



Laivly's 2026 AI Deployment Index:

Modern Contact Centers Aim for a False Finish Line



Executive Summary

A majority of companies (65%) called their most recent AI initiative successful. But 43% of AI projects are currently delayed or stalled, and 53% exceeded their original budgets. The investments are real, but the results often aren't.

Customer experience (CX) and technology leaders operate under a high-stakes mandate: deliver measurable AI-driven ROI or cede market share. New research shows that nearly half of Boards of Directors are dissatisfied with AI progress — and this urgency is driving a risky response from CX teams: rushed, check-the-box deployments that show activity but lack impact.

To protect budgets and satisfy board-level scrutiny, CX and technology leaders are scaling AI at record speed and declaring victory prematurely. But when you dive deeper into the data, an alarming disconnect emerges: the companies struggling most with AI in CX are not those that failed to deploy it. They are the companies that deployed AI and mistook action for achievement.

Laivly surveyed 200 leaders responsible for contact center AI decisions in March of 2026. The findings expose a stark paradox: **while 65% of leaders classified their most recent AI project as a success, the metrics used to define that success are fundamentally flawed.**

The research also found that AI is being launched faster than companies are learning how to make it work within day-to-day operations. This gap is not just a technical oversight; it is a strategic liability that has severe business and CX consequences, including:



Lost Revenue:

Failed hand-offs and rigid automation are driving customers away.



Customer Friction:

AI that adds steps rather than resolving issues.



Agent Distrust:

A total breakdown of trust as frontline staff are forced to work alongside —or fix—ineffective AI tools.





The next era of CX will not be won with more AI. It will be won by better and smarter deployment of AI.

This report digs deep into where and why AI deployments in the contact center break down and how CX leaders can shift their approach to drive the business forward.

The AI Paradox — Everyone Thinks They’re Winning

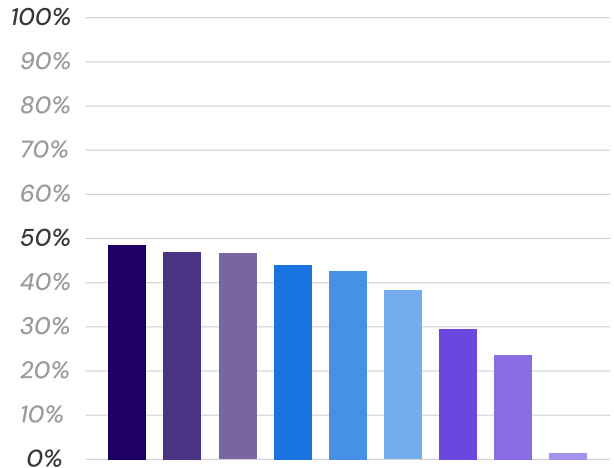
Current market sentiment suggests an era of unprecedented AI progress in the contact center. Laivly’s data found that 65% of companies called their most recent AI initiative to transform CX successful. This enthusiasm is backed by significant capital: 55% of leaders report CX and contact center AI as a top-three AI investment priority across their company, with 30% ranking it as their #1 priority.

However, these figures mask a systemic failure in execution. The perceived “success” of a deployment is often disconnected from the operational reality sitting directly beneath the surface.

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Operational Drag:
 43% of AI projects are currently delayed or stalled.
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Fiscal Mismanagement:
 53% of projects have exceeded their original budgets.
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Direct Revenue Erosion:
 28% of leaders directly attribute lost revenue to AI that cannot handle customer complexity.
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The Blind Spot Risk:
 Another 20% acknowledge revenue loss is occurring but admit they are unable to quantify the damage.

This is the CX AI paradox: The investments are real. Deployment looks successful. But in many cases, AI is over budget, behind schedule, and failing to deliver for the customers and agents who rely on it.

Top AI Investment Areas



- 48% Automated admin tasks
- 46.5% Automated customer chatbots
- 46% Autonomous agentic task execution
- 43.5% Automated voice agents
- 42% Real-time agent guidance and coaching
- 38% Intelligent routing
- 29.5% Security and data-handling controls for CX AI
- 23.5% Governance/oversight for AI decisions
- 0.5% Other


Four Critical Points of AI Breakdown


There are four specific places where AI in customer service is breaking down, even at companies that consider their most recent deployment a success.

1 Customer Friction Impacts Financial Growth

Laivly found that customers continue to experience friction that AI dashboards and reports fail to capture. While internal metrics may show “completed” interactions, the actual customer experience is different: 49% of companies report increased customer friction directly linked to their AI tools — including negative sentiment, repeat calls, and churn.

That friction has a direct revenue translation:

 **57%** of companies that report experiencing *significant friction* due to AI are **losing between 5–10% of sales.**

 Companies that have *reduced friction* tell the opposite story — **36%** report AI is **actively growing revenue by 5%.**

The implication is clear: CX either drives revenue or works against it. And when leaders treat the contact center as a cost center, they miss AI’s potential to increase revenue and expand customer loyalty.

Human Agents Reject AI Tools

The narrative that agents fear AI primarily because of job loss is an oversimplification that masks a deeper execution failure. Many agents shy away from using AI because the technology doesn't always work reliably enough to trust in front of a customer.

That said, the job replacement fear is real — 31% cite it as a fear — but it masks a more fundamental problem: agents don't believe the tools are good enough right now. Specifically, 36% of leaders say agents struggle with AI lacking context across interactions and 34% said it introduces compliance and tone risk. And when agents don't trust AI, they work around it, customers feel the friction, and the investment underperforms.

Agents have an important role to play in the AI era — providing personalized support, empathy and human decision making in complex situations. But in many environments, AI is undercutting what agents do best — being human.

Alarming, and potentially connected, 36% of companies saw agent turnover increase in the last year. That's not a workforce trend in isolation. That's a deployment failure impacting broader CX.

“I've spent years in contact center operations, and the pattern I keep seeing is that companies deploy AI where it's easy to deploy, not where it will actually move the needle. They automate the simple stuff, declare victory, and then wonder why their agents still don't trust the tools and their customers are still frustrated. The most valuable thing you can do is figure out where AI genuinely helps and build toward that.”

—Rod Edwards,
Laiivly Chief Operating Officer

The Agent Headcount Reduction Logic is Backfiring

Current AI strategies are heavily focused on cost-cutting, with 78% of companies expecting to save money through agent headcount reduction and 44% planning cuts within the next 12 months.

Here's the problem: Laivly found that the companies pursuing headcount reduction are the same ones reporting higher customer friction, greater revenue leakage and higher overall AI project costs. Cutting agents doesn't reduce cost if it increases churn, repeat contacts, and brand risk.

The fears are well-founded. Without agents, unattended AI tools take on far more complex situations, increasing the number of high-risk situations managed by AI. In fact, more than half of companies worry about AI failing to recognize high-stakes emotional situations and responding with a generic script. Forty-one percent worry about AI autonomously making financial commitments the company can't honor.

These aren't hypothetical risks. They're the predictable outcome of removing human judgment from complex interactions before AI is operationally ready.

4 The Burden of Vendor Fragmentation

Solution fragmentation is another problem — and it's not an IT inconvenience; it is a CX strategy problem.



Laivly's research found that **56%** of companies are now operating with more than three AI tools, **and the results are consistently negative.**

Complexity Breeds Friction:

A majority of companies with more than three tools report increased customer friction. Companies using fewer than three tools are twice as likely to report friction decreasing.

Fiscal and Operational Drag:

Unified stacks are four times more likely to stay on budget. In contrast, fragmented stacks (6–10 tools) experience dramatically higher implementation delays.

The Cycle of Failure:

Nearly 70% of companies with ten or more tools plan agent reductions, compared to only 30% of those with unified stacks. This fragmentation accelerates the headcount miscalculations outlined above.

Why Smart CX Leaders Are Getting Caught in This Trap

Boards want fast, visible results. Legacy metrics such as deployment rates, headcount reductions, and automated cost savings are easy to understand and boardroom friendly, but they are incomplete.

Customer friction, on the other hand, is harder to measure. Revenue leakage from AI failure is nearly impossible to attribute cleanly. Agent sentiment doesn't always show up on a dashboard.

The organizations that focus on surface-level deployment wins are overlooking the specific areas where AI is quietly failing customers, frustrating agents, and bleeding revenue.

This reality isn't surprising, considering the context. Forty-three percent of respondents said their companies' board of directors or senior leadership are, on some level, dissatisfied with AI progress.



21% are impatient, demanding faster results than their current team or technology can actually deliver.



12% are concerned, worrying they are falling behind their competitors who use AI more effectively.

That pressure accelerates deployment of AI that is not ready and reinforces the very gaps leaders are trying to close.

Breaking this cycle requires a fundamental shift in perspective: moving away from the vanity of deployment milestones and toward turning AI deployment into real results.

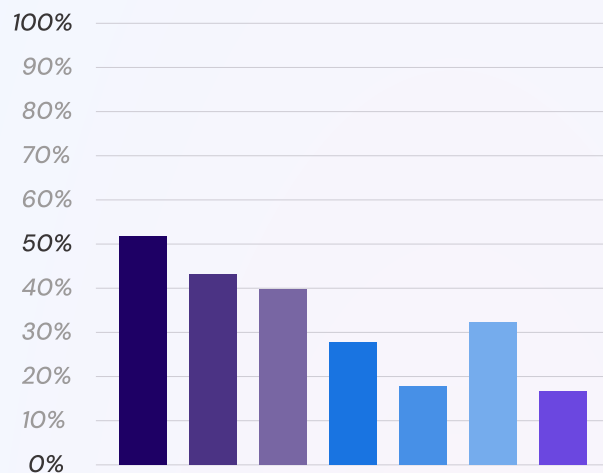
“*Every business case we build starts with the same question: what does success look like in 90 days? Companies that can't answer that clearly before they deploy are setting themselves up to celebrate the wrong things. Getting AI live is not the milestone. Delivering measurable value is.*

—Matt Bruno,
LaiVly Chief Revenue Officer

How High-Performing Companies Are Making AI Actually Work

The AI paradox is solvable. Despite the multitude of deployment issues across the market, Laivly's research shows many CX organizations are getting it right and seeing real results. Specifically, the companies reporting genuine AI success — real revenue impact, reduced friction, agents who actually use the tools — aren't deploying more AI or outspending competitors. They're operationalizing AI more effectively.

Approach to AI Strategy in the Next 12 Months



53.5% Focus on execution

45% Require faster results

41.5% Prioritize integration

29.5% Strengthen human oversight

19.5% Prepare for machine-led requests

34% Consolidate tools

18.5% Model quality

Here's How:

1 They start with quick ROI and operational integration.

Fifty percent of companies that consider their AI deployments successful cite selecting use cases that deliver measurable ROI within the first 90 days as a top success factor.

Operational integration ranks as the second most common success factor (49%). Companies that efficiently layer AI onto existing tech stacks and workflows rather than pursuing full platform overhauls report smoother deployments, lower cost overruns, and higher agent adoption — the conditions that make fast ROI achievable.

2 They're augmenting agents, not replacing them.

Human-AI collaboration is outperforming human-AI replacements. Sixty-one percent of companies that prioritized real-time agent guidance and coaching expect revenue growth through faster, more accurate service. That's the single strongest correlation between a use case and a positive revenue outcome.

Meanwhile, 30% of companies cite human-in-the-loop orchestration as a success factor in their most recent AI deployment, and among those companies, 46% say they are focused on increasing human oversight further in the next 12 months.

3 They're consolidating their stacks.

Forty-two percent are investing in AI that integrates with current software rather than replacing existing systems. Thirty-four percent plan to reduce the number of AI tools in use.

These two trends are connected: tool consolidation and integration—first thinking reduce the coordination costs that fragment stacks and drive overruns.

Companies with unified stacks are nearly four times more likely to stay on budget. That financial discipline is now becoming a competitive differentiator.



4 They're thinking about what's next and moving toward AI execution, not just conversation.

Fifty-four percent of companies are preparing for a future fueled by agentic AI that completes real transactions — refunds, account updates, and order changes — with appropriate human oversight.

5 They're preparing for bot-to-bot commerce.

Similarly, 20% of companies are preparing for the future by upgrading systems to handle interactions coming from a customer's own personal AI assistant. That's a clear signal that the era of bot-to-bot commerce is no longer hypothetical.

That era brings new fears as well. Sixty-five percent of companies are concerned or extremely concerned about financial disputes triggered by autonomous AI agents in the next 12 months. Forty-five percent believe their company should bear liability for transactions initiated by a customer's personal AI bot if their own system accepts the transaction.

Why Infrastructure Decisions Made Today Determine AI Outcomes Tomorrow

The data is clear: companies with unified tech stacks outperform those running fragmented tools across every meaningful metric. The advantages show up in budget adherence, customer friction, agent adoption, and revenue impact.





But stack consolidation is more than reducing vendor count. It's building a foundation that can absorb new AI capabilities without requiring new infrastructure every time. The contact center AI landscape is moving fast, and the use cases that matter most 12 months from now may not exist yet. Companies that have to re-architect their stack to accommodate each new development will always be playing catch-up.

Laiivy was built as that foundation: a single orchestration layer that sits across existing CRM and contact center systems, so new AI capabilities can be activated without disruption. CX leaders should be asking not just which AI tools to use today, but whether their current infrastructure can support the ones they'll need tomorrow.



The Financial Dividend of Operationalized AI

Companies that move beyond the paradox and execute this model expect material returns that redefine their competitive standing:

-  **50%** project meaningful operational savings through intelligent automation.
-  **49%** expect increased sales and higher customer lifetime value due to faster, more accurate service.
-  **41%** expect full ROI of their AI project within a single fiscal year.
-  **31%** expect lower technology debt by avoiding the cost of maintaining old, disconnected systems.

The gap between the companies achieving this and the ones still stuck in the paradox isn't capability. It's clarity about what to measure, what to prioritize, and what governance is needed before AI is trusted to act autonomously.

Closing the AI Execution Gap

The CX AI paradox isn't permanent. It's a maturity gap ready to be closed.

The companies that will lead the next phase of CX are looking honestly at how their AI is actually affecting customers, agents, and revenue — and rebuilding their strategy around those signals.

The question for every CX and technology leader: Are you measuring success the way your board wants to see it — or the way your customers and agents actually feel it?

Those two things can look identical right up until they materially hurt the business.

“ **Most contact center AI deployments succeed technically, but then adoption stalls, scale never comes, and the business case starts to break. If a deployment frustrates agents, adds friction for customers, and misses its targets, it's not really a success story—it's just a launch date. The companies pulling ahead are the ones investing in operationalizing AI, not just deploying it.**

—Jeff Fettes,
Laivly founder and CEO

About Laivly

Laivly helps the world's leading brands operationalize AI in the contact center with the help of Sidd, our AI platform.

Sidd is designed to translate artificial intelligence into measurable results by integrating directly into existing customer service operations. Each deployment is configured to align with a brand's unique business operations and goals, ensuring AI delivers practical impact, not abstract potential. With Laivly, AI becomes an everyday driver of data, consistency, and customer satisfaction.

About This Survey

Laivly surveyed 200 contact center leaders who had decision making authority over AI implementation. The data was collected in a March 2026 anonymous survey. Companies operate in the United States and Canada and are in the following industries: Commercial/retail, healthcare, banking/financial, travel/hospitality, media/entertainment, tech, restaurant/food service, CPG/manufacturing, shipping/logistics, and education/learning. All respondents had started or completed a new AI initiative using an external vendor to transform CX in the past 12 months.