



# Thomson Reuters Institute

## 2025 C-Suite Survey

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Benefits and AI and digital transformation  
may lag behind organizational realities



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## Executive Summary

How C-Suite leaders define success is unsurprising and unchanging: It's a formula of revenue, profit, and customer relationships. However, their blueprint to approaching this formula is rapidly evolving in an increasingly digital world. Change, however, is made more difficult when some of the functions that leaders rely on to drive revenue, profit, and customer relationships are hamstrung by inefficiency, silos, and repetitive work.

This new report on the attitudes and opinions of C-Suite leaders investigates their top priorities and takes a closer look at the teams and technologies they trust to accomplish those goals. The report finds significant barriers to the effective performance of an organization's enabling functions, but also significant optimism that digital transformation and AI will help these functions work more effectively, increasing their contributions to the enterprise.

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**The key to enhancing how enabling function contribute to broader business objectives can be found in some of the C-Suite's key priorities: digital transformation and AI.**

The findings of this report are based on a survey of 200 C-Suite executives leading enterprises in the U.S., U.K., Canada, Australia, Brazil, Mexico, Germany, and France. Of those, 110 were leaders at organizations with more than \$500 million in annual revenue, and 90 were leaders at organizations with between \$200 million and \$500 million in revenue.

Global C-Suite leaders are well aware of the importance of enabling functions, viewing departments such as customer success, technology, and operations as critical to achieving their business goals. They also recognize that those functions aren't as effective and efficient as they could be, buffeted by a mix of internal and external factors. Specifically, C-Suite leaders report that enabling functions are most constrained by ineffective information flows and by time spent on compliance and reporting.

The remedy can be found in some of the C-Suite's key priorities: digital transformation and AI. C-Suite leaders are optimistic about the progress of digital transformation and predict its benefits with a reasonable degree of confidence.

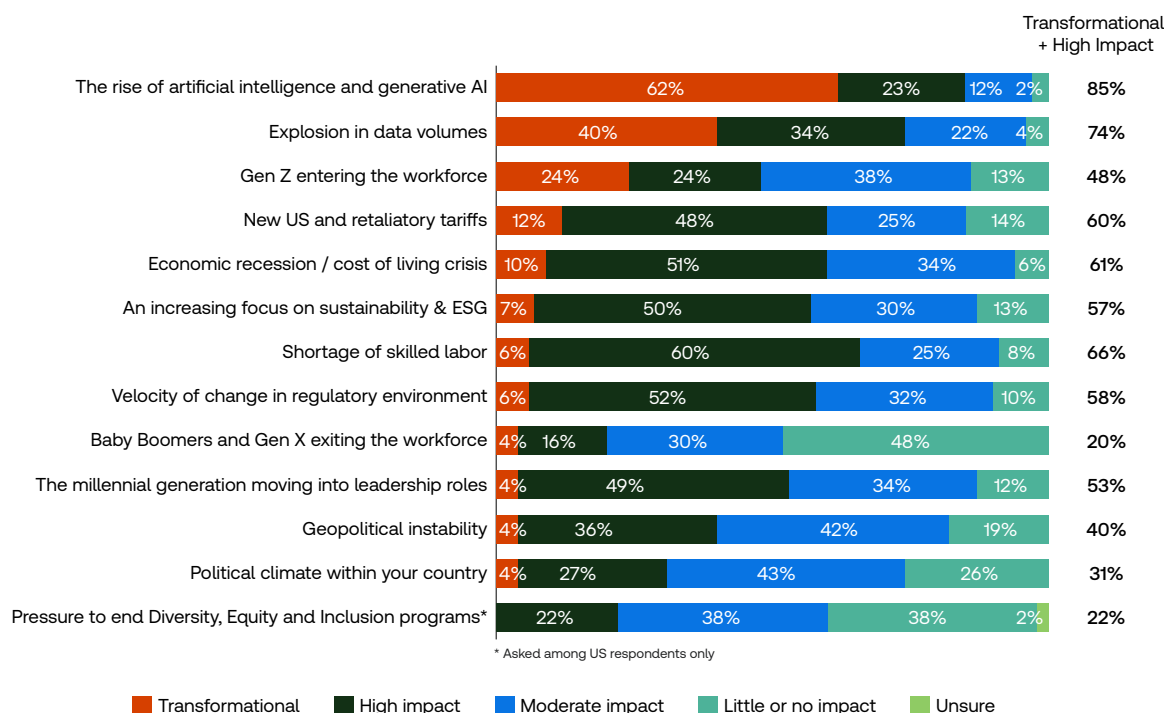
They are similarly optimistic about artificial intelligence, although progress in this area is moving too slowly for many leaders' liking. Although AI, and generative AI (GenAI), show the potential to make enabling functions more efficient and effective, it appears that few organizations have empowered their employees to use even the earliest versions of AI technology to their benefit.

## Understanding the landscape: Transformational trends

C-Suite leaders are more likely to focus their attention on trends that they anticipate will have an outsized impact on their businesses.

By far, the trend most C-Suite leaders expect to have a transformational impact on their business over the next five years is the rise of artificial intelligence, with 62% predicting it to be transformational. An additional 23% said AI would have a “high” impact on their businesses.

**FIGURE 1**  
**High-impact trends**



Closely related to the rise of AI is the anticipated explosion in data volumes, which was cited as the trend with the second-highest impact. Those data volumes may arrive as structured data reported by sensors and other devices at the edges of the networks, but GenAI also contributes to the creation of data, often serving as a net-new data source.

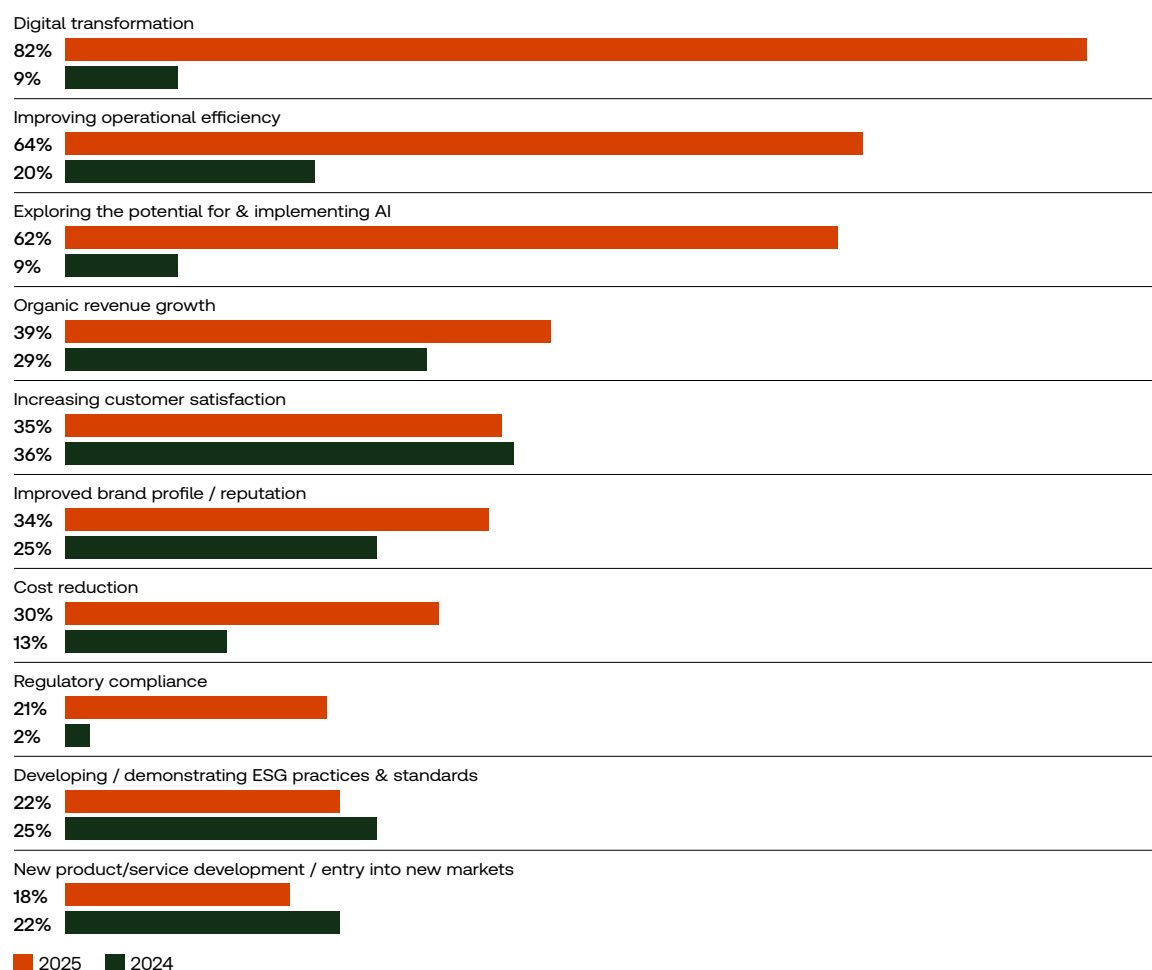
Although it is not anticipated to have as transformational an impact, “shortage of skilled labor” was most frequently cited by C-Suite executives as likely having a “high” impact on their businesses. While many functions have perennially faced a shortage of skilled labor, it’s easy to recognize the effect of technology on this category as well.

## Priorities reflect prevailing trends: technology and efficiency

Given the perceived potential impact of AI and its appurtenant impacts on the future of business, C-Suite leaders are seeking to establish priorities that will reflect the futures they anticipate. Over the next 18 months, C-Suite leaders plan to focus on technology and efficiency, which are strongly linked.

FIGURE 2

### Top 10 C-Suite priorities



It is noteworthy that digital transformation, exploring and implementing AI, and improving operational efficiency rise above long-standing C-Suite priorities like reducing costs, growing revenue, or increasing customer satisfaction. Of course, this is not to say that the long-standing priorities are no longer critical to business leaders. Instead, it reflects the perceived significance of the broader digital transformation underway in the global market. We should also note that this list has been limited to the top 10 priorities identified by C-Suite leaders responding to the

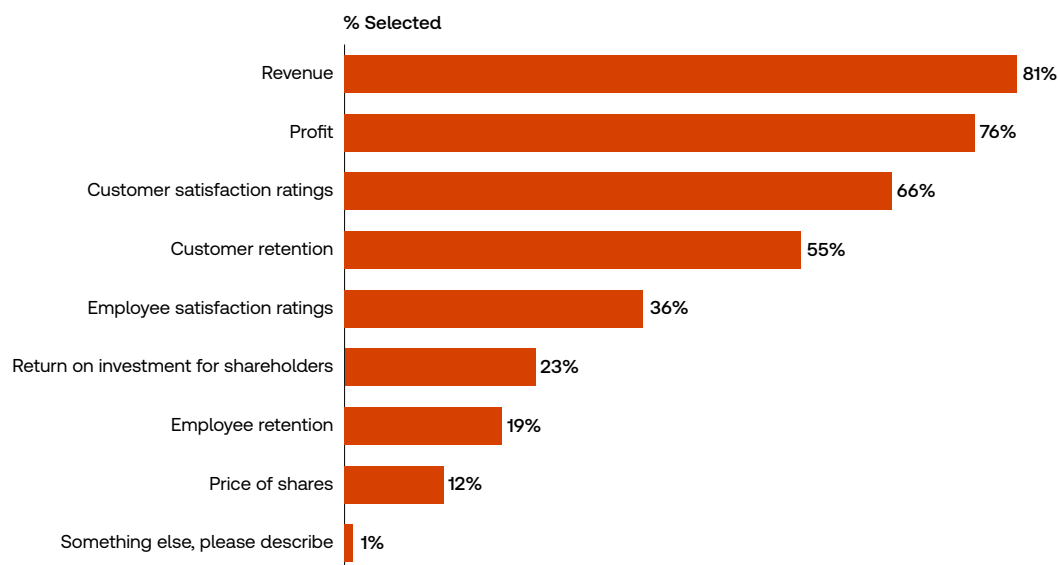
2025 survey. There are additional areas C-Suite leaders prioritize, and conversely, some areas have fallen in their priority ranking. Those areas simply fall outside the scope of this year's identified top 10.

The near meteoric rise of digital transformation as a priority bears examination. The top three priorities in the chart above all relate to the increased frequency of discussions among top executives about AI and the outsized role technology will play in the future of business.

## Defining the measuring success

How C-Suite leaders define success remains much less influenced by current and emerging technology trends than do their current priorities.

**FIGURE 3**  
**C-Suite definitions of success**



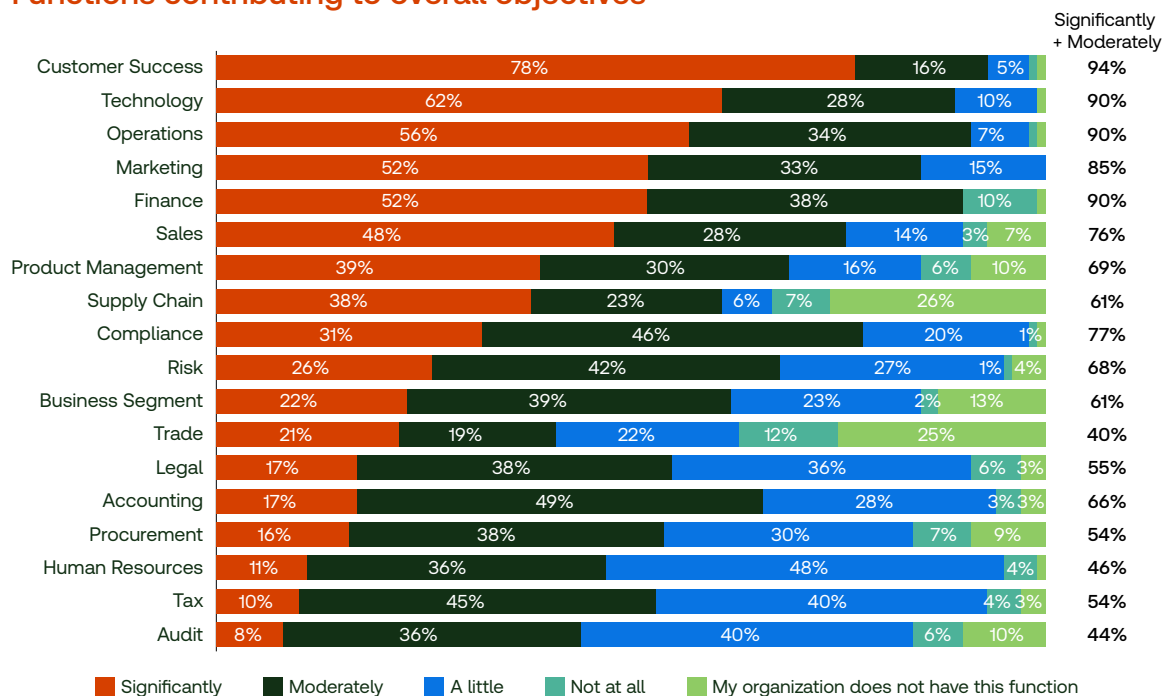
Business revenue, profit, and customer satisfaction and retention remain, unsurprisingly, the key components of most C-Suite leaders' definitions of success. The challenge for these leaders in the coming months and years will be integrating cutting-edge technology and the increased digitization of their business with time-tested measures of success. The rapid growth and development of AI provide ample opportunities to build greater operational efficiency, reduce costs, and expand customer offerings. How a business will accomplish this, however, will vary. Equally important will be how the various enabling functions of the business help to drive success.

## The significance of enabling functions

C-Suite leaders have mixed opinions on how their businesses' enabling functions contribute to their overall objectives.

FIGURE 4

### Functions contributing to overall objectives



While customer success is seen as the enabling function with the most ability to help the organization reach its goals, sales is ranked relatively lower, behind finance and marketing.

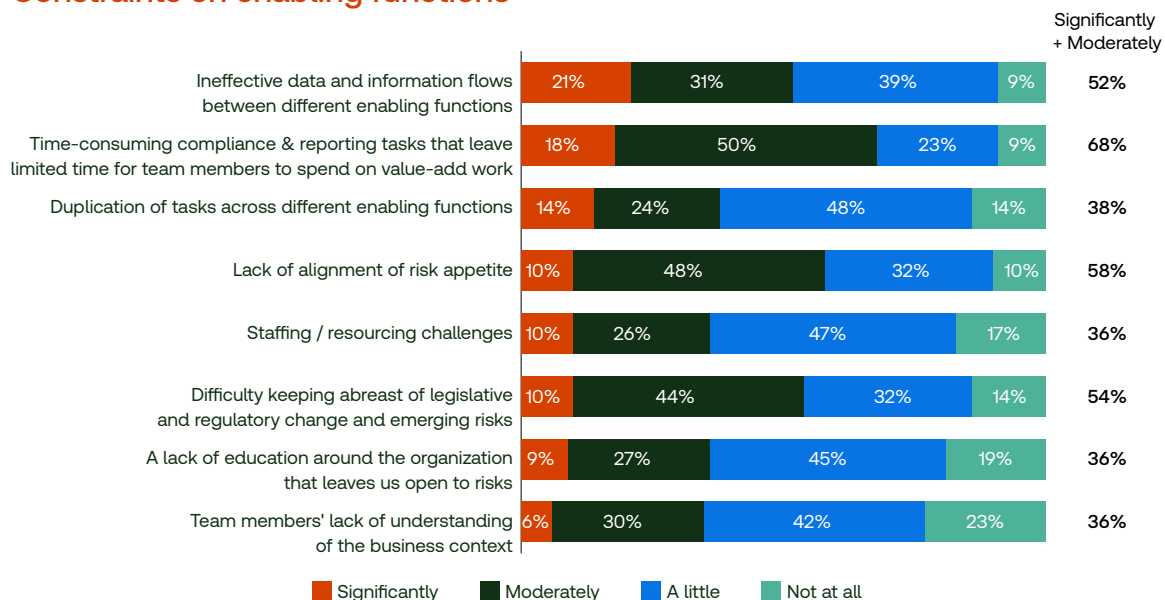
Other C-Suite leaders point to cross-functional teams charged with streamlining manual tasks, improving efficiency, or opening new career pathways for those who used to do more manual work.

Yet, the general perception of enabling functions is that they are not as effective as they could be. It is interesting and concerning that the figure above shows that most enabling functions are not viewed as significantly contributing to the business's overall objectives. Of particular note for the typical Thomson Reuters Institute audience is the business's legal function. Nearly twice as many C-Suite leaders say that their legal function contributes to overall objectives only "a little," compared to those who say their legal function contributes "significantly."

**"Our support functions, especially in technology and operations, were instrumental in driving a digital shift that improved organizational workflows and overall customer satisfaction."**

C-Suite leaders identify several factors that may be hindering these roles from contributing to larger corporate goals.

**FIGURE 5**  
**Constraints on enabling functions**



“Ineffective data and information flows between different enabling functions” was most frequently cited as “significantly” hindering the ability of enabling functions to contribute toward broader objectives. However, “time-consuming compliance and reporting tasks” were most likely to be seen as a “moderate” or “significant” constraint on enabling functions. These two barriers align well to leaders’ desire to investigate and implement AI, as well as their enthusiasm for digital transformation.

C-Suite leaders also identified the top three opportunities to improve how enabling functions contribute to the business’s overall objectives:

- Simplified compliance and reporting
- Technology and automation
- Risk management and mitigation.

While not all C-Suite leaders fully appreciate how AI may create opportunities for improvement in enabling functions, it is clear that movement toward an AI-enabled future and a transformation of businesses toward future digitalization is common across the market. The digital transformation these leaders are driving towards has the potential to address key pain points, empower enabling functions, and create new potential avenues to meet important measures of success.

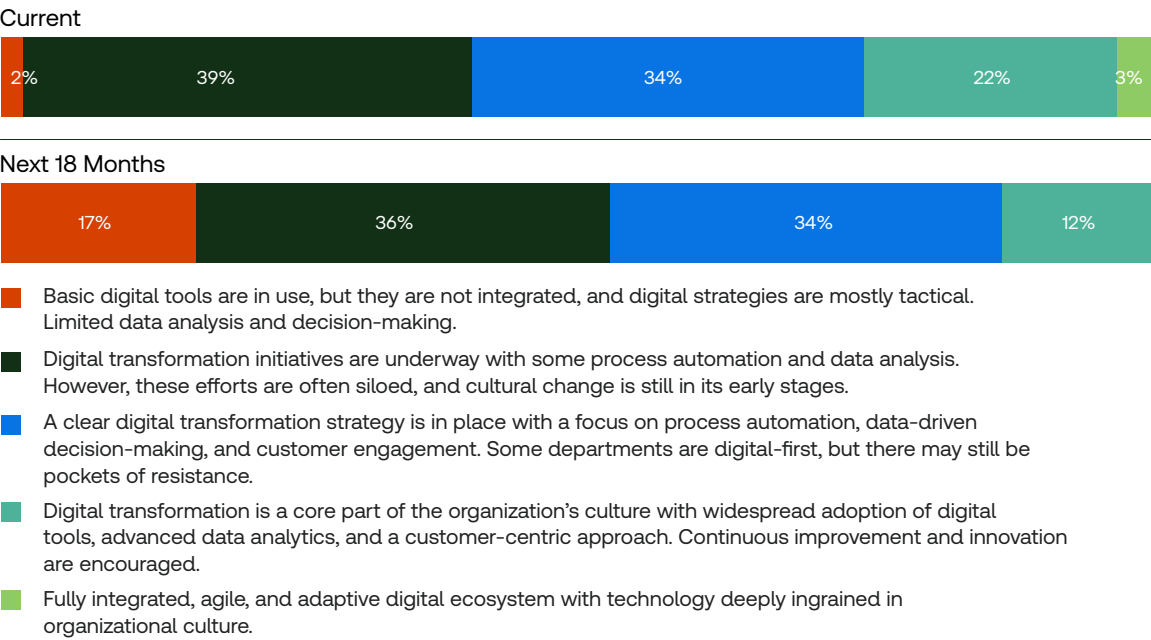
This, however, raises a new question: how are businesses progressing on their journey toward a digital transformation?



# Digital transformation: a progress report

Organizations are making clear progress on digital transformation, demonstrating the impact that a successful transformation can be expected to have and energizing executives’ support for the initiatives.

FIGURE 6  
State of digital transformation



While only 3% of leaders say their organizations have a fully integrated, agile, and adaptive digital ecosystem, with technology deeply ingrained in organizational culture, 12% of leaders say their organizations will reach that state within the next 18 months. They appear to be well on their way: More than half say a clear digital transformation strategy is in place, and more than 80% expect to have a clear digital strategy in place 18 months from now.

Only 2% of organizations have yet to initiate their digital transformations, and that number is expected to go to zero within the next year and a half.

Biggest challenges to digital transformation:

- Risk management
- Skills gaps
- Difficulty defining an overall vision and strategy
- Data quality and structure.
- Cultural readiness



Despite the challenges, two in five C-Suite leaders say they are “very satisfied” with their organization’s level of digital transformation, while another 54% say they are at least somewhat satisfied. Only 6% are dissatisfied.

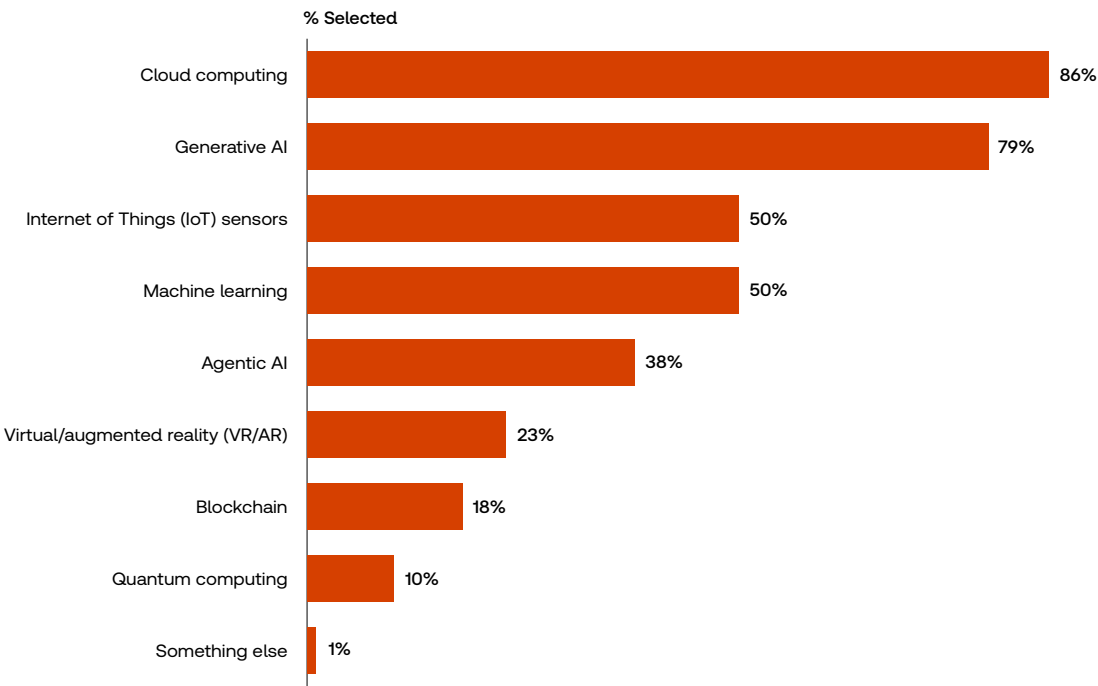
## Technologies leading the digital transformation

Two technologies are of outsized interest to C-Suite leaders: cloud computing and generative AI.

A large number of C-Suite leaders say their organizations are also exploring or investing in AI-related technologies apart from GenAI, such as machine learning and agentic AI. In fact, if looked at in the aggregate, the AI-related answers combined would easily emerge as the top technology for transformation.

**“Our transition to a cloud-based infrastructure has been a major success, reducing system downtimes and cutting data processing times in half. This has allowed us to respond more quickly to customer inquiries and enhance overall service quality.”**

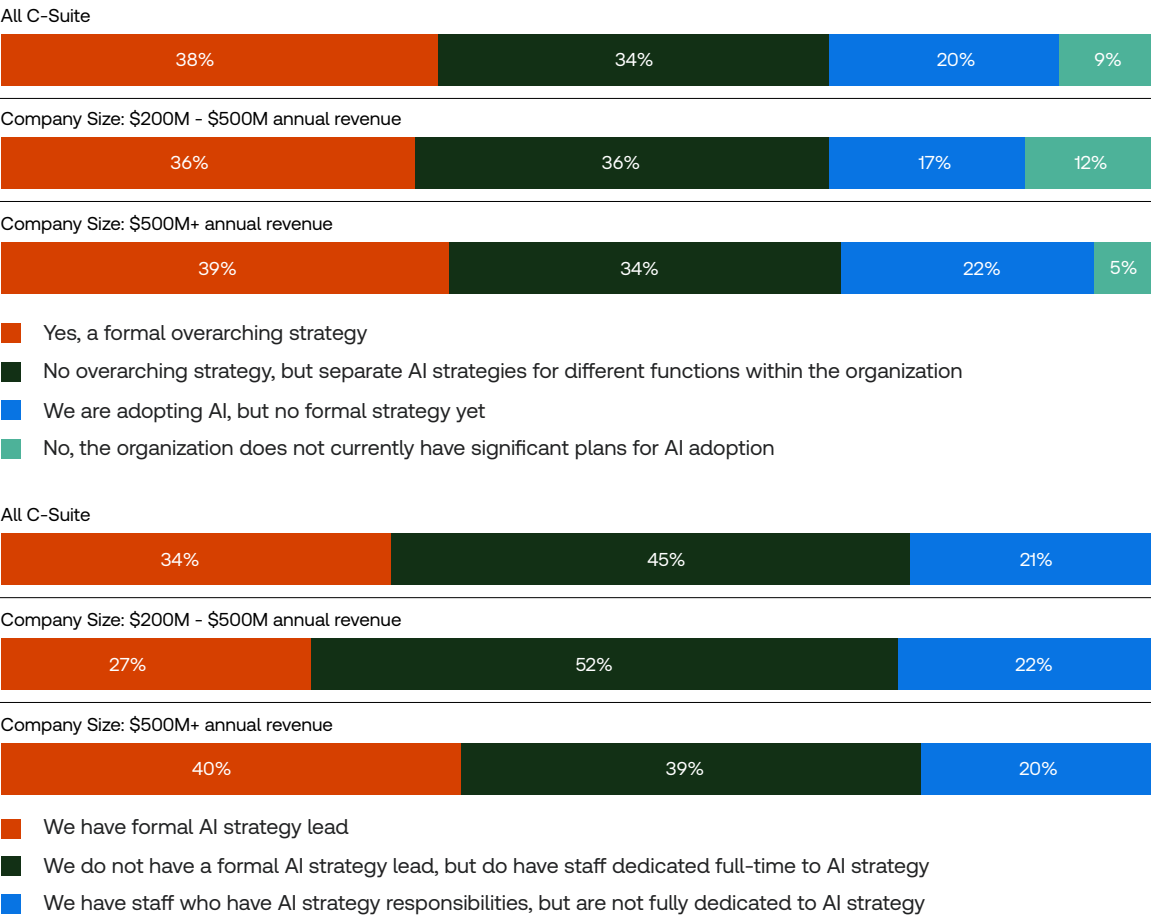
FIGURE 7  
Technologies organizations are exploring and investing in



Even with this being the case, however, C-Suite leaders aren’t necessarily looking to become early adopters. Only a handful (4%) say they’re aiming to lead the way, identifying new uses for AI before anyone else, while 17% say they’re aiming to become “among the first” to use a new AI-powered technology. However, three-quarters say they’re willing to wait to use AI-powered technology until other organizations have done so successfully.

This desire for precedent, however, is not stifling the desire to experiment and learn. In a clear sign that most organizations see the potential of AI and are determined to investigate and implement it thoughtfully and thoroughly, most C-Suite leaders say their organization has a formal strategy for AI adoption. In addition, they have dedicated resources to designing that strategy and promoting buy-in. At larger organizations, that strategy is more likely to permeate the entire enterprise, while at somewhat smaller ones, AI is slightly more likely to be implemented on a function-by-function basis. Fewer than three in 10 C-Suite leaders have yet to put a formal strategy in place, and only a very few say they have no plans at all to implement AI.

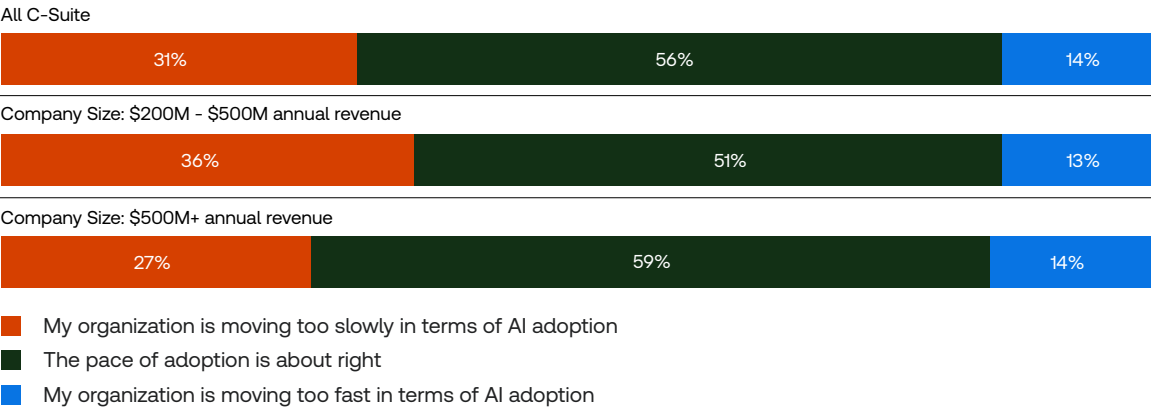
**FIGURE 8**  
**State of AI strategy and transformation leadership**



# AI adoption: Satisfactory progress

Just as C-Suite leaders largely feel satisfied with their organization’s progress toward digital transformation, more than half of C-Suite leaders believe that AI adoption at their organization is proceeding at the right pace. In fact, only about one in seven believe that their organization is adopting AI “too quickly.”

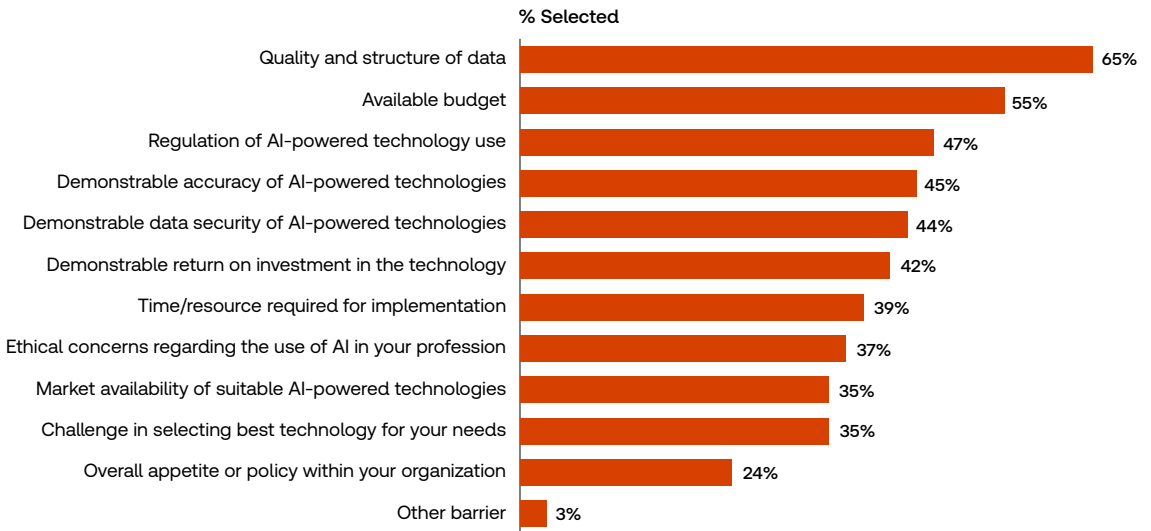
**FIGURE 9**  
**Pace of AI adoption**



## Data, budget, user access slowing down adoption

Nearly one-third of C-Suite leaders believe their organization is moving “too slowly” when it comes to adopting AI. Among these leaders, quality and structure of their organization’s data and available budget are cited as the biggest barriers to faster adoption.

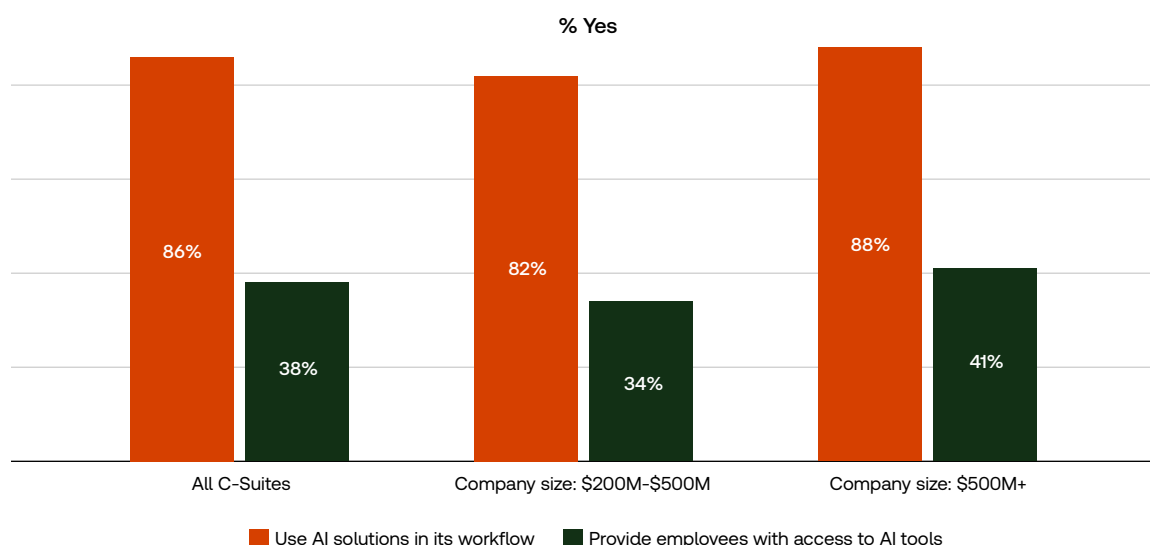
**FIGURE 10**  
**Barriers to AI adoption**



Regulation, security, accuracy, and return on investment are all also significant concerns.

Our research also uncovered another barrier to adoption. More than four out of five global C-Suite leaders responding to this survey say their organization already uses AI solutions within its workflows, and just over one-third say they have equipped their employees with AI tools. However, the Thomson Reuters Institute's recent *Generative AI in Professional Services*<sup>1</sup> report notes that only 12% of professionals say they are using GenAI tools.

**FIGURE 11**  
**Use of AI in workflows**



There are several possible explanations for this disconnect. Leaders may see the summarization and transcription tools available in office productivity software as an implementation of GenAI, but professionals may consider these functions business as usual. It's also possible that GenAI technology may be buried so deep within a team's workflows that it escapes notice. Similarly, GenAI may be widely used by certain departments, such as IT or marketing, and rarely available to others, such as tax.

The frequency of training on AI tools reveals a further disconnect. About 80% of C-Suite leaders say their organizations provide training in AI a few times a year, with 11% saying they offer training monthly. A similar number say they offer it annually or less often.

Yet most professionals surveyed for the *Generative AI in Professional Services* report say that they haven't had any training. That includes 62% of those in corporate risk departments and 84% of tax professionals.

Despite this lack of widespread availability, C-Suite leaders expect AI to yield a wide array of efficiencies that could make enabling functions much more effective in helping to reach organizational goals.

1 See 2025 *Generative AI in Professional Services Report*, Thomson Reuters Institute.

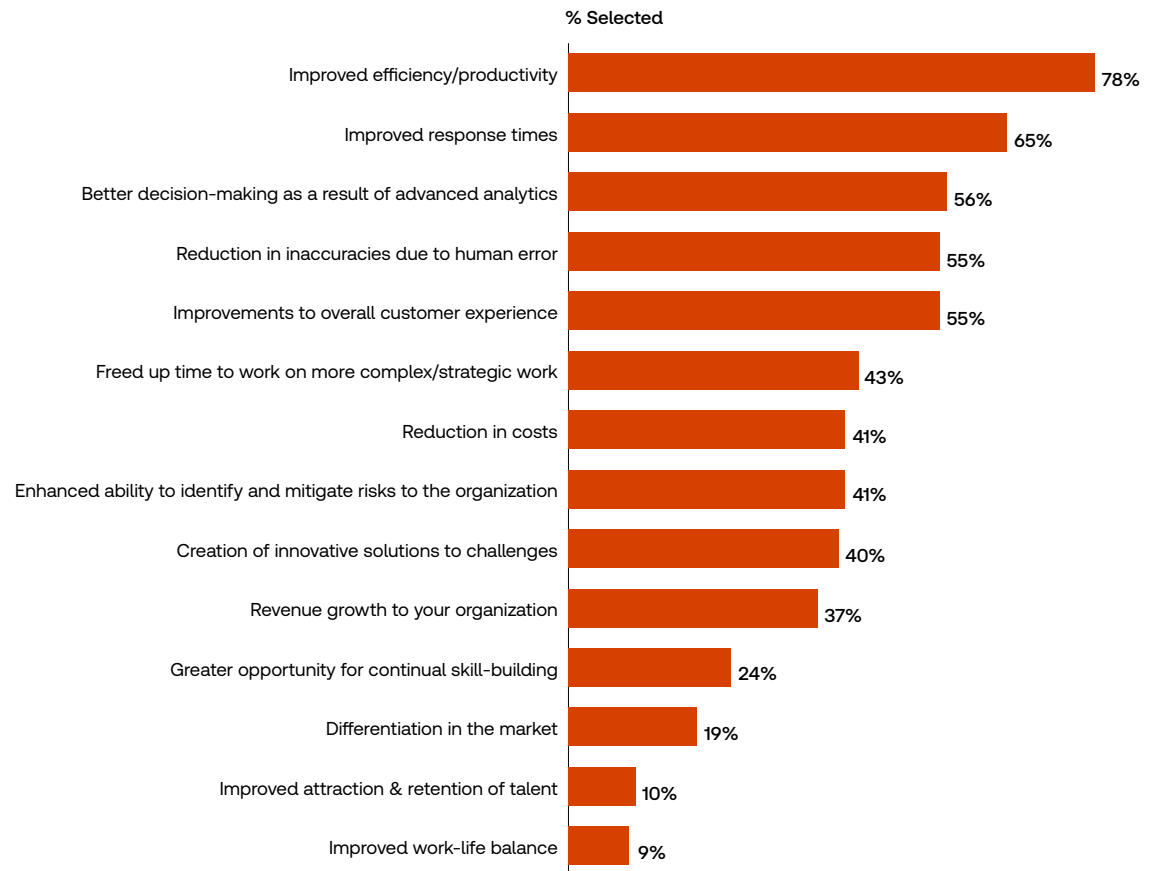
## Early gains from generative AI

Among the earliest benefits of AI to most organizations were improved efficiency, productivity, and response times. More than half of C-Suite leaders also reported improvements to the overall customer experience, which in itself is an important goal.

Notably, 43% of C-Suite leaders say their AI implementations have freed up time for their staff to devote to more complex and strategic work.

FIGURE 12

### Early benefits of AI adoption



## C-Suite leaders share examples of early AI successes in their own words.



### Process automation and efficiency

“Helped us meet our goals by automating routine scheduling tasks, and we’ve measured success through reduced project delays” - AUSTRALIA

“Implementing AI for regulatory compliance checks has allowed us to automate processes efficiently, reducing compliance costs and achieving higher compliance rate” - UK



### Customer experience and engagement

“AI has allowed us to segment our customer base more effectively, enabling targeted marketing campaigns and personalized product offers, which has increased customer engagement” - BRAZIL

“Our AI powered recommendation systems have enhanced the shopping experience by analyzing customer browsing and purchase history leading to increased sales and customer satisfaction” - US



### Predictive analytics and forecasting

“AI has been used to predict optimal rental and sales prices based on various factors such as location, trends and property characteristics” - FRANCE

“By installing AI-powered predictive maintenance tools to regularly monitor equipment in real time which prevents unexpected downtime and costly repairs” - UK



### Risk management

“The use of AI in liquidity risk management led to quicker and more informed responses to market volatility” - CANADA

“Using AI-powered technology, we can easily examine historical financial records, current market dynamics, seasonal trends, and potential financial risks that could impact the business” - GERMANY

# A strong start with a long way to go

It is clear that C-Suite leaders have established priorities for their businesses and measures for success. It is equally clear that many of the enabling functions could do a better job of working towards these broader corporate objectives. In digital transformation and AI, C-Suite leaders may have found the tools to mitigate or perhaps remove constraints from the organization's enabling functions, ultimately helping those functions make more substantive contributions toward the organization's overarching goals.

However, to fully realize the potential benefits of digital transformation, leaders will need to do more to address the tension between their perceptions of the potential of these tools and their readiness to make them widely available to those who could benefit from them. Optimism around perceived benefits and even the investment of significant capital will not bear fruit without meaningful efforts to drive adoption. Even where AI has been embedded into employee workflows, if employees themselves are largely unable to use the tools due to a lack of exposure or training, the ability of their enterprises to experiment with, learn from, and innovate with powerful new technologies will be hampered, and the potential for meaningful progress could founder.



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