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AI LEADERSHIP LANDSCAPE

What executive leaders are really navigating in AI right now

A NOTE FROM THE FIELD

AI is moving faster than most organizations were built to absorb. The pressure to commit is real: build, buy, or lead. The questions rarely come with clean answers.

What helps is knowing where other leaders are standing.

In spring 2026, we gathered with senior leaders—including C-suite executives, CTOs, and vice presidents of strategy and operations—from organizations across financial services, energy and utilities, aviation and travel, retail, food service, supply chain and logistics, higher education, and the nonprofit sector at the DRC Convergence AI event in Dallas, Texas.

The themes in this report reflect what surfaced across those conversations: the tensions that won't resolve on their own, the patterns that emerge regardless of industry, and the few things leaders broadly agree on.

We put this report together to give you a clearer picture of the landscape, so the decisions you're making inside your organization can start from a stronger foundation.

IN THIS REPORT

The issues shaping executive AI decisions right now

- **AI use cases and value prioritization** – How leaders are assessing, sequencing, and measuring the value of AI investments across the enterprise
- **Governance and responsible AI** – The guardrails, approved tools, and policy frameworks shaping what can move forward
- **Workforce readiness and change** – How AI is reshaping roles, skill requirements, and organizational expectations
- **Automation and agentic AI** – The shift from copilots to systems that encode expertise and extend execution
- **The buy, build, or wait tension** – How the pace of AI change is creating real hesitation around bespoke investment
- **AI and societal responsibility** – Questions around regulation, alignment, and who is accountable for long-term outcomes
- **AI in resource-constrained environments** – How smaller or leaner organizations are approaching adoption with fewer resources but similar strategic questions

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SUPPLY CHAIN & OPERATIONS AI

The data is there.
The integration strategy is the gap.

Across asset-intensive environments, leaders are increasingly looking at operations through an AI lens. Existing infrastructure such as cameras, sensors, and other operational systems already contains valuable signals, often without requiring major new investment.

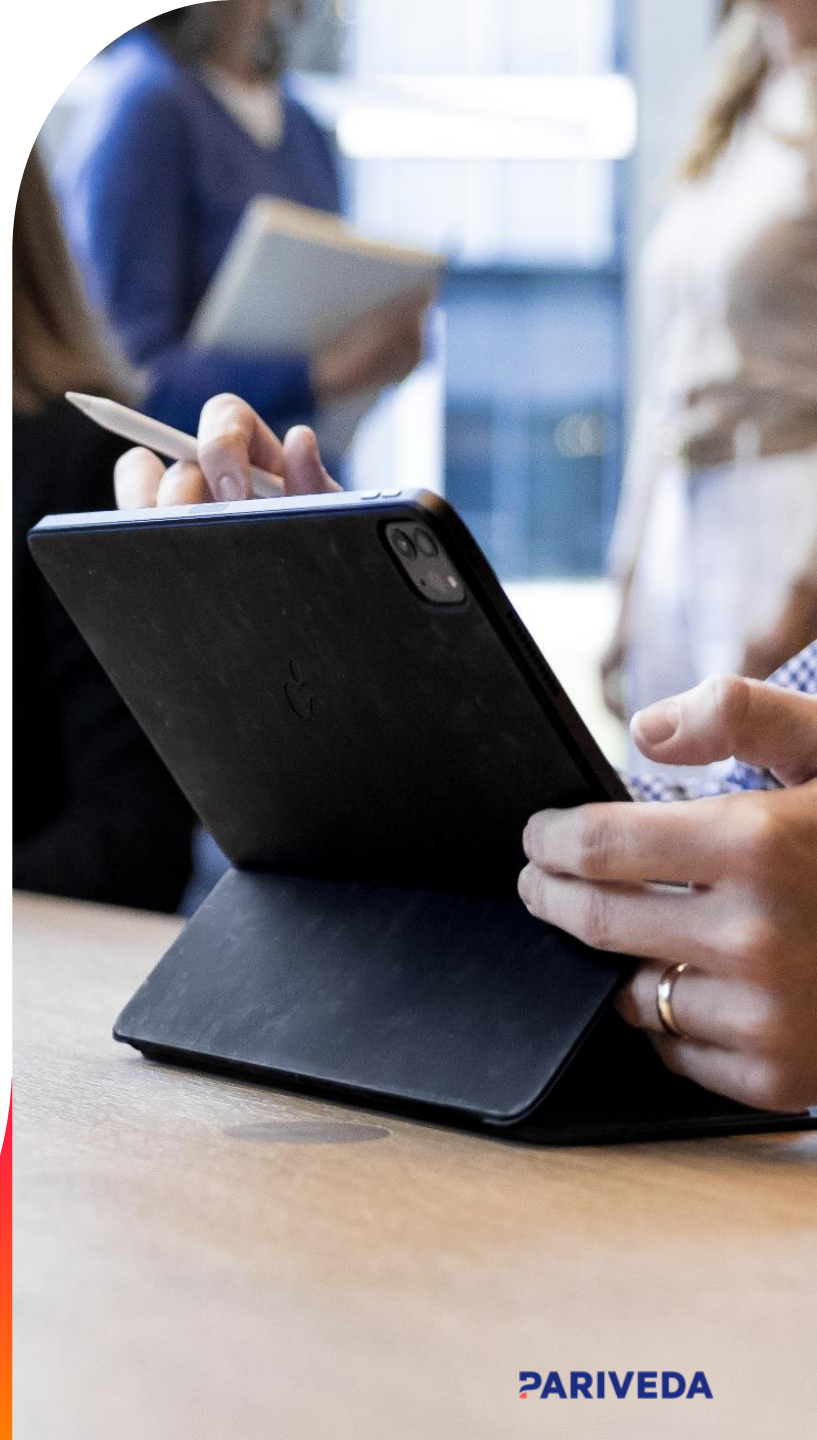
The harder question is what comes next. Once that infrastructure is in place, organizations still need a clear way to identify, rank, and sequence the AI use cases most likely to create enterprise value. The opportunity is already underfoot, but without an integration and prioritization strategy, it remains difficult to unlock at scale.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Existing physical infrastructure is often an underutilized asset for operational AI
- In many cases, the constraint is not data availability but integration strategy
- Even mature organizations are still working through how to identify and rank the highest-value AI opportunities
- A structured framework for sequencing use cases is becoming a practical differentiator

WHY IT MATTERS

Without a clear framework for identifying and sequencing high-value AI use cases, the data advantage already sitting inside your operations stays dormant.



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AI GOVERNANCE, WORKFORCE & PUBLIC SECTOR

It’s not just “can we use AI?” It’s “which AI has been approved, and under what conditions?”

Common AI usage patterns are beginning to emerge across industries, but governance is where many organizations are spending the most energy. The key questions are no longer just about capability. They are about which tools are approved, how policies are being defined, and what responsible use looks like in practice.

At the same time, application modernization continues to surface as a prerequisite to real AI readiness. Organizations cannot layer intelligence onto systems that are not prepared to support it. In public sector and higher education environments, those challenges are compounded by slower procurement pathways and more complex partnership dynamics.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Governance is a real blocker, not a downstream consideration
- Many organizations are asking not just whether they can use AI, but which tools are approved and under what conditions
- Application modernization often needs to happen before AI can scale effectively
- Public sector and higher education entities face procurement realities that require more tailored approaches

WHY IT MATTERS

Organizations that define clear guardrails early will move faster than those waiting for perfect policy alignment.

The pace of AI change is forcing decisions before organizations feel ready.

AI is reshaping work across industries, from hospitality and food service to financial services and travel. As use cases expand, workforce readiness is becoming a central concern, not a secondary one. Leaders are being pushed to think not only about what AI can do, but about how roles, skills, and organizational expectations will change alongside it.

The pace of that change is also creating real hesitation. Many organizations are reluctant to invest too heavily in bespoke solutions when the landscape may shift materially within the next year. At the same time, more leaders are beginning to see AI fluency and agentic solution development as a differentiator, both for their organizations and for their own careers.

The buy vs. build vs. wait dilemma is real.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The pace of change in AI creates genuine hesitancy around investing in bespoke solutions when the landscape may shift in 6 to 12 months.
- Some leaders are making a conscious shift into AI agentic solution development, an example of betting on AI as a career differentiator, not just a tool
- The pace of AI change is creating meaningful societal disruption, not just organizational change

WHY IT MATTERS

Organizations that hesitate risk falling behind, not just in capability but in attracting and retaining forward-looking talent.

AI VALUE REALIZATION & GOVERNANCE

The organizations pulling ahead aren't doing more AI. They're doing it more intentionally.

Operationalizing AI governance inside large, regulated organizations remains a real and active challenge. But beneath that challenge is a broader shift in mindset: leaders are moving away from innovation for innovation's sake and toward more deliberate, value-driven implementation.

That shift is also bringing more difficult conversations into the open. Workforce displacement is no longer being treated as a distant concern. It is entering leadership dialogue now, and the organizations willing to address it honestly are better positioned to make clearer decisions about where AI should and should not create value.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Many organizations are still caught in "AI for innovation's sake" rather than being intentional about which types of AI to implement and why.
- Workforce displacement is entering the leadership conversation as a current, not future, issue
- Leaders must address the developing tension between AI exploration and AI intentionality

WHY IT MATTERS

Clarity on where AI drives measurable value will separate leaders from organizations stuck in perpetual pilot mode.

Clarity on value and intentionality is the differentiator.

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PERSONALIZATION, DATA & AGENTIC AI

When the tooling is no longer the constraint, the bottleneck becomes ideas and expertise.

In more mature personalization environments, the limitation is no longer experimentation capacity. It is the shortage of new ideas, signals, and inputs that can generate better tests and sharper decisions. That shifts the challenge from tooling to upstream insight generation and makes idea creation itself a more strategic system to build.

A similar pattern is showing up in agentic AI. Some of the most compelling use cases are not simply automating tasks. They are capturing expert and institutional knowledge, reducing dependence on a few specialists, and making complex processes easier to execute at scale. Together, these signals point to a broader shift: AI becomes most powerful when it expands creativity, judgment, and access to expertise.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

In mature programs, the bottleneck often shifts from tooling to idea generation:

- Treating idea generation as a system is an emerging opportunity
- Agents that encode expert knowledge can make complex processes more scalable and self-service
- Automation creates the most value when it scales expertise and creativity, not just task execution

WHY IT MATTERS

Organizations that treat idea generation and knowledge capture as systems will unlock significantly more value from AI.

AI IN UTILITIES & ENERGY

AI value may be clear, but risk is defining the pace

AI's role across power transmission and distribution breaks into two distinct tracks: operations and customer-facing. AI for forecasting and monitoring to improve grid resilience is where adoption is most mature. The broader conversation is about demystifying AI agents, separating real maturity from hype, and defining the safe investment zones for an organization operating under significant regulatory constraints.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Operations-focused AI use cases are more mature than broader enterprise adoption
- Many organizations are still defining safe investment zones for AI
- A key tension is how to unlock AI value without increasing risk to regulated infrastructure
- LLMs are emerging as a scaling mechanism for customer information, not a replacement for staff

WHY IT MATTERS

The ability to define "safe zones" for AI investment will determine how quickly organizations can expand beyond operational use cases.

How do we unlock AI value without introducing risk to critical, regulated infrastructure?

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AI IN THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

Nonprofits face the same AI challenges as enterprises, but with fewer resources to navigate them.

Nonprofit organizations are beginning to adopt AI, but readiness and uptake vary significantly across teams. The strategic questions are not fundamentally different from those facing large enterprises. Where should AI start, how should it be governed, and what use cases are actually worth pursuing?

What changes is the resource environment. With leaner teams and less room to absorb missteps, practical use cases matter even more. In that context, AI is showing up as a particularly strong thinking partner for complex modeling, scenario planning, and decision support, especially when it is grounded in established frameworks rather than used as a generic productivity tool.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Nonprofits face many of the same AI adoption questions as enterprises, but with fewer resources to navigate them
- AI is emerging as a valuable thinking partner, not just a productivity tool
- Uneven uptake, unclear governance, and uncertainty around where to start remain common challenges
- Regional nonprofits can still be meaningful innovation leaders when they connect AI to grounded, practical use cases

WHY IT MATTERS

Organizations that simplify AI adoption and ground it in practical use cases will unlock outsized impact in resource-constrained environments.

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE & AI ADOPTION

Fear, Uncertainty, and Doubt (FUD) is a real and consistent barrier.

Customer expectations around AI are beginning to shift. For routine interactions, speed and accuracy increasingly matter more than whether the resolution comes from a person or an AI-enabled experience. At the same time, that growing openness on the customer side is not yet matched by confidence inside many organizations.

What continues to slow progress is not a lack of interest, but the weight of unresolved hesitation. Leaders are struggling with where to start, whether custom investments will become obsolete too quickly, how to protect against bad actors, and what accountability looks like when AI systems fail. Explainability and auditability are not abstract concerns. They are operational necessities in any high-stakes or customer-facing environment.

WHY IT MATTERS

Organizations that directly address fear, uncertainty, and doubt will move faster than those waiting for clarity that may never come.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Customers are increasingly comfortable, and even prefer, AI-driven resolution for service issues.

The obsolescence anxiety is particularly acute: organizations worry about building skills and systems that become irrelevant faster than the ROI can be realized

Explainability and auditability aren't just regulatory checkboxes. They're operational necessities when AI is embedded in customer-facing or high-stakes workflows.

Fear, Uncertainty & Doubt (FUD) is a real and consistent barrier. The most commonly heard hesitations:

- *"We don't know where to start": organizations feel the landscape is too vast and moving too fast to commit to a path*
- *"We'll build it and it will be obsolete": a well-founded concern that significant investment in custom AI solutions may be undercut when vendors bundle equivalent functionality into platforms*
- *"How do we keep bad actors out?": AI model security and adversarial exploitation are genuine enterprise concerns, not just theoretical ones*
- *"When something goes wrong, we can't trace it": the absence of robust audit trails makes debugging and accountability nearly impossible in complex AI pipelines*

AI, SOCIETY & THE RESPONSIBILITY GAP

The responsibility gap is widening as AI moves faster than regulation

The growing divide between AI engineers who deeply understand the technology and the broader public, and policymakers, who don't, is one of the defining tensions in AI right now. The pace of regulatory development vs. the pace of AI advancement is increasingly mismatched. That leaves a widening gap in accountability.

The question of who is responsible for keeping AI aligned with societal values remains unsettled, even as the consequences of getting it wrong grow more significant. More leaders are beginning to recognize that responsible AI cannot be treated as someone else's problem or deferred until regulation catches up.

WHY IT MATTERS

Leaders who take accountability for responsible AI—rather than waiting for regulation—will shape both trust and long-term outcomes.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The alignment problem isn't just a technical challenge. It's a social and ethical one, and the people best positioned to understand it are often the least incentivized to slow down and engage it.
- The regulatory gap is real and widening: policy moves in years, AI advances in months.
- This is a call for collective responsibility. Not waiting for government or industry bodies to act, but every leader holding themselves accountable for how AI is deployed in their organizations and communities.

CROSS CUTTING OBSERVATIONS

What separates leaders who are moving from those who are stuck

A few patterns stood out across every context and industry as consistent signals underneath the conversations.

Intentionality over experimentation. The most sophisticated thinking isn't about what AI can do but about how to be deliberate about which AI to pursue and why. Organizations that have moved past "exploration mode" are seeing better outcomes.

Governance is a real constraint, not a future problem. Across sectors, leaders are actively managing questions about approved tools, risk frameworks, audit trails, and accountability, right now, not theoretically.

The buy/build/wait question is unresolved and the anxiety is growing. Many leaders are consciously choosing to wait on bespoke builds until the platform layer stabilizes. The fear of building something that becomes bundled functionality within 12 months is a significant strategic inhibitor.

Agents as expertise multipliers. The most compelling agentic AI examples weren't about replacing people. They were about encoding expert knowledge so that complex work becomes accessible at scale.

Societal impact is entering the room. Leaders are moving beyond ROI to discuss AI's broader societal implications: workforce displacement, regulatory lag, security vulnerabilities, and the alignment problem. Executive conversations are maturing and the questions are getting harder.

FUD is the enemy of progress. Fear, Uncertainty, and Doubt are slowing adoption in ways that aren't always rational but are entirely understandable. Addressing these concerns directly, with frameworks, proof points, and honest assessments of risk, is as important as any technical capability conversation.

TAKE THE NEXT STEP WITH US

Let’s move from AI exploration to intentional execution

Pariveda helps organizations turn AI potential into meaningful business value by establishing the right guardrails and moving forward with clarity and confidence.

Ready to take the next step? Let’s talk!

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