



Institute of Administrative Management
Level 4 Diploma in Administrative Management

Case study 1
Scenario

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Forth Country Call Centre

Forth Country Call Centre is located in the central belt of Scotland, lying on the outskirts of the large commercial town of Edinkirk. Established in 2002, it started up as the call centre for a sports channel provider but now has a wide range of clients who include travel companies, mail order businesses, home improvement firms and insurance providers. Each of their requirements is very diverse.

The single-storey building is purpose-built and the middle area is a large open plan floor space where all the telesales/enquiries are handled. The Management office suite surrounds the call centre on all four sides so that managers can look out on the call centre operations at all times without leaving their offices. All the management functions are dealt with on site in an effort to streamline customer services and reduce operating costs. These functions include Finance, Administration, Human Resources, IT and Marketing.

Four hundred call centre staff are employed on a shift basis and the centre is operational 24 hours per day over seven days. The centre operators are trained to generate tele-sales, to chase up outstanding and unpaid accounts as well as to handle incoming calls from customer inquiries over a wide variety of issues.

Call centre operators are organised into teams, with each team responsible for a range of clients in a particular area of activity. Teams are organised into pods of four work stations with each pod handling a particular business area. These work areas are badly lit, lack sound insulation and are not at all well designed or laid out. Fixed lunch and tea break times are pre-determined to maintain the 24 hour shift pattern but due to expansion of the work stations, the rest areas are now too far away from many of the work pods so break times are being eroded.

Team members tend not to move across different areas as management prefer that they concentrate on particular business clients in order to be more skilled, efficient and effective. As they are always doing the same job, there is no variety and the staff is becoming complacent and bored. Some staff do not turn up for their shifts and this is putting added pressure and stress on the other team members as there is no additional staff available to cover absence. Due to the nature of the work, operators often have to deal with irate customers and this is also adding to the staff stress levels. Staff rotas covering the shift patterns over a 24 hour period are inflexible and there is no consultation nor choice of shifts for the operators as this is a Team Leader decision. Each work team has up to twelve staff depending on the shift and are supported by a Team Leader.

Team Leaders report to Section Managers who oversee particular areas of activity which are either externally facing - (telemarketing) or internally focused - (product support). The Team Leaders tend to be promoted internally from the tele-operators and in some instances, only have experience in one or two areas of the business. This promotion is usually based on long service and many of the younger members of staff are leaving because there are no career prospects. Tension and conflict is now the norm between the "old hands" who are waiting their turn to be promoted and the younger staff who want to make an impression. However, the Team Leaders choose to ignore this conflict by rather "letting their staff sort it out amongst themselves".

The induction training is not well structured and after the initial start-up training there is little follow-up or refresher training. Staff tend to learn the good and bad habits from "sitting by Nellie" and thereby learning from another member of staff. Operators find it extremely difficult to transfer from one business activity area to another as the Team Leaders and Section Managers make all the decisions about which operator is attached to which team. HR policies and procedures are poor and thus recruitment, selection and development can be inconsistent. In addition Team Leaders manage a diverse workforce in terms of age, gender, race and religion. This also presents challenges in overcoming barriers to diversity and ensuring an equality of opportunity amongst members of their teams.

Service Technology is upgraded by Service Support Teams on an on-going basis and all work stations have predictive dialling, caller prioritisation, number identification and decision support facilities but this has made relatively little impact on quality and performance targets. Performance statistics show worsening figures for the second quarter running. Average queue delays in answering calls have increased which staff can see on their "real time" screens in their work stations. This is another source of stress for the staff who feel their Team Leaders and Section Managers could be doing more to improve efficiency and effectiveness and achieve set goals by using the information provided to exercise control. Call Handling Teams are below industry average in call handling and Team Leaders are defending their staff by indicating the inadequate training facilities and out of date equipment used for induction training.

Concerned about the deteriorating performance of call centre operations, the Operations Director has called a meeting of Section Managers and Team leaders to deal with all of these challenges.