

Service Sector Service Delivery: The Connection between Working Conditions and Service Delivery in the Public Sector



Asemahle Ndaliso

SUPERVISORS: Professor Bridget Kenny and Doctor Benjamin Scully

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ABSTRACT

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This study is an investigation into the relationship between the experiences of employees and service delivery in a public sector call centre. The study zooms into a department of a public sector call centre in order to get a deeper sense of some of the internal factors of local governance, which shape the public servants' experience of work and their ability to deliver services to the public.

The study tries to demonstrate that the insight and experiences of employees can help us begin to uncover some of the root causes which give rise to the issue of poor service delivery. The study discovers some internal issues which affect the ability of public servants to do their job and to successfully and consistently deliver services to the public.

The study looks into issues concerning the nature of the management that the call centre has and how that affects service delivery. The study also tackles the issue of emotional labour and how it relates to and affects employee well-being. The study also includes a discussion on Employee Assistance Programmes and how they can help to enhance employee well-being which can in turn help the public sector call centre to fulfil its mandate of providing the city with quality service delivery.

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*"The race is not to the swift,
Nor the battle to the strong,
Nor bread to the wise,
Nor riches to men of understanding,
Nor favour to men of skill;
But time and chance happen to them all."*

-Ecclesiastes 9:11

DECLARATION

This thesis is my own unaided work and has not been submitted previously for any other degree in any other university.

Asemahle Ndaliso

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACD- Automatic Call Distributor

CRA- Customer Relations Agents

EAP- Employee Assistance Programme

IVR- Interactive Voice Response

NPM- New Public Management

SAP-Systems, Applications and Products

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents

Service Sector Service Delivery: The Connection between Working Conditions and Service Delivery in the Public Sector	i
ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
DECLARATION	iv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction: Research Topic and Research Question	1
1.1) Introduction	1
1.2) City of Johannesburg: A Brief Background	2
1.2.2) The introduction of call centres into the municipality	3
1.2.2.1) Programme Phakama	3
1.2.2.2) The advantages of establishing a call centre for the City	5
1.3) Defining the Problem Statement	5
1.4) Rationale	6
1.5) Objectives of the Study.....	6
1.6) Research Question	7
1.7) Definitions of the study's Key Concepts	7
Chapter 2: Literature Review	10
2.1) The Service Sector.....	10
2.2) Distinctive Features of Interactive Service Work: The role of the customer, emotional labour, control and surveillance and Taylorism in managing service work	11
2.2.1) The role of the customer	11
2.2.2) Emotional Labour.....	11
2.2.3) Control and surveillance	12
2.2.4) Assembly-line principles in interactive service work.....	13
2.3) Labour process theory and the rise of service work.....	13
2.4) Interactive Service Work: Call Centres as an illustration.....	14
2.4.1) What is a call centre?.....	14
2.4.2) International Call centre industry.....	14
2.5) The South African Call Centre Industry- its Labour Process and Context.....	15
2.6) New Public Management.....	18
2.7) Public call centres: A product of New Public Management	18
2.8) Background of City of Johannesburg call centre	20

3) Methodology	23
3.1 Introduction	23
3.2) Gaining Access	23
3.3) Research Design.....	23
Chapter 4: Public Sector Call Centre Management: Is External Management Too External?	27
4.1) Introduction	27
4.2) Control and surveillance in call centres according to the Literature.....	28
4.3) Evaluation of the public sector call centre	28
4.3.1) What was the purpose of establishing the public sector call centre?.....	28
4.3.2) What do the Customer Relations Agents and Operations Managers of the power department of the public sector call centre do?	29
4.3.3) The internal factors at play in the call centre	31
4.3.3.1) The public sector call centre and the script.....	31
4.3.3.2) The public sector call centre and service level targets.....	33
4.3.3.3) The public sector call centre's issues according to the employees.....	34
4.3.3.4) Employee stress as an indicator of external management pitfalls.....	36
4.3.3.5 The management style of the call centre according to the employees	38
4.4) Conclusion.....	39
Chapter 5: Broken Communication Lines in the Public Sector Call Centre, Broken Service Delivery to the Public.....	41
5.1) Introduction	41
5.1.1) Public sector call centres.....	41
5.2) Cracks in the public sector call centre system.....	42
5.2.1) Training at the call centre and its implications.....	42
5.2.2) Equipment Shortcomings and their implications	43
5.2.3) Shortage of Staff and its implications.....	44
5.2.4) Employees' Experiences and their implications	45
5.3) Emotional and Affective Labour and Employee Well-being	47
5.3.1) Emotional Labour	47
5.3.2) Affective Labour	48
5.3.3) Employee Well-being	48
5.3.4) The Mechanisms of Emotional Labour and Employee Well-being	49
5.3.5) Employee Well-being and Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP)	51
5.4) Conclusion.....	54
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	56
Introduction	56

Conclusion.....	58
References	60
Appendix A- List of Interviewees	63
Appendix B: Customer Relations Agent Interview Questions	64
Appendix C: Supervisor Interview Questions.....	67
Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet.....	70



.....	70
Appendix E: Consent Form Interview	72

Chapter 1: Introduction: Research Topic and Research Question

1.1) Introduction

This chapter will serve the purpose of explaining the subject matter of this study and why that particular subject matter has been chosen. A brief background of the City of Johannesburg as a municipality will be provided. There will be a discussion on the introduction of call centres into the municipality. This chapter will also include the problem statement of the study and the rationale of the study as well as the objectives of the study. The research question and the definitions of the study's key concepts will also be presented in this chapter.

This study is an investigation into the relationship between the experiences of employees and service delivery in a public sector call centre. The study zooms into a department of a public sector call centre in order to get a deeper sense of some of the internal factors of local governance, which shape the public servants' experience of work and their ability to deliver services to the public.

The study tries to demonstrate that the insight and experiences of employees can help us begin to uncover some of the root causes which give rise to the issue of poor service delivery. The study discovers some internal issues which affect the ability of public servants to do their job and to successfully and consistently deliver services to the public.

The study looks into issues concerning the nature of the management that the call centre has and how that affects service delivery. The study also tackles the issue of emotional labour and how it relates to and affects employee well-being. The study also includes a discussion on Employee Assistance Programmes and how they can help to enhance employee well-being which can in turn help the public sector call centre to fulfil its mandate of providing the city with quality service delivery.

This study is interesting because it provides some insight into the widely recognised problems of poor service delivery. The study reveals what the employees of the call centre have to contend with as they strive to provide services to the public. The views of the

employees are gems of insight which, if taken seriously could in the long run improve the quality of services the state is able to deliver to the public.

The study also argues that nurturing the well-being of employees is beneficial to the organisation because the employees are a building block of service delivery. The call centre agents at the public sector call centre form part of the 'hand' which delivers the service which the public expects from the state.

The purpose of the study is to help improve the lives of public servants in the public sector and the lives of South Africans from a service delivery point of view. This study also notes and is conscious of the fact that the improvement of service delivery still does not manage to solve all of the problems that South Africans may have with the state.

1.2) City of Johannesburg: A Brief Background



(Picture of Johannesburg, taken from City of Johannesburg website [www. joburg.org.za](http://www.joburg.org.za))

According to Smith (2013) the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality is the metropolitan municipality which manages the local governance of Johannesburg, South Africa. The municipality is split into several branches and departments so as to speed up the rate at which services are delivered to the city. In Johannesburg the poor mainly reside in the southern suburbs or on the peripheries of the far north, whilst the middle class is largely found in the central and northern suburbs of Johannesburg, making Johannesburg a divided city.

The City of Johannesburg is responsible for providing residents of the city with water, electricity, garbage collection services, billing services and customer services amongst others and as such the city has to find ways to effectively provide these services to the public. The establishment of call centres in the public service sector is one of the ways in which the local government attempted to improve service delivery in the city.

1.2.2) The introduction of call centres into the municipality

According to Magoqwana and Matatu (2012) and Magoqwana (2015) post-1994 the Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality became the first municipality, with the encouragement of the World Bank, to introduce New Public Management (NPM) into the realm of public administration. The Egoli 2002 strategy was the outcome of a partnership between the Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality and the World Bank. The partnership has been referred to as being a 'single neo-liberal approach'. The partnership advocated for scaling down, consistent productivity, as well as running public administration in the same way that business administration is run. In restructuring Johannesburg, the World Bank sought to promote privatisation and commercialisation of basic services throughout municipalities in the country (Magoqwana, 2015).

Call centres in the public sector were inspired by the neoliberal concept of the sovereign customer. NPM introduced private sector managerial styles of business operation, which place emphasis on flexibility, performance management systems and privatisation, into the public sector. The call centres are managed in the same way that the private sector manages its affairs and operations and as such the call centres reflect the influence of NPM.

1.2.2.1) Programme Phakama

According to City of Johannesburg (2010) the City was faced with a number of challenges. The arrangement comprised of various billing systems, which hardly engaged with one another. The implementation of the SAP programme began on the 16th of November 2009 and the initiative was implemented in phases as opposed to a "big bang" and this was done with the aim of minimising undesired glitches and any possible negative outcomes. The first and second phases were implemented between February and April and they were focused

on all City regions. Phases three and four concentrated on municipal-owned entities, namely City Power, Joburg Water, Johannesburg Roads Agency, Metrobus and Pikitup.

Programme Phakama allowed Johannesburg to change from the old systems that the city was using, and begin to utilise an integrated Systems, Applications and Products (SAP) platform. The SAP platform improved the way the city was handling the areas of metered services, billing, collections, customers' service options and payment process. Customers were now able to get information about their utility bills from one customer contact centre instead of different municipal entities. All accounts were centralised into one billing database and a single system was used. The database now included customer details such as property matching, tariffs, identity numbers, postal addresses, credit control data and property sizes (City of Johannesburg, 2010).

The City established a unified call centre in the year 2010 which amalgamated all of the City's municipal entities in one location so as to create a "one-stop shop". The justification for the establishment of this call centre was so that the City of Johannesburg would be in a position to provide its customers with "consistent and professional service" (City of Johannesburg, 2010).

Citizens contact this public sector call centre according to City of Johannesburg (2013) in order to resolve whatever queries they may have with the municipality. This study focuses on one department of the call centre so as to get a sense of what is happening internally. This provides a better understanding of the public servants' work experiences and how they are connected to service delivery.

According to City of Johannesburg (2013) the City aimed to create a single point of telephonic contact for all citizens in Johannesburg. The contact centre deals with all queries, suggestions, comments and complaints that Johannesburg residents may have. The call centre operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 365 days a year on 0860 56 28 74 or 0860-JOBURG. All calls are recorded for both training and coaching purposes.

When a customer calls Joburg Connect according to City of Johannesburg (2013) they are able to check their account balance, request that a current statement be sent via e-mail, confirm one's contact details such as postal address, telephone numbers and e-mail

address. Customers can also get their meter readings, enquire about payment related queries as well as deposit information.

City of Johannesburg (2013) states that the call centre was established so that it could function as the main delivery channel for customer service. The City of Johannesburg intended to demonstrate its commitment to look after its staff and customers through establishing a call centre. It also sought out to demonstrate its willingness to deliver the service that customers expect from the City. The City of Johannesburg's functions were said to be similar to those performed by a call centre, however they were fragmented. The single call centre aimed to centralise and formalise those functions into a sophisticated call centre which strived for service performance and organisational efficiency.

1.2.2.2) The advantages of establishing a call centre for the City

According to the City, the advantages of a call centre include having one number which serves everyone and improves service delivery. Customer queries and complaints are properly and promptly addressed, and action is taken to solve queries and eliminate public complaints. A more functional call-handling process has been put into place, with target response times. The call centre ensures that standards are set for its key activities which can then be measured. Plans have been put in place to achieve and maintain targets. City of Johannesburg (2013) states that an efficient process has been developed to manage call centre internal relationships with other business areas and to identify, review and resolve issues as they arise. It enables forecasting and business planning to manage the effect of activity on the operations.

1.3) Defining the Problem Statement

According to Magoqwana (2015) the City of Johannesburg is "an organisation that is characterised by a culture of low commitment, low customer satisfaction levels, high political interference in administration and low trust which is accompanied by increasing forms of bureaucratic control".

The study proposes that the above-mentioned issues are to some extent directly linked to the working conditions of the City's call centre employees. This study is about finding out what kind of conditions the employees of the call centre are working under. Ultimately the

study wishes to argue that poor service delivery is to some extent connected to the poor working conditions of the public servants. Looking at service delivery is merely a means to an end. The question behind this was what is it about the CRAs' working conditions that are undermining the end goal that is service delivery? This question is guided by the assumption that when employees have decent working conditions it gives them a chance to do their job to the best of their ability. In the end the study found that there were internal factors at play which affected service delivery to a much greater extent than working conditions, these internal factors will be revealed and discussed in chapter 4.

1.4) Rationale

This study wishes to contribute to the literature by drawing out the connections between the public sector call centre's working conditions and service delivery. This study was about how an organisation or company impacts on service delivery through the work environment that it provides for its employees. The study uses a public sector call centre as a large-scale demonstration of how working conditions can impact society at large. This study is based on the assumption that satisfied employees are a pillar of service delivery.

1.5) Objectives of the Study

This study aims to highlight the importance of working conditions when it comes to helping and actually ensuring that organisations and companies achieve their goals and function at their optimum best. Employees can be said to be the heart of an organisation and in order for things to get done the 'heart' needs to function at its optimum best and have an environment which allows it to thrive, because when the heart stops working so too does the rest of the body. This study wishes to reiterate the importance of employees and how they need to be treated well not only because it is the right thing to do but also because it can result in higher levels of productivity. Employees have the agency to control the organisation's rate of service delivery, on a daily basis and ultimately how successful and efficient the organisation is and can be.

Working conditions affect various areas of the organisation including reputation so it is actually in the organisation's best interest to provide the most decent working conditions it possibly can for its employees. The study aims to be a tool which firstly helps organisations

to recognise the importance of decent working conditions and secondly demonstrate how working conditions are intricately connected to service delivery.

1.6) Research Question

“What is the connection between the public sector call centre’s working conditions and service delivery?”

This study wishes to investigate the relationship or connection between the call centre’s working conditions and service delivery and in the end it argues that working conditions can affect service delivery either positively or negatively depending on what kind of working conditions the public sector call centre provides its employees.

The study wishes to, through the case of the public sector call centre, discover how the working conditions of the call centre affect its ability to provide a good service to the residents of Johannesburg. This study seeks to get an in-depth look into the way that the public sector call centre is run and how its working conditions affect the employees and service delivery.

1.7) Definitions of the study’s Key Concepts

1.7.1) Call centre

A call centre is a dedicated operation, where the employees use computers and receive inbound phone calls or they make outbound phone calls. The calls are processed and controlled by an Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) or a predictive dialling system. Public sector call centres are usually small and in-house and they deal with customer care services. Whether a call centre is in-house or outsourced, private or public, they use scripts and standardised ways of responding to the customer, and this distinguishes call centre work from other secretarial jobs (Taylor and Bain, 1999; Magoqwana, 2015).

1.7.2) Service sector labour process

Traditional models of the labour process have been developed mainly out of a study of industrial manufacturing workplaces. The labour process theory’s binary model of conflict

had to be reconsidered in the case of analysing interactive service work. The labour process theory had to be modified due to the emergence of interactive service work, an increased emphasis in managerial strategy on front-line workers. Labour process theory also had to consider the changing dynamic which arose from the role of the customer as a third party in the labour process (Omar, 2001: i).

Call centre work qualifies as an interactive form of service work and as such it cannot be placed in the same category as assembly line manufacturing and its accompanying labour processes and the type of management and control strategies which are associated with Fordist, assembly-line manufacturing are not compatible with managing service interactions. There are certain features which make interactive work distinct from assembly-line manufacturing work and these features will be discussed in chapter 2 (Leidner, 1996; Omar, 2005).

1.7.3) Emotional Labour and Affective Labour

Emotional labour refers to 'the management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display' (Hochschild, 1983:7) or the work of trying to feel the right feeling for the job (Hochschild, 1990: 118).

Hardt (1999) describes affective labour as being a direct product of communities and collective subjectivities. He proposes that affective labour is one facet of what he terms 'immaterial labour' and that affective labour is in a more dominant position as opposed to the other forms of labour within the global capitalist economy.

Hardt (1999) views the service sectors of the economy as being rich in productive communication and because the production of services does not result in a material or durable good this can be understood as being immaterial labour. Immaterial labour is labour which results in the production of an intangible good, such as a service, knowledge or communication.

1.7.4) Working Conditions

Working conditions are at the core of paid work and employment relationships. Working conditions cover a broad range of topics and issues from working time (hours of work, rest

periods and work schedules) remuneration as well as the physical conditions and mental demands that exist in the workplace (International Labour Organisation, 2017).

1.7.5) New Public Management

New Public Management refers to the shift in modes of public management towards “accountingization”. New Public Management does away with the differences between the public and private sector. The emphasis is shifted from process accountability towards a greater element of accountability in terms of results. Accounting is very crucial in New Public Management as it reflects trust in the market and private business methods. New Public Management is linked to economic rationalism and is advocated for by “econocrats” and “accountocrats” in high public office positions (Hood, 1995).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1) The Service Sector

Castells (1996) argues that there has been a shift worldwide towards an information economy, which is an economy which is dominated by networks and competition over knowledge and innovation. During the industrial era the economy was dominated by mass production, and then the economy moved to being a service economy where knowledge and knowledge workers become a key source of productivity.

According to Hochschild (1983) there are two groups of knowledge workers. The first group consists of employees who are highly skilled and who are at the centre of the computer, telecommunications and biotechnology industries. The second group is where the most of the knowledge employees are situated and they engage in routine work in the service sector. These are jobs where face-to-face and voice-to-voice interaction is an imperative part of the job such as sales personnel and 'front-line workers' such as receptionists. Hochschild (1983) describes this form of work as emotional labour which is basically a deliberate manipulation of the employees so that they either display feelings (such as smiling) or elicit particular feelings in others (such as relaxing).

According to Frenkel et al. (1999) front-line employees who are involved in people-oriented tasks are difficult to routinise in comparison to assembly-line production employees, who interact with inanimate objects. Front-line employees according to Taylor (1999) require a certain level of discretion or autonomy and this makes them far more difficult to control directly. Leidner (1996) also points out how the relationship between employer and employee ceases to be a two-way interaction, in service work because there is a third party, the customer and this is the relationship which introduces emotional labour into the equation.

MacDonald and Sirianni (1996) argue that the system of control which management can exert over labour in the service sector is different to the one found in mass production. The presence of the third party in service work influences the labour process and alters the relations between customers, managers and employees.

2.2) Distinctive Features of Interactive Service Work: The role of the customer, emotional labour, control and surveillance and Taylorism in managing service work

2.2.1) The role of the customer

D' Cruz and Noronha (2008) argue that because front-line service employees are located at the customer-organisation interface and represent the organisation to customers, the manner in which these employees conduct themselves becomes crucial

According to Omar (2005:271) in interactive service work both the employees and customers can resist management's selected strategies for dictating how work should be done. Customers can exercise control over both employees and management. The 'product' which is produced in interactive service work is a relationship. This relationship by definition is intangible and it is produced and consumed simultaneously.

2.2.2) Emotional Labour

The emergence of interactive service work brought along with it a then new type of work demand known as emotional labour. Emotional labour refers to displaying organisationally desirable emotions during service transactions between service sector employees and customers. The aim is to elicit a pleasant and positive state of mind in a customer so that the perceived quality of service and customer satisfaction are enhanced leaving the customer with an overall favourable impression of the business which provided them with a particular service (D' Cruz and Noronha, 2008).

Omar (2005:272) states that emotional labour is governed by 'feeling rules'- this refers to mechanisms which are put in place by management so as to dictate to their employees how they ought to conduct themselves and which feelings to express whenever they engage with customers. Hochschild (1986:28) who was the first to identify emotional labour demonstrated through this concept just how deep institutions can go into an individual's life while maintaining that they honour the right of employees to privacy.

According to Omar (2005: 272) the concept of emotional labour initially referred strictly to interactive service work which involved face-to-face contact, its scope has since been expanded to refer to the expected behaviours of telephone agents in call centres. These

behaviours include ensuring a friendly tone of voice, expressing empathy with customers as well as maintaining composure as an agent even when customers become abusive.

According to Hochschild (1983) jobs which require emotional labour involve several elements. The work involves direct contact with customers this can take the form of either face-to-face or voice-to-voice; the employee is expected to elicit an emotional state in the customer; and the manager or employer has the opportunity and power to exert some control over the emotional expressions of the employees. According to Hochschild (1983; Taylor, 1999) 'the emotional style of offering the service becomes a part of the service itself'.

Hardt (1999) describes affective labour as being a direct product of communities and collective subjectivities. He proposes that affective labour is one facet of what he terms 'immaterial labour' and that affective labour is in a more dominant position as opposed to the other forms of labour within the global capitalist economy. Hardt (1999) views the service sectors of the economy as being rich in productive communication and because the production of services does not result in a material or durable good this can be understood as being immaterial labour. Immaterial labour is labour which results in the production of an intangible good, such as a service, knowledge or communication.

2.2.3) Control and surveillance

The issue of control and surveillance when it comes to interactive service work is greatly debated in that literature is divided on the issue of control and surveillance. Some literature has concluded that constant supervision can result in inefficiency and ruin the product which is the service relationship. According to Omar (2005) and Taylor (1999) literature on quality management in interactive service work suggests that the delivery of high quality customer service can only be attained through the encouragement of employees having the freedom to be spontaneous, responsive and autonomous in their interactions with customers. Fernie and Metcalfe (1997) have labelled call centres as 'electronic panopticons' because management is said to exert extensive control over the employees taking away room for resistance.

According to Omar (2005: 274) there are studies which do not support the application of a Foucaultian perspective to issues around the labour process because factories and offices are vastly different to institutions such as prisons and asylums. Other studies bring to the fore the limitations of management's control as some labour process theorists have argued that employee autonomy is inherent in the labour process and as such management cannot prescribe how every single interaction ought to pan out.

2.2.4) Assembly-line principles in interactive service work

According to Omar (2005: 274) there is some contestation within the literature around the appropriateness of applying Taylorism managerial strategies in the context of interactive service work. Some studies argue that service productivity can be maximised by simply extending industrial methods of production as well as assessment to service work settings (Omar, 2005: 274).

According to Omar (2005) call centres display a specific form of Taylorism in which technical control and direct supervision combine in new ways. According to Taylor and Bain (1999: 108) studies demonstrate that the call centre labour process is distinctive. In the call centre labour process information and communication technology 'both structures the labour process and generates the extreme levels of surveillance, monitoring and speed-up which are manifest in the call centre'. Omar (2005) states that it should be noted, though that the sophisticated technological capabilities do not render direct human supervision obsolete (Omar, 2005: 275).

2.3) Labour process theory and the rise of service work

Harry Braverman's thesis in *Labour and Monopoly Capital* (1974) has had an enormous impact on theoretical debates around the labour process on the deskilling of labour under the combined effects of modern management and new styles of mechanisation and automation. According to Edwards (1979) Braverman's analysis is based on the conceptualisation of change as a unilinear trend and he endorses one model of management as universal. Friedman (1977) critiques Braverman's analysis on the basis of the gaps in his analysis, such as the neglect of worker resistance, while Burawoy (1979)

focuses his critique of Braverman on the issue of worker subjectivity in the labour process as well as the role of the state.

Omar (2001: i) states that traditional models of labour processes have been developed predominantly out of a study of industrial manufacturing workplaces. The labour process theory's binary model of conflict needed to be reconsidered when it came to analysing interactive service work. Labour process theory had to take into account the emergence of interactive service work, an increased emphasis in managerial strategy on front-line workers and finally it also had to consider the changing dynamic which arose from the role of the customer as a third party in the labour process.

Omar (2001) finds that the dominant view of employees in the service sector as being autonomous and empowered is somewhat a misrepresentation of their reality. Management employed strategies which involved extensive "McDonaldisation" in that the interactive aspects of the job have been routinized and standardised while non-interactive parts of the job have been automated.

2.4) Interactive Service Work: Call Centres as an illustration

2.4.1) What is a call centre?

According to Taylor and Bain (1999) a call centre is a dedicated operation in which computer-utilising employees receive inbound or make outbound-telephone calls. The calls are processed and controlled by an automatic call distribution or a predictive dialling system. According to Magoqwana (2015:16) public sector call centres are predominately small and in-house and they deal with customer care services. Irrespective of whether a call centre is in-house or outsourced, private or public, they make use of scripts and standardised ways of responding to the customer, making this kind of work distinct from other secretarial jobs.

2.4.2) International Call centre industry

Bain et al (2002) write about how even though telephones have been combined with VDU technologies, not all call centres have the same work organisation structure. In the end Bain et al (2002) conclude that contrary to what the optimistic literature says about call centres,

they will not in time come to resemble 'knowledge work'. Bain et al (2002) argue against the notion that the nature of call centre work is a regime of all-encompassing electronic surveillance. The aim of this study is basically to stress that work organisation in call centres is far from being uniform.

Bain et al (2002) differentiate between call centre work which is primarily transactional, brief and extremely repetitive and call centre work which emphasizes quality and empathy and is more relational in nature. They argue that call centre workers do not fit the stereotype image of the technologically trapped, regimented front-line employee; however this does not mean that the dominant experience is not routinised and repetitive work.

Taylor and Bain (1999) analyse the reality of the call centre labour process along with its related employment relations issues. They look into the application of Foucauldian 'electronic panopticon' perspectives and they also make reference to the concept of emotional labour. Taylor and Bain (1999) attempt to provide an analysis of the labour process which captures the nuances of both the way in which work is organised and the way in which employees experience it. The authors argue that call centre management faces various problems when it comes to motivation and commitment, labour turnover, effectiveness of supervision and the delivery of quality and quantity performance and they also challenge the view that electronic surveillance diminishes the possibility of employees' ability to come up with strategies of resistance.

2.5) The South African Call Centre Industry- its Labour Process and Context

The work of Babalwa Magoqwana (2015) is an integral part of this study and it is particularly relevant to this study because her work is also based on the public sector call centre and its employees. The study looks at the South African call centre industry and aims to contextualise the call centre's labour process. She studies the call centre labour process through a study of work and the employee's experiences at Joburg Connect.

Magoqwana (2015) strives to contextualise the public sector call centre labour process and she uses a local government call centre as her case study. She aims to demonstrate that the public sector call centre labour process must be considered within its particular socio-political context rather than using mass production or mass bureaucratic approaches to

better understand the South African public sector call centres. She argues that analysing public sector call centres along economic lines does not provide us with a full picture.

The author uses The City of Johannesburg call centre to investigate the call centre labour process. She focuses on how work is organised and experienced by the call centre agents and how employee relations are managed. She uses Labour Process Theory to argue that the labour process debate needs to be contextualised within the socio-political landscape of work in South Africa. She argues that analysing public sector call centres along economic lines is essentially inadequate and demonstrates that the public sector call centre labour process is politically charged through identifying that literature does not focus on the politicised nature of public sector call centres because of the de-contextualised nature of these call centres.

She views the public sector call centre labour process as multi-layered, contradictory and complex. This is due to the fact that public sector call centre employees occupy various roles such as being citizens, customers, community members and service providers who come from a politicised community environment. She argues that the public sector call centre is largely influenced by political authority when it comes to issues related to employment relations and work organisation.

Magoqwana (2015) concludes that the City of Johannesburg seems to resemble an organisation with low-commitment culture, low customer satisfaction levels, high political interference in administration and low trust matched with increasing forms of bureaucratic control. She points out that the City of Johannesburg call centre labour process is shaped by the socio-economic and political climate of the city. This stems from the call centre's role as the public face of service delivery aiming to open and centralise access to basic service provision.

The author points out that contrary to popular belief call centre agents in City of Johannesburg are young and tend to have been previously employed in private sector call centres as opposed to being previously unemployed. The call centre agents hold post-matric diplomas and some have degrees. Their decision to shift from working in the private sector to the public sector speaks to the fact that there are still benefits to working for the state.

She argues that the Marxist Labour Process theory provides a useful explanation with regards to why the working conditions within a neoliberal state are what they are because the objective labour process conditions continue to shape the subjective experiences of work within local government. She declares that in as much as the labour process perspective provides tools for interpretation and analysing the mass production process it is inadequate when it comes to making sense of the complex and dynamic environment of public sector call centres. In public sector call centres the emphasis is on the political hierarchy shaping work organisations through policies and bureaucratic forms of control.

The author reiterates that the public sector call centre labour process needs to be considered within its particular socio-political context as opposed to simply slotting it into mass production or mass bureaucratic approaches. Public sector call centres are developed from within the bureaucratic administration of the local government and they are part of the goal to centralise and modernise government service delivery. The emphasis moves from cost cutting and efficiency as is the case in private sector call centres to centralisation of access and making government information accessible to all citizens.

She argues that because efficiency in public offices depends on the smooth operation of the bureaucracy and information management due to the poor administration that South Africa is faced with it demands that the labour process be linked to the administration of the service delivery channels. She argues that the poor and insecure nature of call centre jobs should not overshadow their potential to provide a source of income for those who like 'office jobs' without qualifications.

The author states that the study does not deny the degraded working conditions of call centre work in general but the robotic characterisation of call centres must acknowledge the opportunities provided by the security in government call centres. She argues that because of this government call centres cannot be compared to sweatshops in a South African context where Black people and women mainly continue to occupy precarious and dehumanising jobs. Local government call centre jobs security and competitive salaries. She argues that despite the precariousness of call centre work, the benefits within the state sector such as worker routine, access to credit and security outweigh the drudgery of dirty work in most service employment which traditionally employs Black women.

The study is going to be studying a public sector call centre, therefore it is important to understand the government's public administration philosophy so as to get a better understanding of why the public sector call centre is run the way that it is. It was previously mentioned that the Johannesburg Municipality was one of the first municipalities to adopt the New Public Management public administration paradigm with help from the World Bank. The government's public administration paradigm also gives us an idea of how the employees will be treated and how their working conditions will be.

2.6) New Public Management

Hood (1995) writes about how the 1980s brought about a move towards New Public Management (NPM) in various Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. He argues that despite the adoption of a new global paradigm in public management there was variation in the extent to which OECD countries adopted NPM during the 1980s. This shift was characterised by a change in modes of public management towards "accountingization". This development can be viewed as being part of a broader shift in received doctrines of public accountability and public administration.

According to Hood (1995) the accountability paradigm of progressive public administration stresses two basic management doctrines. The first one encourages the public sector to be sharply distinct from the private sector with regards to: continuity, ethos, methods of conducting business, organisational design, people, rewards and finally career structure.

Hood (1995) argues that NPM does away with the differences between the public and private sector. The emphasis is shifted from process accountability towards a greater element of accountability in terms of results. Accounting is an integral part of NPM as it reflects trust in the market and private business methods. NPM is linked to economic rationalism and is advocated for by "econocrats" and "accountocrats" in high public office positions.

2.7) Public call centres: A product of New Public Management

According to Magoqwana and Matatu (2012: 68) call centres are not uniform. There are differences in each call centre with regards to industrial sector, size, call complexity, market and cycle time, the nature of operations whether they are inbound, outbound or both, their

management style and priorities, the configuration of technological integration of telephones and computers, and the effectiveness of representative institutions – including trade unions.

Magoqwana and Matatu (2012: 68) state that the most significant differences in call centres are related to work organisation and call complexity, especially the distinctions that arise from an emphasis on, respectively, quantity or quality. The authors state that these elements are not necessarily exclusive and both may exist at a call centre. Call centres in the public sector were inspired by the neoliberal concept of the sovereign customer. They reflect the influence of New Public Management which introduced private sector managerial styles of business operation, which emphasise flexibility, performance management systems and privatisation, in the public sector.

Magoqwana and Matatu (2012:72) write that call centres are a recent phenomenon in South African municipalities. Their introduction was motivated by the Government's quest for a more customer-centred service delivery plan in compliance with the Batho Pele ("People first") framework outlined in the 1998 White Paper on Local Government (Batho Pele, 2000). Since the introduction of Batho Pele, government philosophy in public administration shifted, giving centre stage to the recipients of services as customers.

According to Magoqwana and Matatu (2012:72) restructuring using NPM served the purpose of introducing private sector business principles into both the management and delivery of public services. Performance management systems, for example, have become mandatory for municipalities, under arrangements set out in various pieces of legislation. These systems are viewed as a means through which municipalities can improve organisational and individual performance to enhance service delivery, and also as a means of promoting a responsive and performance based culture.

According to Magoqwana and Matatu (2012:72) and Magoqwana (2015:4) the Municipal Systems Act (2000) stipulates that local municipalities should treat their residents as consumers. Chapter 6 of the Act states that the "municipality must facilitate a culture of public service and accountability amongst staff ... [and] give members of the local municipality full and accurate information about the level and standard of the municipal services they are entitled to receive". Call centres were used to bring the Batho Pele

principle of access to information and services for “customers” to life. It is worth noting that call centres serve a different purpose from that of customer care centres.

Magoqwana and Matatu (2012:72) and Magoqwana (2015:4) state that the call centre enables residents from anywhere to call in with their queries and complaints, whereas the customer care centres are walk-in centres located in different parts of the municipality to offer services that cannot be resolved over the phone, for example rectifying incorrect bills. Within most municipalities, call centres are designed to answer queries from citizens about utilities accounts, water bills, emergency services, natural disasters, service cut-offs and so forth, using an automatic call distributor (ACD) and interactive voice response (IVR).

According to Magoqwana and Matatu (2012:72) and Magoqwana (2015:4) the Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality, organisational and structural transformation has resulted in the amalgamation of a network of helpdesks into a fully-fledged call centre. This shift was accompanied by expectations that these public call centres would have better working conditions and be less “alienating” than if outsourced private operating call centres had been used.

Magoqwana and Matatu (2012) argue that the introduction of call centres in the public service was intended to bridge the digital gap and encourage active citizenship: arguably, they play a role in improving social inclusion by redressing citizen exclusion from information and services, and foster participatory democracy by encouraging citizens to exercise influence on the provision of services. According to Haque (2001: 69) the idea of a citizen as “customer” should not just be a recipient of service but should be able to participate in policy formulation. However, the concept of customer in the public sector inherently excludes individuals who are deemed unable to pay for services, particularly in developing countries.

2.8) Background of City of Johannesburg call centre

According to Magoqwana (2015:116) the handling of calls has gone through various changes with regards to organisation, structure and process. The City of Johannesburg call centre, like many public sector call centres, was initially a help desk with each department having its own help desk assistant. As it stands, Joburg Connect is the city’s contact centre for all city

enquiries and complaints. It operates around the clock, seven days a week and 365 days a year. Its main purpose is to centralise access for customers and reduce the list of numbers customers need to use before being assisted. This call centre is divided into two sections: Emergency Connect and Revenue Connect.

Magoqwana (2015: 117) states that Joburg Connect was designed to attend to queries and complaints in a standard fashion through the integrated customer relations management technologies. It was now possible for the municipality to measure and quantify different kinds of complaints about their services. This was intended to improve customer satisfaction and ultimately change poor customer perceptions about the city. Call centre information was to contribute to the municipality business planning processes by quantifying the number of complaints about a certain subject, resulting in a 'responsive' municipality.

Magoqwana (2015: 120) states that Joburg Connect is an amalgamation of the City's entities' (such as Joburg Water, Pickitup and City Power) call centres under one roof. This reintegration of the revenue and retail services of the utilities back to the City forms part of the challenges faced by call centre agents after Programme Phakama was implemented. The main objective of Programme Phakama was to create one revenue management system operated with a single customer and revenue view.

Magoqwana (2015: 120) states that the Phakama Strategic plan was based on four principles: one billing database system; alignments of IT strategies (city and utilities); centralised customer database, and centralised customer practice. Justification for this included the idea that the single customer value chain approach included "City of Johannesburg was a brand and utilities a product" (City of Johannesburg, 2005a: 2) meaning the service delivery failure of the utility ultimately means a City of Johannesburg failure.

Magoqwana (2015) states that the labour process in the Joburg Connect call centre is located within the revenue and customer management services. The call centre labour process is at the heart of the billing and revenue management system of the City, which means that any delays and perceived inefficiencies of this call centre affects the city's budget. This stems from the restructuring which occurred in the local government which placed emphasis on metropolitan municipalities having to source 80 per cent of their revenue from their own services.

The picture that emerges from this review of the literature is that the service sector emerged out of the service economy where knowledge and knowledge workers become a key source of productivity. The literature speaks to the features which make service work distinctive to assembly line work and how service work has its own unique labour process. The literature discusses front-line employees and how their work requires them to engage in emotional labour. Call centres are defined as they are the basis of and subject matter of the study. The international call centre industry is discussed so that we can get a global sense of call centres before coming down and contextualising them in the South African context.

A discussion on New Public Management is included because the study is based on a public sector call centre and the New Public Management model is the framework under which the country's public administration is run. Public call centres are said to be a product of New Public Management. A background of the City of Johannesburg is provided so as to introduce the municipality briefly and state how and why the public sector call centre was established.

3) Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The research for this study was undertaken between November 2017 and January 2018. Interviews were conducted for the purposes of answering the research question of the study. The interviews were conducted in various locations which were chosen by the participants of the study to suit their availability.

Research was conducted on employees who interact directly with customers. Research activities (interviews and non-participant observation) were conducted with call centre agents or customer relations agents (CRA) from the public sector call centre agents in Gauteng, Johannesburg. Operations managers (supervisors) from the public sector call centre were also interviewed.

The research focuses on the work of customer relations agents and operations managers from a department of the public sector call centre. The customer relations agents' work in a large open plan office and each cubicle is equipped with a headset and a computer. The customer relations agents push a button on the computer when they wish to receive a call. Engaging with customers usually involves keeping customers on the line while they access information from the computer. At the call centre the customer relations agents are divided into teams each team is managed by one supervisor.

3.2) Gaining Access

I am familiar with one of the employees from the public sector call centre and through her help I was able to gain access to the employees who ended up being participants in the study. I conducted the interviews outside of the public sector call centre premises and I met with the interviewees at a time and location of their discretion.

3.3) Research Design

The study made use of the Qualitative research approach. This is because the research question required in-depth responses which would help me discover and better understand how the working conditions of employees affect service delivery. Although the findings generated from the qualitative data can often be extended to people with characteristics

similar to those in the study population, gaining a rich and complex understanding of a social context or phenomenon will take preference over eliciting data which can be generalised to other populations.

3.3.1) Research Methods

Data for this study was gathered using semi-structured interviews as well as document analysis.

3.3.1.1) Semi-structured Interview

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty participants, sixteen of the participants were customer relations agents and the remaining four were supervisors at the call centre. The selection of participants was based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study. The participants of the study simply needed to be employees at the call centre, it did not matter how long they had worked there or what their gender was.

Each participant was interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire which had open-ended questions. The questionnaire covered the following areas:

1. Demographic Information
2. Employment Information
3. Call Centre Labour Process
4. Working Conditions
5. Employee Well-being

3.3.1.2) Document Analysis

The study made use of document analysis as the City has a rich online archive of information regarding the City and its history and so forth, so the study includes information from the City's online archive on its website.

Interviews took on average about an hour and they were conducted outside of the call centre at venues which were chosen by the participants. The interviews were conducted in English, Xhosa and Zulu this happened naturally as the participants responded in the language they felt most comfortable responding in.

3.3.2) Sampling and Sample size

The study made use of purposive sampling and it included 20 participants. The study has no age or gender restrictions. The study included participants who currently worked at the public sector call centre as either an agent or supervisor.

3.3.3) Data Collection Methods

The required data for the study was collected using in-depth interviews and non-participant observation. Each research method in Qualitative research is aimed at obtaining a specific type of data. Interviews come in different forms; the study made use of the semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are ideal for collecting data on individuals' personal histories, perspectives and experiences, especially when it comes to sensitive topics.

Semi-structured interviews consisted of pre-determined questions with a fixed order and the given responses were open-ended and so they allowed me as a researcher to add further questions in case clarification and elaboration was needed. The semi-structured interviews allowed for in-depth, fluid conversation with a specific and clear purpose; the interviews were flexible, interactive and reflexive in nature. This method of data gathering is participant centred because it seeks to explore, describe, understand and explain the perspective and experience of the research participants, from their point of view.

3.3.4) Discussion and evaluation of the research methods

The research adopted a case study approach which was meant to provide some descriptive material which would be open to interpretation in this research report. The case study approach made room for the study to both recognise and embrace the complexity and embeddedness of the results which the study yielded. The study was conducted with various assumptions in mind however upon conducting the research unexpected details were discovered which ended up turning the research question on its head along with the aims of the study. The interviews revealed that there was a far more nuanced reality which was at play than the study could than fathomed at the onset and the answers were not clear-cut.

The interviews yielded free and fruitful conversation between myself and the participants, my age did have an impact though on how the participants related to me and engaged with me. I was constantly aware of myself and my age and that to a certain extent dictated how the conversation went and there were certain questions which I could not ask such as how much they earn because that question has a disrespectful undertone attached to it and it would have derailed the rest of the interview.

Chapter 4: Public Sector Call Centre Management: Is External Management Too External?

4.1) Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the argument that even though the literature views call centres as typically being highly regulated and having heavy management presence, the findings of this study tell a different story. The study finds that the call centre is characterised by a “lax and inconsistent” external management- the study differentiates between the call centre’s internal management and the external management which refers to the executives of the municipal government- which impacts on the call centre’s ability to provide the public with services. The chapter will begin with a discussion on control and surveillance in call centres according to the literature. The next section will look at why the public sector call centre was established.

The chapter will then move on to a discussion on the internal affairs of the call centre which will serve the purpose of making the case that the call centre’s internal management does not fit the criteria of typical management in call centres. The chapter also aims to establish that the issues which the call centre is said to be faced with according to the participants of the study are in varying degrees, related to external management and need to be addressed in order for the call centre’s service delivery rate to improve. The issues which are raised in this chapter by the participants speak to the existence of cracks in the call centre’s systemic organisational structure which end up undermining the employees’ ability to do their job, which is to help customers.

The reason that this particular call centre was chosen is because it is a rich source of various kinds of information. It is a call centre which already says a lot, it is involved in service delivery which continues to be a source of contention in the country. The call centre has employees who hold interesting information about the work and the inner workings of the City. The call centre enabled the study to say something broader about the City through a small scale study into one government department and the call centre starts to bring to light some of the hindrances which are undermining service delivery.

4.2) Control and surveillance in call centres according to the Literature

The literature is divided on the issue of control and surveillance. Some literature has concluded that constant supervision can result in inefficiency and ruin the service relationship. According to Omar (2005) literature on quality management in interactive service work suggests that the delivery of high quality customer service can only be attained through the encouragement of workers being spontaneous, responsive and autonomous in their interactions with customers (Taylor, 1999). Fernie and Metcalfe (1997) have labelled call centres as being electronic panopticons because management exerts extensive control over the employees leaving no room for resistance.

Taylor and Bain (1999: 108) suggest that call centres display a specific form of Taylorism where technical control and direct supervision come together in new ways. There is a distinctive call centre labour process, where the combination of information and communication technology 'both arranges the labour process and produces extreme levels of surveillance, monitoring and speed-up which are found in the context of the call centre'.

Call centres are commonly known for having workplaces which are highly standardised and routinised. In the public sector call centre which this study is based upon it came to light that the call centre is characterised by management inconsistency which affects the call centre's ability to deliver services to the public. The public sector call centre does not have a heavy presence of management or surveillance on the floor, contrary to what the literature says about call centres. The findings demonstrate that an organisational breakdown exists at the call centre; the purpose of this chapter will be to expound on this point through a discussion of the relationship between the employees and the call centre's management.

4.3) Evaluation of the public sector call centre

4.3.1) What was the purpose of establishing the public sector call centre?

The City of Johannesburg is responsible for providing residents of the city with water, electricity, garbage collection services, billing services and customer services amongst others and as such the city has to find ways to effectively provide these services to the

public. The establishment of call centres in the public service sector was one of the ways in which the local government attempted to improve service delivery in the city.

The City set out to create a single point of telephonic contact for all citizens in Johannesburg so as to restructure its service to its customers. The contact centre deals with all queries, suggestions, comments and complaints that Johannesburg residents may have. The call centre operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 365 days a year on 0860 56 28 74 or 0860-JOBURG. All calls are recorded for both training and coaching purposes (City of Johannesburg, 2013).

The call centre was established so that it could function as the main delivery channel for customer service. The City of Johannesburg aimed to demonstrate its commitment to and care for its staff and customers by establishing a call centre, it also sought out to demonstrate its readiness to provide customers with the services that they expect (City of Johannesburg, 2013).

The City of Johannesburg had functions which were similar to those performed by a call centre, however they were fragmented. The single call centre aimed to centralise and formalise those functions into a sophisticated call centre which strived for service performance and organisational efficiency (City of Johannesburg, 2013).

4.3.2) What do the Customer Relations Agents and Operations Managers of the power department of the public sector call centre do?

The Customer Relation Agents (CRA) are the frontline employees at the call centre which means that they interact directly with customers. Siphephelo*¹ who has worked at the call centre for a year and six months says “my job entails answering calls from customers, assisting with providing information relevant to the department and I report faults that require maintenance” (Interview, Siphephelo). Ayanda who has been a CRA at the call centre for the past two years describes her job as entailing “assisting customers with power supply related queries by logging calls, making follow-ups and escalating unresolved calls so that customers can be assisted” (Interview, Ayanda).

¹ * This study is anonymous so as to protect the identities of the participants and therefore pseudonyms have been used

Pamela who has been a CRA for the past twelve years describes her job as “attending to customer queries telephonically” (Interview, Pamela). June who has been a CRA for the last ten years says “my job is to report power outages and escalating to senior management” (Interview, June). Mvuseleli who has been a CRA for the past twelve years says “I deal with customer service; I take inbound calls and report power failures, streetlights and geyser problems” (Interview, Mvuseleli).

Lufuno who has been a CRA for the past year and eight months says her job is to “report and capture calls on forcelink or SAP (Systems, Application and Products) Systems” (Interview, Lufuno).

Forcelink TM is a company which offers the City with a system that consists of a web-based management console application which serves as a service desk, and mobile application. The system provides integration services to integrate to back office business applications such as Accounting systems, HR, Work Management, Plant Maintenance, Customer Information systems, GIS, etc. (Forcelink, 2016 accessed from www.forcelink.net).

Siphosethu who has been a CRA for the almost two years says “I take calls from the customers, make follow-ups and log their queries if necessary” (Interview, Siphosethu).

The agents are expected to answer inbound calls from Johannesburg residents pertaining to public services. The agents provide customers with information which is relevant to the power department. They report faults which require maintenance, make follow-ups on customer’s queries; they log customer’s queries, and report power outages.

The call centre also has operations managers who are also known as supervisors. Sandra who has been a supervisor at the call centre for the past three years says “my job entails overseeing the day-to-day provision of services at of the call centre. I need to make sure that all is running smoothly at the call centre” (Interview, Sandra). Vuyani who has been a supervisor at the call centre for the last six years says “my job is to monitor and analyse the call centre’s performance with regards to providing the public with services” (Interview, Vuyani).

Gert has been a supervisor at the call centre for the last three years, however he has been working at the organisation for the past twelve years says “I supervise the daily operations of the call centre, managing day-to-day activities, analysing statistics and reading and writing reports. I’m also responsible for creating rosters which is a list or plan which tells the agents when they are on duty or leave” (Interview, Gert).

The supervisors make sure that everything is running smoothly at the call centre. Whenever the CRAs may need assistance with dealing with a customer they call on the supervisors. The supervisors also create the working schedules (roster) of the CRAs and write progress reports about the call centre.

4.3.3) The internal factors at play in the call centre

4.3.3.1) The public sector call centre and the script

According to the City the call centre is meant to strive towards “service performance and organisational efficiency”. Through the establishment of the call centre customer queries and complaints are properly and promptly addressed, and action is taken to solve queries and eliminate public complaints. A more functional call-handling process has been put into place, with target response times. The call centre ensures that standards are set for its key activities which can then be measured. Plans have been put in place to achieve and maintain targets (City of Johannesburg, 2013).

Call centres according to the literature provide their employees with scripts which they are supposed to use when they communicate with customers. The usage of a script at the public sector call centre is significant for two reasons. Firstly, because the literature states that call centres generally make use of scripts. The second reason is that the usage of a script is connected to the degree of management presence at the call centre in the form of control and surveillance. The usage of a script at the call centre will form part of the argument that the call centre’s management is “lax and inconsistent”.

Siyasanga who has been employed as a CRA at the call centre for the past year and six months, responded by saying “no we do not make use of a script” (Interview, Siyasanga) when asked whether the agents make use of a script. It is worth noting that Siyasanga is a

fairly new employee who has recently joined the organisation and undergone training, which could suggest that the use of a script may not be something which is prioritised by the call centre's management.

Mnoneleli has occupied the position of CRA for a month and he says "no we do not use a script. (Interview, Mnoneleli). Pamela says "no, we do not use a script" (Interview, Pamela). Virginia who has been an employee of the call centre for the past five years says "yes we do use a script and it entails greeting, providing the name of the company and agents name and the department. So for example, I'll say good day mam thank you for calling the City of Johannesburg, my name is Virginia from the power department" (Interview, Virginia). Mvuseleli says "yes we do use a script, it entails greeting, name of agent and company, request to serve, polite manners and goodbye" (Interview, Mvuseleli).

Liyolo who has been a CRA at the call centre for the past five years simply says "there is no script" (Interview, Liyolo). Boitumelo who has been a CRA for the past three years says "no, we don't use a script" (Interview, Boitumelo). Siphephelo is an interesting case because he has been at the call centre for a year and six months just like Siyasanga however Siphephelo says "yes, we do use a script. It entails greeting the customer, giving your name, asking how you can assist and before the call is ended customer must be thanked for calling" (Interview, Siphephelo). When the question of the script was posed to the supervisors they agreed that no script was used at the call centre, Vuyani says "not at all" (Interview, Vuyani).

The responses of the CRAs demonstrate that the knowledge of the existence of a script is not based on how long one has worked at the call centre. The mixed responses could suggest that either the calls which the agents take are not always recorded or that no-one is really listening in on the calls to find out how the agents engage with customers and make sure that the agents address the customers in a uniform and particular manner. The public call centre defies the common stance of the literature that call centres generally make use of a script. The responses of the supervisors also lend themselves to the interpretation that management at the call centre is not as strict as expected, through the script issue we begin to see the "lax" approach of management.

4.3.3.2) The public sector call centre and service level targets

The City established the call centre in an effort to improve service delivery for the city in a meaningful way and just like any other company, the call centre has service level targets which help the call centre with providing services to the public.

The CRAs provided different answers and that suggests that perhaps management may not provide the employees with clear service level targets. Tshepiso who has been a CRA for the last four years says “yes we do have service targets. In a day we ought to take a minimum of 50 calls per agents when it is not very busy, when it is very busy each agent is expected to handle a minimum of 100 calls” (Interview, Tshepiso).

Patronella who has been a CRA for the seven years says “yes, we do have service targets we need to log a certain amount of calls a day” (Interview, Patronella). This response has no explicit number it just reveals a general knowledge about the service level targets. Virginia who has been a CRA for the past five years says “I honestly don’t know” (Interview, Virginia).

Lubabalo who has been a CRA for the five years says “yes we do have targets, we have to take 40-70 calls per 8-hour shift with 3 minutes talk time” (Interview, Lubabalo). Linda says “yes, calls taken, average talk time” (Interview, Linda). Siphosethu says “yes we have to take 60 calls per shift” (Interview, Siphosethu). Siphephelo says “yes, there are service targets, we need to take as many calls as possible, make calls as short as possible and have as little break as possible” (Interview, Siphephelo). Mvuseleli says “yes, the target is based on how many calls you take. So assisting as many people as possible providing the best service.” Ayanda says “not to my knowledge” (Interview, Mvuseleli).

The responses of the CRAs suggest that there may be a problem with the training that the organisation provides the employees because they all go through the same training however they have all somewhere they all seem to have different responses for a question which should for the most part have a standard response.

Supervisor Melikhaya who has been a supervisor at the call centre for the past ten years says “Yes, I don’t know what the exact targets are, I have never been given a definitive answer, an industry standard, which I have not been able to confirm of 80 calls or 60 calls has been mentioned to me. The industry it refers to has not been contextualized to me however” (Interview, Melikhaya). It is quite interesting to see that even an employee who

occupies a senior position cannot provide a definite answer for the issue of the call centre's service targets.

Melikhaya when asked how many calls the agents take per shift on average says "on average the agents answer between 400 and 1600 calls per eight- hour shift with an average of 700 calls depending on various factors such as the fact that operations are seasonal and a lack of implementation of disciplinary processes and procedures" (Interview, Melikhaya). Melikhaya's response differs substantially from the responses of the CRAs.

This may suggest that there is a disconnection in communication between the employees and management because the employees of the call centre seem to not have standard service level targets. This could also suggest that the training that the organisation provides the employees with does not provide the employees with clear guidelines on service level targets. "Taking as many calls as possible" is subjective can be interpreted in a number of ways, it means different things to different people. It poses a problem when employees are not clear on what is expected of them because they are then left to figure it out on their own and that has an impact on service delivery too.

Supervisor Gert mentioned at some point during the interview that he did not find the training which the organisation provided him with for the supervisor position worthwhile. Gert said "no, I did not find the training worthwhile because training regarding daily functions and duties was not provided, no training was provided regarding processes and procedures, probably because they are for all intents and purposes largely non-existent" (Interview, Gert). This response suggests that the training that the organisation provides the employees may be flawed in some way or another. The issue of training can be said to be a managerial issue and a training system which does not fully equip employees may in the end reflect poorly on management and affect the organisation as a whole.

4.3.3.3) The public sector call centre's issues according to the employees

CRA Ayanda who has been at the call centre for the past two years say "we have a shortage on the workforce side of things, like I think there aren't enough agents working here" (Interview, Ayanda). Virginia, who has been a CRA for five years, says "value chain issues and operational issues" (Interview, Virginia). Liyolo who has been a CRA for five years says

“queries taking too long to be resolved due to scarcity of technicians” (Interview, Liyolo). So far from the responses of the CRAs we see that it does not matter how long they have worked for the organisation they are each aware of some issue or issues that the call centre is faced with. Lubabalo who has been a CRA for five years reiterates the issue that Ayanda raised, he says “there is limited staff” (Interview, Lubabalo). The staffing issue based on Lubabalo and Ayanda’s responses seems to be something which has been an issue for the call centre for quite some time. This is evident from the fact that employees who have worked at the organisation for a fairly short period of time can mention the same issue that an employee who has been working at the call centre for quite some time.

Mvuseleli who has been an employee at the call centre for the past twelve years says “there is a shortage of staff, shortage of efficient technology and no proper current training of services” (Interview, Mvuseleli). The issue of a shortage of staff comes up again and it appears that the training that the employees receive is once-off and they do not get more training to keep them updated as the years go by and things evolve. Patronella who has been working at the call centre for seven years says “we lack timeous updates, calls are delayed and limited resources” (Interview, Patronella) June says “the system is often offline and the stakeholder being unavailable” (Interview, June). Tshepiso says “many outages” (Interview, Tshepiso).

Supervisor, Gert says “there are non-existent processes and procedures. Insufficient operational communication. Ineffective and dual IT systems for fault logging. Cumbersome IT regulations preventing quick resolutions of access issues. A lack of any form of scripting. Disciplinary processes and procedures are not implemented and enforced. Severe staff shortages in some call centres whilst others are overstaffed. Ineffective and inefficient staffing and rostering. Inconsistently applied conditions of service for persons performing the same work. Lack of service delivery on the ground that leads to escalating call volumes” (Interview, Gert).

The issues Gert and the CRAs raise can be said to all relate to external management. External management seems to leave it up to the call centre to run itself. There appear to be gaps in the communication lines between external management and the call centre. There are issues relating to the technology which is used at the call centre either it is out-dated or it is inefficient. Gert problematises the issue of a lack of scripting at the call centre.

External management is said to neglect implementing and enforcing processes and procedures. The internal management of the call centre is not as heavy-handed and present as the literature states about call centres. The call centre has a staffing problem which has been raised by a number of the employees and extends beyond just the agents to the technicians as well. A connection is established between a lack of service delivery on the ground and a rise in the number of calls that the call centre receives.

4.3.3.4) Employee stress as an indicator of external management pitfalls

Ayanda reiterates the limited staff issue when she mentions what she feels is most stressful about her job, she says “not having enough agents on the floor creates a burden for the few agents taking a lot of calls” (Interview, Ayanda). Lufuno says she finds “the high volume of calls which have gone over turnaround time unresolved” (Interview, Lufuno) to be the most stressful thing about her job. Linda says “delays in conflict restorations from third party partners” (Interview, Linda). Lufuno and Linda’s response reveals that there are external role players which the call centre works with and who form part of the chain of service delivery.

Mnoneleli says he finds “the lack of commitment and interest from management” to be the most stressful thing about his job” (Mnoneleli, Interview). Mnoneleli’s response speaks to the management style of the call centre and how its presence is almost invisible at the call centre. It does not seem to engage or support the call centre in the manner that management is supposed to and in the manner that the literature postulates.

Boitumelo says “not having enough feedback regarding customer’s issues” (Boitumelo, Interview) is the most stressful aspect of her work. This indicates some form of breakdown in communication between the CRAs and the technicians who are supposed to attend to the customer’s power-related queries. Siphephelo says “it’s very busy. We usually deal with unsatisfied customers and many repeat calls. It is so stressful speaking to customers with long outstanding issue. They are angry, mean, and vulgar and call to fight not for assistance” (Interview, Siphephelo). Siphosethu says he feels most stressed at work “when many calls are not attended in time” (Interview, Siphosethu).

This speaks again to the issue of the technicians and how long they take to resolve queries and provide the call centre agents with feedback on the queries which have been resolved and unresolved. June says she tends to feel most stressed when she “receives a high volume of calls or queries and not having proper feedback to give to customers, also system challenges and it being slow” (Interview, June).

Supervisor, Vuyani says “the never ending abyss of ineffective service delivery and inconsistency and apathy of senior managers in dealing with staff and staffing issues.” Sandra says “we do not receive encouragement from management” and Melikhaya says “dispatch does not assist through providing feedback” (Interview, Vuyani).

These issues illustrate that the hands of the CRAs are tied to a certain extent when it comes to the issue of service delivery. A customer may phone the call centre with the expectation that the CRA will be able to immediately resolve their power outage issue for example, by perhaps pressing some button on their computer only to find out that there is another role player who forms part of the service delivery chain which is the technician who has to be dispatched to deal with the customer’s query at an undetermined time and possibly even date.

The CRAs as frontline employees receive all the backlash. Even when they do their job of logging queries they are considered to have not done their job, and perhaps viewed as being incompetent, because a technician takes an undetermined amount of time to attend to the query. Even then they may often either not report that the query has been attended or they may simply not respond to the query in a timeous fashion, which leads to the CRAs having to deal with “repeat calls and angry and mean customers.”

All these responses in some way or another speak to how the issue of service delivery begins to unravel. These responses also reveal where and what changes need to start taking place if service delivery levels are to improve and service delivery is to be as efficient as possible. It is interesting to see how some of the issues which stress the employees the most are the very issues which relate to and contribute to service delivery not being in the best of shape. Based on the responses of the employees it becomes clear that any issue that the employees and the call centre is faced with affects service delivery either immediately or eventually. Internal issues over time become service delivery issues.

4.3.3.5 The management style of the call centre according to the employees

When Ayanda describes the call centre's management style she says "it is good, professional and less stressful as most of us know that call centre agents mostly work under pressure from management" (Interview, Ayanda). Ayanda's response expresses her awareness that there is something distinct about the way that this call centre is run. She does not experience as much stress and her response also suggests that there is not as much pressure from the internal management at the call centre as that which has come to be associated with call centres. The study is not trying to suggest that the employees should be experiencing higher levels of stress and that external management should exert more pressure on the employees. The purpose is to simply point out that the way management does things at this particular call centre is different to how call centres are typically run.

Siphephelo as previously mentioned has been an employee at the call centre for a year and six months describes the management style as "inconsistent, management would introduce new rules and reinforce them only where it suits them. Management also does not function as a single unit and they do not listen to employee concerns" (Interview, Siphephelo). It is interesting to note even though Siphephelo has been at the call centre for less than two years he has been able to form such a substantial opinion of the external management and he did not require much time to "figure management out" so to speak.

Siyasanga who has been employed at the call centre for the same amount of time as Siphephelo says "it various leadership styles as each and every manager has his and her own management style." Mnoneleli describes the management style as "lax and fair" (Interview, Mnoneleli). Once again management is viewed as being laid back which contradicts the typical management style that call centres are synonymous with, which is to be very hands on and monitor the employees as much as possible. June says the management style is "very poor" (Interview, June) while Virginia says "it's fine" (Interview, Virginia). Lubabalo says "it's too central, wethu!" (Interview, Lubabalo). Supervisor Sandra says "in a word, inconsistent" (Interview, Sandra).

4.4) Conclusion

The responses of the employees tell a different story to what one would expect to hear about the management of a call centre. These findings portray the public call centre as being an anomaly and they also provide insight into what is happening internally in the call centre which is negatively affecting service delivery. What becomes clear is that an “inconsistent” management will be hard-pressed to produce a call centre with consistent levels of service delivery.

The internal issues which exist at the call centre speak to the fact that management is alarming absent from the call centre. The internal issues of the call reveal that there is an organisational systemic breakdown in the way that the call centre is run. There are breakdowns in communication between the CRAs and the technicians and these two parties should be working hand in hand because their jobs are so intricately linked to one another. Effective communication lines between the agents and technicians could go a long way in improving service delivery.

The call centre does not neatly fit into the dictates of what a call centre should look like according to the literature. It can be argued that all of the issues that the call centre is faced with according to the employees are related to management and can be resolved by management so as to create a more robust and impactful system of service delivery for the call centre. Through the responses of the participants we see that the way in which the call centre is run leads to the employees lacking clarity on matters which should have standard responses such as the case of the script and service level targets.

Management needs to look into their training system which they provide for their employees to see how and why it yields employees who hold mixed views on matters which are supposed to have standard responses. Management needs to be more willing to engage with the employees of the call centre so that they can learn what is going with the call centre and what issues need to be addressed. It is pretty clear also that a call centre that is understaffed cannot thrive in the way that one which has enough staff can.

The employees need the support of management in order for the levels of service delivery to increase and for the employees to also feel like their work and effort is worthwhile. As it currently stands the system is not set up for success, the system is set up in such a way that

even when the agents answer as many calls as possible during a shift, answering the calls will be in vain because of the breakdown in communication between the various role players of the call centre, for example the CRAs and the technicians.

The call centre as it stands in contrast to the purpose it was created for is not living up to being an efficient vehicle of service delivery for the city. According to City of Johannesburg (2013) the call centre was meant to strive for service performance and organisational efficiency. The findings illustrate that service performance is not where it is supposed to be and the findings reveal that there exists a breakdown in the organisational system of the call centre.

This chapter has used the provided findings to argue that the management of the call centre is an anomaly because it does conform to the kind of management that call centres typically have. This chapter has evaluated the call centre on the basis of what it was established to do and has found that it is not entirely living up to that purpose because of an organisational systemic breakdown which became evident because of the experiences and views of the employees who work for the call centre. These employees are at the frontline of the call centre, the call centre functions as the face of the city and the call centres are the ones who receive first-hand the discontentment that customers may feel towards the City.

The views and experiences of the employees of the call centre are worth looking into and taking into consideration because they provide invaluable insight on firstly what is going on inside the call centre and secondly what steps to take in order to begin to resolve service delivery issues and improve them. An issue for an employee can end up being an issue for an entire organisation when it is not taken seriously and swiftly dealt with. The system at the call centre currently functions in such a way that renders the efforts of the agents to answer as many calls as possible as nearly futile. This is because the way in which the system is set up sabotages the efforts of the agents, systematically it does not really matter whether an agent answers 60 calls, if the technicians do not attend to those queries or they do not communicate when they have resolved the queries, service delivery still suffers because of the poor communication lines between the agents and technicians and the agents having to deal with repeat calls and high volumes of call from unhappy customers.

Chapter 5: Broken Communication Lines in the Public Sector Call Centre, Broken Service Delivery to the Public

5.1) Introduction

This chapter serves the purpose of getting an in depth understanding of how the internal issues of the public sector call centre affect the call centre's ability to fulfil its mandate of service performance and organisational efficiency. The chapter will argue that the call centre cannot fulfil its mandate while it is still characterised by internal issues and that these internal issues are stumbling blocks to service delivery.

5.1.1) Public sector call centres

As stated in the previous chapter the purpose of the call centre was for it to be the main delivery channel for customer service. The City of Johannesburg intended to demonstrate its commitment to and care for its staff and customers through the establishment of a call centre. The City also sought out to demonstrate its readiness to provide customers with the services that they expect (City of Johannesburg, 2013).

The City of Johannesburg had functions which were similar to those which were performed by a call centre; however in the City these functions were fragmented. The single call centre aimed to centralise and formalise those functions into a sophisticated call centre which strived for service performance and organisational efficiency (City of Johannesburg, 2013).

Call centres are created in the public service sphere in an effort to bridge the digital gap and encourage active participation of citizenship; therefore call centres are about social inclusion. Public sector call centres are generally expected to have more stable working hours and better working conditions than those in the private sector. Public sector call centres are less concerned with reducing costs, their main concern is customer satisfaction.

This means that because of the nature of the 'target market', size and orientation, they tend to invest more on quality than quantity. Public sector call centres are funded by the state or sometimes voluntary organisations to provide assistance to the citizen-customer. These call centres are part of the interconnected network between different departments and citizens they are not 'self-autonomous workspaces' but part of the whole production-to-consumption system (Magoqwana, 2013).

According to Magoqwana (2013) the advantages of these call centres are that they reduce large volumes of enquiries so that front-line staff can focus on delivering services; they reduce travelling costs for citizens, customers having to queue, and the time spent in face-to-face customer interaction. They also make it easy to monitor both quality and quantity of contact with service users and to better control the nature of the advice given to the customers. Public sector call centres are designed for the back office to focus on the delivery of the basic services rather than spending time on telephone calls.

5.2) Cracks in the public sector call centre system

The public sector call centre which this study is based on is an organisation which has some internal issues which are both affecting and limiting its ability to provide Johannesburg residents with the best service it possibly can because of these internal issues. This chapter is about demonstrating that because the call centre has broken communication lines internally it cannot function at its optimum best and be a bridge between the public and the City and provide residents with the service they need.

5.2.1) Training at the call centre and its implications

Mvuseleli pointed out that the call centre needed to provide the employees with “proper and current training” (Interview, Mvuseleli) so that the employees can keep up with the changes that come with time. This would enable the employees to do their jobs better and result in improved levels of service delivery. Despite the fact that all the employees at the public sector call centre received training once they started working at the call centre, the training however yielded employees who have non-standard responses when it comes to issues concerning general call centre etiquette, such as the existence of a script and service level targets. Of the sixteen CRAs who participated in the study nine said no script is used at the call centre while seven said the call centre did use a script.

The study included four supervisors and they all said that no script was used at the call centre. The issue of the script does not directly impact the ability of the call centre to deliver services to the public. It does, however speak to the consistency and quality of the training that the employees receive. If a majority of the employees say that there is no script at the

call centre it raises a question around the quality of the training that the call centre provides its employees with and whether it fully equips them for their job.

The existence of service level targets at the call centre was also another matter which revealed the lack of uniformity within the call centre in the way in which it is run. The CRAs all had different responses regarding how many calls they are each expected to take per eight-hour shift, other employees were actually not aware of the existence of service level targets and their length of employment at the call centre did not affect their knowledge of service level targets in any way. The issue of service level targets is connected to service delivery in that it is related to how many customers the employees are meant to help during their eight hour shifts.

The service level targets enable both the employees and the call centre to have clear goals to work towards and it helps them to figure out how they can become more efficient and figure out what works best. The issue of service level targets raises the question of whether the training deals with the issue of service level targets thoroughly because the employees had different answers which could mean that with each training session different service level targets are set for the employees which results in there being no uniformity on this matter, which so intimately affects service delivery.

5.2.2) Equipment Shortcomings and their implications

June pointed out that the “system often goes offline and that the system is slow” (Interview, June) and this affects the employees’ ability to do their job and log the queries of the customers, which delays the resolution time of queries and leaves both the employees and customers feeling frustrated. Mvuseleli pointed out that the call centre has a “shortage of efficient technology” (Interview, Mvuseleli) call centres in the literature are known to be technologically savvy and have cutting edge technology which is supposed to make them better at providing quality service at a fraction of the time.

This public sector call centre seems to be behind from a technological point of view and this is bound to affect its ability to provide customers with the best possible service in a timeous fashion. Mnoneleli said “the computer is slow” (Interview, Mnoneleli) this affects the employees’ ability to log customer queries in a timeous fashion and if a customer does not

have enough airtime to phone the call centre they may run out of airtime due to the shortcomings of the call centre's equipment.

5.2.3) Shortage of Staff and its implications

According to Ahmad and Scott (2014) human resource management is imperative for competitive advantage, service quality, organisational performance and service quality, loyalty, and organisational performance. Human resource management policies and practices directly influence employee knowledge, skills, abilities, attitude and behaviour. Human resource practices such as training and career development seek to motivate, satisfy and retain employees and result in satisfied and loyal customers. The importance of staffing issues in the service industry is driven by the high dependence of service performance on employees.

The issue of a shortage of staff on the call centre floor was raised by CRAs. Ayanda said "we have a shortage on the workforce side of things, like I think there aren't enough agents working here" (Interview, Ayanda) Lubabalo said "there is limited staff" (Interview, Lubabalo) and Mvuseleli said "there is a shortage of staff" (Interview, Mvuseleli). The supervisors also had something to say regarding the call centre's staffing issue Gert said "severe staff shortages in some call centres whilst others are overstaffed. Ineffective and inefficient staffing and rostering" (Interview, Gert).

Gert said "different shifts require different staffing levels. For example we scheduled 33 persons on average for November 2017 per day which breaks down to 11 agents for the 06:00-14:00 shift; 7 agents for the 08:00-16:00 shift; 13 agents for the 14:00-22:00 shift and 5 agents for the 22:00-06:00 shift" (Interview, Gert). The early morning shift 06:00-14:00 and the afternoon shift 14:00-22:00 have the highest number of employees which means that those are the times when customers phone the call centre the most to report queries. The night shift 22:00-06:00 has the lowest number of agents perhaps because most households are usually asleep during these hours and so the call centre gets a low volume of calls during these hours.

Limited staff means that firstly the few agents who are on the floor have to deal with an exaggerated volume of calls to make up for the lack of agents. This increases both the workload and stress levels of the agents and it seems as though the supervisors have tried

to inform management of this issue however to no avail as is depicted by Vuyani's comment "the never ending abyss of ineffective service delivery and inconsistency and apathy of senior managers in dealing with staff and staffing issues." It is interesting to note that even a staff member from the call centre is aware of the issue of poor service delivery that the call centre is confronted with. Staff issues in the end affect the call centre's ability to deliver a quality service to the public. This is because when the employees are overworked they are prone to make mistakes in their work and even take unauthorised breaks because they are overwhelmed by the volume of calls they may need to deal with.

5.2.4) Employees' Experiences and their implications

Customer Relations Agent Virginia shares that in her five of years of being employed at the call centre she has noticed that the call centre is faced with "value chain issues and operational issues" (Interview, Virginia). These are challenges which directly impact on the call centre's ability to effectively and efficiently delivery services to the public. These issues form part of the reason why customers are unhappy with the service they receive from the City or the lack of service. The experiences of the employees begin to partly shed light on why service delivery is in the state which it is in the city. The call centre is not the only role player involved in providing services to the public, as is illustrated by Linda's comment "delays in conflict restorations from third party partners."

CRA, Liyolo in his five years of working at the call centre shares that "queries taking too long to be resolved due to scarcity of technicians" (Interview, Liyolo). Liyolo's response points out two things, firstly that the technicians are the people who are actually responsible for reconnecting the residents when they experience power outages and any power-related issues. Secondly we learn that queries take a long time to get resolved because there is a shortage of technicians which happens to be the exact same problem that the call centre is faced with.

It is a short staffed call centre which makes use of a limited number of technicians; service delivery is bound to take a knock under such circumstances and if that was not enough Boitumelo says there is "not having enough feedback regarding customer's issues" (Interview, Boitumelo). Supervisor Melikhaya also says "dispatch does not assist through

providing feedback” (Interview, Melikhaya). The feedback is supposed to come from the technicians and they are supposed to relay the message of whether a query has been successfully or unsuccessfully attended to and in each case.

The CRAs need to be informed so that they can provide customers with feedback and if the query has not been resolved customers need to know how long it will take. This illustrates a breakdown in communication between the agents and technicians which affects service delivery negatively and the CRAs are left to deal with angry and frustrated customers because they are at the frontline of poor service delivery.

Siphephelo shared that “we usually deal with unsatisfied customers and many repeat calls. It is so stressful speaking to customers with long outstanding issue. They are angry, mean, and vulgar and call to fight not for assistance” (Interview, Siphephelo). Siphosethu shared that “many calls are not attended in time” (Interview, Siphosethu). The employees’ responses reveal the cracks in the lines of communication between the agents and the technicians and over cracks in the system of the call centre. Lufuno shared that “high volumes of calls go over turnaround time unresolved” (Interview, Lufuno). The hands of the agents become tied when they log a lot of queries during a shift, only to come back to work the next day and find out through talking to customers who reported a query previously that the query has still not been resolved. The actions of the technicians reflect on the agents and make them look incompetent and they make the city as a whole look incompetent and synonymous with poor service delivery.

It can be argued that in light of what the employees have to contend with in their work every day that they are on duty some of them may wrestle with feeling as though their work is meaningless. They may also feel powerless because they only make up one component in the machine of service delivery. They cannot press a button and make homes light up again after a power outage has occurred, they cannot replace the food that may have gotten spoilt as a result of the electricity going off for hours on end.

Tummers and Den Dulk (2013) state that work alienation is considered to be a concept with many dimensions. One of the dimensions of work alienation is powerlessness. Powerlessness at work can be defined as the feeling an employee experiences when she or he does not have control over the way things are done at work. Another dimension of work

alienation is meaninglessness. Meaninglessness refers to the awareness or perception of employees that their work is not worthwhile. Powerlessness and Meaninglessness have a big impact on work outcomes, such as job satisfaction and organisational citizenship behaviour.

5.3) Emotional and Affective Labour and Employee Well-being

Frontline employees engage directly with customers whether it is telephonically or face-to-face and they have to contend with managing the interaction between them and customers so that the customers can receive the best service possible and leave the interaction feeling good. The public sector call centre which this study is based on does, not conform to certain established facts in the literature about call centres and how they function, however emotional labour is something that speaks to even this call centre.

5.3.1) Emotional Labour

According to D' Cruz and Noronha (2008) interactive service work led to a then new type of work demand known as emotional labour. Emotional labour refers to displaying organisationally desirable emotions during service transactions between service sector employees and customers. The objective is to elicit a pleasant state of mind in a customer so that the perceived quality of service and customer satisfaction is enhanced which will lead to an overall favourable impression of the business which provided a customer with a specific service.

According to Omar (2005: 272) emotional labour is governed by 'feeling rules'- these are the mechanisms which management puts into place in order to control the manner in which their employees how conduct themselves and the feelings they express during engagements with customers. Hochschild (1986:28) uses this concept to demonstrate just how deep institutions can go into an individual's life while maintaining that they honour the right of employees to privacy.

Omar (2005:272) states that in the beginning the concept of emotional labour used to only refer to interactive service work which involved face-to-face contact, however over time the concept has evolved and now includes the expected behaviours of telephone agents in call centres. These behaviours include ensuring a friendly tone of voice, expressing empathy

with customers as well as maintaining composure as an agent even when customers become abusive.

In Hochschild's conception jobs which require emotional labour involve several elements- the work involves direct contact with customers, either face-to-face or voice-to-voice; the worker is expected to produce an emotional state in the customer; and the manager or employer has the power to exert some control over workers' emotional expressions. According to Hochschild (1983; Taylor, 1999) the manner in which a service is offered also forms part of the actual service.

5.3.2) Affective Labour

Hardt (1999) describes affective labour as being a direct product of communities and collective subjectivities. He proposes that affective labour is one facet of what he terms 'immaterial labour' and that affective labour is in a more dominant position as opposed to the other forms of labour within the global capitalist economy. Hardt (1999) views the service sectors of the economy as being rich in productive communication and because the production of services does not result in a material or durable good this can be understood as being immaterial labour. Immaterial labour is labour which results in the production of an intangible good, such as a service, knowledge or communication.

5.3.3) Employee Well-being

Physical security is said to be important for employees. This includes safe work practices, adequate equipment as well as a pleasant work environment. A sense of job security and clear career prospects contributes to employee well-being (Acas, 2013).

Call centre work is generally known to be stressful and the agents work under high-pressure situations. The agents at the public call centre have to engage in emotional labour every time they engage telephonically with a customer. Siphephelo mentioned that "we usually deal with unsatisfied customers and many repeat calls. It is so stressful speaking to customers with long outstanding issue. They are angry, mean, and vulgar and call to fight not for assistance" (Interview, Siphephelo).

The agents have to deal with the fact that they may come a time during their interactions with customers where they may have to deal with a customer insulting them. This reality is unpleasant and it is emotionally taxing. The employees almost have to have split personalities: their real self and the agent who can at times be treated as useless and made to feel incompetent and one's self esteem can take a knock and this is the agent's lived experience, they have to be prepared for the possibility that the next phone call might result in them being insulted and called names and life has to go on and the work has to go on until their shift is over.

Employee well-being is important in call centre work because how good an agent feels can affect service delivery. Emotional labour tends to attack and pose a threat to an employee's well-being. Emotional labour affects employee performance which then impacts the organisation's ability to reach its goals of service performance and organisational efficiency. The call centre cannot control how customers engage with employees but they can provide assistance when their employees need help with coping with all the pressure and stress that comes with working in a call centre.

This is where employee support services can help employees so that in turn they are able to help the call centre achieve its goals of service performance and organisational efficiency. It can be argued that an organisation is only as good as its employees and in order for it to thrive, its employees need to be well first.

5.3.4) The Mechanisms of Emotional Labour and Employee Well-being

According to Holman, Martinez-Inigo, and Totterdell (2008) emotional labour has been shown to have both a positive and negative relationship with employee well-being. It has been found that people strive to obtain, protect, and foster valued resources. These resources include self-efficacy, effort or energy, personal authenticity and contextual such as job control and social support. Resources are valued if they are able to aid the process of achieving goals, reducing demand, and stimulating personal growth, development, and well-being.

According to Holman, et al. (2008) demands refer to requirements and threats to resources and they include things such as workload and interpersonal conflict. Demands must be addressed in order for goals to be met and in order for resource loss to be prevented. In order to cope with demand and to protect, obtain, or enhance resources, effort must be exerted in regulating behaviour. Different types of regulation strategy require varying levels of effort. Regulation strategies that occur at the habitual level require less effort and use up fewer resources than those which take place at the conscious level; and within the different levels of regulation, certain strategies will use up more resources than others.

Holman, et al. (2008) states that strain enters the picture when resources become depleted faster than they can be replaced, such as when demands are high or when regulation is unsuccessful and goals are not achieved. High levels of job demand are associated with indicators of low employee well-being, including anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and low job satisfaction and personal accomplishment. Individual and job resources are associated with high employee well-being. The effects of emotional labour depend on how much of a role they play in depleting, obtaining, or maintaining resources. Four important resources that are said to be affected by emotional labour include rewarding social relationships, self-efficacy, self-authenticity, and effort.

Holman, et al. (2008) states that the achievement of rewarding relationships and self-efficacy is likely to be affected by the genuineness or falseness of emotional behaviour and the type of emotion expressed. Firstly, customers may interpret fake emotional displays as inauthentic and take this to mean that the employee lacks interest and may not be trustworthy or is dishonest. Such evaluations by the customer may make them react negatively, causing interpersonal difficulties, and lower expressions of social support. It has been discovered that inauthentic displays of emotion lead to reduced customer ratings of performance, while the inauthentic displays of emotion that come from surface acting are associated with reduced interpersonal functioning, less liking and understanding and less rewarding relationships.

Secondly, Holman, et al. (2008) states that discrete emotions have an interpersonal function of communicating intentions to others. For example, happiness communicates an intention to be friendly and affiliate, which yields courteous responses. So the genuine expression of positive rather than negative emotions is likely to create rewarding relationships. Thirdly,

the negative reactions of customers that arise from inauthentic displays may lead employees to question their effectiveness. Since positive performance evaluations are an important tool for improving and maintaining self-efficacy, fake emotional displays are likely to reduce self-efficacy. In summary, fake emotional displays and genuine displays of negative emotions are likely to impact negatively on rewarding social relationships and self-efficacy, which in turn will lower employee well-being.

Holman, et al. (2008) mentions that emotional labour can deplete or threaten to deplete self-authenticity, which is a major life goal and important predictor of well-being. When a fake emotional display is experienced as an inauthentic expression of the self, it is likely to reduce feelings of self-authenticity or represent a threat to its maintenance. Field and experimental studies have found low self-authenticity to be associated with emotional exhaustion, lower mood, and lower well-being. However, faking may not necessarily lead to inauthentic experiences of the self. For example, some professional occupations require felt emotions to be different from emotional displays such as doctors' "detached concern" where they must feel neutral but display sympathy towards patients. Employees may feel they are acting in an authentically professional manner, even though the expressed emotions are not genuine.

Holman, et al. (2008) mentions that emotional labour requires effort. Elements requiring more effort will deplete energy reserves faster, which will result in a lower well-being, predominantly feelings of exhaustion. Spontaneous emotional behaviours require less effort as opposed to those involving conscious regulation and experimental studies show that deep acting uses less effort than surface acting, as surface acting is more cognitively taxing. The display of negative emotions may also involve greater overall effort than positive emotions, as they may produce negative consequences such as interpersonal difficulties that require more effort.

5.3.5) Employee Well-being and Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP)

According to Matlhabe (2003) Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP) are a part of the business strategy to improve employee functioning, loyalty, and performance in organisations. In South Africa EAPs only started gaining momentum in the 1980s. The

growth of EAP in South Africa, has not resulted in them being recognised and categorised as being a part of core business activity, rather EAP still sits on the periphery of real business activities. Matlhape (2003) argues that the location of EAP within a company is very crucial when it comes to determining its impact within the organisation.

Matlhape (2003) states that the connection between business success and customer care has been acknowledged for many years, however very few organisations have taken the time to apply this caring philosophy holistically to include employees and other stakeholders equally.

Matlhape (2003) argues that everyone with a job is prone to experience eustress, which is positive stress. Eustress is stress which occurs as a result of the constant challenges that employees are prone to face at work, and it is said to actually be an essential part of employee motivation and job satisfaction. Distress, which is negative stress, employees experience it when the level and depth of work generated stress becomes negative, and when an employee experiences distress intervention then becomes necessary. EAPs take on the form of being work based employee support programmes which are designed to assist employees who are experiencing work related and unrelated issues.

5.3.5.1) What is an Employee Assistance Programme?

Matlhape (2003) argues that it is a challenge for EAP to establish itself within the business environment, and that could be because it remains outside the realm of what is considered to be important in business. Lots of organisations have employees who exhibit: decreasing levels productivity, increasing levels of absenteeism, rising levels of lateness, violence and alcohol and drug use at the workplace. The sources of these behaviours are usually not understood or investigated, and this leads to losses for both the employee and employer.

EAPs currently are an opportunity to manage such issues in a manner that will lead to retention of talented employees while also improving the employer-employee relationship. The Employee Assistance Professionals Association-South Africa (1999:5, cited in Matlhape, 2003:30) defines EAP as “a work-site based programme designed to assist in the identification and resolution of productivity problems associated with employees impaired by personal concerns but not limited to health, marital, family, financial, alcohol, drug, legal,

emotional, stress, or other personal concerns which may affect employee job performance negatively.”

According to Matlhape (2003: 30) employee assistance programmes serve the purpose of both identifying as well as assisting employees and their families with a multitude of difficulties which impair personal and occupational functioning. EAPs are also meant to improve communication between employers and employees and create a positive atmosphere within the work environment.

According to EAPA-SA (1999:5-6, cited in Matlhape, 2003:30), the core activities of EAPs include the consultation and training of appropriate individuals in the identification and resolution of job performance issues related to employees’ personal concerns and difficulties. EAPs must provide employees with confidential, appropriate, relevant, and timely problem assessment services. EAPs should provide appropriate and relevant referrals for diagnosis, treatment and assistance. EAPs are also responsible for the formation of connections between the work-site EAP, community resources and individual practitioners who provide such services and finally EAPs need to follow up on services for employees who utilise these services.

Matlhape (2003) argues that EAP services are a component of the workplace because of the important role they play in enhancing productivity and improving profitability. It is for this reason that EAP should be regarded as a strategic issue and therefore be located in the core strategies of the business. In order for EAP to deliver the intended results, there needs to be a mechanism which makes it accessible anywhere in the company where employee well-being needs to be enhanced. In this way, EAP will help to produce strategic responses that can help to advance organisational goals towards achieving complete quality.

Employee Assistance Programmes are important in the call centre setting because of the levels of stress and pressure that the employees are prone to experience as a result of the nature of the work and the fact that it is a type of work that is characterised by emotional labour. Call centre work will probably never reach a point where emotional labour becomes obsolete; however organisations can use EAP to curb the negative effects of emotional labour so that the call centre can achieve its purpose of having high levels of service performance and organisational efficiency.

The employees at the call centre shared that the organisation did offer them Employee Assistance Programmes, supervisor Gert said “yes, an Employee Assistance Programme is provided” (Interview, Gert). The existence of EAP in the call centre is a good thing however it is only good if they really do help the employees when they are in need. Melikhaya shared his experience with the EAP department at the call centre saying that “no, I did not find the service to be effective because it seems only to be available for employees dealing with severe personal problems and does not take the negative and stressful impact of the local government environment into account” (Interview, Melikhaya).

Melikhaya’s experience is very unfortunate because the EAP is supposed to cater for all issues that employees may have which will have a negative impact on their work as well as issues which stem from working in the call centre environment. Mvuseleli shared that “we are offered support services but they are far from work” (Interview, Mvuseleli) while Linda said that “the support services are not easily accessible” (Interview, Linda). This is unfortunate that the EAP department is far from where the employees work and the organisation could look into opening up another EAP department which would be in the same location as the call centre so that it can be accessible for the employees.

5.4) Conclusion

This chapter tried to demonstrate that the call centre’s system is internally broken. The call centre has broken communication lines and this means that its ability to provide consistent service to the public is sabotaged by these broken communication lines. It appears that the call centre may continue to contend with unsatisfied customers and poor service delivery until it addresses its internal systemic cracks and issues. An organisation that is struggling internally is exposed by its output.

The chapter dealt with why the call centre was established and what it was meant to achieve. The chapter then proceeded to discuss the internal cracks of call centre and the issues which were dealt with included training, equipment, staff shortage and the experiences of the employees and how those impact on the call centre’s ability to deliver services to the public. The final section of the chapter focused on emotional labour and its connection to employee well-being. The chapter also included a discussion on the

relationship between employee well-being and employee assistance programmes. The chapter set out to demonstrate how poor service delivery is connected to the internal issues that the call centre is faced with.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Introduction

Initially this study had an interest in studying the connection between the labour process of a public sector call centre and its working conditions and how they affected service delivery. Upon beginning to gather the data for the study, other factors which were not entirely related to the working conditions of the employees at the call centre or its labour process were discovered. The study set out to draw out the connections firstly between how the labour process of call centres yields particular working conditions and then it would argue how the working conditions affect the call centre's overall service delivery output.

The data revealed that the call centre had internal issues (these are dealt with in detail in Chapters 4 and 5), which had more of an impact on service delivery than the working conditions of the employees. The study found that the call centre had issues such as having limited staff, the training which the employees received upon the commencement of their contracts resulted in the employees having different answers about whether the call centre uses a script or not and whether the call centre has service targets or not. The call centre's internal management turned out to not rule with "an iron fist" so to speak as the literature often portrays call centre management to be. The study found that it had to distinguish between the call centre's internal management and the municipal government executives who oversee the public sector call centre.

The internal issues which the call centre is faced with according to the participants of the study are intricately connected to service delivery and focusing on them and trying to address them would be a step towards getting to the root problems of service delivery and fixing them. The internal issues which the call centre has need the attention of more than just the call centre's internal management they need the attention of the executives of the municipal government. The study found that there was a breakdown in the call centre's systemic organisation. What this means is that even though the call centre was established in order to improve service delivery it has not been able to successfully and efficiently do that because of the way in the call centre's organisational system is set up.

The call centre has frontline employees who answer calls from customers and their duty is to log the queries into the city's systems. The queries are then supposed to be attended to by the technicians who are employed by the City. What the study found was that there is a breakdown in the communication lines between the customer relations agents and the technicians.

The call centre is faced with a problem of not receiving timeous updates and feedback on the reported queries, and so the call centre has to deal with a high volume of calls from customers and most of the customers are not calling the call centre for the first time. The agents tend to not get feedback or sometimes timeous feedback from the technicians. It also came to light that one of the reasons why service delivery is not as efficient as it ought to be is because there is a scarcity of technicians. It has already been established that the call centre has a shortage of staff and it turns out that there is also a shortage of technicians. This poses a threat to service delivery and the ability of the call centre to efficiently provide services to the public.

The study included a brief section on New Public Management. An argument was made that the public sector call centre was influenced by New Public Management. It has been previously mentioned that NPM introduced private sector business practices into both the management and delivery of public services. NPM was a new way to manage public affairs. NPM brought about a change in the government's public administration philosophy. People moved from being viewed as residents to being viewed as customers.

NPM is about running public administration in the same way that businesses are run. The justification for this was to improve and increase the efficiency of public administration through utilising private sector management models. The private sector focuses on customer service therefore NPM also prioritises citizens because they are recipients of services and they are the public sector's customers.

NPM places emphasis on performance management systems, privatisation and flexibility, etc. We see performance management come alive in the public sector call centre in the recording of the CRA's interaction with the customers who call the call centre. When the agents need to step out or take a brief break, outside of their tea and lunch breaks, for whatever reason they cannot just leave their workstation they need to click on the

“pressure break” option on their computer, this can be viewed as a method of surveillance, keeping tabs on whether agents are at their workstations or not and if not, how long they have been away from their workstation. The agents do not choose or control how many calls they take in a day, there is a system (ACD) which distributes calls for the agents to answer and attend to. It can be said that the manner in which call centres are structured and function compliments the principles of NPM. The connection between New Public Management and public sector call centres is a topic that future research could stand to look into.

Conclusion

The study found that the issues which the call centre is faced with need attention from both the call centre’s internal management as well the executives of the municipal government. This is because there is only so much the internal management can do on its side to improve things at the call centre but something such as the scarcity of technicians is beyond the management of the call centre’s jurisdiction and therefore requires the attention of the executives of the municipal government. The study attempted to demonstrate that knowledge and experiences of the employees at the call centre is invaluable and has the power to get the ball rolling on improving service delivery through identifying what is going on internally that is causing service delivery rates to plummet rather than steadily improve.

The study aimed to evaluate whether the call centre was living up to its purpose and it put forward reasons for why it is not and the recommendation is that the municipal government needs to step in and take action towards resolving the issues which are inhibiting the call centre from fulfilling its mandate and making Johannesburg the “world class city” that the municipal government envisions it to be. The study aimed to shed some light on what the employees of the call centre have to contend with as they try to do their part in delivering services to the public. The employees shared how the lack of service delivery on the ground had a direct impact on the call centre receiving high volumes of calls from customers.

The study found that most of the employees had a passion for their work and were patriotic in that they chose to work for the municipality because they had a passion and interest in service delivery and they wanted to make a difference in their community and this job provides them with that opportunity. During the non-participant observation period of the

study, I did not experience a single agent not respond to a call; the agents were professional and just aimed to do their job to the best of their ability.

The study found that the call centre does not simply have a bad reputation because it is comprised of lazy and incompetent employees; rather the call centre is faced with a lot of internal issues which we as the public are not entirely aware of. The customer relations agents are left to bear the brunt of it all and they get called names because they are the bridge between the public and local government. We imagine that when we phone the call centre that the agent on the other end of the line will be able to simply press a button and our query will be solved immediately.

What the study found is that there are more role players and stakeholders involved in the process of delivering services to the public and the agents in the case of the call centre, are simply the first point of contact and first step to getting your query resolved, the resolution of queries is not entirely in the hands of the agents in the case of this call centre department. The call centre has a long way to go in proving the public with the quality of service it deserves but it is certainly not a lost cause, with intentional planning and problem solving the call centre with the help of the executives of the municipal government can improve and ensure that Johannesburg becomes a “world class city”.

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Appendix A- List of Interviewees

CUSTOMER RELATIONS AGENTS:

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:	DATE OF INTERVIEW:	LOCATION OF INTERVIEW:
1. Siphephelo	28/11/17	JOHANNESBURG
2. Ayanda	01/12/17	JOHANNESBURG
3. Linda	01/12/17	JOHANNESBURG
4. Patronella	14/12/17	JOHANNESBURG
5. Boitumelo	14/12/17	JOHANNESBURG
6. Tshepiso	03/01/18	JOHANNESBURG
7. Lufuno	03/01/18	JOHANNESBURG
8. Siyasanga	04/01/18	JOHANNESBURG
9. Liyolo	05/01/18	JOHANNESBURG
10. Lubabalo	05/01/18	JOHANNESBURG
11. Virginia	07/01/18	JOHANNESBURG
12. June	08/01/18	JOHANNESBURG
13. Pamela	08/01/18	JOHANNESBURG
14. Mvuseleli	10/01/18	JOHANNESBURG
15. Mnoneleli	10/01/18	JOHANNESBURG
16. Siphosethu	11/01/18	JOHANNESBURG

SUPERVISORS:

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:	DATE OF INTERVIEW:	LOCATION OF INTERVIEW:
1. Gert	27/11/17	JOHANNESBURG
2. Sandra	02/01/18	JOHANNESBURG
3. Vuyani	09/01/18	JOHANNESBURG
4. Melikhaya	12/01/18	JOHANNESBURG

Appendix B: Customer Relations Agent Interview Questions

Biographical Information

1. Name
2. Nationality
3. Race
4. Home language
5. Male [] Female []
6. Highest Level of Education
Matric Certificate [] Diploma [] Degree [] None [] Other []

Employment Information

7. How did you find out about this job?
8. Why did you decided to apply for this job?
9. How long have you worked for this organisation?
10. Job Title
11. How long have you occupied the above-mentioned job title
12. Job Description

Call centre Labour Process

13. Upon beginning your work at this organisation were you provided with training? Yes/
No?
14. If yes, did you find the training helpful and worthwhile? If no, why not?
15. Do the Call Centre Agents (CCA) make use of a script? If yes, what does it entail?
16. Are there service level targets? If yes, what are they?
17. Does the call centre make any use of technological instruments in order to monitor
the work employees are doing? If yes, please mention them, such as IVR, Call
recorder, ACD?
18. What issues is the call centre currently faced with?
19. How would you describe the management style of the call centre?
20. What mechanisms, if any, does the call centre have in place to instil the desired
values and norms among staff members?

21. How would you describe the relationship between management and employees?

Working Conditions

22. Please describe a typical day at work for you

23. What are the various shift times at this call centre?

24. How many hours do you work in a day?

25. How many hours do you work in a week?

26. How many days do you work in a month?

27. How many off-days do you get in a month?

28. Is your work environment conducive for the work that you are required to do?

29. What are the various shift times at this call centre?

30. How many hours do you work in a day?

31. How many hours do you work in a week?

32. How many days do you work in a month?

33. How many off-days do you get in a month?

34. Is your work environment conducive for the work that you are required to do?

35. How many employees are required per shift?

36. How many employees does each shift have in reality?

37. Do you get tea breaks and lunch breaks?

38. How long are the tea and lunch breaks respectively?

Employee Well-being

39. What do you like least about working here?

40. Is the chair that you sit on comfortable?

41. Are the headsets that you use comfortable?

42. Is the computer you use user-friendly and does it work well?

43. Are you proud to be an employee of this call centre? If yes, why? If no, why?

44. Does your employer provide you with team building opportunities? If yes, please mention some

45. How often do these team building opportunities come by?

46. Does your employer provide you with employee support services? If yes, please mention them?

47. Would you say these employee support services are effective? If yes, please explain how? If no, please explain why not?
48. What do you think could stand to change in your workplace so as to make it better for employees and ensure that they deliver good service to the public?

Appendix C: Supervisor Interview Questions

Biographical Information

1. Name
2. Nationality
3. Race
4. Home language
5. Male [] Female []
6. Highest Level of Education
Matric Certificate [] Diploma [] Degree [] None [] Other []

Employment Information

7. How did you find out about this job?
8. Why did you decided to apply for this job?
9. How long have you worked for this organisation?
10. Job Title
11. How long have you occupied the above-mentioned job title?
12. Job Description

Call centre Labour Process

13. Upon beginning your work at this organisation were you provided with training? Yes/
No
14. If yes, did you find the training helpful and worthwhile? If no, why not?
15. Do the Call Centre Agents (CCA) make use of a script? If yes, what does it entail?
16. Are there service level targets? If yes, what are they?
17. Does the call centre make any use of technological instruments in order to monitor the work employees are doing? If yes, please mention them, such as IVR, Call recorder, ACD?
18. On average, how many calls does a Call centre agent take per shift?
19. On average, how many queries does a Supervisor have to deal with per shift?
20. In what ways has establishing this call centre benefitted the company?
21. What issues is the call centre currently faced with?

22. How would you describe the management style of the call centre?
23. What mechanisms, if any, does the company have in place to instil the desired values and norms among staff members?
24. How would you describe the relationship between management and employees?

Working Conditions

25. Please describe a typical day at work for you
26. What are the various shift times at this call centre?
27. How many hours do you work in a day?
28. How many hours do you work in a week?
29. How many days do you work in a month?
30. How many off-days do you get in a month?
31. Is your work environment conducive for the work that you are required to do?
32. How many employees are required per shift?
33. How many employees does each shift have in reality?
34. Do you get tea breaks and lunch breaks?
35. How long are the tea and lunch breaks respectively?

Employee Well-being

36. What would you say is most stressful about your job?
37. What would you say is least stressful about your job?
38. How did you find out about this job?
39. Why did you decided to apply for this job?
40. Are you happy working here? If yes, why? If no, why not?
41. What do you like best about working here?
42. What do you like least about working here?
43. Is the chair that you sit on comfortable?
44. Is the computer you use user-friendly and does it work well?
45. Are you proud to be an employee of this call centre? If yes, why? If no, why?
46. Does your employer provide you with team building opportunities? If yes, please mention some
47. How often do these team building opportunities come by?

48. Does your employee provide you with employee support services? If yes, please mention them?
49. Would you say these employee support services are effective? If yes, please explain how? If no, please explain why not?
50. What do you think could stand to change in your workplace so as to make it better for employees and ensure that they deliver good service to the public?

Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet



Asemahle Ndaliso

Private Bag X

WITS, 2050

Email: 752478@students.wits.ac.za

Phone number: 0718581387

Dear Participant,

I am a student at the University of the Witwatersrand and I am conducting my Masters research on how the working conditions of ex-City Power employees who were moved to the City of Johannesburg's unified call centre have changed since the transition took place.

Participation involves making yourself available at a time and place of your preference for an in-depth face to face interview that I expect will last approximately 45 minutes to an hour, along with focus groups which will include five participants at a time which is suitable for all participants, also the same duration as the in-depth interviews.

To make it more private, the only requirement would be that the interviews be conducted only with you wherever you are comfortable. I would like, with your consent, to record the interview. This is for no other purpose but ensuring that I would be able to have your responses more accurately.

Participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to decline to participate in the study without any consequences. Participation will not be beneficial to you in any way. There will be no compensation. In the event that you feel in any way traumatised because of the interview, I will be able to refer you to a psychologist or a therapist. You can therefore refuse to answer any questions, and to end the interview and your participation at any time, without any consequences. If you choose to participate, you will be assisting me, and I will really appreciate it.

I will ensure that no one will know that you participated in this research, and I will not use your real name in transcribing the interviews, or reporting the results of my research. You will therefore not be identifiable in any way. I will ensure that I send you an electronic link to my research report once

it is deposited in the Wits university library and made public. I cannot guarantee that you will agree with my representation of you.

If you are willing to participate, I will be most grateful. You are welcome to contact me at the number listed above, and/or to contact my academic supervisors at the university at any time about this research: Bridget.Kenny@wits.ac.za **011 717 4427** and Benjamin.Scully@wits.ac.za

Yours sincerely,

Asemahle Ndaliso

Appendix E: Consent Form Interview

I, _____ am willing to participate in Asemahle Ndaliso research study. I understand that there will be no direct benefit for me in participating in this study and that, there are not likely to be any risks involved. I understand that participation is voluntary, there will be no benefits for participation, and I am free to withdraw from the study at any time.

I have been given sufficient information about this research project. The purpose of my participation as an interviewee in this project has been explained to me and is clear.

I have been guaranteed that the researcher will not identify me by name.

I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet, my questions about participation in this study have been answered satisfactorily, and I am aware of the risks and benefits of participating in the study.

Signed: _____ Date: _____