

Beyond Workforce Management

Nine Things Every Contact Center Needs to Know About Workforce Productivity

Executive Summary

If companies want to remain competitive, then their contact centers have to go beyond cost savings and become revenue contributors. Gone are the days where the contact center was a cost center to be managed solely for efficiency. Successful businesses recognize the potential the contact center has to build customer loyalty, win new customers, and increase revenue. And in addition to the traditional goal of keeping costs down, these companies are setting new goals, putting new practices in place, and investing in new technology that takes them beyond workforce management to workforce productivity.

Workforce productivity techniques include tying contact center metrics to business goals such as growth and profit; empowering contact center staff to take responsibility for their own contributions; and applying technologies that go beyond traditional forecasting and scheduling applications.

One of the most powerful of these new technologies is analytics, an approach to reporting that combines contact center statistics with business data, focuses on the information most relevant to business goals, matches that information to specific tasks inside the contact center, and gives users the ability to analyze root causes and take corrective actions.

It's time to write the epitaph for contact centers that focus solely on internal efficiency and cost control. And it should go something like this:

"Here lies the inward-facing contact center. It didn't accomplish much, but it was cheap."

This white paper explains the concept of workforce productivity and the technologies that support it, and offers advice for selecting the right workforce productivity solutions and vendors.

The Way it Was (and Still is for Some): Measuring Seconds and Counting Beans

Workforce management solutions first emerged at a time when the contact center was seen primarily as a cost center. Contact center management focused on cutting costs, and early workforce management solutions were tools to manage staff for maximum cost-efficiency. Job one was reducing the number of agents to keep down the cost of supporting and paying them.

Of all the people who work in the contact center, workforce managers have perhaps been the most inclined to focus on internal efficiency. They frequently cite the fact that 60 to 70 percent of contact center expenditures go to pay and support contact center staff, mostly agents. To operate within budget, they take aim at that 60 to 70 percent, adopt practices that reduce it, and measure the success of their operations by how little they spend.

Managers who take this approach use workforce management software primarily for forecasting call volumes and devising schedules that get the most work out of the fewest agents. They use simple metrics like talk time or number of calls handled to assess agent performance. Reporting is primarily a process of proving to management that the center has met its cost-reduction goals, not a process of using information to affect positive change. It is an inward-looking philosophy, with the ultimate objective being to please a tight-fisted CFO. Most centers are successful in accomplishing this, meeting and even exceeding their savings goals. But bigger picture corporate objectives, such as winning customer loyalty and increasing revenue, often suffer as a result.

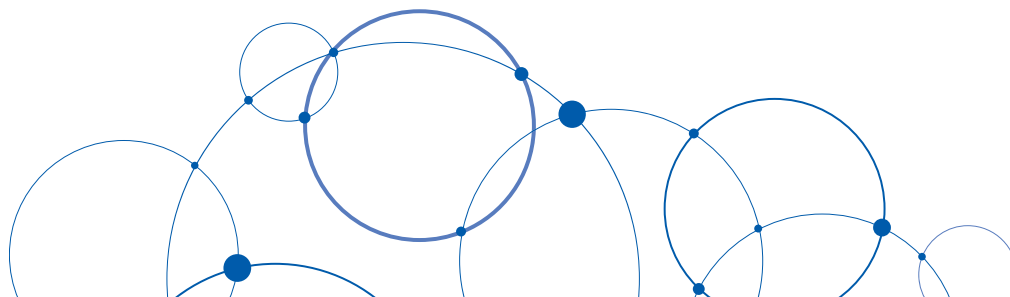
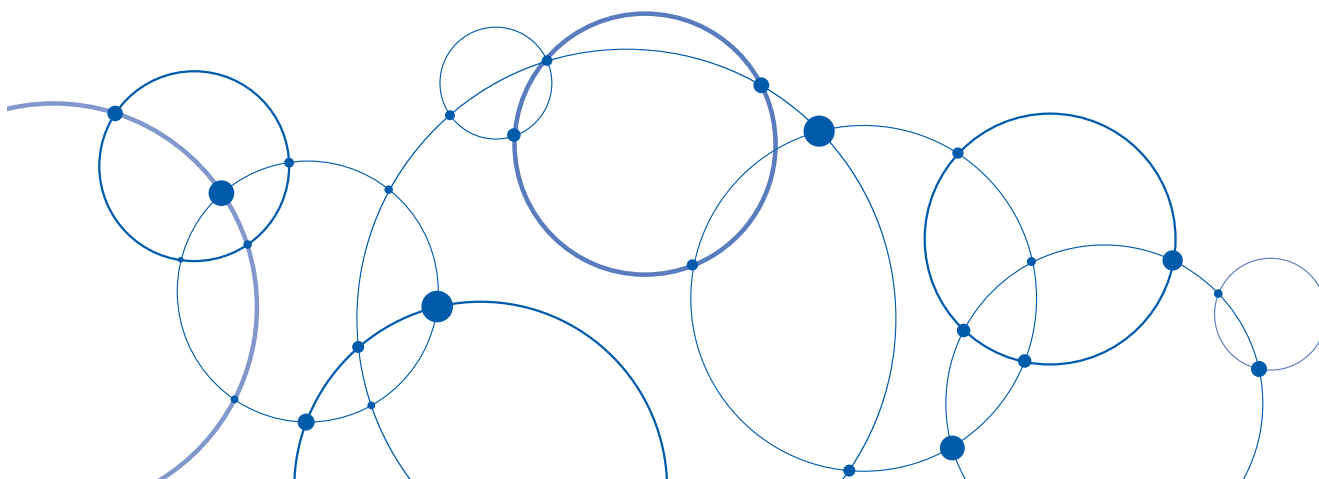


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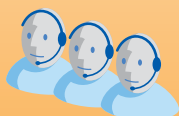




CFO



Contact center manager



Agents



Customers

- Reduced costs
- Low customer satisfaction

Managing the contact center for efficiency - The inward-facing contact center focuses on efficiency. It usually succeeds in keeping costs down, but makes no direct contribution to increasing revenue, and in some cases actually works against important business goals such as customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

With the focus on getting more work out of fewer people, the relationship between managers and agents is too often adversarial. Dissatisfied agents can make life miserable for supervisors and the experience of dealing with the company unpleasant for customers. If an agent is measured strictly on talk time, for example, he may not care whether he solves a customer's problem, as long as he wraps the call up quickly. And in this negative environment, high turnover is common, virtually ensuring that customers will be served by agents in training rather than experienced ones. The company's accountants might be happy, but hardly anyone else is.

In extreme cases, the contact center goals are actually at odds with the company's overarching goals. Who, after all, is the best agent in the contact center? The one who answers the most calls, or the one who sells the most products? What benefits the company most: saving 20 seconds on a call, or winning a customer for life by using those extra seconds to create a memorable experience? These are the tough questions many contact centers have faced for quite some time, and, in fact, some still do.

The Way it Should Be: Nine Things Every Contact Center Needs to Know about Workforce Productivity

Ironically, the 60 to 70 percent that most contact centers spend on staffing often used to justify savings-based contact center practices, yet it is probably the best argument for replacing them. After all, shouldn't the biggest investment yield the biggest return? Contact centers need to focus workforce management practices and technologies at empowering contact center staff to make the largest possible contribution to achieving the company's most important goals.

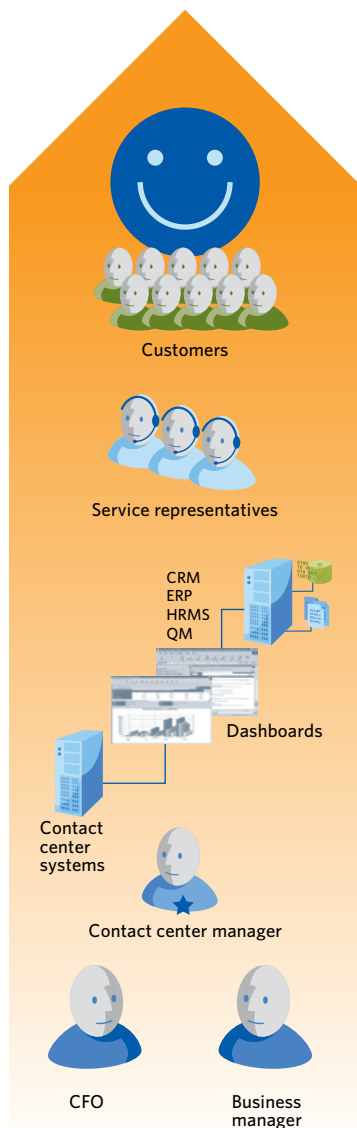
With multichannel contact centers being the norm and consumers being more informed than ever about who they do business with and why, business drivers have changed. The competition is fierce and the only way to keep customers happy and acquire new ones is to differentiate on something other than price - companies have to use the customer experience they deliver as the way to win.

This means changing the way contact centers manage the workforce. To provide a seamless, personalized, consistent experience every time a customer calls, emails or chats, contact center management has to shift its entire perspective about how they measure success. Companies have to view the contact center as a key contributor to revenue goals and shift the emphasis from workforce management to workforce productivity... the active management of processes, technology, and people to achieve growth.

Here are nine things every contact center should know about making workforce productivity successful.

1. Reset goals to achieve greater productivity. The highly evolved capabilities of workforce management software to control costs is still just as valuable as it ever was, but it's not the only game in town. Workforce managers must also establish goals and metrics for reaching the kind of productivity that reflects corporate expectations for business success. They need to ensure that when new agents are hired those individuals understand the importance of their productivity goals in the context for the bigger strategic picture of the organization.

- Increased revenue
- Customer loyalty



Managing the contact center for productivity - The outward-facing contact center focuses on productivity. It is just as capable as the inward-facing contact center of controlling costs, but its real goal is to generate revenue by tying processes to business goals and measuring staff productivity in terms of customer loyalty and increased revenue.

2. Institute best practices for being productive. Contact center managers must do more than keep agents in their seats. To create a work environment conducive to productivity, they need to empower agents to view their own work schedules and easily request shift changes, vacations, and other schedule adjustments. They must automate clerical processes to reduce the time it takes for agents, supervisors, and managers to communicate schedule changes, freeing them to focus on their core duties. Most importantly, they have to really understand the company's overall business goals, tie contact center metrics and processes to them, and give staff at every level detailed, real-time views of their performance so that they can monitor their own productivity and take responsibility for it.

3. Put the right technology in place. To effectively contribute to the success of today's customer-focused contact centers, workforce management software has to be implemented and utilized with the business's goals in mind. The technology is already evolving in this direction as traditional solutions are augmented with tools for empowering agents to gain insight into their work schedules and for streamlining the interactions between managers, supervisors, and agents. Analytical reporting tools that enable employees at every level of the contact center to understand how their tasks contribute to business goals and to take responsibility for their own productivity are becoming more and more prevalent. Having the right technology in place makes it easier to manage the workforce for productivity as well as cost-efficiency.

4. Understand the importance of analytics. Perhaps the most valuable technology for contact centers that want to manage for productivity is analytics. Analytical applications promise to have such a profound and beneficial affect on contact center productivity that one could define workforce productivity in technology terms by calling it workforce management + analytics. Understanding the role of analytics in context of workforce management—that it helps create a structured process through which a company can manage and improve its overall performance—can yield great success when making the leap to workforce productivity. The ultimate goal is to align everyone in the organization towards the same set of goals so the company has a much greater likelihood of achieving them.

5. Focus on relevant statistics. The power of analytical applications lies in large part with the tracking of key performance indicators, or KPIs. The best way to determine what KPIs are best in a given environment is to base them on the strategic objectives of the company and the overall objectives of the contact center, understanding what best practices are and how certain statistics affect the ability to achieve business goals. By presenting statistics carefully selected for their relevance, analytical applications eliminate one of the biggest drawbacks of more traditional reporting techniques—the need to sift through an avalanche of irrelevant data to find the facts that matter.

6. Draw information from business applications. Enabling contact center managers to administer agent performance based on business goals is the essence of workforce productivity. Some analytical applications can deliver all the usual contact center data, across multiple sites and multiple communications channels, and can also pull information from other enterprise data sources. Use information in customer relationship management, enterprise resource planning, human resources management, and quality monitoring systems combined with contact center statistics to create custom KPIs and dashboards.

7. Match the data to the task. In addition to being selected for their relevance to contact center effectiveness, KPIs must also be organized into subsets by function so that each staff member sees the particular KPIs directly related to his or her function. An analytical application might, for instance, offer one view for agents, another for supervisors, another for managers, and yet another for control desk staff.

8. Analyze for root causes. An analytical application that simply dumps statistics in front of staff is no more useful in managing for effectiveness and productivity than traditional call center reports. Look for an analytical application that includes navigation mechanisms that let users drill down into the data – looking at time periods, regions, sites, campaigns, groups, and individual agents – to identify the root causes of performance challenges in order to take immediate corrective action.

9. Manage the infrastructure for optimal productivity. Apply analytical applications to more than just the contact center and customer-facing business processes. Use them to analyze the management of the infrastructure as well. Gain insight into statistics around trunk usage, website traffic, and IP bandwidth to improve the productivity of the infrastructure and the workforce.

Conclusion

There is a paradigm shift happening. Customers are more knowledgeable and more demanding than ever before. To remain competitive, companies have to differentiate themselves based on the customer experience they deliver. The key to achieving this exceptional experience is to rethink the way companies measure contact center agent productivity and how they define success. This means contact centers have to go beyond focusing on cost savings and become revenue contributors.

With the right strategy and the right technology, contact centers can go beyond workforce management to workforce productivity. They can tie contact center metrics to business goals and empower their staff to be aware of and take responsibility for their own contributions to the larger picture of what success means for the entire organization.

It's time to rethink the way they manage their most valuable resource, their human resource.

What to look for in a workforce productivity solution

All of the traditional criteria for workforce management still apply, but go one step further by asking these questions:

- Does the solution have any provision for automatic data exchange with outsourced contact centers, so that an existing agent pool can be augmented without losing control of quality?
- Is there a feature for automating schedule requests, approvals, changes, and notifications, so that staff can focus on revenue-generating tasks rather than clerical details?
- Can agents access their schedules from remote locations via a Web browser and telephone, bid on shifts and vacations, and otherwise exercise control over their work schedules?
- Does the solution include analytical reporting capabilities that give the entire staff the information they need to understand business goals, monitor their own performance, and take responsibility for working productively?
- Is the solution integrated with other components of the contact center infrastructure, such as the automatic call distributor (ACD) or voice self-service system, allowing you to optimize operational components as well as the workforce?

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