



Jabra GN

Unlocking the power of conversation

Customer service challenges – 2017

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Jabra Biz 2300

Abstract

Conversations are complex. What could appear to be a simple exchange of words is actually communication that conveys meaning through so many small factors. Not just the words themselves, but the pauses, the tone, the laughter or sighs. Through a conversation humans have the ability to understand these nuances and to understand the richness of what could otherwise be a simple statement. A conversation is memorable, meaningful and important to the way humans relate to each other. Only in a conversation can people convey empathy.

In “New Ways of Working” initiatives in businesses, conversation is an important but rarely recognised tool. The power of conversation has the potential to transform customer service, business opportunities and employee engagement. Those in the business who are responsible for conversation with customers have immense power and value. However, rarely do businesses focus on this or invest in it. 85% of business leaders think that traditional differentiators alone such as new product features, price promotions or marketing campaigns, are not a sustainable strategy for winning business, but only 12% of the marketing budget is spent on servicing existing customers. Customer service over the phone, which is mainly carried out with existing customers that have questions about how their product works, how to fix problems and more, is a vital component to differentiate the business, yet historically this has not been prioritized.

This is a paradox that is shaping businesses negatively. At the same time, the culture around important calls is shifting. Before, conversation with your bank, consultant or lawyer mainly took place in face-to-face meetings. Today, these complex conversations take place over the phone. In addition, the level of information available online is far greater, making the caller much more knowledgeable on complex subjects like finances, legislation or technical product details. This means that the people at the other end of the call must be better prepared, highly concentrated and more focused on what the result of the conversation should be, rather than simply providing a means of contact and friendly service.

The power of conversation has the potential to transform customer service, business opportunities and employee engagement.

Business resource needs to be focused on protecting these valuable people; their working environments, their technology, and enabling everything that goes into them using their power of conversation. Investment in customer service requires investment in these people.

This Jabra research shows that the most productive customer service profiles are up to 47% more productive compared to the least productive. Combined with the fact that customer calls are getting more complex, winning companies will be the ones that invest in the concentration of their workers and that deliver services over the phone. It will be those who understand how important customer service is, and who will organize it under the right strategic leadership.

What is required to achieve this are new ways of working factors such as job engagement, the right package of supportive technology, behaviors and culture – all of which are fundamental for reaching the highest level of productivity for this important

group. Simply put, it is about investing in the right tools and culture for the people who actually carry out the service deliverables on a daily basis.

This research also poses the question: who should own customer service? Nowadays it is often part of business functions that have little contact with the customers, like supply chain or IT or even a stand-alone department. Very seldom is customer service and interaction owned by sales or marketing functions. However, this research shows that if businesses recognize the value, the potential gains for any business would be cross-selling or up-selling to existing customers, a higher level of branding, positive awareness and potential new business.

Jabra Biz 2400 II
Jabra Noise Guide



The most productive customer service profiles are up to **47% more productive** compared to the least productive.

Jabra has surveyed approximately 3,200 customer centric profiles in seven countries to understand how they craft customer conversations, in a market transforming towards more complex conversations.

73% of decision makers in call centric environments state an increase in the complexity of customer interactions

80% of companies say they deliver “superior” customer service. Only **8%** think the same companies deliver “superior” customer service

89% of customers will leave for a competitor after a negative customer experience

The most productive customer service profiles are up to **47%** more productive compared to the least productive

55% of consumers who intended to make a purchase change their mind because of poor customer service

Sources: RightNow Customer Experience Impact Report, Zendesk, American Express, Jabra 2016 Call Centric Survey by Lindberg International

In addition, we have found:

- Customers are well educated on their issue when escalating it to the brand, so complex problem solving will be the primary function for customer service organizations in 2020
- The length of phone based customer interactions expected to go up by 40% in the next 5 years
- Servicing more complex customer interactions employees have a growing need for concentration in order to deliver the required quality
- The more critical the issue is for the customer, the higher the likelihood for escalating it to a call

Complexity in digital and customer service trends

Consumers today have a lot of choices – not only in their suppliers and vendors, with new disruptive brands emerging on a regular basis, but also in the way they communicate with those brands. Whether it's communicating with their bank, organizing a taxi, buying clothes or business leaders making decisions on technology investments, interaction with a brand is becoming harder to define. Influences on a purchase process could include anything from social media, word of mouth, advertising online or on the street. Similarly, communication methods are increasingly complex. Interaction could be through online chat, email, an online form, on the phone, or via SMS. In summary, target audiences are more unpredictable and demanding than ever before.

Amongst the mix of communication methods one constant has remained over recent years – the power of conversation. People want to discuss, ask questions, and understand from other people. Whatever method they are using to communicate, conversation remains at the heart of those engagements. True conversation – on the phone with a real person – is so much more

valuable to both the vendor and the recipient. In a digital world, conversations are even more powerful.

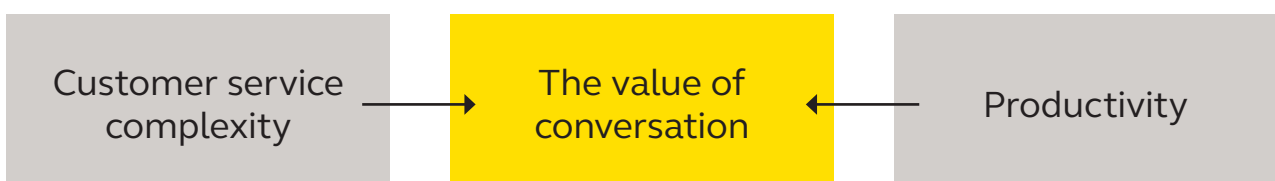
Who are the people conducting those conversations?


Of all the workers delivering customer service via the phone, they do not all have the same challenges. Instead they can be divided into four very different profiles.

Depending on the business, it could be any of the four categories we have labelled: “call center agents”, “civil servants”, “traders” and “advisors” (please see page 9). These groups, which a business could have any combination of at any one time, are incredibly powerful. They own one of the most valuable assets to the business: the power of conversation.

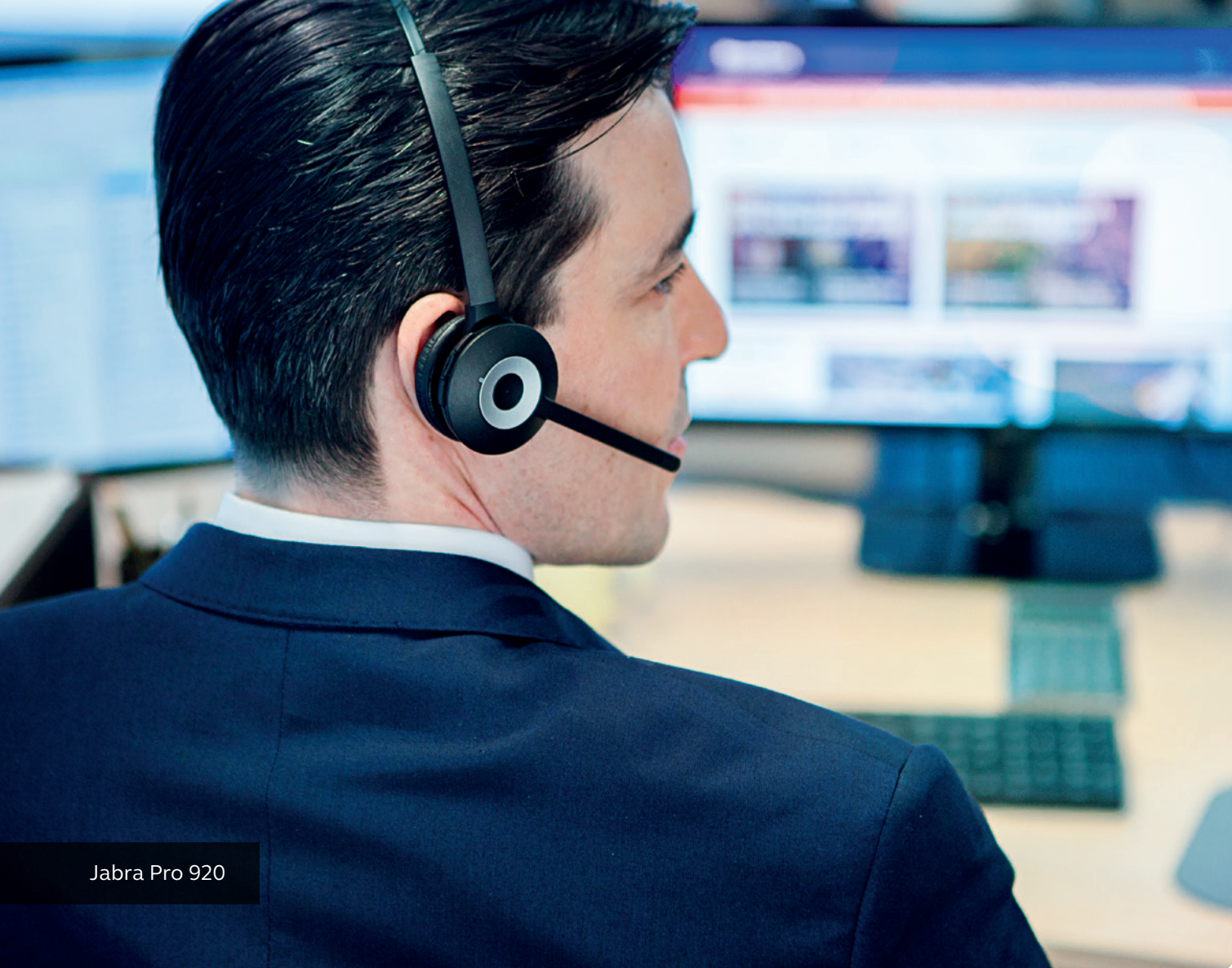
What should businesses do? The natural conclusion is to maximize opportunities through these four groups of people, however possible. That means increasing productivity.

Opposing forces, unlocking the power of conversation:





In a digital world,
conversations are even
more powerful.



Jabra Pro 920

Recognizing the value of call-centric workers

Call centric workers, who should be a strategic priority for the business, need to be focused on conversations in calls in order to produce value. Whether time spent on the call itself, or preparing for a call, these people can work at different extremes of 'efficiency focus' and 'value focus'.

The key is to understand how they operate: how calls play a role in their working lives and what conditions they seek. Businesses should then act on those insights to explore how employees responsible for customer dialogue can upgrade their productivity.

Cost focus vs. value focus

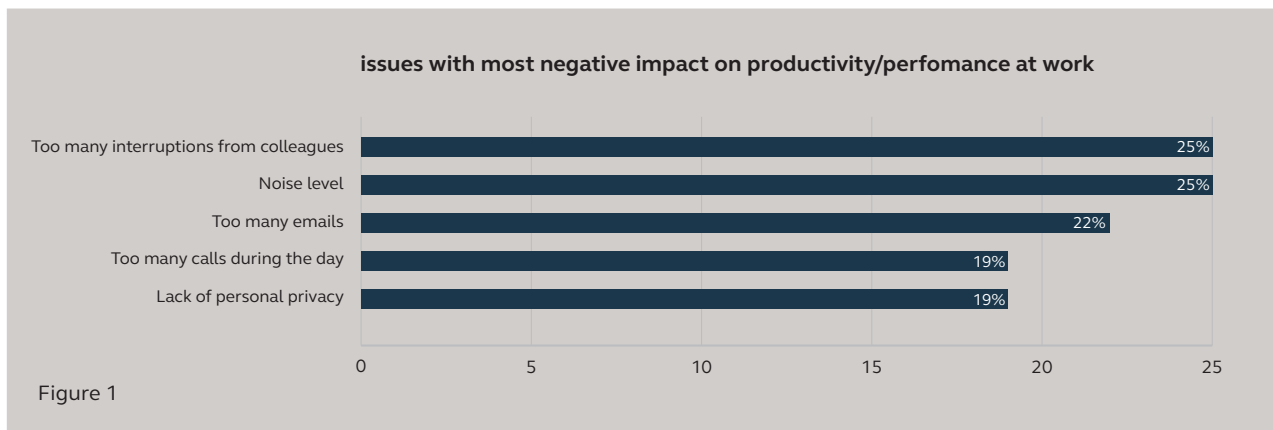
- There are two approaches to how to benefit most from delivering service through the phone based conversations: either from economies of scale (cost focus) or strategic differentiation (value focus)
- Traditionally, customer service organizations have been very oriented on delivering more calls per hour
- During the last decade a strategic movement has evolved towards getting more business value out of each conversation instead of producing customer interaction at the lowest possible cost
- Now businesses primary focus should be on how to drive most value from each conversation

Work mode: conversation vs. concentration

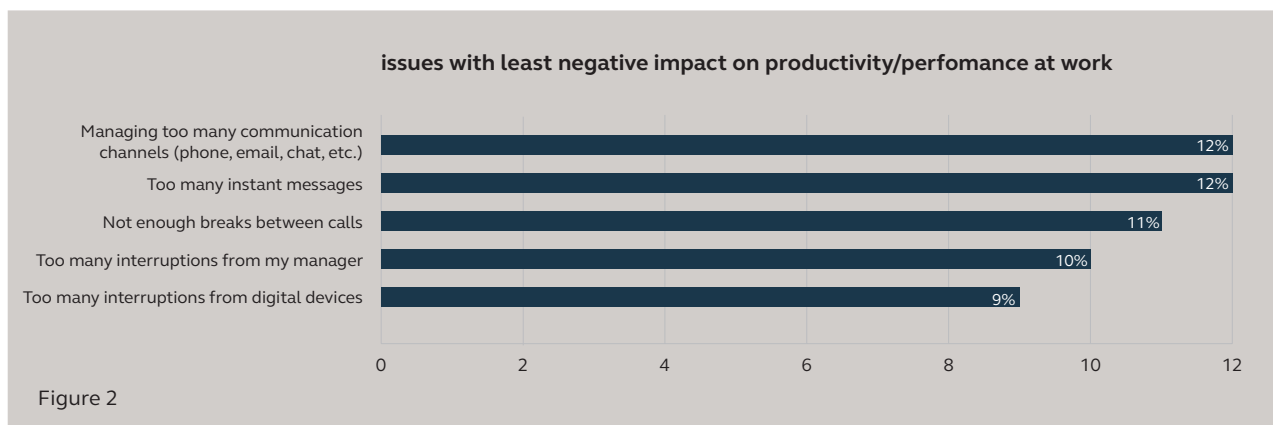
- The way the 'call centric worker' delivers value is via phone based conversations, as there is a physical distance to the customer
- Whilst conversation work mode is a basic work mode for every profile it is not necessarily the dominant work mode, because customer interactions are becoming more complex and people need to prepare prior to the customer conversations that are increasingly valuable
- Concentration as a work mode is for some profiles a more dominant work mode. It's where they actually "create" what is valuable to the customer which is then shared in phone conversation

Factors in the productivity equation

Businesses are facing many challenges in creating productive working environments, as staff battle with many factors and distractions, such as noise, workspace and ineffective technology. All issues factor in to “the productivity equation”. Jabra research shows just how the different factors impact productivity.



The most negative impacts come from colleagues' interruptions, noise level and abundance of emails.

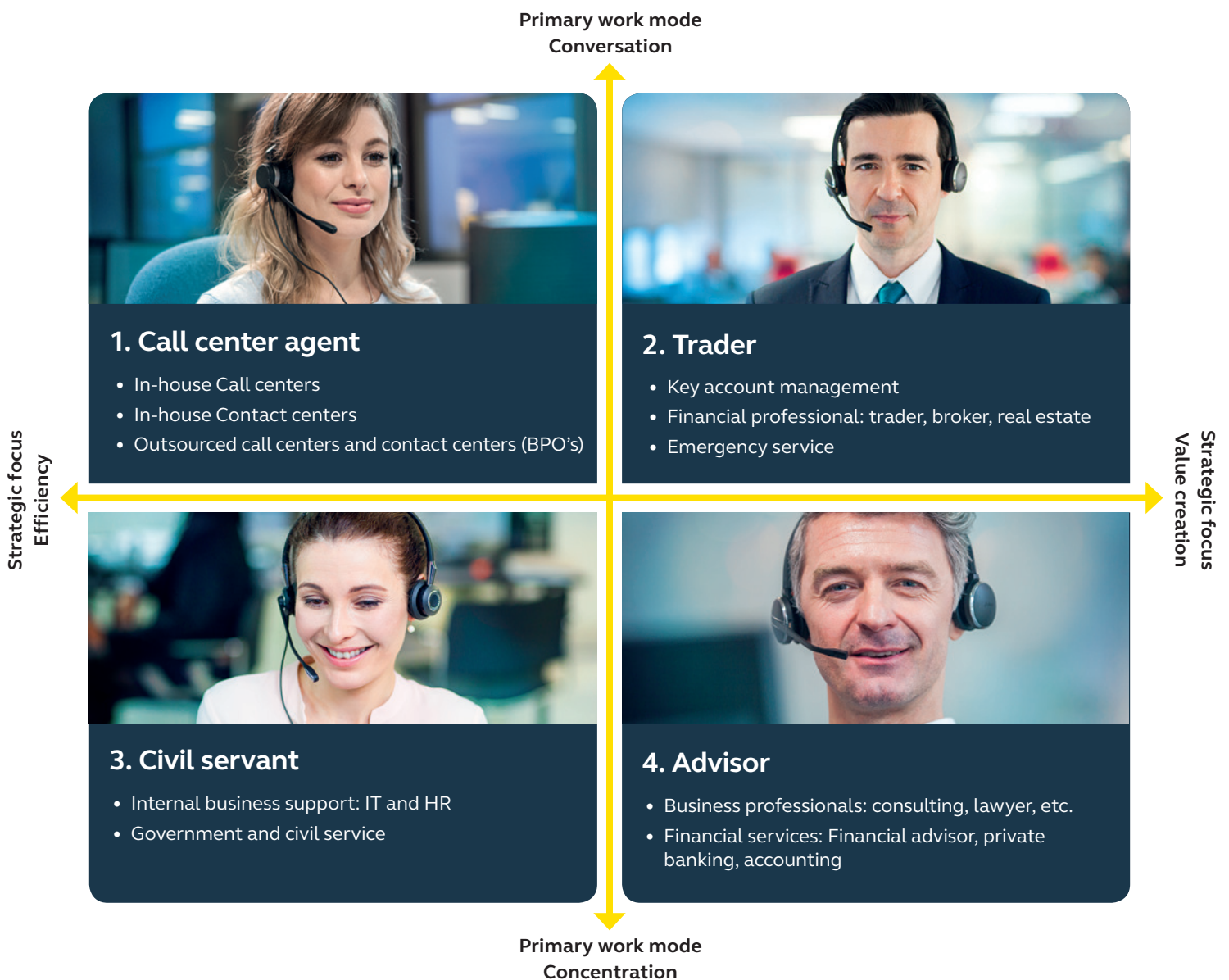


Managing or connecting multiple phones with one or more audio devices does not have much negative impact on productivity at work - most likely because only few have this need.

Who are the call centric workers?

Each of the four groups of workers who are focused on bringing business value through conversations have different priorities based on how much their role is focused on conversation versus concentration, and value creation versus efficiency. Within this group, there are varying numbers of calls every day – some spend more time between calls preparing for conversations, whilst others spend more time on the conversation itself. Any one business could contain all of these profiles, each playing a crucial role in the success of the organization.

This research is built upon detailed responses from a total of 3,166 call centric workers in 7 countries (USA, Germany, UK, France, Sweden, China and Australia). The data was collected between October 6 and October 17, 2015, by means of online questionnaire. Only office workers providing assistance to, or consulting other people through calls, or via online communication channels were chosen to participate in the survey.

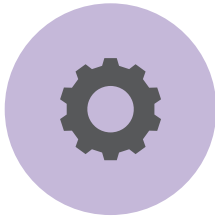


1. Call center agent



For many organizations, call or contact center agents are a key communication method for their customers. This group of people are highly specialized in conducting high volumes of calls, either inbound or outbound. Almost half of people that talk and listen for a living are in a call center agent role or similar.

Key characteristics:



Efficiency



Low level of complexity



Dominant work mode:
conversation



High priority:
conversation zone

Conversation zone

Challenges faced by this group of individuals are partly due to the efficient interactions they need to conduct. The complexity of the conversation is relatively low, so there is less need for time between calls to prepare or take action. The efficiency they are seeking is prevented by noise levels in their nearby surroundings in the office environment, and because of interruptions from colleagues. This adds to stress levels, as does too many calls during the day and too few breaks. The solution for call center agents is to provide them with a larger private zone within the office environment. Very often this environment is

open plan so call center agents need to find a way to increase their conversation zone within this space.

The most productive workers have the right supportive technology available – they are 28% more satisfied with their supportive tech than the least productive. Moreover, they are 25% more engaged in their job than the least productive, and the most productive also raise less issues with their manager about satisfaction and environment. The least productive workers are 17% more likely to look for a new job in their current situation and 62% more unhappy with the workspace in the last 3-5 years.

Key pains impacting call center productivity

- Limited conversation zone: Noise level, interruptions from colleagues and lack of privacy/personal space
- Growing stress zone: Too many calls and too many e-mails combined with not enough time between each call

- The ‘right’ package of technology and supportive culture are the two key factors impacting productivity following the size of workspace
- Working with employee engagement is also on the top 5 list of things to focus on in terms of upgrading productivity
- Call center agents should remember to stay refreshed by drinking water during conversations, and to stay aware of their posture

Key factors that characterize the most productive vs. the least productive for call center agents

- The single most important factor is the size of workspace. This space has decreased for the most productive, but not as much as for the least productive

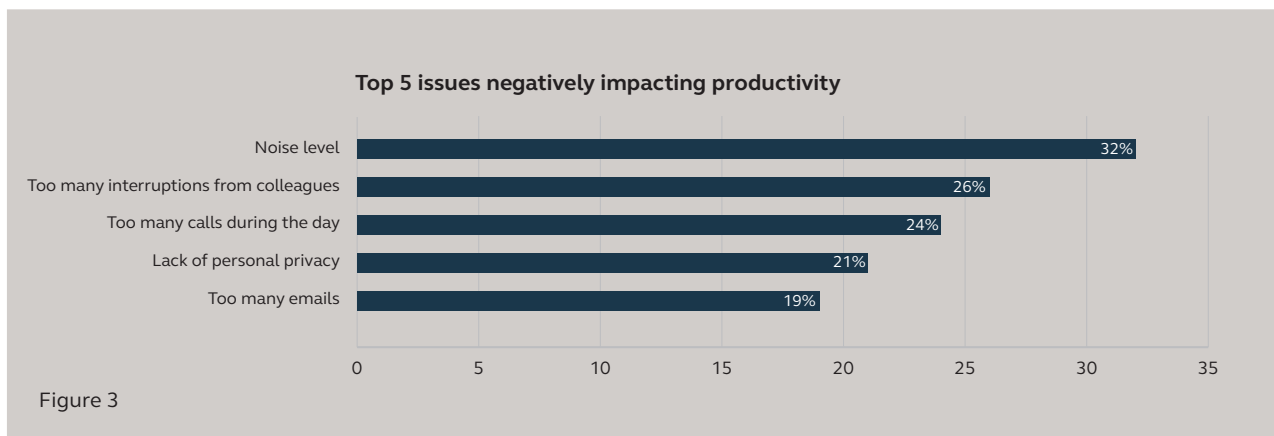


Figure 3

The productivity equation

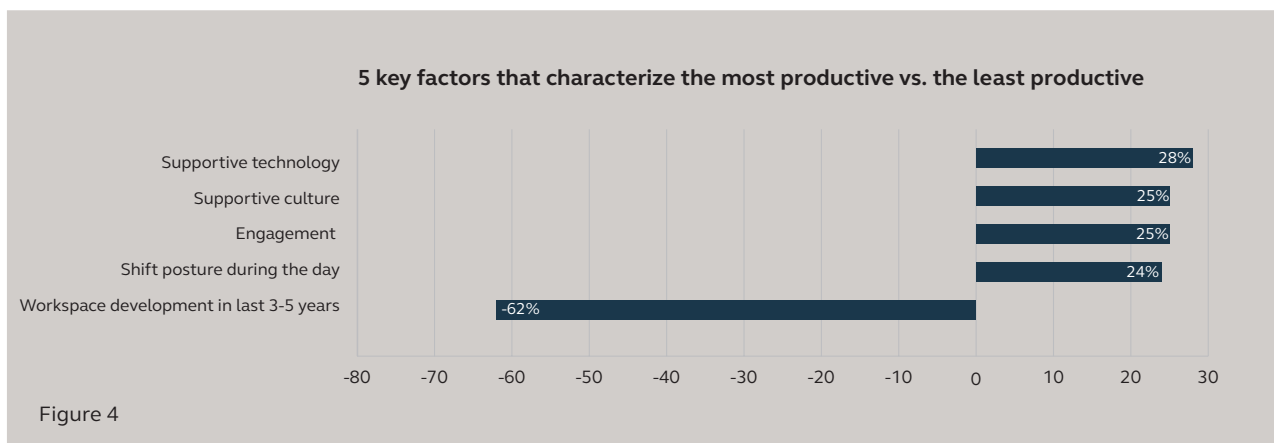
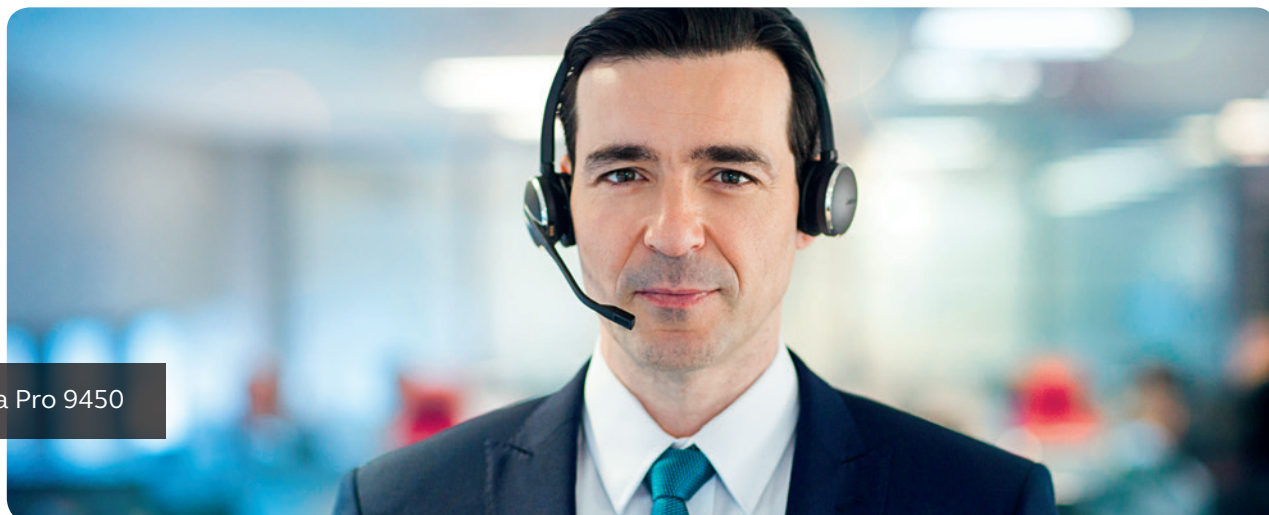


Figure 4

2. Trader



Jabra Pro 9450

The profile that is defined as trader could be anyone from key account management, financial professionals such as brokers, real estate agents or even emergency service personnel. This group of people manage complex and valuable interactions over the phone. They spend the majority of their time on the phone during the day – up to 3.6 hours per day. Though they conduct complex conversations and do need to concentrate, their conversation zone is the priority.

Key characteristics:



Value creation



Low level of complexity



Dominant work mode: conversation



High priority: conversation zone

Conversation zone

Trader's conversation zones are often interrupted by noise and interruptions from colleagues and surroundings. Expanding or dedicating space for conversation can minimise the potential for interruptions. It can improve the trader's ability to focus on the valuable information being shared with customers – otherwise traders risk interruptions from colleagues and overall office noise level. This profile also experiences stress from too many calls and emails, as well as unclear success criteria. Overall, these influences negatively impact productivity. Despite conversation being a primary work mode, traders seek more time

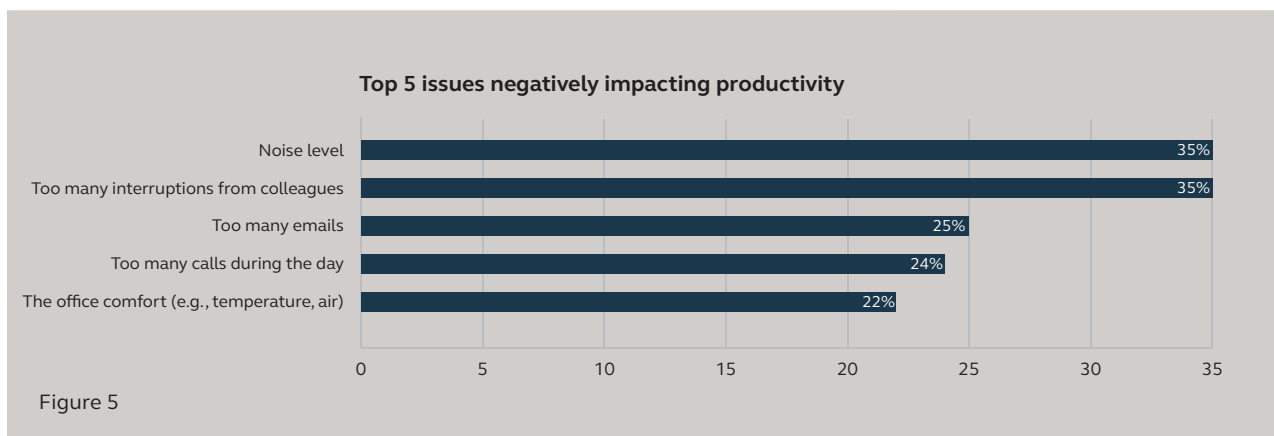
between calls and wish for less calls – indicating that they would like more time to prepare between conversations. This profile also finds that voice training is beneficial. The most productive have 24% more voice training than the least productive. This is because in communication, speech and tone-of-voice are less effective compared to tone-of-voice and body language. However because phone conversations can't benefit from body language, this leaves just the spoken word and tone-of-voice as methods of communication. Developing 'the tone-of-voice' via voice training is therefore a key factor for success.

Key pains impacting the trader’s productivity

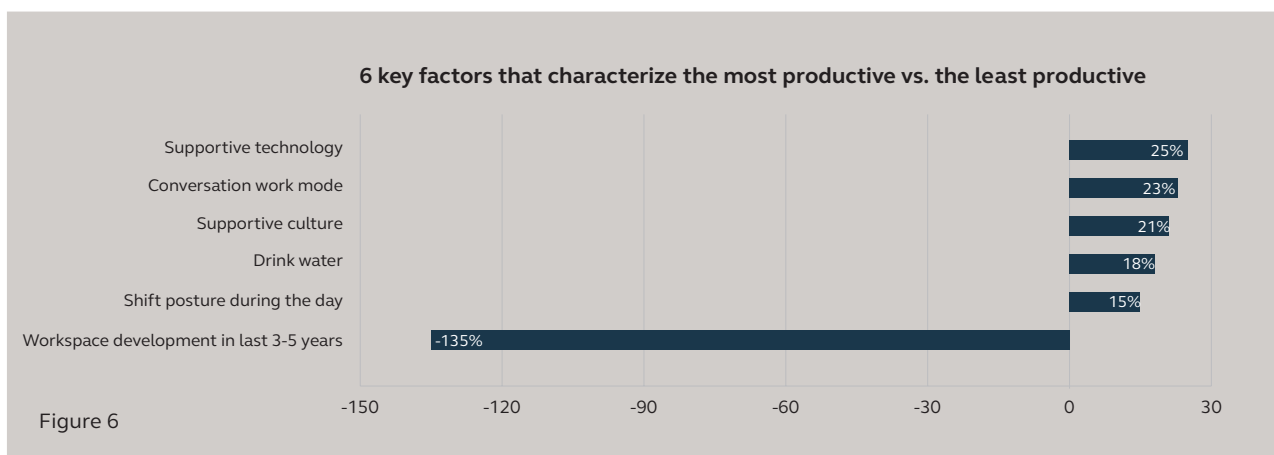
- Limited conversation zone: Noise level, interruptions from colleagues and lack of privacy/personal space impacts the ability to provide valuable information to customers by phone conversations
- Growing stress zone: Too many calls, too many emails and unclear success criteria all add up to stress being a medium-high pain point, impacting productivity negatively
- Too many calls per day impact productivity, yet being in conversation is the primary work mode. This could be linked to the fact that this profile provides a high degree of value via conversations, so they need some breaks in between calls. It is a medium pain point to have less time to prepare between calls

Key factors that characterize the most productive vs. the least productive for traders

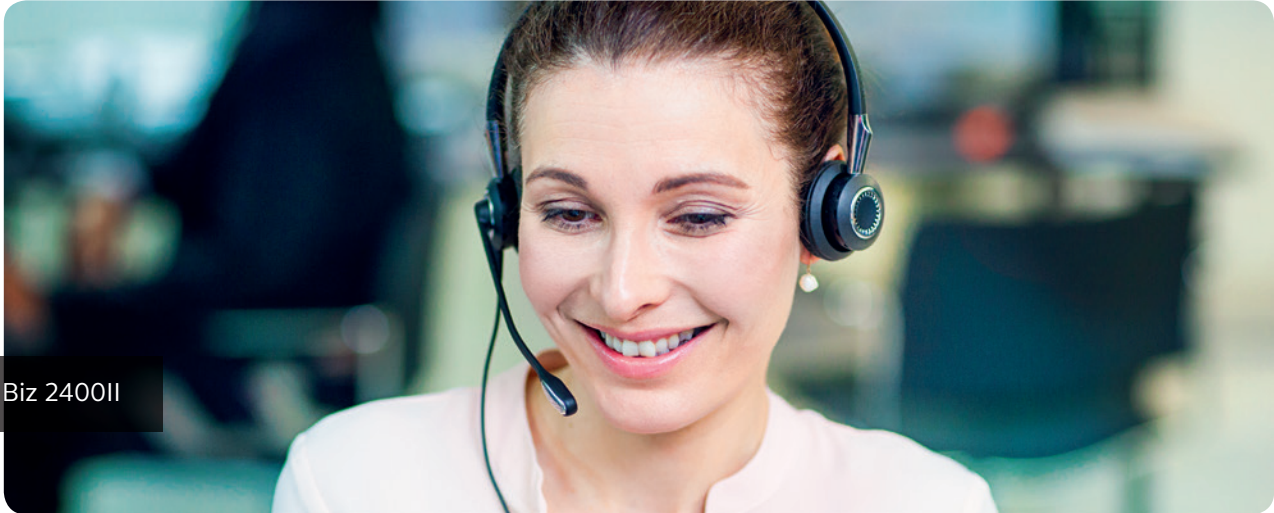
- For the most productive, trader’s workspace has increased during the last 3-5 years, whereas it has decreased for the least productive
- Being in conversation work mode with the right package of supportive technology and culture are key
- Traders should remember to stay refreshed by drinking water during conversations, and to stay aware of their posture



The productivity equation



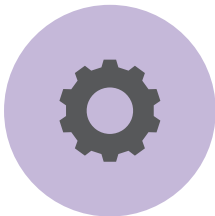
3. Civil servant



Jabra Biz 2400II

It is estimated that 19% of customer service profiles are working in set-ups with efficiency focus, yet the complexity is relatively high. These are roles such as IT, HR or government and civil service. They provide consultancy yet conduct high volumes of calls and therefore must also remain focused on efficiency. Civil servants spend a significant amount of time preparing for the next complex call, whilst also conducting some basic administrative work.

Key characteristics:



Efficiency



High level of complexity



Dominant work mode: concentration



High priority: concentration zone

Concentration zone

Civil servants need sufficient conditions for spending time concentrating, as they prepare for calls. They also feel that there are too many calls during the day, and that their surroundings are distracting – especially due to interruptions from colleagues. These factors contribute to a more stressful environment. This profile is one that has attempted to ‘self remedy’ to address these challenges by listening to music to facilitate concentration. Those that do so report that they are far more productive as a result – the most productive listen to music for over four hours a day, 44% more than the least productive. Civil servants need to improve conditions for them to

concentrate by creating a larger private zone, perhaps without the need for music. They also need to find more time and space to avoid interruptions such as too many meetings or too many emails, as they need to be at their desk to shift between calls and preparation time. However, when they are at their most productive this profile can manage the shift in work modes effectively. Often they have to shift between being on the phone (conversation) and preparing for the next call (concentration) and the better they are at doing so, the more productive they become. The most productive are 13% better at making the shift in work modes compared to the least productive.

Normally, mobility is a plus for call centric workers when it comes to productivity, but for a profile looking to bring value over the phone and also preparing for the next call reading reports, e-mails, news, etc. from a computer, being away from the desk (in internal meetings, in the corridor socializing, travelling between two external business locations) means that they are less productive. Whilst they have time to prepare between calls, the conditions in which they do so needs to change. The most productive are 17% less mobile internally and 31% less mobile externally.

Key pains impacting the servant’s productivity

- Limited concentration zone: Noise level, interruptions from colleagues and too many emails from stakeholders they need to service/respond to – and lack of privacy/personal space
- Growing stress zone: Too many meetings/collaboration and too many emails combined with stress related to unclear success criteria to stress being a medium-high pain point, impacting productivity negatively

Key factors that characterize the most productive vs. the least productive for civil servants

- The single most important factor for upgrading productivity is to listen to music while working. With the need for concentration, this is no surprise. But it is the degree of productivity impact that is very interesting. It could be related to the stress issue, where music is a protection against stress
- The creation of an environment where engagement and job satisfaction is very stimulating for the overall productivity. Here, the human factors matter, which is no surprise. However, as one of the pain points for this profile is lack of privacy, it is surprising that work space is not linked to greater productivity.
- Supportive technology and culture is a key focus. Basic technology is in place, which characterizes the most productive profiles. The cultural aspect could be linked to a behavior, around respect for the need for a concentration zone – so colleagues are not that loud and make fewer interruptions during the day

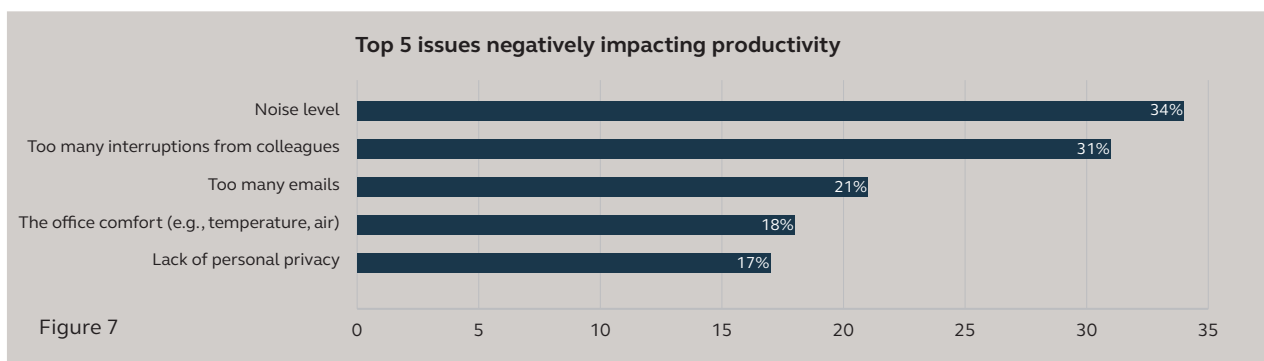


Figure 7

The productivity equation

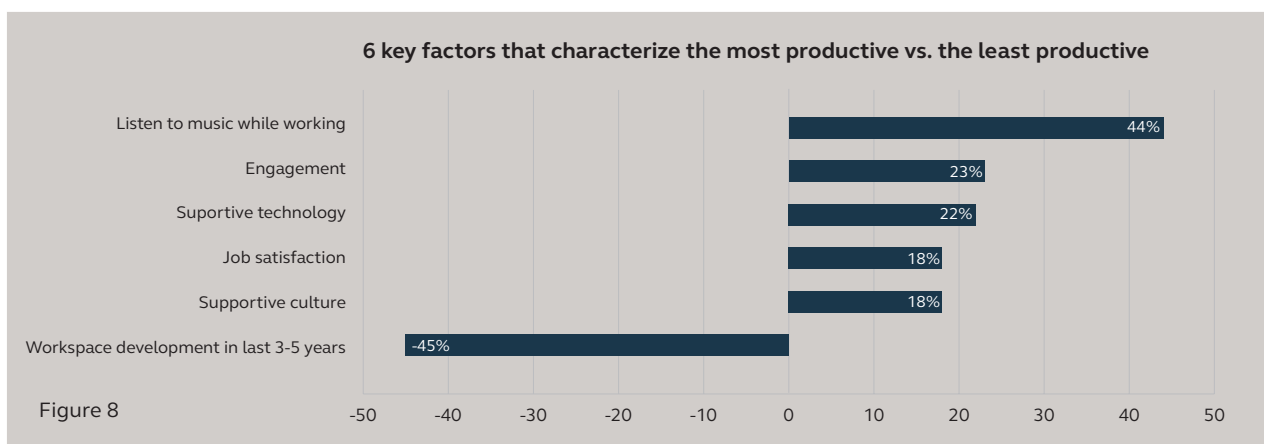


Figure 8

4. Advisor



Jabra Pro 9465

Advisors have some of the most valuable customer interactions of all four call centric profiles. The financial sector delivers high value to customers without the need for face-to-face meetings. Consultants, private bankers and lawyers also fit into the advisor profile. These calls are of high value to customers, they are not focused on efficiency – they are often highly strategic and complex discussions. Because the discussions are complex and customers are often well prepared, this profile needs both conversation and concentration zones – due to the intense focus needed on both preparation and the calls themselves.

Key characteristics:



Value creation



High level of complexity



Dominant work mode: concentration



High priority: concentration zone

Conversation and concentration zone

As this group of employees are conducting complex conversations on a regular basis, they need to focus on concentration. Data shows that this group spends an equal amount of time on concentration and conversation. However, as they are highly dependent on concentration, in order to provide value through conversation, this is the primary work mode. Noise levels and interruptions from colleagues are the main issues affecting productivity, and despite having the largest workspace of all four call centric profiles (their workspace has increased over the last three to five years), there is still a desire for more personal space.

The complexity of the advisor's role means stress is very often an issue, partly because of unclear success criteria. To improve productivity, advisors need more workspace to protect them from noise levels and interruptions. They also tend to listen to music to help improve concentration. Offering the right technology and supportive culture is fundamental for helping this group to reach the highest levels of productivity. The most productive listen to music for an average of 3.3 hours per day. Overall, job satisfaction contributes to productivity – the most productive are 30% more engaged in their job than the least productive.

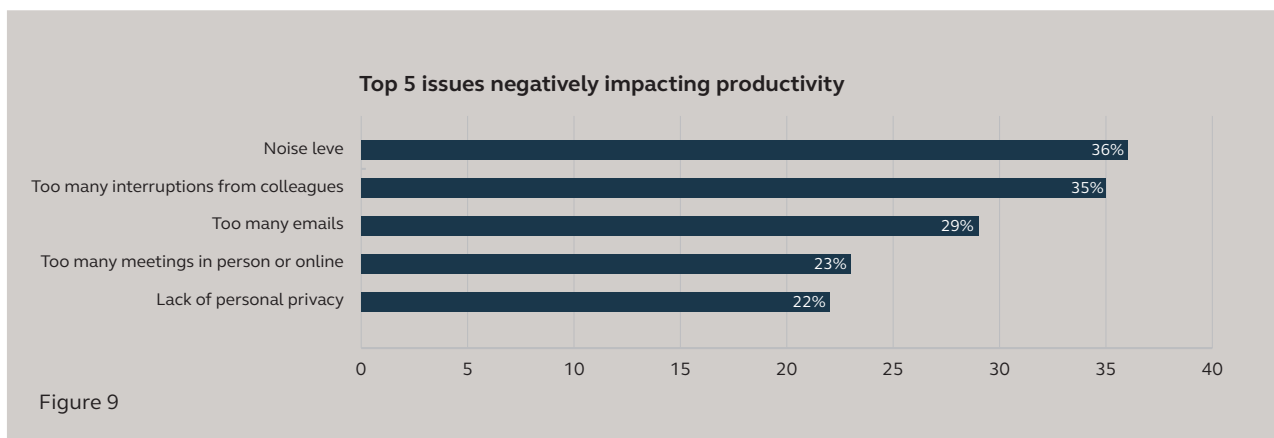
Key pains impacting the advisor's productivity

- Limited concentration zone: Noise level, interruptions from colleagues and lack of privacy/personal space
- Growing stress zone: Too many meetings/collaboration and too many emails combined with stress related to unclear success criteria

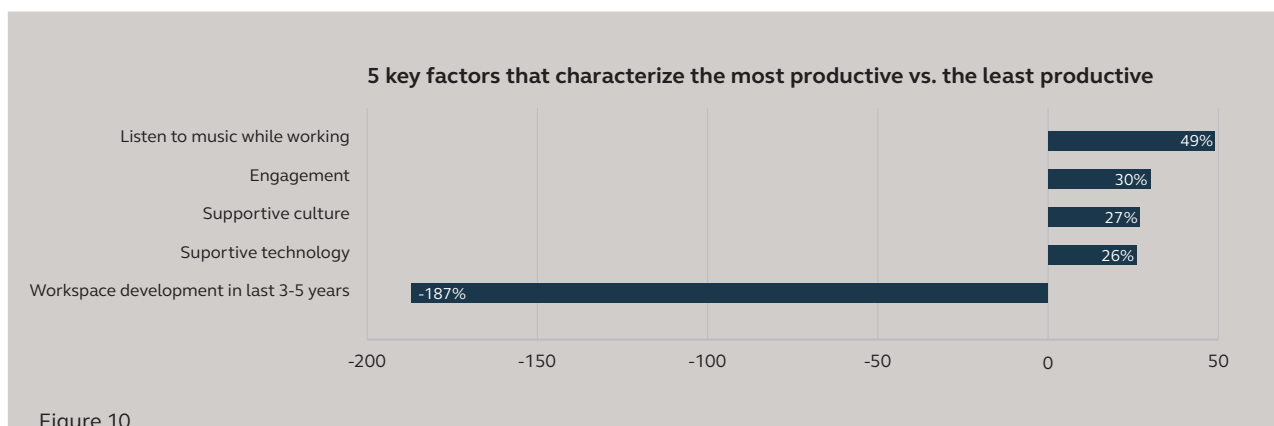
- Creation of a work flow by listening to music is a key factor for those profiles with concentration as a primary work mode
- Working with employee engagement is also on the top 5 list of things to focus on in terms of upgrading productivity
- The 'right' package of technology and supportive culture are the two key factors impacting productivity besides size of workspace

Key factors that characterize the most productive vs. the least productive for advisors

- The single most important factor is the size of workspace. The size of the workspace has increased for the most productive advisor, compared to a smaller workspace for the least productive



The productivity equation



Discover the power of conversation

Commentary by Holger Reisinger, SVP, Jabra Business Solutions

Do we still want humans in customer service?

Any CEO, proudly announcing the latest initiative to streamline operations could be heard saying: “We’re automating 97% of our customer service functions!”.

It seems that more and more organizations are jumping on that bandwagon, without understanding the consequences. When was the last time you made a call and didn’t get frustrated by the maze of “press 1 for this... press 2 for that...” options?

Some customer service processes can be automated without inconveniencing or angering customers. Allowing customers to check account balances, add or drop services or make payments online is relatively easy and low-cost. However there are lot of gains to be made by keeping people on the phone.

So here are three reasons why removing the human element from customer service is pure folly.

Reason #1: Humans Solve Problems

The most important part of customer service is resolving customers’ issues. Humans have the ability to listen, understand, seek out information, and apply accumulated knowledge and past experiences to situations. They are far better problem-solvers than any machine could ever dream of being.

When an issue requires a resolution, the risk to the organization is too big to entrust the task to a machine. At that point, the organization is at an important crossroads and can choose from two options:

1. Delight the customer with friendly service - 73% will fall in love with your brand
2. Anger the customer with poor service - 91% will leave (and tell up to 15 people about it)

Given the choice, most of us will take the human any day.

Reason #2: Humans Can Empathize

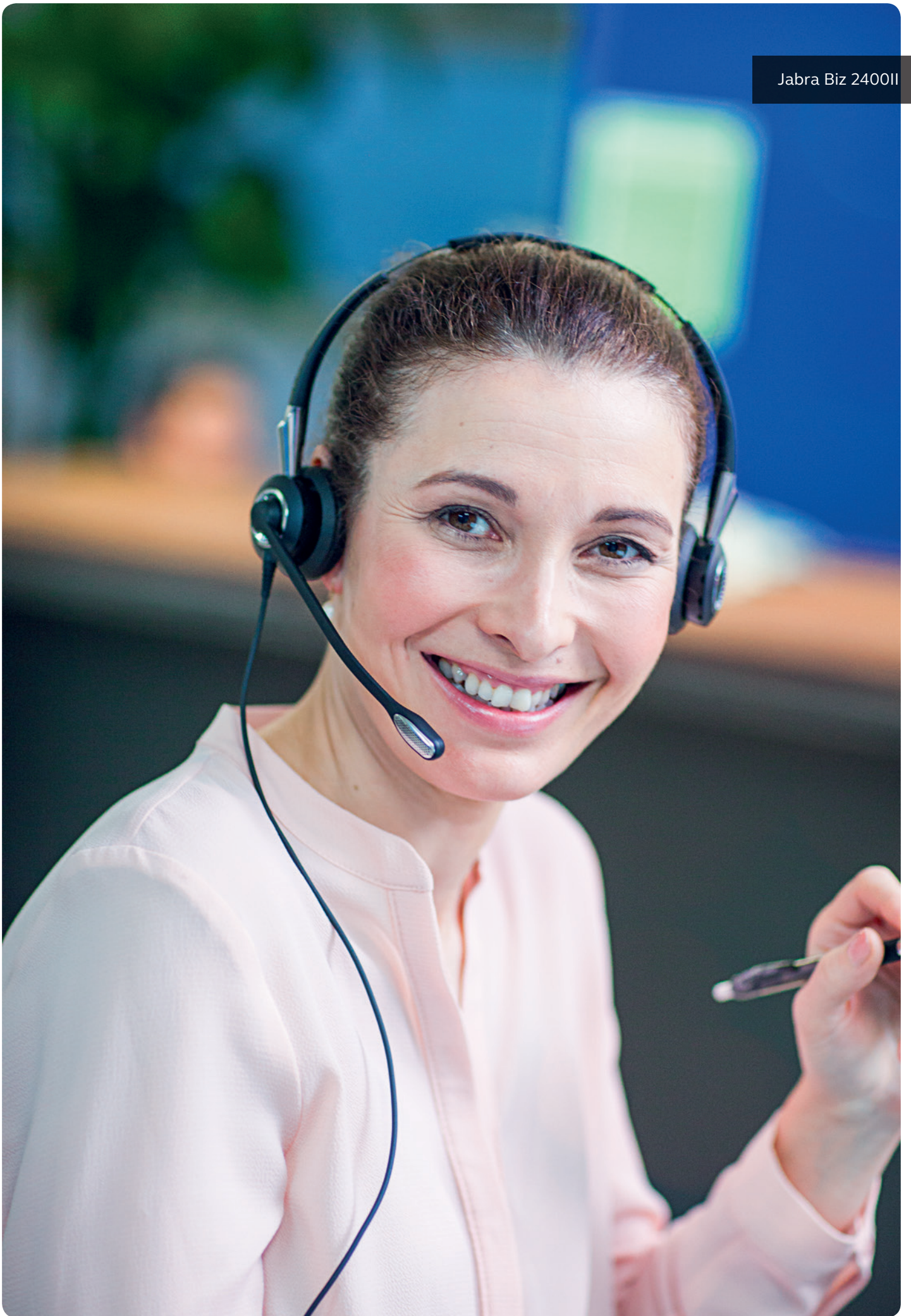
What makes people such outstanding problem-solvers is the unique human emotion of empathy. It’s the warm-and-fuzzy feeling that comes from a soothing voice that reassures you they understand your problem and can fix it.

The impersonal nature of automated machines makes them poor choices to handle vital customer service functions. The computerized voice that intones “I’m sorry you’re having trouble with your selection” isn’t sorry at all because it does not have feelings and cannot empathize with the situation.

And while we’ve all witnessed what computers are able to do these days with things like machine learning, a digital voice will never express empathy the same way as a human voice does.

Reason #3: Humans Want a Choice

Finally, there is a very basic reason why customer service efforts must include the human touch. Consumers want choices in how they receive service and some prefer to talk to another person – even if it’s to handle a mundane task like checking an account balance. Denying them the opportunity to do so is misguided. Whilst it may be more expensive to the organization, it is certainly less costly than losing a customer.



Jabra Biz 2300



The productivity paradox

Many organizations have employees that are using nonproductive ways of working, yet initiatives that improve productivity are too often achieving the opposite. New technology and office designs are introduced as a positive influence, but are instead detracting from productivity. The challenge is overcoming this paradox to achieve the ‘flexible, productive and wise work’ that is within reach. Businesses need a better understanding of human behavior offering elements of autonomy on the individual level and transparency on the collective level, and an acute awareness of when communication methods or a way of working are not delivering the intended benefits.

Jabra’s philosophy on ‘New Ways of Working’ is the idea of organizing work towards realizing people’s full potential. Jabra wants to advocate managers and employees alike to make a conscious choice of work-modes depending on the task whether collaboration, concentration, conversation or communication:

- Concentration is about making good decisions by turning information into knowledge
- Communication is transference of knowledge independent of time and location
- Collaboration is the most powerful tool to turn complex problems into valuable solutions. Bring new knowledge into play with colleagues or business partners
- Conversations between two people, who genuinely listen, understand and talk to impact behavior, is the most effective tool to elevate the value of human interactions

Organizations should continually ask themselves: Who is responsible for productivity in the modern workplace? How do we enable better productivity in the modern workplace? How do we measure the impact of better productivity?

Join the “new ways of working” initiative

Jabra’s ‘New Ways of Working’ initiative is a joint initiative that involves everybody who is struggling with changes in how we work, how we organize work and how we motivate employees and colleagues to be part of the journey. It advocates a reflection on how to best design work for improving the four Cs; concentration, conversation, communication and collaboration, and in turn becoming more innovative, productive, and successful.

Follow our blog and join us in the discussion
www.blog.jabra.com

How Jabra meets these challenges

A lot of issues with today’s working environment are about two common factors: sound and technology, as this research also shows. Jabra works specifically with audio and unified communications solutions that improve the modern work space and enable individuals to hear more, do more and be more. The modern challenges are reflected in the products that we take to market.

If you are interested in learning more, please go to:
<http://www.jabra.com/business/>

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About Jabra

Jabra, part of the GN Group, is a leading developer and manufacturer of communications and sound solutions. We are committed to letting people hear more, do more and be more than they ever thought possible. We believe that through sound, we can transform lives. Jabra innovates and empowers with sound solutions for businesses and consumers, producing corded and wireless headsets, portable and in-office speakerphones, and sports earbuds. Jabra employs 1,000 people worldwide, and produced an annual revenue of DKK3.5 bn in 2016. The GN Group operates in more than 90 countries, and has almost 150 years' experience in innovation and delivering reliability and ease of use. Founded in 1869, employing over 5,000 people, and listed on Nasdaq Copenhagen, GN makes life sound better.

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