# Knowledge is Power: Design your contact centre reporting to provide knowledge - everything else will flow from it.

Throughout my working years, in marketing, outsourcing management, and as a consultant, I have been given all sorts of advice by my peers and my managers. The advice I remember best is the simplest - "If you can't measure it, you can't manage it". Far too often, when clients bring me in to work on their outsourced call centre projects – be it to improve them, manage them or find them a new supplier – I find a real lack of decent management information prevents easy resolution. Recently, a client was concerned that they were paying too much per hour, and for too many advisors, but couldn't figure out why. I found the answer eventually – the outsourced service provider was, partly due to the client's instructions, running a very inefficient ship, at a cost of over £1 million to the client. Another client for whom I was managing an outsourced supplier couldn't understand why the supplier was claiming sales conversion rates that didn't match the client's understanding – ultimately, it transpired that they were using different definitions and conversion calculations. And when it comes to managing a procurement process to find clients new outsourcers, one of my greatest frustrations is a lack of detailed performance information to put into the Request for Proposal – it makes it harder for the bidding outsourcers to properly calculate the cost of the service, or the resource required.

A good, simple and well-tested process to follow in designing management information is the **five-stage process** depicted below:

Such is the nature of contact centre activity that it produces a great deal of **Data**, and as a result, a significant amount of reported **Information**, much of which is never looked at by clients. So many clients get bogged down at this point – the massive morning report that arrives in their inbox, containing a sea of numbers that does little but encourage the recipient to click on to the next, less challenging e-mail.

This is a pity, because they are just one step away from where the reports get interesting – the **Knowledge** stage. Knowing what the reports are telling us – about what has happened, or, more importantly, what may happen - is the core point of management information. From there, the **Implications** can be understood, and **Action** taken. And I'm not just talking negative implications and corrective actions - good MI can also highlight opportunities to improve the service, the products, the costs, or the associated revenues.

In designing report formats, I start at the **Knowledge** point – what do I want to know and what information will tell me? From that frame of mind I work back – what data and information will give me that - and forward – will this knowledge provide an understanding of the implications of the reports, and the ability to agree relevant actions? It is at this point that agreed definitions and calculations are vital – I have seen too many cases where (sometimes conveniently) varied interpretations have led to a state of paralysis.

Designing such reports for a call centre takes time and effort, and the ability to know what the key information triggers are. Unfortunately, many clients lack such time, effort and ability, with the result that the end reports rarely take them past the **Information** stage. It is so often overlooked, but accurate, intelligible and relevant management information is key to any outsourced relationship.

Clients must spend enough time at the outset to specify what they want in reports, how each number is calculated, and how each factor is defined. That's as true for in-house contact centres as it is for outsourced. It is time and effort that will be well-rewarded.

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