

32 REMOTE AGENTS

HOW TO MAKE REMOTE WORK ACTUALLY WORK

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PAGE 6

Awareness

Consideration

Decision

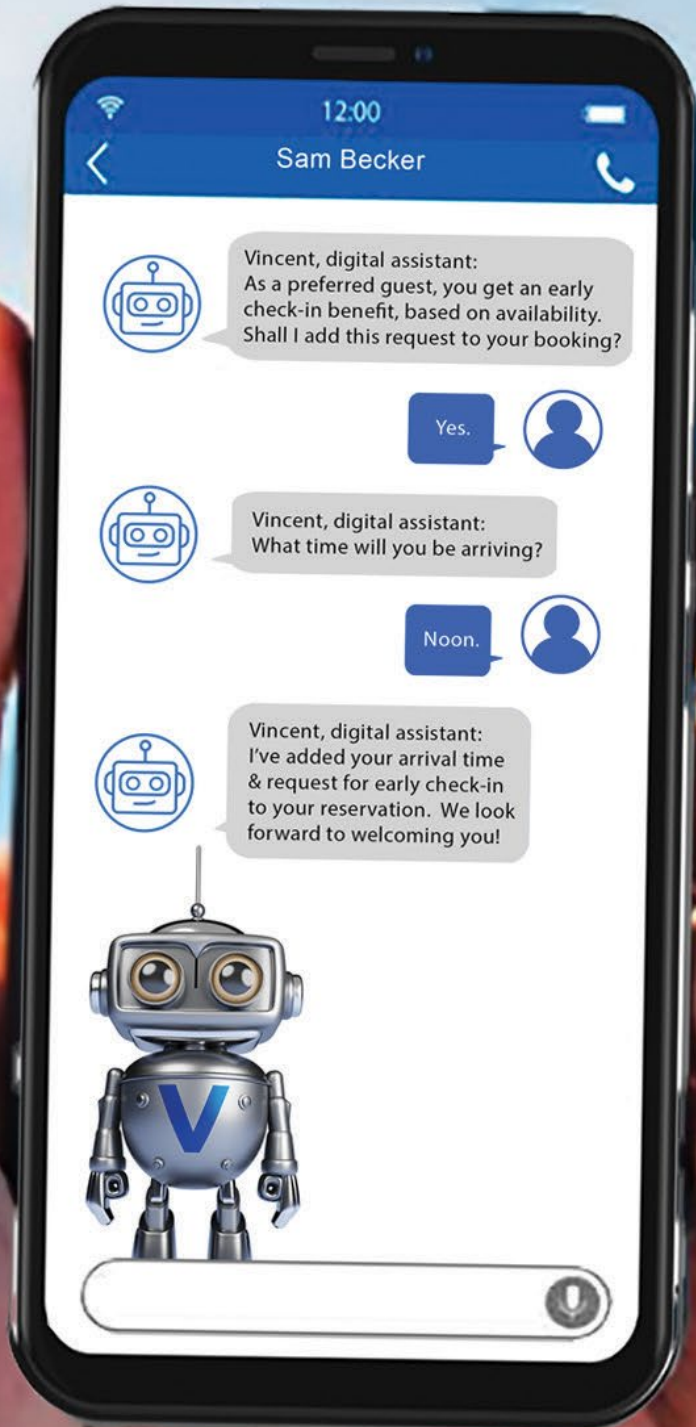
Retention

Advocacy

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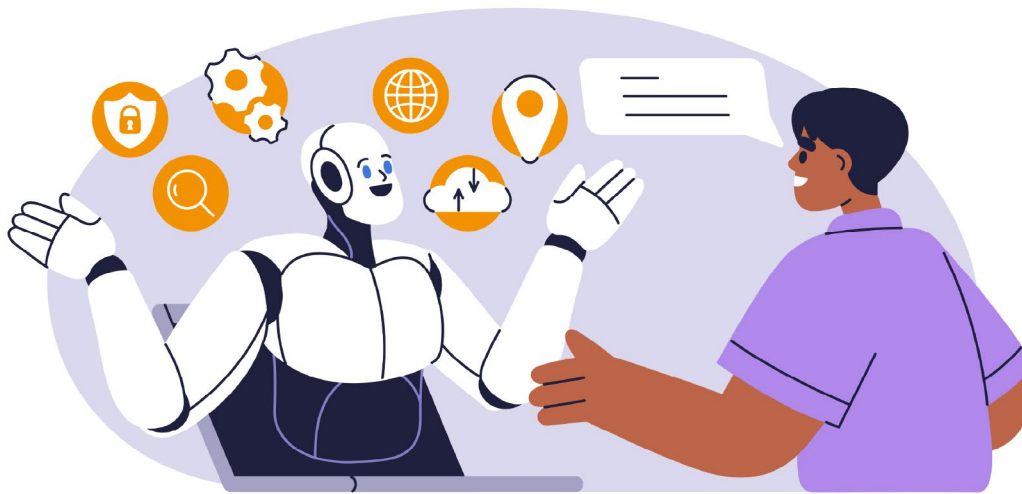
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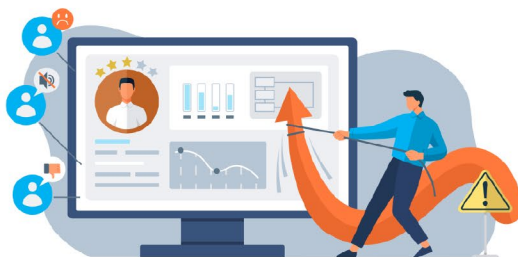
A MONTHLY DOSE OF FACTS & FIGURES FROM INSIDE THE ISSUE



\$10,000 –\$20,000

Replacing a single agent can cost \$10,000–\$20,000 when factoring in recruiting, training, and lost productivity.

SOURCE
RECRUITMENT:
WHY BEHAVIORAL
ANALYTICS MATTER
By Mark Tinney
[#RECRUITMENT](#)



80%

By 2029,
AI agents will
independently
handle 80% of
routine customer
service issues.



70%

Nearly 70% of
organizations
operate under a
hybrid model.

SOURCE
REMOTE AGENTS:
HOW TO MAKE REMOTE
WORK **ACTUALLY** WORK
By Michela Lombardi
[#REMOTEAGENTS](#)

40%

Approximately
40% of agentic AI
projects will fail,
not because the
technology doesn't
work, but because
organizations are
automating
broken processes.

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CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE:
THE HUMAN TOUCH
PARADOX
By Cloud Tech Gurus
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7.5%

The call center
outsourcing
market is
expected to grow
by almost 7.5% per
annum from 2025
to 2030.

SOURCE
FEATURE:
WHICH ROAD TO TAKE
IN SITE SELECTION?
By Brendan Read;
Q&A with Dennis Donovan
[#FEATURE](#)



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FROM THE PIPELINE



LINDA HARDEN

PUBLISHER, CONTACT CENTER PIPELINE

Welcome to our April issue. This issue brings together a range of perspectives and practical insights designed to help us navigate our environments with confidence.

Site selection, once viewed primarily as a matter of cost and geography, has become a far more strategic exercise. Organizations are now weighing access to talent, infrastructure resilience, regulatory environments, and factors that influence employee satisfaction and retention. In our featured article, we explore how forward-thinking companies are reimagining location strategy in a world where "place" is no longer confined to four walls.

Quality assurance continues to be a cornerstone of operational excellence, but it too is undergoing transformation. Traditional scorecards and random sampling are giving way to more dynamic programs that uncover opportunities for improvement and support agents delivering their best work.

Of course, none of these innovations matter without the people who bring them to life. Attracting and retaining talent remains one of the industry's most pressing challenges. Today's workforce is looking for more than just competitive pay—they want purpose, flexibility, and opportunities for growth.

That brings us to remote work, which has firmly established itself as a permanent fixture in our contact centers. In this issue, we examine what's working and what's not.

What ties all these themes together is a shift from reactive to proactive thinking. Whether it's choosing the right location, coaching agents more effectively, or designing the future of work, success requires us to challenge old assumptions.

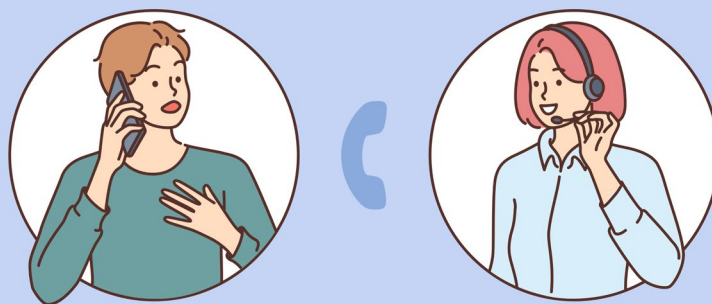
As you explore this issue, I encourage you to reflect on how these ideas apply within your own organization. The path forward may not be one-size-fits-all, but the opportunity to innovate has never been greater.

Thank you for being part of our community.

Linda Harden

Linda Harden
Publisher
Contact Center Pipeline

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE



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THE HUMAN TOUCH PARADOX WHY PREMIUM SERVICE IS THE NEXT CCAAS BATTLEGROUND.

BY CLOUD TECH GURUS

CONTACT CENTER SKILLS



PAGE 22

WHY SCREENING HARDER WON'T WIN - PART 1

THERE IS A NEW APPROACH TO ATTRACTING AND
KEEPING TALENT.

BY APRIL CANTWELL

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EACH ROUTE HAS ITS TWISTS AND TURNS.

Contact centers help guide customers on their journeys, including the twists, turns, and obstacles they face. At the same time, centers are on their own journeys. Decisions about how and where to serve customers – with on-premise or remote agents, onshore, nearshore, or offshore, with BPOs, or shifting more contacts into AI-driven self-service – help shape their success.

Make the right turn and contact centers, and critically their organizations, will bolster their abilities to maintain and grow customer loyalty and revenues while stabilizing or lowering their costs.

But go down the wrong path and they risk turning away customers and losing sales while facing increased expenses, like from not being able to attract and keep quality staff.



In today's uncertain economy, with both rising customer expectations and corporate expenses, and disaster and social disruption risks that threaten employee safety and business continuity, contact centers cannot afford to make poor decisions.

For guidance on which road to follow, we had a virtual conversation with Dennis J. Donovan. He is a principal at Wadley Donovan Gutshaw Consulting (WDGC), a leading site selection firm founded in 1975 with a contact center location practice.

Q WHAT CHANGES ARE YOU SEEING IN THE DEMAND FOR AMERICAN CUSTOMER CONTACT EMPLOYEES?

A: Over the past several years, we have seen a significant shift in the demand for them. The drivers behind these changes are both economic and technological.

I would say one of the most notable trends is the growing pressure on labor pools due to higher turnover.

Contact center roles have always experienced elevated churn, but recent years have intensified the issue. Wage competition, shifts in employee expectations, and the rise of remote opportunities have expanded workers' options.

As a result, companies are competing more aggressively for talent, particularly in markets with already-tight labor conditions. This has reshaped where organizations can sustainably grow and which cities remain viable for long-term staffing strategies.

At the same time, AI-driven automation is changing the nature of the work rather than eliminating it outright. Routine inquiries and transactional tasks are increasingly handled by automated systems, but this has raised the bar for human agents.

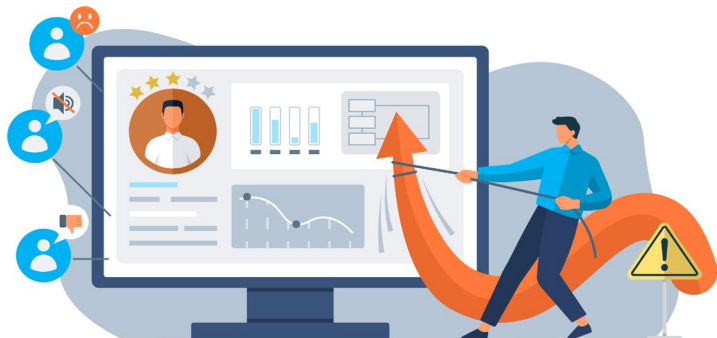
Today's U.S.-based customer contact employees must manage more complex interactions that technology cannot replicate. This shift has increased the demand for stronger problem solvers. As a result, we are seeing companies adjust their hiring profiles and training programs to keep pace.

We are also noticing a measurable movement to reshore customer contact jobs back to the U.S. Several factors are driving this trend:

- Rising overseas labor costs.
- Quality/consistency issues.
- Geopolitical uncertainty and the need for tighter data security.
- But above all, customer experience (CX) has become a brand differentiator.

On balance, demand for customer service agents is projected to decline by 5% over the next 10 years. WDCG believes this decline is underestimated by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). In our view, it might be closer by 10%.

The trend began in 2024 as AI was becoming more widespread. In 2023, according to the BLS, there were 2,859,000 customer service representatives employed in the U.S. Today the number stands at 2,753,000.



While there will be a downward trend in total employment, demand for agents will nonetheless be fairly robust. In large measure this is due to the relatively high turnover which has long plagued the industry.

Turnover in U.S. contact centers averages between 30%-45% from our read of industry data. Consequently, the industry employers will need to fill over 750,000 replacement positions annually.

From a site selection perspective, the top-rated factor for successful call center location will embrace human resources. That is the supply, quality, cost, and stability of qualified talent (especially to perform more complex tasks).

"TODAY'S U.S.-BASED CUSTOMER CONTACT EMPLOYEES MUST MANAGE MORE COMPLEX INTERACTIONS THAT TECHNOLOGY CANNOT REPLICATE. THIS SHIFT HAS INCREASED THE DEMAND FOR STRONGER PROBLEM SOLVERS."

-- DENNIS DONOVAN

LABOR SUPPLY

Q ARE THERE CHANGES IN THE SUPPLY OF LABOR TO FILL CUSTOMER CONTACT POSITIONS?

A: Yes, we are seeing discernible changes in the supply of labor available for them.

One of the most impactful trends is the continued decline in labor force participation, especially among women who have historically played a central role in the customer contact workforce.

The post-COVID-19 pandemic environment introduced lasting challenges (e.g., childcare), which have made it more difficult for many women to return to or remain in traditional shift-based roles. Even remote positions can have rigid schedules and complex tasks.

We are also seeing other demographic and lifestyle shifts that affect labor availability:

- Younger workers are entering the workforce with different expectations around flexibility, career pathing, and work-life balance.
- Contact center roles, which are often perceived as stressful and transitional, struggle to compete with remote jobs in other sectors offering similar wages with less emotional demand.

These factors place additional pressure on companies to rethink scheduling, compensation, and overall work environment.

But something interesting is happening in the higher-skilled labor segment.

As automation absorbs more of the rote work, available customer contact roles are requiring stronger communications skills, higher technical acumen, and robust problem-solving abilities. Foundational skills must also be higher. This has a direct impact on both labor availability/cost and site selection.

Q SHOULD CONTACT CENTERS RECRUIT FROM LABOR POOLS THEY MAY HAVE OVERLOOKED IN THE PAST FOR THESE HIGHER-SKILLED WORKERS? EVEN IN THE FACE OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION (DEI) PUSHBACK?

A: Contact centers need to tap *all* available labor pools. These include the marginalized (e.g., lower income on social assistance), second chancers (e.g., previously incarcerated), individuals with disabilities, and older workers approaching or at retirement age.

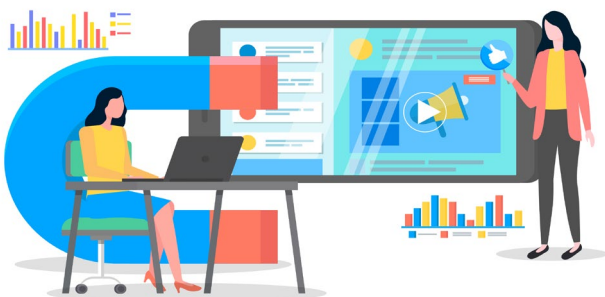
Given protracted labor shortages throughout the U.S., contact centers need to cast a wide net for staffing open positions with either full- or part-time workers. Pushback on DEI programs should essentially be considered irrelevant for staffing contact centers.

Q ARE CUSTOMER CONTACT ORGANIZATIONS BRINGING THEIR AGENTS BACK ON-PREMISE (I.E., RETURN TO OFFICE [RTO])? OR ARE THEY HAVING SECOND THOUGHTS AND KEEPING MANY OF THEM REMOTE?

A: We are definitely seeing a clear recalibration in how customer contact organizations approach RTO strategies. Many companies initially attempted full or partial RTO mandates, but the response from the workforce has prompted organizations to rethink those plans.

Right now, most customer contact employers are landing somewhere in the middle. They recognize the advantages of on-site operations, but they also understand that remote work has become an essential component of talent attraction and retention.

Organizations that are bringing agents back on-premise tend to do so for specific reasons: quality control, training consistency, security needs, and team culture development.



In these cases, companies are typically leaning toward hybrid models rather than a full return. Understandably, hybrid scheduling is more attractive for many workers.

Simultaneously, we are seeing a growing number of companies reconsider the strict “fully remote” approach. Some organizations experienced challenges early on with remote labor models and are now redesigning their remote strategies to be more structured.

However, I would say the biggest shift we are witnessing is *the rise of location-aware remote models.*

Many contact center employers are moving away from hiring anywhere in the country and are instead geofencing their remote labor pools within a defined radius: often two hours or less. This allows companies to maintain the benefits of remote work while having the option to collaborate in-person.

Looking at this holistically, I believe that a modest proportion of contact center employers will rely on a fully remote workforce irrespective of a specific location. An even smaller proportion will mandate being in the office five days a week.

The preponderance of employers will follow either a hybrid work model (typically two or three days in the office) or a location-based remote workforce (e.g., all employees residing within a responsible distance of a central office: that might also house other functions).



THE BPO OPTION

Taking the business process outsourcing (BPO) highway has long been a popular route for contact centers, instead of setting up on-premise facilities or managing remote workers.

So, we asked Dennis Donovan, “*Will contact center organizations increase or decrease their use of BPOs?*”

“Companies with contact center operations will rely to a greater extent on outsourcing over the foreseeable future,” says Dennis. “The call center outsourcing market is expected to grow by almost 7.5% per annum from 2025 to 2030 (according to Morder Intelligence).”

The rationale for greater reliance on BPOs includes technology integration (AI and automation), cost reduction, scalability, global reach, and enhanced customer acceptance (e.g., BPOs can offer specialized skills, data driven performance, and innovation).

“But in choosing BPOs, contact centers will display a preference for U.S.-based agents and not an overreliance on automated customer response systems,” says Dennis.

“Regarding the latter a survey by Data for Progress revealed that 70% of customers were dissatisfied with automated voice systems. Also, there is pending national legislation titled ‘Keep Call Centers in America Act’ to address both offshoring and overreliance on AI.”

Bottom line: *Remote work options, in some form, will be key for recruiting/retaining a qualified labor force for contact centers.*

NATURAL DISASTERS, SOCIAL DISRUPTION

Q NATURAL DISASTERS APPEAR TO BE BECOMING INCREASINGLY COMMON AND SEVERE. HOW IS THIS IMPACTING LOCATING ON-PREMISE AGENTS, USING REMOTE AGENTS?

A: Natural disasters are reshaping how organizations think about where—and how—they deploy their customer contact workforces.

In recent years, we have seen hurricanes, wildfires, flooding, and extreme heat events disrupt entire regions, sometimes for weeks at a time. It is a frightening reality that can happen to any company, particularly those that rely heavily on on-premise operations.

"NATURAL DISASTERS ARE RE-SHAPING HOW ORGANIZATIONS THINK ABOUT WHERE—AND HOW—THEY DEPLOY THEIR CUSTOMER CONTACT WORKFORCES."

Concerns around declining weather forecast quality are also creating new challenges for organizations that rely on accurate climate data for business continuity and site selection.

Historically, companies have depended on increasingly precise forecasting models to anticipate risks, prepare facilities, and safeguard operations. If those forecasts become less reliable, the margin for error widens.

From a business continuity and disaster recovery (BCDR) standpoint, reduced forecast accuracy means that contact centers may have less lead time to prepare.

Power outages, evacuation orders, or infrastructure failures could arrive sooner than anticipated, making rapid response protocols more critical than ever.

This uncertainty also influences on-premise contact center location strategies.

In the past, long-term climate projections helped identify markets with lower risk profiles. But if those projections become less dependable, companies must focus more heavily on observable historical patterns, infrastructure resilience, and the adaptability of local utilities and emergency services.

Even as environmental risks become harder to predict, customer contact organizations are being pushed toward more resilient workforce and operational models.

If medium- and long-term weather forecasting becomes less accurate, companies can compensate by strengthening structural resilience through smarter site selection, robust BCDR plans, and workforce models that can flex quickly during unexpected disruption.

Q SOCIAL DISRUPTION, E.G., CRIME, DRUG USE, CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS, HAS AFFECTED MANY LARGER AND SMALLER METROS. WILL THIS HAVE A DISCERNIBLE IMPACT ON CONTACT CENTERS LOCATING IN THESE AREAS?

A: These social-related challenges tend to be localized in a metro area. In siting a new contact center, it will be imperative to select a submarket that is removed from the primary concentration of these social ills.

If there are no submarkets that will shield a new contact center from these problems, then that metro area will be rejected as a location for their operations.

ON-PREMISE CENTER DESIGN, LOCATION

Q ARE THERE CHANGES IN WHERE AND HOW ON-PREMISE CONTACT CENTERS ARE BEING LOCATED? FACILITIES AND PROPERTIES CHOSEN? DESIGN, INCLUDING FURNITURE AND AMENITIES?

A: Without a doubt, on-premise contact centers are being located, designed, and integrated within broader corporate footprints.

One of the most obvious changes is a stronger emphasis on market stability and long-term workforce sustainability. Companies are no longer selecting sites based solely on labor cost advantages.

The Tier 2 and Tier 3 metro areas (1 million-3.9 million, 300,000-999,000 million population respectively; Tier 1 is over 4 million) are becoming preferred destinations for American contact centers. Desirable location attributes include:

- Favorable demographics.
- Depth of employment in customer-facing occupations.
- Presence (but not an overconcentration) of customer service employment.
- Starting and median salaries in line or less than national average.
- Moderate household income levels.
- Sizable pool of white collar underemployed.
- Presence of bilingual or multilingual skills.
- Available office space close to where targeted skillsets reside.
- Reliable electric power, state of the art fiber connections, and lower exposure to natural disaster risks.

Companies also seek to maximize customer coverage by locating facilities across time zones. Additionally, a strategy to be considered would involve establishing a hub office in a Tier 2 or 3 metro and then having one or more satellite offices within a reasonable distance (possibly up to two hours).

Both the hub and satellites could be hybrid. This strategy would minimize business disruption and allow for tapping into smaller labor markets, bringing supply/cost advantages.

Design expectations are evolving as well. Because the work has become more intricate, and because employee expectations have shifted, companies are investing more intentionally in their physical environments.

Ergonomic furniture, wellness and quiet rooms, collaborative breakout areas, and natural light are now common design priorities, along with amenities that support employee wellbeing.

Overall, the traditional blueprint for contact center locations is being reimagined. Organizations are selecting markets more strategically, choosing facilities that align with broader corporate needs, and designing spaces that better support employee engagement and productivity.

"... THE ORGANIZATIONS THAT WILL BE MOST SUCCESSFUL ARE THOSE WILLING TO RETHINK TRADITIONAL SITE SELECTION CRITERIA, PRIORITIZE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE, AND BUILD FLEXIBLE WORKFORCE STRATEGIES..."

Q WHAT ARE YOUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONTACT CENTER DECISION-MAKERS WHO ARE SEEKING TO OPTIMIZE WHERE AND HOW TO LOCATE TO FIND AND RETAIN QUALITY LOYAL EMPLOYEES?

A: For contact center decision-makers, I would say optimizing where and how to locate operations has never been more critical: or more complex.

As today's agents are being required to handle more complex customer inquiries, they will need to possess superior foundational skills.

In addition, it could be important for potential new hires to have direct experience in the type of customers comprising the bulk of a contact center's market (e.g., health care, financial services, insurance, consumer products, manufacturing, etc.).

What will be key is selecting labor markets allowing for a deep pool of qualified applicants at an affordable cost level, balancing labor availability, long-term sustainability, and operational resilience while designing an employee experience that attracts and retains the right talent.

My first recommendation is to broaden the lens through which location decisions are made.



Instead of focusing solely on wages or population size, organizations should evaluate markets based on workforce stability, infrastructure reliability, climate resilience, and the presence of a diverse labor pool capable of supporting increasingly complex customer interactions.

Equally important is designing an employee value proposition that aligns with the expectations of today's workforce.

Flexibility remains a defining priority. However, that does not necessarily mean going fully remote. Markets that support hybrid or location-aware models tend to produce more reliable applicant pipelines and better retention outcomes.

Facility decisions also play a large role in talent attraction. Modern contact centers benefit from environments that support wellbeing, collaboration, and training. In addition, selecting office sites that will minimize commute times is important.

We encourage organizations to think in terms of distributed resilience. Whether through multi-site footprints, a blend of remote and on-premise staffing, or geographically diverse hiring pools, reducing dependence on a single labor market or climate zone is essential.

Lastly, as customer service agents will be handling more complex tasks, companies need to re-examine the following:

- New-hire selection criteria.
- Onboarding process.
- Compensation levels (at or above market for comparable skills is advisable).
- Flexibility for work/family balance, in time-off policies.
- Fringe benefits to include childcare assistance (e.g., dependent care flexible spending accounts), career mobility potential, excellent health insurance, wellness programs.
- Attractive office space with on-site or nearby amenities.

Ultimately, the organizations that will be most successful are those willing to rethink traditional site selection criteria, prioritize employee experience, and build flexible workforce strategies designed for a more dynamic and uncertain operating environment.



Brendan Read is Editor of Contact Center Pipeline. He has been covering and working in customer service and sales and for contact center companies for most of his career. Brendan has edited and written for leading industry publications and has been an industry analyst. He also has authored and co-authored books on contact center design, customer support, and working from home. Brendan can be reached at brendan@contactcenterpipeline.com.

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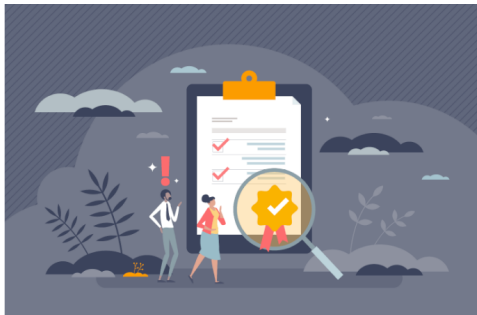
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Q&A WITH THE CCP ADVISORY BOARD

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QA THROUGH THE AGENTS' EYES

AND HOW TO ADDRESS COMMON ISSUES INVOLVING THEM.

We've analyzed quality assurance (QA) from every possible angle: scoring models, calibration sessions, and compliance metrics. But how often do we look at QA through the eyes of the people it impacts most: the agents?

This is what I will focus on in this article. I will be exploring QA and training in the August issue and how QA data can be turned into insights in the October issue.

QA isn't about checking boxes or filling quotas. It's about ensuring consistency

and driving improvement. At its best, QA reinforces what's working, pinpoints what isn't, and creates a continuous cycle of learning that strengthens the agents, the team, and ultimately the customer experience (CX).



QA ISN'T ABOUT CHECKING BOXES OR FILLING QUOTAS. IT'S ABOUT ENSURING CONSISTENCY AND DRIVING IMPROVEMENT.

Yes, today's technology can analyze tone, detect politeness, and highlight friendly exchanges between agent and caller.

That's useful, *but it's not the whole picture.*

I've reviewed calls that looked flawless according to AI sentiment, only to uncover coaching moments after listening to them myself.

On one call, for instance, the agent politely told a member, "If you place me on hold, I'll have to disconnect." The tone was calm, but the message missed the mark.

It reminded me that no algorithm (at the time of this writing) can replace human understanding: the empathy and discernment that come from *real* listening.

I say that not just as a call center leader, but as someone who started on the phones.

WHEN WE DESIGN QA WITH THE FRONTLINE IN MIND, IT CHANGES HOW AGENTS RESPOND TO EACH EVALUATION...

MY FIRST QA EXPERIENCE

I'll never forget my first bad QA score. It was 2008, and evaluations were still done on Excel spreadsheets.

The analyst handed me a printed copy of the spreadsheet - a number at the top, a list of misses below - and nothing else. My "errors" were vague; I missed the greeting, didn't educate the customer, and provided inaccurate information.

But here's the thing: I had greeted the caller. I was confident that I had provided the correct information. And I desperately wanted to know what I had supposedly done wrong so I could fix it.

But the form didn't tell me that. Instead, it only left me frustrated and full of questions.

Most of my colleagues at the time shrugged off poor QA scores, since at the time they didn't affect pay or bonuses, so why care?

But I couldn't let it go. I needed clarity.

So, I approached the QA analyst - carefully, trying not to sound defensive - but eager to learn. That conversation evolved into a 30-minute-long session, during which she walked me through the details of my call. It was my first month on the phones, and that meeting changed everything.

I later realized that the call had come through on the Indiana Care Select line, but I had greeted the caller with, "Thank you for calling Hoosier Healthwise." That's where I lost points, both for using the wrong greeting and for failing to provide the caller with the correct information.

Regarding the caller education section, I had overlooked informing the caller that the first 10 transportation rides are available to them without prior authorization.

Interestingly, about a year or two later, the QA form was updated, especially after quality scores began to directly impact employee bonuses and pay increases.

From that day forward, I knew what "good" sounded like. I had a clear picture of what success looked like, and I worked hard to ensure every call was worthy of a 100% QA score. Not because of the score itself, but because I understood what mattered.

That early experience taught me a lesson I carry with me today. QA without context is just a number: we feel good when we receive a good score and feel frustration when we get a bad one.

But QA with feedback, coaching, and a little humanity becomes a tool for growth: for the agent, the team, and the customer.

THE AGENT'S VIEW OF QA

If you spend time in call center communities on Reddit or Facebook - or sit down with your agents in a coaching session - a familiar theme emerges: the word "QA" rarely feels like it stands for *Quality Assurance*. To many, it feels more like *"Quality Apprehension"*.

Over the years, I've heard the same frustrations surface again and again.

- **Nitpicking:** Agents are penalized for minor checklist oversights that have little to no impact on the CX.
- **Lack of context:** QA scorecards often note deductions without clear explanations or examples of what went wrong.
- **Punitive culture:** QA feels like a tool for punishment rather than growth. A score to survive, not a conversation to improve.



On online forums, agents often describe QA as "the department that waits for you to mess up." One Reddit user summed it up perfectly: *"They call it coaching, but it feels like a report card I didn't ask for."*

When quality reviews prioritize error detection over effort recognition, agents begin to disengage. They start doing just enough to avoid getting flagged: checking boxes instead of connecting with customers. Over time, this mindset breeds frustration, detachment, and eventually burnout.

And here's the real irony: *these are the very people QA was created to support.* When the process adds pressure instead of perspective - when it creates fear instead of feedback - we've missed the mark.

A truly effective QA program should leave agents thinking, *"I learned something today,"* not *"I hope I don't get another bad score."*

WHAT QUALITY SHOULD BE

For agents, QA's job is to make work transparent and fair, to help improve the agent's performance, not to create a "gotcha!" moment. When we design QA with the frontline in mind, it changes how agents respond to each evaluation: from fear and box-checking to curiosity and growth.



Here are a few core elements a QA program must deliver to really serve agents.

Regular calibration so everyone evaluates the same

Calibration is where QA teams, leadership, and sometimes the agents listen to the same calls and align on how they'll score them.

Do this regularly - ideally weekly - to keep evaluators consistent, catch drifts quickly, and respond to changes (such as products, services, or policies) before they cause confusion within the team. Weekly calibration also helps QA staff surface ambiguous rubric items so you can fix them fast.

Be specific, timely, and subjective in the right way

Feedback should be delivered while the call is still fresh in the agent's mind, ideally, within a few days, not weeks or months later.

A QA from early in the month (or worse, a quarter ago) would make the agent question, "*Why is this being brought to my attention now?*"

Every piece of feedback should include three things.

1. **Where the issue occurred.** Identify the exact timestamp or section of the call (for example, two minutes and five seconds into the call).
2. **What went wrong.** Provide an objective description of the behavior (for example, the agent placed the caller on hold without obtaining permission).
3. **How to improve.** Offer a clear, actionable suggestion (for example, before placing a caller on hold, always ask for

permission, explain the purpose, and provide an estimated hold time).

This balance keeps feedback subjective in tone - personal, human, and constructive: while still rooted in objective evidence from the call. Agents appreciate this level of detail because it feels fair and actionable rather than vague or punitive.

One-on-one coaching for wins and misses

I feel that feedback shouldn't be reserved only for when something goes wrong. Schedule one-on-one sessions that celebrate great calls as well as those that require corrections. Hearing "here's what you did well" boosts an agent's morale and makes corrective coaching feel less threatening.

I've noticed that using the actual call during the session helps the agent to understand what needs tweaking faster than reading about it in the QA form notes.

Make scorecards teachable, not just "tallyable"

Scorecards must do more than add up points. Add a feedback field to each scored item so the agent always knows why they lost points on that item and how to improve while it is in front of them, top-of-mind: rather than finding out at the end of the QA form.

Keep the rubric tightly focused (five to seven high-value items) and pair each numeric score with a short, specific coaching line or a suggested phrase the agent can use on the next call. A clear, concise comment is far more helpful than a vague "missed greeting" line.

Apply progressive coaching: warn, don't punish (unless necessary)

I like to give agents the benefit of the doubt. Where most performance issues stem from training gaps, not willful misconduct, start with coaching and corrective notes. If this behavior persists, move to a verbal warning, and finally to written warnings according to your progressive discipline policy.

For small misses (e.g., forgetting to read a call reference number), an initial friendly warning with clear expectations and tips for remembering (like a sticky note on the agent's monitor), plus

a reminder that continued misses will affect scores, often corrects the problem without damaging morale.

However, not all issues can - or *should* - begin with gentle correction. For serious matters, swift and decisive action is essential, particularly when patterns or trends emerge. Here are some examples.

- Agent rudeness or hostility to callers (including the use of profanity).
- Unprofessional conduct (such as laughing at a caller).
- Falsifying information.
- Failure to comply with legal or regulatory requirements (such as improper disclosures, call authentication failures, and data security breaches).

These situations may bypass progressive coaching altogether and move directly to formal investigation and disciplinary steps. These can include written warnings or separation from employment, depending on the severity of the incidents and company policy.

QA plays a critical role here by accurately documenting incidents, preserving call evidence, and escalating concerns through the appropriate compliance and HR channels.

This becomes especially important when agents are issued written warnings or are exited due to serious quality

AI AND QA

Thanks to AI-powered QA platforms, many modernized centers can now audit 100% of interactions - voice or digital - rather than relying on small, randomized samples of agent interactions.

But full coverage doesn't mean infallible coverage. AI tools excel at detecting keyword omissions, authentication slips, or script deviations. But they sometimes miss things when tone of voice, accents, context, or authentic empathy are at play, which are often what make or break an interaction.

I believe the most effective QA programs should use AI for broad coverage, flagging calls and directing them to human reviewers for validation and coaching, especially on complex calls.

QA FEEDBACK TEMPLATE

Here is a handy sample template that you can use and adapt for your call/contact center.

- **Where:** At the 06:12 (call closure) mark.
- **What (objective):** Did not provide the call reference number to the caller.
- **Why it matters:** Without the reference number, customers can't track progress, and it helps to build trust.
- **How to improve:** Say: "Your reference number is 12345. Keep it for follow-up." Tip: add a sticky note to remember to provide the caller with the call reference number at the end of the call.
- **Action (if repeated):** First instance, coaching noted. Repeated, verbal warnings and refresher micro-training.

or compliance violations. These processes ensure accountability while protecting customers, the organization, and the contact center's integrity.

The goal isn't punishment: it's protection, prevention, and providing exceptional customer service. Clear boundaries reinforce professionalism and safety, while coaching remains the primary tool for development when performance issues stem from skill gaps rather than misconduct.

Involve agents in building the rules

Bring experienced agents into rubric design and calibration sessions, which makes agents feel included in decision-making while also improving morale. When agents help define quality, they're more likely to trust it and apply it, and they become catalysts for acceptance among peers.

Co-creation also uncovers real-world nuances that evaluators and leaders might miss, like effective workarounds for system issues or phrases that help build rapport but don't match a script.

Use multiple signals, not just one QA score

A single QA score doesn't tell the whole story. Before deciding that an agent needs corrective action, it's essential to look at the bigger picture. Like how do their QA results compare with customer satisfaction (CSAT) scores, first call reso-

lution (FCR), or repeat-contact rates?

One low score might reflect a challenging caller or a system issue rather than poor performance. For example, I recall an agent who received a few low QA scores for sounding rushed with callers.

The leadership team wanted me to issue a verbal warning to the agent because it was happening consistently. However, when they looked at her CSAT scores and the voice notes taken by the agent from the callers, the callers felt she gave them what they needed quickly and was professional.

Further, the team noted that she took more calls than her peers in her training class. When multiple signals were considered, the feedback shifted from punishment to a coaching conversation, helping her balance tone of voice and empathy with speed.

Selecting an appropriate sample size

Evaluating just a few calls a month doesn't paint a complete picture of an agent's performance. When too-small samples are selected, such as two calls per month, it can lead to unreliable conclusions; one tough call can unfairly skew a score.

A better approach is to set a consistent sampling plan, such as reviewing a fixed number of calls per agent each week or month. Also, ensuring the calls represent different channels, shifts, and call types.

It's also a good practice to create a log of the agent's scores for each month and to place the average score on their monthly scorecard.

CREATE A DISPUTE PROCESS

Of course, even the best-designed QA programs will face disagreement, which makes a clear dispute process essential.

Sometimes, an agent may feel that a score or mark-off doesn't reflect what really happened on a call, and that's okay. What matters is having a clear, respectful way for agents to dispute or question a QA result.

Why it matters

When agents know they can challenge a score fairly, it builds trust in the QA process. It shifts QA from a judgment to a partnership.

Here's how to implement a dispute-handling process.

1. **Document the process.** Clearly outline how an agent can submit a dispute, whether it's through a form, email, or your QA system. Keep it simple: who to contact, what information to include (e.g., call ID, reason for dispute), etc.
2. **Set a review window.** For example, agents can raise a dispute within seven business days of receiving their QA scores. This ensures timely reviews while keeping everyone accountable.
3. **Establish an escalation path.** Disputed calls should be re-evaluated by a neutral QA reviewer or team lead who wasn't involved in the original scoring.
4. **Close the loop.** Once the review is complete, communicate the final decision and explain it, even if the score remains the same. *Agents appreciate knowing why.*
5. **Track dispute trends.** If multiple agents dispute the same rubric item or feedback type, it may signal unclear QA criteria or inconsistent calibration: something worth revisiting in your next QA review session.

REMEMBERING QA'S PURPOSE

QA has a clear purpose: to uncover opportunities for improvement and support agents in delivering their best work.

When done right, QA isn't a policing tool. It's a platform for growth: a mirror that reflects both strengths and learning opportunities. It's about creating a culture where agents feel valued, motivated, and inspired to deliver their best.

Because in the end, QA isn't just about measuring quality: it's about creating it. 📌



Mark Pereira is a certified Trainer and experienced On-Site Supervisor specializing in boosting retention and productivity through proven teaching methods. With an academic background in Business and Innovative Education, he provides coaching to agents with empathy and skill. He stays up-to-date with industry developments from his base in Indianapolis, Indiana.



WHY BEHAVIORAL ANALYTICS MATTER

AND MORE THAN EVER IN CONTACT CENTER HIRING.

In today's volatile economy, contact centers face heightened pressure. Valuable customers — whose spending power is increasingly concentrated at the top — demand flawless experiences while organizations must control costs more tightly than ever.

Against this backdrop, hiring the right agents from the outset is no longer a "nice to have"; it's a strategic necessity.

THE TRUE FINANCIAL RISK OF A BAD HIRE

When a contact center hires someone who doesn't perform, the costs go far beyond their salary. Key contributors to this risk include:

- **Recruitment and onboarding.** Recruiting and training a new contact center agent can run between \$4,000 and \$7,000, according to research published by McKinsey & Company on contact center performance and workforce economics.
- **Turnover rates.** Annual agent turnover often falls in the 30%–45% range, according to industry benchmarking studies from SQM Group and Contact Babel.
- **Replacement costs per agent.** Replacing a single agent can cost \$10,000–\$20,000 when factoring in

recruiting, training, and lost productivity, according to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). Cost-of-turnover estimates frequently place replacement costs at 50%–200% of annual salary, depending on role and ramp-up time.

- **Productivity ramp-up.** New hires often operate at only 50%–60% efficiency in their first months, according to McKinsey. Workforce analyses have highlighted significant productivity gaps during ramp-up periods in contact centers, contributing thousands of dollars in indirect cost per agent.

- **Hidden attrition costs.** According to benchmarking research from *Contact Center Pipeline*, "The Hard, Hidden Costs of Attrition," the total cost of attrition for a contact center agent can range from \$10,882 to \$22,691 per person depending on when they exit.

Putting it all together, a poor hiring decision can cost tens of thousands of dollars per agent: especially when considering training, lost productivity, and turnover. These cumulative cost models are consistent with workforce economics frameworks published by Deloitte and McKinsey & Company.

THE BETTER WAY TO PREDICT PERFORMANCE

Rather than relying solely on resumes or interviews, contact centers can leverage behavioral analytics grounded in a comprehensive job analysis.

The scientific foundation for this approach is well established in industrial-organizational psychology:

- Meta-analytic research by Frank L. Schmidt and John E. Hunter (published in *Psychological Bulletin*) demonstrated that general cognitive ability and structured assessments are among the strongest predictors of job performance.
- The principles of job analysis and validation are outlined in the *Principles for the Validation and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures*, published by the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology. Also, in the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, published by the American Psychological Association and the American Educational Research Association.

This involves:

- 1 Defining the competencies that matter most for a given role (e.g., cognitive ability, emotional regulation, multitasking, customer empathy, decision-making).

- 2 Developing or selecting assessments that reliably measure those competencies.
- 3 Validating the assessments by linking them to performance metrics such as handle time, first call resolution (FCR), quality scores, and turnover.

Because contact centers operate in many different subdomains, assessments should be tailored to specific roles.

This best practice is supported by competency modeling research from SHRM and validation guidance from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) under the "Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures."

...HIRING THE RIGHT AGENTS FROM THE OUTSET IS NO LONGER A "NICE TO HAVE"; IT'S A STRATEGIC NECESSITY.

WHAT BEHAVIORAL ANALYTICS BUYS YOU

Here's what centers gain when they put predictive behavioral tools to work:

- **Reduced turnover.** Organizations using validated pre-employment assessments often report lower early-stage attrition, according to workforce analytics studies by Aberdeen Strategy & Research and Deloitte.
- **Better performance consistency.** Structured, validated selection systems reduce variability in performance outcomes: consistent with meta-analytic findings from Frank L. Schmidt.
- **Greater ROI on training.** Human capital ROI frameworks described by Josh Bersin (Deloitte) suggest that better selection improves downstream training yield.



- **Stronger CX.** Customer experience (CX) research from Forrester links employee performance and engagement to higher customer satisfaction and loyalty outcomes.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

To implement effectively, contact center leaders should follow other best practices consistent with guidance from the EEOC (adverse impact and fairness) and SHRM (talent acquisition best practices).

Specifically:

1. Audit current hiring costs.
2. Conduct role-level job analyses.
3. Evaluate validated assessment vendors.
4. Integrate assessments early in the funnel.
5. Measure post-hire outcomes.
6. Ensure fairness via impact analysis and continuous monitoring.

CONCLUSION

In today's economy, contact centers can no longer afford the guesswork of hiring. High turnover, steep training costs, and wide performance variability make bad hires a serious financial liability.

But by leveraging behavioral analytics rooted in thorough job analysis, organizations can better predict which candidates will thrive, thereby reducing costs, improving performance, and ultimately delivering a superior CX. 



IOBehaviors, Inc. President and CEO, Mark Tinney, is a leading expert in the field of behavioral hiring systems. For over 25 years he has coordinated the development and implementation of over 50 job-specific, behaviorally based selection systems for hundreds of companies worldwide.

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THE HUMAN TOUCH PARADOX

WHY PREMIUM SERVICE IS THE NEXT CCAAS BATTLEGROUND.

The contact center industry is experiencing a fascinating contradiction in 2026. While enterprises race to deploy AI agents and automation at unprecedented scale, a quieter revolution is unfolding: **human service is being repositioned as a premium offering**, and it's working.

Recent industry research reveals a compelling paradox: the vast majority of customers prefer AI chatbots over waiting in queue for simple tasks, yet they report significantly higher loyalty to companies that prioritize human service when it matters. This isn't a contradiction; it's a strategic opportunity that

forward-thinking CCaaS vendors and their clients are already capitalizing on.

THE EXECUTION CRISIS BEHIND THE HYPE

Before we explore the human service renaissance, we need to understand why it's happening now. Despite widespread AI pilot programs, relatively few organizations have successfully deployed AI agents in production environments. According to Deloitte research, approximately 40% of agentic AI projects will fail, not because the technology doesn't work, but because organizations are automating broken processes.

The pattern separating success from failure is clear: "Redesign, don't automate." Companies that succeed are those that reimagine their customer experience holistically, using AI where it excels (speed, consistency, scale) and human expertise where it matters most (complexity, empathy, relationship-building).



THE INTERACTION VOLUME CHALLENGE

Analysis by Sinch of 900 billion interactions across 200,000 businesses points to a significant scaling challenge: automated customer engagements are projected to increase dramatically in the coming years, and current infrastructure wasn't built for this scale.

But here's what the data doesn't capture: as AI handles more routine interactions, the quality expectations for human interactions skyrocket. When a customer finally reaches a human agent, they're no longer looking for basic information retrieval; they're seeking resolution of complex issues, emotional support, or high-stakes decision guidance.

This is where "Outcome Certainty at Speed" becomes the new metric. Leading organizations are creating a new role: **Resolution Specialists** - agents who combine deep expertise, empathy, and AI-driven insights to deliver first-contact resolution on the issues automation can't handle.

THE PREMIUM SERVICE MODEL EMERGES

In 2014, UK mobile operator EE tested "Priority Answer"- charging customers £0.50 to skip the queue. The backlash was swift and brutal. A decade later, the market has evolved, and premium human access is being repositioned not as queue-jumping, but as relationship-building.

Today's premium service model isn't about paying to skip a line. It's about **guaranteed access to expert human support** as a value-added tier within customer relationships. Industries pioneering this approach include:



- **Financial Services:** Private banking clients get direct access to dedicated relationship managers who never route them to AI
- **Healthcare:** Concierge medical practices offering immediate human triage
- **Enterprise B2B:** Platinum support tiers with named technical account managers
- **Luxury Retail:** Personal shoppers and stylists available on demand

The key difference from 2014? These aren't friction removers, they're **relationship builders**. The premium isn't about avoiding AI; it's about accessing human expertise when it matters most.

THE TRUST EQUATION

Consumer research reveals a complex relationship with personalization: while many want personalized experiences, significantly fewer believe the privacy trade-off is worth it, and trust in how companies handle personal information remains low. This creates a fascinating dynamic where **human agents become trust proxies**.

When customers interact with a human who demonstrates memory of past interactions, understanding of context, authority to make exceptions, and genuine problem-solving capability, they're more willing to share information, provide feedback, and remain loyal. Human interaction becomes a differentiator in an AI-saturated landscape.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR CCAAS STRATEGY

For CCaaS vendors and the enterprises they serve, this trend demands a strategic reframe around three key pillars:

1 TIERED EXPERIENCE ARCHITECTURE

Instead of "AI-first" or "human-first," successful implementations are building **intelligent routing** that recognizes customer lifetime value, issue complexity, emotional sentiment, interaction history, and channel preference. The goal isn't automation for its own sake, it's matching the right resource to the right interaction at the right time.



2 AGENT ELEVATION, NOT REPLACEMENT

According to BCG's framework for AI implementation, successful deployments break down as: only 10% algorithms, 20% technology and data infrastructure, and a full **70% people and processes**. This means the real work isn't in the AI deployment, it's in redesigning roles, workflows, and organizational structures. This means the real work isn't in the AI deployment, it's in redesigning roles, workflows, and organizational structures.

Forward-thinking contact centers are transforming agent roles entirely:

- AI handles repetitive queries

COMPANIES THAT SUCCEED ARE THOSE THAT REIMAGINE THEIR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE HOLISTICALLY, USING AI WHERE IT EXCELS (SPEED, CONSISTENCY, SCALE) AND HUMAN EXPERTISE WHERE IT MATTERS MOST (COMPLEXITY, EMPATHY, RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING).

- Humans tackle high-value interactions
- Real-time AI assistance empowers agents during complex calls
- Knowledge management systems ensure consistency across channels
- Complex onboarding scenarios requiring judgment
- Escalated issues that need creative problem-solving
- Renewal conversations where relationship matters
- Win-back attempts for churned customers
- VIP and high-value customer touchpoints

Solutions like AI Agent Assist, Conversational Analytics, and automated QA become strategic enablers rather than cost-cutting tools when deployed with this philosophy.

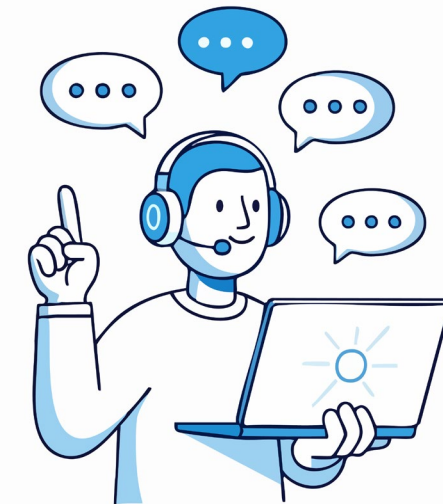
3 THE RESOLUTION SPECIALIST MODEL

Organizations are fundamentally re-designing contact center roles, moving from high-volume, low-complexity interactions to low-volume, high-complexity resolutions. This requires different recruiting, training, compensation, and career pathing, but the ROI is compelling. First-contact resolution on complex issues reduces customer effort, increases Net Promoter Scores, and builds genuine loyalty that automation alone cannot achieve.

THE POST-ACQUISITION EXPERIENCE CRISIS

A pattern emerges repeatedly in failed CX transformations: companies over-invest in acquisition while neglecting onboarding, servicing, and renewal experiences. The result is silent churn. Customers don't leave because of price or product features; they leave because of **failed experiences after the sale**.

When AI handles initial interactions beautifully but complex issues dead-end in frustration, the entire brand promise collapses. The solution isn't more automation, it's **strategic human deployment** at critical moments:



THE STRATEGIC QUESTIONS TO ASK NOW

As contact center leaders evaluate their 2026 strategies, several critical questions emerge:

Which interactions would benefit from being human-only, and how do you position that as premium value rather than AI failure?

How do you measure success in a hybrid model? Automation rate alone is a dangerous metric that can optimize for efficiency while destroying customer relationships.

What does your agent career path look like when AI handles Tier 1 interactions? The best agents won't stay in organizations where their expertise is undervalued.

How do you preserve institutional knowledge and relationship continuity when interactions fragment across AI and human channels?

Which vendors understand this paradox, and which are still selling pure automation plays that miss the strategic balance?

THE BOTTOM LINE

The future of customer experience isn't AI *or* human, it's AI *and* human, **strategically deployed**. The companies winning in 2026 understand that automation enables premium human service by freeing experts to focus on high-value interactions. Human touchpoints become differentiators in AI-saturated markets. Trust is built through relationships, not just efficiency. And outcome certainty at speed requires both technological capability and human judgment.

The question isn't whether to automate, it's **how to automate in a way that makes your human service more valuable, not less**.

Organizations that crack this code will discover something remarkable: their AI investments don't replace human value, they amplify it. The contact centers that thrive in 2026 and beyond won't be the most automated. They'll be the ones that use automation to make their human expertise more accessible, more impactful, and more valuable than ever before. 



THE FUTURE OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE ISN'T AI OR HUMAN, IT'S AI AND HUMAN, STRATEGICALLY DEPLOYED.

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WHY SCREENING HARDER WON'T WIN

THERE IS A NEW APPROACH TO ATTRACTING AND KEEPING TALENT.

Contact centers must deliver more than they ever have before. Interactions are more complex, customers are less patient, products are more configurable, and channels now span voice, chat (including video), email, and social platforms.

In response, organizations have steadily raised the bar for what "good" talent looks like. But there is a fundamental constraint the industry cannot technology its way around; the labor pool is not expanding at the same pace as skill expectations.

And when organizations respond by tightening requirements and screening harder, they may narrow the pool in ways that do not reliably improve performance: and ultimately leave too few candidates to fill open roles.

If the contact center industry had a recurring storyline, it would be this: the next technology wave is always expected to solve the talent problem.

The current version centers on AI. In McKinsey's words, "Many are being inundated with solutions from AI vendors amid predictions that calls requiring hu-

man agent support will virtually disappear in the next few years."

But the reality inside contact centers remains more complicated, because, as McKinsey also points out, "humans remain valued for their ability to handle complex and emotionally nuanced interactions, too."



AUTOMATION AND TALENT

There has always been a conversation, a dialectic, between automation and people in the workplace, one that is now being highlighted with the practicality of AI. But in practice, automation does not (and never has) eliminate the need for talent. Instead, *it changes what talent is needed.*

As AI absorbs routine tasks, the interactions left for humans become more complex, emotionally charged, and consequential. That shift is raising the skills bar, even as labor markets continue to constrain supply.

At the same time, hiring challenges persist. Time to fill remains high. Attrition remains stubborn. And despite new tools, innovative technologies, and louder promises, contact centers are no closer to solving their talent problem than they were years ago.

AVOIDING THE DESTRUCTIVE SPIRAL

This tension raises an uncomfortable question. If expectations continue to rise, but the labor pool does not expand in parallel, what are the unintended consequences? And who is most likely to be excluded along the way?

The answer is not keeping the bar where it is or lowering it. The problem is narrowing the pool of candidates needed to jump over it through requirements and proxies that do not improve performance.

Such practices can disproportionately screen out capable candidates, shrinking the workforce pipeline until there are too few people to staff open positions. Which can then result in long queues, angry customers, and frustrated agents: risking their turnover that together may lead to a destructive spiral.

In this article, which I have further divided into three parts, I focus on three skill areas where the hiring bar is rising fast: digital and AI fluency (Part 1 here), emotional intelligence (Part 2), and finally language skills (Part 3), which will have my conclusion of these points.

For each, I outline the unintended consequences of how organizations are currently screening for these skills. I then suggest a more sustainable approach: measuring skills directly and prioritizing readiness and ramp potential, rather than relying on background-based proxies that narrow the talent pool.

Importantly, this approach does not require complex technology or purchasing new tools. Instead, it requires clearer definitions of job skills and more structured and consistent evaluations.

Contact centers have always been skills-based jobs. Even in “entry-level” roles, success has depended on communication ability, problem solving, and emotional control under pressure. What has changed is the level and breadth of those expectations.

As routine work is absorbed by automation and as service interactions become more complex, organizations continue to raise the skills bar, *often without fully accounting for how those higher requirements narrow the available talent pool.*

...THE INTERACTIONS LEFT FOR HUMANS BECOME MORE COMPLEX, EMOTIONALLY CHARGED, AND CONSEQUENTIAL.

INCREASING DIGITAL/AI LITERACY REQUIREMENTS

Digital skill expectations in contact centers have expanded rapidly in a brief period of time, initially driven by moving large contact center populations home in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

To enable agents to work remotely, hiring and workforce readiness guidance emphasized the practical ability to function independently at home: reliable internet, appropriate hardware, headset quality, secure connectivity, and baseline troubleshooting skills without onsite IT support.

That focus has not disappeared, but the definition of digital literacy has changed. Today, digital literacy is not simply the ability to use a computer and follow a process. In many modern contact center environments, it now includes these abilities:

- Navigating multiple systems and knowledge tools in parallel.
- Interpreting policy and account information in real time.
- Documenting accurately while maintaining customer rapport.
- Completing authentication steps and compliance scripts correctly.
- Switching between tools quickly under time pressure.

Omnichannel service further raises the bar:

- Writing becomes part of the role, not an occasional task. Agents must produce clear, appropriately toned written responses in chats and emails, while also working within structured workflows and meeting quality expectations.
- Video-enabled customer interactions introduce some additional skill demands, but, as I will explore in depth in a separate discussion (**see BOX**), not in the way they are often assumed.

AI adoption adds yet another layer. As AI copilots, automated knowledge systems, and AI-generated call summaries become more common, contact center talent is increasingly expected to demonstrate AI literacy as well.

This does not mean understanding how models work. Instead, it means knowing how to use AI-enabled systems effectively, including these abilities:

- Asking strong questions and using query tools correctly.



- Recognizing when an AI suggestion is incomplete, incorrect, or misapplied.
- Validating outputs against policy and customer context.
- Overriding automated guidance using human judgment when needed.

Clicking “accept” is easy. Knowing when to pause and verify is the skill.

A quieter risk is how organizations translate this shift into pre-hire requirements. When “AI literacy” becomes a hiring filter, employers often rely on resume-based proxies such as prior exposure to AI tools or “GenAI experience” listed in job history. *But tool exposure does not equal safe and effective use.*

IN AI-ENABLED WORKFLOWS, THE REPRESENTATIVE BECOMES NOT ONLY A CUSTOMER ADVOCATE, BUT ALSO A REAL-TIME QUALITY CONTROL LAYER FOR AUTOMATED SUPPORT.

Consider two candidates:

- One candidate has worked in an AI-enabled environment and lists AI tool experience on their resume, but they relied on the system passively.
- The other candidate has no formal AI tooling experience, but they demonstrate strong learning agility, process discipline, and the ability to detect errors and apply judgment under ambiguity.

In a typical hiring process, the second candidate is filtered out early: even though those verification and judgment skills are the true predictors of performance in AI-enabled workflows.

DO VIDEO-BASED ROLES REQUIRE DIFFERENT SKILLS?

Video-enabled customer interactions require a unique set of additional skill demands compared with other channels.

Compared to voice or text-based roles, video increases visibility. Customers can see facial expressions, body language, and response timing in real time. This raises expectations around presence, attentiveness, and emotional control, making small signals more salient.

Video also changes what representatives are exposed to. Agents see customer reactions, environments, and emotional cues that would otherwise remain invisible.

This increases cognitive and emotional load. A key skill in video-based roles is not simply noticing these cues, but regulating one’s response to them, staying focused on the task, and avoiding overreaction to visual information that may be incomplete or misleading.

This added load may be experienced unevenly. For example, individuals working in a non-native language, or those already expending cognitive effort on real-time translation, language monitoring, or heightened self-regulation, may experience a higher overall cognitive demand when visual cues are added.

The issue is not lower capability, but the accumulation of simultaneous demands: language processing, emotional regulation, task execution, and visual interpretation.

In that sense, video places greater emphasis on emotional regulation, composure under observation, and the ability to maintain rapport while managing systems and information in parallel.

However, most of what drives success in video-based roles is not really new. The core requirements are the same: understanding customer needs, applying information accurately, exercising judgment, and managing emotion in demanding situations. Video amplifies these skill requirements rather than replacing them.

And while video became part of everyday communication during the COVID-19 pandemic, the familiarity, informality, and emotional openness in personal and internal meeting video calls do *not* translate directly to customer interaction.

Representatives must manage rapport, compliance, and visible emotional cues simultaneously while navigating systems in real time.

This distinction with skills requirements, and also formality and informality, also matters for hiring. Organizations sometimes respond to video by screening for “camera presence” or presentation style.

When those judgments are unstructured, they can drift quickly from job-relevant behavior into subjective impressions of polish or cultural familiarity.

A more effective approach is to define what video adds to the role and assess those behaviors directly. If anything, video makes the need for clear skill definition and consistent measurement more important.



...ORGANIZATIONS SHOULD ASSESS THE SPECIFIC SKILLS THAT PREDICT WHETHER SOMEONE CAN BECOME PROFICIENT QUICKLY.

But the unintended consequence is a narrower applicant pool shaped by access and prior opportunity, rather than readiness to succeed.

The scenarios requiring candidates with effective AI literacy are *not* theoretical:

- An AI-generated call summary may sound polished, but it omits key details required for downstream resolution or compliance.
- In other cases, an AI knowledge suggestion might point to the wrong policy or apply the right policy to the wrong customer context, requiring the representative to recognize the mismatch quickly.

In both situations, the agent's job is no longer just following guidance. Instead, it is actively validating it.

This is why AI *can* raise, *not* lower, the skill requirements for many roles. In AI-enabled workflows, the representative becomes not only a customer advocate, but also a real-time quality control layer for automated support.

Many of these skills are developed through on-the-job exposure and coaching, particularly in environments that require navigating multiple systems, managing high interaction volume, and operating within tightly structured workflows.

Candidates who have not had access to those environments may possess the underlying capability to succeed but lack conventional signals of readiness. This can result in them unwisely being rejected.

THE FLAWS OF EXPERIENCE

As these requirements rise, hiring processes that rely heavily on resumes or prior job titles can unintentionally favor familiarity over potential. Resumes can indicate whether someone has been in these environments, but they rarely indicate whether someone was effective in them.

In other words, experience can be an *imperfect proxy*. It may screen out candidates with strong underlying capability who have not had the opportunities to show them, while screening in candidates whose prior exposure does not translate into strong performance.

Skills-based testing is one evidence-based alternative that reduces reliance on resume-based proxies by replacing them with direct evidence. Rather than inferring capability from job history, organizations can evaluate job-relevant behaviors directly through simulations, work samples, and structured assessments.

Further, and importantly, and back to the discussion of AI skills, the goal should not be to confirm full mastery of AI-enabled workflows before day one. In most cases, that mastery develops *inside* the job.

Instead, organizations should assess the specific skills that predict whether someone can become proficient quickly. Namely learning agility, process discipline, attention to detail, and the ability to verify and apply information accurately in real time.

The hiring goal is not to find candidates who have already mastered the workflow. It is to identify candidates who have the prerequisite skills to master it quickly.

However, the result of relying on experience is not necessarily better selection, but narrower selection based on background rather than capability.

In practice, that often means favoring those who have had prior exposure to emerging tools over those who demonstrate the judgment required to use them well, particularly when organizations treat AI familiarity as proof of AI capability.

The question is: who does that leave out? Those candidates whose capability exceeds their resume.

When hiring systems rely heavily on

experience thresholds, credential requirements, and subjective notions of readiness, they systematically disadvantage people who have the underlying skills to succeed but have not yet had access to the environments that signal those skills in familiar ways.

Here are two examples:

- 1** Candidates who learn quickly, apply information accurately, and perform well under pressure, but who lack the conventional markers that screening systems are designed to recognize.

In practice, this often includes early-career candidates, people from non-traditional backgrounds, career switchers, and those whose prior roles did not carry the right former job titles, even when the work itself developed relevant capability.

- 2** Candidates who communicate differently in interviews or who do not conform to informal expectations of polish, despite being highly effective once expectations and workflows are clear.



The common thread is not lower ability but limited access to prior opportunity.

As skill expectations continue to rise faster than labor supply, excluding these groups is not just an equity concern. It is a capacity problem and organizations risk choking off the very pipeline they need to sustain performance over time.

The question is not whether standards should rise. They will. The real risk is mistaking exposure for capability and narrowing the talent pool based on signals that do not predict success. [🔗](#)



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ILLUSTRATION PROVIDED BY ADOBE STOCK

UNLOCKING THE CLOUD'S VALUE

SMARTER STRATEGIES FOR CONTACT CENTERS.

Contact centers are among the most infrastructure-intensive operations in any organization, with applications including voice and chat channels, AI assistants, analytics engines, and workforce management (WFM) systems.

But the complexity and cost of supporting modern customer experiences (CXs) with these tools and their supporting platforms can quickly spiral out of control.

Many contact centers embraced the cloud in pursuit of flexibility, rapid scalability, and innovation. Yet without a clear strategy, cloud adoption can lead to surprise costs, inefficient workloads, and disappointing returns on investment (ROI).

Rather than abandon the cloud, contact center professionals must find ways to unlock its potential. Doing so requires aligning cloud strategy with CX outcomes, operational efficiency, and disciplined cost management.

WHEN FLEXIBILITY BECOMES COMPLEXITY

Cloud initially promises agility and scalability but hidden costs often emerge

over time. Underutilized computing capacity and power, idle test environments, redundant storage, untaged services, and poorly optimized workloads can create significant waste.



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ONCE CLOUD OPERATIONS ARE DISCIPLINED AND EFFICIENT, THE TECHNOLOGY BECOMES A LEVER FOR CX.

For contact centers, the impacts are tangible.

- Unpredictable costs make provisioning for seasonal scaling or burst capacity difficult.
- Inefficient workloads can introduce latency in voice systems, slow routing decisions, or delay analytics.
- Lack of visibility limits managers' ability to correlate spending with agent performance or key operational metrics.
- Disjointed governance encourages shadow projects, where teams spin up bots or transcription services outside of IT oversight.

To regain control, IT and contact center operations must partner closely. And in these two areas.

- It's important to measure cloud investments that matter to CX, such as average handle time (AHT), resolution time, and/or first contact resolution (FCR), rather than raw computing power.
- Equally essential is a shared understanding across teams of what cloud success means – scalability, resilience, and cost efficiency – and the adoption of cloud-native designs that fully exploit the platform. Rather than simply lifting and shifting legacy workloads.

PRACTICAL OPTIMIZATION

Before undertaking large-scale cloud transformations, contact centers can achieve immediate benefits by focusing on operational efficiency.

- Non-production environments for development, QA, demos, or training often run around the clock despite minimal usage. Scheduling downtime during the night or weekends can yield substantial savings.

- Many AI engines, routing servers, and analytics workloads are overprovisioned and can be scaled down during low-demand periods.
- It's also important to eliminate unused assets like idle compute instances or stale storage volumes: which quietly contribute to rising costs.

While these optimizations address immediate waste, lasting transformation comes from modernization. Contact centers benefit from moving away from monolithic virtual-machine stacks toward microservices, containers, serverless functions, and managed cloud services.

As a CIO at a large, diversified conglomerate, we lift-and-shifted a sprawling set of digital experience platforms to the cloud. But costs quickly ran well over budget with underwhelming performance.

In response, we consolidated onto modern Kubernetes microservices, edge caching, and serverless components. These changes dramatically lowered spend and improved responsiveness.

This firsthand experience demonstrates how, without a clear cloud strategy and modern infrastructure, organizations can quickly face runaway costs and disappointing performance. And what they could be faced with doing, at a fair expense and downtime, to fix the problems after they occurred.

Modernized systems scale under unpredictable loads. This enables faster deployment of routing changes or AI features and increases resilience, so that a single service failure doesn't disrupt the entire operation.

This is a win-win all around. Agents experience fewer outages, more responsive systems, and faster access to new capabilities. Leadership gains greater insight into the cost-to-value relationship of cloud investments. Customers, and by extension enterprises, gain by improved CX.

GOVERNANCE AND COST ACCOUNTABILITY

But optimizing workloads and modernizing infrastructure alone isn't enough to prevent overspending. Contact centers need a governance framework that accounts for all stakeholders, including IT, CX operations, analytics teams, and business leadership.

A disciplined approach to cloud spending, often described as a FinOps mindset, blends finance, operations, and development to ensure shared accountability.

- Finance teams must understand metrics like agent cost-per-minute and correlate cloud spend to these operational outcomes.
- Have platform teams accountable for resource usage that are tied to agents or campaigns.
- Business leaders must own the ROI of new features such as predictive routing and AI capabilities.

Visibility and accountability are crucial. Here's how they can be implemented.

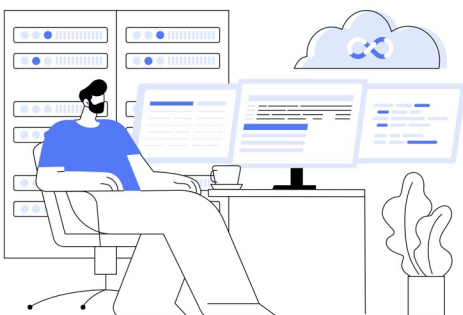
- Tagging cloud resources so that costs can be attributed to teams, campaigns, or even individual agents helps leadership see exactly where money is going.
- Policies and guardrails can prevent uncontrolled provisioning, enforce usage limits, and manage high-cost workloads, like AI or transcription services.

A mature governance model empowers leaders to make informed tradeoffs between performance, capacity, and spend. This turns cloud management from a reactive burden into a proactive strategy for long-term success.

DRIVING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE THROUGH CLOUD

Once cloud operations are disciplined and efficient, the technology becomes a lever for CX.

- Cloud-based analytics can identify root causes and repeat contacts.
- Machine learning can predict wait times and dynamically shift agents across channels to meet demand.
- AI-assisted tools support agents, reduce errors, and shorten AHT.
- Real-time voice transcription and sentiment analysis provide immediate insight into customer interactions.



- Simultaneous workloads allow teams to forecast staffing and routing needs before launching campaigns.

Most importantly, every cloud initiative should be measured in terms of its impact on key contact center performance indicators, such as FCR, customer satisfaction (CSAT), and cost-per-contact.

By tying infrastructure investment to tangible business outcomes, contact centers can justify innovation spend and avoid projects that consume resources without improving CX.

The cloud also enables rapid experimentation, allowing teams to deploy seasonal bots, pilot predictive routing, or test new analytics features with minimal risk.

This flexibility must be paired with governance to ensure that experimental workloads don't become uncontrolled cost drivers. Organizations that implement a culture of continuous evaluation and optimization sustain efficiency gains while simultaneously enhancing CX.

Cloud adoption doesn't fail contact centers. Weak strategy, poor governance, and lack of operational discipline do.

By focusing on optimization, modernization, cost accountability, and alignment with CX outcomes, contact centers can transform the cloud from a potential cost burden into a strategic asset.

When every workload is tied to tangible outcomes, experiments are disciplined, and teams collaborate across

IT, finance, and operations, the cloud becomes a platform for innovation, efficiency, and superior CX.



For contact center leaders, the opportunity is clear. The cloud can be a growth engine, but only when approached strategically and managed carefully. Those who embrace this mindset will be better equipped to deliver exceptional experiences, operational efficiency, and measurable business impacts.⑨



As Senior Vice President, Partnerships & Solutions at HGS, John leverages 20-plus years of executive leadership to drive growth, build high-performing teams, optimize operations, and deliver exceptional customer experiences. He manages complex digital programs, developing and implementing innovative digital strategies and leveraging data and analytics to drive results.

BY FOCUSING ON OPTIMIZATION, MODERNIZATION, COST ACCOUNTABILITY, AND ALIGNMENT WITH CX OUTCOMES, CONTACT CENTERS CAN TRANSFORM THE CLOUD... INTO A STRATEGIC ASSET.

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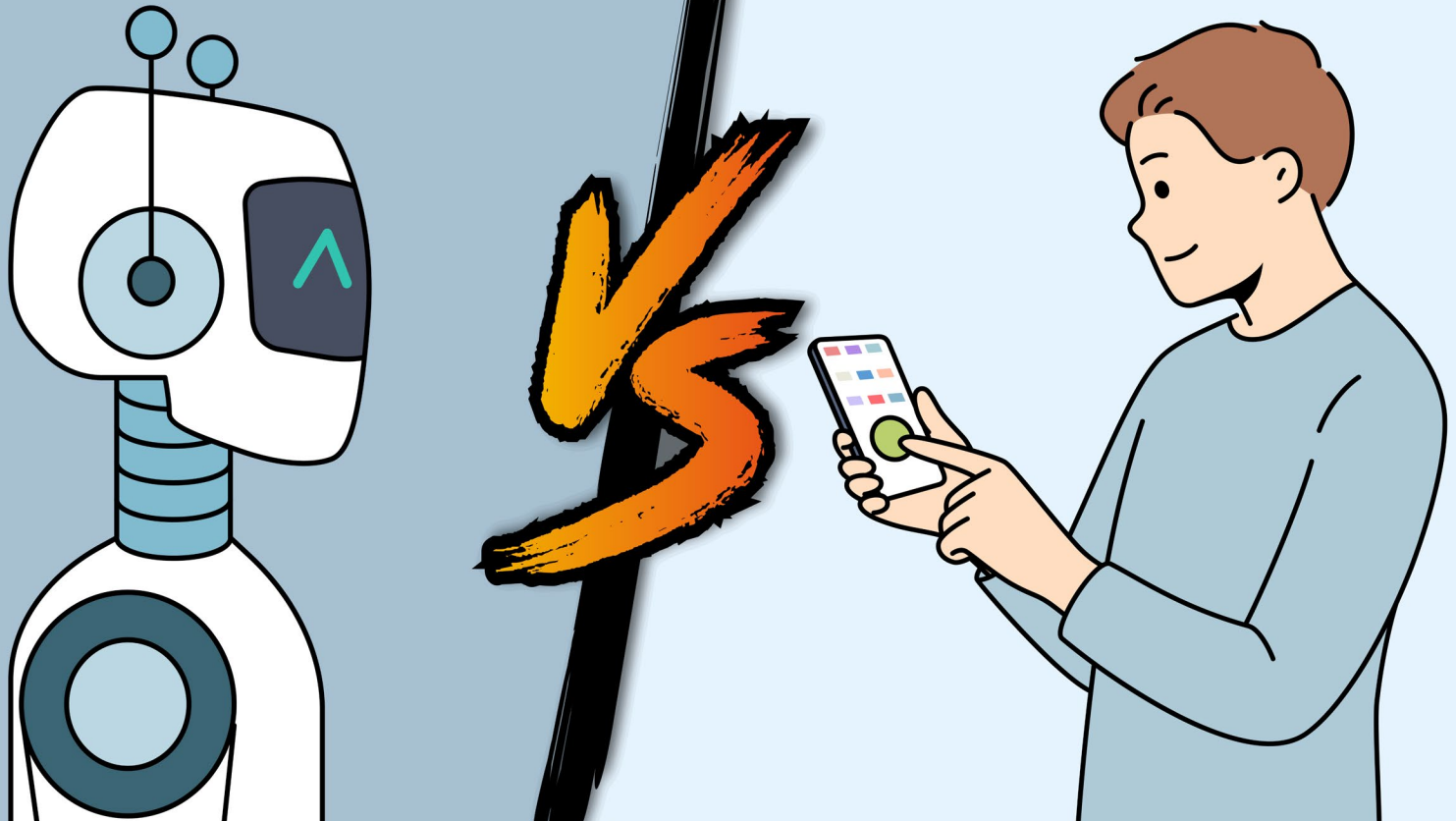


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THE AI ASSISTANT-APP FACE-OFF

HOW DO THESE DIGITAL CHANNELS COMPARE?

For years, mobile apps sat at the center of customer experience (CX), giving brands a direct, owned channel to consumers and offering users easy access to the brands they loved.

That model made sense in the “tap-and-swipe era,” when convenience meant a clean interface and touchscreen navigation. But with the rise of new technologies, consumers are redefining convenience, shifting from polished designs to effortless dialogs: which is an area where AI assistants excel.

We are seeing that AI assistants are starting to rival apps by providing the same capabilities through simpler, more natural interactions.

This was highlighted in a [consumer poll](#) from my firm, TELUS Digital. One in three respondents said they had replaced at least one app with an AI assistant last year, and 36% expect to rely on AI even more a year from now.

Although AI assistants are capturing a growing following who use them for some everyday tasks, traditional apps remain relevant. According to our poll, 58% of consumers reported no change in their app usage over the past year, and nearly a quarter actually said they used them more.

Respondents highlighted several factors that keep them engaged with apps, including loyalty rewards and perks

(51%), ease of browsing (37%), and familiarity and habit (35%).

Apps may also have an advantage when it comes to customer support escalations, particularly when they are integrated into a brand's CX ecosystem.

When customers escalate from branded apps to live agents, the agents can access their purchase histories, account details, and in-app activities: context that stand-alone AI assistants can't yet provide.

With this in mind, the question for brands isn't whether to invest in apps or AI assistants. Instead, it is determining which customer interactions, from first touch to long-term loyalty, should take place on which channel.

And, critically, how to make that customer journey frictionless. As examples, consumers conducting product research on the AI assistants, making purchases in the apps, and doing account management on the websites.

UNDERSTANDING THE SHIFT

For years at TELUS Digital we’ve said that every consumer app and website will need to be rebuilt with an AI-powered voice and multimodal interface. These take advantage of technology advancements to create more natural and intuitive human-computer interactions.

Until now, chat interfaces were primarily about information. But as we move towards having third-party apps that can be used directly within chats, they’re becoming about execution.

The recent introduction of tools like ChatGPT’s Apps SDK highlights this shift, enabling businesses to integrate their apps directly into AI assistant conversations. In this fashion, users can complete tasks, from booking appointments to processing payments, without ever leaving the chat interfaces.

ChatGPT Apps represents a convergence of both AI assistant and app channels. The AI assistant handles tasks where natural language and adaptability excel. It also seamlessly invokes custom app experiences when familiar interfaces or complex transactions are needed.

This hybrid model allows the AI to intelligently route users’ requests while maintaining the branded, intuitive experiences consumers expect from traditional apps.

Looking ahead, the most compelling CX will come from AI assistants that incorporate app experiences and vice versa. A bidirectional integration where the channels become invisible and the customer journeys become seamless.

The brands that move first in this next wave of customer engagement will have a clear advantage.

THE AI VS APPS SCORECARD
EVERYDAY TASKS

A closer look at our consumer poll data revealed that channel preferences were influenced—sometimes significantly—



BOX 1

EVERYDAY TASKS			
Activity	AI Assistant Preference	App Preference	Winner
Designing an exercise plan	46%	35%	AI
Finding out the day’s top news stories	40%	51%	Apps
Comparing hotel prices	36%	50%	Apps
Researching products	33%	63%	Apps
Recommending a restaurant	27%	63%	Apps
Finding the best mortgage rate	24%	67%	Apps

by the type of task that was being performed (see BOX 1).

Notably, our data found AI assistants dominate in speed and adaptability, with a slight edge in personalization (see BOX 2). But key drivers such as familiarity, loyalty, rewards and perks, and ease of use keep consumers coming back to using their favorite brands’ apps.

Implications for CX and Contact Centers

User expectations are evolving rapidly, driven by AI systems that are moving beyond simple responses to autonomous action.

Gartner predicts that by 2029, AI agents will independently handle 80% of routine customer service issues. This

represents a fundamental shift from AI that generates answers to AI that completes tasks end-to-end.

This evolution is already underway. AI assistants are becoming multimodal, allowing customers to interact in ways that feels most natural for the tasks at hand, including through text, voice, images, or a combination.

Whether typing a question into ChatGPT, speaking to Google Gemini, or uploading an image for analysis, customers are gravitating toward interfaces that let them communicate on their terms.

The result? A more intuitive, frictionless experience where AI assistants are becoming a channel that can handle multiple services, such as billing, support, account information, and troubleshooting.

BOX 2

AI ASSISTANTS VS. APPS				
Platform	Personalization	Speed	Adaptability	Accuracy
AI assistants	54%	83%	71%	50%
Apps	46%	17%	29%	50%
Winner	AI	AI	AI	Tied

THE CONVERGENCE OF AI ASSISTANTS, APPS, AND TRADITIONAL CONSUMER CHANNELS... IT'S HAPPENING TODAY...

This shift also supports stronger self-service adoption and higher customer containment by fully resolving issues within an automated or self-service channel without needing a human agent.

As consumers are increasingly preferring quick, independent solutions, and brands are prioritizing efficiencies, AI assistants are delivering both at scale.

So, how can brands maintain exceptional CX as expectations shift in this new era?

OPERATIONAL BEST PRACTICES

- Audit your service channels, and map out how many interactions happen through apps, websites, chatbots, and voice assistants. Then ask yourself how that mix will shift as AI assistants take a bigger role.
- Unify your customer data from across all channels. Pull data from apps, AI assistants, and traditional channels. This way both human or agentic agents can see the full picture and reduce repeated questions, making every interaction feel effortless.
- Strengthen data readiness so that unified customer data is accurate, accessible, and actionable. AI systems and human agents can then deliver consistent, personalized experiences at scale.
- Train agents for hybrid (channel-agnostic AI, app, human) customer journeys. Make sure agents understand what AI can and can't do and give them the tools to quickly verify AI-generated information to seamlessly pick up customer conversations where the AI assistants left off.

TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURE

- AI orchestration isn't optional; it's the backbone of modern contact centers, internal CX operations, and customer-facing channels.
- Connect internal service bots and CRM systems with external AI assistants to deliver seamless, cross-channel experiences.

One of the most powerful emerging trends is third-party app invocation, a technical term for when AI interacts with a third-party app.

For example, imagine a customer asking an AI assistant to book a hotel room. The assistant opens the hotel's app behind the scenes, checks availability, reserves the room, and confirms the details. All without the customer leaving a chat window.

- Combine your apps with AI assistants to create agentic commerce experiences that anticipate intent, streamline decisions, and complete end-to-end actions so customers get what they need instantly. This saves time and eliminates effort.
- Work with trusted partners to build end-to-end processes that cover the full customer journeys, from mobile check-ins and room service orders, to chatting with bots or human agents.
- Equip your CX agents with AI tools that provide real-time guidance, surface context-relevant knowledge, and suggest next-best actions so they can resolve issues faster on any channel.

THE TIME TO EXPERIMENT IS NOW

The convergence of AI assistants, apps, and traditional consumer channels isn't a distant future scenario. It's happening today, and brands that wait for a clear playbook will find themselves behind.

To set themselves up for success, brands must start designing a customer journey with multiple entry and exit

points, between AI assistants, apps, and websites, and for different customer personas. This includes planning for seamless live agent connections that preserve context across channels.

Providing agents with a real-time 360-degree customer view and quick and easy access to customer history reduces frustration and friction. It also enables faster resolution regardless of where the customer journey began. This will help ensure every customer gets what they need, where they naturally engage.

Additionally, forward-thinking brands are designing API-first services so that machines, apps, and AI agents can use them as easily as humans can, making integration and automation seamless.

However, the technical reality is that connecting AI assistants to your existing systems requires the right infrastructure.

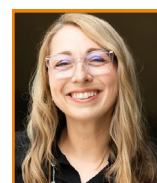
While new standards like model context protocol (MCP) are emerging to make AI integrations easier, most brands today still need traditional API connections to bridge AI assistants with their business systems and customer data.

This approach enables cross-platform consistency in tone, empathy, and resolution quality while maintaining human oversight to handle nuance and complex calls.

This is critical. While AI offers efficiency, experience quality matters. If AI responses are wrong or the tone is off, customers may abandon the brand or escalate to a human.

The brands leading this transformation aren't waiting for perfect conditions. They're testing, learning, and iterating toward seamless, channel-agnostic experiences. Start by identifying one customer journey that spans multiple channels, map the friction points, and experiment with solutions.

The question isn't whether this shift will happen, it's whether you'll be ready when your customers expect it. Brands that deepen human values, empathy, reliability, and transparency are going to win the CX game, regardless of where the conversation begins. 📍



Jamie Timm is Global SVP, Service Delivery and Operations, at TELUS Digital. Jamie leads a cross-functional team to help clients explore the art of the possible when it comes to delivering impactful and innovative digital experiences at scale for their customers and employees, while driving bottom line impact.





HOW TO MAKE REMOTE WORK *ACTUALLY* WORK

SUPPORTING REMOTE AGENTS REQUIRES COMMITMENT.

Remote agents have become the standard operating model for contact centers across North America. During the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work was the only viable option for many contact center and BPO leaders, requiring organizations to pivot quickly to support their customers' demands.

Now, nearly 70% of organizations operate under a hybrid model, according to a report by ICMI reviewing industry trends, reinforcing that remote work is no longer an exception but an expectation.

But the experience of contact centers with remote work is that it cannot be used as a quick fix as it poses its own challenges. And there are many advantages to having agents in-office that are often difficult to duplicate remotely.

Therefore, as I will discuss in this article, contact centers that want to have successful remote agent programs ***must*** make a serious and long-term commitment to them.



...THE EXPERIENCE OF CONTACT CENTERS WITH REMOTE WORK IS THAT IT CANNOT BE USED AS A QUICK FIX AS IT POSES ITS OWN CHALLENGES.

REMOTE WORK BENEFITS

With the ongoing demand for flexible work, candidates increasingly request work-from-home (WFH) positions and, in some cases, decline in-office-only roles. As more North American contact centers offer remote options, this model has become a key factor in attracting new talent.

From an operational standpoint, contact centers are responsible for managing volume and responding quickly to changes in customer demand. Remote operating models can reduce dependency on physical capacity, allowing organizations to scale without being constrained by in-office space or location.

Reliance on a single physical contact center can also introduce operational risk. Recent events, including the pandemic, highlighted how quickly in-office models can be disrupted when remote work is not already established.

In regions prone to extreme weather or potential infrastructure interruptions, remote teams can provide a practical contingency plan, allowing for operations to remain functional even through challenging and unpredictable disruptions.

Remote staffing further allows organizations to extend coverage beyond their immediate geographic reach. Contact centers that lack the physical capacity to support multiple time zones can leverage remote agents without the added burden of establishing additional locations.

Remote work can also provide financial and operational advantages particularly for small- to mid-sized contact centers.

Those with limited office space, or those operating as fully remote organizations, often rely on remote agents to support customer service operations. In some cases, remote agents may also provide their own hardware and equipment, reducing upfront infrastructure costs.

REMOTE WORK'S RESOURCES STRAIN

But remote work can strain contact center resources. Supporting remote agents requires significant operational effort to ensure policies, compliance standards, and quality expectations are consistently maintained without face-to-face access to the agent.

Here are a few key points to consider:

1 WORK ENVIRONMENT

Agents must be set up in quiet, secure, and non-distracting environments, conditions that are not always guaranteed

outside of a traditional contact center floor.

Traditionally, in-office contact centers have multiple resources in place to ensure quiet and productive working conditions, such as white noise machines, sound barriers, multiple queue screens, dedicated workstations, and building soundproofing. Managers also control access to the floors.

2 SUPERVISOR ACCESS

In-office contact center management allows supervisors to provide real-time, on-floor support, with direct line of sight visibility into agent challenges, distractions, and concerns as they occur.

This immediate oversight enables teams to address issues collectively and make timely adjustments to processes when patterns emerge.

In remote environments, this same hands-on support is not consistently available. With a heavier reliance on communication tools such as Microsoft Teams, Slack, and Google Chat, tone and sentiment in agent-management interactions can be more difficult to interpret.

EVEN IN ORGANIZATIONS WITH WELL-ESTABLISHED PROCESSES, MAINTAINING STRICT ADHERENCE TO PROCEDURES CAN BE MORE DIFFICULT AT A DISTANCE.

3 ADHERENCE TO PROCEDURES

Even in organizations with well-established processes, maintaining strict adherence to procedures can be more difficult at a distance. Remote agents do not have access to the advantages of collaborative QA sessions, real-time feedback, and in-person coaching typically provided in physical settings.

Even though contact center platforms give users more insight into agent activity and time management, operational issues may still arise because surface-level metrics might not accurately represent agent performance or behaviour.

4 AGENT AVAILABILITY

Agent availability in certain contact center platforms is dependent on manually setting statuses like "break," "lunch," or "away." Visibility is limited, even in routine or unintentional cases where a remote agent forgets to update their status.

In contrast, in physical in-office contact centers, supervisors can observe agents' presences and activities, whereas in remote environments, this level of awareness is challenging to maintain.





ENABLING REMOTE WORK EFFECTIVELY

Enabling remote contact center operations requires more than deploying preferred technologies and software. It also depends on the regular application of defined expectations, leadership supervision, and transparent procedures that facilitate the execution of accountable remote agent work.

The realities of WFH, such as agent responsiveness, timeliness, and adherence to established workflows that support customer demand, **must** be reflected in processes and standard operating procedures that go beyond those created for in-office settings.

Consider the following points:

- 1. In most cases, remote programs require agents to formally acknowledge WFH policies that outline conduct, security, and performance expectations.**

Increased visibility through management tools can support both agent preparedness and managerial oversight. But these tools are most effective when paired with clear expectations and consistent follow-through.

- 2. Providing feedback to remote agents often requires a higher cadence than for in-office teams.**

As I noted earlier, in the office, agents benefit from proximity to management and frequent real-time support, allowing questions to be answered quickly and coaching to occur informally throughout the day.

But in remote environments, those informal interactions are largely absent, increasing reliance on structured coaching and regular QA feedback.



More frequent touchpoints help reinforce expectations, support skill development, and prevent performance drift. QA feedback should be delivered consistently, with sufficient time for agents to reflect and respond, rather than feeling constrained by tight deadlines.

- 3. Access to management is also critical in remote settings, particularly when agents are handling active customer interactions.**

Without the ability to quickly ask questions in person, escalation paths must be clear, responsive, and consistent with in-office support models. These, along with responsive leadership, reduce hesitation and enable agents to resolve issues efficiently.

Ongoing conversations around performance and the emotional realities of working remotely are essential to sustaining remote agent engagement.

**CLEAR EXPECTATIONS...
HELP REMOTE AGENTS
UNDERSTAND NOT ONLY
WHAT IS REQUIRED OF
THEM BUT ALSO HOW
THEIR PERFORMANCE IS
MEASURED.**

CONSISTENCY IS KEY

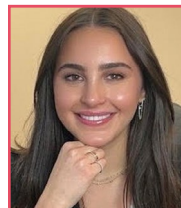
Organizations that succeed with remote contact center models tend to focus less on control and more on consistency.

Clear expectations, reinforced and mutually agreed on from the start, help remote agents understand not only what is required of them but also how their performance is measured.

When standards are documented, communicated early, and applied, remote teams are better positioned to operate with confidence through accountability.

Ultimately, remote work is most effective when treated as a long-term operating model rather than a temporary fix.

Organizations that invest in clear processes, engaged leadership, and ongoing support are better equipped to maintain performance, quality, and agent engagement in distributed environments. They are also better positioned to adapt to change over time. 



Michela Lombardi is the managing director and co-founder of 3C Contact Services, a Toronto-based contact center supporting clients across Canada and the United States. She leads 3C's strategic growth and brings hands-on experience in contact center operations, workforce management, and client service delivery.



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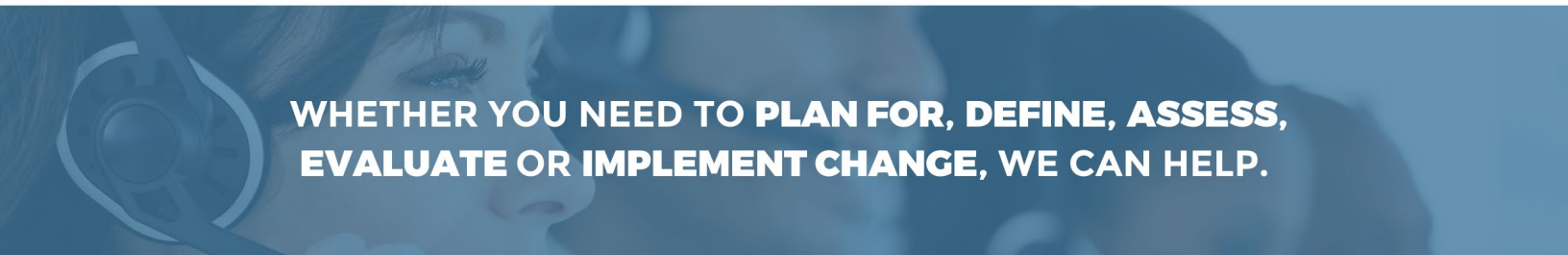
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Project Plan
Design/Development
Testing
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**WHETHER YOU NEED TO PLAN FOR, DEFINE, ASSESS,
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IS WFH *REALLY* DOA? REMOTE/HYBRID WORK IS ALIVE: INCLUDING IN CONTACT CENTERS.

The headlines over the past 12 months appear to give the impression that remote work/work-from-home (WFH) is dying as employers seek to gain more or regain control over their workforces by compelling them to return-to-office (RTO), raising concerns like security (**see BOX 1** on security).

At the same time, there have also been reports of push-back to RTO by employees. WFH freed them from arguably arduous, expensive, and sometimes dangerous commutes, and from struggling to find and access affordable childcare. And such freedoms have made it hard (and costly) to go back.

But contact centers have long been early WFH adopters to provide flexibility, business continuity disaster recovery (BCDR), and to recruit/obtain the services of and retain workers who live outside of daily commuting distance. Business cases that appear to still hold today.

So, what is *really* happening with WFH, including in the contact center? Is it finished as a practice? Or are organizations realizing that it has a place in the workplace?

JEREMY HYDE



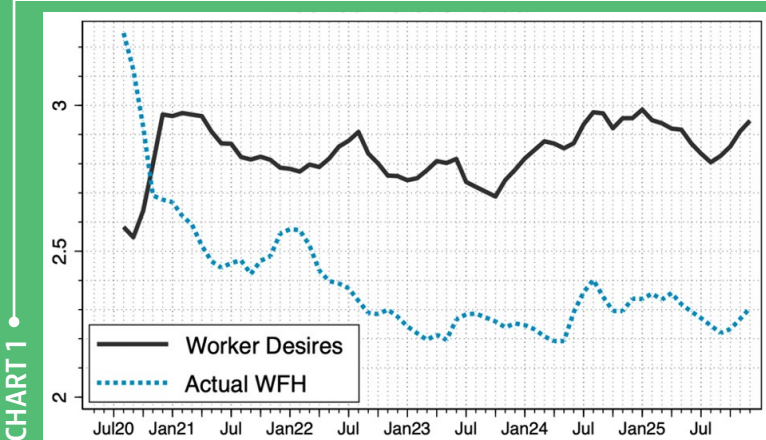
To find out, we had a virtual conversation (from our home offices, naturally) with Jeremy Hyde, president, WFH Alliance, which serves as a mutual, sharing resource for contact centers seeking information and guidance on remote working.

Q WHAT IS THE STATE OF REMOTE WORKING/WFH IN THE CONTACT CENTER? ARE YOU SEEING IT INCREASE, DECREASE, OR STAY THE SAME AS LAST YEAR?

A: Despite the headlines, contact centers aren't experiencing a mass RTO. Nationally, remote work has dipped slightly in average days per week, but it has largely stabilized.

Much of the national RTO narrative is overstated, and the data we've seen (**see CHART 1**) suggests we've settled into a new normal of roughly two remote days per week across the U.S. workforce.

AVERAGE DAYS PER WEEK WORKING FROM HOME: DESIRED VERSUS ACTUAL

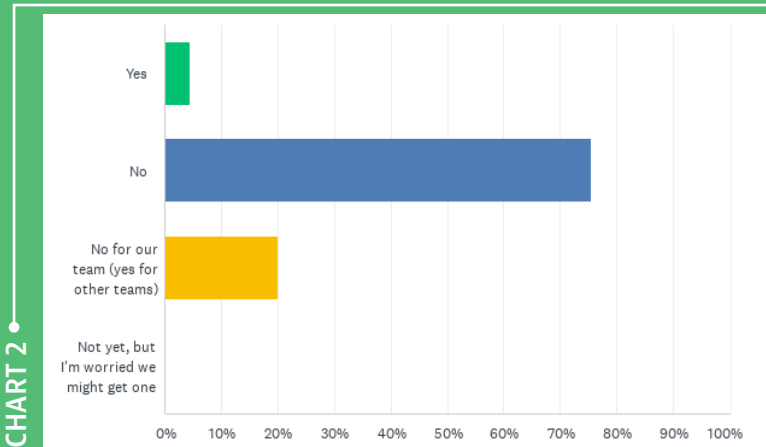


SAMPLE: WORKERS ABLE TO WORK FROM HOME

Source: Barrero, Jose Maria, Nicholas Bloom, and Steven J. Davis, 2021.
"Why working from home will stick," National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 28731.

For contact centers, that number is typically higher, and most teams that adopted remote or hybrid models (**see BOX 2** on hybrid work) have continued using them because the structure works well for staffing, performance, and flexibility.

HAS YOUR TEAM RECEIVED A RETURN-TO-OFFICE (RTO) MANDATE?



Source: WFH Alliance, 2025 Remote Work Benchmarking Survey

So, RTO is happening in pockets. But not on the scale that public narratives suggest (**see CHART 2**). This can create the perception that remote work is shrinking when it's actually holding steady.

It's also worth noting that demand for remote roles remains extremely high. Research suggests, drawing from other studies, that about twice as many job seekers want fully remote positions versus what employers have or have offered.

Q HOW IS THE USE OF WFH BY CONTACT CENTERS COMPARED TO THAT IN OTHER DEPARTMENTS? IS THERE A CONVERGENCE OR DIVERGENCE OF TRENDS LIKE RTO?

A: Many of the concerns that drive RTO elsewhere, such as visibility into work or productivity monitoring, are less relevant because contact centers already rely on clear performance metrics, recorded interactions, and structured workflows.

As a result, WFH adoption remains strong in the contact center. Oftentimes, even if an organization has an RTO mandate, the contact center is excluded from the requirement due to effective management, geographical locations of agents, and space constraints.

Q HAS THERE BEEN ANY PUSHBACK TO RTO IN CONTACT CENTERS?

A: Yes, there is pushback to RTO in contact centers, and it typically shows up first in hiring. Many job seekers filter for remote-only roles and never consider on-site positions, which makes it significantly harder to attract talent when teams are required to RTO.

Attrition can increase as well. But the more immediate challenge is the shrinking candidate pool.

"..EVEN IF AN ORGANIZATION HAS AN RTO MANDATE, THE CONTACT CENTER IS EXCLUDED FROM THE REQUIREMENT..."

-- JEREMY HYDE

Q LET'S DISCUSS BCDR. IS THE SEVERE WEATHER THAT HAS ALSO BEEN IN THE HEADLINES PROMPTING ORGANIZATIONS TO LOOK AGAIN AT WFH? IN HOW THEY USE IT, NOTING THAT REMOTE AGENTS ARE ALSO AFFECTED BY THESE EVENTS? OR ARE THEY RESORTING TO AI-DRIVEN SELF-SERVICE INSTEAD OF WFH AS A BCDR STRATEGY?

A: BCDR is a very strong operational reason to offer hybrid or fully remote work. Using an airline example, a snowstorm at a Midwestern hub creates a spike in delays and cancellations.

At the same time, agents who must commute may be unable or unwilling to drive to the office. Staffing drops at the exact moment customer needs spike.



Remote teams perform much better in these situations. Recently, my team has seen unplanned absences fall by roughly half during critical events compared to normal days. We have also seen staffing increase by about 40% as unscheduled agents log in to help, even if only for short periods of time.

Home-based employees can still experience disruptions, but spreading your workforce across multiple regions significantly improves resilience. For many organizations, remote work models have become a core part of BCDR planning.

"REMOTE WORK HAS ALSO SURFACED CHALLENGES...WHICH REQUIRE LEADERS TO BE MORE INTENTIONAL ABOUT COMMUNICATION AND CONNECTION."

Q HAVE THERE BEEN ANY CHANGES IN HOW CONTACT CENTERS MANAGE REMOTE AGENTS, E.G., USE OF AI TOOLS AND ANY OTHER TECHNOLOGIES? NEW BEST PRACTICES, LIKE FOR RECRUITING, COACHING, TRAINING, TEAM COHESION, AND FOR ISSUES LIKE ISOLATION AND WELLNESS?

SECURITY AND WFH

Cybersecurity concerns have long been raised behind the reluctance of not a few organizations, like in financial services, as why they are reluctant to have their staff, like contact center agents, WFH.

So, we asked Jeremy Hyde, "Is it becoming more or less risky security-wise for agents to be at home or on-premise? And what new, upgraded tools are there to minimize these risks for WFH agents?"

"Security has become more standardized and much easier to enforce in remote environments than it used to be," says Jeremy. "No longer are the days of relying on 'clean desk' policies.

"Modern platforms allow companies to lock down device access, restrict copy/paste and downloads, require secure VPN or VDI sessions, and the ability to have a voice or text-to-pay solution for accepting credit cards.

"Screen recording and real-time quality tools also give leaders full visibility into agent activity regardless of location.

"In short, remote work does not inherently increase security risks. What matters is the maturity of the organization's security posture. With modern security tools and cloud-based platforms, WFH agents can operate as safely as their on-premise counterparts."

BOX 1

A: A lot has changed in how contact centers manage remote teams:

- Flexibility has shifted from a perk to an expectation, and employees place a much higher value on leaders who listen, act on feedback, and support their development.
- Remote work has also surfaced challenges, such as isolation and loneliness, which require leaders to be more intentional about communication and connection.

We're seeing that the direct leader is the most impactful factor on employee satisfaction and engagement, and more leaders are leaning into the human side of leading even as technology and AI dominate so many conversations.

Technology has evolved alongside these leadership expectations. The first wave of AI adoption in contact centers has focused on tools that support agents rather than replace them.

This includes tools such as real-time agent assist, automated quality monitoring, sentiment analysis, and training simulations that help new hires ramp more quickly.

The goal many organizations are moving toward is a true human plus AI partnership, where technology enhances the agent's work rather than overshadowing it.

Q ARE YOU SEEING ANY NEW OR RENEWED INTEREST IN MODELS OF WFH OR HYBRID WORKING, E.G., GEO-SOURCING, SATELLITE OFFICES? PLEASE DISCUSS WHAT THEY ARE AND THEIR BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES.

A: Remote hiring has opened the door to entirely new workforce models in contact centers:

- Some organizations simply cast a wide net and hire the best candidates anywhere in the country.
- Others are expanding globally through a mix of direct hiring, traditional BPO partners, and Employer of Record arrangements.

A more targeted approach is also emerging. Instead of hiring everywhere, some teams identify regions where there is a strong employer-candidate fit.

For example, my team focuses on part-time employees in specific small-town Midwest markets near the airports we serve. These employees can use flight benefits, have strong schedule flexibility, and often stay longer because the role aligns well with their lifestyles.

The possibilities with remote and hybrid models are nearly endless, but many organizations still limit themselves by managing remote work the same way they managed on-site teams.

Q WHAT ARE YOUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONTACT CENTERS SEEKING TO RETAIN, EXPAND, AND MAKE THE BEST USE OF WFH STAFF?

WHAT EXACTLY IS HYBRID WORK?

The term and practice of hybrid work gained popularity after the end of the COVID-19-pandemic as employers sought some form of pre-pandemic in-office/on-premise working normalcy: while noting that many employees still had to WFH. Yet it has existed prior to that.

But what exactly is hybrid work, particularly in the contact center? Does it mean some agents working remotely, some agents on-premise? Or the same agents working some days remotely, other days on-premise?" So, we asked Jeremy Hyde to find out.

"Both versions exist in the industry today, and the choice typically reflects leadership philosophy, talent strategy, and the availability of physical facilities," says Jeremy.

"Some organizations treat every employee as hybrid: all agents rotate between home and the office, often two or three days a week.

"Within this model, some require everyone to be on-site on the same days to support collaboration, while others stagger schedules, with individuals working different in-office days.

"Another hybrid model is based on geography, not shared schedules. Agents who live within a certain distance of a physical office may be allowed—or required—to work on-site part or all of the time, while those outside that radius operate fully remote.

"This model and practice preserves geographic flexibility without mandating commutes for employees hired remotely."

A: My recommendation is to design your remote model intentionally rather than simply replicating old on-site practices.

Start with strong frontline leadership, because the direct supervisors have the greatest impact on retention, engagement, and overall performance. Equip leaders to communicate frequently, act on feedback, and create meaningful connections so remote employees don't feel isolated.

Second, embrace flexibility where possible. Remote work is a major retention driver, and small amounts of schedule flexibility can open up highly reliable talent pools you might otherwise miss.

As mentioned earlier, there are twice as many candidates who want remote jobs as there are remote jobs, so if you offer a good one, people will want to stick around.

Finally, rethink your hiring strategy. Remote work allows you to tap into new geographic markets, tailor roles to different talent segments, and access stronger fits for your business.

Teams that approach staffing creatively get the most out of their WFH model, improve retention, and build resilience into their operations. 



Brendan Read is Editor of Contact Center Pipeline. He has been covering and working in customer service and sales and for contact center companies for most of his career. Brendan has edited and written for leading industry publications and has been an industry analyst. He also has authored and co-authored books on contact center design, customer support, and working from home. Brendan can be reached at brendan@contactcenterpipeline.com.

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HOW TO MAKE CONTACT CENTERS SMARTER AND MORE SCALABLE, EMPATHETIC, AND DRIVE REVENUES.

No matter the industry, just about every brand is trying to navigate a real-world dilemma. That is, to meet (and exceed) rising customer expectations while also managing to cut costs and boost revenues.

This is a constant balancing act. Your customers demand speed, empathy, and consistency, but delivering that at scale often feels like a complex puzzle.

In this high-stakes environment, savvy brands are realizing that their contact center, once viewed as merely a necessary expense, is actually a strategic sales gold mine.

The key to unlocking this potential? It's harnessing contact center intelligence (CCI).

CCI isn't just about bolting on a few new tools. Instead, it's a fundamental shift in how we collect, measure, manage, and act on customer data points.

At its heart, CCI is a strategic imperative that fuses human expertise with AI to drive better outcomes for both cus-

tomers and employees. It's about making sure your service is not only smarter but also more genuinely human.



...CCI IS A DYNAMIC, LIVING ECOSYSTEM BUILT ON AI, REAL-TIME ANALYTICS, AND INTELLIGENT AUTOMATION.

WHAT INTELLIGENCE REALLY MEANS

What passed for "intelligence" in the contact center just a few years ago was pretty basic and very artificial.

Then, intelligence usually meant reviewing historical reports that only looked backward at lagging metrics, such as AHT, queue length, and/or call abandonment rates.

But what was important to one manager would be different for the next: and correlation with actual agent productivity was not possible. While those numbers still matter, they're not enough to navigate the complexity of today's customer journey.

Today, CCI is a dynamic, living ecosystem built on AI, real-time analytics, and intelligent automation. It's designed to understand the "why" behind the numbers.

How does it do this? By fusing two types of data:

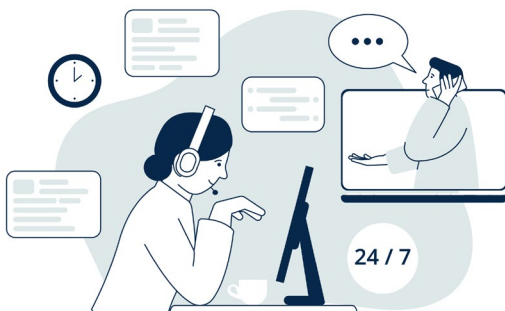
- 1 Structured data.** Neat, organized information like the codes an agent selects after a call.
- 2 Unstructured data.** This is the messy, rich data that makes up most human communication, like call transcripts and knowledge of diverse types.

The system applies AI to this combined data stream to surface real-time, contextual insights.

By applying CCI you no longer have to wait for IT to build a custom dashboard. By creating a simple, natural language prompt like "Why did our service volume spike last Tuesday?" you can instantly uncover performance trends, summarize team-level activity, or explain queue underperformance.

CCI TOOLS AT WORK

This ability to instantly turn raw data into actionable knowledge is a genuine game-changer. Here's how intelligent tools empower both staff and leadership.



- **For agents.** AI tools like agent co-pilots or agent assist listen to live voice or chat interactions, retrieve context-aware answers, recommend next-best actions, predict and suggest wrap-up codes, and even summarize the conversations.

This functionality dramatically decreases cognitive load, reduces manual effort, and ensures that agents focus on complex, empathetic problem-solving.

- **For leaders.** Tools like real-time performance dashboards, AI-powered quality assurance (QA), and predictive analytics provide a clear, instant views of operations.

These tools enable targeted coaching, better forecasting, smarter staffing, and more empowered leadership teams. They can also be used to focus attention on outliers in reporting or operations.

MAKING CUSTOMER SERVICE A REVENUE DRIVER

Brands that successfully leverage CCI can see measurable and often rapid return on investment (ROI). This isn't abstract; it hits the bottom line.

- **Customer loyalty (CSAT and NPS).** When customers receive faster, more accurate, and more empathetic service (because the agents are supported by AI), they are happier. This often translates directly to customer satisfaction (CSAT) and the Net Promoter Score (NPS) increases.
- **Operational efficiency (FCR).** Real-time assistance and automation tools boost efficiency metrics. FCR, which is solving the customer's issue on the very first try, goes up: which is a big win for both the customers and the brand.

Using topics to look for phrases where the agent asks the clients if there is anything else they can help with, or if they answered all the customers' questions, is ideal for finding calls to avoid subsequent calls.

- **Cost reduction and productivity.** By automating repetitive tasks and shortening AHT, brands can improve agent productivity without sacrificing quality, which in turn helps reduce overall operating costs.
- **Operational agility.** Intelligence provides a real-time pulse on your business. This allows your team to shift staffing, adapt call scripts, and refine processes in near real time, ensuring that you can quickly respond to anything from a major product launch to an unexpected service outage.



BUILDING THE RIGHT FOUNDATION

To truly realize their contact center's potential, brands need to look beyond the technology itself and focus on the bedrock of their operations. This requires three key investments: *clean data*, *flexible architecture*, and *a culture of continuous learning*.

Don't just chase the newest tool; embrace a design-first, platform-agnostic approach. This means designing the ideal customer and agent experience *first*, and *then* choosing the technology that best fits that vision.

This enables a customized intelligence ecosystem that aligns precisely with your specific goals and customer needs.

The AI will only become more capable in the years ahead, but the human element will remain the deciding factor. The brands that succeed will be those that realize CCI and AI are not about replacing human agents, but about elevating them.

With the right blend of automation and empathy, the contact center truly transcends its traditional service role and becomes a powerful, true driver of brand loyalty and business growth. 



As Senior Director of Innovation Architects, Robert Wakefield-Carl leads the contact center innovation team at TIEC Digital. His work focuses on the art of the possible with demos, training, and setting up test beds for the latest in new technologies and helping customers understand the technology they have.



ILLUSTRATION PROVIDED BY ADOBE IMAGES

EVOLVING THREATS, EVOLVING RESPONSES

HOW CONTACT CENTERS CAN BEST RESPOND TO THE NEXT DISASTER.

One of the constants of the human experience is coping with disasters. And as their nature changes (which is also a constant), so must our responses to them.

Contact centers sit at the nexus of business continuity and disaster response (BCDR). They must simultaneously inform customers what is happening and provide the latest recommendations for actions when an event threatens and strikes: while safeguarding their staff and operations.

To find out and understand more about the evolving disaster dangers - and to learn how contact centers can best plan and respond to them - we had a virtual conversation with Lou Corbeil, General Manager, Platform Operations, NICE.

LOU CORBEIL



Q WHAT ARE, AND PLEASE RANK, THE TOP FIVE DISASTER THREATS FACING CONTACT CENTERS? HAVE THESE CHANGED OVER THE PAST 12 MONTHS? DO YOU EXPECT THEM TO CHANGE OVER THE NEXT 12 MONTHS?

A: The biggest risks to contact centers have continued to evolve. Today, the top five threats can be ranked as follows:

1. Cyberattacks are more sophisticated and relentless, making strong security and compliance frameworks essential.
2. Platform outages remain a top concern, and multi-site redundancy and high availability are table stakes for continuity.
3. Severe weather and climate-driven disasters are hitting more regions, which has elevated the importance of geo-redundant deployments.
4. Workforce disruption, whether illness, evacuation, or staffing shortages, has become more unpredictable.
5. Finally, vendor and telecom failures remain systemic risks, underscored by the need for transparent incident reporting.

While not a disaster, the possibility of government mandates quickly implemented around data residency and sovereignty may require rapid rerouting of operations.

Looking ahead, the core risk categories are unlikely to change, but greater emphasis will be placed on cyber resilience and AI governance.

Q ARE YOUR CLIENTS EXPERIENCING INCREASES IN DISASTER-CAUSED/RELATED CONTACTS AND INTERACTIONS WITH WORRIED CUSTOMERS (E.G., OUTAGES, FLIGHT CANCELLATIONS/DELAYS)?

A: When issues occur - like travel disruptions and extreme weather - contact centers see sharp spikes in customer interactions, and the capacity to absorb those surges is now considered an expectation. Industries like travel and utilities are especially exposed.

In response to these events, we consistently see that proactive incident communications can significantly reduce customer anxiety and help manage volume.

Q HAS THE RISE IN AUTOMATION, LIFTED BY NEW AI TOOLS, SHIFTED MORE OF THE BCDR FOCUS TO DIGITAL CUSTOMER SERVICE? SO THAT WHEN DISASTERS OCCUR, AGENT-PROVIDED SERVICE IS SHUT DOWN, THE AGENTS ARE EVACUATED, AND THE CONTACTS ARE SHIFTED TO AI AGENTS, IVR/ ONLINE SELF-SERVE, ETC.?

A: Automation and AI play a key role in maintaining operations, particularly during disruptions, seamlessly handling queries if staff aren't reachable.

As organizations adopt more AI-driven self-services, continuity planning increasingly includes digital channels as a first line of response.

Coordinated AI assistants, combined with user-driven platforms, increasingly support emergency response plans. Strong observability and governance of automated systems are critical to ensuring consistent access during crises.

Q CONVERSELY, WITH AUTOMATION ALREADY HANDLING A LARGE SHARE OF CONTACTS, AND WITH THOSE ANSWERED BY AGENTS BEING HIGH-VALUE, EMOTIONALLY CHARGED, AND/OR URGENT, SHOULD CONTACT CENTERS PLACE A GREATER EMPHASIS ON BUSINESS CONTINUITY BY KEEPING THEIR STAFF AVAILABLE, SAFELY?

A: As automation takes on the more routine interactions, it raises the stakes for keeping staff available and protected to handle those that require human engagement.

Hybrid operations and secure remote access are critical to ensuring staff can remain available safely. Staff safeguards - like emergency plans, secure devices, and key personnel lists - must be treated with the same priority as technical backup systems.

Staying operational involves aligning digital resilience alongside human safety and availability.

Q ARE CONTACT CENTER ORGANIZATIONS DOING ENOUGH TO ENSURE EFFECTIVE BCDR? IF NOT, WHY NOT? WHERE ARE THE COMMON DEFICIENT AREAS? OR IS IT A CASE OF PUTTING TOGETHER A STRONG BUSINESS CASE, ALONG WITH EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING PROGRAMS (INCLUDING DRILLS) FOR STAFF?

A: Most organizations have plans in place, but gaps remain. End-to-end testing tends to be minimal, vendor dependency management is incomplete, AI governance is still maturing; and remote agent protections differ significantly from one site to another.

Resiliency guidance emphasizes the need for regular drills and architectural safeguards, while governance frameworks highlight compliance expectations.

Still, many organizations underinvest in overflow capacity or site redundancy, exposing operations to spotty disruptions or telecom failures. Strengthening business cases and integrating practice routines can help address these shortcomings.

Q FOLLOWING UP ON YOUR ANSWERS TO THE PRECEDING QUESTION, REMOTE AGENTS HAVE LONG BEEN A PROVEN BCDR STRATEGY. BUT ARE THESE AGENTS ADEQUATELY PROTECTED?

A: Home networks, electrical stability, and device safety differ, introducing gaps in consistent operations. While protected logins and uniform device rules set starting points, remote agents should be treated as critical infrastructure.

Alternate connections, encrypted hardware, or clear communication protocols remain necessary. Operational resilience must extend beyond software to include those providing support remotely.

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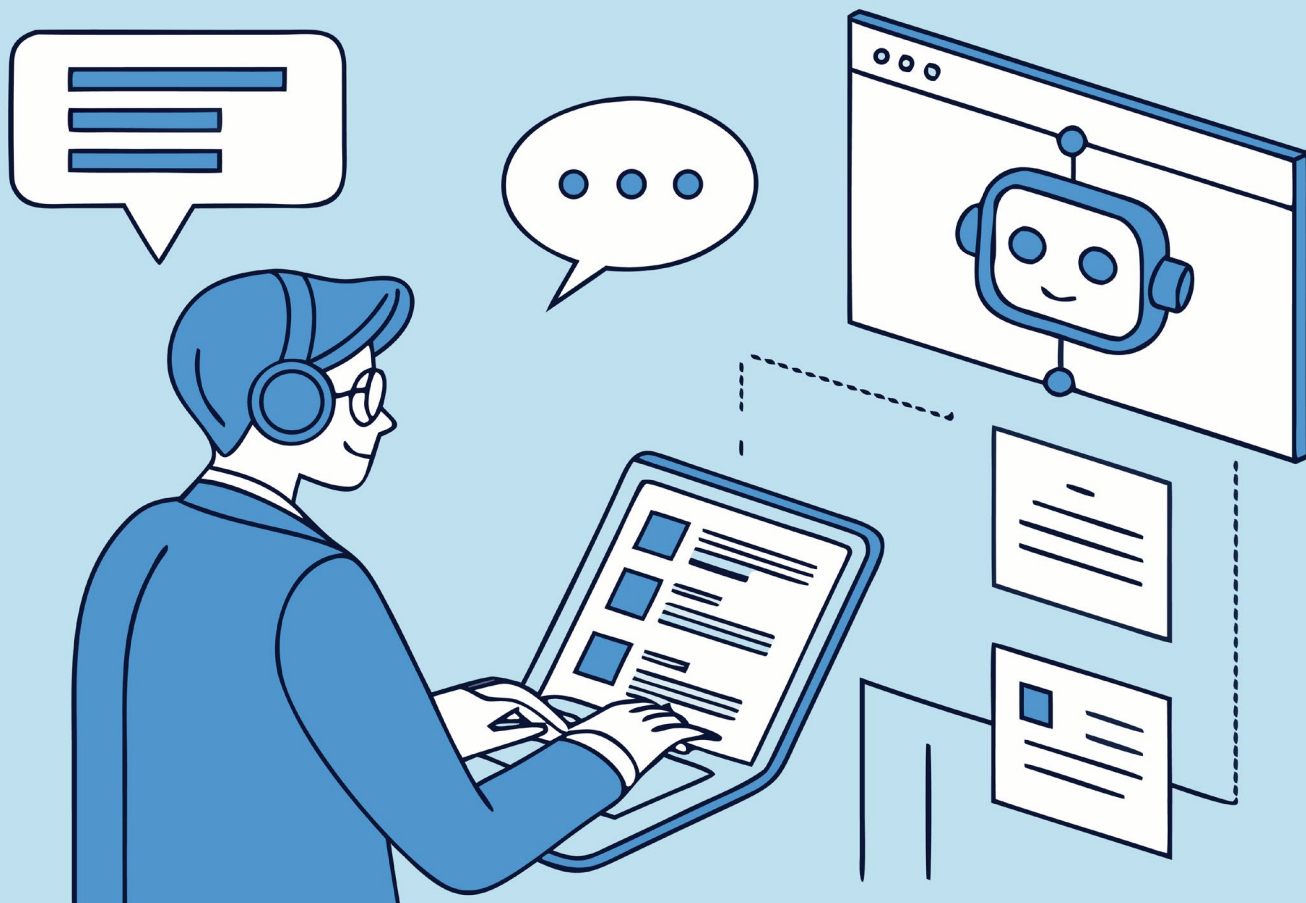


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WHAT CONTACT CENTERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT MCP

HOW MCP HELPS AI SYSTEMS ACCESS CONTEXT MORE RELIABLY.

AI has quickly become an integral component of modern contact centers, playing a central role in interpreting customer intent and guiding real-time decisions.

Virtual agents and agent-assist tools, along with analytics, quality management, and workforce optimization, now rely heavily on AI to support both customers and agents.

As organizations deploy more AI-driven capabilities, they face a foundational challenge: providing AI systems with accurate and secure context across environments that continue to become more complex.

For without the right context, even advanced AI models can produce unreliable outputs or responses that fail to align with business rules or regulatory requirements.

This challenge has driven growing interest in an emerging concept known as the Model Context Protocol (MCP). MCP is not a product or a single technology, but an approach to standardizing how AI models access and use contextual information from enterprise systems.

While adoption is still in the early stages, MCP has important implications for how contact centers scale AI in a responsible and effective way.

WHY CONTEXT IS A GROWING CHALLENGE

Context has always been fundamental to effective customer service. Human agents rely on customers' histories, previous interactions, policies, and real-time signals to resolve issues efficiently and accurately.

But as AI takes on a greater role in customer interactions, those same requirements apply but at a far greater speed and scale.



To work efficiently, AI-powered contact center tools may need access to:

- Customer profiles and interaction histories.
- Real-time conversation states.
- Knowledge bases and policy documents.
- Journey data across multiple channels.
- Operational rules and compliance constraints.

In many organizations, this information is distributed across separate systems. As AI deployments grow, context is often handled through custom integrations, hardcoded prompts, or workflow-specific logic.

While these approaches may work for isolated use cases, they become difficult to scale. Because AI systems are only as effective as the context they receive, this limitation is driving interest in more standardized, flexible approaches to context management.

WHAT IS MCP?

MCP is an emerging protocol and architectural pattern designed to standardize how AI models request, receive, and use contextual information from enterprise systems.

Rather than embedding context directly into every AI application or integration, MCP introduces a consistent way for models to access approved context when needed. It helps decouple AI models from the systems that store data, allowing both to evolve independently.

Large language models (LLMs) operate on historical training data and have no intrinsic access to real-time facts. For example, you can ask an LLM to predict the weather in New York City, but it won't know the current conditions unless it is explicitly provided with live, authoritative context.

MCP addresses this limitation by providing a standardized way for AI models to request and receive approved, real-time context from external systems.

Rather than relying on static prompts or assumptions, MCP enables models to incorporate current state information such as live data, operational signals, or policy updates: at the moment a decision or response is generated.

MCP is about creating a common language between AI models and enterprise data sources. It enables organizations to manage context as a governed asset, rather than duplicating logic across tools, workflows, and integrations.

HOW MCP WORKS

While implementations may vary, MCP generally follows a straightforward model for connecting context providers with AI requests.

(Context providers are enterprise systems, such as customer databases, CRM platforms, knowledge systems, or operational tools, that control what information can be shared and under what conditions.)

AI models or applications submit context requests specifying the required information, the scope of access, and any security or compliance constraints.

Approved context is then delivered in a structured, consistent format, ensuring models receive only the information they are permitted to access. This separation enables AI systems to request current context dynamically, without requiring tight integration with every backend system.

HOW MCP IS DIFFERENT

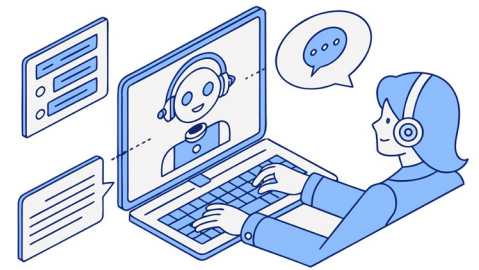
Many contact centers already use AI today, so it is useful to understand how MCP differs from existing approaches.

Traditional AI deployments often rely on direct integrations between AI tools and data sources, which can become brittle and costly to maintain as environments grow. MCP helps reduce integration complexity by decoupling AI models from systems.

Some AI tools embed context directly into prompts or workflows. While effective for narrow use cases, this approach can be difficult to govern and update. MCP treats context as a managed, reusable resource rather than static input.

Workflow and orchestration tools help manage processes, but they often lack standardized methods for exchanging context across multiple AI models.

MCP focuses specifically on how context is requested, delivered, and governed across tools, aiming to address context management as a high-priority concern rather than an afterthought.



WHAT MCP MEANS FOR OPERATIONS

For contact centers, MCP has significant implications. By ensuring AI systems receive consistent, approved context, it helps reduce errors and improve response relevance across self-service and assisted channels.

As customers move between voice, chat, messaging, and digital channels, maintaining context becomes more difficult. MCP supports smoother transitions by enabling access to shared context across interactions.

MCP also allows organizations to experiment with different AI models and tools without re-engineering context handling each time, which supports innovation while reducing technical debt.

By centralizing how context is accessed, MCP helps enforce policies related to privacy, security, and compliance, which are critical concerns for regulated industries. For contact centers, context is the difference between automation that feels helpful and automation that erodes trust.

MCP is still evolving, and industry alignment and best practices are developing, which may create uncertainty for early adopters. Context must be accurate and governed, and poor data quality or unclear ownership can undermine MCP's effectiveness.

MCP, AND AGENTS AND SUPERVISORS

As AI becomes more context-aware, its role in the contact center is likely to shift. Rather than replacing agents, MCP-enabled AI is more likely to surface relevant information automatically, reduce cognitive load during complex interactions, and support supervisors with better insights and visibility.

When AI systems have access to the right context, they can act as more effective assistants rather than as opaque decision-makers.

Contact center environments often require real-time responses. MCP implementations must be designed to deliver context quickly and reliably. Adopting MCP may require rethinking existing architectures and collaboration across IT, customer experience (CX), data, and security teams.

These challenges highlight the importance of a measured, incremental approach.

NEXT STEPS FOR CONTACT CENTER LEADERS

For organizations evaluating MCP, here are several practical steps that can help prepare for adoption.

- Teams should begin by assessing how context is currently managed across existing AI tools, identifying areas where inconsistent or fragmented context limits performance and reliability.

- Engaging vendors and partners in discussions about their approach to context governance can also provide insight into future compatibility and integration readiness.

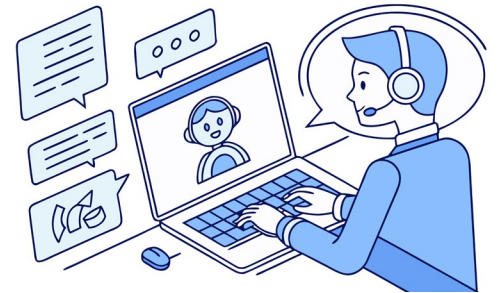
At the same time, organizations should monitor industry developments around MCP and related standards to stay aligned with emerging best practices.

While MCP may not be an immediate requirement for every organization, its underlying principles are becoming increasingly relevant as AI usage continues to expand.

LOOKING AHEAD

As contact centers continue to evolve into highly orchestrated, AI-enabled environ-

ments, managing context effectively will become a critical differentiator. MCP offers a promising framework for addressing this challenge by standardizing how AI systems access and use information.



For an industry built on understanding customer intent and delivering meaningful interactions, getting context right is no longer a nice-to-have. It is foundational to scaling AI responsibly in the contact center. [D](#)

**MCP OFFERS A PROMISING FRAMEWORK...
BY STANDARDIZING HOW AI SYSTEMS
ACCESS AND USE INFORMATION.**



Tony Lama is a seasoned technology executive with over 27 years of experience driving innovation and transformation in the CCaaS and enterprise communications industry. As SVP and GM of Product at Avaya, Tony leads the company's product strategy, innovation roadmap, and go-to-market execution.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 43

Q WHAT ARE YOUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONTACT CENTERS TO ENSURE SAFE, RELIABLE CUSTOMER CONTACT OPERATIONS?

A: The path forward involves building layered safeguards:

- Organizations should map customer journeys to potential failure modes and match recovery goals with the right levels of resiliency. They also should orchestrate AI and human failover, ensuring routine inquiries are absorbed digitally while urgent cases reach trained agents.

BCDR AND RTO

Many organizations, for-profit, not-for-profit, and government have returned to office (RTO) since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic.

But have they RTO'ed their contact centers? Have the growing disaster risks, like from severe weather and fires, given, or should be giving, pause to RTO?

"RTO trends are mixed," says Lou Corbeil. "While many organizations have resumed on-site operations, contact centers are increasingly adopting hybrid or distributed models to hedge against localized risks such as severe weather or fires.

"Spreading operations across regions cuts reliance on a single site, while secure remote agent capabilities let agents remain productive from anywhere. Given rising disaster risks, a blended model combining regional backups with partial remote staffing offers stronger protection."

"...WE CONSISTENTLY SEE THAT PROACTIVE INCIDENT COMMUNICATIONS CAN SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE CUSTOMER ANXIETY AND HELP MANAGE VOLUME."

-- LOU CORBEIL

- Cyber resilience must be hardened through robust controls, audits, and monitoring.
- Remote agents should be equipped with protected devices and backup connectivity, and joint practice exercises with vendors should simulate high demand and partial outages.

Business continuity becomes possible when technology, governance, and human safety are integrated. [D](#)



Brendan Read is Editor of Contact Center Pipeline. He has been covering and working in customer service and sales and for contact center companies for most of his career. Brendan has edited and written for leading industry publications and has been an industry analyst. He also has authored and co-authored books on contact center design, customer support, and working from home. Brendan can be reached at brendan@contactcenterpipeline.com.



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