The State of Agent Experience and Engagement in Today's Contact Centers

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THE STATE OF AGENT EXPERIENCE AND ENGAGEMENT IN TODAY'S CONTACT CENTERS

In a 2013 study, ICMI and NICE inContact partnered on a study on the then-emerging "multichannel revolution," focusing particularly on how contact centers intended to use emerging channels to the overall service experience and customer engagement. Throughout that report, a common theme emerged, one that, while not particularly groundbreaking, was an essential reminder of what's truly at the core of the customer experience: the agent. The study's authors observed that:

> "It's the agent's experience that genuinely impacts the customer's experience. More specifically, it's the agent experience that impacts agent happiness, which powers the customer experience, which builds customer engagement, which ultimately influences the customer's lifetime value to the brand."

Fast forward just six years and the contact center is a more challenging environment than ever before. Interactions are more complex, requiring staff at all levels to have new skillsets and develop greater proficiency across a diverse range of channels. But in a healthy job market and economy, it's becoming more and more difficult to keep staff motivated and engaged and retain them for the long haul. In fact, in ICMI's 2018 Community Interest Survey, contact center leaders reported that their number-one challenge was training and retaining the staff needed to be successful;

not far behind, at number three, was increasing engagement and morale.

As we knew in 2013 and know today, an effective agent experience strategy and program are *essential* to providing quality customer service that engages and satisfies customers, and to ensuring that contact center staff themselves are motivated to stay in their current jobs and make a career out of customer service. So, what are contact centers doing to increase satisfaction and improve engagement? What could they be doing better?

In June and July 2019, ICMI and NICE inContact again partnered to investigate current practices and perceptions surrounding experience and engagement at all levels in the contact center, as well as the impact of multichannel on staff. This executive summary presents the results of that study, with additional insight, where illuminating, into results by contact center size and position (agent, supervisor, manager, or senior leader).[1] Armed with deeper knowledge of the current state of agent engagement and retention, contact center leaders will be well positioned to build high-performing teams of skilled, satisfied agents, armed with the motivation and training they need to provide exceptional customer service.

[1] Overall confidence of 90% with a margin of error of +/- 6.1%. Note that questions where respondents could select more than one option will total > 100%, while some charts will total greater or less than 100% due to rounding.

KEY FINDINGS

- In 50% of contact centers, contact volume increased in the past 12 months, just outpacing the increase in contact complexity (43%). The increase in both volume and complexity is attributed to the number of customers, new applications/systems, and the scope of services offered. Channel proliferation is a factor in the complexity of customer interactions in 18% of large contact centers, and in 11% of contact centers overall.

- Contact centers are known for having high agent attrition, and that is borne out in this study: 25% of agents left the company in the past 12 months; 20% of agents left the contact center but stayed within the company; and 18% of agents changed positions in the contact center. A lack of growth or advancement opportunities is the leading cause of attrition, followed closely by job mismatch (bad fit, bad hire, etc.). A heavy workload runs a distant third (28%), followed by noncompetitive benefits and/or compensation (25%).

- Large contact centers experience higher attrition than their smaller counterparts, which is likely one factor prompting their commitment to formal agent experience (AX) programs.

- Two-thirds of respondents describe their contact centers as multichannel (no support for seamless channel switching), while just 17% of contact centers define themselves as omnichannel (no starting over when switching channels). Phone (inbound and outbound) is still the dominant channel, joined by email, chat, and self-service. Snail mail and fax are hanging on in 48% of contact centers.

KEY FINDINGS CONTINUED

- In 57% of contact centers, agents are expected to support multiple channels; supervisors are expected to do so in 58% of organizations. Two-thirds of respondents expect to see an increase in agents supporting multiple channels, compared to 47% for supervisors.

- The biggest challenge when it comes to handling multiple channels is having to navigate multiple screens/interfaces (52%), followed by having to learn new processes (50%) and technologies (48%).

- Despite these challenges, 54% of respondents perceive the ability and opportunity to support multiple channels to be a net positive for career growth, rather than a negative (18%). Agents and supervisors are the most ambivalent, with 42% of agents seeing it as a potential benefit (i.e., somewhat beneficial) and only half of supervisors seeing it as a definite benefit.

DRIVING SATISFACTION, ENGAGEMENT, AND MOTIVATION

Last year, Forbes' Denise Lee Yohn identified employee experience (EX) as the next frontier for organizations seeking to further cement their competitive advantage: in the coming years, she wrote, "more companies will use employee experience to increase employee satisfaction, productivity, and retention, as well as brand equity, competitive advantage, and sustainable growth."

50%
EX is a priority

42%
EX is important, but not a priority

8%
EX isn't a priority at all

But how might this Era of EX affect contact centers? Agents, in particular, are often the face and ambassadors of a brand, interacting directly with users and customers on a daily basis. They're integral to delivering an exceptional service experience and shaping customers' perception of that service. As we've already noted, satisfied, engaged agents provide quality customer service that engages and satisfies customers; likewise, satisfied, engaged agents are more likely to be motivated to stay in their current jobs and make a career out of customer service. So, how are organizations and their contact centers approaching EX and AX?

72% of organizations survey employees as part of a formal EX program

59% of contact centers survey agents as part of a formal AX program

Nearly three-quarters of organizations survey their employees as part of a formal EX program, up from 55% in 2013. While it's essential that the organization as a whole drives EX initiatives forward, prioritizing both employee satisfaction and engagement, contact centers should be equally invested in agent experience. Contact centers have made solid progress in this area over the past six years, with 59% of contact centers surveying agents as part of a formal AX program, up from 43% in 2013. Small contact centers (<150 FTEs) lag slightly behind the overall sampl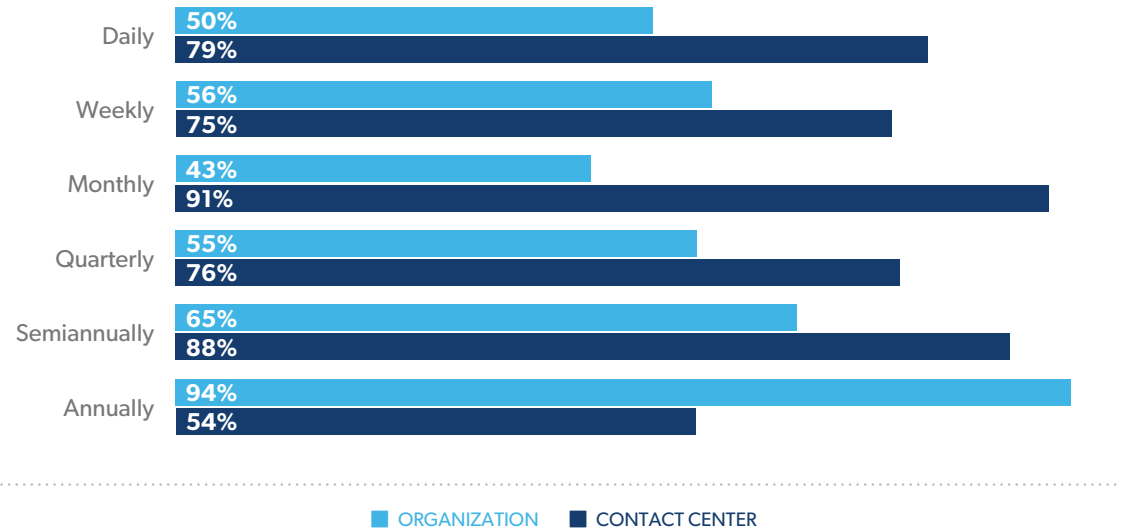e (50%), while large contact centers (>500 FTEs) lead the sample at 72%. As we'll see in a subsequent section, large contact centers experience higher attrition than their smaller counterparts, which is likely one factor prompting their commitment to formal AX programs.
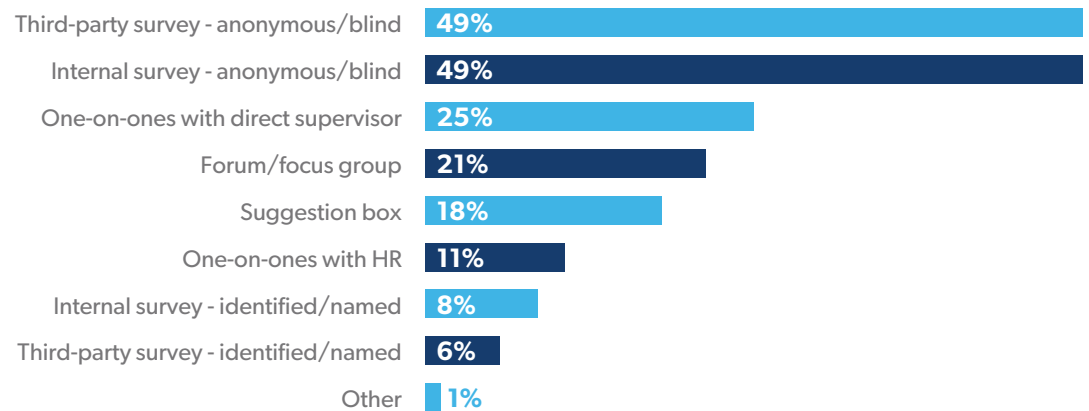
Frequency varies widely at both the organizational and contact center level: 94% of organizations survey employees annually, but 50% conduct some kind of daily pulse as well; contact centers are most likely to conduct monthly surveys (91%), but 79% also conduct daily surveys. Surveying is both art and science, and there are no hard-and-fast rules governing survey frequency; it comes down to capacity (i.e., how many employees/agents must be surveyed, what resources are available/tasked with analysis and reporting, etc.) and capability (i.e., manual survey methodology and analysis, more sophisticated tools available to create, conduct, and analyze survey data, etc.). For example, small contact centers (<150) are able to survey much more frequently (100% conduct some kind of daily survey), while large contact centers are still able to maintain high survey frequency (71%, daily; 80%, weekly; 86% monthly), possibly due to investment in survey tools that enable them to automate discrete steps in the process.

— SURVEY FREQUENCY —

Daily
- 50%
- 79%

Weekly
- 56%
- 75%

Monthly
- 43%
- 91%

Quarterly
- 55%
- 76%

Semiannually
- 65%
- 88%

Annually
- 94%
- 54%

■ ORGANIZATION   ■ CONTACT CENTER

At both the organizational and contact center level, anonymous/blind surveys, whether conducted internally or by a third party, are by far the most common format (both 49%). Anonymity, after all, promotes candor. One-quarter of respondents encourage supervisors to use their one-on-ones to collect feedback, while just over one-fifth provide employees and agents with suggestion boxes for named or anonymous feedback. In large contact centers, anonymous/blind surveys conducted internally are the most common format (60%), while medium contact centers are more likely to outsource their anonymous/blind surveys to a third party (64). Notably, both medium (151-500 FTEs) and large contact centers are more likely to conduct forums/focus groups (28% and 37%, respectively).

— SURVEY FORMAT —

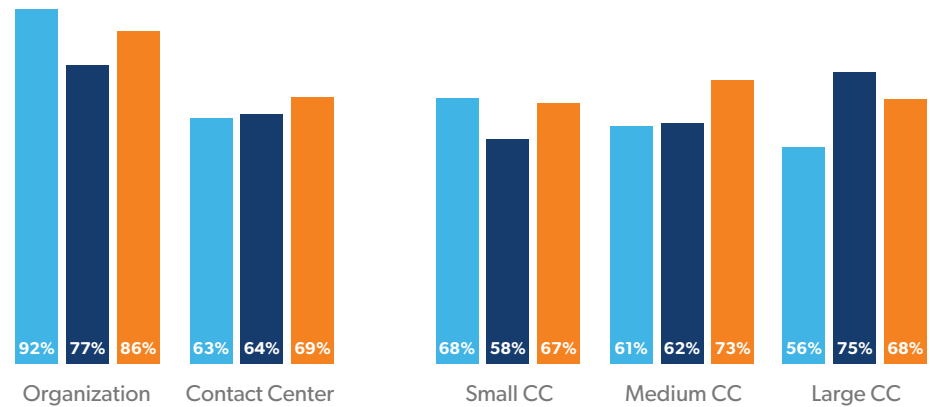|	
Third-party survey - anonymous/blind	49%
Internal survey - anonymous/blind	49%
One-on-ones with direct supervisor	25%
Forum/focus group	21%
Suggestion box	18%
One-on-ones with HR	11%
Internal survey - identified/named	8%
Third-party survey - identified/named	6%
Other	1%

In 2013, 84% of organizations and 65% of contact centers surveyed employees/agents on engagement and/or satisfaction. In general, satisfaction can be defined as general happiness with one's organization/contact center and job; engagement can be understood as emotional commitment to the organization/contact center and its goals. This year, we added stress to the mix, which is the psychological or emotional strain associated with one's job responsibilities, duties, etc. Almost all organizations measure employee satisfaction, but neither engagement nor stress are far behind. Meanwhile, contact centers measure all three factors at a lower rate than the organizational overall; this may correlate with their overall lower commitment to formal AX programs, but it doesn't mean they aren't interested in capturing feedback on these factors. Rather, there may be other factors contact centers prioritize that weren't captured in this current study.

Looking more closely at those contact centers that *do* measure these factors, small contact centers are more likely to measure satisfaction than the overall sample (68%); for medium contact centers, engagement edges out satisfaction and stress (73%); and large contact centers, where volume and attrition are often higher, are most interested in gauging stress. While 64% of contact centers overall measure stress, 75% of large contact centers do, while smaller percentages of large centers measure satisfaction and engagement.

When it comes to satisfaction, overall job satisfaction is high, with 78% of respondents reporting being *satisfied* or *very satisfied*. Agent and supervisor satisfaction is similarly high, just a few percentage points on either side of the overall average (75% and 79%, respectively); senior leaders, meanwhile, report the highest level of job satisfaction (>80%).

— SATISFACTION, ENGAGEMENT, AND STRESS, OVERALL AND BY SIZE OF CENTER —

	Organization	Contact Center	Small CC	Medium CC	Large CC
Satisfaction	92%	63%	68%	61%	56%
Stress	77%	64%	58%	62%	75%
Engagement	86%	69%	67%	73%	68%

■ SATISFACTION - GENERAL HAPPINESS WITH THE COMPANY AND THE JOB
■ STRESS - PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL STRAIN DUE TO JOB RESPONSIBILITIES, DUTIES, ETC.
■ ENGAGEMENT - EMOTIONAL COMMITMENT TO THE COMPANY AND ITS GOALS

— SATISFACTION —

- 2%
- 7%
- 13%
- 27%
- 51%

■ VERY SATISFIED   ■ SATISFIED

■ NEITHER SATISFIED NOR DISSATISFIED

■ DISSATISFIED   ■ VERY DISSATISFIED

Among those who report being *very satisfied*, manageable contact volume, being able to help customers, positive relationships with management, impactful rewards and recognition programs, and productive relationships with business partners are the leading factors contributing to high satisfaction. Of course, agents have different pressures and perspectives than senior leaders, and a cross-sectional view of the top five factors contributing to high satisfaction align, as we'll see, with some of the key pleasures of working in customer service.

— FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO HIGH SATISFACTION —

Factor	%
Contact volume	67%
Customers	56%
Management	52%
Rewards and recognition programs	52%
Relationships with business partners	52%
Team development (including social events)	51%
Number of channels	50%
Organizational culture	48%
Organizational change	47%
Technology - efficiency	47%
Office hours	47%
Career-pathing	43%
Complexity of work	43%
Training provided	43%
Technology - ease of use	41%
Relationship with direct supervisor	41%
Amount of work	40%
Relationships within the team	40%
Type of work	38%
Paid time off	37%
Compensation (including benefits)	37%
Ability to work from home	36%
Certifications provided	36%
Control over workload/tasks	33%

— FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO HIGH SATISFACTION, BY ROLE —

Rank	Agents	Supervisors	Managers	Senior Leadership
1	Rewards and recognition programs	Organizational culture	Contact volume	Amount of work
2	Customers	Training provided	Relationship with business partners	Customers
3	Training provided	Office hours	Career-pathing	Management
4	Technology – ease of use	Technology – ease of use	Customers	Office hours
5	Complexity of work	Team development	Rewards and recognition programs	Rewards and recognition programs

Across the board, when asked what motivates them to work in customer service, respondents overwhelmingly cited *helping customers* (29%), from agents up to senior leaders. Likewise, all roles value the opportunity to *have an impact on achieving the organization's goals* (22%). Compensation is the least significant motivation, with *pay/compensation* at 1% (*benefits* didn't even rate, 0%).

— MOTIVATION FOR WORKING IN CUSTOMER SERVICE —

Motivation	Percentage
Helping customers	29%
Having an impact on the organization's goals	22%
Teamwork and camaraderie with my peers	11%
Having an impact on the contact center's goals	9%
Flexible work schedule	8%
Challenging work	8%
Leadership	7%
Sharing my passion for the brand	3%
Opportunities for career growth	2%
Building my knowledge of a subject or company	1%
Pay/compensation	1%

— MOTIVATION FOR WORKING IN CUSTOMER SERVICE, BY ROLE —

Rank	Agents	Supervisors	Managers	Senior Leadership
1	Helping customers	Helping customers	Helping customers	Helping customers
2	Flexible work schedule	Having an impact on the organization's goals	Having an impact on the organization's goals	Having an impact on the organization's goals
3	Having an impact on the organization's goals	Teamwork and camaraderie with peers	Teamwork and camaraderie with peers	Flexible work schedule

— CHALLENGES TO WORKING IN CUSTOMER SERVICE —

Challenge	Percentage
Inadequate/hard-to-use systems	30%
Management	14%
Customer emotions and behaviors (anger, rudeness, etc.)	14%
Lack of training	10%
Lack of empowerment	9%
Being on the phone	4%
Hours/schedule	4%
Other	14%

— MOST TIME-CONSUMING TASKS/RESPONSIBILITIES —

Task/Responsibility	Percentage
Coaching	23%
Scheduling and forecasting	21%
Fielding complaints	20%
Providing technical support to customers	18%
Helping customers with purchases	6%
Receiving suggestions for improvement	4%
Other	8%

For the very few respondents who report being *dissatisfied* or *very dissatisfied,* inefficient tools and technology, limited career growth opportunities, ineffective rewards and recognition programs, and organizational change (too frequent, poorly executed, etc.) are the leading contributors to low satisfaction. Many of these factors are reflected in the leading challenges to working in customer service, as well as the most time-consuming tasks/responsibilities. Agents cite *management, lack of empowerment,* and d*ealing with customer emotions and behaviors* (e.g., anger, rudeness) as their leading challenges; not surprisingly, supervisors, to whom calls are often escalated, cite dealing with customer emotions and behaviors as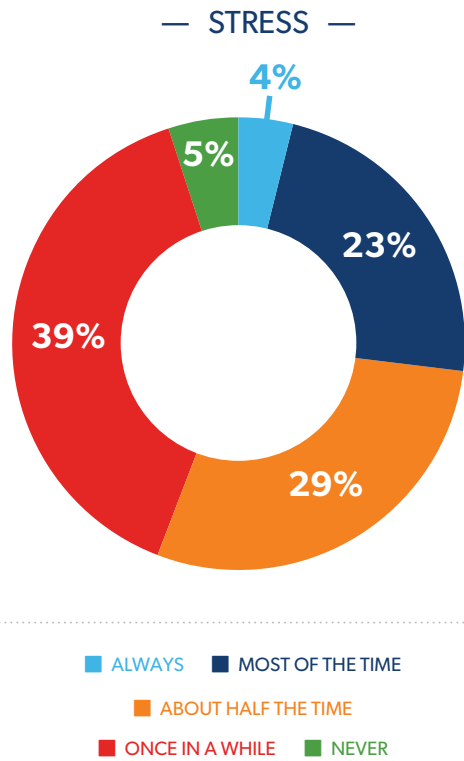 their primary challenge. Across roles, *inadequate/hard-to-use systems* are a major pain point – compounded (or compounding) related pressures, such as lack of technology/tools to perform the job, not having the "right" technology, and poor system integration.[2] Similarly, respondents cite d*ealing with inadequate or inoperable tools/technology* as yet another task/responsibility that consumes time during the day – time that's already committed to tasks like *coaching* (23%), *scheduling and forecasting* (21%), and *fielding complaints* (20%).[3]

Cumulatively, these challenges and time-constraints can serve to increase the severity and frequency of stress. Over half of respondents report feeling stressed at work at least half the time (56%); agents report the highest incidence of stress (75%), followed by senior leaders (63%), while managers report the lowest incidence (46%). Just 5% of respondents report *never* being stressed (exclusively among the ranks of managers and senior leadership).

[2] "Other" challenges: how the organization values the contact center, scope of work, attrition, rapid pace of corporate change/growth, poor knowledge transfer processes, lack of direction from CEO/board, quality of company product, lack of accountability, and silos.

[3] "Other" time-sucks: reporting and data analysis, administrative duties, system administration, email, "not working the plan," developing training, QA, negotiating with clients, and managing new leaders and clients.

— STRESS —

- ■ ALWAYS
- ■ MOST OF THE TIME
- ■ ABOUT HALF THE TIME
- ■ ONCE IN A WHILE
- ■ NEVER

4%
23%
29%
39%
5%

For those who report being stressed *most of the time or always,* insufficient PTO (e.g., not having enough, not having time to take what you've accrued) is the leading cause of stress, followed by having too many channels to support, not being able to work from home, and low or noncompetitive compensation. As with satisfaction, stress triggers vary widely from role to role. Agents, for example, by the type and complexity of their work, as well as their relationship with their direct supervisor; in contrast, senior leaders cite insufficient PTO as their main stressor, followed by insufficient training/ certification opportunities.

— FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO FREQUENT STRESS —

Factor	Percentage
Paid time off	75%
Number of channels	67%
Ability to work from home	60%
Compensation (including benefits)	59%
Office hours	58%
Relationship with direct supervisor	54%
Rewards and recognition programs	54%
Type of work	51%
Certifications provided	50%
Team development (including social events)	50%
Training provided	46%
Organizational culture	44%
Management	43%
Amount of work	43%
Contact volume	42%
Career-pathing	37%
Organizational change	34%
Control over workload/tasks	34%
Relationships with business partners	33%
Complexity of work	32%
Customers	31%
Relationships within the team	30%
Technology - efficiency	28%
Technology - ease of use	18%

— FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO FREQUENT STRESS, BY ROLE —

Rank	Agents	Supervisors	Managers	Senior Leadership
1	Relationship with direct supervisor	Relationships within the team	PTO	PTO
2	Type of work	Organizational change	Compensation (incl. benefits)	Training provided
3	Complexity of work	Customers	Ability to work from home	Certifications provided
4	Management	Organizational culture	Relationship with direct supervisor	Office hours
5	Compensation (incl. benefits)	Office hours	Type of work	Reward and recognition programs

Despite myriad stressors and challenges, 42% of respondents report being extremely engaged with their organizations; this correlates strongly (90%) with those who report being satisfied or very satisfied. Just over half report being moderately engaged, and this correlates with those who report being satisfied or neutral (78%).

— ENGAGEMENT —

- ■ EXTREMELY ENGAGED
- ■ MODERATELY ENGAGED
- ■ MODERATELY DISENGAGED
- ■ EXTREMELY DISENGAGED

High engagement is driven by three main factors: leadership that has a clear vision and strategy (24%), having the necessary tools to perform effectively (22%), and a clear alignment between a role's responsibilities and the business's goals (20%). At the agent and supervisor level, training/career development opportunities and performance-based pay/incentives are impactful factors; for senior leaders, alignment with the business's goals (at the level of responsibilities and performance measures) are key.

— FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO HIGH ENGAGEMENT —

Leadership	24%
Having the necessary tools to perform my job duties effectively	22%
Alignment between roles/responsibilities and business goals	20%
Alignment between performance measures and business goals	16%
Training and career development opportunities	9%
Performance-based pay/incentives	7%
Rewards and recognition	1%

Contact centers that haven't developed a formal program to measure satisfaction, stress, and engagement are missing out on crucial opportunities to optimize and improve their operations. And very often, those opportunities emerge early on, during the hiring and onboarding process.

HIRING, TRAINING, AND COMPENSATION PRACTICES

In the United States, the unemployment rate is currently at its lowest level since Woodstock. Job growth is up, wages are up, and the total labor force clocks in at 163.4 million. As a reflection of the healthy economy and job market, one-third of contact centers are planning to expand in the coming year, while a further 53% are committed to at least filling positions as they come open. Medium contact centers are the most likely to expand their ranks in the coming year (41% creating positions), followed by large contact centers (36%).

— HIRING OUTLOOK —

5%
9%
33%
53%

- ■ CREATING AND FILLING NEW POSITIONS
- ■ FILLING CURRENT POSITIONS AS THEY COME OPEN
- ■ NOT CREATING NEW POSITIONS OR FILLING CURRENT ONES
- ■ CUTTING POSITIONS

On average, contact centers plan to allocate 15% of their budgets to hiring, mostly on agents (12%), who turnover more frequently; large contact centers, which see above-average attrition, plan to spend more than their counterparts on agent hiring (16%). New and upgraded technology (13%) and professional development/training (13% total) are the next priorities, both of which were cited as a factor in satisfaction, stress, and engagement; here again, large contact centers expect to outspend small and medium contact centers (16% on technology; 20% total on professional development/training).

— BUDGET ALLOCATIONS, OVERALL AND BY CONTACT CENTER SIZE —

Technology (new, upgrade)
- 13%
- 15%
- 8%
- 16%

Professional development/training - agents
- 8%
- 7%
- 6%
- 13%

Professional development/training - supervisors and above
- 5%
- 5%
- 4%
- 7%

Hiring - agents
- 12%
- 11%
- 12%
- 16%

Hiring - supervisors and abovve
- 3%
- 2%
- 4%
- 5%

Incentives/engagement - agents
- 6%
- 5%
- 7%
- 7%

Incentives/engagement - supervisors and above
- 3%
- 3%
- 5%
- 4%

■ OVERALL ■ SMALL ■ MEDIUM ■ LARGE

24:1

The average ratio of agents to supervisors.

For contact centers that are expecting to grow and budgeting accordingly, what are they looking for in new hires, specifically at the agent and supervisor levels? The conventional wisdom in service organizations is that you can train for technical skill or business knowledge, but you can't teach good customer service skills. The results of this study bear that out, revealing that, at the agent level, hiring managers are looking for agile, adaptable fast-learners with a suite of fundamental skills, including communication (84%), customer service (83%), and problem-solving (78%).

— AGENTS: SKILLS SOUGHT DURING HIRING PROCESS, OVERALL AND BY SIZE OF CENTER —

Adaptability
- 74%
- 69%
- 77%
- 82%

Ability to learn quickly
- 80%
- 81%
- 95%
- 63%

Ability to work under pressure
- 75%
- 75%
- 74%
- 74%

Business knowledge
- 25%
- 22%
- 23%
- 34%

Communication skills
- 84%
- 91%
- 79%
- 71%

Customer service experience
- 73%
- 72%
- 77%
- 74%

Customer service skills
- 83%
- 83%
- 90%
- 76%

Emotional intelligence
- 53%
- 63%
- 49%
- 34%

Financial management
- 4%
- 1%
- 0%
- 13%

Integrity
- 70%
- 76%
- 62%
- 66%

Interpersonal skills
- 69%
- 76%
- 67%
- 55%

Language skills (multilingual or bilingual)
- 35%
- 28%
- 38%
- 45%

Leadership skills
- 16%
- 19%
- 13%
- 11%

■ OVERALL   ■ SMALL   ■ MEDIUM   ■ LARGE

— AGENTS: SKILLS SOUGHT DURING HIRING PROCESS,
OVERALL AND BY SIZE OF CENTER *(continued)* —

Management skills
- 6%
- 7%
- 3%
- 8%

Multicultural sensitivity/awareness
- 39%
- 36%
- 41%
- 42%

Multitasking skills
- 69%
- 73%
- 69%
- 61%

Problem-solving skills
- 78%
- 82%
- 79%
- 68%

Project management
- 5%
- 8%
- 0%
- 3%

Self-motivated, independent worker
- 64%
- 69%
- 59%
- 55%

Strategic thinking
- 19%
- 22%
- 13%
- 18%

Teamwork skills
- 67%
- 78%
- 59%
- 47%

Technologies used by customers
- 48%
- 49%
- 44%
- 53%

Technologies used to provide service
- 53%
- 51%
- 51%
- 58%

Time management
- 57%
- 67%
- 44%
- 47%

Troubleshooting skills
- 66%
- 74%
- 51%
- 63%

■ OVERALL   ■ SMALL   ■ MEDIUM   ■ LARGE

Small contact centers, where agents are more likely to wear many hats, prioritize strategic thinking and time management, troubleshooting, and multitasking skills at a higher rate than medium and large contact centers. Conversely, in large contact centers where turnover is often higher and new agents need to be able to hit the ground running, hiring managers seek candidates that are adaptable, able to go with the flow, and already have a base of knowledge in both the technologies customers use and the technologies used to provide service to customers.

— SUPERVISORS: SKILLS SOUGHT DURING HIRING PROCESS, OVERALL AND BY SIZE OF CENTER —

Skill	OVERALL	SMALL	MEDIUM	LARGE
Adaptability	76%	80%	84%	61%
Ability to learn quickly	62%	62%	68%	58%
Ability to work under pressure	74%	86%	68%	55%
Business knowledge	66%	65%	70%	63%
Communication skills	84%	92%	81%	71%
Customer service experience	65%	65%	68%	61%
Customer service skills	67%	69%	70%	58%
Emotional intelligence	75%	81%	78%	58%
Financial management	28%	27%	27%	32%
Integrity	81%	86%	81%	68%
Interpersonal skills	81%	87%	78%	68%
Language skills (multilingual or bilingual)	21%	14%	24%	32%
Leadership skills	87%	93%	92%	68%

■ OVERALL ■ SMALL ■ MEDIUM ■ LARGE

At the supervisor level, hiring managers seek strong leadership and management skills, alongside advanced skills like financial management, business acumen, project management, emotional intelligence, and cultural sensitivity. Small contact centers, where the ratio of agents to supervisors is 17:1 (compared to 14:1 in medium and 24:1 in large contact centers), and where supervisors (like agents) tend to have a wide variety of responsibilities, seek deep expertise in fundamental skills/qualities as well, like grace under pressure, strategic thinking, and time management.
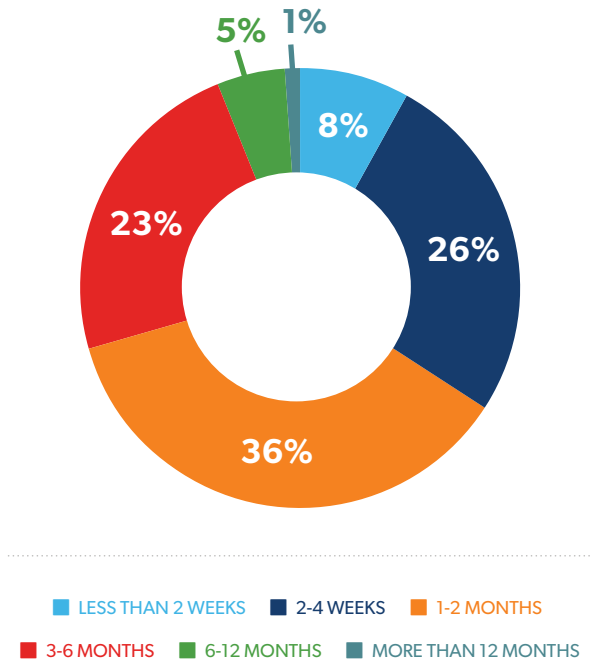
— SUPERVISORS: SKILLS SOUGHT DURING HIRING PROCESS, OVERALL AND BY SIZE OF CENTER *(continued)* —

Management skills
- 81%
- 82%
- 89%
- 68%

Multicultural sensitivity/ awareness
- 55%
- 58%
- 54%
- 47%

Multitasking skills
- 71%
- 73%
- 70%
- 68%

Problem-solving skills
- 81%
- 88%
- 81%
- 66%

Project management
- 55%
- 60%
- 59%
- 42%

Self-motivated, independent worker
- 76%
- 83%
- 70%
- 66%

Strategic thinking
- 73%
- 81%
- 76%
- 53%

Teamwork skills
- 77%
- 82%
- 84%
- 61%

Technologies used by customers
- 43%
- 48%
- 38%
- 39%

Technologies used to provide service
- 57%
- 60%
- 54%
- 53%

Time management
- 84%
- 86%
- 84%
- 82%

Troubleshooting skills
- 67%
- 80%
- 59%
- 47%

OVERALL **SMALL** **MEDIUM** **LARGE**

The opportunity for contact centers of all sizes, particularly those who seek to promote from within, lies in investing in a high-quality onboarding program/ process as well as ongoing agent and supervisor training (including, crucially, sufficient time to complete said training). In general, the onboarding process (i.e., the amount of time allotted/required for new hires to work proficiently on their own) for contact centers takes anywhere from two weeks to six months; few contact centers allow more than six months for onboarding (6%). Across contact centers of all sizes, the median is 1-2 months.

— ONBOARDING: TIME TO PROFICIENCY —

- 5%
- 1%
- 8%
- 26%
- 23%
- 36%

LESS THAN 2 WEEKS **2-4 WEEKS** **1-2 MONTHS**

3-6 MONTHS **6-12 MONTHS** **MORE THAN 12 MONTHS**

— ONBOARDING: PRIMARY TRAINING FOCUS —

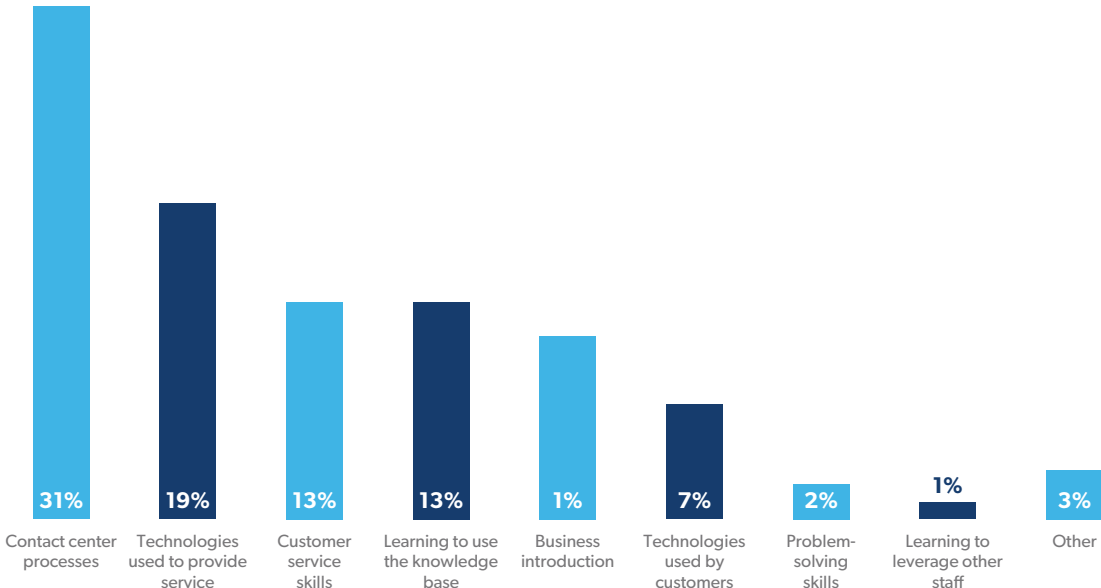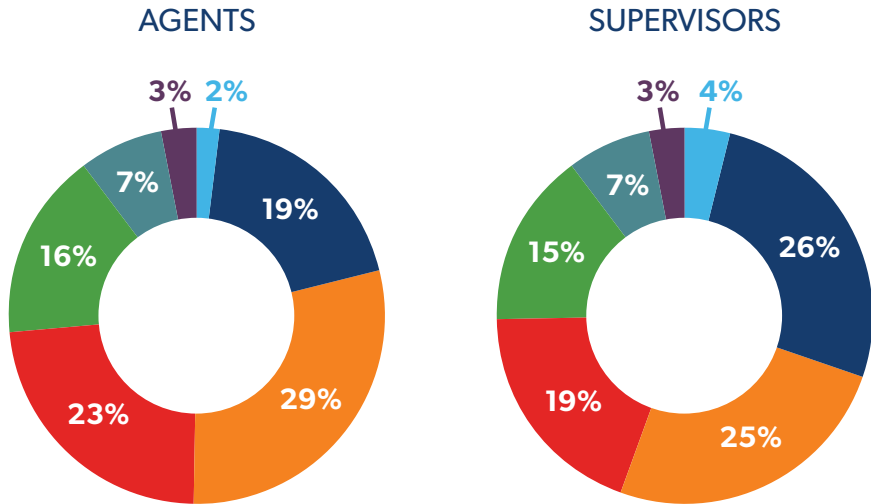| 31%	19%	13%	13%	1%	7%	2%	1%	3%
Contact center processes	Technologies used to provide service	Customer service skills	Learning to use the knowledge base	Business introduction	Technologies used by customers	Problem-solving skills	Learning to leverage other staff	Other

In nearly one-third of contact centers, the first order of business for new hires is familiarizing themselves with the contact center's processes (31%), followed by the technologies used to provide service (19%) and learning to use the knowledge base (13%). Depending on the industry, some new hires will receive initial training in specialty subjects, like pension plans and insurance policies/regulations.

Once new hires have completed the onboarding process, the overwhelming majority spend less than eight hours a month on additional, ongoing training (90%, for both agents and supervisors). A small percentage of contact centers provide no formal ongoing training for agents (9%) and supervisors (12%); those that do focus on building technical skills, communication and collaboration within the team, data and information security, forecasting and scheduling (for supervisors), and people management (also for supervisors), including recruiting, coaching, and performance management.

— TIME ALLOTTED TO ONGOING TRAINING, PER MONTH —

AGENTS

Donut chart: 3%, 2%, 19%, 29%, 23%, 16%, 7%

SUPERVISORS

Donut chart: 3%, 4%, 26%, 25%, 19%, 15%, 7%
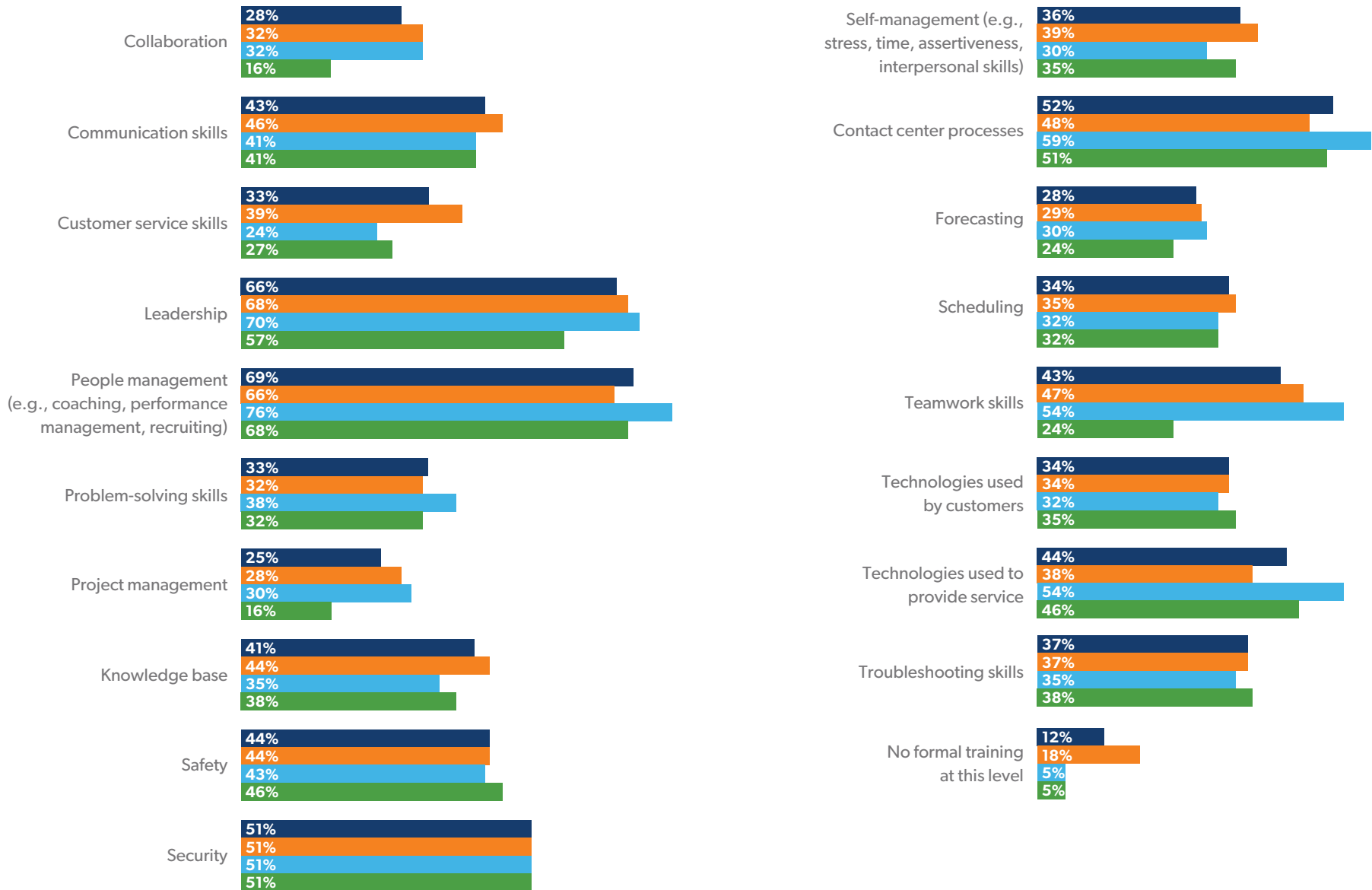
Legend: ■ NONE ■ LESS THAN 1 HOUR ■ 1-2 HOURS ■ 2-4 HOURS ■ 4-8 HOURS ■ 8-24 HOURS ■ MORE THAN 24 HOURS

— AGENTS: AREAS OF ONGOING TRAINING, OVERALL AND BY SIZE OF CENTER —

Collaboration
- 19%
- 18%
- 13%
- 27%

Communication skills
- 44%
- 52%
- 33%
- 35%

Customer service skills
- 64%
- 68%
- 59%
- 59%

Leadership
- 9%
- 10%
- 8%
- 8%

People management (e.g., coaching, performance management, recruiting)
- 7%
- 8%
- 3%
- 8%

Problem-solving skills
- 32%
- 38%
- 28%
- 22%

Project management
- 3%
- 4%
- 0%
- 3%

Knowledge base
- 60%
- 65%
- 64%
- 43%

Safety
- 44%
- 40%
- 46%
- 49%

Security
- 50%
- 43%
- 59%
- 58%

Self-management (e.g., stress, time, assertiveness, interpersonal skills)
- 28%
- 33%
- 21%
- 22%

Contact center processes
- 59%
- 57%
- 64%
- 59%

Forecasting
- 4%
- 4%
- 5%
- 3%

Scheduling
- 7%
- 11%
- 3%
- 3%

Teamwork skills
- 35%
- 44%
- 18%
- 32%

Technologies used by customers
- 43%
- 44%
- 51%
- 32%

Technologies used to provide service
- 57%
- 54%
- 69%
- 51%

Troubleshooting skills
- 41%
- 43%
- 41%
- 35%

No formal training at this level
- 9%
- 13%
- 8%
- 3%

■ OVERALL   ■ SMALL   ■ MEDIUM   ■ LARGE

— SUPERVISORS: AREAS OF ONGOING TRAINING, OVERALL AND BY SIZE OF CENTER —

Collaboration
- 28%
- 32%
- 32%
- 16%

Communication skills
- 43%
- 46%
- 41%
- 41%

Customer service skills
- 33%
- 39%
- 24%
- 27%

Leadership
- 66%
- 68%
- 70%
- 57%

People management (e.g., coaching, performance management, recruiting)
- 69%
- 66%
- 76%
- 68%

Problem-solving skills
- 33%
- 32%
- 38%
- 32%

Project management
- 25%
- 28%
- 30%
- 16%

Knowledge base
- 41%
- 44%
- 35%
- 38%

Safety
- 44%
- 44%
- 43%
- 46%

Security
- 51%
- 51%
- 51%
- 51%

Self-management (e.g., stress, time, assertiveness, interpersonal skills)
- 36%
- 39%
- 30%
- 35%

Contact center processes
- 52%
- 48%
- 59%
- 51%

Forecasting
- 28%
- 29%
- 30%
- 24%

Scheduling
- 34%
- 35%
- 32%
- 32%

Teamwork skills
- 43%
- 47%
- 54%
- 24%

Technologies used by customers
- 34%
- 34%
- 32%
- 35%

Technologies used to provide service
- 44%
- 38%
- 54%
- 46%

Troubleshooting skills
- 37%
- 37%
- 35%
- 38%

No formal training at this level
- 12%
- 18%
- 5%
- 5%

■ OVERALL   ■ SMALL   ■ MEDIUM   ■ LARGE

Onboarding and ongoing training require significant investment in time, money, and resources, but it's worth it, for attrition is far costlier. On average, supervisors stay in their roles far longer than agents: nearly three-quarters of supervisors stay in their roles for 4 years or more, while two-thirds of agents spend three years or less in their roles. In the United States, the current average salary for supervisors is $54,596; for agents, $38,307.[4]

— AVERAGE SALARIES FOR AGENTS AND SUPERVISORS (US ONLY) —

		High	Low	Current
82% of agents are paid hourly	**Agents**	$47,539	$32,641	$38,307
83% of supervisors are salaried	**Supervisors**	$65,790	$46,667	$54,596

[4] For hourly pay rates, annual salary was calculated based on a standard 40-hour work week. Note that these calculations do not include benefits.

Given the higher rate of turnover among agents, and the costs associated with recruiting, hiring, onboarding, and ongoing training, contact centers are justifiably preoccupied with managing attrition. Positive attrition, such as when agents change positions within the contact center or the larger organization, is often encouraged; negative attrition, where the agent leaves the organization entirely, is viewed critically, as it's often the result of operational or strategic issues that can be anticipated and/or remediated. Across industries, survey respondents report a year-over-year negative attrition rate of 25% and positive attrition rates of 18-20%.

— AGENT ATTRITION, OVERALL AND BY SIZE OF CENTER —

Percentage of agentswho left the company in the past 12 months

- 25%
- 21%
- 29%
- 30%

Percentage of agents who left the contact center in the past 12 months butstayed within the company

- 20%
- 19%
- 20%
- 21%

Percentage of agentts who changed positions in the past 12 months but stayed in the contact center

- 18%
- 18%
- 16%
- 20%

■ OVERALL ■ SMALL ■ MEDIUM ■ LARGE

As we've already noted, as the number of FTEs increases, so does attrition: respondents from medium and large contact centers report negative attrition rates of 29% and 30%, respectively. Positive attrition, meanwhile, tracks closely to the overall average, suggesting that mobility in larger operations can be more limited (making a clean departure the simpler choice). This is reflected in the reported outcomes of attrition: in large contact centers, just 7% of agents are promoted out of the contact center, compared to 29% of agents in small contact centers; similarly, 41% of agents in large contact centers make lateral moves outside the organization, compared to 26% of small contact centers.

— OUTCOMES OF AGENT ATTRITION, OVERALL AND BY SIZE OF CENTER —

A lateral move within the contact center
- 6%
- 4%
- 7%
- 9%

A promotion within the contact center
- 11%
- 11%
- 15%
- 9%

A lateral move within the organization, but outside the contact center
- 21%
- 19%
- 24%
- 23%

A promotion within the organization, but outside the contact center
- 20%
- 29%
- 17%
- 7%

A lateral move to another organization
- 32%
- 26%
- 32%
- 41%

A promotion with another organization
- 6%
- 5%
- 2%
- 11%

Other
- 3%
- 5%
- 2%
- 0%

■ OVERALL   ■ SMALL   ■ MEDIUM   ■ LARGE

The causes of agent attrition are as varied as the outcomes. In some cases, it's tied to industry: in higher education, student staff must eventually graduate; in retail, seasonality is a factor. Other respondents noted that the agent "role is seen only as an entry point to the organization, not as a career." In general, however, the two leading causes of agent attrition are *lack of growth and advancement opportunities* (45%) and *job mismatch* (43%), either a bad fit or a bad hire. Poor/ineffective leadership and management, as well as conflict with supervisors and the perception of unfair treatment, are significant factors in large contact centers; these are systemic issues that are likely to be related to size and sprawl, and are unlikely to have simple solutions.
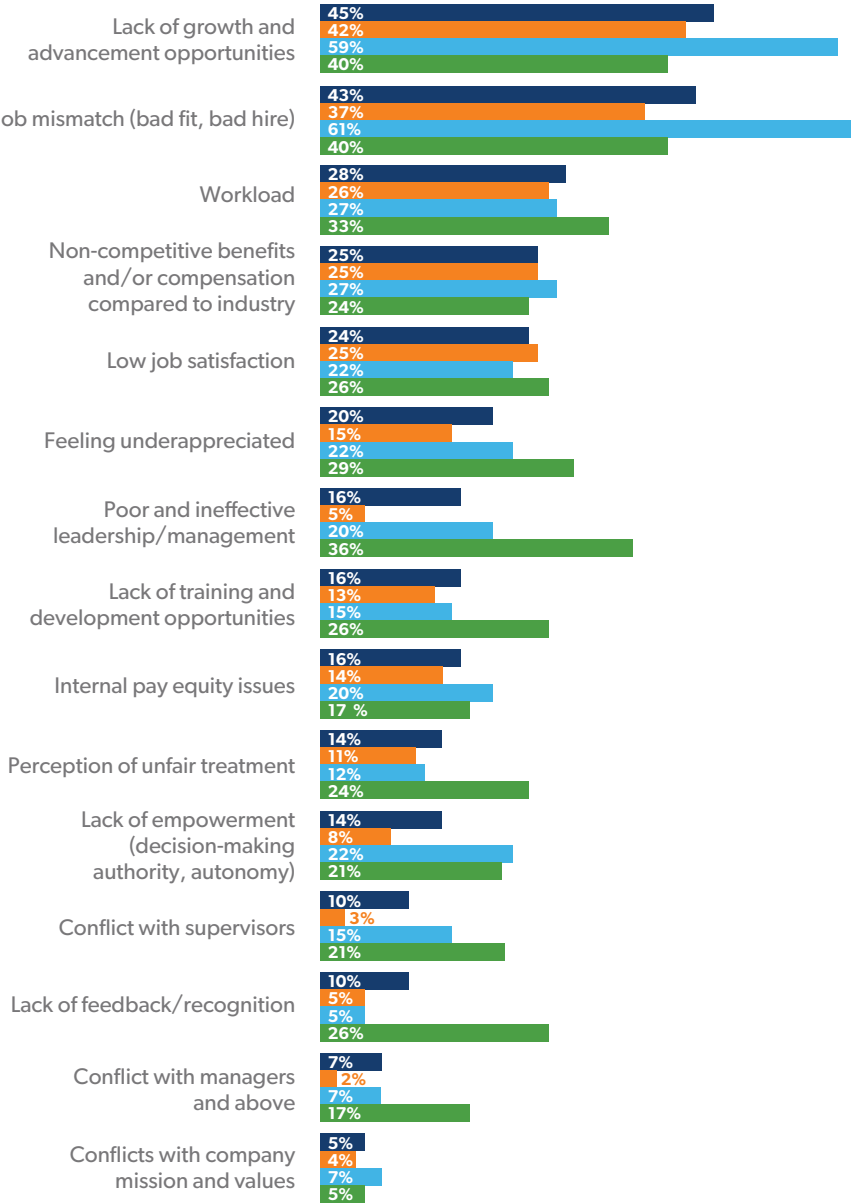
— TOP 5 CAUSES OF ATTRITION, BY ROLE —

Rank	Agents	Supervisors
1	Lack of growth and advancement opportunities	Workload
2	Job mismatch	Lack of growth and advancement opportunities
3	Workload	Job mismatch
4	Feeling underappreciated	Non-competitive benefits and/or compensation compared to industry
5	Lack of training and development opportunities	Low job satisfaction

Agents and supervisors alike are open to challenge and opportunity – in fact, they would seem to crave it. In today's contact centers, is supporting multiple channels a sufficient challenge and/or desired opportunity?

— CAUSES OF ATTRITION, OVERALL AND BY SIZE OF CENTER —

Lack of growth and advancement opportunities
- 45%
- 42%
- 59%
- 40%

Job mismatch (bad fit, bad hire)
- 43%
- 37%
- 61%
- 40%

Workload
- 28%
- 26%
- 27%
- 33%

Non-competitive benefits and/or compensation compared to industry
- 25%
- 25%
- 27%
- 24%

Low job satisfaction
- 24%
- 25%
- 22%
- 26%

Feeling underappreciated
- 20%
- 15%
- 22%
- 29%

Poor and ineffective leadership/management
- 16%
- 5%
- 20%
- 36%

Lack of training and development opportunities
- 16%
- 13%
- 15%
- 26%

Internal pay equity issues
- 16%
- 14%
- 20%
- 17 %

Perception of unfair treatment
- 14%
- 11%
- 12%
- 24%

Lack of empowerment (decision-making authority, autonomy)
- 14%
- 8%
- 22%
- 21%

Conflict with supervisors
- 10%
- 3%
- 15%
- 21%

Lack of feedback/recognition
- 10%
- 5%
- 5%
- 26%

Conflict with managers and above
- 7%
- 2%
- 7%
- 17%

Conflicts with company mission and values
- 5%
- 4%
- 7%
- 5%

■ OVERALL ■ SMALL ■ MEDIUM ■ LARGE

SUPPORTING MULTIPLE CHANNELS: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

In the latest edition of ICMI's *Pocket Guide to Contact Center Management Terms, multichannel* and *omnichannel* are defined as follows:
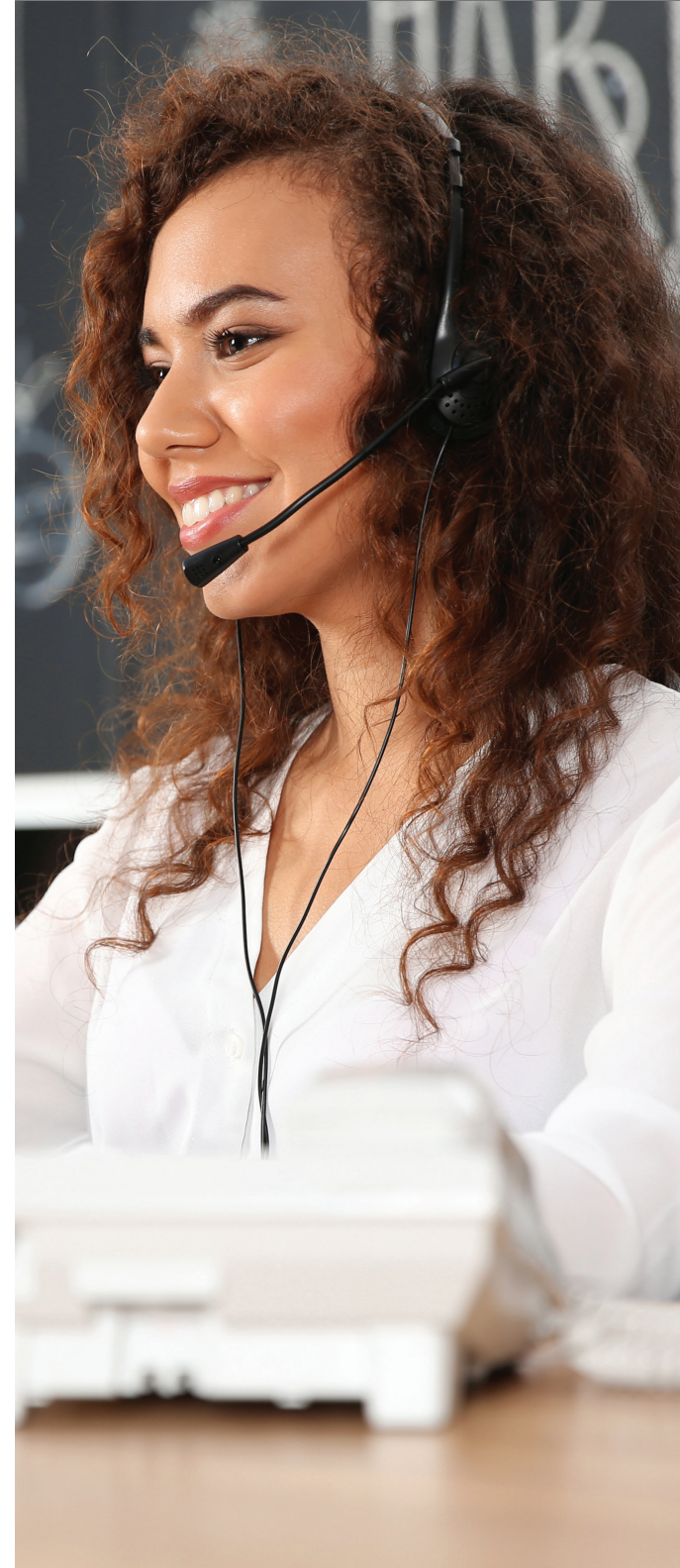
Multichannel

A contact center that enables agents and customers to interact over multiple communication channels (e.g., phone, chat, text, email, social media).

Omnichannel

Systems and methodologies that integrate multiple contact channels into a common queue and shared contact-handling approach, to create a seamless customer experience regardless of channel. Customers may start out in one channel (e.g., a social platform or website) and move to another (e.g., phone, text, chat).

In the 2013 study, in early days of the multichannel revolution, we advised contact center leaders to "be where your customers want you to be, where your business needs you to be, and in the channels where you are able to provide the highest level of service and satisfaction." Today, the key to the omnichannel revolution is seamlessness; for an optimal experience, customers should not have to restart an interaction to complete an interaction. But for many contact centers, omnichannel is a goal, not their current reality. And there are still contact centers that haven't expanded their channel offerings at all yet (17%).

17%

We're an omnichannel contact center – we support all channels seamlessly (that is, no starting over when switching channels)

66%

We're a multichannel contact center – we support multiple channels, but we don't support seamless channel switching
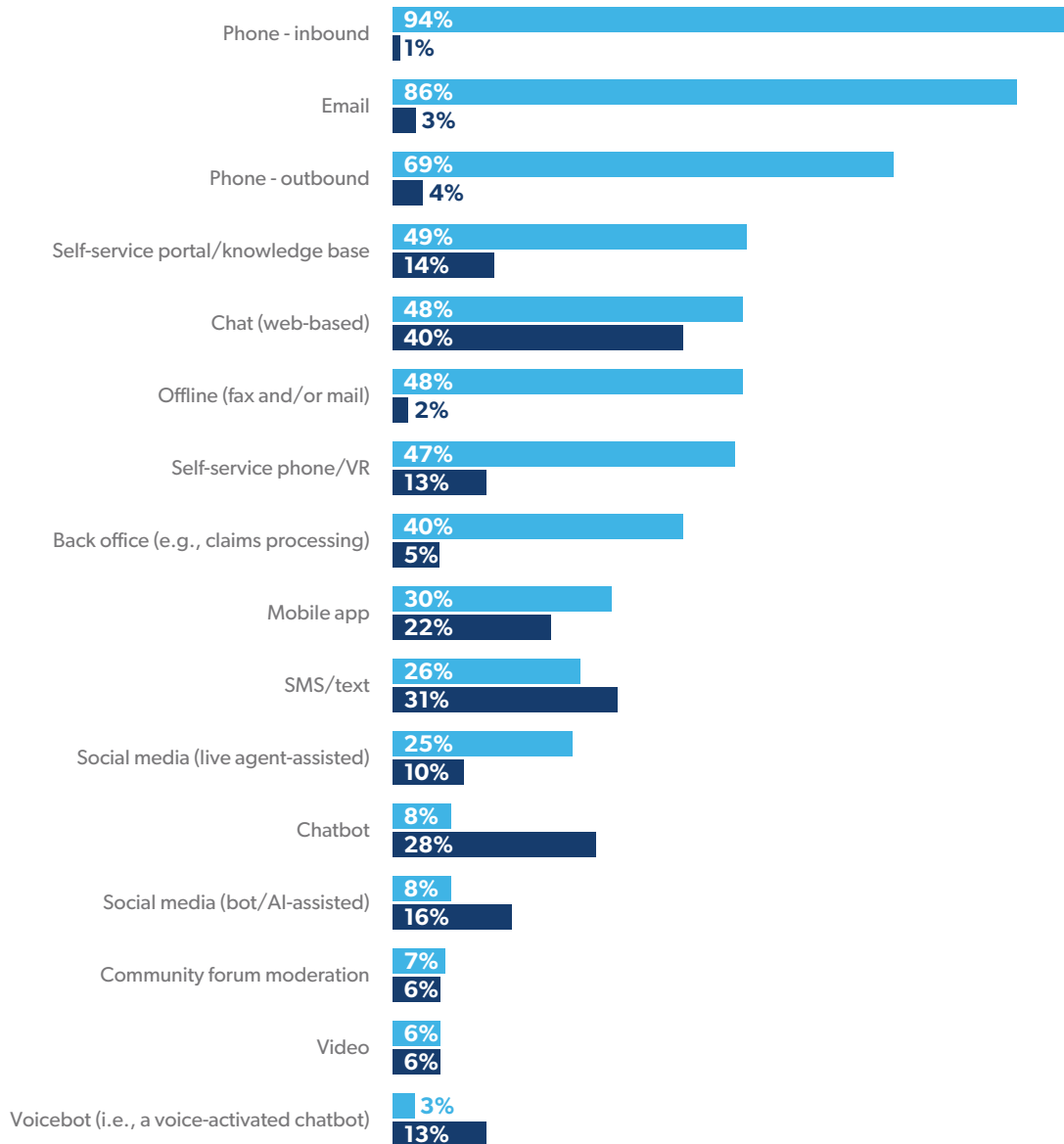
17%

We're a single channel contact center

Even in contact centers that offer multiple channels, the traditional live-agent channels – inbound phone, outbound phone, email, and chat – continue to dominate. However, self-service channels (e.g., IVR, knowledge bases) are on the rise, as are AI-assisted channels, like chatbots and voicebots. Interestingly, contact center size doesn't make much of a difference; small contact centers are as likely as large contact centers to be investing in additional channels, particularly AI-assisted channels. The takeaway here is that it truly doesn't matter what industry you're in, how many channels you offer, how many interactions you process in a month: it's about the customer. Customers expect to be able to reach out and touch someone (or somebot) in the method of their choosing, and the days are long past when contact centers could cling to a single channel or a small suite of channels. Again, it's about being where your customers are: right time, right channel.

— CHANNELS CURRENTLY OFFERED AND PLANNING TO ADD —

Channel	Currently Support	Plan to Add
Phone - inbound	94%	1%
Email	86%	3%
Phone - outbound	69%	4%
Self-service portal/knowledge base	49%	14%
Chat (web-based)	48%	40%
Offline (fax and/or mail)	48%	2%
Self-service phone/VR	47%	13%
Back office (e.g., claims processing)	40%	5%
Mobile app	30%	22%
SMS/text	26%	31%
Social media (live agent-assisted)	25%	10%
Chatbot	8%	28%
Social media (bot/AI-assisted)	8%	16%
Community forum moderation	7%	6%
Video	6%	6%
Voicebot (i.e., a voice-activated chatbot)	3%	13%

■ CURRENTLY SUPPORT   ■ PLAN TO ADD

HIRING FOR THE MULTICHANNEL CONTACT CENTER

Nearly three-quarters of contact centers plan to add at least one new channel in the next twelve months, and more than ever before, the ability to handle contacts/interactions across multiple channels – and do it well – is just part of the job for contact center professionals. Here are six rules of the road when hiring for the multichannel contact center:

1. **Rethink everything.**
    Many of these jobs are completely different than they were even a few years ago; the hiring practices of the past just won't cut it.

2. **Define the job accurately.**
    Analyze the job tasks, identify the skills and knowledge needed, and describe the performance you expect as specifically as possible.

3. **Cast a wide net.**
    Distribute open postings to external websites, recruiting/sourcing companies, social media, etc. And encourage employee referrals – many managers agree, this brings in the best candidates.

4. **Assess applicants through multiple channels.**
    Screen candidates in the channels you'll need them to use, to get a good sense of their comfort level, proficiency, manners, and style.

5. **Provide a side-by-side experience ASAP.**
    To really understand customer service jobs, you must experience them firsthand. The same is true for potential hires. If it's not their thing, better to find out now than later.

6. **Hire nice people.**
    When all is said and done, this is a people business, and you need employees who love helping other people. Or, as one successful manager put it, "Hire the passion and train the skills."

As investment in multiple channels increases, so too can the volume and complexity of interactions. In 50% of contact centers, contact volume increased in the past 12 months, just outpacing the increase in contact complexity (43%). The increase in both volume and complexity is attributed to the number of customers, new applications/systems, and the scope of services offered. Nearly half of the contact centers that have seen an increase in contact volume and complexity are planning to add more staff to compensate (48% and 44%, respectively); very few are planning to freeze hiring or cut staff (<10%).

In those contact centers that have seen *decreases* in volume (13%) and complexity (3%), respondents attribute that to the following:
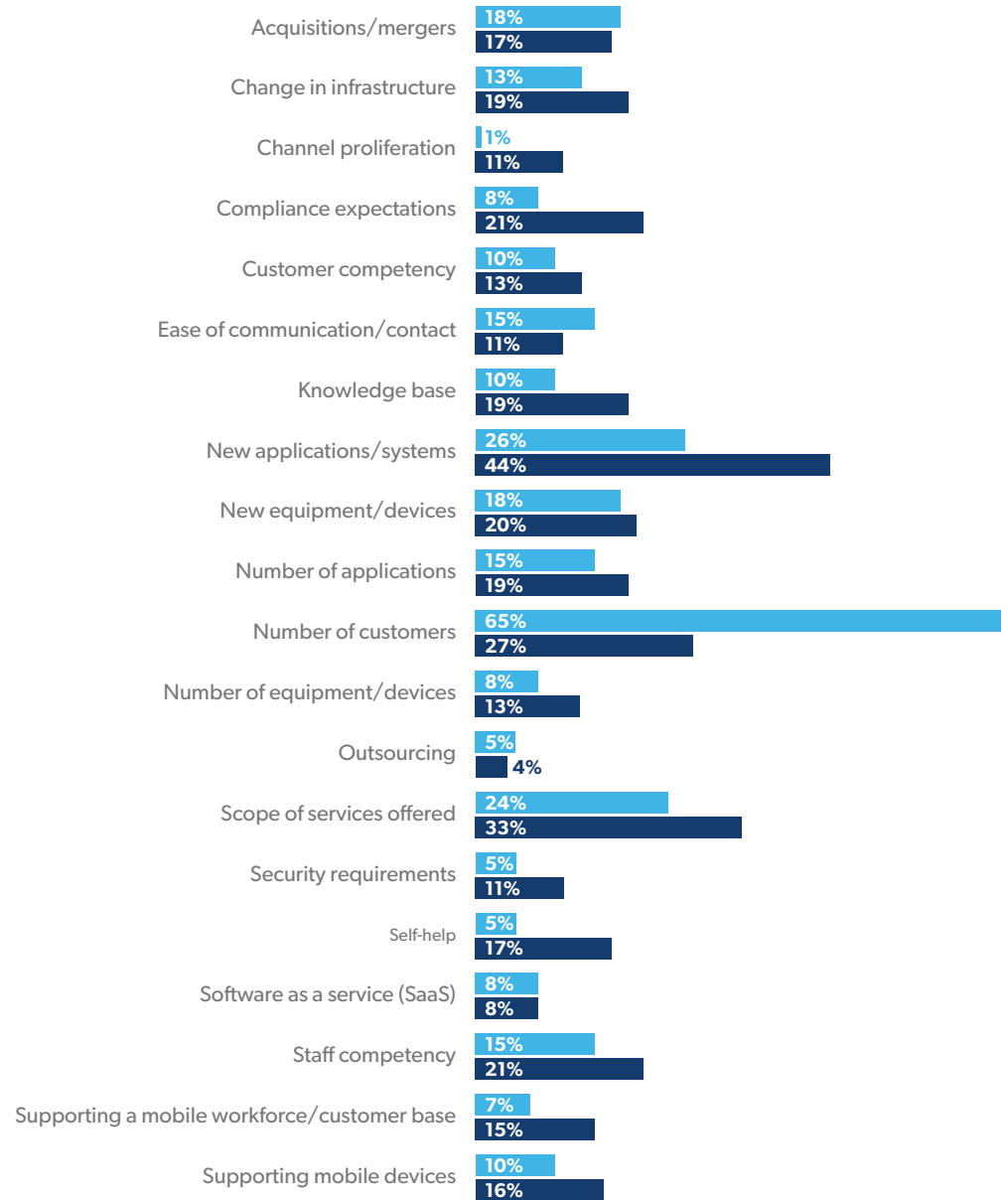
Volume
- An increase in the use of self-help
- More knowledgeable, competent staff
- A decrease in the number of customers
- Increased use of the knowledge base
- The availability of cloud-based tools/solutions (SaaS)

Complexity
- The availability of new applications, systems, and devices
- Changes in the overall infrastructure
- Improved ease of contact and communication with peers and customers
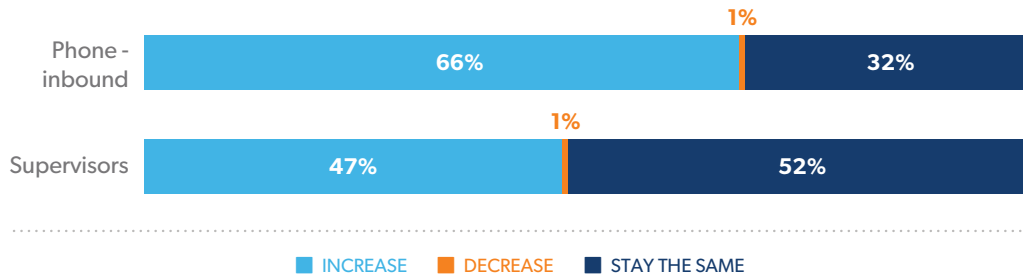- Increased use of the knowledge base

— FACTORS AFFECTING VOLUME AND COMPLEXITY —

Factor	Increased Volume	Increased Complexity
Acquisitions/mergers	18%	17%
Change in infrastructure	13%	19%
Channel proliferation	1%	11%
Compliance expectations	8%	21%
Customer competency	10%	13%
Ease of communication/contact	15%	11%
Knowledge base	10%	19%
New applications/systems	26%	44%
New equipment/devices	18%	20%
Number of applications	15%	19%
Number of customers	65%	27%
Number of equipment/devices	8%	13%
Outsourcing	5%	4%
Scope of services offered	24%	33%
Security requirements	5%	11%
Self-help	5%	17%
Software as a service (SaaS)	8%	8%
Staff competency	15%	21%
Supporting a mobile workforce/customer base	7%	15%
Supporting mobile devices	10%	16%

■ INCREASED VOLUME   ■ INCREASED COMPLEXITY

While this is the first year we've asked specifically about complexity, we can expect this to continue to increase, as both technology and customer expectations evolve and as contact centers expand their services and channel offerings. Likewise, agents and supervisors can expect to see their roles and responsibilities evolve, as multichannel further becomes the norm and organizations begin pursuing omnichannel more strategically. In fact, in over half of organizations that offer multiple channels, handling multiple channels is already part of both agents' and supervisors' official responsibilities (57% and 58%, respectively). Two-thirds of organizations expect that to increase for agents, compared to 47% for supervisors.
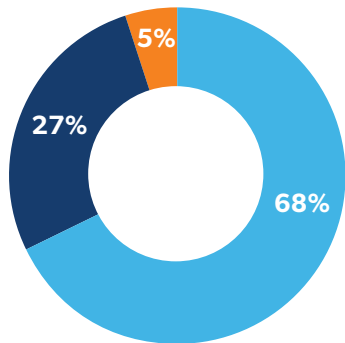
While voice and/or video channels require an agent's complete attention for the duration of a single interaction, some channels—such as web chat, SMS text, and social media—allow agents to interact with multiple customers at the same time. This can exponentially increase complexity, since the agent is not only dealing with multiple channels, but possibly multiple customers on one or more of those channels as well.

— CHANGING EXPECTATIONS FOR MULTICHANNEL SUPPORT —

Phone - inbound: 66% INCREASE, 1% DECREASE, 32% STAY THE SAME

Supervisors: 47% INCREASE, 1% DECREASE, 52% STAY THE SAME

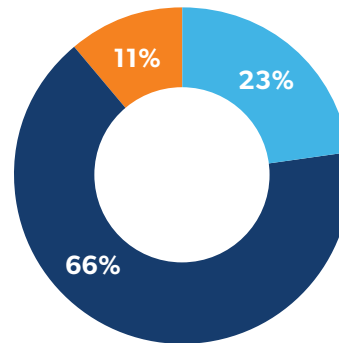■ INCREASE ■ DECREASE ■ STAY THE SAME

Overall, those who handle contacts/interactions across multiple channels are generally optimistic about it. Most find it no easier or harder to navigate transitions between voice and nonvoice channels, and almost all respondents rate their performance positively. That said, while supervisors are overwhelmingly optimistic about handling contacts/interactions across multiple channels, agents tend to be more ambivalent; despite this ambivalence, agents tend to view their performance more positively than their supervisors and leadership, who are more likely (5:1) to rate themselves as *moderately successful than highly successful.*[5]
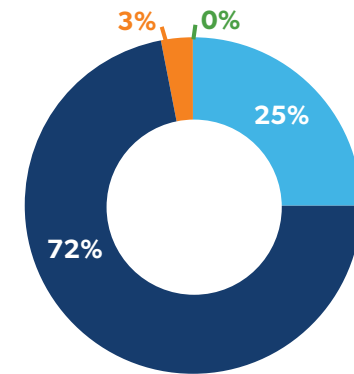
— ATTITUDE —
68% / 27% / 5%
■ OPTIMISTIC ■ NEUTRAL ■ APPREHENSIVE

— DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY —
23% / 66% / 11%
■ EASIER ■ ABOUT THE SAME ■ HARDER

— SUCCESS —
25% / 72% / 3% / 0%
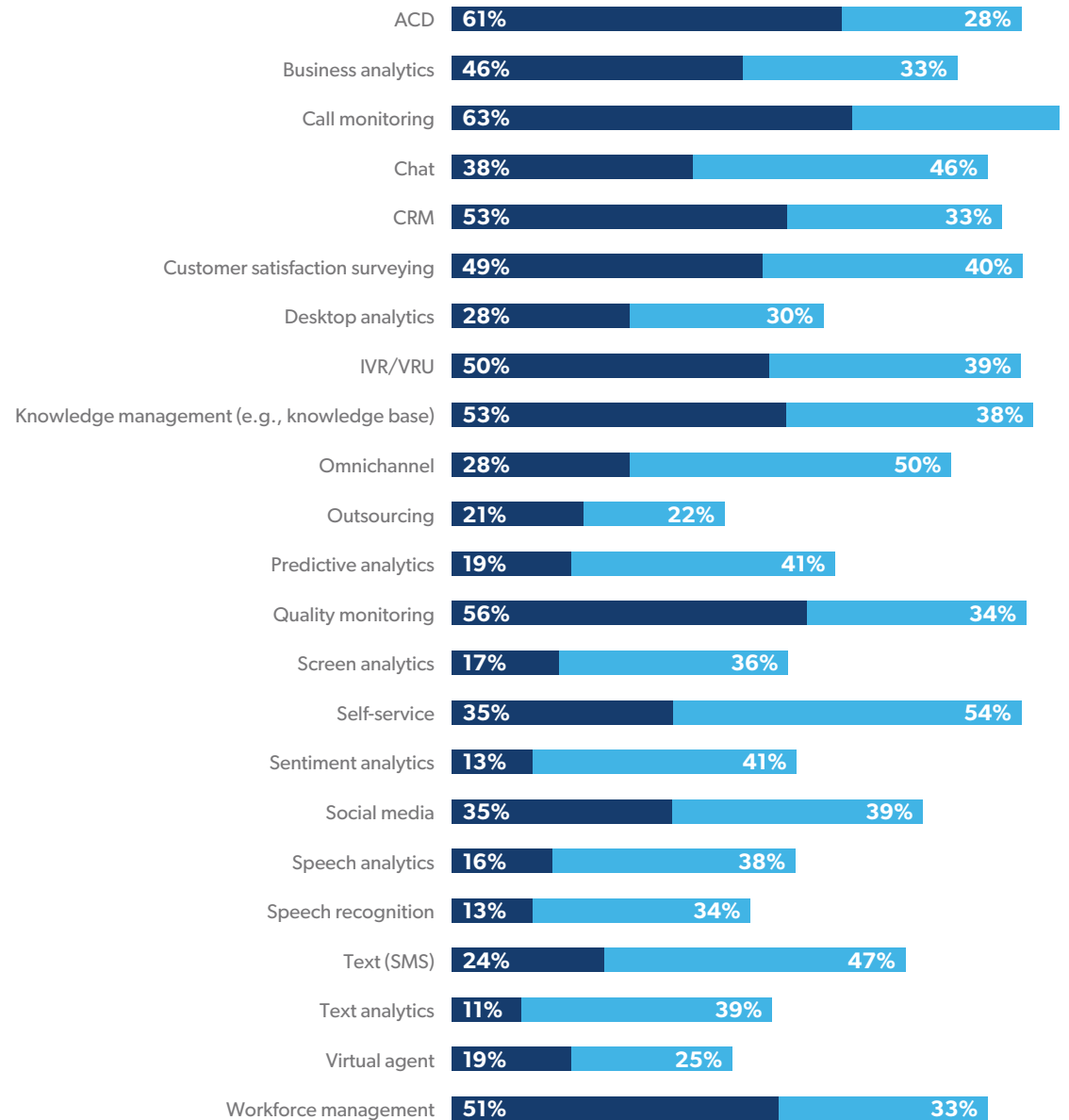■ HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL ■ MODERATELY SUCCESSFUL ■ MODERATELY UNSUCCESSFUL ■ HIGHLY UNSUCCESSFUL

[5] In a 2016 survey conducted by Qualtrics for NICE inContact, researchers found that agents tended to overestimate their success and achievements. That could also be at play here.

— CHALLENGES —

Navigating multiple screens/interfaces
52%

Learning new processes to handle contacts
50%

Learning new technologies to handle contacts
48%

Lacking confidence in ability to answer questions across channels
30%

Challenges to efficiency due to lack of internal processes
30%

Distraction (i.e., too many options)
26%

Challenges to efficiency due to internal approval process
17%

Process and technology present major challenges to effectively and efficiently supporting contacts/ interactions across multiple channels. In two-thirds of contact centers, agents and supervisors are required to toggle between no less than four applications to handle multichannel engagements; in large contact centers, this rises to 84%, with nearly half toggling between more than seven applications (and 6% toggling between more than 15!). Large contact centers, too, are more likely than their counterparts to experiment with new solutions, like advanced analytics (screen, desktop, predictive, text, and sentiment), adding additional complexity.

— CURRENT STATUS OF TOOLS/TECHNOLOGIES IN THE CONTACT CENTER —

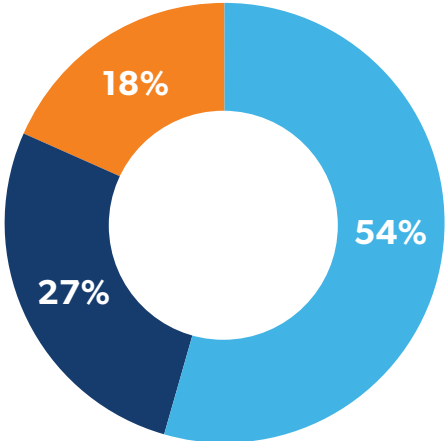| Technology	Currently Using	Planning to Add/Replace
ACD	61%	28%
Business analytics	46%	33%
Call monitoring	63%	
Chat	38%	46%
CRM	53%	33%
Customer satisfaction surveying	49%	40%
Desktop analytics	28%	30%
IVR/VRU	50%	39%
Knowledge management (e.g., knowledge base)	53%	38%
Omnichannel	28%	50%
Outsourcing	21%	22%
Predictive analytics	19%	41%
Quality monitoring	56%	34%
Screen analytics	17%	36%
Self-service	35%	54%
Sentiment analytics	13%	41%
Social media	35%	39%
Speech analytics	16%	38%
Speech recognition	13%	34%
Text (SMS)	24%	47%
Text analytics	11%	39%
Virtual agent	19%	25%
Workforce management	51%	33%

■ CURRENTLY USING ■ PLANNING TO ADD/REPLACE

Contact centers are complex environments that depend on diverse solutions and suites that must be regularly reviewed, updated, added, and/or retired. Multiple channels are no longer optional – contact centers must invest in tools to simply and streamline the process, in training to ensure agents and supervisors are confident in their skills, and clear, defined processes to provide agents and supervisors with actionable guidance.

Attitude, challenges, and successes aside, supporting multiple channels is generally perceived to be a beneficial career move/opportunity (54%). It requires the cultivation of additional skills (multitasking, writing skills, critical thinking, conflict management, emotional intelligence, empathy, etc.), and it can be financially lucrative: in one-third of organizations, agents who handle multiple channels are paid more than their peers who handle single channels, with three-quarters of contact centers increasing compensation by up to 10%. (No contact centers report increasing compensation by more than 30%.)

— PERCEPTION OF SUPPORTING MULTIPLE CHANNELS —

- ■ SUPPORTING MULTIPLE CHANNELS IS A BENEFICIAL CAREER MOVE/OPPORTUNITY
- ■ SUPPORTING MULTIPLE CHANNELS IS SOMEWHAT OF A BENEFICIAL CAREER MOVE/OPPORTUNITY
- ■ SUPPORTING MULTIPLE CHANNELS ISN'T A BENEFICIAL CAREER MOVE/OPPORTUNITY

CONCLUSION

Improving employee experience can have multiple ripple effects across the organization. Costs can be reduced while both employee and customer retention can increase. This study points to some specific areas where improvements can be made, namely:

• Leadership improvement
• Reducing attrition/turnover
• Reducing stress
• Improving technologies and efficiency

People
While attrition in contact centers is certainly an issue, employee churn, which includes both negative and positive attrition, is reaching high percentages. For example, if 25% of agents leave the company, 20% leave the contact center for other jobs within the company, and 18% move to different positions within the contact center, that's a total churn rate of 64%, which can—in and of itself—generate uncertainty and stress. While moving to other parts of the organization or taking a new position—especially if it is a promotion—within the contact center are generally good, reducing negative attrition should be a major focus of efforts to improve the overall experience for agents.

Contact volume is a major factor in both satisfaction and dissatisfaction, so staffing level is critical: There should not be too little work, of course, but having too much is an obvious contributor to lower satisfaction.

Paid time off (PTO) is the largest factor contributing to stress for those who feel it most or all of the time. Not having adequate time off to attend to the needs of children and family can create negative emotions both at the workplace and outside of it. While there certainly is expense involved in PTO, it must be weighed against the expense of high turnover and reduced job performance.

Process
As part of any employee experience initiative, processes should be critically reviewed. Efforts should be made to reduce friction wherever it occurs, whether between employees, teams, departments, or systems. Managers and supervisors can play a pivotal role in obtaining feedback from agents that can illuminate pain points. Since coaching is part of the role of managers and supervisors, they can help agents navigate pain points and make continuous improvements.

While increasing formal training time is desirable, it may not be attractive or feasible. Understanding that training can be a continual process can help managers supervisors, and agents take advantage of learning opportunities they may currently be missing.

Technology
Inadequate or hard-to-use systems are a leading challenge: agents and other employees want to do a better job but feel hampered by the technologies they have to use to accomplish their work. While this study looked at this challenge from the employee perspective, it can spill into the customer experience as well. Struggling with inadequate systems can cause agents to interact slowly, ask the customer to repeat answers, and introduce human errors that are reflected in customer records. Having the right technology in place is extremely important as the number of channels increases and customer expectations become ever higher.

Strategy
Leadership—or lack of it—has a large impact on engagement. Emphasizing not only ongoing leadership development, but also the exercise and demonstration of good leadership throughout the organization, can contribute to a more engaged workforce that accomplishes more and increases the bottom line.
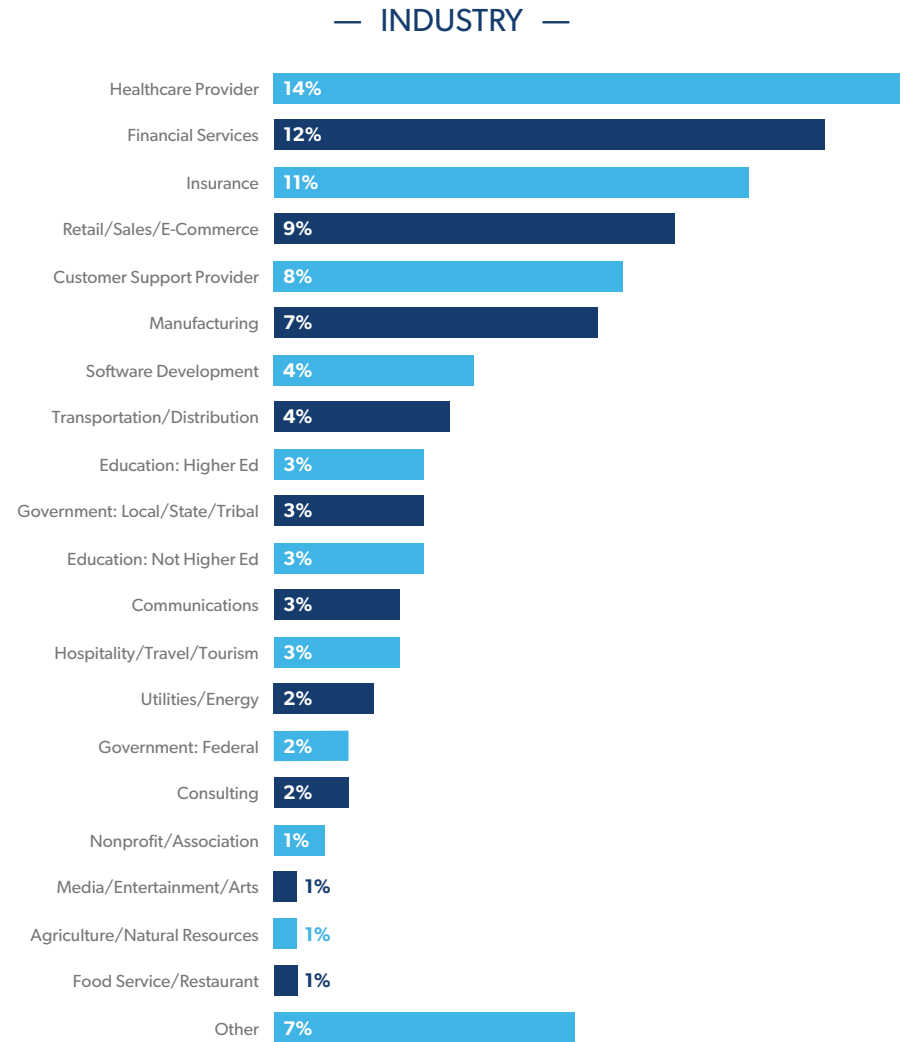
Armed with the information in this study, organizations can focus on strategies to improve the employee (and customer) experience, such as appropriate investment in improved technologies for customer interaction, communication, and workforce management. Employee engagement should be front and center in strategic discussions, since its consequences have the potential to affect every aspect of the organization as a whole—not just the contact center.
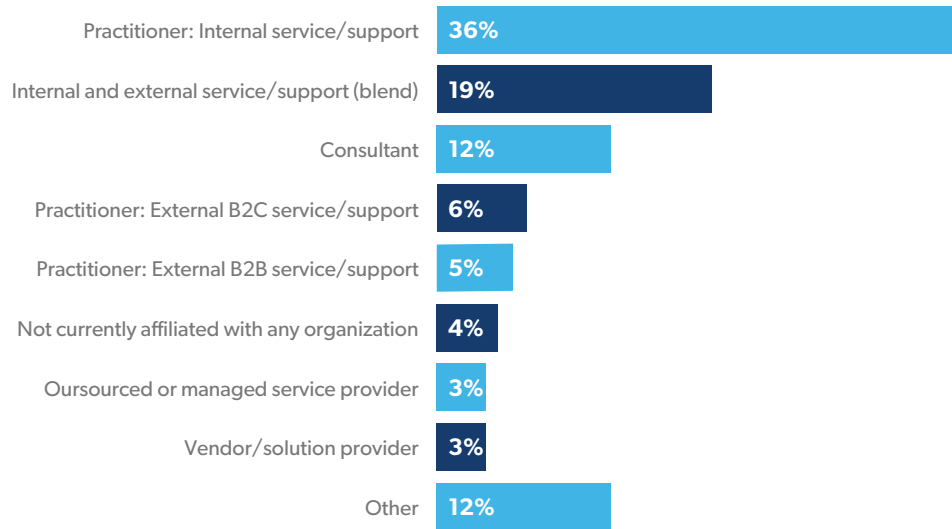
ABOUT THE STUDY

The 179 respondents to this survey represented a range of industries, with the largest representative groups being healthcare and financial services (14% and 12%, respectively), followed by insurance (11%) and retail (9%). The study participants represented all roles within service and support, including executive/senior management (38%), specialist or midlevel management (43%), supervisors (9%), and agents (7%).

Contact centers in this study support a wide assortment of channels, with 69% currently offering five or more different channels of service. With regard to the size of their contact centers, 52% represent small contact centers, those with 150 or fewer full-time equivalents (FTEs); nearly one-quarter represent medium-sized contact centers of 151-500 FTEs; and large contact centers (>501 FTEs) account for 25%.
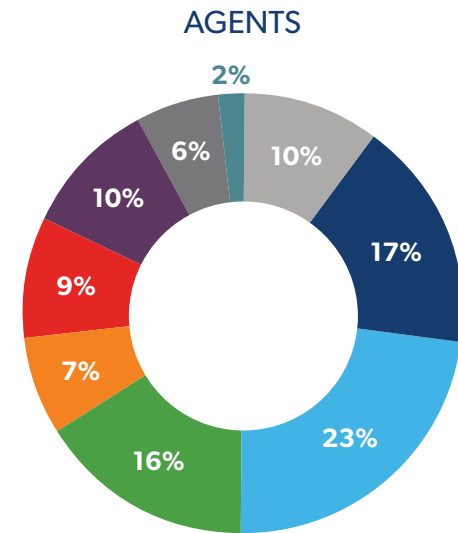
One-third of the respondents provide internal service/support exclusively (36%), with 19% providing blended support (internal/external) and 11% providing external (customer-facing, B2B and B2C) support only. The majority of respondents are involved with customer service and the contact/call center (both 76%), with just over one-third involved in technical support (33%) and nearly one-quarter involved with IT (23%). Less than one-quarter are affiliated with sales and/or marketing. Geographically, this study is representative of organizations that are predominantly based in North America, specifically the United States (93%) and Canada (2%).

— INDUSTRY —

Industry	Percent
Healthcare Provider	14%
Financial Services	12%
Insurance	11%
Retail/Sales/E-Commerce	9%
Customer Support Provider	8%
Manufacturing	7%
Software Development	4%
Transportation/Distribution	4%
Education: Higher Ed	3%
Government: Local/State/Tribal	3%
Education: Not Higher Ed	3%
Communications	3%
Hospitality/Travel/Tourism	3%
Utilities/Energy	2%
Government: Federal	2%
Consulting	2%
Nonprofit/Association	1%
Media/Entertainment/Arts	1%
Agriculture/Natural Resources	1%
Food Service/Restaurant	1%
Other	7%

— ROLE —

Role	%
Practitioner: Internal service/support	36%
Internal and external service/support (blend)	19%
Consultant	12%
Practitioner: External B2C service/support	6%
Practitioner: External B2B service/support	5%
Not currently affiliated with any organization	4%
Oursourced or managed service provider	3%
Vendor/solution provider	3%
Other	12%

— POSITION —

Position	%
Non-IT executive management (CEO, owner, president, VP)	3%
IT/technical executive management (CIO, CTO, CSO, CISO)	2%
Marketing/customer executive management (CMO, CCO)	1%
Senior management (director)	32%
Mid-level management (manager)	22%
Specialist management (knowledge manager, project manager, workforce manager, trainer, etc.)	21%
Supervisor/team lead	9%
Customer support (analyst, technician, representative)	7%
Other	3%

— TENURE, BY ROLE —

AGENTS

Less than 1 year: 10%
1 year: 17%
2 years: 23%
3 years: 16%
4 years: 7%
5 years: 9%
5-8 years: 10%
8-10 years: 6%
More than 10 years: 2%

SUPERVISORS

1 year: 4%
2 years: 10%
3 years: 15%
4 years: 9%
5 years: 14%
5-8 years: 20%
8-10 years: 15%
More than 10 years: 13%

Legend:
- LESS THAN 1 YEAR
- 1 YEAR
- 2 YEARS
- 3 YEARS
- 4 YEARS
- 5 YEARS
- 5-8 YEARS
- 8-10 YEARS
- MORE THAN 10 YEARS

— BUSINESS AREA —

Business Area	Percentage
Customer Service	76%
Contact/call center	76%
Technical support	35%
Sales	23%
IT	23%
Marketing	15%
Other	4%

— ANNUAL BUDGET —

Annual Budget	Percentage
Less than $500,000	18%
$500,000 - $1,000,000	6%
$1,000,001 - $2,500,000	21%
$2,500,001 - $5,000,000	22%
$5,000,001 - $10,000,000	16%
More than $10,000,000	18%

— ORGANIZATION SIZE —

Organization Size	Percentage
Fewer than 50	5%
50-99	3%
100-150	8%
151-500	19%
501-1,000	12%
1,001-5,000	21%
5,001-10,000	8%
10,001-20,000	7%
20,001-50,000	6%
More than 50,000	11%

— CONTACT CENTER SIZE —

Contact Center Size	Percentage
Fewer than 50	28%
50-99	15%
100-150	10%
151-500	24%
501-1,000	8%
1,001-5,000	10%
5,001-10,000	2%
10,001-20,000	1%
20,001-50,000	1%
More than 50,000	3%

For more than 30 years, ICMI has been in the business of improving contact centers. Whether it be your people, your processes, or your strategy, we want to partner with you to take your customer service to the next level. ICMI's experienced and dedicated team of industry insiders, trainers, and consultants are committed to helping you:

• Raise the strategic value of your contact center
• Optimize your operations
• Improve your customer service

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