



THOUGHT LEADERSHIP SERIES

BLENDED WORK TEAMS

Written by **Tony Tregurtha**
CEO, Enlighten Operational Excellence



CREATING BLENDED WORK TEAMS

Vendors in the market are encouraging their clients to implement “blended work teams”, whereby relatively straightforward transactions from the back office are moved and processed by contact centre staff during quieter periods. At face value, blended work teams seem like a good solution in environments characterised by volume fluctuations and where work can seamlessly be moved between teams.

They provide the flexibility to take advantage of the inevitable latent capacity that exists during quieter times. However, after more than 25 years of working in call centres and back-office processing areas, I advise **extreme caution** in instituting this approach as it can lead to disastrous outcomes if not implemented correctly.

ADVANTAGES OF BLENDED WORK TEAMS

There are several advantages to implementing blended work teams. Most notably, they allow companies to employ a more flexible

resourcing approach, which can save time, money and stress. For example, blended work teams enable companies to:

- Instantly tap into a pool of on-demand professionals.
- Access the exact right skills for specific projects.
- Strengthen the current workforce.
- Reduce the need to hire a new team.

COMMON PITFALLS OF BLENDED WORK TEAMS

The main issue with a 100% blended work team is that contact centre agents are multitasking and need to quickly switch from one mode to the next (i.e. from talking to customers on the phone to processing transactions).

Multitasking is often praised; however, the lack of focus leads to mistakes and decreased productivity. Switching from one task to another is also highly disruptive and can cause:



Higher waste and poorer service

Problems arise when an agent has only partially processed a transaction and receives a phone call. Many transactions cannot be left incomplete, leaving the agent with 3 choices:

- Stop working on the transaction and lose all work completed so far.
- Complete the transaction and keep the customer waiting.
- Complete the transaction while simultaneously talking to the customer on the phone.

From years of observation, people tend to choose the third option, which not only increases errors, but also results in poor customer service due to the agent being unable to dedicate his/her full attention to the caller.



Reduced quality

Doing more than one task at a time is distracting to employees and can have a huge negative impact on quality. I have seen many instances of blended work teams resulting in significant financial losses for clients. The most memorable example occurred in a bank, which decided to move the duty of “stuffing envelopes” from the back office to the contact centre to better occupy agents during downtime. These envelopes were to be filled with bank statements containing confidential customer information.

Unfortunately for the bank, the multitasking resulted in dozens of confidential statements being sent to the wrong customer because agents were constantly being interrupted and could not focus on the task at hand. You can imagine the PR nightmare that unfolded when a client was mistakenly sent the confidential bank statement of another rather prominent customer!



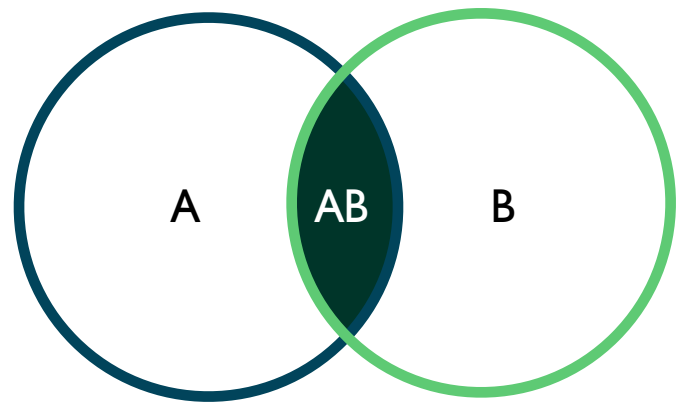
Processing inefficiency

When an agent is focused on processing a particular type of work, they can get into “the zone” or become immersed in the routine, which results in higher productivity. However, when someone switches between many different types of work (especially more complex tasks), processing times are often impacted because now lateral thinking is required. The chaos interrupts the process efficiency.

BLENDED WORK TEAMS DONE RIGHT

There often is considerable latent capacity in many contact centres that can be tapped with blended teams. The most fruitful and cost-effective way to structure these teams is to treat each of them like an independent event and understand:

- Contact centre demand.
- Complexity of the calls and processing activities.
- System limitations (dual systems/ability to save incomplete work).



Once the above factors are clearly understood, the next steps are to:

- Determine the number of agents who will be 100% dedicated to taking calls, i.e. who will not be processing any work from the back office whatsoever.
- Schedule this group of agents to a low Erlang factor (indicating wait times).
- Schedule the number of “overflow” agents who will be part of the blended work.
- Schedule the number of agents who will be 100% dedicated to processing transactions.







“If done right, blended work teams can become a considerable source of flexibility and efficiency.”

ABOUT US

To meet our vision of being the partner that business leaders want to work with, we understand that a strong, experienced, effective and visionary team is needed, with the energy, commitment and drive to succeed. We deliver on our promise through our leading propriety methodology that combines business experience, technology and data analytics.

CONTACT US



-  +61 (2) 923 22771
-  www.enlighten-opex.com.au
-  info@enlighten-opex.com
-  Enlighten Australia