

IT'S ABOUT TIME: OVERCOMING RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS TO DELIVER TECHNOLOGY VALUE

There is no lack of options to support technology—it's about defining and funding the ones that fit best.

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Maxed out. That's how we find many contact center leaders and their IT counterparts. Too much to do, not enough time to do it, and the urgent always trumping the important. So while the center's reliance on technology is high to achieve business goals, the ability to "fix" the current state or pursue new capabilities is constantly compromised. The result is end-of-life systems, functional gaps and underperforming tools that deliver marginal business value. When projects do get under way, time pressure and a dearth of resources seem to be the rule. To add to the challenges, expectations of vendors and their partners to help remedy the situation often exceed their ability or motivation to deliver. The bottom line is not enough resources and time lead to technology disappointment.

If this sounds familiar, rest assured you are not alone. But how do you create a different future with a different outcome?

Current State of the Contact Center

To look at root cause, we start in the center. Large and small, centers are typically under-resourced for *using and applying* technology. Too often, they lack analysts with in-depth system knowledge, yet blame the technology, vendors, IT and other staff for their disappointing (if not frustrating) experiences.

Small companies or centers may suffer the most, with supervisors wearing many hats to accommodate the dearth of support resources. Because they lack time to use the tools routinely, their initial endowment of knowledge is lost. Large companies may have more resources with team leads in addition to analysts, and hope to achieve better understanding and use of their tools. However, "firefighting" often steals time away.

Current State of the IT Department

Things aren't much better down the hall in IT, even for those with substantial staff. Large IT departments have many projects, and long wait times to get new initiatives to the top of the list are typical. The "shared service" model can leave some centers feeling isolated and neglected. The project lists in smaller IT departments may linger as fewer resources juggle priorities.

Bench strength is the next challenge. Contact centers need help with their *specific* applications, in addition to networks, telecom and enterprise systems. Whether few people wear many hats or several individuals have designated responsibilities, it is a rare situation to find enough people with the right skills and experience to provide the broad range of "help" the contact center needs. Telecom expertise may be a greater strength as staff leverage their telephony experience into the more specialized applications of the center. Other IT staff may focus on the website, mobile and core company systems (e.g., ERP, CRM, CIS, OP) that have enterprisewide relevance.

Responsibility Gap

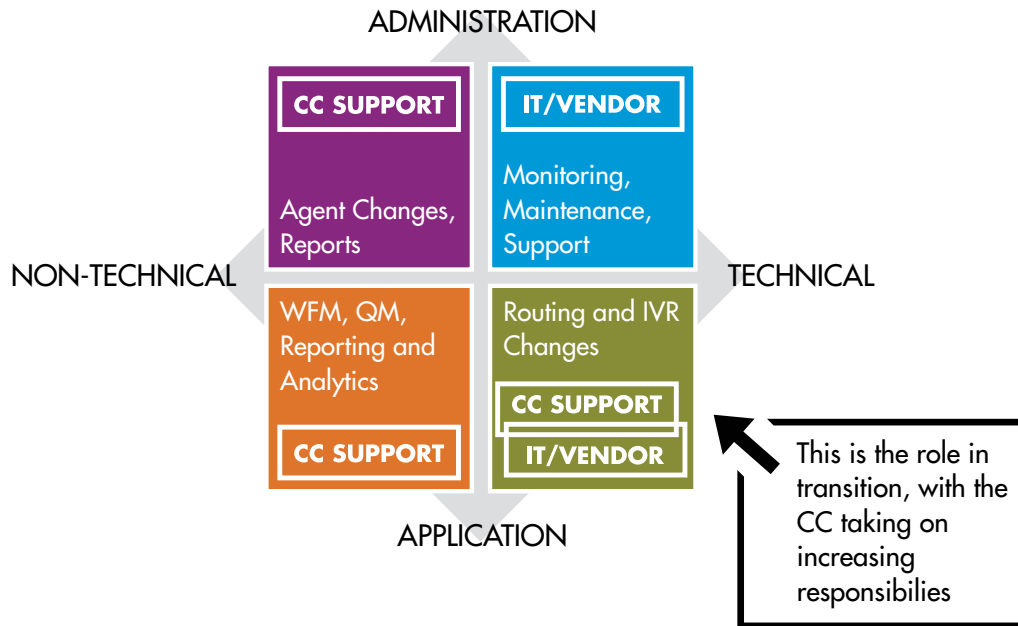
It is a risk to view contact center technologies as "set and forget" when in reality they are dynamic and have daily demands, some of which are routine (e.g., run reports, build schedules) and others that are on-demand (e.g., why is this happening, what is the trend, how do we address this new need, how do we address the latest issue). Then there is the whole "opti-





FIGURE 1

Clear Roles and Responsibilities
Deliver Contact Center Technology Value



mize for business value” challenge. Responsibilities encompass routing and skills assignments for calls and other media (e.g., email, chat), IVR applications and interfaces, reporting and other tools to manage performance (e.g., QM, WFM, analytics), knowledge management and process automation tools. Proper application and administration of these tools is a key to delivering technology value. But who should be responsible?

Given the current states described above and the promises of tools in the market, the contact center often wants more control but can’t ante up resources. It’s a valid fear when they don’t have and/or don’t think they will get the right resources, compounded by the concern that the demands will be too technical. (See Figure 1.)

Business leaders expect the vendors (or their value-added resellers—VARs) to fill IT gaps, whether bandwidth or skill set, availability or responsiveness. However, buyer expectations are often set too high, and vendors sometimes oversell what they can or will do. Competing goals are at play. Buyers want the vendor to provide *consultative* services and help to redesign, transform and optimize. Vendors want speed of implementation (all the sooner to start billing!), which means ease of design, integration, testing, etc. They want you to use the tools as is, “plug and play,” as much as possible, rather than customize or configure heavily.

Filling the Gap

With a wide range of service offerings from the solution providers, you *must* choose the right “partner” to meet your needs. They have to be as good as—or better than—your IT for implementation and ongoing support. Offerings such as cloud and managed services have the potential to alter the resource challenge situation, but buyers still have to get it right on their end. (See the sidebar on page 36.)

To design for value or get more out of their tools, buyers have to pay for “consulting” and not expect the vendor to build it into implementation or ongoing support for free. Further, buyers have to invest the time and energy themselves to facilitate change. The single biggest thing everyone could do to increase the value of contact center technology is to ensure that

when new stuff goes in, it does new things, and different things, rather than the same old things. The buyer plays the greatest role in ensuring that “difference.”

Once the vision for technology value is defined, a buyer must manage the vendor from sales to implementation and support to make sure they deliver what they said they would. That means defining responsibilities and following through on accountability. Document what you really need the vendor to do, and select and negotiate (and pay for it!) accordingly. The instruments are SOWs and SLAs (see “Defining an Effective Statement of Work for Technology Implementation Success,” *Pipeline*, September 2010), not promises made during marketing and sales presentations.

New technology projects and ongoing technology use must address a C-level vicious cycle that has become all too common. “Poorly implemented technology doesn’t deliver value so why should I fund the next one when we still can’t get the first one right?” This view is pervasive across performance tools, but also impacts core tools such as routing and IVR. The secret to stop the madness is having the people to use the technology effectively. Own up to failures of the past in shortcutting implementation under time pressure and not identifying the resources needed to get value from technology. You cannot accomplish anything without the proper resources, and if you aren’t going to or can’t dedicate the people, then it is probably not the right time to purchase.

Implementation and Support Woes and Solutions

Here is an accounting of the top issues we see with contact center technology missing the mark and some considerations for how to change the situation.

The No. 1 issue is the **lack of business value**. The solution is obvious: Plan for and pursue change throughout the project—internally and with what you define for vendors to do. And remember, you have to document, contract for and pay for what you actually want.

Then there is the **install and leave** syndrome, which compounds the first issue. After installation is complete, IT and the vendor(s) don’t fix or optimize because cutover equates to “done.” Solution: Define project “completion” as X weeks or months after cutover with phases and/or defined targets for optimization and refinement. Your critical resources will still be there when you need them.

Once it’s in and working, a common cry is the **systems are too hard to use**, which can be compounded by **not enough of the right people with skills and training**. Users don’t understand what they’ve bought, how it works (including the most basic and most useful tools), or how to use it. Administrator training is non-existent or the knowledge gained is fleeting and weeks after cutover users struggle. The solution is again relatively simple, but requires *time* for training and reinforcement, which can also mean more money for the vendor. Contact Center staff must be trained on the systems (ideally onsite, not online!), with analysts who have these responsibilities and can apply them routinely. Analysts also become great resources to coach others in using the tools, including managers, supervisors and team leads. The reinforcement comes for those present at implementation, as well as those who inherit tools and responsibilities when the trained members leave. They must get training and mentoring, which may come in the form of shadowing as well as formal knowledge transfer.

Another gap surfaces in **basic level 1 support and maintenance**, such as system updates and backups. Whether a vendor or IT responsibility, issues can include lack of responsiveness, timely resolution or knowledgeable resources. Solution: Clarity in roles and responsibilities between the vendor and IT is the starting point, with accountability solidified through SLAs and vendor management.

A final issue that seems less significant on the surface can have a big impact: the **lack of appropriate documentation**. Online documents with general info may not be specific enough to the system and processes (including call flows) implemented. Tie this in with the training issue and we see people just keep asking the vendor, a less than satisfying approach for all. This problem resolution starts with requesting documentation at the requirements and

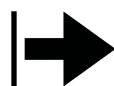
OVERCOMING RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS TO DELIVER TECHNOLOGY VALUE

Primary Responsibility by Solution Type			
AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY	PREMISE	CLOUD	MANAGED SERVICES
General	IT oversees IT/Vendor deliver	CC or IT oversees Vendor delivers	CC or IT oversees Vendor delivers
Implementation	IT, CC and Vendor	CC and Vendor	Vendor
Support	IT and Vendor	Vendor	Vendor
SUPPORT AND MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES			
Planning—Business Need	CC, IT, and Vendor	CC and Vendor	CC and Vendor
Planning—Technical Need	IT and Vendor	Vendor	Vendor
Day-to-Day Changes—Technical	IT and Vendor	Vendor	Vendor
Day-to-Day Changes—Operational	CC and/or IT	CC and/or IT	Vendor
Proactive Management (Monitoring, Testing)	IT and Vendor	Vendor	Vendor
Reactive Response (Trouble Ticketing, Resolution)	IT and Vendor	Vendor	Vendor
Optimization—Technical	IT and Vendor	Vendor	Vendor
Optimization—Operational	CC and Vendor	CC and Vendor	Vendor

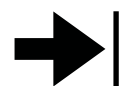


TABLE 1

RESPONSIBILITIES
CHANGE WITH
TECHNOLOGY
SOURCING MODEL



INCREASING RELIANCE ON VENDOR,
DECREASING RELIANCE ON IT



evaluation stage, and is only adequately addressed through collaboration among buyers and sellers, including the implementation team and ongoing support resources, to ensure appropriate documentation is created and delivered.

Resourcing Strategies

The pervasive lack of resources to support and gain value from technology is not due to a lack of options; it's more about defining and funding the options that fit best. The sidebar presents a couple. Consider various stages and roles in implementation and support and define internal roles and vendor/VAR roles. Differentiate what IT will do versus what the contact center can do. A hybrid is likely, and we see a trend toward the center doing more (and IT doing less), especially with cloud solutions and improved user interfaces. Putting administrative control and responsibilities in the hands of the center only works if they have the proper resources. Beware of taking on responsibilities but then resorting to asking IT or the vendor to do the work. The bottom line is you need to commit and invest in resources to match the sourcing model.

Table 1 presents a division of responsibilities for three technology sourcing strategies. The move to the cloud and/or managed services increases reliance on the vendor and decreases reliance on IT. The business case for this transition needs to consider that the cloud approach

incurs an operational expense rather than capital, and managed services further increases operational expenses. So the freeing up of IT may need to consider the savings opportunity, or at least repurposing that enables the company to tackle other projects.

The Path to Success

Properly trained and skilled resources (internal or external) can deliver technology value. Define and assign specific responsibilities that include all requirements for ensuring that technology is implemented effectively, working and up to date, and is delivering ongoing, optimized value. Resources with a bias toward action will move you beyond the current state and blame game to a new outcome of valuable contact center technology. [🔗](#)

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RESOURCE SILVER BULLET?



by Lori Bocklund

A KEY ROLE WE CONSIDER IN OUR CONTACT CENTER ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT MODEL IS A BUSINESS ANALYST/TECHNOLOGY LIAISON TO HANDLE TECHNICAL ELEMENTS OF ALL TECHNOLOGY TOOLS.

This role can make routine configuration changes (e.g., skill changes, routing changes, IVR tweaks) and assist with configuration of email, QM, VoC, etc. They act as the vendor liaison to keep up on technology improvements and opportunities, and learn how to get additional value out of technology. They are also a liaison with IT, including those responsible for telecom, network, contact center and enterprise applications, working on planning, implementation and support. They may also assist other support functions such as reporting & analytics, process optimization & KM, and workforce planning and management.

One option for sourcing this internal role is to promote or assign from within, which delivers a nice career path but is also likely to require investment in training and ramp-up time. Hiring from the outside may provide a faster path to a skilled and educated resource, but they must learn the unique characteristics, applications and workflows of the center. A third option is to procure external contractor(s) or service(s), providing flexibility in the level of internal staffing required.

Looking at external sourcing options, the first stop is the cloud. Cloud solutions appear to lessen the burden on IT for both implementation and ongoing support. The vendor provides basic maintenance, monitoring, issue resolution, technical BC/DR, etc. If IT won't or can't provide enough resources, it bolsters the case for the cloud. However, it is only effective with the right SOW for implementation, SLAs for support and performance, and strong vendor management throughout the relationship.

Managed services relieve the burden on both internal groups (IT and CC). The vendor not only manages the technology operation and health (wherever it resides—cloud or premise), they provide day-to-day support for business changes and optimization. Some models include a resource from the vendor reporting on site and truly getting to know the business and the overall environment that the technology is a part of (including integration with other enterprise systems, call flows and workflows, etc.). With the right SLAs and oversight, managed services can deliver a new level of responsiveness and focus to optimize use and application of technology to business needs.

About Contact Center Pipeline

Contact Center Pipeline is a monthly instructional journal focused on driving business success through effective contact center direction and decisions. Each issue contains informative articles, case studies, best practices, research and coverage of trends that impact the customer experience. Our writers and contributors are well-known industry experts with a unique understanding of how to optimize resources and maximize the value the organization provides to its customers.

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