Research

Solvd CIO & CTO insights: AI research 2026

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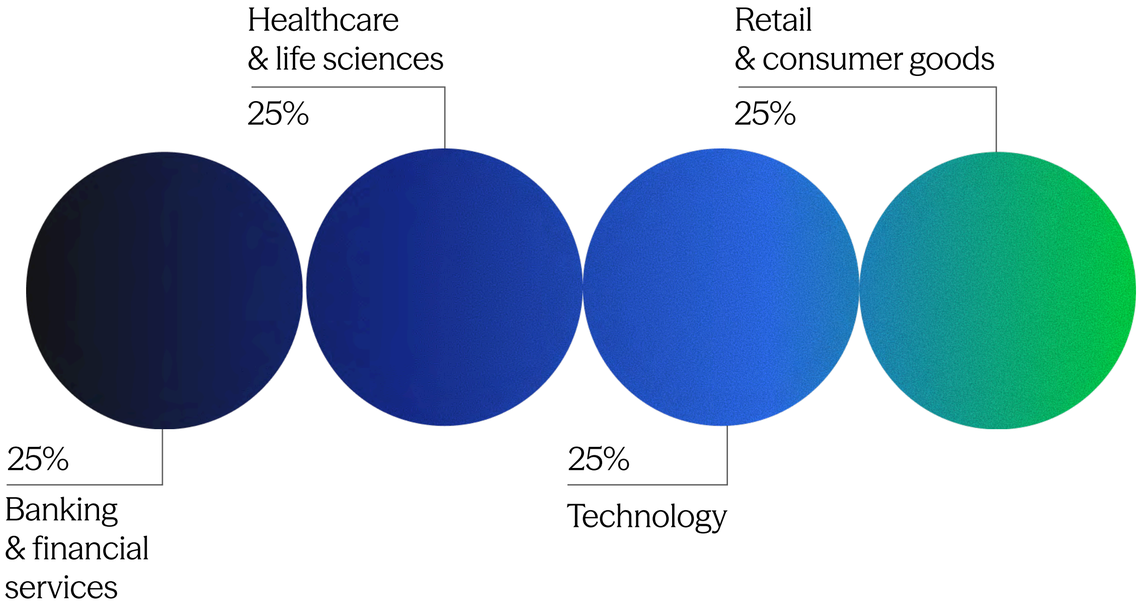
Research methodology

The Solvd survey was conducted by Wakefield Research among 500 U.S. CIOs and CTOs at companies with a minimum annual revenue of $500M, between December 9th and December 22nd, 2025, using an email invitation and an online survey. Results of any sample are subject to sampling variation. The magnitude of the variation is measurable and is affected by the number of interviews and the level of the percentages expressing the results. For the interviews conducted in this particular study, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 4.4 percentage points from the result that would be obtained if interviews had been conducted with all persons in the universe represented by the sample.

The survey primarily utilized multiple-choice questions with the ‘select all that apply’ response format. Respondents were provided 'None of these' options where relevant. In order to demonstrate the attitude, a 5-point Likert scale was implemented.

Respondents by industry

To provide a comprehensive view, this research includes responses from participants across different industries and sectors, as shown in the chart below. Additional materials will further explore differences in responses by industry.



Executive summary

From the Solvd team

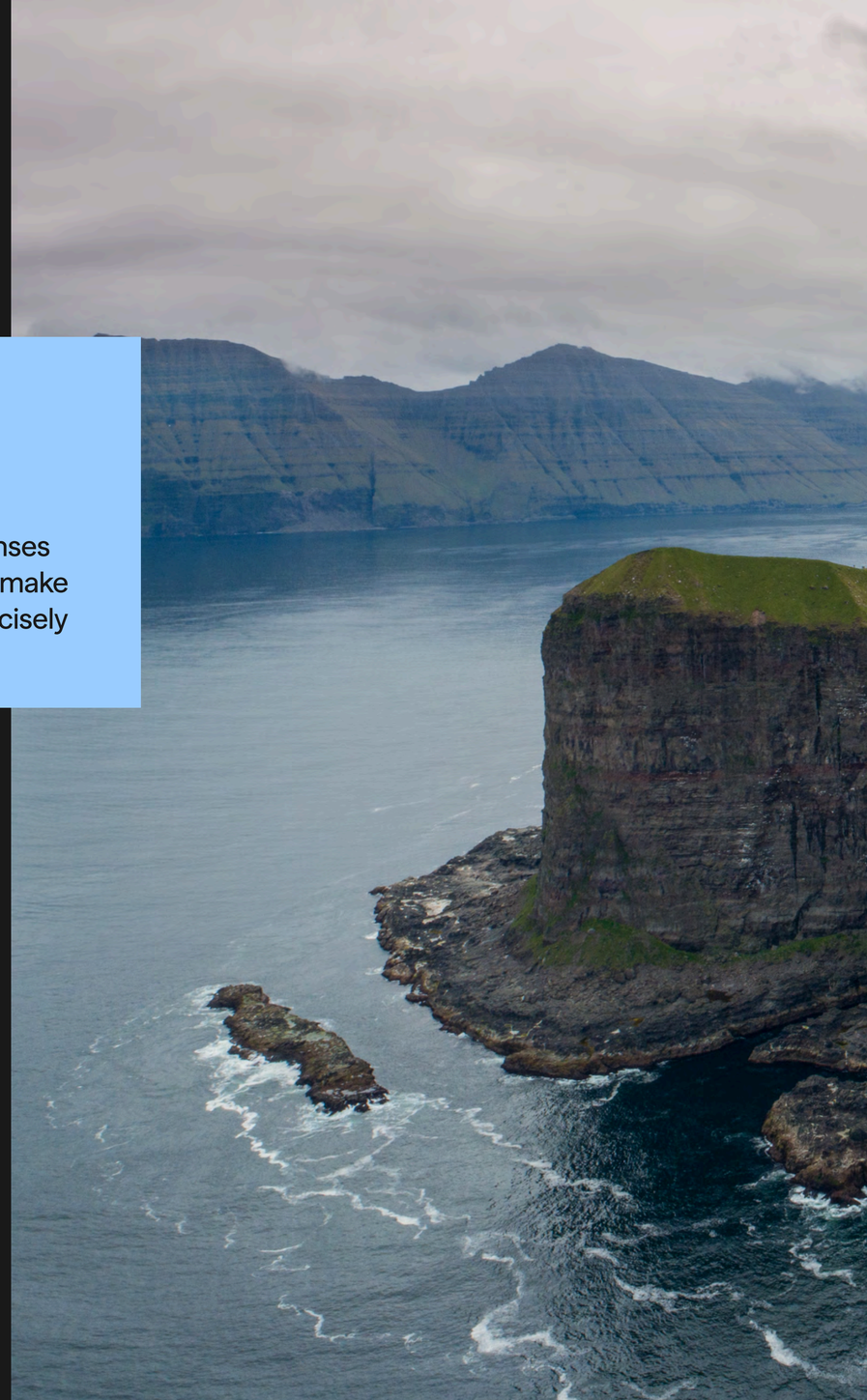
As a company, our goal with this research was simple: to capture and reflect an unbiased view of the current market landscape, including what leaders in the enterprise space consider important and what they don't. It's based on the conversations and data we gathered, and like any research, it's shaped by whom we spoke to and when. These responses are not meant to be a single source of truth, and they may differ from other research on the market. That fact doesn't make them wrong but makes them contextual. We, in turn, believe this kind of raw, experience-based insight is valuable precisely because it shows how the market is thinking right now.

Enterprises across industries have reached a stage in their AI journey where experimentation is no longer temporary, but an indispensable part of modern business. As AI initiatives scale across the enterprise, CIOs and CTOs are developing greater resilience to risk and failure.

In response to this shift, for this research, Solvd examined what CIOs and CTOs think of AI experimentation, how they define success, how they ensure AI governance (if at all), which external resources they use to implement AI, and the primary reasons behind those choices.

The complete findings of the 2026 research address four key themes which reflect the current state of the AI market among enterprise businesses. They arepresented in the following order:

- AI leadership and organizational structure
- AI investment, ROI and performance measurement
- AI governance maturity and practices
- AI integration across the enterprise



The findings of this research indicate that while 49% of respondents believe AI adoption is becoming more data-driven, poor visibility has already led to failures for over 80% of organizations. Despite the emergence of new AI-related roles, responsibility for AI initiatives remains primarily with CIOs and CTOs.
When it comes to AI investments, ROI, and approaches to measuring success, data-driven AI adoption and continued experimentation coexist, as 90% report increased AI investment. At the same time, the pressure to justify the investments is still growing, signaling a gap between CIOs, CTOs, and senior executives, driven by multiple factors, including differing perspectives on AI maturity, timelines for value realization and AI investments.

Consequently, approaches to AI governance have shifted significantly, becoming a new norm for enterprises, with 100% of organizations reporting they have begun establishing governance frameworks and are reviewing them regularly.

With a growing number of AI-powered tools, AI integration may seem inevitable, but in practice, only 31% of organizations report that AI is fully embedded in core decision-making. The primary driver of daily AI usage is the availability of AI tools or platforms (53%), business demand for AI-enabled productivity (52%), automation or workflow redesign and executive prioritization or mandates (48%).

To implement AI, companies are leveraging various external resources (such as consultancies, boutique AI firms and cloud providers), indicating that enterprises are building AI through ecosystems, and managing those ecosystems has become one of the biggest execution challenges.

Key findings

90%
expect investment in experimental AI initiatives to increase in 2026

76%
expect 50% or less of their workforce will use AI daily by end of 2026

72%
believe it's likely AI projects will be shut down in the next year for failing to meet KPIs

69%
say AI is not fully embedded across key business decisions

AI leadership and organizational structure

The first theme explores how enterprises are preparing for AI integration as expectations shift from hype to data-driven outcomes. Although new AI-specific roles are emerging, responsibility for AI strategy and failure lies primarily with CTOs. These insights highlight a transitional phase in enterprise AI leadership and the urgent need to establish transparency in both ownership and success criteria.

More data-driven and less hype-based expectations around AI in 2026

84% of CIOs and CTOs agree that only AI projects that pay back will survive in 2026. As a result, 49% expect AI expectations to become more data-driven and less hype-based, while 48% anticipate company-wide AI governance policies. This is followed by 39% reporting AI performance through objective KPIs, 34% creating new AI-specific roles, and 30% linking executive bonuses to AI performance.

Even though the first impression from the data may be that the hype is over, it's hard to make that claim, as experimentation is still continuing. At the same time, this may suggest that while companies are getting used to a constant experimentation era, they can't sustain it forever without a clear vision and success metrics. As a result, they are becoming more intentional and starting to expect tangible results from it.

The market is at a point where such a long experimentation phase stops being a temporary condition and becomes part of the business. As a result, enterprises appear to be settling into a steadier operating mode as they navigate AI initiatives with clearer reference points rather than reacting to every wave of hype.

80%

of organizations have already experienced failures due to poor visibility, even as AI adoption becomes more data-driven

Company-wide expectations for 2026

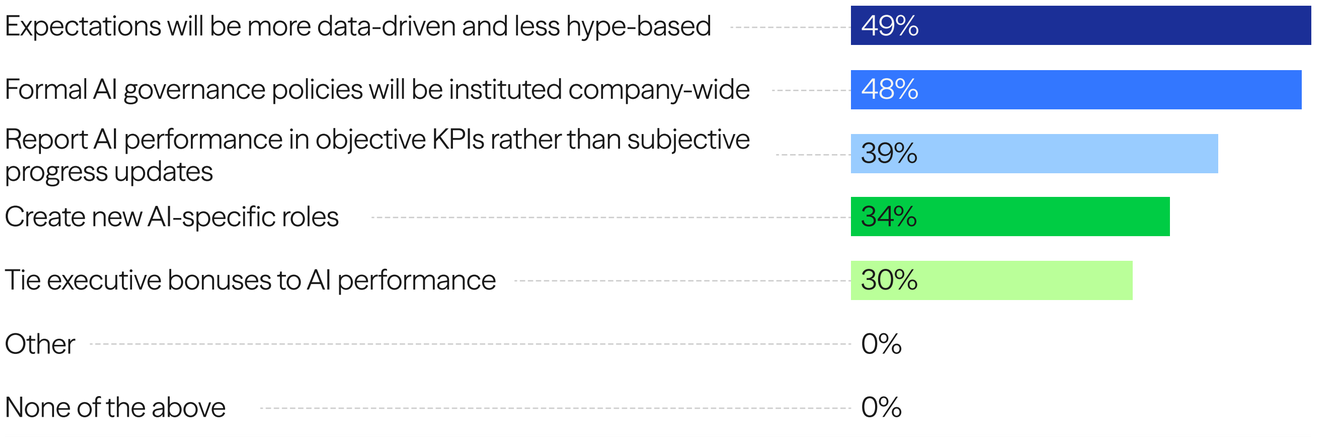


Figure 1. Survey question: "Which of these do you think your company will see happen in 2026?"

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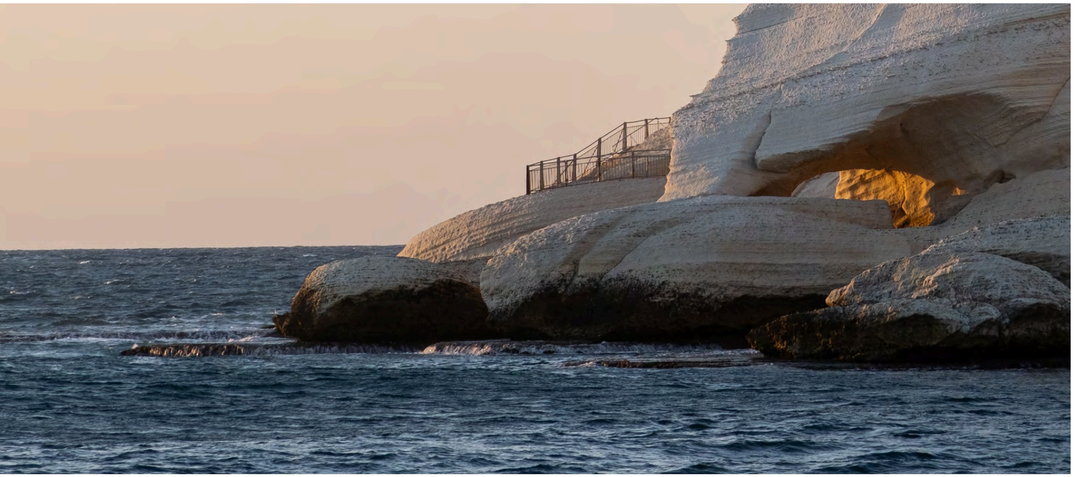
One of the reasons why AI projects have failed is a lack of visibility and oversight

When questioned as to whether or not the lack of visibility and oversight led to AI projects failing, less than a quarter reported having never encountered this issue. For the majority, the opposite held true. Specifically, 41% say this has caused multiple failures, while 39% report at least one failed initiative. These findings confirm that AI initiative failure is not rare, and is often associated with challenges related to visibility, coordination, and management rather than technology limitations. At the same time, if 80% of projects failed at least once from lack of visibility and oversight, despite everyone having started implementing governance (0% not yet begun), then it shows that current management and governance approaches may not yet be fully effective or sufficiently mature.



Moreover, these insights add an important nuance to the experimentation narrative. While the current wave of AI hype, triggered by Generative AI, began in 2022, repeated failures tied to visibility and oversight gaps cannot be explained by early-stage experimentation alone. Instead, this may indicate growing maturity pressure without a corresponding maturity structure. Taken together, the data emphasizes that enterprises are still trying to find a proper way to manage AI initiatives, which highlights the need to establish clearer ownership and transparency across AI initiatives.

Impact of visibility and oversight on AI projects

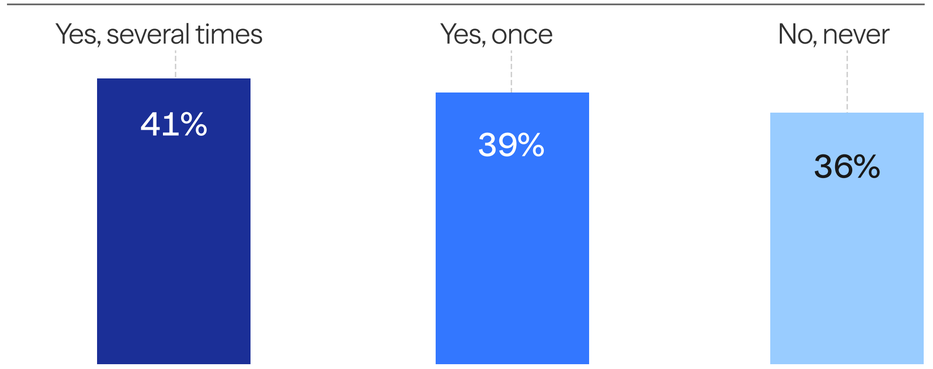


Figure 2. Survey question: “Have AI projects failed due to lack of visibility and oversight?”

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Over one-third of U.S. CTOs are responsible for AI strategy and implementation

39% of executives report that AI is the responsibility of the Chief Technology Officer, while 36% report that it's the Chief Information Officer. These are followed by 19% who cite a newly created role - the Chief AI Officer or an independent Head of AI. Only 4% indicate that the CEO is responsible and just 1% report ownership by other C-suite executives.

This distribution appears to be relatively stable. In Solvd CIO & CTO Insights: AI Research 2025, CIOs and CTOs identified their biggest responsibilities to be the development of business strategies to generate revenue from AI (46%) and keeping up with rapid changes in technology, including AI (40%).

AI strategy and implementation owner

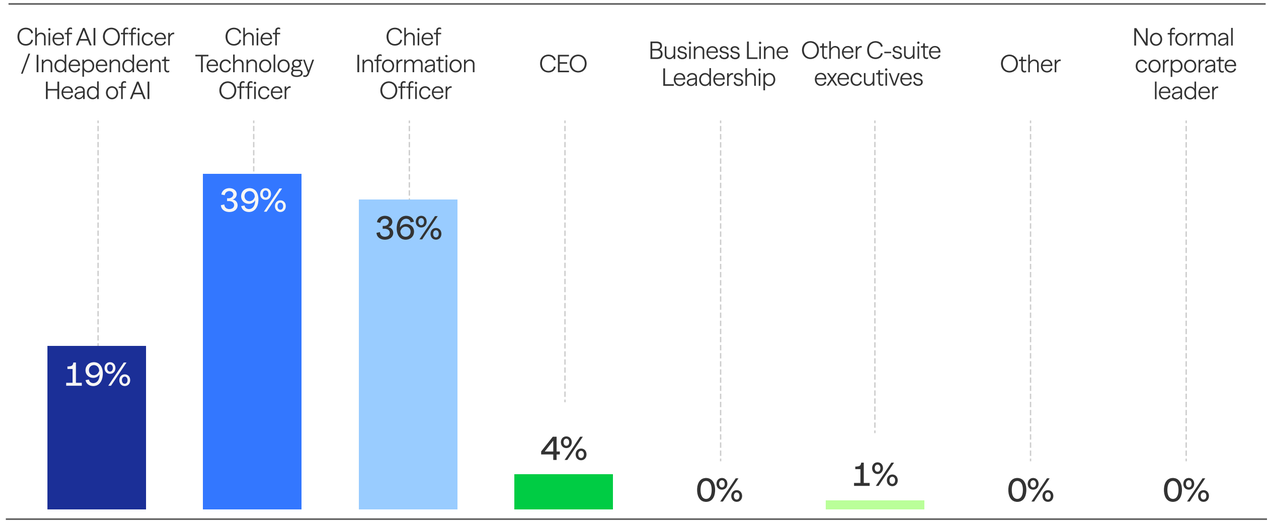

Figure 3. Survey question: "Who is responsible for AI strategy and implementation in your company?"

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Why it matters

As AI initiatives scale beyond isolated pilots, unclear ownership and limited visibility become material execution risks. With responsibility for AI strategy and outcomes concentrated with CIOs and CTOs, obstacles like a lack of transparency, governance immaturity, and/or siloed or unreliable success metrics increase the likelihood of repeated failure. If these issues go unaddressed, it's likely to create a gap between growing AI ambition and the operating structures needed to manage it effectively.

AI investment, ROI and performance measurement

As the nature of AI expectations becomes more data-driven and investment in AI grows, the pressure to justify the return on investment increases. This theme explores the KPIs companies use to measure the success and future viability of AI initiatives. As a result, the research findings highlight a dilemma: even though ROI is the main criterion for measuring success, most AI projects continue to be implemented and funded despite poor ROI. For the market, this means that funding decisions are still not dependent on short-term results and AI is treated as a long-term priority.

90%

of organizations are boosting investment in innovative AI, underscoring how data-driven adoption and continued experimentation coexist

Investment in “innovative AI” initiatives is increasing

Although enterprises may be taking more data-driven approaches to AI, investment isn’t slowing down. In fact, 9 in 10 U.S. CIOs and CTOs (90%) report that investment in innovative AI initiatives (meaning experimental and pilot programs, rather than AI initiatives with proven return) will increase in 2026. Only 9% expect investment to remain unchanged while 1% anticipate a decrease.

This reinforces earlier findings that AI experimentation is still alive, even with limited ROI expectations and established tighter rules. This data may show that enterprises aren’t choosing between innovation and discipline, but they’re trying to do both at once.

Investment plans for experimental and pilot AI initiatives

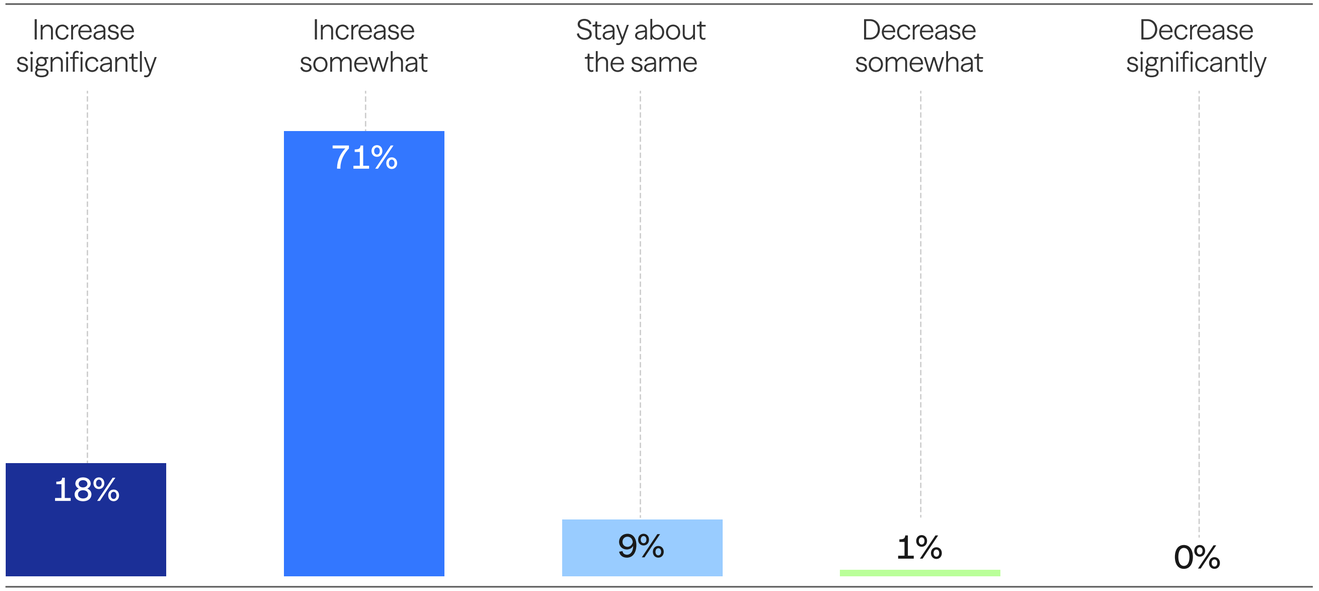

Figure 4. Survey question: “Will investment in “innovative AI” initiatives (meaning experimental and pilot programs, rather than AI initiatives with proven return) increase or decrease in 2026?”

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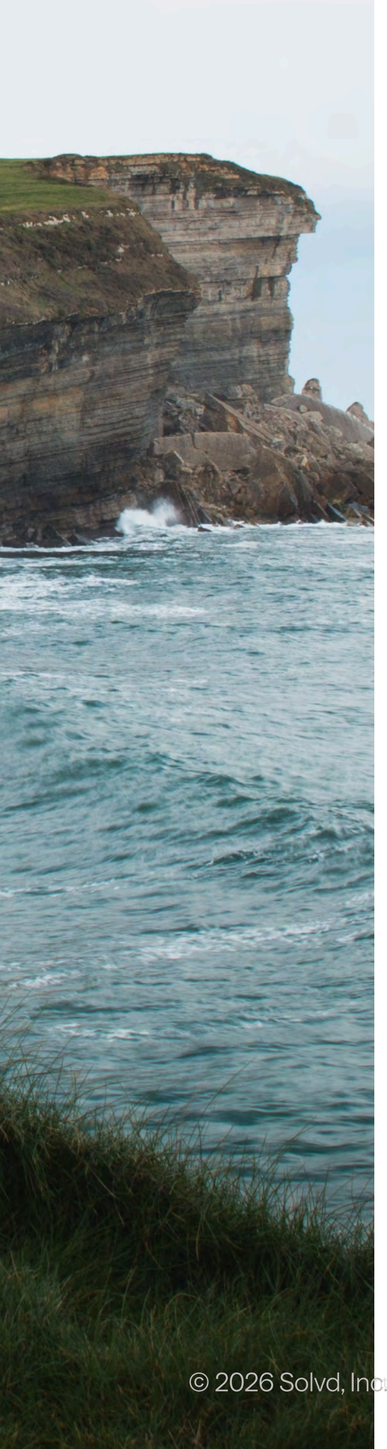

Underperformance on KPIs could lead to the shutdown of AI projects next year

Investments are being held to measurable standards, however, with KPIs becoming a decision-making gate. On the one hand, 70% of U.S. CIOs and CTOs characterize the business cases of individual AI initiatives as generating small to moderate positive ROI. On the other hand, nearly three-quarters of U.S. CIOs and CTOs (72%) believe their company is likely to shut down an AI project in the next year based solely on not meeting KPIs, while 21% consider it unlikely and 7% consider it not at all likely.

The readiness to shut down underperforming projects doesn't mean enterprises are abandoning AI. Rather, it reflects a more disciplined approach, similar to how companies manage capital investments.

AI project shutdown likelihood based on KPI performance

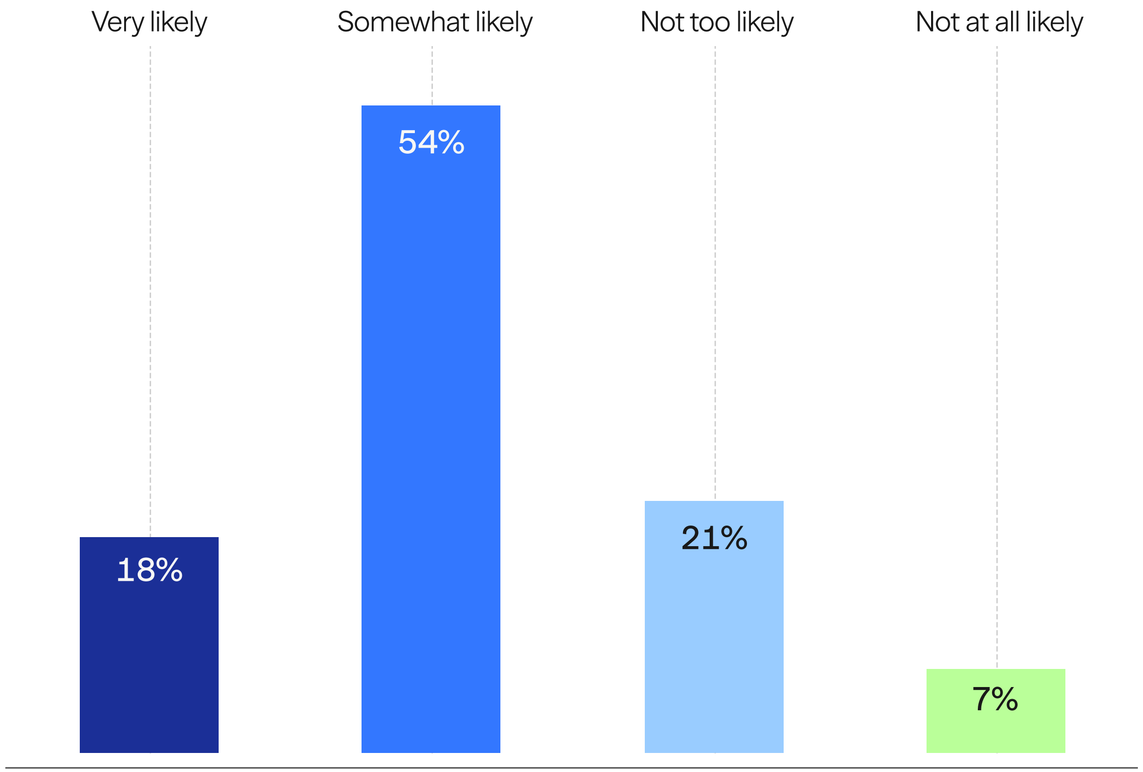

Figure 5. Survey question: “How likely is it that your company will shut down an AI project in the next year based solely on not meeting KPIs?”

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Despite poor ROI, most of the AI projects continue to be implemented and funded

In practice, even though the expectations around AI are more grounded in data and 49% of respondents use increased revenue as a primary KPI metric for their AI projects, nearly 9 in 10 U.S. CIOs and CTOs (86%) report that only half or fewer of them continue despite showing poor ROI.

This may reflect that companies across industries are taking a portfolio approach to AI investments. This strategy entails running several AI experiments in parallel, under the assumption that realistically only some will be successful.

The data suggests that the market landscape is not black-and-white, and while some projects may currently lack measurable impact, in the long term they can still be strategically successful.

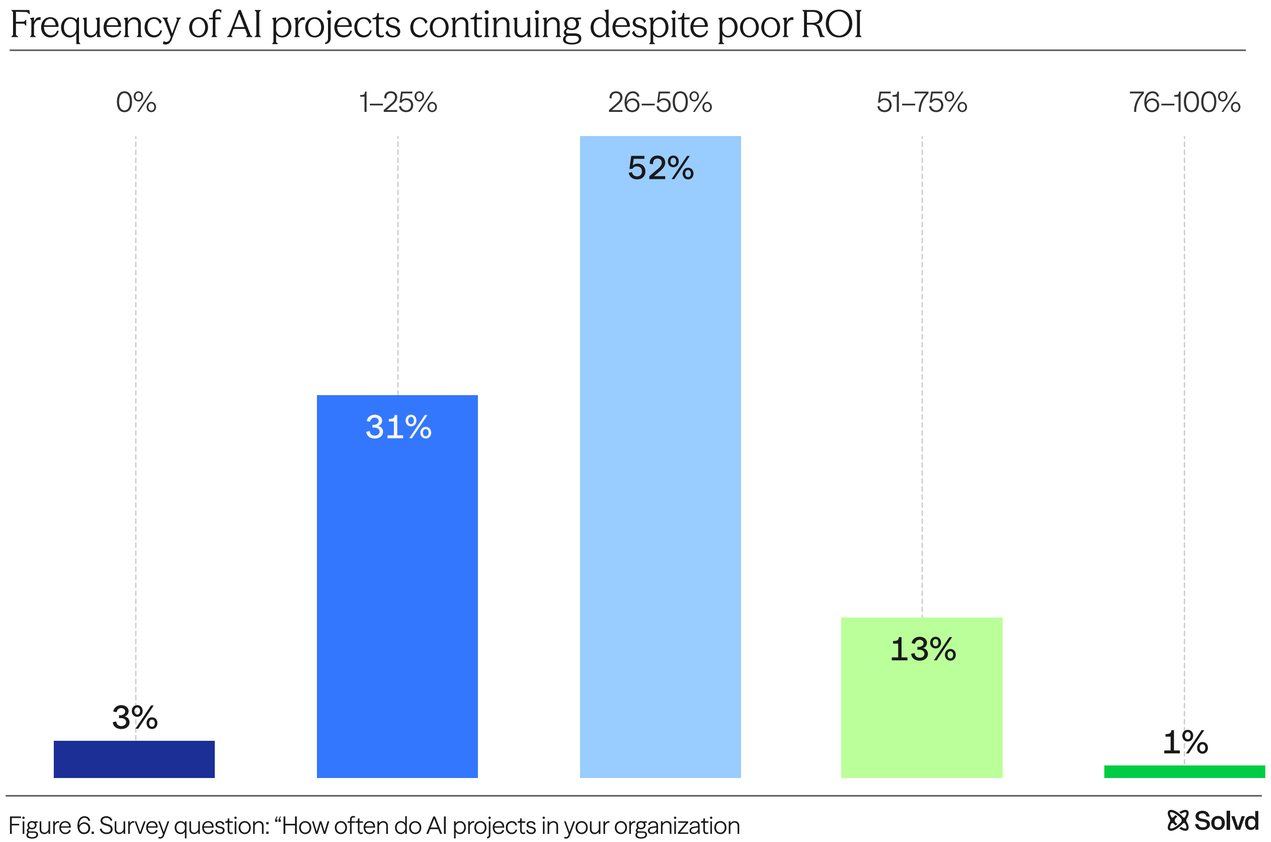
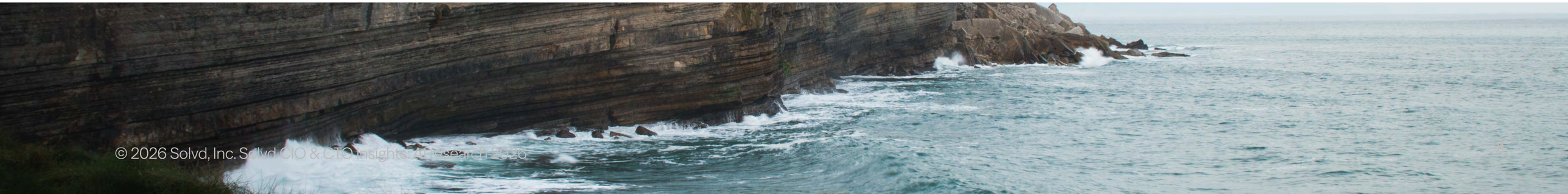


Figure 6. Survey question: “How often do AI projects in your organization continue despite showing poor ROI?”



The pressure to ensure return on investment continues to grow

Over four in five U.S. CIOs and CTOs (82%) agree that more and more, the board is questioning the amount their company is spending on AI. It emphasizes a clear pattern: as AI investment scales, scrutiny from leadership intensifies, with greater emphasis on aligning spend with clear financial rationale rather than unchecked expansion. This finding aligns with Solvd CIO & CTO Insights: AI Research 2025, where 71% of CIOs and CTOs reported unrealistic ROI expectations from executive leadership.

At the same time, the remaining 18% of respondents indicate lower levels of agreement with this statement, suggesting that this pressure is not yet uniform across all organizations. Importantly, this dynamic does not exclude cases where executive leadership may be underinvesting in AI.

What is clear, however, is a gap between CIOs, CTOs, and senior executives, driven by multiple factors, including the challenge of aligning corporate actions with board expectations, as well as differing perspectives on AI maturity, timelines for value realization and AI investments.

Views on whether companies are spending more and more on AI

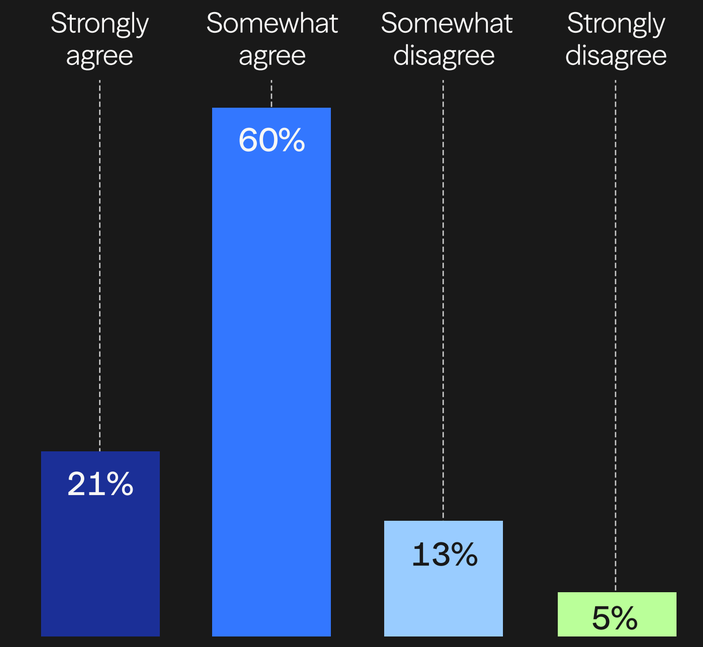


Figure 7. Survey question: "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: More and more, the board is questioning the amount we're spending on AI."

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Why it matters

Today, CIOs and CTOs see ROI as the primary success metric, influencing AI investment decisions, and also report that scrutiny of AI spending increases at the board level. This tension suggests that ROI is often difficult to measure, attribute or validate in practice, which leads to questions about AI investments not necessarily because they fail to deliver value, but because that value is not consistently agreed upon by senior leadership. This raises a critical question for enterprises: What success metrics can be applied to AI that resonate with both executives and board members?

AI governance maturity and practices

Solvd CIO & CTO Insights: AI Research 2025 revealed that 87% of CIOs and CTOs believed that too much AI regulation would limit innovation at their company and become a competitive disadvantage for those companies that operate in less-regulated markets or environments. Since then, the state of AI governance and regulation has dramatically changed, turning from potential constraints to an operational necessity.

100%

of companies are confirming they have begun to establish it, underscoring that AI governance is the new norm

AI governance is evolving as business needs change

Half of U.S. CIOs and CTOs (50%) report that AI governance in their organizations is in place but evolving as business needs change. Another 37% are making progress in establishing governance processes and standards, while 9% are in the early stages and 4% have fully implemented AI governance and do not expect it to change.

With none of the respondents citing that they have not yet begun building an AI governance process, these results demonstrate that AI governance is a near-universal priority now, regardless of organizational size, maturity level or industry.

The current state of AI governance

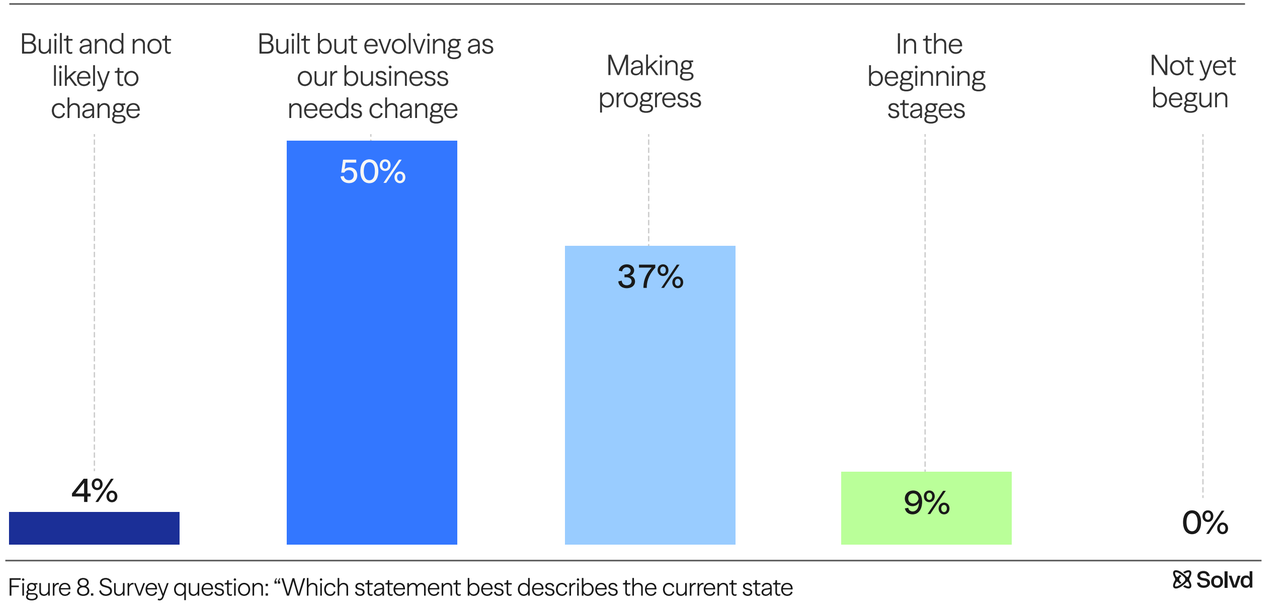

Figure 8. Survey question: “Which statement best describes the current state of AI governance in your organization?”

AI governance frameworks are under continuous review

Among organizations with established AI governance processes and standards, over half of U.S. CIOs and CTOs (52%) review their AI policies quarterly, 23% semi-annually, 17% monthly and 8% annually. The data confirms that AI governance now occupies the same operational category as security, risk, compliance and financial controls. Given the combined forces of rising maturity, ongoing uncertainty, and the rapid evolution of AI, governance frameworks must be continuously reviewed and updated.

Frequency of AI policies reviews

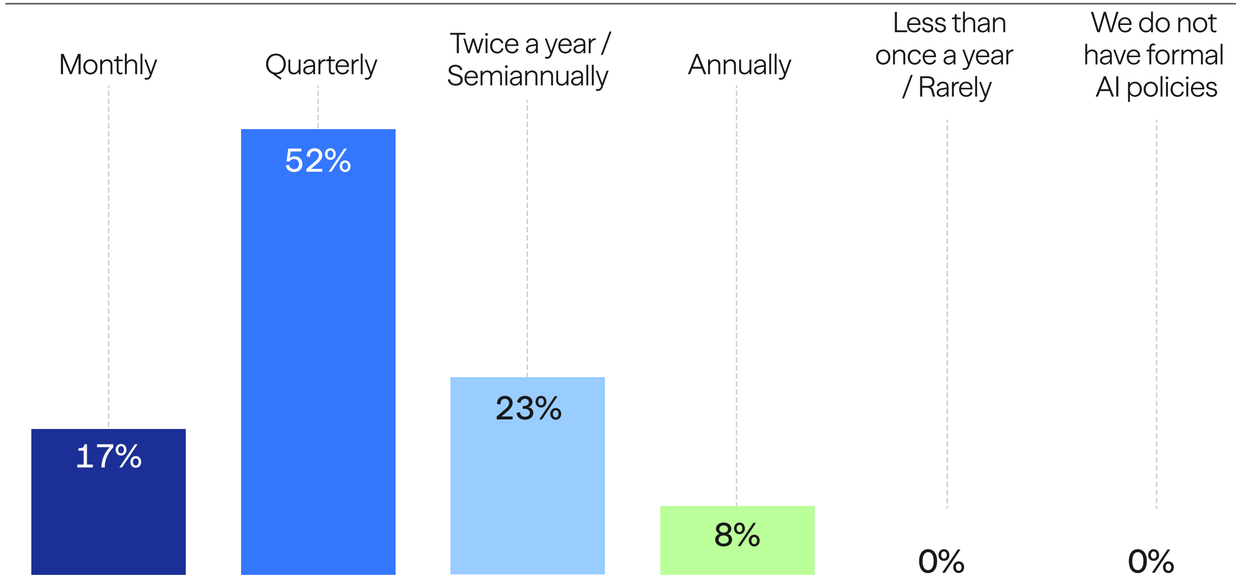

Figure 9. Survey question: “How frequently does your organization review its AI policies?”

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AI governance is becoming more proactive

Though Solvd CIO & CTO Insights: AI Research 2025 found that only 38% of CIOs and CTOs reported having formal internal oversight for AI, this year half (50%) report that their organization's approach to AI governance is more proactive than reactive, while an additional 16% describe it as mostly proactive. In contrast, 26% characterize their organization's approach as more reactive than proactive and 8% as mostly reactive.

As the majority of respondents follow a more proactive approach (66%), most enterprises are anticipating AI risks and the requirements to avoid them and the possibility of consequent fines, rather than responding only after issues arise.

Current approach to AI governance

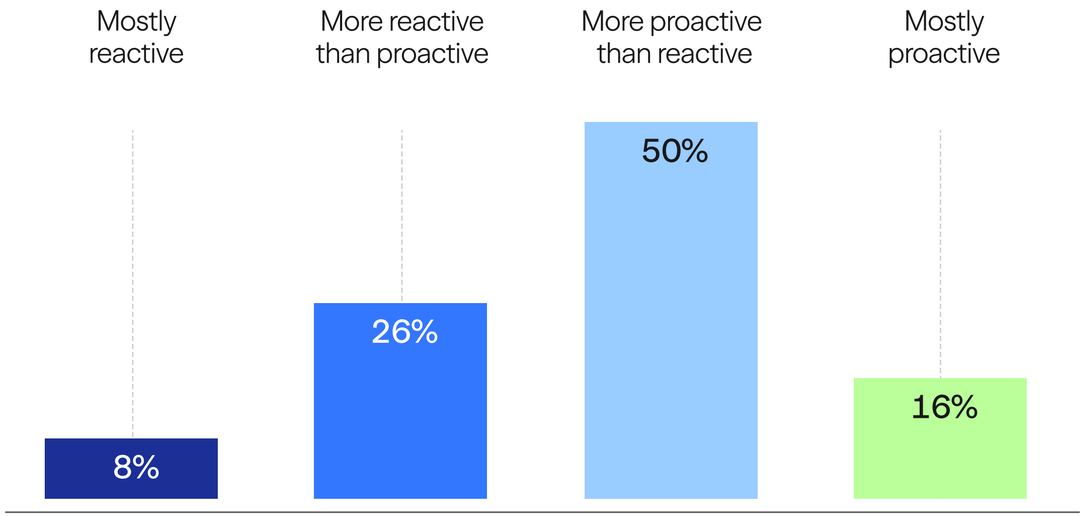

Figure 10. Survey question: "Is your organization's approach to AI governance more reactive or proactive?"

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Why it matters

Compared with previous research, where 87% of CIOs and CTOs believed that too much AI regulation would limit innovation and create a competitive disadvantage in less-regulated markets, AI governance has shifted from a constraint to a common best practice. However, the remaining challenge is not whether governance exists, but how consistently and effectively it is applied as AI use cases, tools and regulations continue to evolve.

AI integration level across the enterprise

With a growing number of AI-powered tools, AI integration may seem inevitable, but in practice, it is more widely adopted rather than deeply embedded in core decision-making processes. This theme examines the current level of AI integration, the drivers of daily AI usage, the resources enterprises leverage to implement AI and why they rely on external partners to do so.

Over three-quarters of U.S. CIOs and CTOs expect 50% or less of their workforce to be using AI daily

Despite the growing number of AI tools and the hype surrounding their benefits, only 31% of respondents report that AI is fully embedded across key business decisions. Reported daily use of AI tools is also a work in progress: 75% of CIOs and CTOs expect 50% or fewer of their workforce to be using AI daily by the end of 2026, while approximately one quarter expect a higher level of AI integration across the workforce. This illustrates the majority of enterprises across industries will follow gradual rather than rapid, organization-wide AI adoption among employees this year.

This contrasts sharply with public narratives suggesting near-universal AI adoption across enterprises. In contrast, the answers indicate that though AI implementations might be deep within certain parts of organizations, they are not widespread. It may also reflect that though many companies previously rolled out generic, packaged chatbot agents included within enterprise software suites, these tools largely failed to prove valuable. As a result, a gap opened up between strategic priority and operational reality, with AI use deployed strategically, rather than an everyday tool for every employee.

31%

of organizations have fully embedded AI in core decision-making, despite its widespread presence

Expected percentage of the workforce using AI daily

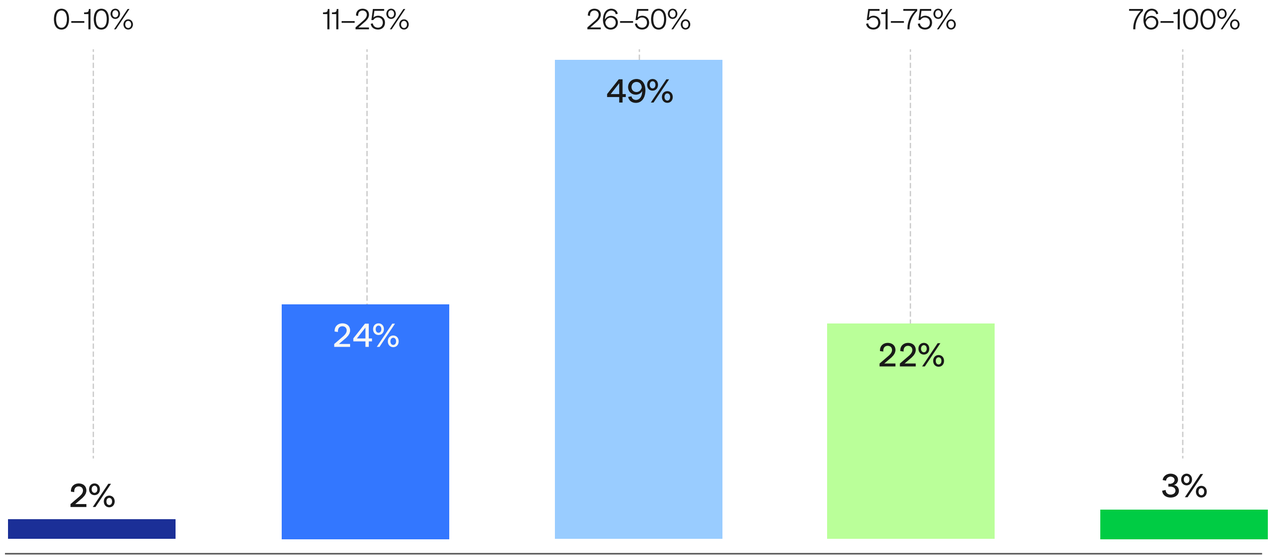

Figure 11. Survey question: “By the end of 2026, what percentage of your workforce will be using AI on a daily basis?”

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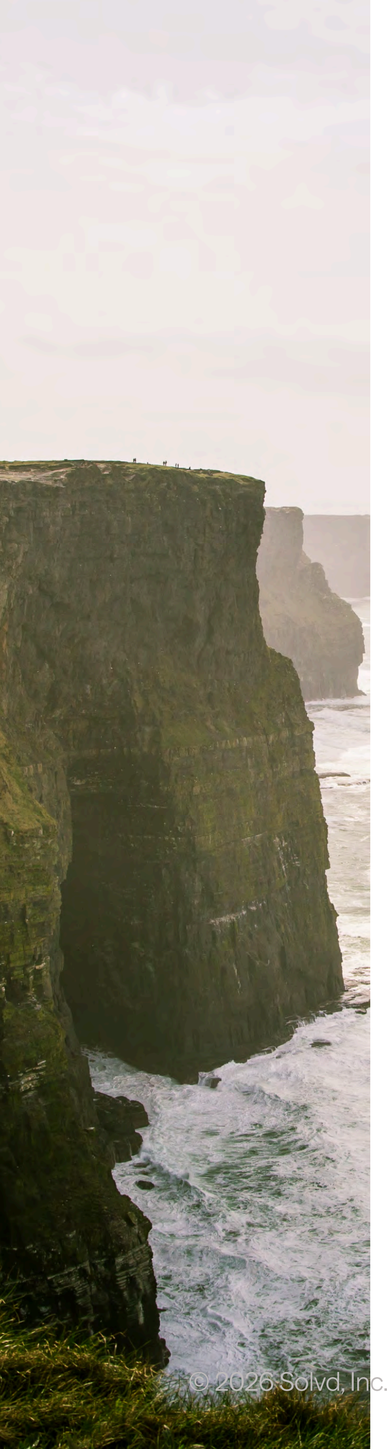

Availability of AI tools and platforms is the primary driver of daily AI usage

When it comes to the primary drivers of daily AI usage, just over half of U.S. CIOs and CTOs (53%) point to the availability of AI tools or platforms, followed by 52% citing business demand for AI-enabled productivity, and 48% selecting automation or workflow redesign and executive prioritization or mandates. In addition, respondents identify internal training and enablement (44%) and the need to address cost considerations, skills gaps, and resistance to change (38%) as important drivers influencing workforce adoption of AI.

Primary driver of daily AI usage among the workforce

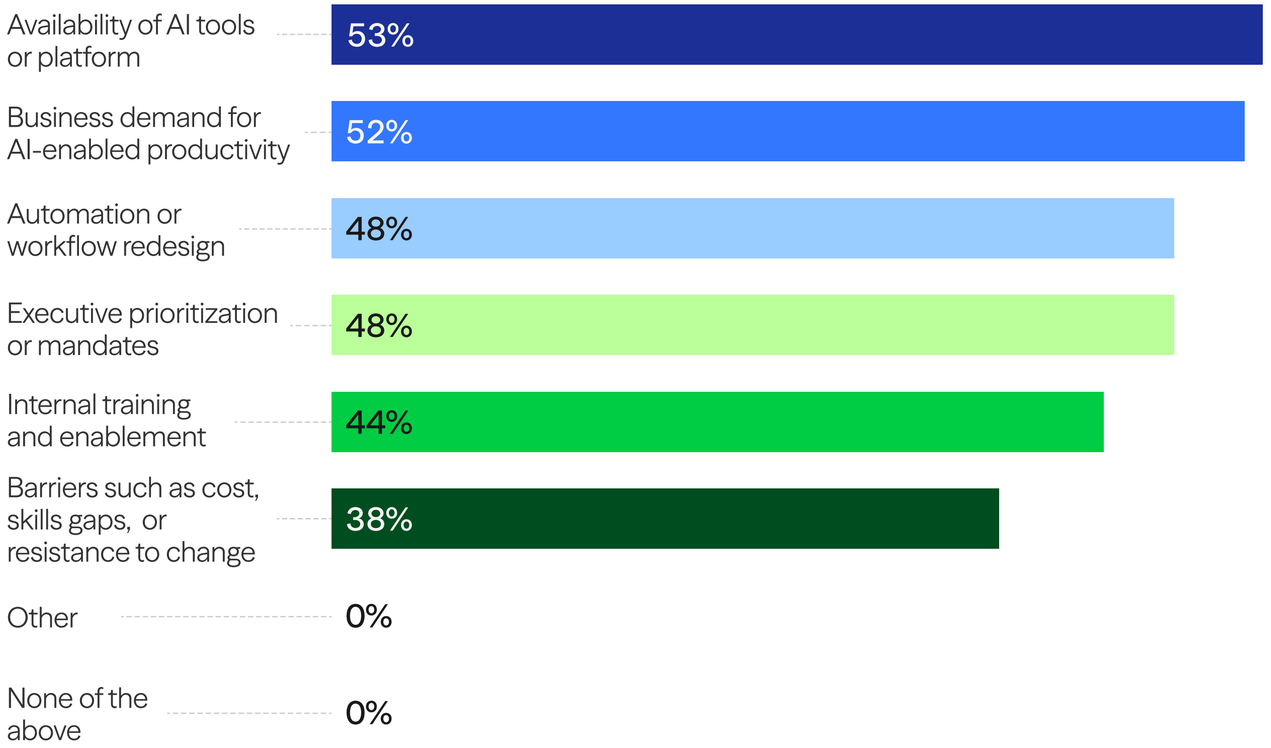

Figure 12. Survey question: “In the next year, which of the following will be primary driver of daily AI usage among your workforce?”

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AI initiatives are broadly distributed across enterprise use cases

Over half of U.S. CIOs and CTOs (56%) identify the primary focus of their AI initiatives as functional use cases integrated into data, systems or workflows, general productivity (53%) and innovation or development of new products or services (52%). Besides this, the respondents cited operational automation and efficiency improvements (50%), transforming core business products or services (47%), and broad experimentation to explore AI capabilities (42%).

The data highlights that there is no single focus of AI initiatives, with multiple use cases cited by roughly half of respondents. This broad distribution suggests that enterprises are not converging on a single "winning" AI use case yet. Instead, they are operating in a still-developing market, taking what can best be described as a portfolio approach to AI initiatives. Companies appear to be balancing experimentation with more practical, near-term applications, being increasingly rational about where and how they invest.

Primary focus of AI initiatives

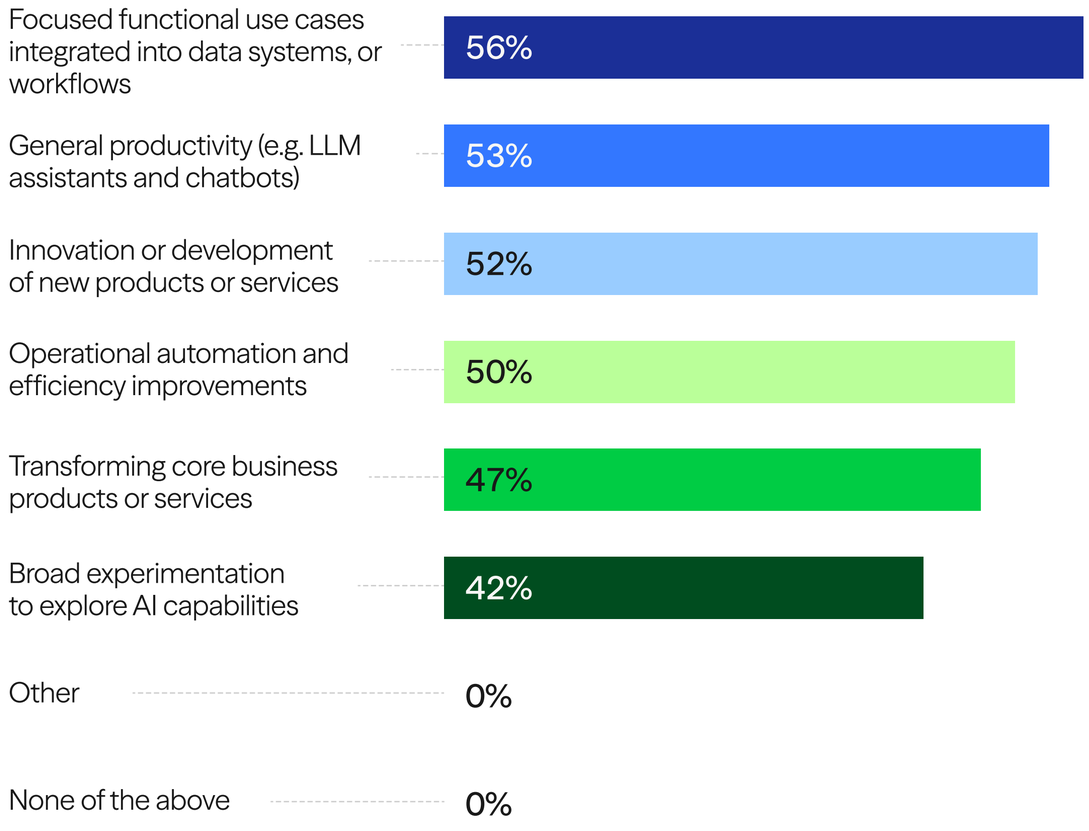

Figure 13. Survey question: "What is the primary focus of your AI initiatives?"

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Successful AI implementation extends beyond a single metric

Nearly half of U.S. CIOs and CTOs (45%) consider increased efficiency or productivity a measure of successful AI implementation, followed by improved decision-making quality (44%) and scalability and reliable performance (42%). Slightly fewer respondents mentioned enhanced customer or employee experience and revenue growth (35%), ability to innovate or develop new products and services (33%), risk reduction or improved compliance (30%) and cost reduction (24%).

Even though efficiency is still the top objective, the criteria for successful AI implementation span a broad range of critical business metrics. Notably, cost reduction is among the least-cited outcomes. This likely reflects the initial focus of AI initiatives on capability enhancement rather than direct cost optimization. With growing adoption maturity, enterprises are shifting toward more transformational use cases such as legacy platform replacement that is about both performance improvements and cost efficiencies.

Success indicators for AI implementation

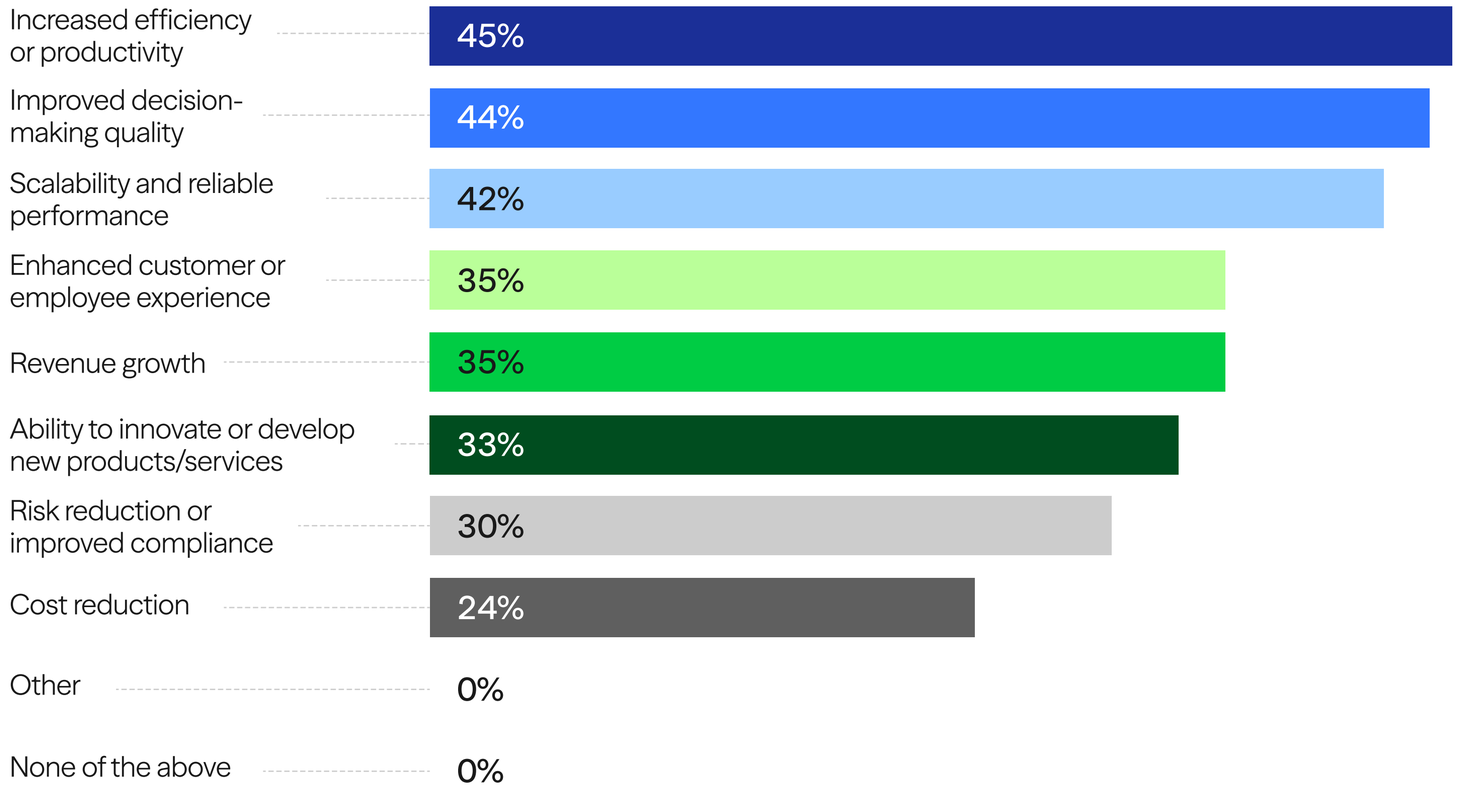

Figure 14. Survey question: “What’s considered to be a successful AI implementation in your company?”

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Enterprises rely on diverse external resources to implement AI

Companies are leveraging diverse teams that include hyperscalers, consultancies, retrained internal staff and boutiques to implement AI. Over half of U.S. CIOs and CTOs (59%) leverage cloud provider AI services to implement AI initiatives, making cloud providers the most frequently cited resource for enterprise AI adoption. This result is notable, as cloud providers outpace traditional partners such as global IT consultancies (51%) and even internal resources (47%). Boutique AI firms account for 31% of usage, suggesting opportunities for specialized providers.

These results suggest that AI might be the first technological wave where platforms are outpacing consulting, with speed and accessibility proving more important than methodologies and large-scale programs.

Taken together, these choices suggest that when it comes to AI implementation, there is no single, clear market leader yet. This reinforces the view of AI as a rapidly evolving, experimental space rather than a settled ecosystem.

Resources used for AI implemention

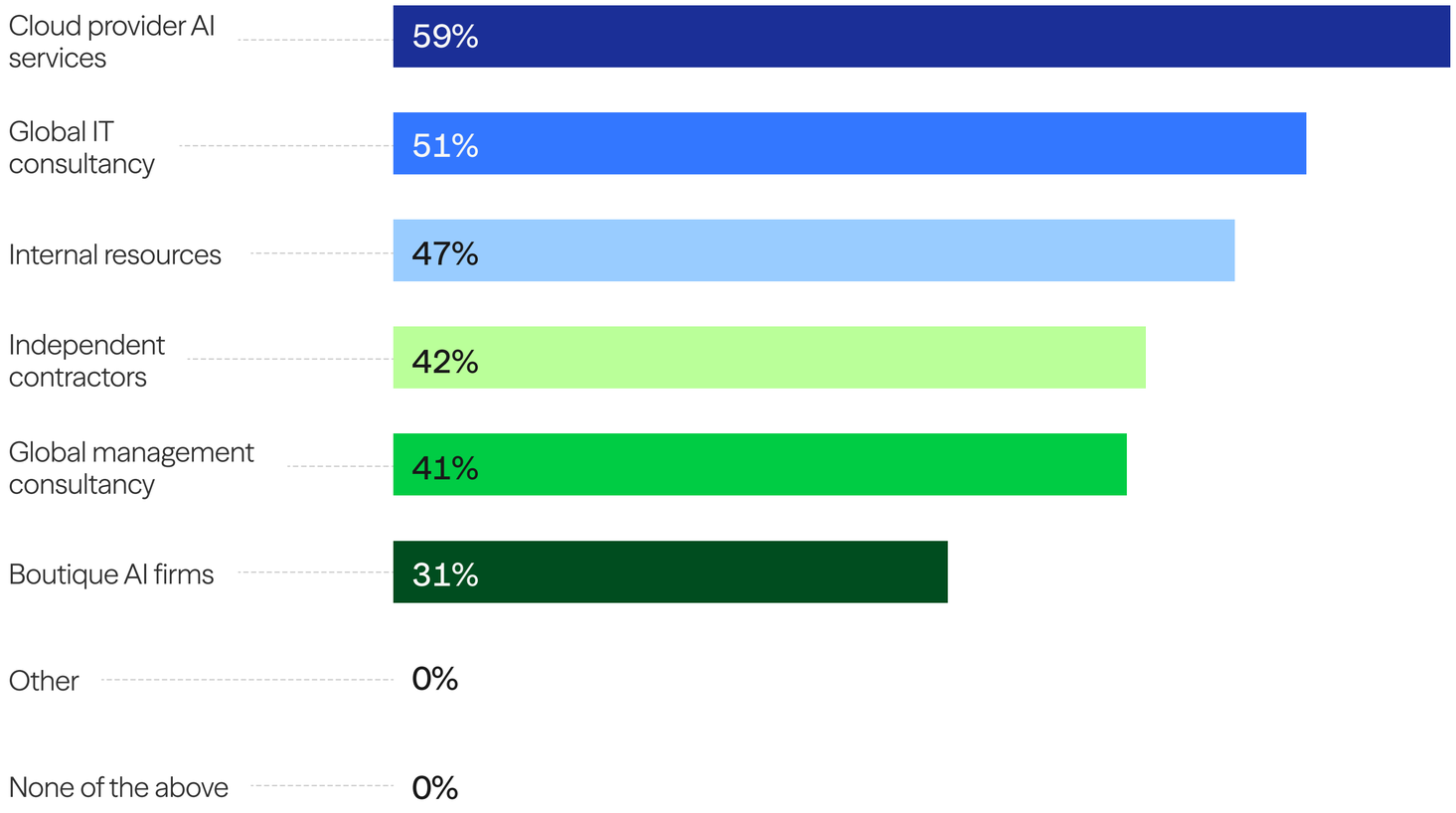

Figure 15. Survey question: “What resources is your company leveraging to implement AI?”

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The top reason to use external resources is to fill specialized, industry-specific technical gaps

The most frequently cited gaps that are filled by external resources are specialized technical skills for particular AI use cases (24%), data preparation and integration with existing systems (18%) and knowledge of applying foundation models to industry-specific use cases (18%).

These results confirm that external resources primarily fill practical, application-oriented gaps. Deep expertise in foundation models and technological roadmapping remains the least in demand, which means that the market's focus is on quick, practical results and limited opportunities for long-term planning due to rapid changes.

Beyond this, the data shows that most organizations rely on a mix of internal teams and multiple external partners (consultancies, boutique AI firms, cloud providers). This pattern indicates that enterprises are building AI through ecosystems, not single teams and managing those ecosystems has become one of the biggest execution challenges due to fragmented ownership and the lack of coordination, integration and accountability.

Top 6 reasons to rely on external resources

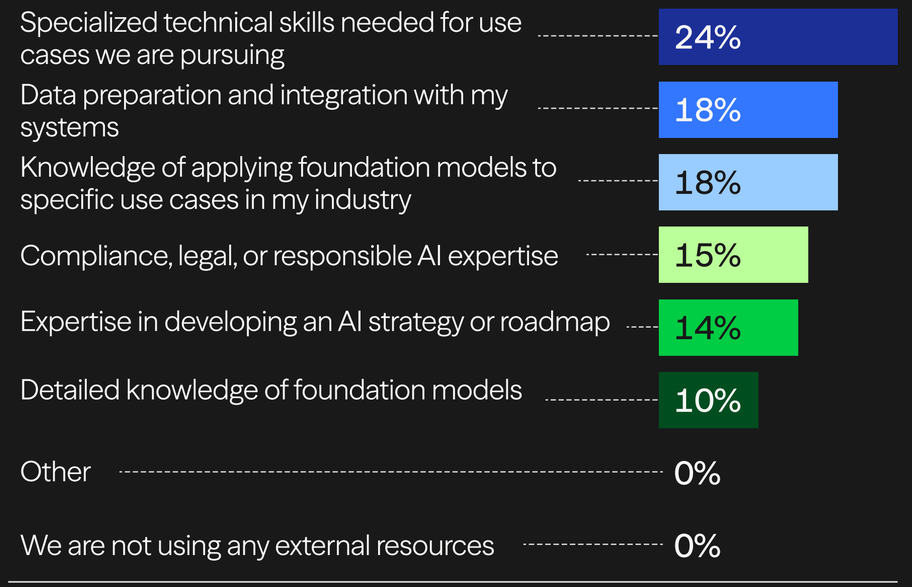

Figure 16. Survey question: "If you are using external resources, what is the most important gap they are filling?"

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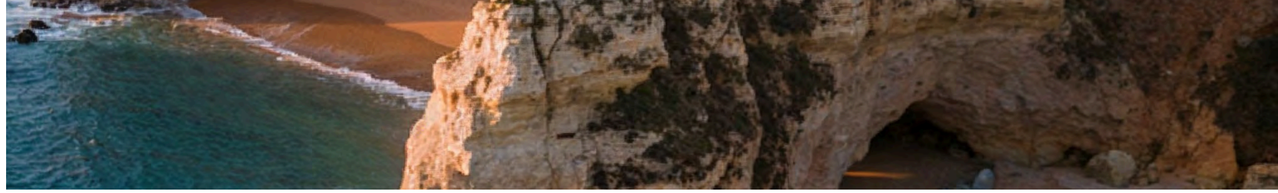
Why it matters

Partial AI integration across decision-making and the workforce reflects an intentional, selective approach. Enterprises appear to be prioritizing specific use cases and processes where AI delivers the most value and broad experimentation continues, but is no longer the primary focus.



Conclusion

AI is changing not only technology itself but also the mindset and attitudes of technology leaders, and this research reinforces this shift. A defining aspect of this change is growing resilience toward risk, where experimentation and continued investment in AI initiatives, even those that may lack immediate ROI, have become an accepted and expected part of enterprise operations.

As CIOs and CTOs are becoming more and more intentional in decision-making, they are trying to frame “AI success” using measurable and reliable metrics that can be clearly communicated to senior executives – especially as pressure to justify AI investment continues to grow.

From a technological perspective, AI implementation remains a process that often requires external support across industries, reflecting the fragmented nature of today’s AI ecosystem. At the same time, with 1 in 5 companies having at least one AI use case driving significant value, and 7 out of 10 executives reporting small to moderate ROI from AI initiatives, the data suggests steady progress. Rather than a rapid, hype-driven push, organizations appear to be moving forward with a more deliberate and thoughtful approach to AI adoption.

At a glance

- Unclear ownership and limited visibility, combined with responsibility concentrated on CIOs and CTOs, are increasing the gap between growing AI ambition and the operating structures needed to manage it effectively.
- Even though ROI is defined as a primary KPI for AI, it is often difficult to measure, attribute or validate in practice. Thus, the question of success metrics that might be applied to AI and resonate with both executives and board members remains.
- AI governance has shifted from a constraint to a common best practice in AI implementation. However, the remaining challenge is how consistently and effectively it is applied as AI use cases, tools, and regulations continue to evolve.
- Enterprises are becoming more intentional and appear to be prioritizing specific use cases and processes where AI delivers the most value and avoiding broad, unfocused use.

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Solvd has been implementing AI in corporations and products for over a decade, serving clients across technology, ecommerce, retail, fintech, hospitality, and banking. Deep understanding of both the latest AI capabilities and the real challenges of implementation is at the core of what we do. Our team includes world-class researchers working with the most advanced clients to drive innovation and competitive advantage, with an active presence at leading conferences including NeurIPS, ICML, and ECCV.

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