Tit-for-Tat: Meeting Customer Expectations
by Wedge Greene and Barbara Lancaster

Part 2 of a 3 part series on Customer Service and the Reintegration of the Contact Center (CC), OSS and business lines in Telecom. [See part 1: 'Customer Service in the Enhanced Contact Center' which appeared in Pipeline's October, 2006 issue.]

Change, Convergence & Crossover
Straight up: the blatant message is that today, our industry does not meet customer expectations. However, it is widely recognized that today's Service Providers (those that are left) finally are now ready to transition from the traditional ways to a more modern 'lean' approach to operations. But how, exactly? Operators ask "How do I make this transition from the old to the new?"   "What products are certified NGOSS and thereby enable this new lean world?" "What interfaces and API's do I use to integrate it all?"

But we authors who evangelized the change are now the skeptics, asking: **are these the right questions**? Is this transition derailed before it starts? Of course, the transition to tomorrow's operator will require new technology, and it will require new processes. But it will also require profound structural changes – one of which is the reintegration of operations, call centers, sales, and business units. Yes just like we are integrating our OSS and BSS products we must also, hand-in-hand, enable seamless collaboration in the processes which span traditionally separate business units.

Having pushed hard for a decade to have the systemic problems identified and accepted... Having evangelized for rethinking integration, for recreating OSS and BSS applications as services.... Having pushed for intelligent processes that serve the company rather than the organization… We now see operators as eager to move forward with the new. But we now say, 'do not throw out the old grandmother with the bath water.' There are clone-able cells in there.

Call Centers are a world apart (way apart!). They should not be. NOCs are insular and inward looking. They must change. Sales push the products. They need to service the customer. Everyone needs to service the customer. The company serves the customer.

Just as Network Management is evolving to focus on managing the customer's network experience, so too are Network Operations Centers (NOCs) changing. They are evolving away from solving only network performance issues and toward solving service issues. In effect, NOCs will become SOCs (Service Operations Centers). To make the transition successfully to customer-centric operations, we need to reexamine the processes, behaviors, and scope of responsibility of Operations with an eye fixed firmly on customer, customer, and customer.

Besides correcting things, the company must listen to the customer, negotiate, and provide flexible responses. Introducing the customer into problem resolution is complexity incarnate. Yet, there seems to be no good reason to turn back from customer-centric behavior, so let's look at some of the steps required for success.

Service Operations Centers
Some operators initially assigned the task of service problem resolution to Contact Centers. But as they stand today, these business units are ill equipped to deal with service issues. Service management tools are not integrated into the Contact Center technology [which we discussed in: Customer Service in the Enhanced Contact Center]. Typically, Contact Center agents are trained, and required, to clear calls as quickly as possible. Traditional Agent Desktop software in Call Centers just includes list of "codes". Codes to be selected to describe the type of problem; codes to indicate the type of resolution; codes which indicated whether we believed the customer's complaint, or choose to initiate a credit as a gesture of good will.

Business Operations Architects

And these systems often contain only a simple free-form notes area for capturing any detail of the problem, to be used at the discretion of the Agent. The notes field is seldom filled because the time between ending a call and being pushed the next call to answer, is so short it does not allow agents more time than that necessary to take a deep breath before greeting the next irate customer.

Some systems provide a screen pop that fills the customer's background information into a formal trouble ticket – and replaces the simple notes field with a complex and structured form. Extensive training in the use of the form is needed if the fields are to be filled in correctly, but again the traditions of the Call Center are to fill in all forms while the customer is on the line, with inadequate time between

calls for fleshing out any missing fields, or correcting any misplaced information on the ticket. No matter how complex the form, these tickets cannot capture the tone and attitude of the customer. Service issues appear in the NOC with little detail on the true experience of the customer.

Enter the Service Management applications introduced around the turn of the last century, that attempted to bridge the gap between the Customer Service Representative and the NOC Technician, by creating a customer facing NOC role; a sort of technician-in-the-middle that could review the information provided by the CSR, determine if it could be passed directly to the NOC technician for resolution, or if they should keep the ticket and first perform some additional investigation. This Service Management (SM) application was initially just another terminal in the already cluttered NOC environment. Data and event integration from the element and network management applications into the SM was not easy, often involving complex logic, queries, and aggregation of information. This was never plug-and-play software. Often the integration remained mostly swivel chair. As the SM was not pre-integrated the way element Managers were to Network Managers, it was easier to train up a subgroup of the NOC as exclusive users of these new tools. Soon these engineers became a group into themselves; developing special and unique skills that were not immediately interchangeable with the network facing engineers. The Service Operations Center (SOC) evolved into place; and once established, spread as a pattern from operator to operator.

Jacqui Namsoo, Senior Business Analyst at LTC International explains: "So the Call Centre takes the call and logs the ticket, the SOC then takes it over from there and performs the different levels of diagnostics through to resolution and the call center calls back to confirm resolution with the customer." Network facing engineers in the NOC began to concentrate on network health – responding only to specific queries from the SOC, and as a result, lost the big-picture, end-to-end view. Because of the multitude of networks affected by the newer services, frequently there were many NOC groups, each watching a type of network technology, or a geographical segment of the network. It was the role of the SOC to determine who to contact and what to do with the answer. Only the SOC engineer had an end-to-end view of the service and could isolate the cause of the problem - if they received sufficient starting information from the Contact Center.

On the other hand, positioning the NOC or SOC to talk directly to the customer can cause its own problems. Jacqui Namsoo explains with an example from a service provider with whom she recently worked: "One of the reasons they put in the SOC and then reinstalled the call center as intermediaries is that it seems technical expertise and customer interface skills can't coexist. The NOC and SOC staffs were often rude to the customers so the company put in a "concerned voice" to take the initial contact."

This is not an ideal solution either, because customers want quick and certain resolution. Customers are unhappy when the call center cannot answer the question and have to wait for an answer from another department – the knowledge levels are spread thin and are diluted among more people. Ms. Namsoo continues: "The communication chain is itself a problem: how the fault goes through the layers, both ways. Currently the Call Center does not get timely advice from the

NOC about network failures and ends up logging several tickets until someone might overhear something; or the Call center manager notices a spike in calls and goes around to see what's up. I saw this in two service providers we helped over the last year. Too many layers cause delays in resolution. Who owns the ticket?" Jacqui continues: "this isolation of the call center from the problem resolution, it just seems like overkill on the resource side – solving one problem by creating another."

Jacqui captures the essence of our argument, the concept of the Service Operations Center is correct, but the execution and integration are not yet right. In favor of the independent SOC, there are several quite distinct skills and knowledge bases involved. When everyone is functioning at top form, this best world scenario ensues, where each group has skills tuned to their task. The Contact Center is skilled at listening, asking questions, and creating a positive impression with the customer. The Service Operations Center is knowledgeable in products, interdependencies, and end-to-end quality. The NOC is skilled in discovering any relevant network issues and resolving them quickly. The trick is to have all three managing their tasks correctly, resulting in a positive customer experience. Yet this requires the various groups to engage the same problem with a consistent, cross group process. Jacqui concludes: "In order to have this model of Call Center, SOC and NOC in a process chain, directed toward delivering the much-touted superior customer service, then processes, tools and people (training) have to work really well together."

The "So What" – Service affects Brand

Let us not forget why having a smooth and efficient customer service resolution capability is important: knowledgeable executives today know that customer interactions help to the define **Brand**. Brand is not defined by marketing and advertisements. These provide a foundation for the way a company or service would like itself to be perceived, and sets an expectation with its customers.   The Brand is affected (positively or negatively) by the aggregate experience the customer has in interacting with the product, with other people that use the product (including friends, people the service connects them to, and views expressed by the news organizations), and with the company supplying the product.
Brand is not just the sum of the market positioning and customer experiences; it extends to include customer expectations of future experiences too.

For Service Providers, every call and every download/upload of data creates an internal data point in the customer's perception of Brand and their evaluation of their experience compared to their expected performance of the product or service. With Service Providers, the interaction of the company and the customer, especially in time of service interruption, billing discrepancies, or general customer education, has become an extremely heavy component of Brand. Besides the concrete experiences impacting a customer's emotions, besides their perception of time stolen every time they experience a problem…, besides these direct experiences, the marketing arms of Service Providers have used extensive advertising over two decades to invest the "service resolution experience" as a differentiator of "good" and "bad" Service Providers. It is possible to have a network which is actually 99.995% perfect, but if that once in a blue moon failure results in a bad customer experience with the interactive problem-resolution-process, the negative impact is

disproportionately severe.

Using today's tools to solve the problem: Collaboration Technology
We have advanced IT integration architecture with NGOSS and SOA and integration technology with ESB and web services. Now it is time to identify, and then apply, technology for *Process and People integration*. The solution for this problem can be found in the roots of collaboration applications. Back in the late nineteen-nineties, after he successfully introduced Lotus Notes (the root seed of both collaboration infrastructure and ERP), Ray Ozzie introduced a novel product called Groove. Ozzie's Groove introduced the notion that each party interacting in the collaboration group would have its own queue of messages and information. The collaboration service would contain a log of all interactions and a repository of all shared documents. When participants would leave the collaboration service, their queues would record interactions in the space and then play them back to the participant when they returned – providing a synchronized view over long term interactions.

Of course Groove was not the only instance of collaboration technology to be independently developed in the late nineties. Wedge Greene's NewWave team at MCI and Sun Microsystems' open-source Rio each independently developed collaborative technology based on Jini Networking software. The Jini-based collaborative services introduced the notion of long-duration distributed transactions to collaboration and control of the shared items with software agents/objects. Both approaches provided a common view for all participants and shared updating of all documents and data associated with the repository of the collaboration.

Today Collaboration technology is represented by two approaches: a peer-to-peer approach where each participant exists independent of the collaboration which is implemented as individual queues synchronized at each peer interaction. This has the advantage of allowing ad hoc interactions to occur such as in advanced social networking applications. However, for larger groups this approach gets very complex to implement. In this case a "collaboration space" is used. Often this collaboration space is implemented on Javaspace technology, an approach recommended by Mr. Greene. But it is possible to use specialized server-side applications (EJB, .NET, or web-servers) which is, for one example, the approach used by Microsoft's NetMeeting and its recasting of the 2005 purchased/assimilated

Groove into today's 'Groove Networks for Office 2007.'

A proper Collaboration Space will have many or most of the characteristics of a governed ESB; however, it extends the interactions significantly (such as both synchronous and asynchronous interactions, distributed long duration transactions, and synchronization services). Collaboration spaces can be used for message-based application integration, but usually, integration is triggered by events which span processes or distributed transactions. What is typically exchanged at the tightly-coupled end are software objects, and at the loosely-coupled end are XML-ish documents.

All Collaborative applications are inherently event-driven architectures. A triggering event is defined which, when fired, invokes a specific behavior or set of actions. Often Collaborative applications have an embedded state model which releases control via firing off an event at the point some established state is met. In this sense, collaborative applications are made up of a series of agents keyed to specific events. They act together, often in repeatable patterns, yet in apparently unpredictable sequences, yielding stable, and desired results.

Besides Collaboration spaces, we believe the new technology of social networking will provide significant new tools that should be added to the architecture of the post-millennium Service Provider. Social network allows people, or software agents, to interlink in remarkable computational engines that are counterintuitive yet produce results. Detailed treatment of the use of Social networks in OSS and customer service will be covered in a future article.

Cross-fertilization of Applications

The hand-off process flow that routes an issue stepwise from the CC to the SOC to the NOC and back as described above is sub-optimal. The escalation process in OSS is just too costly to keep around.

 Before [in part one: Customer Service in the Enhanced Contact Center, Pipeline 10/06], we showed the proposed integration of and active use of CRM, ITSL service desks, and trouble tickets by the modern Contact Center. Ideally each group should access the same customer relationship management tools from the first to last contact with a customer. This will result in end-to-end process accountability, better information collection, and a greater sense of belonging and responsibility on the part of all the elements of a company, as they jointly interact to solve a problem. And we showed how the advent of IP telephony, multimedia, email, chat, and collaborative web browsing are tools that empower the customer in interactions with the company. Now we explore how some specific technologies that are utilized in the Contact Center can improve the inter-working of other groups in the larger company.

When the customer interaction is easily directed to short-term interactions, which can be resolved by the Contact Center agent [today usually called a customer service representative (CSR)] suffice, today's Contact Center applications technology enables a well-engineered machine. Calls, chats or emails are answered in short order. Agents are monitored or recorded for post call analysis and subsequent agent training and tuning of the message. Elaborate work scheduling

applications insure the correct CSR coverage for any skill group at any time. The old check lists and scripts followed by older Call Centers have become comprehensive, query-based knowledge systems and topic-driven identification of referrals. While this may suffice for identifying and expediting the replacement of a broken phone, this engineering, which is geared to a CSR spending the least time possible on a call, in order to clear the greatest number of calls in a day, is unsuitable to the longer-duration issues typically experienced in the SOC/NOC resolution process. No longer is the 'shortest time to clear the call' a reasonable goal. Bell Canada discovered this when they instituted a pilot project to record all calls arriving their call center.

Bell Canada's Use of Analytics

At the May IMCI Call Center demo and conference in Dallas, Bell Canada described their impressive results after initiating a project to explore recording calls as a method for improving the interactions of their CSRs with customers. In call center jargon, this recording and analysis is called Analytics. Impressive new applications, in part enabled by IP telephony and in part by the reduction in storage costs for digital calls, allow a company to seriously consider recording every single call that reaches a CSR. And not just the voice is recorded, the screens on the customer service desk are captured (or the chats or web browsing) allowing the complete interaction to be stored for later analysis. Bell Canada established a pilot program to record a majority of the calls arriving at the call center for their Media delivery service. A surprisingly small team then took the recordings and reviewed them for content, tone, inappropriate language or behavior, but also to identify successful calls for use in improving the interaction of their CSRs. This team classified every call as to who was the core owner of the issue. Whose issue is it (Customer, Agent, or Company)? Who has the control and scope to fix it? Was it a customer issue like a need for training, was it a network issue, or was it a problem exacerbated by the interaction with the call center? The pilot also invited customers to stay on the line and complete a post call survey about their experiences and satisfaction. CSR's also classified each call. This project created a new business process: a process of call capture, index by type, filter a subset for analysis, listen, score and analyze, understand the import of the call, and take action where this was needed.

The software allowed the analytics team to review a large number of recorded calls in remarkably short times. By presenting a sound graph of the call, the listener could skip to the relevant portions and concentrate on them. By looking for volume changes and silent times, they could narrow in on issues. While not described in their conference talk, speech recognition could also be used to focus detailed review of the recordings. Through the use of inflection maps, through picking the center of a call for a quick review and classification, through speech recognition flagging specific words and phrases, a trained analytics engineer can review and classify hundreds of calls an hour. The call capture data classification and reporting in the Analytics application let the analytics team immediately zero in on the calls they needed to review in depth.

Bell Canada found three huge payoffs.
> Payoff #1: The ability to improve call training and processes so that call center workload itself was reduced while quality of interactions was improved. Bell Canada brought the CC management and agents to review

sessions that used recorded calls as good and bad examples. Post mortems, training and process enhancement were scheduled. This resulted in enhancements to Agent Quality Management, Customer Experience Management and Business Process Improvement. First call resolutions, Representative Quality scores, Time to resolve call, revenue per call - all improved significantly. And sometimes, spending a little extra time on a call, stopped many future calls.

Payoff #2: an ability to identify and take action to save a customer that was in danger of quitting the service. This approach reduced churn in a very economical way. Bell Canada realized that if they could identify, first filtering for and then reviewing the recordings of customer that had a probability of a bad service experience or a CSR miss-resolution, they could intervene to recapture the customer. The window was 4 hours from the problem call ended before the opportunity was lost. Bell Canada developed special programs that identified high probability events and kicked off an analytics review. Based on detailed review of the call, the team could brainstorm a solution to offer the customer. Than a special tiger team in the Call Center would proactively contact the customer and negotiate a happier ending (frequently offering the customer some form of freebie.) The correction approaches found successful reduced whatever a customer would need to do in the correction. The best interventions keep the work & cost on the company side. This pilot study with their TV delivery business unit resulted in 25% reduction in churn. At scale, this identification, review, and intervention process is expected to reduce turnover in this business line by 90%.

Payoff #3: The call recording graphs allowed the analytics team to snip out customer and agent identifiers, thus relieving any security issue associated with distribution and wider review of selected calls. The analytics team management therefore was able to present actual examples of customers describing their experiences with the product. These real data points were shared with the appropriate managers and executives in the company. The call center managers got clear examples of issues out of their ability to correct and an understanding of when to 'pass the buck.' Network engineers directly heard about signal issues. Product teams were presented with actual experiences in product use, flaws, or failures – ones they could not ignore. Executives were given very real examples of just how the Brand message was being received by customers. The improvements from this are still to come, but likely this data and the way the company responds to it, could separate the 'just good' company from the great companies.

This is just one example of Contact Center technologies and approaches being integrated into larger business process engaging the business units of a company. There and many clever applications in use within the modern contact center. Several applications could help in time shifting and at-home work plans. Knowledge Management & Analytics can be used in the SOC and NOC to improve response times there. Further integration of the call center, OSS and the business lines is to be expected and certainly encouraged by these authors. But the best way the applications could be made reusable throughout the corporation is to re-engineer the software as SOA services.

And this evolution of the Contact Center is not hidden from the major Contact Center technology vendors. Taking one public example: Avaya's company vision is to extend Contact Center technology into the full corporation. Their argument goes as follows: A call center of 200 agents attached to a company with 400 more staff becomes a company with 600 customer service resources. The agent qualifies the issue and responds, "let me introduce you to a 'subject matter expert'", and transfers the call under control of the soft-ACD and the plethora of services in the newly minted Contact Center application suite. At this time, extending the mechanics of the call from the contact center into the business unit is simple to deploy - because of the advent of VoIP technology. With this approach, every call is tracked and available for reporting, monitoring and analytics.

Representative Behavior
Call center agents receive extensive training – but as we saw with Bell Canada, this needs rethinking for the business strategies of the lean service provider.   Besides recording and coaching on calls internal to the company – deeper lessons are there. Companies should start introspective reviews, utilizing the process pattern of the Bell Canada analytics team: a classification, quick answer, process invocation, introduction of company goal, and rapid action to achieve that goal.

When a CSR is engaged in up-sell of services, or even in bargaining for a replacement that converts the caller from an irate enemy to a re-bonded customer, advanced sales techniques are needed skills. For example, it is important to vary treatment of the customer, based on personality type.   This requires analysis of the customer's mood, separation of their immediate need from the personality type, smoothing and stabilization of the mood, and satisfying the customer by treating them as their personality type expects.

Stu Schlackman of Competitive Excellence, a sales training company, explains: "Most studies of temperament and personality styles tend to place people into one of four categories. You have probably heard of some of these like Myers-Briggs, Keirsey, DISC, and Insight Learning. As we understand a person's dominant personality temperament, it becomes easier to address the needs, issues, and values that are most important to them. Temperament is not the same as attitude. A customer who seems resistant or indifferent might just have a skeptical temperament and want proof; a company representative might mistakenly think the customer is resistant to what is being presented; in fact, the customer might be in strong agreement. Attitude simply indicates whether the customer, at this specific instant, seems agreeable, resistant, or indifferent. A customer with a skeptical temperament needs proof, and a company representative might mistakenly think the customer is resistant to what is being presented; when, in fact, the customer might be in strong agreement."

Winning the Negotiation

Every interaction of a Contact Center with a customer is an instance of a negotiation between CSR and customer. The customer always wants a particular outcome before they call. Sometimes this is nebulous, such as 'I want satisfaction', but quite frequently it is very specific. "I think this phone is broken because it is a defective phone and they (the SP) is going to give me a new replacement." The style of 'play' chosen by the calling customer may vary. Some are polite and cajoling, using good will and reason to gain the desired outcome (the new phone). Others are argumentative and confrontational. 'You did me wrong and I am determined to make you suffer before I force you to give up a new phone or lose me as a customer.' On the other hand, the Service Provider agent has two goals. (1) Close every interaction with a happy or at least satisfied customer. (2) Do so with as little expense and impact to the company as possible. The CSR must negotiate the smallest effort on the part of the company or least expensive giveaway that still leaves the customer satisfied. How do you determine if that customer really needs a new phone and how do you get them to take a new phone or service that includes a new facility service up-sell with it? Clearly this is not a job in which you would rationally put a low-skilled, minimum-pay or least-bid contract labor pool.

This is a problem in game theory [see earlier <u>articles</u> where we introduced game theory to OSS design.] While this negotiation does not exactly correspond to the prisoner's dilemma, it does bare striking similarities. It is probably in the class of problems that mathematicians call "folk theorem". As a game, it is possible to mathematically represent good and bad outcomes and run simulations using different strategies for the different players.   Later, we will provide some simplified strategies that frequently win, but first recognize that a 'process' however well designed, is not an interactive game with varying strategies and the ability and necessity of the players to alter their behavior based on observation of past player behavior and speculation about future behavior. *It is really important that this be driven home*. A process implies a systematic, predictable behavior on the part of all participants. A process does not assume or allow for the players to deliberately sabotage the process… and still expect winning outcomes over the long haul.

This point is important because current best practice and indeed almost all Operations today are governed by "processes." [Indeed, Six Sigma is all about defined processes.] Example process: "Accept call, gather information, classify problem, if solvable with available information or practice, give this to the customer, or else determine what role/group to transfer the call in the next step." A script used by a contact center agent is a form of process. "Say this, than this, if answer is yes, say this, if not transfer." Each group or role has a process to follow and each role/group interacts with another via transfer of one process to another – resulting in a complex but completely pre-determined set of steps. Example" "Customer calls Contact Center, Contact Center classifies problem and transfers ticket to Service Operations Center, SOC determines corrective action and tasks NOC engineer with corrective action. CC informs customer that the issue is resolved and closes ticket." This is not a negotiation. Only in the *well formed* company, where everyone cooperates and always fulfills expectations, does a *process* lead to success.

This game/negotiation treatment applies, not just in customer to agent interactions,

but even inside companies, because people are always involved, and every transfer is a negotiation. That's because different people behave in different and specific ways - not just that they are good or bad employees. Sometimes the act of fulfilling a predetermined process step is a virtual negotiation between an employee and their employee-internalized representation the aggregate company itself; sometimes it is a SOC agent blaming a NOC agent for not responding before their break time. At any instance in the process, is the employee player happy or sad, aggressive or cooperative? This results in incidents taking "bad branches" in what are believed to be otherwise correct processes. But it is the fixed-process approach that is lacking. Bayes Theorem states Truth is the probability of the data given the probability of the model. If the approach is wrong, you cannot fix it with more elaborate processes - trying to fix the process results in the trap of the Copernican view of the universe: circles within circles, within circles. Or processes within processes within processes.

A rigid process looks very much like a game that only succeeds with the application of the "grim trigger".

> "Grim trigger is a strategy which punishes an opponent for any deviation from some certain behavior. So, all of the players of the game first must have a certain feasible outcome in mind. Then the players need only adhere to an almost grim trigger strategy, under which any deviation from the strategy which will bring about the intended outcome is punished to a degree such that any gains made by the deviator on account of the deviation are exactly cancelled out. Thus, there is no advantage to any player for deviating from the course which will bring out the intended and arbitrary outcome, and the game will proceed in exactly the manner to bring about that outcome." {Wikipedia}

Perfect process implementation requires absolute force from management. Not a good strategy. Instead, it is possible to flag bad processes by the number of complaints received from customers or internal employees who are following the processes. These complaints will occur even if everyone follows the process correctly and the desired result is reached. As in, 'the highway successfully leads from home to work, but in the commute some of the drivers experience road rage.'

Our point is processes exist, whether they are designed or just allowed to organically arise. But rather than building systems where people must interact as automatons in processes, *use these process steps as goals or milestones in a collaborative game*. Leave the workflow of repeatable, standard processes to the actual automatons of data transactions. Have people involved in the exceptional circumstances that require non-standard process steps. This is why Collaborative Applications software is better as a control mechanism than ESB driven by workflow. Collaborative Applications can capture games, evoke strategies, react to moves, and recognize milestones or traps. While a rudimentary solution is also afforded by event-driven, or rather reactive-only architectures when applied in web services or advanced ESB products - all collaborative architectures are at their core, event-driven. The best are agent-enabled.

Tit-for-Tat

We promised a few example solution patterns for the negotiation of customer and customer service agent. As this is similar to the prisoner's dilemma, the established winning strategy to use is called Tit-for-Tat. In tit-for-tat, the opening move is always one of cooperation/conciliation/good-will: offer a [small] concession to start. The next move is to follow the opposing players move, the tit-for-tat. If the opposite player is cooperative, then cooperate. If the player is confrontational, respond in kind. In most cases this will bring the desired outcome to the CSR following tit-for-tat. But when a confrontation follows a confrontation, follows a confrontation – a death spiral has been entered. These must be avoided. The recommended response is to follow two repeated confrontations from an opponent with a double conciliation, no mater the intermediate reaction of the opponent. Of course, some readers will be quite offended by referring to the customer who is calling the contact center as the *opponent* of the CSR. Everyone wants the company brand to be one liked by the customer. We agree. Opponent is just a role in the "game". Every interaction starts with the CSR being polite and welcoming to the caller.

Long term studies show that these strategies of interaction generate two extraordinary results: respect and good will. In fact, the successes of the tit-for-tat strategy in every international 'game competition' lead to a remarkable and significant insight by Robert Axelrod: this strategy leads to an *evolution of cooperation* and may be responsible for why people band together in cooperative social groups   [Please note this is a simplified treatment and there are many recommended variations by the professional game strategists.] Similar strategies can be found with non-mathematical explanations in current books on 'constructive confrontation' and 'successful negotiation' and even in 'reciprocal altruism' in population biology.

We specifically mean for these techniques and methods to apply not just to the customer-CSR interaction, but to *all the interactions* of people following processes and trying to clear work in the company. Collaboration applications should be used to govern and "control" the outcome of all group/role to group/role interactions in a multi-departmental organization. Instead of forwarding a trouble ticket, place all the employees interacting in the resolution process in one common collaboration space and let them solve the problem as a team. At the very least, the delays, confusions, and costs of multiple handoffs are eliminated. At best, a rapid, optimal, and transparent solution is achieved. And *transparency* is important in providing cohesion, adaptive learning, and company loyalty.

If you are really daring, open the collaborative space to the customer and make the entire "process" transparent. Bring in the sales team to interact directly with an enterprise customer. But best of all, let the customers participate in the resolution of their problem. Not just through a web page in a service portal. Instead imagine customers seeing a well-meshed team deliver a fair and timely solution - now that would build Brand!

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