A Study on Call Center Callers' Job Attitude and Turnover Intention

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ABSTRACT

The importance and the value of call center callers are increasing since they play very crucial roles as representatives of their companies at the closest contact point with customers. However, they have low satisfaction at work and are more likely to leave their jobs due to the fact that they are exhausted from heavy work load; they provide less pay and less chance for promotion than other jobs in the same industry. The high turnover costs companies high expenses on finding and training new callers. In the mean time, customer satisfaction may drop and it can give the customers negative image of the company. Therefore, solutions are required to keep the turnover of call center callers to the minimum. In this study, call center employees in Gwangju area were investigated for their job attitude and turnover intention. Based on the results, several implications are suggested.

Keywords: Call center, Caller, Job Attitude, Job Characteristics, Job Satisfaction, Job Stress, Turnover Intention.

1. INTRODUCTION

Call center is a company's on-line or off-line channel of communication that provides information and takes inquiries or complaints from customers. It exists in many different forms according to types of industries such as customer service center, consumer counseling center, consumer protection center and it has been spreading to all other industries including public organizations.

According to the style of management of the call center, call centers can be grouped into in-house call center that is directly run by the company or the organization and outhouse (outsourcing) call center that is run by an agency outside the company. Depending on who makes the calls, they can be sub-divided into inbound call center that customers call in and talk about their problems and outbound call center that call center makes the call for marketing and making profits.

Originally, call centers were started and developed by financial businesses and retail businesses, but in these days manufacturing businesses are showing a great interest in adopting the call center that will mainly deal with durable consumer goods.

Call centers don't just give simple responses to customers, but they are turning into profit centers and the customer contact centers that are pathways of communication between companies and other departments in the company [1]. As the communication between customers and companies is becoming more active, the significance of a call center is increasing as a gateway for customers to the company. E-CRM, which is connected to the Internet, has been the desperate marketing strategy of all companies and VoIP-based IPCC (Internet Protocol Contact Center) has been also spreading quickly.

The scale of call center industry in 2007 is speculated to be 10 trillion won. The number of call centers was about 2,500 in 2007 and it is expected to increase up to 3,000 by the end of 2008. The number of call center callers in Korea is estimated to be 300,000 and by 2008, the number is expected to increase to 400,000 [1].

Call centers create jobs (300-500 employees at one call center) and have ripple effect on the community (15 billion won from one call center). For this reason, local governments are competing to locate call centers in their areas. As of January 2006, Gwangju located 21 call centers and took 4,348 seats; Daegu located 18 call centers and took 2,868 seats; Busan located 31 call centers and took 7,212 seats [1].

As for the demand and supply of the labor at call centers, the demand is greater than the supply (see table 1).

Table 1. Supply and demand of call center human power

Unit: 10 thousand people

		'02	'03	'04	'05	'06	Unbalance Rate
Callers	Supply	15	18	22	28	36	53.6%
	Demand	30	36	43	51	62	
Staffs	Supply	3	3.6	4.3	5	6.2	64.1%
	Demand	4.6	5.5	7	7.9	9.5	

Source: http://www.callcenter.or.kr [22]

Nevertheless, the job is known to have the highest turnover rate. According to the research done at University of Purdue (2001), the turnover-related expenses take up 10.5 percent of the total budget for a call center, which means high turnover rate is an important issue [2]. Such turnover rate doesn't just result in high expenses, but it also brings negative images of the company when inexperienced, newly- employed callers don't handle customer's inquiries well and lower the satisfaction of customers.

For this reason, defensive measures should be taken to minimize the turnover rate, but there are not many reliable researches on that [2]. This study tries to derive some helpful implications by investigating the attitude of call center callers at work and their intention to leave their jobs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Turnover Intention

The term, turnover, refers to changing to a different job; there are two types of turnover: voluntary and involuntary turnover. Voluntary turnover may be due to dissatisfaction at work, or due to better job offers, or other personal reasons; it should matter more to the management of call center callers than involuntary turnover that is forced by the company or by the manager.

The most predictable yet important cause for turnover is their intention to leave their jobs [3]. Since having such intention can have negative influence on other employees, this study focuses on the voluntary intention for changing jobs.

2.2 Antecedents of Turnover Intention

In preceding study, the influencing factor to voluntary turnover intention is suggested diversely. The study on the relation between the work and the turnover intention revealed that job characteristics have influence on callers to transfer to another department; and their intention to transfer to another department has influence on them to change their jobs [4].

Job satisfaction is an indicator for turnover intention [5]; when callers have low satisfaction with their jobs, they look for different jobs with turnover intention while high satisfaction has a positive effect on the productivity [6]-[8].

Commitment to their company comes from a strong desire to stay with the company and from the intention to work for the company [9]. Many study results show that strong commitment to a company reduces the turnover intention [10]-[12].

Besides, many researchers have proven that work-related stress has a huge impact on turnover intention [13], [14].

Reasonable work stress helps members of an organization by promoting personal achievements; however, extreme stress causes anxiety and nervous breakdown resulting in indifference to work and intention to leave the job.

People with high self-efficacy have healthy and positive mentality and self-concept, so they try to interpret stressful stimuli as positive inputs [15]. Callers with high self-efficacy can work out the ambiguity of their roles; therefore their satisfaction with work goes up and their intention for turnover goes down [16].

3. SURVEY METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Collection

Survey on call center callers in Gwangju area was taken for 10 days from January 6th to 16th in 2006. Ten companies gave consent to the survey and 251 people (32.8%) out of all 765 callers responded to the survey.

3.2 The Definition of Variables

To clarify all variables used in the questionnaire, definitions and measurements of each variable were listed in Table 2 based on existing literatures [9], [17]-[21].

Table 2. The definitions and measurements of variables

Variables	Operational Definition	Measure-ment	Reference
Job characteristics	Level of skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback	5 items	Hackman & Oldman (1975)
Job satisfaction	Level of satisfaction from job experience (either during or after the work process)	14 items	Hackman & Oldman (1975)
Organizational commitment	Sense of belongingness to the organization and the willingness for commitment	3 items	Porter et.al. (1974)
Job stress	Level of stress due to the discrepancy at work	2 items	Fox et.al. (2001)
Self-efficacy	Degree of self-confidence in given tasks	3 items	Sherer & Adams (1983)
Turnover intention	Intention to leave the current job	2 items	Parasuraman et.al. (1982)

Table 3. Demographic profile of respondents

Items		Frequency	Items		Frequency
Age	20~25	44(17.5)	Job Career (Year)	< 0.6	75(29.9)
	26~30	144(57.4)		0.6~1	35(13.9)
	31~35	48(19.1)		1~2	45(17.9)
	> 36	15(6.0)		2~3	55(21.9)
Marital status	Married	74(29.5)		3~4	28(11.2)
	single	177(70.5)		> 4	13(5.2)
Education	high school	50(19.9)	Job Change Frequency	0	66(26.3)
	college	116(46.2)		1	58 (23.1)
	university	83(33.1)		2	88(35.1)
	graduate school	2(0.8)		> 3	38(15.1)
				void	1(0.4)
Forms of Employment	regular job	146(58.2)	Monthly pay (10 thousand won)	< 70	2(0.8)
	non-regular job (full time)	95(37.8)		70~90	26(10.4)
	non-regular job (part time)	8(3.2)		91~110	110(43.8)
				111~130	68(27.1)
	void	2(0.8)		131~150	26(10.4)
				> 151	13(5.2)
				void	6(2.4)

4. ANALYSIS

4.1 Demography

Table 3 shows the general situations of the respondents.

First, the range of callers' age: People between 26 and 30 were the majority (57.4%) followed by the age group between 31 to 35 (19.1%) and younger age group between 20 to 25 (17.5%). People who are over 35 years old took up 6 percent. In other words, majority of callers (74.9%) were in their 20's, and specifically in their late 20's rather than in early 20's.

Second, marital status: Single people (70.5%) exceeded married callers (29.5%).

Third, educational background: College graduates were the greatest in number (46.2%). University graduates were next (33.1%). High school graduates were 19.9 percent and there was hardly anyone who had gone to graduate school (0.8%).

Forth, type of employment: The number of permanent full-time employees (58.2%) was slightly higher than that of temporary employees (41.0%).

Fifth, work history: People who had been working less than 6 months were the largest group in number (29.9%) and people who had been working less than a year were 13.9 percent. This reflects the characteristic of the job with high turnover rate.

Sixth, frequency of changing jobs: People who had changed jobs 2 times were leading by 35.1 percent followed by the group of people who had changed jobs once (23.1%). People who had changed their jobs 3 times were 15.1 percent. Overall, 73.3 percent of the callers had changed their jobs, which shows that the caller position has higher frequency of changing jobs than other positions.

Seventh, monthly income (basic salary + bonus): The group who were getting 0.91 million ~ 1.1 million won was 43.8 percent, and people who were getting 1.11 ~ 1.3 million won was 27.1 percent. When it converted to yearly salary, they were getting paid around 11 ~ 13 million won a year. Considering that more than 80 percent of the callers had at least associate degrees and they were working for large corporations, their salary was very low in comparison to other jobs. On the other hand, people who were getting paid less than 0.9 million won a month were 11.2 percent, and they seemed to be new

employees under probation for 6 months and part-time employees among temporary workers. People who were getting paid more than 1.3 million won were 15.7 percent and they were more likely to be out-bound callers or staff members.

4.2 Job Characteristics

Survey on the awareness of their core job characteristics was done in 5 categories which had been suggested by [2]-[3]: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback from the job. 53.4 percent of the respondents said that the knowledge and techniques that their job requires are too complicated. 77.7 percent of the respondents said their positions are indispensable for the company and quite a few respondents considered their jobs are meaningful and significant. 69.0 percent of the respondents recognized that they have the full responsibility to handle customer's calls from start to finish. As for the flexibility in the process of job execution, 77.3 percent of the respondents said they don't have the autonomy, while 48.6 percent said they were getting positive feedbacks about their performance.

Table 4. Perception of job characteristics

	Skill variety	Task identity	Task significance	Autonomy	Feedback
Strong Denial	6(2.4)	1(0.4)	-	84(33.5)	1(0.4)
Denial	43(17.1)	24(9.6)	9(3.6)	110(43.8)	30(12.0)
Normal	68(27.1)	53(21.1)	47(18.7)	42(16.7)	98(39.0)
Agree	108(43.0)	143(57.0)	127(50.6)	15(6.0)	111(44.2)
Strong Agree	26(10.4)	30(12.0)	68(27.1)	-	11(4.4)

4.3 Job Satisfaction

4.3.1 Satisfaction with the Job itself: When asked about their satisfaction level with the job itself, 39.1 percent of the respondents said the job is interesting and worth taking the challenge, but 19.5 percent of the respondents were the opposite. 44.7 percent of the respondents said they feel a sense of achievement, while 14.3 percent said they don't. 73.3 percent of the respondents viewed their jobs valuable for meeting the needs of customers at the closest contact point, while 8.4 percent were negative. 41.0 percent of the respondents were satisfied with their overall jobs, but 14.3 percent weren't.

Table 5. Degree of job satisfaction (1)

	Interesting & Challenge	Achievement	Value	Overall Job Satisfaction
Strong Denial	6(2.4)	3(1.2)	2(0.8)	3(1.2)
Denial	43(17.1)	33(13.1)	19(7.6)	33(13.1)
Normal	104(41.4)	103(41.0)	46(18.3)	112(44.6)
Agree	84(33.5)	94(37.5)	135(53.8)	98(39.0)
Strong Agree	14(5.6)	18(7.2)	49(19.5)	5(2.0)

4.3.2 Satisfaction with Benefits, Pay, Training, and

Relationship at Work: When asked about their level of satisfaction with benefits, 46.3 percent of the respondents said they are unsatisfied, while 15.5 percent said they are satisfied. When specifically asked, 60.5 percent of the respondents were unsatisfied with their pay, and only 8.4 percent said their pay is satisfactory. As for the work-related training and development, 39.9 percent of the respondents said they are unsatisfied, while 14.3 percent said they are satisfied. 84.1 percent of the respondents said coworkers help each other when they encounter problems at work, and 78.8 percent said their supervisors usually provide necessary information for them to carry out their counseling jobs successfully.

Table 6. Degree of job satisfaction (2)

	Benefits	Pays	Training	Relationship with	
				Peers	Supervisors
Strong Denial	25(10.0)	42(16.7)	14(5.6)	0(0.0)	3(1.2)
Denial	91(36.3)	110(43.8)	86(34.3)	7(2.8)	12(4.8)
Normal	95(37.8)	78(31.1)	115(45.8)	33(13.1)	38(15.1)
Agree	39(15.5)	20(8.0)	35(13.9)	184(73.3)	165(65.7)
Strong Agree	0(0.0)	1(0.4)	1(0.4)	27(10.8)	33(13.1)
Void	1(0.4)	-	-	-	-

4.3.3 Satisfaction with Promotion System, Work Environment, Work Hours, and Work Life: 29.9 percent of the respondents said promotion is done in a fairly good manner, but 21.1 percent disagreed. 39.1 percent of the respondents were satisfied with their working environment (lighting, room temperature, noise and etc.) while 22.3 percent said they are not satisfied. When asked about their satisfaction with their working hours, 39.5 percent of the respondents said they are unsatisfied, while 26.3 percent said they are satisfied with their working hours. As for their overall satisfaction with their work life, 36.3 percent of the respondents were satisfied, but 15.9 percent weren't.

Table 7. Degree of job satisfaction (3)

	Promotion System	Work Environment	Working Hours	Work Life
Strong Denial	15(6.0)	8(3.2)	14(5.6)	3(1.2)
Denial	38(15.1)	48(19.1)	85(33.9)	37(14.7)
Normal	122(48.6)	97(38.6)	86(34.3)	120(47.8)
Agree	71(28.3)	92(36.7)	61(24.3)	88(35.1)
Strong Agree	4(1.6)	6(2.4)	5(2.0)	3(1.2)
Void	1(0.4)	-	-	-

4.4 Organizational Commitment

When asked if they identify themselves with the company, 31.5 percent of the respondents said they do, while 34.3 percent said they don't. 41.4 percent of the respondents were willing to devote themselves for the success of their company, while 17.9 percent did not care. 22.3 percent of the respondents said that they will continue to work for their company even when the company is going through financial difficulties, while 34.7

percent said they will move to a different job. This shows that majority of respondents have no desire to work for their company in the long term and are more likely to defect their jobs at one point.

Table 8. Degree of organizational commitment

	Identify themselves	Devote themselves	Continue to Work
Strong Denial	12(4.8)	4(1.6)	23(9.2)
Denial	74(29.5)	41(16.3)	64(25.5)
Normal	86(34.3)	102(40.6)	108(43.0)
Agree	78(31.1)	101(40.2)	54(21.5)
Strong Agree	1(0.4)	3(1.2)	2(0.8)

4.5 Self-efficacy

44.6 percent of the respondents said they are well equipped with the knowledge and techniques to carry out counseling, while 20.7 percent said they aren't. 30.7 percent of the respondents considered themselves as professionals, while 33.9 percent said they are not. 35.1 percent said they are average. The results show that almost 70.0 percent of the respondents lack confidence in their qualifications regarding the counseling profession. When asked if they can handle unexpected problems well, 31.1 percent of the respondents said they can; 19.9 percent said they can't; 48.6 percent said they are average.

Table 9. Degree of self-efficacy

	Well Equipped with Knowledge & Technique	Confidence as a Professional	Problem-Solving Skills
Strong Denial	3(1.2)	8(3.2)	2(0.8)
Denial	49(19.5)	77(30.7)	48(19.1)
Normal	86(34.3)	88(35.1)	122(48.6)
Agree	105(41.8)	74(29.5)	73(29.1)
Strong Agree	7(2.8)	3(1.2)	5(2.0)
Void	1(0.4)	1(0.4)	1(0.4)

4.6 Job Stress

As for the workload, 60.5 percent of the respondents said they have too much work and don't have time for breaks, while 14.7 percent said they are not overloaded with work. From this result, we can predict that more than 60.0 percent of the callers can be stressed out from their work. When asked about other work-related stress, 26.7 percent of the respondents said that role ambiguity is the source of job stress and 22.7 percent disagreed.

Table 10. Degree of job stress

	Overload	Role Ambiguity
Strong Denial	34(13.5)	4(1.6)
Denial	3(1.2)	53(21.1)
Normal	61(24.3)	126(50.2)
Agree	104(41.4)	64(25.5)
Strong Agree	48(19.1)	3(1.2)
Void	1(0.4)	1(0.4)

4.7 Turnover Intention

34.3 percent of the respondents said they have been considering submitting a letter of resignation, but 37.1 percent said they haven't. 28.7 percent said they will defer their decision. 33.5 percent of the respondents said they will move to a different job right away if they are offered higher pay, while 33.1 percent said they won't. The rest (33.5%) had reservations. From these two outcomes, one third of the respondents had intention to leave their jobs and would move to different jobs if they got a good chance.

Table 11. Degree of turnover intention

	Considering Resignation	Intention to leave their Jobs
Strong Denial	27(10.8)	16(6.4)
Denial	66(26.3)	67(26.7)
Normal	72(28.7)	84(33.5)
Agree	76(30.3)	56(22.3)
Strong Agree	10(4.0)	28(11.2)

When asked about their specific plans for work, 33.1 percent of the respondents said they will keep working for 2 or 3 years; 18.3 percent said they will stay on the job continuously; 11.5 percent said they will change jobs when they have better alternatives; 6.0 percent said they are working temporarily (less than 6 months).
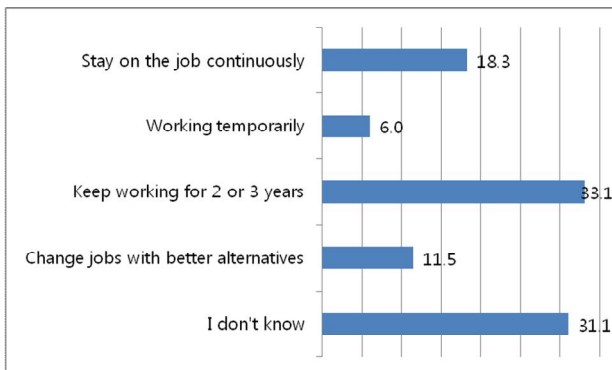

Fig. 1. Specific plans for work

The survey on reasons for their intention to leave the job reveals: 17.5 percent of the respondents were exhausted from heavy work load; 15.9 percent were unsatisfied with low income; 14.6 percent were feeling unappreciated for their jobs; 13.3 percent didn't think the job is beneficial for self-development or growth; 9.0 percent were going to leave because of less chance for promotion, health issue, family issue and etc.
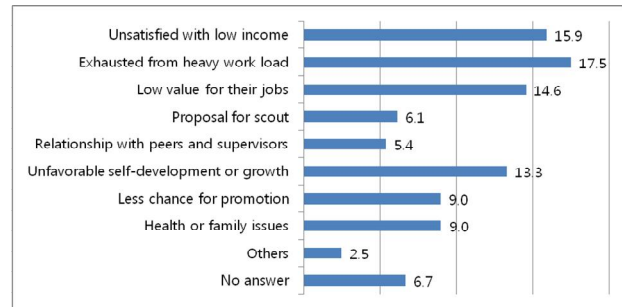

Fig. 2. Reasons their turnover intention

Ask for working conditions that need immediate improvement, 38.6 percent of the respondents chose pay and benefits; 16.9 percent chose adjustment of their working hours; 16.2 percent chose establishment of grievance handling system; 13.2 percent mentioned stability of employment; 11.9 percent wanted better chance for promotion and career development.
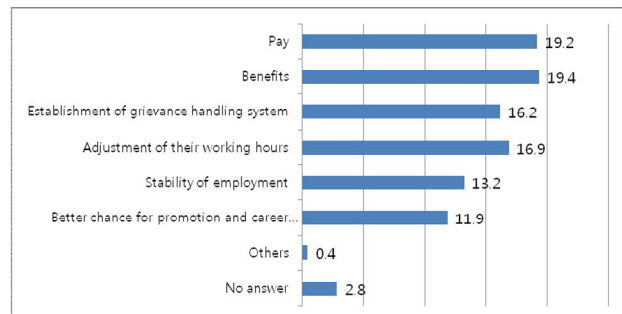

Fig. 3. Working conditions that need immediate improvement

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The summary of results and Implications

As the business concept of customer satisfaction is spreading widely, the role of call center of a company is becoming more important. Call center business, as a type of business service industry among many knowledge-based service industries, is one of the most profitable businesses that create jobs and have the ripple effect on the local economy. Here hence, many local governments are competitively locating call centers.

Nevertheless, the labor is still in great demand, displaying the imbalance in the supply-demand of labor. Call center caller is one of the occupations that have the highest turnover rate. In the present conditions, this study tried to find ways to minimize the turnover rate by investigating the survey on call center callers' job attitude and their intention to leave the job.

The main findings of our survey are as follows.
1) Callers' job is instable. The survey showed that permanent full-time employees were 58.2 percent, and temporary workers were 41.0 percent.
2) Monthly income was rather low. Average income was 0.9 ~ 1.1 million won a month (43.8%).
3) Their work history was short and majority of respondents (73.3%) had changed their jobs at least once already. Respondents who had worked less than a year were 43.8 percent (29.9 percent of whom had worked less than 6 months),

and those who had been working longer than 4 years were only 5.2 percent.

4) 53.4 percent of the respondents thought that the knowledge and techniques for counseling are very complicated; 77.7 percent of the respondents thought that their jobs are important to the company; 77.3 percent of the respondents said the job is not flexible.

5) 41.0 percent of the respondents were generally satisfied with their work; 36.3 percent said they feel content with their work life; 39.1 percent felt challenged; 44.9 percent said they had a sense of achievement; and 73.3 percent felt their jobs are valuable. On the other hand, people were unsatisfied with benefits (46.3%), pay (60.5%), training and development program (39.9%), promotion system (21.1%), work environment (22.3%), and work hours (39.5%).

6) The respondents were greatly satisfied with the collaboration among peers (84.1%) and business support from their supervisors (78.8%).

7) 41.4 percent of the respondents were willing to remain devoted to their company, while 34.3 percent of the consultants could not identify themselves with their work and had the intention to move to a different job when their company is in financial trouble (34.7%).

8) 34.3 percent of the respondents had been hesitating about their resignation; 33.5 percent wanted to leave the job when they get better job offer; 11.5 percent of the respondents had the mind to defect the job immediately after an alternative comes up.

9) The reasons for the callers to think about leaving the job were difficulty of the job (17.5%), low income (15.9%), low value of their counseling position (14.6%), lack of opportunity for self-growth and development (13.3%) and few chances for promotion (10%).

10) What the callers wanted to be changed was pay (19.2%), benefits (19.4%), work hours (16.9), grievance handling system (16.2%), stability of their employment (13.2%) and opportunity for promotion and career development (11.9%).

The survey results give us some implications as to how to minimize turnover. Table 12 is the overview of the reasons for turnover and improvement they wish to be made.

Table 12. Reasons for turnover and desired improvements

Rank	Reasons for turnover	desired improvements
1	strenuous job	Higher pay and better benefit
2	low income	adjustment of working hours
3	Unappreciated job	Providing grievance procedure
4	lack of opportunities for self-improvement or self-development	Increasing the stability of job
5	Rare chances for promotion	allowing more chances for promotion/ career development

First of all, in order to reduce the amount of strenuous work, the working hours should be adjusted: their breaks should be prolonged: obstacles at work should be removed: and grievance procedure should be provided.

Specifically, 1) the time for clocking in and out should be observed: 2) they should be given breaks during their work: 3) five-day working system should begin: 4) other miscellaneous work (such as morning meetings) should be minimized.

To reduce the stress from the constant caller-waiting and repetitious work, the autonomy is required; inconveniences at work can be reduced by improving the equipment and technology.

On the other hand, many callers at call centers complain about their stress level being high from the complexity of the job; therefore, the management needs to consider dividing the jobs -according to the type of calls- into regular customer inquiries or customer complaints that can be dealt professionally at a so-called "a customer complaint handling center". Besides, "a grievance procedure for callers" needs to be provided for callers to communicate with the upper management.

Second, callers are getting paid too little with little benefit, despite their strenuous work and high stress level; their pay system should be re-adjusted according to their actual labor, and their job stability should be increased.

They need to be paid at least the same wage as other employees working in similar/ same departments: their welfare system can be improved by providing a gym, recreation rooms, shuttle buses, snacks, yearly paid vacation, sick leave, and etc.

The management should consider promoting temporary positions to permanent positions in order to resolve their stress issues due to the instability of their jobs, and to clear out the unfair working conditions.

Third, in spite of the significance of the job, most companies hire callers from outside the country, showing depreciation of the caller's job; in reality it leads to the low evaluation of their work and low income.

To help callers feel appreciated and proud of their work, the management of a company should recognize their value and create a system that involves them as core members of their company.

Fourth, educational programs for caller's self-development should be supported. Not only diverse educational programs and career management programs, but hobby clubs should also be supported; however, programs after working hours bring burden and low satisfaction, so it is crucial to include such programs during their working hours.

Fifth, although it is rare for callers to get promoted, it is necessary to introduce a transparent job evaluation system and piece rate system.

5.2 Limitations and future research directions

This study was done with the effort to draw implications from the survey on job attitude and turnover intention. However, there still remain some limitations to this study.

First, the relation between the turnover intention and antecedents factors hasn't been analyzed yet, since this study started with a limited scope to derive implications from examining the reality of call center callers. In the future, more systematic research model should be developed and a better hypothesis should be set for the study.

Second, this study was wholly based on the survey on callers in Gwangju area, and it is difficult to generalize the survey results. In the future, study should be done on national basis or done in metropolitan areas like Seoul, Daegu-Kyungbook and Honam area as well.

Third, call center is growing rapidly in many industries such as financial industry, retail industry, and telecommunication industry. Therefore, future study should investigate each industry on job attitude and turnover intention and do a comparative analysis on the topic.

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