



## Using Contact Center Technologies to Create Empowerment

### *Abstract*

There is a direct relationship between the job satisfaction of agents in the contact center with customer satisfaction levels. A positive working environment is crucial to maintaining and enhancing agent morale and performance. Empowering agents is commonly viewed as a method for fostering this type of environment. A new wave of contact center technologies provide opportunities to help agents be empowered while at the same time helping improve productivity and reduce operating costs.

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It should come as no surprise that happy, motivated contact center agents provide better customer service while making life easier for supervisors and managers. Satisfied agents are also less likely to go looking for other employment opportunities, resulting in lower turnover.

In the 2005 Gartner report, *Agent Esteem and Self-Actualization Are Key to Customer Satisfaction*, Principal Analyst Jim Davies concludes, "Empowerment can have a significant effect on employee and customer satisfaction. For every 1 percent increase in agent satisfaction, customer satisfaction increases 0.53 percent. In addition, agent churn is reduced, providing a cost-savings argument for the business case."

Creating and maintaining a satisfying working environment in the contact center can be a never-ending challenge. Given its critical importance, however, it is a challenge all contact centers must undertake.

**Understanding how to create empowerment, starts with understanding what true empowerment means.**

Empowerment is commonly positioned as a way of motivating the contact center workforce and improving their performance. In many instances however, empowerment becomes more of a catch phrase than a true instrument for change. To really understand what empowerment is and how it can help, let us first look at what it is not.

## What is Empowerment?

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Empowerment is not just delegating responsibility, quite the opposite in fact as the responsibility for performance of the center rightly resides with management. Suppose you are the manager of a contact center. You may empower your agents to take breaks when they need them, but you are still ultimately responsible for meeting your center's service level goals. Rather than simply pushing responsibility down the reporting chain, real empowerment shares responsibility throughout the organization.

Many companies also confuse empowerment and involvement. Involving agents in the decision making process without giving them some degree of control over the eventual outcome is simply using them as an information source. Turning involvement into empowerment requires the delegation of authority, a proposition often found unsettling to management. This delegation of authority however, does not necessitate a loss of control.

True empowerment is based on trust—trust by management that empowered employees will make good decisions without a need for direct oversight. True empowerment requires that responsibility and authority be distributed hand-in-hand within the organization. To do this successfully in the contact center, employees must have the knowledge and skills to make informed decisions along with the desire and opportunity to act. It also requires individual goals to be aligned with overall enterprise-level objectives.

## Empowerment Technologies

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Technology is a valuable ally in fostering an environment of empowerment within the contact center. As indicated by Gartner's Davies, "There are four key areas of technology, driven by software tools, that affect agents positively—quality monitoring, workforce management, contact center performance management and e-learning."

These software solutions help collect, organize and disseminate what is often an overwhelming amount of data available in the contact center. Getting accurate, useful information to the people entrusted with the authority to act, is a key requirement for successful empowerment.

By providing a mechanism for determining, aligning and managing the strategic goals of the contact center, these technologies serve as a compass to success. They guide the operational results of the center, both in the short and long term. These tools also identify areas that need improvement, and assist in the implementation of corrective actions.

Self-service technologies give agents direct control over their working environment, while maintaining the constraints of overall business needs. This not only promotes a strong feeling of empowerment in the workforce, it returns significant cost savings to the organization through automation efficiencies.

Ultimately, empowerment technologies build management's confidence in the ability of agents and supervisors to make sound decisions and take appropriate actions. This fosters the critical distribution of responsibility and authority down the reporting chain needed to enable true empowerment.

**"For every 1 percent increase in agent satisfaction, customer satisfaction increases 0.53 percent."**

*- Jim Davies, principal analyst, Gartner Inc.*

## Workforce Management

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Workforce management systems are primarily known for the forecasting, scheduling and daily management benefits they create in the contact center. However, the benefits from this popular contact center software tool appear to be extending into areas associated with agent empowerment.

Agent self-service technology promotes agent empowerment by giving them a higher level of control over their working environment. This encourages responsibility and accountability for their actions. Automated rules-based processing ensures the needs of the organization as a whole are maintained while giving agents a degree of freedom.

According to Davies workforce management vendors have begun to incorporate these agent empowerment features in their systems, enabling agents to adjust or swap schedules with colleagues, book vacations and sick leave without supervisor intervention, and enter shift preferences from their own Web-based client.

In addition to benefits for agents, access to key performance statistics from ACDs and other contact routing systems, combined with schedule adherence and accuracy information, provide workforce planners with information they need to make empowered decisions. Access to this same information by supervisors in the center creates empowerment by enhancing their ability to manage their team performance and assume greater responsibility for their ultimate results.

Automating many of the tedious and time-consuming processes in the contact center frees up significant amounts of supervisory and management time. Instead of being consumed by doing 'busy-work', they now have more time to focus on activities that promote even higher levels of empowerment such as coaching, team building and performance improvement initiatives.

## Performance Management

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Performance management tools provide a framework for aligning and managing goals across the job functions through scorecards, key performance indicators and workflow controls, combined with advanced analytical and reporting features. Through the clear communication of goals and results, both individual and overall, employees at all levels of the organization understand what is expected of them, where they currently stand and are enabled to take corrective actions when necessary.

Davies says, "Providing agents with dashboards that highlight their work across several key performance indicators, which align to corporate objectives, enables self-management. Agents can work toward predetermined goals across each metric with a clear understanding of the financial merits of achieving these objectives. When an agent's performance is lower than their target, they can work harder in this area or request help such as additional training."

Through the establishment and tracking of key performance indicators, performance management systems provide an enhanced view of execution and success-determining factors. This improved understanding further provides a sound foundation of information, and awareness, upon which to base strategic decision and problem assessment activities.

## Quality Monitoring and e-Learning

Quality monitoring and e-learning systems work hand-in-hand to monitor, identify and resolve skill or training deficiencies within the contact center workforce. Ensuring agents are adequately trained to respond to customer requests promotes a less-stressful, positive working environment.

Quality monitoring systems are generally seen as a way to ensure agents are providing acceptable levels of service to customers. However, these systems also provide opportunities to identify agents that are performing above expectations for recognition and to discover knowledge or performance gaps that need to be addressed.

Once training needs have been identified by capturing the interactions of agents and customers, e-learning tools provide an effective method of closing those performance gaps. According to Davies, “For every hour agents spend in training, the cost per contact drops 3.1 cents for customer service. Deployment of e-learning systems and the training of agents, using a variety of tools that are available, from online courseware and games to simulation tools and classroom sessions, can improve agent performance, as well as make agents happier in their roles.”

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Quality monitoring systems foster management confidence in the agent workforce, helping establish the sense of trust, and accountability necessary to enable the distribution of authority down the reporting chain. Although commonly viewed as agent training tools, e-learning technology can also facilitate training for supervisors and mid-level managers to enhance their decision-making ability.

## Delegation and Technology Empower Success

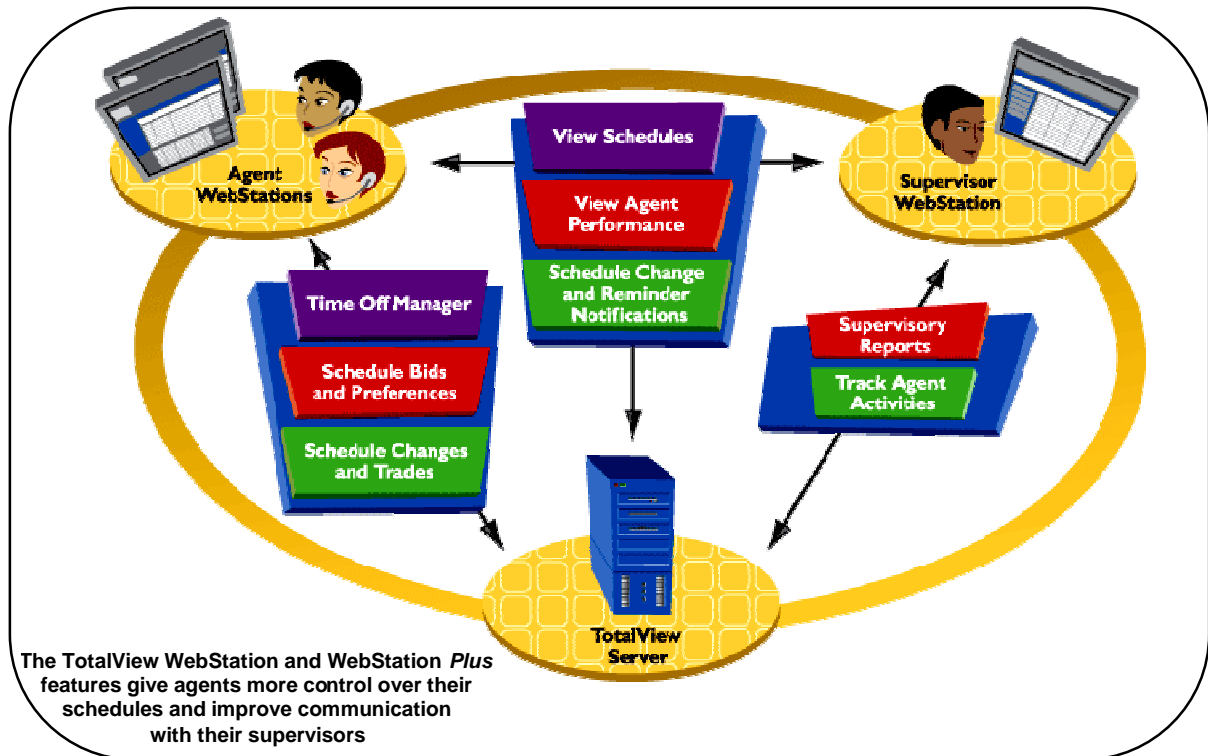
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The operational benefits of empowerment within the contact center are manifold. Enabling true empowerment requires a distribution of both responsibility and authority down the reporting chain. To successfully create and maintain an environment of empowerment, organizations must ensure that employees trusted with making decisions are equipped with adequate knowledge and skills, that they are encouraged and allowed to act and that their actions are supported by management.

Traditional performance improvement technologies in the contact center—workforce management, performance management, quality monitoring and e-learning—can facilitate information availability and operational control across the organization.

## IEX Empowerment Solutions

IEX provides workforce and performance management solutions that help contact centers create true empowerment to enhance job satisfaction and improve service quality.



### TotalView® WebStation™

The TotalView WebStation feature is a 100 percent Web-based solution that helps empower agents and supervisors alike. The Agent WebStation module gives agents unprecedented direct access and control to their schedules. Displays are customizable and can be set in a variety of language options. The Supervisor WebStation module facilitates a paperless schedule change process by enabling supervisors to see their agents' schedules, schedule change notifications and acknowledgments, and to get better and more complete information with which to manage the performance of their teams.

### TotalView® WebStation™ Plus

The TotalView WebStation Plus feature provides advanced workflow automation features to streamline schedule change, bidding and trading processes within the contact center. Eliminating paperwork and reducing data entry and manual processing, WebStation Plus further empowers your agents and supervisors and allows them to be more productive.