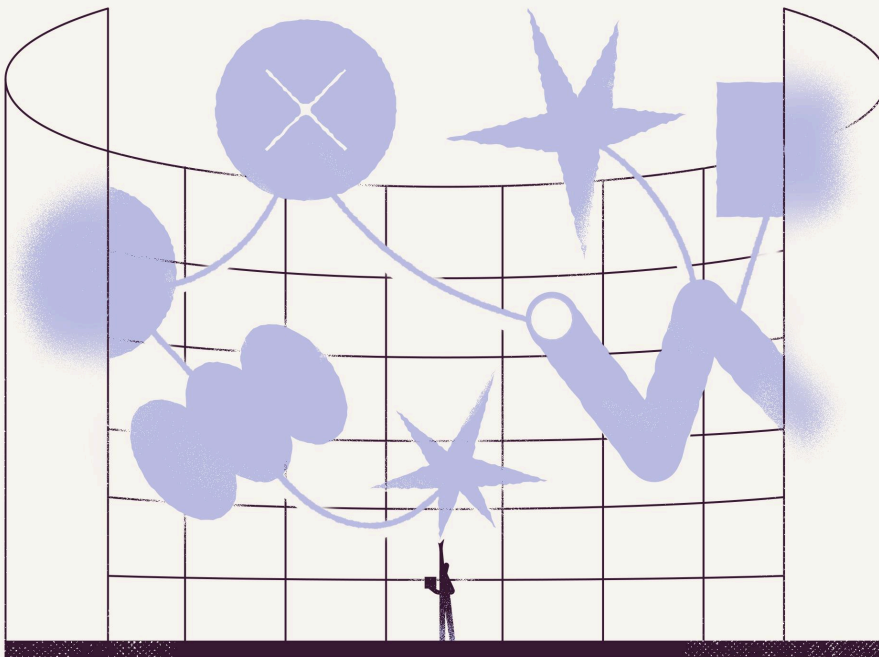


How enterprises measure AI success, governance, and ROI

PROVING AI PROGRESS



zapier

Proving AI progress: How enterprises measure success, governance, and ROI

Introduction

AI is no longer a future bet. It's here: embedded in enterprise workflows, boardroom discussions, and transformation roadmaps. Adoption is accelerating, expectations are rising, and the central question is clear: How do enterprises *prove* they're progressing?

This report examines the gap between AI aspiration and AI proof. It shows how enterprise leaders and practitioners are navigating adoption as the first hurdle, productivity as the first measurable outcome, and the ongoing struggle to align ownership and accountability. It explores why governance continues to lag behind adoption, and why integration remains the hinge point between isolated pilots and enterprise-wide transformation.

The findings come from enterprise leaders (CIOs, CTOs, Chief Data & Analytics Officers, VPs of AI/ML, and Directors of IT) as well as enterprise practitioners (data scientists, engineers, product managers, and operations leads embedding AI into workflows). Together, they provide a dual perspective: the boardroom mandate and the enterprise frontline reality.

In this report, we'll cover:

1. How enterprises are defining and proving AI ROI

2. Why enterprises are restructuring for AI transformation

3. How AI governance must evolve to match enterprise adoption

4. Why enterprise AI success depends on integration and enablement

How enterprises are defining and proving AI ROI

Proving AI's business impact remains elusive

73% of enterprise leaders feel frequent or constant pressure from senior leadership to show AI ROI that doesn't yet exist. And when asked if ROI is actually provable at scale, 92% of leaders say it's either difficult or only partially manageable.

That relentless pressure is shaping how progress gets communicated. Leaders aren't ignoring the challenge—they're laying the groundwork. When ROI proof isn't yet possible, they deliberately use adoption as the entry point. When ROI isn't yet proven, 78% of enterprise leaders frame adoption as a leading indicator of ROI—highlighting usage as progress and signaling that financial impact will follow.

But 74% of leaders admit adoption tracking is inconsistent across teams. Only 25% say adoption is tracked “very consistently” and a small minority—1%—admit it isn't tracked at all.

Leaders report on AI adoption tracking:

73%

feel frequent or constant pressure from senior leadership to show AI ROI that doesn't yet exist

92%

say it's either difficult or only partially manageable to prove ROI at scale

74%

admit adoption tracking is inconsistent across teams

→ This creates a paradox: when ROI can't be clearly demonstrated, leaders turn to adoption as a proxy for credibility. Yet three-quarters of them acknowledge that they can't measure adoption with consistency. In other words, adoption itself has become a critical pain point. Today, it functions as the bridge metric—the earliest proof point leaders can use to build confidence, secure buy-in, and signal momentum. More definitive ROI measures, such as revenue growth, cost avoidance, or churn reduction, take longer to emerge.

After adoption comes productivity

Once adoption is established as the foundation, productivity becomes the first tangible ROI signal. Among enterprise leaders, **43% rely on employee productivity and time savings as their primary ROI measure, compared with 35% who point to revenue.**

Practitioners see the same pattern on the ground: **48% say productivity is the clearest reflection of AI's value in their day-to-day work, while only 26% cite revenue and 17% point to workflow quality improvements.**

This alignment between the boardroom and the frontlines shows that productivity isn't a consolation prize—it's the logical next step after adoption. These early signals give leaders the credibility they need to demonstrate AI's impact today, while laying the groundwork for harder ROI metrics like revenue growth, churn reduction, and customer impact to follow.



Box's \$1B blueprint for AI transformation. See how they embedded AI across the enterprise—and what it takes to scale without sacrificing speed. [Check out the full story in our ZapConnect library.](#)

The reporting disconnect

When business impact can't be measured, adoption is presented as progress—and productivity gains become the default ROI metric. Both are valuable, but neither provides the board with the full picture.

Practitioners see the limits of this framing even more sharply. Two-thirds (67%) say their teams are only “somewhat equipped” with the tools and processes to report AI progress accurately. More than half (57%) identify ROI reporting itself as the most frustrating gap when scaling AI strategy.

This disconnect highlights the fragility of today's reporting ecosystem: leaders feel compelled to showcase signals, while practitioners lack the infrastructure to validate outcomes. Both groups are doing what they can, but neither is fully confident that current reporting captures AI's true business impact.

67%

of practitioners say their teams are only **“somewhat equipped”** with the tools to report AI progress accurately

57%

of practitioners identify ROI reporting itself as the **most frustrating gap** when scaling AI strategy.

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 record, 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

Explore more real-world wins from companies like Okta, Remote, and Vendasta in the [Zapier customer story library](#).

Why enterprises are restructuring for AI transformation

Where does AI sit in the enterprise?

AI isn't just a program to be executed. Enterprises are reorganizing around it. Half of leaders (50%) say AI strategy is now owned by an AI innovation team. That's a striking signal: AI has outgrown its origins in Ops or Engineering and is growing in dedicated hubs built for scale.

The C-suite still plays a powerful role. Nearly 4 in 10 leaders (38%) say AI strategy sits directly with the CEO or executive team, confirming that AI continues to be a top-down mandate. But unlike earlier stages of automation, that mandate is no longer left to technical functions to figure out alone.

The pattern is clear: AI now receives executive sponsorship at the very top and operationalization through centralized teams. Enterprises aren't just experimenting; they're restructuring themselves around AI.

And those central hubs are only the beginning. **One in four leaders (24%) say enterprises should go further and create a dedicated AI strategy function.**

As organizations formalize an AI transformation team with clear roles and fluency rubrics, they can standardize how adoption is instrumented and reported, laying the groundwork for later orchestration maturity that ties usage to cross-workflow outcomes.



Half of leaders (50%) say AI strategy is now owned by an **AI innovation team**



4 in 10 leaders (38%) say AI strategy sits directly with the **CEO or executive team**



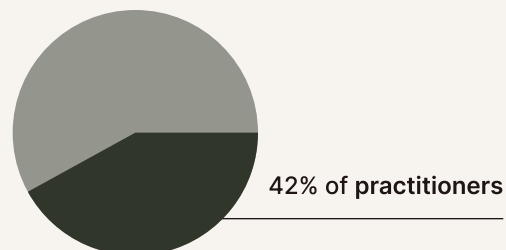
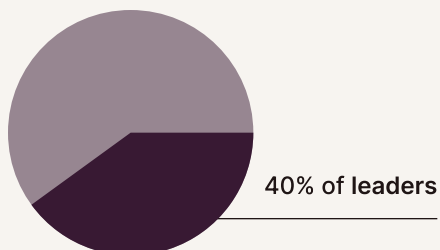
Want to know what roles drive AI scale? See the key hires and team structures in our guide: [How to build an AI transformation team](#)

The push for shared accountability

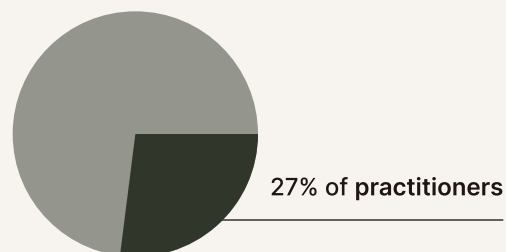
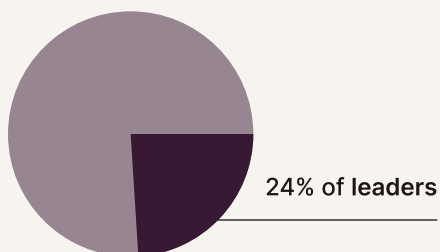
As adoption scales, enterprises are experimenting with what accountability should look like in the future. Four in ten leaders (40%) say accountability should ultimately be shared across functions, the most popular answer but not a majority.

Practitioners echo this: 42% also call for shared accountability, while 27% believe a new dedicated AI function will be required.

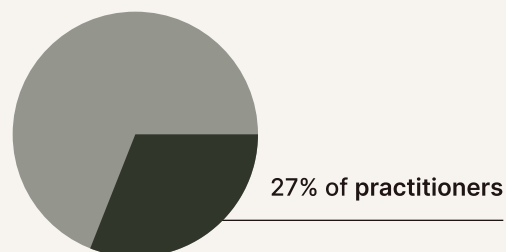
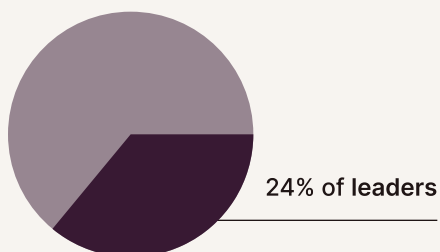
Shared ownership



A new AI function



Existing functions



→ Traditional technical functions are scattered and losing ground as the default owners of AI. No single legacy team commands consensus. Instead, enterprises are evolving in two directions at once: dispersing accountability across functions to democratize adoption, while consolidating into purpose-built structures that ensure governance and ROI at scale.

AI alignment is a coin flip

On the surface, enterprises appear to have AI ownership in place. Outright conflict is rare—**just 5% of leaders report senior stakeholders are misaligned**, holding conflicting views on who owns AI roles and responsibilities. But when you look closer, the picture is less reassuring.

Leaders are split down the middle: half (50%) say alignment exists but is only “somewhat informal,” while nearly as many (45%) report it’s fully documented. The result is a coin flip between structured accountability and informal handshakes.

That split shows that enterprises are committed to AI transformation, but many are still running on implicit agreements instead of hard frameworks. That gap may not be disruptive today, but it could become a bottleneck as enterprises push AI deeper into core business processes.

Where AI ownership falls short

If the alignment picture looks fragile, the accountability picture looks fractured. Both leaders and practitioners point to the same set of weaknesses—and they’re not minor.

From the leadership perspective:

- 29% say governance and oversight is the weakest area of AI ownership
- 23% flag cross-functional alignment
- 22% point to ROI tracking

From the practitioner perspective:

- 21% cite gaps in strategy-setting
- 21% call out enablement
- 20% identify ROI reporting and cross-functional coordination

→ The three pillars of responsible AI—compliance, coordination, and measurement—are the areas where leaders feel least confident, and practitioners experience the same gaps on the ground. Enterprises are restructuring themselves around AI, but the supporting structures haven’t caught up.

This is why orchestration maturity matters. When AI is orchestrated across workflows under platform-level guardrails, governance, coordination, and reporting are embedded into the process itself. Accountability shifts from fragile agreements to structured, measurable systems.



AI transformation requires more than vision—it needs orchestration. See how top enterprises are aligning adoption and ROI at scale in our guide on [maximizing AI adoption, alignment, and ROI](#).

How AI governance must evolve to match enterprise adoption

Governance lags behind AI adoption

51% of leaders say their governance frameworks are falling behind AI adoption—with 47% calling governance “lagging significantly” and another 4% admitting it isn’t deployed systematically at all.

By comparison, only 8% of leaders say governance is ahead of adoption, showing how rare proactive oversight is today. Even the 41% who believe governance is keeping pace are in the minority.

The risks behind that gap are stark. **83% of leaders say the biggest threats come from compliance failures or uncontrolled usage**, including regulatory non-compliance, shadow AI sprawl, and unauthorized use. However they frame it, the conclusion is the same: when governance trails adoption, enterprises lose control.

83%

of leaders say the biggest threats come from compliance failures or uncontrolled usage

- AI adoption is happening faster than organizations can establish proper guardrails. Enterprises that aim to democratize AI safely must embed controls into the workflow itself (approvals, audit logs, identity management) so governance scales with usage instead of trailing behind it.



“

There’s this misconception that empowering non-technical builders will create chaos, but the opposite is true. Technical teams shift from being the sole builder to a coach and monitor, moving from control to enablement.

— Jenica Blechschmidt
Director, Product Management at Zapier

Shadow AI continues to spread

63% of practitioners admit they use AI tools without formal approval, confirming that shadow AI is no longer hypothetical—it's already embedded in daily work. This puts numbers to leaders' fears: the very uncontrolled usage they highlight as a risk is happening inside their organizations.

Visibility is equally fragile. Only 15% of leaders feel extremely confident in their ability to monitor AI usage in real time, while 85% say their confidence is partial at best. Most describe themselves as moderately confident (63%), and 22% openly admit they aren't confident whatsoever. That means more than four out of five leaders acknowledge they don't have full visibility into how AI is being used across their organizations.

Practitioners agree oversight isn't keeping up. **79% say governance isn't adapting as fast as adoption.**

79%

of practitioners say governance isn't adapting as fast as adoption

→ Shadow AI thrives when governance isn't orchestrated into everyday systems. To curb unsanctioned use without slowing innovation, organizations need observability and monitoring by default—ensuring every workflow is visible, policy-aware, and auditable.

★ **Shadow AI thrives when oversight lags behind innovation.** Explore Zapier's [security and compliance hub](#) to see how AI orchestration makes governance automatic.

The future of governance is optimistic

Despite today's cracks, leaders see governance as an enabler rather than a drag. 37% say governance will evolve into a business accelerator—building trust and enabling faster adoption. Another 32% believe it will serve as an operational safeguard, 23% call it a strategic necessity, and just 8% reduce it to compliance.

Leaders and practitioners also align on which capabilities matter most. **44% of leaders say observability and monitoring will be the most critical capability for safe AI scaling in the next three years.** Practitioners are closely aligned but emphasize enforcement: 30% name policy enforcement as the top priority, and 26% also highlight observability.

→ Enterprises know the future lies in visibility, enforcement, and trust—turning governance from a bottleneck into an accelerator of innovation. This is the orchestration blueprint: observability and enforcement at the platform layer so every workflow is visible, policy-aware, and auditable by design.

The enterprise AI reporting framework

Enterprises are investing heavily in AI, but according to Zapier's study, 92% of enterprise leaders say proving AI ROI is still difficult or only partially manageable, and 73% report constant pressure to show ROI that doesn't yet exist.

Use this framework to help move from today's proxy signals to proof—connecting adoption, productivity, governance, and business outcomes into a single narrative that resonates in the boardroom and guides AI transformation.



STAGE 1: ADOPTION	• Why it matters: <u>Adoption</u> is the first hurdle. Without widespread usage, ROI proof has no base. • Enterprise metrics to track: % of workforce actively using AI, # of workflows with AI embedded, adoption consistency across functions
STAGE 2: PRODUCTIVITY	• Why it matters: Once adoption is established, productivity gains are the first measurable outcomes. • Enterprise metrics to track: Hours saved per employee, FTE equivalent savings, % reduction in manual tasks, error reduction
STAGE 3: GOVERNANCE SIGNALS	• Why it matters: ROI claims without governance are fragile. Boards need to see that AI is <u>used responsibly at scale</u>. • Enterprise metrics to track: <u>Governed</u> workflow adoption, the number of workflows or users flagged for policy exceptions or ungoverned activity
STAGE 4: BUSINESS OUTCOMES	• Why it matters: The end goal of AI adoption is measurable business impact. But these signals take longer to stabilize. • Enterprise metrics to track: Pipeline acceleration, increased conversion or upsell, churn reduction, revenue influenced

How AI orchestration closes the gap

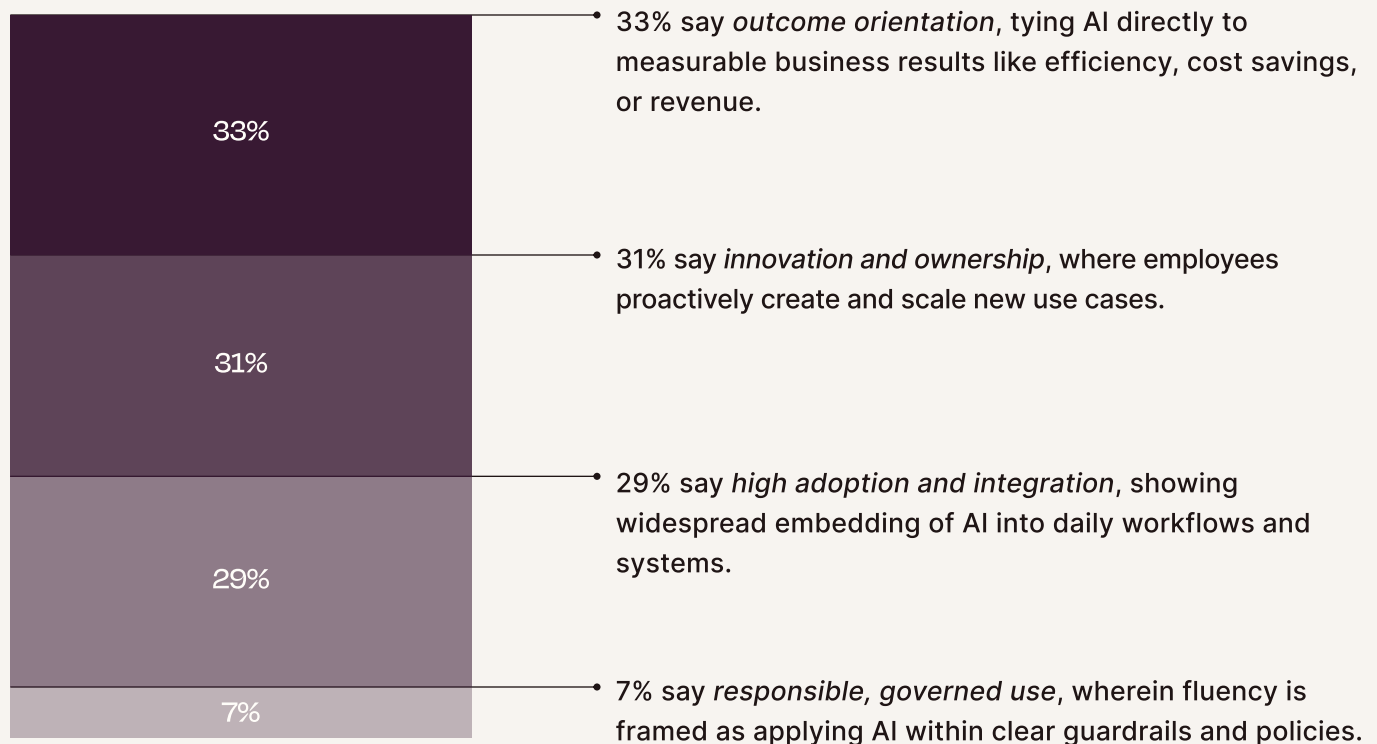
Most enterprises are stuck between Stages 1 and 2: adoption and productivity are tracked, but inconsistently, and rarely tied to governance. Orchestration platforms change that by:

- **Unifying AI adoption data** across systems and workflows.
- **Standardizing productivity signals** into enterprise-level metrics.
- **Embedding governance by design**, so adoption and productivity are policy-aware.
- **Connecting signals to outcomes**, making ROI auditable rather than anecdotal.

Why enterprise AI success depends on integration and enablement

Leaders are mixed on how to define AI fluency

Leaders don't agree on what "AI fluency" in the workforce actually means. The responses are fragmented, with almost equal weight given to three different signals:



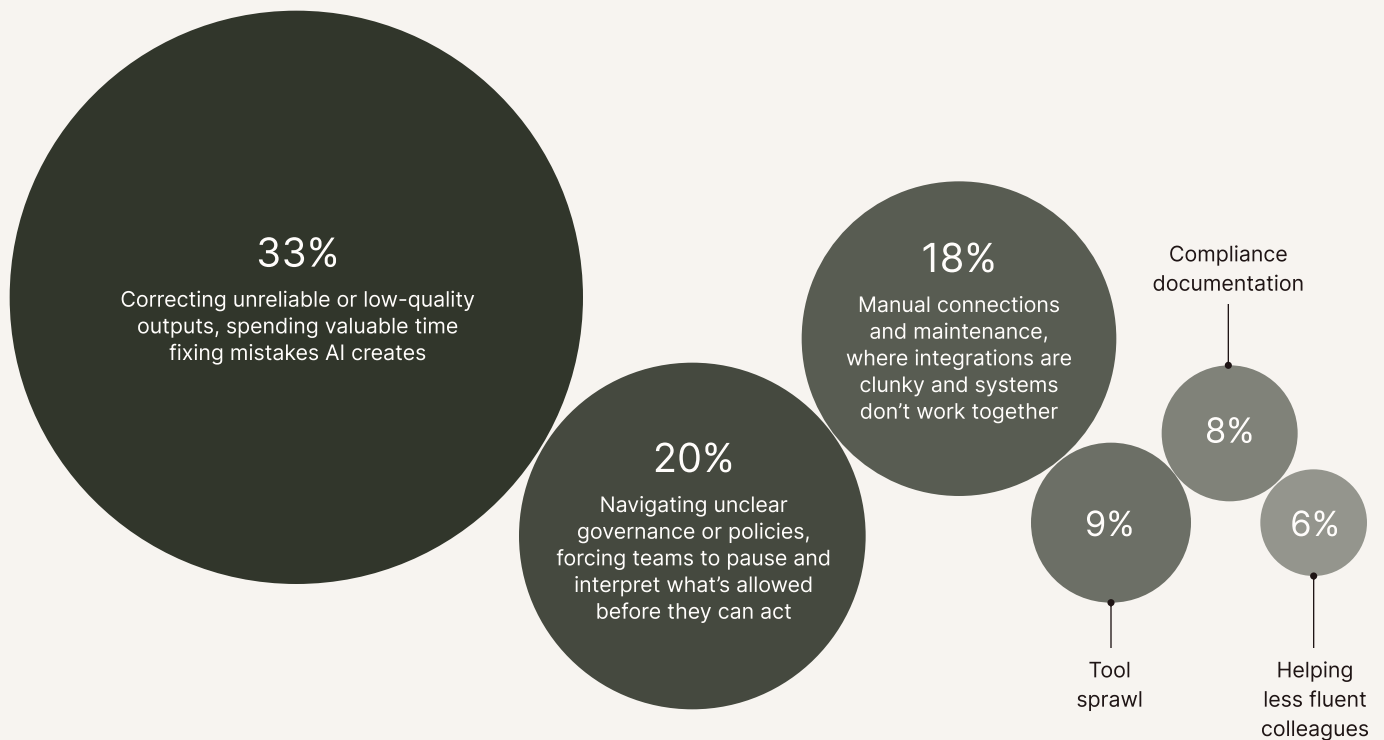
→ This near three-way split shows there's **no consensus among leaders**. Some emphasize measurable outcomes, others value initiative, and others prize scale of usage. All of these definitions are valid, but the lack of alignment makes it difficult to benchmark maturity, track progress across teams, or design enablement programs that scale consistently.

At Zapier, we believe in hiring teams with an AI-first mindset. Learn how we scale AI fluency in our guide to building AI transformation teams. [Get the guide](#)

Practitioner pain is diversified

When practitioners were asked “Where does AI create more work than it saves in your role?” they had the option to choose from a list of burdens—or to confirm that AI consistently saves them time. **The result is striking: only 6% reported consistent time savings. The other 94% pointed to burdens instead.**

Practitioner AI pain points

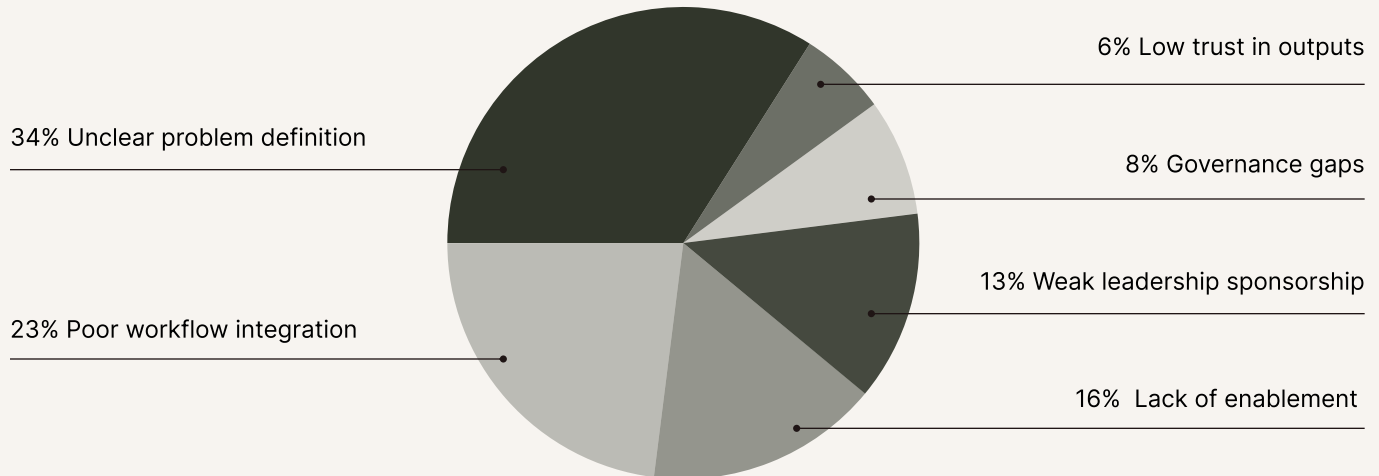


→ These frictions don't mean practitioners are rejecting AI—they reveal where enterprises need to mature. These burdens (quality, policy clarity, manual connections) are what AI orchestration is designed to solve. By providing out-of-the-box connectivity, visual builders, and embedded guardrails, front-line teams can create value without ticketing queues.

This is more than a list of frustrations. It's a warning signal about the current state of enterprise AI. While leaders celebrate adoption as a lever for efficiency, practitioners often spend more time patching gaps than capturing gains. AI orchestration is the key to overcoming practitioner frustrations and unlocking consistent ROI.

Why AI projects fail: A lifecycle pattern

Practitioners were also asked “When AI initiatives fail, what’s usually the reason?” The answers clustered across the lifecycle, not in a single root cause:



→ The diversity of answers reveals a **lifecycle pattern**. Some organizations stall upstream because they never define the problem clearly. Others fail mid-stream when AI doesn’t fit into existing workflows. Others fail downstream when employees don’t have the training or support to succeed. The fact that failures distribute across the lifecycle highlights that **different enterprises are at different stages of maturity, with weak links appearing at different points.**



“

I would push AI as far as possible. If people haven’t yet found real, productive leverage, it’s often because they aren’t asking enough of it. Challenge your teams to rethink workflows: How can we redesign this process to take advantage of AI? How can we push the models further? If you tried them six months ago, try again—many workflows that were impossible six to nine months ago are now entirely feasible. Push AI to do far more for you than you think is possible.

— Aaron Levie
CEO and Co-founder at Box

Integrating AI into existing systems is the #1 barrier to AI adoption

Practitioners are clear: integrating AI into existing systems is the most difficult part of scaling AI across the organization and seeing AI progress.

44% identify integration challenges as the top obstacle to scaling AI, far outpacing any other single barrier.



Even though 44% is under half, integration is still the dominant response—**nearly equal to the next three barriers combined.**

This matters because integration is more than just a technical hurdle—it's the gateway to **AI orchestration maturity**. When AI is seamlessly integrated into existing systems, it moves beyond isolated pilots and experiments into coordinated workflows that touch multiple functions. That's where orchestration begins: connecting AI across tools, data, and teams to create end-to-end business processes.

→ Integration is the choke point between **integration-era** efforts and **orchestration maturity**. Moving beyond piecemeal connectors to **coordinated, policy-aware workflows** is how enterprises achieve consistent enablement and org-wide ROI—without scaling engineering headcount.

★ Turning signals into proof requires structure. Visit the [enterprise hub](#) to learn how orchestration platforms unify adoption, productivity, and ROI tracking.

Conclusion

Enterprises are under immense pressure to prove AI progress today—even as the hardest ROI measures remain out of reach. This report shows that leaders and practitioners alike are working from the same playbook: adoption first, productivity next, governance by design, and integration as the hinge point that unlocks enterprise-wide impact.

The signals are clear: adoption and productivity are no longer “soft” metrics, but the foundations of credible ROI proof. Governance must evolve from lagging oversight to embedded guardrails. And integration is the decisive step that separates isolated pilots from orchestrated, end-to-end transformation.

Enterprises that connect these signals through orchestration—unifying adoption, productivity, governance, and business outcomes into one framework—will be the ones to transform signals into proof. For them, AI won’t just be an experiment; **it will be a measurable driver of enterprise value.**

Ready to join the AI Leaders Lab?

AI transformation takes more than handing out ChatGPT licenses—it requires rethinking how people, processes, and technology work together. That’s why we created a monthly **AI Leaders Lab**: an invite-only session designed for leaders like you who are shaping the future of work.

This 60-minute conversation is small by design. We hand-picked a select group of AI leaders so every participant can contribute, exchange ideas, and walk away with new perspectives. If you can’t make it, let us know—we’ll open your seat to another leader.

What you’ll experience:

- A roundtable discussion tailored to the group’s top priorities
- Peer-to-peer connection through interactive breakouts
- Fresh insights, data, and real-world patterns from Zapier’s AI team
- Practical takeaways you can apply immediately to accelerate AI adoption

Spark viral AI adoption in your org, build habits and infrastructure that endure beyond the hype, and shift AI from a “project” into a company-wide culture. Seats are limited—reserve yours now to be part of this exclusive conversation.

Reserve your seat

Proving AI progress: How enterprises measure success, governance, and ROI

Executive Summary

Enterprises are doubling down on AI, but proving progress remains a challenge. This report examines how enterprises are bridging that gap: what signals they rely on, where the cracks appear, and how orchestration will shape the next stage of enterprise maturity.

The findings come from enterprise leaders (CIOs, CTOs, Chief Data & Analytics Officers, VPs of AI/ML, and Directors of IT) as well as enterprise practitioners (data scientists, engineers, product managers, and operations leads).

- **Reporting & ROI:** 73% of leaders feel frequent pressure to show ROI that doesn't yet exist, and 92% say ROI is difficult or only partially manageable. Adoption has become the bridge metric: 78% of leaders frame it as a leading indicator of ROI. Yet two-thirds of practitioners (67%) say their teams are only somewhat equipped to report AI progress.
- **Ownership & Strategy:** Enterprises are restructuring around AI. Half of leaders (50%) say AI strategy is currently owned by a centralized team. Alignment remains fragile, with 50% of enterprise leaders describing AI alignment as "somewhat informal".
- **Governance & Oversight:** Governance is falling behind adoption. 51% of leaders admit frameworks are lagging, while 83% identify compliance and shadow AI as their top risks. Practitioners confirm the cracks: 63% admit using AI without approval, and 79% say governance isn't keeping up with AI expansion.
- **Enablement & Adoption:** Practitioners reveal the reality on the ground: only 6% report AI consistently saves time, while 94% point to AI costing more time than it saves with burdens such as fixing low-quality outputs (33%), unclear governance (20%), or clunky integrations (18%). Integration emerges as the hinge point: 44% of practitioners say it's the top barrier to adoption.

→ The big takeaway: Adoption and productivity provide credibility, but ownership, governance, and integration determine whether those signals scale into ROI. Enterprises that embed **orchestration**—connecting adoption, productivity, governance, and outcomes into a unified framework—will be the ones to transform signals into proof.

Scale your AI ROI without scaling your risk

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 easily. 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.



airbnb

ActiveCampaign >



okta



betterhelp



Dropbox



hudl

Sysco™

Ruggable



VOXMEDIA



grammarly

 **zapier**

[Talk to an AI expert today](#)

Survey methodology

Publication date: September 17, 2025 | Total respondents (N): 200

This survey was conducted in partnership with NewtonX, which provided verified B2B respondents. All participants were screened for either direct responsibility for building or managing AI/automation or budget/decision-making authority over enterprise AI adoption.

Audience split

- Leaders (Director+): N = 100
Titles include CIOs, CTOs, Chief Data & Analytics Officers, VPs of AI/ML, Directors of IT/Engineering/Operations, and Heads of Automation/Innovation.
- Practitioners (IC–Manager): N = 100
Roles include senior engineers, architects, operations managers, product managers, and automation leads embedding AI into daily workflows.

Role seniority

- C-level executives (CIO, CTO, CDO, CISO): 19
- VP: 24
- Director: 57
- Manager: 63
- Team Lead: 18
- Senior IC (technical): 17
- IC (technical): 2

Company size

- 500–999 employees: 16
- 1,000–4,999 employees: 47
- 5,000+ employees: 137

Primary functions represented

- Leaders (N=100): IT Ops 28, Security 8, Data/Analytics 46, Engineering 18.
- Practitioners (N=100): IT Ops 13, Security 5, Data/Analytics 51, Engineering 31.

Geography

- United States: 11