

## **The Impact of Job Related Factors, Job Context and Work Design on Job Satisfaction in Australian Call Centres**

John Annakis\*

*Past empirical research related to call centres' has had a preoccupation with panoptic extrapolations and suggestions of stereotyping of call centres using 'sacrificial HR' strategies that encourage, high staff turnover, absenteeism and stress as the norm. The aim of this research is to investigate the nature and extent of job related factors on job satisfaction for customer service representatives (CSR's) in five Australian call centres. The study used a broad sample to capture the diversity of call centre structures which included different industries and work designs -inbound, outbound and outsourced call centres. The study used a mixed methods approach of an adapted Job satisfaction quantitative survey N= 205 and in-depth and focus groups N= 60 in five diverse Australian call centres. The study found that, CSR's perception of fairness, equity and relevance of monitoring practices, together with a participative work environment and flexible work life balance practices are the most important contributors to job satisfaction. The findings also suggest that the manner in which work is designed has an impact on CSR satisfaction levels which appear to be higher for inbound CSR's as contrasted to outbound cold-calling and sales, and blended approaches. The study concludes that utilizing a mixed methodology has unearthed nuances in the data that confirm and extend the extant literature of call centres. In particular organisations that embark on a 'one size fits all' HR strategy by ignoring these job related factors could eventually face further problems such as high staff turnover associated costs and potential sacrificial customer service strategies that will impact on the bottom line.*

### **1. Introduction**

Call centres have been described as 'modern day sweatshops' by some labour process writers and alternatively by management and government as enlightened workplaces of the future, offering semi-skilled and low skilled workers modern workplaces and job opportunities (Bain & Taylor 2004). The characteristics of work have been identified by researchers as often including intense monitoring, repetition and a focus on quantitative output at the expense of quality customer service and employee well-being. The extant research suggests that call centres are not all managed the same and diversity exists amongst managerial control mechanisms and so too employee responses to these control mechanisms. Research related to call centres' preoccupation with panoptic extrapolations and suggestions of stereotyping of all call centres using 'sacrificial HR' strategies as the norm has been refuted to a large extent Russell (2008).

The outcomes of poor managerial practices and situational factors associated with working in a call centre results in customer service representatives (CSR),

---

\*Dr. John Annakis, Lecturer in HRM & Organisational Studies, Faculty of Business & Enterprise Swinburne University of Technology, Mail Number H23 PO Box 218 Hawthorn, VIC, Australia 3122. Email: [jannakis@swin.edu.au](mailto:jannakis@swin.edu.au). Telephone: +613 -9214 5311 Fax: + 613 9819 2117 Mobile: 0430276444

## Annakis

employers and consumers alike complaining of poor quality service, high turnover, absenteeism and stress. Management may not be cognisant of how poorly matched their strategies are to combat such problems or that they adopt a deliberate sacrificial approach as external labour market conditions and customer tolerance perpetuates a minimum standards approach to managing profitability. However listening to key stakeholders attitudes and opinions to managerial practices and how CSRs interpret these in their working lives could assist management in meeting CSRs expectations of performing their role and improving job satisfaction and the overall customer service encounter. The motivation for this study initially was to provide further investigation of call centres in Australia which was clearly lacking in the literature and also explore whether utilizing a mixed methodology in the research investigation could unearth any nuances in that data that confirm and extend the extant literature of call centres.

This paper initially provides a context for research an extensive literature review followed by stating the research problem and justification of using a mixed methodological approach. Finally the results are stated together with the testing of hypothesis culminating in a discussion of managerial implications of this study and future research.

## 2. Context of Research

Australia has experienced exponential growth of call centre operations, with similar trends reflected overseas. It is estimated that there are some 4,000 call centres that employ around 250,000 employees and that 24% of Australian call centres operate in more than one country (ATA, 2008). This equates to 1.4 percent of the Australian workforce and represents the second largest percentage of a country's workforce in call centre employment, behind the U.S. at 1.7 percent (Barnes, 2007). The industry handled 77% of all customer interaction which equated to around 16 million calls a day. It is estimated the industry contributed over \$15 billion in value a year with \$9.1 billion of this in wages and other HR expenses (ATA, 2008).

Outsourcing in Australian call centres is estimated at around 20%, however this trend has stabilised as call centres embark on the use of more multi-channel strategies such as web based non-phone channels. Two significant drivers for outsourcing are to reduce labour costs and gaining access to the latest technology (Call centres.net 2011). In Australia, call centres handle 20 million customer service interactions per day across all channels including voice, online, correspondence, social media and smartphone apps. Despite pure self-service web based channels being 6% of total transactions in Australian call centres, compared to Mexico at 17% of total transactions and Brazil 10%. This trend is predicted to grow both locally and internationally. On average Australian and U.S. call centres utilise 3.2 transaction channels, whereas some countries where outsourcing is also growing, experience double digit growth of call centre transaction use on average 4.75 channels including increasing use of virtual channels such as social media and mobile apps. Another important impetus for change of business strategy and technology is that customer satisfaction levels are more than adequate when it relates to basic service transactions such as updating information, confirmation of information, sales/purchase but lower for call centres transactions relating to service issue or complaint, billing enquiry, general enquiries. The industry suggests that

## Annakis

customer service satisfaction is highest with web-self service, phone and social media and less with virtual platforms ([callcentres.net/fifthquadrant/Papers](http://callcentres.net/fifthquadrant/Papers)).

Taylor & Bain (2005) define call centres as “a dedicated operation in which computers utilising employees receive inbound or make outbound telephone calls”. It is expected that the definition of call centres will change as technology and organisational structures advance. Contact centres are a recent definition offered by some industry groups (Kinnie, Purcell, & Adams, 2008). According to a recent global study (Holman, Batt and Holtgrewe, 2007: 40), call centres tend to lose a fifth of their employees on average every year, but in some countries, and particularly in the outsourced sector where labour conditions are harsher, the figure is much higher. In Irish outsourced call centres the turnover rate is 35 percent per year, and in the United States it is 36 percent. In India official figures are of 30-40 per cent, but the real rate has been estimated at 65 to 75 per cent, and exceeding 100 per cent at some companies (Bain and Taylor, 2008: 39). Some recent trends of running prison call centres at costs of up to 30 cents per inmate hour have alarmed trade unions that some call centre operators are exploiting the cost differential and jeopardising local jobs.

However little attention has been given to explain how this type of work influences the overall well-being of CSRs despite the higher turnover rates relative to other industries. The literature suggests that work roles that are designed to suit principles of ‘economic rationalism’ (the maximisation of profit by minimising costs) can lead to negative effects on employee well-being (job satisfaction). Call centre work roles are considered to be based on such principles where workers engage in repetitive, monotonous, highly monitored and pressured short-cycled routine customer transactions. The demands experienced by call centre operators have been reported to lead to stress, anxiety, manifesting in poor states of well-being and high rates of turnover. The impact on the worker role has implications for employee well-being and the financial viability of the call centre.

### 3. Literature Review

Empirically based job satisfaction research within the call centre environment has been limited to only a few studies. Lower perceived levels of job satisfaction has been associated with low job commitment (Deery & Kinnie, 2004), lower job performance higher absence frequency Barnes (2007), higher turnover intent (Zapf, Isic, Bechtoldt, & Blau, 2003) and higher rates of turnover (Folkedal, Vaag, Halvar, & Svebak, 2000). The above findings suggest that low job satisfaction could be detrimental to the profitability of business operating through a function of employee withdrawal. Research on human resource practices and team leader support has demonstrated that these factors can have a positive effect on well-being and job satisfaction. Perceived fairness of payment system, the adequacy of training and usefulness of performance appraisal system has been positively associated to job satisfaction (Grebner et al., 2003) promotional opportunities, control over skill use, distributive justice, supervisory support, social interaction, autonomy and training (Walsh & Deery, 2006). Russell (2008) agrees that the majority of call centre research and job satisfaction has focused on managerial attitudes, theoretical extrapolations, and call centre typologies from a management Perspective even though definitions of job satisfaction clearly recognise the importance of CSR attitudes.

## Annakis

Recent literature on call centres published from 2006-2008 has taken past research and has investigated common themes in international contexts. The models and theories explored have not moved on and researchers are now attempting to test the common themes identified in an international context. Holman, Batt & Holtgrewe (2007) international study of call centres identified that countries with deregulated IR practices had higher agent volumes in terms of intensity, lower flexibility and higher reported absenteeism and turnover, less worker participation than social market driven countries (Northern European) which operated call centres. Walsh & Deery (2006) made a comparative analysis of Australian and Indian Call centres and identified that both of them exhibited very low incidence of professional service models and adopted transactional based, low discretion call operations Taylor & Bain (2006), Kinnie et al (2008). Russell's (2008) review of over a decade of research in call centres concluded that there was a distinct gap in the literature of empirically based research on HRM and intrinsic and extrinsic areas of work and how this relates to job satisfaction of CSR's.

The literature review shows that the explanation of the factors that impact on CSR job satisfaction are more complex than previously expected by past researchers. (Lewig & Dollard, 2003) suggest using a multi-dimensional measuring approach is warranted, which should include factors that incorporate extrinsic, intrinsic and social conditions of the labour processes of work and relations. Noting the absence of other more comprehensive models in the literature, an adapted version of (Rose & Wright, 2005) model appears to be an appropriate model to be used in this study to predict factors related to job satisfaction.

There has also been considerable debate over the links between HR policy and organisational performance, which has been based on the distinction between two particular approaches, 'best fit' and 'best practice' perspectives (Kinnie et al., 2008). Grebner et al. (2003) argue that performance is maximised when the HR practices are consistent with the business strategy. (URCOT, 2000) union study of 13 call centres in Australia investigated the determinants of job quality using an ethnographic approach and the unit of analysis being CSRs perceptions to well-being. They contend that employees reported high stress levels, associated with unrealistic targets, insufficient frequency, duration and timing of breaks, absence of over-time payments, tight monitoring, inflexible leave arrangements, lack of career and training prospects and occupational health and safety concerns. In essence the limitations or problems of past studies have included inconsistency in measures with a preoccupation of either quantitative or qualitative approaches, but not both and little inquiry or no inquiry into call centres across diverse industries.

### 4. Research Problem

The main aim of this research is to investigate the nature and extent of job related factors on psychological well-being (job satisfaction) of CSRs. The primary research question arising from the research, the literature review is: What are the factors that contribute towards CSR's perception of job satisfaction?

The secondary research questions arising from the literature review are:

1. How does electronic performance monitoring affect job satisfaction
2. How does work environment affect job satisfaction

## Annakis

3. How does flexibility affect job satisfaction
4. How does Performance Management System & HR affect job satisfaction
5. How do job benefits affect job satisfaction

The broad aims of the present study is to test the validity of (Rose & Wright, 2005) model in predicting job satisfaction in Australian Call Centres. The secondary aim is to extract from the literature other comprehensive factors associated with job satisfaction to be included in the proposed conceptual model to be tested as valid predictors of job satisfaction. Based on the above research questions the following hypotheses have been developed:

- H<sub>1</sub>:** Job Benefits are positively associated with Job Satisfaction
- H<sub>2</sub>:** Performance Management is positively associated to Job Satisfaction
- H<sub>3</sub>:** Employees' Control of Environment is directly and positively associated with Job Satisfaction
- H<sub>4</sub>:** Monitoring is directly and positively associated to Job Satisfaction
- H<sub>5</sub>:** Flexibility is directly and positively associated to Job Satisfaction

The five employer control factors: monitoring of work and non-work matters including pace, intensity and other natures of call monitoring, work environment, flexibility, HRM & PMS, job benefits have a direct relationship to CSR's perception of job satisfaction. It is suggested that CSR's positive perceived assessment of control over these factors should contribute to job satisfaction. The dependent variable job satisfaction is multi-dimensional in nature which attempts to gauge intrinsic, extrinsic and social aspects of CSR's job satisfaction. The rationale as to why only five dimensions and their sub-elements were used include that they are drawn from directly from the empirical literature on call centres and job satisfaction (Russell, 2008).

## 5. Methodology

The study used a mixed methods approach of an adapted Job satisfaction quantitative survey N= 205 and in-depth and focus groups N= 60 in five diverse Australian call centres. After approaching some twenty call centre companies of different sizes, industries including private, public, local, national and international, in-house, outsourced. Five call centres agreed to participate in the survey. The questionnaires for this study were distributed using random and snowball sampling techniques. The final sample included respondents from metropolitan Melbourne call centres within the state of Victoria. Questionnaires were completed and were returned by mail to a specific post office box address in a self-addressed reply paid envelope to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Of the 246 questionnaires distributed for this study, 210 were returned and 5 incomplete questionnaires were discarded giving a response rate of 83%.

The reasons that the study period was over a long period (2007-2009) were threefold, which included the difficulty of gaining access to organisations, their busy work schedules, revisiting firms to conduct further research in the form of focus groups with a similar or the same sample of participants in order to triangulate the data results. The rationale for sample size chosen (of over 200 participants) included fitting within the statistical borderline to conduct multivariate analysis in particular Structural Equation Modelling (Yin 2003). The rationale for using a multi-

## Annakis

methods strategy was seen to be advantageous in that it gave the researcher a feel for the key issues, enabled the triangulation of results, allowing for verification, comparison, corroboration and the development of convergent lines of inquiry (Cavana, Delayhe & Sekaran 2001).

The identification of variables & their specifications were chosen based on where comparable measures and factor loadings were available in the empirical research from a limited amount of call centre studies (Rose & Wright, 2005; Holman, 2002; Deery et al 2002). The dependent variable Job Satisfaction has been widely investigated in the literature with available tested measures and factor loadings, the rationale for choosing the five independent variables were based on previous studies and emerging trends in the literature (Russell 2008). However these independent variables don't all have consistent measures and factor loadings available to the researcher, which was an impetus for the research to add value to the extant literature by embarking on such a level of inquiry.

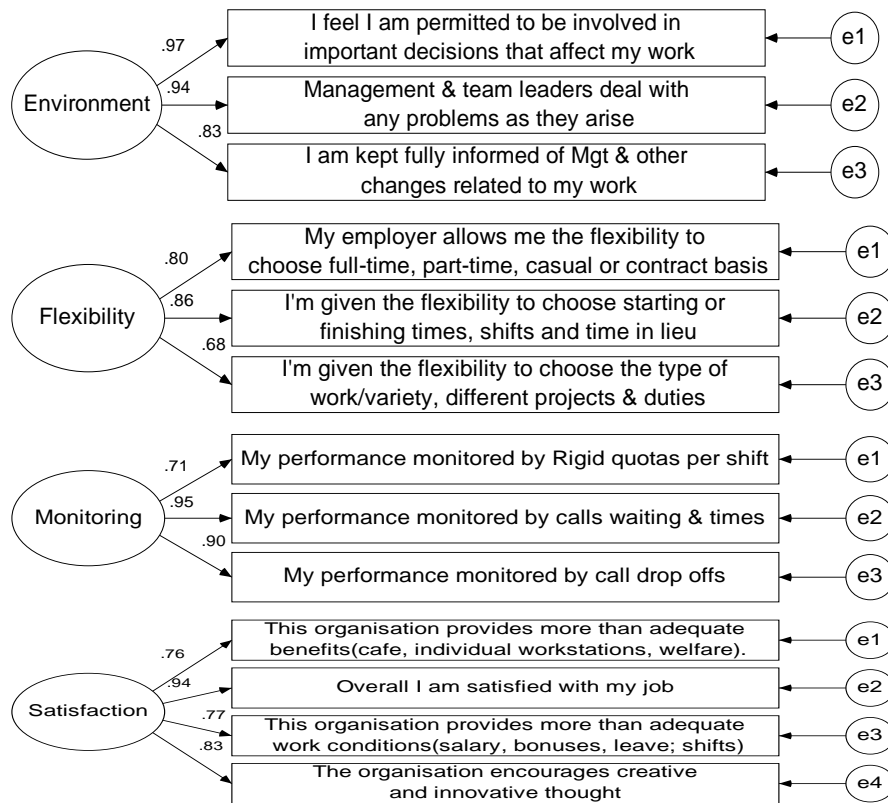
The variables selected were based on a review of the literature, where factor loadings were available to guide the researcher these were included where **no** such consistent measures were available questions were designed based on the wider qualitative literature in call centres.

Independent variable: 1) Monitoring and personal privacy included questions on perceptions of excessiveness of monitoring, satisfaction of monitoring ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ) Chalykoff & Kochan 1989); Targets pressure of monitoring ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ) Technological pressure of monitoring ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ) emotional pressure of monitoring ( $\alpha = 0.76$ ) Appropriateness of monitoring and invasion of privacy ( $\alpha = 0.76$ ) (Rose and Wright, 2005). Independent variable: 2) Work environment: involvement in changes and being informed ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ). Independent variable: 3) Flexibility: functional flexibility or Influence over range of work tasks (Rose and Wright, 2005 ( $\alpha = 0.80$ ) and methods ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ) (Holman 2002. Independent variable: 4) HRM and performance management Performance systems fairness and Training, Promotion opportunities ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ) (Holman, 2002). Deery et al 2002. Independent variable: 5) Job Benefits: Payment and bonus  $\alpha = 0.76$  Holman, 2000; (Warr et al, 1979). The Dependent Variable: Job satisfaction Intrinsic: Satisfaction with features integral to the work itself (variety, opportunity to use one's skills, autonomy)  $\alpha = 0.88$  and extrinsic: Satisfaction with features external to the work itself (pay, opportunities for advancement, the way the firm is managed)  $\alpha = 0.80$ .

## 6. Results

Exploratory factor analysis was initially utilized to investigate the underlying structure of the relatively large set of variables (39 variables) contained within the study. After an oblimin rotation nine factors emerged explaining 67% of the variation. Four of these factors corresponding to job satisfaction (9 items), Monitoring (5 items), Environment (6 items) and Flexibility (5 items) were the main ones. The remaining five factors were poorly represented with only one item having a loading above 0.40 in each case. After removing these items and items with low loadings, a test for discriminant validity resulted in the removal of more items. Next the four factors were tested for validity using Confirmatory Factor Analysis. During this process a few more items were eliminated.

Figure 1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis



Job Satisfaction (chi-square = .85, df = 2, p = .652, RMSEA = 0, GFI = .998)

As the results indicate the GFI represents a good approximation of the data with RMSEA <.05. The factor coefficients ranged from a low of .83 to a high of .97. Given that these coefficients are of reasonable magnitude the items were retained with the data showing a good fit to the model. This is a saturation model as there were only 3 items left. A second Exploratory Factor Analysis of the remaining 13 items was conducted, which explained 65% of the total variance. Based on the findings from Pattern and Structure Matrix, the 13 items are presented with Cronbach Alpha's for factors. The relatively high Cronbach alpha coefficients indicate satisfactory internal consistency and reliability the four factors. Monitoring items: Performance monitored by calls waiting & times; Performance monitored by the number of call drop offs Performance monitored by rigid quotas per shift. Cronbach Alpha 0.888. Environment items : I feel I am permitted to be involved in decisions that affect my work; Management & team leaders deal with any problems as they arise; I am kept fully informed of management & other changes related to my work; Cronbach Alpha., 0.936. Flexibility items: I'm given the flexibility to chose starting/finishing times, shifts & time-in-lieu; My employer allows me the flexibility to chose full-time, part-time, casual or contract basis; I'm given the flexibility to chose the type of work/variety, different projects & duties. Cronbach Alpha, 0.821.

# Annakis

**Table 1: Implied Correlations to check Discriminant Validity**

Construct	Environment	Flexibility	Monitoring	Satisfaction
<b>Environment</b>	1.000			
<b>Flexibility</b>	.685	1.000		
<b>Monitoring</b>	-.544	-.373	1.000	
<b>Satisfaction</b>	.730	.719	-.525	1.000
<b>Item (Satisfaction)</b>				
<b>32</b> This organisation encourages <b>creative and innovate thought</b>	.607	.598	-.436	<b>.832</b>
<b>35</b> The organisation provides more than adequate <b>work conditions</b> (salary, bonuses, leave arrangements, shift rosters)	.554	.545	-.398	<b>.758</b>
<b>39</b> Overall I am satisfied with my job	.689	.678	-.495	<b>.944</b>
<b>37</b> The organisation provides more than adequate <b>benefits</b>	.553	.544	-.397	<b>.757</b>
<b>Item (Flexibility)</b>				
<b>23</b> My employer allows me the flexibility to chose the type of work/variety, work in different projects and undertake different duties	.500	<b>.731</b>	-.272	.526
<b>21</b> I feel I am given the flexibility to choice starting/finishing times, hours of work, particular shifts and time in lieu arrangements	.564	<b>.823</b>	-.307	.592
<b>20</b> My employer allows me the flexibility to chose whether I want to work either full-time; part-time, casual or contract status	.542	<b>.792</b>	-.295	.569
<b>Item (Environment)</b>				
<b>14</b> I feel I am kept fully informed of management or other changes that effect my work	<b>.828</b>	.567	-.451	.605
<b>18</b> I believe management and team leaders deal with any problems at work as they arise	<b>.939</b>	.643	-.511	.686
<b>19</b> I feel I am permitted to be involved in important decisions that effect my work	<b>.969</b>	.663	-.527	.708
<b>Item (Monitoring )</b>				
<b>3</b> Rigid quotas per shift are a criteria used to monitor my work performance	-.420	-.288	<b>.772</b>	-.405
<b>4</b> My work performance is being monitored by criteria on calls waiting and times	-.524	-.359	<b>.963</b>	-.505
<b>5</b> I feel my work performance is being monitored and assessed by the number of call drop-offs	-.470	-.322	<b>.864</b>	-.453

## Structural Equation Modelling

The four confirmatory factor analysis models (measurement models) were arranged sequentially as per the conceptual model in Figure 2. Chi-square = 91.149, df = 60, p 0.06, CMIN/DF = 1.519, GFI = .936, RMSEA = .050, CFI = .985. A good fit, this model explains 66% of the variation in job satisfaction.



Figure 2: Simple SEM regression model



### 7. Testing of Hypotheses

Table 2: Results of the testing of hypotheses

Hypotheses No.	Relationship	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Support for hypotheses
H <sub>3</sub>	Employees Control of Environment → Job Satisfaction	.295	.068	4.319	***	Hypotheses accepted
H <sub>4</sub>	Monitoring → Job Satisfaction	-.186	.068	-2.729	.006	Hypotheses rejected
H <sub>5</sub>	Flexibility → Job Satisfaction	.358	.075	4.765	***	Hypotheses accepted

The initial 5 hypotheses were reduced to 3. The two hypotheses which were eliminated (and hence rejected) during the first exploratory factor analysis, were:

- H<sub>1</sub>:** Job Benefits are positively associated with Job Satisfaction
  - H<sub>2</sub>:** Performance Management is positively associated to Job Satisfaction
- Hypotheses Testing using the Simple SEM regression model:
- H<sub>3</sub>:** Employees’ Control of Environment is directly and positively associated with Job Satisfaction
  - H<sub>4</sub>:** Monitoring is directly and positively associated to Job Satisfaction
  - H<sub>5</sub>:** Flexibility is directly and positively associated to Job Satisfaction

The initial model was used to test the hypotheses, basically a version of ‘t’ test is employed which uses critical ratios from the SEM. Rose (2005) in her study examined CSR perceptions into job satisfaction in U.S. call centres, what is particularly interesting is that 65% of variance was explained by using similar constructs to this study. Consistent with the findings of Rose (2000 & 2005) research, the results of the SEM in this study indicate that employer monitoring had a negative relationship to job satisfaction. Unlike the other factors explored and

## Annakis

their relationships the higher the perception of CSR's to the intensity of employer monitoring the more negative the relationship to overall job satisfaction. The results of the SEM conducted in this study indicate that the environment factor had a direct positive relationship to job satisfaction. Further descriptive analysis was undertaken to assess comparative and emerging trends across the sample.

**Table 3: MANOVA analysis for demographic variables**

	F-Statistic	p-value
Age	F(16,602) = 1.444	.115
Gender	F(4,200) = 1.65	.163
Employment	F(8,398) = .97	.047
Length of service	F(2,524) = 1.79	.047
Area of work	F(12,524) = 3.84	<.001
Industry sector	F(4,183) = 8.532	<.001
Type of education	F(17,524) = 2.106	.015

The MANOVA results for the four factors (satisfaction, monitoring, environment and flexibility) based on comparison of groups reveals only two significant areas based on p-value: area work and industry sector. The results reveal that there are no significant differences in the remaining groups in relation to the five factors (age, gender, employment, length of service and type of education).

**Table 4: Comparison of means for area of work**

Area of work		Satisfaction	Flexibility	Environment	Monitoring
Customer service Inbound	Mean	3.506	3.392	3.422	3.236
	N	79	79	79	79
	Std. Deviation	.811	.974	.929	.852
Direct sales outbound	Mean	3.209	3.139	2.992	3.535
	N	43	43	43	43
	Std. Deviation	1.068	1.108	.964	.855
Both (blended)	Mean	3.000	3.120	2.824	2.917
	N	36	36	36	36
	Std. Deviation	.980	1.147	1.037	.506
Other	Mean	2.910	2.787	3.163	3.277
	N	47	47	47	47
	Std. Deviation	.960	1.084	1.031	.888
Total	Mean	3.218	3.153	3.167	3.428
	N	205	205	205	205
	Std. Deviation	.960	1.077	.999	.845
F Statistic	F(3,201)	4.25	3.23	3.71	6.60
	p-value	.003	.024	.012	<.001
	Effect Size	.068	.046	.052	.090

Satisfaction is highest for customer service inbound. This is associated with higher flexibility, a better environment and less monitoring than is the case for direct sales outbound. The satisfaction and monitoring effect sizes are moderate, while the flexibility and environment effect sizes are slightly smaller. Where blending is part of the CSR role (inbound & outbound) satisfaction levels are also lower. Direct sales outbound and blended operators are monitored on quantitative and qualitative

## Annakis

criteria, there is pressure to sell and higher levels of customer abuse and rejections which could relate to lower job satisfaction rates.

Satisfaction is higher for the business services sector than the services/retail sector. This is associated with moderate effect sizes for more flexibility and less monitoring. Additionally, the invariance tests between the groups demonstrated the same constructs were also significant. An important finding from the invariance testing is that monitoring does not have a significant negative impact on job satisfaction, in the case of business services ( $p=.230$ ) but it does have a negative impact on job satisfaction in the case of services/retail ( $p=.003$ ). This could be attributed to the lower levels of monitoring experienced in the business services sector. In particular the two companies that fit into the services/retail (industry sector), also have higher levels of perceived employer monitoring and perceived negative effects of this monitoring on job satisfaction.

The second part of the study was undertaken using focus groups and semi-structured interviews at the five call centres. This methodology was considered appropriate as it caters for the multiplicity of 'reality' obtained through the subjective experiences, and allows for examination of the experiences of individuals, clarification and exploration of issues in the context of the individual and organisational level (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Table 5 below summarises the structure and HRM process of each of the five call centres which reveals diversity in their processes.

Focus group discussions from each call centre were analysed using content analysis procedures. Content analysis was used to analyse the open-ended text, identifying recurrent words and emerging themes (Patton 2002). Interpretations of responses were based on multiple readings of each question and their responses in order to capture a holistic image of participant's stories. Interpretations of parts were continuously compared to each other and the whole. Concepts were coded and categorised using standard content analysis techniques (Krippendorff 1980; Lincoln & Guba 1985).

## Annakis

**Table 5: Call centre characteristics: Structure and HRM processes**

Company	Insureco	Dynamico	Superco	Legalco	Researchco
<b>Nature of business</b>	Home and car insurance Sales	Outsourced Multiple product/service Sales/service	Member insurance service/sales	Public service Industrial relations advisory service	Market research company
<b>Structure/ Design</b>	In-house Inbound + Outbound	Outsourced Inbound + Outbound + Blended	In-house Inbound + Outbound	In-house Inbound	Outsourced Outbound
Opening hours	7 days 7-7	7 days 7-10	M-F 8-6	8.30-5.30	7days 7-7
<b>Characteristics of organisation Number</b>	500 seater National 80 seater home insurance 80 seater car insure	1,300 seater in 2005 grew to over 2,000 seats in 2008	5 state separate 40 seater	25 seater	60 seater
Average age	21	23	30	25	23
Attrition	30%	6-10%	5%	8%	20%
Management reported absenteeism of CSRs	High	Medium	Low	Low	Medium
Unsocial hours paid at premium	No	Yes (shift allowance)	Yes- Overtime allowance 1:5 first 2 hours 2:0 > 2hrs	Yes-Overtime allowance 1:5 first 2 hours 2:0 > 2hrs	No
<b>Monitoring of calls</b>	Random, no consent, no consultation	Consent with CSR	Consent with CSR and unions	Consent with CSR and unions	Random, no consent, no consultation
Monitoring Performance review based	Quantity number of calls, to sales, time	Quality less quantity	Quality	Quality and quantity	Quantity number of completions, time

(Source: Interviews with managers of call company and documentary materials).

The comparative analysis had the purpose of identifying key themes linked to CSRs' job satisfaction dimensions, looking for meaningful patterns and trends. The researcher grouped the core and emergent themes by dimension to assess their consistency with the literature and compare them with the quantitative results. Table 5 below shows that focus groups shared a very strong concern about the monotony of activities related to their job roles and the overall lack of functional flexibility (70%). This concern is already identified by most of the literature and is consistent as well with the quantitative results (58%). The qualitative information highlighted the important role that job rotation has in diminishing the sense of monotony. This is an emergent theme considered neither by the literature nor by the quantitative model. Lack of job rotation and skill development seems to be a constant theme across all the call centres, irrespective of the type of service delivered.

Quantitative results were strongly confirmed by the qualitative analysis in relation to: Monitoring where negative aspects related to intensity and the amount of criteria. The criteria viewed as most negative related to measuring and punishing call drop-offs, waiting times and ratios which appeared to be out of the control of most CSRs.

Some aspects were considered to be a legitimate part of work where management were entitled to assure safeguards in terms of quality assurance standards set by external agencies and customers alike. As depicted in Table 9 below another area

## Annakis

where monitoring was considered positive by CSRs in two call centres related to monitoring calls and work to maintain internal safeguards where it kept peers working equitably and discouraged some staff from 'slacking off' which could also be considered as peer pressure. Personal privacy became a concern for CSRs at Dynamico. Despite having facilities available to use during work time, in practice the intensity of the work prevented them from doing so. In two call centres the harsh policies related to preventing staff from using facilities to attend to non-work matters influenced the more negative responses with suggestions of unfairness and harshness from a 'societal justice perspective'.

What was consistent across four out of five call centres was lack of functional flexibility where the role became repetitive, intense and stressful. Numerical and temporal flexibility were concerns for three out of five call centres (Researchco, Insureco and Dynamico), CSRs generally feeling that management did not allow choice in the matter. Work environment including participation, involvement and being informed was a significant contributing factor associated to job satisfaction across all five call centres. The areas where the qualitative information was less conclusive were: HRM and PMS: CSRs at Superco and Legalco to some extent wanted more career development and training, other CSRs were concerned with how these were linked to the work role itself in terms of team and individual.

The researcher did not identify areas of contradicting findings between quantitative and qualitative results. Two out of five call centres CSRs' responses (Superco and Legalco) were highly correlated amongst most dimensions. The researcher interpreted this correlation as a by-product of their perception towards equity and fairness issues as a result of the history of union participation in both organisations.

As depicted in Table 5 and Table 6 the qualitative results identified emergent themes worth considering for future research: Differentiation by area of work identified through quantitative findings was further explained where outbound operators were concerned with customer abuse and rejection and feeling insincere about sticking to rigid scripts (Researchco and Insureco). Inbound CSRs were mainly concerned with quality tensions of the customer transaction which was not rewarded and monitoring and performance practices geared towards timing, volumes, call drop-offs and call waiting. Differentiation by gender regarding the negative effects of unsocial hours was a concern for both males and females in two call centres (Dynamico and Researchco). Females were less concerned with not receiving overtime payments but more with physical safety concerns of getting to and from work, as well as spill-over effects on home relationships. A positive aspect of all call centres was identification with company or internal teams (which has been reported rarely in the non-call-centre literature). In two there was positive identification with external customers or clients. For Legalco, this related to deriving job satisfaction through identification with the general public as it was a public service organisation. For Superco, selected clients being trade union members' superannuation and banking funds holders created a 'social reference' to helping the community or public.

# Annakis

**Table 6: Focus group findings: Negative CSR responses**

Companies	Coded themes (by dimension)	No: of incidences	Emergent themes E	Keywords and description of code
D R S I L Total	<b>Functional flexibility</b>	8 10 3 6 2 <b>29</b>	E	Monotony, repetitive work, intensity, large volumes of calls, rigid scripts (six Researchco outbound CSRs only) Differentiation between inbound concerns of intensity, repetitiveness and monotony. Outbound concerned with rigidity of scripts
D R S I L Total	<b>Work environment</b>	6 10 2 8 0 <b>26</b>		Poor management practices including: unfair decisions by management, lack of Involvement of CSRs in decision making Lack of staff meeting meetings to discuss issues Abusive managers, poor treatment and nepotism regarding promotions and pay rises
D R S I L Total	<b>Temporal flexibility</b>	6 8 0 6 0 <b>22</b>	E	Lack of control of hours, shifts especially in first six months of employment (D) Ongoing problem for (I). Shifting agents from inbound to outbound without notice and compensation and no training. Breaks not long enough Unsocial hours Differentiation on gender (link to lack of personal safety to and from work – female (D) CSRs . Male CSRs all centres concerns, lack of penalty rates for unsocial hours
D R S I L Total	<b>Other issues Emotional pressure from customer</b>	6 0 2 3 0 <b>11</b>	E	Customer rejections and abuse (verbal and telephone slamming) (Outbound CSRs or those involved in sales outcomes only) Differentiated by role outbound only. Inbound did not raise this as an area of concern in the study
D R S I L Total	<b>(HRM) (HRM) HRM and PMS</b>	6 4 2 0 6 <b>18</b>		Lack of career opportunities Lack of job security (D) casuals only = 4) Unrealistic targets (I) only = 4) No ongoing training – only training devoted to new recruits and not for developing permanent staff (L) Lack of training on products for new customers/clients (D=4)
D R S I L Total	<b>Other issues</b>	5 5 2 5 0 <b>17</b>		Isolation from team (no time to socialise or discuss work matters on job), only time to socialise if you attend out of hours functions
D R S I L Total	<b>Monitoring</b>	6 0 0 4 0 <b>10</b>	E	Constant pressure the number of calls waiting prompt on your computer screen. Time pressure and associated anxiety. Role conflict torn between providing quality customer service or just answering quantity of calls  Differentiation inbound compared to outbound. Outbound concerned less with overall monitoring, unrealistic targets, rigid scripts. Inbound more concerned with excessive and intensity on quantity criteria of monitoring
D R S I L Total	<b>Personal privacy</b>	3 5 0 5 0 <b>10</b>		Policies are in place to allow facilities and time to attend to personal matters during work Time pressures don't allow this (D) Management have strict policies against this and punish this behaviour. (R)& ( I) team leaders always listening in.

Source: CSR coded responses derived focus groups 'what like least about working in call centre'. N=60 .

(\*Number of responses: T= All centres = 60) D= Dynamico =12 R= Researchco =12 S= Superco =12 I= Insureco =12 L= Legalco =12).

# Annakis

**Table 7: Focus group findings: Positive CSR responses**

Call centre D= Dynamico R= Researchco S= Superco I= Insureco L= Legalco T= All centres	Coded themes	Number of incidences	Emergent themes	Keywords and description of code
D R S I L Total	<b>Identification with 1) customer 2) organisation 3) team</b>	10 8 6 10 6 <b>40</b>	E  E  E	Culture aligned to helping client (Legalco = 6 good Samaritan role) Results oriented and company has a good external reputation (Insureco = 8) Culture aligned well to assisting members (clients) Superco =6 Fun and social environment working in teams (Dynamico=10) Team culture (Researchco friendly student workers = 8) Overall positive identification with culture aspects
D R S I L Total	<b>Management and team leader support</b>	5 2 6 3 5 <b>21</b>		Superco (management and team leaders encourage input and participation) Legalco (management and team leaders encourage input and participation) Other team leaders are supportive
D R S I L Total	<b>Pay and benefits Non-monetary rewards</b>	3 10 0 0 0 <b>13</b>		Realistic targets (Researchco) no pressure easy work for average pay fits in well with study commitments Good conditions (Dynamico café and bonuses)
D R S I L Total	<b>Customer contact</b>	0 3 0 0 0 <b>3</b>		Customer satisfaction from job
D R S I L Total	<b>Temporal flexibility Choosing shifts To suit</b>	5 8 0 0 0 <b>13</b>		Allow to pick shifts around university studies (Researchco = 8) (Dynamico = 5) Being a large organisation (after 6 months probation period have a choice of shifts to suit)
D R S I L Total	<b>Monitoring as safeguard</b>	0 0 3 5 3 <b>11</b>	E    E	Positive aspects of monitoring include ensuring work equitability (i.e. prevent some staff from slacking off) Ambivalence or acceptance that management have a right to monitor work performance and quality assurance. Call monitoring may diffuse customer abuse and hostility when customers are informed that calls would be monitored for quality purposes (outbound CSRs only)

Source: CSR coded responses of focus groups 'what like most about working in call centre'. N=60 (Note: there can be more than one response from individuals).

## 8. Discussion and Managerial Implications

The initial results from this study indicate and support previous empirically based job satisfaction and call centre research in that job content and job context factors are determinants in predicting job satisfaction for CSR's in call centre environments. This study extends the work of previous call centre researchers by identifying that using a multi-dimensional approach for measuring job satisfaction reveals that CSR's overall perception of positive aspects of job satisfaction included intrinsic, extrinsic and social factors. Also that work environment or the context of work has a positive association to job satisfaction. In particular CSR's perceive that being informed of changes, team leaders dealing with problems as they arise and involvement in decision making that affect work are important considerations for

## Annakis

CSR's. These findings are consistent with other empirically based call centre studies (Rose & Wright, 2005; B. Russell, Thite, M., 2008).

The findings on flexibility in terms of CSR control over task variety (functional flexibility) and routine of work is consistent with the findings of previous researchers where there is a correlation that positive perceptions of this factor are associated to job satisfaction. In other words allowing more variety of tasks and duties can relieve monotony, repetition, and intensity which are considered stressors in the workplace (Barnes, 2005; Taylor & Bain, 2006). However this study contributes to the extant literature by using a wider multi-dimensional approach to measuring flexibility found that CSRs also consider other aspects of flexibility to be important contributors to job satisfaction. CSR control and choice over numerical flexibility such as status of work contract whether part-time, full-time, casual; also temporal flexibility such as the choice over hours, shifts starting and finishing times, including social or unsocial hours are also considered important for CSR's. The implications are that these factors could also contribute towards a perception of balancing work and family life and overall life satisfaction beyond the workplace.

These findings are consistent with a limited amount of call centre studies using qualitative study approaches who reported anecdotal evidence that CSRs identified working unsocial hours, inflexible shift and roster systems and often receiving no compensation for overtime contributed to lower perceptions of employee wellbeing (Hannif, Burgess, & Connell, 2006; B. Russell, 2008). In terms of monitoring this study supports the majority of previous call centre research in that employer monitoring appears to have a negative impact on or inverse relationship to job satisfaction. Unlike previous studies investigating employer monitoring practices which used either single-item measures or a few measures, this study used a multi-dimensional approach. This included whether monitoring was too excessive, or an invasion of personal privacy, whether they were assessed informally or formally by management, or assessed in terms of sales performance and it is used for performance management purposes rigid quotas per shift, by calls waiting and times, and by the number of call drop-offs. The negative aspects of monitoring according to CSRs in this study relate to being monitored via rigid quotas per shift, by calls waiting and times, and by the number of call drop-offs rather than other aspects of monitoring.

The implications for management as suggested by this study is that CSRs to a large extent expect to be monitored whether and generally see this as a legitimate part of managerial prerogative. Despite the diversity of call centres in terms of their organisational structure, in-bound, outbound, blended and nature of customer transaction (service or sales driven) and managerial approaches, what was common amongst CSR perceptions was that concerns were raised as to measuring and punishing CSR's for rigid quotas per shift, by calls waiting and times, and by the number of call drop-offs which may have been construed as what some call centre researchers have referred to the tensions of quantitative versus qualitative demands in the customer service transaction (Knights & McCabe, 2003; Taylor, Baldry, Bain & Ellis, 2003). CSRs are under constant pressure to meet rather strict quantitative management criteria however they are also expected to expend large amounts of emotional labour towards meeting and servicing customers. The later may not be measured or rewarded, but what is clear that managerial obsession in punishing CSR's for not meeting some aspects of work are perceived as negative



## Annakis

reinforcement and stressful to the social relations and nature of work. Management could therefore consider rewarding more qualitative components of the work as perceived by the customer rather than reinforce negative or irrelevant parts of the work when designing performance management systems. Overall in this study CSRs were generally satisfied with working in the call centres however this varied across sites studied. CSR's perception of what contributes to job satisfaction overall includes intrinsic (job content) extrinsic (job context) and social aspects of work.

## 9. Summary and Conclusions

The limitations of this study include restricting the level of analysis to only identifying and predicting the determinants of job satisfaction for CSR's as the major outcome of the research. Linking job satisfaction to other outcomes such as customer service satisfaction and organisational profitability was not empirically tested in this study. Notwithstanding this limitation, these relationships could be considered for future research but were deemed not in the scope of this study. Also the information gathered related to a point in time and it did not investigate changes in CSR perceptions to job satisfaction over time. However a follow up with focus group interviews attempted to address part of this. This limitation could be overcome by future research using a longitudinal approach. Finally a significant contribution of this study, is that it challenges some assumptions from field theories, for example the need to train call centre managers (team leaders and supervisors) on job satisfaction and well-being, also that CSR well-being has a positive association to customer outcomes in any kind of organisation and that managerial practices should be aligned to support this.

## References

- ATA (2008) *Australian Contact Centre Industry key statistics*, <http://www.ata.asn.au/imagesDB/news/ATAcelebrates20yearsIndustryFacts.pdf>
- Australian Call Centre Industry Benchmark Report (2010). <http://www.callcentres.net/>
- Bain, P and P. Taylor (2008) 'No passage to India?: Initial responses of UK trade unions to call centre outsourcing', *Industrial Relations Journal*, 39(1): 5–23.
- Cavana, R Y, Delahaye, B L & Sekaran, U 2001, *Applied Business Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods*, John Wiley, Brisbane.
- Deery, S & Kinnie, N 2002, 'Call centres and beyond: A thematic evaluation', *Human Resource Management Journal*, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 3-13,
- Deery, S & Kinnie, N (ed) 2004, in *Call centres & human resource management: A cross-national perspective*. London Palgrave Macmillan.
- Folkedal, J, Vaag, E, Halvar, H & Svebak, S 2000, 'Absenteeism and attitudes towards organizational change in the manufacturing industry with low ergonomic load'. *North American Journal of Psychology*, 2, 357-378.
- Grebner, S, Semmer, NK, La Faso, L, Gut, S, Ka" lin, W & Elfering, A 2003, 'Working conditions, well-being, and job-related attitudes among call centre agents'. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 12(4), 341-365.
- Hannif, Z, Burgess, J & Connell, J 2006, '*The quality of work life in call centres: A research agenda*'. Proceedings of the 2006 ACREW Conference, Prato, Italy

## Annakis

- Holman, D 2002, 'Employee wellbeing in call centres ', *Human Resource Management Journal*, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 35-50,
- Holman, D, Batt, R & Holtgrewe, U 2007. '*The global call centre report: International perspectives on management and employment*'. Sheffield, UK
- Kenny, D A, Kashy, D A & Cook, WL 2006, *Dyadic data analysis*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Kinnie, N, Purcell, J & Adams, M 2008, 'Explaining employees' experience of work in outsourced call centres: the influence of clients, owners and temporary work agencies'. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 50, 209-227.
- Krippendorff, K 1980, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*, Sage, Newbury Park, Calif.
- Lewig, K A & Dollard, M F 2003, 'Emotional dissonance, emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction in call centre workers'. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 12(4), 366-392.
- Lincoln, YS & Guba, EG 1985, *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Sage, Beverly Hills
- Rose, E & Wright, G 2005, 'Satisfaction and dimensions of control among call centre customer service representatives'. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 16(1), 136-160.
- Marshall, C & Rossman, G 1995, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Russell, B 2008, 'Call centres: A decade of research'. *International Journal of Management Reviews* 10(3), 195-219.
- Russell, B, & Thite, M 2008, *Work processes, skills and identity in Australian and Indian call centres: a comparative perspective*. Delhi: Sage.
- Taylor, P, & Bain, P 2005, 'India calling to the far away towns: the call centre labour process and globalisation'. *Work Employment and Society*, 19, 261-282.
- URCOT, 2000 'Call centres: What kind of future workplaces?' . *Monograph RMIT Australia*
- Walsh, J, & Deery, S 2006, 'Refashioning organizational boundaries: outsourcing customer service work'. *Journal of Management Studies*, 43(557-582), 557.
- Warr, P, Cook, J & Wall, T 1979, 'Scales for the measurement of some work attitudes and aspects of psychological well-being', *Journal of Occupational Psychology* vol. 52 pp. 129-148,
- Yin, RK 2003, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, Sage Thousand Oaks, California.
- Zapf, D, Isic, A, Bechtoldt, M, & Blau, M 2003, 'What is typical for call centre jobs? Job characteristics, and service interactions in different call centres'. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 12(4), 311-340.  
<http://www.callcentres.net/fifthquadrant/papers> Social Media as a customer service channel: considerations, whitepaper 2012.