

Leveraging AI to enhance CX – a look at European businesses



Table of contents

Foreword	3
Glossary	4
Executive summary	7
Chapter 1: Businesses held back by lack of AI skills, but executives expect to invest in AI in the next 2 years.....	9
Chapter 2: AI and NLP of high interest for CX.....	13
Chapter 3: Contact centre challenges.....	21
Chapter 4: Improving contact centres with AI and NLP.....	25
Chapter 5: A look at key differences between countries.....	33
Conclusion	37
Methodology	38

Foreword

Recognised as a global leader and visionary in the Contact Centre as a Service (CCaaS) industry, Odigo is committed to developing enterprise, cloud-based solutions that enhance an organisation's ability to provide rewarding customer experience (CX). Our open, proprietary solutions support contact centre agents with intuitive technology that increases engagement and boosts performance. We believe that best-in-class CX is a perfect combination of forward-thinking technology that does not replace humans, but supports them.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming central to CX strategy. The development of AI continues at breakneck speed, as natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning (ML) create numerous possibilities to meet evolving consumer expectations. Customers want increased access across all communication channels, swift resolutions and more personalised customer service. As CX is of paramount importance, organisations need increased efficiency, engaged and motivated employees and predictive analytics. To meet these requirements, CX executives are turning to AI-powered solutions.

Instinctively, this feels true – but how do executives really feel about the role AI plays, or will play, in the CX they provide customers? To find out, Odigo commissioned a study by Davies Hickman, a leading UK analyst firm, to gauge the attitudes of executives across a wide

range of industries in six European markets: the UK, France, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium. The results, presented in this paper, highlight the current AI strengths and weaknesses contact centres have and reveal differences in attitudes and competencies between countries, while charting the course for AI implementation in the coming years.

We firmly believe that the AI revolution should be embraced, not feared, as the aim of AI is to improve experience, both for customers and agents. This informative research not only sheds light on how AI is transforming CX, but also how AI-driven solutions will help organisations re-imagine CX across all industries in the long term.

Happy reading,



Thibaud Pietri
Chief Product Officer at Odigo

Glossary

Algorithms: A set of instructions entered into a program to carry out a specific task.

Artificial Intelligence (AI): Machines that learn from experience while emulating human thinking and actions. In contact centres, AI is incorporated into a communication flow promoting self-service, and (at times) engaging a helpful human contact if the AI senses frustration or hesitation (sentiment analysis) by the customer. In a contact centre, AI chatbots enable the optimisation of agent resources while simultaneously addressing some routine interactions.

Analytics: The systematic analysis of data or statistics.

Automatic qualification: The process of automatically and accurately determining the reason for a customer's interaction, in order to redirect them towards the most appropriate resource to fulfil their needs.

Automation: The use of equipment or computer programs to accomplish predictable tasks without human assistance.

Bot: An AI-driven program that communicates through voice (voicebot), text (chatbot) or over the phone (callbot).

Channel: A medium of communication, such as phone, email, text or social messaging.

Cloud: A network of Internet-based servers that store and manage data. Organisations often turn to the cloud to reduce in-house infrastructure costs and increase flexibility.

Contact centre: An updated term for call centre. While call centre implies the phone channel, a contact centre reflects the fact that agents are responding for requests from a variety of contact channels such as email, chat, social messaging, website, app and phone.

Customer experience (CX): How a customer feels when dealing with an organisation; it is the result of one or many interactions over a period of time.

Customer experience management: The processes a company uses to follow and manage every interaction between a customer and the company throughout the customer lifecycle.

Customer journey: The path of sequential steps a customer experiences each time he or she interacts with a company (for example, contacting the company).

Customer retention: An organisation's ability to keep existing customers and prevent them from taking their business to a competitor.

Customer satisfaction (CSAT): A key performance indicator (KPI) that tracks the level of satisfaction customers have for a company's products and/or services. It is an important measurement of a brand's overall performance with its customer base.

Customer service (CS): The assistance and support provided by a company to people who buy their products or use their services. CS is a crucial factor in determining customer experience.

Dialog management: The methods governing the way information is exchanged between a user and computer system.

First contact resolution (FCR): When a customer's question or issue is resolved after a single interaction. FCR measurements are crucial as they enable contact centres to monitor the quality of answers (not just quantitative KPIs), thereby aligning customer experience and agent performance.

Legacy systems: Any method, technology, application or infrastructure that is considered outdated.

Machine learning (ML): A key component of AI that enables systems to automatically and independently learn and improve from experience.

Natural language processing (NLP): NLP is an AI process that converts text or audio speech into encoded, structured information. NLP lays the groundwork for technologies such as speech recognition, dialog management, speech synthesis and natural language understanding (NLU).

Natural language understanding (NLU): A subset of natural language processing that focuses on machine reading comprehension.

Net Promoter Score (NPS): The percentage of customers who say they would be likely to recommend a company to others. NPS is a common metric used to discern customer satisfaction.

Omnichannel: The integration of different means of communication (face to face, email, phone, text, social messaging) that gives customers more freedom in the way they contact a company.

Self-service: When customers are able to complete tasks on their own.

Sentiment analysis: The identification of emotional states by AI. In CX, sentiment analysis is used to help route requests and provide information for agents.

Smart data management applications: Solutions that make it easier to operationalise digital information.

Smart routing: An advanced form of skill-based routing that factors in additional data, such as the customer's history, products they use, etc.

Speech analysis: The use of AI to analyse speech. In CX, speech analytics is used to analyse recorded calls to gather customer information and improve communication.

Speech recognition: The method of empowering a computer to effectively evaluate and respond to a human's verbal language.

Speech synthesis: Generating verbal language, based on written input, with a computer program.



Executive summary

This unique research explores the extent to which business executives want to invest in artificial intelligence (AI) technologies in order to positively impact the customer experience (CX) provided by their organisations. It specifically focuses on the opportunities to use natural language processing (NLP).

During March 2021, independent research was conducted with 1,007 European business executives from six countries and across different industries. The results are significant. While 89% of European business executives agree their organisations will invest in AI technology in the next 2 years, nearly 8 in 10 respondents recognise their organisations' lack of knowledge when it comes to understanding different AI technologies.

These business executives believe that investing in AI is a good way to improve their organisations' CX; specifically 88% in the UK, 90% in France, 97% in Spain, 89% in Germany and 82% in Belgium and the Netherlands. Despite this high interest in AI, the skills and knowledge to drive the CX that their organisations want to achieve by using AI is not evident.

The research highlights the need for European businesses to improve their contact centres, and executives across Europe want this improvement to happen. Business executives believe their co-workers most interested in AI are in IT, finance, compliance and procurement, sales, marketing, customer experience and e-commerce.

The research shows executives want to see changes to both the functionality and the performance of their contact centres. Many are using or planning to use NLP and AI to make improvements, including automatic qualification of customers, smart routing, advanced analytics and automatic interaction handling in self-service mode. Organisations are keen to use AI in customer experience management, intelligent customer performance management, omnichannel customer profiles, process automation and smart data management applications. However, when investing in AI and NLP for CX, it is improving contact centre outputs such as customer satisfaction (CSAT), retention and increasing the number of new customers, that are the favoured benefits.

Finally, the report takes a look at key differences in approaches and challenges between countries.



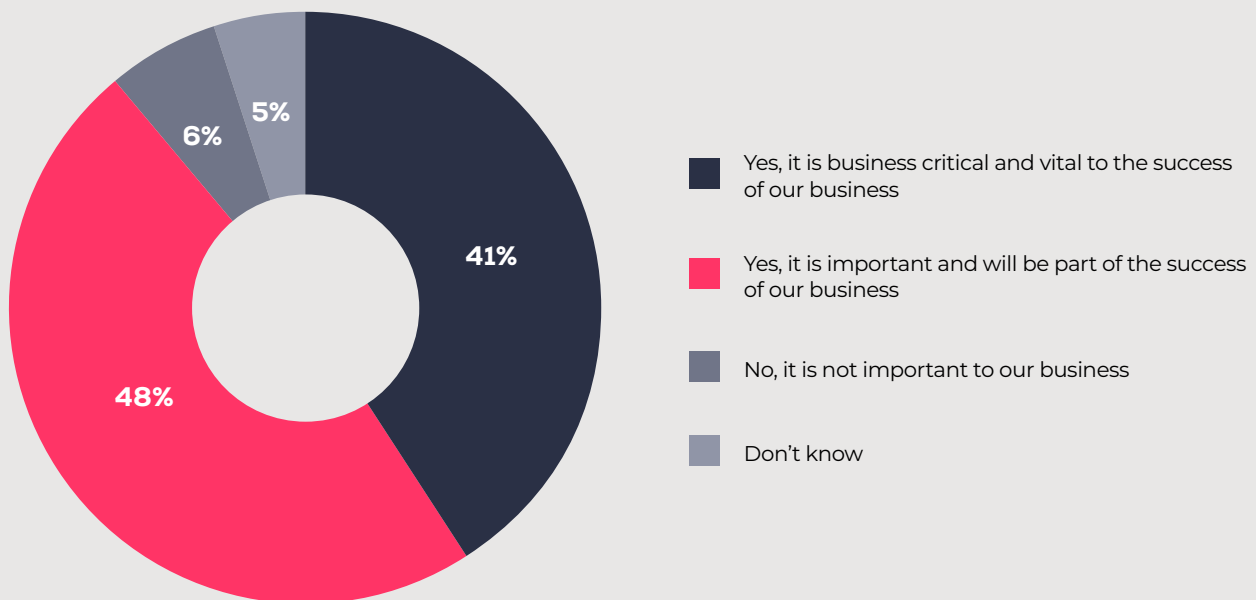


Chapter 1: Businesses held back by lack of AI skills, but executives expect to invest in AI in the next 2 years

A staggering 89% of European business executives say AI technologies are vital or important to the success of their business and they think their organisations will invest in AI technologies in the next 2 years. However, the increased revenues and cost savings to be gained from AI are being delayed because business executives lack the AI skills to improve CX:

- 75% agree that a lack of AI knowledge stops their investment in improving CX.
- Nearly 8 in 10 business executives say that no one or only a few people are AI experts in their area of work.

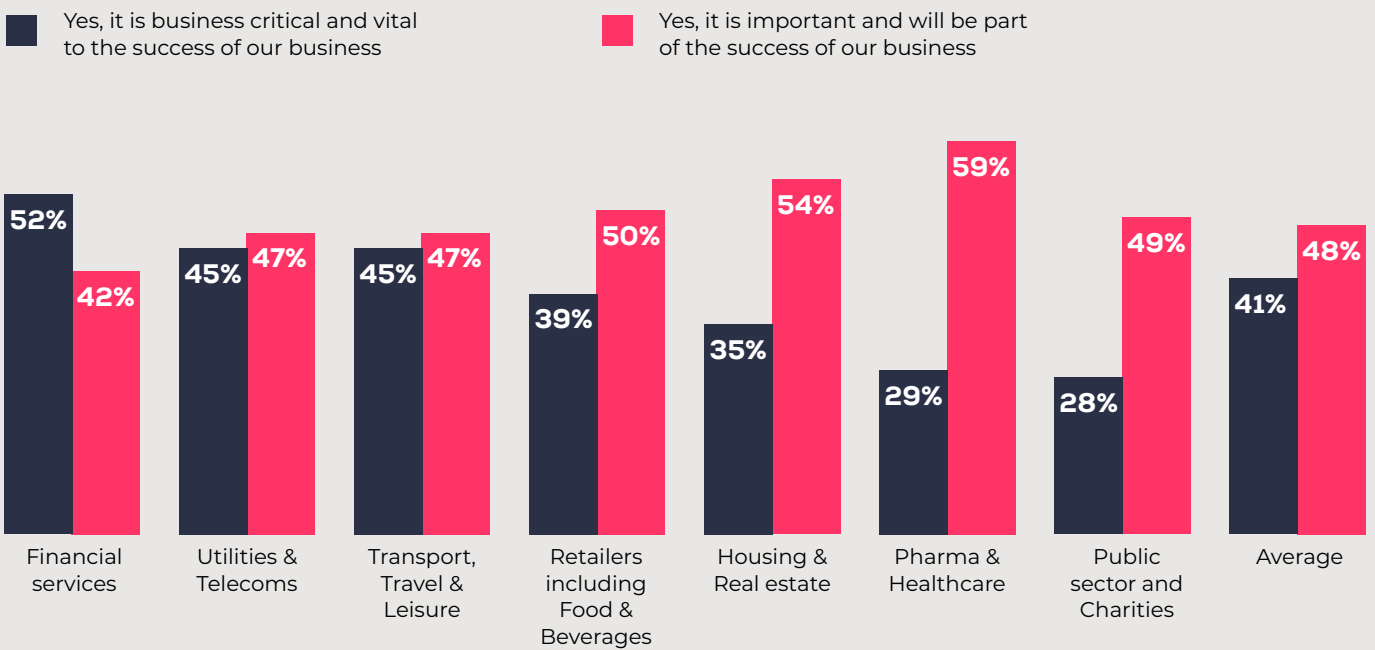
Do you think your organisation may invest in AI technologies in the next 2 years?



Source: 1,007 online interviews of European business executives – Davies Hickman, 2021

Nearly 9 out of 10 business executives agree investing in AI is a priority in the next 2 years, with only 6% of respondents saying it is not important. Of those executives who think it is important to invest in AI, it is the financial services, utilities and telecoms, transport, travel and leisure sectors that emphasise AI investment is business critical and vital to the success of their businesses. Some executives in pharma and healthcare, housing and real estate, retailers, public sector and charities think it is vital to the success of their businesses and most respondents in these sectors view AI as being important while recognising that it will be a part of the success of their business.

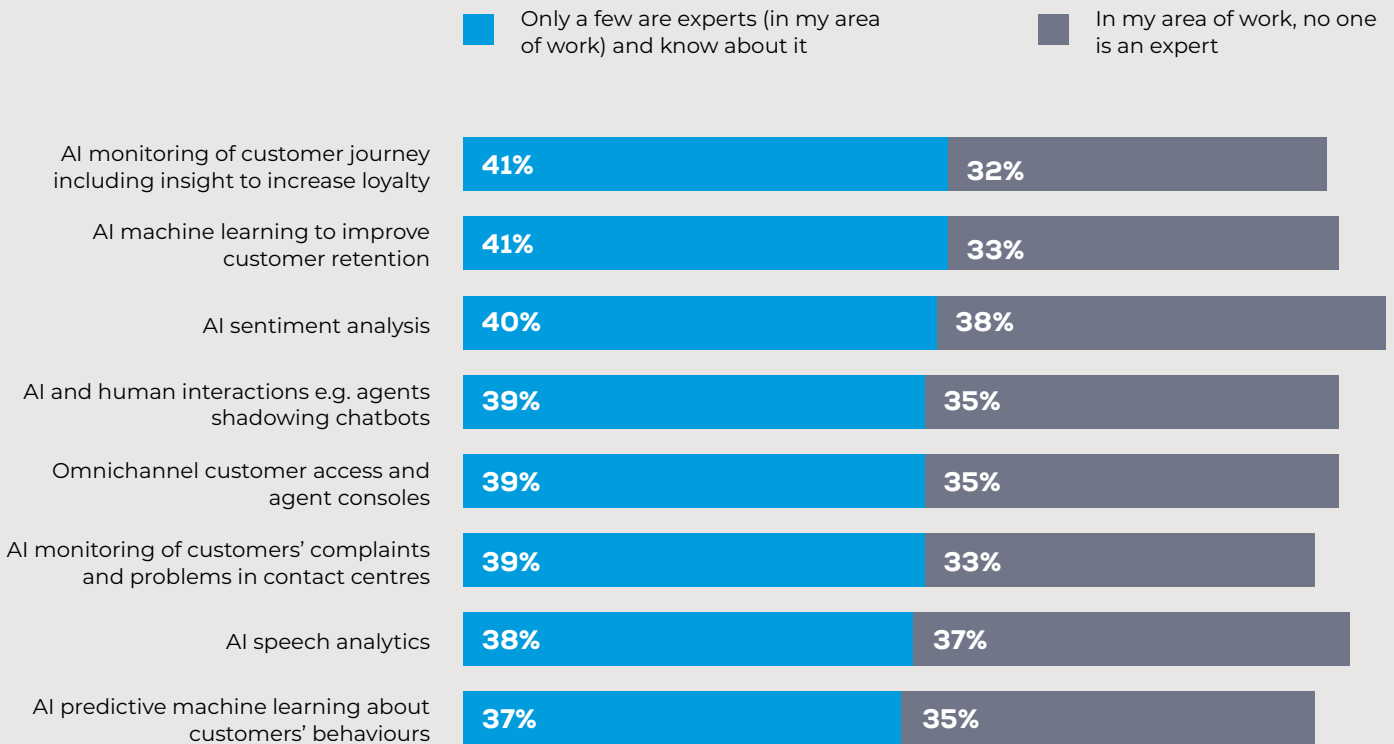
Do you think your organisation may invest in AI technologies in the next 2 years?



Source: 1,007 online interviews of European business executives – Davies Hickman, 2021

Across sectors there is high demand for AI. While there is a wide range of AI technologies available to improve the efficiency of organisations and their relationships with their customers, there are few experts available. AI skill levels are higher for the use of AI in marketing spend optimisation, monitoring the customer journey to increase loyalty and retention and for sentiment analysis, but lower for using AI in speech analysis and customer behaviour prediction.

How familiar are your colleagues, in your area of work, with the following artificial intelligence technologies?



Source: 1,007 online interviews of European business executives – Davies Hickman, 2021

Senior executives with a range of functions and from various sectors agree AI is important but a lack of skills in this area is holding back AI investment. Given the almost unanimous agreement among European business executives that they want to invest in AI in the near future, organisations need to assess their AI capabilities, including the allocation of time and resources, to enable colleagues to understand different AI technologies.

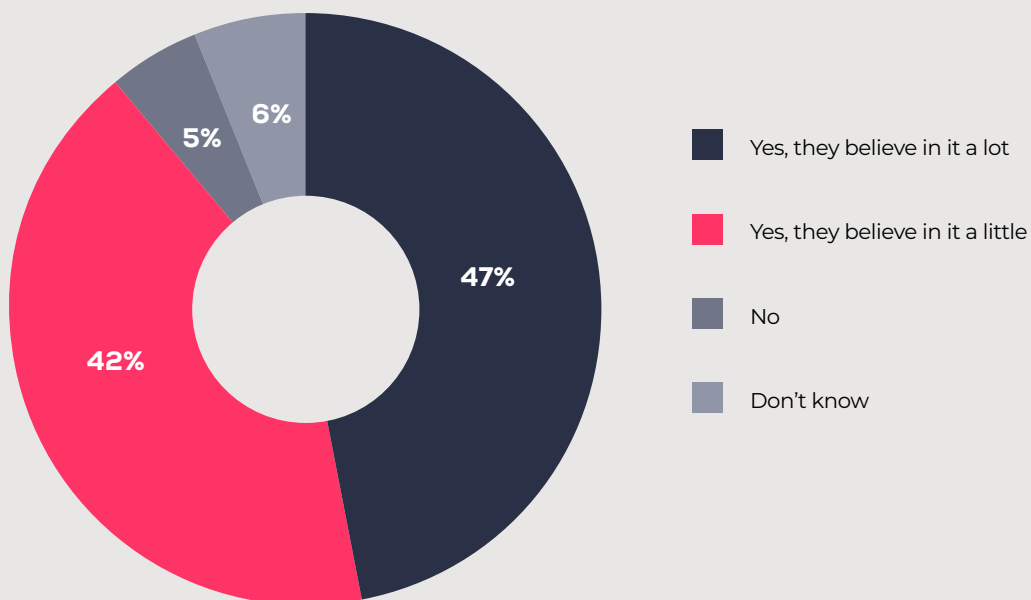


Chapter 2: AI and NLP of high interest for CX

AI and NLP for CX are highly valued by European business executives:

- 89% think that colleagues believe investing in AI is a good way to improve CX.
- 72% suggest they are eager to advance NLP projects with 66% planning to launch NLP projects in the next 2 years.
- Most organisations are using or planning to use NLP and AI for automatic qualification of customers, smart routing of calls, advanced analytics to identify trends in customer behaviour and automating interactions in self-service mode.

Do co-workers, in your organisation, believe that investing in AI is a good way to improve customer experiences?

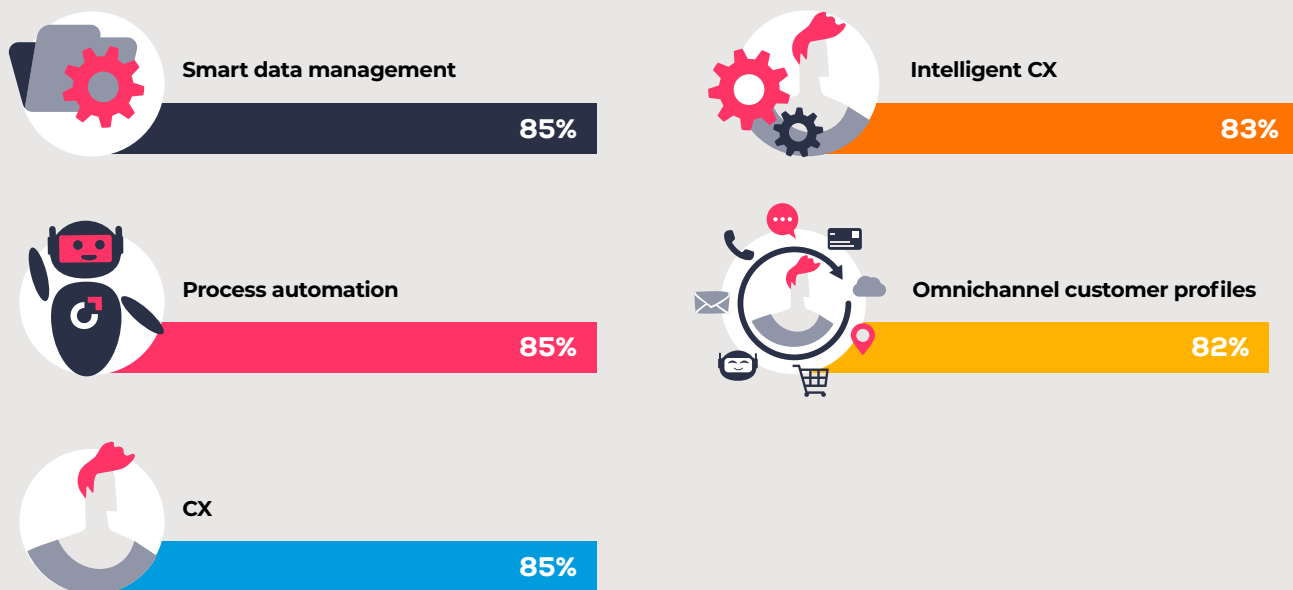


Source: 1,007 online interviews of European business executives – Davies Hickman, 2021

Some organisations intend to invest in the latest AI and CX technologies to get ahead of their competitors, others say if they were the CEO they would trial new AI and CX technologies to see what helps, while others would wait and see how other organisations change their CX. Only a select few would do nothing.

Overall, European business executives show a high interest in the following applications of AI technologies for CX and the business value they can add now and in the future:

Do you think organisations are/will be interested in the following applications of AI technology now and in the future? Respondents who answered "It would really add value now" or "It might add value in the future":



Over 8 in 10 see value in smart data management in order to optimise the analysis of big data for forward intelligence, customer insights and proactive actions. Respondents agree the top benefit is: **Attracting new customers with targeted communication.**

Over 8 in 10 see value in process automation in order to automate back office and supply chain functions. Respondents agree the top benefit is: **Improving customer retention with communication and engagement.**

Over 8 in 10 see value in customer experience management in order to support contact centre agents. Particularly when agents are handling complex interactions or shadowing chatbots used for routine customer tasks. Respondents agree the top benefit is: **Better customer data helps improve employee experience.**

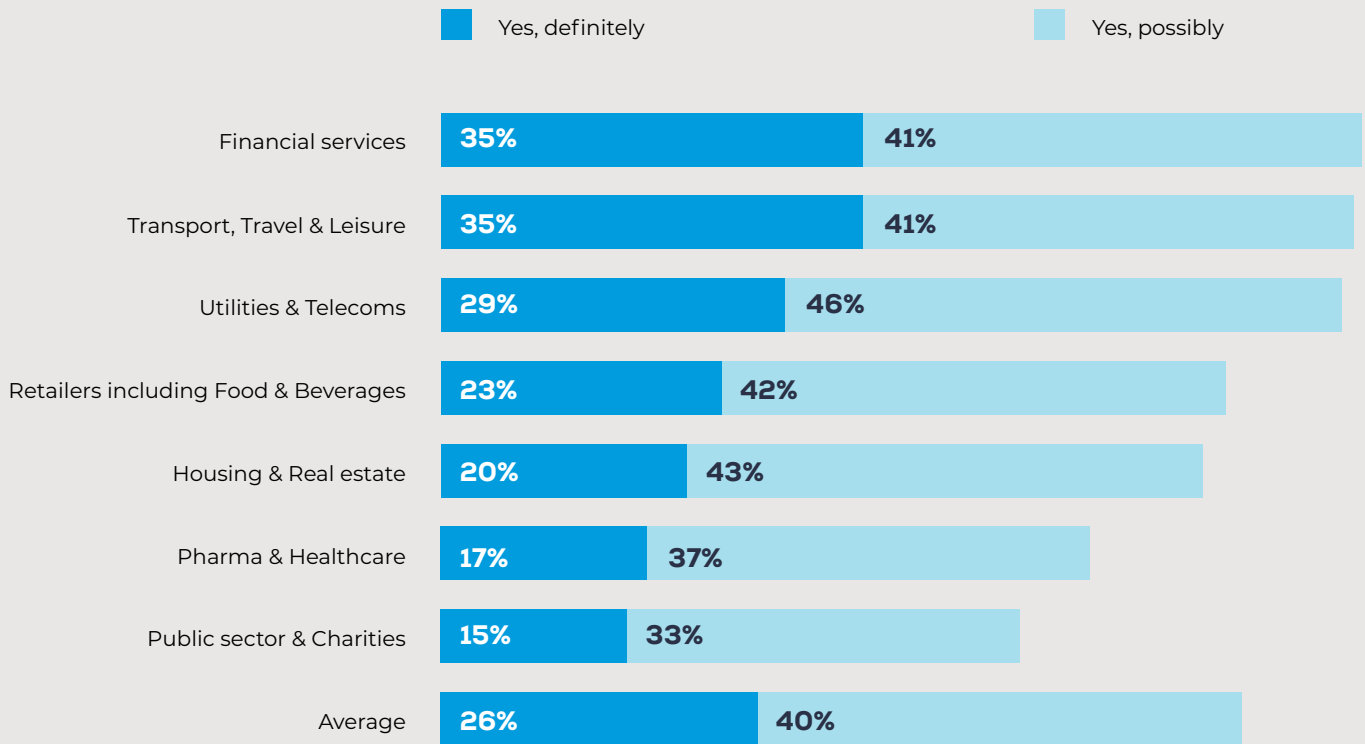
Over 8 in 10 see value in intelligent customer performance management in order to recognise customers and understand the context of their queries and interactions. Respondents agree the top benefit is: **Introducing intelligent, organisation-wide customer service levels.**

Over 8 in 10 see value in omnichannel customer profiles to match customers to service levels for apps, voice, post, chat, text, social and video. Respondents agree the top benefit is: **Improving the ability of customers to access an organisation using a range of channels.**

Part of the research aimed to understand organisations' interest in NLP. This was introduced to the online respondents as an AI process that converts text or audio speech into encoded, structured information which lays the groundwork for speech recognition, dialog management, speech synthesis and NLU. The demand for NLP by sector was explored, with research showing an appetite to launch such projects.



In the next 2 years, do you plan to launch projects based on NLP?



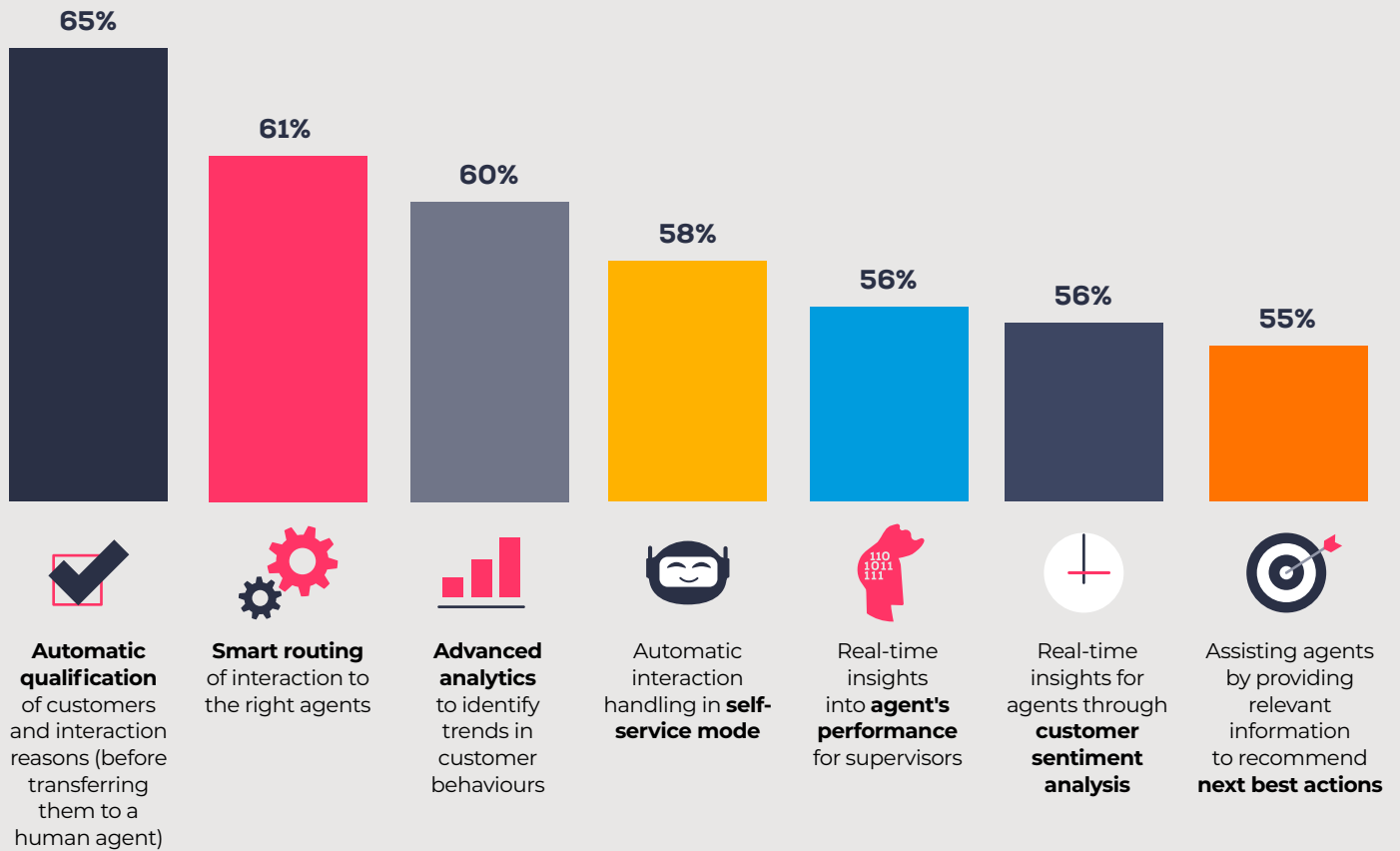
Source: 1,007 online interviews of European business executives – Davies Hickman, 2021

66% of respondents are planning to launch NLP projects in the next 2 years and 72% suggest they are eager to advance existing NLP projects. Organisations in financial services, transport, travel and leisure and utilities and telecoms are more eager to launch NLP projects as this technology is regarded as business critical for their survival. Some organisations strongly agreed that the greatest challenges to implementing NLP were having the right competencies internally to manage such a project (26%) and accessing accurate and usable data (24%).

Despite the obstacles, 45% of organisations said they had already launched projects based on NLP.



What is your organisation using/planning to use NLP/AI for?



Source: 1,007 online interviews of European business executives – Davies Hickman, 2021

89% of business executives believe that investing in AI is a good way to improve CX, with AI enjoying the backing of some key decision makers, including those in IT (59% believe in it a lot), finance, compliance and procurement (48% believe in it a lot) and leadership, strategy and R&D (46% believe in it a lot).



In fact, clients need not only autonomy, but also constant support. A skillful mix of autonomy and support is necessary to ensure that organisations remain one step ahead. But you still have to know how to strike the right balance.”

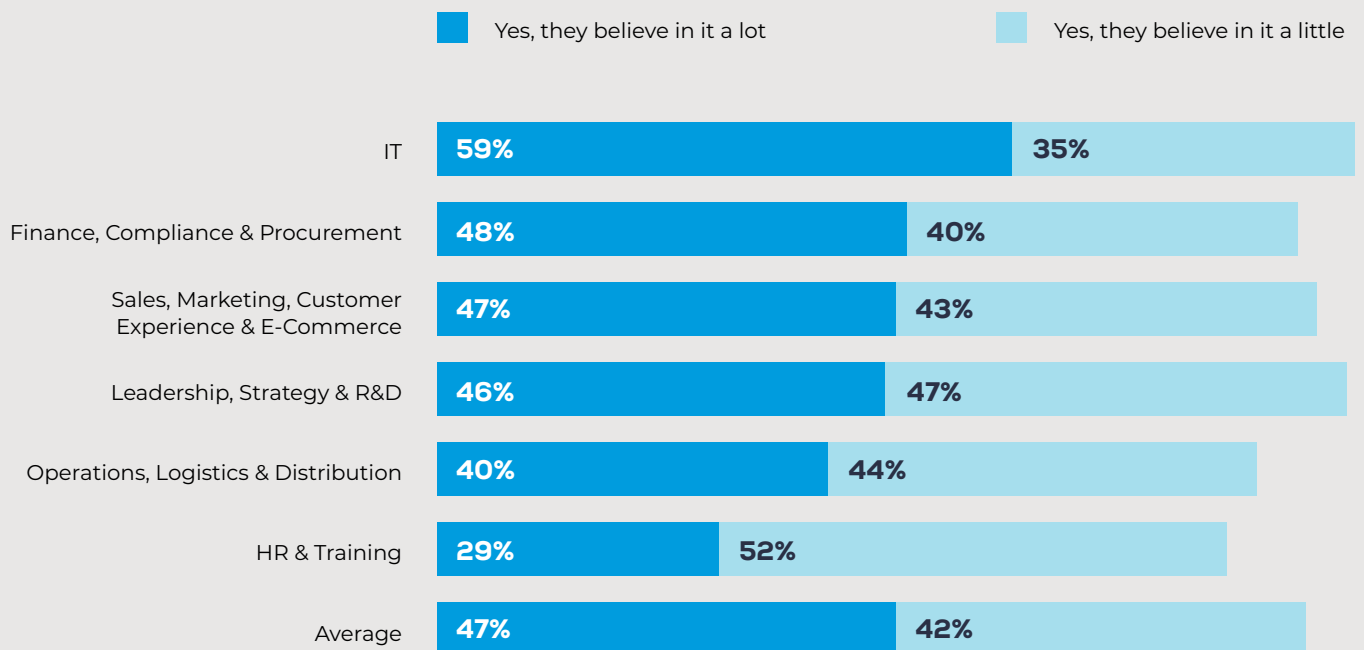
Karim Zemouli

Director of Innovation
and Customer Experience

Natixis Assurances



Do co-workers in your organisation believe that investing in AI is a good way to improve customer experiences?



Source: 1,007 online interviews of European business executives – Davies Hickman, 2021

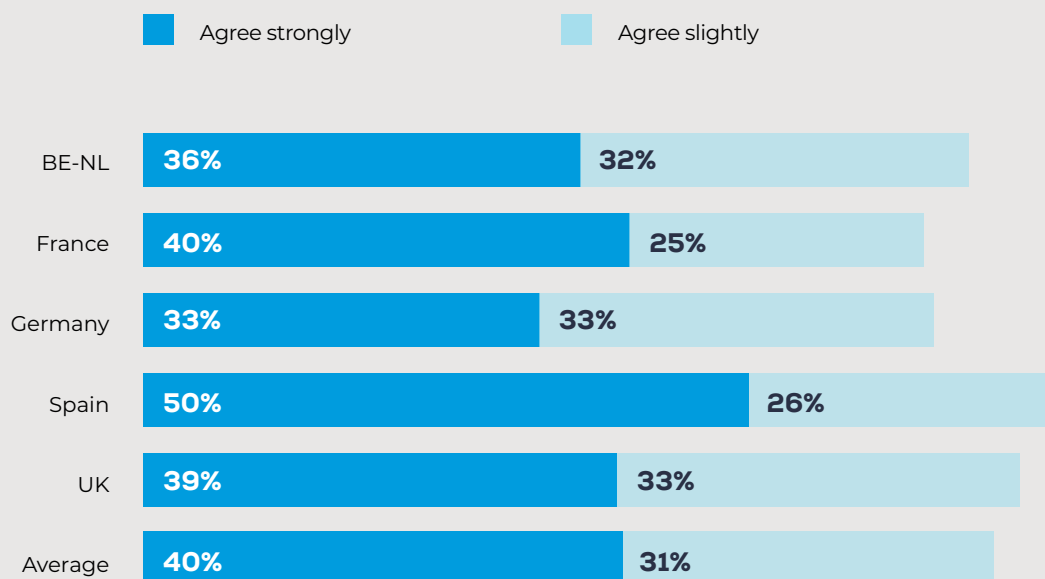


Chapter 3: Contact centre challenges

European business executives want to improve the performance of their contact centres. In a world where great CX is a source of increased loyalty, improved customer retention, increased customer satisfaction (CSAT) and competitive advantage, the quality of CX is important to the success of any organisation.

- 71% of European business executives would like to offer better support to customers in their contact centres.
- Most agree that there is room for contact centre improvements, including employee engagement 81%, cost efficiencies 81% and staff retention 83%.

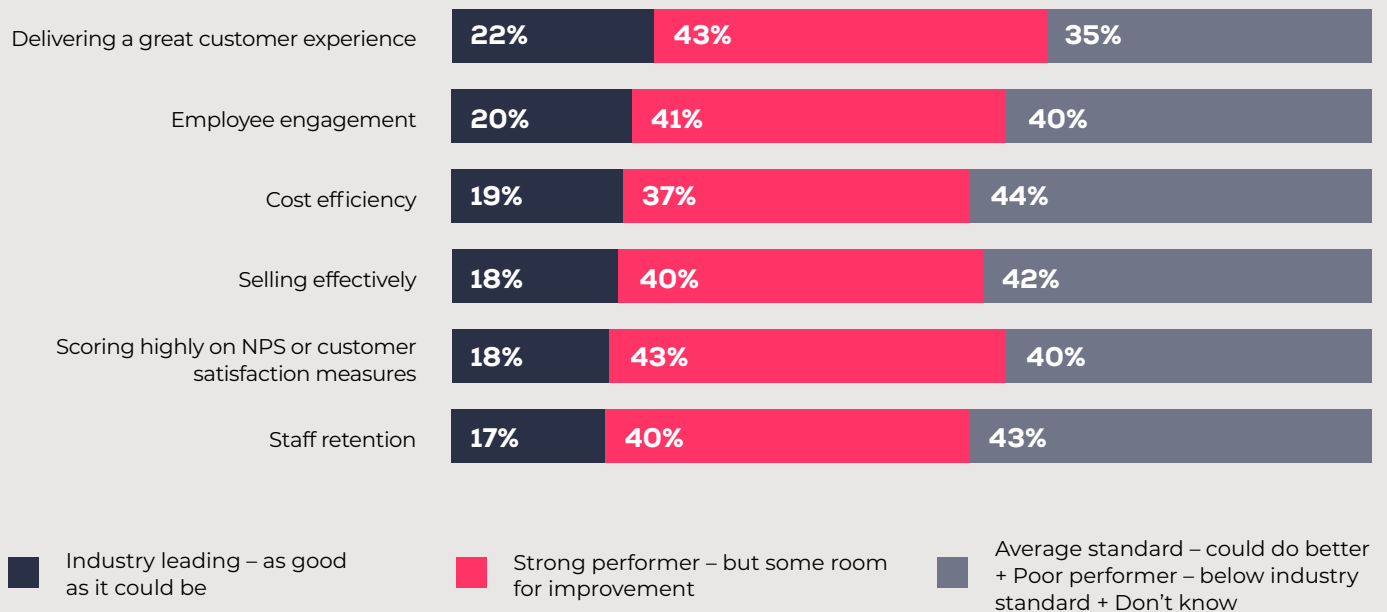
What do you think about your contact centre operations and the level of service it offers? Respondents who answered “We would like to offer better support to our customers”:



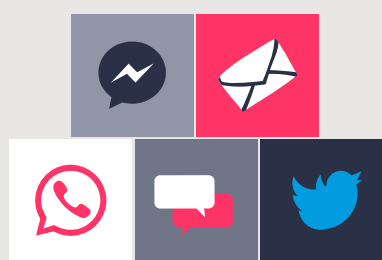
Source: 1,007 online interviews of European business executives – Davies Hickman, 2021

European business executives want to improve CX, but also recognise other contact centre weaknesses such as employee engagement, cost efficiency, sales effectiveness, customer measurements and staff retention.

Thinking about your organisation's contact centre operations, how would you rate it for...?



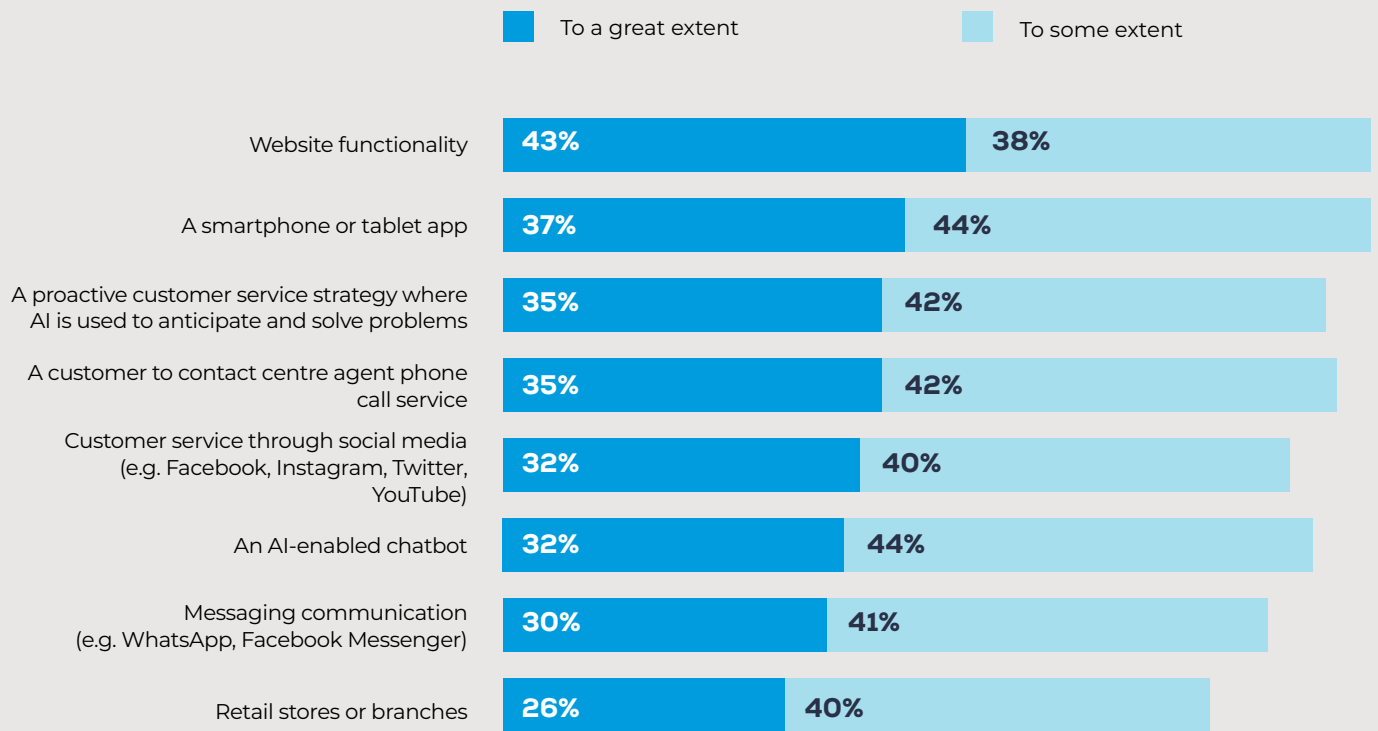
Source: 1,007 online interviews of European business executives – Davies Hickman, 2021



Originally, the intention of contact centres was to provide customers with fast telephone access to information about products and services. Today's contact centres are expected to deliver quality CX using a wide choice of channels including phone, email, social media, live chat, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, mail, chatbots, video-chat and more.

Prospective and current customers expect contact centres to meet their diverse channel needs when they are researching, buying, asking questions and complaining about products and services via multiple devices. European executives indicate their commitment to CX by the range of channels they propose prioritising in the future.

Thinking about the customer experience your organisation offers, to what extent should the following be prioritised in the future?



Source: 1,007 online interviews of European business executives – Davies Hickman, 2021

There are challenges to be addressed in European contact centres. A consistent level of service and support across all channels is increasingly influential on a brand's CX.



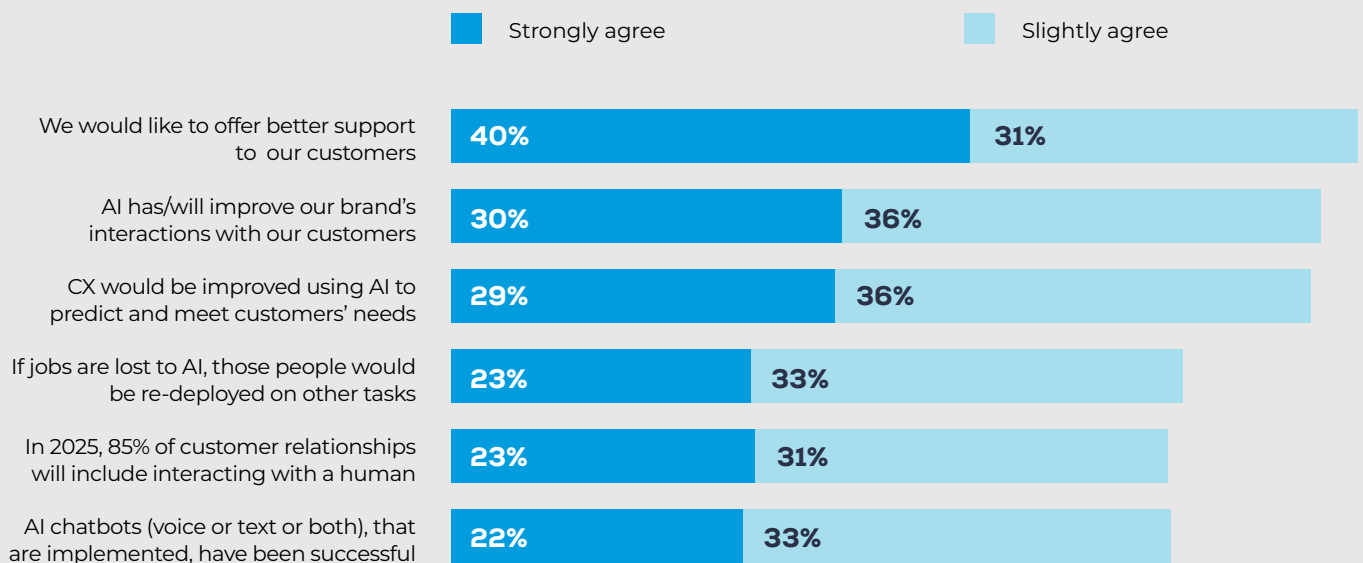


Chapter 4: Improving contact centres with AI and NLP

European business executives want to improve their contact centres. There are many ways these improvements can be achieved using AI and NLP. According to executives:

- 70% of organisations would like to offer better support to their customers.
- 69% agree it would be useful if algorithms and AI could support their agents.
- 65% agree CX would be improved by using AI to predict and meet customers' needs.
- 78% agree that there is room for contact centre improvements when delivering great CX.

What do you think about your contact centre and level of service it offers?

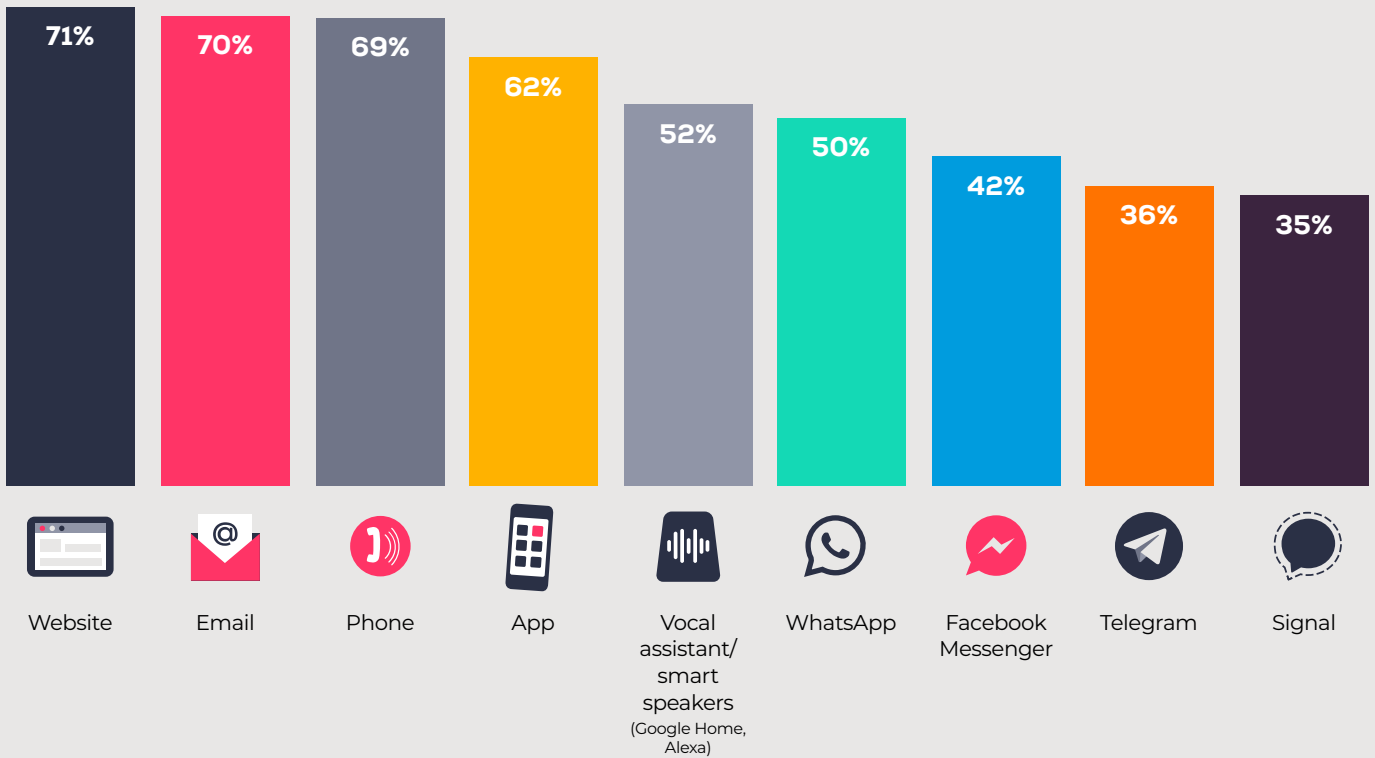


Source: 1,007 online interviews of European business executives – Davies Hickman, 2021

By analysing the responses of executives who work in different organisations, the research also shows how CX channel priorities differ between sectors. Business executives from some sectors agree websites and apps are top priorities, while other sectors believe contact centre agent phone service and proactive AI service are top priorities for CX channels.

The findings suggest that organisations have different channel challenges but say 'Yes' to NLP technologies such as voicebots or chatbots to provide customer service.

Is your organisation using/willing to use customer service bots (voice or text) to provide customer service in the following areas?



Source: 1,007 online interviews of European business executives – Davies Hickman, 2021



Businesses expect a wide range of benefits from AI. Some organisations view AI as a means to enhance collaboration and communication between staff. Chatbots, in particular, have a proven ability to help share information across departments and break down data silos.



We prefer to use chatbots internally, to enable employees to have very rapid information, and thus be able to respond as quickly as possible and under the best conditions.”

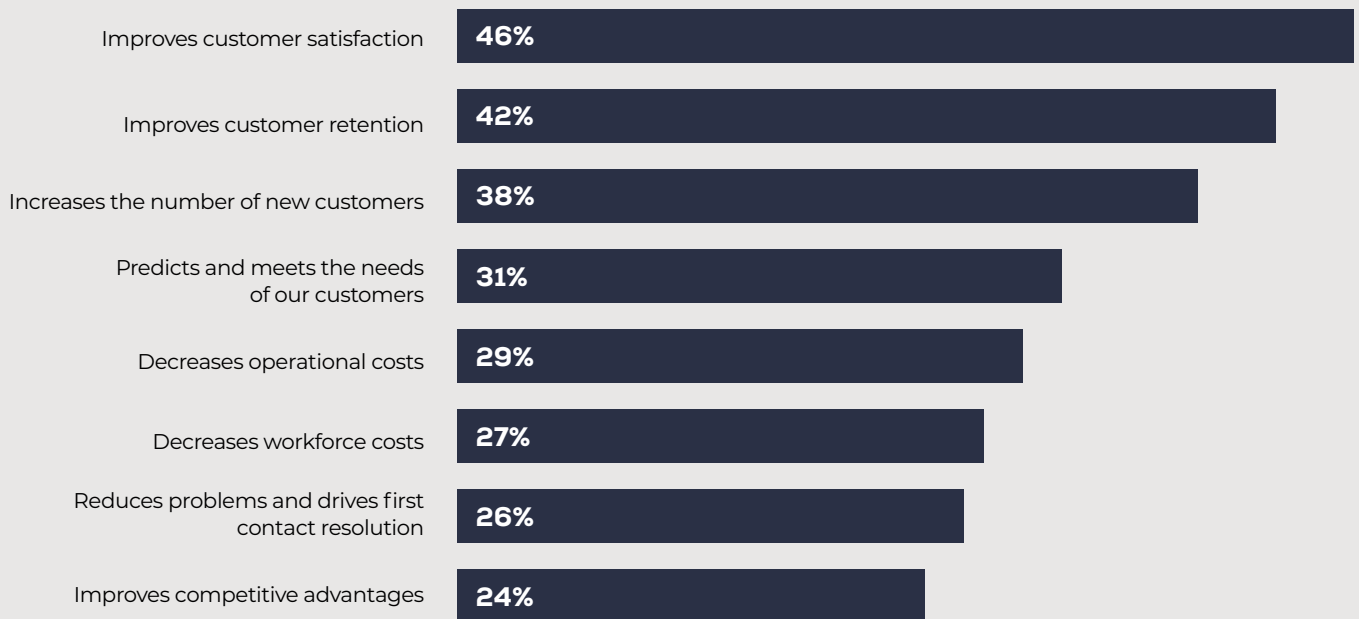
Karim Zemouli

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The benefits of back-office support aside, the priorities for most executives are improving current customer satisfaction, customer retention and increasing the number of new customers. However for other organisations, decreasing operational and workforce costs are important, along with improving first contact resolution (FCR).

What do you think would be the most important business value/s when investing in AI to improve customer experience?



Source: 1,007 online interviews of European business executives – Davies Hickman, 2021

The findings show there is work to be done to modernise contact centres. Moreover, the scale and interest in improving contact centres with AI and NLP technologies highlights the risk of doing nothing.

AI and NLP are not aspirations, but reality!

This research illustrates how eager businesses are to use AI and, specifically, NLP, which are rapidly developing and becoming increasingly effective. Today, customers and agents increasingly trust these technologies for support and know data enables convenient, fast and personalised customer service. There is a growing belief that AI enhances CX, and the Contact Centre as a Service (CCaaS) industry is at the forefront of these innovations.

Organisations must process an ever-increasing volume of data and NLP enables contact centres to understand the content and context of digital and voice interactions. Transforming unstructured calls, chat, emails, etc. into structured data

facilitates analytics and utilises a previously untapped source of insight.

A CCaaS solution incorporates AI and NLP into key features and functionalities, especially in qualification and automation strategies. NLP helps in qualifying interactions and connects customers to the best resource, whether AI-driven self-service options that can manage ever-complex tasks or a human agent with the right skillset.

Prediction capabilities based on machine learning (ML), a branch of AI, empower organisations with the capability to observe and anticipate customer behaviours, communicate alerts, improve processes and plan strategies that lead to reduced



average handle times, lower customer effort scores and higher customer satisfaction.

Beyond minimising waiting times and offering callback options, AI and NLP provide agents with real-time recommendations. By conducting instantaneous analysis, AI-driven software suggests answers and next best actions. This improves CX and helps agents easily extract information. Additionally, real-time transcription of calls, sentiment analysis capabilities and technical indicators boost agent experience.

AI and NLP improve the service quality for both customers and agents. Customers expect contextual engagement that is hyper-personalised, respectful, empathetic, agile and professional. Agents want tools that save time, increase efficiency and support them in delivering world-class CX.

AI and NLP are cutting-edge technologies that already augment agents and help bring humanity to an increasingly digital world; providing customer experience as it was meant to be.



Corentin Messerschmidt
Head of Innovation Lab at Odigo



Chapter 5: A look at key differences between countries



UK

Businesses held back by lack of AI skills, but UK executives expect to invest in AI in the next 2 years

The research confirms UK organisations' interest in AI, with 89% of respondents in the UK (all countries 89%) believing that investing in AI in the next 2 years will contribute to their businesses' success. As in other countries, there is a lack of AI expertise to drive the CX their organisations want to achieve. For example 50% of respondents in the UK (all countries 37%) agree no one in their area of work in their organisation is an expert in AI speech analytics.

Strong interest in AI and NLP

88% of UK business executives (all countries 89%) believe that investing in AI is a good way to improve CX, while 66% of respondents in the UK (all countries 67%) plan to launch projects based on NLP in the next 2 years.

Strong interest in contact centre improvement

The research highlights how most contact centres could be improved, and UK organisations want this to happen. 72% of respondents in the UK (all countries 70%) agree they would like to offer better contact centre support to their customers.

89% of respondents in the UK (all countries 85%) agree that a supplier could help them take advantage of new technologies such as AI contact centre cloud services providing by solutions that work with legacy systems.

Strong belief in AI and NLP helping customer satisfaction and retention

The UK's views about improving contact centres with AI and NLP are similar to the overall views of European business executives. They are positive about using AI and NLP to increase customer satisfaction and retention, while improving competitive advantage.

UK organisations want to see improvements to both the functionality and the performance of their contact centres. 70% of respondents in the UK (all countries 66%) agree that upgrading to new cloud technologies will improve/has improved their organisations' CX. 64% of directors in the UK (all countries 62%) recognise the benefit to contact centres of investing in cloud technology.

UK respondents are more positive than others about some uses of NLP:

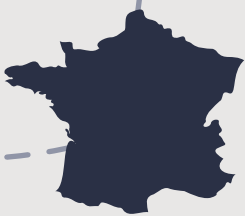


66% in the UK favour automatic interaction handling in self-service mode (all countries 58%)



63% in the UK favour advanced analytics to identify trends in consumer behaviours (all countries 60%).

France



Research reveals a high level of interest from French business executives in AI and how it will improve customer interactions for brands

The research confirms a high level of interest from French business executives in AI, but they recognise their organisations' lack of knowledge when it comes to understanding different AI technologies.

73% of respondents in France (all countries 66%) agree that AI has/will improve their brand's interactions with their customers by offering relevant, real-time, contextual communication for marketing, sales and customer service. However, their expertise is lacking in some areas with 39% of respondents in France (all countries 33%) saying no one in their organisation is an expert in AI for marketing spend optimisation. French executives are more positive than others about the impact on their workforce of introducing AI, with 32% in France (all countries 23%) strongly agreeing that if jobs are lost to AI, those people would be re-deployed to other tasks.

Strong interest but widespread concerns

Business executives in France show a high interest in AI, 90% of respondents (all countries 89%) believe investing in AI is a good way to improve their organisation's CX. 76% of respondents (all countries 69%) have concerns that would need to be addressed first before investing, including their lack of understanding of how emerging AI technologies could add value.

Widespread performance concerns

The research highlights how most contact centres could be improved, and French organisations want this to happen. 60% of respondents in France (all countries 55%) agree that they need global capability in their contact centres while only 55% of respondents in France (all countries 61%) say that their organisation's contact centre operations were either industry-leading or a strong performer.

Strong belief in automating interactions

France is more positive than others about automating contact centre interactions with 63% of respondents in France (all countries 55%) strongly agreeing that the AI chatbots their organisations have implemented have been successful. In fact, 61% in France (all countries 54%), strongly agree that in 2025 their customers will manage 85% of their relationship without interacting with an agent.

French executives are very positive about improving contact centres with NLP:



67% in France (all countries 55%) have launched many projects based on NLP.



74% in France (all countries 65%) say their organisation is using/planning to use NLP and AI for automatic qualification of customers and interaction reasons.





Spain

Spanish business executives appear more confident than others in their AI skills and believe more strongly than others that AI technology is business critical

96% of respondents in Spain (all countries 89%) agree that investing in AI technology in the next 2 years is business critical. 83% of Spanish business executives (all countries 66%) are extremely positive about AI and the improved impact it will have on their brand's interactions with their customers. For 42% of Spanish respondents (all countries 32%) it is the sales and marketing areas that are most interested in AI solutions or innovations.

Spain is similar to organisations in other European countries in that it lacks all the necessary AI skills, but 39% of its business executives (all countries 28%) say they have experts in AI predictive machine learning (PML) concerning customer behaviours.

Very strong belief in AI for CX

97% of executives in Spain (all countries 89%) believe investing in AI is a good way to improve CX while 53% of respondents (all countries 38%) agree that increasing the number of new customers is the top business value when investing in AI to improve CX.

While Spain has a high interest in AI and NLP for CX, 70% of respondents (all countries 57%) think that identifying use cases that fit NLP is a challenge for them.

Strong interest in improving contact centres

76% of executives in Spanish businesses (all countries 70%) recognise that their contact centres would like to offer better support to customers. The research highlights how most Spanish contact centres could be improved, and organisations want this to happen.

Very strong interest in AI and NLP

85% of respondents in Spain (all countries 76%) agree that in the future they will be using AI-enabled chatbots for CX in their contact centres.

Spanish executives are very positive about the uses of NLP including:



69% in Spain favour advanced analytics to identify trends in customer behaviour (all countries 60%).



68% in Spain favour smart routing of interactions to agents (all countries 61%).



67% in Spain favour giving supervisors real-time insights into agents' performance (all countries 56%).



67% in Spain favour automatic interaction handling in self-service (all countries 58%).



67% in Spain favour giving agents real-time insights from customer sentiment analysis (all countries 56%).

Germany



Germany will invest in AI technology in the next 2 years, but recognises a skills gap and is the most eager to learn about AI

93% of business executives in Germany (all countries 89%) agree their organisation will invest in AI technology in the next 2 years, and 41% of respondents in Germany (all countries 41%) agree it is business critical and vital to their success. Yet only 25% of respondents in Germany (all countries 28%) agree that many of them (in their area of work) are experts in AI predictive machine learning (PML) and know a lot about it.

Interestingly, it is the German organisations that have no experts in an AI field but are eager to learn more:

- No one is an expert in AI predictive machine learning about customer behaviour, but they are keen to learn more – Germany 30% (all countries 23%)
- No one is an expert in omnichannel customer access and agent consoles, but they are keen to learn more – Germany 28% (all countries 22%)
- No one is an expert in AI for intelligent supply chain and inventory optimisation, but they are keen to learn more – Germany 27% (all countries 21%).

Strong interest but lack of skills

90% of German executives (all countries 89%) believe that investing in AI is a good way to improve CX and 76% of respondents in Germany (all countries 72%) are eager to advance NLP projects. Despite the high interest in AI and NLP

for CX, German organisations do not currently have the AI skills and knowledge to drive the CX that their organisations want to achieve.

While 44% of respondents in Germany (all countries 36%) say IT staff are most interested in solutions or innovations based on AI, it is the business executives across German organisations who will not be easily deterred from investing in AI:

- 25% of respondents in Germany (all countries 19%) say that a lack of AI knowledge and skills in the workforce will not stop them from investing in AI,
- 30% of respondents in Germany (all countries 24%) say that competing investment priorities will not put them off investing in AI.

Cost efficiency challenges

There is much to be done to improve European contact centres, including those in Germany. Few contact centres are industry leaders, only 18% in Germany (all countries 19%) are industry-leading when assessing cost efficiency and 20% in Germany (all countries 22%) are industry-leading for delivering great CX.

Strong belief in AI for CX

The research highlights how most European contact centres could be improved. 66% of respondents in Germany (all countries 71%) would like to offer better support to customers in their contact centres and German workforces are in agreement, as 90% of respondents in Germany (all countries 89%) think their business colleagues believe investing in AI is good for CX.

Belgium and the Netherlands



Belgium and the Netherlands expect to invest in AI in the next 2 years, but to date they have fewer AI experts

As in the rest of Europe, there is a shortage of AI skills in Belgium and the Netherlands (BE-NL). For example, only 14% of respondents in BE-NL (all countries 22%) agree there are many in their area of work that are experts in AI sentiment analysis. Yet 77% of respondents in BE-NL (all countries 89%) agree that investing in AI technology in the next 2 years will contribute to their business success.

Weaker than average interest in AI for CX

82% of BE-NL executives (all countries 89%) believe investing in AI is a good way to improve CX. 53% of respondents in BE-NL (all countries 72%) say their organisations are eager to advance NLP projects while 50% of respondents in BE-NL (all countries 67%) say they plan to launch projects based on NLP in the next 2 years.

49% of respondents in BE-NL (all countries 46%) agree improving customer satisfaction is the top business value when investing in AI to improve CX but only 25% of respondents in BE-NL (all countries 38%) believe it increases the number of new customers.

There is high interest in improving CX in organisations in BE-NL, and both now and in the future 84% of BE-NL executives (all countries 85%) are/will be interested in customer experience management.

Low confidence in contact centre excellence

When asked about their contact centre operations and the level of service it offers 68% of respondents in BE-NL (all countries 71%) agree they would like to offer better support to their customers.

Only 7% of respondents in BE-NL (all countries 19%) agree cost efficiency in contact centres is industry-leading (as good as it could be) and just 10% in BE-NL (all countries 22%) deliver industry-leading CX.

Below average belief in automation

Many in BE-NL are using/planning to use NLP and AI to make improvements to their contact centres and the research shows organisations want to see changes in their contact centres. 77% of respondents in BE-NL (all countries 81%) think a smartphone or tablet app should be prioritised in the future as part of the CX offering. 52% of respondents in BE-NL (all countries 58%) say automatic interaction handling in self-service mode will be used by organisations while 59% of respondents in BE-NL (all countries 69%) are willing to use customer service bots (voice or text) in their phone service.

BE-NL is in sync with other European countries as 68% of respondents in BE-NL (all countries 70%) agree they too would like to offer better support to their customers through their contact centres.



Conclusion

The research across 1,007 European business executives in the UK, France, Spain, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands shows many more similarities than differences. These European executives are committed to using AI but they and their teams lack AI skills. Here are the main highlights:

- 89% of European business executives say that AI technologies are vital or important to the success of their businesses and think their organisations will invest in AI in the next 2 years. German (93%) and Spanish (96%) executives are most likely to be positive, while those from Belgium and the Netherlands (77%) are slightly less so. The French and UK executives are both at 89%.
- 75% say lack of knowledge holds back their investment in AI, although slightly fewer German executives (70%) agree with this view.
- 71% of European business executives would like to offer better support to customers in their contact centres. This is felt most strongly by executives in Spain (76%) and least by those in Germany (66%) and France (65%).
- AI is seen as a good way of improving their organisations' CX according to 89% of European business executives. Spanish executives (97%) feel this most strongly, ahead of France (90%), Germany (89%) and the UK (88%). 82% of those from Belgium and the Netherlands agree, slightly less than the average.

Overall, Spanish business executives are the most positive about the opportunities for AI and NLP, with the French and Belgian and Dutch slightly less so.

In a world where great CX is a source of increased loyalty, improved customer retention, higher customer satisfaction and competitive advantage, the quality of CX is important to the success of any organisation. The research shows that most organisations want to use AI and NLP, but it is up to individual businesses to understand how they work, before taking advantage of the opportunities to shape a better future.



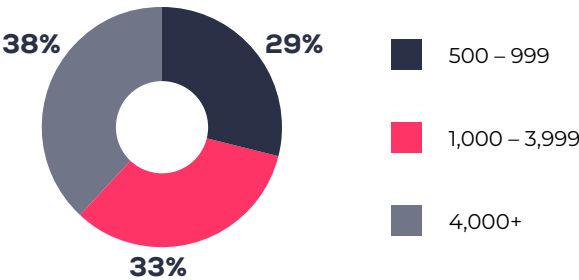
Methodology

Odigo commissioned Davies Hickman Partners, an independent market research consultancy, to conduct an online survey of 1007 European business executives across different industries in the UK, France, Spain, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands during March 2021.

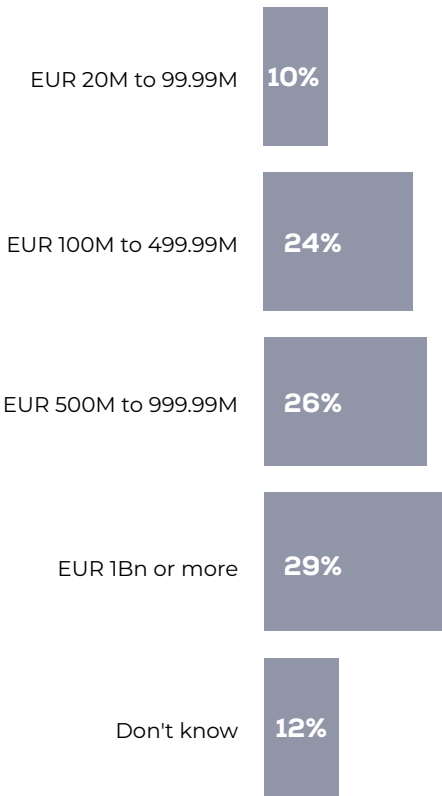
The research was completed according to the Market Research Society guidelines. Below are the details of the firmographic sample. The purpose of the survey was to understand changing attitudes to AI for CX within European businesses.

Due to rounding, some percentages presented in this research may not add up precisely to 100%. This is not material and does not change the meaning of the research.

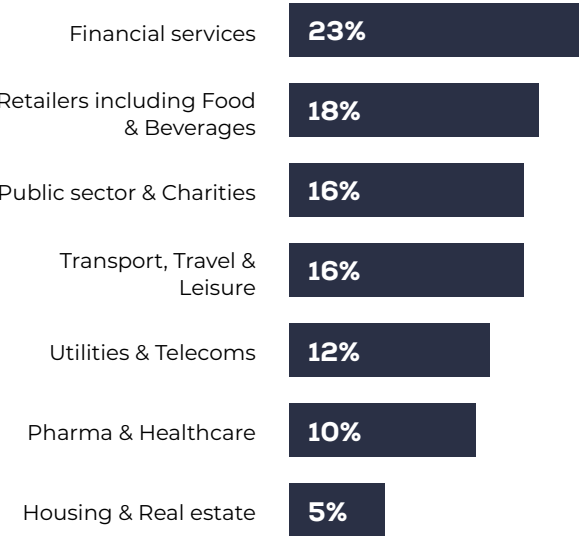
Company size by number of employees



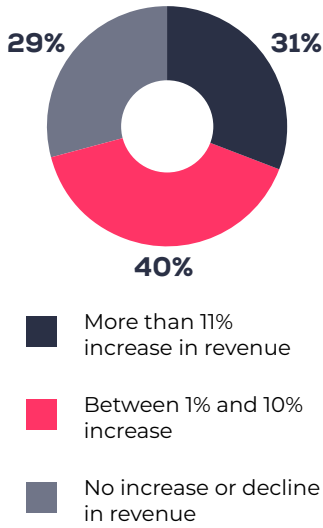
Organisations' annual revenue (EUR)



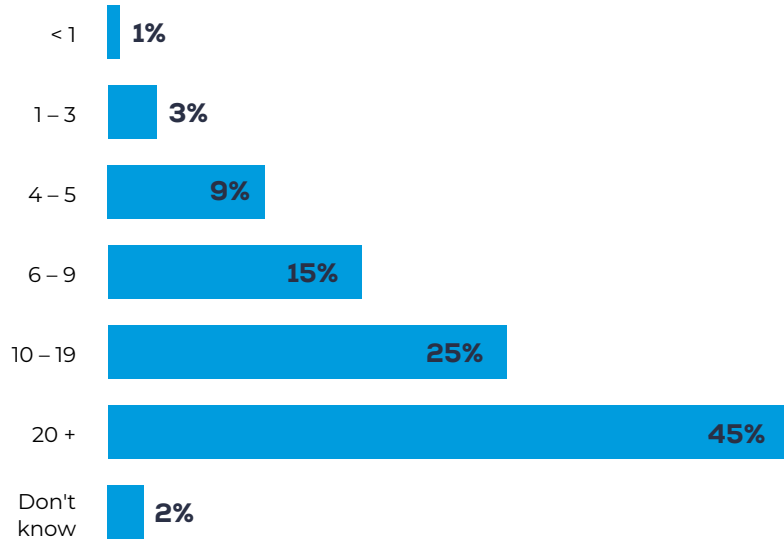
Industry sectors



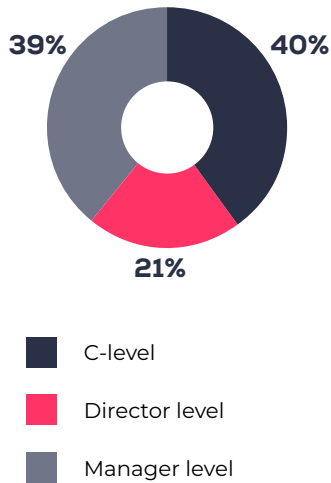
Revenue change in the last year



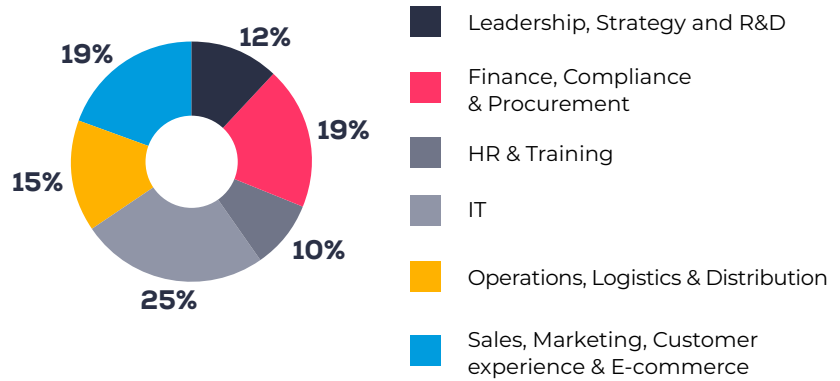
Years organisation has been in operation



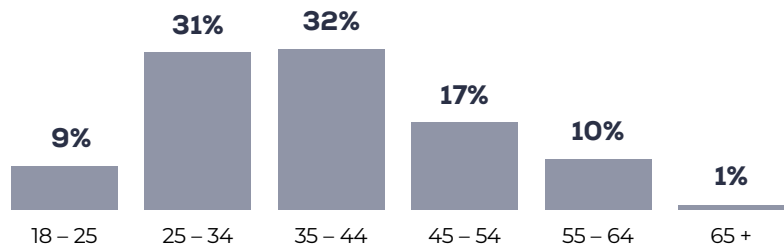
Job level



Job function



Age



About Odigo

Odigo helps large organisations connect with individuals through world-class, cloud-based contact centre solutions. Its cutting-edge, proprietary technologies enable a seamless, efficient, omnichannel experience for its customers and a satisfying, engaging experience for service agents.

Odigo serves more than 400,000 agents and business users globally. With a 25-year history of industry firsts, Odigo has more than 250 clients around the world.

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About Davies Hickman

Davies Hickman are independent market research data analysts based in the UK, with expert knowledge in customer experience management and innovation. Their research and consultancy services provide CX strategy services to a range of B2B and B2C brands. Since 2007, they have advised the national and worldwide contact centre industry by sharing their expertise in market trends, CX and customer service standards.

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