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MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

"Influence of Empowerment and Perceived Organizational Support on Overall Job Satisfaction of Call Centre Employee"

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Abstract

This research is intended to analyze the nature of overall empowerment (EMP), four dimensions of empowerment namely competence (COM), meaning (MEA), impact (IMP), self-determination (SD) and perceived organizational support (POS) in relation to overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre front-line employees.

The research hypotheses are examined by using a sample of Malaysian call centre front-line employees (n=70). Standard multiple regression is employed to test various hypotheses and examine the extent to which overall empowerment (EMP) four dimensions of empowerment (COM, MEA, IMP, SD), and perceived organizational support (POS) in predicting overall job satisfaction (SAT) in the context of a highly contradicting organizational settings.

The research findings indicated that empowerment (EMP), perceived organizational support (POS), competence (COM), and self-determination (SD) are positively related to overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre front-line employees. The remaining variables (MEA and IMP) are found not related to overall job satisfaction.

Based on these empirical findings, call centre management should take proactive measures in the following areas like participative decision making, training and development, job design, open flow of information, organizational structure, and human resource practices to promote overall empowerment (EMP) and perceived organizational support (POS) at the workplace. Some of the advantages for the mentioned initiative include reduced employee turnover, increased overall job satisfaction reduced stress level, and improved job performance among call centre employees. This study takes some initial steps to bridge the knowledge gaps on factors influencing general well being of call centre FLEs in the context of Malaysia's call centre.

Nevertheless, it's recommended to incorporate a diverse range of industries into the

research, to investigate other potential outcomes of EMP and POS within the same context, to explore the impact of EMP and POS on multiple facets of job satisfaction, cross comparison of the result with a benchmark sample like conventional office employees, incorporation of control variables into the study, and to apply structural equation analysis to adequately address the sophisticated nature contained in the variables of interest.

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List of Abbreviations

1. FLEs = Frontline Employee

2. EMP = Overall Empowerment

3. POS = Perceived Organizational Support

4. COM = Competence

5. MEA = Meaning

6. IMP = Impact

7. SD = Self-determination

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Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Call centre industry has experienced phenomenal growth around the globe in the last decade and have become an important component for many companies in terms of customer services, marketing, sales, and operations. As a result, this relatively young industry has generated instant attention worldwide due its rapid growth and potential impact in light of increasingly globalized business environment. Nevertheless, it's a well known fact that call centre industry faces unprecedented challenges such as high employee turnover, low job satisfaction and motivation, absenteeism, high level of work-related stress, concerns over general well being of call centre employee, low productivity, and so forth. Undoubtedly, the aforesaid issues could relentlessly jeopardize the potential of the industry if they are not resolved amicably. The objective of this research is to investigate the role of overall empowerment (EMP) and perceived organizational support (POS) in influencing overall job satisfaction of call centre front line employee (FLEs).

1.1.1 Objective

The primary objective of this chapter is to provide the background to the research, emphasizing the emergence of call centre industry in global arena and their potential implications on business operations. Besides that, some of the contemporary operating challenges facing call centre industry will also be revealed and discussed. From there, problem statement, research questions,

research objectives, and research hypotheses were synthesized, following by establishment of theoretical framework. Finally, research assumptions and limitations of the research are presented.

1.1.2 Structure of Chapter I

Chapter 2 consists of 8 sections namely introduction, background to the study, research issues, justifications for research, contributions of the research, limitations of the research, quick summary, and concluding remarks of the chapter. Section 1.2 outlines the background to the research via a preliminary literature review on the subject of interest. Section 1.3 covers research issues like problem statement, research questions research objectives, research hypotheses and theoretical framework, and research assumptions. Section 1.4 discusses about the justification for the research. Section 1.5 identifies the contributions of the research following by limitations of the research in section 1.6. Section 1.7 provides a quick summary on the chapter before the chapter concludes in section 1.8.

1.2 Background to the Study

Call centre industry is experiencing a phenomenal growth at both national and international markets and has been positioned as an imperative tool for companies' marketing and customer service operations (Gilson & Khandelwal, 2005; Mahesh & Kasturi, 2006; cited by Sawyerr et.al., 2007). According to Datamonitor (2004), call centre industry is forecast to have a value of $52 billion with a volume of 5 million call centre agents position globally, an increase of 29.6% and 19.9% respectively since 2003. In Malaysia, it's estimated that call center industry comprises of 575 call centres operating 12,000 seats (callcentre.net, 2003). Majority of the call centers has been operated for approximately 7 years (callentres.net, 2003) which is congruent with the report by Global Call Centre Report (2007) whereby the call centre sector is relatively young with the typical call centre being 8 years old. Besides that, the prospect of call industry in Malaysia is indeed bright whereby it is forecast that both new entrants and number of seat will continue to grow in foreseeable future (callcentre.net, 2003). According to Taylor and Bain at 2001 (cited by Kasturi & Mahesh, 2006), call centres being operated by organizations to serve a wide variety of purposes, differ across organization. Therefore call centre operations is customized in each and every organization to fit the purpose of its establishment. Some of the common organizational characteristics that are used to differentiate the nature of call centre include strategic purpose, type of technology used, management style, and so forth.

Nevertheless, quoting several research studies, the primary drivers for the tremendous growth of service-based call centre are quite coherent across business literature; including technological advance in integrated telephone computer technology, cost-savings, and convenience factor for consumers (Calvert, 2001; Sergeant & Frankel, 2000; cited by Malhotra & Murkherjee, 2004;

Dimension Data, 2007), and increase sales and revenue (Calvert, 2001). In pursuit of greater customer satisfaction and cost-effective communication, call centre is continually upgrading their features and technology to accommodate ever-sophisticated customer expectations and demands (Holdsworth & Cartwright, 2003).

Concomitantly, the emergence of service industry like call centre contributes to creation of a relatively new labor market known as 'emotional labor' becoming the central pillar of interactive service work. This job is chiefly characterized by frequent customer encounters, and the necessity to control their state of mind and emotions during business transaction as they need to uphold stringent standard operating procedure under all circumstances that is tight to the organizational value (Dollard & Lewig, 2003) and compliance to precise operating procedures (Holdsworth & Cartwright, 2003).

In call centre, employee is known as call centre front-line employees (FLEs) and they play crucial role for service industry as they serve as a bridge between clients and the service provision by the organization' (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000; cited by Malhotra & Mukherjee, 2004) and they are interface responsible for the customer service process on a regular basis. In short, call centres operations are usually centralized, concentrated, routinised tele-based operations (Houlihan, 2001).

In meeting both cost and efficiency, work environment at call center is typically characterized by stringent monitoring and control while managing customer service interaction through the use of information technology to frame, monitor and control their work (Houlihan, 2001; Houlihan, 2002). According to Batt (2008), call centre job is highly standardized and often accompanied by the use of electronic monitoring that may lead to repercussions as it is pervasive in nature and tend to create mistrust between employee and management. Furthermore,

the adoption of high-commitment management style accompanying with a range of stringent control strategies to enforce call centre agent to work in a pre-programmed and rigid way will contribute to tensions and contradictions while interacting with customers (Kinnie et al., 2000).

To worsen the situation, some call centre environment appears to be contradictory and not conducive of high productivity as it's being mismanaged in a way that it doesn't support call centre agent to deliver high quality work to customers (Dean & Rainnie, 2009). some of the classical examples will be inherent conflict between quality and quantity whereby the call centre agent will need to strike a balance between productivity goals and quality of the delivery to the customers (Akroyd et al., 2006; Kasturi & Mahesh, 2006; Holdsworth & Cartwright, 2003; Malhotra & Mukherjee, 2004; Mahesh & Kasturi, 2006; Dean & Rainnie, 2009), control and empowerment issue in which the call centre agent is lack of control over their job due to boundaried roles and responsibilities (Kinnie et al., 2000; Houlihan, 2001; Luks & Savery, 2001; Holdsworth & Cartwright, 2003; Dae et al., 2006; Mahesh & Kasturi, 2006), and lack of perceived organizational support (Brymer et al., 2000).

Besides that, the very intrinsic nature of call centre work itself is often regarded as demanding, repetitive, and stressful (Dollard & Lewig, 2003). Sawyerr et al. (2007) also remarked that call centre job is plagued by job-related stress, the workload is always unbearable, and lack of employee training.

As a result, call centre industry is notoriously plagued by high levels of stress, turnover, and absenteeism (Luks & Savery, 2001; Dollard & Lewig, 2003; Holdsworth & Cartwright, 2003; Kasturi & Mahesh, 2006; Dimension Data, 2007; Batt, 2008; Dean & Rainnie, 2009; Sawyerr et al., 2009), and low job satisfaction (Brymet et al., 2000; Luks & Savery, 2001; Dollard & Lewig, 2003; Holdsworth &

Cartwright, 2003; Malhotra & Mukherjee, 2004; Dae et al., 2006; Mahesh & Kasturi, 2006; Lukea-Bhiwajee et al., 2009).

Due to people-intensive of call centre industry, it is a well-known fact that failure to retain employee leads to huge costs implications to the company (Robinson & Morley, 2006; cited by Lukea-Bhiwajee et al., 2009). For instance, the costs of turnover are high, the simple replacement costs of a call centre agent equals about two months of a typical worker's pay, if lost productivity is taken into consideration, total costs of replacing one call centre agent is equivalent to four months of a worker's pay (Global Call Centre Report, 2007). Apart from that, high turnover also causes other operational challenges namely deteriorated customer services, lower productivity, higher costs of recruitment and training, disruption to daily routine, and management difficulties (Batt, 2008). Given the prominent cost implications of high turnover, it's sensible to study the forces that drive job satisfaction and motivation of call centre agent as research have demonstrated that employee turnover is negatively influenced by employee satisfaction (Hom & Griffeth, 1995; cited by Holdsworth & Cartwright, 2003; Armenakis et al., 2005; Lukea-Bhiwajee et al., 2009). With this backdrop in place, management of call centre is considered as a challenging assignment for top management of call centre industry (Batt and Moynihan, 2002; cited by Kasturi and Mahesh, 2006).

As a bid to combat the aforesaid issues intrinsic to call centre industry, call centre managers introduce employee empowerment strategies. Besides that, many scholars like Eisenberger et al. (1997; 2002; 2006) and Brymer at al. (2000) attempted to address employee satisfaction issues based on perceived organizational support theory.

Quoting business literature, empowerment positively influences overall job satisfaction of call centre agent as it is a key factor to increase job satisfaction of

contact employee as thereby they obtain the flexibility to make on-the-spot decisions (Dae et al., 2006). There is also report in the United States proposing that empowerment strategy can significantly enhance production and efficiency of call centre (Best Practices, 2000; cited by Holdsworth & Cartwright, 2003). Holdsworth & Cartwright (2003) also reported that empowerment will significantly improve psychological and physical well being of call centre agent and lead to reduction in sickness, absence, and turnover. By tackling contact centre agent job satisfaction issue, customer satisfaction will also be enhanced.

According to Brymer (2000), perceived organizational support is relevant in contact centre service context as it will trigger organizational commitment among contact centre agent in completing customer's request. Furthermore, Eisenberger & Rhoades (2002) observed that perceived organizational support will contribute to enhance employees' well-being like overall job satisfaction, mood, performance, intention to stay and withdrawal behavior. Consequently, satisfied employees are reported to have high involvement, and more committed to improve the quality of their service (Cheng et al., 2008).

As low employee retention and low job satisfaction are main operational challenges facing contact centre industry, it would be sensible to study how empowerment and perceived organizational support could be leveraged to optimize the productivity and efficiency of call centre.

1.3 Research Issues

In order to better understand the nature of issue, a preliminary literature review was conducted. Business literature surrounding environment settings of call centre, intrinsic nature of call centre job and its implications on general well being of call centre employee were being thoroughly examined. Contemporary business literature overwhelmingly reports many long-standing issues concerning call centre operations nowadays include high employee turnover, stress, and high level of absenteeism. In an attempt to arrest the situations, concept of sense of empowerment (EMP) and perceived organizational support (POS) were purportedly introduced and practically applied in call centre industry to improve overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre employees. The aforesaid idea has become the core foundation to derive research issues of the study.

1.3.1 Problem Statement

Call centre industry is notoriously plagued by high levels of stress and employee turnover primarily due to intrinsic nature of the job, rigid job design, intensive performance monitoring and surveillance, emphasis on service quality or customer-centric service, quantitative-oriented performance appraisal, high-commitment management, and mismanagement. Therefore it is of interest to understand the nature of empirical relationship between psychological empowerment (EMP) and perceived organizational support (POS) with overall job satisfaction (SAT) among call centre employees which could be capitalized to enhance their job satisfaction in pursuit of reduced employee turnover.

1.3.2 Research Questions

In short, this study is designated to answer the research questions below in a call centre context:

1. Does sense of empowerment (EMP) significantly influence overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre FLEs?

2. Does perceived organizational support (POS) significantly influence overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre FLEs?

3. Do four individual dimensions of empowerment (EMP) namely competence(COM), meaning (MEA), impact (IMP), and self-determination (SD) significantly influence overall jobsatisfaction (SAT) of call centre FLEs?

4. Is there any correlation among four individual dimensions of empowerment (COM, MEA, IMP, and SD)?

5. Is there any inter-relationship between individual dimensions of empowerment (COM, MEA, IMP, and SD) and perceived organizational support (POS)?

1.3.3 Research Objectives

1. To identify which, if any, the four dimensions of empowerment (COM, MEA, IMP, SD) and overall empowerment (EMP) are associated with overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre employees.

2. To examine if there is inter-relationship between four dimensions of empowerment (COM, MEA, IMP, and SD) and how strong the correlation is.

3. To investigate empirically the nature of the link between perceived organizational support (POS) and overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre employees.

4. To examine correlation between perceived organizational support (POS) and four dimensions of empowerment (COM, MEA, IMP, and SD) and how strong the correlation is.

It should be acknowledged that asides from empowerment (EMP) and perceived organizational support (POS), there are numerous other factors like training, salary, opportunity for career advancement and so forth that could influence overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre front-line employees. Nevertheless, our study is dedicated to investigate the impact of empowerment (EMP) and perceived organizational support (POS) on the overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre front-line employees. The reason being is that these two factors were frequently reported in business literature related to call centre industry (e.g Brymer et al., 2000; Luks and Savery, 2001; Holman, 2002; Holdsworth and Cartwright, 2003; Eisenberger et al. 2006; Cheng et al., 2008) that proven to have ability to enhance motivation and job satisfaction of call centre employee.

1.3.4 Research Hypotheses

As documented extensively in business literature, psychological empowerment (EMP) and perceived organizational support (POS) have often been established as antecedent variables to employee job satisfaction (SAT). Based on a preliminary literature review, the following hypotheses were developed:

1. *Hypothesis 1: There is a relationship between overall empowerment (EMP) and overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre FLEs.*

2. *Hypothesis 2: There is a relationship between perceived organizational support (POS) and overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre FLEs.*

3. *Hypothesis 3: There is a relationship between competence (COM) and overall job Satisfaction (SAT) of call centre FLEs .*

4. *Hypothesis 4: There is a relationship between meaning (MEA) and overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call   centre FLEs.*

5. *Hypothesis 5: There is a relationship between impact (IMP) and overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre FLEs.*

6. *Hypothesis 6: There is a relationship between self-determination (SD) and overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre FLEs.*

Theoretical framework for this study was graphically illustrated in figure 1.3.4A below.
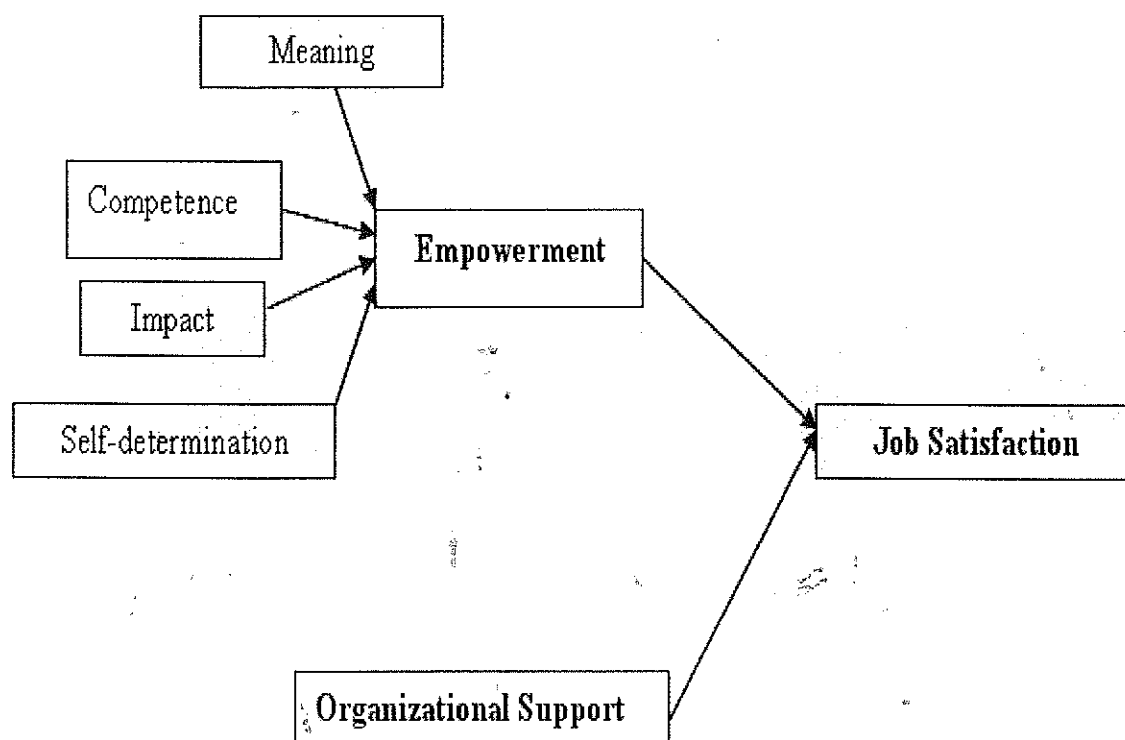

Figure 1.3.4A: Theoretical framework for the study

A summary on research questions and hypotheses is illustrated in Table 1.3.4 below.

Table 1.3.4: Relationship between research questions and research hypotheses

Research Questions	Research Hypotheses
1. Does empowerment (EMP) significantly influence overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre FLEs?	1. There is a relationship between empowerment (EMP) and overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre FLEs.
2. Does perceived organizational support (POS) significantly influence overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre FLEs?	2. There is a relationship between perceived organizational support (POS) and overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre FLEs.
3. Does competence (COM) significantly influence overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre FLEs?	3. There is a relationship between competence (COM) and overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre FLEs.
4. Does meaning (MEA) significantly influence overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre FLEs?	4. There is a relationship between meaning (MEA) and overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre FLEs.
5. Does impact (IMP) significantly influence overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre FLEs?	5. There is a relationship between impact (IMP) and overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre FLEs.
6. Does self-determination (SD) significantly influence overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre FLEs?	6. There is a relationship between self-determination (SD) and overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre FLEs.

Source: Developed for this research

1.3.5 Research Assumptions

The most important assumptions upheld in this research are:

1. Psychological empowerment (EMP) is a four-dimensional construct namely competence (COM), meaning (MEA), impact (IMP), and self-determination (SD). It is a continuous variable and the degree of overall empowerment (EMP) for an individual is the aggregate score of the given dimensions (Spreitzer et al., 1997).

2. Perceived organizational support (POS) is a uni-dimensional construct with high internal reliability (Eisenberger, 1984).

3. Control variables like age, gender, work experience, job level and etc do not affect variables of interest in this study.

4. Personal bias and error inherent in individual respondent might influence the accuracy of their feedback in the survey questionnaire, but this effect is considered marginal and insignificant to influence the reliability of the study.

5. Trends observed in the sample population are assumed to be representative of the total population.

6. This is a quantitative research in which conclusions are generated from statistical tests and the results can be generalized over other samples within the sane industry.

7. The researcher is independent and objective, free from personal agenda and has no influence over the data collected or research findings.

1.4 Justification of the Research

The most important justification in initializing this research was the prominent knowledge gap in the business literature concerning the impact of empowerment (EMP) and perceived organizational support (POS) on overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre employees. Furthermore, the importance of frontline employee, or call centre front-line employee in this context have never been more critical in maintaining and improving service quality and customer satisfaction in service organization. The last and the least, the urgent need for further research in Malaysia's call centre industry justifies the research in terms of timing, scope, level of significance, and potential beneficiaries.

1.4.1 Knowledge Gaps in Business Literature

Knowledge gaps in the business literature concerning the impact of empowerment (EMP) and perceived organizational support (POS) on overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre employees justifies this research. Furthermore, the importance of frontline employee, or call centre front-line employee in this context have never been more critical in sustaining the performance of service organization. The last and the least, urgent need for further research in Malaysia's call centre industry justifies the research.

Apparently, there is very limited literature in terms of volume and scope in explaining the impact of empowerment (EMP) on overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre employee at individual dimensional-level (competence, meaning, impact, and self-determination). So far, the only literature available in this area is exploratory research conducted by Cartwright and Holdsworth (2003) on how empowerment affects the job satisfaction and stress of call centre agent in the United Kingdom. Furthermore, further examination on the impact of perceived

organizational support (POS) on overall job satisfaction (SAT) is of essential in call centre as studies conducted at various service organizations have successfully established positive linkage between the aforesaid variables (Eisenberger and Rhoades, 2002). In other words, research conducted in this area is still relatively sparse. In relation to that, Brymer et al. (2000) and Akroyd et al. (2006) have identified perceived organizational support (POS) positively influences job satisfaction of call centre agent. Given the fact that the aforesaid variables are proven workable in enhancing job satisfaction in call centre and other service organizations albeit lacking of further empirical support in terms of volume and scope, it's sensible to further investigate the causal relationship between empowerment (EMP), perceived organizational support (POS), and overall job satisfaction (SAT) simultaneously in a single research with the hope that both independent variables could be capitalized to improve the well being and motivation of call centre employees. Additionally, this research could serve to enrich and strengthen the body of knowledge in this particular area.

1.4.2 The Importance of Front-line Employee

There is plenty of empirical evidence that demonstrates importance of frontline employees in service organizations (Mahesh, 1993; Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000; Lovelock and Wirtz, 2004; cited by Kasturi and Mahesh, 2006). The unique nature of service job confers frontline employees a very determining role in service delivery (Zeithaml and Bitnet, 2000; cited by Lukea-Bhiwajee et al., 2009) because the service level is governed by the behavior of the frontline employee. The situation is further complicated by the unique labor process in call centres industry in which frontline employees deliver their services independently over the phone and manage the service encounter problems alone, albeit under intensive electronic monitoring (Houlihan 2002; cited by Dean and Rainnie, 2009).

Given the criticality of the frontline employee role in a call centre context, many studies are dedicated to call centre frontline employee and their environment settings like job satisfaction, job-related stress, employee turnover, well being, human resource practices, role stress, and job control (Bain and Taylor, 1999; Hutchinson et al., 2000; Houlihan, 2001; Ruyter et al, 2001; Holman and Wood, 2002; Cartwright and Holdsworth, 2003; Holman, 2003; Rose and Wright, 2005; Akroyd et al., 2006 Kasturi and Mahesh, 2006; Batt et al., 2008). Such studies have established a strong link between frontline employee attributes and the company's performance. This study is aimed to enrich the literature in this area by addressing job satisfaction of frontline employee from the angles of empowerment (EMP) and perceived organizational support (POS). Understanding call centre front-line employee's perceptions towards the current level of empowerment (EMP) and perceived organizational support (POS) in the organization will serve as useful input for call centre managers in the development of appropriate human resource practices to optimize productivity and reduce employee turnover through the improvement of overall job satisfaction. For example, the knowledge acquired can be incorporated into various HR practices like recruitment, training, job design, service delivery, and supporting employees.

1.4.3 Urgent Need for Research in Malaysia Call Centre Industry

Call centre is a growing industry with good future prospects in Malaysia but yet there is limited literature in terms of scope and volume concerning factors influencing overall job satisfaction (SAT) of call centre frontline employees. This empirical study is intended to bridge the knowledge gap through the examination of Malaysia's call centre frontline agents' perception on in what way empowerment (EMP) and perceived organizational support (POS), if any, could significantly influence their overall job satisfaction (SAT).

1.5 Contributions of the Research

Knowing this research is the first attempt to address overall job satisfaction (SAT) of Malaysia's call centre employees from the perspectives of empowerment (EMP) and perceived organizational support (POS), it could be served as a point of reference or benchmark for future research to enhance or complement research done by other scholars in this new area. However, the research findings also provide practical and insightful information and perspectives for various groups as follows:

Call centre managers: With higher-than-average employee turnover resulting from low job satisfaction and high level of stress, call centre managers are pressured to find solution to remedy the situation as the aforesaid phenomenon incurred significant loss to the organization. This research will provide some direction for call centre managers to improve the morale, job satisfaction, and retention of call centre employees.

Workers Union: Workers union is committed to protect the well being and rights of their members. This research could serve as useful input for workers union (workers union for call centre employees in particular) to negotiate with employers to fight for a more productive and worker-friendly environment.

Government regulator: To ensure the general well being of call centre employees, both physically and mentally, government regulator needs to identify intrinsic and extrinsic factors of the job that could contribute to work-related stress and exhaustion. Moreover, variables that could offset or mitigate the aforesaid unpleasant state are highly sought after so that they could formulate and implement corresponding policy to protect the interest of call centre employees. The results of this research will assist to serve this aim.

Human Resource Practitioner: This report could be used as a useful reference for HR practitioner in call centre industry to critically assess and monitor the current performance of job design, recruitment, training, · communication, performance appraisal system and so forth in supporting their most important assets i.e human capital. Adjustments and corrective measures could be taken in the foresaid areas to boost overall job satisfaction (SAT) through the application of empowerment (EMP) and perceived organizational support (POS) principles.

Researchers and Scholars: Empowerment (EMP), perceived organizational support (POS), and overall job satisfaction (SAT) are three complex subjects of growing importance in call centre industry. This research will enrich the body of knowledge in this area by enhancing or complementing works done by other researchers.