
Best Practices in Quality Monitoring and Coaching

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Purpose of This Study	1
Methodology to Determine Best Practices Among World Class Call Centers	1
Summary of Research Findings	2
Significance of Research Findings	3
Introduction to Best Practice Research	5
The Need to Establish Best Practices in Quality Monitoring and Agent Coaching	5
Corporate Strategy Impact	7
Communicating a Corporate Strategy of Quality	7
Quality Monitoring and Coaching Corporate Culture	9
The Importance of Change Management	9
Recommended Corporate Culture Best Practices	10
Purpose of Quality Monitoring	13
Agent Performance Measurement Only	13
Agent Development Only	13
Agent Performance and Development	13
Recommended Best Practices	13
Call Monitoring and Recording Options	15
Silent Monitoring – Remote Location	15
Side-by-Side Monitoring	16
Call Recording	16
Voices and Screens Recorded, Monitored Later	17
Recommended Best Practices	17
Output of the Monitoring Phase	19
A Scoring Data Sheet	19
Specific List of Skill Deficiencies	19
Training Recommendations	19
Tracked Coaching Tips	19
Recommended Best Practices	19
Which Calls Should be Monitored	21
Random Selection of Calls	21
Calls Selected by the Agent	21
Calls Driven by Caller Satisfaction Feedback	21
Calls Driven by Call Handling Characteristics	22
Recommended Best Practices	22
What is Measured During Monitoring	25
Telephone Techniques and Etiquette	25
Product Knowledge	25

System Efficiency/Screen Navigation	25
Company Policies and Procedures	25
Potential Fraud Issues	25
Recommended Best Practices	26
Frequency of Agent Monitoring.....	27
Frequency of Monitoring New Hires and Those on Probation	27
During First Month Following Release from Class	27
During First Six Month of Employment.....	28
After First Six Month of Employment.....	28
When Put On Probation	28
Recommended Best Practices	28
Who Does the Monitoring	31
A Dedicated Quality Team	31
The Direct Supervisor	31
Peer Monitoring.....	31
A Third-party Outsourced Company	31
Recommended Best Practices	31
Who Should do the Coaching.....	33
A Team of Coaching Experts	33
The Direct Supervisor	33
A Third-party Outsourced Company	33
Recommended Best Practices	33
Staffing.....	35
Ratio of QA Team to Agents	35
Ratio of Coaches to Number of Agents.....	35
Recommended Best Practices	35
Building in Consistency in the Evaluation Process	37
Calibrations	37
Agent Appeals.....	37
Multiple Call Center Sites.....	37
Recommended Best Practices	37
How Monitoring Results are Shared with the Agent.....	39
By E-mail.....	39
By Personal Feedback Coach.....	39
By the Direct Supervisor	39
Recommended Best Practices	39
Key Performance Indicators	41
Agent Expectations Tied to Customer Satisfiers.....	41
Overall Center Metrics Focused on Customer	41
Management Information	41
Recommended Best Practices	43
Compensation Impact	45

Pay for Performance.....	45
Reward and Recognition	45
Recommended Best Practices	45
Commitment from Other Departments	47
Human Resources.....	47
Training.....	47
Support on the Job	49
The Emerging Model for Quality Monitoring and Coaching.....	51
Additional Impact Factors	55
List of Vendors—Technology & Services	59
Appendix A: Vendor Survey	61
Introduction.....	61
Survey Questions	61
Appendix B: Questionnaire	75
Appendix C: References and Suggested Readings.....	89
Authors' Biographies	91

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose of This Study

During the past five years, most call centers have migrated from a total focus on call handling **quantity**, namely handling more calls in less time, to a more balanced focus which includes call handling **quality**, namely ensuring that the caller is delighted with the calling experience. This new management scorecard is popularly referred to as balancing effectiveness with efficiency. We define a World Class call center as one that is being successfully managed to a balanced scorecard of quality and quantity.

With the re-focusing of management objectives, there has also been a shift in the quality monitoring approach. Rather than using the monitoring process to “police for compliance,” the new emphasis is on coaching and developing the skills necessary for consistently World Class service delivery leading to consistently satisfied callers.

The existing model of call quality monitoring focuses on “internal metrics,” like average talk time, after call handle time, and the like, while the emerging model focuses on caller satisfaction (an “external metric”) as the “first order” metric for management decision-making, and relegates the internal metrics as second order metrics used to diagnose performance issues with the first order metric.

The purpose of this study was to observe and document the quality monitoring and coaching processes of agents in world class call centers. Our goal was to determine the current best practices for other call centers to meet or exceed.

We define a “world class call center” as one that effectively manages its agents’ performance in terms of both quantity and quality. When we speak of “quantity,” we are referring to an agent’s ability to bring resolution to a call as efficiently as possible. “Quality” refers to the agent’s ability to create and/or maintain loyal customers.

Methodology to Determine Best Practices Among World Class Call Centers

The BenchmarkPortal team, led by Dr. Jon Anton and Anita Rockwell, reviewed a wide range of studies to identify the best quality monitoring and coaching practices of call center agents.

The following steps were used to determine best practices in call quality monitoring and agent coaching:

- A survey instrument was developed to ensure consistent criteria was used in the collection of quality monitoring and coaching practices. (See Appendix B.)

- World class companies were identified based on their benchmark statistics and reputations for excellent service. We surveyed these companies and received hundreds of responses.
- Site visits were conducted to observe the call monitoring and agent coaching processes. This information was used to determine which call centers were effective and why they were effective.
- In-depth telephone interviews were conducted of many companies who are in our database to explore and understand the details of the call monitoring and agent coaching processes used.
- We collected and processed best thoughts from industry leaders.
- We conducted a literature search on monitoring and coaching to see what other researchers have found.
- The data was processed to enable us to produce aggregate statistics.
- Unique best practices were documented.

Summary of Research Findings

After observing and interviewing front-line employees, center managers, human resources managers, quality assurance teams, training teams, senior leadership, and others, we found an amazing degree of similarity among the industry's best. All of the call centers we benchmarked shared a number of commonalities. These included:

- Each had a strong corporate culture, which focused on doing more than just satisfying its customers. In each center, the goal was to delight the customers.
- The culture of each was based on guiding principles, or values, which had permeated the organization. Senior managers, front-line and support employees lived the values every day.
- Each recognized the importance of achieving employee satisfaction. The organization's leaders understood the connection between high levels of employee satisfaction and high quality performance. A distinct appreciation and respect for the front-line team were apparent in each.
- Each committed the resources necessary to meet its customer service standards. This involved a significant investment in hiring, training, and empowering the right employees. It also meant that each provided expert systems and enabling technology.
- In each, we noted open communication between senior managers and front-line employees.
- Each placed importance on knowing what their customers thought. Most surveyed customers routinely as part of their customer-centric environment. Most also solicited feedback from the front-line staff regarding their ideas to improve service.

Significance of Research Findings

In today's fiercely competitive market, service is often the only way to differentiate between your product and your competitor's. The ability of your call center staff to meet and surpass customer expectations is likely the primary determiner of your organization's long-term viability. Using the identified best practices for quality monitoring and coaching is a good start down the right path.

However, for us, the most surprising result of this study, and one we will go into in greater depth later, was the number of call centers that were not able to demonstrate a clear link between their monitoring processes and their agents' performance improvement. **And this leads to what is arguably this study's greatest value: the vision of a new model that will result in a stronger correlation between your quality monitoring and coaching process and your agents' ability to establish and/or maintain loyal customer relationships.** The bottom line result of strengthening this correlation cannot be overstated.

INTRODUCTION TO BEST PRACTICE RESEARCH

More and more companies understand that service is one of the only differentiators between their company and the competition. And it is becoming widely accepted that the quality monitoring and coaching process, when done well, is an organization's best shot at delivering service that delights the customer. It just follows then that a benchmarking study and documentation of the best practices in this arena will offer organizations direction and practical suggestions for maintaining and building their base of loyal customers.

The BenchmarkPortal Team defines best practices as follows:

Best practices are those planned process delivery steps that have proven to achieve the highest effectiveness and efficiency for a given process. Best practices include the strategy and operational implementation of articulated steps to deliver the defined end-goal of a given process.

We discovered best practices by studying companies that are known to be world class. We documented those steps in world class call centers' process implementation that have a substantial impact on achieving and exceeding process end-goals.

The reason we devote ourselves to *benchmarking to find best practices* is because we firmly believe that **all of us are smarter than any one of us**. What this means is that there is seldom one company that is better in all areas than all other companies. More typically, each world class company is doing one or more steps really well, but is unaware of the creativity and effective practices of others. Our research finds the "best of the best" and makes this knowledge available to all. This document is such a report of the best practices in quality monitoring and agent coaching.

The Need to Establish Best Practices in Quality Monitoring and Agent Coaching

Quality monitoring and agent coaching has evolved over the past five years from the most basic techniques to highly specialized and technology-enabled processes. The following bullets roughly outline this progression:

- Basic and random side-by-side monitoring of an agent handling a call, followed immediately by coaching.
- Random, remote monitoring of an agent handling a call, followed by coaching at a later time.
- Random recorded calls monitored at a later date, followed by coaching at a later date.

- Random recording of calls accompanied by saved screen shots followed by later monitoring and coaching.
- Recording of all calls, followed by automatic analysis of call characteristics, such as length, hold time, transfers, and more. This is followed by a monitoring of only those calls that reveal an “opportunity pattern.” For example, an agent may show a pattern of long talk time, excessive hold time, or incorrect transfers. The selective monitoring is followed by focused coaching.

It stands to reason that some call centers are more evolved than others in their quality monitoring and agent coaching practices. At the same time, few, if any organizations have it all figured out. The establishment of best practices allows interested organizations to learn from their counterparts and to choose the path that will most likely result in an increasingly effective frontline staff. The ultimate goal, of course, is to build and maintain a call center that is regarded as world class.

CORPORATE STRATEGY IMPACT

It goes without saying, or at least it should, that world class distinction cannot happen without the commitment and support from senior leadership. In order for a call center to deliver exceptional customer service, leaders must first define quality and then communicate quality expectations.

We define quality calls as those that meet the following criteria:

- Calling experience delights the customer
- Answers given by the agent are accurate
- The call is handled as efficiently as possible
- Company policy is adhered to as closely as possible

If we can agree upon the definition of a quality call, it is of utmost importance that the corporate strategy includes the following:

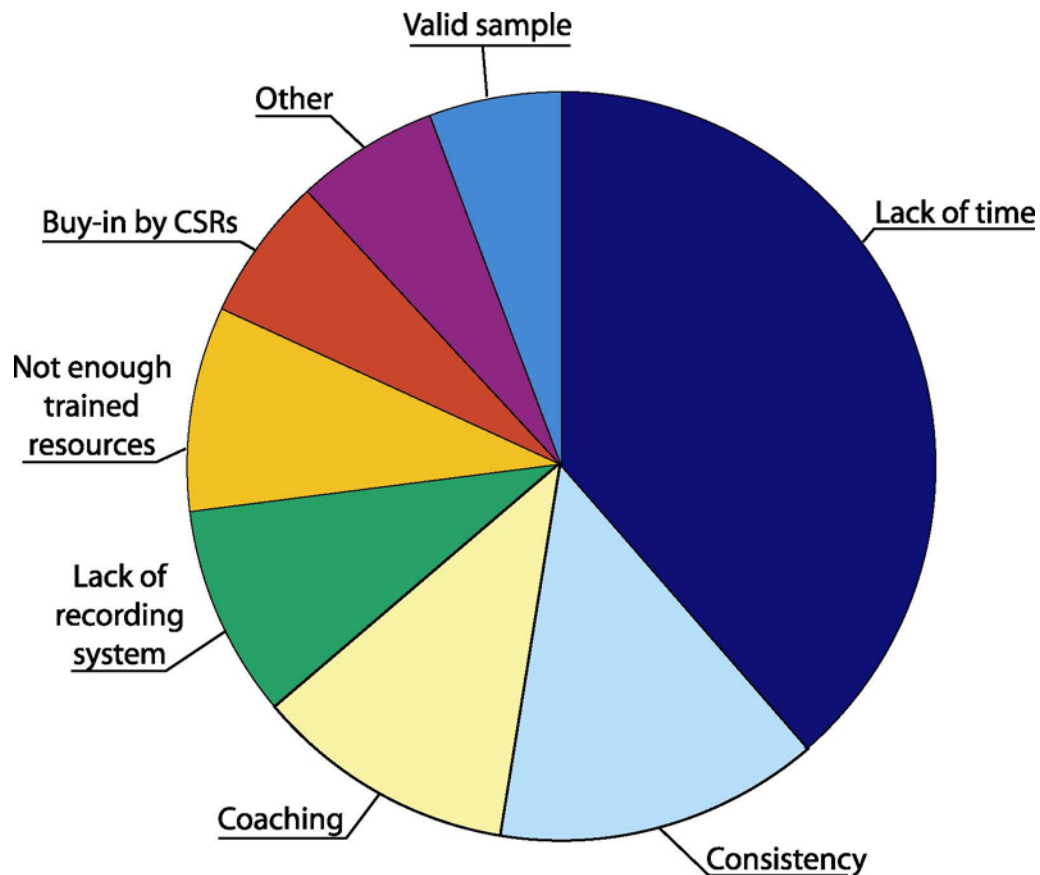
- The call center is given sufficient budget to hire and retain the best agents.
- The agents are enabled with the best technology to ensure efficient and effective call handling.
- Company policies are customer-centric.

Communicating a Corporate Strategy of Quality

Effectively communicating a corporate strategy of “quality is job one” is OVERWHELMINGLY important in delivering a quality experience to customers. Following are some observations we made during this study:

- The CXO level executives can clearly articulate the quality message.
- The CXO level executives frequently articulate the quality message when meeting with employees and stakeholders.
- There is a Chief Customer Officer, and this person’s office is in close proximity to the CEO’s office, indicating a position of power and importance.
- The corporate mission statement includes the word *quality*.
- Key performance indicators include quality metrics.
- There are clearly articulated quality goals in each department including the call center.
- Quality work gets rewarded.
- A true belief that quality pays for itself permeates the organization.

- Adequate time is allowed for quality monitoring and coaching. (See pie chart below to understand why the job does not always get done.) The pie chart reveals the results of a survey of BenchmarkPortal community members responded to. It answers the question “What problems have you encountered in implementing a quality monitoring and coaching program at your center?”



QUALITY MONITORING AND COACHING CORPORATE CULTURE

The companies that do quality monitoring best have created a culture where the agents want to be monitored and coached, and where the supervisors want to be coaches and mentors. In these organizations, there is ample staff and time dedicated to getting the job done properly.

This is in stark contrast to most situations where the quality monitoring and coaching was considered to be a necessary activity, where it is mandated by others and done only when time allowed. In these call centers, there was not enough staff to get the job done. And if call volumes increased unexpectedly (as they often do), the monitoring staff was back on the telephone delivering customer service. The quality process was, as usual, put on the back burner.

The Importance of Change Management

As a company first implements quality monitoring, an essential first step is to get the agents, supervisors, and coaches on board with the concept. The realization that “my work can be scrutinized at any moment” may not be readily embraced by the agents. When not properly positioned, monitoring can feel very negative even to the hard working, well-intended agent.

At call centers where the quality monitoring process was not properly implemented, negative feeling expressed by agents included:

- They are only trying to catch me doing something wrong.
- I do not do as well when I am being watched.
- I get very nervous when someone is watching me work.
- I am being policed.
- I feel like “big brother” is watching me.

At centers that were reviewed for best practices, the agent feelings were noticeably different. Their reaction to quality monitoring and coaching included:

- I look forward to my weekly coaching sessions because it shows that my supervisor really cares about my success.
- I enjoy monitoring my own calls; it is amazing to see what I can improve.
- The time dedicated to evaluating my calls tells me that management really believes in its quality mission.

- The coach always gets me involved in analyzing my own calls, and this helps me better understand what is expected.
- I respect my coach and appreciate it when she shows me examples of ways to do things better.

Recommended Corporate Culture Best Practices

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

Top leadership “walks the talk” by actively listening and responding to the voice of its internal customers—the front-line agents, and the external customers—their customers. Effective leaders maintain multiple listening posts and share customer satisfaction data routinely to stay aligned with what’s important to the customer. Senior managers regularly listen in on live calls in order to stay in touch with the customer and to monitor the effectiveness of their call center operations.

Customer-Driven Mission and Vision

Mission and vision statements provide the focus for strategic planning goals and objectives and help shape the values and the culture of the organization. Vision statements of world-class organizations typically express the goal of providing the best customer service in the business. New initiatives are driven from the voice of the internal and external customers, not from the “ivory tower.”

Customer requirements are clearly defined and reinforced by the organization’s stated mission, vision, and values. Coaching is viewed as a key way to stretch agents towards the realization of the company’s mission and vision. The entire organization understands the mission and supports either the end customer or those that serve the customer.

Constantly Communicated Values

The organization’s emphasis on maintaining a quality culture is demonstrated consistently and constantly through various communication methods that reach the entire work force. These communication formats include newsletters, visual displays, electronic mail, and meetings.

Communication—Facilitating the Information Flow

Agents are the major customers of the organization’s information gathering process. World class organizations recognize agents as the voice of the company to the customer. As such, the most successful call center leaders understand that agents need timely and easy access to pertinent information if they are to provide world class customer service. The leadership in world class call centers make the flow of this information to the agents a priority.

Accessible and Approachable Management

In world class organizations, all managers treat their front-line agents just as they do their customers—with courtesy, respect, and responsiveness.

Impose Single Accountability

There is a single leader in world class call centers who sets the direction for the center and the quality standards. The leader owns the performance for the center. The leader may actively solicit feedback from the team, but ultimately determines the standards.

Operating with a Quality Framework

The world class companies we observed use a quality framework as a general operating guide. Examples were *Six Sigma* and the *Malcolm Baldrige Award*. The call centers did not typically apply for the awards, but rather used the models as a blue print for discipline. The models also act as a checks and balance to ensure all critical components for success have been addressed.

Examples in the Corporate Culture Area

At one of the world class study participant's companies, employees said, "Our CEO is the most beloved person in the company."

Another company's CEO routinely listened to calls, then found the agent and bought him/her their favorite candy bar.

One of the division leaders was teased as her middle name is "raise the bar."

Another leader was self-described as a "quality bigot."

PURPOSE OF QUALITY MONITORING

On a practical level, most call centers typically conduct quality monitoring to measure agent performance and/or for agent development reasons.

Agent Performance Measurement Only

A small percentage of companies we benchmarked currently used quality monitoring scores as an agent performance measurement only. Supervisors used the results of the scored calls as a representative snapshot of an agent's performance. Each month agents were provided with the summary results of their sampling. Annual merit raises and/or periodic bonuses were based on the score.

Agent Development Only

Some companies used the quality monitoring results as an agent development tool only. The supervisor's focus was on cultivating the skills necessary for his or her agents to deliver consistently excellent service.

In this environment, the primary metric was customer satisfaction. The quality monitoring and coaching was designed to reinforce behaviors that delighted customers and to modify behaviors that didn't. The monitoring and coaching **score** was considered a secondary metric. It was considered important but only from the perspective that it would have an impact on caller satisfaction.

Agent Performance and Development

The majority of companies we benchmarked said that they used quality monitoring for both agent performance assessment and agent skill development. These companies viewed the purpose of quality monitoring as the means to ensure customer delight.

Recommended Best Practices

In terms of quality monitoring, we noted the following differences at the world class call centers:

- The monitoring and coaching function was properly staffed. It was not regarded as an "as available" basis.
- Most agents in these centers looked forward to being monitored and coached because there was positive reinforcement for modifying their behavior to better serve the customer.
- The agents frequently took an active role in discovering what they could have done better and skill deficits were looked upon as training opportunities. Specific

training modules were available for almost every skill deficit discovered. The agent's mindset in these call centers was *this makes me a better agent*.

CALL MONITORING AND RECORDING OPTIONS

Once companies are clear about the purpose of quality call monitoring in their organizations, the next decision becomes: How will we gather the information? Following are the various call monitoring and recording models we documented in the discovery phase of our study. We follow up each description with its corresponding benefits and drawbacks.

Silent Monitoring – Remote Location

In silent monitoring, the supervisor (or other assigned team member) listens to an agent taking a customer's call in real-time from a remote location, usually within the call center.

Benefits

- The calls are selected randomly. The aim is that the randomness of the call selection will fair represent the agent's strengths and improvement needs.
- The agent is usually unaware that the call is being monitored, which fosters a more natural call handling. This allows the supervisor to observe the uninhibited interaction between the agent and the customer.
- Monitoring can be done from the supervisor's workstation or from any other remote location, such as another call center, or even from home.
- Silent monitoring at remote locations allows for the establishment of a dedicated, centralized quality assurance team. This team is able to observe calls at all centers within an enterprise to ensure consistency in the application of standards and the rating of results.

Drawbacks

- Providing immediate feedback is typically a challenge.
- This option can be inefficient, as the supervisor experiences unproductive time while waiting for a call to arrive.
- If the agent disagrees with the supervisor's evaluation of the call, there is no "hard evidence" to review as the calls have not been recorded. Disagreements between the agent and the supervisor can be irreconcilable.
- The fact that no recording exists means that the organization has lost the opportunity to share examples of agent excellence for training purposes.

Side-by-Side Monitoring

In side by side monitoring, the supervisor sits beside the agent and listens while the agent handles a customer call. The supervisor also observes the way the agent utilizes available technology and other workstation resources.

Benefits

- The immediacy of providing agent feedback is this option's greatest benefit. It is widely accepted that the closer the feedback is to the actual situation observed, the more potent the learning opportunity.
- This option allows agents to practice more effective behaviors immediately under the guidance of the supervisor.
- The supervisor can observe the agent's use of technology and other workstation resources. Often times, the complexity of information and software available to agents can be a hindrance until it is well understood. The supervisor can facilitate the agents' understanding of available resources.
- Side-by-side monitoring is an excellent option for new hires. Ideally, it is highly interactive and provides an encouraging and supportive environment.
- Questions can be answered, standards can be communicated, and training opportunities can be identified in a conversational manner.
- This option helps establish a personal relationship between the agent and supervisor. This bonding facilitates trust and enhances the agent's confidence in him or herself and between the supervisor and agent.

Drawbacks

- Agents may feel inhibited or threatened and may not perform in a natural or comfortable way. Their true abilities and limitations may not be revealed.
- Observed agents may be on their best behavior; their performance may not reflect their typical behavior.

Call Recording

In call recording, the supervisor or an automated system randomly records calls. The supervisor then listens to the calls and evaluates the agent's performance.

Benefits

- The agent does not know that he or she is being monitored. This scenario provides a more natural example of the agent/customer interactions.
- Agents can listen to the call and hear first hand how they handled the customer.

- The recording is a tangible link between performance and supervisor feedback. It helps agents clearly identify what skills need improvement. In turn, the supervisor coaches the agent for performance improvement.
- Recorders can be programmed to monitor an agent during set periods of time. This frees up supervisors and provides them with more flexibility and control.
- “Dead time,” the period of time a supervisor waits for calls to arrive (as experienced with the silent monitoring method) is eliminated.

Drawbacks

- Providing immediate feedback can be a challenge. Due to supervisors’ busy schedules, agents may receive feedback so long after the fact that the window of learning has closed.
- The randomness of this approach makes it a challenge to find calls that provide “coaching opportunities.” Those calls that should be used as learning opportunities could quite easily be overlooked. In a nutshell, this approach, like others that rely on random screening, is not intentional and focused enough to result in a strong correlation between quality monitoring and coaching and improved agent performance.
- Not all companies have the storage capacity necessary to contain a sizeable volume of recorded calls. (It bears noting that this phenomenon is becoming less of an issue as storage costs continue to drop.)

Voices and Screens Recorded, Monitored Later

The world class companies that participated in this study record all transactions. The best systems capture voice, screen and ACD activity for all phone contacts, chat transcripts with timing for Web chats, and e-mail transcripts with timing on e-mail interactions. Capturing the holistic view of the contact provides a complete picture of the customer’s experience. The length of time these companies retain recordings varies.

Recommended Best Practices

Create a Quality Combination

A combination of call recording, and side-by-side monitoring provides the foundation for a successful quality monitoring program. Each method provides unique benefits that, when coordinated effectively, enable supervisors to give agents well-rounded feedback.

The recommended best practice is to record ALL calls, including voices and screens. Then intentionally select from this rich and extensive database those calls that have the highest potential for agent learning through coaching opportunities. This approach usually precludes a random selection, as many calls do not have coaching opportunities.

The most productive approach to call selection in the world class companies was to program their software system to select only those calls that had some kind of noteworthy aberration, such as the following:

1. The agent talk time was double the average agent's talk time.
2. The number of transfers exceeded two.
3. The dead air time was over one minute in length.
4. The volume of caller and agent voices was such that it indicated disagreement, even anger.

OUTPUT OF THE MONITORING PHASE

The call centers we observed in this study utilized the output of the monitoring phase in a variety of ways:

A Scoring Data Sheet

The typical output of a monitoring session is a simple scoring data sheet. Predetermined characteristics of the call are weighted, observed, rated, and scored.

Specific List of Skill Deficiencies

A slight addition to the basic score sheet includes a listing of skill deficits that need correcting.

Training Recommendations

A further improvement to just listing the skill deficits is to include specific training recommendations for each skill deficit.

Tracked Coaching Tips

Some centers also track the areas coached so that future evaluations can look for specific behavior changes based on the prior coaching.

Recommended Best Practices

Providing a printed sheet with feedback on each category works best. Less is better, but specific is good. Be careful not to overwhelm the agent with too much information. Information overload causes the agent to shut down; this is exactly what you don't want to happen. Also, some companies become so focused on rating the call on a micro level (i.e., Did the agent say the script without missing a word? Did the agent misspell anything in her internal documentation?) that they miss the bigger picture, namely: *What did the customer think?* World class call centers kept this key metric as their primary focus.

WHICH CALLS SHOULD BE MONITORED

Assuming that your company is on board with our recommendation to record all calls, the next decision becomes: Which calls should we monitor and choose for coaching purposes?

Random Selection of Calls

Currently, the most common corporate response to this question is to select calls at random in the hopes of finding calls worth monitoring. Based on our research, this approach is woefully inadequate. The randomness of this method does not provide an accurate reflection of whether or not your agent is consistently delighting your customers. Nor is this approach intentional enough to result in identifying significant coaching opportunities. This approach does not result in a statistically valid measure of the agent's ability or lack thereof.

Calls Selected by the Agent

Getting agents involved in choosing which calls to monitor is an option. Assuming you have a recording system in place, it is relatively easy for the agent to locate calls that definitely delighted the customer. It is as easy for the agent to locate those calls that did not result in customer delight. Listening to calls at both ends of the spectrum provides agents with a fairly representative picture of their skills, as well as their needs for improvement.

Calls Driven by Caller Satisfaction Feedback

Another approach is to start with any caller satisfaction survey information received, assuming the surveys are collected within 24 hours of the call. The call evaluation can be done on those calls and the front-line agent can learn from the actual customer response to the service provided.

The new emerging model promotes starting with direct customer feedback and having the front-line agent's performance rating be determined by the customers themselves.

This eliminates the formal internal evaluation that tries to assess the value the customer would have assigned to the contact because now the customer provides that feedback directly. In the new model, the QA quality monitoring function can be reduced to a sample audit to determine whether internal procedures are being followed for those front-line agents that do not receive a significant volume of dissatisfied surveys, which would be audited at the same time they are reviewed.

Note: It is critical that each survey received as a 'dissatisfied' is reviewed to assess whether or not the reason for dissatisfaction was within the front-line

agent's control. For situations such as policy or system-related issues, the front-line agent should be 'held harmless.'

Calls Driven by Call Handling Characteristics

In our study, we found that the best call monitoring systems provided exception reporting to identify potential problem areas. The system can be programmed to identify any performance metric that is outside the norm and/or unacceptable. Potential problems identified included:

Repeat contacts by customers. The system can identify how many times the customer has called in the last 30 days. The assumption is the more often a customer has to call in, the more hassled he or she is.

Hold times. The system can highlight when the caller is put on hold, the length of each hold time, and the total hold time per call. A supervisor may choose to review interactions where the customer was put on hold three or more times. The supervisor recognizes the high probability that the front-line agent has a knowledge gap or needs some help in knowing how to effectively handle that particular call-type.

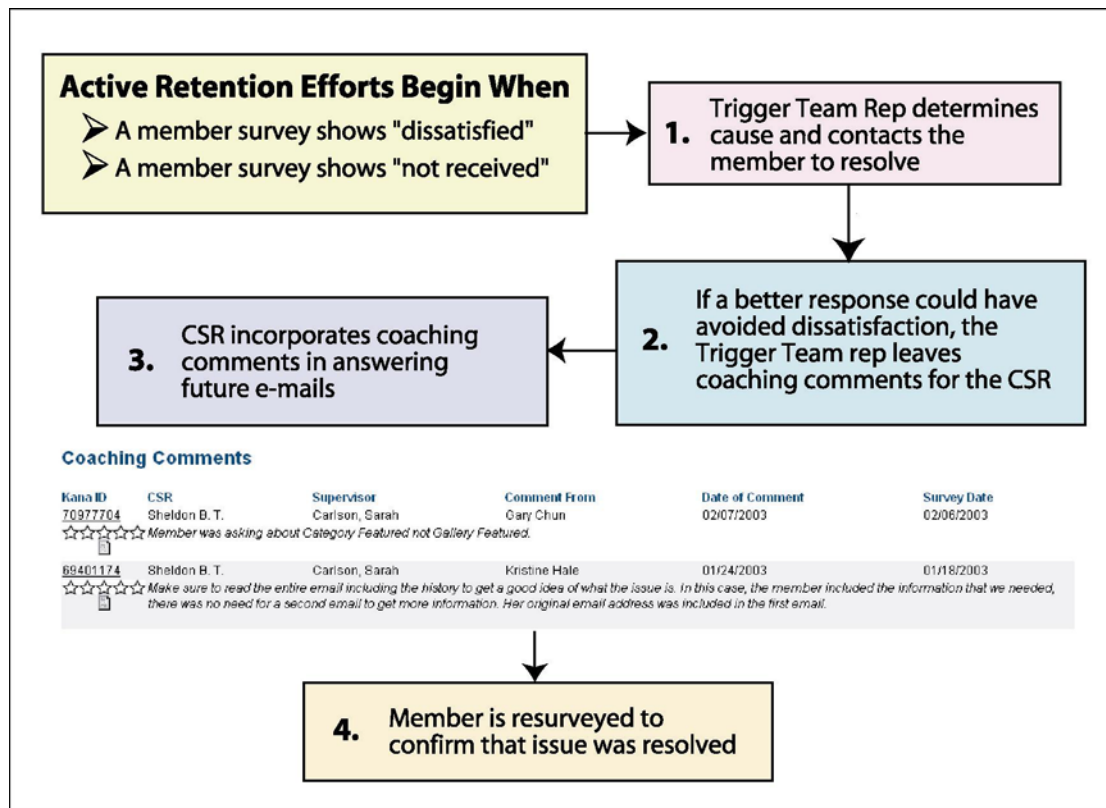
Voice Variance. The system can flag calls where voices escalate and/or talk over one another.

Application Driven: The system can be programmed to look for any performance metric that is out of line. This includes metrics like talk time, after call work time, hold time, transfers, or extended dead air time.

Recommended Best Practices

Cases Selected Based on Coaching Opportunity: In the traditional setting, when front-line agent development is the focus, the best practice is to select 'outlier' calls, where there is a higher likelihood for coaching opportunities. For example, reviewing contacts where the customer was put on hold three or more times. There is a high probability that the front-line agent has a knowledge gap or needs some help in knowing how to effectively handle that particular call-type. This approach only works when the front-line agent's performance evaluation is based on customer satisfaction and not on contact evaluation scores.

Customer-Driven Quality Monitoring: In the emerging model, the customer determines the rating of the service experience. The quality assurance team is re-deployed as a Trigger Team, who coach front-line agents on cases when the customer has expressed their dissatisfaction with the service provided (see graphic on next page).



WHAT IS MEASURED DURING MONITORING

Telephone Techniques and Etiquette

This is the most common area for quality monitoring and can be done by individuals not steeped in product details. In this area, the person reviewing the call is placing him/herself in the role of the customer and assessing the effectiveness of the service provided. Although direct customer feedback is most ideal, when the customer is not providing the direct feedback on effectiveness, anyone with good service judgment skill can provide this type of evaluation.

Product Knowledge

Most companies continue to view *accuracy of the answer provided* as the most essential purpose of quality monitoring. Often the bulk of the final score of the call is based on this need for accuracy. While no one would diminish the essentialness of accurate answers, we believe this should be only part of the final evaluation. The customer experience is also essential.

System Efficiency/Screen Navigation

This is a relatively new area. Now that screen navigation can be recorded along with the voice component, the person monitoring the call can determine the effectiveness of the agent's skill in navigating the system to resolve inquiries. To deliver a quality call in an efficient period of time, screen navigation skills are essential. Monitoring this area can result in a wealth of opportunities to coach on short cuts and efficiency skills.

Company Policies and Procedures

Companies naturally have policies that agents are taught and that must be followed. Quality monitoring is a perfect time to see if these policies are adhered to during the call. These policies could be related to warranty limitations, risk management issues, and complaint documentation.

Potential Fraud Issues

Order taking call centers can be vulnerable to fraud related issues. An example is when an agent is pressured to make certain sales goals. The agent signs up a customer for a special when, in fact, the caller explicitly declined the up-sell. The phone companies even have a word for this practice, namely "cramming."

Recommended Best Practices

This is where there emerges a divergence of philosophy. There are two schools of thought. The best traditional thinking is that the criteria for success in call evaluations focuses on how effectively front-line agents resolve customer issues, on how well agents demonstrate professionalism, courtesy and respect for the customer during the call. The potential flaw with this model is that it is still based on an internal view of what someone else “thinks” the customer values.

The new emerging model is when the *customer* actually provides the service assessment of the call. Through surveys, the customer can provide feedback specifically to the agent about what aspects he/she liked or didn’t like. The aspects to measure are the attributes that have a direct correlation to the overall satisfaction of the customer.

In the new model, the internal evaluation process incorporates reviewing “failed” service experiences, per the customer (i.e., dissatisfied survey responses) and providing direct coaching to the specific situation.

In the new model, the criteria depends on the reason for the initial contact. For example, if the customer contacted a company about a registration issue, the customer might be asked to evaluate whether the agent seemed sincere in his/her desire to resolve the issue. Another question might be whether or not the issue was resolved with the information provided.

For the traditional approach, using internally developed criteria, there are several categories that represented the approach most used by those in our study:

Telephone etiquette – including opening and closing the call, tone, courtesy and language

Customer interaction and relationship building – including acknowledgement skills, active listening, articulation skills

Knowledge and information – including knowledge of product/company, accurate resolution of issue, collects necessary customer information, effective use of resources

Efficiency – manages the call; solid judgment

Accuracy – all important criteria is that the answers must be accurate

FREQUENCY OF AGENT MONITORING

In our research, we discovered that most call centers typically made it their goal to monitor five calls per agent per month. If we can assume that the average agent handled 1000+ calls per month, we find that this metric is not quantitatively valid. Even if these organizations monitored double the typical goal of five, their efforts would only result in a 5% confidence level. This means that the probability of choosing a fair representation of calls is only 1 in 20.

Using the 1000+ calls per agent per month assumption just mentioned, call centers would have to monitor 350 calls per agent every month to reach a 95% confidence level! We have yet to benchmark a call center that can devote the time and resources required to ensure this kind of statistical reliability.

(It bears mentioning that in one of our surveys, we asked call center supervisors to identify their greatest challenges in call monitoring. By far, the greatest challenge identified was *lack of time*.)

Our acknowledgement of the improbability of monitoring 350 calls per agent per month is at the heart of what drove us to find the best practice in this arena. We knew that there was a better way to ensure that quality monitoring was more strongly correlated to increasingly higher levels of customer satisfaction. That better way is the new model that we'll speak to further in the report. It does not require 350 monitored calls per agent per month, but instead relies on an intentional focus to align priority metrics with the customer's perception of his or her service experience and a redeployment of supervisors.

Frequency of Monitoring New Hires and Those on Probation

The issue of monitoring frequency must take into account not only those agents who are fully functioning but those new hires and exceptions, too.

During First Month Following Release from Class

This is a critical period for a new agent. The best practice is to move the agent from the formal classroom setting to a transitional "hub" environment. The entire class moves together, and new agents are provided extensive support and coaching during this period. By helping each new agent become confident and competent in their new role, their productivity and quality scores increase quickly. This method shortens the learning curve significantly and helps ensure agent retention during the most stressful stage of their call center career.

During First Six Month of Employment

The new agent still needs more direct attention from their direct supervisor than those who are fully functioning. This is a period when habits form and most agents are very motivated to make a good impression. Mold them with frequent monitoring and coaching while they are still not set in their ways.

After First Six Month of Employment

While all agents should have periodical audits of their work, the highest performing agents can be monitored and coached less if they have proven that they are consistently effective. It's also important to note the particular preferences of each agent. If an agent really thrives on regular positive feedback, then continue to monitor and coach as usual. For those that appreciate being recognized for needing less coaching, then a reduced monitoring schedule works well for them.

When Put On Probation

How frequently an organization monitors those on probation depends on the reason for probation. Most world class companies have developed zero tolerance policies. So, in cases of blatant disservice (i.e., intentionally disconnecting or arguing with a customer), the agent is likely to be formally terminated without a performance plan. If there is no willful intent to provide poor service, then dedicating some additional time and attention may be time well spent.

Agent behavior needs to be monitored closely to either reinforce movement in the right direction or to redirect at first sign of wrong behavior.

Recommended Best Practices

The recommended best practices regarding monitoring frequency in the categories discussed above are as follows:

1. During the first month following completion of initial training. The best practice during this period was to monitor and coach the new agent at least two calls per day while in the “safe hub” environment.
2. During the first six months following release from the safe hub environment. The best practice during this period was to monitor and coach the agent at least at least two calls per week.
3. After approximately the first seven months of employment, or when the agent has reached “solo” status. The best practice for an experienced agent is to monitor and coach as needed, i.e., to make the experience more customized to each agent's needs. During this period monitoring and coaching may be by exception only, or as dictated by caller dissatisfaction feedback, or unusual performance metrics, for instance long average handle times, above average “dead air” time during the phone call, and the like.

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4. Should the agent be placed on probation for any reason. If an agent is on probation, the best practice is to monitor and coach the agent at least three times per week. These sessions need to be documented in greater detail than normal agent interactions.

WHO DOES THE MONITORING

There are several models developed around who actually performs the quality assessments. This section addresses these models and points out which ones are most conducive to exceptional call quality monitoring and coaching.

A Dedicated Quality Team

One of the most popular models is a dedicated team whose primary responsibility is to monitor 5 -10 contacts for each front-line agent each month. The purpose of the observations is to identify skill gaps. The team provides constructive suggestions to improve the service levels. The majority of those operating in this model use evaluation criteria which attempts to assess the service experience from the assessors perspective. Evaluations may or may not be tied to the performance assessment process.

The Direct Supervisor

Another most common model assigns front-line supervisor responsibility for monitoring some or all of the agent calls. This was especially true when most supervisors were selected from the agent ranks and had call handling experience in the center.

Peer Monitoring

A third approach, not as common as the prior two, is where a team of product experts monitors lesser experienced agents.

A Third-party Outsourced Company

Another alternative is to outsource the monitoring process. Companies now exist that will accept the recorded voices and do the monitoring and scoring process. The end product is a scoring sheet on every call and some recommendations to the coach of corrective action to suggest to the agent.

Recommended Best Practices

A combination approach works best. Having a dedicated quality team provides the framework to ensure that the evaluations are performed each month. The coaching, however, should be done by the direct supervisor. The supervisor needs to be dedicated to team development rather than outside activities. The supervisor also needs to be credible by having current knowledge about the position and the subjects handled.

WHO SHOULD DO THE COACHING

A major problem encountered during our study was that supervisors simply did not have the time to coach based on monitored results. In fact, in a study fielded to all of our community members, we found the time crunch to be a key obstacle.

A Team of Coaching Experts

Often in a center handling very complex calls, only real experts can truly evaluate the level of the agent's understanding of the question or issue. In such a situation, it may be mandatory that product specialists be assigned to monitoring.

The Direct Supervisor

The direct supervisor is the most common and most logical agent coach.

A Third-party Outsourced Company

Because of the tremendous time burden of coaching, often there is simply not enough time in the day to do this activity completely by the internal staff. A number of third-party outsourcing companies have sprung up to assist. When properly trained, they can do a very professional job.

Recommended Best Practices

Front-line management should be dedicated to agent development. The role of front-line supervisors is to develop the talents of their teams. They own the performance of their team, including the satisfaction level of the callers that they serve. We observed that majority of world class supervisors spent their time in:

- side-by-side coaching with the front-line team members
- reinforcing right behaviors and coaching others
- removing obstructions to providing world class service
- communicating performance results/trends
- co-developing development plans with front-line team members
- sharing and learning best practices with co-leadership
- sharing best practices within the team
- creating/maintaining positive environment – team building
- handling irate situations, modeling approach for learning

More than 90% of the supervisor time should be spent with and among the team. World class companies recognize that they have the most pivotal role in determining the success and performance level of the front-line team. They are not pulled away for project work or corporate initiatives.

Ratio of supervisors to front-line agents is important. The front-line supervisor has 13-15 team members as direct reports. There is a commitment to keep the ratio within this range. Newer front-line supervisors may have fewer as they learn how to be an effective people-developer.

Supervisors hired for leadership skills. Rather than promoting the best technical employee, world class companies understand that, while content knowledge is important, that knowledge can be trained. It is more important to ensure the right person is in this role than any other role in the contact center. Ideal is hiring agents who have shown, through aptitude testing and prior history, that they have the ability to excel as a leader.

Training for supervisor role. World class companies invest in their leaders. Because the success of the center is based on the performance of the front-line team, and the front-line leaders are responsible for developing their team, they need to be well-trained for the position. They are trained in the leadership philosophy of the organization; in best practices in motivating and sharing feedback; in team building and on how to read and interpret the reporting for their team and the center. They are also involved in ongoing training to continually improve their leadership effectiveness.

Note: It is important that no matter who does the coaching, that the coach understands the essentialness of agent “self-discovery.” It is critical that the coach doesn’t force feed the agent his or her evaluations but guides the agent to self-discovery through strategically asked questions.

STAFFING

This section addresses the staffing of the call quality monitoring process.

Ratio of QA Team to Agents

In the traditional model, if the technology is effective in capturing contact information, the ratio is one Quality Analyst for every (70) front-line agents. If the process is more manual, then the ratio is one Quality Analyst for every (35) front-line agents. At this ratio, the QA Team can consistently deliver five to ten evaluations per front-line agent per month, depending on the criteria and complexity of the contacts.

Ratio of Coaches to Number of Agents

In the traditional model, the ratio is one coach for every 75 front-line agents. If the process is more manual, then the ratio is one coach for every 50 front-line agents. At this ratio, the quality coaching team can consistently deliver five to ten evaluations per front-line agent per month, depending on the criteria and complexity of the contacts.

Recommended Best Practices

The recommended best practices for staffing are as follows:

- supervisor to agent ratio equals 1 to 15, which includes time for coaching at least one session per month per agent
- monitor to agent ratio equals 1 to 50 for automated recording systems
- monitors to agent ratio equals 1 to 35 for manual systems
- coach to agent ratio equals 1 to 75, which allows each agent to be coached for up to 10 sessions per month

BUILDING IN CONSISTENCY IN THE EVALUATION PROCESS

Calibrations

When there are multiple monitors either at one site or at multiple sites, it's important to make sure there is consistency in the scoring technique. Typically this can be taken care of by periodically having all monitors score the same call, and then discuss only those scores that show a wide variance.

Agent Appeals

To get complete agent buy-in, it is critical that agents have the ability to appeal evaluation scores. Appeals can have many forms, but one of the typical forms is simply to ask that a different person score the call under appeal. Some centers pattern their appeals process after the legal system, namely, every appeal is reviewed by three people to ensure a maximally fair result.

Multiple Call Center Sites

There are a couple of approaches to multiple sites. One is to have monitoring done centrally. All of the evaluations are done by the same team, regardless of agent location. The primary benefit is consistency and communication within the team

Another approach is to have one designated point person at each of the locations. That contact point is responsible for ensuring that there is consistency within their location. A critical practice is to routinely calibrate within locations. The primary benefit of location-specific monitoring is the relationship/partnership between the monitoring team and the front-line leadership and agents.

Recommended Best Practices

Calibrations are a best practice. So are agent appeals. For multiple sites, the benefits of having the monitoring team on site outweigh the benefits on having all evaluations done by a centralized team. Also, in most world class companies, the quality team and training team are either a combined team or are "joined at the hip," which further reinforces the need to be on-site.

HOW MONITORING RESULTS ARE SHARED WITH THE AGENT

We discovered a variety of ways that the monitoring results were shared with the individual agent.

By E-mail

One method was to have the supervisor's score sheet sent to the agent by e-mail. The agent is then taught to do a level of self-coaching by reviewing the feedback and, in some cases, respond with planned actions to improve performance. This is not ideal.

By Personal Feedback Coach

A feedback coach meets with each agent and reviews the results. They then share the evaluations with the agent's direct supervisor.

By the Direct Supervisor

The direct supervisor reviews the monitoring results. The supervisor is also responsible for the performance of the team and the behaviors of each front-line agent. The supervisor, therefore, is essential in facilitating the learning of each front-line agent in the areas needed.

Recommended Best Practices

Build an environment of trust to open the possibilities for change. Front-line agents feel supported and encouraged in world class companies. Everyone from senior leadership to the classroom trainers are dedicated to the agent's success.

Remember that self-discovery is key. World class companies know that no one changes until they decide to change. This is a key differentiator between world class companies and those that are not yet world class. World class leaders know how to share the feedback. Whether the feedback is from the customer directly or from the quality internal evaluation, the supervisor will ask questions that lead the agent to self-discovery.

Keep in mind that words do matter. The actual words chosen for coaching have a significant impact on whether or not the agent 'hears' the message. Unless a person agrees that a behavior needs to be changed, the most that will happen is forced compliance. One world class company specifically opens the feedback sessions with the question:

"After listening to the call, would there be anything you would change?"

Rather than ask “what would you change” which implies that there was something that needed to be changed, the words chosen make “nothing” a viable answer. An old adage may apply here: *A man forced to change opinion under will is of the same opinion still.*

Personalizing the message is best. Since much of behavior modification is driven from an agent’s decision to make a change, the direct supervisor needs to know each front-line agent individually. Each agent is wired differently. And the better the supervisor understands an agent’s values and what motivates him or her, the better that supervisor’s chance is to influence and impact the agent’s performance. In the same way that agents are trained to adjust their style to meet each customer’s needs, the supervisor must adjust his/her leadership style to meet each agent’s professional needs.

Timing is definitely critical. Results from customer surveys should be reviewed with the front-line agent within 24 hours of the call. Feedback beyond that point loses impact and credibility.

Tracking areas for improvement is essential. A best practice is to track the areas that the front-line agent is focused on improving and look for improvement in those specific areas on the next evaluations. Changing behavior is not easy. Reinforcing the right behaviors by recognizing improved results increases the chance for continued agent success.

Who does the feedback can be key. Our study revealed two models:

1. The monitor who conducted the evaluation provided the feedback for those calls scored.
2. The monitor forwards the feedback to the direct supervisor, who reviews it with the front-line agent.

If the other aspects are present, (i.e. supportive environment, those giving feedback are well trained, metrics focused on customer satisfaction, etc.) either model works. But no matter which option works for your call center, ensure your supervisors monitor and provide feedback to each agent at least one per month to stay involved.

Listening to calls is important. A best practice is to include self-assessment of calls as a normal part of the agent development process. Having agents actually listen to the calls and score themselves on their performance is one of the most powerful behavior improvement techniques available. Agents can “hear” their weaknesses when they listen to the call, especially if trained to do so by professional coaching.

At one company we benchmarked, the agents actually listen to eight calls per month and submit the five best for formal evaluation. Another company has *Perfect Call Contests*. Agents can submit any call they feel was perfect for consideration.

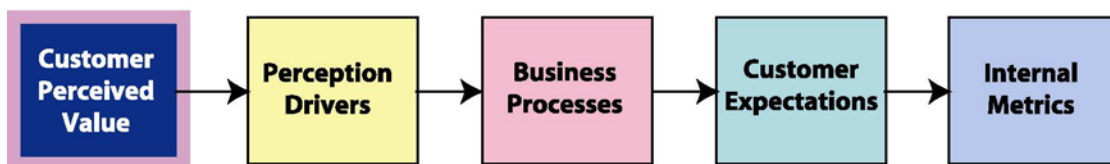
KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The following addresses the key performance indicators that should be used in the call quality monitoring process.

Agent Expectations Tied to Customer Satisfiers

Performance expectations for agents and supervisors should reflect a commitment to delighting the customer. Expectations are tied to key customer satisfiers and clearly communicate the extent to which agents are empowered to serve customers. Mixed messages are avoided (e.g., Agents are told to take the time needed to satisfy callers and, hence, should not be directly evaluated on the average length of the calls they handle).

Connecting Internal Metrics to External Measurements

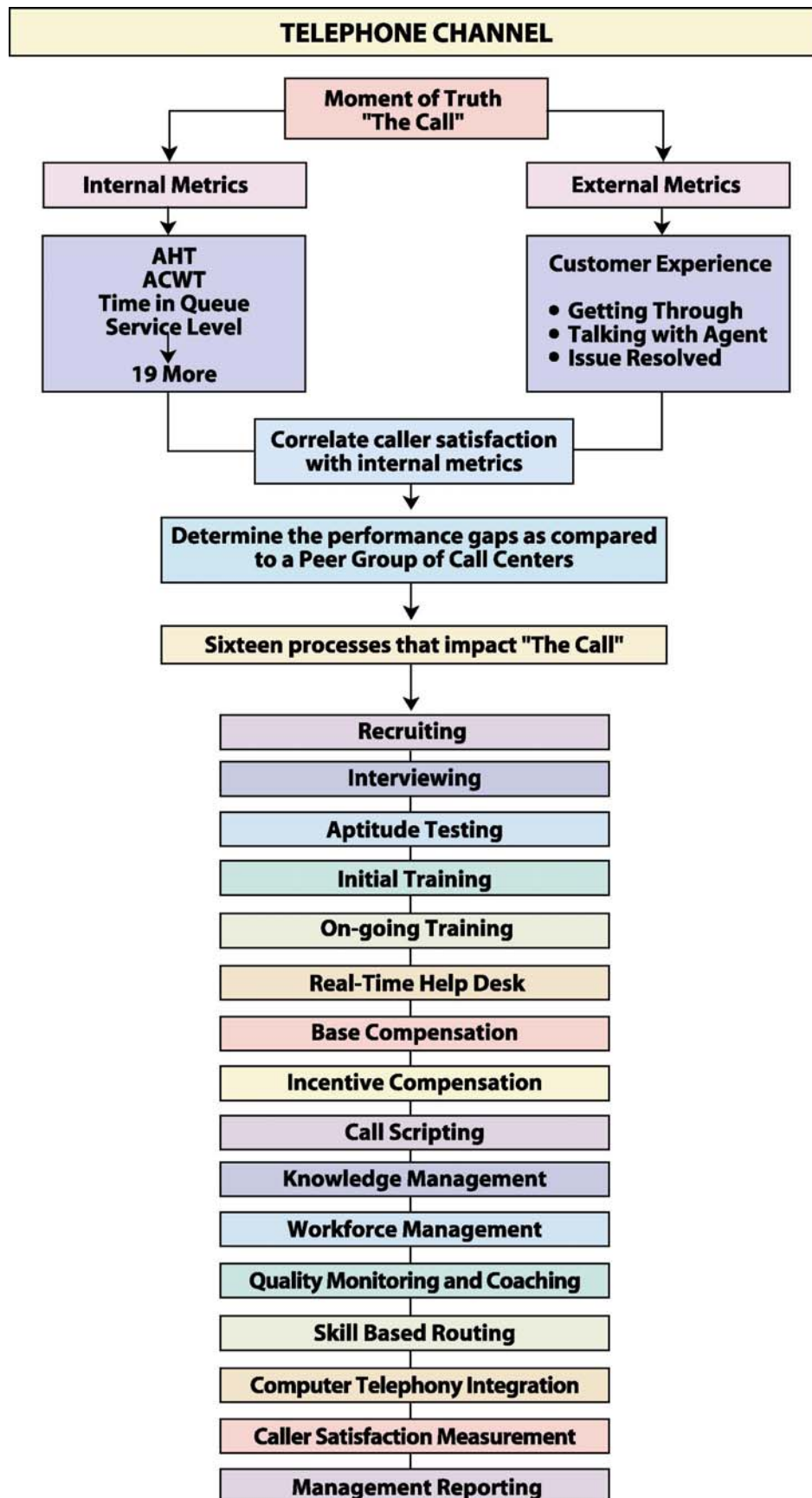


Overall Center Metrics Focused on Customer

Predicting quantitative and qualitative measures for achieving customer satisfaction is a necessary place to start. However, actual customer satisfaction rates, as indicated by the customer, are the central focus. Productivity and efficiency measures are focused on effective use of staff, technology, and employee satisfaction. (Most world class call centers recognize that employee satisfaction is a primary predictor of productivity and efficiency.) Measures are continuously compared to industry data, including industry average, best competitor, and appropriate benchmarks.

Management Information

Front-line managers review statistics on calls, such as numbers of calls, ASA, service level, call lengths, after call work time, and other measures for their group or individual front-line team members. These are used to help improve overall performance and staffing levels, not to criticize the agents. Managers review exception reports for individual-based metrics, such as talk time, average hold time, and after call work as indicators of possible problems areas for coaching.



Recommended Best Practices

Criteria: World Class companies evaluate contacts based on direct indicators that drive customer satisfaction. By analyzing the results from their customers, they determine what internal metrics are representative of the customers' perception of the service experience.

In the evolving model, the customer determines the criteria to assess the service level. Starting with universal service metrics, such as resolved on 1st contact and easy accessibility, World Class companies ask their customers to determine how well the front-line agent performed. Based on the suggestions to improve the service experience, World Class companies evolve the questions to provide actionable feedback on what the customer deems most important. The role of the internal review then changes to an auditing role.

Key Performance Indicators for Quality of Calls Handled

- % Top box score on overall customer satisfaction
(rated 5 out of 5 or 10 out of 10 by the customer)
- % Resolved on first contact (as rated by the customer)
- % of accuracy audits that pass

Key Performance Indicators for Quantity of Calls Handled

- Adherence to schedule
- Occupancy or availability

Other Performance Indicators to Monitor (not always within agent control)

Indicator Types (not absolute list):

- Abandon rate
- Average speed of answer (ASA)
- Average talk time
- Average after call work time
- Percent of calls transferred

COMPENSATION IMPACT

Pay for Performance

Monitoring systems are often tied to performance pay. Using a traditional model, there is not enough sample size to statistically support using the numbers for performance assessments.

Reward and Recognition

It is quite common to tie rewards and recognition to monitoring systems. There are many effective versions of tying reward and recognition to the 'right behaviors.' The most effective methods allow for customization of the rewards to each agents' personal preferences.

Recommended Best Practices

World class call centers typically combine both practices. When tying pay to performance, it is essential that agents receive short-term incentives, such as monthly goals tied to pay outs based on their ability to delight the customer. Compensation programs that pay agents strictly based on longevity or for their acquisition of a specific skill set have their limitations. The caution with both is that they fail to recognize that an organization may end up paying money for a complacent veteran and/or for a skilled, but unmotivated, agent.

COMMITMENT FROM OTHER DEPARTMENTS

Call quality monitoring and coaching assumes the committed support of other departments allied with the call center.

Human Resources

Thorough Screening and Testing

Having the best front-line team starts with hiring the best. The best companies have much more extensive screening/testing of applicants than the average center. Almost all of the companies in the study administer a personality aptitude test to ensure that those hired are 'wired for success' in their environment. The thresholds for acceptance are based on the profiles of the most successful front-line employees in the center.

The overall application process for front-line positions is extensive. Applicants are thoroughly screened through written tests, telephone interviews, and behavior-based interviewing. A high school diploma or college degree, plus some customer service work experience, are the minimum requirements for front-line agents at most world class organizations.

Newcomer's Orientation

Every organization member, from the new clerk trainee to the top leadership, receives orientation training in the organization's mission, vision, and guiding principles before they start to work at world class organizations. A significant amount of time is spent to engage new employees and help them internalize the commitment to promoting the organization's quality culture.

Training

World Class Training Delivery

World class organizations deliver superior training by using instructors who have intimate knowledge of the customers and the key service delivery processes. Formal stand-up classroom training is still considered the most effective for initial training. A dedicated training group is an integral part of successful call center operations.

By using trainers who either specialize in training or who have been trained to be effective, it reinforces the message that the company believes that training is an important function. It also reinforces the company value of hiring and developing the best of everything.

Lifelong Learning

World Class companies embrace a philosophy of continuous training. Training hours are allotted for every front-line agent (ranging from 40-120 hours annually) and are factored into the call demand forecasting and resource scheduling.

This practice reinforces the message that the company recognizes that the front-line team plays an essential role by interacting directly with each customer. The company is investing in each employee, and as employees gain in knowledge and confidence, they will confidently represent the company in a positive light.

Curriculum Approach

Both initial and ongoing training is provided on a just-in-time basis to ensure that the front-line agent receives the most current training possible. Initial training is aligned with key customer satisfiers, such as courteous and respectful behavior, and empowers the agent to satisfy and delight the customer. Front-line agents are trained to recognize and adapt to different caller personality types. The curriculum for front-line agents also includes extensive training on how the overall organization functions so that front-line agents better understand the “big picture.”

World class call centers recognize that new knowledge needs to be applied to be ‘learned.’ They avoid the trap of over-saturating new agents with more information than they can reasonably absorb. The goal is bite-sized, easily digestible chunks of information delivered, then agent application of this information, followed by demonstrated success before moving on to a new topic.

Technical Training by Subject Matter Experts

Technical training programs are developed and delivered by experienced subject-matter experts (including front-line agents). This approach helps to ensure that the skill and knowledge transfer involves information that is current and relevant and has a high-impact on the organization’s overall effectiveness. In cases where the trainers are promoted internally, there is an investment in teaching them effective training methods.

This reinforces the message that content-expertise is valued. Also, it provides trainees with the most current knowledge available.

Training Aligned with Coaching

There is a continuous improvement cycle within world class companies. The training unit is an integral part of a system dedicated to continually improving and staying current with product changes and organizational trends.

Transition from Training to Final Position

The best practice in this area is to move from the formal classroom setting to a nesting or transition hub. In this area, the new agents are heavily coached and supported as they apply their new skills in the real world. The new front-line team moves up the learning

curve quickly and they become more engaged to the larger team from their safety net with classroom peers.

Post-Training Follow-up

World class companies actively solicit feedback from newly released trainees. They specifically target gaps in training and solicit suggestions about how to make the training program more effective. They also capture ideas for process improvement, recognizing that the newest employees are seeing the world through new eyes.

Support on the Job

Expert Resource Hub

The best companies offer instant access to a team of experts. Rather than looking for a senior agent or a wandering specialist, a centralized team of experts is a phone call away. Agents simply calls the resource hub and ask their questions while the customers are on hold. In some cases, the resource hub member may join the call (while the inexperienced agent stays on the phone). But in most cases, the resource hub provides the answer, and the first agent completes the call. The resource hub does not try to train the agent while the customer is waiting. The expert team provides the answer and then may follow-up with the agent to help them learn how to find the answer in the future. In cases where the resource hub team doesn't train the agent directly, the training unit reviews the summary reports and fills the knowledge gaps.

It is important that the expert resource hub documents all agent questions they receive. The tracking of this information will likely reveal knowledge gaps and/or trends that may require additional training.

On-Line Procedures and Information

Call centers use on-line computer information systems to enable front-line agents to answer customer inquiries quickly and effectively. Desktop information services include databases to retrieve information and on-line procedures manuals. On-line procedures manuals are often built into the database applications using a help screen format or a sequence of prompts which walks the agent through each step in the call answering process. On-line procedures significantly reduce the number of pages or procedures necessary, and increase accessibility, speed of access, and ease of use of information.

Fully-Dedicated Support Teams

Information provided by the desktop tools is updated frequently, often daily, to make continuous improvements. Simple changes are reviewed and implemented within 24 hours by 1-2 dedicated information support team resources. More complex changes are prioritized against other requests by the information support team based on their impacts to customer service.

This is one example where the support of the organization is aligned to the customer. If the other departments are not directly serving the customer, they understand that their primary job is to serve those who are. Top priority is given to issues that are apparent to the customer. This aspect reinforces the importance of serving the customer. If the contact center is the only department with that mission, it seems futile to be the best when the support and other touch points with the customer are disconnected.

Operating Procedures and Other Guidance

Procedures and guidelines serve as reference materials to help empowered front-line agents effectively resolve customer issues at the initial point of contact. They are not a substitute for the extensive training and experience that allows agents to exercise sound judgment in making decisions and taking actions in the course of providing customer service. Agent recommendations for needed updates to procedures are continuously solicited. All methods, procedures and other reference materials are on-line and readily available at each workstation. All information is electronically stored, retrieved and communicated.

THE EMERGING MODEL FOR QUALITY MONITORING AND COACHING

As stated early on in this report, following the best practices described here is a great start down the path of differentiating yourself from your competitor. However, findings from our study also helped us shape an emerging model for quality monitoring and coaching. We are excited to share this information with you.

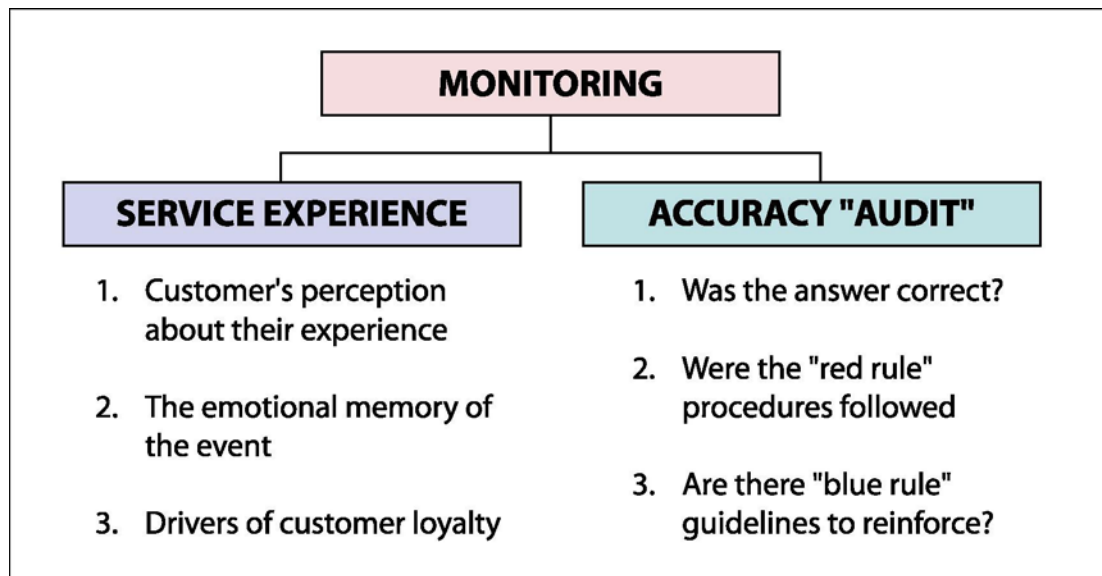
This new model addresses many of the pitfalls addressed previously. Some of those include: there's not enough data to statistically measure an agent's performance; there's not enough time to perform quality monitoring; and the people doing the monitoring must try to evaluate the level of customer satisfaction. How do you know what really makes your customers happy?

The emerging model for quality monitoring acknowledges that, to be effective, we must recognize that customer service is both an art and a science. As such, it must be measured this way. The “artsy” measurement of the **service experience** acknowledges the essentialness of capturing the customers' perception of their service experience. As we've discussed, today, most organizations try to measure agent performance based on what some level of leadership imagines to be the customers' expectations. The potential flaw with this model is that the criteria is based on an internal view of what someone else thinks the customer values. Obviously, no one is better suited to give this kind of feedback than each individual customer. This truth acknowledges that one customer's definition of delightful service is quite likely different than the next one's.

The “scientific” measurement considers the **accuracy of the audit**. Was the correct answer given? Were the “red rules,” those that can never be broken for legal or company reasons, followed? Did the agent display good judgment in some “blue rule” areas? Blue rules are those rules that are established for legitimate reasons but can be bent depending on the situation. Surely, the accuracy of the audit will continue in its importance. Agents may delight their customers but give inaccurate answers to the customers' questions. This is not good service.

Both sides of this model are necessary to building customer loyalty. We are convinced that, while the measurement of audit accuracy will continue in its importance, the trend towards incorporating the customers' voice as the primary half of quality monitoring will gain increasing momentum.

In the emerging model, we actually let the customer assess the call and rate their own satisfaction with the agent. Through surveys, the customer can provide specific feedback regarding what aspects he/she likes or doesn't like. The aspects to measure are the attributes that have a direct correlation to the overall satisfaction of the customer. The customer feedback also helps determine which calls will be monitored.



In the new model, the internal evaluation process incorporates reviewing “failed” service experiences as identified by dissatisfied survey responses. Direct and tailored coaching is then provided to help the agent avoid this issue in the future.

This model uses the customer’s view of the **service experience** as the priority focus of the agent’s coaching. The secondary focus is the **accuracy audit**, the evaluation of the agent’s performance against internal company standards. This approach enables the agent to learn how his or her service was perceived by the customer, as well as how he or she meets internal quality goals. More importantly, it switches the primary focus from compliance to a mindset of “how can I delight the customer?”

Depending on the customer, delighting the customer may require that the agent be able to establish rapport, build loyalty, or manage the customer’s perceptions. The point is to move away from a cookie cutter approach to service excellence and towards the recognition that each customer’s needs are unique. The best agents can adapt their behavior to meet the needs of his or her customers.

We see this approach as being not only a best practice, but we endorse it as the central focus of our new vision for quality monitoring and coaching. We cannot emphasize enough the value of utilizing actual customer feedback. This approach eliminates the leaders’ need to imagine how the customer would have valued his or her interaction. The internal guess work is unnecessary because now the customer provides that feedback directly (and, of course, more accurately). The agent is now evaluated based on the degree to which he or she is able to delight the customer.

This approach is also more cost effective than many other methods of quality monitoring. Instead of using internal resources such as a monitor or supervisor to evaluate countless service experiences, you’ve put the customers to work as evaluators! So your evaluation

results will not only be more accurate, they'll also cost you far less as your customers will evaluate their experience for free.

ADDITIONAL IMPACT FACTORS

The outline below lists the factors which also contributed to the success of the World Class companies in their agent monitoring and coaching process.

Companies that want to significantly improve the results from their agent monitoring and coaching can use this list as a framework.

1. Create the environment where agents are highly valued and respected. Make their satisfaction a priority. Starts with top leadership. Best foundation is “Servant Leadership” principles.
2. Understand that all learning is through “self-discovery”.
3. Hire right. Make it “mean something” to work there. Having an effective screening/testing process increases the odds of success both for the agent and the company. Look for aptitudes that embrace change and individuals who are “lifelong learners.”
4. Train them well. Bite size, then success...repeat. Based on Situational Leadership model of developing confidence and competence.
5. Provide safety net moving into the real world. The training hub sends the message that the company truly cares about their success.
6. Provide instant access to resources. Expert help desk. Also, track contact reasons for continual process improvement.
7. Define clear expectations. What does success look like? How much latitude do the agents have? With more experience and proven judgment, do they earn more trust and latitude?
8. Use the RIGHT metrics!! “What gets measured, gets done.” Focus on first order metrics...why do we really have a customer service department in the first place? To effectively resolve any questions/concerns in a way that builds loyalty and has a positive “brand” impression.

First order metrics:

% top box satisfaction (as measured by the CUSTOMER)

% resolved on 1st contact (as measured by the CUSTOMER)

% of contacts passing audit criteria—providing the right answer and not violating any “red rule” company policies

- Those should be the only measures that tie to performance. Any others should simply be internal gauges to determine the effectiveness of the overall system (i.e., enough resources, call routing, etc.). Examples of these: % of calls transferred, hold times, average speed of answer, abandon rate
9. Invest in the right technology. Ideal is one that captures voice, screen and ACD data. The more information you have, the more insights you'll have on what created the service experience. Also, allows for more specific call selections.
 10. Record everything. Creates the mindset that company takes service seriously and provides high impact information for improvement.
 11. Staff to Peaks and Manage Down. This is key. Having enough resources to be able to pull agents from the phone to learn/grow. Using the Covey quadrant, the majority of their time is in the Important/Urgent quadrant. Any sort of learning is in the Important, but Not Urgent quadrant. It will be time well spent.
 12. Use BNTD (Business Need Time Off) to manage overstaffing. Works well every time. Many more benefits than making sure there is adequate staffing.
 13. Dedicate front-line leadership to agent development. The majority of their role (95+%) should be spent developing the talent on their team. Select the right individuals for this critical role! Their approach can make or break the success of the coaching process.
 14. Ensure that front-line leadership is considered expert in the job and typical customer subjects. Credibility factor is huge. Have them on phones 8 hours/month. Reduces the "position power" separation and builds camaraderie.
 15. Determine what the core competencies are for the position.
 16. Co-evaluate each team member against the core competency criteria.
 17. Provide multiple opportunities for self-discovery. Cannot be emphasized enough.
 18. Determine "why" any agent is not performing the desired way (i.e., "15 reasons employees don't do what they're supposed to do")
 19. Provide examples of excellent service when gap is "don't know what it looks like..."
 20. Understand that in many cases, agents "don't know what they don't know" (i.e., unconsciously incompetent). See reference section.
 21. Have front-line supervisors need to "know" each person on the team. Time spent building rapport, understanding the motivational drivers for each person.

22. Make employee satisfaction a significant success factor for all leadership. Means supervisor satisfaction is factor for managers, etc.
23. Use the “Seven Questions” as a method for measuring climate on monthly basis.
24. Have effective communication systems. As a foundation, use Upward Communication Meetings and ECHO system (every contact has opportunities)
25. Find coaching opportunities through “failed” service experiences (as defined by the CUSTOMER). When customers indicate “dissatisfaction” then determine whether within agent’s control. If yes, review case with agent and co-discovery opportunities for improvement.
26. Audit the cases that are flagged as dissatisfied for accurate process/procedures.
27. Conduct supplemental “spot audits” for agents with little/no dissatisfied cases to ensure consistency.
28. Provide agent-specific reward and recognition programs that 1) rewards top performers 2) encourages developing agents and 3) discourages slackers
29. Reinforce the Coaching Environment. When agents self-select cases to be coached on and ask for advice on how to improve, you’ll know it’s working.
30. Track progress and celebrate success! Make environment one where it’s fun to work, fun to learn and working there means you’re one of the best.

LIST OF VENDORS—TECHNOLOGY & SERVICES

Following are vendors that deliver solutions for call quality monitoring and coaching:

ASC Telecom <www.asctelecom.com>
CadCom Telesystems <www.voicelogger.com>
Data Collection Resources <www.monitoringmadeeasy.com>
Dictaphone <www.dictaphone.com>
Eletech <www.eletech.com>
Envision Telephony <www.click2coach.com>
e-talk <www.e-talk.com>
Eyretel <www.eyretel.com>
Funk Software, Inc. <www.funk.com>
Interactive Intelligence Inc. <www.inin.com>
Iontas <www.iontas.com>
Lanier <www.lanier.com>
MERCOT <www.mercom.com>
Nice Systems <www.nice.com>
Racal Recorders <www.racalrecord.com>
STANCIL Corp. <www.stancilcorp.com>
Tamer Partners <www.tamerpartners.com>
Telecorp Products Inc. <www.telecorpproducts.com>
Telephony@Work, Inc. <www.telephonyatwork.com>
Verint Systems (formerly Comverse Infosys) <www.verintsystems.com>
Voicetronic International <www.voicetronic.com>
Weston Digital Technologies Ltd. <www.weston.co.uk>
Witness Systems <www.witness.com>
Wygant <www.wygant.com>
Voice Logger <www.voicelogger.com>
Voice Print International <www.digitalvoicelogging.com>

APPENDIX A: VENDOR SURVEY

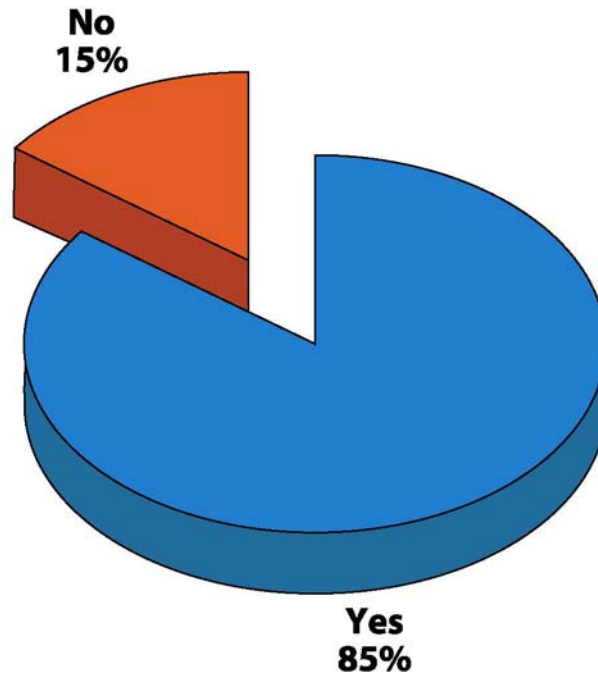
Introduction

The following findings are taken from responses to a survey sent to more than 1200 call centers that are part of the BenchmarkPortal—Purdue University benchmarking community. There were 584 responses to this survey questionnaire.

Survey Questions

For the survey, we asked call center managers to offer their views of the agent quality monitoring and coaching system in use at their center. On the following pages, questions are listed with the compiled results and our interpretation.

Have you implemented a system for agent quality monitoring and coaching for your call center sometime in the past 5 years?

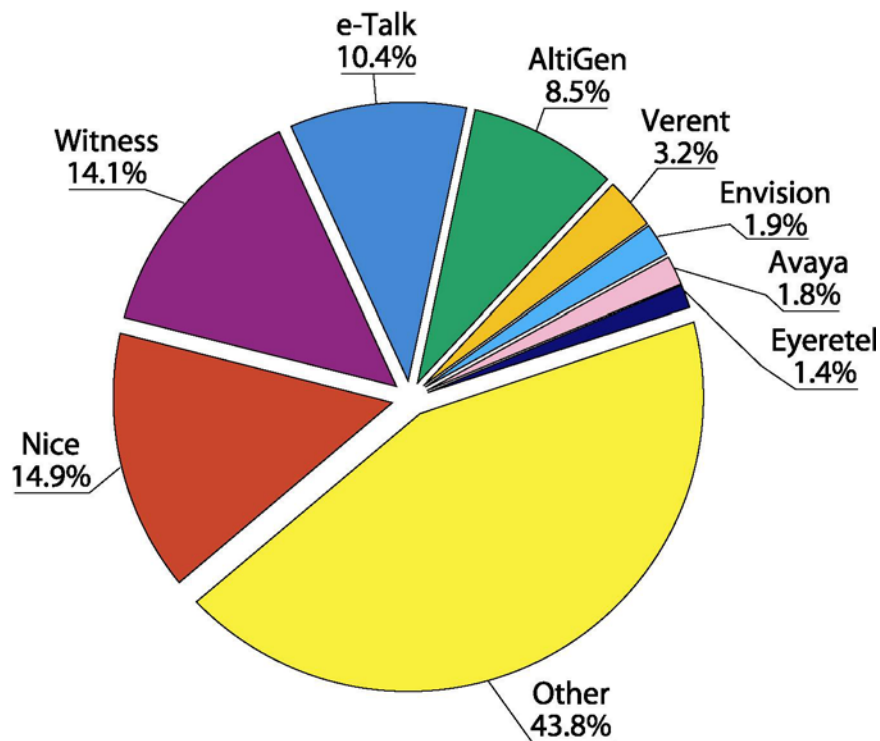


Question 1: Have you implemented a system for agent quality monitoring and coaching for your call center sometime in the past 5 years?

Finding: Almost one out of six respondents indicated that they do not have an agent quality monitoring system implemented in their call center.

Interpretation: Although 85% of the call centers surveyed indicated that they have an agent quality monitoring and coaching system in place, we were astonished to learn that a significant percentage of call centers (based on the statistical results of this survey) are without a system in place.

From which of the following vendors did you purchase the quality monitoring and coaching solution / system?

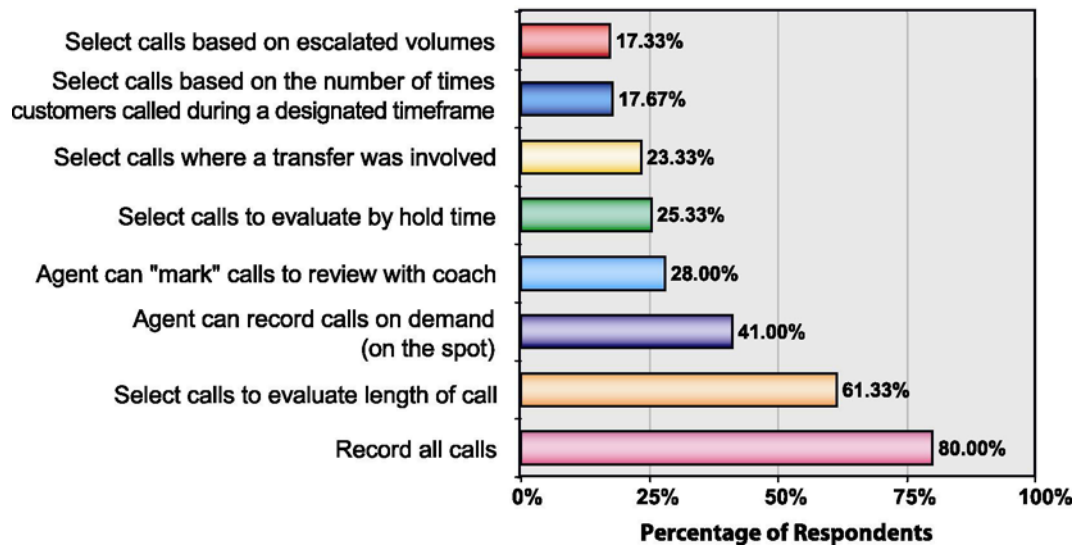


Question 2: From which of the following vendors did you purchase the quality monitoring and coaching solution/system? (AltiGen, Avaya, Envision, e-Talk, Eyeretel, Nice, Verent, Witness, Other)

Finding: Nice and Witness top the list, with e-Talk and Altigen closely following. Verent, Envision, Avaya, and Eyeretel round out the top eight vendors.

Interpretation: Of the respondents who indicated “Other”, most indicated having either a “home-grown” agent monitoring system or having nothing at all.

Which of the following features are you able to perform with your system?

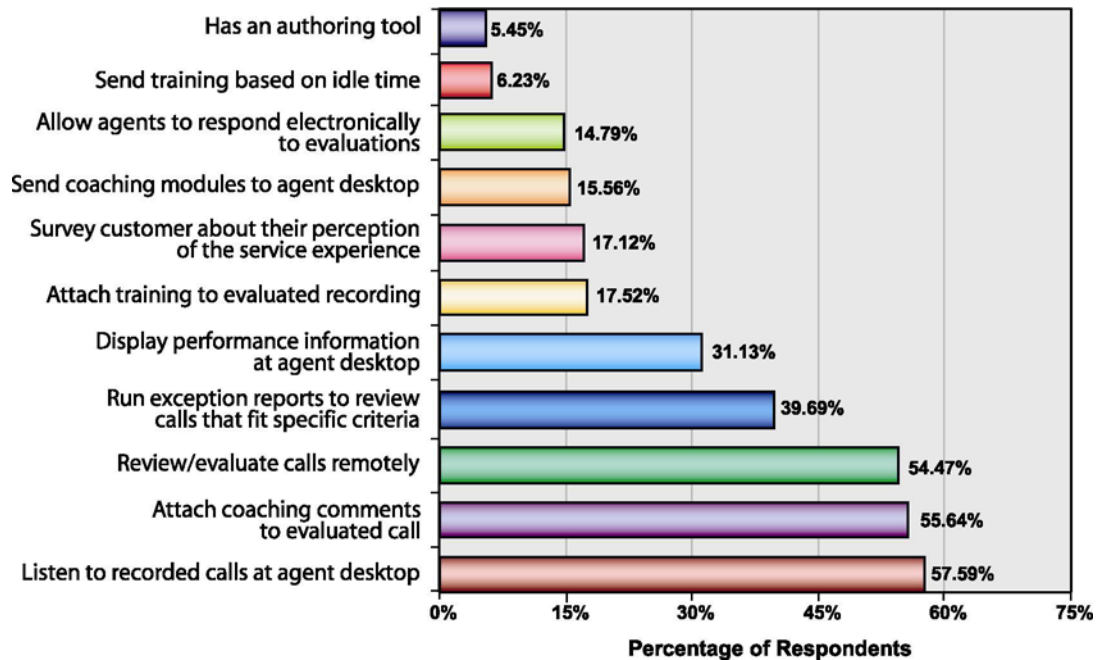


Question 3: Which of the following features are you able to perform with your system? (select all that apply)

Finding: Four out of every five respondents are able to record all calls with their agent quality monitoring and coaching system.

Interpretation: While 80% of the respondents indicated that their quality monitoring and coaching system is able to record all calls, the percentages fall off fairly rapidly with respect to the other features mentioned (see figure above). For example, less than one in five indicated that their system is able to select calls based on volume.

Does your system solution offer any/all of the following features? (select all that apply)

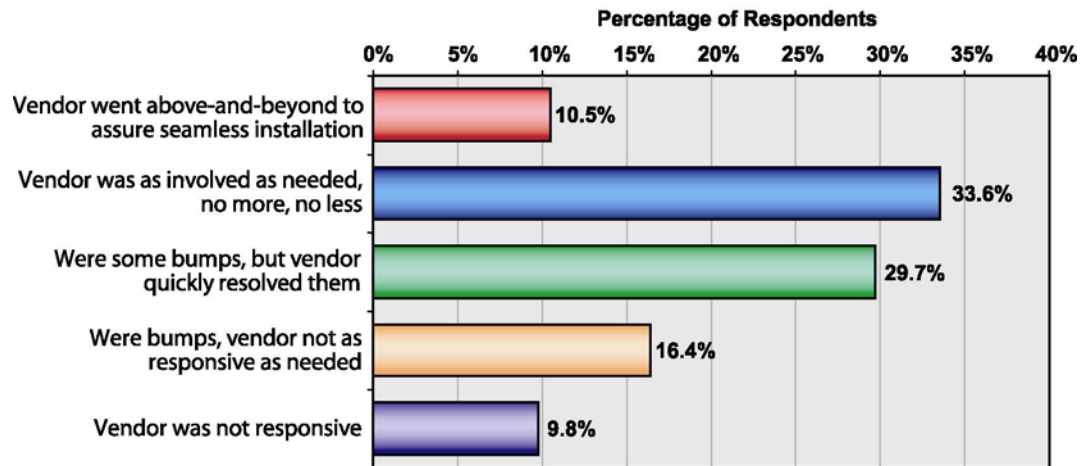


Question 4: Which of the following features does your system solution offer? (select all that apply)

Finding: More than half of the quality monitoring and coaching systems in use offer the option to listen to recorded calls at the agent desktop as well as attach coaching comments to evaluated calls, less than one in six systems allow agents to respond electronically to evaluations.

Interpretation: Features offered by system solution vendors vary widely across the industry, and half of the options listed above are offered by fewer than 18% of the quality monitoring and coaching systems in use.

Describe your overall experience with the vendor during installation of the quality monitoring and coaching solution?

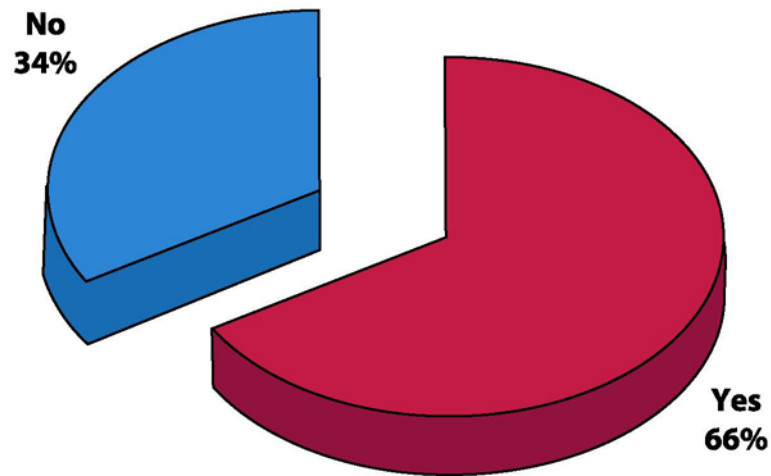


Question 5: Please describe your overall experience with the vendor during installation of the quality monitoring and coaching solution (select one)?

Finding: One-third of the respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their vendor experience during installation, and one out of ten felt that their vendor went above and beyond to assure a seamless installation.

Interpretation: The interesting outcome of this survey response is that more than one-quarter of the call centers responding indicated that they were not satisfied with their vendor experience during installation of their quality monitoring and coaching system.

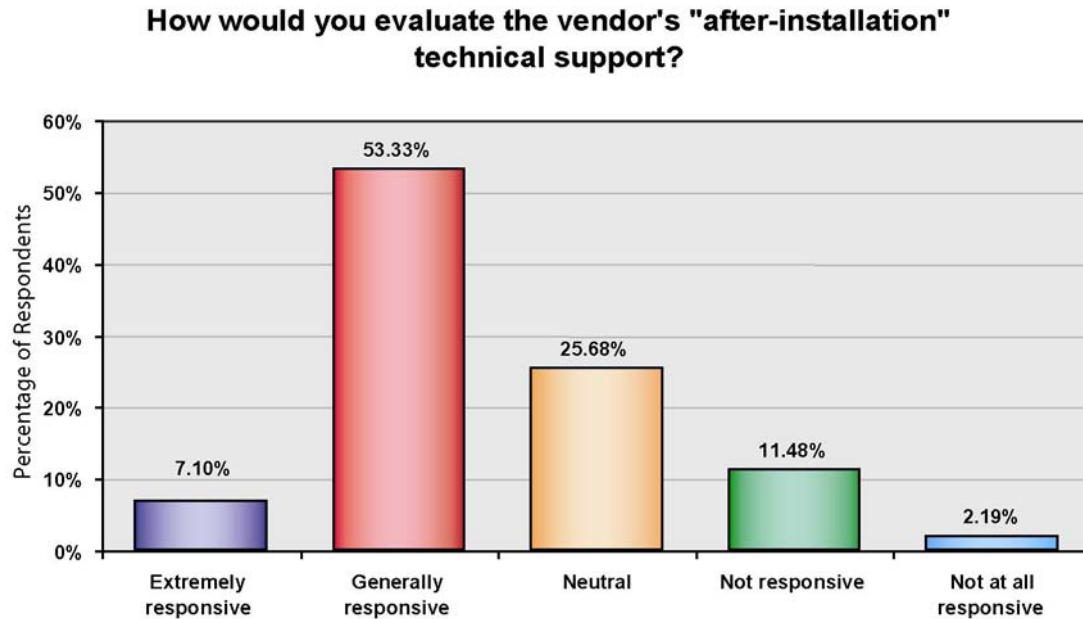
After the installation, have you had any issues that you've needed to get the vendor involved in?



Question 6: After the installation, have you had any issues that you've needed to get the vendor involved in?

Finding: Two-thirds of the respondents have ended up with issues that required vendor involvement to resolve.

Interpretation: Although this survey did not probe further into the nature of the issues that surfaced after installation of the quality monitoring and coaching system solution, such issues may have been training and technology related.

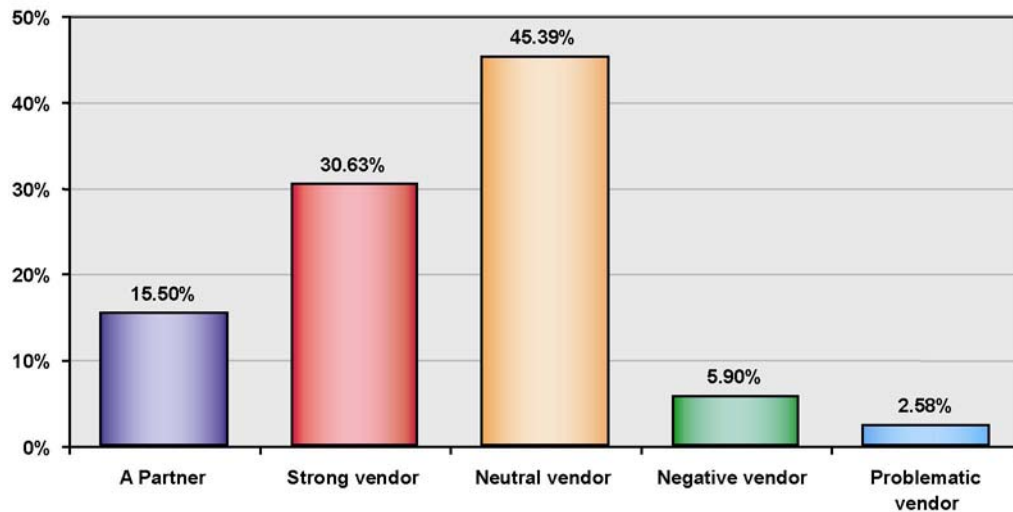


Question 7: How would you evaluate the vendor's "after-installation" technical support (pick one)?

Finding: Over half of the respondents found their vendor's "after-installation" technical support to be generally responsive.

Interpretation: With over 39% of the vendor's "after-installation" technical support ranging from "neutral" to "not responsive at all", it is clear that there is plenty of room for customer satisfaction improvement for vendors in this market.

Which of the following statements best describes your vendor's overall approach to their relationship with you?



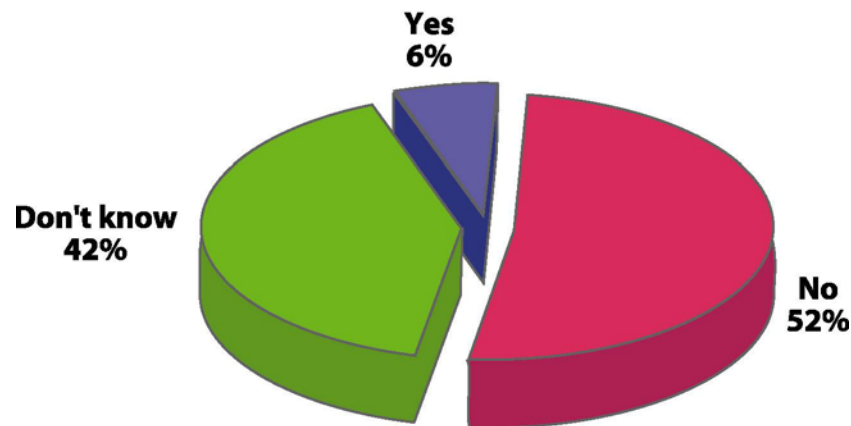
Question 8: Which of the following statements best describes your vendor's overall approach to their relationship with you? (pick one)

- A Partner
- Strong vendor
- Neutral vendor
- Negative vendor
- Problematic vendor

Finding: Over 45% of the respondents rated their relationship with their vendor as positive.

Interpretation: More than half of the respondents were neutral or negative in their feelings about their vendor relationship.

**Was a return-on-investment (ROI)
projection used to justify the purchase?**

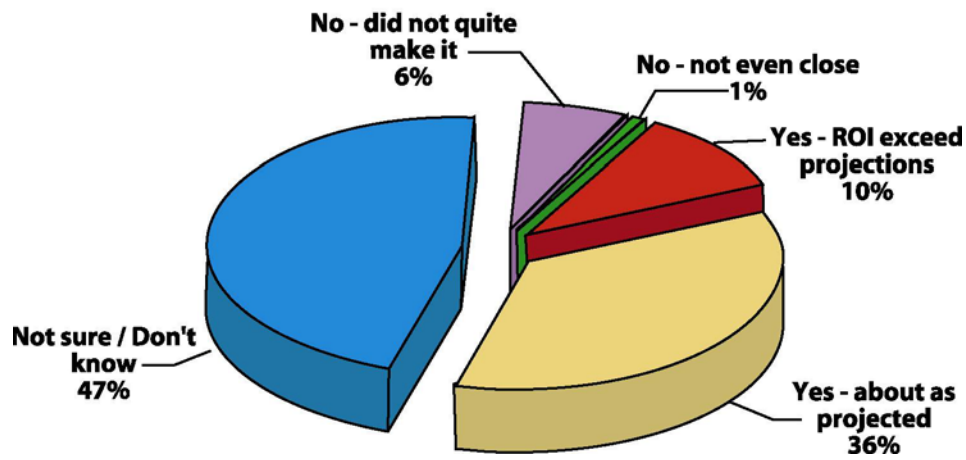


Question 9: Was a return-on-investment (ROI) projection used to justify the purchase?

Finding: Only 6% of the call centers surveyed reported that they conducted an ROI projection to justify the purchase of their quality monitoring and coaching system.

Interpretation: Although ROI projection is not the only reason that companies may use to justify their investment in a quality coaching and monitoring system solution, it is generally true that companies do not make major financial investments in systems without some form of cost justification.

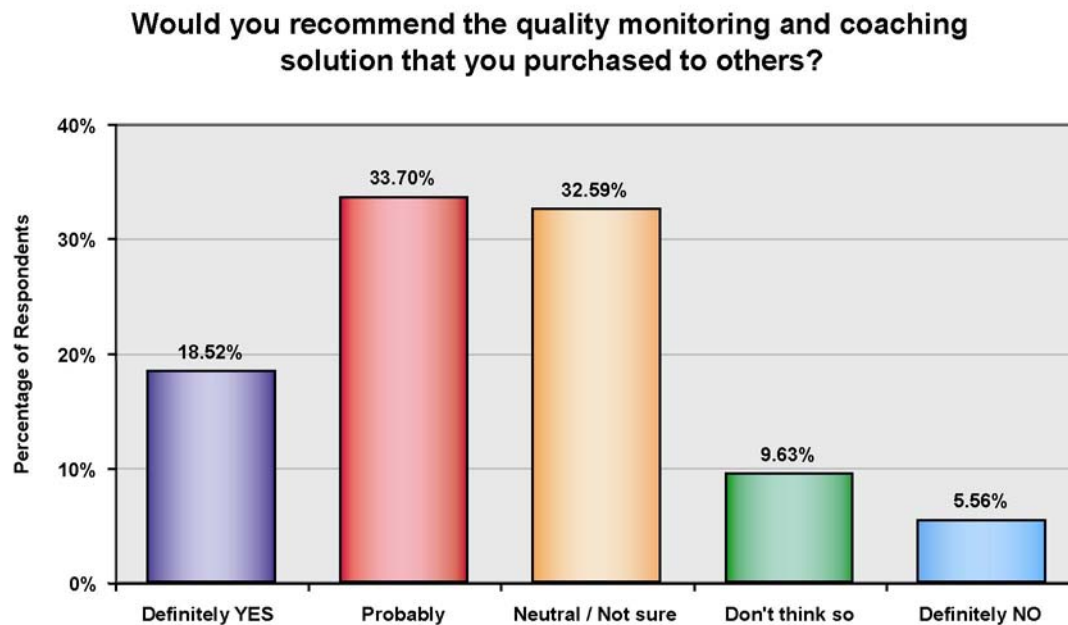
Did you achieve the ROI that you had projected for the quality monitoring and coaching solution that you purchased?



Question 10: Did you achieve the ROI that you had projected for the quality monitoring and coaching solution that you purchased?

Finding: 7% of the respondents indicated that the quality monitoring and coaching system they purchased failed to meet their ROI projections, while 10% reported that their system implementation exceeded their ROI projections.

Interpretation: Setting aside the 47% of respondents who weren't sure or didn't know, it is refreshing to find that all but 7% of those who conducted an ROI assessment felt that their investment was justified and achieved their ROI projections, and that of the percentage that didn't, only 1% found that the system didn't even come close to meeting their projections.

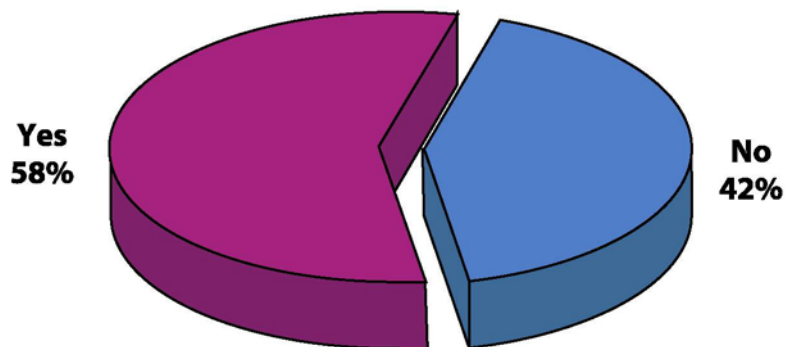


Question 11: Would you recommend the quality monitoring and coaching solution that you purchased to others?

Finding: Over 50% of the respondents indicated that they would recommend the quality monitoring and coaching solution they purchase to someone else.

Interpretation: Just as dramatic as the finding above is the just-under 50% of the respondents who would not recommend the quality monitoring and coaching solution they purchased to someone else. There appears to be plenty of room for improvement in this industry solution segment.

Are you planning to purchase a quality monitoring and coaching solution in the next 12 months?



Question 12: Are you planning to purchase a quality monitoring and coaching solution in the next 12 months?

Finding: 58% of the survey respondents indicated that they intend to purchase a quality monitoring and coaching solution within the next year.

Interpretation: Given the responses to earlier questions in this survey, it is likely that those planning to purchase quality monitoring and coaching solutions include those who are dissatisfied with the system they are presently using. Vendors take note: If you suspect that your customers are numbered among those who expressed dissatisfaction in this survey with the system they are using and their vendor relationship, now is the time to act. You might begin by using your own technological solutions to find out how to improve your customer relationships.

APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE

Purdue University Center for Customer-Driven Quality Monitoring & Coaching Study Benchmark Questionnaire			
Section	Description	Enter Your Answer in the Green Fields	
	Company Name Industry Number of seats Number of FTEs Number of sites Address City State Zip Code Phone Number Phone Extension Number (if applicable) FAX Number Company Website Contact Center Toll Free Number	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div>	
	Are you participating because you feel your company is currently using world class monitoring and coaching methods or because you would like to know more about what others are doing in this area? 5 - We have an excellent method and others could learn from it 4 - We have a basically solid method that works most of the time for us. Not necessarily anything to highlight specifically 3 - We have a fairly typical method. It generally works. 2 - Our methods need some work. We are looking to learn from others. 1 - We need help. Don't adopt our methods.	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div>	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div>
1	Call Types Of the following choices, what kind of calls does your call center handle? Only inbound calls Only outbound calls Both inbound and outbound calls When "both" please provide percent split between inbound and outbound <div style="text-align: right;">Inbound:</div> <div style="text-align: right;">Outbound:</div>	Please check the box next to your answer <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <i>Please answer in the spaces below</i> <div></div> <div></div>	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div>
2	Agent function Which of the following functions do your TSRs provide regarding inbound calls? Advising/Consulting <i>Fill in the percentage of calls where majority of time is spent advising or consulting</i>	<div></div> <div></div>	<div></div> <div></div>

Best Practices in Quality Monitoring and Coaching

2	continued	Complaint resolution		%
		<i>Fill in the percentage of calls that are dedicated to resolving customers' complaints (the complaints do not have to originate from a transaction with the call center).</i>		
		Consumer affairs		%
		<i>Fill in the percentage of calls that are general inquiries about your products or services. An example would be calls prompted by your 800 number on your product encouraging customer feedback.</i>		
		Customer service (questions and inquiries)		%
		<i>Fill in the percentage of calls that are general customer service calls, that do not specifically match the other options available within this question.</i>		
		Dispatching		%
		<i>Fill in the percentage of calls dedicated to dispatching calls, equipment, or personnel.</i>		
		Technical support to internal customers (helpdesk)		%
		<i>Fill in the percentage of calls dedicated to resolving technical issues for other employees</i>		
		Inside sales		%
		<i>Fill in the percentage of calls that require a "sales pitch" before the sale can be completed.</i>		
		Order taking and tracking		%
		<i>Fill in the percentage of calls dedicated to taking orders (no sales pitch required) and/or tracking the progress and delivery of such orders.</i>		
Information requests		%		
<i>Fill in the percentage of calls that are requests for specific information that do not match the other options provided within this question.</i>				
Public relations		%		
<i>Fill in the percentage of calls specific to public relations and company image.</i>				
Reservations		%		
<i>Fill in the percentage of calls specific to taking and making reservations.</i>				
Technical support to external customers		%		
<i>Fill in the percentage of calls related to technical support to external customers.</i>				
Other		%		
<i>Fill in the percentage of calls that are another function that does not match any of the options provided. Any data entered in this option will not be included in the benchmark study.</i>				
Total (This must total to 100%)		0.00	%	
3	Outbound reasons	Which of the following functions do your TSRs provide regarding outbound calls?		
		Outbound telemarketing		%
		Lead generation		%
		Collections		%
		Customer satisfaction surveys		%
		Follow-up to inbound calls		%
		Follow-up to forms received from customers		%
		Market research		%
		Other		%
		Total (This must total to 100%)	0.00	%

4	Call volumes	Approximately how many calls are handled by your contact center per year?		
		Calls handled per year		
5	E-mail volumes	Approximately how many emails are handled by your contact center per year?		
		Emails handled per year		
		<i>Fill in the number of all emails handled, not including automatic acknowledgements</i>		
6	B to B?	How do these inbound calls break down in the following two categories:		
		Business to business (<i>in per cent</i>)		
		Business to consumer (<i>in per cent</i>)		
		Total (<i>This must total to 100%</i>)	0.00	%
7	System	What monitoring software do you use in the center?		
		Monitoring software. Fill in the actual system used (I.e. Witness, e-Talk, etc). Please answer in the space below:		
		How satisfied are you with that application?		
		5 - Very satisfied		
		4 - Satisfied		
		3 - Neutral		
		2 - Dissatisfied		
		1 - Very dissatisfied		
		What are the pros of the system you have? Please answer in the space below:		
		What are the cons of the system you have? Please answer in the space below:		
		Would you recommend your system to other companies? Please answer in the space below:		
		What has been the greatest impact since implementing your software? Please answer in the space below:		
8	Agent awareness	Do the agents know they are being recorded (at time of calls actually being recorded?)	Yes or no	
		Do your agents sign any sort of formal agreement to be recorded?	Yes or no	

Best Practices in Quality Monitoring and Coaching

9	Audit volume	How many calls does each agent handle per month (on average)? <i>Fill in an actual average number (per FTE)</i>		Week - Month
		How many calls are audited/scored each month?		
		How many calls monitored each month?		
		Are any outbound calls monitored?		Yes or no
		Is there different criteria (i.e. # of audits, etc.) for various levels (i.e. Tier One vs. Tier Two)?		Yes or no
	If yes, please explain. Please answer in the space below:			
		Is there different criteria (i.e. # of audits, etc.) for agents that have proven themselves (i.e. consistently score exceptionally well)?		Yes or no
	If yes, please explain. Please answer in the space below:			
		Are there any other call/inquiry evaluations done? (i.e. side-by-side, etc.)		Yes or no
If yes, please describe. Please answer in the space below:				
10	Selection criteria	How are the calls/inquiries to be monitored selected?	<i>Please make a choice from the selection under the "Click here." We also welcome your comments.</i>	Yes or no
	Please enter your comments in the space below:			
	Are the agents involved (in any way) in selecting the calls/inquires evaluated?			Yes or no
	If yes, please explain. Please answer in the space below:			
11	Evaluation criteria	What criteria is used to evaluate the call/inquiry?		
	Evaluation criteria for calls. Describe the factors used to evaluate each call/inquiry. Please enter your comments in the space below:			
	Evaluation criteria for emails. Please enter your comments in the space below:			

11	continued	Evaluation criteria for case management (if applicable). Please enter your comments in the space below: If formal evaluation 'program' - which one? Please provide the name of the evaluation system (i.e. MAGIC, Telephone doctor, etc) in the space below: 			
12	Who audits?	Who actually does the evaluations of the calls/inquiries? <i>Describe the detailed process for conducting the evaluations (i.e. is there a separate QA team? Does the first line supervisor record and evaluate?) Please enter your comments in the space below:</i> 			
13	Auditor selection	How are call/inquiry evaluators selected? Please answer in the space below: <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Are the evaluators given specific training?</td> <td>Yes or no</td> </tr> </table> If yes, please explain in the space below: What is the ratio of 'auditor' to agents Please answer in the space below: If evaluator is other than the first line supervisor (see above), how do they ensure consistency between QA and supervisor? Please answer in the space below: Process for consistency between QA team and direct supervisor. Looking for method used (i.e. communication, etc.) so that coaching areas are consistent Please answer in the space below: 		Are the evaluators given specific training?	Yes or no
Are the evaluators given specific training?	Yes or no				

Best Practices in Quality Monitoring and Coaching

14	Agent feedback	Who provides the feedback from the audits to the agent?	
		Please answer in the space below:	
		Does that same person provide coaching for improvement?	Yes or no
15	Feedback timeliness	How often does the agent receive the results from his/her audits?	
		Please answer in the space below:	
		How timely are the audits done relative to the original call/inquiry?	
		Please answer in the space below:	
		How timely is the feedback to the agent from the time of the audit?	
		Please answer in the space below:	
16	Expectations of agents on results	What does the agent do with the feedback given?	For example, is the agent expected to help create a plan for closing any performance gaps?
		Please answer in the space below:	
		How are improvements in performance monitored?	
		Please answer in the space below:	
		Do you train on soft skills in the initial agent training?	Yes or no
		If yes, how much time is spent training soft skills (i.e. basic customer service/call handling skills) for new hires?	
		If yes, please explain in the space below:	
		Is there any ongoing training for experienced agents? If yes, please explain	Yes or no
If yes, please explain in the space below:			

16	continued	If you train soft skills in the agent initial training, do you use a formal 'program' for it?		Yes or no
If yes, what is the name of the program you use? Please explain in the space below:				
		After being coached on a specific area, is there a specific focus on that areas on future audits?		Yes or no
If yes, please explain in the space below:				
		Are agents with performance issues managed the same as standard performers?		Yes or no
If no, please use the space below to explain the differences (and length of time involved)				
		Are there any audits that are excluded from the agents performance rating (relative to audits)?		Click Here
17	Fairness Factors	Is there any sort of 'appeal' process if the agent disagrees with the audit evaluation?		Yes or no
If yes, please explain in the space below:				
		Are there any situations when you don't hold the agent accountable for the result of the call? (example: customer gets upset due to a strict policy that the agent is upholding)		Yes or no
If yes, please explain in the space below:				
		Is there some sort of calibration process?		Yes or no
If yes, please explain in the space below:				
How often are calibrations done? Please explain in the space below:				
		If calibrations are done, how widely do you calibrate (i.e. immediate groups, across and entire location, across the entire enterprise, etc.)		Yes or no

17	continued			
		Who leads (or 'owns') the calibration process? Please explain in the space below:		
		How are disagreements resolved? Please explain in the space below:		
		Is there an acceptable range for score difference in 'scores' when calibrating?		Yes or no
		How is the acceptable level of variance determined? Please explain in the space below:		
		How are variance differences resolved? Please explain in the space below:		
18	Agent success metrics	What are the agents' primary metrics of focus?		
		Please describe the primary performance measures that the agent is held accountable for (i.e. Top Box results on surveys, Avg talk time, etc.) Please explain in the space below:		
		What criteria is used for the agents' annual review?		
		Please describe the actual categories used on the annual performance evaluation (i.e. productivity, quality, attendance, etc.) Please explain in the space below:		
		Is the criteria weighted? If so, what are the weights?	Yes or no	
		If there is a heavier emphasis on some of the criteria on the annual review, please outline here. For example, if quality is worth 25% of the overall rating and attendance is 15%, etc. Please explain in the space below:		

19	Rewards and recognition	Is there any type of reward and recognition system for agents?		Yes or no
		If yes, please explain in the space below:		
		Please also describe the compensation options available to your agents (i.e. base pay, incentives, recognition awards, etc.) Please explain in the space below:		
		If yes, how effective do you consider your current rewards & recognition program? Please explain in the space below:		
		How do you determine the program's effectiveness (i.e. driving agent performance; linking to key performance/quality measures to your rewards/recognition programs, etc.) Please explain in the space below:		
		How do you link performance/quality measures to your rewards/recognition program? Please explain in the space below:		
20	Agent perceptions	Do you measure how the agents feel about the monitoring and coaching process?		Yes or no
		If yes, please explain in the space below:		
		What would the agents say is the #1 focus within the center? Please explain in the space below:		
21	Tie to Customer Satisfaction	Do you capture feedback directly from customers on their satisfaction level with the interaction?		Yes or no
		If yes, how is that information collected? Please explain in the space below:		
		Is the feedback collected for each individual agent?		Yes or no
		How is that feedback shared with the agents? Please explain in the space below:		

Best Practices in Quality Monitoring and Coaching

21	continued	Is there any sort of tie to the customer feedback and the internal audit of the call/inquiry?		Yes or no
		If yes, please explain in the space below:		
		Do you capture any ACD statistics about the call/inquiry for either the internal call/inquiry audit or the customer satisfaction rating?		Yes or no
		If yes, how is that information used? Please explain in the space below:		
		What are the key drivers of customer satisfaction (i.e. what do you focus on most) Please explain in the space below:		
		Are your customer satisfaction results used as a competitive differentiator?		Yes or no
		If yes, please explain in the space below:		
22	Center specific	What are the metrics used to evaluate the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the center?		
		(Example) Metric	Average talk time	
		(Example) Goal	4 min	
		Comments	currently 5.5 min	
		Metric		
		Goal		
		Comments		
		Metric		
		Goal		
		Comments		
		Metric		
		Goal		
		Comments		
		Metric		
		Goal		
		Comments		

22	continued	Metric		
		Goal		
		Comments		
		Metric		
		Goal		
		Comments		
		Metric		
		Goal		
		Comments		
		Metric		
		Goal		
		Comments		
		Metric		
		Goal		
		Comments		
		Metric		
		Goal		
		Comments		
23	Leadership	What is the ratio of agents to each direct supervisor? (i.e. 1:?) Please answer to the right.		
		What percent of the direct supervisor's time is spent recording and evaluating inquiries? (approximately). Please explain in the space below:		
		What percent of the direct supervisor's time is spent coaching their agents? (approximately) Please explain in the space below:		
		What percent of the direct supervisor's time is spent coaching their agents? (approximately) Please explain in the space below:		

Best Practices in Quality Monitoring and Coaching

24	Company	Does anyone outside the center listen to calls?		Yes or no
		<p>In some cases, marketing or executives periodically listen to calls or even have a 'listening room' to stay in touch with customers' issues. If yes, please describe in the space below:</p>		
		Are there any legal considerations for your center?		Yes or no
		If yes, please explain in the space below:		
		<p>What is the company philosophy around monitoring and coaching? Please explain in the space below:</p> <p>Please describe the 'unwritten' value of monitoring and coaching at your company. For example, does the company believe it is a critical aspect of delivering exceptional service or do they consider it a 'necessary evil' (or something in between)</p>		
		How easy is it to have service improvement initiatives approved in your organization? Please explain in the space below:		
		<p>Scale: 1 - Extremely difficult; 2 - Difficult; 3 - Neutral; 4 - Not difficult; 5 - Easy - Feel free to qualify if it's easy up to a certain dollar amount, etc.</p>		
		Do you feel you have an appropriate staffing level for the inquiry volume/type handled?		
		<p>Please note that this question refers to the staffing level you believe is needed to provide consistently excellent service (not necessarily the budgeted staffing level). Please add comments in the space below:</p> <p>Scale: 1 - Almost always understaffed; 2 - Rarely staffed appropriately; 3 - At the optimum staffing level half of the time; 4 - Almost always staffed at an appropriate right level; 5 - Always staffed at the appropriate level</p>		
		What is the primary purpose of your call/agent monitoring program? Please rank the items below from highest to lowest (1 = low, 2 = medium, 3 = high)		
		Performance improvement tool		
		Performance assessment tool		
		Performance management tool		
		To identify top issues for customer contacts		
		To identify broken processes within organization		
		For legal protection (i.e. all calls recorded)		
		Other (please describe)		
		How does your company know that it's doing well? (i.e. what metrics are used to define success?) Please explain in the space below:		
		Is there any process to ensure that audits are being done as expected?		Yes or no

25	Continuous improvement	Is there any formal process to make changes/improvements to other parts of the company based on results from inquiries?		Yes or no
		How are the training programs/deliverables linked to the audit scores		
		If yes, please explain in the space below:		
		Do you have any measurement of improvements that occurred because of the monitoring and coaching?		Yes or no
		Any measurable differences in metrics, such as top box scores or increased production since implementation?		
26	Outsourcers Only	Does the client have direct access to monitor at will?		Yes or no
		What level of detail is shared with the client? Please explain in the space below:		
27	Open Opinion	Are there other factors that you think significantly contribute to the success of your monitoring and coaching method? Please describe in the space below:		
		Thank you very much for your time and effort in completing this survey!		

APPENDIX C: REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHIES

The BenchmarkPortal team members, Dr. Jon Anton and Anita Rockwell, play an important role for BenchmarkPortal in conducting field research on process best practices. BenchmarkPortal conducts best practice research in all of the following processes that support quality call and e-mail handling:

- Pre-hire aptitude and attitude screening
- Initial and on-going training
- Call forecasting and workforce management
- Quality monitoring and agent coaching
- Supervisor training
- Call center management training
- Key performance indicators
- Caller satisfaction measurement
- Agent satisfaction measurement
- Customer experience management
- Customer self-service

Co-Author



Dr. Jon Anton (also known as “Dr. Jon”) is the director of benchmark research at Purdue University’s Center for Customer-Driven Quality. He specializes in enhancing customer service strategy through inbound call centers, and e-business centers, using the latest in telecommunications (voice), and computer (digital) technology. He also focuses on using the Internet for external customer access, as well as Intranets and middleware.

Since 1995, Dr. Jon has been the principal investigator of the Purdue University Call Center Benchmark Research. This data is now collected at the BenchmarkPortal.com Web site, where it is placed into a data warehouse that currently contains over ten million data points on call center performance. Based on the analysis of this data, Dr. Jon authors the following monthly publications: “The Purdue Page” in *Call Center Magazine*, “Dr. Jon’s Benchmarks” in *Call Center News*, “Dr. Jon’s Industry Statistics” in *Customer Interface Magazine*, and “Dr. Jon’s Business Intelligence” in the *Call Center Manager’s Report*.

Dr. Jon has assisted over 400 companies in improving their customer service strategy/delivery by the design and implementation of inbound and outbound call centers, as well as in the decision-making process of using teleservice providers for maximizing

service levels while minimizing costs per call. In August of 1996, *Call Center Magazine* honored Dr. Jon by selecting him as an Original Pioneer of the emerging call center industry. In October of 2000, Dr. Jon was named to the Call Center Hall of Fame. In January of 2001, Dr. Jon was selected for the industry's "Leaders and Legends" Award by Help Desk 2000. Dr. Jon is also a member of the National Committee for Quality Assurance.

Dr. Jon has guided corporate executives in strategically re-positioning their call centers as robust customer access centers through a combination of benchmarking, re-engineering, consolidation, outsourcing, and Web-enablement. The resulting single point of contact for the customer allows business to be conducted anywhere, anytime, and in any form. By better understanding the customer lifetime value, Dr. Jon has developed techniques for calculating the ROI for customer service initiatives.

Dr. Jon has published 96 papers on customer service and call center methods in industry journals. In 1997, one of his papers on self-service was awarded the best article of the year by *Customer Relationship Management Magazine*.

Dr. Jon has published twenty-two professional books:

Managing Web-Based Customer Experiences: Self-service Integrated with Assisted Service, The Anton Press, 2003

From Cost to Profit Center: How Technology Enables the Difference, The Anton Press, 2003

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Dr. Jon is the editor for a series of professional books entitled *Customer Access Management*, published by the Purdue University Press.

Dr. Jon's formal education was in technology, including a Doctorate of Science and a Master of Science from Harvard University, a Master of Science from the University of Connecticut, and a Bachelor of Science from the University of Notre Dame. He also completed a three-summer intensive Executive Education program in Business at the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University.

Dr. Jon can be reached at 765.494.8357 or at <DrJonAnton@BenchmarkPortal.com>.

Co-Author



Anita Rockwell is the Director of Business Intelligence at BenchmarkPortal, Inc. She is a Purdue University certified contact center auditor specializing in assisting contact center managers in optimally integrating people with processes and technology. Anita's primary passion is around creating the optimal environment in the contact center, with a special emphasis on the dynamics required to release the potential of each team member. In 2001, Anita co-authored a popular professional book called, "Minimizing Agent Turnover" with Dr. Jon Anton.

Anita's other core competencies include all of the following human resource challenges: 1) recruiting and screening, 2) hiring and training, 3) employee development, 4) organizational structure, 5) agent monitoring, coaching, and motivation, 6) change management, customer satisfaction surveys, and finally 7) agent quality measurement and benchmarking.

Anita has also developed a proven methodology to first discover the root causes of workflow process problems in a customer service contact center (including telephone and e-mails), and then to recommend specific solutions to improve efficiency and effectiveness to acceptable, best practice levels.

Anita was the Vice President of Customer Service with Simon Delivers.com where she designed, implemented, and managed an inbound customer service contact center for customer support.

Anita also spent sixteen years with the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota where she was quickly promoted to Vice President of Customer Service, which included all aspects of customer contact management. In this capacity she was responsible for over 1 million members, 235 employees, 7 regional offices and an annual budget of over \$10 million. Anita lists the following as her major accomplishments while with the Blue Cross and Blue Shield organization:

1. Re-organized the division, and championed technology enhancements.
2. Increased percent of inquiries resolved on first contact by 20%.
3. Increased customer satisfaction for regional service team from 75% to 87% in less than a year.
4. Dramatically reduced service employee turnover rate from over 50% to under 10% and improved employee satisfaction to a level 15% above the company average.
5. Developed and piloted first Intelligent Customer Service Workstation to streamline service delivery.
6. Increased market share in the region she managed grew from 45.5% to 49.5%.
7. Developed innovative client review tool that resulted in the identification of 250 initiatives to improve service.
8. Developed, implemented and directed one of the company's first successful pay-for-performance initiatives which increased claims productivity by over 20% while incurring no additional costs.
9. Developed processes and tools that enhanced effectiveness of the team resulting in the retention of key provider partners and turning around the satisfaction ratings of the providers with her company.
10. Worked directly with a Senior Vice President and CIO and other senior staff members on key corporate projects as part of the company's overall performance improvement strategy.

Anita graduated Cum Laude from Bethel College with a Bachelors Degree in Business Management with an emphasis in Organizational Studies. She is also currently working toward her Masters in psychology.

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