Megatrends to Watch for in 2026 and Beyond

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Megatrends to Watch for in 2026 and Beyond

Opus Research

Understanding the Terminology

AI Agents: Conversational assistants powered by LLMs and built using prompts

Example: A self-service chatbot or voicebot.

Agentic AI: Multi-agent systems that autonomously reason, adapt, and coordinate workflows

Example: An AI system that diagnoses customer issues, retrieves account data, and initiates refunds without human input.

Industry Confusion: These terms are often used interchangeably, creating confusion about AI capabilities and implementation strategies
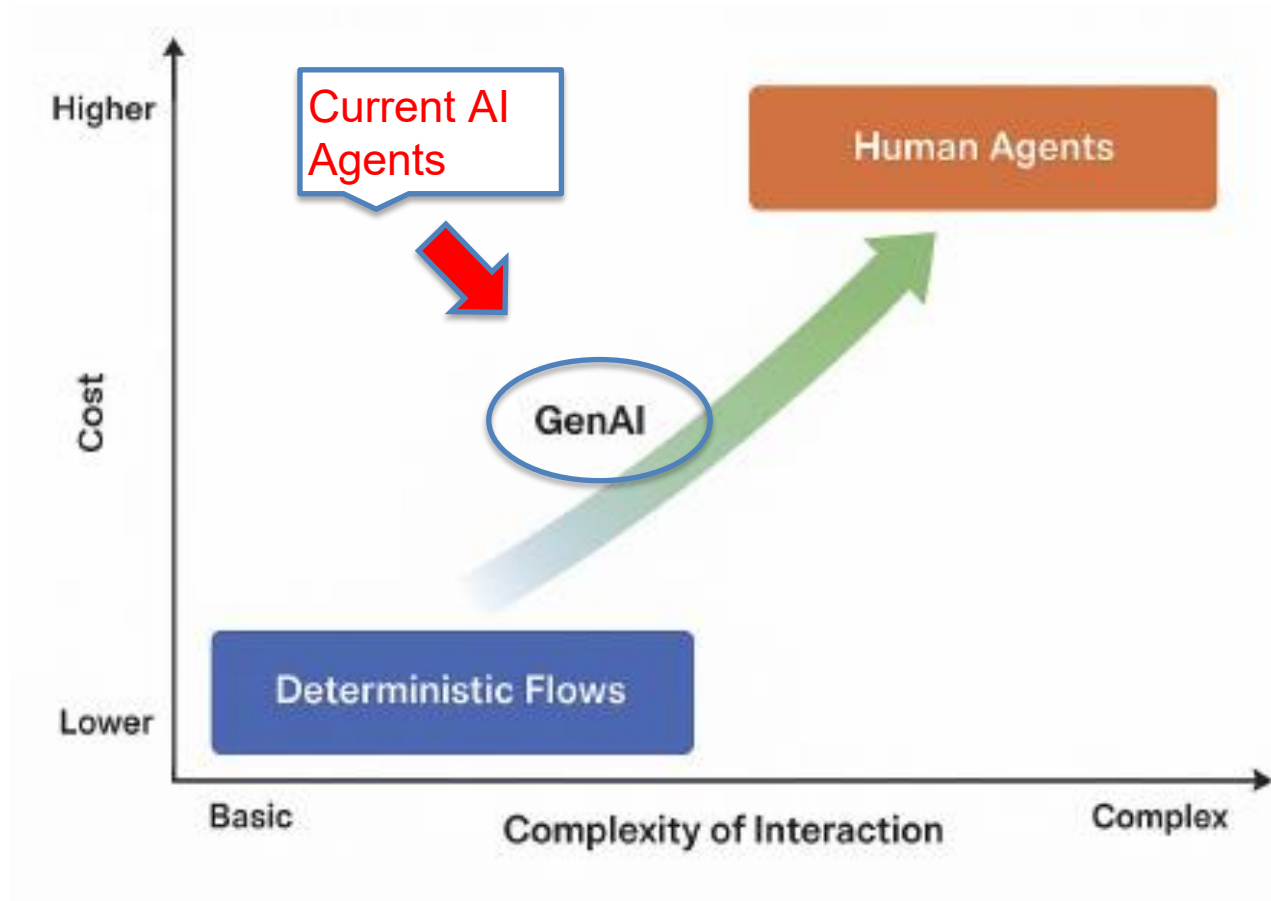
The Evolving Role of GenAI in Customer Service

Human Agents:
- Superior expertise
- Flexible problem-solving
- High cost

Deterministic Flows:
- Automated self-service
- High-volume, repetitive tasks
- Limited complexity

AI Agents as Workforce Multipliers

GenAI Agents assist customers directly, helping them achieve their goals.

GenAI also empowers employees—agents, supervisors, and business analysts—with valuable insights and suggestions.

Are you leveraging AI to empower both your customers AND your employees?
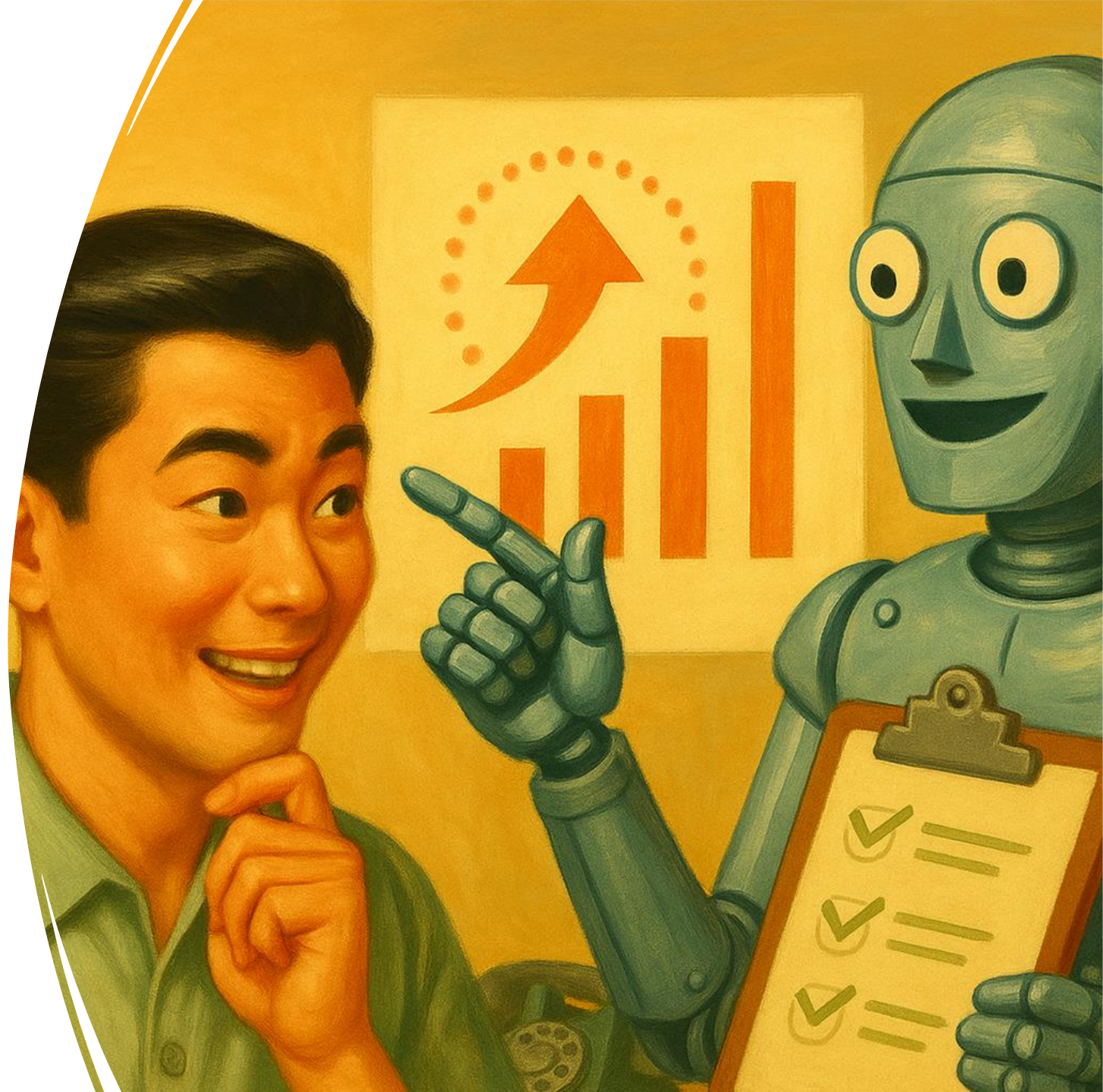
What's Next in Agentic AI for CX

Predictive Journey Orchestration

Cross-Enterprise Ecosystems

Autonomous Decision Making

Human & AI Collaboration — Empowering Smarter Service

- **AI is transforming contact center workflows, not just automating tasks but fundamentally redefining decision-making, agent roles, and KPIs.**

- **Agents and AI now operate as co-workers within blended workflows; AI handles routine work while agents focus on complex, emotionally charged cases—boosting overall job satisfaction and customer outcomes.**

- **Successful adoption hinges on empathy-driven change management, transparent education on AI benefits, and agent empowerment to fine-tune AI tools**

Evolving Agent Role & Workforce Flexibility

- **Agent roles are shifting from entry-level support toward strategic, high-empathy advocacy; new job titles include Bot Managers, Bot Wranglers, Prompt Engineers, and Conversation Designers**

- **Supervisors evolve into empathy coaches and AI adoption guides, while quality analysts audit both human and AI interactions for fairness, compliance, and brand alignment.**

- **Workforce management adapts to blended scheduling, combining human and AI for greater flexibility, resilience, and smart allocation in remote/hybrid setups.**

opusresearch inc.

Advanced AI — Understanding Context and Predictive Intelligence

- **The rise of AI with memory and reasoning enables more natural, context-aware customer service and adapts to feedback from both customers and agents.**

- **Predictive intelligence tools support dynamic planning—forecasting demand, optimizing schedules, and empowering leaders to make instant course corrections in real-time.**

- **Sophisticated interaction analytics offer enhanced operational visibility, with automated categorization and deeper interpretation for ongoing improvement in customer experience.**

opusresearch

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Analysis & Expertise: AI, CX, and the Future of Work

Calabrio

Reactive is nice, but the
future of WFM is
predictive.

Dave Hoekstra

Product Evangelist

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With 20+ years of experience spanning every contact center role—from agent to leader—Dave now serves as Calabrio's Product Evangelist. A seasoned industry voice, he blends deep CX expertise with his passions as a bassist, podcast host, photographer, and proud Texan.
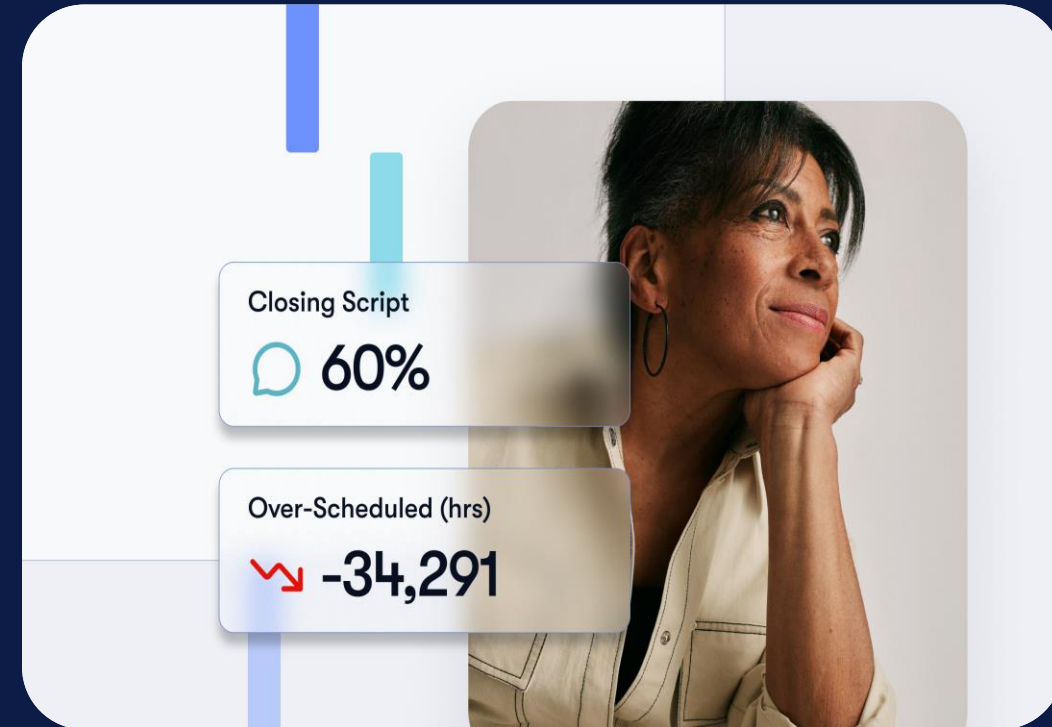
Workforce management is evolving

Calabrio

- Agentic AI & conversational interfaces
- Agent Empowerment
- Advanced visibility through interaction categorization
- Return to the Fundamentals

Closing Script
💬 60%

Over-Scheduled (hrs)
↘ -34,291

The Rise of Agentic AI

- What it is: Artificial Intelligence that is able to understand complex queries and generate customized responses
- The problem with Agentic AI and WFM Together?
- Benefits: Reduces the barrier to entry, eliminates some training, but leaves lots of questions
- How do we leverage AI in a practice that requires human decision making?

Agent Empowerment

- Trend has been around for a while, but continues to evolve at a rapid pace
- Organizations that realize that agent empowerment is important continue to see lower attrition and higher agent satisfaction
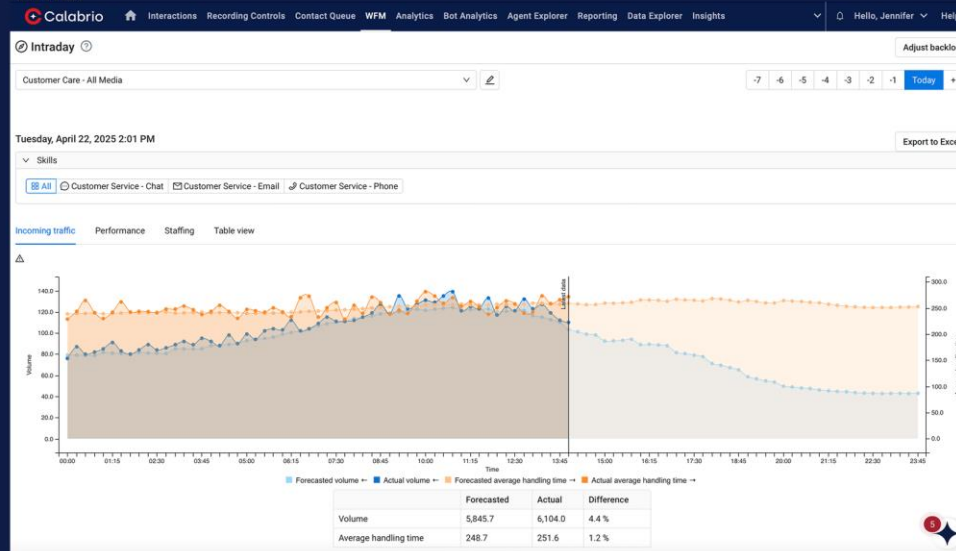- Ask yourself: Are we doing everything we can to make our agents love their job?

Combining Forces with Conversation Intelligence

- Historically have been separate
- New, Powerful Tools help answer the elusive questions in WFM
- The lines will be blurred between WFM and QM/analytics very soon
- Get Ready: Start working cross-departmentally

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Back to the Basics

- With new, powerful tools comes a reminder: The fundamentals of WFM are more important than ever

- Even with all of the great tools we have at our disposal, forecasting and scheduling remain the most important ingredients to a successful strategy

- AI should complement, not replace, a good practice

- We as humans are still responsible for the "art" of WFM

Key Takeaways

- AI is here, but won't continue to be "special", especially in WFM.
- Regardless of the tech, Agent Empowerment is a huge key to developing success
- The lines will be blurred between WFM, QM, Analytics and CRM
- The core concepts of WFM aren't going to change, so keep learning!
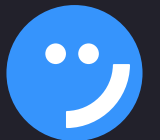
Thank you!

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NiCE

Three trends to watch for **what's next in CX**

Fresh perspectives on AI-first Customer Experience innovation

a new AI era is powering

Transformation

The stakes are high

🐷 Cut costs.

Elevate service. ↗

Scale fast and easy.

NiCE

What are your top priorities for the use of AI?

a) Grow revenue

b) Improve CSAT

c) Reduce operational expenses

d) Boost efficiency

NiCE

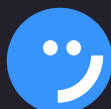# Three trends to watch for where Customer Experience is going

Rise of AI Memory

Human and AI Collaboration

Unified Customer Engagement

NiCE

TREND
Rise of AI Memory

THE FUNDAMENTAL SHIFT

AI learns from past interactions, remembers context, and continuously improves service quality.

OUTCOMES

- Persistent customer memory across touchpoints
- Agents (human and AI) recall tone, issues, preferences
- Context builds intimacy and cuts resolution time

It's NiCE being remembered

NiCE

TREND
Human and AI Collaboration

THE FUNDAMENTAL SHIFT

AI agents will handle automation and orchestration, while human agents focus on complex, high-value interactions—seamlessly working together for smarter service.
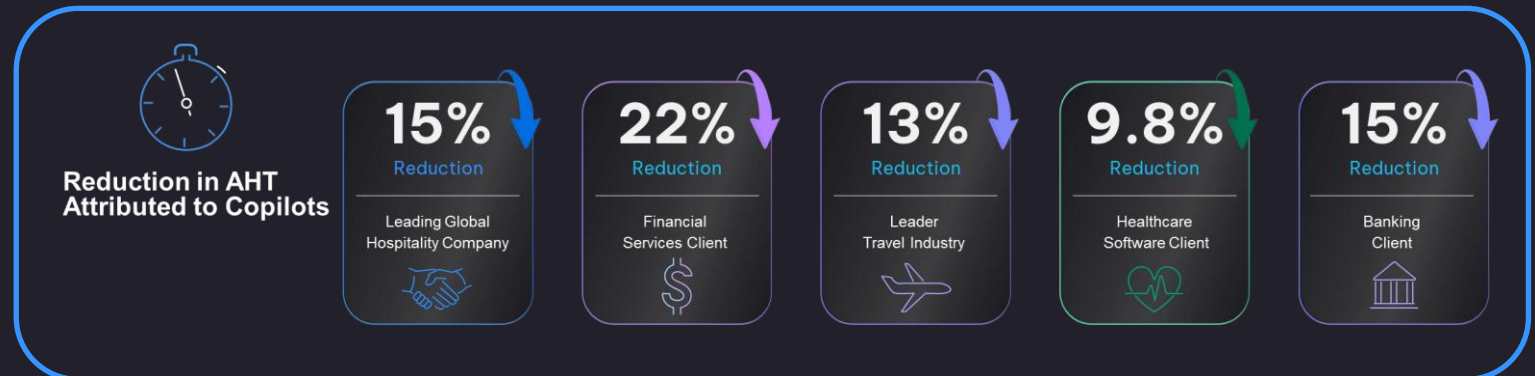
OUTCOMES

- Handle repetitive inquiries within self-service
- Reduced agent workload
- Increased agent productivity
- Reduced handle time

Specialized AI copilots for every role

Reduction in AHT Attributed to Copilots

| 15% Reduction	22% Reduction	13% Reduction	9.8% Reduction	15% Reduction
Leading Global Hospitality Company	Financial Services Client	Leader Travel Industry	Healthcare Software Client	Banking Client

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TREND
Unified Customer Engagement

THE FUNDAMENTAL SHIFT

Organizations will prioritize a unified approach for engaging with customers seamlessly connecting channels, automation, and knowledge to maximize AI's impact.
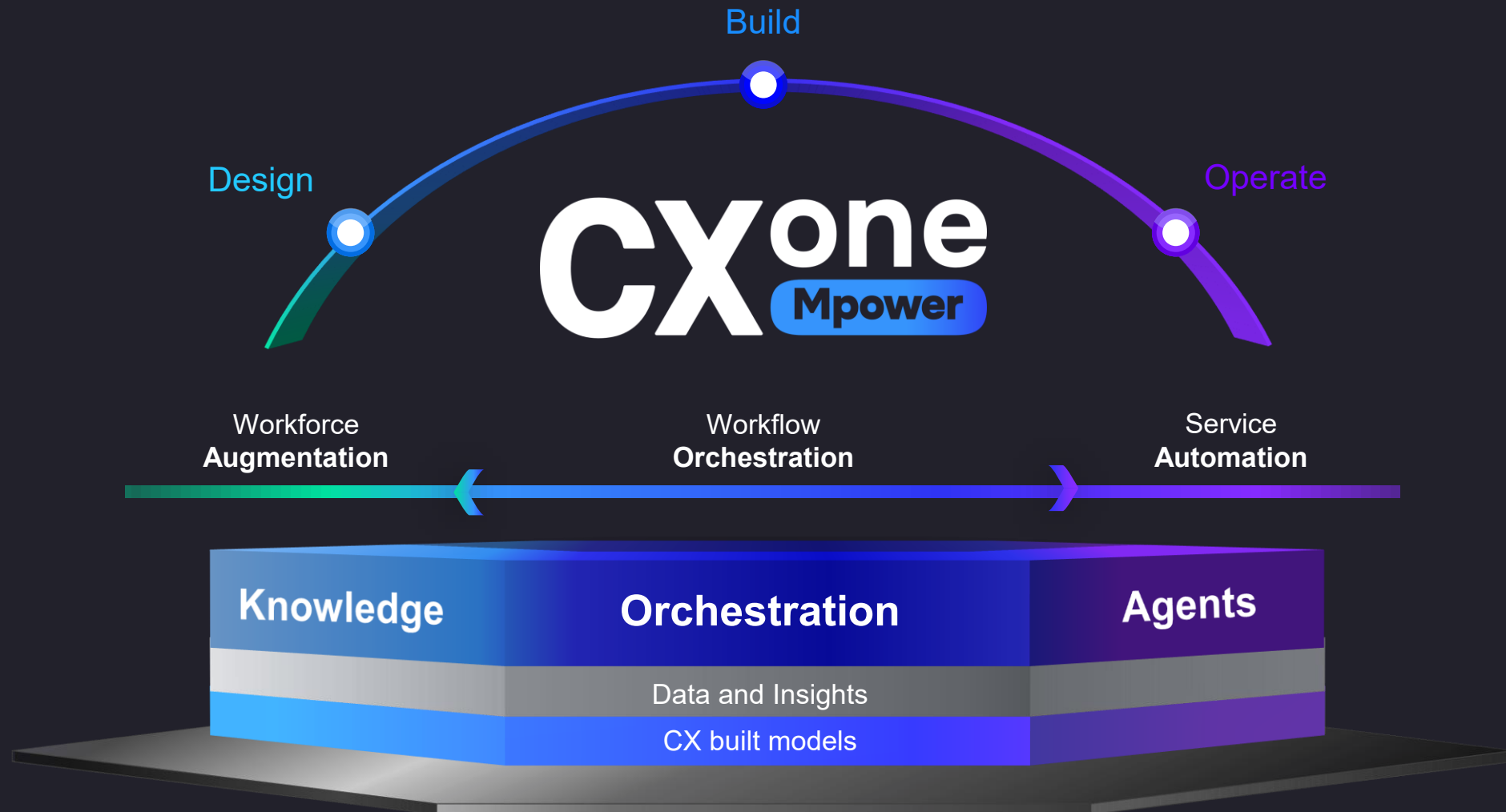
One unified platform for CX
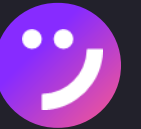
OUTCOMES

- Consistent service across all touchpoints

- Faster, better orchestrated resolutions—front- to back-office

- Connected Intelligence: CX data unified across every interaction, channel, and app

NiCE

Can AI really
strengthen
the business?

NiCE

Improve **Reputation**

32% Increase in Net Promoter Score (NPS)

FINANCIAL SERVICES — BANCO DO BRASIL

Increase **CSAT**

24% Improvement in customer satisfaction

GOVERNMENT — Auckland Council
Te Kaunihera o Tāmaki Makaurau

Reduce **Effort**

14% Decrease in Average Handle Time

HEALTHCARE — KAISER PERMANENTE

Efficient. Profitable. Loved.
Real results from real customers.

Streamline **Technology**

Simplified tech stack by **11** vendors

HOSPITALITY — Marriott INTERNATIONAL

Increase **Efficiency**

15% Increase in self-service success

RETAIL — SONY

Key takeaways: Use these CX trends to help move the needle

Rise of AI Memory

Improve service quality with AI that learns, remembers, and reasons, retaining context across interactions to drive seamless, intelligent, and adaptive CX at scale.

Human and AI Collaboration

Deliver smarter service with proactive role-specific AI copilots to empower the workforce with real-time, actionable intelligence.

Unified Customer Engagement

Accelerate resolution and consistency with a single pane of glass for Customer Experience managed on one platform.

NiCE

What do YOU see as the most important trend transforming Customer Experience?
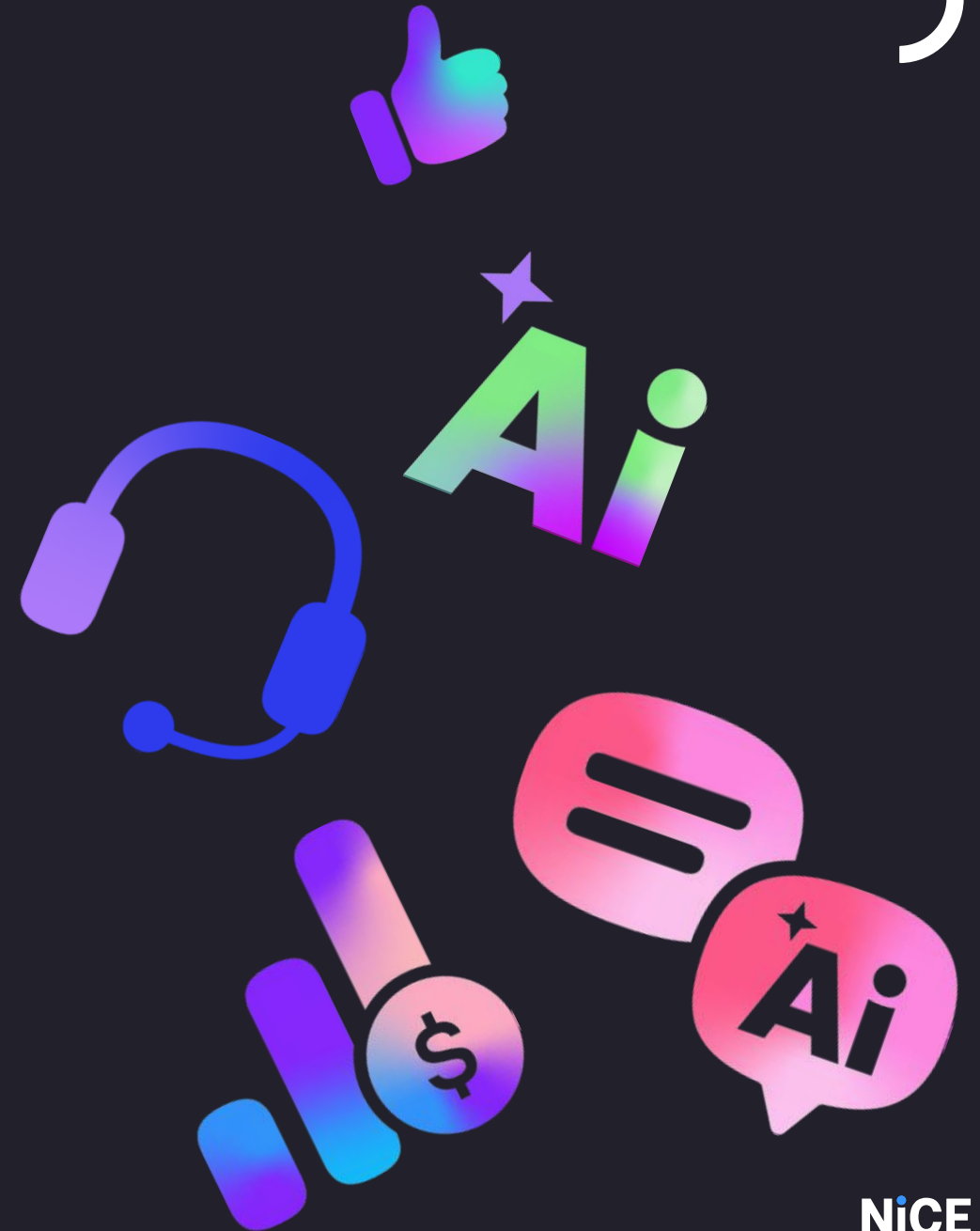
Thank You

Create a **NiCE** world ‿

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Q&A