

The silence of the system

Liz Pinfold Reed, Good CX · Research partner Brenton Webber, Half Time Orange

Why customer experience transformation stalls between intent and action in New Zealand and Australian businesses. And what organisational biology has to do with it.

82% gather. 23% act.

RESEARCH 2026

AUSTRALASIAN CUSTOMER &
EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE READINESS RESEARCH

CONTENTS

What's inside.

WHAT WE FOUND

01	In one minute	03
02	A writing desk in New York	04
03	Listening happens. Closing does not	05
04	What 123 ANZ leaders told us	06
05	Heard, not held. Six findings on CX and EX	07

WHY IT HAPPENS

06	The cause is not strategy. It is biology	14
07	How a whisper becomes silence	17
08	CX feels the state your EX is in	18
09	How the crossing stays open	19

WHAT TO DO

10	The CFO question	20
11	AFAR: the measurement layer	21
12	Six places to start	22
13	Back to the writing desk	23
14	About this research	24

Short on time? Start here.

Leaders across Australia and New Zealand rate customer experience as a top growth priority. Yet they do not, by and large, translate that motivation into action.

As organisations scale, intent stays steady. But translation falters. Inconsistent action on feedback rises from 27 percent in small firms to 55 percent in firms of 51 or more.

Customer experience and employee experience are not two strategies. They are one system seen from two sides, and one thing decides both: whether honest information reaches a decision.

When it stops moving, that is the silence of the system: feedback collected but not acted on, people present but not contributing. The silence is biological before it is organisational. It starts in the nervous systems of the people inside the business. Trust and psychological safety decide what travels.

Here is the headline finding from our diagnostic of 123 senior leaders across New Zealand and Australia.

Eighty-two percent gather customer feedback.

Twenty-three percent have a clear process to act on it. The listening happens. The closing does not.

If you have only ten minutes: the Crossing Model, page 19. The actions, page 22.

A writing desk in New York.



Charles Dickens's writing desk, New York Public Library

In a treasure room at the New York Public Library sits a writing desk. It belonged to Charles Dickens. At that desk in 1854 he wrote *Hard Times*, his novel about a factory town run by men who could measure everything and understand nothing about the people in their factories. It reads as a current critique. And the desk is not the only exhibit in that room.

Five toys sit in a display case. The sixth is the story.

Nearby in the same room sit Christopher Robin Milne's original stuffed animals. Pooh, Eeyore, Piglet, Kanga, Tigger. Roo is missing. He was lost in an apple orchard in the 1930s and never recovered.

In every organisation, someone is Roo. Sometimes embodied as the frontline worker who stopped speaking up. Or the senior leader who learned to hold their tongue. Worst of all, the customer who switched providers without ever saying why.

That gap, between hearing the signal and acting on it, is the condition this paper is about: the silence inside organisations that look, on the dashboard, like they are doing fine.

Customer signals do get heard but are seldom held. Strategies get articulated but rarely travel. Sponsorship sits at the top of the business with no governance underneath it. Teams are willing, but the conditions to act are missing.

Measurement, where it happens at all, does not yet tell anyone whether trust and connection are actually growing.

The silence is not a strategy problem. It is a biological one. That, we believe, is the intervening variable, and it is where the rest of this paper goes.

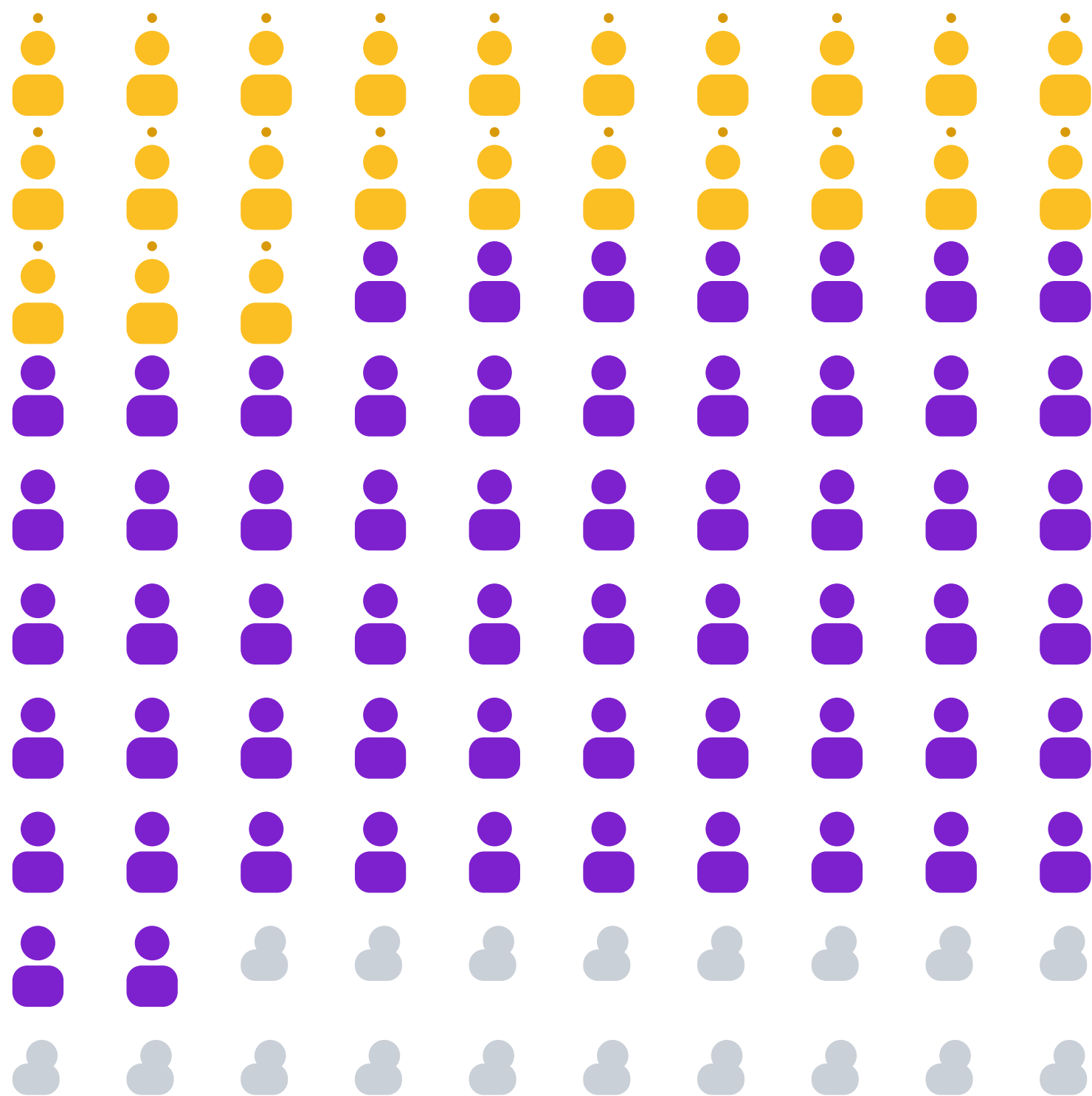
THE INTERVENING VARIABLE

Between a signal and a response sits the state the business is in. The state decides which reading gets made: the same feedback can land as useful or as threat. It is measurable, which makes it manageable. The full mechanism: page 18.

A signal arrives → **The state decides** → A response follows

Listening happens. Closing does not.

Diagnostic of 123 senior leaders across Australia and New Zealand. Applied to every 100: 82 gather customer feedback, only 23 have a clear process to act on it.



■ **23%**
Acting on it
a clear process,
working

■ **59%**
Inconsistent
gathering, but action
is patchy

■ **18%**
In the dark
no plan, no action,
no signal landing

What senior leaders told us about customer experience.

Half Time Orange’s readiness diagnostic, the sample, and what it does and does not measure.

Between April 2025 and March 2026, 123 senior leaders in Australia and New Zealand completed Half Time Orange’s Orange Zest readiness diagnostic. A further 17 international respondents brought the total study to 140. This paper reads the ANZ findings only.

Participants span founders, leadership, management and specialist roles across organisation sizes. The sample is self-selecting, so the findings read as patterns among engaged leaders rather than as a national average. Respondents chose to take the diagnostic in exchange for a free Orange Zest report, which means they are, by definition, leaders already thinking about customer experience.

The live sample is small for now, but it is built to grow under observation. The diagnostic format stays the same in future waves, so we will return to the same questions and see whether the numbers hold. Beyond the 123 respondents sits a larger group we cannot measure: leaders who saw the invitation and chose not to click. That silence is harder to quantify than the people who started the survey and did not finish. It is the same shape of silence, only scaled larger.

What the diagnostic measures is perceived conditions and operating signals. It does not directly measure commercial performance, customer outcomes or psychological safety. To illustrate beyond what the diagnostic measures, we lean on observable signals and named research.

123

senior ANZ leaders

17

international respondents

140

total study respondents

Apr 25 – Mar 26

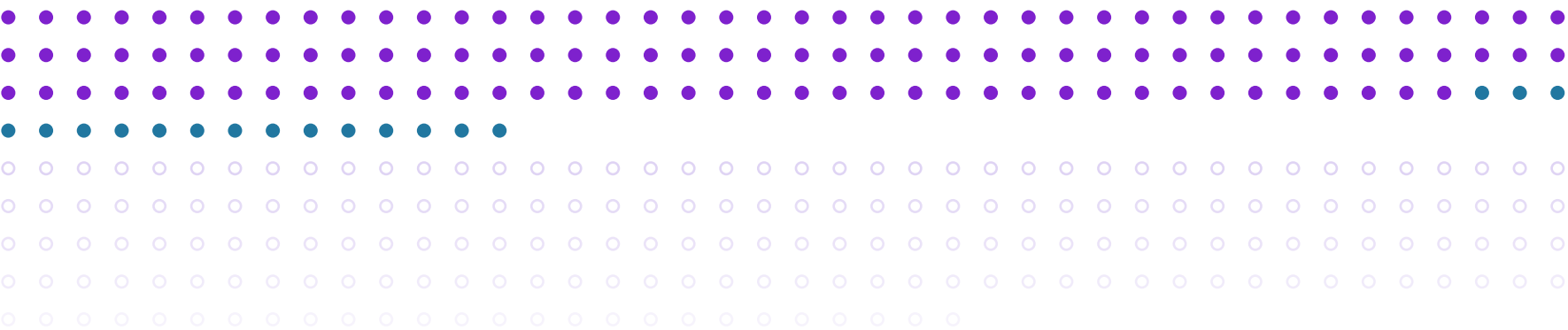
fieldwork window

The sample is live.

Scan to add your organisation to the next wave. Participants receive their own readiness report.



THE SAMPLE, AND THE SILENCE AROUND IT



Each solid dot is a leader who completed the diagnostic: 123 across Australia and New Zealand, 17 international. The open dots are the ones we cannot count, the leaders who saw the invitation and hesitated to complete. We don’t know exactly how many there are. That is the point.



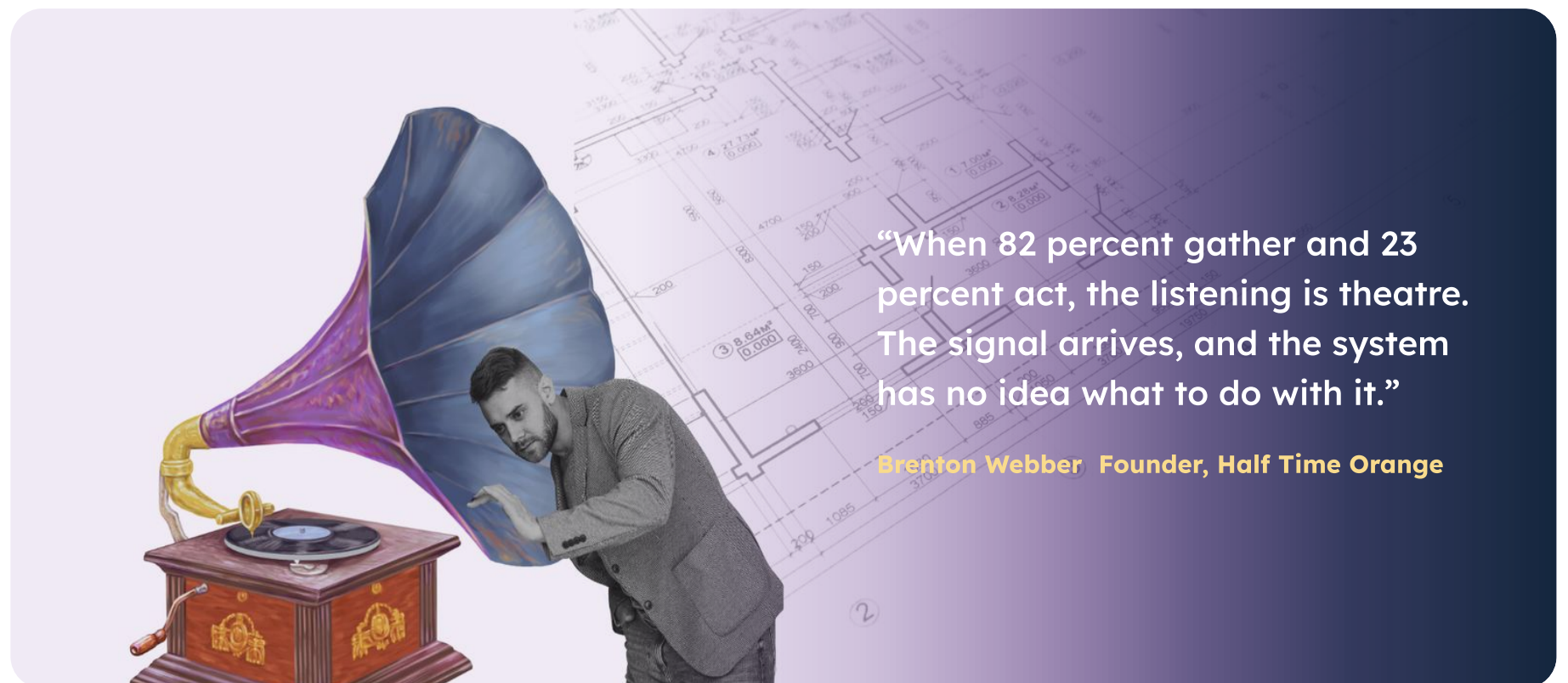
05 · THE CX AND EX FINDINGS

Heard, not held

Six findings on what happens when customer feedback reaches leaders but does not survive long enough to drive decisions. Five are about customer experience. One reaches into employee experience: where the customer outcome is actually made.

FINDING 01

Listening as theatre.



Eight in ten leaders gather customer feedback. Only two in ten have a clear process to act on it. That is the clearest single statistic in the diagnostic. 82 percent of leaders gather feedback frequently or occasionally, while 23 percent collect and act on it through a clear process. So the listening happens, and the application of insight does not.

What fills the gap is what we have come to call the **whisper network**. Seventy-eight percent of leaders say feedback reaches them through in-person conversations, and 60.2 percent say it travels informally through team members. It is useful information, but it is fragile, and it is one resignation away from being lost.

THE WHISPER NETWORK

REACHES LEADERS IN PERSON, IN CONVERSATION



78%

TRAVELS INFORMALLY THROUGH TEAM MEMBERS



60%

Useful, fragile, and one resignation from being lost.

FINDING 02

The cheerleading is real. The ownership is missing.

“Sponsorship is a posture. Governance is a process. Businesses confuse them, and the cost shows up in the gap between what the board says and what the system actually does.”

James Brosnahan Customer Success, Good CX

Leaders sponsor customer experience, but few build the governance to hold it. Among larger firms, 61 percent say CX has executive sponsorship, while only 13 percent run a standing governance forum where customer signals are reviewed and decisions are owned.

Sponsorship sets the tone. Governance sets the cadence. Put plainly: 61 percent have the attitude, only 13 percent have the mechanism. Without a forum that meets, reviews and decides, enthusiasm at the top never quite turns into action through the business. A cheerleader can move a crowd. Only a mechanism moves a system.



SAY CX HAS EXECUTIVE SPONSORSHIP

61%

RUN A STANDING GOVERNANCE FORUM

13%

FINDING 03

Granted, not equipped.

Where customer experience and employee experience meet, and where the cost of getting it wrong lands first on your people.

“Empowering staff without preparing them is the most expensive form of optimism a business can run. Capital is committed, and the return is paid in burnout.”

Craig Manning, Good CX

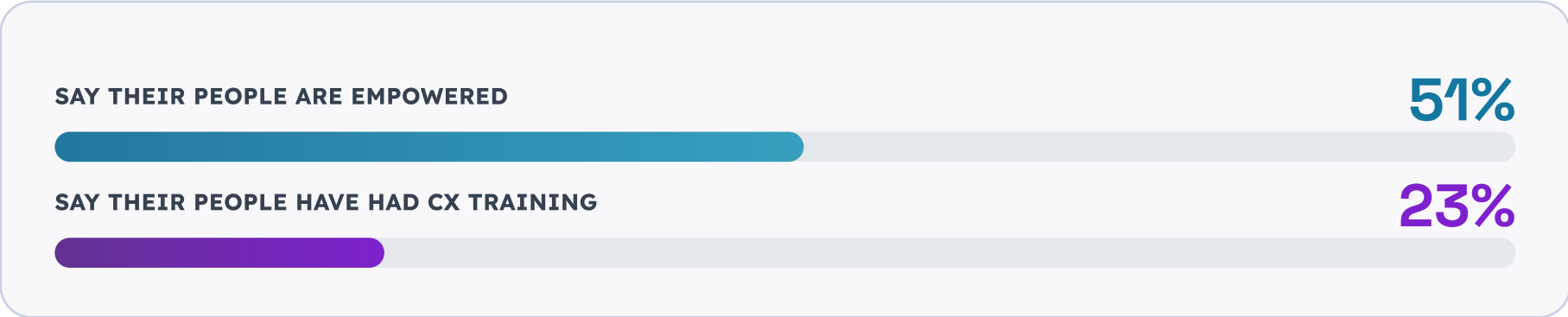
51 percent of leaders say their people are empowered to improve customer experience, while only 23 percent say their people have had CX training. Permission is granted. Preparation is not delivered.

Empowerment without enablement produces anxiety rather than innovation.

Training alone is the learner licence: proof you know the rules, not competence from hours behind the wheel. Real enablement adds coaching, mentoring and the time to practise. Most firms have not got their people past the learner state, yet they have handed over the keys and asked for a better customer experience anyway.

This is where employee experience and customer experience become one another. Every customer outcome your business produces is created by an employee operating inside the conditions you have designed for them.

How that ecosystem works, and what the customer actually feels of it, has its own page: What experience actually is, page 18.



FINDING 04

You know the customer. But you rarely build with them.

“The last time you decided what your customers needed, the room was full of data about them. Data answers the questions you thought to ask. The customer answers the ones you didn’t.”

Liz Pinfold Reed Founder, Good CX

49 percent of leaders say customer needs inform their problem-solving, but only 27 percent involve customers in co-design. Awareness of customer unmet needs may be high, but actual hands-on involvement to solve for them is low. Ultimately, knowing what customers need is not the same as building solutions with them.

When customers are referenced but not in the room, organisations solve for the customer they imagine rather than the one they have.



SAY CUSTOMER NEEDS INFORM PROBLEM-SOLVING

49%

INVOLVE CUSTOMERS IN CO-DESIGN

27%

FINDING 05

What gets measured inconsistently cannot be trusted.

“What gets measured inconsistently cannot defend itself in a P&L review. The first cut after a tight quarter is always the budget you cannot prove moved the relationship.”

Craig Manning, Good CX

Measurement is the weakest condition in the diagnostic, scoring 38 percent overall. Split by what organisations actually do: 31 percent do not measure customer experience at all, 41 percent measure but not consistently, and 28 percent measure regularly. Larger firms fare a little better, at 42 percent measuring regularly.

What is not measured cannot be managed. The measurement trap is the point where good intent loses its evidence, and with it, the case that moves a budget. If you cannot show that the listening is actually moving the relationship, you will struggle to defend it at the next round of cost cuts. Consistency is necessary but not sufficient: measuring the wrong thing on a perfect cadence is just well organised blindness. Knowing what to measure is the other half of the answer, and that is page 21.

THE MEASUREMENT SPLIT



Do not measure at all	31%
Measure, but not consistently	41%
Measure regularly	28%

Percentages are rounded. The middle group is derived as the balance of the two measured behaviours.

Measurement has an applied answer in this paper: the AFAR Framework™, page 21.

FINDING 06

A signal in the survey response itself.

A self-selecting sample that stopped us in our tracks.

“A diagnostic is a small model of the larger organisation. Whether the response makes it through tells you most of what you need to know about whether anything else will.”

Brenton Webber Founder, Half Time Orange

The way people arrived at the survey shaped the way they finished. 52 percent of those personally invited by Good CX completed it. Only 43 percent of those who arrived through the website did.

We read this pattern cautiously. The sample is live, and we will return to it as it grows. A trust relationship raises the odds that honest information makes it all the way through; the same is true inside organisations.

The survey was anonymous. We were explicit that no one at Good CX could match a response to a name. However, participants still hesitated at the email field. Hesitation like that is a warning signal in itself, and we treated it as one. We redesigned the form mid-sample around how it felt to contribute, as it pointed to how vulnerable speaking openly can feel: a flight response, as you will see next.

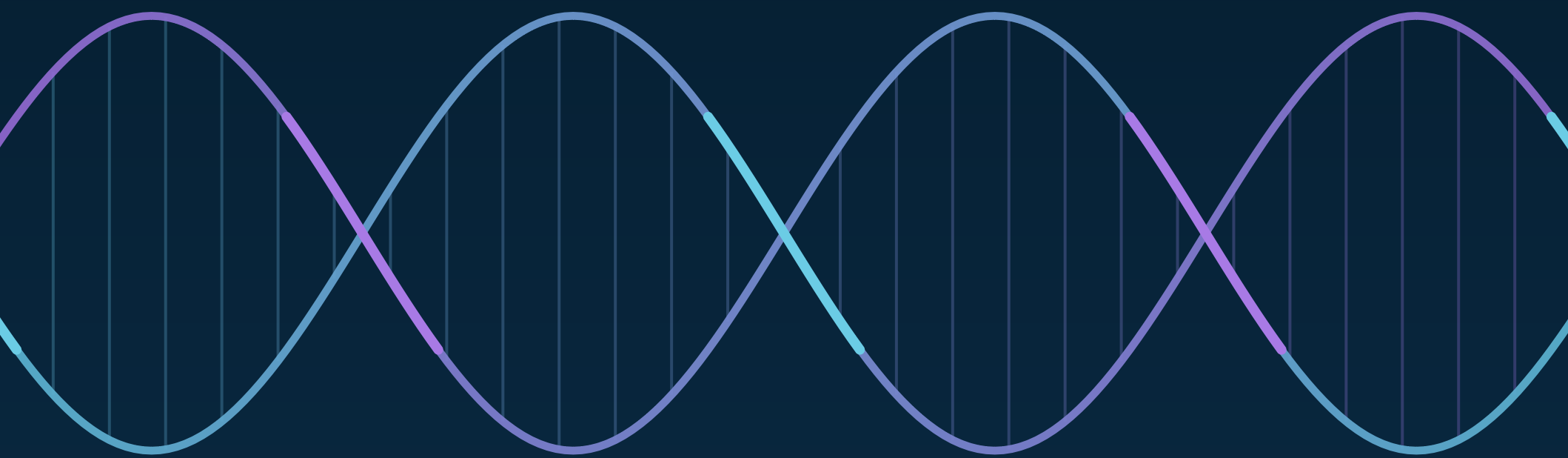


COMPLETION WHEN INVITED BY GOOD CX

52%

COMPLETION VIA THE WEBSITE

43%



06 • THE BIOLOGY

The cause is not strategy. It is biology.

Read through the strategic insight and Polyvagal-informed lens, Liz Pinfold Reed, Good CX.

Silence in organisations starts in the nervous systems of the people inside them.
What Polyvagal Theory and psychological safety research tell us.

Read together, the six findings describe an underlying condition. Customer knowledge gets heard but rarely moves into formal decisions. Strategy gets articulated but seldom translated into behaviour. The mechanism beneath that is not strategic. It is biological.

Stephen Porges' Polyvagal Theory describes three hierarchical nervous system states. For simplicity here, safe, mobilised or shut down. Most workplaces are locked in mobilisation: the hybrid states of this being sympathetic fight or flight. Asking your people to make their bravest decisions, surface their most uncomfortable findings, and offer their most honest assessments from sympathetic activation is, quite possibly, the worst state for any work, let alone innovation.

Amy Edmondson's twenty-year programme on psychological safety arrives at the same conclusion from the other direction. The willingness to surface uncomfortable information is one of the strongest predictors of high-performing teams.

But when the body senses social risk, often subconsciously, stress hormones impair the prefrontal cortex. This part of the brain is responsible for creativity and complex judgement, as documented by Yale neuroscientist Amy Arnsten. So, the same physiology that once kept us alive now shows up in your workplace as silence. A chronically stressed collective nervous system is a disconnected one. And an organisation that cannot regulate internally cannot connect externally.

You can't change what you can't see.

So the fix is not another process that assumes people can use it. A mobilised, stressed team can't.

A leader's nervous system sets the weather of the organisational ecosystem. Safety signalled from the top flows down. But so does threat. The first job of leadership, then, is awareness: being able to notice the state of the team to respond helpfully.

Here is the catch. You cannot read the room while you are bouncing through it like Tigger, all momentum and sympathetic energy, rushing to solutions before you have clarified the problem.

And you cannot read it from up a tree with a pot of honey, however beautifully you are self-regulating.

To create a roadmap, assess from the ground first. Then look for your Roos. Remember him from page 04, left in an orchard, lost forever because nobody noticed he had gone?

Organisations measure this cost as absenteeism. But who asks why the duvet day? Good leaders have the presence to notice the Roos are missing before anything else. They investigate why the lights are on but nobody is home. This awareness is the cornerstone on which to build the conditions that make it safe to come back. Then you can learn how Roos get lost in the first place. And that alone can teach a lot about the friction between CX and EX.

What to look for in your people, and what it costs.

Safe and socially engaged	Senses a signal and responds with flexibility. Curious, connected, able to act collaboratively. Where the best decisions are made.	Innovation and collaboration
Mobilised: fight	Pushes back. Defends the turf, argues the data, wins the meeting rather than the customer. Polarised teams.	Conflict and turnover
Mobilised: flight	Moves away. Avoids the conversation, defers the decision, stays busy instead of present. Motivation wanes.	Presenteeism and burnout
Shut down	Stops sensing and steps away protectively. The Roo state: absent in attention first, then in person.	Absenteeism

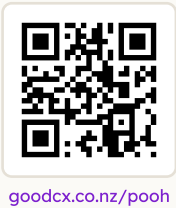
Descending state hierarchy, fight above flight in the mobilised state, after Michael Allison's Performance Hierarchy®, The Play Zone. Used with permission. The hundred leaders on page 05? These states, seen in a crowd.

Why Winnie the Pooh psychology?

A.A. Milne created these characters in the wake of WW1, giving shape to emotional states that were hard to articulate any other way. But the insight here is not from his book. It is from what we saw to be missing in the case at the New York Public Library. We have mapped that idea to describe a state, not to label a person. This is the silence in the system. Scan to find out more.

TRY THIS

At your next team meeting, map how the room feels on the ladder above. No fixing, just noticing. Then ask who is not there.



goodcx.co.nz/pooh

06 · THE BIOLOGY

A note from the Wood.

The Heffalump: the fear of the unknown

A Heffalump is Milne's imagined elephant: the one nobody in the Wood had ever seen. Everyone feared it anyway, and the Wood filled up with traps built for the version they imagined.

Right now, the Heffalump is AI, and it has arrived, just not in the shape anyone imagined. Employees fear for their jobs. Boards fear fumbling something whose scale they do not yet understand. So businesses race to implement what they have barely met, rarely asking how the customer will experience it. Fear of the unknown pushes decisions into fight or flight, where the worst ones get made.



The originals, behind glass. Five toys survived. Roo did not.

Eeyore, who stayed: presenteeism

He turns up to everything and expects nothing. He doubts every step and carries his self-worth in a tail that keeps falling off. In an organisation, Eeyore is presenteeism: at every meeting, contributing just enough to go unnoticed because he hasn't been empowered. He does not need fixing. He needs his community to give him a map.

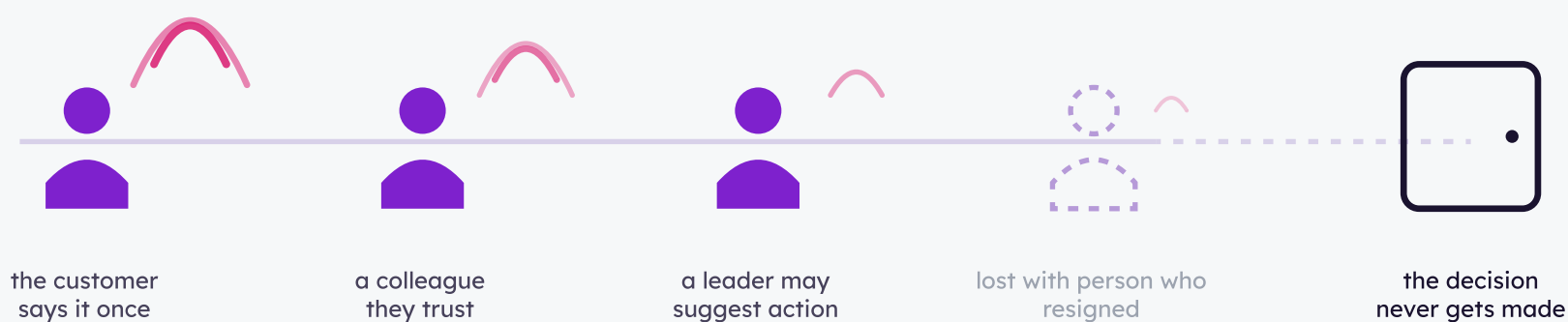
A dysregulated employee cannot serve a customer well. Notice the organisational state. Settle the system. Then invite action... and innovation will follow.

AI is the Heffalump in your boardroom.

How a whisper becomes silence.

78 percent of leaders say feedback reaches them through conversations. 60 percent say it travels informally, through team members. Finding 01 called it the whisper network. It is easy to read that as a culture problem. But it is closer to the opposite.

THE WHISPER NETWORK · WHERE CO-REGULATION HAPPENS, AND STOPS



The corridor is where people are regulated enough to think. It has no door into the room where decisions are made.

The signal does not have to be charged. Perhaps a survey result nobody is especially upset about. When someone takes it to a person they trust, in that moment two nervous systems settle each other, creating enough to think creatively. That is co-regulation, and it's the healthiest thing you can sponsor in EX. For many organisations the corridor is becoming the only place where people are regulated enough to integrate what a customer has told them.

Then they step out of it back into the rush. Mobilisation is not the problem: plenty gets done at speed. Being mobilised without connection is. Behind a screen, defending the numbers, or being too busy for the conversation, does not lead to the presence required to turn insight into action. The whisper is not lost because anyone was careless. It is lost because the most regulated room in the organisation has no door into the one where decisions get made.

AN OUTSIDE READ · DOES THE PATTERN HOLD BEYOND OUR OWN ECOSYSTEM

We passed this paper to practitioners we meet in the corridors of our greater ecosystem and asked: do you see these symptoms too?

“Customer experience is a commercial lever. When internal and external links fall silent, organisations lose clarity, trust, and momentum. A connected, responsive system isn't a ‘nice-to-have’ - it's fundamental to delivering value and protecting the customer relationship.”

Sandra King, Beacon Strategy & Growth

“You describe the norm in most businesses, the richest insights about our customers, good and bad, become collectively trapped in our minds. The solution is less of a process problem and more of a culture shift. Everybody has to recognise the value of what they personally know, before they can contemplate sharing it.”

Andy Mitchell, 3Green Limited

CX feels the state your EX is in.

Experience isn't something you deliver. It is the sum of every engagement read through a customer's lens of belief and expectation. Good experiences must be designed with flexibility to adapt in the moment. Internally, that requires leaders who see themselves as the keystone in the process. Your people can't feel intent. They only experience what you champion enough to build.

Why does the same feedback land as useful for one person and as a threat for another? Porges calls the mechanism the 'intervening variable'. The signal did not change. The capacity to receive did. The variable is the nervous systems reactivity: the in moment state decides the outcome. So, state is not a buzzword: it is measurable and manageable.

Responding well is not willpower. It is capacity: being resourced enough to move fluidly when the moment demands it. Picture a bridge built to expand and contract under load. Pressure makes it stronger (a concept Taleb describes as Antifragile) so long as the keystone anchors the other parts.

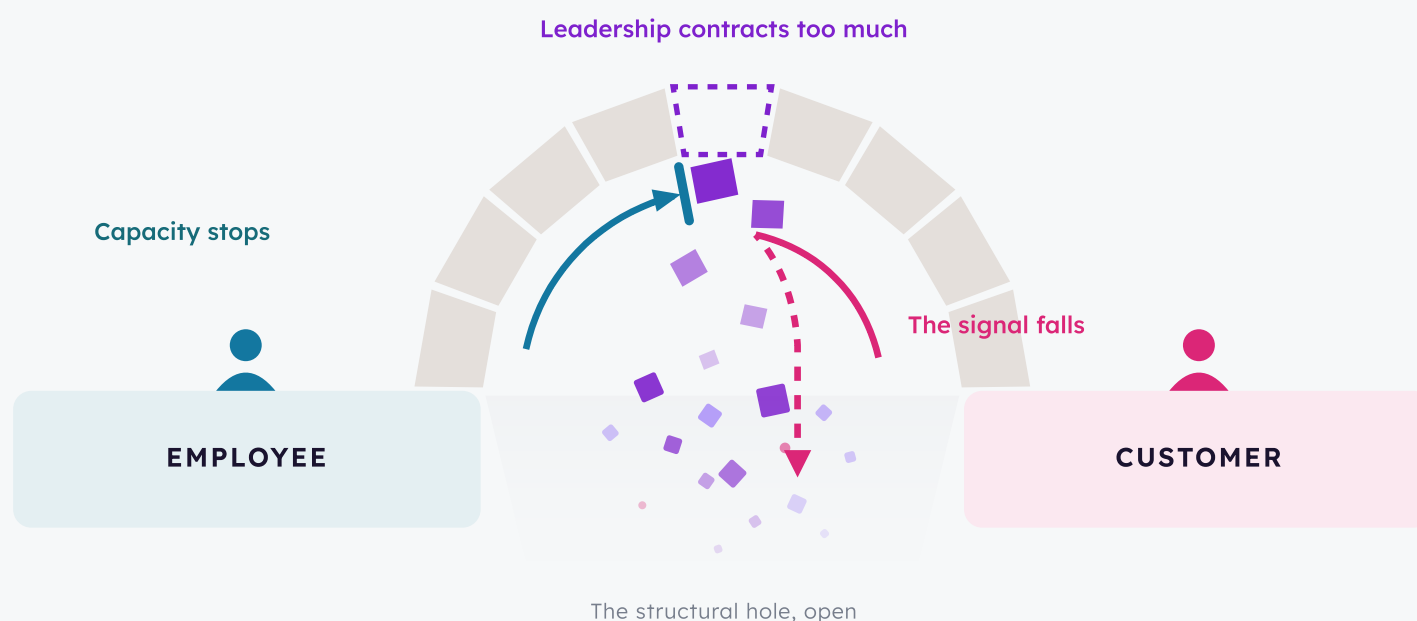
The term Autonomic Agility®, coined by Michael Allison, explains how a team with connection and capacity can manage a complaint without becoming defensive. A team without this trainable resilience cannot, however good the training.

Nobody can borrow calm from leadership that has none to spare. Attunement is not something you perform at a customer. It is a state a well regulated business broadcasts, and you cannot fake being steady with someone already braced.

Capacity is trainable, and building it inside a leadership team is a practice rather than a policy.

An ecosystem: the keystone holds both flows, or neither.

THE CROSSING MODEL™ · WHEN THE KEYSTONE CRUMBLES

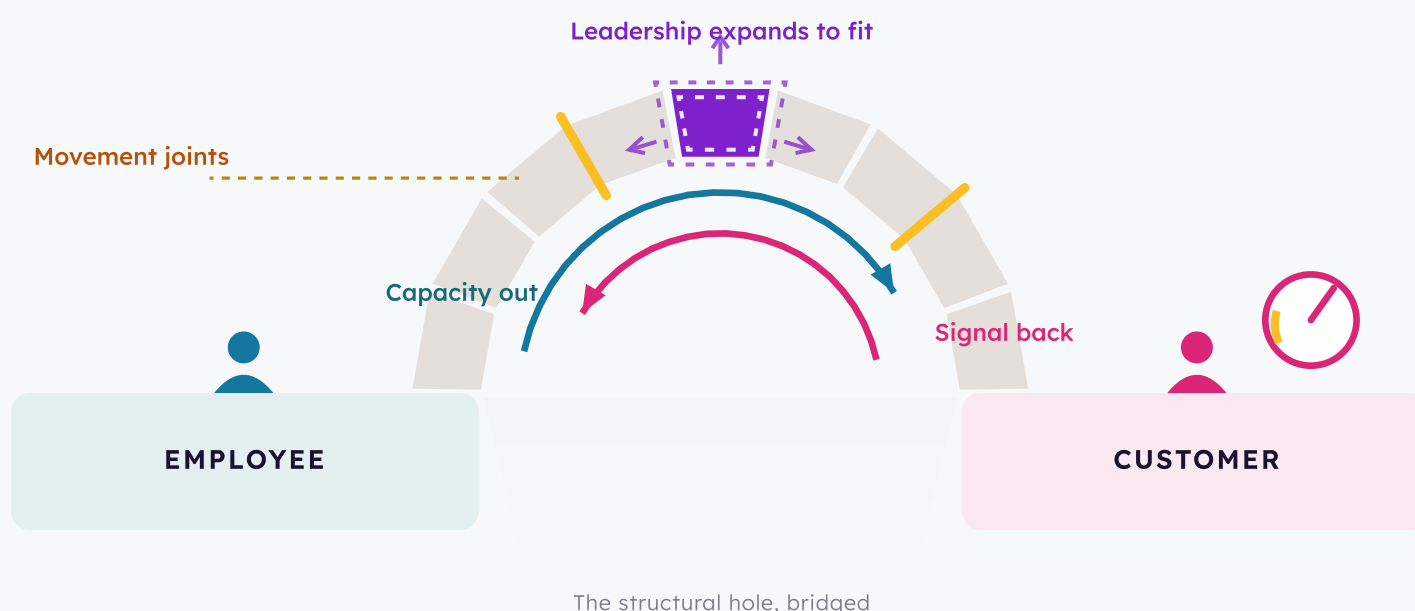


The Crossing Model™ · Pinfold Reed, L. (2026) · Good CX Ltd · goodcx.co.nz

How the crossing stays open.

The Crossing Model™: leadership as the keystone between your people and your customers. Three disciplines keep it standing, each closing a problem the findings surfaced.

THE CROSSING MODEL™ · WHEN THE KEYSTONE HOLDS



The Crossing Model™ · Pinfold Reed, L. (2026) · Good CX Ltd · goodcx.co.nz

HOW TO READ THE CROSSING

➡ LISTENING · the traffic

Does what customers tell you actually reach a decision? Trace one piece of feedback from last month and sense check the decision it changed.

Fixes: places 02 and 04, page 22.

📖 CONDITIONS · stones and joints

Do your people have the time, skills and steadiness to respond?

Backing from the top is not the same as support to scaffold beneath.

Fixes: places 01, 03 and 06, page 22.

🕒 MEASUREMENT · the gauge

Would you know if trust was fading? Measure the relationship, not the activity.

Start with place 05, page 22.

The full method: AFAR, page 21.

“Every market I’ve worked in says the promise travels and the conditions don’t. Brands are designed to be seen, rarely to be worked inside. The crossing holds only when both are drawn together.”

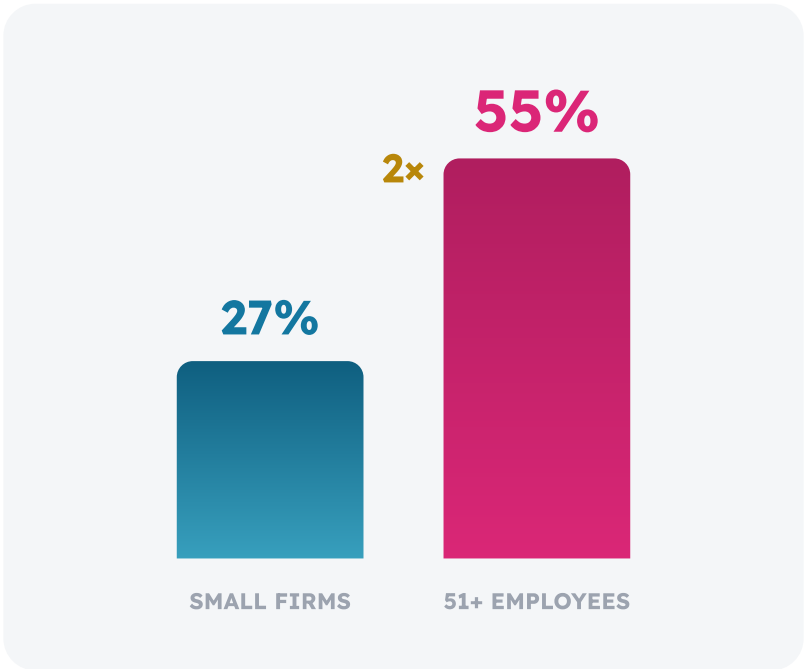
Sebastian Krajewski International Brand and Market Development, BROADEN

“Leaders are role models whether they intend to be, with an outsized impact on future generations. Beyond employees and customers, the crossing is scaffolding for those of us still learning what leadership looks like.”

Anthony Prajogo Gen Z lens, Good CX Intern

The CFO question.

The biology has a bill. As firms scale, response breaks, and that is a cost a CFO can actually move.



Among smaller firms, 27 percent of leaders report inconsistent action on customer feedback. Among firms of 51 or more, that climbs to 55 percent. Awareness of the customer is roughly steady across firm size. Response is not. Larger firms are about twice as likely to sit on a problem they have already sensed, which means the cost of silence is not a sensing problem. It is a closing problem. And the blocker is rarely belief: 63 percent of leaders cite lack of time or competing priorities, which makes the gap operational, not attitudinal. A closing problem is a cost a CFO can actually move.

Customer experience is not a department. It is the sum of every swim lane in your business: sales, marketing, operations, people and finance. The conditions described in this paper sit upstream of your customer lifetime value, your cost to serve, your cost to acquire, your employee churn, and the levers that drive your enterprise value.

“Measurement is an early-warning system, not a scoreboard. If the relationship is drifting, the P&L is the last place you will see it, and the most expensive.”

Craig Manning · Good CX

27→55%

inconsistent action on customer feedback, once firms pass fifty staff

2×

more likely to leave a sensed problem unactioned as firms scale

63%

cite time or competing priorities as the blocker

up to 3.5×

revenue growth for firms combining brand and CX (Forrester 2025)

AFAR Framework™ solutions.

Good CX's proprietary measurement layer. Four trust signals, mapped to a finding in this paper.

Most measurement counts activity. AFAR measures how the brand is experienced by humans. Four customer signals, each paired with the brand condition that generated it, read together as a mirror of the relationship. Drift shows up in affinity first, then advocacy, then frequency, then recency, and only then in revenue. By the time finance can see it, four earlier signals have already been missed.

APPROACH FOR FINDING 04

A Allocentric Affinity

Alignment from genuine attention

Do customers recognise themselves in what you stand for?

Signal: customers describe you back in your own values vocabulary.

Condition: allocentricity, the practice of decentring toward the customer.

Commercially: the loyalty signal that holds revenue through pressure.

APPROACH FOR FINDING 01

F Felt Frequency

Cadence felt, not just sent

How often are you actually felt, not just transmitted at?

Signal: the rhythm at which customers return without being reminded.

Condition: whether your signal goes out in a form the body recognises.

Commercially: a felt brand collapses cost-per-acquisition.

APPROACH FOR FINDING 05

A Attuned Advocacy

Voice earned by responsiveness

Will customers lend you their voice when nobody asks?

Signal: spontaneous mention, unprompted referral, defensive support.

Condition: attunement sharp enough that customers want to repay it.

Commercially: advocacy compounds at declining acquisition cost.

APPROACH FOR FINDING 02

R Regulated Recency

Presence from a steady state

Are customers returning on a steady rhythm, or lurching?

Signal: how recently customers actually showed up.

Condition: whether the brand sustains presence rather than lurching.

Commercially: your earliest warning of revenue drift.

Each signal is scored from your own customer and brand evidence, on a cadence set by your business rhythm: a subscription business might read recency monthly where a project business reads it quarterly. What counts as good is whether the number is moving the right way, not hitting a universal benchmark. The scoring method is applied with clients through the AFAR Framework™.

Cite as: Pinfold Reed, L. (2026). The AFAR Framework™: a measurement layer for the science of connection. Good CX Ltd.

Six places to start.

01

Replace executive cheerleading.

Swap the pep talks for named governance forums and a clear decision cadence. The cheerleading is real, but nobody owns the mechanism, so name the owners and then empower them. Get people acting together and hold them to it.

02

Build a route from insight to action.

Process beats the whisper network every time. First, ensure you're creating trust conditions to surface what's not currently being said. Map who hears the signal, who carries it, who decides, and who acts. Then put dates against each.

03

Resource enablement, not just empowerment.

Permission is not preparation. If you are asking your people to improve customer experience, give them the time, proper training and the air cover that improvement actually needs. Measure the change.

04

Audit the translation risk that grows with scale.

Bigger does not mean indifferent. It means more hand-offs. Find the three hand-offs where customer signals lose their owner, and rebuild those three first.

05

Treat psychological safety as a measurable condition.

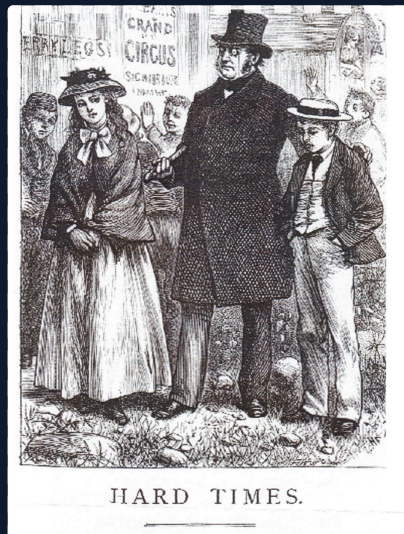
Timothy R. Clark's four-stages diagnostic or Edmondson's seven-item team scale will give you a baseline in under twenty minutes. If you measure nothing else this quarter, measure this. Innovation is not the product of fear or uncertainty.

06

Notice your own state before you ask anything.

The most useful three minutes of any leadership meeting are the three minutes before it begins. Your nervous system sets the room, so set yours first. Self-awareness is step one.

Pick up the pencil.



FROM HARD TIMES, 1854

“Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life.”

Your dashboards are full of Facts. Gradgrind would approve. Dickens would spot the problem in a heartbeat: gathering facts is not understanding them.

Harry French, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

We started this paper at a writing desk in New York. It is worth ending there too.

On that desk Dickens wrote *Hard Times*, a novel that asked what gets lost when a system measures everything and listens to nobody. The answer in 1854 was the same as the answer today. The cost shows up first in your people, who stop speaking. Later, in your customers, who stop coming back. By the time the numbers reflect the hard truth, the cheapest intervention window has already closed.

In April 2026 in that same room, Queen Camilla restored a new Roo back to his friends at the library. If he has been missing in your organisation too, wherever silence has done its work, it's time to make amends. You have met them already: the frontline worker who stopped raising concerns, the leader who stopped sending bad news upward, the customer who left without a word. Restoration starts with noticing who is gone.

Earlier in these pages, AI was the Heffalump. It is also the Maserati: real speed bolted onto every process you own. Neither fear nor horsepower changes what your system can digest. A mobilised organisation with faster tools is mobilised at speed. As intelligence becomes abundant, advantage moves to what cannot be copied: proprietary insight, governance that works, and trust you have actually earned. But what is the destination, who is holding the roadmap, and who is keeping the keystone in place?

A pencil is not nostalgia; it is pace. Slow enough to consider the person on the other end. Sharp enough to make a decision that holds.

Dickens wrote about people a system had stopped seeing, and he carefully wrote the words by hand. In an age mobilising at breakneck speed, the leaders who pause, settle, and connect before they act keep their people and their customers.

Pick up the pencil. Find Roo. Start there.

14 · ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

Who made this, and how.

The Orange Zest customer experience readiness diagnostic was run by Half Time Orange between April 2025 and March 2026. 123 senior leaders in Australia and New Zealand completed it, alongside 17 international respondents. The sample was self-selecting: read the findings as patterns within an engaged population, not as a national average.



Good CX is an insight-first customer experience and leadership practice. It works on how organisations behave under pressure, and on the conditions that let customer and employee experience transformation land: a research first, human centred reading of business, tested through Innovation Labs. Led by Liz Pinfold Reed. goodcx.co.nz

Good CX applies four proprietary models in this paper: the Crossing Model™, DISTIL™ for listening, OPEN Method™ for conditions, and the AFAR Framework™ for measurement. All are detailed at goodcx.co.nz/cx-services/methodology.



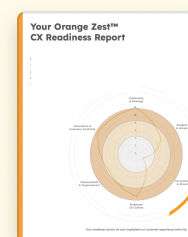
EVIDENCE FIRST INSIGHTS

Good CX is a proud member of the Research Association of New Zealand.



Half Time Orange works at the diagnostic layer of customer experience, where customer ambition meets organisational reality. Its Orange Zest and Blood Orange diagnostics show leaders whether customer intent can travel through the business into ownership, decisions and follow-through. Led by Brenton Webber. halftimeorange.co.nz

Orange Zest is the readiness diagnostic behind this study. The next wave is open: scan the code on page 26 to add your organisation.



WHAT PARTICIPANTS RECEIVED

Everyone who took part received their own Orange Zest CX Readiness Report, scored across the six core ingredients of customer experience maturity.

Contributing experts

The argument in this paper has been sharpened by five lenses, each tagged on the page where the finding most belongs to it. All contributors have been invited to review and approve the language attributed to them.

- Liz Pinfold Reed. Founder, Good CX. The strategic insight and polyvagal-informed lens, and the integrating reading. Play Zone PRO Coach
- Brenton Webber. Founder, Half Time Orange. The diagnostic and research lens.
- Craig Manning. Measurement and Modelling expert, Good CX. The commercial lens.
- James Brosnahan. Customer Success expert, Good CX. The systems lens.
- Anthony Prajogo. Intern, Good CX. The future of work lens.

REFERENCES & NOTES

Notes on the data

Survey of 123 senior leaders across Australia and New Zealand, fielded April 2025 to March 2026. Figures are rounded. Base sizes vary by question (n=61 to n=123), as not all questions applied to all respondents. Drafting and production were supported by Claude (Anthropic). All findings, judgements and final copy are the authors' own.

References

Allison, M. (2026). Autonomic Agility® and the Performance Hierarchy©: a resource-based model of regulation. The Play Zone PRO.

Arnsten, A. F. T. (2009). Stress signalling pathways that impair prefrontal cortex structure and function. Nature Reviews Neuroscience, 10(6), 410 to 422.

Burt, R. S. (1992). Structural Holes: The Social Structure of Competition. Harvard University Press.

Clark, T. R. (2020). The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety. Berrett-Koehler.

Dickens, C. (1854). Hard Times. Bradbury & Evans.

Edmondson, A. C. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. Administrative Science Quarterly, 44(2), 350 to 383.

Edmondson, A. C. (2018). The Fearless Organization. Wiley.

Forrester Research. (2025). The 2025 Global Customer Experience Index and Total Experience Score. Forrester Research, Inc.

Milne, A. A. (1926). Winnie-the-Pooh. Methuen.

Porges, S. W. (2011). The Polyvagal Theory. W. W. Norton.

Porges, S. W. (2025). Polyvagal Theory: current status, clinical applications, and future directions. Clinical Neuropsychiatry, 22(3), 169 to 184.

Taleb, N. N. (2012). Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder. Random House.

The Crossing Model™, DISTIL™, OPEN Method™ and the AFAR Framework™ are proprietary frameworks developed by Good CX Ltd. All rights reserved.

EARLY FEEDBACK FROM INDUSTRY

“What really resonated for me is that the challenge is not usually a lack of customer insight or people wanting to do the right thing. In a large and complex organisation, the harder part is making sure what we hear from customers translates into clear decisions, ownership, and action, so customer understanding becomes part of how we work, rather than relying on a few people to keep pushing it.”

Ezra Henry, Kaiārahi Wheako Kiritaki · Customer Experience Lead, Chorus NZ Ltd

THE CONVERSATION STARTS HERE.

What is your system not telling you?

Two ways in. Talk to us, or spend fifteen minutes and get your own readiness report.



Talk to us about the findings



Join the next wave, get your report

GOOD CX

Liz Pinfold Reed, Founder

goodcx.co.nz

elizabeth@goodcx.co.nz

Media enquiries: media@goodcx.co.nz

HALF TIME ORANGE

Brenton Webber, Founder

halftimeorange.co.nz

brenton@halftimeorange.co.nz