AI LIGHTHOUSE PARTNERS

FROM AI STRATEGY TO PRODUCTISED EXECUTION

WHITE PAPER / BOARDROOM SERIES / NO. 01

AI Strategy for the Boardroom

01 START

02 PROVE

03 SCALE

04 SUSTAIN

Start. Prove. Scale. Sustain.

A practical playbook for executives and directors: how to move from AI activity to governed, measurable and compounding business value.

AUDIENCE	READING TIME	CONTACT
Boards / CEOs / CXOs / Investors	~25 minutes	info@ailighthousepartners.com

CORPORATE EDITION / JULY 2026

One strategic arc. Four execution disciplines.

Use the paper as a sequence, or go directly to the board instruments on pages 13-15.

HOW TO READ Each section ends with a board decision. The left rail shows the execution arc; the contents list shows where each instrument sits.

THE EXECUTION ARC

01 **START** Choose few. Choose well.

02 **PROVE** Turn evidence into decisions.

03 **SCALE** Build the system around the win.

04 **SUSTAIN** Compound assets and learning.

FAST READ Executive summary, Safe and responsible by design, and the Board playbook.

The experiments have run long enough.
The results are due.

Boards no longer need convincing that AI matters. They need a disciplined way to convert conviction into audited business outcomes - without allowing speed, autonomy or tool proliferation to outrun control.

The evidence describes a market that has adopted faster than it has absorbed. Value depends on the management system around the technology: strategic focus, workflow redesign, accountable ownership, usable data, workforce adoption, proportional governance and a repeatable path from pilot to production. [1][2]

MARKET SIGNALS

88%
use AI in at least one function

39%
report an enterprise-level EBIT effect

~6%
meet McKinsey's high-performer definition

THE BOARD-GOVERNED AI VALUE JOURNEY

01 START	Choose few. Choose well.	0-90 days
02 PROVE	Measure value. Decide fast.	Stage gates
03 SCALE	Replicate wins. Build the system.	Operating model
04 SUSTAIN	Compound data, trust and learning.	Continuous

FIVE DECISIONS ONLY THE TOP TABLE CAN MAKE

1. **Where AI is allowed to matter**
   Anchor investment to two or three strategic battles - and starve the rest.
2. **What proof means**
   Define the baseline, target, scale trigger and retirement criteria before funding.
3. **Who owns the outcome**
   Assign a business executive who owns the P&L or risk line.
4. **How trust is built at speed**
   Approve proportional controls, human oversight and rapid suspension.
5. **What will compound**
   Fund data loops, redesigned workflows, operating know-how and learning speed.

> “The winners are not the firms with the most pilots. They are the firms that stop piloting soonest - and start operating.”

The adoption-value paradox

AI adoption has outrun AI absorption. Many enterprises are busy; fewer have changed how the business performs.

The first board task is to distinguish deployment activity from outcome depth. Tool access, licence counts and pilot volumes are input measures. They do not establish financial value, customer impact, risk reduction or durable capability.

McKinsey reports that nearly two-thirds of organisations have not begun scaling AI enterprise-wide. High performers are much more likely to redesign workflows and involve senior leaders in adoption and governance. Deloitte also finds that many organisations remain focused on surface-level productivity rather than business reinvention. [1][3]

OUTCOME DEPTH

PATHSEEKERS Few deployments / high outcomes	**TRANSFORMERS** Broad deployment / high outcomes
STARTERS Early deployment / early outcomes	**UNDERACHIEVERS** Broad deployment / low outcomes

DEPLOYMENT BREADTH

Diagnostic matrix adapted conceptually from Deloitte's adopter segmentation.

WHY THIS IS NOW A GOVERNANCE ISSUE

CAPITAL AI spend and run cost can grow with usage.	Stage-gated funding, unit economics and benefits tracking.
OPERATIONAL RISK Agents act through enterprise systems.	Agent register, permissions, monitoring and off-switches.
REGULATION Rules vary by role, use and risk class.	ERM integration and accountable legal, risk and business owners.
STRATEGY AI-native entrants can change the basis of competition.	Review disruption paths and strategic choices twice a year.

BOARD ACTIONS

1. Place the organisation honestly on the matrix, using evidence. 2. Request one inventory of systems, agents, pilots, subscriptions, owners, spend and outcomes. 3. Make the gap between activity and value the mandate for the strategy that follows.

What a real AI strategy looks like

An AI strategy is not a use-case list or a technology roadmap. It is a set of choices about where human and machine intelligence will help the enterprise win.

1 WHERE AI WILL MATTER
Strategic battles

2 HOW VALUE WILL BE CAPTURED
Financial or risk line

3 WHAT MUST BE TRUE
Data, talent, platform, governance

4 WHAT HAPPENS FIRST
Sequenced roadmap

THE TEST: THE NOT-DOING LIST IS EXPLICIT

PORTFOLIO BALANCE

Operational improvement

Improves how existing work is performed: forecasting, service resolution, document processing and decision support.

Board lens: measurable, near-term and often funds harder change.

Business-model change

Changes what is sold or how value is captured: AI-embedded products, outcome-based services, dynamic propositions or software-like delivery.

Board lens: slower, riskier and where category leadership is made.

FROM ANALYTICAL TO GENERATIVE TO AGENTIC

GENERATION	WHAT IT DOES	WHAT IT DEMANDS	PRIMARY VALUE
ANALYTICAL AI	Predicts, classifies and optimises.	Reliable data, model governance and decision integration.	Better decisions
GENERATIVE AI	Creates and synthesises text, code, images and analysis.	Human review, accuracy controls, IP protection and secure access.	Productivity
AGENTIC AI	Plans and executes multi-step work using tools under defined authority.	Workflow redesign, identity, permissions, runtime monitoring and rapid suspension.	Capacity and end-to-end work

BOARD ACTIONS

1. Require the strategy to fit on one page and use the language of corporate strategy. 2. Show the operational / business-model split explicitly. 3. Ask which three workflows would be redesigned first if agentic execution materially reduced unit cost or cycle time.

Start: the first 90 days

Start narrow, start honestly and bring the P&L owner into the room before technology selection begins.

THE FIRST NINETY DAYS

DAYS 0-30	DAYS 30-60	DAYS 60-90
BASELINE Inventory systems, agents, pilots and subscriptions. Capture owner, users, data, run cost, risk tier, usage and outcomes.	**PRIORITISE** Generate candidates from the business. Quantify value, feasibility and risk. Build a portfolio, not a shopping list.	**COMMIT** Publish the plan on a page, the governance floor and a literacy programme beginning with the board and ExCo.

THE WORKING PORTFOLIO

VALUE		
	QUICK WINS Deploy first	**BIG BETS** Stage-gate
	FILL-INS Buy / bundle	**DEPRIORITISE** Name publicly

DELIVERY DIFFICULTY

THREE ARTEFACTS THE BOARD CAN HOLD

- Plan on a page: 3-5 quick wins, 1-2 big bets, owners, dates, value and dependencies.
- Governance floor: approved tools, data rules, risk tiers, oversight and escalation.
- Literacy programme beginning with directors and the executive committee.

THREE EXPENSIVE EARLY MISTAKES

- Piloting where failure has no business consequence.
- Deferring data and workflow problems until scale.
- Allowing a central technology team to own business outcomes.

BOARD ACTIONS

1. Approve the portfolio and the not-doing list together. 2. Require every funded case to name its financial or risk line and accountable owner. 3. Complete executive literacy before approving the first at-scale automation case.

Prove: from pilot to P&L

Pilots rarely fail only as technology. They fail as investments when they begin without a baseline, a counterfactual or a decision rule.

THE PILOT-TO-P&L PIPELINE

G1
CONCEPT
Owner, value hypothesis, data access, risk tier

G2
PILOT
Real data, real workflow, real users

G3
PROOF
Measured lift, adoption, unit economics

G4
SCALE
Rollout, controls, benefits tracking

EACH GATE ENDS WITH A DECISION: PASS / PIVOT / RETIRE

FOUR NUMBERS BEFORE FUNDING

1
BASELINE
Current cost, cycle time, error rate, revenue, risk exposure or capacity.

Measured, not inferred.

2
TARGET
The outcome the AI-enabled workflow should achieve - and by when.

Specific enough to create accountability.

3
SCALE TRIGGER
The evidence threshold that releases the next investment stage.

Includes adoption and unit economics.

4
RETIREMENT CRITERIA
Conditions under which the pilot stops or pivots.

Defined before sunk-cost bias appears.

MEASURE THE TWO VALUE CURRENCIES SEPARATELY

Hard value
Cost removed, revenue added, loss avoided or capital released. Trace each benefit to a financial line and include the run-cost at scale.

Capacity value
Hours returned or cycle time reduced. Real, but only becomes hard value when leaders decide how the capacity will be redeployed, converted or absorbed.

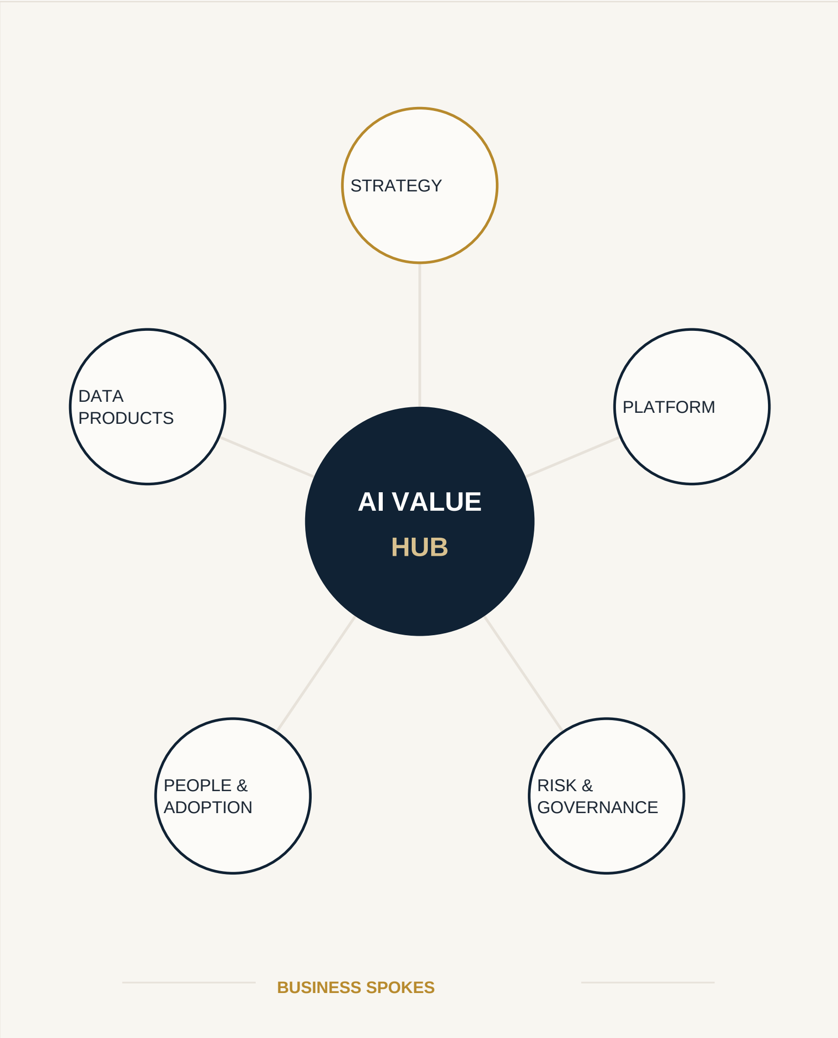
BOARD ACTIONS

1. Require baseline, target, scale trigger and retirement criteria in every business case. 2. Review hard value, capacity value and run cost as separate lines. 3. Track pilot-to-production conversion, time to proof and the quality of retirement decisions.

Scale: operating model

Pilots prove local value. Decision rights, reusable foundations and workforce change determine whether that value replicates.

THE DEFAULT DESIGN FOR MOST LARGE ENTERPRISES



WHY HUB-AND-SPOKE

IBM's 2025 CAIO study reported scaled AI investment across functions in 40% of hub-and-spoke organisations in its sample, versus 30% centralised, 21% hybrid and 10% decentralised. These are study-sample associations, not a universal prescription. [4]

HUB-AND-SPOKE	Central standards; federated business ownership.	Default for most large enterprises.
CENTRALISED	Control and scarce expertise in one team.	Early capability build or highly regulated settings.
HYBRID	Flexibility across businesses and geographies.	Diversified groups with strong local leadership.
DECENTRALISED	Local autonomy and speed.	Small organisations or exceptional BU autonomy.

THE MANDATE MATTERS MORE THAN THE TITLE

One senior executive, accountable to the CEO, should be empowered to set standards, resolve duplication, arbitrate risk and hold the portfolio to evidence. The hub owns platform, governance and scarce expertise; the spokes own workflows, adoption and outcomes.

BOARD ACTIONS

1. Approve decision rights and the operating model explicitly. 2. Make business spokes accountable for outcomes, not merely requirements. 3. Give the hub authority to standardise, stop duplication and control enterprise risk.

Scale: funding and platform

Every scaled use case should make the next one cheaper, faster and safer.

TEST THE BUDGET AGAINST 10-20-70

BCG's enduring heuristic allocates roughly 10% of transformation effort to algorithms, 20% to technology and data, and 70% to people, process and organisational change. It is not an accounting rule; it is a challenge to programmes dominated by licences and platforms. [2]

10%	20%	70%
ALGORITHMS	TECH + DATA	PEOPLE + PROCESS

BUY, BUILD OR PARTNER

BUY

Commodity capability, low differentiation, manageable switching risk.

Standardise and negotiate enterprise controls.

PARTNER

Speed or specialist depth is scarce.

Tie milestones to evidence, integration and knowledge transfer.

BUILD

Workflow, data or control model is proprietary.

Challenge what stays differentiated as models improve.

THE REUSABLE FOUNDATION

BUSINESS WORKFLOWS	Domain outcomes, process ownership, human decisions
AGENT & APPLICATION LAYER	Assistants, agents, orchestration, workflow services
TRUST & OPERATIONS	Identity, permissions, observability, evaluation, cost control
AI PLATFORM	Models, retrieval, tooling, development standards
GOVERNED DATA PRODUCTS	Priority domains, lineage, quality, access, semantics

HOUSE VIEW

Tool consolidation of 20-40% is an engagement heuristic, not a published benchmark. Validate it through the inventory before using it in a business case.

BOARD ACTIONS

1. Challenge licence-heavy budgets: where is the workflow and adoption spend? 2. Ask every build decision: what makes this proprietary? 3. Fund data products, monitoring, identity, cost control and orchestration as multi-year infrastructure.

Safe and responsible by design

Good governance does not make every deployment slow. It makes the safe path predictable - and reserves deeper scrutiny for genuinely higher-risk uses.

PROPORTIONATE OPERATIONAL TRIAGE

GREEN	Internal productivity using non-sensitive data	Approved tools, use policy, basic logging	HOURS
AMBER	Customer-facing content, reviewed decisions or agents operating in core systems	Testing, monitoring, review loops and data-governance sign-off	DAYS
RED	Autonomous actions affecting rights, money, safety or regulated decisions	Formal assessment, human oversight, audit trail and executive approval	DELIBERATE

Operational triage only. It does not replace formal classification under the EU AI Act or sector regulation.

AGENTS RAISE THE CONTROL REQUIREMENT

Every deployed agent needs a named owner, bounded authority, permissions, evaluation criteria, monitoring, escalation, an audit trail and a tested suspension mechanism. [5][6]

EU AI ACT - CURRENT BOARD TIMELINE

02 FEB 2025
Prohibited practices and AI-literacy duties began.

02 AUG 2025
Governance and GPAI obligations began.

02 AUG 2026
Specified transparency rules apply.

02 DEC 2027
Specified standalone high-risk systems apply.

02 AUG 2028
High-risk systems embedded in regulated products apply.

Role split: providers normally carry system-design and conformity duties where applicable; deployers must follow instructions, assign oversight, monitor operation, retain logs and meet impact duties where required. A company can occupy both roles. [7]

BOARD ACTIONS

1. Approve risk tiers and red lines. 2. Ask for the agent register: owner, authority, permissions and off-switch. 3. Track incidents, time-to-approve and audit coverage. 4. Recheck the AI Act timetable before publication or major investment decisions.

Adoption is the strategy

AI value is realised only when people change how work is performed. Adoption is a design and management problem - not a communications workstream added at the end.

51%
of frontline employees regularly use GenAI

1 in 3
employees say they are properly trained

5+ hours
of training is associated with substantially higher use

BCG's 2025 workforce study found a sharp gap between leaders and frontline employees. Only one-third of employees said they had been properly trained, while regular use was markedly higher among those receiving at least five hours of training with coaching. [8]

LITERACY AS OPERATING INFRASTRUCTURE

3 **EXECUTIVE FLUENCY**

Board and ExCo

Challenge AI-derived recommendations, economics, limits and risk.

2 **ROLE-BASED CAPABILITY**

Functions receiving funded use cases

Perform the redesigned workflow and operate its control model.

1 **GENERAL FOUNDATION**

All workers and relevant contractors

Use approved tools safely, protect data and escalate concerns.

READ UNAPPROVED USE AS RISK AND DEMAND

When employees lack adequate enterprise tools, more than half in BCG's survey said they would find alternatives and use them anyway. Provide approved tools that are usable, make migration easy, define the perimeter clearly and enforce it consistently. [8]

THE MIDDLE-MANAGER DESIGN PROBLEM

Middle managers often carry delivery risk, workforce uncertainty and performance pressure. Involve them in use-case and workflow design, make the treatment of freed capacity explicit, and include adoption and process outcomes in management objectives.

SAY THE HARD THING ABOUT JOBS

State which work will change, how capacity will be redeployed, where roles may reduce and what support is available. Silence encourages fear and passive resistance; vague reassurance is not a workforce plan.

BOARD ACTIONS

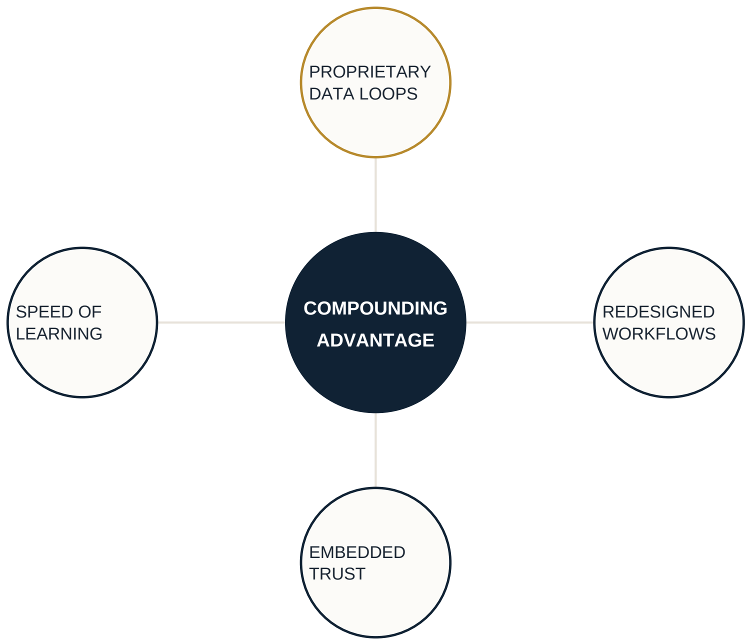
1. Review active usage, workflow outcomes, training quality, unapproved-use trend and manager-level variance. 2. Make executive fluency a standing annual requirement. 3. Require a workforce-transition statement before approving at-scale automation.

Sustain and compete

Models are increasingly rented. Durable advantage comes from what the organisation builds around them - and how quickly it learns.

THE FOUR MOATS AI CAN ACTUALLY BUILD

Sustaining AI means more than maintaining models. Workflows regress, user behaviour changes, vendors release new capabilities and yesterday's differentiator becomes a commodity. Treat AI as an operating rhythm: quarterly portfolio decisions, outcome monitoring, platform roadmaps, control testing, workforce learning and a structured horizon scan.



PROPRIETARY DATA LOOPS
Does the asset become more valuable each cycle - and is that value contractually ours?

REDESIGNED WORKFLOWS
Is the workflow genuinely different, or has AI been inserted into the old process?

EMBEDDED TRUST
Can we demonstrate control effectiveness, not merely policy existence?

SPEED OF LEARNING
What is the median time from approval to measured value - and is it improving?

> “Do not ask only which models the company uses. Ask what the company owns - data, workflows, trust or learning capability - that becomes stronger whenever models improve.”

LEADING INDICATORS WORTH TRACKING

- Pilot-to-production conversion and documented retirement rate.
- Median cycle time from approval to measured value.
- Share of AI spend in core value-creating processes.
- Active adoption and outcome variance across functions.
- Incidents, time-to-approve, audit coverage and unit run cost.
- Reuse of governed data, platform components and controls.

BOARD ACTIONS

1. Request an annual moat statement: what the company now owns, why it compounds and the evidence. 2. Move AI into normal strategy, budgeting, risk and workforce cycles. 3. Benchmark learning speed as well as financial outcomes.

Ten questions directors should ask

The strategy reduced to the instruments a board actually uses: decisions, evidence, accountability and consequences.

01 **Which battles in the corporate strategy is AI assigned to win?**

A use-case catalogue is not a strategy.

02 **Where are we on the adoption-value matrix - with evidence?**

Deployment breadth without outcome depth is the underachiever pattern.

03 **What are the four numbers for every funded initiative?**

Baseline, target, scale trigger and retirement criteria.

04 **Who owns each outcome in the P&L or risk line?**

Technology enables; the business owns the result.

05 **Does the budget pass the 10-20-70 challenge?**

Licence-heavy programmes usually underfund change.

06 **What did we retire last quarter, and what did it teach us?**

No decisions means no portfolio discipline.

07 **Can we stop every agent we run - and how fast?**

Autonomy must remain bounded and interruptible.

08 **Are we ready for the next AI Act milestones?**

Inventory, role classification, transparency and high-risk controls.

09 **Where is adoption strongest and weakest?**

Usage, outcomes, training and manager-level variance.

10 **What do we own that compounds?**

Data, workflows, trust and learning speed.

DILIGENCE LENS

An acquirer will ask for the evidence behind claimed AI value, the pilot-to-production conversion rate, the agent register and the moat statement - and discount valuation uplift the evidence cannot carry.

The twelve-month plan on a page

Deliver, prove and govern in parallel. Do not sequence governance and adoption after the technology work.

QUARTER	DELIVER	PROVE	GOVERN
Q1 / START	Inventory and readiness baseline; 3-5 quick wins; 1-2 big bets; visible not-doing list.	Baselines and four-number value cases for every funded workflow.	Governance floor; risk tiers; ExCo literacy; AI Act gap assessment.
Q2 / PROVE	Quick wins live in production conditions; big bets through G1-G2.	First measured lift; value dashboard operating at ExCo.	Governance council; agent register; approved-tools rollout.
Q3 / SCALE	First wins scaled with process change; platform case approved; hub-and-spoke live.	Hard value tied to financial lines; first documented retirement.	Role-based capability; monitoring and drift controls.
Q4 / SUSTAIN	Second portfolio wave funded from evidence; big bet reaches G3 decision.	Annual hard-value and capacity-value statement; leading indicators trended.	Moat statement; AI in ERM and planning; workforce transition report.

BOARD CADENCE

QUARTERLY
Portfolio decisions, value evidence, adoption and risk.

TWICE YEARLY
Disruption map, operating-model health and platform economics.

ANNUALLY
Moat statement, workforce transition and AI absorbed into strategy, budgeting and ERM.

DECISION GATES

Q1
FUND
Portfolio and not-doing list

Q2
PROVE
Evidence before expansion

Q3
SCALE
Workflow, adoption and controls

Q4
REINVEST
Next wave funded from evidence

Maturity self-check

Locate the organisation before the next board agenda item on AI - and score the evidence, not the aspiration.

DIMENSION	EMERGING / 1	PRACTISING / 2	COMPOUNDING / 3
STRATEGY	Use-case list	Portfolio tied to strategic battles	AI choices shape corporate strategy
VALUE	Anecdotes; no baselines	Four numbers; quarterly dashboard	Audited value; retirements routine
OPERATING MODEL	Scattered teams	Hub-and-spoke with accountable leadership	Each use case cheaper than the last
GOVERNANCE	Policy exists	Risk tiers and agent register used daily	Trust enables safe autonomy
PEOPLE	Training optional	Tiered capability tied to workflows	Managers compete to redesign work

5-9 **CONCENTRATE**

Sections 03-04: baseline, portfolio discipline and proof.

10-12 **INDUSTRIALISE**

Sections 05-07: operating model, platform, controls and adoption.

13-15 **COMPOUND**

Section 08: moats, learning speed and strategic reinvestment.

THE CLOSING ARGUMENT

AI will not reward the boldest boards or the most cautious ones. It will reward the most disciplined: the ones that choose few things, prove them honestly, scale what works, govern what scales and build assets that compound. None of that requires predicting the technology. All of it requires deciding, this quarter, to run AI the way the organisation already runs capital: with owners, evidence and consequences.

The lighthouse does not chase ships. It stands where the rocks are - and the ships steer true.

Sources and interpretation notes

Specific titles, dates and role-specific caveats are provided so that time-sensitive claims can be rechecked before publication.

1 McKinsey & Company - The State of AI: Global Survey 2025

88% adoption; 39% enterprise EBIT effect; high-performer practices and workflow redesign.

2 Boston Consulting Group - The Widening AI Value Gap (2025)

Future-built 5%; scalers 35%; laggards 60%; financial associations; transformation and 10-20-70 guidance.

3 Deloitte - The State of AI in the Enterprise 2026

Enterprise adoption, reinvention and scaling research; methodology includes 3,235 leaders across 24 countries.

4 IBM Institute for Business Value - Solving the AI ROI Puzzle (2025)

CAIO role, operating-model associations and reported ROI / scaling differences.

5 Gartner - Task-Specific Agents in Enterprise Applications (2025)

Forecast that up to 40% of enterprise applications will include task-specific agents by end-2026.

6 Gartner - Over 40% of Agentic AI Projects May Be Cancelled by 2027

Forecast based on escalating cost, unclear business value or inadequate risk controls.

7 European Commission - AI Act implementation and high-risk guidelines (2026)

Current application timetable, provider / deployer role distinctions and high-risk system guidance.

8 Boston Consulting Group - AI at Work: Momentum Builds, but Gaps Remain (2025)

Frontline usage, training gaps, coaching and employee use of alternative tools.

9 MIT / NANDA - State of AI in Business 2025

Evidence on the pilot-to-scale divide and partnered solutions; treated as a study signal, not a universal failure rate.

EVIDENCE STANDARD

Benchmarks are dated and indicative. Associations are not proof of causation; forecasts remain forecasts; house views are labelled separately.

RECHECK BEFORE PUBLICATION

Refresh regulation, market statistics and named research dates. Confirm that claims still match the organisation's role, jurisdiction and risk classification.

This paper is strategic commentary, not legal or investment advice.

AI LIGHTHOUSE PARTNERS

HUMAN-LED / AGENT-OPERATED / EVIDENCE-BACKED / PRODUCTISED

From AI strategy to productised execution.

AI Lighthouse Partners helps investors, boards and executive teams move from strategy to productised execution - combining senior advisory judgement with agentic workflows for faster, evidence-backed decision support.

- **AI Strategy for CXOs & Boards** — Board-ready strategy and funded roadmap
- **Agentic CDD** — Evidence-backed commercial due diligence
- **AI Due Diligence OS** — AI maturity assessment and 100-day plan
- **Process Agentification** — Agent-operated workflows and measured value

ENQUIRIES

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