



# WELCOME TO THE AGE OF AI:

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Why Business as Usual Is  
Over

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**July 2025**

# Welcome to the Age of AI: Why Business as Usual Is Over

Manoj Tavarajoo | AI Essentials for Leaders Series – Article 1



We are living through a fundamental economic transformation that is redefining how organisations create, capture, and deliver value. At the heart of this transformation is Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI is no longer confined to labs or speculative headlines. It is now embedded in the core of business operations, platforms, and decision-making. Welcome to the age of AI, and make no mistake, business as usual is over.

Phase	Mainframes and Enterprise Network <i>Pre-1995</i>	Personal Computers and Internet <i>1995-2005</i>	Cloud and mobile <i>2005-2015</i>	Networks and Artificial Intelligence <i>2015-Now</i>
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enterprise networks</li> <li>Applications, tools</li> <li>Mainframes, minicomputers</li> <li>Email, Data transfer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Networks expansion</li> <li>PCs, internet access</li> <li>Web publishing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mobile revolution</li> <li>Cloud adoption</li> <li>AI revival</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cloud becomes dominant</li> <li>Connected devices &amp; AR innovation</li> <li>“AI first” - AI-driven era</li> </ul>
Economic Framework Model	<b>Products and Industries</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>IT ecosystem takes shape</li> <li>Rise of software licensing</li> <li>Monetising end-users directly</li> </ul>	<b>Initial Software Ecosystems</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scaling of IT ecosystem</li> <li>Industry-specific networks</li> </ul>	<b>Cross Industry Ecosystems</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digital APIs link industries</li> <li>Shifts in value capture</li> </ul>	<b>Platform Centric Economy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fully networked economy</li> <li>AI-powered transformation</li> <li>Collisions between digital and traditional firms</li> </ul>

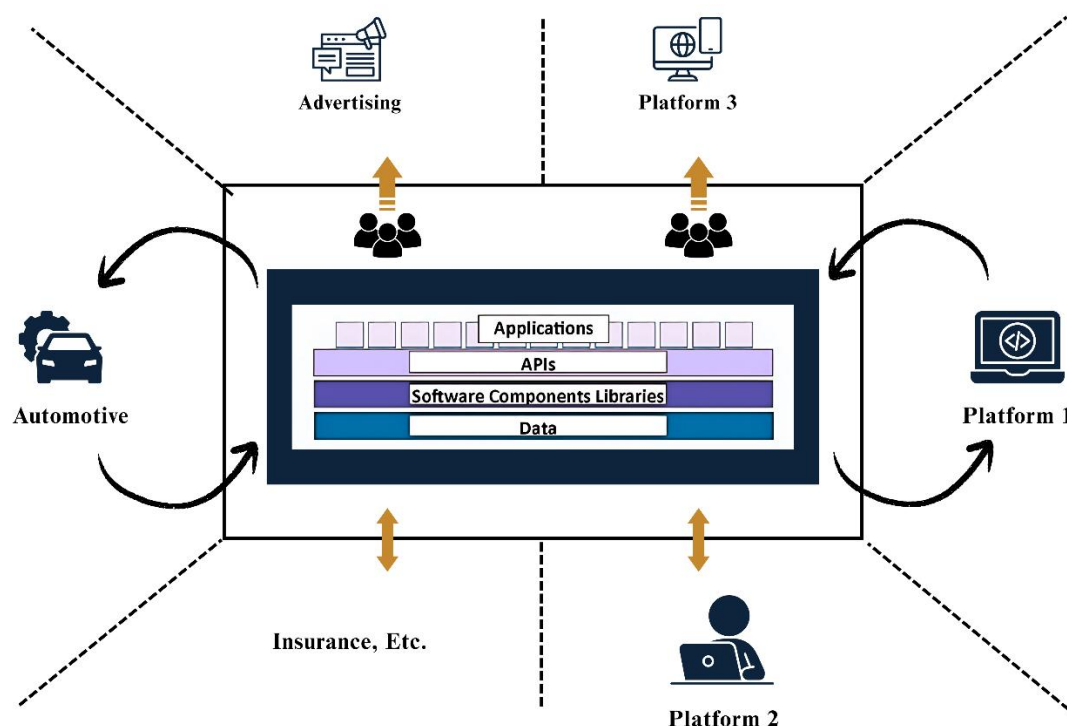
**Figure 1: Digitisation Is Transforming Our Economy** (Source: Adapted from HBS)

## The AI Tipping Point

We have seen major technology-driven shifts before, such as the rise of the internet, mobile computing, and cloud. But AI is different. It does not just change what we do, it changes how organisations learn, adapt, and scale.

AI-first firms like Amazon, Ant Group, and Google have built entirely new operating models that combine data, algorithms, and digital networks to operate at near-zero marginal cost. They are not just efficient; they are continuously improving. These firms do not simply use AI, they are architected around it.

In contrast, traditional businesses still rely on manual processes, fragmented systems, and organisational silos. Many attempt to bolt on AI tools, but without a foundational shift in operating model, they struggle to unlock the true value.



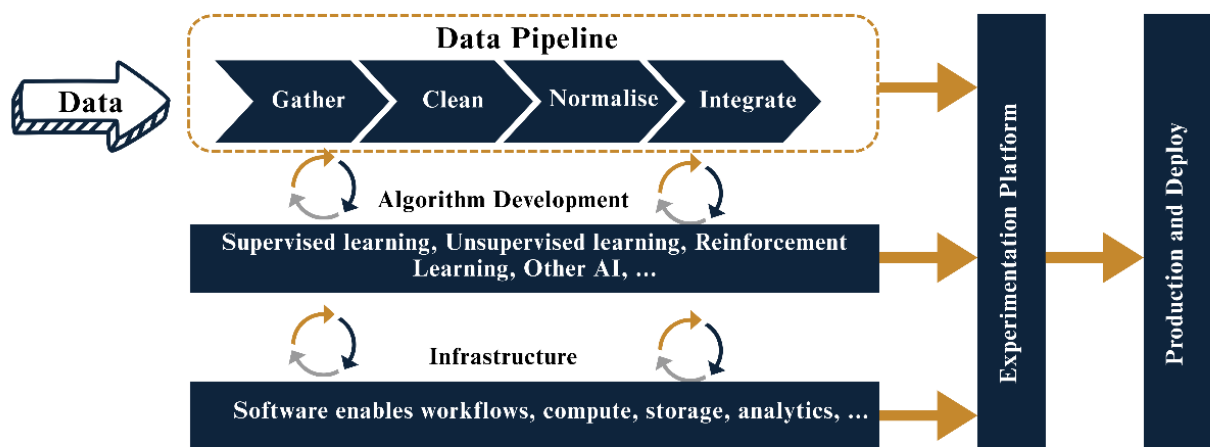
**Figure 2: The AI-First Firm (Ant Group example)**

(Source: Adapted from HBS)

## Data Is the New Operating Core

What sets AI-first companies apart is their ability to feed vast amounts of data into intelligent, agile systems. These systems power predictions, pattern recognition, and process automation — the three primary outputs of what is known as the AI Factory.

Consider Netflix, which uses AI to recommend content in real time, or Tesla, whose vehicles continuously collect and learn from driving data. This ability to learn and evolve turns data from a by-product into a central asset, a core driver of strategy and innovation.



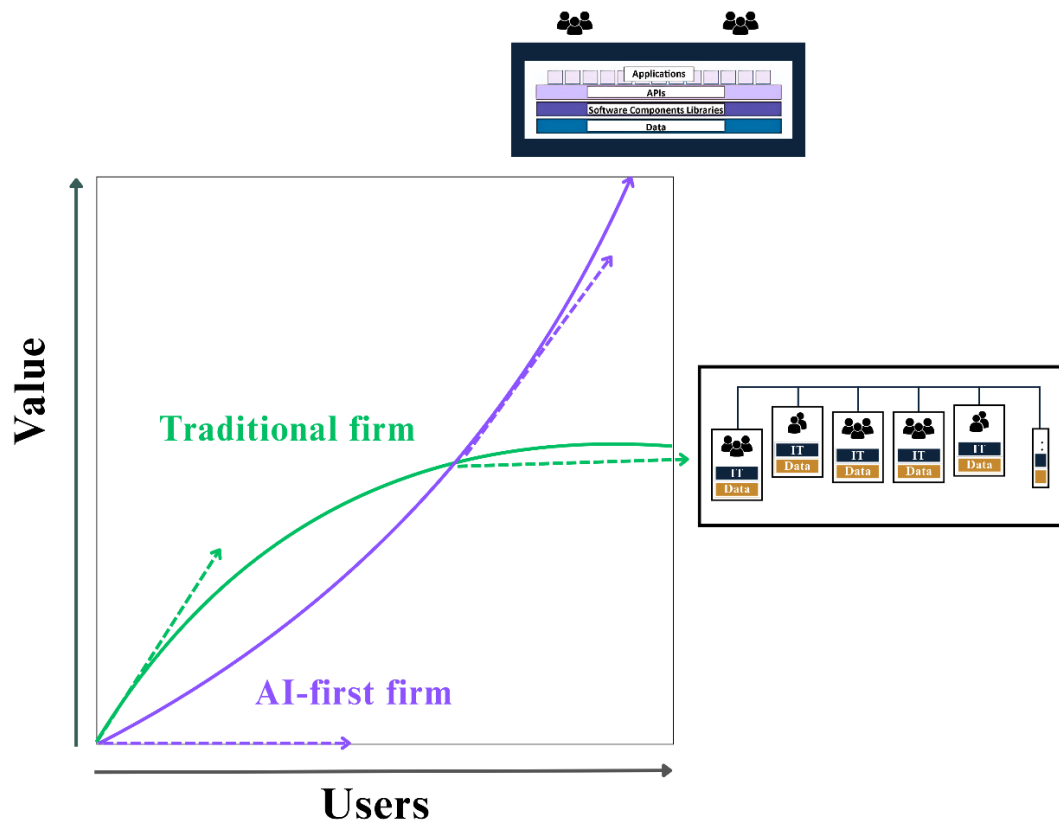
**Figure 3: AI Factory at the Core of Modern Enterprises** (Source: Adapted from HBS)

## The New Competitive Edge

In the AI age, advantage no longer comes from scale alone. It comes from:

- **Data:** Collected at scale and used to personalise, optimise, and predict
- **Learning:** Algorithms that improve with experience
- **Speed:** Rapid experimentation and iteration embedded into the firm's DNA

This shift is not just a technical consideration. It is a leadership challenge. The real question today is not whether to use AI, but how to redesign your business for an AI-first world.



**Figure 4: A New Kind of Firm is emerging in our economy, deploying a digital core to generate, deliver, and capture value (Source: Adapted from HBS)**

## Why Business as Usual Will Not Cut It

The traditional, siloed, hierarchical model was built for a slower and more predictable era. Today, that model has become a liability. In the age of AI:

- Strategy needs to be dynamic
- Operations must be data-driven
- Innovation must be continuous
- Culture must support agility and learning

Sticking to outdated models is no longer a safe option. As history shows us, for example with Nokia, the inability to adapt can be fatal.

## **A New Chapter Begins**

This article is the first in a 14-part series exploring how AI is reshaping business, from strategy and operations to ethics and leadership. Drawing on my real-life experience executing transformation initiatives for various organisations, benchmarking best practices from global AI-first digital firms, and my executive education in AI Essentials for Business at Harvard Business School, this series is written for leaders who want to move beyond the hype and lead AI-first transformations with purpose and clarity.

### **Up next:**

*What Is an AI-First Company, and Why AI Now Defines Competitive Advantage*



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