

# The core elements of exceptional customer contact

## How to turn your Contact Centre into a centre of CX excellence

Contact Centres, and their agents, are the external face of brands and, as such, play a pivotal role in whether customers have a positive or a negative experience with that brand or organisation. The experience and the overall journey of those customers will make a mark on the reputation of that company and can impact its long-term success.

The stakes are high and the path to good customer experience (CX) doesn't always run smoothly. Today's Contact Centres face extensive challenges, with so many technology options, providers, and ways of doing things, as well as challenges like security and working from home to contend with.

"How Contact Centres look to address CX has the potential to make or break a brand. Those who do it well go above and beyond; providing consistent experiences that are personalised, responsive and empathetic, all while driving continuous improvements to ensure that their customers continue to feel heard, their agents still feel valued and their brand remains trusted. To me, this is the definition of exceptional customer contact and what every Contact Centre should be working towards today."

- Craig Farley, Head of Consulting at IPI

Throughout this ebook we will:

- Examine the intrinsic value of good customer contact
- Understand the challenges that need to be overcome in its delivery
- Lay out the underlying principles of an exceptional customer contact strategy

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## The value of good customer contact

“The road to failed customer-experience programmes is paved with good intentions. Executives are quick to see the end-game benefits of a customer-centric strategy: more satisfied customers, increased loyalty, a lower cost to serve, and more engaged employees. But they often fail to understand clearly what a superior customer experience is worth and exactly how it will generate value.”

- **McKinsey**

The value of good customer contact is multifaceted, delivering numerous improvements to organisations. Some of these include:

- **Revenue growth** – analysis shows us that those classed as “leaders” in CX achieved more than double the revenue growth of those classed as “laggards”.
- **Increased loyalty and repeat business** – McKinsey’s research finds that “80 percent of the value creation achieved by the world’s most successful growth companies comes from their core business—principally, unlocking new revenues from existing customers” – so it’s worth getting it right. On the flipside of that, the same research found that one poor customer experience, which results in the subsequent loss of that customer, can impact so poorly on an organisation, that it requires the acquisition of three new ones to compensate for its loss.
- **Market differentiation** – a good customer experience is how organisations seek to differentiate themselves from the competition. In fact, Contact Babel found that more than half of UK businesses say that customer experience, rather than price or quality, is the main factor upon which they wish to compete.
- **Boosted employee engagement** – good CX also has an overwhelming effect on agents. Forrester found that experience led organisations report 1.5 times higher employee satisfaction

With the benefits clear, what does a good customer experience look like?

## Creating a good CX

When it comes to good customer experience, there are two schools of thought:

1. What a **customer** defines as the most important elements of CX.
2. What a **board’s** priorities are around customer experience.

IPI’s own analysis of the key drivers of a positive CX finds that typically, these two schools of thought are not aligned. Customers value first contact resolution, choice of channels, short queues and polite customer agents. However, boards tend to be more focused on cost, revenue, sales, retention, or internal agent metrics.

It seems obvious, but when you’re running an organisation you have to focus on key metrics such as cost, revenue, sales and retention. However, research shows us time and time again that those organisations which focus on CX (leaders) significantly outperform CX laggards in terms of revenue growth.



In fact, when you look more closely at what customers want from an organisation's customer service, it necessitates having the right tools, information, processes and the right levels of staff to help agents do their job properly. If these things aren't in place or don't work well, it's just as much a source of frustration for advisors as it is for customers. Tasks take longer, leading to delays, and annoyances for agents and customers alike.

Therefore, we can't really talk about great CX, without talking about employee experience (EX). In fact, at IPI, we think EX is absolutely key to providing great CX.

## The role of EX

**Employees are the key to delivering operational and CX excellence, and as such building and maintaining a culture where employees are empowered and engaged will ensure business success and customer satisfaction.**

Technology has the power to hugely enhance an employee's working life. A great technology deployment seamlessly connects, speeds up and provides greater opportunities for employees to build relationships, understand complex issues quickly and deliver empathetic service. However, if done poorly, it will have the adverse effect – slowing employees down and adding frustration.

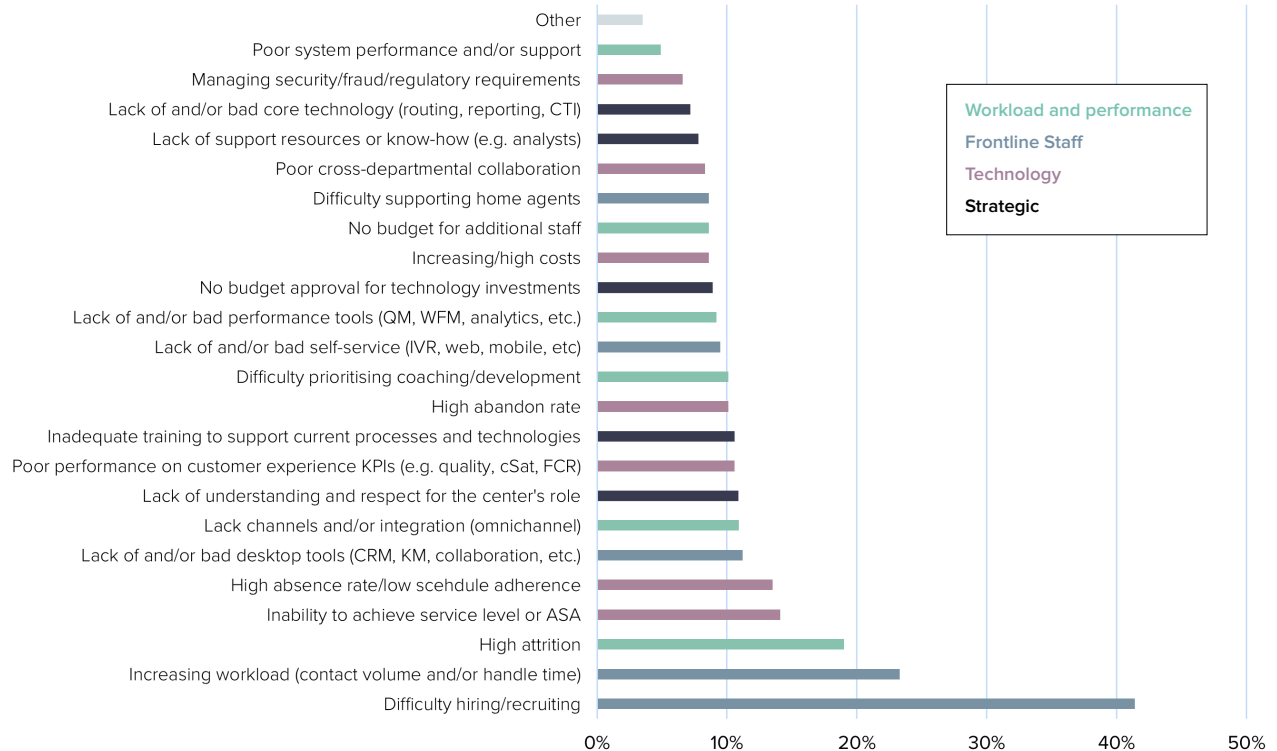
Ultimately, the goal for organisations should be to create **super agents** who can focus on the customer, with automation, AI and data supporting them in decision-making, all with the ability to connect and get human help, e.g., from supervisors, when needed. This is more important than ever with the continued preference for remote and hybrid working.

## The operational challenges to delivering good CX

The value of good CX is clearly undeniable. However, the journey to CX excellence is not without obstacles. Pertinent challenges include:

- **Staffing** – from not having enough staff to deal with customer demand, to high attrition and high staff absence rates – the number of agents, and the level of their skill, can poorly impact on the delivery of good CX. Agent skills shortages have increased wait times and reduced first contact resolution, causing frustration for the customer and damage to the company brand.
- **High customer expectations** – with today's customers wowed by consumer tech and online experiences from global giants with seemingly unlimited access to data and AI to personalise their experience, expectation levels are high. Customers expect these same experiences replicated across the brands that they interact with – no matter how big or small.
- **Legacy infrastructure and siloed working** – traditional point technology solutions are hard to integrate and lack visibility into the customer journey. This legacy tech coupled with different operational departments acting in silos, have resulted in a disjointed, impersonal customer experience.
- **Rapidly evolving landscape** – the Cost-of-Living crisis, coupled with changing demographics towards a more digital-savvy consumer, will require the delivery of a more empathetic, personalised and effortless experience across multiple channels. Some Contact Centres lack the agent expertise and the technical functionality to enable this to be delivered seamlessly.

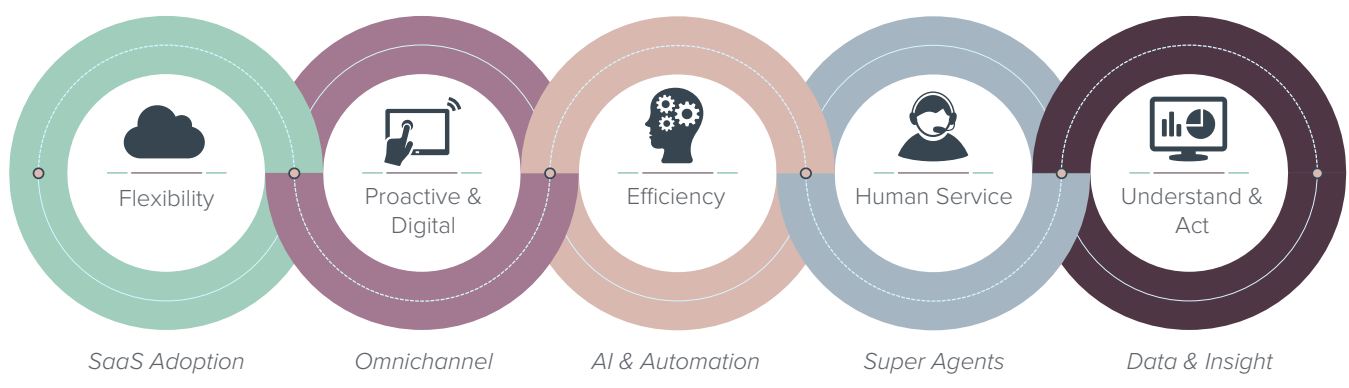
## What are your biggest challenges today?



[Contact Center Pipeline 2022]

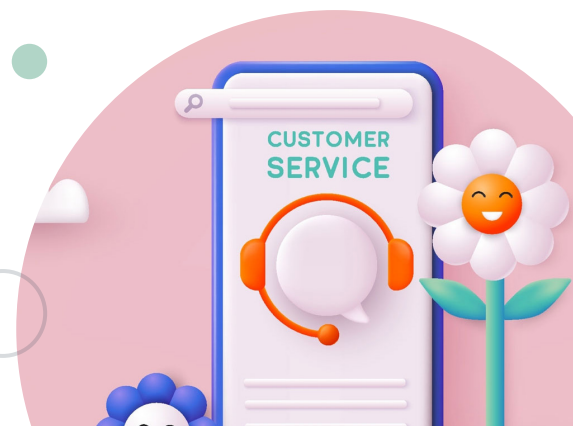
While these hurdles may seem significant, they are certainly not insurmountable. All that is needed is a shift in approach, to focus on five key focal points – or pillars – of your CX strategy to support your organisation in delivering exceptional customer contact.

## The core elements of exceptional customer contact



From IPI's 20+ years' experience in the industry, these are the five key elements – from a technology and a people/process point of view – that need to be reflected in the Contact Centre if organisations want to deliver exceptional customer contact.

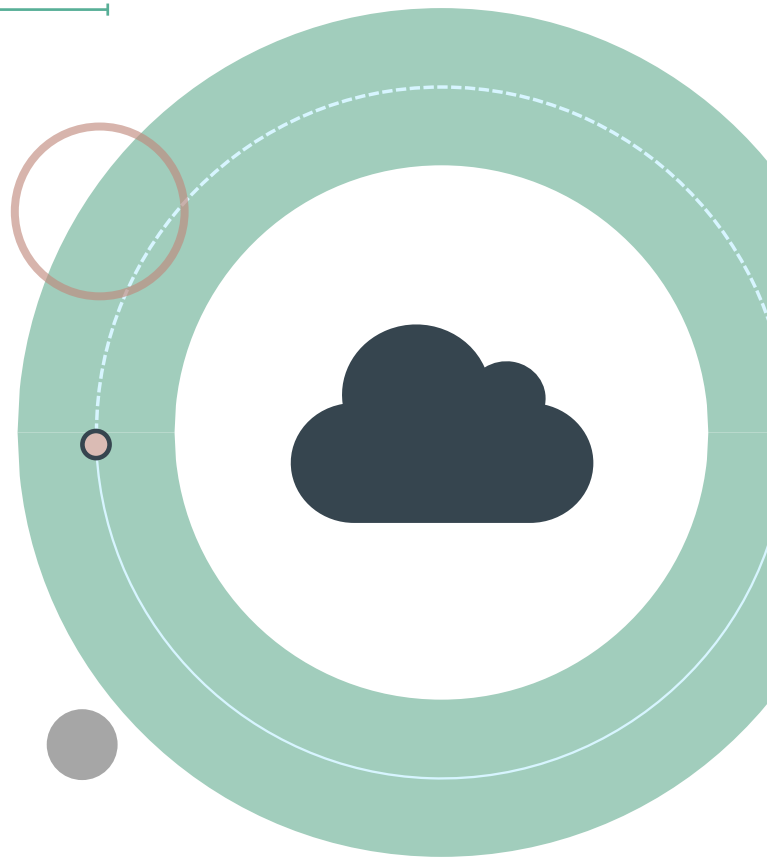
Let's take each of these in turn and assess how Contact Centres can incorporate them into their models.



## Element 1 - Flexibility

### SaaS Adoption

The solution - Moving to a **cloud-based SaaS model** improves scalability and efficiency, and unlocks new capabilities, insight and integration opportunities for today's Contact Centres.



The world of work has changed. Today, 93% of UK Contact Centres expect at least some remote working, with a large majority expecting a hybrid model ([Contact Babel Decision Makers Guide 2023](#)). Contact Centres need to easily and securely facilitate remote working to ensure that they are catering to the needs of all their staff – no matter where they are located.

The traditional on-premise Contact Centre model has also become less favourable. Costs have increased and organisations need to reduce their IT footprint, maintenance and management. The functionality of such on-premise technology is limited – with reduced scope for joined up data and analytics, and cumbersome integration options.

In addition, customers are demanding new contact channels and services, with organisations under pressure to deploy these quickly to compete in a crowded marketplace.

By moving to a cloud-based model, Contact Centres will:

- **Provide flexibility of work to agents.** Web browser and mobile app-based platforms ensure that Contact Centres can unlock higher availability and scalability, while agents can enjoy agile working through the ability to access systems from anywhere.
- **Enhance the customer journey.** When the customer journey is visible through a single pane of glass – with open API access to key operational systems such as CRMs – agents can proactively contact customers through multiple channels, personalise the information they send, route customers more quickly and efficiently, and automate routine tasks. Crucially, this frees up agents' time so they can focus on more complex enquiries.
- **Lower total cost of ownership.** Contact Centres can take advantage of subscription-based models to access advanced technology such as CCaaS (Contact Centre as a Service), AI and WEM (Workforce Engagement Management) tools hosted in public or private cloud.

## Element 2 - Proactive & Digital

### Omnichannel

The solution - **Omnichannel adoption** provides choice, allowing Contact Centres to proactively engage with customers in a timelier manner through a variety of channels – all while offering a more personalised service and a greater customer experience.



Customers are increasingly turning to digital channels as they look to engage with a brand. An organisation's website is often the starting point of a customer's journey – but depending on a customer's needs they will seek to engage with a brand in different ways. Whether it is web chat for live support, or a phone call to speak to an agent regarding a problem, Contact Centres must strive to meet customers where they're at.

Contact Centres are battling with rising costs of calls and increasing call volumes. According to Contact Babel the average cost of an inbound call is £6.55 – 70% more than email and 96% more than a web chat. And it's a cost that is increasing year on year. Alternative channels need to be considered to help Contact Centres deliver the same level of customer service but in a more cost-effective manner.

Call waiting times are increasing, leaving customers frustrated and call abandonment levels high. Proactive communication with customers can limit in-bound Contact Centre traffic, reducing the pressure on agents.

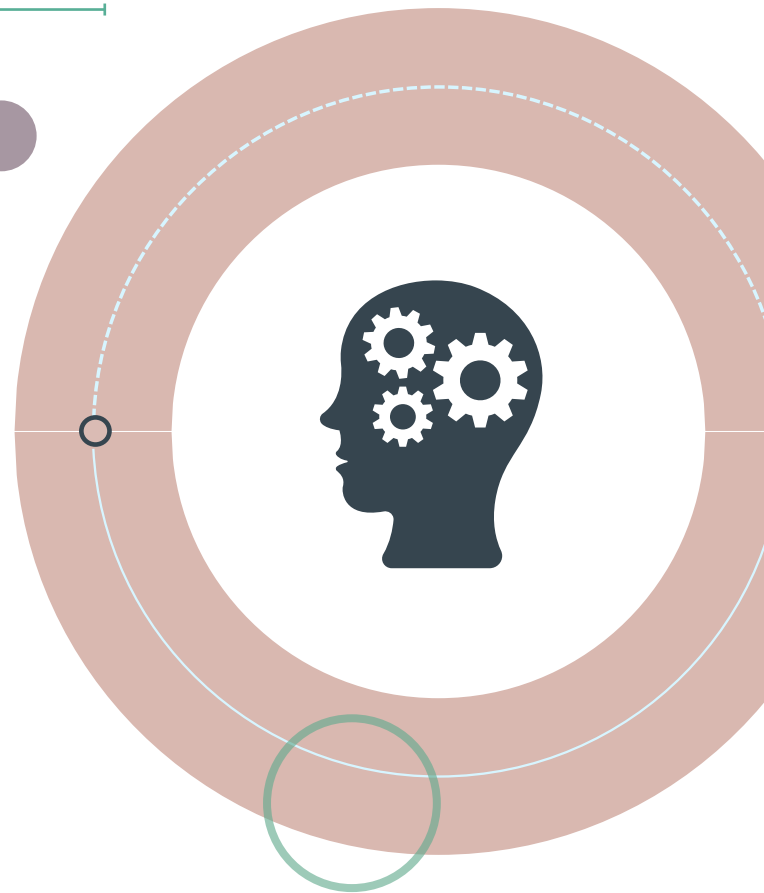
By moving to an omnichannel model, organisations will:

- **Provide a joined-up experience** to customers across the best channel for the query. CCaaS platforms combine traditional inbound voice with outbound, digital and social channels in one place.
- **Better manage customer demand** whilst providing an informative, value-added and personalised experience. Proactive communications such as SMS, email, and messaging, can be triggered automatically at key points in the customer journey to add value or prevent unnecessary inbound contact.
- **Prevent customers from becoming frustrated** and going elsewhere or leaving negative reviews. Engage at, or before, the moment of truth by providing preferred channels of communication to customers.
- **Understand the customer's journey** to prevent repeat contact and having to provide the same information multiple times. By maintaining a history of customer contact and/or integrating with customer systems, Contact Centres can better understand and route customer enquiries or sales opportunities.

## Element 3 - Efficiency

### AI and Automation

The solution - **AI and Automation** - reduce effort and cost to serve with self-service and automation tuned to customer and employee needs, whilst increasing customer understanding.



Today's Contact Centres are battling with increasing levels of customer demand, yet are struggling with difficulties in hiring skilled staff and retaining great employees. Added to this, customers have higher expectations, wanting responses faster, at any time of day or night. With budget restrictions hitting many organisations, CX leaders are increasingly expected to innovate and 'do more with less.'

By introducing AI and automation, Contact Centres can:

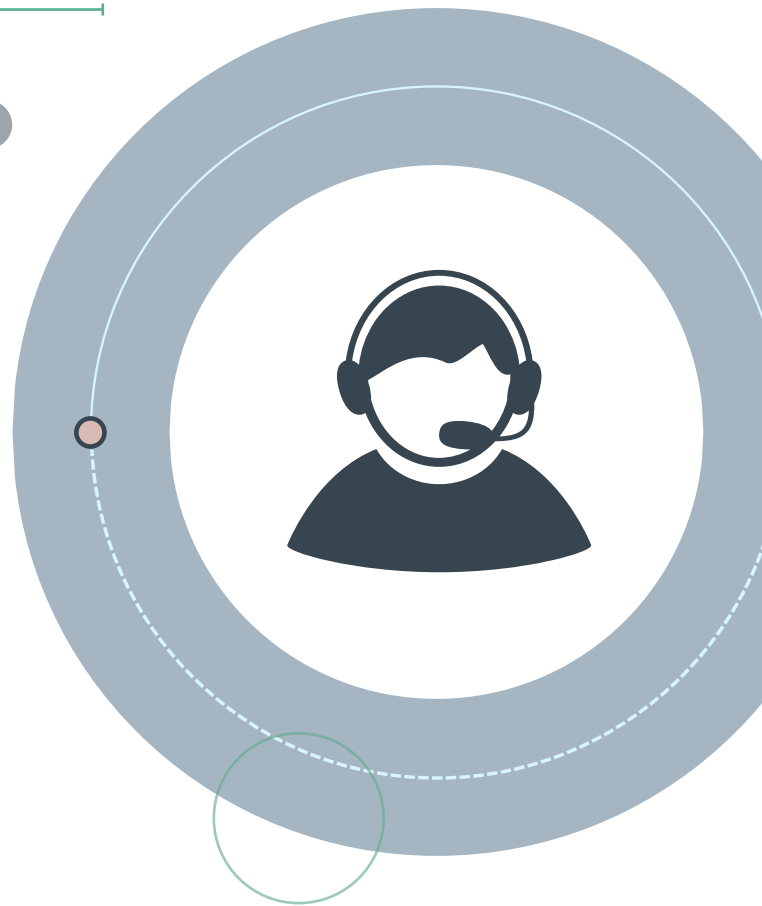
- **Provide knowledge to customers when they need it.** Conversational AI allows customers to self-serve information, providing the service customers require when they need it, 24/7.
- **Seamlessly automate customer processes and reduce their effort.** Intelligent automation and RPA can be used to digitalise and complete processes, saving agents valuable time on routine tasks.
- **Understand the customer journey and predictively improve experience,** answering their queries or creating new sales opportunities. Predictive technology can engage with customers at appropriate times on a website, or route interactions to the agent most likely to achieve the best outcome.
- **Gather insight** for understanding contact reasons and continuous improvement. Speech and text analytics can provide insights on customer sentiment and topics. This allows Contact Centre teams to spot trends, take immediate action and improve upstream processes.



## Element 4 - Human Service

### Super Agents

The solution - **Super Agents** - Engage and empower employees to ensure they are the most effective and empathetic they can be towards customers, wherever and whenever they work.



Rising competition, increasing CX expectations, tightening regulatory environments and challenging financial conditions require even greater empathy and relationship-building from agents towards customers – particularly if the CX delivered is to continue to meet customer expectations.

Yet, as staff attrition rates remain high, agents are under increasing pressure, and are often left juggling multiple systems and sources of information, whilst dealing with complex queries from customers.

By empowering employees to be Super Agents, Contact Centres can:

- **Provide an empathetic service** to the growing number of customers who have complex questions. To achieve this, leverage automation to respond to simple queries and take a more personalised Customer Contact approach.
- **Lower absence and attrition rates.** By creating 'Super Agents' who are engaged and empowered by a Contact Centre's processes and tools, Contact Centres can lower absence and attrition, boost productivity and reduce Average Handle Time. Providing coaching and development opportunities will further help Contact Centres to retain, attract and develop their team of agents.
- **Continue to motivate agents.** By using gamification and performance management tools, Contact Centres can provide motivation to agents and visibility to managers working with a hybrid workforce.
- **Deliver a more personalised CX.** Through single desktops with Knowledge Management and Agent Assist technologies, agents can surface consistent, up-to-date information in real time, as well as linking to vital customer information and other apps.



## Element 5 - Understand & Act

### Data & Insight

The solution - **Data and Insight** - understand the end-to-end customer journey to provide an exceptional experience through utilising modern, API-enabled systems and analytics tools to remove data silos and gain insight on CX and operations.



Many Contact Centres suffer from a lack of insight into their customers and their history of interactions with their organisation, which leads to a disjointed experience. This is often attributed to the challenges of legacy infrastructure, and data residing in multiple, siloed systems, with no mechanisms to enable this data to come together to provide useful insights. However, it also the result of insufficient data gathering. These factors make it difficult for organisations to understand the reasons why customers are getting in contact, and make it harder for them to respond to fluctuations in demands.

By gathering data and insight organisations can:

- **Optimise the customer journey** across any channel or data source through using customer journey mapping and analytics to orchestrate CX across all channels and platforms. This additional insight allows organisations to benefit from greater operational agility and faster decision-making.
- **Personalise the experience of customer interactions.** Open API integrations link valuable sources of customer data such as CRM, in order to personalise the routing

and experience of customer interactions or to allow for self-service. This provides an additional, and quick, source of resolution for customers.

- **Improve First Contact Resolution.** By joining up systems and improving visibility, organisations can better track customer history and understand contact reasons first time round.
- **Understand customer and employee sentiment.** Using analytics, Contact Centres can identify recurring trends and hurdles in the CX, allowing them to make changes to enhance the customer journey.
- **Better manage agent performance.** The collection of data also provides managers with greater visibility into the performance of agents, especially in a hybrid working environment. By understanding performance issues, organisations can make improvements to ensure that customers continue to benefit from the high levels of customer service they expect.

## Enhancing CX through exceptional customer contact

The customer of today expects exceptional customer contact within their CX journey. However, the reality is that for many Contact Centres, strides still need to be taken to ensure that its people, processes and technology are all optimised to deliver the CX that customers demand.

Organisations and their Contact Centre teams vary in size and resources, however, the cloud, and the rising number of CCaaS platforms now available, make the transition to the delivery of advanced functionality a reality. Delivering exceptional customer contact is now achievable for any Contact Centre.

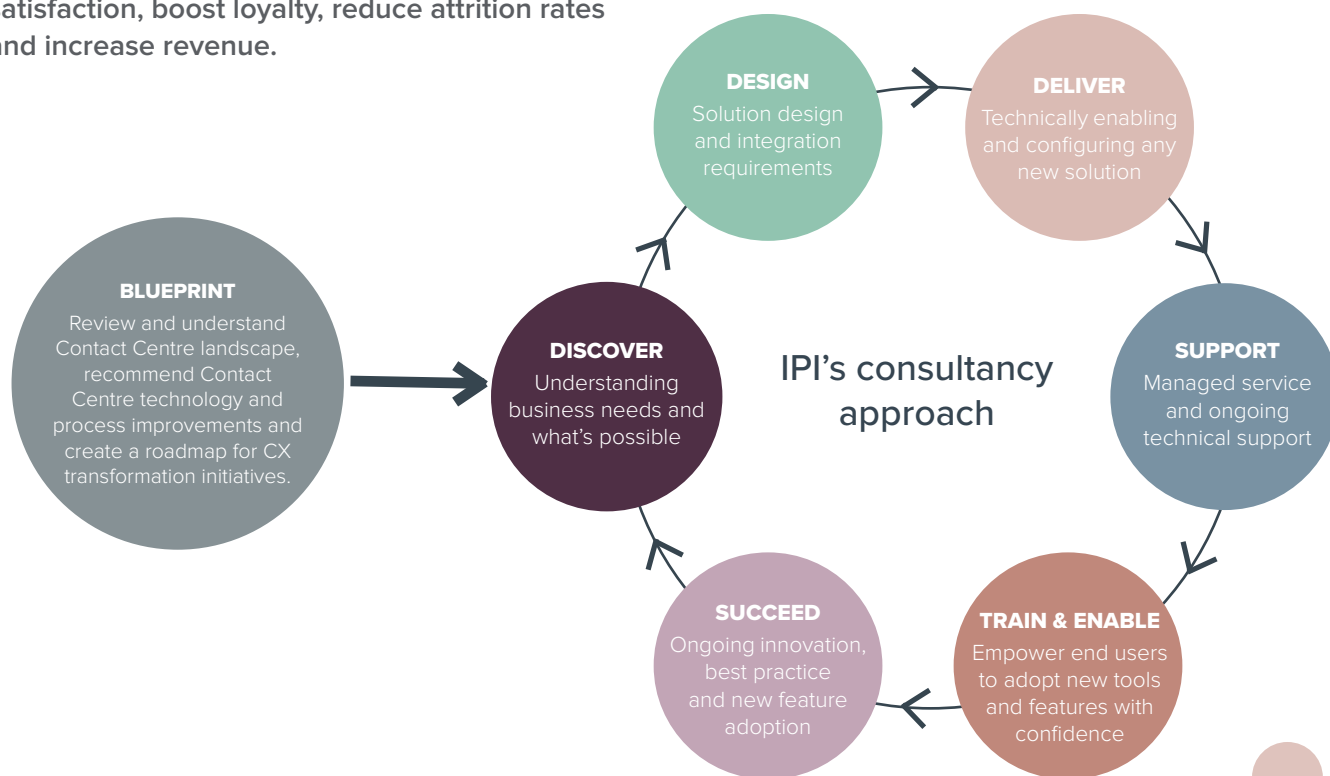
**By ensuring that IPI's five core elements of exceptional customer contact are reflected in an organisation's wider CX strategy, Contact Centre teams can increase customer satisfaction, boost loyalty, reduce attrition rates and increase revenue.**

## How IPI can help

IPI has a dedicated team of consultants who are experienced in helping organisations reach their customer contact potential – no matter the starting point.

We follow an operational consulting-led approach to technology and CX transformation, that is tailored to meet the needs of each individual client to help towards ongoing success.

If you would like to speak to IPI about starting your journey to delivering exceptional customer contact, please get in touch with the team.



## TAKE THE NEXT STEP



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