



**The Australian Call Centre
Industry – Work Practices,
Human Resource
Management and
Institutional Pressures**

**National Benchmarking
Report – February 2005**

A project between the Australian Graduate
School of Management, UNSW and Steven
Hallis Personnel Services Pty. Ltd.

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Report on the Australian Call Centre Industry

This report is the outcome of a project between the Australian Graduate School of Management (AGSM), which is a school of UNSW and Sydney University, and Hallis, Pty Ltd who are a leading recruitment and research organisation in the call centre industry. This report also constitutes the Australian segment of a wider international study by Cornell University in the US and Sheffield University in the UK. This international study involves the fielding of the same survey used to compile this report in 20 countries around the world.

This report is the first large-scale national benchmarking survey of work, human resource practices and institutional pressures (organisations or other external pressures which influence call centres) in the Australian call centre industry. It is based on a survey of call centre managers in a sample of 83 call centres, fielded in 2004. Call centre and human resource managers provided information on the types of customers and industries served and the competitive conditions they face. They also provided detailed information on such management practices as the types of call centre technology used, skill requirements of jobs, organisation of work, training and development policies, staffing and compensation strategies, pay levels, and performance outcomes such as turnover and sales growth.

The survey was administered online and was also distributed as a Word document to call centre managers. The survey data were analysed and this report was prepared by Professor Steve Frenkel (AGSM), Dr. Catriona Wallace (AGSM), Dr. Marc Orlitzky (University of Auckland, New Zealand), Ariane Zouroudis (UNSW) and Mark Stephens (University of Auckland, New Zealand).

Key Results of Interest

This benchmarking report has highlighted some interesting aspects of work, human resource management practices, performance and the impact of institutional pressures on the Australian Call Centre industry. These points are noted below.

1. Strategy and Work

The majority of call centre managers indicated that the strategic focus of their call centre was service differentiation and the primary customer interaction involved agents providing service only or service and sales. Perhaps inconsistent with this are the findings that only a small percentage of interactions involved the agent building a rapport with the customer and that a considerable percentage of the agents' work is scripted. Another result which is perhaps not aligned with a primary focus on service is an Abandon rate of 6%.

The way work is structured for call centre employees appears fairly rigid and there is only a small amount of discretion in the work they perform. The call centre Managers indicated that their agents have little influence over the tasks they perform, the pace of their work, timing their breaks or revising work methods. Few agents are involved in self managed teams or quality or improvement groups and less than a quarter of agents have any flexibility in regard to being able to job share or tele-commute.