AI in the Contact Centre

Where AI implementations are measured by tasks automated, not by economic value created

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ENTERPRISE-WIDE
PATTERN OBSERVED 2024-2026
named examples: CBA, Klarna

The business case asked how many agents the AI could replace. EPM asks where AI creates the most economic value, and shows that resolution, trust and tacit judgement, not call-handling speed, are the assets a contact centre actually produces.

01 The Pattern, and the Deeper Failure Beneath It

THE PATTERN NOW PLAYING OUT

Across enterprises, AI is deployed into the contact centre to cut cost, then quietly walked back. In 2025 **Commonwealth Bank** cut 45 service roles, citing an AI voice bot that reduced calls by ~2,000 a week, then reversed the redundancies within weeks and conceded it "had not fully considered the business needs." **Klarna** claimed its AI did the work of ~700 agents, before its CEO admitted the focus on cost had produced "lower quality."

WHY THIS KEEPS HAPPENING

Roughly 95% of generative-AI pilots show no measurable return (MIT, 2025) and over 80% of AI projects fail to deliver business value (RAND, 2024). The cause is rarely the model. It is that value was never modelled before the spend, only activity was measured after it.

THE DEEPER ECONOMIC-PROCESS FAILURE

An AI rollout is easy to govern as a **headcount-and-automation exercise**: deflect calls, cut agents, book the saving. The real economic process is: *turn a customer contact into a resolved outcome and retained trust, while capturing the information each contact produces.*

Automating a task is not the same as creating value. A step can be faster and cheaper and still leave the business worse off if it was quietly carrying **trust, signals or judgement** that no one measured.

Run as a cost-reduction project, the value AI destroys stays invisible, right up until customers, staff and regulators make it visible.

02 Decompose — What a Customer Contact Is Really Made Of

Information

- customer intent & context
- account & history data
- knowledge-base answers
- edge-case & policy signals
- resolution vs deflection data
- complaint & repeat-contact data
- CSAT & sentiment
- tacit agent knowledge

Actions

- understand the request
- answer routine queries
- handle edge cases
- exercise judgement
- de-escalate & reassure
- route or escalate
- resolve the underlying problem
- capture what was learned

Systems

- AI chatbot / voice bot
- agent-assist & summaries
- telephony & queueing
- CRM & knowledge base
- routing & escalation
- quality & performance reporting

People

- customers
- front-line agents
- experienced specialists
- team leaders
- workforce & union representatives
- operations leadership
- the board
- regulators

What this exposes: deflecting a routine query is the easy, measurable part. Value concentrates in resolution, judgement on edge cases, retained trust and the tacit knowledge experienced agents carry, none of which a "calls handled" or "agents replaced" metric can see.

03 Attribute — Where the Economic Value Actually Sat

PROCESS COMPONENT	ECONOMIC VALUE EPM WOULD ATTRIBUTE
Routine query deflection	**Genuine, high value**: this is where AI creates real, scalable saving when the outcome is actually resolved.
Edge-case judgement	**High value from human presence**: put AI here and you do not cut cost, you eliminate value no one measured.
First-contact resolution	**The real outcome**: an unresolved fast answer generates a repeat contact, not a saving.
Customer trust & brand	**High revenue & risk value**: poor service drives churn and reputational cost the labour saving never nets off.
Tacit agent knowledge	**High option value**: edge-case know-how is slow to rebuild once experienced staff are cut.
Contact & resolution data	**High information value**: the AI's own data shows what it cannot resolve, if anyone reads it.

Why this matters: scored this way, "calls deflected" and "agents replaced" are revealed as activity measures, not value. Resolution, trust and judgement become the figures the board can govern, and the ones a cost-only business case leaves out.

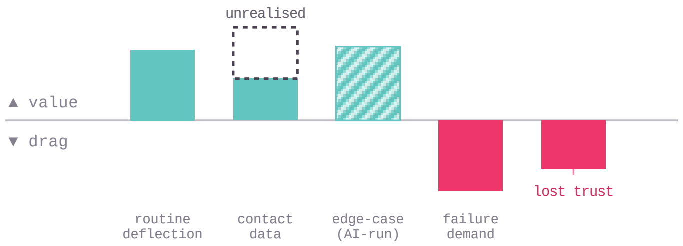
LINQ SEE. SOLVE. SHARE.

From value profile to *the decisions it changes going forward*

04 Diagnose — The Patterns EPM Surfaces

THE ECONOMIC VALUE PROFILE OF A CUSTOMER CONTACT

ILLUSTRATIVE · RELATIVE VALUE, NOT DOLLAR FIGURES



Scored across the value lenses, a customer contact shows real automation value alongside real, hidden drag. The profile is a **ledger, not a call count**: the hatched bar is AI placed where human judgement created the value, and the dashed cap is the resolution signal in the AI's own data that no one fed back into the decision.

VALUE-DEFINITION GAP
Success measured as **calls deflected and agents replaced**, not contacts resolved and trust retained.

FAILURE DEMAND
Poor bot outcomes drive **repeat contacts, so total volume rises** even as "calls handled" looks lower.

JUDGEMENT MIS-PLACED
AI put where **human judgement created the value**, eliminating value no cost model measured.

MEASUREMENT ERROR
Savings booked on **flawed metrics** (handle time, average CSAT) that miss unresolved complex cases.

UNREALISED LEARNING
The **signal of what AI cannot resolve sits in its own data**, unread, instead of guiding the rollout.

LOST TACIT KNOWLEDGE
Cutting experienced agents **destroys edge-case know-how** that is slow and costly to rebuild.

05 Redesign — The Decisions Visibility Enables

AMPLIFY
Point AI at genuine routine deflection and at agent-assist, so it lifts the value of every human contact rather than replacing it.

SUBSTITUTE
Replace "calls deflected / agents replaced" with governed measures of resolution, retained trust and true total contact volume.

RESEQUENCE
Prove resolution and read the AI's own failure signals before booking savings or cutting roles, not after.

ELIMINATE
Remove headcount decisions built on cost-only business cases that never modelled churn, trust and the cost of unwinding.

06 What's In It For the CEO and the Board

IF YOU'RE THE CEO

"We approved a business case built on agents replaced. EPM asks the sharper question: replaced to produce what? If contacts go unresolved and customers churn, the labour saving was never real, and we will find out in public."

IF YOU SIT ON THE BOARD

"The board is told AI activity, not AI value. EPM puts resolution, churn risk and true cost on one page, so we can govern the decision, and the delegation of judgement to a machine, before the spend, not explain the reversal after it."

THE CREDIBLE ALTERNATIVE OUTCOME

Not a claim that AI has no place in the contact centre, both examples kept investing in it. Rather, that **AI is aimed where it genuinely creates value and kept out of where human judgement is the value**, with success measured on resolution and trust rather than deflection. The result is real, defensible savings, fewer public reversals, and a decision the board can stand behind before the money is spent.

EPM forward-looking interpretation. The CBA and Klarna events and the failure statistics are drawn from public reporting and executive statements; the EPM value profile, attribution, diagnoses and redesign are an analytical interpretation, not findings about either company. EPM does not guarantee AI success, and this is not a claim that AI underperforms, both companies continued investing in it. EPM changes how AI in a process is valued and measured before the spend. Primary sources: Bloomberg, ABC, The Register & FSU statements on CBA (2025); Bloomberg & CEO statements on Klarna (2024-2025); MIT NANDA (2025); RAND (2024); Gartner (2025).