The relationship between job satisfaction and locus of control in a South African call centre environment

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Abstract

The high levels of absenteeism and turnover that call centres across the globe experience due to employee job dissatisfaction have led to a renewed interest in the role that personality traits play in the service industry. The purpose of this study was therefore to determine the relationship between call centre agents' job satisfaction and their locus of control orientation. A sample of 187 call centre agents from a municipality in Gauteng participated. The results of a chi-square test analysis suggested that call centre agents with an internal locus of control appear to experience significantly higher general, extrinsic and intrinsic job satisfaction compared to call centre agents with an external locus of control. The results further suggested that the male and female participants did not differ with regard to their general and intrinsic levels of job satisfaction and that participants with post-school qualifications experienced lower levels of intrinsic job satisfaction Further research is necessary to arrive at a better understanding of the antecedents and correlates of job satisfaction in the South African call centre environment.

1   Introduction

The increasing demand for client-centred services in a highly competitive business environment has resulted in a substantial increase in the number of call centres world wide (Knight 2004; Nel & De Villiers 2004; Williams 2000). The call centre industry in South Africa has grown tremendously, experiencing growth rates of up to thirty-five percent (35%) since 1996. At larger call centres the growth rate has levelled off. Growth rates of 20-25% are expected in the next few years, mostly in small to medium sized call centres (with 10-50 agents). Experts estimate that the number of call centre agents is approximately 50 000 and the industry has the ability to create another 50 000 to 100 000 jobs in the next few years (Wesgro 2001).

The term "call centre" refers to the environment within an organisation where the call centre agent, via the medium of the telephone, provides client support and/or a sales channel through which new business is generated and present business is retained (Nel & De Villiers 2004; Sprigg, Smith & Jackson 2003). Call centres are generally regarded as a high-stress environment that makes unique demands on employees

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(Townsend 2005). In order to carry out their duties successfully, call centre agents require specific attributes, such as the ability to maintain good customer relations and deal with constant technological change. The ability to adapt to fast-changing circumstances, to anticipate, and to deal with complaints is therefore essential for success in this environment (Nel & De Villiers 2004). In addition, call centre agents must be able to remain calm and controlled -- even when facing abuse from customers – in order to uphold the company's standard of quality service (Lewig & Dollard 2003).

From a managerial perspective, the call centre manager is confronted with the problem of finding ways to deal with the high percentage of staff absenteeism and turnover in the call centre environment as a result of the workload and stress experienced by call centre agents (Bagnara 2000; Townsend 2005). Factors that lead to unhappiness in call centres are the monotony and repetitiveness of the job content. This situation is aggravated by lack of opportunities for promotion and by stress which leads to high turnover rates (Worldroom Digest 2004). This trend has led to a renewed focus on recruiting individuals who show the greatest potential to be successful in a call centre environment (Nel & De Villiers 2004). Accordingly, attention to individual personality traits as a means of predicting an employee's behaviour has become one of the most prominent features of recruiting in organisations today (Carr, De la Garza & Vorster 2002; Du Toit, Coetzee & Visser 2005).

Most studies on the subject of call centres have focused on job satisfaction but little attention has been paid to individual personalities at call centres (Bouch 2004; Holdsworth & Cartwright 2003). According to Pretorius and Rothmann (2001), situational factors in the job environment as well as dispositional characteristics of the individual can influence job satisfaction. Given the significance of work in an individual's life, it seems vital to understand the relationship between job satisfaction and personality variables such as locus of control in call centres.

2 Aims of the study

This research sets out to determine the relationship between job satisfaction and locus of control in the South African call centre environment. More specifically, the study aims to determine whether call centre agents' levels of job satisfaction are associated with their locus of control orientation, and whether their job satisfaction levels and locus of control orientation are influenced by their gender, tenure and qualifications. The practical value of the results of this study lies in the design of a more effective selection procedure for call centre agents and in the possible reduction of absenteeism and staff turnover within the call centre environment.

3 Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is defined as an affective (emotional) response to work that is produced by an employee's comparison of the real results that are achieved to the results he or she expects from the working environment (Mester, Visser, Roodt & Kellerman 2003; Pretorius & Rothmann 2001). Job dissatisfaction is related to patterns of behaviour such as tardiness, absenteeism and high labour turnover, while job satisfaction is related to behaviour that indicates a positive organisational orientation (Pretorius & Rothmann 2001). Pivotal to the concept of job satisfaction are the attitudes, emotions and feelings about a job and how these attitudes, emotions and feelings affect the job and the individual's life (Stemple 2004).

Results of several studies have indicated that employees are more likely to experience job satisfaction when they are able to use their skills and knowledge on the job, perform enriched and varied tasks, experience positive employee-management relations, and when the organisation adopts a participative approach to decision-making, recognises and rewards employee talents, and instils the values and principles with which employees can identify (Bailey 1999; Berg 1999; Levin & Stokes 1989; Mester et al 2003).

Gruneberg (1979) maintains that while an individual's job involvement can have an influence on job satisfaction there are no guarantees of job satisfaction. The rationale behind this argument is that high job involvement can be challenging to the employee; it can be stimulating and lead to feelings of responsibility. On the other hand it can lead to conflict and high tension levels and therefore supervisors should keep workers focused on goals.

Generally, research seems to indicate that although call centre agents tend to be focused on their jobs, they do not experience much satisfaction (Robinson 2006). Call centre tasks generally have low complexity because the way in which the call centre agent delivers the service is constrained by detailed procedures and a lot of monitoring (Moshavi & Terborg 2002). Agents' work is tightly controlled and of a highly routine nature, and consists of simplified tasks (The Queensland Government 2003). Work is automatically allocated to telephone operators to decrease waiting time and to increase the speed of work. Calls are short and are expected to be completed in a specific time, thus increasing stress levels (Deery & Kinnie 2004).

Call centre agents usually leave their work stations only on allocated breaks because their work is conducted using a telephone and computer. Agents are not encouraged to take the initiative in resolving customer queries. Most call centres have targets that agents need to meet on a daily basis. This places agents in a difficult situation as they have no time to handle a difficult call from a client. In order to meet their targets, agents have to cut the customer's call short (HELA 2001).

Sometimes call centre agents have to deal with customers who react in a highly emotional manner. After completing the calls, agents therefore need some time to recover. Agents are often not even given time to recover from these emotionally-charged calls (Holdsworth & Cartwright 2003). In addition, call centre agents have to deal with unpredictable work schedules which interfere with family responsibilities and quality time with family and friends. Irregular hours and short lunch breaks also interfere with other activities outside the workplace (Putnam & Loppie 2000).

The work tends to be monotonous and repetitive and some agents are given specific scripts to follow, resulting in the agent's having no control over the timing of the work and the methods to be followed (Houlihan 2000; Worldroom Digest 2004; Deery & Kinnie 2004). In addition, call centre agents are not given challenging tasks or allowed to set their own goals. This is a source of dissatisfaction for many call centre agents (Deery & Kinnie 2004). Holman (2002) notes that routine jobs in call centres have been associated with emotional exhaustion, related to a heavy workload and high emotional demands.

Sprigg (2004) states that call centre agents tend to be paid low salaries and they experience poor working conditions. In addition call centre agents generally do not seem to receive much praise or acknowledgement from supervisors for having performed well on the job. There are too few incentive schemes. Instead agents are closely monitored but the feedback received from supervisors appears to be limited to

non-performance. All this results in feelings of dissatisfaction among call centre agents (Buchanan & Koch-Schulte 2000).

At most call centres the sole duty of agents is to answer telephone calls. Agents are generally not given the opportunity to carry out a variety of tasks. As a result agents do not gain any insight into the workings of the organisations nor do they understand how their function fits into the rest of the organisation. The experience gained by call centre agents is very limited. Because most call centres are constantly busy throughout the day, managers are unable to train agents to perform other tasks or duties (ETSI 2003). Belt, Richardson, Webster, Tijdens and Van Klaveren (2000) report that call centre agents reported a strong desire to stop working on the phones. This was due to the lack of variety in the work and the stressful nature of telephone-based work.

A study conducted by Putnam and Loppie (2000) revealed that males and females had the same complaints about call centre work. They experienced constant monitoring by supervisors, and were constrained to follow certain work schedules. In addition, they perceived their pay levels as being too low and experienced themselves as operating like "robots" because they were expected to follow scripted dialogues.

According to Hunt and Saul (1975), job satisfaction is found to be high when people start their first jobs but decreases until people reach their late twenties or early thirties, when it begins to increase. Once satisfaction levels increase, they do so for the rest of the working career. Increasing maturity and work experience lead workers to adjust their ambitions and work expectations to a more realistic level. These new expectations are more attainable and satisfaction tends to increase.

Belt (2002) maintains that agents who have qualifications tend to move on to jobs with better prospects. They also tend to focus on higher positions within the call centre industry. Young, middle-class, well educated and single people from both gender groups, especially university graduates, tend to move out of call centres quickly. This group have higher expectations in terms of the jobs they would like to get and their career but they tend to experience no more dissatisfaction in call centres than people without degrees.

4 Locus of control

The construct locus of control was developed by Rotter (1966) and in the context of this study it refers to the extent to which individuals believe that what happens to them is within their control or beyond it. People with an internal locus of control believe that the outcomes of their actions are a result of their own personal effort and ability. They believe that hard work and personal abilities will lead to positive outcomes. On the other hand people with an external locus of control believe that their own actions do not influence future outcomes and that the outcomes of their actions are dependent on factors outside their personal control (Landy & Conte 2004; Martin, Thomas, Charles, Epitropaki & McNamara 2005).

Research findings indicate that an internal locus of control is associated with job satisfaction, and an external locus of control with job dissatisfaction. Internals who ascribe achievement to events under their control, experience more job satisfaction than individuals who believe that they have no control over events determining their achievements (Pretorius & Rothmann 2001). Individuals with a low external locus of control tend to experience satisfaction with most of the aspects that determine employees' job satisfaction, except with regard to opportunities to express one's ability, receiving recognition and task variety (Pretorius & Rothmann 2001).

Internals tend to be happier in their jobs, are absent less frequently, are less alienated from the work setting and tend to be more involved in their jobs compared to externals (Pretorius 2004). Internals tend to exert more control than externals in certain areas, such as work flow, task accomplishments, operating procedures, work assignments, working conditions, relationships with superiors and subordinates, goal-setting, work scheduling and organisational policy. Regardless of the nature of the job, internals tend to be more satisfied with their jobs because of the way they perceive them (Blau 1987; Hackman & Oldham 1975; Kosmoski & Calkin 1986).

Gemmill and Heisler (1972) found a low correlation between job strain (caused by factors such as uncertainty about promotion, ambiguity of supervisors' evaluations, a very heavy work load and too little authority) and locus of control. Internals experienced less strain than externals. Individuals who have an internal locus of control tend to exert greater effort in coping with work stress and manage to remain contented with their jobs even in work settings where they have no control (Lu, Wu & Cooper 1999). An internal locus of control relates to lower levels of perceived stress because these individuals tend to have a stronger belief in their own control, thereby increasing the use of problem-focused strategies (Parkes 1991).

According to Parkes (1991), people with an external locus of control tend to experience more stress and job dissatisfaction in jobs that are highly demanding but low in autonomy (Parkes 1991). Rahim and Psenicka (1996) found that individuals with an external locus of control are unable to handle the pressure, uncertainty and challenges associated with a demanding working environment. Job dissatisfaction was experienced among police personnel who had an external locus of control (Rothmann & Agathagelou 2000).

Muhonen and Torkelson (2004) posit that research on gender and locus of control has produced inconsistent results. Some studies indicate that women are more externally oriented than men (Rubenstein 2004). Some research has shown no gender differences in locus of control (Holder & Vaux 1998; Lengua & Stormshak 2000). In terms of the relationship between locus of control and qualification level, previous research has yielded contradictory findings. Nowicki and Kalechstein (1994) state that in research dealing with adults who attended college as opposed to those who did not, it was found that although an internal locus of control has been related to greater academic achievement, this does not guarantee success in the workplace. Lao (1976) posits that internality is positively related to education level. Finally, although the relationship between locus of control and tenure is regarded as important in the call centre environment (Bagnara 2000; Townsend 2005), little research on this relationship has been done.

In view of the foregoing, it was expected that high levels of job satisfaction are associated with high levels of internal locus of control in the call centre environment. Furthermore, it was expected that gender, tenure and qualifications will be found to be related to job satisfaction levels and locus of control orientation.

5 Research design

5.1 *Research approach*

A survey design was used to achieve the research objectives (Shaughnessy & Zechmeister 1997).

5.2 *Participants*

A stratified random sampling of 187 call centre agents was chosen from a municipality in the Gauteng province. The majority of participants were females (65.24%) with males representing 34.76 percent of the total sample. Sixty-three percent of the sample had less than three years' work tenure in the call centres within the organisation. Twenty-seven percent of agents had been working at a call centre for more than three years. Forty- one percent of the participants had a tertiary qualification, either a diploma or a degree, and 59% had a school qualification. Both tenure and qualifications were split into dichotomous variables (employed for more than three years or less than three years at a call centre and holding a school or tertiary qualification), for the purposes of statistical analysis.

5.3 *Measuring instruments*

Two measuring instruments, namely the shortened Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ 20) developed by Weiss, Dawis, England and Lofquist (1967) and Rotter's Locus of Control Scale (Rotter 1966), were used in the present study. A biographical questionnaire was used to obtain personal details of the participants.

Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ)

The shortened Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) was used to assess participants' general, intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction with their jobs (Weiss et al 1967). The MSQ is a 20 item self-report questionnaire that uses a seven-point Likert scale. The questionnaire contains responses, which are weighted from very dissatisfied to very satisfied. A summation of all 20 items yields a general satisfaction score and the two subscales yield an intrinsic satisfaction score (relating to the content of the job itself, such as variety, satisfaction with skills utilisation, opportunities for performance, creativity, autonomy, recognition, responsibility) and an extrinsic satisfaction score (relating to the context of the job, such as supervision, working conditions, promotion, authority, company policy and practices).

The MSQ yielded an acceptable internal consistency of 0.90 (Kaplan 1990). The MSQ reliability coefficients for the Intrinsic Satisfaction scale range from 0.84 (for the two assembler groups) to 0.91 for engineers. According to Rothmann, Scholtz and Fourie (2002), Cook, Hepworth, Wall and Warr (1981) reported that test-retest reliabilities of 0.70 and 0.80 were found over a span of a week and a year, respectively. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.96 was found for total job satisfaction.

For the extrinsic satisfaction scale, the coefficients varied from 0.77 (for electronic assemblers) to 0.82 (for engineers and machinists). On the General Satisfaction Scale, the coefficients varied from 0.87 for assemblers to 0.92 for engineers. Median reliability coefficients were 0.86 for intrinsic satisfaction, 0.80 for extrinsic satisfaction and 0.90 for general satisfaction (Weiss et al 1967).

Locus of Control Scale (LCS)

The Locus of Control Scale (Rotter 1966) was used to assess the participants' locus of control orientation. The LCS is a 29-item self-report questionnaire that uses a forced choice format. For each item, individuals have to indicate their preferred choice between two statements reflecting the two locus of control orientations (internal or external). The overall score ranges from 0 to 23, with higher scores reflecting an external locus of control.

The LCS has a well-established construct validity. Test-retest reliability over a period of one month was relatively constant with a coefficient alpha of 0.78 (Boone, De Brabander, Gerits & Willemé 1990; Tarver, Canada & Lim 1999).

5.4 *Procedure*

The participants were approached by their respective managers, who explained the aims of the study to them. Participating agents were assured that the information obtained would be used for research purposes only. Participation in the study was voluntary and questionnaires were answered anonymously. The questionnaires were scored manually according to the instructions of their authors.

5.5 *Statistical analysis*

The statistical analysis was carried out with the help of the SAS programme (SAS Institute 2000). The Chi square test was used to test the statistical significance of the association between the variables (Tredoux & Durrheim 2002). A cut-off point of $p<0.05$ was set for the interpretation of the statistical significance of the results.

6 Results

The results regarding the relationship between levels of job satisfaction and locus of control orientation are reported in table 1. Overall there is a significant relation between job satisfaction levels and locus of control. Call centre agents with an internal locus of control appear to experience significantly higher general (GJS), extrinsic (EJS) and intrinsic (IJS) job satisfaction compared to call centre agents with an external locus of control orientation.

Table 1
CHI-square test for general, extrinsic & intrinsic job satisfaction and locus of control

LOC	GJS			EJS			IJS		
Internal	**Low**	**High**	**Total**	**Low**	**High**	**Total**	**Low**	**High**	**Total**
Frequency	43	29	72	30	42	72	47	25	72
Column %	63.24	90.63		57.69	87.50		66.20	86.21	
External	**Low**	**High**	**Total**	**Low**	**High**	**Total**	**Low**	**High**	**Total**
Frequency	25	3	28	22	6	28	24	4	28
Column %	36.76	9.38		42.31	12.5		33.80	13.79	

LOC x GJS: LOC x EJS: LOC x IJS:
$x^2 = 8.097$ $x^2 = 11.0005$ $x^2 = 4.089$
$df = 1$ $df = 1$ $df = 1$
$p = 0.004$ $p = 0.001$ $p = 0.043$

The results reported in table 2 indicate no significant association between general job satisfaction and gender, tenure and qualifications respectively. Males appear to have lower levels of general job satisfaction than females. Call centre agents with more than three years' tenure and post-school qualifications appear to have lower levels of job satisfaction than those with less than three years' experience in the call centre environment and school qualifications. However, no significant association was established between these variables.

Table 2
CHI-square test for general job satisfaction and gender, tenure & qualifications

GJS	GENDER			TENURE			QUALIFICATIONS		
Low	Male	Female	Total	<3	>=3	Total	School	Post-school	Total
Frequency Column %	35 70.00	33 66.00	68	40 64.52	28 73.68	68	38 64.41	30 73.17	68
High	Male	Female	Total	<3	>=3	Total	School	Post-school	Total
Frequency Column %	15 30.00	17 34.00	32	22 35.48	10 26.32	32	21 35.59	11 26.83	32

GJS x Gender: GJS x Tenure: GJS x Qualification:

$x^2 = 0.1838$ $x^2 = 0.9101$ $x^2 = 0.8538$

$df = 1$ $df = 1$ $df = 1$

$p = 0.668$ $p = 0.340$ $p = 0.356$

The results reported in table 3 indicate no significant association between intrinsic job satisfaction and gender, tenure and qualifications respectively. Males appear to have lower levels of intrinsic job satisfaction than females. Call agents with more than three years' tenure and post-school qualifications appear to have lower levels of intrinsic job satisfaction than those with less than three years' experience in the call centre environment and school qualifications. However, no significant association was established between these variables. The relationship between post-school qualifications and intrinsic job satisfaction is significant at the $p<0.10$ level. The results suggest that call centre agents with post-school qualifications have lower levels of intrinsic job satisfaction.

Table 3
CHI-square test for intrinsic job satisfaction and gender, tenure & qualifications

IJS	GENDER			TENURE			QUALIFICATIONS		
Low	Male	Female	Total	<3	>=3	Total	School	Post-school	Total
Frequency Column %	38 76.00	33 66.00	71	41 66.13	30 78.95	71	38 64.41	33 80.49	71
High	Male	Female	Total	<3	>=3	Total	School	Post-school	Total
Frequency Column %	12 24.00	17 34.00	29	21 33.87	8 21.05	29	21 35.59	8 19.51	29

IJS x Gender: IJS x Tenure: IJS x Qualification:

$x^2 = 1.2142$ $x^2 = 1.8801$ $x^2 = 3.0381$

$df = 1$ $df = 1$ $df = 1$

$p = 0.271$ $p = 0.170$ $p = 0.081$

Regarding the relationship between extrinsic job satisfaction and gender, tenure and qualifications, the results reported in table 4 indicate only a significant association between extrinsic job satisfaction and tenure. It appears from table 4 that call centre agents with more than three (3) years' tenure had significantly lower levels of extrinsic job satisfaction than call agents who have been less than three years in the call centre environment.

EJS	GENDER			TENURE			QUALIFICATIONS		
Low	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**	**<3**	**>=3**	**Total**	**School**	**Post-school**	**Total**
Frequency **Column %**	26 52.00	26 52.00	52	27 43.55	25 65.79	52	28 47.46	24 58.54	52
High	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**	**<3**	**>=3**	**Total**	**School**	**Post-school**	**Total**
Frequency **Column %**	24 48.00	24 48.00	48	35 56.45	13 34.21	48	31 52.54	17 41.46	48

EJS x Gender:

$x^2 = 0.0000$

df = 1

p = 1.000

EJS x Tenure:

$x^2 = 4.6692$

df = 1

p = 0.031

EJS x Qualification:

$x^2 = 1.1896$

df = 1

p = 0.275

Regarding the relationship between locus of control orientation and gender, tenure and qualifications, the results reported in table 5 indicate no significant association between these variables. Furthermore, it appears from table 5 that the female participants have a higher orientation towards internal locus of control than males. However, no significant associations were established between these variables.

LOC	*GENDER*			*TENURE*			*QUALIFICATIONS*		
Internal	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**	**<3**	**>=3**	**Total**	**School**	**Post-school**	**Total**
Frequency **Column %**	35 70.00	37 74.00	72	45 72.58	27 71.05	72	46 77.97	26 63.41	72
External	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**	**<3**	**>=3**	**Total**	**School**	**Post-school**	**Total**
Frequency **Column %**	15 30.00	13 26.00	28	17 27.42	11 28.95	28	13 22.03	15 36.59	28

LOC x Gender:

$X^2 = 0.1984$

df = 1

p = 0.656

LOC x Tenure:

$x^2 = 0.0273$

df = 1

p = 0.869

LOC x Qualification:

$x^2 = 2.5407$

df = 1

p = 0.111

7 Discussion

Overall, the results suggest that call centre agents with an internal locus of control appear to experience significantly higher general, extrinsic and intrinsic job satisfaction than call centre agents with an external locus of control orientation. In line with these findings, Martin et al (2005) suggest that individuals with an internal locus of control usually have the ability to deal constructively with the amount of control they feel they have over their environment. Research generally indicates that jobs which are highly demanding and low in autonomy (such as those in the call centre environment) result in greater job dissatisfaction for externals than for internals (Parkes 1991; Pretorius &

Rothmann 2001; Rothmann & Agathagelou 2000; Spector 1986). When stress levels are high within a job situation, individuals who have an external locus of control tend to experience job dissatisfaction (Näswall, Sverke & Hellgren 2005). Rahim and Psenicka (1996) found that individuals with an external locus of control were unable to handle the pressure, uncertainty and challenges of a demanding working environment -- the kind of environment found in call centres.

The results further suggest that the male and female participants did not differ with regard to their general and intrinsic levels of job satisfaction. The research results relating to job satisfaction and gender differences are inconsistent. Some studies report that males are more satisfied than women, other studies report the opposite findings, yet others report no differences. Hulin and Smith (1964) suggest that gender differences are due to differences in education, pay and tenure and males and females are equally satisfied with their jobs when these factors are controlled. The findings of Hulin and Smith were confirmed by similar research (Weaver 1978). Andrisani and Shapiro (cited in Weaver 1978) reported that females were satisfied with both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Weaver (1978) found that both gender groups derived satisfaction from the same factors.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that the participants' general and intrinsic levels of job satisfaction were not significantly influenced by their length of service and qualifications. It also appears from the findings that the participants with post-school qualifications experienced lower levels of intrinsic job satisfaction. Gruneberg (1979) reports findings suggesting that more college than high school educated people were dissatisfied with their jobs as they tend to expect more in terms of higher paid jobs and better working conditions. Therefore for lower level jobs, individuals with post-school qualifications tend to have higher expectations of what a job should offer, and are therefore less satisfied with what they get. To choose someone who is over-qualified for a job will only lead to dissatisfaction when reality fails to live up to the incumbent's expectations. Glenn and Weaver (1982) found that education had little direct effect on job satisfaction. It was also found that educated women tended to experience more job satisfaction than their educated male counterparts.

The findings also suggest that the extrinsic job satisfaction of the call centre agents who participated in this study was influenced by their length of service. It appears that their extrinsic job satisfaction within the call centre environment has decreased over time. Hulin and Smith (1964) showed an increase in job satisfaction with length of service, whereas Hunt and Saul (1975) showed a decrease in job satisfaction with increased tenure. Oshagbemi's (2000) study revealed that individuals who remained at one organisation for a long time experienced more job satisfaction than those who job hopped. The levels of overall job satisfaction of people who remained at one organisation were also higher than those of people who changed organisations frequently.

The failure to find any significant association between locus of control orientation and gender, tenure and qualifications suggests, in line with research conducted by Holder and Vaux 1998 and Lengua and Stormshak 2000 that the male and female participants did not differ with regard to their locus of control orientation. Contrary to findings reported by Lao (1976), no relationship was found between subjects' locus of control orientation and their qualifications. The current findings do not support previous research, probably because the majority of participants had only a school level qualification. Finally, no relationship was found between subjects' locus of control orientation and their length of service.

8 Conclusions, implications and recommendations

8.1 *Conclusions*

The results that have been discussed confirm the importance of understanding the relationship between employees' job satisfaction and their locus of control orientation, particularly in the call centre environment. Generally, the findings suggest that although the servicing of customers through call centres represents substantial cost savings to organisations through a rationalisation of work processes and the use of information technology, the nature of the working environment and job content appear to significantly influence the job satisfaction levels of call centre agents (Robinson 2006).

The results indicate aspects related to job content such as variety, autonomy, recognition, performance opportunities, skills utilisation and responsibility as the major contributing factors to participants' levels of job dissatisfaction. The closely monitored, highly fragmented, tightly controlled, highly routinised, low-skilled, stressful and poorly paid nature of work in the call centre environment appears to diminish employees' experience of control over their working environment. These experiences generally increase call centre agents' levels of job dissatisfaction (Buchanan & Koch-Schulte 2000; Robinson 2006).

Furthermore, the findings of this study suggest, in line with observations by Belt (2002), that call centre agents with post-school qualifications experience higher levels of job dissatisfaction as they generally have higher expectations in terms of work and career. They may therefore tend to move on to jobs that offer better prospects. It also appears that job dissatisfaction with regard to working conditions, supervision, promotional opportunities and company policy and practices increases over time, particularly for call centre agents with post-school qualifications.

Call centre agents with an internal locus of control appear to experience significantly higher general, extrinsic and intrinsic job satisfaction than call centre agents with an external locus of control orientation. These people seem better able to handle the pressure, demands and challenges characteristic of the call centre working environment.

8.2 *Implications*

The practical value of the research results lies in the design of a more effective selection procedure for call centre agents and in the possible reduction of absenteeism and staff turnover within the call centre environment. More specifically, managers need to consider the impact of lower level jobs on individuals with post-school qualifications. These individuals tend to have higher expectations of what a job should offer, and are therefore less satisfied with what they get. To choose someone who is over-qualified for a job will only lead to dissatisfaction when expectations or values on the job are not fulfilled (Gruneberg 1979; Martin 2005). Furthermore, selection techniques should consider the impact of personality attributes such as individuals' locus of control orientation on their ability to deal with the pressures and demands characteristic of the call centre environment.

Robinson (2006) indicates that staff retention initiatives within call centre environments mostly include improved recruitment and selection techniques; the introduction of incentive schemes, flexibility of working and career progression programmes; increased training and development activities; improved communications mechanisms; and improvements to the working environment. However, job design

initiatives or changes to the job content are generally lacking. The research results suggest that managers need to consider job enrichment initiatives that will provide higher levels of stimulation, job variety, responsibility and skill flexibility, particularly for call centre agents with post-school qualifications.

8.3 *Recommendations*

The main limitation of the study was arguably the demographic confines of the sample. It must be kept in mind that these results were obtained from a sample of call agents in a particular organisational setting and that this would probably limit the generality of the findings. Therefore, it is recommended that the study be replicated with other samples in various economic sectors and different measuring instruments before drawing conclusions about the relationship between job satisfaction and locus of control variables in the call centre environment. More recent normative measures of the construct locus of control, such as Schepers' (1995) Locus of Control Inventory, could also be considered. Notwithstanding the limitations, the results of this study could serve as a useful source of reference in further research. Future studies on attrition, for example, need to explore whether agents with an internal or external locus of control tend to leave call centres more readily. Further research is necessary to better understand the antecedents and correlates of job satisfaction in the South African call centre environment.

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