

Z E N T A R A W H I T E P A P E R

From SLAs to XLAs

The Paradigm Shift Your Contact Center Needs

*Your SLAs are green. Your customers are still leaving.
Discover why experience-level agreements are the future of customer retention.*

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Contents

1. Executive Summary
2. The SLA Paradox: Green Dashboards, Red Revenue
3. What Are Experience Level Agreements?
4. The XLA Framework: Seven Dimensions of Experience
5. The Technology Gap: Why Legacy Platforms Cannot Deliver XLAs
6. The AI Engine: How Zentara Makes XLAs Operational
7. Case in Point: Measuring What Matters
8. The Business Case: From Soft Metrics to Hard Dollars
9. Implementation: From SLA to XLA in 10 Days
10. Conclusion: The Experience Assurance Era

1. Executive Summary

The contact center industry has operated under the same measurement framework for decades. Service Level Agreements track speed: how fast calls are answered, how quickly tickets are resolved, and how short hold times can be kept. These metrics were designed for an era when efficiency was the primary competitive advantage.

That era is over.

Today, contact centers operating with green SLA dashboards are watching customer churn climb, NPS stagnate, and revenue erode. The disconnect is not a mystery — it is a measurement failure. SLAs measure operational speed. They do not measure customer experience. And in a market where switching costs approach zero and customer expectations are shaped by the best experience they have had with any brand, speed alone cannot protect revenue.

Experience Level Agreements (XLAs) represent a fundamental shift in how contact centers measure, manage, and deliver value. Rather than tracking whether a call was answered in 20 seconds, XLAs measure whether the customer's problem was resolved completely, whether the interaction built or eroded trust, and whether the experience will drive retention or defection.

This whitepaper examines why SLAs fail to capture the metrics that drive business outcomes, how XLAs fill this gap, and the technology infrastructure required to make experience measurement operational at scale.

2. The SLA Paradox: Green Dashboards, Red Revenue

Consider a contact center with the following performance metrics: 92% of calls answered within 20 seconds, average handle time of 4 minutes 30 seconds, 95% first-call resolution rate reported, and QA scores averaging 88% across the team.

By every traditional measure, this operation is performing well. SLA dashboards are green. Monthly reports show targets consistently met.

Yet this same contact center is experiencing 18% annual customer churn, declining NPS scores over six consecutive quarters, rising complaint volumes on social media, and repeat contact rates that tell a different story than FCR metrics suggest.

The paradox is clear: the metrics are green, but the business outcomes are red. This is not an anomaly. It is a systemic failure of the SLA framework.

Why SLAs Miss the Signal

Service Level Agreements were designed to measure operational efficiency in environments where the primary cost driver was staffing and the primary competitive differentiator was availability. They answer one question: did the operation run within defined parameters?

They do not answer the questions that matter to the business: Did the customer leave feeling confident their issue was resolved? Will the customer stay? Will they recommend the brand? Was the experience worth the investment?

The Speed Trap

SLAs optimize for speed, which creates perverse incentives. Agents are trained to minimize handle time, which often means rushing through complex issues. First-call resolution metrics are gamed through narrow definitions of “resolved.” Quality assurance reviews, limited to 3–5% of interactions, miss systemic patterns entirely.

The result is an operation that appears efficient while systematically degrading customer relationships.

The Sampling Problem

Traditional QA programs evaluate a tiny fraction of customer interactions. In a contact center handling 10,000 calls per month, a 5% QA sample means 9,500 interactions go entirely unreviewed. Compliance violations, sentiment shifts, coaching opportunities, and process failures in those 9,500 calls are invisible to management.

Operating a contact center on 5% visibility is equivalent to making financial decisions based on 5% of your transaction data. No CFO would accept that standard. Yet it remains the industry norm for customer experience measurement.

3. What Are Experience Level Agreements?

Experience Level Agreements represent a measurement framework that evaluates the quality of the relationship between a business and its customers, rather than the speed of operational processes.

Where SLAs ask “Did we answer the phone fast enough?” XLAs ask “Did the customer’s experience build or erode trust?”

This is not a semantic distinction. It fundamentally changes what gets measured, what gets managed, and what gets improved.

The SLA-to-XLA Shift

Dimension	SLA Approach	XLA Approach
Quality Metric	QA score on 3–5% sample	AI scoring on 100% of interactions
Resolution	Was the ticket closed?	Was the problem truly resolved?
Customer Effort	Not measured	Friction quantified at every stage
Sentiment	Post-call survey (10–15% response)	Real-time AI analysis, every call
Churn Risk	Reactive — after cancellation	Predictive — 60–90 day warning
Agent Health	Not measured	Burnout prediction, 81% accuracy
Compliance	Random audit sampling	100% automated monitoring
Business Impact	Cost per call	Revenue at risk, lifetime value

The XLA framework does not replace SLAs entirely. Operational metrics still matter. The shift is one of primacy: SLAs become supporting data for the experience metrics that actually drive retention, revenue, and growth.

4. The XLA Framework: Seven Dimensions of Experience

The XLA score is not a single metric. It is a composite measurement derived from seven distinct dimensions, each weighted based on the specific dynamics of the business and its customer base.

1. Resolution Quality Score

Measures the completeness and accuracy of issue resolution. Unlike binary first-call resolution metrics, Resolution Quality evaluates whether the root cause was addressed, whether the solution was durable, and whether the customer was equipped to avoid the same issue in the future.

2. Sentiment Score

Analyzed in real time across 100% of interactions using AI that achieves 94% accuracy. Sentiment is tracked not just as an aggregate but by journey stage — greeting, investigation, resolution, closing — to identify exactly where in the interaction experience breaks down.

3. Net Promoter Score (NPS)

Derived from interaction patterns rather than relying solely on post-call surveys with low response rates. AI-predicted NPS correlates customer behavior signals with likelihood to recommend, providing continuous measurement rather than periodic snapshots.

4. Customer Effort Score (CES)

Quantifies the friction a customer experiences during an interaction. Hold times, transfers, repeat authentication, information re-entry, and escalation steps are all measured and weighted to produce a friction index for every interaction.

5. First Contact Resolution (True FCR)

Goes beyond the traditional definition by tracking whether the same customer contacts again within a defined window for the same or related issue. A call marked “resolved” that generates a callback within 72 hours is not truly resolved — and XLA reflects that.

6. Customer Satisfaction (CSAT)

Measured per interaction with AI-derived scoring that does not depend on customer survey participation. The system evaluates verbal and tonal indicators of satisfaction throughout the interaction, providing a CSAT signal for 100% of contacts rather than the 10–15% who complete surveys.

7. Churn Prediction Score

Zentara's predictive model identifies customers at risk of churn 60–90 days before cancellation with 87% accuracy. This is not a lag indicator — it is an actionable early warning that transforms retention from reactive to proactive.

5. The Technology Gap: Why Legacy Platforms Cannot Deliver XLAs

The reason most contact centers have not adopted experience-level measurement is not philosophical resistance. It is technological limitation.

Delivering XLAs requires capabilities that do not exist in traditional contact center stacks:

- 100% interaction analysis (not sampling) across voice, chat, email, and video
- Real-time speech-to-text with 98%+ accuracy for live monitoring and scoring
- Multi-dimensional AI engines running simultaneously: sentiment, compliance, quality, churn, burnout
- Journey-stage mapping that breaks each interaction into measurable touchpoints
- Predictive modeling integrated directly into operational workflows

Legacy CCaaS platforms were architected for call routing and workforce management. Quality assurance, analytics, compliance, and workforce optimization were bolted on over time — often through acquisitions — creating fragmented data silos that cannot support the unified, real-time analysis that XLAs demand.

You cannot measure experience with tools that were designed to measure efficiency. The architecture has to be different from the ground up.

This is the fundamental insight behind Zentara's platform design. Rather than retrofitting experience measurement onto a legacy telephony stack, Zentara was built as an AI-native intelligence platform with experience measurement as its core architecture, not an afterthought.

6. The AI Engine: How Zentara Makes XLAs Operational

Zentara's platform runs eight AI engines simultaneously across every interaction, producing the data required to calculate, display, and act on Experience Level Agreements in real time.

Speech Intelligence (98% Accuracy)

Real-time transcription with contextual understanding that goes beyond word recognition to capture meaning, intent, and nuance. This is the data foundation that powers every other engine.

Sentiment Analysis (94% Accuracy)

Multi-layered emotional intelligence that tracks sentiment shifts throughout the interaction. The system maps emotional trajectory by journey stage, identifying the precise moments where experience improves or degrades.

AI Quality Scoring (97% Accuracy)

Automated evaluation of 100% of interactions against customizable quality frameworks. This replaces the 3–5% manual sampling standard with comprehensive, consistent, and immediate quality measurement.

Churn Prediction (87% Accuracy)

An ensemble model combining XGBoost and LSTM networks that identifies at-risk customers 60–90 days before cancellation. The system identifies the specific interaction patterns driving churn, enabling targeted retention interventions.

Burnout Prediction (81% Accuracy)

An industry first. Using acoustic analysis, interaction patterns, and performance trends, Zentara identifies agents showing early signs of burnout before it impacts performance or leads to attrition. No competitor in the CCaaS market offers this capability.

Compliance Detection

Real-time monitoring for HIPAA, PCI-DSS, TCPA, SOC 2, GDPR, and CCPA adherence across 100% of interactions. Violations trigger immediate alerts with the specific agent, violation type, and recommended corrective action.

XLA Calculation Engine

The proprietary scoring engine that combines all seven experience dimensions into a unified, weighted XLA score. The engine benchmarks performance against industry standards, internal targets, and historical trends.

Real-Time Agent Assist (Cora AI)

A conversational AI assistant that provides live guidance to agents during calls and generates on-demand reports, dashboards, and coaching plans for supervisors. Cora bridges the gap between data and action.

7. Case in Point: Measuring What Matters

To understand the difference between SLA and XLA measurement, consider how each framework evaluates the same customer interaction.

The Scenario

A customer calls to request a refund after being enrolled in the wrong service plan. The call lasts 5 minutes and 21 seconds. The agent verifies the account, processes the refund, and enrolls the customer in the correct plan.

SLA Evaluation

- Speed to answer: 8 seconds (within SLA)
- Handle time: 5:21 (within target)
- Resolution: Ticket closed (FCR = yes)
- QA: Not selected for review (95% probability)

SLA verdict: Passed. Green dashboard.

XLA Evaluation

- Resolution Quality: 95 — root cause addressed, correct plan activated, refund processed
- Sentiment: 88% — started frustrated, shifted to relieved during resolution
- Customer Effort: Low — single call, no transfers, no repeat authentication
- CSAT: 98 — customer expressed relief and stated she would recommend the service
- Churn Prediction: 0 — risk eliminated by successful recovery
- Journey Map: Problem Description stage had 60 CSAT, indicating enrollment error caused significant friction

XLA verdict: Strong recovery interaction. The journey map reveals a process problem upstream — incorrect plan enrollment — that should be investigated to prevent recurrence.

SLAs told you the call was fine. XLAs told you the call saved a customer, identified a process failure, and provided the data to prevent it from happening again.

8. The Business Case: From Soft Metrics to Hard Dollars

Experience metrics are often dismissed as “soft” — important for brand but difficult to connect to revenue. XLAs eliminate this objection by translating every experience dimension into financial language.

Churn Prediction = Revenue Protection

When Zentara’s churn prediction engine flags 122 customers as high risk, that is not an abstract warning. Multiply by average customer lifetime value and you have a dollar figure representing revenue you can either save or lose. A CFO can act on that number.

Burnout Prediction = Retention Cost Savings

Agent turnover in contact centers averages 30–45% annually, with replacement costs estimated at \$10,000–\$20,000 per agent. Zentara’s burnout prediction identifies at-risk agents before they disengage, enabling intervention that reduces attrition and protects the investment in trained talent.

100% QA Coverage = Compliance Risk Reduction

A single HIPAA violation can result in fines ranging from \$100 to \$50,000 per incident, with annual caps up to \$1.5 million per violation category. PCI-DSS non-compliance can cost \$5,000–\$100,000 per month. Monitoring 100% of interactions fundamentally transforms compliance risk.

Customer Journey Mapping = Process ROI

When the journey map shows a 6% drop-off at Resolution Attempt with a 68 CSAT, the cost is calculable: drop-off rate multiplied by interaction volume multiplied by cost of re-contact or churn. The fix has a measurable return.

9. Implementation: From SLA to XLA in 10 Days

One of the most significant barriers to platform modernization is implementation complexity. Legacy CCaaS migrations typically take 6–12 months, requiring extensive professional services, data migration, and retraining.

Zentara was engineered for rapid deployment. The platform delivers full operational capability — including voice infrastructure, omnichannel routing, workforce management, quality assurance, compliance monitoring, and XLA dashboards — in a 10-day implementation window.

The 10-Day Implementation Path

1. **Days 1–2:** Infrastructure provisioning and SIP trunk configuration
2. **Days 3–4:** Queue design, IVR configuration, and routing rules
3. **Days 5–6:** AI engine calibration and QA framework setup
4. **Days 7–8:** WFM scheduling, compliance rules, and XLA dashboard configuration
5. **Days 9–10:** Agent onboarding, live testing, and go-live

This is not a proof-of-concept timeline. It is full production deployment with live voice, real-time AI, and complete XLA visibility from day one.

10. Conclusion: The Experience Assurance Era

The contact center industry is at an inflection point. The tools and metrics that defined operational excellence for three decades are no longer sufficient to protect customer relationships or drive business growth.

SLAs were built for an era when being reachable was enough. That era has passed. Customers now expect every interaction to be effortless, empathetic, and resolved completely. They will not tell you when they have decided to leave — they will simply leave.

Experience Level Agreements provide the measurement framework to see what SLAs cannot: the quality of the relationship, the health of the customer base, and the true performance of the operation in terms that matter to the business.

The technology to deliver XLAs at scale exists today. It requires AI-native architecture, 100% interaction analysis, predictive intelligence, and a unified platform that eliminates the data silos that have kept experience measurement aspirational rather than operational.

The question is no longer whether the industry will shift from SLAs to XLAs. The question is whether your organization will lead the shift or be disrupted by those who do.

Ready to See XLAs in Action?

Zentara is the first full AI-native CCaaS platform built from the ground up for experience-level measurement. See how 100% interaction intelligence, predictive churn and burnout detection, and real-time XLA dashboards work in a live environment.