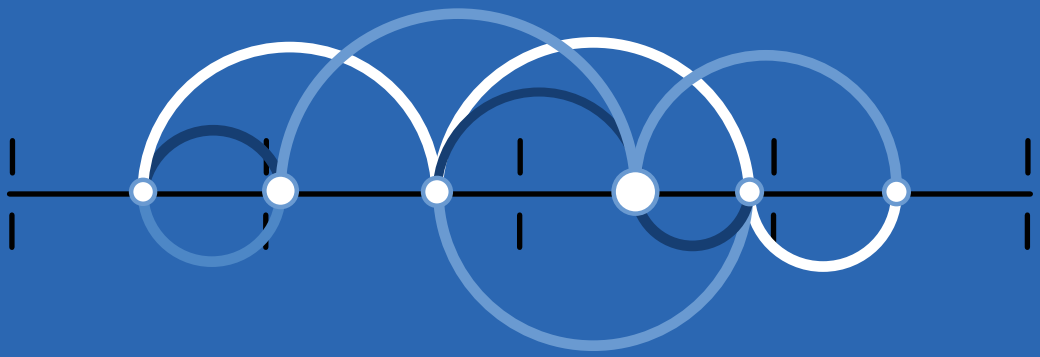
HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW



Agentic AI

Expectations, Readiness, Results

HBR Analytic Services **RESEARCH REPORT**

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The Next Frontier: Leading Through the Age of Agentic AI

We are at a remarkable inflection point, where the very nature of how work gets done is being reinvented. The era of generative AI has already begun to reshape creativity and efficiency—a progression we've seen firsthand at AWS, applying autonomous systems to solve complex operational challenges for over two decades. Now we are on the cusp of the next great leap: the age of agentic AI, where intelligent systems can not only generate ideas but also execute complex, multi-step tasks autonomously.

To understand how leadership is preparing for this transformation, we sponsored this report by Harvard Business Review Analytic Services. This report offers a clear-eyed view into the ambitions and challenges facing organizations today. The findings confirm the immense scale of the opportunity: A striking 84% of survey respondents agree that agentic AI will transform their organization's business.

However, this report also reveals a nuanced picture of preparedness. The intense focus on readying data for artificial intelligence seems to have paid dividends for organizations at the forefront of agentic AI innovation. The next significant growth areas now appear to be in governance and, most critically, workforce readiness. With a lack of skilled talent cited as a top barrier to adoption, it's clear that preparing our people for this new way of working is the central challenge executives must address. Tellingly, this strategic gap extends to measurement itself: Only 5% of respondents say that their organization has well-defined success metrics for agentic AI implementation. This can lead to a critical blind spot for executives trying to steer and accelerate their investment.

Despite these obstacles, the rewards for agentic AI use are notable. Among respondents whose organizations are already piloting or using agentic AI, 36% report achieving greater organizational productivity and 26% cite a better customer experience, indicating that the journey, while complex, is worthwhile.

At AWS, our goal is to help you navigate these complexities and unlock this potential. We believe this report provides an essential strategic lens for the path ahead. I invite you to delve into these findings to better inform your approach as we collectively move into this new frontier of business innovation.

Dr. Jana Werner
Executive in Residence
AWS

Agentic AI

Expectations, Readiness, Results

The advent of agentic AI has left many organizations grappling with strategic choices around how to prepare for and use the new technology to create value. Agentic AI's ability to automate complex tasks, coordinate with other artificial intelligence (AI) systems, make decisions, and potentially take action without human intervention has created high expectations. But cutting through the agentic AI hype rests on well-informed and decisive leadership, says Jeremy Groeteke, global head of IT and digital strategy at the Basel, Switzerland-based agricultural innovation company Syngenta.

"OUR CEO AND CIO [chief information officer] really grabbed the bull by the horns and saw where the AI revolution was going," he says. "They understood how agentic AI could transform our industry and other industries around us and where we could capitalize on it for best effect."

Early adopters are moving ahead with great strides, whether helping farmers grow crops or assisting doctors in delivering better patient care. Moreover, this groundbreaking technology is likely to create value in ways not yet anticipated as new use cases are discovered. Indeed, the market for agentic AI is expected to be worth around $196.6 billion by 2034, according to New York City-based market research and analysis company Market.US.[1]

Executives, too, have high hopes for agentic AI. Ninety percent of the 623 members of the *Harvard Business Review* audience that Harvard Business Review Analytic Services surveyed in July 2025 expect that most organizations in their industry will use agentic AI in the future. Survey respondents are involved with decisions regarding their organization's use of data and technology, such as agentic AI, and their organizations are using or considering using agentic AI. In addition, 84% of respondents agree that agentic AI will transform their organization's business.

Yet there is work to be done to bridge the gap between such high expectations and reality. AI is important for organizations, but it is not yet being used effectively. While 74% of

HIGHLIGHTS

90%

of survey respondents agree that they expect that **most organizations in their industry will use agentic AI in the future.**

84%

agree that **agentic AI will transform their organization's business.**

74%

agree that **any type of artificial intelligence (AI) use is very important** for their organization, but only 26% say their organization is very effective at leveraging any type of AI to achieve positive business outcomes.

Due to rounding, some figures in this report may not add up to 100%.

> **“The winners in every industry will be those that innovate, that don’t just do old things better but that use technology in new ways.”**
>
> John Santaferraro, founder, Ferraro Consulting

respondents agree that any type of AI use is important for their organization, only 26% say their organization has been effective at leveraging any type of artificial intelligence to achieve positive business outcomes.

For Groeteke, achieving effective business outcomes from agentic AI depends on focusing effort on what matters most. “The speed of technological change is so fast that we decided not to build or fine-tune the technology, as this would lead us into constant tech debt. Major hyperscalers will likely always be a few models ahead of the one we would be working on,” he explains. “Rather, we make sure that we’re building what we need to build for agentic AI: our data infrastructure and business processes, as well as the orchestration and strategy of where we need to go and the change management to help us get there. We focus on what we can control.”

This report examines expectations for agentic AI and explores what organizations are doing to prepare and move ahead with its adoption, particularly in the areas of data, governance, workforce, and ways of working. It looks at how organizations are using, or planning to use, agentic AI and what they hope to achieve from doing so. The report also highlights common agentic AI challenges and opportunities, and it uncovers best practices organizations may need on their agentic AI journey and how to apply them to achieve better business outcomes.

“There is a lot of hype around agentic AI, but it is not a flash in the pan. Agentic AI is here, and it’s here to stay,” says John Santaferraro, host of *The Digital Analyst* podcast and founder of Ferraro Consulting, a Lone Tree, Colo.-based industry analyst firm specializing in marketing, digital strategy, AI, and analytics. “Agentic AI has already changed the world we live in, and significantly more change is coming. To stay ahead of this wave of change, organizations must be open to new business models—not just improving the way the business operates but designing products and services for their customers. Initially, organizations use new technologies to do old things better. The winners in every industry will be those that innovate, that don’t just do old things better but that use technology in new ways.”

Adoption and Getting Started

According to Santaferraro, organizations can define their agentic AI starting point by looking at areas where technology has already created value. Examples include business intelligence, process mining, and robotic process automation (RPA). “The beauty of RPA is that there’s a lot of logic that’s already been created,” he explains. “RPA is 100% deterministic and rule-based, so why not add insight in the form of agentic AI on top of that? An agent could access the full unstructured data world in addition to performing automation. For example, it could look at all documents, policies, and procedures and take action on the latest knowledge. In addition, the business rules that are already embedded in RPA turn out to be fantastic guardrails for the agent.”

While some organizations are moving ahead on their agentic AI adoption journeys, these situations tend to be the exception to the rule. Overall, there is a high level of interest in agentic AI, but use cases are still very much in the development stages. Many respondents (34%) say their organization is using agentic AI either widely or in limited use cases. For purposes of this report, these organizations are defined as leaders. A further 40% are piloting or planning for the use of agentic AI, making them followers, and 26% say their organization has considered agentic AI use, whether they are moving forward with it or not, and these organizations are defined as laggards. FIGURE 1 Examining the differences between these three groups—their strategies for agentic AI readiness and the actions they’re taking to advance its use—can shed light on the use of agentic AI and how other organizations might follow.

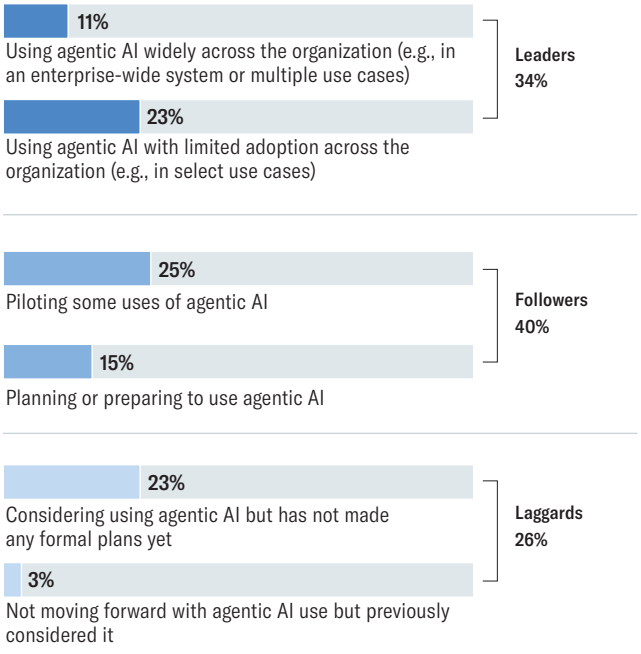
Syngenta’s Groeteke explains that the company moved fairly quickly in its agentic AI adoption across multiple business areas that include production, supply, sales, and marketing. It also uses descriptive AI—a specific type of AI well suited to analyzing large data sets and identifying patterns and trends—to provide insights on agriculture, such as through studying drone or satellite imagery to identify

FIGURE 1

A High Level of Interest in Agentic AI

Most organizations are at least considering use of the technology

Which of the following best describes your organization's current level of agentic AI use? My organization is ...



Base: 623 respondents.

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, July 2025

signs of plant disease. Syngenta helps farmers improve crop yields and quality while promoting sustainability and addressing challenges like climate change. The company provides crop protection products, such as insecticides, and farming inputs, like seeds, as well as digital solutions to farmers around the world. "AI is not new to our organization," he says. "We've been using machine learning and descriptive AI through our R&D organizations—for example, for predictive breeding and active ingredient development. We have a long history of working with data science and machine learning models, so it's not like we started the agentic AI journey at ground zero."

Syngenta uses agentic AI agents for a variety of tasks, such as automating flows between orders, production, and inventory. Additionally, sales teams work in tandem with agentic AI sales assistants and marketing teams draw on the technology for content generation and end-to-end campaigns. "When it comes to automating processes and workflows, agentic AI can reduce human error that occurs when you have multiple teams trying to match up information manually," says Groeteke.

He adds that value comes from transforming business processes, not simply automating them with agentic AI. "This is not a technology project but a business transformation. What you don't want to do is take an existing business process and put it on a shiny new toy of a tech stack. Then all you've done is made an expensive business process," Groeteke asserts. "Instead, you have to reimagine processes, rethink every step, [and] decide whether your data will support automation, as well as plan for a human in the loop. One thing we learned very quickly is that we have to bring our business process experts into agentic AI."

Generally, use cases for agentic AI are varied and span numerous business functions. In the survey, data analytics/business intelligence (28%) stands out as the most common area where agentic AI is being used, followed by software engineering (23%), customer service and support (23%), and IT and cybersecurity (23%). When it comes to functions where respondents are considering agentic AI use, operations (61%), customer service and support (56%), and HR (49%) are frequently cited. FIGURE 2 Looking at the distinction between groups, overall, leaders are ahead in terms of current agentic AI use. Operations seems to hold the most promise for followers and laggards, as this area is where these groups are most commonly considering agentic AI use.

Going back to Syngenta's situation, when it comes to choosing the right use cases, the company took a wide approach, at least at first. "We started with a 'Let a thousand flowers bloom' perspective, which is necessary when there is so much you need to understand about your data, processes, and people and to assess where agentic AI can add value and where it can't," says Groeteke. "After wide exploration, we identified 'lighthouse' projects in R&D, supply chain, and other functions where AI can accelerate innovation and create measurable impact on how much EBITDA we expect these use cases to add to the business."

FIGURE 2

Potential Avenues for Agentic AI Adoption

Data analytics/business intelligence is the top way the technology is being used

To what extent is your organization implementing or exploring use cases for agentic AI in the following areas?

Base: 623 respondents.

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, July 2025

Barriers to Adoption

The agentic AI journey faces significant adoption barriers. According to Ritesh Shah, chief architect, AI/ML/genAI, at The Vanguard Group Inc.—a global investment management company based in Malvern, Pa.—an overarching challenge is the sheer pace of technological advancement. "New techniques, tools, and language models emerge very, very rapidly, making it difficult to build evaluation systems and determine the best path forward for agentic AI use," he explains. "Providers and vendors are working to simplify adoption, but the speed of change is an industry-wide challenge. End users, developers, and providers are all striving to keep pace with this fast-evolving landscape together."

At Syngenta, too, the pace of technological change is a challenge, particularly in how it affects the workforce. "I think the biggest challenge regarding the workforce transformation element of agentic AI adoption is that the pace of transformation lags the pace of the technology. This is where you get friction," Groeteke says. "A few individuals can keep up with change; they can see where the technology is going and they understand its potential. But attitudes and adoption fall in the typical bell curve. The middle mass of the population may still be a bit skeptical. For this reason, you can see a big disconnect between what is possible and what is practically getting done. Of course, we are trying to close that delta," he adds.

Organizations typically have to overcome challenges spanning workforce, governance, strategy, and technology issues to get their agentic AI efforts off the ground. The most common barrier cited by respondents is a lack of talent/skills to execute (48%) followed by not having a clear roadmap/agentic AI strategy (46%), which is a more pronounced issue for the laggard cohort than for the others (64%). FIGURE 3

Getting Ready for Agentic AI

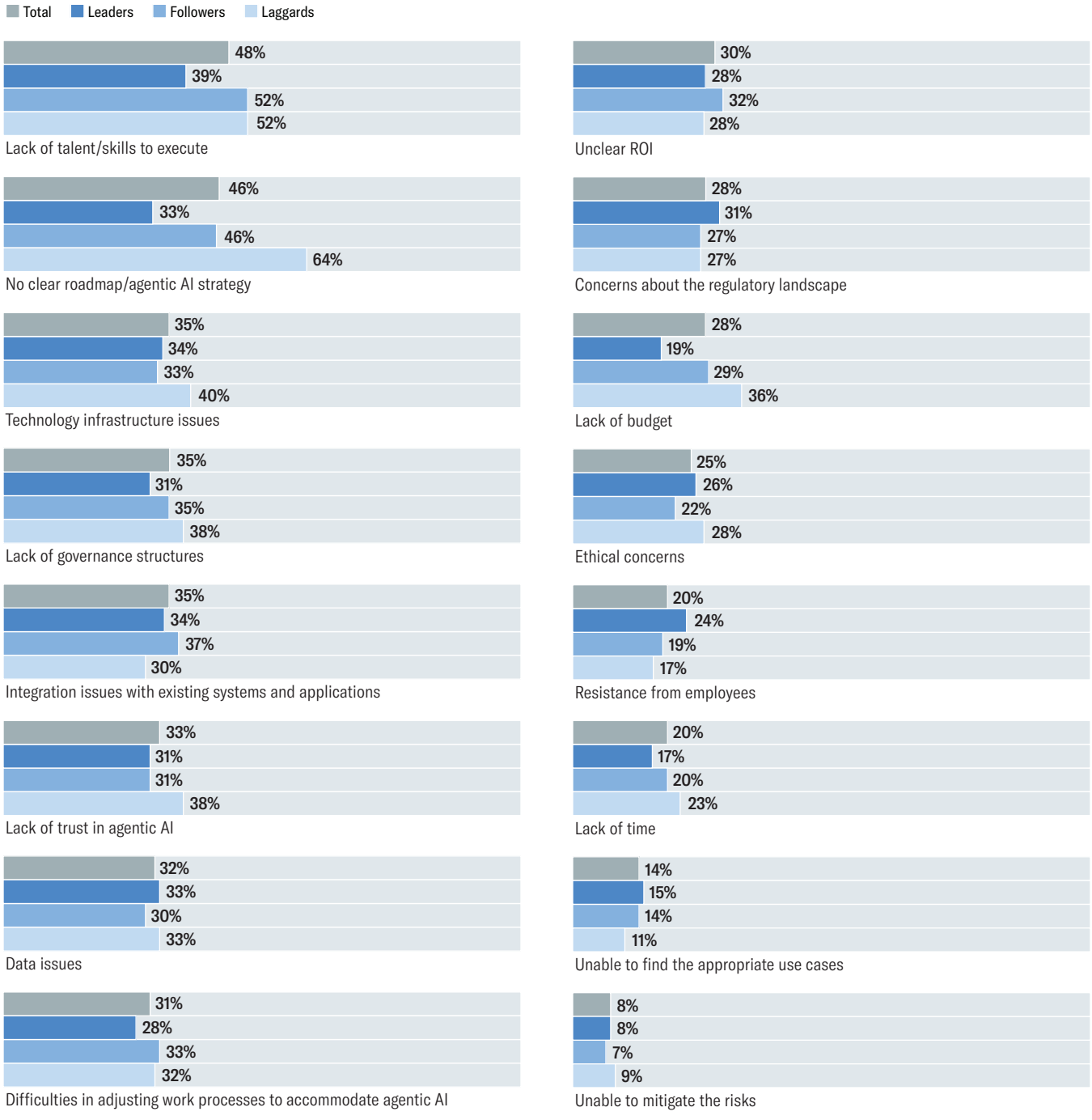
Organizations need to adequately prepare for agentic AI—not doing so could risk failed implementation and wasted resources and effort, according to Pascal Bornet, author of *Agentic Artificial Intelligence: Harnessing AI Agents to Reinvent Business, Work, and Life*. "The gap between expectation and reality remains wide. Organizational readiness

FIGURE 3

Hurdles to Adoption

Lack of talent and lack of an agentic AI strategy stand out as barriers

What barriers, if any, has your organization experienced regarding the adoption of agentic AI? *Select all that apply.*



Base: 623 respondents. Not shown: 2% other, 0%–2% none, and 1% don't know; varies by segment.

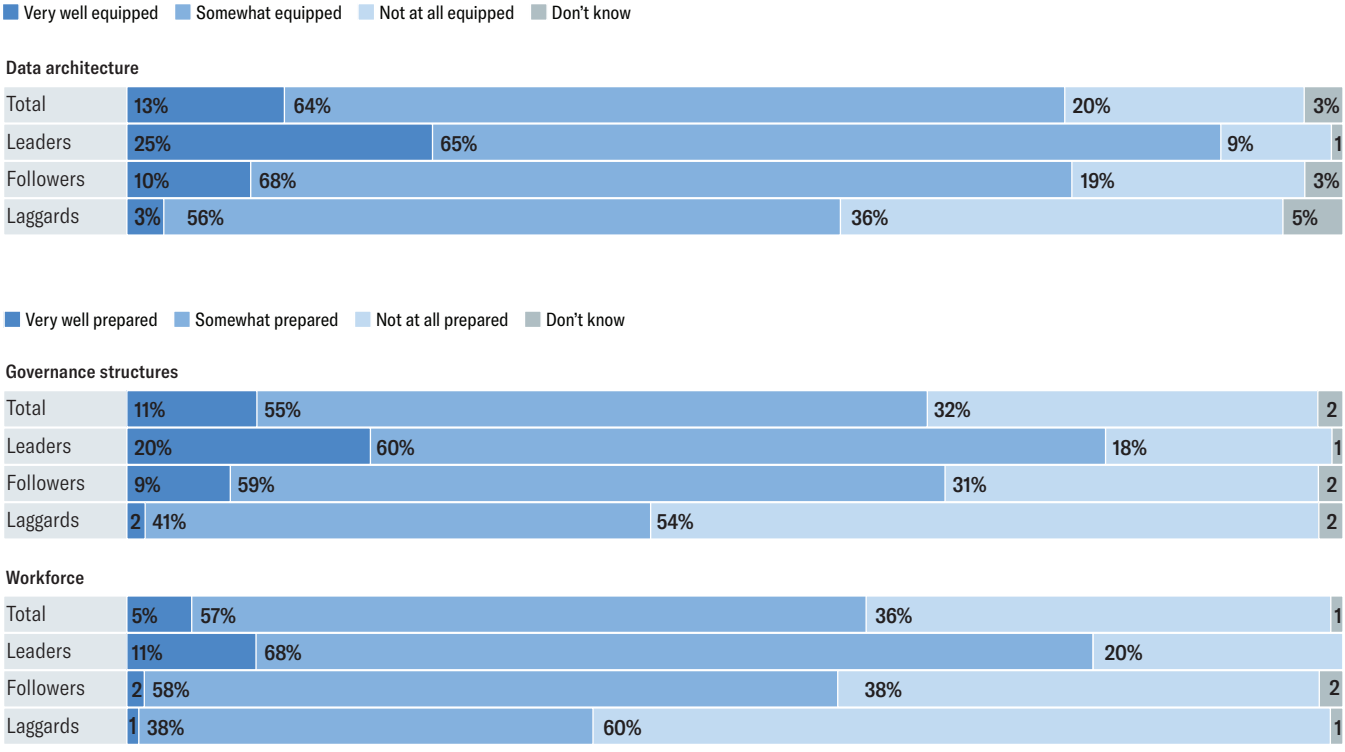
Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, July 2025

FIGURE 4

Much to Be Desired with Organizational Readiness

Most organizations are only somewhat prepared or equipped for agentic AI use

How equipped is your organization's data architecture for agentic AI use? How prepared are your organization's governance structures for agentic AI use? How prepared is your organization's workforce for agentic AI use?



Base: 623 respondents.

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, July 2025

can help bridge the gap by giving implementation a better chance of succeeding," he says. "Many well-intentioned agentic AI implementations have failed due to inadequate technical knowledge, poor governance structures, or a lack of change management to prepare the workforce."

Despite the high level of prioritization placed on agentic AI, many organizations are not yet well prepared to use it. Organizational readiness varies widely. Few survey respondents say their organization is very well equipped or prepared for agentic AI use. Most respondents say their organization is somewhat equipped or prepared across three criteria: data architecture, governance structures, and workforce.

Regarding their organization's data architecture, 13% say their organization is very well equipped for agentic AI use and 64% say it's somewhat equipped. In terms of governance structures, 11% say their organization is very prepared for agentic AI use and 55% say it's somewhat prepared. And finally, with respect to the workforce, 5% say their organization is very prepared for agentic AI use and 57% say it's somewhat prepared. FIGURE 4 Notably, 60% of laggards say their organization's workforce is not at all prepared for agentic AI use.

Understanding risk is vital when it comes to preparation for agentic AI, says Steve Grobman, chief technology officer at McAfee Corp., a San Jose, Calif.-based cybersecurity and software company focused on online protection for consumers. Grobman studies how new technology, including agentic AI, impacts consumers, what new security threats it may create, how bad actors are using it, and what techniques and

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technologies can be used to defend against errors or malicious intent.

“It’s clear that agentic AI will take productivity to the next level for both consumers and enterprises,” he says. “Agentic AI will change the way we live, just like driving cars and flying on planes changed daily life. But in the same way that we developed rules, principles, and technologies for those inventions—such as rules of the road, driver’s tests, seatbelts, and airbags—thinking through the potential risks of agentic AI and defining rules and technologies to mitigate them will be just as important as developing the velocity of the technology.”

Making Data Usable

Bornet, the author, cautions that agentic AI can amplify existing problems if a company’s data quality is not solid. “Organizations need to ensure they have robust technical infrastructure with integrated data architecture across systems, along with strong security measures, and scalable systems in place before beginning agentic AI deployment,” he says. “I’ve seen agents overwrite each other’s work or create infinite loops when poorly coordinated. Maintaining consistent understanding of the overall process state becomes critical, which is why I advise what I call shared memory architectures—centralized systems that track the current state of complex workflows so all agents stay synchronized.”

An organization’s interest in agentic AI may give it the motivation it needs to get its data in order. “In some ways, agentic AI is a forcing mechanism to make sure that we’re well on the journey toward consistently good data,” says Jonathan Moss, executive vice president, revenue growth and operations, at Experity, a Machesney Park, Ill.-based company that provides software solutions such as electronic medical record and practice management systems designed for the on-demand medical sector. “If we’re all honest about this, everyone has messy data. But you don’t have to embark on a multiyear project to get data right before you adopt agentic AI. The key is to align on which data you need for the specific workflow or job being done by agentic AI. Understand where *that* data is and ensure its quality and consistency. Just start there.”

The most common actions respondents say their organization is taking to ensure its data is ready for agentic AI use are improving aspects of data infrastructure (e.g., hardware, software, networks, analytics, tools) (53%), enhancing data security and privacy (51%), improving data quality (51%), and improving data integration (e.g., harmonizing data sets, adopting lakehouse architecture) (49%).

“Agentic AI is the cornerstone of our digital transformation, both for internal processes and our products,” Moss explains. Use cases include coding, workflow orchestration, patient communication, market research, inbound prospect qualification, and user interface design. “Our agentic AI-based products are designed to solve some of health care’s most challenging journeys for patients, clinicians, and medical staff. A complaint you hear a lot is that people who practice medicine have become typists, spending time and energy on notes and admin. We can orchestrate workflows that happen between the provider, the front desk, the biller, and the patient all in the agentic ecosystem, essentially giving practitioners time back to make the delivery of care more human.”

A data stewardship model has helped Experity’s digital transformation efforts. “Data is a trusted asset, and we are all stewards of it,” Moss asserts. “Whether you work in product development, engineering, operations, IT, or on the business side of things, everyone owns the data from their perspective. We are all jointly responsible for ensuring that data is relevant, accurate, and has the contextual integrity of what we’re trying to accomplish. That’s the approach that we’ve taken—and it’s been successful so far.”

Building Governance Structures

What makes agentic AI unique is its ability to act autonomously. This functionality can raise ethical, legal, and operational issues, all affecting governance. Businesses may have

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to consider their willingness to allow agentic AI to make decisions autonomously or grapple with how to balance decision making between agentic AI and humans. A little more than half of survey respondents (52%) agree that their organization is open to agentic AI making some operational decisions without oversight.

Governance often entails specifying a level of agentic AI autonomy that is appropriate for the organization. For McAfee’s Grobman, businesses and consumers alike need to understand the risks and rewards autonomy can bring. “Having a well-thought-out risk-reward assessment is critical,” he asserts. “Take driving a car, for instance. We all say safety is the most important thing when driving. But it isn’t. If safety were the most important element, we would all drive at 20 miles an hour and wear helmets. The point is that we balance the risk of driving with the utility that traveling at 80 miles an hour on the freeway provides. Using a new technology like agentic AI is exactly the same—you need to understand the risks, understand the likelihood of those risks, and then calculate whether taking those risks to reap the reward is something that is a net positive.”

For each agentic AI use case, Grobman suggests imagining what full autonomy might look like and assessing what the worst outcome could be. “Recognize the privilege that you’re granting an agentic system, whether that’s access to your bank account or sending an email,” he says. “First, you need to define what level of access to specific capabilities you are comfortable with and then ask yourself, ‘If agentic AI had autonomy to perform that capability, what could it actually do—either in error or by someone exploiting the system?’ If you’re not comfortable with the answer, then keep a human in the loop.”

Moss describes Experity’s approach as “directed autonomy,” where, depending on the use case, agents can act independently within defined parameters and humans remain in the loop for oversight, exception handling, and learning. “For routine workflows, agents can be fully autonomous,” he notes. “For context-dependent workflows, there’s shared control between agents and humans. When it comes to high-impact workflows, there’s always a human in the loop with escalation pathways.”

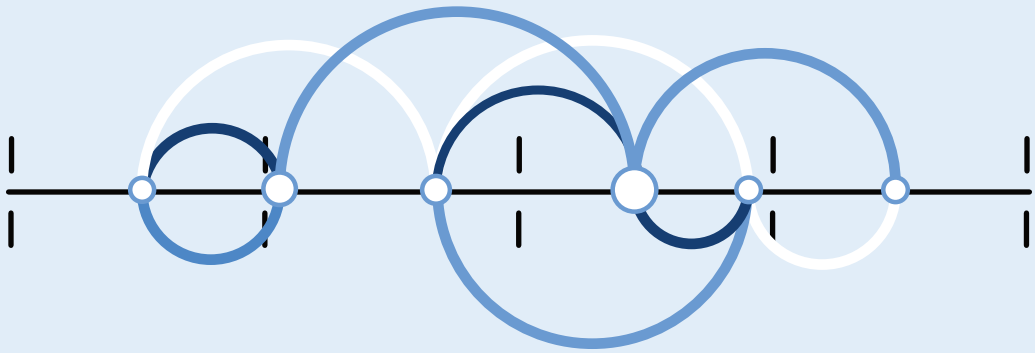
However, Moss cautions that there are actions that agentic AI should not perform alone, especially in health care. “We would never let agentic AI create a medical diagnosis on its own,” he asserts. “Our aim is to use agentic AI to help the clinician make the correct diagnosis—for example, by providing them with all the relevant patient information they need [in order] to do so.”

Agents excel at tasks with clear parameters, repetitive elements, and measurable outcomes. Conversely, agentic AI may not be well suited for tasks requiring deep emotional intelligence or empathy; high-stakes decisions involving ethics, justice, or nuanced human judgment; and situations where accountability must rest with humans, according to Bornet. For these reasons, he advises that organizations build governance structures early in their agentic AI journeys, with monitoring, auditing, and ethical frameworks in place before scaling. “Organizations can implement what I call circuit breakers—automatic shutoffs that prevent small failures from becoming system-wide problems,” he says. “When one agent in a chain fails, it can cascade through the entire system without proper safeguards.”

Organizations are taking steps to establish governance structures for agentic AI. The survey finds that top actions in this regard include developing/implementing responsible AI policies (46%), defining what data agentic AI can access (44%), defining which applications agentic AI can and cannot be used for (43%), updating security frameworks (42%), assigning roles and responsibilities for agentic AI governance (42%), and updating security frameworks (42%).

Vanguard’s Shah explains that while it’s still early in the company’s agentic AI journey, it is evaluating and piloting several internal and client-facing use cases including agents that can assist employees in a variety of everyday tasks such as developing code, creating presentations, reviewing contracts, and supporting client service.

Each use case goes through multiple governance “toll gates” to ensure strong risk mitigation, Shah says. “Each case



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is evaluated through the lens of how much value it’s going to generate and how much uplift in productivity it’s going to provide. Productivity is expected to translate into value generated,” he adds. “We also evaluate risk. To pass through a toll gate, each use case must meet defined risk mitigation standards, which may vary for internal versus client-facing pilots.”

Shah notes that there are multiple types of risks, requiring multiple approaches. “There could be reputational risk, or system risk that impacts availability,” he explains. “Importantly, leaders from different parts of the organization understand risk differently. Leaders across business, IT, and legal collaborate to assess and approve risk levels before any application moves into production.”

Preparing the Workforce for Change

Given the enormity of agentic AI’s potential impact on the workforce, it stands to reason that workforce preparedness is critical. Employees may need to upskill or learn new ways of working, and they may also be worried about job security. “In my experience, organizational barriers are actually a bigger challenge for adoption than technological preparedness. The technology works; the human systems often don’t,” says Bornet. “Organizations can invest heavily in employee training, communication, and involvement in the agentic AI design process for a better chance of a smooth transition to agentic AI use.”

Many employees may not yet understand agentic AI’s value, which could dampen their willingness to adopt the technology. Fewer than half of survey respondents (47%) agree with the statement, “My organization’s employees generally understand the value of agentic AI.” This sentiment is notably different across the survey cohorts. The majority of leaders (66%) agree with the statement compared to 46% of followers and 24% of laggards.

Groeteke believes in the power of change management to ease technology adoption. “Just because senior leadership wants to capitalize on automation and productivity efficiencies, it doesn’t mean the rest of your organization is along for the ride. There will always be skeptics. If you can turn those skeptics into cheerleaders and champions of agentic AI, that carries a lot of weight,” he says. “Change management can empower individuals to use the technology and see its benefits. If you go after a specific business problem that they are facing and show how AI can improve it, you can raise up these individuals as spokesmen and spokeswomen of change and the benefit that it brings.”

Organizations are finding ways to encourage their workforce to use agentic AI. Respondents say the most common actions their organization is taking regarding its workforce in response to agentic AI are encouraging agentic AI use (e.g., through training or information sessions) (54%) and reskilling existing talent in agentic AI use (47%).

Another impact on the workforce is that roles are changing. “Agentic AI requires collaboration between technology functions and human resources groups that hasn’t typically happened in the past,” notes Bornet. “The role of chief AI officer is emerging as something beyond AI strategy to bridge technology and business strategy. At the same time, the CIO role is evolving from an infrastructure manager to a hybrid team orchestrator, while the chief data officer’s role is expanding from data governance to AI governance.”

“What is exciting is that entirely new roles are emerging,” he adds. “For example, AI orchestrators are becoming crucial intermediaries between human teams and AI systems, and ethics officers and AI auditors can play a part in ensuring AI decisions align with human values and organizational principles. Ultimately, HR could evolve toward human and digital resource management as agentic AI becomes more prevalent.”

Establishing a Strategic Direction

Organizations need strategic direction to get agentic AI plans off the ground, and there appears to be an urgency to act.

"The real danger is in not doing anything at all," says Tim Cortinovis, a regular keynote speaker on AI and automation and author of *Agentic Sales: AI and the Future of Sales*. "I think the agentic AI opportunity is so huge that companies should act right now. But they shouldn't do it out of a false sense of urgency or under pressure. They should be motivated to act by focusing on the opportunity."

While many organizations are still grappling with how they could use the technology for greatest effect and what the agentic AI opportunity means for them in terms of business outcomes, for Cortinovis it's clear that moving forward with adoption can bring business value. "When it comes to quantifying the opportunity, there is a clear correlation between using more technology, being more innovative with that technology, and greater annual revenue per employee," asserts Cortinovis. "A traditional large tech company typically sees revenue of around $400,000 per year, per employee. Innovative tech companies can reach up to nearly $2.5 million in annual revenue per employee. So, the more innovative the company and the more it uses the most advanced AI technology, the more revenue per employee [that] will result." He adds that the opportunity to use agentic AI to create business value isn't limited to large companies; small and medium-sized businesses stand to gain, too.

Whatever the business size or the issues an organization is trying to address with agentic AI, the most important point is to center the way forward on the customer. "Agentic AI should not be for the sake of technology," Cortinovis notes. "It is an opportunity to do better business. Focus your business strategy on the expectations of your markets, your clients, and your employees as well, of course. And then you should use the appropriate technology to do so. It's not the other way around."

Integrating business strategy and agentic AI strategy is on executives' minds, even if few of them have actually taken the steps to do so. The survey finds that only 6% of respondents say that agentic AI is fully integrated into the organizational strategy, 35% percent say their organization is in the process of integrating agentic AI into the organizational strategy, and almost half of respondents (49%) say their organization is planning to do so. Notably, leaders are further ahead with this task: 13% of leaders say agentic AI is fully integrated into organizational strategy compared to only 3% of followers and 1% of laggards. Meanwhile, 54% of leaders are in the process of integration compared to 37% of followers and 9% of laggards.

Ferraro Consulting's Santaferraro stresses the importance of integrating business and AI strategy to ensure that a focus on technology does not push executives off the path of pursuing their business objectives. Ultimately, any type of technology should enable the organization to reach its objectives. "Make sure that anything you do in the world of AI is tied to your business strategy," he says. "The fact that you have an AI strategy does not make your business strategy unimportant. The business strategy is still the number one priority for the executive. Business strategy can change based on the technology, but the strategy has to be the driver for every single use of AI."

At Vanguard, business and technology strategies are interwoven, as multiple dynamics are at play when making decisions around agentic AI. "Scaling, quality, cost, and latency are interconnected and often challenging to balance. Ultimately, decisions must make business sense. Value generation guides us, and risk mitigation can ensure we move forward responsibly," says Shah. "Agentic AI has potential, but adoption requires careful evaluation."

Ideally, an organization's strategy should bear in mind the short- and long-term impacts of agentic AI, says Mark Purdy, cofounder and managing director of Beacon Thought Leadership, a London-based independent advisory and research firm focused on issues at the intersection of economics, technology, and business. "Typically, businesses are focused on identifying and progressing a set of AI use cases through a funnel from experimentation to prototype, testing, and production. This approach works well in the short term," he notes.

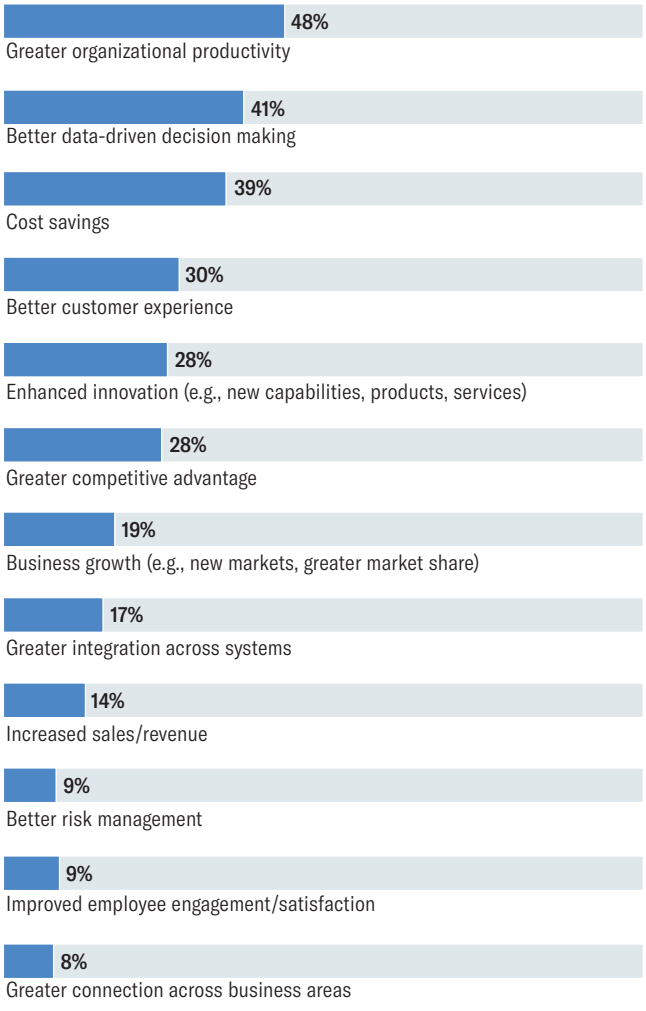
However, executives shouldn't ignore the bigger picture. "If agentic AI really takes off, and we can assume it will, then

FIGURE 5

Most-Sought Benefits from Agentic AI

Organizational productivity tops the list

What benefits is your organization seeking to achieve from agentic AI the most? *Select up to three.*



Base: 623 respondents. Not shown: 1% other, 0% none, and 0% don't know.

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, July 2025

the results will be quite transformative," Purdy says. "Organizations will have to adapt. They'll have to change a lot of the ways in which they operate. The vision that agentic AI offers is a future where agents collaborate with humans. That's a very different reality to how most teams work today and it has huge implications for business strategy and workforce strategy. For example, if the agent is doing most of the work, how do you evaluate the human? The way we think about performance, HR, talent, and business processes and ways of working will need to change."

Purdy adds that it's important for organizations to think about the long-term implications, instead of pursuing agentic AI solely for short-term benefits like productivity boosts. "With any general-purpose technology with widespread applicability like agentic AI, you can't make decisions on the short-term ROI alone because there are so many long-term impacts to consider," he says.

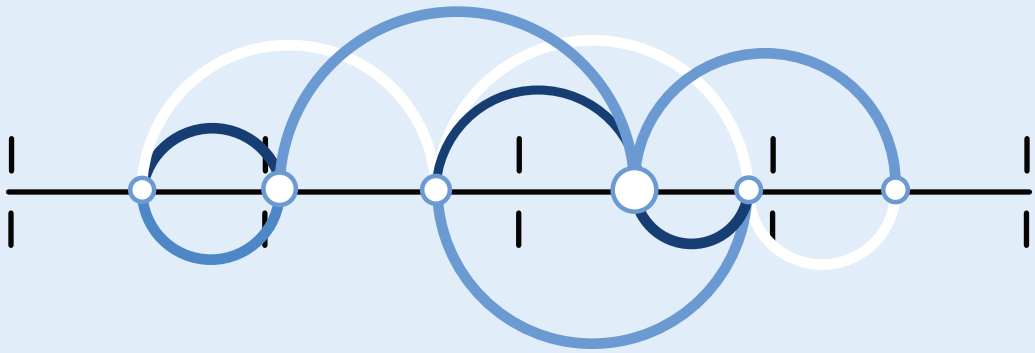
The Fruits of Adoption

Organizations are seeing the fruits of their agentic AI efforts, often in the form of saved time and effort in daily tasks, enhanced innovation, and improved processes and workflows.

Moss describes how agentic AI has lightened employees' administrative burden—one example being the automation of input into the customer relationship management (CRM) system. "Humans tend to be terrible at data entry. Most of the time we don't enjoy it, and we make mistakes. In the world of agentic AI, we no longer need to do it," he says. "Our agentic AI system can analyze call transcriptions, notes, and revenue data and input that into the CRM for the sales teams. Now all kinds of qualitative and quantitative intelligence can be entered quickly and in the correct way. Apart from eliminating drag and employee burnout, having agentic AI handle repetitive tasks helps with our data integrity, too."

Although organizations may have multiple reasons for investing in agentic AI, the prospect of heightened productivity is a common driver. In the survey, the most-cited benefit sought from agentic AI use is greater organizational productivity (48%), followed by better data-driven decision making (41%) and cost savings (39%). FIGURE 5

For those organizations that have moved ahead with agentic AI implementation, such efforts are bearing fruit. Among respondents whose organizations are currently piloting or



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>
> Mark Purdy, cofounder and managing director, Beacon Thought Leadership

using agentic AI, the top benefits achieved are greater organizational productivity (36%), better data-driven decision making (35%), and cost savings (33%). FIGURE 6 These results are similar to the top three benefits that all respondents in the survey say their organization is most hoping to achieve.

The consensus seems to be that the journey will be worth it. A vast majority of survey respondents (72%) agree that their organization expects that agentic AI will deliver a return on investment.

However, many organizations may not know whether their agentic AI efforts are paying off. Only 5% of respondents say that their organization has well-defined success metrics for agentic AI implementation, while 19% say their organization has some success metrics in place. Many respondents say their organization is in the process of defining (28%) or planning (27%) such metrics and some (17%) say their organization has not considered success metrics for agentic AI implementation.

Leaders stand out in this regard, as they are far more likely to have success metrics in place. Indeed, 10% of leaders (compared to 3% of followers and just 1% of laggards) say their organization has well-defined success metrics, and 32% of leaders (compared to 16% of followers and 7% of laggards) say they have some metrics but they could be improved. Leaders (34%) and followers (33%) alike are in the process of defining such metrics.

Experity has several ways of measuring key success factors and the benefits of its agentic AI efforts. “For our client products, we measure the time we have saved the end users. How quickly can practitioners get a patient in and out while still delivering quality care? How many follow-ups have we been able to reduce? How much time have clinicians spent with the patient and on administrative tasks? These questions give us a sense of our impact,” says Moss.

For internal agentic AI use cases, Experity assesses time to value. “The reduction of time spent from ideation to proof of concept, creation, and deployment—to actually generating value for the organization—is by far the outstanding benefit of agentic AI,” Moss explains. “What used to take weeks can be done in a few days. Every part of that value chain is shortened, which helps us get speed to market.”

Best Practices for the Road Ahead

Survey results highlight several practices leaders employ that set them apart from followers and laggards. Specifically, leaders are far more likely to integrate their agentic AI and organizational strategies than the other groups. Leaders are also better prepared for agentic AI use across data architecture, governance, and the workforce compared to the other groups. Regarding the workforce, leaders are far more likely to say their employees understand the value of agentic AI. Additionally, leaders have better-defined metrics for evaluating the success of their agentic AI efforts.

Other practices that organizations could consider as they progress along their agentic AI journeys include the following:

Prioritize data quality above all else. Bornet cautions that implementations can fail catastrophically if agents produce inaccurate outputs due to poor data quality. “Data quality is foundational—agents amplify existing data problems rather than fix them. If your data quality isn’t solid, fix that before building agents,” he says.

Define the agent clearly. “Before building anything, meticulously define the agent’s identity—its precise purpose, role, scope, and limitations,” says Bornet. “Ambiguity is the enemy of successful agentic AI; clarity prevents unpredictable behavior and ensures that the agentic solution aligns with your goals.”

Draw on your ecosystem. Beacon’s Purdy reminds organizations that they don’t have to embark on the agentic AI journey alone. “Get your foundation blocks in place, pay attention to data and governance, and then look at your ecosystem [of vendors, consultants, and automation specialists] and make sure you’re using it in the right way for the best outcomes,” he says.

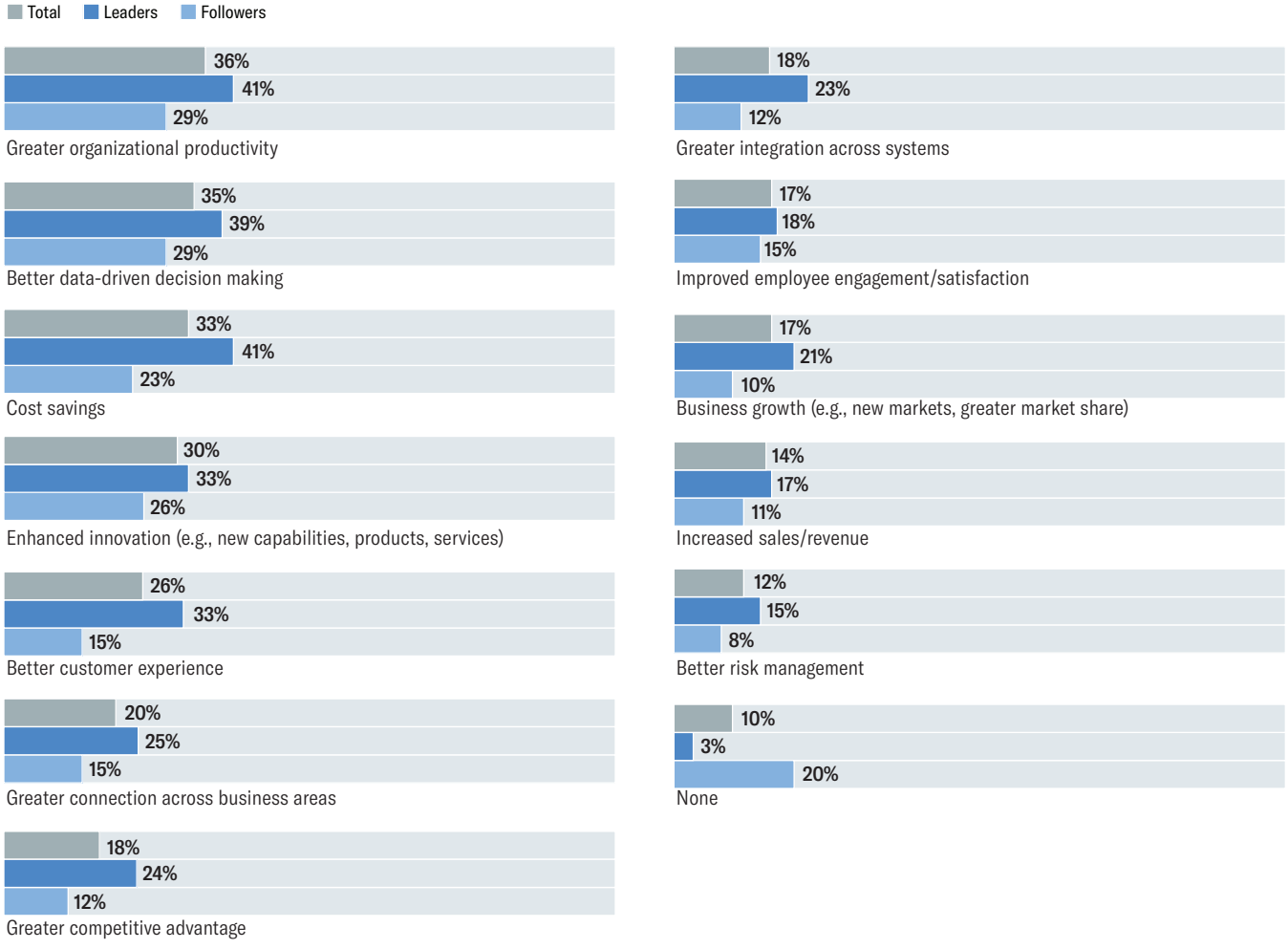
Educate yourself. “Executives who know how to leverage AI are going to be in high demand,” says Santaferraro. “You

FIGURE 6

Reaping the Benefits

Agentic AI use is driving improvements in productivity, decision making, and cost savings

What benefits has your organization achieved from agentic AI use ? *Select all that apply.*



Base: 368 respondents whose organization is piloting or using agentic AI. Not shown: 7%-8% don't know, 2%-3% other, varies by segment.

Source: Harvard Business Review Analytic Services survey, July 2025

> **“A good starting point for fostering shared enthusiasm is to show employees not just how the tools work but to let them experience the truly magical feeling that comes from using agentic AI to its full effect.”**
>
> Tim Cortinovis, speaker and author of *Agentic Sales: AI and the Future of Sales*

don’t have to become an agentic AI expert, but AI literacy is probably one of the most important success factors, not just for executives but for entire organizations.”

Get buy-in for agentic AI. “You can’t transform a business against the buy-in or the will of your people,” asserts speaker/author Cortinovis. “A good starting point for fostering shared enthusiasm is to show employees not just how the tools work but to let them experience the truly magical feeling that comes from using agentic AI to its full effect.”

Conclusion

While many are keen to make the most of the agentic AI opportunity, some organizations may not yet be able to fully realize their overall AI ambitions and turn their efforts into tangible positive business outcomes. But there are signs that agentic AI may prove to be worth the effort. Current use cases exist, and organizations are considering using agentic AI in a wide variety of business areas. Those that have gone ahead with implementation are reporting benefits in line with what they’d hoped for. Despite the difficulties of adoption and limited levels of preparedness, organizations are working to overcome these challenges, and many expect that agentic AI will deliver significant ROI.

More is yet to come, too. So far, organizations have concentrated on getting a few prioritized use cases up and running. As adoption picks up pace, the wider implications of agentic AI for business, and perhaps even for society, will become apparent.

For Bornet, this turning point where agentic AI reaches scale represents a remarkable time in history. “The transformation ahead isn’t just technological—it’s civilizational,” he posits. “We’re building the foundation for a future where human creativity and AI capability can combine to solve challenges and create opportunities that neither could achieve alone.”

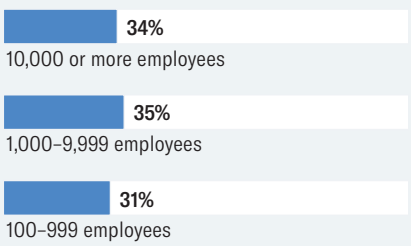
Endnote

1 Market.US, “Agentic AI Market,” October 2025. https://market.us/report/agentic-ai-market/.

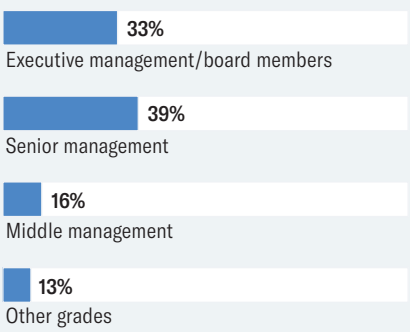
METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Harvard Business Review Analytic Services surveyed 623 members of the *Harvard Business Review* audience via an online survey fielded in July 2025. Respondents qualified to complete the survey if they are involved with decisions regarding their organization's use of data and technology, such as agentic AI, and their organizations are using or considering agentic AI.

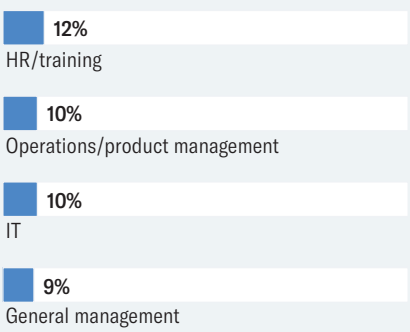
ORGANIZATION SIZE



SENIORITY

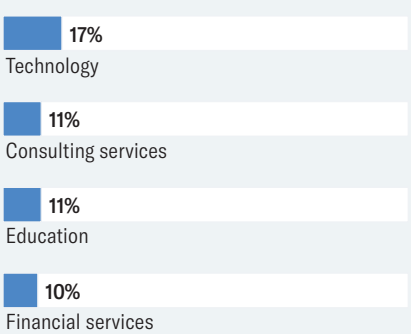


JOB FUNCTIONS



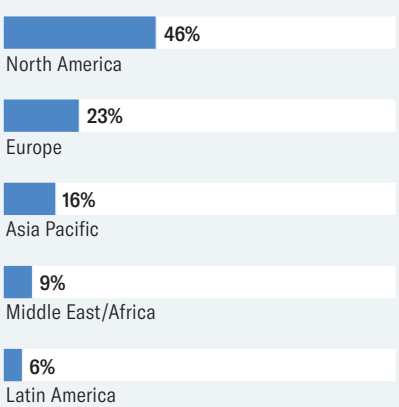
All other sectors less than 9% each.

INDUSTRIES



All other sectors less than 9% each.

REGIONS



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