OUT OF A CRISIS, AND ON TO EXCELLENCE

Abstract

In 2020, when the pandemic struck and lockdowns spread worldwide, Alexa Curtis, the director of vendor operations at a leading American telecommunications firm lost all her customer support centers in the Philippines within just 24 hours. This case study details how Infosys BPM not only helped Alexa tide over the crisis by quickly setting up a brand-new support center, but also how it raised end-customer experience to a whole new level.

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An unexpected twist

In March 2020, Alexa Curtis' work life took a drastic and unexpected turn. As the Director of Vendor Operations at a leading American telecommunications firm offering communication, network, security, and cloud solutions, she was responsible for managing vendor partnerships relating to the company's installation and repair lines of business. Alexa's vendors provided 24/7 repair helpdesk support over chat to the firm's residential customers facing issues with their internet, email, and anti-virus services, dispatching technicians to the customers premises if a quick solution could not be provided through chat.

But when Asia shut down due to COVID-19, Alexa lost all her repair centers in the Philippines in just 24 hours. The situation

was dire, with customers waiting hours just to get their repair calls answered. Within just a few weeks, Alexa was able to get 50% of the support agents back online through work from home arrangements. Yet, with the rest of her vendors unable to meet the sudden manpower challenges due to the lockdowns, the company's customer service was severely short staffed for the volume of calls coming in.

To manage the crisis, Alexa negotiated a contract with Infosys BPM to quickly open a new support center. Then teaming up with Infosys BPM's Aarti Shekhar, the two were able to get the new center up and off the ground by mid-April. Within just ten days, a new team of ~50 started taking on live chats. However, after a few months

when the situation stabilised, Aarti realised based on customer satisfaction surveys that customer experience (Cx) was not optimal.

Like with the other vendors, the Infosys BPM center's overall net promoter score (NPS), a key metric of customer satisfaction consistently hovered around the low tens. With customer experience (CX) being the cornerstone of all Infosys BPM engagements, Aarti decided to focus on reshaping the experience of customers and improving the historically poor NPS scores to over 40 and sustaining it at that level. This would require propelling the performance of the new center to the next level, and that became Aarti's consuming goal.
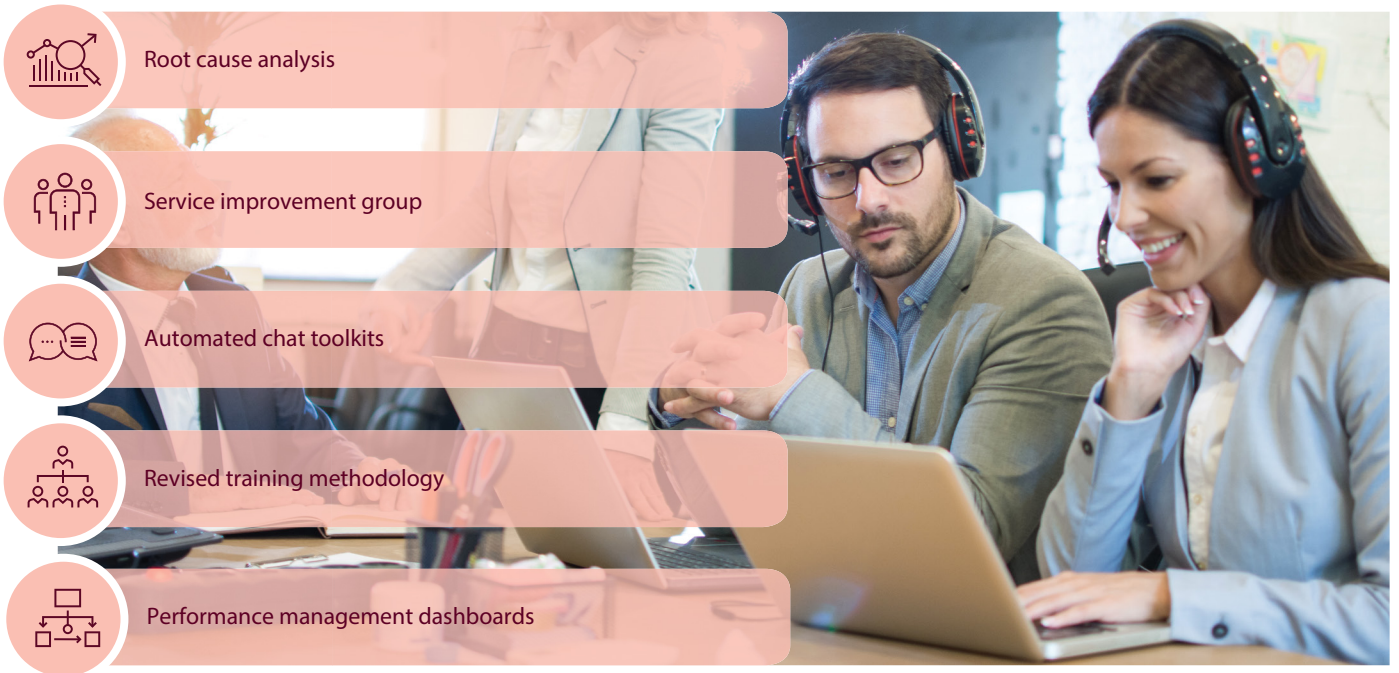
The hard work of pursuing excellence

Aarti and her team first conducted detailed root cause analysis of the historical NPS survey data to identify the key drivers behind customer dissatisfaction and their underlying challenges, and to correlate the NPS scores with these factors. The team discovered several causes of customer dissatisfaction. Primarily, the first call

resolution (FCR) percentage — which measures how many problems were diagnosed and satisfactorily resolved within just one call by the customer — was at a low 60%. Due to this, customers had to reach out again repeatedly for their issues, and sometimes there would be internet connectivity drops at the agent's end, all

of which impacted the average handling time (AHT) required to solve issues. More importantly, with attrition also high at ~35%, knowledge drain was an important issue and many of the agents had process knowledge gaps due to their low tenure in the center.

Approach summary

- Root cause analysis
- Service improvement group
- Automated chat toolkits
- Revised training methodology
- Performance management dashboards

Aarti realised she had to push the center towards service excellence through developing in-house process expertise and driving continuous improvement. She addressed this challenge on several fronts. As a first step to reshape the customer experience, she introduced a service improvement group dedicated to work on unresolved cases and call back customers once their issues were resolved. Then to create a broader culture of excellence, Aarti and her team brainstormed on ideas to reduce process complexity, improve the training methodology, and better manage performance.

To enable her agents to efficiently handle the process complexity, Aarti developed and deployed an automated chat toolkit which had canned FAQ responses and ready conversation scripts for the agents. This toolkit empowered the agents to simultaneously deal with up to three different real-time customer chats, thus

also contributing towards reducing the average handling time per issue. She also implemented KDAT, a tool to disseminate updated process knowledge to the agents, and reinforced this knowledge through conducting regular refresher sessions, giving coaching and feedback, and publishing knowledge bytes. Then she also instituted best practice sharing forums where the agents could share their experiences of handling a new scenario or a learning experience.

Updating the training methodology was another area of focus for Alexa and Aarti because of the steep learning curve for new hires. Utilising process discovery and mining, she designed scenario-based training sessions, incorporating real-life examples and activities, and revising the older training content to include more visual impact. The new standardised training plan which had an on-job training (OJT) phase, helped reduce the learning

curve for new hires by over 40%.

Then, to instill a general culture of excellence within the team, Alexa and Aarti implemented a schedule of daily NPS performance reviews, root cause analysis, feedback, and coaching, using stack rankings to place the lower 5% of low performing agents under performance improvement plans. This involved training modules focused on imparting soft skills, probing and issue investigation skills, and chat etiquette.

The two also enhanced performance management in the center through implementing multiple data visualisation dashboards. These dashboards used business intelligence tools for the analysis and hourly reporting of key performance indicators – volume inflow, AHT, NPS, and agent satisfaction – which helped with insights for the daily operations management.

Taking the graph northwards

All of Alexa's and Aarti's efforts towards better performance management began

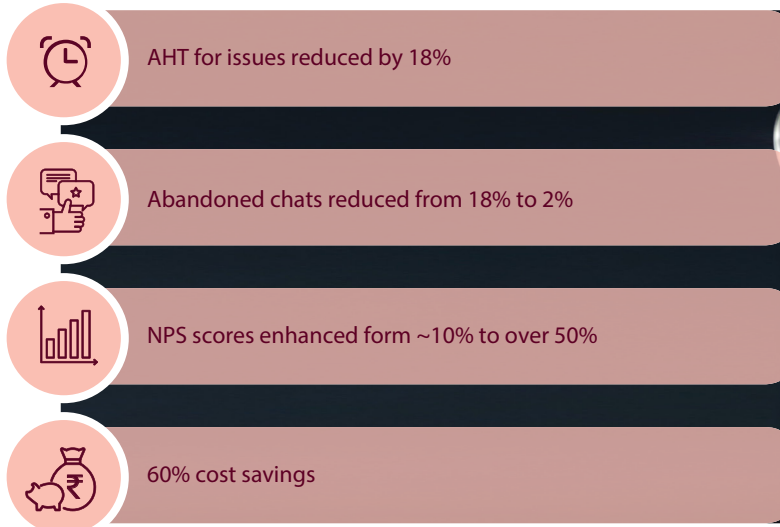paying rich dividends and the aimed-for culture of excellence started taking root.

The customised toolkit for the agents helped them with quick communication

and faster resolution, and the AHT for customer issues reduced by ~20%, typically taking JUST OVER 15 minutes for a repair chat to have a successful outcome. Further

the team also reduced the percentage of abandoned chats to an average of 2% from the earlier high average of 18%. Moreover, the revamped training modules helped to

drastically reduce the new agent's learning curve by 30%.

Key benefits

- AHT for issues reduced by 18%
- Abandoned chats reduced from 18% to 2%
- NPS scores enhanced form ~10% to over 50%
- 60% cost savings

With all of this, the telecom giant's average NPS scores which were languishing in the low range of 10s before Infosys BPM came on board, began rising steadily as depicted in the graph below.

The overall NPS eventually rose to 40+ in April 2021 and has been consistently at 50+ since May-21. Since NPS stands for the direct voice of customer expressing their satisfaction with the availed services, Alexa was thrilled at the uptrend.

Not only did the quality of the repair chat improve as reflected in the scores improving from 81% to over 95%, the productivity of the team also shot up. Realising this, Alexa started reallocating additional work to the Infosys BPM team from her other vendors, and Infosys BPM's volume share of chats handled increased from 30% to 54%. The chat process which started initially with 50 customer service agents has now ramped up to over 300

agents.

As Alexa said in a recent mail of appreciation to Aarti, not only did the Infosys BPM team help her out of a tough situation during the pandemic, the results of its unshakeable commitment to excellence have been tremendous for the telecom company in terms of end-customer satisfaction.

Names have been altered to preserve the identities of the people involved.

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