The Customer Experience Effect Insight Series

Volume 2: The Agent Experience

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Let us help you transform your CX & Business Operations.

Customer experience and the strategies formed to drive customer satisfaction are typically measured by external feedback, otherwise known as the "Voice of the Customer." Unfortunately, many companies miss the mark by not also including the voice of the agent – or the "Agent Experience" – as a key indicator in measuring a customer's brand perception and journey. As covered in Volume 1 of *The Customer Experience Effect*, Customer Experience (CX) is defined as a customer's holistic perception of their interactions with a company. Much like CX, Agent Experience is the sum of all experiences an employee has with their employer over the duration of their relationship from recruitment to exiting the organization. Contact centers use data to identify important trends to improve performance and measure customer satisfaction. However, without clearly understanding the agent's role in the equation, companies will continue to fall short on service delivery excellence. Agent Experience is likely the most important metric you are not yet measuring.

The Link Between Agent Experience and Customer Experience

The Agent Experience and Customer Experience similarly align in terms of a lifecycle, perception, and overall satisfaction. According to a recent ICMI survey, 92% of consumers stated that an agent's perceived happiness played an important role in their personal customer experience. When a consumer has a positive experience, more often than not, the agent on the other end of the communication was personally engaged and helpful. The reward? Highly satisfied and loyal customers.

Agent Satisfaction Killers: 2 Common Drivers

1. Omnichannel Service: The Era of the "Always On" Agent

Today's customers have more contact channels than ever with the advent of social, mobile, chat and SMS support. With the increase in self-service and IVR, customer inquiries reaching the agent continue to evolve with further complexity. According to a report published by ContactBabel, idle time has dropped to an 11-year low. Agents are busy answering calls, addressing emails and chats, managing service tickets, and mastering new skills during their "off-phone learning" breaks.[1] Contact center supervisors have very little time to address the human side of the agents' needs, leaving agents alone to manage their day-to-day stress, build peer relationships, or view their work in a meaningful context.

2. Workforce Optimization: Optimizing Everything but the Workforce

The great irony of "workforce optimization" is that it doesn't always optimize the workforce. Instead, it often optimizes the work while negatively impacting the Agent Experience. While workforce optimization (WFO) can "squeeze" additional productivity from agents, it can also have a negative effect on agent resiliency and quality of life. In fact, this "squeezing" is a key contributor to employee turnover.

Nice inContact reported that in 57% of contact centers, agents are expected to support multiple channels with the biggest challenge in doing so being navigating multiple screens/interfaces (52%), followed by having to learn new processes (50%) and technologies (48%).[2] As contact center leaders, it's critical to balance optimization with agent performance and incorporate simplified technologies and tools within your WFO strategies to protect your workforce and mitigate agent "burn out."

Aside from the obvious human cost, agent dissatisfaction can have a substantial negative effect on business outcomes. Common contact center stresses and isolation erode the customer experience. Dissatisfied and stressed agents quit, taking customer intelligence and experience with them.

The Solution: Enhancing the Agent Quality of Life

Research shows brands that take into account the "agent quality of life" and embed it throughout its customer care strategies see the highest employee loyalty. This requires a commitment to investing in Resiliency and Community.

Resiliency

Many ways to combat stress have been tested by both the medical and psychological communities. Approaches such as mindfulness training or certain cognitive behavioral therapy techniques like positive self-talk, weighing evidence, and compartmentalization have been found to have a tremendous effect on employees' response to stress. Evidence-based exercises like guided breathing, biofeedback, as well as physical activity, yoga, and improved sleep all contribute to healthier agent engagement in the face of increasing customer interactions. Rather than withering, resilient people often grow and prosper when confronted with a challenge. This translates to motivated agents who are engaged, more likely to show up for work, and much less likely to quit.

Community

Cultivating a strong sense of community in the fast-paced call center environment can be very difficult. Training classes tend to be large and it's difficult to keep new agents together once they reach the production stage given empty seats are typically available across teams and employees tend to opt for different schedules. As stated previously, idle time is at an 11-year low, indicating that agents are extremely busy answering calls, performing follow-up call work, or working on skills training.

Agent relationship-building faces significant barriers since the opportunity to socialize requires downtime that aligns with that of their colleagues. According to The New Zealand Journal of Psychology and McKinsey, peer relationships are important agent influencers promoting employee happiness and decreasing attrition. Building a peer community is also integral to making work more meaningful for employees.

But how do organizations build a sense of community in light of 2020's "new normal" of increased work-at-home contact center environments?

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A Challenging New Reality: Community in a Virtual Contact Center

2020 has proven to be a monumental year for contact centers. With COVID-19 forcing companies to abruptly shift to work-at-home environments (many for the first time), employee satisfaction and the ability to provide a sense of community is more important now than ever. According to a recent survey conducted by Future Workplace, an HR advisory and research firm, business leaders ranked employee experience as one of their top initiatives for 2020. It was ranked as the first priority for over 50% of respondents.

As cloud adoption becomes more common and a vital requirement to transitioning to a work-at-home infrastructure, many are finding that employee gamification has now become more widely implemented as a means to enhance an employer's ability to nurture employee experience, increase engagement, and build a connected agent community.

The Costs of Agent Dissatisfaction

It shouldn't come at a surprise that customer experience directly impacts a business's top and bottom line. Quite simply, disengaged employees increase costs and engaged employees increase revenue. The contact center ecosystem is ever-evolving with customers becoming increasingly more comfortable with online self-service tools and contact center live calls growing in complexity.

Providing consistent, high-quality customer service depends on experienced, knowledgeable agents with proper training and support. Losing tenured and talented employees can have significant cost repercussions. An individual new hire is estimated to cost a contact center $10,000 to $20,000 in training, recruiting costs, and lost productivity.[3] Organizations miss the mark by not embracing employee engagement or building strong programs that motivate employees in a way that feeds the company's unique culture while also being sustainable. The facts speak for themselves:

2.3X greater growth

Companies with highly engaged employees experience average 3-year revenue growth of **2.3 times greater** than companies whose employees are only engaged at an average level. (UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School)

Companies that increase their talented managers and double their engaged employees achieve **147% higher earnings** per share on average than their competitors. (Gallup)

Customer retention rates are an average of 18% higher when employees are highly engaged. (Cvent)

Companies with engaged employees outperform those without by **202%** (Business 2 Community)

Companies with high employee engagement scores saw... (Source: Queens School of Business)

65% greater share-price

26% less turnover

20% less absenteeism

15% greater productivity

up to **30%** higher CSAT levels

The Agent Experience: The Customer Experience Effect Insight Series: Volume 2 • Page 7

A 2013 Walker study projected that by the end of 2020, customer experience will overtake price and product as a key brand differentiator. Present-day customer behaviors and loyalty trends support this projection. Brands that include Agent Experience as a metric in their customer satisfaction strategies experience increased customer loyalty and customer lifetime value (CLV).

Survey Says: Customers

Highly Value
Great Customer Experiences

By the end of 2020, **customer experience will overtake price and product** as the key brand differentiator.

86% Of buyers will pay more **for a better** customer experience.

It costs 5x more to attract a new customer than it does to retain one. Loyal customers also spend 67% more than new ones. When contact support agents are engaged, they are more motivated to deliver exceptional customer experiences. Organizations that do not have an agent satisfaction focus are missing out on direct revenue opportunities while also experiencing compounding operational costs.

Measuring Agent Experience

While employee satisfaction refers to employee happiness, employee engagement measures their emotional attachment to the job, the company, and the company's vision. This directly correlates to the amount of effort they place into their work each day. Measuring the contact center Agent Experience provides a true 360-degree view of the contact center and the quality of service they are providing. When incorporating agent satisfaction into the mix, organizations are empowered to make impactful changes that lead to long-term improvements in customer satisfaction and profitability.

The good news is that a recent survey conducted by McKinsey revealed that 38% of contact-center agents are extremely satisfied with their job, and another 43% are more satisfied than not. However, the levels of satisfaction varied across industries; this is where customer experience leaders need to focus on properly measuring and tracking Agent Experience. For example, banking, securities, and financial services received the highest proportion of respondents who reported being extremely satisfied at 52%, followed by travel, transport, and logistics at 44% and nonhealthcare insurance at 35% (which also had the lowest overall percentage of dissatisfied employees).

Meanwhile, telecommunications and technology earned the lowest marks with just 25% indicating that they are extremely satisfied. Properly measuring agent satisfaction and fine-tuning as your business needs change is vital in any organization's ability to retain top talent.

Finding Your Happy Place: Employee Satisfaction By Industry

Overall satisfaction by industry, % of respondents
n=320

Industry	Dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Extremely satisfied	100% =
Total agent population	19%	43%	38%	320
Banking, securities and financial services	18%	30%	52%	73
Travel, transportation and logistics	9%	47%	44%	43
Nonhealthcare insurance	4%	61%	35%	51
Healthcare insurance	26%	43%	30%	23
Telecom and technology	30%	45%	25%	53
All other industries	25%	40%	35%	77

Legend:
- Dissatisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Extremely satisfied

Source: McKinsey Employee Engagement Contact Center Survey

Agent Experience Metrics Driving the Right Business and CX Outcomes:

Agent Satisfaction

While there are several options for organizations to measure agent satisfaction, surveys are the more widely used method. Agent surveys typically include a 1-5 scale and include questions such as "how excited are you to come to work each day?" and "how challenged do you feel in your role?"

Employee Net Promoter Score (ENPS)

Employee NPS provides employers the ability to measure and obtain a snapshot of their employees' willingness to serve as company ambassadors by advocating employment. This is done by asking a variation of the question "On a scale of zero to ten, how likely is it that you would recommend this company as a place to work?" The answers provide organizations the opportunity to segment employees into promoters, passives, and detractors.

Agent Engagement Surveys

Agent engagement surveys are designed to measure and assess how motivated and engaged your employees are to perform their best at work each day. This helps organizations gain insight into employees' thoughts and attitudes towards their work and the overall working environment.

Agent Turnover Rate

Agent turnover is a well-known and common contact center metric, commonly used to determine revenue impacts and optimize workforce management. However, agent turnover is also a good indicator of employee engagement and satisfaction. Turnover can be controlled by proactively managing agent job satisfaction – community, resilience, tools, and empowerment.

"The way you treat your **EMPLOYEES** is the way they will treat your **CUSTOMERS.**"

– Sir Richard Branson

Engaged and satisfied call-center employees are ...

8.5x more likely to stay than leave within a year

4x more likely to stay than dissatisfied colleagues

6x more likely to refer friends to their company 3.3x more likely to feel extremely empowered to resolve customer issues[4]

Performance Management in the "New Normal"

The idea of the conventional contact center is nearly obsolete with so many organizations having to fully or partially transition to work-at-home models. The work-at-home contact center requires companies to take a new stance on how performance is managed in a remote environment. According to a recent survey conducted by Nice inContact, 50% of call centers are now fully "work-at-home" and 30% of organizations have at least a portion of their agents working remotely. Additionally, a report released by Workplace Analytics states that by the end of 2021, 25%-30% of the U.S. workforce will be working remotely.

At-home agents create additional demands on supervisors to closely monitor key performance indicators (KPI) and service levels and may create the opportunity for additional metrics and service-level agreements (SLA). Having agents at home creates an extended "interaction chain" for supervisors to coach and monitor agent progression against goals. Now, more than ever, companies are examining and understanding the need to fully utilize a pre-integrated platform for performance analytics, gamification, and performance management as part of their efforts to enable more effective and efficient coaching while also ensuring that agent engagement levels remain high.

50% of call centers are now fully work-from-home

30% of organizations have at least some of their agents working remotely

Simply Put, Happy Employees Equal Happy Customers

As customers continue to become more comfortable with self-service channels, contact center calls will only become more complex. As a result, the expertise of longer-tenured service agents will be more essential than ever to providing an excellent and effortless customer experience. Companies that create a workplace where employees feel a strong sense of community, resilience, and empowerment will be rewarded with engaged employees and lower attrition. However, it is clear that the "new normal" presents many challenges outside of the conventional contact center as companies will need to seek new and enhanced technologies and tools to ensure their employees are engaged and exceeding performance standards. Agent Experience success will translate directly to controlled costs, happier agents, and more delighted customers.

To schedule your complimentary consultation, visit PPTSolutions.com/CXEffect.

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