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The call center as a revolving door: a Philippine perspective

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Abstract

Purpose – This study sought to explain the high turnover rates in Philippine call centers using a cultural lens. Specifically, the study looks at the phenomenon of work-life conflict and its impact on turnover intent. It also examined the moderating role of perceived organization support on the relationship between work-life conflict and turnover intent.

Design/methodology/approach – The study utilized a two-phased, mixed-method approach. In the first phase, qualitative data from 30 interviews were obtained to validate the existence of the constructs among Filipino call center agents. In the second phase, 991 surveys were administered to quantitatively test the hypothesized relationships between the study variables.

Findings – Results show that work-life conflict predicts intent to leave over and beyond that explained by job satisfaction. Findings also show that organizational support moderates the relationship between work-life conflict and intent to leave. The results also reveal the context-specific sources of work-life conflict: physical and psychological impact of work schedule, social isolation and lack of social support.

Research limitations/implications – The study focused on work-life conflict and perceived organizational support. However, there are other variables that may be examined in future research such as personality, family, and organizational variables.

Practical implications – Beyond the traditional responses to the issue of work-life conflict, the results suggest the importance of cultural nuanced responses to address work-life conflict.

Social implications – Although outsourcing is a boon to the economy of developing countries, policies encouraging call centers need to be coupled with an understanding of the personal and social costs of call center work.

Originality/value – This study highlights the importance of considering culture in viewing management practices and their impact on workers' behavior and wellbeing. It calls attention to the unique experience of call centers in developing countries and the importance of developing work-life interventions that are contextualized to local culture.

Keywords Call centers, Turnover intent, Work-life conflict, Perceived organizational support, Philippines, Call centres, Turnover, Employees turnover

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The Philippine call center industry has grown leaps and bounds in the past decade. From only two US based call centers in 2000, the country now houses 68 US-based call centers (Fringal, 2007). In 2010, it generated 5.5B dollars edging out India as the call center capital of the world (Macaraig, 2010).

The preference for the Philippines has been attributed to the large pool of computer-literate college graduates with American English communication skills. The growth was also made possible because the industry has lured workers with high

wages and financial incentives. Call center workers earn more than double the legislated minimum wage. On top of this, call center agents who work graveyard shifts earn 30 percent to 50 percent additional night differential pay (IBON, 2003). Given the more than 100 call centers around the country, the industry has created a new class of relatively affluent and financially independent young Filipinos (Greenlees, 2006).

However, despite high wages and attractive financial incentives, the call center industry has one of the highest turnover rates in the country (Greenlees, 2006). One explanation for the rapid turnover is the explosive growth in the industry. With more than 100 call centers scrambling to fill in their seats, the war for talent is on. This has resulted in aggressive recruitment strategies that include weekly, full-page ads, job fairs, mall-based applicant centers, referral bonuses, and signing bonuses to lure the best of talent (Peña, 2008). This has created an employee's market where agents are hopping from one center to another, lured by more attractive offers.

Beyond the labor market, there are a number of theories that seek to explain employee turnover. March and Simon's (1958) Theory of Organizational Equilibrium suggests that turnover occurs when people perceive that their contributions exceed the inducements they receive from an organization (in Joseph *et al.*, 2007). Building on this, Porter and Steers (1973) explain that one's level of satisfaction is determined by the extent to which employees expectations about rewards, advancement, relations, etc. are met. There is also evidence that relationship with co-workers and quality of leadership predict overall job satisfaction that, in turn, predict turnover (William and Hazer, 1986). A study of service workers also shows that empowerment, coaching, and role clarity predict turnover intention. However, this relationship is mediated by perceived service quality (Slätten *et al.*, 2011).

Research has also revealed a number of individual characteristics that are related to turnover. Because career exploration tends to happen at the beginning of one's career, turnover is to be expected among younger workers (Finegold *et al.*, 2003). Married employees have constraints that will make them think twice about leaving their jobs (Joseph *et al.*, 2007). There is also evidence that women workers may perceive less opportunity for employment and advancement compared to their male counterparts hence their reluctance to leave (Joseph *et al.*, 2007).

Studies specific to call centers validate the previously-mentioned factors but also suggest some additional factors. For example, a study among Australian call center agents point to the impact of workload and lack of promotion opportunity on withdrawal behavior (Deery *et al.*, 2002). A study among US call center workers found that quit rates are lower in establishments that emphasize high skills, employee participation in decision-making and human resource incentives such as high pay and employment security (Batt, 2002). A study by the Incoming Calls Management Institute (ICMI) (2004) reveals that the top causes of turnover are: better opportunities outside the organization, lack of career development opportunities, repetitive work, and daily physical confinement.

The previous literature on turnover explain turnover from the perspective of individual characteristics, attitudes, and job or organizational factors. Erez and Earley (1993) contend, however, that culture may determine the effectiveness of work practices. Their Cultural Self-Representation Theory suggests that cultural values and norms shape interpretation of work practices that, in turn, influence individual outcomes and work motivation and behavior. Unfortunately, majority of the literature

on turnover has emerged from the West and there is a dearth research from Asian cultures. This study seeks to fill this gap and examines the role of culture in influencing turnover intent in the Philippines.

This paper first situates call center work in the context of Philippine culture. The review of literature describes the salience of work-life conflict and perceived organization support from the context of culture. The paper presents the results of a two-phased mixed-method study. Phase one examines the salience and context of the constructs of turnover intent, work-life conflict, and perceived organization support using a qualitative approach. Phase two uses a quantitative approach in testing the relationships between these variables (see Figure 1).

Call center work in the context of the Philippine culture

The Philippines has been described as a collectivist culture. As opposed to individualistic cultures that emphasize individual goals and self-interest, in collectivist cultures, individuals define themselves in terms of their group membership (Hofstede, 2003). In the Filipino social structure, the family has a pervasive influence on individuals and plays a big role in decisions regarding marriage, residences, and even careers (Jocano, 1999). The influence of family in the context of call center work is especially important because majority of call center agents are fresh graduates who, given the education system in the Philippines, are about 20 years old. Unlike in the
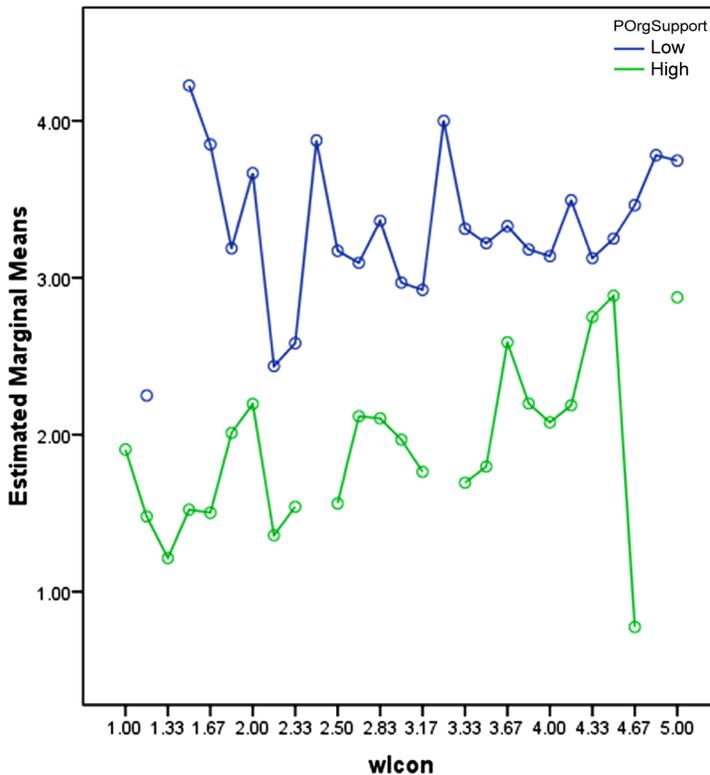

Figure 1.
Interaction of work-life conflict and perceived organization support on turnover intent

West where children are expected to be on their own after 18 years, Filipino children typically stay with their parents until they get married (Medina, 2001). In addition, the norms on parental regulation and obedience to parents are stronger among Filipinos than in the West. Filipino youth report that their parents set more rules and Filipino children are more likely to believe these rules as legitimate compared to counterparts in the US. Filipino parents also grant adolescents autonomy more slowly compared to parents in the US (Darling *et al.*, 2005). Given the role of the family on career choices, it is important to consider the impact of call center work on family norms and dynamics.

Work-life conflict and turnover intent
The transfer of call center work offshore is done for two reasons – enhanced customer satisfaction and lower costs. Customer satisfaction is enhanced because call centers operate 24/7 and thus, may be contacted by clients anytime. The lower costs are made possible when services are located in developing countries where labor wages are lower.

Majority of Philippine call centers service international clients, and given the different time zones, have graveyard shifts to coincide with the working hours of their customers. Research on nightwork suggests that problems associated with this work schedule can be classified into three kinds: disruption of circadian rhythm, physical and psychological problems. Of these, the most common negative impacts reported are lack of sleep, fatigue and greater health problems. In addition to these factors, another negative impact of night work reported by Filipino call center works involves physical safety. Some call center workers who use public transportation have reported being mugged on their way home.

Beyond the physical impact of nightwork, however, there are also social problems associated with a disruption to family life and diminished time with friends (Muecke, 2005). In addition, a study among Indian call center workers suggests that workers in call centers become "detached from the spaces of social life such as markets, households and transportation links, which occur only during the day" (Mirchandani, 2004, p. 365).

Another unique characteristic of call centers is that they follow the holiday schedules of their clients rather than the holidays of their country. For example, Filipino call center agents servicing US accounts take a break during Thanksgiving but not during Holy Week which is a religious holiday in the Philippines.

Thus, the call center work schedule is expected to challenge Filipino call center workers' ability to juggle their professional and personal roles. In this study, we examine work-life conflict defined as an experience that occurs when the emotional and behavioral demands of work and non-work roles are incompatible and the participation in one role is made difficult by the participation in another (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Work-life conflict has been associated with both negative health effects as well as greater likelihood of turnover (Pisarski *et al.*, 2006). In addition, the inability of organizations to address work-life conflict issues lead to costs related to absenteeism and turnover (Brough *et al.*, 2008).

Because the phenomenon of call centers is fairly new in the Philippines, we suggest that the deviant work schedule may create tension between call center workers and their family. Such work life conflict may then influence turnover intent.

Organization support as a moderator

Despite the inherent difficulties created by call center schedules, work-life conflict and its subsequent relationship with turnover intent may be moderated by the amount of social support provided to workers. Parasuraman *et al.*'s model (1992) of work-life conflict describes the antecedents and outcomes of work-family conflict and the moderating role of social support. Parasuraman *et al.* (1992) describes two types of social support – personal social support emanating from one's spouse and support from one's work organization.

Organizational support is generally defined as the degree to which an organization takes care of its employees (Naumann *et al.*, 1998). Research has shown that perceived organization support (POS) is negatively related with absenteeism (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1990). Thompson *et al.* (1999) found that employee perception of a supportive work-family culture in their organization is negatively related to work-family conflict and intentions to leave.

The value of organizational support is of particular importance in the Philippine culture. Workers in collectivist societies tend to view their work groups and organizations as a fundamental part of themselves (Matsumoto, 2000). Filipinos, in particular, have been described as personalistic, familial, and paternalistic. Personalism involves placing a high concern for the welfare of individuals. Familialism, on the other hand, is manifested in a spirit of collective concern and sentiment as though the organization is one big family. The value of paternalism is manifested in the expectation that leaders treat workers with concern and compassion as if they were family members (Jocano, 1999). There is local evidence of the impact of organization support on turnover. A study by Carbonnel (2008) revealed that an important factor that predicts turnover intent in the Philippines is perceived organization responsiveness to employee needs.

In the past years, some Philippine call centers have begun to respond to the work-life issues of their agents. For example, Convergys provides sleeping lounges for their employees. To address security issues, the company made arrangements with a taxi service to ensure safe passage home. Employees are also picked up at specific locations by a shuttle service that transports them to the office (Sibal, n.d.). TeleTech opened a gym and spa right inside the company premises. Both facilities are open 24/7 to allow employees to use them before work, during break time, or after work (Gomez, 2007). This kind of care would be seen favorably in a personalistic culture such as the Philpines and may even generate a sense of reciprocity. Defined as a "debt of gratitude" that one feels in the face of kindness or aid, *utang na loob* is a motivational force that shapes Filipino social interactions and behaviors (Church, 1986).

This study used a mixed-method approach obtaining both quantitative and qualitative data. In the first phase, a qualitative approach was used to explore the phenomenon of turnover, work-life conflict and organizational support. In the second phase, the relationships between the variables were empirically tested.

Phase one: qualitative study

Research problem

Given the dearth of research from non-Western culture, this phase aimed to validate the salience of the constructs under study. Specifically, we asked:

(1) Do Filipino call center workers experience work-life conflict?

(2) What are the sources of work-life conflict among Filipino call center workers?

(3) How does work-life conflict influence turnover intent?

(4) What is the role of organization support in buffering the impact of work-life conflict?

Methods

Sample. Interviews were conducted with 30 call center customer service representatives (CSRs). Convenience sampling was used. However, a selection criterion was that respondents had to have been at least six months on the job. Majority (65 percent) of interviewees were females. The age of interviewees ranged from 20 to 43 years old ($M = 26$ years, $SD = 5$). Of the agents 14 (54 percent) handled customer service account, 31 percent handled sales, and the rest handled process outsourcing or technical accounts. The interviews lasted one to two hours. On average, the transcriptions were 1,100 words long.

Instrumentation. The in-depth interviews utilized open-ended questions. Interviewers were trained and given an interview guide that consisted of three sets of questions: preliminary (How long have you been a call center agent? What do you do as a CSR?), well-being (How are you? How do you feel about your work?), perceived organization support (What kind of support does your organization provide you?), and turnover intent (Do you see yourself staying in this job? What would you make you stay or leave?).

Analysis. Thematic content analysis was conducted by identifying the categories and subcategories that emerged from the transcription data. The lead researcher first went through the transcription and identified the themes. Two researchers validated the initial categories and coded the data independently. The lead research consolidated the coding done by the two researchers.

Interview results

Experience of work-life conflict. We asked call center agents how they were and majority used the word "stressed" to describe their state. Although they did not specifically use the term "work-life conflict," the salience of the construct was evident in their responses. Reported one agent, "when I had a day job, I used to have time for myself and my family. We could have dinner together. Now I only see them on the weekends." Another agent said, "I have less time for myself, my family because of the time."

In terms of the sources of call center agents' work-life conflict, the responses clustered around three themes: physical and psychological impact of work schedule, social isolation and lack of social support.

Physical and psychological impact of work schedule. A common complaint among agents was feeling physically tired. Said one call center agent, "This schedule really throws off your body clock. Even if you force yourself, you never really get eight hours of sleep and when you wake up, you still do not feel rested", " It's hard to sleep well in the morning. It's bright, noisy and hot. I sleep only three to four hours at most."

The interviews also suggest that the fatigue because of night work impedes the quality of time that agents spend with their significant others. Recounted one agent, "Initially, I thought the night shift was okay because my kids were getting older and I wanted to be home during the day. But the graveyard shift and lack of sleep was making me cranky and sickly."

Social isolation. Another source of work-life conflict is social isolation. As articulated by a married agent, "My husband also works in a call center. But we have a

different shift. So we hardly see each other." Even those who are still single experience the isolation, as described by one agent, "I have no social life anymore because my friends have normal day jobs and I'm the only one working nights. I still live at home but hardly talk to my family anymore. Even when I am home, I am asleep so my parents just communicate with me via text."

Other agents decried the loss of holidays, "We still need to go to work even on Holy Week so the tradition that you go to the province and pray, do Visita Iglesia (church visits) – you won't be able to do that anymore. Even during Christmas you still need to go to work. We also go to work on New Year, so we miss a lot," and "Because I am sleep-deprived, I would sleep instead of going to family gatherings. So I have a bad reputation in my family because I am always absent during get-togethers." Agents do get breaks when their client countries have holidays (such as Thanksgiving) – however, Filipino agents merely see these holidays as opportunities to rest as they have no cultural significance to them.

Lack of social support. For some agents, it is the lack of social support that makes them feel conflicted, "There were difficulties at home because people at home could not understand why you're sleeping during the daytime. My children knew I was working at night, but didn't understand why I was asleep during the day. I could not go out with my friends who have normal lives so my ties with them weakened. My choir head didn't understand why I was always absent during practice. Sunday is family and church time so my mom also didn't understand why I would work even on weekends."

Beyond reactions of immediate family, there were also negative reactions from kin or neighbors. There appears to be misconceptions about the work of call center workers. Recounted one agent, "My neighbors think I am a "bad woman" because I work at night." There was also the stigma related to the work as explained by one agent, "Other CSRs do not take pride in their work. They think others look down on our work because the industry accepts even those who did not finish college." This was validated by another CSR, "The reaction of my family was – you graduated from college and you just will end up in a call center?".

Turnover intent
When we asked whether they intended to stay in the organization, more than half of agents reported that they were thinking of leaving, "I'm just waiting for the right time for me to resign. Maybe, before this year ends." Many of them viewed their work as temporary, "My goal is to have a business of my own [...] get a real job..."

Other than work schedules, agents cited a number of factors including the volume of work, "we receive calls at least 80 calls to 100 calls a day," high expectations "It is stressful for us to balance quality and handling time," nature of customers "With the calls we get, it's really stressful really – people who are irate, old people who cannot hear... it is really challenging. Sometimes callers treat you like trash," job design, "For the past two years, it's been the same. I'm not learning anything," and lack of career growth "There's no growth if you're going to stay in a call center."

The importance of organization support
When asked what would make them stay in the organization, agents highlighted the role of organizational support. Majority appreciated the fact that their work allowed them to become more financially stable. As interviewees said "You have to admit that

call centers pay better than other companies." Another agent echoed, "I feel good about my work. I do not think I can find work elsewhere that would give me the same amount in terms of compensation and benefits." In fact, for some, the pay was a big factor in getting the support of their family. As one married agent recounted, "Initially, my family especially my husband was against my working in a call center. But it paid the bills. My husband was already a product manager for a clothing company but he was just earning minimum compared to what I was earning – and I was just an agent. So eventually my husband decided to join a call center too."

Agents also cited the attractive benefits provided, "My company provides health benefits for me and my children so at least I am secure that if anything happens to my kids, I do not need to shell out such a big amount of money. It's assuring that I can take them to the hospital anytime because I have health benefits."

Agents also cited good relations as a reason for staying. Said one agent, "A lot of my friends will spend three months in one call center and move to another. After my six month here, I had so many offers outside but I didn't take any of them. I love the people I work with." Another agent said, "We are like one big family so that's why I really love my work."

There were those who also cited good management-employee relations, "What I really appreciate about the company is the way we treat each other. We treat each other equally and address our American bosses on a first name basis. My bosses are all down-to-earth, no superiority complex."

The interviews also highlighted the role of employee welfare programs and facilities such as gym, recreation facilities, sleeping lounges. The agents appreciated the fact that their company also provided them access to TV and Internet, " We usually do not have time for TV because when I get home, I just sleep. We also have access to newspapers and the Internet that is not allowed in other call centers. Here we are allowed as long as we have time. But we are allowed to play hard as long as we work hard. They do not want us to be workaholics and encourage balance."

Phase two: quantitative study

The qualitative results validate the presence and salience of work-life conflict, turnover intent and the role of organizational support. Thus, in the second phase, a survey was administered to test the relationships between these three factors. Specifically, we hypothesized that:

H1. Work-life conflict would predict turnover intent, over and beyond that explained by job satisfaction.

H2. Perceived organization support (POS) moderates the relationship between work-life conflict (WLC) and intention to leave, such that when POS is high, WLC is less positively related to intention to leave than when POS is low.

Survey sample

Surveys were administered to a total of 991 call center agents from 10 call centers. Initially, letters were sent out to about 30 call centers but only 10 of these (30 percent) agreed to participate. Respondents were recruited through the Human Resource managers. Respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 60 years with an average age of 25.

Majority (74 percent) of respondents were first-time workers. The number of years of services of respondents ranged from less than a year to ten years with an average of 18 months. Majority of CSRs were female (54 percent) and single (82 percent).

In terms of job level, more than three fourth of respondents (76 percent) were at the agent level. Nature of work varied with 37 percent handling customer service functions, 34 percent handling technical support functions, 18 percent handling sales, 6 percent financial transactions and 5 percent others.

Of agents 60 percent were on graveyard shifts. The rest either had early morning to early afternoon shifts (10 percent), regular days shifts (17 percent), or mid-day to evening shifts (12 percent). Majority (63 percent) of agents also reported that they had recently shifted work schedules (see Table I).

Survey measures
Based on the results of the interviews, the following constructs where measured in the survey: job satisfaction, work-life conflict, perceived organization support and turnover intent.

	(%)
Age	
18-60	
Average = 25	
Percent of first-time workers	74
Years of service	
Less than one to ten years	
Average 18 months	
Gender	
Female	54
Male	46
Civil status	
Single	82
Married	18
Job level	
Agents	76
Supervisor/managerial	24
Nature of work	
Customer service	37
Technical support	34
Sales	18
Financial transactions	6
Others	5
Work schedule	
Graveyard	60
Early morning to early afternoon	10
Day shift	17
Midday to evening	12
Recently shifted work schedules	63

Table I.
Profile of respondents

Job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is defined as employees' evaluation of different facets of their work such as work hours, work conditions, autonomy, responsibilities, use of abilities, job variety and security. This was measured using Warr *et al.*'s (1979) 15-item job satisfaction scale and utilizing a seven-point scale with a higher score indicating greater job satisfaction. Internal consistency reliability of this scale was $\alpha = 0.92$.

Work-life conflict. Defined as the extent to which an individual experiences tension between work and family responsibilities, it was measured using Kopelman *et al.* (1983) scale that included items such as "My work schedule often conflicts with my personal life." Items utilized a five-point scale with a higher score indicating greater work-life conflict. The original scale had eight items, but two items "My family dislikes how often I am preoccupied with my work while I'm at home" and "My job makes it difficult to be the kind of spouse or parent I'd like to be" were dropped due to low item-total correlation (below 0.30). The first item was not valid because agents do not bring work home. Majority of agents were also single thus the latter item was not applicable to many of them. The remaining six items yielded an internal consistency reliability of $\alpha = 88$.

Perceived organizational support. This is the extent to which employees perceive their organization values their contributions and cares about their wellbeing. It was measured using the short version of Eisenberger *et al.*'s (1986) Perceived Organizational Support scale. Items utilized a five-point scale with a higher score indicating greater organization support. The scale consisted on nine items include items such as "The organization really cares about my well-being." Two negatively worded items were reversed scored but dropped from the final survey because of item-total correlations below 0.30. The seven items utilized had an internal consistency reliability of $\alpha = 0.93$.

Intent to leave. Turnover intent is defined as the propensity to leave the organization. It was measured using four items. Respondents were asked the extent to which they intended to leave the organization within the next year on a scale of 0 to 100 percent. The responses were later categorized into a five levels with one being 0 to 20 percent and five being 80 to 100 percent. The other item asked respondents to indicate their career plans with one "no plans to leave", two "will leave after five years", three "will leave between three to five years", four "will leave between one to three years" and five "will leave within the year." The other two items consisted of a five-point Likert scale where respondents were asked their level of disagreement to the following items, "I like this career too well to give it up" and "I definitely want a career for myself in this profession." The four items had an internal consistency reliability of $\alpha = 0.74$.

Survey results

Correlational analysis. Correlational analysis reveals that of the demographic variables, only age and civil status are significantly related to turnover intent. Specifically, younger and single workers express greater intent to leave than older and married workers. Job satisfaction, work-life conflict and perceived organization support are all significantly correlated with intent to leave (see Table II).

Work-life conflict and intent to leave. The study hypothesized that work-life conflict would predict intent to leave over and beyond that predicted by demographic variables and job satisfaction. Hierarchical regression was conducted with age, civil status and job satisfaction as control variables in the first step and work-life conflict and

	Mean	SD	Age	Gender	Tenure	Civil status	Job satisfaction	Work-life conflict	Perceived org support
Age	25.33	4.06	1.0						
Gender	1.54	0.49	0.03	1.0					
Tenure	17.60	17.50	0.30*	0.12*	1.0				
Civil status	1.17	0.38	0.36*	0.04	0.14*	1.0			
Job satisfaction	4.79	0.91	0.01	-0.02	-0.07*	0.03	1.00		
Work-life conflict	3.18	0.96	-0.10*	-0.02	0.00	0.05	-0.40*	1.00	
Perceived org support	4.79	1.01	0.09*	0.03	0.00	0.02	0.75*	-0.35*	1.00
Intent to leave	2.86	0.85	-0.15*	0.04	-0.00	-0.10*	-0.51*	0.34*	-0.50*

Note: Age was coded as is, Gender was coded 1 for male, 2 for female, Tenure was coded in terms of number of months, Civil status was coded 1 for single, 2 for married * significant at $p < 0.05$

Table II.
Descriptive statistics and correlations between variables

perceived organization support in the second step. Results support the hypothesis as work-life conflict does predict a significant, albeit small amount, of additional variance in turnover intent over and above that predicted by demographic variables and job satisfaction ($beta = 0.10, p < 0.01$) (see Table III).

Organization support as a moderator. We found support for our hypothesis that organization support would moderate the relationship between work-life conflict and turnover intent. The product of the standardized variables of work-life conflict and perceived organization support was entered in the third step of the hierarchical regression analysis. As seen in Table III, although the amount of variance was quite small, the F value was significant ($F = 4.69, p < 0.05$).

Discussion

The results supported the hypothesis that work-life conflict would predict intent to leave over and above that explained by demographic variables and job satisfaction. Although the relationship between work-life conflict and turnover intent has been established in previous studies and samples, the qualitative data highlight the importance of understanding the cultural nuances and context in which work-life conflict occurs.

Our results suggest that the sources of work-life conflict among Filipino call center agents are not entirely the same as those identified in previous researches. Work-life conflict has generally been conceptualized as a result of work and non-work stressors. Typical work stressors are work load, job demands, lack of support and resources, unclear expectations, lack of autonomy, multiple demands or a lack of job fit (Higgins and Duxbury, 1992). Non-work stressors have typically been defined in relation to finances, relationships, children, friends, health, transportation, etc. (Klitzman *et al.*, 1990). Although work hours and stress are not unique to call center work, the results suggest context-specific factors – the physical and psychological impact of the work schedule, the lack of support from family and friends, and the isolation that night work creates. Consistent with the experience of other call center workers in India (Mirchandani, 2004), such isolation is all the more salient because the Philippine culture puts a premium on the family, social relations and religion (Hechanova *et al.*, 2005). Thus, the crux of the tension between culture and work practice is that agents are unable to spend time and celebrate significant events with their families or participate in faith-related activities – all of which are important aspects of who they are.

Predictor variables	B	Std error	β	ΔR^2	F change
Step One: controls				0.33	112.06[**]
Age	− 0.03	0.01	− 0.12[**]		
Civil status	− 0.04	0.07	− 0.03		
Job satisfaction	− 0.31	0.05	− 0.32[**]		
Step Two:				0.039	21.12[**]
Work-life conflict	0.09	0.03	0.10[**]		
Perceived organization support (POS)	− 0.22	0.04	− 0.25[**]		
Step Three:				0.004	4.69[*]
WLConflict x POS	0.06	0.03	0.07[*]		

Note: [**] $p < 0.01$, [*] $p < 0.05$

Table III.
Regression of work-life conflict on intent to leave

The results also validate the importance of organization support in moderating the relationship between work-life conflict and turnover intent. Although this relationship has likewise been found in previous research (e.g. Cementina *et al.*, 2005; Eisenberger *et al.*, 1990; Thompson *et al.*, 1999) what the qualitative data suggests is that type of support needs to be nuanced to culture and context. Work-life interventions tend to focus on providing leaves, work-at-home arrangements, flexibility of time, reducing work hours or days, and even onsite child care (Webber *et al.*, 2010). Although some of these such as flexible or reduced work hours may not be possible given the nature of call center work, work-at-home arrangements are something Philippine call centers may wish to consider. For example, in the US there is a growing trend for home-based phone representatives (Incoming Calls Management Institute (ICMI), 2004). For employers, it is a cheaper alternative because they pay their workers only for the time they are on the phone. For the workers, it saves call center agents travel costs and gives them the convenience of working from their homes.

The physical, psychological, familial, and social impacts of the work schedule require interventions that are outside the purview of traditional work-life programs. Unfortunately, because of the difference in time zones, night shifts are a given for Filipino call center agents. There may be a need to re-examine work scheduling practices. For example, a common practice in call centers is to rotate shifts. However, studies show that irregular shifts or constant rotation may actually be even more harmful than night work (Muecke, 2005). Thus, one strategy would be to avoid radical shifts in biorhythms of individuals when planning work schedules.

In addition, the element of control appears to be an important predictor of work-life conflict (Skinner and Pocock, 2008). The tolerance to night work may increase when individuals have a choice that can be factored into the workforce planning practices of call centers. A local airline, for example, has a system where high performers are given priority in choosing their shift for a given month. In the US, hospitals such as Johns Hopkins, Memorial Sloan-Kettering, etc. use shift-scheduling software that allows administrators to create scheduling rules, monitor, and analyse schedules. Employees log on to a web-based interactive calendar grid to select the hours and days they want to work. It also allows them to swap shifts with co-workers or include auctions where workers bid against one another for an open shift.

The social isolation that night work brings is particularly problematic because call center agents are young. A study among young Filipino workers also reveals that an important retention factor for young workers is having peers that they enjoy working with (Hechanova *et al.*, 2006). This is consistent with the results that call center workers value having a fun and supportive work atmosphere and good relations with their colleagues. This is actually something that Philippine call centers have recognized and are addressing. Parties, night outs, sports and recreation activities and teambuilding activities have become staples in many Philippine call centers. The implicit intent is to provide agents friendships and social bonds and for them to feel less isolated.

The lack of social support from family and kin is likewise another issue that appears to be peculiar to this sample and setting. One way some companies have sought to address this is to invite family members to an "open house" in the company or by having family days. These events are opportunities for them to clarify misconceptions and demonstrate the legitimacy of the work of call center agents to family members.

Beyond such interventions, however, there may be a need to review recruitment and training of CSRs. Call centers have extensive recruitment and training processes in order to select the right people. Typically, this means selecting people who can communicate well, interact with customers, manage emotions, use technology, learn information, and other technical skills (Townsend, 2007). Our results suggest that it may also be necessary to examine issues of family support, living arrangements and personal values to spot possible areas of conflict. In addition, although not everyone is cut out for night work, there are individuals whose body clocks are more attuned to graveyard shifts.

In addition to technical skills, product information, and customer service training given to CSRs, the result also suggest there may be a need for work-life training programs to help agents maintain relationships with family members and friends given their unique work schedule. Programs on communication, time, stress and energy management may be important in order to ensure that work stress does not spillover into the domain of family.

Limitations and implications for future research

The results show that job satisfaction, work-life conflict and perceived organization support accounted for about 37 percent variance in turnover intent. This suggests that there are other factors not measured in this study that may influence retention. For example, personality, motivations, educational and family background are some other factors that may need to be tested in future research for their impact on retention.

Other than individual variables, future studies may wish to examine differences in types of call centers. For example, a study of call centers in Spain found evidence that in-house call centers have better job quality than outsourced call centers. The authors also found that call centers that participate in associations or networks have better labor quality ratings (Gorjup *et al.*, 2009).

The study examined the issue of turnover only from the perspective of call center agents. Given the apparent importance of their family and kin, future studies may wish to explore their perceptions of call center work. Future studies may wish to explore the role of personal social support on the experience of work-life conflict. In addition, other researchers may wish to focus on how call center agents cope with work-life conflict and successful strategies.

The study was limited to cross-sectional design and single-source responses. Longitudinal studies may be able to pinpoint when work-life conflict peaks. Multi-source information especially on the impact and manifestation of work-life conflict may also be informative in understanding the phenomenon and antecedents of work-life conflict. Finally, studies on retention strategies of call centers would be important in enabling this growing industry to meet its full potential.

Conclusion

Call centers presents both opportunities and challenges for the Philippine workforce. In a country with a high unemployment rate and weak economy, the call center industry allows Filipino workers to provide for their families. However, the nature of the work schedule also isolates workers from their families and social group – an important source of tension given the family-oriented and collectivist nature of the Philippine culture. Some of these effects can be buffered through effective workforce scheduling and competitive compensation and benefits. Employee development and well-being

programs are likewise a means to provide employees the resources to cope with the demands of the job. Unless Philippine call centers address the challenges that work schedule brings to the cultural norms and values of its workers, they may be forever viewed as a revolving door.

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