

THE STATE OF CONTACT CENTER TRAINING

Market Research Report

JUNE 2021

Introduction

Accelerated technological changes have been a driving force for innovations in the contact center industry, and now other disruptors are pushing the boundaries of contact center operations. Most recently, COVID-19 has been the catalyst for shifting the way organizations train and onboard their front-line agents and help new hires reach proficiency. In this report, we examine the current state of training for contact centers in North America, and future trends that may become permanent changes to employee training.

We partnered with [The Analyst Agency](#) to conduct a survey targeting contact center leaders in the United States and Canada who oversaw training resources. 155 contact center professionals took part in the survey, and we are thrilled to be able to share the results with you.

Key Findings

1/

Contact centers are facing steep training & onboarding times

55% of contact centers spend 6-12 weeks training and onboarding new agents. This is potentially problematic for an industry with average annual turnover rates of 30-45% (1).

2/

Contact centers are struggling to help their team reach proficiency.

Less than 10% of contact centers have agents reaching proficiency in less than two months. 42% of contact centers take between 2-4 months and over a third spend 5-7 months helping agents become fully proficient. Additionally, helping agents reach proficiency faster was the number one thing that contact centers said was the greatest area of improvement in their training program.



3/

Engagement continues to be a challenge.

Half of the industry professionals surveyed said they wished their training was more hands-on and engaging. When asked what would make their training more engaging, participants listed role play, scenario-based training, on the job experience, and more interactions with agents.

4/

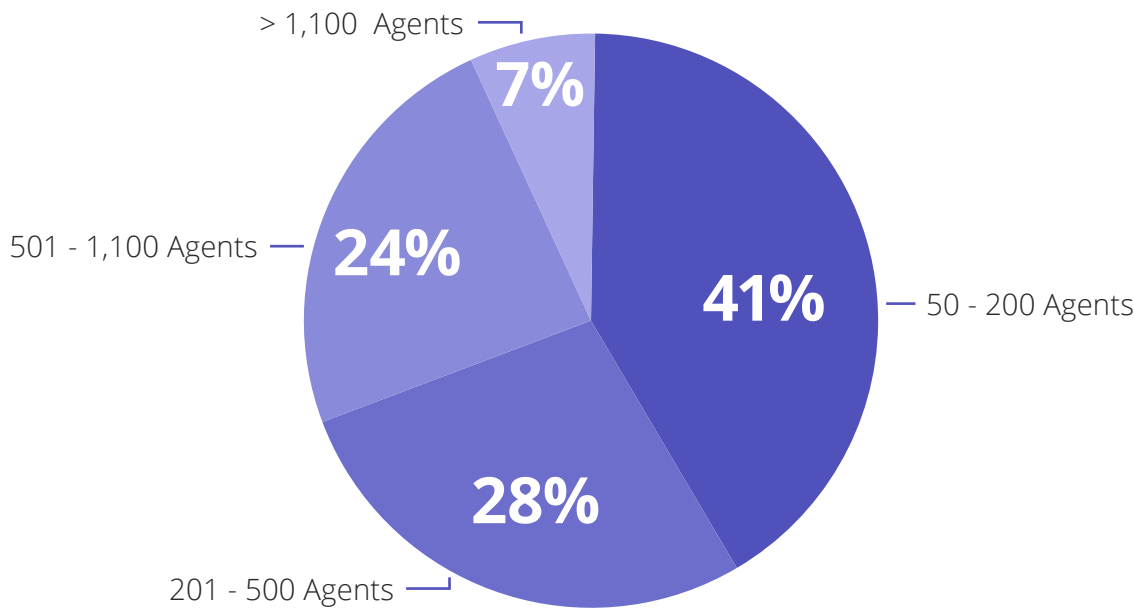
Remote training is here to stay.

73% of contact center professionals say that their training will remain virtual post-pandemic. However, it won't be an "all or nothing" change. Many contact centers have indicated that portions of their training will be remote, and other parts will return to in-person.

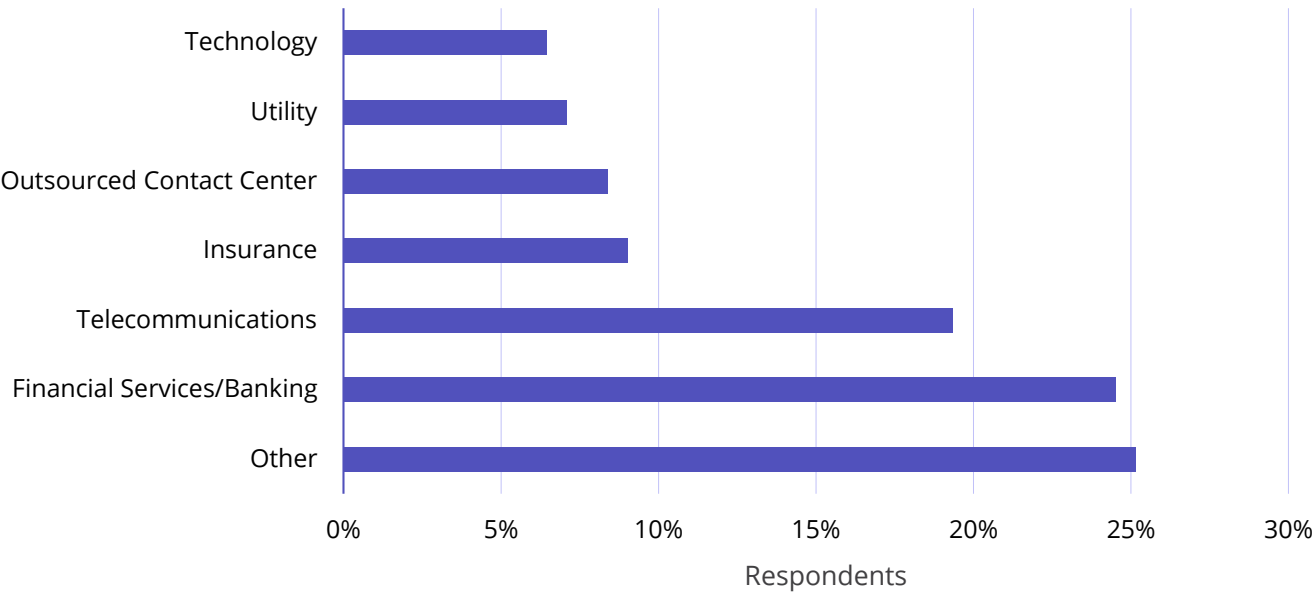
Demographics

The industry professionals who participated in the survey were decision makers of training or of training resources for contact center agents. Participants spanned across several industries and had a minimum of 50 agents in their contact center.

Contact Center size by number of Agents



Industries

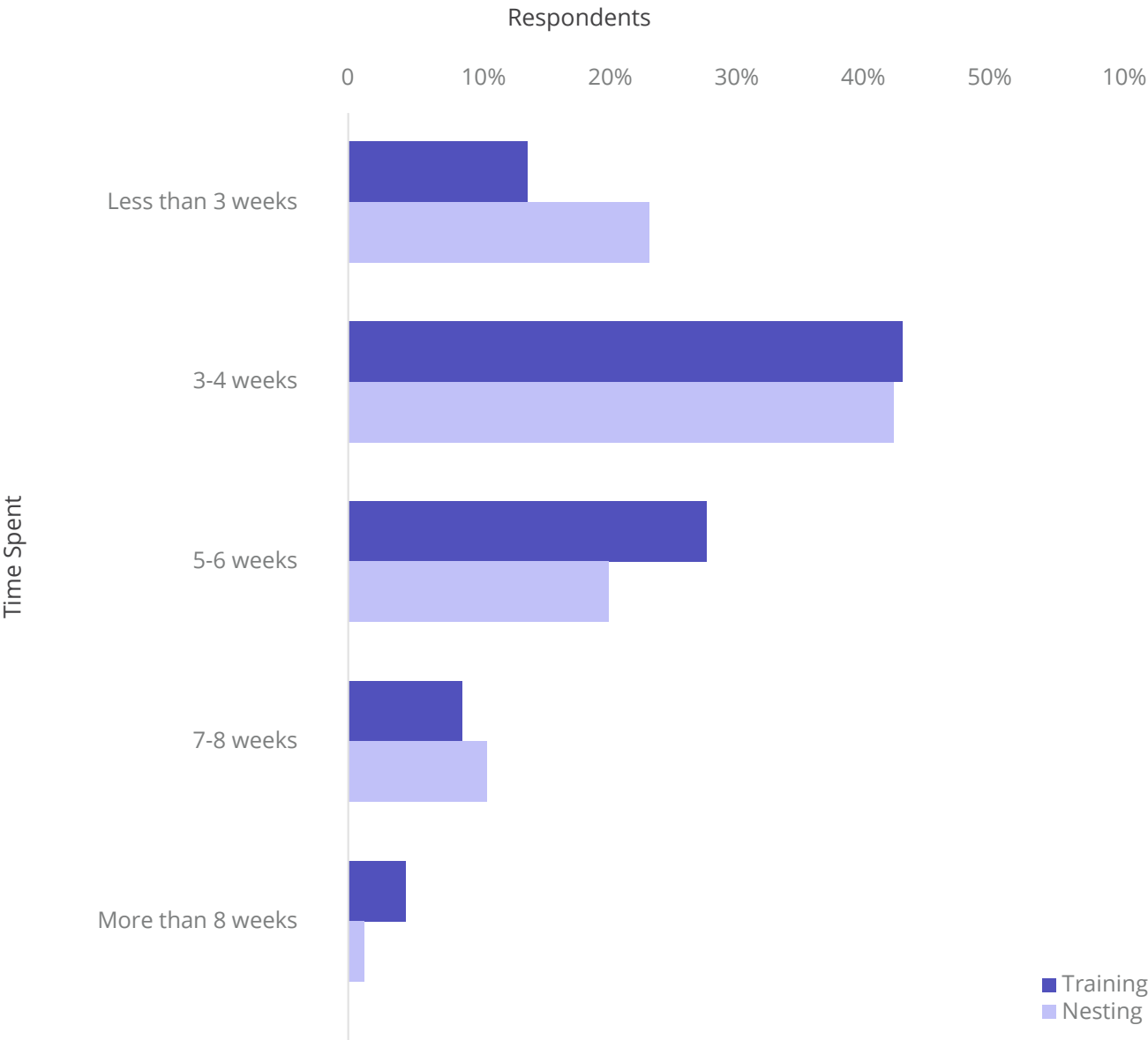


The true state of training & onboarding time

We asked contact center leaders to break down the duration of their training and nesting programs to depict an accurate picture of the true length of training and onboarding time.

Nearly 44% said agents complete training in 3-4 weeks and just over 28% take 5-6 weeks. We found a similar pattern with nesting times ranging from 3-4 weeks for 43% of contact centers, and 5-6 weeks for over 20%.

Training and Nesting Time of Contact Centers



Training vs Nesting Time of Contact Centers

Our findings seem to indicate a positive correlation between training and nesting time. Combining the duration of training and nesting of all the contact centers in the 3-4 week and 5-6 week ranges shows that **55% of contact centers spend 6-12 weeks training and onboarding new employees.**

Training vs Nesting Time of Contact Centers

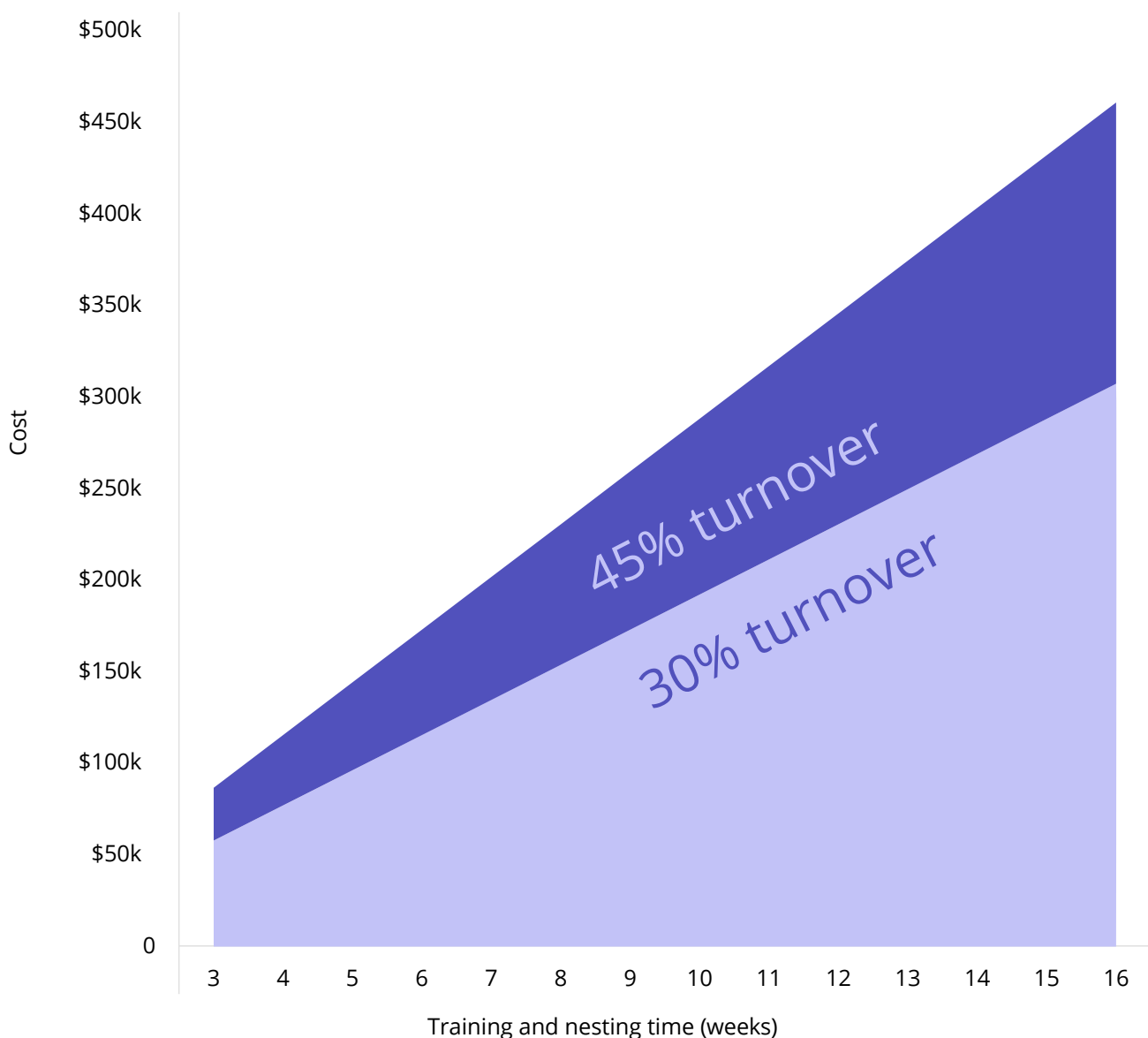
		Training				
Nesting	Weeks	< 3	3 - 4	5 - 6	7 - 8	> 8
	< 3	11%	12%	0%	1%	1%
	3 - 4	3%	25%	14%	1%	0%
	5 - 6	1%	6%	10%	4%	0%
	7 - 8	0%	1%	4%	3%	3%
	> 8	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%

The cost of training time

Combining this data on training and nesting time with industry turnover rates of 30-45% (1) and average hourly wages of \$16 (2) produces annual estimated expenditures on training and onboarding new agents.

For the 55% of contact centers that take 6-12 weeks to train and onboard new agents, training and nesting costs range from \$115,200 - \$345,600. These costs are solely the sum of agent wages, and do not include costs such as trainer's salary, HR, costs, or IT costs.

Training & nesting costs for a 100 agent contact center



Training focus & methods

Similar paying jobs spend significantly less time in training than contact center employees. For example, the average retail worker spends as few as 20 hours in training (3). So why is it 6-8 weeks or more for most contact center agents to complete training and nesting?

We asked contact centers what they spent the most time on in training and the number one thing they said was teaching agents how to navigate systems and technologies, followed by teaching employees how to execute highly complex processes.

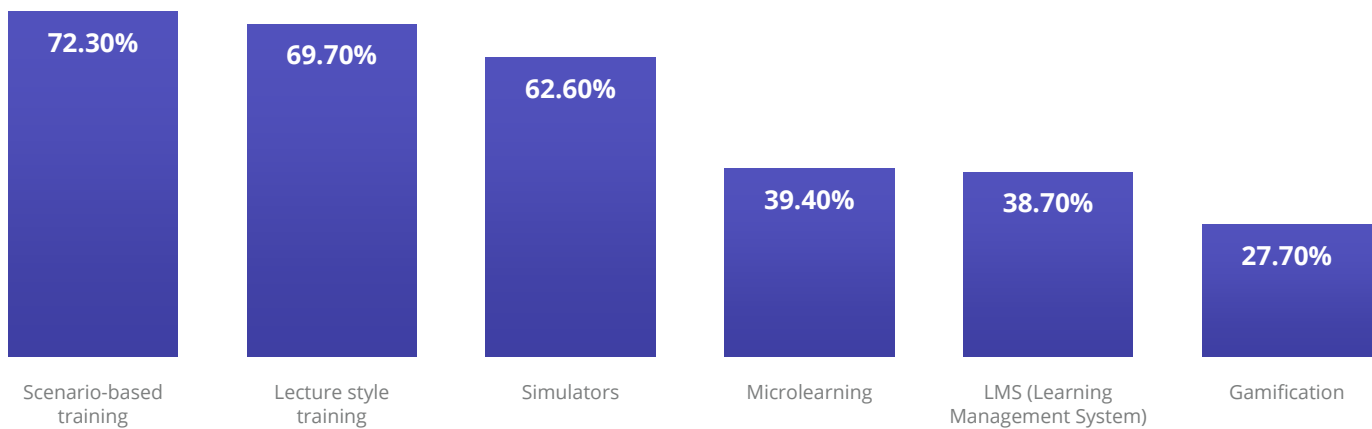
Most time spent on in training

- #1** Learning how to navigate systems and technologies
- #2** How to execute highly complex processes
- #3** Learning company/product information/ industry jargon and acronyms
- #4** Customer service and soft skills
- #5** Other

Methods used in training

Contact centers are increasingly using a wide range of tools and methods to train new hires. Among our industry professionals surveyed, we found that scenario-based training was the most commonly used training method among contact centers, followed closely by lecture style training.

Methods used in training



Post-training agent experience

Post-training proficiency

Beyond training and nesting time, speed to proficiency continues to be another significant challenge faced by contact centers. Even after an agent completes all necessary training related activities, it often takes much longer before they are confident and able to work independently.

We asked contact centers how long it takes before agents are fully proficient, specifically when agents are:

- **Confident handling every type of contact scenario**
- **Have reached quality scores and AHT of a tenured agent**
- **Can work without assistance from supervisors**

Less than 10% of contact centers say their agents reach proficiency in less than two months, with 42% taking 2-4 months, and over a third taking 5-7 months. While a 5-7 month ramp time may be adequate in more stable roles, these numbers prove problematic when combined with average turnover rates for the contact center industry which currently lie between 30-45% (1).

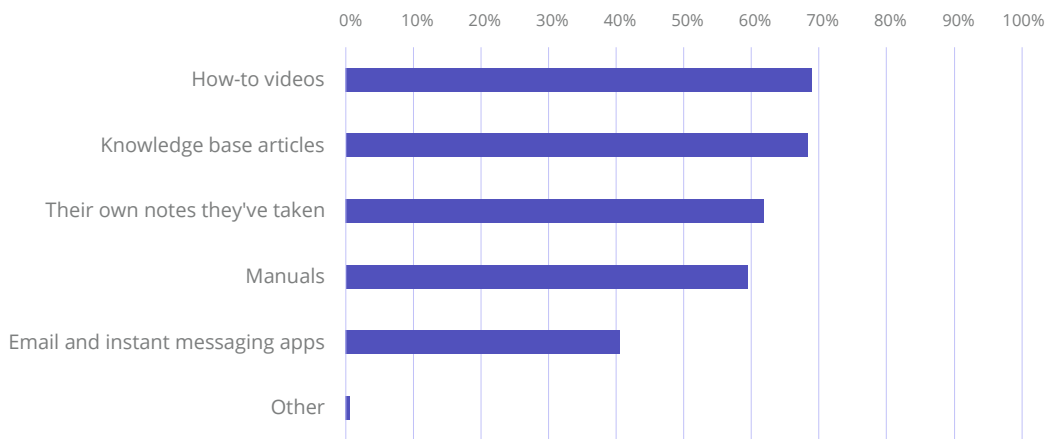
With these turnover rates, assuming agents complete training, contact centers are left with just a few months of productivity before agents move on to other opportunities.



How agents access information

There are several factors that can impact an agent's post-training experience, including how agents access information. This is where agents go when they need to review something they learned in training. The surveyed industry professionals say their agents use several methods to access information post-training, with the top three being how-to videos, knowledge base articles, and agents' own notes they've taken.

How agents access information post-training



Post-training agent performance

Once agents complete training and nesting, their individual performance varies greatly. Approximately a third of contact centers feel that agents are confident and can work independently after completing training and nesting. That leaves two thirds of contact centers with agents who rely on assistance from supervisors for assistance post-training.

Agents performance after their first round of classroom training and nesting.

Agents are confident, make few if any errors and are able to work independently	34.2%
Agents are somewhat confident but need assistance from supervisors for more complex scenarios	53.5%
Agents can only handle a few simple call types and require assistance from supervisors for all contact scenarios	11%
Agents are overwhelmed after training, and make frequent errors on simple call types when they start taking live calls	1.3%

Greatest areas for improvement

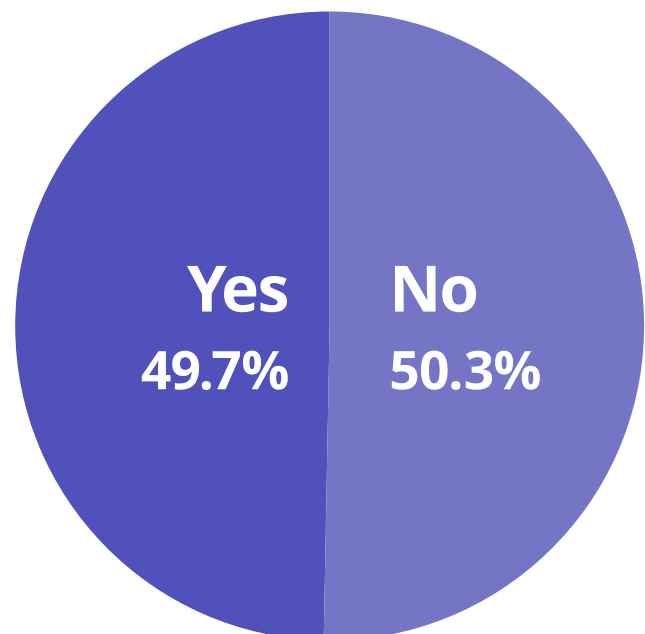
Even the best training programs have room for improvement. Notably, contact centers said the greatest area of improvement in their training was to help their agents reach proficiency faster. Following this, contact centers are looking to help keep their agents engaged.

Greatest area for improvement in training



While over 25% of contact centers said keeping agents engaged was their greatest area of improvement in training, half of the surveyed industry professionals said that they wished their training was more hands-on and engaging.

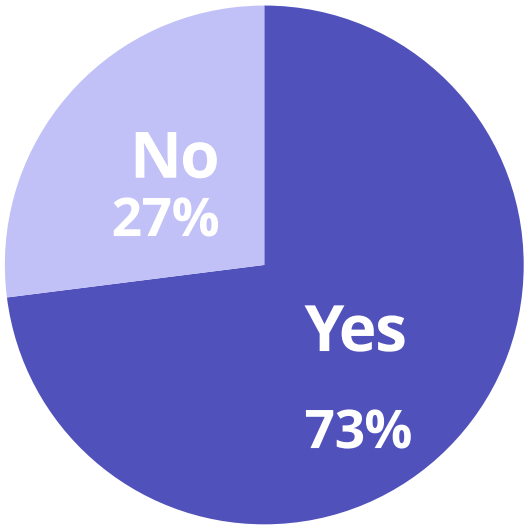
Do you wish your training was more hands-on and engaging?



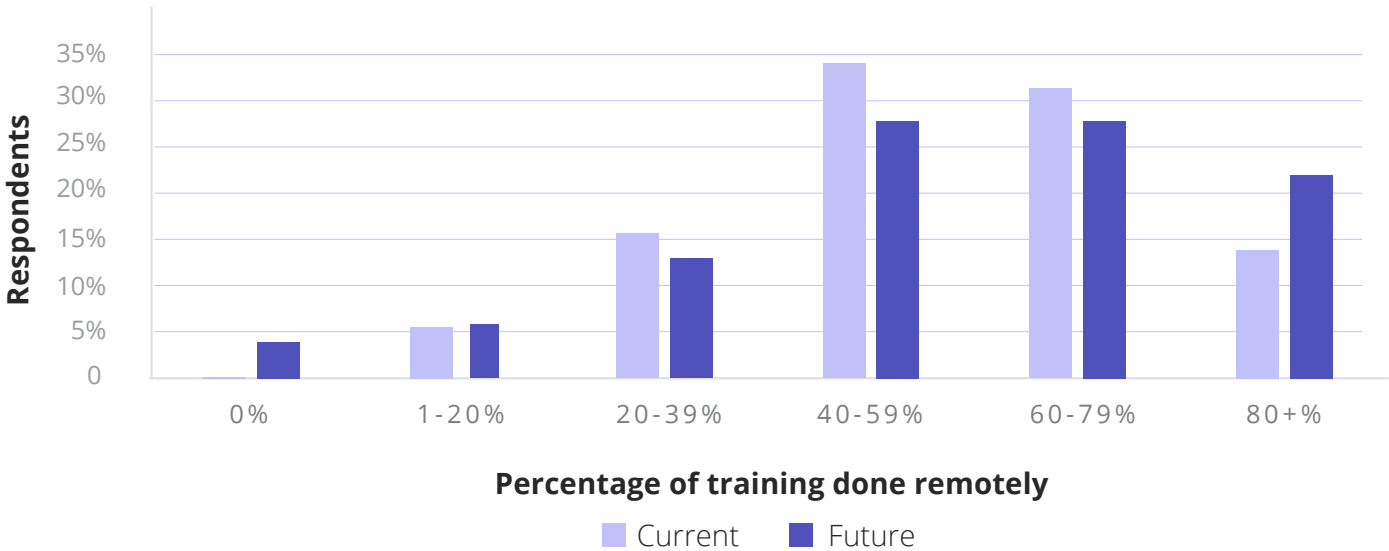
The state and future of remote training

COVID-19 has significantly and possibly permanently altered the way contact centers train their agents. In fact, over 73% of contact centers say their training will continue to be remote even after the pandemic has settled down. But of the contact centers who will stick with remote training, it won't be an "all or nothing" approach. Of the contact centers who said they are currently doing remote/virtual training, 50% said that 60+% of their training program is done virtually. When asked what proportion of training will be remote/virtual in the future, that number drops slightly to 45% of contact centers who will do 60+% of their training remotely.

Will training continue to be remote post-pandemic?



Proportion of current and future training done remotely



Final thoughts:

Recommendations for successful contact center training

The above data highlights several challenges that the contact center industry is facing with training and onboarding. To combat these challenges contact centers will need the right approaches and tools at their disposal. To improve the training experience and post-training agent performance, we recommend the following strategies.

1/ Better access to information

The core of any training program is for new employees to know and understand new information whether it's something simple like corporate goals, or more complex processes and contact scenarios. Our results indicate that nearly 70% of contact centers have agents using challenging and time-consuming methods to access information such as how-to videos and knowledge base articles. To help agents better learn new concepts, it's critical that information is:

- **Quick and simple to find when on the phone with a customer**
- **Easy for new employees to understand and follow**
- **Accurate and consistently reviewed and updated**
- **Accessible whether employees are in-office or remote**



2/ **Reduce reliance on memorization**

70% of contact centers surveyed rely on lecture style training which requires agents to memorize large volumes of information and slows down the training process significantly. Instead, contact centers should ensure agents know where to find answers to their questions and information when they need it. With this approach new hires can get up to speed faster and start assisting customers sooner.

3/ **Increasing emphasis on scenario-based learning**

As mentioned above, lecture style training is still used regularly by 70% of contact centers. The challenges with this approach are that agents have difficulty focusing during lectures, and it is not optimal for retaining information. According to the forgetting curve, within as little as one hour from the first presentation employees forget 50% of presented material. By 24 hours, that number climbs to 70%, and by one week, 90% of the material is forgotten (4).

In contrast, learning by doing maintains a retention rate of 75% (5). Replacing portions of lecture style training with scenario-based learning helps employees feel comfortable with the technology and systems they'll encounter, and gives employees the confidence to handle more challenging contact scenarios.

Additional Sources

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Procedure*Flow*

About ProcedureFlow

ProcedureFlow is a step-by-step visual guide that supports agents as they navigate company processes. With a knowledge management solution that simplifies complex information, employees can spend less time searching and focus on what they do best. ProcedureFlow helps contact centers improve efficiency and better serve customers by making information easier to find, create, and maintain.



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