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The State of AI in the Contact Center

A 2025 ICMI Industry Practices Report

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Table of Contents

03 NiCE Perspective

05 Executive Summary

06 Survey Methodology

07 Customer Service: The Benchmark for AI Success

12 Becoming AI-Ready: Learn, Listen, Adapt

17 Becoming AI-Resilient: Anticipate, Address, Overcome

21 Becoming AI-Resolute: Identify, Invest, Inspire

26 Respondent Demographics

29 About ICMI & NiCE

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The Real Price of "Good Enough" AI: Where You're Losing Value

Organizations across every industry are feeling the pull of artificial intelligence (AI). That drive to check the innovation box is so strong that they often settle for a disjointed solution—shifting to a state of inertia instead of supercharging their customer service strategy.

Despite substantial investments in AI and customer experience technology—with 92% of C-suite executives reporting AI deployments—just 42% say they have yet to realize ROI or value, according to Constellation Research.

To start realizing the true potential of AI, let's demystify five specific areas where a "good enough" strategy is silently undermining strategic goals in the contact center and beyond.

Disjointed point solutions

Incomplete AI solutions are just that—incomplete. The temptation to solve each customer experience challenge with a separate point solution creates a dangerous pattern. Need a new digital channel? Bolt on a solution. Need analytics for that channel? Add a separate tool.

This approach may seem efficient initially, but results in more fragmented, time-consuming customer journeys and additional overhead maintenance. For example, Metrigy found 74% of agents have to juggle three to eight apps just to access the information they need.

Organizations that neglect strategic AI integration find themselves paying twice: once for the incremental solutions, and again in missed opportunities and customer frustration. A single pane of glass (SPOG), or platform, provides enterprise-wide visibility into various sources of information and data to create a comprehensive single source.

Productivity mirage

Treating AI as just another automation tool can create a productivity mirage with efficiency gaps. Organizations celebrate technological advancement without critically examining whether these capabilities truly boost effectiveness or simply generate digital busywork. Why create a bot that adds unnecessary steps instead of resolving issues—or generate a report that no one will read?

At advanced stages, AI becomes integrated into organizational DNA. Systems perform complex tasks with remarkable sophistication—from real-time translation to automated quality assurance and personalized training.

As AI maturity grows, perspectives shift. Large language models (LLMs) enable more conversational interactions, transforming mechanical processes into nuanced problem-solving. Analytics evolve beyond basic data collection to reveal patterns. Employees begin to view AI as a powerful collaborator.

Quiet customer exodus

When dealing with brands, customers abide by the three strikes law. Three bad experiences are all it takes for a customer to leave a company for good, according to Metrigy's research.

Consistency in every customer touchpoint can be a constant with the right technology. And customers value consistency —

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NiCE Perspective

—as The State of CX report found an 88% difference in customer sentiment and 31% in talk time between the top and bottom performing agents.

AI-powered tools add finesse to customer service—standardizing service delivery and reducing agent variability while enhancing both customer and employee experiences through improved consistency, decreased burnout and stronger engagement.

Inefficient processes

The greatest returns come from orchestrating both AI and human agents on a unified platform with centralized knowledge. This creates streamlined operations where each component handles what it does best.

The results speak for themselves: reduced average handle time, lower operational costs, improved customer satisfaction and superior precision that eliminates costly errors.

For example, Sony Electronics used AI-powered analytics to determine 40% of their inquiries were candidates for automation---achieved nearly 16% greater containment with conversational self-service.

Adding self-service workflows based on Lowe's goals and agent input resulted in saving $1 million in operational costs.

To achieve this transformation, organizations need a technology partner with a comprehensive AI platform delivering end-to-end customer service automation. Only then can they shed inefficient, shift from reactive to proactive processes and unlock substantial ROI hidden within operational optimization.

Lack of refinement

Successful AI implementation requires methodical refinement of existing operational ecosystems.

Organizations can:

- Begin with a thorough operations assessment to identify structural limitations hiding beneath surface-level compatibility.
- Conduct workflow audits to uncover high-friction areas in customer journeys. Such sticking points often conceal the greatest ROI potential.
- Unify fragmented information sources.
- Prioritize capabilities that address critical customer pain points.
- Implement robust monitoring systems for real-time improvements.

Even the most modern AI solutions require ongoing measurement and adjustment to maintain effectiveness in an ever-changing business environment. Only then can organizations reverse the cost of AI neglect, and race ahead of competitors.

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Executive Summary

"AI is not your strategy. Your customer access strategy needs to inform your AI, not the other way around. Don't put the cart before the horse."

Those comments, given by ICMI founder Brad Cleveland in a recent webinar on the state of the industry, nails the predicament facing many contact center leaders today.

What role will artificial intelligence play in the contact center? What impact will it have on agents? Will it drive productivity and make work more enjoyable, or could it create greater complexity and disruption? How will it change the customer experience, and will customers embrace it or deny it?

ICMI's 2025 State of AI in the Contact Center Survey collected input on these questions from 113 contact center leaders across the industry. What we got back is a snapshot of a community on the prowl – for AI tools, expertise, and insight — to understand how it can best serve their customers amid an increasingly complex market.

In the eyes of these leaders, AI could be a powerful ally in eliminating such complexities. A third of respondents say the top challenge they'd like to fix with better technology is the complexity resulting from disjointed data, channels, and endpoint tools. Even as some express hope that AI could help unify these systems, a quarter of respondents are skeptical that their current IT would even be compatible with AI.

More than half say they're already using AI in the contact center, although a good portion of these are very early in the process. It's a good sign that many are moving ahead with AI plans by starting small. Nearly all respondents see AI progress through the lens of iteration and refinement, not as a one-and-done event.

However, contact center executives have their work cut out for them. While this group is highly optimistic about AI's potential influence in the contact center, the perception is that agents and customers may require more proof. Not everyone is convinced that AI is working in their best interest, and the onus is on leaders to demonstrate how AI can do more help than harm.

Many respondents anticipate that AI efforts will encounter difficulties along the way, such as integration troubles, prohibitively high costs, and a shortage of in-house expertise to implement it properly. However, many still believe that such pursuits are worth it in the long run, and are spending accordingly.

Eight in 10 respondents believe their organization will increase funding for AI in the next 12 months. Their rationale is that AI will improve worker productivity, eliminate tedious drudge work, and free agents to focus on more worthwhile problems. A majority think AI usage will lead to better customer service and faster resolution.

Ultimately, ICMI's hope is that this report provides contact center decision-makers a lens into how their peers are thinking about AI and the kind of value it brings to customer service. AI is just a tool, but with the right approach, it could help organizations expand customer access in ways they never anticipated.

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Survey Methodology

Survey Name: The State of AI in the Contact Center: A 2025 ICMI Industry Practices Report

Survey Date: April 2025

Number of Respondents: 113 contact center, customer service, and IT technical support professionals from organizations of all sizes. The margin of error for the total respondent base (n=113) is +/-9 percentage points.

Methodology: The survey queried representatives from support organizations across multiple industries to understand contemporary perceptions of artificial intelligence in contact centers. Survey respondents are predominantly employed in customer service, contact center operations, and technical support roles. Most respondents are leaders in their organizations, including contact center directors, managers, and executives in IT and non-IT disciplines. ICMI conducted the survey online in April 2025. Respondents were recruited via emailed invitations containing an embedded link to the survey. The invitations were sent to a select group of ICMI's qualified database. ICMI was responsible for all survey design, administration, data collection, and analysis. These procedures were carried out in strict accordance with standard market research practices and existing U.S. privacy laws.

92%

of respondents are contact center directors, managers, or executives in their organizations.

* See demographics section for full breakdown

Use this report! If you want to incorporate one of the charts into your presentation(s), we only ask that you provide citation: ICMI, "The State of AI in the Contact Center: A 2025 Industry Practices Report," https://www.ICMI.com.

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Customer Service: The Benchmark for AI Success

Channel gaps = service delays

Great customer service requires coordination across multiple channels, departments, platforms, and disciplines. When these channels break down or fail to communicate with one another, it can create unnecessary delays that leave customers in the lurch.

AI can help agents anticipate customer needs and make intelligent recommendations, but its accuracy depends on how well these systems cooperate to convey the customer journey. As the data shows, very few respondents believe their org effectively leverages multiple channels and departments to resolve issues before escalation becomes necessary **(Figure 1).** A majority (64%) do this somewhat well (albeit with gaps here and there), while 28% hint at major incompatibilities affecting their channel ecosystem.

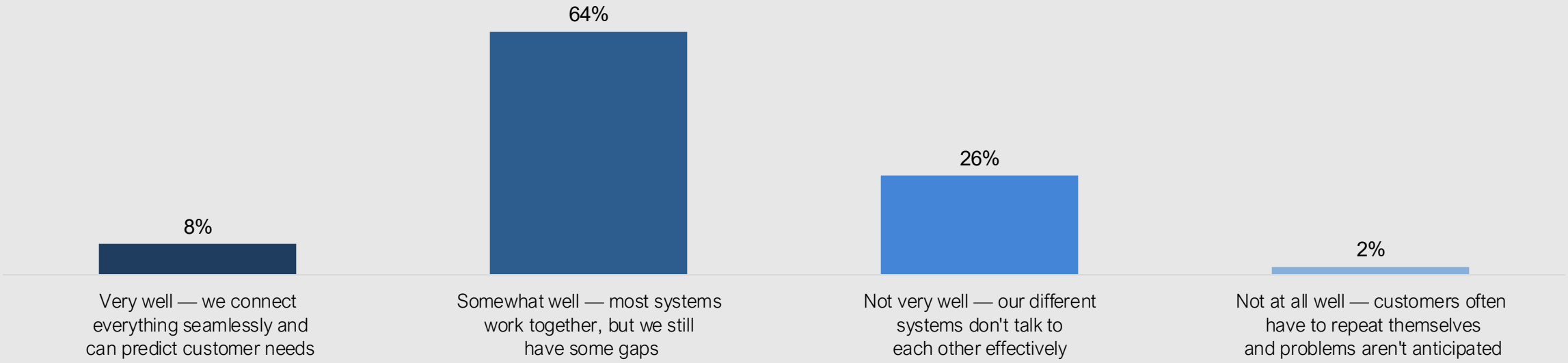
'Somewhat well' might sound like a passing grade, but imagine if that evaluation were applied to another industry. Would you still board your plane if you found out its systems work mostly well together, barring the occasional malfunction?

92%

of respondents acknowledge some level of miscoordination between systems and channels that hampers quick resolution.

Figure 1.

How well does your organization leverage different channels and departments to resolve customer service issues before needing to escalate?



Base: 113 respondents; Percents may not add up to 100% due to rounding

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Complexities on the rise

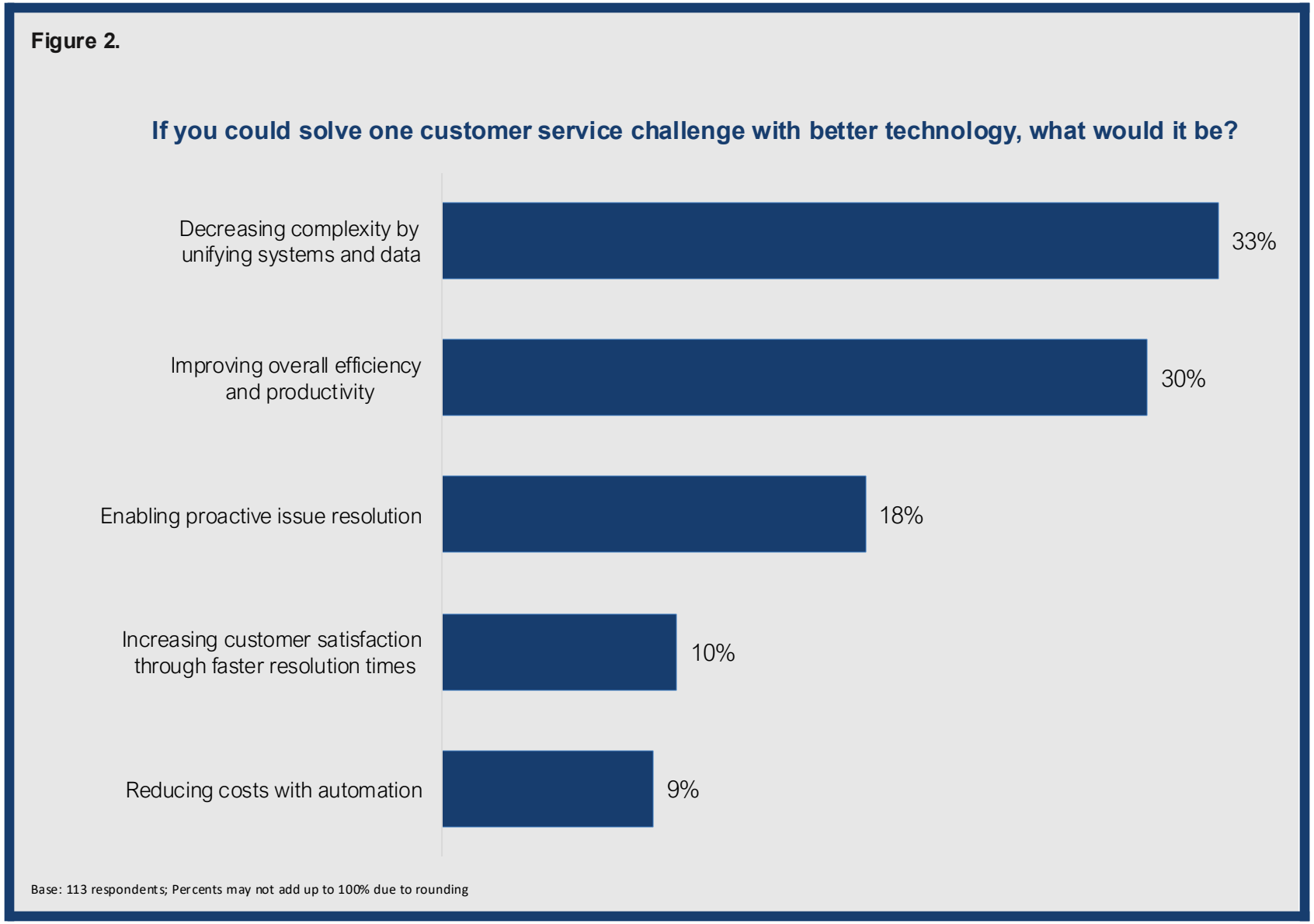
Contact centers, once viewed primarily as efficiency-focused cost centers, are now expected to play a leading role in shaping customer experience and value-driven outcomes. But in trying to meet these lofty expectations, contact centers may quickly find themselves boxed in by greater and greater complexity.

These complexities span everything from managing disparate endpoint tools, to preserving customer interactions across channels, to deciding on what to automate, to diagnosing performance gaps, and more.

So it's no surprise that respondents are eager to de-clutter this mess. When asked which customer service challenge they'd like to solve with the aid of better technology, 33% opt for reducing complexity by unifying systems and data (Figure 2). Almost as many would like to see technology help improve overall efficiency and productivity (30%).

This bodes well for generative AI platforms, which contact centers can use to consolidate multiple data sources and systems under one roof. AI can effectively serve as a translator between these systems, reading and relaying pertinent information

Figure 2.



Base: 113 respondents; Percents may not add up to 100% due to rounding

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to agents so they have more context and insight when responding to a customer issue.

This also makes AI a powerful companion to omnichannel support. As more customers engage with companies in non-traditional channels (e.g., social media, messaging apps, video chat), it puts enormous strain on agents to process and make sense of all these interactions at once. AI systems, on the other hand, can be trained to monitor interactions across all channels, quickly generate a robust customer profile, and make informed recommendations to agents based on observed customer behavior, history, and past interactions.

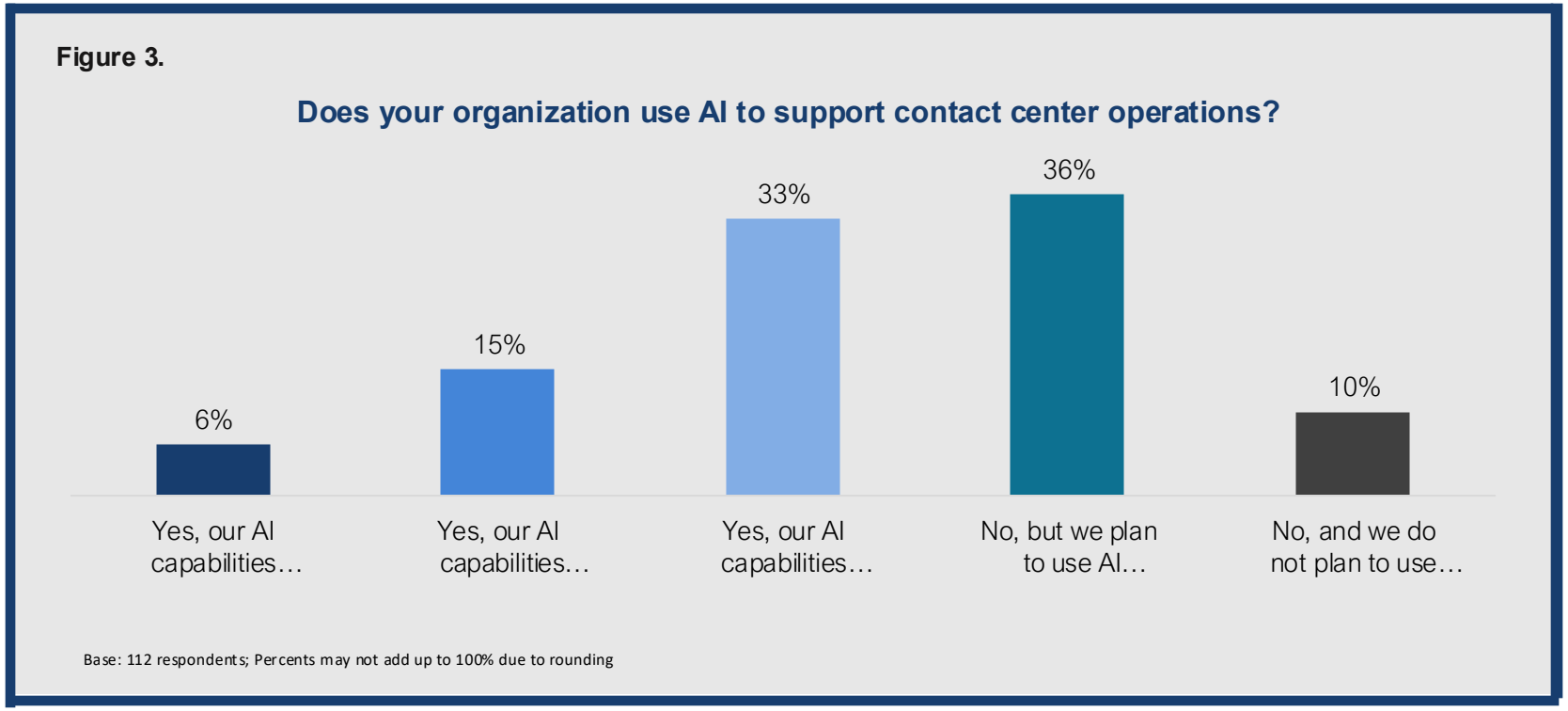
AI is on the way and here to stay

Is AI still just a distant prospect or have contact centers already begun putting it to good use?

The results are in. Fifty-four percent of respondents say their contact centers now feature some degree of AI functionality (Figure 3). Thirty-three percent have just taken their first steps, 15% are deploying basic instances, and only 6% would describe their AI capabilities as "advanced" in nature.

While forty-six percent have not yet added AI capabilities, 36% say there are plans to do so in the future. Only 10% do not expect AI to be introduced at some point in time, citing concerns around cost, security, and lack of resources (time, knowledge) to set up properly.

Figure 3.



"Speak to human"

Even as respondents see AI playing a greater role in the future, there is concern over its customer-facing potential.

Thirty-one percent believe the biggest challenge in using AI to improve service will be ensuring that customer interactions still feel personal and human (Figure 4). Are customers willing to trade empathy for efficiency? Can AI learn from human agents how to handle difficult interactions and steer customers with a gentle hand? Will customers still feel like they are the priority under this new arrangement? These are the questions contact centers are grappling with as they prepare AI deployments.

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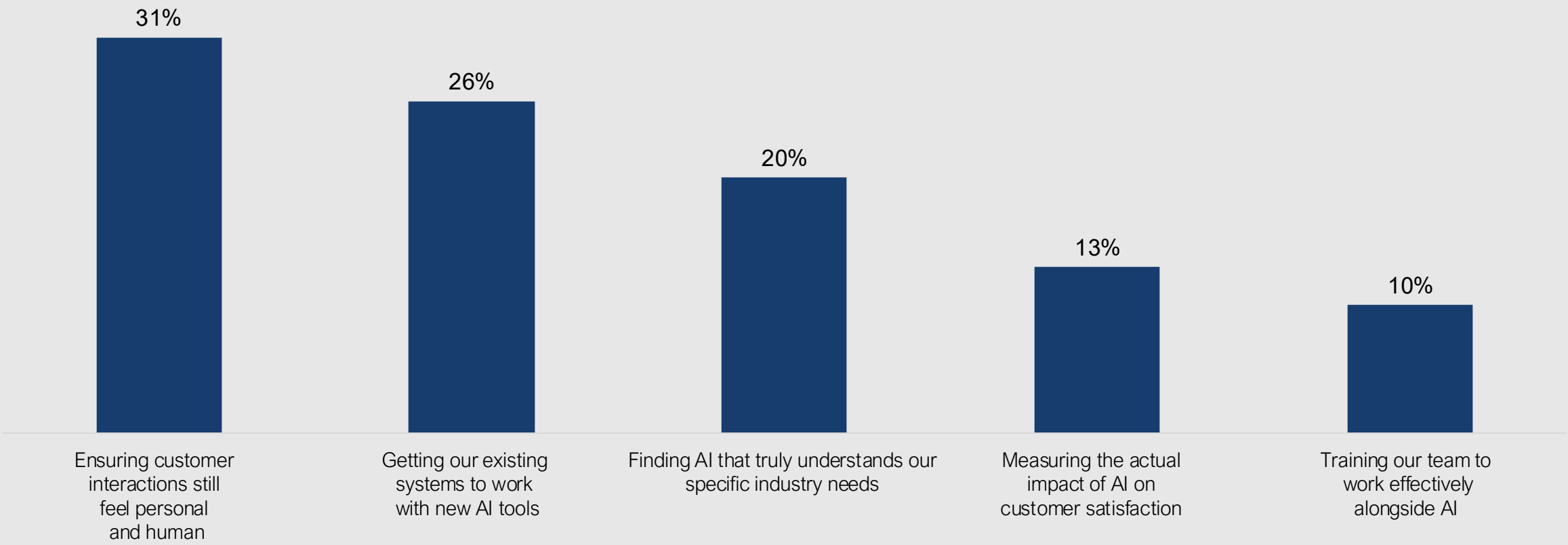
Figure 4.

What do you consider the biggest challenge in using AI to improve customer service?



Base: 102 respondents; Percents may not add up to 100% due to rounding

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Becoming AI-Ready:

Learn, Listen, Adapt

Collecting feedback on AI use

For contact centers to become AI-ready, it's vital for leaders to listen and collect feedback from a broad group of stakeholders regarding how such AI tools might be used – and the impact they could have.

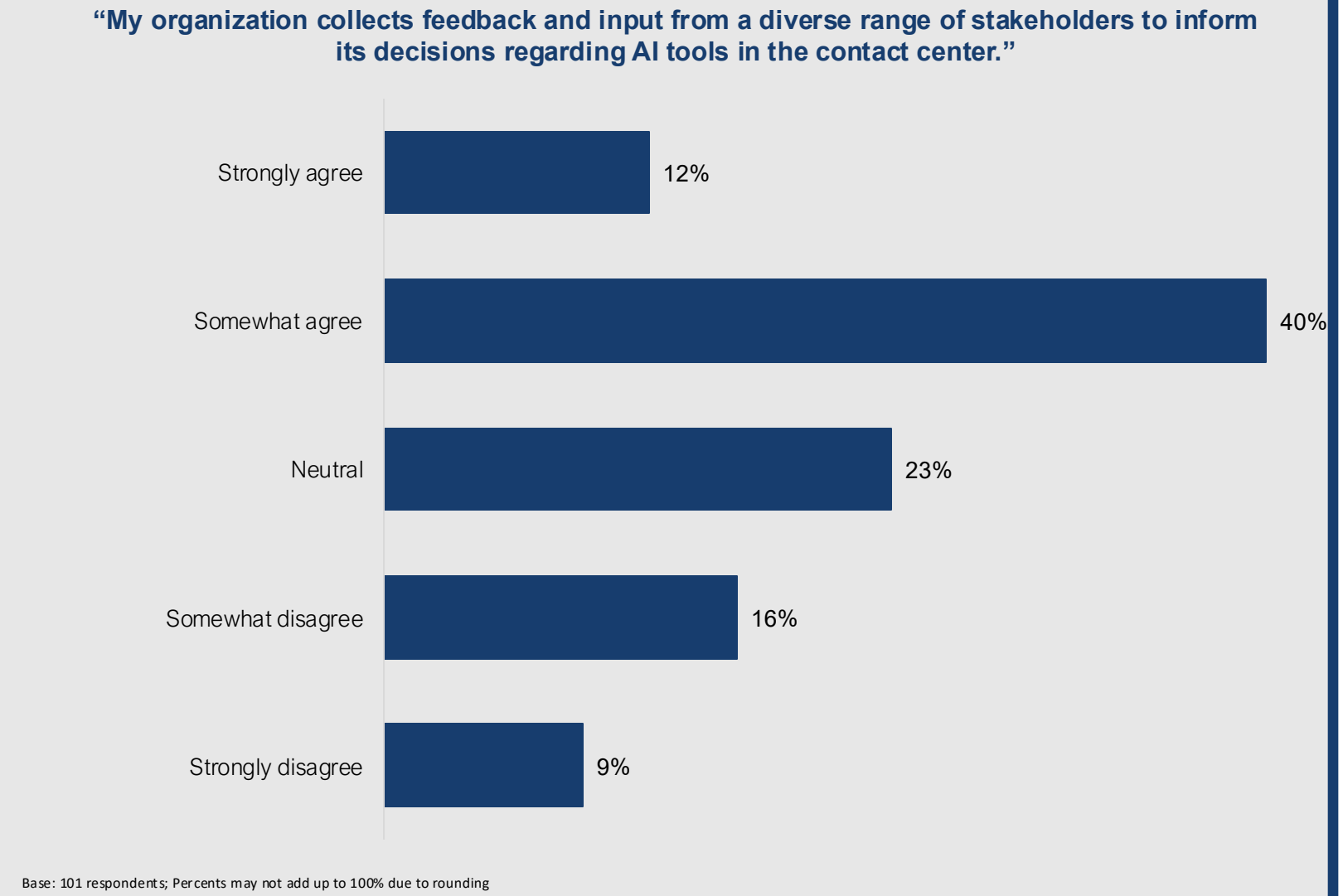
Employees will want to know how AI might affect their day-to-day responsibilities and performance expectations. Customers may have valuable feedback or reactions to AI demos that might never have been raised organically by those on the inside. Other business units will have a unique perspective on ways that AI could remove silos and create greater collaboration across departments.

On this note, respondents generally approve of how their organization solicits feedback prior to deploying AI tools (Figure 5). Fifty-two percent agree that such input is sought out and informs decisions on AI use, compared to 25% who feel such fact-finding is limited or not taken seriously. Another 23% are neutral on this matter.

Making the case to the AI-cautious

This feedback is essential for leaders as not everyone shares their excitement for AI's role. As shown in Figure 6, leaders are highly favorable of

Figure 5.



Base: 101 respondents; Percents may not add up to 100% due to rounding

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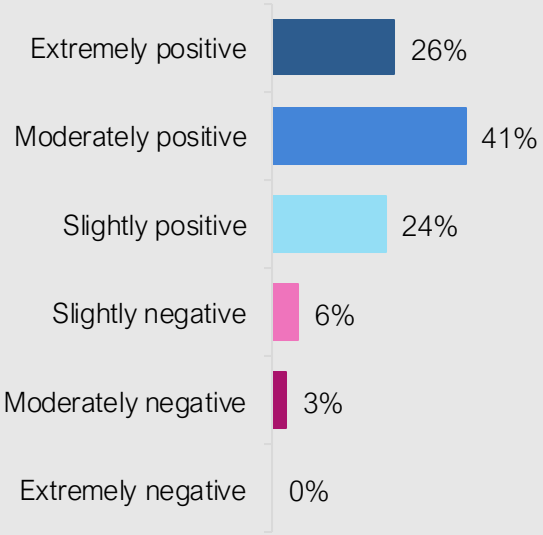
Figure 6.

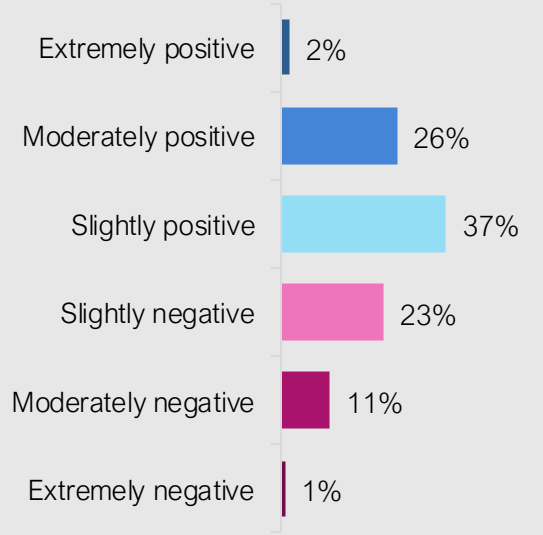
Among the stakeholder groups below, what are the general sentiments or impressions regarding AI's influence in contact centers?

Contact Center Leadership



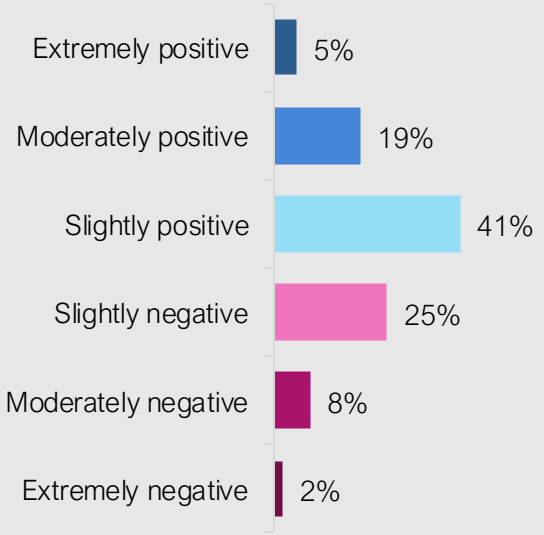
Base: 102 respondents; Percents may not add up to 100% due to rounding

Contact Center Agents



Base: 101 respondents; Percents may not add up to 100% due to rounding

Contact Center Customers



Base: 97 respondents; Percents may not add up to 100% due to rounding

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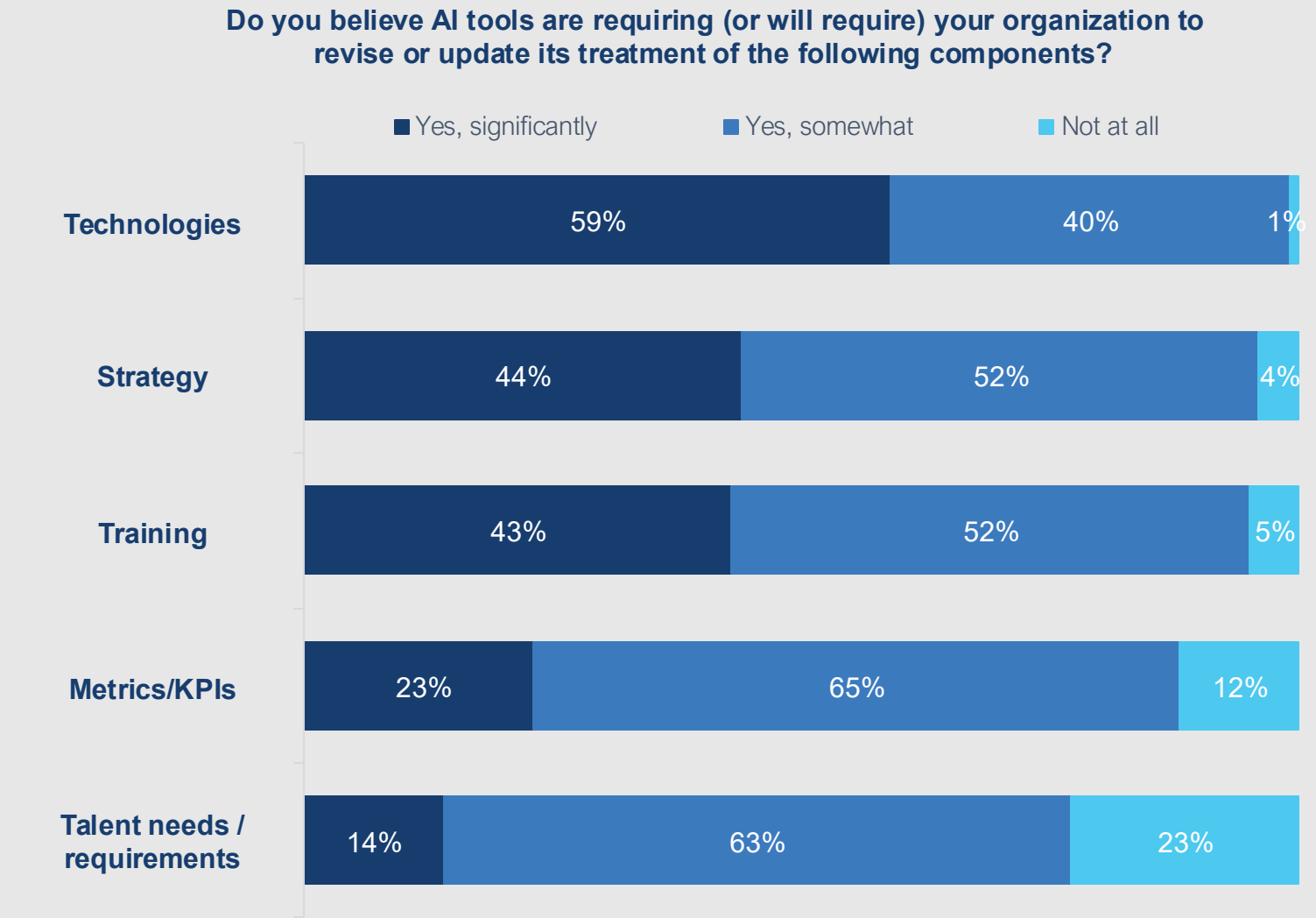
AI's influence in the contact center, much more so than what is perceived among agents and customers. Where 67% of leaders are extremely or moderately positive about what AI brings to the table, only 28% of agents and 24% of customers express the same level of support.

Contact center directors see AI as a tool to improve productivity, reduce complexity, lower costs, and streamline operations. Contact center agents probably view AI with some mix of trepidation and curiosity — will it outperform them? Could it replace them? Will they need to learn new skills to keep up? And it's easy to sympathize with customers who may be skeptical that conversational AI will be significantly different than the monotone IVR systems they've encountered before.

Nothing will be the same

To make room for AI, organizations will likely need to revise and update many long-standing policies and systems. Fifty-nine percent believe AI will require significant updates to existing technologies. Many expect AI to dramatically impact future strategy (44%) and training methods (43%), and 77% think it will at least somewhat influence recruitment and talent needs.

Figure 7.



Base: 99 - 102 respondents; Percents may not add up to 100% due to rounding

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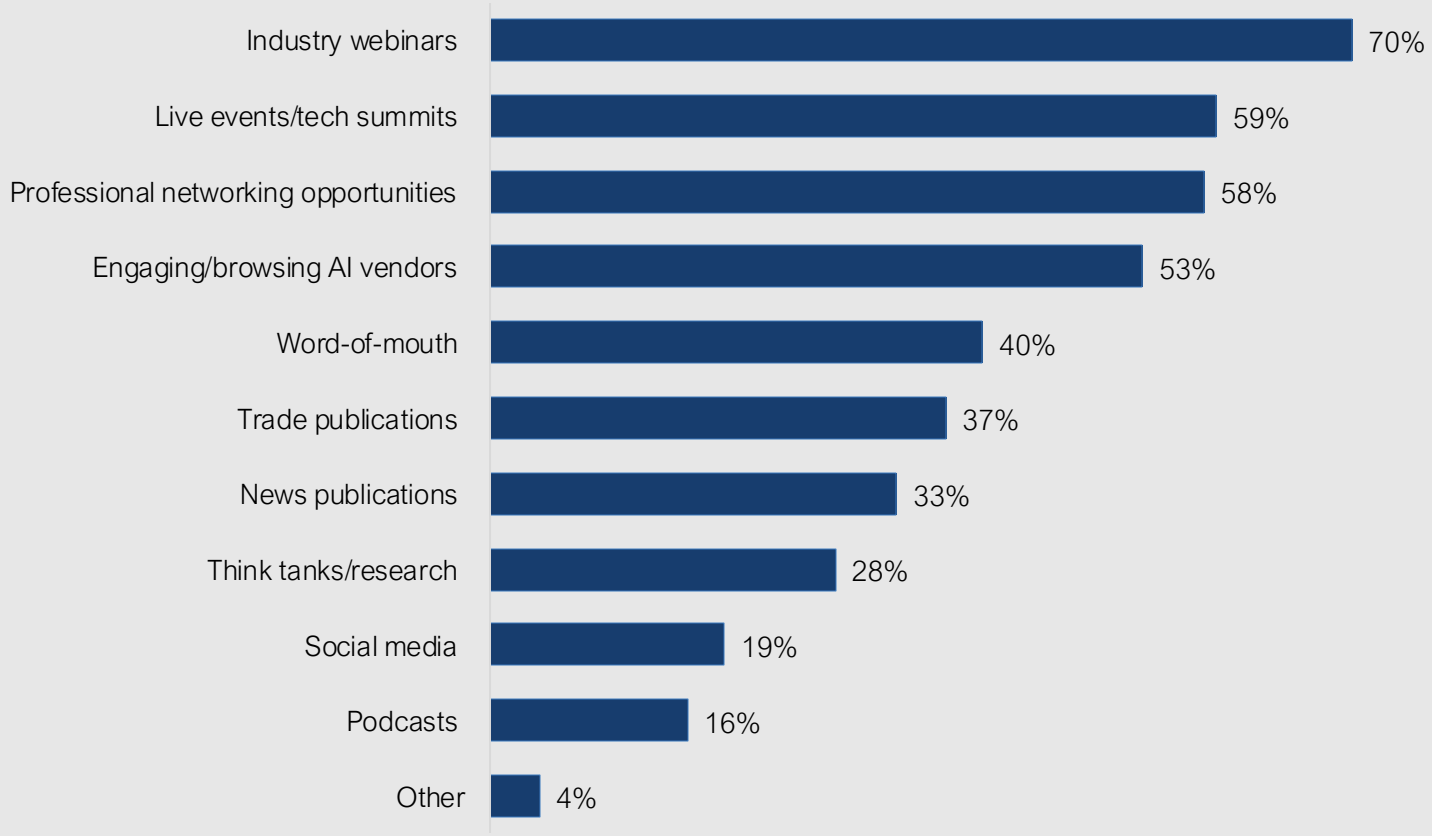
Figure 8.

How do those responsible for AI progress in your contact center stay informed about AI tools, applications, vendors, and best practices?



Base: 113 respondents; Percents may reflect multiple answers

Staying in the know

The market is flooded with AI hype. How do contact center leaders cut through the noise to stay informed on developments that could affect their AI capabilities?

The answer is in community. Industry webinars (70%), live events (59%), and professional networking opportunities (58%) are excellent for bringing together different experts, tools, and best practices in one place. Industry webinars are usually free to attend and give participants an opportunity to learn from experts in their field and ask questions in real-time.

Note the power of word-of-mouth as well. Forty percent of respondents stay apprised of AI developments by sourcing their colleagues, peers, and friends for recommendations.

46%

of respondents believe they are underpaid considering their workload and level of responsibility.

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Becoming AI-Resilient:

Anticipate, Address, Overcome

Tech woes and burnout – an opportunity for AI?

Just because an organization is ready for AI doesn't mean it's going to be smooth sailing. Becoming AI-resilient is being able to anticipate and address the stumbles that can emerge during this transition.

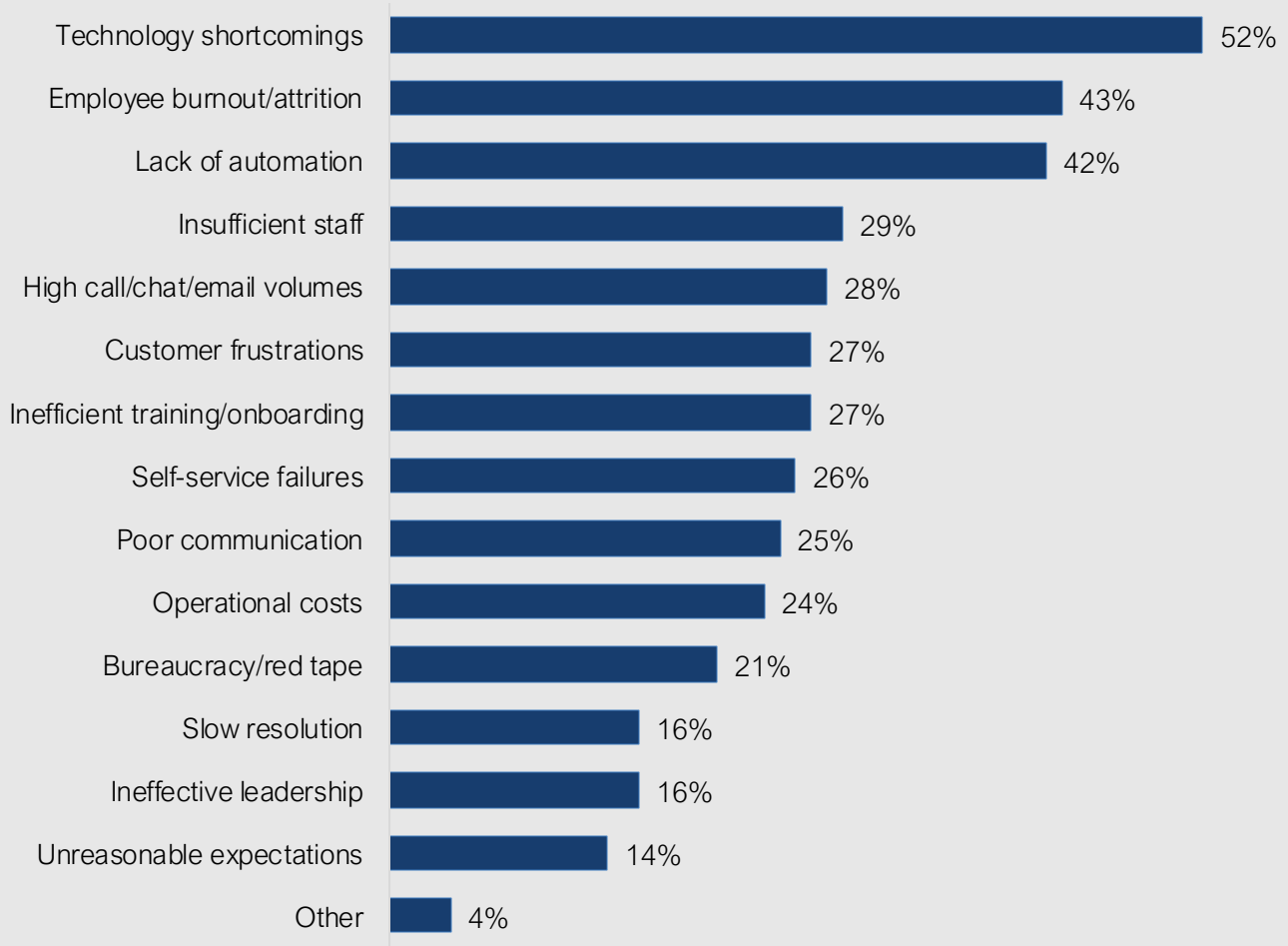
The biggest frustrations respondents encounter in their contact centers generally stem from technology failures (52%), employee burnout (43%), and lack of automation (42%) (Figure 9).

Burnout is a long-documented problem in the industry. In last year's survey, ICMI found that 54% of agents rarely make it past the two-year mark before exiting their role due to lack of career growth opportunities, the nature of the work, and poor pay.

AI could help organizations reduce burnout by automating the tedious, time-consuming aspects of an agent's workload, thus giving agents time back to focus on higher-order customer service issues.

Figure 9.

Which pain points generate the most frustration for your contact center?



Base: 113 respondents;
Percents may reflect multiple answers

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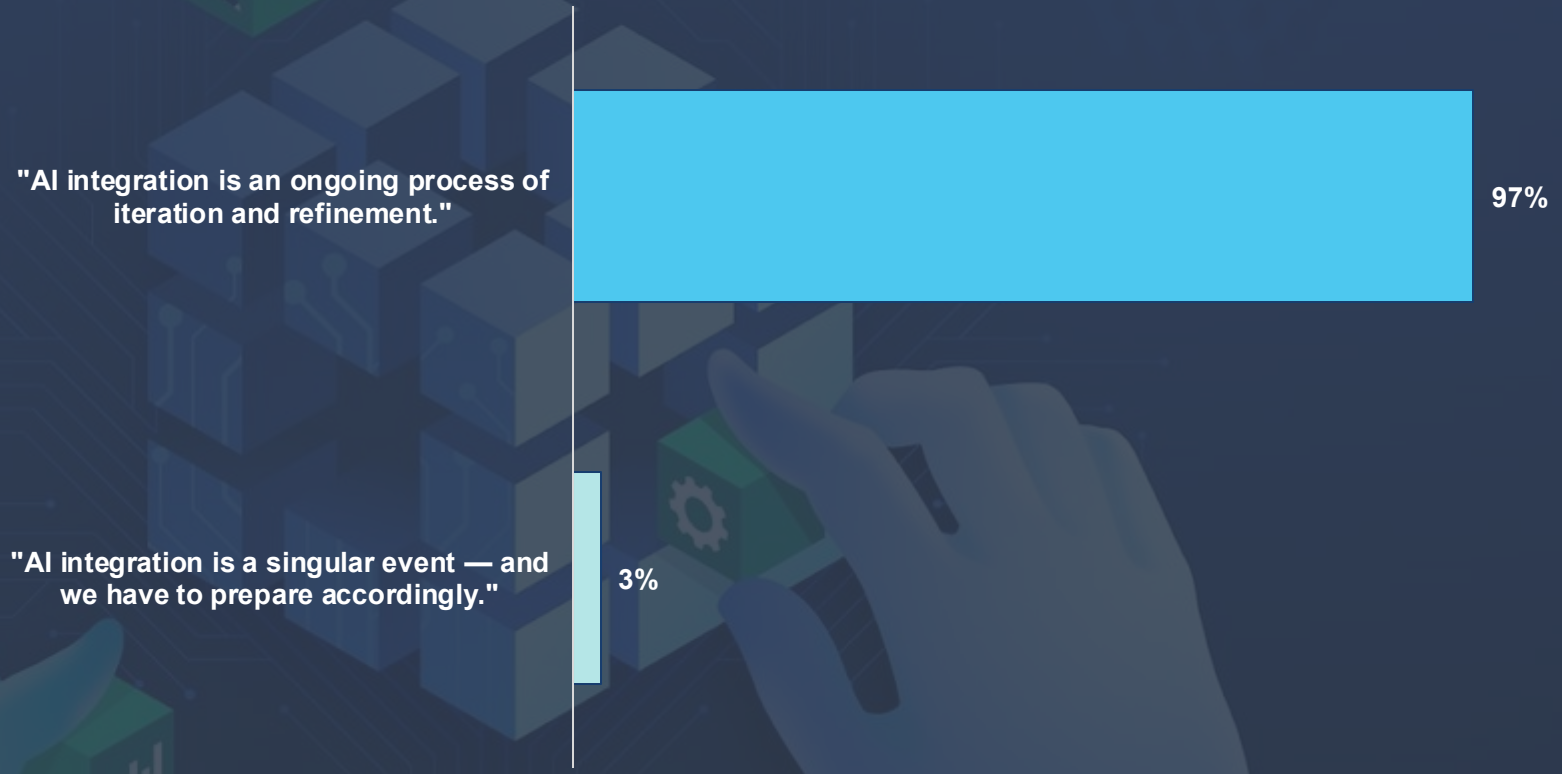
97%

of respondents view AI integration as an ongoing process of iteration and refinement.

Figure 10.

Which statement more accurately captures your organization's mindset when it comes to integrating AI in your contact center?



Base: 102 respondents; Percents may not add up to 100% due to rounding

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Obstacles to AI deployment

If only it were as easy as flipping a switch. The reality is that deploying AI effectively could require time, money, and expertise that is hard for most organizations to come by.

Roughly half of all respondents believe legacy IT systems won't play nice with new AI tools **(Figure 11).** Many others put the blame on AI's price tag and the cost associated with implementing it. Forty-five percent don't have in-house expertise to ensure smooth AI deployments, while 41% are concerned that bad or inaccurate data might muddy AI's performance.

As one respondent writes, "right now we do not have the resources or the knowledge to set up AI based on the ROI."

At the same time, respondents do see AI integration as an ongoing process and accept that not everything will be fully worked out and operational on day one. Ninety-seven percent feel that AI is about iteration and refinement, not a one-and-done milestone **(Figure 10).**

Figure 11.

What challenges are most likely to impair your organization's ability to use AI in the contact center effectively?

Base: 113 respondents;
Percents may reflect multiple answers

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Becoming AI-Resolute:

Identify, Invest, Inspire

AI's top benefits

Becoming AI-resolute means seeing the big picture. In the long term, contact centers stand to win much by leveraging AI in support of customer service.

Specifically, respondents think AI will deliver the biggest value by automating repetitive tasks, freeing agents to focus on more complex endeavors, and optimizing staffing and knowledge management **(Figure 12).** A majority also think AI will improve customer experience, speed up resolution, and make self-service tools more palatable to the public.

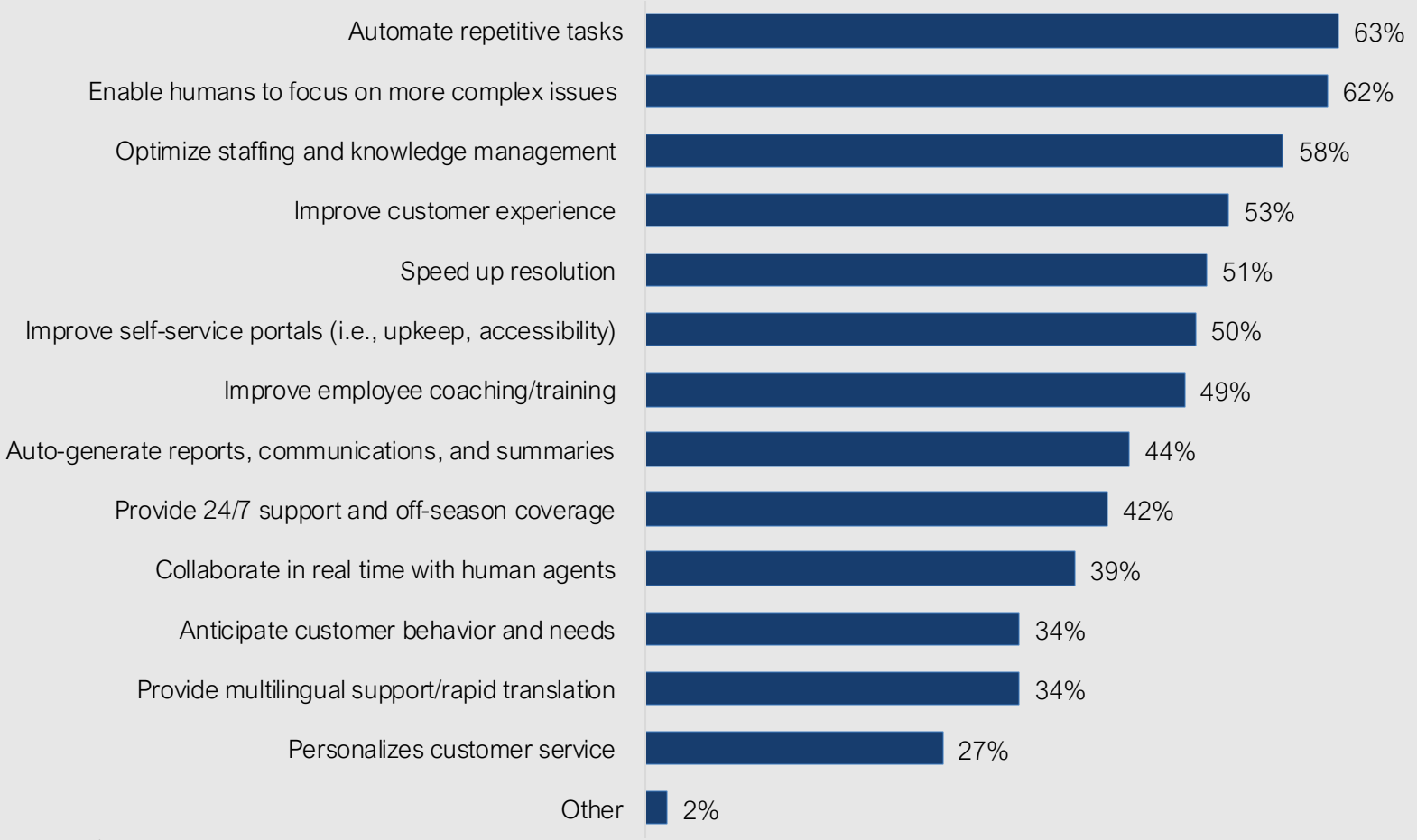
Forty-two percent see AI's value in providing 24/7 support or coverage during off-seasons when volumes are low. Thirty-nine percent think agents can benefit by collaborating with AI on customer issues. Seventy-nine percent also believe this collaboration will result in greater productivity among agents **(Figure 13).**

42%

of respondents expect AI to provide 24/7 support and off-season coverage.

Figure 12.

Where do you see AI delivering the most potential value in your contact center?



Base: 113 respondents;
Percents may reflect multiple answers

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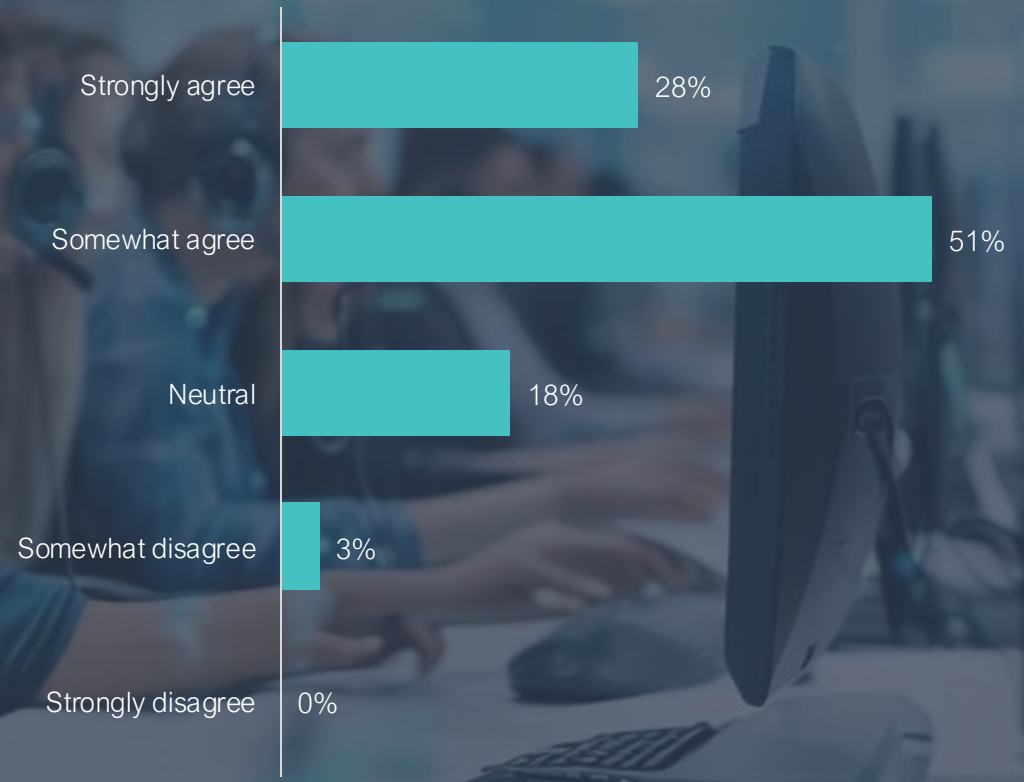
79%

of respondents agree that AI tools will enable their agents to be more productive.

Figure 13.

"Integrating AI tools in the contact center will make our agents more productive."



Base: 101 respondents; Percents may not round up to 100% due to rounding

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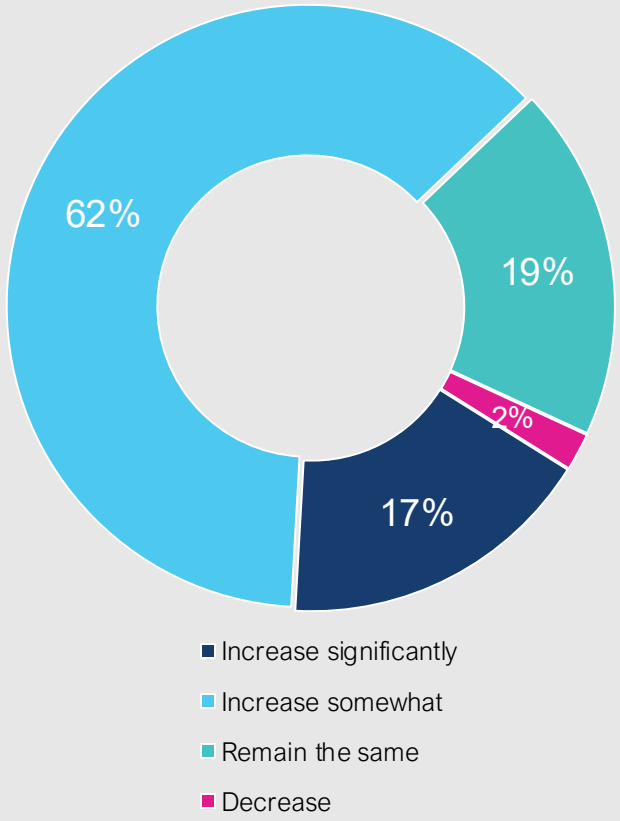
Figure 14.

Do you expect your investments in contact center AI tools or services to increase, decrease, or remain the same in the next 12 months?



Base: 102 respondents; Percents may not add up to 100% due to rounding

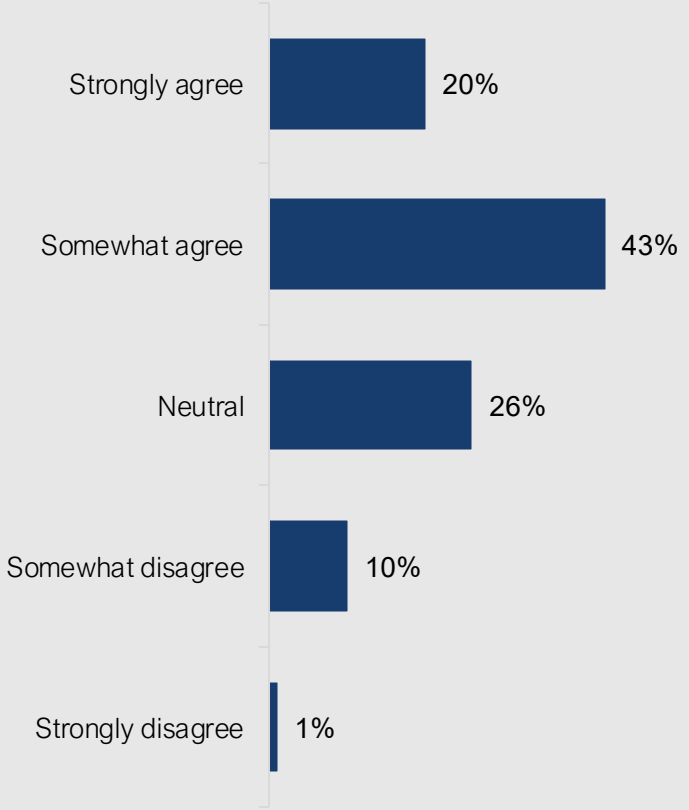
Betting big on AI

Many contact centers are betting big that AI will pay them back substantially more than what it cost to obtain. Seventy-nine percent of respondents believe their organization will invest somewhat or significantly more in AI tools in the next 12 months, compared to 19% who expect no change in budget **(Figure 14).** Only 2% anticipate a decline in funding for AI.

Meanwhile, 63% somewhat or strongly agree that the upside to integrating AI justifies the costs of procuring and supporting it **(Figure 15).** Having already tasted the first fruits for themselves, organizations are betting that AI will be worth the journey.

Figure 15.

"The upsides to integrating AI in the contact center justify the costs associated with procuring and supporting it."



Base: 101 respondents; Percents may not add up to 100% due to rounding

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“What advice would you give to other contact centers considering adoption of AI tools?”

(All displayed quotations below were submitted anonymously by respondents)

- *Pick the right tool that will support the entire organization. Letting individual departments select technology versus the collective good can cause unnecessary stress to the agents.*
- *Get buy-in for a long-term investment. AI develops fast, but is still more an evolution than a revolution. ROI will come step by step.*
- *Implement in a systematic way, starting small and adding new features as tools are adopted. Make sure you have frequent, transparent, and effective communication and feedback loops.*
- *Don’t ignore the human aspect. Ensure the technology users are part of the stakeholder team.*
- *Establish solid goals and KPIs to set expectations on AI benefits.*
- *Have a change management plan and be prepared to communicate with everyone who will be impacted. Get ahead of fear and myths by educating the team on the benefits and providing reassurance of job security.*
- *Start small, but start… don’t wait.*
- *Start the journey by working on cleaning up your data and ensuring it’s up to date. It’s also important to ensure your existing systems are functioning optimally before you start layering on the complexity.*
- *Examine where your customers are most amenable to AI-enhanced self-service, even if it’s just one intent, and start there. The worst thing you can do is rush to deploy a broad, sweeping set of AI tools to reduce costs, and your customers reject them because they want to speak to people.*
- *Create a strategy, build a governance committee, and look at all your options. However, narrow down to one or two to execute and get some early wins.*
- *Understand customer sentiment and be rigorous about data analysis. As you deploy AI, monitor customer response carefully and look for trigger words or phrases that indicate frustration or increasing effort.*
- *Focus on internal-facing tools first.*
- *The only constant is change. Embrace AI as another tool in the belt of assisting our customers. The end goal is growth.*
- *Make sure you have the time and expertise to help with training the AI tool as that is crucial to making it work effectively.*

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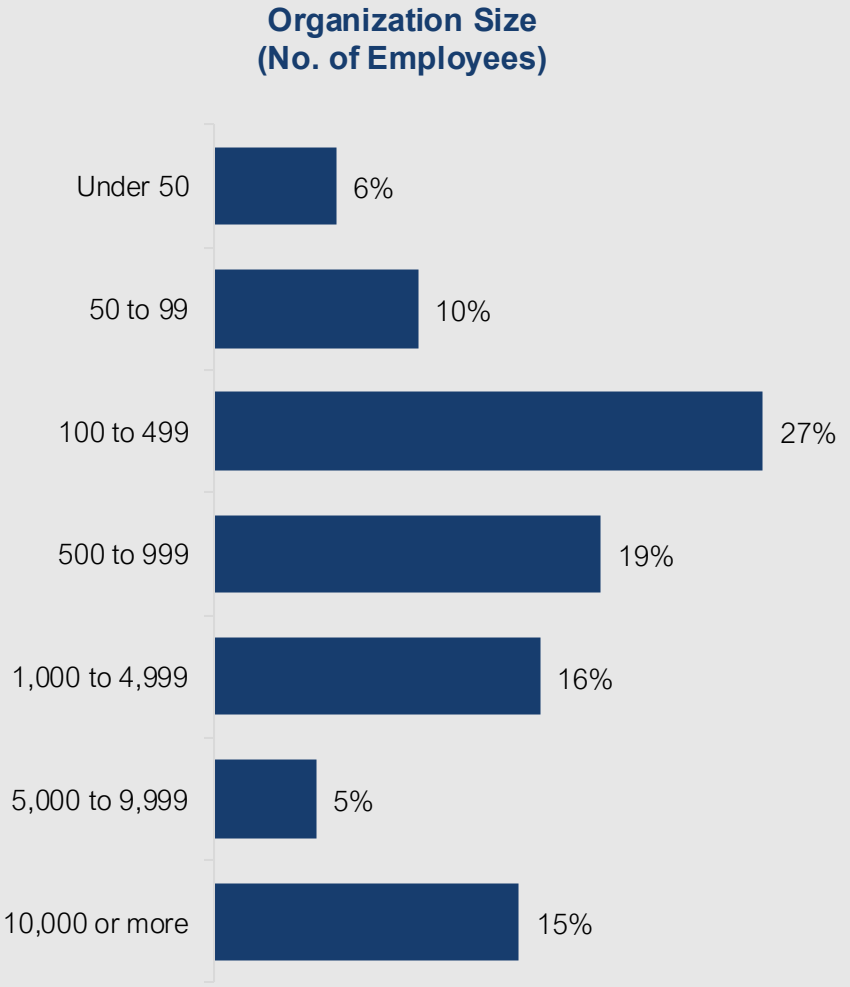
Respondent Demographics

Figure 16.

Base: 113 respondents; Percents may not round up to 100% due to rounding

Figure 17.



Base: 113 respondents; Percents may not round up to 100% due to rounding

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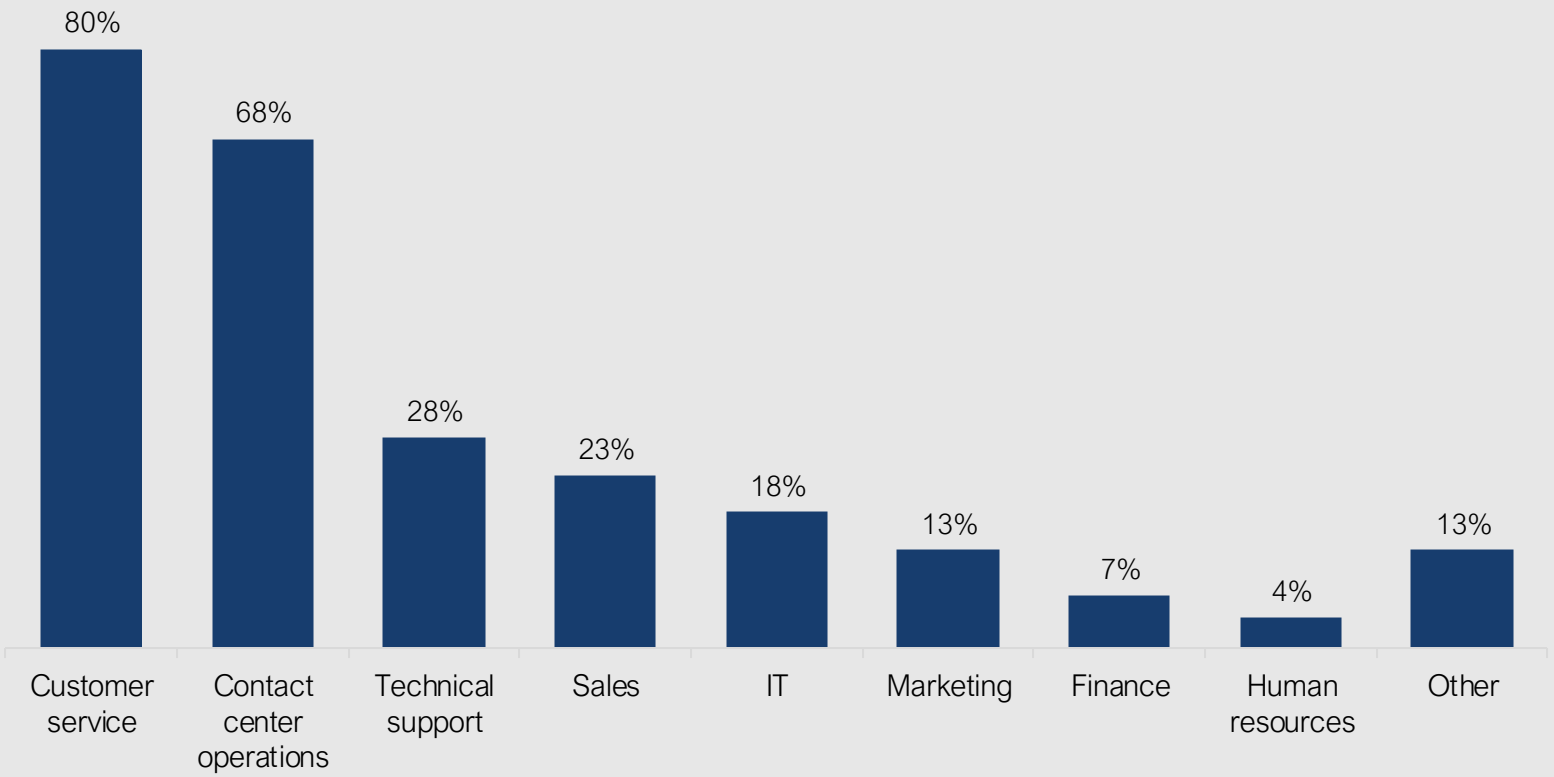
Figure 18.

Which of the following business areas are you involved with?



Base: 113 respondents; Percents may not round up to 100% due to rounding

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