How strategy leaders are using AI today

Our survey of strategy leaders about their use of AI shows that nearly 20% say their companies are not yet using AI—and nearly 60% think that their companies are adopting AI too slowly.

Separate surveys explored the perspectives of chief people officers; chief marketing officers; chief legal officers; chief sales officers; chief supply chain and operating officers; chief digital, technology, or information officers; and chief AI officers. Other survey reports and other insights on leadership and AI can be found on heidrick.com.

Usage is widespread—but most leaders want to move even faster

The majority of **strategy leaders say their companies are using AI in at least some capacity**, consistent with their peers across functions.

Not yet using AI	Piloting it in some functions or business units	Using it in some functions or business units	Using it in most or all functions or business units
16%	38%	38%	8%

Nearly 60% of strategy leaders say their companies are adopting AI too slowly, which is similar to, though a bit higher than, what most of their C-suite peers say. It's notable that none thought they were moving too fast.

At the right speed	Too fast	Too slowly	Don't know
36%	0%	57%	7%

A focus on internal use and productivity gains

A strong majority of **strategy leaders say they are focused on AI for internal use…**

Internal use	82%
External use with customers	48%
External use with suppliers and partners	13%
Other	3%
Don't know	6%

…with 60% seeking opportunities to support their internal functions. Across marketing, sales, and strategy officers, content creation was also a frequently indicated use for AI.

Looking two years ahead, a notable share of **strategy leaders expect the biggest increases in the use of AI will be in revenue planning, HR operations and recruitment, and customer value analysis.**

	Currently	In 2 years' time
Support for internal functions (for example, drafting documents)	36	60
Creating content (copy and/or images)	30	58
Process automation	40	48
Market analysis	36	45
Developing customized advertising/customer messaging	34	47
Customer or technical service	32	51
Product or service development	29	45
Customer sentiment analysis	29	48
Recruitment	22	49
Risk and cybersecurity	19	52
Customer value analysis	19	49
Speeding up ROI return data	18	42
Revenue planning	18	49
HR operations	15	51
Mining subscriber data	14	41
Other	4	3

Measuring ROI

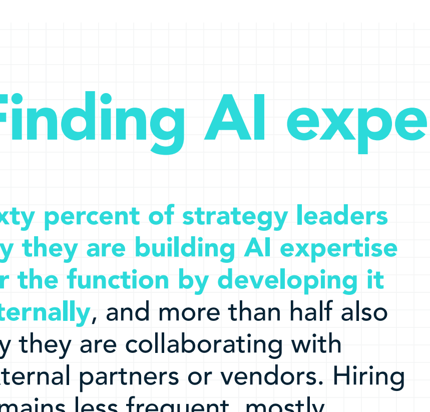
Despite the hype about AI and how quickly companies are adopting it, strategy leaders, as well as most of their peers across functions, indicate that their companies aren't investing just to keep up with peers: **they are measuring success based on their goals, as they would any other investment.**

Improved productivity	58%
Cost reduction	36%
Improved customer engagement scores	32%
Faster time to market	19%
Increased market share	19%
Other	7%
Don't know	15%

Who's taking the lead?

Across functions, the person who is most often cited as owning AI strategy is the chief information, technology, or digital officer. **About 10% say it's the CEO. And just over 10% say no one.**[1]

Forty percent say the CEO is involved in setting AI policies, and just over 60% say the digital leader is involved. There's little consistency among survey respondents in who else is involved, though general counsels and chief information security officers are cited more often than most other leaders by leaders across functions.



As for the board, **40% of strategy leaders do not think the board is spending enough time on AI.** This share is similar across most functions.

Spending enough time	21%
Spending too little time	40%
Spending too much time	4%
Overseeing as part of their normal oversight of strategy and risk	18%
Asking for special reports on AI policies	7%
Asking for special reports on AI's effect on strategy	8%
Asking for special reports on AI's risks	4%
Seeking input from executives about AI's development and opportunities	21%
Seeking input from external experts about AI's development and opportunities	14%
Other	4%
Don't know	8%

Finding AI expertise for the strategy function

Sixty percent of strategy leaders say they are building AI expertise for the function by developing it internally, and more than half also say they are collaborating with external partners or vendors. Hiring remains less frequent, mostly because expertise remains hard to find. Most functional peers' views are similar.

Developing internally, including upskilling or reskilling existing workforce	60%
Collaborating with external technology partners or vendors	53%
Engaging consultants	21%
Hiring full-time leaders	12%
Engaging on-demand talent	8%
Other	1%
We aren't trying to build AI expertise	12%
Don't know	4%

The top two talent challenges strategy leaders cited were too few people with AI expertise available at any level and too few leaders available who can combine AI and business expertise, with the shares almost the same.

Too few people with AI expertise available at any level	36%
Too few leaders who can combine AI and business expertise available	34%
Too few leaders with AI expertise available	23%
We have other priorities for investing in talent	22%
We don't know how to define roles related to AI	22%
Lack of interest among leaders at our company in developing AI expertise themselves	18%
People with AI expertise are less interested in our industry than others	16%
Our compensation for AI talent is not competitive	12%
Too few leaders who have run a large AI program available	10%
We aren't trying to build AI expertise	10%
No specific challenges	7%
Other	3%
Don't know	3%

Considerations for leaders

Across functions, it's still hard for companies to find the AI talent they need. As leaders seek to use AI for a broadening range of tasks and projects—eventually rewiring business processes across the enterprise—we expect high demand for AI-specific expertise at all levels to continue for three to six years. In the long run, it seems likely demand will follow a pattern similar to that in earlier waves of computing innovation, from personal computing to cloud, in which specific technical expertise was in high demand during the transition, but then declined as the relevant knowledge became a part of every person's role. In other words, we expect that basic working knowledge of AI will be as fundamental an expectation for senior leaders as being digitally savvy is today.

That said, we also expect every enterprise will have a senior leader responsible for the AI strategy and for AI platforms and tools. This executive may or may not have a chief AI officer title.

[1] Notably, only 31% of the respondents who said no one owns the AI strategy also said their company is not yet using AI; 39% said their company is piloting, and another 29% said their company is using it in some areas.

About the research

In spring 2024, we surveyed 1,894 executives: 518 executives in finance; 401 executives in human resources; 153 executives in legal; 335 executives in marketing; 93 executives in sales; 90 executives in strategy; and 304 executives in supply chain and operations. This survey had a global reach; respondents represent the full range of industries, company revenue levels, and various company ownership structures.

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