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Business Solutions and Technology

Improving Contact Center Performance – Where Do We Start and How Do We Get There?
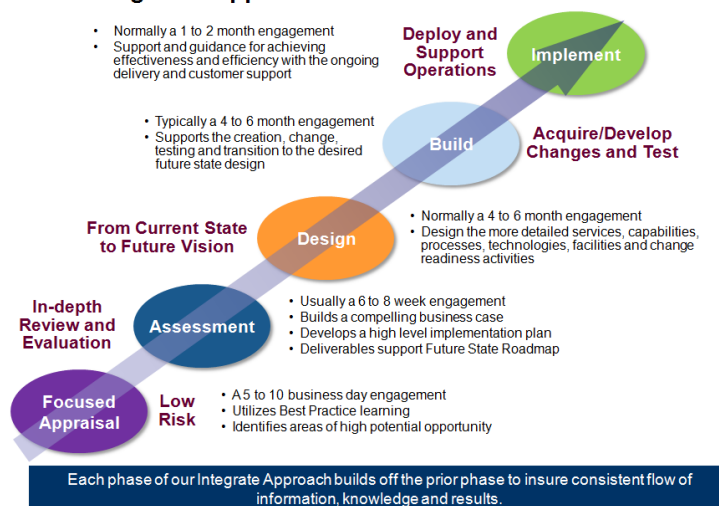
By **Michael V. Lauro**
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Contact center performance metrics (service level, abandonment, first contact resolution, contact quality, etc) are key factors influencing customer satisfaction and the success of the organization or company. When these metrics are lagging, an Integrated Approach methodology should be utilized to address all aspects of the contact center operations, processes and technology to deliver the desired improved results. Whatever improvements, changes or updates are required, following a specific plan including assessment, design, build and implement stages can provide the needed benefits and improvements to contact center performance.

Introduction

A contact center, also known as interaction center, service center, call center, service desk or shared service center can be described as a facility or organization used to manage in-bound contacts and interactions through a variety of mediums or channels such as telephone (land lines and mobile), e-mail, online live chat, web portal, instant messaging, social media, fax and yes, even paper correspondence. Through multi-channel contact centers, customers (internal or external) and/or vendors can interact with a company or organization through a single point of contact and be directed to a self-service system or a qualified company representative that can best en handle their needs.

Contact center performance metrics (service level, abandonment, first contact resolution, contact quality, etc) are key factors influencing customer satisfaction and the success of the organization or company. When these performance metrics are lagging, contact center executives tend to address issues by first considering updating, changing or adding technology, either equipment or systems, or both to accomplish needed improvements. Contact centers are a complex blend of people, processes, systems and infrastructure and as such, attempts to improve performance by focusing on one area (i.e., adding, changing or updating technology) may not achieve the necessary results and may be more costly than what was actually needed. However, a more balanced, holistic approach should be used to determining what specifically needs to be improved within the contact center to achieve performance goals.

LCI's Integrated Approach Delivers Results in Each Phase

- Normally a 1 to 2 month engagement
- Support and guidance for achieving effectiveness and efficiency with the ongoing delivery and customer support

Deploy and Support Operations — **Implement**

- Typically a 4 to 6 month engagement
- Supports the creation, change, testing and transition to the desired future state design

Build — **Acquire/Develop Changes and Test**

From Current State to Future Vision — **Design**
- Normally a 4 to 6 month engagement
- Design the more detailed services, capabilities, processes, technologies, facilities and change readiness activities

In-depth Review and Evaluation — **Assessment**
- Usually a 6 to 8 week engagement
- Builds a compelling business case
- Develops a high level implementation plan
- Deliverables support Future State Roadmap

Focused Appraisal — **Low Risk**
- A 5 to 10 business day engagement
- Utilizes Best Practice learning
- Identifies areas of high potential opportunity

Each phase of our Integrate Approach builds off the prior phase to insure consistent flow of information, knowledge and results.

Integrated Approach

Based on my experience with contact centers, an Integrated Approach methodology should be utilized to address all aspects of the contact center operations, processes and technology to deliver the desired improvement results. This Integrated Approach includes a comprehensive assessment of the contact center organization and infrastructure to develop initiatives, a design phase to develop the recommended changes, a build phase to create the solutions and an implement phase to deploy the improvements.

Since most contact center management and support staff are attending to the hour-by-hour and day-to-day operation of the center and staff, they would normally not have the time nor the expertise to perform such an in-depth assignment to identify initiatives, then design, build and implement those initiatives to improve performance. However, they would have many good suggestions as to where to look within their operations and should be included in all aspects of this type of project. Many organizations look to professional consultants (either internal or external) to perform this type assignment to construct a compelling business case and high level implementation plan that will present a path to improvement, and then lead the design, build and implement phases.

Assessment Phase

A comprehensive assessment of the contact center to identify inefficiencies or problems impacting performance will likely begin with in-depth interviews, reviews of process and organization documentation, reviews of data and reports, side-by-side observations of interactions. This phase continues with more in-depth reviews of pertinent systems and technology, the development of a capability maturity matrix, and hands-on workshops to verify the status of current operations and develop an understanding of desired future state. A gap analysis will identify which operational areas, processes or technology need to be addressed to achieve the necessary improvements in contact center performance.

Specific short and long term contact center initiatives, a business case and roadmap for implementation can be developed with the assistance of the contact center management team. This roadmap should be tailored to meet the specific performance needs identified and to ensure that the pace of change will achieve the desired benefits while addressing any concerns relating to risks, financial constraints and the organization's capacity for change.

Design Phase

The Design phase of the Integrated Approach to contact center performance improvement utilizes the work from the Assessment phase to continue the development of the initiatives identified in the Roadmap. This includes the design of the more detailed processes, technologies, facilities, training, change readiness activities, operations, and configuration guides associated with the future state vision. A project plan is developed during this phase that is comprehensive through the Implementation phase. Also, this phase includes creating and developing and issuing any RFP's required for purchased items, services, systems or equipment.

Build Phase

The Build phase again uses the work completed in the Design phase to create, select, or obtain new processes, services, systems, and infrastructure or change the current ones. This phase includes testing all changes to insure they meet the documented needs and requirements of the Design phase. The change readiness program is conducted and if new staff is required, the hiring and training processes are performed during this phase. All documentation (project plans, operations guides, configuration guides, processes, etc.) are updated prior to the completion of the Build phase.

Implement Phase

The Implement phase provides support and guidance for the initial "Go Live" of the completed changes from the Build phase. This also includes providing support for achieving effectiveness and efficiency with the ongoing delivery of the changes to ensure expected value is achieved for the contact center organization. Performance of all changes are tracked and documented and processes and systems are adjusted as necessary. The Continual Process Improvement process is implemented relating to the changes and improvements implemented. All documentation (operations guides, configuration guides, processes, training, etc.) are finalized prior to the completion of the Implement phase.

Conclusion

Multi-channel contact centers are complex and dynamic customer facing organizations that require focused attention and an Integrated Approach to changes and improvements. Whether operational, process, or technology changes and/or updates are required, following a specific plan including assessment, design, build and implement stages can provide the needed benefits and improvements to contact center performance whether operational, process, or technology changes and/or updates are required.

About the Author

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Mike is the owner and senior consultant for Lauro Consulting, Inc. He has also worked for CSC, Ansell Healthcare, Prodigy, Entergy, and Timex. He is a contact center, customer service and performance management specialist with more than 25 years experience and in-depth knowledge of technology, customer service, and process improvement methods. His experience includes developing strategic direction; planning and completing contact center consolidations; selecting and implementing contact center telephony, including ACD's, IVR's, workforce optimization systems and CRM systems; business process redesign; and successfully directing customer service, contact center, financial, and technical functions.