

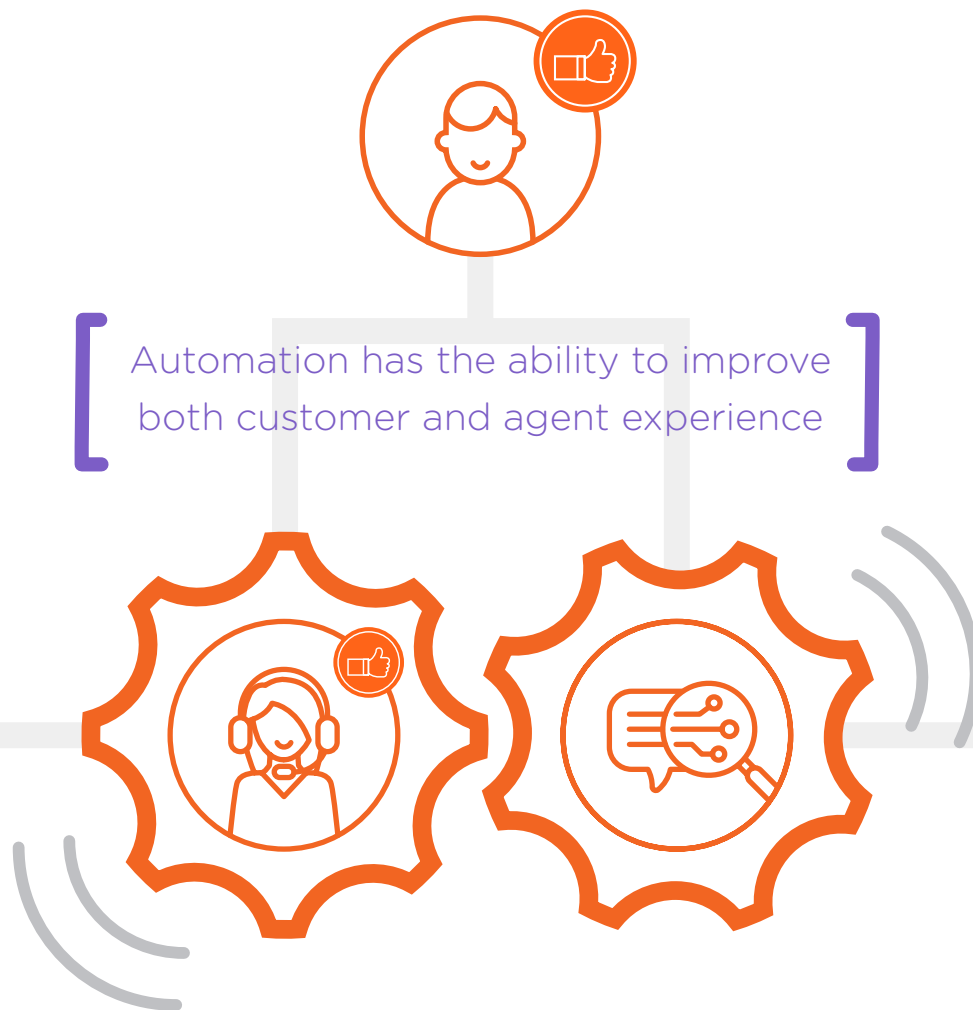
CHANGE MANAGEMENT:

Redefining Agent Experience in the world of Conversational AI



Introduction

Artificial intelligence is a powerful force shaping the future of work. Contact center agents were once responsible for every interaction that a company had with their customers, but this is quickly changing. Despite the fear, this is a good thing for not only businesses, but also for agents themselves.



Agent Experience

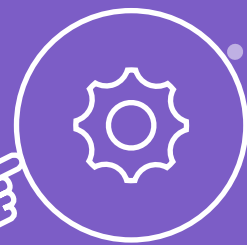
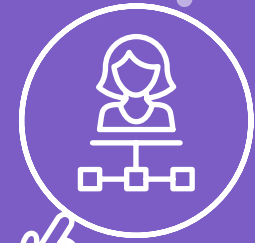


What is Agent Experience?

Agent experience is the entirety of every touchpoint that a contact center agent encounters during their workday and with the company for whom they work. This includes the shift's hours, the facilities, the management, compensation, and more. But perhaps the most important aspect of agent experience is the work itself.

According to the Harvard Business Review, employees that want to stay in their current job are highly motivated and remain with the company almost exclusively for reasons associated with the work itself. In other words, the satisfaction of one's job is majorly influenced by the day-to-day tasks that are performed.

Contact centers have a reputation for high turnover of agents. A large reason for this churn is the fact that contact center agents traditionally handle simple, repetitive tasks, such as resetting passwords or inputting customer information. Monotonous work tasks are frequently cited as a top stress of a contact center agent because it's human nature to want mental stimulation. This topic will be explored further in the following sections.



Why is Agent Experience Important?

Agent experience is important because customer experience is important. Fifty-eight percent of customers say that customer service is a very important factor that affects their choice of a brand, and 61% of consumers say that they have stopped transacting with a business after a poor service experience, according to Microsoft's State of Global Customer Service Report.

Simply put, in order to have positive customer experience, you must have a positive agent experience. If a customer calls a contact center and has a conversation with a frustrated, bored, or unknowledgeable agent, chances are the customer experience will be bad. In other words, agent pain points often result in customer pain points. If an agent does not have seamless access to customer information when they call, it can lead to frustrated customers because the customers have to repeat information they have already given.

Another reason for providing a good agent experience is that it will reduce operational costs for the contact center, as high agent churn can be costly. This is due to the allotment of resources and money for hiring and training contact center agents.

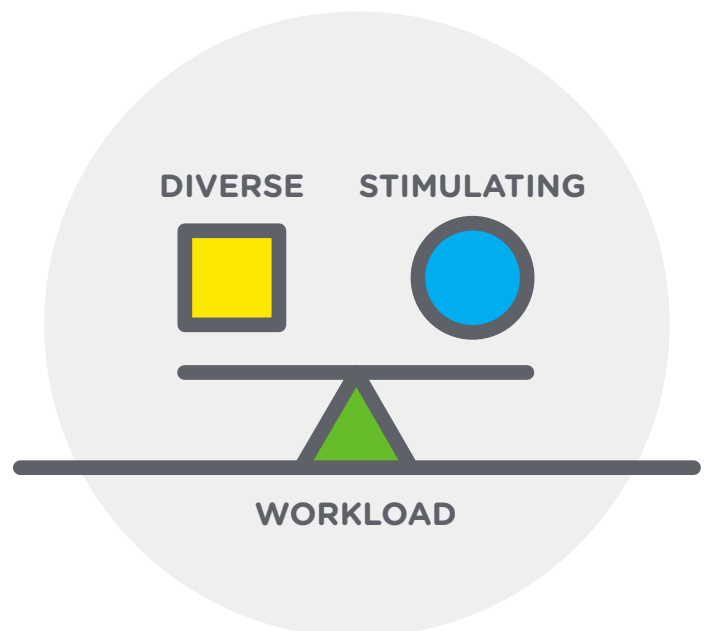


What is a “Good” Agent Experience?

Agents crave diverse and stimulating work. This type of work makes agents feel valued and therefore satisfied in their role. In fact, monotonous work tasks are frequently cited as a top stress of a contact center agent because it's human nature to want mental stimulation.

As an example, agents would much rather be focused on tasks that require human reasoning and complex thinking, like helping a customer, as opposed to a mundane task like resetting passwords over and over again.

Conversational AI applications have the ability to take over these mundane and data-driven tasks, while delivering the same level of customer experience to the customer, so that agents can refocus on these more productive and stimulating tasks.



What are Some Common Agent Pain Points, and how can a Conversational AI application help?

There are many pain points for agents that can hurt agent experience, including:



Repetitive Tasks

As mentioned earlier, repetitive tasks become monotonous for live agents which leads to reduced job satisfaction. With an IVA, there is a dramatic reduction in the repetitive tasks that agents have previously been forced to manage. Rather, agents are refocused on tasks that require human reasoning and complex thinking. Having the opportunity to upsell or cross-sell different offerings to customers provides diversity in the work day.

According to Gartner, by 2022, 85% of customer service interactions will start with self-service, up from 48% in 2019. By leveraging a properly deployed Intelligent Virtual Assistant, customers will get the care they need, when they need it, without relying on agents for the simple tasks customers can manage on their own.



Maintaining Empathy when dealing with frustrated customers

Long wait times, difficult to understand phone trees, and lack of self-service have all been known to frustrate customers. These customers will likely reach agents, and proceed to take their frustration out of the same individual that's trying to get them to a resolution. Contact center agents are often inundated with frustrated customers which takes a toll on their overall happiness in their role. It's nearly impossible to maintain empathy and understanding when there's a never ending queue of dissatisfied customers.



Access to data

Executives report that their service agents' top frustration with using their current tools in the field is that current tools are not fast enough (45%) and they can't access all of the information they need (38%).(Source: Salesforce, 2016)

Agents are frequently concerned with having quick access to data to appropriately respond to customer inquiries without a long pause or delay.

HUMANS ARE STILL VITAL TO A GOOD CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE. AI WILL NEVER REPLACE THEM COMPLETELY.



Unexpected Volume

Contact center demand often exceeds the capacity of agents. IVAs are able to put up the slack without missing a beat. When the unexpected hits, agents are required to work overtime to manage the sudden spike in volume. This unpredictability is a cause of stress for contact center agents, and it's difficult to plan for without the scalability of an IVA. Since IVAs can handle unlimited volume without any notice or additional training,

Change Management



So if agent experience will be improved with a Conversational AI application, such as an Intelligent Virtual Assistant (IVA), then it should be easy to get them on board? Well, not always. There are a lot of surrounding misconceptions and misinformation around the word AI which causes fear and misunderstanding. Just like with any new technology, the way that leadership helps roll out the new system to employees can have a great impact on its success. Ultimately, with successful change management, agents will see AI as a positive thing that improves their jobs and satisfaction. Introducing the technology in the right way can make or break organizational sentiment of the application.



What is change management?

Change management describes the approaches made from the leadership within a business to prepare, support, and help individuals, teams, and organizations during organizational changes. Because the introduction of a Conversational AI system changes many aspects of agents' jobs, it's important to approach the implementation as an organizational change.

Every company is different and will require its own approach to change management, but there are general considerations to follow to ensure the transition to a new way of working is seamless and successful. Below is a list of three best practices based on experience with our own clients to guide a successful employee transition:

1. A Clear Message

Having a clear vision and implementation strategy that is used by the entire leadership will ensure that the information that trickles down to agents is trustworthy and reliable. If agents are hearing different messages from different people, or not hearing anything at all, there is a lot of room for interpretation and misconceptions about Conversational AI.

Imagine you are a contact center agent who hears from word of mouth that AI will be replacing tasks from agents. Even if the original intention was that the AI would handle mundane tasks to leave agents more time to focus on customers who need their support, agents may start to fear that their jobs are at stake. Creating and widely distributing a clear message, such as, "we are bringing a technology to our contact center that will support you in your role better" will create a more seamless transition to the new way of working.



2. Education & Training

Just as Conversational AI requires constant tuning and training to stay relevant, human agents will need regular training with the technology to ensure the implementation is not only successful outright, but continues to stay beneficial for many years to come.

Because advanced Conversational AI is relatively new, it can be assumed that many contact center agents will not have worked with a system like it before. Providing education, even to those who excel at their role, is vital to ensuring that there is a smooth transition. Leadership should strategize the communication plan to employees before the project is announced. Include direction of where to find information and when they will receive their training. Have a central place where agents can access this information at any time and ask questions about the system.

Educating your contact center agents should go beyond just training them how to use the new technology, but should also include education around the Conversational AI system and all its implications. Fully enrolling your team in all aspects of the technology will allow them to see all the benefits that it brings, and how it relates to their overall experience. It builds trust from the agents, for example agents won't feel the need to re-authenticate or ID customers because they understand how the IVA works and that the technology is accurate and efficient. If an employee feels more involved in the roll-out of the application, they will be more invested in its success.

3. Constant Feedback

Agents are at the frontlines of your customer experience, and therefore they have a unique insight to customers and the Conversational AI application. It's important to provide places where agents can give their feedback, concerns, and insights easily and frequently. Listening to the agent feedback can give great understanding into parts of the conversation design that can be improved, especially when the application is first launched.

As the future of work continues to evolve, AI will become more commonplace and drive tremendous benefit not only to agents, but the entire business. However, getting agents on board is the first step to having a successful implementation, so taking caution to implement the Conversational AI application successfully not only on a technical side—but also with your employees for the best and lasting results.



About Interactions

Interactions provides Intelligent Virtual Assistants that seamlessly combine artificial intelligence and human understanding to enable businesses and consumers to engage in productive conversations. With flexible products and solutions designed to meet the growing demand for unified, omnichannel customer care, Interactions is delivering significant cost savings and unprecedented customer experiences for some of the largest brands in the world. Founded in 2004, Interactions is headquartered in Franklin, Massachusetts with additional offices worldwide.

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