Orchestrating agentic AI for intelligent business operations





How IBM can help

IBM brings deep business process outsourcing industry expertise, partnerships, and experience to transform intelligent operational workflows, helping businesses unlock value with AI agents and assets. For more information, visit https://www.ibm.com/ consulting/operations

Key takeaways



AI agents elevate employees.



of executives say that by 2027, AI agents will enable business operations professionals to move beyond simple reporting to perform insightful analytics for real-time optimization.



AI agents accelerate operational velocity.



of executives say AI agents will execute transactional processes and workflows autonomously within two years for 24x7 availability.



People remain essential to agentic AI.



of executives recognize that to seize competitive advantage, they need the right people in the right positions with the right incentives.

Introduction

AI agents change the playing field

Organizations are turning to agentic AI— AI systems that can accomplish specific goals without supervision¹—to capture a competitive edge.

With agentic AI, operations autonomously learn, adapt, and optimize in real time. It isn't just about being faster and more efficient. It's about intelligent agents that proactively anticipate challenges, personalize experiences, and drive innovation. It's a shift from automating tasks to orchestrating ever-adapting processes.

But successful deployment of agents isn't just about the tech. It depends on creating synergy between people and AI across virtually every operational transaction and communication. Human oversight and connections, decision-making, and most critical, creativity, are more important than ever in this next generation of intelligent operations.

New research from the IBM Institute for Business Value (IBM IBV) highlights the dramatic evolution underway. We surveyed 750 cross-industry operations executives across six countries. More than 80% cite automating global business services as a major strategic imperative. And they expect AI agents to get them there. 86% say that by 2027, process automation and workflow reinvention will be more effective because of AI agents. Automation is a journey (see Perspective, "Automation progression" on page 6). As organizations move from basic automation of tasks, to automating interconnected workflows, to fully autonomous systems, they can design a new operating model for business operations (see Figure 1). As with each form of AI-enabled automation, the effectiveness of this model depends on the data fueling agents and the governance managing outcomes.



In this research brief, we review three elements of autonomous automation. Part one explores a new workplace paradigm where technology acts while people orchestrate. In part two, we discuss how AI agents focus on outcomes, not rules, to improve results, while people add value throughout. Part three examines how best to scale automation across global business operations, with expert strategists averting potential pitfalls. The report concludes with an action guide that outlines specific steps you can take today to capture the advantages of autonomous automation.

Figure 1

In an agentic AI operating model, agents and people work in tandem, using the inputs on the left in a continuous flow of interaction, reaction, decision, and action to enhance business operations.



Perspective

Automation progression

AI automation journeys begin with rulesbased systems that handle repetitive tasks, evolving to AI assistants that help with tasks through natural language interactions, and finally to AI agents, which are broader systems that carry out tasks and make decisions autonomously with little human input (see figure).

AI assistants and AI agents play different roles. Here's what sets them apart:²

Assistants

- Perform tasks as requested through prompts
- Use a conversational AI interface
- Base insights on machine learning or foundation models

Agents

- Work autonomously to achieve specific goals and KPIs
- Act independently, deciding which tools to use and when
- Use persistent memory and adaptive learning to refine their approach

AI benefits business operations at each maturity stage, but agentic AI holds transformational potential.



Basic automation

Type of impact

Business operations examples Automate high-volume, repetitive tasks

Automate repetitive tasks and integrate finance, HR, procurement, customer service, and order-to-cash workflows



AI-enabled automation

Augment workforce capabilities

Apply AI-driven predictive analytics for accelerated decision-making and to enable proactive operations



Interconnected and intelligent workflows

Scale expertise and reach with AI assistants

Integrate workflows with AI assistants to provide real-time and personalized responses to customer, employee, and partner inquiries



Agentic AI and autonomy

Orchestrate and execute workflows autonomously

Use AI agents to continuously improve business operations by making feedback-based adjustments—autonomously —with touchless 24x7 operations

Source: IBM Institute for Business Value

Embrace a new workplace paradigm

Tech runs ops. Talent runs tech.

More than half of executives say that employees, suppliers, and customers already interact with AI assistants as their primary point of contact for transactions. It's only the beginning. AI agents are entering the workplace in quantity.



76% of executives say their organizations are developing, executing, or scaling proofs of concept that enable autonomous automation of intelligent workflows through self-sufficient AI agents. By 2027, 83% expect AI agents to make proactive recommendations based on learning from operational metrics, transaction history, and external data sources.

84% anticipate that AI agents will seamlessly collaborate with humans. And already, two-thirds of executives say their workforce has a practical understanding of AI agent technologies. Given the actual rate of AI deployment at scale across enterprise processes, this could be perceived as overly optimistic. But the momentum is clear: 28% are scaling individual processes using AI-powered automation, with 10% fully scaled. And one thing is certain: operations is at the epicenter of agentic AI investment and activity.

87% of executives anticipate redefining how teams work due to agentic AI by 2027. And 90% say AI agents will enable employees to drill deeper into analytics to support real-time analysis and optimization in areas such as predictive financial planning and dynamic product pricing of customer orders based on inventory availability and constraints.

But the people factor remains central. By 2027, 85% of executives predict employees will interact with AI agents to analyze data and solve complex issues, make data-driven decisions based on AI agents' recommendations, and focus on areas where humans are essential: empathy, customer and partner experiences, and authentic communications (see Figure 2 and Perspective, "How agentic AI impacts five core functions" on page 9).

Figure 2

Executives project AI agents will unleash their business operations workforce over the next two years.

Percentages represent the relative increase in executives agreeing with each statement for the end of 2024 and the end of 2026.

/

/

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Employees will make data-driven decisions

based on agents' recommendations.

Employees will work with agents in tandem for seamless process delivery.

+25%

Employees will leverage agents to analyze data and handle complex issues.

/

Perspective

Agentic AI in practice

How agentic AI impacts five core functions

Infusion of AI agents throughout operations enables people and AI to co-execute tasks—and agents to engage with other agents across processes. Some examples (see the appendix on page 17 for more details):

- Customer service. AI agents
 proactively resolve customer concerns
 by predicting issues, automating
 alerts and appointment scheduling,
 and analyzing customer sentiment.
 Customer service advisors address
 escalated issues and deepen customer
 relationships through meaningful
 conversations and advocacy for
 customer needs.
- Finance. AI agents monitor and detect fraud as well as learn and adapt over time to new fraud patterns. Finance professionals investigate complex cases, improve communication and support to customers, and enhance fraud prevention practices.

- Human resources. Multiple AI agents digest data and learn, assisting the talent acquisition lifecycle from forecasting demand to onboarding. Using insights from AI agents, HR professionals develop the talent acquisition strategy, define complex role requirements, conduct in-depth interviews, manage the offer process and negotiations, and design and implement onboarding programs.
- Order to cash. AI agents streamline resolutions of invoice disputes through real-time data analysis, anomaly detection, and automated communications while employees handle complex dispute negotiations and manage relationships with customers.
- Procurement. Multiple AI agents navigate and interact with thirdparty tools to manage the strategic sourcing lifecycle, including demand forecasting, market research, supplier identification and qualification, RFP generation, bid evaluation, contract generation, and performance monitoring. Procurement professionals focus on sourcing strategies, managing complex supplier relationships, and identifying opportunities for innovation with key suppliers.

Optimize outcomes

Less about rules and more about results.

To understand how AI agents work, think self-driving car. Just as the vehicle ingests a destination and navigates through environmental interpretations and decision-making via sensors and algorithms, AI agents perceive their surroundings, set objectives, and dynamically modify actions to meet these goals. Agentic AI frameworks and guardrails—coupled with strong digital identity management control the safe, correct execution of core enterprise functions. And with AI agents operating around the clock and the globe, automated operational functions never take a break.

Autonomous AI-driven automation is a potent tool for expediting business outcomes. Consider personalization: roughly two-thirds of executives say their AI-driven automation initiatives are helping them personalize customer experiences (69%), employee experiences (64%), and business partner experiences (66%). AI agents amplify generative AI's creative powers by learning and adjusting responses in real time, enabling large-scale personalization.

AI agents operate around the clock and the globe, so automated operational functions never take a break.

Most organizations are exploring or piloting agentic AI today, but executives have high expectations for the future (see Figure 3). And 75% of executives say AI agents will execute transactional processes and workflows autonomously in the next two years.

Touchless workflows and processes are also gaining traction. By 2027, 85% of executives forecast their AI-driven automation efforts will significantly facilitate touchless operations, with varied applications across different functional areas (see Figure 4).

By 2027, 85% of executives forecast AI-driven automation will significantly facilitate touchless operations.

Figure 3

Executives expect AI agents to significantly empower employees and enhance agility by 2027.

Percent of executives agreeing with the statement for the end of 2026

90%

Employees can drill deeper into analytics to support real-time analysis and optimization because of our AI agent's collaboration.

34%

Our AI agents seamlessly collaborate and transfer knowledge with humans.

81%

Our AI agents continuously improve their performance by making feedback-based adjustments.

77%

Our AI agents autonomously adapt to changing business processes and environments.

Figure 4

Touchless systems are fueling automation.

Percent of executives saying a process will be fully automated/touchless



Fast-track value and avoid potholes

Agentic AI at scale requires serious investment plus having the right people in the right places at the right time.

Scaling autonomous operations is a strategic overhaul demanding significant muscle. Indeed, as technology becomes more pervasive, 81% of executives agree their ability to differentiate will depend on having the right expertise in the right positions with the right incentives. But for 74% of executives, the rapid evolution of technology creates skills gaps. What's more, 68% cite a lack of skills as a transformation hurdle, with more than half (51%) grappling with AI expertise deficiencies in their automation endeavors.

These shortfalls make do-it-yourself AI solutions daunting. They require significant investments—not just in specialized talent, but also in infrastructure, maintenance, and time. Even prebuilt AI solutions require orchestration of diverse data sources and systems—a challenge given that 82% of executives say interconnectivity with business partners is difficult because of technology differences.

Organizations plan to almost double their total spending on managed services with pay-for-performance contracts based on business impact: from 12% in 2024 to 21% by 2027. And organizations are seriously considering business process outsourcing across functional areas (see Figure 5).

Many of the leading contenders for fully autonomous or touchless automation—such as purchase orders, accounts payable, and predictive analytics in procurement, and recruitment and employee self-service with digital assistants in HR—are also likely prospects for outsourcing.

Figure 5

Given the challenges of do-it-yourself AI, organizations are looking to outside experts.

Likelihood of using business process outsourcing services to accelerate transformation and impact for each area



Customer service

79%

Customer self-service with digital assistant

86%

Field services self-service with digital assistant

44%

Finance

CFO self-service with digital assistant

51%

Predictive insights

Recruitment

Human resources

'/3%

Employee self-service

71%

with digital assistant

Order to cash

60%

Customer self-service with digital assistant

81%

Customer and order predictive analytics



73%

Sourcing

88%

Predictive analytics

Q. How likely is your organization to use services from business process outsourcing providers to accelerate the transformation and performance in each process? Percentages represent the sum of those responding "likely" and "very likely."

Action guide

Three steps to unlock the potential of agentic AI in business operations

Pervasive autonomous automation is imminent. To harness its value across business operations, organizations need to redirect their talent, rethink their processes, and refresh their capabilities.



Center your operating model around outcomes, not tasks.

Teams must shift from directing how work gets done to controlling what is delivered. Agents manage execution, so people should focus on strategic outcomes and value creation. Success is measured by impact, not activity.

- Embrace a startup mentality. Agentic AI is new and changing rapidly. Some experiments will fail, and learning from failures is an important part of the transformation. Stay abreast of AI R&D. Focus on business process optimization first, leveraging employees to collaborate and fine-tune multiagent workflows for impact and efficiency. Experiment with AI agents in controlled environments to gain hands-on experience.
- Consider management of "digital labor" a new profession. Your workforce talent is key to ensuring transparency and quality in AI-driven operations. Anticipate and redefine roles and skills to manage digital labor. Consider what data feeds will keep it current, how to manage performance, and how to orchestrate and control it. Launch skilling programs to equip staff with digital literacy, strategic skills, and ethics guidelines.
- Establish a digital labor operating team to build guardrails and drive ethical outcomes. Bring together developers, ethicists, policymakers, and domain experts to cultivate enterprise-wide collaboration. This go-to squad serves as the advisory voice to set the guidelines needed for safe exploration and development. That's what can lead to scale.



Prepare to scale securely.

Enterprise business operations are prime candidates for capitalizing on agentic AI because they rely on data-driven processes and are focused on measurable outcomes. But embedding strong data management, governance, and security from the outset is non-negotiable for responsible and impactful agentic AI adoption.

- Invest in data management. If you can't explain your data, you will never scale beyond basic automation. Evaluate your data lineage, quality, privacy, and security processes. Ensure your data can deliver high-quality, unbiased results.
- Don't leave AI governance behind. Autonomous AI scales opportunity as well as risk, so governance must scale faster. Assign people to be responsible for actions taken by AI agents. Establish audit trails for accountability and compliance to ensure alignment with company policies, legal requirements, and ethical guidance.
- Manage your AI agents' identities. Verify the identity of AI agents acting on behalf of users or other agents. Align data privacy and security protocols to new forms of digital identity. Include Identity Access Management for AI agents (such as nonhuman authentication, authorization) to provide dynamic access management, policy-based authorization, and governance.

Speed time to value.

The right balance between in-house and external AI capabilities determines whether you build a powerful, differentiated engine or a weaker, unoptimized solution. Strategically blend internal domain expertise with external specialized skills to rapidly deploy tailored agentic AI solutions that deliver a competitive advantage.

- Evaluate organizational capabilities. Assess your internal expertise, resources, and long-term goals to determine if building in-house expertise is feasible and beneficial. Identify existing in-house skills, knowledge, and experience related to AI, machine learning, automation, and process orchestration. Review budget, infrastructure, and tools needed to support AI agent development and integration.
- Benchmark external options. Compare managed service providers and outsourcing partners based on AI agent capabilities, reputation, and alignment with business needs. Use this information to establish the relative advantages and disadvantages of building versus buying AI agent expertise.
- Pilot projects. Test in-house and external solutions to gauge effectiveness, cost, and potential ROI. This hands-on approach helps executives make informed decisions on building and buying agentic AI expertise. Establish clear performance metrics and KPIs for agents—and be sure to align them with business objectives and future strategies.

Appendix

Operations-specific views



Finance

Finance has room to grow in its use of AI-enabled automation. Today, executives report minimal use of AI automation in digital assistants for self-service (68%), fixed asset and risk management (55%), intercompany transactions and reporting (50%), and general accounting (45%).

53% do report using automation in financial analysis and management reporting and in predictive insights. And these are the same areas where they project moving to fully autonomous automation. By 2027, 37% expect to be using touchless automation in predictive insights and 29% in financial analysis and reporting.

Agentic AI holds great promise for the finance function. Financial modeling AI agents can analyze historical data and build predictive models to forecast outcomes such as cash flow projections or budget variances. This allows finance professionals to focus on assessing inherent uncertainty in the forecasts and developing risk mitigation strategies. Multiagent systems can enable intelligent reconciliation—automating journal entries, matching transactions across different environments, and flagging anomalies. This allows finance teams to identify and tackle fraud and errors faster to limit damage.

AI-powered virtual assistants streamline inquiries from employees on payment processing, expense tracking, and compliance reporting. Assistants free finance professionals to focus on complex analysis for corporate and analyst reporting, and on setting guidelines for financial practices across the enterprise.

Finance executives realize the potential benefits of AI automation. They project predictive financial modeling will improve forecast accuracy 24% by 2027. They also foresee 23% improvement in touchless continuous close processes and 29% in days sales outstanding (DSO). And they expect cycle times for accounts payable and accounts receivable to improve by 35% and 33%, respectively.

To drive an agentic AI transformation, finance leaders anticipate needing outside expertise. The top areas they are likely to outsource: general account transactions and processing (71%) and financial close optimization (67%).

Methodology

Of the 750 respondents in the survey conducted for this study, 150 are financial leaders. They include Chief Financial Officers, heads of global business services, and heads of outsourcing, who were asked to assess the prevalence of current and future-state AI automation in their organizations' finance functions, the impact of such AI-enabled automation on related KPIs, and the likelihood of outsourcing various finance processes.

Source data for finance analysis

Table 1

Impact KPIs for finance

Percent organization improved / will improve the following metrics as a result of AI automation initiatives

	2024 (actual)	2026 (expected cumulative improvement)
Forecast accuracy	11.53%	24.30%
Revenue leakage reduction	9.83%	20.95%
Days sales outstanding	12.59%	29.15%
Accounts payable cycle time	15.74%	34.79%
Accounts receivable cycle time	13.70%	32.55%
Cost reduction	11.89%	28.89%
Touchless continuous close process	7.55%	23.37%



Agentic AI operating model in finance

Finance professionals



Agents

Human resources

HR's appetite for AI-driven automation grows over the next two years. 53% of executives report minimal use of automation in workforce planning and analysis today, but by 2027, many plan to augment employees with AI-enabled tools in this area. Some even want to quickly leap to fully autonomous automation. Their focus for touchless automation is recruitment (62%), employee self-service with digital assistant (61%), and talent acquisition (52%).

Agentic AI can spark radical change in HR. AI agents can use historical data on employee turnover, promotions, and performance to forecast future workforce needs. These predictions position HR professionals to hire, train, and plan for succession with precision. Early agentic AI adopters are scaling proofs of concept to automate and personalize talent acquisition. Agents can crunch data so HR specialists can turn insights into action-optimizing benefits, refining compensation plans, and integrating employee feedback. Virtual assistants can provide employees a single point of contact for HR queries. Assistants are enhanced by agents that deliver personalized responses and execute transactions-such as travel bookings and compensation analyses.

HR executives speculate that by 2027, AI automation will improve employee productivity by 35%, training effectiveness by 30%, and retention by 20%. They also expect AI automation to boost employee sentiment and NPS scores by 26% in the next two years. And they anticipate that 56% of their workforce will require reskilling due to AI-driven automation, even expecting to increase headcount by 2.5%.

HR leaders also anticipate needing outside expertise to orchestrate AI-driven automation initiatives. The top areas they are likely to outsource: employee self-service with digital assistants (73%) and recruitment (71%).

Methodology

Of the 750 respondents in the survey conducted for this study, 150 are Chief Human Resources Officers, heads of global business services, heads of outsourcing, and heads of talent acquisition. These leaders were asked to assess the prevalence of current and future-state AI automation in their organizations' employee operations, the impact of such AI-enabled automation on related KPIs, and the likelihood of outsourcing various HR processes.

Source data for HR analysis

Table 2

Impact KPIs for human resources

Percent organization improved / will improve the following metrics as a result of AI automation initiatives

	2024 (actual)	2026 (expected cumulative improvement)
Employee productivity	15.07%	34.95%
Employee retention rate	9.30%	19.31%
Training effectiveness	16.59%	29.63%
Employee experience (NPS)	12.61%	26.01%

Percent of organization's workforce requiring reskilling as a result of AI-driven automation			
2024 (actual)	2025 (expected)	2026 (expected)	
33.15%	44.61%	55.51%	

Percent change in organization's workforce headcount as a result of AI-driven automation

2024 (actual)	2025 (expected)	2026 (expected)
1.31%	1.80%	2.51%

Figure 1.2

Agentic AI operating model in human resources



Order to cash

Financial executives are embracing automation in order-to-cash processes. Today, 71% of organizations use either partial or full automation in customer and order predictive analytics, 67% leverage it in customer order management, and 66% in cash application. And momentum is building. The number of organizations planning to apply full autonomy to processes across the board by 2027 is roughly double today's rate. Executives say they are prioritizing credit and risk management and claims and dispute management for touchless automation.

Agentic AI is driving this automation transformation. It can extract order data, check compliance with terms—including credit risk—and initiate fulfillment instructions based on customer segmentation and logistics. AI agents can analyze sales trends, demand forecasts, order requests, and supply chain data to optimize inventory, reducing stockouts or excess inventory. This real-time analysis frees fulfillment specialists to focus on strengthening supplier relationships and managing unexpected supply chain disruptions.

Agentic AI also transforms customer experiences. It can respond immediately, no matter the day or night, to customers who have order questions, such as product pricing or delivery windows. And it can predict customer needs, resolving issues before they ever occur.

By 2027, finance executives predict AI automation will improve order-to-cash cycle time 51%, order accuracy rates 42%, and order fulfillment rates 39%. They also predict cash collection time will improve 48%, perfect order performance 43%, and inventory turnover 34%.

To meet these ambitious targets, executives anticipate ecosystem support will be critical. 81% say they are likely to outsource customer and order predictive analytics, and 80% are likely to outsource marketing support.

Methodology

Of the 750 respondents in the survey conducted for this study, 150 are Chief Financial Officers, Chief Supply Chain Officers, Chief Operating Officers, heads of global business services, and heads of outsourcing. These finance leaders were asked to assess the prevalence of current and future-state AI automation in their organizations' employee operations, the impact of such AI-enabled automation on related KPIs, and the likelihood of outsourcing various order-to-cash processes.

Source data for order-to-cash analysis

Table 3

Impact KPIs for order to cash

Percent organization improved / will improve the following metrics as a result of AI automation initiatives

	2024 (actual)	2026 (expected cumulative improvement)
Order fulfillment rate	15.97%	38.63%
Order-to-cash cycle time	20.57%	51.10%
Inventory turnover	12.95%	34.28%
Perfect order rate	13.79%	42.65%
Cash collection time	18.64%	47.61%
Order accuracy rate	13.05%	42.08%
Customer experience (NPS)	15.66%	50.45%

Figure 1.3

Agentic AI operating model in order to cash

Order to cash professionals



Procurement source to pay

AI-fueled automation is reshaping the procurement source-to-pay workflow. Today, 60% of organizations use partial automation for predictive analytics, 56% for accounts payable, and 55% for purchase order and request management.

But procurement leaders are keen to move to fully autonomous processes. By 2027 55% want touchless predictive analytics, 45% aim for autonomous accounts payable, and 37% target fully automated purchase order and request management.

Agentic AI is poised to supercharge the procurement revolution, redefining efficiency and agility. Agents can identify and vet suppliers based on quality, price, location, capacity, and reputation. They can anticipate disruptions (such as weather or geopolitical) and proactively recommend alternative sourcing. Armed with insights on market conditions, supplier capabilities, and organizational needs, they can even draft and negotiate contracts. While AI agents analyze, procurement professionals can focus on cultivating supplier relationships, driving innovation in sourcing strategies, and navigating complex negotiations where nuance and judgement are essential.

AI agents can also optimize the source-to-pay workflow by continuously monitoring transactions and operations for compliance while analyzing supplier performance, market trends, and news feeds to assess and mitigate potential risk.

Procurement executives project that AI automation will boost efficiency in sourceto-pay processes 41% by 2027. They also expect automation to improve touchless invoice processing by 49%, procurement compliance ratings by 36%, and real-time spend visibility by 43%.

Executives are looking to their ecosystems to help drive these improvements. The top areas they are likely to outsource: predictive analytics (88%), purchase order and request management (77%), and accounts payable (75%).

Methodology

Of the 750 respondents in the survey conducted for this study, 150 are Chief Procurement Officers, Chief Supply Chain Officers, Chief Operating Officers, Chief Financial Officers, heads of global business services, and heads of outsourcing. These procurement leaders were asked to assess the prevalence of current and future-state AI automation in their organizations' employee operations, the impact of such AI-enabled automation on related KPIs, and the likelihood of outsourcing various procurement processes.

Source data for procurement source-to-pay analysis

Table 4

Impact KPIs in procurement source to pay

Percent organization improved / will improve the following metrics as a result of AI automation initiatives

	2024 (actual)	2026 (expected cumulative improvement)
Procurement compliance	17.75%	36.33%
Real-time enterprise spend visibility	22.45%	43.31%
Touchless invoice processing	25.11%	49.10%
Tactical buying cost savings	15.42%	34.28%
Source-to-pay process efficiency	20.68%	41.16%

Figure 1.4

Agentic AI operating model in procurement source to pay

Procurement source-to-pay professionals



Sales support and customer service

AI-enabled automation in customer service is an untapped goldmine for pinpointing sales opportunities and tailoring customer interactions. Today, more than half of customer service executives report minimal automation in customer communications and little use of self-service assistants for field services and customer service. But 49% say they do leverage partial automation in customer feedback and customer support inquiries, 48% in customer retention, and 47% in customer onboarding.

By 2027, executives look to embrace fully autonomous automation. Their biggest ambition: 71% want touchless customer support inquiries. Nearly half also target touchless automation in customer product and service training (47%), communications (43%), and feedback (42%).

With agentic AI, organizations can drive breakthrough customer service and sales support. AI agents can automate lead scoring, sharpen forecasting, personalize customer engagement, and curate sales content—all while handling routine interactions with virtual assistants. Analyzing historical sales data and market trends, AI agents can zero in on promising customer leads, helping sales teams focus on high-value opportunities that drive win rates and revenue growth. In customer service, agentic AI can deliver 24x7 multilingual global support with proactive, customized responses. It even deciphers customer sentiment so customer service representatives can fine-tune their in-person engagement strategies.

Executives expect AI-fueled self-service options to facilitate higher customer satisfaction. By 2027, they anticipate 53% growth in using AI to power personalized self-service for customers and 47% improvement in self-service call resolution. And they project customer service NPS scores to increase by 35%.

To accelerate transformation across customer services, executives indicate ecosystem expertise will be critical. The top areas they are likely to outsource: self-service digital assistants for field services (86%), customer support inquiries (85%), customer product and service training (81%), and customer communications (81%).

Methodology

Of the 750 respondents in the survey conducted for this study, 150 are Chief Customer Service Officers, Chief Customer Officers, heads of global business services, and heads of outsourcing. These customer-facing leaders were asked to assess the prevalence of current and future-state AI automation in their organizations' employee operations, the impact of such AI-enabled automation on related KPIs, and the likelihood of outsourcing various customer service processes.

Source data for sales support and customer service analysis

Table 5

Impact KPIs in sales support and customer service

Percent organization improved / will improve the following metrics as a result of AI automation initiatives

	2024 (actual)	2026 (expected cumulative improvement)
Resolution of calls through self-service	30.04%	46.89%
Agent ramp-up	26.51%	41.40%
Reduction in pre- and post-call operations	25.27%	44.63%
Personalized self-service responses	35.57%	52.85%
Customer experience (NPS)	16.58%	34.71%

Figure 1.5

Agentic AI operating model in sales support and customer service

Sales support and customer service professionals



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Study approach and methodology

The IBM Institute for Business Value (IBM IBV), in conjunction with Oxford Economics, interviewed and surveyed 750 executives with equivalent roles and titles, including Chief Customer Officers (CCO), Chief Customer Service Officers (CCSO), Chief Financial Officers (CFO), Chief Human Resources Officers (CHRO), Chief Operating Officers (COO), Chief Procurement Officers (CPO), Chief Supply Chain Officers (CSCO), Global Business Services/Shared Services Leaders, Heads of Outsourcing/VP of Outsourcing, and Heads of Recruitment/Talent Acquisition.

Respondents represent organizations in Australia, Germany, India, Singapore, the UK, and the US. In addition, they represent five industry sectors, including banking/ financial markets, insurance, healthcare, life sciences, and consumer (products and retail), with each comprising 20% of our total respondent sample. The size of organizations surveyed, in terms of revenue, ranged from \$500 million to \$680 billion, with a mean of \$31 billion.

The IBM IBV ran a series of contrast analyses, including pairwise comparisons, highlighting results and differences as shown in this report. Statistical significance for all pairwise comparison contrasts was set at the (p = .05) level, meaning there is only a 5% chance that the observed differences or relationships between the groups are due to random variation.

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Notes and sources

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