

Walking the Golden Path to Value: 2025 IT Symposium/Xpo Keynote Insights

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By: Daryl Plummer, Alicia Mullery, Mary Mesaglio, Hung LeHong, Frances Karamouzis, Nate Suda, Rajesh Kandaswamy, Helen Poitevin, Alastair Woolcock, George Brocklehurst, Mukul Saha, Soyeb Barot, Gaurav Gupta, Don Scheibenreif

Initiatives: [CIO Leadership of People, Culture and Change](#)

As a CIO, you're expected to deliver value with AI — even if the technology and your people aren't ready. Use the insights from Gartner's IT Symposium/Xpo keynote to navigate AI readiness and human readiness, so you can find, capture and sustain value along the "golden path."

Insights at a Glance

As a CIO, you're expected to take the next step in your AI race: finding, capturing and sustaining value with AI. But as you walk the golden path to value, you'll often find that AI isn't ready, humans aren't ready, or both.

To **find new value**, you need AI to be ready. To navigate AI readiness:

- Build your own AI accuracy guardrails.
- Start training autonomous AI agents to be experts at performing specific tasks.
- Anticipate hidden AI costs, including the cost of training and change management.
- Use Gartner's Agentic Compass as an aid to select vendors with the capabilities you need.
- Prepare for the rise of digital nation-states and AI sovereignty.

To **capture and sustain value**, you need your workforce and organization to be ready. To improve human readiness:

- Transform your workforce using the right combination of hiring restraints, talent remixing and value remixing.

- Develop critical, emerging skills like context engineering that enable people to capture AI value.
- Monitor and manage the behavioral byproducts of AI, such as skills atrophy and “Swiss-Army-Knife” workers.
- Provide change management for managers.
- Plan for how AI will affect your entire IT estate through 2030, including the extra capacity paradox.

When AI and humans are ready, you'll be able to find, capture and sustain value. And once AI and human readiness are high, prepare for AI shockwaves that will revolutionize your industry and enable you to transcend limitations.

The Golden Path to AI Value

In 2023, CIOs started the AI race by defining AI ambitions. In 2024, you kept up the pace by building an AI-ready technology stack. In 2025, CIOs have entered the third stage of the AI race. Now, it's time to take your next steps down the **golden path** to find, capture and sustain AI value.

Nearly every organization has taken the first step down the golden path: employee productivity. During a webinar poll, 74% of CFOs told Gartner that they have seen productivity gains in the form of time saved. ¹

Now, your CEO and board of directors expect you to take the next step: delivering value from AI. But most CIOs have not yet accomplished this step. In 2025, only 11% of CFOs have said that their organization has seen clear ROI value from AI. ¹

Some of you will want to take it a step further. You'll want to invest in reinventing your business model so you can transcend organizational and industry limitations. But in 2025, only one out of every 50 AI initiatives achieves this type of transcendent value. ² We need to improve these odds.

The reality is, most organizations are not ready to achieve AI value, let alone transcend limitations.

Are You Ready?

Readiness is the key that unlocks AI value. To take your next steps down the golden path, you need two types of readiness:

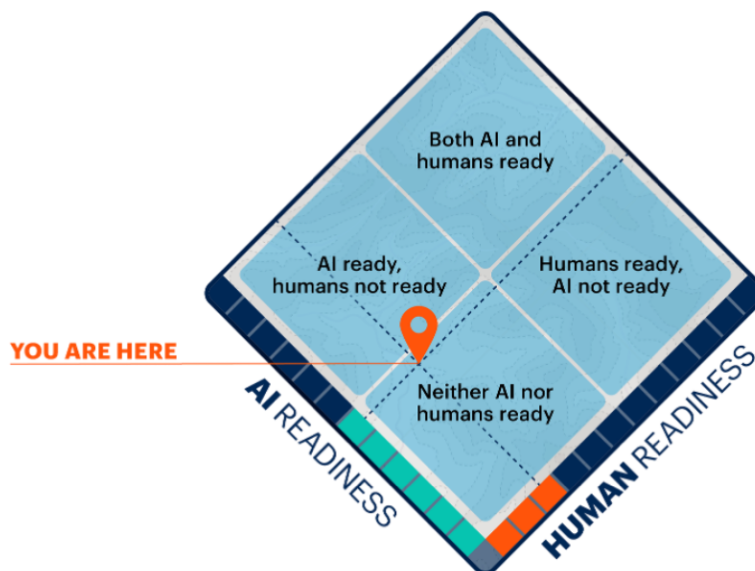
- **AI readiness:** Can AI help you find value?
- **Human readiness:** Can your workforce and organization capture and sustain AI value?

While AI is not totally ready to deliver value, humans are even less ready to capture and sustain value. Plus, AI readiness is growing much faster than human readiness. This disconnect makes it hard to achieve value.

To achieve value, first you need to know your readiness levels. The “You Are Here” Gartner Positioning System (GPS) enables you to identify and communicate how ready AI and your people are for every initiative you pursue. Figure 1 shows the “You Are Here” GPS, with an example location marker for an AI use case (also see [Navigating Key Stakeholder Conversations With Gartner’s GPS for AI Use Cases](#)).

Figure 1: The “You Are Here” Gartner Positioning System

The “You Are Here” Gartner Positioning System



Source: Gartner
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Use the “You Are Here” GPS to guide your next steps down the golden path, so you can find, capture and sustain AI value – and even transcend limitations.

Table 1 will help you navigate the insights.

Table 1: Walking the Golden Path to Value

Section	Key Insight
Find AI Value	Evaluate technical capabilities (like AI accuracy and AI agents), calculate the hidden costs of AI and navigate the rise of digital nation-states.
Capture AI Value	Transform your workforce, develop critical emerging skills and manage behavioral byproducts of AI.
Sustain AI Value	Prepare your C-suite peers, managers and organization for the impact of AI through 2030.
Transcend Limitations	Anticipate shockwaves that will disrupt your industry.

Source: Gartner (October 2025)

Implications

Find AI Value

[Back to top](#)

When AI readiness is low, it’s like there’s a fog obscuring your golden path. To cut through the fog and find new sources of AI value, you have to evaluate AI readiness in terms of:

- Technical capabilities

- Costs
- Vendors

Assess the Readiness of AI Technical Capabilities

Some AI capabilities, like search, content generation and summarization, are ready. Other capabilities are not. Let's look at two points of interest on your golden path: **AI accuracy** and **AI agents**. If AI cannot deliver these capabilities for your use cases, your value returns will be fragile.

AI Accuracy

Generative AI (GenAI) models have error rates that range from 3% to 25%.³ Yet 84% of CIOs and IT leaders lack a formal process to track AI accuracy.⁴ Of those that do, the most common approach is human review. But AI is making mistakes faster than humans can catch them.

Key Insight

Bring your own AI accuracy with:

- *Formal metrics:* Benchmark AI output against established norms.
- *Two-factor error checking:* Use one AI to validate the output of another.
- *A "good-enough" ratio:* Define acceptable accuracy for each initiative.

AI Agents

As of writing, 17% of CIOs have reported that their organization has adopted AI agents, and an additional 42% have plans to adopt them in the next 12 months.⁵

But not all agents are created equal. Today, 88% of IT leaders who are exploring, piloting or implementing AI agents are focusing on conversational agents.⁶ Only 15% of IT leaders who are exploring, piloting or implementing AI agents are focusing on autonomous decision-making agents.⁶

Don't settle for conversational AI agents. Demand autonomous AI agents.

Autonomous agents are the ones that enable you to extend your AI capabilities and find new value. To unlock value from autonomous AI agents, train them to perform specific jobs (see [Turn AI Agents into Revenue-Generating Experts](#)).

Expert AI agents are digital work resources that you can supervise and assign goals. They're transforming knowledge work as we know it.

Key Insight

Go beyond conversational AI agents. Start training autonomous AI agents to be experts at performing specific jobs.

Calculate the Hidden Costs of AI

It's easy to underestimate your AI bill, and costs can quickly spiral out of control. In fact, 72% of CIOs have reported that their organizations have broken even or have lost money on their AI investments. ²

The average organization has spent \$1.89 million on implementing AI. ⁷ But implementation and licensing costs are just the beginning.

You know your AI costs on day one. But you don't know what the costs will be on day 100.

When you adopt a new technology, you expect a transition cost. But with AI, it's more like a hefty transition mortgage that you just keep paying for years. AI requires more training and change management than any other technology.

Gartner's position is that for every 100 days of AI implementation, you can expect to spend 25 more days training staff and an additional 100 to 200 days for change management.

For every AI tool you buy, you'll also run into other costs you didn't anticipate. This could include the costs of:

- Managing access credentials for autonomous agents.
- Acquiring new datasets to ground AI.
- Measuring and improving AI accuracy.

Key Insight

For every AI tool you buy, anticipate 10 hidden costs plus the transition costs of training and change management. Conduct an analysis and decide which costs you'll fund.

Navigate the AI Vendor Landscape

If choosing an ERP vendor was like getting married, then choosing an AI vendor is like getting married, having kids and moving to a different country. It's complicated.

When you "marry" an AI vendor, their AI becomes like your "child" — a child who needs to be fed the right data to grow, who needs to be educated and grounded, and who takes on your ethics and the vendor's.

You also have to pick the right country to move to. Vendors in the AI races are acting as **digital nation-states** — that is, they control enough resources to rival actual countries (see [Shattered Norms: How CIOs Navigate Digital Nation-States and AI Power Blocs](#)). Large vendors spend more on AI infrastructure per quarter than the annual GDPs of 47% of the world's countries. ^{8,9}

You'll find three types of digital nation-states:

- **Hyperscalers.** If you're planning a massive rollout of AI to your enterprise, "superpower" vendors like Amazon, Google, Microsoft, Alibaba, Oracle, Tencent and Huawei have the AI infrastructure scale to support you.
- **Startups.** If you have industry-specific use cases, these "developing nation" vendors can offer domain-specific AI agents, in-depth knowledge and capabilities (although working with startups is inherently risky).

- **Wildcards.** If you're seeking rapid innovation and leading-edge capabilities for AI, the "newly minted nation-states" of OpenAI, Anthropic, Meta, Mistral, Stability, DeepSeek, Aleph Alpha and xAI can help. They don't have the scale and reach of a superpower, but their influence is rapidly growing.

Don't select a digital nation-state based on its AI technology or valuation alone. Select it based on its ecosystem of partners and their shared ability to deliver game-changing solutions.

Choosing an AI vendor can be complicated. But Gartner has an "easy button" to help you make the right choice.

Key Insight

Use the Gartner Agentic Compass (see [Innovation Insight: Use the Gartner Agentic Compass for Better Business Outcomes](#)). This "easy button" will take your use-case characteristics, map them to AI capabilities and point you to the AI vendors that provide those capabilities.

Account for AI Sovereignty to Avoid Model Lock-In

To ensure AI sovereignty, you can't just protect the data. You have to protect the model and the results the model generates, and control who has access to those results.

Model lock-in is a growing risk. Nations across the globe, including the U.S., China and the European Union, are building sovereign AI solutions with proprietary models that they control. Gartner predicts that by 2027, 35% of countries will be locked into region-specific AI platforms that use proprietary contextual data.

Key Insight

Build or buy a digital tokenization solution to anonymize data, so that the real data doesn't leave your shores — even inside a model. Where contract terms allow, mimic the models you depend on by using model distillation (see the innovation "model distillation" in [Hype Cycle for Artificial Intelligence, 2025](#)).

Digital Tokenization With Zelle

Early Warning Systems, the company that owns the payments network Zelle, has embedded CapitalOne's Databolt tokenization platform to protect data and transactions. Databolt handles anonymizing and deanonymizing the data for you, without having to manage a bunch of encryption keys. This allows users to get financial transactions and data sovereignty protection.

Capture AI Value

[Back to top](#)

You won't get value from AI unless your people are able to capture and sustain it over time. Yet 71% of CIOs and IT leaders have reported that the people in their organizations are not ready for AI. ⁴

To capture value, you have to improve the readiness of your workforce. And to sustain AI value, you need to improve the readiness of your organization.

Transform Your Workforce to Capture AI Value

People are anxious about AI taking their jobs. But AI is not causing mass layoffs yet. Gartner's analysis of layoffs from January 2025 through June 2025 found that only 1% of headcount reductions have been due to AI (see [Adapting Workforce Strategies to Prepare for AI's Impact on Jobs](#) and [AI's Ripple Effect on Jobs and Organizations](#)).

Gartner's position is that AI's impact on global jobs will be neutral through 2026. By 2036, AI solutions introduced to augment or autonomously deliver tasks, activities or jobs will result in more than 500 million net-new human jobs.

While some people will lose jobs due to AI, the bulk of AI value is not coming from headcount reductions. It's coming from workforce transformation.

As a CIO, you need a strategy for how to transform your workforce so your people can better capture value from AI (see [How to \(Re\)set Headcount Targets in the AI Era](#)). This strategy could include:

- **Restraining new hiring:** You won't need to hire as many junior-level associates to assist with low-complexity tasks like summarizing content or building presentations. Senior associates can use AI to do it faster and cheaper.
- **AI talent remix:** Reduce headcount in lower-performing business units and hire people in high-potential, AI-driven business lines. This strategy is effective for technology companies, but most organizations have a limited ability to create entirely new lines of business.
- **AI value remix:** Use AI to generate revenue or realign your organization's core functions. Integrate AI to cut your backlog, reduce fraud, write better loans or use fewer trucks in city operations. AI has so much more to offer than staff reduction.

There is no “easy button” for dealing with job loss. But these strategies will help you capture AI value and reduce the need for layoffs.

Key Insight

Transform your workforce using the right mix of hiring restraints, talent remixing and value remixing.

Prioritize Development of Critical Skills

To capture value, your people need to be able to work with AI in radically new ways.

AI also creates a need for entirely new skills. These AI skills are fundamentally different from most skills. Where skills were traditionally about doing tasks better, AI skills are about making you better — a better motivator, a better thinker and a better communicator.

Your workforce will need to develop critical, emerging skills. Context engineering is a great example of one skill. Context engineering is all about clarifying your intent to reduce hallucinations and help the LLM build a better answer. It takes all the constraints, directions and contextual cues out of the prompt and puts them into the system.

Start hiring context engineers and build a context engineering discipline. In practice, context might be complex drug interactions, patient histories or surgical protocols if you're a hospital; or if you're in government, it's district zoning, census records or tax rolls. It looks different across industries, but everyone needs context engineering.

Key Insight

Develop critical skills, like context engineering, that your people need to capture AI value.

Anticipate the Behavioral Byproducts of AI

Your skills development plan should go beyond training people on new skills. If your people rely too much on AI and stop using their core skills, you'll run into skills atrophy. Simply put: if you don't use it, you'll lose it.

AI is stealing your skills.

It's okay for some skills to atrophy, like note-taking, meeting summarization and editing. But you need to fight to retain critical skills like security, people management and critical thinking. Test your people periodically to make sure they are retaining these critical skills.

Skills atrophy is one behavioral byproduct of AI that can derail your efforts to capture value. But other behavioral byproducts will actually help you capture value, such as the rise of Swiss-Army-Knife workers. These are people who have the curiosity, skill and initiative to grab an AI tool and use it to solve any given business challenge.

To encourage Swiss-Army-Knife workers, create a modern AI literacy that includes experiential learning. Some companies are even creating experiential learning programs that include GenAI simulators, which can clone personas and mimic business scenarios in a gamified 3D world.

In addition to skills atrophy and Swiss-Army-Knife workers, you'll need to watch out for other unintended outcomes of AI-driven change (see [Prepare for AI's Unexpected Workforce Behavioral Byproducts](#)).

Being proactive in managing these behavioral byproducts can give you a boost ahead on the golden path, as 91% of CIOs and IT leaders have told Gartner that their organizations dedicate little to no time scanning for behavioral byproducts. ⁴

Key Insight

Create a program to monitor and manage the behavioral byproducts of AI, such as skills atrophy and Swiss-Army-Knife workers.

Sustain AI Value

[Back to top](#)

To sustain AI value in your organization, you need to remodel your organization. This remodeling requires a lot of change management, and your managers are tasked with taking charge of this effort. Yet only 23% of CIOs have said the managers in their enterprise are ready to help employees navigate technological changes in their enterprise. ⁴

To successfully remodel your organization, you need **change management for managers**. Provide them with the resources they need to support and enable their teams, like conversation guides, role-play exercises and AI value stories.

Key Insight

Provide resources for managers to help them oversee change management due to AI.

Change Management for Managers at Lenovo

Lenovo provides middle managers with tailored resources, including empathy-building tools, emotional intelligence coaching and context-specific training. This targeted support has enabled managers to reduce employee resistance, communicate the business value of AI and bridge the gap between strategic vision and implementation. As a result, Lenovo achieved a sixfold increase in AI tool adoption among employees and higher user satisfaction.

For more details, see [Case Study: AI Adoption and Change Management Support for People Managers](#).

Sustaining AI value also requires you to look at how AI will change your entire IT estate. In a Gartner survey conducted in July 2025, CIOs reported that 81% of IT work is done by humans without AI.¹⁰ But between now and 2030, the way that humans and AI work together will fundamentally change. AI will no longer be a “nice-to-have.” It will be the default way of working.

By 2030, CIOs expect that 0% of IT work will be done by humans without AI, 75% will be done by humans augmented with AI, and 25% will be done by AI alone.^{10 11}

In your next IT leadership meeting, talk about how AI will change your entire IT estate through 2030.

As a CIO, you’ve got to go on the offensive to prepare for the next five years. In particular, confront the “extra capacity” paradox. Because of AI, the capacity of IT will be larger. But if you don’t show the value of that extra capacity, you will face pressure to reduce headcount.

Work with business leaders now to identify new value-creating IT work. Expand into new markets, create additional products and services or add features that boost margins. That will be IT’s role in sustaining value.

Key Insight

Talk with IT leaders about how AI will change your entire IT estate through 2030. Confront the extra capacity paradox.

Transcend Limitations

[Back to top](#)

Once you’ve taken the steps you need to find, capture and sustain AI value, you’ll be able to take it a step further to transcend our organizational and industry limitations.

When AI and human readiness are both high, it creates **shockwaves** — that is, the larger secondary and tertiary impacts of AI, such as the emergence of new business models and transformation of roles within an industry's system (see [AI Shockwaves Are the Real Disruptors That Emerge in the Postproductivity Era](#)). Let's explore five of these AI shockwaves.

Shockwave No. 1: What if AI were to change your entire value proposition? For example, in healthcare, AI can now diagnose many things, like rheumatic heart disease from a photograph of your eye. Sensors remotely monitor patient data, which doctors use to diagnose illnesses. And virtual care allows for recovery at home. In this case, hospitals will become treatment centers — not places for diagnosis or recovery.

Shockwave No. 2: What if a college education is no longer an economic advantage? Because of AI, your talent pipeline will radically change through 2030. You won't seek out candidates based on their college degrees. You'll look for candidates who are certified to have deep AI immersion experience with the digital badges to prove it.

Shockwave No. 3: What if the most effective price for selling GenAI tools is zero? Clients consistently tell us that the cost of GenAI is too high for what they get. That's because GenAI has become an undifferentiated, general-purpose capability. But vendors have to sell it, because customers expect to have it.

That's not to say you can't make money from selling GenAI. But vendors should focus on solving wicked problems, like minimizing global hunger, curing chronic diseases or eliminating financial crimes. And their AI solutions should elevate the core competencies of customers. That's what people will pay for.

Elevating Core Competencies With AI

A top-five North American bank uses GenAI and machine learning from KX and Nvidia to shave microseconds off the insight-to-trade loop.

Shockwave No. 4: What happens when machine autonomy becomes the norm? We are gradually adding machine autonomy around the edges of our organizations. But soon, we'll reach a tipping point. The era of autonomous business will be in full swing (see [What Is Autonomous Business, and Why is it Important in the Age of AI?](#)).

Imagine a team of agents that autonomously execute business processes 24/7. Our current limitations on work hours will become a thing of the past, as we would have digital teammates who never sleep or go on vacation.

If we keep fighting to protect our roles of the past, we'll never reimagine our roles for the future. We must decide what AI will do and will not do.

The day will come when we humans collectively choose to give up control of managing operations or configuring systems. These tasks will be firmly within the realm of agents. Instead, we'll choose to maintain human connectedness or to enhance storytelling. But as humans, we are in control.

Shockwave No. 5: What happens when we will never not know something again? AI is revolutionizing the way that we leverage knowledge, by giving us the ability to:

- **Understand the future.** AI can help you make more accurate predictions about customer buying behavior, supply chain disruptions or even possible mergers and acquisitions.
- **Retain personal knowledge.** AI can help with immediate challenges like “brain drain.” For example, what happens when your last COBOL programmer retires? You need to preserve their knowledge. Train AI on their documentation, code reviews, meeting recordings and chat logs before they retire.
- **Create AI clones of ourselves.** AI will also give rise to avatars — that is, digital clones that look, talk and act like you. Avatars are in your near future.

Understanding the Future at GOSI

GOSI, a Saudi Arabian government agency managing pensions and employment insurance, is creating a way for a 20-year-old person to talk to a 60-year-old version of themselves.

GOSI knows information like marital status, compensation and retirement contributions. You can ask it questions like, “Hey, future self...How do I plan for three kids and a house? How much life insurance do I need? How do I retire at 39?”

MyTwin From Genpact

Genpact, a business process outsourcing vendor, uses a small language model to create “AI twins” of key employees. MyTwin enables you to create “twins” who answer questions just like a human employee, even when that employee is on vacation.

We must stop waiting to see what AI will do. It’s time for us to decide what to tear down and what to keep. When we decide, humans win.

Evidence

¹ **2025 Gartner CFO Leadership Series – Drive Finance Productivity and Performance With AI Webinar Poll.** This webinar poll took place on 4 March 2025 with 137 attendees participating in the poll. Respondents were CFOs and other finance leaders across multiple industries. Disclaimer: The results of this survey do not represent global findings or the market as a whole, but reflect the sentiments of the respondents and companies surveyed.

² **2025 Gartner AI Survey – CIO and Technology Leader View.** This survey was conducted to understand CIOs’ and technology leaders’ views on enterprise’s status in their AI journey, investment and technology priorities for 2025. It also captured their sentiments toward their enterprises’ response to and effectiveness in dealing with disruptions. The survey was conducted online in May 2025 among CIOs (n = 224) and other technology leaders (n = 282). The total sample was 506 respondents, with representation from North America (n = 211), Europe (n = 141), Oceania (n = 54), Asia (n = 41), the Middle East (n = 30) and Latin America (n = 29) across all industry sectors. Disclaimer: The results of this survey do not represent global findings or the market as a whole, but reflect the sentiments of the respondents and companies surveyed.

³ [Humanity’s Last Exam](#), Humanity’s Last Exam (The Center for AI Safety and Scale AI).

⁴ **2025 IT Symposium Keynote Webinar**, 12 August 2025.

⁵ **2026 Gartner CIO and Technology Executive Survey.** This survey was conducted online from 1 May to 30 June 2025 to help CIOs and technology executives benchmark their priorities and investment plans against those of peers worldwide. Qualified respondents led a digital/technology function and were accountable for running or improving/growing a specific area of their enterprise. In total, 2,501 CIOs and technology executives participated, with representation from all geographies, revenue bands and industry sectors (public and private).

⁶ **2025 Gartner Generative and Agentic AI in Enterprise Applications Survey.** This study was conducted to understand the key challenges and opportunities when deploying generative AI (GenAI) tools, and where organizations should focus their AI investments. This research also aims to understand what stage organizations are at on their AI agent journey and their thoughts on AI agents. The research was conducted online from May through June 2025 among 360 respondents from organizations with at least 250 full-time employees across all industries (except IT software) in North America (n = 149), Europe (n = 140) and Asia/Pacific (n = 71). Soft quotas were established for country, company size, and respondent's function type and job level to ensure a good representation across the sample. Organizations were required to have deployed or plan to deploy in less than one year at least one generative AI tool in at least one core enterprise application domain: digital workplace applications, customer relationship management applications, or enterprise resource planning applications. Respondents were team leaders or above, excluding C-level, and involved in the rollout of generative AI tools; they were required to have certain responsibilities regarding these generative AI tools. Disclaimer: The results of this survey do not represent global findings or the market as a whole, but reflect the sentiments of the respondents and companies surveyed.

⁷ **2024 Gartner AI Mandates for the Enterprise Survey.** This study was conducted to understand how AI and generative AI (GenAI) are being adopted by enterprises, focusing on areas such as AI strategy, data, governance, literacy, engineering, organization, portfolio and value, to assist clients in keeping pace with AI's rapid evolution. The research was conducted online from October through December 2024 among 432 respondents from the U.S. (n = 181), the U.K. (n = 70), France (n = 50), Germany (n = 50), India (n = 51) and Japan (n = 30). Quotas were established for company sizes and for industries to ensure a good representation across the sample. Organizations were required to have deployed at least one AI use case in production. Respondents were screened for C-level executives (e.g., chief AI officer, chief data officer, chief data scientist, chief digital officer, chief information officer, chief operating officer, chief technology officer or equivalent) or roles above vice presidents. All respondents were required to have high involvement in at least one AI initiative. Disclaimer: The results of this survey do not represent global findings or the market as a whole, but reflect the sentiments of the respondents and companies surveyed.

⁸ [Tech Megacaps Plan to Spend More Than \\$300 Billion in 2025 as AI Race Intensifies](#), CNBC.

⁹ [GDP by Nation](#), World Bank Group.

¹⁰ **Gartner CIO Talent Planning for 2025 Survey.** This survey was conducted to benchmark the skills that CIOs plan to prioritize, capture the methods they plan to use to hire and develop talent, and assess the key technology roles CIOs are implementing in their enterprise. The research was conducted online from October through December 2024 among 487 respondents from midsize and large enterprises in North America, EMEA and the Asia/Pacific region. Respondents were screened for CIO or senior IT leadership roles with decision-making responsibilities in talent planning strategies. Disclaimer: The results of this survey do not represent global findings or the market as a whole, but reflect the sentiments of the respondents and companies surveyed.

¹¹ **2025 Gartner CIO Leadership Forum Pre-Conference Survey.** This survey was conducted to capture CIOs and IT Leaders current sentiments, key initiatives and challenges for the coming year, and potential topics of interest to inform the agenda for the 2026 Gartner CIO Leadership Forum. The survey was conducted online in July 2025 among CIOs (70%) and other IT leaders (30%). The total sample is 310 respondents, with representation from North America (53%), Europe (39%), and Asia/Pacific (8%), and across all industry sectors. Disclaimer: The results of this survey do not represent global findings or the market as a whole but reflect the sentiments of the respondents and companies surveyed.

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