

State of AI 2026

Trends, adoption, and maturity levels
in European companies



INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Context and key insights from the analysis on AI adoption in Europe

This document, based on data collected through an open and public survey conducted by Keeper Data Tech in October 2025, aims to shed light on key insights regarding AI adoption in European companies, including aspects such as the existence of a **defined AI strategy**, the strategic priority assigned to AI by senior leadership, and who holds primary **responsibility for the organization's AI strategy**.

It also assesses **the current state of AI adoption**, the business areas where it is applied, the **maturity of data and technology infrastructure**, and the **main challenges** companies face when attempting to scale their AI initiatives.

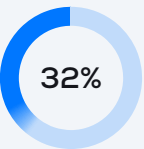
Finally, it provides information on **AI ethical governance, regulatory preparedness**, and whether these initiatives are generating **tangible business benefits**.

1. LEVEL OF STRATEGIC MATURITY IN AI ADOPTION

A well-defined artificial intelligence strategy is the fundamental pillar upon which success and competitiveness are built in today's market. An organization's ability to articulate a clear plan, secure leadership support, and assign explicit responsibilities not only accelerates adoption but is also a key indicator of its digital maturity. **Without this strategic vision, AI initiatives risk becoming isolated efforts, misaligned with**

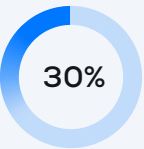
business objectives and generating limited impact.

According to the survey conducted by Keeper, the landscape shows a diverse picture regarding the formalization of AI strategy, with most organizations positioned in **intermediate phases of planning and experimentation**.



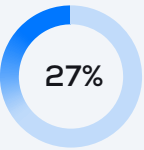
Isolated Initiatives

Companies operating with occasional AI initiatives but without a centralized strategy to coordinate them.



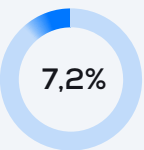
Strategy in Development

These companies are actively in the planning phase, with a strategy under development or at a pilot stage, indicating a widespread move toward formalization.



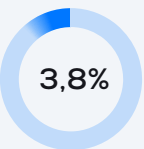
Defined Strategy

These organizations already have a formal AI plan, although its implementation is often limited to certain business units.



Absence of a Formal Strategy

Companies that report having no formal AI strategy and no plans to develop one.



Integrated Strategy

Only 3.8% have a fully integrated, company-wide strategy.

The lack of a unified strategy remains the biggest barrier to effective AI adoption.

In line with this stage of development, the priority that senior leadership assigns to AI is high. **73%** of respondents rate **AI as a priority of 3 or higher on a 5-point scale**, demonstrating a broad commitment from leadership to drive the transition from experimentation toward deeper integration. Responsibility for the AI strategy falls across different

roles, reflecting diverse organizational approaches. Leadership is distributed almost evenly among technology management (CIO: 23%), top executive leadership (CEO/Board: 23%), and innovation roles (Head of Innovation: 19.2%), indicating a convergence of technological, business, and transformation perspectives.

Who Leads the AI Strategy in Organizations



CIO
23%

AI strategy is approached primarily from a technology and infrastructure perspective.

CEO / Board of Directors
23%

Direct involvement from top leadership highlights AI as a strategic pillar for the company's future.

Head of Innovation / Digital Strategy
19.2%

Suggests a focus on transformation and the pursuit of new business opportunities.

CTO / CDO
13%

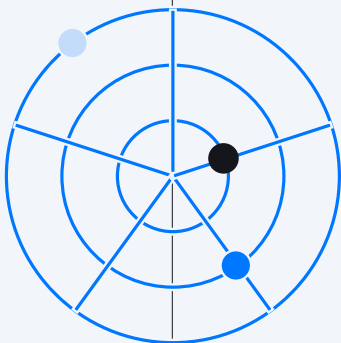
Indicates a technical orientation centered on data capabilities and product development.

Corporate Committees
11%

Promotes a collaborative, cross-functional approach, although it may slow down decision-making.

No Formal Responsible Role
10.8%

A clear sign of strategic immaturity, often associated with isolated and uncoordinated initiatives.



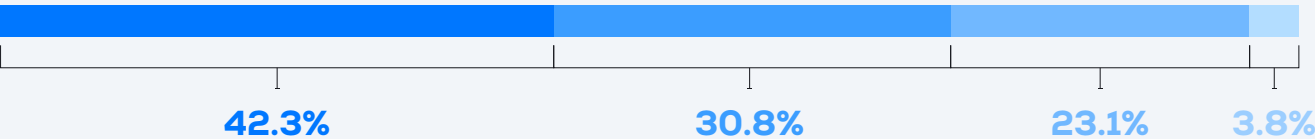
The presence—or absence—of a formal strategy and clear leadership directly influences how AI materializes in the company's day-to-day operations, an aspect explored in the following section.

2. CURRENT STATE OF AI ADOPTION AND USE

Analyzing the current state of adoption is essential to understanding the gap that often exists between strategy and execution. The true measure of an organization's progress lies not only in its plans but in the **breadth and**

depth with which artificial intelligence is **integrated and used** across business functions.

The distribution of adoption phases confirms that the market is in a **period of transition**. While experimentation remains relevant, a majority of companies have already moved into a phase of active implementation.



- **Limited use in some areas**
The majority of organizations (42.3%) have moved beyond the testing phase and are using AI in a limited way within certain functions.
- **Broad use across many areas**
Nearly a quarter (23.1%) have achieved extensive AI adoption across multiple parts of the business, indicating a more advanced level of maturity.

- **Experimental pilot**
A significant proportion of companies (30.8%) are still in the experimentation stage, testing the potential of AI.
- **No initiatives**
Only 3.8% report having no AI initiatives currently underway.

This trend is reflected in the number of business areas where AI is applied. 38.5% of companies focus their efforts on just one or two areas, while a smaller group deploys AI more extensively across three to five areas (27%), or even more (15.4%).

The business functions where AI is most frequently applied are those with high potential for process optimization and data-driven analysis. The order of prevalence is as follows:

- 1 Information Technology / IT Infrastructure**
- 2 Marketing and Sales / CRM / Customer Insights**
- 3 Finance / Accounting / Treasury**

- 4 Operations / Manufacturing / Supply Chain / Logistics**
- 5 Research and Development / Innovation**
- 6 Customer Service**
- 7 Human Resources and Legal (tied)**

When it comes to **generative AI**, adoption is notable. The vast majority of companies are already using it, although usage is predominantly limited (45%) or in a pilot phase (20%). Nevertheless, a considerable group (35%) has adopted it more broadly, demonstrating the rapid assimilation of generative AI within the business environment. The ability to expand AI usage beyond these initial focus areas depends directly on the robustness of the underlying technical and data infrastructure.

3. FOUNDATIONAL CAPABILITIES

Infrastructure and Data

A robust technological and data infrastructure is an essential requirement for scaling AI initiatives beyond the experimental stage. Without seamless access to high-quality data and systems capable of processing it, any AI strategy—no matter how ambitious—is destined to remain theoretical.

Companies' self-assessment of the maturity of their data and technology infrastructure reveals a **moderate level of readiness**. The average rating stands at 2.9 out of 5, indicating that while organizations do not perceive themselves as entirely outdated, most acknowledge a **significant margin for improvement** to effectively support large-scale AI initiatives.

The availability of specialized platforms and tools (such as MLOps, AutoML, or data lakes) for developing and scaling AI solutions is still partial. 54.5% report having these tools “partially implemented or in development”. Only 31.8% state they have fully deployed them, while 13.7% lack them entirely.

This suggests that the technological ecosystem required to industrialize AI is still under construction.

The greatest obstacle lies in **data integration and accessibility**. This area receives an average rating of 2.8 out of 5, confirming that for many organizations, the data needed for AI projects remains **fragmented, siloed, and difficult to access**—representing a critical bottleneck for effective implementation.

These shortcomings in infrastructure and data management are the primary drivers behind many of the implementation challenges detailed in the following section.

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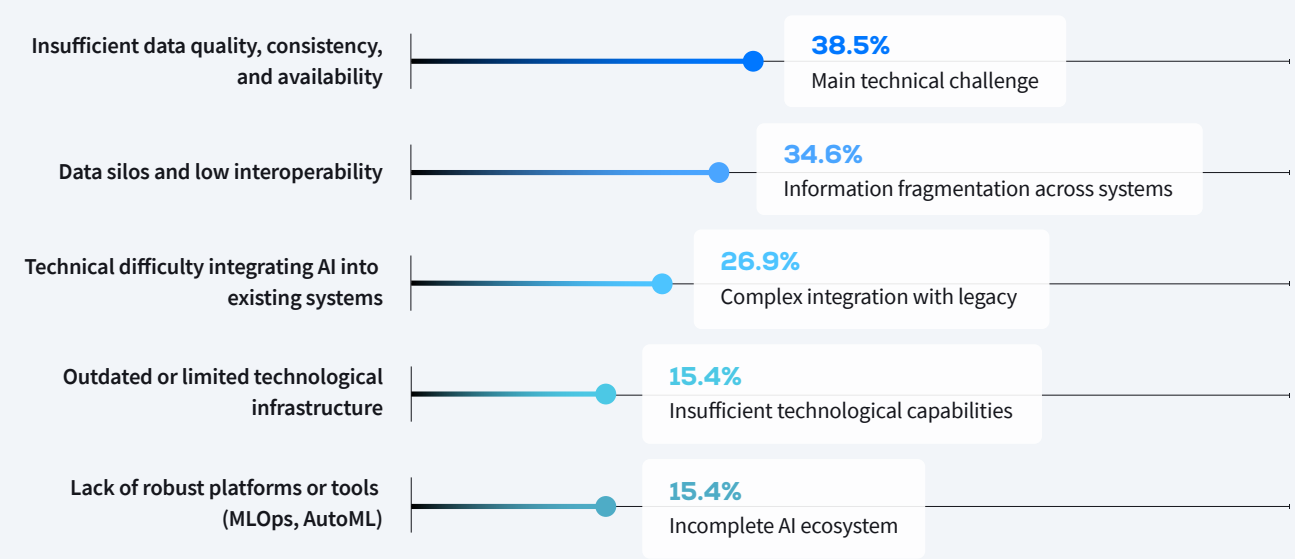
4. ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION

As anticipated in the previous section, deficiencies in infrastructure and data emerge as the primary obstacles to AI adoption. The path toward widespread implementation is filled with barriers that extend well

beyond technology alone. Understanding the nature of these challenges—both technical and organizational—is the first step for business leaders to develop effective strategies to overcome them.

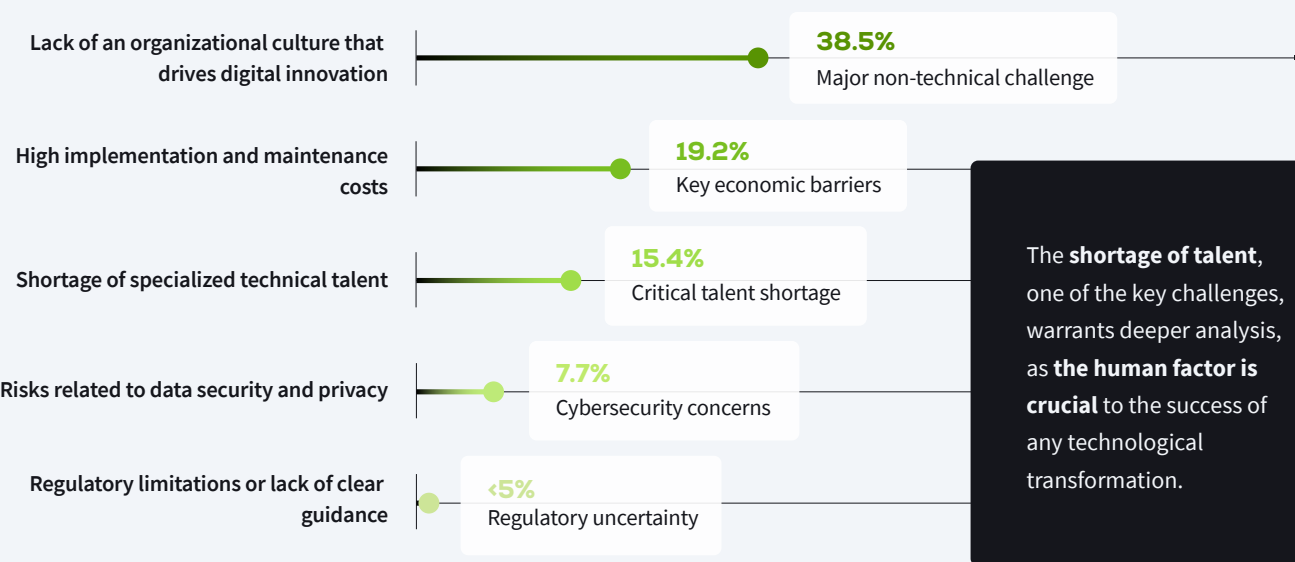
When analyzing the main technical and data-related challenges, it **becomes evident that fundamental data issues** outweigh purely technological limitations.

Technical Barriers to AI Adoption



In the **organizational and resource domain**, the main challenges center on culture and talent, surpassing even cost-related concerns.

Organizational Barriers to AI Adoption

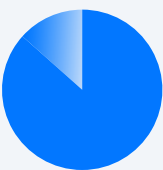


The **shortage of talent**, one of the key challenges, warrants deeper analysis, as **the human factor is crucial** to the success of any technological transformation.

5. TALENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL

The Human Factor

Technology alone is not enough to ensure the success of artificial intelligence. **Human talent**—with its specialized skills—and an organizational culture that embraces innovation and change are the **true catalysts** that transform AI tools into tangible and sustainable business value.



81.8%

A substantial majority believe they lack sufficiently qualified AI professionals, confirming that this shortage is one of the main barriers to adoption.

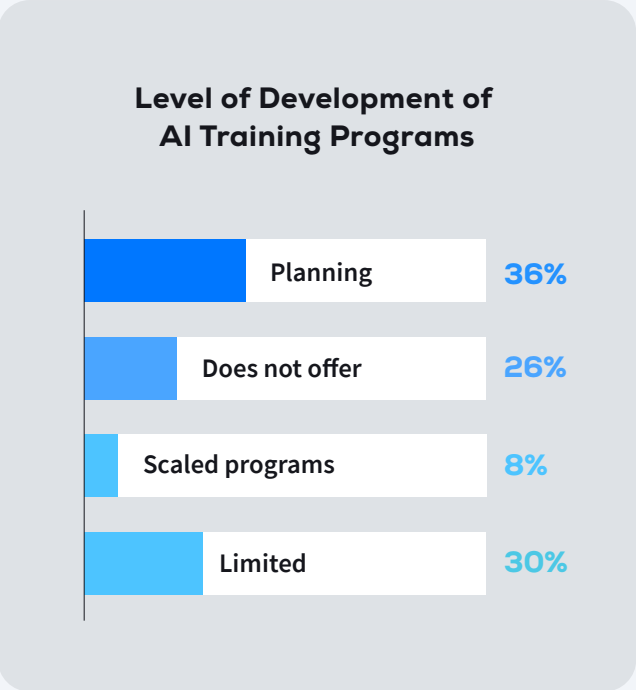
The perception of talent scarcity is widespread. A substantial majority—81.8% of companies—believe they **do not have enough qualified AI professionals**. Considering ratings from 1 (“significant deficit”) to 3 (“barely sufficient”) as indicators of insufficient capacity, it becomes clear that the talent gap is one of the main barriers to AI adoption.

Consequently, organizations face considerable difficulty in attracting and hiring specialized talent.

The challenge of attracting talent is significant: the most common rating is 4 out of 5 (reported by 32.8% of respondents), and nearly half—47.8%—rate it as very difficult (4 or 5). Competition for profiles such as data scientists or machine learning engineers is intense.

However, investment in **training and upskilling internal staff** is still not a widespread practice.

Most companies are in the “planning” stage (36%) or simply “do not offer” training programs (26%). Only 8% report having programs at scale, while 30% offer them in a limited capacity.



This suggests a **missed opportunity to develop internal talent** and reduce dependency on the external hiring market.

Finally, the **organizational culture** presents a landscape that leans toward openness. Although there is a group that describes itself as cautious or resistant (31%), **the majority classifies itself as innovative or open to change (39%)**, with an intermediate group remaining neutral. This division, while generally positive, can create internal friction that slows implementation—demonstrating that change management is just as important as technical project management.

Talent management and the cultivation of an appropriate culture must be accompanied by **solid governance frameworks** that guide the responsible use of these powerful technologies.

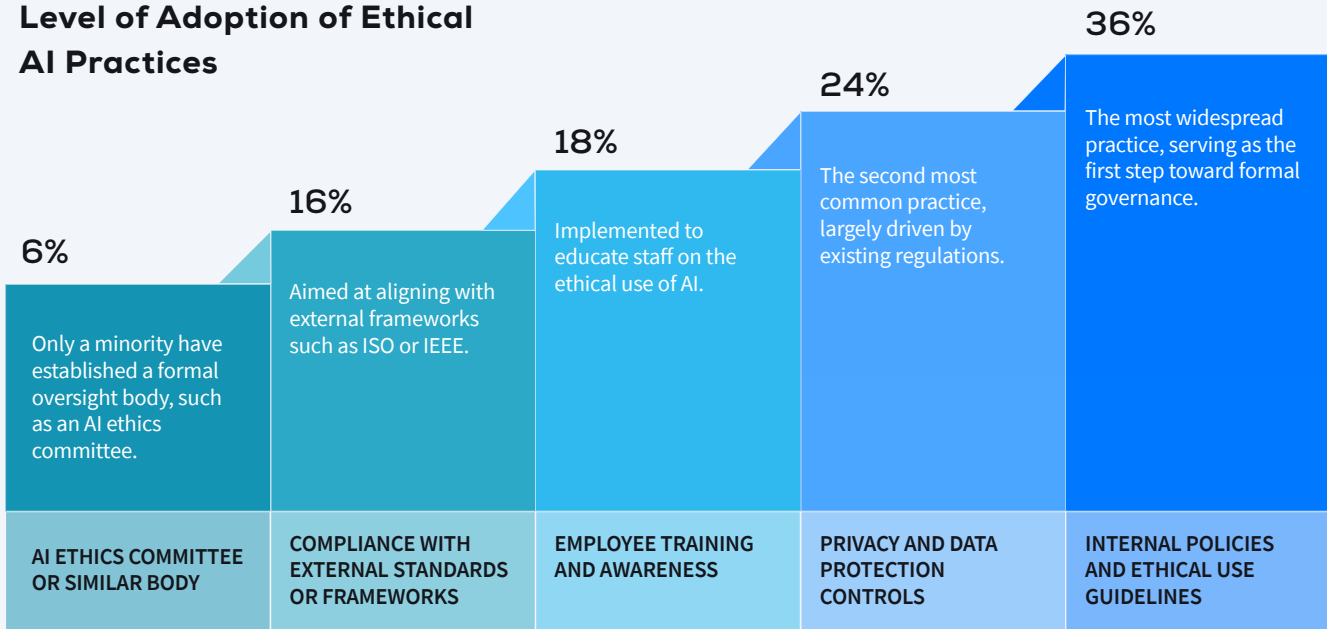
6. GOVERNANCE, RISK, AND REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

As artificial intelligence becomes more powerful and pervasive in business operations, **AI governance takes on critical importance**. Proactive management of ethical, legal, and compliance risks is no longer optional—it is a strategic priority to protect the company’s reputation, customer trust, and long-term viability.

The current level of maturity in this area shows that most organizations are still **laying the groundwork**. 42.3% report having an AI-specific governance framework that is “in development.” Only 19.2% state that such a framework is already implemented, while 23% acknowledge that they do not have one in place at all.

Regarding implemented ethical AI practices, the focus lies on foundational and compliance-oriented measures.

Level of Adoption of Ethical AI Practices



The adoption pattern suggests that companies prioritize **governance practices based on policies and regulatory compliance**, while more proactive and structural actions—such as the creation of ethics committees—remain less common.

Proactivity in risk management is still limited. Only 27% of respondents have carried out formal risk or impact assessments related to their AI systems. On the other hand, the vast majority of companies have not experienced (or have not reported) negative incidents arising from the use of AI.

Regarding **preparedness to comply with current and future regulations**, such as the European Union’s AI Act, sentiment is mixed. Although a significant group considers itself fairly prepared (41% rate their readiness as 4 or 5 out of 5), a similar proportion perceive themselves as moderately prepared or not prepared at all—suggesting that a substantial adaptation effort lies ahead.

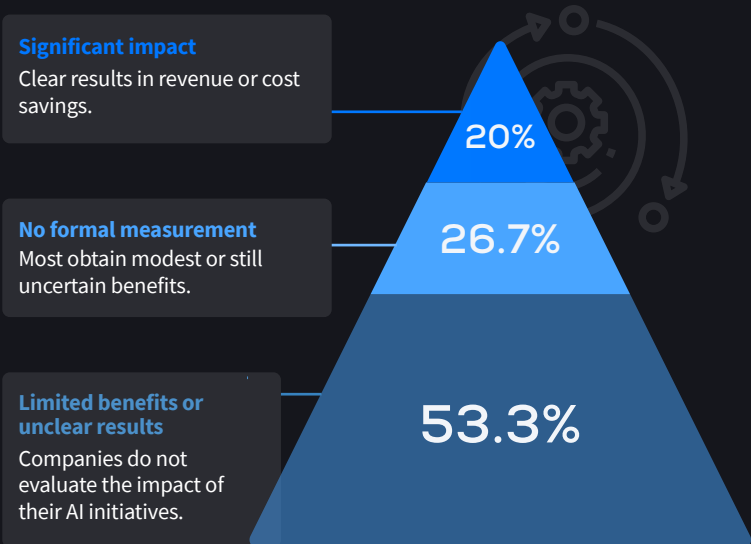
Despite the challenges and the growing need for robust governance, the key question remains whether investments in AI are generating tangible business outcomes.

7. ASSESSING BUSINESS IMPACT AND RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI)

Ultimately, the success of any technological initiative is measured by its **real impact on the business**. Investments in artificial intelligence must be justified not only by their innovative potential, but by their **ability to generate tangible benefits**—whether through increased revenue, cost reduction, or improved operational efficiency.

The analysis of business outcomes reveals an emerging landscape, where clear and significant benefits are still the exception.

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This emerging impact is directly reflected in AI's contribution to operating profit (EBITDA). The most common contribution is below 5% of total EBITDA (66%).

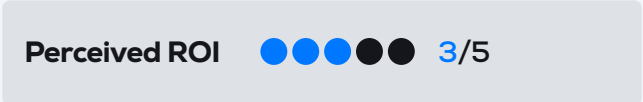
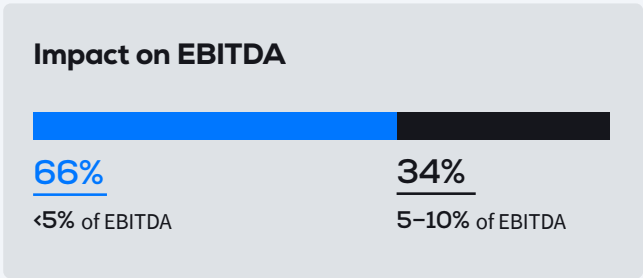
Only 34% of companies place AI's impact in the 5–10% EBITDA range, confirming that, for most, AI is not yet a primary financial driver.

Perceptions of return on investment (ROI) to date are generally moderate. The most frequent rating is 3 out of 5, suggesting that companies see a balanced or slightly positive return, but far from exceptional. A significant number of respondents rate ROI as low or very low.

Despite these modest short-term results, confidence in AI's future potential is very high. **The dominant trend for investment over the next 1–2 years is to**

increase it. Most companies plan to “increase slightly” (30.8%) or “increase significantly” (23%) their AI budget. Very few expect to maintain or reduce it.

The combination of a developing strategy, gradual implementation, and still-emerging results paints a **complex but opportunity-rich landscape** for organizations capable of navigating it successfully.



8. KEY STRATEGIC CONCLUSIONS

This analysis has examined the **state of artificial intelligence adoption across a diverse set of companies**, covering everything from strategic maturity to business impact. The findings reveal a sector in active transition—full of ambition but also significant challenges.

Below are the key strategic conclusions for business leaders seeking to navigate this landscape.



1. A critical gap exists between Strategy and Execution

There is a clear **disconnect** between intention and reality. While most companies are developing a strategy or running isolated initiatives, only a minority—23%—have achieved broad and mature AI adoption.

This indicates that the sector is in a **crucial transition phase**, moving from experimentation to industrialization—a step that requires not only **planning** but **flawless execution** and a strong **focus on scalability**.

2. Data, talent, and culture are the main bottlenecks

The most frequently cited **challenges** are not purely **technological** but **foundational**. Insufficient data quality, information silos, a shortage of specialized talent, and organizational cultures that still need to strengthen their openness to innovation are the true barriers.

Future success will not depend solely on algorithms, but on companies' ability to build a **solid base of accessible data**, attract and develop **talent**, and foster an **agile mindset**.

3. Current ROI is modest, but future investment is decisive

At present, most companies report limited benefits or do not formally measure the ROI of their AI initiatives, and the **contribution to operating profit remains marginal**.

However, this short-term reality has **not diminished confidence** in long-term potential.

The clear intention of most organizations to increase their AI investment over the coming years demonstrates **strong conviction that AI will become a fundamental value driver**, even if the path to realizing that value is proving more complex than expected.



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