



MAKE AI SCALE



From experimentation to transformation

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FORWARD



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There's a point in almost every AI programme where progress stalls. The technology is impressive. Investment is flowing. Teams can point to a handful of wins. And yet, soon after early success, momentum fades. Not because ambition has dried up. But because organisations are trying to manage AI like a change programme when, in reality, they are redesigning how work gets done.

Most businesses talk about 'AI transformation' as if it were a single category. It isn't. There are three types of change – and confusing them is how you end up with endless pilots, growing scepticism, and a CFO asking why the Profit and Loss statement hasn't moved.

The first is process redecoration: using AI to make existing work faster or easier. Better drafts. Faster search. Fewer manual steps. This creates some value and feels safe because it improves the experience without forcing the organisation to renegotiate roles, governance or accountability. This is where many teams declare success. It's around 10-12% automation.

The second is renovation. At this point – roughly 30% automation – roles blur and gaps, where existing metrics and controls no longer fit, are exposed. This is where value becomes meaningful, but also where friction begins to show up because the organisation is being asked to change.

The third is manufacturing. At this point – beyond 50% automation – you've reached a point where you are no longer improving a process but building a new production line. This is a new way of getting to an outcome. At this stage, AI stops being a tool and becomes part of the operating model itself. This is where many leadership instincts fail, because the work is handled like a change management programme, when it now looks far more like industrial engineering: flow, throughput, control loops, buffers, variation and escalation paths. This manufacturing framing isn't just a nice analogy. It's a useful model of what high-automation work becomes.

This report draws on the UK findings from KPMG's AI Pulse, our quarterly global survey of business leaders, alongside our client experience. What we're seeing is that UK organisations have committed to investing in AI. Use cases are multiplying and agentic AI is already being introduced into workflows.

The challenge now is scale. If you want to implement AI into workflows at higher levels of automation, you need to be clear about what you're trying to achieve. You're not installing a tool. You're building a factory – with new methods, new controls, new roles, and new ways of producing value. The conclusion is simple: stop managing AI like a change management programme when you are managing the next Industrial Revolution.

Stop managing AI like a change management programme. You're managing the next Industrial Revolution.

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UK organisations have committed to AI

There aren't many UK organisations questioning whether to invest in AI. That debate has been settled. AI is no longer seen as an emerging technology to watch from the side, but as a core part of how businesses now expect to grow and operate.

Despite economic uncertainty, most UK businesses plan to continue investing in AI. Seven in ten (70%) say AI will remain a priority even if the UK enters a recession, and nearly two-thirds (65%) are prepared to keep investing even when the return on that investment is not yet easy to measure.

This confidence is not misplaced. Many organisations are already seeing tangible benefits. Six in 10 leaders (60%) say AI is delivering value in a meaningful way today, whether through productivity gains, cost savings, revenue growth, or improved decision-making. And across the UK, examples of progress are emerging. AI being embedded into customer interactions, supporting product development, or accelerating financial processes are just a few examples.

Often this progress follows a remarkably consistent pattern. There's a successful pilot. A process is improved. Productivity has increased and admin reduced. Something meaningful has been achieved. These are changes that improve how work feels without forcing an organisation to rethink how work is produced. And they sit at around 10–15% automation of a process.

70%

UK leaders say AI will remain a priority even through a recession.

65%

of leaders would continue to invest in AI, regardless of tangible ROI.

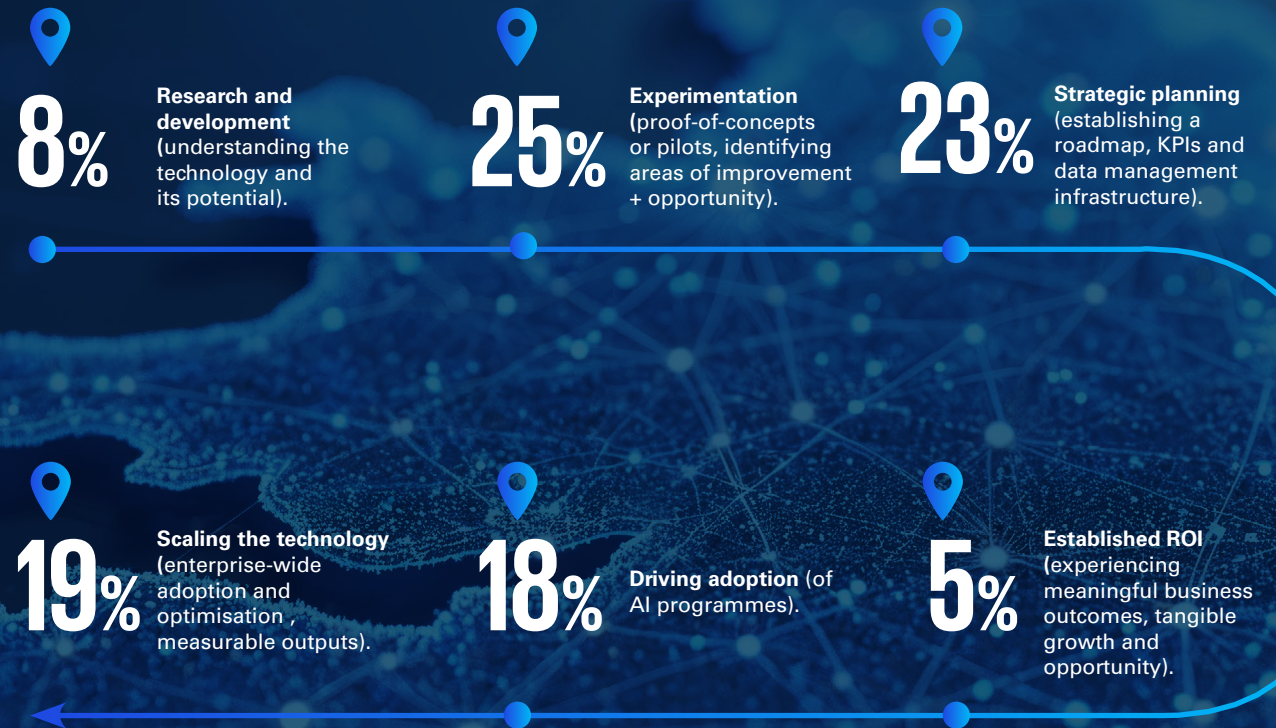


This is where many UK businesses are today. Most can point to a handful of AI successes, often three or four examples, where a specific process has been materially improved. What's less common is enterprise-wide change. Just 5% have reached a point where AI is delivering established returns. The majority sit somewhere in between – beyond experimentation, but not having materially transformed the business. They are confident enough to invest in and accelerate AI use cases, but are still working through the challenges of scaling.

This acceleration phase is where tension starts to emerge. Businesses are far enough along the journey to see AI's promise, and to have surfaced issues around skills, governance, risk and measurement.

But they're not yet far enough along to have resolved those issues. Around seven in 10 leaders (69%) say they now feel an expectation to demonstrate value to investors or the board. But it's important to say that organisations aren't feeling pessimistic. Two-thirds (67%) of UK leaders are confident in their ability to future-proof their AI strategy. The challenge is not a lack of ambition or confidence. It's working out how to scale AI beyond isolated successes in a way that is trusted and deliberate.

Where UK organisations are on their AI journey



From early wins to enterprise-wide value

AI models are quickly improving, not just in accuracy but in their ability to carry out longer chains of work without human intervention. In areas like engineering, this has already translated into significant gains in speed: products built faster, systems modified quicker, problems solved in a fraction of the time.

Similar capabilities are now emerging for functions such as finance, legal, risk, and product design. This means that most organisations could soon run core parts of their business many times faster than they do today. The limiting factor won't be the technology – it'll be whether the organisation can move fast enough and with enough rigour to earn the trust that enterprise-wide transformation deployment requires.

With that, there is real value in being only a few steps along the journey. Even automating a small proportion of an end-to-end process can surface fundamental questions that your organisation wouldn't otherwise come against. Do your existing roles still make sense? Is your data organised in the right way? Do your governance and financial models reflect how work will be done? Early automation is less about maximising value and output and more about learning what will break at speed and scale.

Agentic AI is here

Many organisations are moving beyond systems that generate answers to systems that act – agentic AI. These tools can autonomously carry out a series of tasks within a process, rather than simply supporting human decision-making. It's this technology that really drives the efficiency and automation rates promised by AI.

Almost all UK organisations (90%) say they are now engaging with forms of agentic AI, although maturity varies widely. In practice, this often looks like a small number of semi-autonomous agents embedded into specific processes – enough to deliver value, but also enough to create challenges around accountability, control and risk.

Crucially though, even limited use of agentic AI tends to accelerate learning. Organisations quickly discover what breaks, where data is insufficient, where roles are unclear, and where there are gaps in governance.



The simplest way to understand it is generative AI is AI that says something and agentic AI is AI that does something.



Paul Henninger

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Client story: Manufacturing in practice

Our client - a global tech, media and telecoms business - was relying on an extremely manual transfer pricing reporting process. Tax teams had to review tens of thousands of rows of data line by line, and completing the work could take up to three months. During a busy year-end, this was slow and becoming hard to sustain.

Working closely with senior tax leaders, we built a bespoke machine-learning model using the client's historical data. The model classifies and checks line items, applies rules, and produces a clear draft report for review. Human expertise was built in from the start. Workshops with tax specialists helped identify risks, agree controls, and decide where professional judgement was needed.

The difference has been significant. What once took months can now be done in around two hours. Instead of reviewing every line item, tax professionals focus only on flagged areas that need attention. The process is faster, more reliable and far less repetitive.

Most importantly, the new system is now part of day-to-day operations. The development of the machine learning model has transformed a box-ticking exercise into an ongoing opportunity to unlock value. It's an early example of building a new production system – where AI and humans work together to deliver outcomes at scale.

What once took
months can now
be done in around
two hours.



What AI at scale looks like

Moving beyond early wins means moving beyond tools and pilots. AI is designed into core workflows, reshaping how the work is done, how decisions are made, and how outcomes are measured.

When organisations try to move beyond early AI wins, the conversation changes. Up to this point, progress has been measured in terms of tools and use cases. Where else could AI help? Which process should we improve next? What new tools can we roll out? But once those first gains are made, new questions surface. Who owns the work when AI does more of it? How far should automation go? And if things are working well enough, why not stop here?

This is the point at which many AI programmes stall. Not because the technology has failed, but because the nature of the change has shifted. AI at scale is not a collection of tools, pilots or experiments. It is an organisation that runs differently.

In practical terms, it means AI is designed into the core workflows of the business, not bolted on at the edges. Humans and AI systems are jointly responsible for outcomes. Humans make decisions faster because data analysis and execution happen at a fraction of the speed. And performance is measured at the level of outcomes delivered, rather than activity completed. In simple terms, AI at scale changes outcomes, not just efficiency.

Reaching that point requires a shift in what work is, and how it is organised and delivered across the business. Once automation moves beyond incremental improvements and starts to cover a significant share of an end-to-end workflow, you're no longer simply optimising existing processes. At that point, often above 50% automation, you're effectively building a new system of production – a fundamentally different way of determining what needs to be done, and by who. AI stops being a productivity tool and becomes part of your operating model itself. This is the move from helping people work faster to changing what work gets done, and how.

59%

of UK businesses are already making good progress towards becoming a fully integrated human and AI workforce.

61%

are upskilling and reskilling their people to meet the needs of an AI-enabled workforce.

Skills like adaptability, critical thinking and judgement already exist across the workforce – and they will matter most as people learn to work alongside AI.



Leanne Allen

Head of AI Advisory, KPMG UK

What this means for your people

Automation creates capacity. And what you choose to do with that capacity is a strategic decision. Used well, it can support growth, innovation, improved customer experience, and more sustainable ways of working. The organisations that succeed will be those that treat measurement as part of the redesign: defining what 'good' looks like at the end, tracking progress towards that end goal, and being deliberate about how newly created capacity is reinvested.

As AI becomes more embedded, the nature of human work evolves. Roles focus on supervising systems, making judgement calls, and handling exceptions – work that relies on context, experience and accountability. This shift requires adjustment, but it also creates new opportunities for higher-value work, new skills, and more varied career paths.

Taken together, this is the real destination of AI at scale. It is not an AI-led organisation in which people are sidelined. It's an organisation where humans and increasingly capable AI systems work together within redesigned processes, clearer accountability structures, and modern operating models.



AI at scale is not a collection of tools, pilots or experiments. It is an organisation that runs differently.



Paul Henninger

UK Head of Technology & Data,
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Client story: Developing skills at scale

One of our UK financial services clients recognised early that data was no longer just an IT department issue. To unlock the value from data, capability had to be built across the organisation. A Data Academy was created to focus on storytelling, visualisation and practical use, not just technical skills.

Through this, the organisation has committed to growing talent from within, launching internal apprenticeships that have supported 60–70 colleagues so far. Learning is created by internal experts and designed to build both confidence and competence across the enterprise. This same approach underpins their AI skills programme: progressive learning pathways and continuous development, with leaders learning and experimenting alongside their teams. It matters, because scaling AI depends on people, not just technology. This approach builds the capability to embed AI across the business.

How to stop your AI transformation stalling



Managing fear, focus and friction

Fear: the adoption problem is usually a clarity problem

Fear is often described as resistance to AI. It shows up first as job insecurity, and then as something deeper that relates to employee identity. Teams reach a point where AI is doing enough of a process for it to feel successful - and then they stop. AI is welcomed on periphery tasks, but people draw a line around the part of work that relates to expertise and status. The part that says: "this is what I do."

In the UK, employee adoption is ranked highest in a list of challenges to AI strategy over the next year (51%). Close behind are skills and capability gaps (43%) and poor user experience or poor integration into daily workflows (43%). None of these suggest that the workforce is anti-technology. But it suggests that people might be asking questions like "what does this mean for me?" And "how will I be supported?"

What's more, only a very small proportion of leaders (1%) report strong resistance to AI. Most describe either a mixed response (34%) or significant adoption (30%), plus a smaller group adopting while anxious about job security (10%). This uneven adoption is exactly what you'd expect when AI begins to move into higher-value work.

In the early stages, you can work around this adoption mismatch, but further along the process, you must solve it. There are a few levers you can use to do that.

The time-saved contract

One is a time-saved contract. This explicitly says that time saved doesn't simply get filled with lower-status work. It's deliberately reinvested in better outcomes, deeper analysis, improved customer outcomes, stronger risk control and upskilling — work that employees recognise as meaningful. It also ensures that accountability stays human. Roles evolve towards editor, supervisor, and decision owner, rather than pretending the AI 'owns' the outcome. This contract tells people what success looks like for them, not just for the AI programme.

The design choice that changes everything

Another lever is to deliberately state your value proposition. What are you optimising for? In the absence of an explicit choice, many initiatives drift toward cost reduction, which inflames anxiety and slows adoption. The solution is not reassurance, but clarity.

Split any time saved 50/50 with the team that created the value and the enterprise. The idea is to be explicit about how you turn these magic tricks with AI into real value. That's a great way to keep everybody focused on what you're trying to achieve.



Paul Henninger

UK Head of Technology & Data, KPMG

There are four directions you can go:

- ➔ **Augmentation:** better decisions, more capacity, better outcomes
- ➔ **Substitution:** labour replacement and cost-out
- ➔ **Agility:** speed-to-market
- ➔ **Attention:** optimising for engagement rather than value

Focus: improving BAU becomes replacing BAU

In any transformation programme, progress compounds when the right people are involved. With your best operators involved, speed increases significantly - because they know where the hidden controls are, where exceptions live, and how to expertly navigate processes.

This matters even more once automation reaches scale. Above 50% automation of an end-to-end workflow, 'improving BAU' becomes 'replacing BAU'. At that point, the organisation is running two systems at once: the old way of working, still expected to deliver quarterly outcomes, and a new production system taking shape alongside it.

That is not a change-management exercise. It's like asking a factory to rebuild its production line while continuing to ship at full capacity - without admitting that the factory itself is being rebuilt. We've seen this happen in the engineering sector, where transformation accelerated because engineers were the users. After enough iterations, they adapted the technology to the work, and the work itself changed.

At this level, success is no longer about clever prompts or isolated pilots. It requires real operating discipline. A pattern that consistently works is:

- 01.** Protect BAU with explicit ownership and service-level guardrails.
- 02.** Assign a focused, senior team to redesign the workflow end-to-end - not a demo.
- 03.** Embed the new workflow back into BAU with new metrics, controls, training and accountability.

Without step two you get AI as a performance. Good stories, good slides, but without any real impact. Skip step three and you're stuck with pilots.

91% of UK businesses are prepared to pay a premium for AI skills.

At the core, focus is a capacity challenge. And UK businesses are recognising this. Nearly two-thirds (62%) of UK leaders say limitations on hiring and upskilling could slow or pause AI implementation over the next six months, and skill gaps are cited as the biggest barrier to moving past pilots. As a result, they are responding by investing in reskilling, recruiting new capability and redesigning roles. The majority (91%) are prepared to pay a premium for AI expertise.

Scaling AI means redirecting limited skills and capacity towards the hardest problems. Ultimately, it's a leadership choice - are you willing to put your best people on the hardest bottlenecks?

An asset management client pulled his top operations lead out of BAU and into AI - accepting a dip in day-to-day performance. But for AI to work, it needs the best people for the job. That is what focus looks like in practice.



Leanne Allen

UK Head of AI Advisory, KPMG

Friction: the organisational immune system doing its job

Friction is the controls, approvals and checks that slow progress as AI moves into core business processes. It shows up through governance requirements, risk management, compliance processes, and the need for accountability. It's your organisational immune system in action.

But this friction exists for a reason. In regulated organisations especially, controls are in place because changes to critical systems carry consequences. AI introduces new and increased risks around data security, privacy, compliance, and misuse. And organisations are right to pause, review and apply additional scrutiny.

For UK organisations, data security, privacy and risk concerns are the biggest factors influencing AI strategies in the next six months, with more than four in five organisations (81%) saying these considerations could cause them to slow down or pause implementation. Leaders also ranked cybersecurity first, and data privacy second, as the biggest barriers to achieving AI goals.

Problems arise when governance processes are not designed for scale. Traditional organisations are built around stable, step-by-step processes. AI behaves differently. Outputs vary. Outliers emerge. Decisions need to happen continuously rather than at fixed points. When approval cycles and controls are slow or unclear, governance itself becomes part of the bottleneck.

Many AI programmes stall at this point. Risk is used – especially in highly regulated environments – as the reason ambitious transformation cannot proceed. Early value is demonstrated, but progress slows because the organisation believes it cannot move faster without increasing exposure.

This is where the concept of human-in-the-loop often comes in, though often in the wrong way. A common response to risk is to put a human at the end of the process to check whether the AI has made a mistake. This approach can reduce confidence, rather than increase it. By the time problems are detected, work has already gone off course, creating duplication of effort and delays. We see this show up in UK businesses where a third (33%) say that the biggest challenge to gaining leadership trust or buy-in for deploying AI agents is loss of control or predictability.



81%

say data security, privacy and risk concerns could cause them to slow down or pause implementation of AI.

A more effective approach is to place humans at key points throughout a process – to set direction, choose between options, redefine objectives – and designing workflows so AI does the heavy lifting in between. These touchpoints are not accidental. They are purposeful friction: deliberate decision gates designed into the flow where humans must pause, assess, and either approve or redirect before the process continues. Humans then review progress, steer the system and intervene where context, experience or trade-offs are required. This reflects what people are good at: understanding the business, recognising patterns, and making instinctive judgement calls. This is humans-in-the-lead, not just in the loop.

Done this way, human-in-the-lead allows AI to move faster with clearer accountability and lower risk, because direction is corrected as work unfolds, rather than after the fact. It also means that both human and AI are adding value in different ways.

This approach can be extended to governance more broadly. The way through this is not to weaken controls, but to redesign them. That means clearer ownership, better monitoring, and controls that operate continuously rather than episodically. Our UK AI Pulse data suggests this shift is already happening.

Many organisations are introducing practical risk-mitigation measures for AI agents, such as human validation of outputs rather than every action (39%), restricting agents access to sensitive data (37%), and investing in monitoring and evaluation frameworks (31%).

These steps do not remove friction. In fact, the goal is to make friction intentional. When governance is designed this way – with humans placed deliberately, rather than defensively – it becomes an enabler of scale rather than a brake on it. And when your organisation encounters resistance in the flow, that is not a failure of the system. It’s a signal that AI has reached a level of importance where trust, control and accountability must evolve alongside capability. Friction in this sense, is a mark of maturity.

“Friction is the organisational immune system that by design slows change down the more it tries to speed up – especially when risk and controls are deeply wired into BAU.”



Leanne Allen

UK Head of AI Advisory, KPMG

Client story: Reducing friction

Our client — a leading UK insurer — identified many opportunities for developing AI applications, but faced several security, deployment and design challenges. Creating a new AI use case could take around three months, mainly because teams had to go through lengthy design, risk and approval processes each time.

We designed a shared AI platform that gave data scientists and developers a pre-approved, secure environment to build, test and run AI models using production data. Because the risk controls were already agreed, teams no longer had to start from scratch for every new idea.

As a result, the time from concept to implementation fell from three months to three days, and the client was able to put 15 AI use cases into production much faster and more efficiently. We helped them create the conditions for scale — enabling AI to be deployed quickly, safely and repeatedly across the business.



How to make AI scale



At high levels of automation, progress is no longer driven by enthusiasm, tools or pilots. It's a matter of system design. Enterprise-wide AI transformation requires you to deliberately redesign how work is produced end-to-end: what humans own, what AI handles, and how the two are connected through decisions, handoffs, and controls. Most organisations handle AI like a software rollout – choose a platform, run a programme, train the workforce, publish a policy.

That approach can deliver some benefits at the beginning. It supports early experimentation and helps activity move in the right direction. But to reach scale, you're going to need to rethink five areas.

How to make AI scale

1. Infrastructure: build the AI production line, not a 'demo stack'

If AI is going to be used in day-to-day work, it can't sit on the sidelines as an optional tool. It needs to be built directly into core processes, with clear rules around security, oversight and how success is measured.

At scale, organisations aren't just experimenting with AI. They're using it to run real work end-to-end. That requires systems that can manage each step of a task, handle errors, keep clear records, and show exactly where human judgement is needed.

Flexibility is just as important. Different tasks have different needs around risk, cost and speed, so organisations often need more than one AI model. This isn't about adding complexity for the sake of it, but about staying in control and using the right tool for each job.

Finally, high levels of automation only work if performance is constantly monitored. Trust in AI comes from being able to see, measure and manage its behaviour. Without this, friction will slow things down – as it's intended to.

2. Data: think less about perfection, and more about providing the right context

When scaling AI, data becomes a core part of how work gets done. That said, you don't need to have perfect data. It comes back to your goal: what are you trying to achieve with AI?

While there is a lot of data work to do, there's specific data work to do. And what matters is context: giving AI the information it needs to make a responsible decision at the right moment.

Trying to perfect enterprise-wide data before scaling slows everything to a halt. The better approach is to define the problem, identify the minimum information needed to address it, put basic controls around that context, measure results, and improve over time. It should be packaged, documented and monitored, just like any other critical system component.

Finally, this can't all sit with a central data team. Responsibility for data and context needs to sit with the teams closest to the work, with shared standards rather than central bottlenecks.

3. People: change what humans are responsible for

As AI takes on more of a process, human work becomes more about supervising, exception-handling, quality control, improving methods and making judgement calls.

Where organisations struggle at scale is treating human-in-the-loop as a vague safety concept. What works is clear ownership: human-in-the-lead. For every automated process, someone needs to be accountable for how it works, what good looks like, how exceptions are handled, and when the process should be paused or stopped.

Team structure also matters. High levels of automation rarely scale through central AI teams. They scale through teams organised around workflows, combining subject-matter expertise with engineering, data and risk skills, and owning the full end-to-end process, not just an early pilot.

Finally, your people model must evolve. When AI frees up time, that time has to be deliberately redirected into higher-value work. Work that makes employees feel valued and fulfilled.

How to make AI scale

4. Financial: build a ledger that showcases the value of automation

High levels of automation create real value, but traditional financial models often fail to see it. That's because the first benefits are usually about capacity, not immediate cost savings. Early wins show up elsewhere: work gets done faster, teams handle more volume, new products become viable, risks fall, or pricing power improves. If this value isn't visible, it won't be funded. And without funding, automation never reaches scale.

At this stage, project-level ROI stops being useful. What matters instead are unit economics: cost per case, cycle time, rework and exception rates, and the cost of governance delays.

You may also need to change your funding models. Stop-start investment disrupts learning curves, breaks up teams, and forces repeated relearning at higher cost. Scale depends on stable teams, ongoing improvement, consistent measurement, and the ability to replicate what works.

There is also a commercial choice to make. If delivery costs fall, do you keep the efficiency, reprice to win market share, or share value with customers? These decisions shape what you build next.

5. Governance: design for trusted, value-led speed

Governance is often treated as paperwork, but that approach fails when trying to achieve enterprise-wide AI transformation. Here, governance is the control system: it enables teams to move quickly, make confident decisions, and manage risk without slowing delivery.

Frameworks such as the NIST AI Risk Management Framework and ISO/IEC 42001 are useful because they push organisations to operationalise AI safety. But effective governance starts with clarity of intent. Leaders must be explicit about what AI is optimised for: productivity and speed, human augmentation, risk reduction, resilience, or cost efficiency. When this is unclear, organisations tend to default to cost cutting, which increases fear and resistance. Strong governance makes trade-offs visible – what is non-negotiable, where flexibility exists, and how decisions will be revisited over time.

Enterprise transformation involves many workflow changes happening at once, requiring a clear operating model: a pipeline for identifying opportunities, structured prioritisation based on value and risk, clear decision rights, and common standards for approval, review and escalation. Many organisations support this through a value delivery office alongside AI governance, ensuring investment decisions remain grounded in outcomes.

From experimentation to enterprise-wide transformation

The most realistic precedent for AI isn't the Internet. It's electricity. General purpose technologies like these often take a long time to show up as productivity, because early adoption swaps technology into old workflows, instead of redesigning the system around the new method. That's been the AI story so far. And that's fine to a point, but manufacturing-level value arrives when the workflow is rebuilt around a new method of producing work.

This is why AI so often stalls in the middle. Redecoration is easy to start and easy to stop. Renovation exposes resistance. And manufacturing demands a much bigger change. There is no single platform powerful enough to deliver this on its own. Scale comes from redesigning real workflows, step by step, until a new production system takes shape. That is the difference between deploying AI tools and running an AI-enabled organisation.

How we can help

KPMG supports organisations to scale AI across the enterprise with confidence. We combine commercial and sector expertise, robust governance and trusted technology partners to help you deploy AI safely, prove value, and rethink how work is delivered.

Find out how we can support your AI transformation.

1. AI Trust

We help clients design, build and deploy AI in a way that customers, boards and regulators can trust. Trust is the foundation that enables AI to scale; without it, value will not follow.

3. AI Workforce

We help our clients in adopting AI, building their capabilities, and transforming how they work. AI can only add value if people use it, trust it and work differently.

2. AI Value

We help clients define where AI matters most and redesign their operating model to deliver measurable outcomes. Helping organisations improve their performance, not just automating tasks.

4. AI Enable

We help clients integrate AI into core processes, scaling from individual use cases to enterprise-wide transformation – from secure foundations through to the design and delivery of end-to-end agentic systems.

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About the data in this report

The findings from this report draw on data from KPMG's Global AI Pulse, conducted between 17 February and 17 March 2026. We surveyed 2,110 C-suite and senior business leaders (including 114 in the UK) to provide insights into how organisations are adopting and investing in AI, as well as their strategic priorities and emerging risks. All respondents represent companies with annual revenues of at least USD\$100 million, with three-quarters reporting revenues of US\$1 billion+.

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