

How to create a culture for innovation in your contact centre



Continued innovation is essential if brands are to stay competitive – particularly given today's evolving customer expectations. But how do you enable an environment where contact centre innovation thrives?

In this CCMA Good Practice Guide we examine the different types of contact centre innovation, highlight some common characteristics, and focus on the importance of actionable data in driving innovation effectiveness. We also identify a number of key guidelines to follow when implementing innovation projects, while also identifying some of the common barriers to innovation success.

Three key types of contact centre innovation

Everyone wants to be innovative, but it's important first to recognise the three distinct types of contact centre innovation:

- **New Frontier Innovation** – involving probably the most transformational type of customer journey innovation. It could be the application of bots to revolutionise multiple aspects of service, or the deployment of the latest delivery drones. While exciting, these kind of projects are relatively infrequent, involve a limited number of people, and typically take a long time for such innovations to deliver business value.
- **Everyday Innovation** – where everyone across the customer service operation, from advisors, team leaders and coaches through to quality and resource

planning specialists and Customer Experience Directors, all work to identify incremental improvements and innovations that, when brought together, can lead to meaningful and quantifiable improvements. Contact centre advisors particularly are well-placed to share customer insight around issues whose resolution can lead to immediate benefits.

- **Adjacent Innovation** – a largely risk-free approach where the customer service operation simply adapts its existing proposition to either extend its service proposition for current customers, or makes its proposition available to new users. An example of adjacent innovation might be to extend contact centre availability in response to growing customer demand for support outside of traditional opening hours.

Recognising these different categories is important as it helps organisations to shape a more effective innovation strategy. Each category has its own advantages. However, it's essential that any project is clearly focused on delivering against core contact centre goals such as finding easier, quicker and cheaper ways to help customers. Brands also need to leverage innovation to engage colleagues and help them operate effectively in today's evolving contact centre environments.

Unlock the potential

The drive for innovation in the contact centre can come from a wide range of sources: advisors, customer feedback, organisational strategy, peers across the industry, as well as external consultants. Inspiration can come from looking at other best practice operations, either through networking or via membership associations with structured benchmarking programmes.

It's also important to recognise that innovation isn't just a leadership issue. Advisors are a great source of new ideas to improve customer journeys, but these suggestions need to be backed by an effective filtering process with built-in closed loop reporting to acknowledge contributions. Supervisors have a key role here. Contact centres also need input from the rest of the business – it's great to get senior leadership to sit with advisors and experience the reality of customer service first-hand. Marketing teams will also benefit from hearing what customers are actually talking about, helping them to refine their planning and also better understand their likely impact on contact centre activity.

Effective decisions depend on having access to key data

Collecting input from both within and outside of the contact centre, and tying that data to the corporate vision and goals, is essential in building an innovation culture – but these activities cannot be carried out in isolation. Contact centres need to set metrics and accountability that encourage innovation, however any programme always needs to be referenced against detailed business data. But we need to solve what's happening with information in our businesses – in terms of knowing what's important and figuring out where to look – before we can start taking innovation decisions and begin to drive real change.

Both leading and lagging indicators can help to identify areas or processes that require focus, but if we want to drive real change consistently then we need to have better data to support innovation. Often the actual data needed is fragmented across multiple systems or silos, so contact centre teams need to make sure they're part of the conversation when it comes to sourcing critical CX data from ever deeper corporate 'data lakes'. It's also incumbent on contact centre leaders to recognise how much of the insight that's gathered in the contact centre can prove extremely valuable to other parts of the business – data flow needs to be both ways.

Benefits and barriers to contact centre innovation

While every contact centre operation is keen to innovate, some prove more successful than others. That's why it's useful to identify some of the characteristics that differentiate innovative contact centres. It's also helpful

to recognise potential obstacles to innovation. Here's a checklist for both that will help you establish your own contact centre readiness.

5 characteristics of innovative contact centres

There is no guaranteed formula, but every contact centre that succeeds in being consistently innovative share these five characteristics:

1. Innovation activity begins with clear definition of the problems or challenges to be solved
2. There's an understanding and articulation of the business case and value to be realised
3. Contact centre leaders have the right metrics and KPIs in place to drive desired outcomes
4. Colleagues are not only listened to, but benefit from closed loop feedback on progress
5. Consistent engagement across the organisation to secure buy-in and collaboration.

5 barriers to contact centre innovation

CCMA research has identified five of the main barriers to contact centre innovation:

1. As the impact of the pandemic recedes, it's all too easy to revert to pre-pandemic thinking
2. Experience of previous unsuccessful projects can induce innovation cynicism
3. Focusing on traditional operational metrics without a clear focus on the customer experience
4. Increasing systems fragmentation as customer data spreads across multiple channels
5. Reliance on third parties can reduce visibility and lead to lack of control.

It's also important to remember you don't have to innovate everywhere at once. But wherever you do begin, start with a clear idea of what you're looking to achieve, establish where the data sits to support and measure your progress, and identify the key stakeholders you'll need on board to support the change management process. Once that's in place you'll have a strong foundation for your contact centre's continuous innovation improvement cycle.



Read the CCMA Research Report: Breaking barriers and accelerating innovation in the contact centre

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