

2024 November
Market Study

Future of the Contact Center

WWW.CUSTOMERCONTACTWEEKDIGITAL.COM

Intro

For the customer contact community, 2024 was another sobering year. Consumer unhappiness remained significant, with 55% saying their experiences got worse. Familiar pain points like long wait times and repetitive questions endured, and interactions remained troublingly devoid of personalization and humanity.

But it was also one that spurred ample promise and excitement. Thanks to visible advances in technology, notably the ascent of conversational, generative, and agentic AI solutions, the world seems to be closer than ever to achieving *true* customer centricity and unlocking *real* agent empowerment.

Of course, contact center transformation is not simply about introducing new technology. It is about recalibrating objectives, rethinking performance standards, redesigning customer journeys, and reassessing workflow. It is about creating an environment in which technology can genuinely work its magic.

How are customer contact leaders navigating these strategic imperatives? How are they ensuring the contact center they are building is *actually* the one customers and agents want and need? How are they preparing their operation for an AI-driven tomorrow?

The product of exclusive research, CCW Digital's annual Future of the Contact Center market study provides the answers.



Table of Contents

- 2** Intro
- 4** Methodology & Demographics
- 4** About the Author
- 5** Key Findings
- 6** Redefining Customer Expectations
- 9** Establishing Priorities for 2025 and Beyond
- 11** The State of AI in the Contact Center
- 14** The State of Human Agents in the Contact Center
- 19** Evolutions on the Frontlines - and in the Boardroom
- 21** Selecting Technology for the Future of the Contact Center
- 23** Industry Insights
- 25** Appendix
- 25** Meet the Team
- 26** 2024 Editorial Calendar



Methodology & Demographics

To uncover the Future of the Contact Center, CCW Digital conducted a survey in October and November 2024. Reaching a pool of respondents that included contact center, customer service, customer experience, marketing, and operations executives, the survey uncovered critical challenges, priorities, and ambitions for 2025 and beyond.

Example respondent job titles included chief operating officer, chief marketing officer, vice president of member relations, head of client care, vice president of sales and marketing, senior customer service manager, director of customer experience, head of service excellence and operations, vice president of client solutions, director of support services, and vice president of retail.

The respondents spanned organizations of all size ranges and most major industries.

About the Author



Brian Cantor
Principal Analyst, CCW Digital
Customer Management Practice
CMP 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 170,000.

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 From a performance perspective, today's contact center leaders know the customer comes first. Moving forward, they will increasingly rely on customer satisfaction, accuracy, customer retention, and first contact resolution as critical operating metrics.
- 2 They will also increasingly emphasize *employee experience* metrics, highlighting employee satisfaction, employee retention, return on learning, and workflow ratio as success indicators.
- 3 Given their emphasis on retention, it is no surprise that leaders are also paying careful attention to potential signs of agent churn. Top warning signs include increased time off, negative "voice of the employee" feedback, and a decline in enthusiasm.
- 4 Aware that they need to know customers in order to connect with them, employees identify enhancing analytics as their #1 priority for 2025 and beyond. Other high-ranking priorities include determining the best AI use cases, improving web and digital self-service options, and improving the employee experience.
- 5 Rather than simply *recommending* investments in new technology and employee initiatives, contact center leaders say they will be increasingly responsible for making these investment decisions. And as they pursue the right analytics and automation solutions, they will pay particularly careful attention to price, reporting and data capabilities, privacy and security, and integration.
- 6 Most contact center leaders feel pressure to be more efficient, but that cannot result in *impersonal* experiences. Nearly all contact center leaders say customers are increasingly demanding tailored, *proactive* journeys.
- 7 As they work to deliver these frictionless, personalized, predictive, and proactive experiences, leaders will account for risks and challenges related to improper AI automation, scalability, and data security and privacy.
- 8 They will also focus on elevating digital experiences, with 88% viewing web and mobile engagement as a clear focus. Just over half will treat digital as a "front door" with the understanding that many customers will still escalate to the phone. The others will look to increase containment within digital channels.
- 9 AI has captured universal interest, but many customer contact leaders are still waiting for meaningful results. Only 8% feel their AI journey is progressing faster than expected; about half feel it is moving disappointingly slowly.
- 10 Nonetheless, these leaders do think AI will eventually drive transformation. When it does, they expect agents to pivot to complex work, client retention and winbacks, knowledge management, and customer feedback management.
- 11 To ensure leaders develop the necessary competencies, 69% plan to modify training in the coming year.
- 12 They will also need to address noteworthy productivity inhibitors, such as too much low value work, insufficient knowledge and CRM systems, and unclear performance standards.



Redefining Customer Expectations

The construct of the contact center has and will continue to change. It will harness the power of new technologies. It will engage customers via new contact channels. It will employ workers in new, highly distributed arrangements.

One thing, however, will always remain constant: its reason for existence. Above all, the customer contact function is the vessel through which a business engages its customers.

The *contact center of the future* must, therefore, align its operations with the *customer of the future*. If the way a leader perceives “good performance” differs from the way a customer defines a “good experience,” all decisions – from technology deployments, to policy implementations, to personnel hiring – could greatly jeopardize business success.

While pursuing this alignment, savvy contact center leaders will re-evaluate the metrics and performance indicators they establish within their organizations. They will ascribe markedly more importance to certain measures, while maintaining or even relaxing their emphasis on others.

Customer satisfaction will command a particularly luminous spotlight, with 94% of leaders saying they will place more emphasis on that score in 2025 and beyond. Other high-priority metrics include accuracy and quality (86%), customer retention (83%), and first contact resolution (80%).

The emphasis on customer satisfaction and retention underscores an acceptance of the contact center’s true purpose: to delight and connect with customers. First contact resolution plays a pivotal role in that effort, ensuring that those who *ask a question* receive the correct answer *on the first try*.

Always foundational to the contact center, accuracy and quality will logically gain even more significance as brands expand into new channels – and increasingly harness the power of artificial intelligence. The introduction of these additional, automated touch points heightens the potential risk of inconsistent, errant communication; by prioritizing quality, brands are expressing their refusal to let that potential risk materialize.

In a sign that they want their contact centers to perform better across the board, there are few major metrics that leaders plan to outright abandon ahead of 2025. Some will, however, command comparatively less attention.

Just over 51% say opt-in and subscription rates will actually become less important, while 41% will reduce their reliance on average handle time. Callback rate will lose prominence in 40% of organizations.

Though understandable, waning interest in these metrics is not necessarily justifiable.

Opt-in rate may not seem as pivotal to the traditional “call center” operation, but it still carries tremendous meaning for the overall experience. Outbound communication is an important way to reduce inbound volume, demonstrate proactive support, strengthen customer relationships, and drive sales. But it can also manifest as overbearing SPAM, which serves to not only frustrate customers but prevent them from engaging in future communication. Holding one’s organization accountable for opt-in rate, therefore, represents a pivotal way to ensure all outbound communication creates value for the customer.

Once the defining contact center metric, average handle time has been losing favorability due to the notion that it forces agents to rush customers off the phone. The rise of AI self-service for “simple issues” further jeopardizes its relevance, as agents will be pivoting to more complex work that, by definition, should take longer to resolve.

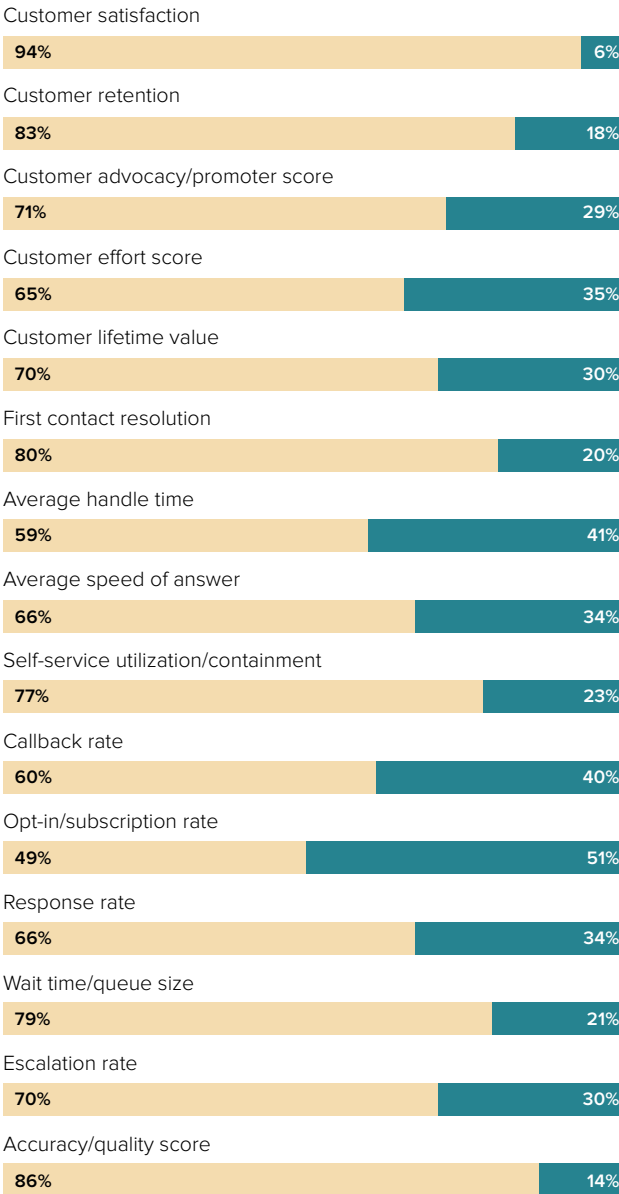
However, to reject AHT is to outright ignore the reality that time is money. Customers may not want to be rushed off the phone before their issue is resolved, but they also do not want to spend any longer than necessary. Continuing to rigorously manage against AHT, albeit with more nuance than in the past, ensures agents are doing everything they can (and have access to everything they need) to quickly, easily, and conveniently support customers.

The de-emphasis on callback rate will naturally spur some concern amid the simultaneous increase in focus on first contact resolution. If brands are not ensuring that their initial communication actually sticks and keeps customers from raising the same issue in the future, are they truly measuring (let alone delivering) “first contact resolution”?

Callback rate, moreover, can play a big role in determining whether an answer provided in a low-touch digital channel or automated chatbot is good enough to prevent customers from calling an agent in the future.

Going into 2025, will the following metrics be more or less important for evaluating the customer experience?

■ This metric will be more important
■ This metric will be less important



THE PUSH FOR PROACTIVE PERSONALIZATION

It may not be fully evident in their approach to metrics, but contact center leaders understand the importance of proactive communication. An astounding 95% of leaders, in fact, say that they believe customers will increasingly expect and evaluate them on an ability to anticipate and proactively meet their needs.

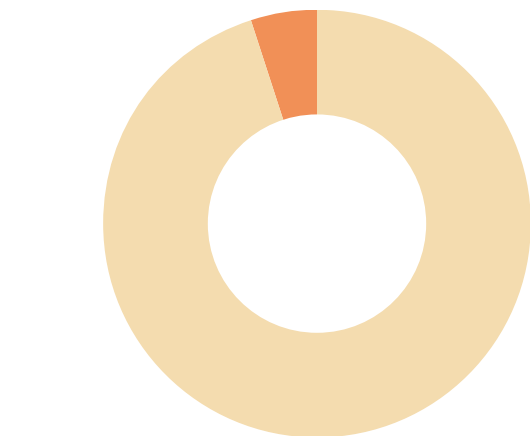
To put it simply, the ideas of “knowing one’s customers,” “predicting their intentions,” and treating them as “people rather than numbers” will no longer be hollow clichés in the contact center of the future. They will become fundamental operating principles.

Granted, achieving these objectives will require some navigation and refinement. Presently, contact center leaders cite numerous factors that prevent them from sufficiently personalizing customer experiences.

Notably, 78% worry that the increasing use of AI will thwart their ability to deliver highly personalized experiences. An alarming 70% do not feel they can maintain personalization at scale, while 69% are concerned about the data privacy and security landscape. The inability to measure personalization (65%) and fear of coming off as “creepy” (53%) are also hindering the personal touch in the majority of organizations.

With so many organizations citing these concerns, one would be hard-pressed to demonstrate significant optimism about the rise of personalization in 2025.

Looking to 2025 and beyond, do you believe customers will expect – and evaluate you based on – an ability to predict/anticipate their needs and proactively address them?



95% Yes
5% No

A glass-half-full individual should, however, point out the fact that each of these concerns is readily addressable.

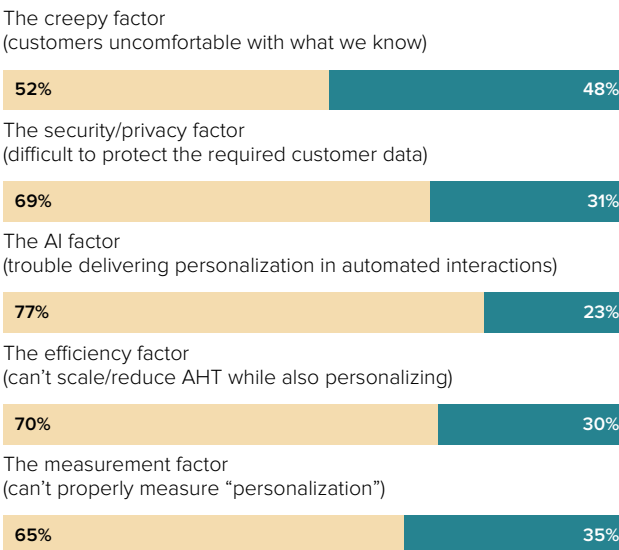
Modern conversational and generative AI solutions enable automated experiences that understand customer language and provide personalized, relevant responses. Although they may not be able to mirror every emotional tenet of the “human touch,” they can certainly create interactions and journeys that are uniquely tailored to individual customers and contexts. And they, notably, can do so at scale!

The best contact center technology vendors take privacy and security very seriously, injecting important guardrails into their customer-facing bots, contact center platforms, analytics solutions, and CRM or CDP systems. Managing customer data may be scary, but it is certainly doable with today’s solutions.

“Scoring” personalization may not be cut-and-dried, but contact center leaders can certainly measure the impact of efforts to personalize experiences. If they are able to demonstrably streamline bot interactions, reduce repetitive questions, improve upsell conversion rates, and preempt future support calls, they are clearly using customer data to enhance experiences. Ensuring that all “personalization” efforts are transparent and drive critical customer experience outcomes, moreover, serves as a way to avoid the “creepy” factor. It is data abuse – not mere data use – that spurs resistance.

Do the following challenges impact your comfort/success in delivering a personalized CX?

- Yes, this is a concern/challenge
- No, this is not a concern/challenge





Establishing Priorities for 2025 and Beyond

Aiming to deliver accurate, consistent, personalized experiences that drive satisfaction and retention, contact center leaders are constantly establishing and revisiting their strategic priorities. They are constantly working to determine which initiatives, technologies, and “best practices” are most important to the contact center of the future.

As they look ahead to 2025, they are paying particular mind to customer data. A whopping 95% say improving analytics, intelligence, and quality capabilities will be a bigger priority.

Other key focuses for 2025 include determining the best AI use cases (90%), better leveraging digital and web self-service options (90%), and growing employee satisfaction (85%).

Emphasizing data is both a testament to the importance of knowing customers and an admission that current intelligence frameworks are lacking.

Throughout 2024, CCW Digital’s market studies have uncovered contact centers’ ongoing challenge to even access a “360-degree view of the customer experience,” let alone democratize that view to agents, supervisors, and other key stakeholders. With new channels emerging, customer expectations growing, and data-driven automation opportunities materializing, a failure to address this problem – and harness the power of real-time, omnichannel analytics – will introduce unprecedented consequences.

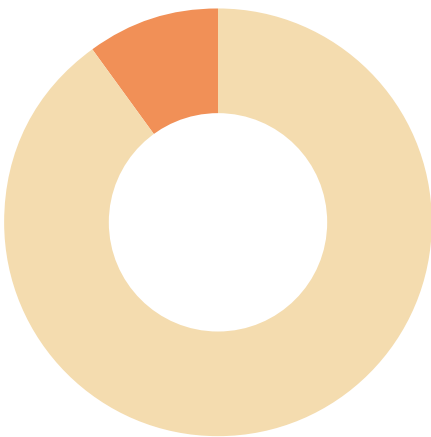
Successfully unifying and democratizing data, on the other hand, can generate unprecedented value – even beyond the contact center. Subscribing to the idea that “data is one of the contact center’s greatest exports,” 90% of contact center leaders believe the intelligence they gather should play a greater role in overall business decisions.

After years of hearing the hype, assessing the risks, and making the investments, it is surely unsurprising that most contact center leaders want to increasingly surface the most valuable AI opportunities. They no longer want to talk about AI; they want to talk about the *results* of AI.

An extension of the AI movement, the hype around low-touch and no-touch digital engagement has introduced a vision for the contact center where employees will only get to focus on high-value, complex interactions. Appealing from both an efficiency and employee engagement perspective, this vision will nonetheless remain a pipe dream if organizations cannot actually deliver compelling self-service experiences. For 90% of organizations, the time has clearly come to actually create those customer-centric self-service interactions.

With that “AI for simple issues, agents for complex ones” vision at the top of their minds, leaders know that the connection between “happy agents and happy customers” will be more important than ever. Agent demeanor will be instrumental to the success of these complex interactions, as will the knowledge that comes from a long tenure in the contact center. It is thus utterly logical that contact centers would want to further emphasize the employee experience in 2025.

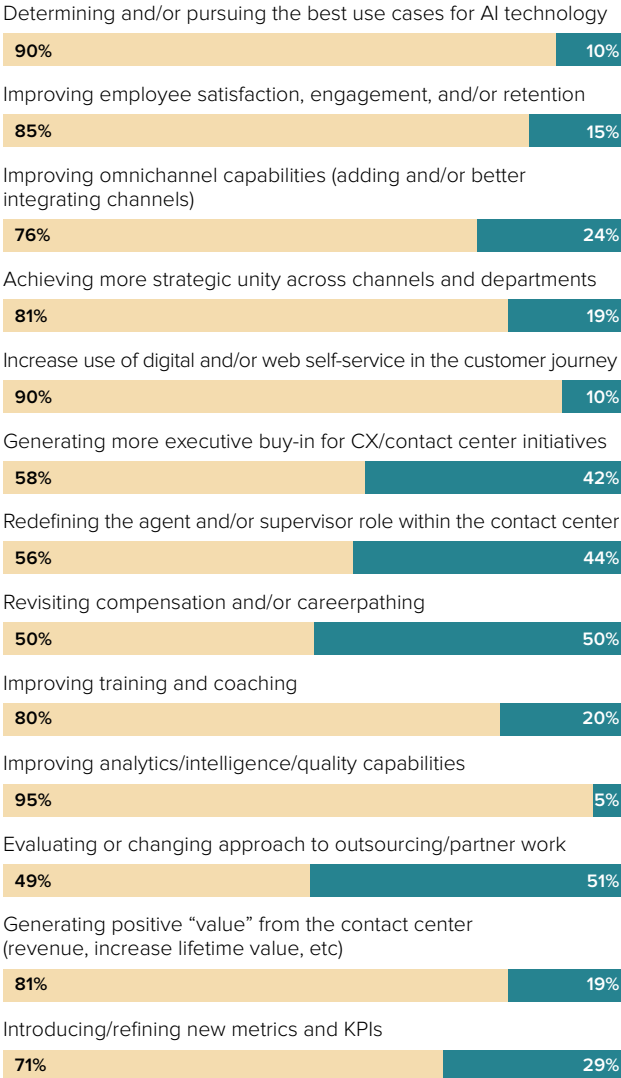
Going into 2025, do you believe customer data should play a key role in driving overall business decisions?



- 90% Yes, customer data should impact the overall business
- 10% No, customer data is only a priority for the contact center/CX team

Do you expect the following initiatives to command more or less attention in 2025?

- More important in 2025
- Less important in 2025





The State of AI in the Contact Center

Efficiency remains a driving force behind contact center strategy. Nearly 94% of contact center leaders say they are facing efficiency demands from their executive leadership, with 46% in cost-cutting mode and 48% in responsible growth mode.

Combined with the desire to unlock better intelligence and improve overall performance, this emphasis on efficiency vividly reveals why so many contact centers are looking to identify high-impact AI use cases in 2025.

It also reveals why generative AI is particularly exciting. By empowering more personalized, relevant engagement

in self-service channels, it promises contact centers the chance to have their cake and eat it too. It enables them to reduce inbound call volume without sacrificing experience quality.

Cognizant of those benefits, 80% of contact center leaders are embracing customer-facing generative AI. Nearly 18% are already leveraging the technology, while just shy of 63% have meaningful plans to do so.

THE IMPACT OF AI AND DIGITAL ON CUSTOMER JOURNEYS

Whether focusing on generative technology, different forms of AI, or merely the overarching idea of “digital engagement,” the typical contact center leader acknowledges an opportunity for transformation. Nearly 88% identify digital and AI-driven engagement as a clear focus for their customer experiences.

As they explore opportunities to optimize AI and digital engagement, contact center leaders are generally falling into one of two major camps. Forty-five percent (45%) are, at least for now, content to treat digital options as a “front door” to the customer journey. They expect to see customers increasingly *start* in digital and/or self-service options, but they will continue to accommodate escalations to live phone calls.

Nearly 43%, on the other hand, believe containment is important. They are actively looking to see more resolutions in AI and digital – and thus a quantifiable reduction in phone volume.

Regardless of their specific view, all contact center leaders will be wise to consider customer perception. CCW Digital’s 2024 Consumer Preferences Survey revealed that consumers still resoundingly view the live phone call as their most reliable customer service option. Whereas nearly 70% have confidence in resolving a customer support issue over the phone, less than one-quarter have the same confidence in chatbots or other digital options like messaging or social media.

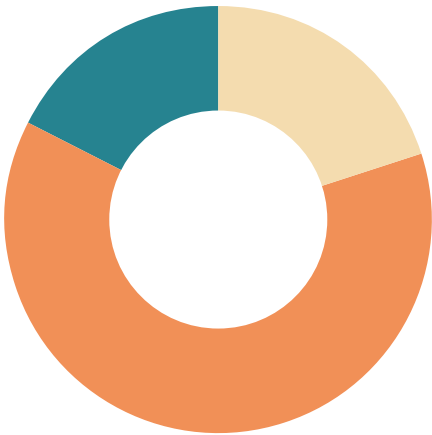
Ultimately, these statistics confirm that today’s customers carry a stigma toward low-touch digital options. This means attempts to force customers into such channels, let alone actively restrict them from going elsewhere, could be met with resistance and even rejection. If brands wish to increase digital utilization and delight, they will have to overcome this conditioning through transparent communication and unwaveringly superb service delivery.

Which best describes executive leadership’s demand for “efficiency” from the contact center/CX function?



- 6% “Efficiency” is not a major priority; we are not scrutinizing spend/financial impact
- 46% We are in cost-cutting or containment mode - “do more with less”
- 48% We are in responsible growth mode - freedom to increase spend, but we must show clear/meaningful ROI

Are you using, or do you have concrete plans to use, generative AI in a customer-facing way?



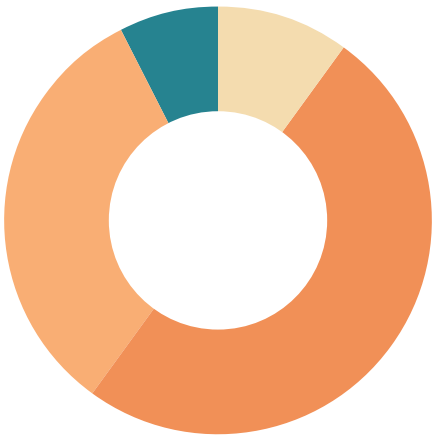
- 20% No, we are either not using gen. AI at all ... or only using or planning to use it for internal use cases
- 62% We are not using customer-facing gen. AI right now, but we have clear plans to
- 18% Yes, we are already using customer-facing gen. AI

With 2025 approaching, which best describes your goal for customer-facing digital and/or AI self-service options?



- 12% Digital/AI self-service is not a focus for us
- 45% Phone escalations are still fine, but we want customers to increasingly *start* their interactions in digital/AI
- 43% We want to see more resolutions in digital/AI – and thus a reduction in live agent phone calls

How would you rate the speed at which you are implementing and/or achieving results with AI technology in the contact center/CX?



- 10% Not applicable / we are not meaningfully pursuing any AI
- 50% Our AI journey is progressing slower than we expected/hoped
- 33% Our AI journey is progressing as expected/hoped
- 7% Our AI journey is progressing more quickly than we expected/hoped

THE MEANDERING AI JOURNEY

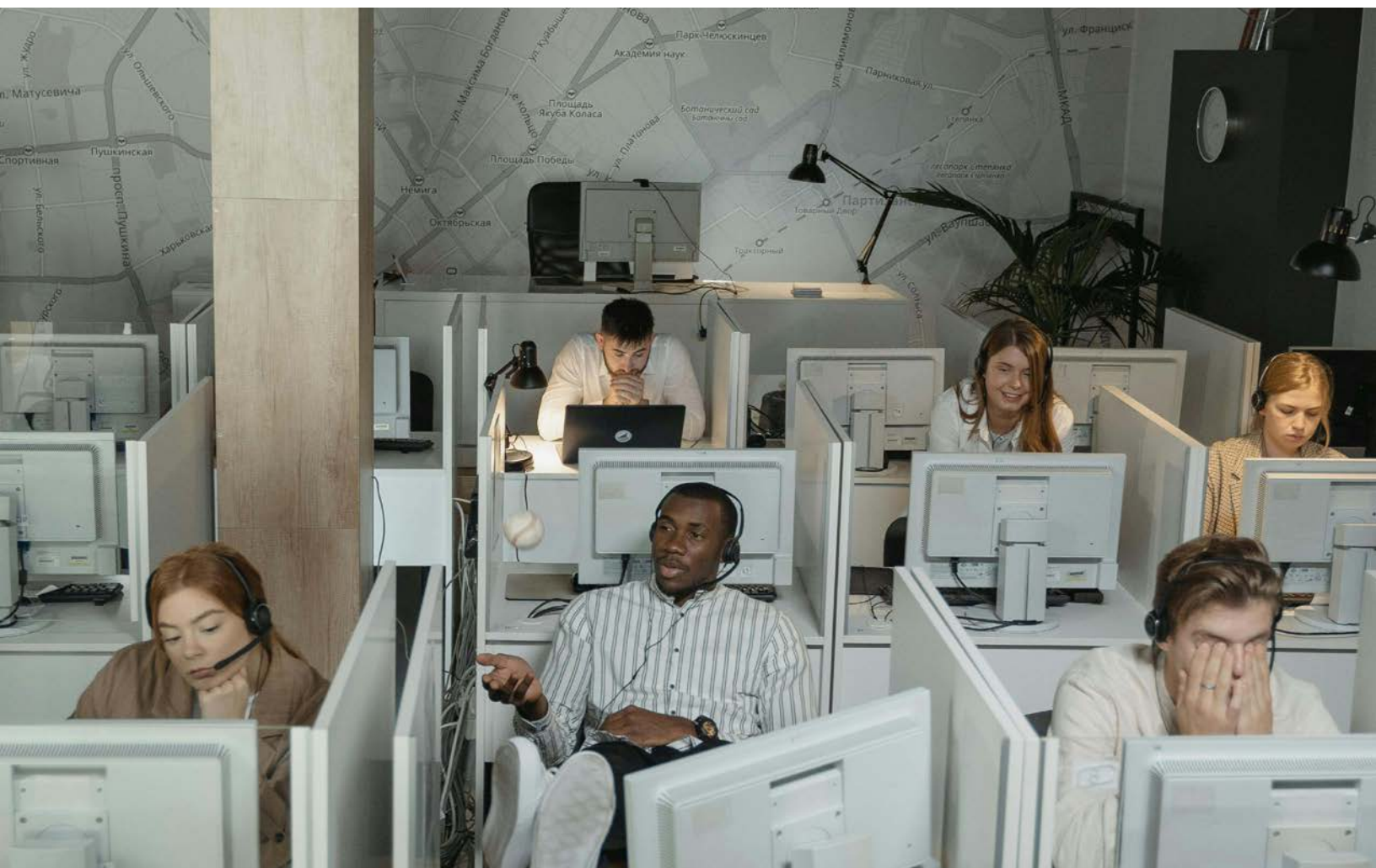
Delivering superb AI-based service may, unfortunately, seem quite daunting for today's contact center leaders. Thus far, the typical leader has not been blown away by the speed or significance of return on AI investment.

Only 8% say that their AI journey is progressing more quickly than expected.

Just under 33% say it is meeting expectations, with 50% actually confessing that their AI journey is moving *more slowly* than anticipated.

With customer demands rising and business expectations growing by the second, solution providers that can assist with faster, more impactful AI deployments stand to make waves in 2025.





The State of Human Agents in the Contact Center

AI will play a pivotal role in the contact center of the future, but so too will human agents. Responding to CCW Digital studies over the past few years, contact center leaders have *emphatically* trumpeted the idea that the rise of AI is about augmenting rather than replacing humans.

And with 85% of leaders identifying the employee experience as a more crucial priority for 2025, the value they ascribe to their people is clearer than ever.

MEASURING THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

To ensure they are creating an experience conducive to both high agent satisfaction and strong productivity, the majority of contact center leaders will prioritize crucial employee-facing metrics.

A substantial 85% of leaders say they will increase their emphasis on employee satisfaction moving forward. Nearly 83% say employee retention will represent a more important metric.

Other high-priority employee experience metrics include return on learning (78%) and employee workflow ratio (76%).

The former two reflect an acceptance that “what gets measured gets managed.” Contact center leaders have long touted the connection between happy agents and customers, and they have often talked about the need to reduce employee churn. Few contact centers, however, have seen *success* at cultivating teams of resoundingly happy, unwaveringly loyal agents. By treating employee satisfaction and retention as critical operating indicators, leaders create accountability around the experience. They send the message that the contact center can only be successful if it is creating happy employees.

The latter two reflect a commitment to a next-generation contact center, in which agents are focusing on *complex work* rather than simple, repetitive issues. This pivot will, of course, require ample training – recent CCW Digital research confirmed that only 16% of leaders feel their agents currently have the necessary skills.

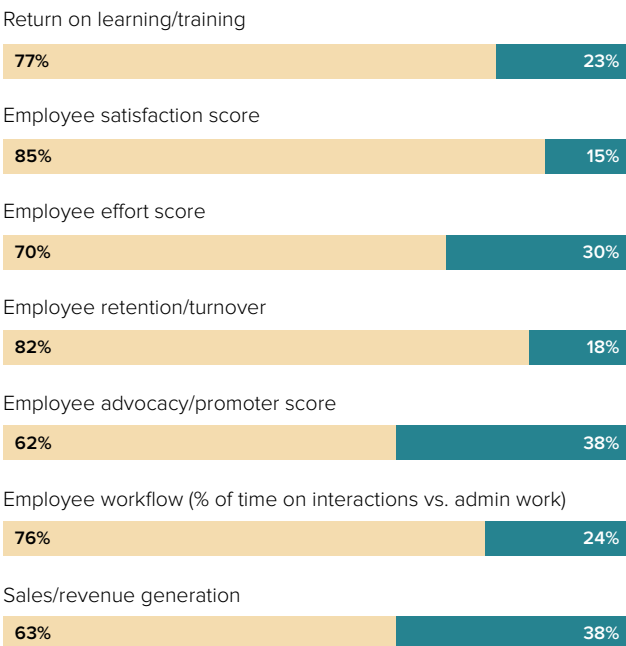
By actively measuring their training efforts, leaders will create accountability for their upskilling process, while also providing a window into agent indifference or disengagement.

Measuring the amount of time agents spend on high-value work will not only assess progress toward the next-generation contact center but uncover actionable employee experience insights. If employees are spending too much time on low-value work, the likelihood of attracting high-competency talent, let alone retaining and motivating them, will be miniscule.

On the other hand, if employees are spending too much of their days on challenging, high-stakes customer inquiries, they might be facing a significant amount of emotional and mental drain. Without a corresponding investment into wellness and benefit programs, such drain could create its own negative impact on the employee experience and lead to burnout, disengagement, and churn.

Going into 2025, will the following metrics be more or less important for evaluating the employee experience?

- This metric will be more important
- This metric will be less important



EMPOWERING EMPLOYEES FOR NEXT-GENERATION WORK

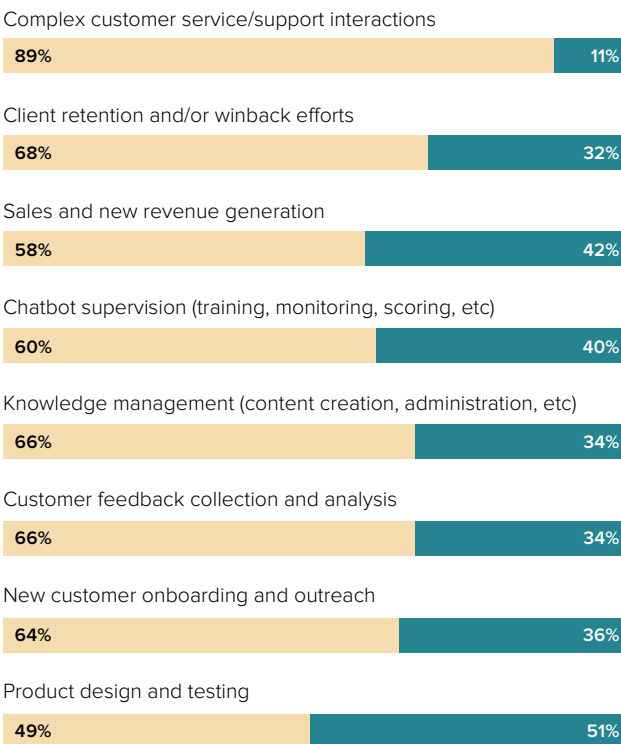
Whether by declaring their interest in AI or by emphasizing metrics related to competency and workflow, leaders are transparent in their belief that the role of the agent is evolving. As 2025 arrives, many are beginning to more precisely define what that role will entail.

Nearly 89% say that the typical agent of the future will handle complex customer service and support interactions. Other likely aspects of the role include participating in client retention and winback efforts (68%), contributing to knowledge management (66%), and collecting and sharing customer feedback (66%).

Although one might hope that the typical agent is *already ready* for this type of work, reality says otherwise. The previous section of this report highlighted a CCW Digital finding that only 16% of leaders believe their agents currently possess the competencies necessary for this work.

Moving forward, do you anticipate some or all of your contact center/CX agents taking on the following roles and responsibilities?

- Yes, some/all agents will focus on this role
- No, this will not be a common role for our agents



That is fundamentally unsurprising; even though agents may theoretically possess the emotional intelligence, sales savvy, and critical thinking needed to thrive in the contact center of the future, they have not been previously hired, trained, or managed for such work. It will take time to help agents transition from being “script readers” to “customer engagement consultants.”

Fortunately, many leaders are actively working to close the competency gap. Almost 69% say they have concrete plans to train agents for more complex work.

Training, of course, is only part of the battle. Contact center leaders will also have to ensure their environment is actually empowering agents to succeed.

Right now, numerous factors are undermining that culture of empowerment.

More than 71% of contact centers are not automating enough low-value work to help agents pivot to more complex tasks. Upwards of 63% of contact centers subject agents to ineffective knowledge management and CRM solutions, inhibiting their ability to engage in more nuanced, complex, personalized interactions. Nearly 59% are still struggling to establish the right metrics and performance expectations.

Are any of these factors preventing you from empowering agents to focus on more complex or varied work?

- Yes, this is preventing success toward a new agent normal
- No, this is not preventing success toward a new agent normal

We don't want agents to focus on new/more complex work



Insufficient training/coaching/supervisor support



AI self-service not yet absorbing enough “simple tasks” to change agent workflow



Knowledge/CRM/internal systems aren't sufficiently empowering agent performance



Have not yet defined what “complex work” looks like



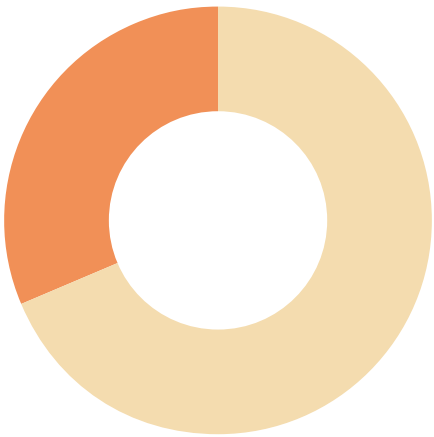
Don't have the compensation/career strategy to shift agents to higher-value work



Don't have the appropriate metrics/KPIs in place



For 2025, do you have a concrete plan for training/coaching agents to take on evolving and/or more complex work?



- 69% Yes
- 31% No

PROMISING SIGNS OF AGENT ELEVATION

Although present-day strategies, mindsets, and technologies are hindering agent empowerment, they are providing reason for optimism. Numerous initiatives are starting to move the needle in the right direction, making a favorable impact on the employee experience.

Particularly impactful solutions include modern workforce management solutions and collaboration tools, which are respectively driving agent experience improvements in 73% and 72% of organizations. Both types of solutions are becoming especially critical in the modern customer contact era, in which emerging contact channels and flexible work models are creating less predictable workflow and physical isolation. Modern WFM and collaboration tools will enable businesses to more efficiently staff and plan, while also fostering connections between *physically separated* employees. Both should have a strong impact on employee satisfaction and productivity.

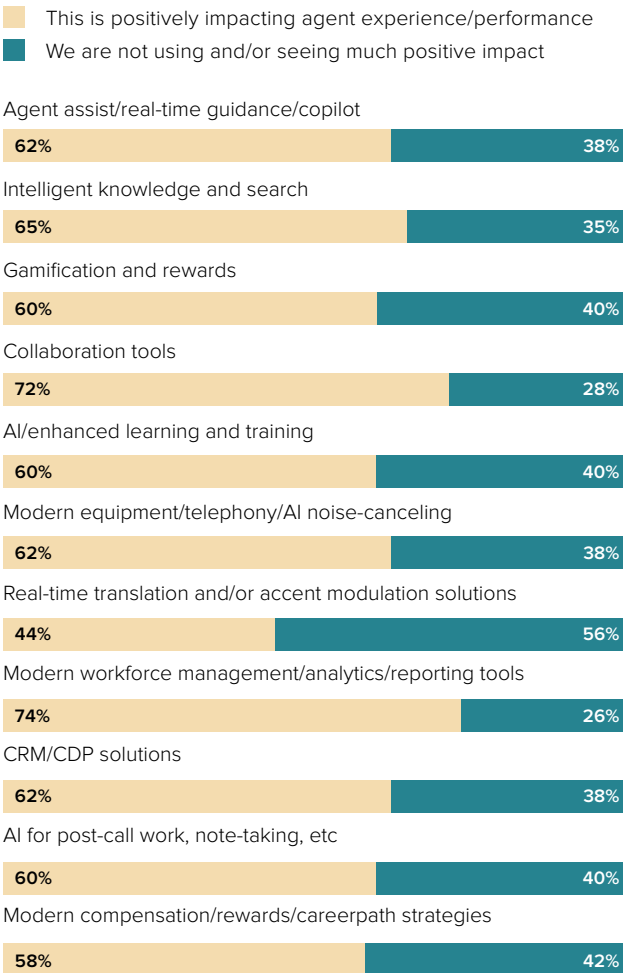
Intelligent knowledge and search (65%), agent assist (63%), modern equipment (63%), and CRM solutions (63%) are also beginning to drive favorable results.

Insofar as knowledge management and CRM also rank as top performance inhibitors, it would be irresponsible to declare “mission accomplished” with regard to these tools. That intelligent knowledge, agent assist, and CRM offerings are *beginning* to improve employee engagement, therefore, is an encouraging sign that brands are approaching this technology correctly.

As organizations look to empower agents to handle even more nuanced inquiries, complex topics, and personalized interactions, doubling down on investment into these tools will prove critical.

The connection between upgraded equipment and employee performance has always existed, and it will mean even more in the contact center of the future. With agents set to spend more time on high-value interactions, their ability to properly communicate with customers will become more pivotal than ever. Noise-canceling technology will ensure agents – and customers – can properly hear each other during every interaction. That audio union will lead to more harmonious, relationship-driven communication, while also enabling analytics solutions to more accurately transcribe, interpret, and glean insights from the speech.

Which best describes your use of the following to improve agent performance and engagement?



FORECASTING EMPLOYEE EXIT

As they work to boost their employee retention rate, contact center leaders will consider all opportunities for elevating employee satisfaction, buy-in, and loyalty. They will leverage automation technology to reduce effort and streamline the workday. They will leverage self-service to optimize workflow. They may also consider compensation overhauls to generate more incentivization and excitement.

But unless they can guarantee every effort will be perfectly successful, these leaders will still have to accept the reality of churn. Savvy ones, however, will proactively look for signs of this churn – and do all they can to remedy those issues in advance.

For today's leaders, an increase in time off – whether or not it is approved PTO – represents a particularly alarming indicator. Nearly 73% of leaders believe an increase in agent absence helps to forecast potential churn.

Other top churn signals include negative employee feedback (71%), lack of enthusiasm for collaborating and sharing feedback (70%), and a decline in customer-facing metrics (68%).

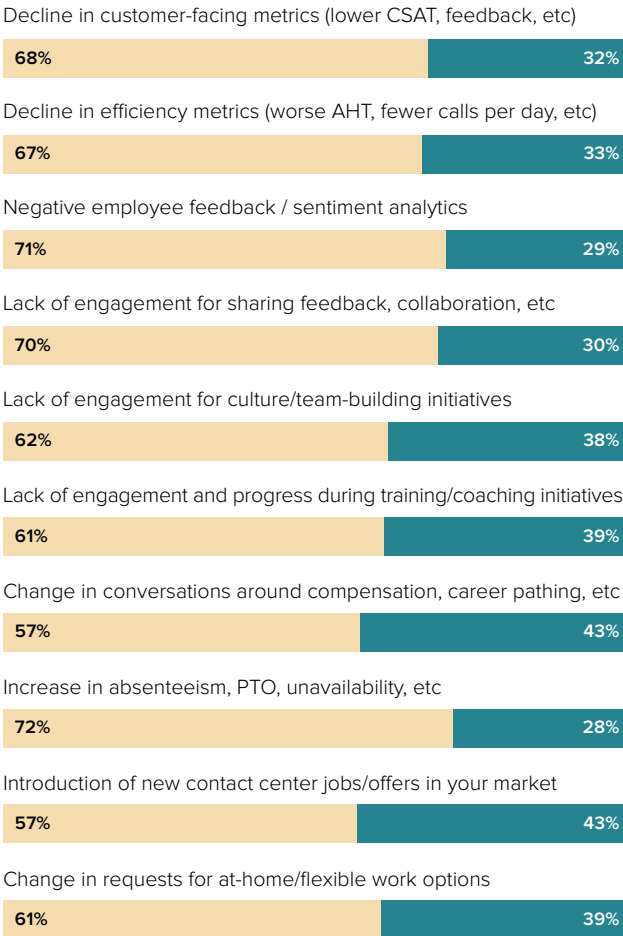
The wariness around time off is sure to generate debate. On the one hand, sudden bouts of absence can absolutely reflect a loss of passion, a disinterest in supporting the overall team, or frankly just a full lineup of job interviews with alternative employers. On the other hand, PTO and work-life balance are critical components of an employee-centric culture. By effectively sending the message that “time off is bad,” leaders may exacerbate engagement challenges.

The other high-ranking indicators either directly confirm disengagement (negative feedback) or are the obvious consequence of dissatisfaction. Those who are “on the way out” are undoubtedly less likely to bring their “A game” to team meetings, brainstorming sessions, or customer interactions. They are undoubtedly less likely to care about capturing and actioning feedback from the front lines.



Are you successfully using the following indicators to predict/address potential agent churn?

- Yes, this helps us forecast churn
- No, this does help us forecast churn



THE FUTURE LOCATION OF THE CONTACT CENTER

It was once a rare perk. During the COVID-driven lockdowns, it became a necessary standard. But as 2025 arrives, where does “work-from-home” fit into the corporate dynamic?

The question is a touchy one. Some argue that workers spent the past four-to-five years *proving* that they could be just as productive without spending time and money traveling to a physical office. Others believe the absence of in-person interaction has resulted in an undeniable loss of collaboration, ideation, and culture.

With 2025 approaching, contact center leaders have their own thoughts on this situation.

Presently, 70% describe their contact center environment as “remote or hybrid.” Over the next year, 36% will maintain that flexibility, while 34% will make a bigger push toward in-office work.

Of the 30% relying primarily on in-office work, 24% plan to maintain that approach in 2025. Just over 6% will increase flexibility.

Ultimately, this means that workplace venue optionality will persist in 2025. There will be plenty of opportunities to work remotely, and there will be plenty of contact centers that exist within four fixed walls.

It is nonetheless worth noting that those currently in a remote or hybrid model are *more likely* to consider switching to the opposing model than those currently operating on-site. This certainly does not mean all agents should expect a return to office memo (42% plan to maintain or increase flexibility, after all), but it does indicate a slight push toward the traditional office.

Will that push intensify or relax as 2025 unfolds?





Evolutions on the Frontlines - and in the Boardroom

As they deliberate over *where* their employees will work, many contact center leaders are also considering *who* will be doing the work. With younger generations joining the workforce and making purchasing decisions, they understand the need to adapt their approaches to staffing and service delivery.

More than 63% of leaders are actively preparing for the next-generation of employees, including those who fit into the Generation Z or Generation Alpha classifications. An even more significant 76% are preparing to engage with these generations of *customers*.

At the high-level, it is encouraging that the typical contact center leader is beginning to tailor their operation to younger generations. These individuals have well-documented preferences for work-life balance, corporate

culture, and communication strategy, and no customer- or employee-centric business can succeed by ignoring them.

If there is a concern, it is the fact that businesses are presently focusing more on the changing customer base than the changing employee pool. The customer contact community has long embraced the connection between great employees and great customer experiences, and that connection will only go stronger as agents pivot to more consultative, personalized interactions.

Taking steps to not only cultivate the best, most engaged agents but ensure those agents mirror the changing customer base is thus a pivotal step on the road to success.

Are you or do you have concrete plans to address the impact of younger generations, notably Gen Z and Gen Alpha, on your contact center/ CX operation?

Yes
No

We are working to adapt to the next-generation of customers



We are working to adapt to the next-generation of employees



THE EVOLVING LEADER

While considering the changing makeup of their customers and teams, leaders are also recognizing the need for individual evolution. Specifically, they are acknowledging that their role is requiring them to wear new hats.

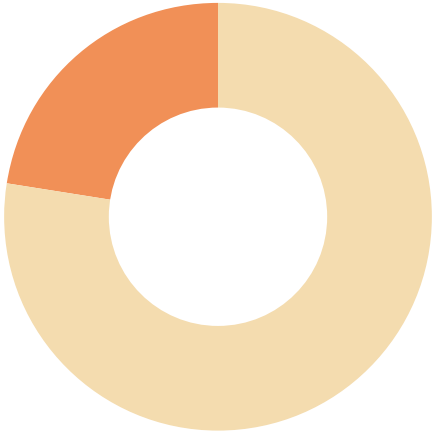
Nearly 78% say their role now requires them to play a bigger role in technology decisions, while 58% say they are more actively involved in talent decisions.

These trends are very encouraging. Since their teams are the ones who will actually be using the technology, leaders playing a bigger role in sourcing should lead to better purchasing and deployment. Leaders, in theory, should guide businesses to make decisions based on usability, customer and employee experience impact, learning curve, and real-world functionality. At a time when there are so many new solutions to consider, this “strategic” voice is incredibly valuable.

And insofar as people are the heart of the contact center, leaders driving the recruiting and onboarding process should lead to better hiring and stronger cultural development.

They, nonetheless, will require the leader to engage in active learning and development. The typical contact center leader is not necessarily a technology expert, which means they will have to amass practical knowledge before making purchasing decisions. And though leaders may know what kind of employees and cultures they want to cultivate, the skills – and time – required to actually bring that vision to fruition are not inherent. Leaders will need to spend time understanding common HR practices and principles.

Over the past year, has your role as a CX/contact center leader grown to include more responsibility for technology decisions and purchases?



77% Yes, I play a heavier role in technology decisions
23% No, I play an equal or lighter role in technology decisions

Over the past year, has your role as a CX/contact center leader grown to include more responsibility for recruiting, onboarding, training, and other talent focuses?



57% Yes, I play a heavier role in talent initiatives
43% No, I play an equal or lighter role in talent initiatives



Selecting Technology for the Future of the Contact Center

Selecting the right AI use cases represents a pivotal contact center goal, and with more than three-quarters of them gaining responsibility for technology sourcing, it is one that sits on the shoulders of contact center leaders. They will play a crucial role in identifying solutions that make sense for the business while creating value for customers and employees.

Leaders will consider numerous criteria when pursuing technology, but price will remain a defining factor. A whopping 90% say that the price and/or cost model plays a crucial role in their evaluation process.

Other high-ranking components include reporting and data capabilities (89%), privacy and security (86%), integration capabilities (84%), and the user experience interface (84%).

Though it may not be a “noble” criterion, price is obviously going to be fundamental for the many leaders facing efficiency directives.

The emphasis on reporting and data speaks to the dual need to demonstrate ROI and achieve buy-in throughout the organization. Executives will need to know the technology is working in order to assess the overall investment, and practitioners will require performance insights to make vital refinements, process updates, and strategic shifts. Visibility into their own performance benefits, moreover, will help frontline employees become more “bought into” disruptive solutions.

With the concurrent rises of new communication channels and personalization expectations placing an emphasis on customer data, leaders will naturally want to select solutions that mitigate any security or privacy risks. Providers that promise such data protection and expertise, moreover, may signal their ability to *partner* with contact center leaders through AI and digital transformations.

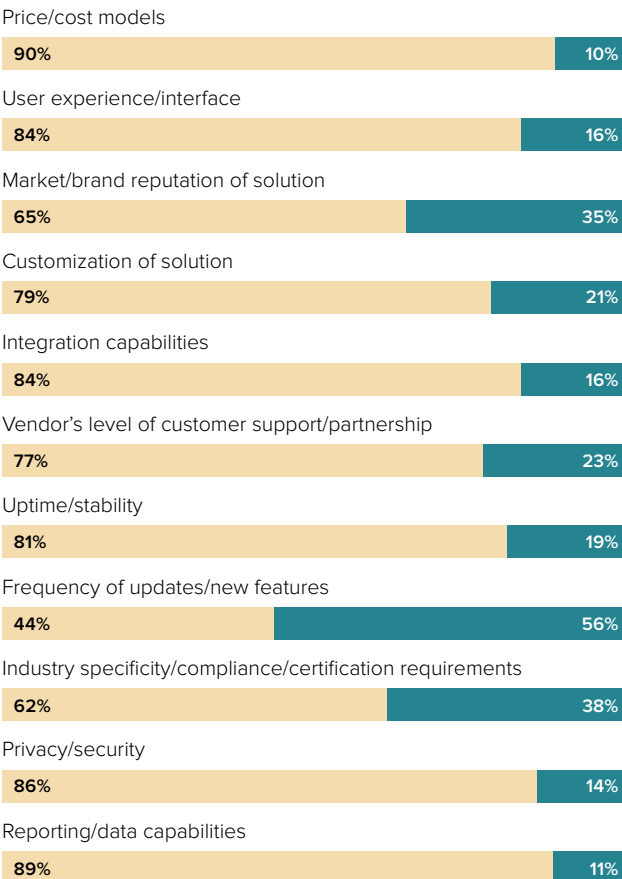
Emphasizing integration capabilities simultaneously reflects a desire to reduce implementation time and prevent the “fragmentation” that has long undermined contact center performance. It also opens the door to intelligent automation; AI solutions cannot truly “work their magic” if they do not have seamless access to all tools, interfaces, and databases.

Insofar as modern contact center technology is being sold on its ability to reduce friction and add value, an intuitive, appealing user interface represents a logical priority. Technology that is difficult to use goes unused, leading to a squandering of the benefits contact centers, customers, and employees need right now.

Although the aforementioned factors represent the *most* critical concerns, the truth is that other considerations like uptime, customization, and vendor’s level of support, weigh heavily on sourcing decisions.

Do the following factors meaningfully impact your contact center/CX tech investment decisions?

- Yes, this is a key factor for us
- No, this is not a key factor for us



The only key factor *not* driving decisions in the majority of contact centers is frequency of updates and new features. This likely speaks to one of three realities:

1. Contact centers are still in “fix-it” mode and looking to address existing pain points before they can think about what is on the horizon.
2. Contact centers are looking for compelling core, out-of-the-box functionality and do not expect to go deep down the well of constant upgrades or refinements. They may also see constant changes – and associated retraining – as a burden.
3. Contact center leaders do theoretically value potential upgrades, but they cannot chase the future at the expense of current cost, integration, or usability.

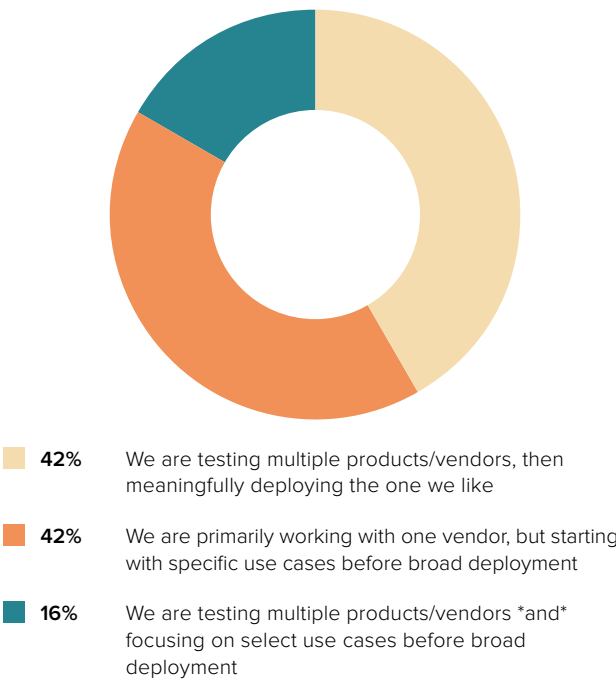
AI = ASTUTE IMPLEMENTATION

Expertly evaluating AI solutions is important, but it is the actual implementation of that technology that will drive results. When it comes to that implementation, leaders have mixed thoughts on the correct approach.

Of the organizations focusing on major AI products, 42% are testing multiple vendors and then going “all-in” with the one they like. By contrast, an equal 42% are already confident in specific vendors – but operating more methodically when it comes to determining the right use cases.

The remaining 17% are rigorously choosing between numerous vendors *and* numerous use cases.

Which best describes your approach to AI implementation/deployment?

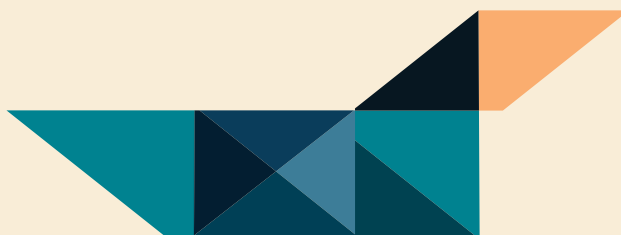


Industry Insights

Contributor:



Scott D. Clary
founder & host of Success Story
(#1 Entrepreneur Pod)



Q: Throughout the many success stories you have covered and experienced yourself, what sets many of these successful leaders apart?

A: The leaders who truly stand out aren't just decisive - they're calculated risk-takers. They've mastered the art of making bold moves without being reckless. These individuals don't just adapt to change; they anticipate it and position their organizations to capitalize on emerging trends before competitors even notice them.

What's fascinating is how they balance seemingly contradictory traits. They're confident yet humble, visionary yet pragmatic. They have the rare ability to inspire with grand visions while simultaneously drilling down into nitty-gritty details when needed.

One often-overlooked quality? They're master storytellers. They weave compelling narratives that align their teams, stakeholders, and customers around a shared purpose. This isn't just fluff - it's a powerful tool for driving organizational coherence and motivation.

Q: From your perspective, how can we better meet the needs of our customers?

A: Forget traditional customer service - the real innovators are creating customer success ecosystems. It's not about reacting to needs; it's about partnering with customers to co-create value. This means embedding yourself in their world, understanding their challenges at a deep level, and often solving problems they didn't even know they had.

Here's a counterintuitive approach: sometimes, the best way to serve customers is to say no. By clearly defining what you don't do, you create a sharper value proposition and attract the right customers who truly benefit from your core strengths.

Consider implementing "customer advisory boards" with a twist - invite your most vocal critics alongside your fans. This tension creates a dynamic environment for honest feedback and breakthrough ideas.

Q: What insight do you have on accepting losses and using them as fuel to improve?

A: Let's flip the script on failure. Instead of just learning from losses, proactively engineer small failures. Create safe spaces for experimentation where the cost of failure is low, but the lessons are invaluable. This builds organizational resilience and innovation muscle.

Implement "failure Fridays" where team members share recent setbacks and extract insights. This normalizes failure as part of the growth process and crowdsources learning across the organization.

Here's another idea: celebrate your biggest failure of the year. Award the team or individual who took a smart risk that didn't pay off but provided crucial insights. This sends a powerful message about the value of intelligent risk-taking.



Q: Can you share some insight on one of the top 'x factors' that is essential for employees today?

A: Beyond adaptability, the future belongs to those who master “skill fusion” - the ability to combine disparate areas of expertise to create unique value. The next breakthrough might come from a marketer who understands data science, or an engineer with a deep grasp of psychology.

Cultivate “selective ignorance” - the wisdom to know which trends to dive into and which to ignore. In a world of information overload, the ability to focus on what truly matters is priceless.

Develop “empathy at scale” - the capacity to understand and connect with diverse groups across cultural and technological divides. As work becomes more global and virtual, this skill will be a key differentiator.

Q: In a world of 'time-saving' technology like AI, how will this mindset shift? How can (or should) we lean on new technology to maximize our time spent?

A: Don't just use AI to automate existing processes - use it to reimagine them entirely. The biggest gains come from rethinking workflows from the ground up with AI capabilities in mind.

Implement “AI shadowing” - have AI tools analyze your work patterns to identify non-obvious productivity drains and suggest personalized optimization strategies.

Counter to common advice, don't always strive for maximum efficiency. Build in deliberate “inefficiencies” - time for reflection, random exploration, and serendipitous connections. These apparent time-wasters often lead to breakthrough insights.

Q: Do you have any insight on how leaders can best engage their team in 2024?

A: Foster “productive conflict” - create structured debates on key issues where team members are assigned opposing viewpoints. This breaks groupthink and surfaces innovative ideas.

Implement “role fluidity” - regularly rotate team members through different functions. This builds empathy, cross-functional knowledge, and helps identify non-obvious synergies.

Create “micro-cultures” within your organization - allow small teams to develop their own rituals, language, and ways of working. This fosters a sense of belonging and can incubate innovative practices that can later be scaled.

Q: What is one of the most insightful or interesting insights shared on your podcast that shifted your perspective on success?

A: The conversation with Seth Godin didn't just highlight the importance of creating significance - it underscored the need for “productive discomfort.” Godin argued that true growth, both personal and organizational, happens when we consistently operate at the edge of our abilities.

This insight led me to implement a “discomfort quota” in my own work and encourage it in others. It's about regularly taking on tasks or projects that make you feel slightly out of your depth. This constant stretching builds adaptability and prevents stagnation.

Moreover, it reframed my view of leadership. Effective leaders don't just create a vision - they orchestrate the right level of challenge for each team member, pushing them to grow without overwhelming them. It's a delicate balance, but mastering it is what separates good leaders from great ones.

Appendix



- Aragon Research Globe for the Intelligent Contact Center 2025
- AI for Contact Center Cost Reduction

Meet the Team



Brian Cantor
Principal Analyst, Director
CCW Digital
E: Brian.Cantor@customermanagementpractice.com



Brooke Lynch
Divisional Director of Digital
CCW Digital
E: Brooke.Lynch@customermanagementpractice.com



Andy Kuang
Senior Marketing Manager
CCW Digital
E: Andy.Kuang@customermanagementpractice.com



Ben McClymontt
Divisional Sales Director – CMP Digital
CCW Digital
E: ben.mcclymontt@cmpteam.com



Melinda Acuna
Marketing Manager
CCW Digital
E: Melinda.Acuna@customermanagementpractice.com



Simon Copcutt
Head of Strategic Accounts
CCW Digital
E: Simon.Copcutt@customermanagementpractice.com



2024 Editorial Calendar

JANUARY

Future of Contact Center Employees

APRIL

State of Generative AI

JUNE

CX Trends, Challenges & Opportunities

AUGUST

**Modernizing Service Experiences
With AI & Digital**

SEPTEMBER

Next-Generation Omnichannel CX

NOVEMBER

Future of the Contact Center

FEBRUARY

Future of Contact Center Employees
February 27-28

MAY

State of Generative AI
May 21-22

JULY

CX Trends, Challenges & Opportunities
July 16

AUGUST

**Technology vs. Humanity in the
Contact Center**
August 13

SEPTEMBER

**Modernizing Service Experiences
With AI & Digital**
September 10

OCTOBER

Customer Trust & Data in the Digital Age
October 15

NOVEMBER

Knowledge Management & Agent Assist
November 12

DECEMBER

Future of the Contact Center
December 10