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ABSTRACT

Increasing numbers of British firms are outsourcing their call centre operations. This move has aroused a significant amount of criticism. On the one hand, some politicians argue that the trend has the potential to detrimentally impact employment rates in Britain. On the other hand, customers are complaining that they are receiving sub-standard service. Both claims are somewhat exaggerated as a review of the literature indicates that while there are, undoubtedly, some poorly managed offshore call centres, there are significant numbers of excellently managed ones as determined through customer feedback. This study focuses on the said problem, in an effort to uncover the key determinants of successful offshore call centre operations.

The literature review was conducted with the aim of uncovering the reasons behind the offshoring of call centre operations and identifying the characteristics of successfully managed call centres. Accordingly, the findings of the literature review are in the form of a list of the key determinants of successfully managed call centres. Following from that, a survey was conducted for the purpose of evaluating a specific offshore call centre from the perspective of both customers and employees. The study's conclusions are based on both the findings of the literature review and the survey and are a set of recommendations for the more effective management of call centres.

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PLAGIARISM STATEMENT

Recognising that students have an ethical and moral obligation to ensure that all work that they submit in their name is, indeed, their own and free of plagiarism, I exercised caution throughout the writing process. When writing the dissertation, I made sure that all my sources were meticulously acknowledged. Even so, there remained a fear that I might have, inadvertently, plagiarised sections of my study or paraphrased something without referencing it correctly. Therefore, following the completion of the study, I scanned the dissertation through EVE 2.5 for plagiarism and also checked it through <http://www.articlechecker.com/checker.php>. The plagiarism reports received from both plagiarism detection engines indicated that the work was, indeed, original and that I had not plagiarised any part of it. I am, thus, satisfied that the work which I am submitting as my own is original and is, in truth, my own.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction to the Problem

Managing customer relationships is not a new concept. Since the beginning of trade, sellers have focused on providing products and services to satisfy their customers. Since globalization has brought about an increase in competition for customers, the emphasis has switched from customer acquisition to customer retention, particularly with the cost of acquiring a new customer estimated at 4 to 10 times higher than simply retaining one (Kumar & Kumar, 2002).

Access to businesses worldwide via the Internet has resulted in a power shift from business to customer, with today's consumer demanding a higher level of customer service than in the past (Broetzmann & Grainer, 2005). For organizations, such as call centers that handle customer complaints on a daily basis, that heightened level of customer service expectation is measured by having problems resolved on the first call, customers having the perception that they are valued by the organization, and employing call center representatives who exhibit patience, understanding, and a caring attitude (Broetzmann & Grainer, 2005).

The ability to resolve effectively customer complaints in a reasonable amount of time (as perceived by the customer) should be a priority for organizations that care about increasing customer retention and reducing the costs associated with acquiring new customers. One recent study noted that 72% of customers will return if their complaints are resolved quickly, while 46% of customers will not return if their complaints are not resolved in a timely manner (Stone, 1999).

Call centres, as clear from the above, play a very important role in customer satisfaction and retention. Yet, more and more British companies are outsourcing their call centres to India and other locations because of cost consideration. This study will examine

the functions of call centres and explore the key operational determinants of successful call centres.

1.2 Background of the Problem

Many companies have implemented use of call centers as their primary means of handling customer inquiries and complaints (Staples, Dalrymple, & Bryar; 2002). Since the transaction is conducted over the telephone rather than in a face-to-face manner, the consumer is not able to see the facial expression of the call center representative. Attitude, interest, empathy, and willingness to help must be communicated through voice tone and by the ability of the call centre operator to resolve the customer's complaint or respond to his/her inquiries. By identifying the key operational determinants of successful call centre operations and the call-handling manner of operators who receive the greatest percentage of positive customer feedback, call centre management will be in a better position to improve their operations. In other words, understanding why some call centre operators receive positive feedback for the majority of calls they handle and why some call centres have positively contributed to customer satisfaction with an organisation, is absolutely necessary for the effective management of successful call centres.

The organization chosen for this study (Company A) is a major telecommunications provider in the United Kingdom. This company has been offshoring and outsourcing some of its work processes since 1995 but its call centre operations starting in 2000. Offshoring has cut down operations costs by as much as 60% and, according to the company's spokesperson, the services of its Indian-based offshore call centre is equal to, if not better than, call centre operations in the United Kingdom (McCue, 2005). There have been a large volume of customer complaints regarding Company A's Indian call centre. This indicates a high volume of customer dissatisfaction with the Company A. The company's spokesperson,

however, claims that service quality is very high. All calls are monitored and recorded and the company regularly reviews the content of these calls. This content, according to Company A's spokesperson, confirms that service quality is high but that many, although not the majority, of customers are prejudiced against offshoring, talking to a non-British call centre operators for a British company and tend to be extremely rude (McCue, 2005).

From Company A's point of view, therefore, the call centre is successful but from the point of view of many customers it is not. Regardless of which of the two views is more accurate, it is important to investigate why the call centre has not neutralized negative prejudices and what it can do in order to neutralize negative opinions. Doing so necessitates the identification and implementation of the key operational determinants of successful call centres.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Increasing numbers of British firms, are outsourcing their call centres to developing economies. Despite the economic benefits of doing so, there are multiple challenges to outsourcing call centres, chief amongst which is the management of the call centres and the agents and the achievement of customer satisfaction.

1.4 Statement of Purpose

Attitude, technical expertise, and the ability of the call center representative to resolve problems all influence the customer service experience (Adria & Chowdhury, 2002). In an effort to identify possible reasons why many customers are not satisfied with the company's offshore call centre, the study will examine the function of call centres, as in the service they are expected to provide, and the services which successful call centres provide. In doing so, the study will uncover the key determinants of successful call centre management.

1.5 Rationale

Telephone call centers are a relatively new phenomenon, and the availability of scholarly studies on call center dynamics as they relate to call center representatives is very limited. A comprehensive bibliography compiled by Mandelbaum (2004) listed almost 300 academic studies pertinent to the call center industry dating back to the early 1970s. The majority of research has been conducted since the early 1990s, with over half the studies focused on efficient call center operation and optimal staffing using mathematical modeling and queuing theory (Jagerman & Melamed, 2003).

A number of studies investigated the technological and engineering aspects of call centers, including ergonomics, work-related injuries and stressors, and skills-based routing of calls (Smith & Bayehi, 2003). Drawing from the fields of psychology and consumer behavior, several studies looked at factors such as waiting time and call abandon rates that influence customer perception of the service encounter (Duder & Rosenwein, 2001; Feinberg, Kim, Hokama, de Ruyter, & Keen, 2000). More recent research has looked at the role of call center representative hiring and training on the impact of employee turnover, as well as on employee and customer satisfaction (Adria & Chowdhury, 2002; Callaghan & Thompson, 2002).

The massive growth of the call center industry as a cost-effective means of resolving customer problems and increasing customer retention has led to call centers becoming the primary channel for customer service activities (Staples, Dalrymple, & Bryar, 2002). Businesses striving to increase profits by building customer loyalty and retention through excellent customer service practices could be missing a major element by not focusing on understanding the key operational determinants of successful call centre operations and the best way to achieve excellent customer satisfaction levels. This study is guided by the rationale of exploring these determinants.

1.6 Aims and Objectives of Study:

The aim of the study is to identify the key operational determinants of successful offshore call centre operations and the ways in which the performance of these centres may be improved.

As influenced by the aim of the study, the primary objective of this dissertation is to examine and analyze the main problems that offshore outsourcing call centre management countenance with customers and employees' and to examine how problems such as these can be over come. In this context the main objectives of the research study could be stated as:

- To identify the key operational determinants of offshore outsourcing call centre management
- To have a clear picture of current scenarios of call centre management.
- To suggest solution to over come issues in outsourcing call centre management.

1.7 Research Question

What are the key determinants of successful call centre operations which are outsourced to INDIA and what are the more effective ways of managing call centres?

1.8 Definition of Terms

The following definitions are provided to ensure a common understanding of the primary terms used in this study.

Abandon rate is the percentage of callers who hang up after what they perceive is an unacceptable wait in the queue without a call center representative handling their call (Schwartz, Ruffins, & Petouhoff, 2007).

Call center is the communications link between a company and its customers where call center representatives often make and receive calls to and from customers (Staples, Dalrymple, & Bryar, 2002). As defined by Brad Cleveland (2006), president of the Incoming Calls Management Institute, a call center is “a coordinated system of people, processes, technologies and strategies that provides access to organizational resources through appropriate channels of communication to enable interactions that create value for the customer and the organization” (p. 1). Call centers may also be known as contact centers, customer service centers, customer support centers, customer care centers, or customer interaction centers (Cleveland, 2006).

Call center representatives interact with customers over the telephone to provide basic customer service and support that solve customer problems and generate revenue for the company (Stevenson & Summers, 2004). Call center representatives may also be known as customer service agents, call center agents, customer service representatives (CSRs), telephone representatives, or contact center agents (Hurst, 2006).

Customer satisfaction is the “complete fulfillment of one’s wishes, needs, and expectations” (Berry, 1983, p. 141).

Customer service, as defined by Byrnes (2005) is not only the experience a customer has with the company, but what that customer perceives and remembers about the service received.

1.9 Research Method

The study was both desk-based and ethnographic. Scholarly articles and books on outsourcing, its efficacy and the challenges confronting the practice, with particular focus on call centre outsourcing in the UK were reviewed. In addition, primary data on

the operation of outsourced call centres was conducted. The study examined the key operational determinants of call centre management.

1.10 Assumptions and Limitations

Several assumptions and limitations pertain to this study. First, the study used a forced choice survey instrument. This means that the respondents were not free to state their views on the questions but had to select from a number of written answers. This means that some of the answers may not accurately represent the point of view of respondents but the most closely related view point

The second limitation of this study is that the size of the sample was small and was limited to the call center representatives working in one offshore call center in the telecommunications industry, and the customers of one telecommunications company located into two areas only. Indeed, there is no evidence that the sample in this study is typical of the broader population.

The third limitation of this research is the fact that the collection of data took place at a particular point in time. There is no guarantee that the responses received would be indicative of responses solicited and given at another time. There is also a potential that other factors outside the control of the researcher (setting, time of day, recent conflicts, and fatigue of the participants) could influence the responses (Shell, 2001).

A final limitation is based upon the researcher's lack of experience in conducting scholarly research and evaluating the data.

1.11 Description of Thesis Organisation

The research is comprised of five chapters, the first of which frames the area of interest and outlines the problem investigated. The research questions are presented, the

study's limitations are reviewed and the selected methodology is generally, and briefly, discussed.

The second chapter reviews literature on call centre management and the functions and responsibilities of call centres. The third chapter, discusses the study's methodological approach, the strategies employed for the collection of primary and secondary data and concludes with a justification of the defined selections, even while acknowledging some inherent limitations. The fourth chapter presents the study's findings, as informed by the primary and secondary data collected and responds to the research questions presented in the first chapter. Responses to the research questions raised in the first chapter and a discursive analysis of the validity of the research hypothesis are presented in the findings. The fifth chapter concludes the research and presents the study's recommendations.

1.12 Conclusion

As explained in this chapter, the study shall focus on the key determinants of offshore call centre management. The next chapter presents the literature reviewed for this study.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature on outsourcing, call centres and offshore call centre operations. Given the importance of offshoring and call centres, there is a wealth of literature on the topic. Few of this literature, however, focuses explicitly on the key operational determinants of successful offshore call centre operations. Instead, and as will be seen through this review, the majority of the studies discuss the cost and benefits of outsourcing and the operation and functions of call centres.

2.2 Outsourcing Debate

The popular view is that outsourcing of work processes, such as manufacturing and call centres, among others, has a negative effect on the economy of the outsourcee. In other words, many assume that outsourcing negatively influences the economy and employment rates in countries whose companies are outsourcing part of their business processes. Butler (2003) and Abromovsky, Griffith and Sako (2004) insist that this is not the case. Referring to the offshoring of call centres, they argue that there is no evidence to suggest that this practice negatively influences domestic economies or employment rates of the outsourcees. Researchers like Weidenbaum (2004) support this view point. Unemployment rate may be increasing in the United Kingdom and there may be economic setbacks but there is nothing to establish a link between these two developments and the outsourcing of call centres.

It appears that the available facts support the argument in favour of outsourcing not having a negative effect on the economies of outsourcees. The United Kingdom, according to an *Economist* (2005) magazine article is responsible for 20% of all outsourced jobs and operations across the world. In fact, the United Kingdom is the second largest outsourcee in

the world. If the argument which states that outsourcing creates unemployment were true, the UK unemployment rate should have dropped by 20% but it has not. To the contrary, the labour market has grown by 14%. Added to that, during this same period and because it was able to focus its workforce on the Services and IT industry, the UK closed the 80% productivity gap in IT and services which stood between it and the United States (Abromovsky, Grifith and Sako, 2004). Even if none of this provides absolute and concrete evidence that outsourcing is a cause of economic growth for outsourcees, it shows that it does not have a detrimental economic effect on outsourcees.

2.3 Overview of Call Centre Industry

Mandelbaum (2004) compiled a comprehensive bibliography of almost 300 academic studies pertinent to the call centre industry. The majority of academic literature in this area offers a multi-disciplinary approach covering such disciplines as Operations Research and Management, Mathematics and Statistics, Forecasting and Modeling, Industrial Engineering, Information Technology, Human Resource Management, Psychology, and Sociology. Some studies date back to the early 1970s, but most have been conducted since the early 1990s. Over half of the research focused on efficient call centre operation and optimal staffing using mathematical modelling and queuing theory (Andrews & Parsons, 1993).

A number of studies investigated the technological and engineering aspects of call centres, including ergonomics, work-related injuries and stressors, and skills-based routing of calls. Drawing from the fields of psychology and consumer behaviour, several studies looked at factors such as waiting time and call abandon rates that influence customer perception of the service encounter (Duder, & Rosenwein, 2001; Feinberg, Kim, Hokama, de Ruyter, & Keen, 2000).

Human resource issues are the focus of much of the current research on call centres. These studies have investigated optimal staffing requirements for call centres, as well as the impact that hiring and training practices have on employee attitude, job satisfaction, and employee turnover (Adria & Chowdhury, 2002; Callaghan & Thompson, 2002).

As the previous research studies indicate, telephone call centres are a relatively new phenomenon. Pan American Airways introduced the first call centre in the United States in 1956 (Schwartz, Ruffins, & Petouhoff, 2007). The introduction of toll-free telephone numbers in the late 1960s led to the growth of call centres and their use by organizations as a means of interacting with customers.

Call centres are known by a variety of names: contact centre, customer service centre, customer interaction centre, and call centre. By whatever name it is given, a call centre is the communications link between a company and its customers. A call centre is typically a physical location, or a virtual operation within a company, where call centre representatives often make and receive calls (Gilmore, 2001). Inbound calls from customers are primarily concerned with service and support issues, while telemarketing, debt collection, and fund-raising account for the majority of outbound calls (Gilmore, 2001).

It is standard practice today for companies to use the call centre as the primary means of communicating with their customers (Staples, Dalrymple, & Bryar, 2002). The growth of this industry indicates that companies view call centres as a cost-effective mechanism in providing customer access and improving customer retention. While call centres may also use a variety of communications technology such as e-mail and web pages, customers prefer personal attention via telephone to any other mode of interaction (Dawson, 2004). Indeed, complaining customers may be more comfortable voicing their concerns over the telephone, rather than face-to-face, becoming more verbally aggressive than they would in person.

2.4 Role of the Call Centre Representative

The call centre representative has the principal task of taking and making calls while being proactive in resolving customer concerns. As goodwill ambassadors for the organization, they are the primary link between the company and its customers (Ojha & Kasturi, 2005). Their interaction with callers impacts the overall customer perception of the organization and is a major factor in customer retention (Evenson, Harker, & Frei, 1999). It follows, therefore, that characteristics such as attitude, knowledge of the company and its products, and the ability to “connect” with the person on the other end of the line are essential in building customer satisfaction, loyalty, and increased revenue (McCulloch, 2005). Since the average call time lasts from three to five minutes, it is possible that representatives will participate in an average of 100 calls daily and interact with as many as 30,000 separate customers over a three-year period. Call centre representatives who have the skills to retain customers by resolving their problems quickly, using a win-win approach, will most likely be viewed as valuable assets to the organization (Stein, 1985).

2.4.1 Call Centre Representative Training

A major issue facing call centres is recruiting, training, and retaining high quality call centre representatives (Lee, 2005). Employees are the biggest investment and most important resource an organization has, with the average call centre spending between \$5,000 and \$18,000 to recruit and train each call centre representative (McCulloch, 2005). Initial training takes two to six weeks, depending on the industry, and staffing costs for call centre representatives range from 60% to 70% of operating expenses for many call centres (McCulloch, 2005). Call centre representatives need technical competence in using the phone and navigating through computer screens, as well as in gaining the product and service knowledge necessary to meet customer needs. The ability to assess a customer’s disposition

through excellent listening, strong communication skills, and effective conflict resolution skills is also necessary for call centre representatives to effectively do their jobs (Adria & Chowdhury, 2002).

Most call centre representatives have the technical expertise to do the job, yet are lacking when it comes to human relations skills (Rosenberg, 2005). Hartline and Ferrell (1996) stressed the importance of service organizations taking steps to ensure that the attitudes and behaviours of their customer service representatives result in quality customer service delivery. This is not an easy task since call centre representatives are subjected to angry and upset customers on a daily basis, approaching as many as 30% of all calls in some cases. A survey of 1,012 randomly selected households nationwide found that 70% of the respondents experienced “customer rage” when attempting to resolve problems with organizations. Of those respondents experiencing customer rage, one third yelled or raised their voices at the customer representative and 13% used profanity to express their displeasure (Broetzmann & Grainer, 2005).

For call centre representatives who want assistance in developing interpersonal skills, there are numerous companies, such as the Incoming Calls Management Institute, that offer such training. The ability to defuse anger and address customer concerns takes talent, sensitivity, and self-confidence (Fluss, 2004; Lucas, 2005). Gaining proficiency in these soft skills comes from daily interaction with customers and additional training. Whether delivered on-site, off-site, or on-line, representatives now have access to courses ranging from basic customer service skills, problem solving techniques, stress management, to developing skills that deal with angry customers (Fleischer, 2005).

Training consultant Elizabeth Ahearn indicated that the majority of call centres focus 90% of their training on product and technology, leaving only 10% for development of soft skills. She has recommended increasing the time allocated to teaching customer interaction

skills to 50% of the total training call centre representatives receive (Read, 2002). Call centre representatives who develop the ability to interact positively with others have the potential to lower their stress levels, increase customer satisfaction and retention rates, and reduce conflicts with co-workers, subordinates, and superiors in the workplace (Schwartz, Ruffins, & Petouhoff, 2007).

2.4.2 Call Centre Representative Stress and Turnover

Schwartz, Ruffins, and Petouhoff (2007) cited inadequate training, unrealistic job expectations, limited authority, and inability to handle conflicts as contributors to the stress experienced by call centre representatives. Rosanne D'Ausilio, president of Human Technologies Global, Incorporated, blamed the lack of conflict training and the high volume of irate callers in putting the job of call centre representatives among the top 10 most stressful jobs in the country (as cited in Franklin, 2003). Studies by Bitner, Booms, and Mohr (1994) and Grandey, Dickter, and Sin (2002) found that customer service representatives subjected to "problem customers" and verbally abusive callers experienced higher levels of stress and increased job dissatisfaction.

To achieve customer satisfaction, representatives are often called upon to display emotions required by the organization, such as empathy and friendliness, rather than the anger or frustration they may actually be feeling (Grebner, Semmer, Faso, Gut, Kälin, & Elfering, 2003). This emotional dissonance has been associated with reduced job satisfaction, stress, and emotional exhaustion (Zapf, 2002). As Dawson (2001) noted,

a call centre representative, ... answers the phones and takes a day's worth of crap from customers and comes back tomorrow. A rep puts up with long hours and low pay and not enough motivation from his or supervisors, and usually doesn't stay at the job for very long. A rep ensures that the customer experience is the best it can possibly be, a truly thankless task. (p. 315)

Because of the high stress, low morale, repetitiveness of tasks, and limited opportunity for advancement, the turnover rate for call centre representatives is extremely high (Baker, 2004). Average turnover rate for call centre representatives ranges from 33% to 61% annually, with some call centres reaching 100% turnover every year (Baker, 2004).

Studies by Houlihan (2001) cited similar findings of high representative turnover due to job dissatisfaction, exhaustion, high levels of stress, and burnout. These high rates of turnover and employee dissatisfaction reinforce the need to identify conflict management styles used by call centre representatives since it has been shown that an integrating style results in less conflict and stress, while dominating or avoiding styles increase the level of conflict and stress.

It has been estimated that replacing a representative costs one and one half times his or her annual salary (McCulloch, 2005). With many representatives staying no longer than 6 to 12 months, call centres are hesitant to spend the money necessary to adequately train and motivate their employees, yet with such high rates of absenteeism and burnout, the financial impact of such on-going turnover is extremely detrimental to the industry (McCulloch, 2005).

To build a workforce with the ability to offer superior customer service, call centre management must take a serious look at who is being hired, how they are being hired, and what training is being provided (Allen, Reichheld, & Hamilton, 2005). Many call centre representatives work part-time and come from the ranks of college students, homemakers, recent arrivals to an area, and senior citizens (McCulloch, 2005). Moreover, the existing labour pool may be low quality compared to what today's call centres demand. According to Jeff Furst, president of FurstPerson, only 1 in 10 interested call centre job candidates will make it past the background check, pre-screening, and selection testing to ultimately be hired (Read, 2004).

Self-service has replaced routine customer inquiries, so the live calls representatives receive are often more complex and take more time to resolve. With many areas facing a shortage of qualified applicants, call centre managers should take steps to ensure their employees have the right skills to resolve customer complaints and keep them from leaving for employment with the competition (Beaujean, Davidson, & Madge, 2006).

2.4.3 Assessing Call Centre Representative Skills

Some call centre representatives possess the proper temperament, effective communication skills, positive attitude, and a sincere desire to help others that mark excellent customer service; however, many representatives lack both aptitude and training for the job (Fluss, 2004; McCulloch, 2004). Handling upset customers and resolving complaints are, “something[s] that few people do well naturally” necessitating the need for conflict training (Kessler, 1996; Saxby, 2005). Saxby (2005) found that a half-day training session could lead to improved customer satisfaction and retention rates. Saxby (2005) recommended that call centre representatives practice their customer listening skills as little as 30 to 60 minutes monthly in order to achieve higher levels of service.

Call centres that offer a narrow range of services and employ representatives with similar skills often route calls to the next available representative; however, identifying and maximizing the strengths of call centre representatives can result in higher employee satisfaction, lower representative turnover, and increased customer satisfaction and retention (Callaghan & Thompson, 2002). Dawson (2001) referred to this as skills-based routing. Technology is available to identify the skills of each representative and store that information in a database. When the representative logs on to the call centre network, calls can then be automatically routed based on the needs of the customer and the skills set possessed by each representative, rather than on the basis of the next available representative (Cleveland, 2006).

Using a predictive assessment during the pre-hiring process to help determine the type of customer interactions representatives are best suited to handle, based on their skills set, could aid management in matching specific call centre jobs to the individual call centre representatives. While some call centres do participate in pre-screening testing, others view the process as too costly, time consuming, and not of much value (McCulloch, 2005). Using an assessment instrument to measure these characteristics could benefit the company in terms of reduced training costs, decreased representative turnover, and potential retention of customers due to improved representative performance (Dawson, 2005).

2.5 Customer Satisfaction

According to Byrnes (2005), customer service is not measured by the customer experience – it is based on what the customer remembers about the experience and how that perception drives his/her future behaviour. For organizations, translating that customer experience into customer satisfaction is likely to result in “higher customer retention, favourable word of mouth, or increased purchases” (Keiningham, Goddard, Vavra, & Iaci, 1999, p. 57).

In an effort to quantify customer satisfaction by comparing the level of service received against the level of service expected, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985, 1988, 1991) developed and later refined the SERVQUAL model. This model consisted of a 22-item survey instrument designed to measure customer perception of five dimensions of service quality: (1) tangibles: appearance of physical facilities, equipment, and staff; (2) reliability: ability to provide dependable and accurate service; (3) responsiveness: willingness to help the customer; (4) assurance: ability to inspire confidence and trust; and (5) empathy: extent of caring and individualized service. Berman (2005) attested to the popularity of using the SERVQUAL model to measure customer satisfaction and Khatibi, Ismail, and

Thyagarajan (2002) acknowledged the SERVQUAL as “the most comprehensive and frequently cited tool for measuring and managing service quality” (p. 35).

Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault (1990) observed that the majority of the service quality items from the SERVQUAL are directly related to the human interaction between the customer service representative and customers, thus lending support to the proposition that customer satisfaction is highly dependent upon the employee’s performance when providing customer service (Khatibi, Ismail, and Thyagarajan, 2002). Therefore, in order to provide the level of service quality that meets or exceeds customer expectations, organizations must determine what elements of service are important to customers by analyzing customer complaints, listening to feedback from front-line workers, and gathering customer satisfaction data from customer surveys (Berman, 2005).

2.6 Customer Satisfaction with Call Centres

Although each call centre establishes its own measures of customer satisfaction and loyalty, common measures include call abandon rates, average speed of answer, wrap-up time, percentage of blocked calls, representative turnover rate, courtesy, willingness to help, product and service knowledge, verbal skills, listening skills, feeling the problem was taken seriously, number of times the call was transferred, accuracy of response, and first-call resolution (Saxby, 2005; Schwartz, Ruffins, & Petouhoff, 2007).

Traditionally call centres have focused on technology as the main determinant in establishing successful customer service relationships, yet the key factor in building and maintaining customer relationships is the people using that technology. Even with the increase in telephone and Internet self-service options available to customers, technology cannot replace the human interaction necessary for resolving complex consumer issues (Read, 2005).

How representatives do their jobs directly impacts whether customers will stay with a company or take their business elsewhere. Every time a customer contacts a call centre, an opportunity exists to transform a customer problem into a positive experience, resulting in a positive view of the organization. Call centres which fail to provide a level of service that satisfies the customer are likely to face negative word of mouth publicity and loss of business to competitors. Negative word of mouth publicity from customers who are dissatisfied results in twice the market damage compared to the positive impact resulting from positive word of mouth publicity from satisfied customers (Goodman & Newman, 2003). Studies conducted by the Technical Assistance Research Program (1986) for the White House Office of Consumer Affairs concluded that, while the majority of unhappy customers never complained when treated poorly, these same dissatisfied customers refused to continue to do business with the organization again.

Peters (1987) revealed that 26 out of 27 customers failed to report to an organization about a bad experience, and 9 out of 10 customers would not only switch service providers, but would also attempt to get even with the company through negative word of mouth publicity. Customers receiving poor treatment from a company tell an average of 20 friends, neighbours, and relatives about their negative experiences (Broetzmann & Grainer, 2005). In turn, these individuals then spread the news to an additional 10 or more people. Based on the studies by Broetzmann and Grainer (2005) and Desatnick (1987), one bad customer experience could cost a company over 200 potential customers due to the negative word of mouth communication. Given that these studies were conducted prior to the widespread use of the Internet, the possibility now exists for a dissatisfied customer to use “word of mouse” technology to spread his or her story to thousands of people in a short period of time (Thompson, 2003).

On the other hand, the majority of customers who are treated in a courteous, prompt, and responsive manner are likely to remain loyal to the organization and purchase future products and services (Peters, 1987). Being able to resolve quickly a conflict or complaint has the potential of creating positive word of mouth publicity, could make the difference between a dissatisfied and a satisfied customer, and potentially could increase the overall customer base.

Global competition offers the consumer a myriad of choices and has changed the way companies do business. Three out of four call centres now use customer satisfaction as a primary measure of call centre success, and the majority of call centre representatives believe they are doing an excellent job in satisfying customers, yet only 20% of customers feel that way (Dawson, 2004). The quality of the calling experience is taking precedence over the quantity of calls processed. In the past, call centres have been primarily rated on cost efficiency (number of calls processed), but J.D. Power & Associates has begun rating call centres based on whether the customer's problem has been resolved, if the customer is satisfied, and if the customer will buy again (Hindo & Sager, 2003).

As noted by Nardin (2006), customer satisfaction and loyalty are gained over time; yet losing a customer takes no time at all. Retaining existing customers is also much more cost effective than replacing them. Some studies put the cost of acquiring a customer from 4 to 10 times higher than retaining one (Kumar & Kumar, 2002). By increasing the customer retention rate just 5%, companies can double their profits (Reichheld, 1996). Providing resolution of customer problems on the first call can result in higher employee satisfaction, increased customer satisfaction, and a 3% to 6% rise in annual revenue (Goetzmann & Moutzidis, 2006).

Building customer satisfaction and retention is also much easier to accomplish when problems are resolved in a timely manner (Byrnes, 2005). Research by Feinberg, Kim,

Hokama, de Ruyter, and Keen (2000) indicated that first call resolution was an essential element of the call centre operation, but according to Blanding (1991), speed of resolution had a greater effect on how a customer perceived the organization than did the quality of the resolution. Other studies focused on the attitude, competence, and response by the individual call centre representative as the major influences on customer perception (Bitner, Booms, & Mohr, 1994).

Adria and Chowdhury (2002) asserted that, “the first front-line service provider reached in a call centre should be able to deliver the information or service required by the customer, without reconnecting to another party of the organization” (p. 74). While Gulbranson (1998) noted that it was “a bit utopian to believe that all issues and conflicts...will be resolved each time on the first attempt” (p. 6), that level of resolution is exactly what the customer expects. Nevertheless, recent studies have found that only one in five callers has his or her problem resolved on the first call, with the average number of call-backs to the organization placed at four before resolution is achieved (Broetzmann & Grainer, 2005).

Call centres that make the customer call back repeatedly for additional help are likely to find an angry, dissatisfied, and often former client; however, resolving problems on the first call has the potential to lower operating costs, to reduce the number of follow-up calls, and to result in increased customer satisfaction. Companies lose approximately 65% of their customers because of poor service and lack of attention, whether the complaint is resolved or not. In sharp contrast, more than three out of four customers who complain remain loyal to the company if the call centre representative has the knowledge and skills to resolve the problem quickly and fairly (Dawson, 2001).

2.8 Conclusion

Business outsourcing, as in offshore, has generated a great deal of criticism. These criticisms are motivated by the fear that offshoring negatively impacts the domestic economy of the outsourcee and leads to unemployment. These assumptions, however, are incorrect as there is nothing to suggest a link between outsourcing and unemployment. To the contrary, the facts indicate that outsourcing is a highly effective way of reducing operation costs while maintaining quality of service and, hence, increasing competitiveness. In other words, outsourcing is a positive economic development.

Following a review of the literature on the debate on outsourcing, the study moved to a review of the literature on call centres. An overview of the industry was provided and issues as customer satisfaction and retention, followed by an overview of the call center industry, the role of call center representatives, job stressors, customer conflict, and potential training requirements were discussed.

Chapter Three describes the methodology that was used for this study. A review of the study's purpose and research questions was presented, followed by an outline of the research design. Next, identification of the target population, sampling procedures, and methods for conducting the study were described. Then, the survey instrument used for the study was evaluated. The procedures for data collection and analysis were presented.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the study's selected research methodology. As shall be seen, the methodology is influenced by the purpose of this study and is based on an assessment of the optimal strategy for responding to the research questions. As such, the current chapter reviews the purpose of the study, presents the research questions and hypothesis, discusses the data collection and data analysis procedures and the limitations of the research.

3.1 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the phenomenon of outsourcing with specific focus on outsourcing call centres. The reason for doing so is the determining of the factors which distinguish the successful call centres from the unsuccessful ones. To fulfil this purpose, it was necessary to review the literature on call centres, the outsourcing of call centres and the function which call centres are supposed to satisfy. This necessitated an exploration of the nature of the work processes in call centres, the tasks which agents are expected to perform and whether or not they receive the training required for them to perform these tasks. At the same time, it was important to explore customers' expectations from call centre services and their attitudes towards outsourcing of call centres. All of this was done with the aim of satisfying the primary purpose of the study which was the identification of the key determinants of successful call centre operations.

Like it can be deduced from the above, the current research has an explanatory purpose. According to Miles and Huberman (1994) the purpose of explanatory researches is to clarify a phenomenon or make a complex issue understandable. It does so by clarifying

the relationship between variables. This research has an explanatory purpose in that it aims to explain the key determinants of successful offshore call centre operations.

3.1.1 Research Question

What are the key determinants of successful call centre operations which are outsourced to INDIA and what are the more effective ways of managing call centres?

3.1.2 Hypothesis

- The key operational determinants of successful call centre management are qualified, technically knowledgeable, linguistically proficient operators who have good communications skills and continued monitoring of calls and consideration of customer feedback.

3.1.3 Research Problem

The study, like it is clear from the research question, hypothesis and Chapter One, examines a single problem. This problem is the key determinants of successful call centre operations which are offshored to India. The problem of the study emerges from this focus. Simply stated, increasing numbers of British firms are outsourcing their call centre operations to India and other offshore locations because it is economically feasible to do so. At the same time, these forms must make sure that this does not affect their quality of service. They can only make certain of this is they understand the characteristics of successful call centres and implement these key determinants in their own operations. Accordingly, the research problem, as explained, is how to benefit from the economic opportunity of offshoring call centres without quality of service suffering.

3.2 Instrument

This study conducted a survey of employees, as in call centre operators and supervisors, and customers of a specific call centre. The company in question, a British telecommunications company, has outsourced its call centre operations to India. The survey instrument was distributed amongst employees and customers specific to this company and its call centre.

The instrument distributed to the offshore call centre through the HR department of the British telecommunications company was developed by the researcher. It took the form of close-ended questionnaires which collected demographic data, job related information and training received. The questionnaire was accompanied by a short cover letter which explained the purpose of the study.

The instrument distributed amongst customers was handed out by the researcher at one of the High Street outlets where the company's customers pay their bills. The questionnaire sheet was short in order to ensure that it would not take more than 5-7 minutes to answer and therefore, encourage participation. The questionnaire included a two line paragraph explaining the purpose of the study.

3.3 The Research Site

The research site was a British telecommunications company. It was selected by the researcher because it had the longest history in the British telecommunications industry and was the primary and most popular telecommunications carrier in the country. This company had recently outsourced its call centre to India and had faced a great deal of criticism for doing so. Despite this, the telecommunications company insists that its outsourced call centre is successful and that the quality of service has not deteriorated.

3.3.1 Population

The researcher had requested that the employee questionnaire be distributed among 200 call centre employees. However, only 39 completed questionnaires were returned at the end of the two week period. As participation was voluntary, it was not possible to get more responses, especially as there was no direct contact between the researcher and the employee respondents.

In order to keep the two samples consistent in size with one another, the researcher distributed only 39 questionnaires to the customer respondents. These were distributed over a single weekend from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Even though the questionnaire was short, a large percentage of the potential respondents which the researcher approached said that they were not interested.

3.3.2 Sample

For the purposes of the study and consideration the circumstances of the distribution of the questionnaire, it was impossible to apply a systematic type of sampling method. Therefore, convenience random sampling was used. The final customer sample population consisted of 39 of the telecommunications' customers and they belonged to various age groups, both sexes and numerous ethnic origins. The final call centre employee sample group also consisted of and numerous ethnic origins. The final call centre employee sample group also consisted of 39 respondents, two of which were supervisors and the remainder operators; the sample population represented both sexes, one nationality/ethnic group and some had prior industry experiences while others did not. In other words, both sample populations were varied.

3.3.3 Data Collection

Secondary data is primarily collected through desk-based research. According to Jackson (1994) the value of a research is related to its data collection methods and importantly, whether or not it includes both secondary and primary data.

As Creswell (2003) states, secondary data, which is an unobtrusive data collection method, depends on the location of pertinent and verifiable previously published academic studies and theories. After locating such data, the researcher should critically evaluate it in order to make sure that it is valid and reliable. This means that the researcher should only include in his study secondary data which is presented in academic researchers and articles which are verifiable and well-referenced (Creswell, 2003). Out of this consideration, the researcher of this study only used data which was obtained from electronic databases or libraries, articles or books and which was scholarly.

In addition to secondary data, the researcher also collected primary data from two sample populations, like explained above. The data collection method was questionnaires because, like Creswell (2003) explains, questionnaires allow the researcher to collect a large volume of information on a limited budget and in a short time. It should be noted that the questionnaires were handed to the HR department at the British telecommunications company. The HR department then sent the questionnaires to its off-shore call centre agents and representatives, later forwarding the results to the researcher via email.

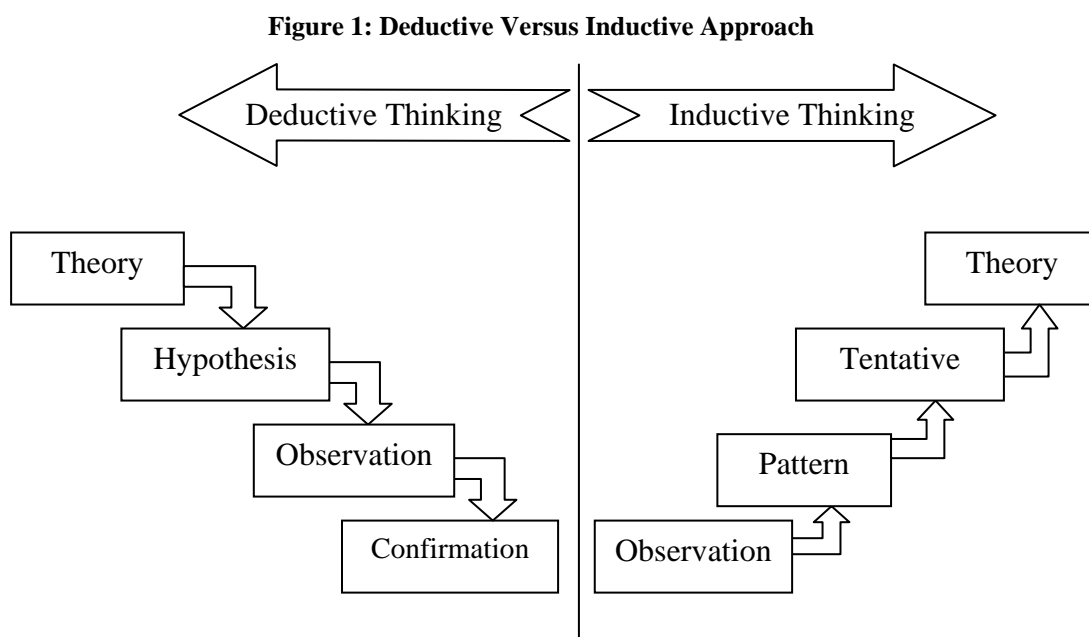
The personal data which was collected through the questionnaire will be kept confidential. In fact, the participants were assured in the questionnaire that personal identifying information will not be revealed at all, except as part of the study's results. The data collected was analysed using Microsoft Excel.

3.4 Research Approach

The research approach influences design and gives the researcher the opportunity to consider how each of the various approaches may contribute to, or limit, his study (Creswell, 2003). The research approach refers to the deductive/inductive and qualitative/quantitative approaches.

3.4.1 The Deductive versus the Inductive Approach?

Marcoulides (1998) defines the deductive approach as a testing of theories. The researcher begins with a set of theories in mind and forms the hypotheses on their basis. After that, the research tests the hypotheses. The inductive approach, on the other hand, follows from the collected empirical data and forms concepts and theories on the basis of this data (Marcoulides, 1998).



Source: adapted from Trochim (2001)

Like the figure above shows, the difference between the deductive and the inductive approaches is that one follows a top-down and the other a bottom-up approach.

This study follows the deductive approach for two reasons. In the first place, it is beyond the expertise and the academic knowledge of the researcher to propose a theory and then test it through observation. In the second place, the deductive approach appears more appropriate to the purpose of this study which is to gather the key determinants of successful call centre operations from the literature and then determine how they translate into practice in an effort to evaluate current practices and propose strategies for improvement.

3.4.2 The Qualitative versus the Quantitative Approach

The quantitative tools for data analysis generally borrow from the physical sciences, in that they are structured in such a way so as to guarantee (as far as possible), objectivity, generalizability and reliability (Creswell, 2003). Here the researcher is objective and the research results are numerical. Qualitative tools, on the other hand, are based on content analysis, among other things and are presented in non-numerical format. Even though they allow the researcher to gain a very deep insight into the topic that he is investigating, they are not suited for all types of studies. In addition to that, the quantitative tools are objective and straightforward and, so, are ideal for testing the validity of certain hypotheses.

Even though the value of qualitative data analysis cannot be denied, especially since, as Creswell (2003) explains, it allows researchers to conduct in-depth explorations of a particular phenomenon, it could not be used in this study. There are two reasons why the researcher decided to use quantitative, instead of qualitative data analysis. The first is that there was no chance to conduct interviews and gather the material that is needed for qualitative data analysis. The second is that the researcher had already identified the key determinants of operational success and wanted to test them through quantitative measure of employee and customer's opinions.

3.5 Summary

As this chapter has argued, the research methodology that is most suited for this study is a quantitative, deductive one which uses both primary and secondary data. The next chapter will present the results of the questionnaires handed out to both the customer and the employee groups and present the study's findings on the basis of these results.

CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

The results of this study are based on a quantitative investigation of customer satisfaction ratings related to a single offshore call centre. The results are further based on the call centre's employee perceptions on the factors which influence operational success and their own ability to satisfy their job requirements in such a way as would enhance customer satisfaction levels.

As mentioned in Chapter III, the sample in the study was limited to call centre representatives of Company A, employed at an offshore call centre site in India. This company was selected because of its long-standing in the British telecommunications industry and the extent of public opposition expressed when it announced the offshoring of its call centre. The company claims that the service offered at its call centre exceeds, or is at least equal to, the services offered by any call centre located in the United Kingdom. Many customers disagree, indicating that there is significant room for improvement.

Improving the services offered by an offshore call centre is dependant upon identifying the key operational determinants of successful call centres. As earlier noted, therefore, the purpose of this study is to uncover the key operational determinants of successful call centres. In order to satisfy this purpose, the study focused on primary and secondary data. The secondary data was collected from academic journals, books and in very few cases, websites. The literature collected and reviewed overviewed call centre operations and the factors which influence customer satisfaction and the ability of call centre employees to satisfy customers. As for the primary data, it was collected from two sample populations: call centre employees and Company A customers. Both groups were asked to fill in close-

ended questionnaires. Completed questionnaires from 39 respondents from each group form the basis of the results of this chapter.

This chapter presents a summary of the findings, followed by a discussion of the study's results as related to the statement of the problem, purpose of the research, and the research question.

4.2 Discussion of Results

As earlier noted, the questionnaire which was to be distributed to call centre employees was emailed to the HR director, following which the HR director sent them to call centre supervisors and operators. As the researcher was briefly informed, the HR sent the questionnaire to their call centre manager, specifying that participation was strictly voluntary.

The researcher had requested that at least 100 questionnaires be completed since 100 had been calculated as an appropriate sample size. A period of two weeks was set for the completion of the questionnaires and their return to the researcher. At the end of the two week period, 43 questionnaires were returned. Four of them were rejected and excluded from the study because they were not complete. Therefore, only 39, not 100, respondents were drawn from the employee group. As the researcher did not have any direct contact with the respondents and, therefore, could not communicate with them for the purpose of soliciting more responses, it was not possible to increase the sample size.

Following the completion of the employee questionnaires, the researcher began to distribute the customer questionnaires. To maintain consistency in number between the two groups, the researcher decided to keep the sample size at 39.

Even though the HR had agreed to participate in the distribution of the questionnaires to the call centre employees, they refused to participate in distribution to customers. Furthermore, they would not give the researcher access to customer lists, saying that it was

against the law and contrary to company policy. To access the telecommunications company's customers, therefore, and to survey their satisfaction rates with the call centre, the researcher distributed the questionnaire outside two of the company's High Street bill settlement branches. On the first day, the researcher gathered 45 responses but 15 were rejected because they were not completed correctly and fully. The next day the researcher distributed one questionnaire in the same way until a total of 39 valid questionnaires were collected.

The results of the questionnaires will be presented below in a comparative format. Employee responses are compared to those of customers.

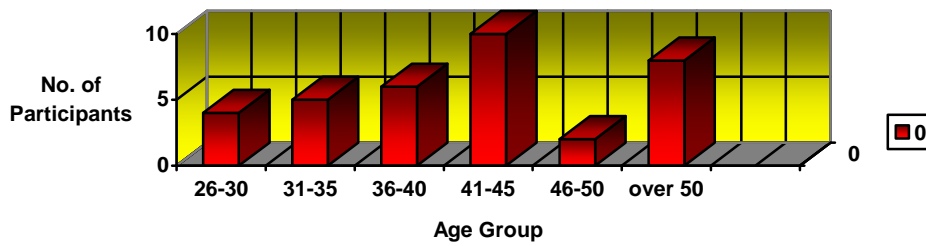
4.2.1 Subject Demographics

Demographic information was collected from the entire participant group using a survey questionnaire. Employees reported they had participated in performance evaluation activities ($n = 29, 72\%$) or answered they had not participated at all. Of the respondents, 30 male and 9 female employees participated in this study. As regards the customer group, only 9 had provided feedback regarding the call centre's quality of services. The customer respondents were comprised of 13 males and 16 females.

The educational data reported that all of the respondents had completed their high school education. Within the customer group, 18 had university degrees, two had master degrees and the remainder had, at least, earned their O-levels. As pertains to the employee group, all had finished their O-levels but only two had earned university degrees.

Age distribution among the customer respondents is indicated in the figure below, which was produced by the researcher using the information from the questionnaire survey:

Figure 2: Frequency of Study Participants By Age



In the employee questionnaire, the demographic questions were the same as those for the employees but also included number of years at the centre. The responses were as follows:

Figure 3: Age and Experience

Time	Mean	Median	Mode	Range	Standard deviation
Age (years)	31.5	28	24	18-66	11.2
Experience (years)	4.6	3	2	<1-28	5.1

The ages of call center representatives ranged from 18 to 66 years. The average age of call center representatives was 31.5 years, with the most frequent age being 24 years. The years of call center experience ranged from less than 1 to 28 years. The average length of call center experience was 4.6 years, with the most frequent years of experience being 2 years. A review of the questionnaire responses indicated that there was a direct relationship between age of employees and years of experience in the industry.

4.2.2 Determinants of Operational Success

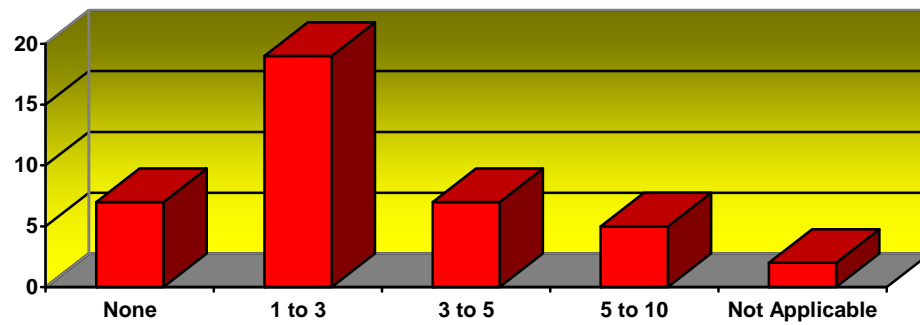
The study tested the following determinants of operational success, all of which were derived from the literature reviewed during the research process and included in Chapter Two. These determinants are:

- Technical training and expertise
- Operators' interpersonal communication skills
- Staffing numbers
- Length of time before agent picks up call and number of holds
- Agent/operators' linguistic proficiency

4.2.2.1 Training

Seven of the employee participants (17.5%) had not participated in any training, whereas 19 participants (47.5%) had between 1 and 3 hours of training each year. Seven of the participants (17.5%) had between 3 and 5 hours of training, and 5 participants (12.5%) answered they received 5–10 hours of training every year. Training is important; however, from these data it is apparent that few hours are devoted to training, with 65% of the study participants receiving fewer than 3 hours of training per year. The figure below (see Figure 2) was produced by the researcher using the responses which employees provided to the survey questions regarding training hours received. The chart below was generated using Excel.

Figure 2: Technical Training Hours



A close review of the responses shows that the employees with the longer experience tend to have more training hours while those with the shortest industry experience have the least number of training hours and, in some cases, not at all.

There is a comment to be made here regarding training, industry experience and call centre functions. According to the ACA Research Group (2004), industry experience is important in that it means that the call centre operators have the communications skills necessary for interacting with customers. It also means that supervisors have the experience necessary for identifying successful versus unsuccessful operators. Industry experience, however, cannot replace technical training for two reasons. The first is that different call centres represent different companies, maybe even industries and products. Technical experience and knowledge of one industry cannot be used in another, especially as customer complaints and questions may be product specific. Secondly, given that products and services are continually developing and changing, technical training is a necessary means of ensuring that operators can handle customers' technical questions and complaints. In other words, and as emphasized by the ACA Research Group (2004) industry experience is not a replacement for training and training is, without doubt, one of the most important determinants of call centre operational success.

It is interesting to note that when customers were asked about whether training was important or not, with the exception of two non-responses (do not know), all respondents said

that it was very important. Added to that, 22 of the customer respondents claimed that they could immediately detect whether or not the agent handling a call had received training or not. It is interesting to note that the responses indicated that the 19 customers who reported themselves satisfied with the services stated that they believed that the agent handling their call had received training.

4.2.2.2 Communications Skills

Ten of the employee participants had received training in communications skills. Three said that they had received two hours of training and seven reported that they had received between 5 to 8 hours of training. The remainder had received no training to date, although 4 mentioned that they were to receive training in the near future. Irrespective of whether or not they had received any training in communications, all of the employees who participated in this study handled customer calls.

With the exception of twelve, all customer respondents said that training in communications skills was very important and that it was evident that the agents who had handled their call were not properly trained.

4.2.2.3 Staffing

Sixteen customer respondents said that while they could not tell whether staffing numbers was important or not, they strongly assumed that it was. Eleven said that staffing numbers was very important and that it was evident, from the length of time it took for an agent to take their call, that the centre was not adequately staffed. The remainder of the respondents said that staffing was important but less so than agents' communication skills and technical knowledge.

The agents, without exception, answered that staffing numbers were very important. Shortage directly impacted the ability of every individual agent to satisfy customers and placed agents under a great deal of stress. Agents also mentioned a direct link between staffing numbers and job satisfaction levels.

4.2.2.4 Call Duration

This item refers to both the number and length of times a customer is kept on hold and the length of time s/he waited before an agent picked up his/her call. Agents said that they have observed a direct relationship between length of time and number of holds and customer satisfaction levels. Customers reiterated this last point and answered that call duration was a primary determinant of satisfaction and of operational success.

4.2.2.5 Linguistic Proficiency

The literature reviewed indicated that a common complaint among customers was the linguistic proficiency of operators. By this last, they meant the ability of the agent to understand them and to respond in intelligible English. Eleven of the agents said that this was a very important factor, seven said it was important and the remainder said that it was not so important as long as the agent understood what the customer was saying and could make him/herself understood. In direct comparison, all customers said that linguistic proficiency was extremely important.

4.3 Call Centre Management

The survey sought the identification of the key characteristics of the selected call centre's management style. The questions posed to employee and supervisor respondents were directly informed by the literature review's findings regarding the key operational determinants of successful call centre operations. These factors are:

- Employee Performance
- Call Centre Performance
- Quality of Call

4.3.1 Employee Performance

The Nice Quality Monitoring System enables live observance of an agent and scheduling of recordings. The Quality Assurance team at the telecommunications company's home office in the United Kingdom location will continue to be responsible for monitoring a specified percentage of calls per agent. They score agents' performance on a standard evaluation form. The evaluation criteria is usually based on how the agent handles the call opening, the job knowledge displayed during the call, the skills in handling the customer, the courtesy extended during the call, and the closing comments. The scores grade the employees on performance standards as *Outstanding*, *Above Average*, *Met Expectation* and *Needs Improvement*. The home office always retains at least 10% in the outstanding service category with less than 5% in the needs improvement category (ACA Research Group, 2004).

A few of the performance metrics of particular to the telecommunications company in question are provided in Table 1. The information displayed in this table was obtained from a study by the ACA Research Group (2004). The offshore centre should take initiatives to retain consistency in agents' performance.

Table 1: Employee Performance (from ACA Research Group, 2004)

Performance Goals	Acceptable Minimum levels
Agent Productivity – Calls per agent	1200 calls per month
Agent training – Continuous training hours	80 hours per year
Quality Monitoring – Calls per agent	5% of calls per agent

Performance – Average scores of employees	96%
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The above table represents the ideal and the questionnaire tried to determine the degree to which the reality represent the ideal. Therefore, the performance goals were presented in the form of questions with preset answers: In the table below, the information that was derived regarding minimum acceptable performance from the ACA Research Group (2004), was posed in the form of close-ended questions to the respondents. The Acceptable Minimum Levels displayed in Table 2 are according to the majority of the employee respondents.

Table 2: Employee Performance

Performance Goals	Acceptable Minimum levels
Agent Productivity – Calls per agent	1000 calls per month
Agent training – Continuous training hours	48 hours per year
Quality Monitoring – Calls per agent	5% of calls per agent
Performance – Average scores of employees	90%

As it can be easily seen, there is a gap between the reality and the ideal. The reality shows that performance falls below the minimum required acceptable level cited in the earlier table. Based on these two tables, it is recommended that the supervisors at the offshore centre should conduct employee performance appraisals on a regular basis to share any quality concerns, productivity failures, and training issues. If the metrics show reduced quality scores, the Quality Assurance team should increase the percentage of calls monitored for the offshore centre. Based on the quality scores provided, management should identify reasons

for any performance issues, such as inadequate empowerment, lack of product knowledge, linguistic capability, etc. Managers and the supervisory team should jointly brainstorm suitable solutions for the problems and implement solutions. The supervisors should keep a close vigil on the scores of the agents until the expected company standards are achieved.

It can also be commented that in direct relationship to the above, there is a conflict between the results uncovered earlier and the recommendations outlined in the above table. According to the table above, derived from ACA Research Group (2004), the acceptable minimum number of training hours a year is 80. However, when asked about training earlier, it was revealed that a significant number of agents had not received adequate training.

4.3.2 Call Centre Performance

The other important aspect is the overall efficiency of the offshore call centre. The call centre industry has standardized performance metrics for call centres' operational efficiency and customer satisfaction. Advancements in call centre technology enables managers to measure practically every aspect of call centre performance. Management must review the key performance indicators relating to the offshore centre and compare them to the measures set for the home office. A list of the most popular call centre performance metrics is shown in Table 3 which was obtained from information obtained from a study by the ACA Research Group (2004).

Table 3: Call Centre Performance

Performance Indicators	Measurement Description
Average speed to answer and average wait time	Reported by ACD – measured in minutes and seconds
First call resolution rate	Measured by percentage of calls resolved the first time
Abandonment rate	Measured by percentage of calls abandoned to total calls received
Percentage of calls answered	Measured by percentage of calls answered to total calls received
Average After-Call work time	Reported by ACD – measured in minutes and seconds
Service Level Performance	Actual call volume and system availability compared to service level agreements with customers

Average Wait Time and First Call Resolution rate are believed to have the highest impact on the perception of service quality. Management must compare the metrics of the offshore centre with the company's established service standards. The collected metrics set the direction and level of required monitoring for the offshore centre.

According to employee responses, there was a reasonable adherence to the service quality levels established by the telecommunications company in question. Calls were promptly answered and 18 respondents maintained that issues were resolved during the first call. All but one employee respondent claimed that there was no abandonment level.

The responses of the customer differed. At least 60% of the respondents said that the issue was not resolved during the first call and 30% insisted that there was a high abandonment rate, as deduced from their personal experience with the call centre's service. Added to that, 40% of the customer respondents said that call answering took a long time and that they had to call the centre at least twice before their call was answered.

4.3.3 Call Quality

As deduced from the literature research for this topic, one of most common complaints regarding offshore call centres was voice quality. Voice quality suffers because calls are directed from a local service centre number to the offshore one. Even though the telecommunications company, as the researcher was informed by the HR Director, has invested a substantial amount in its technological setup so as to ensure that voice quality is not compromised at all, and meets with customer satisfaction, customers stated otherwise. According to 60% of the respondents, the line was not clear and the operator's voice was scratchy, distant and there was an echo. Interestingly, the call operators who participated in this study made a similar comment and claimed that one of the obstacles to their ability to satisfy callers was the quality of the call.

4.5 Findings

The real question to ask at this point and after the results of the survey have been discussed is what the previous information says about the research questions. In other words, what are the responses to the research question as can be inferred from both the survey and the literature reviewed?

The research question was: What are the key operational determinants of call centre management, which are outsourced to INDIA and what are the more effective ways of managing call centre than are used present? Both the literature reviewed and the

findings of the survey questionnaire provide a very good indication of the answer to this question. According to both the primary and the secondary data, the key operational determinates of successful call centres are:

- Well-trained agents with good communication skills and technical knowledge
- Timely answering of calls and satisfactory resolution of customer complaints and questions
- High percentage of call answering and very low percentage of call abandonment
- Customers are not kept on hold for extended periods while agents make inquiries regarding customer complaints and questions
- Intelligible English
- Good voice quality

This means that the successful call centre is one which is adequately staffed with qualified personnel who receive regular training. Furthermore to assure service quality, the well-run call centre should monitor calls and regularly review employee performance measurements. These are the key operational determinants of successful call centres and the means of achieving them.

On the basis of the above summary of the findings for the research question, it is clear that the first hypothesis is valid:

- The key operational determinants of successful call centre management are qualified, technically knowledgeable, linguistically proficient operators who have good communications skills and continued monitoring of calls and consideration of customer feedback.

4.6 Conclusion

As may be determined from the foregoing, the survey exposed the key determinants of operational success, as in the factors which characterise the successful call centre. The findings of the primary and the secondary data provided responses for the research question and validated the study's hypothesis. The next chapter will discuss the implications of these results and conclude the dissertation.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the findings, followed by a discussion of the study's results as related to the statement of the problem, purpose of the research, and the research question. Based on the analysis of data from Chapter Four, specific conclusions are presented. Limitations of the research are then discussed, followed by recommendations for future research.

5.2 Summary of Findings

Previous studies of the call center industry have focused on optimal staffing levels, call center efficiency, technical expertise of employees, job satisfaction, and the human relations skills needed for call center representatives to resolve customer problems (Broetzmann & Grainer, 2005). This study contributes to the body of scholarly knowledge by providing new findings that specifically outline the key operational determinants of successful call centres from the viewpoint of customers and call centre employees.

In order to investigate the nature of these key determinants, the study proposed one research question and one hypothesis. The research question is: **What are the key determinants of successful call centre operations which are outsourced to INDIA and what are the more effective ways of managing call centres?** The study's hypothesis is: **The key operational determinants of successful call centre management are qualified, technically knowledgeable, linguistically proficient operators who have good communications skills and continued monitoring of calls and consideration of customer feedback.** The findings of the study may be summarized as the validation of both of the hypotheses.

To reiterate these findings in more concise format, it can be said that this study offered insight into the relationship between customer satisfaction and the management styles preferred by inbound customer service representatives. By analyzing the nature of the relationship between the preferred management style of call centre representatives and customer satisfaction ratings, this study found optimal staffing levels, call centre efficiency, technical expertise of employees, job satisfaction, and the human relations skills are the key determinants of customer satisfaction and the leading characteristics of successful offshore call centres (Broetzmann & Grainer, 2005).

Proceeding from the above, it is important to emphasise that the study mainly derived its findings regarding the key determinants of successful call centres from the literature review. Within this context, the primary data served the purpose of testing these determinants in the sense of exploring their validity from the viewpoint of customers and call centre agents, on the one hand, and evaluating the call centre in question from the perspective of these determinants. It was found that the determinants are valid and that through their application, it is discovered that the call centre in question requires improvement in the area of training, above all.

5.3 Limitations

A limitation of this research was that collection of data took place at a particular point in time. While this limitation is addressed in recommendations for future research, the findings do not support a conclusion that responses received in this study would be similar to responses solicited and given at another time. There is also a potential that other factors outside the control of the researcher (setting, time of day, recent conflicts, and fatigue of the participants) could influence responses (Shell, 2001).

The study focused on one microcosm of the call centre industry; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to the broader population of call centre representatives employed in other domestic and international telecommunications call centres. The geographic limitation of one area, India as the outsourcee and the UK as the outsourcer, cannot be assumed to represent other regions.

The third and most important of this study's limitations is that the survey populations were extremely limited and there was absolutely no opportunity for the researcher to contact the respondents with follow-up surveys or to encourage them to participate in the study. Company A had agreed only to very limited cooperation with the researcher. This meant that, besides the researcher not being able to include the name of the company in the study, the researcher would not be able to contact the call centre employees directly. Instead, the questionnaire was to be delivered to Company A's HR department which would then send it to its offshore call centre employees, emphasising that participation was voluntary. As there was no motivation or inducements to participate, only 39 employee responses were received by the end of the two week period. Customer responses were also limited to maintain consistency with the employee survey population. This means that the survey population is quite small and so, the findings that are derived from this population cannot be generalized to a larger one.

5.4 Implications of the Study

This study indicates that a major issue facing call centres is recruiting, training, and retaining high quality call centre representatives. Using a predictive assessment during the pre-hiring process could aid management in matching specific call centre jobs to the skills possessed by individual call centre representatives who receive high customer satisfaction rankings, thereby keeping the cost of staffing down. Using an assessment instrument to

measure these characteristics could also benefit the company by reducing training costs, decreasing call centre representative turnover, and increasing customer retention through routing of calls based on employee skills.

A very important implication of the study is that offshoring call centre operations does not mean reducing cost of operations at the expense of quality of service. Service quality can be maintained at very high levels, providing that the company in question exercises great selectivity in the recruiting of agents, ensuring that they possess communication skills and, importantly, comprehensible English. Furthermore, it is absolutely necessary that call centre agents receive appropriate training and that training is continuous so that agents do not fall behind in their technical knowledge regarding the company's services and products. Similarly, to ensure quality of service, it is imperative that the call centre be appropriately staffed so that customers are not kept waiting for extended periods prior to their calls being answered and that the technology installed at these centres supports good voice quality. In other words, the implications of this study are that if call centres apply these key determinants of success, service quality can be maintained at high levels, leading to customer satisfaction and lower levels of complaints.

5.5 Recommendations

Two recommendations for future study come to mind. The first of these is a quantitative comparative study which contrasts the key operational characteristics of a highly rated offshore call centre with a poorly rated one. Such a study could have invaluable practical benefits insofar as it will provide a blueprint for successful operations, even as it presents a comprehensive understanding of that which to avoid in offshore call centre management.

A second recommendation is for a qualitative study whose primary purpose is the generation of a call centre best practices management model. This study will investigate the operation and management paradigm of a number of successful call centre operations for the explicit purpose of designing a generic best practices management model which can be implemented in offshore centres.

While, needless to say, there are numerous other issues worthy of investigation within the context of call centres, these two are most relevant to the current study and have immense practical value.

5.6 Conclusion

Call centres are a relatively new phenomenon and most of the research in this field has focused on call centre efficiency, optimal staffing levels, and technology. A review of previous offshore call centre management paradigms reveals an emphasis on the foregoing factors, in addition to an interest in call centre supervisor-subordinate and peer-to-peer communication patterns and relationship models. The purpose of this study was the investigation of the key operational determinants of successful offshore call centres. Upon investigating the stated, with specific focus on a British telecommunications company's offshore call centres, the research found an immediate relationship between call centre efficiency, optimal staffing levels, and technology, thereby confirming earlier studies on the topic. The results of the primary data were displayed in figures and tables in Chapter IV and these served to confirm the literature review findings. That is, there are a set of key determinants for the successful operation of call centres and these determinants, if applied, can ensure that offshore call centres meet with the satisfaction of customers in Britain.

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