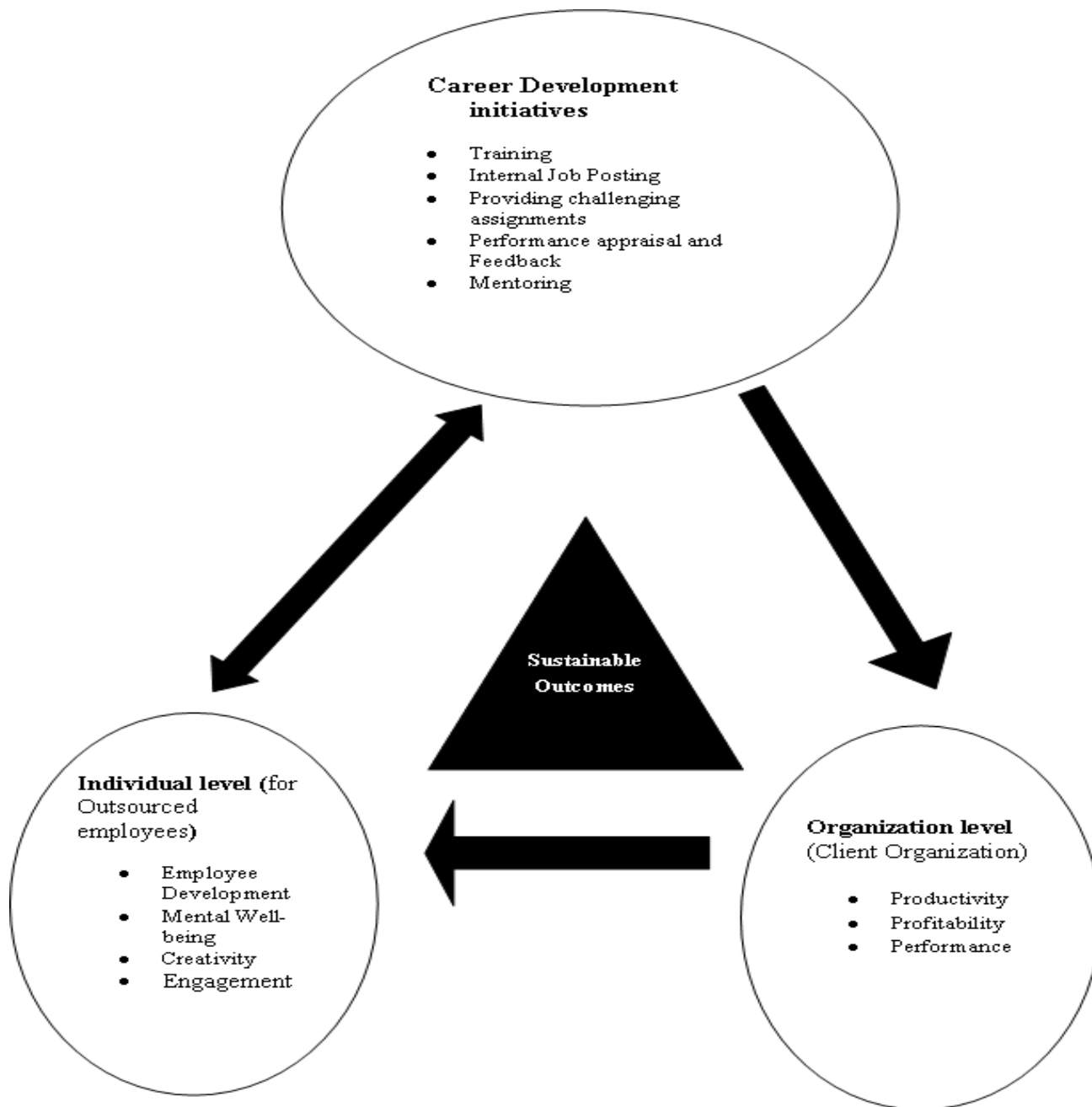
Performance, Productivity and Profitability

At organizational level, the outcomes of career development initiatives include all those initiatives which contribute directly towards the firm's performance, profitability and productivity. Through content analysis, it was found that performance, productivity and profitability are the key indicators of an organization's health. These variables were automatically generated under "Organizational" (refer Table 2). These variables were mentioned in 90.32 % of the cases, and held an Eigen value of 4. 23. The aggregated TF-IDF value of this variable is 70.7%. A study conducted by Bryson, considering outsourced workers, found a positive relationship between hiring of outsourced employees and the financial performance of the firm.

According to Santhanam et al. and Jindal and Sheikh [43], career development initiatives upgrade employee's knowledge skills and ability, empower and increase employee motivation, thus contributing to increased productivity and improve overall organization's financial position. According to Slattery, Selvarajan and Anderson [34], focus on the career development initiatives enable the organization to provide a learning environment to the outsourced employees, where they are able to think creatively leading to achieving desirable performance.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the above highlighted issues and findings of the present paper, the paper has attempted to come up with a model for implementation.



Source: Primary

Figure 1: Conceptual framework identifying the outcomes of career development initiatives at the individual employee (outsourced) level and organization level

The above framework signifies that when client organization invests in the careers of outsourced employees by undertaking initiatives in the form of training programs, internal job postings, performance appraisal etc., it induces positive behavior among outsourced employees. This long-term investment by the client organization impacts the outsourced employees’ development as well as the organization’s performance. These have been categorized into outcomes at individual level and at organizational level. At the individual employee level, career development initiatives would result in employee development, mental well-being, better engagement and creative behavior. While making the careers of outsourced employees

more continuous and sustainable, it would improve the employee productivity, contributing to the firm’s performance as well. The findings of the present study support a previous research conducted by Koh and Yer [13], which reported that when the client organization and the outsourced employee invest in each other, it will benefit both. The outsourced employee will be employable with better marketable skills, while at the same time contributing to the organization’s performance. This will be a win-win situation for both i.e. outsourced employee as well as client organization. The outsourced employee will be up-skilled and the client organization, while retaining its objective of flexibility, would do better.

Conclusion

It is evident from literature that initiatives such as training, internal job posting, providing challenging assignments, performance appraisal and feedback and mentoring need to be given emphasis as they contribute towards career development and sustainability of outsourced employees. Extensive review of literature and the resultant integrated conceptual framework on career development initiatives for outsourced employees, presented in this paper, contribute immensely to the body of knowledge on initiatives for sustainable careers of outsourced employees.

Firstly, since the outsourced employees are a major part of the total workforce in organizations today, it is important to understand the relevance of career development initiatives, undertaken by employers, contributing to their career sustainability. Secondly, by identifying these initiatives, this paper provided a holistic picture of career development of outsourced employees. Thirdly, the methodology used in this paper i.e. latent content analysis done through QDA miner technique, is unique in this area of research. Fourthly, this study identified individual as well as organizational outcomes, as a result of career development initiatives undertaken by the client organization.

Fifthly, this paper could serve as a base, for further developing a scale on these career development initiatives, for temporary employees. Sixthly, the whole cluster of findings that emerged from the qualitative data analysis, has been presented at one place, thus, providing a comprehensive base for further studies on careers of outsourced employees (especially in the Indian context). Through an integrated view of the career development initiatives and the outcomes, leading to sustainability, this paper makes a positive contribution to both theory and practice in human resource management [44-51].

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