

RESEARCH ARTICLE

From Identity to Integration: Motivational Factors and the Impact of the Call Center Industry on Muslim-Filipinos in the Philippine BPO Sector

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study examines the motivational, psychological, and behavioral experiences of Muslim-Filipino employees in the Philippine Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry, focusing on how they navigate workplace integration within a highly structured and secular environment. Eighteen Muslim-Filipino call center agents from Metro Manila, Cebu, and Davao participated in in-depth interviews that explored their employment motivations, workplace challenges, and coping strategies. Data were analyzed thematically to capture participants' lived experiences and meaning-making processes. Islamic ethical values emerged inductively from participants' narratives and were used as an interpretive lens to understand how Muslim-Filipino employees assign meaning to work, motivation, and adaptation within the BPO sector. Findings indicate that entry into the industry is largely driven by the need for economic stability and accessible employment opportunities. However, sustained engagement is shaped by self-worth, professional growth, ethical livelihood, and personal discipline. Participants reported persistent challenges related to night shifts, physical fatigue, limited accommodation for religious practices, and reduced family interaction. Despite these constraints, they demonstrated resilience through adaptive time management, faith-informed coping, and peer support. Workplace integration emerged not as passive assimilation but as an ongoing process of negotiation between professional expectations, personal values, and religious identity. The study highlights the importance of faith-sensitive and inclusive workplace practices that support employee well-being, dignity, and sustainable integration within the Philippine BPO industry.

Keywords: Identity; Integration; Motivational Factors; Muslim-Filipinos; Call Center Industry; Philippine BPO Sector

1. Introduction

The Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry has emerged as a defining economic force in the Philippines, transforming its labor market and social landscape over the past two decades. As one of the fastest-growing industries, it contributes significantly to national income and employment generation, with call centers at its operational core ^[1-2]. BPOs are characterized by the delegation of non-core yet essential business functions to external providers, allowing companies to achieve efficiency, scalability, and

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innovation ^[3]. In this highly competitive and globally connected environment, the Philippines has risen as one of the leading outsourcing destinations, second only to India. However, beyond the industry's macroeconomic impact lies a subtler but equally significant social dimension the integration and lived experiences of Muslim-Filipinos working within call centers. These individuals navigate unique intersections of motivation, religious identity, and behavioral adjustment within a predominantly secular and Westernized work culture ^[4-5].

Muslim-Filipinos' entry into the BPO sector represents both an opportunity and a negotiation of cultural belonging. Historically, this group has experienced systemic marginalization in mainstream industries due to socio-political stereotypes and limited access to resources. Yet, the BPO industry's open hiring policies emphasizing communication skills, English proficiency, and performance have created a pathway for social and economic advancement ^[6]. For many Muslim professionals, joining call centers provides not only financial stability but also exposure to urban lifestyles and cross-cultural interactions that extend beyond the confines of their traditional communities ^[7]. Still, this professional inclusion introduces psychological and behavioral challenges: reconciling religious duties with rigid work schedules, maintaining modesty norms in mixed-gender environments, and adjusting to Westernized communication practices that often contrast with Islamic values ^[8].

The psychological implications of working in the BPO industry are multifaceted. Long work hours, night shifts, and continuous exposure to customer interactions generate fatigue, stress, and emotional strain, affecting employees' mental health and work-life balance ^[9-10]. Muslim-Filipinos face additional burdens due to the difficulty of performing obligatory prayers (Salat) or attending Jumu'ah during operational hours. These external stressors can be categorized as "hygiene factors" conditions that prevent dissatisfaction but do not inherently motivate. Yet, for many Muslim workers, intrinsic motivators such as achievement, self-esteem, and recognition compensate for these challenges, helping them sustain job satisfaction and personal growth. The psychological balance between extrinsic demands and intrinsic motivation defines their long-term commitment and adaptation to the BPO industry.

Equally significant are the behavioral adjustments required to function effectively in multicultural call centers. Behavioral integration involves not only skill acquisition but also the ability to align one's conduct with corporate norms without compromising personal values ^[11-12]. Muslim-Filipino employees often develop coping mechanisms such as selective self-disclosure, time management strategies for prayers, or seeking solidarity with co-religionists within the workplace. These adaptive behaviors demonstrate resilience and emotional intelligence key elements in managing cognitive dissonance between faith-based identity and professional expectations. However, these behaviors are not merely personal; they reflect broader institutional dynamics of inclusion and exclusion within the BPO sector. When organizations lack diversity-sensitive policies or facilities such as prayer rooms or Halal food options for Muslim employees are left to navigate these tensions individually, which can intensify stress and reduce long-term retention ^[13].

Furthermore, the socio-cultural environment of call centers affects both interpersonal relations and moral decision-making. Peer influence, competition, and exposure to Western lifestyles often pressure employees to adjust their habits, communication styles, and even personal identities ^[14]. For Muslim-Filipinos, these pressures can lead to moral conflicts, particularly when work culture encourages social drinking, dating, or mixed-gender interactions practices that may conflict with Islamic ethics ^[15]. Some choose assimilation as a survival strategy, while others consciously maintain distinct boundaries, drawing strength from spiritual discipline and community ties. Such behavioral variations reflect the psychological

continuum of integration, ranging from identity concealment to identity assertion, as theorized in grounded qualitative studies.

The theoretical foundation of this study bridges Islamic economic thought and Western motivation theories. Ibrahim and Tijjani ^[16] asserts that Islam encourages the pursuit of lawful livelihood (halal rizq) while promoting moderation, fairness, and social responsibility. Islamic Work Ethics was operationalized through three analytic dimensions derived from participant narratives: (1) halal rizq, referring to ethical income legitimacy; (2) faith–work negotiation, reflecting the reconciliation of religious obligations with organizational demands; and (3) sabr, or endurance, as a form of moral and psychological resilience in the workplace. This verse reflects the theological premise that economic activity, when guided by ethical intent, becomes an act of worship. Thus, Muslim-Filipinos’ participation in the BPO sector represents a convergence of spiritual duty and modern ambition, a psychological reconciliation between religious devotion and material progress ^[17].

Research on psychological well-being and motivation within the call center industry also highlights the dual nature of empowerment and strain. On one hand, call centers provide structured training, communication skills, and financial incentives that enhance self-esteem and confidence ^[18-19]. On the other hand, continuous monitoring, target-driven performance, and irregular schedules can lead to burnout, irritability, and decreased family interaction ^[20]. For Muslim-Filipinos, these stressors manifest uniquely because they involve moral and spiritual dimensions where failure to fulfill religious obligations may cause guilt or internal dissonance. The integration process, therefore, is not merely occupational but existential requiring emotional regulation, faith reinforcement, and psychological resilience. Muslim employees in secular organizations further notes the tension between religious obligations and standardized work regimes. However, these studies often treat religion as a background variable rather than as an organizing ethical framework shaping motivation and adaptation. The present study extends this literature by offering a phenomenological account of Muslim-Filipino workers in the Philippine BPO sector, focusing on how faith-based values intersect with workplace integration.

This study builds upon qualitative approaches that capture the lived experiences of Muslim-Filipino call center agents through phenomenological and interpretive methods. It examines motivational, psychological, and behavioral factors shaping their employment journeys and explores how they construct meaning from the tensions between faith and modernity. The research extends earlier findings by highlighting how emotional intelligence, moral reasoning, and cultural flexibility become adaptive tools for survival and growth. In doing so, it contributes to the broader discourse on workplace inclusion, Islamic work ethics, and identity negotiation in globalized labor economies. This study examines the lived experiences of Muslim-Filipino employees in the Philippine BPO sector, focusing on how motivation, psychological well-being, and behavioral adaptation are shaped by ethical livelihood, faith-based responsibility, and workplace negotiation. While existing studies have explored religious minorities in call center environments, this research contributes a phenomenological account of Muslim-Filipino integration grounded in Islamic ethical meaning-making rather than treating religion as a demographic variable alone.

2. Literature

2.1. Philippine BPO sector

The Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry has emerged as a cornerstone of the Philippine economy, providing millions of jobs and attracting substantial foreign investment. This expansion has been driven by the increasing demand for outsourced customer service, information management, and back-office

operations from Western economies ^[21]. BPOs allow firms to delegate non-core business functions to external providers, ensuring operational efficiency, cost reduction, and competitive advantage ^[22]. Among its subfields, the call center sector has become the largest employment generator due to its accessibility to graduates with communication and interpersonal skills. This has led to the Philippines being recognized as one of the top outsourcing hubs globally, second only to India in terms of service delivery capacity and workforce volume. However, despite these achievements, the industry has also brought complex changes in workplace culture, identity, and employee well-being, especially among minority groups who experience both inclusion and marginalization within corporate settings ^[23].

Beyond its economic success, the BPO industry has introduced new forms of social and cultural transformation. The influx of foreign business practices and the adoption of Westernized communication styles have redefined how Filipino professionals relate to work, self, and others ^[24-25]. The emphasis on productivity, customer satisfaction, and performance metrics fosters an environment of competition and emotional discipline, which can lead to stress and burnout. For Muslim-Filipinos, these pressures intersect with faith-based obligations that may not be fully accommodated in corporate spaces, creating a unique layer of adjustment. Although studies have documented the overall benefits of the BPO sector, few have examined how its structure influences the psychological and social experiences of employees from religious minorities. This underexplored dimension highlights the need for a culturally and spiritually inclusive analysis of how the industry shapes identity and integration in modern Filipino society.

2.2. Motivational theories in work and organizational settings

Employee motivation has long been recognized as a critical factor influencing job satisfaction, productivity, salary and supervision, and intrinsic motivators, such as recognition, achievement, and personal growth. In the context of the BPO industry, financial incentives, bonuses, and career progression opportunities initially attract employees. However, sustained engagement relies on deeper motivators, including meaningful work, supportive relationships, and recognition from management ^[26-27]. Employees who feel valued and respected exhibit stronger emotional commitment, while those who perceive neglect or inequity experience dissatisfaction and turnover. For Muslim-Filipinos, motivation also includes adherence to ethical labor practices and alignment of work with religious obligations. Earning halal income and maintaining moral conduct are viewed as both professional duties and spiritual achievements.

While conventional motivation theories provide insight into general work behavior, they often fail to account for cultural and religious variations that shape employee perspectives. Muslim-Filipinos approach work with a balance between material necessity and moral responsibility, guided by Islamic teachings that regard diligence, honesty, and justice as virtues ^[28]. Their motivation to remain in the BPO industry is not only economic but also aspirational, involving a pursuit of dignity and community belonging in an environment that often challenges faith-based routines. Yet, literature addressing this intersection remains scarce, and most motivational frameworks remain Western-centric. The absence of studies exploring how Islamic work values interact with organizational systems reveals a research gap on how intrinsic and extrinsic motivations coexist in multi-faith corporate environments like Philippine call centers.

2.3. Psychological dimensions of BPO employment

The psychological landscape of call center employment has been widely documented as demanding and emotionally taxing. Long working hours, night shifts, and continuous exposure to customer grievances can lead to mental exhaustion and emotional fatigue ^[29-30]. Employees are trained to maintain composure and empathy even during high-pressure interactions, which often requires suppressing personal emotions, a phenomenon referred to as emotional labor ^[31]. Over time, emotional suppression results in cognitive

dissonance and stress accumulation, reducing job satisfaction and increasing burnout risk ^[32-33]. For Muslim-Filipinos, these challenges are intensified by spiritual obligations that may conflict with rigid work routines, such as performing the five daily prayers or fasting during Ramadan ^[34]. Without institutional accommodations, employees may struggle to reconcile their faith with occupational demands, affecting psychological stability and workplace engagement.

Another important psychological aspect involves identity affirmation and emotional well-being. Workers who perceive organizational respect for their cultural identity are more likely to demonstrate resilience and satisfaction ^[35-36]. Conversely, those who encounter stereotypes or insensitivity regarding their beliefs may experience alienation and stress. For Muslim-Filipinos, maintaining religious identity while adapting to a predominantly secular and Westernized environment becomes a daily psychological negotiation. Some studies highlight that a lack of awareness among managers about Islamic practices contributes to unintentional exclusion and moral fatigue among Muslim employees ^[37]. Despite extensive research on job-related stress in BPOs, the psychological implications of faith-based adaptation remain underexplored, signaling a need to integrate spirituality and mental health perspectives in workforce management.

2.4. Behavioral adaptation and integration in multicultural workplaces

Behavioral adaptation in the BPO sector encompasses the strategies employees develop to navigate cultural expectations and professional norms. Working in call centers requires linguistic adjustment, accent neutralization, and adherence to service protocols aligned with Western customer expectations ^[38-39]. For Muslim-Filipinos, this adaptation process involves maintaining ethical conduct and modesty while engaging in team activities that often blur the lines between work and social life. Many Muslim employees adopt practical strategies such as adjusting prayer times, seeking out peer support, or selectively sharing aspects of their identity to fit workplace culture ^[40]. These behaviors demonstrate agency and resilience, reflecting an ability to blend cultural sensitivity with professional competence. However, behavioral adaptation also entails emotional costs, as individuals may feel pressured to conceal religious practices to avoid discrimination or misunderstanding.

Integration in multicultural workplaces goes beyond behavioral conformity; it requires organizational structures that recognize and accommodate diversity. True inclusion is achieved when employees can express their identities freely without fear of exclusion. Muslim-Filipinos who are provided with spaces for prayer, halal food options, or flexible scheduling tend to integrate more successfully and display higher job satisfaction ^[41-42]. Conversely, when such accommodations are absent, employees may experience identity dissonance and lower engagement. Behavioral adaptation thus becomes a form of survival rather than belonging. Most existing studies focus on behavioral integration from a cross-cultural or performance standpoint, leaving a gap in understanding how minority faith identities influence adaptation in corporate environments ^[43]. This study responds to that gap by examining integration not only as a behavioral process but as a moral and emotional journey shaped by faith and community values.

2.5. Islamic work ethics and faith-based motivation

Islamic work ethics provide a distinctive framework that links faith, labor, and morality. According to Bolton ^[44], labor is a divine obligation that brings dignity and spiritual fulfillment when performed with honesty and fairness. For Muslim-Filipinos, employment within call centers represents an opportunity to practice these principles while achieving financial independence. The integration of faith into the workplace offers psychological comfort and strengthens moral resilience amid the pressures of modern corporate life ^[45-46]. However, this integration is often challenged by organizational structures that prioritize productivity over

spiritual welfare. The lack of awareness regarding Islamic needs such as prayer accommodations or halal dietary options can lead to moral fatigue and disengagement.

Recent studies argue that incorporating religious values into organizational ethics enhances motivation and commitment. When management acknowledges and respects employees' belief systems, workers report higher levels of satisfaction and loyalty ^[47-48]. In contrast, environments that ignore cultural or spiritual needs inadvertently contribute to turnover and emotional strain. This insight has significant implications for diversity management in Philippine BPOs, where inclusivity must extend beyond gender and language to encompass religion and ethics. Despite its potential, empirical research on Islamic work ethics in the context of globalized service industries remains limited. Exploring how these ethical foundations influence motivation and integration among Muslim-Filipinos offers an important contribution to both organizational psychology and Islamic business studies.

This study is grounded on the understanding that the experiences of Muslim-Filipinos in the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector extend beyond economics and employment. Their participation in the call center industry reflects an ongoing negotiation between identity, motivation, and adaptation within a secular and fast-paced corporate environment. It contributes to existing literature by offering an in-depth phenomenological analysis of Muslim-Filipino employees' experiences in the Philippine BPO sector, emphasizing how faith, work motivation, and adaptation intersect within a highly structured and secularized work environment. This research explores how Muslim-Filipinos find balance between spiritual obligations and professional demands, how their intrinsic and extrinsic motivations influence their workplace satisfaction, and how behavioral adaptation supports their sense of integration in multicultural organizations. The study situates these experiences within both Islamic ethical perspectives and established motivation theories to produce a more holistic understanding of work in the Philippine BPO context. Focusing on their voices and lived realities, this study aims to contribute to the growing scholarship on diversity, inclusion, and identity in globalized service industries, while offering practical insights for developing culturally responsive and psychologically sustainable workplace environments.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study employed a **qualitative phenomenological research design** to understand the lived experiences of Muslim-Filipinos working in the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry. A phenomenological approach was chosen because it focuses on uncovering the meanings individuals attach to their everyday experiences ^[49-50]. It allowed participants to articulate their perspectives on motivation, identity, and integration in their own words, providing insight into how they balance faith-based values with the demands of a secular and Westernized work culture.

The use of phenomenology was appropriate since the study's purpose was not to measure frequency or correlation but to describe in depth the inner realities of Muslim-Filipino call center employees. Through rich narratives, the research sought to explore how these individuals define fulfillment, manage challenges, and construct a sense of belonging in the BPO environment. This design enabled the researcher to interpret meanings drawn from participants' accounts and situate them within the broader social, psychological, and spiritual contexts of modern employment.

3.2. Research environment

The research was conducted in **selected BPO companies** located in major urban centers of the Philippines, including **Metro Manila, Cebu City, and Davao City**, where a considerable number of

Muslim-Filipinos are employed. These areas were strategically selected because they serve as central hubs for the country's outsourcing operations and represent a mix of global corporate culture and local diversity. The BPO industry in these cities is known for its fast-paced, client-driven environment that requires 24-hour service, flexible shifts, and high communication competency.

The chosen settings provided ideal contexts for observing the dynamics of identity, motivation, and adaptation. Within these companies, Muslim-Filipino employees engage with co-workers of varied cultural and religious backgrounds, creating both opportunities and tensions in integration. The study paid attention to the presence or absence of culturally accommodating facilities such as prayer rooms, halal food options, or inclusive management practices that may influence employees' psychological and behavioral adjustment. Observations from these environments helped frame the context for interpreting participants' narratives.

3.3. Participants of the study

The study involved eighteen (18) Muslim-Filipino call center employees selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was employed to capture variation in lived experiences among Muslim-Filipino call center employees. Participants were selected based on differences in age, gender, tenure, and job roles within the BPO sector. While initial access was facilitated through professional contacts, recruitment was expanded to include participants with diverse perspectives to avoid homogeneity and to ensure a range of workplace experiences consistent with phenomenological inquiry. This approach was appropriate for phenomenological research as it ensured that all participants possessed relevant experience and could provide in-depth reflections. Inclusion criteria required that participants:

1. *Identify as Muslim-Filipino;*
2. *Have at least one year of experience in the BPO or call center industry; and*
3. *Be willing to participate voluntarily and share their experiences openly.*

Participants represented both genders, aged between 22 and 39, and came from varied ethnic groups including Tausug, Maranao, Maguindanao, and reverts to Islam. They worked in or had experience with companies such as Teleperformance, Concentrix, Sitel, Accenture, and other multinational firms. Recruitment was facilitated through professional and personal networks, ensuring ethical transparency and voluntary participation. Each participant signed an informed consent form prior to the interview, and pseudonyms were used to maintain confidentiality.

3.4. Research instrument

Data were collected using a **semi-structured interview guide** designed to elicit comprehensive narratives from participants. The interview instrument was aligned with the two main objectives of the study, ensuring that questions captured the dimensions of motivation, psychological experience, and behavioral integration. The instrument was validated by qualitative research experts for clarity, cultural sensitivity, and relevance.

Table 1. Instrument of the study

Objectives	Interview questions
1. To explore the motivational factors and personal circumstances that influence Muslim-Filipinos to pursue and sustain employment in the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) or call center industry.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What factors led you to work in the call center industry? 2. What disadvantages or difficulties have you encountered while working in the call center industry?
2. To examine how Muslim-Filipinos manage their	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What challenges have you faced as a Muslim-

Objectives	Interview questions
religious identity, psychological well-being, and behavioral integration within the multicultural and Westernized environment of the Philippine BPO sector	2. Filipino call center agent? How do you cope with these challenges? How do you manage your religious practices such as prayer, fasting, or observance of Islamic values while working?

Table 1. (Continued)

According to Ruslin et al. ^[51], the semi-structured format allowed flexibility during interviews, giving participants freedom to elaborate on experiences and enabling the researcher to ask follow-up questions for clarification. The use of open-ended questions provided in-depth responses that captured both cognitive reflections and emotional undertones of their lived experiences ^[52-53].

3.5. Data gathering procedure

Data collection was conducted over a three-month period after securing ethical approval from the researcher's academic institution. Coordination with BPO company representatives and participants was established through professional networks. Once participants confirmed availability, individual interviews were scheduled either in private meeting spaces or via secure online platforms to ensure confidentiality and comfort.

Before each interview, participants were briefed on the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. With their consent, interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder and transcribed verbatim afterward. Field notes were also taken to capture contextual observations, tone, and non-verbal cues. Data collection and analysis proceeded iteratively until no new meaning units emerged across successive transcript reviews.

3.6. Data analysis

The transcribed data were analyzed using **Thematic Analysis** guided by phenomenological principles. Thematic analysis is a highly popular technique among qualitative researchers for analyzing qualitative data, which usually comprises thick descriptive data ^[54]. Thematic analysis proceeded through several stages: Three major themes emerged: (1) motivational drivers and economic aspirations; (2) psychological negotiation between faith and workplace demands; and (3) behavioral adaptation as a form of integration. Triangulation with literature and theoretical frameworks, including Islamic Work Ethics, reinforced analytical validity. While the study did not begin with a predetermined religious framework, Islamic ethical values emerged inductively from participants' narratives during the thematic analysis process and were subsequently used as an interpretive lens to deepen understanding of how Muslim-Filipino employees negotiate meaning, motivation, and adaptation in the workplace. The analysis reached analytical sufficiency, as recurring experiential patterns emerged across participants' narratives, allowing for meaningful thematic interpretation consistent with phenomenological inquiry. The study does not claim statistical or theoretical saturation, but focuses on depth of lived experience rather than exhaustive coverage.

3.7. Trustworthiness and ethical considerations

The study adhered to the principles of **credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability** as proposed by Korstjens et al. ^[55]. **Credibility** was ensured through prolonged engagement with participants and the use of member checking to verify accuracy. **Transferability** was achieved by providing detailed contextual descriptions that allow readers to assess applicability in similar settings. **Dependability** was established through transparent documentation of procedures, including interview guides, field notes, and analytic steps. **Confirmability** was maintained through reflexive journaling to minimize researcher bias.

Ethical protocols were strictly observed. Participants' identities were protected using pseudonyms, and personal data were kept confidential. Interviews were conducted in a culturally respectful manner, taking into consideration participants' prayer schedules and religious sensitivities. Ethical clearance was obtained from the researcher's institution prior to data collection. These safeguards ensured that the study upheld the dignity, privacy, and autonomy of all participants while maintaining the integrity of the research process.

4. Results and discussion

The demographic results reveal that Muslim-Filipino employees in the BPO sector are largely young adults aged 22–39 mostly single, and with college-level education. This demographic composition reflects a generation seeking economic empowerment and social mobility through globalized employment structures. The study interviewed 18 participants in total ($N = 18$). Some closed-question items received fewer responses; where applicable, the denominator for each item is shown in the table caption or footnote. As Erikson's psychosocial theory in 1968 suggests, individuals in this life stage are motivated by identity formation and the pursuit of competence, making them more open to modern occupational cultures that reward adaptability and skill ^[56].

The respondents' high educational attainment aligns with Bandura's ^[57] concept of self-efficacy, wherein individuals with advanced education tend to perceive themselves as capable of meeting high-performance standards. Their participation in English-intensive and client-oriented work environments enhances linguistic competence, self-confidence, and intercultural awareness an outcome consistent with Deci and Ryan's ^[58] Self-Determination Theory, which identifies competence and autonomy as core psychological needs driving workplace motivation. The diversity of ethnic backgrounds (Tausug, Maranao, Maguindanao, and reverts) signifies that the BPO sector functions as a social integrator bridging regional and cultural divides. According to Van Laer ^[59], inclusive workspaces that acknowledge Islamic identity allow Muslim employees to negotiate between faith-based values and modern corporate expectations. Moreover, the mix of employed and resigned participants reveals behavioral patterns of mobility that reflect both opportunity-seeking and adjustment challenges, aligning with Lukas et al. ^[60] view that turnover intentions often stem from perceived mismatches between individual identity and organizational climate.

The demographic composition portrays a psychologically adaptive and resilient workforce, actively integrating personal faith, socio-economic ambition, and cultural identity within the dynamic structure of the Philippine BPO industry. The eighteen participants were Muslim-Filipino call center employees aged 22 to 39. Most were single young adults, reflecting the dominant workforce profile in entry- and mid-level BPO roles. Participants represented diverse ethnolinguistic backgrounds, including Tausug, Maranao, Maguindanao, and Muslim reverts. Educational backgrounds ranged from undergraduate to postgraduate levels. Demographic information was used solely to contextualize lived experiences and not for statistical generalization, consistent with phenomenological research principles. The ethical dimensions discussed In this section reflect meanings articulated by participants themselves, with Islamic values emerging organically as part of how they interpreted their work experiences rather than as externally imposed categories.

Objective 1. To explore the motivational factors and personal circumstances that influence Muslim-Filipinos to pursue and sustain employment in the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) or call center industry.

Question 1. What factors led you to work in the call center industry?

1.1. Competitive salary as an entry point to employment

Participants commonly described competitive starting salaries as a primary factor that attracted them to the call center industry. Employment in the BPO sector was perceived as offering faster financial stability compared to other available jobs, particularly for young Muslim-Filipinos seeking immediate income. Rather than being framed as luxury or excess, salary was understood as a practical necessity that enabled participants to meet daily expenses and support family obligations. The importance of income was therefore embedded in responsibility and survival rather than material aspiration. A substantial proportion of respondents agreed that high starting salaries are a decisive factor in pursuing call center employment. This underscores how extrinsic motivation, primarily economic reward serves as a strong behavioral determinant for workforce participation among Muslim-Filipinos. A salary acts as a hygiene factor essential to attract and retain workers, though not sufficient for long-term satisfaction ^[61].

Beyond financial relief, salary satisfaction also reinforces psychological empowerment by validating one's contribution and worth. According to Adams' Equity Theory in 1963, employees evaluate fairness through perceived input–output balance; equitable pay thus generates emotional stability and trust in the organization ^[62]. For Muslim-Filipino workers, competitive wages also represent social justice and inclusion, addressing long-standing employment disparities among minority groups. This interpretation aligns with Linando's ^[63] findings that equitable compensation fosters workplace integration for Muslim professionals, enabling them to reconcile faith-based modesty with modern career aspirations. Furthermore, Roskams et al. ^[64] explain through the Job Demands–Resources Model that adequate compensation serves as a critical resource mitigating occupational strain, improving energy, and sustaining motivation. In this sense, salary operates both as a financial incentive and a psychological buffer that enhances perceived stability and self-worth. Hence, high starting salaries do more than meet material needs they empower Muslim-Filipinos to assert professional identity, independence, and confidence in an industry where cultural and religious representation remains limited.

1.2. Employment benefits as sources of security and stability

Beyond salary, participants highlighted the value of employment benefits such as healthcare coverage, incentives, and allowances. These benefits contributed to a sense of security and reduced financial anxiety, particularly in addressing medical needs and family responsibilities. Participants described benefits as indicators of organizational legitimacy and fairness, reinforcing their decision to remain in the industry despite demanding schedules and performance pressures. A significant portion of respondents agreed that remuneration packages, including health insurance, performance incentives, and night differentials, are critical motivators influencing their decision to join and remain in the BPO industry. This reflects the centrality of financial security and socio-economic resilience as behavioral motivators among Muslim-Filipino employees navigating an industry marked by intense performance demands and cultural assimilation pressures. In this study, the assurance of tangible benefits fostered a sense of predictability and fairness, reducing anxiety associated with unstable income sources a key concern among workers from historically marginalized communities.

For Muslim-Filipino agents, these benefits do not only satisfy material needs but also validate their competence and equal participation in a competitive, often Western-oriented corporate structure. As Schneider et al. ^[65] highlight, equitable compensation reinforces a sense of inclusion and mitigates the perception of structural discrimination against faith-based minorities in modern workplaces. Moreover, Avey

et al. ^[66] emphasize that rewards systems promoting fairness and well-being enhance psychological capital, leading to optimism, hope, and resilience traits that are essential for employees operating in cognitively demanding night-shift environments. Complementarily, Demerouti et al. ^[67] argue that the presence of robust financial and welfare incentives serves as a job resource, buffering against fatigue and stress under the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model.

Question 2. What disadvantages or difficulties have you encountered while working in the call center industry?

2.1 Reduced Family Interaction and Emotional Adjustment

Participants consistently reported reduced time spent with family due to night shifts, extended working hours, and irregular schedules. This limitation affected participation in family activities and religious gatherings, contributing to feelings of emotional distance and fatigue. While participants recognized the economic necessity of their work, they also acknowledged the emotional cost associated with diminished family engagement. BPO employment transcends financial motivation it fosters holistic professional development and self-determination, equipping Muslim-Filipinos with globally competitive skills, a stronger professional identity, and enhanced psychological resilience necessary for sustained integration in the Philippine BPO sector. Most of the respondents agreed that spending less time with family is one of the major disadvantages of working in the BPO industry. The finding reflects a behavioral and psychosocial strain resulting from night shifts, irregular schedules, and the 24/7 operational structure characteristic of global outsourcing. From the lens of Greenhaus and Beutell's ^[68] Work–Family Conflict Theory, conflicting role demands between work and family generate emotional exhaustion and reduced well-being, especially among employees whose cultural values emphasize familial cohesion. This tension is magnified among Muslim-Filipino workers, for whom family interaction and shared religious routines hold deep spiritual significance.

The call center's demanding schedule often disrupts prayer times, communal meals, and participation in domestic responsibilities, Xie et al. ^[69] describe in the Job Demands–Resources Model as a mismatch between high job demands and limited recovery opportunities. Such disruptions can lead to chronic stress, fatigue, and diminished social connectedness, all of which erode intrinsic motivation and psychological stability. Meng et al. ^[70] further explains through the Work/Family Border Theory that employees experience lower satisfaction when transitions between work and home domains become fragmented, reducing perceived harmony and identity coherence. Behaviorally, prolonged absence from family can also trigger guilt and cognitive dissonance, as workers reconcile their financial responsibilities with cultural expectations of presence and care. Zeng et al. ^[71] found that inadequate family interaction weakens emotional support systems, often resulting in compensatory behaviors such as isolation or over commitment to work. In the Muslim-Filipino context, this separation may also lead to spiritual disconnection, as family often reinforces religious observance and moral grounding.

However, Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources Theory in 1989 offers a psychological explanation for resilience amid this strain: employees seek to conserve and restore personal resources like time, energy, faith, and support to maintain equilibrium ^[72]. Some respondents reported coping through digital communication and scheduling prayer or family calls around rest periods, signifying adaptive strategies toward maintaining relational ties despite occupational challenges. The reduced time with family identified in this table underscores the emotional cost of occupational modernization, a behavioral adjustment that challenges but does not entirely sever familial bonds. For Muslim-Filipinos, integration into the BPO workforce entails

navigating between economic survival and relational duty, demanding organizational policies that recognize faith-centered and family-oriented well-being as essential components of sustainable workforce management.

2.2 Physical Fatigue and Psychological Strain

High levels of fatigue were commonly described, particularly among participants assigned to night shifts. Sleep disruption, prolonged screen exposure, and performance monitoring contributed to physical exhaustion and mental strain. Participants reported that fatigue often affected concentration, mood, and overall well-being. Despite these challenges, many continued employment due to financial responsibility and limited alternative opportunities. The majority of respondents acknowledged that high fatigue is a significant disadvantage of working in the call center industry. This result underscores the physiological and psychological toll imposed by irregular schedules, circadian disruption, and the emotionally demanding nature of customer service interactions. As Maslach ^[73] describe in their Burnout Inventory Framework, prolonged exposure to work-related stress without adequate recovery leads to exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased performance efficacy. For Muslim-Filipino agents, fatigue extends beyond physical tiredness; it challenges mental clarity, emotional regulation, and the capacity to maintain religious observance, particularly during night shifts. When job demands such as time pressure, customer complaints, and graveyard shifts exceed the available resources (e.g., rest, social support, autonomy), strain accumulates, resulting in fatigue and disengagement. Individuals experiencing resource depletion such as loss of energy or sleep undergo psychological distress that can cascade into burnout if recovery mechanisms are absent ^[74-75].

The phenomenon of fatigue also intersects with Islamic work ethics, where balance, moderation, and self-care are emphasized as moral imperatives. Setianingsih & Hendratmi ^[76] argue that Muslim employees perceive excessive fatigue not only as a health risk but as a disruption of *Ishan* (excellence through balance and discipline). This religious framework influences coping strategies: many respondents manage exhaustion through prayer breaks, mindfulness, and social support from co-believers behaviors consistent, where positive reappraisal and problem-focused coping mitigate psychological distress. Moreover, Cunningham et al. ^[77] highlight that chronic fatigue diminishes work engagement and affects long-term career sustainability, suggesting the need for organizational intervention. Companies that provide rest breaks, wellness programs, and culturally sensitive accommodations not only reduce fatigue but also strengthen employee loyalty and identity integration. Their lived experiences confirm that motivation in this context transcends material reward, encompassing the pursuit of dignity, self-respect, and divine purpose in labor. Thus, integration within the BPO industry is not simply an economic achievement but a continuous negotiation of values, where faith serves as both anchor and catalyst for personal and professional empowerment.

Objective 2. To examine how Muslim-Filipinos manage their religious identity, psychological well-being, and behavioral integration within the multicultural and Westernized environment of the Philippine BPO sector

Question 1. What advantages have you faced as a Muslim-Filipino call center agent?

1.1 Growth in Self-Esteem Through Professional Exposure

Participants described call center work as contributing positively to their self-esteem. Exposure to international clients, structured communication training, and performance evaluations enhanced their confidence and professional identity. Successfully managing customer interactions reinforced a sense of competence and achievement. For many Muslim-Filipino participants, they realized that this professional growth carried additional significance, as it challenged preconceived notions about marginalization and capability. The results reveal unanimous agreement among respondents that

working in a call center has strengthened their self-esteem and personal confidence. This finding indicates that the BPO environment, despite its challenges, serves as a transformative platform for psychological empowerment and identity reconstruction among Muslim-Filipino employees. The concept of self-efficacy, self-esteem grows when individuals successfully perform tasks perceived as challenging, leading to greater confidence in their ability to influence outcomes ^[78]. The exposure to foreign clients, continuous communication training, and performance feedback mechanisms within the BPO industry reinforce employees' belief in their professional competence.

A call center work provides consistent reinforcement through productivity metrics, performance incentives, and recognition programs boosting perceived worth and autonomy ^[79]. Fulfilling the psychological needs for competence and relatedness fosters intrinsic motivation and self-assurance. For Muslim-Filipino agents, these experiences also intersect with cultural and religious identity affirmation. The opportunity to excel in a globalized workplace challenges stereotypes of marginalization and enhances their sense of belonging in a pluralistic workforce. Anli ^[80] note that participation in inclusive professional environments promotes both spiritual pride and civic confidence among Muslim minorities, as success validates their capacity to integrate without compromising faith. Furthermore, Pignault et al. ^[81] suggest that self-esteem in professional contexts often depends on perceived respect from others; thus, the call center's meritocratic evaluation system focused on skill and performance allows Muslim-Filipinos to gain recognition based on competence rather than ethnicity or religion. This merit-based validation strengthens emotional resilience and social identity, fostering behavioral adaptation and long-term engagement. Call center work contributes not only to financial well-being but also to psychological development, where self-esteem functions as a mediating factor between motivation, identity, and workplace integration. Through daily interaction, feedback, and recognition, Muslim-Filipino employees experience enhanced self-worth and empowerment key indicators of successful socio-psychological integration within the Philippine BPO sector.

1.2 Skill Acquisition and Career Orientation

Participants emphasized the development of transferable skills, particularly in communication, problem-solving, and time management. These competencies were viewed as valuable assets that extended beyond the call center environment. Some participants expressed optimism regarding career advancement within the BPO sector, while others perceived the experience as preparation for future employment opportunities. Skill development thus functioned as both immediate professional growth and long-term career investment. All respondents agreed that working in a call center provides substantial opportunities for skills enhancement and career development, emphasizing its role as a catalyst for personal and professional growth among Muslim-Filipino employees. The industry's structured training systems, exposure to international clientele, and emphasis on communication proficiency contribute to a significant rise in cognitive competence and workplace adaptability. Learning occurs through concrete experiences, reflective observation, and active experimentation key mechanisms embedded within BPO training processes. From a behavioral perspective, call center employment fosters continuous self-regulation and learning agility, observational learning and reinforcement as central to skill acquisition. The feedback-driven performance culture characteristic of BPO organizations nurtures self-efficacy, allowing employees to translate technical competence into confidence and initiative. Skill mastery strengthens intrinsic motivation by satisfying the need for competence, leading to greater commitment and persistence ^[82].

In addition, skill and career development among Muslim-Filipino agents also serves as a form of psychological empowerment and social validation. According to Goel et al. ^[83], developing psychological capital comprising self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience that enables employees to cope with demanding job structures while maintaining motivation. This is particularly significant for Muslim workers who navigate both professional expectations and faith-based values. Hollar et al. ^[84] note that the opportunity to upskill and advance within diverse work environments reinforces positive identity integration, proving that religious affiliation need not limit career success. Furthermore, Skill development functions as a job resource that offsets emotional strain and enhances engagement. In the context of Muslim-Filipino call center agents, professional growth becomes a balancing mechanism that counteracts the pressures of night shifts, cultural adaptation, and client stress.

Question 2. How do you cope with these challenges? How do you manage your religious practices such as prayer, fasting, or observance of Islamic values while working?

2.1 F Flexible Religious Practice

Participants described coping with workplace challenges primarily through a process of faith work negotiation, wherein religious practices were not abandoned but strategically adjusted to align with the operational demands of the call center environment. Rather than perceiving religious observance as incompatible with employment, Muslim-Filipino employees demonstrated adaptive flexibility in practicing Islam within the constraints of shift-based, performance-driven work structures. Daily prayers were often rescheduled within permissible Islamic guidelines, performed during break times, or conducted discreetly in quiet or unused office spaces. For many participants, they suggest that this flexibility was not interpreted as a weakening of faith but as a practical response to occupational realities, allowing them to remain spiritually grounded while fulfilling professional responsibilities. The management of fasting during Ramadan emerged as a particularly demanding aspect of this negotiation.

Religious fasting, or faith-based fasting, is predominantly practiced to satisfy prescribed religious requirements and is defined as a nutritional model characterized by a variance in the degree of caloric restriction and abstinence from specific foods ^[85]. Interestingly, religious fasting could help to improve individual health as well as the community, and planet. Fasting rituals are followed by billions of individuals worldwide and their effects may differ from one religious community to another ^[86]. It should be acknowledged that 83% of the world's population self-identified as adhering to a religion in 2010, and this number is projected to rise to 87% by 2050 ^[87-88]. Participants assigned to night shifts reported heightened physical exhaustion due to prolonged wakefulness, customer-facing emotional labor, and altered eating patterns. To cope, respondents described regulating sleep cycles, prioritizing hydration and nutrition during suhoor and iftar, and mentally reframing fasting as both a spiritual obligation and a test of endurance. Despite the lack of formal accommodations in many workplaces, participants emphasized that maintaining religious discipline provided a sense of moral structure and internal stability amid workplace pressure. This finding underscores that religious observance functioned not as an obstacle but as a stabilizing psychological resource.

From an interpretive perspective, this theme reflects the core principle of Islamic Work Ethics, particularly the concept of halal rizq and sabr. Employment in the BPO sector was viewed as morally legitimate when approached with sincerity, ethical conduct, and patience. Participants framed their ability to balance faith and work as a form of moral accountability rather than mere compliance with corporate expectations. This aligns with phenomenological understandings of meaning-making, wherein individuals actively construct coherence between personal values and external demands. Faith-work negotiation thus

emerged as a dynamic process of integration, allowing Muslim-Filipino employees to sustain religious identity without disengaging from professional life. Rather than full assimilation into a secular workplace culture, participants demonstrated selective adaptation that preserved spiritual integrity while enabling continued participation in the industry ^[89].

2.2 Behavioral Self-Regulation and Discipline in a Secular Workplace

In addition to religious negotiation, participants described behavioral self-regulation as a central coping mechanism for managing the psychological and emotional demands of call center work. Muslim-Filipino employees emphasized the importance of emotional control, discipline, and professionalism in navigating customer interactions, performance monitoring, and culturally unfamiliar workplace norms. Sabitova et al. ^[90] discovered that a supportive working atmosphere, collaborative teams, and fair, honest, and transparent processes were all positively connected with job morale in a study of healthcare employees. In addition, it has been discovered that working in a learning culture improves clinical services and that assisting clinicians in their work boosts morale and increases worker retention ^[91]. These experiences resonate with participants reported consciously regulating tone, language, and emotional responses when dealing with difficult customers, recognizing that emotional outbursts or visible frustration could negatively affect both performance evaluations and job security. This deliberate behavioral management reflects the broader emotional labor required in call center environments, intensified by night shifts and continuous surveillance. Behavioral discipline also extended to social participation and workplace interactions. Participants described selectively engaging in team activities, particularly those involving practices that conflicted with Islamic values, such as alcohol-centered gatherings or informal socialization that challenged modesty norms. Rather than framing these choices as social withdrawal, respondents viewed them as intentional boundary-setting strategies that allowed them to maintain ethical consistency without disrupting professional relationships. Many participants emphasized that respect was earned through consistent work performance and professional conduct rather than full participation in all aspects of workplace culture. This indicates that behavioral adaptation was guided by agency and self-awareness rather than passive conformity.

From a psychological standpoint, self-regulation served as a protective mechanism against stress, moral conflict, and identity dissonance. Maintaining discipline in both behavior and values, participants minimized internal tension between personal beliefs and organizational expectations. This aligns with theories of behavioral integration in multicultural workplaces, which suggest that effective adaptation does not require identity erasure but rather the ability to navigate multiple normative systems simultaneously. In the context of Muslim-Filipino call center agents, behavioral self-regulation functioned as a form of resilience allowing individuals to meet productivity demands while safeguarding personal dignity and moral coherence. The emergence and growth of call centers in the Philippines is undeniably phenomenal. The industry has been both praised and criticized for its emergence as a job option for Filipinos. One issue that arises is the potential effects of emotional labor rendered by call center agents on their workplace well-being and ultimately their tenure ^[92-93]. This suggests that integration within the Philippine BPO sector is sustained not by structural accommodation alone but by employees' capacity for disciplined behavioral negotiation in environments that remain largely secular and performance-oriented.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the lived experiences of Muslim-Filipino employees in the Philippine BPO sector, focusing on how motivation, psychological well-being, and behavioral adaptation shape their process of workplace integration. The findings demonstrate that participation in the call center industry is neither a purely economic decision nor a straightforward path to inclusion. Instead, it is a complex and ongoing

negotiation shaped by financial necessity, professional aspirations, family responsibilities, and faith-based values. The prominence of Islamic ethical values in the findings reflects participants' own meaning-making processes, underscoring how faith functions as a lived resource rather than a prescriptive framework in workplace integration. Employment in the BPO sector provides Muslim-Filipino workers with economic stability, skill development, and increased self-confidence. These opportunities enable participants to support their families, strengthen their professional identity, and challenge perceptions of marginalization. At the same time, the findings reveal significant psychological and emotional costs. Irregular schedules, night shifts, and high performance demands contribute to fatigue, reduced family interaction, and internal tension, particularly when work requirements intersect with religious obligations. Integration, as experienced by participants, does not occur through full assimilation into organizational culture. Rather, it is achieved through individual strategies of adaptation, resilience, and discretion. Muslim-Filipino employees often carry the responsibility of adjustment themselves, navigating workplace expectations while preserving personal values and religious identity. This underscores a form of inclusion that relies more on individual endurance than on institutional accommodation. Overall, the study highlights the need to understand workplace integration as a lived and relational process rather than a static outcome. For organizations, these findings point to the importance of recognizing faith-sensitive experiences and addressing structural conditions that affect employee well-being. Foregrounding the voices of Muslim-Filipino workers, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of diversity, motivation, and integration within the Philippine BPO industry and offers insights relevant to broader discussions of inclusion in multicultural work environments.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to address the motivational, psychological, and behavioral realities of Muslim-Filipino employees in the BPO industry:

1. *Provide Culturally Responsive Facilities.* Companies should allocate prayer spaces and ensure the availability of halal-certified food options in office cafeterias or nearby establishments. Such facilities promote spiritual comfort and reduce the need for employees to conceal religious practices, thereby enhancing morale and psychological balance.
2. *Implement Flexible Scheduling for Religious Observance.* Management should integrate schedule flexibility during significant Islamic periods such as Ramadan and Friday congregational prayers. Allowing shift adjustments for fasting and prayer observance demonstrates organizational empathy and builds employee trust and retention.
3. *Strengthen Faith-Inclusive Human Resource Policies.* Human resource departments should embed religious sensitivity in recruitment, evaluation, and welfare policies. Dress codes should accommodate modest attire such as hijab, and policy language should affirm respect for faith-based practices to prevent silent exclusion or discrimination.
4. *Develop Comprehensive Fatigue and Wellness Programs.* The study revealed that fatigue and family strain are major psychological concerns. BPO companies must introduce wellness programs, rest breaks, and mental health counseling that acknowledge the dual pressure of night shifts and religious routines. This approach promotes holistic well-being and improves job sustainability.
5. *Enhance Leadership and Diversity Training.* Supervisors and team leaders should undergo structured diversity and sensitivity training that includes Islamic work values. Awareness of faith-related needs fosters empathy and reduces misunderstanding in daily interactions, improving team cohesion and performance outcomes.

6. *Promote Career Advancement and Faith-Compatible Recognition.* Management should create mentorship programs that link performance rewards with ethical behavior, social responsibility, and cultural inclusion. Recognition of moral discipline and professional excellence reinforces both intrinsic motivation and organizational loyalty among Muslim employees.

Encourage Academic and Policy Collaboration. Future research should involve partnerships among universities, Islamic organizations, and corporate institutions to design inclusive management models grounded in both business ethics and cultural diversity. Policy advocacy should emphasize the social responsibility of the BPO industry in supporting minority workers' welfare.

Through these actions, the study envisions a BPO environment that upholds productivity while nurturing faith identity, psychological health, and ethical awareness. Integration will only be achieved when the workplace evolves into a space where professional excellence coexists with moral authenticity and cultural respect.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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