EXECUTIVE REPORT ON PERFORMANCE, OPERATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY

By Brian Cantor
Customer-centricity has become the driving force behind today’s call centers.

Call centers define customer satisfaction—not cost efficiency or revenue generation—as their paramount objective. Instead of situating performance evaluation with C-level executives, investors or even lines on their income statements, the majority of today’s businesses believe the most important voice of judgment is that of the customer. Customer-oriented metrics like CSAT score and first call resolution now possess the influence once held by operational ones like average handle time and average speed of answer.

Always designed to serve customers, the call center is now committed to satisfying them. In order to honor that commitment, organizations must calibrate their call center operations with the notion of customer satisfaction.

From the metrics used to evaluate operational performance and contact quality, to the strategies employed when recruiting and developing agents, to the technologies used to execute back-office operations and front-line interactions, every facet of the customer service function plays a role in either driving or preventing customer satisfaction.
Contributors

Stefan Captijn
Director, Product Marketing
Genesys

Nigel Warren
Head of Marketing
MatsSoft

Steve Chirokas
Vice President, Marketing
VoltDelta

Mike Burke
VP, Sales & Business Development
IQ Services

Patrick Botz
Global Director of Marketing
VPI

Matt McConnell
CEO
Intradiem

Erik Strand
Vice President of Product
CallMiner
In April and May of 2014, Call Center IQ conducted this research with collaboration from an audience of customer service, customer experience and contact center professionals. Representing buy-side organizations, vendor organizations and independent consultancies, respondents contributed insights via a web survey and/or targeted, one-on-one interviews. Requests to participate were issued irrespective of company size, call center size or region, assuring that the sample represented a global customer management audience.

Participation nonetheless skewed in favor of larger organizations. 37% of respondents represent organizations with more than 5000 employees. Only 42% work for organizations with less than 500 employees, and 18% work alongside less than 100 people.

The skew in favor of large organizations did not, however, produce a marked skew in favor of large call centers. 50% of respondents seat more than 100 agents in their call centers. While 14% employ more than 1000 customer service agents, 19% seat less than 25.

The overwhelming majority of respondents operate at the managerial level or higher. 89% are at least managers, while 36% are at the director or vice presidential level and 6% are C-level executives. 9% classify themselves as analysts, while 3% are agents or “team members” and 2% perform in administrative positions.

Example respondent job titles included “Director, Global Support,” “VP, Global Customer Care,” “VP, Marketing,” “Managing Director,” “Director, Customer Care,” “Senior Director, Customer Interaction Center,” “Operations Manager,” “Vice President, Customer Care,” “President,” “Call Center Director,” “Chief Operating Officer,” “Director, Technical Product Support,” “Customer Service Manager,” “VP, Client Services,” “Call Center Manager,” “Customer Support Manager” and “Contact Center Operations Manager.”

50% confirm they make purchasing decisions for their call centers. An additional 38% play an influential role in decision making.

Although industry representation was not concentrated—28 distinct industries were identified by respondents—it did skew slightly in favor of telecommunication services (15%), outsourcing (12%), healthcare (8%) and finance/banking (8%).
Q1

How large is your organization? (# employees/staff members)

[Bar chart showing percentage distributions for different employee/staff size categories: 5000+ employees, 2500-499 employees, 1000-2499 employees, 500-999 employees, 250-499 employees, 100-249 employees, 50-99 employees, 10-49 employees, Less than 10 employees.]

Q2

Which define your contact center architecture/function/strategy?

[Bar chart showing percentage distributions for different architecture/function/strategy categories: 23% Single site On-Premise, 4% Single site Cloud, 7% Single site Hosted, 9% Single site Hybrid On-Premise/Cloud, 4% Single site Hybrid On-Premise/Hosted, 3% Single site Hybrid cloud, 21% Multi-site On-Premise, 7% Multi-site Cloud, 7% Multi-site Hosted, 9% Multi-site Hybrid On-Premise/Cloud, 9% Multi-site Hybrid On-Premise/Hosted, 3% Multi-site Hybrid cloud.]
Q3

In which channels do you presently engage with customers?

- 44% Twitter
- 54% Facebook
- 20% LinkedIn
- 11% Google Plus
- 14% Other Social Networks
- 87% E-Mail
- 92% Telephone (live agent)
- 59% Telephone (IVR)
- 39% Web Live Chat
- 51% Web Self-Service
- 21% Mobile (live chat, text, etc)
- 24% Mobile (app self-service)
- 43% In-Person
- 5% Other (please specify)
How will your level of service within these channels change over the next 6-18 months?

- Twitter
- Facebook
- LinkedIn
- Google Plus
- Other Social Networks
- E-Mail
- Telephone (live agent)
- Telephone (IVR)
- Web Live Chat
- Web Self-Service
- Mobile (live chat, text, etc)
- Mobile (app self-service)
- In-Person

Legend:
- Not using - will not start
- Not using - will start
- Using - will decrease use
- Using - will maintain current use
- Using - will increase use
- Using - will cease

Q4
State of the Call Center:
Meet Today’s Customer Service Function

"Customer care professionals are finding out that achieving the efficiency of the cloud does not require putting their customers Personally Identifiable Information (PII) at risk or being concerned with scalability when partnering with a capable cloud contact center vendor."
- Steve Chirokas

Despite existing in a world of multiple contact channels and virtual infrastructures, many of today’s call centers remain at least partially committed to the traditional conception of a customer service department.

Positioning the Call Center

42% of today’s call centers exist entirely on organizational premises. An additional 30% adhere to a hybrid infrastructure that includes an on-premise element. 13% exclusively use physical infrastructure hosted by a third party, while just 10% operate on an exclusively cloud-based infrastructure.

Planning to retain at least a remnant of past architecture, few businesses will completely eliminate their reliance on-premise technology. They will, however, more notably integrate hosted and cloud call center solutions.

While 69% will at least retain an on-premise element throughout the next 6-18 months, a reduced 34% will exclusively situate their call centers on premise. The others will pursue hybrid solutions involving a blend of on-premise and hosted or cloud technology.

Up from 58% in the status quo, a total of 66% of call center operations will feature a hosted or cloud element by the end of the next eighteen month period. 31% of organizations will exclusively rely on hosted or cloud solutions.

Reflective of a trend towards cloud and hosted solutions, the data nonetheless reveals a reluctance to completely abandon their on-premise installations. Aware of the objections that contribute to that hesitation, VoltDelta’s Steve Chirokas argues that contemporary iterations of cloud and hosted technology can nullify the concerns.

“Cloud and hosted solutions are gaining momentum, but in many cases the path from premise to hosted encounters some bends in the road,” acknowledges Chirokas. “Internal constituents occasionally feel that they must maintain their call centers on premise because that’s what they depended upon in the past for reliability and security.

“What has changed is that there are now hosted contact center solutions that demonstrate a level of reliability and security that will meet if not exceed what might be currently deployed on premise. Customer care professionals are finding out that achieving the efficiency of the cloud does not require putting their customers Personally Identifiable Information (PII) at risk or being concerned with scalability when partnering with a capable cloud contact center vendor.”

Citing the constraints created by internal IT departments, MatsSoft’s Nigel Warren contends that shifting to an externally hosted or cloud-based call center provides businesses with greater flexibility, agility and rapidity in their efforts to satisfy customers.

“Internal IT is often focused on long-term strategic projects; meaning even small tactical improvements to customer service processes have to take their place in a queue,” argues Warren. “If customer experience improvement is the new battleground for competitive advantage, being made to wait for such improvements is not acceptable. Customer Service organizations that want to jump this
What is the primary objective of your call center?

- 12% Create revenue through customer acquisition
- 4% Create revenue through upselling/cross-selling
- 9% Create revenue through customer retention
- 27% Minimize costs/maximize efficiency of customer engagements
- 1% Minimize marketing/sales spend
- 1% Gain customer insights
- 44% Improve customer satisfaction
- 3% Other (please specify)
queue and take charge of their own improvement agenda are increasingly looking to external technology partners and Cloud platforms to sidestep internal IT constraints."

Aware of the opportunity created by hosted or cloud platforms, VPI’s Patrick Botz still questions whether a complete transition into a cloud or hosted solution is feasible.

“The majority of contact centers aren’t built to transition to cloud technology,” notes Botz. “They still have legacy systems, they still have to have everything on site and they still intend to maintain direct control over security, especially for processing sensitive transactions that may involve regulated information, like PCI-DSS or HIPAA. [To account for these concerns], any businesses are creating their own private clouds or opting for a hybrid premise/cloud model versus transitioning 100 percent to the cloud.”

Perpetually concerned about data security and uncertain about how new technology will impact reliability, decision-makers are succumbing to the inertia illustrated by the data.

"Unfortunately, if [call centers] don't deal with what will be important in the long-term, issues that are minor today will eventually become urgent." - Mike Burke

Positioning the Call Center continued

Amplifying that inertia, as IQ Services’ Mike Burke explains, is the fact that call center professionals—constrained by limited time and resources—tend to focus on urgent, disaster situations at the expense of optimizing what they believe is already working sufficiently.

“There are always going to be things that are at the moment more important than tweaking things that are working within tolerance,” elaborates Burke. “What we see in terms of tuning call center performance is that when there is a disaster at hand, they focus on the disaster. They’ll deal with urgent issues rather than technology improvements.”

That phenomenon, which not only affects decisions about call center infrastructure but all technology matters, is not without dire consequence.

“Unfortunately, if they don’t deal with what will be important in the long-term, issues that are minor today will eventually become urgent,” warns Burke.

Omni-Reluctance to go Multi-Channel

The term “contact center” might be in vogue, but the “call center” moniker remains very appropriate.

Telephony continues to reign as organizations’ primary customer service channel. Offered as a platform for live agent support in 92% of organizations and IVR support in 59%, it represents one of only four channels in which the majority of businesses provide care.

E-mail, Facebook and web self-service, the other channels, maintain penetration rates of 87%, 54% and 51%, respectively.

Despite offering evidence that businesses are, technically, serving customers in multiple channels, the data casts significant doubt on the maturity of the alleged omni-channel revolution.

Instead of providing service wherever customers can conceivably demand care, today’s businesses concentrate their support efforts within only a handful of channels. In the status quo, that concentrated effort largely excludes mobile, live chat and many social channels.

“I think it’s been hyped but mostly by vendors,” says Genesys’ Stefan Captijn. “There’s this wave of people that think it is cool and interesting, but it is hard for us to justify the real ROI.”

Only 11% of businesses support customers on Google Plus. Only 20% of businesses offer mobile customer service. Merely 39% of businesses grant customers the ability to connect via live chat.

While this reluctance surprises Intradiem’s Matt McConnell, who argues, “To have a great customer experience, [businesses] need to serve customers in whatever channel they choose,” it does not surprise CallMiner’s Erik Strand.

“Part of the reason for the delay is adoption of the channels by customers,” retorts Strand. “There are still a ton of things that customers will only do on the phone.”

And because offering service in a given channel is not the same as committing to optimizing support in that channel, the reality of multi-channel customer service is even more sobering.

The majority of organizations only allocate dedicated support resources to the phone (85%) and e-mail (72%) channels. Facebook, which plays host to customer service interactions for many organizations, only commands dedicated attention from 30% of organizations.

Dedicated support is even rarer for channels like LinkedIn (7%), mobile (14%) and Twitter (22%).
When evaluating call center performance, how valuable are the following metrics?

![Bar chart showing rankings of various metrics]
“Right now, the perspective seems to be more exploratory in general,” says VoltDelta’s Steve Chirokas regarding dedicated support for some social and mobile channels. “Even if businesses don’t choose to support these channels now, they are increasingly becoming aware that they will likely have to add this dedicated support down the road.”

Affirming Chirokas’ message about adaptation, MatsSoft’s Nigel Warren adds, “Call Centers need to adapt quickly to keep pace with these changes, or else customer experience could suffer if multiple channels lead to disjointed service and fractured customer data.”

While its penetration is among the lowest for all channels, Google Plus receives dedicated attention from the same 11% of organizations that consider it a viable customer service channel. Uncompelled to provide dedicated resources for the majority of contact channels, businesses possess even less drive to measure performance within most media.

Live agent phone conversations (87%) and email (61%) are the only service realms within which the majority of businesses manage performance. Even though they represent service destinations in more than 50% of businesses, IVR and web self-service go unmeasured by an abundance of businesses.

Believing respondents likely understated the extent of their self-service offerings, IQ Services’ Mike Burke finds this gap particularly alarming.

“There is an awful lot of self-service technology for minor interactions,” says Burke. “When people want to talk to an agent, they’re going to have to buzz through that technology. There is hardly anyone that gives you a number that lands at an agent desktop. Performance measurement is too low for self-service and IVR.”

Despite its existence as a service channel in 54% of businesses and its ability to command dedicated staff in 30% of businesses, Facebook goes unmeasured by a staggering 87% of organizations. The same quantity of organizations opts not to measure support via Twitter. Mobile service is managed by only 14% of businesses.

Insofar as today’s call centers are designed to drive customer satisfaction, the absence of measurement in most communication channels creates an obvious challenge. Without any insight into the service customers are experiencing in the majority of channels, including popular ones like telephone IVR, web self-service and Facebook, many of today’s organizations are inherently unable to evaluate the success of their contact center functions.

Excuses like lack of customer demand and financial constraints might explain why businesses cannot commit dedicated resources to the full suite of contact channels, but they do not explain why organizations are rendering themselves unable to even assess their existing customer service efforts.

While phone and e-mail will retain their significant penetration, businesses will spend the next 6-18 months initiating or improving experiences within several alternative channels.

Organizations are particularly adamant about implementing or amplifying web, voice and mobile self-service options. Over the next 6-18 months, 56% of organizations will increase their reliance on web self-service. Mobile self-service will command increases from 48% of businesses, while 38% will devote more focus to IVR.

If implemented correctly, the additional self-service options could prove instrumental in improving the customer experience.

“I think what organizations should focus on is how they can achieve a resolution for the customer via self-service,” says Genesys’ Stefan Captijn. “Right now, it still takes customers a lot of interactions to get a resolution or get their question answered. Self-service would solve that problem.”

“Used properly, [self-service and virtual agent technology] can drive just as much—if not more—satisfaction as long, drawn out but friendly calls,” adds CallMiner’s Erik Strand.

“Improving customer communications and web self-service capabilities can dramatically cut the number of chaser (follow-up) calls,” articulates MatsSoft’s Nigel Warren. “For example, Cambridge Building Society halved the number of chaser calls within a few weeks of implementing automated status-update-messaging for their mortgage applicants.”

Other channels due for increases included live chat and live mobile care. They are earmarked for increases in 50% and 49% of businesses, respectively.

Conspicuously absent from the shortlist are any social channels. Occasionally treated as synonymous with the word multi-channel, social remains slow to garner support from today’s enterprises.

Social channels Google Plus and LinkedIn, in fact, will become less relevant in some organizations over the next 6-18 months. 6% and 5% of organizations, respectively, will decrease their Google Plus and LinkedIn offerings.

Other channels marked for notable decreases include phone (down 12%), email (down 6%) and in-person (down 6%).
How would your organization rate its performance against the following metrics?

- Average Handle Time
- After Call Work
- Hold Time
- First Call Resolution
- Average Speed of Answer
- Blockage
- Self-Service Utilization Rate
- Abandon rate
- Transfer rate
- Adherence to Procedure
- Accuracy of Agent Information
- Agent Occupancy
- Scheduling Efficiency
- Contact Volume by Channel
- Cost Per Call
- Sales Conversion Rate
- Employee Satisfaction Score
- Customer Satisfaction Score
- Customer Retention/Loyalty Rate
- Time to Resolution
- Frequency of Customer Callback
- Net Promoter Score
- Social Media Feedback Score
- Customer Effort
- Quality Assurance Score
- Other Internal/Organization-Facing
- Other External/Customer-Facing
Knowledge of how businesses are constructing their call center infrastructure provides a degree of context for understanding operational limitations. Knowledge of where businesses offer service provides a degree of context for understanding customer experience limitations.

But in order to appreciate the magnitude of those limitations, one needs to understand the fundamental objectives of today’s call centers. That also requires knowledge of the extent to which businesses are committed to fulfilling those objectives.

According to respondents, customer satisfaction trumps cost minimization and revenue generation as the most important call center objective. 44% of businesses define driving customer satisfaction as their call center’s primary focus; only 27% most notably focus on reducing the cost of customer engagements.

12% believe revenue generation through customer acquisition is the call center’s primary focus. 9% believe revenue should most notably come from up-selling and cross-selling existing customers.

A top priority for 27% of call centers and a lingering concern for virtually all business units, cost remains a prominent factor in the contemporary customer management environment. The idea that businesses are now throwing cost concerns to the wind when developing customer service strategies is simply not one rooted in accuracy or reality.

That 73% of businesses are more concerned with the value generated by their call centers does, however, underscore the dissolution of the cost center stigma. Contemporary businesses see their call centers as gateways to improved customer relationships and greater revenue. They do not view them as sources of unwanted cost within which less is always more.

And by rating customer satisfaction as the most paramount call center objective, businesses are declaring that while cost is always relevant and significant, it cannot be the source of final judgment on a customer service strategy.

A call center investment is not inherently bad if it is costly. It is, however, fundamentally inferior if it does not favorably contribute to customer satisfaction levels.

“It’s all driven by this intent to focus on the customer experience,” says Intradiem’s Matt McConnect of the trend towards customer-centric call centers. “Driven by the Apples and the Zapposes of the world, there is an expectation on the part of consumers that a high quality of service can now be delivered. Because of that, it is responsible for determining market share.”

“Increasingly organizations regard customer experience improvement as their primary process improvement goal,” adds MatsSoft’s Nigel Warren. “Partly that’s because of increasingly powerful customers, and partly it’s because of diminishing returns from long established efficiency initiatives like shared services and outsourcing. The agenda has switched to winning, delighting and retaining more customers.

“That will ultimately help drive profitability.”

As businesses consider strategies for achieving their paramount, customer-centric and value-centric call center objectives, they are more likely to increase than decrease budget.

37% of businesses will increase their customer service spending over the next 6-18 months. 38% will make no changes, while only 25% will enforce budgetary reductions.

Knowledge of how call centers are structured, how deeply they extend into different media, how they define success and how serious they are about achieving that success provides the requisite backdrop for understanding how they are managing performance, developing agents, assessing quality and optimizing technology.
How would you rate your organization's commitment to improving performance against the following metrics?
Operational Performance

Some businesses focus primarily on the cost of operating their call centers. Considerably more businesses focus on the value being generated by their centers. All, however, require insight into how their call centers are performing.

A business unit for which there are inevitable cost and inevitable revenue opportunities, the call center invites—and requires—strict investigation into the efficacy of its operation.

Even the most cost-conscious organizations require their call centers to generate value. Even the most customer-centric businesses require their call centers to operate with a mind for cost-efficiency.

And insofar as businesses ascribe clearly articulated objectives to their customer service functions, more knowledge about performance is insufficient. Successful businesses assure that the metrics they use serve to illuminate and incentivize the connection between call center performance and the objectives held most dear.

When selected and managed correctly, performance metrics bridge the gap between call center activity and the desired outcomes. When selected and managed incorrectly, performance metrics contribute to the disconnect between customer service efforts and core business objectives.

Performance: Evaluating the Metrics

Confident that customer satisfaction represents the most notable call center objective, businesses unsurprisingly declare CSAT Score the most important performance indicator.

According to the annual survey, businesses assess the importance of CSAT score at 4.08/5. The only metric to receive a value rating of 4 or higher, it is viewed as important by 88% of businesses and very important by 61% of them.

Net Promoter Score, another metric deemed customer-oriented, ranked as one of the most valuable with a score of 3.94/5.

Emotional indicators like CSAT Score and Net Promoter Score are not, however, the only metrics businesses believe play a valuable role in call center performance management.

Accuracy of agent information, which offers a more objective assessment of the customer experience, earned a strong 3.95/5 importance mark from respondents. Quality assurance score, which, depending on the organization, will blend objective and subjective elements, garnered a strong 3.83/5.

Widely subject to debate about what constitutes a “first” interaction, what constitutes a “call” and what constitutes a “resolution,” first call resolution is not, however, subject to debate about its importance. Given a valuation of 3.66/5, it represents a key metric in the age of customer-centric call centers.

“We believe FCR is important,” declares CallMiner’s Erik Strand in defense of the metric. “The survey says that the key thing that needs to be measured is customer satisfaction, but we believe the most important component to customer satisfaction is successful outcomes.”

While businesses are paying reverence to both objective and subjective metrics, they are not embracing all standard indicators of call center performance.

Blockage/blocking rate, a long-standing call center metric, was deemed relatively unimportant by respondents. With a score of 2.15/5, it was considered the least valuable of the 25 metrics rated by respondents. Only 26% of businesses felt it was either important or very important.

Other metrics of limited value for today’s call centers include transfer rate (2.26/5), after call work (2.46/5), self-service utilization rate (2.53/5) and average handle time (2.76/5).

“We’ve got one client where the agents are on the phone for twenty minutes or more by design,” says VoltDelta’s Steve Chirokas of the shift from metrics like average handle time. “They’re engaging with different dealerships that are supporting cars across multiple countries, and that’s what they want. This organization is focused on delivering exception customer care. AHT just goes right out the door.”

“More CSAT, more NPS,” says Matt McConnell of
Q9

Which do you use when evaluating agent performance?

- 71% Call Quality Metrics
- 68% Call Efficiency Metrics
- 60% C-Sat Metrics
- 48% Supervisor Reports
- 43% Call Resolution Metrics

Q10

How does your organization use agent performance data?

- 36% Determining agent shifts
- 36% Determining call routing/specialty assignments
- 56% Determining agent promotions
- 23% Determining supervisor promotions
- 43% Determining front line agent firings/terminations
- 17% Determining management/supervisor firings/terminations
- 51% Determining incentives - for individual agents
Performance: Evaluating the Metrics

The optimal approach to call center metrics. “Call centers should also more on intent to purchase or do business and less focus on handle time and other metrics focused on efficiency.

VPI’s Patrick Botz, however, believes after call work—or wrap time—is exactly the type of efficiency metric businesses should be measuring.

“The best customer champions remove average handle time, but measure wrap time where agents tend to hide out,” says Botz. “By minimizing wrap time, you keep productivity exactly where it was when measuring talk time but allow agents to be more comprehensive on the phone.”

The lack of merit ascribed to self-service utilization rate is surprising given the extent to which businesses plan to increase their self-service offerings over the next 6-18 months. If self-service utilization is truly meaningless to businesses and their customers, why are web, phone/IVR and mobile self-service initiatives earmarked for significant focus in today’s era of customer centrity?

And while their scores suggest they too are being deemed irrelevant by businesses, blockage rates and transfer counts absolutely could impact satisfaction levels. A customer who consistently endures hurdles to connecting with an agent or sits through one or two transfers before reaching the person qualified to help is absolutely less likely to declare satisfaction than one who gets what he wants on the first call.

The metrics deemed more important do, however, possess a quality absent from the low-rated metrics: the presence of a holistic assessment. While metrics like average handle time address an aspect of the customer experience that may or may not influence satisfaction levels, CSAT score speaks directly to a customer’s overall opinion of the customer experience. NPS speaks directly to a customer’s willingness to, with consciousness of its best and worst qualities, advocate on behalf of a brand. First call resolution speaks to whether the necessary elements came together in support of the optimal outcome.

Even accuracy rate and quality assurance score are the sums of many moving parts.

Today’s customer management mindset, therefore, is not one that rejects the importance of individual customer experience elements but one that asks businesses to think about the totality of the customer journey. A business strictly striving to minimize blockage or reduce average handle time is not necessarily addressing other bottlenecks in the customer experience. One concerned with elevating CSAT and NPS is looking at everything.

While IQ Services’ Mike Burke supports this holistic mindset, he advises businesses to remain focused on how each individual component of the experience is contributing to the overall customer satisfaction score.

“I think metrics should be at all the individual components and channels,” says Burke.

“Accuracy and efficiency within each one of the components is what is going to make customer effort lower and should drive customer satisfaction to a higher level.

“If any of the technology doesn’t work the way it is supposed to or slows down, then you end up with frustration both on the part of the agent and the customer.”

Performance: Is Right Now the Right Way?

In declaring customer satisfaction their greatest call center objective and CSAT score the most relevant call center metric, businesses are talking the customer-centric talk. They are emphasizing their commitment to approaching the call center as a gateway to value rather than a landfall to unwanted cost.

According to survey data, they are also walking the talk.

In addition to rating CSAT the most valuable indicator of call center performance, businesses confirm that is the measure against which they are enjoying the greatest level of success.

Respondents assess their existing CSAT performance at 4.06/5. 39% deemed current performance very satisfying, while a total of 69% are at least somewhat satisfied with CSAT levels. Only 8% are dissatisfied with performance.

Believers in the connection between accuracy and a strong customer experience, businesses are also successfully delivering in that regard.

Respondents rate their performance against the “accuracy of agent information” metric at a strong 3.91/5.

Also performing competently against the quality assurance score (3.73/5) and first call resolution metrics (3.67/5), organizations have thus far been struggling to deliver against one of their most cherished measures.

Businesses rate their performance against Net Promoter Score, that measure, at an underwhelming 3.38. Whereas performance against the aforementioned four metrics is roughly in line with the extent to which businesses value those metrics, NPS performance lags considerably behind the 3.94/5 importance rating.

Trailing both its importance rating and performance against other key metrics, the current NPS success level is likely hurt by the heightened standard. While CSAT hinges on a fairly broad definition of satisfaction, NPS requires a level of satisfaction strong enough to
Q11

How do you collect and/or manage agent feedback?

- 25% Focus only on "voice of the customer" insights
- 56% Treat performance issues/inquiries/internal call center as feedback gathering tool
- 17% Ask agents to submit in writing; respond if deemed important
- 17% Ask agents to submit in writing; respond in all cases
- 39% Ask agents to submit in conversation with supervisor/management; follow-up after the fact
- 39% Ask agents to submit in conversation with supervisor/management; resolve during conversation
- 47% Ask agents for feedback during group training sessions; follow-up after the fact (ex - at next meeting)
- 48% Ask agents for feedback during group training sessions; resolve during session
- 46% Ask agents for feedback during private training sessions; follow-up after the fact
- 43% Ask agents for feedback during private training sessions; resolve during session
- 51% Employee satisfaction surveys
- 34% Suggestion "boxes"
Performance: Is Right Now the Right Way? continued

inspire advocacy. Efforts to drive increased satisfaction are evidently not driving a corresponding increase in customer advocacy.

Moving forward, organizations could benefit by treating NPS—not CSAT—as the paramount objective. Businesses that focus on cultivating that advocacy will naturally be improving satisfaction. Businesses content to prioritize improvement against CSAT, however, are not necessarily doing enough to drive an equivalent increase in NPS.

While businesses are not yet succeeding on the NPS test, they are, however, succeeding against less important tests. Indicative of the extent to which previous customer service mindsets influence performance in the present, businesses are delivering strong marks against traditional metrics like average handle time (4.03/5) and average speed of answer (3.91/5).

Performance against the blockage (3.13/5) and transfer rate (3.21/5) metrics is not strong—those scores are among the weakest for the 25 assessed metrics—but it is stronger than is deemed necessary by the relevance scores.

While confirming that call centers are not yet optimizing performance, the contrasting disparities—overperformance against irrelevant metrics, underperformance against important ones—collectively create an ideal scenario for businesses moving forward.

Since businesses are already delivering satisfactory marks for the unimportant metrics, they can remove or reduce focus from those areas in the coming 6-18 months. That will enable them to focus more directly on the important metrics for which performance improvements are more meaningful.

Performance: Does the Circumstance Breed Action?

The circumstances within today’s marketplace are perfect for fostering call center improvement.

Because businesses are over-delivering on irrelevant aspects of the customer service process and moderately delivering—or even under-delivering—on some of the most relevant ones, they can recalibrate their efforts without negative consequence.

And insofar as the overwhelming majority of today’s businesses appreciate the call center as a value driver—either by virtue of generating customer satisfaction or driving revenue—they have an incentive to continue improving. The call center might be performing at a decent level, but insofar as better performance directly creates more value, no business has a reason to curb its effort.

Well, no business should have a reason to curb its effort.

No matter how evolved today’s businesses are on the topic of customer service, they are ultimately still businesses. They still do fear rising costs.

Additional investment into the customer service function might position the call center to create more value, but if the business fears future returns on investment will be diminishing or delayed, it becomes a more tightly constrained prisoner of cost consciousness.

If the business is not certain the value of becoming great warrants the cost of becoming great, which is a particularly conceivable reality given the stigma long associated with the call center, it might opt to settle for being good.

Current performance, after all, is fairly satisfactory. Businesses are proud of their CSAT scores. They are proud of their ability to provide accurate information during customer interactions. They are reasonably content with their ability to resolve matters on the first contact. Certainly not broken, do these areas warrant fixing simply because they can technically get better?

Moving forward, businesses will definitely grapple with the conflicting thought processes.

On the one hand, businesses are committed to improving against the metrics they deem most valuable.

With respective commitment scores of 3.20/5 and 3.15/5, they will devote their greatest effort to improving NPS and CSAT Score over the next 6-18 months. With a commitment score of 3, First Call Resolution is also a realm targeted for improvement.

Other areas most notably earmarked for improvement are Customer Effort Score (2.95/5) and Employee Satisfaction Score (2.78/5). While neither metric is considered as valuable as accuracy or quality assurance, for which improvement commitments are rated 2.54/5 and 2.56/5, respectively, both fit in with the emotional, holistic motif that plays an influential role in today’s performance culture.

Unimportant areas like transfer rate, after call work and blockage will receive limited attention from businesses moving forward. Respondents rate their commitments to improve at just 1.84/5, 1.91/5 and 1.92/5, respectively.

Noteworthy, however, is the fact that no score is particularly significant. CSAT score might be the greatest target for improvement, but only 49% of businesses are making such improvement a significant or paramount priority. 21%, meanwhile, do not consider improvement a priority at all.

That no area of improvement is a significant priority for more than 50% of respondents confirms a degree of complacency within the marketplace. Businesses absolutely care about their call centers, but they place a ceiling on the effort and investments they are willing to commit.
Q12

Which aspects of your agent performance management strategy are you planning to change?

- 5% Nothing - it is perfect
- 27% Metrics - need to focus more on call stat/efficiency metrics
- 29% Metrics - need to focus more on call quality metrics
- 27% Metrics - need to focus more on call resolution metrics
- 33% Metrics - need to focus more on customer satisfaction/loyalty metrics
- 13% Metrics - need to focus more on post call/recurring customer feedback
- 18% Transparency - need to make performance statistics more private
- 5% Transparency - need to be clearer about how performance stats are utilized
- 16% Transparency - need to be clearer about why certain performance elements are measured
- 25% Feedback - need to encourage open communication (floor-wide)
- 31% Feedback - need to create more opportunities for agents to share private feedback with management
- 33% Feedback - need to demonstrate how agent feedback is being utilized
- 27% Feedback - need to demonstrate how customer feedback is being utilized
- 21% Incentives - need to improve the quality of incentives
- 18% Incentives - need to improve the frequency of incentive programs
- 31% Incentives - need to be more public about celebrating individual agent success
- 4% Incentives - need to be more private about celebrating individual agent success
- 22% Training - need to focus more on group exercises
- 44% Training - need to focus more on personalized, one-on-one coaching
- 18% Training - need to focus more on e-learning
- 25% Training - need to focus more on script/process knowledge education
- 36% Training - need to focus more on soft/interaction skills
Q13

What is your primary source of data when measuring quality?

- 0% Agent feedback
- 7% Side-by-side live agent evaluation
- 22% Listen to recordings - evaluate using spreadsheets or paper forms
- 29% Listen to recordings - evaluate using commercial software
- 17% Listen to recordings - evaluate using in-house software
- 3% Automated scoring using speech analytics
- 16% Customer feedback
- 0% Built-in QOS/MOS from VoIP network
- 0% Audio intelligibility automatically monitored from the outside-in
- 7% No formal quality measurement program
Agent Development

By declaring employee satisfaction score one of their top improvement areas for the next 6-18 months, businesses are underscoring the importance of the agent experience.

By declaring that they value the opinion of front-line agents more than they do that of C-level executives, potential customers, income statements and competitors (albeit less than they do call center supervisors and current customers), businesses are underscoring the importance of the agent’s perspective.

By declaring accuracy of information one of the greatest indicators of call center performance, businesses are underscoring the importance of the agent’s knowledge and access to training.

Investing in People

When evaluating the myriad of available call center solutions and technologies, respondents adhered to a pattern: if it impacts the agent’s happiness or ability to satisfy customers, it is likely a valuable solution.

Destined to be utilized by 82% of businesses within the next 6-18 months, call center coaching represents the second most popular solution category. Only call center recording and monitoring solutions, which can technically play an instrumental role in agent performance management and coaching, will command a greater utilization rate.

67% of businesses will use performance management solutions, while 66% will rely on workforce management tools.

Beyond garnering strong overall utilization rates, agent development solutions will attract more new investment than the majority of other call center services.

Before even considering the direct roles agents play in driving customer satisfaction, unlocking revenue opportunities and controlling call center costs, businesses are adamant in their belief that the call center agent experience commands considerable attention.

As they work to improve call center operations and achieve their fundamental customer service objectives—all while managing changes in infrastructure and methods of communication—organizations will therefore devote significant attention to their strategies for driving agent development and performance.

To be implemented by 19% of businesses over the next 6-18 months, unified agent desktop solutions will attract the greatest level of new investment.

“Agents always complain about multiple screens,” begins VoltDelta’s Steve Chirokas in his advocacy for unified desktops. “Anytime you can reduce the number of those screens, that’s helpful.”

15% of businesses will empower agile agent performance by launching knowledge management solutions, while 14% of businesses will invest in e-learning solutions to aid in agent training. 12% will introduce workforce management tools.

The only other technology to command comparable levels of new investment will be live chat solutions (18%), mobile customer service solutions (17% will initiate), virtual agent solutions (14%) and CRM applications (11%).
A: How do you measure system quality?

- 39% DIY – test equipment purchased & staff trained to test & evaluate technology performance
- 24% 3rd party managed testing & monitoring service
- 34% Staff periodically check availability & performance of self-service IVR and Web applications
- 29% Collection & analysis of network component metrics such as uptime, CPU consumption, etc.
- 31% No formal testing/evaluation process in place

B: Which strategies will you employ to improve call quality?

- 26% Automate QA workflow to be able to evaluate more calls and/or spend more time coaching agents
- 37% Use analytics to find and QA higher value calls and focus on outcomes
- 19% Ramp-up calibration sessions
- 48% Tie quality scores directly to training to quickly bridge knowledge gaps
- 324% Speed up the feedback on QA scores to agents
- 11% Use auto-scoring via speech analytics to evaluate more calls
- 3% Voice & Data on separate VLANs
- 0% Voice & Data on separate physical LAN segments or networks
- 8% Implement QOS within blended network
- 0% Move to G.711 exclusively instead of G.729

C: How many interactions do you quality monitor per agent per month?

- 7% 0
- 14% 1 to 2
- 29% 3 to 5
- 22% 6 to 10
- 8% 11 to 15
- 21% More than 15
Notably focused on tools that facilitate training, knowledge development and performance versatility, businesses are clear in their declaration that agent development is a priority for the next 6-18 months.

In order to succeed in that effort, businesses will need to do more than simply invest in tools. If they do not develop a call center environment that sustains the positive impact of people investment and incentivizes further agent development, they will not only squander opportunity for return on their investments but hinder efforts to drive customer satisfaction.

Effective performance management plays an integral role in creating a sustainable, ever-improving atmosphere of agent productivity. More than mere routines in measurement, the best performance management strategies assure that the data collected is used to inform operational practices, aid in agent training and development and incentivize performance. It is what an organization does with the data—not the data itself—that drives the most valuable and effective agent behavior.

Putting the Data to Work

While organizations consider a myriad of factors when evaluating agent performance, they turn most notably to call quality metrics. 71% of businesses rely on call quality assessments to determine the efficacy of agent performance.

Efficiency metrics are no longer top of mind when it comes to holistically evaluating call center performance, but they remain strong indicators of agent productivity. 68% of businesses continue to look at factors like average handle time when evaluating their talent.

60% look at the agent’s impact on customer satisfaction metrics, while 49% acquire information about front-line performance from supervisor reports. 42% rely on resolution metrics, including first call resolution and customer call back rate to make educated assessments of agent performance.

Less widespread—but still often employed—sources of agent performance insights are metrics related to revenue generation (used by 30% of businesses), downtime efficiency intelligence (used by 29% of businesses), agent self-evaluation data (used by 29% of businesses) and performance in training sessions (used by 22% of businesses).

Aggregating the relevant performance data is only the beginning of the journey. Once businesses understand how their agents are performing, then they must decide how to leverage that knowledge to improve productivity and inch closer to achieving prominent call center objectives.

Such data is most commonly used to inform agent training strategies. Wanting to assure their personnel development efforts are lean, targeted and mindful of the actual strengths and weaknesses within the talent pool, 61% of businesses utilize performance insights when crafting individual training curricula. 55%, meanwhile, use the aggregate data to drive group training syllabi.

A positive trend, CallMiner’s Erik Strand nonetheless urges businesses to assure the link between performance data and training is a fast, seamless one.

“You don’t want to look at a monthly report and then schedule a training session that they take two weeks later,” says Strand. “Make that feedback loop as tight as possible. As soon as there is highly targeted and certain knowledge that this agent needs training, provide that training right away.”

“Today’s agents expect these kinds of moment-of-need learning and collaboration capabilities,” notes MatsSoft’s Nigel Warren. “They typically prefer them to long formal classes, where half the content is forgotten before it’s applied.”

While most commonly used to drive training, process assessment (60% of businesses do so in this circumstance), agent promotions (56%) and agent incentives (51%), agent performance insights empower a wide array of applications. None of the survey’s 13 listed options applied to less than 17% of respondents.

Even some relatively new or creative applications are gaining considerable traction within the customer management marketplace. 36% of businesses, for instance, use agent performance—potentially as an alternative to seniority—to determine shift assignments. An equivalent percentage draws from agent performance data when determining routing and specialty assignments.

That organizations are beginning to use agent performance to inform shifting decisions makes VIP’s Patrick Botz particularly optimistic about the state of call center management.
Which represent your plans for addressing reliability issues?

- 18% Not issues
- 11% Will not address
- 3% Will eliminate technology
- 44% Will improve staff training/knowledge of technology
- 52% Will upgrade/optimize technology
- 24% Will replace technology
“Performance-based versus tenure-based shift bidding is a huge opportunity,” explains Botz, “because the choice of shift is often more important than the pay. The current American dream for the up-and-coming generation is not owning a fancy house and a nice car — it is having the flexibility to incorporate your personal life while working for a company about whose cause you’re passionate.”

While agent performance data is frequently used to determine agent promotions (56%), agent incentives (51%) and agent terminations (43%), it carries less weight as an advisory tool at the supervisor level. A considerably smaller 23% use the intelligence to drive agent promotions, while only 17% use the information to determine agent firings (it was the aforementioned lowest-ranking application of agent data). 27% use agent performance information to determine incentives for supervisors.

Because the data directly measures agent performance, the disparity is an expected and intuitive one. But insofar as it sends the message that agent performance is not a surefire indicator of a manager’s performance, the disparity also runs the risk of de-incentivizing accountability. If managers are not led to believe that great agent performance can earn them more money and more job stability and that poor agent performance can spell the end of their tenure, they have less motivation to cultivate strong performing habits. They can place the blame on “bad agents,” which minimizes their sense of investment in the front-line and thus continues the vicious circle of workplace detachment.

Essential to business leaders when assessing productivity, managing workflow, determining future call center investments and developing training curricula, performance data can also prove immensely fruitful to the agents themselves. By giving agents a transparent window into their own performance—and sometimes that of their peers—businesses provide them with a more vivid, palatable understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. If communicated correctly, the information can also serve as a tangible source of motivation.

Skewing more to the former mentality than the latter, businesses’ favorite medium for communicating performance information is within private training and coaching sessions. 68% of businesses deliver performance statistics in that environment.

55% of businesses, meanwhile, issue private, periodic reports to inform agents of their performance statistics.

Utilizing performance insights to inspire friendly competition, motivation and collective accountability is not, however, a foreign concept. 42% issue periodic agent reports to all team members. 38% track performance statistics on real-time wallboards to add a de facto Gamification element to their call centers.

Genesys’ Stefan Captijn is confident the practice will only gain traction moving forward.

“The angle I find interesting is gamification,” he explains. “That drives a performance culture and also inspires competition. It is an area where if it’s done well, [businesses] will see that people come up to speed faster.”

“The Voices Behind the Front Line

Over the next 6-18 months, businesses intend to devote attention to employee satisfaction. It ranks as one of the customer management world’s top five performance improvement areas.

“There is a direct one-to-one correlation between E-Sat and CSAT,” says VPI’s Patrick Botz. “It’s so important to empower front line employees to self-manage and make decisions, and engage them through collaboration and proactive updates.”

Given the importance of employee satisfaction, singular, standalone efforts will prove insufficient. If businesses truly want to improve the customer experience, they must address the issue from a multitude of positions.

They need to incorporate concepts of empowerment and customer-centricity into the cultural dynamic.

“People aren’t motivated by making more money for their employer,” explains Intradiem’s Matt McConnell. “But they are motivated by how to do right by these customers.”

They need to assure the assistive technology is fast, accurate and accessible.

“The concepts of technology not being available, not performing correctly or being inaccurate and the quality of the interaction are directly connected,” says IQ Services’ Mike Burke.
A dichotomy commonly explored within the abstract concept of customer centricity, the distinction between thinking and doing also applies to the realm of agent development. Per the aforementioned findings, businesses recognize opportunities for acquiring performance statistics and agent sentiment and then utilizing those insights to drive action. When shaping their customer service investment strategies, they are prioritizing the tools, technologies and other solutions that directly improve the agent experience.

While those commitments speak to admirable intentions for processes and mindsets, they do not necessarily generate valuable action. Developing a proper utilization chain for performance metrics is important, but if businesses do not measure and deliver the right metrics at the right times, the utilization chain will be limited in its efficacy.

Investing in training and coaching solutions might be a valuable approach to talent development, but if training curricula and coaching strategies are off base, the impact of the investment will not resonate with agents, executive leadership or customers.

Pivotal value, therefore, exists in understanding the actions businesses will take to improve the customer experience. And insofar as only 5% consider their performance management effort perfect, the overwhelming majority will be taking precise actions.

No specific action, however, commands support from the majority of businesses. 48% of businesses say that they not only accept feedback during such sessions but resolve any issues on the spot. 47% collect the feedback but then follow up after the session concludes. 45% collect feedback—and follow-up with needed resolutions—during private training sessions. 43% resolve the issues within such private sessions.

Less popular options for collecting agent feedback include asking agents to submit their issues in writing (17%) and looking solely at agent-related issues in voice of the customer data (24%).

The most popular actions include focusing more on personalized, one-on-one coaching (44%), focusing on softer, interaction skills during training sessions (36%), increasing transparency into how agent feedback is being utilized (32%), shifting more focus to customer satisfaction and loyalty metrics (32%), incentivizing performance by more openly celebrating top performers (31%) and encouraging open communication on the call center floor (31%).

VPI’s Patrick Botz appreciates the emphasis on customer satisfaction metrics but recognizes an existing barrier to implementation.

“A lot of call centers aren’t measuring CSAT well or frequently enough to do so at the agent level,” says Botz. “If you can’t measure customer metrics down to the agent level, it is difficult to start incentivizing agents on those metrics.”

Working on the Workplace

Putting the information at their fingertips at real-time could enable them to be as competent as possible,” adds CallMiner’s Erik Strand.

“While those commitments speak to admirable intentions for processes and mindsets, they do not necessarily generate valuable action.”

“A lot of call centers aren’t measuring CSAT well or frequently enough to do so at the agent level.”

“This is difficult to start incentivizing agents on those metrics.”

“Right now, I see that organizations are measuring CSAT on a macro level – as an organization – but many are unable to drive it down to incentivize individual agents. A macro level approach is very limited in providing insights into drivers of CSAT – including, but not limited to, the impact of service provided by individual agents. Organizations also often lack the mechanism for the delivery of personalized metrics to agents in a manner that would provide fast feedback and inspire improvement through self-management.”

“Putting the information at their fingertips at real-time could enable them to be as competent as possible,” adds CallMiner’s Erik Strand.

“It is difficult to start incentivizing agents on those metrics.”

“A lot of call centers aren’t measuring CSAT well or frequently enough to do so at the agent level.”

“This is difficult to start incentivizing agents on those metrics.”

“Right now, I see that organizations are measuring CSAT on a macro level – as an organization – but many are unable to drive it down to incentivize individual agents. A macro level approach is very limited in providing insights into drivers of CSAT – including, but not limited to, the impact of service provided by individual agents. Organizations also often lack the mechanism for the delivery of personalized metrics to agents in a manner that would provide fast feedback and inspire improvement through self-management.”
Q16

What are your plans for call center technology?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Type</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>30%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>60%</th>
<th>70%</th>
<th>80%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agent recruiting &amp; training solutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automatic call distribution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call center coaching/consulting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call monitoring and recording solutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cloud or hosted call center</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance management solutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRM applications</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer analytics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer engagement/interaction management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer feedback management solutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer satisfaction measurement solutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialing solutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eLearning/Training applications</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e-Mail Support Solutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help desks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction management solutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IVR solutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge management solutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live chat applications</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile customer support solutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-channel customer service solutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outsourcing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote/at-home agent solutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media support applications</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech and text analytics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training solutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unified desktop solutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual agent/assistant solutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web/self-service solutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workforce management &amp; optimization solutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Once organizations overcome that challenge, however, Intradiem’s Matt McConnell believes they will create improved agent engagement.

“If you’re measuring me on things that I know are only good for the company, then I’m not as engaged,” explains McConnell. “But when companies really do make it all about the customer and focus on the customer’s pain points and empower the agents to serve the customers, unlock something that is part of our nature of wanting to help other people.

“The organizations that do that really have more effective cultures. It’s human nature.”

And culture is the ticket to a better call center operation.

“Culture is obviously about identity, but it’s also about people. It’s about values. It’s about giving people a safe place--giving them the right circumstances to perform and to excel. Organizations still underestimate the business case for driving employee engagement,” adds Genesys’ Stefan Captijn.

Initiatives not commanding much attention include becoming more private about celebrating agent success (4%), becoming more private about agent performance stats (5%), granting recurring customer feedback a greater role in the performance management process (13%), increasing transparency into how performance statistics are being utilized (16%), being more transparent about sharing floor-wide performance statistics (18%), increasing the number of incentive programs (18%) and focusing more on e-learning (18%).

If there is a trend to the data, it suggests a movement towards a more employee-centric, holistic approach to agent engagement. Businesses are emphasizing one-on-one coaching more than group or e-learning activities (the soft response to e-learning is interesting, however, given that it is a popular new investment target for technology buyers). They will emphasize agent feedback and communication rather than hard performance data. When agents do perform well, however, they want the entire office to join in the celebration.

While the limited emphasis on recurring customer feedback suggests businesses will not hold agents directly accountable for long-term relationships with customers, the rise in emphasis on customer satisfaction metrics guarantees a cultural shift in favor of customer centricity.

Despite the persistence of claims that the call center’s existence in a silo impacts customer satisfaction efforts, businesses interestingly are not committed to bridging the gap between agents and the rest of the business.

VoltDelta’s Steve Chirokas believes doing so would be a boon to customer satisfaction.

“You have to make sure the agents are up to date on things that you might not consider part of their realm, such as marketing messages,” says Chirokas. “All of a sudden, calls might be showing up in their system because of a promotion, and the agents are not aware of it. The agent screen does not show up with the right information because the marketing team didn’t stay in touch with the operations team or the contact center team.”
Quality

Focusing on the softer, more emotional elements of the customer experience has its advantages.

It offers more opportunity for creativity in the customer experience process. It incentivizes making meaningful connections with customers. It aligns more neatly with the cultural element that thought leaders deem so crucial to fostering strong agent engagement. It makes performance management more subjective—and thus more friendly to supervisors and agents who fear the unflattering reality of hard statistics.

As customer centricity continues to gain traction as the driving force behind call centers, there is absolutely merit to escaping from the rigidity of a transactional mindset. But if not tempered by a simultaneous emphasis on the more tangible, measurable elements of the customer experience, the new mindset could prove harmful to the business. It, a function of business’ desire to become more customer-centric, could actually reduce satisfaction levels.

“Customers want speed and accuracy,” declares Intradiem’s Matt McConnell. “They don’t want relationships, they don’t want to know you – they want to get in, get what they need and get out.”

“[When it comes to call center operations], availability, performance and accuracy are really important and lead directly to more customer satisfaction,” adds IQ Services’ Mike Burke.

Collectively, the McConnell and Burke comments offer the reminder that customers have a clear, transactional objective when they call a contact center. And they ascribe a clear cost to any inefficiencies they encounter in pursuit of that objective. They do not necessarily want to be treated like a number, but they will not welcome a friendly interaction as a substitute for a pointed one.

They will not overlook the burden of excessive wait times, the hassle of multiple transfers, the frustration of dropped calls or the harm of inaccurate information simply because one agent attempted to make a personal connection.

Knowing that it plays a meaningful role in driving customer satisfaction, a customer-centric organization does not downplay the importance of call quality. It instead makes quality a paramount concern for call center operations.

Quality Measurements of Quality, Part One: Customer Interactions

Businesses share in the belief that quality management is an essential part of customer service strategy.

According to the annual survey, only 7% of organizations operate without a formal program for measuring interaction quality.

The overwhelming majority of businesses that do measure quality, meanwhile, look directly to call recordings as their most relevant indicator. 68% of all businesses treat call recordings as their primary gateway to an assessment of quality.

Confident in the value of call recording solutions, VoltDelta’s Steve Chirokas is unsurprised by the trend.

“Call recording is great for businesses because it captures intelligence with the emotional element that is so important with
Quality Measurements of Quality, Part One: Customer Interactions

“Quality monitoring is, unfortunately, viewed by executives as just a necessary cost. They don’t view it the way they do the voice of the customer, and they’re not willing to invest that much into it unless it’s focused on business outcomes and there’s a clear contribution to the bottom line. Aligning QA with CSAT and adjusting the name and focus of your call quality monitoring program to ‘voice of the customer’ program can have a big impact.”

telephony interactions,” says Chirokas. “The ability to easily share segments of dialogs between callers and agents also becomes a portal into customer care reality for senior execs and marketing departments as well as for agent training.”

43% of those who primarily focus on call recordings most commonly leverage third-party, commercial applications to analyze the recordings; 25% rely primarily on in-house programs.

The remaining 32%, meanwhile, still largely rely on paper forms and spreadsheets to transform call recordings into usable quality insights.

Beyond call recordings, other top sources of quality data are customer feedback (15%), live agent-to-agent comparisons (7%) and automated scoring reports developed with speech analytics (3%).

Call recordings will remain a significant source of quality insights moving forward. In eighteen months, 87% of organizations will be utilizing some form of call monitoring or recording solution. That figure represents a five percent increase from the solution category’s already dominant market presence.

Businesses, however, seem considerably more concerned with the insights they unlock from customer feedback. Asked to rate their intention to improve within the various lenses of quality measurement, respondents scored customer feedback at a 2.54/5.

Agent feedback, which was not identified by any business as its primary source of quality insights, was nonetheless given the category’s third best score. With a 2.13/5, agent feedback trails automated scoring from speech analytics (2.20/5) but outranks live agent comparisons (1.94/5), built-in QOS tools (1.92/5), call recordings (1.84/5) and external audio intelligibility monitoring (1.63/5).

Despite demonstrating universal support for measuring interaction quality, businesses are not necessarily exhaustive in their actual evaluations. Only 21% of businesses measure more than 15 monthly interactions per agent. 49% measure no more than five of an agent’s monthly interactions.

The limited scope of call centers’ quality monitoring practices does not catch VPI’s Patrick Botz off guard.

“Quality monitoring is, unfortunately, viewed by executives as just a necessary cost,” says Botz. “They don’t view it the way they do the voice of the customer, and they’re not willing to invest that much into it unless it’s focused on business outcomes and there’s a clear contribution to the bottom line. Aligning QA with CSAT and adjusting the name and focus of your call quality monitoring program to ‘voice of the customer’ program can have a big impact.”

Quality Measurements of Quality, Part Two: System Performance

Assuring agents—or non-human touchpoints—convey the right information and offer the right resolution in a timely, seamless, hassle-free manner is an essential element of the call center quality process.

It is not the only pivotal element.

In addition to driving quality within the actual interactions, businesses must also assure the systems on which the interactions take place are reliable. A business might provide its agents with everything they need to succeed once the interaction begins, but if the customer has trouble initiating that interaction, the experience is not a high quality one. It is not a satisfactory one. It is not an acceptable one.

“Unacceptable technology experiences can be reliably identified both before and after contact center implementation so they can be addressed & eliminated,” adds IQ Services’ Mike Burke.

Businesses, however, do not value system reliability to the same extent that they value interaction quality. While virtually all organizations formally measure quality, a non-trivial 31% abstains from measuring system quality.
Those that do test reliability embark on several avenues of evaluation. 39% of businesses rely on do-it-yourself testing, which requires the purchasing of in-house technology and proper training of staff members. 34% rely on staff members to periodically test systems by simulating the customer contact process. 29% focus on system data related to uptime and CPU usage. 24% enlist a third-party testing or monitoring service.

Quality Improvement Strategies

One of the hazards when looking at quality—or any other call center performance indicator—is the disparity between a successful score and a successful operation. As Intradiem’s Matt McConnell explains, excelling at 85% of interactions might sound like an intrinsically good number, but when leadership considers that a whopping 15 out of every 100 calls is a failure, it comes to recognize the extent to which its call center is underperforming.

Businesses are committed to measuring quality, and based on their statement of plans for the next 6-18 months, they are also committed to improving the scope of the data they collect.

Success, however, comes not from knowing the quality score but putting agents and systems in position to avoid or promptly resolve nearly every conceivable point of failure.

When it comes to interaction quality, businesses believe tying quality scores to training curricula is the most pivotal step. 48% of businesses will focus on that initiative over the next 6-18 months.

37% will use analytics to locate and evaluate the higher-value calls (for which quality lapses are most damaging), while 26% will automate the quality process to evaluate a larger sample of calls and create more time for coaching based on performance insights. 24% will work to more rapidly communicate quality assurance scores and insights to agents.

To improve system reliability, 52% will optimize or upgrade their technology. 44% of businesses will work to better acquaint agents with the technological systems, while 24% will replace technology. 18% declare that they have no issues, while an additional 11% will refrain from addressing the reliability issues they do have.
Logical in black-and-white terms, continued call center investment is a decidedly grayer topic in the nuanced realm of business reality. In reality, businesses will recognize the often vast costs associated with purchasing, testing, implementing, maintaining and improving of new technology. In reality, businesses will recognize the likelihood that the benefits of new technology are being inflated by marketing hype. In reality, businesses will recognize the steep learning curve associated with educating both agents and customers on the new systems. In reality, businesses will recognize the gap between the incurrence of investment costs and realization of return revenue. In reality, businesses will recognize the potential difficulty of integrating new technology with legacy systems. In reality, businesses will recognize the security risks associated with unproven call center systems. Just as inertia is preventing businesses from aggressively foraying into new channels and preventing businesses from committing to improving performance to the same extent that they value it, that same inertia, a product of the aforementioned concerns, will prevent businesses from rapidly investing in new technology.

“People are in this mode of we need to do more with less,” explains Genesys’ Stefan Captijn. “Every dollar we spend needs a return, so we have to be really sure [of that return] before moving forward. So we look at things that we know work.”

CallMiner’s Erik Strand adds, “For so long, processes have been in place and polished up like shiny dimes…[that is] especially [true] in bigger enterprises that aren’t really forward thinking. This stuff is so baked in, that it’s really hard to effect change within those organizations.”

Businesses will direct a significant portion of the rising or steady call center budgets to the overall realm of technology, but their efforts will be primarily centered on improving existing systems.

Solutions and Technology

Capable of facilitating entry into new channels, improving oversight over performance, quality and reliability issues, addressing those performance, quality and reliability of interactions, reducing the cost of satisfying customers and capturing valuable insights from inside and outside the call center, technology is an irrefutable gateway to a stronger call center operation. No matter the business’ fundamental call center objective, if it aligns solution and technology investments with the most relevant experience elements, it can bring itself dramatically closer to success.

Not of Necessity

While common practice urges observers to blame that mentality on resistance to change or aversion to cost, businesses maintain that their opposition is driven by an honest value assessment.

If a business does not plan to invest in a new technology or solution over the next 6-18 months, odds are strong that they do not believe it is a necessity.

On the topic of technology or solutions they will not begin using within eighteen months, the amount of respondents who declared that they should be using the technology never exceeded the percentage who felt it was unnecessary.

In the cases of cloud call centers (43% of business will not begin using the technology and do not believe they need to; 12% will not but believe they should), dialing solutions (48%
do not believe they need to, 10% believe they do), interaction management solutions (46% do not believe they need to, 11% believe they do), outsourcing (58% do not believe they need to, 2% believe they do), at-home agents (42% do not believe they need to, 7% believe they do), speech analytics (49% do not believe they need to, 10% believe they do), virtual agents (45% do not believe they need to, 10% believe they do), and third-party testing and monitoring solutions (66% do not believe they need to, 7% believe they do), the disparities are significant enough to send a vivid message regarding necessity. If a solution is neither currently in use nor tapped for upcoming use, it has not successfully convinced call center decision makers of its value.

Even solutions that will command new purchases from substantial numbers of businesses, including unified desktop solutions (19% will initiate), live chat applications (18% will initiate), mobile customer service solutions (17% will initiate), knowledge management solutions (15% will implement) e-learning solutions (14% will initiate) and virtual agent solutions (14% will initiate) will go justifiably ignored by a considerably larger number of businesses.

To overcome this barrier, providers—or desired users—of new solutions and technologies must more compellingly align their value propositions with call center objectives. Insofar as areas like CSAT score, NPS and call accuracy are top priorities for businesses, any solution hoping to gain widespread adoption must successfully articulate its ability to positively affect performance against those measures. It must also demonstrate an ability to do so without exposing the business to intimidating costs, troublesome disintegration with existing technology, daunting learning curves for users and security concerns for customers.

VPI’s Patrick Botz, however, believes resource constraints remain a barrier even as solutions begin to demonstrate significant returns on investment. “Everything can have a good ROI, but a lot of organizations don’t have the adequate financial and human resources to implement and manage more stuff,” contends Botz. “Technologies that have a strong ROI and are easy to implement with minimal IT resources needed on their end – for ramp-up and everyday use - are far more attractive.”

Solutions that Satisfy

A further inhibitor to the adoption of new technology comes from the fact that businesses, which all operate under resource and budgetary constraints, are largely content with their existing solution purchases.

The percentage of businesses using a solution who continue to see the merit in that solution exceeds the percentage of businesses using it that do not see the merit for every single category identified by the survey. Few businesses, in fact, even fit into the latter category for most technologies.

The ones that did elicit value questions from a sizable number of businesses, including training solutions (14% who use see the category as unnecessary), dialing solutions (12%), performance management solutions (10%), e-mail support solutions (10%), web self-service solutions (10%) and workforce management solutions (10%), go unquestioned by a significantly larger portion of businesses (51% for training, 23% for dialing, 60% for performance management, 46% for e-mail support, 53% for web self-service and 46% for workforce management).

Several solution categories, meanwhile, maintain significant approval ratings and limited disapproval ratings. Call monitoring is used and valued by 77% of businesses and used and valued by just 8%. Automatic call distribution is used and valued by 72% and used and valued by just 8%. Call center coaching is used and valued by 71% and used and devalued by less than 10%.
The Impending Solution Landscape

Largely content with the solutions they are using and largely uninterested in the solutions they are not using, businesses will demonstrate stagnation on both sides of the equation.

The solution landscape eighteen months from now will thus share a staunch similarity with the one in the status quo.

At present, the most commonly used solution categories are call monitoring (85%), coaching (80%), automatic call distribution (80%), performance management (71%), customer satisfaction measurement (64%) and training solutions (64%). The least popular categories are third party testing and monitoring (21%), speech and text analytics (29%), virtual agent (31%), dialing (35%), social media support (35%) and cloud or hosted call center solutions (35%).

In eighteen months, the most popular categories will be call monitoring (87%), call center coaching (82%), automatic call distribution (78%), CRM (74%) and knowledge management (67%). The least popular categories will be third party testing (26%), speech and text analytics (36%), outsourcing (37%), social media support (38%) and dialing (40%).

Only CRM and knowledge management, which already possess solid utilization rates of 63% and 57%, will ascend into the top five.

Only outsourcing, which currently possess a low 38% utilization rate, will descend into the bottom five.

Within that fairly stagnant landscape, however, will be some movement in favor of certain solutions and in opposition to others.

Categories that will receive the greatest increases in utilization rate include unified desktop (+14%), live chat (+13%), CRM (+11%), virtual agent (+10%) and workforce management (+10%).

Categories that will endure the greatest decreases include performance management (-3%), agent recruiting and training (-2%), e-mail support (-2%), outsourcing (-2%) and automatic call distribution (-2%).

While he is surprised by the current lack of market penetration for virtual agent and speech analytics solutions, CallMiner’s Erik Strand is not at all surprised by the anticipated growth (10% for virtual agent technology, 7% for speech analytics technology).

“I’m a little bit surprised about the penetration of speech analytics…and virtual agent technology, which is an example of something that is fairly obviously going to be a high-impact technology [as evidenced by the clear, but gradual growth],” explains Strand.
Turning Action into Transformation

While businesses continue to subject all facets of the customer service operation to inertia and resistance, they are also granting the call center an unprecedented level of leeway to align with the customer. They, now recognizing customer satisfaction as the primary call center objective, are reducing emphasis on operational metrics like average handle time and average speed of answer demonstrating support for customer-oriented metrics like CSAT Score and NPS.

Recognizing the front-line as an instrumental pathway to customer satisfaction, they are committing themselves to simultaneously improving agent training and development, improving the agent desktop experience, improving the manner in which agent performance is managed and improving the culture in which customer service activity takes place. Businesses are not simply hiring but investing.

Recognizing the role quality continues to play in driving customer satisfaction, businesses are scrutinizing call content and system functionality. They are also beginning to recognize customer feedback as a rich source of insights about call quality.

While the scope of investments remain limited, businesses are also committing themselves to solutions and technology that impact agent performance, customer relationships and self-service options. Their distribution of investment, which extends into areas like call center coaching, CRM and knowledge management, reflects a desire to purchase and optimize technology that drives value rather than that which exists as a supposed, yet antiquated call center necessity.

A shift in action is clearly preferable to a mere shift in rhetoric and mindset. It does not, however, represent the end of the line for call centers that truly wish to transform into beacons of customer centricity.

Shifting focus to CSAT over AHT clearly represents an admirable step, but it can also degenerate into a sorely limited one.

A customer-centric business will not simply evaluate the score but the context of the metric itself. What does satisfaction mean to customers? What elements of the customer experience—including channel offerings, resolution elements, accuracy, consistency and, yes, even average handle time—most notably contribute to customer satisfaction?

Which forms of subjective behavior influence customer satisfaction, and how, in turn will a satisfied customer behave?

Focusing on the metric reveals that businesses care about the information. Deconstructing the metric— and identifying opportunities for marked improvement—reveal that businesses care about a customer-centric transformation.

The difference between satisfying and supremely satisfying might be obscured by a blanket score, but it could ultimately play a game-changing role in reducing costs and securing customer loyalty.

“If things are performing exactly as they should, that should lead to a lower customer effort score and an improved customer experience,” offers IQ Services’ Mike Burke. “It might not be particularly noticeable, but there is the potential for real cost savings in perfecting processes.”

That businesses now recognize the call center as a source of value offers a great deal of empowerment for call center managers, but it also risks creating an aura of complacency. That stakeholders “get” the connection between customer satisfaction and favorable business outcomes must not discourage call centers from continuing to optimize the value and minimize the cost they generate.

What additional opportunities to create customer satisfaction exist? What additional opportunities to boost agent productivity exist? What technologies and practices can optimize performance? And how else can the contact center help the business?

“When making such changes call centers need to be mindful, not just to improve what they do, but to challenge current practice and innovate,” declares MatsSoft’s Nigel Warren.

Virtually no respondents identified gaining customer
“Managers in the call center space must find better, alternative ways to add more value. It’s not just about picking up the phone and answering the question or selling – it is also about consider how the customer service operation be used to gain greater insight into overall business performance.”

- Stefan Captijn

“Automate, automate, automate. You should not have call center personnel doing anything that is not directly supporting the customer or is not part of the end game.”

- Erik Strand

**Turning Action into Transformation**

Insights as a top objective of the call center. When one considers how valuable that information can be to the business—and how effectively the call center can capture that information—he sees that the prevailing mindset could drive businesses to squander opportunity.

“Managers in the call center space must find better, alternative ways to add more value,” says Genesys’ Stefan Captijn. “It’s not just about picking up the phone and answering the question or selling – it is also about consider how the customer service operation be used to gain greater insight into overall business performance.

“What is really happening on the floor? What is the voice of the external customer? What about the internal customer? The call center should be much bigger than just service and sales.”

They might be thinking more intently about the way agents are measured, trained and conditioned into the call center environment, but businesses continue to accept undesirable restrictions and limitations on boosting agent productivity.

Few businesses, after all, guarantee an instant response to customers. Failure to do so can unfortunately neutralize all the progress in favor of a more customer-centric call center.

“No matter how much work companies put into providing the agent with the right information when they finally talk to the customer, if the customer has been put on hold, I don’t care what you’ve done about multi-channel [and other trendy customer service endeavors] – it’s not a great customer experience,” argues Intradim’s Matt McConnell.

And insofar as businesses have access to unprecedented data, they have no excuse for allowing their customer service supply to fall out of line with customer demand.

Aware that interaction and system quality can impact the customer experience, businesses continue to measure and assure quality.

But they also do so from a position of obligation rather than one of enthusiasm and urgency. They are not creatively thinking about areas in which quality issues can arise. Content to measure only a few calls per month, they are not considering opportunities to expand their quality assurance program. They are not considering how automating the more objective aspects of quality monitoring can free up resources to focus on the subjective ones.

“Automate, automate, automate,” says CallMiner’s Erik Strand. “You should not have call center personnel doing anything that is not directly supporting the customer or is not part of the end game.”

Despite rejecting some new technology categories due integration concerns, businesses ironically overlook opportunities to better integrate the technology they are using.

Customer-centric businesses are striving to introduce and optimize technology that improves agent knowledge, improves customer experience monitoring, creates better interactions and builds customer relationships. But if the data is not correctly integrated and positioned before the agent in real-time, it significantly loses its efficacy.

“Many companies can’t track the customer journey as a single entity,” explains VoltDelta’s Steve Chirokas. “They can’t really, easily identify what the customer’s perspective was.”

Chirokas argues that properly integrating channels, CRM, knowledge management and quality insights can produce a more efficient, more measurable experience. And when that happens, the technology is truly doing its job of producing more value.

Call centers also must develop comfort looking internally for results. While measuring performance based on popular metrics are mirroring popular “best practices” or benchmarks can help inspire, provide a direction for change and quickly eliminate weaknesses in existing processes, it can also cause them to overlook the existing strengths.

According to VPI’s Patrick Botz, inter-organization benchmarking has limits in that it reveals the standards attained by other organizations but does not always consider the circumstances under which those standards were attained and how they were measured. Businesses should first look at their best performing internal agents, processes and technologies and determine how to replicate that success across the entire organization.

“My recommendation is to first look internally to see what your best performing agents can do,” advises Botz. “There are usually a handful of tactics that your top performing agents are using in the sales and service processes. Find out what those are and train everyone else on how to use those tactics. Once they’re trained, you can quality monitor or use speech analytics to ensure they’re consistently doing those things.”

Technology and process improvement decisions can then be evaluated based on their ability to consistently employ those three tactics.

Businesses have developed a customer-centric mindset. They have begun using that mindset to drive call center performance and decision-making. The next step is deconstructing the actions to assure they are not simply addressing past call center wrongs but transforming the business so that it can routinely operate in the right.