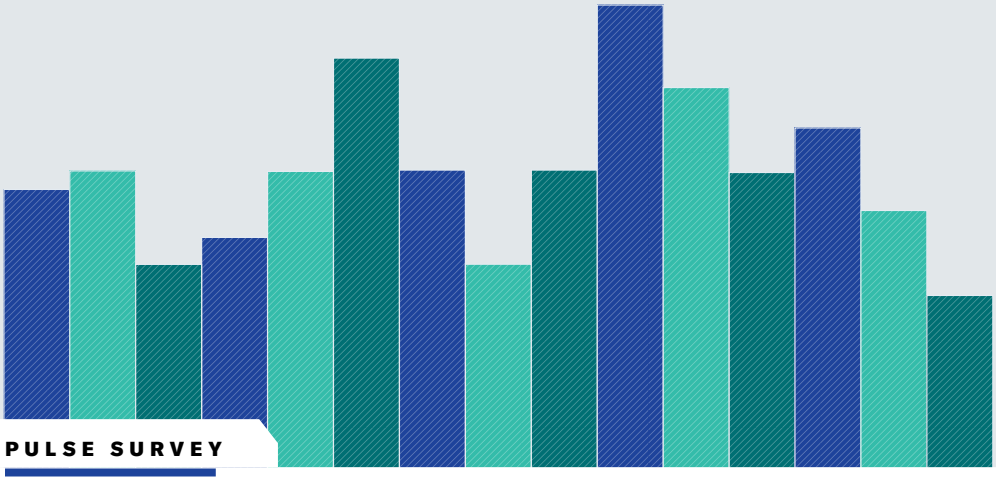
Harvard Business Review
ANALYTIC SERVICES



PULSE SURVEY

Perception and Reality:

Moving Beyond AI Anxiety to AI Action in the Contact Center

Sponsored by

Microsoft

SPONSOR PERSPECTIVE

Generative AI (gen AI) is transforming business landscapes at an unprecedented pace, and nowhere is this transformation more evident than in the contact center, where this technology is driving new levels of efficiency, cost savings, and customer experience (CX).

We're excited to share this report, which explores how contact centers worldwide are moving beyond initial curiosity about artificial intelligence (AI) to meaningful, impactful action. The report charts a promising path forward for gen AI as a tool that empowers service teams, personalizes CX, and redefines contact centers as essential drivers of business value.

Interestingly, a majority of survey respondents prioritize better CX as their top outcome for AI investments, signaling a shift in how contact centers view technology—not merely as a cost-cutting measure but to drive real customer value and loyalty. As organizations implement gen AI, they're discovering how it can help enhance self-service, streamline the workflows of customer service representatives, and offer operational insights at an unprecedented scale.

While these benefits are clear, respondents still point to challenges around data, knowledge management, and infrastructure readiness, realizing that AI's full potential requires more than technology alone. The report highlights that successful implementation depends on establishing a strong tech foundation; ensuring data quality, privacy, and security; having strong AI governance; and fostering organizational change. Additionally, on the technology and infrastructure front, experts suggest cloud adoption is proving to be a big differentiator between leaders and laggards.

At Microsoft, we've experienced the transformational impact of gen AI in our own service and support organization—from improved collaboration to reduced handle times and faster resolution rates. Our commitment to supporting organizations in achieving these outcomes is evident in solutions like Dynamics 365 Customer Service, Dynamics 365 Contact Center, and Microsoft 365 Copilot for Service, which are all infused with Copilot capabilities and designed to make AI's potential accessible, actionable, and impactful. Now we're advancing innovation with AI agents that extend Copilot's role—from facilitating simple prompt-and-response interactions to enabling fully autonomous capabilities—automating and executing key tasks while seamlessly collaborating with service representatives.

This report is an essential guide for those navigating the shift from AI exploration to execution, packed with actionable insights to help you move forward with confidence. Whether you're in the early stages of evaluating gen AI's potential or well into deployment, Microsoft is here to support your journey.

Learn how Microsoft can help you transform service experiences with AI here.

Perception and Reality:

Moving Beyond AI Anxiety to AI Action in the Contact Center

For years, customer service leaders have been seeking ways to drive productivity, improve customer service, and reduce costs in the contact center. Now generative AI (gen AI) is offering solutions to these age-old contact center challenges—and it's already proving its worth in terms of cost savings, productivity improvements, data-driven insights, and enhanced customer experience (CX).

According to Mary Wardley, program vice president for customer care and customer relationship management (CRM) at Needham, Mass.-based International Data Corp. (IDC), gen AI has come along at precisely the right moment for contact centers, as customer service executives grapple with multiple channels, high employee turnover, increased customer expectations for seamless service, and vast amounts of data.

"The contact center environment has gotten very complex," she asserts. "Over the last 20 years we've added many channels, including self-service options, and this has generated a large volume of data about customers. Generative AI has the scalability to get that under control and make sense of it. I believe AI is going to transform contact center and customer handling just by virtue of its ability to assimilate a vast amount of data, summarize it, and find commonalities and exceptions in it."

But not all organizations with contact centers have wholeheartedly embraced gen AI—at least not yet. According to a survey by Harvard Business Review Analytic Services in April 2024 of 248 members of the *Harvard Business Review* audience, all involved in their organization's decisions about using (or not using) gen AI in the contact center, 27% say their organization has deployed gen AI in the contact center—either with early use cases (21%) or fully operational ones (6%). Forty-eight percent are in pre-deployment stages, in that they either

HIGHLIGHTS

70% of respondents at organizations moving forward with generative AI (gen AI) in the contact center say one of the benefits they're most aiming to realize is **better customer experience**.

48% of respondents at organizations moving forward with gen AI say **data privacy and security issues** are challenges they have faced in incorporating gen AI into the contact center.

42% of respondents whose organizations have not moved forward with gen AI in the contact center say their **tech infrastructure not being prepared** for gen AI integration is preventing their adoption.

Due to rounding, some figures in this report may not add up to 100%.

"The contact center environment has gotten very complex. Over the last 20 years we've added many channels, including self-service options, and this has generated a large volume of data about customers. Generative AI has the scalability to get that under control and make sense of it," says Mary Wardley, program vice president for customer care and customer relationship management (CRM), International Data Corp. (IDC).

have a plan for (16%) or are exploring/evaluating (32%) using gen AI in the contact center, while a quarter are not moving forward with gen AI at this time.

Certainly, committing to the technology presents challenges. Moreover, reaping the benefits of gen AI requires a focus on good design and change management, notes Nicholas Clark, partner and associate director for service and support operations in the London office of Boston-based global strategic consulting firm Boston Consulting Group (BCG).

"The benefits of gen AI are not a given," he explains. "From the work we've done over the past two years, we estimate about 30% of the effort in a big AI transformation of the contact center is about building the tools and the underlying tech infrastructure. The bigger effort—70%—is the people and process change that needs to go along with that." This side of the equation includes things like redesigning customer journeys, how teams are structured, what skills are needed, and training.

To move out of the exploratory phase of gen AI and into its deployment, customer service executives will need to address persistent challenges related to the technology infrastructure that underpins their contact center environment and the quality of their own knowledge bases, as well as the broader organizational hurdles of change management, security, and investment.

This report delves into how customer service executives are approaching today's increasingly AI-powered contact center. It also explores how organizations are overcoming challenges and risks to ensure that gen AI fulfills its promise of improved CX, better employee experience, and overall contact center efficiency.

An Early Test for Gen AI

Alongside code development and marketing, the contact center has emerged as one of the most popular early organizational tests for gen AI—and with good reason. Contact centers are expensive to run and struggle with high employee turnover, but they remain a critical customer interface and determiner of overall CX.

"When businesses approach gen AI, their focus is often on cost optimization and efficiency," says Charlie Mitchell, senior editor at *CX Today*, a global publication focused on customer experience technology based in Blackburn, U.K. "The contact center is still viewed by many as a cost center for businesses, so there's a natural fit," he says.

While "efficiency" and "productivity" are the gen AI watchwords capturing the attention of business executives, customer experience is a real motivation for deploying gen AI in the contact center, too. In fact, of those survey respondents whose organizations are moving forward with gen AI in the contact center (i.e., have deployed use cases, have a plan for use, or are exploring/evaluating potential use cases), a significant majority (70%) say one of the benefits they are aiming most to realize is better customer experience. This finding challenges the conventional wisdom of the past few years that cost savings are the biggest appeal of gen AI. Reduced contact center costs actually finish behind motivations such as better data-driven customer insights and improved self-service options for customers. **FIGURE 1**

BCG's Clark says his conversations with major organizations support the pervasive narrative of the contact center as a leading early use case for gen AI. "All my clients want to talk about gen AI at the moment," says Clark. "In my more than 20 years in this industry, the level of excitement and interest in a technology is greater than I've seen before." Clark believes much of this furor is due to the fact that gen AI directly answers some of the persistent issues contact center managers must deal with.

"What people can clearly see with generative AI is that it has capabilities that very nicely match up to the challenges you have in customer service," he asserts. "And it's not just the chief information officer or tech executives who get excited about it, but also those in operations who bear the cost of running customer service and delivering customer experience."

Generative AI is already being used in different ways in the contact center, including for assisting customer service representatives. "It's not just one thing," explains Clark. "In very broad terms, there are three main sources of value. The

first is self-service, where you have a bot that can completely interact with a customer and resolve an issue for them; the second—agent assist—is where gen AI supports human agents to be more effective and provide more accurate, more personalized answers for customers, more quickly."

The third source of value comes from gen AI's powerful analytical capabilities. "If I'm the head of customer service and I need to know why I've had a spike in calls, for example, I can now use gen AI to analyze that at scale, whereas historically, I'd have to phone around the contact center to try to get a sense of what's going on," Clark says. These three sources of value essentially galvanize to create a better customer experience overall.

The first category includes automated customer responses and agent assist, or copilot-style use cases, which take the pressure off busy contact centers by helping offload calls or improve the productivity of customer service representatives, and they currently represent the most popular use cases for early gen AI deployment. Some 77% of respondents say they are either already using or considering gen AI for automated or self-service responses, while 80% are using or considering gen AI for agent assist. **FIGURE 2**

Clark reports that organizations are starting to see compelling results from their early deployments. "In a recent discussion with clients across industries, we've observed those that have scaled these kinds of early use cases are fairly consistently seeing around an average 20% productivity improvement off the back of those tools," he says.

For Nik Willetts, chief executive officer of London-based TM Forum, an industry association that supports more than 850 global telecommunications companies, the common early use cases represent the easy wins of gen AI in the contact center. He believes true differentiation will lie elsewhere. "There's a lot of low-hanging fruit in the contact center, and you can have a sizable impact quickly," says Willetts. "So, organizations will probably quite quickly get to a similar point. The competitive advantage lies in what happens next."

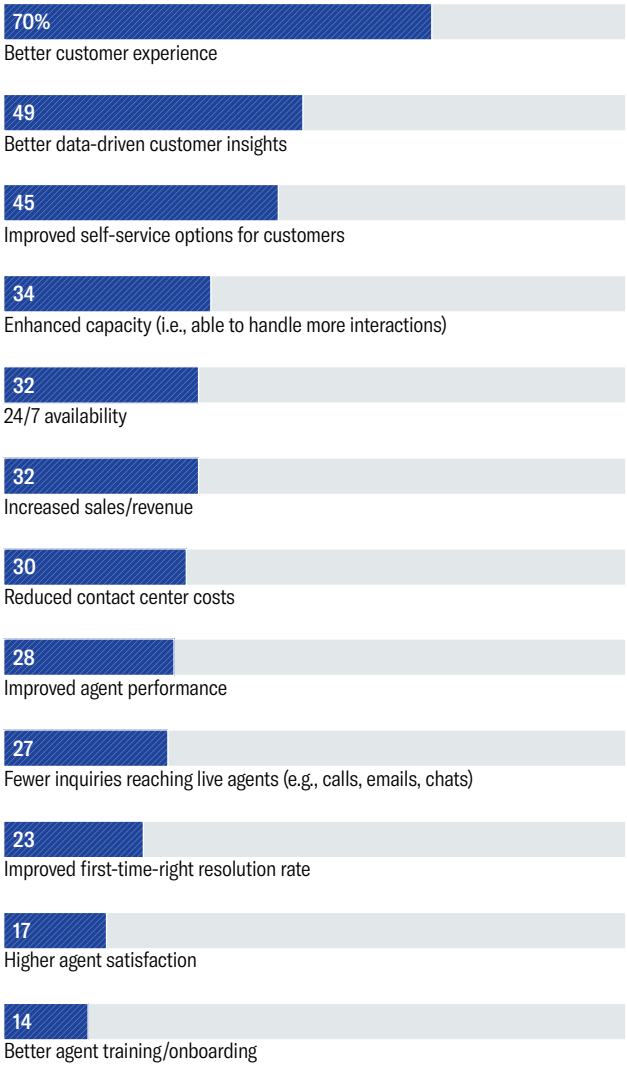
For Willetts, the opportunity beyond reducing cost and improving the efficiency of contact centers—and theoretically producing a better customer experience—is likely to be more-advanced end-to-end problem resolution. "This is where gen AI sits across the different expert teams in a contact center and starts stringing together their expertise to resolve complex problems as fast as possible," he says.

FIGURE 1

Customers Drive Gen AI Adoption Most

Better customer experience is the dominant reason for its use in the contact center

What benefits is your organization most aiming to realize from deploying gen AI in the contact center? *Select up to five.*



Base: 186 respondents whose organizations have deployed use cases of, have a plan for, or are exploring/evaluating potential use cases for gen AI in the contact center. Not shown: 2% Don't know, 1% Other, 0% None.

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, April 2024

Lessons from Early Adopters

To realize such tantalizing benefits across the gamut of gen AI use cases and applications, organizations will first need to overcome a range of challenges. These span everything from technical hurdles to the poor quality of contact center knowledge bases themselves.

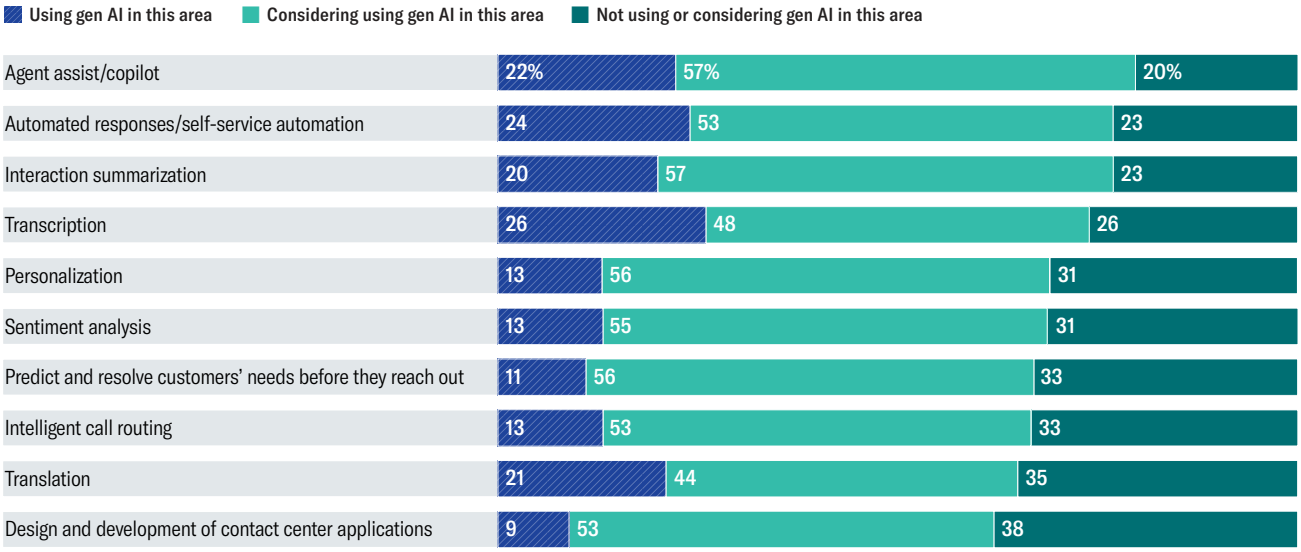
For those companies that are already moving forward with gen AI in the contact center, data security, talent, and unclear adoption plans are the main challenges they are dealing with. Data privacy and security issues are the top-cited challenge, selected by 48% of survey respondents, followed

FIGURE 2

Harnessing Gen AI to Help Serve Customers

Automated responses and agent assist are prioritized use cases in the contact center

To what extent is your organization exploring the use of generative AI in the following areas of the contact center?



Base: 209 to 226 respondents, varies by row; excludes "Don't know."

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, April 2024

by a lack of necessary technical skills or talent (39%), an unclear roadmap for execution (38%), budget limitations (34%), and issues with the quality of data knowledge sources (34%). **FIGURE 3** Given the importance of—and often strict legal requirements for—protecting sensitive or personally identifiable customer information, it is little surprise that data privacy and security top the list of reported challenges. Clark lists the three main risks that are worrying companies as data privacy, hallucination (where gen AI provides an answer that is wrong or made up), and attacks by malicious actors trying to extract sensitive data from a gen AI application. He has ideas about addressing the first two.

"The first risk—data privacy and security—can be addressed through sensible technology design and architecture, and by not feeding personally identifiable or customer data into a large language model (LLM) that might be used publicly by someone else," he explains. "And there are a lot of people working on smart designs to make sure that doesn't happen." The second risk, according to Clark, is hallucination, or the risk that gen AI will provide an answer that is not fully accurate.

"A lot of the focus for this particular risk is on constraining what the bot can answer," explains Clark. "That means setting the context up front in terms of what topics the bot can accommodate, but I think solutions are going to get a lot more sophisticated, and we are starting to see companies using one LLM to test and validate another, for example."

Even when clear guardrails are in place or the necessary talent is available to set up and manage these tools, businesses can still get stuck in execution. Much of this can come down to how digitally mature a company is to begin with. Research from New York consulting firm McKinsey & Co. indicates that the gap between digital leaders and laggards is growing, and over the past three years this spread in digital and AI maturity has grown 60%.[1] McKinsey attributes much of this difference to a holistic set of capabilities that digital leaders invest in across strategy, organization and talent, operating model, technology, data, and adoption and scaling.

How companies work with their vendors is also important, according to Willetts. "Many of the companies we work with—if they are following our advice—are making sure they are 'smart buyers,' which means they know how their model is trained and have a level of control over that," he says. "This means that if they ever need to change from one gen AI model to another in the future, they can do so."

Linked to this idea is the very premise that not all LLMs are created equal, adds Willetts, which is a factor critical in forming a winning execution plan, too. "Not all gen AI LLMs are the same and we see leading companies experimenting

“The first risk—data privacy and security—can be addressed through sensible technology design and architecture, and by not feeding personally identifiable or customer data into a large language model (LLM) that might be used publicly by someone else.”

Nicholas Clark, partner and associate director for service and support operations, Boston Consulting Group (BCG)

with three or more LLM providers, where one might be really good with dealing with customers and another is better at transcription. LLMs are a bit like humans in that they have different strengths and weaknesses." Willetts believes that's important knowledge when adopting gen AI because it forces companies to look at a range of options—both to avoid lock-in and to find the best model for the job.

Technology, Security, and Cost Barriers

Meanwhile, those organizations that have yet to harness generative AI in the contact center face several barriers preventing them from deploying this technology, giving early adopters a head start to realizing the benefits for customers, employees, and business efficiency.

This slower-to-adopt group is most commonly coming up against tech infrastructure challenges, data privacy and security concerns, and funding woes. Just under half (42%) of these respondents say their tech infrastructure is not prepared for gen AI integration, 39% cite data privacy and security concerns, and 32% say a lack of budget is preventing them from getting gen AI into the contact center.

On the technology and infrastructure front, cloud adoption is proving to be a big differentiator between leaders and laggards, according to Mitchell of *CX Today*. "Around two-thirds of contact centers aren't in the cloud yet, and that could slow adoption down to some extent over the next five years," he says.

In this respect, there appears to be a difference between large and small organizations. Among the bigger telco organizations that Willetts works with at TM Forum, most have already moved their CRM to the cloud. "There's probably also a correlation between cloud adopters and early adopters of gen AI, because if you're in the cloud, you're probably a more forward-thinking technology organization and therefore more ready to adopt a new technology," he asserts. "And that filters through to a range of attitudes toward risk tolerance, too."

While it is technically possible to deploy gen AI in an on-premises contact center, it is more difficult and expensive to do so, and companies that choose to go this route—often due to legal or regulatory issues that govern where they store customer data—can miss out on a range of other benefits, according to Wardley. "Of course, some industries have to be on premises, but there is a halo effect on the technology side of being in the cloud," she says. "It opens ecosystems of compatible products and reduces the burden on your IT staff having to maintain servers, which means you can start doing other things like rethinking business processes."

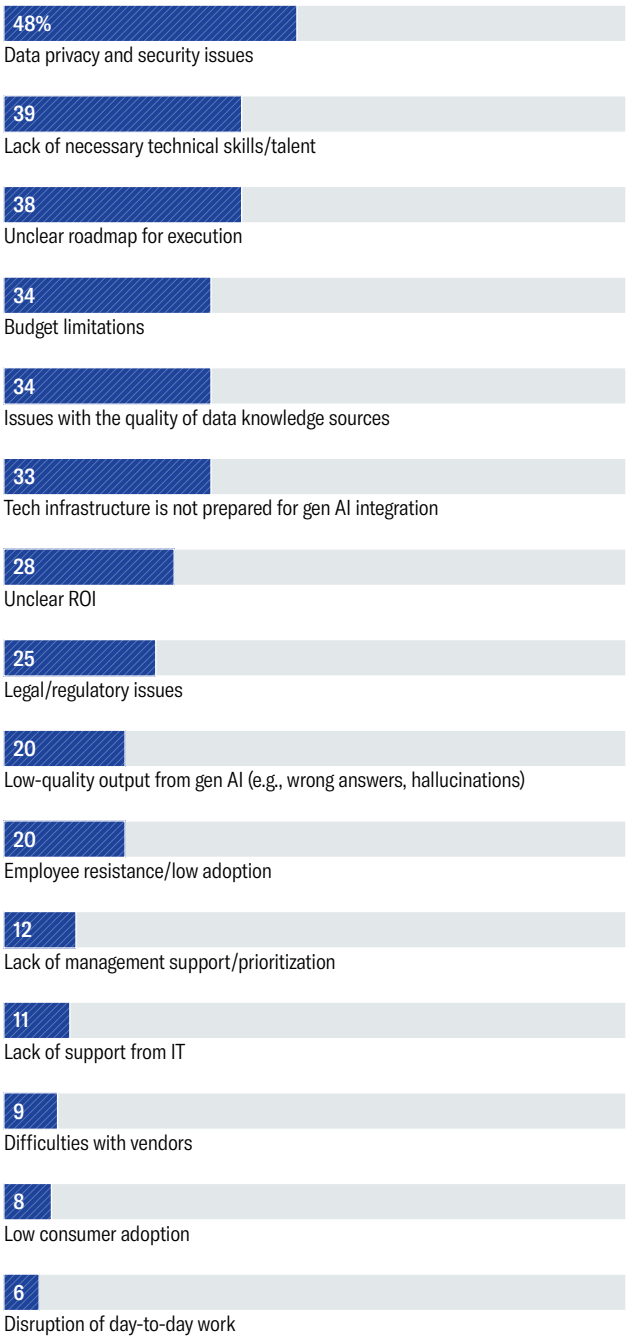
Unlimited cloud storage is also important when it comes to storing and analyzing the vast volumes of call recordings and transcripts that are created daily within contact centers. "In the old days, you had to sample calls to work out what was

FIGURE 3

Early Adopters Tackle Data Privacy and Security

Such issues are the top challenges they face when incorporating gen AI into contact centers

What challenges has your organization faced in incorporating gen AI into the contact center? *Select all that apply.*



Base: 186 respondents whose organizations have deployed use cases of, have a plan for, or are exploring/evaluating potential use cases for gen AI in the contact center. Not shown: 8% Don't know, 2% None, 1% Other.

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, April 2024

“Not all gen AI LLMs are the same and we see leading companies experimenting with three or more LLM providers, where one might be really good with dealing with customers and another is better at transcription. LLMs are a bit like humans in that they have different strengths and weaknesses.”

Nik Willetts, chief executive officer, TM Forum

happening in the call center," says Wardley. "You couldn't analyze all of them, so someone would have to sit and listen to some of them. But now with high-speed technologies working in real time and available cloud storage, we have 100% call recording, and by using tags and generative AI, we can start to find correlations between certain phrases, explicit and implicit intents. Customers phrase a request for termination of a service in many ways, including indirectly. A phrase such as 'I'm unhappy with my service' indicates a propensity to churn, for example."

This ability to drill down into issues' root causes is set to transform how companies think about and design their customer experience, and this change of perspective is already becoming apparent, says Wardley. "I've spoken recently to companies that are in the cloud, and one of the things they've said is that cloud is enabling them to be more outcomes focused and not just focused on KPIs for specific things that we know about and currently measure in the contact center," she notes. "What are the broader outcomes that we want to target?"

A concern shared by some adopters and non-adopters alike when deploying gen AI in the contact center is the quality of their own knowledge sources. Around a third (34%) of those moving forward with gen AI in the contact center say issues with the quality of their data or knowledge sources are proving a challenge. This is a barrier preventing adoption for nearly a quarter (23%) of the non-adopters, too.

"One of the big lessons so far is that a company's knowledge management strategy is more important than ever when it comes to gen AI," warns Mitchell. "Because everyone is always so busy in the contact center, there's often a lot of out-of-date information in these knowledge bases. So, it's vital to keep a human in the loop until a proper knowledge strategy is in place."

Mitchell foresees that gen AI itself may offer a solution to the knowledge issue. "You can leverage particular gen AI applications that analyze successful call transcripts regarding a specific customer query, and they will work out the optimal contact handling process and create a guide that other [human] agents can follow to resolve that issue," he says. "So, I think there's going to be lot more use cases like this of AI creating the data that trains the AI."

For those without a knowledge strategy, the risks are very real. The old "garbage in, garbage out" maxim has been around for years, but Willetts is surprised by how many companies continue to overlook this seemingly obvious problem.

"A great example of 'garbage in, garbage out' is a company that tried to automate RFP [request for proposal] responses," Willetts asserts. "They pointed a gen AI tool at their last decade of RFP responses and found that it generated a very average RFP response in return. And that's because— guess what?—the average person creates a pretty average RFP response to start with. It's the same in the contact center. You have to invest the time in defining the best data to train on, otherwise you're going to get average or disappointing results."

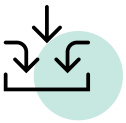
Around a third (34%) of those moving forward with gen AI in the contact center say issues with the quality of their data or knowledge sources are proving a challenge. This is a barrier preventing adoption for nearly a quarter (23%) of the non-adopters, too.

Even if the knowledge issue is well understood by companies, it's not necessarily that simple to solve, he admits. "I think the challenge for a lot of gen AI use cases generally is getting high-enough-quality data to train the model, and then testing relentlessly to make sure the model is giving you accurate answers—and the answers that you actually want to give customers," Willetts says. "And that's a big challenge because most call center agents actually do a pretty poor job of capturing calls, categorizing those calls, and so on, either because they don't have the time or they don't see the value. So, it's not like you are pointing gen AI at this brilliant set of records from previous calls to begin with."

Recasting the Customer Service Representative

The varying skills and experience of customer service representatives, which Willetts alludes to, has been an ongoing struggle for contact center managers for as long as contact centers have existed. Add to this picture the traditionally high churn of customer service representatives in contact centers and it's clear to see why so many companies are so eager to explore how gen AI might help.

For one, gen AI can greatly speed up the time it takes to train a new customer service representative and deploy them in front of customers, explains Willetts. "We're seeing a heavy reliance growing on gen AI to make all [human] contact center agents like the best agent, with gen AI learning which answers tend to get the right customer sentiment and then proliferating that across the contact center," he notes. Using gen AI also allows more training to happen on the job, and that reduces the time-to-impact of a new customer service representative.



"They pointed a gen AI tool at their last decade of RFP responses and found that it generated a very average RFP response in return. And that's because—guess what?—the average person creates a pretty average RFP response to start with. It's the same in the contact center. You have to invest the time in defining the best data to train on, otherwise you're going to get average or disappointing results," says TM Forum's Willetts.

But the impact of gen AI on contact center employees will go much deeper than training and development. There will be both positive and negative effects, and Clark expects to see a change not just in the number of contact center staff over time but also in the very nature of contact center roles. "The obvious impact that everyone goes to straight away is that if you automate a lot of stuff, there will be less of that specific task for people to do," he asserts. "But the shape and type of work in customer service is going to change quite radically, too."

In this respect, roles within the contact center may become more content-focused and technical in nature, with fewer roles and less workload related to directly supporting customers. "But there will be more work for people to do in terms of creating and updating knowledge content, managing the bots—assessing their performance, adapting them for business change or regulatory change, and continually improving their performance—plus managing all the security," says Clark. "It won't just be a pure reduction of numbers."

Despite the radical change to come, Clark says that most customer service representatives in the companies he works with are actually excited about the technology because it is able to solve many of the day-to-day challenges they face. "Often, they'll get a question they don't know how to answer, or a customer is dissatisfied because they've had to repeat their issue three or four times— or the [human] agent needs to navigate up to 15 different systems to get the answer," he recounts. "If gen AI takes away that stress, there's intrinsic value to it."

Much is said about the potential of gen AI to free up employees for higher-value work of the type that Clark describes, and Mitchell asserts that companies need to make plans to support these changes. "We often hear that when you introduce AI, you take away all the really simple transactional queries, and [human] agents will focus on the more interesting customer cases," Mitchell asserts.

But changing the role also has the effect of changing the job description. "They will need to be better at certain skills like problem-solving and leveraging technology," Mitchell explains. "That means agents may become higher paid because the work is harder, and maybe they'll need to take more breaks, too."

Wardley believes these problem-solving skills are going to become crucial, given customer interactions today. "The nature of customer issues are very different compared to 20 years ago, and we need more [human] agent time to service them because our world has gotten more complex. Whereas previously a customer may have called in to get help resetting a password, now they could get a call asking why a smart home device is not working or why a notification wasn't delivered from a personal medical device." To Wardley's mind, the customer service representative of the future is a detective using AI to solve such complex queries.

In this AI-driven future, the role of human agents will continue to evolve even further, including how they interact with increasingly advanced AI systems. Already, autonomous agents, which are also called gen AI agents, can go beyond delivering automated responses to perform a range of complex customer service tasks without any human intervention.

McKinsey asserts that gen AI is rapidly transforming what such autonomous agents can do, enabling them to move "from thought to action" to "execute complex, multistep workflows across a digital world."[2]

"While versions of these software systems have existed for years, the natural-language capabilities of gen AI unveil new possibilities, enabling systems that can plan their actions, use online tools to complete those tasks, collaborate with other agents and people, and learn to improve their performance," McKinsey continues. "Gen AI agents eventually could act as skilled virtual coworkers, working with humans in a seamless and natural manner."[3]

This potential of autonomous agents to learn continuously from the best examples of human service—as well as their ability to function independently of human agents—could spell the next wave of human agent transformation that Mitchell describes. As autonomous agents handle increasing volumes of queries and transactions, human agents may be able to focus exclusively on the value-driven tasks that require

critical thinking and empathy, with autonomous agents also taking on the task of keeping knowledge bases up to date, which is something busy contact centers often struggle to find time to do.[4]

The Way Forward

Daunting as it may be to move ahead and persevere through the challenges and barriers, the rewards of generative AI in the contact center are too big to ignore. With executive support for gen AI also generally very high, contact centers have an exciting opportunity to leverage this technology to benefit customers, employees, and the business itself through lower costs and higher productivity.

Companies are taking a range of actions to get ready for gen AI in the contact center. According to survey respondents, the top three ways companies are getting prepared for the gen AI-powered contact center of the future is by building a business plan (49%), launching pilots or proofs of concept (45%), and cleaning or improving their data and knowledge sources (38%). **FIGURE 4**

In all these things, companies are managing to move surprisingly quickly, says Clark. "What's so striking is the pace of development," he stresses. "One thing about generative AI compared to other technologies is that it's very easy to set up a proof of concept. The models are already pretrained. Those companies that did that well are now pushing ahead and scaling ahead of their competitors, and we do believe this is going to become a point of differentiation, especially in industries where customer service really matters, like banking or telecoms. If there's a lot of customer service need in your business and a lot of requirements for customer trust, then this is an opportunity to differentiate."

Wardley says those organizations that haven't moved ahead yet need not panic. "Don't feel bad if you haven't jumped in," she suggests. "You haven't missed the wave. But having said that—get educated about this technology. Address your knowledge sources. Think about what LLMs you might want to source. And finally, do a bit of white space thinking. Step back and look at what you aren't doing now in terms of customer service and experience, instead of only looking at the problems you already have that you might want to solve."

FIGURE 4

The Preparedness Effort for Gen AI

Building a business plan for contact centers' use of the technology tops the list

What efforts is your organization putting resources toward, if any, to prepare for gen AI in the contact center? *Select all that apply.*

Base: 248 respondents. Not shown: 4% Don't know, 2% Other.

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, April 2024

Willetts advises companies to move forward in three ways if they haven't started. "First, go out and speak to people who've done it, and tech providers can help with that," he says. "Second, decide where it's going to have the greatest impact first, because learning how to implement these models takes time and is a skill in its own right. And third, be ready for the challenges—be it in navigating the risks with legal and regulatory teams, getting your data and knowledge in order, or doing the prep work to procure the right model."

Endnotes

1 Bryce Hall, Eric Lamarre, Rob Levin, et al., "Rewired and Running Ahead: Digital and AI Leaders Are Leaving the Rest Behind," McKinsey & Co., January 12, 2024. https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/mckinsey-digital/our-insights/rewired-and-running-ahead-digital-and-ai-leaders-are-leaving-the-rest-behind.

2 "Why Agents Are the Next Frontier of Generative AI," McKinsey & Co., July 24, 2024. https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/mckinsey-digital/our-insights/why-agents-are-the-next-frontier-of-generative-ai.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

“Finally, do a bit of white space thinking. Step back and look at what you aren’t doing now in terms of customer service and experience, instead of only looking at the problems you already have that you might want to solve,” says IDC’s Wardley.

METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Harvard Business Review Analytic Services surveyed 248 members of the *Harvard Business Review* audience via an online survey fielded in April 2024. Respondents qualified to complete the survey if their organization had a contact center and if their role was involved in the organization's decisions about using, or not using, generative AI within the contact center.

Size of Organization

25%
10,000 or more employees

28%
1,000–9,999 employees

12%
500–999 employees

35%
50–499 employees

Seniority

35%
Executive management/ board members

40%
Senior management

18%
Middle management

7%
Other grades

Industry Sectors

13%
Technology

12%
Manufacturing

11%
Financial services

10%
Health care

All other sectors less than 8% each.

Job Functions

25%
General/executive management

12%
Sales/business development/ customer service

8%
Administration

8%
HR/training

All other functions less than 8% each.

Regions

48%
North America

21%
Europe

20%
Asia Pacific

6%
Middle East/Africa

5%
Latin America

Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Harvard Business Review
ANALYTIC SERVICES

ABOUT US

Harvard Business Review Analytic Services is an independent commercial research unit within Harvard Business Review Group, conducting research and comparative analysis on important management challenges and emerging business opportunities. Seeking to provide business intelligence and peer-group insight, each report is published based on the findings of original quantitative and/or qualitative research and analysis. Quantitative surveys are conducted with the HBR Advisory Council, HBR's global research panel, and qualitative research is conducted with senior business executives and subject-matter experts from within and beyond the *Harvard Business Review* author community. Email us at hbranalyticservices@hbr.org.

hbr.org/hbr-analytic-services

MCCRE52311124