

To move beyond experimentation and achieve enterprise-scale AI, C-suite leaders must champion a comprehensive framework that includes investing in the right technology, building collaboration among the right people, and developing a strong AI strategy.

Bridging the AI Maturity Gap: How CXOs Can Mobilize Business Users and Turn Data Into Competitive Differentiation

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Introduction

In 2026, forward-thinking organizations will look to AI not simply to drive incremental efficiency but to unlock transformative business outcomes, accelerate revenue growth, open doors to new markets, and fuel innovation. For the C-suite, the imperative is clear: AI is no longer a siloed IT initiative but a strategic lever for competitive differentiation and potential value creation. Executives who empower their organizations to reimagine business models and decision-making through AI will be best positioned to lead in a rapidly evolving digital economy.

However, realizing this vision requires more than isolated AI pilots or creative ideation. IDC research shows that 51% of enterprises remain in the "AI Pivot" phase, where experimentation is prevalent, but integration, scalability, and measurable business impact are limited. For the C-suite, this signals a critical inflection point: Without operationalizing AI development, deployment, and governance, organizations risk losing out on potential value creation and missing an opportunity to build a competitive edge.

To move beyond experimentation and achieve enterprise-scale AI, C-suite leaders must champion a comprehensive framework that includes investing in the right technology, building collaboration among the right people, and developing a strong AI strategy. This approach is essential to transforming AI from a tactical project into a core driver of growth and innovation.

AT A GLANCE

KEY STATS

IDC's *AI-Fueled Organization MaturityScape Benchmark Survey* found that organizations reported being at the following phases:

- » **6.6%:** AI Scramble
- » **51.0%:** AI Pivot
- » **34.5%:** AI Alignment
- » **7.5%:** AI Transform
- » **0.4%:** AI-Fueled Organization

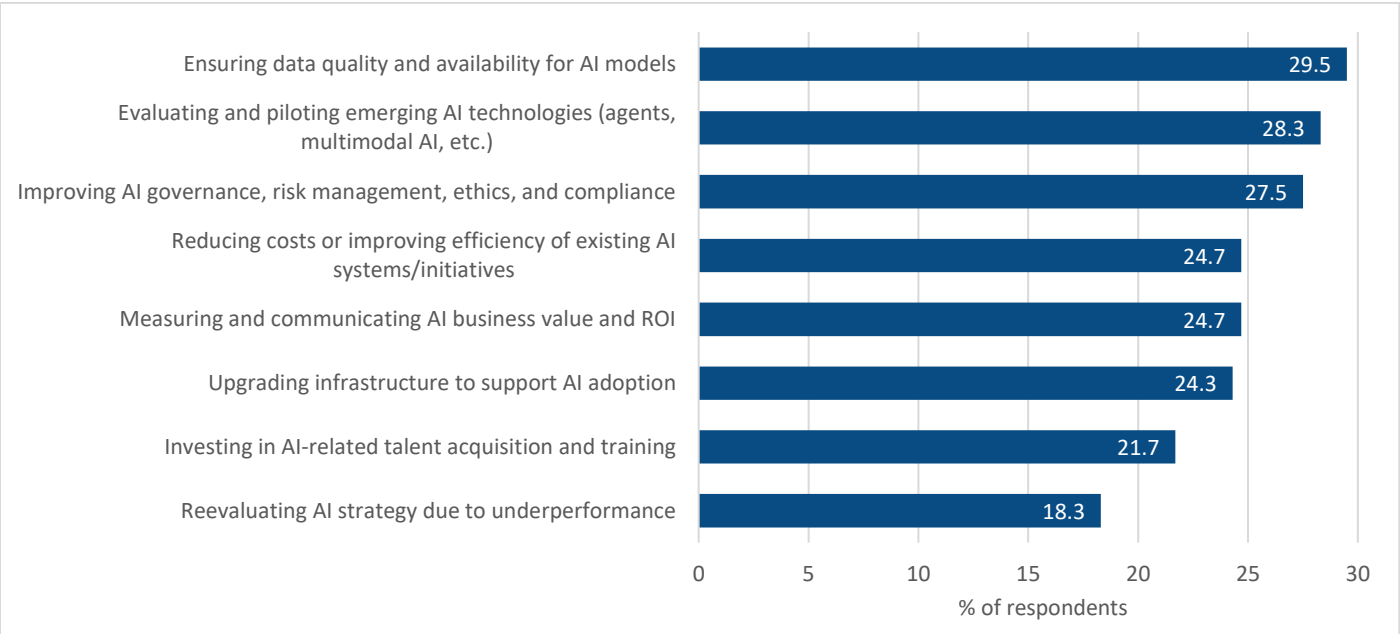
KEY TAKEAWAY

Few organizations fall into the most mature AI Transform and AI-Fueled Organization phases.

Technology

Unlocking the full value of AI hinges on a foundational investment: enabling access to enterprise data. IDC research finds that ensuring data quality and availability for AI models is the top priority for global organizations pursuing AI-driven transformation (see Figure 1). However, most enterprises face a critical gap — corporate data must be trusted, contextual, accessible, and secure before it can reliably fuel AI at scale.

Figure 1: **Top priorities for enterprise AI investment**
Q What are your organization's top 2 priorities for AI investments in the next year?



n = 894
Source: IDC's Future Enterprise Resiliency and Spending Survey, Wave 7, September 2025

To address this, organizations must invest in improving governance and accessibility. Governance includes not only enforcing robust authentication, authorization, and compliance with internal and regulatory mandates but also enabling granular, IT-managed controls that empower business users to access and prepare data for AI applications without compromising oversight or security. The ability to make enterprise data broadly accessible — regardless of where it resides, including across systems of record, cloud platforms, or file stores — is essential for breaking down silos and accelerating AI outcomes.

Other important technology investments include those in AI observability and agent management. As AI adoption scales, organizations require visibility into the accuracy, performance, and cost of AI systems, as well as comprehensive oversight of all AI agents in use. This includes tracking agent usage, managing identity and access, and ensuring that only authorized agents operate within the enterprise environment.

By prioritizing data accessibility and governance, C-suite leaders can empower business users to drive innovation and deliver measurable business impact with AI, turning enterprise data into a strategic asset for growth.

People

IDC research shows that when it comes to AI agents in particular, organizations say that enhanced automation beyond menial tasks is the most important potential benefit, followed closely by improved competitive advantage, innovation, and growth. Building systems that use AI agents to automate complex and critical workflows or deliver innovation requires close collaboration between business and technology teams. Business users have the best understanding of workflows and are also often closest to the data and best positioned to determine the data sets that should be made available to AI models to drive accuracy and value. Their active participation is essential to identifying, curating, and delivering the right data sets to AI models, ensuring accuracy and business relevance.

However, business roles aren't always authorized to tap into that data, or they may have access to only certain silos of data. Effective governance is the linchpin for securely unlocking enterprise data. When governance is approached as a comprehensive requirement, IT can confidently enable self-service data access for business users, accelerating innovation without compromising security or compliance. The right tools empower technology and business teams to collaborate, bringing governed, high-quality data to AI applications at scale.

Beyond IT and business teams, successful AI initiatives increasingly depend on cross-functional engagement. Leading organizations are establishing AI centers of excellence that bring together stakeholders from finance, compliance, risk, strategy, IT, and beyond. These teams collectively shape AI policy, investment, and adoption, ensuring that data governance and accessibility align with enterprise objectives and regulatory requirements. For C-suite leaders, fostering this collaborative, governed approach is key to driving sustainable AI value across the organization.

Strategy

A comprehensive AI strategy is a hallmark of organizations that achieve meaningful, enterprisewide impact from their AI investments. IDC's *AI-Fueled Organization MaturityScape Benchmark Survey* finds that the most successful organizations are those that have formalized their approach to AI transformation, with governance serving as a foundational pillar. For the C-suite, this means that AI cannot be treated as a series of isolated projects; rather, it must be embedded into the organization's core business strategy, with clear frameworks for accountability, risk management, and value realization.

A modern AI strategy should begin with a robust governance framework that extends well beyond traditional IT controls. This framework must encompass processes for managing, securing, and provisioning enterprise data, ensuring that the right data is available to the right users and applications at the right time. Importantly, governance should not be a barrier to innovation; instead, it should enable business users to access and prepare data efficiently while maintaining the oversight and controls that IT and compliance teams require.

Ultimately, an effective AI strategy balances innovation with governance, enabling organizations to scale AI initiatives confidently and securely. By investing in the right tools, expertise, and processes, C-suite leaders can transform AI from a tactical experiment into a strategic driver of growth and differentiation.

Definitions

- » **AI agents:** AI agents are software systems that are often powered by large language models and can autonomously reason, make decisions, and execute tasks to achieve business objectives. Agentic AI systems can act autonomously by perceiving, reasoning, deciding, and taking actions across connected workflows. They are distinct from traditional AI systems due to their autonomy in decision-making and ability to handle complex tasks without constant human intervention.
- » **Agentic analytics:** This process involves the use of agentic workflows to automate several steps of the business intelligence and advanced analytics workings, ranging from data preparation to analysis and insights. In addition to operating autonomously (with human-in-the-loop protocols), these agents can recommend actions and engage in continuous learning.
- » **AI governance:** AI governance is a comprehensive set of policies, processes, and controls that ensure the responsible, ethical, and secure development, deployment, and use of AI/ML systems. It involves combining AI initiatives with business objectives, regulatory requirements, and ethical standards, with an emphasis on explainability, fairness, accountability, data privacy, security, and risk management. AI governance is critical for building trust in AI and is becoming more standardized in organizations, helping reduce risks such as bias, privacy violations, and regulatory exposure while also integrating with broader cybersecurity and compliance strategies.
- » **Data quality:** Data quality is a multidimensional concept that ensures data assets are fit for consumption and meet the needs of data consumers. Data quality management is operationalized through a combination of process, people, technology, and data and is measured across dimensions that include accuracy, completeness, consistency, and timeliness.

Benefits

The ability to supply data to AI systems is critical to success. Organizations that efficiently and effectively tap differentiating enterprise data for their AI implementations will realize a number of benefits, starting with improved accuracy of outputs. When unique corporate data is supplied to AI models via RAG pipelines, prompts, fine-tuning, or other context engineering techniques, outcomes are typically better. The most immediate benefit is a measurable improvement in the accuracy and relevance of AI-generated outputs — models are able to leverage proprietary business context that generic data sources cannot provide.

Enhanced accuracy directly translates into reduced risk. When decision-makers can trust the outputs of AI applications, they are empowered to pursue more ambitious and innovative use cases, ranging from dynamic pricing and personalized customer engagement to intelligent sales quoting. For example, an AI-powered quoting system that taps both internal and external data sources can deliver actionable recommendations that protect margins and drive revenue growth. However, without comprehensive, clean, and governed data, such applications risk producing unreliable results, potentially undermining business objectives.

Ultimately, the ability to deliver a complete, trusted set of enterprise data to AI applications is foundational for building differentiated solutions that create sustainable competitive advantage. By investing in data accessibility and governance, organizations position themselves to unlock new business value, accelerate innovation, and lead in an AI-driven economy.

Considering Alteryx

Alteryx's heritage is in offering products to business users for preparing and analyzing data. These capabilities support the delivery of important enterprise data to AI applications, including generative AI (GenAI) and agentic AI.

Alteryx data prep capabilities include:

- » More than 300 tools for cleansing, blending, and analyzing data; many do not require coding, making them more easily accessible to business users
- » Prebuilt connectors for accessing data that may be stored in enterprise applications and data platforms
- » AI-assisted capabilities, including schema fit and precision match
- » A copilot that supports building workflows in Alteryx

In addition, Alteryx has built in governance capabilities that include authentication, authorization, versioning, auditability, and the ability to maintain data lineage. Alteryx can also inherit existing governance defined by IT teams.

Oriented around use by the business user, Alteryx aims to empower the business to prepare the right data for use by AI systems, including GenAI models and AI agents, in ways that improve outcomes and provide business value to organizations. Alteryx seeks to ensure that business users can easily select and prepare data for AI while complying with regulatory and company policies.

Alteryx also offers other capabilities, including workflow automation and orchestration tools and analytics.

Challenges

Organizations are inundated by suppliers across many different categories that offer tools designed to ease the challenge associated with preparing and delivering quality data to AI systems. Alteryx can stand out as a supplier that enables access to data from multiple platforms and caters to the users in the business who are best suited to understanding the available enterprise data and AI use cases.

Conclusion

Organizations that prioritize secure, governed access to enterprise data will be best positioned to unlock the transformative potential of AI. For the C-suite, investing in robust data strategies and empowering business users is not just an operational necessity; it is a strategic imperative for driving innovation, mitigating risk, and achieving sustainable competitive advantage in an AI-driven marketplace.

About the analyst



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Nancy Gohring is a senior research director, co-leading IDC's GenAI and Agentic AI Strategies program. Nancy covers big picture trends related to enterprise adoption of AI, including GenAI and agentic AI. Key research themes include business, organizational, and technology architecture transformation, in the context of AI and GenAI. As part of the Worldwide AI, Automation, Data & Analytics Research practice, Nancy supports a range of clients across the technology stack including hyperscalers, developer tool providers, enterprise application vendors, professional services organizations, automation frameworks providers, and infrastructure suppliers.

MESSAGE FROM THE SPONSOR

As organizations work to scale AI beyond pilots, many face challenges related to data access, data quality, and governance. IDC research shows that most enterprises remain in early or transitional stages of AI maturity, often limited by fragmented data environments and restricted access for business teams.

Alteryx supports organizations by enabling business and technical users to work with enterprise data in a governed and auditable way. The platform helps teams prepare, analyze, and operationalize data for analytics and AI use cases while respecting existing security, access controls, and compliance requirements.

By making it easier for business users to access and prepare trusted data, Alteryx helps organizations improve collaboration across teams, reduce dependency on manual processes, and support more consistent use of data in decision-making.

Learn how organizations are using data and analytics to support enterprise transformation at <https://www.alteryx.com/solutions/role/c-level-executives>.

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