



BACK OFFICE VIRTUAL ROUNDTABLE 2019

Getting Deeper into
the Most Requested Back
Office Best Practices



NICE Back Office Virtual Roundtable 2019— Overview

At Interactions 2019, we had a session called “**30 Back Office Best Practices in 30 Minutes**”, where an expert panel presented a quick-fire overview of tips to increase back-office productivity. At the end of this session, participants were asked which topics they wanted to explore further in a virtual roundtable. In response to the results of this survey, NICE brought together the expert panel and customers on 21 May 2019 for a virtual roundtable to delve further into the top six requested best practices for the back office.

The topics covered were:

- Blending back office and contact center activities.
- Capacity planning for the back office.
- Establishing and measuring handle times in the back office.
- Tracking work items touched by multiple employees or touched multiple times by the same employee.
- Preparing by repairing broken workflows.
- Patience and perseverance in back office workforce optimization.

The roundtable was structured as a series of presentations with two of our four experts talking to each best practice. Each presentation was followed by questions from participants in the virtual roundtable addressed to the expert panel.



Who was presenting?

Paul Leamon, Director of Back Office Solution Management at NICE served as moderator for the virtual roundtable. Here are the expert panel presenters:

Brenda Hansen, Back Office Customer Success Manager at NICE

Brenda Hansen leads the Back-Office Customer Success program for the NICE Back Office suite of products. She brings a track record of over 22 years of experience in the Customer Management industry. Brenda came to NICE in 1996 from Fidelity Investments where she held the position of Global WFM Administrator.

Over the past 22 years, Brenda has worked in various capacities within NICE including training, consulting, QA, R&D, Product Management and Customer Success. Brenda has a reputation for helping customers get the best use of NICE tools, so her insight and skills are in high demand. Brenda graduated with a BS in Finance from the University of Utah and a Master of Science in Finance from Boston College.

Andrea Murray, Workforce Optimization Manager at WPS Health Solutions

WPS Health Solutions is a nationally regarded government contractor for claims administration in the United States and Wisconsin's leading not-for-

profit health insurer. With headquarters in Madison, Wisconsin, the company maintains additional main locations of operations in Wausau and De Pere, Wisconsin, in Marion, Illinois, and in Omaha, Nebraska. WPS has 1,850 employees across its offices to handle customer interactions.

Andrea's background includes implementing and managing workforce management and production leadership teams in a contact center, back-office and blended environment. Prior to her current role as Workforce Optimization Manager, she was the Customer Service Director at WPS Health Solutions. She enjoys working through challenging situations requiring the need to analyze data, collaborate with peers and execute new processes.

Irfan Kadiwal, Director of Workforce Management (Back Office) at Optum

Optum, owned by the UnitedHealth Group, is a health services and innovation company with 150 locations worldwide. Using advanced technology, management services and data analytics, Optum focuses on modernizing infrastructure, advancing care and empowering consumers. Optum uses workforce management solutions both in house and on behalf of their clients.

Irfan has been with Optum since 2011 and has worked on designing, implementing and deploying NICE's Back Office solution within Optum the past several years.



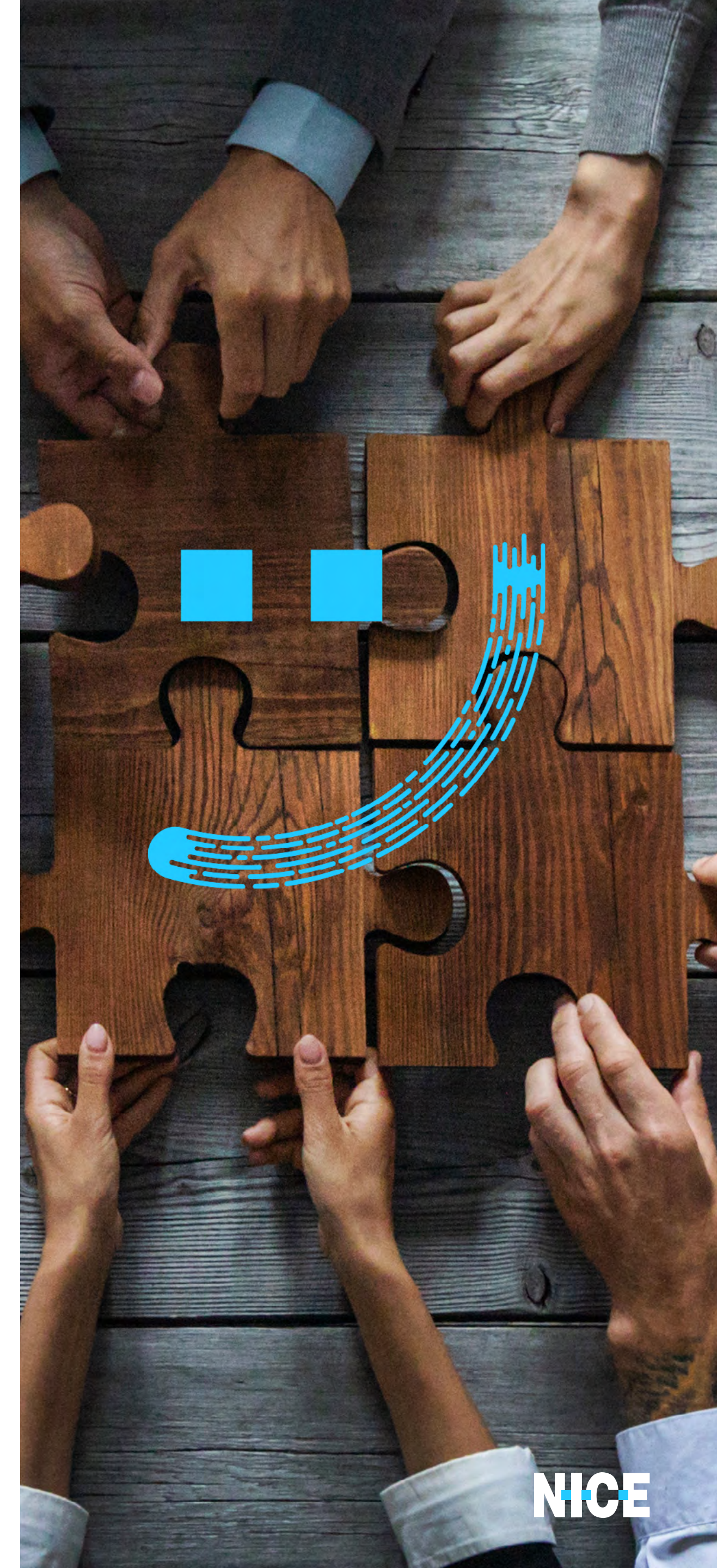
Jerrod Rogers, Workforce Optimization Consultant and founder of JR Optimization

JR Optimization is dedicated to improving the operational performance and efficiency of organizations through measurement, analysis, management, forecasting, and planning. The company provides consulting services for workforce optimization (for both contact centers and the back office), reporting, benchmarking, performance management, forecasting and staffing planning, and business analysis.

Jerrod is a Workforce Optimization Consultant for WPS Health Insurance, helping with Back Office Integrations, Blended Environments, and Performance Management. His past work includes being a Scheduling Manager for Aon Hewitt and a Workforce Manager for Dean Health Plan. Jerrod has a bachelor's degree in Business Management from the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay.



Who was there?



Blending the Perfect Smoothie

Frontline employees at contact centers have some downtime during working hours due to lulls in incoming calls because of the occupancy level needed to realize their service level goal. The question for many organizations is how to use that time productively on a regular basis, while keeping the employee available for the next call so that service levels are met.

Andrea Murray discussed the advantages of incorporating back office and call center work in a single workforce management environment. This combination, which can be visualized like a multi-layered smoothie, involves assigning back office work items to call center staff during those otherwise idle times.

When the daily busy and slow periods are known, it is possible to create teams and schedules that leverage multiskilled (and willing) employees for both handling calls and processing back office work. In the back office, as well, appropriately skilled employees can be assigned to login to the call center ACD during their idle time. As Andrea noted, WPS has thus been able to do more with the same staff, meeting service levels in a timely manner and keeping employees engaged and productive.

While it is a relatively straightforward optimization method, there are some clear guideposts to follow and pitfalls to avoid when interspersing back office work in a contact center. Irfan Kadiwal laid out the do's and don'ts.

✓ DO's:

- The back-office work items most suited for inclusion in a contact center workload are repetitive, have short handle times, and can't be fully automated.

- The back-office work must have clear start and end points, which can be easily adhered to, so that their performance can be measured and incorporated.
- Make sure the teams are blended correctly. In the contact center, occupancy rates indicate where blending is feasible, while in the back office measurable nonproductive time (idle, non-business, and lock times) is the relevant metric.
- Employees need to be trained to handle their new work.
- Follow up—make sure the blending is effective and impacts productivity positively.

✗ DON'Ts:

- Not all work types are a good fit for a blended environment.
- Sending too many work types to an employee may hinder their expertise, inadvertently creating a “jack of all trades, master of none”—and negatively impacting their average handle times (AHTs).
- Occupancy is also a balance: keep employees busy, but don't overwork them.

Arfan went on to describe how to measure the impact of blending call center and back office activities on employee KPIs. While call center staff primarily use call metrics for their KPIs, blended teams need to incorporate desktop analytics data on how time is spent before and after each call. Each business unit may have its own unique blend of KPIs they will want to track, but blended staff need to be evaluated with data from both the automatic call distributor (ACD) and the desktop analytics.

Andrea showed an example of how that was put into practice in the WPS experience. The company used the NICE Back Office solution to centralize information on all employee teams, blended or not, and listing productivity in terms of back office work items completed and contacts handled, providing a combined “earned hours” metric for each team. She noted that the WPS managers and supervisors can see all the data in one screen, without having to adapt to various screens and correlate metrics, providing consistency for staff development as well.

Paul Leamon of NICE noted the effort WPS made to create standardized or comparable KPIs across different groups and different locations. As Paul said, standardization “helps ensure everybody is on the same page with how their performance is being measured, how it’s being managed, regardless of the work type, making it easier to share... in a cohesive manner.”

BLENDING THE PERFECT SMOOTHIE: Q&A

Healthfirst, a New York-based health insurance company, asked about how blending works in practice on an intraday level.

Andrea and Irfan replied that contact center employees on blended-skill teams have a queue of back-office work items from which they draw whenever they experience low call volumes or other downtime on the phones. This approach leaves it up to the employee, but undue irresponsibility would be quickly evident in their overall blended productivity score. For example, the desktop analytics would indicate a higher idle time than other employees on their team and the number of back-office work items would also be lower than other blended employees.

A question was then asked about incorporating data on volume and performance from multiple separate systems, including CRM. The short answer is, “Yes.” Jerrod Rogers jumped in with the example of NICE Workforce Management and NICE Performance Management allowing customized back office work arrival feeds from a variety of systems just as calls in the front office are tracked in the ACD system.



You Want It When?

Brenda Hansen introduced the idea that capacity planning is as important for the back office as it is for the front.

Forecasting that is too high means you have too many employees scheduled at one time, which leads to low occupancy in practice. Expectations are a key part of satisfaction and when employees are not working as expected, they become distracted or bored. Low forecasting, with too few employees scheduled to meet work volume demands, contributes to poor customer service and long turnaround times, as well as overworked employees and overtime costs. The likely result is lower customer loyalty and lost business. In either direction, inaccurate forecasting has the harmful effects of lowering employee morale and work quality, ultimately costing your company money.

Conversely, building a proper capacity plan for the back office allows you to meet service level goals and maintain a consistent, reasonable employee workload. This translates into clear benefits of increased customer satisfaction and lower staffing costs, such as by reducing overtime. Employee satisfaction also improves when overwork or idle time is reduced.

Accurate forecasting allows you to identify and prepare for business changes. Moreover, accurate forecasting allows you to create hiring plans that consider the training time needed and are timed to better match workload changes and attrition.

Andrea of WPS Health Solutions then laid out what is needed to successfully complete a back-office capacity plan.



✓ DO's:

- Prepare by ensuring you have a method of tracking work item arrivals, including by work type.
- Set handle time standards for each work type.
- Determine what is considered a completed work item for forecasting purposes; it could be a work item fully completed and going out the door to the customer or it could be completion of a few elements in the workflow that move the item along to the next employee.
- Handle time must be broken down accordingly, so you can determine by work type if you will forecast by touches or completes.
- Know the service level agreements for each work type and measure performance consistently in accordance with the predetermined handle times.
- Account for shrinkage in your planning—both the back and front offices must account for paid time off, break lunches, meetings, training, etc.

✗ DON'Ts:

- Don't wait! The plan should be a continual change process, adjusting to incorporate more work types and data of greater accuracy over time. But you can start with what you already know from experience.
- Similarly, don't get too caught up on work types you cannot precisely account for, either due to undefined handle times or a difficulty differentiating specific work types. You can choose to consider the work types as part of your shrinkage or as an undefined percentage of worktime.
- Don't build capacity plans based on outdated handle time standards. Consider what efficiencies have been introduced into a process when evaluating handle time estimates and service levels. Notably, updates of processes in the front office can affect the workflow in the back office.

Supervisors looking at capacity planning in the back office should be able to see work items received, work items handled, and the backlog. Alongside that, the service level expectations, occupancy and shrinkage, which are included in the calculation of the FTE required to cover projected back office work.

YOU WANT IT WHEN: Q&A

Mapfre insurance company, asked about measuring handle time in their company's blended environment, in which calls are a minor element. Andrea suggested that it would be a mistake to leave out the calls from capacity planning, no matter how short and infrequent. They can be included either as their own work item or included in the overall handle time for related work before and after the call, but they are necessary to measure capacity needs accurately.

HealthFirst raised the issue of varying AHT calculations in a blended environment. Andrea explained that WPS differentiates between the back office and front office handle times when creating its capacity plans.

Jerrod of JR Optimization noted that setting up back office data feeds from chat systems, email systems and the like have different levels of compatibility. Some might be plug-and-play with workforce management tools, while others may require custom development to get the data into the system where it is needed for accurate capacity planning.

Paul Leamon added that the NICE Workforce Management system recognizes the issue of many backoffice solutions not tracking handle times at all; therefore, WFM allows users to enter time standard per work type that can be used for forecasting, allowing the data feed to be focused on how many work items were received.

Got the Time?

Jerrold Rogers of JR Optimization addressed in greater detail the challenges regarding average handle times in the back office.

As noted, handle time data is often not available in back office systems, and there is not always a sufficiently detailed or consistent tracking of work item arrival and completion times. Even when arrival and completion is noted, often the actual time spent by back office employees on the work item is not recorded. Yet, setting time standards are a must for effective capacity planning and performance management.

To that end, you need a solid process for how to capture handle times and, thereby, to set standards. In addition, a predictable and consistent process is needed regarding how and when to update time standards.

Time standards can be determined in a variety of ways, depending on resources available and accuracy needed. One option is a manual time and motion study, which consists of observing employees in action for each work type or having them self-report activity. A more accurate method is the NICE Desktop Work Tracker, part of the Back Office Proficiency Essentials solution, which employees manually interact with to keep track of time spent on each work item. The results can be set to provide daily or periodic reports on average and total handle times.

When detailed tools or time for a study are unavailable, the fastest, roughest approach is to calculate average work items per hour; i.e., simply dividing the total number of work items completed by the number of working hours in practice for a given period. All the methods can be enriched by reviewing workflow system in and out times, when they are available. This data can provide a somewhat more detailed view into handle times for specific work types or items. The benefits of establishing standards for average handle times—specific as possible to back office tasks, teams, and types of work—are evident in terms of efficiency and planning. Staffing is more accurate when based on measured handle times, including the capability to quickly and correctly increase or decrease employee hours or hiring to meet business fluctuations.



A REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE OF AHT-DRIVEN APPLICATION OPTIMIZATION

While using NICE Desktop Analytics to determine back office handle times, Optum noted long idle times among a specific team immediately after implementing a new application.

That insight led to the discovery that the application was periodically slowing down, which was demonstrable from the data. The company's IT team was informed, and the bug was fixed, improving performance and AHT accuracy.

Moreover, the process of defining time standards provides a better understanding of employee productivity and capacity. It can also identify process bottlenecks that slow down workflows in the back office, allowing for greater optimization. Then, when changes are implemented, their effects on average handle times can be measured.

Optum's Irfan listed out the do's and don'ts, no matter which option you choose to determine your time standards.

✓ DO's:

- Find a process that works for you, even if it takes a few iterations of defining average handle times.
- View application analytics data combined with Desktop Work Tracker to provide a more granular and comprehensive picture of each employee's workday, as much as possible down to each work item.
- Determine a process to complete and document regular updates to handle time standards.

✗ DON'Ts:

- Don't get too granular with Desktop Work Tracker process definitions. Start at a high-level view of work types, as employees should be able to use the tool easily and quickly for best results.
- Don't forget to redo time studies every six months or so. This will allow you to consider possible workflow changes, performance improvements, business requirement changes, developing bottlenecks, and the like, which is how you can maintain consistently realistic time standards.



GOT THE TIME: Q&A

Highmark questioned how the distinction between AHT in the back and front offices would be implemented. Paul replied by explaining that they can be distinguished by work type and tracked separately for forecasting, in both NICE Workforce Management and NICE Performance Management.

HealthFirst asked how to consider a third-party dialer—as phone or back office work. Paul replied that Workforce Management can treat it as phone work and capture the handle time as it would for any other call types, even if the source of the data is a separate feed, not an ACD connection.

You Complete Me

Jerrold Rogers of JR Optimization noted that it is a rare case, in his experience, that back office work items are “one-touch and done”. Rather, it often requires multiple touches by different people or by the same person to complete a single item. Sometimes this is limited to moving a work item through a single team, at other times it involves multiple teams, and in yet other cases, work item completion requires both kinds of handoffs.

Paul noted that reporting from the Desktop Work Tracker provides data on each touch, a net duration for each process, and a total work duration. This capability gives detailed information to distinguish the time spent at each touchpoint, as well as with each employee, in a single work item’s back office lifecycle.

Thus, the granular view of touches per work item has an impact on both employee performance measurement and forecasting. It allows you to decide if employees get performance credit for each touch or only completing the work item. Jerrod suggested that credit should be noted for actions that move the work forward in the process (such as escalation, partial issue resolutions, etc.).

For any productivity metric, the work type will help define what is considered a touch that can be fairly credited to the employee.

The result is giving credit where credit is due. In addition, if you have first touch resolution goals, the ability to identify the time and value of each action taken in handling the work item can help define the necessary cross-training and workflow changes.

For evaluating employee performance in a multi-touch, back-office environment, Jerrod named some do’s and don’ts.



✓ DO's:

- Define with SMEs or analysts which actions move the work forward and count as productive—and be sure to document it.
- Identify which actions are non-productive, as well. You can then leverage that information to optimize your processes.

✗ DON'Ts:

- Don't reduce the credit given to an employee if they serially complete multiple actions with the same work item. It would be like penalizing them for having the training or ability to move the process forward by several steps, rather than just one.

Andrea then explained how the distinction between touches and completes plays a role in forecasting and capacity planning. Each company will have to decide what makes the most sense for their specific back office – looking at how many touches were involved by how many people or how many items were completed in how much time. This decision will impact planning for the appropriate volume, handle times, and service level expectations.

Notably, the decision regarding completes or touches can vary by work type, depending on the data available. However, consistency needs to be maintained in a single queue of work for accurate planning.

Andrea provided some do's and don'ts for improving forecasting with information from multi-touch completion tracking.

✓ DO's:

- Determine how to count the action in your forecasting and capacity plans, distinguishing where necessary between different work types.
- Include non-productive time in your plans, because service levels and capacity planning need to consider the actual time needed to complete a work item. Productive time can help determine the need for FTEs, while identifying non-productive time can help make the FTEs more efficient and impact your capacity planning.
- When you identify opportunities for optimization, you can implement changes, measure their effects, and adjust your forecast accordingly.

✗ DON'Ts:

- Don't count the number of employees that completed the work, but rather the number of total actions. The same work item may be handled by a different number of employees depending on their skills and availability, but it will always involve the same number of steps.

YOU COMPLETE ME: Q&A

Amerisource Bergen posed a hypothetical question: If you had data on both completes and all touches, and you had to choose one, what would be your recommendation to use for forecasting?

Jerrod and Andrea replied that there are advantages and disadvantages to both, but there was a consensus that whichever option gave you better information on handle time would be preferable.

Specifically, for forecasting service levels, however, the handle time for completes is more immediately useful, though it is less powerful a tool for performance analysis and can therefore be somewhat misleading if there are handle time issues evident only at the touch level.

HealthFirst asked about using the same tools and methods for various projections, not necessarily forecasting alone, in a back-office-only operation. Andrea replied Yes, you can use WFM tools in the back office, if you have data on work item arrivals in the WFM tool, and you can identify handle times and set service levels.

Clean Up This Mess!

So far, the roundtable has focused on back office processes and how to improve them. Jerrod Rogers of JR Optimization tackled the question of best practices even before deploying any workforce optimization solution.

First, you and your corporate leaders need to fully know what your back-office workflows consist of. To that end, they should be fully documented, because it is likely that many stakeholders are not even aware of the steps needed to complete the work. Most companies simply do not have this documentation; yet, it is critical to understanding how to optimize.

There may be processes that you know are broken or unfair, or you may discover such processes during documentation efforts. In any event, it is advisable to fix them prior to deploying WFO in the back office. For example, it may be that employees are not getting full credit for actions they take as part of a multi-touch process and the correction may

be simply reframing the workflow to account for the contribution of each touch.

Just taking those few measures ahead of time will help lessen the data feed maintenance necessary after deployment of WFO solutions. You will be able to better integrate them when you have the full picture of what is happening in the back office. In addition, the clearer and better your processes are before deployment, the better you will be able to measure employee performance in practice.

Andrea provided an important example of cleaning up processes in the back office—by consolidating multiple touches or expanding employee capabilities wherever possible. This can be accomplished with cross-training. While some managers have expressed concern about undercutting the advantages of specialization with increased training, Andrea explained that employees who are trained in other work types or tasks have a bigger picture of the workflow, and better understand what they are doing and why. This, in turn, tends to contribute to their engagement and satisfaction.

For WPS, these steps preceded the implementation of an extensive suite of NICE optimization solutions, including Desktop Analytics, Workforce Management, Performance Management, and Quality Management.

Jerrod summarized with the following recommended do's and don'ts for documenting and cleaning up processes ahead of WFO deployment.

✓ DO's:

- Document your current workflows
- Identify broken processes to be optimized
- Document updated processes (post-optimization)

✗ DON'Ts:

- Don't assume you have to do it the way you've always done it. You should look for changes you can independently make to tweak the processes even before WFO deployment, such as improving fairness, accuracy or efficiency.

After deploying the WFO solution, use Desktop Analytics to look for additional process inefficiencies that can be addressed. And for future management and optimization efforts, maintain process documentation going forward.

Don't Let Perfect Get in the Way of Better

Brenda Hansen, NICE Back Office Customer Success Manager, and Jerrod Rogers of JR Optimization introduced a best practices topic to the roundtable that can best be defined as an attitude—patience and perseverance in back office optimization.

And that attitude is even more important in the back office, where workforce optimization is trickier to implement than in the contact center and requires more work to maintain. This is generally due to the challenges of the complex processes, multiple sources of data, and, in many cases, an absence of task-specific handle time information. Therefore, you will rarely find solutions that are a perfect fit.

For the best outcomes, although a slower implementation process, Jerrod recommended an iterative process of deployment, reviewing and tweaking, and expanding to encompass more of the back office over time.

That said, Jerrod warned against letting the additional challenges deter you from moving forward with implementing WFO in the back office, as the benefits are well worth it.

They include a potential 25 percent gain in productive time per employee, per day, as well as procedural efficiency gains. With WFO tools, you will be able to look at the back office processes in a way you haven't before. These new insights and data will allow you to question the way things are being done, and allow you to propose new, more efficient processes.

For the back-office employees, one of the greatest benefits is transparency regarding their work performance, as is already common for contact center employees using WFO solutions. This clarity promotes greater engagement, as well as guiding managers in identifying each employee's specific challenges in meeting their goals for productivity, proficiency and quality.

THE WPS ROADMAP FOR DEPLOYING WFO IN THE BACK OFFICE

WPS tried several approaches to optimization in the back office, with the roadmap described by Jerrod at the roundtable being the one that worked best. However, he emphasized, each company should determine the WFO deployment strategies that work best for its own specific circumstances.

WPS focused first on communication: "roadshows" and interviews with leaders in the different back office areas. These discussions revealed how work was being done in practice, if processes were ready for optimizations or needed to be cleaned up (as mentioned previously), and what the requirements might be for an optimization solution deployment, as well as the expected ROI.

Paul noted that key to the communication with the field were surveys that were done before, during and after deployment. This highlighted culture changes at all levels, as well as providing feedback that could be used to further tweak the WFO solution where needed.

Once the need and efficacy of deploying WFO was confirmed, WPS deployed desktop analytics to collect hard data and trained leaders on using the information. Then came the stage of implementing WFM Scheduling and Time Off Management, as well as training employees and leaders to use the available tools.

With the data coming in, work compliance and production time KPIs were measured and managed. Together with scheduling data, you can begin to determine compliance and productivity. Next, WPS started work on incorporating historical data feeds from its backoffice systems. This included productive and arrival feeds.

The next WFO piece deployed was Quality Management, including evaluation forms for the back office and training the in-house QA teams and employees. Then came Performance Management deployment and training, which essentially brings all the data and insights from the previous tools together.

With the performance management solution deployed, WPS began managing all KPIs and more targeted coaching (for quantity, quality, compliance, etc.).

Finally, after wrapping up remaining work on historical data feeds from back office systems, WPS was positioned to implement long-term WFM forecasting with the greatest possible accuracy and efficiency.

The deployment, from start to finish, took only about four months. This was because it was an extension of WFO solutions that the company was already using in the front office.

The do's and don'ts of moving ahead with confidence to back office workforce optimization were laid out by Jerrod and Brenda together.

✓ DO's:

- Take it one step at a time... No need to try to implement all the WFO applications at once.
- Remember that "progress is progress even if it's slow."
- Start by identifying the "low-hanging fruit" in employee behavior or process bottlenecks identified by desktop analytics.
- Be agile and ready to revise and refine processes, keeping communication 100% open throughout deployment and thereafter.
- Always look ahead and keep the end goal in mind, while setting reasonable milestones along the way.
- Always keep an eye out for areas for improvement and be open to change.
- New visibility and technology could lead to the need to rethink longstanding practices.

✗ DON'Ts:

- Just one: Don't be stuck in your ways. Think outside the box and be willing to act, tweak, and act again.

In addition, there were a few words of caution voiced at the roundtable. When deploying workforce optimization solutions in the back office, you must

be cognizant of the challenges of adoption and engagement, as the staff is generally not as comfortable with the relevant tools as contact center employees. Consider options to get them involved and keep them engaged with the solutions, so they see it as a positive. This will require building trust in the technology and the new processes, which can include open lines of communication for ongoing feedback.

The over-arching message is to help transform WFO in the mind of your back-office staff from George Orwell's "Big Brother" to a loving "big brother" that has your best interests in mind.

Another necessary precaution is planning for maintenance. The solutions may require ongoing support from members of a WFO team, as they are not necessarily as easily "plug-and-play" as in the front office.

DON'T LET PERFECT GET IN THE WAY OF BETTER: Q&A

Highmark asked how many people WPS assigned to the workforce optimization team. Andrea replied that they had between 8 and 10; however, she noted it really depends on how many individual business units that WFO staff is supporting. WPS supports multiple contact centers and back offices. In practice, the ratio was about 200 employees to 1 WFO team member.