The Decision Gap in CX

Why change stalls, and what it takes to move forward

Customer Contact Panel White Paper | Q4 2026



Executive Summary

Customer experience leaders have more technology, data and operating-model choices than ever before. Yet transformation moves more slowly than the opportunity demands.

Projects stall, stakeholders pull in different directions, business cases fail to create confidence and pilots struggle to become scaled change.

> CCP calls this the Decision Gap: the space between recognising an opportunity and having enough clarity, alignment and confidence to act on it.

Customer Contact Panel sponsored research by Ryan Strategic Advisory through the 2026 CX Technology and Global Services Survey covering more than 800 enterprise decision-makers across contact-centre strategy points to recurring barriers: unclear ownership, weak ROI, an overload of options, misaligned priorities and insufficient attention to people and change.

This paper explores why decisions stall, what better decision-making looks like and how leaders can move from ambition to practical action.

The next phase of CX transformation requires a better decision system — one that begins with the outcome.



Foreword: Martin Newman



AI should not begin with the question, 'Where can we deploy AI?' It should begin with the customer and business outcome we are trying to improve. The technology is an enabler; it is not the strategy."

In his work across sectors, Martin Newman repeatedly observes a gap between knowing change is required and agreeing what change should happen, who owns it and how its value will be measured. Customers do not wait for internal alignment — their expectations are shaped by the best experiences they encounter anywhere.

The Decision Gap shifts the conversation from technology selection to decision quality — forcing leaders to consider outcomes, commercial value, operational reality, people, risk and accountability together.

1. The Decision Gap

The Paradox

Organisations have access to more technology, delivery models and data than ever. AI, automation and outsourcing have significantly expanded the range of options available to leaders.

The Reality

Progress often feels slower than expected. Projects stall. Internal alignment becomes difficult. Decisions take longer than they should. Opportunities lose momentum.

The challenge is not necessarily a lack of ambition or capability. It is the distance between recognising what is possible and building sufficient organisational confidence to decide, commit and act.



2. The Illusion of Progress

High activity can disguise low decision velocity. Organisations invest in platforms, introduce automation and explore delivery models — from the outside, this looks like transformation. Inside, different stakeholders optimise for different outcomes.



Technology

Stability, integration, security and risk



Operations

Performance, service delivery and productivity



Finance

Cost, return and investment risk



Customer

Experience, loyalty and outcomes



People

Capability, roles, engagement and change

Every perspective is legitimate. The problem arises when there is no shared definition of success and no clear mechanism for resolving trade-offs. More choice creates more evaluation — not more progress.

3. What the Research Tells Us



The research conducted through questions within the Ryan Strategic Advisory 2026 CX Technology and Global Services Survey captured the views of more than 800 enterprise decision-makers responsible for contact-centre strategy and operations across multiple markets and sectors. Three themes stand out.

Change is driven by accountability

CEOs, COOs and customer leaders are strong enablers — close to commercial and operational outcomes, they are more likely to push for progress.

Finance tests confidence, not simply blocks change

CFOs challenge initiatives when benefits are unclear. That scrutiny is often a test of whether the organisation can articulate the problem, expected return, assumptions, risks and success measures.

The evidence threshold is rising

Decision-making is becoming more use-case led, more dependent on evidence-based ROI and more reliant on validation of options and trade-offs. Ambition alone is not enough.

People and workforce leaders can be relatively passive in decision-making, even though many CX changes materially alter jobs, skills and organisational design.

4. Five Reasons CX Decisions Stall

1. **Unclear ownership**
   Multiple stakeholders participate without a single person accountable for the outcome.

2. **Weak or unproven ROI**
   Theoretical benefit is not enough. Leaders need confidence in implementation cost, time to value and the realism of productivity assumptions.

3. **Too many options**
   Without a structured way to compare options against the desired outcome, choice becomes a source of delay.

4. **Misaligned priorities**
   Functions optimise against different measures. A shared North Star is essential — including the impact of not acting.

5. **People and change are underplayed**
   Skills, training, role design and culture need to enter the decision much earlier than they typically do.

5. Why the Decision Gap Matters Now

The pace of change in customer operations is accelerating. Organisations face more decisions, not fewer and the stakes are rising.



Automation Boundaries

What should be automated — and what should remain human?



Outsourcing Evolution

Moving beyond labour arbitrage toward expertise and outcome-based models.



Human Interaction

Concentrated in moments where judgment, empathy and reassurance matter most.



Personalisation

Increasing complexity of delivery as anticipation and personalisation rise.

The cost of getting a decision wrong is significant. But the cost of prolonged indecision is rising too.

6. Stop Asking "Where Can We Use AI?"

Solution-First Thinking

"We need to implement AI."

This sends teams into demonstrations and technology selection before the problem and desired outcome have been agreed.

Capacity-First Outsourcing

"Should we outsource?"

Outcome-First Thinking

"Can AI help us reduce cost to serve by 15% while maintaining or improving customer satisfaction?"

Value-First Operating Model

"How could a different operating model improve flexibility, resilience and customer outcomes while reducing operational cost?"

Changing the question shifts the conversation from buying technology or capacity to solving an agreed problem — and makes ROI easier to define because success is established before the solution is chosen.

7. Rethinking ROI in CX Transformation

Traditional business cases over-focus on headcount, average handling time or licences. AI changes the economics: as simpler interactions disappear, remaining human contacts may take longer and require more expertise. AHT can deteriorate while the overall operation becomes more effective.

> ROI should describe the value of the outcome — not merely the efficiency of the activity.

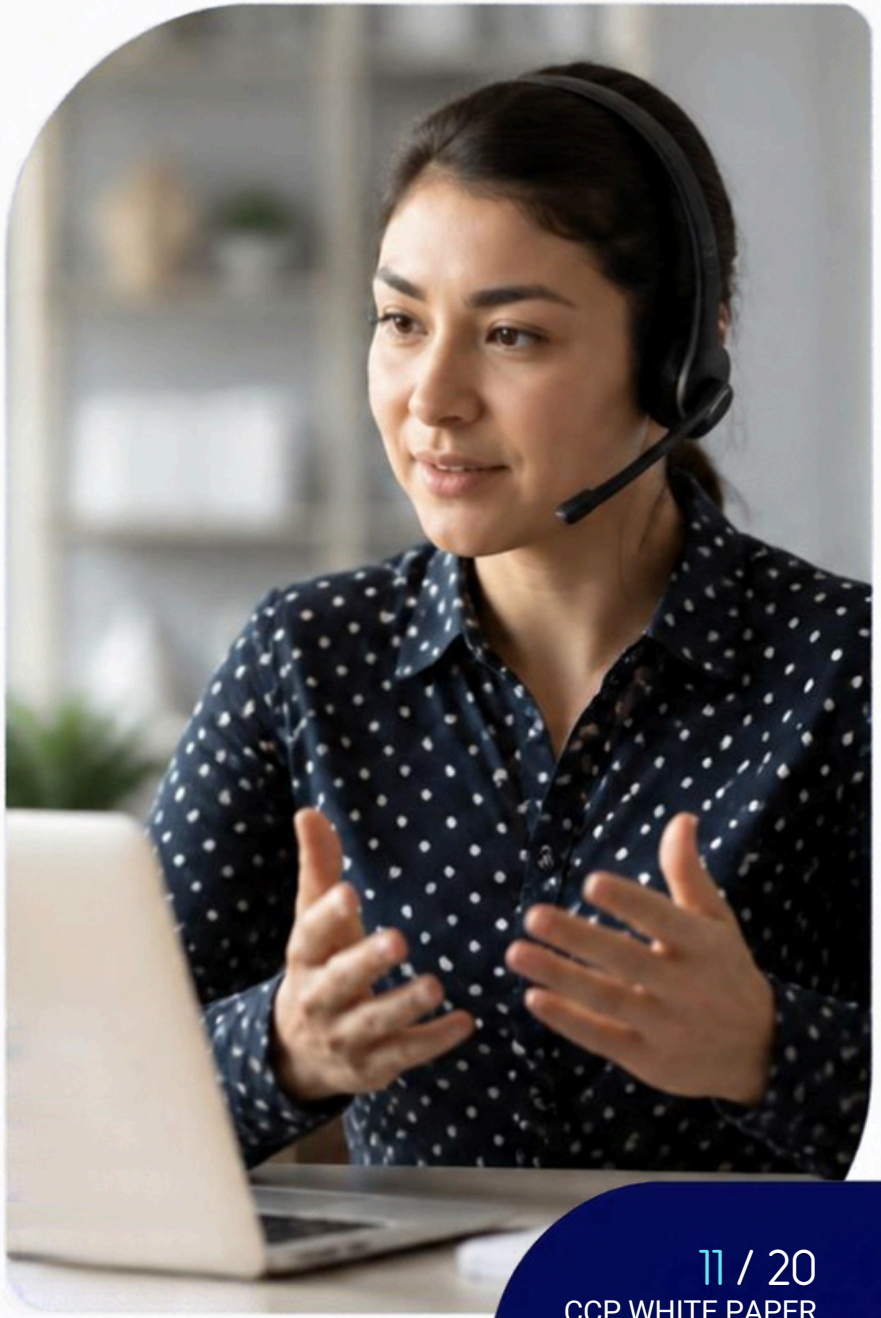


8. The Human Decision Inside the Technology Decision

The debate about AI in CX frequently focuses on what technology can replace. A more useful question is what the future operating model requires from people.

Automation removes routine work — but increases the concentration of difficult conversations handled by employees. Customers who reach a human may be more vulnerable, more frustrated or dealing with exceptions automation could not resolve. Human capability becomes more valuable at precisely the point that overall human volume may fall.

Organisations need to decide how recruitment profiles, training, performance management, career paths and frontline leadership should evolve. Successful CX transformation should be treated as an organisational change programme enabled by technology — not simply a technology implementation.



9. What Better Decision-Making Looks Like

Organisations that move effectively create a repeatable way of making decisions — not necessarily those with the largest budgets or most advanced technology.

Dimension	Weak Environment	Strong Environment
Ownership	Shared responsibility; unclear accountability	Named decision owner accountable for outcome
Outcome	Technology or activity-led	Customer and commercial outcome defined first
ROI	Headline savings and assumptions	Evidence-based value case with risks and ranges
Options	Vendor-by-vendor evaluation	Structured comparison against common criteria
People	Considered after selection	Workforce and change implications designed early
Action	Wait for certainty	Act with managed uncertainty and clear measures

10. A Practical Decision Gap Framework

CCP proposes five dimensions organisations can use to assess their decision and adoption maturity — revealing where a decision is most likely to stall.

1. **Decision Ownership & Alignment**
   Is there a clear owner and a shared definition of success?
2. **ROI & Commercial Clarity**
   Can the organisation explain value, cost, risk and the cost of inaction?
3. **Use-Case & Evidence Maturity**
   Is the decision grounded in a defined problem and credible proof?
4. **Delivery-Model Design**
   Have in-house, technology, hybrid and outsourced routes been compared consistently?
5. **Change & Workforce Readiness**
   Are skills, roles, leadership, culture and adoption built into the decision?

11. From Ambition to Action

The CX landscape will continue to evolve. New technologies will emerge, delivery models will shift and customer expectations will rise. Organisations will not have fewer options — they will have more.

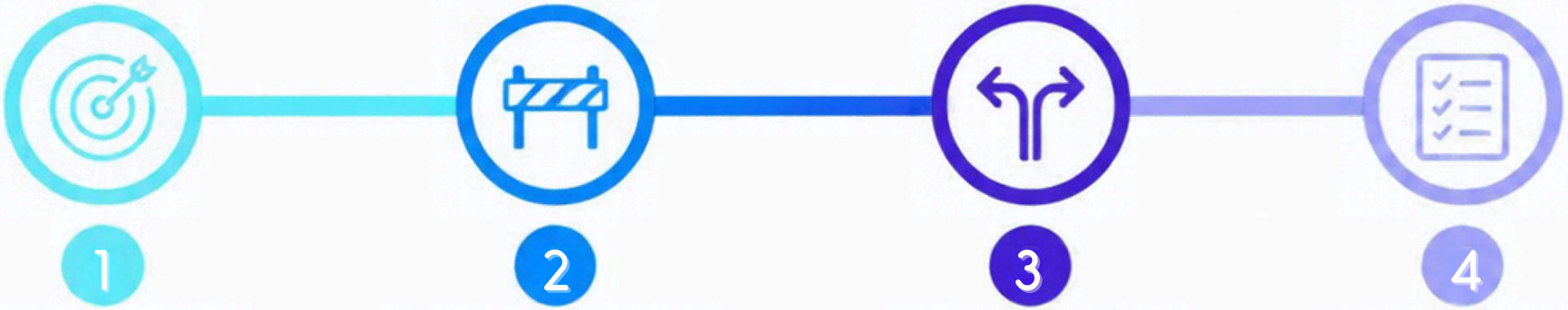
> The challenge is no longer simply: "What should we do?" The better question is: How do we decide what to do, and act on it?

Closing the Decision Gap requires clarity about the ambition, shared understanding of the blockers, disciplined comparison of realistic routes forward and agreement on the practical next step. The goal is not a perfect decision — it is a decision that is sufficiently evidence-based, commercially credible, customer-centred and organisationally aligned to move forward with confidence.



12. Future Fit: A Practical Next Step

CCP's Future Fit methodology is a focused working session to help organisations sense-check their operating approach, identify where decisions are slowing progress and clarify what should happen next.



The session is not intended to solve everything. It should leave leaders with a clearer direction, shared understanding across stakeholders, agreed priorities and a practical next step.

Future Fit: What the Session Covers



Clarify Outcomes

Agree what the organisation is actually trying to improve: cost to serve, customer experience, productivity, scalability, revenue performance, risk or compliance.



Identify Blockers

Too many options, internal misalignment, lack of confidence in the business case, uncertainty around automation or outsourcing, or fear of disruption.



Compare Routes

Assess in-house optimisation, AI and automation, platform change, hybrid delivery or outsourcing — using consistent criteria: cost, speed, complexity, risk and flexibility.



Agree Next Steps

Align stakeholders around priorities and trade-offs, and leave with a clear, practical next step — not a predetermined solution or technology pitch.

Ready to Close Your Decision Gap?

If your organisation knows that change is needed but is struggling to agree what to prioritise, where to invest or how to move forward, the problem may not be a lack of options. It may be a lack of clarity and confidence in the decision.

CCP's Future Fit session is a focused two-hour working session for leadership teams — independent, structured and designed to help you make the right decision with greater confidence and at greater pace.

No predetermined solution

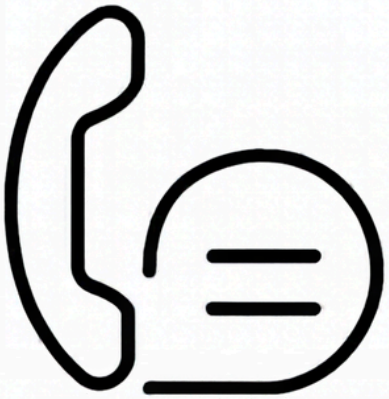
No technology pitch

No pressure to transform everything at once

Mind the gap. Then close it.
Talk to CCP about a Future Fit session for your organisation.

www.customercontactpanel.com

About CCP



CCP helps organisations make better customer-experience and customer-operations decisions faster, with more confidence and a clearer line of sight to outcomes.

Its role extends beyond sourcing or delivery support — helping leaders clarify the problem, compare realistic options, validate decisions and, where appropriate, design and deliver the solution.

This white paper forms part of CCP's Decision Gap in CX campaign.

Talk to us

If you know us, you know we love to chat and problem solve.
If you don't, we'd love to hear from you.

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Key Takeaways

01

The gap is real — and widening

As AI and automation accelerate, the distance between ambition and execution is growing for most organisations.

02

Start with the outcome, not the technology

Change the question from "Where can we use AI?" to "What outcome are we trying to improve — and by how much?"

03

ROI must reflect the full value equation

Beyond headcount savings — include retention, quality, risk, scalability and the full cost of change.

04

People are part of the decision, not an afterthought

Workforce and change implications must be designed in from the start, not bolted on after selection.

05

Better decisions beat better ideas

The organisations that move fastest will be those that make better decisions — not those with the newest technology.

ccp

> The organisations that succeed will be those that are clearest about the outcomes they want to create.

Martin Newman,
Customer Centricity Expert, Author and Advisor

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A framework for closing the space between ambition and action in customer experience transformation.



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