Process Optimization: Increase Contact Center Efficiency *and* Improve Customer Service

By Brian Hinton, Principal Consultant
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Most contact centers were not built with all the applications they would ever need, ready to scale as the business grew. Most centers were cobbled together step by step, adding applications and functions as needed to respond to changing requirements. Manual processes bridged the gaps at the desktop and the "border crossing" as work moved out of the center across the organization. They weren't efficient, effective, or scalable, but they got the job done.

As we observe contact handling in centers of all sizes, shapes and locations, we hear the frustration with disconnected, manual tasks. Symptoms include:

- Lots of paper shuffling
- Inconsistent execution, including unmet commitments
- Many layers of review and approval
- High error rates and re-work
- Low self-service success rates
- "Tribal knowledge" rather than manuals and tools to enable process steps
- Low first call resolution leading to high transfer and callbacks

Few have made progress solving these problems by integrating desktop applications or automating processes because process change is hard. IT is busy implementing and maintaining systems and applications, leaving little time to optimize. Ideas for changes go onto wish lists or await a future initiative. And anyone with baggage from a past business process re-engineering initiative probably has a sense of "oh no, not again" whenever suggestions of focused process improvement surface.

But just as broken processes can decrease efficiency and negatively impact the customer, **optimizing processes make the contact center more efficient while improving service.** Take another look at your processes – you'll be surprised at the opportunity.

Contact centers are a great place to start process improvement for the whole organization. You aren't alone in your patchwork system infrastructure and process design. Other departments are in the same boat. But as the kick-off point for many of your organization's customer-facing workflows, you have the wherewithal to create positive change that will have a ripple effect throughout the company.

Contact centers have high human resources costs that are directly impacted by labor intensive, repetitive, high volume processes. Our estimates place labor costs at 67-76% of your total budget. [See our white paper entitled *Cost Structure and Distribution in Today's Contact Centers.*] There is "low hanging fruit" that could generate results – in measurable payback – quickly and secure buy-in to go farther.

Process improvement is easier with technology. There are also some very real possibilities that could get you started without a road-blocking capital request.

- Underutilized technology that you already have – data-directed routing tools, workflow components of your current CRM or KM
- Basic unified communications components – presence/IM, conferencing, collaboration tools
- CEBP tools from your current contact center vendor – workflow events that trigger communication
- Desktop process analysis, application integration and process automation tools

Contact centers notoriously have to do more with less. But you have to stop decreasing service to improve efficiency by haphazardly reducing labor or eliminating useful process steps. Improving processes is a golden opportunity. You can get more efficient *while* improving service, breaking the historical tradeoff between better service and lower cost and shifting to a new paradigm where you can have it all.