

Embracing transformation in the contact centre



We live in an era of big social change. Adaptation of contact centres is required more than ever because of the consequences of Brexit, pandemic, conflict and the cost of living crisis all contributing to changing customer and adviser needs. Go back a little further and we see the consumer shift towards the internet also having profound consequences for the contact centre.

Many of the simple call types have now gone onto the customer portal, meaning that onboarding new starters can be harder or take longer, and keeping top performing experienced advisers is more important than ever.

Social change is accelerating and keeping customers and colleagues satisfied is the reason that good transformation is so important for contact centres. In this Good Practice Guide, we'll explore three simple ways to positively embrace transformation enabling you to deliver proactive improvements that can lead to increased efficiency and service improvement.

1) Own the desire to improve

In some organisations the contact centre can be an afterthought. Change can arrive as an instruction from the organisation without consultation with the contact centre operation. Sometimes contact centre leaders get instructed at the point of delivery of the change, and not at the design of the change. Sometimes the contact centre doesn't get informed at all.

The most obvious example of this is when a communication about a change to the service goes out to customers and the contact centre finds out about it from customers.

The contact centre has the insights to be able to take

responsibility for setting the change agenda. Leaders can create a well thought out strategy of the improvement areas that are needed, along with the tactical actions that will deliver it and the metrics to monitor progress.

The strategy may consider these areas that can be used to build a case that leaders outside of the contact centre will support:

- Revenue enhancement
- Cost reduction
- Colleague satisfaction
- Customer satisfaction

Appreciating that not all contact centres will be able to influence revenue enhancement, most will be able to reduce costs and give an improved customer or colleague experience. In today's world of highly competitive recruitment anything a contact centre can do to improve the colleague journey is likely to have a good return on investment.

It is also likely that a frontline colleague in the contact centre will have an idea worth exploring and it is vital that that these voices are heard. Encouraging suggestions from all parts of the contact centre is good practice, new colleagues or junior colleagues often have the best improvement ideas but may not be heard.

Not all suggestions sound like recommendations or are expressed positively, often a point raised as a negative observation can be inverted into a great suggestion. When you hear someone say “I keep getting problems with”, that might be the need, and opportunity, to develop an improvement that has high impact. A Colleague Forum or Pre Shift Brief could be the safe space where problems could develop into ideas.

Wherever the suggestions emanate from, where possible, make sure that your contact centre is owning improvement.

2) Use common sense to support a delivery methodology

Modern business often use language that references methodologies. Transformation discussions are even more likely to be linked to some of these methodologies, and it is unlikely that all contact centres will have access to trained practitioners of a particular methodology from within their own ranks.

Apply common sense here. Contact centre professionals are experts in supporting customers through their journey. Transformation professionals are experts in helping other parts of the organisation deliver improvements that have meaningful impacts. The use of the right methodology can help the delivery, the use of the wrong methodology can impede the delivery.

Using common sense, any key changes should be led by a Transformation Team that includes relevant contact centre representatives and people from across the business to make the improvement more likely to have a successful outcome. Sometimes Transformation Teams make change excessively complicated, when a structured and well-managed approach can deliver change quickly. Transformation Teams come in various guises:

- A Contact Centre Improvement Team.
A dedicated team within the contact centre tasked with delivering improvements to just the contact centre.
- A Centralised Transformation Team. A shared resource within the organisation tasked with delivering improvements across the whole organisation.
- External transformation consultants engaged either by the organisation or the contact centre to provide specific assistance.
- A contact centre leadership team wanting to make continuous changes without any dedicated assistance.

Depending on the scale of the change you are embarking on will determine the approach you take. Crucially, ensure your contact centre is getting the support it needs.

As well as having the right approach to the project team, it's worth considering the styles for improvement delivery, for example, waterfall, iterative or hybrid.

Briefly, waterfall is a classic date driven project such as the construction of a building, iterative makes progress through successive refinement such as software development and hybrid is a change that has elements of both waterfall and iterative.

When making improvements in a contact centre setting, we typically embrace aspects of people, process, technology, data and reporting and again typically we can expect the delivery style to be hybrid as it is likely that some aspects will use waterfall and other aspects will use iterative delivery mechanisms.

Whatever language or methodology is used make sure common sense prevails and the contact centre gets an outcome that is beneficial.

3) Good improvements take time and effort before and after

Improvements require resources and persistence to get the outcomes needed. Mainly, organisations can identify problems, conceptualise what a solution may look like and create a solid plan to deliver the improvement. Really embedding the change into the operation can be the most difficult aspect, and will take patience and the ability to adapt to a changing environment in order to create a new norm.

Get the change baked into operational life and the benefit will stay delivered and outcomes keep flowing. If the intended change gets diluted, or forgotten, then the benefits will become undermined. Tenacity here is the key, make sure that your contact centre embeds the change through strong leadership and coaching.

These three simple steps may help your contact centre move towards a culture of continuous improvement, able to delight customers and attract and retain top talent.