

CHAPTER ONE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Call centres may be regarded as “a service network in which agents provide...telephone-based services or, sometimes more generally online-services, with customers and servers being remote from each other” (Mandelbaum, 2004). Call centres have been referred to as a type of helpdesk or “one-stop help shop”, in which call centre agents attempt to answer and solve client’s queries, concerns or complaints in a friendly and timely manner (Badler, 2004), or provide information to the client and call centres may even deal with sales aspects of a product (Mandelbaum, 2004). Thus, a call centre is described as a work environment in which the main business is conducted via a telephone whilst simultaneously using display screen equipment (DSE).

Call centres were originally regarded as a cheaper means of communication than ‘face-to-face’ contact. However, in recent years with advanced telecommunications and computer technology, call centres are seen as a means of improving customer service facilities (Cartwright, 2003).

The functions that call centres provide are varied. Multiple functions are blended into one office and according to a United Kingdom call centre study (ContactBabel, 2004), call centres may offer a wide range of services ranging from customer queries, telesales, marketing and information services, to reservations and balance enquiries. Call centres can be categorised in several dimensions in all sectors of business, for example banking,

insurance and health care, have become an important part of the global economy.

Call centre management service may be seen to be 'mass service' or 'high commitment service'. The mass service call centre where profit margins are low, deliver standardised products using 'standardised' interactions (Holman, 2005). Examples of mass service low value-add work include account balance enquires, timetable enquiries, where the agent acts as an interface between the office and the customer (ContactBabel, 2004, p53).

Call centres with a high commitment service offer a customised service, which is low-volume, high value-add work. In a high commitment call centre, there is little scripting and supervisors are supportive and facilitative (Holman, 2005). Examples include sales advice or technical helpdesk queries (ContactBabel, 2004, p53).

Organisations utilising call centres benefit from positive 'paybacks' thus, this type of work environment is becoming more prevalent worldwide (Holman, Wall, Clegg, Sparrow and Howard, 2005). Organisations accrue many benefits from the call centres. For example, centralising functions reduce costs, improved customer services as in telephone banking and direct selling also generates new opportunities for extra revenues (Holman, 2005).

In the past, many call centres have been built in economically depressed areas, housing thousands of staff in large hangar-like buildings and thus, companies benefit by getting cheap land and labour (www.gshomepage.com). However, call centres today are located

in business parks and city centres (ContactBabel, 2004) in an attempt to improve the working environment.

The typical working environment of a large call centre can be seen as an “endless room with numerous open-space cubicles, in which people with earphones sit in front of computer terminals, providing teleservices to phantom customers” (Gans, Koole and Mandelbaum, 2003, p81). Call centres vary greatly in size and are geographically dispersed. Call centres range from small sites employing only a few agents and handling local calls, to national and international centres employing thousands of agents connected over several continents (Gans et al., 2003).

Many Western firms have opted to transfer or outsource their call centres and India has become a huge call centre destination. The Indian sites are professionally managed and have a huge labour-force that is cheap, well educated and English speaking (ContactBabel, 2004).

Michael Allen, director of Mital, in a recent article published by the Gauteng Economic Development Agency, purports that South Africa has positioned itself to become a ‘world player’ in the call centre provision (GEDA, 2003). He states that the South African call centre industry is “twice the size of Ireland’s and equal in size to the Netherlands, according to a benchmark study by a UK research company”. South Africa is in similar time zones to Europe, has cheap electricity, a first-world telecommunication infrastructure and skilled labour which are requisites for successful call centres. Thus, it

can be seen that the call centre industry plays an important part in the economy globally as well as in emerging economies in India, Malaysia and South Africa (ACA research, 2001).

The call centre industry has become a vast and rapidly expanding industry in terms of both workforce and economic scope (Gans et al., 2003), and research indicates that telemarketing and telesales handled by call centres is one of the fastest growing industrial sectors.

Statistics indicate that 1-3 percent of the working population in the European Union, the USA and Australia are employed in call centres. A call centre survey (eSkills UK, 2003) indicates that around 790,000 people presently work within the call centre industry in the UK.

Call centres may offer organisations a number of clear benefits, but according to Holman (2005) the benefits for 'front-line' staff are less clear. In fact, the call centre industry has attracted much negative feedback both in the media and in research. It seems that, in the rush to set up call centres (many of which operate twenty-four hours a day seven days a week), employers sometimes neglect the 'people management' issues found in this working environment (Arkin, 1997).

The negativity surrounding call centres, especially the psychological job demands, perceived organisational support or lack thereof has led to the concept of the present

study. Psychological demand related to job pressure, the lack of decision latitude, and the resultant impact on life and wellbeing will be investigated. Organisational climate as a whole will be researched using subscales from the Job Content Questionnaire (Karasek, 1985 as cited in Sprigg, Smith and Jackson, 2003).

Work design theory first postulated by Hackman and Oldham (1975) identified 'core job characteristics', which related to satisfaction and motivation of employees. Various job characteristics acknowledged as being significant were skill variety, task identity and task significance. These core characteristics led to the 'critical psychological' state of experienced meaningfulness of the task and resulted in work motivation, job performance and job satisfaction. However, research indicates that for many call centre agents the work is boring, repetitive, demanding and stressful and offers very little task skill, variety or challenge. This is because contact or call centres perform a range of roles, regarded as tasks with low value, where work is repetitive and intense and call centre agents must work under pressure to keep up with quotas, while having very little influence over their work (Arkin, 1997). The result is role overload and little leeway in decision making, which is believed to result in a lack of motivation and according to research (Karasek, 1979) has negative outcomes on self esteem and on life satisfaction.

These workplace experiences, including daily work activities of the call centre agent, work organisation as well as management practices are issues purported to contribute to the high levels of staff turnover, high stress levels and related health problems associated with call centre work (Holman and Wood, 2002), and may not be conducive to an

employee's well-being and job satisfaction in the long term.

From the above it is evident that call centre agents are subjected to a great deal of pressure in their daily work-lives. Indeed, call centres have been referred to as 'electronic sweatshops' or modern-day 'dark satanic mills', and call centre workers called 'galley slaves' and 'battery hens'. These terms suggest the intensive and stressful nature of the call centre agent's job (Garson, 1988; Fernie and Metcalf, 1998; Taylor and Bain, 1999 as cited in HELA, 2001).

It is acknowledged that to be engaged continuously in call-handling activities generates identifiable effects on physical and psychological wellbeing (HELA, 2001; Taylor, 2000; Rose, 2002 as cited in Taylor and Scholarios, 2003). Therefore, there is a general negativism attached to stress and the concept of 'working under pressure'. Time constraints, workload and stressful work environment are referred to as job demands. According to Karasek and Thorell, (1990) they can be defined as psychological stressors and as such relate to the organisational climate of the call centre.

The present study aims to ascertain by means of a standardised questionnaire, whether there is a psychological dimension between aspects of the organisational climate and the call centre agent.

Management plays a significant role within the call centre environment and management style in call centres tends to be of the command and control variety. Consequently, the

manner in which some call centre managers control, coerce, cajole and threaten their workers is of concern.

Human aspects impacting on the call centre industry suggest a lack of skills and training with the average agent in the UK receiving only twelve days training per year (ContactBabel, 2004) and 58% of contact centres taking on new staff without the skills to do the job (eSkills UK, 2003).

Technology plays a significant part in call centres and there has been a huge increase in the use of efficiency-enhancing technology. Interactive voice response, computer telephony integration, automatic call distribution are all geared towards cutting the length of the call while call recording is implemented for security and training purposes (ContactBabel, 2004).

The use of sophisticated computer technology is an important factor affecting performance, well-being, job control and job satisfaction. However, inexperience and negativity associated with new technology may have negative outcomes for employer and employee alike (ContactBabel, 2004).

Telephone call centres can be seen as sociotechnical systems, in which the behaviour of call centre agents and customers are closely involved with physical performance measures (Gans et al., 2003). Studies outline important problems associated with the 'user-friendliness' of technology in call centres and the fact that electronically monitoring

workers may be deemed as invasive and controlling (Schlesinger and Heskett, 1991), and may cause anxiety and stress in the workplace.

Using data from 347 call centre agents from two call centres of a UK bank, Holman, Chissick and Totterdell (2002) reported that call centre agents, subjected to electronic performance monitoring as well as being listened in on by supervisors while interacting with customers on the phone, were shown to suffer from work exhaustion. Electronic surveillance is claimed by many employees to violate their privacy rights and has become a new human resource management issue, causing conflict between employers and employees (Lee and Kleiner, 2003).

The continued growth in complexity and economic importance of call centres as 'global players' employing thousands of workers worldwide has prompted research and academic work devoted to call centres. Studies and research undertaken by Holman, Wall, Clegg, Sparrow and Howard (2005) have highlighted call centre work as being particularly stressful. Call centre workers were shown to suffer from depression, emotional exhaustion and other illnesses resulting from stress at work (Metlife, 2003). Poor working conditions, repetitive job tasks, lack of decision latitude, electronic monitoring, technostress and lack of supervisor/organisational support also aggravated the stress levels and wellbeing of call centre agents.

These factors are important organisational concerns and are the aim of this study and the subject of the following sections, which delve into organisational climate, including

leadership styles, work role and technology and consider how these organisational factors impinge upon call centre agents' work, life satisfaction and self-esteem. It also considers job characteristics that are a constraint on worker wellbeing and self-esteem, all with particular reference to call centre agents.

Organisational Climate

Organisational climate has its roots in Gestalt psychology, with the concept of the 'whole'. As such, organisational climate is an umbrella term that covers a vast number of different themes, they include but are not limited to: managerial philosophy, leadership, supervisor support and guidance, group dynamics, employee attitudes and perceptions, job autonomy and control, job satisfaction (Ashkanasy, Wilderom and Peterson, 2000), colleagues in the job as well as working conditions (Mashatola, 2003).

Essentially, by studying the climate of an organisation, one endeavours to understand more than the individual and more than the organisation – it is an exploration of people in a social context (Ashkanasy et al., 2000).

Schwartz and Davis (1981) and Schlesinger and Balzer (1985) emphasise that although climate is often referred to as culture, they differentiate between the two concepts (as cited in Hutcheson, 1996). However, Denison (1996) does not view climate and culture as strongly differentiated, but rather that they “represent different but overlapping interpretations of the same phenomenon” (Ashkanasy et al., 2000), and so climate and culture are similar in that both concepts add to our understanding of organisations as a

whole (Ashkanasy et al., 2000).

Organisational climate therefore, represents a “set of measurable properties of the work environment, perceived directly or indirectly by the people who live and work in this environment and is assumed to influence their motivation and behaviour” (Litwin and Stringer, 1968), whereas culture “refers to the deep structure of organisations” (Denison, 1996, p624 as cited in Patterson, Warr and West, 2004).

It has been stated that organisational climate is “embedded in the physical look of the place, the emotionality exhibited by employees, the experiences...of new employees upon entry, and myriad other artefacts that are seen, heard and felt” (Shein as cited in Ashkanasy et al., 2000).

It involves a series of variables, namely: environmental, personal and outcome variables. An environmental variable refers to the size and structure of organisations. Personal variables are those associated with a person’s attitude and motives that are carried into and conveyed within the work setting. Outcome variables denote the effect of the environmental and personal variables, such as satisfaction, motivation and productivity (Tagiuri and Litwin, 1968).

Researchers (Denison, 1990; West, Smith, Lu Feng and Lawthom (1998); Burke and Litwin, 1992) claim that there is a link between organisational climate and performance, which is based on the perceptions of the individual. Indeed, Wiley (1996) has termed this

type of research 'linkage research', as it involves identifying elements of the work environment supplied by the employee, that link organisational outcomes such as customer satisfaction. Thus, organisational climate, leadership practices, employee outputs, customer responses and business productivity are strategically linked.

The concept of organisational climate according to West, Smith, Lu Feng and Lawthom (1998, p262) refers to the "perceptions that organisation members share, of fundamental elements of their organisation" (Kangis, Gordon and Williams, 2000). It is the members of the organisation's perceptions about trust, support, innovation, recognition and fairness that serve as a means of assessing and interpreting the organisation's climate and thus, shaping the members' behaviour (Moran and Volkwein, 1992 as cited in Kangis et al., 2000).

Thus, organisational climate is seen as a 'descriptive construct', whereby members of an organisation come to an agreement on elements of the organisation, such as "systems, practices and leadership style" (McMurray, 2003, p1). For that reason, organisational climate is concerned with social psychology and research aims to assess member perceptions of organisational events (Rentch, 1990), events which are strategically linked as structures and elements of the work environment (McMurray, 2003).

Thus, studies of organisational climate may look at the effects of climate on social system characteristics and its effects on individual behaviour (Tagiuri and Litwin, 1968), or the influence on employee well-being (Dewe, 1992; Kahn and Byosiere, 1993; Lazarus,

1993). Such studies attempt to ascertain what values and processes are influential in creating a positive environment for employee wellbeing as well as productivity.

In utilising the Job Content Questionnaire (Karasek, 1985 as cited in Sprigg et al., 2003) one is able to focus on both the psychological and social structure of the work climate. According to results from Gimeno, Benavides, Mira, Martinez and Benach (2004), psychological demands measured by the Job Content Questionnaire (JCQ) reflected the actual psychosocial work environment.

This allows an interpretation of the effect of climate on the employee, and because the climate of call centres has a negative connotation, this investigation is seen to be justified. In the changing work environment there is a belief that structures should become more 'flexible and decentralised' rather than 'centralised and mechanised' (Greenberg, 1999).

The 'centralised and mechanised' structure according to classical theorists such as Weber (1947) and Taylor (1911; 1947) believed that specialisation of tasks and an impersonal and bureaucratic management led to an effective organisation (Spector, 1997). In this environment communication was command-style (Courtright, Fairhurst and Rogers 1989), and clearly defined rules were seen to clarify job roles (Burnes and Stalker, 1961 as cited in Conner and Scott, 2005), thus decreasing job ambiguity and reducing job-related conflict and stress.

This type of bureaucratic or mechanistic organisational climate is accordingly geared

towards establishing control and decision latitude within a hierarchical chain of command. According to findings by Meadows (1980), a mechanistic organisational climate suggest that individuals with a strong bureaucratic orientation may show a low need for autonomy and achievement and therefore, may prefer this strict control management style. These findings indicate that individual personality and characteristic traits play an important part in person/job fit.

In contrast, in a constantly changing and globalised work environment, existing literature suggests that an 'organic' climate, with its flexibility and adaptability is the most suitable (Burns and Stalker, 1961; Slevin and Covin, 1997; Zanzi, 1987), and that structures should become more adaptable and decentralised (Greenberg, 1999).

This school of thought – belonging to the 'human relations movement' – including Follett (1949) and McGregor (1960) and more recently Mayo (1993) believed that managers should motivate job performance rather than demand it. These sentiments are referred to as 'organic' structures, where managers view their employees as self-motivated, committed and responsible. Managers in this organic climate offer shared control, opportunities for participation, adaptability and an informal and relaxed form of communication – a human-centred approach (Conner and Scott, 2005).

Just as a 'mechanised' environment brings with it the possibility of 'technostress', with its associated health and well-being hazards, so too does the 'organic' alternative, which also has the potential to cause distress at work. For example, Ashford (1998) found that

some individuals may prefer a bureaucratic climate with its associated authoritarianism, strict rules and regulations, while others would find a similar climate to be oppressive and restrictive. Therefore, it becomes evident that the organisation must consider individual differences when considering structure change within organisational climate (Ashkanasy et al., 2000). Lazarus (1993; 1994) refers to this as a transactional approach and agrees that individual perception varies from one person to the next. Thus, in order to minimise stressful work outcomes for the employee an 'employee-job fit' is just as important as an 'employee-organisational fit'.

Research papers (Garson, 1988; Fernie and Metcalf, 1998; Taylor and Bain, 1999 as cited in HELA, 2001) have suggested that call centres are organised and fit into the Taylorist approach of the 1900's, and can be described as 'centralised and mechanised'. In fact, labelled as 'electronic sweatshops' and 'production lines' call centres conjure up a picture of 'battery hens' performing heavily routinised job tasks that allow little leeway for decision-making and this suggests an extremely stressful and intensive work schedule.

Classical theorists contend that such a 'controlling' environment is successful and effective with regard to productivity, and need not be – as is often presumed – detrimental to the health and well-being of the employees especially if the employee shows traits with a strong 'bureaucratic orientation' (Meadows, 1980).

However, Karasek (1979) and Westman (1992) disagree and in contrast suggest that mechanistic working environments are seen to allow employees less decision latitude and

lower levels of control, which according to results in research studies causes work related stress and lowered self-esteem.

Other research has shown that structures which are more 'flexible and decentralised', such as those found within an organic climate allow employees to feel empowered, due to informal networks of authority (Courtright et al., 1989). Additionally, organic climates promote task adaptation, greater control and autonomy for the worker, which lead to positive outcomes if the employee displays traits such as the need for dominance, achievement and autonomy (McClelland et al., 1953; Murray, 1938; Meadows, 1980).

Organisational Climate has been extensively researched and it is hypothesised that one's environment significantly affects many worker outcomes, such as job satisfaction, employee well-being and even employee's perceived commitment to the organisation (Carr, Schmidt, Ford and DeShon, 2003). Within the call centre environment, research indicates that for many call centre agents the work is boring, repetitive, demanding and stressful. This is because call centres perform a range of roles regarded as tasks with low value, where work is repetitive and intense and call centre agents must work under pressure to keep up with quotas, while having very little influence over their work (Arkin, 1997).

In agreement with this, Batt and Moynihan (2000) state that more and more call centres are becoming like a 'production line' with jobs considered 'low quality' and repetitive, with limited task variety. Often call centre agents are provided with a 'scripted' response,

which result in low control and high role conflict – factors that can be regarded as psychological risk factors (Sprigg, Smith and Jackson, 2003).

These stressful environments, requiring repetitive work in often unpleasant working conditions and monitoring every move will have negative outcomes. For example work overload or job pressures, feelings of lack of job satisfaction, which may affect one's feelings of self-worth; these are negative emotional reactions (Pinheiro, Troccoli and Tamayo, 2003), which result in stress and have a detrimental effect on employee wellbeing. In addition to the ill health associated with a stressful work environment, this interaction of organisational environment and employee wellbeing has been seen to play a part in productivity and profits.

It is thus, of paramount importance to address factors which are seen to impact on economic factors (productivity and profits), technology (development of new products/services) and social factors (customers) (Bartram, Robertson and Callinan, 2002 as cited in Patterson et al., 2004).

Karasek, Brisson, Kawakami, Houtman, Bongers and Amick (1998) purport that the JCQ can be used as a measure of work quality, to test various hypotheses and assumptions, such as job satisfaction, job-related illness or psychological distress. In using a reduced version of this questionnaire, Escriba-Aguir, Mas Pons and Flores Reus (2001) reported Cronbach's alpha was between .74 and .88 thus, indicating it to be a reliable scale for the present study.

Organisational climate is an important antecedent to job satisfaction, as a negative work environment may have an impact on every facet of one's job (Robbins, Odendaal and Roodt, 2001). Important too is the fact that individuals react to organisational factors in different ways suggesting that an 'individual's organisational fit' in terms of their skills in various work environments is of importance to their job satisfaction and coping methods related to job stress (Perrewe et al., 2000). Furthermore, organisational climate and systems, as well as supervisory style affect employee's perceptions of autonomy and competence. Supervisors were listed as the most significant constraint to job satisfaction (Supervision = - 0.42) (O'Connor, Peters, Rudolf and Pooyan, 1982).

To recap the main points of the chapter, organisational climate is a term used in organisational psychology literature, and it is an umbrella term that covers a vast number of different themes. The Taylorist approach is contrasted with the human-centred approach. Managerial styles have an impact on employee perceptions of the organisation, and employee outcomes are related to these managerial styles. The importance of employee-organisation fit is emphasised and job satisfaction hinges upon both organisational culture, and clear and fair management style.

The cognitive evaluation theory predicts that when work context and managerial style provides opportunities for employees to satisfy needs for self-determination and competence, intrinsic motivation will be enhanced. In this way, leaders play an important part in communicating role expectations, and in supporting and facilitating effective performance (Douthitt, 2002).

Leadership and managerial style is a key factor in organisational climate. In support of this theory, the following section is a discussion of leadership/management requirements necessary for favourable outcomes with regard to employee well-being and job related issues with particular reference to call centres.

Leadership and Managerial Style

The theory of leadership is complex and has an interdependent nature, not only in the relationship of leaders and followers (House and Mitchell, 1974; Horner, 1997 as cited in Applebaum et al.1999), but also in the organisational culture (Schein, 1985; Horner, 1997 as cited in Applebaum et al., 1999).

Leadership and leadership style is a key factor in promoting and implementing effective employee outcomes within organisations. Accordingly, many leadership models and theories have come out of research. Behavioural theories suggest that specific ‘leader behaviours’ have important organisational outcomes and can influence employees in a positive or negative way, thus affecting company climate, productivity, employee perceptions and well-being. The following Leadership and Management models and theories are briefly mentioned below.

Fiedler’s contingency model (1967), the Hersey–Blanchard Situational Leadership Theory (1974), the Ohio State leadership model (1951) and the Vroom–Yetton leadership model (1973) suggest that two leadership styles emerge. Firstly, a directive and authoritarian style that focuses on task, and secondly, a more considerate, informative,

joint decision-making and participative style (Vecchio and Applebaum, 1995 as cited in Appelbaum et al., 1999; Robbins et al., 2001).

Trait theories look for personality, intellectual and physical attributes that set ‘them’ apart from the ‘rest’, and surmise that there are ‘born leaders’, suggesting that personal qualities such as dimensions of personality are somehow related to effectiveness as a leader (Appelbaum et al., 1999).

Literature suggests more than eighty traits that could make up leadership qualities. Qualities indicative of leadership behaviours include the ability to be ambitious, energetic, honest, courageous and strong. However, the fact that all or some of these individual traits may be evident does not conclude that the person with these traits will be a successful leader.

More recent research has identified self-monitoring and flexibility in adjusting one’s behaviour in different situations as characteristics desirable in leader behaviour (Dobbins, Long, Derrick and Clemons as cited in Robbins et al., 2001). They consider leadership as a process, where leaders are not seen as individuals ‘in charge’ but rather coordinating efforts and moving together as a group (Horner, 1997 as cited in Appelbaum et al., 1999).

An eLoyalty Employee Commitment Model considers leadership dimensions to include: building trust, establishing credibility, encouraging employees to perform, leading by example, and to coach and align goals (Harter, 2005).

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It is therefore suggested that leadership is the ability to influence, inspire and direct individual and group actions toward attaining desired objectives (Hellriegel and Slocum, 1988). Additionally, management control styles can have a proactive influence on employee behaviours by making use of 'power' tactics and involving employees in setting objectives and making decisions that relate to their jobs.

Critical theorists say that power is a source of domination (Appelbaum et al., 1999). Indeed, it has been observed that management coercion may be seen to overtly influence outcomes in a non-participatory manner, resulting in de-motivation and dissatisfaction once the participatory outcome has been reached (Baloff and Doherty, 1989 as cited in Thorlakson and Murray, 1996).

Early research (French and Raven, 1959 as cited in Robbins et al., 2001) identifies the sources of power linked to individual and organisational power. Reward power and coercive power may be used by authoritarian managers to compel people to act in a particular way with the threat of sanctions for non-compliance. Within the call centre industry such 'power tactics' are often referred to, with managers and leaders demanding

‘excessive and unreasonable’ performance targets (Deery, et al., 2002).

Management theorists on the other hand surmise that one of the main functions of a manager is to motivate employees to achieve organisational goals. They interpret power as legitimate and functional, and suggest that it can be shared supposedly for everyone’s benefit (Moorhead and Griffin, 1998 as cited in Fisher, Katz, Miller and Thatcher, 2003). However, management style in call centres tends to be of the command and control variety, and the manner in which some call centre managers control, coerce, cajole and threaten their workers is of concern.

Call centres have come ‘under fire’ for the way that they are managed and how call centre operators are supervised. In many centres there is a poor structure whereby management put pressure on the supervisors to increase performance, who in turn increase pressure on the call centre agents. This cycle of pressure – according to researcher David Oliver – leads to unhappiness at all levels and is a major cause of the high turnover rate experienced in call centres (Anon, 2005).

Research undertaken by Cartwright and Holdsworth (2003) confirms that the controlling aspects of call centre environments ‘significantly reduce the opportunity to exercise individual autonomy’, which has a negative impact on job satisfaction and wellbeing (Cartwright, 2003).

Other studies demonstrate that employees’ overall job satisfaction is on the whole

correlated .30 with work performance (Thoresen, Bono and Patton, 2001). Positive emotion at work predicts subsequent employee performance (Staw, Sutton and Pelled 1994) while negative affect related to job-tension is associated with poorer work performance (Kamal, 1984).

These sentiments are suggestive of an expectancy theory which proposes that a positive affect increases the expectancy that more effort on the part of the employee, will lead to better performance, which in turn will lead to desirable outcomes in respect of personal goals, task cooperation, greater altruism and ultimately better productivity. Action theory similarly suggests that employees' satisfaction with their jobs is linked 'conceptually and empirically' to affect-laden constructs (Patterson et al., 2004).

With this in mind, it is necessary for organisations to recognise the significance and complexity of the notion of leadership and management as a process and its interdependent nature, not only in the relationship of leaders and followers, but also in the organisational climate (House and Mitchell, 1974; Horner, 1997, Schein, 1985 as cited in Applebaum et al.1999).

The role of the team leader in call centres is important. Studies have concluded that perceived supervisor support greatly enhanced employee wellbeing, especially where payment systems were seen to be fair, and useful performance appraisal and training were implemented (Holman, 2003). Other studies also suggest that social support is a significant predictor of employee stress (Karasek and Theorell, 1990).

Results of studies conducted by Holman (2003) suggested that employees' evaluation of HR practices were negatively associated with depression and positively associated with extrinsic job satisfaction. Thus, these factors have a relationship to employee wellbeing. To illustrate, if an individual feels that they do not receive fair pay for work done, they may become less motivated to perform, become depressed and wellbeing may suffer. Alternatively, employees receiving performance appraisals, training and feedback are likely to result in a positive effect on wellbeing. This research demonstrates the importance of a supportive leadership environment and the positive effect it has on the wellbeing of the employee (Holman, 2003).

There are a range of leadership styles, from leaders that are 'people-oriented' to more 'production-oriented' leaders. Some researchers suggest that call centres are an 'expression of an advanced form of Taylorism (Bain et al., 2002; Knights and McCabe, 1998; Taylor and Bain, 1999 as cited in HELA, 2001) while others place call centre management at the other end of the continuum and call them 'empowered' (Batt, 2000; Frenkel et al., 1998; Holman, 2002).

Whether the management style is of the command and control variety, as is seen in call centres, or a supportive leadership encouraging participation and empowering its employees, the fact remains that leadership style and specifically the controlling aspects of the call centre environment has a huge impact on perceptions of psychological empowerment and how it 'impacts on stress and job satisfaction' (Cartwright, 2003).

The JCQ is a self-report instrument which is used in the present study to focus on the psychological and social structure of the work situation, with questions presented around the call centre agent's perception of their decision latitude, psychological demands and social support (Karasek, 1985 as cited in Sprigg et al., 2003).

Various theories attempt to categorise leader behaviour; some theorists regard leadership qualities as innate, while others believe that training can produce leaders. Perceived leader behaviours and management styles (effective or negative) have an impact on employee behaviour. Management intimidation may have a negative impact on the overall organisational climate and could produce dissatisfaction amongst workers with regard to the tasks to be performed. Research findings indicate that supervisors were the biggest source of constraint in relation to job satisfaction (Spector, 1997).

Call centre management style tends to be of the command and control variety, where employers insist on rigid working practices, such as agents having to "put up their hands before being allowed a toilet break and then being timed" (cited in UK Contact Centre Industry Study, 2003). Studies conducted identified that such controlling HR practices were negatively associated with depression and positively associated with extrinsic job satisfaction (Holman, 2003).

Team leader support however, had a high positive association with depression and satisfaction and this finding supports research results – that a supportive leadership climate will have a positive effect on employee behaviour and wellbeing. These findings

are supported by Karasek and Theorell (1990), who allude to the level of social support within an organisation as a significant predictor of employee stress.

Call centre management service may be seen to be ‘mass service’ or ‘high commitment service’. These two services differ in market segment, work organisation HR management, customer-employee interaction and organisational strategy (Bowen and Schneider, 1988; Frenkel, 1999 as cited in Holman, 2005). In the mass service call centre profit margins are low and ‘standardised’ interactions are used to deliver standardised products. This allows a Taylorist job design using cheap unskilled labour, minimal training and high monitoring in order to ensure the standardised job requirements.

Call centres with a high commitment service offer a customised service, which is low-volume and high added value, where there is little scripting and supervisors are supportive and facilitative. Profit margins are high and continuous training and performance-related pay helps to cultivate employee commitment to the organisation (Holman et al., 2005).

It is evident and studies prove that ‘empowered’ call centre jobs – those with high employee control, low scripting and high skill requirements – are associated with positive management practices, such as positive relationships, low monitoring and discretionary pay (Batt, 2002 as cited in Holman et al., 2005).

Call centre agents serving in mass-market service (for example banking) reported “lower

job control and variety, lower skill use, higher monitoring and poorer relations with managers” (Holman and Fernie, 2000, as cited in Holman et al., 2005, p119).

It becomes evident therefore, that where call centres are concerned the management strategies and work practices adopted may not be “the result of a top-down strategy informed by a well-conceived rationale..., but rather the practice adopted from pragmatic choices in the dynamic call centre environment” (Hutchinson et al., 2000; Kinnie et al., 2000).

To sum up, leadership and leadership style is a key factor in promoting and implementing effective employee outcomes within organisations. The leadership may be ‘organic’ and empowering, allowing opportunities for employees to satisfy needs for self-determination and competence, so that intrinsic motivation will be enhanced.

Alternatively, supervisors and management may display controlling, mechanistic, non-supportive behaviours, which ‘significantly reduce the opportunity to exercise individual autonomy’, which has a negative impact on job satisfaction and wellbeing (Cartwright and Holdsworth, 2003 as cited in Cartwright, 2003).

Organisational management controls and implements computer technologies to be used within the call centre. Technical systems play an important role in call centres, and although management is instrumental in the choice and implementation of the call centre technology they rarely use the equipment (Holman et al, 2005). Therefore, the following

section will review the technology used in call centres, and also the relationship between technology and the social aspects.

The Role of Technology in Call Centres

During the last two decades technology has developed and has changed the face of work globally (Carrithers, 1992; Smit and Schabracq, 1998). Technology allows people to work at times and in places of their own choosing, it provides the means to “transcend geographical, cultural and temporal boundaries and so increase collaboration amongst organisations and their members” (Cartwright, 2003).

The rapid advancement of computer and telecommunication technology has contributed to the surge in the call centre industry. Research undertaken by Datamonitor (2003) indicated that by the year 2005 there would be 640,000 people employed in the call centre industry. This phenomenal growth in call centres in almost all economic sectors is an indication of changing structures and employment policies, new work methods, the drive to reduce costs and become an integral part of the global economy (HELA, 2001).

Call centres are technology driven, using computers that monitor every aspect of the agent’s day, from the length of each call to entering the client’s details and their query (Badler, 2004). Call centres have been aided by a range of telecommunications and computer technologies such as automatic call distribution (ACD), interactive voice recognition (IVR) and computer telephony integration (CTI). The incorporation of these technologies promotes improved efficiency, improved customer service, reduction in

costs and an increase in the organisation's profits (Holman et al., 2005).

Electronic performance monitoring (EPM) is another technology that has been employed by many call centres as the core means of observing and examining their employee's performance (Kolb and Aiello, 1996). With the use of EPM technology it is possible for supervisors and managers to acquire detailed records of their subordinate's functioning as call centre agents (Holman, 2003; Aiello and Kolb, 1995).

EPM may be considered an invasive and controversial practice, as employees may not know when or even that their performance is being observed. Thus, employees may not know if the information will be used for "punitive purposes, developmental purposes or to inform reward and payment decisions" (Holman, 2003). This could result in employees suffering increased levels of stress due to reduced feelings of privacy, and also lead to a decrease in employee job satisfaction as a result of their perception of the electronic performance monitoring (Holman, 2003; Aiello, 1993 as cited in Aiello and Kolb, 1995). Conversely, various positive aspects of performance monitoring have been established, such as providing employees with feedback quickly and the transparency of the performance rating criteria (Holman et al., 2002 as cited in Holman, 2003).

The trend towards globalisation has resulted in many organisations facing mergers, acquisitions and strategic alliances, as well as downsizing and restructuring in an effort to survive (Cooper and Jackson, 1997). Sub-contracting and outsourcing are among the new and changing structures of work, with many firms choosing to outsource their call

centres, resulting in a need for changes to organisational employment policies, norms and cultures. These changes of working patterns have an impact on the individual employee as well as the organisation (Cox, Griffiths and Rial-Gonzalez, 2000).

According to business psychologists at Kaisen Consulting, call centres are for many organisations the future of customer service. Gans et al. (2003) agree and state that call centres are rapidly becoming a preferred means for companies to communicate with their customers, offering efficiency and consistent customer relationship management.

Centralised offices mean that large numbers of workers can be managed by a small number of supervisors and support staff (Holman et al., 2005), and allows for a large customer base. Furthermore, by using telephone-based technology a large influx of incoming calls is permitted (Mashatola, 2003). Indirect communication between organisations and their customers is becoming more common, where the contact between company and client is via telecommunication with call centre operators (Eason as cited in Warr, 2002).

Call centres come under criticism frequently for a number of reasons. Personnel are criticised by callers who find that the staff are unable to answer queries adequately, either because of lack of skills, authority or technical know-how to resolve the caller's problem. The length of time required to answer a call is also problematic. Frequently, a large influx of incoming calls are permitted (Mashatola, 2003), requiring the caller to be put 'on hold' resulting in frustration on the part of the caller and anxiety and stress on the part of the call centre staff (Mandelbaum, 2004).

As a result, it is of paramount importance to develop “technology in the form of a technical subsystem and people in the form of a personnel subsystem...which interact with one another at every human-machine and human-software interface” (Hendrick, 1995).

There is interdependence between the technological and social practices or human-machine interactions, and both are significant in the call centre environment (Holman et al., 2005; Pasmore and Sherwood, 1978). This sentiment is echoed in the quote: “As technological advances have gained momentum and become embodied in cultural norms, the influence of technology on the operation of social systems, with reference to ways of living and working, concepts of time and the like, is highly important” (Tagiuri and Litwin, 1968).

Socio-technical system theory (STST), a term coined by Trist and Emery in the 1950s, is a method used in the design and the management of systems. It is a theory of work design and often of work redesign (Appelbaum, 1997), and is “based on the premise that an organisation or a work unit is a combination of social and technical parts and that it is open to its environment” (Trist, Higgin, Murray and Pollack, 1963 as cited in Appelbaum, 1997). There are various aspects of STST, the key dimensions being autonomy, self regulating groups, participation in planning and quality control.

STST assesses whether a planned technology, in this case call centre technology, satisfies an essential need of the user, as well as assessing whether it allows its users to

accomplish something they were unable to do in the past. Therefore, the goals of STST are to design systems that improve the welfare and quality of life of the system's user. Thus, the role of technology should be seen as an enabling factor in individual work activity (Corea, 2000).

Management is instrumental in the choice and implementation of the call centre technology; however ironically seldom use the equipment (Holman et al, 2005). Therefore, it is important that management understands the call centre agent's needs, perceptions and experience of the technology they use.

Engineering Psychology looks at aspects of technology concerned and related to the well-being of operators. Areas of concern include the external work environment such as workplace stations and ergonomics related to the worker and his/her well-being. Poor work station design has been linked to muscular-skeletal disorders (Bakker Demeriuti and Schaufeli, 2003 as cited in Holman et al., 2005). Environmental considerations include: paying attention to lighting, (ultraviolet lighting, often used in office settings, can produce headaches, eyestrain and fatigue), computer monitors should be large enough to reduce eyestrain and have the necessary applications for task efficiency, chairs should be ergonomically designed to reduce back and repetitive strain injuries, even the colour scheme should be selected to positively affect mood. A well designed work environment can positively affect work performance and productivity.

It becomes evident that depending on the interaction between the work environment, the

technology used and the relationship between corporate management and employee – in this case the call centre operator – the person-technology interaction can have far-reaching emotional and work outcomes.

Negative outcomes could be seen in a resistance to the technology, employee stress and feelings of a loss of autonomy (Eason as cited in Warr, 2002). The nature of technology used in organisations has a significant influence on tasks to be performed. Call centres rely on sophisticated technology and the organisation and management should carefully consider the dependency between people and technology in order to minimize constraints associated with technology in the workplace (Pasmore and Sherwood, 1978).

If the interactions between the socio-technical aspects in a call centre results in a negative work environment, it will also have an impact on the organisation, the client, the call-centre operator and the profits. Therefore, in order to eliminate the negative implications of working in a call centre environment, a more human-centred approach is needed to the design and application of the technology used.

Given the fact that technology influences the work role of the call centre agent, work aspects such as the ease of using the technology (user-friendliness), flexibility (autonomy), the use of performance monitoring, and the degree to which the use of technology controls the way employees carry out their work (skill discretion and decision latitude), is of concern in the socio-technical approach (Passmore, 1988, as cited in Corea, 2000).

Extensive research has shown that role ambiguity has been linked high levels of anxiety and tension (Nelson and White, 1988; Rizzo, House and Litzman, 1970; Van Sell, Brief and Schuler, 1981, as cited in Corea, 2000). In agreement, research findings show that if the technology is seen to be user-friendly and flexible, then it will be positively related to role clarity, role supervisor support and role expectations (Van Sell et al., 1981, as cited in Corea, 2000).

Various roles associated with work play a significant part in employee wellbeing and if not well defined, can be a constraint to an individual's work and life satisfaction.

Role Variables

The role theory has its origins in the theatre. Just as actors play many roles in their stage lives, employees and managers have expected roles to play in their work-lives which differ from their home-lives.

A role is the required pattern of behaviour for an individual in the organisation (Spector, 1997). These roles may result in stressful outcomes if they do not satisfy expectations, and thus are of great significance in organisational psychology as conflicting roles have proved to cause an adverse effect on health and well-being.

Roles within organisations may differ from person to person and from time to time. Organisational roles may be associated with titles, (manager or supervisor), with its associated role expectations (train driver), or it may be a role relating to a job title (call

centre agent), or a role relating to technology.

Within an organisation various groups of people work together, such as a particular department staff, management teams, unions and individuals. Every group has a designated job to do and an expected role to play which is linked to their job.

Role theory researchers emphasise the importance of 'role behaviour' in job satisfaction. Role overload, role ambiguity and role conflict (Frone, 1990; Grover, 1993; Grundberg et al., 1998) all cause the employee to suffer stress and resultant job dissatisfaction. Where job responsibilities and job tasks are not clearly defined due to organisational factors such as inconsistent expectations and uncertainty, role conflict and role ambiguity result (Leigh et al., 1988; Westman, 1992).

Organisational psychology studies suggest that mismatch between tasks and expectations causes employee work related stress (Cooper and Cartwright, 1994), and this mismatch results in job role ambiguity.

Stress may arise not only because there is a lack of information to perform the job, but also because there is the possibility of an unpredictable outcome as a result of faulty or missing information (Pearce, 1981; O'Driscoll and Beehr, 1994 as cited in Spector, 1997).

Role theory research considers a supervisor to be a 'key source' of role expectations and

the guidance and information provided by the supervisor is of utmost importance to the employee in fulfilling his/her work role. It has been shown that due to lack of communication, or insufficient information with regard to job requirements on the part of the supervisor, the employee may suffer the consequences of 'role ambiguity'. Studies conducted note that, within the call centre industry, role clarity is cited as being ambiguous and a source of employee distress, resulting in diminished work satisfaction (Van Sell et al., 1981, as cited in Corea, 2000).

Literature describes 'intra-role' conflict as occurring when conflict involves either different people or different work functions, for instance, two supervisors making conflicting demands on an employee. Intra-role conflict is aptly described using an example of shop stewards (Fisher et al., 2003). Organisations and unions are often at loggerheads with one another, shop stewards, with their dual roles, will often suffer role conflict, by not meeting one or the others expectations. In addition, 'extra-role' conflict occurs when there are conflicting demands between work and non-work.

In the case of an unclear person-technology role – when an employee is not familiar with the technology – the employee may resist using the technology and develop stress as a result of the ambiguous role and their inability to keep up with their tasks (Corea, 2000).

Role overload occurs when an individual is called upon to perform several roles which may not allow enough time to execute the job outcomes as expected. Call centre agents are called upon to perform several roles, ranging from customer queries, telesales,

marketing and information services, to reservations and balance enquiries. Failure to realise the multiple roles in a satisfactory way may cause uncertainty about one's ability to achieve expected results, thus causing job related stress and in extreme cases may affect one's self-esteem (Cooper, 1987). This is borne out by Karasek and Theorell (1990) who suggested that the 'task requirements' and the 'workload' are the key components of psychological job demands for the majority of workers (Sale and Kerr, 2001).

Cultural differences within organisations may cause role conflict. Hofstede and Peterson (1980) note that national culture is concerned with 'values', while organisational culture has its focus on 'practices', the Rokeach Value Survey and further research (Sagiv and Schwartz, 1995) argue that nationality and 'cultural value dimensions' directly affects individual behaviour.

Paying particular attention to the constraints of role variants, researchers have (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, Rosenthal, 1964 as cited in Buck, 1972; Sagiv and Schwartz, 1995) hypothesised that role overload occurs when the national culture and climate emphasise mastery and hierarchy with little importance attached to harmony. Differences between nations, organisations and industries play a part in how management addresses cultural differences, role-related individuals and discipline in the international arena (Hofstede and Peterson, 1980). Thus, when the climate is hierarchical, regulatory and enforcing it demands commitment to organisational goals, 'even at the expense of personal needs' resulting in 'role overload'. On the other hand, a climate emphasising harmony and

acceptance of world-view would not find it necessary to pressure people 'beyond their limits'. Thus, role overload would be unlikely (Sagiv and Schwartz, 1995).

With regard to role ambiguity, it was hypothesised that a climate with shared values, shared goals and embedded in collectivism, would follow well established rules and have shared and stable expectations, and therefore display little or minimal role ambiguity. Organisational climates showing egalitarianism, and intellectual control, accepting diversity, introducing new options and mutual commitments, was hypothesised to create greater role ambiguity. However, Sagiv and Schwartz (1995) reported little support for this hypothesis. Only when adding the dimension of hierarchical values did this add to role ambiguity. Role conflict research presented was greater in supervisors with climates and cultures 'high on hierarchy and low harmony' (Sagiv and Schwartz, 1995).

According to surveys conducted by Peters and O'Connor (1980) role variables have been shown to have an effect on job satisfaction. Role conflict, role ambiguity and role overload have negative implications for both supervisor and worker, and are thus regarded as constraints to well-being, health and job satisfaction.

Karasek and Theorell (1990) suggested that the 'task requirements' and the 'workload' are the key components of psychological job demands for the majority of workers (Sale and Kerr, 2001). Other researchers cite high role conflict and low role clarity are, as psychological risk hazards, as are jobs with low control (Sprigg et al., 2003).

Workload and control are thus seen to be important stressors within the organisational climate and particularly within the call centre climate. They are regarded as constraints to job satisfaction and are discussed in the next section.

Workload and Control

Work is associated with human activity and practitioners, and theorists share an interest in the result or productivity of work (Drucker, 1973). Over the last two decades, several studies have researched the changes taking place in relation to work and consequences of these changes (Endler, Marcrodimitris and Kocovski, 2000).

Technological advances, complex tasks, tight dead-lines, greater emphasis on speed and timeliness all point to a rise in work intensity and workload. Workload includes both mental and physical effort required by the job task, but is also concerned with the amount of work required to be done. Workload has been found to correlate with job dissatisfaction as well as other work strains (Jex and Beehr, 1991) and excessive work demands may translate into 'job pressure' which may result in unexpected costs to the organisation such as high absenteeism or staff turnover, ill health or pay rise demands (Buck, 1972). Research found that heavy workload and high job demands have been linked to increased psychological strain (Karasek and Theorell, 1991).

Work in the capitalist world is concerned with maintaining or increasing profitability. Work according to Lengermann, (1988) will be increasingly characterised by high-performance, requiring high employee involvement and effectively managing human

resources (Pfeffer, 1995; Rousseau, 1995). It is also suggested that the influence of technology on the operation of social systems, with reference to ways of living and working, concepts of time and the like, is highly important” (Tagiuri and Litwin, 1968). Thus, in today’s organisations, work and the manner in which it is managed or controlled go hand-in-hand.

In relation to work, control – especially organisational control – refers to actions aimed at ensuring inputs and outputs of a certain quality and quantity (Drucker, 1973). Control includes actions aimed at directing or manipulating the job activity. Control may also be seen as means of measuring actual conditions and comparing them to expected conditions and then taking steps to ‘close the gap’ if there is a discrepancy (Drucker, 1973).

The Taylorist approach to work is still evident in many call centres worldwide, that is, supervise, reward or punish in accordance with performance. Pressure tactics are sometimes part of the organisational strategy considered necessary to ensure the productivity of the organisation (Webster, 1966, as cited in Spector, 1997), and managers often exercise tight control over workers and impose unrelenting pressure on call centre operators at work.

Work within a call centre according to Prabhanker, Sheehan and Coppett (1997) involves solving problems and resolving complaints quickly, having information, answering questions and being available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and fifty two weeks a year. Call centre performance measures are dominated by stopwatches and

measures such as time to answer a call or call duration, and performance management systems focus on 'operational efficiency' while the human aspect is often ignored (Marr and Parry, 2004).

These controlling measures and high job demand are important factors in the call centre industry and have a significant effect on employee health, both emotionally and physically and many theorists and researchers agree in this regard. 'Perceived control' and its effect on health and well being have been extensively researched. Ganster and Fusilier (1989) suggest that more or less control is related to threatening or rewarding work outcomes (Sparks, Faragher and Cooper, 2001). Averill (1973) and Miller (1979) indicate that control at work has a 'profound' effect on health and well being, and Evans and Carrere (1991) and Spector (1986) suggest that control pressures at work result in emotional distress, absenteeism and mental health problems (Sparks et al., 2001; Cooper and Cartwright, 1994, as cited in Spector, 1997).

Karasek (1979) put forward the job strain model, which proposed that strain, emerges when an individual experiences large amounts of psychological job demands in association with their level of job control or decision latitude. 'Psychological demands' has been defined as: "the quantity of work, the mental requirements and the time constraints put on the worker" (Karasek, 1979 as cited in Pelfrene, Clays, Moreau, Mak, Vlerick, Kornitzer and de Backer, 2003), with 'job control/decision latitude' referring to: "the ability to make decisions about one's own work and the possibility of being creative and using or developing skills" (Pelfrene et al., 2003).

Lack of creativity and constraints on skill development is commonplace in call centres which are characterised by jobs that are repetitive and limited in task, responses are often 'scripted', not allowing any decision latitude in answering queries, there is often a time limit allowed per call and calls are routed automatically.

Besides the ordinary job-description or 'duty', there are aspects of the job, which make other demands on the agent such as abusive customers or situational factors. Deery, Iverson and Walsh (2002) provided quantitative evidence that links emotional exhaustion with difficult customer interactions. "The issue of job stress is of utmost importance to the public health community and working people....where the economic costs of job stress in general such as absenteeism and lost productivity are enormous" (Schnall, 1998). Job stress may be described in various terms and often include the words: strain, tension, conflict and anxiety (Likert, 1961; Trice and Belasco, 1965 as cited in Buck, 1972).

Workplace stress was cited as a common complaint and contributing factor among all the call centres reviewed in the Metlife Disability Study on the current state of call centre productivity (2004). Indeed, Metlife Insurance claims received during 2001-2002 listed many stress related illnesses resulting in call centre absenteeism, they include: digestive illnesses, musculoskeletal conditions, psychiatric illnesses, and respiratory illnesses.

These findings are in agreement with related organisational psychology research. Karasek's (1985) 'job strain' model states that the greatest risk to physical and mental

health from stress occurs to workers facing high psychological workload demands or pressures combined with low control or decision latitude in meeting those demands.

Job demands are defined by questions such as ‘working very fast’, ‘working very hard’ and ‘not enough time to get the job done’ (Schnall, 1998). It is expected that call centres are characterised by this type of work environment, as call centres perform a range of roles, regarded as tasks with low value, where work is repetitive and intense and call centre agents must work under pressure to keep up with quotas, while having very little influence over their work (Arkin, 1997).

Making use of the standardised job content questionnaire (JCQ) perceptions of job demands, job control and workplace social support, are measured.

Individual control within the workplace (decision latitude) is seen as the freedom that employees are given to make decisions about their work. This is one of the ‘core job characteristics’ essential for job satisfaction. Research has theorised that job satisfaction affects life satisfaction (Riley, 2005). Thus, the following section will discuss the concept of job satisfaction, in relation to well-being.

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is one of the most frequently studied topics in Organisational Behaviour research. Job satisfaction is seen to be an indicator of emotional well-being – a positive emotion resulting from the evaluation of one’s job (Mortimer and Lorence, 1995 as cited

in Riley, 2005).

There are many known predictors of job satisfaction, including work and life roles, perceptions of organisational climate, job content, individual characteristics and the conflicts or rewards associated with these factors.

Various theories have been formulated to describe job satisfaction, they include: need and value-base theories and social comparison theories (Muchinsky, 1993 as cited in Cassim, 2000). Another theory relating to job satisfaction is that of Herzberg's (1959) Two-factor theory (Fisher et al., 2003).

Herzberg (1959) developed his theory of motivation by asking his sample of engineers and accountants to recall a time when they felt positive about their work and also a time when they felt particularly negative about their work. Herzberg (1959) proposed that there are different factors that lead to work motivation and de-motivation. Some contributing factors of work motivation are: interesting work, recognition and opportunities for advancement. De-motivation is influenced by hygiene factors such as: the quality of supervision, working conditions and interpersonal relations at work (Fisher et al., 2003).

It is clear that many dimensions have an impact on one's job satisfaction. Advancement in the job and one's career, interaction with colleagues and supervisors, working conditions and job requirements all influence one's decision to remain at a particular

organisation (Robbins et al., 2001).

A recent study (Patterson et al., 2004) showed that there was a significant correlation between organisational climate, performance and job satisfaction. Organisational climate is an important antecedent to job satisfaction, as a negative work environment may impact on every facet of one's job (Robbins et al., 2001), from physiological outcomes, to various behavioural symptoms. Thus, it is important to consider job satisfaction as a symbiotic relationship that exists within the organisation with respect to supervision, job design and organisational climate.

Work environment and work climate “reflect the prevalent norms and attitudes of the organisation's culture” (Moran and Volkwein, 1992 as cited in Kangis et al., 2000). The changing structures, employment policies and new working methods within the global working environment are demanding that organisations adapt and address inequalities which may conflict with existing organisational cultures.

The Taylorist theory aligns itself with organisations showing a ‘mechanistic’ climate with well-defined hierarchy of command exhibited a system of clearly defined rules that ‘foster role clarity’ (Burnes and Stalker, 1961 as cited in Conner and Scott, 2005). Role clarity is recognised in organisational literature and research as an essential job characteristic in fostering job satisfaction and reducing job stress (Parker and Wall, 1998).

Contemporary trends in organisations, on the other hand, promote decentralised management, with ‘task adaptation, flexibility, informal networks of authority and shared systems of authority’ (Burnes and Stalker, 1961 as cited in Conner and Scott, 2005; Tannenbaum and Dupuree-Bruno, 1994). This has made employees, usually those at the lower levels, who are closest to customers extremely important. Giving this group more input into certain decision-making activities can result in increased firm performance.

A ‘new public management’ reform – the concept of empowerment – is intended to encourage a sense of common purpose which replaces the need for a direct hierarchical exercise of control. Hart (1998) states that, “empowerment reaches deep into the managerial psychology” and requires the role of the supervisor to change dramatically. For example, the introduction of the empowered self-managed work teams leads to the group becoming responsible for its own organisation once output and targets have been agreed upon. Ironically, some research indicated that these ‘organic’ or ‘empowering’ organisational climates showing relaxed authority, displayed role ambiguity and role conflict, which resulted in employees experiencing job dissatisfaction and job related stress (Ashford, 1998).

Studies conducted showed that perceptions of an organisations emphasis on achievement, autonomy and understanding were highly correlated to personal meaningfulness (Payne, Fineman and Wall, 1976 as cited in Patterson et al., 2004). Existing literature suggests that organisational climate is descriptive and has a value-laden content. If the organisation is perceived to be supportive and just there is a positive correlation to job

satisfaction and work motivation (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch and Topolynsky, 2002). Studies of organisational climate were shown to correlate .63 with regard to perception-affect. “In other words the more an area is valued, the higher the relationship between climate and satisfaction” (Payne et al., 1976 pg. 53). Whereas negative affect in terms of job-related tension, including reduced productivity, absenteeism, anxiety and depression is associated with poorer work performance” (Jamal, 1984 as cited in Patterson et al., 2004).

The degree to which an employee identifies with the organisation is likely to depend on the workers’ perception of good outcomes (job satisfaction) in exchange for their effort (Patterson et al., 2004).

Job satisfaction has been described as “an internal state that is expressed by affectively and/or cognitively evaluating an experienced job with some degree of favour or disfavour” (Brief, 1998). Thus, it is an attitudinal response and is regarded as extrinsic satisfaction (Holman, 2002). Job satisfaction may be considered an attitude and may include cognitive, affective or evaluative perceptions of the work an individual performs, and such attitudes affect the individual’s reaction toward their job (Moore, 2002). For instance, an individual who holds positive attitudes towards their job is thought to have high job satisfaction. Conversely, an individual who is dissatisfied with their job holds negative attitudes about their job (Robbins et al., 2001).

It has been suggested that a decline in job satisfaction and/or organisational commitment

can lead to an increase in one's desire to leave that job (Mowday, Porter and Steers, 1982 as cited in Mashatola, 2003). Peters and O'Connor (1980) agree and suggest that organisational climate may offer constraints to employee job satisfaction (Spector, 1997). It was postulated however, that job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction are not merely opposite ends on a continuum, but rather two discrete dimensions – one for satisfaction, with its opposite being no satisfaction/neutrality and the other for dissatisfaction, with its opposite no satisfaction/neutrality (Short, 1996). Thus, the essence of the Two-factor theory is that job satisfaction comes from more than just good pay, it purports that individuals must find some form of intrinsic satisfaction from it as well (Fisher et al., 2003). Intrinsic job satisfaction relates to aspects of the work itself such as task variety, autonomy, decision latitude to name but a few.

Job satisfaction has been seen as fulfilling physical and psychological needs, such as pay and well-being (Porter, 1962; Wolf, 1970 as cited in Spector, 1997) also known as extrinsic factors. Other known predictors of job satisfaction, include work and life roles. The extent to which one's job is satisfying or dissatisfying may depend on the extent to which the job is seen as threatening to other self-relevant roles. When self-relevant roles (i.e. roles that define our identity) are threatened, we appraise the source of threat in a negative way (Carlson and Kacmar, 2000; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Lazarus, 1991). For example, if work is perceived as sapping energy and time needed to fulfil the 'family role' (work interfering with family) then it may produce a threat to one's self image and thus, a negative attitude towards work develops (Frone, 2003). This psychological contract or person-organisation fit, according to Sparrow (2001) is linked to perceived

organisational climate, and results in perceived justice, and support, leading to motivation at work, commitment, job involvement and job satisfaction.

When considering job satisfaction, it is relevant to note that the content and nature of the job play an important role in job satisfaction (Hertzberg, Nausner and Snyderman, 1959; Wall and Martin, 1987 as cited in Spector, 1997, p31). Work design theory first postulated by Hackman and Oldham (1975), identified “core job characteristics” which related to satisfaction and motivation of employees. Various job characteristics acknowledged as being significant were skill variety, task identity, and task significance these core characteristics led to the ‘critical psychological’ state of experienced meaningfulness of the task and resulted in work motivation, job performance and job satisfaction.

Job Characteristics Model (JCM) focuses on the individual level of analysis (Hackman and Oldham, 1975). According to this model, individuals experience high internal motivation if three critical psychological states are experienced. Job satisfaction relate to: meaningfulness of work; responsibility for the outcomes of the work; and knowledge of the results of the work.

Seen globally, job satisfaction is many-faceted and includes job conditions, supervision, appreciation, nature of work, recognition and the organisation itself (Spector, 1997). Management and supervisors must therefore be seen to be ‘supportive and favourable’ as this type of management style has a potent influence on employee cognitions, attitudes

and behaviour (Ostroff, 1993). Echoing these sentiments, Brown and Brown (1994) state that “the core purpose of the organisational process is control” and in practice the more supportive and compliant employees are, the more likely the organisation is of “achievement of managerial defined goals” (Armstrong, 1996; Brown and Brown, 1994 as cited in Ogden, 1982).

However, studies conducted by Jackson and Schuler (1985) found that supervisors were the biggest source of constraint to job satisfaction, especially concerning role conflict and ambiguity. Much of the negative comment regarding call centre management is aimed at supervisors and management control (Callaghan and Thompson, 2001).

Call centres are perceived as being ‘oppressive regimes’ and management tactics have been a matter of concern with regard to ‘the unrelenting pressure of work and tight control, low pay and restrictive working practices’ (Arkin, 1997; Callaghan and Thompson, 2001). “Horror stories, which have recently come to light, include tales of managers who threaten staff with wearing disposable nappies if they visit the toilet too often, and workers disciplined for taking two six-second breaks between calls” (Moore, 2005, p1).

Job satisfaction is most commonly assessed by the use of standardised questionnaires, either directing the assessment to facet-specific satisfactions or by investigating an overall satisfaction for one’s job (Fisher et al., 2003; Robbins et al., 2001). The present research attempts to measure call centre operator’s overall job satisfaction by use of a

standardised questionnaire.

In summary, job satisfaction is a thoroughly researched topic in the organisational psychology literature. Job satisfaction is an individual's perception of their experiences at work and is important to convey an understanding of human behaviour (Landy and Trumbo, 1976; Locke, 1976).

In an attempt to elucidate why people feel satisfied or dissatisfied with their jobs various theories were developed and discussed. Organisational climate, supervisor support, individual and job characteristics all have an impact on job satisfaction which in turn 'spills over' and have a significant impact on our life satisfaction. The concept of life satisfaction will be reviewed in the next section.

Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction has been defined as "a global assessment of a person's quality of life according to his chosen criteria" (Shin and Johnson, 1978, p 478 as cited in Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin, 1985). As human beings, we seek to live our lives in a stable environment and we develop ways and means of 'behaving, thinking and feeling' that allows us to fit in with our own preferences (Schabracq, 1991), allowing us control over our lives.

Life satisfaction is concerned with how a person feels about life in general. It includes physical and emotional well-being, a balanced commitment to work and personal life,

levels of satisfaction with friends and other positive (or negative) lifestyle behaviours.

Various hypotheses have been suggested relating to job and life satisfaction. The compensation hypothesis predicts that dissatisfaction at work will result in the worker putting energy into non-work activities and vice versa. A segmentation theory posits that people may keep their work lives completely separate from their home lives, thus job and life satisfaction are uncorrelated.

However, research studies favour the spill over hypothesis, which suggests that one's level of job satisfaction will extend to that individual's behaviour in other areas of their life – impacting on their general satisfaction with life. Longitudinal studies done show that job satisfaction and life satisfaction overlap and each aspect affect the other (Judge and Watanabe, 1993 as cited in Spector, 1997).

It is said that we 'live to work and work to live'. We live in a material world, where work is often regarded as a means to an end, and for the majority of workers this remains a truism. How we value work depends on work behaviour and work related outcomes. Therefore, in a definition given by Nord, Brief, Atieh and Doherty (1988), "we define work values as the end states people desire and feel they ought to be able to realise through working". Weaver, (1978) agrees with this statement and indicates a positive correlation between job satisfaction and life satisfaction.

Work is a major factor in our lives and there is a dynamic interplay between our work

and non-work lives. Events and situations outside of the workplace influence behaviour and feelings just as workplace issues may have an effect on home life, in agreement with the 'spill over' hypothesis.

The importance of meaningful work and job satisfaction has been extensively researched and documented. Muirhead (2005) suggests that an 'optimal fit' between the person and work is when work is at the heart of one's personal identity.

Related to personal identity is the concept of roles in ones life. Roles provide individuals with a framework on which to develop a sense of meaning, purpose and agency (Reitzes and Mutran, 1994). Roles are attached to status, which Merton (1957) defined as positions in society (Buck, 1972). With status comes identity, the meaning that one attributes to himself or herself by virtue of occupying a particular role in a social structure that he or she subsequently views as descriptive of oneself (Thoits, 1995). An individual occupying a particular status plays a number of roles associated with it, for example: mother, call centre agent, wife and daughter.

Researchers agree that a person's status or role in society gives meaning and purpose to life and some researchers (Martire, Stephens and Townsend, 2000; Pleck, 1985 as cited in Noor, 2004) suggest that role salience, also known as role centrality (Martire et al., 2000), role commitment (Brown, Bifulco and Harris, 1987) and personal involvement (Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1995) have a direct effect on well-being, and may act as a moderator between role stress and well-being, in addition to, as mentioned above,

providing individuals with meaning, self-worth and purpose. However, when self-relevant roles (i.e. roles that define our identity) are threatened, we appraise the source of threat in a negative way (Carlson and Kacmar, 2000; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Lazarus, 1991).

Individual characteristics play a part in job and life satisfaction, especially when related to job pressure. Personality theories suggest that personality characteristics are established and influenced from early childhood and are “very resistant to change... defence and coping mechanisms are shaped early in life” Maslow (1965, p.307 as cited in Buck, 1972). Similar research concurs; McClelland (1951), Zubek and Solberg (1954) noted “...while data do not indicate a rigidity of childhood personality structure a sizeable nucleus of stubborn individuality remains intact in the face of environmental vicissitudes” (1958, p97 as cited in Buck, 1972). A worker with the ability to solve problems and problem-focused coping has often been shown to be associated with better general well-being (Buck, 1972).

There are varying perspectives on the job satisfaction-life satisfaction relationship. However, research shows that it is rather the different situations that may arise that shape the type of job satisfaction-life satisfaction relationship (Cassim, 2000), including work and life roles, perceptions of organisational climate, job content, individual characteristics and the conflicts or rewards associated with these factors.

Call centre jobs are considered ‘low quality’ and do not meet the higher order needs

necessary for fulfilment and life satisfaction (Hackman and Oldham, 1975). Thus, the call centre agent may become de-motivated and dissatisfied and as a result their mental and physical health may become compromised. Such workers have constant rebuffs to their self-worth and self esteem which has a direct effect on life and work satisfaction.

Organisational factors, most of which have been mentioned in previous chapters are believed to have a significant influence on self esteem and wellbeing and are examined next.

Self-Esteem and Well-being

Life satisfaction, self esteem, wellbeing and work life are all inextricably linked and all or some of these factors have an influence on the general health of the world workforce. There is thus interplay between work and non-work events which influence both feelings and emotions and have an impact on how we view life in general. Life satisfaction is regarded as a measure of well-being and it has been hypothesised that life satisfaction, well-being and job satisfaction are related (Rain, Lane and Steiner, 1991)

Subjective well-being (SWB) is an area of psychology that attempts to understand people's evaluations of their lives. Evaluations may be cognitive, such as life satisfaction, or may consist of a person's experience of pleasant or unpleasant emotions (Diener, Suh and Oishi, 1997). However, there is research suggesting a compensatory model – claiming that people compensate by enriching one area of life to make up for negative experiences in another area of their life (Rain et al., 1991). Closely related to both life

satisfaction and well-being is self-esteem.

Self-esteem can be defined as: “a positive or negative orientation toward oneself (Rosenberg, 1965), or “an overall evaluation of one’s worth or value” (Santrock, 2003). It is important to note the findings of (Mortimer, 1979 as cited in Riley, 2005) that the quality of one’s work life has been shown to have an effect on one’s sense of worth.

There are numerous psychological scales measuring self-esteem and self-efficacy. For example: the general self-efficacy scale (GES) (Jerusalem and Schwarzer, 1979), the Occupational Self-Efficacy Scale, developed by Betz and Hackett (1981) and possibly the most widely-used self-esteem measure in social science research is the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1965), which was the instrument selected in the present research.

The scales reveal statistics, which elucidate the importance of self-esteem and well-being in the workplace. Numerous self-esteem studies (Brockner, 1988; Branden, 1998 as cited in Robbins et al., 2001) have investigated various aspects of organisational behaviour, from how individuals choose jobs to how self-esteem can predict an individual’s performance in a particular job and has been related to job satisfaction (Robbins et al., 2001).

Self-efficacy too is a closely related term. It is defined as: the idea that an individual can achieve in a situation, and thus create positive outcomes (Santrock, 2003; Bandura, 1994). It has been purported that an individual’s perceived self-efficacy influences the

belief that they can succeed in undesirable situations (Rose, 2002 as cited in Taylor and Scholarios (2003), and self-efficacy can affect every aspect of an individual's being – “how a person feels, thinks, motivates him/herself and behaves” (Bandura, 1994).

There are many known predictors of well-being and self efficacy, including work and life roles, perceptions of organisational climate, job content, individual characteristics and the conflicts or rewards associated with these factors.

The life/work roles that one assumes are of great significance in organisational psychology as conflicting roles have proved to cause an adverse effect on health and well-being. Researchers agree that a person's role in society gives meaning and purpose to life and some researchers (Martire et al., 2000; Pleck, 1985 as cited in Noor, 2004) suggest that role salience, role commitment (Brown et al., 1987) have a direct effect on well-being.

March and Simon (1958) agree and have posited that role compatibility played a significant part in job/life satisfaction. As such, it should contribute positively to psychological well-being (Noor, 2004). Conversely, when an individual experiences stress in a social role that is highly salient to the individual's self, it will be perceived as threatening and may undermine his or her psychological well-being. Such is the case with work-family role conflict.

Due to the dramatic changes in demographic composition of the workforce in the last

decade much research has been done regarding work-family conflict and the impact on well-being and job/life satisfaction. An increasing number of women have entered the workforce, bringing with it a concern about balancing work and personal life (Schwartz, 1992; Davidson and Burke, 1994).

The extent to which one's job is satisfying or dissatisfying may depend on the extent to which the job is seen as threatening to other self-relevant roles. When self-relevant roles (i.e. roles that define our identity) are threatened, we appraise the source of threat in a negative way (Carlson and Kacmar, 2000; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Lazarus, 1991). For example, if work is perceived as sapping energy and time needed to fulfil the 'family role' (work interfering with family) then it may produce a threat to one's self image and thus, a negative attitude towards work develops (Frone, 2003) and result in depression, burnout or even intentions to quit the job (Allen, 2001; Behson, 2002; Bond et al., 2003; Frone et al., 1997; Kaufman et al., 2001; Thomas and Ganster, 1995; Thompson et al., 1999 as cited in Thompson, Jahn, Kopelman and Prottas, 2004).

Individual characteristics also play a part in job and life satisfaction. Personality theories suggest that personality characteristics are established and influenced from early childhood and are "very resistant to change... defence and coping mechanisms are shaped early in life" Maslow (1965, p.307 as cited in Buck, 1972).

In a study based on Murray's (1938) personality research which included the categories 'needs, internal factors, general traits and attributes' and compared workers with

managers it was found that, workers were 'less dominant' wished to avoid criticism, had the need to protect self and self-esteem (higher on Abasement and Blamavoidance), were low on Dominance scale, and rated high on Affiliation and Nuturance, to name but a few variables.

These characteristics are seen to influence work life and relate to the way the worker copes within the organisation and work environment. This is in accordance with the "Personality-Job fit Theory" developed by Holland (1985). He selected six personality types namely, realistic, investigative, social, conventional, enterprising and artistic and he proposed that that job satisfaction and propensity to leave the job were related to how successfully the individual's personality matched the occupational environment.

Occupational environment or organisational climate has been shown extensively to affect job satisfaction, life satisfaction and associated with these factors, well-being and self esteem.

Research has demonstrated clear associations between work design characteristics and employee effectiveness, and mental health and performance (Parker and Wall, 1998; Parker cited in Warr, 2002).

Lastly, when considering job/life satisfaction including well-being and self-esteem it is of importance to note that theorists confirm that the content and nature of the job play an important role in job satisfaction (Hertzberg, Mausner, Snyderman, 1959; Wall and

Martin, 1987 as cited in Spector, 1997, p31).

Core job characteristics are cited as being related to job satisfaction, life satisfaction and a contributing factor in psychological wellbeing of the worker. It is therefore of paramount importance to address the nature of the job.

Core Job Characteristics

Job characteristics refer to the content and nature of the job task. Literature suggests that “people who prefer challenge and interest in their work will be happier and more motivated if they have complex jobs” (Spector, 1997, p34).

This prompted researchers to assess and measure the most popular job characteristics and develop scales to compute reliable scales. The Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS) formulated by Hackman and Oldham (1975) has proved to be the most widely used in the field. However other similar scales such as the Job Characteristic Index (Sims, Szilagyi and Keller, 1976 as cited in Spector, 1997) and the Multimethod Job Design Questionnaire (Campion, 1988, 1989: Campion and Thayer, 1985 as cited in Spector, 1997) have also been reliable sources of data.

The Job Characteristics Model (JCM) focuses on the individual level of analysis (Hackman and Oldham, 1975). According to this model, individuals experience high internal motivation if three critical psychological states are experienced. These are: meaningfulness of work; responsibility for the outcomes of the work; and knowledge of

the results of the work. To achieve these three critical psychological states, the model prescribes that the work be designed with optimal levels of five job characteristics, i.e., skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback.

The concept of perceived autonomy has been extensively researched. In the workplace, autonomy is concerned with the amount of control an individual believes they have over their environment (Ganster and Fusilier, 1989 as cited in Sparks et al., 2001). The amount of freedom an individual is given when deciding how to accomplish a task affects their overall well-being (Averill, 1973; Miller, 1979).

According to individual personality, some individuals need to fulfil their 'higher order needs', like self esteem and autonomy, (Hackman and Oldham,1975) thus, autonomy allows the worker to experience responsibility which leads to motivation and job satisfaction. Research (Hackman and Oldham, 1975) also found that feedback produced knowledge of results thus motivating the worker and allowing for the need to 'grow'.

Conversely, there is converging evidence that low job control (decreased autonomy) increases the risk of impaired well-being (Sonnentag and Frese, 2003; Warr, 1999 as cited in Patterson et al., 2004) and health (Belkic, Landsbergis, Schnall and Baker, 2004; Cooper, Dewe and O'Driscoll, 2001; Marmot, Theorell and Siegrist, 2002; Siegrlst, 2002 as cited in Elfering et al., 2005).

Control is seen to be a constraint to autonomy. Technology and supervisor control has an

impact on perceived autonomy. The call centre agent is controlled to a large extent by the volume of incoming or outgoing calls, time limits per call and efficiency of technology (computers, telephones, etc.). Supervisors, concerned with the fact that ‘time is money’ put constant pressure on the call centre agents to work fast leaving the call centre agent little room for decision latitude or to make use of individual skills.

A worker with the ability to solve problems and problem-focused coping has often been shown to be associated with better general well-being. It has been found that problem-focused coping is more effective when controllability is high (Lazarus, 1999). Research in this field agrees that “There is converging evidence that low job control as well as chronic job stressors increase the risk of impaired well-being (Sonnetag and Frese, 2003; Warr, 1999 as cited in Patterson et al., 2004) and health (Belkic, Landsbergis, Schnall and Baker, 2004; Cooper, Dewe and O'Driscoll, 2001; Marmot, Theorell and Siegrist, 2002; Siegrist, 2002 as cited in Elfering et al., 2005).

Skill discretion has been defined as ‘task variety’, while decision authority is defined as ‘social authority over making decisions’ or ‘autonomy’ (Karasek and Theorell, 1990) and literature refers to the overall decision latitude scale as being a measure of job control (Sale and Kerr, 2001).

Call centres perform a range of roles, regarded as tasks with low value, where work is repetitive and intense and call centre agents must work under pressure to keep up with quotas, while having very little influence over their work (Arkin, 1997). Thus it is

evident that the 'core job characteristics' are to a large degree absent in the industry. It is assumed that if these core job characteristics are absent, job stress will result and will lead to ill health and job dissatisfaction.

The Job Content Questionnaire (JCQ) according to results from Gimeno, Benavides, Mira, Martinez and Benach (2004), has been found to reflect the actual psychosocial work environment. Karasek, Brisson, Kawakami, Houtman, Bongers and Amick (1998) purport that the JCQ can be used as a measure of work quality to test various hypotheses and assumptions, such as job satisfaction, job-related illness or psychological distress. This questionnaire has been used in the study to test the effects of call centre jobs items on decision latitude, psychological demands and social support measure Karasek's (1985).

Finally, the factors purporting to influence the well-being, job and life satisfaction of call centre agents with respect to organisational climate will conclude the review of past literature.

Integrating the Concepts

Organisational climate and how employees perceive it to be supportive or not, have an impact on job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and well being, and these perceptions play a part in organisation commitment and productivity. Job satisfaction has been described as "an internal state that is expressed by affectively and/or cognitively evaluating an experienced job with some degree of favour or disfavour" (Brief, 1998).

The present study attempts to take cognisance of employee perceptions in call centres and relate these issues to organisational climate and thus to evaluate the job experience within the call centre environment.

Research shows that various situations may arise that shape the type of job satisfaction-life satisfaction relationship (Cassim, 2000), these situations include work and life roles, perceptions of organisational climate, job content, individual characteristics and the conflicts or rewards associated with these factors.

It is of the opinion, that in the rush to set up call centres (many of which operate twenty-four hours a day seven days a week) employers sometimes neglect the 'people management' issues found in this working environment (Arkin, 1997).

The call centre agent is a prime example of a worker under stress and experiencing little or no job satisfaction. Call centre jobs are considered 'low quality' and repetitive, with limited task variety. Often call centre operators are provided with a 'scripted' response, which result in low control and high role conflict; factors that can be regarded as psychological risk factors (Sprigg et al., 2003), and do not meet the 'higher order needs'.

Thus, the call centre agent may become de-motivated and dissatisfied and as a result their mental and physical health may become compromised. Such workers have constant rebuffs to their self-worth and self esteem. When they cannot keep up the frenetic pace of calls, there is a reprimand and an insinuation that one is not competent.

The fact that there is little opportunity for autonomy, knowledge, status or creativity, 'nothing to gain and much to lose' all add up to feelings of unfulfilled egoistic needs and lack of self-esteem.

This fact is supported by research which has indicated that poor working conditions lead to lower levels of job satisfaction and contribute to the psychological distress and health problems experienced by such groups of individuals (Mortimer, 1979; Kalleberg, 1977; Coverman, 1989; Tuch and Martin, 1991 as cited in Riley, 2005). Metlife Insurance claims corroborate these findings. Claims received during 2001-2002 listed conditions most frequently resulting in call centre absenteeism, they include, digestive illnesses, musculoskeletal conditions, psychiatric illnesses, and respiratory illnesses.

Work-family conflict, especially in call centres with mostly women agents poses a problem due to conflicting roles. Thus, if work is perceived as sapping energy and time needed to fulfil the 'family role' (work interfering with family) then it may produce a threat to one's self image, and as a result a negative attitude towards work may develop (Frone,2003).

Supervisor support has been seen to be lacking within call centres, resulting in work-family conflict, depression, burnout, intentions to quit and absenteeism, low levels of commitment and less job/life satisfaction. It is stated that "perceptions of organizational and supervisory support have been linked to lower levels of work-family conflict, depression, burnout, intentions to quit, and absenteeism, and higher levels of

commitment, organisational citizenship behavior, and job satisfaction” (Allen, 2001; Behson, 2002; Bond et al., 2003; Frone et al., 1997; Kaufman et al., 2001; Thomas and Ganster, 1995; Thompson et al., 1999 as cited in Thompson, et al, 2004). This is borne out in recent research, which suggests that a supportive climate and supportive supervisors make it easier to balance work and family.

Perception of organisational support according to research results suggest that individuals who perceive themselves to have strong social support in the workplace are less likely to perceive work demands as stressors (Carlson and Perrewwe, 1999 as cited in Valcour and Batt, 2003).

Organisational values and employees experiences are related to performance, (productivity and profitability, etcetera). Denison (1990) found that a climate that encouraged decision making was found (across 34 firms in 25 different industries) to predict financial success. Adaptability and risk taking (decision latitude) was also positively associated with financial growth, (11 insurance companies) in data collected by Gordon and DiTomaso (1992).

Organisational factors such as task and role demands, interpersonal demands and organisational structure and leadership style also impact on experienced stress and result in decrease in job satisfaction and an increase in staff turnover (Robbins et al., 2001).

McLean (1960) noted that stress at work can cause psychological and physiological

problems with resultant behavioural outcomes. Research has indicated that call centre agents suffer from great levels of stress, with findings showing that job pressure is a function of several personal and environmental factors (Buck, 1972).

Environmental factors causing stress include economic and political uncertainties such as downsizing as a result of currency devaluation and the effects of affirmative action on job loss, and the introduction of technology. These fears may cause both physiological as well as behavioural symptoms, namely reduced productivity, absenteeism, anxiety and depression.

Work and family roles are the two most important life roles for most people (Mortimer, Lorence and Kumka, 1986 as cited in Grandey, Cordeiro and Crouter, 2005) an incompatibility between them is likely to create tension and negative feelings. Known as 'extra-role' conflict, it occurs when there are conflicting demands between work and non-work. Researchers distinguish between two types of work-family conflict: work-interfering-with-family (WIF) conflict and family-interfering-with-work (FIW) conflict.

Role conflict may cause conflict in the workplace and have an impact on one's domestic life and if this conflict becomes excessive, it may have far-reaching consequences affecting an individual's feelings of self-worth (Fisher et al., 2003).

Personality characteristics and traits, such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control as well as emotional stability, according to Judge and Bono (2001) are significantly

associated with both job satisfaction and job performance (as cited in Patterson et al., 2004) especially when related to job pressure and job stress. Job stressors such as performance monitoring and continuous customer interaction results in call centre agents suffering from work exhaustion and life/ work dissatisfaction.

These negative outcomes for employees and organisations indicate that efforts to address the core job requirements improve supervisor support and redesign jobs to make them more challenging and to reduce the intensity of performance monitoring. The result will be an improved work/life satisfaction for all.

The following section will present the present research, which will outline the rationale and aims for the present study, the research questions, the procedure and method carried out.