

Report

# CDO Insights 2026

Data governance and the trust paradox of data and  
AI literacy take center stage

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## Executive Summary

The moment has come: AI has transitioned from experimental technology to a strategic, transformational imperative.

### Now comes the hard part.

With organizations exploring use cases and steering initiatives toward production, many are discovering that the growing, widespread use of AI at their companies is exposing infrastructure and governance gaps as well as shortfalls in employees' data literacy and AI literacy. The enthusiasm around AI is being tempered by the realization that there are high-stakes challenges ahead that need to be addressed if ongoing and future AI initiatives are to continue finding success. Many are embracing the mindset that going all-in on AI is the only way to make it work.

AI adoption has reached a tipping point at companies, with 69% having incorporated generative AI (GenAI) into their business practices and another 25% expecting to do so in the next 12 months, according to a survey of 600 data leaders (CDOs, CDAOs and CAOs) from companies with \$500M+ in revenue across the U.S., UK / EU and APAC conducted by Wakefield Research for Informatica.

That's a sharp rise from **48% who had adopted GenAI last year** and **45% who had adopted it the year prior**. Agentic AI, seen by many as an important next step in AI use — moving from content creation to autonomous execution and decision making — is following suit with nearly half (47%) already having adopted the technology.

While there are numerous factors that can ultimately make or break the success of an AI initiative, not grounding the initiative in high quality data and a strong underlying data management foundation can destroy a project before it takes off. The majority (61%) cite better data — including higher data quality and completeness — as a factor that is making it easier to successfully transition more of their GenAI pilots into production. That said, the job is far from finished: among data leaders at companies that have adopted or plan to adopt agentic AI, half (50%) cite data quality / retrieval concerns as a top challenge for moving AI agents into production.

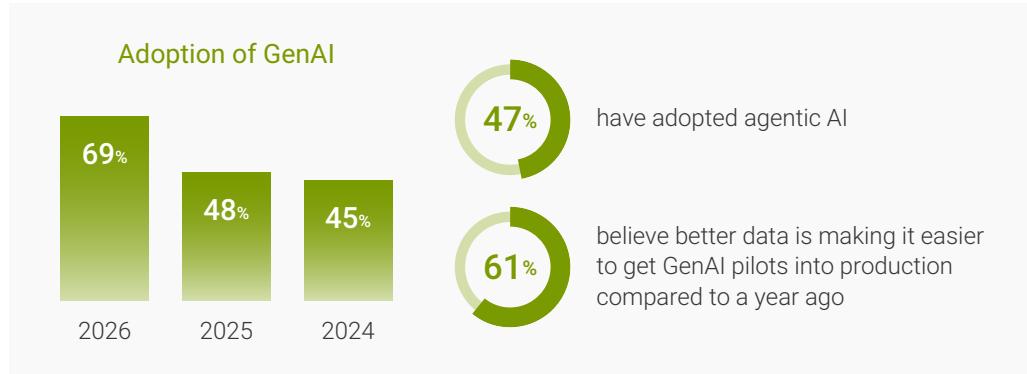
As AI initiatives spread, there's another widespread concern on data leaders' minds: **75% believe their workforce needs upskilling in data literacy and 74% in AI literacy to responsibly use AI or AI outputs in day-to-day operations**. Within organizations, however, trust in the data being used to drive AI is high: 65% of data leaders believe most, all or almost all employees at their company trust the data they have and are using for AI. **But that high trust is a cause for concern when there are underlying data reliability problems and data and AI literacy gaps preventing workers from being able to recognize and address the potential shortcomings of the data being used for their AI efforts.**

In addition, **76% acknowledge their company's visibility and governance have not completely kept up with employees' use of AI**, which could increase exposure issues for companies already grappling with vulnerabilities.

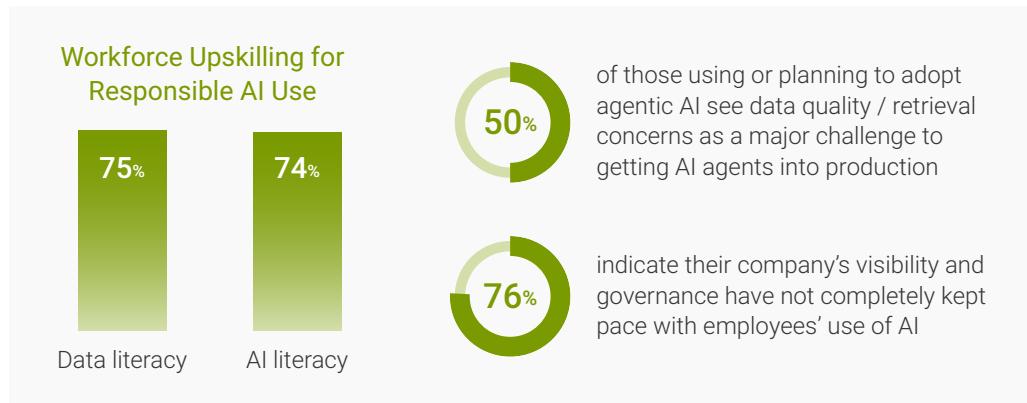
The great push to embrace the transformational possibilities of AI companywide increases the risks companies are taking if they don't have their data houses in order. As companies look to the future, 86% will increase data management investments to help navigate the trust paradox and address issues ranging from data privacy and security to AI visibility and governance as well as lagging employee data and AI literacy.

## Key Findings

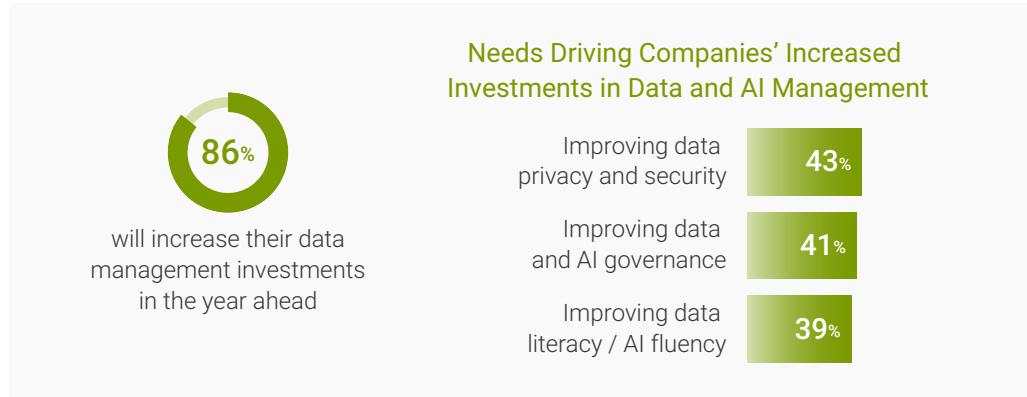
### The Current State of AI



### The Trust Paradox



### The Path Forward



## Making Room for AI

### Adoption is speeding up for GenAI, and agentic AI technologies are following suit

GenAI adoption has jumped to 69%. In comparison, from two years ago to last year, those who said their company had adopted GenAI into its business practices had only increased from 45% to 48%. That ramp-up isn't over. An additional 25% expect their company to adopt GenAI in the next 12 months, leaving just 6% who don't anticipate using GenAI by this time next year. GenAI adoption is highest in the U.S. (75%, compared to 48% the year prior), followed by the UK / EU and APAC (both 66%, compared to 47% and 51% in 2025, respectively).



### More than 2 in 3 have already adopted GenAI

And many are continuing this trend with agentic AI in the hope that AI agents will help their companies improve customer service functions, streamline work processes and even create new virtual workforce teams, among other use cases. Agentic AI is still emerging, but nearly half (47%) have already adopted it and an additional 31% plan to adopt it in the next 12 months. The U.S. leads that adoption at 52%, followed closely by the UK / EU (50%) and trailed by APAC (41%). However, an additional 24% of data leaders in APAC expect to adopt agentic AI within the next six months. Larger companies with 5,000 or more employees are more likely to have already adopted agentic AI (54%) than those with fewer than 5,000 employees (44%).

As adoption ramps up for agentic AI, there's a split among companies who've adopted or plan to adopt agentic AI on how they'll manage or deploy AI agents. For 54%, expectations are that it'll be done with vendor solutions while 44% expect to develop and manage AI agents internally.

### Companies face challenges getting AI agents in production



But as with GenAI, data will be an important factor for success. The most common challenge current and anticipated adopters of agentic AI cite in migrating agents into production is data quality / retrieval concerns (50%). Security concerns (43%), observability concerns (39%) and lack of safety guardrails for AI use (35%) are common challenges as well.

## Spotlight: Organizations Eye Customer Experience Enhancements with AI

Some of the promises of AI include increased efficiencies, improved processes and strategy guidance, or projects that directly drive revenue generation, among many others.

In considering the most beneficial use cases for all types of AI at their organization, many are prioritizing client-focused applications. In ranking their company's top three AI use categories for the next 12 months, more than a quarter include enhancing customer experience and loyalty (29%) and nearly as many (25%) cite optimizing post-sale customer support.

Looking more internally, companies are also eyeing AI initiatives to improve business intelligence analytics and decision making (28%), comply with regulatory and ESG standards (27%) and improve risk management / fraud prevention (25%).

Employees won't be left out either, though, as companies look at AI options for enhancing employee collaboration and workflows (26%) and optimizing employee education / HR support (26%), as well as optimizing internal business-process efficiency (25%).



## Taking AI from Pilot to Production

With the table set for AI initiatives, companies are working to clear the path to successful implementation by eliminating barriers to taking ideas and concepts and turning them into revenue-generating AI products or services and operational efficiency solutions.

### Better data is a critical factor for AI success.

Conversely, a lack of data reliability can be a barrier to moving initiatives from pilot to production for organizations who have already adopted or plan to adopt GenAI. Among these companies, 57% view data reliability as a top or key barrier to moving more projects from pilot to production. That's on par with the 56% who **indicated this last year**, suggesting that this continues to be a major issue that has not been solved. The number who view data reliability as the top barrier has increased slightly from **10% last year** to 12% now.

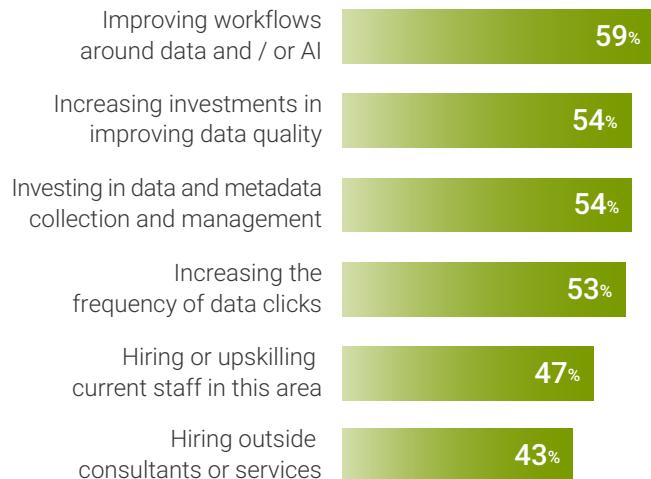
**Data reliability remains a key barrier to success**



More than half of data leaders at companies who've adopted or plan to adopt GenAI (56%) are very or extremely concerned about AI pilots moving forward without addressing data reliability problems uncovered by previous initiatives.

That high concern is more pronounced in the U.S. (66%) than in the UK / EU (50%) or APAC (51%). Larger companies with 5,000 or more employees are more likely to be very or extremely concerned (62%) than those with fewer than 5,000 (52%).

### Leaders are taking steps to improve the reliability of the data used for AI

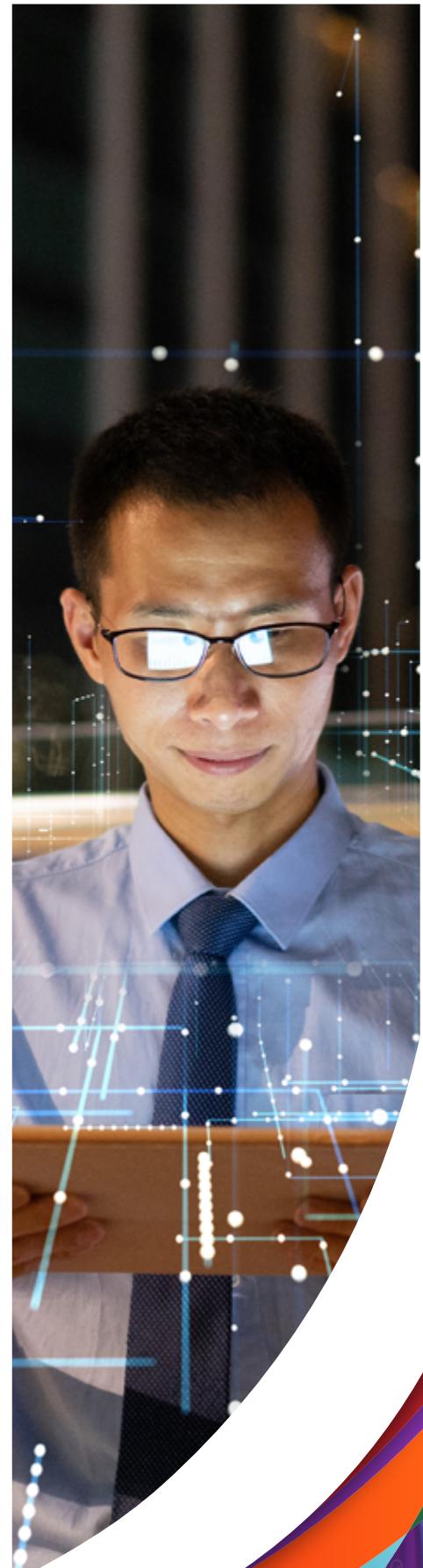
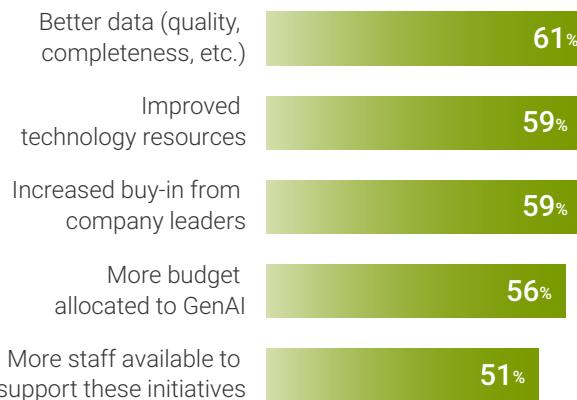


To address those concerns, they're taking steps to improve reliability for data used in AI initiatives in several ways. That starts with process changes, such as improving workflows around data and / or AI (59%) and increasing the frequency of data checks (53%). Some of that involves investments, including adding funds to improve data quality (54%) and investing in data and metadata collection and management (54%). And then there's addressing data reliability with people, by hiring or upskilling workers in this area (47%) or hiring outside consultants or services (43%).

## Spotlight: Improvements to Data and Resources Are Aiding GenAI Success

For 61%, better data (data that's higher-quality or more complete) is making it easier to successfully transition GenAI pilots into production compared to a year ago. Better data is more likely to be a factor for success in the UK / EU (67%) than in the U.S. (53%); APAC is in the middle at 62%.

Other top factors easing these transitions include improved technology resources (59%), increased buy-in from company leaders (59%), more budget allocated to GenAI (56%) and more employees being made available to support these initiatives (51%). Increased buy-in from company leaders is a bigger factor for AI success at companies with \$1 billion or more in revenue (61%) than those with less than \$1 billion (53%).



## The Need to Temper Employee Trust

**Leaders must grapple with the potentially blind trust their employees have in the data they are using for AI and the reality of known data reliability, security and privacy gaps.**

As AI has entered the mainstream, becoming part of everyone's work and personal lives, companies see high trust among their employees for the data being used for AI: 65% work in organizations where most, all or almost all their employees trust the data they have and are using for AI.

This is especially true for companies that have adopted agentic AI, where 74% believe most or all their organization trusts the data they are using for AI efforts. That's a signal that as companies get further into their work with AI, their trust in the data driving AI initiatives, as well as AI itself, is higher.

What's driving this increase in AI trust? For 42%, it's the sheer fact that AI is seeing more widespread use across their organization. Similarly, nearly half (48%) cite improved AI tools and models among the top three reasons for that trust increase over the last 12 months, while 44% note better results in AI outputs. While still a concern for many, another top driver is increased AI literacy (46%).

### Yet, this high level of trust is a cause for concern.

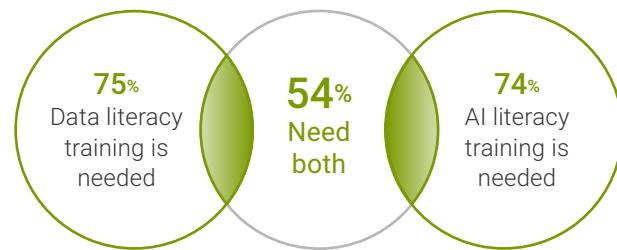
Leaders are more likely to report most or almost all of their employees trust the data being used for AI at companies where they also believe their employees need both data literacy and AI literacy upskilling to responsibly use AI or its outputs (71%). This compares to 60% at organizations where workers need only AI literacy upskilling and 53% at organizations where employees need only data literacy upskilling. Thus, some of that high trust in AI may be due to a lack of understanding about what constitutes high-quality data in the first place.

Data leaders see upskilling needs before their employees are ready to responsibly use AI or its output in their day-to-day operations. A large majority (75%) believe their workforce needs more upskilling in data literacy and 74% believe their employees need more upskilling in AI literacy. Those at smaller companies, with under 5,000 employees (61%), are more likely to see upskilling needs in both areas than those at companies with 5,000 or more employees (41%).

Upskilling is also a concern for agentic AI adoption: around two in five data leaders at companies that have adopted or plan to adopt agentic AI cite lack of agentic AI expertise (42%) as a barrier to getting AI agents into production.

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### Most feel employees need upskilling before they can responsibly use AI



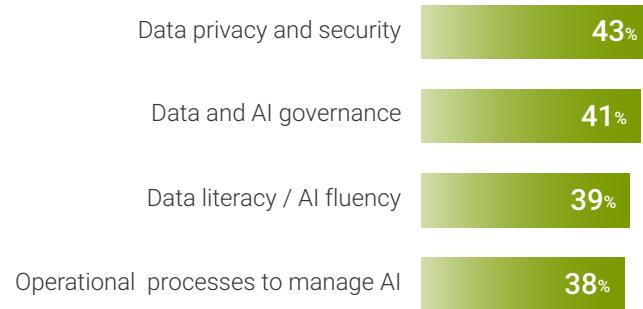
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CDOs must temper employees' potentially blind trust in data for AI to avoid catastrophic risks.

## Governing AI for Confidence in Responsible Use

AI is pushing past the tipping point of adoption. As this happens, visibility and governance on how employees use it are paramount. These concerns are critical, both for reducing risk and for solving the underlying issues holding AI efforts back. That's especially true given the potentially misplaced trust employees have in the data being used for AI. For 41% of those increasing their investments in data management this year, improving data and AI governance is a top need driving this increase.

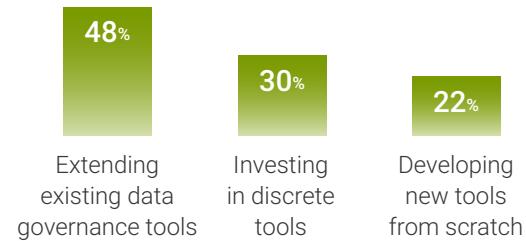
### Data and AI goals will drive data management investments



AI comes with high stakes, so it's troubling that many companies aren't fully aware of how employees at their organizations are using it. They're also struggling to keep up with governance frameworks, especially given how quickly these technologies are moving. More than three-quarters of data leaders (76%) indicate their company's visibility and AI governance has not completely kept pace with employees' use of AI.

How can this be improved? Nearly half of companies (48%) have approached AI governance by extending their existing data governance tools to incorporate AI. This approach is particularly common among more established companies in business for 20 years or longer (58%). Fewer (30%) have invested in discrete tools for AI governance or started from scratch to develop new tools for the task (22%).

### Nearly half are adapting existing tools for AI governance



Notably, companies investing in discrete tools for AI governance or developing new tools from scratch are more likely to feel confident that their AI visibility and governance have kept pace with employees' use of AI, at least for the most part (90% and 88%, respectively). By comparison, 78% of those extending existing data governance tools to incorporate AI share that view.

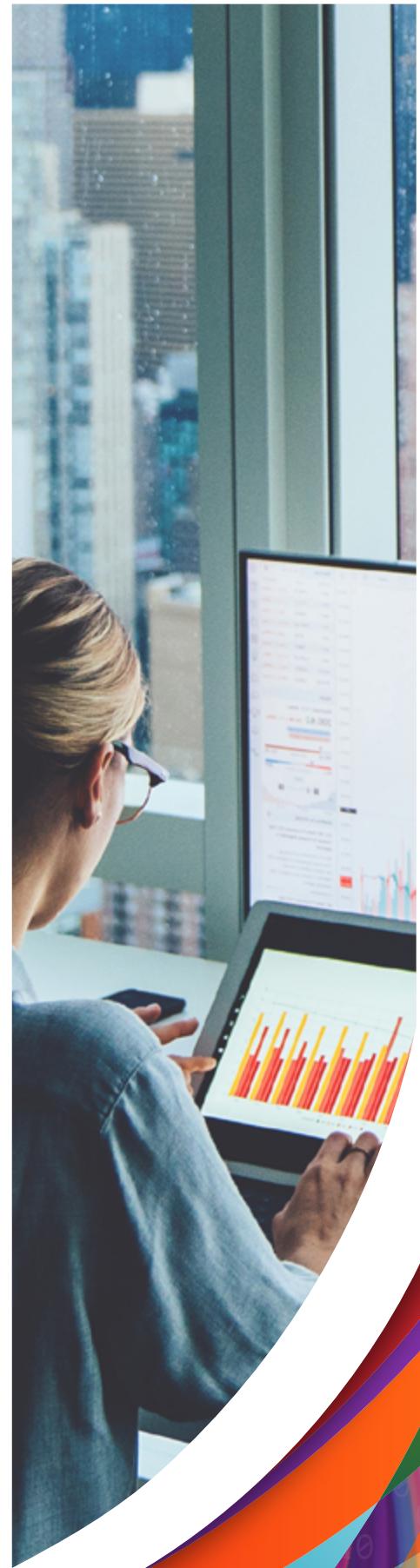
**However, this creates a conundrum.**

Extending existing governance tools may be the more time-sensitive approach for those looking to quickly adopt AI.

Three-quarters of data leaders at companies that are extending existing data governance tools to incorporate AI (75%) have already adopted GenAI, compared to less than two-thirds of those who are investing in discrete tools for AI governance (65%) or started from scratch to develop new AI governance tools (60%).

Companies extending existing data governance tools to incorporate AI are also more likely to have adopted agentic AI (56%) than those investing in discrete tools for AI governance (39%) and those who started from scratch to develop new AI governance tools (40%).

Some companies may be taking a dual approach, extending existing governance tools for the short term, while evaluating longer-term investments in discrete governance tools, including in-house development and consolidation.



## Data Management Investments

In addition to governance, devoting the resources to improve infrastructure and protection is another way companies are addressing the potential gaps they're seeing. Given the importance of data reliability for AI initiatives to succeed, the vast majority of companies (86%) are continuing to increase data management investments for 2026, **just as they expected to do last year** (also 86%).



plan to increase their investments in data management this year

The adoption of AI is a driver for these investments: Those who have adopted GenAI (90%) or agentic AI (91%) are more likely to be increasing investments in data management versus those who haven't (77% and 81%, respectively).

And their investments will go toward addressing many of the foundational elements organizations will require if they are to have anticipated success with their AI initiatives. Among those increasing data management investments, the most common needs driving this are improving data privacy and security (43%) and improving data and AI governance (41%). Meeting changing regulatory requirements is a bigger driver for data management investments in APAC (43%) than in the U.S. (32%) or the UK / EU (32%).

In addition to the structural foundations needed for success with AI initiatives, companies are investing in making certain their employees are ready for AI. Upskilling to improve data literacy / AI fluency (39%) is another common factor driving increased investments, as is improving operational processes to manage AI (38%).

Investments will also be used to address data challenges related to the adoption of AI, with around a third citing data readiness for AI (35%), data readiness for analytics (33%) or managing unstructured data (28%) as drivers of their anticipated increase in data management investments this year.

## Data challenges threaten the successful adoption of AI



In the next 12-24 months, data leaders see five top data-related challenges to successful AI adoption: data privacy protection (42%), quality of data (41%), regulatory compliance (39%), quality and governance of unstructured data (38%) and AI ethics and governance (36%). Companies that have adopted GenAI (45%) or agentic AI (47%) are more likely to cite quality of data as a top challenge than those who haven't (34% and 36%, respectively), providing even more evidence of where the work ahead should be focused to achieve AI success.

## Vendor Support

### The use of multiple vendors to meet AI and data management needs is proliferating, but this is likely a short-term fix.

Companies surveyed are finding that to support their AI and data management priorities, they can't do it all themselves. To tackle their data management priorities this year, data leaders believe they will need to partner with an average of seven vendors. Those companies that have adopted GenAI or agentic AI anticipate needing to partner with even more vendors — eight and nine on average, respectively.

### Leaders believe they'll need multiple vendor partners to meet their data and AI goals



Average number of vendor partners to **support data management priorities in 2026**



Average number of vendor partners to **support AI management priorities in 2026**

To support their AI management priorities this year, data leaders believe they'll need to partner with eight vendors on average, including an average of nine vendors for those in the U.S. and seven for those in the UK / EU and APAC.

Among those partnering with more than one vendor for data or AI management in 2026, the most common reason for doing so is improving data trust (52%).

Others are opting for multiple partners for more practical reasons, such as perceived cost-effectiveness (41%) or specialized organizational requirements (41%). That's especially the case for more established companies that are 20 years or older, where 49% cite specialized organizational requirements versus 37% of younger companies. In the U.S., perceived cost-effectiveness is more likely to be a reason for companies to use multiple vendors (48%) compared to APAC (36%); the UK / EU falls in the middle at 40%.

### But using more vendors has the potential to add complexity and ultimately reduce scalability.

Just as more employees using AI increases risk for the company, relying on multiple vendors for data and AI management does the same. With this in mind, the use of so many vendors may be a temporary trend. As companies develop the skills to do more of their own AI development and as the industry naturally sees the inevitable consolidation of tools and platforms that offer solutions across fewer products, it's likely there will be less reliance on so many vendors in the future, streamlining total cost of ownership.

It remains to be seen whether this expansiveness in the use of vendors will continue past the rapid, exuberant ramp up of AI adoption or if companies will choose to consolidate vendors and move more data and AI functions to internal teams in the longer term. Big spend on too many vendors may be creating another kind of data paradox as companies chase AI's growth: one that could stall the ROI on their AI investments.

## Conclusion

**Companies are seeing widespread adoption of GenAI and the emergence of agentic AI, offering the potential for huge opportunities and tremendous business value. But with big potential comes big risk. The implications of getting it wrong are greater than ever before as the scale and breadth of AI initiatives — some of which may involve core operations and entire organizations — grows.**

As AI becomes more pervasive throughout organizations, **companies must ensure their AI initiatives are built on reliable, high-quality data and effective governance for privacy and security of the data**. Also important is the appropriate use of the data and AI tools. In advancing these new technologies, they can't dispense with the fundamentals.

Data leaders are concerned about the risks of moving forward with new AI initiatives without having addressed the ongoing, yet critical challenges such as data quality uncovered through previous initiatives. In addition, **companies are seeing more AI users across the organization, especially as agentic AI adoption rates increase, leaving more opportunities for risk exposure**. And, for the time being at least, they'll be relying on many outside vendors for data management and for AI development and deployment.

It is clear that success in AI initiatives requires governance that delivers confidence. Data leaders must ensure that AI governance and security are top priorities — for outside threats as well as risks inherent in AI. They will also need to address skills gaps in their employees' understanding and appropriate use of data and AI.

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**If last year marked a turning point for AI adoption**, 2026 is expected to be the year companies start realizing the rewards of their efforts.

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More projects will move into production and AI's promise will begin paying off, accelerating new innovations and delivering stronger returns on investments.

Those rewards could be great: improved customer experience and service leading to higher loyalty, more intelligent analytics-driven decision making and better optimized workflows and collaboration across the workplace. And that's just the beginning; many other potential improvements are on the horizon. **But the same companies making major investments must ensure those efforts — particularly those aimed at improving data reliability — are set up for success in the long term**, well beyond the point where AI is new, novel and unproven.

## About Wakefield Research

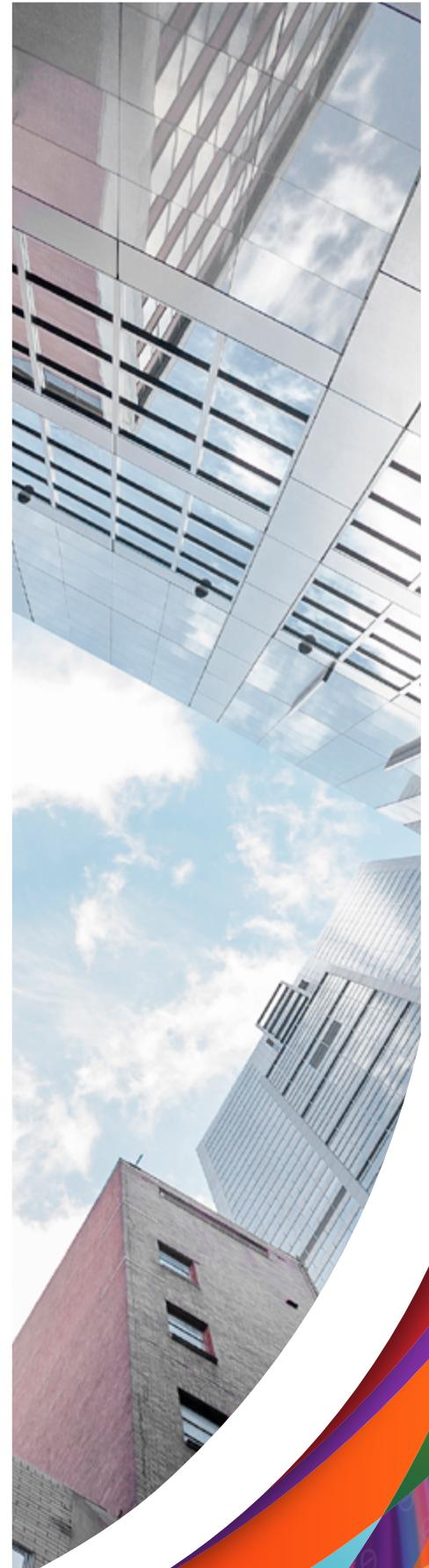
Wakefield Research is a leading, independent provider of quantitative, qualitative and hybrid marketing research for thought leadership and strategic insights. Wakefield Research is a partner to the world's leading brands and agencies, including 50 of the Fortune 100. Wakefield conducts research in nearly 100 countries and our surveys appear regularly in top-tier media. Learn more at [www.wakefieldresearch.com](http://www.wakefieldresearch.com).

## Methodological Notes

The Informatica Survey was conducted by **Wakefield Research** among 600 data leaders (defined as CDOs, CDAOs and CAOs) from companies with \$500M+ in revenue, between September 12th and September 25th, 2025, using an email invitation and an online survey. Quotas were set for 200 U.S., 200 UK / EU (UK, France, Germany), and 200 APAC (Japan, Korea, China, Singapore, Australia, Malaysia, India).

Results of any sample are subject to sampling variation. The magnitude of the variation is measurable and is affected by the number of interviews and the level of the percentages expressing the results.

For the interviews conducted in this particular study, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 6.9 percentage points in the US, UK / EU and APAC from the result that would be obtained if interviews had been conducted with all persons in the universe represented by the sample.



# About Us

## About Informatica

Informatica from Salesforce is a leader in AI-powered enterprise cloud data management. Its Intelligent Data Management Cloud (IDMC) platform enables organizations to connect, manage and unify AI-ready data across the enterprise. With capabilities spanning data cataloging, integration, governance, quality, privacy, metadata management and master data management, Informatica supports a broad partner ecosystem and helps customers unlock the full value of their data and AI initiatives.

## About Salesforce

Salesforce is the #1 AI CRM, empowering companies to connect with their customers in a whole new way through the power of artificial intelligence, data, and trust. For more information about Salesforce (NYSE: CRM), visit: [www.salesforce.com](http://www.salesforce.com).

## About Deloitte

This report was made possible through sponsorship by Deloitte Consulting LLP. Deloitte Consulting LLP had no input over the research findings, analysis, or conclusions presented.

## Where data & AI come to



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