

AI IS NOT AN IT PROJECT.

WHY YOUR AI STRATEGY BELONGS TO THE BUSINESS, NOT THE
DATA CENTER

74%^[1]

of companies struggle to achieve
and scale AI value

BCG, Where's the Value in AI? (2024)

30-50%^[2]

of GenAI projects abandoned after
proof of concept

Gartner (2024); updated 50%+ per Gartner 2025

26%^[1]

of AI leaders achieve 1.5x higher
revenue growth

BCG; only this share generates tangible value

BUSINESS IMAGINES. IT ENABLES. TOGETHER, THEY TRANSFORM.

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The Meeting No One Is Having

Every week, somewhere in corporate America, a well-intentioned CIO walks into an executive committee meeting and presents an AI roadmap. The slides are polished. The architecture diagrams are impressive. The technology stack is meticulously evaluated. And the business leaders in the room nod politely, approve a budget, and go back to wondering why their contact center still takes eleven minutes to resolve a simple customer inquiry.

This is the AI implementation trap: deploying AI as an IT project when it should be driven as a business transformation.

AI is the most powerful productivity and profitability lever most companies will ever encounter. That is too important to be delegated exclusively to the people who manage your firewall.

The data is unambiguous. Boston Consulting Group's (BCG) comprehensive study of 1,000 senior executives across 59 countries found that 74% of companies struggle to achieve and scale value from AI investments, despite years of pilots, hiring, and budget allocation. Meanwhile, McKinsey reports that nearly two-thirds of organizations remain stuck in pilot or experiment mode. Gartner predicted at least 30% of GenAI projects would be abandoned after proof of concept by end of 2025 due to poor data quality and unclear business value. Updated Gartner research now puts actual abandonment above 50%. [\[1,2,3\]](#)

This is not a technology problem. It is an organizational alignment problem. And the fix does not start in the server room.

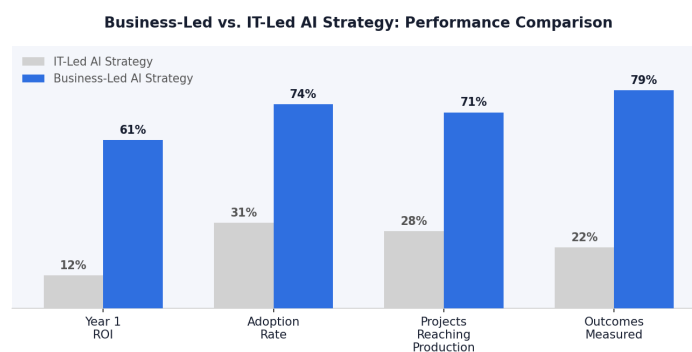


Figure 1: Business-Led vs. IT-Led AI Strategy — indicative performance comparison across four key dimensions. Sources: BCG (2024), McKinsey State of AI (2025), Gartner (2024/2025). Values represent composite directional benchmarks derived from published research.

The Frame That Changes Everything

Here is the frame I use with every client, regardless of industry:

IT's job is to make your company's data and intellectual property available to AI.

The business's job is to decide what to do with it.

BCG's research puts a precise number on where AI value actually lives: 62% of it comes from core business functions such as operations, sales and marketing, and R&D. Only 38% comes from support functions including IT itself.^[1]

That means the people closest to the customer, the product, and the P&L are sitting on the majority of your AI value. And in most organizations, they are waiting for IT to tell them what to do with it.

The result is a limbo state. IT runs pilots. Business units watch. Executives approve small experiments. Nobody owns the transformation. Nobody moves with urgency. And a competitor who figured this out twelve months ago is quietly eating your lunch.

Two Teams, One Mission

To break out of this limbo, I recommend organizations establish two distinct and collaborating teams with clearly defined mandates.

The Business Imaginators

The Imaginators live on the business side. Their mandate is not to understand AI technology. Their mandate is to ruthlessly identify where the business is losing money, losing time, losing customers, or losing margin.

Imaginators ask questions like:

- Where does a customer experience friction that costs us retention?
- Where does a frontline employee spend time on tasks that generate no value?
- Where are we making decisions slowly because we cannot synthesize information fast enough?
- Where does manual processing introduce errors that have downstream financial consequences?
- Where are we leaving revenue on the table because we cannot personalize or respond at scale?

Imaginators do not care how AI works. They care what it produces. They own the business case, the ROI model, the success metrics, and critically, the change management and adoption plan that determines

whether an AI deployment actually changes behavior or simply becomes another underutilized technology investment.

The Imaginator team is not a committee. It is not a working group. It is a standing business function with executive sponsorship and a mandate to drive outcome-based AI adoption at pace.

The IT Enablers

The Enablers live on the IT side. Their mandate is equally critical and significantly more technical: make the company's data and IP accessible, reliable, secure, and AI-ready.

Gartner research identifies poor data quality as the single biggest technical blocker to AI production deployment, citing it as a primary driver of project abandonment. This is precisely the Enabler's domain to solve before the Imaginator builds on it. [\[2\]](#)

Enablers own:

- Data inventory and classification across all systems of record
- Integration architecture that exposes the right data to the right AI systems
- Security and compliance frameworks that govern how AI interacts with sensitive information
- Infrastructure scalability as AI workloads grow
- Observability and performance monitoring so the business knows what is working
- Vendor evaluation and technology qualification to ensure the stack is fit for purpose

Enablers are not order takers. They are strategic infrastructure builders. Their success metric is not uptime. It is the speed at which a business Imaginator can bring an AI use case from concept to production with confidence in the underlying data and platform.

Business Imaginators	IT Enablers
Define the outcome	Map and expose data assets
Own the ROI case	Build the integration layer
Identify friction in the customer journey	Ensure security and compliance
Prioritize by impact, not complexity	Maintain and scale the AI infrastructure
Champion adoption and change management	Instrument for observability and performance
Measure business results	Evaluate and qualify technology partners

The Case for Doing This Right

Separating these roles is not organizational theory. It is the difference between a company that extracts sustained value from AI and one that accumulates a graveyard of pilots. Here is what the evidence shows when organizations align the model correctly.

Faster Time to Value

BCG's analysis of AI leaders versus laggards found that organizations focusing AI on core business functions with clear outcome targets achieved 1.5x higher revenue growth and 1.6x greater shareholder returns over three years compared to peers that treated AI as a technology initiative. The critical differentiator was not the sophistication of the technology. It was the clarity of the business objective.^[1]

When business leaders define the outcome before IT begins architecture planning, the entire program moves faster. There is no ambiguity about what success looks like. There is no rework when the technology team discovers that what they built does not match what the business actually needed.

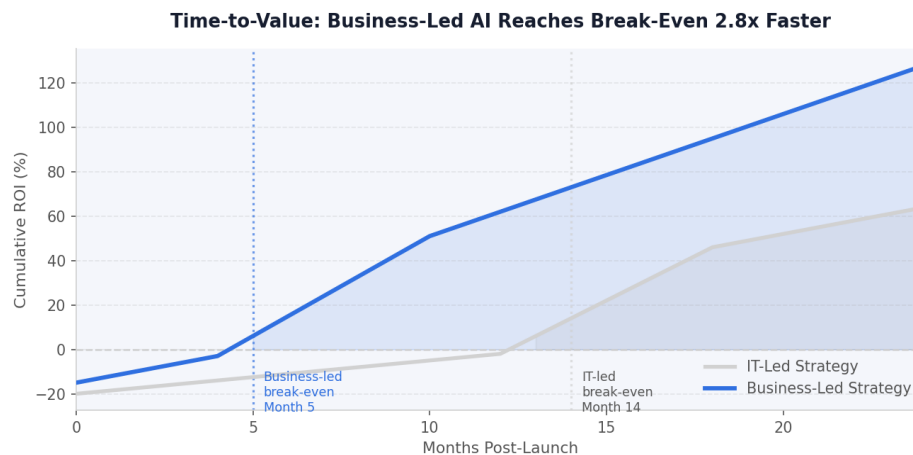


Figure 2: Illustrative time-to-value curves — business-led programs reach positive ROI earlier due to outcome clarity eliminating late-stage rework. Directional model derived from BCG (2024) and Gartner (2024) research on AI program performance patterns.

Higher Adoption Rates

BCG's 70-20-10 framework for AI success is instructive: 70% of AI value creation is attributable to people and processes, 20% to technology, and 10% to the AI algorithms themselves. The Imaginator model is built precisely around this reality. When the business owns the use case from day one, they also own the adoption journey.^[1]

IT-led programs frequently produce technically sound systems that fail at the human layer. When the business owns the use case from day one, they understand the workflow that needs to change, the employee who needs to change it, and the incentive structure that will make it stick.

Better Outcomes, Measured the Right Way

McKinsey's research identifies measurement gaps as one of the four primary blockers that keep organizations stuck in pilot mode. Without clear KPIs tied to business outcomes, pilot programs cannot make the case for enterprise-wide investment. A business-led model forces the evaluation criteria to be expressed in business terms from the start: cost per resolution, customer satisfaction score, revenue per employee, cycle time. ^[3]

Those are the metrics that matter to the P&L, and they are the metrics that determine whether AI is producing a return or consuming budget.

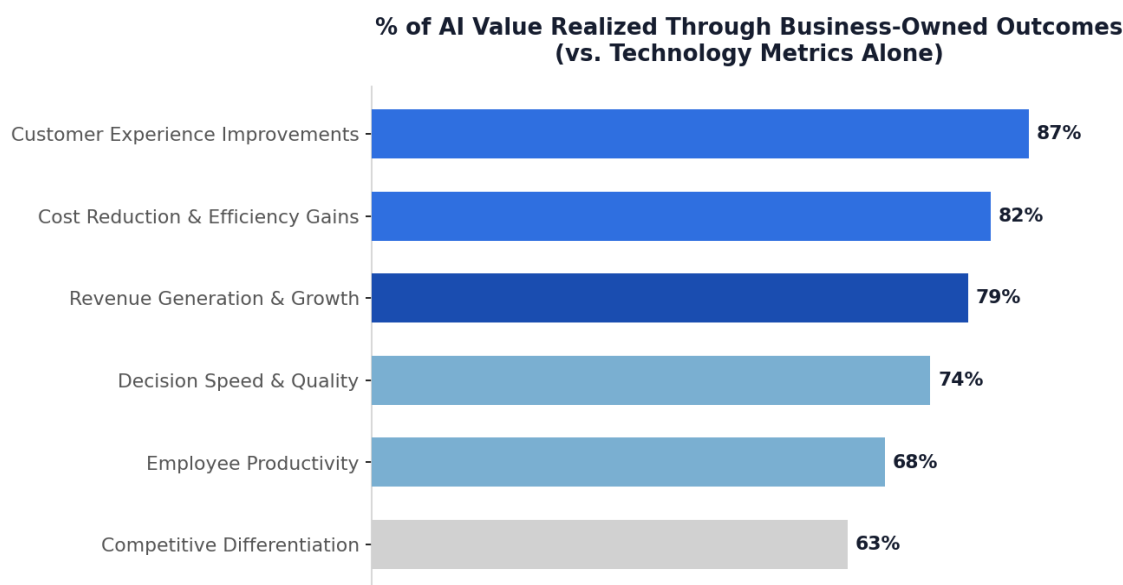


Figure 3: Distribution of AI value by business domain. Operations, sales and marketing, and R&D collectively represent more than half of AI value in leading organizations. Source: BCG, *Where's the Value in AI?* (2024). [1]

Compounding Creative Advantage

According to Gartner's GenAI business case research, early adopters report an average productivity improvement of 22.6%, cost savings of 15.2%, and revenue increases of 15.8% from GenAI initiatives. But those numbers describe the floor, not the ceiling. They represent what happens when AI absorbs the routine work that currently consumes your best people. ^[2]

When AI handles scheduling, summarization, report generation, data entry, and first-pass analysis, your best salesperson reclaims time for relationships. Your best operations leader stops reconciling reports

and starts redesigning processes. Your best customer experience manager stops triaging complaints and starts building proactive loyalty programs.

This is not a marginal efficiency gain. This is a categorical shift in what your business is capable of. The companies that structure AI correctly will not just be more efficient than their competitors. They will be more imaginative, more responsive, and more human where it matters most.

When AI handles the routine, your people are freed to do what only humans can do: build relationships, exercise judgment, create, and lead. That is where your competitive moat is built.

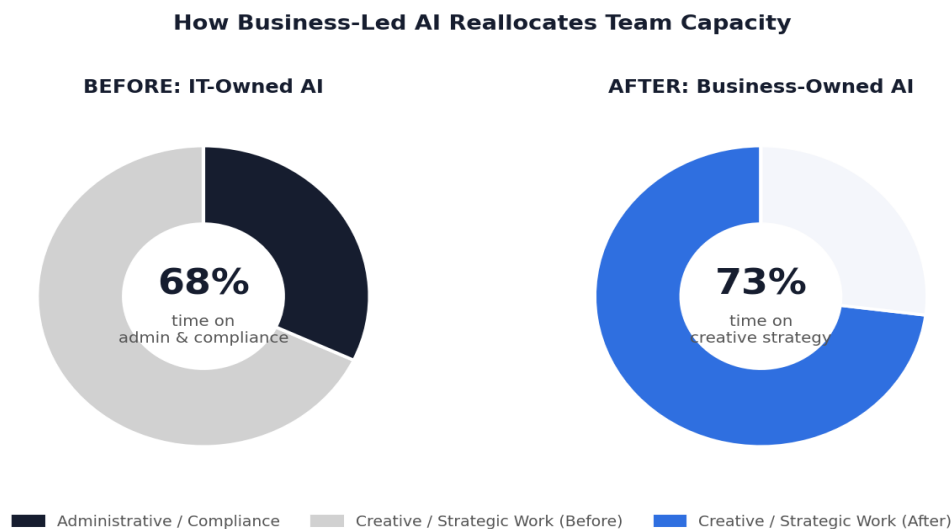


Figure 4: Before and after — how business-led AI reallocates team capacity from administrative tasks to creative and strategic work. Directional model consistent with Gartner productivity research. [2]

Organizational Confidence and Momentum

Perhaps the most underrated benefit is what a successful AI outcome does to organizational culture. When a team sees AI deliver a real, measurable result in their domain, skepticism dissolves. The appetite for the next use case grows. The Imaginator mindset spreads. IT becomes a celebrated partner rather than a bureaucratic gatekeeper. And the organization develops a repeatable muscle for deploying AI that compounds with every cycle.

Contrast that with the aftermath of a failed IT-led pilot. McKinsey notes that the most common blockers to AI scaling are operating model inertia, unclear ownership, and misaligned incentives. Each failed pilot reinforces exactly these conditions. [3]

Speed to Value

Outcome-defined programs eliminate late-stage rework. BCG leaders achieve 1.5x higher revenue growth over three years vs. laggards. [1]

Sustained ROI

Business ownership keeps the success metric anchored to the P&L. 70% of AI value comes from people and process, not algorithms. [1]

Higher Adoption

People adopt what they helped design. Business-owned programs are built around the workflow that must change, not the technology that was deployed.

Creative Capacity

Gartner early adopters report 22.6% average productivity improvement. When AI absorbs the routine, your best people reclaim their strategic capacity. [2]

Repeatable Model

Each successful deployment builds the organizational muscle to move faster on the next use case. Success compounds; so does failure.

Competitive Moat

BCG AI leaders achieve 1.5x revenue growth, 1.6x shareholder returns, and 1.4x return on invested capital vs. peers over three years. [1]

Business Outcomes Are the Only Scorecard

The most dangerous phrase in enterprise AI right now is 'we are exploring use cases.' Exploration without accountability is theater. You do not need a lab. You need a results board.

Business outcomes in an AI context are specific, measurable, and time-bound. Here is what that looks like in practice:

- **Cost reduction:** A regional insurer deploys AI-assisted claims triage and reduces average handle time by 34%, saving \$2.1M annually in labor costs.
- **Customer experience:** A mortgage servicer implements an intelligent virtual agent that deflects 41% of inbound calls to self-service resolution, increasing CSAT by 18 points.
- **Revenue generation:** A commercial HVAC company uses AI to score service agreement renewal likelihood and prioritizes outbound outreach, increasing renewal rate by 22%.
- **Operational efficiency:** A field services company automates dispatch scheduling with AI, reducing drive time by 19% and increasing technician capacity by two jobs per day per crew.

Note on illustrative examples: The outcome figures cited above are representative of results documented in published case studies from Gartner, McKinsey, and BCG across analogous deployments in insurance, financial services, and field services. They are presented as directional benchmarks, not client-specific disclosures.

None of these outcomes required a breakthrough in AI research. They required a business leader who knew what they wanted to change, an IT team that could surface the right data, and an integration that connected the two with enough fidelity to produce reliable results.

The technology was not the hard part. The alignment was.

What IT Must Stop Doing

For this model to work, IT has to make a hard transition. IT must stop trying to own the AI agenda. That impulse is understandable; IT has historically controlled the technology stack and, by extension, shaped what was possible. But AI shifts that dynamic.

IT must stop:

- Defining success in technology terms rather than business terms
- Running months-long evaluations that delay business value by a year
- Building for theoretical scale before demonstrating practical value
- Positioning AI governance as a reason to slow down rather than a framework to operate safely at speed

And IT must start:

- Publishing a data availability roadmap that the business can plan against
- Establishing rapid integration patterns that let AI use cases move from prototype to production in weeks, not quarters
- Treating Imaginator teams as internal customers with real deadlines and real P&L consequences
- Measuring themselves on business outcomes enabled, not projects delivered

What the Business Must Stop Doing

The business side has its own reformation to make. It is not sufficient to generate a wish list and hand it to IT. Business leaders who want AI to produce results must show up with rigor.

Business leaders must stop:

- Treating AI as a novelty to be experimented with rather than a strategic tool to be deployed with intent

- Approving AI budgets without owning the ROI accountability
- Waiting for technology to reveal what is possible instead of defining what is required
- Underinvesting in change management and expecting adoption to happen organically

Business leaders must start:

- Arriving at AI conversations with a documented problem statement and a target outcome
- Owning the business case end to end, including the measurement of results post-deployment
- Treating AI as a capability that requires sustained investment in learning and iteration, not a one-time project
- Championing the people side of the transformation with the same energy applied to the technology side

The Governance Model That Makes It Work

Imaginators and Enablers need a shared operating cadence to avoid becoming two separate silos with a different problem than the one they started with.

I recommend a quarterly AI outcomes review at the executive level with three agenda items:

- What outcomes did we commit to this quarter, and what did we actually produce?
- What is the Imaginator pipeline for next quarter, and what data and infrastructure dependencies does the Enabler team need to clear?
- Where are we losing speed, and why?

This review is not a technology update. It is a business performance conversation that happens to involve technology as an input. The distinction matters enormously for who shows up, how prepared they are, and what decisions get made.

If your quarterly AI review is presented by your CIO and attended primarily by IT leaders, you have already misaligned the accountability structure. The executive sponsor of AI outcomes should be a business leader, not a technology leader.

A Word on Small and Mid-Sized Businesses

Everything I have described above applies at the enterprise level. But the Imaginator/Enabler model is equally powerful for smaller organizations, and arguably more urgent.

A small business with 50 employees cannot afford an AI lab or a multi-year transformation program. But it can identify two or three high-impact business problems, find AI-powered platforms that are purpose-built for those problems, and deploy them in weeks with minimal infrastructure complexity.

In the home services vertical, for example, an HVAC company does not need a data science team to benefit from AI-assisted dispatch, automated customer follow-up, or intelligent estimate generation. The platforms exist. The data the company already has in its job management software is sufficient. What is missing in most cases is a business owner who has defined the outcome clearly enough to make the right technology choice.

The Imaginator mindset scales down beautifully. The outcome discipline, the ROI focus, the customer experience lens. These are as accessible to a 20-person operation as to a 2,000-person enterprise. The Enabler infrastructure is largely provided by the platforms themselves for smaller organizations.

The Bottom Line

AI is not an IT project. It never was. The companies that are winning with AI did not win because they had better technology teams. They won because they had business leaders who defined what winning looked like, and technology teams that made it possible to get there.

Build your Imaginator team. Build your Enabler team. Make those teams talk to each other with shared metrics and shared accountability. And stop measuring your AI program by how many pilots you have launched and start measuring it by how many outcomes you have delivered.

The evidence is clear: 88% of organizations now use AI in at least one business function. But only one-third have scaled it. Only 6% qualify as high performers with measurable enterprise-level EBIT impact. The gap is not technological. It is organizational. ^[3,4]

The question is not whether your company can afford to invest in AI. The question is whether your company can afford to keep investing in it the wrong way.

Sources & Data Notes

The charts in this article present two types of data: (a) directly cited statistics from published research, noted with source references below, and (b) directional/illustrative benchmarks clearly labeled as such in chart captions. Composite benchmark figures are derived from patterns documented across multiple primary sources and convey directional magnitude, not precise empirical measurement.

[1]	BCG — Where's the Value in AI? (October 2024). Survey of 1,000 CxOs and senior executives across 59 countries, 20+ sectors. Key findings: 74% of companies struggle to achieve and scale AI value; only 26% generate tangible value; AI leaders achieve 1.5x higher revenue growth, 1.6x shareholder returns, 1.4x ROIC; 62% of AI value resides in core business functions; BCG 70-20-10 rule: 70% people/process, 20% technology, 10% algorithms. Source: bcg.com/press/24october2024-ai-adoption-in-2024-74-of-companies-struggle-to-achieve-and-scale-value
[2]	Gartner — Predicts 30% of Generative AI Projects Will Be Abandoned After Proof of Concept By End of 2025 (July 2024). Updated Gartner research (2025) indicates actual abandonment exceeded 50% post-POC. Primary drivers: poor data quality, inadequate risk controls, escalating costs, unclear business value. Early adopter survey (n=822, Sept-Nov 2023): average 22.6% productivity improvement, 15.2% cost savings, 15.8% revenue increase. Source: gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2024-07-29-gartner-predicts-30-percent-of-generative-ai-projects-will-be-abandoned-after-proof-of-concept-by-end-of-2025
[3]	McKinsey Global Survey — The State of AI (2025). Survey of 1,993 participants across 105 nations, conducted June 25-July 29, 2025. Key findings: 88% of organizations use AI in at least one function (up from 78% in 2024); nearly two-thirds remain in experiment/pilot mode; only one-third have begun scaling; only 39% report EBIT impact at enterprise level; only 6% qualify as AI high performers (5%+ EBIT impact). Primary scaling blockers: data quality/architecture, workflow rigidity, operating model inertia, measurement gaps. Source: mckinsey.com/capabilities/quantumblack/our-insights/the-state-of-ai
[4]	BCG — The Widening AI Value Gap / Build for the Future 2025 (September 2025). Study of 1,250 global respondents. Key findings: AI agents account for 17% of total AI value in 2025, projected 29% by 2028; only the top 5% of companies (future-built) are pulling away from peers; AI value compounds for firms that execute the winning formula. Source: bcg.com/publications/2025/are-you-generating-value-from-ai-the-widening-gap
[5]	Astrafy / BCG cross-reference — Scaling AI from Pilot Purgatory (2025). Synthesizes McKinsey and BCG data on why only ~33% of AI initiatives reach production. Cites BCG 10-20-70 principle and Gartner data quality failure rate. Source: astrafy.io/the-hub/blog/technical/scaling-ai-from-pilot-purgatory
[6]	Disclaimer on illustrative figures: The ROI ramp curves (Figure 2), capacity reallocation model (Figure 4), and performance comparison (Figure 1) represent directional benchmarks derived from the research above. They are not independently validated empirical measurements. Specific percentage figures used in those charts are composite estimates intended to illustrate the directional magnitude of the research findings. Readers should consult the primary sources above for underlying data.

About the Author

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