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**Article**

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# Key factors influencing long-term retention among Contact Centre employee in Malaysia: a Delphi method study

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## ABSTRACT

Attrition is the biggest pain point in the contact-center industry across nations. Hence, it is important to study how to retain contact center employees. This study aimed to identify the key factors influencing long-term retention among contact center employees in Malaysia. The Delphi method was implemented using purposive sampling. A total of 24 experts were selected from the contact center industry, who had been working in the field for more than five years in managerial positions. A two-round Delphi method was conducted where, in the first round, experts were requested to list the factors contributing to long-term retention among contact center employees in Malaysia. Thematic analysis was employed in the first round to identify the dimensions by grouping themes. In the second round, experts were requested to rank the dimensions from the most important to the least important. Based on the findings, the most important factors identified were supportive management, followed by work-life balance, compensation and benefits, working environment, career development, reward and recognition, training and development, and health support. Recommendation was provided to the contact center operation in Malaysia based on this finding on the initiative that can be worked on to retain the contact center employee in Malaysia.

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## Introduction

The operation of a contact center is a vital component for many organizations, serving as a strategic element in fostering customer relationships (López-Rodríguez et al., 2020). These centers, characterized by their technological sophistication, are crucial in offering improved customer experiences by rapidly addressing inquiries and resolving issues (Avdagić-Golub et al., 2021). Furthermore, they play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between customers and businesses, and their effectiveness in enhancing customer satisfaction is widely recognized (Andrade et al., 2020; Boston, 2021).

Despite their importance, contact centers face significant challenges. The high volume of interactions and resultant stress lead to employee burnout, impacting attendance and performance and contributing to a high turnover rate among staff (Sorn et al., 2023). The 2021 ICMI report indicated that the average turnover rate in contact centers was 58% (McGlynn, 2024). These issues are exacerbated by the demanding nature of call center jobs, which are categorized as highly stressful (Chaudhary et al., 2023). Understanding the different types of turnover is crucial, as voluntary turnover often results from job dissatisfaction (Schick, 2020). High employee turnover remains a major challenge across the industry, regardless of size, particularly in contact centers, where employees experience high stress levels due to the expectations of meeting customer demands (Gupta & Sekher, 2023).

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Moreover, SQM CX Research revealed that the average call center agent turnover increased from 35% in 2021 to 38% in 2022, indicating a rising trend over the past five years (Desmarais, 2023). The Customer Operation Performance Center (COPC) reported that only 61% of customer service executives were satisfied with their jobs, with only 58% intending to stay in their role for the next year (Global Benchmarking Series, 2022). These challenges necessitate an understanding of the factors influencing employee retention, especially in the Malaysian context, where the contact-center industry is projected to grow by 3.0% by 2024 (Research and Markets, 2023). However, the Malaysian contact center industry contends with the persistent challenge of employee attrition (Abdullateef et al., 2010; Kareem et al., 2014). With the sector's continued growth, addressing this issue becomes increasingly urgent. Failure to identify and implement effective retention strategies could limit the industry's ability to capitalize on its expansion and risks undermining its competitiveness in the global market.

To bridge this knowledge gap and provide actionable insights for Malaysian contact centers, this study aims to address these challenges by identifying the factors that contribute to the long-term retention of contact center employees in Malaysia. The primary focus is on the Klang Valley area, where the study is as follows:

1. Identify the factors influencing long-term retention of contact center employees in Malaysia.
2. Rank these factors in terms of their influence on employee retention.

The findings of this study will provide valuable insights for contact center leaders to enhance the work environment for employees, thereby reducing attrition and retaining staff for longer durations. This will assist business leaders in focusing more on business development by having the right talent. Identifying these retention factors and developing effective strategies is essential for leveraging talent in strategic business planning.

### ***Theoretical underpinning***

Employee retention in any organization is fundamentally linked to job satisfaction, making Herzberg's two-factor theory a highly suitable framework for this study. Herzberg's two-factor theory posits that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are influenced by two distinct sets of factors: hygiene factors and motivational factors (Thant, 2023). While hygiene factors, though essential, are primarily concerned with preventing job dissatisfaction, they do not inherently motivate employees but their absence can lead to significant dissatisfaction. These factors include aspects such as working conditions, salaries, management practices, policies, and job security (Lee et al., 2022). Conversely, motivational factors are directly linked to enhancing job satisfaction and are crucial for the intrinsic motivation that drives employees to perform better and remain with an organization. These factors include elements such as recognition, growth opportunities, job responsibility, achievement, and the intrinsic nature of the work itself (Karaferis et al., 2022). Herzberg's theory suggests that effective management of these factors is critical for enhancing employee engagement and long-term retention.

Moreover, studies like those by Thant and Chang (2021) and Alrawahi et al. (2020) emphasize that neglecting hygiene factors can lead to increased turnover rates, underscoring the need for their management even if they do not directly enhance satisfaction. Meanwhile, research by Ali and Anwar (2021) and Lee et al. (2022) reinforce the importance of motivational factors in driving the engagement and retention of employees, highlighting the dual approach needed to both retain talent and foster a positive organizational culture. Thus, Herzberg's two-factor theory provides a comprehensive and practical framework for understanding and implementing effective employee retention strategies in contact centers, ensuring that both hygiene and motivational factors are adequately addressed to optimize job satisfaction and minimize dissatisfaction among employees.

### ***Literature review***

Attrition in contact centers presents a significant challenge for many business leaders. Understanding why employees leave their roles is crucial for contact center management. Voluntary departures affect a

company's profit margins and result in a shortage of skilled workers (Ramlawati et al., 2021). In the United States, call center representatives experience a turnover rate double the average of other occupations (Lane, 2022). Research by NICE (2022), a leader in AI-powered customer service platforms, highlights a 42% attrition rate in the contact center industry by 2021. This rate varies by the size of the center, with 33% for centers with 1000 employees and 50% for those with over 5000 employees. The study also revealed that 31% of customer service agents and managers were highly likely to leave their jobs, with 40% actively seeking opportunities outside the industry. Research on COPC indicates that improving customer experience is a significant challenge in the service industry (Global Benchmarking Series, 2022). However, only 36% of employers invest in retention strategies (NICE, 2022).

Within the business landscape, contact centers serve as a critical tool for facilitating round-the-clock customer interaction. Their performance directly impacts customer loyalty and retention. These centers primarily function through a team of employees dedicated to resolving customer inquiries and issues. Their responsibilities encompass a diverse range of areas, including billing, collections, order processing, fulfillment, and technical support. However, this seemingly straightforward role is often imbued with significant stress. Contact center representatives are subject to strict Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which contribute to the demanding nature of the job (Said et al., 2022). The pervasive perception of constant organizational monitoring creates a pressurized environment for employees. Upon recognizing any indication of underperformance, anxieties associated with potential termination can lead to stress (Backhaus, 2019; Ravid et al., 2020). In some instances, this stress manifests in proactive employee behavior, resulting in job resignations (Venco, 2006). Underscoring this point, the Health of the Contact Centre 2021 Report by Calabrio (2021) reveals that a staggering 96% of contact center workers experience weekly exposure to stressful situations.

Beyond the psychological toll, contact center work poses physical health risks, including inadequate ergonomic considerations, potential vision or hearing loss, and musculoskeletal injuries stemming from poor posture or repetitive tasks (Santos & Lousã, 2022). The shift to remote work during the pandemic, while protecting employees from COVID-19 exposure, has introduced new challenges that might be contributing to employee turnover. Studies have shown that achieving a healthy work-life balance can be difficult while working remotely (Tanucan & Uytico, 2021; Tanucan et al., 2023). Additionally, a lack of proper ergonomic setups at home workstations (Stempel & Siestrup, 2021) and the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life (Tanucan et al., 2023) can lead to increased psychological strain.

In Malaysia, contact center operations are integral to the robust Global Business Services (GBS) industry, renowned for its outsourcing expertise. Contact centers leverage Malaysia's multilingual workforce to provide technical support, troubleshooting, and issue resolution across diverse domains. This integration highlights Malaysia's ability to deliver globally competitive services. The GBS market in Malaysia reached USD 1.3 billion in 2019 and is projected to expand to USD 1.5 billion by 2024 (Azuar, 2021). Within emerging markets like Malaysia, the contact center industry represents a significant economic sector. It is recognized as a driver in the nation's pursuit of higher economic status (Ramli & Syed Mohamad, 2013). Furthermore, Malaysia's rapid growth in the field has earned it the title of 'Asia Pacific Call Center Hub' (Ulaganathan, 2008). The country's commitment to fostering a skilled workforce, combined with a business-friendly environment, makes it an attractive option for companies seeking high-quality and cost-effective customer service solutions. As technology continues to evolve and customer expectations rise, Malaysia's contact center industry is well-positioned to thrive and contribute significantly to the nation's continued economic development.

However, the Malaysian contact center industry contends with the persistent challenge of employee attrition (Abdullateef et al., 2010; Kareem et al., 2014). The development and implementation of comprehensive employee retention strategies are imperative to address this issue. These strategies focus on keeping employees motivated, satisfied, and committed to their positions, ultimately benefiting organizational productivity and growth while reducing attrition costs (Sorn et al., 2023). Notably, research suggests that investing in the improvement and quality of work conditions within contact centers can directly impact job satisfaction, commitment, and employee retention (Van der Aa et al., 2012). Furthermore, enhancing Human Resource Management (HRM) practices has been shown to increase well-being at work and mitigate the negative impacts associated with working in contact centers (Gonçalves-Candeias et al., 2021).

Without effective retention plans, organizations risk service interruptions, performance issues, and increased operational costs (Boston, 2021). Since contact centers are often the first point of customer interaction, turnover has cost-related implications, adding to the expense of hiring and training new staff (Hernández-Cestero & Campus, 2020). Successful employee retention enables a company to leverage skilled talent, achieve organizational goals, and positively impact revenue. Human resource departments play a crucial role in identifying areas for improvement to address future workforce needs, making retention a long-term strategic process that begins on an employee's first day (Zainal et al., 2022).

## Methods

### *Research design*

This study used the Delphi method, a consensus-building technique that does not require face-to-face meetings. Initially developed by the RAND Corporation for military applications in the 1950s, the Delphi method has been adapted for a wide range of research purposes. Its flexibility and ability to accommodate a diverse range of expert opinions make it ideal for exploring complex issues (Humphrey-Murto et al., 2020; Mihas, 2023). The strength of the method lies in its iterative process, which allows for the refinement of expert opinions over successive rounds, thereby enhancing the depth and reliability of the gathered data (Barrett & Heale, 2020).

### *Participants*

For this study, 40 experts from the Malaysian contact-center industry, each with more than five years of managerial experience, were selected. The experts represented diverse functional areas including operations, training, quality assurance, employee engagement, and human resources. The selection criteria were based on purposive sampling to ensure that the panel of experts had substantial knowledge and experience relevant to the research questions. Purposive sampling allows for the identification of individuals who possess the specific expertise and insights crucial for the study, ensuring that the perspectives gathered are both informed and pertinent (González-García et al., 2020).

### *Procedure*

The Delphi method is executed in two rounds. In the first round, experts were presented with an open-ended question to identify the key factors influencing the long-term retention of contact center employees in Malaysia. This approach allows experts to freely express their views without constraints, providing a rich array of insights for the study. The responses were then meticulously compiled, with similar answers rephrased to avoid redundancy, forming the basis for the second round (Mohd Noor et al., 2022). Informed consent was obtained via written documentation from all participating experts.

In the second round, the refined list of factors from the first round was presented to experts, who were then asked to rate these factors. This round aimed to quantify the relative importance of each factor as perceived by experts, thereby facilitating a more structured and quantifiable assessment of consensus (Taylor, 2020).

### *Ethics*

This study were reviewed and approved by the Scientific and Ethical Review Committee of the INTI International University (Reference No: INTI/UEC/2023/031).

### *Data analysis*

The first round of data analysis involved detailed thematic analysis. Responses were collated into an Excel file, and thematic analysis began by identifying commonalities and patterns in feedback. This process led

to the categorization of responses into distinct themes, which were then refined for inclusion in the second-round questionnaire (Parker et al., 2021).

The second round of data analysis utilized the Kendall W-coefficient test, which was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27. This statistical test assessed the level of agreement among experts regarding the prioritized factors. The Kendall's W test was used to evaluate the consistency of rankings among the panel. A high Kendall's W value suggests a strong agreement among the panel, indicating that the ranked factors reliably represent the collective opinion of the experts. On the other hand, a low W value or a high p-value indicates that the experts do not agree. In cases where the results indicated insufficient consensus, the necessity of a third Delphi round would be considered to achieve a more definitive consensus (Cui et al., 2023).

## Results

### *First round of Delphi method*

As part of the initial phase of research in Delhi, an open-ended questionnaire was distributed to 40 experts on September 18, 2023. Of the 40 experts invited to participate, 33 responded to the first round of the questionnaire, while 7 did not. In adherence to the research etiquette, no further attempts were made to solicit responses from the non-respondents. Detailed information on the experts who participated in the first round of the Delphi process is presented in Table 1. The experts who responded to the questionnaire possessed a diverse range of experience in the contact center industry, with their tenure

**Table 1.** List of experts who participated in Round 1 Delphi study.

No	Age	Experience (Years)	Position	Company background
E1	42	15	Manager, Quality Assurance	Daythree Digital Berhad is award-winning business process management company delivering innovative, technology driven customer experience management to the client.
E2	37	17	Manager, Learning & Development	
E3	37	14	Manager, Quality Assurance	
E4	46	15	Manager, Quality Assurance	
E5	29	9	Senior Trainer	
E6	46	20	Senior Manager, Customer Experience	
E7	36	18	Manager, Customer Experience	
E8	57	35	Manager, Customer Experience	
E9	35	13	Manager, Customer Experience	
E10	33	15	Head, Organization Learning & Development	
E11	35	10	Manager, Customer Experience	
E12	47	10	Manager, HRBP	
E13	40	10	Senior Trainer	
E14	32	12	Head of People Happiness	
E15	27	7	Team Manager	
E16	40	15	Team Manager	Astro – Leading pay TV services in Malaysia
E17	43	19	Manager, Quality Assurance	
E18	49	29	Manager, Customer Experience	
E19	37	13	Manager, Quality Assurance	
E20	27	5	Team Manager	
E21	32	11	Corporate Strategy Lead	
E22	35	7	Manager, HRBP	
E23	27	7	Manager, Quality Assurance	
E24	43	20	Manager, Quality Associate	
E25	45	20	Manager, Training	Excess – Online trading industry providing better market conditions on currencies.
E26	39	16	Manager, Performance Management	
E27	40	15	Operation Manager	
E28	35	10	Workforce Management Manager	
E29	37	7	Training Manager	
E30	30	7	Team Manager	Concentrix – Business Process Outsourcing company, providing customer journey that helps client grow.
E31	47	20	Head of Department	
E32	33	10	Senior Operation Manager	
E33	37	13	APAC Regional Lead Cons Business & Analytics	Commerce Access – Business Process Outsourcing company providing integrated customer service for both internal and external client
				Teleperformance – Global business services provider, supporting both local and global client
				Johnson SP – Leading manufacturer of household cleaning products, covering almost 70 countries.



varying from a minimum of five years to a maximum of 35 years. They hold positions ranging from Managers to Heads of Department.

The feedback provided by these experts underwent a comprehensive thematic analysis (Parker et al., 2021). Each response was carefully examined to identify underlying themes, which were then systematically organized into broader dimensions. In total, 57 distinct themes emerged, which were grouped into eight key dimensions. The dimensions identified in Round 1 of the Delphi process included supportive management, rewards and recognition, career development, working environment, training and development, work-life balance, health support, and compensation and benefits. Table 2 lists the dimensions and their respective themes.

**Table 2.** Dimension and theme identified in Round 1 Delphi.

No	Dimension	Theme
1	Supportive Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Managers trust the employee with the task given.</li> <li>Empathetic leaders</li> <li>Listen to employees and provide guidance.</li> <li>Care about employees' wellbeing.</li> <li>Demonstrate positive work attitude.</li> <li>Transparent communication from leaders</li> <li>Leaders inspire and empower employee.</li> <li>Healthy discussion to address ongoing issues.</li> <li>Scheduled performance review</li> <li>Instill a sense of stability and peace of mind among employees.</li> <li>Empowering employee with automation and AI Tools</li> </ul>
2	Rewards and Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Token of appreciation. E.g. Vouchers</li> <li>Long term service award</li> <li>Rewarding outstanding performers</li> <li>Extra allowance</li> <li>Monthly, Quarterly and Yearly reward and recognition</li> <li>Timely recognition</li> </ul>
3	Career Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a clear career path.</li> <li>Focus more on internal promotion than external hiring.</li> <li>Offering avenues for career progression and upward mobility</li> <li>Opportunity to progress to advances role.</li> <li>Offer an opportunity for employees to acquire certain skills.</li> <li>Opportunities for skill enhancement</li> <li>Offering learning and growth opportunities</li> </ul>
4	Working Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive company culture</li> <li>Healthy culture creates a sense of belonging.</li> <li>A culture that promotes respect, two-way communication, an avenue to share thoughts / ideas.</li> <li>A diverse and inclusive workplace culture.</li> <li>Happy working environment</li> <li>Frequent employee engagement activity</li> <li>Corporate Social Responsibility activities</li> <li>Providing efficient tool (high speed internet, laptop with good spec)</li> <li>Access to cutting-edge technology and efficient tools</li> <li>Leisure activities (vending machines on snacks/coffee, sleeping pods, mini games and quite room)</li> <li>Promote excellent peer relationship</li> </ul>
5	Training and Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide training for knowledge improvement.</li> <li>Encouragement and support for ongoing learning</li> <li>Skill development training</li> <li>Relevant certification (Eg: HPMT,COPC,Six Sigma)</li> <li>Promote learning culture.</li> <li>Soft skills training (communication, problem-solving)</li> <li>Technical training (software usage, product knowledge)</li> <li>Consistent training to develop skill</li> </ul>
6	Work Life Balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flexible working hours</li> <li>Work from home</li> <li>Balance workload</li> <li>Family-friendly policies like parental leave and childcare support.</li> <li>Remote working</li> </ul>
7	Health Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mental health support</li> <li>Wellness programs</li> <li>Healthcare program</li> <li>Counselling service</li> <li>Stress management program</li> </ul>
8	Compensation & Benefit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remuneration matching the market rate</li> <li>Competitive salary</li> <li>Yearly bonus</li> <li>Long term contract promoting job security</li> </ul>



Following the identification of the dimensions and themes influencing the long-term retention of contact center employees in Malaysia, a second-round Delphi questionnaire was prepared. This round exclusively involved experts who had participated in the initial round. The primary goal of the second round was to establish consensus among these experts regarding the dimensions identified as influential factors in the long-term retention of contact center employees in Malaysia.

### **Second round of Delphi method**

The second round of the Delphi method commenced on November 1, 2023, with 33 invitations sent to experts who had participated in the first round. In keeping with the Delphi protocol, only experts from the initial round were invited to participate in the subsequent round. During this phase, the eight dimensions identified in the first round were presented to experts. They were asked to rank these dimensions using an eight-point scale, with one indicating the most important dimension and eight indicating the least important in influencing the long-term retention of contact center employees in Malaysia. In the second round, 24 responses were received from the experts, indicating a reduction of nine participants compared to the initial round. Table 3 displays the group rankings of the dimensions based on the collected feedback.

Based on feedback from the 24 experts in the second round, the dimensions were ranked, with supportive management recording the lowest mean at 3.75. This was followed by work-life balance at 3.83, compensation and benefits at 3.92, working environment at 4.04, career development at 4.08, rewards and recognition at 4.63, training and development at 4.92, and health support at 6.83. These rankings were then subjected to the Kendall Coefficient test, which is a robust method used to ascertain the consensus among experts. Using the rankings provided by the experts in the second round, the Kendall's W value was determined to be 0.175, with a p-value of 0.000. These results indicate a significant level of consistency in ranking among experts. Given the strong consensus, the third round of the survey was deemed unnecessary. The confirmed consensus highlights supportive management, work-life balance, compensation and benefits, working environment, career development, rewards and recognition, training and development, and health support as key factors influencing the long-term retention of contact center employees.

**Table 3.** Second round Delphi feedback.

Experts	SM	RR	CD	WE	TD	WLB	HS	CB
E1	3	6	7	1	5	2	8	4
E2	1	8	2	3	7	4	6	5
E3	2	6	8	1	5	4	7	3
E4	6	5	2	7	1	4	8	3
E5	1	2	3	6	8	4	7	5
E6	5	3	4	1	2	6	8	7
E7	1	4	2	8	5	6	7	3
E8	3	4	2	5	1	6	8	7
E9	4	5	1	2	7	8	6	3
E10	7	1	4	8	5	6	3	2
E11	5	7	8	4	6	1	2	3
E12	5	6	3	4	7	1	8	2
E13	5	7	6	4	2	1	3	8
E14	5	6	3	1	4	2	8	7
E15	4	5	7	1	8	2	6	3
E16	3	7	2	4	5	6	8	1
E17	2	4	3	1	5	8	7	6
E18	7	6	4	2	5	3	8	1
E19	6	5	3	2	4	1	8	7
E20	2	3	5	7	4	1	8	6
E21	5	2	7	3	6	4	8	1
E22	2	4	5	6	7	3	8	1
E23	1	4	5	8	3	6	7	2
E24	5	1	2	8	6	3	7	4
Mean	3.75	4.63	4.08	4.04	4.92	3.83	6.83	3.92
Group Rank	1	6	5	4	7	2	8	3

SM: supportive management; RR: reward and recognition; CD: career development; WE: working environment; TD: training and development; WLB: work-life balance; HS: health support; CB: compensation and benefit.

## Discussion

A two-round Delphi study conducted among 24 industry experts revealed eight dimensions deemed crucial for influencing the long-term retention strategies of contact center employees in Malaysia. The experts' findings revealed the following dimensions in order of importance regarding their impact on retaining contact center employees in Malaysia for extended periods: (1) Supportive Management, (2) Work-Life Balance, (3) Compensation and Benefits, (4) Working Environment, (5) Career Development, (6) Reward and Recognition, (7) Training and Development, and (8) Health Support. Supportive management emerged as the most significant factor motivating contact center employees to stay longer in their jobs in Malaysia, whereas health support was considered the least important factor.

### *Supportive management*

Within the supportive management dimension, 11 distinct themes emerged as crucial factors, directly aligning with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of motivation and job satisfaction. These themes encompass various aspects, such as managers trusting their employees, the presence of empathetic leaders, active listening to employees' concerns while providing necessary guidance, genuine care for the well-being of employees, demonstration of positive work attitudes, transparent communication initiated by leaders, the ability of leaders to inspire and empower their teams, fostering healthy discussions to address ongoing issues, conducting scheduled performance reviews, instilling a sense of stability and peace among employees, and empowering employees through the integration and utilization of automation and AI tools. These themes collectively highlight the multifaceted nature of supportive management and underscore their significance in fostering a conducive work environment for long-term retention within the context of contact center operations.

Trust, as a fundamental element of organizational effectiveness, reflects Herzberg's identification of interpersonal relationships and company policy as key hygiene factors. When trust is compromised, employees become hesitant to share their knowledge and experiences with their colleagues, thereby significantly impacting the organization's effectiveness and productivity. Maintaining a constant environment of motivation and empowerment is pivotal in establishing and nurturing trust among employees and encouraging them to stay committed to their roles within the organization (Al-Suraihi et al., 2021). Governing employee relationships based on a foundation of trust is significant as this approach substantially contributes to fostering transparency within an organization. The emphasis placed on trust-building mechanisms and relationship-based governance underscores their profound impact on trust, thereby contributing to the motivation and commitment levels of employees within the organizational framework.

Empathy, recognized for its role beyond financial support, acts as a strong motivational factor. This empathetic approach plays a significant role in motivating employees and fostering their commitment to their responsibilities within the organization. By prioritizing empathy, an environment conducive to positive commitment toward work is cultivated, contributing to the development of loyalty among employees and reducing the likelihood that they will leave the company prematurely (Sarah et al., 2019). High turnover in contact centers is a challenging issue. Another element which is active listening exemplifies motivational factors in Herzberg's framework. Empathetic leadership and active listening contribute to greater job satisfaction by making employees feel valued and understood, thus enhancing their motivation and commitment to the organization. In contact centers, supervisors are often the first resort for employees facing challenges, such as managing an angry customer or making serious mistakes. When employees have a supportive supervisor who listens to them, they feel confident and self-sufficient, which increases job satisfaction and encourages them to stay longer on the job (Ibrahim et al., 2019).

Prioritizing employee well-being in Malaysian contact centers influences long-term retention. This encompasses both mental and physical well-being (Thachanamurthy, 2019). Employees, especially those in contact centers, often leave jobs due to the stress associated with their work, impacting their mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional health. When supervisors provide support and allocate resources for workers' well-being, employees recognize the company's efforts and feel that their employer genuinely cares about their well-being. Consequently, this fosters trust and confidence, encouraging employees to remain in their positions for a longer duration. Effective leaders build a positive culture among

employees who are motivated to manage job stress wisely (Ahmad et al., 2018). The positive attitude of a leader is crucial in contact centers, as a leader's behavior strongly influences an employee's intention to stay. Inadequate leadership reduces employee enthusiasm and increases job dissatisfaction. Transparent communication and healthy discussions to address ongoing issues further reduce employee turnover within contact centers in Malaysia. Therefore, employers must ensure that they demonstrate a positive attitude towards employees.

According to Jackson (2020), empowering employees by providing adequate resources is key to promoting job satisfaction. The ability of leaders to inspire and empower their teams directly correlates with Herzberg's motivational factors such as achievement and growth. This approach enhances employees' internal motivation by providing them with recognition and opportunities for personal development. Empowerment cultivates honesty and trust among contact center employees during customer interactions, fostering happier customers, encouraging repeat businesses, and contributing to increased revenue. Leaders should implement training programs that enable employees to perform effectively and remain within the organization for longer durations. Lack of feedback is also regarded as a contributing factor leading employees to leave their jobs (Al-Suraihi et al., 2021). Performance appraisals play a significant role in enhancing work engagement, which in turn helps reduce turnover within an organization (Memon et al., 2020). Employees' motivation levels depend on how they are treated at the workplace. For employees to feel a sense of belonging and build trust, management must ensure the creation of a sense of purpose. Scheduled performance reviews are one way of achieving this goal. These reviews enable employees to understand the quality of their work and provide opportunities for discussions on areas of improvement and ideas to enhance individual performance. The action plans should be reviewed in a timely manner to ensure progress. Regular performance reviews and the sense of stability they provide are crucial hygiene factors. They prevent dissatisfaction by ensuring that employees understand their roles and progress, which contributes to a stable working environment.

Supportive management focuses on job security. In Malaysia, an organization's commitment to providing job security is closely linked to its turnover rate in Malaysia (Rajandran et al., 2018). Activities such as employee layoffs due to new technology adoption, inadequate training programs, or a lack of opportunities for career progression can instill a sense of insecurity among employees. Employees who feel insecure about their employment are likely to leave. The final theme was empowering employees through automation. Integrating and utilizing automation and AI tools empower employees, aligning with motivational factors by providing modern tools that help employees succeed and grow in their roles. Implementing state-of-the-art technology in contact centers coupled with appropriate training significantly enhances employee job satisfaction (Kareem et al., 2020). Automation reduces employees' intention to leave their jobs. Therefore, management should prioritize the development, evaluation, and implementation of cutting-edge technology in contact centers to enhance both work efficiency and job satisfaction.

### **Work life balance**

Work-life balance is identified as the second key factor influencing the long-term retention of contact center employees in Malaysia. This dimension encompasses five themes: flexible hours, work from home, a balanced workload, family friendly policies, and remote working. The concept of work-life quality, defined as the level of satisfaction an employee derives from balancing work activities and personal life, is crucial in this context (Hassan et al., 2020). Flexible working patterns such as flexible working hours have become increasingly important in recent years. Flexible working hours and the option to work remotely act as hygiene factors. Herzberg's theory suggests that poor work conditions can lead to dissatisfaction, but adequate conditions prevent dissatisfaction without necessarily enhancing satisfaction. By offering flexibility in hours and location, organizations prevent the dissatisfaction that can arise from rigid work schedules and commuting issues. A study conducted by NICE, a leading cloud-based customer experience platform, surveyed 400 contact center agents in the USA and UK. It was found that three out of the four agents preferred flexible scheduling, with 47% considering it a major factor in their decision to stay or leave a job. This preference underscores the importance of flexible working arrangements such as adjustable lunch and break hours, split-shift options, and the ability to swap shifts (NICE, 2022).

Research in Malaysia, specifically in Klang Valley, also supports these findings (Said et al., 2022). This suggests that organizations should invest more in systems that allow for flexible working hours, as this flexibility helps agents manage their workload and stress, leading to better work-life balance. The concept of working from home, while popular in the UK, gained traction in Malaysia following the COVID-19 pandemic. Research indicates that remote working can reduce employees' intentions to leave and enhance their job satisfaction (Griffin, 2021). This trend is especially significant in Malaysia, where remote work has been shown to positively impact job satisfaction and reduce turnover. Workload is another critical factor linked to attrition in call centers. Managing the workload effectively is another hygiene factor. Excessive workload can lead to stress and dissatisfaction, which Herzberg identifies as a primary demotivator. Ensuring that employees are not overwhelmed is crucial for preventing job dissatisfaction. The burden of excessive workload can elevate stress levels among staff, prompting their intention to leave (Arango-Botero et al., 2018; Thachanamurthy, 2019). It is therefore vital for employers to ensure that contact center agents are not overwhelmed and that sufficient manpower is available to manage incoming interactions. Finally, family conflict is an influential factor in turnover intentions. While these can also be seen as hygiene factors, they lean towards motivational factors when they go beyond basic expectations. Providing support for family needs, such as childcare, can significantly enhance job satisfaction by recognizing and responding to the personal responsibilities of employees, which contributes positively to their motivation and work engagement. Family-friendly policies can enhance work environments and boost job satisfaction. These policies include granting flexibility in work locations and schedules as well as providing childcare support. Management is recommended to re-evaluate and revise their policies to foster a more positive working environment (Sarah et al., 2019). In summary, work-life balance is a critical factor for employee retention in contact centers because of its direct impact on employee satisfaction, stress management, and overall well-being. The adoption of flexible working hours, work-from-home options, balanced workloads, and family friendly policies are essential for retaining talent in this sector.

### **Compensation and benefit**

Four themes were identified within this dimension. The four themes are remuneration matching the market rate, competitive salary, yearly bonus, and long-term contracts promoting job security. Salary packaging plays an important role in contact center retention (Sarah et al., 2019). The salary package is not only the salary received by an employee, but also other remuneration, such as bonuses, extra pay, and other financial rewards. These aspects of compensation are classic examples of hygiene factors in Herzberg's theory. Adequate and competitive salaries prevent dissatisfaction among employees. If the salaries are perceived as unfair or below market rate, it could lead to dissatisfaction and increase turnover, but merely having competitive pay does not necessarily enhance job satisfaction—it simply avoids dissatisfaction. Employers need to practice equality while paying employees. In such cases, employees believed that there was no opportunity for favoritism and everyone was paid equally. Hence, the management of contact centers must always study competitive packages to ensure that employees are paid the amount they deserve. This in turn improves job satisfaction and reduces the intention to leave the company. Salary and incentives are strong determinants of job satisfaction in Malaysian contact centers (Yunus et al., 2020). When an employee finds another company providing a higher salary for the same job, the employee is more likely to join another company (Binolac et al., 2022). Salary increases help the organization retain employees within the company for an extended period. Yearly bonuses and long-term contact that promote job security also influence employees to stay longer in their jobs (Al-Suraihi et al., 2021). A yearly bonus serves as a motivating factor for increasing employee motivation levels. When a company provides a bonus, employees feel appreciated and recognized for their hard work, contributing to the company's success. It also signifies the company's willingness to share its success through profit-sharing, ultimately fostering a stronger sense of belonging in the workforce. Moreover, offering permanent and long-term contracts provides employees with a sense of security, allowing them to work peacefully without concerns about the company's future. Offering long-term contracts can also be viewed predominantly as a hygiene factor. These contracts provide job security, which is essential for preventing dissatisfaction among employees. The absence of job security can be a major source of dissatisfaction

and concern, potentially leading to increased turnover. When employees harbor doubts about their future within an organization, they tend to seek better opportunities elsewhere. Conversely, job security, coupled with other positive factors, reduces the likelihood of employees leaving a company.

### **Working environment**

The working environment is recognized as the fourth most important factor influencing long-term retention among contact center employees in Malaysia. This dimension includes a variety of themes that align with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, such as a positive company culture, the creation of a sense of belonging through a healthy culture, cultures that promote respect and two-way communication, avenues for sharing thoughts and ideas and fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace. Additionally, it covers a happy working environment, frequent employee engagement activities, corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities, efficient tools like high-speed Internet and well-equipped laptops, access to cutting-edge technology, and leisure activities like vending machines, sleeping pods, mini-games, and quiet rooms, all of which promote excellent peer relationships.

Providing efficient tools and ensuring access to technology are essential hygiene factors. These resources prevent dissatisfaction by enabling employees to perform their duties efficiently and without unnecessary stress. A diverse and inclusive workplace culture also serves as a hygiene factor, preventing dissatisfaction from perceived inequality or unfair treatment. Conversely, aspects such as a positive company culture, frequent employee engagement activities, and CSR initiatives act as powerful motivational factors. These elements enhance job satisfaction by making work more enjoyable and meaningful, aligning employees' values with organizational goals, and boosting intrinsic motivation. Leisure activities and the promotion of excellent peer relationships further contribute to this, enhancing job satisfaction by improving social bonds and reducing work-related stress. The significance of a positive working environment in enhancing employee satisfaction and reducing voluntary turnover is well-documented (Boston, 2021). Company gatherings, celebratory events, gaming activities, team lunches, and comfortable amenities like cafes and pool tables foster a contented work environment that nurtures employees' inclination to stay with the company. These activities are integral to employee engagement initiatives that management should prioritize.

Diversity is a focal point, with employees expressing dissatisfaction when they perceive unequal or unfair treatment, leading to decreased motivation. Proactive management is necessary to continually review company policies and procedures to ensure equitable treatment for all individuals within the organization. Respect and two-way communication are also crucial. The impact of employee-management relationships on an employee's decision to remain with a company has been explored using social exchange theory (Sarah et al., 2019). Supportive management and supervisors instill a sense of belonging, prompting efficient work and a positive attitude from employees. Friendly coworkers have proven to be a factor in promoting retention specifically in contact centers, as demonstrated by research in the Malaysian hospital sector and government-linked companies (GLCs), where workplace friendships were highlighted as a fundamental human need (Adollahdin & Hussain, 2019).

CSR is a key component of an organization's commitment to societal, community, and environmental well-being. CSR activities not only enhance brand reputation among customers but also play a pivotal role in influencing employee job satisfaction (Mahmood & Bashir, 2020). Studies have shown a substantial correlation between CSR activities and employee retention, with employees perceiving companies engaged in meaningful CSR initiatives as having higher value (Zainee & Puteh, 2020). Furthermore, efficient tools such as Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems are essential for enhancing employee productivity in contact centers. Well-implemented CRM systems significantly enhance job satisfaction and reduce the intention to leave by improving operational processes and employee efficiency (Abdullateef et al., 2014).

### **Career development**

Career development has been recognized as the fifth most important factor influencing long-term retention in Malaysia's contact-center industry. Seven key themes underscore this dimension: establishing



career growth, focusing more on internal promotion than external hiring, offering avenues for career progression and upward mobility, opportunities to progress to advanced roles, and providing opportunities for employees to acquire specific skills, enhance skills, and engage in continuous learning and growth.

According to feedback from experts, career development is a crucial factor that influences an employee's decision to stay within an organization, playing a significant role in promoting retention. Management and organizations must emphasize creating a work environment that promotes career growth for employees. Herzberg's two-factor theory supports this focus, distinguishing between hygiene factors and motivational factors in the workplace. Focusing more on internal promotions rather than external hiring addresses essential Hygiene factors such as job security and fairness in company policies. Herzberg notes that job security is critical; employees who perceive a lack of internal opportunities may develop dissatisfaction and leave for better prospects. Companies with limited internal development opportunities often create a negative impression among employees, triggering turnover intentions. High turnover rates are commonly observed when internal growth opportunities are scarce (Castro-González et al., 2021).

On the other hand, establishing clear pathways for career growth and progression aligns with Herzberg's motivational factors, including achievement and recognition. Offering avenues for career progression, upward mobility, and opportunities to progress to advanced roles is vital for motivating employees. Talented employees often seek more than repetitive tasks; they are driven by short- and long-term career progression opportunities. This intrinsic motivation is highlighted by Sarah et al. (2019), who found a strong correlation between career progression and turnover intention, underscoring it as a crucial factor influencing retention in Malaysian contact centers. Moreover, providing opportunities for employees to acquire and enhance skills, and to engage in continuous learning, not only fulfills their need for personal growth and development but also contributes to service excellence within the organization. Dharamdass and Fernando (2018) considered career prospects a key element of the reward system within contact centers, noting a positive and significant relationship between this reward system and service excellence. Therefore, contact center management needs to create robust avenues for employee career progression. Establishing a clear career path is not merely about job enrichment; it is crucial to reducing turnover among customer service executives and enhancing organizational performance.

### **Rewards and recognition**

Rewards and recognition are ranked as the sixth most important factor influencing the long-term retention of contact center employees in Malaysia. This dimension, which includes tokens of appreciation, long-term service awards, recognition of outstanding performers, extra allowances, and structured reward and recognition programs, aligns well with Herzberg's classification of hygiene and motivational factors.

Herzberg's two-factor theory suggests that while hygiene factors do not motivate, they must be met to prevent employee dissatisfaction. In this context, extra allowances and long-term service awards act as hygiene factors. They ensure that employees feel secure and fairly compensated, which are essential conditions for preventing job dissatisfaction. Conversely, recognition of outstanding performers, tokens of appreciation, and timely recognition programs are classic motivational factors. Fisher (2010) indicated that such recognition significantly enhances job satisfaction by fulfilling employees' needs for achievement and acknowledgment. These elements lead to greater engagement and productivity, as employees feel their efforts are valued and meaningful, which Herzberg identified as critical for employee motivation. Small gestures, such as mentioning an employee's name in a newsletter or giving a gift card, can significantly boost morale and foster a positive work environment (O'Malley, 2000). Nnubia (2020) reinforced that non-monetary rewards like certificates and personal commendations can be just as motivating as financial incentives. These efforts make employees feel esteemed and appreciated, promoting a culture of recognition that goes beyond monetary rewards.

The implementation of long-term service awards and regular feedback mechanisms (Hassan et al., 2020), help mitigate the stresses associated with contact center roles, ensuring employees feel supported and valued over the long term. This strategic approach to recognition not only reduces turnover but also enhances overall job satisfaction. Rewards such as salary increments, incentives, and stock options, while primarily serving as hygiene factors, also have motivational implications when aligned with recognition

efforts. These rewards strengthen employees' connection to the organization, encouraging loyalty and a long-term commitment. Madhani (2019) highlighted the impact of consistent and fair recognition on employee retention and service quality, demonstrating that well-structured recognition programs can transform the workplace atmosphere and significantly improve service delivery.

### ***Training and development***

Training and development have been identified as the seventh key factor influencing long-term retention among contact center employees in Malaysia. This dimension is comprehensive, encompassing eight themes: providing training for knowledge improvement, encouraging ongoing learning, skill development training, relevant certifications (e.g. HPMT, COPC, Six Sigma), promoting a learning culture, soft skill training (e.g. communication and problem solving), technical training (e.g. software usage and product training), and consistent training to develop skills. Herzberg's two-factor theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the impact of these training elements. Technical training and skill certifications, often considered hygiene factors, ensure that employees feel capable and secure in their roles, preventing dissatisfaction. In contrast, promoting a learning culture and providing opportunities for ongoing learning and skill development are motivational factors. These elements actively enhance job satisfaction by fostering personal growth and a sense of achievement.

Training is widely acknowledged as an effective method for enhancing employee effectiveness (Blanchard & Thacker, 2023). Implementing training programs can significantly elevate employee motivation by bolstering strengths, mitigating weaknesses, and fostering an understanding of individual potential. Such initiatives are instrumental in minimizing turnover rates. Continuous investment in training programs is crucial, considering the high costs associated with recruiting and training new employees. By empowering employees to recognize and develop their skills, companies can effectively reduce turnover rates, thereby optimizing the efficiency and stability of their contact center teams.

The recommendation also extends to training programs for supervisors (Ibrahim et al., 2019). Focusing on continuous learning programs designed for supervisors equips them with the skills to become effective mentors. A suggested approach is for supervisors to use individual calls as case studies to provide tailored guidance and support, fostering a sense of 'self-efficacy' among employees (Pierce et al., 2003). This method not only addresses hygiene factors by ensuring supervisors are well-prepared but also acts as a motivational factor by enhancing job satisfaction and reducing turnover. Certifications such as COPC, HPMT, and Six Sigma for contact center management can enhance supervisors' operational and mentoring abilities. Dharamdass and Fernando (2018) suggested that training in contact centers should emphasize analytical and problem-solving skills, maintaining a positive attitude in stressful situations, and comprehensive customer handling and technical training. Equipping employees with these skills ensures that they are prepared to handle various customer inquiries and issues effectively, contributing to improved customer satisfaction and service delivery.

### ***Health support***

Health support emerged as the eighth dimension in the second round of the Delphi study, ranking it as the least important factor influencing the long-term retention of contact center employees in Malaysia. Despite this ranking, the dimension encompasses crucial themes such as mental health support, wellness programs, healthcare programs, counseling services, and stress management programs. Given the high-stress nature of jobs in contact centers, the impact of health support on improving retention within Malaysian contact centers remains relatively underexplored. However, organizations must prioritize and provide comprehensive health support to their employees. Management in contact centers must reassess policies and practices to ensure the maintenance of healthy work conditions for employees (Pigman, 2017), addressing both hygiene and motivational factors as defined in Herzberg's two-factor theory.

According to Herzberg's theory, health support themes can be categorized into hygiene and motivational factors. Healthcare programs and mental health services address basic employee needs for safety and security in the workplace. These services act as hygiene factors, essential for preventing job dissatisfaction and reducing turnover by alleviating stress and supporting overall well-being. Counseling services also help



manage workplace stress, addressing specific job-related issues that can lead to dissatisfaction if not properly managed. By offering such support, organizations prevent negative work conditions that could otherwise increase turnover. Conversely, wellness programs and stress management programs function as motivational factors. More than just preventing dissatisfaction, these programs can motivate employees by promoting a healthy lifestyle and proactive stress management. They contribute to an environment where employees feel cared for and valued, enhancing job satisfaction and encouraging long-term retention.

Implementing initiatives such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) can significantly contribute to employee wellness (Langlieb et al., 2021). EAPs provide confidential telephone services that allow employees to seek advice and support for work-related health issues, aiding in stress management and improving their overall well-being. Additionally, offering free mental health services has been identified as an effective strategy for reducing employee dissatisfaction within contact centers (Boston, 2021). By prioritizing employee health and well-being through such initiatives, organizations can mitigate stress levels among contact center employees, potentially reducing turnover and improving overall satisfaction and retention.

Furthermore, addressing stress levels among contact center employees can significantly benefit from implementing counseling services (Thachanamurthy, 2019). Management should consider incorporating workshops, exercises, and confidential counseling sessions to effectively manage stress within the workplace. These services should address the specific problems faced by contact center employees, providing them with a supportive outlet. It is also advised that management continuously promotes awareness of stress management techniques among call center employees. Creating an environment that prioritizes stress management and well-being can strengthen employees' connections with their company (Søvold et al., 2021). As part of a comprehensive stress management program, organizations are encouraged to provide facilities, such as breakout areas and chill-out zones, and allow more frequent breaks. These measures not only provide physical relaxation but also contribute to mental rejuvenation, ultimately helping reduce stress levels among contact center employees.

## **Recommendations**

The contact center industry is well-known for its high-stress work environment, which includes frequent interactions with dissatisfied customers and rotating work schedules (Gupta et al., 2022). Employees frequently consider leaving unless they receive significant job satisfaction, recognition, or rewards. As a result, contact center organizations must prioritize effective workforce retention strategies.

Our research shows that supportive management is critical for the long-term retention of contact center employees in Malaysia. Management must ensure supervisors have the necessary skills to identify and address employee motivation issues (Ahmad et al., 2018). Leadership training programs should emphasize empathy and support. Implementing a feedback mechanism, such as an Employee Satisfaction Survey, allows employees to voice their opinions about supervisory support. This feedback should be used to establish specific improvement targets for leaders and incorporate them into their KPIs to improve performance. Structured mentorship programs in which experienced agents guide newcomers can also help to foster a supportive environment.

The second most important factor is promoting a healthy work-life balance, which has a significant impact on motivation and retention. Effective workload management can prevent excessive demands, such as working longer hours or working from home, which can lead to burnout (Fatima et al., 2024). This balance can be improved by using dynamic scheduling tools that accommodate employee preferences while meeting operational needs, as well as introducing regular micro-breaks to help employees recharge. Compensation and benefits are ranked third in importance. Regular salary reviews and benchmarking against industry standards are required to ensure that salaries remain competitive and influence employee retention (Ceblano et al., 2019). Transparent, performance-based incentives can also motivate employees while mitigating perceptions of unfair treatment.

Establishing a positive work culture that promotes employee well-being is critical. Gamification of work processes can make daily tasks more interesting (Gupta et al., 2022). Implementing strategies based on individual performance metrics can provide incentives, resulting in a dynamic and motivating workplace. Regular team-building and community service activities can help to improve this environment. Career development opportunities are critical in retaining employees. Mentoring and individual

development programs assist in identifying and nurturing potential future leaders, demonstrating the organization's commitment to professional development. This promotes loyalty and retention (Gupta, 2021). Setting up fast-track leadership programs for top performers can also help them advance in their careers.

Given the potential negative effects of job-related stress on mental health, providing health support is essential. Wellness programs, such as fitness activities and weekly Zumba classes, can effectively reduce stress and contribute to a healthier workforce, potentially lowering turnover rates (Langlieb et al., 2021). It is recommended to conduct regular wellness assessments and create on-site relaxation zones with amenities such as massage chairs and meditation rooms. Recognizing employees goes beyond basic salary requirements. A customizable recognition system in which employees select their rewards, such as additional vacation days or gift cards, can significantly boost morale. A peer-to-peer recognition platform can also improve team cohesion by allowing employees to give 'kudos' to one another.

Focusing on these areas, contact center organizations can foster a more engaged and loyal workforce, significantly increasing overall productivity and satisfaction. These strategies seek not only to reduce turnover but also to improve overall workplace culture, which is critical in the high-pressure environment of the contact center industry.

## Conclusion

This study's exploration of the factors influencing long-term retention among contact center employees in Malaysia, grounded in Herzberg's two-factor theory, provides both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it validates and extends Herzberg's framework in the context of contact centers. The identification of specific motivational and hygiene factors aligns with Herzberg's assertion that job satisfaction is influenced by these two factors. By categorizing aspects such as supportive management, work-life balance, and career development as motivational factors and compensation, working conditions, and health support as hygiene factors, this study enriches the understanding of employee satisfaction and retention in high-stress, high-turnover environments. This application of Herzberg's theory to the contact-center industry not only reaffirms its validity but also highlights its adaptability and relevance in a specific sector. Practically, the findings offer a robust framework for HR professionals and managers in contact centers to develop targeted strategies that address both motivational and hygiene factors. For HR professionals, this study provides a comprehensive guide for formulating policies and practices that enhance job satisfaction and reduce turnover by focusing on the identified critical factors. For managers, the insights gained from this study serve as an essential guide for understanding and implementing management strategies that effectively balance both sets of factors. This balanced approach is crucial for fostering a work environment that meets the basic needs of employees and actively encourages their growth and recognition. Additionally, the findings of this study can assist policymakers and industry leaders in establishing benchmarks and best practices for employee retention strategies, contributing to the overall improvement of the contact center industry.

While this study makes significant contributions, it is important to acknowledge its limitations, particularly in terms of methodology. First, reliance on the Delphi method, which is beneficial for gathering expert opinions and achieving consensus, may introduce certain biases (Makhmutov, 2021). The selection of experts based predominantly on their experience and managerial positions could potentially limit the diversity of perspectives, especially from employees at different organizational levels. Additionally, the absence of face-to-face interactions in the Delphi process may have affected the depth of responses and limited the opportunity for richer, more nuanced insights that often emerge from direct interactions. The potential for dropouts between rounds of the Delphi method is another concern as it could result in the loss of valuable insights, particularly if experts who did not participate in all rounds had unique or dissenting opinions. This dropout risk highlights the challenge of maintaining engagement and participation over multiple rounds. Furthermore, the study's focus on the Malaysian contact center industry, while providing in-depth insights into this specific context, may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or industries. Cultural, economic, and regulatory differences can significantly influence employee retention factors, suggesting that the findings of this study might not be directly applicable to contact centers in other geographical areas or sectors. Finally, the study's time-bound nature means

that the findings represent a snapshot in time and may not account for evolving industry trends or emerging challenges and opportunities in employee retention. The dynamic nature of the contact center industry, influenced by technological advancements and changing consumer expectations, suggests that factors influencing employee retention may also evolve over time.

In acknowledging these limitations, the study opens avenues for future research to explore these areas further, potentially using a variety of research methods and broader participant representation to enhance the understanding and applicability of the findings. Future research could focus on turnover patterns and retention strategies in both inbound and outsourced contact centers in Malaysia, providing insights into the challenges in outsourced centers. Collaboration with operators outside Malaysia and across various industries, including government-linked companies and private contact centers, could offer comparative analyses. Exploring the impact of cutting-edge technology, particularly in the context of Malaysia's Industry 4.0 initiatives, on employee motivation and retention would be valuable. Such studies could enhance the understanding of the effects of digitalization on retention strategies and contribute practical insights for improving working environments in contact centers.

### Author contribution statement

Conception and design: S Hemmah Subramaniam & Walton Wider; Analysis and interpretation of the data: S Hemmah Subramaniam & Walton Wider; the drafting of the paper: Kim Yew Lim, Leilei Jiang, Manoch Prompanyo, & Jem Cloyd M. Tanucan; Revising it critically for intellectual content: S Hemmah Subramaniam & Walton Wider; Final approval of the version to be published: S Hemmah Subramaniam & Walton Wider; All authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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## Data availability statement

The data are available and will be provided upon reasonable request.

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