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# Work design, anxiety and depression: A call centre case study

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# Chapter 1
# Introduction

The prevalence of call centres South Africa has been frequently emphasised and recognised by researchers over the past decade. Explosive growth and the use of computers and telecommunication are creating an information revolution. Call centres have rapidly become an established and significant part of the global economy. Every week new call centres are being set up in banks, in insurance companies as well as in government. These institutions have all embraced the alternative distribution concept of call centres (Parker and Wall, 1998).

It has been noted that South Africa is becoming the preferred call centre outsource location for many international countries. The development and prevalence of these call centres in South Africa, is creating a huge amount of employment in the country, especially for those who may not have had the opportunity to further their education. As for organisations, there are great benefits to be acquired such as the ability to reduce the cost of existing functions, to extend and improve customer service facilities. However, although call centres offer organisations a number of clear benefits, the benefits for those employed in them, particularly the frontline staffs are less clear (Holman, 2002).
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Majority of research publications on call centres have been concerned with the forms of management control (Callaghan and Thompson, 2001), high commitment management (Hutchinson, Purcell and Kinnie, 2000), industrial relations and unionism (Bain and Taylor, 1999), payment systems (Fernie and Metcalf, 1997) and emotional work (Zapf, Vogt, Seifeit, Mertini and Isic, 1999). No known research exists that investigates the effects of call centre work design on the anxiety and depression level reported by the call centre employees. Minor research has been completed on 'separating the psychological effects of job design, equipment design, lighting, machine pacing and other potentially stressful aspects of computer- based office work' (Barling and MacIntyre, 1993). Therefore, this has raised the need for such a study, one that will focus on job design and how it may have psychological effects such as anxiety and depression on call centres' employees especially in the South African context.

## Aim

This research study aims to explore the possible relationships that may exist between the work design, level of anxiety and depression in South African call centres. Investigating the work design of call centres and exploring its relationship to anxiety and depression will help to achieve this. Variables that will be looked at are work design, anxiety and depression. In this study the call centre work design is categorised as the input variable whilst anxiety and depression levels are the outcome variables. In order to explore the work design of call centres, the study compares two different call centres, one inbound and the other outbound call centre. However, it emerges that there is no significant distinction between the two call centres on all the measures taken therefore it is concluded in the study that the two be combined to represent one call centre.

## Layout of the report for the current investigation

Chapter 2 will attempt to review the pertinent literature in this field of study. In Chapter 3 the methodology employed in the collection of data and analysis is discussed, and Chapter 4 deals with the results of the study and finally in Chapter 5 the discussion and

conclusion of the study is offered, as well as the limitations and recommendations for the study and for the future research.