

UFS  
UV



BUSINESS SCHOOL  
SAKESKOOL  
BE WORTH MORE  
WEES MEER WERD

# **THE EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT OF A CALL CENTRE**

**MARISKA FIEBERG**

A fieldstudy submitted to the UFS Business School in the Faculty of  
Economic and Management Sciences in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree

Magister  
in  
Business Administration  
at the  
University of the Free State  
Bloemfontein

**SUPERVISOR: JACQUES VAN WYK**

NOVEMBER 2014

## DECLARATION

“I declare that the fieldstudy hereby handed in for the qualification Master’s In Business Administration at the UFS Business School at the University of the Free State is my own independent work and that I have not previously submitted the same work, either as a whole or in part, for a qualification at/in another university/faculty.

I hereby cede the copyright of this work to the University of the Free State.”

---

Mariska Fieberg

20 November 2014

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine whether the focus call centre is managed efficiently. Certain core competencies that are necessary for call centre agents to effectively do their job is also considered. The study also considers the reason for staff turnover, how it can be reduced and how it affects management decisions.

Thirty five questionnaires were submitted to the call centre personnel for completion. The questionnaires were used to determine the attitudes and feelings of personnel on the efficiency of the call centre and whether they are of the opinion that core competencies are vital for call centre agents. Their opinion on the reasons for staff turnover was also requested.

It was found that the focus call centre was indeed managed efficient but there was some room for improvement with regard to certain management aspects.

**Keywords:** Call centre, management, efficiency, core competencies, staff turnover,

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Declaration</b>	2
<b>Abstract</b>	3
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	6
1.1 Background	6
1.2 Objectives	10
1.3 Research question	11
1.4 Conclusion	11
<b>Chapter 2: Literature review</b>	12
2.1 Introduction	12
2.2 Key factors affecting efficiency of the call centre	12
2.3 Essential core competencies of call centre agents	24
2.4 Main reasons for staff turnover	29
<b>Chapter 3: Research Methodology</b>	36
3.1 Introduction	36
3.2 Research design	36
3.3 Sampling	37
3.4 Data-collection method	38
3.5 Ethical considerations	40
3.5.1 Permission from management	40
3.5.2 Voluntary participation	40
3.5.3 Confidentiality and respect	41
3.6 Conclusion	41
<b>Chapter 4: Results</b>	42
4.1 Introduction	42
4.2 Demographic information	42
4.3 Company efficiency	46

4.3.1	Company efficiency	47
4.3.2	Training and selection	53
4.3.3	Supervisors and emotions	55
4.3.4	Performance management	56
4.4	Skills needed by call centre agents	58
4.5	Motivating factors	61
4.6	Conclusion	63
<b>Chapter 5: Recommendations and conclusion</b>		<b>64</b>
5.1	Introduction	64
5.2	Recommendations	64
5.3	Conclusion	72
<b>References</b>		<b>73</b>
<b>Appendix A</b>		<b>78</b>
<b>Appendix B</b>		<b>87</b>

# CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

A call centre is defined as a business operation at a location where high volumes of calls are made and/or received for the purpose of customer service, marketing, technical support, sales or any other specialised business activity such as legal advice, collections or recruitment (White & Roos, 2005:41). Call centres provide fast, efficient and relatively cheaper business solutions to business enterprises in managing their day-to-day activities. Similar to businesses, governments all around the world also need to provide a variety of services to their citizens and other stakeholders and often make use of call centres to provide some of these services (As-Shaber & Hossain, 2008:2). To stay competitive, a call centre needs to be efficient and to find the golden balance between satisfying quality and quantity.

During the last decade or so, the call centre industry has been growing at a rapid pace internationally, although it is a relatively new industry. The average age of international call centres is eight years, whereas in South Africa, the average age of call centres is nine years (Benner, Lewis, & Omar, 2007:10). The use of call centres is part of a trend in many countries, moving from manufacturing to service work (Hunter & Hachimi, 2012:553). Call centres now form the cornerstone of the service industry, as almost two thirds of customer interactions occur through call centres (Das, Nandialath, & Mohan, 2013:17). Call centres are now the preferred form of interaction with customers or clients. At first, it occupied a small niche in the services market but has now grown to form a significant part of the global economy (Banks & Roodt, 2011:2).

Developments in information technology, economies of scale and greater emphasis on customer satisfaction are some of the factors contributing to the booming of the call centre industry (Budhwar, Varma, Malhotra, & Mukherjee, 2009:351). India has become the preferred destination for call centres because of the abovementioned reasons and the availability of a large number of English-speaking, trained professionals and low labour costs (Budhwar *et al.*, 2009:352). Call centres have a

few problems, such as high employee turnover, a stressful work environment, and almost no career development, but rapid growth is guaranteed and call centres have great potential internationally. Sensory overload, work pressure, high workloads, and rapid technology and product changes are some of the characteristics of call centre work (Simons & Buitendach, 2013:1). The future growth of call centres in India is influenced by poor infrastructure and safety concerns (Budhwar *et al.*, 2009:352). Call centres in India are unique in the way they mainly serve the international market. More than 400 of the *Fortune 500* companies have their own call centres in India or outsource to Indian firms (Budhwar *et al.*, 2009:352).

Call centres are also established all over Africa, with South Africa leading the pack (Thompson, 2013:1). A VOIP-based calling centre is based in Togo, while two hotline response centres are established in Senegal. A recently launched Kenyan ICT venture identified call centres as business areas of interest. An American company used the services of a Ghana company to establish a call centre in that country, although the setting up of the business proved quite challenging. Acquiring property in an African country is difficult, as most Africans regard property as a key and valuable asset; therefore they are reluctant to sell. The second frustration was trying to get fixed lines installed. Because of all the red tape, it took nearly six months to get the lines installed (Thompson, 2013:1). However, industry experts are of the opinion that Africa has great potential to develop its call centre industry.

The first call centre was established in 1976 in South Africa, but the industry experienced a boom on the late 1990s. Amongst others, the growth experienced by the industry can be attributed to improved computer technology and reduced telecommunication costs (Benner *et al.*, 2007:10). Key strengths of the South African call centre industry are that the English proficiency of call centre agents compare well with international market needs, and the fact that South Africa lies in the same time zone as some European countries. (Thompson, 2013:2). Opinions on the advantages of call centres in South Africa differ. On the one hand, government, private companies and economic development agencies see call centres as a valuable source of jobs and economic development, and as a cost-effective way to

deliver services to customers. On the other hand, customers complain about poor service delivery, and unions complain about stressful working conditions (Benner *et al.*, 2007:9). Poor service delivery might include customers having to wait too long to have their calls answered or their problem not being solved properly during the first call. Call centres in South Africa developed to serve the domestic market (however, focus on the international market has increased) and big call centres are located in the major economic centres (Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban) (Benner *et al.*, 2007:11).

In 2007, Government introduced an incentive scheme offering a grant of R88 000.00 for each new call centre post that is created and sustained for three years. This incentive helped to attract more than R1,6 billion of direct investment and created 10 500 jobs (Cohen(a), 2013:1). Hoping to create more jobs and to attract foreign investment, the Trade and Industry Minister, Rob Davies, launched a government investment at a call centre in Soweto in 2009 (Banks & Roodt, 2011:2).

Africans are still underrepresented in the call centre industry, with only 27% of them being call centre agents, 18% team leaders, and 7% managers, while more than 75% of South Africa's population are Africans. Although 26% of whites are call centre agents, 37% team leaders, and 61% managers, they represent only 10% of the total population of South Africa (Benner *et al.*, 2007:4). In 2005, the South African call centre industry had 50 000 employees, which increased to 180 000 in 2010. Currently, 210 000 people are employed by the call centre industry, with 9% working for offshore companies (Cohen(b), 2013:1). The call centre industry in South Africa has grown with 30% to 35% in each of the last five years (Cohen(a), 2013:1) It is predicted that approximately 100 000 new jobs will be created in the country by 2015 (Simons & Buitendach, 2013:1). In the focus call centre, 100% of the call centre agents are Africans, 100% of supervisors are Africans and all the manager positions are filled by Africans.

Location and economic geography is one aspect of call centres that has received limited research attention. The expansion of call centres can have great local

economic development effects. As indicated above, the call centre industry is concentrated mainly geographically in the most economically important provinces, namely: Gauteng, the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. A reason for this concentration of call centres is that the most prosperous provinces offer greater opportunities for organisations to access a pool of educated work seekers that are suitable for employment at call centres (Pandy & Rogerson, 2012:23). The South African labour pool has more than 300 000 school leavers and 100 000 graduates entering the workforce annually. However, the problem however is that there are not enough people with higher skill levels to meet the demand of the market. Another factor that plays a role when deciding on the location of a call centre is access to transport. Most potential call centre employees do not have their own transport and need to use public transport.

In Bloemfontein, one of the call centres is located in the central business district, allowing easy access to public transport for employees. This is not a very safe area. The other two call centres are located in the business suburb of Westdene, which has seen rapid expansion in the last five years. The Westdene business suburb is now the preferred choice of most businesses, as it is easily accessible, even for people using public transport, and it is much safer than the central business district. The focus call centre is situated in the Westdene business suburb and right next to its biggest client, Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality. The call centre collects outstanding rates and taxes from the citizens of the greater Mangaung area. They also collect payments of electrical accounts for Centlec. The advantage of being situated right next to the biggest client is the fact that, when debtors of the municipality visit the municipal offices to enquire about their arrear accounts, they can be referred to the debt collection firm without having to go to another place to make the necessary arrangements for payment. The location gives the focus call centre a competitive advantage over its competitors.

Call centres can be divided in two types, namely: inbound and outbound call centres. When customers or clients phone in to have technical problems solved, queries answered or to enquire about services, the call centre will be described as

an inbound call centre. Outbound call centres are characterised by agents calling customers or clients to sell products or services or to collect information (market research) (White & Roos, 2005:41). As with the focus call centre, outbound call centres can be used for debt collection purposes.

This field study will focus on an outbound debt collection call centre in Bloemfontein, although information obtained from recent studies focus mainly on inbound call centres. Currently, there are three debt collection call centres in Bloemfontein. Two of them have approximately 70 agents and 4 supervisors each, while the focus call centre has only 30 agents with two supervisors, a manager and a performance officer. The focus call centre is 100% owned by black people, while the other two call centres are owned by white people.

Nationally, the average salary of call centre agents varies between R4 200.00 and R4 600.00 per month. In some instances, agents might be paid an annual bonus if they exceeded the target that was set by their managers (Ball, 2010:295). At the focus call centre, agents earn R2 500.00 per month, while the salary of the supervisors is R4 700.00.

## **1.2 Objectives**

The main objective of this study is to determine if the call centre is effective in its operations.

Managers need to consider certain key factors to manage a call centre successfully and efficiently.

The secondary objective, which will assist the researcher in achieving the main objective, includes an investigation of which core competencies are essential for call centre agents to be effective.

Another objective is to determine what the main causes for high staff turnover are and what steps managers of call centres can take to reduce turnover.

### **1.3 Research question**

The research study aims to answer the following primary question: Is the call centre effective, and which factors affect efficiency?

The following secondary questions will be explored and will help the researcher in formulating a possible answer to the primary question:

- a. Which core competencies are essential for call centre agents to make a call centre more effective and competitive?
- b. How does staff turnover affect management decisions, and what can be done to reduce staff turnover?

### **1.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter, a brief background of the development of the call centre industry globally and locally has been discussed. It also focuses on the important shift in business to move from manufacturing to service work. The research question and objectives of this field study have also been discussed.

In Chapter 2, an overview of current literature with regard to efficiency of call centres will be discussed. Literature on the secondary objectives will also be analysed.

## **CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, a brief background is given with regard to what exactly call centres are, for what they are used, and how the industry developed. In this chapter, theories regarding the efficiency of call centres and competency requirements will be analysed and discussed.

The environment for the development of call centres was set by a rise in global competition and an increase in deregulated national economic orders. The globalisation process has offered economic growth opportunities to some, while putting downward pressure on wages and employment levels for skilled and semi-skilled occupations in advanced economies (Batt, Holman, & Holtgrewe, 2009:453). Call centres were the response to ensuing pressure to realise labour efficiency. Call centres are mainly about cost efficiencies in delivery information or improved customer service (Russel, 2008:197).

Call centres were identified as major job creators and a method to attract foreign investment by the South African Government. Literature confirms that proper management of call centres is necessary to prevent this rapidly growing industry, which has a lack of external training opportunities, to suffer a sudden death. In the call centre employment relationship, control is the primary feature, while there are limited opportunities for personal development (Ball, 2010:297).

### **2.2 Key factors influencing efficiency of the call centre**

What is efficiency? The Oxford Dictionary of English (2010:521) defines efficiency as “achieving maximum productivity with minimum wasted effort or expense.” In the debt-collection call centre, it will mean that as much as possible money must be collected while keeping the collection cost as low as possible (collection costs will be low if the debtor pays after the first or second call indicating the outstanding balance).

In the introduction, it is stated that call centres can be divided into two groups, namely: inbound and outbound centres. The outbound call centre can be divided further into two distinct groups, namely: in-house call centres or outsourced call centres. The in-house call centre is a separate unit within the larger firm that focuses on other business activities such as financial services. The outsourced call centre is a specialised firm that handle customer relationships or debt collections for external clients (Benner *et al.*, 2007:12). The varying nature of call centre work has a great effect on the skills required and the quality of work (Pandy & Rogerson, 2012:24). This field study will focus on the outbound outsourced call centre. However, the question can now be asked: How does outbound, outsourced call centres work?

Outsourced call centres are in a contractual relationship with their client companies. Once the negotiations have been finalised, a service level agreement for a fixed period is signed. This contract, in fact, allows the client company to play an active role by closely monitoring and controlling service delivery by the call centre. The service level agreement not only determines the expected level of service, but also in some cases may determine aspects with regard to the management of the call centre and its agents. Therefore, the client company can influence the working conditions of the call centre agents and the effectiveness of the call centre itself (Del Bono, Gorjup, Henry, & Valverde, 2012:705). Management has to consider the stipulations and conditions of the service level agreement carefully to ensure that they do not lose management control and that their management practices enable them to adhere to the requirements of the client company. Currently, the focus call centre has three big clients, on whose behalf it collects outstanding debt. Each client has its own service level agreement, and management need to ensure that it is able to meet all the requirements set by the three clients while still operating effectively and profitably.

Most of the research done with regard to call centres focused on three core topics, namely: technology, people and performance (Hingst, 2004:3). These three factors can be used to determine the efficiency of the call centre. A relative large number of

recent studies on call centres focused specifically on call centres delivering customer services (selling products or services or solving customer queries). However most of the issues they discuss and findings they make can be applied in debt collection call centres. The main aim of debt-collection call centres is not customer satisfaction, but rather to collect as much outstanding debt on behalf of their clients as possible. The customers from whom they collect the money are not the clients of the debt collection call centre but rather of the companies or institutions on behalf of which the money is collected. Although customer satisfaction is not the main aim of the debt collection call centre, it is important that debtors be dealt with in a professional and courteous manner. Call centre agents have a great influence on customer satisfaction and company profitability. Research shows that interpersonal interactions experienced by customers when they lodge a voice complaint influence their perceptions of the company (Pontes & Kelley, 2000:42). Therefore, the way in which debtors are managed can determine if they pay their outstanding accounts or not. If the call centre agent manages to get the debtor to pay after only one or two calls, he/she indirectly effected customer satisfaction, as the client company will get its money sooner, and the collection cost is kept to a minimum. However, if debtors refuse or neglect to pay, another call will be made to the debtor to indicate the outstanding account again. The failure to pay will lead to further legal action, which means that collection cost is increased and the client company will have to wait longer to get its money.

Most call centres have a dual service-and-sales role; therefore, managers need to manage this additional, complex aspect without compromising customer satisfaction, service quality, or response times. Because most call centres now serve as the “public face” of the company, management need to consider their vital role in customer acquisition and retention (Aksin, Armony, & Mehrotra, 2007:666). Call centre managers need to find a golden balance between low operating costs and high service quality. To obtain this balance, call centre managers need to deploy the right number of agents with the right skills to meet the time-varying demand for services.

Call centres are now the main route for service delivery and contact with the customers, which means that their strategic role has changed. Companies try to obtain better customer satisfaction by giving customers easy access to the products and services of the company, while lowering the costs of the company. Managers do find it difficult to balance efficiency and quality. (Banks & Roodt, 2011:331). Management will be able to manage the quality-efficiency trade-off better if they have a good understanding of the relationship between human resource practise and performance outcomes (Aksin *et al.*, 2007:679).

The question can then be asked: Why is customer satisfaction so important? It is argued that a satisfied customer will support the company and a loyal customer will recommend the product or service to other people. The benefits of good service quality are twofold: The customer will continue to use the product and the company will maintain its market share. Secondly, the customer will tell other people of the product, which means that the company will acquire new customers and thus increase its market share (Lau & Chan, 2012:76).

When considering the debt-collection call centre specifically, customer satisfaction will have been achieved if as much outstanding debt as possible has been collected in the shortest period of time. The biggest clients of the focus call centre are provincial government departments and local authorities. Government allocates work to service providers (private companies) via a tender process; current service providers are not guaranteed an extension of their contracts. Current service providers can improve their chances of getting an extension of their contracts if the customer (government department) is satisfied that as much as possible of the outstanding debt as possible has been collected with minimum cost involved. The government department will also recommend the service provider to other state departments if they are satisfied with the services delivered.

With reference to the three core topics of discussion with regard to the call centre, the researcher will briefly discuss technology, people and performance and how

these affected the main objective of this field study being the effectiveness of the call centre.

In the introduction, it is indicated that rapid developments in computer technology and reduction in telecommunication costs set the stage for the establishment of the call centre industry. Call centres might resemble offices but they operate like factories (Suff, Reilly, & Mercer, 2005:6). It is often said that the call centre industry implement Taylorist principles while engaging in low-profit value-added activities. It is also characterized by poor wages and working conditions with a disposable workforce (Hannif, Burgess, & Connell 2008:272). In a factory type working environment (call centres resembles factories), mass processing will lead to shorter job cycles but more intensive work processes, while more focus on quality will lead to longer call-handling times and improved customer care. Call centres cannot ignore cost associated with service delivery levels (Russel, 2008:198).

Owing to rapid changes in technology that threatened deskilling, dehumanization, and alienation, concerns about working conditions have been raised (Hannif *et al.*, 2008:274). The call centre industry is a labour- and technology intensive industry, and one of the biggest challenges for managers is to manage agents in this intensive environment (Banks & Roodt, 2011:332). When one considers technology in terms of the definition of efficiency, the improvement in computer and telecommunication technology will assist with the maximization of the productivity while minimizing the wasted effort or expense. All call centre calls are recorded, and information obtained during a call to a customer is captured on the system. This computerised system allows call centre agents to check the history of calls made to a specific client. Call centre managers can also use the recorded calls to identify possible shortcomings in training or in the system. Therefore, a proper computer and telecommunication system at a call centre is vital for the effective and efficient operation of the call centre.

As a core topic of research, people will now be discussed. Without people (the call centre agents), a call centre will not be able to operate: it is surprising that very little

research has been done about recruitment, selection and training in call centres. In this line of work, empathy towards customers plays an important role in recruitment, induction and training (Callaghan & Thompson, 2002:234).

Recruitment, selection and training of call centre agents are very important to ensure effective operation of the call centre, When considering the discussions about recruitment and selection, the next step is training, which should not be neglected. During recruitment, organisations consider technical skills only, but also consider social skills. During training, call centre managers should focus their training not only on technical skills, procedural knowledge, and knowing the system, but also on social skills. Training with regard to social skills could be divided into two parts: managing a conversation and managing yourself. Managing a conversation will teach employees the necessary skills to control a conversation and how to deal with difficult or rude customers in the best way. Managing yourself will teach employees how to control their energy and enthusiasm, and how to regulate their feelings (Callaghan & Thompson, 2002:244).

In a debt collection call centre, the skill to manage a conversation is vital. Most debtors do not like to be reminded that they have outstanding debt; therefore a large percentage of them will be very difficult or rude. It is essential that call centre agents be trained on how to handle debtors best. Another problem that might arise at a debt collection call centre is the fact that a debtor could have settled his/her account, but the payment is not reflected on the system. The call centre agent should then be able to offer an “added” service by indicating to the client that the matter will be investigated and that he /she will ensure that the payment is captured on the system and give feedback to the debtor that the matter has been finalized.

Because call centre agents have an enormous effect on the efficiency of the call centre, labour processes used by management are very important. Most call centres make use of two models: the production line approach and the empowerment approach. When the production line model is followed, the main objective of the organisation is to maximise call volume and minimise cost. To manage this, they will

limit customer discretion, standardise the service, restrict employee discretion, and make little use of the skills of employees. When using the empowerment approach, the organisation chooses to compete on the quality of its service. To reach this objective, the organisation constructs jobs that gives employees greater autonomy and allow them to utilise their skills to meet customer demands. Whatever model is chosen by an organisation, the human resource system will have to be adapted to train, develop and establish supportive supervision and teamwork or rely on the individualised pay system to achieve objectives (Deery & Kinnie, 2002:5).

The competitive advantage of an organisation, whether it is cost, innovation, quality or customisation, will determine how management organises the work. The above-mentioned empowerment approach is also known as the high-involvement approach. The mass production or production line approach is also known as the high-intensity approach. It was determined by literature that high and low involvement and high and low intensity is not always mutually exclusive. In the customer service industry, an organisation using the high-involvement approach can incorporate some cost-reduction strategies to make it more competitive in the market (Kwon & Van Jaarsveld, 2013:1078). Researchers found evidence that some call centres follow a hybrid approach, combining elements of mass production strategy with elements of the high-involvement approach.

Debt collection call centres should make use of a hybrid approach to ensure an effective and efficient organisation. Although their main objective is to maximise call volumes and to minimise cost, they should allow call centre agents to use their discretion and to use their skills to find a solution to a problem that might arise during the collection process.

Customer satisfaction and overall system performance are influenced by the psychological issues associated with the agent's experiences. Owing to the history of South Africa, certain groups of people were excluded from certain jobs. Currently, employment equity is a reality in South Africa and the previously disadvantaged are now increasingly becoming part of the workforce where they are subject to

influences of westernisation and potentially changed traditional culture-specific family roles. It is so that very little is known about how characteristics such as race and culture shape the work-family experience (Potgieter & Barnard, 2010:2). The call centre work environment has a unique effect on employees' experience of work-life balance.

With extensive research on quality of work life, various perspectives about how to define and measure quality of work life has emerged. Currently, there are three groups when quality of work life is defined, namely: "as either a concept that is concerned with employee's job satisfaction; a concept that goes beyond examining job satisfaction, by also encompassing subjective well-being; or a multidimensional construct that incorporate any number of measures relating to employment quality" (Hannif *et al.*, 2008:274). The effect of work-life balance is especially of interest because more married women, dual-career couples, and single parents are part of the job market.

Although most research done on work-life balance focuses on the negative effects, recent research found that there might be a changed perspective recognising the fact that work might be a source of satisfaction and fulfilment for employees (Potgieter & Barnard, 2010:3). Once again, support from team leaders is indicated as an important factor to help employees with work-life balance. Other key activities that can also assist employees with their attempts to achieve work-life balance are time management, role prioritisations, and support structures (Potgieter & Barnard, 2010:6).

Employees that are not committed to the organisation and poorly motivated are highly unlikely to provide the service quality that is necessary for high levels of customer satisfaction that is crucial for commercial success. Most staffing problems will have a negative and damaging effect on customer service (Suff *et al.*, 2005:1). Employee performance and customer satisfaction can be improved by recruiting and retaining suitable employees by focusing on good working practices and salaries, development opportunities for employees and effective leadership.

Performance is discussed next. Performance measures are dominated by factors such as time to answer a call and call duration, while individual performance is measured by factors such as calls handled per hour and call quality (Suff *et al.*, 2005:12). Standard productivity measures include the following:

- Percentage of first-call completion
- Average time to answer a call
- Average time of call and wrap-up
- Total number of calls handled per day, week, month, and year
- Percentage of abandoned calls (Suff *et al.*, 2005:13).

Target setting is another popular performance measure for individual agents (Suff *et al.*, 2005:15). In the debt-collection call centre, the target will be determined by the service level agreement that was signed with the client company. Targets for the call centre will normally be an amount that should be collected within a fixed period or a percentage of the outstanding debt handed over. Targets for individual call centre agents will also consist of an amount that should be collected during a fixed period. As indicated above a standard productivity measure is the number of calls handled per day or week. At a debt-collection call centre, this might not be a very effective measure, as calls are not scripted and the main aim of the call is to motivate the debtor to pay his outstanding debt. Some debtors might differ about amounts claimed or indicate that they have already paid; the call centre agent will then have to spend time to find a solution for the problem. Some calls might be short, as the debtor acknowledges the debt and promise to pay, while other calls might be long when the debtor disagrees with information submitted by the call centre agent.

Multiple targets are often constraining and demotivating. Therefore, more and more organisations are moving away from using standard productivity measures. They now rather prefer to use a more balanced approach by also using customer satisfaction as a performance measure for individual call centre agents (Suff *et al.*, 2005:15).

Management's decisions on staffing, rostering, control and agent incentives influence the performance of the call centre, but these aspects are mostly ignored by management. A key trade-off between customer service and efficiency is an aspect that needs to be managed by the human resource department and management of the call centre (Aksin *et al.*, 2007:678).

Another school of thought is of the opinion that the tension between service and efficiency can be resolved by adopting a "sacrificial human resource strategy". By using this strategy, organisations maintain high levels of service at low costs by accepting that there will be high levels of burnout and stress amongst call centre agents. They sacrifice employee well-being and morale for low costs. To be successful in applying this model, call centre managers must have access to a pool of skilled labour, and the job should require minimal organisational knowledge (Deery & Kinnie, 2002:8).

The service-efficiency trade-off also unveils other conflicts, for instance between cost and quality, between flexibility and standardisation, and between constraining and enabling job design. Call centre agents are constantly aware of these conflicts because of the performance management system. As target setting is the most popular performance measurement system, how it is done will be examined next.

Both quantitative (calls per hour, time between calls) and qualitative (content, adherence to policies) aspects are monitored in the call centre. When quantitative measures are used to record and monitor performance, they are normally supplemented with "listening in time" where soft skills and emotive tasks are scrutinized (Hannif *et al.*, 2008:278). Most call centre managers apply "listening in time" to:

- measure performance
- ensure quality standard of all calls
- evaluate customer satisfaction

- identify training needs for individual agents (Suff *et al.*, 2005:16): and
- provide feedback to agents

Feedback is another important aspect that can function as a source of reward or punishment. There are two types of feedback: intrinsic and extrinsic feedback (Sial, Imran, & Zaheer 2011:459). Intrinsic feedback is available to the employee while the task is performed. On the other hand, extrinsic feedback contains information about results and is available to the employee only after a task has been completed. Lack of feedback can cause reduction in morale and motivation of employees. “Timely, constructive and clear” feedback from monitoring that is used to develop the skills of the agents can improve job satisfaction and reduce anxiety and depression (Sial *et al.*, 2011:459). In return for the emotional investment in the job, call centre agents react favourable towards rewards such as positive feedback, career path development and monetary reward (Choi *et al.*, 2012:499). To enable one to learn, one needs to receive feedback. Performance of employees will not improve without feedback, although the work might be repetitive. It is important that employees should receive performance-related feedback, and managers should use direct praise to acknowledge good work and to show employees that their competencies are recognised (Suff *et al.*, 2005:29).

The three topics of technology, people and performance and their effect on efficiency were discussed in detail. Another factor can affect the efficiency of the call centre and that is whether the employees belong to a union or not. There is not much literature on the role of unions at call centres. However, in one study in the United Kingdom, it was found that employees have a stronger union identification than an organisational identification (Russel, 2008:206). In South Africa, only about 25% of call centres have a recognition agreement with a union, which is lower than the international average of 40%. It seems that employees at unionised call centres have greater opportunities for career advancement (8,4% compared to 4,7% at non-unionised call centres). Staff turnover also seems to be lower at unionised call centres than at non-unionised call centres (Benner *et al.*, 2007:6).

Finally, we will consider the study done by Connell et al. (2009:4-5) at two Australian call centres. In their study, they considered the size of the call centre and the kind of call centre it was. They also considered the sex of the employees and whether they belonged to a union or not. Finally, they considered the work organisation and used all these factors to determine whether the call centres were effective or not.

They used two small call centres (between 50-100 seats) on which to base their study. One call centre was a high-tech maintenance (HTM) call centre, and the other a consumer marketing (CM) call centre. At HTM, the majority of employees were female and permanently employed. The workplace was not unionised. Quality of service was paramount, there was no time limit on calls, and calls were not scripted. At the CM call centre, most employees were casual workers, and calls were monitored extensively. The workplace was not unionised. Recent retrenchments had an impact on levels of trust and increased job insecurity. Call centre agents were unhappy with management, as they felt that the retrenchment process was not transparent, consequently they were unsure if any jobs were secure at all.

In their research, Connell et al. (2009:5-6) made use of focus group interviews to gather data. From the data gathered, they were able to make the following findings:

With regard to HTM, employees indicated high levels of job satisfaction. Employees indicated they received extensive in-house training and that quality of service was highly emphasised. The performance management system revolved around audits of speed and quality of calls. Calls were not scripted and not monitored continuously. Staff turnover was very low. Bonus payments were linked to the performance management system, and employees were able to negotiate flexible working hours. From the management system used by the HTM organisation, it is clear that they were able to increase productivity and support by the organisation, and supervisors ensured that employees who were committed to the organisation experienced high levels of team identity.

With regard to CM, employees were also subject to training. Employees were also given the opportunity to access training outside the call centre, but this was restricted heavily due to financial constraints. Although bonuses were mentioned, none of the employees interviewed ever received any bonus for exceeding targets. At this call centre, monitoring was quite extensive. Employees had a very negative view of the quality of the job and management. The employees indicated that they felt that management had handled the recent retrenchments very poorly. It is clear that the lack of transparency and variable management at this organisation caused its employees to lose trust and commitment, which would have a definite effect on productivity.

From the above-mentioned study, it can be concluded that training is important not only for employee morale, but also for the efficiency of the call centre. Very close monitoring increase anxiety and stress among employees, as feedback is normally used as a punishment tool. Although scripted calls are sometime necessary, depending on the kind of service delivered by the call centre, some discretion might enhance employee morale. If the payment of incentives is linked to performance, management need to ensure that payments are made when employees exceed targets. Non-payment will affect future productivity and morale and have a definite effect on effectiveness.

To conclude, the way in which a call centre is managed will affect its performance (Banks & Roodt, 2011:331); therefore, call centre managers use a wide variety of strategies in an attempt to reduce the negative outcomes of the way in which call centre work is organised (Raz & Blank, 2007:83).

### **2.3 Essential core competencies of call centre agents**

The first secondary objective of this field study is determine whether call centre agents need to have certain core competencies to enable them to do their job effectively and to ensure effectiveness of the call centre as a whole.

Currently, there is a growing notion that there should be a move from job- to competency-based organisational requirements. The call centre industry is a very young industry; therefore the “job” of the call centre agent is a new type of work, and human resource managers will not be able to use only traditional selection tools such as psychometric tests. Call centre agents need new and other competencies (compared to normal office workers); when recruiting, human resource managers need to consider skills and qualities such as, teamwork, adaptability, acting on performance feedback, positive orientation to change, and self-confidence, to name only a few (Callaghan & Thompson, 2002:235). New organisational requirements have caused a shift towards the recognition of “extra-functional” skills.

Literature with regard to core competencies includes an in-depth study by White & Roos (2005:41), which emphasises that core competencies are essential for call centre agents. Call centre agents are a “source of differentiation” for the company, as they are the contact point with the client, and they can be the creators of the competitive advantage of the company. Core competencies cannot deteriorate but improve over time (White & Roos, 2005:41). As few elements dilute the effect of service employees, the competencies of call centre agents are likely to have a great effect on customers’ perception of service quality.

Ability to communicate effectively is the most important competency. Call centre agents should be able to communicate effectively and explain information or a situation clearly (Pontes & Kelly, 2000:43). Agents need to be able to communicate verbally and non-verbally, convey ideas and information and understand customers. Non-verbal communication is the message agents convey by changing their tone or a shift in the tempo of their speech (White & Roos, 2005:44). Effective communication includes the ability to use appropriate vocabulary, pronounce words properly, and communicate with different people in a professional manner, as well as having a good voice and speaking clearly. Management of customer relationships and oral communication competencies are essential for call centre agents (Pontes & Kelly, 2000:42).

Effective communication also includes the ability of call centre agents to address customers in their language of choice. If the call centre is located in South Africa but service international customers, this might be almost impossible to obtain; therefore English will be the official language of the call centre. The focus call centre employs call centre agents that can speak English, Afrikaans, and South Sotho, as most customers they call, speak either one or all three of these languages. Explaining a situation to the customer in his/her language of choice will most probably enhance the customer experience and assist with finalising the matter.

Another important competencies that is a subset of relationship management is emotional management (the ability to management the emotions of people). Call centre agents must be able to defuse the negative emotions of customers and solve their problems. Previously, the importance of customer satisfaction was discussed. To ensure customer satisfaction, call centre agents need to be able to manage the interaction with customers. To achieve this, they need to:

- personalize the interaction
- allow the caller to speak but also know when to interrupt to get information to assist the customer further
- acknowledge emotions of the caller; and
- be non-defensive (Pontes & Kelly, 2000:43)

A third essential competency is listening. Call centre agents need to be able to listen actively and respond to statements or questions of customers (White & Roos, 2005:44). An agent's listening behaviour involves three components:

- **Attentiveness:** The agent use short affirmative words or sounds to indicate that he/she is listening.
- **Perceptiveness:** The agent continuously attempts to understand the problem.
- **Responsiveness:** The agent uses full sentences to answer and not only “yes” or “no” (Downing 2011:412).

Call centre operations based mainly on computer and telephone functions, which are subject to rapid changes. It goes without saying that all call centre agents should be able to use telephone and computer technology (White & Roos, 2005:45). Call centre managers will look for candidates with keyboard skills, basic numeracy, and the ability to move around a system (Callaghan & Thompson, 2002:239). Once suitable candidates have been recruited call centre managers should make use of effective competency measurements and develop procedures that will allow them to develop new competencies to enable call centre agents to use new technology (Pontes & Kelly, 2000:48).

More and more call centre managers place a high premium on social skills such as communication and people skills. Managers are more likely to assign behavioural traits such as patience, empathy, and emotional labour to women rather than to men, as it is assumed that these traits form part of their “natural talents”. It is argued that call centre work has been gendered work from the start. It is not coincidental that most employees are female and a conscious recruitment strategy. The “natural talents” have also created opportunities for women to enter the ranks of management, especially line managers (Russel, 2008:207).

Competencies are complemented by certain personality traits that might be just as important as the competencies to ensure that the call centre agents are able to do their job effectively. Ashill (2009:339) found that job resourcefulness is an important personality trait that call centre agents should possess. He describes job resourcefulness as “the enduring disposition to garner scarce resources and overcome obstacles in the pursuit of job-related goals.” It is essential for managers to identify employees who are able to work productively under resource constraints and have a problem-solving disposition as well as satisfying customer requirements in a highly demanding work environment.

Going hand in hand with job resourcefulness is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy can be defined as an individual’s ability to mobilise the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action to accomplish a specific task. It can also be described as an

enthusiastic concept that is closely linked to work-related performance. Self-efficacy also relates to socialisation and retention of new employees. In a recent South African study, it was found that self-efficacy could have a mediating effect on occupational stress, burnout, and work engagement (Simons & Buitendach, 2013:3)

Other competencies and personality traits that should be considered when recruiting call centre agents are a positive attitude and a sense of humour. A positive attitude is crucial in providing good customer service; however, it is not a competency that can be taught but something that is inherent in a person. There is a positive correlation between a positive attitude, energy and enthusiasm. People are “infected” by the feelings or emotions of others. Employees with positive attitudes and expressions can have a favourable effect on customers. A sense of humour is a competency that can help to mitigate the negative effects of the call centre environment. The employees’ ability to “read” a conversation to determine when and where banter will be appropriate can also improve the customer’s experience with the call centre (Callaghan & Thompson, 2002:240). However, other competencies such as attentiveness, understanding, attitude, knowledge and goal-orientation will also enhance the capabilities of the agent and make him/her even more efficient.

Callaghan & Thompson (2002:242) interviewed call centre managers and call centre agents to determine which skills, according to the managers and agents, are essential to ensure that the call centre operates effectively. The managers and agents indicated that emotional self-management, tolerance, patience, flexibility, a sense of humour and level-headedness are important. Technical skills are no longer the primary skills needed by agents, but social skills have taken over that role. Therefore, during the recruitment process, managers need to look for candidates with not only the competencies discussed above but also the personality traits discussed.

## 2.4 Main reasons for staff turnover

According to Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs, people are motivated to achieve certain needs. When needs are fulfilled on one level, a person will seek fulfilment of the next level. The model can be divided into basic needs and growth needs. Physiological needs are the most basic needs, such as food and shelter. Safety is the next basic need, and belonging is the last of the basic needs (McLeod, 2007:1). All three basic needs can be fulfilled by being employed. Earning a salary will ensure that one is able to buy food and obtain accommodation. Employment will also provide stability, and the social need would be fulfilled by belonging to the work group.

Therefore, the hierarchy of needs theory will have a direct effect on staff turnover and ways in which to reduce turnover. When an employee feels that the organisation he or she works for no longer fulfils his/her needs (for example, stability is threatened), he/she will look for another job where these needs might be fulfilled. Most call centre agents see their jobs at the call centre as a stepping-stone and not as a career.

The staff turnover rate can be anything between 30% and 70% (Thite & Russel, 2010:356). When one considers the figures, it is clear that staff turnover has a great effect on the profitability and effectiveness of the call centre. Training of new agents is a costly exercise, and while new agents are being trained, the call centre might not perform optimally (Choi, Cheong, & Feinberg 2012:493). It is reported that it costs just more than R17 000.00 on average to recruit, screen, and train a new call centre agent. A high staff turnover rate is often the consequence of bad recruitment decisions. Turnover is often the highest amongst newly recruited employees because the company realises that the employee is unsuitable for the job, or the employee realises that the job is not suitable (Suff *et al.*, 2005:11).

Human resources (64%) and technology (17%) are the main expenses of a typical call centre. It is critical to determine the correct strategies for recruiting, staffing and

work schedules that will affect profitability and efficiency of the call centre directly (Sencer & Ozel, 2013:481). In India, the average tenure for call centre agents is 11 months (Das *et al.*, 2012:16). In South Africa, the average tenure for call centre agents at out-sourced call centres are higher than at in-house call centres (3,6 years compared to 2,9 years) (Benner *et al.*, 2007:21). With regard to training, the investment in training at out-sourced call centres is lower than at in-house call centres. It takes an average of 12 weeks for agents at out-sourced call centres to become fully competent (Benner *et al.*, 2007:5).

High staff turnover is a possibly the biggest problem in the call centre industry, because call centres have been identified as very stressful places to work, and although computer technology is there to assist the call centre agents do their work more effectively, it is also a merciless monitoring tool (Hingst, 2004:5). As indicted previously, call centres are compared to mass production assembly lines where functions are highly specialised, minimal skills are required, and there is no discretion, only repetitive tasks (Banks & Roodt, 2011:335).

In the call centre industry, most employees complain about high stress levels caused by unrealistic targets, duration and timing of breaks, tight monitoring, lack of incentives to meet goals, and lack of career and training prospects (Hannif *et al.*, 2008:277). The above-mentioned together with other factors such as repetitive work and low pay, will have a great effect on staff turnover.

Various factors affect the intention of an employee to leave and can be divided in personal factors, job-related factors and external factors (Das, 2012:371). With regard to personal factors, the negative aspects of call centre work might have a greater effect on some types of employees. As indicated previously, women form the greatest percentage of employees at call centres, and they are less protected from poor treatment and are more likely to suffer negative effects of emotional labour. The quality of emotional labour is an important factor in call centre management that is often neglected by managers. Women are expected to be more empathetic than men are and to tolerate offensive behaviour from customers (Deery & Kinnie,

2002:8). The call centre job is not very flexible. Women are still the main caretakers at home, and sometimes they are the main breadwinners. The long working hours at the call centre might affect women's ability to stay in the call centre industry for an extended period, as the working hours will have an effect on the duties she has to fulfil at home.

Job-related factors are most probably the biggest reason why employees leave a job. One of the major work-related factors that affects employees' intention to leave is performance. Employees often leave an organisation before they are discharged, if they perceive their performance as low (Kuruville & Ranganathan, 2010:139). Sial et al. (2011:459) found in their study that there is a positive correlation between pay and performance of employees. Bonuses and incentives are popular methods of rewarding staff at call centres. Recent studies found that call centre agents prefer additional financial rewards rather than flexible work hours, discounted products or subsidised meals (Suff *et al.*, 2005:24). If an organisation is able to attract, retain, and motivate best performers with their higher pay levels, organisations experience better performance not only at individual level but also at organisational level. Das (2012:369) found in his study that companies needed to foster organisational identities, as constantly high performing employees will stay in a company with occupational identity.

Job burnout is another main reason for high staff turnover and involves the following factors: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment. High levels of job burnout cause agents to feel depressed, suffer from fatigue, and experience a sense of failure and loss motivation, which in turn leads to high staff turnover, low morale, low job satisfaction, and lower productivity (Choi *et al.*, 2012:496). Factors contributing to emotional exhaustion are role ambiguity or conflict in job descriptions and overload in terms of not having the required skills or not having enough time to complete a task (Askin, 2007:679). Role ambiguity can arise when insufficient information or funds available to do one's job, or when there is a lack of clarity about the role and its expectations. It can also be

described as a discrepancy between the information needed by an employee to perform his role adequately and the information he/she has. (Sial *et al.*, 2011:459).

Work engagement is another concept that affects employee burnout. An employee is engaged when he/she has a “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind”. This state of mind is characterised by dedication and enthusiasm, full concentration, a sense of importance and pride. Research on work engagement has confirmed that there is a relationship between engagement and positive organisational outcomes, which include performance, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and low turnover intention (Simons & Buitendach, 2013:3).

By reducing role stressors and employing coping strategies, the negative effects of job burnout can be mitigated (Choi *et al.*, 2012:493). A number of intervention programmes that have been developed to mitigate the adverse effects of job burnout include training, stress management programmes, time management programmes, social skills, and relaxation techniques. Supervisors play a critical role in call centre management, and it has been found that proper support from them can reduce turnover intentions. Call centre managers will be able to control the workload of call centre agents better by adjusting staff levels or improving skills-based routing or call blending. By controlling the workload, one of the most important reasons for burnout is controlled (Askin, 2007:679). If managers are able to manage stress and fatigue of call centre agents effectively, they might be able to improve organisational performance (Deery & Kinnie, 2002:9).

The lack of career advancement opportunities is another factor that plays a great role in an employees’ decision to leave a call centre job. Therefore, most call centre agents see the call centre job as a stepping-stone to a better paying job rather than a final career choice (Hunter & Hachimi, 2012:551). Promotion in an organisation could serve two roles. First employees are assigned to roles where they can best contribute to the performance of the organisation, and secondly it can serve as incentive or reward (Sial *et al.*, 2011:460). As indicated previously, only 5,3% of agents are promoted at the call centre. If an organisation encourages promotion

from within, there will be greater expectations of high performance and less staff turnover. In their study Choi et al. (2012:494) determined that, when call centre agents are provided with clear career paths, they are likely to remain in the company, even when they face high depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment. However, career advancements should include not only formal promotions but also include informal promotions, for example when agents with high job resourcefulness are asked to improve practices by assisting with the training of new agents (Ashill, 2009:340). Hingst (2004:6) indicates in his study that successful career management should not always be about “climbing the ladder,” but can be about broadening skills, experience, and expertise. Opportunities for career advancement will improve job satisfaction, and organisations need to engage in human resource practices that enhance job satisfaction. Organisations need to develop strategies to differentiate themselves as supportive organisations to work for (Das et al 2012:17). By devising better and transparent promotion practices, managers at call centres can enhance productivity of employees.

Although career paths at a call centre are flat, more opportunities are created for women to advance to management ranks due to the “natural talents” they have. Organisational structures will determine gender representation in the ranks of management. It is more likely that women advance beyond the ranks of line managers to people management positions opposed to strategic management positions (Russel, 2008:208).

Another important factor that can affect staff turnover is the work organisation used by the organisation, which can also signal a threat to employees’ job security. Organisations make use of the high-involvement approach by employing people permanently and hardly ever make use of temporary staff. Employees working in such an organisation are sure about the employer’s level of investment in job security, training, and compensation. Research has found that staff turnover in organisations making use of permanent employees are less than in organisations that make use of more temporary staff (Kwon & Van Jaarsveld, 2013:1080).

Currently it is realised that the call centre model based on low discretion and high monitoring of performance is inappropriate; therefore, call centre managers should move from a “control paradigm” to paradigm of internal motivation (Raz & Blank, 2007:84). Findings from various studies indicate that employee well-being may be improved by increasing the control employees have over work methods and procedures, improving support from team leaders, and decreasing the levels of monitoring (Hannif *et al.*, 2008:277).

Because of the working conditions and low pay of call centres, the call centre industry carries a “bad name” globally. In Argentina there is a positive aspect with regard to call centres that might reduce staff turnover, namely the fact that employees are given a formalised contract (permanent employment) after a three-month probation period. This formalised contract allows employees access to social security services. Many other industries in Argentina do not offer their employees formalised contracts or permanent employment (Del Bono *et al.*, 2012:708). The positive aspect of a formalised contract in the call centre industry in Argentina does not mean that the job quality is good. The fact that Argentinian call centres offer permanent contracts to employees ensure that their staff turnover stays low (between 20%-30% opposed to 30%-70% in other countries).

To conclude, employees’ experiences and attitudes will vary from workplace to workplace and from industry to industry, but most employees in the call centre industry find their overall work experience to be neither enjoyable nor positive. Managers need to work on strategies to improve the work experience of call centre agents. As indicated above, a method to achieve this it to adopt the “empowerment strategy” that includes a people-orientated approach that also focuses on workplace quality. Implementation of career progression, rewards, and recognition practices can be used to improve productivity and efficiency and lower staff turnover (Connell *et al.*, 2009:13). Supervisors play an important role, not only in motivating agents and improving productivity, but also with regard to staff turnover. Therefore, some of the negative effects of the call centre job can be alleviated by supportive supervision and job autonomy (Suff *et al.*, 2005:18).

In the next chapter, the research methodology will be discussed. The researcher will indicate how data were collected and analysed to determine if the call centre was effective and if the research outcomes and theories discussed in the above-mentioned literature are indeed correct with regard to which factors affect staff turnover and if certain competencies are essential to call centre agents.

## **CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In Chapter 2, international and national research on the efficiency of call centres is discussed. Core competencies of call centre agents and reasons for high staff turnover are also elaborated on.

The plan of how the research will be conducted is called the research design and will enable the researcher to answer the research questions. To identify, formulate and use the correct design is very important.

This chapter explains the research design and methodology that was used to pursue the research objective as well as the secondary research objectives. The use of a questionnaire as an optimum measurement tool is explained. The various stages of analysis relating to the research objectives are explained.

The chapter concludes with the ethical considerations that guided the study.

### **3.2 Research design**

For this study, the quantitative research method was used. The quantitative view is described as being realist or positivist. Realists are of the opinion that research is conducted to uncover an existing reality. According to positivist paradigm, the world operates according to fixed laws of cause and effect (Muijs, 2011:4).

Quantitative research can be defined as the explanation of happenings by collecting data (numerical) and then analysing the data using statistical based methods (Muijs, 2011:1). When used in business research, quantitative methods are normally used to measure customer behaviour, opinions or attitudes (Cooper & Schindler, 2011:161).

The definition can be divided into three steps. The first step is to provide an explanation of a phenomenon. The second step is the collection of data. The last step in the process is to analyse the data using a statistical based method. The researcher does not have to be a mathematician to analyse the data, as there are various computer software that can assist with the analyses.

Quantitative research can be divided in two categories, namely experimental and non-experimental designs. Non-experimental research is used mainly in descriptive studies. Descriptive studies can be defined as studies in which the units that are selected for participation are measured against all relevant variables at a specific time (Maree & Pietersen, 2007:152).

Cooper and Schindler (2011:142) define cross-sectional research as “studies carried out once and represent a snapshot of one point in time.” The use of this research design is rationalised by a focus on a specific unit of analysis (a debt-collection call centre in Bloemfontein).

### **3.3 Sampling**

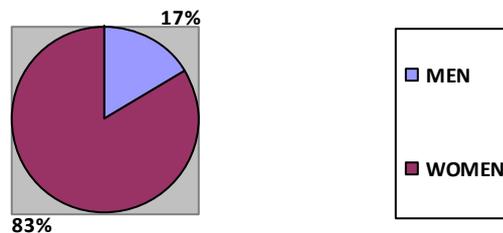
Simple random probability sampling was used in this study. Cooper and Schindler (2011:369) define this sampling design as “based on a concept of random selection – a controlled procedure that assures that each population element is given a known nonzero chance of selection.”

As previously indicated, Bloemfontein at the time of the research had three debt collection call centres. The researcher approached all three call centres to conduct the study but was denied access by two of the three call centres, because there was fierce competition among the call centres, and each one wanted to ensure that their competitive advantage would not be revealed to the others.

If all three call centres had formed part of the study, the population size would have been 200 call centre agents, 10 supervisors and 5 managers (directors). However,

because the study is focusing on only one call centre, the population size includes 30 agents, 2 supervisors, a manager, a performance officer and a director.

The gender division of the call centre are presented visually in the following chart



Twenty five of the call centre agents are woman, and five of them are men. The supervisors are a man and woman, and the manager is a woman, while the performance officer and the director are men.

As previously indicated, the researcher distributed the questionnaires to all the agents, supervisors, managers, and director herself. Although participation was voluntary, it was expected that the entire population will participate in the study, as the questionnaires would be distributed to the entire population at the same time and the researcher would be present during the completion of the questionnaires by the call centre personnel. The sample size included 30 agents, 2 supervisors, 1 manager, 1 performance officer, and 1 director.

### 3.4 Data collection method

The quantitative data was collected by means of a structured questionnaire. Information from the literature review was used to develop the content of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered physically because the call centre agents did not have access to email.

The researcher adhered to the following guidelines provided by McMillan and Schumacher (2001:100) to draft an effective questionnaire:

- Clarity: Participants must be able to understand the questions, and the questions should be unambiguous.
- Double-barrelled questions: Only one concept should be addressed per question.
- Competent participants: The participants must know what the questions are about so that they can give reliable feedback.
- Relevant: All questions should be relevant to the study.
- Simple and short: The questions must be to the point to encourage participants to complete the questionnaire.
- Avoid negative questions: Questions must be easy to interpret and negativity should be avoided.
- Avoid biased terms: Avoid questions that can lead the participants in a certain direction.

See Appendix A for a copy of the questionnaire. The questionnaire is divided into four sections. Section 1 deals with specific demographic questions. Section 2 deals with the participants' opinion on efficiency. Section 3 deals with skills needed by call centre agents, and Section 4 deals with motivating factors.

In Sections 2 to 4, a Likert Scale was used to test employees' feelings, attitudes, beliefs, and judgment on certain variables. The advantage of using the Likert Scale is that it is easy and quick to construct, while it most probably provide more reliable data than many other scales do.

The information gathered was be used to get a better understanding of factors that affect efficiency, whether competencies of agents are indeed important and what role motivating factors play in the management of a call centre.

### **3.5 Ethical considerations**

Cooper and Schindler (2011:32) define ethics as follows: “Ethics are norms or standards of behaviour that guide moral choices about our behaviour and our relationship with others.” The aim of ethics in research is to ensure that no one is harmed by the research activities and specifically in this research study that no trade secrets of the organisation or competitive advantages are revealed to competitors. Respondents completed their questionnaires anonymously to ensure confidentiality.

The following research ethics proposed by Bryman and Bell (2007:149) where used as guidelines for the study:

#### *3.5.1 Permission from management*

The researcher approached the directors of the organisation and specifically the director responsible for the call centre, to obtain permission to conduct the research at the call centre and to have access to the call centre agents and supervisors. As all the call centre agents and supervisors are located in the same building and all work the same hours, the researcher was be able to discuss the purpose of the research with the respondents.

#### *3.5.2 Voluntary participation*

Before the questionnaires were distributed, it was explained that participation was voluntary. The researcher ensured that no one was misled or coerced into participation by either management or fellow agents. Participation in the study had no foreseen legal implications.

### 3.5.3 Confidentiality and respect

It was explained to the respondents that the questionnaires would be completed anonymously and that confidentiality was guaranteed.

## 3.6 Conclusion

This chapter is crucial to the outcome of the research study, and the aim was to arrive at a reliable answer for the research question. The chapter outlines the quantitative research design and methodology used in this study. This method was used to answer questions relating to how certain factors influence the efficiency of a call centre and how management need to deal with these factors. Data were collected by means of a structured questionnaire and administered by the researcher. The processes of data editing and statistical analysis then followed.

The results obtained from the research methods and analysis are presented in Chapter 4.

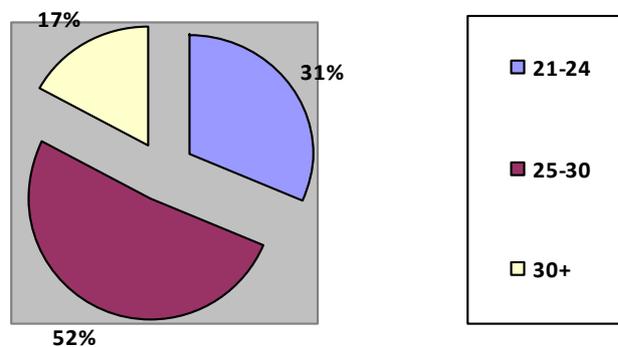
## CHAPTER 4 – RESULTS

### 4.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4, the findings and results of the study are discussed. The findings and results are based on data collected from the questionnaires. In Chapter 5, recommendations will be made based on the findings and results. The questionnaire was divided into four sections, namely demographic information, company efficiency, skills needed by call centre agents, and motivating factors.

### 4.2 Demographic information

The results represent data collected from the entire population of the focus call centre. In the demographics section, the respondents were required to indicate their age, gender, education level, tenure, and position in the company. The results are presented in the figures below.

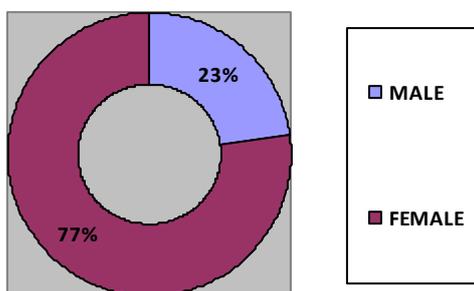


*Figure 1: Age of respondents*

Source: Fieldstudy data

The total number of questionnaires completed is thirty five. Of the total number of respondents, 31.43% fell in the 21- to 24-years age group; 51.43% of the respondents were between the ages of 25 and 30 years; and only 17.14% of the respondents were older than 30 years. This is consistent with international findings that most call centre agents are between the ages of 24 and 29 years.

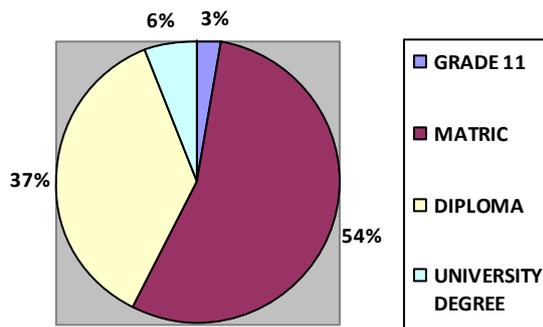
The data indicate a good representation of the different age groups. Only two of the call centre agents were older than 30 years; the other four respondents older than 30 years were people in senior positions. Therefore, it suggests that almost all of the call centre agents leave the industry before the age of 30 years, which corresponds with the findings of Hunter & Hachimi (2012) that call centre agents see the call centre agent job as a stepping-stone and not as a career. Most call centre agents use the call centre job to gain work experience before they move on to more advanced job opportunities.



*Figure 2: Gender of respondents*

Source: Fieldstudy data

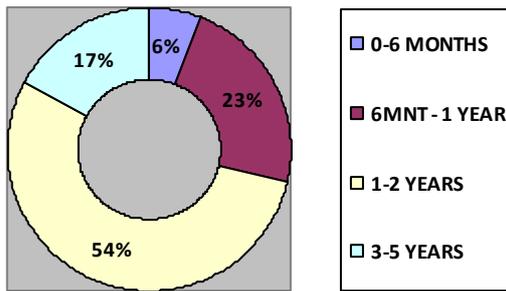
The research results indicate that more women than men are employed by the focus call centre. It is consistent with information in the literature review that found, globally, that call centres employ more women than men. Of people employed by the focus call centre, 77.14% are women and 22.86% are men. When considering promotion in the call centre, and although more women are employed by the call centre, it is still difficult for them to advance to the ranks of senior positions. In his study, Russel (2008) found, that when women advance to senior positions, it is normally to personnel management positions and not operational management positions. The focus call centre has a woman as a manager; however, she is responsible only for the administrative part of the position, while operations are managed by the director in charge of the call centre. This finding is consistent with international trends with regard to women in management positions in the call centre industry.



*Figure 3: Education level of respondents*

Source: Fieldstudy data

Data obtained from the questionnaires confirmed that most call centre agents (54.29%) had Grade 12. The director and the performance officer were the only two respondents who had university degrees. The manager, the two supervisors and ten call centre agents had diplomas. The data from the focus call centre indicate that the higher the education level, the higher the respondent's position in the call centre hierarchy. The result is consistent with international findings that confirm that most call centre agents have Grade 12 or a similar qualification. India is the only exception to this norm, as the majority of its call centre agents have university degrees. In South Africa, the education arena is vastly different from that in India. Although India is a poor country with a huge population, most people get the opportunity to obtain a tertiary education. In South Africa, with its large number of poor and unemployed people, not as many people get the opportunity to finish school, let alone obtain a diploma or a degree. Education levels affect not only efficiency of the call centre but also the type of training call centre agents should receive.



**Graph 4: Tenure**

Source: Fieldstudy data

Most call centre agents (54.29%) had been in the employment of the call centre for 1 to 2 years, and 22.86% of the call centre agents had been employed at the call centre for between 6 months and 1 year. The respondents in senior positions had been working at the call centre for more than three years (17.14%). Therefore, it can be derived from the data that the longer a person had been employed at the call centre, the better the chances were of being promoted to a senior position. Only two call centre agents (5.71%) had been employed at the call centre for less than 6 months. The data confirm that the focus call centre did not have a big staff turnover over the past six months as only two new call centre agents were recruited. The average tenure for call centre agents in South Africa is 3.6 years. The average time spent working at a call centre allows call centre agents to gain work experience that gives them a better chance than people with no work experience of being employed in a more advanced position. The difference between Indian call centres and South African call centres, specifically the focus call centre, is that in India, most call centre agents already have other work experience. Therefore, it can be derived from the data that call centre agents do not work at call centres for long periods, which is in line with international trends. Management need to consider the average tenure of call centre agents when they develop their recruitment, training, and management strategies.

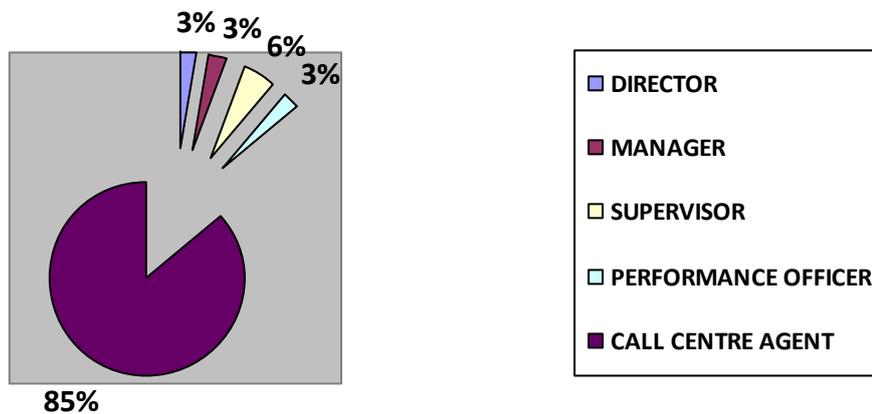


Figure 5: Position  
 Source: Fieldstudy data

The focus call centre had a flat command structure (three levels) which leaves little room for advancement or promotion. Figure 5 above shows the different job categories at the focus call centre. The respondents were divided as follows: 2.86% directors, 2.86 % managers, 5.71% supervisors, 2.86% performance officers and 85.71% call centre agents. When considering that there were only two supervisors for a group of thirty call centre agents, management should ensure that each supervisor is able to support the fifteen call centre agents under his/her control properly. Lack of support, limited support, or the inability to assist agents with difficult situations timely could affect the efficiency of operations of the focus call centre. Management should consider using senior call centre agents to assist supervisors in managing the rest of the call centre agents. Smaller teams with team leaders should be considered.

### 4.3 Company efficiency

Section 2 of the questionnaire was divided in subsections, namely company efficiency, training and selection, supervisors, and emotions and performance management.

### 4.3.1 Company efficiency

A Likert scale was used for the questions, ranging from 1 for *strongly disagree* to 4 for *strongly agree*. The four-point Likert scale was used to eliminate neutral responses by the respondents. For the sake of reporting, in Table 1, the categories of *strongly disagree* and *disagree* are grouped together, and *agree* and *strongly agree* are grouped together. In *Appendix B*, the results of the categories for all questions are indicated separately.

Table 1: *Company efficiency*

	<b>DISAGREE</b>	<b>AGREE</b>
<b>Q2.1</b>	34.29%	65.71%
<b>Q2.2</b>	22.86%	77.14%
<b>Q2.3</b>	54.28%	45.72%
<b>Q2.4</b>	34.28%	65.72%
<b>Q2.5</b>	20.00%	80.00%
<b>Q2.6</b>	14.28%	85.72%
<b>Q2.7</b>	05.72%	94.28%
<b>Q2.8</b>	68.57%	31.43%
<b>Q2.9</b>	20.00%	80.00%
<b>Q2.10</b>	74.28%	25.72%
<b>Q2.11</b>	25.72%	74.28%
<b>Q2.12</b>	05.72%	94.28%

Source: Fieldstudy data

The first set of questions indicated in Table 1 indicates that most of the respondents agreed with the statements with regard to company efficiency. Question 2.3 is an exception. In response to the statement that maximum productivity was achieved by the focus call centre, 54.28% of the respondents indicated that it was not true. Not achieving maximum productivity could be the outcome of various factors, such as lack of training, lack of motivation, or ineffective systems. Management need to consult with call centre agents and supervisors to determine the reasons for not

reaching maximum productivity. The answers to Question 2.8 might indicate a possible reason for the low productivity. In response to the question whether there were enough call centre agents for the call centre to operate effectively, 68.57% of the respondents disagreed with this statement. If the number of agents is one of the reasons for low productivity, management will have to recruit more agents. However, numbers are not the only important factor; the existing call centre agents should be properly trained and motivated to ensure their maximum productivity, and new agents they recruit need to have the right skills to ensure that the call centre operations are effective.

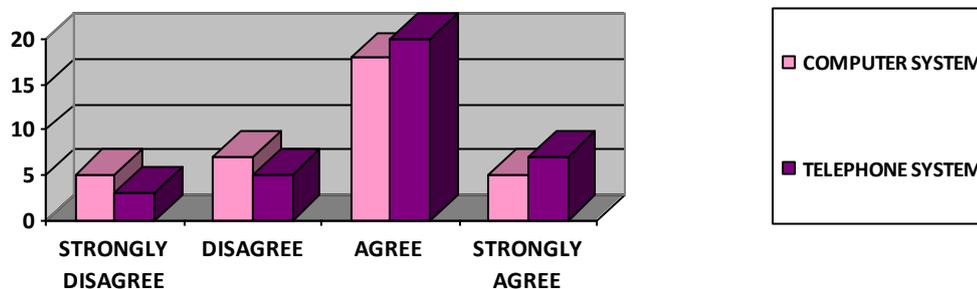


Figure 6: Effectiveness of the computer and telephone system

Source: Fieldstudy data

In Figure 6, the responses to questions 2.1 and 2.2 are presented to indicate the effectiveness of the computer and telephone systems of the focus call centre. These two factors are the most important technological features that determine the efficiency of the focus call centre. If the computer collection system were difficult to operate or constantly give problems, it would affect productivity negatively. If the company used the most up-to-date systems, it would be expected that all respondents would agree strongly with the statements. While a small percentage of respondents indicated that they did not agree with the statements, it can be assumed that there were minor problems with the two systems. Management should engage with the employees that indicated that the systems were not effective to determine where the problems are. The computer and telephone systems are vital to the call centre operations, and management need to ensure that secondary or

backup systems are available should the main telephone or computer system fail. The telephone and computer technicians employed on site by the company should always be aware of the newest technology available to enhance the operations of the focus call centre and convey these developments to management for consideration. The availability of computer technicians on site ensure the reliability and stability of the computer and telephone systems as problems can be addressed immediately.

Questions 2.10 and 2.11 relate to questions 2.1 and 2.2. In Question 2.10 the statement is made that correct information is always available on the system, and Question 2.11 makes the statement that wrong information frustrates the collection process. The responses are represented in Figure 7 below.

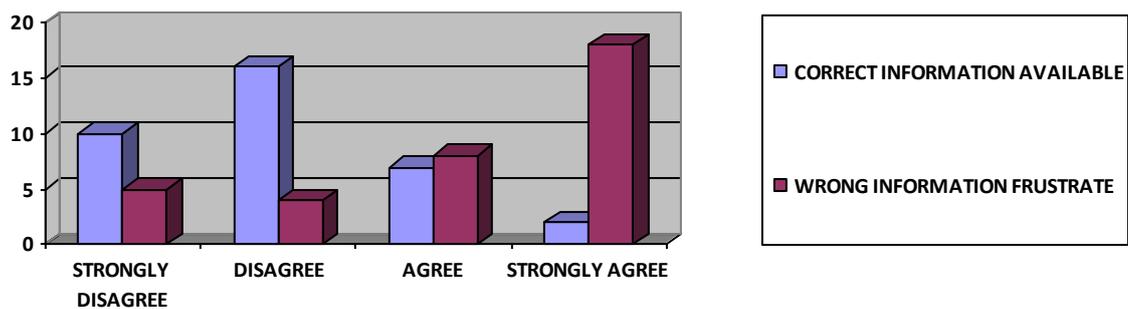


Figure 7: Importance of correct information

Source: Fieldstudy data

Only two respondents, namely the two call centre agents who had been working for the company for less than six months, strongly agreed that the correct information was always available on the system. However, 74,28% of the respondents indicated that the correct information was not always available. Management will have to discuss this problem with the clients to ensure that the correct information is received from them so that call centre agents always have access to the right information to ensure that the collection process flows smoothly.

More than 50% of the respondents indicated that the wrong information frustrated the collection process. The respondents who did not agree with the statement might

have high levels of job-resourcefulness, whereby they had learnt to deal with the frustration and developed ways to work around the problem. Management need to utilise the “skills” of these individuals who have developed ways to work around problems. They have valuable information about how to enhance the collection process, although information supplied is sometimes wrong. In accordance with international findings very few people have high levels of job-resourcefulness, and when recruiting, management should look for candidates with this “soft” skill, as job-related skills can be learnt easily.

In the data analysis process, factor values were calculated using the age, gender, education level, and tenure of respondents as variables. When using age as a variable, the age group 30+ are the majority group that agree with the statements on company efficiency. Seeing that most of the respondents in the 30+ age group were in the senior positions of the call centre, it can be derived from the data that their opinion of company efficiency was more positive than that of the call centre agents. However, It should be considered that different people would have different views on what the levels of efficiency are, and this might influence their responses.

With reference to gender as a variable, the majority of males agree with the efficiency statements of the company.

When using education level as a variable, the group with university degrees are the majority that agree with the company efficiency statements. Once again, this group represented the senior managers in the company. The response from the respondent who only had a Grade 11 qualification has been omitted, as he was the only respondent on that education level and his answer cannot be considered representative of that specific group.

With reference to tenure as a variable, the group in employment for between 3 and 5 years (the senior managers) again was the majority that agreed with the efficiency statements. It can be derived from the data that the longer persons are employed by

the call centre and with that advance to higher positions, the more positive their view of efficiency becomes.

Correlation testing was done to determine whether there was a relationship between company efficiency and each of the following variables namely: training, supervisors' conduct, performance management, skills needed, and motivating factors. The p-value was considered and compared with a significance level of 0.1. If the p-value is less than 0.1, it can be concluded that a relationship exists between the variables. The correlation coefficient was also calculated. If there is a positive relationship between two variables, the correlation coefficient will be positive and range between 0 and 1. The closer the value is to 1, the stronger the relationship between the 2 variables.

Table 2: *Correlations*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Correlations coefficient</b>	<b>P-value</b>
<b>Training</b>	0.397	0.018
<b>Supervisors' conduct</b>	0.437	0.009
<b>Performance management</b>	0.546	0.001
<b>Skills needed</b>	0.104	0.553
<b>Motivating factors</b>	-0.072	0.680

Source: Fieldstudy data

The p-values for training, supervisors' conduct, and performance management are 0.018, 0.009, and 0.001 respectively, which is less than 0.1. This means that there is a significant positive correlation (0.397, 0.437 and 0.546) between company efficiency and these three variables. It implies that, with an increase in training, better conduct by supervisors and improved management of performance, company efficiency will increase.

The p-values for skills needed and motivating factors are 0.553 and 0.680 respectively, which are both greater than 0.1. Therefore, there is no significant relationship between company efficiency and the two variables of skills needed and motivating factors. This is contradictory to findings reported in the literature review, namely that when call centre agents have the necessary core skills, they will be able to do their jobs more efficiently, which will increase the efficiency of the call centre. Motivating factors, on the other hand, might increase productivity but that does not necessarily lead to efficiency. Management must consider whether the motivating factors they use indeed increase efficiency or merely increase productivity.

The results indicate that members of top management had a more positive opinion of the efficiency of the company than the other employees had. It is important that all stakeholders see the company as efficient. When management consider the call centre as efficient, they should use this fact as a marketing tool to get more work in. When clients consider the call centre as efficient, they might consider extending their contracts or increasing the workload to the call centre. As indicated previously, views of efficiency can differ, but for the call centre to operate optimally, all stakeholders need to understand what efficiency specifically for the focus call centre entails whether it be that targets are met or exceeded, that all systems operate optimally and/or that agents have the highest skill levels. To be able to manage efficiency, one needs to be able to measure it. By defining efficiency, management will be able to measure it, and call centre agents will know what is expected of them.

### 4.3.2 Training and Selection

In this section of the questionnaire, statements were made regarding whether certain training and selection processes could enhance company efficiency. Once again, for reporting purposes, the *strongly disagree* and *disagree* answers were grouped together and the *agree* and *strongly agree* answers were grouped together. See Appendix B for details of each category separately.

Table 3: *Training en Selection*

	<b>DISAGREE</b>	<b>AGREE</b>
<b>Q2.13</b>	45.71%	54.29%
<b>Q2.14</b>	45.71%	54.29%
<b>Q2.15</b>	14.28%	85.72%
<b>Q2.16</b>	11.43%	88.57%
<b>Q2.17</b>	02.86%	97.14%
<b>Q2.18</b>	14.29%	85.71%
<b>Q2.19</b>	00.00%	100.00%
<b>Q2.20</b>	02.86%	97.14%

Source: Fieldstudy data

The results indicate that, except for questions 2.13 and 2.14, the overwhelming majority of the respondents agreed that training and selection play a very important role in company efficiency. However, it is interesting to note that 14,28% (5) of the respondents were of the opinion that training will not enhance efficiency of call centre agents. Although they represent a small percentage of the population, it would be interesting to determine why they held the opinion, as it is clear that, in all occupations and irrespective of what job a person does, training will make him better in what he does. Respondents are also of the opinion that call centre agents should be able to control themselves during a collection call but they should also be able to control the conversation. Respondents had insights and understood that they could not allow a debtor to take charge of the telephone conversation; if they allowed the debtor to take charge, the possibility that the debtor would settle his account was

very slim. It is also good to know that call centre agents understood that, if they became angry or upset or competed in a shouting match with the debtor, the problem would not be solved, and quite possibly the debt would not be collected. This answers correspond with the findings of the literature review in Chapter 2. It is important that self-control and conversation control constantly form part of the training module, both for new and existing call centre agents.

A T-test was also used to determine if the group means of interval variables of the two groups differ from each another. In this case, the test was conducted to determine whether the views on company efficiency, training and selection, supervisors and emotions, performance management, skills needed, and motivating factors were different between males and females. For a conclusion on whether these views were different or not, the p-value was considered and compared with a value of 0.1. If the p-value was less than 0.1, the the views are different, and if the p-value was greater than 0.1, the views are the same.

Table 4: *T-Test*

<b>Gender</b>	<b>T- statistic</b>	<b>P-value</b>
<b>Company efficiency</b>	2.662	0.012
<b>Training and selection</b>	0.574	0.570
<b>Supervisor and emotions</b>	2.006	0.053
<b>Performance management</b>	3.600	0.001
<b>Skills needed</b>	1.117	0.272
<b>Motivating factors</b>	-0.814	0.422

Source: Fieldstudy data

The p-values for company efficiency, supervisor and emotions, and performance management are all less than 0.1, indicating that the views on company efficiency are different between males and females. The t-statistics indicate that the difference is statistically significant. The p-values for training and selection, skills needed, and motivating factors are greater than 0.1; therefore, the views on these factors are the same between males and females.

### 4.3.3 Supervisors and emotions

This set of questions required respondents to indicate how their emotions affected their work and performance and if supervisor support was important. For reporting purposes, the *strongly disagree* and *disagree* answers are grouped together, and *strongly agree* and *agree* answers grouped together. See Appendix B for detail on each category.

Table 5: *Supervisors and emotions*

	<b>DISAGREE</b>	<b>AGREE</b>
<b>Q2.21</b>	08.57%	91.43%
<b>Q2.22</b>	05.71%	94.29%
<b>Q2.23</b>	25.71%	74.29%
<b>Q2.24</b>	31.43%	68.57%
<b>Q2.25</b>	31.43%	68.57%
<b>Q2.26</b>	00.00%	100.00%

Source: Fieldstudy data

The data indicate that respondents considered supervisor support very important and they were of the opinion that supervisor support did affect the quality of their work. With regard to Question 2.24, 11 of the respondents indicated that supervisors were not available to assist with difficult clients. It is important for management to discuss this fact with the 11 respondents to determine whether there is friction between the agents and their specific supervisors or whether other underlying factors influence their opinions. It is vital that call centre agents and supervisors have a good working relationship because the lack thereof will affect productivity and efficiency and might increase the call centre agents' thoughts of leaving the call centre. The rest of the findings are in line with the views of researchers discussed in the literature review. All the respondents agreed that call centre agents should not allow their emotions to influence their work. This is an important realisation – call centre agents understand that their emotions affect their work and negative emotions they experience might reflect in the way they handle clients and lead to

lower customer satisfaction. Management need to ensure that systems are in place to help call centre agents to deal with their emotions and assist them with work or personal problems they might experience to ensure that it does not affect their work.

#### *4.3.4 Performance management*

In this last sub-section of company efficiency, the respondents were asked to agree or disagree with statements about the importance of a performance management system and whether they thought the performance management system of the company was effective. They indicated that target setting was the best method for performance appraisals, although they were of the opinion that other methods should also be used. Management should engage with call centre agents and supervisors to obtain their views as to what other methods they suggest to appraise performance. A performance management policy should then be drafted and presented to the call centre agents before implementation. By allowing call centre agents and supervisors to make suggestions regarding the performance management policy will ensure that they understand the policy better and how it will be implemented and affect them. Respondents indicated that feedback after performance appraisals is important and that good work should be recognised. A feedback policy (when and how) should form part of the performance management policy and should include inputs from call centre agents and supervisors. It is recommended that performance appraisals be done regularly and not only once a year. As previously recommended, call centre agents should be divided into smaller teams with a senior call centre agent as team leader. Team leaders should do monthly performance appraisals, while supervisors should do quarterly appraisals of the teams under their control. Performance appraisals by management are done annually. Regular performance appraisals will ensure that call centre agents are always aware of their performance and highlight possible problems that need to be addressed in training. Thus, problems can be resolved in a short period and not only after a year when annual appraisals are done.

The results with regard to performance and feedback correspond with information presented in the literature review. More and more international researchers are of the opinion that target setting should no longer be the primary performance management tool.

Table 6: *Performance management*

	<b>DISAGREE</b>	<b>AGREE</b>
<b>Q2.27</b>	00.00%	100.00%
<b>Q2.28</b>	42.68%	57.14%
<b>Q2.29</b>	00.00%	100.00%
<b>Q2.30</b>	02.86%	97.14%
<b>Q2.31</b>	02.86%	97.14%
<b>Q2.32</b>	14.29%	85.71%
<b>Q2.33</b>	80.00%	20.00%
<b>Q2.34</b>	05.71%	94.29%
<b>Q2.35</b>	02,86%	97.14%
<b>Q2.36</b>	11.42%	88.57%
<b>Q2.37</b>	20.00%	80.00%

Source: Fieldstudy data

The data confirm that in a company various factors influence efficiency, and the focus call centre is no exception. The factors indicated in the literature review, amongst others supervisor support, emotions of call centre agents, and the performance management system, are also the factors that affect efficiency at the focus call centre.

With regard to questions 2.28 and 2.37, the answers relate to each other. In Question 2.37, the majority of the respondents indicated that good work done was recognised, and in Question 2.28, a small majority indicated that the performance management system was effective.

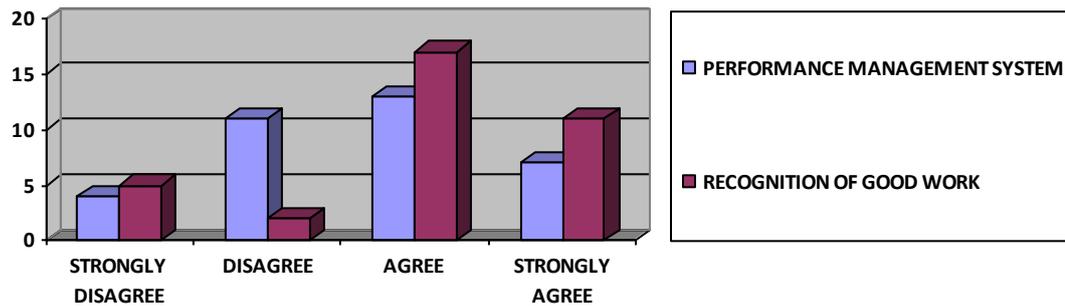


Figure 8: Efficiency of performance management system

Source: Fieldstudy data

Management should engage with the respondents that indicated that good work was not recognised to determine whether they truly feel that their good work is not acknowledged or whether other underlying factors influenced their opinion. To ensure that maximum efficiency is achieved, management need to engage with call centre agents continually to identify problems before they escalate into full-scale problems that affect morale.

#### 4.4 Skills needed by call centre agents

Section 3 of the questionnaire confronted the respondents with statements on which core competencies call centre agents need to make them effective and efficient. The statements were made to obtain an answer to the first secondary research question. For reporting purposes, *strongly disagree* and *disagree* answers were grouped together and *strongly agree* and *agree* answers were grouped together. In Appendix B, details of each category can be found.

Table 7: Skills needed

	<b>DISAGREE</b>	<b>AGREE</b>
<b>Q3.1</b>	05.71%	94.29%
<b>Q3.2</b>	05.71%	94.29%
<b>Q3.3</b>	05.71%	94.29%
<b>Q3.4</b>	00.00%	100.00%
<b>Q3.5</b>	00.00%	100.00%
<b>Q3.6</b>	00.00%	100.00%
<b>Q3.7</b>	22.86%	77.14%
<b>Q3.8</b>	14.29%	85.71%
<b>Q3.9</b>	22.85%	77.15%
<b>Q3.10</b>	02.86%	97.14%
<b>Q3.11</b>	02.86%	97.14%
<b>Q3.12</b>	02.86%	97.14%
<b>Q3.13</b>	54.28%	45.72%
<b>Q3.14</b>	08.57%	91.43%
<b>Q3.15</b>	31.42%	68.58%
<b>Q3.16</b>	54.28%	45.72%
<b>Q3.17</b>	08.57%	91.43%
<b>Q3.18</b>	08.57%	91.43%
<b>Q3.19</b>	00.00%	100.00%
<b>Q3.20</b>	02.86%	97.14%
<b>Q3.21</b>	08.57%	91.43%

Source: Fieldstudy data

In the literature review, it was established that communication is the most important skill. All the respondents (100%) agreed that communication is the most important skill. The majority of the respondents also confirmed that it is important for call centre agents to address clients in their home language (however, this might not always be possible if the call centre operates in the international market).

It is interesting to note that 54.28% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that women are more suited to the call centre job than men. Question 3.16 stated that women could deal with difficult clients better than men could, and 54.28% of the respondents disagreed with this statement. However, the findings of researchers discussed in Chapter 2 reveal that women are indeed more suited to the call centre job, and although the respondents differ from that, the physical evidence (that more women are employed at the specific call centre) proves that it is in fact true.

Factor values were calculated to determine which core competencies were important to the employees. The literature review indicates that communication is the most important core competency. This was confirmed by the respondents. The literature review indicates that the second important competency was listening. According to the respondents, telephone and computer skills are the second most important core competency, with listening only in the third place. Listening is one of the “soft” skills that call centre agents should have. Telephone and computer skills are easier to teach. Therefore, when recruiting, management should rather consider candidates who have good communication and listening skills, as their telephone and computer skills could be enhanced with training.

Table 8: *Factor values of core competencies*

<b>Core competencies</b>	<b>Questions</b>	<b>Factor values</b>
<b>Communication</b>	Q3.5	0.96
	Q3.6	0.89
<b>Listening</b>	Q3.10	0.90
<b>Telephone &amp; computer skills</b>	Q3.11	0.94
<b>Numeracy skills</b>	Q3.12	0.84
<b>Job resourcefulness</b>	Q3.17	0.80
<b>Self-efficacy</b>	Q3.19	0.87
<b>Positive attitude</b>	Q3.20	0.86

Source: Fieldstudy data

In the respondents' opinion, job resourcefulness is the least important core competency for call centre agents to have. Job resourcefulness is another important "soft" that is important for call centre agents. By having job resourcefulness in the high demanding and stressful environment of the call centre will enable the call centre agent to overcome obstacles in reaching job-related goals.

#### 4.5 Motivating factors

The fourth and last section of the questionnaire dealt with statements about motivating factors. The statements referred to the call centre job as a career or just a stepping-stone. It also required respondents to give their opinion on promotion possibilities in the company. Statements also referred to possible reasons for call centre agents to leave the call centre industry. For reporting purposes, the *strongly disagree* and *disagree* answers were grouped together, and the *agree* and *strongly agree* answers were grouped together. See Appendix B for details of each category separately.

Table 9: *Motivating factors*

	<b>DISAGREE</b>	<b>AGREE</b>
<b>Q4.1</b>	08.57%	91.43%
<b>Q4.2</b>	02.86%	97.14%
<b>Q4.3</b>	00.00%	100.00%
<b>Q4.4</b>	17.14%	82.86%
<b>Q4.5</b>	82.85%	17.15%
<b>Q4.6</b>	42.85%	57.15%
<b>Q4.7</b>	37.14%	62.86%
<b>Q4.8</b>	31.43%	68.57%
<b>Q4.9</b>	11.42%	88.58%
<b>Q4.10</b>	02.86%	97.14%
<b>Q4.11</b>	22.86%	77.14%
<b>Q4.12</b>	54.29%	45.71%
<b>Q4.13</b>	54.28%	45.72%

<b>Q4.14</b>	17.14%	82.86%
<b>Q4.15</b>	20.00%	80.00%
<b>Q4.16</b>	25.71%	74.29%
<b>Q4.17</b>	34.28%	65.72%
<b>Q4.18</b>	14.29%	85.71%
<b>Q4.19</b>	37.14%	62.86%
<b>Q4.20</b>	31.42%	68.58%
<b>Q.4.21</b>	42.86%	57.14%
<b>Q4.22</b>	37.14%	62.85%
<b>Q4.23</b>	17.14%	82.86%

Source: Fieldstudy data

The literature review indicates that most call centre agents see their call centre job as a stepping-stone and not as a career. This has been confirmed by 82.85% of the respondents. Questions 4.12 and 4.13 made statements with regard to the promotion policy of the company and promotion opportunities in the company. Respectively, 54.29% (question 4.12) and 54.28% (question 4.13) of the respondents did not agree with the statements made. Promotion is a very important motivating factor, and the literature review indicates that there is little opportunity for promotion in the call centre industry. This is also the experience of respondents in the focus call centre

Question 4.20 referred to the non-payment of bonuses and how it influenced their decision to stay with the company or not. In their study, Sial, Imran, and Zaheer (2011) found that there is a positive relationship between pay and performance. The better the pay, the better the candidates who will apply, and the better the performance will be. The salaries agents received at the focus call centre were low in relation to salaries paid by other call centres in Bloemfontein. Management should investigate how to improve the salary structure of the company to motivate the best performers to stay with the company and attract new suitable candidates for employment.

## 4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, the results obtained from the questionnaires have been discussed in detail. The results correspond with international research findings that balancing quality and efficiency is essential for the success of a call centre. Factors such as training and core competencies are vital to ensure that call centre agents are able to achieve maximum productivity. A proper and transparent performance management system should be implemented, and some form of incentive scheme and supervisor support are essential motivating factors.

The overall results presented here, linked well with the theory in this industry, and the researcher is confident that they are applicable to and representative of the focus call centre population.

## **CHAPTER 5 – RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The objective of this research was to determine if the focus call centre was effective and which factors affected efficiency. The first secondary objective was to determine whether call centre agents should have certain core competencies that make them more efficient, which in turn will increase the efficiency of the call centre. The second question to answer was how staff turnover affect management decisions and what can be done to reduce staff turnover.

In Chapter 4, the results of the research are discussed, and in this chapter, recommendations are made and a conclusion is presented.

### **5.2 Recommendations**

The call centre industry is a dynamic industry, and although the first call centre was established in 1970, this industry has boomed only since the late 1990s. Because of the rapid growth of the industry and its unique character, certain operations are still a trial-and-error process. It should also be understood that what works for call centres in one country might not necessarily be true for another country. The same is true for call centres in the same town, and what works for inbound call centres might not necessarily work for outbound call centres. However, some aspects of the call centre industry will be similar, no matter what call centre you are running.

Most call centres base their operations on the operations of call centres in India, which is renowned for its huge call centre industry. India is the preferred destination for big international companies from which to operate their call centres from, as India has a huge supply of English-speaking graduates, and labour cost in India is very low. Companies should use the lessons learned by call centres in India to manage their call centres more efficiently. When the call centre in India is servicing clients, for example America, it is expected of the call centre agents to almost give up their identity and adopt an American identity, which means they have to choose an

English name for themselves and learn to speak without the Indian accent. The other factor affecting the lives of call centre agents in India is the working hours. Once again, if clients in American are serviced, there is a huge time difference between India and American. Therefore, the call centre agents are working hours other than those considered normal working hours. Both the factors mentioned above affect staff turnover, as call centre agents are sometimes not supported by their families because of the “change” in identity and the working hours. Therefore, the lessons learned from call centres in India is that support by families is very important, and supervisor support is vital to assist call centre agents with balancing work and life at home. In South Africa, the accents and working hours do not play such a big role, but management can still learn valuable lessons in how to support call centre agents.

The biggest challenge for call centre managers is to find a balance between efficiency and quality. There will always be some degree of trade-off between efficiency and quality; however, the percentage of trade-off will differ from call centre to call centre and will depend on the management style followed at the call centre. Call centres can make use of two models to manage the labour process, namely the production line approach or the empowerment approach. The focus call centre follows the production line approach to standardise the service and restrict employee discretion. The production line approach also does not utilise the skills of employees. On the other hand, the empowerment approach allows employees greater autonomy and enables them to utilise their skills to meet customer demands. To make the call centre more efficient, it is recommended that the call centre follow a more hybrid approach by giving senior call centre agents files that are more complex files, allowing them more discretion in dealing with clients, and using their skills to the benefit the company. When considering the education levels of the call centre agents, most have only grade 12 qualifications, but agents with a diploma should be utilised to identify problems in the frontline, as they are working in the frontline and know what is preventing the call centre from being even more efficient and productive.

With regard to identifying possible problems early, it is recommended that short “kick-start” meetings should be held with the different sections at the call centre. This gives agents the opportunity to discuss experiences of previous day or indicate problems they have experienced. This ensures that problems are solved before they escalate into serious issues, and it gives management the opportunity to identify possible training subjects. The performance goals for the day can also be conveyed to the call centre agents. At the end of the working week, a debriefing meeting should be held to discuss how issues or problems were resolved, lessons learned and whether performance goals were reached. The regular meetings ensure that call centre agents are always informed about what is expected of them and are not only confronted with non-performance at the annual performance appraisals.

Although there are already two supervisors, it is suggested that call centre agents with further qualifications should be used as team leaders. They should be the link between the call centre agents and the supervisors. They are able to understand the frustrations of the call centre agents better and possibly may convey the problems to the supervisors better.

The way in which a call centre is managed will determine its performance. Therefore, the role of management is very important to make the call centre a success. It is recommended that the director in charge of the call centre spend time on the call centre floor once a week. This time should not be used to discuss work problems, but he should enquire only about the well-being of the agents. This will make him more approachable, and although discussions of problems still need to follow the chain of command, call centre agents will feel that their problems have a better chance of being resolved if management is truly involved and cares about each individual. By spending time on the call centre floor, the director will get a better understanding of individual call centre agents and what makes them tick. Because of the way in which call centres are operated, high intensity and high stress levels, there are many negative outcomes. One of the challenges management face is to mitigate these negative outcomes through different management strategies.

From the results of the questionnaires, it is apparent that the call centre agents were of the opinion that the call centre is not achieving maximum productivity. The question should then be asked whether productivity is not achieved because of the lack of agents; the lack of skills or motivation. Call centre agents indicated that there were not enough call centre agents to operate the call centre effectively: therefore, maximum productivity was not achieved. Management was of the opinion that maximum productivity was achieved and enough call centre agents were employed. The reason for the difference in opinion might be that call centre agents daily experience difficulties in reaching their goals because of the large number of files they have to deal with. This leads to exhaustion and low morale that affect productivity. Management just receive the overall figures and are not aware of the challenges call centre agents experience to reach the targets. It is recommended that management should employ more call centre agents. However, it is important that the correct people be recruited. Although the focus call centre is currently employing only one agent with a Grade 11 qualification, it is recommended that all future call centre agents should have at least a grade 12 qualification because they are a little bit older and have a better education background. It is important that possible call centre agents with the necessary core competencies be identified during the recruitment and selection process. During the interview process, questions related to the customer operations should be included. It is preferable that call centre agents that have the necessary soft skills for the job are employed, as job-specific (hard) skills are much easier to teach.

However, not only the recruitment and selection process is important. Training of the new call centre agents is of utmost importance. It is very important that the right person must present the training. Although supervisors should be able to train new agents, it is recommended that supervisors not be used for the initial official training. However, they are invaluable for follow-up and day-to-day training. Training should also focus on the differences in skills levels of new and existing agents. Training can be enhanced by partnering new agents with top performers. Productivity can be increased only if call centre agents are trained properly and know exactly what is expected of them. It should not stop with initial training for the new agents. Because

technology used by call centres is improving, constantly, it is important that training is continuous to ensure that call centre agents are able to use the new technology. New technology can also improve productivity and efficiency of the call centre.

The role of supervisors is very important. Supervisors are the link between call centre agents and management. Therefore, a certain bond between call centre agents and their supervisors is important. It is also important to concentrate on how new call centre agents identify with the core values of the company. It is important that call centre supervisors should be trained in managing call centre agents, but they also need additional training. They should also be trained in how to improve customer satisfaction. Supervisors should also be able to assist call centre agents with personal or work-related problems. They need to be trained in methods of motivating call centre agents. Work-life balance is another factor that affects emotions of call centre agents. Because of the operational set up of a call centre, supervisors should be able to assist call centre agents with balancing work and their personal lives. They must train them in time management and how to prioritise certain roles. It should also be indicated to them how to use their support structures (family and friends) to mitigate the negative effects of their call centre job.

It is recommended that the focus call centre look at ways to improve their training methods and expand the courses available. Better-trained agents will be more motivated and will improve productivity and efficiency.

Another factor that can affect productivity and efficiency is performance management. Setting targets is the most popular method to measure performance. It emerged from the questionnaires that performance management system of the focus call centre is effective. The respondents indicated that, although they were satisfied with target setting as a performance management system they would also prefer the use of other tools to measure performance. Currently, performance is measured only by the amount of money collected by each call centre agent. It is also important to define each individual call centre agent's role in the team and the company. By doing this, they will not only know exactly what they need to do but

also how they are contributing to the operations of the company as a whole. When performance is measure, it is important to ensure that call centre agents understand how each aspect is measured and what significance it has. This is currently a gap in the performance management system at the focus call centre. It is also recommended that, when key performance indicators (KPI) are set, a management outline should be provided first and then include the inputs from the call centre agents. This will ensure commitment and buy-in from everyone concerned.

Although it is difficult to determine other performance management tools, management should investigate possible tools. Consistency could be a possible performance management tool, measuring the success of call centre agents over a period of three or six months, which can ensure that call centre agents will also set long-term goals and not only focus on the month-to -month financial targets. It is recommended that not only “top performers” are rewarded, but also “best improvers”, which will motivate all call centre agents to be more productive and effective.

Feedback should always be given to call centre agents after a performance appraisal. Feedback will not only allow management to identify possible training opportunities but also indicate to call centre agents where they are lacking and where they can improve. However, it is important to use feedback as constructive criticism and not to punish call centre agents. As indicated in the literature review, proper feedback can motivate call centre agents and improve morale.

The first secondary question also need to be considered, namely whether call centre agents should have certain core competencies to ensure that they are able to do their work effectively.

The results of this research overwhelming confirmed international findings that core competencies are vital for call centre agents. However, responses of the respondents differ from international findings that women are more suited for the call centre job than men are and that women are better at dealing with difficult clients

than men are. For most of the call centre agents, the call centre agent position is their first job and they are unaware of the challenges that other jobs might have; therefore, they assume that women and men are equally suited for the call centre job. In addition, most of them are lucky to have a job and consider themselves suitable for any job they are currently doing, whether that is in fact true or not. Although their opinion does not affect the results of the study radically, it is interesting that they differ from the international standard where call centre agents most of the time have other work experience. This is one of the big differences between South African call centres and those in India. In India most call centre agents have a degrees and work experience, whereas in South Africa, most call centre agents have only Grade 12 and no work experience. Call centre agents in India are more mature and have developed better people skills through their work experience. In South Africa, specifically in the focus call centre, most agents are young and fresh from school. Therefore, training needs to include not only people skills but also strategies of how to conduct oneself in a work environment and how to deal with colleagues and senior staff.

As indicated in the literature review core competencies can be enhanced over time, and again training will play a vital role. Management should also focus not only on training that enhances work-related skills but also should consider training that can enhance life skills. The life skills training can assist call centre agents to deal better with the team dynamics of a call centre and the stressful environment. This training can also assist them with balancing work and their personal life.

Finally, the great problem of staff turnover is considered. The greatest reason for call centre agents leaving the call centre industry is the fact that there is very little opportunity for career advancement. Call centre agents that are committed to the company will be less likely to leave their current employment. Therefore, it is important that management understand the exact reasons why call centre agents are not committed to the company. Management should not assume that they know the answers; they must truly listen to the call centre agents. Respondents also indicated that the promotion system of the focus call centre was not transparent. It is

recommended that management formulate a proper promotion policy in conjunction with the call centre agents, and once it has been formulated and agreed upon, it should be implemented properly at the focus call centre and communicated to all relevant parties.

Although there are few possibilities for promotion at the focus call centre, management should look at ways to motivate call centre agents to stay. One way to do is to recognise good work. Good work must not only refer to reaching of targets but also consider consistency and how call centre agents assist new agents, for instance, or help out when supervisors are otherwise occupied. The focus call centre should also promote informal “promotion” whereby the best performing agents are used to train new agents.

Another motivating factor is the payment of incentives. As indicated in the literature review, incentives play an important role in motivating employees, and the non-payment of incentives will most definitely lower morale and move employees to resign. If management and call centre agents have agreed on the payment of certain incentives or bonuses when targets are reached, management should ensure that they keep to the agreement. Just one non-payment is enough to lower the morale of the agents seriously, and it will be difficult to convince them to stay in the job. It is important that incentives are aligned with KPI goals, and that KPI’s should be reviewed regularly to ensure that they stay relevant. From the questionnaires, it emerged that respondents prefer incentives other than money, which is in line with international findings indicating that employees prefer time off, movie tickets, restaurant vouchers, or other entertainment vouchers when targets are reached.

Other factors that also affect the decision of call centre agents to resign is lack of support or limited support from supervisors and their unwillingness to address problems call centre agents might have.

When considering the above-mentioned discussion, one cannot separate call centre efficiency, skills needed by agents, and staff turnover, as each one of them affects

the others. Addressing one factor in one aspect will affect the others as well. Thus, it can be said that proper management through training and support services, for example, will not only improve call centre efficiency but also enhance skills of agents and possibly reduce staff turnover.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

The findings of this research were consistent with findings of international research on call centres and their efficiency. It was determined that the call centre is effective although there is room for improvement.

International research indicates that certain core competencies are essential for call centre agents to do their work effectively. In this regard, the findings of this research are consistent with international findings. The more competent the agent, the more effective the call centre.

Staff turnover is not only a real problem in the focus call centre but also internationally. Although staff turnover will always be a factor in any industry, especially the call centre industry, managers need to look at ways to mitigate the effects of this problem.

The results of this research are in line with research done globally in the call centre industry.

## REFERENCES

- Aksin, Z., Armony, M. & Mehrotra, V. 2007. The Modern call center: A multi-disciplinary perspective on operations management research. *Production and Operations Management*, 16(6), 665-688.
- Ashill, N. J. 2009. Job resourcefulness, symptoms of burnout and service recovery performance: an examination of call centre frontline employees. *Journal of Services Marketing*. 23(5), 335-350.
- As-Shaber, S. & Hossain, K. 2008. Call centres and their role in E-governance: A developing country perspective. *The Journal of Community Informatics*, 4(3), 1-13.
- Ball, K. 2010. Data protection in the outsourced call centre: an exploratory case study. *Human Resource Management Journal*. 20(3), 294-310.
- Banks, D. & Roodt, G. 2011. The efficiency and quality dilemma: What drives South African call centre management performance indicators? *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*. 9(1), 331-347.
- Batt, R., Holman, D. & Holtgrewe, U. 2009. The globalization of service work: Comparative institutional perspective on call centres. *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 62(4), 453-488.
- Benner, C., Lewis, C. & Omar, R. 2007. The South African call centre industry: A study of strategy, human resource practices and performance. *The Global Call Centre Industry Project*.
- Bryman, A. & Bell, E. 2007. *Business Research Methods (2<sup>nd</sup> ed)*. New York: Oxford University Press Inc.
- Budhwar, P. S., Varma, A., Malhotra, N. & Mukherjee, A. 2009. Insights into the Indian call centre industry: Can internal marketing help tackle high employee turnover? *Journal of Services Marketing*, 23(5), 351-362.

- Callaghan, G. & Thompson, P. 2002. "We recruit attitude": The selection and shaping of routine call centre labour. *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(2), 233-254.
- Choi, S., Cheong, K. J. & Feiberg, R. A. 2012. Moderating effects of supervisor support, monetary rewards, and career paths on the relationship between job burnout and turnover intentions in the context of call centers. *Managing Service Quality*, 22(5), 492-516.
- Cohen, M(a). 2013. Call centres give SA's unemployed a voice in the job market. Retrieved from <http://www.bdlive.co.za/business/technology/2013/12/03/calcentres-give-sas-unemployed-a-voice-in-job-market?service> on 30 January 2014
- Cohen, M(b). 2013. South Africa ideal for call centres, accent "sounds British". Retrieved from <http://mg.co.za/print/2013-12-02-south-africa-ripe-for-call-centre-expansion> on 30 January 2013
- Connell, J., Hannif, Z. & Burgess, J. 2009. Australian call centres: Time to search for a new management model? *International Employment Relations Review*, 15(1), 1-15.
- Cooper, D. R. & Schindler, P. S. 2011. *Business Research Methods (11<sup>th</sup> ed)*. Singapore: McGraw-Hill.
- Das, D. 2012. Effects of identity variables and job performance on employee intentions to leave: An empirical study in Indian call centers. *International Journal of Management*, 29(1), 368-378.
- Das, D., Nandialath, A. & Mohan, R. 2012. Feeling unsure: Quit or stay? Uncovering heterogeneity in employees' intention to leave in Indian call centers. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 24(1), 15-34.
- Deery, S. & Kinnie, N. 2002. Call centres and beyond: A thematic evaluation. *Human*

*Resource Management Journal*, 12(4), 3-13.

- Del Bono, A., Gorjup, M. T., Henry, L. & Valverde, M. 2012. Call centres' employment practices in global value networks: A view from Argentina as a receiving economy. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 34(4), 693-717.
- Downing, J. R. 2011. Linking communication competence with call centre agents' sales effectiveness. *Journal of Business Communication*, 48(4), 409-425.
- Hannif, Z., Burgess, J. & Connell, J. 2008. Call centres and the quality of work life: Towards a research agenda. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 50(2), 271-284.
- Hingst, R. D. 2004. Call centres, recent history – Where have they come from and how did they get here? *Second Call Centre Research Conference*.
- Hunter, M. & Hachimi, A. 2012. Talking class, talking race: language, class, and race in the call center industry in South Africa. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 13(6), 551-566.
- Kuruvilla, S. & Ranganathan, A. 2010. Globalisation and outsourcing: Confronting new human resource challenges in India's business process outsourcing Industry. *Industrial Relations Journal, Special Issue: Employment relations in India*, 41(2), 136-153.
- Kwon, H. & Van Jaarsveld, D. 2013. It's all in the mix: Determinants and consequences of workforce blending in call centres. *Human Relations*, 66(8), 1075-1100.
- Lau, E. K. W. & Chan, W. S. 2012. An integrative framework capturing customer satisfaction and service quality in call centers. *Review of Business Research*, 12(3), 76-82.
- Maree, K. & Pietersen, J. 2007. The quantitative research process. In K. Maree (Ed.). *First steps in research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

- McLeod, S. A. 2007. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Retrieved at <http://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html> on 28 April 2014.
- McMillan, J. H. & Schumacher, S. 2001. *Research in education: A conceptual introduction*. New York: Pricilla McGeekon.
- Muijs, D. 2011. *Doing quantitative research in education with spss (2<sup>nd</sup> ed)*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Pandy, W. R. & Rogerson, C. M. 2012. The Economic Geography of South Africa's Call Centre Industry. *Urban Forum*, 23, 23-42.
- Pontes, M. C. F. & Kelly, C. O. 2000. The identification of inbound call center agents' competencies that are related to callers' repurchase intentions. *Journal of Interactive Marketing* 14(3), 41-49.
- Potgieter, S. C. B. & Barnard, A. 2010. The construction of work-life balance: The experience of black employees in a call centre environment. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 36(1), 1-8.
- Raz, A. E. & Blank, E. 2007. Ambiguous professionalism: Managing efficiency and service quality in an Israeli call centre. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 22(1), 83-96.
- Russel, B. 2008. Call centres: A decade of research. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 10(3), 195-219.
- Sencer, A. & Ozel, B. B. 2013. A simulation-based decision support system for workforce management in call centers. *Simulation: Transactions of the Society for Modeling and Simulation International*, 89(4), 481-497.
- Sial, M. A., Imran, R. & Zaheer, A. 2011. Job related stress and role performance: An empirical evidence from call centers of Pakistan. *International Journal of Academic Research*, 3(5), 459-463.
- Simons, J. C. & Buitendach, J. H. 2013. Psychological capital, work engagement and organisational commitment amongst call centre employees in South Africa.

*SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 39(2), 1-12.

Stevenson, A (ed). 2010. *Oxford Dictionary of English (3<sup>rd</sup> ed)*. London: Oxford University Press.

Suff, P., Reilly, P. & Mercer, M. 2005. Your call: Managing reward and performance in call centres. *Institute for Employment Studies*, 1-36.

Thite, M. & Russel, B. 2010. Work organization, human resource practices and employee retention in Indian call centres. *Asian Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 48(3), 356-374.

Thompson, G. 2013. Call centre special – Africa fights for its share of a global market. Retrieved at <http://www.balancingact-africa.com/news/en/issue-no-169/top-story/call-centre-special/en> on 30 January 2014

White, C. & Roos, V. 2005. Core Competencies of a call centre agent. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 3(2), 41-47.

## APPENDIX A

### CALL CENTRE EFFICIENCY QUESTIONNAIRE

As partial fulfilment of my MBA degree, I am conducting a research project for my dissertation. The title of my research dissertation is “The efficient management of a call centre.” The purpose of this questionnaire is to determine if the call centre is managed efficiently and which factors have an influence on effective management.

#### **PART 1: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

Please mark the appropriate box **with an x**

1.1 AGE	<input type="checkbox"/> 18 - 20	<input type="checkbox"/> 21 – 24	<input type="checkbox"/> 25 - 30	<input type="checkbox"/> 30+
1.2 GENDER	<input type="checkbox"/> Male	<input type="checkbox"/> Female		
1.3 HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION	<input type="checkbox"/> Grade 11 or lower	<input type="checkbox"/> Grade 12 (Matric)	<input type="checkbox"/> Post matric qualification (diploma)	<input type="checkbox"/> University degree
1.4 HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN WORKING FOR THE COMPANY?	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 - 6 months	<input type="checkbox"/> 6 months – 1 year	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 – 2 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 - 5 years
1.5 WHAT IS YOUR POSITION AT THE COMPANY?	_____			

#### **PART 2: COMPANY EFFICIENCY**

Please read the statements below carefully before rating

Please indicate your answer **by circling** the chosen number

<b><u>OPERATIONS</u></b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
2.1 The computer collection system is effective	1	2	3	4
2.2 The telephone system is Effective	1	2	3	4

---

2.3 Maximum productivity is Achieved	1	2	3	4
--------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.4 Calls are scripted	1	2	3	4
------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.5 It is important to allow agents to use their discretion during calls	1	2	3	4
--------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.6 It is important to get debtors to pay after the first call	1	2	3	4
----------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.7 Quality of service is important	1	2	3	4
-------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.8 There are enough call centre agents for the call centre to operate effectively	1	2	3	4
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.9 Work is monotonous and Repetitive	1	2	3	4
---------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.10 The correct information is always available on the collection system	1	2	3	4
---------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.11 Wrong information on the system frustrate the collection process	1	2	3	4
-----------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.12 Call centre agents should be allowed to correct incorrect debt information on the system	1	2	3	4
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

**TRAINING & SELECTION**

2.13 The recruitment process is effective	1	2	3	4
-------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.14 The selection process ensure that suitable candidates are appointed	1	2	3	4
--------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

---

2.15 Training enhances call centre agent effectiveness	1	2	3	4
--------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.16 Training modules include “how to control a conversation”	1	2	3	4
---------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.17 It is important that a call centre agent is able to control the conversation	1	2	3	4
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.18 Training modules include “how to control yourself”	1	2	3	4
---------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.19 It is important that a call centre agent is able to control him / herself during a collection call	1	2	3	4
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.20 It is important that call centre agents call back clients with information if they have promised to do so	1	2	3	4
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

### **SUPERVISORS & EMOTIONS**

2.21 Work is a source of satisfaction and fulfilment	1	2	3	4
------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.22 Supervisors motivation is Important	1	2	3	4
------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.23 Supervisor support have an influence on the quality of work by call centre agents	1	2	3	4
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.24 Supervisors are available to assist with difficult clients	1	2	3	4
-----------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.25 Negative emotions experienced by call centre agents reflects in the way they treat clients	1	2	3	4
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.26 Call centre agents should not allow their emotions to influence their work	1	2	3	4
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

**PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

2.27 A performance management system is important	1	2	3	4
---------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.28 The performance management system of the company is effective	1	2	3	4
--------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.29 Performance is measured by Targets	1	2	3	4
-----------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.30 Target setting is the most effective performance management tool	1	2	3	4
-----------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.31 Other performance management tools should also be used	1	2	3	4
-------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.32 Feedback should be given to agents after a performance appraisal	1	2	3	4
-----------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.33 Feedback should be used as a punishment tool	1	2	3	4
---------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.34 Feedback is more effective when used to enhance training	1	2	3	4
---------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.35 Bonuses should be paid if targets are exceeded	1	2	3	4
-----------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.36 Bonuses should be something other than money for example: restaurant vouchers or time off	1	2	3	4
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

2.37 Recognition is given to call centre agents for doing a good	1	2	3	4
------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

job				
-----	--	--	--	--

### **PART 3: SKILLS NEEDED BY CALL CENTRE AGENTS**

*Please read the statements below carefully before rating*

*Please indicate your answer **by circling** the chosen number*

	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
3.1 Call centre agents need competencies other than those needed by normal office workers	1	2	3	4
3.2 Certain core competencies are essential for call centre agents to effectively do their job	1	2	3	4
3.3 Competencies of the call centre agents can give the company a competitive advantage	1	2	3	4
3.4 Teamwork, adaptability and self-confidence are important skills	1	2	3	4
3.5 Communication is the most essential skill needed by call centre agents	1	2	3	4
3.6 Effective communication is the ability to explain concepts clearly and use proper vocabulary	1	2	3	4
3.7 Call centre agents should be able to address clients in their language of choice	1	2	3	4
3.8 Addressing a client in his language of choice will enhance the customer experience	1	2	3	4
3.9 Emotional management (manage the emotions of the client, diffuse the	1	2	3	4

negative emotions) is an important skill				
------------------------------------------	--	--	--	--

3.10 Listening is an essential skill for call centre agents to do their job effectively	1	2	3	4
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

3.11 Call centre agents should be able to use computer and telephone technology	1	2	3	4
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

3.12 Call centre agents must have numeracy Skills	1	2	3	4
---------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

3.13 Women are more suited to call centre jobs than men	1	2	3	4
---------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

3.14 More women than men are employed by call centres	1	2	3	4
-------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

3.15 Women have more empathy and patience than men	1	2	3	4
----------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

3.16 Women can better deal with difficult clients than men	1	2	3	4
------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

3.17 Job resourcefulness (the ability to overcome obstacles to reach job goals) is an important skill required by call centre agents	1	2	3	4
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

3.18 Call centre agents must have problem solving skills	1	2	3	4
----------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

3.19 Making use of mental processing (cognition) that includes producing language, calculating, reasoning, problem solving and decision making to accomplish a specific task (also referred to as self-efficacy) is an important skill for call centre agents	1	2	3	4
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

3.20 The positive attitude of a call centre agent can mitigate the negative emotions of a client	1	2	3	4
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

3.21 Call centre agents should be able to adapt to changing situations (flexible)	1	2	3	4
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

## **PART 4: MOTIVATING FACTORS**

*Please read the statements below carefully before rating*

*Please indicate your answer **by circling** the chosen number*

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
4.1 Earning a salary ensure that you can provide food and shelter for your family and yourself	1	2	3	4

4.2 When your salary no longer allows you to provide for your basic need your look for another job with a higher salary	1	2	3	4
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

4.3 It is important that you are able to provide for your basic needs	1	2	3	4
-----------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

4.4 The call centre job is just a stepping stone	1	2	3	4
--------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

4.5 I consider my call centre job as my career and will not change to another industry	1	2	3	4
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

4.6 Staff turnover in call centres are high	1	2	3	4
---------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

4.7 The call centre is not as effective as it could be because of the fact that there is a constant influx of new agents	1	2	3	4
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

4.8 The call centre is not as effective as it could be because of the number of call centre agents leaving the company	1	2	3	4
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

4.9 Staff turnover can be reduced by improving the recruitment and selection processes	1	2	3	4
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

4.10 Training is an important tool to enhance performance	1	2	3	4
-----------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

4.11 Lack of career development is a reason for staff turnover	1	2	3	4
----------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

4.12 The promotion system of the company is transparent	1	2	3	4
---------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

4.13 There is opportunity for promotion in the company	1	2	3	4
--------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

4.14 Women have a better chance to be promoted than men	1	2	3	4
---------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

4.15 Call centres are stressful places to work	1	2	3	4
------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

4.16 Call centre work are more stressful than normal office work	1	2	3	4
------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

4.17 My job is emotionally Exhausting	1	2	3	4
---------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

4.18 Unrealistic targets might cause call centre agents to resign	1	2	3	4
-------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

4.19 Monitoring of calls are very Tight	1	2	3	4
-----------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

---

4.20 Non-payment of bonuses or incentives might move me to resign	1	2	3	4
-------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

4.21 There is no job satisfaction	1	2	3	4
-----------------------------------	---	---	---	---

4.22 Good work is acknowledged	1	2	3	4
--------------------------------	---	---	---	---

4.23 Proper support from my supervisor might prevent me from resigning	1	2	3	4
------------------------------------------------------------------------	---	---	---	---

*THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO COMPLETE THE QUESTIONNAIRE*

## APPENDIX B

	<b>STRONGLY DISAGREE</b>	<b>DISAGREE</b>	<b>AGREE</b>	<b>STRONGLY AGREE</b>
<b>Q.2.1</b>	14.29%	20.00%	51.42%	14.29%
<b>Q2.2</b>	08.57%	14.29%	57.14%	20.00%
<b>Q2.3</b>	08.57%	45.71%	37.14%	08.57%
<b>Q2.4</b>	08.57%	25.71%	40.00%	25.71%
<b>Q2.5</b>	02.86%	17.14%	48.57%	31.43%
<b>Q2.6</b>	05.71%	08.57%	34.29%	51.43%
<b>Q2.7</b>	02.86%	02.86%	17.14%	77.14%
<b>Q2.8</b>	25.71%	42.86%	22.86%	08.57%
<b>Q2.9</b>	05.71%	14.29%	68.57%	11.43%
<b>Q2.10</b>	28.57%	45.71%	20.00%	05.71%
<b>Q2.11</b>	14.29%	11.43%	22.86%	51.43%
<b>Q2.12</b>	02.86%	02.86%	31.43%	62.85%
<b>Q2.13</b>	08.57%	37.14%	48.57%	05.71%
<b>Q2.14</b>	08.57%	37.14%	40.00%	14.29%
<b>Q2.15</b>	08.57%	05.71%	51.43%	34.29%
<b>Q2.16</b>	02.86%	08.57%	42.86%	45.71%
<b>Q2.17</b>	00.00%	02.86%	31.43%	65.71%
<b>Q2.18</b>	02.86%	11.43%	48.57%	37.14%
<b>Q2.19</b>	00.00%	00.00%	31.43%	68.57%
<b>Q2.20</b>	00.00%	02.86%	31.43%	65.71%
<b>Q2.21</b>	08.57%	00.00%	71.43%	20.00%
<b>Q2.22</b>	02.86%	02.86%	40.00%	54.29%
<b>Q2.23</b>	08.57%	17.14%	42.86%	31.43%
<b>Q2.24</b>	14.29%	17.14%	42.86%	25.71%
<b>Q2.25</b>	11.43%	20.00%	37.14%	31.43%
<b>Q2.26</b>	00.00%	00.00%	28.57%	71.43%
<b>Q2.27</b>	00.00%	00.00%	31.43%	68.57%
<b>Q2.28</b>	11.43%	31.43%	37.14%	20.00%

<b>Q2.29</b>	00.00%	00.00%	54.29%	45.71%
<b>Q2.30</b>	02.86%	00.00%	45.71%	51.43%
<b>Q2.31</b>	00.00%	02.86%	54.29%	42.86%
<b>Q2.32</b>	02.86%	11.43%	65.71%	20.00%
<b>Q2.33</b>	42.86%	37.14%	17.14%	02.86%
<b>Q2.34</b>	05.71%	00.00%	51.43%	42.86%
<b>Q2.35</b>	00.00%	02.86%	17.14%	80.00%
<b>Q2.36</b>	05.71%	05.71%	17.14%	71.43%
<b>Q2.37</b>	14.29%	05.71%	48.57%	31.43%
<b>Q3.1</b>	02.86%	02.86%	74.29%	20.00%
<b>Q3.2</b>	00.00%	05.71%	65.71%	28.57%
<b>Q3.3</b>	00.00%	05.71%	51.43%	42.86%
<b>Q3.4</b>	00.00%	00.00%	20.00%	80.00%
<b>Q3.5</b>	00.00%	00.00%	17.14%	82.86%
<b>Q3.6</b>	00.00%	00.00%	42.86%	57.14%
<b>Q3.7</b>	14.29%	08.57%	31.43%	45.71%
<b>Q3.8</b>	02.86%	11.43%	34.29%	51.43%
<b>Q3.9</b>	05.71%	17.14%	31.43%	45.71%
<b>Q3.10</b>	00.00%	02.86%	34.29%	62.86%
<b>Q3.11</b>	00.00%	02.86%	20.00%	77.14%
<b>Q3.12</b>	02.86%	00.00%	54.29%	42.86%
<b>Q3.13</b>	17.14%	37.14%	20.00%	25.71%
<b>Q3.14</b>	02.86%	05.71%	34.29%	57.14%
<b>Q3.15</b>	05.71%	25.71%	37.14%	31.43%
<b>Q3.16</b>	17.14%	37.14%	28.57%	17.14%
<b>Q3.17</b>	05.71%	02.86%	57.14%	34.29%
<b>Q3.18</b>	05.71%	02.86%	28.57%	62.86%
<b>Q3.19</b>	00.00%	00.00%	51.43%	48.57%
<b>Q3.20</b>	00.00%	02.86%	48.57%	48.57%
<b>Q3.21</b>	02.86%	05.71%	57.14%	34.29%
<b>Q4.1</b>	05.71%	02.86%	31.43%	60.00%

<b>Q4.2</b>	00.00%	02.86%	31.43%	65.71%
<b>Q4.3</b>	00.00%	00.00%	11.43%	88.57%
<b>Q4.4</b>	05.71%	11.43%	20.00%	62.86%
<b>Q4.5</b>	57.14%	25.71%	05.71%	11.43%
<b>Q4.6</b>	17.14%	25.71%	37.14%	20.00%
<b>Q4.7</b>	05.71%	31.43%	42.86%	20.00%
<b>Q4.8</b>	08.57%	22.86%	40.00%	28.57%
<b>Q4.9</b>	05.71%	05.71%	62.86%	25.71%
<b>Q4.10</b>	00.00%	02.86%	17.14%	80.00%
<b>Q4.11</b>	02.86%	20.00%	51.43%	25.71%
<b>Q4.12</b>	22.86%	31.43%	22.86%	22.86%
<b>Q4.13</b>	28.57%	25.71%	31.43%	14.29%
<b>Q4.14</b>	00.00%	17.14%	25.71%	57.14%
<b>Q4.15</b>	11.43%	08.57%	42.86%	37.14%
<b>Q4.16</b>	08.57%	17.14%	34.29%	40.00%
<b>Q4.17</b>	08.57%	25.71%	31.43%	34.29%
<b>Q4.18</b>	02.86%	11.43%	34.29%	51.43%
<b>Q4.19</b>	05.71%	31.43%	42.86%	20.00%
<b>Q4.20</b>	05.71%	25.71%	40.00%	28.57%
<b>Q4.21</b>	14.29%	28.57%	37.14%	20.00%
<b>Q4.22</b>	17.14%	20.00%	45.71%	17.14%
<b>Q4.23</b>	08.57%	08.57%	37.14%	45.71%