**Service Desk Metrics – Context is everything**

We, as an industry, are dominated by huge pressure to meet an inordinate number of performance targets.

In some organisations, targets are given such significance that meeting, or not meeting, an often arbitrary target takes precedence over everything else, often to the detriment of the performance of the desk as a whole. Ideally, these Service Desk targets should not be considered in isolation – but rather considered in the context of the overall performance of the desk.

Sometimes, the performance levels achieved elsewhere in the industry become accepted as a ‘standard’ or ‘norm’, and are championed as an acid test as to whether or not a desk is up to par. Such ‘norms’ can be misleading and disheartening as they do not reflect variations in the industry and differences in types of support. Also calculations are not always based upon equivalent criteria which can make comparative analysis misleading.

Although the potential benefits of fast, effective and cheap incident resolution to end-users, and ultimately their businesses, are undeniable, seemingly excellent ‘scores’ in these key metrics may have unseen side effects and create an inaccurate impression of how well the desk is actually performing from the perspective of its customers.

So, whilst Service Desk performance targets undoubtedly play an integral and valuable role in today’s Service Desk industry, here are some key issues to bear in mind to help keep a balanced perspective whilst reviewing Service Desk performance:

**First Level Fix (FLF):**

**Definition:** The percentage of incidents that are resolved by the First Level / First Line operation i.e. the Service Desk. This may not necessarily be fixed on the first call, but the fix is delivered by the First Level group.

Dealing with incidents at first level is often the quickest and therefore most convenient for those contacting the Service Desk, and ultimately, is likely to be the cheapest option. First level analysts can quickly deal with incidents rather than consuming the time of highly paid technical experts. End users will be up and running and productive quickly which is beneficial for their businesses and is least disruptive to the end-user. Usually customer satisfaction levels are directly proportional to FLF rates.

The things you should consider are:

- When excessive significance is put on this statistic, first line analysts may feel obliged to provide a fix at all costs. It may be cheaper to deal with this incident at first line – but is this in the best interests of the customer? A second or third level analyst may be better equipped to deal with this more quickly. Clearly defined escalation procedures and time-based thresholds should be in place to avoid this situation arising.

- Are first line analysts dealing with all these incidents effectively? There may be a relationship between “resolved” incidents and those that are subsequently re-opened, or involve repeat calls.

- A very high First Level Fix rate might imply that there are a high number of straightforward incidents that could be easily resolved by end-users with the help of a self-help facility, thus freeing up the Service Desk for other incidents.

- A very high First Level Fix rate may imply that too much fire-fighting is going on rather than a more proactive Problem Management approach.
If you would like to increase your FLF rate, it may be useful to look at your Knowledge Management process. Good first level fix rates are highly dependent on a good Knowledge Management process and well trained first line analysts.

A standardisation of hardware / software might make support more straightforward and in turn improve your First Level Fix rate.

First Contact Resolution (FCR):

**Definition:** The percentage of incidents that are resolved at first contact/call without delay or referral.

From the perspective of the end-user, dealing with issues at first contact is highly beneficial. It should be least disruptive to their working day and is often likely to offer the quickest resolution.

The things you should consider are:

- A lack of industry consensus into exactly what constitutes a ‘first call resolution’ makes comparison of these rates problematic and probably accounts for some of the reported variation in resolution statistics.

- What do you consider to be a first contact fix? Some organisations will count a call that is transferred within the help desk as a first call fix. Some organisations include those instances where an analyst refers to another staff member, and some organisations count calls that are routed to 2nd / 3rd level as ‘resolved’.

- Is the time taken to achieve this fix taken into account? - From the perspective of the customer is a long telephone call which provides successful resolution more or less convenient than being called back later?

- What level of complexity are most of the calls to the desk?

- Good Knowledge Management will play a significant role in improving this metric.

Call Duration

Reducing the amount of time spent on each call can, in some ways, imply that end users are being dealt with quickly and efficiently, causing minimal disruption for the caller. Service Desk analysts are also able to deal with a larger number of calls, reducing disruption to the organisation as a whole.

Things you should consider:

- Short average call duration may be related to the number of incidents that are subsequently re-opened or require repeat calls.

- In a paper produced for the contact centre industry, an agent-lead initiative revealed that the existence of an average call handling time target was contributing to a significant number of repeat calls. When average call handling targets were abolished, the repeat contact resolution figures improved considerably.¹

¹ Defining the causal link between how you treat employees: Its impact on customers and creating the psychological climate to drive up profitability.

Too much emphasis on this metric may put pressure on analysts to dispense with ‘pleasantries’ which may have negative implications for customer satisfaction and relationship building.

If you wish to reduce average call duration it may be beneficial if analysts are trained to effectively question callers enabling them to extract the necessary information quickly and effectively - for example effective telephone skills courses.

**Incident Turnaround Time (TAT)**

**Definition:** The time required to process a customer call, including call logging and initial diagnosis, research, resolution, follow up, and closing the call.

The value of turning an incident around quickly is obvious. The end-user is able to be working and productive more quickly, with reduced unproductive time.

**Things you should consider:**

- Obviously, the complexity of the incidents will significantly affect the incident resolution time.
- If excessive significance is placed on TAT targets, analysts may be encouraged to close incidents prematurely; therefore there may be a correlation between short incident turnaround and the number of re-opened incidents.
- Callers should be aware of expected resolution times as defined in SLAs. Management of expectations will reduce frustration and enable the caller to plan their time.
- Giving your analysts access to remote diagnostic tools may reduce the average incident turnaround time.
- Good Knowledge Management will play a significant role in reducing this time.

**Average speed to Answer and Abandon rate (ASA/ABR)**

Answering a call quickly is likely to be least frustrating for the caller – especially if they are under stress.

**Things you should consider:**

- A very low average time to answer and a low abandon rate imply there are too many analysts on the shift.
- Can you answer the phone too quickly? This could be disconcerting for a caller
- What are the caller’s expectations – 2 seconds? 20 seconds?
- The business must make the decision as to how much they are prepared to pay for resources to ensure a prompt answer.
- Callers may be more likely to abandon a call quickly if they feel that the service they will ultimately get will not be good anyway.
No. of calls / incidents per analyst

The number of calls / incidents dealt with by each analyst is another key metric used by the industry. This gives an indication of the productivity of each analyst and can help to identify where staffing levels may be under or over requirement.

Things you should consider:

- There are a number of factors which may significantly affect the number of calls that analysts can be expected to deal with in a day such as:
  - the amount of post call work
  - the technical level of the desk
  - the technical ability/amount of training of end users
  - the nature of the calls
- Some analysts may be taking on a significantly higher proportion of work than others. Are calls distributed fairly? Are calls being “cherry picked” so the less complex calls are taken by some individuals?
- Some analysts may be closing a significant number of calls that are subsequently reopened.
- How long should an analyst be in their position before they can be considered to be up to speed?
- Support requirements may not be constant and may change considerably over the course of a month or year. How does this affect the figures?

Cost per call / per incident etc.

Cost per call is often used as a key factor in deciding whether or not to outsource a service desk. Using these figures out of context can be very misleading – especially when considering outsourcing off-shore. The ‘cost per call’ may appear very low when considered out of context, making an offshore option seem attractive. However it is essential to look at the wider picture – all metrics must be considered in terms of support models, demographics, business need and operational constraints.

Very few Service Desks do actually measure the CPC/CPI with fully rounded figures and accuracy. For some, the cost of support is one of the overriding factors in the provision of support. Limiting the cost of services whilst still sustaining quality is a common dilemma faced by the vast majority of people in all types of organisation.

Things you should consider:

- Which costs should be included in this calculation? I.e. not just Service desk but Second and Third level support.
- Is quality or cost most important in the business environment?
- Can any cost efficiency measures be implemented without adversely impacting quality?
- Formulae designed to calculate call cost vary from simple calculations including basic costs to a series of complex calculations. In an attempt to estimate a “fully weighted” cost, many organisations feel obliged to include figures that are difficult to quantify with any great accuracy such as informal peer support.
Variation within the industry:

Please note: These figures are just examples from various sources within the industry, they cannot be said to equate to any sort of industry average and should not be taken out of context.

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<td>The Merchants Global Contact Centre Benchmarking Report 2006</td>
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<td>&gt;60</td>
<td>15.80%</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>(Best practice) 90% within 4 seconds</strong></td>
<td>Tech Republic Introduction to Help Desk Concepts and Skills 2004</td>
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<td>Tech Republic Introduction to Help Desk Concepts and Skills 2004</td>
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<td>“Measuring Up?” - FMJ/Integrated FM KPI Survey - 01 December 2005</td>
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