

Factors Influence Business Process Outsourcing Employees to Transition into Virtual Assistance: A Qualitative Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of digital labor platforms and remote work technologies has expanded alternative career pathways for professionals in the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry. Among these emerging opportunities, virtual assistance has become an increasingly attractive option for employees seeking greater flexibility, professional autonomy, and improved career prospects. Despite growing scholarly interest, evidence explaining this transition remains dispersed across studies, making it difficult to develop a comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping career mobility within the digital economy. This qualitative systematic literature review (QSLR) therefore synthesizes existing empirical evidence on the factors influencing the transition of BPO employees into virtual assistance, the challenges encountered during this career shift, and the broader implications for workforce transformation.

The review was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 reporting framework. A structured search strategy based on the PICOC framework was implemented using Lens.org as the primary scholarly search platform, which aggregates records from multiple academic sources. The search identified 596 records published between 2021 and 2026. Following duplicate removal, title and abstract screening, full-text eligibility assessment, and independent quality appraisal by four reviewers, 17 studies were retained for thematic synthesis. The included studies represented diverse geographical contexts, primarily from Asia and Europe, providing evidence on digital work, remote employment, online freelancing, and workforce transformation.

Across the reviewed studies, financial advancement, flexible work arrangements, work-life integration, career autonomy, and opportunities for continuous skill development consistently emerged as the principal factors motivating the transition from BPO employment to virtual assistance. The synthesis further indicates that technological advances, cloud-based collaboration tools, digital labor platforms, and the increasing demand for remote professional services have accelerated this career shift. At the same time, recurring barriers—including income instability, limited employment benefits, intense client competition, and the need for ongoing professional development—continue to influence the sustainability of virtual assistance careers. The findings also suggest that successful transitions depend not only on technical competence but equally on self-management, adaptability, entrepreneurial orientation, and lifelong learning.

By consolidating fragmented evidence from multiple disciplines, this review provides a more integrated understanding of career transition within technology-enabled work environments. The findings offer practical implications for employers, educators, policymakers, and workforce development practitioners seeking to support employee adaptation in an evolving digital labor market. While the review offers a comprehensive qualitative synthesis, future research would benefit from broader geographical coverage and, where sufficient homogeneous evidence becomes available, the application of quantitative synthesis techniques to examine the relative influence of individual transition factors and the long-term sustainability of virtual assistance careers.

Keywords: Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), Virtual Assistance, Career Transition, Digital Workforce, Remote Work, Freelancing.

INTRODUCTION

Interest in virtual assistance has increased considerably as digital technologies continue to reshape the nature of work. Yet, research on this career pathway remains scattered across different fields, including digital work, remote employment, freelancing, workforce transformation, and technology management. Existing studies have identified a range of factors associated with career transitions, such as work-life balance, digital competence, entrepreneurial aspirations, career mobility, job satisfaction, and organizational conditions. Most of this evidence, however, has been generated independently, with each study examining only a limited aspect of the transition. As a result, there is still no clear picture of how these interconnected factors collectively influence the decision of Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) employees to pursue careers in virtual assistance.

A closer examination of the literature also reveals that previous systematic reviews have concentrated on broader themes, including digital transformation, remote work, online freelancing, impact sourcing, workforce engagement, and technology-enabled employment. Although these reviews provide valuable insights into evolving work arrangements, they do not specifically address the movement of employees from conventional BPO roles into virtual assistance. Consequently, the evidence remains dispersed, making it difficult to understand how financial considerations, technological readiness, organizational experiences, professional aspirations, and personal motivations interact throughout this career transition. This fragmented knowledge limits the ability of organizations, educators, and policymakers to design interventions that are grounded in a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

The issue has become even more relevant as artificial intelligence, cloud-based collaboration tools, digital labor platforms, and remote work technologies continue to expand employment opportunities beyond traditional organizational settings. While the number of individual studies has grown, their findings differ in context, methodology, and scope, making direct comparisons challenging. Bringing this evidence together through a systematic literature review offers an opportunity to consolidate current knowledge, identify recurring patterns, clarify inconsistencies, and highlight areas where further investigation is needed.

From a Technology Management perspective, the transition from BPO employment to virtual assistance represents more than a change in occupation. It reflects how technological innovation, organizational change, and evolving labor market conditions influence career decisions and workforce adaptation. Understanding these dynamics can support organizations in developing talent retention strategies, assist higher education institutions in preparing graduates for digital careers, inform policymakers responsible for workforce development, and help professionals make informed career decisions within an increasingly technology-driven economy.

In response to these gaps, this systematic literature review synthesizes recent empirical evidence on the factors influencing the transition of Business Process Outsourcing employees into virtual assistance, examines the challenges encountered during this career shift, and discusses its broader implications for workforce transformation in the digital economy.

This systematic literature review addresses this research gap by synthesizing evidence concerning the factors influence Business Process Outsourcing employees to transition into virtual assistance. The review follows the PRISMA 2020 reporting framework.

RQ1: What are the factors influencing BPO employees' transition to virtual assistance?

RQ2: What challenges and risks are associated with the transition from BPO work to virtual assistance?

METHODS

Research Design

Search Strategy and Study Selection

The review was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 reporting framework to ensure a transparent, systematic, and reproducible review process. Before the search was initiated, the review protocol, research questions, eligibility criteria, search strategy, and data extraction procedures were established to minimize selection bias and maintain methodological consistency throughout the study. Although the protocol was not formally registered in an external repository, all review procedures were determined prior to data collection and remained unchanged during the screening and synthesis stages.

A comprehensive literature search was undertaken using Lens.org as the primary scholarly search platform because it aggregates records from multiple academic databases, including Crossref, PubMed, Microsoft Academic archives, OpenAlex, and other scholarly repositories.

Lens.org was selected to maximize coverage of multidisciplinary research related to digital work, workforce transformation, virtual assistance, remote employment, and Business Process Outsourcing. The final search was completed in May 2026.

The search strategy combined controlled keywords with Boolean operators to capture studies addressing the transition from BPO employment to virtual assistance. Several search strings were tested iteratively before selecting the final query to balance sensitivity and specificity.

Search terms included combinations of *Business Process Outsourcing*, *BPO employees*, *virtual assistance*, *virtual assistant*, *remote work*, *digital work*, *freelancing*, *career transition*, and *workforce transformation*. Reference lists of eligible studies were also examined to identify potentially relevant articles that were not retrieved during the initial database search.

Records were exported directly from Lens.org into Rayyan, an online systematic review platform used to facilitate screening, duplicate identification, and reviewer collaboration. Duplicate records were removed automatically within Rayyan and verified manually before title and abstract screening commenced. Two levels of screening were subsequently performed.

The first involved evaluating titles and abstracts against the predefined eligibility criteria. Articles considered potentially relevant progressed to full-text assessment, where each publication was reviewed independently to determine whether it met all inclusion requirements.

Studies were included if they were peer-reviewed journal articles or conference proceedings published between 2021 and 2026, written in English, available in full text, and addressed factors associated with remote work, virtual assistance, workforce mobility, freelancing, digital employment, or the transition of employees into technology-enabled work arrangements. Studies were excluded when they consisted solely of editorials, commentaries, opinion papers, book chapters, dissertations, duplicate publications, or articles whose primary focus was unrelated to the review objectives.

To reduce reviewer bias, three independent reviewers assessed each eligible study using a predefined quality assessment checklist consisting of seven methodological criteria. Rather than relying on a single evaluator, disagreements were discussed collectively until consensus was reached regarding study inclusion.

Only articles demonstrating adequate methodological quality and clear relevance to the research questions were retained for the final synthesis. This consensus-based approach strengthened the credibility of the evidence base while improving the reliability of study selection.

Following quality appraisal, seventeen studies satisfied all eligibility requirements and formed the evidence base for thematic synthesis. Data extracted from each article included publication characteristics, research design, study context, participant characteristics where applicable, principal findings, and reported factors influencing the transition from BPO employment to virtual assistance. The extracted information was subsequently coded, compared across studies, and synthesized into higher-order themes that addressed the research questions.

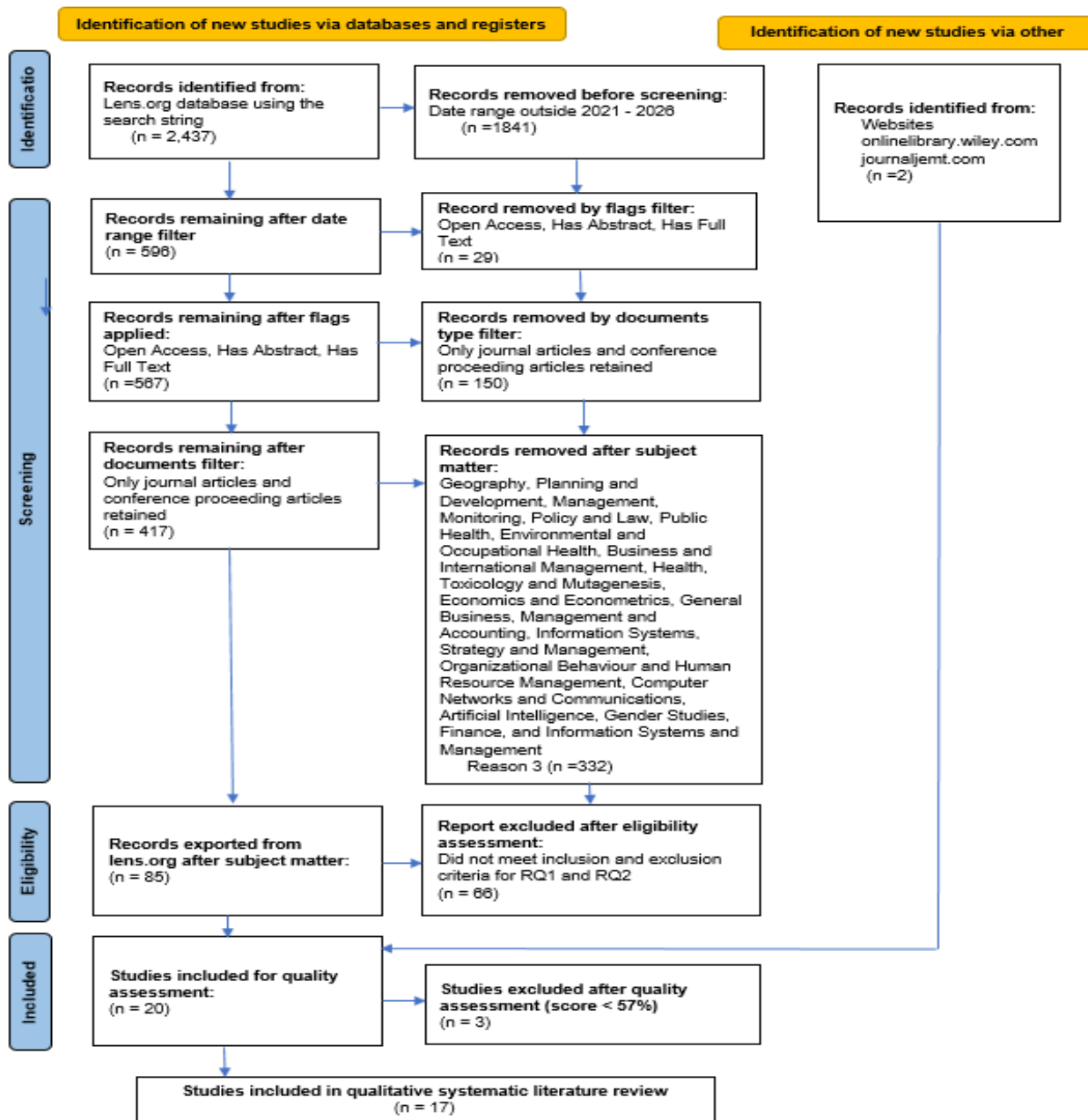


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Framework Model

Formulation of the Research question

The research questions for this Qualitative Systematic Literature Review are formulated to explore the key determinants and experiences associated with the career transition of Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) employees into virtual assistance (VA).

The first research question seeks to identify and summarize the many elements that promote, incentivize, or facilitate the transition of BPO personnel to virtual help employment. It aims to investigate how personal incentives, such as the desire for work-life balance, autonomy, career advancement, and entrepreneurial goals, influence career decisions. The examination also looks at economic aspects such as income potential, financial independence, and market demand, as well as organizational factors including job satisfaction, working conditions, career growth constraints, and management practices. The question also takes into account the importance of technology elements such as digital literacy, access to remote work technologies, online freelancing platforms, and technological readiness in allowing employees to successfully migrate to virtual assistance. By addressing these factors, the study hopes to gain a thorough knowledge of the primary determinants of career mobility in the digital workforce.

The second research question examines the problems, barriers, and hazards that persons face when transitioning from BPO to virtual support. The evaluation looks into concerns such as job insecurity, changing income, client acquisition and retention, limited access to employee benefits, and rising competition in the freelancing industry. It also investigates the professional and psychological demands associated with independent employment, such as self-management, work-life boundary issues, professional isolation, and the need to constantly update skills in response to changing technological requirements. The study also takes into consideration technological and operational risks, such as cybersecurity concerns, platform dependency, and the long-term viability of virtual assistant employment. This inquiry seeks to provide a balanced knowledge of the potential barriers to the effectiveness and sustainability of job transitions in the digital economy by synthesizing previous literature.

Collectively, these study topics lay the groundwork for investigating the potential and obstacles associated with the transition from BPO to virtual support. The study aims to contribute to the fields of technology management, digital workforce transformation, and career mobility by systematically synthesizing qualitative evidence, as well as providing practical insights for employees, organizations, policymakers, and educational institutions adapting to the changing world of work.

In response, the study developed the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the factors influencing BPO employees' transition to virtual assistance?

RQ2: What challenges and risks are associated with the transition from BPO work to virtual assistance?

The research questions were refined using the PICOC framework to ensure alignment between the study's objectives, search strategy, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and synthesis procedures. The questions were intentionally designed to explore the key determinants and experiences associated with the career transition of Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) employees into virtual assistance (VA).

Table 1. PICOC Framework for RQ1

PICOC Element	Specification
Population	Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) employees, including customer service representatives, technical support agents, back-office personnel, and other BPO professionals
Intervention	Transition from BPO employment to Virtual Assistance (VA) work, including motivations, drivers, barriers, and enabling factors
Comparison	Pre-transition BPO employment status vs. post-transition virtual assistant status and traditional BPO work conditions vs. virtual assistance work conditions.
Outcome	Identification of factors influencing the transition, such as financial incentives, work-life balance, flexibility, autonomy, skill utilization, technological readiness, job satisfaction, and career development opportunities
Context	Digital economy, remote work environment, freelancing platforms, outsourcing industry, and technology-enabled work settings

Table 1 presents the PICOC framework provides a methodical approach to establishing the scope of the research issue, which includes the factors that influence BPO employees' shift to virtual help. The term Population (P) refers to BPO people such as customer service representatives, technical support specialists, back-office staff, and other outsourced industry professionals. These individuals represent the target population whose career options and experiences are being researched. The Intervention or Interest (I) focuses on the transition of traditional BPO positions to virtual assistant roles. This includes the reasons, possibilities, issues, and events that lead people to leave typical office-based outsourcing jobs in favor of independent or remote virtual support work.

The Comparison (C) component, which is optional in qualitative systematic literature studies, may involve comparing BPO personnel who have successfully moved to virtual help versus those who continue in traditional BPO roles. Such comparisons might help reveal variances in career motivations, career satisfaction, work preferences, and professional goals. The study's Outcome (O) is to identify and understand the factors influencing this job shift. These factors may include increased income potential, flexible work schedules, improved work-life balance, greater autonomy, technological preparedness, entrepreneurial aspirations, professional growth opportunities, and job satisfaction. Additionally, impediments such as economic insecurity, a lack of employee benefits, and difficulties in obtaining clients may emerge as significant effects. Finally, the study's Context (C) is based on the digital economy and the increasing remote work environment. Advances in information and communication technologies, the proliferation of freelancing platforms, and the growing adoption of remote work have culminated in new job alternatives outside of typical organizational contexts. This setting is especially important because it influences the conditions under which BPO personnel evaluate and pursue virtual help job opportunities. By utilizing the PICOC paradigm, the study provides a clear and complete platform for systematically investigating the elements that influence the career transition from the BPO business to virtual help in the new digital workforce.

Table 2. PICOC Framework for RQ2

PICOC Element	Specification
Population	Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) employees who are considering or have undergone a transition to virtual assistance.
Intervention	The transition from BPO employment to virtual assistance work.
Comparison	Employees who remain in traditional BPO roles versus those who transition to virtual assistance.
Outcome	Challenges and risks encountered during the transition, such as income instability, lack of employee benefits, job insecurity, client acquisition difficulties, skill gaps, and work-life boundary issues.
Context	The digital economy, remote work environment, and online freelancing platforms where virtual assistants operate.

Table 2 present the PICOC framework developed for the second question, which focused on the BPO employee who are either planning to transition or have already transitioned to virtual assistance careers. Population (P) is a set of BPO personnel who intend to or have already shifted to virtual help employment. The Interest (I) focuses on the transition from traditional BPO jobs to virtual help work. The Comparison (C) may include comparing differences between personnel who remain in BPO businesses and those who pursue virtual help employment, although this component is not necessarily required in qualitative research. The Outcome (O) identifies the

transition's problems and hazards, such as financial instability, a lack of job security and benefits, difficulty finding clients, increased competition, and the need for constant skill development.

Search Strategy

A systematic search strategy was developed to identify relevant studies addressing the research question. Keywords associated with business process outsourcing (BPO), call center, customer service representative, customer support agent, home-based, remote work, online work, virtual assistant, freelance, digital work, platform work, gig economy, career mobility, occupational mobility, employment transition, job change, factor, determinant, motivate, influence, and drive. The search phrase was created using Boolean operators to enhance the retrieval of research on the factors influencing Business Process Outsourcing employees' shift to virtual assistance.

The following search string was used during the initial literature identification and screening process:

("business process outsourcing" OR BPO OR "call center" OR "contact center" OR "customer service representative*" OR CSR OR "customer support agent*")

And

("virtual assistant*" OR freelanc* OR "remote work*" OR "online work*" OR "home-based work*" OR "gig economy" OR "digital work*" OR "platform work*")

And

("career transition" OR "career shift" OR "job transition" OR "job change" OR "occupational mobility" OR "career mobility" OR "employment transition")

And

(factor* OR determinant* OR motivat* OR influence* OR driver* OR reason* OR cause* OR antecedent* OR predictor* OR "push factor*" OR "pull factor*")

The search string was designed to capture studies discussing business process outsourcing (BPO), call center, customer service representative, customer support agent, home-based, remote work, online work, virtual assistant, freelance, digital work, platform work, gig economy, career mobility, occupational mobility, employment transition, job change, factor, determinant, motivate, influence, driver, reason, cause, antecedent, and predictor. The use of Boolean operators and alternative terminology improved the comprehensiveness of the search strategy and ensured boarder coverage relevant to the factors influencing Business Process Outsourcing employees' shift to virtual assistance.

The systematic search was carried out using Lens.org as the primary scholarly indexing platform. Lens.org was chosen because it aggregates records from multiple scholarly repositories that include CrossRef, OpenAlex, PubMed, and publisher databases, allowing for broader interdisciplinary retrieval across software engineering and information systems literature. The search strategy adhered to the PICOC framework and used Boolean operators to enhance retrieval sensitivity while remaining relevant to the factors influencing Business Process Outsourcing employees' shift to virtual support.

To facilitate a transparent and systematic screening procedure, the retrieved studies were exported and organized with the Rayyan systematic review software. Rayyan oversaw blinded title and abstract screening, duplicate checking, eligibility determination, and reviewer conflict resolution. Three reviewers conducted the screening procedure separately in order to increase methodological reliability and reduce selection bias.

The assessment intentionally focused on research published between 2021 and 2026 to gather current evidence about the factors driving Business Process Outsourcing employees' migration to virtual support. The review focused on English-language publications from 2022 to 2026 that were published as scientific journal articles or

conference papers and had full text available. Although the exported records were from a specific database, the assessment followed PRISMA guidelines to ensure transparency in the screening and inclusion process.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria outline the qualities that research must meet to be included in the review. First, studies must involve BPO employees or outsourcing professionals, as they are the target population of the research. The studies should also examine factors related to the transition from BPO employment to virtual assistance, freelancing, or remote work, including motivations, opportunities, barriers, and experiences. To maintain academic integrity, only peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, theses, dissertations, and other scholarly works are included. The study focuses on publications from 2021 to 2026 to reflect current advances in digital work and virtual support. Furthermore, only English-language research with accessible full texts is included, allowing for detailed study and comparison of results.

The exclusion criteria identify papers that are irrelevant to the research aims. Studies that focus on workers outside the BPO industry without mentioning BPO personnel are skipped as they do not reach the intended audience. Research that focuses just on BPO or virtual assistance without addressing the career transfer process is also omitted. Non-academic sources, such as blog postings, opinion pieces, newsletters, and promotional materials, are excluded because they may lack methodological rigor and credibility. Studies published in languages other than English, inaccessible full-text papers, and research with insufficient methodological details are all rejected to guarantee uniformity and quality in the review process.

Table 3. Eligibility Criteria

Category	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Population	Studies involving Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) employees, call center agents, customer service representatives, technical support staff, back-office personnel, or outsourcing professionals.	Studies focusing on workers outside the BPO industry without discussing BPO employees specifically.
Phenomenon of Interest	Studies examining factors, motivations, drivers, barriers, experiences, or determinants influencing the transition from BPO employment to virtual assistance, freelancing, or remote independent work.	Studies focusing solely on BPO employment or virtual assistance without discussing career transition or influencing factors.
Context	Studies conducted within digital work environments, remote work settings, freelancing platforms, outsourcing industries, or technology-enabled workplaces.	Studies unrelated to remote work, digital employment, freelancing, or virtual assistance.
Study Design	Qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods studies, case studies, and empirical research relevant to the topic.	Editorials, opinion papers, commentaries, blog posts, newsletters, and studies lacking a clear research methodology.
Publication Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, theses, dissertations, and scholarly publications.	Non-scholarly sources, magazine articles, unpublished reports, and promotional materials.

Language	Studies published in English.	Studies published in languages other than English without an accessible English translation.
Publication Period	Studies published between 2021 and 2026 to capture recent developments in remote work and virtual assistance.	Studies published before 2021 unless considered highly relevant foundational works.
Outcomes	Studies reporting motivations, opportunities, challenges, barriers, career mobility factors, work-life balance, income expectations, technological readiness, or skill development related to the transition.	Studies that do not report factors influencing the transition from BPO employment to virtual assistance.
Accessibility	Full-text studies available for review and analysis.	Studies with unavailable full texts, abstracts only, or inaccessible documents.
Quality	Studies meeting established quality appraisal standards and providing sufficient methodological detail.	Studies with poor methodological quality, insufficient data, or unclear findings.
Language and access	English-language studies with full text available	Non-English, abstract-only, or inaccessible studies
Uniqueness	Unique studies	Duplicate publications

Table 3 shows the inclusion criteria, which ensure that the review comprises studies that can be directly relevant to understanding the factors that influence BPO employees' shift to virtual help. The criteria are designed to uncover high-quality, recent, and easily accessible research that investigates the motives, opportunities, and challenges connected with this career transition in the context of the digital economy and remote work environment. This method improves the reliability, relevance, and comprehensiveness of the systematic literature review.

Screening and Selection Process

The screening and selection process followed the PRISMA-based systematic review procedure to ensure a transparent and systematic identification of relevant studies. The initial database and registry search produced 2,437 records related the keywords associated with business process outsourcing (BPO), call center, customer service representative, customer support agent, home-based, remote work, online work, virtual assistant, freelance, digital work, platform work, gig economy, career mobility, occupational mobility, employment transition, job change, factor, determinant, motivate, influence, and drive. Publication year filter was applied to retain contemporary studies, reducing it to 596 studies. Flag filter further reduced the studies that only includes open access, has abstract, has full text remaining to 567. Documents type restriction that only include journal articles and conference proceeding articles retained reduced the study to 417. Subject matter filter that includes Geography, Planning and Development, Management, Monitoring, Policy and Law, Public Health, Environmental and Occupational Health, Business and International Management, Health, Toxicology and Mutagenesis, Economics and Econometrics, General Business, Management and Accounting, Information Systems, Strategy and Management, Organizational Behaviors and Human Resource Management, Computer Networks and Communications, Artificial Intelligence, Gender Studies, Finance, and Information Systems and Management reduced the study to 85 studies eligible for screening.

The remaining studies were evaluated in terms of title, abstract, and full-text using predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria, as well as the PICOC framework and research questions. Following the eligibility screening and quality evaluation procedure, 18 studies were selected for the final qualitative synthesis, along with two other studies on the factors influencing Business Process Outsourcing employees' move to virtual support. The 20 studies will proceed to the final qualitative synthesis since they demonstrated enough methodological rigor and direct relevance to the review's objectives.

Table 4. PRISMA Screening Summary

PRISMA Stage	Number of Records
Records identified through database searching	2,437
Records after date filtering	596
Records after Flags filtering	567
Records after document filtering	417
Record after subject matter filtering	85
Records after screening the abstract and title	45
Records excluded after full text screening	18
Records including 2 additional studies	20
Studies included after quality assessment	17

Table 4 highlights the PRISMA-based screening and selection procedures. The initial search yielded 2,437 studies utilizing database and registry searching methodologies. Sequential filtering based on publication year, with flags for only including open access, abstracts, and full-text research. Furthermore, we filtered the documents by type, topic matter, title, and abstract relevance, eligibility requirements, and quality evaluation technique, resulting in 17 high-quality research included in the final qualitative synthesis.

Quality Assessment

The quality assessment can be conducted using a custom Quality Assessment (QA) checklist adapted from established SLR guidelines. The purpose of this assessment is to evaluate the methodological quality, relevance, and contribution of each selected study before it is included in the final synthesis. The assessment evaluated the factors influencing Business Process Outsourcing employees' shift to virtual assistance. Seven predefined quality assessment criteria were used throughout the evaluation process.

Table 5. Quality Assessment Criteria

Code	Quality Assessment Questions
QA1	Was the study clearly related to BPO employees and their transition into Virtual Assistance?
QA2	Was the research objective clearly stated and aligned with the study topic?
QA3	Was the research design appropriate and the methodology clearly described?
QA4	Were the factors influencing transition clearly identified and supported by evidence?

QA5	Were key issues such as compensation, work-life balance, career growth, skills, or work environment discussed?
QA6	Were limitations, barriers, or contextual influences adequately addressed?
QA7	Were the conclusions consistent with the findings and useful for the SLR topic?

Three reviewers conducted an independent quality evaluation to improve inter-review reliability and reduce evaluator bias. Each reviewer used the predefined criteria to all of the papers that were initially included.

Table 6. Quality Assessment Results

Reviewer	Number of Papers	Studies Above 57% Threshold	Percentage
Reviewer 1	20	16	80%
Reviewer 2	20	17	85%
Reviewer 3	20	12	60%

The quality evaluation results showed good methodological consistency among reviewers. Following consensus appraisal, papers that consistently demonstrated lower methodological quality and poor alignment with RQ1 and RQ2 were eliminated from the final synthesis. As a result, the ultimate evidence base contained of 17 high-quality studies.

Data Synthesis

A theme synthesis approach was used to assess and integrate the findings from the 17 articles included in the final review. This method permitted the identification of recurring trends, linkages, and concepts linked to the factors influencing the transition of Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) staff to Virtual Assistance (VA), as well as the problems experienced during the process. The synthesis was carried out in three stages: (1) extracting essential data from each study, (2) coding recurring concepts, and (3) developing overarching themes that fit with the research goals.

The analysis yielded two key categories in response to the research questions: variables influencing the transition from BPO employment to virtual support, and challenges and risks associated with the transition.

RESULTS

A total of 17 studies published between 2021 and 2026 met the inclusion criteria and passed the quality assessment methodology. The selected studies investigated various aspects of remote work, freelancing, virtual assistance, career mobility, digital labor platforms, and workforce transformation that are relevant to the transition of Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) employees into Virtual Assistance (VA) roles.

The included studies utilized a variety of research approaches, including qualitative interviews, quantitative surveys, mixed-methods research, case studies, and empirical investigations. Most research looked at employee incentives, work arrangements, technical readiness, freelancing prospects, job satisfaction, and career advancement in digital work environments.

Through independent reviewer evaluation using predetermined quality assessment criteria, papers with lower methodological rigor, insufficient relevance to workforce transition and career mobility, or inconsistent alignment with the research questions were excluded from the final synthesis. The retained studies provided a sufficiently broad and methodologically sound evidence base to address RQ1 (factors influencing BPO employees' transition to virtual assistance) and RQ2 (challenges and risk factors associated with the transition from BPO work to virtual assistance).

Table 7. Final Included Studies After Quality Assessment and Reviewer Consolidation

Study	Methodology	Primary Focus	Alignment	Reviewer Notes	Inclusion Decision
Pavithra et al. (2022)	Quantitative Survey	Workforce learning and career adaptation	RQ1	High relevance to employee career mobility and skill development.	Included
Tong et al. (2021)	Empirical Quantitative Study	Digital transformation and workforce strategy	RQ1	Provides evidence on changing employment structures.	Included
Dembińska et al. (2022)	Survey Research	Employee well-being and work environment	RQ1, RQ2	Supports flexibility and quality-of-life themes.	Included
von Richthofen et al. (2022)	Empirical Study	AI adoption and digital work transformation	RQ1, RQ2	Directly supports digital workforce transition themes.	Included

Parmelee and Greer (2023)	Content Analysis	Corporate adaptation during COVID-19	RQ2	Demonstrates increased acceptance of remote work models.	Included
Kim & Yang (2022)	Quantitative Survey	Remote work satisfaction and employee outcomes	RQ1, RQ2	Strong support for remote-work motivations.	Included
Patel et al. (2021)	Mixed Methods	Information systems and digital work practices	RQ1, RQ2	Supports technology-enabled employment transitions.	Included
Zaporowska and Szczepański (2022)	Case Study	Process improvement in service organizations	RQ1	Useful for identifying push factors from traditional employment.	Included
Paudel & Kumar (2021)	Quantitative Research	Digital transformation and workforce performance	RQ1, RQ2	Supports employability and career transition readiness.	Included
Beerepoot and Oprins (2022)	Empirical Study	Information systems and remote collaboration	RQ1, RQ2	Relevant to technology-supported remote careers.	Included
	Quantitative Study	Digital technologies and workforce interaction	RQ1	Supports technological readiness findings.	Included

Nirala et al. (2022)			, R Q 2		I u d e d
Trittin-Ulbrich et al. (2022)	Conceptual/Empirical Study	Ethics and future of work	R Q 2	Important evidence regarding risks of independent work.	I n c l u d e d
Staniec (2021)	Quantitative Study	Digital platforms and information work	R Q 1 , R Q 2	Supports virtual assistance ecosystem.	I n c l u d e d
Anshari et al. (2022)	Empirical Research	Digital transformation and workforce adaptation	R Q 1 , R Q 2	Relevant to digital skill development.	I n c l u d e d
Nguyen and Beimborn (2022)	Survey Research	Sustainable employment and remote work	R Q 1 , R Q 2	Supports long-term attractiveness of virtual work.	I n c l u d e d
Oprins (2026)	Qualitative Study	Future of work and platform labor	R Q 1 , R Q 2	Highly relevant to both research questions.	I n c l u d e d
Gatuslao (2025)	Empirical Study	Employment trends and digital entrepreneurship	R Q 1 , R	Directly supports transition to self-managed virtual careers.	I n c l u d

			Q 2		e d
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Table 7 shows the seventeen papers that were maintained following the quality assessment and reviewer consolidation procedure. These studies were selected for their methodological rigor, relevance to the research objectives, and ability to provide evidence answering the two research questions: (RQ1) the factors influencing BPO employees' transition to virtual assistance, and (RQ2) the challenges and risks associated with that transition.

The included studies used a wide range of research methods, including quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, mixed-methods approaches, case studies, empirical investigations, and conceptual analyses. This methodological diversity enhanced the review by offering both statistical evidence and in-depth insights into workforce transformation, remote work adoption, digital labor platforms, and job mobility.

RQ1: Factors influencing Business Process Outsourcing employee’s transition to virtual assistance Outcomes

The findings indicate that career development and learning opportunities, work-life balance and flexibility, economic and entrepreneurial motivations, technological readiness and digital competence, autonomy, and organizational constraints collectively influence the decision of Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) employees to transition into virtual assistance. These factors reflect broader transformations in the digital economy, where workers increasingly seek flexible, technology-enabled, and self-directed forms of employment.

Career advancement and learning opportunities emerged as one of the strongest motivations. Pavithra et al. (2022) found that employees pursuing professional growth and skill development perceived alternative digital work arrangements as offering broader learning opportunities than traditional employment settings. Similarly, Paudel and Kumar (2021) reported that digital work environments create new avenues for career mobility that are often constrained within conventional organizational structures.

Work-life balance and flexibility also featured prominently across the reviewed studies. Dembińska et al. (2022) observed that many workers prioritize flexibility and personal well-being when evaluating career options. Kim and Yang (2022) further demonstrated that flexible scheduling and greater control over work arrangements significantly contribute to employee satisfaction in remote work environments. Likewise, Nguyen and Beimborn (2022) highlighted that flexibility remains a key attraction of digital and impact-sourcing employment models.

Economic and entrepreneurial motivations constituted another important factor. Tong et al. (2021) showed that technological and organizational changes encourage workers to explore alternative employment arrangements beyond traditional organizational boundaries. Similarly, Gatuslao (2025) identified entrepreneurial aspirations and income-generating opportunities as important drivers influencing workers to pursue more independent and self-managed careers.

Technological readiness and digital competence served as critical enablers of transition. von Richthofen et al. (2022) demonstrated that successful adaptation to technology-driven work environments depends heavily on digital readiness and the ability to work alongside emerging technologies. Comparable findings were reported by Patel et al. (2021), who emphasized the importance of technological competence in digitally mediated work environments, and by Anshari et al. (2022), who linked digital transformation with workforce adaptability and knowledge development.

Autonomy and organizational constraints also emerged as significant influences. Zaporowska and Szczepański (2022) found that dissatisfaction with organizational limitations and rigid work structures can encourage workers to seek alternative employment arrangements. Similarly, Oprins (2026) identified autonomy, flexibility, and greater control over work activities as central motivations among individuals participating in platform-based and freelance labor markets.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that the transition from BPO employment to virtual assistance is rarely driven by a single factor. Rather, it reflects the interaction of professional aspirations, lifestyle considerations, economic opportunities, technological capabilities, and the desire for greater autonomy within an increasingly digital labor market.

Table 8. Factors influencing Business Process Outsourcing employee's transition to virtual assistance Themes and Outcomes

Study	Primary Focus	Key Findings	Outcomes
Pavithra et al. (2022)	Workforce learning and career adaptation	Career development opportunities and learning paths drive career mobility; employees viewing virtual assistance as offering more diverse learning paths than traditional BPO roles	Career development and learning opportunities are the strongest driver of transition; skill advancement and career mobility are primary motivations
Paudel, S., & Kumar, V. (2021)	Digital transformation and workforce performance	Career opportunities in digital work attract BPO employees; digital work creates new career opportunities that conventional employment structures limit	Career development and learning opportunities drive transition; new career opportunities in digital work attract BPO employees
Dembińska et al. (2022)	Employee well-being and work environment	Work-life balance is primary motivation for remote work; work-life balance motivations outweigh compensation concerns for transitioning employees	Work-life balance and flexibility rank as second strongest factor; balance motivations outweigh compensation for many transitioning employees
Kim & Yang (2022)	Remote work satisfaction and employee outcomes	Flexibility and autonomy drive satisfaction; quantitative data showing autonomy and flexible scheduling as primary satisfaction drivers in remote work	Work-life balance and flexibility are primary satisfaction drivers; autonomy and flexible scheduling motivate transition decisions
Staniec, I. (2021)	Lean Management in Shared Services	Dissatisfaction with organizational constraints and rigid processes pushes employees toward flexible employment; organizational constraints motivate departure from traditional employment	Autonomy and organizational constraints function as push factors; dissatisfaction with organizational constraints motivates departure from traditional employment
Tong et al. (2021)	Digital transformation and workforce strategy	Organizational and economic drivers push workers toward independent employment; changing employment structures favor flexibility over traditional roles	Economic and organizational drivers push workers toward independent employment structures; conventional employment limitations motivate transition
Gatuslao, J. de la T. (2025).	Employment trends and digital entrepreneurship	Entrepreneurial motivations and income potential attract workers to self-managed careers; entrepreneurial motivations and income potential attract BPO workers	Economic and entrepreneurial motivations influence decisions significantly; entrepreneurial motivations and income potential attract workers to self-managed careers entrepreneurial motivations and income potential attract workers to self-managed careers
Oprins, J. H. (2026).	Future of work and platform labor	Autonomy and flexible employment drive platform labor adoption;	Autonomy and organizational constraints function as core values;

		autonomy is a core value driving platform labor adoption	autonomy drives platform labor adoption and transition decisions
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This information source provides sufficient variation across quantitative surveys, empirical studies, and qualitative research to support credible conclusions for RQ1.

RQ2: Challenges and risks are associated with the transition from BPO work to virtual assistance.

According to the analyzed studies, transitioning from BPO employment to virtual assistance offers greater flexibility and autonomy but also introduces several challenges that may affect career stability and long-term sustainability (Pavithra et al., 2022; Tong et al., 2021; Kim & Yang, 2022; Oprins, 2026).

Financial uncertainty emerged as one of the most significant concerns. Unlike salaried BPO positions, virtual assistance often involves fluctuating workloads and irregular income streams, particularly during the early stages of establishing a client base (Paudel & Kumar, 2021; Oprins, 2026). Furthermore, independent workers frequently lack employment benefits such as health insurance, paid leave, and retirement plans, increasing their financial vulnerability and exposure to economic risks (Dembińska et al., 2022; Trittin-Ulbrich et al., 2022; Nguyen & Beimborn, 2022).

Another challenge involves securing clients within highly competitive online labor markets. Studies on online freelancing and digital labor indicate that technical expertise alone is often insufficient for success. Workers must also develop strong networking capabilities, personal branding strategies, and client relationship management skills to establish credibility and maintain a sustainable flow of work opportunities (Beerepoot & Oprins, 2022; Oprins, 2026; Staniec, 2021).

The findings further emphasize the importance of self-management. Remote work arrangements can blur the boundaries between professional and personal life, increasing the likelihood of stress, overwork, and productivity-related challenges when appropriate coping mechanisms are not in place (Kim & Yang, 2022; Dembińska et al., 2022; Parmelee & Greer, 2023). The absence of direct organizational supervision may also require workers to exercise greater discipline, time management, and personal accountability.

Rapid technological change presents an additional challenge. Several studies highlighted the need for continuous learning and ongoing skill development to remain competitive in technology-driven labor markets. Workers are expected to adapt to evolving digital platforms, communication technologies, artificial intelligence tools, and changing client expectations (Tong et al., 2021; Patel et al., 2021; von Richthofen et al., 2022; Anshari et al., 2022; Nirala et al., 2022).

Overall, the transition to virtual assistance provides opportunities for greater independence and career flexibility while simultaneously exposing workers to financial uncertainty, employment insecurity, market competition, and the ongoing demands of professional reinvention. Long-term success, therefore, depends not only on technical competence but also on adaptability, resilience, entrepreneurial capabilities, and a commitment to continuous learning (Pavithra et al., 2022; Trittin-Ulbrich et al., 2022; Oprins, 2026).

Table 8. Challenges and risks are associated with the transition from BPO work to virtual assistance.

Study	Influencing Factors	Key Findings	Impact
Dembińska et al. (2022)	Employee well-being and work conditions	Remote work improves flexibility but may create psychological strain and reduced organizational support.	Identifies work-life boundary issues, reduced organizational support, and employment security concerns.

Parmelee et al. (2023)	Corporate responses to changing work environments	Remote work arrangements require greater employee self-management and accountability.	Reveals risks related to productivity management, professional isolation, and self-discipline.
Kim & Yang (2022)	Remote work satisfaction and outcomes	Flexible work arrangements may blur personal and professional boundaries.	Highlights stress, burnout, and self-management challenges associated with remote work.
Paudel & Kumar (2021)	Ethics and future employment models	Independent workers often experience fewer protections than traditional employees.	Highlights employment precarity, lack of benefits, and job insecurity.
Staniec (2021)	Digital platforms and information work	Platform-based work increases competition among workers.	Demonstrates challenges related to client acquisition and intense market competition.
Zaporowska & Szczepański (2022)	Sustainable employment practices	Flexible work can improve autonomy but may reduce employment stability.	Highlights the trade-off between independence and employment security.
Oprins, J. H. (2026).	Platform labor and future work	Independent workers experience income volatility and limited labor protections.	Provides strong evidence of financial risk, employment insecurity, and vulnerability in platform work.
Gatuslao, J. de la T. (2025).	Digital transformation and workforce restructuring	Technological changes reshape job roles and require workers to acquire new competencies.	Demonstrates the risk of skill obsolescence and the need for continuous upskilling.
Patel et al. (2021)	Digital work and information systems	Digital work success depends on technological competence and system adaptability.	Identifies technology-related barriers and continuous learning demands.

The findings shows that the strongest evidence suggests that although virtual assistance offers greater flexibility and autonomy, it also exposes workers to financial risks, employment precarity, intense market competition, self-management pressures, and the ongoing need for continuous skill development.

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that the transition from BPO employment to virtual assistance is best understood as part of a broader shift in how work is organized and valued in the digital economy. The reviewed studies do not portray workers as simply leaving one occupation for another. Rather, they reveal a movement toward work arrangements that offer greater control over time, location, and professional direction.

One of the more interesting patterns across the literature is the tension between flexibility and security. Workers are drawn to virtual assistance because it promises a degree of freedom that is often difficult to achieve in conventional BPO environments. Flexible schedules, remote work arrangements, and the possibility of selecting clients create a sense of autonomy that many employees find attractive. At the same time, the very features that make virtual assistance appealing also remove many of the safeguards traditionally associated with employment. Stable income, organizational support, and employment benefits are often exchanged for independence and flexibility.

The findings also indicate that economic motivations should not be viewed in isolation. Although higher earning potential frequently appeared in the reviewed studies, financial considerations were closely intertwined with lifestyle preferences and career aspirations. For some workers, virtual assistance represents an opportunity to improve income. For others, it serves as a means of achieving better work-life integration or escaping

organizational constraints. This suggests that career transition decisions are shaped by a combination of economic, personal, and professional factors rather than by financial incentives alone.

Another recurring issue concerns the role of skills. The evidence demonstrates that competencies developed in BPO environments particularly communication, customer service, problem-solving, and digital literacy provide a strong foundation for virtual assistance work. However, possessing transferable skills does not guarantee a smooth transition. Workers must often acquire additional competencies related to self-marketing, client management, entrepreneurship, and digital platform navigation. In this respect, success appears to depend not only on technical expertise but also on the ability to adapt to a more self-directed career model.

The findings emphasize the expanding impact of technology on job mobility. Digital platforms, communication tools, and online markets have reduced the barriers to entry, making remote employment opportunities more accessible than in past decades. However, technology also introduces new pressures. Workers are required to constantly update their expertise, adapt to new tools, and maintain competitiveness in quickly changing markets. As a result, professional sustainability is increasingly reliant on ongoing learning rather than a permanent set of certifications.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that the transition from BPO employment to virtual assistance reflects broader changes in contemporary work. Flexibility, autonomy, and digital connectivity create new opportunities, but these opportunities are accompanied by increased responsibility and uncertainty. The transition, therefore, represents both an opportunity for empowerment and a source of vulnerability.

Limitations

This systematic literature review has a few limitations. First, the review relied mainly on Lens.org as an indexing engine, which may have had restricted retrieval coverage despite aggregating several scholarly sources. Second, the review only considered English-language research published between 2021 and 2026, potentially omitting significant older or non-English literature. Third, the review focused only on peer-reviewed journal and conference proceedings articles, excluding gray literature, industry reports, and practitioner publications that may provide additional organizational insights. Fourth, while the study used independent reviewer assessment techniques, qualitative synthesis and thematic interpretation may still have elements of subjective interpretation. Finally, the review focused on the motives, possibilities, problems, and dangers connected with transformation. Long-term outcomes such as career sustainability, salary growth, psychological well-being, and professional happiness received less focus over time. These places are yet underexplored and merit additional exploration.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review sought to identify the elements that influence Business Process Outsourcing employees' transition to virtual support, as well as the obstacles that come with it. Following the PRISMA 2020 framework and drawing on findings from seventeen studies, this study sheds light on how workers navigate emerging opportunities in an increasingly digital labor market.

The data suggest that the appeal of virtual assistance goes beyond the potential of increased profits. Flexibility, professional autonomy, enhanced work-life integration, and access to worldwide employment prospects all add to the appeal of this career path. Workers frequently see virtual assistance as a method to have more control over their professional lives while applying abilities learned via past BPO experience.

At the same time, the transition is accompanied by significant uncertainties. Income instability, the absence of traditional employment protections, intense market competition, and the need for continuous learning remain persistent challenges. The evidence suggests that success in virtual assistance depends not only on technical competence but also on adaptability, resilience, and the ability to operate within increasingly competitive digital environments.

More broadly, the review illustrates how technological change is reshaping employment relationships. The movement from organizational employment to independent digital work reflects larger transformations occurring

across the global workforce. As opportunities for remote and platform-based work continue to expand, understanding both the advantages and risks of these career pathways becomes increasingly important for workers, employers, educators, and policymakers.

Future research would benefit from longitudinal studies that follow former BPO employees over time. Such work could provide a deeper understanding of career sustainability, financial outcomes, and the long-term implications of transitioning into virtual assistance within the evolving digital economy.

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