



## UK businesses drastically overestimate their AI progress

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**EXL's 2026 UK Enterprise AI Study finds that while most companies think they're ahead of the competition at AI, few actually see results at scale**

- 75% of companies believe they are ahead of their competitors on AI, but just 12% meet the criteria to qualify as an AI Leader
- 93% of UK companies believe it's important to scale AI, yet only 3% will be given incremental budget (compared of 60% U.S. companies)
- 77% of respondents say data is their biggest challenge in using AI effectively

LONDON, July 08, 2026 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- Most UK businesses believe they're outperforming their competitors on AI, and 38% of companies in the UK have already moved agentic AI beyond the pilot stage. But new research from [EXL](#) (NASDAQ: EXLS), a global data and AI company, shows that just 12% 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 third annual [EXL UK Enterprise AI Study](#) is based on a survey of 212 C-suite and other senior decision makers across the banking and finance, insurance, retail, and utilities industries. Its findings reveal a significant disconnect between how organisations assess their AI progress and where they currently stand on real-world AI integration.

"As the pressure mounts for companies in the UK to deliver measurable results from AI, leaders in this space are distinguishing themselves by reimagining their business from the ground up," said Bhupender Singh, president and head of international growth markets at EXL. "In order to catch up to these leaders, companies that are lagging behind need more than just technology; they need to redesign their operating models, from workflows to talent management and underlying data infrastructure."

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

- **Most UK businesses are overestimating progress made on AI integration:** While 75% of UK business leaders say they are ahead of their competitors on enterprise AI integration, our research shows only 12% 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.
- **UK firms struggle with data in AI implementation:** Overall, 77% of respondents said data is their biggest challenge in using AI effectively, even though improving data quality and accessibility was recognized as the most important approach for scaling future AI implementations. The companies succeeding in AI were roughly five times more likely to say they had leading-edge data management programs than those lagging behind.
- **Utility companies drive biggest returns on AI investments:** Agentic AI has been deployed in areas from customer service and experience in banking, finance and insurance, merchandising management in retail, and network security in utilities. However, it is utility companies that generated the biggest improvements in cost reduction, revenue growth, and margin expansion. Utilities in the UK have seen an average improvement across these financial measures of 27% from AI and 28% from agentic AI. The smallest financial benefits have been seen by insurers, with average returns of 18% and 17%, respectively. This may be a matter of who's willing to prioritise AI, as 61% of utilities organisations rated scaling AI as extremely important against only 33% of insurers.
- **Leaders reshape their operating models to align with AI:** UK firms defined as AI Leaders understand that this technology cannot scale as a bolt-on to traditional operating models. Last year's study found that 52% of Leaders completely redesigned their enterprise-wide operating model to deploy and benefit from AI. This year, 35% of Leaders indicate having done so. To their credit, AI Laggards are beginning to get the message. After only 3% of Laggards in last year's study reported having redesigned their operating model, this year the figure jumps to 38%.

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

### About EXL

EXL (NASDAQ: EXLS) is a global data and AI company that offers services and solutions to reinvent client business models, drive better outcomes and unlock growth with speed. EXL harnesses the power of data, AI, and deep industry knowledge to transform businesses, including the world's leading corporations in industries including insurance, healthcare, banking and capital markets, retail, communications and media, and energy and infrastructure, among others. EXL was founded in 1999 with the core values of innovation, collaboration, excellence, integrity and respect. We are headquartered in New York and have approximately 67,000 employees spanning six continents. For more information, visit [www.exlservice.com](http://www.exlservice.com).

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