THE IRON CHRONICLES
ENTERPRISE IRON FINANCIAL INDUSTRY SOLUTIONS, INC.
Delivering impactful Business, Technology, & Workforce Solutions since 2002

MAY 2026 | VOL. 7 | ISSUE 2

From The Corner Office

Welcome to our Q2 2026 edition, focused on resilience, modernization, and the evolving demands shaping Financial Services and Retirement Services organizations today.

As we approach Memorial Day and take time to reflect on service, resilience, and community, we're pleased to share another edition centered on the operational challenges continuing to redefine our industry.

In this issue, Adrienne Ryan Pinto explores how organizations are rethinking operational resilience in **The Case for a "Spare Tire" Contact Center: Designing for Continuity, Not Just Efficiency.**

We also feature a perspective from Robert Holman in **When Consultants Cost Less Than Employees: A Practical Perspective for Budget Owners**, examining the evolving conversation around consultants versus full-time staffing models, alongside a new **Case Study** highlighting how Enterprise Iron helped stabilize and accelerate a complex pension platform modernization initiative.

Together, these pieces reflect the increasing importance of balancing speed, expertise, governance, and operational execution in today's transformation efforts.

As organizations continue navigating modernization, operational resilience, workforce pressures, and increasing customer expectations, our focus remains helping clients deliver sustainable transformation with clarity and measurable outcomes.

Thank you for being part of the EI community and for continuing the conversation with us throughout the year. We look forward to reconnecting again in August following America's 250th anniversary celebration.

Wishing you and your families a safe and meaningful Memorial Day Holiday.

Warm regards,

John Crocker
Co-Founder & EVP
jrc@enterpriseiron.com

The Case for a "Spare Tire" Contact Center: Designing for Continuity, Not Just Efficiency

By **Adrienne Ryan Pinto,** *Managing Director, Delivery*

In retirement and financial services, resilience has traditionally meant safeguarding data, maintaining compliance, and ensuring systems availability.

But when clients and participants need support during market volatility, distribution events, or plan changes, none of that matters if they can't reach you.

Increasingly, organizations are discovering that their existing service models were never designed for this level of operational disruption.

When a contact center is disrupted by a cyber event, regional outage, workforce gap, or unexpected surge in demand, customers don't interpret it as an operational issue. They experience it as unavailability at a critical moment.

In this industry, that's more than a service gap.

It's a break in trust.

From Single Point of Failure to Continuous Customer Access

For many organizations, the challenge is no longer whether disruption will occur, it's whether customer access can be maintained when it does.

Traditional contact center models were built around efficiency and centralized operations. But in today's environment, resilience requires a different approach: one designed to absorb disruption without compromising customer experience.

Traditional Contact Center Model	Spare Tire Contact Center Model
• Regionally concentrated operations	• Parallel ready-to-activate support model
• Limited redundancy	• Geographic and operational redundancy
• Vulnerable to outages and staffing disruption	• Scalable surge capacity
Outcome: **Service interruption and degraded experience**	**Outcome:** **Continuous customer access and service stability**

The Reality: Disruption Is Now Part of the Operating Model

What's changed isn't just the frequency of disruption, it's the nature of it.

Contact centers are no longer impacted by isolated events. They're being pressured simultaneously by:

- Infrastructure and weather-related disruptions that still affect both physical and remote teams;
- Cyber incidents that take down customer-facing capabilities, not just backend systems;
- Sustained workforce instability that limits responsiveness at scale; and
- Unpredictable spikes in participant and customer inquiries driven by market and policy activity.

In many organizations, these pressures expose a structural issue: the contact center was designed for efficiency, not resilience.

From Efficiency to Continuity: Rethinking the Model

Most contact center models still rely on a primary environment that carries the full burden of customer demand. When that environment becomes stressed or unavailable, service levels can decline rapidly.

A more resilient approach introduces what we refer to as a "spare tire" contact center, a parallel, ready-to-activate capability designed to maintain customer access during periods of disruption or elevated demand.

This is not traditional outsourcing, nor is it simply overflow support.

It is a continuity layer intentionally built into the customer experience.

What That Looks Like in Practice

In our work with financial services and retirement organizations, this model typically comes into play in very specific, real-world scenarios:

- During periods of elevated call volume tied to market activity or participant behavior, where internal teams cannot scale quickly enough without impacting service levels.
- In situations where core systems or telephony platforms are temporarily unavailable, and customer interactions need to be rerouted without disruption.

- When organizations are navigating workforce constraints, whether from attrition, absenteeism, or hiring delays, and need a stable, trained extension of their servicing model.
- And increasingly, as part of a broader shift toward geographic and operational diiversification, reducing reliance on any single location, team, or infrastructure.

These are not theoretical scenarios. They are the moments where customer experience either holds or breaks.

For example, we've supported organizations navigating periods of elevated participant activity where servicing demand increased rapidly and internal teams required scalable operational support to maintain responsiveness and service continuity.

We've also worked with firms seeking to diversify contact center operations across delivery models and geographies to reduce concentration risk and improve business continuity readiness.

The Contact Center Risk Landscape Has Changed

The pressures affecting contact center operations are no longer isolated or temporary. Organizations are now managing multiple layers of operational risk simultaneously, while customer expectations continue to rise.

What was once considered a contingency scenario has increasingly become part of day-to-day operational planning.

Operational Disruption	Cyber Events	Workforce Instability	Demand Volatility	Regulatory Exposure
Weather and regional outages	Service interruption risk	Attrition and absenteeism	Unexpected inquiry spikes	Compliance and reputational risk

Why This Matters More in Retirement and Financial Services

In many industries, a delayed response is an inconvenience. In retirement and financial services, it can have far greater implications.

Customer interactions are often tied to account access, transactions, distribution and rollover decisions, life events, financial planning needs, and regulatory timelines. When access is disrupted, the impact extends well beyond the interaction itself, it can affect confidence, retention, and long-term customer relationships.

That's why contact center continuity is no longer viewed as simply an operational concern. It has become a critical component of both customer experience and risk management strategy.

A Shift in How Organizations Are Thinking

Leading organizations are beginning to rethink resilience through the lens of customer experience, not just operational recovery.

Instead of asking, "How do we recover from disruption?" they are asking, "How do we ensure the customer never feels it in the first place?"

That shift is changing how contact center operations are designed, moving beyond traditional recovery models toward interaction-level failover, scalable parallel capacity, omnichannel continuity, geographically diversified servicing, and compliance-aware operational processes.

Modern contact center strategies are increasingly defined by their ability to remain secure, scalable, and continuously available, not simply efficient.

The Real Value: Protecting Trust in Critical Moments

A spare tire contact center is often viewed as a contingency capability.

In practice, it serves a much broader purpose.

It ensures that during the moments customers are most likely to reach out, and most sensitive to delays, your organization remains accessible, responsive, and operational.

The goal is not simply recovery. It is maintaining continuity in moments where responsiveness matters most.

How Enterprise Iron Approaches It

Enterprise Iron works with financial services and retirement organizations to design contact center models built for operational resilience, scalable servicing, and continuity under pressure.

Our approach helps organizations extend capacity, support uninterrupted customer access, and integrate seamlessly with existing platforms and processes.

Because in today's environment, resilience is not defined by whether disruption occurs, it's defined by whether your customers ever experience it.

Disruption is no longer the exception. The organizations that differentiate themselves will be the ones that continue delivering for customers, even when disruption occurs.

Exploring Contact Center Continuity Strategies?

Learn how Enterprise Iron helps financial services and retirement organizations strengthen customer service continuity and operational resilience.

Visit our Contact Center Solutions and Case Studies pages or contact us at **contactcenters@enterpriseiron.com.**

WHITEPAPER: When Consultants Cost Less: A Practical Perspective For Budget Owners

By **Robert Holman**, *Principal Enterprise Architect*

Executive Summary

Across the industry, there is a longstanding assumption that consultants are inherently more expensive than full-time employees (FTEs). At a glance, that conclusion appears sound, consulting rates are typically higher than the equivalent cost of internal staff.

However, when viewed more holistically, factoring in time, risk, and delivery outcomes, that assumption does not always hold. In certain situations, consultants can represent the more economical choice.

For budget owners, the more relevant question is not "What does this resource cost?" but "What is the total cost of delivering the outcome?"

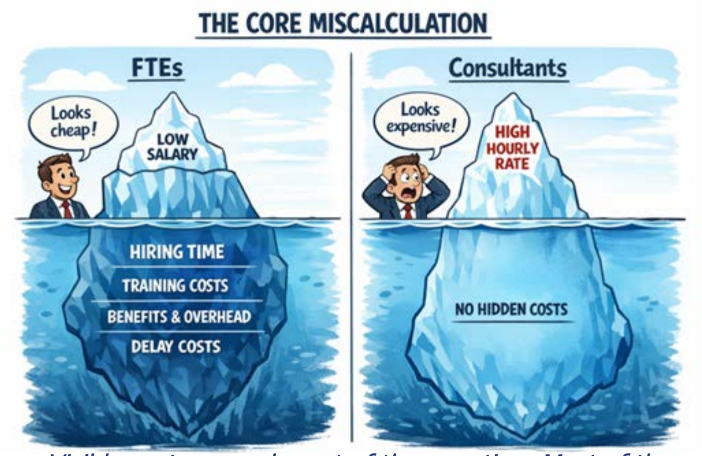
> "Cost is not just what you pay, it is what you delay, redo, or get wrong."

UPCOMING CALENDAR OF EVENTS

PRISM Annual Conference
May 17-19 | San Diego, CA

DCIIA | EBRI | SPARK Public Policy Forum
June 4-5 | Washington, DC

Rethinking the Cost Comparison



Visible costs are only part of the equation. Most of the economic impact is often below the surface.

Most cost comparisons between consultants and full-time employees focus on what is immediately visible, salary versus hourly rate. But like an iceberg, the largest cost drivers are often hidden beneath the surface.

These "below-the-line" costs include hiring time, training and ramp-up, benefits and overhead, and the cost of delay when work does not progress. Less visible still, but often more consequential, are the costs associated with rework, misaligned decisions, and the challenge of redeploying resources once an initiative is complete.

Individually, these factors may appear manageable. Collectively, they can materially exceed the visible cost difference between a consultant and an FTE.

When these hidden costs are accounted for, the economic comparison shifts, from a focus on rate to a more accurate view of total cost.

Situations Where Consultants May Be the Lower-Cost Option

1. Time-Bound Initiatives: For efforts with a defined endpoint, such as system upgrades, conversions, or regulatory implementations, consultants provide a flexible model. Costs align directly to the duration of the work,avoiding the need to carry excess capacity after completion.

2.Specialized or Hard-to-Find Skills: Certain capabilities, particularly in legacy platforms and niche systems common in the retirement industry, are difficult to source and take time to build internally.

In these situations, the primary cost driver is not compensation, it is time to proficiency. Experienced consultants reduce ramp time and help avoid costly missteps.

3. Programs Under Time Pressure: When timelines begin to slip, delay quickly becomes a dominant cost factor. Extended vendor engagements, duplicated effort, and missed milestones all contribute to increased spend.

External support can help restore direction and momentum, often reducing total cost by shortening the duration of the issue.

4. High-Impact Decisions: Decisions related to architecture, vendor selection, or platform strategy carry long-term implications and are not easily reversed. Independent validation in these moments can provide additional confidence and help avoid outcomes that are far more expensive than the advisory support itself.

5. Fluctuating Workloads: Many organizations operate in cycles of peak demand followed by periods of relative stability. Staffing permanently for peak conditions can create inefficiencies over time.

Consultants allow organizations to scale resources in alignment with demand, helping maintain cost discipline without constraining delivery.

6. Capability Build-Outs: When establishing new capabilities, such as data platforms, automation frameworks, or DevOps practices, the greatest value is often in initial design and implementation.

Consultants can accelerate this phase and support knowledge transfer, enabling internal teams to sustain the capability without long-term overstaffing.

7. Hiring Constraints: Recruiting for specialized roles is often both time-consuming and uncertain. Even successfu hires require time to become fully effective.

Consultants help bridge this gap, ensuring progress continues while longer-term staffing strategies are executed.

Where FTEs Remain the Right Choice

Full-time employees remain the most effective option for work that is ongoing, predictable, and deeply embedded in the organization. They provide continuity, preserve institutional knowledge, and support long-term operational stability. For many core functions, this makes them the more economical choice over time.

A Balanced Decision Framework

In practice, the decision is rarely binary. Instead, it is about aligning the resource model to the nature of the work.

Consultants tend to be more cost-effective when:

- The work is time-bound
- Skills are specialized or scarce
- Speed is critical
- Demand is variable
- Independent perspective is valuable

FTEs tend to be more cost-effective when:

- Work is ongoing and stable
- Skills are readily available
- Long-term continuity is important

Closing Perspective

Effective cost management is not simply about minimizing visible expenses, it is about managing total economic impact. Organizations that consistently deliver are those that balance speed, quality, and risk. In that context, consultants are not inherently a premium cost, nor are they a universal solution. They are one of several tools available to budget owners to navigate complex and evolving demands.

Used thoughtfully, they can help control cost, reduce risk, and support better outcomes.

About Enterprise Iron

Enterprise Iron advises and delivers complex transformation programs across the retirement and financial services industry. We specialize in stepping into high-stakes initiatives, where timelines are tight, risks are elevated, and outcomes matter. Our teams bring deep, hands-on experience across platform modernization, data initiatives, and large-scale program execution. We focus on restoring momentum, improving decision quality, and delivering results without adding unnecessary overhead.

Take the Next Step

When cost, speed, and risk are all in play, the question is not just who is cheaper, it's who will deliver the right outcome. Enterprise Iron helps organizations apply the right expertise at the right time, whether accelerating a critical initiative, addressing capacity gaps, or providing independent perspective on key decisions.

If you are under pressure to deliver more efficiently without compromising outcomes, *We Can Help!*

Modernization Under Pressure?

What happens when a pension modernization program risks losing momentum? See how Enterprise Iron helped turn it around.

READ MORE

FOLLOW US