

Agent Activation Experiment: Microsoft UK & Cognician

Agent Activation Quest

Solution Partner

Cognician (Employee Activation Platform & Program Design)

Program Duration

Two weeks (eight daily challenges)

200%

Enduring increase in agent usage vs.
28% for the control group

84%

Of 75 survey respondents in the
Cognician group would recommend the
program to colleagues

1,315

AI tool uses during challenges
(Copilot: 461; Sales Agent: 447;
Researcher: 407)

"Cognician offered a transformative approach to AI adoption. Everything was centralized in one place, giving real-time visibility into the next best action – where to drive engagement, when to send messages – and even participant feedback as it happened. Being able to spark instant conversations within the tool was a game changer, making it effortless to create impact."

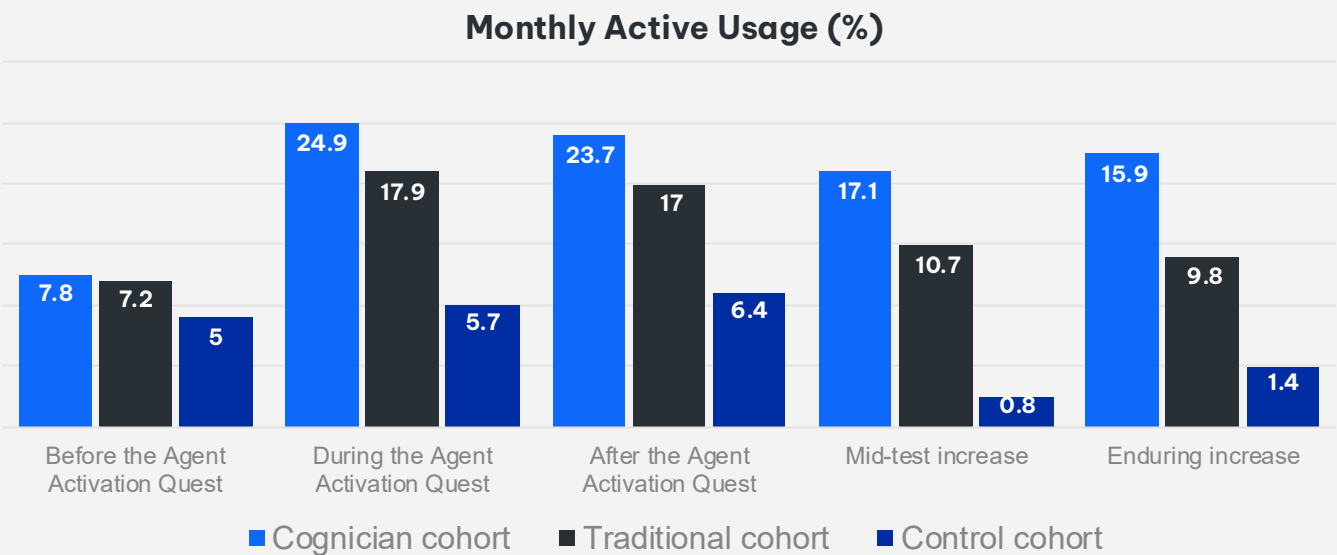
– Kwadwo Benko, Microsoft AI Team

Executive Summary

During July and August of 2025, Microsoft & Cognician worked together to test and compare two different approaches to AI agent adoption: a software-based behavioral change tool provided by Cognician and a standard Adoption and Change Management approach.

The goal in both scenarios was to drive adoption of specialized AI agents within a B2B salesforce. The test included 793 participants, split into two groups. One group received the Cognician experience and the other group experienced the more traditional approach, driven by proactive communications. The test included 20 weeks of measurements to develop a clear understanding of Weekly Active usage (WAU) before, during, and after the adoption period. During the adoption period, each cohort consumed eight activities over two weeks. To baseline impact, results were compared against a control group that did not participate in this program.

Both adoption models delivered significant usage growth compared to the control group, with the Cognician-enabled cohort outperforming the traditional approach in most areas. But the clearest benefit to the Cognician approach is its scalability, repeatability and that it produces real-time actionable data that administrators can use to monitor and tweak their tactics in real time.

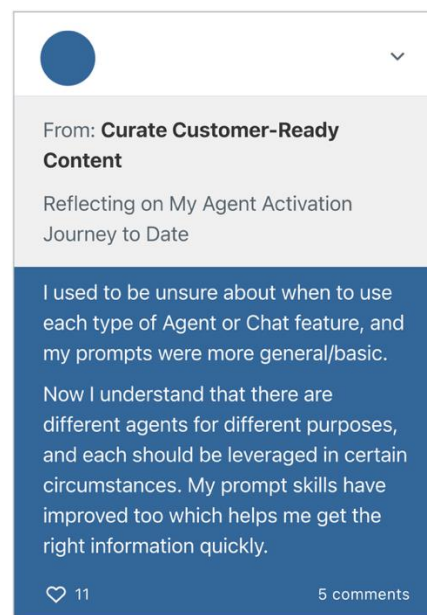


The Cognician group experienced a **200% enduring increase agentic usage** (from 7.8% before to 23.7% after) vs. 28% for the control group (from 5% before to 6.4% after).

Methodology

The test aimed to explore the adoption of Sales Agent and Researcher Agent. This required overcoming various challenges identified in initial onboarding:

- **Lack of Confidence**
Sellers weren't sure when to use the Sales vs. Researcher Agent, or how to craft effective prompts.
- **Perceived Complexity**
Some felt the AI tools were 'nice to have' for simple tasks like drafting an email, but too limited for complex sales work.
- **Habit and Inertia**
Busy salespeople defaulted to familiar methods (e.g., manual research in CRM, writing account plans in Word) rather than experimenting with new AI features.

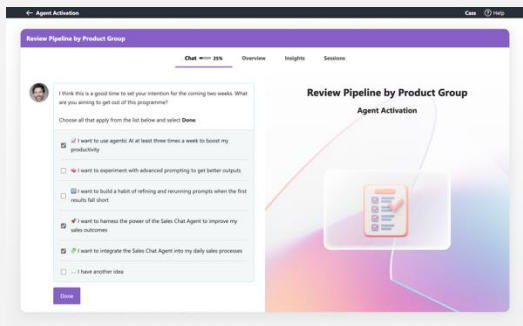


The program was set up as an A/B test. Of a total of 793 eligible sellers in the pilot cohort, 423 were given access to the Cognician program, with the balance receiving a more traditional adoption and change management experience, led by a communications specialist. This group received the same prompt suggestions in the same period as the Cognician group, but without the automated nudging, framing, reflection, social, and gamification experience. This enabled Microsoft and Cognician to rigorously measure the impact on usage and behavior attributable to the Cognician program.

For completeness, both cohorts were measured against a control group that received no additional adoption support.

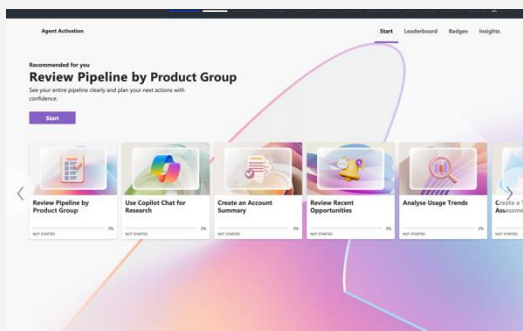
Cognician's Agent Activation Program

Agent Activation was designed as a two-week, high-impact sprint to spark new habits. Instead of traditional training or mandates, it uses gamification, self-reflection, and social learning to drive voluntary, enthusiastic adoption of AI tools. Sellers were invited into a friendly challenge: Use AI agents in real tasks, share insights, and earn recognition.



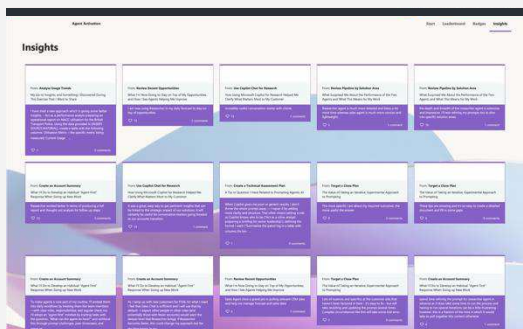
Intrinsic Motivation

Positioned as a way for top performers to get ahead, it appealed to ambition and curiosity. Communications emphasized 'what's in it for me' (WIIFM) – namely, saving time, winning more deals, reducing drudgery. Participation was voluntary but leader-endorsed, tapping into drive rather than compliance.



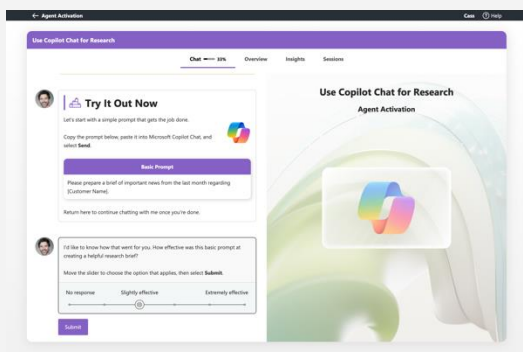
Gamified Challenges

A two-week program with eight daily tasks ('cogs') was delivered via Cognician. Each day unlocked a new bite-sized challenge, e.g., "Review your pipeline by product group using an AI agent." A leaderboard tracked progress, and digital badges marked milestones. Friendly team competition boosted engagement through fun rivalry.



Reflect & Share

Each challenge ended with coach-guided reflection. Participants posted learnings to the Insights Wall – a shared feed visible to all. Colleagues could read, like, and comment on 'aha' moments, creating a feedback loop of peer-to-peer learning, inspiration, and community.



Guided Coaching

Cognician acted as a virtual coach, delivering challenges via interactive chat. It offered context, examples, and prompting tips for using Copilot or agents. The tone was supportive, encouraging experimentation and reducing fear of mistakes. If someone lagged, automated nudges from sales leaders reminded them of the benefits and encouraged re-engagement.

Overview of the Two-Week Sprint

Agent Activation was intensive but time-efficient by design. Over ten business days, participants progressed through a series of exercises that integrated seamlessly into their workday. Each challenge was intended to take 15–30 minutes to complete. Major components were:

- **Daily Challenges:** There were eight core challenges with one released each weekday with a break after four days. These were real-world tasks drawn from the sales cycle, deliberately chosen to showcase where AI agents could save time or add insight. For example, on Day 1, sellers were challenged sellers to use the Sales Chat Agent to review the pipeline by product area and identify which deals needed attention. Each challenge explicitly asked participants to try using different AI tools (e.g., Sales Agent vs. Researcher, or combining Copilot with internal data) so they could discover the unique strengths of each. This approach addressed the knowledge gap about when to use what.
- **Interactive Guide:** When participants opened the day's challenge on Cognician's platform, a scripted conversational interface walked them through it. For instance, it might say: "Today, let's see how an AI agent can speed up building an Account Plan for your target account. What's one account you're working on? Now, open the Researcher Agent and ask it for an executive summary ...". After the action, it would ask a follow-up question like "What did you find most useful, and what would you improve in the agent's response?" Participants would enter a brief reflection, effectively coaching themselves through the learning process. This method turned abstract training into hands-on practice on one's own accounts, yielding immediate personal and business value.

CREATE AN ACCOUNT SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION



Welcome!

Hi again, Cass. Today, you'll compare the results of two agents – the Sales Chat and the Researcher Agent – to see how they can help you create detailed account summaries.

This is great for account planning, but it can also save you time pulling together account summaries for weekly forecast meetings and those frequent Manager and Leader reviews!

Let's get started.

YOUR CHALLENGE



That sets us up nicely for today's challenge:

Create an Account Summary

Use the Sales Chat Agent to create a quick account summary for one of your key accounts.

Repeat this with the Researcher Agent, using a more detailed prompt to create a comprehensive account summary.

3

LEVERAGE THE SALES CHAT AGENT

START WITH THE BASICS



Customer Name(s)

For which of your customers would you like an account summary? You can keep the customer name that you've used previously or enter a new name by replacing what's in the answer field already.

Cognician



Try It Out Now

We'll start by testing a general-purpose version of the prompt. This prompt is great for when you're moving fast and all you need is a quick, high-level overview.

Let's try it out now. Copy the prompt below, paste it into the Sales Chat Agent, and select **Send**.

Sales Chat Agent Prompt

Show me the account summary for Cognician.

I'll wait here while you do that.



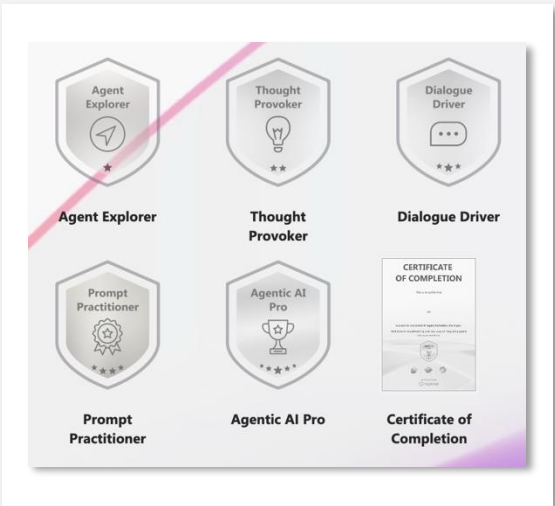
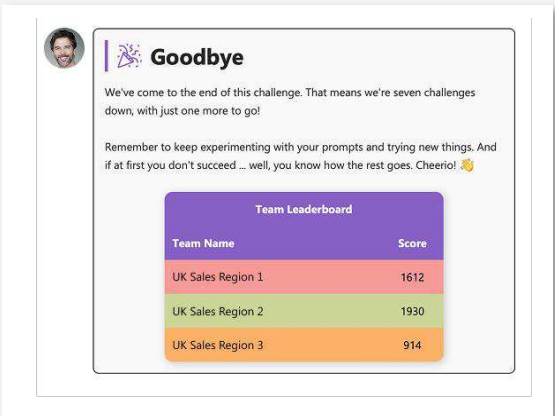
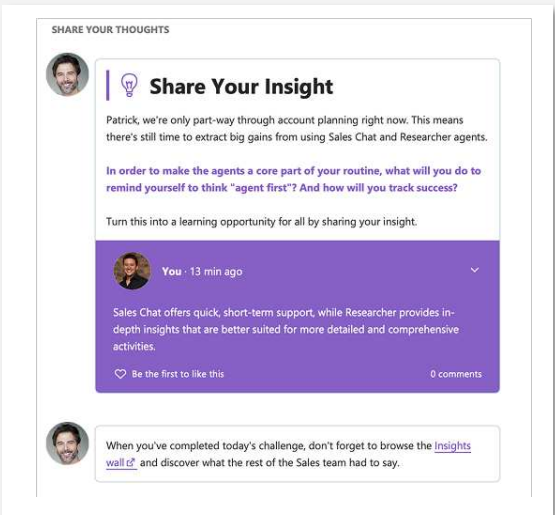
Let's get your first impressions. How fit for purpose was the account summary that the Sales Chat Agent produced for your needs?

Choose an option on the scale from 'Not at all suitable' to 'Extremely suitable'.

No response Moderately suitable Extremely suitable

Overview of the Two-Week Sprint (cont.)

- Social Sharing:** Certain reflection responses were posted as 'insights,' which were visible to the team. Colleagues could see comments like "Researcher Agent pulled in external news I hadn't seen – a pleasant surprise!" Participants could then react with a 'like' or reply with a comment discussing their experiences or suggesting tips. The sales culture that was targeted is competitive but also collaborative; seeing their peers benefit from the tools created a bit of FOMO and encouragement for others to keep up. This social learning aspect leveraged peer influence to normalize the new behaviors.
- Gamification and Incentives:** Progress was made visible and fun. Teams were drawn from and organized around three functional/business units, which encouraged light-hearted rivalry among them. Participants earned points every time they completed a challenge, and these points accrued to their team. By making these scores visible daily through a leaderboard, participants could monitor their team's progress in real time. Leaderboards were placed within each of the challenges but, importantly, they were also shared daily in the team's dedicated social channel. This applied social pressure and motivated competitively-minded participants to play their part in helping their team to get ahead. Digital badges were awarded at milestones (e.g., for completing four challenges, they earned the Agent Novice badge; for completing all eight challenges, they earned the Agent Master badge), and leaders gave shout-outs to high performers in meetings. Notably, no tangible prizes (no gift cards, etc.) were given – the motivation was primarily intrinsic (pride, accomplishment) and social (recognition).



Delivery and Support

The program launched with a kickoff communication from a senior leader. The email framed *Agent Activation* as an elite opportunity: "Top sellers are doing something that most aren't even thinking about yet: using AI agents to win more deals with less effort. Now it's your turn ..." This set a positive, aspirational tone.

Throughout the two weeks, daily reminder emails (branded as coming from a respected internal figure) introduced each day's challenge and reiterated the benefit: "Today you'll learn to create an account summary in no time ... spend less time searching so you can spend more time selling." If participants fell behind, they received a gentle nudge noting that many of their peers were progressing and re-emphasizing the program's value (without judgment).

The A/B test structure meant only the Cognician-supported participants had access to all this, whereas the group supported through traditional comms continued business as usual for comparison. This was communicated transparently – one of the initial email versions told the Cognician group: "You've been selected for the A-team ..."

This messaging boosted intrigue and exclusivity, making participants feel like they were part of something special – a classic intrinsic motivator. It also implicitly challenged them to prove the investment worthwhile by engaging fully.



Results and Impact

Over the course of just ten working days, the *Agent Activation* program achieved rapid behavior change – outperforming traditional adoption approaches and delivering enduring impact – with ongoing regular usage of Sales Agent more than doubling amongst the cohort.

Quantitative Outcomes

- **Increased Tool Engagement:** Participants in the Cognician-led cohort didn't only passively use the agents more; they actively experimented with them. Over the two weeks, the sellers in the Cognician group conducted 1,315 AI-assisted 'experiments' as logged by the system. Each experiment corresponds to a challenge step (e.g., asking the Researcher Agent a question, trying a prompt in Copilot, etc.), so this number reflects a very high level of hands-on engagement. On average, that's about six or more AI interactions per person over the sprint, above and beyond their usual workflows. Many reported continuing to use the agents even outside the prescribed challenges as they discovered useful applications.
- **Enduring Impact:** By measuring the four weeks before and after activation, we were able to identify enduring patterns in behavior change with the use of Sales and Researcher Agents. Enduring impact was significantly higher for the Cognician cohort, where the program proved particularly strong in stimulating demand for the less-used Sales Agent.

A combination of vacation time, conflicting deadlines, and organizational change were a barrier to engagement with the agents in the broader audience and are likely to have influenced the absolute results. However, the impact was broadly comparable across the two groups. In the Cognician-supported group, of those who started the first challenge, the majority went on to finish the entire series, indicating strong ongoing engagement once hooked.

Enduring increase in agentic usage for the Cognician group, vs. 28% for the control group

200%

(from 7.8% before to 23.7% after) vs. 28% for the control group (from 5% before to 6.4% after)

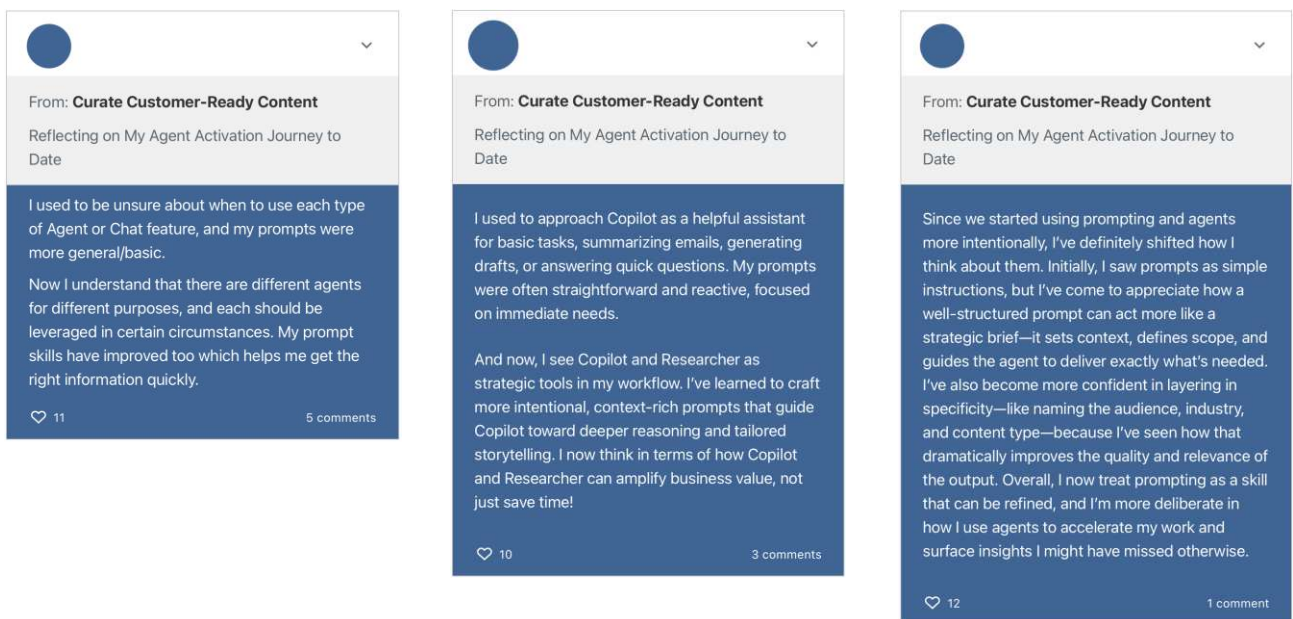
- **Researcher Agent Weekly Active Usage (WAU)** – Cognician drove a stronger mid-test lift (+18.8%) vs. the Traditional group (+10.5%), but both had similar enduring impact (~+5.7%).
- **Sales Agent WAU** – Cognician showed a significantly higher mid-test increase (+14.8%) and enduring lift (+3.5%) than the Traditional group (+7.7%, +2.1%).
- **Researcher Agent Monthly Active Usage (MAU)** – Cognician outperformed both the Traditional group and Control with the highest sustained gains (+22.7%), nearly 2.5× the Control's (+9.3%).
- **Sales Agent MAU** – Cognician led with a 15.9% enduring increase, far exceeding the Traditional group (+9.8%) and the Control (+1.4%).

Qualitative Outcomes

Numbers only tell part of the story. The qualitative feedback and observed behavior changes were equally impressive, revealing a strong impact on mindset and work habits.

Improved Prompting Skills

The engagement model provided by Cognician also offered valuable support for participants earlier in their AI adoption journey. Qualitative feedback showed that Cognician's approach enabled participants with lower confidence in AI usage to mature in their usage with confidence. They learned through practice that providing specifics and format guidance gets better outputs. The difference was noted in reflections: "My prompts used to be short and reactive; now I include clear requirements and context", said one participant. This aligns with the program's design focus on iterative refinement. Participants got into the habit of trying a prompt, reviewing results, and then iterating – a new behavior for many. This iterative mindset was a key skill gain and increases the likelihood that they'll continue to use the agents effectively.



Strategic Use of Multiple Tools

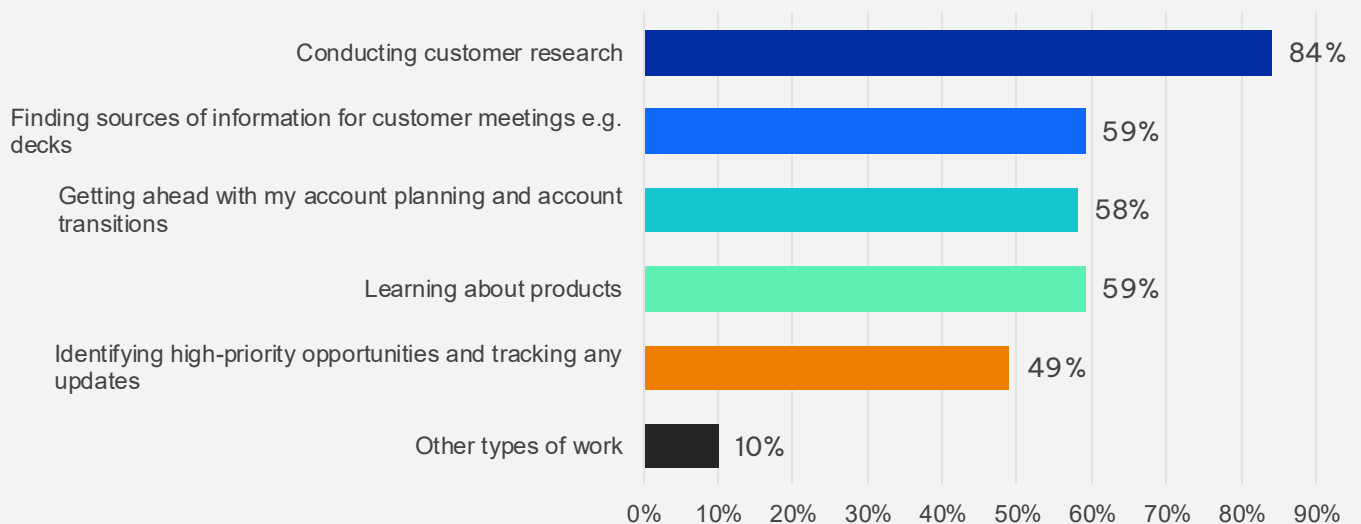
Previously, confusion existed around the overlapping agent tools – some ignored one or the other entirely. The challenges suggested by Cognician encouraged sellers to try both the Sales Chat Agent / Researcher Agent, and core M365 Copilot side by side, allowing them to assess the right tool for specific tasks. By the end of the A/B test, participants reported using the right tool for the job more confidently: "Now I understand there are different agents for different purposes, and each should be leveraged in certain circumstances." They began to understand, for instance, that the Sales Agent is great for pulling CRM data or opportunity updates, whereas the Researcher excels at gathering external news or industry info, and Copilot chat can be used for open-ended brainstorming or drafting. In practice, many described an 'agent-first' approach: when confronted with a task (account prep, forecasting, content creation), they would first ask themselves, "Can an AI agent help me here?" whereas before, they might not have considered it at all. It's important to realize that simply informing people about these nuances is ineffective; the best way to truly appreciate the nuances is through personalized experimentation. This represents a fundamental change in workflow integration. The program leads for the sales organization noted that "sellers now choose strategically among multiple agents for specific tasks, where before usage was occasional and often limited to one tool."

Broader Range of Use Cases

The *Agent Activation* program introduced sellers to using AI agents not just for trivial admin, but for complex sales activities. In surveys, participants indicated that they were now using agents for tasks like conducting customer research (84% of respondents), finding content for customer meetings (~59%), account planning (~58%), and learning about products (~59%), among other uses.

The post-program survey figures illustrated below show that AI tools are now being used across all stages of the sales cycle. One particularly important area was opportunity management – nearly 50% of sellers mentioned that they had started using AI to help track updates on deals and identify priorities. In short, the AI became a Swiss Army knife in the sellers' toolkit. They were no longer pigeon-holing Copilot as just an email draft writer; it was now seen as a means of gaining insight and accelerating many different tasks. This diversity of use is crucial for sustained adoption.

The Kinds of Work I'm Increasingly Using Agents to Help With



TOTAL RESPONDENTS: 75

Time Savings and Efficiency

While precise productivity gains would require longer-term measurement, there was abundant anecdotal evidence that participants were saving significant time. For instance, one seller shared that using the Researcher Agent to compile account intel "saved hours I'd have spent pulling info from various systems" – and now that person planned to routinely start prep with the AI and only then dig deeper if needed. Others cited examples like generating a first draft of a customer-ready Appraisal deck with Copilot, which previously might have taken them a full day.

These stories indicate real efficiency improvements. In a business where time with customers is the most valuable resource, reclaiming even an hour a day from admin tasks can translate to better sales outcomes.

Mindset and Confidence

Perhaps the most substantial change was in how sellers viewed the AI tools. Initially, many were skeptical or viewed the agents as a novelty. Post program, there was a palpable shift to seeing them as an integral part of doing business. Participants' reflections often used words like 'confident,' 'excited,' and 'empowered' to describe how they now feel about using AI. They learned that these tools won't replace them but augment their capabilities. One account executive wrote, "I now think in terms of how Copilot and Researcher can amplify business value, not just save time." Another said, "I've learned to craft intentional prompts that guide Copilot toward deeper reasoning and tailored storytelling," highlighting increased trust in the tool's efficacy. These statements show a new confidence that, with the right approach, Copilot will deliver useful results, and an understanding that users of AI play a role in improving outcomes through better prompts. In short, the program succeeded in nurturing an innovation mindset: sellers became more open to experimenting with new tech and proactively finding ways to leverage it. This cultural shift is invaluable for the organization as it rolls out more AI capabilities.

Here's a direct quote from a participant's before-and-after insight that illustrates this mindset shift:

"I used to approach Copilot as a helpful assistant for basic tasks... My prompts were straightforward and reactive, focused on immediate needs. And now, I see Copilot and Researcher as strategic tools in my workflow. I've learned to craft more intentional, context-rich prompts ... I now think in terms of how Copilot and Researcher can amplify business value, not just save time!"

– Account Executive

This encapsulates the journey from skepticism to enthusiastic adoption. Many similar testimonials ("I used to ... now I ...") were collected, painting a consistent picture of transformed attitudes:

"I used to use the Researcher agent only occasionally when I remembered. Now I use Researcher and Sales agents as the first point of call."

"I used to try one prompt and not keep changing it. Now I test different prompts and get very specific to gain the best insights."

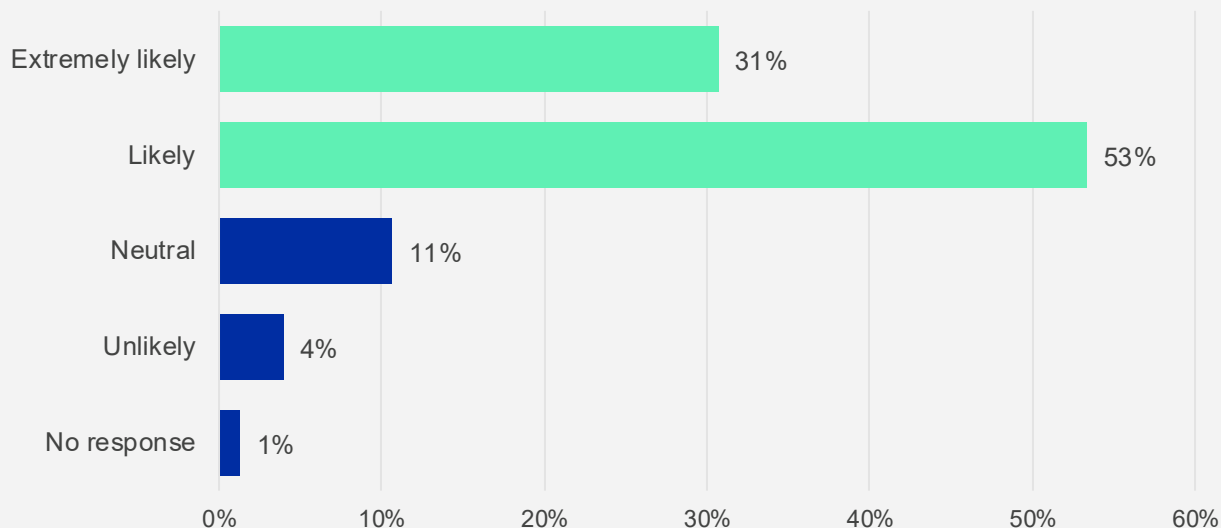
Such feedback demonstrates that the behavioral objectives – not just tool usage, but the *quality* of usage – were met.

Participant Satisfaction

The program's reception was overwhelmingly positive. In post-program survey:

- 84% of 75 respondents said they were 'Likely' or 'Extremely likely' to recommend *Agent Activation* to a colleague.

The Likelihood That I Would Recommend the Agent Activation Program to a Colleague



TOTAL RESPONDENTS: 75

- Many participants specifically praised the program's format. They enjoyed the interactive, game-like approach, often contrasting it with traditional corporate training. Comments included "This didn't feel like training; it felt like a team challenge," and "I looked forward to the new task each day – it was actually fun." The novelty and brevity maintained high engagement.
- The community aspect was frequently cited as a highlight: "Reading others' insights was super useful – I picked up tips I would have missed." For a dispersed sales force, the program also created cross-team connections – as some noted that they'd met new peers through commenting on insights. This kind of networking and shared learning is an ancillary benefit that can outlast the program itself.
- Sales managers reported observable changes in their team members. Some managers started incorporating check-ins on how sellers are using Copilot into regular meetings – something they hadn't done before. There's now a common language and baseline of skill around prompting and agents, which enables further coaching and encouragement from leadership.

"Cognician offered a transformative approach to AI adoption. Everything was centralized in one place, giving real-time visibility into the next best action – where to drive engagement, when to send messages – and even participant feedback as it happened.

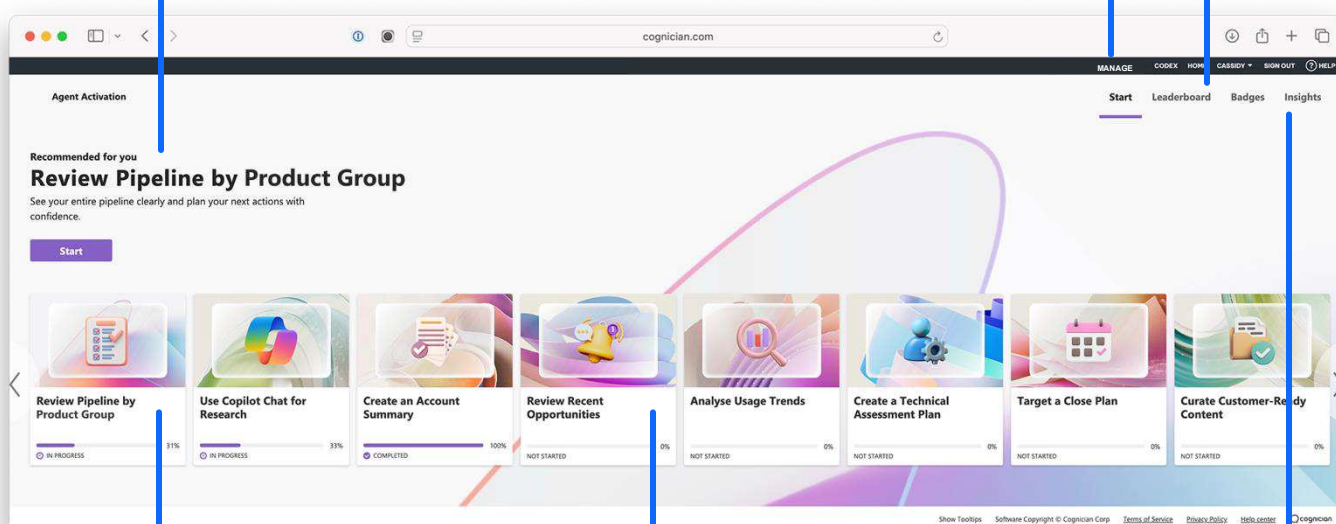
Being able to spark instant conversations within the tool was a game changer, making it effortless to create impact."

– Kwadwo Benko, Microsoft AI Team

A guided activation path releases **automated nudge messaging** and **Copilot challenges**.

Gamification using social proof, **badges**, and a **leaderboard** drives social engagement.

Managers get **real-time data**.

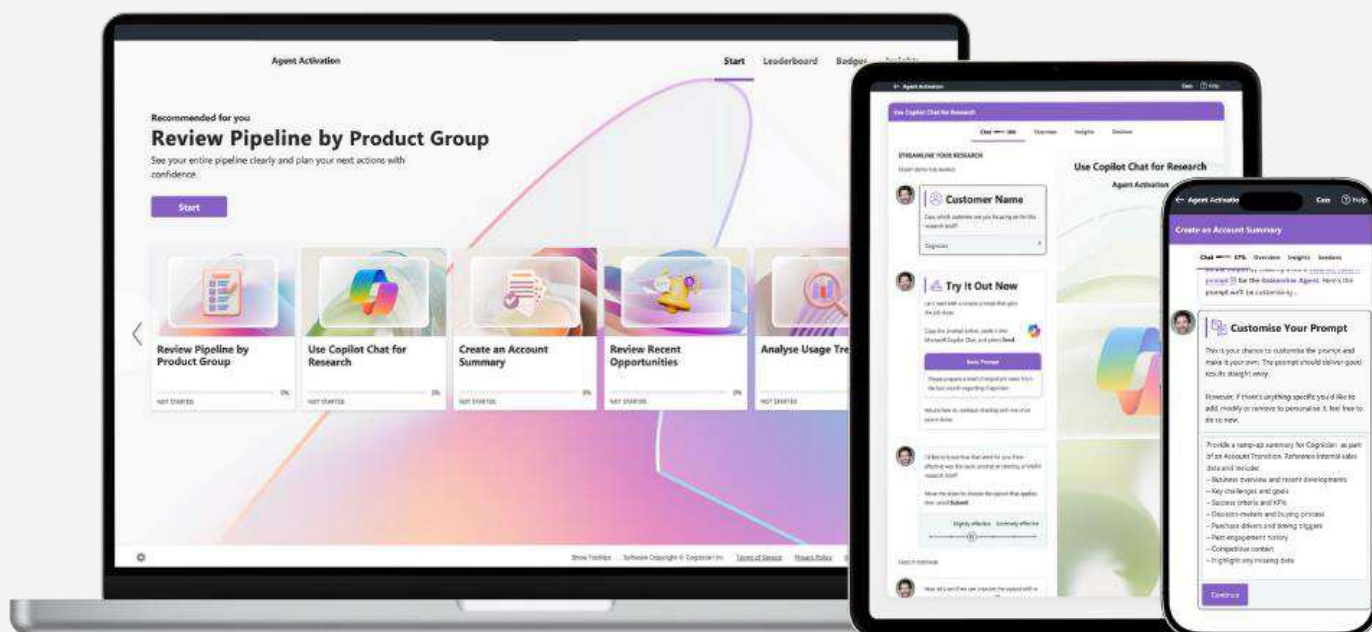


Each coaching guide captures **data** like:

- **Survey responses**
- **AI goals and questions**
- **Copilot prompt feedback**
- **Copilot product feedback**

Copilot challenges drive participants to use **AI agents**, complete **post-action reflection**, get **follow-through support** and engage in **peer-to-peer learning**.

Participants share **insights** (questions, tips, or aha moments) which accelerates peer-to-peer learning. Natural language analysis of insights provides unprecedented **visibility** into how **AI mindsets and behaviors are maturing**.



Summary

Driving Behavior Change to Unlock Technology Value

The *Agent Activation* case study demonstrates that achieving technology adoption at scale is fundamentally about human behavior change. The sales organization used for this case study already had access to cutting-edge AI tools, but it took an intentional, well-crafted activation program to get its employees to embrace these tools in daily practice.

Both the traditional and Cognician approaches to agentic activation made a measurable impact on their audiences. However, Cognician's activation framework – with its intrinsic motivation levers (personal relevance, autonomy, mastery), gamification, guided reflection, and social reinforcement, as well as its data collection capabilities – made it possible to infer more detailed insights about the ways in which the program made an impact.

This initiative can be seen as a blueprint for how to drive adoption of any new digital capability in a large organization: It's not enough to enable a feature, you must activate people to use it. In just two weeks, a shift occurred within the participants. AI assistants are now seen as a natural part of the workflow, and uncertainty has faded. The A/B test provided evidence that the changes were attributable to the program, not just an organic trend: participants who experienced *Agent Activation* outperformed the control group their use of AI tools.

Ultimately, the success of *Agent Activation* was due to treating adoption as an activation experience, rather than a deployment task. It created space for play, competition, and peer learning, which unlocked the intrinsic desire of salespeople to improve their craft. By the end, the sales team had not only increased their usage of Copilot and its sister agents; they had also become advocates for these AI tools, with a new mindset to continually explore and innovate in how they sell. In the rapidly evolving world of Generative AI, such human activation is the key to turning technical potential into tangible business outcomes.

Ready to Activate Your Workforce?

This case study proves that technology adoption isn't just about deploying tools—it's about transforming behaviors. In just two weeks, Cognician's activation framework delivered a **200% enduring increase in AI agent usage**, boosted confidence, and turned skepticism into advocacy. Imagine what this approach could do for your organization. If you're looking to scale AI adoption, unlock productivity, and build a culture of innovation, now is the time to act.

Ask yourself:

- How are you currently driving behavior change for new technologies?
- What would real-time insights and gamified engagement mean for your success?

Let's explore how Cognician can help you design an activation experience that turns potential into performance. Contact us today to start your journey.

[TELL ME MORE](#)

Do you have any questions?

Email us: copilot@cognician.com



About Cognician

Cognician's founding belief is that people are capable of great things when their behavior is driven by meaningful conversations, great questions, powerful ideas, and deeply felt emotions. Our core capability is enabling large organizations to activate behavior change at scale. We achieve this by creating personalized, data-driven digital experiences that are grounded in action, follow-through, reflection, and social engagement. With our multi-day challenges, you can drive measurable change in 30 days or less.