



Department of Consumer
and Employment Protection
Government of Western Australia

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CODE OF PRACTICE FOR PUBLIC SECTOR CALL CENTRES

A review of public sector call centres has culminated in the development of a Code of Practice.

The attached *Code of Practice for Public Sector Call Centres* is to be adopted as the minimum standard of practice by all public sector agencies using employees to operate in-house call centres.

Call centres can generally be defined as specialised units where telephone contact with customers is centralised and regulated. Call centres can be of any size, dealing with either incoming calls from customers, such as enquiries, bookings or claims, and/or making outgoing calls, such as telemarketing or phone surveys. Answering or making calls would be the primary function of those employed in a call centre. Officers providing reception or switchboard services would not normally be regarded as call centre operators.

The aim of the Code is to provide minimum standards in a rapidly growing and specialised area.

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LABOUR RELATIONS**

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CODE OF PRACTICE FOR PUBLIC SECTOR CALL CENTRES

Application of this Code

1. This Code of Practice is to be adopted as the minimum standard of practice by all public sector agencies operating in-house call centres using their own employees.

Training and Development

2. Call centres are to develop training and development programmes aimed at addressing organisational competency and individual career development needs in line with the principles established in the document *Good Practice in Training and Development: A Guide*.¹

Qualitative Assessment

3. Performance targets shall reflect a balance of quantitative and qualitative customer service measures.
4. Performance assessment criteria must provide sufficient flexibilities to cater for customer service requirements balanced with efficiency or consistency requirements.
5. Performance reviews are to embody the fair procedures and review options established by the *Public Sector Standards in Human Resource Management*.
6. Whenever practical, employee feedback shall be sought from the employee consultative committee when examining performance targets.

Consultation

7. The skills, knowledge and experiences of employees are to be recognised as a valuable resource to be utilised in the decision making process and, wherever practical, call centres shall utilise this resource in developing procedures and policies which have a significant effect upon call centre operations.
8. Call centres are to establish an appropriate employee consultative committee in accordance with the current guidelines², or agencies are to provide call centre employees with the opportunity to be represented in a departmental employee consultative committee. In addition, where applicable, agencies should consult with the relevant union.
9. A major objective of an employee consultative committee shall be to increase the quality of working life for all employees, particularly in the areas of:
 - a) job design;
 - b) skill formation;

¹ Good Practice in Training and Development: A Guide, 1994, Workforce Management and Development Office, Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

² Joint Consultative Committees, Circular to Department and Authorities No. 8 of 1993, Department of Consumer and Employment Protection, Labour Relations.

- c) training; and
 - d) the working environment.
10. A positive consequence sought through this objective should be the retention of a highly motivated and skilled workforce.

Call Monitoring

11. Call monitoring³ is recognised as an effective and legitimate means of assessing the qualitative aspects of employee performance.
12. Where call monitoring takes place, call centres shall recognise that uncertainty regarding the use of call monitoring for performance assessment can be a substantial source of employee stress. To minimise these concerns, call centres are to:
- a) inform call centre employees of the use of call monitoring, where such practices exist; and
 - b) provide employees with a reasonable time frame, of no greater than 2 weeks, during which call monitoring may occur for the purpose of employee evaluation.
13. The above does not affect the use of call monitoring for purposes such as coaching, development, or training.
14. Where call monitoring occurs, employees are to be provided with feedback on their performance in a timely manner.

Recording of Calls

15. The recording of calls for the purpose of employee performance assessment shall not occur without the agreement of the employee concerned. This provision does not affect the ability of a call centre to record calls for other purposes.

Time off the Phones

16. In a standard working day call centre staff shall, on average, be provided the opportunity to spend 35 minutes carrying out other duties not involving the answering or receiving of telephone calls. Time off the phone need not be consecutive and shall be organised to meet the operational requirements of the call centre.

Eye and Ear Testing

17. In addition to the current policy on eyesight testing for users of screen based equipment⁴, call centre employees should have access to hearing tests through departmental policy.

³ Call monitoring, for the purpose of this document, is defined as the active listening to calls made or received by employees for the purpose of performance assessment.

⁴ *Eyesight Screening and Testing – Users of Screen Based Equipment*, Circular to Departments and Authorities, Department of Consumer and Employment Protection, Labour Relations.

Getting the Job Done

18. Call centres shall, as far as is practical, provide appropriate work practices and resources to allow employees to effectively carry out their duties.

Occupational Safety & Health Committees

19. Call centre employees are to be given the opportunity to be represented in occupational safety & health committees established within the organisation.

Collective Bargaining

20. In line with the Government's policy⁵ of establishing collective agreements as the primary form of employment regulation, public sector organisations must ensure that future agreements continue to make provision for:
- a) a meal break after not more than 5 hours of work;
 - b) the establishment of appropriate penalty rates for work performed outside of ordinary hours and public holidays, or an appropriate alternative as established through the bargaining process; and
 - c) the provision of standard leave entitlements of annual, sick, carer's, bereavement and parental leave for full-time and part-time employees.

Part-Time Employees

21. Call centres shall provide part-time employees with:
- a) clearly defined, regular hours of employment;
 - b) a specified minimum engagement period;
 - c) an opportunity to be consulted regarding changes to hours; and
 - d) pro-rata leave entitlements, as prescribed by the relevant award or agreement.

Casual Employees

22. For the purpose of call centre operations, casual employees are defined as employees whose employment is:
- a) on a short-term basis;
 - b) of an irregular nature; and/or
 - c) on an uncertain basis.
23. Casual employees shall be provided with a minimum engagement period of 2 hours, or as specified by the relevant award or agreement.

Working from Home

24. In the event that a call centre is considering the viability of decentralising its call centre operations to require all or part of its staff to work from home, management shall consult with employees and relevant unions prior to implementing any trial or proposal.

⁵ *Labor. Industrial Relations*, Page 17, ALP, 2001 (WA election policy).

Use of Contract or Labour Hire Staff

25. The use of contract or labour hire staff by call centres shall only be on the basis of providing for short-term staffing needs, or the provision of specialised skills or knowledge, and not utilised as a means of replacing permanent employees.

Communication

26. Team meetings provide an effective means of facilitating two way communication and consultation between employees and management. Whenever practical, call centre operations shall seek to establish team meetings on a regular basis.
27. Where this is not achievable, similar benefits may be achieved through the use of a joint consultative committee.

Dispute Resolution

28. Call centres shall ensure the establishment of a fair process for resolving or redressing employee grievances in line with the requirements established in the *Public Sector Standards in Human Resource Management*.

Anti-Discrimination

29. Through compliance with the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (WA)* and the *Public Sector Standards in Human Resource Management*, call centres should aim to provide workplaces which promote equal opportunity and are free from discrimination.