PERSONA COMMUNICATION STYLES

Are your Agents Able to Adapt to Persona Communication Styles?

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Persona Communication Styles

Most agents cannot identify the different persona styles for the customers who call them or are not trained to be adaptive to match their communication style to the Persona Communication Styles of the customers calling them. Therefore, the majority of contact centers do not understand the impact that different customer and agent Persona Communication Styles have on their customer experience (CX) performance.

Both customers and employees use one of four Persona Communication Styles (i.e., supporter, influencer, analyzer & driver) as their primary communication style when interacting with others. Identifying customer and employee communication styles and applying adaptability style strategies helps agents determine the best way to interact with all customer persona communication styles successfully. Good communication with customers does not mean an agent has to change their communication style completely. For communication styles, there is neither a good nor a bad style. Put simply; there is no preferred style to another. Contact centers and agents who provide great CX (e.g., high FCR, call resolution, and NPS ratings) have high adaptive style ratings for handling different customer Persona Communication Styles. An agent needs to identify the persona of a customer they are interacting with quickly and adapt to their Persona Communication Style to deliver great CX and for improving customer satisfaction (Csat).

While there are a lot of ways that organizations measure communication styles, at SQM, we realize the value of letting the customer be the judge for determining their communication style. SQM's Persona Communication Styles is unique because it uses the voice of the customer. After all, it is the customer's view that matters most for assessing and improving CX. SQM conducted comprehensive research to determine persona communication styles. Furthermore, our research identifies the agent behaviours and word choices that an agent can use to adapt to a customer's persona and ultimately provide a great customer experience.
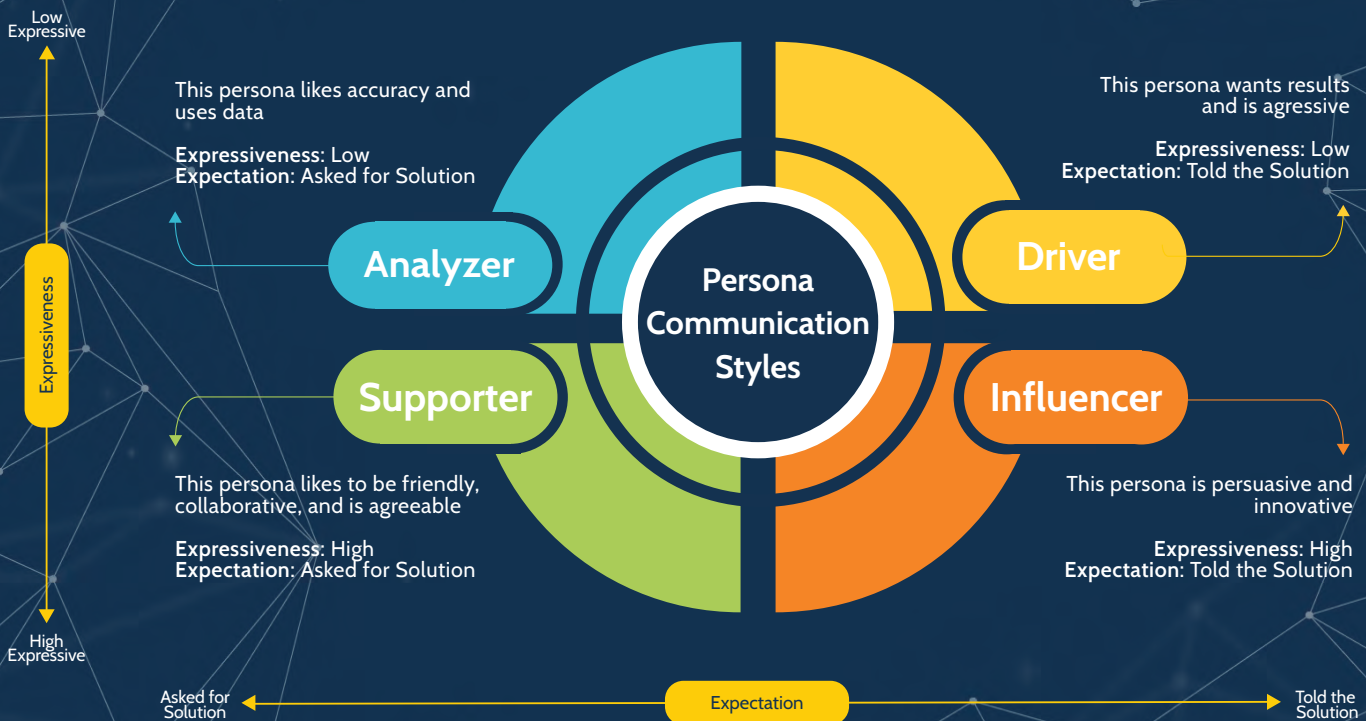
Identifying customer Persona Communication Styles is based on a contact center interaction with an agent. To determine personas, we used two contact center interaction customer survey questions:

1. On your call, how did you express your **expectations** to solve your inquiry?

2. Again, on your call, how **expressive** were you with the agent trying to solve your inquiry?

Figure 1 shows each Persona Communication Style which is based on the level of 'expressiveness' and 'expectation' dimensions. For example, an analyzer is less expressive and asks for a solution. The analyzer persona likes accuracy and uses data when interacting with an agent. Adaptive behaviors and word choices that an agent should use on a call for an analyzer persona are centered around being informative, precise, providing value, and clearly explaining next steps. Drivers are also less expressive but will tell an agent the solution they want. The driver persona wants results and is aggressive. Adaptive behaviors and word choices for a driver persona are focused on meeting needs, providing doable actions towards resolution, solving the inquiry, and being quick. Supporters are highly expressive but ask for a solution. The supporter persona likes to be friendly, collaborative and is agreeable. Adaptive behaviors and word choices for a supportive persona are based on spending time with the customer, working together towards a solution, being agreeable, and making an emotional connection. Influencers are also highly expressive but will tell an agent the solution they want. The influencer persona is persuasive and innovative. Adaptive behaviors and word choices for an influencer persona are focused on being innovative, quick, telling relevant stories, and showing appreciation.

Figure 1. Persona Communication Styles

Low Expressive

This persona likes accuracy and uses data
Expressiveness: Low
Expectation: Asked for Solution

This persona wants results and is aggressive
Expressiveness: Low
Expectation: Told the Solution

Expressiveness

Analyzer

Persona Communication Styles

Driver

Supporter

Influencer

This persona likes to be friendly, collaborative, and is agreeable
Expressiveness: High
Expectation: Asked for Solution

This persona is persuasive and innovative
Expressiveness: High
Expectation: Told the Solution

High Expressive

Asked for Solution ← Expectation → Told the Solution

Persona Communication Styles Research

SQM Group conducted Persona Communication Style surveys within one day of customers calling a contact center. The customer sample size was 2,757 surveys, and the margin of error was +/- 1.87. The survey was conducted in 2020 using a randomly based sampling approach with leading North American contact centers, and all major industries were represented. Again, we used two customer survey questions to determine a customer's Persona Communication Style.

Figure 2 shows the responses to the first survey question, "On your call, how did you express your **expectations** to solve your inquiry?" 54% of customers said they told the agent what they wanted, and 46% of customers said they asked the agent for help to solve their inquiry. These numbers mean that there is a split between customers 'asking for a solution', and the agent being 'told the solution' that the customer wants. Put simply, expectations are balanced between being told the solution by customers and being asked by customers for a solution.

Figure 2. Expectations

Asked for a Solution
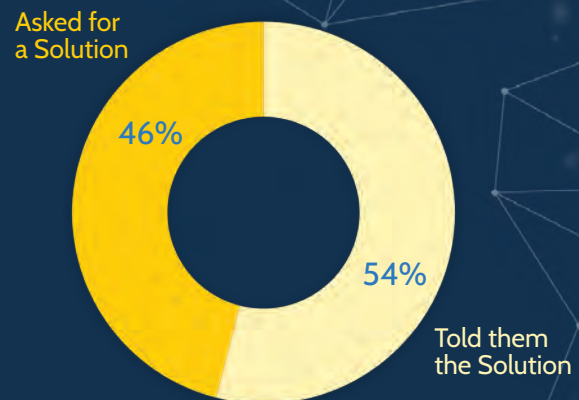
46%

54%

Told them the Solution

Figure 3 shows the responses to the second survey question, "How **expressive** were you with the agent trying to solve your inquiry?" 58% of customers said they were highly expressive, and 42% of customers said they were in the middle of the road or low for being expressive. These numbers suggest that an agent will be handling more customers that will be highly expressive for trying to resolve their inquiry.

Figure 3. Expressiveness

Low
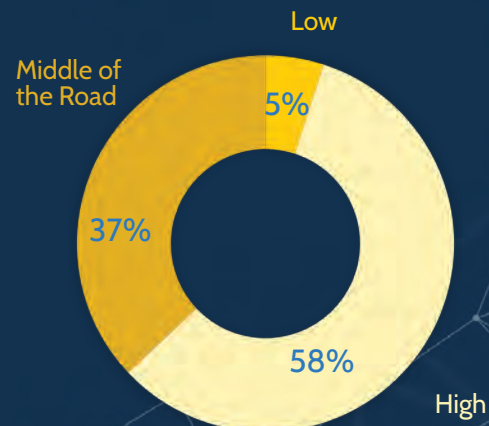
Middle of the Road

5%

37%

58%

High

Figure 4 shows the Persona Communication Styles percentage distribution breakdown. The influencer persona (i.e., highly expressive & told the agent the solution) is the highest at 34%. The supporter persona (i.e., highly expressive & asked for a solution) is 24%. The analyzer persona (i.e., low/mid expressive & asked for a solution) is 22%. The lowest is the driver persona (i.e., low/mid expressive & told the agent the solution) at 20%. Figure 4 Persona Communication Styles distribution breakdown indicates that each persona has a significant percentage, which suggests that for an agent to provide great CX and improve Csat, they need to understand each persona. By identifying the customer Persona Communication Style quickly, an agent can potentially avoid the behaviors that can create poor customer experiences by using behaviors and word choices that match the customer's Persona Communication Style. A customer has a primary Persona Communication Style but can also have dimensions of different styles. The majority of customer Persona Communication Styles are different compared to each specific agent. Not better or worse, just different.

Figure 4. Persona Communication Styles Distribution

22%	20%
Low/Mid Expressive & Ask for a Solution	Low/Mid Expressive & Told Solution
ANALYZER	DRIVER
SUPPORTER	INFLUENCER
Highly Expressive & Ask for a Solution	Highly Expressive & Told Solution
24%	34%

Figure 5 shows SQM's ground-breaking contact center CX research for the Persona Communication Styles impact on Csat. For Csat top box response, the analyzer Csat is 73%, the driver is 76%, the influencer is 78%, and the supporter is 80%. These ratings suggest that there is deviation among the Persona Communication Styles. The Csat ratings are based on all call types. World Class Csat contact centers have a smaller range between the four different styles; only 3% separates the highest and lowest. Put differently, for the World Class Csat contact centers, there is very little deviation among the Persona Communication Styles. However, Persona Communication Styles' impact on Csat can be significantly lower or higher by specific call types or by segment, so it is essential to measure the Persona Communication Styles impact on Csat by major call types and segments. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for the Csat range between the four different Persona Communication Styles to be as high as 20% for low performing contact centers. In figure 5, the data shows the analyzer persona has significantly lower Csat than the other personas. Again, the analyzer persona likes accuracy, uses data when interacting with an agent, and can be a tougher grader. Conversely, the supporter persona likes to be friendly, collaborative, agreeable and can be an easier grader. It is important to emphasize that SQM's research shows that very few organizations train their agents to identify and handle different customer Persona Communication Styles.

Figure 5. Persona Communication Styles Impact on Contact Center Csat
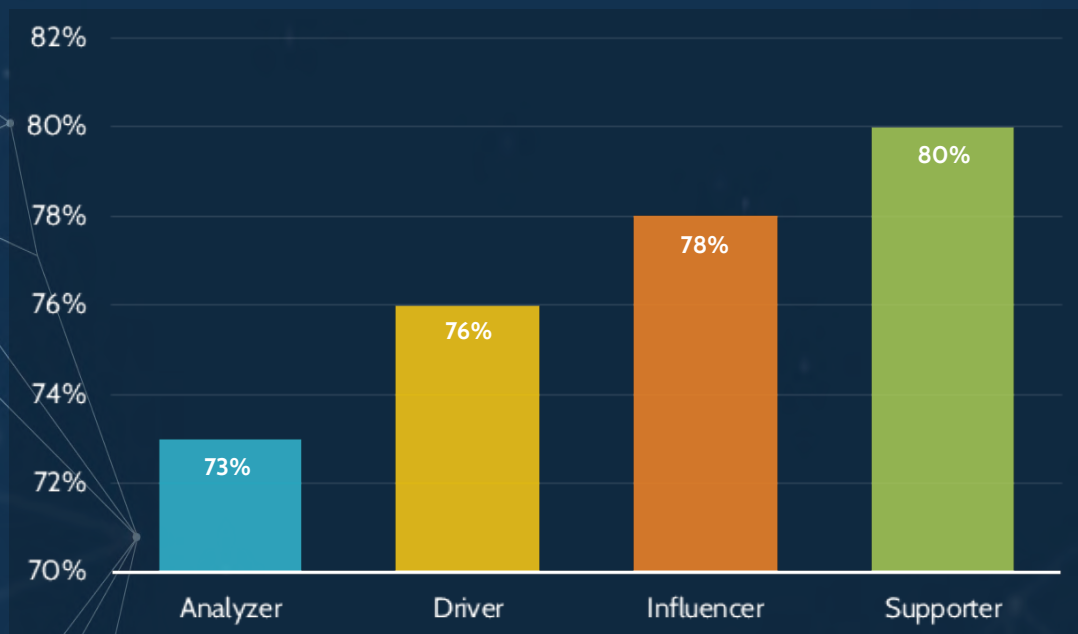
To determine agent adaptability capabilities, we use the following customer survey question: "On your call, how strongly do you agree that the agent's communication style was a good fit for you?" To assess agent adaptability capabilities, SQM uses an Agent Adaptability Score. This score is based on the percentage of customers who rated them top box response (i.e., Strongly Agree).

Figure 6 shows that for the average contact center only 62% of customers felt that they strongly agree that the agent's communication style was a good fit for them. A world class agent adaptability score is 78% or greater. However, 4th quartile contact centers are extremely low at 49%. It is important to note that agents with high adaptability scores have the same customer satisfaction ratings across all customer Persona Communication Styles. Put simply, there is no deviation among Persona Communication Styles. Low Agent Adaptability Scores represent a great opportunity for most contact centers to focus on improving their agent's ability to quickly identify the customer's Persona Communication Style within the first minute of the call and train them on how to adapt their communication style to match the customer's Persona Communication Style.

Figure 6. Agent Adaptability Score
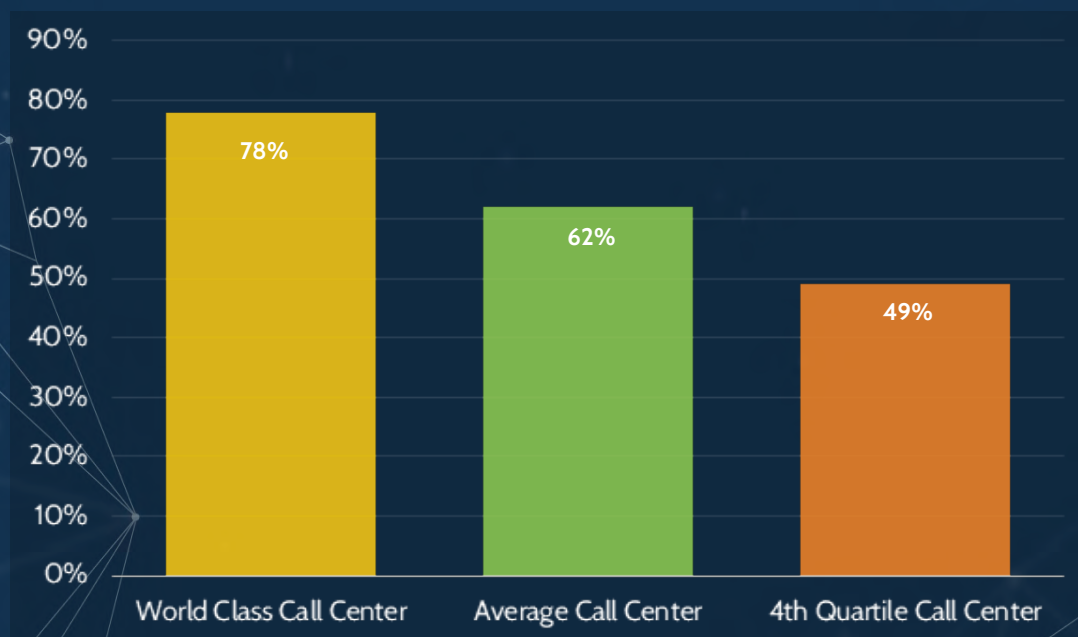
Conclusion

Matching an agent's communication style to a customer's Persona Communication Style will create a stronger connection and enhance their experience in doing business with your organization, resulting in higher call resolution and Csat ratings. Each persona impacts the preferred way a customer and an agent acts, thinks, and makes decisions. Effective communication requires two-way communication, and it is helpful to match the Persona Communication Style towards something that the customer and agent can relate to. By identifying the Persona Communication Style an agent will be able to use behaviors and word choices that match the customer Persona Communication Style. Again, while there are a lot of ways that organizations measure communication styles, at SQM, we believe the best practice for identifying Persona Communication Styles is to let the customer be the judge. What makes SQM's Persona Communication Styles approach unique is that it is based on the voice of the customer using mySQM™ CX Insights software for identifying personas and our software's Soft Skills e-Learning Personalized Intelligence™ feature for training agents how to adapt their communication style to match the customers they are talking to.

*my*SQM™ - CX Soft Skills e-Learning

https://www.sqmgroup.com/software/personalized-intelligence/soft-skills-e-learning

If you are interested in learning more about adapting agent communication styles to match your customer's Persona Communication Styles, learn how you can use our *my*SQM™ CX Insights software to help agents adapt to a customer's Persona Communication Style.

[Click Here to Learn More]

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Mike received his MBA from Athabasca University in April of 2020. Mike has over 25 years of customer experience management (CXM) experience working with leading North American companies. Mike has written five thought-provoking contact channel CXM books (i.e., World Class Call Center, First Call Resolution, FCR Best Practices, One Contact Resolution, and most recently One Contact Resolution 2nd Edition). Mike has conducted CXM best practice case studies with organizations such as American Express, FedEx, and VSP Vision Care. Also, Mike is a popular contact center industry thought-leader with over 20,000 LinkedIn followers and is considered one of the most influential contributors for CXM in the contact center industry.