

OVERVIEW ▼

- ☐ **Listening and discussion**
The future of work
- ☐ **Reading and language**
India: call centres ring the changes
- ☐ **Business skills**
Resolving conflict
Writing: e-mails
- ☐ **Case study**
Delaney: call-centre absenteeism



“A lot of fellows nowadays have a B.A., M.D., or Ph.D. Unfortunately, they don’t have a J.O.B.”

Fats Domino, US musician, singer and songwriter

Listening and discussion



▲ Sean McGuinness,
Business Studies
Lecturer

- A** 5.1 Listen and decide which work pattern each person is talking about. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each? There are two items that you don’t need.

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| a) Seasonal work | e) Self-employment |
| b) Teleworking | f) Shift work |
| c) Casual labour | g) Fixed-term/Temporary contract |
| d) Migrant worker | h) Part-time work |

- B** 5.2 You are going to listen to Sean McGuinness, Business Studies Lecturer at Hammersmith and West London College, talking about the future of work. Do you think the following statements will be true or false? Listen and check your predictions.

- 1 There are fewer permanent contracts in the UK than there were a decade ago.
- 2 The trend is away from self-employment and temporary jobs in the UK.
- 3 People are now staying in their jobs longer.
- 4 There is increasing flexibility in employment contracts.



C 5.3 Listen to the next part of the interview with Sean McGuinness. Put the topics in the order he mentions them.

- Occupations that are experiencing growth
- Development of job enlargement
- Proportion of people using the Internet and e-mail at work
- Recommendations for government employment policy
- Description of the 'hour-glass' economy

D 5.3 Listen again and make notes for each of the five sections in Exercise C.

E Complete the sentences with these words and phrases from the interview.

bargaining power	employment tenure	job stability
middle-management	minimum-wage	mobile workforce
service sector	skilled manual	

- Jobs in the , such as catering and cleaning, are traditionally very low paid.
- The average length of has, surprisingly, increased in the last decade in the UK.
- Some experts predict that the expansion of the European Union will produce a more , with people moving around more for work.
- With the economic downturn and new flexible contracts, there is less than there was a generation ago.
- Will the phenomenon of job enlargement produce a reduction in positions?
- Employees with fewer skills have always had less when it comes to negotiating pay and conditions.
- Fewer workers, like plumbers and electricians, are being trained these days.
- The government has recently introduced new legislation in an attempt to protect salaries.

F Discuss these questions.

- Do you share Sean McGuinness's views about the need for employment legislation? What are the arguments for and against regulating work?
- What are the employment trends in your region/country in terms of a) length of working week b) overtime c) holidays and d) unemployment?
- Do you think there is an acceptable work-life balance in your country or is there a corporate 'work-all-hours' culture?
- Do you think there is likely to be a reduction in the working week in the foreseeable future?

Reading and language


A Look at these factors that affect job satisfaction. Number them in order of importance in your view (1 = very important, 2 = quite important, 3 = not important). What other factors might you consider? Discuss your answers.

- flexible working hours
- friendly work atmosphere
- interesting work
- location
- perks, e.g. company car
- job security
- good pay
- promotion opportunities
- getting on well with the boss
- recognition for work

B What do you think are the main benefits and problems of managing a call centre in India? Read the first two paragraphs of the article on page 45 and check your answers.


C Read the whole article and choose the correct option to complete these sentences.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 Despite significant growth in the sector, a high turnover of staff in India's call centres has led to ... | a) loss of contracts.
b) criticism of its work culture.
c) closure of many call centres. |
| 2 Young workers recruited by a call centre in India ... | a) often leave the job to work in another centre that pays better.
b) often leave, even if they don't have another job to go to.
c) both (a) and (b). |
| 3 As a result of some unfair tactics by competitive call centres, some multinationals are now ... | a) increasing employee count at a faster rate.
b) opening call centres in more remote places.
c) retaining workers with attractive work facilities. |
| 4 Allowing more mature employees to work from home or part-time is another way of ... | a) telecommuting from home.
b) attracting more experienced employees.
c) dealing with the problem of staff turnover. |
| 5 Despite high attrition rates, call centres in India are expected to ... | a) continue to grow.
b) do worse than those in the West.
c) both (a) and (b). |

 Grammar reference: Cohesive devices page 123

D Discuss these questions.

- Do you think that your job will be 'a job for life'? Why (not)?
- Which work sectors are currently experiencing a high turnover of staff in your country? Why do you think that is?
- In what other ways can a company make an unpopular job more attractive in order to retain employees?

 Grammar reference: Using inversion for emphasis page 124

India: Call centres ring the changes

by Edward Luce

1 India's call centres have a lot to answer for, according to the traditionalists. Not only has the booming sector helped spawn a brash new generation of profligate consumers, they say, but its revolving-door work culture is also undermining virtues such as loyalty, hierarchy, patience and discipline. Such anxieties might appear futile in view of the fact the sector has almost quadrupled its headcount in the past three years to more than 350,000 employees and looks set to continue expanding at 50 per cent a year.

2 Such concerns are also becoming the chief headache of Indian call-centre managers. Attrition rates, particularly in the larger hubs of Bangalore, Delhi and Mumbai, have jumped to more than 50 per cent a year in the past 18 months. This is still comfortably below the worst rates in western centres, where it could exceed 100 per cent. It is now posing serious challenges to India's increasingly stretched human resource managers. 'Until very recently, India had a culture where you took a job for life and never dreamed of leaving it unless you had a firm counter-offer,' says Noni Chawla, a management consultant and headhunter in Delhi. 'But these young call-centre workers think nothing of taking a job, doing four weeks of training and leaving without anything else in the bag.'

3 There is an economic logic to such restlessness, however. In spite of India's unmatched supply of English-speaking graduates – roughly 2.5m a year graduate in India, most of them with some level of English – the industry's rate of expansion has meant that demand has often outstripped supply. This is particularly true of the more established centres. 'I would advise companies that are setting up in India to avoid Bangalore in particular,' says Paul Davies, managing director of Onshore Offshore, a UK-based consultancy. 'There is a circuit where new companies come in and poach employees at higher salaries.'

4 One solution has been for companies to choose more isolated locations – as HSBC has recently done, when it opened a call centre on the coast of Andhra Pradesh. India has more than 50 towns with a population of 500,000 or more. Nevertheless, the strategy has its risks. One multinational that recently opened a centre in the Rajasthan capital of Jaipur has found it hard to boost its employee count at the pace it would wish. 'India has a lot of English speakers, but investors should not overestimate the number that are ready to work,' said Raju Bhatnagar, president of ICICI OneSource, an Indian third-party call centre, with 4,200 employees in Bangalore and Mumbai. 'It is probably better to face problems of attrition than of shortage of supply.'



5 Another remedy, which has taken on increasingly bizarre forms, is to make the workplace more attractive. Some companies have introduced salsa classes. Others have moved to multi-cuisine canteens. Almost all have on-site recreational facilities, such as football tables and cafés, albeit with limited success. 'You can only really attract people with such gimmicks,' says Mr Chawla. 'Retaining them is a different matter.'

6 More seriously, companies are also becoming more alert to dealing with employee trauma, particularly for those who work on the telephone, for example abusive calls. 'All 10 calls are recorded, so we sit everyone around and replay it and ask everybody to suggest where it could have been better handled,' says Mr Bhatnagar. 'It helps the employee realise that it was nothing personal. In fact, only about 1 per cent of calls are abusive and training can do much to help.' The typical Indian response to anger is to fall silent, which only makes the Western customer worse,'

says Mr Davies. 'But they learn very quickly.'

7 Another solution – still in its infancy – is to hire part-time older employees, including housewives, and to allow them to telecommute from home. About 80 per cent of India's call-centre employees are aged between 20 and 25 and do not consider the industry to be a long-term career.

8 Another option, which one company is considering, is to open a call centre on campus and allow students to drop in and out and work part-time. 'The more flexible we can be, the more likely the employees are to stick around,' said a human-resources manager in Delhi.

9 Ultimately, though, there is not much companies can do to surmount the two core problems: that very few people like to sleep during the day and work at night (the permanent 'jet-lag syndrome') and that, in spite of some of the more glamorous-sounding outgrowths, most work in call centres is repetitive and is likely to remain so.

At the same time, there is little to suggest the problem of an inherently footloose workforce will pose a mortal threat to India's continued expansion. 'Call-centre attrition is a universal problem,' says Mr Bhatnagar. 'It has got worse in India, but not nearly to the extent you would see in the West.'

FINANCIAL TIMES

Business skills**Resolving conflict**

A Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Discuss your answers.

- Conflict isn't necessarily a bad thing.
- It's best to keep things rational when there's a conflict rather than show your emotions.
- The most common kind of workplace conflict is between colleagues of the same grade.



B Look at this checklist of techniques used to deal with conflict. Which do you most often use? Which get the best/worst results? What other techniques have you used or seen used?

Conflict resolution techniques	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever
Avoid the person or issue			
Change the subject			
Get an 'independent' mediator			
Admit you are wrong, even if you think you're not			
Turn the tension into a joke			
Work towards a mutually acceptable solution			
Apologise and give in			
Try to understand the other person's perspective			
Identify exactly what you agree or disagree on			
Complain until you get what you want			

C Read this description of communication problems. Do you consider yourself to be a good listener? How do you show other people you're listening to them?

According to Roger Fisher and William Ury in their book *Getting to Yes*, there are three major problems in communication: Firstly, people may not be talking to each other. Frequently each side has given up on the other and is no longer attempting any serious communication. Secondly, people don't pay enough attention to what other people say. Then there are misunderstandings which are compounded when people speak different languages.

The solution they propose is to listen actively; acknowledge what is being said and question your assumptions. Understanding is not agreeing, but unless you can show that you grasp how the other person sees things, you may be unable to explain your point of view to them. You therefore maximise the chance of having a constructive dialogue.

D 5.4 Listen to a conversation between two work colleagues. What techniques does Terry use to show he's listening actively to Yolanda? How would you resolve their situation?

Useful language

Active listening, paraphrasing and checking understanding

Let me see if I follow you. You're saying that ...
 From your point of view, the situation looks like this ...
 Do I understand correctly that what you're saying is ...?
 OK, let me make sure I understand you. You say that ... Have I got that right?
 I'm sorry, I missed that. Could you please repeat it?
 I'm not sure I follow/understand you. Could you say that again?
 Please go on.
 I appreciate how you feel.
 I can see why you feel that way.
 Yes, you have a point when you say ... and here's how it looks from my angle ...

E Role-play. Read your information and try to resolve the conflicts with your partner.

Student A: Turn to page 145.

Student B: Turn to page 152.

F 5.5 How would you answer these questions? Listen to Rob Giardina. Does he mention the same points as you?

- 1 Why are there sometimes problems and misunderstandings when people write e-mails to each other?
- 2 What can you do to avoid these misunderstandings?
- 3 What can you do to solve the problem when there's obviously a conflict?

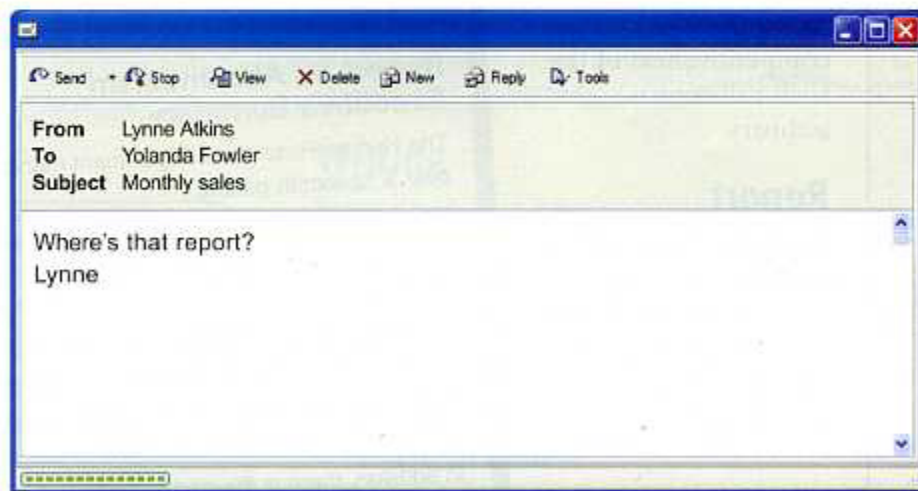


▲ Rob Giardina,
international
communications
consultant



Writing: e-mails

G You're very busy at work at the moment and haven't had time to finish the monthly sales report. Read this e-mail from your manager and write a reply.



➡ Writing file page 135