

- 2017 Benchmark Research -

ICMI

Modern Standards for Managing Contact Center Quality



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction and Key Findings	3
Tools and Methodologies in Quality Management	4
Using Quality to Drive Performance	11
The Impact and Influence of Quality Management	14
Conclusion	17
Demographics	18
About ICMI and NICE	21

Introduction

Delivering a great service experience in today's competitive landscape is difficult for even the most sophisticated of service organizations. Aside from changes in channel offerings and technologies, the contact center is responsible for handling the world's most volatile resource: people. It is the responsibility of the contact center to ensure that this volatile and important resource is handled with the utmost care and consistency. For those on the inside of these contact centers, the methodology behind ensuring that this care and consistency happens is known as *quality management*. In this latest research from ICMI and NICE, we explore the strengths, weaknesses, and new opportunities for organizations to ensure that they are delivering a quality experience.

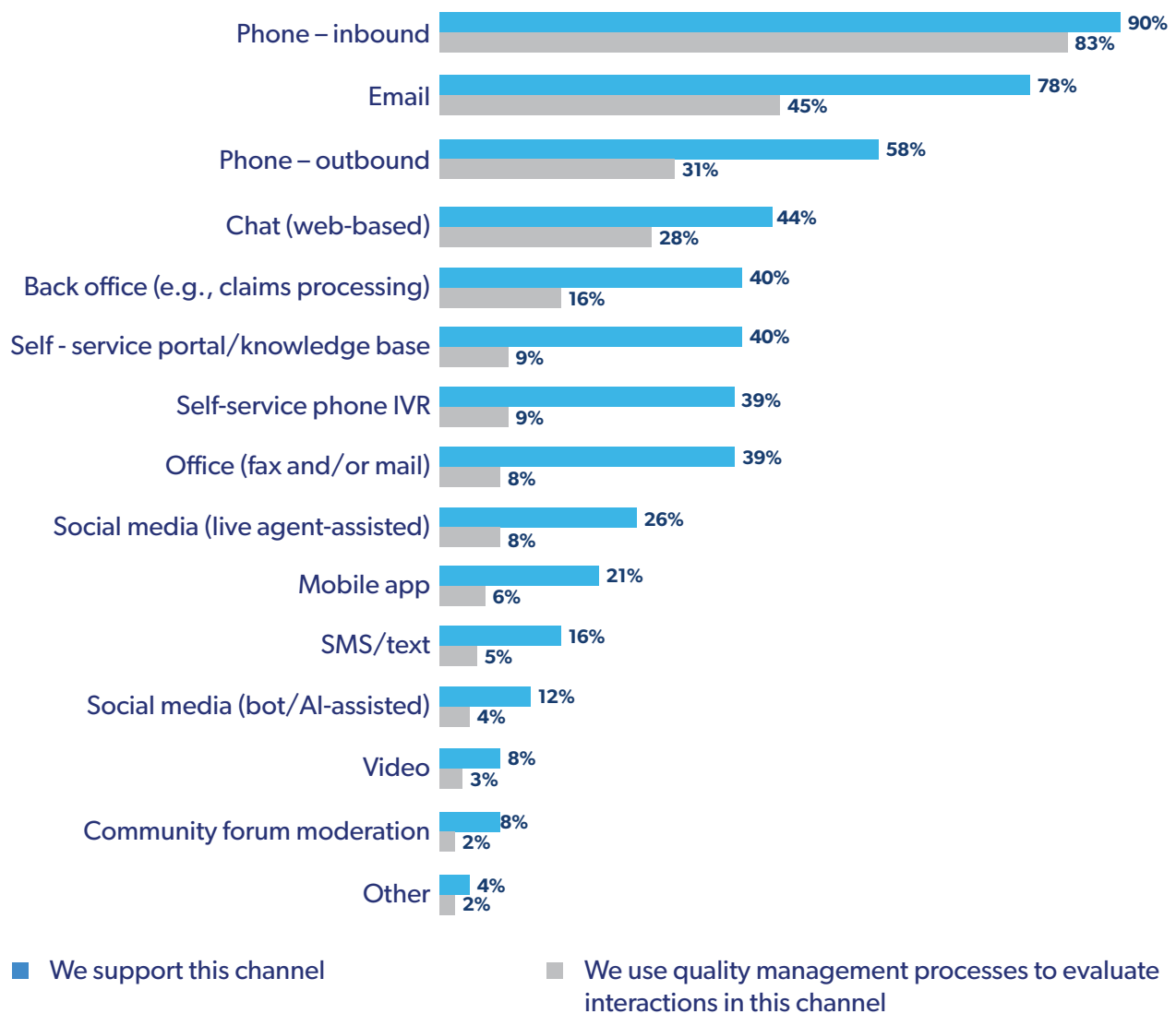
Key Findings

- Quality management practices are lacking in nonphone channels.
- Much of the quality management metrics are measured using a manual tool or process. Subsequently, the biggest quality management challenge faced by contact centers is the amount of manual work that is involved.
- 55% of contact centers do not use any type of analytics (data, voice, or screen) as part of the quality management program.
- On average, contact centers target the completion of seven quality assurance evaluations per agent per month.
- Just 34% of research participants consider contact quality to be a top key performance indicator.
- Only 6% of contact center leaders strongly agree that their agents feel that the QA program at their company can help them to be successful.

Tools and Methodologies in Quality Management

A solid quality management program is a cornerstone of a successful enterprise. Recent research by ICMI found that most organizations consider their service experience to be their primary competitive differentiator, over both price and product. What this means to someone who is responsible for leading the contact center or customer service team is that the quality of the experience could ultimately make or break a company’s future. In other words, quality management is necessary for an organization to ensure future success.

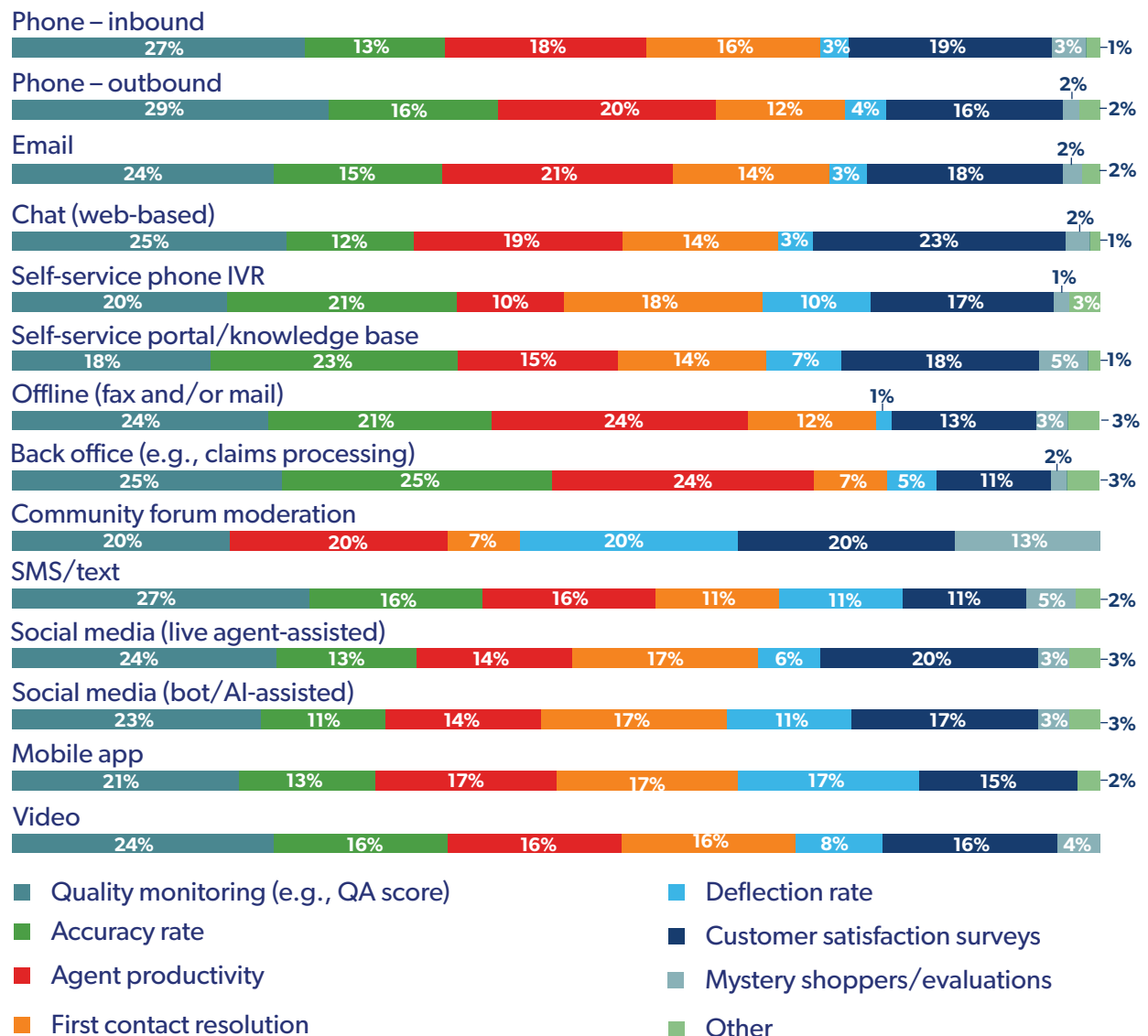
Channels Used and Channels Evaluated Through the Quality Management Process



Throughout this report, we will examine various aspects of quality management, provide current data on where organizations are succeeding and missing the mark, and share guidance and insight on how companies can effectively evolve their quality management practices. Let’s begin with a shocking reality: *Other than inbound phone, most channels are not evaluated through a formal quality management process.*

Inbound phone is the most widely used channel, followed by email, outbound phone, web chat, etc. As you see in the chart on the previous page, 83% of contact centers that support inbound phone calls also monitor those interactions through a quality management process. But for the second most utilized channel—email—less than half of the contact centers supporting email also perform quality management on those contacts. The percentages decrease sharply from there.

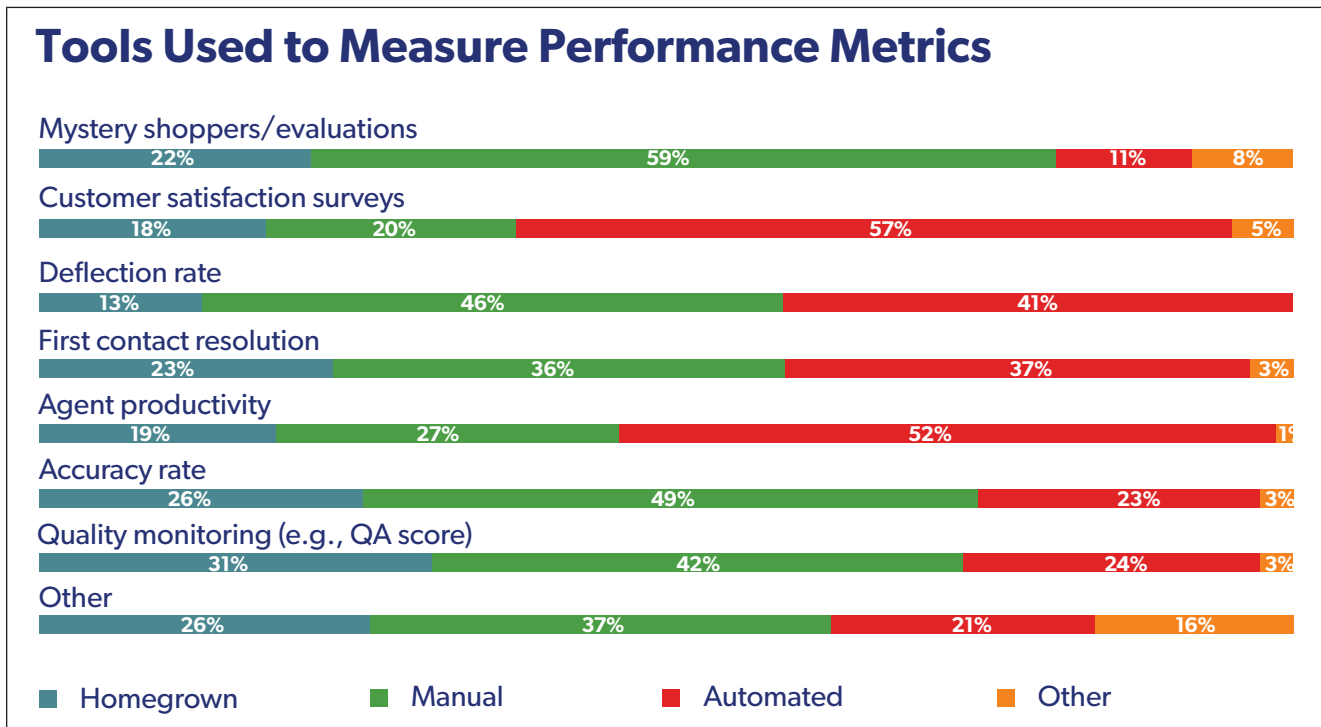
Performance Management Metrics, by Channel



The story here is loud and clear: organizations are inconsistently monitoring the quality of the experience across their various channels of service. Such an approach leaves companies vulnerable to destruction and undermines the core values, brand promises, and mission statements upon which they stake their reputations. The lack of insight makes root cause analysis difficult or impossible, leads to customer and agent dissatisfaction alike, and will most certainly hold an organization back in the omnichannel era. In other words, the organizations that will thrive in the future know that quality management must be consistently applied across all channels of service.

When it comes to the metrics behind quality management, organizations use a variety of key performance indicators (KPIs). According to this study, the most popular method is to conduct quality monitoring on an interaction and assign a QA score. Measuring accuracy rates, agent productivity, and conducting customer satisfaction surveys were also among the most utilized performance metrics.

As the previous chart illustrates, the most utilized quality management metric(s) vary slightly by channel but are consistent in use and popularity. When we looked at the types of tools organizations are using to measure each metric, we discovered that most quality management metrics are captured using a homegrown or manual tool. The exceptions to this were customer satisfaction surveys and agent productivity, both of which are measured in many contact centers by using an automated tool.



The percentage of manual work should be concerning to contact center leaders, as it could be driving several negative outcomes. Aside from the cost and inefficiency of the extensive amount of time required for doing manual quality management reporting, organizations risk higher percentages of human error in measuring the data, or they measure insignificant or random samples of information due to insufficient time available to complete the work.

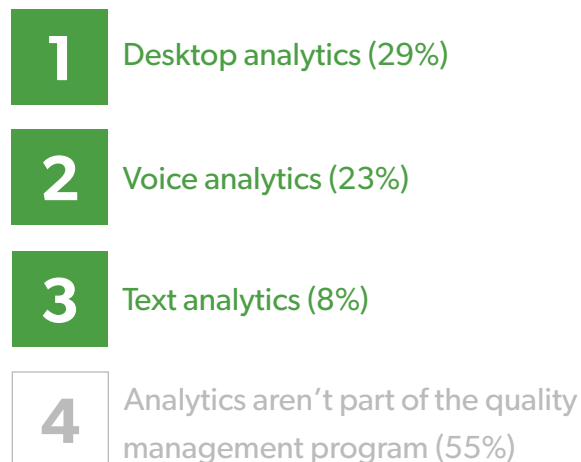
Regarding the organizations that utilize homegrown tools, there is wide variation in the quality of these tools and their ability to effectively measure and report on data. For some, these tools deliver a necessary and unique level of customization, but for most, they deliver the bare minimum necessary for capturing and reporting on a data point. The primary challenges here often include a lack of integration with other systems, which leads to data silos or inaccurate points based on incorrect formulas utilized when developing the system.

Ideally, contact centers should leverage automated tools to reduce their manual workload and ensure their ability to capture data across all contacts and all channels of service. This provides a full picture of the service experience and enables contact center leaders to focus on addressing trends, providing meaningful coaching, and delivering a comprehensive quality management program.

An additional toolset of value in quality management is analytics. Many types of analytics are available, including voice, desktop, and text, all of which enable contact center leaders to identify trends and customer trigger points and evaluate overall interaction quality when utilized effectively. This latest research finds that most contact centers do not utilize analytics as part of their quality programs, despite acknowledging the potential benefits. In total, 45% of the survey respondents indicated that they use analytics as part of their quality management programs. The most common type of analytics utilized are desktop analytics, with just under one-third of contact centers using them. The contact centers that use analytics for quality management primarily use just one type, with only 10% using two or more types of analytics.

Overall, the metrics, tools, and technologies that quality management professionals leverage can significantly enable or disable their ability to deliver a quality experience. In an era when the service experience plays a significant role in an organization's overall value and competitive differentiation, it would behoove customer service professionals to invest in the tools and resources that will enable them to effectively measure and manage quality in their organizations. While having the right tools alone will not ensure a quality experience, they will provide a solid foundation for those responsible for managing quality to build upon.

What types of analytics, if any, are utilized as part of your quality management program?



When it comes to the individuals responsible for managing quality in the contact center, this study explored the various contact center functions and their specific roles in quality management. The findings enable us to shed further light on who is responsible for completing QA evaluations and how these findings are used by organizations.

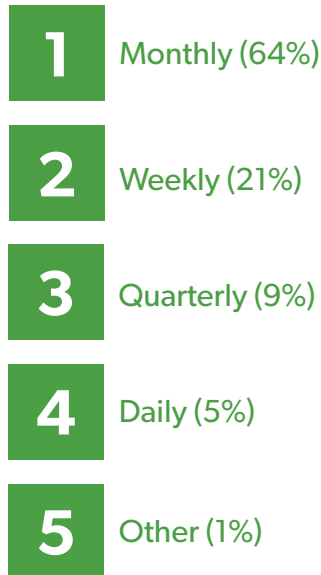
Participants in the study were asked to identify any and all individuals responsible for completing QA evaluations in their contact centers. Employees' direct supervisors are most often responsible for completing QA evaluations, with the utilization of a dedicated QA team close behind. An even more valuable finding from this study was how contact center size correlates to who in the contact center completes the QA evaluations: *In most situations, those responsible for completing QA evaluations remains consistent regardless of contact center size.* That said, there are a few minor differences that were uncovered:

- **VERY SMALL CONTACT CENTERS (<50 AGENTS)** are more likely to make QA evaluations the responsibility of the employee's direct supervisor than all other segments; they're also much more likely than other segments not to complete QA evaluations.
- **CONTACT CENTERS WITH 50-99 AGENTS** are almost equally likely to task a QA team and the employee's direct supervisor with QA evaluations; contact centers with 1,000-4,999 are equally likely to do the same.
- **CONTACT CENTERS WITH 100-499 AND 500-999 AGENTS** are the most likely to make QA evaluations the responsibility of a QA team.
- **CONTACT CENTERS WITH 1,000-4,999 AGENTS** are more likely than contact centers in other segments to task a compliance team with QA evaluations.

Who is responsible for completing QA evaluations in the contract center?



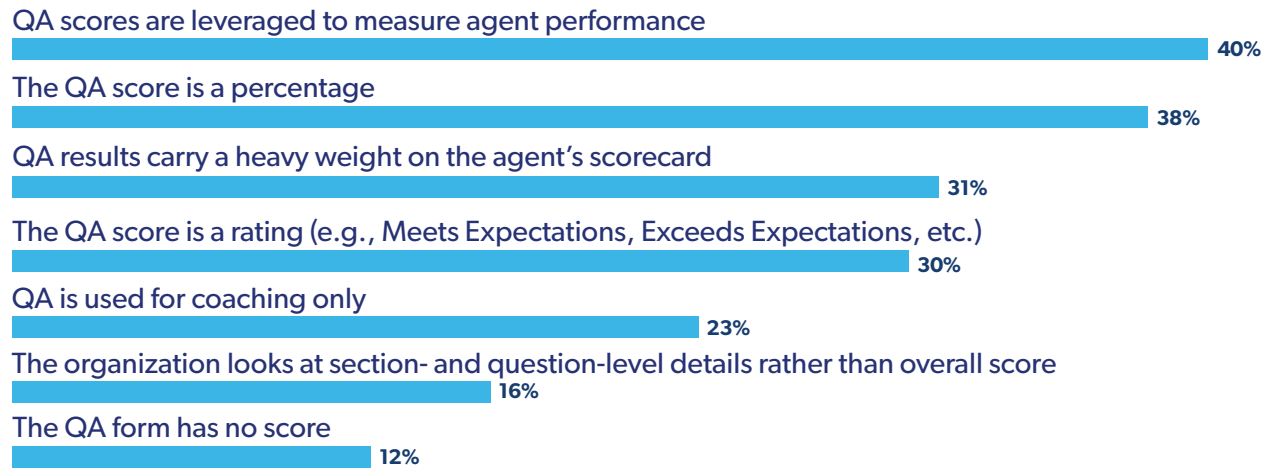
How frequently do you measure the completion of quality monitoring evaluations?



A frequently sought-after benchmark is the target of quality monitoring evaluations per agent. According to this study, the overall average objective is to complete six evaluations per period. In looking at the monthly and weekly respondents specifically, the average monthly target is seven evaluations per agent per month, while the average weekly target is three evaluations per agent per week. The unknown variables in these numbers, however, include the total workload of those responsible for conducting the evaluations, as well as the individual criteria and work required to complete an evaluation. Any contact center that is looking to set a target objective should consider the total workload of those responsible for completing the evaluations, the time available to deliver coaching and feedback on the evaluations, and the emphasis they want to place their quality monitoring program. While the average uncovered in this research was six evaluations, some organizations will find that this is significantly more than they can effectively handle, while others will discover that it is significantly less. What is right for one contact center will not necessarily be right for another. The same holds true for how contact centers choose to use QA scores.

Survey respondents were asked to identify any and all ways in which the contact center utilizes QA scores. As indicated above, QA scores are most commonly leveraged to measure agent performance. When it comes to what contact center agents can affect, it really boils down to two things: adherence and quality. Using QA to determine the quality of an agent's interactions is foundational to ensuring that your contact center team delivers a good experience.

Using QA Scores



A somewhat surprising finding was that just 38% of contact centers report their QA score as a percentage, while 30% use a rating scale, and 12% employ a scoreless QA program. There are valid arguments to support each of these methods, but underlying each of them should be a focus on reinforcing and improving behaviors for the long term, not simply performing to hit a certain percentage or rating. Over ICMI's more than thirty years of training and certifying contact center professionals, we have seen time and again that an amplified focus on a score or rating can undermine agent performance and the lasting impact of coaching.

Using Quality to Drive Performance

A strong quality management program is about more than regulating the quality of the service experience; in fact, that is only part of the impact that a focus on quality will deliver to the contact center. When surveyed on the most important KPIs, contact center leaders ranked three things at the top of their list of key metrics:

- 1** Service level/response time (59%)
- 2** Customer satisfaction (49%)
- 3** Contact quality (34%)

Through the effective implementation of quality management, contact centers can impact each one of these critical indicators of success. In the case of service level and response time, these two metrics are partially impacted by the average handle time (AHT) of a contact. While most contact center leaders will agree that AHT is not an effective metric for managing agent performance, using the quality management process to drive agents to the most efficient way to handle a contact is effective. When quality management is utilized to change agent behavior for the long term, organizations will often find that a decreased average AHT is the byproduct. When this occurs, the contact center can achieve its service level and response time objectives with fewer resources.

In the case of customer satisfaction, a well-rounded quality management program is built around delivering a satisfying customer experience. In many cases, the contact center should be able to correlate a highly rated quality evaluation to a high customer satisfaction rating. While contact quality and customer satisfaction may be at odds in some organizations (for example, a contact center that is responsible for informing people that they have been denied a mortgage could experience negative customer satisfaction results despite meeting their internal quality standards), they should be in alignment for most contact centers.

Lastly, contact quality is inherently related to the quality management program. It is important for customer service leaders to realize, however, that quality management is about much more than a quality assurance form or some company mantra. True quality management takes a comprehensive look at the service experience and the people, processes, and technologies necessary for making it successful. More importantly, quality management is not about what you uncover through the process—it is about what you do to drive improvements and sustain successful outcomes.

One of the best ways to drive and sustain success is by coaching, both formally and informally, throughout the contact center. Coaching is a term that is often thrown around within organizations and, in many cases, carries a negative connotation for frontline employees. There is monumental value to be gained from an effective coaching program, and it all begins by identifying the best person to conduct the coaching. Through this study, we uncovered insights on how contact centers use QA evaluations to conduct coaching and who serves as the coach in these circumstances.

Who in the contact center conducts coaching based on an agent's QA evaluations?



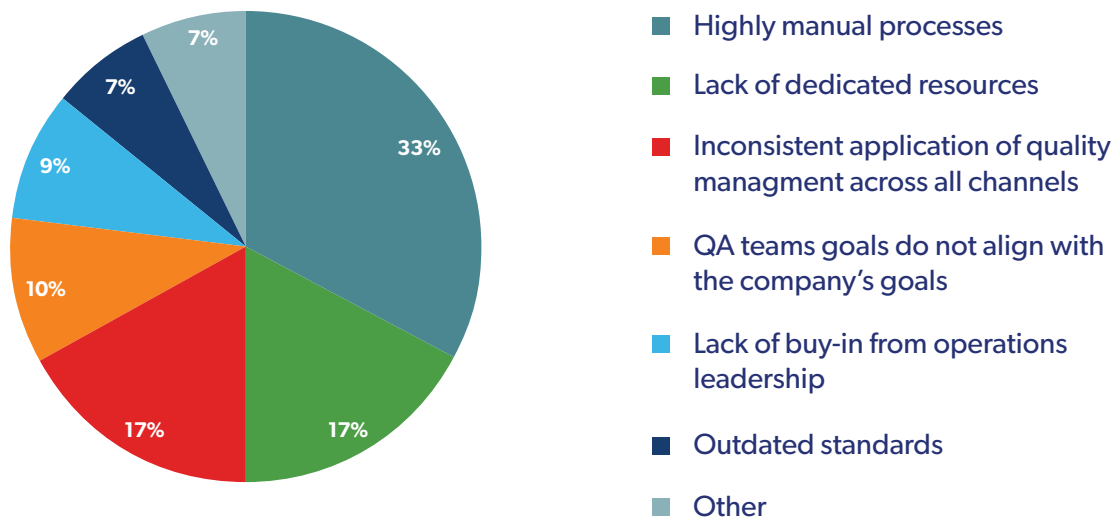
Research participants were asked to identify anyone and everyone who conducts coaching based on an agent's QA evaluations. *In most cases, there was no significant difference in the size of the contact center and who conducts the coaching.* We discovered, however, several correlations between a contact center's size and who conducts QA-based coaching:

- **CONTACT CENTERS WITH 100-499 AGENTS** are more likely than other segments to task the QA team with coaching, followed by contact centers with 1,000-4,999 agents.
- **CONTACT CENTERS WITH 500-999 AGENTS** are more likely than other segments to task the employee's direct supervisor with coaching, followed by contact centers with 50-99 agents.
- **CONTACT CENTERS WITH 1,000-4,999 AGENTS** are more likely than other segments to task the compliance team with coaching.
- **VERY SMALL CONTACT CENTERS (<50 AGENTS)** are more likely than other segments to provide no coaching based on QA evaluations.

Whether it is the QA team, a supervisor, or a group dedicated to compliance, what is important is that contact centers coach on the interactions that are monitored through the quality management process. Monitoring and coaching are fundamental tools in driving overall agent performance and affecting the quality of service. Going back to earlier findings in this study, however, there is still much work to be done with the gap between the channels supported by organizations and those that are monitored through the quality management process. If an organization is not measuring and monitoring quality in a channel, then they most certainly are unable to effectively manage what happens in that channel.

Moving beyond the metrics and methods for managing quality, this research sought to understand the challenges that contact center leaders face in their quality management programs, and we discovered that the biggest offender is the highly manual processes that are involved. Considering our findings that uncovered the high percentage of quality management tools that require manual work and the small percentage that utilize analytics, this finding was not entirely surprising. It was also revealed that contact center leaders recognize their lack of resources as a challenge and acknowledge the risks associated with the inconsistent application of quality management across all channels. These findings make a clear case for how an investment in better tools and resources that deliver on automation would alleviate the primary quality management challenge that contact center leaders face.

Challenges to Effective Quality Management



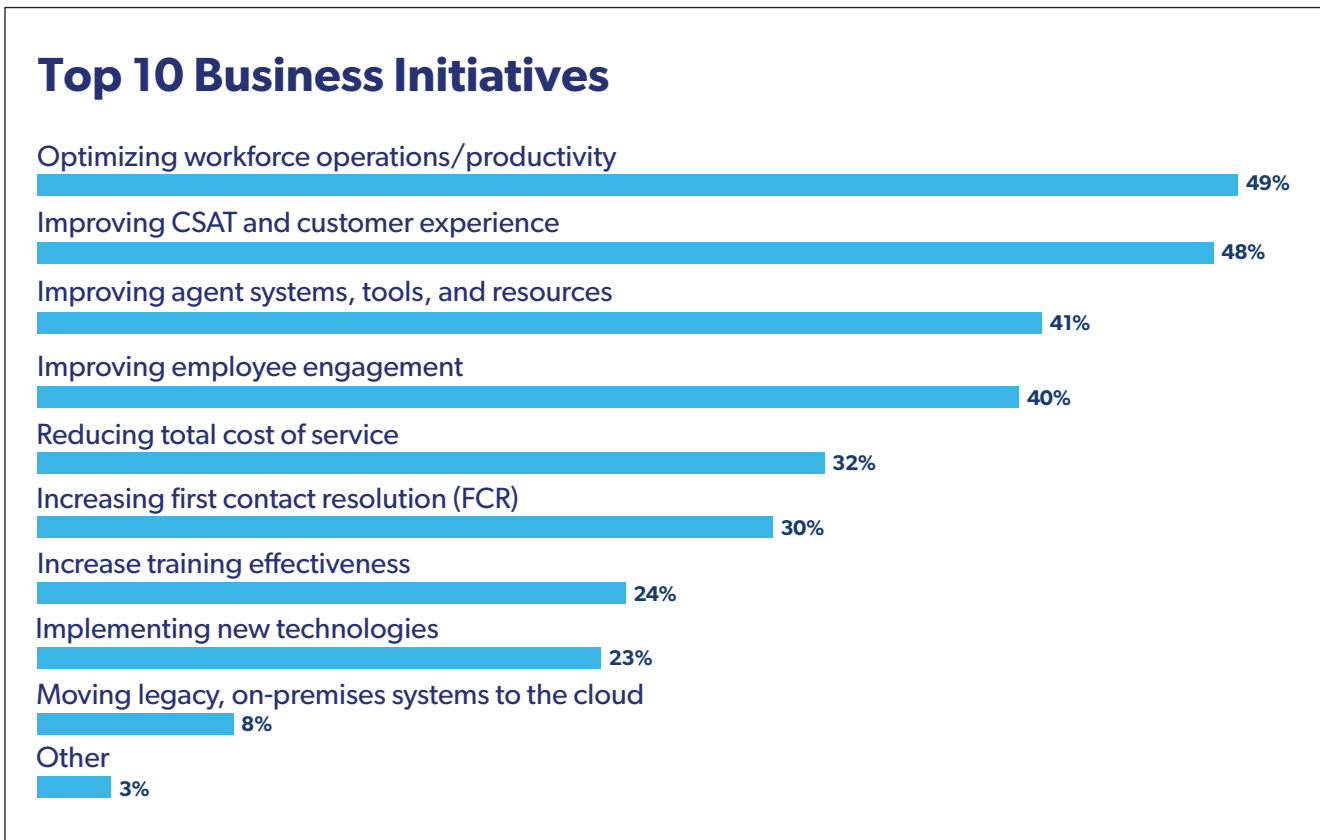
The Impact and Influence of Quality Management

To further emphasize the value of quality management, we asked survey respondents to share their contact centers' top three business initiatives.

The number-one business initiative is optimizing workforce operations/productivity, which, as was previously mentioned, is an outcome of quality management. This should further emphasize why all channels of service need to be part of the quality management process. It is impossible for an organization to optimize its operation if it is not effectively monitoring all parts of it.

The second top business initiative is improving customer satisfaction and the customer experience. With the customer experience viewed as the key competitive differentiator, it is no surprise to see this initiative near the top of the list. A quality management program has direct influence on CSAT and customer experience as it is an agent's foundation for delivering service. It is important for contact centers to align their CSAT and CX objectives with those found in their quality management program.

The third most pursued business initiative is improving agent systems, tools, and resources. This is where there is significant potential for contact centers to improve the impact of their quality management programs. Best-in-class quality management programs arm everyone in the contact center, from the agent on up, with the systems, tools, and resources that are necessary for success. If an organization is going to focus on this as a business initiative, a quality management program must be at the core.



In the final part of our study, we asked contact center leaders a series of questions about the impact and influence of quality management within the organization. This was one of the most telling parts of the entire study, as it affirmed that there is still much work to be done in the field of quality management.

The Impact of Quality Management

Our overall QA results are generally high with little variation



Supervisors rely heavily on QA results and input for effective coaching and development



The QA team is viewed as a key contributor to our company's success



- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

With less than half of respondents agreeing that their QA results are generally high with little variation, this leads to the belief that most organizations struggle with QA results that are widely variable and inconsistent. While there is a variety of reasons why this could be the case, organizations with generally high results and little variation performed above the entire group average in their percentages of interaction types that are evaluated through quality management, in addition to having higher usage rates of analytics.

It is not surprising to see that the majority of respondents agree that supervisors rely heavily on QA results and input for effective coaching and development. It should be noted, however, that supervisors should not coach exclusively to the “bad” QA results, as this can contribute to a negative perception of quality management. Instead, supervisors should use informal and formal opportunities to both reinforce positive behavior and coach to behaviors for improvement or replacement.

A disappointing finding in this study is that one in five QA teams are not viewed as a key contributor to their company's success, while another 31% are unsure on their impact and contribution to the company. If the contact center desires to advance and improve their quality management programs, it must articulate how QA contributes to the overall success of the company. This can take many forms and could be as simple as business intelligence for marketing or product development purposes. There is a wealth of insights available through quality management; it is up to the contact center to share this information throughout the organization.

When done right, quality management can influence every level within an organization, but this often is not the case in today's contact centers. To gain influence through quality management, it is important to establish the relevance and value to each stakeholder within the organization. It is only when people are actively engaged and informed that quality management will deliver on its fullest potential.

The Influence of Quality Management

Voice of the Customer results are reviewed when considering enhancements to our program



Agents are asked to provide input when QA guidelines are renewed



Agents feel that the QA program at our company can help them be successful



Training leverages QA data and input regularly



There is alignment between QA and training at my company



Business processes have been changed, altered, or discontinued based on feedback from QA results



QA results are used when considering business changes



Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

One group that should be influenced because of your quality management program is your customer base. Given the stated connections between quality and customer satisfaction, it should be expected that the quality of the interaction will influence a customer's response. By leveraging Voice of the Customer data in the enhancement of your quality management program, you can align customer expectations with your service requirements.

Another key group to influence through quality management is the frontline agents responsible for delivering on the expectations of the quality program. A frequent disconnect that occurs, however, is that agents are left out of the process of developing QA guidelines and feel that quality management is working against them, not helping them to achieve their goals. If the contact center wants to achieve increased agent buy-in and engagement with the quality management process, it will need to enable agents to provide input on the QA program. While this does not mean that everything agents suggest should be adopted into practice, it does mean that they should have the opportunity to provide their feedback and suggestions. An area in which many contact centers surveyed agreed that they influence through quality management is the training department. This should not come as a surprise, as quality management often reveals opportunities for refresher training and should be utilized to inform the learning and development team of areas for additional education. A strong relationship between quality and training is crucial for success, as these two functions are closely related in their purpose and importance to the organization.

Lastly, the findings of quality management should not remain exclusively for the benefit of the contact center. The business intelligence gathered through the quality management process has the potential to influence every part of an organization, if properly captured, analyzed, and communicated. The fact that only 6% of contact center leaders strongly agreed that QA results are used when considering business changes indicates tremendous opportunity for contact centers to gain and build their influence within the organization. It all begins with establishing a process for managing quality across every channel and service interaction.

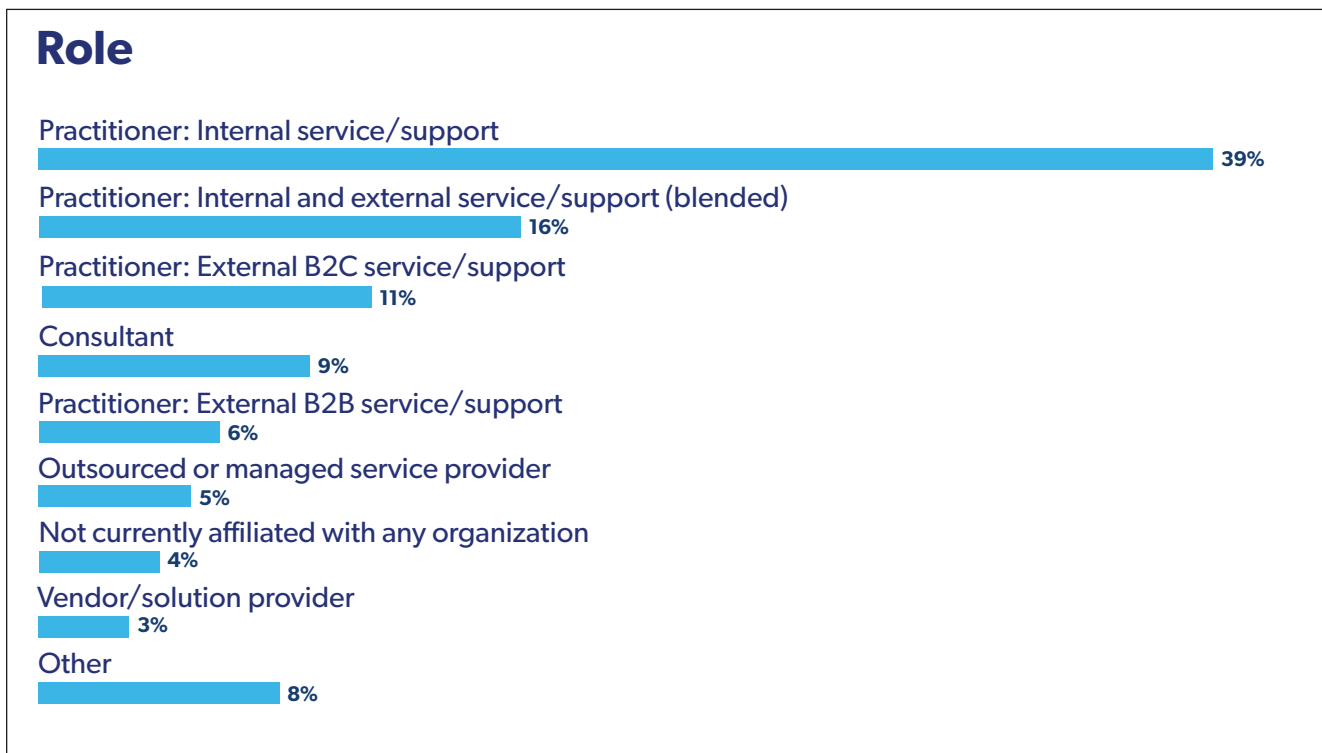
Conclusion

Quality management is a critical function in the contact center, and while there are numerous aspects of quality in practice today, there is significant opportunity for organizations to advance and improve their approach. Above all else, quality management principles should be equally applied across all channels of service to ensure that the agent and customer experience alike can be fairly and accurately managed.

Demographics

Serving the contact center industry for more than thirty years, ICMI has established a robust community of practitioners from contact centers and customer service organizations around the globe. This level of engagement with a large population of contact center professionals enables ICMI to provide a well-informed perspective on quality management in the contact center.

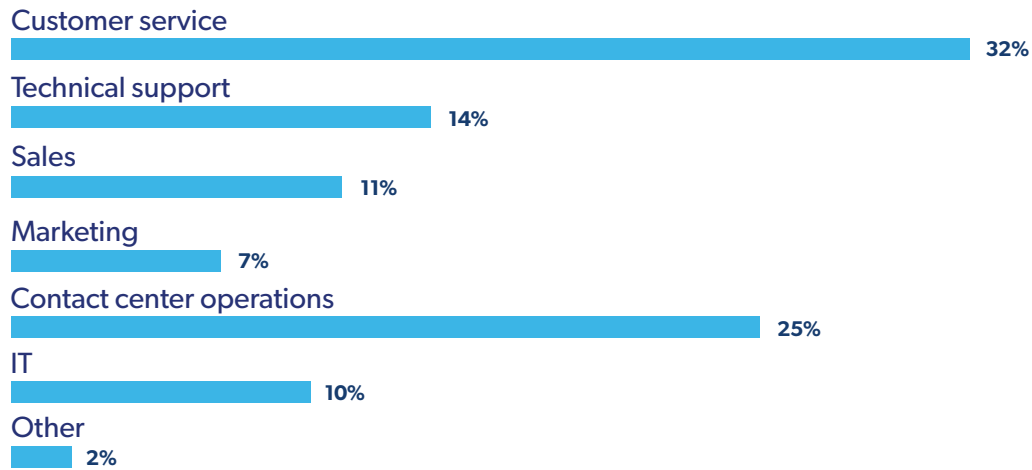
The 347 respondents to this survey were primarily executives and directors (35%) and managers (45%). The remaining 20% of respondents encompasses an assortment of contact center supervisors, analysts, and consultants whose feedback rounded out the data's insights.



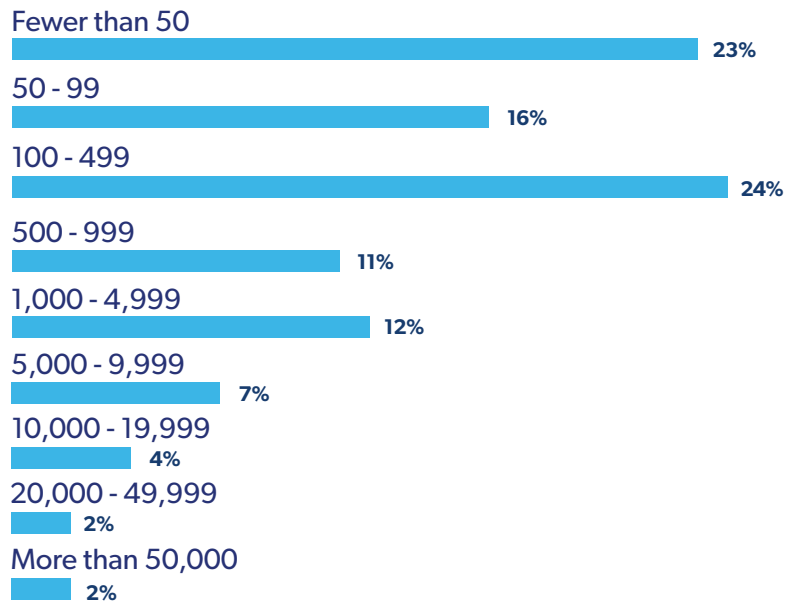
Industry



Area of Responsibility



Size of the Contact Center



About ICMI

ICMI is the leading global provider of comprehensive resources for customer management professionals—from frontline agents to executives—who wish to improve customer experiences and increase efficiencies at every level of the contact center. Since 1985, ICMI has helped more than 50,000 organizations in 167 countries through training, events, consulting, and informational resources. 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 and improve your customer service. ICMI is a part of UBM plc (ubm.com), a global events-led marketing services and communications company.

About NICE

NICE is a recognized global leader in the Workforce Optimization (WFO) market. As part of the WFO product suite, NICE Quality Management solutions enable organizations of all sizes to fully automate the evaluation, calibration, and coaching processes to align employees' efforts with their business initiatives and optimize their operations. The solutions are available on-premises, hosted, or in the cloud. We invite our current customers and anyone interested in improving their productivity to take a closer look at NICE's offerings, including NICE Quality Central or CXone QM, to find the solution that best fits their needs at www.nice.com/engage/workforce-optimization/quality-management.