The Case for Quality Monitoring in a Speech Analytics World:

What's Working and What Isn't

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INTRODUCTION

It's no secret that call centers are a treasure trove of data. The evolution of call center technology has given us so many data points, we barely know what to do with them all. And so it was with much fanfare and trepidation that we watched the first installation of speech analytics into the call center environment in the late 90's. It certainly wasn't perfect but it promised to take the grunt-work out of listening to a large number of calls and provide us with the insight we needed to reduce call volume and improve agent performance.

Over the last decade we've seen this technology evolve, improve and become more cost-effective resulting in more and more call centers jumping on the speech analytics bandwagon.

Of the many opportunities attributed to speech analytics, there are four that stand out and are worth exploring further:

(1)   operational cost efficiencies;

(2)   customer experience improvements;

(3)   compliance monitoring replacement; and

(4)   quality monitoring replacement.
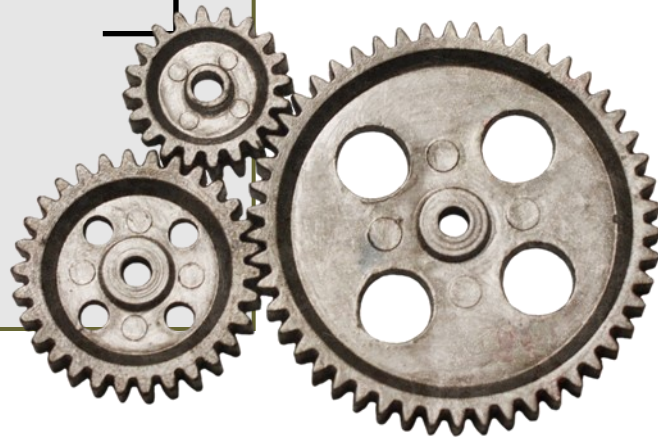
SPEECH ANALYTICS 101

With thousands of calls directed at a call center every minute, the amount of data accumulates exponentially every day. That data – containing valuable insight buried deep in audio recordings – was once unstructured and unmeasurable. Previously, if you wanted to analyze this massive data set for insight, you'd have to listen to a sizeable sampling of calls. Sample size and the cost associated with listening to them was always the challenge in being able to see the big picture. Speech analytics technology promises to change all of that.

Speech analytics technology, tied into your call recording system, transcribes the call recordings (more or less) into text. This text-based data can then be sorted into buckets based on keywords or voice patterns (phonemes or language models) that can, in turn, be analyzed for patterns. These patterns help to identify opportunities related to call volume or talk time reduction, process improvement, customer behavior, competitive insight and more.

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The Case for Operational Cost Efficiencies

Verdict:

Powerful tool for uncovering opportunities for cost reduction but don't under-estimate how time-consuming it will be.

The key benefit of speech analytics is its ability to sort thousands of calls into categories based on pre-defined characteristics like word patterns or volume of voice. This makes the job of understanding where the opportunities for cost reduction lie a lot easier. Opportunities like:

- Reducing call volume
- Reducing talk time
- Migrating volume to self-serve options

But don't expect it to be as simple as pushing a button. Speech analytics is still very manual and very time-consuming.

" *Speech analytics is a huge investment and the tool is only as good as the queries you put into it. It doesn't provide context and, in order to have that, it means a lot of call listening. When we do some of our larger studies it means physically listening to hundreds of calls to get a large enough sample size in order to be confident in our data,*" says a Speech Analytics Manager at a major bank. "*As a result, it can take up to 6 weeks to prepare the data with a customer data overlay. At this point you have to ask if the data is outdated. It feels like we are always a step behind instead of being proactive.* "

It's important to reiterate that speech analytics doesn't eliminate the need to listen to calls. In fact, it may mean that you need to listen to more calls than you do now to better understand the context of the call and validate findings.

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The Case for Customer Experience Improvements

Verdict:

Can point you in the right direction but there is still lots of work to be done to validate your findings and innovate.

Speech analytics' ability to sort through a large number of calls based on pre-defined word patterns also helps to identify trends that can be a result of a broken process, product or policy.   Given that the dataset can be counted means that you will have a quantifiable source of data to build your business case and measure your success. Once you have identified the opportunity, however, the real effort begins with innovation and transformation.

" *The role we wanted speech analytics to play was to identify trends and opportunities to improve the customer experience while at the same time realizing efficiencies,"* says the Manager of Speech Analytics at a large insurance company. *"We typically look at the highest trends that are making a customer unhappy. And, when we listen to calls, we ask ourselves, 'What are the people opportunities and what are the process or procedures opportunities?' Sometimes that means eliminating steps and changing processes. Sometimes training. Sometimes both.* "

Still other organizations hope to get ahead of the complaint curve by targeting, listening to and acting on <u>all</u> high emotion calls. Certainly a lofty ambition and definitely on the right track. Speech analytics can identify calls where the voice pattern suggests high emotion; however, once again, it requires effort on the part of humans to listen to the calls to understand the context of the call and identify what is really happening.

It is important to reiterate that speech analytics is great at identifying *what* a customer is calling about – not the underlying context of *why* or *how* to eliminate the call.

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The Case for Compliance Monitoring Replacement

Verdict:

May work in some organizations but not in highly regulated environments

Many saw the case for speech analytics for compliance monitoring to be a slam dunk. It may work well within some industries by targeting word patterns that align with general operational guidelines like opening or closing statements and flagging those that do not comply. However, for more tightly regulated environments such as financial services, the promise of speech analytics-driven compliance monitoring still has a way to go.

Currently, speech analytics doesn't transcribe the interaction word-for-word and, for most compliance departments, every single word in a script must be captured.

The Case for Quality Monitoring Replacement

Verdict:

Great for targeting specific types of calls but no real cost savings here. Quality monitoring for agent performance still needs the human touch.

Some organizations leverage speech analytics to identify high priority calls for agent coaching by targeting:

- High emotion calls (e.g. raised voice/tone)

- Key words (e.g. "you people", "called before", "password reset", etc.)

- Product specific calls (e.g. product/service mentioned in a call)

Certainly speech analytics can flag calls based on a wide range of word or voice patterns and provide a list of call recordings for quality assurance or frontline managers to review and listen to. However, someone still has to listen to them.

In fact, those organizations who planned on eliminating quality monitoring teams to help pay for speech analytics simply moved the cost to frontline managers. Granted, it makes sense to have frontline managers listen to some calls throughout the month, but it is important to ensure they aren't bombarded and distracted from where the real value of their time falls – coaching.

Importantly, if speech analytics is pushing out a specific type of call (e.g. high emotion or product-specific) then it is critical to also listen to a random sample to balance your overall view of the agent's performance. Best in class organizations continue to leverage specialized quality monitoring teams to identify opportunities for agent coaching.

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CONTEXT IS EVERYTHING
You still need to listen to a lot of calls!

The real power of speech analytics is realized when it is combined with call listening. Speech analytics points you toward the calls that are likely to contain the types of interactions you are investigating or want to focus your coaching around. Call listening provides the context and specificity in order to act on the information.

The optimal model may look something like this:
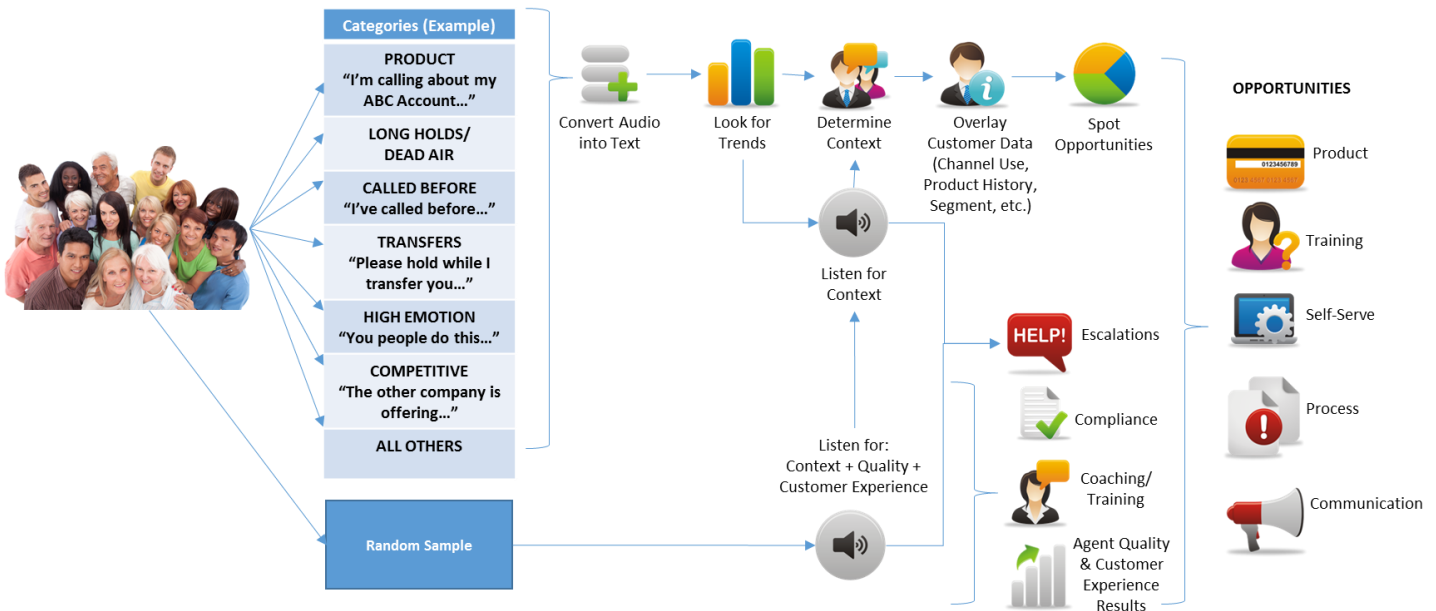
3 IMPORTANT WAYS TO INTEGRATE SPEECH ANALYTICS INTO YOUR QUALITY MONITORING PROGRAM

1. Leverage your existing quality monitoring expertise to provide the necessary context to inform your speech analytics effort.

2. Enhance your quality monitoring by listening to specific call types like high emotion or product-specific calls to inform other parts of the organization.

3. Any call listening environment would benefit from having a combination of internal and external quality monitoring resources. Internal resources provide subject matter expertise. External resources bring an independent third party view that is more closely aligned with that of the customer. Bring an external point-of-view into your speech analytics review.

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CONCLUSION

1. You can't determine the context of the interaction without the listening. You need humans to do that. Be prepared for a huge investment in time – or plan to outsource it.

2. Spend time developing categories that sort calls to isolate trends. This will help to eliminate the number of calls you have to listen to.

3. Overlay speech analytics insight with customer data to provide enhanced richness to the analytics you can perform.

4. Consider outsourcing your call listening for both quality monitoring and speech analytics support to take advantage of a more customer-centric and unbiased point-of-view.

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GET TO KNOW US!

VEREQUEST is a consulting firm specializing in driving and sustaining the quality of the customer experience in the contact center environment. We help our clients, each a leading organization in N.A., to strive to win the hearts and loyalty of customers through a wide range of proprietary tools and techniques.

Our outsourced Quality Monitoring solution pairs VereQuest's highly skilled Customer Insight Specialists with our proprietary quality monitoring technology to capture the level of detail you need to understand the motivations and experiences customers have when interacting with your call center — across all of your channels (calls, email, chat, video, etc.). This same technology is available in a cloud-based, SaaS model for internal quality monitoring teams.

Our quality monitoring solutions not only informs coaching at the agent performance level but can also provide valuable insight needed to build innovative and differentiated solutions for opportunities identified via speech analytics.

Get in touch with us today for a no-obligation demonstration and test-run of our high quality evaluations and coaching.

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