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# As Agentic AI Spreads, Empathy Is the Next Competitive Edge World Economic Forum (2025)

## Context

As agentic AI systems become more capable of multi-layered sensing context, adapting in real time and responding with emotional intelligence, the long-standing trade-off between internal efficiency and investing in customer relationships may be shifting. 30% of customers surveyed said they will leave after a single poor interaction; yet only 3% of companies are rated as truly customer-centric (Forrester CX Index). This article therefore argues that empathy, strengthened by agentic AI-human-collaboration, is becoming a key competitive differentiator for organisations.

## Key Insights

### From linear automation (LLMs) to sensing systems (agentic AI)

- Traditional automation follows linear, trigger-based paths; agentic AI creates a continuous sensing layer that can detect emotional and contextual cues in real time and adapt
- Example: a virtual agent detects rising stress in a customer conversation and provides real-time coaching to the human agent, personalised to their emotional state and the call context, rather than defaulting to a rigid script

→ Empathetic Customer Experience = Effectiveness x Efficiency x Emotional Intelligence

▶ Use the **FORGOOD** questions below to check this for your customers (authors' interpretation)

- **F - Fairness:** Are emotionally adaptive AI responses applied consistently across customer segments, or do certain groups receive less empathetic or more efficiency-driven interactions?
- **O - Openness:** Do customers know when AI is detecting their emotional state or adapting the conversation in real time? What is disclosed to them and at what point in the interaction?
- **R - Respect:** Does real-time emotional sensing respect customer autonomy and privacy, or does it risk overriding their expressed preferences through re-nudging? Are boundaries selectable and clear?
- **G - Goals:** Whose outcomes does the sensing system prioritise: the customer's resolution, the agent's wellbeing, or the organisation's operational KPIs?
- **O - Opinions:** How would customers react if they learned about such agentic sensing systems?
- **O - Options:** Is agentic AI the best approach or could simpler design changes achieve similar outcomes?
- **D - Delegation:** Who is accountable when an agentic-AI-led response leads to a poor customer outcome: the agent, the system designer, or the organisation?

## Implications

- What does empathy look like in practice across your customer touchpoints, and where might its absence create friction or reduce trust without being measured?
- Where could agentic AI surface emotional or contextual signals in real time that your current systems miss?
- How might redefining "efficiency" around customer understanding (rather than operational speed or self-reported satisfaction scores) change how you design products or services?