



Update to the June 2020  
Work at Home Study

## Interviews with Contact Center Leaders

November 2020



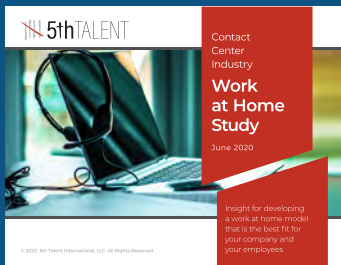
What they said about  
work at home fatigue  
and what to do about it.

## Background | Who Participated in the Contact Center Leader Interviews?

During September and October of 2020, 5th Talent International interviewed contact center leaders to understand their experience with shifting employees to a work at home model. The purpose of these interviews was to provide an update to the previous Contact Center Work at Home Study which in May 2020 surveyed more than 4,000 agents and supervisors across 7 countries.

The interviews provided insight regarding:

- Their initial shift to the work at home model
- Current experiences with remote employees
- Work at home best practices
- Post pandemic plans



[Read the Previous Study](#)

### Summary of the Previous 5th Talent International Contact Center Work at Home Study

The study uncovered that employees want a mixed work at home model, and it identified key challenges to sustainability. It also revealed that initially performance improved on most metrics when employees shifted to working at home.



**Participants:**  
41 Contact Center Leaders

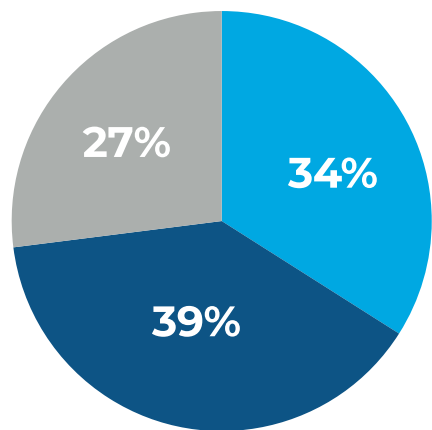


**Number of agents represented:**  
40,000+ agents are represented among the companies interviewed



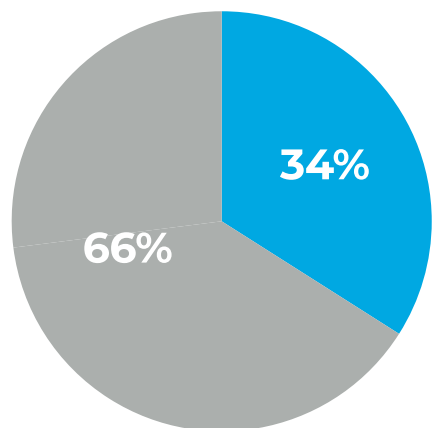
**Contact Center Locations:**  
11 Countries

## Background | Who Participated in the Contact Center Leader Interviews?



### Contact Center Locations:

- Small (0-199 agents): 27%
- Medium (200-999 agents): 34%
- Large (1,000+ agents): 39%



### Use Outsourcers:

34% of companies use contact center outsourcing companies

### Industries:

Utilities, Financial Services, Insurance, Healthcare, Retail, Government, Travel/Hospitality, Technology, and Communications



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## Summary | Interviews with Contact Center Leaders


5th Talent International recently interviewed 41 contact center leaders regarding their shift to a work at home model for their employees.

Listen to a J.D. Power podcast with 5th Talent International as they discuss issues and trends related to the shift to Work-at-Home.

[Listen to the Podcast](#)

**J.D. Power  
Work at Home  
Podcast**

Featuring  
Ted Nardin and  
Brian Kearney of  
5th Talent  
International



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# 01

### **Most Employees are Experiencing Work at Home Fatigue and it is Impacting Performance**

Leaders said work at home fatigue is a wide-spread issue and most key performance indicators are trending downward to be at or below pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels. A negative trend with absenteeism and adherence may indicate a looming employee attrition issue.

# 02

### **Work at Home Employee Development Has Been Less Effective**

Most managers and agents have not been trained to overcome the challenges of the work at home model. New hire training delivered virtually has been less effective.

# 03

### **Leaders are in a Holding Pattern Due to Uncertainty and a Lack of Resources**

Uncertainty about the COVID-19 pandemic and depleted 2020 budgets have put most contact center leaders and their companies in a waiting mode rather than addressing the work at home fatigue issue.

# 04

### **Most Leaders are Not Allowing any Agents to Work in the Center, but Most Plan to Utilize a Mixed Home and Center Model in the Future**

Although most leaders are operating a completely virtual work at home model today, they plan to provide access to a center after the pandemic.

# 05

### **Allowing Agents to Occasionally Work in the Center Appears to be the Most Impactful Best Practice to Reduce Work at Home Fatigue and Improve Performance**

Other valuable best practices shared by leaders were to solicit feedback from their employees to understand their experiences, reduce reporting ratios, and training employees to overcome the inherent challenges of the work at home model.

# What Leaders Are Saying About Work at Home Challenges

Most employees are experiencing work at home fatigue and it is impacting performance



# Work at Home Fatigue Has Set In | Leaders Believe it is Impacting Performance

The downward trend in adherence and absenteeism may be signaling a potential attrition problem.



Employee work at home fatigue is a wide-spread issue



Most key performance indicators are trending downward to be at or below pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels

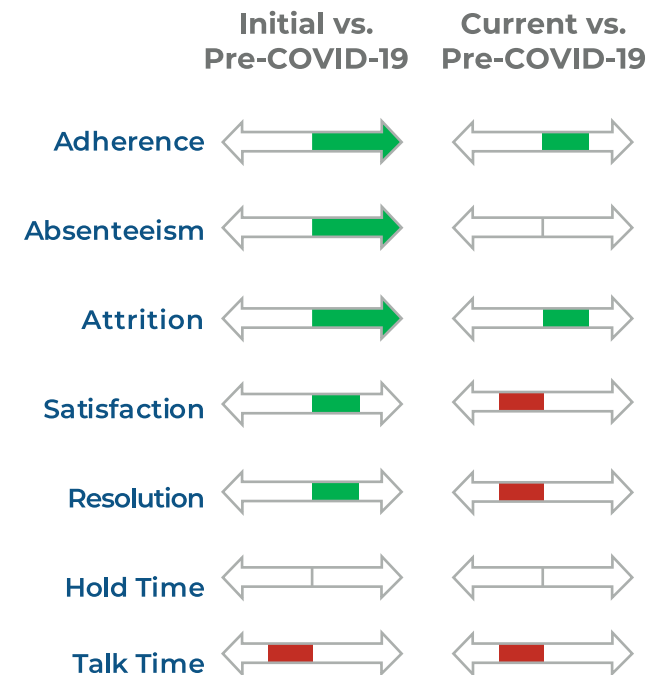


Negative trend with absenteeism and adherence may indicate a looming employee attrition issue

Approximately eight months after contact center employees transitioned from the center to their homes due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most employees are experiencing work at home fatigue, according to contact center leaders. They said initially when employees transitioned to their homes most key performance indicators (KPIs) improved. But now most KPIs are trending downward to be the same or below pre-Covid-19 levels. The negative reversal regarding absenteeism and adherence is especially concerning because it may indicate a looming attrition issue.

Leaders remarked that their outsourcers were quicker to respond and are currently performing around pre-pandemic levels, but they have the same concerns regarding work at home fatigue.

## Comparing Performance to Pre-COVID-19 Pandemic Levels



### Legend

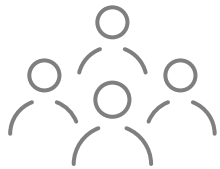


Most managers and agents have not been trained to overcome the challenges of the work at home model. New hire training delivered virtually has been less effective.



### Training to Adapt to the Work at Home Model

*"We have not provided training for how to work at home."*



#### Managers

Managers and supervisors expend dramatically more effort while working at home compared to agents. With the loss of in-person contact they need to learn how to effectively adapt to leading remote teams.



#### Agents

Many agents have received technology training, but not training on how to adapt to working at home. Each person may struggle with different challenges, and training on how to effectively address these will reduce fatigue and improve performance.

### Virtual New Hire Onboarding and Training

*"It is less effective"*

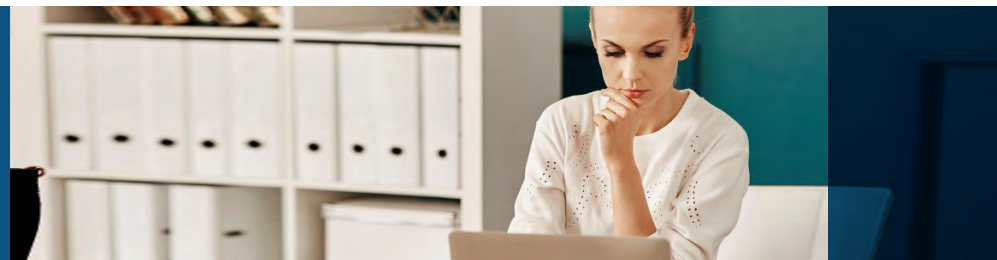


#### New Hires

Remote onboarding and training for new hires is resulting in a lower speed to base-line proficiency and increased attrition. Remote new hires are not only struggling with acquiring knowledge and skills, but they are less connected to the company, their supervisors, and their co-workers.



The ongoing pandemic and depleted budgets are delaying many decisions.



### Uncertainty Regarding the COVID-19 Pandemic

Contact center leaders are unsure about the duration of COVID-19 pandemic. They are also concerned about major resurgence of the disease that could impact customer volume and their ability to bring people back in the center.



### 2020 Budget Spent on Unplanned Shift to a Work at Home Model

Most leaders have serious budget constraints in 2020 because a major part of their budget was spent on unplanned technology needs.



### Their Company is in a Holding Pattern

Executives at many companies are in a holding pattern which is making it difficult for contact center leaders to get approval to execute their strategy.



### Unsure About What is Causing Work at Home Fatigue and How to Prevent It

Many companies have surveyed their employees about working from home and their future preference, but most contact leaders are still uncertain about what is causing work at home fatigue and how to prevent it.



### They are also Suffering from work at home Fatigue

Most contact center leaders are struggling from their own work at home fatigue because they feel they are working more and getting less done.

# Work Arrangements | Where Employees are Working & Plans for the Future

Currently, most leaders are not allowing agents to work in the center, but most plan to utilize a mixed model in the future where people can work in the center and at home.



## Center

Everyone Working in the Center



## Home

Everyone Working at Home



## Mix

Working at Home & in the Center

	Center	Home	Mix
<b>Current Work Arrangements</b>	None	Most	Many
<b>Future Work Arrangements Desired by Employees</b>	Few	Many	Most
<b>Future Work Arrangements Planned by Leaders</b>	Very Few	Some	Most

# Leaders Share Best Practices

Insight from leaders experiencing  
the least work at home fatigue  
and getting great performance



Allowing agents to occasionally work in the center appears to be the most impactful of many best practices to reduce work at home fatigue and improve performance.



### Leadership

- Understand the challenges your people are having by getting their feedback.
- Create and communicate a plan to address challenges. Provide regular live updates and record them for those who can't be in the broadcast.

### Performance Management

- Reduce the emphasis on handle time and hold time to take pressure off the agents and focus more on resolution and customer satisfaction.
- Have agents occasionally work in the center.

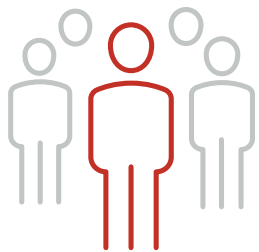
### Monitoring

- Don't over monitor because it burns people out, reduces trust, and they disengage from your company culture.
- Invest in methods to prevent agents from having access to sensitive customer data like allowing the customer to enter in credit card information in an IVR or be transferred to a secure group of agents.
- Establish a fraud detection program that flags suspicious behavior rather than monitoring everything.

### Outsourcing

- Collaborate and share best practices among multiple outsourcers.
- Invest in your outsourcers which may include providing resources and training.

Effective supervisors have learned how to overcome the communication challenges of the work at home model and continue to engage and develop each of their agents.



**Supervisors**

### Reducing Effort

- Decrease supervisor to agent ratios to provide more time for one-on-one interaction.
- Reduce non-agent interaction workload.

### Connecting with Your Team

- Avoid canceling or rescheduling meetings, especially one on one meetings, because it sends a message that your people are not the priority.
- Be available and approachable virtually.
- Utilize voice and video communication more than emails and texting because text forms of communication are less engaging.
- Provide daily team check in meetings and encourage questions and discussion.
- Facilitate team collaboration virtually and engage agents in problem solving and improvement projects.

### Training and Development

- Train supervisors to effectively lead remote teams, because the work at home model is fundamentally different.
- Encourage supervisors to focus on agent development which is often left behind when there is a transition to working at home.
- Provide virtual mentoring programs for new supervisors.

To reduce work at home fatigue, agents need to know how to overcome their individual challenges, continue to be connected to the company and their co-workers, and have the support and flexibility they need to be successful.



### Agents

#### Reducing Effort

- Enable people to occasionally work in the center because it appears to reduce work at home fatigue and improves performance.
- Allow work at home employees to choose split shifts, longer breaks, and flexible break times. These approaches will help them manage their work at home life.
- Pay for equipment and internet connectivity and provide some funding for creating a good work at home space (including furniture).

#### Connecting with Your Team

- Enable agents to communicate with each other via voice and/or video, because texting is less engaging.
- Conduct virtual team trivia events which engage agents through informal and genuine interactions.
- Create team walking competitions which are a great way to get people out of their homes.
- Host an activity periodically in the center to allow them to reengage with the company and co-workers.
- Provide off-site opportunities for teams to get together for an activity or a meal.

#### Training and Development

- Help agents adjust to a working at home by overcoming individual challenges.
- Onboard and train new hires in the center as much as possible.
- Improve virtual training by having smaller classes and at least 2 trainers in each session.
- Provide virtual mentoring programs for new agents.

# The 5th Talent Solution for Excelling at Home

Transferring Agent Success  
to Their Homes



## The Work at Home Model is Different

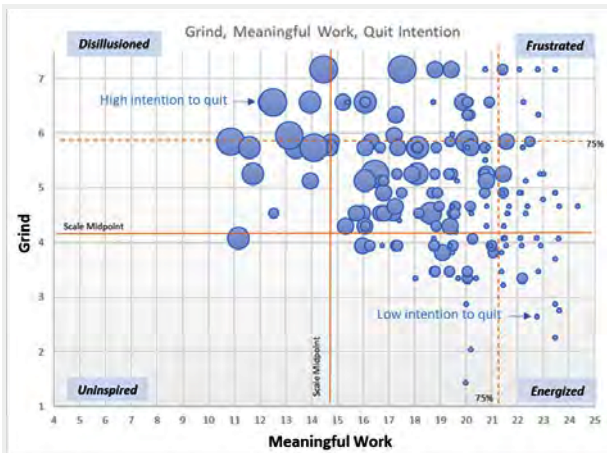


Through our research we uncovered five challenges to long-term success:

1. Increased effort
2. Less effective coaching
3. Increased isolation and loneliness
4. Reduced collaboration
5. Withdrawal from company culture

## The Excelling at Home Program

Set up a free Consultation



### Meaningful Work at Home Assessment

#### Survey & Operational Review

Gain valuable insight into your work at home culture by collecting employee perceptions about the potential for meaningful work and challenges of working at home.



### Leading Remote Teams Senior Leaders & Supervisors

Leading remote teams requires adopting a different mindset, a mindset more like a "life coach." Participants are guided through a self-discovery process to learn new skills to build a highly functioning team of engaged employees.



### Adapting to Your Home Office Agents

This workshop helps identify and resolve fundamental challenges with adjusting to working at home, including managing isolation and feelings of loneliness while encouraging teammates who may be feeling the same.





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