

Parlance Perspective

Join us as we take a new look at key business challenges facing today's healthcare organizations.



The Issue:



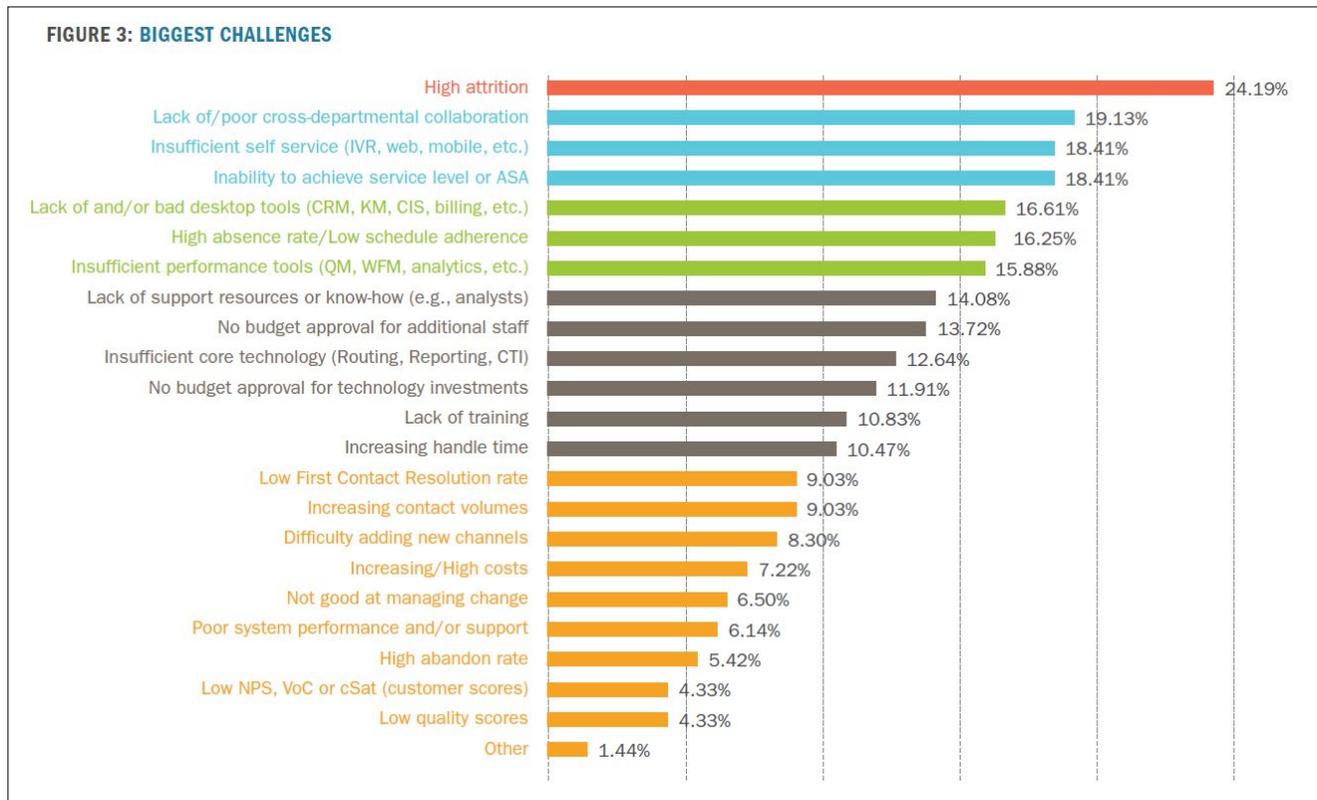
When Key Departments are Disconnected – Callers Suffer

Many hospitals and healthcare systems face an organizational challenge that creates inefficiency and lowers service levels – a disconnect between the contact center and the main switchboard. Though these two departments should be working hand in hand, they’re often operating independently, without much communication or coordination. The result? The right hand (contact center) may not know what the left hand (PBX switchboard) is doing, and vice versa. And that’s not good for any organization, particularly in the healthcare industry.

Why does this issue matter? Because it lowers service levels, frustrates callers, creates a poor caller experience, and wastes money. Ultimately, these two groups share a common goal – to meet the needs of all callers, quickly and efficiently, without transfer to a different destination. From outside the organization, callers don’t know – or care – that there are two departments or functions handling calls. They just want to get to the person or resource they’re calling – whether it’s Medical Records, a patient, the ER, scheduling, or physician referral – and complete any transaction they want to complete. Any delay or hand-off risks turning a positive caller experience into a frustration.

A top issue for healthcare contact centers.

According to a recent survey by Contact Center Pipeline, cross-departmental collaboration is a top challenge for contact centers in the healthcare industry, making realigning processes a critical issue. So this disconnect is a well-known issue, one that merits exploration, organizational evolution, and technological innovation.



Source: “2016 Contact Center Challenges and Priorities Survey Results”, Contact Center Pipeline, January 2016.

First, it's important to take a close look at where these functions fit within your organization, since they often reside in different business units. PBX switchboard operations may be part of the security department, since these operators also handle dispatch duties, or within another related department. In contrast, contact centers tend to reside in the business office (billing, financial services) or patient access (registration/admitting). While these departments often reside in different business units for good reasons, they have significant overlap when it comes to ensuring good caller experiences. Failing to recognize the intertwined roles of these two departments is costly for your operation and frustrating for your customers.

It's time to bridge the gap.

These two groups – PBX switchboard and the contact center – share common goals, and need to collaborate closely to ensure a fast, effective response to all calls, from routine switchboard requests to scheduling an appointment to getting a referral. But being located in separate parts – or silos – of an organization inherently creates distance and challenges. Plus, management tends to think differently about these two groups, with the switchboard viewed as a cost center while the contact center is positioned as a resource that helps drive revenue.

Callers don't care about departmental distinctions.

None of these organizational differences are visible to outside callers, however. Callers are just looking for information or a resource as quickly and easily as possible. They may call the first number that they find online, on a bill, or elsewhere – regardless of whether it's the right one. They may call a physician referral number with a general switchboard request, or vice versa. When callers go rogue, that's where an organizational issue can become a customer service issue. Because these two key departments may not be collaborating together seamlessly, callers may experience delays, multiple hand-offs, or other difficulties reaching their final destination.

In short, this disconnect creates dissatisfaction among your callers. But it also has an impact on your operations – boosting call loads, creating long call queues, stressing agents, and lowering morale.

Data from our healthcare customers shows that routine switchboard requests add up to about 30% of the overall call volume in contact centers. And PBX operators also receive significant volumes of calls that should go to the contact center. These misdirected calls aren't the caller's fault – they're just a fact of life for any healthcare organization. They can be reduced by distinguishing your main numbers clearly online and elsewhere, but your outside callers will never call the right number 100 percent of the time.

What can be done?

There are two general ways of dealing with a disconnect between your switchboard and contact center – aligning processes and empowering operators and agents with new technology and tools. The first requires an executive-level commitment to bringing these departments together and collaborating on call handling/routing as if they are one department. The second is perhaps the easier of the two – using advanced call handling technology to enable two departments to work as one.

A new, more effective approach to handling routine requests.

At Parlance, we work with health systems to bring together PBX switchboard and contact center operations so callers get to the right resource quickly, no matter what number they call. Parlance Operator Assistant – our advanced call handling solution – can handle any type of request that arrives at any number. Callers simply ask for what they need, from scheduling an appointment, reaching a patient, or discussing their bill. Parlance Operator Assistant then offloads the general information calls – allowing them to self-serve – and routes the rest to the appropriate agent. All invisibly to the caller.

The result? With Operator Assistant, a caller to your scheduling line asks for medical records and is quickly connected to that department – without an agent getting involved, or multiple hand-offs. A caller to your main number who needs to schedule a podiatry appointment is directed directly to a scheduling agent to complete that transaction – without requiring any attention from an operator.

For simplicity and efficiency, we deliver Operator Assistant as a managed service, taking primary responsibility for call routing. And our solution fits seamlessly into a wide range of existing environments, including PBX (we're agnostic, open to all), operator consoles, Unified Communications (we don't replace, we supplement and extend), and many more.

We'd be glad to discuss how to bring your PBX switchboard and contact center operations closer for greater efficiency, an exceptional caller experience – and higher service levels. Just contact us today to start shedding light on this call handling issue and others that affect your business.



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