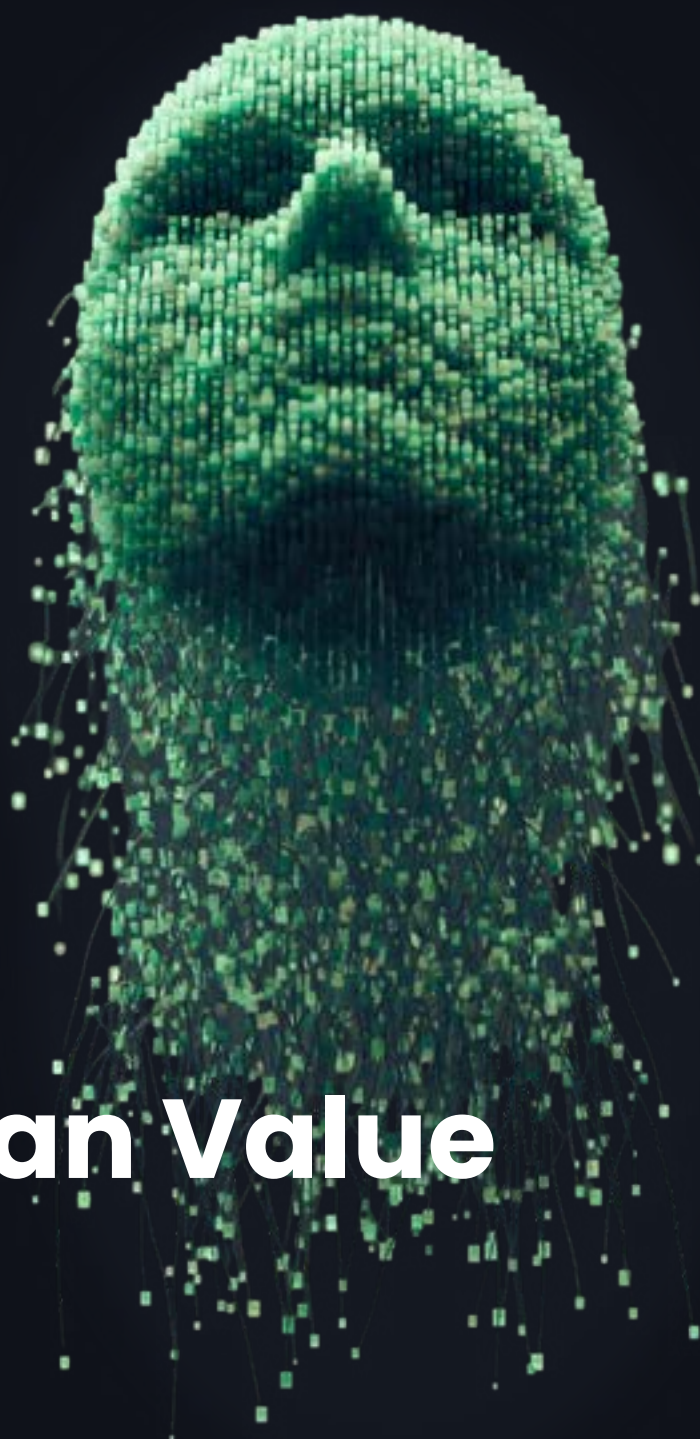




The Human Value of AI

Rethinking **where people create value** in the modern contact centre.

Author: Jared Richards

cloudclevr.com

Chapter One

Executive statement

The conversation about AI in the contact centre has become increasingly dominated by questions of automation.

- How many interactions can be handled without an agent?
- What proportion of demand can be moved to self-service?
- How much capacity can be released?

Inevitably, somewhere within that discussion sits the question of what all of this means for people.

There is another way to approach the subject, and it begins by looking at the role of the human rather than the capability of the technology.

For decades, contact centres have worked hard to optimise human performance. We measure how quickly agents answer, how long they spend handling an interaction, how many contacts they manage, how many interactions are resolved on the first contact, and how efficiently customers move through a process. Technology has largely been deployed in support of that model: helping people work faster, giving them better access to information and increasing the number of interactions an operation can manage.

Conversational AI creates the opportunity to reconsider the model itself.



If an organisation employs skilled people because of their ability to listen, interpret, reassure, negotiate, solve problems and exercise judgement, it is reasonable to ask how much of their working day actually requires those capabilities. In many contact centres, a significant amount of human capacity is still consumed by identification and verification, information gathering, status enquiries, appointment management, routine administration and other highly predictable activities.

This creates an interesting question for CX leaders. Rather than asking how we can make people perform those activities more efficiently, should we first ask whether those activities need a person at all?

That is a more useful starting point for **understanding the human value of AI**.

Chapter Two

Human interaction is valuable when it adds something

There has long been an assumption within customer experience that human service is inherently better service. It is easy to understand why. At its best, human interaction can offer empathy, judgement, flexibility and reassurance in ways that traditional automated systems have struggled to replicate.

However, the presence of a human does not automatically improve an experience.

Consider a customer who wants to change an appointment, check the progress of an order or complete an identification process. If that customer has to wait in a queue, explain their request and then wait while an agent works through a prescribed series of steps, the fact that a person handled the interaction may have contributed very little to its value.

The same would not necessarily be true of a customer experiencing financial difficulty, making a complicated complaint or dealing with circumstances that fall outside a predefined process. In those situations, the ability to understand nuance, adapt a response and exercise judgement may fundamentally alter the outcome.

The distinction is important because it moves us beyond the increasingly unhelpful debate about whether AI or humans provide the better customer experience.

Neither does, universally.

The better experience is one designed around what the customer is trying to achieve and the capabilities required to help them achieve it.

Sometimes that will require a person. Sometimes it may not. Increasingly, it could involve both.



For CX leaders, the challenge is therefore not simply to introduce AI into an existing contact centre. It is to understand, with far greater precision, the customer journey and where human involvement materially improves an interaction and where it has become part of a process largely because that is how the organisation has always delivered it.

Chapter Three

The job may be the wrong unit of measurement

Much of the discussion about AI and employment considers automation at the level of the role: what will happen to the contact centre agent, which jobs are vulnerable to automation, or how many people an organisation may eventually require.

Looking at the work itself produces a more nuanced picture. A single customer conversation can contain several very different types of activity. An agent may establish identity, understand intent, retrieve information from several systems, follow a prescribed process, interpret an unusual circumstance, make a judgement and agree a resolution. Some of those activities rely heavily on distinctly human capabilities; others do not.

Treating the whole interaction as either “human” or “automated” can therefore obscure the real opportunity.

A more useful approach is to deconstruct customer journeys and understand where value is being created at each stage. AI might complete an entire routine interaction independently. In another journey it might deal with identification and information gathering before transferring the customer, with full context, to a person. Elsewhere it may remain largely invisible to the customer while helping the agent find information, summarise history or determine the next best action.

This is why the language of replacing agents can be so limiting. It encourages organisations to think about people as units of capacity rather than considering how human capability is actually being used. The more strategic question is not which jobs can be automated, but **which work deserves human attention.**

Chapter Four

The economics look different through a human lens

This distinction also changes the business case for AI.

The cost of a contact centre agent is not simply their salary. Organisations carry employment costs, management overhead, training, technology licenses and the wider infrastructure required to support each role. When those costs are considered together, human time is a valuable organisational resource.

The important question is therefore not simply how much an agent costs, but what the organisation receives in return for that investment.



If several minutes of thousands of customer interactions are spent completing highly predictable administrative steps, there is a measurable cost attached to that activity. Automating an appropriate part of the interaction can create an obvious financial saving, but concentrating solely on the saving misses a potentially more important point: the organisation has also released human capacity.

What happens to that capacity should be part of the original business case, rather than an afterthought.

It could allow the contact centre to absorb growth without increasing headcount at the same rate. It could reduce queues during periods of peak demand. It could create more time for customers whose circumstances are complicated. It could allow experienced agents to spend more time on retention, revenue generation or complex problem solving. It may also remove some of the repetitive work that contributes little to either employee satisfaction or professional development.

Seen this way, the return on AI is not solely the difference between the cost of an automated interaction and the cost of a human one. It is also the value created by redeploying finite human capability more intelligently.

That is a much richer commercial conversation than cost reduction alone.

Chapter Five

As AI takes the simple work, human work becomes harder

There is a further consequence that deserves considerably more attention. If AI becomes increasingly capable of handling predictable, transactional interactions, the mix of work reaching human agents will change.

The straightforward status enquiry disappears. The simple administrative request is completed elsewhere. Routine identification and information gathering may happen before the agent joins the interaction. What reaches the person is increasingly likely to be the exception: the situation that did not fit the process, the customer who is unhappy, the unusual circumstance, the complex technical issue or the conversation requiring judgement.

This creates a paradox. The more capable AI becomes, the more valuable the remaining human interaction may become. It may also become more demanding.

A contact centre that successfully automates routine work could find that its agents handle fewer interactions but require greater levels of emotional intelligence, commercial awareness, problem-solving ability and technical knowledge to manage them successfully. An operating model designed around large volumes of relatively predictable work may not automatically be suited to that environment.

This has implications for recruitment and training, but also for workforce planning, coaching, career development and performance management. If the role of the agent changes but the organisation continues to recruit, train and measure people in exactly the same way, part of the potential value of AI will be lost.

There is also an important employee-experience question here. Removing repetitive work is often presented as an uncomplicated benefit for agents. In reality, a working day consisting almost entirely of difficult, emotionally demanding or exceptional conversations could create different pressures. Organisations need to think not only about the work AI removes, but about the composition and sustainability of the work that remains.

The future contact centre workforce therefore needs to be part of the AI strategy from the beginning, rather than considered once the technology has been deployed.

Chapter Six

Automation rates tell us very little about whether transformation has worked

The same rethink is required in measurement.

It is tempting to make automation itself a measure of success. If an AI agent handles a certain percentage of contacts without human intervention, the programme appears to be delivering.

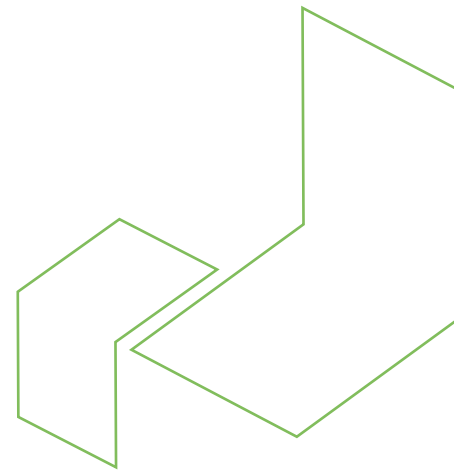
Yet a high automation rate tells us surprisingly little about the quality of the resulting customer experience.

The customer may have achieved what they wanted quickly and effortlessly. They may also have spent several frustrating minutes trying to escape an automated interaction that was poorly suited to their needs. Both could potentially appear as an “automated contact” on a dashboard.

For CX leaders, the more meaningful measures sit beyond the technology: whether customer effort reduced, whether the issue was resolved, whether unnecessary repeat contact disappeared, whether customers reached the right destination more quickly, whether human capacity was genuinely released and, importantly, what the organisation subsequently did with it.

This becomes even more important as customer journeys move between AI and humans. A successful interaction may no longer belong neatly to one channel or one agent. The quality of the orchestration becomes part of the experience.

The organisations that learn most from AI will therefore be those that measure the outcome of the redesigned journey rather than simply the performance of the technology within it.



Chapter Seven

The risk is not that organisations will fail to adopt AI, but that they will do so without understanding the value

The extraordinary pace of AI development has understandably created pressure on organisations to act. Contact centre leaders are being asked about AI strategies, roadmaps and adoption by boards that are themselves trying to understand how quickly the technology will reshape their businesses.

The danger is that urgency encourages organisations to begin with capability: **identifying what the technology can automate and then looking for somewhere to deploy it.**



A more sustainable approach starts with the customer interaction: Why are customers making contact? Which journeys consume the greatest human capacity? Where do customers encounter friction? Which activities are highly predictable? Where does judgement genuinely change the outcome? Where would consistency be more valuable than human variation? Where is empathy essential? What happens before and after the interaction, and what other systems or processes contribute to the experience?

These questions provide a much stronger foundation for investment because they establish the problem before introducing the solution. They also recognise that the objective is not to maximise the amount of AI within the contact centre. It is to create an operating model in which technology and people are each applied where they produce the greatest customer and commercial value.

Chapter Eight

A different way to think about the future of customer contact

The most significant impact of conversational AI may ultimately be less about how many customer conversations it handles and more about how it changes our understanding of the conversations humans should handle.

That requires contact centre leaders to look beyond traditional measures of productivity and automation and examine human capability as something more valuable than available capacity.

Where do people make a meaningful difference to an outcome? Where are we currently consuming their time without gaining the benefit of their skills? Which customer interactions could be redesigned rather than simply accelerated? If AI releases human capacity, where could that capacity create greater value? And how will the skills, support and measures required of the human workforce need to change as a result?

These are not technology questions. They are questions about customer experience, operating models and the future design of service.

At CloudClevr, we believe that is where the conversation about AI in the contact centre needs to move next. The opportunity is not to remove humanity from customer experience, nor to preserve human interaction simply because it is familiar. It is to become much more deliberate about where human involvement matters and to use technology intelligently everywhere else.

The real measure of progress will not be how much work we manage to hand over to AI. It will be whether, as a result, customers receive a better experience and people are able to spend more of their time doing the work for which being human genuinely matters.

Which calls could AI take off your team's hands?

Explore the opportunity in a 45-minute Voice AI Opportunity Session with CloudClevr and PolyAI.

Bring one common customer enquiry. Hear how PolyAI handles relevant conversations, then explore where voice AI could help in your operation and when a person should take over.

You'll receive a short summary of the potential use case, the questions to resolve and the next step towards assessing its value.

[Book your Voice AI opportunity session](#)

 CloudClevr

 PolyAI

cloudclevr.com

