THE STATE OF EMPATHY IN THE CALL CENTER
OVERVIEW OF EMPATHY IN THE WORKPLACE

Companies are under intense pressure to consistently deliver positive customer experiences and be a brand with which their customers are proud to do business. This requires operational excellence at enterprise scale and separates the leaders from the laggards. Self-service is a necessary requirement, but for complex emotional interactions, people demand an authentically human experience.

Forrester has consistently found that emotion is the number one driver of customer loyalty. They recently reported that “customer-obsessed companies report having happier employees, more loyal customers, and increased likelihood to exceed revenue growth expectations.”

The definition of empathy is the ability to understand and share someone else’s feelings. It sounds simple, but most people believe they are much more empathetic than they really are. It’s not easy for people to put themselves in someone else’s shoes, especially when dealing with complex, stressful, and emotional situations.

Implementing empathy at scale in large customer-focused organizations is even more challenging with a myriad of moving parts and dependencies within an organization. While research has repeatedly shown how critical empathy is to customer experience, the human factor makes it difficult to measure and even more difficult to improve at scale. New methodologies and technologies – like Artificial Intelligence (AI), enabled coaching and intelligence augmentation – are paving the way for these organizations to embrace, measure and excel at being more empathetic to their customers’ needs. The stakes are high and competition for customers is fierce – if customers do not believe they are interacting with a company that cares about them and their best interests, they will move on and find a company that does, and they will share their poor experience with their network and beyond.

BARRIERS TO PRACTICING AND MEASURING EMPATHY IN CALL CENTERS

This report examines the role of empathy in the call center. There are 3.4 million call center workers in the U.S. (AT Kearny), and each of them - every day, every hour – is attempting to
make an emotional connection with customers, quite literally, on demand. It’s absolutely vital for a company to strengthen connections with customers, through empathy and compassion.

Phone professionals working in call centers, who are regularly the first and last line of defense when it comes to this task, have an increasingly difficult job that prevents them from being as successful as they could be. For instance, existing systems and processes can create an “assembly line” type of environment which can cause the phone professional to sound robotic and lacking empathy when having a conversation. How they speak and interact with customers has a direct impact on loyalty, the customer experience, and operational performance.

Today, organizations traditionally track customer satisfaction with post-call surveys or “sentiment” data; however, this data is incomplete, skewed and a lagging indicator, which makes it impossible to take timely action or predict future operational outcomes such as, customer churn, employee engagement or claims duration. There’s clearly an opportunity for meaningful improvement.

There has been a considerable amount of discussion about self-service solutions – both to reduce operational costs and to eliminate friction for consumers. Self-service solutions excel at reducing friction for basic transactions. However, with more complex conversations, such as with insurance claims, health coverage, or financial transactions, self-service is simply not sufficient. Human interactions represent the proverbial “moments-of-truth” for customer relationships. Nail that human connection, and you’re rewarded with brand loyalty. Miss your chance, and you’re the next trending topic.

Phone interactions are more critical than ever before to the customer experience journey you deliver, and call center phone professionals are your biggest competitive advantage – the arbiters of a brand promise. The time is right to re-examine how we can better empower phone professionals and augment their natural abilities to deliver empathy.
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[cogitocorp.com]
Cogito’s State of Empathy in the Call Center report was compiled to explore how companies are adapting their customer experience strategies – including tactics, training and technology – to address growing customer expectations, competitively differentiate their offerings, and drive greater customer loyalty. This report is constructed with two sets of data. The first set of data is a series of survey findings that examine both consumer opinions about interactions with call centers; and challenges and trends among call center phone professionals and managers. The second set of data is sourced from behavioral insights derived from Cogito’s collaborative work with our clients, based on a systematic analysis of 2.3 million calls from 2018.

### RESEARCH DEMOGRAPHICS

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<th>SURVEY</th>
<th>COGITO DATA</th>
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<tr>
<td>500 U.S. B2B phone professionals and managers from healthcare, insurance, retail, financial services and telecom industries surveyed.*</td>
<td>~2100 U.S. consumers surveyed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3M analyzed calls from 2018 across multiple industries.</td>
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*between November 2018 and January 2019  
**between November and December 2018
TOP TRENDS: EMPATHY IN THE CALL CENTER

Empathy and quality service are universal needs.

Empathetic service drives customer loyalty.

Delivering empathy consistently and at scale is exceedingly difficult.

Coaching is more critical than ever in helping phone professionals be more empathetic more often.
FAST FACTS

CONSUMER PERSPECTIVE

45% Quality customer service is the number one factor (45%) in determining whether a consumer views an organization as empathetic.

44% Nearly half (44%) feel like customer service conversations are transactional, and impersonal — one size fits all.

PHONE PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVE

96% Believe empathy is important to being successful at their job.

MANAGER PERSPECTIVE

TOP QUALITIES

90% Empathy and courtesy are top qualities that phone professionals should have.

90% Nearly 90% agree it's important to forge a human connection with their customers.

Cogito's 2019 State of Empathy in the Call Center Report
Findings from Cogito’s 2019 State of Empathy in the Call Center report indicate that consumers, phone professionals and managers are aligned: empathy in an organization is important. Customers want to work with trustworthy companies that are responsive in times of need. In fact, according to a 2018 study from the Temkin Group, customer experience is made up of three components – success, effort, and emotion; and while all three elements impact customer loyalty, an improvement in emotion drives the most significant increase in loyalty.

While companies have responded with bots, apps, and IVRs to make it easier for customers, few have invested in technology specifically focused on emotion, to help improve human behavior and enhance the soft skills of phone professionals. Because customers depend on the intellect and emotional support provided during difficult and complex interactions, these innovations are insufficient when it comes to more complex or more emotionally charged conversations. As a result, the phone professional-customer relationship is more strained than ever. While it’s impossible to control the customer’s actions, a fully engaged phone professional who listens and expresses a genuine interest in resolving the situation will foster the type of partnership between phone professionals and customers that’s necessary for ensuring more engaging and successful conversations.
Insights from the survey reveal some interesting conflicts between consumer, phone professional and manager perspectives. While managers and consumers agree that being empathetic is the most important attribute of a good phone conversation, phone professionals believe that being courteous is most important. Managers and phone professionals both consider consistency a critical factor of a good conversation, however only about 30 percent of consumers agree. Consumers rank reliability as the second most important factor behind empathy. Interestingly, social psychologists generally consider empathy and reliability as synonyms for the two factors that drive a positive first impression — trust and confidence.

All of these findings beg the question of whether phone professionals and consumers are aligned on what’s most important to have a good conversation.

Customers, Managers, and Phone Professionals Consider Empathy on Every Call a Key Responsibility
What Do Millennials Really Want?
What We All Do — Empathy

Receiving empathy appears to be a universal need across age groups, based on our survey data. Making a favorable human connection is a critical component of positive customer experiences for all generations. Regardless of age, consumers are really not all that different in seeking a positive, empathetic and human experience with the brands with which they choose to do business. This runs almost contrary to the common and well-worn narrative that millennials and generation Z are so different from other generations. Yes, it’s critical that brands listen to their customers’ needs and adapt their brand experiences and services to meet customer expectations. However, when we look at the factors that make consumers more likely to remain loyal to a company, all age groups – including Millennials – rated empathy within 10 percentage points of the other generations’ ratings. Maybe age really doesn’t matter after all. What matters most is that your organization is authentically delivering empathy in every interaction.
FAST FACTS

The most important factors in remaining loyal to a company include:

- Responsive: 62%
- Reliable: 56%
- Courteous: 55%

66% might switch to a different service provider due to poor customer service experience.

94% are more likely to continue using a particular product or service if they know empathy is a focus for the organization.

97% say empathy from phone professionals is important in considering future spending decisions with a company.

67% say it’s very important in considering future spending decisions with a company.
Survey findings support the fact that consumer loyalty is driven by empathy - almost 100 percent of respondents will continue using a particular product when empathy is a priority for an organization. This adds another layer to our finding that more than half of consumers would switch to another service provider after a poor experience - a data point that has been repeatedly proven by various organizations. As an example, according to the American Express 2017 Customer Service Barometer, 33 percent of customers will consider switching companies after a single instance of poor service. According to data from the Temkin Group’s 2018 ROI of Customer Experience report, the correlation between customer experience and repurchasing is very high. Furthermore, there’s a 21-point difference in Net Promoter Score (NPS) between consumers who have had a very good experience with a company and those who have had a very poor experience.

In a 2018 survey conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers (“PwC”), consumers said they would pay up to 16 percent more for better customer service. Empathy translates into wins for the customer, the employee, and a business's bottom-line. Establishing and maintaining customer trust and loyalty is critical to a brand’s success. According to PwC, 73 percent of people point to customer experience as an important factor in their purchasing decisions, yet only 49 percent of U.S. consumers say companies provide a good customer experience. It might seem like a no-brainer, but
customer experience must be a priority for organizations who want to safeguard customer loyalty, win new customers, and stay ahead of the competition.

“We see Cogito as additive to the in-person coaching our associates receive from their supervisors. It’s exciting to see our digital transformation strategy is paying off. Since piloting and rolling out the platform our associates have said Cogito has helped them to more confidently deliver a consistent customer experience and we’ve seen a steady increase in our customer satisfaction scores.”

—Kristine Poznanski, EVP and Head of Global Customer Solutions at MetLife
The good news is organizations that focus on empathy improve outcomes. In fact, after analyzing data from over 2.3 million calls where phone professionals were guided by Cogito to be more empathetic, the following trends emerged:

- **2.5%** average increase in tNPS
- **4.9%** average increase in NPS
- **8%** average decrease in handle time
- **1.7%** average increase in first call resolution
- **6%** average improvement in claim duration
FAST FACTS

Delivering a quality customer experience becomes harder after about 25 calls per day per phone professional.

Phone professionals also reported that establishing rapport and dealing with emotionally distraught, rude or irritated customers are more difficult during the second part of their shift than the first.

We refer to this as compassion fatigue.

COGITO CALL ANALYSIS DATA

PHONE PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVE

While 30% of phone professionals surveyed find keeping their tone warm, friendly or energetic difficult during the first part of their shift... 70% find doing so is more difficult during the second part of their shift.

25 CALLS PER DAY

30% 9am-12pm

70% 1-5pm

25 CALLS PER DAY
Phone professionals have a difficult job, and, with chatbots, IVRs, etc., now skimming off simple interactions, every call that a phone professional handles includes complex issues and high emotions. Additionally, try as they might, call centers still struggle with consistently training employees on the vital “soft skills” required to navigate these challenging calls. Finally, call centers lack key insights into their employees’ emotional behaviors and, since each human varies, have difficulty in coaching them to improve. As a result, phone professionals struggle with building rapport, resulting in poor customer experiences. Eventually, they miss their KPIs and then burn or churn out, leaving a call center to start the costly cycle all over again with a new phone professional.

Overall, phone professional performance tends to decline as the day wears on. In fact, Cogito’s analysis of over 2.3 million calls offers interesting findings related to the effect these complex emotional calls have on phone professionals. The data demonstrates that delivering a high-quality customer experience becomes harder after just 25 calls, and, on an average 10-minute call, phone professionals will exhibit at least one nonverbal behavior that can negatively impact a call outcome. “Slow to respond” notifications (see callout box on Cogito’s In-call Notifications for more information) last longer (mean duration) during early and late hours, as phone professionals are distracted and tired. And the frequency with which longer periods of silence occur (e.g., because a phone professional is distracted, more fatigued, or busy trying to solve a problem) unsurprisingly peaks in the evening hours (corresponding to shift changes). Cogito data also shows that calls lacking empathy are characterized by periods of silence, lower energy on the part of the phone professional, and/or inconsistent pace.
The Temkin Group, which has pioneered research in customer experience, explains that customer experience can be distilled down into three components — success, effort, and emotion. While all three elements impact customer loyalty, improvements in emotion have the most significant positive impact on customer experience. Temkin is not alone. Other experts such as Gartner and Forrester have consistently found that emotion is THE number one driver of customer loyalty. It’s how a customer FEELS how well they are treated that matters most.

Cogito detects — in real time — how a customer feels about a call and measures customer experience with a CX Score that uses non-verbal, vocal signals from both the customer and phone professional to understand customer experience. On average, organizations that leverage live coaching from Cogito, which supports agents or phone professionals and helps them perform better during conversations with customers, improve their CX Scores by 7.7 percent. In turn, this improvement affects their traditional means of measuring customer experience, on average, by 4.9 percent.
The Cogito Empathy Cue Notification appears when a change in the customer’s behavior indicates a heightened need for emotional support. The emotion that is detected in the customer’s voice may need an adjustment in the phone professional’s communication to keep the conversation on the right track. The Empathy Cue Notification tends to appear more often later in the day, as a phone professional gets fatigued. On average, a customer will need Empathy at least 1 time during a 10 minute call.

The Cogito Slow to Respond Notification appears when a phone professional delays for too long in responding to a customer. These periods of silence give customers the perception that the phone professional is incompetent or untrustworthy. The Slow to Respond notification tends to appear more often later in a shift, as a phone professional is more likely to suffer from cognitive overload from multitasking.
The Energy Cue Notification triggers when a phone professional demonstrates subdued energy and their voice sounds flatter and less engaged. Customers perceive the phone professional as disinterested in solving their problem. As you would expect, the Energy Cue Notification appears more often later in the day, as a phone professional is more likely fatigued. This data support survey results where phone professionals self-report that they find it harder to make a connection or pay attention in the 2nd half of their shifts.

“The ability to provide an empathetic human touch is a must for any customer-focused organization. Cogito’s AI has the potential to have a dramatic impact on the future of financial services and beyond.”

—Tim Del Bello, Director, New York Life Ventures
### CHALLENGES OVER THE COURSE OF A SHIFT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>1st half of shift</th>
<th>2nd half of shift</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finding information to resolve my customer’s problem</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making a human connection with the customer</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing rapport</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paying attention and listening while navigating complicated systems</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with emotionally distraught, rude, or irritated customers</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping my tone warm, friendly, and/or energetic</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>60%</td>
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*Phone Professionals Report Greater Difficulty Establishing a Personal Connection During the 2nd Half of their Shift*

### PHONE PROFESSIONALS & MANAGERS DISAGREE OVER RESOURCES & TRAINING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Managers</th>
<th>Phone Professionals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I / My team has the tools I need to learn from previous calls</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I / My team has the time I need to learn from previous calls</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I / My team receives an adequate amount of time for guidance or feedback</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It would be useful if I / my team had feedback on every call, rather than a few</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>27%</td>
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*Phone Professionals (purple) & Managers (blue) Disagree Over Resources & Access to Training*
How Often Do Phone Professionals Actively Listen to Consumer Concerns?

Less than 1/5 of phone professionals report always actively listening to customer concerns.
Technology to Support Self-Improvement—Cogito’s In-call Notifications

Call centers have been using technology for decades to support post-call quality and compliance as well as aid in “after the fact” coaching. Newer technology, like that from Cogito, analyzes phone conversations in real time and acts like a personal AI Coach—via in-call notifications—to augment phone professionals’ natural abilities, helping them be more aware of their behaviors in an effort to improve conversations. Cogito’s in-call notifications include:

- **Slow to Respond**: Nudges the phone professional that they aren’t reacting quickly enough and should be more responsive.
- **Extended Silence**: Reminds the phone professional to check in with the customer to re-establish presence.
- **Speaking Slowly**: Signals the phone professional to take note of their speaking pace and determine if speeding up is appropriate.
- **Speaking Quickly**: Reminds the phone professional to take a breath, slow pace down, and allow the customer to catch up.
- **Continuous Speaking**: Nudges the phone professional to pause and ask an open-ended question to make sure the customer is following.
- **Extended Overlap**: Signals the phone professional to pause and stop speaking to let the customer finish his or her thought.
- **Energy Cue Notification**: Detects a change in the phone professional’s vocal energy and nudges the phone professional to consider speaking with more enthusiasm.
- **Empathy Cue Notification**: Detects a change in the customer’s emotional state and offers the phone professional a prime opportunity to make a human connection with the customer.

After using Cogito for just eight weeks, clients have found that phone professionals showed the following notification improvements:

- Speaking Quickly: **58% lower frequency**
- Continuous Speaking: **26% lower frequency**
- Slow to Respond: **16% lower frequency**
- Extended Silence: **14% lower frequency**
- Speaking Slowly: **11% lower frequency**
- Energy Cue: **5% lower frequency**

Cogito’s 2019 State of Empathy in the Call Center Report
Managers think empathy is the most important thing for their phone professionals, but consumers/phone professionals are more tempered and aligned with their thoughts; need to provide coaching to help phone professionals understand what empathy is, when they are exhibiting it and when they are not — so they can understand how to be more empathetic more often.

Managers believe phone professionals could be +70% more empathetic on calls if they had more coaching.

59% of managers agree it would be useful if team members had feedback on every call instead of just a few.

27% believe the calls they listen to during coaching are not representative of the calls they receive in a month.

36% believe that during a call, they’re more likely to focus on the customer’s emotions than their coach’s advice.

There’s a disconnect between what managers are coaching and what phone professionals perceive they’re being coached on:

Managers believe they are coaching their teams on being:
- Empathetic: 79%
- Consistent: 56%
- Courteous: 52%

Phone professionals perceive they’re being coached on:
- Empathetic: 58%
- Consistent: 54%
- Courteous: 63%
Surveyed managers believe that phone professionals could be at least 70 percent more empathetic with more coaching. Further, the majority believed that their team would be more effective with feedback on every call rather than just a handful. Empathy can be measured and coached, but, ultimately, it is reliant on one’s own ability to improve his or her emotional intelligence and be able to adapt to the emotions of others.

In the absence of unlimited operational budget to hire a personal coach for every phone professional, organizations are instead turning to technology to provide the means by which to measure empathy at an organizational scale, correlate the impact of empathy to bottom-line metrics, provide coaching to employees as to how they can adjust behavior to be perceived as more empathetic and trustworthy, and tie actual conversational behavior back to customer experience metrics. Ultimately, artificial intelligence,
grounded in behavioral science, can analyze conversational behavior and guide phone professionals while improving their emotional skills. This helps reinforce coaching from managers, ensuring a more consistent customer experience. Objective and automatic measurement of the customer’s emotional experience on 100 percent of calls, provides companies with a wealth of data they’ve never had access to before. This data can be used to continuously improve the customer experience delivered by their call centers and to gauge brand perception and loyalty. Enhanced customer experience insights can also identify customer patterns that enable organizations to better align product needs with their current and future base.

Coaching for Consistency: This demonstrates the value of Cogito’s AI Coach, which guides agents in the moment. We mentioned that all of these calls weigh on phone professionals...and their job gets harder and they get worse at their job as the day goes on. However, with Cogito, we ensure that customer experience stays CONSISTENT even when the phone professional is lagging.
THE IMPACT OF REAL-TIME COACHING

Cogito data demonstrates that overall, phone professionals who use Cogito for coaching in their calls perform better than their peers.

- “Slow to respond” notifications last longer (mean duration) during early and late hours as phone professionals are distracted and tired; Cogito users are protected against this extreme variation with 10% shorter silence durations than non-users (across clients) during these periods. During the crucial morning and afternoon hours, Slow to Respond notifications occur 23% less frequently for Cogito users relative to non-users.
- Extended Silence: Extended Silence frequencies peak in the evening hours.
- Cogito users are protected against this spike with Extended Silence appearing 30.6% less frequently after 5p than for non-users.
- Energy Cue Notification frequency: Lower for Cogito users vs. non-users during the critical daytime performance hours (8a-5p) – by an average of 22.7%
- Speaking Quickly frequency: Lower for Cogito users vs. non-users during daytime – by an average of 10.7%
- Continuous Speaking frequency: Lower for Cogito users vs. non-users during daytime (8a-5p) – by an average of 14.1%
- Speaking Slowly frequency: Lower for Cogito users vs. non-users during daytime (8a-5p) – by an average of 7.6%

“Cognitive computing is how we will bring more humanity to how we interact with our customers.”

—Marty Lippert, EVP/Global Head of Tech and Ops, MetLIfe
Controlling all of the variables allows businesses to ensure that every phone interaction is of consistent, controlled quality.

Holistically, all of these notifications help course-correct behavior to ensure that customers consistently have authentic, empathy-driven, high quality conversations. Phone professional consistency also means reduced variability in tracked KPIs, which leads to better, more predictable forecasting for site leaders. Controlling all of the variables allows businesses to ensure that every phone interaction is of consistent, controlled quality.

Cogito has also found that investment in empathy as a business strategy yields high ROI:

- Drives operational efficiency (AHT, FCR, Issue Resolution)
- Enhances customer satisfaction (CSAT, NPS)
- Improves employee productivity & reduces churn
EMPATHETIC SERVICE FOR LOYALTY

To be an industry leader, companies must build strong, lasting relationships with customers. In the past year, Cogito has seen a shift in thinking in the market, where organizations have squeezed what they can from operational efficiencies in both process and technology investments and now seek to invest more in their phone professionals by coaching and augmenting their soft skills.

Because of advancements in AI, customer-focused organizations can now elevate the recognition and delivery of empathy by augmenting the emotional intelligence of front-line employees with technology. Simultaneously, technological advances can also provide objective measurement of the customers’ emotional experiences during phone calls. With this technology, organizations can deliver in-the-moment coaching to phone professionals while empowering leaders with better customer insights to gauge brand impact.

A study from the Temkin Group (Source: Temkin Group Q1 Consumer Benchmark Study) shows very large revenue increases tied to moderate improvements in CX over a three-year period. On average, the revenue increases were approximately $775MM – through customer retention or through up- or cross-sales, for example.

“Since deploying the system, the call center has seen an increase of 10% in both its first-call resolution and net promoter scores, which track customer sentiment to understand how likely they are to recommend a brand.”

—Kristine Poznanski, Wall Street Journal
THE FUTURE OF EMPATHY IN SERVICE

In the coming years, AI will evolve to become increasingly more human aware and will provide personalized guidance to humans during their moments of need. As a result of this evolution, each person will have an AI coach accompanying them in their professional lives that will reinforce their strengths and augment their individual weaknesses resulting in a more productive, emotionally intelligent and successful workforce.

Human performance varies between individuals and from moment to moment. AI coaches will help create more consistency and predictability for an organization by reducing outliers, helping average performers perform better, and by helping top performers be more consistent.

The impacts of AI coaches will be far reaching:

- A larger number of high performing, emotionally intelligent employees;
- More informed and effective managers;
- Faster, more complete, and more objective customer insights;
- More positive customer experiences leading to increased loyalty;
- Improved company culture with higher employee retention.

As a result, with the continued rise of AI, we foresee organizations investing more broadly into intelligence augmentation (i.e., technology that helps employees perform at a higher level and better adapt to their situations) as both a competitive advantage and a revenue-enabler for the business. Empathy, compassion, and having more human connections are now core business and operational strategies – not just immeasurable fringe concepts. We see far-reaching advantages for those organizations who embrace the strategy of delivering more empathetic and trusted relationships with their customers and leverage technology to empower their phone professionals with AI coaching that helps them execute on this strategy. Those who do this successfully will be the industry leaders of the future.
ABOUT COGITO

Cogito improves the emotional intelligence of phone professionals. The company has developed an AI coaching system that measures how well a conversation is going, as it is happening, to provide in-call guidance — an instant measure of customer perception and novel insights into behaviors and outcomes. Cogito’s AI is widely deployed in large sales, service, and care organizations, such as MetLife and Humana, where it has proven to help reduce call handle time, increase first call resolution, improve phone professional engagement, and increase customer loyalty.