An exploration through the organisational metaphor: The precarious work and emotional labour experienced by call centre employees in India.

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Submitted in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree of Doctor of Business Administration

University of Wales Trinity Saint David, London Campus

2023

<u>DECLARATION</u>

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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Date 12th June 2023

<u>STATEMENT 1</u>

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It would not be enough to thank my dearest husband, Mr Medhunchakravarthy Mohandoss, for his constant support, encouragement, and motivation to complete this thesis. He guided and provided me with emotional support whenever I needed it throughout this journey.

Dedicated to Medhun, Dad and Mom……

<u>ABSTRACT</u>

The call centre industry is one of the fastest-growing employment sectors, providing job opportunities globally. However, the nature and characteristics of jobs in call centres mean the centres are referred to as 'electronic sweatshops' where the jobs are said to be "dead end" with no progression. Although the call centres provide customer service at a lower cost to the employer, the employees working in the call centres are highly affected by their job's characteristics and nature, which includes poor remuneration and a highly routinised and strict performance monitoring process.

India is considered a highly desirable location for Western organisations to outsource their customer service operations due to the low cost and the specific advantage of the massive pool of talented English-speaking graduates. However, contrary to the positive perspective of the country being a hub for call centre operations, the call centres are also said to suffer from a high employee turnover rate, stressful working environment, lack of career development, and poor infrastructure. These issues in Indian call centres can be related to precarious work and emotional labour experienced by the call centre agents which the researcher has explored in this study. Previous researchers have focused on precarious work and emotional labour in call centres as one aspect in their research studies but have failed to study both. Through organisational metaphors, the researcher explores precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres in this study.

The uniqueness of the research is exploring the call centre industry through organisational metaphors. In the book "Images of Organization", Gareth Morgan proposed eight organisational metaphors that can be consciously employed to study an organisation. In this study, the researcher has focussed on applying two of those metaphors, namely the machine and psychic prison, on giving more vital contributions to the precarious work and emotional

labour experienced by Call centre employees in India. Based on the machine metaphor, the nature of precarious work is explored and inspired by the psychic prison metaphor; the researcher has explored the emotional labour in the Indian call centre industry. To the researcher's knowledge, this study collectively provides a novel approach to studying precarious work and emotional labour through organisational metaphors.

Both primary and secondary data collection has been employed. The qualitative research method was employed, focussing on thematic analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted among thirty call centre employees working in two different call centres which provide customer service to different customer bases. Secondary data was collected from books, journal articles, conference proceedings, reports, and trusted online resources. Eight themes emerged from the semi-structured interviews: five for precarious work and three for emotional labour. The five precarious work themes were analysed using the machine metaphor, and the three for emotional labour were analysed using the psychic prison metaphor. Based on the analysis, the researcher has presented the conceptual framework to comprehend the precarious work and emotional labour challenges that Indian call centre agents encounter daily.

The research study also contributes to theory and the general body of knowledge and literature by employing organisational metaphors to study precarious work and emotional labour. Based on the research findings, future research has been recommended to focus on the different service sectors, to employ other organisational metaphors proposed by Gareth Morgan and employ the research in a wider context.

Key Words:

Precarious work, emotional labour, Indian call centres, machine metaphor, psychic prison metaphor

PUBLICATIONS

This doctoral thesis gives a detailed account of the research study undertaken by **Miss Preethi Nageswaran (1805231).** Some of the material contained herein has been presented in the form of the following doctoral / knowledge exchange symposia and research event.

Nageswaran, P., 2020. *Metaphorical view of the call centres: the psychic prison - A qualitative study of the Indian call centres.* London: Knowledge exchange symposium UWTSD London campus.

Nageswaran, P., 2021. M*etaphorical View of the call centres: the psychic prison-A qualitative study of Indian Call centres.* London: Research event, LSC Research Innovation Centre.

Nageswaran, P., 2022. *Understanding precarious work and emotional labour through the machine metaphor in Indian call centres.* Manchester: BAM Doctoral Symposium.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of figures

List of tables

List of graphs

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The service sector has become the most significant employment sector in developed nations. A service-oriented job involves constant and intense communication with clients, customers, and service providers. The advent of call centres in business has created job opportunities for millions of people worldwide, and these call centres serve as the primary customer contact channel for many organisations. The industry is a very peculiar service industry as it is based chiefly on the voice-to-voice interaction between the customer and the call centre employees. In India, the call centre industry emerged in the late 1990s when GE Captial established India's first voice operations, which was followed by a boom in third-party outsourcing (Jyothi and Sharma, 2015; Chicu et al., 2018).

The call centre industry has flourished with the advancement in telecommunications and the integration of information technology (Manuti et al., 2016). The services provided by call centres include billing enquiries, marketing, banking and complaints handling (Oodith and Parumasur, 2014). Cornell and Hannif (2009) say that elements of all industries are likely to be found in the call centre. Huge savings on cost, rapid development in information technology and software and the availability of a large workforce fluently speaking English resulted in India becoming a preferred location for businesses to outsource their call centre activities (Kurniali and Titan, 2015).

Precarious work is a general term for insecure employment conditions, implying a deficiency in several dimensions of employment quality (Bodin et al., 2020). Researchers use the term precarious work to describe temporary employment, which is primarily underpaid, insecure and unprotected. Workers in such circumstances cannot support their households as they lack job security, benefits, and employee rights (Benach et al., 2016). The advent of precarious work has made the quality and availability of jobs uncertain and risky. The global shift from

manufacturing to service industries has resulted in an economy that demands workplace flexibility (Broughton et al., 2016). This flexibility has resulted in declining formal employment relationships between employers and employees (Prosser, 2016). Uncertainty and instability in planning the future are characteristics of precarious work where a worker/an employee of an organisation has limited control of their destiny (Fouskas, 2018). Precarious work may also involve different dimensions of job insecurity, decreased cost to employers, and decreased worker protections. According to Kalleberg and Vallas (2018), the consequences of precarious work are not limited to work and the workplace but also affect non-work aspects such as individuals' health and well-being, including mental stress and poor physical health.

Emotions are the experience of biological response to an environmental stimulus that results in psychological and physical changes, leading to readiness for action (Back et al., 2020). Similarly, emotions are vital in organisations and organisational domains (Agrawal and Sadhana, 2010). Many events that impact employees and organisations are challenging to acknowledge without emotions (Akanji, 2016). Although various frameworks study emotions, ambiguity prevails around the structure of the human addictive experience (Bağcı et al., 2014). Also, there is limited esearch on the substantial role emotions play in organisations.

Nonetheless, from an organisation's point of view, emotions can be linked to behaviour in organisational settings in different ways. For instance, Frost (2003) highlighted that unhappy employees become disengaged from their work. Emotional labour, according to Hochschild (1983), is the "management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (p.7). Emotional labour involves psychological practices necessary to manage emotions at the workplace following organisational guidelines (McGowan, 2020). Peters et al. (2005) argue that emotional labour is an individual's reaction to emotional job demands,

including job characteristics that push an employee towards emotionally stressful conditions like handling demanding clients or customers.

This study reviews the literature on precarious work, emotional labour, the organisational metaphors of a machine and psychic prison, and the nature of work in Indian call centres. In this study, the researcher explores precarious work through the machine metaphor and emotional labour through the psychic prison metaphor in Indian call centres. In the following section, the background of the research illustrates the idea behind this research study.

1.1 <u>Research background</u>

1.1.1 <u>Background to the call centre industry</u>

The socio-economic paradigm of the late 1970s involved a production chain that was vertically integrated which can be related to transcending national borders today, allowing the utilisation of resources, including human resources, anywhere in the world (Anwar et al., 2018). Information technology-enabled services (ITES), also known as the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry, refers to outsourcing business services through the internet and telecommunication technology (Ishtiyaque and Gera, 2014). It is a rapidly growing industry globally, and many organisations outsource their services to ITES providers in other countries. According to Lahiri and Pangrikar (2013), the outsourcing company and the country where the service is located both benefit from outsourcing. The outsourcing company saves significant money while many jobs are created in the host country (Charoensukmongkol & Puyod, 2022).

Call centres have experienced substantial growth worldwide (Akanji, 2016). They offer multi-national companies the ability to deliver services to their customers from a distance with efficiency, flexibility and speed (As-Saber et al., 2004). They also cater to technical and labour-intensive inputs (Rathinasamy et al., 2003). Taylor and Bain (1999) explain that call centres are

operations where the agents receive inbound or make outbound calls using computer technology and process the data by an Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) or predictive dialling system. They offer the benefit of responding quickly to customer queries, which helps the firms promote their products and services. They are multipurpose organisations providing sophisticated services such as banking, insurance claims, IT helpdesk etc. (León et al., 2017).

1.1.2 An insight into the Indian call centre industry

India is a significant ITES destination and undeniably a leader in the call centre industry. Global organisations prefer outsourcing their call centre services to India rather than other Asian countries. The significant factors for the rise in the call centres in India are a large and educated working population and growth in number of those in the workforce who speak English or multiple languages. A skilled professional can provide support in different verticals besides technical support and low-cost employment with a quality and professional crew compared to developed nations. Furthermore, India's time difference facilitates global organisations to provide their customers with services 24/7. Companies in the US provide round-the-clock customer service to their customers using India's twelve-hour time difference. By migrating the voice services to the Indian sub-continent, companies have not only saved on cost but have also found a solution to issues concerning utilisation and management of labour often prevalent with call centre work in countries like the UK, North America, and Australia (Raja and Bhasin, 2014; Khan and Du, 2014; Raj and Raj, 2016; Ananthram et al., 2017).

The increase in call centre usage has driven customers to demand out-of-office hours to access a range of services and their desire to access services from the comfort of their homes (Narlı & Akdemir, 2019). Business organisations gain more benefits from call centres, such as reduced costs due to the centralisation of operations, increased customer base, and improved customer retention and satisfaction (Chicu et al., 2019). Buuren et al. (2017) say there

is an increase in the customer base by gathering customer data through customer relationship management. Call centresutilise technology that integrates telephony and computers (Agrawal and Sadhana, 2010). Interactive voice response and automatic call distribution are technologies in which the incoming customer calls are queued and then routed to the appropriate call centre agents according to the nature of the customer queries (Rampton and Woydack, 2016). With the advent of call centres, customers need not visit organisations to address their queries but can resolve their questions or complaints wherever they are (Ibrahim et al., 2016).

1.1.3 <u>Precarious work and emotional labour in call centres</u>

Although call centres help organisations reduce costs and generate huge profits, the job characteristics and the working conditions of the call centre agents, including their well-being, are not often emphasised (Alarcon and Heyman, 2013). Despite many benefits to the organisations, the call centres' precarious work and emotional labour are stressful for the employees due to the various performance management metrics employed to reduce costs and enhance efficiency (Mankeka and Gupta, 2016). According to Miller and Hendrickse (2016, p.51), "The call centre industry has suffered from a poor reputation of low pay, monotonous work, high job demand, low control, limited social support and few opportunities for participating and acquiring new skills and training". The jobs are monotonous and tedious and require long periods of sitting in a confined area (Chicu et al., 2016). The static working postures and the lack of variety of tasks often lead to mental stress and musculoskeletal disorders in call centre agents (Sharifi et al., 2022). The work hours in call centres are unsociable, and some shifts can be at any time of the day or night (Alarcon and Heyman, 2013).

The call centre agents may start early, finish late and work weekends to service customers outside of work hours (Hauptfleisch and Uys, 2006). However, outsourced call centres operate in different countries worldwide. Cornell and Hannif (2009) highlighted that call centre agents

spend long hours on customer calls without a break and work beyond their login hours. The working hours in the call centres depend on numerous factors, such as the type of service provided, staffing levels and the customer base location (Akroyd et al., 2006). Call volumes and demand levels are significant determinants and vary according to the day and time of the year (Feyerabend et al., 2018). Huws (2009) says most call centres operate on a dual-tier system. In the first tier, the call centres work the regular working hours, a full range of services are offered to the customers, and all the call centre activities are carried out. The second tier provides after-hours activities and emergency services (Deery and Kinnie, 2004). Call centre employees are regularly called at short notice to work their shifts (Molino et al., 2016). Such instances lead to high levels of stress and sickness among call centre agents. Also, the agents are prone to having less personal autonomy over their tasks and job environment (Cloutier et al., 2018).

A typical goal for any organisation is customer satisfaction, which is achieved by the way the call centre employees interact with their customers; thus, being polite and friendly and assisting them with their requirements is essential (Raja and Bhasin, 2016). Emotional labour is a fundamental component of call centre work. Call centre jobs involve constant customer interaction and require frontline employees to regulate and display emotions via vocal cues (Jaarsveld and Poster, 2013). Emanuel et al. (2020) argue that professions involving customer interactions require emotional effort where the employees must exhibit emotions at variance from their true feelings. In call centres, the customer service agents must be pleasant and friendly in representing the organisation they work for, respecting the customer's attitude towards them (Echchakoui and Baakil, 2019). In the book "Smiling Down the Phone", Townsend (2007, p.277) says that irrespective of personal feelings, emotional labour leads to emotional dissonance and stress among customer service agents. Employees must display emotions in conjunction with the organisational standards (Anafarta, 2015).

[7]

1.1.4 <u>The machine and psychic prison metaphor</u>

A metaphor is a multi-faceted literary device that assists in illustrating complications and expressing lucidity (Engen, 2008). Organisations and metaphors have a close link (Short, 2000). In the book Images of Organization, Gareth Morgan (1986) draws on various approaches to study organisations by employing insights from various subjects such as organisational behaviour, sociology, management theory, political science, and social psychology. Morgan uses metaphors to think about organisations (Morgan, 1986). However, this approach brings advantages and disadvantages when considering organisations (Tohidian et al., 2019). The eight metaphors Morgan presents are machine, organism, brain, culture, political system, psychic prison, flux and transformation, and instruments of domination (Morgan, 1986). Each metaphor constitutes and captures the nature of life in organisations in diverse ways, thereby creating powerful, distinctive, partial insights (Dufva and Dufva, 2016). They are tools to determine the sustaining state of organisations. The metaphoric evaluation assists organisations in development and innovation (Shahzad, 2012). Morgan (1997) states that metaphors are indispensable for organisational leaders to communicate to or about the organisation. In this study, the researcher has employed the machine and the psychic prison metaphors.

The machine metaphor serves as a foundation for bureaucratic organisations. Based on this metaphor, organisations function similarly to machines comprising unbending structures, adjusting to any transformation, and inhibiting fast adaptations (Rowland et al., 2021). The machine metaphor's priority lies in increased efficiency and maximum labour utilisation. Organisations require rigid hierarchical structures, determination of the most efficient method to work, and tasks designed to match the principles mentioned above (Whang, 2021). Morgan (1986) states that the image of an organisation as a machine metaphor gives rise to a bureaucratic environment in which the interlocking parts play a vital role. The mechanical system that

characterises the features emphasises the bureaucracy of organisations, as each segment plays a predefined role in aiding the whole system's functions. According to Elkind (1998), organisations based on bureaucracy assume a division of tasks, top-down supervision, and detailed rules and regulations. The life of organisational workers is also routinised with the demand for clockwork (LaViers, 2019). In organisations under the machine metaphor, the employees or workers should arrive at work at a given time, perform a predetermined set of tasks, rest at scheduled hours and complete their tasks by the end of their shift. Some organisations work in shift patterns where one shift of workers systematically replaces workers in another to ensure that the work is carried out continuously and without any interruption 24/7, round the clock, 365 days per year (Suchman, 2011).

The psychic prison metaphor in an organisation considers the shadows of the mind and their impact on the organisational reality (Jermier and Forbes, 2012). Morgan (1986) states that in organisations influenced by the psychic prison metaphor, human beings have a flair for becoming trapped in the webs of their creation. The employees fear that their organisations are caught in a fixed way of thinking, and employees adopt conventional values, resist change, and find it hard to think of other methods of how they might do things. The employees become prisoners of their ideas (Pistol, 2020).

1.5 Problem statement

The employees in Indian call centres are prone to stress, burnout, and turnover intention due to adopting pseudo-names to mask their identity and then servicing customers worldwide from different economic and cultural backgrounds (Akroyd et al., 2006). The call centre employees experience health, social and psychological issues that mitigate a positive working atmosphere (As-Saber et al., 2004). Working 'graveyard shifts' to match the business hours of Western countries further complicates the precarious work and emotional labour of the Call

centre employees in India (Ananthram et al., 2018). The call centre staff lack control over their working time and methods. These constrained working processes in the call centre can be related to the organisational metaphors proposed by Gareth Morgan who developed the images of the organisation by using metaphors, including the machine and psychic prison metaphors (Morgan, 1986).. When innovation is needed, the metaphors communicate comprehensive and intangible concepts such as the organisation's strategy and mission. Using metaphors helps create a picture of an object under study (Itkin and Nagy, 2014).

Organisations are the machines, and the employees and workers are the parts Morgan (1986) stated. According to Cornelissen (2005), in organisations under the influence of the machine metaphor, the employees or workers are expected to work and rest routines mechanically according to specific rules. Ramnath and Singh (2016) studied 150 employees from four different call centres in India. They showed that emotional competence rejuvenates the employee's quality of work-life as working conditions can influence human life to a significant level.

Morgan (1998) refers to exploring Plato's Cave and explains the psychic prison metaphor where the organisations are ultimately created and sustained by the conscious and unconscious process with the idea that human beings become imprisoned in or confined by images, ideas, thoughts and actions,, to which these processes give rise. Morgan (1998) suggests that the idea of the psychic prison is derived from Plato's The Republic, in which he presents an Allegory of the Cave, an underground cave where prisoners are chained so they cannot move and can see only the cave wall in front of them. In the prisoners' reality, there are only shadows in the cave and sounds from outside the cave through which the cave dwellers construct their truth and reality from their limited experience. If an outsider comes and attempts to describe the world outside the cave, the dwellers would have difficulty understanding the new knowledge. They

would cling to their familiar way of viewing the world, which Morgan (1986) describes as their psychic prison. Thus Morgan uses the metaphor to depict how people in organisations can be trapped by their familiar ways of thinking and unconscious processes. According to Gazendam (1993, p.7), "Organisations are socially constructed realities based on unconscious preoccupations of people in the organisation. These socially constructed realities or cultures may be experienced as problematic and confining". The organisations are sustained and created consciously and subconsciously, and the employees become confined or trapped by mind maps (Itkin and Nagy, 2014).

The researcher found that a significant amount of research has been conducted on Indian call centres and the nature of work carried out by the call centre employees. However, Ananthram et al. (2018) suggested that Indian call centres may benefit from adopting a strategic human resource management approach to positively contribute to job satisfaction and the well-being of call centre employees. Hence to facilitate this, it is imperative to view the Indian call centres through organisational metaphors to explore precarious work and emotional labour in these workplaces.

1.6 Significance and rationale of the research study

The literature on the call centre industry offered theories and models based on employee turnover and turnover intention in call centres (Agrawal and Sadhana, 2010; Bolton, 2013; Akanji, 2016). Several authors (As-Saber et al., 2004; Agrawal and Sadhana, 2010; Banks and Roodt, 2011; Ananthram et al., 2018) argued only on the issues faced in the call centre industry and the factors that impact the call centre agents to quit their jobs. Call centre agents in India face emotional and psychological issues (Aksin et al., 2009). For instance, the requirements of their job demand that when working in an international call centre, the agents have to use pseudonyms and mask their identity, and they have to work at staggered timings to match the

working hours of their clients abroad (Alarcon and Heyman, 2013). These factors affect the call centre agents daily, leading to precarious work and emotional labour. However, the previous research studies have not focused on exploring the precarious work and emotional labour in the call centres through organisational metaphors, which makes this research study significant, providing a prospect for the current research to contribute to the theory in the call centre industry. It allows the researcher to carry out the current research, which might require replacing the current view of the call centre industry, signifying the importance of the research study. The researcher found that employing organisational metaphors to explore the precarious work and emotional labour in the call centres is needed to make the management understand the issues and challenges the agents face. Also, a framework is required to comprehend the precarious work and emotional labour challenges the Indian call centre agents encounter daily.

Therefore, this research study aims to fill the knowledge gap by viewing the call Indian call centre industry through the organisational metaphors of a machine and psychic prison to recognise call centre employees' precarious work and emotional labour. The researcher feels that this study will present the required knowledge in the call centre environment, especially in developing countries like India, where developed nations outsource their call centre business.

The literature on the call centre industry will be extended with this research's finding to view the call centres through organisational metaphors. In doing so, this research study will also assist in filling the gaps in the existing literature on the call centre industry. This research study can also be used as a basis and be related to the view of other sectors/industries through the remaining six metaphors of organisation proposed by Gareth Morgan (Morgan, 1986). Finally, this research study will provide enough information for future researchers to

better understand precarious work and emotional labour in the Indian call centre industry, especially by viewing the call centres through organisational metaphors.

1.7 Research aim and objectives

1.7.1 Research aim

This research aims to explore the precarious work and emotional labour experiences of call centre agents in Indian call centres through machine and psychic prison organisational metaphors.

1.7.2 Research objectives:

The objectives necessary to achieve this aim are as follows:

1) *To assess the nature of precarious work among call centre agents in Indian call centres and its impact on employees*

2) *To explore aspects of work that cause call centre employees to experience emotional labour and the impact of emotional labour on employees.*

3) *To examine the precarious work and emotional labour perceptions of Call centre employees in India through the organisational metaphors of the machine and psychic prison, respectively*

1.8 Research questions

The questions that need to be addressed in this research are as follows:

RQ1: What is the nature of precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres?

RQ2: How is precarious work enacted in Indian call centres explored using the machine metaphor?

RQ3: How is emotional labour experienced in Indian call centres explored using the psychic prison metaphor?

1.9 Outline the research methods and data analysis process.

The researcher has chosen a qualitative method in this study as the present research does not require any measurable quantitative table. This study mainly focuses on understanding and analysing the call centre employees' precarious work and emotional labour experiences; hence, the researcher chose a qualitative method to fulfil the requirements. Likewise, the research philosophy chosen is interpretivism. This philosophy lets the researcher conduct in-depth and extensive research on the industry or sectors, (Balnaves and Caputi, 2001) in this case the call centre industry

The researcher collected data from interviews with the call centre agents working in two call centres in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. The researcher employed semi-structured online interviews in data collection as travel was restricted due to the pandemic. The interviews are considered a vital data collection method as it assists the researcher in acquiring relevant information about the research area and subject of study. The researcher carried out a thematic analysis for data analysis which provides detailed thematic descriptions of the data sets, especially when the research study involves exploring new or under-researched research areas(Bairagi and Munot, 2019).. With exploring organisational metaphors in call centres being a new area of research, the researcher feels the use of thematic analysis will contribute to the research aim and objectives

[14]

1.10 Structure of the thesis

The structure of the thesis is divided into six chapters, as outlined below.

Chapter 1 – Introduction: The researcher introduces the study in this chapter, which includes the research background, problem statement, significance, and rationale for the research study. The researcher discusses the research aim, objectives, and the research questions the study addresses and provides an overview of the research methodology used for the study.

Chapter 2 – Literature review: In the literature review chapter, the researcher presents the literature concerning precarious work, emotional labour, the call centre industry, and organisational metaphors based on the evidence from books, journal articles, reports, conference proceedings, and trusted online resources. The literature review chapter provides the theoretical background to develop the conceptual framework.

Chapter 3 – Research methodology: In this chapter, the philosophical stance, research design, research strategy, along with research type is provided. The chapter also discusses the data collection and analysis process, including the research study's quality, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4- Data presentation, interpretation and analyses

This chapter presents data presentation, interpretations from the semi-structured interviews and details the sub-themes and themes along with discussion and analysis.

Chapter 5 – Findings and discussion: This chapter provides an overview of the Indian call centre industry, presents the data findings and discusses the themes in detail. The justification for

[15]

using organisational metaphors and the revised conceptual framework based on the research findings are also covered in this chapter.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion, limitations, and areas for future research: This chapter illustrates how the research aim, objectives and questions are addressed. It also presents a summary of the key findings along with the research contributions. Finally, the research limitations and the recommendation for future research are presented.

References and appendices: The references and bibliographies follow the Harvard referencing style. The interview questions, consent for data collection from the organisations, interview transcript, and the representation of themes and sub-themes are included in the Appendices section.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

Research into the service sector has increased in the last few decades. Call centres have attracted substantial interest among researchers, mainly due to the nature and characteristics of the jobs created, leading to call centres being of spectacular importance and source of employment in many countries (Akanji, 2016). However, they have been described as electronic sweatshops and human battery farms providing poorly paid jobs with closely monitored employees and highly routinised tasks (Akanji, 2014). However, the primary purpose of call centres is to provide high-quality customer service at the lowest cost, leading to implications for the well-being of the call centre employees (Akroyd et al., 2006).

Though the Indian call centre industry has been a phenomenal success, the industry also gives rise to issues such as stressful working environments, increasing employee turnover rate and poor career development, no different from issues experienced by call centre employees in other parts of the world (Abraham, 2008). Outsourcing the call centres to the Indian sub-continent has shown significant cost savings, information technology development and has highlighted the availability of professionals speaking fluent English (Mukherjee and Maheshwari, 2014). However, the Indian call centres experience additional problems when compared to call centres in other parts of the world, such as poor infrastructure (Feyerabend et al., 2018).

Atkinson (1984, p.11) proposed the "Flexible–Firm model", which suggested that organisations need increased flexibility to adapt and adjust to changes in a competitive business market and achieve economic growth. The study also suggested that employers seek to accomplish three types of flexibility: functional, numerical and financial. Although the model focuses on flexible staffing arrangements in terms of flexibility in employment and work, it also noticed that Indian call centres are inclined towards numerical flexibility, where the hours

worked by the employees can be increased or decreased to match the organisational requirement. This may also be a precursor to precarious work due to non-standard and staggered work arrangements and result in emotional labour which includes emotional aspects such as balancing organisational expectations, re-orienting self, neutralising stress, and managing irate customers leading to emotional labour among the call centre employees (Alrawadieh et al., 2020; Pattnaik and Panda,2020; Kushwaha et al., 2020).

In this chapter, the researcher presents a review of the literature concerning precarious work, dimensions of precarious work and health consequences. This chapter discusses emotional labour in detail, the call centre industry, precarious work and emotional labour in call centres and the organisational metaphors. Also, in this chapter, the theories and models relevant to the research study, the research gap, and the proposed conceptual framework are discussed.

2.1 Familiarisation with the term precarious work

Work is a core activity for an individual in society. It is significant to the individual's identity and links them to others. Also, work is seen as a mechanism to enhance people's living standards. Different authors utilise the term precarious from different perspectives. The definition of precarious work shifts from context to context and from one sub-context to another based on the risk involved. Agreeing on a comprehensive definition of precarious work is considered one of the most challenging tasks for social scientists (Rubery et al., 2018; Allan et al., 2021)

Different researchers use precarious work to describe contingent workers under different conditions. According to Maiti (2012), precarious work refers to non-standard employment relationships with high uncertainty, insecurity and instability in economic activities (p. 509). Precarious work is paid employment depicted by higher levels of employee risk, unpredictability and uncertainty (Kalleberg, 2009). It means that contract workers and those

working on an informal basis are precarious workers. Precarious work prevails in the labour markets. Precarity can also be associated with atypical, alternative, and marginal work (Standing, 2011). It is also the result of employment practices designed by organisations to lower cost, reduce the permanent workforce, increase flexibility and migrate risk and uncertainty to the employees (Barnes and Weller, 2020).

Researchers (Benach et al., 2014; Puig-Barrachina et al., 2014; Benach et al., 2015) have focused on the adverse effect of precarious work on health conditions. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2019), precarious work involves workers with little or no bargaining power. On the other hand, OECD (2014) describes that precarious work does not hold the same protection rights as a permanent job, making it less expensive from an employer's perspective and less protective and flexible from the worker's perspective. Puig-Barrachina et al. (2014) proposed four separate domains to represent the quality of work: Job content which is an employee's degree of autonomy and control over their job; working conditions which are the physical and psychosocial demands of work; employment conditions which refers to the mutual agreement between employees and their employers on the terms and conditions of the work, including rewards and compensation, and lastly employment relations which is the relationship between the employees and their employers (Ahmad and Kuang, 2018). Much attention has been given to the increase of precarious work in recent decades (Akanji, 2016). Studies say there is an overwhelming increase in the number of employees whose work is becoming precarious, thus bringing challenges to employment relationships (Puig-Barrachina et al., 2014). According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2012, p.3), workers worldwide experience precarious work in insecure, unpredictable and uncertain working conditions. It is emphasised that unemployment figures cause concern, failing to report most workers who work but do not have a decent job, a decent wage, a secure future,

social protection and access to rights (Patulny et al., 2020). Precarious work is also considered an employment condition that affects workers' health, their families, and society. The power relationships between employers and employees are vital in existing employment conditions. However, it is argued that employment conditions are subject to labour laws and hiring contracts in developed nations (Anderson, 2010).

Evidence shows that precarious work is the uncertainty related to the work (employees might lose their jobs). Bosmans et al. (2016) emphasise that uncertainty is the incapacity to manage unanticipated consequences of social power and resource access. For instance, contract workers have the power, privilege and access to resources and will deal with unexpected changes but experience uncertainty in their work. In contrast, employment agreements are not regulated in developing nations, resulting in informal employment (Benach, 2014). As precarious workers experience miserable working conditions compared to regular employees due to hazardous working environments, repetitive work, toxic exposures and demanding workload, they are prone to a high risk of occupational injuries (Sharaf and Rashad, 2020). Saha et al. (2004) studied workers' injuries at factories in India. It was found that the workers in fixed-term contracts experienced up to 3.5 times more occupational injuries than the permanent workers. The higher injury rate is due to the workers' exposure to a hazardous working environment and lack of occupational risk training. The precarious workers also experience a lack of support in their relationship with their supervisors. Fouskas (2018) says that precarious workers are inadequately paid and have limited or no access to rights in the workplace.

Connell and Burgess (2006) explored the influence of temporary precarious work on career development and employability in Australia. The study concluded that there are both positive and negative aspects concerning temporary employment and career development among

workers and firms. In contrast to Connell and Burgess (2006), Booth et al. (2002) argue that temporary jobs are less desirable than permanent employment. This is because temporary workers are prone to low job satisfaction; they are lower paid and receive less training, leading to poor career development prospects. Migrant workers who engage in precarious work are trapped at the bottom level of poverty and the occupational status hierarchy. Various studies (Alberti, 2014; Swider, 2015; Fouskas, 2018; Harrison et al., 2020; Muñoz-Comet and Steinmetz, 2020; Maury, 2020) have focused on the precarious employment or work experienced by migrant workers in different contexts. Zhang et al. (2022) conducted a narrative literature review of thirty-eight journal articles published between 2005 and 2020. They suggested that macro and meso-level aspects contribute to migrant workers' precarious working conditions. Esbenshade et al. (2018), in a mixed-method research study among immigrant taxi drivers in the Californian state of San Diego, showed that such workers lack protections compared to other employees working in formal employment. Similarly, Datta et al. (2007) suggest that low-paid migrant workers face precarious employment challenges concerning generating extra income and cutting household expenses.

As precarious work is a complex and multi-faceted issue, there are many dimensions of precarious work. In the next section, the researcher discusses the significant dimensions of precarious work, focusing mainly on employment or job insecurity, income adequacy, lack of rights and protection, poor working conditions, and low control over working hours. In the next section, the researcher discusses the dimensions of precarious work in detail.

2.1.1 Dimensions of precarious work:

Precarious work is a multidimensional and complex phenomenon (Kalleberg, 2018). Technological advancement, economic shifts and the movement of capital and workers have changed employment conditions. There has been a transition in the labour markets where flexible

and new forms of employment replace the standard (full-time, secure and long-term jobs with benefit entitlement) (Bolibar et al., 2021). Though the surge in labour flexibility positively impacts financial growth, it has increased low-quality and precarious work (Kreshpaj et al., 2020). Although there is no stable definition for precarious work, several conditions contribute to lower pay levels and job insecurity. Kreshpaj et al.(2020) studied the definition of precarious employment based on sixty-three research studies from different research areas and continents. Researchers have spanned five dimensions of precarious employment: employment insecurity, income adequacy, lack of rights and protections, low control over working hours and poor working conditions (Vosko, 2010, p.2). Figure 2.1 illustrates the five dimensions of precarious work.
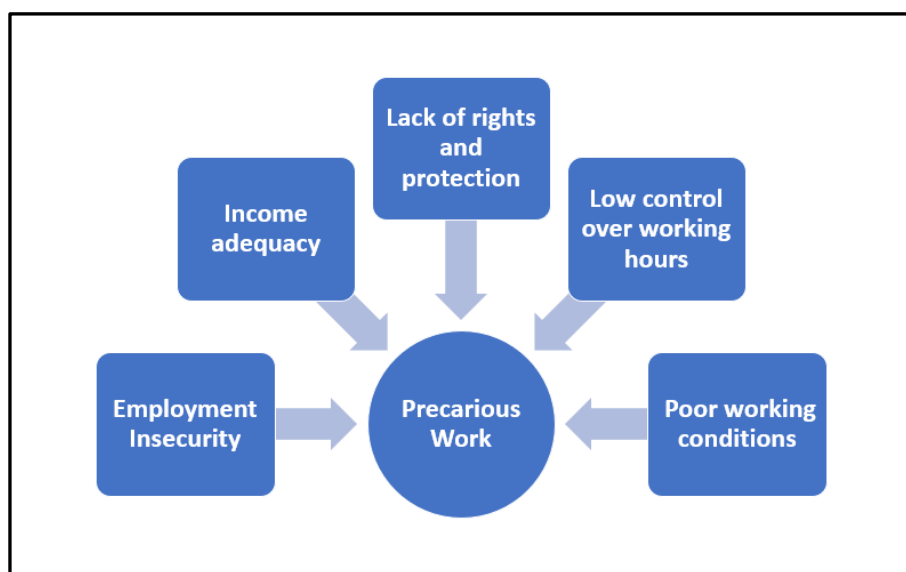
Figure 2.1: Dimensions of precarious work

Source: Adapted from (Vosko, 2010, p.2)

2.1.1.1 Employment insecurity or job insecurity

Job insecurity is the recognised powerlessness to maintain continuity in threatened job conditions. It is said that when employees experience precarious work, they suffer uncertainty about their job and low income. Kalleberg's (2018) study offers a comprehensive analysis of job

insecurity, focusing on the employment relationship, the standard employment relationship (SER) and the non-standard employment relationship. In his study, Kalleberg (2009) explains that temporary work is the most common non-standard employment relationship indicator. Temporary work includes workers hired through temporary job consultancies and workers recruited for fixed or limited terms (McNamara et al., 2011). The work also explains other non–standard employment relationships, including contract work, part-time work, and casual employment. A broadly different point has been made by Hannif and Lamm (2005), who introduced precarious work as a sub-set of non-standard employment. They used the Tucker model as a bridge between non-standard employment and precarious work to study the work experiences of call centre employees in New Zealand. The study suggested that precarious work differs based on the nature of the employment agreement. Zheng et al. (2021) see job insecurity as a mediator to study precarious work and employee withdrawal intention among 473 employees working in Chinese hotels. The study concluded that increased job insecurity positively impacts employees' withdrawal behaviour. According to TUC (2018), the growth of job insecurity can be monitored by examining phenomena such as zero-hour contracts and self-employment. This report also studied workers' job insecurity in the retail, logistics, and higher education sectors. In the retail sector, it was noticed that unpredictable working hours impacted the employees' work-life balance. On the other hand, the workers in the logistics sector indicated they desire to have a permanent contract to enhance job security and eradicate their sense of vulnerability. Similarly, fixed-term contract workers from the higher education sector also reported levels of insecurity due to the lack of career development prospects (TUC, 2018).

2.1.1.2 Income adequacy

The term income adequacy refers to the minimum income required for living or a poverty line which does not include the mandated government poverty line (Goel and Deshpande, 2018).

Income level depends on the hourly wage, monthly or yearly income and studies have confirmed a high level of uncertainty and insecurity when the income level of an employee or worker is low. Precarious work is associated with temporary contracts resulting in low earnings (Anderson, 2010). It is also characterised by poor living conditions and the impact on workers' physical and mental health. Frade et al. (2004) argue that introducing the National Minimum Wage (NMW) in the United Kingdom has not decreased the number of low-wage workers.

On the other hand, Avram (2020) draws attention to the increase in zero-hours contracts in the UK after the financial crisis in 2008. Zero-hour contracts give rise to significant variability and uncertainty in employees' work hours, pay, and schedules by not guaranteeing work and paying only for hours when required. A study to understand precarious work in the UK by the TUC (2018) in the retail sector reported that the workers had difficulties building up their credit history and availing of mortgages or loans due to unpredictable hours and wages. The workers also expressed their struggle to pay their monthly bills. Similarly, the report indicated that the workers from the logistics sector experienced fear and uncertainty regarding financial concerns about regular income as the workers could not make ends meet (Manolchev and Teigen, 2019). The fixed-term contract workers from the higher education sector expressed the dominant feature of financial insecurity, affecting their housing options due to the contract length, typically less than 12 months (TUC, 2018).

2.1.1.3 Lack of rights and protection

The root of precarious work is the weakness, omissions and gaps in labour law. The ILO (2012) states that workers in specific job roles, like domestic and agricultural workers, are not included in the labour legislation, thus excluding them from most or all of the labour law protection and making their lives more precarious. However, it is argued that in other situations, the employment practices bypassed the explanations of employees and employers provided in the

labour law descriptions and so created a different employment relationship (Chan and Au-Yeung, 2021). The employers avoided providing the benefits to which the workers should be entitled. Hiring temporary and subcontracted workers also leads to misuse of contracts (Manolchev and Teigen, 2019) and limits workers' access to trade unions, thus making the situation more vulnerable and precarious for the workers (Sharaf and Rashad, 2020).

2.1.1.4 Low control over working hours

Low control over working hours is one of the adverse constituents of precarious work. Job and income security are more likely due to short working hours, irregular scheduling, and employers' inability to guarantee hours to the employees (Avram, 2020). Zeytinoglu et al.(2004) argue that in many service organisations, the work schedules for the following week are posted a week in advance, making it very difficult for the employees to balance their work, family, and social lives. It is also found that temporary workers have less control over their working hours than permanent workers due to the labour market position, which is weak and because of their tenuous employment (Lambert et al.,2019). Frontline managers across service industries adopt scheduling practices to facilitate and meet the organisation's accountability and keep labour flexible (Perry et al., 2019). The practice of scheduling by varying the number of hours and work timings of employees by providing little notice can weaken their job quality and performance. It makes it difficult for the workers to predict when they will need to work, thus creating an imbalance between their work and non-work responsibilities (Manolchev and Teigen, 2019). According to Morduch and Siwicki (2017), the instability of working hours has led to difficulty paying bills in some households in the United States. Irregular working hours are one of the primary sources of insecurity regarding the financial crisis and uncertainty.

2.1.1.5 Poor working conditions.

Work is a significant part of human beings' everyday lives. Working conditions and environments are vital aspects that impact an employee's performance in the workplace (Swider, 2015). Working environments also impact job satisfaction and employee engagement (Kalleberg, 2009). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) proposed the concept of decent work according to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, which expressed the right to productive and equitable employment (United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, 1948). Precarious working conditions can include external factors such as temperature, noise, and lighting in the workplace and organisational factors such as duration of the shift, working time, pace of work and excessive strain due to work (Connell and Burgess, 2006). Precarious work also includes uncertain working conditions and unpredictable job continuity. Besides the dimensions of precarious work relating to job security and income, precarious work is also associated with poor remuneration, and impacts on health and safe working conditions (Scott-Marshall and Tompa, 2011). Workers under the influence of precarious work are unable to complain and must remain silent. Poor working conditions are a primary reason employees leave the organisation (Anderson, 2010). Precarious working conditions contribute to financial insecurity, increasing hours of working time, thus leading to little or no time for socialising (Perry et al., 2019). This, in turn, damages the psychological well-being of the workers and community relationships (Lewchuk et al., 2008).

2.1.2 Health impacts of precarious work

Organisations tend to adopt various forms of precarious work that are non-standard. Precarious work is linked to low wages, lack of employee representation, and temporary contracts (Genders, 2021). Contractual agreements like this are primarily seen in the manufacturing and service sectors (Allan et al., 2021). Though these practices increase flexibility

and reduce costs from an operations point of view, precarious work harms the workers and the organisation's performance (Weingarten et al., 2021). Bhattacharya and Ray (2021) argue that an individual working in a standard work arrangement is said to have a permanent and secure job. These workers also have regular and stable pay, employment status, benefits such as retirement and health insurance, a work schedule, and the ability to take time off (Kreshpaj et al., 2020).

On the other hand, non-standard work differs from standard employment (Shircliff, 2020). Stable and suitable employment is essential for better health; however, in recent decades it has been seen that due to the increase in non-standard employment, there has been a substantial increase in job and income insecurity (Swider, 2015). Technological factors and globalisation contribute to non-contracted and insecure job positions. As previously mentioned, precarious work does not have a concrete meaning or definition. Still, it contributes to various dimensions, such as employment insecurity, low wages, limited workplace rights, and social security. Precarious work is detrimental to health (Gray et al., 2020). Studies have also found that precarious work has impacted physical and mental health during the last decade (Scott-Marshall and Tompa, 2011; Vives et al., 2013; Moortel et al., 2014). Due to temporary employment, workers experience mental health issues with adverse effects in the long term. Utzet et al. (2020) state that job insecurity is also associated with the poor mental health of the workers and a deterioration in occupational health and safety. Tompa et al. (2007) developed a theoretical framework to outline the vital aspects of precarious work experiences and study their link to health effects. Stressful events associated with poor physical and mental health lead to psychophysiological issues plus health conditions such as cardiovascular diseases, metabolic syndrome, osteoporosis and depression (Bolibar et al., 2021). Many researchers have argued that precarious work can negatively affect mental health (Canivet et al., 2016; Benach et al., 2016;

McKee et al., 2017). Although there is significant empirical literature on the impact of precarious work on workers' mental health, Moscone et al. (2016) argue that there is an open debate.

Ferrante et al. (2019) studied two Italian cross-sectional studies to assess whether precarious work impacted mental health. This study concluded that a two-fold risk of depression and mental health was found in the workers subjected to precarious work due to the mediating factor of financial strain compared to workers with a permanent contract. Another cross-sectional study by Matilla-Santandera et al. (2019) studies the associations between precarious work and health-related issues among 398 salaried workers from 28 European countries. The study found significant relations between precarious work and health problems such as stress, depression, anxiety, musculoskeletal problems, respiratory problems and infectious diseases (p.1). The main weakness of these studies is the failure to address the multidimensional aspect of precarious work, like job insecurity and lack of rights, which affect the worker's health. In their comprehensive analysis, Vives et al. (2020) showed multidimensional measures to better understand precarious work and its association with health outcomes. The study found general health issues associated with precarious work in terms of job insecurity; however, it did not have any association with occupational injuries.

2.1.3 Theories relating to precarious Work:

2.1.3.1 Job characteristics model

a) The Job characteristics model explains the relationship between job characteristics and individual responses to work (Ayandele and Nnamseh, 2014). The job characteristics are identified as skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and job feedback (Hackman and Oldham, 1976, 1980). Job characteristics model suggests that high motivation and job satisfaction at work is related to experiencing three psychological circumstances which

result from specific characteristics of the job as follows a) experienced meaningfulness of the work, b) experienced responsibility for the outcomes of the work, and c) knowledge of actual results of the work.

b)   **Meaningfulness of work:**

The work performed by the employees is experienced as meaningful. Employee contribution significantly affects the organisation's effectiveness (Park and Hubert, 2017). The meaningfulness of work can be from

> *Skill Variety*: The extent to which the job requires various activities involving several talents and skills.
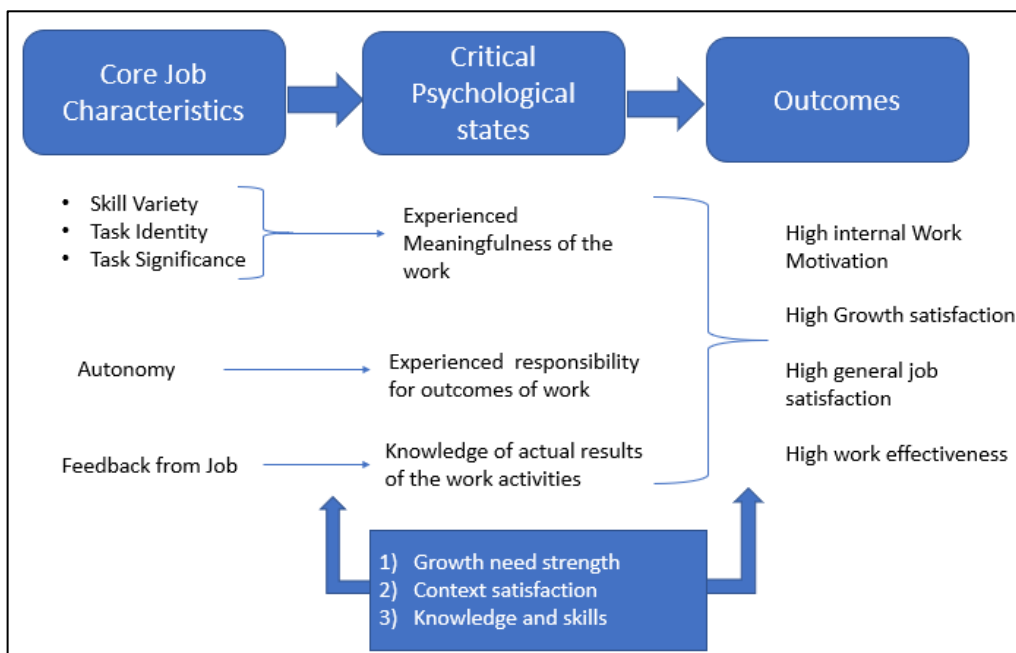
Figure 2.2: Job characteristics model
Source: Adapted from (Boonzaier et al., 200, p.13)

> *Task Identity*: The extent to which the job involves completing a whole and identifiable piece of work, thus taking pride in the outcome of the work.

> *Task significance*: The extent of identifying the job as a contribution to something more extensive like a society or a group over and beyond self (Hackman and Oldham, 1980).

[30]

Figure 2.2 illustrates the Job characteristics model proposed by Hackman and Oldham (1980).

c) **<u>Responsibility:</u>**

Responsibility from autonomy is freedom, independence, and discretion the job provides to the employees in scheduling the work and determining the process and procedures to follow in carrying out the work.

d) **<u>Knowledge of outcomes:</u>**

The knowledge of outcomes comes from feedback. An employee's awareness of the effectiveness of their effort in the job performance is retrieved from production figures to customer satisfaction scores (Hackman and Oldham 1980).

According to Ali et al. (2013), the Job characteristics model (JCM) depends on the degree of different activities required to carry out the work involving several skills and talented employees. The primary purpose of JCM is to analyse the current job and evaluate the impact of job changes on the employees by focusing on the job from the perspective of job design.

This model supports the need to understand precarious work in call centres more thoroughly to find answers to the research questions in section 1.8 of Chapter 1.

2.1.3.2 Herzberg's two-factor theory

According to Herzberg's two-factor theory, designed in 1959, motivation and hygiene are two factors. Motivation factors contribute to job satisfaction, while hygiene factors contribute to job dissatisfaction among the employees in an organisation. Below, figure 2.3 shows the motivation and the hygiene factor formulated by Fedrick Herzberg (Henha, 2017).
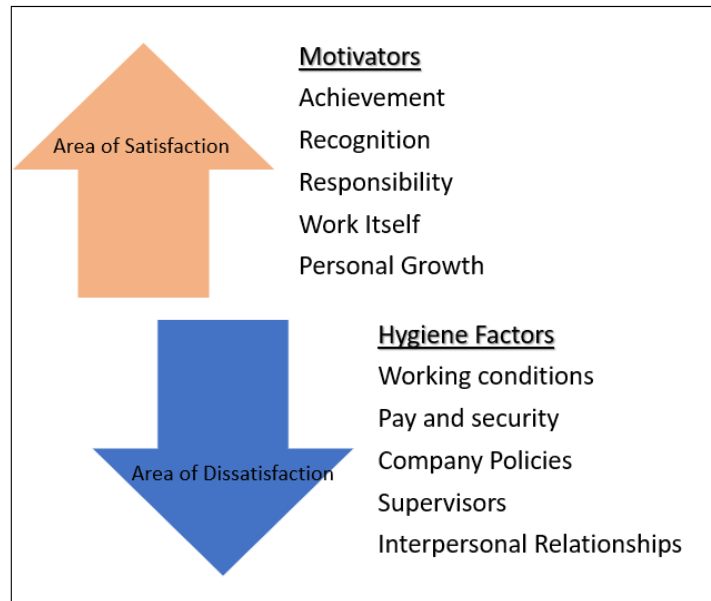
Figure 2.3: Herzberg's two-factor theory

Source: Adapted from Henha (2017, p.2763)

Herzberg's two-factor theory might explain the factors motivating call centre agents to perform efficiently. According to Ngo-Henha (2017), "Motivation factors include experience achievement, recognition, interesting work, increased responsibility, advancement, and learning. The hygiene factors include unfair company policies, incompetent or dishonest supervisors, unpleasant working conditions, unfair salary, threats to status and job insecurity" (p.2763). The theory claims that both factors are not contrary to each other. If employees are unsatisfied with the organisation's poor working conditions, they will not inevitably be satisfied performing their work (Chiat and Panatik, 2019). Hilmi et al. (2016) conducted a quantitative study to examine high school teachers' job satisfaction and motivation. Both hygienic factors and motivation factors, especially hygiene factors, contributed to teacher group satisfaction. Herzberg's two-factor theory is relevant to determining the implications of precarious work. The theory is, therefore, more relevant to

this research study as it allows the researcher to identify the potential performance implications of precarious work in call centres.

2.1.3.3 Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Abraham Maslow proposed the theory of motivation in 1943. This theory argues that employees in an organisation have needs they want to satisfy. Maslow's theory explains an employee's needs for personal development, presented by Maslow's Pyramid (Ozguner and Ozguner, 2014). The approach proposed by Maslow helps to understand the needs of employees in an organisation and determine what should be done to satisfy them. According to the theory, Maslow suggests that an organisation's managers should recognise that any need of which an employee is deprived could harm the employee's attitude and behaviour, leading to turnover (Hanif et al., 2013). According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, psychological needs are low-level while self-actualisation needs are high-level.
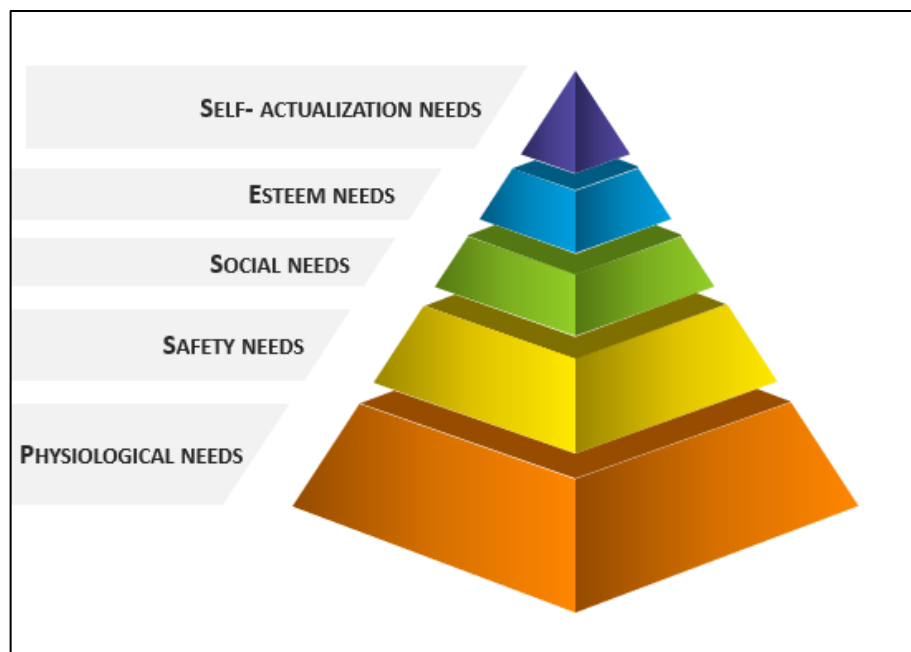
Figure 2.4: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Source: Adapted from Ozguner and Ozguner (2014, p.208)

The above figure 2.4 illustrates Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The psychological needs are low because they are essential, such as breaks, comfort while working, etc. (Ozguner and Ozguner, 2014). The next set of requirements for an employee is safety needs. The safety needs include job security, satisfactory compensation, benefits etc. Once the safety needs are satisfied, an employee requires social conditions gained from colleagues, support from co-workers, supportive managers/supervisors etc. (Lahida et al., 2017). The esteem needs explain the necessity for an employee to feel influential and respected in the workplace; this includes their ideas being accepted and recognised. Finally, self-actualisation must involve challenging work and opportunities for growth and progression within the organisation (Jerome, 2013). When all of theses needs are fulfilled, the employee feels motivated to work in the organisation, negating turnover intention (Ozguner and Ozguner, 2014). Stefan et al. (2020) studied the implications of Maslow's hierarchy of needs on healthcare professionals in the Romanian healthcare system. They found that the employees were highly motivated when their higher-level needs, especially the self-actualisation needs, were met and less motivated by meeting the needs at the lower level. Maslow's hierarchy of needs could be used to better study the precarious nature of and critically review its impact on call centre employees.

2.2 Understanding emotional labour.

Emotions are vital to consider in a workplace or an organisation, like any social interaction an individual has with people in their personal lives (Bhowmick and Mulla, 2016). According to Tronvoll (2011), researchers always debate how emotions can be defined and studied as they gain attention. Emotions are positive or negative mental stages or reactions to specific circumstances or events. They can be defined in a wide variety of ways Certain situations cause an individual to experience emotions (Smith and Ellsworth, 1985). There has been an increasing interest in workplace emotions in the past few decades (Morris and Feldman,

1997; Spector and Goh, 2001; Ashkanasy and Daus, 2002). When it comes to the workplace, researchers have differentiated emotions. Svari and Oslen (2012), in their research on the relationship between emotions and customer complaints, distinguished three types of emotions: internal, external, and situational. Emotions are a natural part of day-to-day life in an organisation and also play a vital role in workplace surroundings (Mishra, 2012). Studies by Cox and Patrick (2012) and Ashkanasy and Dorris (2017) looked at how emotions influence work outcomes like job satisfaction and job performance and how an employee's emotions at a workplace impact the emotions, behaviours and attitudes of other people (Andrieş, 2011). Cox and Patrick (2012) highlight that working with people requires understanding to manage an individual's emotions to stimulate desirable responses in others From the perspective of organisational psychology and organisational behaviour, emotions are linked to workplace settings or environments (Lee et al., 2016).

Emotions shape an individual's belief about the job's value, the workplace, and the team. Emotions at the workplace become a liability when the limiting factor to increasing productivity is to increase the efficiency of the workers in the assembly line (Soronen, 2018). For instance, if a factory employee or worker had to take time out to process their emotions, it would delay the production line (Lau, 2020). The interconnection between attitude, emotions and behaviour at the workplace is studied using the affective events theory (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996). In the affective events theory, researchers Howard Weiss and Russell Cropanzano explained the impact of six primary workplace emotions: fear, anger, joy, love, sadness and surprise. According to this theory, specific events at the workplace cause different emotions in different people and the emotions exhibited either impede or benefit other employees in the workplace (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996).

For many years, emotions in the workplace have been an area of interest in research studies; sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild conducted the most critical study on workplace emotions. She introduced the concept of emotional labour in 1983. Hochschild's study concluded that workers in any organisation are subjected to expectations and rules regarding their emotions as a part of their work (Hochschild, 1983). Emotional labour was coined in her seminal book "The Managed Heart: The Commercialisation of Feeling." which focused on the interactions of employees working with passengers in an American airline company. According to Hochschild (1983), emotional labour manages feeling and creates a visible bodily and facial presentation. Emotional labour controls emotion and expression as part of the job role (Molino et al., 2016). Choi and Kim (2015) emphasise the importance of emotional labour and say it is pivotal in describing how employees cope with their emotions. Emotions are vital in relationships between employees and customers (Connell and Hannif, 2009). It is also a practical component of dynamics between individuals. Emotional labour involves regulating feelings and expressions to contribute to the rules of organisational goals (Lee and M. Madera, 2019). Walsh (2019) states that displaying naturally felt emotions contributes to emotional labour as there is always a need to ensure the emotions expressed coincide with the display rules. Hence, as expressed by Morris and Feldman (1996, p.988), "Even in situations in which there is congruence between the individual's felt emotion and the organizationally desired emotion, there will still be some degree of effort (or "labour") required in expressing emotions".

2.2.1 Key aspects of emotional labour

As mentioned in section 2.2, Hochschild coined the term emotional labour and devised the social theory of emotion (Hochschild, 1983, p.218) in her book The Managed Heart: Commercialisation of Human Feeling, although the concept existed even before it was coined (Goffman, 1959; Friesen and Ekman, 1975). In her 1979 and 1983 seminal works, Hochschild

[36]

emphasised that flight attendants are pushed to control their emotions for their work. The attendants displayed emotional labour to obey the organisation's code of conduct, in which they must display particular facial expressions, tone of voice and pleasant body language (Hochschild, 1983). The study highlighted that the attendants had to practise faking a smile and appearing happy in front of their passengers, thus depicting that the people or individuals in customer-facing roles must exhibit emotions they are not feeling. As perceived by Hochschild, the concept of emotional labour was based on Goffman's (1956) 'impression management' perception. Impression management is the self-presentation of a person who aims to enhance their image in others' eyes (Sinha, 2009, p.104). Goffman (1956, p.66) portrays the presentation in two significant front and back regions of the stage. The performance in the front region takes place in others' presence leading to an impression from the audience; however, the back region is the private or hidden space where the artists can relax and step out of character. Hochschild further expanded Goffman's idea to depict the desired emotions an employee experiences in a workplace – Surface acting and Deep acting (Hu et al., 2017)**.**

In surface acting, an employee must show physical signs such as a smile, reflecting the emotions a customer would like to experience (Lyndon et al., 2020). According to Hochschild (1983, p.37), "Surface acting means the body, not the soul, is the main tool of the trade". It is a type of emotional labour that is an intentional expression of one's emotions different from one's real emotions, verbal or non-verbal representation, to conform to rules (Kim and Han, 2009).

Deep acting is "Real feelings that have been self-induced" (Hochschild, 1983, p.35). According to Zapf (2002), in deep acting, the person more actively tries to influence their inner feelings to align with the emotions required by their organisation. Thus, rather than faking the

unfelt feelings, the individuals alter their inner feelings to display the emotions needed for their job (Anafarta, 2015).

A decade after Hochschild's study on emotional labour, a significantly different perception of emotional labour was presented by Ashforth and Humphrey (1993). Ashforth and Humphrey (1993, p.90) state that emotional labour is the "act of displaying appropriate emotion, confirming a display rule". The individuals who interact with customers regularly as a requirement of their job roles must display appropriate emotions. Ashforth and Humphrey's (1993) viewpoint differs from Hochschild's (1983) view, as emotional labour's definition focuses on genuine and visible behaviours. t Surface acting and deep acting are two different aspects performed by employees in the service role (Ashkanasy & Dorris, 2017). They also pointed out that Hochschild (1983) failed to focus on the situation where employees in customer-facing roles could naturally and honestly exhibit the appropriate emotions by assuming that emotional management is deliberate. Thus Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) proposed a third dimension of proposed experience and genuine expression of emotions to the concept of emotional labour. Bolton (2005) argued that emotional labour is suitable for some contexts but not all.

2.2.2 Emotional labour in the service sector

The organisation and management always emphasise the importance of the relationship between employees and customers; hence, employees in customer-facing roles are motivated to display emotions that fit the organisation's standards (Biron and Veldhoven, 2012). Employees must express emotions during face-to-face or voice interactions with their customers and their day-to-day tasks (Agrawal and Sadhana, 2010). Humphrey et al. (2015) support this view and write that service sector employees must show friendly and cheerful behaviour during interaction with their clients, thereby expressing certain emotions. Hence, service-related jobs are emotionally challenging for the employees as they must express emotions they do not necessarily

[38]

experience (Biron and Veldhoven, 2012). In the book Managed Heart (1983), Arlie Hochschild described constant smiling for clients or customers as an effort taken by the workers who mainly deal with people. The service industry includes many jobs, including some that do not naturally spring to mind for instance dentists, nannies, lorry drivers, and (DCruz and Noronha, 2008). Some professions require emotional labour, and some do not (Soronen, 2018) . However, other sectors, such as manufacturing, also require emotional labour where the job nature is service-oriented, involving sales and customer service (Leidner,1999). To attain the goals of the organisation by contributing to a service experience that is positive for the customer (Agrawal and Sadhana, 2010), the jobs involving emotional labour have three criteria a) the job requires face-to-face or voice contact with the customers or clients b) it requires the employee to deliver a state of emotion in the customer or clients c) through supervision and employee training where they are allowed to stress on a degree of control over the emotions of the employees (Choi and Kim, 2015). A study by Grandey and Sayre (2019) shows that when employees try to alter their feelings to appear honest, though their performance is enhanced, they often fake their emotions, affecting their well-being. Modekurti-Mahato et al. (2014) mention the situation of the service sector in India and reveal a positive and modest relationship between emotional labour and role stress in organisations. Similarly, Hülsheger et al. (2015) found that service job workers such as waitresses, taxi drivers and hairdressers received more customer tips when regulating emotions.

2.2.3 Theories relating to emotional labour

2.2.3.1 James – Lange's theory of emotions

James – Lange's theory of emotions was proposed by American psychologist William James and independently developed by Danish psychologist Carl Lange (Coleman and Snary, 2011, p. 844). This theory states that physiological reactions to occurrences are

primary and immediate causes of emotion. This theory is one of the best-known physiological theories of mood and feeling. According to this theory, an external stimulus can be seen, which leads to a physiological reaction (Das, 2017). This theory is related to the physiological reactions encountered while carrying out a job/work to actual response to behaviour given to the interpretation. For instance, when employees feel irritated, it will impact their tendency to carry out the work (Owoseni, 2015).

Employee emotions and moods are prevalent in their workplace. Emotions and moods contribute to a deep-seated part of the working culture and play a significant role in an employee's job satisfaction and performance. George and Brief (2006) claim that employees bring feelings of anger, love, fear, and respect to work. Emotions at the workplace can be either good (positive) or bad (negative). Larsen and Dickson (2005) say that positive emotions achieve organisational goals, whereas negative emotions are destructive.

James-Lange's model is relevant to understanding the emotional labour experienced by call centre employees. This model emphasises that emotional reaction depends on interpreting the physical responses.

2.2.3.2 Morris and Feldman's theory

Morris and Feldman (1996) defined emotional labour as the "effort, planning and control needed to express organisationally desired emotion during interpersonal transactions" (p. 987). It was suggested that emotional labour includes the effort needed to exhibit emotions and the level of expectations. Morris and Feldman (1996) proposed four dimensions of emotional labour a) frequency of interaction, b) intensity of interaction and duration of emotions, c) variety of emotions required, and d) emotional dissonance. Below, figure 2.5 illustrates Morris and Feldman's theory.
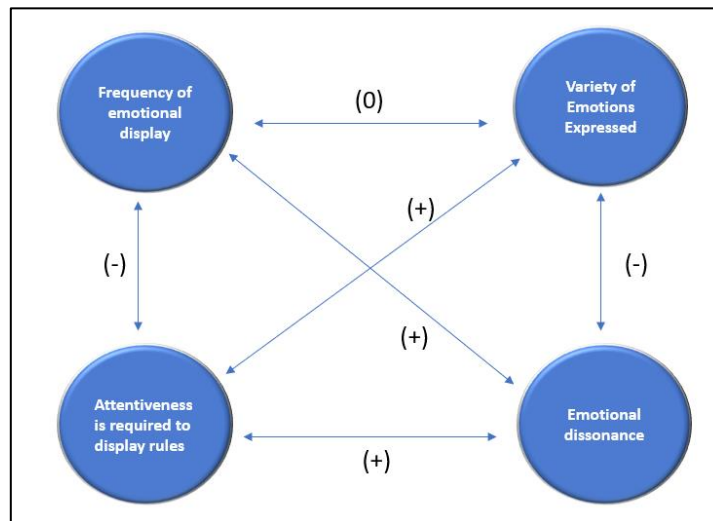
Figure 2.5: Relationship among four dimensions of emotional Labour

Source: Adapted from Morris and Feldman (1996, p. 993)

The frequency of emotional display and attentiveness required to display rules should be related negatively because when there is an intense and more prolonged display of emotions, the employees in an organisation get fewer opportunities for multiple service interactions within the given time frame (Yang et al., 2019). Contrastingly there was no direct relationship between the variety of emotions expressed and the frequency of emotional displays. Morris and Feldman's model can be used to explore the emotional labour experienced by call centre employees in Indian call centres.

2.3 Organisational metaphors

2.3.1 Defining metaphors.

Metaphors are conceptual and practical instruments that encompass a rewarding component in day-to-day discussion, debates, and academic research. Metaphors contain the figurative language "basic to the intellectual processes humans use to determine truth, facts, and meanings" (Oztel and Hinz, 2001). According to Engen (2008), metaphors are multifaceted literary devices that help portray density and express transparency. Using metaphors improves communication

and is also a valuable tool for managers and leaders (Weick, 1979). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) see metaphors as conceptual instruments that are sometimes unnoticed. These tools interpret meanings and make sense of people's worlds and lives. Individuals can make use of them to build definitions of their acts. As metaphors help understand the conversation, they also help clarify the organisational nature (Kemp, 2016). Applying metaphors improves interaction and is a precious tool for managers and top management (Küpers et al., 2015). Metaphors are a component of developing representational understanding and a vehicle for effective communication with and in the world. Eliciting upon symbolic constructs supports considering the relationship between individual and quantitative worlds. As an element of analogical reasoning, the exploration through organisational metaphors is a fundamental mode of representation that is an innovative form effected by utilising and the intersection of images (Morgan, 1996). They provide structure and renovate or generate as well as negotiate new values. Organising and artistic forming comprise a competency for managing, understanding, and conveying personified skills (Schoeneborn et al., 2016). They are also a way of witnessing a phenomenon as something else, thereby offering a link between two different domains.

2.3.2 Gareth Morgan's metaphors

Gareth Morgan believed that by creating types of actualities within, the metaphors assist in contextualising the world in many approaches not proposed. Morgan introduced a new concept to organisational theory (Morgan, 1996). He proposed the imagination of thoughts as a method to organise. In his book "Images of Organization" Morgan used metaphors to understand, handle business, and resolve organisational issues. The metaphors in Morgan's (1986) Images of Organization broadly imply order, consistency, stability and manageability. The book is aimed at managers and professionals from all walks of life (Morgan, 1986, p.11) and is imbued with a managerial view. Tohidian and Rahimian (2019) consider Morgan's work a valuable source for

specialists in organisations to broaden their investigation of the symbolic underpinnings in the related field of organisational studies. According to Morgan (1986, p.12), the main concern is to provide a "general method of analysis" that can be "utilised as a practical tool for diagnosing the organisational problems". These metaphors assist in understanding the organisations, making sense of their culture, and the leadership style followed by the management control and the organisational behaviour by linking meaning to them (Oswick and Grant, 2016). Morgan proposed eight perspectives of the organisations: machines, organisms, brain, culture, political systems, flux and transformation, psychic prison, and instruments of domination (Morgan, 1986). Figure 2.6 illustrates organisational metaphors.

The 8 Metaphors of Organization
From Gareth Morgan's *Images of Organization*
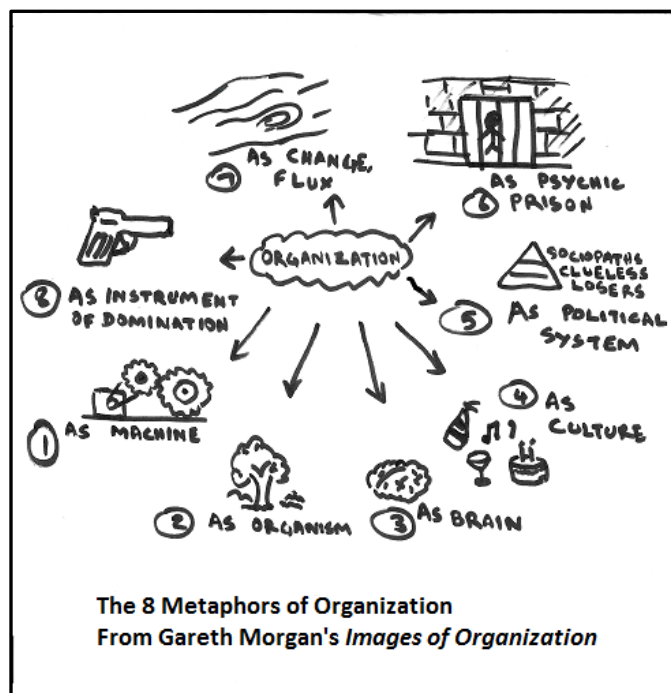
Figure 2.6: The Eight Metaphors of an Organisation

Source: Morgan (2006, p.208)

Organisational theory implication affects metaphors. The metaphors communicate comprehensive and intangible concepts such as the organisation's strategy and mission and a need for innovative ideas. Using metaphors helps create a picture of an object under study (Itkin and Nagy, 2014). There is a close link between metaphors and organisations. The metaphors

represent and portray organisational life, thus creating compelling, unique, and vital insight (Morgan, 2006). No single metaphor can capture the fundamental nature of life in an organisation. When individuals in an organisation change their methods of working, they understand their organisational change. Table 2.6 shows the eight metaphors proposed by Morgan.

Metaphor	Key Characteristics
Machine	• Organisations as machines of interlocking parts • Rules and regulations in bureaucratic organisations • Routinisation, efficiency, reliability, and predictability
Organism	• Organisations as living systems • Environmental adaptation • Different species of organisations
Brain	• Organisations as learning systems • Information processing in decision-making and communication • Knowledge management and capacity for learning
Culture	• Organisations as cultures • Social interaction and shared meaning in organisational behaviour • Values, ideas, beliefs, norms, and rituals
Political System	• Organisations as stages for political gaming • Conflicting interests and the use of power to resolve conflicts • Political dimensions of structures, technologies, and strategies
Psychic Prison	• Organizations as mental prisons • Trapped by conscious and unconscious thoughts, ideas, and beliefs • Habitual thinking and rigid thought patterns
Flux and transformation	• Organizations as self-producing systems • Forces shaping organizations in a permanent state of movement • Logics of change shaping social life
Instrument of domination	• Organizations as a state of slavery • Hidden agendas and exploitative actions using power • Class-based tensions and oppression

Table 2.1: Understanding Morgan's metaphors

Source: Adapted from Müller et al., (2008, p. 4.)

The exploration through the organisational metaphor, through which a broader view of the organisation can be understood and contrasted with more comprehensive views, often results from witnessing the organisations through an individual's favoured and familiar frames (Jermier and Forbes, 2012). An essential characteristic of metaphors is that Morgan (2006)

[44]

observed a resemblance between the various notions or experiences using the metaphors, e.g., organisations as machines. The metaphorical view will be incomplete and unique, and Morgan also observed that metaphors always create distortions (Oztel and Hinz, 2001). However, contemplating an organisation as a machine notices specific aspects based on a comprehensive understanding; an organisation is not a machine. Still, considering an organisation as a machine, it can be perceived by how the organisation functions to produce its products and services (Cornelissen, 2005). Organisations' managers invoke different metaphors by viewing the organisations as something else, thus making sense of the organisational life (Cobo et al., 2012). However, managers educated in organisation theory are more likely to use different metaphors by gaining various insights (Oztel and Hinz, 2001). The managers in organisations will also see the images of the organisation from a different perspective, which will assist them in developing action strategies (Tohidian and Rahimian, 2019).

2.3.3 The machine metaphor

The machine metaphor serves as a foundation for viewing organisations as bureaucratic. Morgan (1996) states that machines virtually influence every aspect of human life. The productive capabilities of machines have increased significantly, thus shaping our lives. The work carried out by the employees or workers is mechanical and repetitive (Örtenblad et al., 2016). Morgan (1996) highlights that work is similar to work in mass-production or paper-processing officesfor instance those that deal with insurance claims, bank cheques and tax returns (p.12). These organisations operate in a machine-like way. Such characteristics are also seen in service organisations and fast-food restaurants, where every action is timed to the minute and preplanned. The employees in such organisations are trained to converse with customers methodically with instructions, and their performances are monitored continuously (LaViers, 2019). The employee's casual smile, greeting, comment or suggestion made by the sales

[45]

executive is programmed by the company policy and sometimes practised to produce legitimate results. Morgan (1996, p.14) presents a management observation checklist to monitor employee performance in a fast-food restaurant, indicating that simple tasks like customer service can be mechanised, monitored, and evaluated. It has also been noted that such organisations accomplish tasks by following rigid hierarchical structures and finding the most efficient ways to work (Itkin and Nagy, 2014). The 'machine' organisations experience maximum efficiency and increased production capacity. The rigid policies and structures followed in the organisations inhibit quick adjustments and prohibit change.

Furthermore, it is also shown that the operations in the organisations are performed with clinical precision, as the tasks are divided into smaller sections with maximum efficiency and assigned to trained employees (Digha, 2014). It is also argued that organisations under the influence of machine metaphor require special leadership skills. In such organisations, the manager's role is to ensure the operation is carried out smoothly and it runs according to the plan.

2.3.3.1 Organisations as machines

Morgan (1986) states that the image of metaphor as a machine underlies the development of a bureaucratic organisation. According to Max Weber's bureaucratic theory, bureaucracy is the supreme model of an efficient organisation (Lutzker, 1982). In the machine metaphor, organisations are assumed to be similar to machines. The main feature of the machine organisations is to produce maximum efficiency and utilisation of labour (Lowney, 2011). Organisations under the influence of machine metaphors follow a rigid hierarchical structure to accomplish tasks. There is a shift of responsibility from the worker to the manager, focusing on the most efficient work method. The work and tasks are predesigned to achieve maximum efficiency, thus allowing the production to multiply (Örtenblad et al., 2016). Organisations also have rigid policies and structures, preventing them from quickly adapting and adjusting to

change. Viewing an organisation as a machine profoundly moulds the expectations, actions, and perceptions. According to Suchman (2011), people in organisations can be trained and operated according to what is needed, just like machines. Each worker in an organisation can be allocated precise functions that they repeatedly carry out without any variations resulting in overall reliable performance. Just as machines do not participate in the implementation of change, and it is under the control of an engineer to perform right from design to results, in an organisation that works similarly to a machine the manager has complete control over the workers' tasks and day to day activities (Morgan, 2004). However, unlike the parts of machines, workers in organisations think about the work they perform and repetition of work creates boredom.

2.3.4 The psychic prison metaphor

Morgan (1986) states, "The idea of a psychic prison was first explored in Plato's Republic in the famous "Allegory of the Cave", where Socrates addresses the relations among appearance, reality, and knowledge. The allegory pictures an underground cave with its mouth open toward the light of a blazing fire. Within the cave are people chained so that they cannot move. They can see only the cave wall directly in front of them. It is illuminated by the fire, which throws shadows of people and objects onto the wall. The cave dwellers equate the shadows with reality, naming them, talking about them, and even linking sounds from outside the cave with the movements on the wall. Truth and reality for the prisoners rest in this shadowy world because they do not know any other" Morgan (1986, p 199-200). Figure 2.4 below illustrates Plato's Allegory of the cave
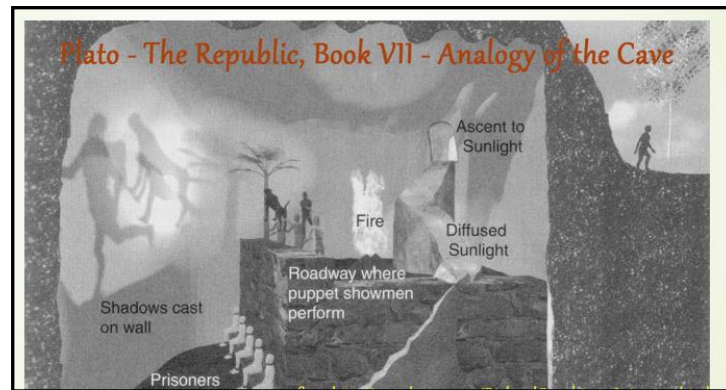
Figure 2.7: Plato's allegoryof the Cave

Source: Morgan (1986)

Gareth Morgan (1997) focuses on psychological observations and theories which explore experiences that lead to the unconscious and become roadways that guide the journeys created. In psychic prison organisations, the employees are trapped by favoured thinking methods (Andriessen and Gubbins, 2009). Human beings become trapped in the webs created by themselves; they are entrapped in a favoured familiar way of thinking because it proclaimed success in the past. Technologies and organisations are psychic phenomena established and maintained by conscious and unconscious psychological processes (Cornelissen, 2005). In these organisations, Morgan argues that "human beings have a knack of getting trapped in webs of their creation" (Morgan 2006, p.207). Psychic prison organisations are held together by the worker's idea what the organisation is ? They also find it challenging to think of different ways of conceptualising and how things might work. The employees in these organisations become imprisoned in their ideas (Walsham,1991). This metaphor follows from the idea that organisations replicate the behaviour of humans, which is inhibited by how individuals visualise the world by their unconscious motivations; the created organisation acts as a strength of the restricted behaviour at the individual level (Morgan, 1996). Morgan (1997) quotes the metaphor as "joining the idea that organizations are psychic phenomena, in the sense that they are ultimately created and sustained by conscious and unconscious processes, with the notion that

people can become imprisoned by the images, ideas, thoughts and actions to which these processes give rise" (Morgan,1997, p.248).

2.3.4.1 Organisations as a psychic prison

According to Gazendam (1993), "organizations are socially constructed realities based on unconscious preoccupations of people in the organization. These socially constructed realities or cultures may be experienced as problematic and confining" (Gazendam, 1993). The organisations are sustained and created consciously and subconsciously, and the employees become confined or trapped by mind maps. Morgan confirms that humans tend to get caught in the traps they develop (Itkin and Nagy, 2014). The organisations have a grip on the employees' ideas, making it difficult to form a concept or idea on what needs to be done. The employees are prisoners of their ideas. Organisations are tangled in their actions and thoughts (Oztel and Hinz, 2001). The metaphor depicts how an organisation is entombed in a thinking style. This thinking style was chosen to ensure organisational peace (Örtenblad et al., 2016). Such organisations tend to be a barrier to creativity nd to confine change, leading to limited progression. Young (2013) proposes the behaviour of organisations trapped under the psychic prison metaphor. Figure 2.5 shows the vital aspect of the psychic prison metaphor organisations.

Figure 2.8: Behaviour of Psychic Prison Organisations

Source: Adapted from Young (2013)

In psychic prison organisations it is a tendency for human beings to conform. The team members obey the psychic prison organisations (Tohidian and Rahimian, 2019). They do not change their thinking and they accept group thinking, following the ideas and processes challenged. Group thinking in these organisations is a way to maintain amity; however, on the other hand, maintaining harmony does not lead to productivity (Cornelissen, 2005). There is group thinking within the organisation, so there is less or no conflict when its decision-making is considered. The top management makes most choices, and the employees have no voice in such decisions (Young, 2013). When the top management is involved in all decisions, they do not tend to understand the employees' problems, resulting in a barrier to change (Örtenblad et al., 2016). Only when the management knows about the problem the employees face will there be scope for a change. As there is a barrier or resistance to change, there is no right or wrong decision, and

[50]

only one best decision for the whole group prevails in the organisations (Jermier and Forbes, 2012).

The organisations entangled in the psychic prison metaphor follow the native culture when performance management is considered. The promotions in these organisations are given to employees based on their experience rather than their performance. And finally, in these organisations, an arbitrary culture is prevalent, which means that the top management is the decision-maker, and their order needs to be followed irrespective of whether they are correct or incorrect (Young, 2013). The psychic prison metaphor allows the employees to understand their colleagues from a different perspective. Morgan (1997) noted that the metaphor significantly contributes to understanding why it is difficult to introduce change and practice it in organisations. Also, it is highlighted that an employee's role in an organisation becomes a part of their identity (Küpers et al., 2015). Hence, when there is a need for an organisational change, the employees interpret that their being and identity should also change, making them feel threatened and insecure (Itkin and Nagy, 2014).

The psychic prison metaphor emphasises that being aware of the factors and effects of the transformation and changes in management can make an organisation move in the right direction (Tohidian and Rahimian, 2019). The psychic prison metaphor helps the team leaders and managers understand the conscious and unconscious aspects that affect the employees and provide insights to control and manage the adverse effects and challenges (Morgan,2011). The management in these organisations must recognise the conscious and unconscious, including mergers, policies and distorting incidents that increase the negative consequences in an organisation (Oswick and Grant, 2016).

The psychic prison metaphor relates to the corporate culture, where they both focus on similar issues from diverse perspectives. In a paper titled 'Vision or Psychic Prison', Kemp

(2016) argues that psychic prison metaphors' mentalities can be seen in decision-making processes in organisations, where narrowing the strategic directions leads to the organisation's failure to adopt a more comprehensive and multiple-seeking environment. It was hypothesised in the study that the vision of an organisation has an immense potential to serve as a determinant of the organisation's psychic prison mentality. Another study by Müller et al. (2010) chose images of the organisation as an analytical framework to study software process improvement as organisational change. In this study, the psychic prison metaphor assists the researchers in focusing on how and why the software process improvement initiatives reinforce the current practices, leading to new and improved practices.

2.4 The context: The call centre industry

The development and growth of the call centre industry are impressive; thus, they are forming a vital part of the global economy (Brown, 2017). The call centres can be physical or virtual operating set ups within an organisation where managed people conduct business operations by telephone. According to Cristina and Helena (2014), a primary concern is the complex operations that need a combination of human talent, technology, and process to succeed. The use of call centres in businesses is in line with technological advancement. They are essential in most sectors and national economies in both developed and developing nations (Holman, 2005). The advantages offered, for example cutting expenses, and increasing productivity and efficiency, thus enhancing the return on investment, make call centres desirable to businesses (Akroyd et al., 2006). The use of technology allows organisations to monitor workflow and employee performance electronically, thus giving organisations greater control over the workplace (Agrawal and Sadhana, 2010). There has been a considerable amount of literature on call centres. These studies show that though businesses experience the advantages of call centres, the case is not the same for the employees working there (Akroyd et al., 2006). Several researchers (Grebner

et al., 2003; Connell and Hannif, 2009; Gangwar and Saraswat, 2017) have identified that the employees in call centres experience adverse consequences like burnout, dehumanisation, and intense managerial control.

2.4.1 Background to call centres.

Many organisations conclude that their customer relationship should not take a back seat and finish with the customers' store experience (Feinberg et al., 2000). Hence call centres have emerged from significant changes which have taken place in the sphere of employment and work (Noronha and D'Cruz, 2006). In general, the call centre is one of the fastest-growing industries globally. Also, it has become vital for businesses to communicate with customers with information employing inbound and outbound processes (Charoensukmongkol & Puyod, 2022). Authors (Burgess and Connell, 2004; Brown, 2017; Chicu et al., 2018) have further argued that they are an alternate mode of contact between the organisation and its customers. It eliminates the cost of face-to-face interactions (Akanji, 2016). They justify call centres as an essential constituent of services the organisations provide to their customers through problem-solving, complaint resolution and providing information (Miller and Hendrickse, 2016).

Askin et al. (2009) believe customer service through call centres has delivered substantial financial growth to businesses and organisations. The staff interact daily with the customers through outbound calls for sales and telemarketing and inbound calls for product or service information, customer booking or queries (Deery and Kinnie, 2004). In a comprehensive study on call centres, Kostadinov (2013) says that they are virtual setups traditionally the after-sales and service functions of manufacturing industries that provide after-sales support. Call centres encompass customer care, technical support and services related to specific products (Parikh, 2016). Abraham (2008) claims call centres integrate telephone and visual display unit technology. Today, they also use interactive voice response technology that overlays the existing

technologies (Robinson and Morley, 2006). There has been substantial growth in the number of call centres at an incomparable rate nationally and internationally (Harry, 2022). They have become vital to most business organisations' marketing and customer service operations (Sawyerr et al., 2009). Organisations use call centres for a varied range of environments. Hence, there are many variations in call centre operations, ranging from the type of technology used, the purpose of their operations, and their management styles (Mahesh and Kasturi, 2006).

According to Dean and Rainnie (2009), "Call centres are strategically important to many organisations. They are often the primary customer interface and can provide a service-based competitive edge using high volume, low-cost delivery via telephones" (p.326). They have become a leading mode of contact with customers, with around 70% of customer contact now through call centres (Yagnik et al., 2015). Hence Whiting and Donthu (2009) concluded that call centres are a crucial touchpoint for customer satisfaction management. Abraham (2008) suggests that call centres are a hub of successful customer relationship management strategies and are considered organisations' pivot. The technological application is essential in gaining access to more customers and providing quality call centres (Griffith et al., 2019). Alternatively, Burgess and Connell (2004) point out that call centres were not officially classified as an industry until early 2000 but were considered a derivative of the businesses to which they deliver services. Also, the operations are not specific to a drive, product, or service, as a call centre can render any service (Brannan, 2015).

2.4.2 Evolution of call centres

Call centres, no doubt, are an efficient and economical alternative to face-to-face interaction between organisations with their customers (Saberi et al., 2017). They are usually office-based or home-based facilities. The company's representatives interact with the customers using telephony by accessing the databases to assist with their queries (Holland and Lambert,

2013). Research into the call centre has a long history, and the evolution of call centres is claimed to be the history of customer service (Purba & Hidayati, 2020). They have been instrumental in shaping the service experience, which paved the way for businesses to adapt to the global market (Point of View, 2012). The term call centre was coined in 1983. However, the history of call centres dates back further than that (Deery and Kinnie., 2004). The call centres we know today originated from the Automated Call Distributor developed in 1973 by US firm Rockwell (the Rockwell Galaxy), allowing Continental Airlines to operate through their telephone booking system (Winiecki, 2009).

Call centres in the mid-1960s employed Private Automated Business Exchanges (PABX) to handle customer calls (Gans et al., 2002). However, according to Moradi et al. (2014), operation in a call centre is based on an automated call distributor (ACD) system that follows a process where the customer calls are filtered and answered by the most appropriate agent available. Connell and Hanif (2009) claimed that an algorithm determines the agent who receives the call. The call centre concept was made possible with ACD technology, which replaced human operators with a far more flexible automated system efficient enough to handle a much greater volume of calls (Callcentre Helper, 2011). In the 1970s and 1980s, large businesses adopted call centre technologywhich served mainly as a tool for sales. The prominent role of the agents was to call customers or consumers and sell products or services (CallMiner, 2019). Later, toll-free numbers for customers to contact the call centres changed how calls were managed.

During the early 1970s, the PABX systems allowed the development of call centres on a large scale. In 1972, the magazine New Scientist reported that Barclaycard installed the PABX system at its processing centre in Northampton, United Kingdom. This facility included an Automated Call Distributor that allowed up to 72 customer calls in the cyclic order (Callcentre Helper, 2011). The agents could handle credit card queries and check the credit card record of

about 1.6 million Barclaycard customers reported the installation of an ACD system at British Gas in Wales. This system could handle a maximum of 20,000 customer calls per week. This facility was the first multi-lingual call centre, taking customer calls in Welsh and English (Russell, 2008). Figure 2.3 shows the evolution of the call centre industry from the 1950s to the 2000s.

Primitive Call Centres
Late 1950s Shortly after the Automatic Call Distributor arrived, private companies began implementing the technology privately to replace manual switchboards. This system came to be known as a Private Automatic Branch Exchange (PABX). Today the term has been shorted to PBX because the "automatic" is just assumed.

The Term "Call Centre" is Coined
The term "Call Centre" was first coined by the communications trade publication Data Communications.

Global Expansion
Outsourced call centres became more and more prominent as technology and costs continued to improve. The 1990's and 2000's saw an enormous shift of call centre work overseas to developing countries who could compete for far more competitive wages.

Mid 1950's | Late 1950's | 1970's | 1983 | Early 1990's | 1990's & 2000's

Computer -Based Call Answering
In the mid-1950's computer-based systems replaced the manual process of routing phone calls. This system was called the Automatic Call Distributor (ACD) and was the innovation that finally enabled the very first call centres.

1-800 Numbers
AT&T established toll-free numbers to make access to call centres much more accessible to end users. Not only did they eliminate the cost of paying long distance charges for customers, but they made the numbers easier to remember

The Rise of Computer Telephony Integration
As the name suggests, computer telephony integration allows computers to integrate with phones. These early solutions were the forerunners to modern CRM solutions.

Figure2.9: Evolution of Call centres

Source: Adapted from Brown (2017)

During this period, most of the global industry giants established themselves with the help of call centres.

Call centre technology paved the way for companies to base their business model on telephone sales. In 1985, Peter Wood founded Direct Line in the United Kingdom, the first company to sell insurance products to customers entirely via telephone services (Personalized Communications, 2016). Jim Carreker founded Aspect Telecommunication in the USA, which

improved Automated Call Distribution systems. These systems allowed calls from touch-tone phones to be routed more efficiently by differentiating them and connecting them to specialised call centre agent teams. This facility reduced the call waiting times, allowing call centres to deal with an increasing volume of calls (Marr and Neely, 2004).

In 1989, Aspect Telecommunications emerged in the United Kingdom, with Microsoft as its first client. Subsequently, deregulation in the UK's telecom industry reduced service costs. It led to a drop in service costs and resulted in the UK call centre industry growing more than in any other country except the USA. In 1989, the UK's First Direct emerged as the first direct-banking company with innovative ACD systems (Robinson and Morley, 2006). Following First Direct, TSB phone banking opened its 300-seat call centres in Newport and Glasgow (Smith, 2016). These two call centres used linked ACD systems, enabling the company to route each customer call to the appropriate call centre advisor between the sites. Other banks also felt the need for innovation and Nationwide opened a 24-hr phone banking service in 1995 with speech recognition and Interactive Voice Response (IVR) units (Russell, 2008).

In the 1990s, there was continuous growth in the call centre industry driven by the rise of the Internet. The dot com boom elevated the development of call centres. With the companies increasing their online operations, there was often no longer a physical store for customers to visit when they needed assistance (Aksin et al., 2009), prompting businesses to start call centre operations to provide customer service and customer support.

In 2001 the call centre industry suffered a blow when global crash occurred. However, they continued to be a robust method of customer support for large companies that survived the crash (Callcentre Helper, 2011). Additionally, call centres started to relocate to countries with skilled and cheap labour (Ro and Lee, 2017), thus relocating from Europe, North America and Australia to countries like India, the Philippines and South Africa (Hauptfleisch and Uys, 2006).

Below, graph 2.1 illustrates the size of the call centre market worldwide in 2020 with a forecast for 2027.
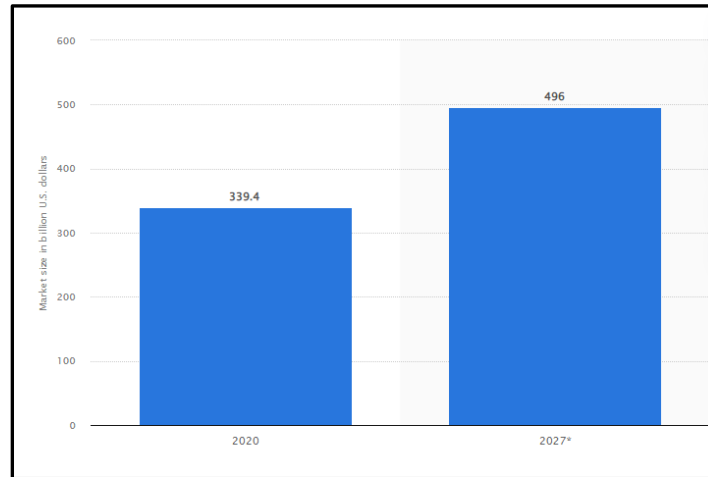
Graph 2.1 Size of the call centre market worldwide in 2020
with a forecast for 2027

Source: (Statista, 2022).

The development and growth of the call centre industry are not only remarkable but also challenging. In less than twenty years, the call centre industry has transformed business delivery services, the location where the service is offered, and the service sector's nature (Taylor and Bain 2004).

2.4.3 Precarious work in the call centres

Precarious work is an increasingly common phenomenon in labour markets. It can also be broadly defined as non-standard employment that offers unstable and insecure positions where the employee permanently experiences uncertainty. While the meaning of precarious work is different to national definitions and various frameworks, Tasset (2017), from a sociological point of view, says that precarious work involves subjective experiences and the process of social estrangement. Precarious work is also a new kind of poverty and leads to social disengagement, lack of employment, and lack of social protection (Bolibar et al., 2021). However, in the case of call centres, several negative characteristics emerge, such as computerised controlled

performance, non-standard working hours leading to health consequences, low pay levels and limited training and development opportunities (Campbell and Price, 2016). Although call centres offer companies the benefit of saving costs and generating huge profits, not much emphasis is placed on the job characteristics of the employees in the call centres (Dean and Rainnie, 2009). The call centre employees, agents or customer service representatives, have limited independence over their tasks (Anwar et al., 2018). Miller and Hendrickse (2016) argue that the work tends to be more repetitious as their jobs are not challenging, and agents cannot set their own goals. Much previous research into the call centre industry (Gerbner et al., 2003; Hanif et al., 2008; Norman et al., 2008; Miller and Hendrickse, 2016) has focused on the nature of work of call centre employees.

The call centre system also monitors the employee's performance to a greater extent, characterised by a high degree of computerisation and standardisation of work. This feature portrays call centre work as unskilled and involving high time pressure and dehumanisation (Yilmaz and Keser, 2006). An investigation to analyse the reality of the call centre environment and the associated employment issues found that the call centre environment is demanding and frequently stressful (Taylor and Bain, 1999). A follow-up study by Taylor and Bain (2004) referred to call centre work as an expression of "Taylorism" as constant monitoring leaves the agent mentally, emotionally and physically exhausted. The continuous and tight monitoring methods and repetitive work cause stress, leading to job dissatisfaction among the call centre agents.

Efficiency in call centres links to performance under time pressure that is always associated with the workload (Akanji,2016). The agents are often required to achieve key performance indicators like average call handling time, abandoned call rates, and average answering speed (Miller and Hendrickse, 2016). Several studies (Grebner et al., 2003; Deery and Kinnie., 2004; Rasila, 2012)

have investigated call centres' physical working environment and failed to understand the precarious work in call centres by viewing them through the organisational metaphor. Along the same lines, Connell and Hannif (2009) suggest that the nature of work in call centres includes burnout and stress. Call centres are highly measured environments (Anwar et al., 2018). The advancements in telephone-based and computer technology have facilitated the call centre managers to track the number of calls the agents answer within a specific time, the speed at which the calls are responded to, the time spent on each call and the number of calls abandoned (Dean and Rainnie, 2009). Technological development also helps managers monitor the agents' activities while at work (Grenier et al., 2017). Apart from the quantitative measures, all calls are recorded, enabling the managers to listen to and review the conversations between the agent and customer (Banks and Roodt, 2011). The data collected from the monitoring process manages agents' performance or has a disciplinary purpose (Callcentre Helper, 2011). The agents consider this performance monitoring process as a perceived method of threat as it affects their remuneration (Deery and Kinnie, 2004). According to Healy and Bramble (2003), the stringent performance monitoring of work settings controlled by automatic call distribution is controversial. The managers' constant monitoring, feedback, and mentoring contribute to job satisfaction among the call centre agents (Raghuram, 2013).

The call centres also attract negative ramifications due to extensive monitoring. The managerial team at the call centres focuses on quantity rather than quality (Anwar et al., 2018). The tension caused due to this ambiguity is the general characteristic of work in the call centre industry, which leads to stressful working conditions (Westhuizen and Bezuidenhout, 2017). A quantitative study conducted by Connell and Hannif (2009) in two Australian call centres concluded that the call centre agents require an appropriate work setting to provide quality customer service. Computer technology significantly changes call centre employment (AlBattat

and Som, 2013). Also, the agent's autonomy and control of their work reduce due to the machine regulation, which is a risk to health and well-being, specifically when the demand and weak social support are high (Anafarta, 2015). The risk of conflict between quantitative and qualitative demands on the call centre agents is another feature that leads to stress (Wegge et al., 2010). The work in call centres can vary from one week to another and change often. The rapid and continuous changes and information regarding products and services may lead to stress among the agents (Matos, 2010). Also, the organisations strive for increased speed with which the agents process the call while emphasising the importance of quality and customer satisfaction (Yilmaz and Keser, 2006). The cognitive demands lead to stress in the agents.

The jobs are characterised as 'dead-end', low in status, and offer poor pay and downward career progression (Deery and Kinnie, 2002). Call centres that are part of an organisation or business are called in-house call centres. Those working for other companies that provide external services are called Service Bureaux (Zapf et al., 2003). The job in any call centre is controlled and standardised, where each job role is clearly defined. This type of service is known as mass service, where there is no customer participation in the service design process (Agrawal and Sadhana, 2010). The choices and the alternative routes are pre-defined in the call centre setup. The agents use scripts to resolve customer queries. Hence there is always technological complexity (Burgess and Connell, 2004).

Each call centre agent utilises computers to receive calls in the inbound call centre and make calls to customers in an outbound call centre (Deery and Kinnie, 2002). The outbound agents use pre-defined patterns of answers to make telemarketing calls. These pre-defined answers are available to the agents throughout their interaction between the machine and the customer. According to Saberi et al. (2017), the agents experience depersonalisation and disengagement by repeating the same sentences. The other contributing factor in the call centre

operation is the IVR (Interactive Voice Recognition) system which assists in forwarding the call via pre-defined routes, ensuring timely and correct customer service (Hauptfleisch and Uys, 2006).

Conversely, Woydack and Lockwood (2017) conducted a study in a monolingual call centre in Manila and a multi-lingual call centre in London, where the agents and managers found scripts helpful. Commenting on the use of scripts, Woydack and Rampton (2015) concluded that scripts were not the principal source of stress among the agents, although agents struggled with monotony and repetition. Also, the call centre agents need to create a customised answer for each customer, which is also unique, ensuring a customised method to serve the customer (Zapf et al., 2003). However, on the other hand, the tailored way of answering the customer has increased trust in the company as their needs are identified, and answers provided by the call centre agent exceed the customer's expectations (Cristina and Helena, 2014). Service-oriented organisations adhere to the "customer is always right" adage (Agrawal and Sadhana,2010). Studies conducted on customer-employee interaction overemphasise the intention and behaviours of the customer. Coleman (1976, p.137) highlights the modern age as the 'age of anxiety and stress; A recent study by Gonçalves-Candeias et al. (2021), involving 1440 participants from 15 countries, concluded that working in a call centre implies experiencing stress. A quantitative survey by Khalid et al. (2013) to analyse whether the levels of stress varied due to gender, shift work, and type of organisation among 191 participants (106 men and 85 women) concluded that there is a substantial difference in stress levels concerning the type of organisation (inbound/outbound) and shift work. Various studies on call centres have pointed out occupational stress (Suri and Rizvi, 2008) due to call centre employment's emotional and psychological aspects. Occupational stress also leads to high turnover among call centre employees (Akanji, 2016).

Call centre agents experience repetitive, intense, and stressful work, leading to exhaustion (Oh et al., 2017). They are also pressured by the service sector organisation, increasing customers' expectations about the service the agents render. The precarious psychosocial work and emotional labour in the call centres lead to many concurrent demands on the call centre agents (Korat and Joshi, 2014). According to Bakker and Heuven (2006), companies expect the agents to resist stress, be team players, be empathetic, and be success oriented. The agents should have fast reactions and excellent vocabulary. They should be able to handle a large amount of information, tackle different kinds of customers and handle emotional stresses (Charoensukmongkol and Puyod, 2022). Thus, the nature of the job leads to a conflict of demands, and it is the agent's responsibility to ensure that the customer is satisfied with the service provided within a short call handling time (Emanuel et al., 2020).

2.4.4 Emotional labour in call centres

In call centre employment, though face-to-face interaction with customers is not present, the organisations demand that call centre agents be friendly with customers as a part of their job role (Jaarsveld and Poster, 2013). The non-conformities from these emotional standards are easily detected as the organisations monitor the call centres' performance. Generally, the customer contacts the call centre with a problem or an issue, wherein the call centre agents primarily interact with demanding and aggressive customers (Grandey et al., 2013). Any verbal aggression displayed by the customer is related to the customer's intentions to intentionally hurt the call centre agents through words, tone of voice, and sometimes the use of profane language (Jaarsveld and Poster, 2013). Research shows that this behaviour from the customer can destabilise the agents' conformity to regulate their emotions, and agents feel the customers mistreat them and force them to manage their feelings (Rohrmann et al., 2011; Humphrey et al., 2015). The customer contacting the call centres is unaware of whether the call centre agents are

[63]

smiling while talking to them; hence the agents learn to smile during the call to convey positive emotions through their tone and articulation of their voice (Choi and Kim, 2015). These workplaces predominantly use information and telecommunication technologies to manage their workflow and workforce (Akroyd et al., 2006). Managers in the call centres listen to the calls throughout the day and review the calls with the agents (Hashem, 2017).

In addition to the controlled environment, the agents interact with the customers more frequently than any other service employees, which involves emotional labour (Molino et al., 2016). Compared to other service occupations, call centre agents are under constant pressure to show fewer negative emotions (Nath, 2011). In other words, the call centre agents must virtually exhibit the organisation's values and customer orientation to leave an enduring positive impact (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2008). Despite any personal worries they may be experiencing, the call centre agents must appear happy while providing customer service (Ruppel et al., 2013). Mulholland (2002) says that the essential skill required in a call centre is not technical but social. Apart from product or service skills and computer knowledge, the employees need to have the ability to maintain calm, stay positive and exhibit a friendly manner under pressure (Grandey et al., 2013). Agents are psychologically disengaged when the customer is angry and abusive and show empathy to the customer when required. Hashem (2017) conducted a quantitative study among 231 participants from three major telecommunication companies in Jordan. This study concluded that call centre departments train their employees to show the emotions required for a job without altering how they feel about dealing with all types of customers while exhibiting the best performance.

The call centres in India have gained attention worldwide due to their massive growth and impact on the Indian economy. India holds a significant economic share of the service sector. The emergence of call centres created a dynamic change in the service sector (Feyerabend et al.,

[64]

2018). The Indian subcontinent has fundamental strengths such as a large pool of English-speakers, making it a thriving outsourcing destination for call centre operations by the rest of the world (Ananthram et al., 2018). Computer-based telecommunication has been advantageous for organisations to address customer issues promptly through call centres (Akanji, 2016). Although call centres are vital sources to manage customer relationship management, they have also been described as "electronic panopticons" and "dark satanic mills" (Hollman, 2002, p.35). These descriptions of the call centre industry apply to the stress, monotony, work schedules of the call centre agents and health issues experienced by the call centre agents working in the Indian call centres. Raja and Bhasin (2014) argue that due to the unique nature of their work, call centre agents can experience problems in three domains; physical, mental and social. The call centres provide jobs for unemployed youth in the Indian sub-continent, offering lucrative attractive salaries to entry-level employees (Dwivedi et al., 2013). These employees also enjoy additional non-cash incentives, including transport, subsidised food and company-sponsored insurance benefits. The call centre jobs do not require any skills or knowledge from the employees; however, the agents must have excellent communication skills (Jeon et al., 2022). India has a large pool of talented low-cost English-speaking graduates, a vital aspect of the outsourced call centre industry (Aziz, 2013).

Indian call centres are both international and domestic. However, transnational call centres are prominent where the clients are from developed countries like the USA and UK. Due to the difference in time zones between these countries, the call centre agents in India work during the night hours to correspond to times suitable for international customers (Bain and Taylor, 2000). These at-night work timings are referred to as a 'graveyard shift'. Hence the agents are forced to live as Indians by day and Westerners at night (Feyerabend, et al., 2018). The burden of working night shifts and this double identity leads to anxiety and work-related

disorders among the agents. The call centre agents working under stringent conditions also suffer from digestion-related issues, physical issues such as strain in their head, neck and eyes, back pain and even spondylitis (Singh and Pandey, 2005; Noronha and D'Cruz, 2006; McMillin, 2006). Most international call centre agents must use pseudo-names, learn a foreign accent, and develop interests and hobbies to converse with foreign clients, which leads to psychological stress. Another stress for the call centre agents is racial abuse from irate international customers (Ahmad and Kuang, 2018). The agents must show positive emotions to the customers and suppress any anger, frustration, and resentment in their interaction with the customer during the call. Apart from this, pressure in handling the call, dealing with an angry customer and reading pre-scripted conversations on the phone, being constantly monitored activities, and forced to achieve targets all cause job stress in the call centre employees (Agrawal and Sadhana, 2010).

It is clear from diverse research that call centre employees experience emotional labour due to their high number of daily interpersonal interactions. From the previous literature, the researcher found that several qualitative and empirical researches on the realities of emotional labour (Aykroyd et al., 2006; Biron and Veldhoven, 2012; Hashem, 2017) originated in the call centre industry. The global reports on the call centre industry have also presented information on their working environment, job characteristics, managerial practices, and performance monitoring (Mahesh and Kasturi, 2006; Holman et al., 2007).

Organisations in developed economies use the call centre facility as a fundamental way to deliver customer service to their clients and customers (Aksin et al., 2009). As mentioned in Section 2.1, call centres are working environments where the call centre agents communicate with the customers over the telephone with the help of computer and telecommunications technology (Jaarsveld and Poster, 2013). They have become a vital part of the business world,

operating as the primary contact for customers on behalf of the companies, thus ensuring low labour costs while still providing high service quality (Jansen and Callaghan, 2014).

Research shows that upbeat service delivery is integral to call centre work (Akroyd et al., 2006). The service delivery to the customer links to vital outcomes such as customer satisfaction, loyalty, and retention (Banks and Roodt, 2011). Several lines of evidence suggest that while call centres focus mainly on customer satisfaction and retention, many of them fail to utilise the ultimate strategic value of the operation in a call centre and the well-being of its employees (Agrawal and Sadhana, 2010; Akanji, 2016; Anwar et al., 2018). Hence this research study is significant to view the call centres through organisational metaphors. Generally, call centres encompass divisions of labour and broad technology usage designated to maximise productivity and restrict autonomy and control of its employees, like tasks, timing, and participation (Molino et al., 2016). Also, the call centre job is low on variability and complexity. The job characteristics involve regular customer interaction, controlled by the ACD (automated call distribution) systems, and lastly, the performance monitoring process is widespread in almost all call centres. The agents are monitored based on quantitative indicators such as the number of calls taken, average handling time, and the nature of calls taken electronically (Garcia et al., 2014).

In addition to the quality of conversations, the call centre agent engages with the customer, handling the call, content, and adherence to compliance policies; they are also monitored by recording and listening to the calls whenever required (Moradi et al., 2014). These examples depict the demanding nature of jobs in the call centre, which is primarily repetitive and stressful, leading to high attrition/turnover, absenteeism, and incapability to meet targets (Agrawal and Sadhana, 2010). The stress perceived by the call centre agents differs between the inbound and outbound call centres (Rod and Ashill, 2013). Inbound call centres mainly focus on

assisting customers who contact the agent. On the other hand, the agents in an outbound call centre facility call the customer to sell and provide telemarketing services (Jansen and Callaghan, 2014). The outbound agents use standard scripts to sell products and services to customers. (Deery et al., 2002). Hence an inbound call centre agent experiences more significant emotional labour than the outbound agent. Their day-to-day activities involve dealing with customer complaints and inquiries and possibly aggressive customers who abuse them verbally if they do not get good service (Aksin et al., 2009), which affects the agents emotionally and psychologically.

Additionally, the inbound call centre agents must exhibit telephone etiquette, such as actively listening to customers, remaining calm, and showing empathy and patience when required. Hence the inbound call centre job is more complex than those at the outbound call centre as the inbound agents receive daily calls (Rod and Ashill, 2013).

2.4.4.1 Key aspects of emotional labour in call centres

2.4.4.1.1 Emotional dissonance

Emotional dissonance occurs when the agents' emotions follow the organisational standard but conflict with their true feelings (Iyer and Yada, 2018). Indregard et al. (2017) say it clashes with the unique role—an employee's reaction conflicts with the job responsibilities and anticipations of the desired level of emotions. Service-oriented organisations expect their employees to exhibit positive feelings such as concern and happiness in their interactions with customers, even when they do not feel any such emotion or feel exhausted, pessimistic, or bored (Abraham, 1998). Indregard et al. (2017) stated that emotional dissonance significantly predicted the absence due to sickness among 7785 employees working with clients from 96 Norwegian companies. Emotional dissonance is the inconsistency between the emotions expressed and those felt (Gelderen et al., 2017). During face-to-face or voice-to-voice interactions, it is essential to express suitable

[68]

feelings as it is the requirement that service industries expect from their employees (Abraham, 1998). Emotional work requires psychological efforts to show the organisational standards' emotions during their conversations with the public (Carrasco et al., 2014). Bakker and Heuven (2006) cited that police officers should manage their feelings to display a controlled, neutral, solid physical and facial expression. Hence, emotional dissonance is an inconsistency between true and exhibited emotions as part of the job (Zhou et al., 2016). Though performing emotional work may have positive effects, such as self-expression, effective task performance and assistance with personal encounters, as cited by Zapf, et al. (2003). Evidence shows that suppressing true feelings and emotions harms employees' well-being and health (Bakker and Heuven, 2006).

Service industries are increasingly important, and call centres, where there is an intense use of emotions, fall under the umbrella category of the service sector. However, the literature review suggests that studies explore emotional dissonance in the call centre work environment (Goussinsky, 2011). Molino et al. (2016) point out that emotional dissonance is a significant characteristic of a job in the call centre. Interacting with customers requires the call centre agents to express certain emotions that the organisations accept, irrespective of whether they differ from the agents' true feelings (Akanji, 2016). Though the call centre agents do not interact with the customers face to face, they must be friendly to those with whom they interact. The agents should express few negative emotions (Totterdell and Holman, 2003).

Also, the management constantly monitors the agents by recording the calls and making test calls to detect any agent deviations from the organisational standards (Abraham, 1998). The unfriendly nature of the customers to the agents and repetitive work tend to create boredom for the agents; hence there is always a vital necessity in the call centre job to suppress such negative emotions (Wegge et al., 2010). The work in the call centre is stressful. This intense

feeling of uneasiness is experienced by call centre agents when they deal with demanding and unfriendly customers (Bakker and Heuven, 2006). This will be detrimental to the agents' emotional well-being, leading to the development of actions and attitudes that are disadvantageous to the success of the call centre that employs them (Jr et al., 2018). Grebner et al. (2003) compared 234 call centre employees and 572 workers in traditional jobs. The study identified that demands of concentration, interruptions in work and time pressure were low in call centre agents (Charoensukmongkol and Puyod, 2022).

Call centre agents experience repetitive, intense, and stressful work, resulting in exhaustion (Anwar et al., 2018). The agents are also pressured by the service sector organisation, increasing customer expectations about their service. The emotional labour in the call centres leads to many concurrent demands on the call centre agents (Banks and Roodt, 2011) and may lead to a conflict of demands. The agent's responsibility is to ensure the customer is satisfied with the service within a short call handling time (Dhanpat and Parumasur, 2014).

The significant change to call centre employment is computer technology. The calls are routed to the agents automatically and regularly monitored. Supervising and controlling the agents' performance may be a vital stressor (Perkins, 2013). The risk of conflict between quantitative and qualitative demands on the call centre agents is another feature that leads to stress (Krishnamurthy, 2018). Work in call centre changes rapidly . The assignment can vary from week to week and change more often. The rapid and continuous changes and information regarding products and services may lead to stress among the agents (Deery et al., 2002). Organisations strive to increase the speed with which the agents process the call while emphasising quality and customer satisfaction (Dhanpat and Parumasur, 2014).

2.4.4.1.2 Emotional exhaustion and emotional burnout

Role clash or role conflict is a precursor to emotional exhaustion, and emotional dissonance predicts emotional exhaustion (Abraham, 1998). Emotional exhaustion means feeling emotionally tired and weary and is a vital indicator of emotional burnout (Banks and Roodt, 2011). It links to outcomes at an individual and organisational level. Emotionally exhausted employees tend to have turnover intentions, less or no commitment to their work, unsatisfactory job performance, and less organisational commitment (Wullur and Werang, 2020). They also tend to be depressed and have family issues (Agrawal and Sadhana, 2010). It is expected for employees in the service sector to suppress undesirable emotions and always express friendly and cheerful feelings to ensure the customers are satisfied and remain loyal (Noreen et al., 2021). However, employees must make an emotional effort to ensure a positive tone in their voice, thus making them vulnerable to feeling overwhelmed and exhausted by their work (Qureshi & Sajjad, 2015). Echchakoui and Baakil (2018) show that emotional exhaustion problems arise due to emotional labour, where employees display positive emotions during the duration and interact with their customers (Marc and Osvat, 2013). Emotionally exhausted employees encounter difficulty managing their feelings, which shows that emotional exhaustion is inversely proportional to service performance (Lam et al., 2010). Koon and Pun (2017) say that job demands and emotional exhaustion can be interrelated. Job demands are "those physical, social, or organisational aspects of the job that require sustained physical or mental effort and are associated with certain physiological and psychological costs" (Demerouti et al., 2001, p.501). Extreme workload, pressure, and emotionally positive customer interactions are job demands. An emotionally exhausted individual is said to exhibit the burnout dimension of strain. Also, employees tend to experience frustration and tension when they fear they cannot show consistency in their performance (Edmondson et al., 2019). Abraham (1998) says that the role–

[71]

stress model proposed by Kahn et al. (1964) emphasises that an employee who neglects the organisational standards to exhibit required emotions experiences increased stress to conform. Employees may get angry, tense, and displeased (Houkes et al., 2003). An ineffectiveness may build over time, causing emotional exhaustion (Kim and Stoner, 2008).

The advancement in information technology and telecommunications has minimised the cost of remotely providing support to customers and clients. However, the call centre industry has gained a negative reputation as a channel for customer contracts and the workplace (Bakker and Heuven, 2006). Customers calling the call centre get angry or frustrated with the call centre agents when they cannot resolve their issues (O'Brady and Doellgast, 2021). Emotional exhaustion among call centre agents is a common issue affecting the call centre's performance, quality of service, and turnover of agents. (Taylor and Bain, 1999; Deery et al., 2002; Akroyd et al., 2006) argue that repetitive work, use of scripts, continuous interaction with customers, and ambiguous job objectives like providing quality service and the volume of calls handled cause call centre agents to become emotionally exhausted. Job burnout leads to job dissatisfaction for call centre agents (Healy and Bramble, 2003)The agents must smile while on the telephone and display emotions that comply with the organisational standards, thus creating a desired state of mind (Charoensukmongkol and Puyod, 2020). The call centre agents serve the customer despite their private misgivings or feelings. Hence the emotions displayed by the call centre agents play a vital role in their day-to-day working environment. Prior studies on emotional exhaustion and burnout in the call centre industry have not convincingly shown the depiction of call centres through the organisational metaphors of a psychic prison. Hence, the researcher will evaluate whether emotional exhaustion and burnout among call centre employees constitute a psychic prison metaphor.

2.4.5 Major consequences of precarious work and emotional labour in call centres

Call centres act as a bridge between the customer and the organisation. Employee turnover is a significant consequence of precarious work and emotional labour in the call centre (Akanji, 2014). The high pressure and very stressful working atmosphere are due to the monotonous work, non-existence of control and the extent to which the agents are monitored constantly by electronic means and target achievement (Siong et al., 2006). According to Mwenda and Gitonga (2017), training and development, rewards management, job characteristics, manager or supervisor support, and career growth in call centres influence the turnover of call centre agents. The other reasons for employee turnover in call centres are low pay and unfavourable working conditions, both physically and interpersonally (Abbasi and Hollman, 2000). To date, several studies have investigated turnover in call centres. They have revealed that job satisfaction, work environment, organisational commitment and problematic customer behaviours are essential for employees to leave the organisation. However, a quantitative study by Ahmad and Kuang (2018) among 389 call centre employees in Malaysia's leadership style impacted the employees' work engagement, which affected the turnover intentions among the employees. At the same time, the study of 126 call centre representatives in Australia concluded that employee burnout was a fundamental reason for turnover intention (Mellor and Moore, 2015). However, these approaches do not focus on the precarious work and emotional labour in the Indian call centre through organisation metaphors.

The other factors that impact the turnover of call centre agents include poor work-life balance and absence of personal and emotional engagement (Imtiazhossain et al., 2018). Performance metrics portray the supremacy of stopwatches by employing the number of calls handled by the agents in an hour and in a day on which the monthly performance of an agent is

[73]

measured (Marr and Neely, 2004). Turnover intention refers to an employee's intent to leave the job. As the call centres have a stressful working culture, there is always high absenteeism and turnover intentions among the employees (Ro and Lee, 2017). A high turnover rate creates critical complications for organisations that use call centres to manage their clientele. Due to increasing intentions to quit call centres, it is essential to consider the role of job satisfaction, emphasised by studies, as a significant variable to influence employees with turnover intentions (Aliyu and Nyadzayo, 2018). Understanding the factor limiting an employee's intention to leave is also imperative. Cristina and Helena (2014) suggest that the availability of resources can improve the employees' recognition and commitment to the organisation, which is inversely related to turnover intentions. Also, studies state that the essential resources in the call centre environment are associated with developmental prospects, the opportunity to handle and control time to do the work, and social support, especially from managers, linked to training and positive feedback (Zito et al., 2018).

Chowdhury et al. (2012) say absenteeism in call centres is a significant issue compared to other industries. As the call centre is more dependent on agents to answer phone calls and resolve issues, absent employees are a significant issue. Missing work leads to intensified workloads for other agents handling customer calls. Mahoney (2019) shows that call centre workers are absent approximately 8.2 days per annum, more significant than in other industries, where employees are absent roughly 7.4 days per annum. The reasons for absenteeism given by call centre agents are emergencies, elder and childcare, on-the-job harassment, routine health or lifestyle appointments, transportation access, and disengagement. Substituting employees is expensive (Akanji, 2014). With the elevated turnover rates of call centres, the expenses to replace agents can increase rapidly. The costs of returning a call centre

[74]

agent can vary significantly, but it will typically amount to between $5,000 and $7,500 to employ and onboard new agents (CallMiner, 2019).

The main challenge that call centres face is employee turnover rates (Hassan et al., 2015). Reduced employee well-being resulting in absenteeism, is the main reason for employee turnover (Mafini and Dlodlo, 2014). Variations in the economy, changes in demographics, and international and local businesses encourage organisations to focus on retaining employees. The skills and knowledge of an employee are vital for an organisation to be competitive. However, retaining employees is challenging for organisations (Cloutier *et al*., 2015). There is always a requirement to utilise retention strategies to retain employees by reducing their intention to quit the organisation (Hernández-Cestero, 2020). To manage talented employees and keep them longer, competitor organisations deploy strategic retention management plans (Dhanpat and Parumasur, 2014). For an organisation to flourish in the competitive world, there is a requirement to attract and retain an employee with the proper knowledge and skill and enhance the organisation's effectiveness (Akanji, 2016). According to Dhanat et al. (2018, p.2), "Call centre managers face difficulty retaining their employees, resulting in high turnover rates. Employee retention still lacks management support and fair labour practices" . High organisational turnover happens due to extrinsic factors like pay, reward, and work-life balance. A more positive approach during the initial screening process and training of the call centre agents can be adapted to cope with the demand for call centre employment (Cristina and Helena, 2014). The cost of turnover has a negative impact and can affect the operational expenses in call centres. The cost of replacing call centre agents ranges from 25% to 250% of the employee's annual salary (Brannan, 2015). Retaining employees is a challenge faced by leaders in organisations. Hence, devising retention strategies is an effective method to decrease turnover rates. Many researchers (Heavey et al., 2013; Khan and Du, 2014; Milman and Dickson, 2014; Emiroğlu et al., 2015)

[75]

have described strategies to retain employees, which include employee engagement, rewards and recognition, recruitment, career progression opportunities, employee and management relationships, training and development. Khan and Du (2014) conducted a quantitative study with 137 inbound and outbound call centre employees from Pakistan, depicting that recognition, compensation, training, and development reduced the agents' intention to leave the organisation. An exploratory study by Ratan and Chawla (2012) shows that implementing training strategies is more motivating for employees when compared to rewards, recognition and compensation. However, Belete (2018) argues that safe working environments and trust-building processes can decrease employees' intent to leave the organisation. The manager in the call centre can reduce turnover by implementing appropriate leadership and supervision strategies to ensure that the supervisors or team leaders build healthy relationships with their team members or subordinates to build suitable work environments. Remuneration and training also decrease the turnover intentions among call centre employees (Brannan, 2015).

2.5 Research gap and proposed conceptual framework development based on literature.

There is an apparent need to develop a conceptual framework to explore precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres through organisational metaphors. Numerous scholars increasingly document that working in call centres causes employees to experience precarious work and emotional labour (Castro and Deluna, 2013; Dwivedi et al., 2013; Hechanova, 2013; Brannan, 2015; Ananthram et al., 2018). The lack of control over their working time leads to stress in the employees (Agrawal and Sadhana, 2010). Ruyter et al. (2001), as cited in Malhotra and Mukherjee (2004), highlight that call centre work is one of the top ten most stressful jobs in the present-day economy. This has brought massive employee well-being awareness to call centres. Costa and Costa (2017) presented comparative research on precarious

work in Portugal and Brazilian call centres by studying employees' perceptions of the work process. A similar New Zealand call centre industry study by Hannif and Lamm (2005) focused on non-standard work as a subset of precarious employment. However, no literature appears to study precarious work and emotional labour in the Indian call centre industry through organisational metaphors. In fact, up to now, several studies have highlighted the factors that are associated with emotional labour in the call centre industry individually and failed to combine it with precarious work to understand the industry in depth (Annakis et al., 2011; Chowdhury et al., 2012; Castro and Deluna, 2013; Brannan, 2015; Rubel and Kee, 2015; Anwar et al., 2018). The proposed conceptual framework comprises precarious work and emotional labour in call centres.

Having reviewed the literature, the researcher proposed a conceptual framework incorporating precarious work focusing on poor working conditions, employment insecurity, income inadequacy, lack of rights and protection, and low control over working hours. Regarding emotional labour, the conceptual framework focuses on emotional dissonance, burnout, and exhaustion.

The proposed framework is illustrated in the following figure in two significant sections:

i. *Precarious work* – Assessing the nature of precarious work among call centre employees and its impact on employees *[Job characteristics theory - Hackman and Oldham (1976), (1980); Herzberg's two-factor theory – Henha (2017); Maslow's hierarchy of needs - Ozguner and Ozguner (2014)].*

ii. *Emotional labour* – Exploring the aspects of work that cause emotional labour among call centre employees in India. [*James-Lange theory of emotions – [Coleman and Snary (2011); Morris and Feldman's Theory - Morris and Feldman (1996)].*

Table 2.7 below compares various theories and models in the literature and their relevance to precarious work and emotional labour. Based on the identified research gap from the literature, the researcher can ascertain the degree to which these theories and models will be adopted in developing the proposed conceptual framework.

S. No	Theory / Model	Characteristics	Relevance to Research Study	References
	Job Characteristic Model	The primary purpose of this model is to diagnose the current job and evaluate the effects of job changes on the employees for outcomes such as motivation, productivity, and satisfaction.	The JCM focuses on the job and the effects of job changes in an organisation. In the call centre environment, though the management defines the tasks and the nature of the job, the call centre agents experience changes in the job in terms of non-standard working conditions, adverse health conditions and challenges to performing the job according to the company standards. The characteristic job model can be used to study precarious work in call centres.	(Hackman and Oldham, 1976, 1980). (Muwanguzi, et al., 2022)

Herzberg's Two Factor Theory	The two-factor theory focuses on the motivators and hygiene factors independent of each other. Motivator factors are ascertained intrinsically by the employee, and hygiene factors are determined by extrinsic factors of the employee's job.	Various literature suggests that call centre agents are prone to poor working conditions leading to a precarious working environment. Herzberg's two-factor theory has been widely used in various industries; hence the theory can be used to explore precarious work in the call centre. The factors prescribed by the two-factor theory guide the employer in creating a favourable working atmosphere for the employees where the employees feel comfortable working inside the organisation.	(Henha, 2017; Chiat and Panatik, 2019)
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs	Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs focuses on the social and psychological needs that people must satisfy. The theory advises the managers in organisations to recognise the needs and understand that depriving employees of their needs will impact their attitude and behaviour. The ideas portrayed by Maslow help in understanding the needs of people at work and determine what can be done to satisfy them.	The needs described by Maslow are required to explain the call centre agents' motivation to work daily. In the context of call centres, the basic needs of the agents are unfiulfilled egarding their job roles. The agents also experience non-standard working hours, low control over working hours and poor remuneration, contributing to precarious work in the call centres. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs can be used to explore the precarious work in call centres, thereby creating the opportunity for call centre managers to recognise and fulfil the needs of the employees.	(Ozguner and Ozguner, 2014)

James-Lange's Theory of Emotions	James-Lange's theory of emotions explains that external physiological reactions lead to emotions. The emotional reaction depends on how the physical reactions are interpreted.	James-Lange's theory of emotions helps us understand the emotional labour in call centres. Call centre agents exhibit emotional labour due to their daily higher interpersonal interactions with customers. While interacting with the customers, the call centre agents regulate their emotions due to the customer's behaviour.	(Coleman and Snary, 2011)
Morris and Feldman's Theory	Morris and Feldman's theory focuses on the relationship among the emotional display frequency, attentiveness required to display rules, variety of emotions to be displayed and emotional dissonance.	In the call centre, the agents must take care of the frequency of emotional displays while interacting with the customer, ensure the variety of emotions displayed to comply with the organisational standards and be attentive while displaying emotional rules. Thus, the theory can be used in the research study to explore the emotional labour experienced by call centre employees.	(Morris and Feldman 1996, 1997)

Table 2.2: Comparison of the different theories

The researcher intends to justify the proposed conceptual framework to address the research questions not discussed in the literature.

RQ1: What is the nature of precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres?

The researcher can validate the aspects of precarious work through machine metaphor and emotional labour through psychic prison metaphor and data collected from semi-structured interviews. The nature of precarious work is discussed under employment insecurity, income adequacy, lack of rights and protection, low control over working hours, and poor working

conditions. Emotional labour is discussed under emotional dissonance, emotional exhaustion, and burnout.

RQ2: How is precarious work enacted in Indian call centres explored using the machine metaphor?

RQ3: How is emotional labour experienced in Indian call centres explored using the psychic prison metaphor?

The researcher has proposed a conceptual framework based on the literature review and models reviewed. Through the semi-structured interviews, the researcher aimed to identify additional aspects of precarious work and emotional labour by analysing through the organisational metaphors contributing to the revised conceptual framework. The revised conceptual framework draws insights from precarious work, emotional labour and organisational metaphors of the machine and psychic prison. Precarious work is explored through the machine metaphor and emotional labour through the psychic prison metaphor. The researcher will justify the conceptual framework as there is no combined literature to focus on the precarious work and emotional labour experienced by call centre employees in India through the machine and psychic prison metaphor, respectively.

The researcher expects to identify additional factors contributing to a revised framework through the semi-structured interviews. The literature review conducted by the researcher has shown that there is no framework to depict a holistic view of the combination of precarious work and emotional labour in call centres. It is expected that the proposed framework in Figure 2.10 would allow practitioners such as call centre managers and researchers to better analyse and explore precarious work and emotional labour in the call centre industry.
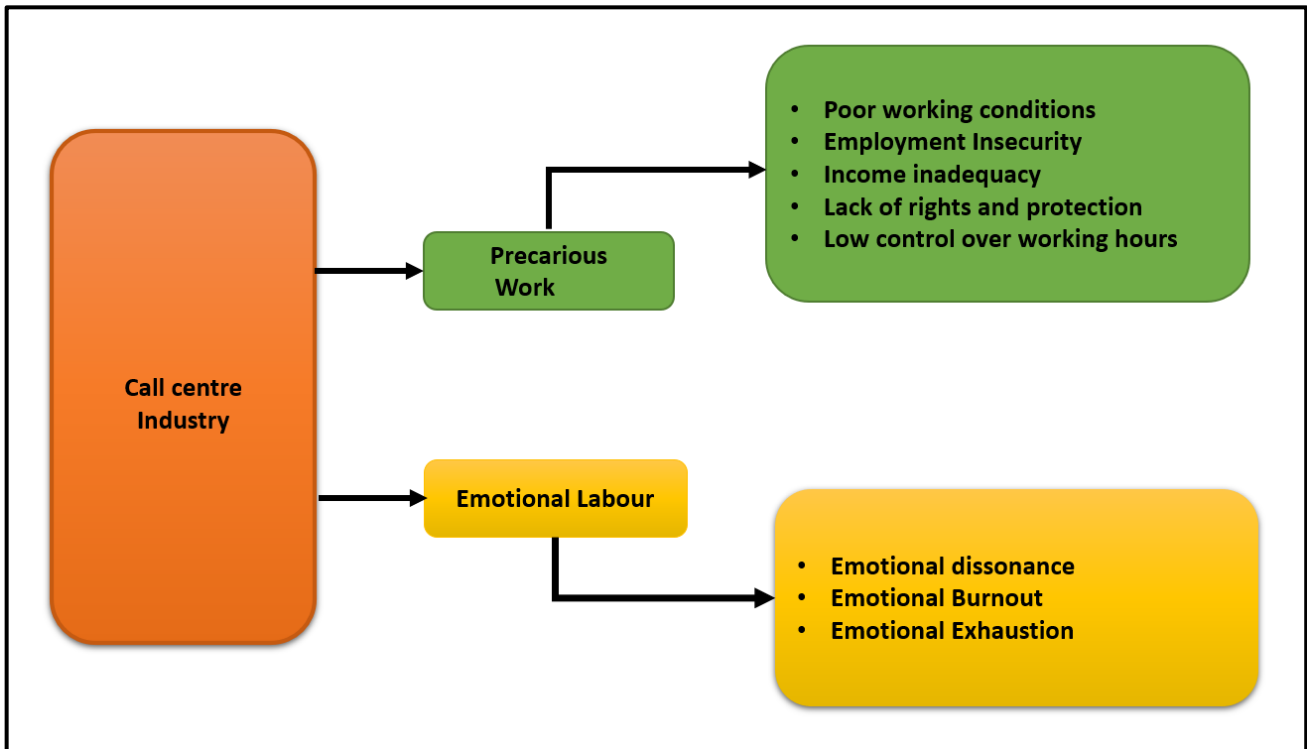
Figure 2.10: The proposed conceptual framework based on the literature review

The revised conceptual framework is presented in chapter 5 based on the research findings. The proposed conceptual framework above identifies the critical aspects for exploring precarious work and emotional labour in call centres, which will help researchers and academicians study the industry.

In the above proposed conceptual framework, the researcher has focused on the critical aspects of precarious work and emotional labour individually to present a thorough model to explore precarious work and emotional labour. The researcher will explore precarious work and emotional labour through organisational metaphors in the following research stage. This exploration would assist in testing the proposed framework through semi-structured interviews conducted among the call centre employees from two Indian call centres. As mentioned earlier, the researcher will explore the precarious work through the machine metaphor and the emotional labour through the psychic prison metaphor proposed by Gareth Morgan in his book, "Images of Organization" (Morgan, 1986). Depending on the scope and limitation of the research study, the

researcher will validate the framework by incorporating the organisational metaphors and exploring the precarious work and emotional labour in the Indian call centre industry.

2.6 Chapter Summary

The researcher provided a detailed literature review concerning precarious work, emotional labour and organisational metaphors in this chapter. From the reviews, the researcher has identified the key concepts and aspects required for the current research study. The chapter has also presented the theories relating to the study. The researcher identified the gaps in the literature in which no research has been conducted to explore precarious work and emotional labour through organisational metaphors. Finally, the researcher has proposed a conceptual framework based on the gap identified in the literature, existing theories and models. The proposed model will incorporate organisational metaphors and is anticipated to be validated after the data analysis and findings in Chapters 4 and 5.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents in detail the appropriate research design specifications, the philosophical stance, and the research methodology that the researcher has chosen to address the research questions and objectives mentioned in Chapter 1. The chapter discusses the research design, strategy, data sources, data collection techniques, analysis, and ethical considerations. This chapter also justifies the interpretive, inductive, and qualitative research methods selected for the research study.

3.1 Purpose of the research

The primary purpose of this study is to explore precarious work and emotional labour within the context of Indian call centres through organisational metaphors. The identified research problem is that the call centres are driven by technology (Ananthram et al., 2018). They combine computer systems that train call centre agents to assist customers daily (Abraham,2008). As discussed in Section 1.1.1, when working in the call centre, the agents experience high pressure and a stressful environment. Call centres look like sweatshops in industries with a very congested working environment for the agents (Ananthram et al.,2018). The agents work on their computers in tight and confined surroundings (Akroyd et al., 2006). They also work on irregular time zones and shift patterns to provide customer service (Chowdhury et al., 2012).

The research study addresses the following research questions.

RQ1: What is the nature of precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres?

RQ2: How can the precarious work enacted in Indian call centres be explored using the machine metaphor?

RQ3: How is the emotional labour experienced in Indian call centres explored using the psychic prison metaphor?

The purpose of the research is ascertained by considering the research questions. The research questions assist in determining the research category (Bryman, 2012). The literature review indicates that the precarious work and emotional labour experienced by the call centre agents have not been analysed through organisational metaphors. This research's exploration through organisational metaphors could improve the significance of how the call centre industries are considered, thus encouraging exploratory study.

3.2 Research design

According to Saunders (2009), the research design is the general plan of how the researcher will answer the research questions. The research design comprises the research objectives derived from the research questions helping the researcher specify the sources from which the data will be collected and considering the constraints the researcher will encounter along with the ethical issues. The research design used by the researcher for the study is depicted in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1:   Summary of research design (The Honeycomb of Research Methodology)
Source Adapted from Wilson (2014, p.8)

3.3 Philosophical stance

The philosophical stance used in this research study is interpretivism. The interpretivist philosophy will provide scope for an in-depth understanding of the phenomena in the mentioned views of this study. It is concerned with comprehending unique truths from individuals or groups, emphasising understanding rather than seeking objectivism (Bryman and Bell, 2013). Its emphasis is that the human being varies from the phenomenon physically as they create meanings and these meanings are studied by interpretivism (Acquaye, 2013). An interpretivist believes that humans are separated from the study or research on an epistemological stance. Therefore, there lies a relationship between the research and the researcher (Bryman, 2012). The philosophy of interpretivism is a criticism of the positivistic approach (Adams, 2014). However, the above views about the positivist and interpretivist philosophies ascertain that they are fundamentally not in opposition to each other but require a different analytical lens for the same data (Bryman and Bell, 2013). According to Creswell (2009), the philosophical ideas in the research are always unnoticed, however, they influence the research practice. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) claim that the research process stems from assumptions meaning various researchers have various assumptions regarding the nature of reality and the knowledge and its acquisition for understanding the significance of philosophical knowledge as suggested by Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) are a) clarifying the research design, which includes considering the evidence type and the method of collection and interpretation of the evidence, b) the philosophical knowledge helps to ascertain the best research design for the study and c) it can assist the researcher in identifying and adapting the research design following the constraints of the subject and knowledge structures. The interpretivist philosophy will provide scope for an in-depth understanding of the phenomena in the mentioned views of this study. Some social scientists described interpretivism as phenomenology (Creswell, 2009) and social

[87]

constructionism (Easterby-Smith and Thorpe, 2010). Although they seemingly oppose each other in objectivity and subjectivity, rigorous methodological research choices could complement these principles (Farquhar, 2012).

Wilson (2014) argues that it is crucial to understand research philosophy as it builds on how a researcher approaches the research study. Understanding the philosophical stance is vital as it makes the researcher realise their role in the research study (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Research philosophy develops assumptions, knowledge, and nature (Burton et al., 2002). The researcher needs to be familiar with the stance that will exhibit the mechanics of the research methods (Rashid et al., 2019). Also, when starting the research, the researcher must begin with a clear understanding of whether the research methodology should be quantitative (using numeric data) or qualitative (descriptive data) (Maree, 2010).

According to Saunders et al. (2009), "Interpretivism advocates that it is required by the researcher to understand the differences between humans in our role as social actors" (p.147). It emphasises that the human being varies from the phenomenon physically as they create meanings, which are studied by interpretivism (Acquaye, 2013). Therefore, a relationship exists between the research and the researcher (Bryman, 2012). The interpretivism philosophy assumes that social reality has meaning for human beings, and hence human actions have a sense (Kevin et al., 2015). An interpretivist act is the meaning they attribute to their actions and the actions of others (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). The significant role of the interpretivist approach is to develop in-depth knowledge and the interpretation of social reality (Bryman and Bell, 2013). Hence it is bound by values and thus follows an inductive approach. An inductive approach is where the research shifts from specific observation to generic ideas (Adams et al., 2013).

The research methods used are structured and semi-structured interviews. The essential factor of an interpretivist researcher is understanding the social world of the participants in the research (Tracy, 2012). Interpretivists are interdependent on their research; thus, the research is subjective (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). In certain circumstances, the researcher will also carry out a participant observation by working with the participants, thus illustrating that an interpretivist research view is participatory and collaborative, creating an in-depth understanding and interpretation of the social reality (Burton et al., 2002) . The research is usually based on an inductive approach, thus moving from observation to theory (Taylor et al., 2015). An interpretivist approach is a bottom-up approach where the study moves from specific observation to general ideas (Hussey and Hussey, 1997).

However, the stance of an interpretivist philosophy is mostly but not entirely associated with qualitative research methods (Williamson and Johanson, 2018). In this research study, an interpretivist approach enables the researcher to collect the experiences of the call centre employees and gather their views to explore and develop an in-depth understanding of precarious work and emotional labour. Also, it was adopted by the researcher because it concentrates on the social construction of reality in a specific arrangement basis the knowledge and experiences of people in that context (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Creswell, 2014; Easterby-Smith et al., 2015).

The research question focuses on the precarious work and emotional labour experienced by call centre employees in India. It will provide a suitable framework to view the call centre industry through organisational metaphors; hence the interpretivist philosophy is the best-suited philosophy. Bryman (2001) states that an interpretivist helps to understand the behaviour of a human in the social world, whereas a positivist seeks to explain the situation. Also, an interpretivist philosophy allows the researcher to gain in-depth knowledge about the reality behind the subject matter (Adams et al., 2013). Interpretivism emphasises that people

view the world by sharing their experiences (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). However, Bryman and Bell (2007) argue that the main aim of an interpretivist approach is to explain why people have different experiences when socially interacting.

Also, an interpretative paradigm helps to gain insight by discovering meanings and understanding the social world. According to Ponterotto (2005) the goals of an interpretivist are emic and idiographic, aiming to characterise how people experience the world, their patterns of interaction and the settings in which the interactions occur. The participants' experiences are vital for gathering information on exploring the precarious work and the emotional labour experienced by the call centre employee through the organisational metaphors. It can help understand the critical issues, thereby assisting the research in illustrating new and different concepts. Bevir and Rhodes (2002) suggest two reasons for using interpretive research. Firstly people act on their preferences and beliefs. Secondly, the people's preferences and ideas are not understood from objective facts, such as their institutional position or social class. These two reasons are also significant for the current research study to explore precarious work and emotional labour through organisational metaphors.

Additionally, the research study required more explanation to make recommendations supporting exploring the call centre industry through the organisational metaphor. Hence it was difficult for the researcher to address the research problem by adopting the positivist stance. Also, interpretivism was adopted because, according to Adams et al. (2013), interpretivists generally undertake a detailed review of the existing literature to build an understanding of the subject explored. Based on the literature review, interpretivists create exploratory questions and the research study plan. A research problem can be addressed by positivism when the problem develops from literature and the availability of theories and variables that need to be tested and verified. However, in interpretivism, a greater extent of

exploration is required due to little or no evidence. The variables are unknown (Creswell, 1994), thus justifying the researcher's interpretivist stance

3.4 Research approach

Choosing the research approach is vital for directing the entire research (Carson et al., 2001) as it informs the research design and allows the researcher to consider how each approach may contribute critically. It also allows the researcher to fulfil the formulated objectives and design its approach (Creswell, 2003). Interpretivist philosophy focuses on an inductive approach. The inductive method is where theories are built, starting with observing instances and then establishing generalisation about the phenomenon under investigation (Kothari, 2004). In the research that follows an inductive approach researcher will be seeking to make observations about the research and possibly contribute to a new theory (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). The researcher builds theories and discusses the experiential reflection of the natural world (Lancaster, 2004). The experiential review depends on various factors, such as personal experiences (Creswell, 2014). The approach is also flexible, making it easy for the researcher to include sample size and data type characteristics. However, it does not require the formation of prior hypotheses or philosophies (Bairagi and Munot, 2019). This prolonged approach consumes more time for data collection, interpretation, and analysis. Also, in an inductive approach, there is a high probability that from the data collected, the information could be of no meaning or not valuable for the researcher (Carson et al., 2001).

Following an inductive approach requires the researcher to have detailed information on precarious work and emotional labour before commencing the research. The researcher developed the conceptual framework (refer to Section 2.8) to access the research study's resources and represent the assumptions that supported the research study and helped

collect data. An inductive approach is suitable for the research study as it builds theory, especially in unknown areas, such as using the organisational metaphor to explore the precarious work and emotional labour experienced by call centre employees in India.Qualitative research suggests the inductive approach as the collection date means that the problems or issues are investigated from the perspective specific to the research context (Adams, 2014). Also, the inductive approach to the qualitative research with in-depth interviews was consistent with ethnography. Unlike the deductive approach, the inductive approach does not require a statistical test or random sampling of the results (Saunders et al., 2009). It is mainly because of the selection of participants for the research study who can provide appropriate information. Hence the inductive approach was relevant to this research study because it intends to develop a context-specific conceptual model for exploring the precarious work and emotional labour experienced by the call centre employees in India through organisational metaphors. Finally, the inductive approach is chosen in line with the nature of the research study. Also, this research approach aims to consolidate the raw data into a summary format and then develop connections between the research objectives and findings (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

3.5 Research methods

The researcher has adopted a qualitative research method for the current study. Qualitative research is associated with the inductive approach. It requires adjustment and flexibility at every stage of the research study. Qualitative researchers need to outline the research design to provide direction, focus the research and avoid an overload of information (Flick, 2013). Qualitative methods mainly answer the phenomenal nature of considering and unfolding the phenomenon from the participants' perspective. Sykes (1990) says that the strength of the qualitative research method is the flexibility and the responsive interaction between the researchers and the participants. Also, Yin (2009) noted that the qualitative method encourages clarifying

complicated concepts in the natural environment of the research phenomenon. The power of qualitative research is the validity of the data as the participants are interviewed for detailed outcomes of their own experiences that are factual, realistic, and precise.

Myers (2009) argued that qualitative research explores a briefly written subject and supports the researchers in realising the participants, what they tell, and how they behave. Apart from that, this research also supports the researchers in comprehending the social environment in which the individuals live. Patton (2001) states that qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach to understand the phenomenon in a specific context, like a real-world setting, where the researchers cannot try and manipulate the concerning phenomenon. The qualitative research method also offers an in-depth understanding of the concept explored where the specific phenomenon or subject is less researched (Yin, 2009).

The philosophical stance about the nature of reality supported the researcher's choice of research methodology. The researcher adopted the philosophical stance of interpretivism as it was suitable to the aim and objectives of the research study, which supports qualitative research. Crotty (1998) suggests describing the research method precisely and accurately is vital. The open and exploratory nature of the research question regarding their working experience in call centres leads to a qualitative research method. Also, the method was chosen for this research study, considering the information needed to accomplish the research objectives, which includes critically analysing the employees' precarious work and emotional labour in the call centres in India through organisational metaphors. The qualitative research method reflects the nature of the research question. It ensures a greater possibility of generating their responses and ideas to develop a more comprehensive account than the quantitative research method. Also, the qualitative research method is reliable and helps the researcher establish a multidimensional phenomenon by revealing the background of the settings. Berg and Lune (2012) describe

qualitative research as meanings, concepts, definitions, descriptions and symbols. This method acknowledges sophistication and subjectivity, which has assisted the researcher in interpreting the results and obtaining a greater understanding of the call centre employees' situation, experience, and environment.

Using the interpretivist perspective and the inductive approach to explore the precarious work and emotional labour experienced by call centre employees through organisational metaphors requires qualitative research methods. The quantitative method lets the researcher know the issues/problems to be investigated and generate hypotheses for testing. However, the researcher's main focus was to understand the precarious work and emotional labour of the call centre employees, where the participants' (call centre employees') thoughts and experiences were mandatory. Another main reason for the researcher to choose the qualitative method is to identify the connection between the philosophical stance and the research approach used. On the other hand, the quantitative research method is unsuitable for a research study that explores a specific issue's complexities. Researchers Edmondson and Mcmanus (2007) gave methodological advice for Harvard Business School doctoral students. Table 3.5 below summarises their views, which can also be used for selecting research methods.

State of Prior Theory and Research	Nascent Theory	Intermediate theory	Mature Theory
Type of data collected	Qualitative, initially open-ended data that need to be interpreted for meaning.	Hybrid (both qualitative and quantitative)	Quantitative data: focused measures where extent or amount is meaningful
Illustrative methods for collecting data	Interviews; observations; obtaining documents or other material from field sites relevant to the phenomena of interest	Interviews; observations; surveys; obtaining material from field sites relevant to the phenomena of interest	Surveys: interviews or observations designed to be systematically coded and quantified; obtaining data from field sites that measure the extent or amount of salient construct
Constructs and measures	Typically, new constructs, few formal measures	Typically, one or more new constructs and/or new measures	Typically relying heavily on existing constructs and measures
Goal of data analyses	Pattern identification	Preliminary or exploratory testing of new propositions and/or new constructs	Formal hypothesis testing
Data analysis methods	Thematic content analysis coding for evidence of constructs	Content analysis, exploratory statistics, and preliminary tests	Statistical inference, standard statistical analyses
Theoretical contribution	A suggestive theory, often an invitation for further work on the issue or set of issues opened by the study	A provisional theory, often one that integrates previously separate bodies of work	A supported theory that may add specificity, new mechanisms, or new boundaries to existing theories.

Table 3.1: Types of research in Nascent, Intermediate and Mature Theories

Source : Adapted from (Edmondson and Mcmanus 2007, p.1160)

According to Edmondson and Mcmanus (2007), the mature theory depicts one end of the spectrum characterised by an accurate model and widespread use of supporting data. These are well-developed and focus on extensive research. The nascent theory is standard for the emerging area where only limited research is available. The mature theory focuses on quantitative data to make new contributions, whereas the developing theory builds on qualitative research involving ethnography and interviews. Edmondson and Mcmanus (2007) explained a middle grouping

called the intermediate theory. It helps the researcher create provisional propositions and models on existing and occasionally distinct research areas to present new incorporations of the previous research ideas from existing mature theory.

As demonstrated by the researcher in Section 2.8 (Research gap) in Chapter 2, exploring the precarious work and emotional labour experienced by the call centre employees in India through organisational metaphors is nascent. Thus the nascent research area justifies qualitative research methods. The qualitative research methods aim to identify a pattern instead of testing propositions. The data analysis for the current research study, as depicted in Figure 4.2, includes the thematic analysis of the transcripts and notes, coding and categorising by the research checking for patterns and insights (Edmondson and Mcmanus, 2007, p.1173).

3.6 Research strategy

3.6.1 Exploratory research

Exploratory research helps to find out "what is happening to see new insights; to ask questions and assess phenomena in a new light" (Saunders, 2009, p.170). The research questions concerning an exploratory study most likely begins with "what" or "how." Also, exploratory research is valuable when the researcher wishes to clarify the understanding of a problem, an issue, or a precise phenomenon. According to Taylor (2010), an interpretive philosophy is commonly associated with exploratory research. It is also essential that the researcher accepts to change direction as the research progresses due to new data or insights. An exploratory research strategy offers a nascent phenomenon for the researchers to help them better understand the research. Polit and Hungler (1999) suggest that an exploratory research strategy produces qualitative data, mainly from conversations between the investigated people and the investigator. Also, the researcher leads the conversations. However, while covering the issues during the

interviews, the discussions are kept open to the participants by asking semi-structured and open-ended interview questions. The exploratory research produces non-numeric data, which leads to textual analysis.

For this research study, the researcher has chosen an exploratory research strategy as the research study aims to answer the research questions and meet the objectives. The research question is associated with exploring precarious work and emotional labour experienced by call centre employees in India through machine and psychic prison metaphors. Through the literature review, the researcher identified the gap that no research on precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres uses organisational metaphors. It assisted the researcher in creating an enormous opportunity to answer the research question using an exploratory strategy and add novel knowledge in exploring precarious work and emotional labour. Additionally, by adopting an exploratory strategy, the researcher has gained an opportunity to explore and make a unique contribution to the understanding of precarious work and emotional labour experienced by call centre employees in India through the machine and psychic prison metaphors.

3.6.2 Netnography

According to Bartl et al. (2016), netnography is a vital research tool from a theoretical perspective. It uses social sciences methods for conducting ethnographic research that ethically combines archival and online communications participation and observation with new digital and network data collection, analysis, and research representation (Kozinets, 2010). The term netnography was coined by Robert V Kozinets (2002). It helps the researchers access community members' online knowledge to provide in-depth consumer insight. Also, Kozinets (2002, p.62) considers netnography a new qualitative research methodology that adapts electronic networks to study cultures and communities through ethnographic research.

Furthermore, this research method differs from other prevalent forms of online ethnography. It offers a step-by-step and systematic approach, thus addressing ethical and methodological issues relevant to online research (Kavanaugh and Marate, 2020). It is a new research method to study consumer behaviour (Bartl et al., 2016). Research in the field of business also regards it as an established methodology. It is a kind of online ethnography that requires the researcher's participation through engagement and conversations, focusing on the stories of human beings and their interaction in an ethnographic study. Netnography employs participation observation, interviews, archival data, elicited data, and other social insights that originate from understanding cultural elements as they unfold. The task of the netnographer is to listen, compare and understand stories of how the narratives and built and shared (Jeacle, 2021).

The advantage of netnography is that it is less evident than face-to-face survey methods. It is unelicited and hence more naturalistic. It also provides the researchers with ongoing and new materials that record daily experiences (Kozinets, 2002). Traditional ethnography requires the researcher to move physically in the field to become a part of the culture. However, virtual ethnography can establish unprecedented access to the invisible behaviour of groups that communicate online. The researcher can access various fields from the ease of their desk, and groups or individuals display their lives online through texts, video or both, which are viewed in real-time or as archival (Heinonen and Medberg, 2018).

Netnography was initially developed by Kozinets (1997; 2002) as an instrument for marketing and consumer behaviour research studies. "As Netnography is an open-ended implementation of ethnography online" (Kaya et al., 2017, p.1120), it helps the researcher in every study stage. The netnographic approach includes various phases such as a) blending into the community, b) implementing ethical research, c) data collection and data analysis, d)

[98]

providing reliability e) providing opportunities for the participants to provide feedback (Kozinets, 2002).

Lobe et al. (2020) highlight that online qualitative methods like online interviews and focus groups are other traditional methods that employ the internet instead of direct face-to-face interactions (p.2). For this study, the researcher employed Netnography in semi-structured interviews as the call centres in India followed the work-from-home concept to carry out their business-as-usual (BAU) activities during the Covid-19 pandemic as India was affected by the third wave of the virus. The researcher could not observe the participants because the call centre employees work from home. Moreover, the researcher found that the organisations did not allow the netnographic method of monitoring the participants due to data protection. Hence, the researcher entirely relied on online interviews to collect actual and reliable data from the call centre employees in India. The details of the online interview process are presented in section 3.7.1.5.

3.7 Data collection techniques

3.7.1 Interviews

Interviews comprise open-ended questions that provide qualitative data. According to Flick (2018), an interview is a method of data collection in which an interviewer (researcher) asks the interviewee (participant) questions to collect the data. The significant advantage of data collection using interviews is that the researcher can use prompts to obtain clarity and additional information from the participants. Barrett and Twycross (2018) highlight that collecting data via interviews is a characteristic of most qualitative studies, as interviews provide the most straightforward and direct approach to collecting rich and detailed information regarding the subject area. The type of interview used to collect is tailored to the research question, preferred

approach and the characteristics of the participants (Adams et al., 2013). Interviews can be conducted face to face (in-person interviews), or over the telephone (telephone interviews) to overcome the geographical barriers to recruiting participants (Bairagi and Munot, 2019).

The main difference in the interview types depends on the structure. An unstructured or open interview will often be based on a single question between the interviewer and the interviewee and then structuring the conversation in real-time (Barrett and Twycross, 2018). This data collection method is suitable when the participants must share their life experiences, like a narrative enquiry. This interview will not follow the pre-written pattern. The most common data collection method in qualitative research is semi-structured interviews. During semi-structured interviews, the researcher or the interviewer explicitly asks about the core aspects of the subject being studied (Adams, 2014). An adequately designed semi-structured interview should capture data in critical areas while allowing the participants the flexibility to express their personalities and perspective in the discussion (Adams et al., 2013). The success of an interview and the data accuracy depends on the careful and proper design of the interview questions, structure and the form of reply from the participants (De Jonckheere and Vaughn, 2019).

In this study, the researcher used semi-structured interviews where the interviewer prepares questions and plans the possible questions to explore. The researcher used semi-structured interviews to explore the precarious work and emotional labour experienced by the call centre employees in India. This helped to probe the participants and get more profound and rich information.

3.7.1.1 Interview Questions

The interview questions designed by the researcher were more exploratory. The researcher focused on understanding precarious work experiences and call centre employees'

emotional labour. The questions were divided into questions on personal background, questions about the job role as a call centre employee, questions on precarious work and questions on emotional labour. The researcher updated the interview questions to accommodate emerging ideas during the interview process. The interview questions are presented in Appendix A.

3.7.1.2 Gaining access

When starting the research journey in October 2019, the researcher planned to travel to India to collect data from the call centre employees working in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. However, India went into complete lockdown on 1st April 2020, and the researcher couldn't travel. It made it difficult for the researcher to access Chennai's call centres. Also, the call centre businesses assisted their clients with a business continuity plan by moving their agents to work from home. An article published in Economic Times (2020) stated "One in three call centres in India to switch permanently to WFH (work from home)". One in three call centres in India constitutes about 27% of the entire industry globally, which will ensure that their call centre agents will work from home permanently as a long-time strategy. Hence the researcher collected data through online interviews employing Netnography. Also, the call centres from which the researcher planned to collect data were very busy with the work-from-home migration process, and the researcher could not get in touch quickly with the intended point of contact. After continuous follow-ups and emails, the researcher was granted permission to interview their employees. The researcher focused on two call centres in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India: A and B. The organisations will remain anonymous throughout the research study for commercial confidentiality purposes. Table 3.2 provides a summary of the chosen call centres.

Location	Type of call centre	Call centre	Description of the services provided
Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India	Domestic Call centre	A	Phone banking services to customers based in India.
	International call centre	B	Technical support to customers based in the United States

Table 3.2: Summary of chosen call centres

3.7.3.2.1 Overview of the organisations and permission to conduct interviews

Call Centre A represents an outsourced domestic call centre in Chennai, India, for a bank established in 1994 with a wide footprint, over one million customers, and about 2000 branches. The call centre assists bank customers from all over India by helping through IVR and call centre agents. The centre provides job opportunities to 260 call centre agents. The phone banking officers/agents serve customers in seven regional languages: Hindi, Marathi, English, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam. It offers phone banking services to bank and credit card customers who contact call centres for various banking services. It includes debit card activation, re-issues of debit cards and PINs, statement requests, complaints handling, chequebook requests, balance enquires etc. The credit card service include outstanding balance enquiry, credit limit enquiry, loan on card enquiry and booking, payment enquiry etc. The researcher asked the Head of Human Resources in September 2021 to provide access and grant permission to conduct online interviews. The researcher also had a couple of telephone conversations with the Head of Human Resources to explain the nature of the interview questions and the idea behind the research study. The final permission to conduct the interview was granted in November 2021. The researcher was directed to a manager to liaise with for the interviews. The researcher was also told that the employees working from home might not be readily

available for the interviews. The email confirming the permission for interviews from call centre A is presented in Appendix B.

Call centre B represents an outsourced international call centre providing technical support for an internet service provider company headquartered in the United States. It provides a suite of customer-centric and technology-driven services to its customers. The services range from technical support to infrastructure management. Call Centre B in Chennai, India, provides technical support to customers in the United States with professionals qualified in technical support who can handle all types of challenges. The services provided by the call centre include technical and hands-on support to the customer over the phone, along with engineer visit booking for installation and repair. The researcher communicated with the team leader via email and phone since November 2021 to gain permission and interview access. The final permission was granted to the researcher in December 2021 to conduct interviews in the call centre. The team leader was the point of contact for communicating with the call centre agents. The researcher was also told to ensure the participant's working time should not be hindered as they work during evenings to support the clients in the US. The email confirming the permission for interviews from call Centre B is presented in Appendix C.

3.7.2 Research settings

As mentioned earlier, the researcher could not travel to India due to the pandemic, and the call centre employees worked from home. Most companies in India, including call centres, re-started their operations from their office premises on 1st May 2022, and it was planned to be in the hybrid working mode and phased. Due to their hybrid working, the researcher could not plan travel because of time constraints and the feasibility of meeting the participants in person. Hence the researcher conducted online interviews via computer-aided technologies Zoom and Google Meet. After obtaining consent from the organisations to conduct the

[103]

interviews, the researcher sent the participant information sheet presented in Appendix D to the point of contact to be circulated to the participants. As confirmed by the point of contact, the interested potential participants were contacted via email and WhatsApp by the researcher to make sure they understood the purpose of the interview and to clarify any doubts before the interviews. It was then followed by scheduling the Zoom and Google Meet interviews based on their availability and feasibility. The researcher also reminded the participants a day before the interview schedule. The participant demographic details are presented below in Table 3.3. The participants' names are anonymised to maintain confidentiality, and they have been given pseudonyms.

Call Centre	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Education	Position	\Number of years experience in current company
C1	RESP1	F	25	Engineering	Senior Associate	5
C1	RESP3	M	22	Engineering	Associate	1
C1	RESP4	F	35	Arts and Science	Senior Associate	8
C1	RESP5	M	29	Arts and Science	Senior Associate	1
C1	RESP6	F	21	Arts and Science	Associate	1
C1	RESP7	M	24	Engineering	Associate	2
C1	RESP 11	M	30	Arts and Science	Senior Associate	5
C1	RESP 14	M	31	Engineering	Senior Associate	3
C1	RESP 16	F	26	Arts and Science	Associate	3
C1	RESP 17	F	28	Arts and Science	Senior Associate	4
C1	RESP 20	M	25	Engineering	Associate	1
C1	RESP 23	F	30	Arts and Science	Senior Associate	7
C2	RESP2	M	30	Arts and Science	Senior Technical Support Engineer	5
C2	RESP 8	F	28	Arts and Science	Technical Support Engineer	3
C2	RESP 9	F	26	Arts and Science	Technical Support Engineer	2
C2	RESP10	M	32	Arts and Science	Senior Technical Support Engineer	6

C2	RESP 12	M	31	Arts and Science	Senior Technical Support Engineer	5
C2	RESP 13	M	28	Engineering	Technical Support Engineer	4
C2	RESP 15	M	29	Engineering	Senior Technical Support Engineer	5
C2	RESP 18	F	26	Arts and Science	Technical Support Engineer	4
C2	RESP 19	F	24	Arts and Science	Technical Support Engineer	2
C2	RESP 21	M	32	Engineering	Senior Technical Support Engineer	4
C2	RESP 22	M	36	Engineering	Senior Technical Support Engineer	4
C2	RESP 24	M	27	Arts and Science	Technical Support Engineer	2
C2	RESP 25	F	22	Engineering	Technical support Engineer	1
C2	RESP 26	M	34	Arts and Science	Senior Technical support Engineer	7
C2	RESP 27	M	27	Engineering	Technical support Engineer	6
C2	RESP 28	M	36	Arts and Science	Senior Technical support Engineer	9
C2	RESP 29	F	25	Engineering	Technical support Engineer	2
C2	RESP 30	M	30	Arts and Science	Senior Technical support Engineer	3

Table: 3.3 Participant demographic details

The researcher made sure to be available at least ten minutes before the scheduled time to welcome the participant and have an informal chat to make them feel comfortable during the interview and thank them for participating. The researcher then introduced herself to the participant and provided a reason for this study. This helped the participant feel at ease and helped the researcher develop a rapport with the participant. The researcher assured the

[105]

participant that their responses would be confidential, and their identity would be anonymous; their name would not be published anywhere; the interview would be recorded and solely used by the researcher. Also, the respondents were informed that they were free to decline if they were uncomfortable answering any question they found to be too personal Before starting the interview, the researcher checked with the participant if they had any doubts or questions. The participants were free to turn their videos off if they were uncomfortable.

After clarifying any questions, the participant had, the researcher started the interview process. As it was a semi-structured interview, which employs a combination of closed and open-ended questions, the researcher could explore the participant's insights by follow-up questions like how and why. The researcher also used probes to help the participant understand the questions better. Each interview lasted from forty-five to fifty minutes. The interview questions used by the researcher during the process are presented in Appendix E.

A couple of participants gave valuable insights to the researcher about their experiences working in the call centre industry. Once the interview was over, the researcher again thanked the participants for their valuable time and checked if they wanted to share any further information that might be helpful for the study. The researcher conducted a total of 30 interviews for this study. Twelve interviews were from the domestic call centre, and 18 were from the international call centre.

The researcher's plan to travel to India did not materialise due to the pandemic and work-from-home policy, and the interviews were conducted online. Sah et al. (2020) argue that virtual interviewing methods will likely become the preferred choice rather than an alternate option if the main challenges of virtual communication tools like the internet connection are addressed appropriately. While conducting the interviews, the researcher did not encounter any

internet connectivity issues with the participants as they all were well equipped with internet connection and system access provided by their organisations to work from home.

The participants' demographic details are summarised in Table 3.2. The participants were given pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. The interviews were conducted between February 2022 and May 2022. All participants were interviewed at times and dates convenient for them. The interviews were conducted in English and recorded via the respective application's record functions. The researcher transcribed all interviews manually, which was time-consuming and tedious. However, it was an enriching experience for the researcher to gain more insights from the participants about the precarious work and emotional labour they experienced. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the transcribed interviews.

According to Mwita (2022), while collecting qualitative data, the researcher must decide if sufficient data has been collected. The validity of the research findings relies entirely on the appropriateness of data collected to answer the research questions, which is also vital in knowing when data saturation is reached. Though there are fewer probabilities of data saturation in a research study involving questions based on experiences from the research participants, the set of themes from all the participants began saturating. It yielded repetitive or similar themes after the twenty-fifth interview. Hence, the researcher could not explore any new themes, which led the researcher to conclude the data collection after interviewing thirty participants. The process of data analysis is repetitive and systematic. Hence the researcher transcribed immediately after each interview discussion with the participants to avoid missing any important insights provided by the participants. The detailed data analysis process is presented in section 3.8

3.7.2 Sampling process

3.7.2.1 Population and sample size

According to Saunders et al. (2018), a researcher must select one or more samples irrespective of the research objectives and questions. The population is the complete set of elements or cases from which the sample is taken. The researcher chose the population for the research study to be call centre employees working in India. However, due to access issues, the researcher could not collect data from all the population members. Hence, the researcher chose a few people (sample units) who represent the entire population (Loeb et al., 2017). According to Etikan et al. (2016), having a sample in a research study eradicates the issues concerning cost and time compared to collecting data from the entire population.

For this research, though the population were all employees working in Indian call centres, the researcher had to limit the data collection to two call centres in Chennai and Tamil Nadu, India, contributing to the target population. The target population is the subset of the population. The sample size for the research was 30 call centre employees working in two call centres. Of the 30 employees, 12 worked in the domestic call centre (A), and 18 worked in the international call centre (B). The main reason for the researcher to choose both domestic and international call centres is to explore better the perspectives of precarious work and emotional labour from both types of call centres.

3.7.2.2 Sampling method

According to Saunders et al. (2018), there are two sampling techniques: probability and non-probability. Probability sampling techniques are chosen when the target population is known. On the other hand, non-probability sampling is used when the sample units selected are unknown. As the call centre employees selected for the research were unknown, the researcher employed a non-probability sampling technique.

The researcher employed purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is used when the researcher uses their judgement to choose cases to answer the research question and meet the research objectives. Also, purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). This also comprises identifying and selecting experienced and knowledgeable individuals with an interest in the subject area of the research (Cresswell, 2011). For the research study, the researcher was keen to acquire rich information on the precarious work and emotional labour experienced by the call centre employees; hence purposive sampling was employed to gain a good representation of the participants from the two call centres.

Although the researcher had not interviewed all population members in the sample size due to access and situational conditions, leading to the research limitation (as discussed in Chapter 6), the sample size and choice of appropriate data analysis tools have led to research findings. The researcher represented herself as an individual rather than a call centre employee. This helped the researcher in avoiding potential participant basis. The researcher also took great care to ensure the autonomy of the participants. As mentioned in the participant information sheet, the participants were informed that they could withdraw from the research if they wished. Furthermore, the researcher also made sure not to conduct interviews during the participant's shift time, thus avoiding errors due to any kind of stress for the participants.

3.7.3 Pilot study

A pilot study is the initial step of the research protocol and is a smaller-sized study assisting the research in planning and modifying the primary research study. For the research study, the researcher carried out a pilot study to test the interview questions. Polit and Hungler (1999) argue that when data is collected through interviews, the researcher must check whether the interview questions provide clarity to research the subject and whether the participants are

sure about the researcher's expectations. Hence, after designing the research questions, the researcher carried out a pilot study twice with two groups to check for clarity in the interview questions and whether the participants could understand the questions. The researcher conducted the first pilot study based on the initially designed questions with four call centre agents, two from each call centre. The pilot study enabled the researcher to identify and correct the initial interview questions that did not focus enough on the research subject. The questions about the job role were redesigned so the participants could give insight from their experience. The second pilot study was conducted with two participants from each call centre with the revised interview questions. All the interviews from the pilot study formed a part of the research study.

3.8 Data analysis

The researcher started data analysis from the first interview and continued throughout the research process. According to Bogan and Biklen (2007), data analysis is qualitative research's most critical and challenging aspect. The research technique creates many words that need summarising, describing, and analysing. The researcher used thematic analysis to analyse the interviews. A detailed description of the process is presented in the following sections.

3.8.1 Thematic analysis

The thematic analysis approach is extensively used in qualitative research to identify, analyse and report patterns (themes) in the data (Xu and Zammit, 2020). It organises the data minimally and describes the data set in rich detail. The thematic analysis interprets various aspects of the research study. However, this approach has less impact or acknowledgement when compared to methods like grounded theory. It is argued that the thematic analysis differs from the grounded theory because it does not reply to pre-existing theoretical frameworks. Hence, it is considered an easily accessible approach with the ability to use many frameworks (Braun and

[110]

Clarke, 2006). It also provides a detailed thematic description of the entire data set, thus making it a helpful approach when exploring the new and under-researched area (Kevin, et al., 2015). A well–built analysis requires an acceptable level of data interpretation. Thus the thematic analysis provides clear links to the aim of the research study and the themes to guide the research through data analysis (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

Since this research study on employing organisational metaphors is new and an area that has not been researched so far, the researcher felt the need to use a thematic analysis. Data analysis in qualitative research is an ongoing process that needs to be done concurrently with the data collection process and should continue throughout the research study. The researcher carried out the data analysis process from the pilot study, which assisted in expanding the understanding and developing new ideas with each interview. Braun and Clark (2012) provided a six-phase thematic analysis process, as depicted in Table 3.3.

Phase	Process description
1. **Familiarising self with the data**	*Transcribing data; reading and rereading the data and noting ideas.*
2. **Generating initial codes**	*Coding for interesting features of the data, systematically across the data set*
3. **Searching for patterns and themes**	*Reviewing codes and beginning to collate these into potential themes across the data set.*
4. **Reviewing themes**	*Checking whether the data supports the themes i.e., at the level of the coded extracts and across the data set, generating an initial map of themes.*
5. **Defining and naming themes**	*Refining the thematic map in relation to specific themes and how these link to tell a story, generating clear definition and names of themes.*
6. **Writing the analysis**	*Selecting vivid extracts to illustrate themes, analysing these in relation to the research questions.*

Table 3.4 Phases of Thematic Analysis

Source: Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2012, p. 87)

Researchers generally employ software like QSR NVivo to simplify qualitative data analysis to achieve transparent and reliable results. However, the researcher did not use any software for data analysis. The researcher followed the six phases of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2012, p. 5-10). The data collected was manually transcribed, which assisted the researcher in identifying the codes and themes.

3.8.1.1 Data familiarisation/transcribing the data

Braun and Clarke (2006) highlighted that it is very significant for the researcher to be familiar with all the collected data characteristics. Transcription practice could consume time and be tedious and frustrating. However, it is better to familiarise the data (Rhodes and Brown,

2005). There is always a requirement to create a complete record of the interviews conducted at the earliest as the researcher can control bias and produce reliable data analysis (Davidson, 2009). The same fact was emphasised by Damaskinidis (2017) that a complete interview record should be complied with by the researcher immediately after the interview.

According to Kiger and Varpio (2020), when a researcher transcribes their data, it will provide an opportunity to revisit the silences, tone, pauses and words. Hence to achieve familiarity with the collected data, the researcher transcribed the recorded interview on her own. The researcher used Microsoft Excel to type the transcripts and then print them. Also, the researcher went through the transcription to familiarise herself with the data. During the interviews, notes were taken by the researcher with the consent of the participants. The notes were added to the transcriptions and sent to the participants to cross-check. The process was repeated after every interview. The transcripts were used to identify the codes. All codes were combined and narrowed to formulate the themes. The researcher labelled the interviews with unique names to determine the data accurately. The labels were used to represent the data throughout the research study. A snapshot of the transcribed interview is presented in Appendix F.

3.8.1.2 Generating initial codes.

Interviews conducted by the qualitative researcher must be coded (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). The coding process promotes the quality of qualitative data analysis, which ensures accurate and relevant data analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The coding process plays a vital role in the organisational and analytical aspects of managing data and storing knowledge acquired from interpretations and documentation. Coding involves producing initial codes from the data gathered (Braun and Clarke, 2006). To identify the initial codes, the researcher

recognised the vital meanings of the interviews in each conversation and mentioned them under coding and indexing. The researcher generated several initial codes from the transcribed data.

3.8.1.3 Searching for patterns and themes

This phase of thematic analysis focuses on the data analysis process at a broader level of themes than the codes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It combines different codes into a unique code that provides prospective themes and organises appropriately coded data extracts within the recognised themes (Roberts et al., 2019). Also, some initial codes form the main themes, others contribute to sub-themes, and additional codes may be discarded (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The relationship between the codes and themes is explored in this stage.

The researcher collated the codes generated to form sub-themes. The codes were organised, and redundant codes were removed. The codes were compared repeatedly to generate the sub-themes.

3.8.1.4 Reviewing and defining themes.

This phase in the thematic analysis involves two stages of reviewing and refining the themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), "the review of themes should be carried out at two levels, firstly, the themes should be reviewed concerning the coded extracts, and secondly, they should be checked whether they work with the entire data set" (p89). The researcher reviews the themes to further refine each theme's specifics and provide names and working definitions. At this stage, the themes should produce a unified data store. The names and definitions should capture the essence of each of them concisely.

Eight main themes were finally generated from the interview data. The sub-themes were further filtered and compared to generate the main themes. The themes generated along

with the sub-themes are presented in Appendix G. The mapping of codes and sub-themes to main themes is illustrated under the discussion of the respective theme in Chapter 4.

3.8.1.5 Writing the analysis

Writing the analysis or presenting the report is the final stage of thematic analysis. At this stage, the researcher should give a logical, coherent, concise, non-repetitive account of the story within and across themes. From the generated themes, the researcher interpreted the data from the themes. A detailed presentation of the data interpretation, along with the discussion of the themes and sub-themes, is discussed in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, the researcher presents the findings and discussion concerning exploring precarious working and emotional labour through organisational metaphors.

3.8.2 Quality and trustworthiness of research findings

Qualitative research quality is considered a complex and emerging area (Creswell, 1998, p.193) and lacks scientific consistency. This research study focuses on understanding precarious work and emotional labour experienced by call centre employees through machine and psychic prison metaphors. According to the researcher, an interpretive approach was considered appropriate (Adams et al., 2013). As the interpretivist approach interprets phenomena and events, such as how the participants concerned understand and perceive their experiences, according to Mason (1996), the quality of a research study is evaluated using criteria like reliability, validity, generalisability and transferability.

3.8.2.1 Reliability

Joppe (2000, p.597) defined reliability as "the extent to which results are consistent over time and accurately represent the population under study. If the study results reproduce a similar methodology, the research instrument is considered reliable" . Identifying reliability in a qualitative research study is a challenging process. The data collected is based on interactions

where the participants provide real experiences from their life (*Burton et al., 2002*). Methods like conducting and systematically reporting the research, ensuring that the interpretations presented are supported by data and seeking clarification when uncertainty is identified demonstrate reliability in research studies (Black, 1999). These methods are often liable to be misinterpreted or have personal bias. Hence, it is essential to describe each process involved to ensure reliability is demonstrated and enhanced in the qualitative research study. Reliability also focuses on whether the experiment can be replicated to achieve the same results (Yin, 1981). Replication and transparency are the two most precise methods of determining reliability in case study research (Gibbert and Rulgrok, 2010). Transparency is achieved by maintaining a complete record of research procedures followed by the researcher. The replication process focuses on the overall pattern of results and attempts to determine how the anticipated patterns are like the observed pattern (Yin, 1994).

The researcher ensured the entire data collection process was transparent. The participants were explained the research objective and how the information they provided would be utilised only for research purposes by the researcher. Also, the researcher made sure to word the interview questions so that they did not raise any bias among the participants.

3.8.2.2 Validity

Various methods ensure that the truthfulness of the research to reality is possible. According to Joppe (2000, p.106), "Validity determines whether the research truly intends to measure or how truthful the research results are" Creswell and Miller (2000) highlighted that validity in qualitative research depends on the researcher's choice of lens to validate the research and the philosophical stances. The two types of validation techniques are triangulation and participant or member validation. The process of triangulation involves using more than one data source and data collection method to validate the authenticity of the data, analysis and interpretation. Participant or member validation is sending the data collected from the

[116]

participants, which enables them to confirm the accuracy and validate the data (Saunders et al., 2019).

The researcher was not able to perform triangulation of data due to access restrictions which have been discussed in Section 6.6 under Research Limitations. Hence, in this research study, validity is approached from the perspectives of the researcher, participants, and people who read and reviewed the study. Understanding the participant's perceptions in the research study was required to exhibit the complexity of human behaviour and a holistic approach to the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009).

The researcher performed member checking and peer debriefing to validate the current research study.

Member checking

Member checking is vital for trustworthiness in qualitative research (Lincoln and Guba, 1986). Member checking provides the researcher with a way to ensure the voices of the participants are portrayed accurately by allowing the participants to confirm or deny the interpretations and accuracy of data, thus adding credibility to the research study (Lincoln and Guba, 1986; Stake, 1995; Creswell and Miller, 2000).

In this study, the researcher sent the interview transcripts after transcribing the interview to most participants to double-check whether the interpretations reflected their ideas and thoughts during the interview process. The member-checking process thus reassured the maintenance of trustworthiness in the research study.

Peer-debriefing

According to Creswell and Miller (2000), peer review ensures the validity of the research study. It involves the viewpoint of individual/s familiar with the research study other than the researcher and the study participants. The researcher consulted the University of Wales

Trinity Saint David's research committee during the proposal phase at the start of the research study. Later, the researcher consulted the supervisory team regularly during the data collection process while interpreting and analysing data and during the writing stage. The consultation with the supervisory team took place every month following assessments and consequent approvals to the next step of the research study. Thus the credibility of the research study was established by close collaboration between the researcher and the supervisory team (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

3.8.2.3 Generalisability and transferability.

Ali and Yusof (2011, p.35) state, "The word 'generalizability' is defined as the degree to which the findings can be generalized from the study sample to the entire population." In most qualitative research findings, generalisability is not an expected attribute (Leung, 2015). However, Gheondea-Eladi (2014) argues that qualitative research, though not generalisable, should ensure transferability, where most of the possible contextual information will aid future researchers and should be transferred to different studies.

In this study, the researcher focused on collecting data from two call centres in Chennai handling inbound calls from customers in India and the United States, which restricts the generalisability of research findings to other call centres in India. The limitation of generalisability has been discussed in detail in Section 6.6 under Research Limitations. Although the research study is not generalisable, the researcher recommends (See Section 6.9 Recommendations for future research) using research studies in other call centres and service sectors in India and other countries and employing the other metaphors proposed by Gareth Morgan, thus ensuring the transferability of the contextual research information for future studies.

3.9 Researcher reflexivity

After graduation, I started my career as a call centre agent and have about ten years of experience working in various call centres in India and the United Kingdom. My experience includes two years as a manger at a call centre in India . When I started my DBA programme, I realised that though call centres are essential for businesses to reach out to their customers, the precarious work and emotional labour perspectives of the employees or the call centre agents have not been considered combinedly. While reviewing the literature on call centres, I found an increase in the growth of call centres in India. The employees working in the Indian call centres face issues concerning precarious work and emotional labour due to the nature of the job role. I was finding ways to relate my employment in the call centre industry to an external concept that would enhance exploring the precarious work and emotional labour in the call centres. I realised that the organisational metaphors formulated by Gareth Morgan and viewing the call centres through the organisational metaphors could be a solution to explore the precarious work and emotional labour in call centres. Also, a further review of the literature on the call centre industry revealed that no research or study had been carried out to explore the precarious work and emotional labour in the call centre industry through organisational metaphors. Hence I was encouraged to conduct the research, thus studying the precarious work and emotional labour in call centres through the machine and psychic prison metaphors.

As discussed previously, I could not travel to India due to the pandemic and travel restrictions. Hence I chose to interview participants through Zoom and Google Meet. I shared the participant information sheet with the point of contact in both call centres and asked them to circulate it to the interested participants. On the day of the interview, I ensured the participants were comfortable and allowed them to turn off their cameras if they wished. I also assured them that confidentiality would be strictly maintained throughout the research. I explained to the

participants about my background in working in call centres and why I am doing research in the call centre industry. The participants were very supportive and helped me by answering questions. Some participants also said the questions reflected their experience and shared their information wholeheartedly. After the interviews, I also shared some of my experiences working in call centres, which helped me build a rapport with them and thus assisted me in going back and talking to the participants when required. As a researcher, the interviews also helped me get a bird's eye view of the precarious work and emotional labour experienced by the call centre employees. I am fortunate to have conducted this research study in the industry, which has elevated me from a fresh graduate in 2006 to a doctoral researcher.

3.10 Ethical consideration

Data collection in natural settings creates various ethical issues (Lambert et al., 2011). Bridging relationships and trust-building are the two main issues that should be addressed (Moore and Savage, 2002). In any research, the initial step is to propose ethical considerations (Kozinets, 2010).

Research ethics signifies the acceptance of the investigators and the rights of people who become the study subject and are affected by the study (Saunders et al., 2007). It can occur at any time during the entire research process, and ethical consideration is recommended at every stage (Adams, 2014).

The researcher initially planned to observe call centre employees and interview them; however, the online data collection approach was used to collect data due to the pandemic and travel restrictions. Also, all these methods are interwoven and dependent on each other. The researcher had to rule out the participant observation method as most call centres in Chennai, India, as mentioned in section 3.7.1, allowed their employees to work from home. Hence the researcher chose to collect data by employing online semi-structured interviews.

[120]

The research study wholly adhered to the Ethical Guidelines of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD). Ethical approval from UWTSD's Ethical Committee was sought before the commencement of the research. The ethics approval for this research study is presented in Appendix A. The participants were provided with information regarding confidentiality. The researcher also provided the participants with information regarding the research study with their contact details via email. The participants were informed that they could contact the researcher at any time to discuss the research process and with any questions regarding the study.

The participants were assured their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw from the research study at any time. They were also assured that their anonymity would be maintained and respected throughout the research. The researcher also confirmed that the participants' reference information and responses would remain confidential and coded. The emphasis on data protection and confidentiality enabled the participants to confidently share their experiences and insights sans prejudice, thus assisting the researcher in gathering reliable and quality data.

3.11 Chapter summary

In this chapter, the researcher has presented the research methodology adopted through the research study. The chapter provides a clear picture of the adopted research methods. The researcher has also justified the research philosophy used for the data collection. A detailed description of the sampling and the data analysis process have been presented. The researcher has also provided details of each process during the data collection. An inductive approach was used following an exploratory and qualitative research design. Semi-structured interviews were conducted among the research participants for data collection. The sample size was 30

participants working in two Indian call centres. Purposive sampling was used to recruit the participants. The researcher has also presented the data analysis technique used to analyse the data. A detailed description of the thematic analysis process used has been discussed. The chapter concluded with the trustworthiness of the research, including reliability and validity issues, the researcher's reflexivity and ethical considerations. In the next chapter, the themes that emerged from the data collection and the interpretation of data are discussed in detail.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSES

4.0 Introduction

The data collected from the two Indian call centres are presented in this chapter. The researcher has concentrated on extracting the vast narratives from the interview recordings for in-depth analysis and discussion. Based on the interview data collected, eight themes emerged that were directly related to the aim of the research study.

It is argued that the data naturally shapes the characterisation and the context inside which the research meaning should be constructed (Silverman, 2010). Hence the researcher has focused on highlighting the verbalisation of the logically arising matters and following the precise legitimacy of the Indian call centres. The researcher collected data using semi-structured interviews with 30 call centre employees in India from forty-five to fifty minutes. The voice-recorded interviews were then transcribed for analysis. The researcher employed thematic analysis to analyse the transcripts. The researcher cross-checked the transcripts for accuracy.

4.1 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is the process of identifying the themes or patterns in the qualitative data collected. The thematic analysis is the most appropriate data analysis method for any study seeking interpretations. Braun and Clarke (2006) say that thematic analysis is the first qualitative method to learn as it provides core skills for conducting other data analysis (p.78). As qualitative research requires understanding and collecting varied data and aspects, thematic analysis helps understand the potential of any issues in a broader context. Also, the thematic analysis emphasises precisely what the respondents mentioned and adds value to the meaning as it focuses on how the data is mentioned. It also provides a logical element to the data analysis process, conferring intricacy and accuracy and enhancing the research's meaning. Also, by employing a thematic analysis, the researcher can accurately determine and assess the relationship between the concepts with the replicated data.

[124]

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews using pre-identified topic areas in this study, which may serve as themes/sub-themes and codes in the qualitative data analysis process. The themes encompassed the agent's view on how precarious work and emotional labour are enacted in the Indian call centres. Table 4.1 below illustrates the themes for exploring precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres generated from semi-structured interviews.

Precarious work in call centres	**Theme One:** Non-standard work schedule
	Theme Two: Inadequate personal and family time
	Theme Three: Fear and pressure to perform
	Theme Four: Health and safety Issues
	Theme Five: Remuneration and career-related issues
Emotional labour in call centres	**Theme Six**: Suppressed emotions
	Theme Seven: Conscious falsification
	Theme Eight: Emotionally despondent due to customer behaviour

Table 4.1: Themes generated for the research study from semi-structured interviews.

4.2 Presentation, interpretations, and analyses of the emerging themes

The researcher has presented the outline of the eight themes that emerged after performing the thematic analysis.

4.2.1 Theme One: Non-standard work schedule
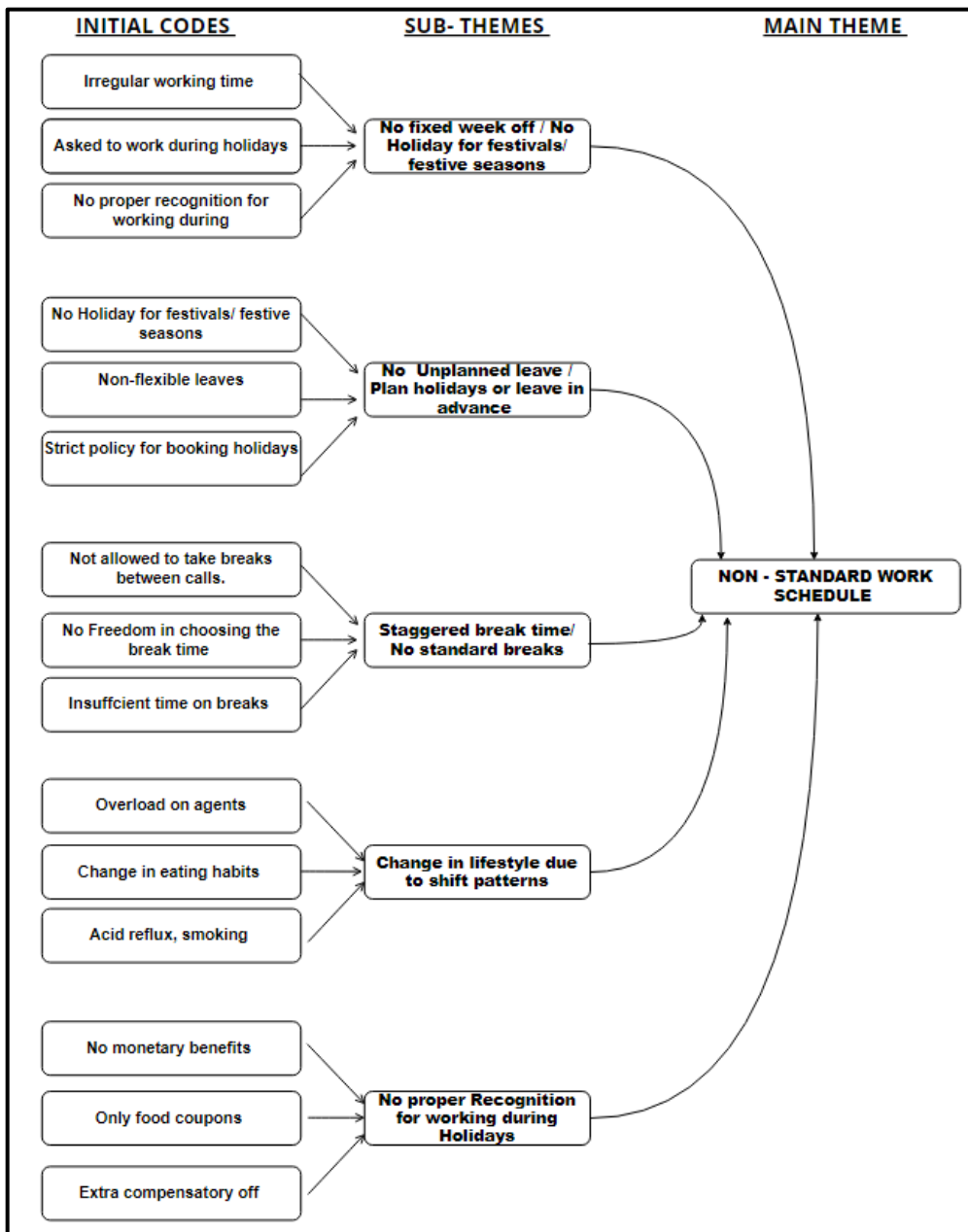
Figure 4.1 Codes and sub-themes mapping for Theme One

4.2.1.1 Interpretation of Theme One

Theme one was formulated from many sub-themes that focused on the daily non-standard work schedule that the call centre employees experienced. The sub-themes represent call centre agents' staggering working schedules. The researcher acquired more vital information from the respondents that focused on the non-standard working process ranging from holidays, weeks off, and scheduled breaks.

> *"……our week offs are not constant…. we get only one week off and every alternate Sunday off…." (RESP3)*

As the call centre needs to provide customer service 24/7, the agents do not get a fixed weekend off and must work on Sundays. The agents are rostered to work during the local public holidays and during the festival seasons.

> *"…. As you know we work 24/7, this includes public holidays and festivals also. I will often be rostered to work on public holidays and festival days…as I am unmarried, my manager tries to convince me and say that there are married ladies who need a festival day off." (RESP6)*

Respondent (RESP6) who is twenty-one years old and has worked in the call centre for one year, said that she registers her request for a holiday during festivals earlier than others. Being new to the team, she said that all she could do was agree to what was being told as her manager would convince her by saying that other married ladies in the team who have children must be with family more than her.

As agents are rostered for their shifts based on the estimated number of calls on that day, during such times the agents are not allowed to take unplanned leave as taking it will impact the service level agreement of the call centres with their clients. When there is an unplanned leave in the centre, the other agents' burden increases, resulting in calls getting queued and abandoned.

[127]

Hence, the agents must plan their leave for festivals, etc., using a holiday booking system or requesting a holiday well in advance.

".... It is similar with holidays, also
we must request a holiday at the start of the month, and the holidays will be granted as per
availability.... this makes me feel quite disturbed sometimes. Because there will be times when
things don't go as planned, there might be some situations where I must take leave... if I take
unplanned leave, it will be a loss of pay for me for that...I have sacrificed it... as there some
things that are more important than money...." (RESP10)

Respondent (RESP 10) also expressed that they must give a request at the start of the month for holidays. However, he said they sometimes encounter sudden emergencies in their family. During this time, they cannot avoid taking unplanned leave. It was also registered that they do not get paid while taking unplanned leave and will lose their pay for those days.

"……. but the breaks and holiday schedule have seen no changes. It's the same.... we have an
intranet where our rosters will be updated every week, including our holidays. The break
schedule will be updated daily...so during our break time we are supposed to go on our breaks as
per the schedule.... even during working from home we must follow the same routine..."
(RESP15)

Respondent (RESP15), who works in the international call centre, said they have an intranet where the agents' daily schedules are updated along with the holidays and breaks. The agents are required to take breaks according to the schedule.

".... ideally the company follows a holiday request schedule, and it's on a first come, first-serve
basis; imagine we have about 15 teams, with almost 20 members in each team and by the time I
try to put in the request, the option is closed (laughs), and I end up working on holidays." (RESP
12)

Respondent (RESP 12) registered a similar statement where the call centres follow a first-come, first-served basis for booking breaks. Due to the number of people working in the call centre, the

availability closes quite quickly, and he said he ends up working during holidays. The respondent laughed while saying that he ends up working during the holidays; the sense of not being able to get holidays for festivals was seen in his voice. While taking a holiday is challenging for the agents, the other main issue highlighted by the respondents was the staggered break schedule followed in the call centres.

"...In a day we are allowed to take 30 min lunch break and 15 min break. It depends on how we take the 45 min break. I usually finish my lunch in 20 minutes and take the remaining 10 minutes as an extra break. So, it is something in a total of 7hr 30 min shift; I take my first 15 min break after 2 hrs of starting my shift, then a 20 min break for my lunch after the next 2 hours and then another 10 min break.... however, this is just a tentative break structure, when there is call-in queue, we will not be allowed to take breaks...." (RESP17)

Respondent (RESP17) explained the agents' break schedule in a day. It was seen that the agents get very little time for breaks, especially lunch breaks, which are only for 30 minutes. Though it is for 30 minutes, the agent confirmed that they are not allowed to take breaks if a call is in the queue. Some agents were also told they had to check with the supervisor or the real-time queue management team (RTQM) to take a bio break if they did not take the break in the scheduled time. A couple of female respondents also talked about their difficulties during their menstrual period. One respondent (RESP 23) said that when the manager or supervisor is male, it is difficult to make them understand their situation and ask for an extra break. The respondent has been working in the call centre for four years under a male supervisor and says that she finds it hard to explain her situation to him during such times.

It is seen that agents are allowed to take breaks according to schedule, and if missed due to a call or calls in queue, the agents are not allowed to take the missed break. This strict break routine was followed even while working from home.

".... The break schedule will be updated daily...so during our break time, we are supposed to go on our breaks as per the schedule.... even during

working from home, we must follow the same routine..." (RESP9).

"...we are not allowed to take breaks when we need it... sometimes I skip my break ...and that cannot be taken as one...We get two 15 min breaks in the day and one 30 min -- let's say I skip both 15 min breaks...I cannot take a 1 hr break together, and we will have others who are rostered to go on break during that time ... and if the call flow is too much, it will get queued and increase the burden on other agents...." (RESP 20).

Respondent (RESP 20) said that if the agents skip their breaks due to being stuck in a call or high call flows, they are not allowed to combine the break with another break and take them together. A missed break must be forgone even though it is not the agent's fault for missing it.

".... In November 2016, the Government of India announced the demonetisation of currencies. We had constant call queues. About three weeks was a nightmare for us.
Customers were panicking about the money; they could not withdraw any money from the bank or the ATMs. Due to the heavy call flow, we were not
allowed to take breaks and were offered tea and snacks at our desk by the company, which generally would not happen. We were given 15 min lunch break and bio breaks when needed but no more than 5 minutes. Some of my friends on holiday were also asked to come to work during that time…. (RESP23)

Respondent (RESP24) highlighted the situation in call centre C1 when the government of India imposed demonetisation of currencies and how the agents were not allowed to take breaks during that period.

The respondent (RESP10), working in an international call centre, expressed the agony over the change in his lifestyle due to the night work.

"My shift starts at 5.30 pm and ends at 2.30 am, typically

from 8 am to 5 pm in the US. We work in the night shifts - the typical 5.30 pm to 2.30 am shift is called the graveyard shift --- this is the first thing that questions my choice of work in the call centre. Imagine doing night shifts. I sleep late and wake up in the afternoon. By the time I wake up, it's almost half day for most of them... and by the time they finish work, I start my work ...by this shift pattern, my biological clock has changed...” (RESP 10)

He said that working the night shift has changed his daily routine and has altered his biological clock.

The call centre calls it the graveyard shift when they work from 5:30 pm to 2:30 am, which is 8:00 am to 5:00 pm in the United States. A couple of agents said the imbalance between family and work is due to these staggered working hours. The researcher also found that few married women worked in the call centre (C2) due to the night shifts and the female participants who were interviewed were unmarried. A couple of them also registered that they may need to leave the job and look for a day shift job if their future husbands disagree with their work schedule.

“...My parents are not happy with me working the night shifts.
Every day when I start to work, my mom asks me to check for different opportunities with day shifts. She worries that I may not get married due to the shift pattern. Hence, they have said I could work in this job only until my marriage is fixed. Once my marriage was confirmed, they asked me to leave the job….” (RESP 29)

It is also seen that the agents do not get proper recognition for working during the holiday and festive season and sometimes the agents on leave are also asked to cut it short and resume work earlier than they should.

“…. We don't get paid extra for working during the holiday period, but the company used to sponsor our food as a token of appreciation, and we get compensatory off which we can take any time….”
“….. however, some agents have been asked to cut short their holiday and come to work when there is heavy call flow….” (RESP23)

Respondent (RESP 23) said that the company provides food while working during the holiday period. However, the agents do not get motivated by the food provided to them They would rather have some time off to enjoy with family. Respondent (RESP10), working in the international call centre, said that his friends working in the IT sector, who provide IT services to the same US and UK customers, said they are given leave for Indian festivals and a couple of US and UK Bank Holidays. He asked why only the call centres or the ITES sector have the curse of not getting leave.

".... you know a worse thing, which I would say a curse we employee working in the ITES sector have… My friends who work in the IT sector get leave for Indian
Festivals and US holidays. However, it looks that only we are not allowed. I understand we face the customers directly. Hence, we do not get leaves for Indian festivals, but we do not get for even US holidays; we are rostered on that day with minimal staffing. One of my friends who went to the US and returned said that service people working on holidays get paid 1.5 times more on that day, but we do not get that privilege either…. (RESP10).

4.2.1.2 Analysis of Theme One

In many parts of the world, the call centre industry is a source of job growth. In India, call centres represent one of the significant sources of job growth in the service sector. Extensive research about the industry focused on the labour process and concluded that the work in call centres is demanding, highly pressured and entails continuous operation in shifts. Most call centres' work is shift-based, where the agents do not have a daily or weekly fixed work time. Bohle et al. (2011,p.219) say that the employees in the call centres encounter psychosocial issues that include undesirable working hours.

The respondents from both call centres expressed concerns over their weeks off and holidays during the festival seasons and their staggered working hours. The in-house and outsourced call centres must provide 24/7 support to the customers irrespective of the holidays

and weekends in the call centre agents' location. The respondents said they needed to apply for holidays at least a month in advance. However, registering their interest would not guarantee their holidays; this depends on various factors. A couple of new joiners said preference was given to married women with children to spend the holiday with family.

A call centre job advertisement for a position of customer service advisor in a leading call centre in the UK, based in Rotherham, South Yorkshire, confirms the shift for the advisors as fixed shifts between 8:00 am to 8:00 pm (8:00 am to 4:00 pm; 10:00 am to 6:00 pm or: 12:00 pm to 8:00 pm) (Totaljobs, 2022). The applicants can choose the shifts with which they are most comfortable. However, in the Indian context, the researcher found a disparity in working patterns contributing to precarity in working schedules and hours. The researcher would like to highlight that while the call centre employees in India work 24/7, the UK call centre shifts stop each day at a specific time.

In the case of the international call centre, male and female employees must be flexible to work the night shifts. The respondents from the domestic call centres registered that the female employees are rostered for any 7.5-hour shift between 7:00 am to 8:00 pm. At the same time, the male employees have to work the night shifts for at least one week a month. The researcher also found six female respondents from the international call centre were unmarried and said they might leave their jobs after marriage if their families were uncomfortable with the night shifts and they would look for jobs in domestic call centres. About one-third of the total workforce in Indian call centres is constituted by women (Kaur and Gupta, 2012). A detailed depiction of women working at night in call centres is presented in the book Working the Night Shift: Women in India's Call Center Industry (Patel, 2010). Though the researcher aims to focus on the precarious work in the call centres, it was clear that the female employees still have inhibitions to working night shifts due to non-standard work and shift arrangements.

Another noted issue raised by the participants was their fear of taking unplanned leave in emergencies. About two-thirds of the respondents from both call centres (20 respondents) reported that they were not allowed to take unplanned leave and had to come to work even when they were ill. The remaining said they had to juggle work and family when their family members were sick. (Schalk and Rijckevorsel, 2007). Due to the call centres' demands to provide continuous customer support without any delay or call disconnection, the call centre agents are under pressure to work as per the rostered schedule. The respondents said that when an agent does not turn up to work, the burden of answering calls falls on the others present. Hence, the agents feel they must attend to customer calls as per their shifts.

León and Morales (2018) highlight that call centre employees are prone to absenteeism and lateness due to their high-stress level, low skills and low wages. However, the researcher found that none of the employees quoted the above reasons for absenteeism. The respondents claimed factors such as illness, a family member's illness and unavoidable emergencies as reasons for the unplanned absence. A couple of respondents were the sole breadwinners of their family and, as the eldest sibling, had the responsibility to care for their parents during sickness.

The respondents in the domestic call centre also expressed their displeasure about not taking a break when the call flow is high. The domestic call centre, which provides phone banking services to customers, said that the worst situation was in November 2016 when the government of India announced the demonetisation of currencies. The agents expressed that they had never seen such massive call queues in their careers. They said there were about 100 calls in the queue for almost twenty days as the customers were panicking about their savings and the automated teller machines (ATMs) were always empty. To manage the call flow during such busy times, the respondents said they were not allowed to take breaks, and there was a lack of

freedom in choosing their break time. The agents also registered that the length of break times was drastically reduced.

The respondents from international call centres spoke about the staggered break times. A few respondents said that their login hours are from 5:30 pm to 2:30 am, which the agents call the 'graveyard shift'; the lunch break (when the agents in India have their dinner) for the agents is as per the scheduled rosters. Sometimes, when the agents have dinner, it is almost 11:00 pm or 12:00 am IST (Indian Standard Time). One respondent said that she experiences acid reflux due to this and always carries an antacid. The staggered break schedule was seen among domestic and international call centre agents. Unlike any other corporate company, the agents are not allowed to choose their break time or take a break when required. They have to take a break according to the roster and call flow. The respondents insisted that taking breaks as per their wish affects the call queue and the service level agreement.

A respondent from the international call centre said that some of his friends working in the IT sector who work for companies providing IT services to countries such as the UK and the US enjoy holidays for both countries' festivals. He said it is a curse for them to work in call centres as they cannot enjoy their work as many friends do. The non-standard working arrangements in the call centre have contributed to a drastic change in the respondents' lifestyles, contributing to precarious work in Indian call centres. Precarious workers are expected to be always available and ready to work (Ndzi, 2017). Though the call centres provide holidays and leave entitlements to the agents, the lack of standardised shift patterns and freedom to take leave makes the work precarious.

In their study of precarious work in New Zealand call centres, Hannif and Lamm (2004) say that employees' working arrangement in terms of shifts contributes to precarious employment and leads to stress and intention to leave the job among employees. Theme One is a

prominent theme to explore precarious work in this research study as it represents the respondent's feelings about the non-standard working environment they experience in the Indian call centres. The researcher found that the theme of non-standard work schedules in call centres constitutes precarious work, consistent with Hannif and Lamm's findings (2004).

4.2.1.3 Summary of Theme One

The call centre agents working in the international call centres which serve customers in the US undergo a drastic change in their lifestyle due to the working hours. From the above interpretation, responses from the respondents and discussion it is evident that jobs in the call centres correspond to non-standard work, wherein the agents experience staggered break schedules and no fixed weeks off due to the nature of the job to assist the customers 24/7. In addition, the agents also are not recognised for the hard work they put into their daily work to meet the organisational deadlines. As a result, the researcher finds that this aspect of the call centre work contributes to the precarious work.

4.2.2 Theme Two: Inadequate personal and family time
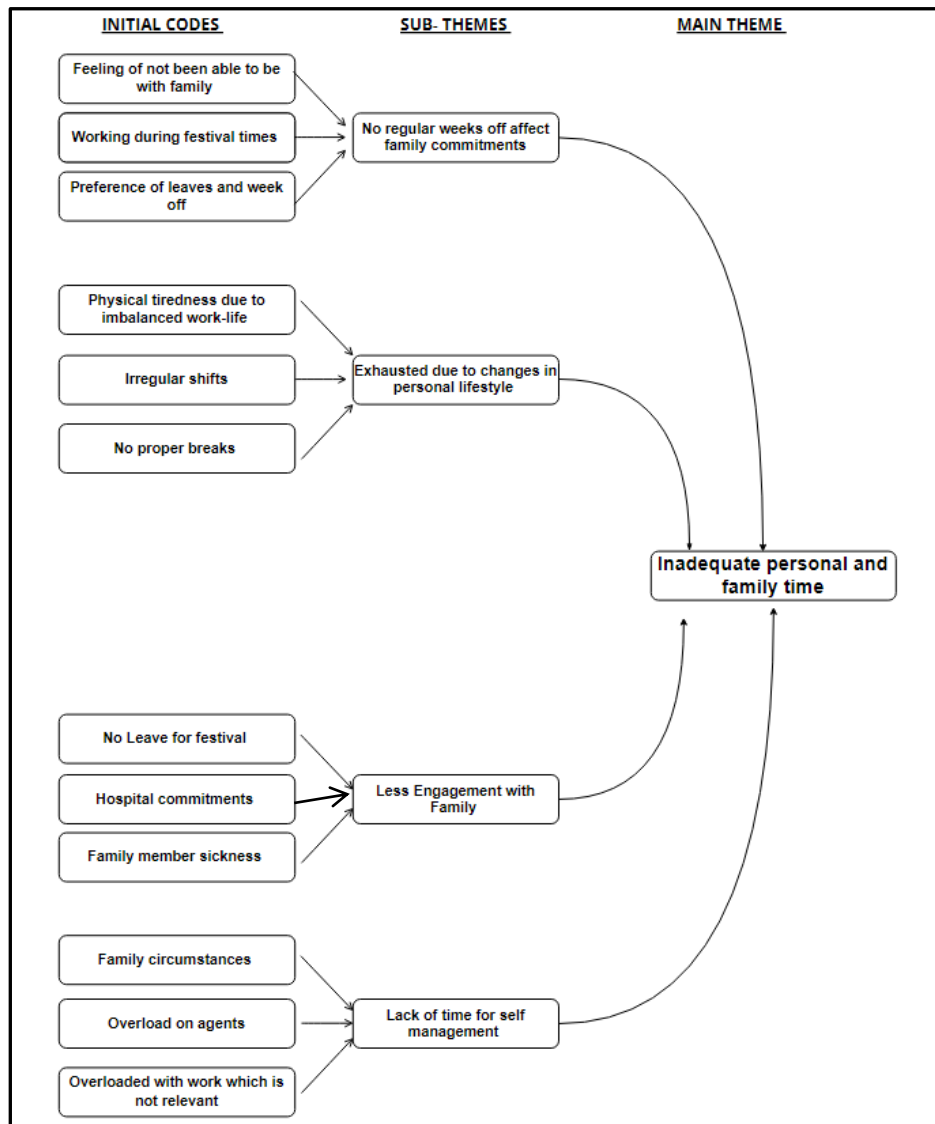
Figure 4.2 Codes and sub-themes mapping for Theme Two

4.2.2.1 Interpretation of Theme Two

 Theme Two represents the lack of quality time with family where the call centre employees expressed their concern about how they miss being with their family when needed due to their work and no fixed weeks off.

The respondent (RESP1), the sole breadwinner for her family, expressed that she could not take her mother to hospital appointments when needed and planned the appointment according to her week off.

"......sometimes I must plan my personal commitments according to my week offs. ……accept that it does affect me to some extent because I must plan everything based on my week's offs. ……my family also must plan according to my week off. Things like my mother's doctor appointment, which are important, needs to be planned according to my schedule."
(RESP1).

The agents work six days a week in the call centre (C1) and get alternate Sundays off. Due to this working pattern, the agents face difficulties managing personal commitments.

The respondent (RESP16) also expressed that she does not spend time with her family during festival periods as the agents must work 24/7. Though the respondent confirmed that their call volumes during festival periods are drastically reduced compared to a typical working day, it was evident that the very feeling of not celebrating the season with family was affecting her significantly. Even though she said that the company sponsors their food and gives a compensatory day's holiday for working on a bank holiday, she was not motivated, and her voice showed her disagreement.

"…… My friends and family will celebrate the festivals, but I will work here and talk to my customers. Though the call volumes are not so much during this time, I have the pain of not being with my family." "……. We don't get paid extra for working during the holiday period. Still, the company used to sponsor our food as a token of appreciation, and we get a compensatory off which we can take any time…. I am not sure of others, but I needed the festive period to spend with family… (RESP16)

The respondent (RESP2) confirmed that he had undergone a complete change due to night work. He also said managing work and personal commitments was challenging,

especially when attending family functions and hospital appointments. On the other hand, the night shift employees, especially in international call centres, also registered how their working pattern does not allow them to spend quality time with family.

"……due to this night shift, my sleep pattern has undergone a drastic change…and the worse thing is when I have my commitments, I must finish my work early in the morning, take a couple of hours sleep and then attend my commitments like hospital appointments attending family functions etc. and then go to work in the evening." (RESP2).

Another respondent (RESP30) expressed how he could not help his family while moving house due to his shift pattern.

…I have worked in the call centre industry for ten years, and all my work has been on the night shift. Sometimes, it isn't easy when we cannot support the family when there is a need. We had to shift our house, during which time I could not take holidays. My parents and sister were moving things while I used to sleep. I used to feel bad when my parents were working while I was sleeping…. (RESP30)

It was seen that the change in shift pattern affects the male employees working in a call centre (C1)

".... Guess you know that male associates here must work night shifts for at least one week. This has drastically changed my eating and sleeping habits. I work the days shift for three weeks, and suddenly I need to work at night for one week. It takes me a couple of days to adapt to the night, and by the time I am used to it, I again have work during the day. I am deprived of sleep sometimes, and I take medication for the same. …" (RESP14)

The participants confirmed they get exhausted due to lifestyle changes. They seem to juggle their personal and professional life constantly. They have to plan things well in advance, be it family functions or medical appointments. Respondent (RESP3), who is relatively new to the call centre environment and professional life, humorously expressed how he maintains a database to manage his personal commitments.

"…. As I told you, this is my first experience working in the call centre. Due to the pandemic, we have been given one day of systems training in the office. I was baffled by the office atmosphere. It was like a dream job for me. But when I started the actual job, I felt wrong. To be honest, I am maintaining a database to meet friends due to the shift timings and my week off. In the first week of joining the company, I forgot my week off and went to a movie with friends; my manager called me to check why I had not logged in, and I realised I should work that Sunday. My manager gave me a warning and told me that it should not repeat; hence I maintain a database with my work and personal commitments. (RESP3)

Respondent (RESP4), a married woman, expressed how the shift pattern affects her personal life.

".. Ladies start their shift as early as 7:00 am. The last shift we start is at 11:45 am and work till 8:00 pm; after 8:00 pm, ladies are not allowed to work. Though this shift pattern is good, for ladies like me with kids, an early shift and late login are pretty tricky.
The shift keeps rotating for all ladies; when I get the 7:00 am shift, I have to wake up early to prepare food for my husband and kids and come to work. During that time, my husband has to take care of the kids. Similarly, if I have to work till 8:00 pm, I don't get time to spend with the kids, and by the time I reach home, they are off to bed. I will check on them until they reach school by calling my husband. But unfortunately, I am not in a position to leave the job and stay with the kids….but right now, thanks to the pandemic, we are working from home, but we will resume back to the office quite soon…." (RESP 4).

Another essential sub-theme from the interviews was the inadequate time for self-management. The respondents said that they have not been able to take care of themselves due to the improper work-life balance.

"... I have found that this night shift has left me growing obese daily. I don't have time to take care of myself at the gym. My eating habits have changed. I usually followed a strict diet regime before joining this call centre. I worked as an administrator before and lost my job due to the pandemic. When the opportunity to work from home came up, I was interested; I applied and got the job. However, I have not been able to follow my diet from day one, which has taken a big hit

on my health. Even though it is working from home, I end up eating all night and growing fat day by day (giggles)…" (RESP29)

Another male respondent registered how he started smoking due to his shift pattern.

"… even in my wildest dream, I would not have thought that I would start smoking while working at night; my friends suggested smoking would help me concentrate on my work, and I could work better. I believed that and started smoking. It had continued so that when a customer is angry and shouts at me, I take a break for a cig. Now I am finding it difficult to quit smoking… and in this pandemic, my wife found that I have started smoking and was very upset with me…."
(RESP26).

Respondent (RESP23) expressed her difficulties managing work and family as a single mother.

"…. being a single mother of a four-year-old kid, I find it very difficult sometimes to take care of myself with my shift patterns and week off. I recently have been diagnosed with arthritis, and I cannot manage my hospital appointment with work commitments and a kid. I cannot take my treatment leave due to constant shifts…." (RESP23)

4.2.2.2 Analysis of Theme Two

According to Subramanian and Vinoth Kumar (2009), call centre employees experience higher stress levels. They are subjected to long working hours and higher job demands than employees working in other service sectors. As discussed in Section 5.1.1, India is a global leader in outsourcing, where most of its clients are in the US and the UK.

The researcher found that the call centre agents experienced issues where they could not attend to family commitments due to the work demand. A few agents expressed that they were unable to engage with their families. A respondent who is the sole breadwinner of her family expressed how she could not take her mother to hospital appointments when needed and had to reschedule them according to her shifts. In this sense, the precarious work results prevent

agents from anticipating the future (Anderson, 2010). The respondents also said they could not spend time with family members during special essential occasions. India has citizens of diverse cultures celebrating festivals according to their various traditions. In Tamil Nadu, where the call centres operate, the people celebrate Diwali, undoubtedly one of the important festivals for Indians. The agents are rostered during the holidays to provide 24/7 customer support. The respondent from the domestic call centre said that during festival days, the volume of calls they receive is drastically lower than on normal days. However, the agents are still rostered to work, making them unhappy as they cannot spend time with their families as they have been able to over the past two years while they have been working from home. The agents also talked about their physical exhaustion due to the lack of family time.

Though the call centres allowed the agents to register their preferences regarding holidays and weeks off, the management undertook the final roster scheduling. The agents confirmed that though they put their request for holiday and weeks off well in advance during festival times, the request is processed on a first-come, first-served basis. Most of them do not get their holidays or leave approved due to the limited availability. However, it is noticed that in an economy that demands 24/7 activity, shift work predominantly exists, hindering family and work commitments. Though the female employees in the call centre (C1) work the day shift, the male associates must work night shifts on a rotational basis. The associates working in the international call centre (C2), which services customers in the United States, work according to the US time zones. Working in shifts harms health and complicates the scheduling of family activities (Ananthram et al., 2018). The call centre agents, especially those working in the international call centre, expressed concern about how they struggle to juggle family commitments and work due to working night shifts.

Family or non-work characteristics include social support, parental stressors, family role ambiguity and family stressors. Work- or job-related characteristics include work stressors, work demands, hours spent at work, job stress, job support and flexibility at work. Enhancing the balance involving work and life makes it advantageous for organisations to retain a talented workforce (Feyerabend et al., 2018). Imbalance in the work and family environment due to demands in work usually leads to significant stress in the employees, resulting in conflicts at work and in the family. While interviewing the call centre agents, the researcher found that a couple of respondents were upset about not being able to attend to medical emergencies of family members due to work commitments. It was also found that though the agents have insufficient family time and extreme work intensity, they felt they could not avoid working in such conditions due to their economic circumstances.

The researcher found this finding consistent with Bohle et al. (2004) and Dyer et al. (2011). Furthermore, Dyer et al. (2011), whose research was on the precarious life of migrant workers, state that migrant workers work in the service sector, enhancing others' lives by neglecting their own. Similarly, the call centre agents who provide customer service to their customers put their personal and family commitments at stake to fulfil the job demands of the organisation and assist customers.

4.2.2.3 Summary of Theme Two

From the above interpretation and analysis, it is clear that under Theme Two, the participants working in Indian call centres experience inadequate time for personal and family life. Based on the responses provided by the participants, the researcher could conclude that working in call centres, the agents cannot cope with the work pressure and, at the same time, take care of family commitments. It can conclude that this research study finds inadequate work-life balance in Indian call centres contributes to the precarious work experienced by the call centre agents.

[143]

4.2.3 Theme Three: Fear and pressure to perform.
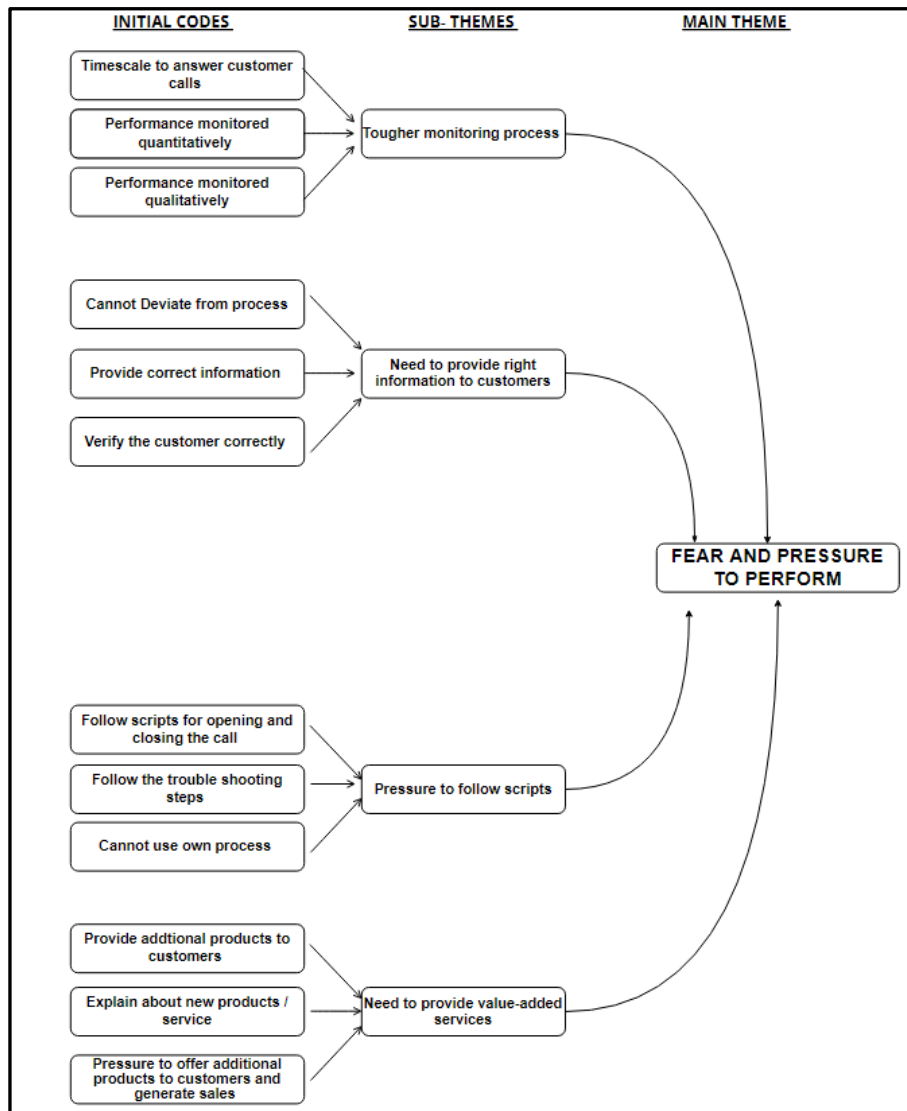
Figure 4.3 Codes and sub-themes Mapping for Theme Three

4.2.3.1 Interpretation of Theme Three

Theme Three emerged from many sub-themes, mainly on the stricter monitoring process and the need for the call centre employees to provide correct information to the customers during their calls. According to the employees, following the process and providing the correct information to

the customers was vital. They were also constantly afraid that any incorrect information they provided to the customer would terminate their job.

"……. Here everything is monitored, right from the time we log in to the time we log out, adherence to breaks, the average talk time, average handling time, after-call work, call quality which includes empathising and sympathising with the customer, providing the right information, call opening and closing, adherence to process, almost everything" … (RESP11)

The respondent (RESP11) expressed how they are monitored from when they log into the phone to attend customer calls to when they log out. He mentioned that every detail is monitored quantitatively and qualitatively. In terms of qualitative, time taken to answer the call, the time they take to finish the call, the time taken to write notes after every call are all monitored, and qualitatively wherein the agents must empathise and sympathise with the customers whenever needed. It is also vital for the agents to provide the customers with the correct information and proper call opening and closing.

Another issue the respondents raised was strict timescales under which they must answer customer calls.

"….. let's say I get a call on my phone; I have to answer the call within 3 seconds of ringing, or else the call
will be transferred to another agent, or the customer will drop the call. In which case, I will hit my transfer rate and the abandoned call rates. At call centres, the customer calls should not be abandoned; if abandoned, they will hit the company's service level agreement. When I cannot answer calls on time, I get very anxious and nervous as I don't want to be questioned by my manager. They say what if the customer has lost a debit card and called you to block the card.. and the call is abandoned. Between the time the customer makes another call, what will happen in case his card is misused …."

The agents in call centres have to answer the call within a specific time, usually three seconds. If they fail to answer the call in that time, a respondent (RESP23) working in the domestic call centre said that the call might be transferred to another agent, or the customer may disconnect the call due to the delay in answering it. Both the transfer and abandon call parameters are monitored, impacting the service level agreement the call centre has with the client who has outsourced to them. The respondent claimed that if she cannot answer the call on time and the call is abandoned, the manager will question her. As a call centre supporting a bank's customer service operation, the agents must be vigilant on every call they handle, even before answering the call.

"…. Let's say I answer the call within 3 sec; I have welcome the customer with the prescribed welcome script and with a smile; if I don't do it and the call gets monitored, I will be marked down on the call opening, if I have opened my call well, I have verified the customer to make sure I am talking to the genuine customer, if I fail on verification, I would say my life is in hell …
(RESP4)

The respondent (RESP4) emphasised the importance of the time taken to answer the call and verify the customer. As the bank in India outsources the call centre to carry out the telephone banking operations, the agents are under constant pressure to verify the customer correctly by asking the required verification questions. It was seen that the monitoring process in the international call centre was also like the domestic call centres.

"…..We are monitored on every aspect of the call right from the opening of the call, we have to use the prescribed script, if the customer is not able to understand our English again, it will hit our performance...following the process is very important... and also giving the right information to the customer....and finally closing the call. We also have the customer satisfaction score after every call where the customer rates us for their experience with us during the call…." (RESP5)

Apart from call monitoring by the quality team, customers can rate their experience interacting with the agent. The respondent (RESP5) from technical support confirmed that they are monitored for using the correct American accent with the customer. If the customer cannot understand the agent's accent, they will be marked down on the call monitored. If the customer is unsatisfied with the call experience, the agents will be called in for enquiry and a meeting.

".....Verification is very important as we are a banking call centre; after verification, I have to ask the customer query, and based on the query, I have to provide the right information and any requests if needed, if I don't take requests or provide the right information, I will be in soup as it is a bank (giggles)... I will also need to ask the verification question based on the customer query…".(RESP23)

It was very clear from the way the respondent (RESP 23) answered that in supporting the bank's customers, the call centre agents fear and always urge to verify the customers correctly and provide the correct information. When a question was asked if they could deviate from the process, the respondent (RESP 2) said as below

".... That's a big NO-NO... (voice gets excited) we are not allowed to deviate from the process… If we deviate, we will be called for a meeting the very next day…." (RESP2)

A similar reply was also said by the respondent (RESP15), a senior technical support engineer from call centre C2

"...As said, we must follow the process to troubleshoot any technical errors…. However, not every customer call gets resolved like this …sometimes we need to arrange for an engineer to visit the customer location to check the main lines or if there is any physical damage to the line etc......this is where the customer gets irate; they will be losing their service until the engineer comes, and mostly the engineer visit appointments have a wait time for up to 2 weeks..... that's when they start shouting as they have wasted time with us on call and then must wait for two

weeks for the engineer visit.... but they don't understand the fact that it is a process we follow... they would want to write an email to the complaint about me or talk to manager.... for some junior staff I handle manager calls... but even if it goes to the manager, it will be the same and no change to the process... (RESP 15)

.

The respondent (RESP15) expressed the pressure he experienced not to deviate from the process in the call centre, which provides technical support to customers in the United States. He expressed that he must follow the process irrespective of whether the customers get irate. Evidently, the agents get stuck between the company and the customers to perform their job correctly. And it was seen that customers who get irate with the company process and are not satisfied with the process complain about the agent for not being able to help them promptly.

"....Yes, of course, we have scripts to follow right from when we welcome the customer until we close the call…. As this is an international call centre, all agents must follow the same script and process during the call...." (RESP 10)

Additionally, the agents working in international call centres must follow scripts when talking to a customer. The scripts are templates the agents will use for calls based on the customer query and provide resolution accordingly.

".... Then I have to offer other products to the customer. If the customer is interested, I have to transfer the call to the sales or offer a call back from the sales department, else I will be marked down. The customer accepts or rejects talking to the sales team, but I have an offer. However, we also have our monthly sales target, which needs to be achieved.   (RESP9)

On the other hand, the agents must provide additional products and services to the customers irrespective of the customer's query. The respondent (RESP 9) said that the customer has to be offered a banking product he does not currently have with the bank. If the customer is not offered the product to promote sales, they will be scored down when the calls are monitored. They are

[148]

under pressure to offer the product even if the customer is not interested. Also, the agents have a monthly sales target which should be achieved.

"..... we also have monthly sales targets which need to achieve. For all agents handling calls, the sales target is set to Rs 15000, which means we should pitch in the product to the customer, and in case the customer is interested, we must transfer the call to the sales team. If the team converts the call to a sale call, the sales will be added to our target. Currently, for banking customers, we have to offer insurance and premium debit cards… (RESP 23)

It was also highlighted that the agents should achieve their sales target monthly. If not, they will face the consequences of meetings with team leaders, re-training, or a performance improvement plan.

Similarly, the international call centre (C2) respondents also said they have a monthly target. The targets are based on the company's product upgrades and other value-added products.

".. we have to look out for the potential customer and make sure to offer them upgrade on their service and other extra which could be used as a bundle… although we have a dedicated sales team who make calls to customers and sell products, the company tells that we as inbound agents have more grip on customer contact and hence we need to grab any opportunity that arises to sell the products to the customers.." (RESP30)

The respondent (RESP 12) said that the systems they use to handle the customer calls are equipped with all the information they need to promote sales to the customer. The agent raised a concern that when the customer is unhappy with the service they have received, it is evident that they do not have time to hear their promotional pitch. He also said he should at least attempt to offer the product to the customer by asking if they could spare a couple of minutes to hear about the offers.

"…. We have to offer our customers promotional products when they call. Our customer telephony interface (CTI), where we receive customer calls, is a well-equipped system. The entire

history of the customer's relationship with the service provider is displayed. When customers are unhappy with the company's service, do you think they will have the patience to listen to the promotion we offer? And if I fail to offer any product to the customer, I will lose my marks on the call... I should ask if they are ready to talk about additional services. If the customer is not ready and says "No, " it's fine. ." (RESP12)

4.2.3.2 Analysis of Theme Three

Call centres deal with customer interaction over the telephone and are a vital point of contact for customers. Hence, call centre work is considered performing a role that requires adequate expertise. It is also imperative that the information shared by the call centre agents to their customers is accurate and relevant. The respondents shared about the more demanding performance monitoring process followed by the call centres to ensure that the agents provide the correct information to the customers. According to Stanton (2000), performance monitoring involves observing, examining, and recording employees' work to enhance employee performance and ensure customer satisfaction. It is said that the employees benefit from the accurate and timely feedback they receive on their performance; the call centre agents expressed their discomfort because of constant monitoring. Respondents, especially those from call centre C1, expressed how strict the monitoring is as they provide phone banking services. As the agents handle customer bank accounts, they must take extra care while talking to customers about money. The respondents from both call centres expressed how they are monitored quantitatively and qualitatively. All the call-handling employees in both call centres are monitored from the minute they log in to their phones to answer calls until they log out for the day. The agents have to ensure they log in on time per their roster. The respondents expressed that not logging in on time will impact the calls being answered and burden the other agents logged in. The call centres follow electronic performance monitoring systems to record the agents' activities while answering calls.

The systems allow managers to track quantitative activities such as average handling time, average talk time, calls taken per hour, after-call work time, abandoned call rates, time taken to answer the phone and number of calls transferred. These tedious monitoring processes instil fear in the agents. Respondents expressed that the call centres set a benchmark for each quantitative performance metric and that the agents should be within limits. Apart from the quantitative metrics, the agents are also monitored qualitatively. To assess their performance, the managers and quality audit team monitor the agents' calls with or without their knowledge. The qualitative aspects of performance monitoring include welcoming the customer, providing the correct information, talking politely to customers, actively listening, smiling during calls, and offering value-added products to the customers. (RESP4) highlighted that the calls need to be answered within three seconds; if not, they will be marked down on the call.

The researcher found that the monitoring aspects for domestic and international call centres were almost identical. The agents' performance is monitored monthly based on the qualitative and quantitative aspects. If the agents do not meet the standards set by the company, they will need to undergo a performance improvement plan for a minimum of three months to improve their performance. The respondents said their employment would likely be terminated if the performance metrics were still not achieved. The employees are constantly afraid and pressured to perform well in their jobs. The researcher also found that one of the crucial aspects of the call centre's job is to provide the correct information to the customer.

The respondents said they must follow scripts to assist customers with their queries. Both call centres follow scripts to assist their customers in ensuring consistent resolutions. The technical support agents from the international call centre confirmed that they must follow scripts irrespective of how confident they are with repeated scripts. Also, the respondent (RESP2) said that the agents could not deviate from the process. Respondents narrated a couple of incidents

[151]

where it was seen that even if the customer is unhappy with the resolution, they are not allowed to deviate from the process. Again, deviating from the process will impact their performance score, and repeated incidents affecting the performance score will have severe consequences for the agents. In the banking call centre, the agents must be more careful while verifying the customer and talking to the correct person before sharing banking information.

Respondent (RESP 23) said that the type of verification questions asked to the customers depends on the nature of the customer query. The agents follow a set of verification questions for the customer's financial and non-financial-related queries. If the necessary verification is not done, the agents fear being called in to meet with the centre manager and the compliance team. The researcher would like to highlight the constant fear and pressure the agents must undergo daily to carry out their work successfully. Another critical pressure the agents undergo while attending customer calls is the need to offer additional products to customers. The call centres urge the agents to offer additional products to customers based on their portfolio. For instance, in the domestic call centre, the agent should offer eligible banking products to customers, such as loans, credit cards, loans on a credit card, insurance etc. If the customer is interested, the agents should transfer the call to the sales team for further discussion.

It was noted that even if the customer is not interested and does not want the banking product, the agents should offer the product, and the agent will be marked down for not creating value addition to the customer. The agents also have a monthly sales target which needs to be achieved. A similar situation also prevails in the international call centre, where customers must be offered upgrades or value-added services to promote the business and increase sales. The agents from the international call centre said that all details of the customer's existing relationship and other relevant offers to the customers are displayed on their screen during the customer call. The agents must inform the customers and try to convince them to accept the

[152]

products based on the offers. The respondent's monthly and yearly performance includes the number of sales. Thus, it instils constant fear and pressure in the agents to perform well and contributes to precarious work in the call centres.

The researcher would like to highlight that Theme Three was consistent with the findings of Manolchev and Teigen (2019). According to Manolchev and Teigen (2019), precarious work contributes to the negative experiences of pressure due to the nature of the job and the fear of job loss. Similarly, the call centres' employees at C1 and C2 are under constant fear and pressure to perform well to sustain their job.

4.2.3.3 Summary of Theme Three

From the interpretation and analysis of Theme Three, it is evident that the call centres, whether domestic or international, follow a strict monitoring process that instils fear in the call centre agents. The agents are also pressured to follow scripts and to not deviate from the process. Although these are a part of the everyday process, the agents are under additional pressure to sell products and services to the customer based on the customer's portfolio The fear and pressure experienced by the agents contribute to the precarious work.

4.2.4 Theme Four: Health and Safety Issues
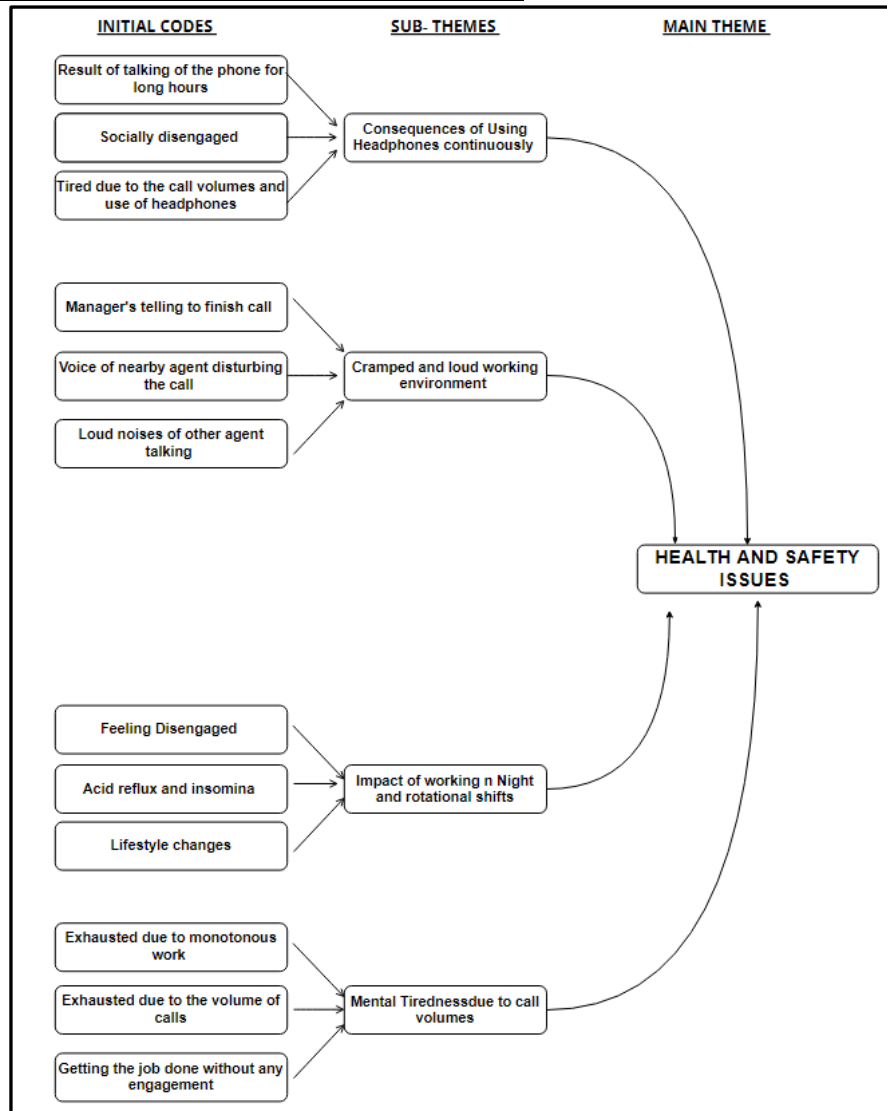
Figure 4.4 Codes and sub-themes Mapping for Theme Four

4.2.4.1 Interpretation of Theme Four

The call centre job involves using headphones to communicate with the customer. The

respondents shared their views on the constant use of headphones to answer customer calls when

the question on what they dislike about the job was asked.

".......I have to accept that I dislike the job because of the constant use of headphones; there are
times when even after removing the headphones, I get the customer's voice echoing in my
ears..." (RESP7)

The respondents were asked what they disliked about the job, and the primary response was that they disliked the constant use of headphones. The agents generally take calls for about seven to eight hours with only short breaks, and constant use of headphones affects their health. The agents said customers' voices are sometimes heard after removing the headphones due to their constant use. Respondent (RESP7), who has been working in call centres for two years, explained how headphones' constant use impacted him. He said that, even after finishing the shift, he felt the customers' voices echoing in his ears.

Another respondent (RESP22) working in the international call centre expressed how his hearing capacity had drastically reduced due to the constant use of headphones.

"... I have been working in the call centre sector for seven years now, and over the years, my hearing capacity has reduced due to the constant use of headphones. I even checked with an ENT specialist, and I have been advised to stop using the headphone, but I would not want to leave the job in the current scenario. I am checking with my managers if there are any non-voice openings, so I am considered for it…" (RESP22)

"… the constant use of headphones and talking with customers has made me refrain from talking to friends and family as before. My friends used to call me chatterbox as I always kept talking over the phone. The past two years after taking up a job in the call centre, I have had an aversion when It comes to talking to friends over the phone…." (RESP19)

(RESP 19) expressed how she had been refraining from talking to her friends and family over the phone in the last few years since she joined the call centre.

Respondent (RESP10) said that on one occasion, the customer followed instructions given by another call centre agent sitting so close to the respondent. The agent also said that the office atmosphere is deafening as their managers always ask them to finish the calls quickly due to the volume. It is seen that while the agents were working in office premises before the pandemic, they were seated in a cramped and loud environment.

"...we were working in our office - we used to be seated with colleagues near us. Sometimes…. When I am silent, my customer used to follow instructions given by the person next to me (giggles) ….. The office atmosphere was a bit cramped and always loud as we will have all managers and floor supervisors go round asking to finish the call soo due to call waiting time…. But I must accept that the condition here is not the same as those working in domestic call centres. We have a large floor and much better facilities, mainly because we used to have client visits from the US now and then. "(RESP10)

Some respondents from call centre C1 said the floor set-up was cramped, causing suffocation.

".... While working in our office, the floor will always be noisy and cramped. People on the floor will also ask to finish the call quickly and be ready for the next call. Sometimes I get suffocated due to this…for the past two years, we have been lucky to be working from home..but again the same routine will continue when we resume office." (RESP 16).

The respondents were asked if there was something they did not like about working in a call centre. The researcher also learned that before the pandemic, while the agents worked on shifts, they were forced to occupy workstations and use headsets that were used by someone else before their shift.

"………. we provide services to customers 24/7, which means that not all employees will log in simultaneously; hence, the number of workstations and equipment is not equal to the headcount. We did not have individual workstations. The main issue we had before the pandemic or while working from the office was using another agent's workstations and headphones. Sometimes I make sure to clean them before I use them. However, many times it was not feasible to clean. Now that we are working from home, we have been provided with our headsets; I hope this practice is retained after starting to work from the office…. " (RESP 16)

A respondent also gave a similar response from the international call centre when the respondents were asked if they were provided with individual headphones.

".... We did not have individual headphones; the headphones will be attached to computers just like how a mouse and keyboard are attached, so we have to use the ones connected to the

computers. The worst part is the headphone, mouse, and keyboard will be tagged together, so we cannot move anything separately. If we had any issues, we used to call the IT person who would sort it for us or ask to change the computer. Now we are asked to come to the office and return the equipment, which means we have to use the one connected to the computer as before....”
(RESP10).

Another issue with the agents was their mental tiredness and disengagement due to the call volumes and the nature of customer calls.

“...we don't feel, it's just attending calls, answer the query and then close the call ..and In a busy day when we are expecting over 80 - 90 calls to attend, I can tell that for the first hour I can be engaged with the customer, but as the day progresses, it is surely not....”(RESP17)

The respondents were asked how engaged they felt when talking to the customers. Respondent (RESP17) pointed out that they do not feel very engaged due to the volume of calls they handle in a single day, and this volume of calls makes them tired after a couple of hours.

The international call centre was no different in terms of exhaustion experienced by agents.

“......reading through the script the entire day makes me feel crazy sometimes ... think I normally handle about 30 - 40 calls in a day, and if I had to read through the scripts the ... it sometimes is monotonous and like a recording... I get exhausted and sometimes go through the process again and again....”(RESP2)

The respondent (RESP2) from the international call centre explained how tiresome it is for them to go through the scripts daily with customers. In a technical support role, the agents must follow every step to resolve the customer's query. Although they are confident with the steps and process to follow due to the monotonous use of scripts, it is required that the agents follow the process and use an online checklist to make sure they have been informed of the steps to the customer.

4.2.4.2 Analysis of Theme Four

Another important theme that emerged from the interviews was the health and safety issues that the call centre employees encountered. It is noticed that the call centre job involves constant communication with customers using headphones. The agents reported the consequences of using headphones daily. The respondents reported that the constant use of headphones leads to pain in the ear and lessens their hearing capability. Most respondents said that this one was the central aspect they did not like about the call centre job. The headphone provided to the call centre agents has an earpiece on one side and a mouthpiece on the other (Monoaural). During interviews, respondents reported feeling like the customer was still talking to them, and their voices echoed even after finishing their shifts. It was also seen that the participants seemed to lose their hearing capacity due to the constant usage of headphones. The call centre agents are exposed to constant noise produced by their headsets. According to Trompette and Chatillon (2012), the employees working in a call centre can be exposed to noise levels exceeding the regulatory exposure values.

The respondents found working from home from 1st April 2020 to 30th April 2022 to be arguably peaceful as it was unnecessary to shout or ask the customer to speak more loudly. They said they were working in the comfort of their homes and not exposed to any background noise. However, they also seem to accept that the business design is such that using headphones cannot be avoided. Respondent (RESP22) seemed tired of working in the call centre after seven years and said that his hearing capacity had been reduced due to the noisy environment. He also added that he could not leave the job due to family commitments and is looking for non-voice openings internally.

The researcher also found that the respondents expressed how the call centre job's nature has made them aloof from their social life. Respondent (RESP 19) expressed she has developed an aversion to talking over the phone with friends due to her work. The next major

issue is the cramped working spaces where the agents are seated. The number of calls is anticipated, the agents are rostered for their shifts, and it was said that during peak times, the workstations are occupied as most agents are logged in to take customer calls. The respondents expressed that the voices of other agents and background noise hinder their calls affecting their quality parameters. The researcher found that the respondents from the domestic call centre C1 experienced cramped working conditions while working from the office. Taylor et al. (2013) highlight the structure of India's domestic call centre premises as small and comprised of limited facilities (p.439).

On the other hand, the respondents from the international call centres seemed quite happy with their working atmosphere. Respondent (RESP 10), who has been working in the international call centre for six years, said that he started his career working in a domestic call centre and noticed the difference between the working environment of both call centres. He also pointed out that they had a large floor occupied by agents taking customer calls and better facilities than domestic call centres because the call centre used to be visited periodically by clients from the US. Apart from that, a few respondents said how suffocating it used to be due to noise pollution because of constant reminders from the managers to finish the calls during busy times.

The next sub-theme from the interviews was the lack of hygiene while using shared computers and headsets. It was understood that the total number of employees in call centre C1 is approximately 250. Due to the nature of the job, the agents are forced to use the computers and headsets on rotation as the number of workstations does not equate to headcount. However, the available workstations are much fewer, making the agents occupy any available workstations at the start of the shift. The respondents also raised concerns that when they do not have permanent workstations, they must use another agent's workstation, thus instilling fears about hygiene-

related issues. However, as they have been working from home since April 2020, the agents said they had been provided individual headsets and wished this practice would continue.

Similarly, international call centre agents said they had been provided with an individual headset during work-from-home. However, they have been asked to return the office equipment before returning to the office. Respondent (RESP10) said that the headsets, mouse and keyboards were tagged together to ensure they were not moved, thus forcing them to use the headsets another agent had used, which were not sanitised or cleaned before their login. Some respondents said they used to clean the headsets before logging in to ensure they were safe. Another significant health and safety issue was the mental tiredness experienced by the agents due to the volume of calls they handled. The respondents were asked if they felt engaged while talking to the customer. Respondent (RESP17), who works in the domestic call centre, expressed that he does not feel engaged while talking to customers. On a typical day, the agents attend about 80-90 customer calls and even more when busy. The respondent said that owing to the number of calls and the nature of calls they attend, they don't feel engaged with the customer and become tired due to the call volumes. While the domestic call centre agents expressed how they felt tired while answering calls, the international call centre agents expressed how they felt exhausted reading the scripts daily. Some respondents said they had read the same scripts for over four years. The call centres follow scripts, especially those serving international customers, to answer customer calls consistently. Respondents expressed that following scripts makes them exhausted due to the monotonous practice.

Hannif and Lamm (2005) studied precarious employment in New Zealand call centres. They pointed out that the monotonous, repetitive work and lack of control over tasks lead to adverse health and safety outcomes among the call centre employees (p.339). This finding is similar to Hunt et al. (2010), who discussed significant health issues in call centres due to

stress, repetitive strain and occupational overuse syndrome due to the constant use of headphones.

4.2.4.3 Summary of Theme Four

Theme four emerged from the interviews focused on the health and safety aspects of the call centre jobs. From the respondents' view, constant use of headphones and constant conversation on the phone made the agents mentally tired. The constant use of scripts and monotonous phrases also drains their energy daily. Even though the agents are confident of the process they need to follow; they cannot use them in their own style and are compelled to use the scripts. Besides using the scripts, the volume of calls also raises concerns about health and safety. This theme contributes to the study on the precarious nature of the call centre job.

4.2.5 Theme Five: Remuneration and career-related issues
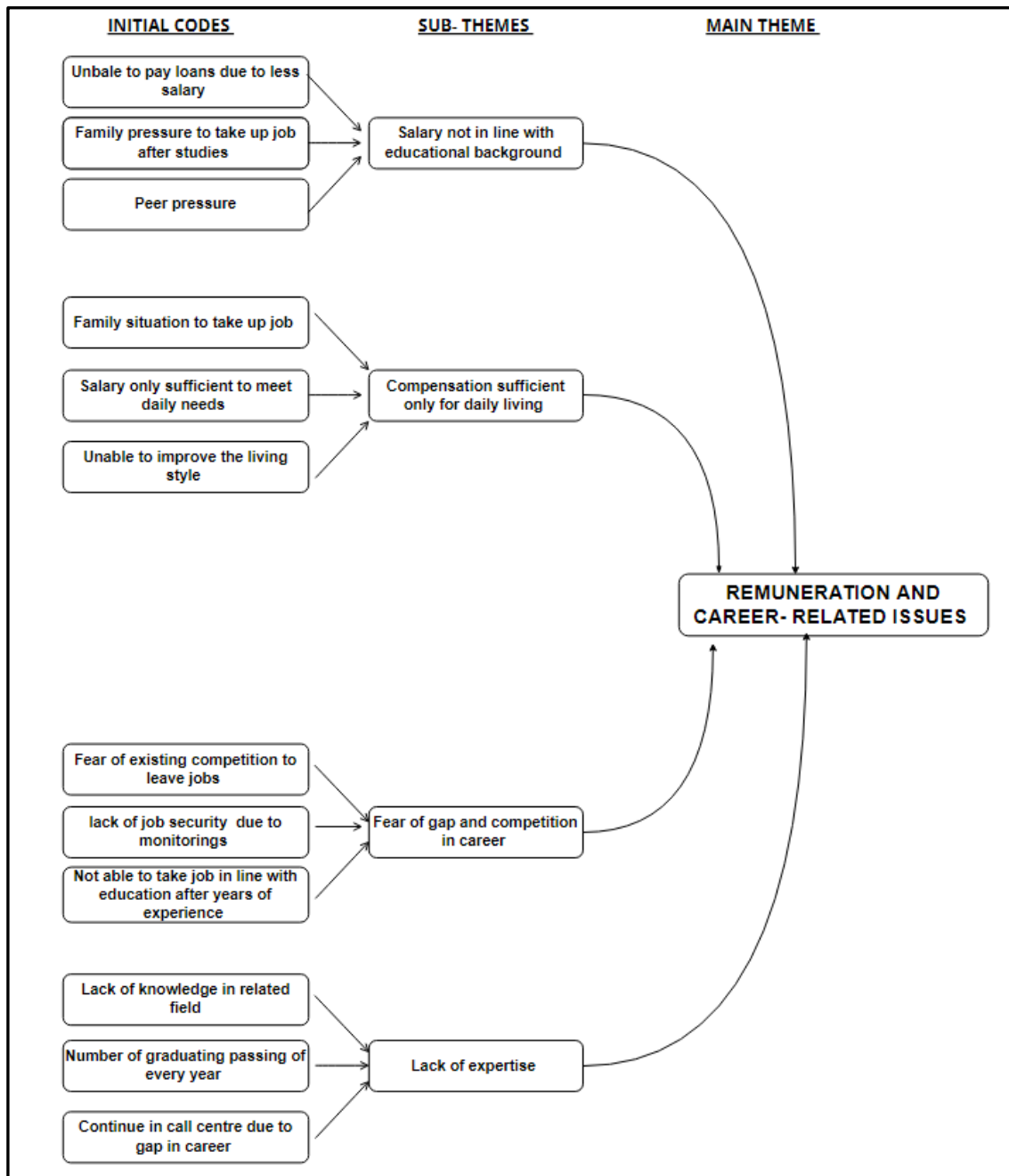
Figure 4.5 Codes and sub-themes Mapping for Theme Five

4.2.5.1 Interpretation of Theme Five

The next theme that emerged from the interviews was about the remuneration and the career-related fear or issues the agents have for working in the call centres.

The respondents were asked if the call centre job was related to their educational background.

"….To be honest, it does not relate to my studies. I finished my engineering, a technical degree… but a call centre job does not require a technical degree. Anyone with a Bachelor's degree and English language skills will be able to work in a call centre….my father passed away when I was in my third year of engineering; being the eldest child in the family, I was forced to take up a job immediately after completing my studies. Though I applied for IT-related jobs, I appeared for my interview in this call centre and got the job…." (RESP1)

The respondent (RESP1) started her career in the call centre soon after her Bachelor's degree in engineering. Though she has a technical degree, the respondent was forced to take up work in a call centre due to her family circumstance. After her father's death, the respondent was forced to take up a job as she was the sole breadwinner of her family. The call centre job does not require any specific educational requirement except the people taking up jobs need to be graduates in any discipline and be fluent in English. Though she is happy with what she has been offered, she claims that her friends with the same degree earn about three times more than her salary in the call centre job.

"…..In my opinion, the salary or compensation offered is ok, but it is not too much……. As I told, I am an engineering graduate my classmates and college mates who graduated along with me earn almost thrice my salary because they are in the IT industry…." (RESP10)

The respondent working in the international call centre (RESP10) also confirmed that the call centre job didn't require any specific educational requirement and said that the primary requirement for the job is the ability to work during night shifts.

"…..because when they advertise for a call centre job, they do not specify any specific expertise. They advertise as any graduate with excellent communication skills and willingness to work in night shifts. So I would say my qualification relates to my job. (RESP10).

[163]

Respondent (RESP2) is a thirty-year-old male with nine years of experience working in the call centres. He said that being a male, the Indian society expects him to take up a job immediately after completing his studies, so he had to take up the call centre job. The respondent also registered that he aspired to do his Master's degree in Business Administration after completing his Bachelor's in Business Administration. However due to his lower score in his entrance exam and peer pressure to take up jobs, he opted for the call centre job

"....never thought I would end up in a call centre job; after graduation, I wanted to do my MBA but did not do well in my CAT entrance. As I hope you know, in Tamil Nadu, engineering degrees cannot be beaten up by any other degree. And being a male, you must know how society will talk if you are without a job. So I had to get a job somehow. I did not get any proper job; they were a less paying jobs, just like admin or office assistant. I saw the job adverts and found that call centre employees' payees are better than the admin jobs, so I just tried to attend the interview. I attended a couple of international call centre jobs but could not pass their voice and accent test, so I ended up in a domestic call centre.... (RESP2)"

It was also seen that the respondents said that the remuneration offered to the call centre agents covers only their basic cost of living and they cannot save anything for the future.

".... The salary I get is sufficient to meet my daily needs, but I cannot save any money for the future..... However, though I started working before all of them, I am earning less. My friends have already bought cars and houses, but I am still here without even a two-wheeler....I chose to work in call centre because I have to start paying my education loan 6 months after my graduation" (RESP20)

"....The salary I get is sufficient for my monthly survival. However, there is nothing much I can save...... When it comes to bonuses or rewards, we get quarterly and annual performance awards for high performance.... But they are not monetary awards. We get a souvenir and certificate... In these four years of working... I have got two times are the best employee... due to the

pandemic, we did not have any event for the past two years..The certificates and souvenirs are only lying in my cupboard….”(RESP10)

Respondent (RESP10) also confirmed that his salary is sufficient only for his monthly expenses and that he cannot save for the future. Also, when asked if they are offered any performance-related bonuses, he confirmed that the employees are being awarded based on performance; however, the awards are not monetary but just souvenirs and certificates. The respondent expressed his disagreement on how they are awarded as the certificate or the souvenir as he said that though he bagged the best employee award twice, the awards are lying in his cupboard without much use.

The respondents were questioned if they even thought of changing their careers from the call centre to a different industry or sector.

“…..Even if I think of leaving this career, I cannot because I passed out in 2017, almost five years now. In India, I hope you must know that every year about
Two lakhs of engineering graduates pass from college. And not everyone gets jobs, so I need to shift my career from BPO to the IT industry. I will be asked why I did not join IT after my graduation, they will not be able to hire me as I have not been in the industry and that it's a long time since I completed my graduation, and I will not have any IT expertise. So I have to grow within my industry.... and can never think of a career in the IT industry....”
(RESP1)

Respondent (RESP1) claimed that as she passed out in 2017, the career gap of five years had created a massive competition among the more recent graduating engineers over the years. Also, the agent fears that her lack of expertise in the IT sector will not help her secure a job in the IT industry. Hence, it looked like the respondent had decided to survive and grow in the call centre industry rather than shift career.

A similar response was given by the respondent (RESP2), who has worked in the call centre for nine years.

"....to be honest. As I have been here for nine years... It is not possible to choose a different career....

if I change my career... I will be idiotic because I must start from scratch, and my nine years of experience will go to waste. I must sustain myself in the industry and try to succeed in this career... I will be considered for a promotion in the next appraisal cycle and will handle a team of my own... so I don't intend to leave the industry...." (RESP2)

The respondent confirmed that if he changes his career after nine years of call centre experience, the experience he has gained will be of no use, and he will need to start his career from the beginning. He was happy and said he would be considered for promotion to the next level, and he is keen to sustain himself in this industry instead of thinking about changing his career now.

4.2.5.2 Analysis of Theme Five

The fifth theme generated from the interviews related to remuneration and career. The two main streams of bachelor's degree education in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, are engineering and Art and Science, which are studied for over four and three years, respectively. Most engineering graduates secure jobs in Information Technology companies through campus recruitment; however, some do not successfully get jobs related to their studies. The graduates who are not successful in getting a job often join the call centres due to peer pressure and family pressure to start earning after their studies. Of the 30 respondents interviewed from both call centres, 11 were engineering graduates. The respondents were asked if their educational background was related to their job in the call centres. The 11 respondents with engineering degrees said that call centre work does not relate to their studies.

Respondent (RESP1), who had studied engineering, said that her father passed away while she was in the third year of her studies. Being the eldest in the family, she had to take up any job to support her mother and two siblings. She was not successful in securing an IT job. However, she completed her engineering in Computer Science degree but was lucky to get into

the call centre or customer service industry. She also highlighted that securing a call centre job is easy as the requirements are minimal. In their blog, Naukri.com, an Indian employment website, mentions that a call centre job does not require specific educational qualifications. However, the minimum requirement is a bachelor's degree or a high school certificate. It also requires fluency in English (for an international call centre) or native language (for a domestic call centre), along with basic computer and internet knowledge (Naukri Content Team, 2019). The 11 respondents who had studied engineering expressed concerns that their economic and family situations forced them to work in call centres.

On the other hand, the respondent (RESP2), an Arts and Science graduate in Business Administration, also said that the call centre's jobs do not require specific educational requirements except excellent communication skills and being a graduate. He had worked in the call centre industry for nine years and seemed relatively satisfied working here with his educational background. However, the respondent also said that he had wanted to pursue his master's degree in Business Administration after graduation but had to sacrifice his dreams due to family pressure. The researcher could see that the respondents with Arts and Science backgrounds claimed that their educational background related to their job because, in a state like Tamil Nadu, much preference is given to engineering and little or no preference to Arts and Science, except for commerce graduates. Students who opt to study Arts and Science are primarily from economically weaker backgrounds or did not qualify for engineering because of their academic eligibility.

The next question the researcher asked the respondents was whether the pay provided was sufficient. It was seen that the respondents who completed their arts and science degrees were quite satisfied with the compensation provided to them though they expressed that they could not save anything. Respondent (RESP10), a 32-year male senior associate from the international call

centre who had completed his Arts and Science degree, confirmed that the salary is sufficient for his monthly survival, but he cannot save. It is because arts and science graduates who do not work in the call centre industry or business process outsourcing sector earn much less than those who have chosen it. On the other hand, the respondent (RESP20), a 25-year-old male working in the domestic call centre who had done his engineering degree, said that his peers who work in IT companies are earning much more than him. He seemed pretty upset as he could not buy a two-wheeler, but a few of his classmates had bought a car. The respondent said that he had taken an education loan for his studies, and he was forced to earn to repay it after completing his studies. Thus, he took a call centre job which was relatively easy for him to join.

The researcher also asked the respondents if they wished to switch careers from the call centres if they had an option. The respondents were quite sceptical about it, mainly because of the time they have been working in the call centre sector. Respondent (RESP1), who started her career in a call centre in 2017, soon after her engineering degree, said that she has worked in the call centre for five years and that if she chooses to change career, she will be questioned about her stability and switching careers. Also, she said that she does not have expertise in engineering and will surely be unable to succeed if she thinks of changing her career. The respondent (RESP2), who has worked in the call centre industry for nine years, gave a similar response. He said that if he switched his career, the nine years of experience gained in the call centre would not be considered, and he would have to start from scratch. The respondent felt he would be promoted and grow in the industry rather than lose his experience. Respondent (RESP1) also said she would stay and grow in the industry for better prospects.

Smith and McBride (2021) highlight that precarious work contributes to low pay for the worker's experience. Also, Costa and Costa (2017) researched the perceptions of the precarious work process in two telecommunication call centres in Brazil and Portugal. In this study, the

researchers focused on the socioeconomic characteristics of the call centre employees' personal and employment history and expectations. The Smith and McBride (2021) and Costa and Costa (2017) studies are consistent with the researcher's findings on remuneration and career-related issues contributing to precarious work in Indian call centres.

4.2.5.3 Summary of Theme Five

Theme Five emerged from six sub-themes focused on remuneration and career-related issues in the call centre industry. It was seen that the call centre agents are compensated on the lower side when compared to the other industries. Although they are not content with the salary compensation, the respondents working in both domestic and international call centres fear changing their careers and moving out of the industry due to the prevailing competition. It is also seen that a career gap and lack of expertise due to the gap restrict the agent from thinking of leaving the call centre sector. However, they are keen to excel in their current job role and grow.

4.2.6 Theme Six: Suppressed emotions
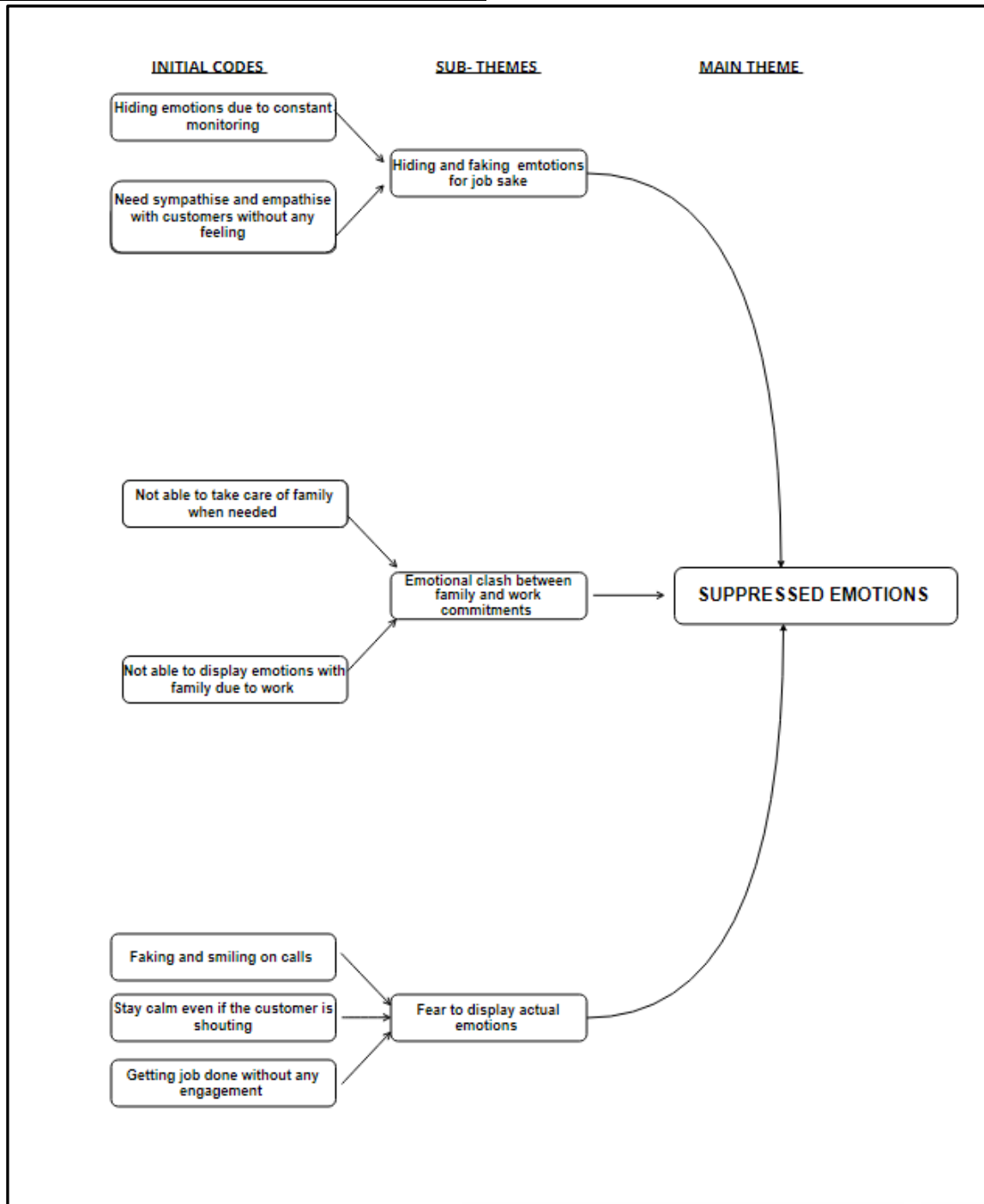
Figure 4.6 Codes and sub-themes Mapping for Theme Six

4.2.6.1 Interpretation of Theme Six

Theme Six is the central theme for the research study to understand emotional labour experienced by call centre agents in Indian call centres. This theme is based on how the

agents suppress their actual emotions during their daily interactions with customers. For the researcher to get an honest reply regarding how the display of emotions affects the agents, she used prompts to help the respondents think deeply and then reply. As mentioned, the theme emerged as a vital theme in understanding the emotional labour experienced by the call centres; the sub-themes identified repeated and were more likely related to faking and hiding the actual emotions, which are the critical aspects of emotional labour.

During the interview, the participants expressed the importance of managing emotions while talking to customers.

"...Managing emotions is essential for call centre agents;
for example, let's say I have a customer shouting at me; I must stay calm and not react to what the customer says...however it does not mean I am turning a deaf ear to them.... I have to make sure I do not react to whatever the customer...."(RESP1)

Respondent (RESP1) considered managing emotions an essential aspect of the job. She said even though the customer may be shouting at them, they should not react to what has been said and always need to stay calm and listen to the customer. She also confirmed that staying calm does not mean not listening to the customer but making sure they give ample time for the customer to vent his annoyance and then provide a solution.

Respondent (RESP8) also said it is vital that people in a customer-facing role have the patience to tolerate customers and, more essentially, to ensure that their own real emotions are not shown.

".... While talking to customers, we must make sure we do not express our actual emotions.... It so happened in 2020... when it was my Birthday ...
I was happy because my husband had gifted me an iPhone; it was my first birthday after my wedding. However, I had this customer who called to tell me that she had been made redundant due to Covid and could not pay her bill and wanted a payment plan to pay it, she was crying in the call. In such a situation, all I have to do is hide my actual happiness and empathise with her...try to calm her down, understand her situation and try to resolve her query...." (RESP8)

As call centre work does not involve face-to-face interaction, it is crucial to stay calm and understand the situation irrespective of whether the customer is angry, sad, or upset. In both cases, the agents must listen to the customer and rectify the issue about which the customer called in.

Respondent (RESP21) narrated an incident where he had to avoid taking unplanned leave even when his mother had a medical emergency. At the same time, the company had Black Friday deals for customers in the United States.

"...Taking unplanned leaves always negatively impacts our performance when the appraisal is concerned ... It will hit our call flow and the centre's performance.
We will be told to avoid unplanned leaves as much as we can…. Sometimes, I must take unplanned leave due to emergencies at home. Still, as I said, being a senior executive, I think a lot and then come to work. Making alternative arrangements.
Once my mom fainted before I started to work in the evening and had to be admitted to the hospital. The company has given some promotions to upgrade to a better plan to the customer for free.... and we have been told that the day will be hectic, and calls will be pouring.
Unfortunately, it was Black Friday in the US.
I had no option but had come to the office and make arrangements with my friends to take care of my mother..... it was a nightmare for me to be in the office and think about my mom, who was in the hospital...... Luckily it was nothing serious... for her... but when she was in the hospital, my mind and heart were not with me......" (RESP21)

A similar incident was narrated by the respondent (RESP17) where she had personal commitments outside work but had no choice but to juggle them.

"...very few months after I joined. I had to visit my grandparents in Salem (A district in Tamil Nadu, about 500 kilometres from Chennai). I told my parents I would come to the train station directly after my shift and asked them to wait for me there.
I had about three minutes to finish my shift and log off...hope you know we cannot log off earlier as that might impact our productivity and monthly stats... There was no queue, so I didn't expect

any call as I had to be at the train station within the next 1hr. I had a call precisely two minutes before my log-off time..(takes a big sigh). And it was the lengthiest call. Ideally, for .... bank, when a customer reports a fraudulent transaction.

we have to fill out about three forms and block his card... read out the recent transactions. I had a customer whose card was misused for a fraudulent transaction... and I knew for sure I would miss my train.

I had to fight with all the emotions at that time anxious, tensed, stressed, worried... (laughs) but simultaneously empathise and sympathise with the customer...

It was WHY ME!!! It was very tough to finish the call. I could not inform my parents as we are not allowed phones on our floor...

I could not put the customer on hold as I had to fill out the forms...if I put the customer on hold. and if he disconnects the call, I must call him back again, which is still a worse situation... I finished the call 20 min after my shift. I missed my train and had to take a bus to go to my hometown." (REP17)

After narrating the incident, the respondent smiled and said that she does not repeat such commitments during her working day. Still, the emotional clash she experienced with her professional and personal commitments could be seen while she narrated the incident.

Respondent (RESP21) further explained the emotional agony he experienced when his mother was in the hospital, and their customers were delighted with the good deals they got for Black Friday. It was also seen that agents could not exhibit the actual emotions they felt during customer calls. The respondent's voice lowered, explaining his breakdown on a particular day.

"I cannot be in the same state of mind or show my emotions to my customers during the call. Like it was Black Friday for the people, and many

perks and cheap deals were given. I made many upgrades, and the customers were happy about the fabulous deals. But I was in terrible distress as I did not know my mother's condition....

I could not show my feelings to the customer, as our calls were monitored while my mother was ill in hospital; I had an emotional breakdown as I could not be with her". (RESP21)

We must ensure our actual emotions are not shown while talking to customers.

[173]

Our performance is monitored based on how we handle our customer calls. While all calls are recorded, the quality team picks any call-in random to gauge our performance. If we do not engage with the customers correctly and do not exhibit the right
emotions needed for the customer call, we will be marked down. In case of repetition, we will be called in for a meeting with the supervisor and quality team.
(RESP 23)

4.2.6.2 Analysis of Theme Six

The next set of themes relates to emotional labour. Theme Six emerged from the interview and focused on suppressed emotions. Emotions play a vital role in the service industry. However, when the call centre industry is considered, it was seen that agents in call centres fake and hide their emotions to maintain the quality of calls and compliance issues. During the interviews, the researcher asked the respondents what they considered the essential aspects of the call centre job. Most of the respondents expressed that managing emotions is essential.

Regarding call centres, agents or employees interact with customers directly over telephone systems. Hence the agents need to be calm and composed when talking to customers. Respondent (RESP1) said customers would shout when their banking requirements were not fulfilled. In such cases, the respondent said she could not talk back to the customer and must listen to what the customer said. The respondent also acknowledged that they are very aware that the customer is not shouting at them but at the bank for not being able to provide the right services. In such cases, the respondent said that she must calmly listen to the customer and reassure them that she can resolve their query. When the customer is angry at the agents, they are not supposed to talk back to the customer or raise their voice. They are required to be attentive and appear to be ready to help the customers with their concerns. Respondent (RESP8) narrated how she was forced to hide the actual emotions she felt and had to empathise with the customer. She said it was her birthday, and she had an iPhone as a gift from her husband. However, at

[174]

work, a customer called her to say that they could not pay the bill as she had been made redundant, and the customer was crying; the respondent said that in such a case, she must listen to the customer patiently and empathise with them. Also, the performance monitoring process in call centres focuses on how the agents attend the customer call. Jaarsveld and Poster (2013) highlight that call centre employees must comply with display rules while talking with customers. Similarly, the respondents from both call centres said they had to fake their emotions due to the job role.

Respondent (RESP21), working in the international call centre C2, narrated an experience of how he was juggling personal and professional emotions when his mother fainted just before he started to work, as the call centres do not encourage taking unplanned leave. It was also seen that the employees have an emotional clash between family and work commitments. The respondent said that the call centre had a promotion for Black Friday on that particular day. They anticipated a heavy call flow, and as one of the senior executives, he was not in a position to take leave. Although he had arranged for friends to take his mother to the hospital, he still had an emotional clash thinking about his mother during his entire shift. Respondent (RESP17), too, narrated a similar experience where the work commitments made her fight with all emotions. Respondent (RESP21) further expressed that the confusion and emotional stress agents undergo is unbearable when things are difficult in their personal life. On that day, when his mother was in the hospital, he said that the customers were happy with their Black Friday deals; however, he was unable to display his actual and genuine emotion as he was upset about his mother being in hospital.

The call centre's performance monitoring process plays a vital role in the emotions displayed by the agents. All calls received at the call centre are recorded and picked randomly to monitor the agents' performance. It instils fear in the agents that if they do not display the right

emotion during the customer calls, they will be marked down and called in for a meeting if repeated. Respondent (RESP 23) highlighted the consequences the agents would experience if they do not exhibit the right emotions during customer calls.

Choi and Kim (2015) argue that individual character and job characteristics are the main factors causing emotional labour. Kim et al. (2019), focused on researching suppressing anger and emotion, mediating emotional labour in Korean nurses. The researcher found that when there is a mismatch between individual characteristics and job demands, call centre agents tend to suppress their emotions. The researcher found that call centre employees in India suppressing all emotions due to the nature of the job also contributes to emotional labour.

The finding of Theme Six on suppressed emotions is consistent with the findings of Kim et al. (2019).

4.2.6.3 Summary of Theme Six

From the above interpretation of Theme Six, it is evident that the call centre agents suppress and hide their emotions daily to ensure they handle the customer calls. The agents are expected to be courteous and friendly with the customers. Almost every respondent said they must hide their feelings when handling the calls. The agents confirmed that regulating emotions during the calls is monitored as a part of their performance metric. The agents also face an emotional clash between their personal and professional work commitments. As the call centre work demands call centre employees to work according to the pre-prepared roster, it is not feasible for them to take unplanned days off when needed and when situations like family commitments arise, the agents face an emotional clash affecting their work-life balance. Overall it can be widely seen that the agents hide and fake their actual emotions as a demand of their job role.

4.2.7 Theme Seven: Conscious falsification
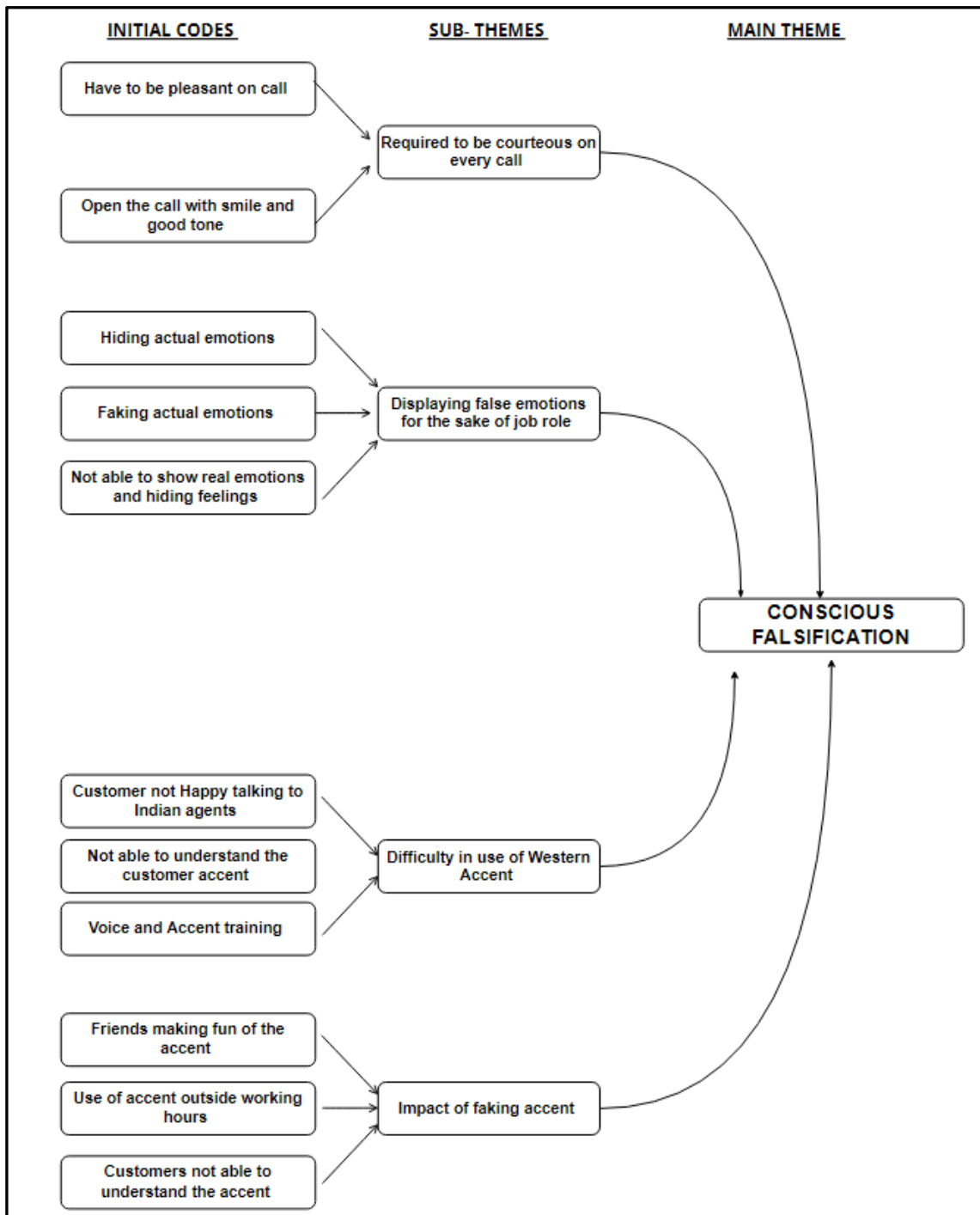
Figure 4.7 Codes and sub-themes Mapping for Theme Seven

4.2.7.1 Interpretation of Theme Seven:

Theme Seven focuses on the falsifications the agents tend to perform consciously. As the job demands, the agents must pretend and act according to the company norms. The agents said they are required to smile when answering the call, thus making sure it is welcoming for the customer who speaks to agents without face-to-face interactions. A couple of participants also mentioned that all the workstations have a mirror for the agents to see themselves when they talk to the customer to ensure they smile on every call.

".... I am not sure; if you are aware, our workstations have mirrors while working from the office, and during our training, we were told to see ourselves in the mirror, smile, and answer every customer call. You can't imagine the emotional turmoil I used to have when something was not right within me, and I had to smile and talk to the customer...." (RESP23)

The respondent (RESP23) is a single mother who recently got divorced. She said though she had been working in the same organisation for seven years, every day during her divorce phase was a new day for her where she had to keep her sadness within her and work.

"Our stations have mirrors; we are asked to see ourselves in the mirror and smile while talking to customers. However, I can only smile and answer calls for the first hour of my shift every day. I can't pretend and smile on every call due to the pressure on the calls and the number of calls we handle, and by the end of my shift, I am exhausted physically and emotionally... (RESP 16)

The respondent (RESP16) expressed her emotional exhaustion due to the volume of calls they handle daily and how she cannot pretend to smile during calls by being emotionally and physically tired after the first hour of her shift.

The sub-theme that emerged was falsifying emotions for the sake of the job role. The call centre demand that the agents exhibit an agreed level of emotions to their customers during their interactions. The agents need to empathise and sympathise if the customer is in a state of distress

[178]

and ensure they are engaged with the customer throughout the call. The agents expressed that they tend to act according to the customer's emotions and cannot display their own emotions most of the time. They falsify their emotions for the nature of their job role.

"Displaying the right emotions to the customers is vital for our job.
We were told during our training that as the customer doesn't see us … we need always to smile and attend to the calls. While opening a customer call, we must smile… smiling on-call positively impacts the customer. When customers are not happy or express dissatisfaction, we need to empathise and sympathise with them. So ideally, when the customer is happy, we must be happy, and when customers are sad, we must be sad along with them. irrespective of what our emotions are (giggles....) …" (RESP8).

Respondent (RESP8) expressed how they need to empathise and sympathise with the customer. She also added that when the customer is happy, the agents should look happy, and if the customer is sad, they must be sad for the customer on their calls and not care about their own emotions. Similar thoughts were expressed by a couple of other agents working in both call centres, emphasising that the call centres expect their agents to falsify their emotions as part of the job role.

The following two sub-themes (Sub-themes 7C and 7D) pertain to the international call centre where the agents need to use accents. Being a call centre servicing American customer, case study organisation C2 provides voice and accent training to adopt an American accent while talking to customers and process-oriented training. The agents expressed their discomfort in adopting the accents and how the customers reacted when they found the agents faking their accents.

"…Initially, it was very
difficult to adopt an entirely new accent which I have seen only in Hollywood cinemas. And during my initial days, the customers

quickly identified I was faking my accent and would shout in the call that they wanted to speak to an English-speaking executive. It wasn't very comforting when customers rudely talked to us and mocked my accent. It took me a lot of time to overcome that trauma, I would say….I was feeling like I was losing my confidence In such cases…but now I am fine with my accent and can talk to any customer with ease in American accent.........." (RESP2)

Respondent (RESP2) stated that when he started to work in an international call centre, the customers would mock his accent. He said he lost his confidence because of this constant mocking. He overcame the issues and is now well versed with the accent, however, the impact of the mockery could be felt in his tone.

Respondent (RESP10), who had been working in the international call centre for more than nine years, also expressed a similar agony during his initial days. He said adopting a Western accent was very difficult as one's mother tongue will always influence answering calls.

"Initially days, when I started to work in an international call centre, was a nightmare. The customers will not understand my accent because I used to have the mother tongue influence (MTI)… Which is no matter if I fake my accent,
One lady shouted at me, saying, "I want to speak to an English-speaking agent". I used to have that Indian accent when I communicated with the customers. I felt humiliated because she was not ready to speak to me and kept repeating it. (RESP10)

Apart from the constant monitoring and emotional aspects experienced by the agent, the accent also makes them emotionally disturbed when customers do not accept talking to people from different parts of the world. Respondent (RESP19), who joined the call centre two years ago, straight after her graduation, did not wish to talk about this as she said she was new to the call centre job. She joined during the lockdown period, where they were not given face-to-face training for voice and accent, and it was only online. She says that sometimes the customers do not want to talk to her and want to speak to someone else as they could identify her accent was

fake. She did express that though they are providing the correct information to the customers, it is pretty discomforting when they are not accepted for using a preferred accent.

The next theme that has emerged is the impact of faking the accent. The agents who constantly work in international call centres tend to use the accent in their lives outside work.

"Being in an international call centre, I also use US accent while usually talking to my friends and family .... and they make fun for that (laughs).. and sometimes I use words like dollars instead of rupees... (giggles).." (RESP15)

Respondent (RESP15) said that the constant use of an American accent makes him use the accent with his family and friends. He also said that sometimes, he used words like dollar instead of rupee. Though the respondent expressed it with amusement, it is constantly the result of faking an accent.

"My friends say without even going to America, I am using the accent, and they laugh at me about what I would do if I visited America once. Sometimes they say that I am just acting by using an American accent while talking to them. But they don't understand that it comes spontaneously as I spend most of my time talking to a customer with that accent…" (RESP 24).

The respondent (RESP24) said his friends make fun of him and say he uses an American accent even without visiting that country. However, the respondent points out that he has habituated to using an accent as he spends most of his time talking to customers.

4.2.7.3 Analysis of Theme Seven

Theme Seven focuses on the conscious falsification performed by the agents. Due to the nature of the job, the agents should be pleasant and friendly as they represent the organisation, irrespective of the customer's attitude towards the agents. The respondents mentioned that they had to answer the call with a smile because the interaction between the agents and the customers is only over the telephone; answering the call with a smile will make

the customer feel welcomed. Respondent (RESP 23), a single mother, registered that when working from the office, the workstations used mirrors to help the agents practice the art of smiling when answering customer calls. The respondent also said that during their training, they had been told to look in the mirror and smile frequently to ensure they are habituated to doing the same while answering customer calls.

She also talked about the emotional turmoil she would experience during her divorce phase when she was not feeling unhappy but her job demanded her to smile while talking to customers. She could not take a break from work as she had a small child to care for, so it was a challenging phase for her. She expressed her frustration when she was supposed to handle the customer calls with a smile when she cried inside all day. Another respondent (RESP16) expressed how the number of calls exhausts her daily. Working in the domestic call centre, the agents attend about 70-80 calls per day, and the respondent said that it is impossible to attend every call with a smile as the day progresses.

It was also seen that the agents working in the call centres are falsifying their emotions as a part of their job demands. The research found that the job demands the agents to be happy when the customer is happy and be sad or upset when the customer they are talking to is sad. Also, the agents experience a mixture of emotions throughout the shifts without exhibiting their actual emotions. Over eight or nine hours, they are forced to falsify their emotions for the sake of their job role. The researcher also found that while smiling on every call and falsifying emotions were common for both the domestic and international call centres, two sub-themes of difficulty in using and the impact of faking a Western accent emerged from the respondents of international call centre C2. As international call centres provide technical service to customers in the US, the agents are trained to speak in an American accent during their training.

Respondent (RESP2) said that when he first started handling customer calls, the customers would quickly realise that he was not an American but someone sitting in another corner of the world and trying to speak like an American. He also said that the customers would rudely say that they wanted to speak to an "English-speaking" person and mock his accent, making him emotionally weak. It took much time for the respondent to recover from the mental trauma because he could not speak like an American. However, the respondent says now he can flaunt his accent just like an American.

Similarly, the researcher found that in the movie "Slumdog Millionaire" (2008), the main character Jamal Malik is employed as a tea seller (Chai Walla) in a call centre in Mumbai servicing customers in the United Kingdom. Scenes from this movie resonate with the perceptions and images associated with the Indian call centre industry, especially when Jamal stands in for a call centre agent, taking a Scottish customer's call and mishandling it. The movie portrays the call centre agents' language, cultural differences, and ambiguous identities. Also, in the film, the management team updates the call centre agents daily on UK television soaps so the agents can talk with their customers (Slumdog Millionaire, 2008).

Respondent (RESP10), who has been working in the international call centre for more than nine years, also registered similar experiences he used to have when he started his career. The international call centres have voice and accent trainers to help agents speak to customers. While faking an accent or talking to a customer in a different accent, the agents are found to have MTI (Mother Tongue Influence). The agents are given the training to reduce MTI while talking to customers. MTI is also a parameter when the calls are monitored, and if the agents cannot reduce it or adopt an American accent, they must be retrained on their voice and accent. The respondent expressed grief about how the customers would humiliate them for not being able to speak English properly. A couple of respondents did not even want to talk with the

researcher about their experiences, which could easily resonate with the deep feelings the agents have gone through in adapting their accents.

Respondent (RESP19) did not wish to share her emotional trauma; however, as she joined the call centre two years ago during the lockdown, she and the people who joined along with her did not have face-to-face training. It was all online, making it even more difficult for the agents to understand the accent. She expressed how she used to be upset when customers did not want people using different accents to answer their queries though they were provided with correct and accurate information. While adopting the American accent was seen as a vital sub-theme, some experienced respondents expressed how the fake accent has impacted their daily lives. Respondent (RESP15), who has been working in the call centre for five years, said he habitually uses an American accent while talking to his friends and family.

Respondent (RESP24) said that his friends mocked him for talking with an American accent and said he could not help it as he spends most of the time talking to customers this way at work also, how he used words like Dollar instead of Rupee unknowingly. Though the respondent found this funny and giggled while talking about the impact, the researcher would like to point out how working in the call centre had changed the agents' lives.

The researcher found Theme Seven consistent with the findings of Krishnamurthy (2018) who depicts the emotional agony the call centre agents experience while trying to fulfil their job requirements. The emotional challenges are the agent's experience, and how they knowingly falsify their emotions is a part of the job. Theme Seven on conscious falsification contributes to exploring the emotional labour experienced by the Indian call centre agents.

4.2.7.3 Summary of Theme Seven:

To conclude, theme seven of conscious falsification emerged from four sub-themes. The agents tend to falsify their smiles and accents as their job demands. However, it is also seen that the

agents are emotionally impacted by faking their smiles and accent. The researcher noticed that

the respondents said they must knowingly falsify their emotions to ensure the work is done.

4.2.8 Theme Eight: Emotionally despondent due to customer behaviour
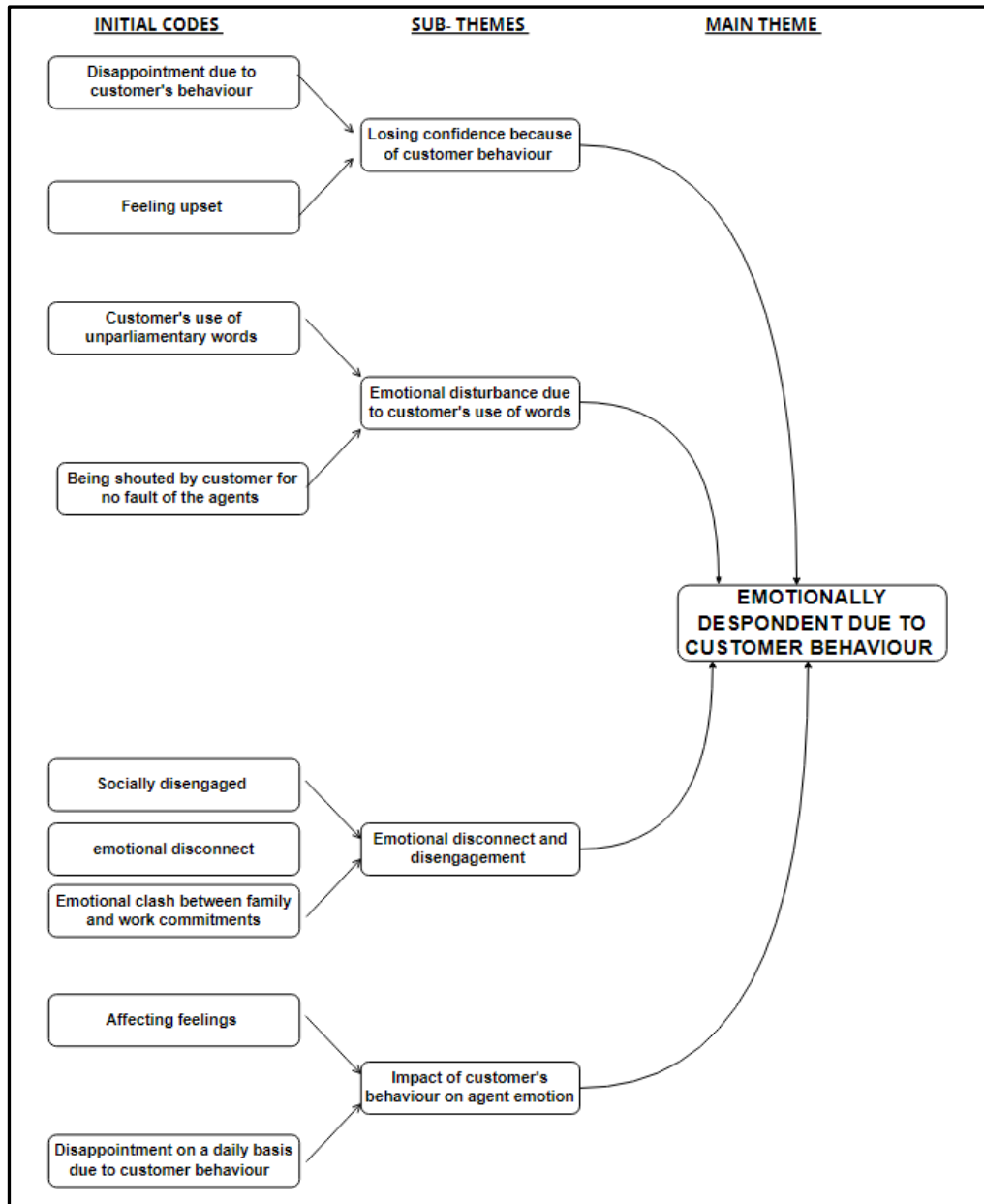
Figure 4.8 Codes and sub-themes mapping for Theme Eight

4.2.8.1 Interpretation of Theme Eight:

Theme Eight focuses on the agents' emotional exhaustion due to customer behaviours. This theme is based on the call centre agents' experiences and how the customer interacts with them.

> *"It was so upsetting when customers talked to us so*
> *rudely and mocked at my accent. It took me a lot of time to overcome that trauma, I would say....I was feeling like I was losing my confidence in such cases." (RESP2)*

Although the call centre agents working in international call centres serving customers from Western countries are given voice and accent training and process training, the agents can often not cope with American English. The agent (RESP2) working in the international call centre expressed his concern about how he felt when customers from America used to mock his accent. The agent said he felt traumatised, and it took a long time for him to overcome the mockery. Though he said he is now very confident with his American accent, the agent could recollect the experiences even after five years of working in the call centre, thus illustrating how the agents lose confidence due to customers' behaviour.

A similar experience was shared by (RESP19), who worked in call centre C2 in their first job and how she was afraid to take calls after a customer shouted at her during the first few days of taking calls.

> *"I was shattered when the customer kept saying that I am not doing my job and not fit for work. She kept saying I was sitting in another world and did not talk to customers. I told my manager I would not be working the next day...." (RESP19)*

The agent joined the company in 2020 when the pandemic started and had little training before the country went into complete lockdown. Although she managed to take a call with the little training provided, she exclaimed that the customer's attitude permanently lowered her confidence.

At the same time, the respondent (RESP6), new to the call centre industry working at the domestic call centre with a year of experience, expressed her state of mind when a customer shouted at her for putting his call on hold for an extended period.

"……I did not have the correct information handy,
so I had to call my manager to check on the information as we were working from home…. I
informed the customer about the time it would take to get the information…. kept refreshing my
hold and apologised for the time it took for his query to be rectified…. I also explained to him
that I had to call my manager and get it sorted…. But he was impatient and
wanted to speak to my manager directly…and said I was not ready to help him…".(RESP6)

The behaviour of the customer disturbed the agent emotionally. However, he explained to the customer that they were working from home, so it might take longer than usual to get an accurate reply. It was also seen that the agents got emotionally exhausted due to the monotonous work.

Respondent (RESP2) said that talking to the customers repeatedly during the same process makes him emotionally exhausted.

"…. just think I normally handle about 30 - 40 calls in a day,
and if I had to read through the scripts, the … it sometimes is monotonous and like a
recording… I get exhausted and sometimes go through the process again and again. My mother
used to tell me that I sometimes talk as if I talk to the customer in my sleep..."(RESP2)

The agent must follow the scripts irrespective of how confident they are with the process. As it is technical support, the agents must use a flow chart for each customer's technical issue. The agent also expressed how he talked about the process during his sleep.

"We have a difficult time when there is a network outage…. During this time, the call flow is
unimaginably high. But the saddest part is we have to follow the process to make sure that the
customer is facing a network issue only because of the outage… imagine attending almost 70-80
same type of calls and following the same script."(RESP18)

The monotonous work may make them emotionally exhausted due to the pressure from the customer also the use of scripts continuously on all calls.

The next sub-theme identified is the call centre agent's disappointment due to the customer's behaviour. The call centre agents act as a medium between the company and the customer, the customers who have issues with the service provider or the bank interact with the agent as if they are talking directly to the company or bank, not bearing in the mind that the agents are a medium of communication. Due to this constant irate customer interaction with the agents, they get disappointed and are emotionally disturbed.

"Ideally, I know that the customer is not shouting at me,
but is upset with the services of the bank.
Though I know that, sometimes it upsets me when I hear harsh words from customers that even
my parents have not used at me..." (RESP1)

Respondent (RESP1) expressed how she becomes upset when the customers use harsh words, which she says even her parents have never used. Although she knows the customer is not shouting at her but is shouting at the bank for poor service, she is nevertheless disturbed due to such customer behaviour. When she reported this, the respondent's voice changed, depicting how such incidents affect the agents.

Similarly, the respondent (RESP15) said customers sometimes use profane language when their requests are improperly handled. The agents can give customers three warnings for their language usage; then, they can disconnect the call if they continue.

"Sometimes, I feel agitated when customers use profane language at us…
for no reason and when it is not my fault. As I said, this was my first international call centre
experience, and when I took calls, I could not understand some of the
profane words that the customers used…. I search for the meanings and feel down when I know
the meaning of such words…. Although we have the right to disconnect the call after giving
three warnings to the customer. for someone a bit sensitive. like me, even hearing the word three
times is hard to digest…." (RESP15)

[188]

The sub-theme 8D is the emotional disconnect and disengagement call centre agents have while interacting with customers. The agents expressed how they cannot build rapport and engage with the customers, although they have been asked to do so and to treat each call as if it was their first call.

Respondent (RESP1) accepted that it is impossible to engage with the customer due to the number of calls they handle daily and the nature of the customer's query for every call.

".... Engaging with a customer is impossible due to the volume of calls we attend and the nature of the query. We don't feel it; it just attends calls,
answers the query and closes the call...and on a busy day. when we expect over 80 - 90 calls to attend, I can tell that I can be engaged with the customer for the first hour, but as the day progresses, it is undoubtedly not...." (RESP1)

Respondent (RESP24) also said they must focus on various aspects while answering customer calls. The agents during the calls will need to focus on qualitative and quantitative aspects which account to the performance monitoring process. The respondent expressed that he does not feel very engaged while talking to the customer because the call may be monitored and they may be scored down for quality. The respondent also confirmed that he needed to ensure that he provided correct information and promoted sales to the customers during the call.

"I need to attend calls, provide correct information, and maintain my talk time and after-call work time.
If not, my manager will call my name to finish the call quickly and prepare for the next call.
While on call, I need to focus on my quality aspects and promote sales to the customer.........with all these running in the mind it is challenging to engage with the customer..." (RESP24)

Some respondents also said they become emotionally impacted when the customers are rude to them. The respondent (RESP 21) said that when she encountered calls like the one when a

customer shouted at her, she remembers and feels why the customer was harsh to her when it was not her fault. However, she also exclaimed that these are routine activities as a call centre agent.

"Sometimes, when similar situations or calls occur
I remember what happened and feel why the customer was harsh to me though it was not my
mistake, again it's part and parcel of our life as call centre agents...
. so we have to accept it...." (RESP21).

One of the tenured respondents working in the call centre industry for about fifteen years (RESP22) from the case study organisation C2 also expressed how he gets emotionally impacted even now when customers raise their voices. The respondent was also one of the older call centre agents I interviewed from both call centres.

"As you know, I have worked in the call centre
industry throughout my career, but still, if a customer Shouts at me. I get upset... although it is
not the same as when I started my career, to some extent, I feel disappointed.... Many times, I
feel about the calls
when after going home.... Because such calls spoil your days...Being one of the most senior
technical support engineers, I find it difficult to overcome when customers of much younger age
shout at me for no fault of mine...." (RESP22).

4.2.8.2 Analysis of Theme Eight

The final theme from the interviews was how the agents are emotionally despondent due to customer behaviour; as already discussed, a call centre job involves agents talking to customers daily. The respondents expressed that some customers are good to them, but many of the customers they encounter shout at them and get angry at them for no reason. It was seen that the respondents from the international call centre experienced mockery, humiliation and rudeness from their customers during their initial days as they could not talk with a natural American accent.

The respondent (RESP19) said she was afraid to take calls when a customer shouted at her. She also said that the customer's behaviour made her lose confidence and feel unfit for the

[190]

job. Also, as the respondent joined the call centre during the pandemic lockdown, she could not share or get guidance from anyone. Respondent (RESP6), working in the domestic call centre, expressed how a customer started shouting at her for not helping him and putting the call on hold for an extended period. The call centre agents are allowed to put the customers on hold while trying to gather information. However, they must keep the customers informed of what they are doing and assure them the query will be resolved.

The respondent said her customer was impatient and unwilling to talk to her even though she was ready to help him. She said she was disturbed by the customer's behaviour. Some respondents said when a customer is shouting at them, they know that they are not shouting at them but because of the service they have received from the company. However, they said that the customers should realise that the person listening to their shouting is also human and expects courteous behaviour from them. (RESP2) spoke about the emotional exhaustion he experiences due to constant interaction with customers. He said he talks in his sleep as if he is talking to a customer. Respondent (RESP18) said that, even if the customer is not happy with the process, the agents should ensure they follow the complete process before giving any solutions to the customers. She also said there are some days when they encounter network outages, during which the call flow is very high. They are not allowed to tell the customer about the outages immediately but must follow the script and the process before confirming it. The monotonous nature of the call centre job created emotional tiredness among the agents. It was also seen that the agents became upset by the customer's behaviour and the customer's use of profane language.

Respondent (RESP15), working in the international call centre, expressed how the customer's profane language upsets them. The respondent said that some words used by the customers were very new to him, and he used Google to find out the meaning and would feel

very upset once he understood the meaning of the profane language used by the customer. The call centres allow the agents to disconnect the call if, after three warnings, the customer does not stop using profane language. Hearing such words from customers upsets the agents emotionally. The respondent was asked if they could emotionally engage with their customer while talking to them. Most respondents said it is not feasible to engage on every call due to the monotonous nature and the volume of calls they handle on a single day. The call centre advises the agents handling the customer calls to build rapport with them and always put themselves in the customer's shoes to understand their query and distress.

Most respondents agreed that it is impossible to connect easily with the customer. Apart from handling customer calls, the agents have many things to concentrate on when talking to the customer, making emotional engagement impossible. Respondent (RESP24) said she must concentrate on attending calls, providing correct information, maintaining her talk time, and the after-call work time during the calls. When she must focus on many aspects of a call, it is impossible to engage with the customer. Respondent (RESP22) highlighted how the customer's behaviour upsets him and can ruin his day. Having worked in the call centre industry for almost fifteen years, the respondent expressed how he gets emotionally distressed when customers much younger than him shout at him. The researcher wanted to understand whether the agents emotionally connected to their customers while talking. Theme Eight, emotionally despondent due to customer behaviour, contributed to exploring the emotional labour in the Indian call centres. Also, it was seen that this finding was consistent with D'Cruz and Noronha (2008). The authors in that study have shown how call centre agents experience a racist reaction from foreign customers and how they are victims of emotional labour. Likewise, in the current research study, Theme Eight, emotionally despondent due to customer behaviour, contributed to emotional labour.

4.2.8.3 Summary of Theme Eight

From Theme Eight's interpretation and discussion, it is evident that the call centre agents become emotionally disheartened due to the customer's behaviour. Though it was evident in most cases where agents understood that the customer is not shouting at the agents as individuals but was not happy with the company's services, the agents sometimes took it personally due to the customer's language and harsh words. However, the agents know that it is part and parcel of their daily lives in a call centre and accept that they must manage their emotions during such situations.

4.3 Chapter summary

In this chapter, the researcher has presented the interpretation and analysis of the data collection through semi-structured interviews with the call centre employees. The interpretation of the data presented in this chapter will help the researcher conduct the thematic analysis and provide a discussion in Chapter 5. Additionally, it helped the researcher to answer the research question and provide recommendations to the practitioners to explore precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres through organisational metaphors.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

5.0 Introduction

This research study aims to explore the precarious work and emotional labour experiences of agents in Indian call centres through organisational metaphors. In this chapter, the researcher has presented the findings on precarious work and emotional labour in call centres through the machine metaphor and psychic prison and the literature to answer the research questions**.** The researcher has formulated four research objectives and two research questions.

The research aim can be achieved by answering the following research questions.

RQ1: What is the nature of precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres?

RQ2: How is precarious work enacted in Indian call centres explored using the machine metaphor?

RQ3: How is emotional labour experienced in Indian call centres explored using the psychic prison metaphor?

Eight major themes emerged from the semi-structured interviews with call centre employees of organisations C1 and C2. Also, in this chapter, the researcher will assess the findings and highlight precarious work and emotional labour through the machine and psychic prison metaphor. The details of the hemes are illustrated below in Table 5.1

Precarious work in Call centres	**Theme One:** Non-Standard Work Schedule
	Theme Two: Inadequate personal and family time
	Theme Three: Fear and Pressure to Perform
	Theme Four: Health and Safety Issues
	Theme Five: Remuneration and career-related issues
Emotional labour in Call centres	**Theme Six**: Suppressed emotions
	Theme Seven: Conscious falsification
	Theme Eight: Emotionally despondent due to customer behaviour

Table 5.1 Themes generated for the research study from semi-structured interviews.

5.1 Outsourcing call centres to the Indian subcontinent

In 2003, approximately 5,300 call centres were operating in the UK, which employed about 800,000 agents. The industry was said to have risen by 250% since 1995 and is still growing. In the early 2000s, large companies tended to transfer their customer service operations overseas (Gupta et al., 2015). Cheap labour has always been a fundamental reason business move their call centre departments to countries like India, the Philippines, and South Africa, which paved the way to cut costs (Hauptfleisch and Uys, 2006). India has been the primary destination for businesses due to the availability of English-speaking graduates for call centre work (Noronha and D'Cruz, 2016). Offshoring the call centres overseas led to a subsequent decrease in the UK's

growth of its industry, but only a few companies moved their entire customer service operation overseas (Marr and Neely, 2004).

India is a significant player in the call centre industry due to its location, worldwide connection to different time zones, and the working population's ability to speak English despite it not being their mother tongue (Deery and Kinnie, 2002). The call centre industry in India originated in the 1990s (Pereira et al., 2020). Companies such as GE Capital established their first call centres in India, which later boomed in outsourcing. Large organisations with sufficient financial resources and infrastructure went to India to grow their offshoring contracts to meet international demands (Poster, 2007). Significant development has been made, such as outsourcing global business processes to third-party providers and joint ventures between global North and Indian companies (Akroyd et al., 2006). In the call centre industry context, outsourcing indicates emptying the organisation. At the same time, offshoring facilitates organisations to transfer repetitive tasks, so that the head office or the home office focuses on the core functions of the business (CallMiner, 2019). The call centres established in India were mainly designated to perform the more monotonous jobs. These call centres operate with the demand to be cost-efficient and mainly customer oriented. The concept of customer service always proves that it produces more profitable results while considering customer interests as an essential feature as organisations place a high expectation on customer satisfaction and service quality. According to Taylor and Bain (2004), the call centres in India are under two broader divisions: ITES and BPO. Call centres are mainly concentrated in the National Capital Region (Delhi) and other larger cities and commercial centres such as Mumbai, Bangalore (the software capital), Kolkata, Chennai, and Hyderabad (CallMiner, 2019).

GE Capital established the outsourced call centre industry in the late 1990s. Following GE, British Airways, HSBC, AOL, and DELL offshored their customer service

operation in India and supported industries like transportation, banking and insurance, telecommunication, and hardware support (Taylor and Bain, 2008). These outsourced call centres display distinct traditional and interactional features compared to their Western counterparts (Chowdhury et al., 2012). The frontline agents in the offshored Indian call centres, namely the call centre agents, were required to modify their accents while talking to customers on calls (Nath, 2011).

Some companies instructed the agents to use pseudo names and hide their physical location from the customers. However, this also led to a backlash. Customers sometimes complained about difficulty understanding the English spoken by overseas agents whose first language was not English (Thite and Russell, 2010). Aziz (2013) highlights that the call centre agents faced verbal abuse from customers after being found to be Indian. His research participants were seeking psychiatric assistance for depression and dissociative identity disorder (p.6). Thus leading to emotional and psychological instability among the agents, which signifies the need for the current research study.

The outsourcing phenomenon was explicitly the export of clerical, data management and other jobs from Western countries like the US and the UK to countries like India, which has a vast pool of proficient English speakers, giving rise to international call centres (Bolton, 2013). In India, an international call centre is an outsourced call centre with a physical location or an office. However, it will serve customers in other countries (Christensen, 2010). "A telephone call to a British bank or insurer is as likely to be answered in Delhi as Reading by staff with flawless British accents. The level of sophistication in some call centres is remarkable: US callers get routed to operators with American accents, British callers to those with British tones" [Ringshaw (2003, p.8) as cited in Bolton (2013, p.495)].

5.1.1 International call centre employment in India

Multinational corporations hire call centre workers to communicate and interact with American and British customers by training them to conceal their temporal and spatial Indian locations (Poster, 2018). In 1998, India set up its first call centre. Since then, US and UK companies have subcontracted many customer service jobs to the Indian subcontinent (Pattnaik and Panda, 2020). The processes known as business process outsourcing (BPO) and information technology-enabled services (ITES) are responsible for the remarkable increase in call centre jobs across various Indian cities.

Working in an Indian call centre involves the agents providing voice service to the customers dialling toll-free numbers, mainly from North America. These are international call centres (Mukherjee and Bhal, 2017)These workers had to assume different names, locations, and cultural markers and work the night shift to provide customer service to an American customer whose workday is between 9 am and 5 pm. The time difference, especially between the United States and India, entails the call centre agents working night shifts, typically 8:00 hrs to 17:00 hrs in the US which is 17:30 hrs to 2:30hrs in India, termed the graveyard shift (Geroge, 2005). The employees drastically change their 24-hr biological rhythm while working in an international call centre (Agrawal and Sadhana, 2010. The call centres provide customer service operations to business processes that range from insurance to credit card, electricity and gas billing, account queries, and back-office support functions. These customer service roles were either inbound or outbound (Mahoney, 2019).

The call centres are either owned by companies in the US or UK and have a joint venture with an organisation in India to provide voice-based customer care services to their customer. The call centres are Third Party Service Providers (TPSPs). TPSPs in the Indian subcontinent, provide contract services within a single office building to various clients abroad.

[199]

Different floors in the office building cater to other industries, such as airlines or insurance (Gupta et al., 2015). The same vendor outsourced in India will likely provide service functions to rival organisations (Jansen and Callaghan, 2014). A substantial segment of the workforce in India works as call centre employees or customer care representatives (Mukherjee and Bhal, 2017). The offshoring of call centres from countries like the USA and the UK has grown remarkably. However, the migration happened mainly because of the lower labour cost and the availability of an English-speaking, well-educated workforce who could deliver high-quality customer service (Taylor et al., 2013).

Though the Indian call centres have had a tremendous rise with an annual growth of 40-50%, there is another side to the Indian call centre industry (Healy and Bramble, 2003). Expanding numerous problems severely affects growth rates (D'Cruz and Noronha, 2008). The issues include high employee turnover, stressful work environment and poor career progression, also call centres' problems in other parts of the world (Banks and Roodt, 2011). However, the Indian call centre industry faces additional issues like inadequate infrastructure and security concerns. Due to the irrevocable commitment of national and multinational corporations and the significant impact of the Indian call centre industry on the world economy, the call centres need to combat the issues faced. NASSCOM (2010) reports highlight that the call centres face poor electricity and telecommunication infrastructure along with cultural differences between the customers and the call centre agents. Under-trained call centre agents speak English with a heavy accent, and employees have little or no work experience (Hegde, 2016).

Friedman (2007, p. 22) highlights his visit to an international call centre in India; he saw several rooms and about 2500 people working on the phones. Some specific agents called outbound operators were selling products ranging from phone minutes to credit cards. In contrast, others dealt with inbound calls - from tracing lost luggage for US and European airline

customers to solving technical queries for American customers. The calls get routed to the call centre via satellite and undersea fibre optic cables. Also, the accent neutralisation training was a significant feature of training recruits in the international call centre. Friedman (2006, p.27) describes how a voice and accent trainer wearing a traditional Indian saree trains new joiners and seamlessly moves between American, British and Canadian accents.

Sotang (2002) portrays that the call centres in India employ many thousands of young men and women providing technical assistance or making reservations by dialling 1-800 (the toll-free number in the US). Sontag (2002) also says that most call centre agents are people who already speak English. They compete for the desirable jobs in call centres after completing training courses that erase all traces of their Indian accent when they speak English. They are paid munificent remuneration for office work in India. However, though the salary is considered high in India, it is less when compared to what the American companies will pay Americans to do the same job. The agents learn American accents and work night shifts to coordinate with the US time zones, thus adjusting to an altered social and family lifestyle. During the initial phases of the outsourcing trend in India, the call centre agents had to adopt a Western name. The agents also claimed to be in the customer's country to make the customer feel comfortable, thus facilitating the interaction. (Feyerabend et al., 2018). Sontag (2002) stresses the role played by the call centre agents. Young Indians who answer calls from large office building floors in cities like Chennai, Mumbai, New Delhi, or Bangalore have a computer that lets them answer customer calls. The agents use pseudonyms and tapes to establish a pleasant middle-American accent and learn American slang and mass culture references like TV personalities, informal idioms, baseball, and basketball scores to ensure that the agent creates a rapport with customers during their interaction. During the training, the agents are trained in pronunciations of the alphabet,

[201]

phonetics, and different British and American English words. Table 5.2 shows examples of the difference between common British and American words.

British	American
Fortnight	Two weeks
Anticlockwise	Counter clockwise
Autumn	Fall
Caretaker	Janitor
City centre	Downtown
Mobile phone	Cell phone

Table 5.2 Examples of common British and American words

Source: Selected from Raina (2004, p. 79-81)

Also, Raj and Raj (2013) point out that the agents are trained on learning the NATO phonetic alphabet: A for Alpha; B for Bravo; C for Charlie and so on, which is contradictory to what a person in India would have learnt: A for Apple; B for Bat; C for Cat. It raises questions on the mental well-being of the call centre agents about the prolonged use of fake accents and phonetics, thus signifying the organisational metaphors of the machine to view the call centre employment. However, recently, specific call centres have discarded using Western names and their accents and converse with a customer with a neutral accent (Raghuram, 2013). Taylor and Bain (2004) call our attention to the negative and positive portrayal (p.17) that emerged from outsourced Indian call centres; the negative illustration depicted the call centres as sweatshops where the working conditions were similar to South-East Asian textile factories. However, on a positive note, it was observed that the call centre employees in India are fluent English speakers,

exhibit an outstanding commitment to their company and job and are highly educated (Taylor and Bain, 2004).

Poster (2007) explores the service work globalisation by analysing the call centres in India that provide customer service to US companies. In the study, the call centre agent's job involves posing as an American for eight hours. As a result, the agent get trained in four aspects of a) voice and accent where the agent had learned American diction, modulation in voice and training in grammar, b) pseudonym to prove their American identity to their customers, c) conversational skills whereby the agents should utilise small talk with the customer to suggest that they are in the United States, d) the script that the agents will use in almost every call.

5.1.2 Domestic call centre employment in India

The domestic call centres in India developed randomly compared to international ones (Burgess and Connell, 2004). They began to conduct direct selling and telemarketing operations in a basic office setup used to make calls with fundamental ACD systems. Advanced technology and international marketing were the entry barriers for companies setting up international call centres; however, the domestic call centres did not have these obstacles to establishing their business (Callcentre Helper, 2011). Though many companies developed their call centres into influential organisations, they were unorganised, the domestic call centre workforce is said to be younger when compared to the employees in the international call centres (Brannan, 2015). The domestic call centre environment is smaller and has limited facilities (Taylor et al., 2013). (Batt et al., 2005) say that small working office space in domestic call centres enables close relationships between managers and the call centre agents, thus providing flexibility in the workplace. However, working in a domestic call centre is distinct from working internationally. Taylor et al. (2013) highlight that domestic call centre agents experience lower salaries, inferior working conditions, and extended working hours due to low revenue and margin.

[203]

5.2 Findings and discussions

5.2.1. Justifying the use of machine and psychic prison metaphors.

Carlsen and Gjersvik (1997) used metaphors to analyse workflow technology. Carlsen and Gjersvik (1997) used the brain metaphor proposed by Morgan (1997) to show the link between workflow and organisational learning. Similarly, the study focused on the cultural metaphor to focus on the social reality. Each metaphor proposed by Gareth Morgan implied a method of thinking and perceiving organisations. However, it was argued that all metaphors could be used consciously to contribute vital contributions to study organisations. Morgan (1996) highlights that the organisational issues or problems rest in the methods of how the researcher perceives them. Kendall and Kendall (1993) applied metaphors as a cognitive lens to understand information systems development. In this study, the researcher focused on the machine metaphor to understand precarious work and the psychic prison metaphor to understand the emotional labour in Indian call centres.

Furthermore, Morgan (1986) emphasises that "theories of organisational life are based on metaphors that lead us to see and understand organisations in distinctive yet partial ways. Using different metaphors to understand organisational life's complex and paradoxical character allows us to manage and design organizations that we may not have thought possible before" (p. 12-13). Morgan also justifies that the metaphors provide different ways of perceiving organisations. The eight metaphors were examined and suggested methods for organisational researchers to identify and assess life in an organisation.

Morgan (1986, p.322) suggested the two-step approach, "The first step is to produce a diagnostic reading of the situation being investigated using different metaphors to identify or highlight critical aspects of the situation. The second step is to evaluate the significance of critically different interpretations thus produced". Although the researcher for the

[204]

current research study draws insights from Morgan's work, the approach described in the research study differs from Morgan's approach in two ways. In this study, the researcher directly collects information from the voice of the organisational members (call centre agents) on the precarious work and emotional labour they experience and uses their data to analyse the organisation (Indian call centre industry) through the machine and psychic prison organisational metaphors.

5.2.1.1 The machine metaphor:

The significant implication of the machine metaphor is its predictability. In general, machines in organisations have a goal or purpose to achieve at which point their performance can be measured. The machine metaphor's vital component lies in how employees in an organisation are handled. Under the influence of the machine metaphor, employees in organisations are seen as interchangeable cogs, as in a machine (Morgan, 1996). Each part of the machine (employees) has its function to perform within the organisational context. In such organisations, individual parts are unnecessary, as they are subordinate to the whole functioning, as the machine metaphor emphasises rationality. Thus, while an organisation's users enact the machine metaphor, the system is trouble-free as they are well-oiled and work perfectly well. However, when problems or issues are encountered, it concentrates on the worker's inadequacy, not the machine (Kendall and Kendall, 1993).

High-end technology and innovations in India shape the call centre industry almost daily. Businesses in developed nations outsourcing their customer service operations to the Indian sub-continent as a business strategy to cut costs is now used as a strategic extension to the company's branding, expansion, and survival in the market. The main reason businesses in the UK, USA and Australia prefer India as a viable location for outsourcing is the availability of a large, cheap, educated workforce. Although the jobs in Indian call centres are portrayed to the

external world as well-oiled and smoothly running machines, the researcher aims to study the intrinsic aspects of precarious work through the machine metaphor and understand the industry in-depth. The call centre agents work in very cramped conditions on the computer throughout the shift and under controlled conditions (Anwar et al., 2018). The lack of control over their working time leads to stress in employees (Agrawal and Sadhana, 2010), contributing to precarious work.

This research study represents a novel approach to exploring the precarious work and emotional labour in the Indian call centre industry through organisational metaphors. Also, it was found through an extensive literature review that most research and contributions to academia on Indian call centres focus mainly on the causes of stress, turnover, factors that impact turnover in call centres, and psychosocial risk factors (As-Saber et al., 2004; Budhwar et al., 2009; Aziz, 2013; Ananthram et al., 2018) and have not focused on studying the precarious work in the Indian call centres. Precarious and precarious work in call centres has been studied in various countries (Hannif and Lamm, 2005; Matos, 2010; Costa and Costa, 2017). To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is no similar analysis to study the precarious work in the Indian call centre industry through the machine metaphor.

5.2.2.2 The psychic prison

Studying an organisation through the psychic prison metaphor assists managers and leaders in understanding the factors that influence their employees unconsciously and dealing with organisational challenges. The psychic prison metaphor also creates an awareness of rational and irrational employee behaviours, which, when understood, can effectively support changes in the organisational setting. Ruyter et al. (2001) highlight that call centre work is one of the ten most stressful jobs in the current working environment. Employees must show specific emotions during interpersonal interactions with customers or clients. It requires employees to exhibit these emotions according to the organisational standards. Researchers (Goodwin et al.,

2011; Ghalandari et al., 2012; Rajak et al., 2021) have focused on emotional labour in service interactions between the customer and employees and how the employees can improve their performance well by displaying their emotions effectively. This has brought about massive awareness regarding employee well-being in call centres.

A considerable amount of literature has been published on the well-being of employees and the working culture of employees in Indian call centres by authors including Akroyd et al., (2006), Agrawal and Sadhana (2010), Biron and Veldhoven (2012) and AlBattat and Som (2013). Although D'Cruz and Noronha (2008), Agrawal and Sadhana (2010) and Nath(2011) have studied emotional labour in Indian call centres, the researcher found that studying emotional labour through the psychic prison metaphor provides a vital contribution to the research study. There appears to be no literature exploring, through the psychic prison metaphor, emotional labour in the Indian call centre industry. In fact, up to now, several studies have highlighted the factors that are associated with emotional labour in the call centre industry individually and failed to combine them to understand the industry in-depth through the organisational metaphor of psychic prison (Annakis et al., 2011; Chowdhury et al., 2012; Castro and Deluna, 2013; Brannan, 2015 Rubel and Kee, 2015; Anwar et al., 2018)

. Various concepts discussed in the literature review concerning emotional labour in call centres call for the development of a combined framework to explore emotional labour in Indian call centres through the organisational metaphors of a psychic prison.

In the following sections, 5.2.4.2 and 5.2.4.3, the researcher has analysed precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres through the themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews using the machine and psychic prison metaphors. The researcher mainly focused on the seminal works of Gareth Morgan (Morgan, 1997; Morgan,

2004; Morgan, 2006) to explore the precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres through organisational metaphors.

5.2.2 Precarious work in Indian call centres and the machine metaphor

The analysis of Theme One suggests that call centre employees in India are prone to non-standard work schedules. Their shifts are not regular and alter every week. The agents from both call centres expressed concern about their non-standard working hours and the impact on their daily lives. According to Connell and Burgess (2006), those in precarious work experience poor working conditions, low job security, extensive working hours and weak attachments to their organisation. This research study found that irregular shifts majorly impacted the respondents. The respondents said their working hours are not fixed and have variable working hours every week, which demand clockwork. The non-standard working arrangement results in no fixed week off or festival holidays. The respondents also said they could not take unplanned leave; in case of holidays or leave requests, they must register their interest at least a month before so the leave requests and the shifts are allocated accordingly. The working hours in call centres are based on several factors the type of service provided, staffing levels and the customer base locations (Hashem, 2017). Morgan (2006) suggests that organisational life under the influence of machine metaphor is routinised with the demand for clockwork. The employees are expected to arrive at work at a given time, perform the pre-determined tasks, rest at allocated hours and then work until the tasks are completed.

The researcher found that the domestic and international call centres provide 24/7 service to customers irrespective of their customer base. Similarly, it was seen that the call centre employees in India' work-life is wholly routinised from when they login to when they log off from their shifts. The respondents expressed they have to log in on time to ensure the burden of calls is not on the other agents who are already logged in. In machine organisations, workers

from one shift replace workers in another in a methodological pattern to ensure work continues uninterruptedly 24/7, 365 days a year (Digha, 2014). The call centres operate in such a fashion to provide uninterrupted service to customers. In the domestic centres, though the agents provide banking services to customers in India, the male agents work night shifts to provide round-the-clock assistance (Taylor et al., 2013).

Morgan (2006, p.12) highlights the operations in "mass production factories" where the organisations act like a machine, and the employees or workers are designed to behave like parts of machines. In the context of Indian call centres, the researcher found a similar mode of operation to keep the business running. The call centre agents work 24/7 to provide services to their customers. Similarly, international call centre agents work the night shift to provide services to customers in the US.

Theme Two emerged from the analysis focused on inadequate personal and family time. The researcher found that call centre agents in Indian call centres lack sufficient time to spend with family and friends. Goldberg and Solheim (2021) emphasise that the precarity in employment leads to family stress and affects the relationship between parents, children, and partners. The respondents from the call centre expressed their displeasure about not being able to spend time with family due to their job requirements. Lestari and Yuwono (2020) investigated the effect of work-family and family-work conflict on call centre employees. The study was carried out on 154 call centre employees, and the result showed that the incompatibility between them and their job reduces work-family and family-work conflict. The study also recommended that the management in call centres should create a family-friendly job environment for the call centre employees. The researcher also found similar findings when the respondents had issues managing family and work and spending time with family, especially during festival periods and while attending to family members who may become sick. Machine organisations are designed

and operated like a machine which is bureaucratised to some extent, limiting their development of human capacities (Morgan, 2011). Morgan (2006) argues that in machine organisations, employees tend to lose personal growth opportunities as the employees spend more time on work. Morgan (2006, p.28) says that the "mechanistic approaches to an organisation can have dehumanising effects upon employees especially those at lower levels of organisational hierarchy". The respondents interviewed were at a lower level of the organisational hierarchy; the respondents were agents in customer-facing positions and at the bottom level when the hierarchy in a call centre is considered. The researcher found that they do not get sufficient time to spend with their families, which dehumanises them. The respondents from the call centres said that due to the non-standard working time and the nature of their job, which involves constant interaction and talking to customers, they have been avoiding family commitments and have started to create their own space.

Theme Three focuses on the fear and pressure to perform. The performance of call centre employees is based on quantity and quality. The agents must answer calls quickly to avoid the customer waiting or being on hold for a long time. According to Marr and Neely (2004), the performance monitoring process in call centres depends on the time the agents take to answer calls and the time spent on the calls . The number of calls monitors the individual performance of the agents handled per hour, per day, and the administration time (after-call work) associated with each call and the talk time. Apart from the quantitative aspects of the performance monitoring, the agent's calls are also monitored for quality. Suff et al (2005) argue that complex data (p. 12) monitors quality in the call centre. In the call centres, the agents were very closely examined on the quality of their calls by the team leaders. The researcher found a similar situation in both call centres. The agents had fear about their calls being monitored. As the calls were monitored, the respondents felt pressure to provide accurate customer information. The

researcher also found that the monitoring level was stricter in the call centre providing customer phone banking services than in the call centre providing technical support. Hannif and Lamm (2004) argued that the tight monitoring process in New Zealand call centres contributed to precarious work. According to TUC (2018), surveillance monitoring, draconian performance management regimes (p.6), and performance targets contribute to stress and anxiety among workers, leading to precarious work. The respondent also registered the stress they experienced from the pressure to perform.

Along with the performance metrics, the call centres require the agent to offer value-added services to the customers. They also have monthly targets to achieve based on their performance evaluated. Agents who do not perform well or contribute to sales will need to undergo a performance improvement plan, where they will be monitored even more closely and, failing to perform, will be asked to leave the job. Morgan (2006) links the machine metaphor to the scientific management theory proposed by Frederick Taylor and says that machine organisations follow the five principles Taylor advocates. One of the principles proposed by Taylor was to "monitor worker performance to ensure that appropriate work procedures are followed and that appropriate results are achieved" (p. 23). This principle is prominent in the call centre industry, where the agents are monitored rigorously to ensure business results are achieved; however, it can be seen that in the process of doing so, the call centre employees experience fear and pressure to perform.

The fourth theme focused on the health and safety issues encountered by the call centre employees. The respondents claimed that the primary health and safety issue they encounter is the constant use of headphones. The call centre job involves interaction with the customer using telephone systems, so the agents must use headphones to talk to customers. The agents are exposed to noise through their headsets or in the background leading to not only

occupational deafness but also vocal strain (OHAG, 2008). The researcher also found that the respondents talked about the impact of using headphones regularly. One respondent shared concern and said she stayed away from talking on her phone after her shift as she had been using headphones during her shift. The respondents also said that the manager on the floor used to shout to finish the call early and alert them of the possible call queues. While health and safety regulations generally focus on personal health, the work environment in call centres is also a significant issue. Most call centres operate in cramped office premises, prone to poor air quality and poor ventilation. OHAG (2008) highlights that employees who work close to others pass on infections to other employees by sneezing and coughing. The report also highlights the workstation and chair design leading to musculoskeletal problems in the back, upper limbs, and neck. Manolche and Teigen (2019) argue that precarious workers have reduced access to health and safety regulations. Poor working and health conditions are characteristics of precarious work (Livanos and Nuñez, 2017). The two theories discussed by Morgan (2006), viz scientific management theory and classical management theory in support of the machine metaphor, have not emphasised the importance of the health and safety of workers in an organisation. Hence, organisations under the influence of the machine metaphor do not consider the health and safety of their employees or workers.

Similarly, although the respondents registered issues related to health and safety concerns, the call centres concerned have not addressed the issues. Some respondents raised concerns that they may not be made to use shared headsets when they return to their office, raising concerns about their health and safety. Especially during the pandemic, the respondents said they were given their own headphones only because of working from home.

The final theme of precarious work that emerged from the data collection was the issues related to remuneration and career. According to Ishtiyaque and Gera (2014), call centres

in India offer employees attractive salaries and other service benefits. However, respondents from both the call centres expressed their reasons for choosing the call centre job though it was not related to their education for some, and some respondents compared their salary with their college friends. They expressed dissatisfaction as they have not been able to earn as much as their peers by working in call centres. Srivastava and Theodor (2017) compared the salary offered to call centre agents and outsourced Indian call centres to the salaries of agents working at a call centre in the United States. It was seen that the Indian call centre agents are paid an average of $2,400 to $4,000 per year compared to the annual salary of a call centre agent in the United States, who gets paid $16,000 to $20,000 per year. The respondents said they could manage their monthly costs with the salary they get paid but could not save for the future. Benach et al. (2014) say that precarious employees generally receive low pay. The earnings of the employees in precarious employment suffice only the requirement to pay rent and buy food (Fouskas, 2018).

According to Sharaf and Rashad (2020), precarious workers lack workplace rights, including the prospect of promotion. Lack of promotion creates a sense of social disadvantage and marginalisation, leading to a low sense of self-worth and depression among employees. A similar case was seen regarding career progression and promotion in the call centres. Career progression in call centres is mapped from the advisor to the manager level. Respondents whose educational qualifications did not correspond to their work in call centres reported that they would not be able to change their careers due to the experience gained and therefore wish to continue in the call centre industry. They did not seem interested in switching careers corresponding to their educational qualifications. Some respondents who have worked in the call centre for over five years said they would progress to the next level soon. In machine

organisations, Morgan (1997) emphasises the bureaucratic structure to achieve the overall goals of the organisation rather than the individual employees.

Similarly, with the scientific management theory, Morgan (2006) focuses on the principles of how work is performed rather than what it takes for the employees to perform the work. The employees are considered tools and instruments in the organisation and are expected to work with reliability, standardisation and productivity. Workers in machine organisations are not allowed or encouraged to think about the process of doing their work. Still, they are expected to follow the routines and procedures the management has devised for them.. It was evident from the respondents that they did not have an opportunity to discuss their career path or remuneration at the respective call centres. Instead, they had to wait for an opportunity for the management to offer progression.

5.2.3 Emotional labour in Indian call centre and the psychic prison metaphor

To analyse emotional labour through the psychic prison metaphor, the researcher has discussed the themes that emerged in detail and then analysed them through the psychic prison metaphor. Theme Six about emotional labour that emerged from the interviews was suppressed emotions. Emotional labour is the effort, planning, and control needed to exhibit accepted organisational emotions during interpersonal conversations (Kinman, 2009). Employees enact emotional labour in voice-to-voice (over the telephone) or face-to-face (in person) job roles. Most employees in customer-facing roles display emotional labour to some extent. During the interviews, the respondents expressed how they suppressed their genuine emotions while talking to customers. Customer service executives are said to be subordinate to their customers as their interactions tend to be routinised and scripted, thus constraining their options for personal emotion (Cho et al., 2017). A similar situation was seen in the call centres, where respondents had no variety in their daily tasks.

[214]

The respondents said they log in to their shifts per their roster or schedule and attend customer calls. To achieve the goal of the customer service job, which is to make customer interactions warm and friendly, the call centre agent suppresses their own emotions due to the emotional display rules set by the organisation. The agents may inform or communicate the emotional display rules through mission statements, staff handbooks, training, and performance appraisals. To achieve the organisational goals, the agents in the call centre do not show their actual emotions while interacting with customers. Even if the customer is angry and shouts at the agents, they need to remain calm and courteous to the customer. A couple of agents said that when a customer is shouting at them, even though they know they are shouting at the company and not at them, they feel very disappointed and upset. The agents do not express their emotions to the customers but control and keep them within themselves. Emotional labour is enacted when the customer shouts at them and when the customer is upset or sad with the company's services. The respondents said they need to empathise and sympathise in such situations even though they do not feel like doing so. As discussed previously, call centre work requires the agents to interact with demanding customers while talking over the phone. According to Wegge et al. (2010), during interaction with the customer, the agents mask boredom, anger, and emotion. The respondents said they must keep calm and composed when talking to customers. Respondents from both call centres said they must remain quiet even if the customer is shouting. The agents in call centres suppress and fake emotions, whether positive or negative. The respondents said they know they express fake emotions while talking to the customer; however, the organisation's standard requires them not to express emotions while interacting with customers. However, suppressing and faking emotions while interacting with customers does not affect the customer. According to Lee et al. (2014), the interaction between the service employees and the customers plays a vital role in assessing service quality.

Additionally, the emotions exhibited by the employees enhance customer satisfaction. When service employees exhibit surface acting, the customers may be reluctant to continue their interaction with the employees. However, call centre interaction involves communication over the telephone; suppressing emotions while sincerely acting with the customers does not impact customer satisfaction as they feel they are treated sincerely. The respondents from both call centres expressed that while doing so, they cannot go on to display the right emotions outside their working environment, especially with family members and friends. A few respondents registered that they had to juggle between emotions when their family members were ill.

Theme Seven that emerged from the interviews was conscious falsification. The agents falsify their emotions and behaviour for the job role's sake. Inigo et al. (2007) argue that workers with occupations in the service sector have to pretend to have emotions which are not felt. Similarly, in call centres, it is evident that the agents pretend to show their emotions to the customer based on the nature of the call. They are aware that the emotions they exhibit are not genuine. The respondents from both call centres said they must smile during every call, even if they don't feel like doing so.

The researcher noticed another aspect of conscious falsification when it was noticed that the respondents in the international call centre providing technical support to customers in the United States falsified their names and accent. Poster (2007) depicts the routine life of a call centre agent in India answering calls from a customer from the United States. The agent, whose job involves pretending to be an American during his shift, talks, thinks and behaves like an American while talking to the customers. Poster (2007, p. 202) mentioned that the agent's supervisor asks the agent to behave similarly during breaks and while talking to colleagues and friends. While acting like an American, the agent's job revolves around four components a)

voice and accent, b) alias, c) practising American conversation skills, and d) practising the use of scripts to answer customer queries. The researcher also found similarities with the components as suggested by Poster. The respondents said they are given voice and accent training to adopt American slang when hired. The agents must also be proficient with their accents before attending customer calls. Respondents said they sometimes use the same accent when talking to their friends. Though the respondent is aware that they should act normally while being outside work, the conscious falsification they exhibit during their eight-hour shift continues for the remaining sixteen hours until their next shift.

Another major issue the agents face is the use of aliases or pseudonyms. To help the customers familiarise themselves with the agent's name, the agents are given American names and mask their real names. Burgess and Connell (2004) say that using pseudonyms to conceal their identities and the obligation to speak in an American accent contributes to a pressurised experience for the agents. The respondents during the interview expressed this to the researcher and said that the falsifying nature makes them a laughing stock among their friends and family. As Poster (2007) said, the respondents also said they practice American conversational skills to depict themselves as answering customer calls from American cities. Some respondents said they use American words like Dollars instead of Rupees while conversing outside work. Some respondents even registered the emotional trauma they had to undergo when customers discovered they were not in the United States.

Theme Eight focuses on how the agents become emotionally despondent due to customer behaviour. Although customer satisfaction plays a vital role in the sustainability of the business, their behaviour towards the agents answering the call makes them unhappy and upset. It is understood that customers want better service irrespective of the nature of the service. Nevertheless, the customers contacting the call centre expect to be treated better and have their

issues resolved during their first interaction of reporting the problem or issue. The respondents from both call centres expressed how the customer's behaviour makes them feel helpless after trying to please and help them. Sharma et al. (2009) argue that there is a greater chance of misunderstanding as outsourced call centres involve telephone interaction between customers and agents from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. The researcher found that the respondents working in the international call centre expressed that they face humiliation and mockery from the customers when they find out it is not an American answering their call. They find the agents' accents different from their own, making it difficult for them to understand what they say. Respondents said they often feel helpless when customers are rude and not ready to talk to them. Some respondents said they had an emotional breakdown when working in international call centres.

The psychic prison metaphor proposed by Morgan (2006, p.207) exhibits a similar feature where "human beings have the knack of getting trapped in the webs of their creation". Morgan argues that the employees in organisations are under the influence of the psychic prison metaphor and become trapped in their ways of thinking. Organisations are socially constructed realities causing harm to the people within. Most people are accountable for locking themselves inside the psychic prison. One of the significant aspects of the psychic prison is that when people are trapped in the socially constructed world, they cannot experience other worlds. In the call centres, the agents must exhibit emotional labour, as with many other types of service work. The agents within the context of Indian call centres are trapped inside the organisations experiencing emotional labour. The call centre agents should ensure they are pleasant and friendly in representing their work organisation. According to Kinman (2009), the significant component of service work is the higher degree of emotional control required to retain a positive customer relationship. Organisations viewed through the organisational metaphors of psychic prison help

predict human beings' nature. Throughout the various research studies on psychic prisons, the organisations cannot take on new perceptions and visualise dramatically different circumstances. Similarly, in the call centres, the researcher found that the respondents consciously perceive the nature of their job and exhibit emotional labour.

According to Junisbai (2022), psychic prison organisations start brainwashing the employees or people within. What the employees witness and are told is quickly registered in their heads. Morgan (2006) argues that the psychic prison metaphor encourages people to think outside the box; however, it can be seen that the very thought of starting to to think outside of the box restricts them . In the context of call centres, how the agents are monitored and controlled can be related to the work of Michael Foucault (2008), who argues that monitoring and surveillance are central features of management in organisations. By creating monitoring and surveillance mechanisms, the management or managers in organisations tend to control the subordinates or employees when they think they have a choice of how they work. The processes in the call centres are seen to be socially constructed, and control is exercised over the call centre agents through group illusions which creates group thinking (Morgan, 2006, p. 211), thus producing conformity.

Similarly, when the respondents exhibited emotional labour in the call centres, the researcher found that they were indirectly asked to do so by the management because of various performance metrics imposed on the agents' day-to-day job roles. Confining in a psychic prison blocks individuality, discourages creativity and restricts people from group thinking. Thus emotional labour enacted by the call centre employees in both the call centres confines them to the organisational setting, not allowing the agent to think otherwise. The researcher thus found that the themes relating to emotional labour that emerged from the interviews - suppressed emotions, conscious falsification and emotionally despondent due to customer behaviour are

[219]

because the agents are trapped by the traditions and methods which have prevailed in the call centre industry since their emergence. Agents do not have an opportunity to change and question the management about why they do what they do and why things are the way they are.

5.3 Revisiting the conceptual framework.

In this section, the researcher has presented the revised conceptual framework based on the validity of the data. The researcher has discussed the research aim, objectives and whether the research questions have been addressed. Based on the data analysis and findings, this section uses metaphors to present the additional factors contributing to precarious work and emotional labour among call centre employees. As a result of the data analysis and the findings, the researcher has been able to explain the research study, thereby making recommendations to explore precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres through organisational metaphors. Chapter 2 presented the review of the literature and the proposed conceptual framework, and Chapters 4 and 5 provided the interpretation and data analysis to assess the conceptual framework. In this section, the researcher seeks to integrate the empirical findings with a literature review and proposed conceptual framework of the Indian call centres through machine and psychic prison metaphors.

To achieve the research aim, the researcher focuses on validating and revising the proposed conceptual framework to explore precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres through organisational metaphors, thus enabling the researcher to present a novel approach. The revised conceptual framework can be used to explore the call centre industry in developed nations and possibly extend to other service sectors.

The interview data analysis revealed the daily precarious work and emotional labour the call centre agents experience as part of their job routine. Based on the findings, additional factors such as inadequate personal and family time, fear and pressure to perform, health and

safety issues, remuneration and career-related issues have been identified for precarious work in Indian call centres. Factors such as suppressed emotions, conscious falsification and emotional despondent due to customer behaviour have been identified regarding emotional labour. The identified factors have been analysed through the organisational metaphors, machine metaphor for precarious work and psychic prison metaphor for emotional labour to validate the research aim and objectives. The changes are illustrated in the revised conceptual framework.

Some respondents expressed the importance and the need to have this job due to their family circumstances even though they experience precarious work and emotional labour. Similarly, other respondents expressed how their lifestyle has changed by working in the call centres, irrespective of their educational background. Morgan (2006) argues that metaphors can be used to develop theories of organisation and management (p.9). He also says that the metaphors can generate complementary and contending insights about the organisation's nature and how they can be designed and managed. Thus, there is a need to analyse the call centre industry through organisational metaphors to understand better the extent to which the call centre agents experience precarious work and emotional labour.

5.3.1 Revisiting the research aim and objectives.

The research aims to explore the precarious work and emotional labour experiences of call centre agents in Indian call centres through the machine and psychic prison as organisational metaphors. The researcher conducted qualitative research in two Indian call centres to achieve the research objectives. The significant research objectives of this research derived from the research aim are:

RO1: To assess the nature of precarious work among call centre agents in Indian call centres and its impact on employees.

The nature of precarious work call centres has been presented in the literature review in Chapter 2 (Section 2.1). Reviewing the literature, the researcher evaluated the dimensions of precarious

work (Section 2.1.1), such as poor working conditions, employment insecurity, income adequacy, lack of rights and protection, and low control over working hours presented in the proposed conceptual framework (Section 2.5). The researcher has also presented the health implications of precarious work.

RO2: To explore aspects of work that cause call centre employees to experience emotional labour and the impact of emotional labour on employees.

Similarly, the researcher reviewed the literature on emotional labour (Section 2.2). The key consequences of emotional labour, namely emotional dissonance, emotional burnout, and emotional exhaustion, were evaluated, reviewed (Section 2.2.1) and presented in the proposed conceptual framework (Section 2.5).

RO3: To examine the precarious work and emotional labour perceptions of call centre employees in India through the organisational metaphors of the machine and psychic prison, respectively.

Based on the data collection and the research findings in Chapter 5, the researcher explored precarious work in Indian call centres through the machine metaphor and emotional labour through the psychic prison metaphor. A thematic analysis was performed to find the key themes from the semi-structured interviews. The themes that emerged from the data analysis have been presented in Table 4.1. In Chapter 4, five themes were generated for precarious work: non-standard work schedule, inadequate personal and family time, fear and pressure to perform, Health and Safety issues, remuneration and career-related issues. The themes have been analysed through the machine metaphor and presented in Chapter 4. Three themes were generated for emotional labour: suppressed emotions, conscious falsification, and emotionally despondent due

to customer behaviour. The three themes have been analysed through the psychic prison metaphor and presented in Chapter 4.

5.3.2 Answering the research questions

RQ1: What is the nature of precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres?

The researcher conducted a critical literature review on precarious work and emotional labour to understand the key aspects. A semi-structured interview was conducted with the call centre agents to test and validate the proposed conceptual framework and make appropriate modifications.

RQ2: How is the precarious work enacted in Indian call centres explored using the machine metaphor?

The research findings concerning precarious work in Indian call centres were explored and analysed using the machine metaphor. Additional factors were identified, some of which were specific to the research context of the Indian call centres. Figure 5.1 below illustrates the key dimensions and additional factors identified in precarious work after analysing through the machine metaphor.
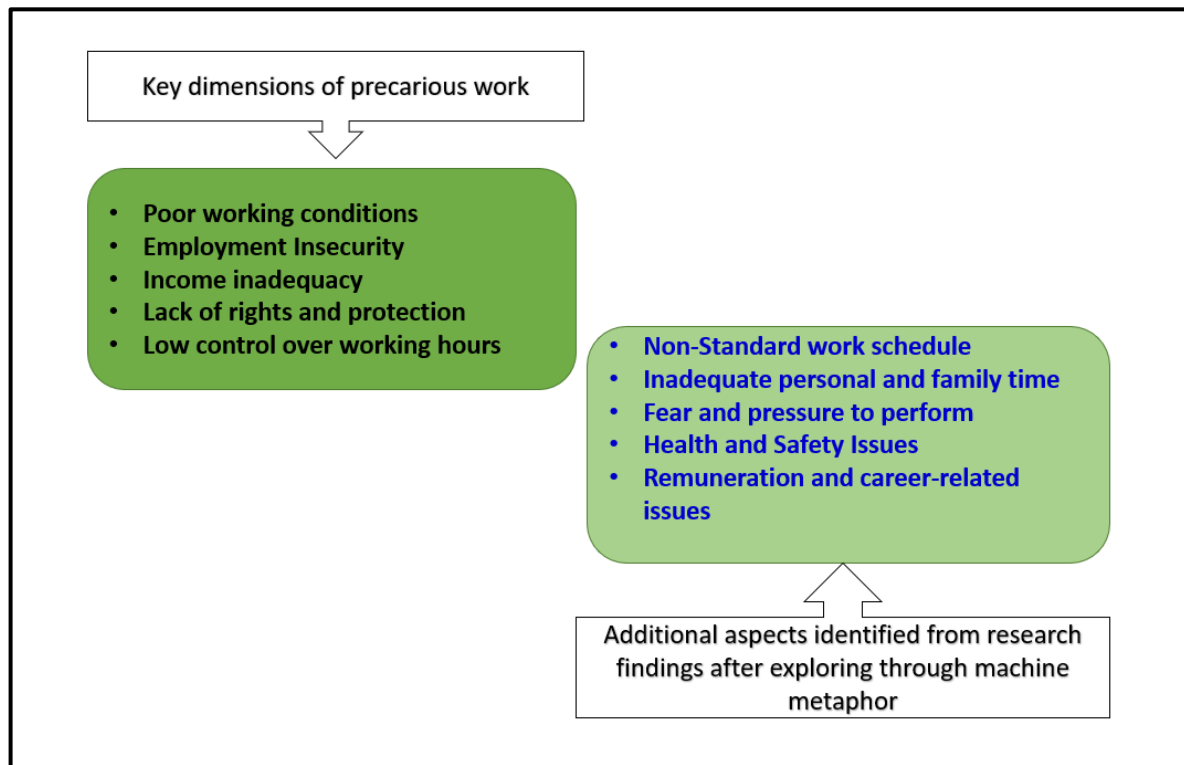
Figure 5.1 Key dimensions and additional factors identified in precarious work after analysing through the machine metaphor

RQ3: How is the emotional labour experienced in Indian call centres explored using the psychic prison metaphor?

The research findings relating to emotional labour in Indian call centres were explored and analysed using the psychic prison metaphor. Additional aspects were identified, some of which were particular to the research context of the Indian call centres. After analysing the psychic prison metaphor, figure 5.2 below illustrates key aspects and additional factors concerning emotional labour.
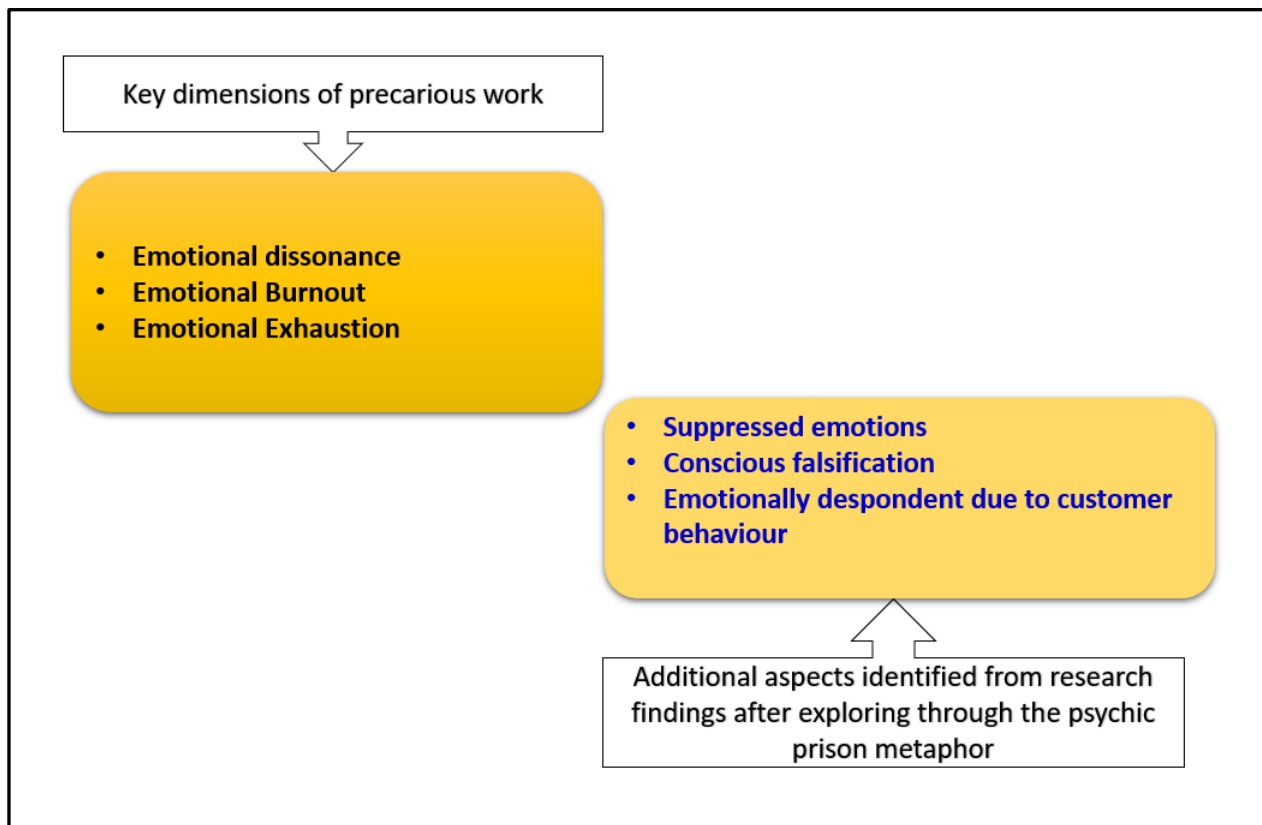
Figure 5.2 Key dimensions and additional factors identified in emotional labour after

analysing through the psychic prison metaphor

5.3.3 Presentation of key aspects after validation and revised conceptual framework

In this section, the researcher has presented the key aspects identified after changes to the proposed framework following the semi-structured interviews conducted with the call centre employees in India. Table 5.3 below presents the changes made to the proposed framework, and the revised conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 5.3, which follows.

Dimension / Concept	Conceptual Structure	Empirical Structure	Outcome (After validation)
Precarious Work	Poor working conditions	Poor working conditions	**Variation:** Additional aspect **Health and safety issues** identified
	Employment insecurity	Employment insecurity	**Variation**: Additional aspect **Fear and pressure to perform** identified
	Income Adequacy	Income Adequacy	**Variation:** Additional aspect of **Remuneration and career-related issues** identified
	Lack of rights and protection	Lack of rights and protection	No significant impact on the call centre employees in India.
	Low Control of working hours	Low Control of working hours	**Variation:** Additional aspects **Non–standard work schedule and inadequate personal and family time** was identified.
Emotional Labour	Emotional Dissonance	Emotional Dissonance	**Variation**: Additional aspect **Conscious falsification** identified
	Emotional Burnout	Emotional Burnout	**Variation**: Additional aspect **Emotionally despondent due to customer behaviour** identified.
	Emotional Exhaustion	Emotional Exhaustion	**Variation**: Additional aspect **suppressed emotion** identified

Table 5.3 Changes made to the revised conceptual framework.

The revised conceptual framework in Figure 5.3 illustrates the key aspects of exploring precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres through organisational metaphors. As discussed earlier, precarious work is explored through the machine metaphor, and emotional labour is explored through the psychic prison metaphor. The main aspects concerning the Indian call centre industry context are also presented, enabling researchers, scholars, and academicians to prioritise and identify the additional aspects of their respective contexts. The

conceptual framework was validated by conducting semi-structured interviews with the employees of two Indian call centres based on the research methodologies and strategies discussed in Chapter 3. This enabled the researcher to analyse the findings using the organisational metaphors and present a revised, authenticated conceptual framework. The framework can be used in different contexts and analysed through organisational metaphors.
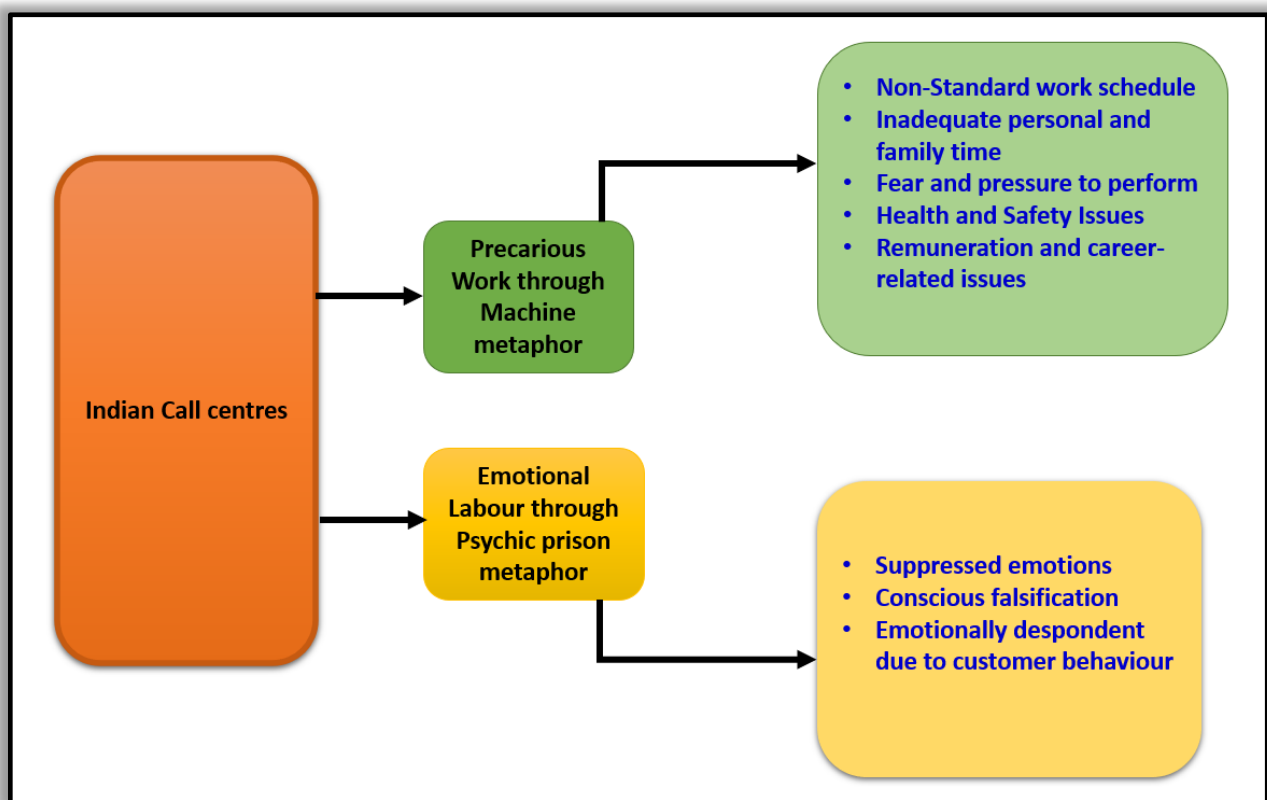
Figure 5.3 Revised conceptual fFramework

As seen in the revised conceptual framework, the key aspects of precarious work and emotional labour that emerged from the findings after analysing the organisational metaphors are specific to the Indian call centre industry. The researcher is satisfied that this validated framework could help academicians and practitioners better understand the call centre industry's precarious work and emotional labour in any context.

5.4 Chapter summary

In this chapter, the researcher has presented the findings and discussion of the data collection from the two Indian call centres. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with employees from two call centres in Chennai, India. The chapter also aimed to validate the proposed conceptual framework in section 2.8. From the research findings, the researcher was able to conceptualise additional factors which differed from the ones presented in the proposed conceptual framework. This chapter also discusses how the researcher has addressed the research aim, objectives, and questions. The revised conceptual framework is presented in section 5.3.3, which has facilitated the researcher to explore the precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres through organisational metaphors. The next chapter discusses the conclusion, limitations, and further research.

CHAPTER 6
RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusion summary of this research study and reflects on the overall process of exploring precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres. In this chapter, the researcher also emphasises how the research aim and objectives have been achieved and how the research questions were addressed. Further sections focus on the research contributions and recommendations for practitioners, the limitation of the research study and recommendations for future research. A summary of the research findings and the outcome of the research study is also presented in this chapter.

6.2 Accomplishing research aim, objectives, and questions

The primary aim of this research study is to explore, through the organisational metaphors, the precarious work and emotional labour in the context of Indian call centres. The researcher employed the machine metaphor to explore precarious work and the psychic prison metaphor to explore emotional labour in Indian call centres. In investigating the current literature on call centres, the researcher understood the need to explore precarious work and emotional labour in the Indian context as most of the current literature on precarious work and emotional labour is based in the context of Western countries, and very few researchers have focused on both precarious work and emotional labour in Asia. In the service sector, precarious work and emotional labour play a significant role which is acknowledged in the existing literature.

Regarding the Indian sub-continent, no significant research has explored precarious work and emotional labour in call centres. Also, the researcher found that no study has focused on analysing precarious work and emotional labour through organisational metaphors. This research study focused on addressing five research objectives and three research questions. Table 6.1 illustrates the research objectives and questions and their corresponding chapters.

[230]

Dimension/Concept	Research objectives	Research Questions	Chapters
Nature, key aspects of precarious work and Emotional labour	RO1: To assess the nature of precarious work among call centre agents in Indian call centres and its impact on employees. RO2: To explore aspects of work that cause call centre employees in India to experience emotional labour and the impact of emotional labour on employees.	RQ1: What is the nature of precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres?	Chapter 2, Chapter 4 & Chapter 5
Exploring Precarious work in Indian call centres through the machine metaphor	RO3: To examine the precarious work and emotional labour perceptions of call centre employees in India through the metaphorical lens of the machine and psychic prison, respectively.	RQ2: How the precarious work enacted in Indian call centres is explored using the machine metaphor?	Chapter 2, Chapter 4 & Chapter 5
Exploring emotional labour in Indian call centres through psychic prison metaphor	RO3: To examine the precarious work and emotional labour perceptions of call centre employees in India through the metaphorical lens of the machine and psychic prison, respectively.	RQ3: How the emotional labour experienced in Indian call centres is explored using the psychic prison metaphor?	Chapter 2, Chapter 4 & Chapter 5

Table 6.1: Illustration of research objectives, questions, and the corresponding chapters.

The researcher conducted a critical literature review to understand the dimensions of precarious work and the key aspects of emotional labour. The critical literature review helped the researcher in developing a proposed conceptual framework. The conceptual framework is presented in Section 2.5.

The first and second research objectives and the first research question addressed the call centre industry's precarious work and emotional labour. The call centre industry is said to be experiencing issues that fall outside the characteristics of standard employment, namely irregular working hours, staggered break times, and continuous performance monitoring. While these factors contribute to precarious work in the call centre industry, various literature and studies on call centres focus on the emotional labour experienced by call centre employees. The researcher focused on the call centre industry's precarious work and emotional labour and presented the theories supporting precarious work and emotional labour. Although scholars have researched and studied precarious work and emotional labour in the call centre industry separately, the researcher could not find a combined study focusing on precarious work and emotional labour, especially in the Indian subcontinent.

Objective three and research questions two and three focus on addressing the main aim of the research study, which is to explore the precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres through an organisational metaphor. Gareth Morgan proposed organisational metaphors to draw attention to organisational behaviour. Morgan initiated using metaphors to study organisations to understand and handle organisational problems. Although the metaphors are not restricted to a specific set of organisation metaphors, Digha (2014) argues that the metaphors can be employed singularly or combined with others to guide the understanding of an organisation and its issues or problems. The researcher also found that there has not been any significant research on the call centre industry using organisational metaphors. While conducting the initial literature review on precarious work and emotion, the researcher could relate the metaphors of the machine and psychic prison to the subject and found it more significant to employ them to explore precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres.

India is a desirable destination for Western companies to outsource their call centre operations because of the low cost and the massive reservoir of literate and fluent English-speaking population. However, from the employee perspective, the call centre agents experience, daily, precarious work and emotional labour as part of the job. The researcher analysed precarious work through the machine metaphor, which has its roots in Max Weber's organisational bureaucracy. In the Indian call centres, where efficiency is guaranteed, work needs to be performed orderly with precise clockwork. However, the researcher noticed that the call centre agents are prone to precarious work to achieve organisational efficiency. The researcher has analysed the precarious work through the machine metaphor. As the interaction in the call centres is by telephone, the call centre agents must exhibit pleasant and acceptable behaviour according to the organisational standards because the call centre agents are the prime point of contact for the customers and the organisations and act as a bridge between them. Hence the agents suppress their emotions to meet the organisational standards while interacting with customers. The researcher could best relate the emotional labour experienced by the call centre agents to the metaphor of psychic prison proposed by Gareth Morgan.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with employees working in two call centres in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. Based on the research findings, the researcher presented the conceptual framework in section 5.3.3. Academicians and researchers can use the conceptual framework in different contexts.

6.3 Summary of the key research findings and Outcomes

The exploration through metaphors has played a pivotal role in understanding the precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres. The significant objectives of the research study are exploring the nature of precarious work and emotional labour experienced by call centre employees through metaphors. The researcher explored precarious work through the

machine metaphor and emotional labour through the psychic prison metaphor. By reviewing the literature on precarious work and emotional labour in call centres, it was noticed that there is a lack of research which would have served as guidance in enhancing the well-being of employees in the Indian call centres. The researcher could not find any relevant literature where the call centres have been analysed through organisational metaphors.

As the aim of the research study does not involve testing hypotheses or necessitating data to fit in any framework, the researcher focused on developing themes of evidence from the research participants to understand precarious work and emotional labour and explore them through metaphors. Table 6.2 illustrates the key findings of the research study.

Research question /concept	Examples	Key Findings
RQ1: What is the nature of precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres?		
Precarious work	*".... As you know we work 24/7, this includes public holidays and festivals also. I will often be rostered to work on public holidays and festival days...as I am unmarried, my manager tries to convince me and say that there are married ladies who need a festival day off." (RESP6)* *The break schedule will be updated daily...so during our break time, we are supposed to go on our breaks as per the schedule.... even during working from home, we must follow the same routine..." (RESP9).* *"......our week offs are not constant.... we get only one week off and every alternate Sunday off...." (RESP3)*	Precarious work in the Indian call centre is primarily related to the non-standard work arrangements that the call centre agents experience. It includes staggered working hours, irregular breaks, work during weeks off and the need to work during public holidays. A poor working environment and low wages also characterise precarious work.
	"...Managing emotions is essential for call centre agents.	

Emotional Labour	*for example, let's say I have a customer shouting at me; I must stay calm and not react to what the customer says...however it does not mean I am turning a deaf ear to them.... I must make sure I do not react to whatever the customer....” (RESP1)* *We must ensure our actual emotions are not shown while talking to customers.* *Our performance is monitored based on how we handle our customer calls. While all calls are recorded, the quality team picks any call-in random to gauge our performance. (RESP 23)*	The call centre employees experience emotional labour as a part of their daily routine. These agents must exhibit emotions of an acceptable level and organisational standard, which also impacts performance monitoring.
*RQ2: How is the precarious work enacted in Indian call centres explored using the machine metaphor?*	
Non-Standard Work schedule	*“....... but the breaks and holiday schedule have seen no changes. It's the same.... we have an intranet where our rosters will be updated every week, including our holidays. The break schedule will be updated daily...so during our break time we are supposed to go on our breaks as per the schedule.... even during working from home we must follow the same routine...” (RESP15)*	Organisations under the influence of the machine metaphor treat their employees as parts of the machine. To keep the machine running, the parts need to function correctly. Similarly, Indian call centres experience a non-standard work schedule to provide uninterrupted customer service.
Inadequate personal and family time	*...I have worked in the call centre industry for ten years, and all my work has been on the night shift. Sometimes, it isn't easy when we cannot support the family when there is a need. We had to shift our house, during which time I could not take holidays. My parents and sister were moving things while I used to sleep. I used to feel bad when my parents were working while I was sleeping.... (RESP30)*	In the machine organisation, employees lose their opportunities for personal growth as they spend more time on work. Likewise, in the Indian call centres, it was seen that the employees were unable to spend quality time with family due to the nature of the job.
Fear and pressure to perform.	*“....... Here everything is monitored, right from the time we log in to the time we log out, adherence to breaks, the average*	The machine metaphor can be linked to the scientific management theory proposed by Frederick Taylor, where worker performance needs to be monitored to

[235]

	talk time, average handling time, after-call work, call quality which includes empathising and sympathising with the customer, providing the right information, call opening and closing, adherence to process, almost everything" ... (RESP11)	ensure work procedures are followed to achieve desired results. In the Indian call centres, the respondents expressed that the constant monitoring systems instil fear in them to perform to exceed the business expectations.
Health and Safety Issues	*"... I have been working in the call centre sector for seven years now, and over the years, my hearing capacity has reduced due to the constant use of headphones. I even checked with an ENT specialist, and I have been advised to stop using the headphone, but I would not want to leave the job in the current scenario. I am checking with my managers if there are any non-voice openings, so I am considered for it...."* (RESP22)	It was seen that organisations under the influence of machine metaphor do not emphasise the health and safety aspects as the vital aim of the organisation is to achieve. Similarly, in the Indian call centre, the employees' health and safety have not been addressed. The main concern most of the respondents had was the use of headphones. The constant use of headphones raised concerns about the health and safety of the call centre employees.
Remuneration and career-related issues	*".... In my opinion, the salary or compensation offered is ok, but it is not too much....... As I said, I am an engineering graduate my classmates, and college mates who graduated along with me earn almost thrice my salary because they are in the IT industry...."* (RESP10)	In machine organisations, workers are allowed to only focus on the job and not on the process involved in doing the job, including remuneration and career progression. Regarding career progression, the employees are made to work in the same role for a significant period before being offered a role change. In the call centres, it was seen that the employees were paid only enough to carry out their daily activities. The respondents registered that they are unable to save anything for the future.

RQ 3: How is the emotional labour experienced in Indian call centres explored using the psychic prison metaphor?

Suppressed emotions.	*"I cannot be in the same state of mind or show my emotions to my customers during the call. Like It was Black Friday for the people, and many perks and cheap deals were given. I made many upgrades, and the customers were happy about the fabulous deals. But I was in terrible distress as I did not know my mother's condition....* *I could not show my feelings to the customer, as our calls were monitored while my mother was ill in hospital; I had an emotional*	In psychic prison organisations, the workers get trapped in the webs of their creation. Similarly, when the Indian call centres are considered, the employees must suppress their emotions and hide them within themselves while attending customer calls.

	breakdown as I could not be with her". (RESP21)	
Conscious falsification	*Our stations have mirrors; we are asked to see ourselves in the mirror and smile while talking to customers. However, I can only smile and answer calls for the first hour of my shift every day. I can't pretend and smile on every call due to the pressure on the calls and the number of calls we handle, and by the end of my shift, I am exhausted physically and emotionally… (RESP 16)*	Employees working in psychic prison organisations are brainwashed, thereby accepting what they witness and what they are being told. In Indian call centres, the employees must smile while answering calls and talking to customers from Western countries. The agents must use accents they learn within one month of training and pseudonyms to help Western customer remember their names quickly.
Emotionally despondent due to customer behaviour	*"It was so upsetting when customers talked to us so rudely and mocked my accent. It took me a lot of time to overcome that trauma, I would say…. I was feeling like I was losing my confidence in such cases."* *(RESP2)*	The core belief underpinning the psychic prison metaphor is that human beings get trapped in their thoughts. In the Indian call centres, it is seen that the call centre agents get disappointed when a customer shouts at them when it is not their fault. Though the respondents know that the customers are not shouting at them, but at their company, they become despondent due to the customers' behaviour.

Table 6.2 Key Findings of the research study

6.5 Research contributions

This section presents the contributions of this research study, focussing on theoretical, practical, and contributions to the general body of knowledge.

6.5.1 Theoretical contributions

This research study helps contribute to the literature relating to precarious work and emotional labour in the Indian call centre industry. The study also contributes to the literature concerning the organisational metaphors proposed by Gareth Morgan, particularly the machine

and the psychic prison metaphors. The research study has the below contributions fo the existing body of literature.

- ➤ The Indian call centre industry is one of the fastest-growing employment sectors, providing many employment opportunities. As a service sector, the industry faces much criticism regarding the nature of the work and job environment. The researcher in this study has explored the nature of precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres through the organisational metaphors of the machine and psychic prison, respectively.

- ➤ The research study has attempted to explore precarious work and emotional labour through the conceptual framework. The framework focuses on the literature on precarious work and emotional labour in the service sector. When analysed through the organisational metaphors of the machine and psychic prison, the revised conceptual framework has offered different insights for future research in the Indian call centre industry.

- ➤ To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this study is the first to employ organisational metaphors to explore precarious work and emotional labour in the Indian call centre industry. Although precarious work and emotional labour are present in almost every service sector irrespective of the location and the type, focusing on them combinedly through the metaphors in the Indian call centres provides a novel approach.

- ➤ The proposed conceptual framework incorporated vital aspects in the literature review, which explored precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres. The revised conceptual framework incorporated the metaphors, namely the machine metaphor for precarious work and the psychic prison metaphor for emotional labour, to understand the Indian call centre industry better. The researcher identified that the Indian call centre

[238]

industry should focus on measures to understand the precarious work and emotional labour experienced by the call centre agents. Hence through this research study, the researcher has tried to enhance how the Indian call centre industry addresses precarious work and emotional labour.

6.5.2 Contributions to the existing body of Literature and Knowledge

This research study contributes to the existing literature in organisational studies by exploring precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres by employing the organisational metaphors proposed by Gareth Morgan to understand the nature of precarious work and emotional labour experienced by call centre employees. Previous research has separately focused on precarious work and emotional labour in call centres and has not considered combining them. Researchers (Walsham, 1991; Kendall and Kendall, 1993; Bhattacharya and Tchouakeu, 2014) have employed organisational metaphors in their studies for different contexts. However, in this research study, the researcher identified that metaphors could also be used to study precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres. There is also a dearth of research articles on organisational metaphors. Hence the researcher believes that this research study will make a significant addition to the existing body of literature and make a specific contribution to research on organisational studies in the Indian call centre industry. This research study also contributes to filling the gap in the existing literature as it offers recommendations and suggestions to employ the organisational metaphor while studying any organisation to offer an intrinsic way to understand the organisation/ sector under study.

Analysis and findings of the research show how precarious work and emotional labour are experienced in the Indian call centres by the call centre agents. The revised conceptual framework shows that the themes from the data collection, when viewed through the

organisational metaphors, vary compared to the proposed conceptual framework, thus providing a vital requirement to employ metaphors while carrying out organisational studies. Below, Table 6.3 provides the taxonomy of the research findings.

Research area	Existing research	Contributions of this research study
Organisational Metaphors	The organisational metaphors were proposed to study organisational behaviours. Researchers have employed metaphors for various contexts. Also, these studies have employed all eight metaphors.	In this study, the researcher focused on employing two metaphors, machine, and psychic prison, on studying the precarious work and emotional labour experienced by call centre employees in India. This is a novel contribution of employing organisational metaphors to explore precarious work and emotional labour. The findings of this research show that employing the organisational metaphors and viewing the industry provides a more focused and in-depth understanding of the research context.
Precarious work	Researchers have studied precarious work in different contexts, including the call centre industry. The studies focus mainly on the nature of precarious work and factors contributing to the call centres' precarious work.	So far, organisational metaphors, particularly the machine metaphor, have not been used to study precarious work. In this study, the researcher focused on employing organisational metaphors, particularly the machine metaphor, on exploring the precarious work experienced by call centre employees in India. The researcher found that employing the machine metaphor contributed to the change in the aspects presented in the proposed conceptual framework.
	Like precarious work, researchers have studied emotional labour in different	Focusing on the psychic prison metaphor to explore emotional labour in Indian call

Emotional labour	contexts, including the call centre industry. These studies focus primarily on the effect and impact of emotional labour, including the detrimental effects of emotional labour.	centres is a novel approach and has not been studied until now. The researcher in this study has explored the emotional labour experienced by the call centre employees in India by employing the organisational metaphor of psychic prison. By employing the organisational metaphor of psychic prison to explore emotional labour, the research has found significant changes to the proposed conceptual framework.

Table 6.3: Taxonomy of research findings

6.6 Research Limitations

The researcher has presented the limitation of the research study from the start to the end of the data collection process. The researcher conducted this research study with the call centre employees in India. Initially, when the researcher progressed to Phase II of her DBA journey in October 2019, she intended to travel to India to conduct interviews among the call centre employees from the two call centres in Chennai, India. However, due to the onset of the pandemic in March 2020 and international travel restrictions, the researcher could not travel. The companies carried on their business-as-usual operations by migrating to working from home. The researcher postponed the data collection process to 2021, hoping the travel restrictions would be lifted by then. With the onset of the second wave of Covid-19, it was still impossible for the researcher to travel. The researcher also faced issues obtaining permission from the organisations for call centre A; the point of contact sadly passed away due to Covid 19. The contact was transferred to a different location in call centre B due to internal organisational restructuring. Also, the researcher had a change to the supervisory team in early November 2021, which delayed the data collection process as a significant revision to the literature review was

recommended. The researcher focused on revising the literature review, which she thought was more important due to the time constraint in completing the thesis, even though permission for data collection was granted in November and December 2021. The organisations were not back to work in their office premises until May 2022, and it was noticed that they had a hybrid working pattern. Hence it was not feasible to conduct face-to-face interviews due to the availability issues of the participants. However, the researcher conducted the interviews via online platforms like Zoom and Google Meet.

This research study was primarily conducted in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. Most of the findings are particular to the call centres in Chennai, and the researcher thinks that the outcome may not suit the entire call centre industry in India or abroad. The researcher believes that this could limit the generalisation of the research outcomes. Hence further study is required to cover other cities in India where call centres operate, such as Bangalore, Pune, New Delhi, and Gurgaon. Although the researcher presented a revised conceptual framework based on validation from data collected and analysed in Indian call centres, it may be difficult to generalise to other nations until it is tested and validated. However, the researcher believes the framework would guide further research in call centres in other countries.

This study used semi-structured online interviews to explore precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres, mainly owing to the travel restrictions due to the pandemic. Although the semi-structured interviews helped the researcher in an exploratory study, the research could have used other approaches. Initially, the researcher planned to conduct an ethnographic study to gain an in-depth understanding of the precarious work and the emotional labour experienced by the call centre employees. However, this was omitted due to the pandemic and work-from-home situation.

Another limitation of the study is that both the call centres are outsourced and not in-house. Therefore, few research outcomes are explicitly for the outsourced call centres. Also, though the call centres provide customer service to banking and internet service-providing companies, the study has not focused on other service-providing call centres. Apart from that, the respondents interviewed answered inbound calls, whereas the call centres also provide outbound and tele calling services. Thus, generalising research outcomes may not be feasible for in-house call centres, which provide other outbound services. The researcher could not perform the data triangulation as the organisations did not consent to provide any relevant sources of information as the communication was via electronic media and not face-to-face.

The other major limitation of this research study relates to the literature review, especially for literature regarding organisational metaphor. The researcher mainly had to focus only on the seminal works of Gareth Morgan as there has not been enough research focused on organisational metaphors. Hence in terms of reviewing the literature on organisational metaphors, the researcher found it difficult to gather as much literature as she would have wished. Similarly, concerning the literature on the call centre industry, much of the research was carried out between 2000 to 2015, when the industry flourished and quite a few after 2015. Not many studies have been carried out in the past decade, which also was challenging for the researcher; however, the insights provided by the research participants and the findings in terms of precarious work and emotional labour experiences of the call centre employees in India in the current study were very similar to those of the studies carried out by researchers like Bain and Taylor,(2000),As-Saber et al (2004), Charbotel et al (2009), Connell and Hannif (2009); Agrawal and Sadhana (2010), Taylor et al.(2013), Jaarsveld and Poster(2013); Zito et al. (2018) Feyerabend et al.(2018). The findings of this research show that employing the organisational

metaphors and analysing the call centre industry provides a more focused and in-depth understanding of the research context.

6.7 Implications for managerial practice

This research study has two vital practical implications. Firstly, employing organisational metaphors to understand precarious work and emotional labour experienced within the call centre industry is essential. Specifically, the call centre industry in India is expanding at the CARG (Compound Annual Growth Rate) of 10.8% and India's size of the global market share is expected to reach US$55.5 Billion by 2029 (Adroit Market Research, 2023). It is crucial to create awareness among the management in Indian call centres to understand the precarious work and emotional labour experienced by the call centre agents. One of the significant features of the call centre industry is the high employee turnover rate, primarily due to the nature of the work and the stress experienced by the employees (Taylor et al., 2013; Feyerabend et al., 2018; Aliyu and Nyadzayo, 2018). Hence, the managers and top management in the call centre industry or similar contexts are advised to mainly support a relaxed working atmosphere for their employees such as lenient working hours, break schedules and holidays, which will support the other vital aspects such as a balance between work and personal life, and a healthy and safe working atmosphere. Secondly, the findings establish that the employees are in constant fear while performing their jobs, including emotional labour aspects such as suppressed emotions and consciously falsifying their emotions and emotions due to customer behaviour. Again, the call centre management should review their operation policies regarding the monitoring processes, which include quantitative and qualitative aspects, to ensure the employees do not experience emotional labour to the extent they are experiencing it currently.

Though the research findings for this study are from the Indian call centres, the researcher strongly believes that the results can be applied to any call centre or service industry,

[244]

irrespective of geographical location, to enhance employee satisfaction, thereby improving the organisation's performance. As a result of the research study, the Indian call centres can benefit from how they are viewed from the employee perspective, thus enabling the organisations to understand and work towards the welfare of the employees.

6.8 Recommendations for practitioners in the call centre industry

Precarious work and emotional labour are common aspects experienced by people in various service sectors. However, in-depth research is always required when organisational studies are considered.

This research study found that call centre employees in India experience daily precarious work and emotional labour. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 5, analysing the organisational metaphor of machine and psychic prison plays a significant role in exploring the precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres. The researcher would like to recommend that the practitioners in Indian call centres, especially the managers and top management, understand and take necessary measures to address the issues the call-handling employees encounter in their job roles to enhance their job satisfaction and well-being. The issues the employees raised, especially regarding non-standard work schedules, fear and pressure to perform, suppressed emotions and emotional despondent due to customer behaviour, must be addressed. For the industry to flourish and develop, the practitioners must invest in employee well-being, such as personal development initiatives like team outings, family get-togethers, and work-life balance for example flexible working hours and sabbaticals.

The call centres could organise monthly meetings with the employees to put forward their requests regarding the issues encountered in their job roles. The management can address the requests or suggestions and ensure the employees are satisfied. However, the researcher believes that the extra motivation from the organisations will help call centre agents

overcome their inhibitions of precarious work and emotional labour and work towards the performance of the organisations and decrease the turnover rate. Also, the researcher would like to recommend that the call centres appoint expert strategic management professionals or consultants who could analyse the organisations occasionally and recommend strategies that would benefit the organisations and employees.

6.9 Recommendations for future research

This research study has contributed to the body of knowledge exploring the precarious work and emotional labour in call centres through organisational metaphors. As this is a novel approach to employing organisational metaphors in Indian call centres, it necessitates a comprehensive discussion and may raise questions to be responded to. Though the study is specific to the Indian call centres, it is evident that the findings and analysis require further research in other contexts. The research study was focused on an employee perspective. Hence, there is a need for further research to focus on the institutional and management perspective as this might further provide a balanced and different insight into the concept of precarious work and emotional labour. In this study, the researcher mainly employed the two metaphors of the machine and psychic prison. The researcher also strongly recommends using other metaphors proposed by Gareth Morgan to study various contexts.

Also, the current research study focussed mainly on the day-to-day experiences of the call centre employees in terms of precarious work and emotional labour. The researcher would also like to recommend that the labour law and the legal implications of work precarity and emotional labour in Indian call centres also can be studied, thus ensuring a social dialogue with the Industry.

The developed conceptual framework for exploring precarious work and emotional labour in Indian call centres through organisational metaphors has been analysed; however, it

[246]

could be applied to different service sectors where precarious work and emotional labour prevail. The researcher would also recommend using mixed-method research, as this study was conducted using the qualitative research method.

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8.0 APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethical approval

Hi Preethi,

Thanks for sending the changes to the Ethics committee. As your supervisor has approved these changes, this Ethics form is now considered APPROVED. I will store a finalised copy of this Ethics form on our central systems. You can now continue with your research.

Kind regards,

Chris

From: Jill Venus <j.venus@uwtsd.ac.uk>
Sent: 11 June 2020 09:23
To: Postgrad Research <pgresearch@uwtsd.ac.uk>
Cc: Preethi Nageswaran (1805231) <1805231@student.uwtsd.ac.uk>; Dr. Amy Takhar <amy_takhar@yahoo.com>
Subject: FW: EC620 NAGESWARAN PREETHI 1805231-APPROVED SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS

Dear Chris

The attached revised PG2 for Preethi Nageswaran is ready for reconsideration by the June Ethics decision cycle.

Regards

Jill

From: Preethi Nageswaran (1805231) <1805231@student.uwtsd.ac.uk>
Sent: 10 June 2020 22:29
To: Postgrad Research <pgresearch@uwtsd.ac.uk>
Cc: Dr. Amy Takhar <amy_takhar@yahoo.com>; Amy Takhar <a.takhar@uwtsd.ac.uk>; Jill Venus <j.venus@uwtsd.ac.uk>
Subject: Re: EC620 NAGESWARAN PREETHI 1805231-APPROVED SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS

Dear team,

Please find attached the revised PG2-Ethical Approval document with the required amendments in red color font as requested.

The following matters highlighted from the previous PG2 document have been addressed as below

- Audio recording of interviews means that personal data (as defined by the Data Protection Act 2018) is being stored, and so section J needs to be filled in accordingly. - Section J has been amended accordingly

- Student should be familiar with the Indian Information Technology Act 2000; risk analysis statement that the research will "bring about a significant change to the industry" is unrealistic and should be modified as this sets unrealistic expectations for the participants. - <mark>Please refer Risk to participants section under Section H (Anticipated Risks) where the unrealistic expectations have been modified</mark>

- Fieldwork in call centres should not commence until local Covid rules state it is safe and permission is granted by the Ethics Committee -
  <mark>Please refer Risks to Investigator section under Section H (Anticipated Risks) where I have mentioned that the fieldwork will not be carried out until local COVID rules state it is safe and permission is granted by the Ethics Committee</mark>

Thanks and Regards

Preethi Nageswaran

Dear Preethi,

Thank you for the submission of the PG2/E1 form to the Ethics Committee regarding your research titled 'Metaphorical View of the call centre: The Psychic Prison – A Qualitative study of Indian Call centres'.

The Committee have given APPROVED SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS to your application subject to the submission of a revised form which addresses the following matters:

- Audio recording of interviews means that personal data (as defined by the Data Protection Act 2018) is being stored, and so section J needs to be filled in accordingly.

- Student should be familiar with the Indian Information Technology Act 2000; risk analysis statement that the research will "bring about a significant change to the industry" is unrealistic and should be modified as this sets unrealistic expectations for the participants.

- Fieldwork in call centres should not commence until local Covid rules state it is safe and permission is granted by the Ethics Committee

Please also ensure that you are aware of, and use, the University's Research Data Management Policy and the extensive resources on the University's Research Data Management web pages (http://uwtsd.ac.uk/library/research-data-management/).

Please make these changes highlighted in red type. Once you have completed the amendments please send to your supervisor to authorise and then send the finalised form to the Postgraduate Research Office. Once this is done, your form will be considered APPROVED and you may continue with your research.

Please do not hesitate to contact this office should you require any further information on this outcome.

Appendix B: Permission to conduct interviews – Call centre A

Preethi Nageswaran (1805231)

From:	███████████████████████████
Sent:	23 November 2021 11:19
To:	Preethi Nageswaran (1805231)
Cc:	███████████████
Subject:	Re: Doctoral Research Fieldwork Access - Preethi Nageswaran

Dear Preethi

We are happy to provide access to you to conduct fieldwork for your doctoral research. Kindly treat this email as our official consent to carry out your interviews with our employees.
███████████████████ copied in this email is our team leader, who can help you to contact our employees. Kindly get in touch with him going further.
Please note that you have to maintain confidentiality of our employees details and any information they share with you during the interviews.

Dear ██████████

As discussed please liaise with your team about the interview they will be attending with Preethi, let them know it will be via zoom.

Appendix C: Permission to conductinterviews – Call centre B

Preethi Nageswaran (1805231)

From:	███████████████
Sent:	07 December 2021 00:33
To:	Preethi Nageswaran (1805231)
Cc:	███████████████
Subject:	Re: Doctoral Research Fieldwork Access - Preethi Nageswaran

> **RHYBUDD:** Deilliodd yr e-bost hwn o du allan i system E-bost Prifysgol Cymru Y Drindod Dewi Sant. Peidiwch ag ateb, na chlicio ar ddolenni nac agor atodiadau oni bai eich bod yn adnabod cyfeiriad e-bost yr anfonwr ac yn gwybod bod y cynnwys yn ddiogel.
> **WARNING:** This email originated from outside University of Wales Trinity Saint David's Email System. Do not reply, click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender's email address and know the content is safe.
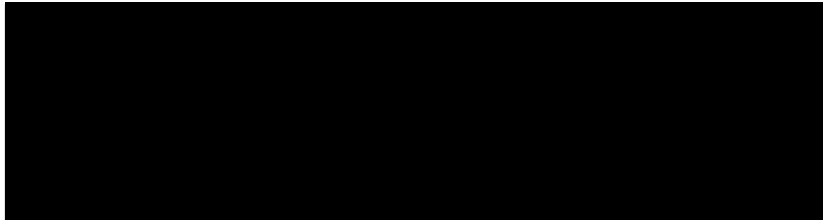
Hi Preethi

Our centre head has agreed to grant you permission to conduct interviews with out employees. I would like to inform that my team work in US shift from 5.30 pm to 2.30 am so I will need your interview time in advance to let them know about the interview.

I would appreciate if you could contact them out of office hours of interview because it will affect our Service level agreement if they are off calls .

I wish you all the best with your studies on behalf of ███████████

████████████████████

Appendix D: Participant information sheet

An exploration through the organisational metaphor: The precarious work and emotional labour experienced by call centre employees in India.
Participant Information Sheet

Dear Participant,

You are invited to take part in this research study. Before you proceed, you must understand why the research is carried out and what it involves. I request you take your time to read the below information carefully and discuss it with others if required. Please feel free to ask me if you need clarification or if you require any more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part in the research or not.

1. What is the purpose of the research?

   The primary purpose of the research activity is to understand the working nature, conditions and environment of the call centre employees in India and how they impact the employees and analyse it through the organisational metaphors.

2. Why have I been chosen?

   You have been chosen because, as a call centre employee/agent or a person in a similar role, you will have the adequate knowledge required by the research for the study purpose.

3. Do I have you take part?

   Participation in the research is voluntary, and you can decide whether to participate. You may withdraw at any time and do not have to provide a reason.

4. What will happen to me if I take part?

   Your involvement would be to participate in an interview with the researcher. The main topic of the discussion will be your experiences and the nature of your job role as a call

centre agent. The discussion will last for a maximum of 45 minutes. You may also wish to agree to a follow-up interview with the researcher to find out more about your experiences or job role. The data collected will be analysed by the researcher independently.

5. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

    Participating in the research is not anticipated to cause disadvantages or discomfort. The information shared will only be used for study purposes by the researcher.

6. How will I benefit from this research?

    The researcher feels that there are no immediate benefits for the participants now; however, you will find the experience of taking part in the interview and sharing your views exciting and interactive.

7. Will my participation in the research be kept confidential?

    All information collected during the research, including the interview recordings, will be strictly confidential. The researcher will take notes on the discussion. Still, any information you provide during the interview will be completely anonymised and combined with the views and experiences of other participants who agree to participate. You will not be identified or identifiable in any reports or publications. Your organisation will also not be identified or identifiable. Data collected will be stored securely in password-protected drives, consistent with the UK data protection act.

8. What will happen to the results of the research?

    The data collected through interviews will be aggregated with the data collected from participants in the interviews. They will be analysed and used to write the thesis by the researcher.

9. What will happen if I do not want to carry on with the research study?

    Suppose you subsequently change your mind about participating after agreeing to participate in the interview. In that case, you can withdraw from the study at any time

(including during or after the interview). Any data collected from you will not be included in the study.

Name and Address of the Researcher:

Preethi Nageswaran
Email: 1805231@student.uwtsd.ac.uk
Mobile: ████████████

Address:
University of Wales Trinity Saint David (London Campus)
Winchester House, 11 Cranmer Road
London SW9 6EJ

PREETHI NAGESWARAN

DBA STUDENT, UNIVERSITY OF WALES TRINITY SAINT DAVID, LONDON CAMPUS

1805231@student.uwtsd.ac.uk

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. Please feel free to ask any questions before the interview if you need any clarification. Also, throughout the interview, you will have the right not to answer any questions you do not want to. You are free to withdraw at any time with or without giving reasons.

Personal background	1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself? 2. How long have you been with the current company? 3. Can you tell me about the educational qualification you currently hold? 4. Does your educational background relate to your job as a call centre agent? 5. Why did you take up this job? 6. Is this your first call centre job? If not, can you tell me about your previous experience working in the call centre industry and your length of service? 7. Can you please tell me about your job? 8. What do you like about your job as a call centre agent? 9. Is there anything which makes you dislike your job?

	1. How do you feel about the current working environment? 2. (Probe: Has anything changed since you joined, what did you expect the job to be like) 3. What are the most critical aspects of your work in a call centre?

[291]

About the job role	4. In your opinion, what are the main priorities while handling customer calls? (Probe: Do you follow scripts/response sets). 5. Personally, how do you feel while talking to customers the whole day? 6. How do you feel at the end of the workday (Physically and emotionally)?

Precariousness	1. Can you please elaborate on your job? (Probe: You can talk about your job status during the probation period) 2. Can you please tell me about your work schedule? 3. Can you please elaborate on your working conditions? ❖ You can talk about your office set-up 4. We could also talk about the break schedule. (Prompt: How often are you allowed to take your breaks) 5. As a call centre agent, can you elaborate on how you are monitored in terms of performance? (Probe: You can share the quantitative and qualitative aspects you are monitored on) 6. Also, can you please share how you are rewarded for your performance?

Emotional Labour	1. Do you generally feel engaged while interacting with customers? (Kindly explain). 2. Do you ever need to manage the feelings you show during the I interactions, and if so, how? 3. How do the behaviours of the customer during interactions affect you?

	• Does it affect your feelings/ well-being? And how
	• Does it affect your efforts to engage with them?
	4. How do you recover from a difficult customer interaction?
	5. Can you explain how you manage or express your feeling in such a situation?
	6. Would you please give a specific example of your feelings at that time?
	(Prompt: How do you control your negative feelings)
	7. What happens to you in typical day that makes you feel satisfied or dissatisfied about working in a call centre?

Do you have any additional comments you would like to share with me?

Thanks a lot for participating in this interview; it was truly very interesting to hear about your job as a call centre agent.

I wish you the best of luck in all your future endeavours.

Appendix F: Interview transcript of the interview with respondent RESP 1

Interview Conversation		Initial Codes Identified
Researcher	Can you tell me a bit about yourself?	
RESP-1	I am …................, I am working as a Senior customer experience advisor at …..….......... I finished my engineering in 2017 and joined this company as a customer experience advisor.	
Researcher	So, I understand this is your first job after completing your studies.	
RESP-1	Yes, I had an opportunity to join the company as soon as I finished my studies. It was off-campus recruitment, the first job offer I got.	Easy to get a job with minimal education
Researcher	That's nice; getting that first job offer is always a dream for a new graduate. Does your educational qualification relate to your job as a customer experience advisor	
RESP-1	(Giggles ….) It does not relate to my studies. I finished my Engineering, which is a technical degree… but a call centre job does not require a technical degree. Anyone with a bachelor's degree and English language skills will be able to work in a call centre.	No Standard educational requirement
Researcher	Ok, if that's the case, is there any specific reason for joining a call centre with your Engineering degree?	
RESP-1	…. Hmmm, yes, my father passed away when I was in my Third year of Engineering; being the eldest child in the family, I was forced to take up a job immediately after completing my studies. Though I applied for IT-related jobs, I appeared for my interview in this call centre and got the job.	Family circumstances
Researcher	I am so sorry about that...Can you please explain your job role?	
RESP-1	Here at …...…................. We handle domestic calls. The customers are banking customers of …................. Bank. They have various banking relationships, including savings, salary, loans, credit cards and fixed deposits. I normally handle calls from banking customers who have queries regarding banking products. When calls are queuing in other departments, the calls are diverted to me and I handle the calls. I am also globally trained, which means I am trained across all other banks' products.	Need to take on additional responsibilities
Researcher	In such times, you feel when you are asked to attend calls from other departments due to the queue. Can you please elaborate?	
RESP-1	Attending calls from customers of other departments is an overload for the agents. This is mainly because of the application we need to use, and the follow-up required for the calls.	Overload on agents
Researcher	Would it be possible for you to explain it further? Maybe you can give me an example of such a situation.	
RESP-1	(Thinks ….) Hmm yes… there are a lot of days when I have faced such situations. When I am mapped to handle global calls, I must open about five to six applications to assist customers. For each banking product, we must refer to different applications. And after every call, we must make call notes. Sometimes, it happens so that when the customer calls again for a query, I will be asked to follow up on the case. In such a situation, I feel overloaded with work as I attend the calls only to kill the queue. But when it comes to me following up with the case and assisting the customer, I sometimes must work over my shift time and finish the work for which I do not get paid extra.	The pressure of using additional applications Overloaded with work which is not relevant Working overtime with no pay/ benefits
Researcher	I understand your situation. My next question to you is, what do you like about your job as call centre agent.	
RESP-1	Initially, when I started to work here as a fresher, I liked many things about this job. The new corporate culture, working on computers in air-conditioned rooms and getting paid a five-figure salary. Everything was like a dream come true. But now that is not the case, to be honest	The good working environment at the beginning
Researcher	Is there anything related to the job role that you liked?	
RESP-1	As such, I knew about the job role as I have one of my cousins working in a call centre, so she used to tell me the Nature of work in a call centre. She said they needed to talk to customers for their entire shift and have their headsets. As I knew the Nature of the job and how the call centre operates, I did not have much hope. I accepted the job role, so if you asked if I liked something about the job, I would like to be neutral.	Routine Nature of job
Researcher	Well, in this case, is there anything which makes you dislike your job?	
RESP-1	I expected this to be your next question (giggles….) ... Yes… the first I must accept that I dislike about the job is the constant use of headphones; there is a time when Even after removing the headphones, I get the customer's voice echoing in my ears. That is something not only me, but all call centre agents also dislike about the job. Well, that is part and parcel of our job so The next thing I dislike is the working hours. We can't say we can't use it. We must provide 24/7 support to the customers; hence we do not have fixed offs, and sometimes I must plan my commitment according to my week offs.	Consequences of using headphones continuously A unanimous feeling of all agents in using headphones Non- Standard working hours Unstable work-life balance
Researcher	So do you mean to say that you do not have fixed working hours or shifts., Can you please elaborate on your hours of work, please. And how about your week offs?	

RESP-1	Yes, of course, at …................... We must support the customer 24/7. However, female agents start their shift at 7:00 am and end by 8:00 pm. So, we will be rostered for any 8hr 15 shift during this time frame. The shift changes every week for us to maintain uniformity. And, our week offs are not constant. As we work only 8hr and 15 min... we get only one week off and every alternate Sunday off. The work hours are 7hrs 30 min, 30 min lunch break and one 15 min break.	Irregular working time No fixed week off Insufficient time on breaks
Researcher	Ok, thanks for telling me about the hours of work. How do you manage your breaks?	
RESP-1	During the day, we are allowed to take 30 min lunch break and 15 min break. It depends on how we take the 45 min break. I normally finish my lunch in 20 mins and take the remaining 10 min as an extra break. So, it is something in a total of 7hr 30 min shifts; I take my first 15 min break after 2 hrs of starting my shift, then a 20 min break for my lunch after the next 2 hours and then another 10 min break.... however, this is just a tentative break structure, when there is call-in queue, we will not be allowed to take breaks.	Staggered break time/non-standard breaks Not allowed break during high call flow
Researcher	Hmmm, understand. Do you feel that this working and break schedule impacts your personal life?	
RESP-1	I must accept that, to some extent, it does affect me because I must plan everything based on my week's offs. It's not only me. My family also must plan according to my week off. Things like my mother's doctor appointments, which are quite important, need to be planned according to my week offs, but the good thing is that the shifts are rostered one week in advance. As far as breaks are considered, we cannot take the lunch and tea break as per my wish. While taking a break, we must check with the supervisor or manager and the call queue. If calls are queuing, we are not allowed to take breaks, which might affect our company's service level agreement with the bank.	Impacting work-life balance No regular weeks off affect family commitments No Freedom in choosing the break time Work pressure affecting break time
Researcher	What do you think are the critical aspects of the call centre job?	
RESP-1	The main thing that we need to follow is punctuality. We must log in at the scheduled time. This is because the scheduling and rosters of the agents are prepared based on the call volumes we received in the previous years. Hence the call volumes are anticipated well in advance, and the weekly rosters are prepared. So, if we do not log in on time, there are chances that the calls might queue, and calls can be abandoned. Such things are very crucial in call centres.	No Flexibility in working schedule Business Impact
Researcher	Are there any other aspects that you can think about?	
RESP-1	Yeah, while attending calls, it is vital that we need to ensure we talk to customers in a calm and composed way. We need to show empathy and sympathy to customers whenever needed. There are situations when the customers get irate and shout at us; in such times, we have to make sure that we need to keep our minds calm and not react to what the customers say (Smiles)	Talking to customers in a calm manner Essentials while talking to customers Not reacting to customers when they are irate
Researcher	Have you ever had an experience that made you question your choice of work in the call centre?	
RESP-1	There is no specific experience, but many instances have made me feel why I chose this career. As you know, we work 24/7, including public holidays and festivals. I will often be rostered to work on public holidays and festival days; it is mainly during these times that I think about why I chose this career. My friends and family will celebrate the festivals, but I will sit at work and talk to my customers. Though the call volumes are not so much during this time, I have the pain of not being with my family. Ideally, the company follows a holiday request schedule, and it's on a first come, first serve basis; imagine we have about 15 teams, and with almost 20 members in each team and by the time I try to put in the request, the option is closed (laughs), and I end up working on holidays. Luckily last two years, 2021 and 2020, I got to celebrate Diwali with family, but again we have lockdown, so not that much of a celebration but to some extent enjoyed it with family.	No Holiday for festivals/ festive seasons Less engagement with family Strict policy for booking holidays Positive Impact of Pandemic
Researcher	I agree; I can understand your state of mind working when all others enjoy themselves at home. While working during the holiday period are you recognised working during the holiday period. I mean, do you get paid extra?	
RESP-1	We don't get paid extra for working during the holiday period. Still, the company used to sponsor our food as a token of appreciation, and we get a compensatory off which we can take any time. But sometimes I feel that it is not something I need, food from the restaurant can be bought anytime, I am not sure of others, but I needed the festive period to spend with family.	No proper recognition for working during holidays The feeling of not being able to be with family
Researcher	I get you; it is always nice to spend time with family, especially during the festive season when everyone gets to be at home and spend quality time. Can you please explain your typical working day?	
RESP-1	I normally reach the office at least 30 minutes earlier to rest and have a coffee before starting my work. Now, as we work from home. I don't have to do that...We are not allowed to bring any eatables or drinks on the floor. We can only have a water bottle with us. As soon as I log in, I get calls, so I make sure I have sufficient time to open all the required applications and During Sundays and holidays, the call volumes are drastically low. ready for the calls. I handle quite about 100 to 120 calls in calls in a day. Then when the shift is over, I log off and leave.	Eating Habits on the shop floor Getting ready for work Large Call Volumes per day
Researcher	100-120 calls per day!! How do you manage, and how do you feel at the end of every day?	

RESP-1	Yes, that's on average; not sure if you know that we have what is called the Average handling time; our the target for the average handling time is 3 min, which means that we have finished the calls within 3 minutes The average handling time is also one of the metrics on which our performances are reviewed. And be ready for the next call. When it comes to the end of the day, I feel exhausted; imagine talking on the phone for 8 hours continuously.... with headphones on ... and this has made me hate talking over my mobile phone. I used to talk to people for hours together during college, but now I can't talk like that with friends and family. I sent a message to my mom once I reached and left work, but now even that is not there as we are working from home. And mostly try to stay away from mobile phones.	Tight deadline to finish the call tired due to the call volumes and use of headphones Result of talking on the phone for long hours Socially disengaged
Researcher	Can you please explain how performance monitoring is carried out in your call centre?	
RESP-1	Haha … I was just checking why this question is still not been asked, as the performance metrics in call centres are very different from any other industry. Here everything is monitored, right from the time we log in to the time we log out, adherence to breaks, the average handling time, after-call work, call quality which includes empathising and sympathising with the customer, providing the right information, call opening and closing, adherence to process, almost everything.	Performance monitored quantitatively Qualitative performance monitoring
Researcher	Would it be possible for you to elaborate on their metrics, please?	
RESP-1	Hmm, let's say I get a call on my phone; I must answer the call within 3 seconds of ringing, or else the call will be transferred to another agent, or the customer will drop the call. In which case I will get a hit on my transfer rate and the abandoned call rates. At call centres, the customer calls should not be abandoned; if abandoned, they will hit the company's service level agreement. Let says I answer the call within 3 sec; I have welcomed the customer with the prescribed welcome script and a smile. If I don't do it and the call gets monitored, I will be marked down on the call opening; if I have opened my call well, I have verified the customer to make sure I am talking to the genuine customer; if I fail on verification, I will say my life is in hell. Verification is very important as we are a banking call centre; after verification, I must ask the customer query; based on the query, I must provide the right information and any requests if needed, if I don't take requests or provide the right information, I will be in soup as it is a bank (giggles). Then I have to offer any products to the customer; if the customer is interested, I must transfer the call to the sales or offer a call back from the sales department, or else I will be marked down. I have closed the call with proper closing emphasising to be thankful to be banking with us. ... again, if this is not proper, I will be marked down.... The calls will be picked randomly for monitoring, so I must stay alert and handle it as my only call, which will be monitored. All these needs to be done with a max of 3 minutes and I should be ready for the next call quite soon... if I am one the after-call work mode for more than 2 minutes. ... I will be questioned ...	Timescale to answer phone and impact if not achieved Need to follow a script Strict monitoring process Need to Provide the right information to the customer Pressure to offer additional services to customer Can't deviate from the process / not allowed to take breaks between calls. Fear of call being monitored
Researcher	I understand the performance metrics are quite strict in call centres; what or how do you feel about such stringent metrics?	
RESP-1	To be honest, these metrics are so tough sometimes. Just imagine, we must always be alert, not knowing which calls will be monitored. When the monthly performance target is not met continuously, the agents will put in a three-month performance improvement plan. At the end of three months, if there is no improvement or the agent is not able to show progress, they will need to leave the company.	Tougher monitoring process fear of being terminated due to poor performance
Researcher	I agree how tough this can be. Can you explain your holiday entitlement? You can also say About your sick leave and sick pay if applicable.	
RESP-1	All permanent agents will get 20 days of leave and five days of sick leave in a year. Both these leaves are paid but anything more than that will incur a loss of pay. Apart from that, we also get compensatory off when we work during a public holiday.... however, some agents have been asked to cut short their holiday and come to work when there is heavy call flow.	No paid sick leave Asked to work during holidays
Researcher	Thanks for the information on your holiday entitlement. Do you generally feel engaged with customers?	

[296]

RESP-1	Engaging with customers is impossible due to the volume of calls we attend and the Nature of the query. However, any new joiner would be told that we must build a rapport with the customer and make them feel welcomed. But, honestly speaking, we don't feel it's just attending calls, answering the query, and closing the call. And on a busy day, when we expect over 80 - 90 calls to attend, I can tell that I can be engaged with the customer for the first hour, but as the day progresses, it is surely not. On very busy days, I must ensure that I attend the call and provide the right information, maintaining my talk time. After all work time, if I don't, my name will be called out to finish the call and get ready for the next call... in the call, I need to focus on my quality aspect and promote sales to the customer.........with all these running in the mind it isn't easy to engage with the customer.	Getting the job done without any engagement Exhausted due to the volume of calls Pressure to get the work done without any involvement
Researcher	ok, that's fine. Do you ever need to manage your emotions during interactions with the customer, if so please elaborate	
RESP-1	yes, of course, Managing emotions is very important for call centre agents; for example, let's say I have a customer who is shouting at me, I must stay calm and not react negatively to the customer's words. However, on the contrary, I am not a person who remains calm when someone shouts at me; however, for the sake of my job, I should ensure that I manage my emotions and do not react to what the customer says.	Hiding actual emotions Displaying fake emotions because of job requirement
Researcher	How does a customer behaviour affect you	
RESP-1	Ideally, I know the customer is not shouting at me but is upset with the bank's services. Though I know that, sometimes It upsets me when I hear harsh words from customers that even my parents have not used at me.	Disappointment due to customer's behaviour
Researcher	I understand how you will feel,...how do you recover from such difficult customer interaction…	
RESP-1	A couple of times, I have had the impact of such calls throughout the day. But most of the time, we should not show our emotions and prepare for the next call. Sometimes when similar situations or calls occur, I remember what happened and feel as to why the customer was harsh to me though it was not my mistake, again it's part and parcel of our life as call centre agents.... so we have to accept it	Faking actual emotions Impact of customer behaviour on agents' emotions
Researcher	Hmm ok, thanks, Can you please tell me how satisfied you are with the compensation package or salary package	
RESP-1	The salary or compensation offered according to me is ok, but it is not too much…..... As I told you, I am an engineering graduate. My classmates and college mates who graduated along with me earn almost thrice my salary because they are in the IT industry. However, although I started working before all of them, I am earning very less. The salary I get is sufficient to meet my daily needs, but I cannot save any money for the future.... My friends who are earning more have already bought cars and houses, But I am still here...	Salary payment not in line with the educational background Salary only sufficient to meet daily needs
Researcher	Hmm, understand…. If that is the case, have you ever felt like leaving this career as a call centre agent,	
RESP-1	Hahahha I would say that's a good question…. Even if I think of leaving this career, I cannot because I passed out in 2017, which is almost five years now. In India, I hope you know that every year about two lakhs of engineering graduates pass from college.... and not everyone gets jobs.... so, I need to shift my career from BPO to the IT industry. I will be asked so many questions about why I did not join IT after my graduation; they will not be able to hire me as I have not been in the industry and that it's a long time since I completed my graduation, and I will not have any IT expertise. So, I have grown within my industry.... and can never think of a career In the IT industry...	fear of existing competition to leave jobs Lack of expertise
Researcher	Yes, I am quite aware of the facts that have been discussed…. Do you have any additional comments that you would like to share with me?	
RESP-1	No	
Researcher	Thanks a lot for participating in this interview; it was truly very interesting to hear what your job as a call centre agent entail. I wish you the best of luck in all your future endeavours	
RESP-1	Many thanks and all the very best !!!	

Appendix G: Snapshot of sub-themes and main themes that emerged from the interviews.

Main themes emerged from the interview

Themes relating to Precarious work					Themes relating to emotional labour		
Theme 1 : Non Standard work schedule	Themes 2 : Inadequate personal and family time	Theme 3: Fear and pressure to perform	Theme 4: Health and Safety Issues	Theme 5 : Remuneration and career related issues	Theme 6: Supressed emotions	Theme 7 : Conscious falsification	Theme 8 : Emotionally despondent due to customer behaviour
Working overtime with no pay/ benefits	Family circumstances	Performance monitored quantitatively	Consequences of using headphone continued	Compensation for daily living	Hiding actual emotions	Displaying fake emotions because of job requirement	Getting job done without any engagement
non-Standard working hours	Impacting work-life balance	Qualitative performance monitoring	Unanimous feeling of all agents in using headphones	fear of existing competion to leave jobs	Faking actual emotions	Use of accent when talking to customer	Impact of customer behaviour on agents' emotions
Irregular working time	No regular weeks off affecting family commitments	Need to follow script	Essentials while talking to customers	Lack of expertise	Displaying emotions	Difficulty in adopting accent...	Losing confidence because of customers behaviour
No fixed week offs	Less engagement with family	Strict monitoring process	Large Call Volmes per day	Salary payment not in line with the eductional background	Hiding the right feelings	Impact of faking accent	Exhausted due to monotonous work
Insuffcient time on breaks	Feeling of not been able to be with family	Need to Provide right information to customer	Tight deadline to finish the call	Fear of gap in the career	Not able to show real emotions and hiding feelings	Requirement to smile when not needed	Disappointment due to customer's behaviour
Staggered break time/ no standard breaks	Peer pressure to take up work	Pressure to offer additional services to customer	Mental tiredness due to call volumes	Peer pressure to take up work	Emotional clash between family and work commitments	affecting feelings	emotional disconnect
Not allowed break during high call flow	Impact of work-life balance	Can't deviate from the process	Impact of talking on the phone for long hours			Faking actual emotions	
No Freedom in choosing the break time	Physical tiredness due to imbalanced work-life	Fear of call being monitored	Timescale to answer phone and impact if not achieved				
Work pressure affecting break time		Tougher monitoring process	Cramped and loud working conditions				
No Holiday for festivals/ festive seasons		fear of being terminated due to poor performance					
Strict policy for booking holidays		Pressure to get the work done without any involvement					
No proper recognition for working during holidays		Additional responsibility					
not allowed to take breaks between calls.		Be in constant engagement with customer					
No paid sick leave		Following scripts					
Asked to work during holidays		No deviation from the process.					
Strict break and work schedules		Monitoring process - strict					
change in lifestyle due to shift patterns		lack of job security					
Strict break and holiday schedules		pressure of constant monitorings					
Not allowed to take additional breaks if missed		Unable to deviate from process and not able to think outside what can be done					
No unplanned leaves / plan holidays or leave in advance.							
Non-flexible leaves							
Need to take additional responsiblities							
Overload on agents							
Pressure of using additional applications							
Overloaded with work which is not relevant							