



Customer Service in the Digital Workplace

An Employee Effectiveness Model: A More Active Approach To Workforce Optimization

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Introduction

Your customers are coming to you via an ever-growing variety of channels: phone, e-mail, the corporate Web site, and social media. Every employee is now customer facing — either directly or indirectly — and, as a result, distinctions between the front office and back office are blurring. How do you make sure that these employees are in the right place at the right time, and possess the right skills and the right information, to provide excellent service to your customers? How can you do this while effectively leveraging existing corporate systems and resources? And, perhaps most importantly, how do you boost employee engagement to ensure that what employees do aligns with customer and company objectives, increases profitability, and gives you a competitive advantage?

The answer: An employee effectiveness model. This is the practice of aligning training, job assignment and scheduling, quality assurance, and career development to ensure your workforce has the right skills to provide stellar service to customers. If done right, the model builds a more engaged, efficient, and effective organization — one with happier employees, more satisfied customers, and a much healthier corporate balance sheet.

Today's Customer Service Challenges

With many more channels and a much more dispersed workforce, organizations today are forced to manage a dizzying array of customer service systems, customer touch points, and customer-related tasks — often with very little insight into the business value of a given activity. This raises issues for business leaders across a diverse range of departments — from customer care, to human capital management, to training. The challenges facing these business heads include:

- > **A more diverse and distributed employee base.** Gone are the days when all customer support functions took place inside the contact center. Today, teams in both the front and back office — as well as remote and distributed employees such as home workers — need to connect and better engage with customers. Companies also need to align the competencies and skills with customer needs, regardless of location.
- > **A proliferation of customer-facing channels.** Companies need to differentiate how they approach and interact with both customers and employees. For example, the rising popularity of Web and e-mail channels, chat, and text, as well as social networking, means that companies have to evaluate and develop new employee competencies and skills within the workforce.

- > **An incomplete assessment of employee talent.** Just because an employee is hired with a certain level of skill and knowledge doesn't mean he or she will — or should — remain at that level indefinitely. Products and services change; job roles transition; and the types of customer interactions shift as technology evolves. Unless skills and knowledge are constantly assessed and updated — with the right training reaching the right people at the right time — organizations will be unable to use their talent pool effectively. The result of this would be duplications of skills in some areas, skills gaps in others, and an overall lack of engagement with customers. It's immensely costly to hire new customer service employees, yet this cost can be reduced with the proper coaching and training.
- > **Misalignment of people and tasks.** When there's no centralized view into employee skill sets and no centralized way of managing the talent, processes and people become misaligned. With one department owning workforce planning, another owning quality assurance, and still another responsible for training, many organizations lack the holistic view they need to streamline processes and improve employee performance.
- > **High turnover of customer-facing employees and compromised quality.** The turnover rate among contact center employees — widely reported to be between 40-50% annually — is among the highest in any category of workers. Although this is less the case for back-office employees, companies face an equally large challenge: some of the highest-paid employees in the company work there, and frequently there is no accountability for the quality or response times of customer-related tasks.

What an Employee Effectiveness Model Is, and Why It Matters

The degree to which customers are satisfied directly impacts your profitability, and customer service plays a key role in ensuring customer satisfaction. Consider the following statistics from a recent survey commissioned by Genesys in collaboration with Datamonitor / Ovum that measured the cost of poor customer service worldwide:

- > Seventy percent of consumers report that poor customer service alone has caused them to end a business relationship.
- > An estimated \$83 billion is lost annually due to failed customer relationships.
- > Seventy-eight percent of consumers say that competent customer service representatives play a significant role in customer satisfaction.

In most customer service operations, staff costs — such as salary and benefits — represent between 60-70% of operating expenses. As such, they add up to a major expense line item — an expense that can be incurred in the traditional front-office customer service operation, like the contact center, or by supporting customer service resources in the back office.

Although companies have long measured and tracked utilization in their front office customer service operations, they have rarely taken a more holistic view to include personnel outside the contact center — employees who are equally critical to the quality of customer service. Not only are these back office workers often underutilized, but they tend to be the more expert knowledge workers who incur a higher proportion of overall salary costs.

Despite the fact that the financial stakes are high, many companies don't have a firm grasp on the characteristics and capabilities of their workforces, much less how those characteristics and capabilities impact the quality of customer service. For example, they fail to appreciate how important it is to understand and develop employee talent so that workers possess the skills needed for the digital age.

This challenge has four distinct components. Companies need to:

- > Hire the right people
- > Train them well
- > Schedule them efficiently
- > Give them the right tools to do their jobs

A first step is to identify the degree of engagement of both front- and back-office employees. A report from Watson Wyatt states that highly engaged employees are more than twice as likely to be top performers overall than other employees. Engaged employees are also much more effective, are less likely to leave, are more productive and, most critically, produce higher customer satisfaction ratings and therefore larger revenues and greater profitability for the business.

A Gallup Poll survey shows that only 26% of employees are actively engaged with customers, while 55% are passively engaged, and 19% aren't engaged at all. However, an employee effectiveness model can help to address these issues.

The premise behind an employee effectiveness model is that by proactively identifying workforce needs before they become critical; getting the right insight into employee profiles and gaps; and providing the right training at the right time to ensure you have the right people in the right roles to achieve success, you can quickly pinpoint passively engaged employees and shift them into being actively engaged ones. In other words, with an employee effectiveness model, businesses can potentially sift out low-tier performers, continue to motivate the top-tiers, and concentrate on moving mid-tier ones into the top tier through the right training. By doing this, they can enhance productivity and, more importantly, increase customer satisfaction as well as profitability.

An employee effectiveness model brings together a host of capabilities under a single umbrella. Organizations may already have legacy systems in place to handle critical functions like quality assurance, workforce management, coaching, e-learning, and customer feedback. However, such systems provide a "passive" approach and often remain siloed, creating latency delays, errors, and overhead. As a result, executives are not getting the high-level view of workforce capabilities they need to identify and develop the talent their organizations require to keep pace with customer demands. The best way to obtain such a view is by deploying a more "active" approach that brings together all these disparate systems into a consistent and effective model and provides a more dynamic way to manage customer-impacting resources.

By providing a consistent view of resources, interactions, and outcomes that can ensure a close link between customer engagement and employee effectiveness, an employee effectiveness model will give companies a suite of capabilities that provide a holistic approach to managing employee competencies and developing talent pools across the enterprise — all while minimizing overhead costs.

Why is this important? Ultimately, customer engagement has a direct impact on the bottom line. As a Towers Perrin study points out, companies with higher engagement saw a 3.7% increase in operating profit, while those with lower levels of engagement witnessed a 2% decline.

What to Look for In An Employee Effectiveness Model

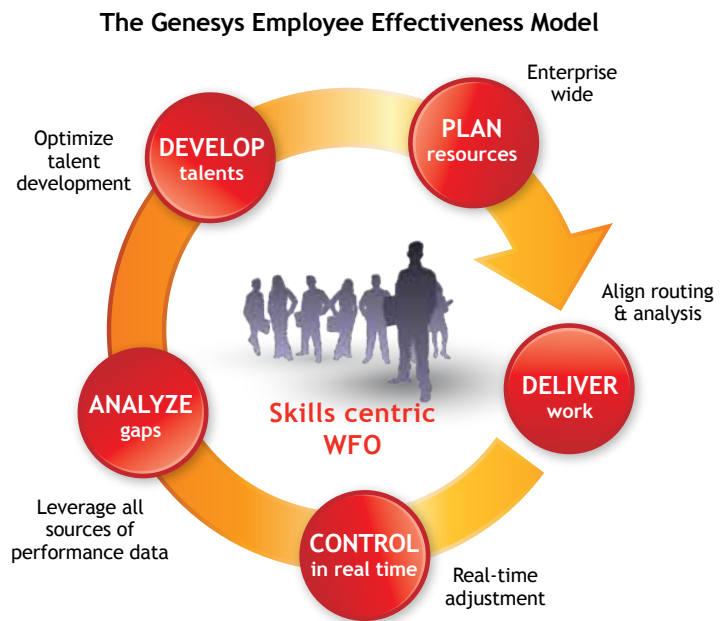
During tough economic times, the phrase “do more with less” becomes the mantra of every business. Yet in reality this mantra rings true regardless of the economic climate. Companies that thrive in good times and bad have learned how to get the most out of their workforce — matching interactions and tasks to business results, and talent to interactions and tasks, in a way that increases employees’ engagement with customers. In this way, they ensure a closed-loop process of customer engagement, employee effectiveness, and profitability. An “active” workforce optimization solution facilitates this closed-loop employee effectiveness model by providing the following key capabilities:

- > **Plan.** Not all communications channels are equal, nor do they require the same skill sets for successful customer interactions. A good model recognizes this, and uses multiple algorithms based on actual trends across voice, e-mail, chat, text, social media, and work items to help organizations plan and optimize staffing across a variety of channels. With the right employees communicating via the right conversation channels, these tools ensure that resources remain aligned by linking schedules with development plans, skills, and training. A good model should also include tight integration with routing to ensure that employees only receive customer interactions or work items that they have been trained to handle or that fall within their area of channel expertise. Thus, a phone support expert should not suddenly be required to interact with customers via Twitter, for instance, nor should customer service reps find themselves fielding questions about products they’ve yet to be trained on.
- > **Deliver.** By measuring employee skill levels from the first day a new hire walks through the door to the last day he or she walks out, a good model provides employees with a development path through constant monitoring and coaching. By tracking skill development in a centralized way, a leading-edge solution can automatically trigger updates for workforce management scheduling, training programs, and routing strategies to ensure customer interactions and tasks are assigned to the workers best able to handle them. And, lastly, this helps you retain those employees who exhibit the most potential to become and remain engaged.
- > **Control.** Once an organization has put a plan in place and defined key performance indicators (KPIs), a leading model will ensure that organizations are meeting service level agreements (SLAs). By providing a centralized view of team and agent/employee performance metrics, the most innovative software allows companies to determine, monitor, and identify employee behaviors, and to take immediate corrective action in real time at both the team and individual levels if they are not meeting established SLAs. Organizations can even leverage these tools to provide employees with scorecards so that they can monitor their own progress as it relates to the specific goals they have been assigned.
- > **Analyze.** By offering a wealth of analysis tools, the solution takes advantage of both internal and external data to help organizations identify skill gaps in both teams and individual employees. By feeding data into a single common skills repository, such tools can be used to identify those employees who are exceptional at their jobs and isolate the skills they have in common. Organizations can then establish best-practice benchmarks and employ interactive tests, evaluate quality scores from recorded contacts and screen captures, and perform customer feedback surveys and correlate these to get a 360-degree view of employee performance.
- > **Develop.** Once skill gaps and best employee practices have been identified, a top solution helps organizations address them by dynamically creating, scheduling, and managing custom-designed training programs at the most convenient times given employees’ work schedules without impacting service levels. A good solution also provides a centralized portal from which supervisors, schedulers, trainers, and employees can monitor employee progress. Additionally, they can ensure compliance with training plans using “complete by” dates as well as tracking both classroom and e-learning sessions attended.

The Benefits of an Employee Effectiveness Model

By implementing an employee effectiveness model, enterprises can:

- > **Do more with less and reduce training costs.** By identifying skill gaps and automatically delivering the right training and resources to fill them, the model can have a direct impact on the bottom line, transforming underperforming employees into engaged and effective ones and eliminating the need for costly new hires.
- > **Increase revenue through enhanced employee performance.** More informed employees are more effective and productive employees. Indeed, the cardinal rule of customer service is that the employee must possess more information than the customer. An effective model allows you to identify and track employee performance and to take immediate and appropriate action — such as coaching or training — to improve performance.
- > **Improve customer satisfaction.** When you consider that industry statistics show that it takes, on average, five engaged employees to counteract the negative effects of just one disengaged one, it's clear that every customer experience counts. An effective employee effectiveness model helps ensure that each experience is a good one.
- > **Hire and retain the right people.** The improved insight into employee skill sets and talent pools enables companies to make better use of existing resources. They're able to hire just the right people with just the right skills at just the right time, filling real holes in their customer support capabilities. Once employees come on board, companies can use agile feedback loops such as maintaining and updating employee proficiencies/skills in one place, testing employees after training has been completed, and regularly reviewing career plans to help ensure that they excel at their jobs and follow a clearly defined development path.



An Employee Effectiveness Model — The Genesys Workforce Optimization Suite

Improving customer service has been the core of Genesys' business for almost two decades. Today, Genesys solutions support more than 100 million customer interactions per day for 4,000 organizations in 80 countries.

The Genesys Workforce Optimization Suite forms an integral part of the customer service ecosystem — effectively building better customer relationships through enhancing employee engagement.

The Genesys Workforce Optimization Suite takes a holistic approach to maximizing productivity and minimizing overhead. It optimizes the link between customer and employee engagement by targeting the right training, skill development and career growth to the right employee at the right time — resulting in a more engaged, efficient, and effective organization.

Many other vendor's workforce optimization approaches provide the assessment and analysis tools, but lack the ability to control and manage all processes from one centralized location. Furthermore, they miss the ability to seamlessly integrate skills into the routing logic, deliver end-to-end analyses of employees' career paths, or optimize both front- and back-office performance.

Genesys Workforce Optimization ensures that customers are dynamically directed to the employee with the most relevant training and knowledge, and that employees in turn are assessed and scheduled with just the right training to meet their needs. The result: well-trained, well-informed customer service employees at every customer touch point.

Enterprises looking to optimize and improve people performance can avoid costly new hires by accurately understanding skill gaps, targeting training, and quickly assessing the impact of that training on new/improved skill levels. The Genesys Workforce Optimization Suite helps them do all these things, plus:

- > **Plan the right staffing enterprise wide** — enhancing supervisors' ability to coach and manage the activities of both individuals and teams
- > **Control and adjust in real time** — providing timely troubleshooting and quick corrective action when agreements are not being met
- > **Identify skills gaps** — using both internal data and external data by leveraging all sources of data such as employee test results, interaction monitoring, customer survey results, and performance management to pinpoint training needs
- > **Implement corrective training plans** that provide all interested parties with visibility into training schedules and development plans to close skill gaps and deliver classroom or e-learning training
- > **Optimize service delivery** — leveraging routing rules, competencies, and skills to guide employees down a positive career development path, and customers to a quick resolution of issues and a high level of engagement

Conclusion

Successful customer service organizations realize that maximizing employee potential is the key to success in both good times and bad.

A leading workforce optimization solution requires an effective employee model to help businesses transcend merely weathering the current recession to flourishing in the new economy by enabling them to:

- > Break down silos and make information available to everyone who needs it — including supervisors/managers, schedulers, planners, quality and training departments, and employees
- > Centralize management of employee competency requirements and gaps
- > Control costs by scheduling the right training at the right time
- > Develop effective talent pools and direct all interactions to the appropriate employees

Most importantly, with the right employee effectiveness model in place, the workforce optimization solution will enable companies to optimize the all-important link between customer engagement and employee effectiveness to achieve better business results.

Genesys Worldwide

Genesys software solutions from Alcatel-Lucent manage customer interactions over phone, Web and mobile devices. The Genesys software suite handles customer conversations across multiple channels and resources — self-service, assisted-service and proactive outreach — fulfilling customer requests and optimizing customer care goals while efficiently using resources. Genesys software directs more than 100 million customer interactions every day for 4,000 companies and government agencies in 80 countries. These companies and agencies leverage their entire organization, from the contact center to the back office, while dynamically engaging their customers.

For more information, go to www.genesyslab.com.

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