

Big Brother is Watching You: Emotional Resilience In Contact Centres

Contact centres or call centres as most of us think of them are not hazardous in the same way as some working environments e.g. deep-sea fishing. There are, however, unique factors about these environments that make them challenging for employees. In Contact Centres, stress accounts for half of all absenteeism and 25% of all voluntary turnover. Presenteeism does not appear to get much of a mention in the literature on Contact Centres, which focus heavily on staff turnover. We know from the research into mental health, however, that Presenteeism will also be taking place i.e. where staff remain in work when they are experiencing reduced mental health and should really be taking sickness absence.

Some of the challenges in these roles are around the extensive micro management in the job. How would you feel, if every call you made was recorded and timed and you had a target of 'x' minutes per call? How would you feel about spending your day listening to unhappy customers swearing at your or desperate customers crying down the phone because they cannot pay their fuel bills? The calls are relentless and you have to finish one call as quickly as possible in order to pick up the next one. Equally, career prospects can be limited. So, what does the research say about how staff in these environments can remain emotionally resilient.

Emotional Resilience in Big Brother Environments

The research suggests that four factors have been found to be important in maintaining emotional resilience and performance in Contact Centre environments i.e. Self-Awareness, Emotional Intelligence(Cynicism). The ability to Identify Boundaries of Control and Problem Focused Coping Strategies. (Harry 2015)

Self-Awareness has been shown to be important as it helps individuals to understand their reactions to different stressors and this may help them devise better coping strategies. Research by Yu-Chi (2011) indicated that Contact Centre staff with higher levels of emotional intelligence were able to control their levels of cynicism and maintain a positive mental state, which led to better overall wellness. Contact Centre staff who felt that they had a degree of control and who strove to have some influence were overall more active and involved rather than detached, which is a non-resilient response. This facilitated the use of more problem focused coping strategies and resulted in greater emotional resilience and higher levels of wellbeing.

Building Emotional Resilience in Big Brother Environments

Obviously, the real solution to improving wellbeing amongst Contact Centre staff lies in changes to the working environment and culture, as well as providing staff with support to build their emotional resilience. Changing work environments, however, can be more of a longer-term solution, but in the short-term, there are various actions that organisations can take. Emotional Resilience training can help staff learn to recognise when they are starting to feel pressured and provide them with coping strategies and techniques that they can use to manage their pressure levels and reduce feelings of cynicism. Emotional intelligence training can be combined with this or delivered separately to help staff respond to situations in an emotionally intelligent manner, which facilitates better customer service as well as higher levels of staff wellbeing.