



## CALL CENTER BUSINESS ISSUES RELATING TO FACILITY DESIGN

### ***Business***

- ① Call Center Functions in Context w/Corporate Objectives
- ① Current & Future Needs
- ① Staff Retention
- ① Advancement Opportunities
- ① Competition for Resources
  - ① Internal
  - ① External

### ***Management***

- ① How to Achieve Productivity
- ① Coaching versus Supervising
- ① Sense of Belonging
- ① Workroom Sightlines
- ① Supervisor / Agent Ratio(s)
- ① Team Size Flexibility

### ***Skill Sets***

- ① Inbound and Outbound
- ① Blended Calling
- ① Licensing
- ① Hierarchy
- ① Evolution Over Time

### ***Work Process***

- ① Outward Focus
- ① Inward Focus
  - ① Private Work
  - ① Group Interaction
  - ① Training
  - ① Supervision

### ***Schedule***

- ① Peak Hours
- ① Shifts
- ① Breaks
- ① Staggering
- ① Parking

### ***Personal Interaction (Meetings)***

- ① Formal and Informal
- ① Lateral versus Horizontal
- ① Frequency and Size
- ① Large Group Meetings
- ① Privacy Requirements

### ***Training***

- ① Formal and Informal
- ① Consistency of Message
- ① Initial Training
- ① Retraining
- ① Mentoring
- ① Peak Time Usage

### ***Business Continuity***

- ① Level of Sustainability
- ① Disaster Recovery

### ***Welfare Support***

- ① Break Rooms
- ① Quiet Rooms
- ① Personal Phone Calls
- ① Food Service
- ① Locker and Exercise Rooms
- ① Smoking
- ① Efficiency

### ***Technology***

- ① Power Quality
- ① Technology Platform Impact on Staffing
- ① Current and Future Infrastructure
- ① Bandwidth
- ① Cabling Capacity and Flexibility
- ① Sustainability

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**Workstation Configuration**

- ① Ergonomics
- ① Worksurface
- ① Filing
  - ① Personal
  - ① Business
- ① Displayed Items
  - ① Personal
  - ① Business
- ① Privacy
- ① Supervision
- ① Standing versus Seated
- ① Size Determination
  - ① Functional
  - ① Psychological
  - ① Hierarchical
- ① Circulation as Shared Volume

**Workroom Layout**

- ① Regimentation
- ① Team Reconfiguration
- ① Density
- ① Hoteling, Etc.

**DISCUSSIONS**

*Outward Focus* —

Call centers are unique in that their primary function involves an “outward focus,” where center staff communicate with people outside the office environment. This situation reinforces the need for privacy so agents can conduct business without distractions. Studies have shown that increasing privacy in computer-intensive environments results in reduced errors and increased productivity. However, call center agents require informal training and supervision. The workstation design should balance the advantages of privacy with the need for access to management.

**Economics**

- ① Quantitative
  - ① Capital Costs
  - ① Operating Costs
- ① Qualitative
  - ① Staff Retention
  - ① Productivity Impact
  - ① Sustainable Design

**Component Systems**

- ① Lighting
- ① Ergonomic Accessories
- ① High Performance Ceilings
- ① Indirect and Task Lighting
- ① Daylighting
- ① Integrated In-Floor Systems
  - ① Access Floor
  - ① In-Floor HVAC
  - ① Modular Power, Data and Control Wiring
  - ① Acoustic Absorption and Sound Masking

**Benchmarks**

- ① Workstation Size by Function
- ① Density
- ① Functions as Percent of Total
- ① Furniture Costs
- ① Tenant Fit-Out Costs

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*Vertical Communication —*

The evolution of general office design toward the information/technology model is essentially based on two factors: full integration of the computer into the office environment (and call centers are on the leading edge in this regard) and a change in management style that promotes teamwork and horizontal communication among staff. In order to preserve consistency of the message delivered by agents, most call centers are organized for vertical communication where the message is delivered and reinforced by management. This is particularly important with lower-level staff, where there is typically higher turnover.

However, large financial institution call centers typically employ personnel with a wide variety of skill sets; therefore, a more highly compensated staff may benefit from both horizontal and vertical communication. It's important to understand and define the optimum personal communication requirements for each skill set.

*Staff Retention —*

High turnover is typical in call centers. There are many opportunities to increase employee satisfaction and reduce turnover. In addition to compensation, call center employees are interested in a work environment that supports their effort and offers a sense of belonging to the organization they serve.

Since most call centers require minimal paperwork and reference material, satisfaction of work function requirements alone can result in very small workstations that promote the worker as a commodity rather than an integral part of the corporation.

Personal breaks in call centers are short. For example, during a typical 10-minute break an agent may need to go to the restroom, make a personal phone call, buy and eat something from the vending machine and check the newspaper. Therefore, it is very important to consider the location and efficiency of staff welfare support spaces such as cafeterias, break rooms, quiet rooms and restroom facilities.

*Technology —*

The call center industry appropriately focuses on hardware and software technology solutions that increase statistical performance (perhaps at the expense of customer service). However, the personal link between the corporation and its customers is the call center employee. Building technologies exist that can enhance the performance and well being of the employee in a manner similar to the way that hardware and software technology improves performance.

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Noise, one of the biggest problems in open office environments, is an even greater problem in call centers, where everyone's job is to talk, whether servicing or selling. Excessive noise levels increase stress and clerical errors and distract both the agent and the customer. While a normal conversation level measures 50 decibels, many of the call centers we visit have background noise levels of greater than 65 decibels (with sound energy doubling every three decibels). Consequently, the proper use of high acoustical performance ceilings and furniture systems combined with sound masking systems can greatly reduce noise levels in call center environments.

Lighting is also an important issue in call centers. Most conventional office space is illuminated at a 50 to 80 foot-candle level at the worksurface. To achieve proper contrast with a Video Display Terminal, 30 foot candles is ideal. It is also important to provide consistent light levels at the ceiling (3:1 or 4:1 luminance ratio) to reduce glare and veiling reflections. These performance criteria can only be met through the use of indirect lighting.

Conventional HVAC systems, with both supply and return in the ceiling, are largely ineffective in high density environments. Technology for second generation in-floor supply systems has been developed that achieves 100-percent efficiency of air circulation and uses 40 percent less energy. Depending on climate, these systems which include access floor and modular cabling, can cost no more than conventional "VAV" systems that do not include access floor and modular cabling.

#### *Flexibility —*

In an industry undergoing such rapid change, it's noteworthy that most call centers are not designed to be flexible. The result can be that inflexible centers will limit business opportunities, which can be much more costly than achieving flexibility through proper design of the call center facility. As management realizes the potential for call centers to economically satisfy business requirements, the need for computer and layout flexibility will increase. There is no reason why the ratio of supervisors to customer service representatives should be fixed. Rather, it should vary based on the capabilities of the staff and the complexity of their work. If the facility is properly designed, it's possible to switch over to new technology and/or reconfigure workstations literally overnight.

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