



2011 Research Report

Balancing Call Center Efficiency and the Customer Experience

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Overview And Executive Summary

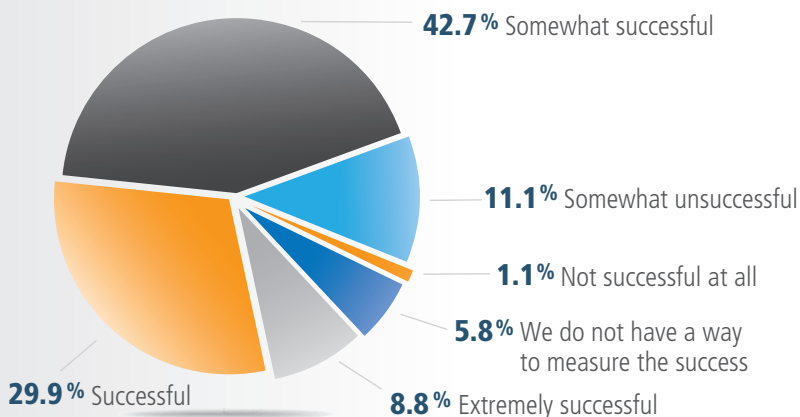
In January and February 2011, 428 contact center professionals working in centers of all sizes and shapes around the globe participated in the study, sharing critical information about their centers' ability to strike a balance between call center efficiency and the customer experience.

Perhaps the most telling response in the entire survey process is that less than one third (29.9%) of contact center professionals surveyed rate their centers as successful at achieving the balance between call center efficiency and customer experience. A slightly more positive 42.7% rate their centers as somewhat successful in this endeavor. While a small portion (8.8%) say their centers are extremely successful at striking this balance, another 11.7% say they're somewhat unsuccessful at it, and 1.1% say they're not successful at all. Another 5.8% say they have no way to measure success in this area. What this indicates is that there's much room for improvement. (Figure 1)

When we examined the complete survey results, we found that it's not one area that contact centers are struggling in; rather, their lack of success – or mediocre performance – can be explained by a combination of shortcomings (or, perhaps, shortsightedness) with regard to understanding the interrelatedness of call center efficiency and the customer experience metrics and the people, processes and technologies that they're meant to track.

The survey sought to find out how well contact centers were meeting their customers' needs, as well as their own. Here are some of the major findings from the study:

1. How successful has/have your center(s) been at achieving the balance between call center efficiency and customer experience?



Key Findings

- Asked to indicate the challenges they face in balancing call center efficiency and the customer experience, the majority (54.7%) of survey participants said insufficient time, money and/or technology (resources) is their biggest stumbling block.
- Interestingly, the barriers to success in delivering on customer experience nearly match those cited as barriers to success in call center efficiency.
- Employee engagement has an equal impact on both call center efficiency and customer experience; however nearly one quarter of centers don't track agent attrition.
- Nearly half of respondents do not track employee satisfaction.
- Service level is set by contact center management for most of the centers represented.



- Customer satisfaction, contact quality and first-contact resolution (in that order) took the top priority slots in a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being the highest priority).
- The next highest-ranked metric is speed of answer, high on the list of efficiency desirables. But, slightly more than one third of respondents rated short handle a 4 or 5 on the priority scale.
- Less than half of participants said their center has a proactive customer feedback/voice of the customer process.

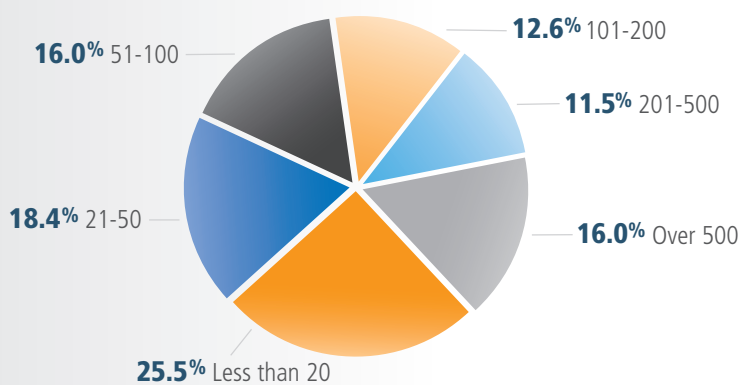
Study Results

Respondents' Background

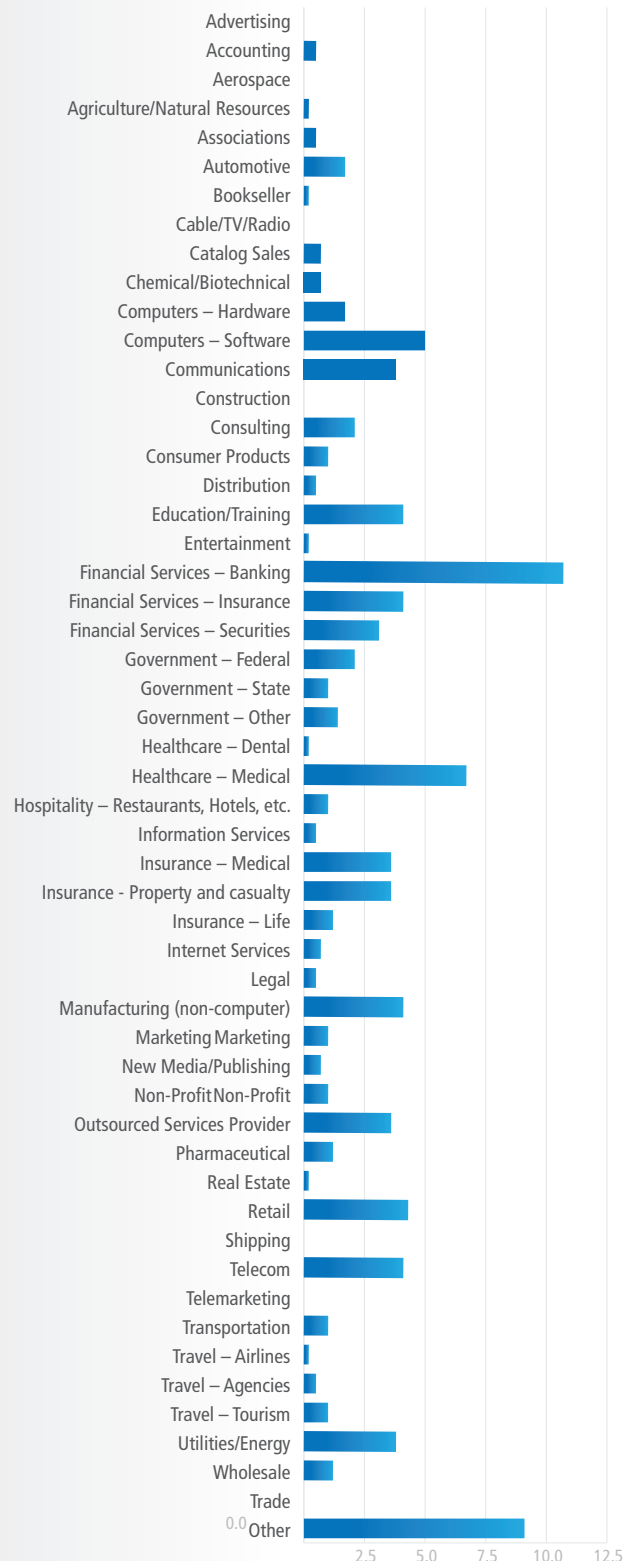
More than half of study respondents work in small- to mid-sized centers: 25.5% reported employing fewer than 20 full-time agents; 18.4% employ just 21-50 full-time agents; and another 16% work in centers with 51-100 FTEs. Larger centers were also fairly well represented: 16% of respondents work in giant centers with more than 500 agents; 12.6% work in centers staffed with 101-200 agents; and the remaining 11.5% work in centers employing 201-500 FTEs (Figure 2).

Study participants also represented a diverse range of industries. The largest percentage of respondents (17.9%) was

2. Call Center Size/Number of Agents



3. Industries Surveyed

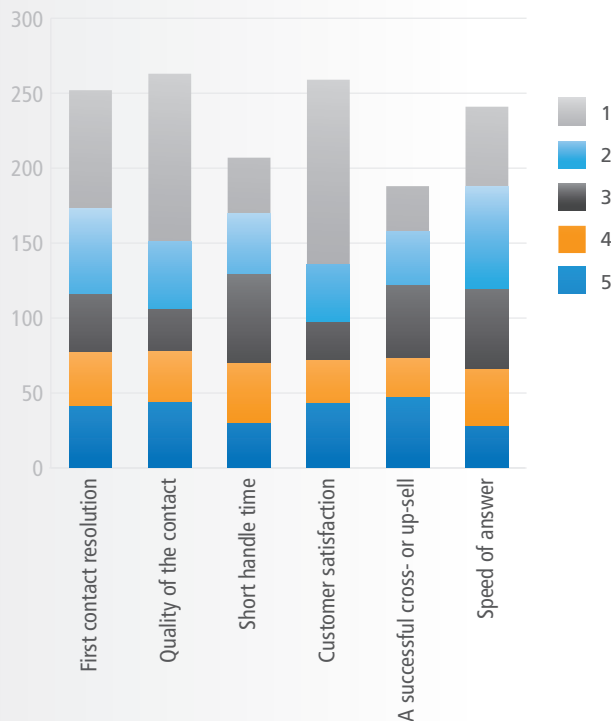




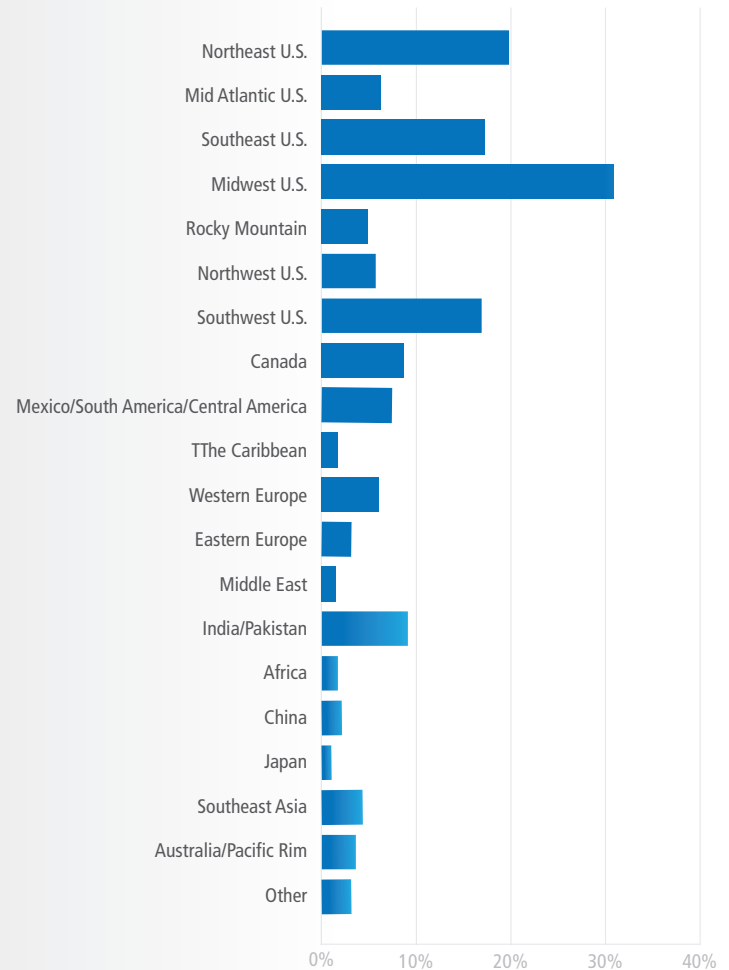
in the Financial Services sector (including banking, insurance and securities). Rounding out the top industries in terms of representation in the study were Healthcare (medical) at 6.7%; Computer (software) at 5%; Retail at 4.3%; Telecom, Manufacturing (non-computer) and Education/Training, each at 4.1%. (Figure 3)

Geographically, the majority of the contact centers represented were in the U.S. (30.8% of respondents said their organization has centers in the Midwest, with another 19.8% reporting centers in the Northeast). Another 8.6% reported centers in Canada. A host of other countries and regions were also represented in the study, including India (and Pakistan), Europe, Mexico, Central America, South America, Australia (and the Pacific Rim), Africa, the Middle East, China and the Caribbean (Figure 4).

5. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest priority, what do you consider the key components of a successful contact?



4. Locations of Call Centers Surveyed



Key Components of a Successful Contact

Because a successful contact should exhibit a balanced devotion to both efficiency and the customer experience, we asked survey participants to prioritize the key components of a successful contact. (Figure 5)

Overall, customer satisfaction, contact quality and first-contact resolution (in that order) – key contributors to a good customer experience – took the top priority slots in a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being the highest priority). The next highest-ranked metric is



speed of answer, high on the list of efficiency desirables. Where we'd expect to see them – in a position of medium importance – are successful cross-selling or up-selling and short handle time, considered to be secondary efficiency metrics.

Slightly concerning is that more than one third (37.7%) of respondents rated short handle time a 4 or 5, giving it considerably higher importance when you add the 28.5% who rated it at 3. Short handle time, particularly, is an oft-debated metric. For efficiency's sake, it's easily considered a key metric to watch, and it is – to watch, but not to rigidly enforce. Focusing too much attention (and action) on handle time can jeopardize quality, contact resolution, customer satisfaction and even cross-selling and up-selling.

On the other hand, it's important to monitor handle times for spikes so that you can determine causes that might be diminished or eliminated. On average, however, focusing on the people, processes and technologies that can improve performance around metrics such as contact resolution, quality and customer satisfaction should be a daily vigil.

Note that these are the respondents' opinions and not necessarily the practices in their contact centers. Call center professionals have the right ideas about balancing call center efficiency with customer experience, but survey results regarding actual practices show that they may not be able to enact what they consider to be best or better practices.

Contact centers that can analyze and act on the relationships between KPIs such as average handle time, first-call resolution and customer satisfaction will find themselves ahead of the game.

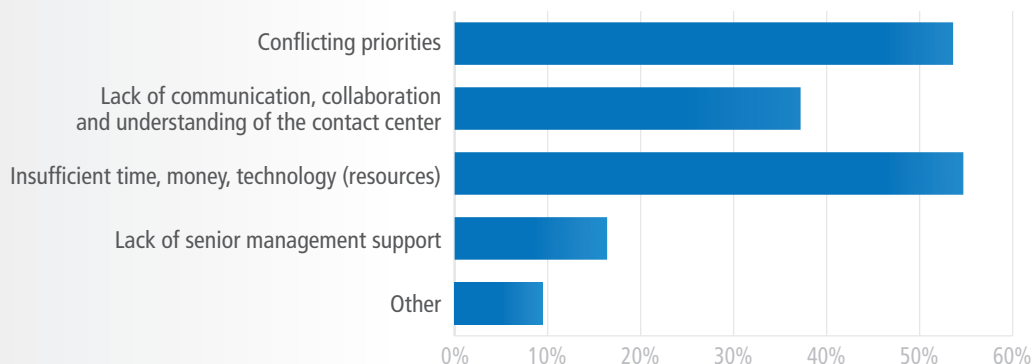
Challenges to Balancing Call Center Efficiency with the Customer Experience

Asked to indicate the challenges they face in balancing call center efficiency and the customer experience, the majority (54.7%) of survey participants said insufficient time, money and/or technology (resources) is their biggest stumbling block. Conflicting priorities came in at a close second (53.6%), followed by a lack of communication, collaboration and understanding of the contact center (37.2%). Lack of senior support was also cited as a challenge by 16.4% of survey participants. (Figure 6)

Prioritizing, communication and executive support can make or break the balance call centers are trying to effect. Executives that hand down efficiency-heavy mandates are leaving money on the table. Those organizations may save money on a single contact, but they may be forcing an increase in the number of needless contacts and chasing customers away.

Asked to elaborate on their centers' challenges to successfully balancing call center efficiency and the customer experience, survey participants cited the following:

6. What challenges do you face in terms of balancing call center efficiency and customer experience?





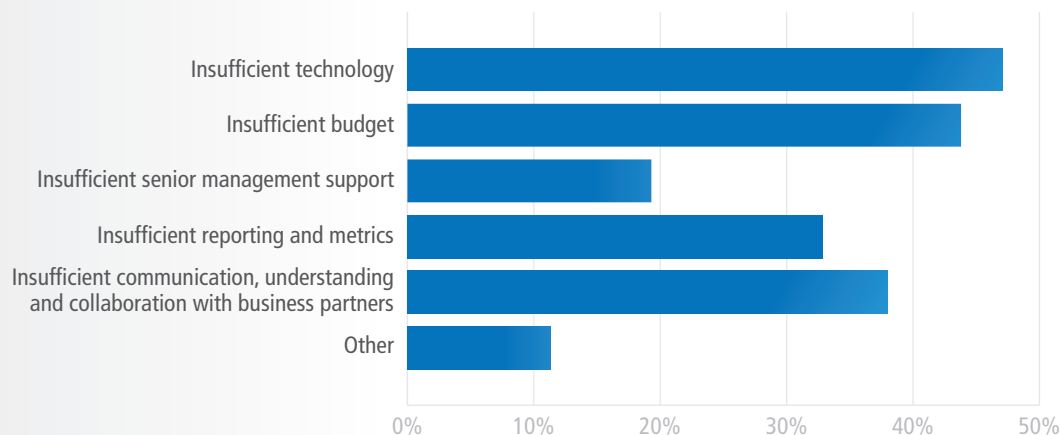
- Staffing to volumes
- High cost
- Varying needs among clients/customers
- High attrition rates, resulting in difficulty in achieving high customer satisfaction and low talk time
- Technology limitations with existing systems
- A lack of more qualified support talent
- Immaturity of customer experience programs
- Limited hours of operation
- Lack of a customer survey program
- Labor union collective bargaining (CBA) restrictions
- Leadership does not understand the unique characteristics of the call center and doesn't appear to care to learn
- Lack of management support to set expectations with customers – or back that practice once expectation guidelines are set – resulting in a lack of realistic expectations with customers
- Tight labor budget
- Budgetary balancing act
- Negotiating for manpower
- Inefficient enterprise resource management (ERP) system lacking proper processes
- Lack of proper tools for agents
- Scheduling for queue availability in an inbound/outbound environment is challenging at peak hours of the day

Barriers to Success – Efficiency

Nearly half of respondents (47.1%) said insufficient technology is their center's primary barrier to success in achieving call center efficiency. Following closely behind are insufficient budget (43.8%) and insufficient communication, understanding and collaboration with business partners (38%). (Figure 7)

But look at the next most-cited barrier – insufficient reporting metrics (more than 30%). This reveals that the foundation for discussions and negotiations with executives and senior management isn't there. Without this data, it's hard to understand the contact center's needs, let alone convince upper management to meet them.

7. What barriers to you face in terms of achieving call center efficiency?

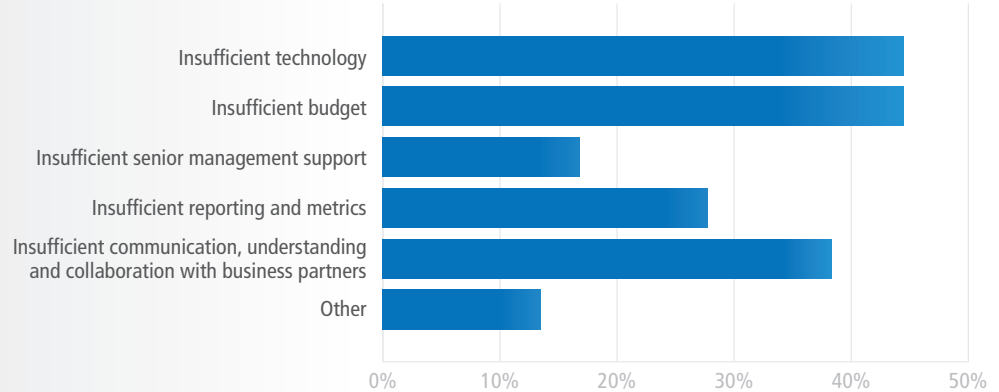




Barriers to Success – Experience

Interestingly, the barriers to success in delivering on customer experience nearly match those cited as barriers to success in call center efficiency. Insufficient technology (44.5%) and insufficient budget (44.5%) are equally challenging barriers to success in achieving call center efficiency. Following closely behind are insufficient communication, understanding and collaboration with business partners (38.3%). Again, we see the possible hobbling effect of insufficient metrics tracking, reporting and analysis capabilities. (Figure 8)

8. What barriers do you face in terms of delivering exceptional customer experience?



9. Please tell us how you use the metrics listed below?

	Used to manage the Contact Center Customer Experience	Used to manage the efficiency of your contact center	Routinely shared with executives	Included on the agent scorecard
Quality Assurance Performance	78.2%	63.5%	57.1%	72.9%
% Perfect Satisfaction Score (% Top Box) - Phone	70.6%	55.2%	53.4%	53.4%
Average Customer Satisfaction Score - Phone	78.1%	54.2%	59.4%	47.4%
First Contact Resolution - Phone	73.5%	77.2%	50.3%	46.0%
% Of Customers Surveyed - Phone	66.4%	52.1%	52.9%	30.0%
Ability to Answer - Phone	69.5%	78.5%	47.1%	49.3%
Completeness of the Answer - Phone	74.7%	67.0%	32.4%	59.3%
Likely to Recommend	71.3%	49.2%	59.0%	27.0%
Likely to Purchase - Phone	64.6%	49.4%	48.1%	26.6%
Transfer Rate to tier 2	57.0%	79.7%	43.8%	39.1%
Escalation Rate to tier 1 Supervisor	59.8%	76.2%	32.0%	33.6%
Telecom Answer Rate	66.1%	82.5%	59.6%	32.2%
Telecom Service Level	74.1%	85.9%	70.7%	30.7%
Telecom Average Speed to Answer	72.1%	85.8%	63.3%	31.0%
Telecom Total Call Volume Handled	57.6%	86.0%	72.9%	36.2%
Average Handle Time - Phone	63.7%	85.3%	52.7%	55.1%
Average Hold Time - Phone	65.1%	83.0%	43.1%	50.5%
Average Talk Time - Phone	62.7%	85.2%	44.1%	53.8%
Average After Call Work - Phone	56.9%	86.8%	41.7%	60.3%
Average AUX0 Time	49.6%	81.0%	31.4%	51.8%



9. Please tell us how you use the metrics listed below (continued).

	Used to manage the Contact Center Customer Experience	Used to manage the efficiency of your contact center	Routinely shared with executives	Included on the agent scorecard
Emails Received	51.4%	81.8%	48.1%	30.9%
Emails Handled	52.2%	80.0%	50.0%	38.3%
% of Email Transfers to tier 2	42.7%	65.3%	37.3%	32.0%
Number of emails to which responses were sent and Closed	52.1%	82.6%	34.7%	45.5%
Response Time (CSR response - submitted)	58.1%	79.1%	40.3%	41.9%
Rep Response Time (CSR response – assigned)	62.6%	77.8%	39.4%	47.5%
Reassigned (4 Status Types: Researching, Waiting, Supervisor Review, Supervisor Return)	54.8%	68.5%	31.5%	31.5%
Schedule Adherence	55.3%	80.5%	41.1%	72.1%
Chats Received	56.3%	72.5%	52.5%	37.5%
Chats Handled	53.0%	71.1%	48.2%	42.2%
Chats Abandoned	52.7%	73.0%	40.5%	35.1%
Average Chat Abandon Time	55.2%	65.5%	41.4%	27.6%
Chat Answer Rate	50.0%	74.2%	39.4%	31.8%
Chat Service Level	60.3%	73.5%	44.1%	29.4%
Average Time in Chat	50.0%	71.2%	40.9%	28.8%
Letters Received	52.4%	77.4%	42.9%	31.0%
Letters Average Response Time	49.4%	78.5%	44.3%	32.9%
Agent-to-Supervisor Ratio	40.1%	81.7%	49.3%	15.5%
# of Case Management Cases Closed within 14 Calendar Days	54.2%	73.5%	55.4%	38.6%
# of Case Management Cases Closed within 15-30 Calendar Days	54.4%	70.9%	51.9%	31.6%
# of Case Management Cases Open Longer than 30 Days	54.4%	69.6%	50.6%	35.4%
Average Time to Case Management Case Resolution	61.9%	76.2%	53.6%	34.5%
# of New Case Management Cases	40.7%	74.4%	53.5%	26.7%
# of Closed Case Management Cases	44.4%	74.1%	51.9%	28.4%
% of Cases Case Managed	52.1%	70.4%	43.7%	28.2%
Average Case Manager Workload	43.3%	75.0%	38.3%	16.7%
Average Customer Satisfaction Score - Case Management	59.2%	69.7%	53.9%	34.2%
Number of Customers Surveyed - Case Management	54.5%	62.1%	54.5%	27.3%
Average Satisfaction with Time to Resolve Concern - Case Management	60.7%	78.7%	52.5%	32.8%
Cost per Contact	42.9%	74.5%	75.8%	13.7%
Number of Incidents by topic area or stroke category/ A separate report must be created for the stroke counts	50.0%	70.6%	48.5%	17.6%
Number of Incidents handled by hour/ by date	43.5%	76.5%	44.7%	34.1%
Number of incidents created by hour /by date	44.2%	72.7%	44.2%	28.6%
% Reassigned to Group/Queue/Rep by Rep	44.1%	73.5%	36.8%	27.9%
Number of Keyword Searches	40.0%	72.0%	36.0%	28.0%



We also looked at how contact centers classify and report performance on a host of metrics. We see some promising overlap of value placed on key metrics, as well as the way they're reported. Quality Assurance performance, for example, is valued nearly as much as an efficiency indicator as it is as a key customer experience element. Most centers report this information to executives as well as to agents. On the other hand, when we look at average handle time (Average Talk Time here), it's of no little concern that it's so heavily tracked in relation to the customer experience in addition to call center efficiency. Even more concerning is how many survey respondents include this routinely on agent scorecards. Agents have little control over talk time; of course, it should be tracked – perhaps periodically along with quality scores and first-call resolution. But alone, it's relatively meaningless to the agent, even to the call center for that matter unless the center is tracking spikes in talk time related to new products or services. (Figure 9)

Enablers – Efficiency

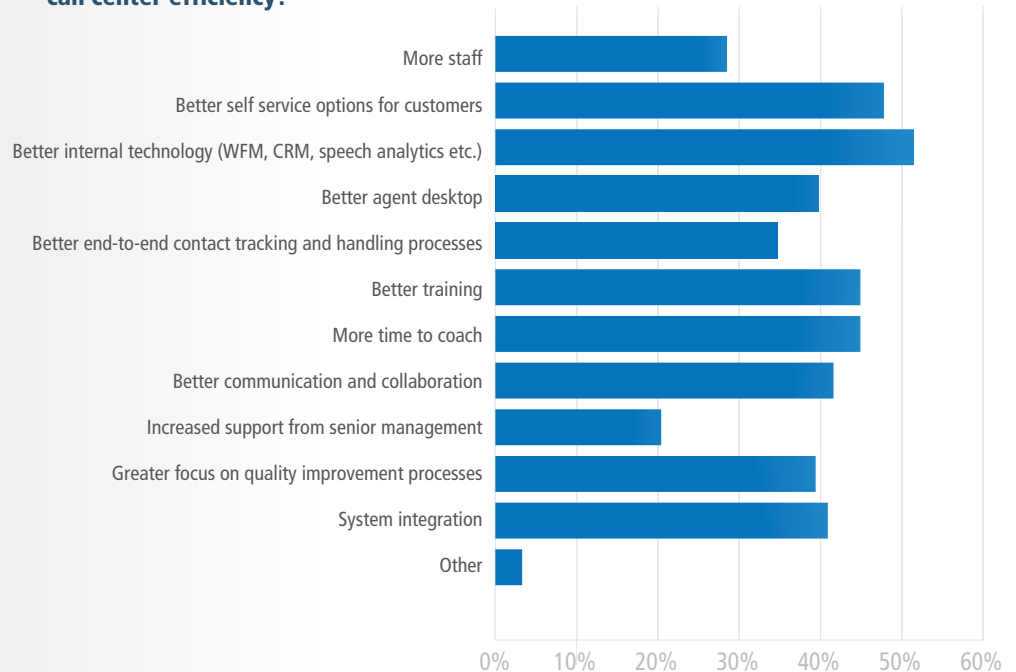
Technology is a prime enabler cited by respondents. More than half (51.5%) say better internal technology (WFM, CRM, speech analytics, etc.) would enhance their centers' ability to achieve efficiency. Better self-service options are a close second (47.8%), followed by better agent desktops (39.8%) and better end-to-end contact tracking and handling processes (34.7%). (Figure 10)

Asked to share their primary, secondary and tertiary contact center platform providers, we see that the major vendors are securely ensconced at the top. (Figure 11)

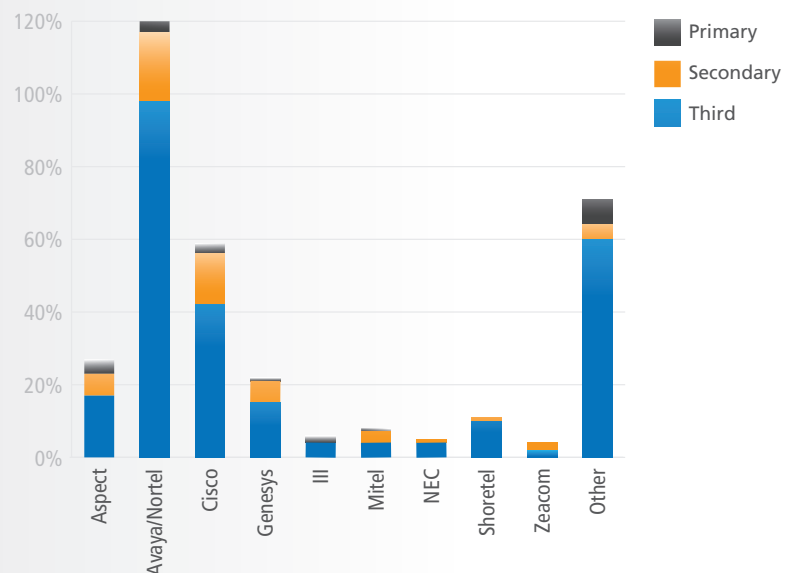
Regarding future technology purchases, intelligent routing systems and workforce management optimization are at the top of the list. (Figure 12)

Considering the top platform providers and the purchases that are top of mind for the next six

10. Which of the following do you feel would enhance your ability to achieving call center efficiency?



11. Who is your contact center provider?





months to five years, it's important to note that many of the platform providers offer capabilities to meet these technology needs or have designated integration partnerships with many of the technology-specific vendors. Questions that contact center leaders must ask themselves include: What are our current goals? What technology and processes do we have now to meet those goals? What more do we need? In addition, they must look at current platforms and systems to determine the best integration performance in order to get the most out of technology purchases. The contact center's ACD (automatic call distributor), for example, can and should provide a wealth of critical data. Combine that with CTI (computer telephony integration) and CRM (customer relationship management system), and there's a powerful combination for accessing data that will serve as the foundation for many decisions the center will make. And this is just a short version of the equation.

Next to technology, people and processes areas are high on the list of efficiency enablers. Survey participants ranked better training and more time to coach as equally important by survey participants (44.9% for each). Better communication and collaboration round out the list of key enablers with 41.6% saying improvement here would enhance call center efficiency.

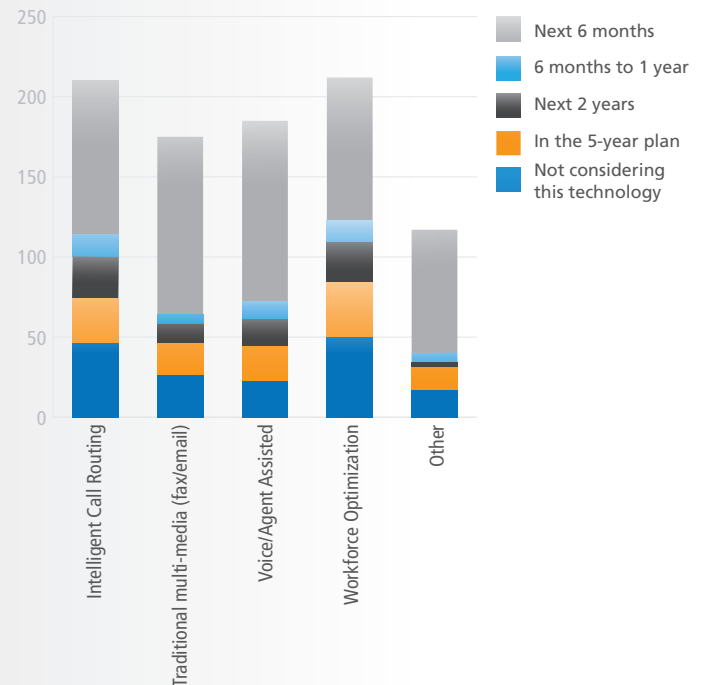
Don't overlook, however, process enablers such as focusing on quality improvement processes (39.4%) and system integration (40.9%). (Figure 13)

It's important to note that improvements in all these areas would likely also have a noticeable positive impact on customer experience.

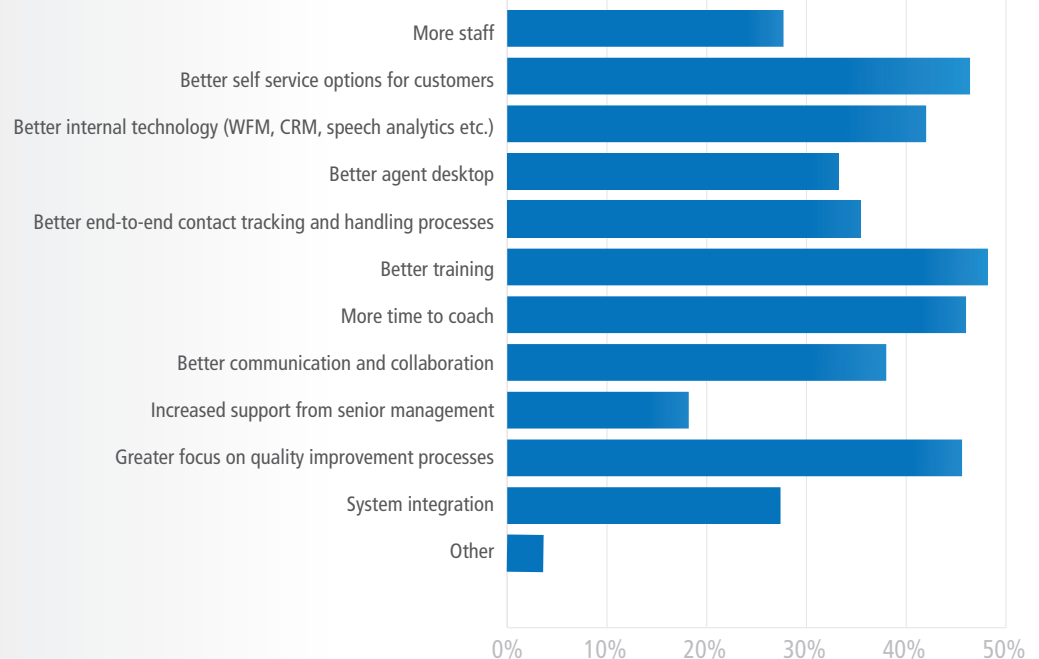
Enablers – Customer Experience

Technology, people and process (in that order) align with enablers identified for enhancing the contact center efficiency.

12. What advanced contact center application are you currently considering or evaluating? And in what time frame?



13. Which of the following do you feel would enhance your ability to deliver a better customer experience?





People, Process and Technology

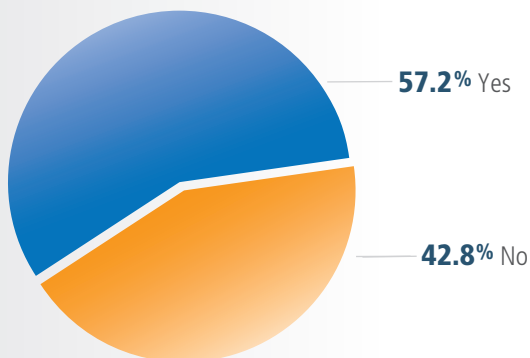
Because people, process and technology are so interdependent in the contact center, it's nearly impossible to separate them. Here, we look at survey results in these three areas together, and how each and the other impact contact center efficiency and the customer experience.

Employee Engagement and Satisfaction

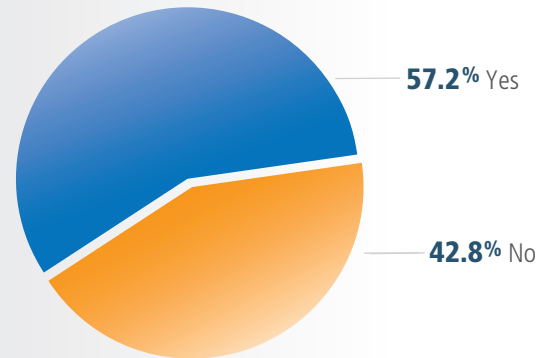
Employee engagement has an equal impact on both call center efficiency and customer experience, with 57.2% of respondents saying their organizations have identified linkages between employee engagement and operational efficiency and 57.2% saying their organizations have identified linkages between employee engagement and a better customer experience. (Figures 14 and 15)

However, more than one third (40.5%) of centers in this study do not measure employee engagement. (Figure 16)

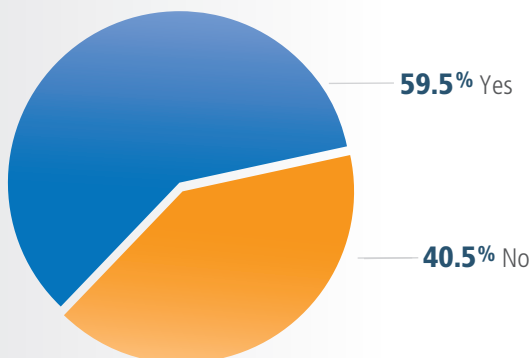
14. Has your organization identified any linkages between employee engagement and better customer experiences?



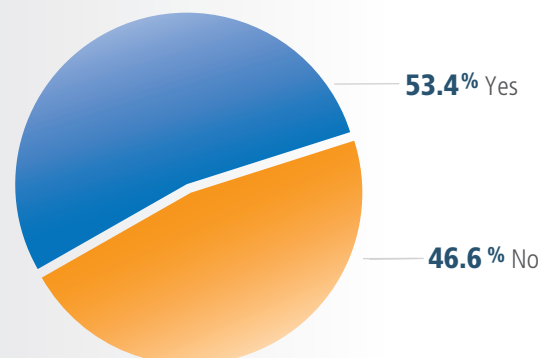
15. Has your organization identified any linkages between employee engagement and operational efficiency?



16. Do you measure employee engagement?



17. The center has a documented and ongoing employee engagement measurement process in place to evaluate overall staff satisfaction using data collection and analysis in order to identify specific opportunities for improvement.





And nearly one half (46.6%) of centers represented in the study do not have a documented and ongoing employee engagement measurement process in place to evaluate overall staff satisfaction using data collection and analysis to identify opportunities for improvement. (Figure 17)

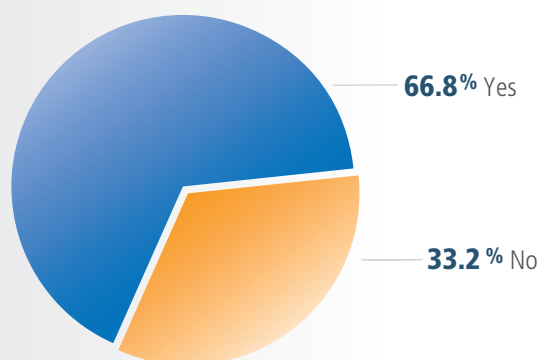
The good news is that more than two-thirds (66.8%) of contact center professionals surveyed said their organizations are able to address opportunities for improvement with regard to agent engagement and staff satisfaction in a timely manner. Still, nearly one-third (33.2%) said they are unable to do so. (Figure 18)

Just more than half (52.4%) of participants said their centers measure and track employee satisfaction (ESAT), leaving nearly half (47.6%) with no ESAT measurement/tracking. (Figure 19)

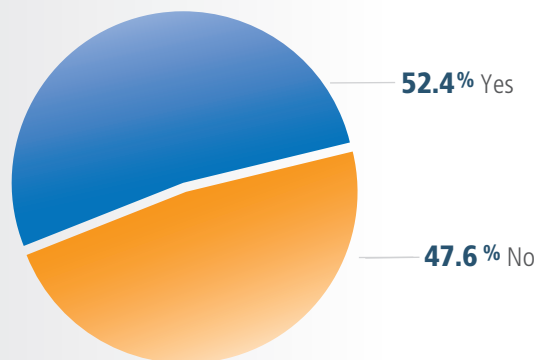
Most (52.9%) of those centers that do measure ESAT only do so on an annual basis. (Figure 20)

More than one-third of centers represented do not have a proactive employee feedback process. (Figure 21)

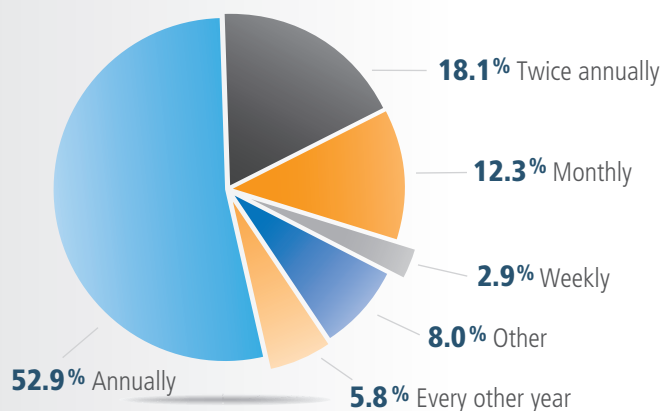
18. Agent engagement/staff satisfaction opportunity areas are addressed in a timely manner.



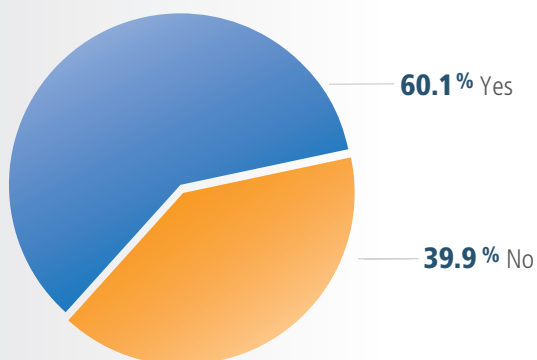
19. Do you measure and track Employee Satisfaction (ESAT)?

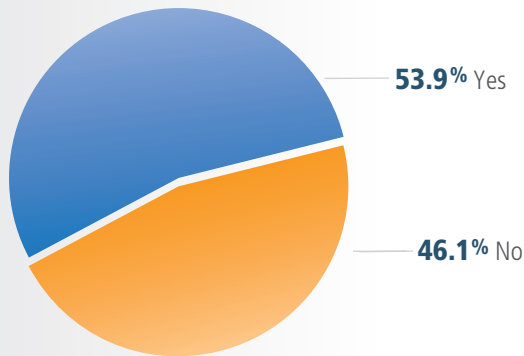


20. How frequently do you measure and track ESAT?



21. Does your center have a proactive employee feedback process?



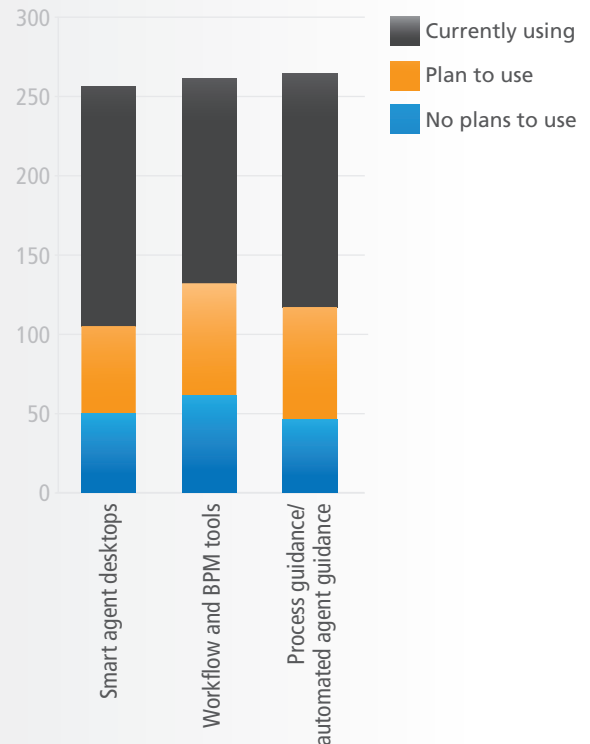
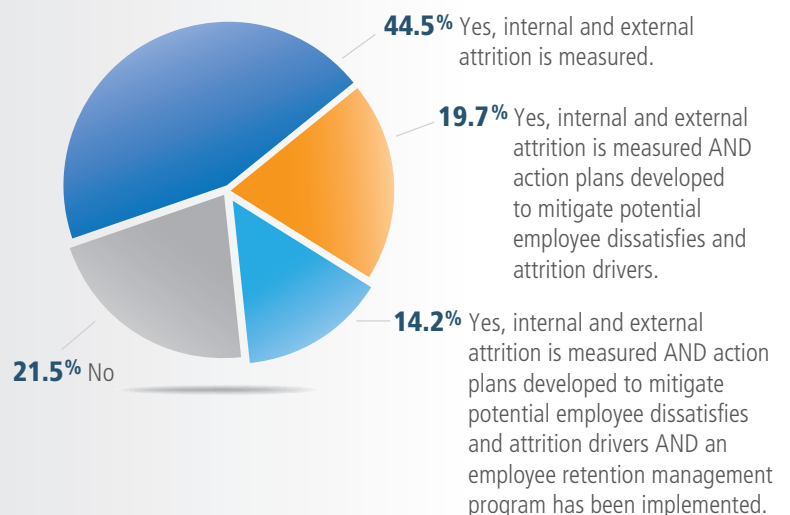
**22. Does your center have a formal process for aligning feedback from employees?**

Nearly half (46.1%) of centers represented do not have a formal process for aligning feedback from employees. (Figure 22)

Respondents currently investing in technologies to improve the employee experience are clearly in the minority. (Figure 23)

Improving the customer experience may be difficult, however, for the more than one-fifth (21.5%) of centers that don't track and measure employee attrition routinely. Of those that do track attrition, only 14.2% include developing action plans to mitigate dissatisfaction and attrition drivers and have an employee retention management program in place. That leaves the majority (44.5%) with measurement data but no action plans and another 9.7% with no formal retention management plans, leaving them in a more reactive than proactive position. (Figure 24)

Remote agents have a great engagement and performance track record to date in almost every organization that employs them, according to research and anecdotes. Additionally, today's WFM automation technologies are quite facile in accounting for home agents. Participants in our study, 62.9%, report that they do not have a home agent staff (but 9.7% of them say they plan to deploy remote agents).

23. Has your organization invested in/ does it plan to invest in any of the following technologies to improve the employee experience?**24. Levels of employee attrition are routinely tracked and measured.**



Agents are empowered to create positive customer experiences with training to develop an emotional connection with customers (61.6%), desktop tools (47.8%), and formal processes for agent input on the customer experience (46.6%). (Figure 25)

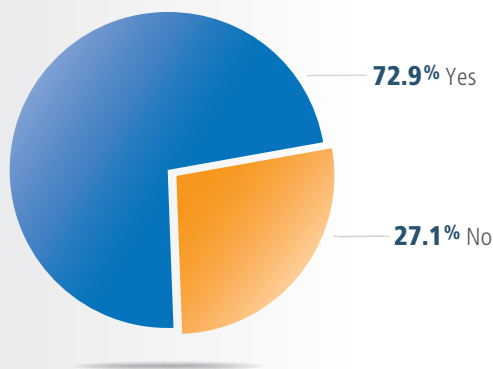
In fact, recurring training is included in the budget for nearly three-quarters (72.9%) of the contact centers represented in the survey. (Figure 26)

Customer Experience Standards/Measure

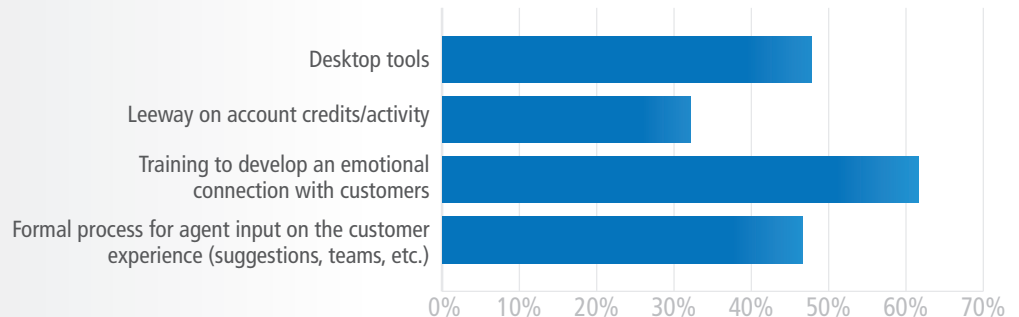
Among those centers that measure the customer experience, the majority of them do so primarily by tracking CSAT and net promoter scores (66.8%). Quality monitoring is the next most common method (63.9%). Complaints (58%), compliments (50%) and voice of the customer (43.8%) are secondary practices, followed by first-call resolution (29.2%). (Figure 27)

Capturing the voice of the customer is as simple as administering a concise and timely transactional survey, using either an automated (IVR- or email-based) post-contact survey or one administered by a live person over the phone, allowing the immediate (or near-immediate) capture of direct feedback on agent performance that can be tied to the individual agent.

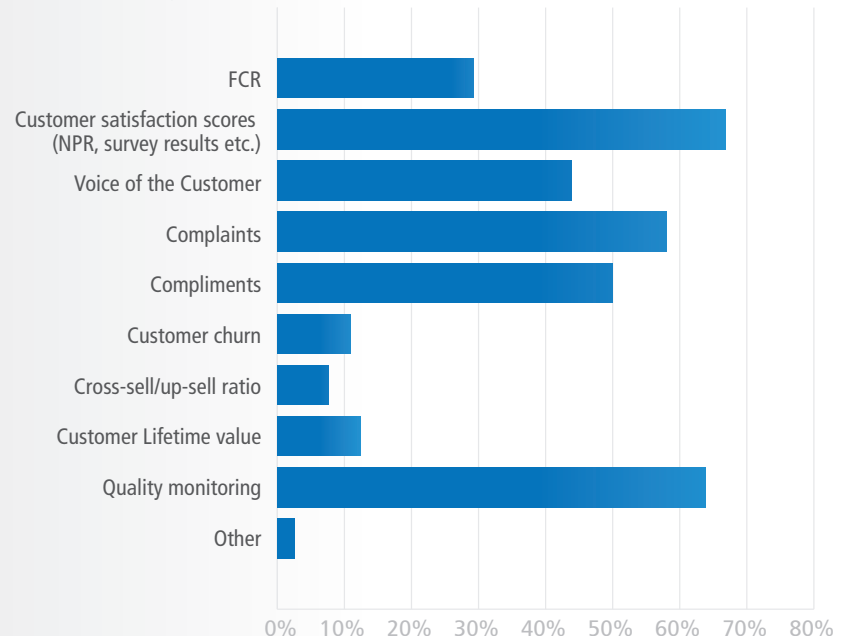
26. Is recurring training included in your budget?



25. How are your agents empowered to create positive customer experiences?



27. How do you measure customer experience?





A great part of the equation for measuring the customer experience is to let the customer tell you about the experience. However, nearly one-third (32.2%) of centers do not measure and track customer satisfaction, according to respondents. (Figure 28)

Those centers that do measure and track CSAT do so at various intervals with most (36%) conducting this activity on a monthly basis. Some (21.3%) do so on a weekly basis. (Figure 29)

However, nearly one-third of centers surveyed (32.6%) do not have a documented customer satisfaction survey process in place to capture and measure the customer experience. (Figure 30)

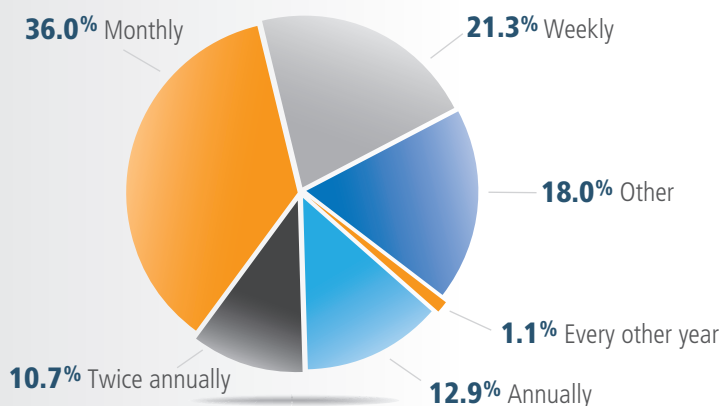
Anecdotally, centers that have solid voice of the customer (VOC) processes in place typically feature one or more of the following in their survey response options:

- rating scale (e.g., 1-5);
- a satisfaction scale ("very satisfied", "satisfied", "neutral", "dissatisfied", "very dissatisfied"); or
- an agreement scale (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree) – depending on how the question is posed.

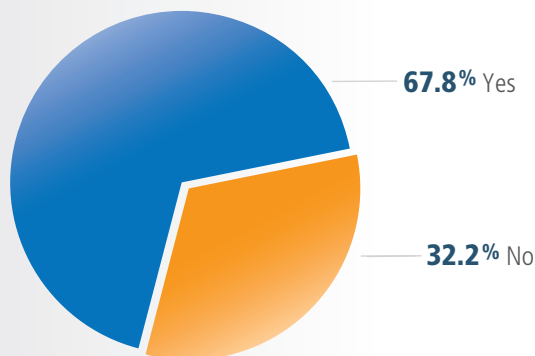
The best surveys also feature a couple of open-ended questions that give customers the opportunity to provide detailed responses or to elaborate on previous ones

Quality Assurance specialists can include VOC survey scores in the agent's overall quality score by combining the typical compliance score with the customer rating from the survey, taking any weighting issues into consideration.

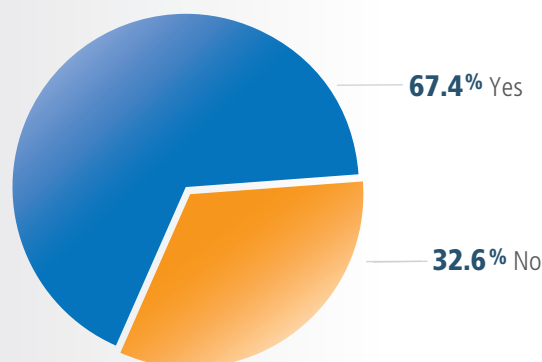
29. How frequently do you measure and track customer satisfaction (CSAT, NPS, other)?



28. Do you measure and track Customer Satisfaction (CSAT, NPS, other)?

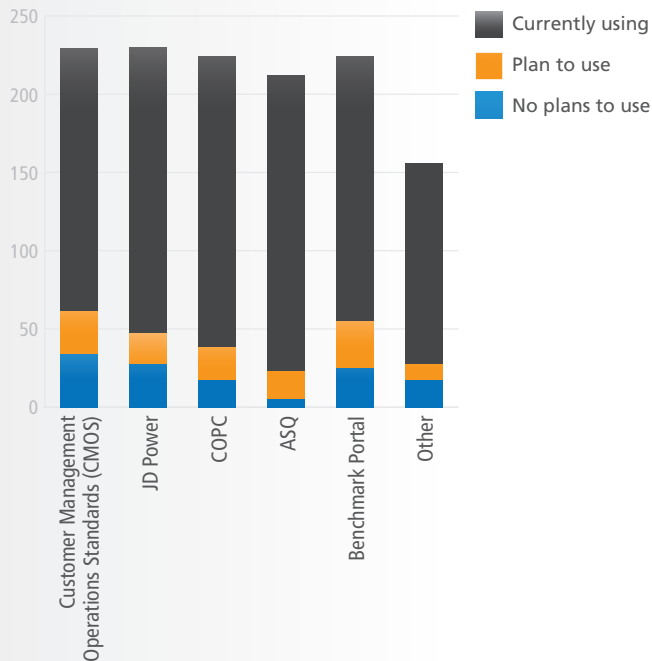


30. Do you have a documented customer satisfaction survey process in place to capture and measure the customer experience?





31. Have you adopted/do you intend to adopt any of the following customer experience standards?



Asking customers whether or not their issues were resolved provides a clearer picture of the call center's true FCR rate, it can help the center (if the survey is appropriately designed) discover some of the main causes of repeat calls.

That's why VOC and first-call resolution should go hand in hand.

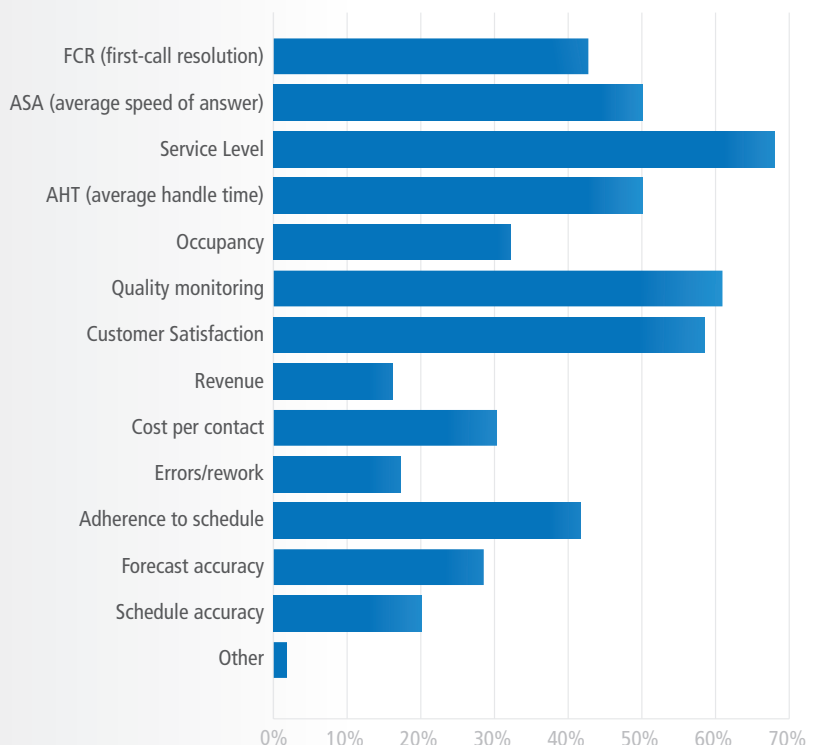
Supporting the Customer Experience/ Contact Center Efficiency

Most centers surveyed use service level as their key efficiency metric. Quality monitoring (60%) and customer satisfaction are the next leaders, followed by average speed of answer (58.4%) and, unfortunately, average handle time (50%). The next leaders are first-call resolution (42.7) and agents' adherence to schedule (41.6%). (Figure 32)

Additionally, the majority of contact centers represented have no plans to use customer experience standards. This denotes a lack of third-party evaluation and validation that might be helpful for some organizations in correlating call center efficiency and the customer experience. Such standards exercises are not required, but they may be helpful, especially for those centers that currently do not track performance. (Figure 31)

For many centers, shifting focus from average handle time to first-call resolution (FCR) could offer a dramatic improvement in both call center efficiency and customer experience. Paired with effective VOC survey processes (in fact, included in them), first-call resolution can be a reasonably cost-effective process. While technology solutions for tracking repeat calls exist – and there's a growing number of centers using them – it's important to remember that the best way to determine first-call resolution is to let the customer tell you.

32. How do you measure call center efficiency?



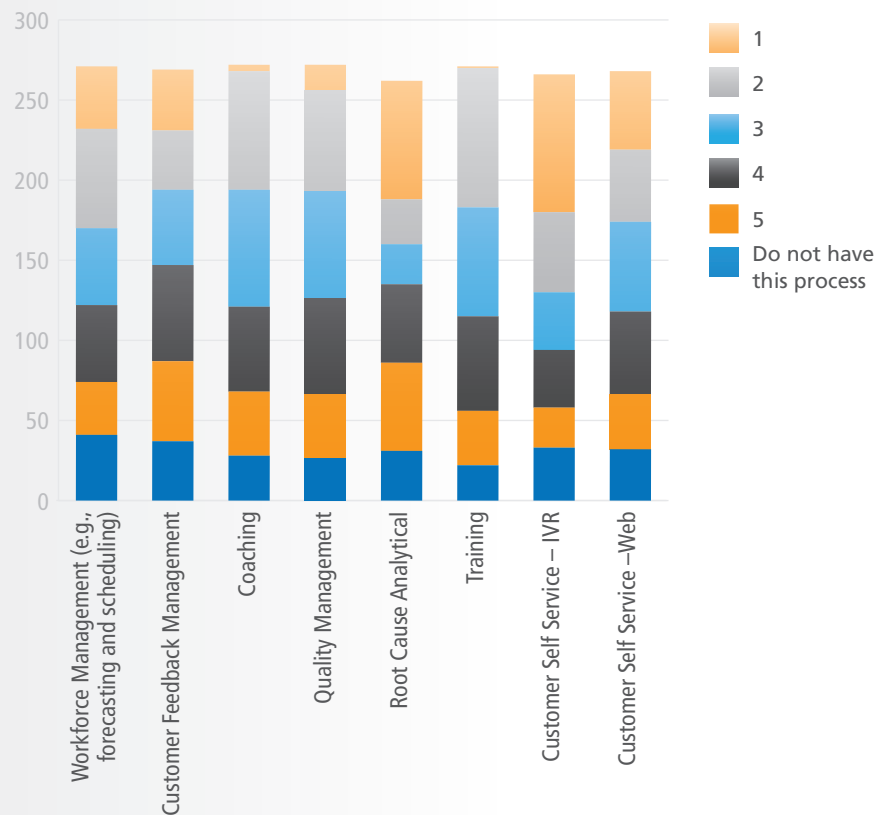


In support of those metrics, the most mature processes are WFM (forecasting and scheduling) and coaching, followed by quality management and customer self-service (rated at mid-level maturity) and customer feedback management (rated next to last in maturity). It's interesting to note that root cause analysis has yet to get a firm foothold, with most respondents reporting that they do not have this process in place. (Figure 33)

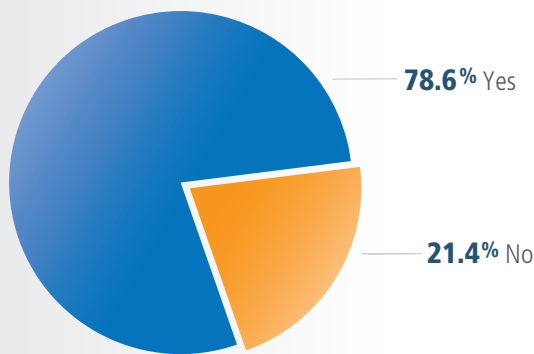
However, more than one-fifth do not have a documented quality monitoring and coaching program in place and in use. (Figure 34)

Processes to routinely collect and analyze data from customers (via surveys, etc.) are fairly divided between enhanced center efficiency and enhanced customer experience, with a majority of centers focusing on both. Problematic, however, is that more than one-quarter (25.5%) reported that they do not have processes for either. (Figure 35)

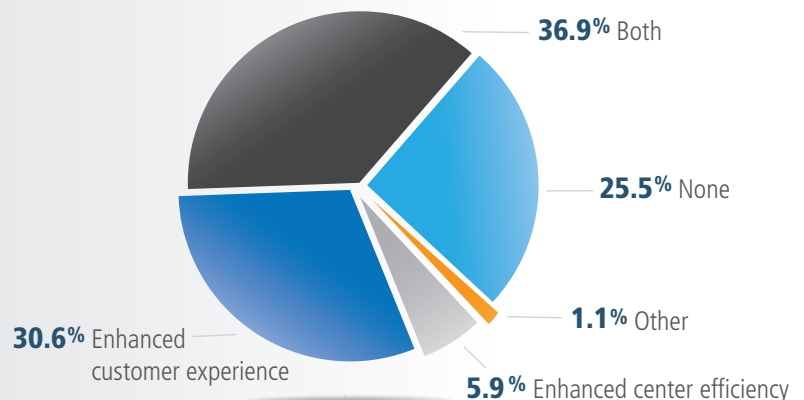
33. On a scale from 1- 5 (with 5 meaning very mature and 1 meaning just started) how mature are these processes in your center?



34. Do you have a documented quality monitoring and coaching program in place and in use?

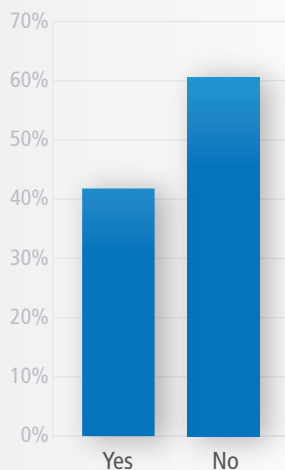


35. Do you have a process in place to routinely collect and analyze data from customers (surveys, etc), stakeholders and those within the center to determine areas for improvement related to...?





36. Do you ever sacrifice the customer experience for enhanced efficiency when making operational decisions?



Balancing Efficiency with Experience in Operational Decisions

While most respondents (60.5%) say they never sacrifice the customer experience for enhanced efficiency when making operational decisions, an astounding number – nearly half (41.8%) say they sometimes do. (Figure 36)

Enabling Technology

As previously noted, insufficient technology is reported to be the top barrier to both call center efficiency and the customer experience.

On the efficiency side, survey participants cited better internal technology (WFM, CRM, speech analytics etc., as the primary enabler (51.5%). Note the functions of WFM, CRM and speech analytics can also have a positive impact on the customer experience.

Another technology angle on both efficiency and experience is customer self-service. There are two primary reasons for offering self-service options to customers: giving customers the information they want on their terms (51.9%)

and reducing calls into the contact center (38%). What we've learned in previous research is that centers offering self-service to customers are struggling to make it work for the center and the customer.

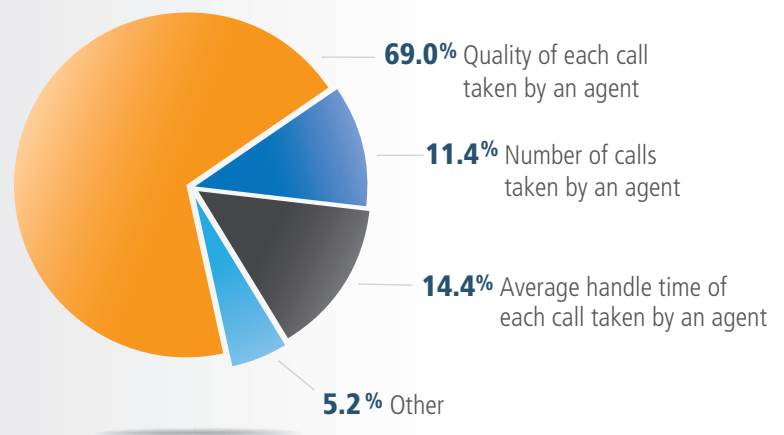
Metrics Focus

The majority (69%) focuses on call quality as a primary metric. It's troubling, however to see even a small percentage (14.4%) focusing on average handle time. (Figure 37)

Focusing a service strategy on the number of calls handled per hour or on average handle time will inevitably lead to shortcomings in quality – and short fuses among customers.

For the most part, average handle time (AHT) is an easily accessible metric that is available from most ACDs or call-routing systems. AHT has long been considered a chief productivity measure, but keep in mind that it's hard for agents to understand this metric – and very easy for them to meet the set objective, creatively and incorrectly, by cutting corners in other qualitative areas, for example.

37. Relative to call center metrics measured against, which of the following does your center focus more on?





In determining the success of their call centers, the top three metrics respondents use (in descending order of importance) are contact quality, service level and average speed of answer. (Figure 38)

Service level

As an efficiency metric, service level takes the lead with most (67.9%) of respondents. Again, average handle time is considered to be a key metric for efficiency by half (50%) of respondents. (Refer to figure 32 on page 17).

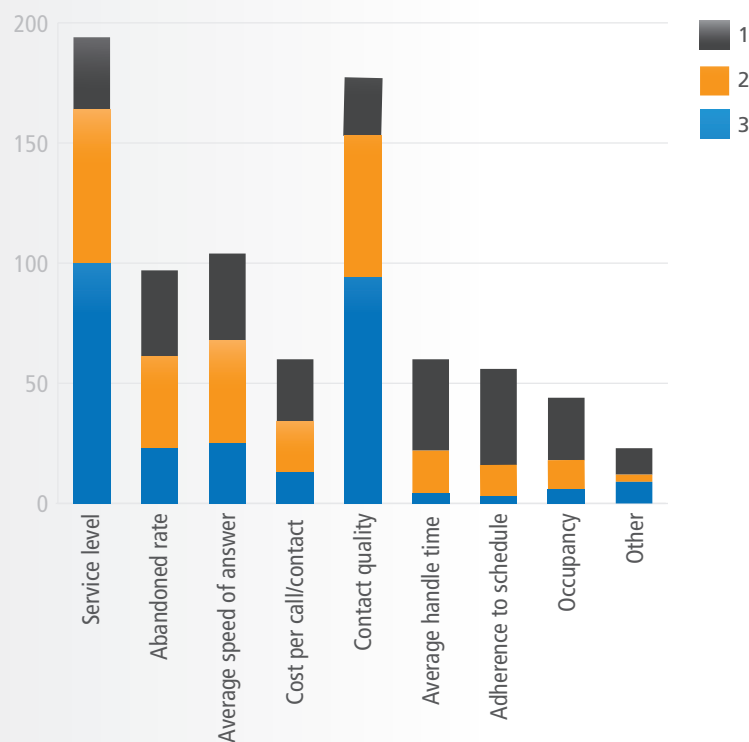
Most respondents (57.3%) say their center's service level is set by contact center management. (Figure 39)

Asked how service levels are determined, nearly one-quarter (22.6%) said their organizations used an industry standard of 80/20 (80% of calls answered in 20 seconds). Little more than 10% base service levels on customer expectations. (Figure 40)

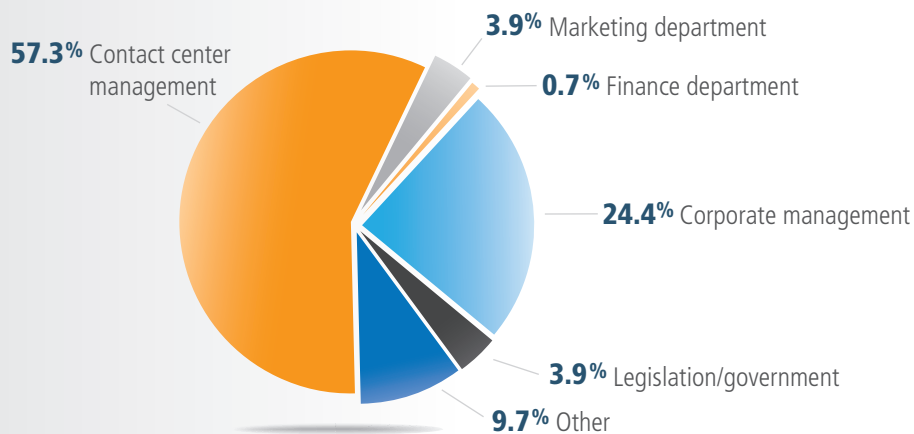
There is generally no "industry standard" service level for contact centers, with the exception of utilities and other regulated industries. The optimum service level should be created by taking into account a multitude of factors, including the value of the call, fully loaded labor costs, trunk costs and caller tolerance. The correct service level for any center accomplishes the following:

- Meets customers' needs and expectations
- Keeps abandonment at an acceptable level
- Minimizes agent burnout and errors
- Minimizes expenses
- Maximizes revenue
- Is agreed upon and supported by senior management

38. What are the top 3 metrics, in order, you use to determine the success of your contact center?



39. Who determined your Service Level (SL) metric?





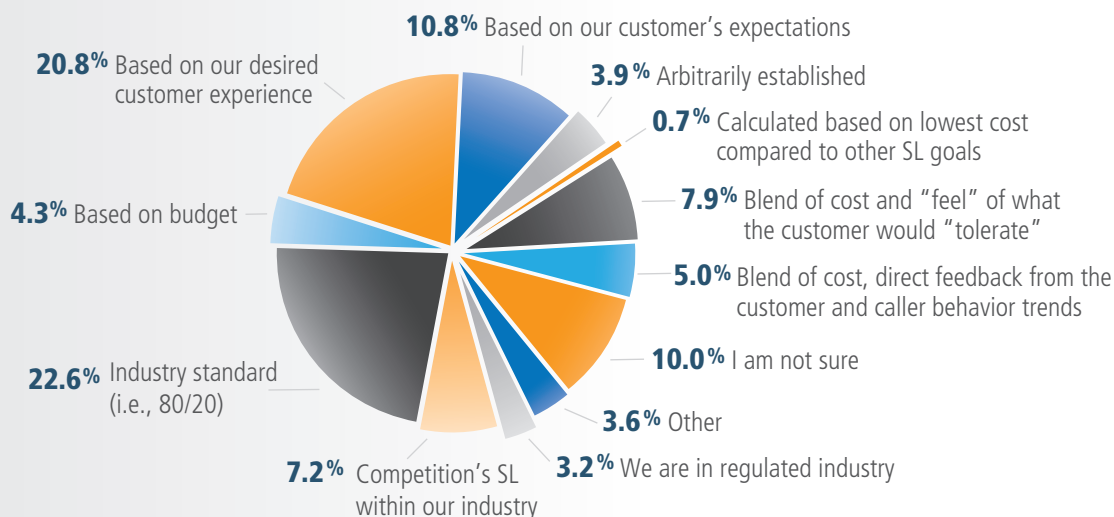
We include responses on the inclusion of chat in channel offerings because policies and processes here can have both an impact on overall service level and the customer experience.

Interestingly, when asked about chat practices (76.7% said they use this channel), it was surprising to see that even a handful of centers either set limits too high or don't set limits at all on the number of chats an agent can handle.

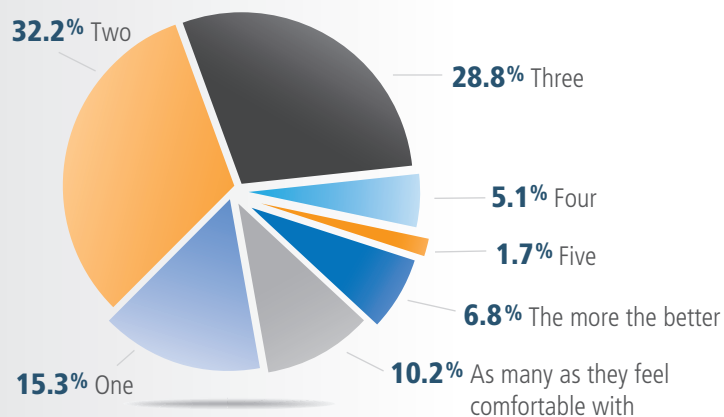
Fortunately, a strong majority (76.3%) of study participants say their agents are limited to no more than three concurrent chats – and 32.2% of those limit the number to two. (Figure 41)

In most centers, 64.4%, agents are not allowed to handle chat transactions while they're on a call. (Figure 42)

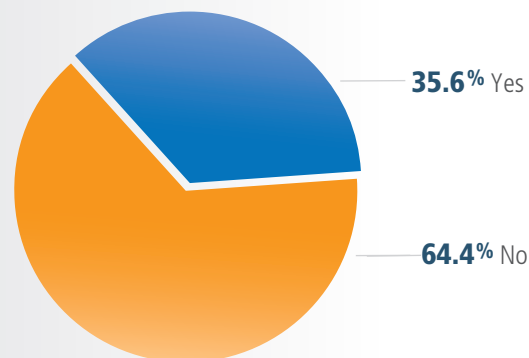
40. How was the SL goal established?



41. How many chat sessions are your agents expected to be able to handle simultaneously?

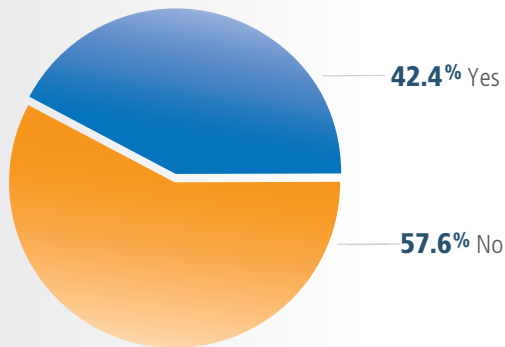


42. Can agents receive chats while on a call and vice versa?





43. Do you have integrated routing where chats and calls are delivered only when the agent is not on the other activity?



When we look at whether the center has the routing capability to only send chats to agents not engaged on the phone, we can get better understanding of why so many centers cannot dip into the agent pool based on need for phone and chat. Nearly half (42.4%) of participants say their centers do not have integrated routing that ensures that chats and calls are delivered only when the agent is not on the other activity. (Figure 43)

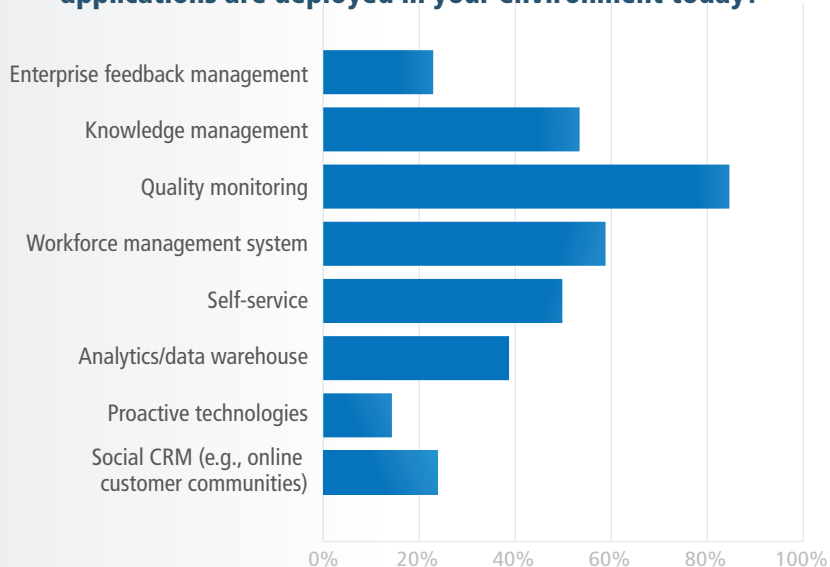
Quality

Quality monitoring is the predominant system/application deployed within respondents contact centers, with 84.6% ranking it first. Interestingly, knowledge management systems are quickly gaining on WFM systems, with 53.4% reporting deployment of knowledge management and 58.8% reporting deployment of WFM systems. Self-service is fourth, with 49.8% reporting its use. We do see, however, a foothold for analytics/data warehouse systems or applications, with 38.7 reporting their use. (Figure 44)

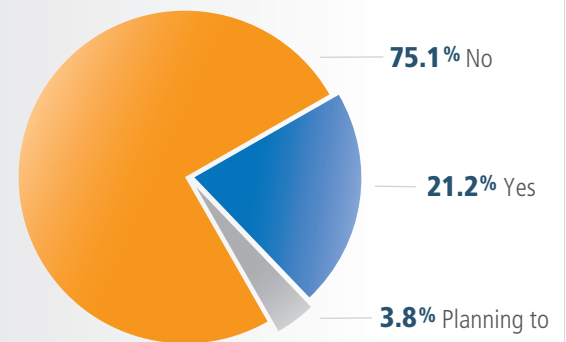
reporting its use. We do see, however, a foothold for analytics/data warehouse systems or applications, with 38.7 reporting their use. (Figure 44)

Most respondents (75.1%) reported that their compliance and quality control services are performed in-house, with just 21.2% using third-party services. (Figure 45)

45. Which of the following contact center systems and or applications are deployed in your environment today?



44. Are you using third party compliance or quality control services?





The majority of centers (78.6%), according to survey participants, combine documented quality monitoring with a coaching program. (Refer to figure 34 on page 18)

Customer Satisfaction

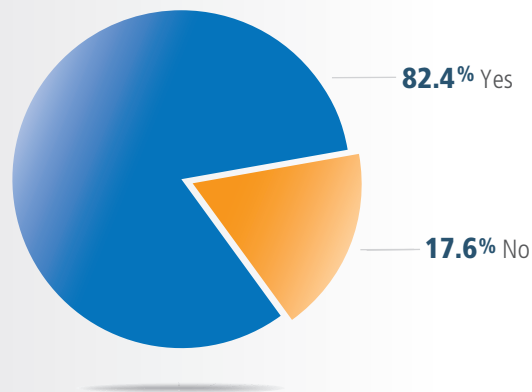
While first-call resolution wins out as the key measurement for success in call center efficiency, customer satisfaction scores lead as the key measurement for the customer experience, with 66.8% of respondents ranking it most important. This metric's nearest competitor in importance is quality monitoring (63.9%). Interestingly, only 43.8% indicated voice of the customer as a key measurement, and that's surpassed by focus on customer complaints (58%) and compliments (50%). (Refer to figure 27 on page 15)

FCR goals are aided by centers allowing their agents to work outside the script to satisfy customers on the first call (82.4%). (Figure 46)

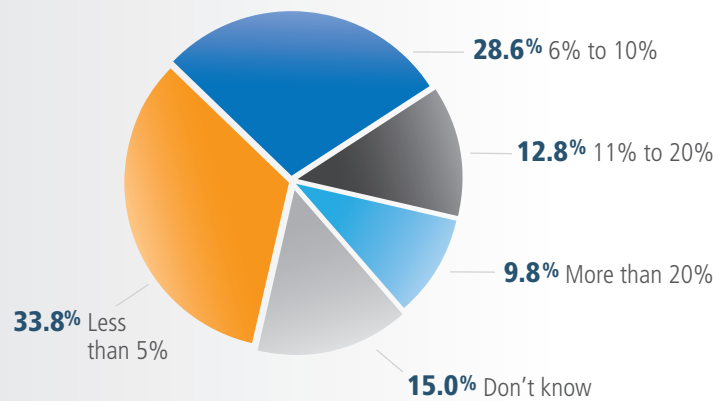
FCR goals are hit-or-miss for many centers, with most centers keeping transfers under 10% while more than a third transfer or escalate more than 11 percent of calls or don't know their transfer rates. (Figure 47)

The point here is that customer satisfaction, FCR and quality scores go should be pieces of the same picture for contact centers – they all go hand in hand. Brand management doesn't want to know about FCR or quality scores, and they misunderstand the value of customer satisfaction scores without these two key pieces. What top management wants is customer retention at the lowest possible cost. Combining FCR and quality scores with CSAT scores allows the center to get an accurate performance picture while understanding ways to increase retention and cut cost by eliminating unnecessary calls or customer defection.

46. Are your call center agents empowered to “work outside the script” to ensure they have done everything possible to satisfy the customer on the first call (First Call Resolution)?



47. What is your transfer rate within your call center (callers that need to be escalated or reached someone that couldn't assist them on the initial contact)?



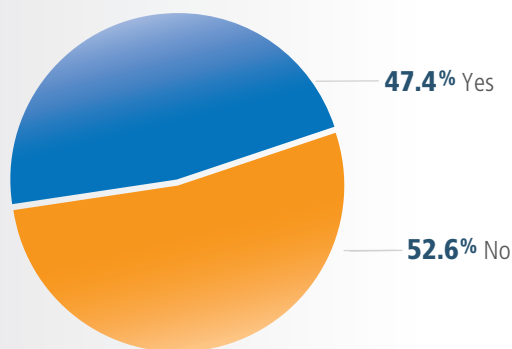


Customer Feedback/Voice of the Customer

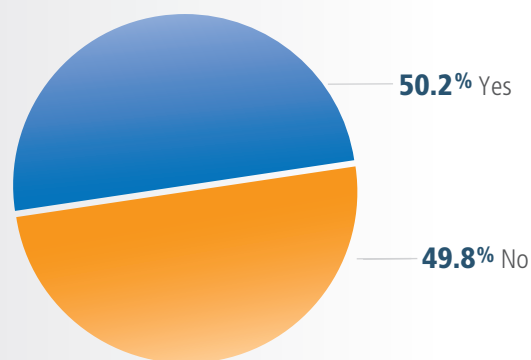
Note that less than half (47.4%) of participants said their center has a proactive customer feedback/voice of the customer process. (Figure 48) However, those centers that do have a documented process for reviewing and implementing VOC-based change focus their efforts on the areas of quality (81.2%) and training (71.3%). (Figure 50) Notable is that WFM and recruiting receive significantly less focus, selected by 25.7% and 23.8%, respectively, by survey participants.

Nearly half (49.8%) of the centers represented do not have a formal process for aligning feedback from customers. (Figure 49)

48. Does your center have a proactive customer feedback/Voice of the customer process (actively reaching out for input)?



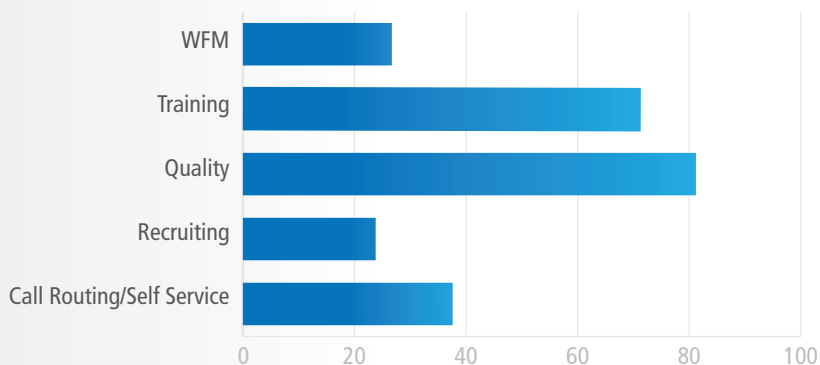
49. Does your center have a formal process for aligning feedback from customers?



Quality and training seem to be natural areas where customer feedback/VOC data would be channeled for implementing change. However, recruiting and WFM shouldn't be overlooked here.

Forecasting and scheduling practices and performance can certainly have an impact on the customer experience regarding hold times and routing to agents with the proper skills set (and contact resolution, as well, when it comes to agents forced to churn through calls because the queue has exceeded forecasts).

50. Do you have formal, documented processes for reviewing and implementing VOC based change within the following areas?



And agent training – geared toward customer experience goals – can have a significant impact on the contact. Customers will tell you (if you let them) if they didn't feel like the agent was knowledgeable enough to answer their questions or handle their transaction.



Conclusion

Contact centers, as always, are conscious, if not driven by cost and efficiency goals and initiatives. But as today's customer continues to grow more savvy about the quality of service they should be able to expect from companies they do business with, and as they become aware of even more choices for providers or products and services, focusing on the customer experience is of growing importance among brands as a marketplace differentiator. Our research shows that many organizations are struggling to strike that balance.

What our research uncovered is a lack of focus on performance metrics that inherently create a balance between call center needs for efficiency and the customer experience. For instance, pushing average handle time farther down in the metrics priority list would allow contact centers to focus more on metrics such as first-call resolution (or even call resolution, in general), service level and quality-related metrics that both control contact center cost and improve the customer experience.

Additionally, survey responses uncovered a lack of processes that can improve both efficiency and the customer experience. Many centers are missing out on fundamental feedback from both agents and customers. Furthermore, among those centers that do collect such feedback, those that have a formal process for evaluating and acting on it are in the minority.

Technology is an enabler for both performance management in the contact center (and down to the agent level) and process improvement. It's important to note, however, that technology is not a panacea for all the contact center's ills. Centers will need to work to integrate even the most mature technologies, such as workforce management automation, customer relationship management systems, and contact routing and tracking technologies, to get the most value out of them for both efficiency and the customer experience.

The current imbalance between contact center efficiency and the customer experience is not an insurmountable challenge. Our research shows that merely a slight shifting of the weights and measures – particularly considering operations from a customer-centric point of view – by many centers would improve their ability to effectively strike the balance and to deflate costs in the contact center and inflate customer satisfaction.

About This Report

This research was made possible by the underwriting support of Avaya (www.Avaya.com). ICMI research sponsors do not have access to research participant information, including individual survey responses.

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