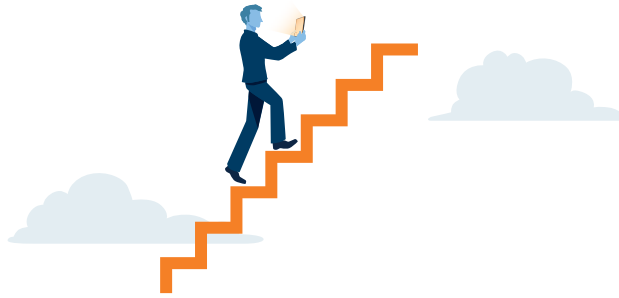


Think Quick: Increase Speed to Proficiency



Help Your Agents Reach Their Potential Faster



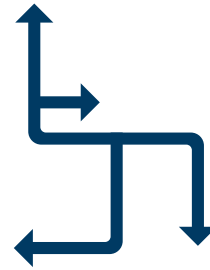
With more complex customer-agent interactions happening today than ever before, swiftly advancing agents to proficiency is a great challenge—but not an insurmountable one. We're here to show you how.



Think Quick: Increase Speed to Proficiency

Introduction

Fewer Calls. Better Agents.

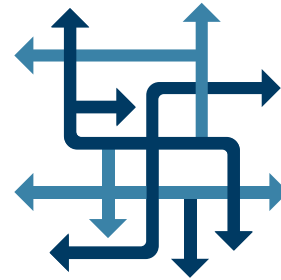


73% of contact centers say they've seen a noticeable increase in the complex nature of their customer-agent interactions.ⁱⁱⁱ

As customers become more comfortable using self-service for routine issues, and by 2025, 85% of interactions with a business will exist without person-to-person communication.ⁱ But this means that the calls that *do* come in tend to be more involved, and they require greater agent finesse and problem-solving skills.

The U.S. economy and workforce is undergoing a seismic shift. Job creation is outpacing the search efforts that workers are putting forth, with over 7.4 million job openings in the U.S. Competition for talent drives attrition as wages escalate—but getting individuals and teams quickly to a level of proficiency to handle these complex interactions can be even tougher. However, the importance cannot be stressed enough—increasing speed to proficiency not only drives up customer satisfaction and the customer experience, but it also increases the ROI and profitability of your programs.

What to Do?



73% of contact centers say they've seen a noticeable increase in the complex nature of their customer-agent interactions.ⁱⁱⁱ

Naturally, almost every organization wants to increase its agents' speed to proficiency, but few actually achieve comprehensive success. For some organizations, figuring out how to quantify the process is a challenge. For others, the hurdle isn't measuring the *time* it takes to become proficient, but figuring out how to effectively *reduce* that time.

Regardless of the challenges you face, there are ways to help your agents reach their potential faster—and in ways that last.

Okay. Enough dawdling. Let's bring you up to speed.

A blurred crowd of people walking through a modern building with a blue tint. The background features large, curved architectural elements and a tiled floor. The overall atmosphere is one of motion and speed.

Think Quick: Increase Speed to Proficiency

The What and The Why



Defining Speed to Proficiency

Let's start by making sure we're on the same page with what is meant by "speed to proficiency." A generally accepted definition is that *competence* is a collection of related abilities, commitments, knowledge and skills that enable a person to act effectively in a job or situation. The time it takes to be independently productive on key performance indicators (KPIs) relates to the agent's scope of responsibility—more complex jobs will naturally take more time to gain proficiency in.

To be truly proficient, an agent must master not only the required skills for the position, but be able to work independently while meeting all KPIs. How long an individual or team takes to reach this level of competence is the speed to proficiency.

Why Improving Speed to Proficiency Matters

For every agent hired, there is a cost and time investment to recruit, onboard and train them—and until an agent becomes truly proficient, it's hard to maximize their business value. In the contact center environment, profitability hinges on agent proficiency; programs that get agents up to speed faster are more profitable than others.

Additionally, improving speed to proficiency helps to build agents' confidence, lower their stress levels and keep them better engaged. With high attrition considered the number one challenge in the contact center industry,^{iv} those organizations that improve their time to proficiency will not only see more value from new hires, but may be able to reduce attrition by helping agents feel confident and engaged in their jobs more quickly.

Why Improving Speed to Proficiency Matters

While the importance of speed to proficiency is hardly debatable, few organizations can successfully implement programs that yield improvements. This is because in many cases, the critical first step—establishing a standardized measurement framework—is overlooked.



24% say high attrition is their biggest contact center challenge.^v



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Measuring Speed to Proficiency



Start at the Base

Establishing a framework of proficiency metrics is *essential*. Simply put, if you can't measure it, you can't manage it—and you can't see whether it's working.

It all starts with forming a baseline, which involves:

- Collecting a significant sample size of people to determine the average time it takes someone to become proficient
- Assessing proficiency across all skill sets and KPIs
- Recognizing that agents will not reach all proficiency metrics simultaneously



Take a Comprehensive Look

Expect proficiency to come in stages. For instance, in a customer care program, proficiency in compliance may be reached in 90 days, customer satisfaction in 120 days, and average handle time (AHT) in 150 days.

The key is to look at the metrics comprehensively. But this is something most organizations don't do—and it's a lost opportunity.



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The Three Biggest Impacts on Speed to Proficiency



Pillar 1 | Recruiting & Onboarding

Recruiting and onboarding are a critical component of improving speed to proficiency, and they are at the foundation of agent competency. If recruiting and onboarding processes aren't consistent, you will find that even with great processes and structures in place to train and mentor agents, you'll still see a lot of variance in how employees perform out of the gate.

Here's a look at what you can do to improve your recruiting and onboarding processes:

1. Hire the right people
2. Focus on the fundamentals
3. Hold recruiters and human resources accountable



Pillar 1 | Recruiting & Onboarding

1. Hire the right people

Your recruiting processes should certainly meet or exceed your baseline requirements for agent skill sets. But also be sure to focus on assessing agents for soft skills—personality, active listening, empathy, and confidence (and maybe awesomeness, too). The agent profile should reflect the right traits depending on the position—for instance, customer care requires empathy, while a sales position requires high levels of confidence. Deploy talent matching technology for high volume recruiting allowing for the qualifications and mapping of agents to the right programs at scale.

Hiring best fit candidates can result in candidate satisfaction ratings as high as **49%**.





Pillar 1 | Recruiting & Onboarding

2. Focus on the fundamentals

Too often, organizations ignore basic elements of the onboarding process. Even small measures, such as ensuring your agents receive their equipment, login information, lockers, lanyard, ID cards and paychecks on time are important.

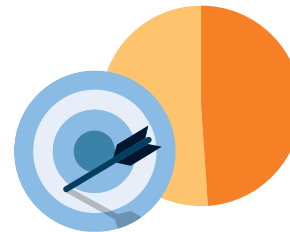
As bestselling author Michael Watkins notes in his book, *The First 90 Days*, small things matter. He describes once seeing a new hire who had to walk around with a visitor tag the first week. “That sent a particular message to the newcomer and everyone around him,” said Watkins. The message you send your employees from Day One should be one of respect and support.



Pillar 1 | Recruiting & Onboarding

3. Hold recruiters and human resources accountable

Many organizations measure recruiters' success by the number of seats filled. However, this makes it tempting for recruiters to fill empty seats at all costs, even when the candidate quality is low. By deploying a recruiting technology solution, you can hold recruiters accountable for quality as well as quantity—gaining better agents who have the ability and motivation to succeed in less time.



49% of those who don't hit initial performance goals had no onboarding training.^{vii}



Pillar 1 | Recruiting & Onboarding

What to do?

- Measure attrition, referrals and hiring trends from social media and other sources. Take note if one source is producing better hires than another.
- Use analytical tools to create better hiring profiles based on behavioral skills.
- Identify agent motivations. The hiring process is critical to selecting those who will be motivated and engaged.



*Employees whose companies have longer onboarding programs gain full proficiency **34% faster** than those in the shortest programs.^{vii}*

Case Study^{ix}

Decreased Attrition

One of our long-term clients, a digital mailing solutions provider, saw a significant drop in attrition by revising hiring profiles to better match line of business (LOB) needs. Here's what we did:

- Built a skills matrix more adapted to a customer service profile, including identifying which soft skills, agent tools and types of product knowledge were essential
- Revamped existing hiring profiles for new hires to better fit new LOBs
- Invited employees to participate in engagement surveys to help us identify best practices
- Conducted random touchpoints with tenured employees to identify gaps and address attrition specific to a team

Results:

- 39% attrition reduction after new hiring profiles were implemented
- 89% of new applicants passed Foundations Training, and 88% of trainees passed nesting
- With the addition of the touchpoints and surveys, the attrition rate went from 16% to 2% in approximately two months



Pillar 2 | Training and Curriculum

Inconsistencies with the delivery of training and the quality and structure of the curriculum can impact speed to proficiency. Here are some ways to improve the experience for agents that will help them gain competency faster:

1. Tailor training to your specific audience
2. Design a curriculum that tailors to learning preferences





Pillar 2 | Training and Curriculum

1. Tailor training to your specific audience

Make sure that the curriculum your trainers use provides a bridge between what agents know and what they *need* to know. If you're using a specific curriculum in the U.S. and then implementing the same curriculum at an offshore site or work-at-home program, there may be gaps in comprehension.

For example, when one of our retail clients offshored its credit card support work to the Philippines, 90% of the agents didn't own a personal credit card, and they couldn't comprehend what having a card declined on Black Friday meant to U.S. customers. In this case, the curriculum needed contextual adjustments that would provide agents with a better cultural understanding of how customers use credit cards in the U.S.



Pillar 2 | Training and Curriculum

2. Design a curriculum that tailors to learning preferences

A lot of training courses rely heavily on lecture-and-learn techniques. But Millennials—who make up the majority of new hires in a contact center—tend to have a shorter attention span and learn better through more visual and interactive material. If Millennials are your core group of new hires, make sure to tailor your training curriculum to meet their learning preferences.



Pillar 2 | Training and Curriculum

What to do?

- Measure test scores, graduation rates, attrition and first 30 days of trainees' performance, including each agent's average customer experience score.



Case Study^x

Reduced Training Time

In working with a client who used instructor-led classroom training, we better aligned the learning to focus on the necessary tools and content for successfully setting the foundation. Here's what we did:

- Built hands-on production time into each case type learning module
- Developed nine self-teach modules with complementary facilitator guides and participant materials to provide a blended learning experience
- Created assessments to measure both skill and knowledge at the end of each topic as well as a mid-term and final assessment

Results:

- An improved curriculum led to a 70-percent reduction in training time
- \$2.5M saved by the client over 12 months on reduction in classroom time
- Upon graduation from the transition period, agents were outperforming with a 100-second lower AHT and an increase in transactions handled by four cases per hour



Pillar 3 | Mentoring and Support

The final variable that can impact speed to proficiency is on-the-job mentoring and support. As new hires move out of training and into the nesting or transition phase, it's critical to provide continued coaching and other support elements to help them be successful. These include:

1. Keeping a low mentor-to-trainee ratio
2. Leveraging big data technology to track trends and provide real-time insights.
3. Engaging production managers as part of the mentoring process
4. Allowing transition agents to take calls specifically from one product category at a time
5. Creating growth goals



Pillar 3 | Mentoring and Support

1. Keeping a low mentor-to-trainee ratio

When agents move into the transition period, they will succeed faster with access to consistent feedback. By keeping the mentoring ratios low (no more than 1:8), mentors are better able to monitor and coach new hire agents as needed.

2. Engaging production managers as part of the mentoring process

The nesting phase shouldn't be viewed in a silo—agents need to be prepared for the production environment. Production managers who engage with their agents at this stage have the opportunity to mentor them in ways that will make agents more effective once they join the floor full-time.

3. Leveraging big data technology to track trends and provide real-time insights.

Utilizing a big-data platform to capture agent sentiment and performance. Allowing you to track trends at the agent, site and organizational levels to implement requirement improvements.



Pillar 3 | Mentoring and Support

3. Allowing transition agents to take calls specifically from one product category at a time

Servicing a variety of transactions requires proficiency in several areas. We have found it beneficial to allow agents to practice on one category at a time in order to boost their subject matter expertise. Then, at the end of the transition period, agents can more confidently experiment with taking multiple calls types from multiple product categories.

4. Creating growth goals

In order to feel engaged and enthusiastic about their role, agents need to see they are making progress. Establish growth goals early in the process—the key is to make the goals challenging enough that they stretch the agent, but not so challenging that it demotivates them.



Pillar 3 | Mentoring and Support

What to do?

- Measure the first 90 days of performance.
- Calculate the program's KPI metrics (including NPS[®], AHT and customer satisfaction) to determine how well new agents are performing.



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Avoiding Risks



Set Up Agents for Success

If you push out new metrics before the agents are ready, they can miss these measures and become discouraged. Agents may become further disappointed or frustrated when they are unable to earn bonuses and other rewards because they are not proficient enough to meet the metrics. This will drive attrition—both voluntary and involuntary—as employees experience dissatisfaction. Ultimately, this drives up cost.

As new metrics are added to a program (such as NPS[®]), it's important that you can see what is coming down the pipeline, so that you have enough time to train agents and help them adapt.



Think Quick: Increase Speed to Proficiency

Conclusion

Speed is Just the Beginning



The goal of an effective proficiency program isn't just about speed—it's about eliminating waste. Identify what isn't adding value and remove those non-value adds from the recruiting, training and mentoring process, all while inserting elements that will add more value to those same processes.

The result of these changes is what will speed up proficiency—enabling your organization to deliver a better customer experience and reach a higher agent ROI as you drive down agent attrition.



Higher speed to proficiency and more confident, capable agents?
Now that's some fast thinking.

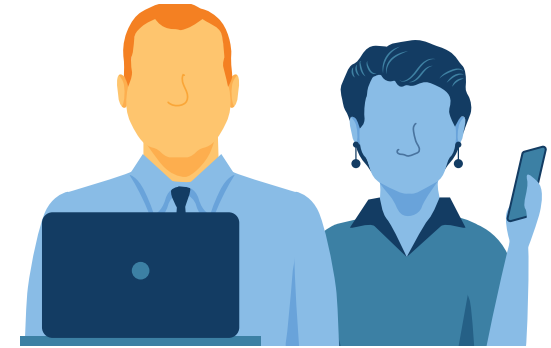
Looking for an expert to help get your programs and agents up to speed faster? Call 866-ALORICA or email sales@alorica.com.



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About Alorica

Alorica



Alorica is a leading provider of Business Process Outsourcing solutions that span the entire customer lifecycle. Good, glad we got that out of the way. Here's the deal—we think serving customers is awesome. And that's why, when it comes down to it, we really only do one thing—we make lives better...one interaction at a time.

PASSION • PERFORMANCE • POSSIBILITIES

These are the principles that guide us in helping others make better choices and informed decisions. They're more than words. They're our rally cry.

PASSION

Everything starts with conviction. A desire to obliterate the status quo, and the audacity to believe that we will. We're problem solvers. Question answerers.

Strategic dreamers. We see every interaction as an opportunity to create opportunities—for our customers, our clients, our colleagues and our communities.

PERFORMANCE

We're 110% committed to the end result. Onward and upward, it's all about taking our clients to the next level. We stay engaged. We mine new sources of inspiration. And we give it our all, no matter the challenge. They say go big or go home. We don't believe in the latter.

POSSIBILITIES

100,000 employees. Operations in 15 countries. Over 70% of our clients are Fortune 500 companies. So where do we go from here? Anywhere. Everywhere.

We're always innovating, evolving, imagining new ways to continuously improve. Some see the sky as the limit. We see the sky as a stepping stone.

WHAT'S IN OUR SECRET SAUCE?

A spoonful of customer care. A dash of technical support. A pinch of revenue generation. Equal parts receivables management, customer retention and reverse logistics. Fulfillment and B2B solutions, for sweetness. And finally, hosted contact center solutions, direct response and back office processing for that added kick.

Guess it's not so secret anymore, huh...

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