



The State of Contact Center AI 2026

Where contact center leaders are investing, what's working, and why businesses need an AI reality check

The Shift From Cost Center to Value Center

For years, contact center leaders have been asked to do more with less. To absorb rising customer expectations, scale support volumes, and adopt new AI capabilities – often without a clear mandate or budget to match.

That's changing. The data in this year's The State of Contact Center AI report shows a turning point. The majority of organizations now see the contact center as a value center. And to navigate that shift, they're increasing their AI spend and moving from pilot projects to production.

But the same data reveals that investment alone doesn't guarantee impact. Only 62% of consumers report AI has had a positive effect on CX. Less than half say AI tools have significantly reduced routine work. And the contact centers still stuck in cost-center mode point to one consistent blocker: data.

This report is built for contact center leaders navigating that tension – providing guidance on where to invest, what's actually working, and what it takes to move from running a contact center to operating one that drives measurable business value.

Happy reading!



Anna Convery
CMO, Verint

Key Findings

TREND 01

AI's Investment Surge

87%

of contact center leaders are planning to increase their spend on automated agent assistance.

TREND 02

The AI Reality Check

94%

of organizations see value in additional AI-powered tools for supervisor support despite mixed results thus far.

TREND 03

Where AI Meets Reality

75%

of organizations report AI tools have increased the performance of their human agents.

TREND 04

The Value Shift

62%

of leaders now view the contact center as a value center, where its value outweighs the cost to operate it.

TREND 01

AI’s Investment Surge

Budgets are up, adoption is broad across industries, but tech stacks are fragmenting – raising the stakes on ROI.

What the data tells us

AI is no longer a question of if – it’s a question of where and how much. Almost every contact center is increasing its AI investment in 2026, and a significant share are increasing it substantially. After several years of cautious pilots, budgets are catching up to ambition.

What it means for your business

Rising budgets bring rising expectations. Finance teams approving these increases will want to see measurable outcomes – ones that go beyond contact center metrics and impact the P&L.

The contact centers winning approval for next year’s budget will be those that can clearly tie this year’s investment to business outcomes. Leaders who can’t provide that proof risk having investment redirected elsewhere.

Where Companies Are Increasing AI Spend in 2026

87%

Customer-facing AI

84%

WFM and forecasting AI

87%

Agent assist AI

86%

AI for decision making and insights

82%

Quality and speech & text AI

TREND 01 | AI's Investment Surge

What the data tells us

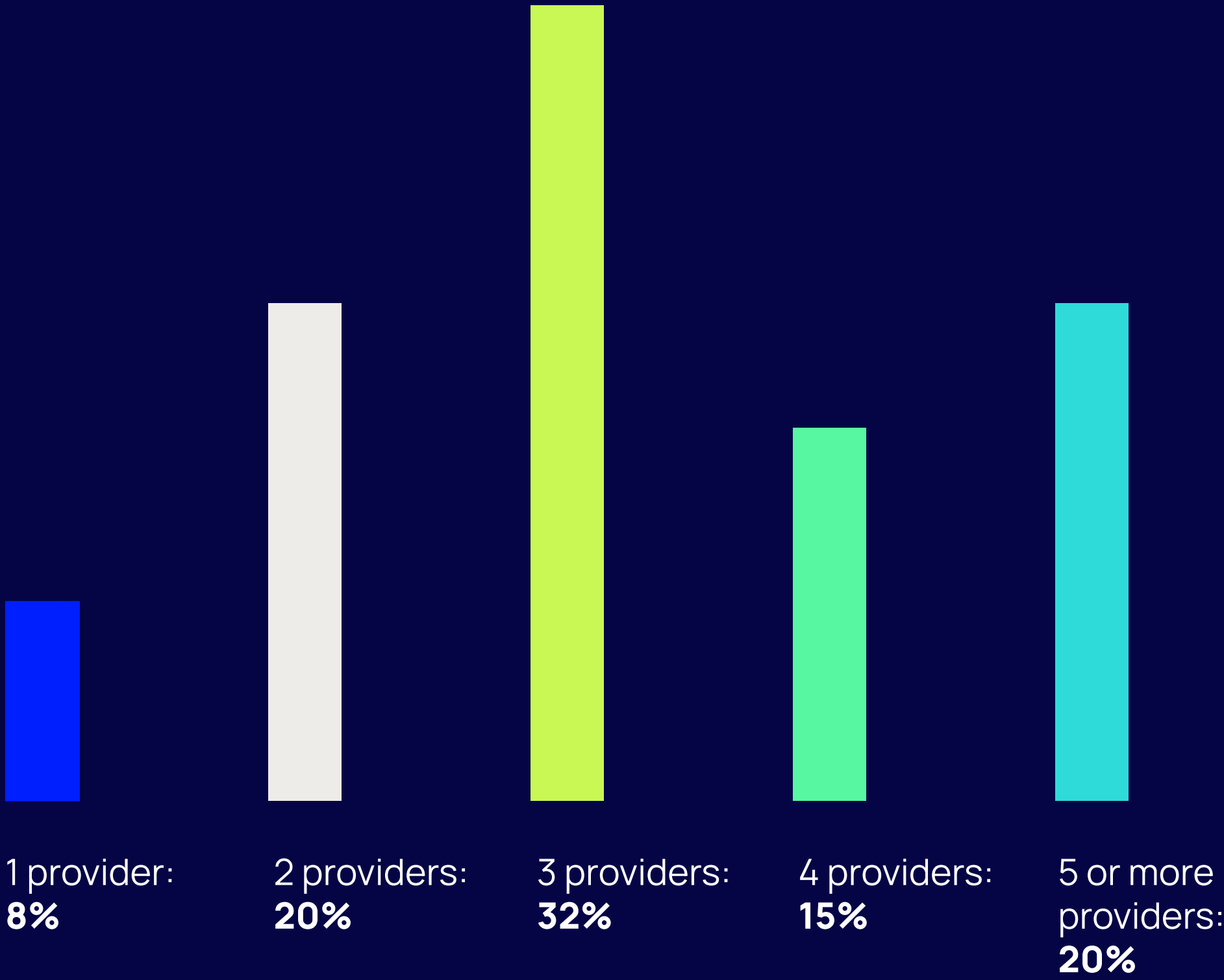
The average contact center now runs on technology from three or more providers, and that number climbs with company size. More than a quarter of the largest contact centers (1,000+ agents) use five or more.

What it means for your business

Fragmentation is the hidden tax on AI ROI. Every additional provider adds an integration to maintain, a data source to reconcile, and a handoff that can break. AI works best when it has full visibility of the customer journey, but a fractured stack means fractured data – and fractured data means AI that can't reach its full potential.

That's why contact centers should prioritize vendors that take an open approach to integrations, making it easy to plug in the best-fit solutions and AI capabilities, rather than being locked into a closed ecosystem of limited, vendor-only tools.

Thinking about your contact center ecosystem, approximately how many different providers does your organization currently use?



*5% of respondents selected 'unsure'

TREND 01 | AI's Investment Surge

What the data tells us

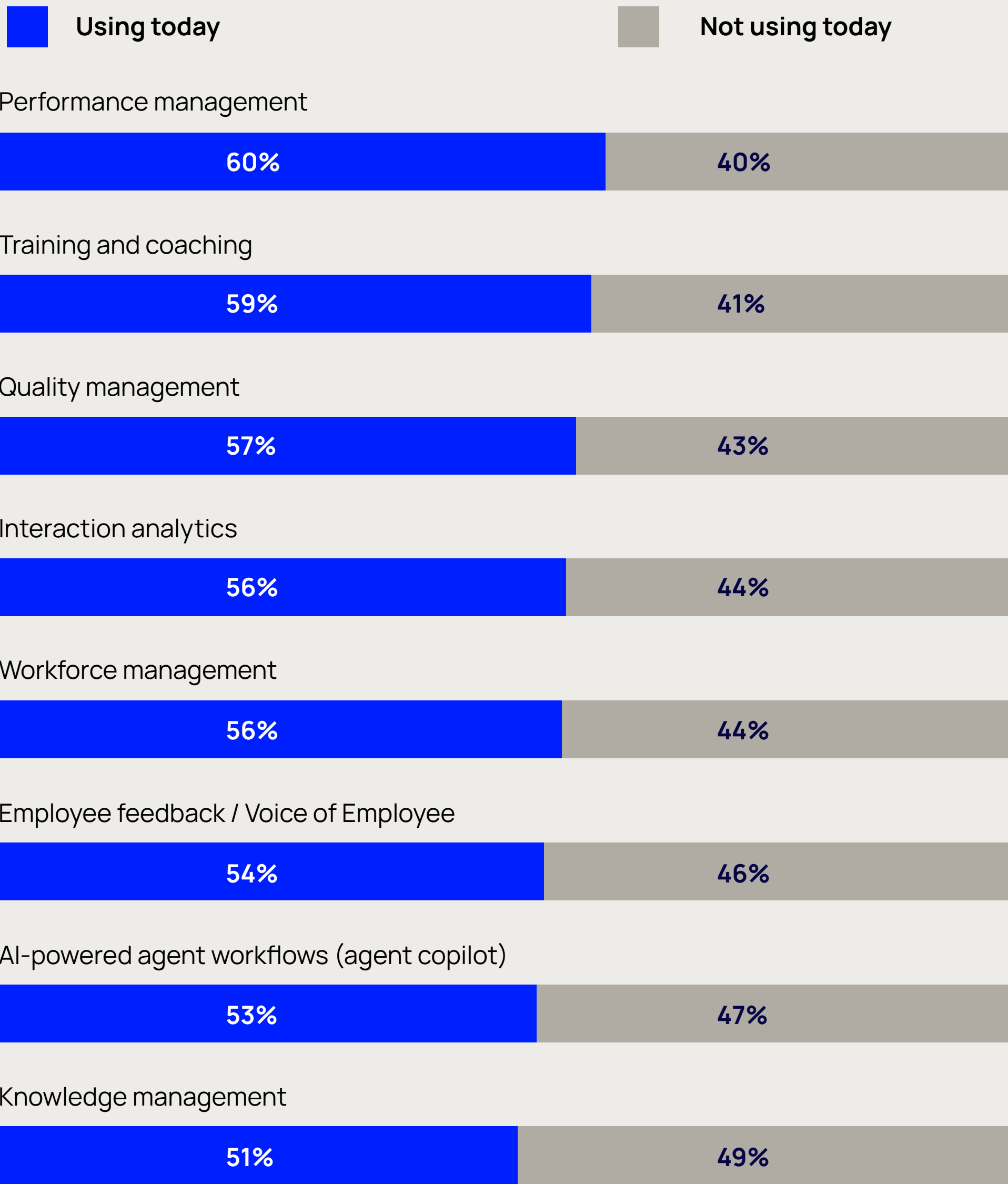
Beyond customer-facing AI, contact centers are investing heavily in the technologies that support the workforce behind the interactions. Performance management, training and coaching, and quality management rank as the most widely adopted workforce engagement management (WEM) technologies – a signal that leaders see the direct impact that agent experience has on customer experience.

What it means for your business

The contact centers getting the most from their CX investments are the ones investing on both sides of the interaction – customer-facing AI and the WEM tools that make agents more effective. Skipping the latter creates a familiar problem: faster automation handing off to under-supported agents, and the bottleneck simply moves.

Trend Summary

Budgets are rising, adoption is broad, and stacks are growing. But spend alone isn't the story. The next question – and the one that's now separating leading contact centers from laggards – is whether the AI being deployed actually provides outcomes. Trend 2 looks at where AI is delivering, where it's falling short, and why the answer comes down to operations.



TREND 02

The AI Reality Check

Everyone has deployed AI. Few have operationalized it.

What the data tells us

The majority of consumers acknowledge that AI is changing their service experience, but only 62% believe that change has been positive. That 38% gap signals significant room for improvement.

What it means for your business

A 62% positive rating is a success benchmark that contact center leaders should aim to surpass. The organizations set to surpass that standard will be those deploying AI on both sides of the interaction – enhancing the customer experience while empowering human agents.

64%

of consumers have seen AI's impact on customer service.

62%

but only 62% think it's had a positive impact.

Source: Metrigy Customer Experience Optimization - Consumer Views 2025-26

TREND 02 | The AI Reality Check

What the data tells us

Less than half of organizations (44%) report AI has significantly reduced routine and repetitive work for their agents. This is well short of the productivity transformation many leaders were promised.

What it means for your business

For the 53% of organizations where AI has only somewhat reduced routine work, the path to greater adoption is selecting workflows that agents can't wait to automate. For example, call summarization is repetitive, easy to evaluate, and a natural fit for generative AI.

44%

think AI tools have significantly reduced routine/repetitive work.

53%

think AI tools have somewhat reduced routine/repetitive work.

TREND 02 | The AI Reality Check

What the data tells us

Despite mixed results so far, appetite for more AI is overwhelming. 94% of organizations see value in additional AI-powered tools for supervisor support. Only 4% rule it out, and the rest are unsure.

What it means for your business

The bar is moving. Many contact centers initially focused on AI tools to assist agents. The next step is to enable supervisors with real-time coaching, automated quality scoring, and performance pattern detection across teams. Leaders evaluating their roadmap should be asking not, “Do we need more AI?” but, “Where does AI multiply leadership leverage, not just agent capacity?”

94%

of organizations see value in additional AI-powered tools for supervisor support.

Trend Summary

AI is widespread, but perception hasn't caught up with investment: 38% of consumers don't believe AI has improved their service experience. The problem is less likely to be about capability, and more about operations. Unified data, ongoing training, workflow integration, and governance determine whether AI reaches the customer as a better experience or causes friction. Without that infrastructure, AI investment doesn't reliably translate into a better customer experience.

TREND 03

Where AI Meets Reality

Contact center leaders are running two parallel agendas – one for the workforce, one for automation. Getting both right is critical.

What the data tells us

Ask leaders what their human agents need most for 2026, and the answers fall into a recognizable pattern: better compensation, tools that make them more efficient, and more flexible scheduling. The list reflects a workforce that wants to be valued, equipped, and trusted to manage their own time.

What it means for your business

These priorities are interrelated. AI tools that help agents work more efficiently and drive revenue support the case for better compensation. Scheduling flexibility, often perceived as a workforce-management challenge, is more achievable when AI-driven forecasting handles the volume planning. The leaders who treat these priorities as one connected program – not three separate budget lines – will see the best returns.

Companies’ top priorities for human agents in 2026

- | | |
|----|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | Improve compensation |
| 2 | Improve overall efficiency |
| 3 | Provide more scheduling flexibility |
| 4 | Drive revenue |
| 5 | Improve overall job satisfaction |
| 6 | Allow more breaks throughout the day |
| 7 | Improve accuracy & consistency |
| 8 | Improve training |
| 9 | Help with career growth |
| 10 | Stabilize attrition |

TREND 03 | Where AI Meets Reality

What the data tells us

The priority list for customer service AI agents centers around outcomes. Containment, revenue generation, and CX quality top the list – language that increasingly mirrors how the business measures any commercial function. AI is no longer being asked to deflect calls. It’s being asked to drive outcomes.

What it means for your business

This is the clearest signal that customer-facing AI has graduated from a cost-saving tool to a revenue-influencing one. Containment metrics on their own – call deflection, self-service rate – were never enough to demonstrate value to the C-suite. The new benchmark is end-to-end resolution that produces a measurable outcome: a renewal, an upsell, a retained customer. Virtual assistants that can only answer FAQs are now behind the curve.

Companies’ top priorities for customer-facing AI agents in 2026

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Improve issue containment |
| 2 | Drive revenue |
| 3 | Improve customer experience outcomes |
| 4 | Reduce operational costs |
| 5 | Support human agents improve performance |
| 6 | Expand the range of issues AI can handle |
| 7 | Increase availability and coverage |
| 8 | Improve accuracy and consistency |
| 9 | Improve handoff to human agents |

TREND 03 | Where AI Meets Reality

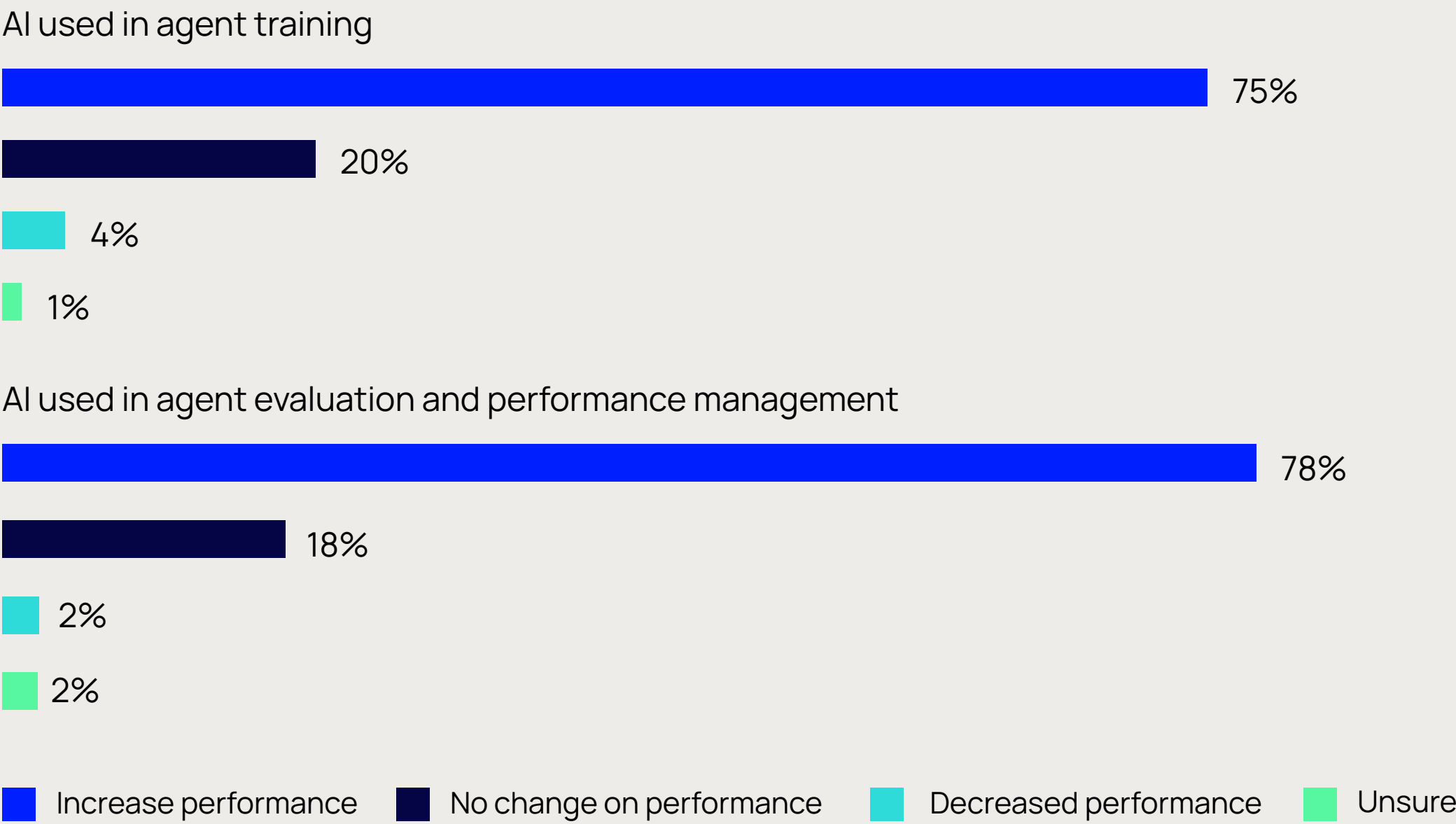
What the data tells us

Where AI is deployed well, it isn't replacing agents – it's making them better. More than three in four organizations report that AI tools have increased the performance of their human agents. The pattern is consistent: AI handles the predictable, agents focus on the complex, and the combined output is greater than either could deliver alone.

What it means for your business

The performance gain is the most underreported AI ROI story. It rarely shows up on a cost-savings line item, but it shows up everywhere else: lower handle times, higher first-contact resolution, better customer satisfaction scores, lower agent attrition. When making the case for further AI investment, leaders should be quantifying this lift – not just the calls AI contained, but the calls agents handled better because of it.

How have the following uses of AI affected human agent performance?



Trend Summary

Where AI is working well, contact centers are operating in an entirely different way. Different KPIs. Different agent roles. Different training priorities. The contact centers that have got the fundamentals right are able to cross the line from cost center to value center. The ones that haven't, can't. Trend 4 looks at the leap, and at the single barrier that keeps coming up again and again.

TREND 04

The Value Shift

Leaders now see the contact center as a value center. For the rest, ambition isn't the problem – data is.

What the data tells us

The mindset shift is real. 62% of leaders now describe the contact center as a value center – a function that delivers measurable revenue, cost reduction, profit, or customer satisfaction that outweighs its operating cost.

What it means for your business

The value center label is more than just framing – it changes how budgets are debated, how performance is measured, and how careers in the contact center are positioned within the wider business. Leaders running contact centers still labeled as cost centers face a different operating reality: every investment is justified against cost reduction rather than value creation. Crossing that line is one of the most consequential transitions a contact center leader can make.

62%

of executive leadership now view the contact center as a value center, where the value of the contact center outweighs the associated costs to operate it.

59%

of those that still see it as a cost center want to turn it into a value center.

TREND 04 | The Value Shift

What the data tells us

When the 59% who want contact centers to become value centers are asked what's stopping them, the answer is consistent: data. Specifically, data availability and the ability to track customers across the journey. The blocker isn't ambition. It isn't even budget. It's whether the technology has the data it needs to do its job.

What it means for your business

Trend 1 showed investment is up. Trend 2 showed only the AI with good data is delivering. Trend 3 showed where AI works, it works well. And now Trend 4 makes the cause explicit: the contact centers that can't make the leap from cost to value center are the ones whose data isn't ready. Unifying data across the channels, providers, and systems that are increasingly fragmented is the single highest-leverage move a contact center leader can make in 2026.

Trend Summary:

Four trends. One conclusion. Investment is up, AI is working where it's well-fed, agents are thriving where AI lifts them rather than replaces them, and the value center is within reach for the contact centers that can solve their data problem. Read on to learn how to take action.

What would your company need to do to enable the transformation from cost center to value center?

- 1 Make customer data available for business decision-making
- 2 Track new customers resulting from contact center performance
- 3 Increase revenue derived from contact center
- 4 Analyze/address customer retention and churn reduction
- 5 Improve customer satisfaction from contact center
- 6 Invest in personnel development
- 7 Use contact center as pipeline for sales and marketing roles

CONCLUSION

What it Takes to Operationalize AI

Budgets are rising. AI is mainstream. Agents are responding well to the change. And the majority of contact center leaders now believe their function delivers measurable business value.

That's the headline. It's also the reality check.

Because beneath those headline numbers, the picture is uneven. Roughly four in ten leaders still operate cost centers. Less than half say AI has significantly reduced routine work. And more than a third of consumers don't believe AI's impact has been positive at all.

This is the AI Reality Check playing out across the industry: investment has outpaced impact. Deploying a model is the easy part. Maintaining its accuracy over time, training it on the right data, embedding it into live workflows, governing it responsibly, and managing the ongoing cost of running it are what separate AI that delivers from AI that doesn't.

Get this right, and the payoff compounds: agent-assist tools actually reduce handle time instead of adding another screen. AI agents resolve issues instead of handing off frustrated customers. Copilots lift agent performance instead of sitting underused. And contact centers make the leap from cost center to value center.

The organizations ahead in this report aren't the ones who invested the most in AI. They're the ones who closed the gap between what they invested in and what it actually delivered. That's the AI Reality Check: not a verdict on whether AI works, but a measure of whether the operational conditions – data, training, workflow integration, governance, and cost management – are in place for it to deliver.

Methodology

A total of 602 firms participated in this study, representing contact center and customer experience professionals across 17 countries and 29 vertical industries, including high-tech (22.4%), financial services (18.8%), manufacturing, healthcare, retail, and others.

Respondents' organizations were headquartered across a number of countries, led by the United States (21.9%), Canada (13.0%), India (9.1%), the United Kingdom (8.8%), and Australia (8.6%).

Job titles were weighted toward manager (31.6%), senior director/director (26.6%), and executive management (18.6%) levels, with additional representation from engineers/architects and contact center agents and supervisors.

Work functions spanned contact center technology and enablement (36.4%), general executive management (16.9%), customer service (9.5%), and contact center workforce engagement, operations, and analytics roles.

The age ranges of respondents are: 25 to 34 (26.7%), 35 to 44 (34.1%), 45 to 54 (22.1%), 55 to 64 (11.6%), and 65 or over (4.3%).

About Verint

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