

How an Organization Re-engineered Processes to Navigate Change in a Virtual/Work-at-Home Environment

Summary:

Due to the inefficiencies of the internal help desk, supervisors in a 650-seat virtual/work-at-home technical support contact center were tasked with internal help desk duties in addition to their regular duties. Low agent utilization and lost agent coaching time had a direct effect on customer service satisfaction scores and labor costs. Though not brand new to the work-at-home environment, this multi-billion-dollar company needed assistance in reengineering how their leaders navigated a Virtual First™ environment. New strategies for the internal help desk, a new way to tackle projects quickly, and consistent communication with the virtual operations floor were all needed.

The Problem:

Process inefficiencies, low employee engagement, and the crash in agent utilization left employees getting lost in the “virtual hallways,” eroding thousands of dollars off the bottom line.

The help desk schedule was inefficient and did not align with the agents’ schedules, which caused long wait times for customer-facing agents who were calling in for technical assistance. To make matters worse, agents were frustrated and said they “felt the company didn’t care about them,” which caused not only distrust of management but led to agents using the long help desk wait times as an excuse not to adhere to their schedule and get “lost in the virtual halls.” This caused high customer wait times as a result of unavailable agents, drove more internal gossip, and led to crashing utilization and bleeding money.

The current help desk reporting system was not helpful in analyzing the performance of the help desk, call patterns, or reasons the agents were calling in for assistance. The agents were also frustrated with the lack of knowledge the help desk employees demonstrated, which meant waiting longer for help. In some cases, the agents just hung up, asked another agent or their supervisor instead, or even called a friend outside the company for assistance.

Solution:

Sinousia’s Virtual Live Lab™ helped leaders reengineer how they led in the virtual/work-at-home environment to drive organizational change.

To assist with this specific situation, a facilitator worked with an operations manager to assemble an employee focus group, a supervisor focus group, and a help desk employee focus group to identify some of the gaps that each group was experiencing with the help desk. After identifying the gaps in each of these focus groups, an Assistant Contact Center Manager (ACCM) who showed a lot of promise as a future contact center manager was selected to tackle the project. The facilitator worked with the ACCM to look at different ways to lead the project effectively in the virtual/work-at-home environment.

Virtual Learning Forums create an environment where new leadership skills are cultivated in real time.

The project team included an analyst, a reporting expert, two front-line representatives, two operations supervisors, the manager and one supervisor from the help desk, the director in charge of the help desk organization in the U.S., and a member of the HR team. All of these individuals were assembled for a “triage.” A triage is a very short meeting with a specific agenda. The goal of these triages was to identify the “next steps” of the project, not the entire process. By utilizing the triage, teams could be very focused and move quickly through the project. These triages are conducted inside a **Live Learning Forum**.

Laser-Focused Format over a 30-Day Period and Implementation Support

The facilitator supported the implementation of the entire Virtual Live Lab series, including mentoring the ACCM. Since both leadership and the participants in the Learning Forum were learning to reengineer how they navigate in the virtual environment, the learning took place in triage meetings inside the **Virtual Learning Forums**.

Initially, the team was concerned about too many triages, but after the first week, the team was enthusiastic about the process as the project was moving so quickly. The key is to hold triages inside the **Learning Forums** often, with minimal action items each time. Regroup quickly if necessary.

Flexible Virtual Learning Forums

After the first week of triages inside the **Virtual Learning Forums**, the ACCM was ready to take the number of triages down to three times a week and shave five minutes off the duration of each one. The ACCM was surprised when the team decided they were making so much progress that they would continue the daily triages during Week 2.

During each **Virtual Learning Forum**, the gaps were identified more quickly, and solutions and action items were agreed upon immediately. If there was a gap that needed a senior leader’s input or an obstacle that needed to be moved, the more senior leader in that department could be invited to the next **Virtual Learning Forum Triage**. Senior leaders found it easier to be invited into a project when it was for a short, 15-minute duration.

During Week 2, the team went through the reporting, quickly identifying changes they wanted. The analyst and the reporting person took notes and promised the changes at the triage inside the **Virtual Learning Forum** the following day.

The training on new processes for this 650-seat organization needed to be scheduled. The two front-line employees volunteered to put the training together for the operations teams, and the workforce manager was invited to the triage to answer some questions.

During Week 3, the project team moved to three triages inside the **Virtual Learning Forums** to make sure processes were going smoothly and that any additional gaps were discussed with further action items to be tackled. At this point, the help desk was trained on some additional skills to better serve their internal customers.

By Week 4, all front-line agents had been trained on the new process for contacting the help desk. The project team wanted to keep doing three triages for the week to get ahead of any gaps that came up during the launch.

In today's work-at-home environment, how the organization navigates and communicates has to be reengineered.

As changes were developing, the director, along with the facilitator, did three to five videos per week to help take the rest of the employees along on the journey with the project team. There were no surprises, and the buy-in from the operations floor was building before training on the new processes even started.

Examples of the new reporting were posted on the internal team websites so the front-line employees could have hands-on experience before the new reporting was launched. Weekly agent surveys were given, and the results were posted in the team intranet rooms for true transparency.

Inside another **Virtual Learning Forum**, the ACCM shared the new reporting in "Supervisor Triages" that now happened at the beginning of every supervisor shift. Everyone was in the know and could get excited about the new help desk initiative.

Implementation support adds to employee satisfaction and project success.

The assistant contact center manager was mentored throughout this project by a more senior leader. Because the organization was virtual, the facilitator could help answer questions from the groups and with other assistance via chat during the triages. This helped the Assistant Contact Center Manager learn new leadership skills in real time. Additional support from the facilitator included help with documentation and project management skills.

Breakthroughs Reported Weekly

The video series was also introduced to supporting departments, such as HR, Training, Nesting, Finance, and Quality, so excitement could be cultivated inside the entire organization. Senior leaders were also included in the video distribution, but they received a more in-depth weekly overview by either email or an additional video.

Outcomes:

Multiple positive results stem from 30-Day Virtual Live Lab™

Front-line agents now utilized the help desk without long wait times and were no longer frustrated. Everyone understood the process and the reporting. The agents appreciated that management had addressed their issues, which started to rebuild their confidence and trust in management. Employees were more engaged and spent time chatting about positive changes in the organization instead of gossiping in the chat rooms. A new mindset was starting to be cultivated on the virtual operations floor. Employees said they felt more encouraged to identify gaps more quickly.

The help desk agents now understood and bought in to why their schedules needed to be changed to meet staffing requirements. The help desk agents also received additional technical training to be able to help the agents more efficiently. The survey sent to the help desk employees showed a "very satisfied" when this process was completed.

Additional information from the new reporting helped leadership understand why agents were calling the help desk in the first place and helped to drive new training initiatives in their nesting process.

Updates were systematically reported back to front-line agents. At the end of the **30-Day Virtual Live Lab™**, agents reported a "very satisfied" with the entire process.

The professional maturity and leadership skillsets of the ACCM and project team grew inside the virtual environment. Because of their interaction with multiple departments and more senior leaders, the **Virtual Learning Forums** gave these participants exposure to more senior leaders than they would have ever been able to work with previously since they were in different cities, states, and countries around the globe. One hundred percent of the project team said they learned new skills from the triages inside the **Virtual Learning Forums**.

The Director of Operations and Contact Center Manager weren't involved in the project, so that saved them an enormous amount of time. They were kept abreast of the progress with the videos.

The organization saved time and completed a project that would normally take months to accomplish in just four weeks.

Ultimately, employees spent less time waiting for help desk assistance for technical issues, and customer-facing time and agent utilization were increased, saving labor dollars.