



## Contact Center

# 2016 Survey of Contact Center Operation Trends

*Based on 2016 Data // A Contact Center Success Manager (CCSM) program initiative by Inflow Communications*

## Overview

For decades, call centers and contact centers have been the central point from which all customer and client contacts are managed. Technologies in the call center can vary widely, and usually include speech recognition software to allow computers to handle first level of customer support, text mining and natural language processing to allow better customer handling, agent training by automatic mining of best practices from past interactions, support automation, and many other technologies to improve agent productivity and customer satisfaction.

While each Contact Center has its unique business model, goals, and strategies, we find that one fact is consistent: the Contact Center is a living, breathing, ever-changing business application, and it is most often the life-blood of an organization.

Another facet we find often is that many of those supporting the Contact Center operation came into their roles through their work as an Agent, advancing their careers into a Supervisory or Manager capacity, oftentimes with little formal education associated with the “business” of the Contact Center. Admittedly, many clients we speak with are quick to acknowledge the lack of formal education as it directly relates to the Contact Center operation.

This report marks Inflow’s first Survey of Contact Center Trends. The purpose of the survey is to provide benchmark data that aims to identify parallels across contact centers, track operational and educational gaps, and provide insight in order to help professionals bolster their customer experience.

VP’s of Customer Care, Quality Assurance Directors, Customer Experience Executives, Contact Center Directors, Call Center Managers and other Customer Experience senior executives may find this survey useful when trying to decide the focus of training for their staff.

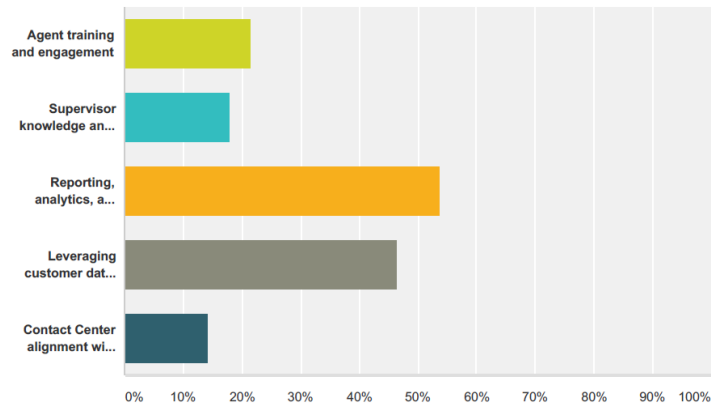
This data may also be useful to policy makers, academics, journalists and others who monitor developments in the Contact Center industry.

## Methodology

This report is based on surveys sent by email to over five thousand Contact Center Directors, Managers and other senior executive level nationwide.

The survey was conducted over a period of 3 months in 2016, from September to November, during which time surveys were emailed to a proprietary list of contact center executives. The final survey was released November of 2016.

### Question 1 / What area(s) do you feel your Contact Center Operation is the WEAKEST?



### Winner / Reporting, Analytics, and Decision Making

Over 50% of the respondents feel that reporting and analytics is the weakest link.

### Key Findings |

To those well acquainted with the unified communications industry, this may not come as a surprise. To date, the most popular and most attended Educational Session Inflow has provided has been focused on Contact Center Metrics and Reporting.

Not only do people feel like they don't know WHAT metrics to measure, they don't know HOW to analyze them -- thus tying them to strategic decisions for their business. They generally struggle with the meaning behind the numbers.

Reporting not only impacts discussions with Agent workflow processing and performance, the most often neglected aspect is the configuration of the Contact Center software. Knowing how the data results can lead the user to a strategic partnership with their internal IT operations. Together, the Contact Center and IT operations can impact the overall efficiency of reporting, call routing and/or treatment, agent workflow performance, and ultimately, customer satisfaction.

### Runner Up / Leveraging Customer Data in The Contact Center – The Power of Big Data.

Today, as always, data has been an integral part of managing any customer in the Contact Center operation. Although not necessarily Earth shattering as we know, many Contact Centers are grappling with data and how to use it for improving the

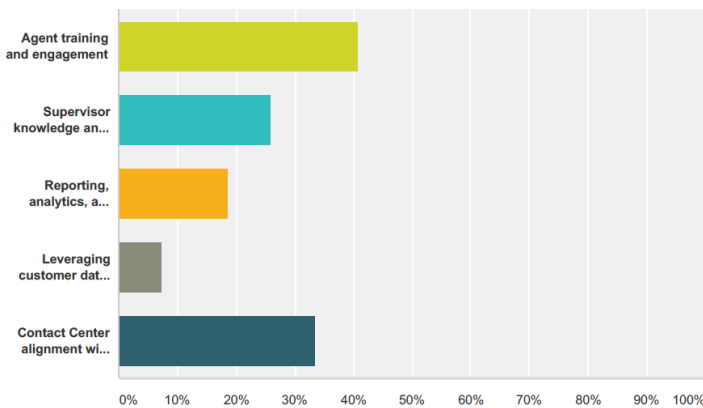
customer experience and agent efficiency alike.

Because every Contact Center has customer-facing data, this is truly the low hanging fruit for Contact Center enhancements. Customer data can play a key role in your operation, such as: customized & personalized service, skills-based routing, priority routing, self-help options, etc. This is likely the single most neglected available option in some of the Contact Center environments we see.

### **Running Close Behind | Agent Training and Engagement**

With the chronic issues of agent turnover and attrition, we are happy to see this as a primary concern. However, we are surprised at how many Contact Centers we visit fail to provide a consistent training and employee engagement program. Agents are the life blood of the personality of the Contact Center. Programs of this nature are essential in maintaining tenure, increasing agent value, and increasing operational efficiencies. Without consistent and solid Agent Training and Engagement programs, agents suffer burnout, turnover, job dissatisfaction, and the impact on customer service is without questions. The costs associated with replacing agents is costly. Agents are your most valuable and costly asset.

### **Question 2 | Which of the following areas do you feel your Contact Center Operation is the STRONGEST?**



### **Winner | Agent Training and Engagement**

#### **Key Findings |**

Given the results of the first question, these results should come as a surprise. As mentioned in previously, burn-out, turn-over, and the resulting hit to customer satisfaction, and costs are all areas of concern with Contact Center customers at Inflow.

Regardless of the results, it is still apparent that this is a tough challenge for most Contact Center professionals. With technologies like agent wallboards and gamification, it seems as though the industry shares the same sentiment. But Agent engagement is not limited to wallboards and performance awareness. In fact, Agent engagement need not involve technology at all. There are creative paths to enhancing Agent engagement and this can have a tremendous upside to reducing agent

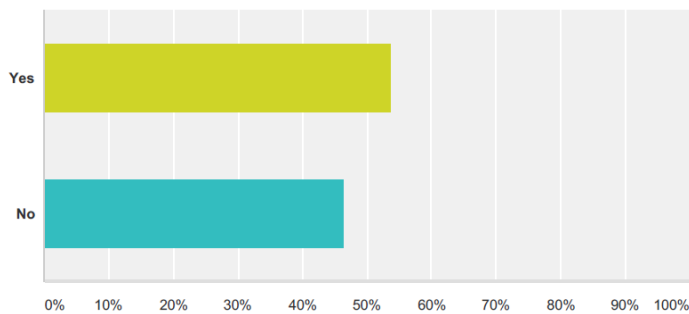
burnout, agent involvement, and more. The benefit to customer satisfaction through strong agent engagement programs typically run in parallel.

### **Runner Up | Contact Center Alignment with Culture and Business Requirements**

At the end of the day, what's the purpose of technology if it isn't enabling the business and driving it forward? Too many technology providers get fixated on the "bells and whistles" and forget to stop and ask the overarching questions as it pertains to culture and business alignment.

As such, we have seen consistently at Inflow that IT personnel forget this important connection too and/or are often left out of the configuration discussion when decisions are being made at the operational level. The technology, operation, and business discussions are all part of the same goal. However, we also find that IT is often not given the experiential and technical knowledge of the software and hardware they support in providing services to the Contact Center. This causes the most amount of friction between the Contact Center operation and IT personnel. Although the runner up, 30% of the respondents feel this is the strongest aspect of their Contact Center. There is definitely room for growth here.

### **Question 3 | Do you currently leverage customer data to make dynamic call routing decisions in your Contact Center?**



#### **Key Findings | Overall: Yes**

This result should be encouraging to see. Yet, given the response of over 50%, many Contact Centers using data to aide in the customer experience have missed the opportunity in expanding the use of dynamic decision making outside of the basic call routing process.

There are a variety of applications within the Contact Center allowing for dynamic treatment of each Contact Center interaction. Data too allows the operation to be broadly creative in surprising their customers with less effort to get them to the best destination or process for customer support. Using data also gives the business more control over the call outcome. The ability to dynamically control each interaction gives equal control to the business as well as the customer.

#### **On the Flip Side: No**

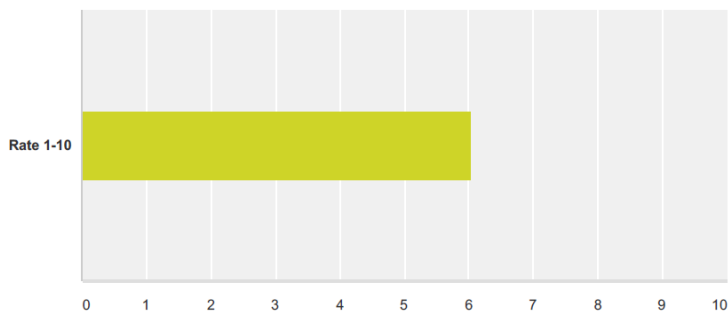
With over 46% of respondents indicating NO, there is ample opportunity to help Contact Centers continually learn more of

when and how to leverage data for the overall customer experience and Contact Center journey.

**“Keep it alive and keep it fresh.”** - Chris Recio, Contact Center Director at Inflow

This can be applied to priority handling, dynamic greetings, menu options, special services announcements, and so much more. Customer often get very familiar with the operation. Why not surprise your customers with a branded experience at each interaction with your Contact Center?

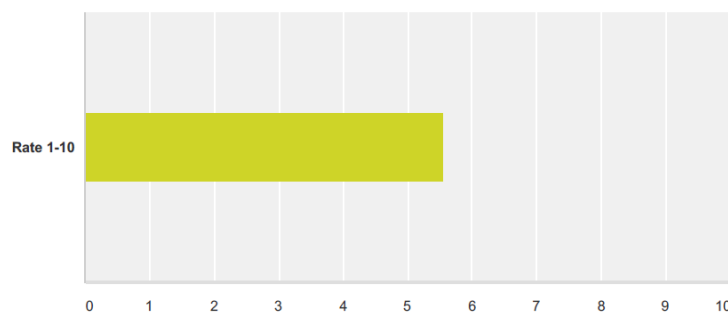
**Question 4 /** On a scale of 1 to 10, do you feel your Contact Center personnel understand the meaning behind the KPIs you measure?



**Key Findings / Overall: 6**

The results of this survey showed that over 25% of respondents landed dead-center on this scale. Surprisingly, 17.86% ended up on 7, with an overall rating of 6.04% which is fairly low considering in every Contact Center visit by Inflow, the topic of KPIs appears to be high on the list of details. So, seeing this mediocre reply implies that while Supervisors and Managers may present KPIs to their team of agents, about 50% of them are not confident that their Contact Center personnel fully understand the value of the KPI presented. This is an essential element of Agent Training and Engagement. After all, how can an agent be held accountable to a result they do not understand?

**Question 5 /** On a scale of 1 to 10, do you feel your Contact Center personnel have adequate foundational knowledge and Contact Center best practices to be successful?



## Key Findings | Overall: 5.56

With 33.33% arriving at a 5, the remaining results were all over the map.

On a scale of 1 to 10, a result of 5.56 indicates the following:

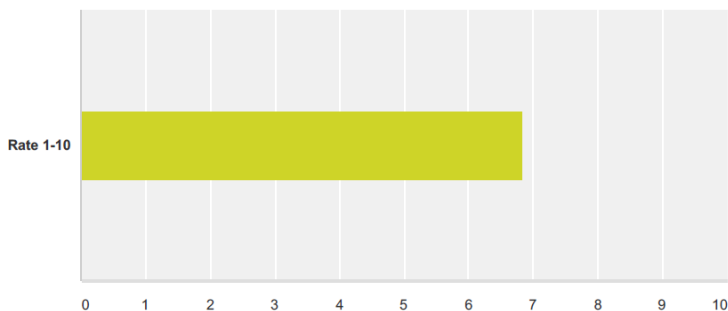
1. Respondents are not really in touch with the level of knowledge their staff possess, or
2. Respondents have not taken the time to consider this from the employee point of view.

**Knowledge creates the foundation for expectation.**

**Communication creates the transfer of knowledge and expectation.**

A commitment to ongoing training, education, and communication will provide a great foundation in setting the benchmarks for success. With the busy day-to-day demands of the Contact Center, we have found that many Contact Center operations understand this fully, yet often grapple with finding the time to include Training and Agent Engagement as part of their regular routine, either weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, or quarterly. Frankly, quarterly may not be enough dedication. In our experience, weekly programs create a greater sense of commitment to the operation and to the agents alike.

## Question 6 / On a scale of 1 to 10, do you feel your Contact Center operation is aligned with goals and delivers premium customer service?



## Key Findings | Overall: 6.82

While better than average, our results showed varying percentages. Almost 15% gave it a 3, 25% gave it a 7, and only 14.29% gave it a 10. This was fairly hit-and-miss across the spectrum. However, over 71% of respondents gave it a 5 or better. This is good to see. Most every Contact Center understands their role in delivering customer service. However, it is often found that the understanding of the goal is not usually the issue. We also see great opportunity for enhancing the delivery of great customer service by evaluating the Contact Center at multiple levels of the operation – especially the culture. Most often the obstacle is culture and how the culture lines are shared across the organization and not just within the Contact Center itself.

Often, the issue of culture can negatively impact the Contact Center. While the Contact Center is focused on the goal of great customer service, there too can be an underlying current of culture that weighs down the Contact Center. Resolving this takes

a greater commitment and much more communication across multiple lines of business associated with the Contact Center.

The good news: we have seen quite a few Contact Centers unify their goals for customer service by unifying business units that are directly or indirectly impacted by the Contact Center operation.

You would be surprised to see just how many individuals within an organization take great pride in achieving a goal of increasing revenue, or reducing a specific cost by gaining greater understanding of how their specific job impacts the Contact Center, and vice versa.

## Conclusion

This survey, polling hundreds of Contact Center directors and managers, found parallels across many Contact Centers. Interestingly, most Contact Centers strive to fill the same operational gaps and industry knowledge.

New training classes and organizational structures will be needed to ensure the constant integration and adoption of new technologies is occurring, while helping agents meet the effective delivery of customer experience across a proliferating number of communication platforms and communication styles. Organizations that run Contact Centers will have to incorporate a structured curriculum of training for their contact center leadership team in order to meet this growing knowledge demand needed.

The unified communications industry is rapidly evolving as new innovations in technology require contact centers and their agents to adapt. Therefore, it is important, now more than ever, to provide contact center agents, supervisors, managers, and directors with the support and tools they need to take operations to its full potential.

With today's focus on superior customer experience and customer retention, Contact Center professionals are increasingly looking for resources to bolster their customer experience and gain an edge over their competition. The results of this survey will assist contact center organizations to develop a comprehensive blueprint strategy to elevate their Contact Center operations to the next level.

*For more information about this survey or to learn about Inflow's comprehensive consulting and training program "Contact Center Success Management", contact us. **We'd love to help you take your contact center to the next level.** Email: [contact@inflowcommunications.com](mailto:contact@inflowcommunications.com) // Phone: 971-352-3815*



**Contact Center &  
Call Center Educator**

## About Inflow

*Inflow is a national leader in unified communications and contact centers. With over 100,000 endpoints under Inflow's innovative support plans around the world, Inflow's dedication to knowledge and innovation, and unrivaled customer support, has landed them in ShoreTel's top 2% in global customer satisfaction and as a winner of ShoreTel's coveted Circle of Excellence Partners award. Inflow was also recently named a ShoreTel Platinum Partner and is their fastest growing partner globally. In addition, Inflow is the only cloud contact center provider that provides implementation, ongoing support and compressive consulting and training programs. Founded in 1997, Inflow has offices in Portland, Seattle, Dallas, Houston, Tampa, L.A. and the Bay Area.*