



## Businesses overestimate real progress on AI

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**EXL's 2026 U.S. Enterprise AI Study finds significant gap between perceived progress on AI adoption and real-world performance improvement**

- 76% of companies believe they are ahead of their competitors on AI
- Just 10% meet the criteria of an AI Leader
- AI Leaders achieve 27% revenue growth, 26% cost reduction and 22% margin improvement by reimagining core workflows

NEW YORK, June 17, 2026 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- Most companies believe they're outperforming their competitors on AI. New research from [EXL](#) [NASDAQ: EXLS], a global data and AI company, shows only one in 10 are making significant company-wide progress integrating AI across core business functions and experiencing a notable return on investment (ROI) from their AI initiatives. The gap is not a technology problem. It is an operating model problem.

The third annual [EXL U.S. Enterprise AI Study](#) is based on a survey of 322 C-suite and other senior decision makers across the banking and finance, insurance, retail, utilities, life sciences, and healthcare payer industries. Its findings reveal a significant disconnect between how organizations assess their AI progress and where they currently stand on real-world AI integration.

"Every company is now using AI in some capacity, but we're really starting to see leaders distinguish themselves from the pack when it comes to large-scale enterprise integration," said Anand "Andy" Logani, executive vice president and chief AI officer at EXL. "What separates the leaders is that they've stopped trying to fit AI into the way they already work, and started asking a more fundamental question: if AI were built in from the start, how would this workflow, this team, this decision look different? Moving from AI experimentation to AI execution requires more than technology investment; it requires operating model transformation."

The following are some of the report's key findings:

- **Most companies see themselves as ahead on AI, but the reality is more sobering, while 76% say they are ahead of competitors, our research show only 10% qualify as AI Leaders.** Those leaders have moved beyond pilots and embedded AI into high-impact workflows, reimagining how work gets done to generate greater business value.
- **AI leaders generate quantifiable ROI:** AI Leaders, despite representing just 10% of respondents, are generating substantially stronger returns. Leaders estimate that AI has reduced costs by 26%, boosted revenue by 27%, and improved margin by 22% within the specific areas it's been implemented. Laggards trail in all three areas. Leaders also report greater stability in uncertain markets, better customer engagement, and more effective market expansion as direct results of AI use.
  - **Operating model transformation is a key differentiator:** Central to the Leaders' approach is a willingness to redesign enterprise-wide operating models rather than adapt existing ones. While many organizations have made incremental changes to accommodate AI, Leaders have taken a more fundamental step: rebuilding workflows, redefining roles, and restructuring decision processes with AI embedded at the core. All told, 44% of Leaders have completely redesigned their enterprise-wide operating models to accommodate AI use. That number falls to just 23% among Laggards.
  - **Data-readiness remains a massive challenge:** Data infrastructure remains the single most cited barrier to scaling AI, with seven in 10 respondents describing data as a challenge. Data privacy and security (34%), siloed data across multiple sources (31%), and limited model transparency (31%) were the three most frequently named obstacles. Among Laggards, 83% still contend with data siloed within business functions, compared to 44% of Leaders who have achieved enterprise-wide data accessibility.

To dive deeper into the findings, [download the 2026 EXL U.S. Enterprise AI Study](#). For more information and to explore how EXL can deliver value for your AI initiatives, [contact us](#).

### About EXL

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