Six Sigma and Root Cause Analysis for Call Centers by Rigoberto Stokes

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Many businesses outsource some processes related to interacting with customers to call centers. A call center handles customer calls, emails and other customer interaction activities based on certain metrics agreed upon with a client. Outsourcing can be a cost-effective solution for businesses: They are only charged a fraction of what it would cost them if they were to have their own in-house team.

Like any business, though, a call center can have its own share of problems. A common conflict is when agents achieve good customer satisfaction scores but consistently exceed the average handling time. This means that the agents pass one metric while failing on another at the same time. Another problem is too many being abandoned a result of many people calling and later dropping the line for being on hold for too long.

A call center might try to remedy these difficulties by hiring more personnel, yet there is still a possibility that the same issues may be encountered. A more effective approach that call centers can try is the Six Sigma strategy. A business management strategy developed by Motorola in 1986, Six Sigma aims to improve processes by identifying and removing the causes of the problems. In a call centerâ€™s case, it can be applied to reduce average handling time, lessen the number of abandoned calls, and eventually meet client targets.

Six Sigma starts by doing a root cause analysis of the problems. In the case of call centers, it has been discovered that some agents are ill-equipped with the skills to deal with escalate calls. Compounding matters is when there are insufficient personnel to handle these escalations, resulting in other calls being neglected and later dropped.

Additionally, customer interactions were not documented properly or specifically, creating difficulty in determining patterns and common customer issues not getting resolved.

Six Sigma attacks these causes by utilizing tools, objectives and methods to track results and improve process flows. Part of this involves modifying the software agents use to document customer issues under specific categories, and assigning more senior agents into a "Tier 2" level to handle irate customers with complex issues.

As a result of implementation, front line agents are able to resolve customer issues faster and transfer more difficult ones to second-level ones, thus answering more calls and lessening the abandonment rate to comply with client targets. In effect, Six Sigma is able to pinpoint underlying causes and address them directly. To know more about Six Sigma processes, you can get more information at msn.com and ezinearticles.com.

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