

# Mind matters

Ensuring Agent Wellbeing  
through the pandemic  
and beyond

Wellbeing Survey  
Results 2021



Enhouse  
Interactive

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This report showcases the results of a survey – commissioned by Enghouse Interactive – investigating Agent Wellbeing to uncover the pains and challenges faced by contact centre agents today and how they impact on their motivation, wellbeing and productivity.

The research polled 100 UK contact centre professionals and was carried out in February 2021.



# Introduction

## Ensuring Agent Wellbeing through the pandemic and beyond

The onset of the COVID-19 crisis in Spring 2020 saw many businesses moving their customer service agents out of the contact centre and back into their home environments.

A survey conducted by customer engagement and channel specialists, Channel Doctors right at the outset of the first UK lockdown found that at the end of March 2020, **84%** of contact centres had shifted to a homeworking model.

Once the pandemic is over, it appears unlikely that all contact centres will return to how they were before the crisis and will look to adopt a long-term hybrid working, where agents will have a permanent desk at home while attending the office for meetings and strategic planning. Homeworking has however brought challenges.



# 84%

of contact centres  
had shifted to a  
homeworking  
model

# 1

## Pressure building

While homeworking does bring some benefits, from a reduced commute to more flexibility around work times right through to greater location independence, for many contact centre workers there are significant downsides.

**91%** of contact centre professionals polled in a new survey by Enghouse Interactive say they are likely to leave their role in 2021. Nearly half (**48%**) say stress or emotional burnout is likely to play a role in their decision. Agents switching to homeworking found themselves having to flex and adapt to deal with a dramatic increase in inbound calls and the introduction of new systems, processes and ways of working. Demand for services certainly skyrocketed in many contact centres as the pandemic spread.

The Channel Doctors survey referenced above found that as the COVID-19 outbreak was accelerating at the end of March, **15%** of contact centres in the UK were seeing demand up by **50%** and more, while **18%** said they were recruiting with only **4%** having to let people go.

During lockdown, agents were also often having to deal with increasingly demanding or abusive customers, who, used to the fast speed of delivery pioneered by online retailers like Amazon, were more exacting and less patient than before.

# 91%

are likely to leave their contact centre role in 2021



# 41%

say stress or emotional burnout is likely to play a role in their decision



## 2

# Systems and solutions raising stress levels

Many agents are also challenged by IT and security issues. **34%** of contact centre professionals, polled for the Enghouse survey, highlighted 'security breaches' as one of the biggest challenges their organisation faces when using video calls.

As video usage is only expected to increase due to the benefits it can offer such as replicating face-to-face interactions and allowing customers to visually show agents what is wrong with a product, consumers need to be confident that their conversation will be private and the software they are using is secure. Organisations must think about who they are engaging with and the level of sensitivity of that interaction along with how calls are encrypted and how people are being invited to participate.

Two of the biggest security challenges respondents identified for their team were employees 'accidentally opening phishing emails' (**31%**) and 'using personal devices to store work material' (**31%**).

# 31%

and 'using personal devices to store work material'

# 15%

coupled with a lack of support can often be another issue agents face

Moreover, **31%** cited 'poor connectivity of broadband' among the biggest technology challenges their staff experience when dealing with customers from home, with **29%** citing 'slowness in accessing information needed for customer query resolution'. Such issues can contribute to poor agent mental health.

A sense of isolation working in the home environment (**15%**) coupled with a lack of support can often be another issue agents face. **22%** of respondents to the Enghouse survey highlight 'loss of spontaneous social interaction with colleagues' among the biggest challenges for staff as a result of working from home. All contributing factors to an agents state of mind.



# 3

## Assessing employer shortcomings

**66%** of respondents to the Enghouse survey said staff in their business had not received 'remote training/advice on health and wellbeing in the home workplace' since being required to work remotely.



### 37%

admit that 'lack of capability in detecting changes in employees' mood/emotions



### 66%

of respondents to the Enghouse survey said staff in their business had not received 'remote training/advice on health and wellbeing

**60%** also said that their organisation had not put in place any new training and policies to improve mental resilience for new recruits since March 2020.

Another key issue is that contact centre supervisors find it hard to gauge how agents are feeling at these times. **37%** admit that 'lack of capability in detecting changes in employees' mood/emotions' is one of the most significant challenges relating to staff wellbeing. **33%** cite 'working out whose mental health resilience is deteriorating so we can step in early' as a significant challenge.



# 4

## A roadmap forward

Given these shortcomings, how can businesses move forward with a new approach to agent wellbeing? Organisations need to ensure that they have the systems and support in place and provide employees with training tailored to their needs and procedures in place for emotional support.

Smart, bright well-resourced businesses have put such processes in place formally, launching staff well-being initiatives to better engage with their employees. It is important because without engagement and interaction of this kind, we are likely to see sickness, absenteeism and staff turnover rising and productivity falling within many businesses. Isolation is however perhaps the key issue leading to mental health concerns and it is vital businesses take steps to deal with it.



# 4

Without physical proximity, supervisors cannot easily spot someone struggling, so now is the time to innovate. Speech analytics tools for example is a great way to identify when an agent is experiencing stress, becoming emotional, or in need of whispered or direct intervention on a call.



Additionally, it is crucial that remote environments are able to seamlessly preserve the human element, and video is key to that. Employers should also be considering flexible working rosters, especially for those with difficult domestic environments or commitments. They also need to encourage agents to take regular breaks, get sufficient exercise, and not sign up for too many overtime shifts. Finally, it is also important not to neglect training and coaching for contact centre workers.

Training programmes offer excellent opportunities for engagement between managers and agents and opportunities for employees to better understand progress, where they stand in the organisation and what is expected of them.

## Ultimately,

organisations adopting these kinds of approaches and striking the right balance between the use of technology, and putting the right processes in place to support wellbeing, will be best positioned to help agents address the mental health issues that the pandemic has brought to the fore and keep staff loyal and engaged.



## About Enghouse Interactive

We are the world's most reliable customer contact technology provider. Our global brand is built on our track record of consistently honouring our commitments to our customers, our staff and our shareholders.

Enghouse Interactive, a subsidiary of Enghouse Systems Limited (TSX: ENGH), is a leading global provider of contact center software and service solutions that deliver enhanced customer service and transform the contact center from a cost center into a powerful growth engine.

Our Practices and Solutions enable businesses to leverage meaningful, daily customer interactions to extract key insights used to deepen customer loyalty and uncover new opportunities to add value, profitably.

Globally, Enghouse Interactive's divisions support thousands of customers worldwide, respecting local regulatory requirements, and supports any telephony technology, whether deployed on premises or in the Cloud, ensuring that our customers can be reached by their customers – anytime, anywhere, and via any channel.



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