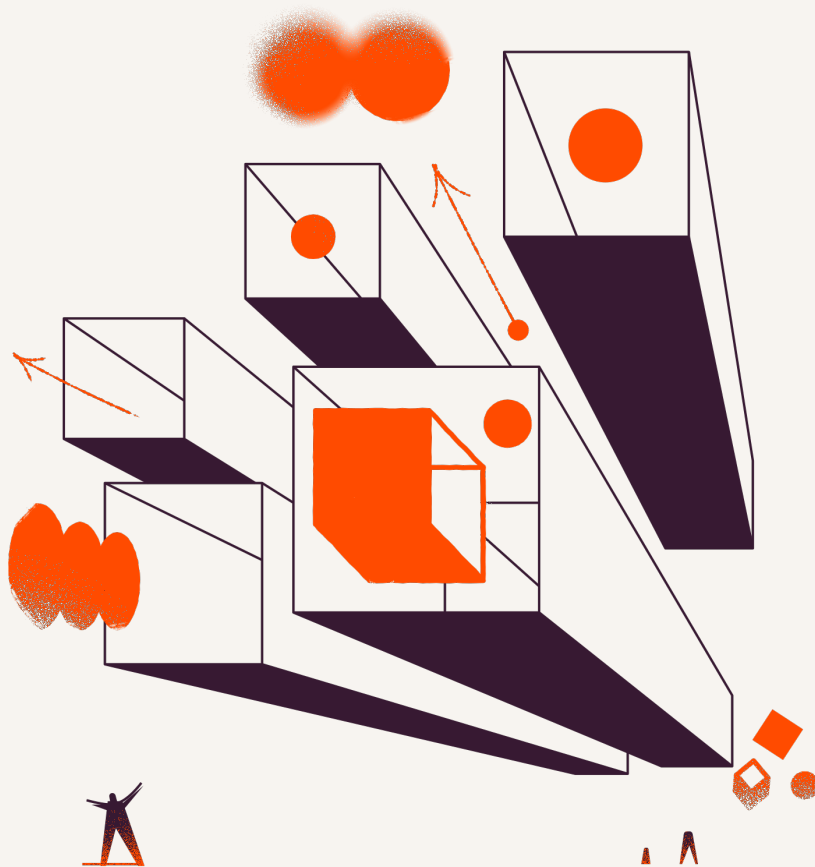


Maximize AI Adoption: From Strategy to Scaled Execution



zapier

AI is now a board-level mandate—yet many companies remain stuck. Leadership teams face pressure from boards to slash operating expenses and rapidly adopt AI. At the same time, they're overwhelmed by the explosion of tools, the shifting landscape, and the absence of clear implementation strategies.

Many enterprises continue to experiment with basic GPT solutions in isolated silos. However, the few that have unlocked the formula for successful AI adoption are quickly pulling ahead. What's their secret? It isn't just about tooling, having the most sophisticated models, or even possessing the largest AI budgets. Instead, successful adoption hinges on creating the right conditions for AI to thrive across the entire organization.

This guide explores how leading enterprises expand adoption, prevent AI sprawl, and develop trusted, scalable systems to meet their efficiency goals.

In this report, you'll learn:

1. What scalable AI means, and why widespread adoption is challenging.

2. How to build a clear roadmap for successful AI rollout.

3. A step-by-step guide to running hackathons that boost AI adoption.

4. Which metrics matter most for tracking and maximizing AI adoption.

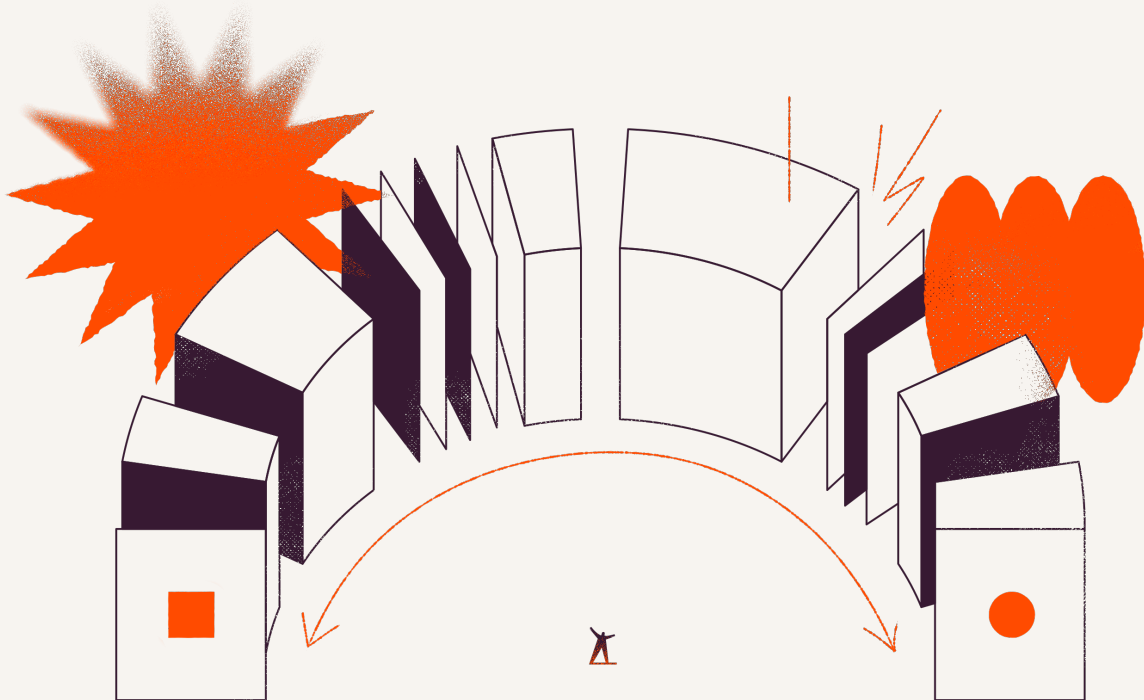
5. How to assess your company's readiness to scale AI.

1. The foundations of scalable AI

To scale AI successfully, you need an AI infrastructure that's secure, compliant, strategically aligned, and capable of growing with your business.

Four characteristics of scalable AI

1. **Systematically governed:** The right implementation means teams can innovate with AI without putting security, privacy, or compliance protocols at risk.
2. **Strategically aligned:** Scalable AI should directly ladder up to broader business outcomes. The impact should be measurable, and technical leaders should be able to track the success of AI initiatives.
3. **Broadly adopted:** Scaling AI adoption means you empower all your departments to leverage these tools and systems—not just technical teams.
4. **Continuously evolving:** There's never an end point with AI. When scaling, your infrastructure should be adaptable and continue to evolve as AI does. That means teams don't have to start implementations from scratch every time a new tool or capability hits the market.



Why scaling AI often stalls

According to Forrester, 25% of all AI initiatives will stall—and the consequences are costly. Despite significant investments in AI, many organizations fail to realize their promised returns, leaving leaders frustrated and under pressure to explain missed goals.

Why does this happen? Often, it's because organizations underestimate how quickly AI adoption can spiral into chaos without the right oversight:

Misalignment and unclear ownership

When no one truly owns the AI strategy, initiatives lack clear direction, resources get wasted, and critical projects stall. If IT, Marketing, and Operations all implement different AI tools without talking to each other, the result is likely duplication of work, confusion, and wasted budget.

Fragmented, uncontrolled tool proliferation

New AI tools emerge constantly, tempting individual departments to act independently. This unchecked growth results in a disjointed technology landscape. Businesses often use a mix of tools, which is great for experimentation and innovation (one team may prefer ChatGPT, another uses Claude, and opts for an internal model) but if they're all solving similar problems without talking to each other, they're unable to effectively collaborate or share insights.

Ineffective governance leading to compliance and security risks

Without proper controls, AI use can introduce vulnerabilities or compliance failures that put your organization at risk. For example, a financial services firm deploying AI without rigorous governance might inadvertently expose sensitive client data, resulting in reputational damage and costly regulatory penalties.

Did you know? Broad AI adoption offers incremental value at scale—think 20-30% increases in productivity, speed to market, and revenue.

Ultimately, AI stalls because organizations lack the capability to coordinate and align their efforts at scale. True AI scalability requires AI orchestration—the ability to seamlessly connect and coordinate AI capabilities across tools, teams, and workflows. Only then can organizations fully realize AI's potential.

20–30%

increases in productivity, speed to market, and revenue.

2. Build your roadmap to scale AI

To overcome these challenges, we've studied enterprises that have successfully scaled AI—including our own experience reaching 97% company-wide adoption—and identified four critical elements that define effective AI transformation strategies.

THE ZAPIER METHOD: HOW WE REACHED 97% AI ADOPTION (AND COUNTING)	
<p>Phase 1: Curiosity</p> <p>When ChatGPT launched publicly in November 2022, we encouraged Zapiens internally to explore it through informal, word-of-mouth sharing. Interest significantly increased following our annual team summit in January 2023, after Zapier customer Danny Richman's inspiring AI Q&A emphasized that GenAI was a clear paradigm shift.</p>	<p> Key takeaway</p> <p>Encourage all teams to actively experiment with AI across multiple use cases.</p>
<p>Phase 2: "Code Red"</p> <p>In early 2023, Zapier CEO Wade Foster issued our first-ever "Code Red" to highlight the immediate strategic importance of AI adoption, despite uncertainty about specific next steps. This underscored that standing still was riskier than taking decisive action.</p>	<p> Key takeaway</p> <p>Transparently communicate urgency, frame AI adoption as essential, and articulate the risks of inaction.</p>
<p>Phase 3: The foundations</p> <p>Soon after declaring "Code Red," Zapier paused regular projects to hold a mandatory, week-long, company-wide AI hackathon. We established clear guardrails by collaborating closely with legal, privacy, and security teams, and created expedited procurement processes to enable teams to quickly experiment with AI tools.</p>	<p> Key takeaway</p> <p>Pause regular work to prioritize structured, safe, and rapid AI experimentation.</p>
<p>Phase 4: From hackathons to habits</p> <p>Following our initial hackathon, AI quickly became integral to daily workflows. We established internal groups to share best practices, began tracking adoption through engagement surveys, and integrated AI directly into essential business processes. Usage rose dramatically—from 65% daily adoption in late 2023 to 97% by summer 2025—supported by regular training sessions and continued hackathons.</p>	<p> Key takeaway</p> <p>Make AI adoption sustainable by embedding it into daily processes, actively tracking usage, and continuously nurturing a culture of shared learning.</p>

Executive alignment

It's no surprise AI adoption plans need executive buy-in. Otherwise, your scaling strategy is dead in the water before you even leave the dock.

“

We issued Zapier's first-ever 'Code Red.' Not because we had all the answers. But because we knew standing still was the only certain losing move.

—Wade Foster
CEO of Zapier



Executive sponsorship is more than just green-lighting AI projects—it's the foundation for moving from experimentation to full-scale transformation. True executive alignment includes:

- **Clear, strategic vision:** The C-suite explicitly communicates why AI matters and how it aligns with broader business goals.
- **Dedicated investments:** Leadership provides budget, time, and attention to emphasize AI's importance across the organization.
- **Proactive prioritization:** Executives openly integrate AI into their own workflows and publicly celebrate company-wide AI wins.
- **Hands-on learning:** Executive-led hackathons and workshops inspire teams by demonstrating leadership's commitment and hands-on engagement with AI.
- **Integration into planning cycles:** Embed AI adoption metrics into quarterly planning and reviews (we'll cover the different ways to calculate these metrics in Chapter 4).

Governance by design

Some executives still hesitate to fully embrace AI, fearing costly missteps. Robust AI governance helps mitigate these risks while still allowing room for innovation—too much control stifles creativity, too little exposes the organization to significant threats.

Effective AI governance balances oversight with agility by:

1. **Centralizing standards, decentralizing innovation:** Establish AI guidelines similar to building codes—clear safety standards paired with flexibility. Currently, 70% of employees report lacking clear AI usage policies, highlighting the need for defined guardrails that still enable experimentation.
2. **Automating compliance:** Use an AI orchestration platform to enforce governance policies automatically. For example, sensitive data can route through approved models, while non-sensitive data allows more flexibility.
3. **Documenting workflows and progress:** Maintain traceable, auditable records of AI activities to ensure compliance and drive continuous improvement.
4. **Creating risk tiers and approval flows:** Develop tailored approval processes based on risk level—fast-tracking simple use cases and applying rigorous review to customer-facing AI.

Embed AI training across your organization

Successful AI transformation isn't just about technology—it's about people. Once your governance is established, empower your teams through ongoing training to ensure adoption and ROI.

Leveraging AI can be intimidating, especially for non-technical teams. Effective AI literacy programs help employees become comfortable, identify practical use cases, and confidently integrate AI into workflows.



Did you know? Half of employees want more formal AI training, yet almost half of AI users say their company hasn't offered any training at all.

Here's how you can position AI as a core competency by embedding AI literacy into hiring, onboarding, and professional development programs:

HOW TO EMBED AI INTO YOUR COMPANY'S DNA	
Current employees	New employees
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop centralized internal resources (knowledge base, prompt libraries, workflow templates). At Zapier, we use an "AI at Zapier" Coda for tooling recommendations, learning resources, and product updates.• Create dedicated communication channels (Slack, message boards, forums) for teams to share AI successes, experiments, and examples.• Host live training sessions and use-case walkthroughs for newly approved AI tools, sharing recordings afterward.• Run hackathons to encourage hands-on experimentation and innovation.• Schedule bi-weekly office hours with internal AI experts for employee questions.• Provide a learning budget for employees to enroll in external AI courses like Zapier's ZapConnect (which is free!), Google's AI Essentials course, and DeepLearning.AI short programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implement AI fluency tests for job candidates during the hiring process.• Update job descriptions to clearly outline required AI-related skills.• Include AI-focused interview questions tailored to specific roles (e.g., asking marketers how AI impacts campaign planning).• Add AI fluency training directly into onboarding for new hires.• Encourage new employees to actively participate in AI communication channels and hackathons.• Set AI usage benchmarks in employees' 30/60/90-day goals.

Composable infrastructure

Now, you'll need to create a technical infrastructure that can grow and adapt with your AI needs. That way, you can scale smarter even as your organization evolves.

An adaptable infrastructure will include:

- **An orchestration platform:** Connect AI tools and your existing systems without building point-to-point integrations each time. [AI orchestration platforms like Zapier](#) simplify creating and automating scalable AI workflows.
- **Model Context Protocol (MCP):** Instead of custom connections for every tool, MCP acts as a universal translator, enabling seamless integration across your entire stack.
- **Flexible data pipelines:** Design pipelines that route data dynamically to different AI models based on security, context, and business logic.
- **Human-in-the-loop capabilities:** Even automated AI systems should have built-in mechanisms to involve human decision-making when necessary.

3. Run hackathons that drive AI innovation

Hands-on learning, especially hackathons, significantly boosts AI adoption. Rather than running them as isolated events, use hackathons systematically to embed AI into your organizational culture. Start with one hackathon every six months, then consider increasing to quarterly events.

Did you know? Building a habit builds momentum: Based on Zapier data, companies can increase broad AI adoption if employees use it twice their first week. **We found that users who created their second zap within 7 days were 1.6x more likely to continue scaling their automations.** Encourage teams to try using AI again in that timeframe. For example, if you host an org-wide AI hackathon, set up a daily Slackbot to automatically remind teams in the week after the event to build another AI workflow.

1.6x

To make AI hackathons a sustainable catalyst for cultural change, establish a consistent schedule (e.g., twice yearly) and follow a structured seven-week planning and integration cycle.

THE SEVEN-WEEK HACKATHON CYCLE		
Weeks	Priorities	
4 weeks out: Build your foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Define objectives, roles, and responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Create clear guidelines and select approved tools
3 weeks out: Get the ball rolling	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Announce the hackathon company-wideBrainstorm ideas for potential use casesStart early participant registrations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Share examples and resources from previous hackathons (or if it's your first, explore examples from other organizations)
2 weeks out: Start skill building	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Hold intro to AI workshops so teams can jump right into hackathon projectsDistribute resource kits and prompt libraries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Pair AI newbies with mentorsPrep or review security and governance guidelines
1 week out: Refine plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Finalize teamsFinalize project selections	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Hold final Q&A for technical setup and verificationHold mentor briefings
Hackathon week: Host your event	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Hold daily stand-ups and progress check-insHost mentoring sessions and offer technical support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Course correct with a mid-week check in (help teams pivot accordingly)Host final presentations and team workflow demonstrations
One week after: Recognize a job well done	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Announce winning team(s) and workflowsEnsure teams document all successful projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Present the hackathon's results to the whole companyStart collecting feedback from participants to incorporate into the next hackathon
Two weeks after: Follow-up and integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Incorporate successful use cases into daily workflowsShare learnings and best practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Plan improvements for next hackathonUpdate company AI resources and documentation

Roles and requirements

To ensure your hackathon goes off without a hitch, identify and assign these essential roles:

Project manager coordinates overall event management, schedule, and communication.

- Establishes clear, measurable goals for each project
- Regularly communicates progress and expectations to all stakeholders.
- Fosters an environment that encourages experimentation and embraces failures as learning opportunities.
- Ensures thorough documentation of project outcomes and insights

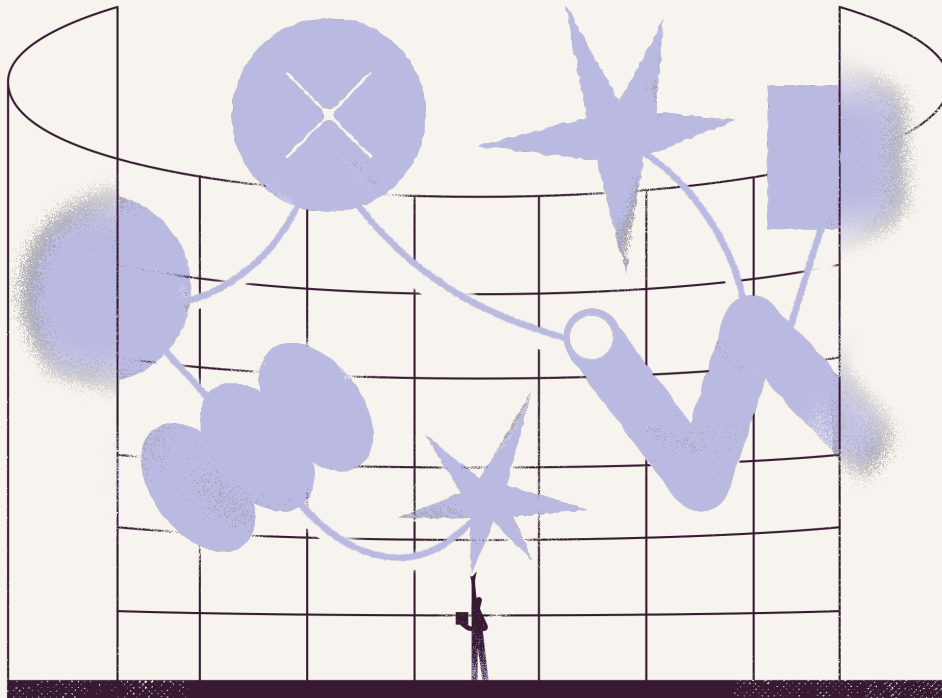
Technical leads offer technical guidance, assist with problem-solving, and oversee the mentoring process

Mentors provide hands-on support and facilitate learning

Judges evaluate projects based on defined criteria and ensure recognition of innovative outcomes

Compliance officer ensures adherence to data privacy and AI governance policies

Communication lead manages all internal communications, announcements, and updates



4. Measure AI adoption with confidence

Once you've made the moves to go all in on AI as an organization, it's crucial to measure your ongoing AI transformation.

To demonstrate AI usage growth, you can lean on one (or both) of these adoption metrics:



Percentage of employees actively using AI tools.



Number of AI workflows deployed per department.

97%

Pro tip: At Zapier, we asked employees to confirm or deny "I use AI to support me in completing my work at Zapier" in our twice-yearly engagement survey. Our most recent results showed that 97% of respondents confirmed they use AI every day.

Percentage of employees actively using AI tools

There are a few ways you can measure ongoing AI adoption among individuals in your org:

- **Monthly pulse surveys:** Incorporate specific questions—like "Which AI tools did you use for work this week?" with checkboxes for known tools—into your existing staff surveys. Zapier initially measured our adoption rate via employee engagement surveys.
- **Anonymous surveys:** Shadow AI usage is very real, and offering an anonymous survey can help account for people using personal AI accounts.
- **AI analytics dashboards:** Most AI tools provide admin dashboards showing active users, session frequency, and usage patterns. So, if your employees are tinkering with ChatGPT via a company account, you can track it.
- **IT system logs:** Track logins, API calls, and session duration through your IT infrastructure.
- **Self-reporting tools:** Integrate a quick self-reporting option into existing workflows. For example, create a Slack bot that asks which AI tools they used that week.
- **IT help desk tickets:** Your IT teams can monitor the number of AI-related requests and support issues as a proxy for adoption.

Number of AI workflows deployed per department

Top 5 AI apps used within Zapier workflows

ChatGPT (OpenAI)AI by Zapier (Zapier)Claude (Anthropic)Gemini (Google AI Studio)Chatbots (Zapier)

5 most popular AI use cases in Zapier			*This data was pulled July 14th, 2025.
Use case category	Live Zaps		
Customer success management	<div></div>	31,927	
Lead management	<div></div>	21,588	
Marketing/communications	<div></div>	15,254	
Data management	<div></div>	13,567	
Project management	<div></div>	12,872	

It's also important to drill down to the department-level when monitoring AI adoption. To keep track of what teams are seeing success with which workflows, you can set up these measurement methods:

- **AI workflow inventory:** Conduct process-mapping sessions with department heads to document existing AI-enabled workflows.
- **Workflow management platforms:** Track departmental AI projects using platforms like Monday.com or Asana with dedicated AI project tags.
- **Regular department audits:** Use standardized templates to consistently catalog new AI implementations.
- **Centralized AI registry:** Consolidate audit findings into a single, accessible source where department leads can continuously log new AI uses.
- **API monitoring:** Automatically track the volume of AI-powered processes and integrations.
- **Custom dashboards:** Leverage business intelligence platforms to aggregate AI-related data from departmental systems.
- **Workflow automation platforms:** Use tools like Zapier or Power Automate to measure AI-driven automations.
- **Self-reporting mechanisms:** Embed measurement tools in existing workflows—like Slack bots prompting teams to share weekly AI activities.

5. Assess your AI maturity—and level up

To maximize adoption and ROI, you'll need to assess your organization's AI maturity. Nearly all companies are investing in AI, yet only 1% believe they've reached full AI maturity.

Once you know where you stand, you can meet your teams where they are and create a plan to level up to the next stage of AI transformation. Here's a practical roadmap to help you move to the next point in your AI journey —no matter where you're starting from.

Stage 1: Curiosity and exploration

Where you are: You're interested in AI but lack formal structure. Most usage is individual and experimental.

What to focus on: Create awareness and build foundational skills.

Key actions:

- Encourage curiosity-driven exploration of tools like ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, and Zapier
- Host AI awareness sessions on AI value and use-cases to showcase early AI wins
- Launch internal channels for sharing AI discoveries and prompts

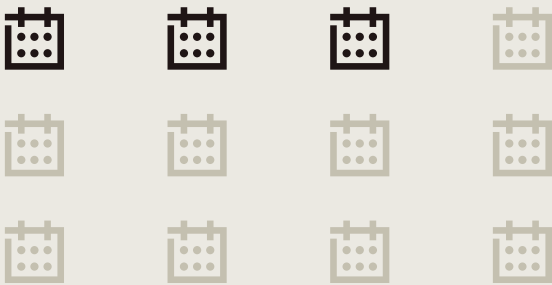
What success looks like:

50% of employees have tried at least one AI tool

Basic governance policies are in place

AI champions are identified and trained

Suggested timeline:



2–3 months

Stage 2: Early adoption and urgency

Where you are: You're experimenting with AI but lack strategic direction and coordination.

What to focus on: Develop systems, align stakeholders, and reduce fragmentation.

Key actions:

- Communicate urgency and strategic importance—even without full clarity
- Frame adoption as essential; articulate the risks of inaction
- Conduct an AI readiness assessment across departments
- Develop a formal AI strategy aligned with business objectives
- Introduce AI-enhanced workflows using no-code tools
- Provide onboarding and baseline governance training
- Implement AI orchestration infrastructure
- Launch recurring AI hackathons and training programs

What success looks like:

50% of teams actively using at least one AI use case

A formal AI strategy is approved and communicated

A clear AI usage policy is in place (reducing shadow AI)

Suggested timeline:



4–6 months

Stage 3: Capability Building and integration

Where you are: You have a defined AI strategy and are rolling out structured solutions across teams.

What to focus on: Scale successful implementations and embed advanced practices.

Key actions:

- Run a company-wide hackathon by pausing regular work to accelerate experimentation
- Establish guardrails with legal, privacy, and security teams
- Create a streamlined procurement process for AI tools so teams can access and test new AI tools without red tape
- Invest in enablement resources by building a centralized, self-service hub of training and practical examples
- Designate leaders to drive AI initiatives across departments and build momentum
- Prioritize both strategic top-down and experimental bottom-up use cases
- Reinforce adoption through regular all-hands, internal demos, and ongoing messaging that reinforces AI's importance
- Build and scale advanced workflows (APIs, custom models)
- Start measuring AI performance through defined metrics
- Incorporate AI into hiring and performance reviews
- Allow parallel projects, tolerate duplication, and treat “failures” as fast learning—not missteps
- Deploy AI orchestration across departments

What success looks like:

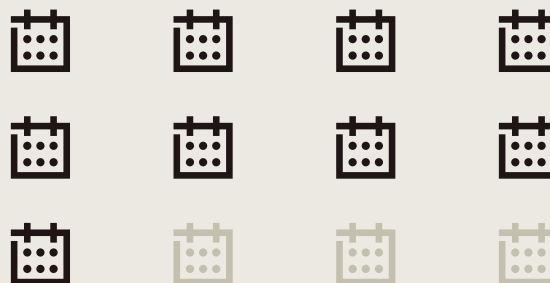
75% of employees use AI regularly

Advanced workflows and models are live across departments

Teams independently launch and iterate on AI use cases

AI impact is tracked and optimized

Suggested timeline:



6–12 months

Stage 4: Embedded orchestration and reinvention

Where you are: AI is deeply embedded in your organization's strategy and day-to-day operations. Your teams are no longer just adopting AI—they're optimizing around it.

What to focus on: Drive continuous innovation by scaling orchestration, reimagining legacy processes, and making AI fluency a core competency across your organization.

Key actions:

- Redesign workflows with an AI-first mindset, empowering teams to use orchestration platforms to replace manual fixes with scalable, automated solutions.
- Align headcount plans to reflect AI-driven productivity and new roles enabled by AI.
- Reframe AI skills as career-critical to reduce resistance and build buy-in.
- Make AI onboarding mandatory so AI fluency becomes part of company DNA.
- Host recurring learning experiences like internal workshops, demos, and partner-led sessions to continuously uplevel team skills.
- Track performance and ROI at the process level, not just tool usage.
- Tie AI experimentation and iteration to team OKRs and planning cycles.

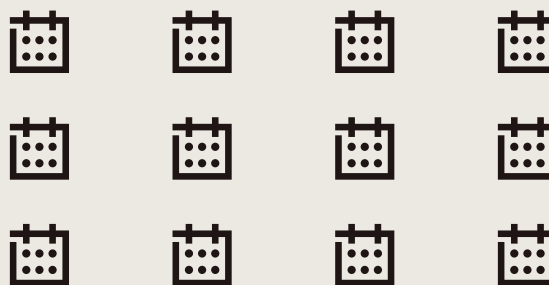
What success looks like:

85%+ AI adoption across all departments

AI-driven innovations directly contribute to revenue growth

AI governance scales without slowing innovation

Suggested timeline:



12+ months

CASE STUDY: PROVEN PATH TO SCALING SUCCESS

VENDASTA LEVERAGES AI-POWERED LEAD ENRICHMENT TO RECLAIM \$1M IN REVENUE

The challenge

Lead enrichment at Vendasta was painfully manual. Reps had to pull data from multiple sources—company names, phone numbers, job titles—then enter it by hand into the CRM. This slowed down the sales cycle and introduced inconsistencies that hurt their close rates.

The solution

Vandasta adopted a company-wide AI strategy powered by Zapier to streamline lead enrichment. When leads come in, the workflow automatically enriches the lead data through [Apollo](#) and [Clay](#), AI summarizes company descriptions into digestible sales insights, creates an account records, and instantly routes them to the right sales rep based on industry or segment.

Results

\$1 million

in recovered revenue

282+

working days saved annually by eliminating manual admin for sales reps

1,200 minutes

saved daily by using AI to summarize sales conversations

"Our reps can now focus purely on closing deals—not admin. Before Zapier, we'd hack together solutions. Now, we think automation-first. We're solving problems in a way that empowers our team and drives real results."

Jacob Sirrs
Marketing Operations Specialist

Is your company ready for org-wide AI transformation? [Take our quiz](#) to discover where your company stands on the path to AI adoption.

Go from AI silos to company-wide systems

Ready to turn AI into a powerful competitive advantage at scale? Zapier's AI orchestration platform gives you everything you need to maximize your AI adoption by connecting tools, deploying agents, and scaling intelligent systems across your business.

Connect every app, AI model, and workflow. Securely integrate with thousands of tools using advanced authentication and data handling.

Automate complex workflows with ease. Build, test, and scale AI-driven systems using no-code, low-code, or full-code—whatever your teams need.

Deploy intelligent systems across the org. Connect AI to the workflows your teams rely on—sales, support, IT, ops, marketing, and more.

Control AI at scale with IT-grade governance. Prevent shadow AI, enforce permissions, and keep AI use auditable, visible, and compliant.

Move beyond isolated AI experiments to company-wide transformation. Learn why the world's leading businesses trust Zapier.



Talk to an expert today to assess your AI maturity and start your AI adoption journey.