The Modern Call-Center: A Multi-Disciplinary Perspective on Operations Management Research

Zeynep Aksin
College of Administrative Sciences and Economics, Koc University
Rumeli Feneri Yolu, 34450 Sariyer-Istanbul, Turkey
zaksin@ku.edu.tr, +90 212 338 1545 (Tel), +90 212 338 1653 (Fax)

Mor Armony
Leonard N. Stern School of Business, New York University
West 4th Street, KMC 8-62, New York, NY 10012
marmony@stern.nyu.edu, 212 998 0291 (Tel), 212 995 4227 (Fax)

Vijay Mehrotra
Department of Decision Sciences, College of Business, San Francisco State University
1600 Holloway Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94132-1722
vjm@sfsu.edu, 415 817 4357 (Tel), 415 405 0364 (Fax)
The Modern Call-Center: A Multi-Disciplinary Perspective on Operations Management Research

Call centers are an increasingly important part of today’s business world, employing millions of agents across the globe and serving as a primary customer-facing channel for firms in many different industries. Call centers have been a fertile area for operations management researchers in several domains, including forecasting, capacity planning, queueing, and personnel scheduling. In addition, as telecommunications and information technology have advanced over the past several years, the operational challenges faced by call center managers have become more complicated as a result. Issues associated with human resources management, sales, and marketing have also become increasingly relevant to call center operations and associated academic research.

In this paper, we provide a survey of the recent literature on call center operations management. Along with traditional research areas, we pay special attention to new management challenges that have been caused by emerging technologies, to behavioral issues associated with both call center agents and customers, and to the interface between call center operations and sales and marketing. We identify a handful of broad themes for future investigation while also pointing out several very specific research opportunities.

Acknowledgements

We thank George Shanthikumar and David Yao for the invitation to write this paper. We are also grateful to Tommy Mermelshayn for extensive literature search and many helpful comments and to Leslie Culpepper for invaluable assistance with the paper bibliography. Finally, we greatly appreciate suggestions made by Avi Mandelbaum in various stages of this manuscript evolution.