

Resolving Customer Service Failures: There is always tension between front-line staff and their back-office support teams in delivering customer service

Resolving the tension between a front-line sales team and their back-office support teams resulted in increased coordination between the teams and an improvement in the service provided to customers.

The Problem

Front-line teams are dependent on their support teams to help fulfil customer requests. It was observed that in reality, sales staff were spending too much time themselves doing tasks or following-up with the back-office staff to complete the necessary work.

The Approach

A full Lean Six Sigma DMAIC approach was deployed to understand the realities of the current situation, to uncover the root causes that were driving the sales team's behaviour and to then identify and deploy solutions across the back-office and sales teams to resolve the identified issues.

Findings

The analysis showed that front-line teams were spending up to 7% of their day chasing up work and that in fact, 31% of the work completed by the back-office did not meet published SLAs for the time to complete the tasks that lead to increasing tension and eroding trust. It was also determined that the back-office had no concept of the time it was taking to complete work, or of the customers' expectations for delivery.

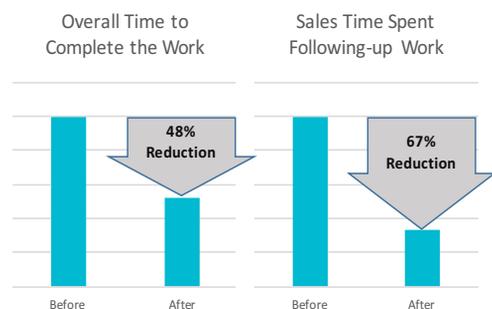
Solutions

To remedy these issues, solutions included the amendments to the work management system to show SLA due dates, clearer instructions to the

sales teams on how to submit work requests and a redesign of the work allocation process within the back-office. These solutions were supported by updated documentation and standard operating procedures adopted across the business.

Results

The solutions delivered immediate changes in behaviour and a significant improvement in the speed at which the work was completed. This in turn increased the trust between the teams and helped to reduce the tension between the sales and back-office teams.



Sales Team and Back-Office Alignment is Critical

In most modern operations, front-line teams no longer work in isolation to meet customer needs. Now there is usually a support team, or back-office function which takes responsibility for the actual fulfilment of many of the customers' needs. If there is a mismatch, or failure point between these two functions, customer needs are not met, and internal tension escalates to critical levels.

Resolving these failure points is achievable and can have a significant positive impact on the business results and the customer.

