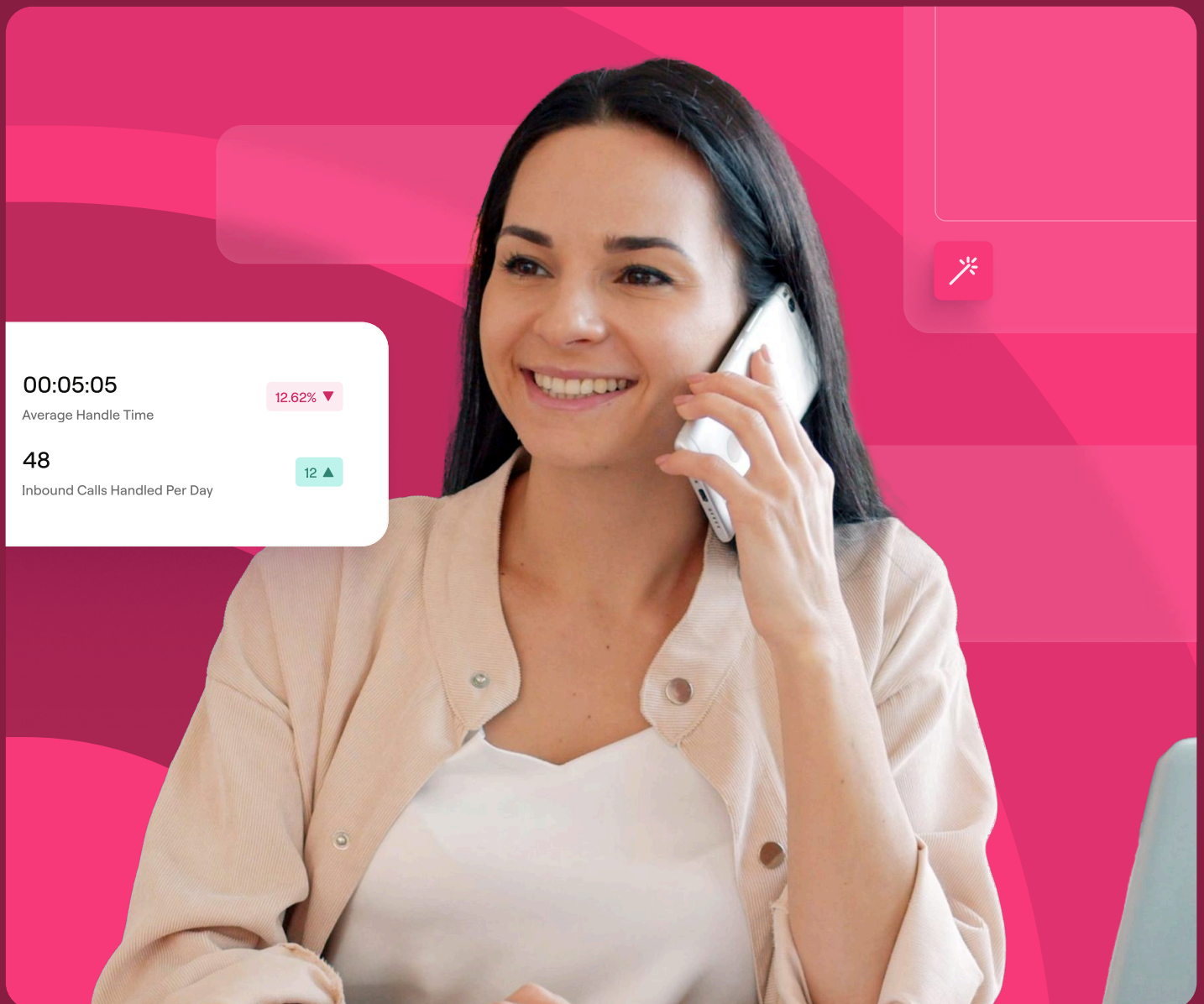


Winter 2025

WFM trends: 5 changes to consider in 2026



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Introduction

01

Executive summary

In 2025, WFM teams had to rethink how work gets done.

The industry didn't just evolve — it reorganized around new realities:

- 01 AI became operationally useful.
- 02 With simpler tasks now automated, more complex interactions are coming to agents, creating stress and increasing burnout and attrition.
- 03 Agent expectations shifted faster than staffing models could keep up.
- 04 Data fragmentation exposed long-standing gaps in strategy and planning.
- 05 Cloud adoption accelerated as leaders sought more flexible, scalable, and integration-ready systems.

AI matured from a buzzword into a daily partner, helping planners, analysts, and supervisors respond to variability with more confidence and far less manual lift. **AI made forecasting more adaptive, scheduling more intelligent, and quality insights more precise**, giving teams clearer signals in an increasingly complex environment.

At the same time, organizations have realized that you cannot run an effective operation if your people are depleted.

These human and technological shifts collided with a third force: the urgent need for connected, accessible data. As channels multiplied and hybrid work expanded, siloed systems became the biggest barrier to progress.

Leaders recognize that modern WFM demands **cloud-enabled, API-first architectures** that deliver consistent, real-time access to operational data. Without that foundation, coaching, intelligence, and operational optimization cannot reach full potential.

Layered on top of this is the growing focus on **responsible AI**. Automated decisions influence schedules, staffing, routing, and coaching. As a result, transparency and compliance are non-negotiable.

Organizations need AI they can trust — and technology environments that support safe, auditable, and regulation-ready deployments across cloud, hybrid, and on-prem systems.

Taken together, these forces defined 2025 as a **year of transition — not just toward new tools, but toward a more intelligent, connected, cloud-enabled, and human-centered approach to workforce management**.

This report explores the drivers behind that transition and offers practical guidance for leaders preparing for 2026.

5 changes to consider in 2026

2026

01 The shift to AI-enhanced workforce management

In 2025, **AI moved beyond experimentation and became an operational partner** across forecasting, scheduling, intraday management, and quality assurance, WFM teams began shifting from manual, reactive processes to **predictive, adaptive, and agent-supportive AI systems**.

Leaders quickly realized this evolution isn't about replacing human skill—it's about **augmenting human expertise**. Without empathy, flexibility, and human judgment, AI may fall short, especially in industries where customer and employee experience drive competitive advantage.

But adopting AI came with new challenges and expectations.

As AI takes on simpler, repetitive tasks, **agents are now handling more complex, emotionally demanding interactions**. This shift requires stronger training, deeper product knowledge, and more specialized support. It also increases the risk of burnout when the remaining workload is consistently heavy.

For WFM leaders, this makes **coaching, balanced scheduling, and real-time visibility into workload complexity** more important than ever. Modern workforce management must account not just for volume, but for the emotional load and cognitive intensity of the work agents are now handling.

Agentic AI: From assistive to proactive

A major transition in 2025 was the rise of **agentic AI** — systems capable not just of following rules but of **anticipating needs, proposing actions, and adapting continuously to real-world conditions**. Instead of waiting for human inputs, agentic AI works alongside WFM

“When done right, AI frees up people to do the things only humans can do.

It's about amplifying talent, not replacing it. It's about giving teams space to breathe, think, and show up as their best selves. And when that happens? That's when we unlock the next level of performance.”

Darryl Kelly, CEO at Aspect



teams, acting as an always-on partner that learns, recommends, and adjusts in real time.

In practice, this means:

- AI that flags staffing risks before they escalate.
- Scheduling engines that suggest alternatives proactively.
- Forecasting models that adjust in real time as patterns shift.
- Coaching tools that identify moments that matter for agent performance.

By automating repetitive tasks, surfacing real-time insights, and enabling faster, more confident decision-making across forecasting, scheduling, and intraday adjustments, agentic AI lifts a significant load off WFM teams.

TRANSFORMATION IN ACTION

Using real-time analytics from Aspect, a Fortune 500 telecom reduced average handle time by 30 seconds, unlocking over **\$9.5M in annual savings**

The benefits show up everywhere, reducing decision-making time and creating a predictable planning environment. The outcome is an operational model where workforce planners and supervisors are no longer chasing issues — they're **staying ahead of them, supported by intelligent systems.**

Agentic AI doesn't replace the nuance or judgment of WFM teams. It gives them **visibility, speed, and decision support** they've been missing – and the space to operate more strategically.

AI-Powered forecasting: Smarter, faster, more adaptable

Forecasting has always been central to effective workforce management. But in many contact centers, it's also one of the hardest jobs to get right, especially when demand shifts quickly and channels behave differently.

In 2025, machine learning (ML) models began **spotting patterns early, adjusting automatically, and improving accuracy as conditions changed.**

Instead of a static forecast updated once a week (or once a month), AI turns forecasting into a living system that evolves hour by hour, helping WFM teams:

- **Catch unexpected demand changes early** before they cause staffing issues.
- **Re-forecast automatically** when new data comes in.

- **Understand channel differences** (voice, chat, messaging, email).
- **Learn from past exceptions** to avoid repeated mistakes.

With AI in place, WFM teams get forecasts that stay aligned with reality (not yesterday's version of it). **Analysts spend less time cleaning data and tweaking models and more time planning, validating, and partnering with operations.**

AI **removes the guesswork** that slows teams down. Workforce planners still make the final call, but they're supported by models that adapt faster, see more, and catch shifts earlier than manual tools ever could.

AI-enhanced scheduling and intraday management

Scheduling is one of the most time-consuming parts of WFM. It's where planners spend hours comparing coverage needs, agent preferences, skills, breaks, labor rules, and real-time changes.

Instead of manually building and adjusting schedules, AI gives planners a starting point that's already optimized, **so they can focus on decisions.**

AI-enhanced scheduling delivers several key advantages:

- **Schedules that update automatically** as forecasts shift.
- **Shift options that balance coverage and agent preferences.**
- **Better skill matching** so the right people are in the right place at the right time.
- **Reduced overtime and last-minute chaos** because the system spots gaps early.
- **More predictable staffing plans**, especially during peak and seasonal periods.

Intraday teams also feel the benefits of AI. With real-time signals and automatic re-forecasting, AI helps teams **adjust staffing quickly, reassign agents across channels, and protect SLAs.**

“AI will never replace the empathy of a well-timed coaching moment, the insight of a seasoned planner, or the nuance of a frontline conversation. What it can do is eliminate the noise—removing repetitive tasks, surfacing insights faster, and giving your teams more time to focus on high-impact work.”

Ariana Kornblau, Senior Product Manager at Aspect



AI doesn't remove the need for human decision-making. It turns scheduling and intraday from a constant scramble into a more stable, predictable, and strategic function.

AI for QA & coaching: Personalized guidance at scale

In 2025, AI stepped in to close a gap in QA and coaching, **giving teams better visibility and more time to focus on the conversations that matter.**

AI-powered QA and coaching tools help WFM managers:

- **Spot performance patterns early**, long before they show up in KPIs.
- **Identify specific coaching moments** instead of reviewing hours of calls.
- **Detect sentiment shifts and customer frustration** across channels.
- **Give agents more timely feedback**, not weeks after the fact.
- **Reduce the manual review workload**, letting supervisors spend more time supporting their teams.

Instead of digging through recordings and transcripts to find issues, AI helps quality managers and supervisors

get a curated view of the interactions that need attention, organized by coaching themes, behavioral patterns, or business priorities.

AI also makes it easier to tailor coaching to each agent's strengths, goals, and learning style. What used to take hours of manual analysis can now happen daily, or even in the moment.

Agents also benefit directly. With more frequent feedback and clearer performance insights, they gain a better understanding of where to focus and how to grow, reducing frustration and improving retention.

One of the biggest advantages of **AI in QA and coaching** is that it helps leaders **connect the dots between performance, well-being, and workload.**

Supporting a more human agent experience, AI tools can highlight signs of burnout, high-cognitive-load interactions, and repetitive friction points in customer journeys.





This creates a more **human-centered coaching environment** — one that recognizes not just how agents perform, but why they perform that way.

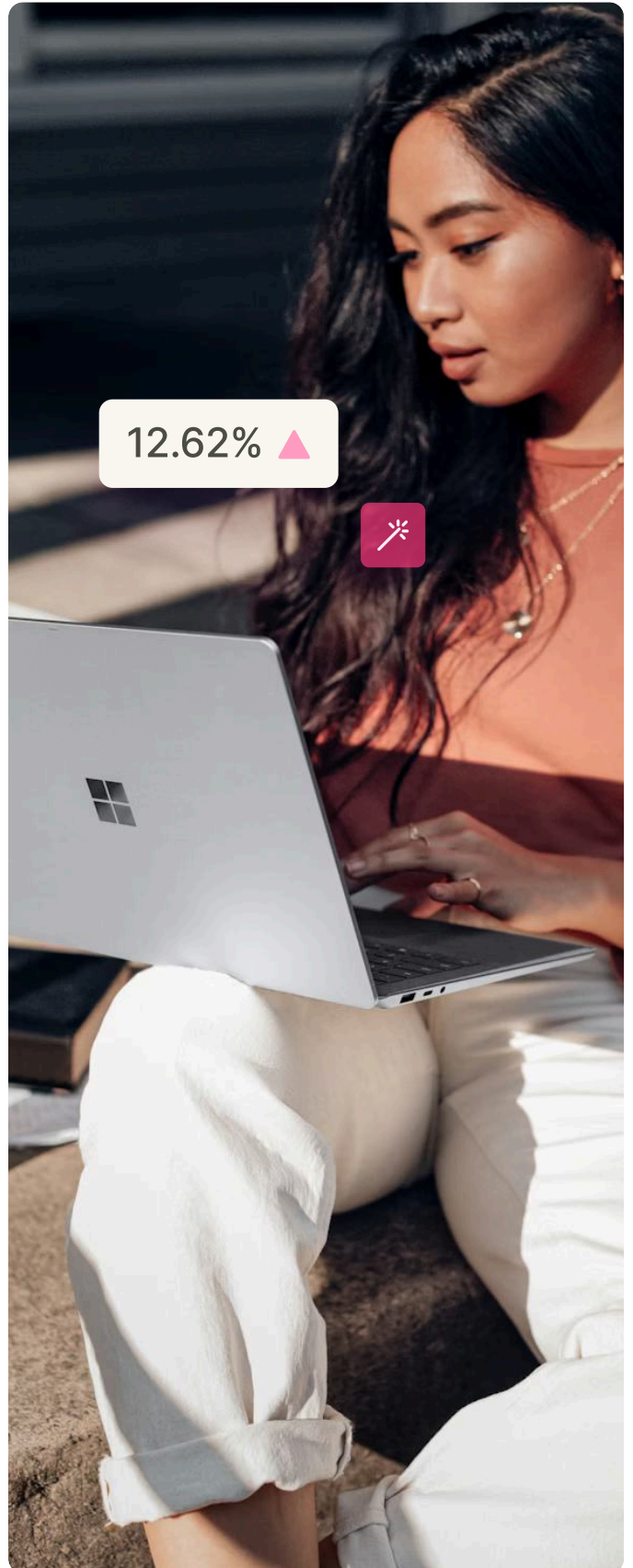
Aspect's vision for AI in WEM

At Aspect, we believe AI should **empower people, not replace them.**

Our vision for AI reflects a simple but powerful idea: technology should strengthen workforce capabilities, reduce friction, and deliver measurable improvements to every aspect of workforce engagement management (WEM) - all while maintaining the human connection that is at the heart of exceptional experiences.

Our core principles:

-  Human-centered intelligence
-  Practical innovation
-  Compliance-first development
-  Transparency and trust



02 The new agent era: Flexibility & productivity rebalance

In 2025, it became clear that flexibility, well-being, and workload balance weren't perks - they're pillars of operational performance.

Agent expectations shifted faster than many organizations anticipated, driven by a new generation entering customer service roles, rising burnout, increased pressure on mental health, and the lasting impact of hybrid work.

Agents asked for more flexibility, more support, and more autonomy. These expectations pushed WFM teams to rethink long-standing practices around schedules, workloads, and employee experience.

TRANSFORMATION IN ACTION

Aspect helped BC Services **boost retention by 60%** and **save more than \$70,000** through its engagement and performance tools.

Gen Z is redefining what "good work" looks like

As Gen Z becomes a larger part of the frontline workforce, they're reshaping expectations around what meaningful, sustainable work should feel like. This generation isn't shy about what they want — and their preferences are pushing contact centers to rethink long-standing workforce practices.

Gen Z agents place a high value on:

- **Flexibility** in when and how they work
- **Greater control** over their schedules
- **Technology that helps them**, not slows them down
- **Continuous support and feedback**, not annual reviews
- **Work environments that prioritize wellbeing**

73%

Of Gen Z employees want permanent flexible work options



According to research, **73% of Gen Z employees want permanent flexible work options (1)**. And the need for support is real: Gallup reports that **68% of Gen Z workers feel stressed most of the time (2)**.

These realities reinforce the need for modern, self-service scheduling tools that let employees set preferences, bid on shifts, and adjust their schedules in ways that genuinely fit their lives. For Gen Z, flexibility and wellbeing aren't perks — they're baseline expectations.

Flexibility becomes a retention strategy, not a perk

Across the industry, flexibility moved from "nice to offer" to **critical for keeping top talent**.

In 2025, WFM teams embraced:

- **Shift bidding and self-service schedule adjustments.**
- **Flex shifts** aligned to peak and low-volume windows.
- **Gig/part-time blends** to handle seasonal volatility.
- **Remote and hybrid staffing models** for broader talent pools.

What changed was not the technology, but the mindset. Organizations began designing coverage *around* agents, not expecting agents to conform to rigid plans.

TRANSFORMATION IN ACTION

Aspect's mobile scheduling reduced **Asurion's** admin workload significantly, saving **2,500 hours and \$75K a year**, while giving agents the control they've been asking for

Schedule Preferences

Configure your schedule preferences to automatically reorganize your schedule.

Spring '24 Semester

Spring '24 Semester

Summer '24 Semester

+ Add Preference

Shift

Work Days

S M T W T F S

Earliest

Latest

🕒 07:30 AM

🕒 04:30 PM

Activity Preferences

Activity Type

Earliest

Latest

Lunch break

🕒 12:00 PM

🕒 1:00 PM

Morning shift

🕒 7:30 AM

🕒 11:00 AM

Afternoon shift

🕒 12:30 PM

🕒 4:30 PM

Repeating Activities

Activity Name *

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Start

🕒 12:00 PM

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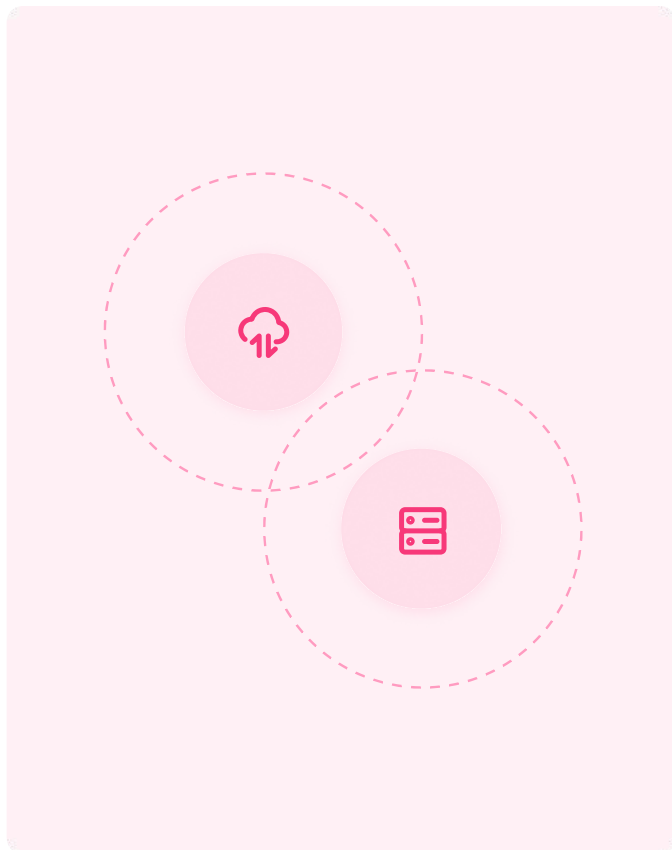


03 Data consolidation and the API-first contact center

2025 was the year many contact centers discovered a hard truth: **you can't modernize WFM if your data is stuck in old systems.**

As channels multiplied and customer behavior became more unpredictable, leaders faced growing pressure to unify data across their tech stack: forecasts, schedules, interactions, quality, performance metrics, and operational signals.

However, for many organizations, these critical data points lived in siloed tools, legacy platforms, or hard-to-reach repositories. This is why **data integration is essential.**



Omnichannel complexity exposed the limits of fragmented data

A few years ago, most centers could get by with siloed systems because channels behaved in predictable ways.

Now, WFM teams have to support:

- Voice, chat, email, messaging, and social.
- AI-driven deflection and bot escalations.
- Blended agents with different skill sets.
- Remote and hybrid staffing models.
- Highly variable customer traffic patterns.

When **these signals live in different systems, fragmented data doesn't become just an inconvenience. It creates waste, rework, and blind spots** at every layer of operations.

Leaders have recognized that there is no accurate forecast, no flexible schedule, and no proactive intraday plan without a single, consistent, accessible data foundation.

Cloud, on-prem, and hybrid: The new reality of hybrid environments

While many contact centers accelerated cloud adoption, many kept heavier, regulated, or legacy systems on-prem. And many others operated a hybrid environment, intentionally or because transitions take time.

This created an important requirement: **WFM technology must work across environments.**

The most mature organizations didn't approach cloud vs. on-prem as a binary choice. Instead, they focused on consistent data access and API-friendly architectures.

This approach allows them to adopt new WFM capabilities while still respecting regulatory, security, and infrastructure realities.

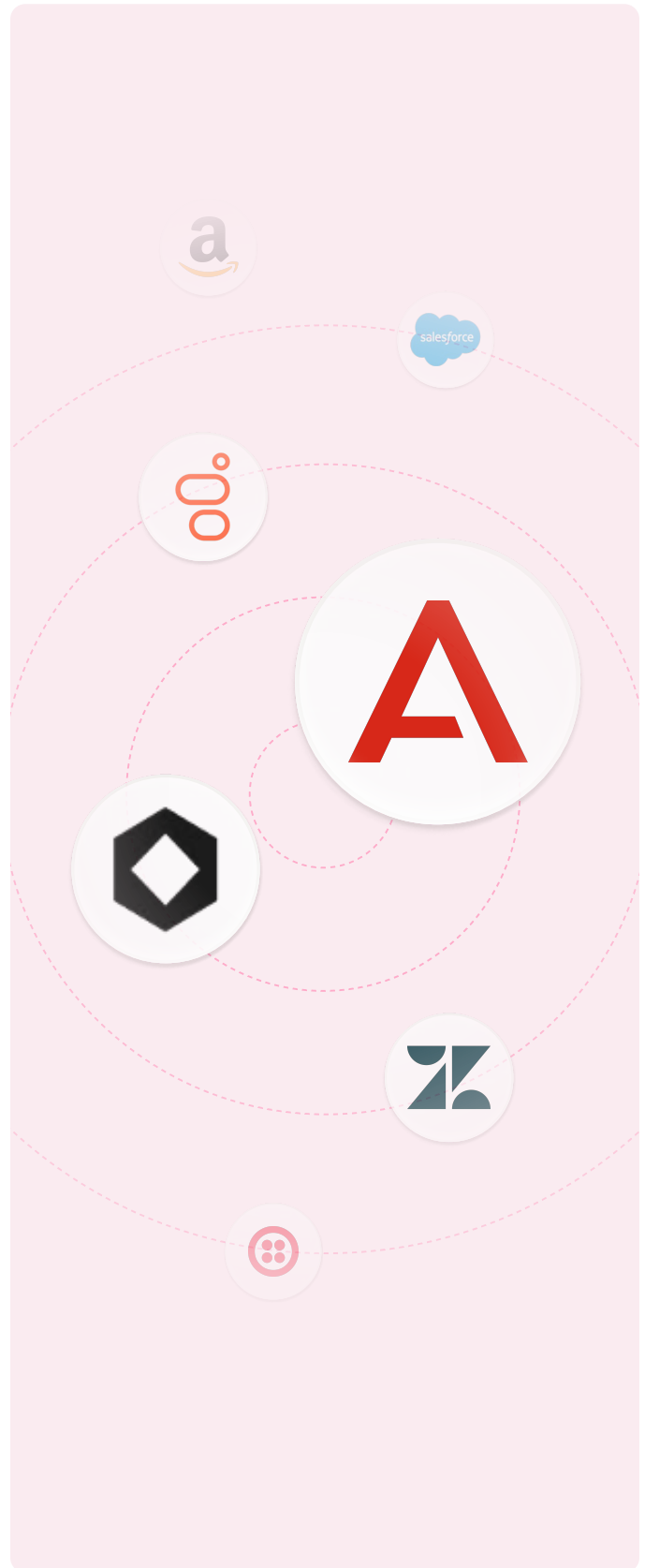
API-First models become the standard, not the exception

To solve these fragmentation issues, more contact centers embraced **API-first architectures**. This shift wasn't about technology for technology's sake. It was about enabling:

- **Real-time data sharing** between WFM, QM, CCaaS, CRM, HRIS, and analytics tools.
- **Faster integration** with new AI capabilities.
- **Cleaner, more reliable data flows**.
- **Better access paths for operational insights**, whether teams are cloud, hybrid, or on-prem.

Modern WFM requires **open, flexible, integration-friendly systems** that can evolve with business needs - not lock teams into a fixed architecture.

In 2025, the takeaway was clear: cloud isn't just a deployment model. It's an enabler of innovation, agility, and employee empowerment.



04 Compliance, privacy, and responsible AI

As AI became more deeply embedded in workforce management, 2025 also brought a new level of scrutiny to **data governance, compliance, and ethical decision-making**.

Leaders quickly recognized that adopting AI wasn't just a technology choice — it was an operational responsibility.

WFM teams began asking new questions:

- *How is data used to make AI-driven scheduling or forecasting recommendations?*
- *Are our models transparent enough for regulators and our own employees?*
- *How do we balance automation with fairness, privacy, and workforce protections?*
- *Can our systems meet emerging labor and scheduling laws without breaking workflows?*

This shift marked the rise of **responsible AI in WFM**, an approach that emphasizes transparency, auditability, fairness, and human oversight.

According to research, organizations adopting AI continue to face three major barriers: data privacy and security concerns, complex or fragmented data, and difficulty proving ROI. All of these reinforce the need for governance, transparency, and responsible AI design. (3)



Data governance becomes a frontline priority

With WFM systems collecting more operational, performance, and behavioral data than ever before, organizations needed strategies that ensured:

- **Clear data lineage** (where data comes from and how it's used).
- **Proper access controls** across distributed teams.
- **Protections for sensitive employee data**.
- **Transparent AI recommendations** supervisors can explain.
- **Auditable records** that stand up to compliance reviews.

Responsible AI requires more than smart algorithms. It requires **frameworks, policies, and guardrails** that keep humans in control.

Cloud vs. on-prem: A more nuanced decision

Compliance concerns also reshaped the conversation around **where WFM and contact center systems should run**.

While many organizations accelerated cloud adoption, others (especially those in regulated industries) needed hybrid or on-prem flexibility for:

- Data residency.
- Security and privacy controls.
- Local regulations.
- Union and workforce agreements.
- Legacy operational dependencies.

In fact, **security** (58.7%) and **reliability** (56.6%) are the top reasons companies keep their contact center on-premises. (4)

05 Unified workloads: Contact center, digital, and back-office

Leading organizations began shifting toward **unified workload management** — a model where every task, interaction, and workflow across contact center, digital, and back-office functions is part of one integrated ecosystem.

The result: better forecasting, more strategic staffing, fewer bottlenecks, and a more stable, predictable operation.

Why workload unification became essential

As channels multiply and customer expectations continue to evolve, organizations encounter a recurring set of challenges:

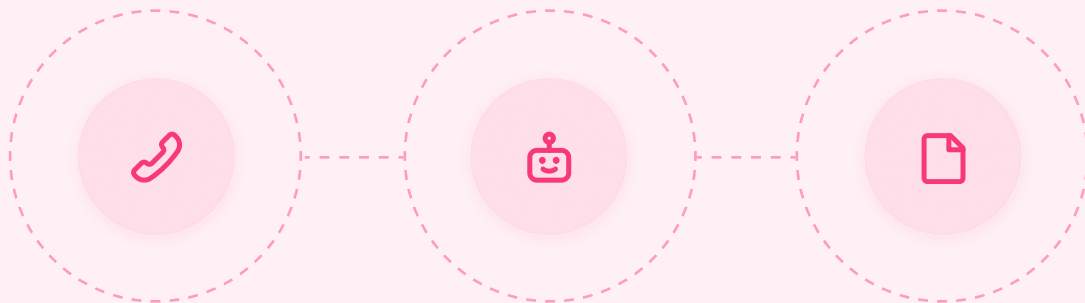
- **Digital channels experience unpredictable volume swings.**
- **Back-office queues build up with limited operational visibility.**
- **Contact center surges strain specialized teams beyond capacity.**

A unified model gives leaders a **complete view of total demand**, not just parts of it. It becomes possible to staff intelligently across teams, anticipate pressure points earlier, and eliminate the operational blind spots that slow teams down.

Unified workloads mean staffing, scheduling, routing, and planning are coordinated across:

- **Contact center interactions** (voice, chat, messaging, email).
- **Digital support work** (asynchronous channels, escalations, bot exceptions).
- **Back-office teams** (claims, verifications, processing, fulfillment).
- **Specialized teams** where appropriate.

As contact centers continue adapting to rising expectations, unified workloads will become a defining capability of high-performing workforce organizations.



Conclusion

03

How Aspect helps contact centers win in 2026

Aspect is helping contact centers enter 2026 with a smarter, more connected workforce platform.

We've strengthened our **AI and automation capabilities** across forecasting, scheduling, QA, and real-time guidance—giving leaders faster insights and freeing teams from manual work.

We also launched the Aspect Cloud Workforce experience with an intuitive technology that empowers agents, reduces supervisor workload, and speeds up approvals with the power of real-time insights and predictive analytics.

Our mobile app gives agents full control of their schedules from anywhere, improving flexibility and engagement.

This direction is also reflected in independent analysis. In the latest **Frost Radar™** report, Aspect was named a Leader, recognizing **our continued innovation across AI, automation, and workforce engagement technologies.**

With capabilities like AI-powered forecasting, automated conversation scoring, and real-time adherence, Aspect is helping organizations strengthen performance, reduce burnout, and achieve better business outcomes heading into 2026.

Discover the features helping teams achieve more in 2026



A human-centric approach to AI.

Our AI empowers people rather than replacing them. It handles repetitive tasks, provides clear explanations for its recommendations, and ensures humans remain in control. You get transparent models with understandable rationales, simple overrides, and customizable guardrails that align with your policies.



A unified WFM platform.

Forecasting, scheduling, intraday management, adherence, and analytics work together by design. One source of truth across channels and sites, with extensibility to your CCaaS, HRIS, and QM, reducing tool overload and enabling continuous optimization.



Faster deployments. Lower disruption.

Stand up new workflows in weeks, not quarters. Our prebuilt integrations and guided configuration minimize cutover risk, so teams keep serving customers while you modernize in the background. Fewer surprises. Faster time to value.



Built for complex, compliant operations.

Manage multi-site, unionized, and highly regulated operations with confidence. Aspect's native compliance controls, advanced scheduling, and automated adherence reduce risk and simplify workforce management at scale.



Built-in compliance you can trust.

Meet PCI and other stringent audit requirements natively across voice and digital channels — no extra integrations needed.

Features helping teams achieve more in 2026 (continued)



Your WEM, working as one.

Cut tool friction across voice, digital, outbound, and back office with WFM, QM, and analytics connected through supported integrations and pre-built connectors.



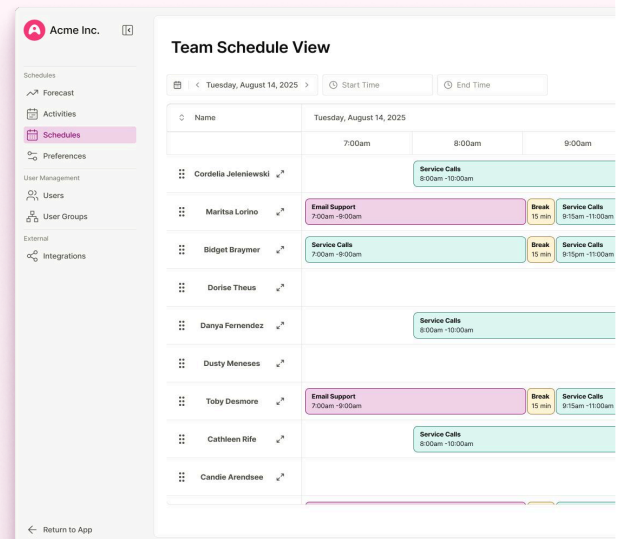
Get responsive, expert support.

Work with a dedicated support team that understands your business and solves issues quickly so your teams stay productive.

Learn how Aspect can help your team accelerate WFM transformation

See how AI forecasting, intelligent scheduling, and real-time insights can drive smarter decisions, happier teams, lower costs, and better business outcomes in 2026.

[Learn more about Aspect WFM](#)



Talk to our WFM specialists

Get a personalized walkthrough of how your organization can modernize planning, reduce complexity, and build human-centric operations — powered by data, AI, and responsible innovation.

[Talk to our team](#)

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