

WORK-LIFE BALANCE for the Prepared Agent



NICE

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Find harmony between business and agent needs with a flexible workforce environment

The pandemic only accelerated the growth of the gig economy—which already had significant appeal to younger generations—as employers and employees alike redefined where, when, and how work is performed.¹ Even before the pandemic, about 84% of millennials and 81% of Gen Z said they would consider joining the gig economy, and more than 4 in 10 employees said they'd be willing to trade a tenth of their salary for more flexibility in their schedules.

¹ Smith, Ania. "Covid-19 And the Gig Economy: What to Anticipate When the World Returns to 'Normal.'" Forbes, Sept. 10, 2021.

² "Managing Flexible Work Arrangements." SHRM, Sept. 21, 2021.

That preference for work-life balance has become even more pronounced today. Many workers now consider work-life balance and schedule flexibility the most important factors when considering whether to take—and stay in—a job.² In fact, nine in ten people want flexibility in where and when they work, according to the [EY 2021 Work Reimagined Employee Survey](#).

Companies of all types have started vying for workers in all age groups by offering similar flexibility. This has created an atmosphere of fierce competition, and contact centers must adjust to this new expectation for work-life balance in order to attract and retain agents.

But delivering schedule flexibility must be done in alignment with day-to-day business needs. Contact centers need to fill less popular shifts, provide customer support on holidays and have a certain number of agents onsite to deliver a quality customer experience day in and day out.

All of this must happen in an environment that's increasingly challenging: Customers have noncompromising expectations, and in many cases, they are already frustrated when they reach out to a brand, causing the agent to work in escalation mode. Agents must also handle multiple new channels, sometimes in parallel, in a disjointed, constantly changing workspace. And self-service has gotten smarter, which means the customer issues that remain to be handled by agents are more complex. Agents are best prepared to meet these demands in a flexible workforce environment.



The artificial intelligence and machine learning capabilities of **NICE Workforce Management (WFM)** make it easy to balance agent desires for work-life balance with business demands. Here's how contact center leaders can utilize NICE WFM to tap into the flexibility that has made the gig economy so appealing, creating a win-win situation for agents and the organization.



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The top reason the gig economy took off is pretty simple: employee preference. Workers can start and stop working when they want, work only on the days they want to work, and take breaks whenever they desire.

Contact centers can make powerful adjustments to their scheduling procedures to offer similar benefits. Giving agents the reins on scheduling makes them more engaged with their positions, which in turn increases productivity and satisfaction, drives agents to provide better service, and makes agents less likely to miss work.³

While the level of extreme flexibility provided by Uber and similar businesses is unlikely to meet the staffing needs of the typical contact center, organizations have the opportunity to give the agents more freedom while still providing a great customer experience. By utilizing NICE WFM, the leading solution for workplace flexibility, contact center leaders can incorporate additional preference types into the scheduling process.

³ Society for Human Resource Management. "Leveraging Workplace Flexibility for Engagement and Productivity."

NICE WFM enables contact centers to provide much flexibility that makes many people love gig work. Among the preference types NICE WFM offers for scheduling are:

- Custom priorities
- Hours per week
- Daily rules
- Lunch lengths
- Days off
- Lunchtimes
- Days per week
- Start times
- Fairness
- Stop times

Offering agents the ability to prioritize each preference type is also key. One agent might want a long lunch break to run errands instead of having a Saturday off. Another might need a particular shift free to attend classes and would be willing to come in during a higher call volume shift. NICE WFM enables workers to select the preference types that are most important to them, creating a schedule that's closely in line with their ideal working hours.



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All or None Isn't the Only Way


When contact centers have attempted to implement agent preferences in the past, many initiatives centered on an “all or none” approach utilized only one type of preference due to the complexity involved.

With NICE WFM, contact centers have numerous options to implement agent preferences, including:

- 1 **Choosing to implement only a select few preference types.**
- 2 **Utilizing certain preference types** for only specific groups at a contact center.
- 3 **Awarding preferences based on seniority or rank.** Contact centers can implement a composite scoring methodology that weighs seniority as a factor to ensure fairness and reward the most loyal employees.

NICE WFM uses a proprietary algorithm to empower contact centers to compare an agent's ranked preferences against a generated schedule, solving the “all or nothing” problem by evaluating an agent's individual values in each preference category. The solution also combines the organization's preference priorities or the agent's custom preference priorities to create a single category for evaluation.

This evaluation process turns a complicated endeavor into a simple, streamlined procedure that considers the full breadth of agent preferences. Giving agents a voice in the scheduling process mitigates one of the most significant sources of agents' frustration: lack of control over their schedules.



With NICE WFM, contact centers can take in-depth agent scheduling feedback into account at scale across their business.

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Solve For Business Scheduling Needs



Empowering agents to share the entirety of their preferences is just a start.

Enabling preference sharing has a huge potential to solve agent engagement challenges. Still, it doesn't consider when the employee is actually available to work, contact center work rules, and needs. Consider the following scenario:

Joe would appreciate occasionally having consecutive days off to spend time with his family during the week. But his contact center doesn't have business rules that cover employee preference or a way for Joe to share that preference – so it's never considered in scheduling. As a result, he never gets the consecutive days off he would like.

Over time, Joe becomes disgruntled about his schedule and has lower job satisfaction. He isn't engaged in his position, so he isn't motivated to go the extra mile when interacting with customers. As a result, the contact center misses out on opportunities to provide better service. And when you multiply this agent disengagement problem across an organization, it creates large-scale issues with schedule adherence, exceptions, productivity, and attrition.

Does this situation sound familiar? Many contact center leaders who have attempted to implement agent preference have experienced setbacks like this one. When this happens, it can seem like enabling agent preferences doesn't work, causes more harm than good, or wastes everyone's time. That's because agent preference is only one part of the equation.



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Availability Points

Why do you need Availability Points?

What's missing is a method for agents to communicate when they are and aren't available to work. NICE WFM provides that functionality, known as Availability Points.

Here's how they work:

- 1 **Supervisors define each interval of a day** with a unique numeric value.
- 2 **Supervisors set rules that agents must meet** to complete their availability; examples include:
 - Requiring approval if availability does not meet all rules.
 - Requiring a minimum amount of available time.
 - Requiring a minimum number of points each week.
 - Requiring a minimum number of hours each week.
 - Requiring a minimum number of days per week.
- 3 **Agents must provide their availability** in line with the supervisor's rules.

When paired with enabling agent preferences, Availability Points gamify the scheduling process and drive agents to compromise their availability based on business needs. Availability Points drive engagement, make agents willing to provide incremental discretionary effort, and reduce absenteeism. NICE WFM ensures that both business and agent needs are met and empowers contact centers to avoid the pitfalls of using agent preference in scheduling.

Remember Joe? Like most agents, he has availability constraints in addition to preferences. Here's how he would share his availability with NICE WFM:

Joe's wife works Tuesday evenings, so Joe needs Tuesday off to care for their children. When he submits his availability in NICE WFM, Joe can share that he's not available on Tuesdays; he's required to provide availability on other days of the week. His need to have Tuesday evenings off is always met, and he is willing to work other shifts as needed in exchange. Joe understands the rules that guide the schedule creation and feels that his voice is heard. He's more productive at work and misses fewer shifts.



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Empowering agents to manage their schedules on the go

Provide Anytime, Anywhere Access

NICE WFM empowers agents to manage their schedules on the go.

An agent can easily manage their schedule on the desktop or with the NICE EEM mobile app, which takes flexibility to new heights by enabling agents to do things like trade shifts or set schedule preferences without the need to make these changes with their supervisors. EEM makes it easy for agents to manage their work-life balance with pre-approved time off, self-swap, and extra hours.

EEM ensures that:

- ✓ **Agents have visibility into:**
 - Up-to-date, personalized schedules.
 - Vacation/time off balances.
 - Time off allotments for their group by date.
- ✓ **Agents can instantly self-swap, add or give up scheduled hours** based on the contact center's staffing needs.
- ✓ **When there are new schedule change opportunities for the agent, EEM automatically alerts users in real-time** about available shifts, swaps, and time-off via the mobile app, desktop application, pop-ups, email, or text message.
- ✓ **Agents can set communication preferences**, so they are only contacted during certain hours they set.



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Leverage the power of work-life balance

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Empower Employees to Manage Their Own Performance

NICE WFM also helps ensure that agents are empowered to manage their own performance. Automated KPI-based notifications allow agents to see how they perform during the day, get recognized for best practices, or self-correct in those areas that need improvement.

Leverage the power of work-life balance

Contact centers must equip employees with the right tools to make them successful, productive, and engaged in the new reality with digital, self-service, and constant change. Agents are best prepared to meet these new demands in a flexible workforce environment.

With employee expectations of work-life balance here to stay, NICE WFM is a key part of the modern contact center's toolbox. NICE WFM empowers contact centers to make schedule flexibility a reality while meeting business scheduling demands. Leaders who take this approach will be positioned to deliver the exceptional employee and customer experience needed to drive growth and market leadership.

CASE STUDIES

Retail company increases scheduling flexibility while reducing operating costs by \$1 million with NICE WFM

An online retail company wanted to provide its agents with greater flexibility and better meet real-time business needs. After implementing NICE WFM, the company developed more accurate forecasts by combining them with agent preferences. The company realized:

- A \$1 million reduction in operating costs.
- A 77-second reduction in average speed of answer.
- 53% fewer unplanned absences

Bank eliminates overstaffing and improves employee engagement with NICE WFM

A bank selected NICE WFM to increase its forecasting accuracy and eliminate overstaffing entirely while providing its employees with professional development time during off-peak hours. With NICE WFM, the bank achieved:

- Zero instances of overstaffing.
- Improved employee engagement, management effectiveness and job satisfaction survey scores.
- A score of 3.38 out of 4 for workplace enjoyment among agents.



The AI Behind Better Connections

About NICE

With NICE (Nasdaq: NICE), it's never been easier for organizations of all sizes around the globe to create extraordinary customer experiences while meeting key business metrics. Featuring the world's #1 cloud native customer experience platform, CXone, NICE is a worldwide leader in AI-powered self-service and agent-assisted CX software for the contact center – and beyond. Over 25,000 organizations in more than 150 countries, including over 85 of the Fortune 100 companies, partner with NICE to transform – and elevate – every customer interaction.

www.nice.com



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