

Challenges posed by Job profile for Employees of Call Centers in Mumbai

Sandeep Hegde

Abstract

Since the last decade, there has been a tremendous growth in the call center businesses in several metropolitan and urban cities in India. Mumbai city is no exception to this sudden boom. The call center businesses employ over 500,000 nascent employees in the age group of 18 – 28 yrs in Mumbai. The nature of outsourced work along with the odd working hours in this industry leads to high employee attrition in the call centers. Job satisfaction, high levels of stress, health issues, employee safety and career prospects are some of the reasons cited by industry experts as some of the factors leading to absenteeism and high employee turnover.

This study facilitates the understanding of the extent of impact of call center job profile and the related challenges that it poses to the employees of call centers.

Keywords: Call Centers; Contact Centers; BPO; Outsourcing; Job Satisfaction; Job Profile; Job Characteristics; Motivation and Job Stress.

Introduction

In the past decade or two, it has often been said that we live in a global village. This has increasingly become a reality with the advent of satellite televisions and the revolution in telecommunications. The convergence of all these technologies has meant that we can be the back office for the developed world. Wages that are 80% cheaper than anywhere in the world and a vast pool of English speaking graduates has made this possible.

The last decade ended with a mammoth downsizing of human power used in various industries worldwide. With the Globalization and liberalization era dawned today, we face challenges of survival in the commercial world. The effects of Global downsizing in various industries combined with high cost of infrastructure and resources has

given impetus to a new commercial viable phenomena for the Indian economy better termed as "Call Centers" or "Voice Processes based BPO's".

India has witnessed a tremendous growth in these Global Outsourced Shops. In the last 5 years over 300+ Call Centers have mushroomed in and around Mumbai region. The industry revenues are touching over 10 Billion Dollars per annum and employing over 5 Lac youngsters.

Job Satisfaction

Investigated by several disciplines such as psychology, sociology, economics and management sciences, job satisfaction is a frequently studied subject in work and organizational literature. This is mainly due to the fact that many experts believe that job satisfaction trends can affect labor market behavior and influence work productivity, work effort, employee absenteeism and staff turnover. Moreover, job satisfaction is considered a strong predictor of overall individual well-being, as well as a good predictor of intentions or decisions of employees to leave a job.

Author's Affiliation: Associate Professor – NMIMS University, Mumbai.

Reprint's request: Sandeep Hegde, NMIMS University, V. L. Mehta Road, Juhu, Vile Parle (West), Mumbai, Maharashtra- 400056

E-mail: sandeep.hegde@nmims.edu

Beyond the research literature and studies, job satisfaction is also important in everyday life. Organizations have significant effects on the people who work for them and some of those effects are reflected in how people feel about their work. This makes job satisfaction an issue of substantial importance for both employers and employees. As many studies suggest, employers benefit from satisfied employees as they are more likely to profit from lower staff turnover and higher productivity if their employees experience a high level of job satisfaction.

Job satisfaction has been defined in several different ways:

Job satisfaction is simply how people feel about their jobs and different aspects of their jobs. It is the extent to which people like (satisfaction) or dislike (dissatisfaction) their jobs [1].

Frederick Herzberg proposed the Motivation-Hygiene Theory, also known as the Two Factor Theory (1959) of job satisfaction. According to his theory, people are influenced by two factors:

1. *Satisfaction*, which is primarily the result of the motivator factors. These factors help increase satisfaction but have little effect on dissatisfaction.

Motivator Factors

1. Achievement
2. Recognition
3. Work Itself
4. Responsibility
5. Promotion
6. Growth

2. *Dissatisfaction*, is primarily the result of hygiene factors. These factors, if absent or inadequate, cause dissatisfaction, but their presence has little effect on long-term satisfaction.

Hygiene Factors

1. Pay and Benefits
2. Company Policy and Administration
3. Relationships with co-workers
4. Physical Environment
5. Supervision
6. Status
7. Job Security

To better understand employee attitudes and motivation, Herzberg performed studies to determine which factors in an employee's work environment caused satisfaction or dissatisfaction. He published his findings in the 1959 book *The Motivation to Work*.

The studies included interviews in which employees were asked what pleased and displeased them about their work. Herzberg found that the factors causing job satisfaction (and presumably motivation) were different from those causing job dissatisfaction. He developed the motivation-hygiene theory to explain these results. He called the satisfiers motivators and the dissatisfiers hygiene factors, using the term "hygiene" in the sense that they are considered maintenance factors that are necessary to avoid dissatisfaction but that by themselves do not provide satisfaction.

The following are the top six factors causing dissatisfaction and the other six factors causing satisfaction, listed in the order of higher to lower importance.

Factors Affecting Job Attitudes

Leading to Dissatisfaction

1. Company policy
2. Supervision
3. Relationship w/Boss
4. Work conditions
5. Salary
6. Relationship with Peers

Leading to Satisfaction

1. Achievement
2. Recognition
3. Work itself
4. Responsibility
5. Advancement
6. Growth

Herzberg reasoned that because the factors causing satisfaction are different from those causing dissatisfaction, the two feelings cannot simply be treated as opposites of one another. The opposite of satisfaction is not dissatisfaction, but rather, no satisfaction. Similarly, the opposite of

dissatisfaction is no dissatisfaction. If the motivation-hygiene theory holds, management not only must provide hygiene factors to avoid employee dissatisfaction, but also must provide factors intrinsic to the work itself in order for employees to be satisfied with their jobs.

Herzberg argued that job enrichment is required for intrinsic motivation, and that it is a continuous management process. According to Herzberg:

1. The job should have sufficient challenge to utilize the full ability of the employee.
2. Employees who demonstrate increasing levels of ability should be given increasing levels of responsibility.
3. If a job cannot be designed to use an employee's full abilities, then the firm should consider automating the task or replacing the employee with one who has a lower level of skill. If a person cannot be fully utilized, then there will be a motivation problem.

Hackman & Oldham identified five 'core job characteristics' that relate to the motivation and satisfaction of employees. These characteristics are:

1. *Skill variety*: the degree to which the job requires different skills.
2. *Task identity*: the degree to which the job involves completing a whole, identifiable piece of work rather than simply a part.
3. *Task significance*: the extent to which the job has an impact on other people, inside or outside the organization.
4. *Autonomy*: the extent to which the job allows jobholders to exercise choice and discretion over work.
5. *Feedback from the job*: the extent to which the job itself (as opposed to other people) provides jobholders with information on their performance.

These core job characteristics were suggested to produce 'critical psychological states', for example, skill variety, task identity and task significance affecting the *experienced meaningfulness of work*. Autonomy influences the *experienced responsibility for work*, and feedback relates to *knowledge of results* of work activities. These states were then responsible for four main outcomes, that is, work satisfaction, internal work motivation, work performance, and absenteeism and turnover.

Problems Faced By Call Centre Executives

1. Abuse from British and American customers is driving increasing numbers of Indian call centre workers from their jobs, defeated by the strain of handling persistent rudeness.
2. Call Centre workers face a spectrum of rudeness - from sexual harassment to fury at unsolicited sales calls, to open racism.
3. Call Centre workers face stress of having to work through the night and are under extreme pressure to meet productivity targets. The number of calls attended in one shift of 8.5 hours is over 200 calls. A drop in the call rate warrants for serious action like salary slashing or at times even loss of job.
4. During the working hours agents are entitled for a 30 minutes lunch/breakfast break and two small breaks of 10-15 minutes duration for tea and refreshment, for which records are maintained.
5. Due to 24 X 7 work culture the call centre employees can hardly avail of any leave facilities.
6. Most of the workforce comprise of people in the age group of 18 – 24 years of which nearly 60 – 70 % are females. Most of them are undergraduates. Most of the workforce is unskilled in any particular profession as being a computer literate, a good communicator, having good typing skills and a command over English is all that it requires joining a call centre. Most of the workforces do not have a long term career goal as they consider the job as a stop gap arrangement for a few years at the most. This leaves them unqualified for any skilled job at a later stage in their work career.
7. Most young workers quit jobs early due to reporting pattern of the organization. In most organizations the average age for a supervisory position is about 25 – 28 years. This is the same age profile of the reports and this many a times is the root cause for friction among the employees. At times 45 year old reports to a 24 years old team leader.
8. High volatility in the workforce due to high attrition rates is cited as the most common cause for HR departments of Call Centers for not considering "Career Advancement Programmes" for call center agents seriously.
9. Most call center employees work from dusk to dawn and hence their social life is at the minimal.

This leads to emotional imbalance as they feel alienated from their social circuit.

10. Many of the call center employers are disgruntled with their employees on productivity norms. This leads to unwarranted separations which in turn lead to many highly paid "Cyber Coolies" to be unemployed for relatively longer periods. This is the root cause for many "Cyber Crimes" and frauds typically seen in call centers and BPO's.
11. Work environment is generally a highly surveillance zone and constant pressures from Quality supervisors by intruding in calls and monitoring of call timings and language usage leads to a very high level of frustration. This can many times lead to substance addiction in the employees or many employees can experience BOSS (Burn Out Stress Syndrome). This can mar the mental as well as the physical health of a young generation.
12. Most of the nascent workforce of call centers are financially independent but at the same time materialistic in their outlook. The need to spend has generated an artificial need for capital goods for which they have to keep on working at call centers for payment of the several mortgage and personal loans taken for several such purchases.
13. Most Voice based call centre processes force employees to don a different identity altogether, this causes dual identity problems with them. It goes to such an extent that he / she is given a pseudo identity in an alien nation, where they have never been or may never travel in their lifetimes. Even the local lingo and slang are taught to them. In some cases the local landmarks and current happenings in that part of the world along with today's weather conditions are displayed on the employee's workstation terminal. The call centre employees work with this hegemony, accepting this cultural subordination as a part of their jobs.
14. Balancing work life and family for a working women in call centre poses a challenge as odd work hours coupled with the innate job stress leads to upheavals in family life.
15. The attraction of higher salary/perks in BPO's also gets murky, when it is juxtaposed with the education and opportunity costs of the employees. As majority of them are educated in expensive institutions, the average cost of their education far exceeds that of an ordinary Indian graduate. Thus, these agents represent a group of expensively educated cheap labor. The long-

term opportunity costs of BPO work could be still higher. Most of these youngsters are in fact burning out their formative years as 'cyber coolies', the toll of which is very high. Entering into a well-paid employment soon after the completion of graduation act as a deterrent to continue studies. Further to this, BPO work does not provide any scope for skill up gradation. Most workers in the sector are doing low-end work, which were handled by erstwhile computer operators and receptionists, other than picking up accents and certain communication skills; the skill up gradation is minimal. Gaining specific accents would sometime adversely affect the job prospect of the employee also.

Review of Literature

The area of research is quite nascent and hence not much research papers are published. But of late there have been many articles related to problems faced by call center executives in the print media. Some of the recent research papers highlight the problems faced by call centre executives. These range from occupational diseases, role stress, facing verbal abuses from irate customers to job related monotony.

1. Sudhashree V. P, Rohit K. and Shrinivas K. in their article titled "Issues and concerns of health among the call center employees" (The Indian Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, December 2005, Volume 9, Issue 3 Pgs. 129 – 132) mention that BOSS (Burn Out Stress Syndrome) is seen very common among the young call centre executives. The symptoms of this sickness include chronic fatigue, insomnia, and complete alterations of the 24 hour biological rhythm of the body are routine cause for sickness absenteeism. Chronic levels of stress affect the heart, endocrine system and can also lead to sleep disorders.
2. Ernesto Noronha and Premilla D'Cruz in their research paper titled "Organizing Call Centre Agents: Emerging Issues" (Economic and Political Weekly, May 27, 2006 Pgs.2115 – 2121) indicate that during their primary data collection from call center employees located at Mumbai and Bangalore, it was found that their job content required them to enthusiastically deal with irate customers keeping aside their emotions. Interacting with irate or abusive customer was seen as an integral part of their job content. Emotions were to be kept aside and it was mandatory to attend the next call with equal

attention even when the previous caller had verbally abused the employee.

3. Divya C. McMillin in her research paper titled "Outsourcing Identities - Call Centres and Cultural Transformation in India." (Economic and Political Weekly, January 21, 2006 Pgs. 235 – 241) mentions of in-depth interviews conducted with 40 employees of six call centers located at Bangalore. Her research findings point out to the fact that most of these employees had to change their names, identities and their voice accent to suit the customer's home country where the calls were being made or from where they originated. This resulted in fictional personal profiles created by their job content which affected their cultural identity.
4. Kode Ruyter, Martin Wetzels and Richard Feinberg in their research paper titled "Role Stress in Call Centers: Its Effects on Employee Performance and Satisfaction" published in the Journal Of Interactive Marketing, pp. 23 – 35, Volume 15, Number 2, Spring 2001 mention that particularly the autonomy dimension of empowerment has a role-stress-reducing effect. Interesting substantive direct positive effects of empowerment competence and leadership consideration on job satisfaction were found. Job satisfaction was found to be conducive to job performance. Furthermore, it was found that job satisfaction reduces turnover intentions, directly and indirectly via organizational commitment.
5. A study on "Women in Call Centers" conducted by Preeti Singh and Anu Pandey, wherein interviews of 100 women employees of several call centers based in India were undertaken. (Economic and Political Weekly, February 12, 2005 Pgs. 684 – 688). The study finds a direct and adverse effect of nightshift employment on the health of women. This study concluded both the positive as well as the negative aspects of call center environment. The positive aspects related to the number of years of experience, age and qualifications of the respondent with that of her salary. There appears to be no other area of employment in India which gives its employees an attractive pay package at such a young age and with minimum qualifications. There are also some negative aspects about this job, which includes risks such as the difficulty of traveling at night, health hazards and social stigma. But the major problem is the health hazard from doing night duty. Some respondents felt they were like security guards who stayed awake all night to attend to their duties and slept the whole day through, and in doing so they suffer from problems like sleep disorder and indigestion. In order to keep awake against the body clock, they start smoking and drink innumerable cups of tea and coffee. This gets them addicted to tea, coffee and cigarettes, which subsequently becomes the cause of their bad health.
6. Some studies have also been conducted in other countries for issues and problems faced by call centre employees. One such study was conducted during the year 2003 by The University of Sheffield (UK), Health and Safety Laboratory and UMIST for the Health and Safety Executive, which published the research report titled "Psychosocial risk factors in call centers: An evaluation of work design and well-being". This report is based on primary research data from 36 call centers and 1,141 call centre employees. This report highlights that majority of the employees in any call centre are in the age group of 20 – 29 years old and almost 80% of them are at the lowest level (Customer Care Executives) in the organization. 75% of the respondents in their sample were women. This also indicates the male female ratio of employees in a call center. This study indicated that the main two parameters viz: Job related anxiety and Job related depression, when measured with similar job profiles of other industries like financial services and retail banking, Shop floor manufacturing, and technical support staff in IT organizations, it was found that call centre executives reported significantly higher levels of depression than almost all benchmark groups. Similarly there was a remarked higher level of job profile related anxiety in the call center employees as compared to other groups. This study was conducted in small, medium-sized and large call centers located across the UK.
7. The Business Standard Reported on November 16, 2007 that India's Union Health Minister A. Ramadoss recently called for a "health policy for the tech sector", stating: "[BPO employees] have a sedentary lifestyle. They smoke, go for late-night parties, and even take drugs. Some get heart attacks in their mid-20s..." However, strain as a reason for leaving a company ranked seventh while health issues stood at number six, according to the survey. "Health as a stress factor is indeed a concern with a fifth of employees citing health as a stress factor. The good part is that the industry is sensitive to this and many companies are taking real measures, from checking indoor air quality to testing food in labs," said Kapil Dev Singh, Country Manager, IDC India.

8. The Dataquest-IDC BPO E-Sat survey 2007² was based on the feedback from 1,749 employees belonging to 19 companies located in cities like Mumbai, Pune, Kolkata, Delhi NCR, Chennai, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad and Bangalore. The survey also revealed that while large firms ranked better in parameters like work culture and image, niche companies were better in terms of salary and job content. Of the 1,749 employees surveyed as a part of the survey, 32 per cent complained of having sleep disorders, followed by 25 per cent as having digestive disorders and 20 per cent of having eye-sight problems. The survey measured employee satisfaction was based on 11 parameters.
 9. There have been many incidents of women call centre employee being raped and murdered at Mumbai, Pune and Bangalore regions. Some newspapers have commented on this issue. Newspaper "The Hindu" reported on the rape and murder of Hewlett Packard employee Pratibha Murthy in December 2005 shook the BPO (business process outsourcing) industry, which scrambled to damage control mode and tighten security for its women employees. Series of measures were announced to protect women, especially on the night shift. The Press Trust of India, New Delhi, reported on January 17, 2006 that "In the light of the rape and murder of a call centre employee in Bangalore, the National Commission for Women (NCW) today said it will formulate guidelines to ensure safety of women employees in the BPO sector".
 10. A recent study by Dataquest-IDC employee satisfaction survey of the Indian BPO firms points to slow but steady decrease in the number of women working in the BPO segment. The percentage of female employees has steadily come down to 32% in 2007 from 34% in 2006 and 36% in 2005. While a 2% decline in the number of female employees has not affected companies' current activities, it sure is a concern for BPO industry which is already facing problems of high attrition. One out of every three employee working in BPOs is a woman and going by the study, it indicates that this number is likely to further go down in coming years. "This is a serious issue for BPOs as they want more women to join since women tend to stick longer with company, if the environment is comfortable," says Shailendra Gupta Sr. Manager - User Research IDC (India) Limited. "Unless BPOs get their security in place, have better HR systems, the number of women joining is likely to continue to reduce." Several surveys conducted at these call centers and BPOs that have mushroomed in Bangalore, Pune and Gurgaon have pointed towards inadequacies in service conditions of employees. The latest survey done by Prof Phil Taylor of HR and Business School, Glasgow (UK) and Prof Ernesto Noronha of IIM Ahmedabad also highlights the security problem of employees among other things. Over 65% BPO and call centre employees expressed concern about working times which included shift length, night-time working and effects on well being.
 11. The article "Setback for BPO industry: Nasscom" in the Times of India dated 4th November 2007 mentions, The National Association of Software and Service Companies (Nasscom) has expressed deep shock and dismay at the incident involving murder of a young Pune based BPO employee Jyoti Kumari Choudhary. In a press release issued by them, it stated that the murder reflects the need for greater safety and security and emphasized that every possible measure should be taken to eliminate such crime. "Such incidents setback efforts that are being made to bring about gender equality in the country's workforce."
 12. The Associated Chambers of Commerce & Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) had undertaken a study titled "Night Shift for Women: A Research Study" which was sponsored by National Commission for Women (NCW) recently. Out of the employees surveyed 13% of the respondents face difficulties during commuting whereas 87% are satisfied about the arrangements made by their employers. Problems of 13% are qualitative in nature in the way that employers may sometimes accommodate passengers of two cabs in one, attitude of drivers is rude or that drivers drink and drive during nightshift, etc. that provide an uncomfortable environment for women. BPO employees are satisfied in Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Hyderabad, in Bangalore situation is fearful because of recent rape and murder case of Pratibha.
- Social Problems – The survey observed that 13.5% nightshift working women face social problems. They are unable to devote time to evening parties and small get-togethers in their neighborhoods and among relations. The company that children also need in the evenings is not met. Women felt that it becomes really hard to spend quality time with children and to attend their

school functions and meetings. Unfortunately women working in night shift are blamed for breaking up the institution called family system and for poor childcare accorded even though they may be working harder than men.

During the survey doctors felt that night shift employees face physiological, emotional and biological problems, based on disturbed rhythmic pattern of sleeping and waking.

Defining The Problem

Job satisfaction is a factor affecting call centre representatives. Call centers are generally associated with low levels of satisfaction due to the fairly low skilled nature of their work. Other factors that are often associated with call centers are; high stress levels, high staff turnover and emotional burnout. These factors impact negatively on job satisfaction therefore the researcher wants to investigate absenteeism, turnover and performance in terms of the relationship these variables have with job satisfaction.

Theories of Job Satisfaction

Theories related to job satisfaction can be traced to Elton Mayo's Hawthorne Experiments - a series of experiments on factory workers carried out between 1924 and 1932. Based on the Hawthorne experiment observations, certain parameters essential to job

satisfaction like job characteristics, motivation, monotony, fatigue, etc. were highlighted and further research was conducted by various behavioral experts in this area. Some of the research was propounded into the job satisfaction theories that we know of today. Some of these theories are mentioned below.

The Job Characteristics / the Work Design Model

Work design is concerned with the characteristics of the jobs. Work design theory would provide an important guiding framework for examining the psychosocial challenges facing employees in the call centre context.

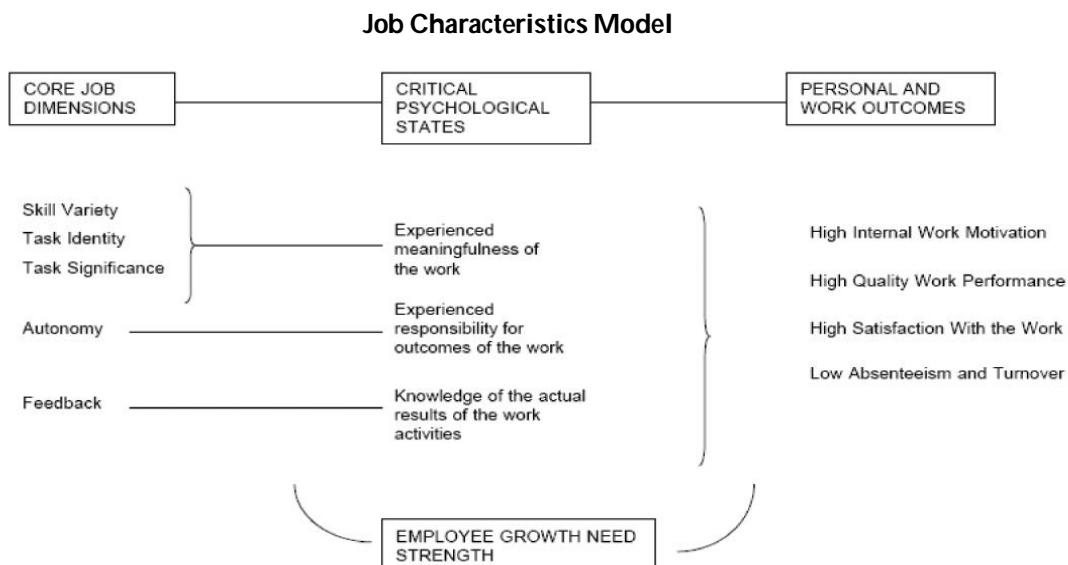
Skill: A trait or a technique required to accomplish a task.

Task: A single unit of work the employee has to perform.

Job: Multiple tasks which are homogenous when grouped together form a job

An employee's job profile would therefore be all the jobs that he does during the working hours every working day. The job characteristics model defines these jobs and their effects on the motivation levels of the employees. This is identified by the core job dimensions and the psychological effects it creates on the employees performing those jobs. The outcomes resulting from these psychological effects either act as a morale booster or become detrimental to the productivity of the employees.

Chart 3.2: Hackman and Oldham's Model of Job Characteristics



Source: "Organizational Behavior" by Fred Luthans.

Hackman & Oldham identified five 'core job characteristics' that relate to the motivation and satisfaction of employees. These characteristics are:

1. *Skill variety*: the degree to which the job requires different skills.
2. *Task identity*: the degree to which the job involves completing a whole, identifiable piece of work rather than simply a part.
3. *Task significance*: the extent to which the job has an impact on other people, inside or outside the organization.
4. *Autonomy*: the extent to which the job allows jobholders to exercise choice and discretion over work.
5. *Feedback from the job*: the extent to which the job itself (as opposed to other people) provides jobholders with information on their performance.

These core job characteristics were suggested to produce 'critical psychological states', for example, skill variety, task identity and task significance affecting the *experienced meaningfulness of work*. Autonomy influences the *experienced responsibility for work*, and feedback relates to *knowledge of results* of work activities. These states were then responsible for four main outcomes, that is, work satisfaction, internal work motivation, work performance, and absenteeism and turnover.

The Job Characteristics Model (JCM) is the most widely used theoretical approach to job design. This research focuses mainly on two important aspects of a call center executive's problems related to job satisfaction and mental health posed by their job design.

Emotional Labor

Another dimension of studying the psychosocial challenges facing employees in the call centre would be the "emotional labor" component of their job design.

Emotional labor is a forced alteration in the behavioral aspect of a worker wherein he is expected to display or change his emotions as a part of his job to manage customers. Most of the times this concept is used in the service industry like hospitality, tourism, banking, entertainment, healthcare, etc wherein the employees of such organizations have to face to face contact with their customers or at least over the telephone. In such situations they have to

change their emotions as per the needs of the organization. These changes in their emotions are required to satisfy their organizations customers. This includes changes in their body language too.

The term "emotional labor" was first defined by the sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild (1983) as the "management of feeling to create a publicity observable facial and bodily display".³

According to Hochschild, jobs involving emotional labor are defined as those that:

- (1) require face-to-face or voice-to-voice contact with the public;
- (2) require the worker to produce an emotional state in another person;
- (3) allow the employees to exercise a degree of control over their emotional activities.

In the case of call center employees the concept of "emotional labor" is applicable as the very core characteristic of their job profile involves voice-to-voice contact with the customers.

Display rules refer to the organizational rules about what kind of emotion to express on the job. Every call center employee has to be very cordial to the customers over the telephone. The employee has to remain calm and composed even in the event of verbal abuses which are personal and racial in nature. These Display rules of the call center leads to stress, nervous breakdowns, frustration, suppressed anger and many more psychological ailments with the call center employees.

Emotion regulation refers to the process of modifying one's own emotions and expressions. That is, the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions.

There are two kinds of Emotion regulation:

Antecedent-focused emotion regulation, which refers to modifying initial feelings by changing the situation or the cognitions of the situation;

Response-focused emotion regulation, which refers to modifying behavior once emotions are experienced by suppressing, faking or amplifying an emotional response.

A call center employee cannot in any situation disclose his identity or the country he is from. He makes a fake identity and shows his pseudo-nationality status with every caller. Therefore, most call center employees are imposed *response-focused emotion regulation* by their employers. This double identity and pseudo-nationality causes cultural

conflicts, emotional instability and total loss of self esteem within the call center employees. Most call center employees take recourse to substance addiction and abuse. Many take to criminal activities for sustaining these habits while others succumb to remorse resulting in high attrition among call center employees.

Forms of emotional labor

Employees can display organizationally-desired emotions by acting out the emotion. Such acting can take two forms:

Surface acting, involves "painting on" affective displays, or faking; Surface acting involves an employee's (presenting emotions on his or her "surface" without actually feeling them. The employee in this case puts on a facade as if the emotions are felt, like a "persona").

Deep acting wherein they modify their inner feelings to match the emotion expressions the organization requires.

Though both forms of acting are internally false, they represent different intentions. That is, when engaging in deep acting, an actor attempts to modify feelings to match the required displays, in order to seem authentic to the audience ("faking in good faith"); in surface acting, the alternative strategy, employees modify their displays without shaping inner feelings. They conform to the display rules in order to keep the job, not to help the customer or the organization. Deep acting is argued to be associated with reduced stress and an increased sense of personal accomplishment; whereas surface acting is associated with increased stress, emotional exhaustion, depression, and a sense of inauthenticity.

In 1983, Arlie Russell Hochschild, who wrote about emotional labor, coined the term *emotional dissonance* to describe this process of "maintaining a difference between feeling and feigning".

Determinants of using emotional labor

1. Organizational norms.

Typically organizations that are hard driven or where the work culture is more standardized with the aim to give uniform services to customers are more prone to having emotional labor among its employees. This can be seen clearly between the job profile of

Airhostesses in major airlines and the job profile of insurance selling agents.

2. Employee's feelings on the job.

If the employee's feelings match with the feelings that he is supposed to express at the workplace, there would be less discrepancy in his expressed behavior and his inner feelings. Similarly if he feels that the job profile he exhibits match with his career aspirations, then the employee can easily express the organizationally desired behaviors or emotions.

3. Supervisory Control.

Since the workers directly report to their supervisors, they look forward to some flexibility and understanding on the part of the supervisor regarding their emotional state of mind. Their incessant struggle between personal emotions and displayed emotions can be minimized by their supervisors who can define the display of emotions rules of the workers.

According to psychologist PT Sundaram, sometimes, it's a clash of values and the lack of job satisfaction which pushes an individual over the line. "I have many young employees who are not happy with their new jobs, in spite of getting a 100 per cent hike. To make matters difficult, many are clueless about their source of their discontent," says Dr Sundaram". Therefore the title of the study is "Challenges posed by job profile for Employees of Call Centers in Mumbai".

Objectives of The Study

The objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To study the levels of job satisfaction among call center employees.
2. To evaluate the security measures adopted by the call centre employers for its employees.
3. To study the effect of job profile on the health of the call center employees.
4. To study the impact on cultural transformation of the call center employees.
5. To study the high manpower attrition rates in the call center industry and the causes of it.

Hypotheses

1. Null hypothesis – The employees in the call centers are having their job satisfaction.

- The job profile and security arrangements in call centers are not satisfactory.

Research Methodology

- The researcher has followed the survey method for conducting the study. The primary data was collected with the help of a structured questionnaire. The secondary data was collected with the help of research papers in journals, newspapers, magazines and websites.
- Sampling – The universe of the population are the call centers located within Mumbai. The sample was selected from the call centers on random basis. The size of the sample was 250 employees selected from these call centers.
- Data Analysis – The data collected was tabulated, analyzed and interpreted for drawing conclusions. Statistical methods such as average, percentage, standard deviation and co-relation were used for the analysis of data.
- Hypothesis was tested with a suitable statistical technique. The conclusion and few suggestions are given at the end.

Data Analysis

The data collected through the questionnaire was analyzed with the help of computer software i.e. SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). There were 344 respondents and each respondent has given responses to 42 questions. Most of the questions were

close ended. The detailed analysis is given below. We use the Job Characteristics Model and Emotional Labor as the theoretical constructs to analyze the data collected from the 344 respondents as follows:

In the case of call centre employees these core job characteristics would reflect the following:

- Skill variety*: the degree to which the job requires different skills. Most employees in a voice based call centre either make telephone calls or are receiving telephone calls from customers spread across the globe. In their case the only skill required is communicating in good English with developed accents as per the location needs i.e. if the customer is located in USA, the accent developed by the call center employee would be such that it suits the local slang. They are trained to use words and phrases common to the public of that region, state or country. Like the people in USA generally use the word "Ya" to mean "Yes". The term "Gas" means "Petrol" in the USA.

This essentially means that for a call center employee the degree to which the job requires different skills are low. The skill variety demands of the job are only communication skills, listening skills and general command over some accents on which the employee is trained as per the customer locations. This is highlighted by the following data analysis.

Creativity In Job Profile

The researcher asked the respondents whether their job profile provide for being creative at workplace. The responses were as follows:

Table 1.2: Creativity in Call Center Job Profile

Creativity in Call Center Job Profile	Frequency	Percent
Not at all	Nil	Nil
Sometimes	152	44
Generally	192	56
Always	Nil	Nil
Total	344	100

The above data can be presented in a diagram as follows:

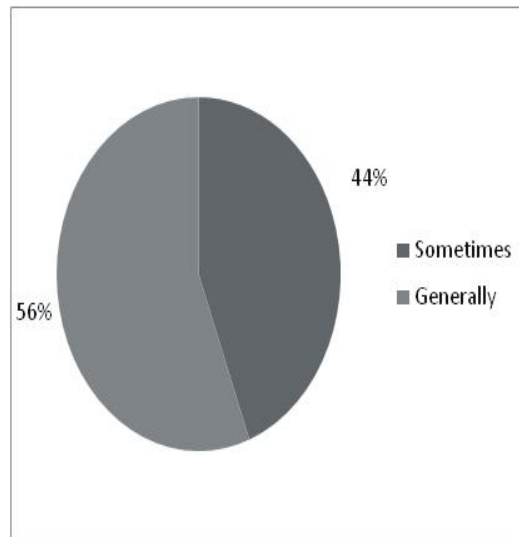
Chart 1.2: Creativity in Call Center Job Profile

Table 1.2 reveals that 192 out of 344 respondents (56 %) have responded that their job profile at the call centre allows them to be creative generally but not always. 44 % of the respondents mention that their job profile allows them to be creative sometimes. Thus the call center jobs do not allow the employees to be totally creative at their workplace. This can lead to monotonous work and boredom for the employees in the long run. Fatigue and stress results from monotonous job profile which can be seen in most call centers.

2. *Task identity*: the degree to which the job involves completing a whole, identifiable piece of work rather than simply a part. In most in-bound call centers (where the customer makes a telephone call to the call center) the customer calls for some information request or some service request or any type of query for a product / service which the customer is using. In all such cases the task of the call center employee is just to provide the necessary information to the customer and that ends the transaction there. In case the call center executive is unable to provide the information or fulfill the service request, the call gets escalated to his supervisor or to the next level executive. So in both cases the task itself limits the call center executive from identifying his work to the customers

end needs. Only in a few cases where only passing on some information that can help the customer achieve his need can the call center employee identify his work to the customers end needs.

In cases of the out-bound call centers where the call center employees are expected to make telephone calls to the customers for either selling insurance, mortgage loans or to recover credit card payments the only interaction between the call center employee and the customer is to get appointments for the field executives, who then personally visit the customer and arrange for further interaction with them. Here again like the in-bound call center employee even for the out-bound call center employee the task of calling up the customer does not fulfill the customers end needs and hence has a feeling of being a mere cog in the wheel. This is highlighted by the following data analysis.

Challenging Job Profile of The Call Center Employee

The researcher asked the respondents whether they find their call center jobs posing a variety of challenges that utilizes their skills. The responses were as follows:

Table 1.3: Challenging Job Profile of employees of Call Centers

Challenging Job Profile of Call Center Employees	Frequency	Percent
Not at all	88	26
Sometimes	66	19
Generally	174	51
Always	16	4
Total	344	100

The above data can be presented in a diagram as follows:

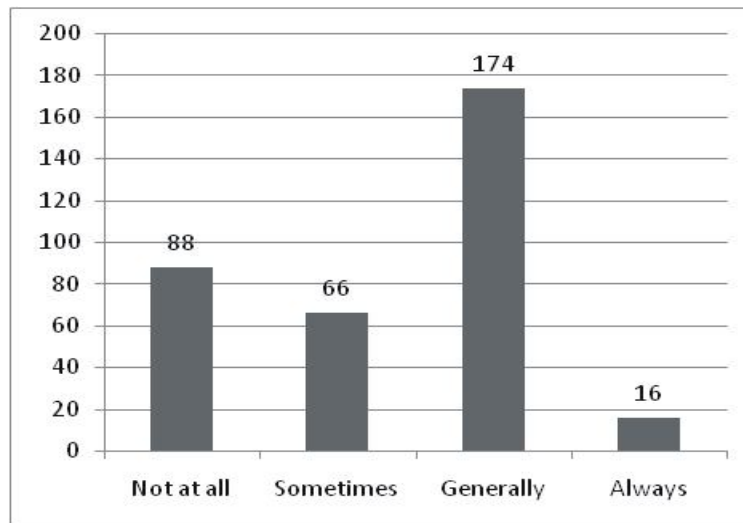
Chart 1.3: Challenging Job Profile of employees of Call Centers

Table 1.3 reveals that 174 respondents out of 344 (51 %) feel that their call center jobs generally pose challenges which utilizes their skills, 26 % felt that their job profile does not provide any challenges for utilizing their skills, 19 % of the respondents felt that only sometimes their jobs pose challenges that utilize their skills and 4 % of the respondents felt that their skills are utilized by job challenges every day. Thus generally the jobs in call centers pose challenges that utilize the skills of their employees.

3. *Task significance*: the extent to which the job has an impact on other people, inside or outside the organization. Most of the job responsibilities of any call center employee are related directly to either making or receiving telephone calls and satisfying the customer's query. Most of the call center representatives are judged for performance based on number of call attended / made and also on the duration of time spent on such a call. Where the number of calls being low and where the duration of

any call exceeding the specified optimal call duration the call center employee is judged to be performing below defined productivity norms / standards. Since the call center employee's job profile being "person centric" in nature it does not have a direct impact with the peers in the group. This can lead to higher levels of job stress and no peer interaction during the job performance. There is minimal team based interactions required while performing the core job by any call center employee. This is highlighted by the following data analysis.

Pseudo Name at Workplace

The researcher asked the respondents whether they were having a pseudo name at their workplace and how did they feel about it. The responses were as follows:

Table 1.4: Pseudo Name for employees of Call Centers

Pseudo Name for employees of Call Centers	Frequency	Percent
Good	Nil	Nil
Neutral	218	63
Bad	100	29
Miserable	26	8
Total	344	100

The above data can be presented in a diagram as follows:

Chart 1.4: Pseudo Name for employees of Call Centers

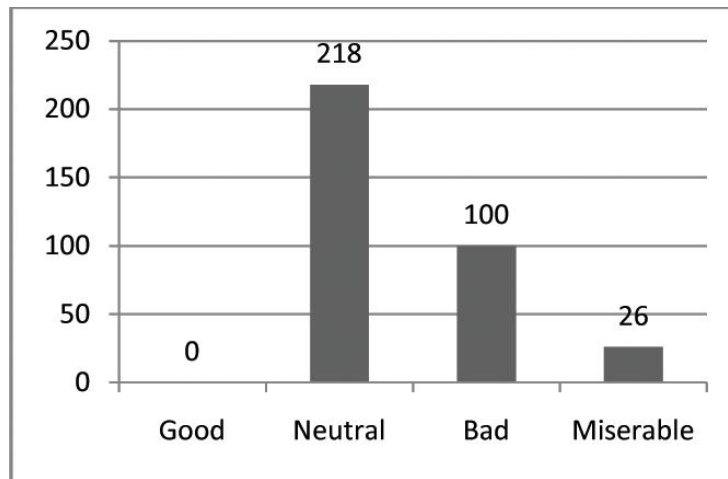


Table 1.4 reveals that 218 respondents out of 344 (63 %) mentioned that they are neutral i.e. they are neither feeling good nor bad about their pseudo name at workplace, 29 % felt bad about the pseudo name at workplace and 8 % felt miserable about it. None of the respondents felt good about their pseudo name. Thus we find that all the call center employees do not feel good about their pseudo name. 37 % of the call center employees mentioned that they either felt bad or miserable about their pseudo name at their workplace. They feel as if they lead a dual life as they

are not being identified as per their original identity. They need to fake their identity at workplace. This leads to emotional labor called as surface acting. This can lead to lower morale of the employees.

Change Of Accent At Workplace

The researcher asked the respondents whether they were made to change their accent at their workplace and how did they feel about it. The responses were as follows:

Table 1.5: Change of Accent for employees of Call Centers

Accent Change	Frequency	Percent
Good	26	8
Neutral	68	20
Bad	220	64
Miserable	30	8
Total	344	100

The above data can be presented in a diagram as follows:

Chart 1.5: Change of Accent for employees of Call Centers

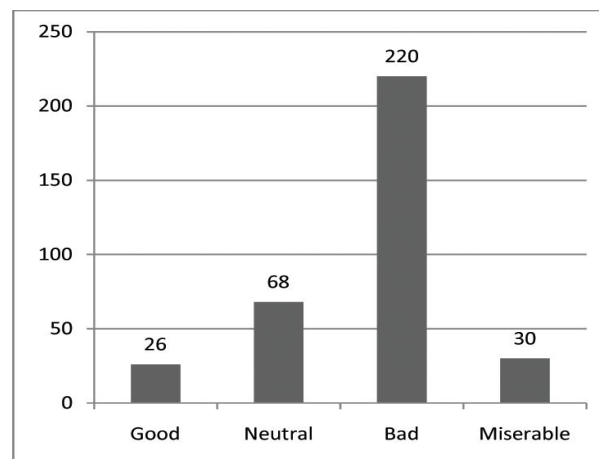


Table 1.5 reveals that 220 respondents out of 344 (64 %) mentioned that they felt bad for having to change their accent while attending customer calls, 20 % were neutral regarding this, 8 % felt miserable about having to change their accent and the remaining 8 % felt good about it. Thus 72 % of call center employees feel bad or miserable about having to change their accent while attending customer calls. Call center employees need to lie about their ethnic identity from the western customers. This leads to emotional labor called

as emotional dissonance. This can hurt their self esteem.

Loss of Personal Identity of Employees Due To Job Profile At Call Center

The researcher asked the respondents whether they have lost their personal identity due to their job profile at the call center and how do they feel about it. The responses were as follows:

Table 1.6: Loss of Personal Identity of employees of Call Centers

Loss of Personal Identity	Frequency	Percent
Alienated	70	20
Impersonal	8	2
Lower Self Esteem	92	27
Dual Identity	174	51
Total	344	100

The above data can be presented in a diagram as follows:

Chart 1.6: Loss of Personal Identity of employees of Call Centers

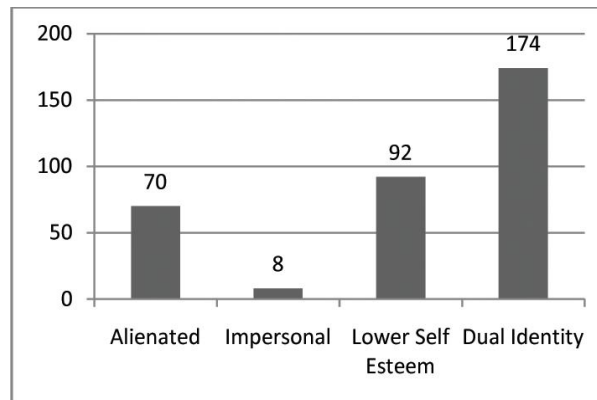


Table 1.6 reveals that 174 respondents out of 344 (51 %) mentioned that they felt like having a dual identity due to loss of their personal identity at workplace, 27 % mentioned that they are having lower self esteem, 20 % mentioned that they are alienated from their jobs and 2 % of the respondents were impersonal about having lost their personal identity. Thus 98 % of the employees of call centers are being adversely psychologically affected due to the changing of identity at their workplace. This leads to emotional labor called as emotional dissonance. This leads to lots of Psycho-Social disorders in the call center employees.

4. *Autonomy*: the extent to which the job allows jobholders to exercise choice and discretion over

work. Most call center employee does not have any autonomy over their job content as well as its delivery. Automated call dialer just throws up calls to every call center agents (CSA – Customer Service Agents) and queues up calls one after another for response. No call can be unattended without prior permission from the floor supervisors. This is because the call center bills their clients based on the number of telephone calls attended / made in a day. If the call rate goes down there is a slump in the billing. In most cases the client pays the call center the same rate irrespective of the call duration. Higher the call duration, lower is the call attending rate. Therefore no call center allows the CSA any discretion over the number of calls one has to attend during the 8 hour work shift or the duration of each call one attends.

This leads to frustration and fatigue. All this lowers the productivity of each employee. This is highlighted by the following data analysis.

Authority and Responsibility Given At Workplace

The researcher asked the respondents whether they were given enough authority and responsibility for accomplishing their tasks at their workplace. The responses were as follows:

Table 1.7: Authority and Responsibility for employees of Call Centers

Authority and Responsibility for employees of Call Centers	Frequency	Percent
Not at all	44	13
Sometimes	60	17
Generally	224	65
Always	16	5
Total	344	100

The above data can be presented in a diagram as follows:

Chart 1.7: Authority and Responsibility for employees of Call Centers

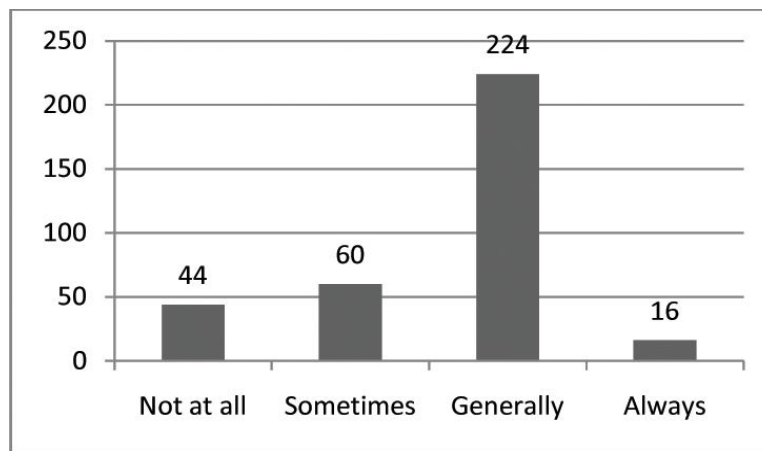


Table 1.7 reveals that 224 respondents out of 344 (65 %) mentioned that generally they are given enough authority and responsibility by their superiors to accomplish their tasks, 17 % feel that it is only sometimes that they are given authority and responsibility to accomplish their tasks at workplace, 13 % feel that they do not have any authority and responsibility to accomplish their tasks and 5 % felt that they are always given authority and responsibility to accomplish their tasks at their workplace. Thus 70 % of the call center employees feel that they have the required authority and responsibility to accomplish their tasks at workplace.

5. *Feedback from the job:* the extent to which the job itself (as opposed to other people) provides jobholders with information on their performance. Most call center employees are closely monitored by their supervisors as well as their quality departments for the number of call attended and the duration of these calls. There is also a check for whether the call was

terminated successfully or there was an escalation to a higher level. All such checks are regularly communicated to every CSA at the end of their work shifts. Any deviation in their calling from the set quality standards demands immediate reprimand in the form of cuts in incentives and in worst scenario loss of one's job. Hence such feedback about one's job keeps them on tenterhooks every day. This leads to BOSS (Burn Out Stress Syndrome) in many employees. On the other hand positive feedback boosts the morale of the CSA, but the pressure for zero defect performance gets building up and increases the stress levels leading to mental and physical deterioration in the long run. This is highlighted by the following data analysis.

Monotonous Job Profile of Call Center Employees

The researcher asked the respondents whether they feel that their job profile at the call center was

monotonous, boring and meaningless. The responses were as follows:

Table 1.8: Monotonous Job Profile of employees of Call Centers

Monotonous Job Profile of Call Center employees	Frequency	Percent
Not at all	34	10
Sometimes	146	42
Generally	164	48
Always	Nil	Nil
Total	344	100

The above data can be presented in a diagram as follows:

Chart 1.8: Monotonous Job Profile of employees of Call Centers

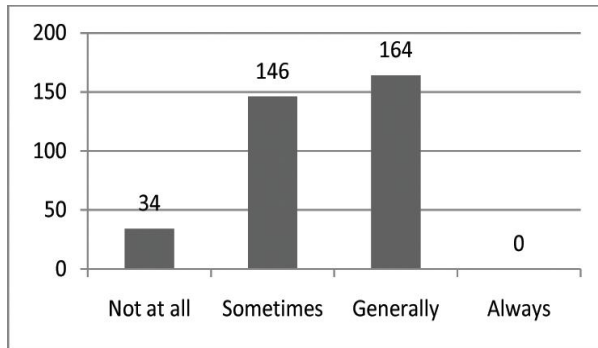


Table 1.8 reveals that 164 respondents out of 344 (48 %) mentioned that they find their job profile at call center generally monotonous, boring and meaningless, 42 % mentioned that sometimes they find their job monotonous and boring. Only 10 % of the respondents felt that their jobs were not monotonous or boring. None of the respondents felt that their jobs were monotonous, boring and meaningless always. Thus 90 % of the call center employees find their job profile to be monotonous, boring and meaningless generally or sometimes and only 10 % of the call center employees are happy with their job profile.

All these core job characteristics of call center employees cause mental and physical despair among them. At a very young age they adopt a deteriorating lifestyle by getting addicted to substances due to the mental stress. The physical aspects of their job profile do not permit them to be mobile for long periods within the stipulated 8 – 12 hour shifts. This leads to physical problems like backache, hearing problems, high blood pressure, etc to name a few ailments. Therefore there is high manpower turnover and chronic absenteeism among call center employees. To highlight this and to find out the causes for the high manpower turnover the

researcher further analyzed the factors call center employees expect from their jobs.

Employee's Expectation From His Job

The researcher asked the respondents to rank 12 parameters of a job in the order of one's preference. The responses to parameters that were chosen as the first preference were as follows:

Table 1.9: Employee Expectations from their Job

Employee Expectations in his Job	Nos. of Respondents giving this parameter Rank No.1	Percent
Job Satisfaction	92	26
Salary	56	15
Growth Prospects	16	5
Team Work	20	8
Variety in Job	8	2
Personal Security	26	8
Appreciation	24	6
Work Stress	50	15
Flexible Work Hrs	52	15
TOTAL	344	100

The above data can be presented in a diagram as follows:

Chart 1.9: Employee Expectations from their Job



Table 1.9 reveals that 92 respondents out of 344 (26 %) chose the parameter job satisfaction as their first rank out of 12 parameters that they expect out of their call centre job followed by salary by 15 % respondents, work stress by 15 % respondents and flexible work hours ranked as first by 15 % respondents. This was followed by team work by 8 % respondents and personal security by 8 % respondents. Thus job satisfaction is the main expectation of an employee working in a call center. This is followed by salary, work stress and flexible work hours.

Testing of Hypotheses.

The hypothesis stated at the beginning was as follows:

1. Null hypothesis – The employees in the call centers are having their job satisfaction.
2. The job profile and security arrangements in call centers are not satisfactory.

In order to test the above Null hypothesis a question was asked to the respondents as to how much are they satisfied with their call center job. The responses were framed in the Table 1.10 as follows:

Table 1.10: Job Satisfaction of Call Center Employees

Job Satisfaction	Frequency	Percent
Not at all	42	13
Somewhat Satisfied	110	32
Neither Satisfied not Dissatisfied	146	42
Quite Satisfied	46	13
Total	344	100

The Chi-Square test is applied in order to test the null hypothesis as follows:

	Job Satisfaction of Call Center Employees
Chi-Square	89.674
df	3

The degree of freedom is 3 hence, at 5% level of significance the table value is 7.81. As the calculated value is 89.67 and it is higher than the table value hence the Null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis is accepted. Therefore it is concluded that the employees in the call centers are not having their job satisfaction.

In order to test the hypothesis - The job profile and security arrangements in call centers are not satisfactory; the following questions were asked to the respondents:

- a. Whether their Job Profile at the call center requires them to be creative. The responses were framed in the Table 1.11 as follows:

Table 1.11: Creativity in Call Center Job Profile

Creativity in Call Center Job Profile	Frequency	Percent
Not at all	Nil	Nil
Sometimes	152	44
Generally	192	56
Always	Nil	Nil
Total	344	100

The Chi-Square test is applied in order to test the hypothesis as follows:

	Creativity in Call Center Job Profile
Chi-Square	4.651
df	3

The degree of freedom is 3 hence at 5% level of significance the table value is 7.81. As the calculated value is 4.651 and it is lower than the table value hence the research hypothesis that the job profile of call center employees is not satisfactory is accepted.

- b. Whether there were any safety incidents involving the safety of female employees. The responses were framed in the Table 1.12 as follows:

Table 1.12: Employee Safety Incidents at Call Centers

Employee Safety Incidents at Call Centers	Frequency	Percent
None so far	85	24
Only one	153	45
Two	98	29
More than two	8	2
Total	344	100

The Chi-Square test is applied in order to test the hypothesis as follows:

	Employee Safety Incidents at Call Centers
Chi-Square	1.246
df	3

The degree of freedom is 3 hence at 5% level of significance the table value is 7.81. As the calculated value is 1.246 and it is lower than the table value hence the research hypothesis that the employee safety arrangements at call centers are not satisfactory is accepted. Therefore it is concluded that the job profile and security arrangements in call centers are not satisfactory.

Conclusions

The data collected through the questionnaire was analyzed for 344 respondents. The following points were concluded from the same.

1. Approximately 90 % of the call center employees found their job profile to be monotonous, boring and meaningless generally or sometimes and only 10 % of the call center employees were happy with their job profile.
2. Only 13 % of the call center employees were fully satisfied with their jobs and the remaining 87 % are either not satisfied or are partly satisfied with their jobs.
3. The call center jobs do not allow the employees to be totally creative at their workplace. This can lead to monotonous work and boredom for the employees in the long run. Fatigue and stress results from monotonous job profile which can be seen in most call centers.
4. Approximately 98 % of the employees of call centers were being adversely psychologically affected due to the changing of identity at their workplace. This leads to lots of Psycho-Social disorders in the call center employees.
5. Approximately 92 % of call center employees faced customer abuse generally or sometimes. This can be very de-motivating factor for the employees of call centers. This can lead to frustration about one's job and can result in a high rate of employee turnover for the call centers.

Suggestions

The researcher after analyzing the data available from the filled questionnaire of 344 respondents and reaching the conclusions would like to suggest the following points to the Management of Call Centers:

1. It was found that call center employee's job profile to be monotonous in nature; it leads to boredom, fatigue and stress. The management and the human resources department can allow the call center employees to have job rotation at regular intervals. This would not only give them a change in their routine job but also groom them to take additional responsibility in other work areas.
2. The HR department of call centers can devise an appropriate career plan for its employees. The same may be communicated to all the employees at the time of joining.

3. Rewards and recognition schemes may be made available to all employees. Talented employees can be recognized and appropriately rewarded through monetary as well as non-monetary reward schemes.
4. The management of the call center can strive to bring about a proper work life balance for its employees by encouraging of annual vacations, putting the employees through time management and self development workshops, encourage employees in developing hobby and also to introspect his / her spiritual self through meditation and yoga sessions at workplace.
5. The call centers can have resident doctors to deal with employee health problems. They can also take help of nutritionists to devise diet and health plans for its employees.

References

1. Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, Twentieth Anniversary Edition, 2003.
2. Babu P. Ramesh, *Cyber Coolies in BPO*, Economic and Political Weekly, January 31, 2004.
3. Christer Strandberg and Olof Wahlberg, *All Call Centers are not electronic sweatshops*, The Journal of E-working (www.eworkjournal.org), December 2007, Vol 1, pp. 116-136.
4. Cornell University, USA, University of Sheffield, UK and The Working Life Research Center, Austria, *The Global Call Center Report*, 2007.
5. Divya C. McMillin, *Outsourcing Identities – Call Centers and Cultural Transformation in India*, Economic and Political Weekly, January 21, 2006, pp. 235 – 241.
6. Ed Rose and Gillian Wright, *Satisfaction and dimensions of control among call centre customer service representatives*, The International Journal of Human Resource Management, January 2005, Volume 16, Issue 1, pp.136 – 160.
7. Ernesto Noronha and Premilla D'cruz, *Organizing Call Centre Agents: Emerging Issues*, Economic and Political Weekly, May 27, 2006, pp.2115 – 2121.
8. Fred Luthans, *Organizational Behavior*, 2007.
9. Frederick F. Reichheld and W. Earl Sasser, Jr., *Zero Defections: Quality Comes to Services*, Harvard Business Review, October 01, 2000.
10. ICMR Case Study, *The Indian Call Center Journey*, 2002.

11. Jane Paul and Ursula Huws, *2nd draft report for the TOSCA project*, Analytica Social and Economic Research Ltd, August, 2002.
 12. K. A. Lewig and M. F. Dollard, *Emotional dissonance, emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction in call centre workers*, *European Journal Of Work And Organizational Psychology*, 2003, 12 (4), pp. 366–392.
 13. Kode Ruyter, Martin Wetzels and Richard Feinberg, *Role Stress in Call Centers: It's Effects on Employee Performance and Satisfaction*, *Journal Of Interactive Marketing*, Spring 2001, Volume 15, Number 2, pp. 23 – 35.
 14. National Commission for Women's sponsored ASSOCHAM research study on *Night Shift for Women – Growth and Opportunities*, 2008
 15. Preeti Singh and Anu Pandey, *Women in Call Centers*, *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 12, 2005, pp.684 – 687.
 16. Purdue University Center for Customer-Driven Quality, Kelly Services, *Offshore Company Call Centers a Concern for U.S. Companies*, September 21, 2004.
 17. The University of Sheffield (UK), Health and Safety Laboratory and UMIST for the Health and Safety Executive, *Psychosocial risk factors in call centers: An evaluation of work design and well-being*, Research Report 169, 2003.
 18. V. P. Sudhashree et al, *Issues and concerns of health among call centre employees*, *Indian Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, December 2005 – Vol 9 Issue 3, pp.129 – 132.
 19. www.bpiat.org
 20. www.bpointindia.org
 21. www.callcentres.com.au/resource.htm
 22. www.cybermedia.co.in
 23. www.eworkjournal.org
 24. www.globalcallcenter.org
 25. www.ilo.org/safework/lang—en/index.htm
 26. www.indiatimes.com
 27. www.it.fmi.uni-sofia.bg/TOSCA/
 28. www.nasscom.in
 29. www.thehindubusinessline.com
 30. www.thehindu.com
 31. <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/>
 32. <http://ncw.nic.in>
-