



CLARK BRIDGE INSIGHTS

THE CONDUCTOR OF THE AI ORCHESTRA

Why the Future of CX Is Orchestration, Not Replacement

A reflection on Tony Bates' perspective on AI, CX, orchestration, trust and leadership from Genesys Xperience 2026



**Technology creates possibility. Orchestration creates performance.
Trust creates adoption. Leadership brings it all together.**

01 WE NEED A BETTER EXPERIENCE

I recently listened to Tony Bates, CEO of Genesys, speak about the future of customer experience, AI, agent orchestration and the operating models organizations will need to navigate what comes next.

One analogy in particular stayed with me: the symphony and the conductor.

It resonated because it is a metaphor I have used myself when talking about AI, particularly with people who are concerned about what increasingly intelligent technology means for people and the future of work.

And as I listened to Bates describe where he believes we're headed, I found myself thinking:

Yes. This is exactly the shift in thinking organizations need.

The conversation isn't really about AI replacing humans.

It's about orchestrating intelligence—human and digital—to create something better than either could create alone.

That distinction matters.

02 THE STANDARD HAS CHANGED

Bates' message starts with something deceptively simple:

We need a better experience.

But delivering that experience requires more than adding another AI capability or technology layer.

Our expectations are changing faster than many organizations are changing their operating models.

We are increasingly using AI in our personal lives. We're becoming accustomed to immediacy, personalization, context and intelligent assistance.

And once you've experienced something better, you don't want to go backward. That changes the standard.

Customers aren't just comparing one company to another anymore.

They're comparing every experience to the best experience they've had anywhere. That creates a new competitive reality.

03 THE SYMPHONY OR ORCHESTRA ANALOGY IS MORE RELEVANT THAN EVER

Think about a symphony.

You can have extraordinary musicians.

A brilliant violinist. A phenomenal percussionist. A world-class cellist.

But individual excellence doesn't automatically create an extraordinary performance.

The magic happens when all of those experts are brought together—in the right way, at the right time, in response to what is happening in the moment.

That's the conductor's job.

Bates' comparison of agent orchestration to a conductor made this particularly clear. The conductor doesn't replace the musicians.

The conductor enables them to perform together.

And I believe that's an important way for leaders to think about AI.

04 AI ISN'T THE REPLACEMENT. ORCHESTRATION IS THE OPPORTUNITY.

We often frame the AI conversation as:

Human vs. machine.

I think we're going to discover that is the wrong framework.

The opportunity is human + digital intelligence + data + technology + process + context.

The challenge is figuring out how all of those components work together.

Imagine an orchestra where every musician is talented but everyone is following a different score. The individual performances might be impressive.

The collective experience won't be.

That's what happens inside organizations when data is fragmented, technology is disconnected, processes operate in silos and AI is layered onto the organization without fundamentally changing how the organization operates.

More tools don't necessarily create better experiences. Orchestration does.

05 THE CONDUCTOR DOESN'T HAVE TO PLAY EVERY INSTRUMENT

Another point from Bates' conversation that stood out to me was the leadership parallel. Classical conductor Roger Kalia spoke about what it takes to lead a Symphony.

A great conductor isn't necessarily the world's greatest musician on every instrument. But they need a deep understanding of the components.

They need to understand music. They need to understand the technical elements. They need to communicate. They need to listen. They need an artistic vision. They need collaboration. They need trust. They need passion.

And they need to bring all of that together in real time.

That is leadership.

And increasingly, that's what leadership will look like in an AI-enabled organization. You don't have to be the expert in everything.

But you have to understand enough about the pieces to know how they work together.

06 THE PERFORMANCE BEGINS LONG BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE

One of the most compelling parts of the conductor analogy is that the performance doesn't begin when the conductor steps onto the stage.

It begins months earlier.

The conductor studies the score. Learns the musicians. Understands the capabilities of each section. Works with the performers. **Builds trust. Creates alignment. Develops a vision.**

Then, when the performance begins, the conductor is responsible for bringing all of those elements together in real time.

Slow down. Build intensity. Bring someone forward. Pull something back. Change the emphasis. Listen. Adjust.

That is remarkably similar to the challenge organizations face as AI becomes more capable and more autonomous.

The technology may be able to act.

But who determines how it should act?

Who establishes the boundaries?

Who understands the context?

Who determines when a human needs to intervene?

Who owns the outcome?

07 THIS IS WHY THE OPERATING MODEL HAS TO CHANGE

This is where I believe Bates' thinking is particularly important. The conversation can't stop at an AI strategy.

Organizations need a new agentic operating model.

One that is designed for a world where AI agents can increasingly reason, act, interact with systems and make decisions in real time.

That requires us to rethink how work actually gets done. We need to ask:

- What should happen automatically?
- Where does human judgment matter most?
- What data needs to be connected?
- How does information move in real time?
- Who—or what—is authorized to act?
- Where are the guardrails?
- How do we govern autonomous decisions?

- What metrics actually matter?
- And ultimately, what outcome are we trying to create?

That's a very different conversation from simply asking:

“Where can we use AI?”

08 FROM KPI's TO OUTCOMES

Another thing Bates emphasized was the importance of outcomes. A KPI isn't valuable simply because it appears on a dashboard.

The question is:

Does it tell us what actually matters?

That distinction is going to become increasingly important.

As AI automates more activity, measuring activity alone becomes less meaningful.

We need to measure whether the organization is actually producing better outcomes—for customers, employees and the business.

That means moving from:

What did we do?

to:

What did we accomplish?

And ultimately:

Did it matter?

09 TRUST BECOMES MORE IMPORTANT AS AUTONOMY INCREASES

There was another word Bates emphasized that I believe deserves enormous attention:

Trust.

The more autonomous technology becomes, the more important trust becomes.

Autonomy without trust doesn't work.

You cannot simply give a system more authority and assume the organization will automatically embrace it.

Governance becomes more important—not less.

Organizations need to understand:

- What can the system do?
- What can't it do?
- Who is accountable?
- What happens when it gets something wrong?
- When does a human step in?
- How do we know the decision was appropriate?

Trust isn't a feature. Trust is an operating principle.

10 YOU CAN'T PATCHWORK YOUR WAY INTO TRANSFORMATION

Bates also spoke about the importance of a platform and ecosystem.

That resonated with me because transformation cannot be built indefinitely through disconnected point solutions.

You can't create a great symphony by continually adding instruments without giving them a common score.

The same is true inside organizations.

Fragmented data. Disconnected systems. Siloed processes. Multiple AI tools. Different sources of truth. Different governance models.

Eventually, the organization spends more energy connecting the pieces than creating value.

The platform matters.

The ecosystem matters.

Integration matters.

Governance matters.

And no organization will create this future alone.

Partners, technology, employees, customers, data and AI all become part of the ecosystem.

11 AND THE CUSTOMER ISN'T JUST THE AUDIENCE

This is where the conversation went one step further.

Traditionally, the orchestra performs for the audience.

But the future of CX is increasingly about creating the experience with the customer.

The customer brings their history. Their preferences. Their context. Their expectations. Their current situation.

And all of those things influence what happens next.

There is no single score for every customer.

There is a score that is increasingly created in real time for an audience of one.

That's the experience we're moving toward.

12 GREAT PERFORMANCE DOESN'T HAPPEN BY ACCIDENT

This may be the most important lesson I took away from Bates' conversation.

Great performance doesn't happen by accident.

Neither does great customer experience.

Neither does transformation.

Neither does AI adoption.

And neither does the future of work.

Technology creates possibility.

But leadership determines how that possibility gets translated into value.

The conductor doesn't play every instrument.

The conductor creates the conditions for the entire orchestra to perform.

And I believe the same will be true of leaders navigating AI.

The leaders who create the greatest value won't necessarily be the people who know the most about every technology.

They will be the people who can:

- See the whole system.
- Connect the pieces.
- Create alignment.
- Build trust.
- Listen deeply.
- Know when to intervene.
- Know when to empower.
- And keep everyone focused on the outcome.

13 WHY BATES' VISION RESONATES WITH ME

This is why I found so much alignment with Bates' perspective.

At ClarkBridge, I think about transformation through a similar lens.

Strategy, experience and outcomes cannot operate independently.

Technology has to connect to the operating model.

The operating model has to connect to the people.

People have to understand the change.

Data has to inform decisions.

Governance has to create trust.

And ultimately, everything has to connect back to the experience and the outcome we're trying to create.

That's the bridge.

And that's why the symphony/orchestra analogy works so well for me.

We're not building a future where humans disappear from the stage.

We're building a future where humans and intelligent technology have to learn how to perform together.

The question isn't whether we still need the conductor.

The question is whether we're preparing enough leaders to become one.

14 LEVEL UP. ORCHESTRATE. LEAD.

Those words from Bates are a powerful way to think about what comes next.

Level up our capabilities.

Orchestrate our people, technology, data and intelligence.

Lead with trust, judgment and purpose.

Because the objective isn't simply to build a smarter organization.

It's to build an organization capable of delivering a better experience, faster, more personally and more intelligently—without losing the human leadership that makes the experience meaningful.

Technology creates possibility.

Orchestration creates performance.

Trust creates adoption.

And leadership brings it all together.

That's the next chapter of transformation.

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