

2025
NOVEMBER
MARKET
STUDY

TECH VS. HUMANITY

Redefining The Agent Role



Intro

AI will elevate rather than eliminate humanity.

Thought leaders have enthusiastically trumpeted this concept, and research confirms that executives have widely embraced it.

But will employees and consumers actually experience it? Will they actually enjoy a world in which technology is removing barriers to human connections?

As AI investment soars, so too does the urgency of answering these questions. Customer contact leaders need to know precisely how AI is transforming interactions and workflows. Equally importantly, they need to know exactly what this transformation means for the future of the human contact center agent.

To empower leaders with much-needed clarity, CCW Digital is thrilled to share this new market study. Driven by in-depth research, it uncovers the present state of AI investments, the impending evolution of frontline customer interactions, and the future of the agent role.

With precise insight into how AI can best elevate employee performance, and vice versa, you will have a blueprint for optimizing the technology and human balance. You will ensure both work together to turn customer frustration into trust and transactions into relationships.



Methodology & Demographics

To navigate the technology vs. humanity balance and redefine the agent role, CCW Digital conducted a survey in the fall of 2025. The in-depth study captured insights from leaders in the contact center, customer experience, marketing, information technology, and operations spaces.

Representing organizations of all sizes and most major industries, respondents hold job titles like director of contact center operations, head of customer service, director of customer experience, vice president of the contact center, director of guest experience, vice president of marketing, vice president of customer care, chief information officer, chief operating officer, and director of guest care.

About the Author



Brian Cantor
Principal Analyst, CCW Digital
Customer Management Practice



Brian Cantor is the principal analyst and director for CCW Digital, the global online community and research hub for customer contact professionals. In his role, Brian leads all customer experience, contact center, technology, and employee engagement research initiatives for CCW. CCW Digital's articles, special reports, commentaries, infographics, executive interviews, webinars, and online events reach a community of over 180,000.

A passionate advocate for customer centricity, Brian regularly speaks on major CX conference agendas. He also advises organizations on customer experience and business development strategies.



Key Findings

- 1 AI has not yet radically transformed customer contact, but it has made a positive impact. The overwhelming majority of leaders are celebrating gains in efficiency, analytics, customer experience quality, and employee experience quality.
- 2 Moving forward, top goals for AI investments will include cost savings, better interaction standards, greater interaction efficiency, and higher satisfaction scores.
- 3 Beyond citing the impact on *business objectives*, the majority of customer contact leaders believe AI has thus far augmented *humanity* within their experiences. There is, however, reason to question whether the impact is truly living up to the hype.
- 4 When determining how to balance AI and human agents on the frontlines, top considerations include issue complexity, issue significance, and real-time contact volume.
- 5 Leaders will also account for the specific advantages humans have over automation solutions. Right now, leaders see the ability to express empathy, the ability to relate to real-world experiences, the ability to recognize issue significance, and the ability to make off-script decisions as fundamentally “human” strengths.
- 6 Ultimately, however, optimizing the AI-human balance remains a work in progress. Only 13% of leaders have clearly mapped out the future of the agent role. Particular ambiguity surrounds the impact human agents will have on non-interaction tasks, such as bot tuning, knowledge creation, and data analysis.
- 7 Not simply useful for workflow planning, achieving clarity will be critical to securing employee buy-in. More than two-thirds of leaders say their agents’ willingness to take on “complex work” is conditional upon the specific tasks they will handle, the specific guidance they will receive, and the specific compensation they will earn.
- 8 It will also be critical for refining recruiting, hiring, and training – all of which warrant attention. As it stands, only 13% of leaders believe their current agents are equipped for a complex, high-value work slate.
- 9 Beyond skills limitations, leaders cite fragmented systems, insufficient data and knowledge frameworks, inadequate coaching, and unsuitable career paths as top inhibitors to agent development and performance. Exacerbating the situation, a significant number of contact centers *lack* a singular view into agent productivity.
- 10 When leveraged correctly, technology should remedy these pain points. Top agent-facing AI priorities include knowledge management, call summarization, workflow automation, copilot/agent assist, and post-call automation.
- 11 Maximizing the return on these technology investments will require businesses to address operational concerns. Notably, they will have to create a better framework for measuring AI’s impact, alleviate change management concerns, and mitigate risk management worries.
- 12 They will also have to establish a consensus on how to prioritize their investments; as it stands, today’s leaders are split on whether they should place the greatest emphasis on internal preferences, root cause analysis, or marketplace trends.
- 13 Finally, they will have to create an *environment* that allows technology *and* humans to thrive. Top considerations include workplace culture, management and leadership quality, compensation, and flexibility.



State of Transformation: Is AI Making a Positive Impact?

AI has not been a silver bullet for the customer contact function. It has not prevented customers from complaining about slow, impersonal experiences. It has not saved agents from the frustrating, inefficient tasks that lead to disengagement and churn.

Customer contact leaders do, however, believe it is *starting* to make a positive impact on numerous facets of their operation.

Nearly 89%, for example, believe their AI investments are boosting operational efficiency. An impressive 40% celebrate the efficiency gains as “significant.”

They are nearly as celebratory when discussing the impact of AI on analytics; 84% cite *some* degree of positive impact, and 40% call it significant.

Though not *quite* as resounding, the numbers for customer experience (82% celebrate some impact, 28% call it significant) and employee experience (81%, 22%) are still encouraging.

Customer contact leaders will look to build upon these results in 2026 and beyond, holding their AI investments accountable for specific performance indicators.

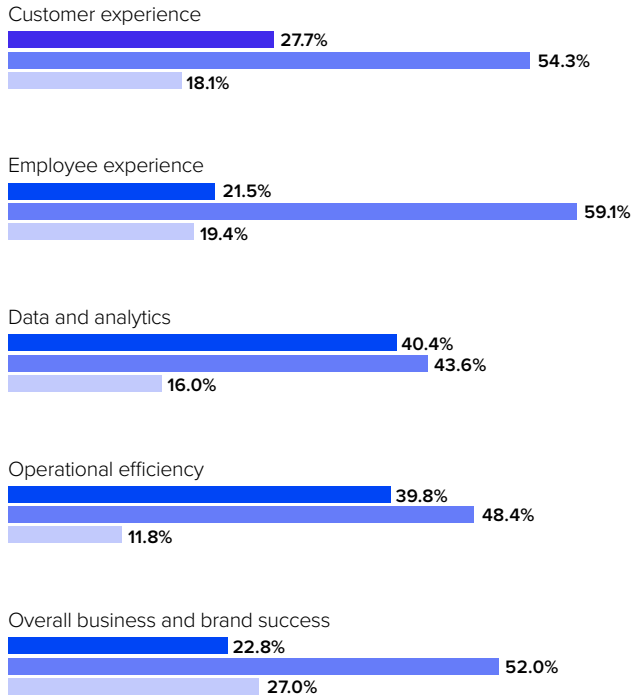
Priority outcomes include cost savings (a target outcome for 87%), better interaction quality (83%), improved interaction efficiency (81%), and enhanced customer satisfaction scores (80%).

In emphasizing these metrics, leaders are affirming their optimism in AI as a “best of both worlds” technology. They see it as a way to simultaneously reduce operational inefficiencies and elevate experience quality.

If it delivers on that dual expectation, customers, employees, and business stakeholders will all benefit from the AI revolution.

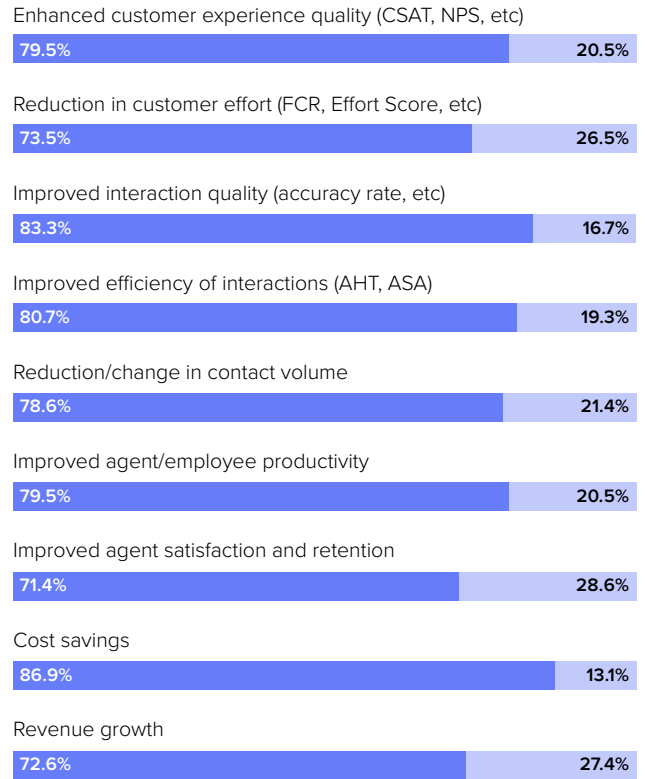
Have your AI investments and initiatives positively impacted the following areas?

- Yes, significantly positive impact
- Yes, slightly positive impact
- No or unsure



Do the following represent important objectives or KPIs for your AI self-service investments?

- Yes
- No



HOW IS AI IMPACTING HUMANITY?

With tangible reason for optimism, customer contact leaders are not going to relent in their AI investments. They are going to continue deploying technology and continue seeking meaningful transformation.

This means that the question of what the rise of AI will mean for humanity will only command more attention in the months and years ahead.

Within the customer contact community, thought leaders continue to argue that “AI will be about augmenting rather than eliminating the human touch.” More than 60% of consumers, however, worry that AI will reduce their access to human support. Upwards of 52% fear a pivot to more generic, impersonal support experiences.

Which perspective will prove right?

For the “AI will augment humanity” crowd, the status quo provides a cautiously upbeat outlook.

Thus far, 83% of customer contact leaders believe their AI investments have at least somewhat elevated humanity. Just over 21% feel AI has made self-service and employee-led interactions more human; 33% have exclusively seen benefits to self-service, and 29% have only seen a positive impact on employee-led ones.

Encouraging on the surface, the data may still provide fuel for cynicism.

The most superficial and cliché AI use case – a self-service chatbot that can resolve certain “simple issues” – should automatically increase humanity. More conversational and contextually aware, an AI self-service tool should inherently feel more “human” than traditional FAQ pages or IVRs. And by freeing them from repetitive work and arming them with more customer data, this enhanced self-service offering should inherently empower agents to demonstrate more humanity.

The fact that 100% of organizations are not reporting a boost in humanity across self-service or agent-led interactions, therefore, raises questions about operational frameworks and strategies.

If AI-based self-service does not feel more “human,” it is likely because organizations are not letting the solution play to its strengths. They may not be providing it with the “single source of truth” it needs to generate personalized messaging. They may not be allowing it to take actual action or provide real resolutions. They may not be allowing it to adapt to a more natural conversation flow.

In a sense, they may be presenting their AI self-service platform as a static deflection tool – as nothing more than a more expensive FAQ page.

Any success on the self-service front, moreover, should empower agents to better understand and focus on the customers they are serving. If that is not translating into a more human experience, it would suggest some combination of skills limitations, poor coaching, unsuitable performance metrics, or undue restrictions on their ability to go “off-script” for customers.

If these employee experience limitations are not addressed, it will not matter how advanced the self-service tool is. Agents will not be capable of delivering an elevated experience. They will *not* come across as a warmer, more “consultative” alternative to the “script readers” of yesterday.

A longer-term issue concerns the “humanity standard.” Will brands be looking to maximize the humanity of their customer journeys? Or, will they settle for a minimum viable level of humanity?

An AI-enhanced self-service platform may, for example, understand natural language and deliver decently personalized, highly relevant resolutions. But it may not do *everything* a human employee could do, especially as it relates to demonstration of empathy and commitment to relationship-building.

Will the business restrict customers to the self-service option because it is “human enough” to handle most issues? Or will it guarantee them seamless access to the human agent capable of going above and beyond?

The answers will be important as the AI revolution unfolds.

Thus far, do you believe investing in AI has led to increased humanity throughout your CX?



- 17.0% No, our experiences have not become more human
- 33.0% Self-service experiences are more human-centric; agent interactions are unchanged or less so
- 28.7% Agent-led interactions are more human-centric; self-service is unchanged or less so
- 21.3% Both self-service and agent-led interactions are more “human”



Rethinking Customer Engagement: Vision for a New Front Line

In their quest to improve efficiency, elevate quality, and strengthen customer relationships, customer contact leaders will have to evaluate their front lines. They will have to determine whether their balance of technology and humanity is the best way to cultivate customer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty.

The customer contact community has not yet reached a consensus on the exact way to approach this balance. Many are, however, confident in letting AI play a meaningful role.

In an ideal world, 30% of businesses say they would let AI handle *most* of their frontline communication. Humans would be in the loop to provide guidance, critical thinking, and approvals, but AI agents would be leading the actual engagement.

Another 21% still believe in AI-human synergy, but they are less hardline on which should handle the actual engagement. Their intention is simply to use a combination of automation and manual effort in most situations.

Less enthused by this singular, more synergistic approach, 28% believe in a binary philosophy. They believe certain issues should wholly sit with AI agents, while others should exclusively warrant human involvement.

Just over 19% remain dubious of using AI in frontline communication. They believe *humans* should handle the majority of customer conversations; any AI investments will be about empowering these agents behind-the-scenes.

WHEN DOES HUMAN INVOLVEMENT MAKE SENSE?

The overwhelming majority of customer contact leaders believe AI *can* play a pivotal role in the frontlines. They believe it can handle some, if not most, customer-facing conversations.

Many nonetheless recognize the likelihood of cases where AI is ill-equipped to quickly, seamlessly, and accurately support a customer.

And even if leaders are confident that few exceptions exist, they still have to consider the voice of the customer. If customers are convinced a human agent is required for a given issue, many leaders – even those very bullish on AI technology – will consider accommodating.

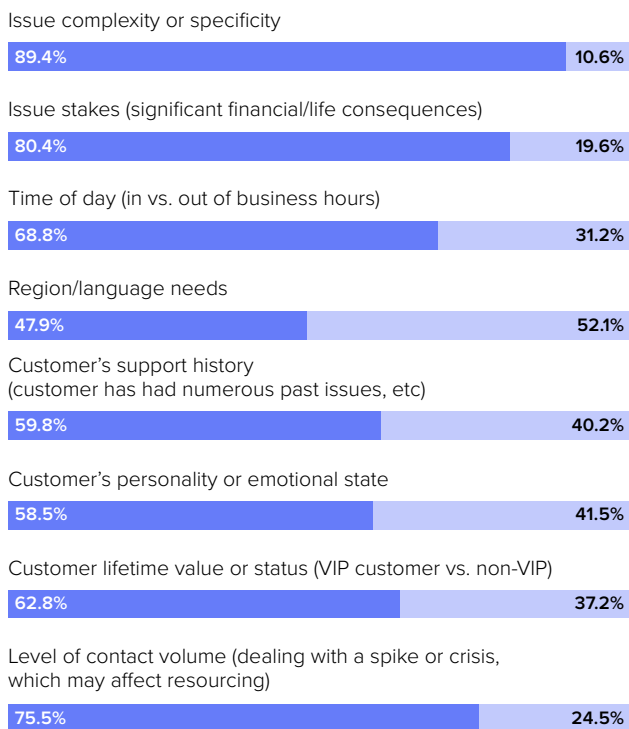
So what are these factors? What will impact whether an organization routes customers to a human agent vs. a self-service option?

For today’s customer contact leaders, “issue complexity” ranks as the #1 consideration. More than 89% of organizations will make their determination based on the specificity and complexity of the matter.

Other key factors include issue significance (80%), real-time contact volume (75%), and time of day (69%).

Do the following represent important objectives or KPIs for your AI self-service investments?

- Yes, this will impact whether we provide access to a human
- No, this will not impact whether we provide access to a human



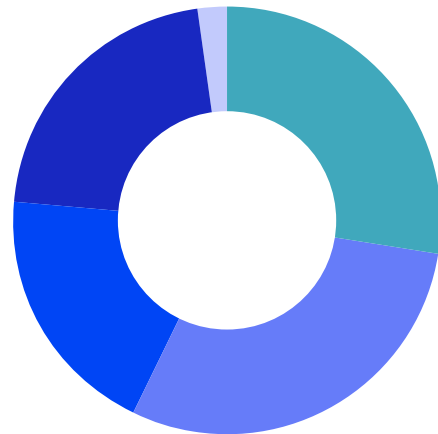
On the one hand, it is highly intuitive that issue complexity and significance would rank as top considerations. Still in its early stages, AI is routinely positioned as the option for “simple issues.” Human agents, moreover, have more trust to navigate the complicated, personal matters that have enormous ramifications for customer sentiment, brand reputation, and financial health.

On the other hand, the “AI for simple, humans for complex” divide can eventually become a self-fulfilling prophecy. If brands continue to position AI as an option for the most straightforward, generic issues, they condition customers to see *human agents* as their best pathway for a more valuable, tailored resolution. This will not only bottleneck self-service *containment* but discourage customers from even *starting* in a self-service environment.

In turn, the brand will have less opportunity to learn how customers would navigate self-service for a given intent. They will also have less opportunity to capture customer context prior to escalation; the agent will have to directly ask for all this information, reducing efficiency and the perception of personal recognition.

The emphasis on real-time contact volume and business hours reflect a belief in AI as a scalability play. All organizations will inevitably encounter volume surges and receive requests outside of business hours. Based on their resource needs, they can determine the balance of AI and human support that will keep wait times and operating costs as low as possible.

When it comes to frontline engagement, what do you see as the ideal AI/tech vs. human balance?



- **27.7%** Certain issues are fully handled by AI self-service, others are fully handled by human agents
- **29.8%** AI handles most of the actual frontline communication, but a human is in the loop to provide guidance and jump in where necessary
- **19.2%** Humans handle most of the actual frontline communication, but AI supports them with context/ data/knowledge
- **21.3%** Most conversations involve a combination of AI- and human-led communication
- **2.1%** Other



Redefining the Agent Role: A Vision for the Future of Agent Work

There is a distinction between trumpeting the importance of an AI-human balance and actually *defining* it. How will AI transform the future of customer interactions? How will employee responsibilities change as a result of that transformation?

There is also a distinction between *defining* the AI-human balance and actually *optimizing* it. Are tasks and responsibilities being allocated at random or based on past expectations? Or, are they being divided in a way that will maximize performance, efficiency, and customer centricity?

Most businesses are aware of the high-level call-to-action – they know they want to use a combination of AI and humanity. Many, however, are uncertain about the specific dynamics of that balance.

More than 23% of leaders, in fact, have no real clarity on what the rise of AI will mean for human workers. Just shy of 64% know how day-to-day *customer service* interactions will change, but they are unsure of the new tasks, focuses, and responsibilities that will become part of their agents' workflows.

Only 13% feel confident they understand how the agent role is evolving.

When AI was in its most *experimental* stages, this ambiguity was permissible. AI was not meaningfully impacting workflow, which meant that organizations faced little pressure to rethink their hiring, training, compensation, and performance management strategies.

Does your organization have clarity on what the rise of AI will mean for employee workflows and responsibilities?



- **23.4%** Not yet - we are still evaluating how AI will impact the role of the agent
- **63.8%** We have an understanding of how their core day-to-day tasks will change, but we've yet to map out the new tasks and functions for which they will be responsible
- **12.8%** We have a complete understanding of how agent roles and responsibilities will transform

Which best describes how agents feel about the concept of AI automating simple issues so they can focus on more complex ones?



- **13.8%** Unclear; our organization has not done enough to clarify how simple vs. complex issues will be defined
- **5.3%** They are not interested; they prefer handling straightforward, simple tasks
- **69.2%** They are potentially interested, but it will depend on factors like the nature of the work, changing processes, and compensation/career pathing
- **11.7%** They are all-in; they are craving more complex tasks and will jump at them even if systems, processes, and compensation do not meaningfully change

But as AI becomes a cornerstone of the customer contact operation, any ambiguity will become catastrophic. Workflow *will* change dramatically, which means organizations require vivid insight into the ramifications for agents. Without that clarity, they cannot design the right workflows, cultivate the right skills, allocate the right resources, and analyze the right metrics. They cannot elevate their operation.

THE BUY-IN CHALLENGE: ARE AGENTS EMBRACING NEXT-GENERATION WORK?

Not simply a threat to operational decision-making, workflow uncertainty jeopardizes agent buy-in.

Whereas customer contact leaders have historically positioned the rise of AI as an inherently pro-employee movement (AI will handle the boring work agents do not want to do, enabling them to only focus on more “complex,” exciting, and rewarding work), many recognize the hazard in taking that stance for granted.

Employees may appreciate the broad promise of variance in their workdays, but they still require specifics. They still want to know exactly how their job will change, and exactly what those changes will mean for their day-to-day experiences and long-term career trajectories.

They want to know if the pivot to more complex, consultative work will be more engaging or rewarding – or simply harder and more mentally draining.

Only 12% of leaders, in fact, say their agents are “all-in” on the “AI for simple, humans for complex” dynamic. By contrast, 69% feel agent interest is *conditional* upon the specific nature of the work, compensation changes, and new processes.

Another 14% are so unclear on the AI-human divide that they cannot even gauge interest.

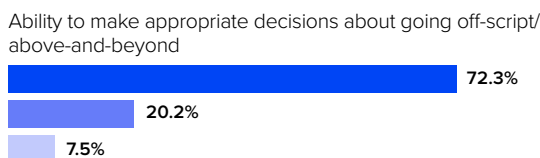
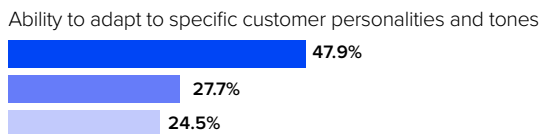
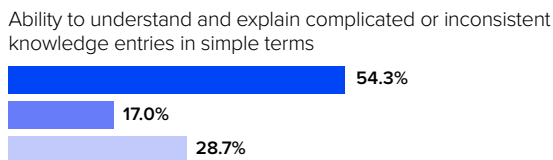
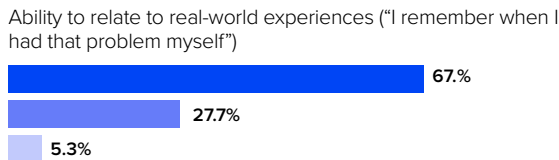
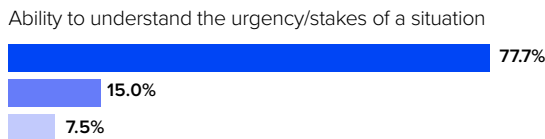
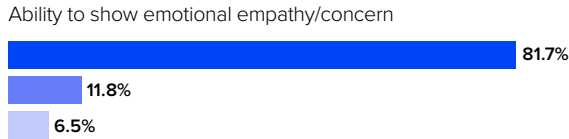
Whether “complex work” will actually be *harder* in a particular organization remains to be seen. What is more certainly true, however, is that agents who can pair their *existing experience* with *new competencies* will be in the best position to succeed.

This means that agents will have to be satisfied with the organization (and thus willing to stay and share their experience) *and* motivated with the new vision (and thus willing to accept new responsibilities and cultivate new skills).

Clarifying the evolution of the role, and transparently communicating what it means for the individual agent, will be the key to achieving both.

When thinking about the tech-human balance, which key advantages do human agents have over AI/self-service?

- Humans are better at this, and it's important
- Humans are better at this, but it's not important
- I do not believe humans are clearly better at this



THE HUMAN ADVANTAGE: WHAT UNIQUE VALUE WILL LIVE AGENTS PROVIDE?

Transparently defining the future of the agent role may be critical, but it is only possible if organizations can overcome existing questions and uncertainties – and precisely define how workflows and responsibilities will evolve.

One way to *begin* answering those questions, however, is to identify the key advantages humans have over AI. With clarity into the type of work that should sit with humans, organizations can better prioritize AI use cases – and better design future processes and workflow strategies.

Empathy is at the heart of this conversation. Nearly 94% of leaders believe human employees are fundamentally better at showing concern for customer issues, and 82% believe this advantage will be *critical* when defining the future of the agent role.

An even greater 95% believe employees are fundamentally superior at relating to real-world customer experiences, although a lesser 67% believe this is critical to workflow allocation.

Other critical differentiators between humans and AI are the ability to understand the stakes of a situation (93% cite the advantage, 78% call it important to workflow design) and off-script decision-making (93%, 72%).

Recognizing these advantages does not prevent an organization from relying heavily on self-service for frontline communication. It does, however, at least underscore the importance of having a human in the loop.

If customer-facing AI is not supported, scored, and optimized by employees who understand the emotions of a situation, what it means in practice, and how to think critically about unique resolutions, it will never excel as a customer support vehicle. It will never boost customer trust in the brand's ability to recognize and adapt to customer needs and, in turn, inhibit the ability to turn customer contact transactions into customer-centric relationships.



Understanding Next-Generation Skills: Are Agents Ready for an Evolved Performance Standard?

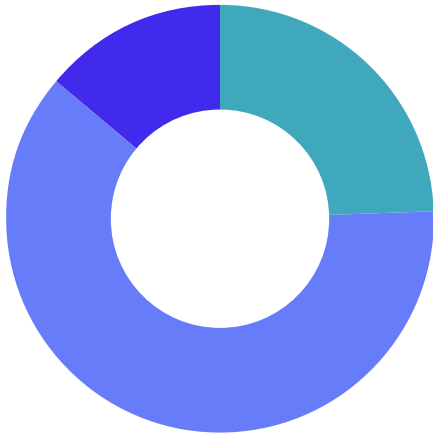
In comparison to AI, customer contact leaders believe humans are inherently more capable of emotional intelligence, empathy, contextual awareness, and creative decision-making.

That comparative confidence is not, however, the same as an unequivocal endorsement. It is not the same as saying that existing contact center agents are optimally suited for a role that will require them to handle more complex inquiries or engage in a more conversational, emotionally charged context.

More than 24% of leaders, in fact, question whether their existing agents could ever handle such elevated workflow. They believe their typical agent is specifically suited for “basic support.”

Just shy of 62% of leaders believe agents are suitable for emotionally and intellectually complex *support* conversations, but they are not as confident in a pivot to non-interaction work. A mere 14% believe their agents would excel at a work slate involving high-stakes customer interactions, sales, data analysis, and bot training.

Consider the typical agent that works in your current contact center/customer support operation. Are they suitable for “complex work”?



- 24.5% They are best-suited for basic customer support
- 61.7% They are suited for complex/emotional support inquiries, but not necessarily tangential tasks like sales, data analytics, or bot training
- 13.8% They are suited for complex customer support *and* related areas like sales, data analysis, and bot training

Since more than two-thirds of leaders still expect agents to play a key role in frontline communication, these statistics may not seem concerning in the short-term. The majority of employees will remain capable of handling frontline interactions, even as those interactions become more complex and emotionally demanding.

They do, however, raise questions for the long-term. As the power of the technology increases, brands may become more confident in letting AI handle a greater percentage of frontline communication. This would greatly limit the amount of contact volume that requires direct agent involvement – and thus greatly limit the number of employees needed on the frontline.

To avoid job loss in that scenario, the contact center would have to allocate agents to non-support tasks like knowledge management, sales, AI oversight, and feedback analysis.

Without empowering today’s agents for *that* type of work, contact center leaders could eventually find themselves in a difficult situation. They will either have to accept lesser performance (thereby reducing the impact of AI investment) or replace their talent (thereby eliminating job security).

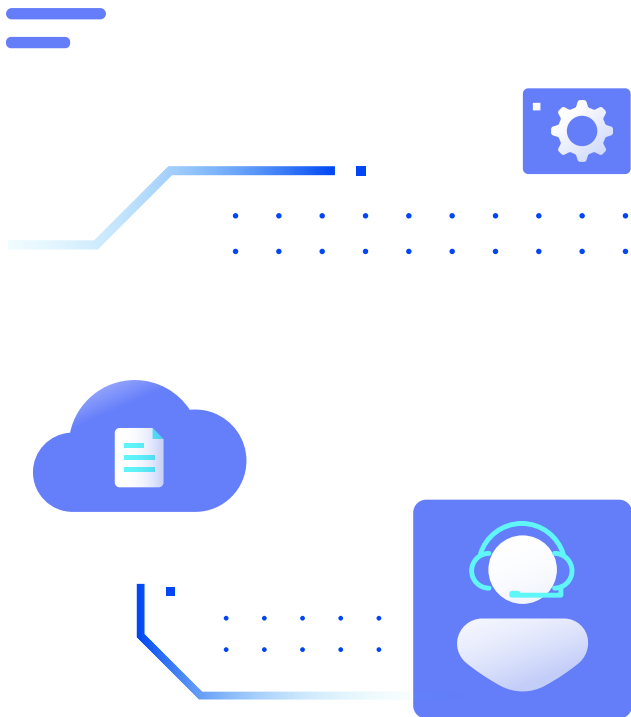
AGENT EMPOWERMENT: FAR FROM A REALITY IN TODAY’S CONTACT CENTERS

The fact that some agents are theoretically suitable for high-value conversations does not mean they are *presently* ready to thrive. Nearly 59% of leaders believe their agents lack the necessary skills for success.

Having agents with the right technical skills is not, moreover, the same as empowering agents to use those skills. The overwhelming majority of contact center leaders acknowledge troubling friction within their organizations. This friction would inhibit even the most capable agents’ ability to thrive at consultative work and thus dampen the impact of AI transformation.

Particularly common inhibitors include fragmented systems and tools (73%), insufficient knowledge and data frameworks (71%), inadequate coaching programs (69%), unsuitable compensation and career path strategies (69%), and ill-prepared managers and supervisors (68%).

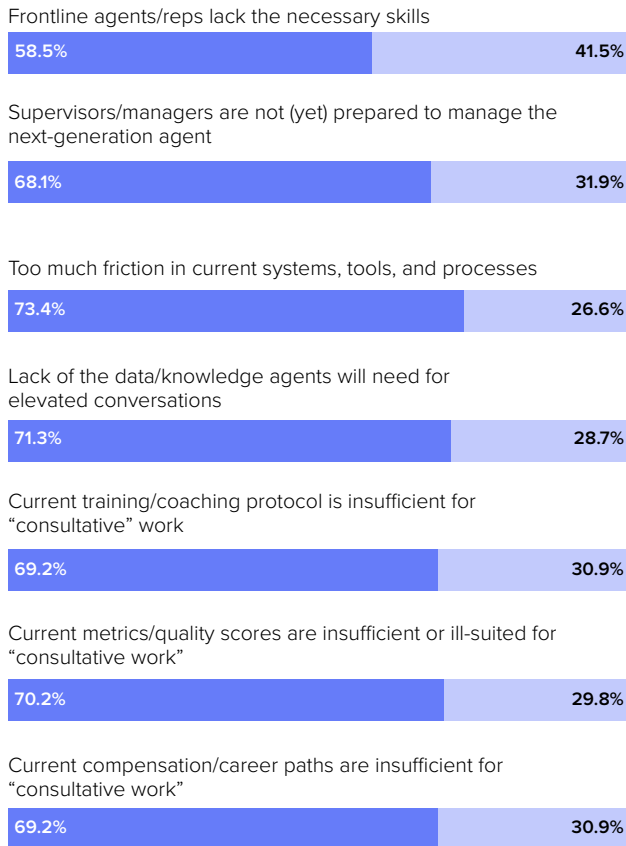
A deeper dive into existing “pain points” confirms the adverse impact of insufficient customer intelligence (a challenge in 69% of organizations), outdated knowledge bases (62%), time-consuming administrative work (57%), and mandatory disclosures and authentication processes (56%).



Collectively, these inhibitors provide a sobering commentary on the state of the contact center. They suggest that agents will not receive the time, training, data, coaching, or incentivization they need to thrive in the new normal.

Consider your current customer contact team and environment. Will any of the following prevent them from quickly excelling at more complex, consultative work?

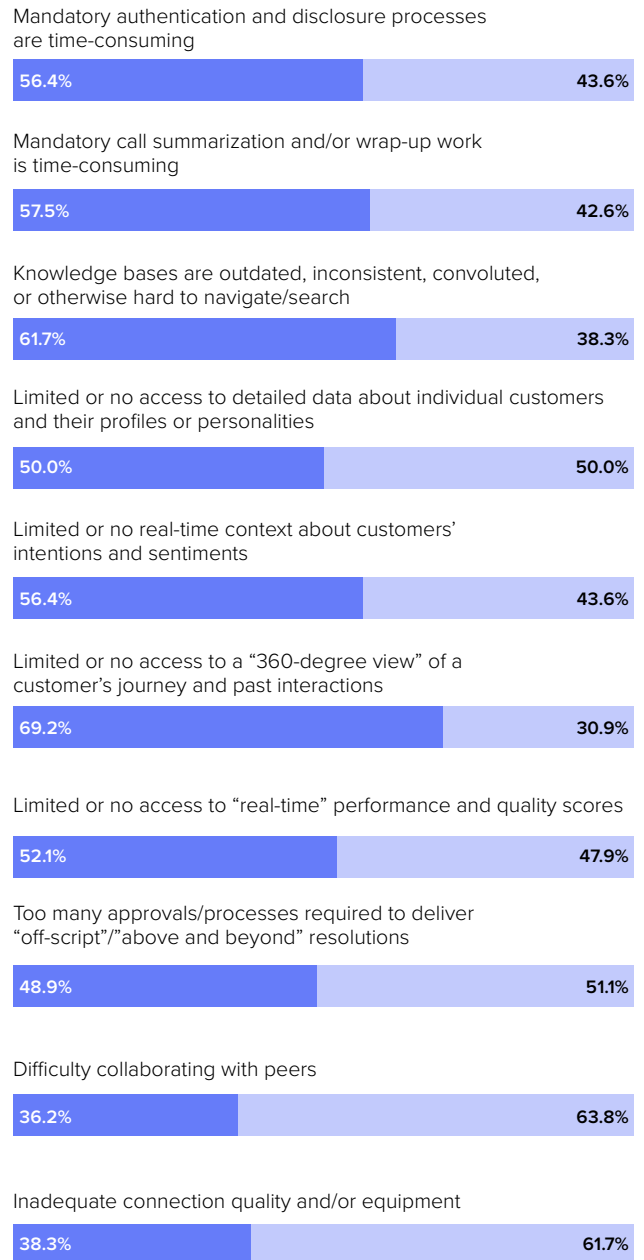
■ Yes ■ No



Those without the skills for next-generation work will struggle to develop them, and those with the skills will struggle to use them. Operational efficiency, agent engagement, and customer experience quality will all suffer.

Do your current human agents/representatives face any of the following operational challenges?

■ Yes, this is a challenge for our employees
 ■ No, this is not a challenge for our employees





Augmented Humanity: Can AI Empower Agents For Next-Generation Work?

Unclear visions, skill limitations, and inhibitive environments are coming together to prevent employees from reaching heightened standards of performance. They are compromising employees' ability to demonstrate the *humanity* that represents their biggest advantage over AI technology.

To create the optimal contact center balance, one that accentuates the respective strengths of AI solutions and human workers, leaders cannot let these challenges stand. They must streamline workflow. They must eliminate friction. They must augment performance.

The rise of AI is emphasizing the importance of this effort. By handling more straightforward tasks and consumer inquiries, it creates a need for humans to handle a different sort of work – and an expectation that they will do so with added levels of empathy, critical thinking, and contextual awareness.

Fortunately, the right AI can also help achieve this empowering atmosphere.

REVIEWING ROADBLOCKS: UNDERSTANDING WHAT DRIVES EMPLOYEE EFFORT AND FRUSTRATION

To identify opportunities for agent augmentation, the typical contact center leader will require an understanding of current performance levels and barriers. Are agents presently meeting their performance goals? And, if not, what factors are standing in the way?

Many can at least *partially* answer these questions, but most have a long way to go before they can claim a complete understanding.

Nearly 32% feel they have a comprehensive, real-time, unified view of individual agent performance. Just under 25% have a clear, big-picture view but may struggle to drill down to the individual agent level. More than 34%, meanwhile, have vivid insights into agent performance but concede that their perspective may be fragmented across systems, teams, and channels.

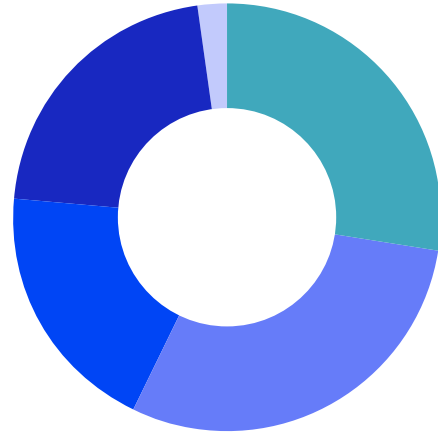
To understand how internal effort is *hurting* performance, many organizations evaluate the impact on customer satisfaction metrics (71%) and efficiency metrics (65%). Lenses like supervisor performance reviews (43%), internal search activity (37%), and voice of the employee feedback (35%) are comparatively popular, but they remain underutilized by the majority of organizations.

Although it is encouraging that most organizations are evaluating employee performance and effort levels to some extent, it is clear that many have work to do.

If contact centers are looking to pivot from a transactional support function into a true relationship driver, they will require a more complete view of performance. Insight into 360-degree, agent-specific performance will become non-negotiable.

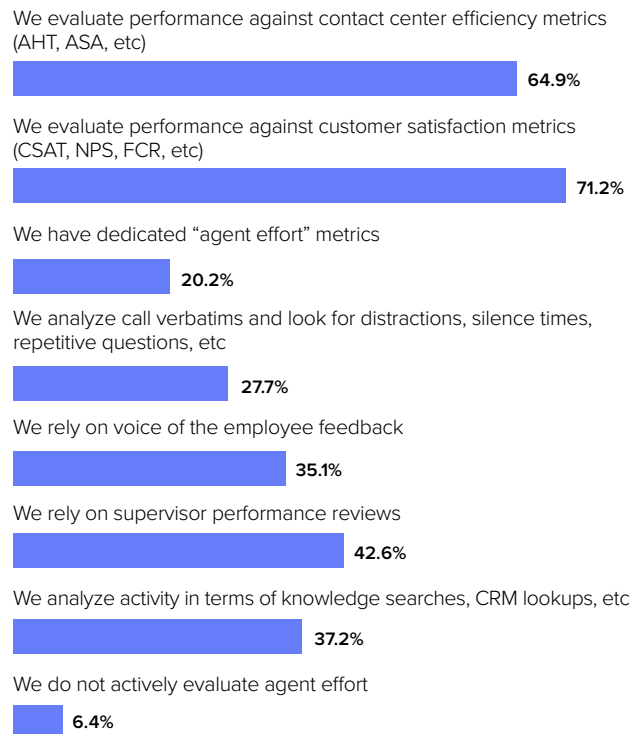
Accurately defining inhibitors to that performance, meanwhile, will require a more robust approach to identifying agent friction. Placing an even greater emphasis on factors like tool utilization and voice of employee feedback will prove *particularly* important in today's landscape, as leaders need to know exactly how their AI investments are resonating with frontline users.

Which best describes your ability to measure and analyze employee productivity and efficiency?



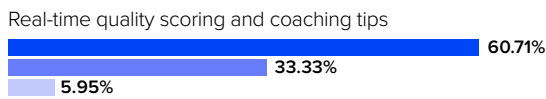
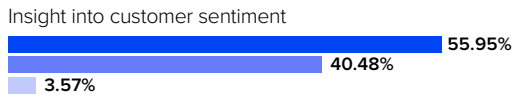
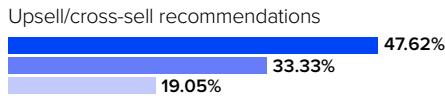
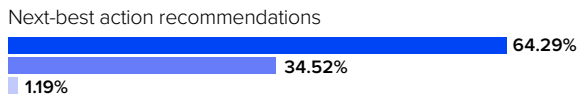
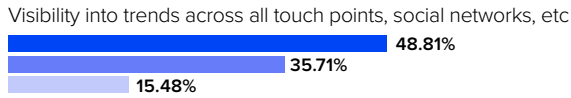
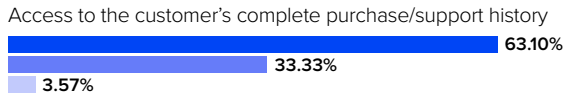
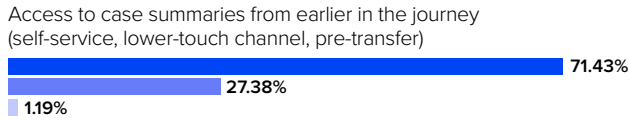
- 31.9%** We have a comprehensive, real-time view of how all individual agents are performing
- 24.5%** We have a unified, holistic view of operational efficiency and performance, but we can't always drill down to the agent level
- 34.0%** We track numerous efficiency metrics, but our view is fragmented across different systems, teams, and/or channels
- 5.3%** We have limited quantitative insight into performance and primarily rely on anecdotal feedback and observation
- 4.3%** We do not measure employee productivity, systematically

How do you presently measure or monitor agent "effort" / factors that inhibit productivity?



Rate the importance (or expected importance) of the following on agents' ability to build relationships with customers.

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Very unimportant



KEYS TO AUGMENTING HUMAN PERFORMANCE

Identifying and eliminating existing friction helps enable agents to perform at a higher, more human-centric standard. It does not guarantee it.

Transformation also hinges on empowering agents with *additional* insight and guidance for personalizing conversations, enhancing service quality, and building relationships.

Leaders almost universally recognize case summary access as a pathway to this augmentation. Nearly 99% call it important to provide agents with seamless access to summaries of customers' previous interactions; 71% call this insight very empowering.

Other augmentation priorities include next-best action recommendations (important to 98% of leaders, very important to 64%), access to the customers' complete purchasing and support history (96%, 63%) and real-time quality scoring and coaching (94%, 61%).

Collectively, these data points will provide agents with a rich set of *context* about the customers they are supporting. They will know the nature of the customer's relationship with the business, the intricacies of their prior interactions, the best way to tailor a conversation to the customer's needs, and the impact of their behaviors on that customer's satisfaction.

They will be able to recognize customers as humans with real needs, preferences, emotions, and expectations and not simply as faceless, nameless conversational counterparts.

Given their inherent proclivity for empathy, their *recognition* of each customer's humanity should drive agents to be more human-centric in their behaviors.

FROM INTEREST TO IMPERATIVE: TOP AGENT-FACING AI PRIORITIES IN 2026

Today's contact center leaders view reducing internal effort and providing actionable context as pathways to agent augmentation.

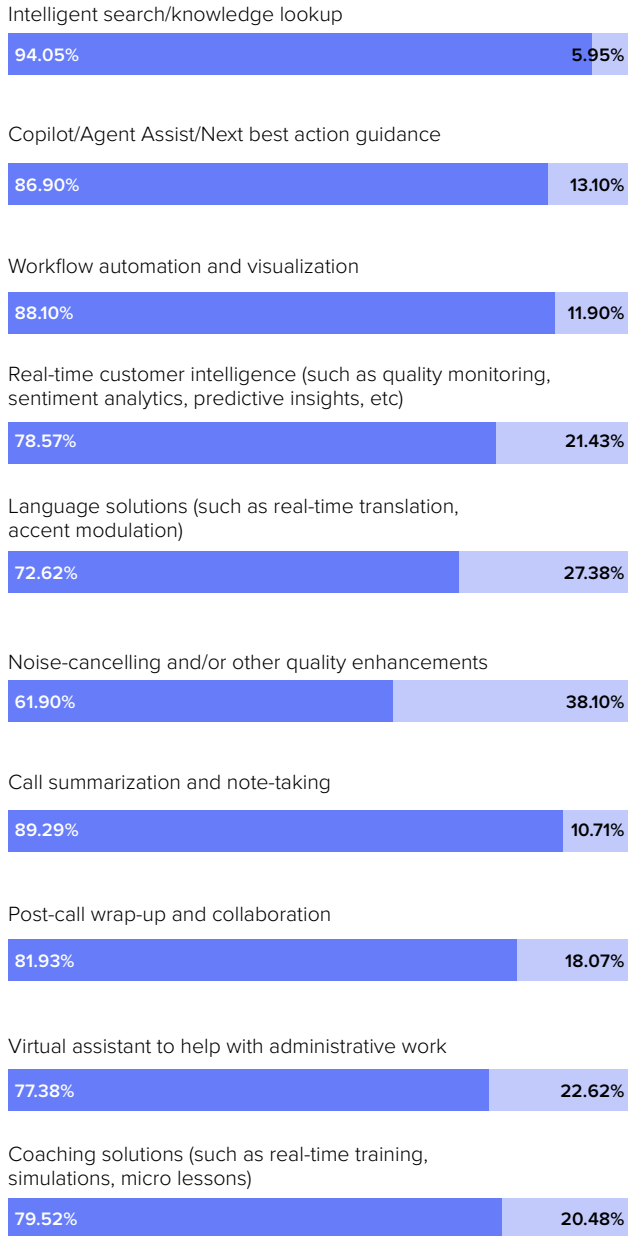
Their AI investment focuses align with this perspective.

More than 94% see intelligent search and knowledge management as a critical AI priority for 2026. Call summarization (89%), workflow automation and visualization (88%), copilot/next-best action solutions (87%), and post-call automation (82%) also rank as top use cases.

Collectively, these types of solutions will eliminate notorious inefficiencies *and* elevate agent performance. They thus position the AI revolution as an opportunity to impact both phases of the income statement; costs will fall as opportunities to cultivate more customer satisfaction, loyalty, and wallet share rise.

Which types of agent-facing AI use cases do you feel are important to pursue or continue pursuing in 2026?

- Yes, this is important
- No, this is not important



Although they are not as *high* on the priority list, language solutions (73%) and audio enhancements (62%) are firmly in the AI conversation.

These solutions further reflect an interest in using AI to bridge human connections by making conversations clearer, more accessible, and more tailored to the individual. They further reflect the notion that technology and humanity are synergistic companions, not oppositional concepts.

MEASURING IMPACT: DO CONTACT CENTERS KNOW WHAT AI MEANS FOR AGENT PERFORMANCE?

Directly tied to widespread challenges like cumbersome processes, fragmented systems, and inadequate data, the priority AI solutions should move the employee experience needle. They should make agents better, and faster, at what they do.

But the stakes of customer contact performance require more than theoretically sound investments. They necessitate an emphasis on real results.

Are organizations in position to properly quantify the impact of AI?

A non-trivial 21% outright admit that they are not. They concede that they are not actively measuring the return on their AI investments.

One-third say they are monitoring certain outcomes but lack a standardized measurement framework. Another 30% are thoroughly measuring results but cannot always trace impact to specific tools.

Just 15% have a robust measurement framework in place.

Addressing the measurement gap will be *critical* moving forward. Beyond the general value of understanding results, robust performance analysis will help organizations navigate a still murky, uncertain AI market. It will reveal which use cases are generating impact, and how that impact is changing the nature of employee workflow.

Demonstrating proof of value, moreover, will help achieve buy-in at all levels of the organization. It will be a way to excite employees about the AI transformation, while also securing support (and budget approval) from business stakeholders who demand proof of success.

EMPOWERING ENVIRONMENTS: BUILDING A CULTURE OF AUGMENTATION

When thinking about the ideal framework for success, it is easy to fixate on technologies and processes. Are key tools and databases well-integrated? Is workflow well-defined?

It is just as important to consider the cultural environment. Will the overall agent experience attract and motivate the right talent?

While it took a backseat during COVID lockdowns in some organizations, *workplace culture* has re-emerged as the #1 priority for improving employee engagement and satisfaction.

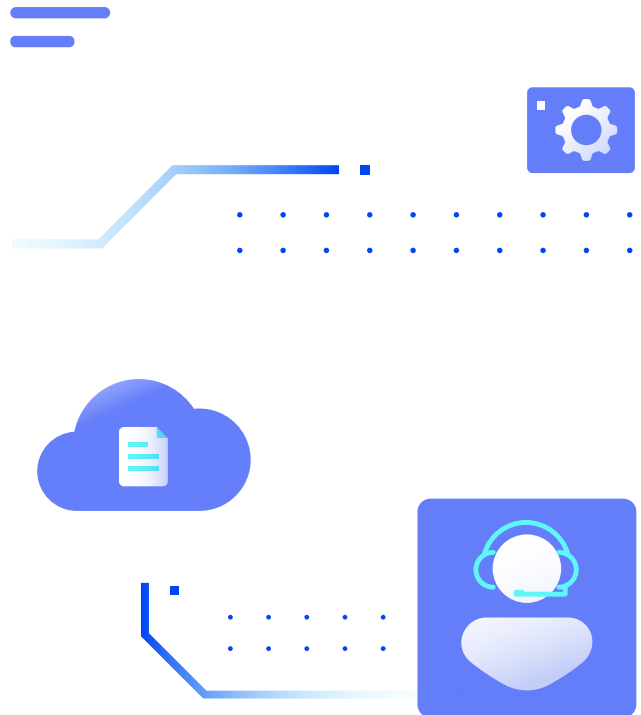
Quality of management and leadership ranks as the #2 driver, while compensation and career paths place in the #3 position. Flexibility, quality and convenience of tools, and workflow are the next-biggest focuses.

Specific rankings aside, it is clear that all factors will play a role in mobilizing the customer contact employee of the future. As these employees take on more challenging work, they will require organizations that support them with the right tools, training, and leadership support.

The fact that many will be handling more conversational, human-centric work, moreover, explains the particular value of workplace culture. Future conversations will likely be more emotionally jarring; issues will be higher stakes, and individual customers might be more heated or demanding. An organization that commits to employee *happiness* in the face of this adversity will be one that not only keeps agents engaged but ensures they bring that positive demeanor to the frontlines.

Moving forward, how will your organization rank the importance of the following on improving employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention?

- 1 Workplace culture and office experience initiatives
- 2 Quality of management/leadership
- 3 Compensation and career paths
- 4 Flexibility of work location and schedules
- 5 Quality/convenience of tools, systems, and processes
- 6 Workflow and types of interactions/tasks they get to perform





Technology vs. Humanity: From Aspiration to Action

The AI revolution does not simply promise more exciting, human-centric work for today's employees. It also promises a mechanism for making humans better at that work. By eliminating key sources of friction, elevating the training experience, and providing real-time empowerment, AI should enable humans to better leverage their emotional intelligence and creativity. It should allow them to look beyond transactions and focus on connections.

These are not empty promises; modern AI solutions are already capable of optimizing workflow and augmenting human ingenuity. Their accessibility, usability, and impact are all growing by the second.

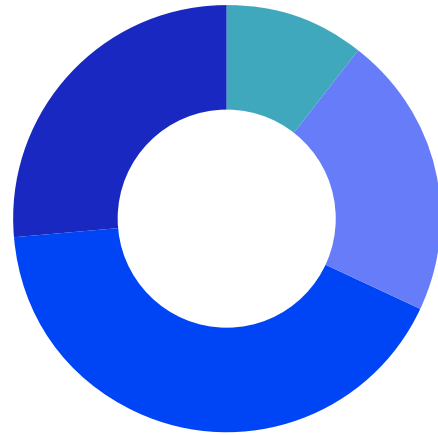
Nonetheless, there is an important distinction between availability and inevitability. AI may have the ability to elevate customer contact, but if the organization is not ready to make the necessary transformation, it will miss out on the opportunity. It will neither optimize the efficiency nor humanity of its customer experience.

Do any of the following represent barriers to scaling your AI investments?

Yes, this is a challenge No, this is not a challenge

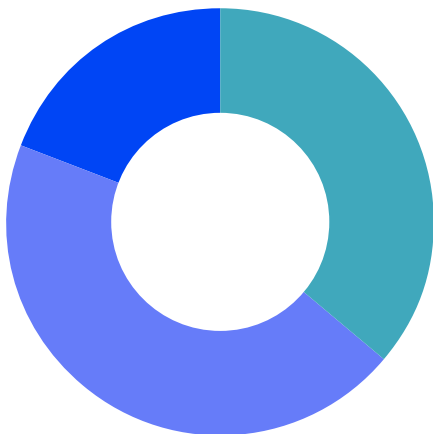


When pursuing new AI initiatives, how do you address any fears or reservations agents have about what it could mean for their jobs?



- 10.7% Not applicable, no fear of AI exists within our teams
- 21.4% We do not actively address it; leadership makes tech decisions exclusively based on ROI and business considerations
- 41.7% Leaders make the final decision, but they incorporate some feedback and transparently discuss the vision with agents
- 26.2% Employee buy-in is critical; agents play a substantial role throughout the sourcing, implementation, and iteration processes

Do you measure the extent to which employees are engaging with your AI tools/solutions?



- 36.2% No, we are not currently evaluating their tech utilization
- 44.7% We monitor the impact on other KPIs, but we do not drill-down into specific utilization
- 19.2% We actively monitor how (and how often) they use the tools

Which best describes your ability to measure and analyze employee productivity and efficiency?



- 15.5% We fully measure outcomes and can attribute impact to specific initiatives with precision
- 29.8% We fully measure outcomes/ROI, but our ability to trace impact to specific initiatives is limited
- 33.3% We assess some holistic outcomes, but we do not have a consistent/standardized measurement framework
- 21.4% We are not presently measuring or evaluating outcomes of our AI investments

BARRIERS TO AI TRANSFORMATION

What is standing in the way of AI transformation?

Presently, there is no answer more common than cost; nearly 81% cite budget as a barrier to scaling their AI investments.

Other top inhibitors include concerns about their existing technology framework (80%), risk management worries (80%), and present employee adoption and enthusiasm for AI (69%).

Previous CCW Digital research confirmed that nine-in-ten contact centers are facing efficiency pressure. More than 71%, meanwhile, say that AI pricing has proven costlier or at least more unpredictable than expected.

Given those realities, cost's status as a top inhibitor is unsurprising. Overcoming that reservation will require a combination of astute implementation strategy, an emphasis on more quantifiable success metrics, and support from vendor partners who tether their innovation to *business outcomes* and not just cool features.

Fragmented systems have been the enemy of so many customer contact technologies and trends; their inhibitive effect on AI marks yet another reason to take system unification and data harmonization seriously.

The risk management challenge will be interesting to monitor in the years ahead.

Which best describes your ability to measure and analyze employee productivity and efficiency?



- **31.0%** We rely on a comprehensive, data-driven analysis of root causes and KPIs related to efficiency and/or customer and employee satisfaction
- **40.5%** We rely on insights and recommendations from leaders, employees, and other relevant stakeholders
- **8.3%** We focus on industry trends, competitive intelligence, and popular use cases
- **20.2%** There is no singular framework; our AI initiatives are case-by-case

On the one hand, the maturation of AI technology should reduce the likelihood of costly hallucinations, inaccuracies, or inconsistencies, and thus make organizations more comfortable deploying the technology at scale. On the other hand, as comfort in AI grows, so too will the push to implement AI into higher-stakes customer interactions. That will strike its own chord with risk-averse organizations.

Insofar as omnipresent macroeconomic conversations – overall job market trends, stories about layoffs – shape sentiment, contact center leaders cannot completely control the AI narrative. They cannot completely eliminate employee skepticism.

Indeed, 90% of leaders acknowledge that their employees do have fears or hesitations about the impact of AI.

Many, though, will take action to minimize concerns within their organizations. Beyond providing the aforementioned transparency about evolving job roles, responsibilities, and trajectories, a significant number are beginning to involve employees in technology decisions.

More than 26% provide a meaningful seat at the table, involving employee feedback in the sourcing, implementation, and iteration processes. Nearly 42% do not provide quite as much of a platform, but they still listen to employee feedback and transparently share their technology roadmaps.

For some, this analysis does not stop at the sourcing and implementation phases. More than 19% of organizations closely analyze how employees are using the technology, ensuring it is resonating as desired. Just shy of 45% monitor the impact technology investments have had on employee KPIs, but they do not necessarily quantify actual utilization.

AI PRIORITIZATION: HOW DO BRANDS DECIDE WHAT MATTERS?

Today's customer contact functions face so many challenges. They also receive briefings on so many technologies and solutions.

Knowing they will face the aforementioned barriers to selecting and implementing specific solutions, how do they know which opportunities to prioritize?

In 40% of organizations, the sourcing *most commonly* starts from within. These teams make decisions based on the input of leaders, employees, and other key stakeholders.

As an alternative, 31% place a paramount emphasis on harder, more outside-in data. They look at an analysis of root causes or KPI performance before making investment decisions.

Just over 8% take a market-driven approach, looking at overarching trends and competitor behaviors. The remaining 20% say that they have no set framework; they take a case-by-case approach.



Beyond Automation: Where Agentic AI Meets Human Empathy

Redefining CX Through Flexibility, Precision, and Empathy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Customer service is entering a new phase. Automation is finally good enough to take on the repetitive work, but customers still judge brands on how they are treated in the hard moments. The future belongs to leaders who can run both at once.

Liveops has been doing that for 25+ years by pairing on-demand, brand-aligned customer support professionals with a precision-scheduling operating model. Now we are extending that model with agentic AI and AI-powered agent assistance so that every interaction can be fast, empathetic, and measurable.

“Tier-1 automation is accelerating, but empathy isn’t automatable,” said Molly Moore, Chief Operating Officer at Liveops. “Enterprises need both: AI that resolves simple tasks and agents who can de-escalate, retain, and grow relationships. Liveops brings those worlds together.”

Liveops approaches AI with one priority—keep the human interaction strong and let technology clear the path forward. The next era of CX won’t be defined by technology itself, but by how intelligently we combine it with human judgment.

AI AS A FORCE MULTIPLIER, NOT A SUBSTITUTE

A lot of the market is still talking about AI as if it will replace agents. We don't believe that. What we are seeing across programs is that AI is most valuable when it is supporting the agent, not competing with them.

At Liveops, AI isn't a project—it's a design principle. We're using it to anticipate intent, route with precision, and assist in the moments that matter most for quality and compliance:

- Designing AI to anticipate intent and route work to the right person at the right time.
- Piloting AI agent assistance in the moments with the greatest quality and compliance impact.
- Expanding automation where the brand experience will not suffer.

How Liveops can apply this to real customer interactions:

- AI can prepare a customer snapshot so the agent can start warmer and faster.
- AI can suggest language that protects the brand voice and calms tense situations.
- AI can draft the follow-up so the agent is not spending time on notes.

That's practical AI—built around the reality of service work.

THE MODERN AGENT: TECH-ENABLED AND HUMAN-CENTERED

The people within the Liveops network are not sitting in a row of cubicles waiting for calls. They are skilled, often industry-aligned customer support professionals with an average of 15 years of work experience, and 80% are college educated. Our job is to give them the context, guidance, and schedule design that lets them show up as the best version of themselves.

“Winners in customer experience will not be AI only or human only; they will be AI-accelerated and human-centered,” said Jim Watson, Chief Executive Officer at Liveops. “Enterprises want one partner that can operationalize AI responsibly for tier-one work and stand behind human quality when stakes are high, and Liveops is that partner.”

That's our point of view: AI-accelerated, human-centered. Not AI-first, not people-only.

WHY LIVEOPS' MODEL MATTERS IN AN AI ERA

The Liveops model delivers what modern CX demands: scalability powered by AI, efficiency through data, and human talent perfectly aligned to each brand.

- **Precision Scheduling:** Because Liveops schedules agents in 30-minute intervals—compared to the traditional 4-to-8-hour shifts, brands can match coverage to actual demand instead of paying for hours of idle time. AI makes those forecasts sharper; our model makes them usable.
- **AI Shifts the Work Upward:** As AI takes over simpler, repeatable contacts, the human work that remains is higher value and harder to cover. A virtual, on-demand model like Liveops attracts experienced, brand-aligned agents to handle those complex, emotional, or regulated interactions without a large, fixed team.
- **Brand-Aligned Agents:** AI can keep knowledge current, but it cannot create a human-to-human interaction that sounds like your company. That's why talent is selected for brand alignment and relevant industry experience.

That mix is harder for traditional, facility-bound providers to tell convincingly. It's built into the DNA of Liveops.

The next phase of Liveops innovation is already underway—using AI to make every interaction not just faster or cheaper, but smarter, safer, and more human.

WHY LIVEOPS?

Customer service is at its best when technology clears the way and people carry the relationship. That is the idea running through this paper, and it is the way Liveops already shows up for brands.

Liveops brings three things together in one place: AI that takes care of the repeatable work, an on-demand network of professionals who can handle the conversations that matter, and an operating model that makes performance visible. The result is simple. Empathetic customer experiences at scale, without losing the human touch.

