



Enghouse
Interactive

Agent Empathy Playbook For the New Reality

Support your teams so they can
provide the customer experience
your organization wants to deliver





Introduction

It is often said that an organization is only as good as its employees and that they are what makes customers want to do business with your company.

Contact Center agents are your front line and create that first impression, be it good or bad. If they aren't pleasant to deal with, or offer bad service, the company will quickly fail. Therefore, making sure your agents are well equipped to make the customer's experience a positive one will go a long way to ensuring your company is well regarded and seen to be a good one to do business with.

That means that while organizations invest in technology, they must equally invest in their staff, their skills and well-being.

When you step back and think about it, this only makes sense - supporting your people helps to ensure that they remain engaged, motivated and focused on making the customer experience a positive one, even in highly contentious problem situations.

Agent well-being should therefore always be a focus, but COVID and the switch to hybrid working has accentuated its importance. While working from home has increased flexibility for staff and opened up new online opportunities for support, it has also heightened stress levels amongst both agents and customers alike and made it more difficult to support remote staff that may be struggling.

Agents may feel isolated, overwhelmed and under enormous pressure. On the positive side, employers increasingly understand the importance of well-being and are implementing programs that better support their people.

This eBook will provide some insight into what can be done by organizations to support their employees, how best to leverage technology, and outline how a supportive culture and flexible processes, can help these programs succeed as we move into the new reality of hybrid work.



Ensuring and Protecting Agent Well-being

Agents are taking calls from upset or panicked customers and need to react in a calm and welcoming manner - all while responding compassionately, and competently, in real-time. And yet, their days are filled with repetitive actions, questions/issues and tasks, which can quickly become exceedingly monotonous, while also dealing with an onslaught of ever increasing calls. Compounding these issues are the performance KPI's, constant monitoring for compliance, protocol and script adherence along with unrealistic call resolution targets. These challenges are leading to stress levels never before experienced.

Overcoming the Negatives

All of these factors have led to increased dissatisfaction, low morale, illness and burnout. Gallup reports that burned out employees are 63% more likely to take a sick day and 2.6 times as likely to be actively seeking a different job. Contact centers already have an issue with agent retention, with a recent ContactBabel report finding that the staff attrition rate in 2020 was 20%, with 16% of contact centers having resignation rates exceeding 30%.

The counter-point is that there is a direct correlation between high levels of mental and physical well-being and running a successful contact center.

The question is, how does your company best ensure agent well-being for their own mental health, while also ensuring that the company can continue providing the service and support that customers need and expect?

This is where enlightened organizations can provide support. By providing ongoing stability in the work environment, (and maybe even relaxing some performance metrics) organizations can ensure that the proper structures will be in place to help agents do their jobs with resilience and empathy, both for themselves and their customers.

Happy Agents = Happy Customers

Engaged, motivated agents are more productive, less likely to take a sick day or look for another job. They are more confident, interested and willing to learn and grow. And, as a result, they deliver better service – which directly leads to lower customer churn, a better work environment and consequently higher revenues.

While this has always been true, at a time when routine queries are increasingly dealt with through self-service and chatbots, agents are now expected to handle more complex and involved issues, which takes more time and requires more support to resolve. This also requires them to be more specialized in their knowledge, detail oriented and committed to delivering higher levels of service. They also need to be more empathic when dealing with customers as well.

Positive Well-being Helps Reputation

Being seen as a good place to work can help attract and retain talent. This is especially true of contact centers given the competition for qualified agents. Making certain that the contact center environment is welcoming, well-designed and provides technical support, team camaraderie, positive reinforcement and coaching from leaders along with a wide range of social activities, contributes to and deepens an overall positive environment.

However, in today's evolving hybrid, and disparate blended working structures (home, and office-bound agents), well-being must also evolve to go beyond the physical to reach those working remotely.

As contact centers can now utilize people and their unique skills or knowledge irrespective of geography – other commitments (such as personal and family responsibilities, spouse/partner career obligations, etc.) and mobility issues or requirements (including for those with disabilities) are impacting how organizations must now view and support agent well-being. The culture must change by being supportive in ways that organizations have never before considered.

Challenges to Agent Well-being are Increasing

A consideration before the pandemic, these issues have now become a priority with the rise of hybrid working. At the same time, the range of these challenges has increased significantly:

- 1 Ever-increasing stress of dealing with difficult or irate callers, without respite.
- 2 Lack of resources, such as poor access to information or knowledge, with organizations relying more on an agent's personal tools and devices.
- 3 Insufficient training, leaving agents feeling unprepared to help consumers.
- 4 Repetitive work, performing standardized tasks throughout a shift.
- 5 Dealing with heavy workloads, such as a high volume of calls during a working day.
- 6 Poor technology, inconsistent/non-existent IT support for remote agents, disparate, standalone systems, out of date FAQ's, lack of Knowledge Base systems, and a lack of self-service options – all irritate customers before they even get to an agent.
- 7 Pressure from performance monitoring and the need to meet KPIs and quality standards on every call, while issues become more complex and time consuming.
- 8 *Out of Sight, Out of Mind* fears, not feeling valued due to a lack of visibility and positive praise from supervisors and managers.
- 9 Worries around the pandemic and personal health, compounded by lack of healthcare and mental health program coverage.
- 10 The pressures of remote working, such as inadequate home working environments, the need to homeschool or care for family members, unwelcome distractions, a lack of work/life balance and the removal of the face-to-face working and social support provided within an office environment.

Create an Open Culture Around Well-being

The pandemic has brought agent well-being into the spotlight, forcing organizations to re-examine how well their culture and processes provide the necessary support to a hybrid, and disparate workforce.

Contact center leaders have had to change how they manage when the majority of their staff are not physically located within eyesight. Successful management requires a culture of openness, continuous and transparent communication while trusting and empowering agents to do the right thing for the customer.

An open culture means that agents understand that “it’s OK to not be OK”, and can communicate with their manager about issues and concerns without fear that they will be viewed negatively. There has to be acceptance and support of those with mental health concerns, actively eliminating the stigma that still surrounds this issue.

Team members, from managers to agents, should be trained to spot the signs of burnout and stress in others, and be able to take action before they develop into larger well-being issues. Additional support can be provided to agents in a remote work environments by ensuring that there’s always easy access to resources (on-line and off-line) which can enable employees to manage their own mental and physical health. Lastly, extra effort should be made to develop team relationships and extend the resulting informal support networks to everyone’s benefit, both now and in the future.

Empathy Is Foundational

Developing empathy (i.e. Emotional Intelligence or EQ) in oneself is one thing. Helping others become more empathetic is altogether different.

It requires the ability to motivate others to do so. The best way is to lead by example.

Creating a culture of high EI leaders can only be achieved if they demonstrate and believe in those behaviors themselves.

“It is the rare exception that a person succeeds solely on their own. There are always others that have helped them along the way.”

Develop Empathy to deliver the best Customer Service in Times of Turmoil
(Resource: Training and Checklists)



Combine Technology with Empathy to Increase Well-being

The lack of appropriate enabling technologies can directly affect an agent's well-being due to the inability to quickly and effectively resolve the customer's issues. **The Solution:** combine technology with an empathetic approach, and everyone benefits.

Quality Management

Agent performance evaluation tools provide more than just opportunities for training and improvement. They can also spot potential issues that are impacting agent well-being. These can then be followed up by managers, helping to prevent them from developing into larger problems for the agent.

Real-time Speech Analytics

Within a physical contact center, managers and other agents can see when issues are developing on a call, and supervisors can then intervene to provide help. Real-time speech analytics bring this understanding to the hybrid world, automatically monitoring for triggers such as raised voices or long silences which may indicate that there is a problem.

Supervisors can then step in to address any developing issues, help off-load call surges, lowering stress levels for agents and providing help to the customers.

Call Recording

Having a verifiable record of every interaction helps agents as it provides objective proof of exactly what happened during a call, while also providing an opportunity where training or support can be used to help them improve. It also provides a legal record of what was said, or was displayed on the agent's screen along with any text-based interactions that happened. This supports agents in case of customer complaints and disputes, reducing stress and demonstrating that they are compliant with processes.





Knowledge Management

Increasingly, customers want to be able to help themselves to avoid long wait times. Should they engage with an agent, they expect the agent to be able to resolve their issue quickly and efficiently. Either way, a knowledge base (KB) ensures that the right information is readily available at the right time, in the format that the customer prefers. No more wasting time manually searching through files or folders to find information.

Video

Video is the new Face-to-Face. It provides an emotional connection to colleagues when working remotely. With interactive video, customers and agents can share information more efficiently, especially when complemented with document sharing and other communications channels used concurrently in an omni-channel contact center environment.

The Collaborative Contact Center

Microsoft Teams now controls the desktop, and offers intuitive and ubiquitous collaboration and communication tools to the contact center agent. Agents can now instantaneously reach anyone in the organization that can help resolve a customer's issue. With *Presence* indicators, agents can immediately see who is or isn't available – whether it's a subject matter expert half-way around the world or the accounts payable manager in the back office. The result: agents can resolve situations more quickly than ever before, with happier customers and better CSAT ratings as a result.

Customer Data at Their Fingertips

A major cause of agent frustration has been the need to toggle between disparate systems in order to get anything done, and having to rate the interaction and manually update customer records after the call. Integrating your CRM with the contact center, provides agents with a complete view of the customer, while enabling them to focus on responding as quickly and efficiently as possible. This effectively reduces much effort and stress, positively impacting agent motivation and well-being.

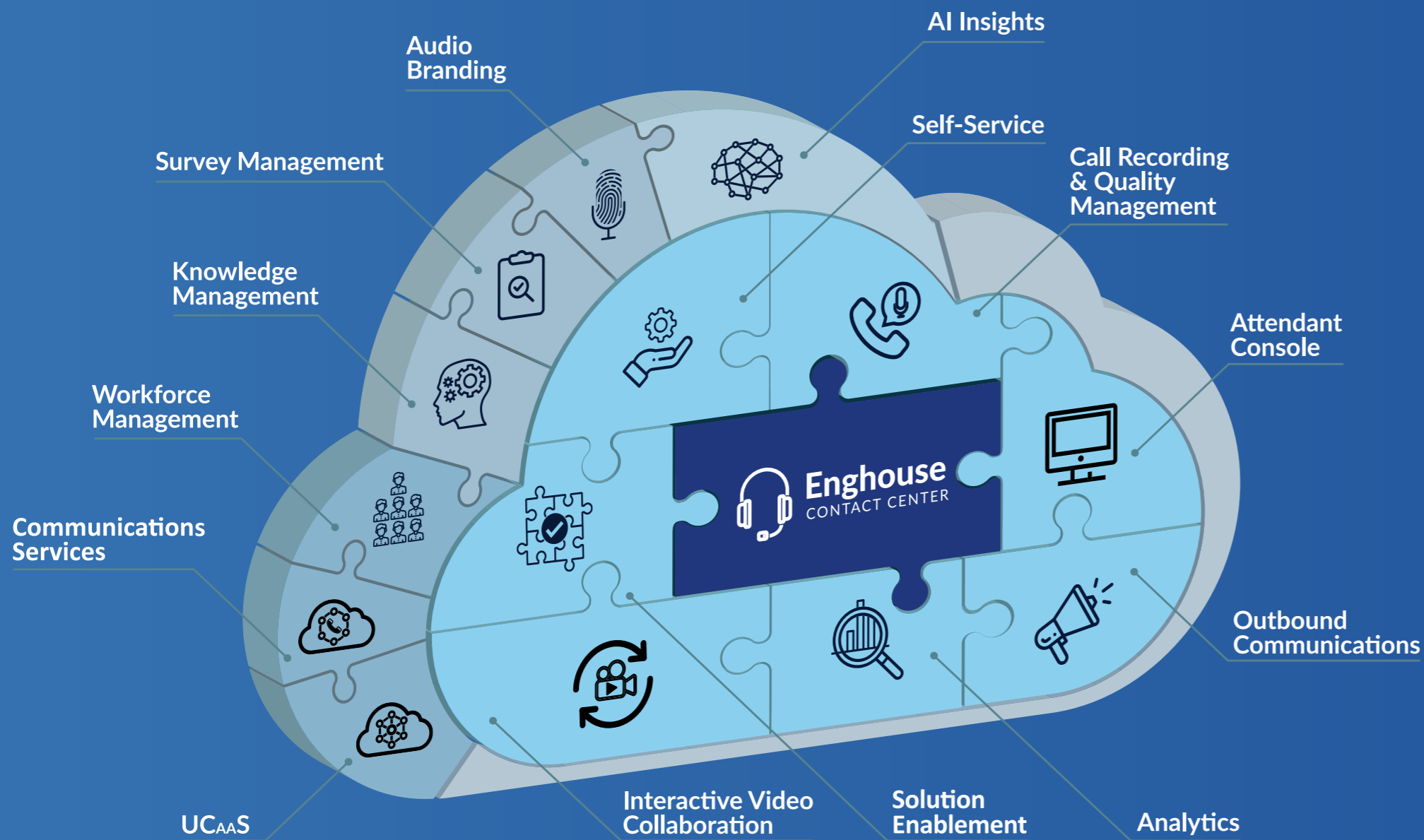
Workforce Management

Effective workforce management (WFM) solutions empower agents by providing them with the ability to directly control their work schedules. Through self-service, they can flag when they are available for overtime, trade shifts with colleagues, manage sudden parental issues or manage holiday requests – receiving an instant response, per the rule-based decision process. This increased autonomy reduces overall stress levels and positively impacts agent satisfaction. Gamification can also provide the basis for friendly inter-agent competition and social engagement, positively affecting agent churn.

Combine Empathy and Technology To Enhance Your Agent Well-Being

Equip your Contact Center with the industry's most capable agent collaboration tools





When you install Enghouse Cloud on your choice of cloud provider, **IBM Cloud, Amazon AWS, Microsoft Azure, Google Cloud** or any other, it provides your organization with the ability to be set up and operational in hours. Enghouse Cloud ensures your agents are able to work effectively from anywhere.

As a highly secure all-in-one cloud contact centre platform, it provides a feature-rich solution that gives the functionality and flexibility to deliver effective, efficient customer service. By easily connecting resources across your entire organization, you can resolve customer needs, no matter where they are located, no matter what devices they prefer.

Solutions



Industry-leading, highly effective self-service capabilities put control in the customer's hands

Capabilities: IVR, Virtual Assistants (chatbots), enhanced consoles, portals, voice biometrics and authentication



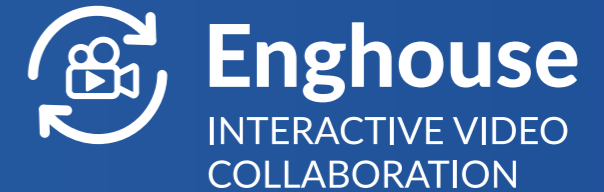
Cost-effective, intuitive and quickly implemented recording and quality monitoring solution

Capabilities: Call Recording (always-on & on-demand, multi-site) and screen recording modules, full indexing for quick omni-channel data searching, agent evaluation and training tools



Collects and analyzes call accounting data to deliver key insights into unified communication and telephony system usage and to prevent fraud

Capabilities: Microsoft Teams enabled, with an intuitive web browser interface, automated email warnings for threshold alarms, misuse/abuse, call duration, lost calls, trunk capacity alarms, call tracing



Connect the world by video-enabling any application. Vidyo delivers the most secure, highest-quality video experience, on-prem or from the cloud

Capabilities: multi-modal collaboration enhanced with real-time content sharing and editing. Screen cascading delivers consistent 4K HD quality even in calls spanning multiple geographies- a Vidyo exclusive

Consulting and Technology Practices



A set of innovative core methodologies and services which integrates and activates Artificial Intelligence within the contact center.

Capabilities: using Conversational AI, vecko listens to the Voice of the Customer (VoC) and extracts actionable insights from a wide range of digital media (>95% analysis accuracy)



A set of core methodologies and services designed to help customers get the most out of their knowledge bases and management tools.

Capabilities: real-time article editing and intuitive admin tools, robust analytics and reporting, ongoing analysis and optimization for continuous improvement



A set of core methodologies used to deliver an easily scalable multi-modal survey management platform and managed services for collection of customer insight data and management.

Capabilities: ability to undertake ad hoc and scheduled surveys without adding resources. Data Collection platform with Services providing Advanced Programming and Reporting services in multiple languages



Provides voice talent and audio recording services that are unmatched in the industry. Industry-renowned experts guide your marketing, training, IT and CRM professionals to unify all customer-facing touch points.

Capabilities: 32 languages, male and female personas, integrates with all voice, video, online technologies and platforms

Third-Party Provided Capabilities



Unified Communications as a Service. Offering a range of industry-leading UC providers which enable customers to fully benefit from the most comprehensive communications and collaboration capabilities available.

Capabilities: integrated communication and collaboration capabilities with complete resiliency and redundancy, visual voicemail, choice of deployment: full mobile, with desk phones or mix of device types (hybrid)



Telecom infrastructure – purchased as a Service. Leverage the industry’s most flexible provider of telecom services to underpin your contact center with high-reliability infrastructure.

Capabilities: SIP Trunking, North American DiD’s with automated or supervised LNP, Voip911, SMS, LD, PSTN termination plus operational management and surveillance tools



Optimizes the utilization of resources, based on skills, response time, resolution skills and customer feedback.

Capabilities: enhances internal visibility, adaptability and performance of all agents. Mobile-ready with an easy-to-use, intuitive interface. Integrated training tool



**Enghouse
Interactive**

We are the world's most **reliable** contact center technology provider. Our global brand is built on our track-record of consistently honoring our commitments – to our customers, our staff and our shareholders.

Enghouse Interactive, a subsidiary of **Enghouse Systems Limited** (TSX: ENGH), is a leading global provider of contact center software and service solutions that deliver enhanced customer service and transforms the contact center from a cost center into a powerful growth engine. Our Practices and Solutions enable businesses to leverage meaningful, daily customer interactions to extract key insights used to deepen customer loyalty and uncover new opportunities to add value, profitably.

Globally, Enghouse Interactive's divisions support thousands of customers worldwide, respecting local regulatory requirements, and supports any telephony technology, whether deployed on premises or in the Cloud, ensuring that our customers can be reached by **their** customers – anytime, anywhere, and via any channel.

For more information, visit:
enghouseinteractive.com

Contact Us:
hello@enghouse.com | 1.833.ENG.INTv (364.4688)