

THE INSTITUTE OF ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGEMENT

DIPLOMA IN ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGEMENT

CASE STUDY I

6th June 2008, TIME: 09.30 – 12.30

Scenario

Time Allowed: 3 hours
Answer all FOUR QUESTIONS.
Graph paper is included in the centre of the examination script.

Allocation of marks as shown on the paper.

SILVER CIRCLE CALL CENTRE

The Silver Circle call centre employs some 600 staff operating from one site on a shift based system round the clock. The centre administers product support inquiries from its customers as well as outgoing calls for telemarketing and servicing the collection of debts. By centralising the management functions of its business services and call center operations under one roof, the company aims to provide a streamlined service to its customers, whilst reducing its operating costs. Staff specialists concerned with monitoring levels of quality and performance back all this up.

Clients range from utilities and catalogue companies to financial services and home improvement. In short, clients are varied, and the range of services diverse. Call centre operators are organised into teams in an open plan setting, typically responsible for a range of clients within a particular area of activity. In this way, the center retains some flexibility in deploying operators to meet operational requirements within the separate areas.

Customer operations are backed up by a range of office services, covering the usual areas of business and administrative systems including finance, human resources, procurement, IT services, account management, marketing, and general office.

Customer operations for second tier support staff are organised into work teams of up to twelve staff depending on shift, each under a Team Leader. These in turn are grouped into four functional business areas, each under a Team Manager servicing particular types of activity: outgoing e.g. telemarketing, and inbound e.g. product support. This provides for an element of flexibility in the number of clients for a common type of service that individual teams can handle using interactive decision support and predictive dialing. Technical support staff to which they can switch callers to if requiring a more specialised response, back up teams dealing with incoming calls.

It was against this background that Ray Sanchez, Operations Director, opened the monthly review meeting with his Team Managers, Information Manager and a Client Account Manager from account management. "Lucy, you're our information Manager who handles ICT communications between us and our

clients to ensure the smooth running of our services. I see performance measures are showing worse figures all round for the second quarter running. Average queue delays are up and teams can see this on 'real time' screens in their work areas. It's the same with conversation time, idle and handling time. Service levels of calls answered within the timeframe, together with non-contact processing time and call handling are down. Both trends in the wrong direction! At the last meeting we all said we'd keep the figures under review, though I sometimes feel we're drowning under the amount of detail, and aren't getting enough time to deal with the information that really counts". Any ideas how we might improve on performance, and do we really know where we're heading?

Lucy Chang turned to Milton Band one of the other Team Managers. "Milton, before this meeting, you told me what you thought the problems were, and yes, you are right about the performance. Why not tell the others here what you think the problems are?"

Milton thought for a moment then spoke to the group. "After having talked to my Team Leaders, I see it this way, and I think all the managers here are experiencing the same problems, since all our areas show a similar pattern of performance. Lucy is right on commenting on the poor results, and Fiona Seaton our Client Accounts Manager can confirm this in her communication with our clients and the non-renewal of some contracts in the last six months. Whilst we have continued to update our service technology in the various areas with predictive dialing, caller prioritisation, number identification and decision support, it's made relatively little impact on quality and performance targets. Our absence and turnover rates in call screening and service support teams in particular, are well above industry average and the other teams are going the same way. Our team leaders closely monitor their staff, take a very firm line with poor performance, follow-up staff absence sometimes with an interview, and make use of built-in software to monitor and report on each member of the team. However, this is only backed up by policies and procedures that are insufficiently detailed and lack really clear guidance to ensure that actions by Team Leaders are consistent across all areas".

To this Rose Topping, Team Manager for telemarketing added, "and it's not as if we spend a lot on training, other than ensuring staff can do their job and slot in to cover absence or other requirements in their area. HR even keeps the costs of recruitment, selection and induction down by keeping advertising to a minimum; relying on an application form and brief interview with themselves and the Team Leader, and their policies and procedures are no better. From this they gauge an applicant's suitability without having to resort to testing. They also let Team Leaders induct new staff with a brief overview of what's involved in the job, employment conditions, health and safety and an introduction to their work team. Then another team member 'shows them the ropes' by taking them through the scripts, familiarising them with the software and sitting with them for a couple of hours whilst they make or take calls. Times of lunch and tea breaks are fixed, so that the pattern of working can maintain a 24 hour cover within the two or three shifts depending on time of the week, though in practice, we all know there's little or no cover if staff are off sick, much of it apparently due to stress. Sure it's stressful and repetitive, staff have to deal with angry customers, workstations and desk layout don't reflect best practice, and sound insulation and lighting levels could be better".

Milton came in again at this point to agree commenting, "we could also do with breakout and rest areas closer to the teams and proper training facilities with dedicated rooms and equipment to simulate working conditions".

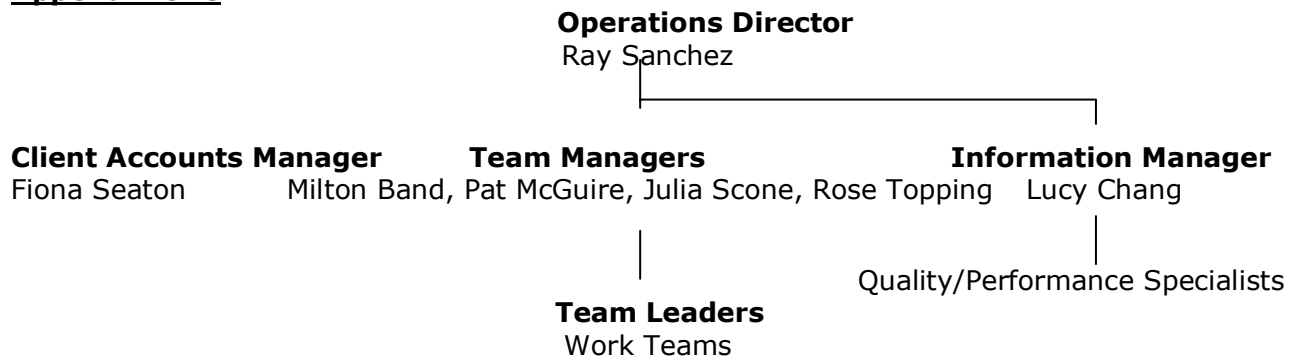
Fiona cut in, "that's all very well Milton, but we have to keep an eye on our costs, and yet, if we continue to drift like this with all talk and no action, we're going to lose even more accounts. We can't continue as we are, so let's look to the future. If you were all able to manage your time better in using information available and working more closely with your Team leaders, perhaps you would have more time to properly plan ahead".

At this, Pat McGuire stepped in, "before we do, another factor is the shift patterns, covering our 24-hour operation. I feel we're too inflexible in the way we devise our staff rosters and the cover they provide. There's no consultation, staff is just told what shifts they'll be working. As it is, we don't always have enough staff to cover the work, and it creates extra pressure for those on duty. We need to bring in Human Resources to look at our rosters and see what's affecting staffing levels and their attractiveness to staff.

Julia Scone went further and commented on the diversity of the workforce managed by the Team Leaders. "Differences and similarities among our staff, for example in terms of race, gender and age, present a management challenge and opportunity to all of us. Louis Planter in HR needs to alert Team Leaders to the benefits of and barriers to diversity, and provide development opportunities for all of us here in how to manage and make the most of its potential"

At this point, Ray Sanchez announced it was now time for the meeting to take a break, before reviewing the performance statistics in detail and following Fiona's call to look to the future. In the back of his mind though was a more fundamental concern about whether the goals and objectives for call center operations should be more clearly defined in order to focus any future action that was needed.

Appendix One



NOTES

In dealing with this case you are requested to:-

- (a) Make clear any assumptions you feel necessary
- (b) Make clear any local circumstances if appropriate to your case