

Chapter 24

Information Systems Projects in Contact Centers

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ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, Contact Centers have experienced exceptional growth. In UK and USA Contact Centers employ about three percent of the working population. Contact Center's projects are complex because occur in a multidisciplinary area with multiple actors and constraints. Information systems play a decisive role in these projects. However, several studies indicate a low success level of information and communications technology projects leading to research opportunities for their improvement. In their previous research the authors have identified a framework with the key factors to be considered in these projects. Due to the highly dynamic reality of the Contact Centers, the framework must evolve in order to maintain its usefulness for project managers and other center professionals. Focus groups are interactive discussion groups used for generating knowledge and hypotheses, exploring opinions, attitudes and attributes. In this way, the study presented in this chapter aims to verify, expand and actualize the existent framework, using a focus group with professionals in the area.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, Contact Centers have experienced phenomenal growth in several countries around the world. Fuelled by advances in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the plummeting costs of data transmission, orga-

nizations have found it cost effective to provide service and sales to users (of the Contact Center) through remote technology-mediated centres (Holman, Batt, & Holtgrewe, 2007).

Contact Centers' users gain from new or lower cost services, while governments view them as a source of jobs and economic development. Organizations reduce costs, increase productivity and gather information about their users that

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enable either the identification of new business opportunities either the personalization of the services/products generating more business and better services.

A multi-disciplinary approach is called for in order to balance service quality, efficiency and profitability from the likely conflicting perspectives of users, service-providers, managers and society (Gans, Koole, & Mandelbaum, 2003; Mandelbaum & Zeltyn, 2007). Research crosses a significant number of disciplines from Operational Research, Statistics, Human Resources Management, Psychology and Sociology to Marketing and Information Systems (Gans et al., 2003).

ICT plays an important role in the Contact Centers, supporting the operations and data mining user's information. However, Standish Group studies indicate low success rates in the ICT projects (Standish Group, 2006). This situation represents research opportunities in order to contribute to improve the success level of the projects.

In our research we focus on Contact Centers Information Systems (CCIS) project management. In order to increase success rate, identify best practices, create decision processes and, in the future, prepare standards, it is fundamental to identify and systematize the concepts used and the key issues to consider in CCIS project management. In this way, a framework with the key factors to be considered in a CCIS project and the characterization made by project managers specialists in this area was proposed in our previous work.

Because of its growth and development, Contact Centers' reality is dynamic leading to the evolution of the framework. To verify framework's actuality, adapt and expand it in order to keep its usefulness, the present research study was conducted.

Focus groups are an important approach to create knowledge. They permit time efficiencies and to take advantage of possible synergies that the combined effort of a group will provide.

Taking the characteristics of the reality to study and our access to it, focus group was chosen as the suitable method to gather empirical data in the present research.

The result is an expanded and actualized tool for CCIS project management.

This chapter is organized as follows: the background section introduces key Contact Center's concepts; the following section presents the existent framework; the research objectives and design section explains in detail the objectives of this work. Research design is presented and justified; data collection and analysis describes how empirical data was gathered and analyzed; the reviewed framework, the main contribution of this paper, presents the resulting framework for CCIS project management; finally, a summary of the results is given in last section. Future research directions are also discussed.

BACKGROUND

Call centres appeared in the middle of eighties (Cardoso, 2000; Cohen, 1980; Gaballa & Pearce, 1979; Hawkins, Meier, Nainis, & James, 2001) and they are the predecessors of contact centers. A call center constitutes a set of resources that enable the delivery of services via the telephone. Resources are typically people, the agents that handle calls, also known as customer service representatives (CSR), which interact with the users of the services provided by an organization.

An interaction is a contact between a user (customer or citizen) and the organization. Call centers may handle inbound and outbound interactions. Inbound interactions are those initiated by users requesting some service to the center. Outbound interactions are those initiated from within a center.

Call centers use Interactive Voice Response (IVR), Computer Telephony Integration (CTI) and Skills Based Routing (SBR) and present three main architectural possibilities.

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