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AI-first companies

Designing organizations for intelligence at the core

What is an AI-first company?

An AI-first company embeds **artificial intelligence at the core** of its business model, operating model, and decision-making processes, not just as a tool optimization, but as a **foundational capability**.

Rather than simply leveraging AI for incremental optimization, it systematically reimagines its structures, workflows, and culture to be powered and extended by intelligence, human and artificial, at every level.

It is fundamentally different from companies that *use* AI; it is **a company that is AI-enabled by design**

Imagine an organization where …

- … the workforce is **twice as productive**
- … core business applications **detect and resolve issues in real time**
- … every worker is supported by a **team of virtual experts**
- … scaling 'workforce' means **adding compute, rather than adding headcount**
- … decisions can be made **real-time, cross-company**
- … work can continue **24/7**
- … customer feedback can trigger **instant product tweaks**

AI is redefining business at an historic pace

AI is no longer an emerging technology, it is scaling at a **record speed**, fundamentally reshaping how organizations operate. The global rate of AI adoption is **unprecedented**, driven by advances in natural language processing, multi-agent systems, and accessible "build your own agent" solutions. Recent developments are rapidly redefining what is possible:

- AI agents are evolving into **digital co-workers** that collaborate with humans and technologies to manage workflows and share responsibilities
- Agentic automation is enabling solution development at **lower cost**, accelerating innovation through rapid prototyping and solution building by business users
- Multi-modal, multi-agent, and multi-environment capabilities are **enhancing the autonomy of AI agents**, allowing them to operate effectively across physical and digital domains
- Organizations are deploying "guardian agents" to autonomously **monitor and manage risks** such as data quality, trustworthiness, and cybersecurity threats

This shift goes beyond isolated AI use cases, it is redefining the business model, operating model and decision-making process. Companies are rebuilding around human-agent collaboration, with AI fluency now becoming a core skills and AI understanding a vital leadership competency.

As technology accelerates, the real constraint will be human and organizational readiness. Unless organization proactively adapt, operating models risk becoming the bottleneck to realizing AI's full potential

$7.5Bn
AI market value in 2025[1]

$47.1Bn
Projected AI market value in 2030[1]

78%
of global organizations expect to increase AI investments in the coming year[2]

25%
of enterprises are expected to deploy AI agents in frontline roles by 2025[2]

80%
of firms in markets like India, are already actively building autonomous AI capabilities[2]

[1] MarketsandMarkets, AI Agents Market by Agent Role, Apr 2025
[2] Deloitte State of Generative AI in the Enterprise Survey, Jan./Feb. 2024

Unlocking AI's value requires organizational reinvention

1 To unlock the full value of AI, organizations must **rethink their operating models and embed AI into the business core**. This requires new approaches to talent strategies and decision-making frameworks. Competitive advantage will go to those who embed AI into the fabric of their business, not as a layer, but as a logic from the core.

2 Fixed hierarchies and function-based teams are ill-equipped for an environment where data, decisions, and execution flow in real time. To keep pace, organizations must **replace traditional structures with dynamic, adaptive organizational design** that enables faster decision-making, cross-functional collaboration, and **embed continuous learning loops between humans and machines**.

3 Many organizations invest in AI but remain stuck in legacy mindsets: risk-averse, siloed, and output-focused. Yet, truly integrating AI requires a new way of thinking. To unlock transformation, organizations must **evolve leadership, culture and workforce capabilities by fostering experimentation, agility, continuous learning and developing skills needed to effectively work with AI** at every level.

Although technology is evolving rapidly, it is ultimately people, organizational structures, and culture that determine whether these advances deliver lasting value. Success depends not just on adopting new tools, but on how well the workforce and operating model adapt and evolve alongside them. This requires a new organizational blueprint, a blueprint for the age of intelligent organizations

The AI-first organizational blueprint

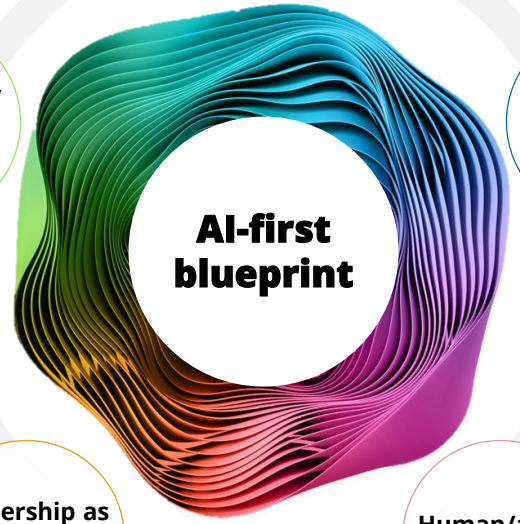
Future successful companies are not adopting AI around the edges; they're rebuilding their business around AI

Real-time autonomous operating model

The operating system of an AI-first company is **data-driven**. Decisions are **automated** where possible, made **proactively** instead of reactively, and continuously enhanced through **live feedback loops** throughout the business

Continuously learning workforce

Workers are **upskilled not once, but constantly**, learning how to work with, train, and challenge AI systems. Adaptability, AI fluency, and the ability to frame good questions become more valuable than static expertise



Outcome-driven structure

The AI-first company abandons rigid hierarchies in favour of **modular, cross-functional teams organized around outcomes**. Structure becomes flexible, dynamic, and scalable, with AI agents embedded as part of the team

Leadership as system orchestrator

Managers no longer simply supervise people, they **orchestrate entire ecosystems of human-agent collaboration**. Leadership shifts toward coaching, enabling, and ethical oversight of AI-enabled work

Human/agent collaboration

Work is reimagined to be **co-owned by humans and AI**. Agents take on execution, pattern recognition, and scalability, while humans focus on context, creativity, and decisions that require empathy or nuance

The AI-first organizational blueprint is an integral part of the larger AI ecosystem that together shapes how artificial intelligence delivers impact

Technology
Data
Architecture

Organization
Strategy
Governance & ethics

Real-time, autonomous operating model

An AI-first operating model delivers continuous execution and adaptation, powered by autonomous AI agents and empowered humans

The operating model defines how an organization delivers value, by aligning people, processes, technology, and data to run the business effectively. In **traditional companies**, this model is typically structured around **fixed functions, defined roles, hierarchical approval layers**, and periodic planning cycles. Work moves sequentially through these predefined stages, creating **rigidity** and making it difficult for organizations to respond quickly to change.

AI-first companies fundamentally rethink this model. The operating model is designed for **speed, continuous learning,** and **automation.** Powered by AI agents and real-time data, these models enable organizations to execute decisions and workflows instantly, with human-agent collaboration at the core to manage scale and complexity.

Traditional operating model		AI-first operating model
Manual execution through people	→	*Execution through AI agents with human oversight*
Planning in quarterly or annual cycles	→	*Continuous planning and forecasting via live data & models*
Static processes, built around ERP or workflow tools	→	*Adaptive workflows built on AI orchestration layer*
Human-driven decisions with limited input	→	*AI-supported decision-making with real-time recommendations*
Top-down coordination	→	*Autonomous teams enabled by intelligent infrastructure*

Organizations should **systematically identify which business capabilities** (e.g., reporting, data analysis, transaction processing, or monitoring) **can be reliably automated** using AI agents. When assessing where to apply full or partial automation, consider factors such as process standardization, availability and quality of underlying data, potential risks, and the need for human judgement or ethical oversight. Capabilities best suited for AI are typically repetitive, data-rich, rule-based, and have clear success measures, while areas involving complex judgement or significant risk may still require tight human involvement and robust governance.

In turn, the **role of people evolves significantly**. Instead of owning and managing every step of a process, workers **focus on orchestrating outcomes** by configuring how AI-driven systems operate. This shift means teams become smaller, more empowered, and more autonomous, with a clear focus on innovation and problem-solving.

Key enablers to get started

- **Capability mapping:** Systematically identify priority processes and areas for AI-driven redesign
- **Familiarize with rapid prototyping and an iterative approach:** Build mechanisms for testing, learning, and refining new operating model components in short cycles, enabling continuous improvement and de-risking change
- **Data readiness:** Develop robust data infrastructure and governance to ensure high-quality, accessible, and well-integrated data across the organization

Outcome-driven organizational structure

From ‘org-chart’ to ‘work-chart’; AI-first organizations organize around dynamic, outcome-driven work structures

As organizations adopt AI-first operating models, one of the **most profound shifts is how work is structured**. This affects how teams are organized, how roles are defined, and how work gets done across the organization. Moreover, it can prompt a visible shift in the C-structuralsuite, with roles like the Chief AI Officer (CAIO) emerging to take ownership of AI strategy, governance and value delivery.

Traditional organizational models rely on fixed hierarchies, static role descriptions, and function-based teams. These approaches **struggle to keep pace with the speed, complexity, and adaptability made possible by AI**. Organizations need to move towards dynamic work structures that bring together the right people and technologies to achieve specific outcomes.

The dynamic work structure: A new operating logic

AI-first companies embrace **dynamic work structures**, where teams **form and evolve around outcomes** rather than predefined roles or reporting lines. Work is organized around value streams instead of departments, breaking down traditional silos.

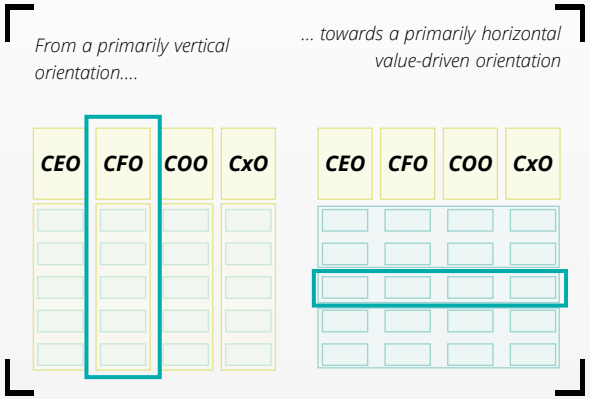
Key shifts include:

- **From roles to skills**: People are staffed based on the skills they bring to a specific outcome, not their place in the hierarchy
- **From fixed teams to dynamic teams**: Teams assemble dynamically, often cross-functional, depending on the challenge at hand
- **From human-only teams to human-agent teams**: AI agents are no longer just tools, but embedded collaborators in insight generation, content creation, decision-making, and orchestration
- **From org charts to work charts**: The organization becomes a living network, continuously mapping how work, people, and capabilities connect in real time

What does this mean in practice?

Strategy execution no longer happens within siloed functions, it flows **across value streams** that cut through the organization. These become the primary unit of execution, staffed with cross-functional capabilities and governed by their own KPIs. Executives must shift from managing vertical functions to enabling **end-to-end delivery**, aligning resources and removing barriers to make **horizontal governance** scalable.

Traditional management constructs, like fixed teams and annual funding cycles, must be reconsidered. Leadership focus shifts from input ownership to outcome accountability, requiring **new operating rhythms and more flexible resource deployment**. Ultimately, the ability to execute horizontally becomes a core competitive advantage: structure should follow the flow of work, not the other way around.



Key enablers to get started

- **Shift focus from functions to outcomes:** Identify the core value streams that drive your organization’s purpose like customer journeys, products and services
- **Adopt dynamic teaming models:** organize flexible teams around priorities where staffing is based on skills needed for the outcome, not static roles, and focus on short-cycle assignments with flexible resource allocation
- **Enable horizontal leadership:** Create and empower leaders who steer across functions by focusing on removing blockers and delivering outcomes

Human/agent collaboration

As execution becomes continuous, organizations must redefine workforce strategies to integrate human and AI agents effectively

In an AI-first environment, work execution is no longer simply a matter of human–AI collaboration; it evolves into **systemic co-dependence**, where people and intelligent agents are deeply integrated within teams, processes, and decision-making. AI agents are embedded as true team members, handling an expanding share of analytical, transactional, and operational activities, from preparing materials and responding to customer queries, to monitoring systems and providing real-time insights. Crucially, these agents operate continuously and without the constraints of time, fatigue, or geography.

This shift creates a **continuous, always-on execution layer**, expanding the organization's capacity far beyond traditional workforce boundaries. Human roles shift in response. Workers take on higher-value responsibilities, defining objectives, refining prompts, reviewing outputs, and intervening in exceptions. The result is not parallel collaboration, but a symbiotic system in which human and machine capabilities are interdependent, collectively delivering value.

To embed this systemic collaboration at the heart of the organization, four major shifts are required:

1. **Workforce strategy must be redefined.** Talent planning now includes both human and non-human capacity. The organization must develop new operating models, role frameworks, and capability maps that reflect this hybrid structure
2. **Performance and productivity metrics must evolve.** Traditional effort-based KPIs give way to outcome-based metrics that reflect how effectively teams leverage both human expertise and AI-enabled execution
3. **Technology governance must expand.** AI agents must be monitored and governed as integral team members, requiring new policies on agent training, task allocation, escalation, and auditability
4. **Change leadership becomes critical.** The adoption of systemic human–AI collaboration depends on trust, engagement, and a culture of co-evolution. Leaders must articulate the purpose of AI integration, foster upskilling, and champion a mindset where technology and people are inseparable partners

Looking ahead: the future of work in AI-first organizations

The move to human–agent collaboration and a continuous execution layer is **reshaping the competitive landscape**. Organizations that excel here will gain unmatched speed, adaptability, and efficiency, while elevating their people to focus on creativity, judgement, and strategy. To seize this opportunity, companies must redefine their operating models, talent structures, and embed AI at the core, making human–AI collaboration a foundational enterprise capability.

Meet *Leila*, a senior product manager in an AI-first company.

- **07:00** – Her personal AI agent delivers a tailored briefing: market shifts, product KPIs, and flagged anomalies, all analysed and summarized
- **08:30** – Leila reviews the summary of overnight work that has been executed by the various agents
- **09:00** – Leila reports to the team on the progress made. A coordination agent transcribes decisions, assigns tasks, and updates the backlog in real time
- **14:00** – A design agent proposes layout variants based on behavioural data, ready for human review
- **16:45** – A pricing agent models revenue scenarios for a new freemium offer and recommends the most viable option for A/B testing

Leadership as system orchestrator

Leaders must shift from supervision to orchestrating people and AI, fostering collaboration, accountability, and trust

AI-first companies don't just redesign workflows or technology; they fundamentally change how leadership operates. In these organizations, leaders are no longer defined by hierarchical control or functional ownership. Instead, they take on a new mandate: to **orchestrate systems of people, AI agents, and platforms** that work together to deliver outcomes at speed and scale.

Leaders **shift from managing within silos to orchestrating across the system of work**. Their focus shifts from routine oversight to enabling frictionless collaboration, removing barriers to execution, and embedding governance and ethical clarity into every AI-human interaction. As intelligent systems take over transactional oversight, the leader's role becomes one of **sense-making, enablement, and cultural stewardship**. They set the tone, keep teams focused on outcomes, and act as internal evangelists for trust, transparency, and responsible AI use.

These shifts will redefine what it means to be effective as a leader:

Coaching replacing supervision

With AI handling execution, leaders focus on developing people, guiding decisions, and aligning teams over supervising operations

Systems thinking as a core leadership skill

Leaders understand AI, data, and capabilities across the organization and address breakdowns in their flow and span across business functions

Shared accountability across boundaries

Leaders co-own outcomes across domains, sharing accountability with AI-human teams

Ethics and trust become operational

Leaders set AI boundaries, review outcomes, and ensure responsible use; ethics is embedded in every leadership role

Actively shape culture

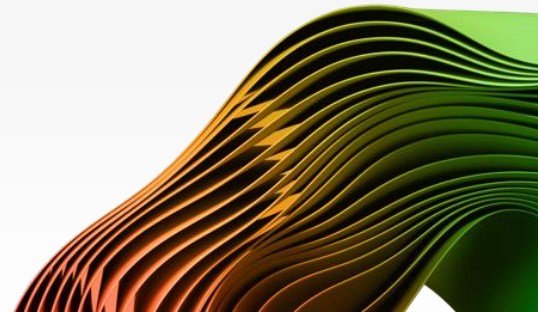
Leaders shape the behaviours, values, and social fabric that unite human teams amid increasing machine execution

Teams in AI-first companies operate with a high degree of autonomy. They execute at speed because many of their tasks are handled by AI agents. But autonomy without clarity leads to drift. This is where leadership shows up, not to dictate, but to anchor.

Leaders ensure teams understand the "why" behind their work. They create coherence across distributed, modular units. They resolve tensions that AI systems can't interpret. They clarify trade-offs, set priorities, and protect space for innovation. **Leadership is less about managing individuals** and **more about enabling high-performance ecosystems.**

Key enablers to get started

- **Establish cross-functional accountability forums:** Set up regular sessions where leaders co-own outcomes, resolve trade-offs, and break silos, moving from vertical to horizontal governance
- **Foster outcome ownership:** Focus on clear results and empower teams to share accountability across functions
- **Frame and communicate a clear "Why":** Anchor teams around purpose and outcomes, not just tasks, consistently articulate the rationale behind priorities and AI integration
- **Embed ethics and trust:** Set ethical standards for AI, monitor its use, and ensure responsible practices



Continuously learning workforce

Organizations must recruit for adaptability and embed continuous learning, evolving talent models to support ongoing skill growth

In an AI-first company hiring priorities shift. You're not hiring just for capability. You're hiring for skills that match the human-agent collaboration: **adaptability, AI fluency, and system contribution**. The best workers help improve *how the system works*, with both humans and agents on the loop.

Implications for organizations

- **Learning becomes operational, not peripheral.** It's built into workflows, sprints, and routines. It's monitored and measured like any other key capability
- **Human advantage drives competitive edge.** Success comes from intentionally deciding where AI enables, augments, or automates, and where human skills must lead, ensuring people focus on high-value work
- **Capability development focuses on activation.** Skill-building centres on real-world application. Workers engage with AI in ways that sharpen decision-making, enhance productivity, and elevate collaboration between agents and people
- **Talent models evolve for agility.** Rather than matching narrow expertise to job descriptions, organizations prioritize learning agility, contextual reasoning, and comfort in ambiguous, rapidly evolving environments
- **People systems need to keep up.** HR, L&D, and workforce planning are structured around accelerated role transitions, ongoing skill calibration, and peer-driven learning cycles. The people infrastructure is built to scale reinvention

What it means in practice

In a traditional organization, upskilling is periodic. Skills are acquired, then used, until a reorg or new tool triggers the next training wave. In AI-first companies this model breaks. Roles evolve rapidly. New tools are deployed weekly. AI agents change how tasks are performed, and often who performs them.

Adaptability becomes a core skill. AI fluency, knowing how to interact with intelligent systems effectively, becomes more important than deep expertise in a fixed domain. The best contributors are those who can explore, test, learn, and pivot quickly.

Human advantage is realized through choice. Organizations must deliberately determine where AI adds most value, and where uniquely human strengths are essential to deliver creativity, empathy, judgement, and context. Ultimately, those who master this balance will set themselves apart in an AI-powered marketplace.

Core skills for an AI-First worker

- ✓ **AI Fluency:** Understanding what AI can do, where it breaks, and how to work with it.
- ✓ **Learning agility:** The ability to absorb, apply, and evolve skills quickly.
- ✓ **Systems thinking:** Seeing beyond tasks to understand how work connects across teams, tools, and processes.
- ✓ **Problem framing and prompting:** Knowing how to ask the right questions and define the right problems.
- ✓ **Collaboration and communication:** Working effectively across hybrid teams of people and machines.
- ✓ **Judgment and ethical reasoning:** Knowing when to trust the AI and when to override it

How to get started: five actions to initiate the shift

Even as you invest in required AI technology and data capabilities, there are five no-regret moves that prepare you for becoming AI-first at the core

Real-time autonomous operating model

Outcome-driven structure

Human/agent collaboration

Leadership as system orchestrator

Continuously learning workforce

Redesign for agility and automation

Executives should drive the redesign of planning, budgeting, and operations to run in shorter, AI-informed cycles. Encourage the adoption of AI agents to automate routine tasks and enable faster, data-driven decision-making

Transition to dynamic, outcome-focused teams and structures

Lead the shift from rigid hierarchies to flexible, cross-functional teams organized around outcomes and value streams. Break down silos and foster horizontal governance to enable seamless collaboration and end-to-end accountability.

Embed AI agents into workforce strategy

Integrate AI agents as active collaborators within teams, redefining roles and responsibilities towards supervision and orchestration rather than task execution

Lead with integrated vision

Shift leadership focus from direct supervision to orchestrating systems of humans and AI agents working together. Foster a culture of trust, transparency, and ethical AI use while enabling high-performance, autonomous teams

Embed learning into daily workflows

Champion ongoing upskilling by integrating learning into everyday activities, encouraging adaptability and AI fluency. Support talent models that prioritize agility, systems thinking, and ethical decision-making to sustain workforce evolution

Becoming an AI-first organization is a staged transformation

The shift to AI-first is not a binary leap. It consists of five key phases, each with their own priorities and pitfalls

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
	Digital adoption	***Cognitive enhancement***	***AI agent integration***	***End-to-end providers***	***AI-first organizations***
	Human teams use productivity suites and lightweight tools like RPA to accelerate routine work, yet silos, static roles and centralized control still dominate. The business remains essentially analogue, with AI confined to simple rule-based automation	LLM APIs, summarizers and point AI tools inject rapid insight into discrete tasks, sharpening decisions and boosting productivity. These gains, however, stay locked inside isolated pilots owned by individual functions, leaving core structures and processes largely unchanged	Embedded copilots and domain agents actively participate in workflows inside hybrid human–AI teams. Roles shift from doing the work to supervising, validating and refining agent output, freeing workers to focus on higher-value analysis and innovation	Orchestrated networks of agents execute entire workflows across value streams, learning from exceptions and handing work off with minimal human touch. The organization pivots to system-level ownership and near-real-time optimization, reducing friction and accelerating cycle times	Foundation-model ecosystems, digital twins and continuous decision engines run the enterprise at scale, dynamically planning, executing and optimizing operations. A lean layer of human oversight concentrates on ethics, strategy and compliance while AI governs, innovates and scales every business capability
Common Pitfalls	Mistaking basic tools or process automation for true AI-driven change	Point solutions, pilot fatigue, no path to scale	Overlooking the need to redesign roles, processes and structure	Poor coordination between agents, fragmented workflows	Lack of trust layer, inadequate risk governance, leadership not redefined
Priority	Establish robust digital and data infrastructure, define AI readiness roadmap	Scale high-potential use cases, Standardize technology platforms and ensure strong business sponsorship	Redesign operating model, implement agent management frameworks	Re-architect systems of work across functions and domains, formalize agent-to-agent governance	Build governance, policy, and oversight systems for machine-led execution

Key takeaways: unlocking the AI-first blueprint

The AI-first organizational blueprint addresses key transformational components shaping the future of work and business

The transformational power of AI

AI is no longer future tech and scaling rapidly with historic adoption rates driven by advances in NLP, multi-agent systems, and low-code agent solutions

AI agents act as digital co-workers, collaborating with humans to automate workflows, accelerate innovation, and manage complex tasks continuously

The shift is systemic, redefining business, operating, and decision-making models through human-agent collaboration and AI literacy as a core leadership skill

The window for deliberate transformation is narrowing as AI compresses planning cycles and demands leadership that can match this speed

Real-time autonomous operating model	Organizations redesign planning and operations to run in shorter AI-informed cycles, supported by modular, scalable AI-driven automation and decision-making
Outcome-driven structure	Organizations move from rigid hierarchies to dynamic, cross-functional teams organized around value streams and outcomes, fostering horizontal governance and flexible resource deployment
Human/agent collaboration	Work execution is shared continuously between humans and AI agents, creating 24/7 operational capacity and elevating human roles toward orchestration, oversight, and innovation
Leadership as system orchestrator	Leaders shift from supervision to orchestrating ecosystems of people and AI agents, focusing on enabling collaboration, embedding ethics, and driving shared accountability
Continuously learning workforce	Talent models evolve to prioritize adaptability, AI fluency, and systems thinking, embedding learning into daily workflows to keep pace with rapidly evolving AI capabilities

Want to learn more?

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