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Job Design and Wellness in New Zealand Contact
Centres: A Paradigm Shift or Same Old
Management?

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ABSTRACT

The impact of the Contact Centre workplace upon employee satisfaction or wellness is attracting the attention of researchers across the globe. Over 10 years of research has resulted in recommendations about how Contact Centres should be managed and how the jobs of Contact Centre agents should be designed. There is growing concern that the current practices result in significant psychosocial risk factors which are ultimately harming the Contact Agents and less obviously the bottom line of their organisations through emotional exhaustion, stress, employee absenteeism and turnover.

The aim of this study was to explore whether Contact Centre managers were aware of these recommendations, in particular those relating to the design of motivating, satisfying and “healthy” jobs. Using an expanded Job Characteristic Model, this descriptive study explored the level of awareness of New Zealand Contact Centre managers (n=20) regarding the recommendations about the design of jobs, and what changes, if any, have occurred as a result. Where changes have not been forthcoming, the study explored the constraints which were preventing or limiting change.

The results of this study indicated that there is a low level of awareness of the research recommendations, that approaches to improving the management and design of Contact Centre agents roles are ad hoc, and that there is a level of resistance in providing agents with autonomy to manage their day to day roles. Some efforts to increase task and skill variety have been made but these are also ad hoc rather than built into the job.

As a result of this study, it appears that Contact Centres in New Zealand are still adopting a mass production model of management.

This study has implications for Contact Centre managers and senior organisational managers, these are discussed. Limitations of the research, implications for Contact Centre Managements are highlighted and areas for further research are highlighted.