

Whitepaper Series

# Konverging Lenses on AI

Atlanta Roundtable Edition | 2026

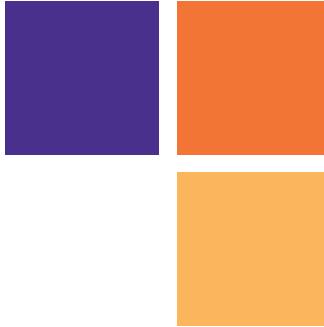


This first edition of the Konverging Lenses on AI report launches our year-round series of insights drawn from Konverge AI's Leadership Roundtables. Each report highlights essential survey results, speaker-led discussions, and the diverse perspectives contributed by attendees throughout the events organized by Konverge AI.

### **This series highlights:**

- **Leadership decision-making:** How senior leaders evaluate, prioritize, and sequence AI initiatives under real organizational constraints.
- **Practical direction:** Frameworks and decision lenses that help organizations move from experimentation to scalable execution.
- **Enterprise execution:** The operating models, governance approaches, and adoption patterns behind successful enterprise AI.





# FOREWORD

Atlanta, the Silicon Valley of the South, proved the perfect setting for our AI Leadership Roundtable, where leaders aligned and discussed transforming AI pilots into profits. Atlanta's mix of established enterprises, growing technology talent, and a culture of practical innovation made it an ideal setting to discuss topics like scaling Agentic AI, developing AI skills, and practical industry applications.

Our discussions centered on understanding today's AI landscape and what it truly takes to scale with confidence. Leaders explored how AI leadership is making AI work in practice, the vision and operating structures required to move beyond experimentation, and the discipline needed to convert early momentum into sustained business value. We also reflected on AI's growing presence in boardrooms and the increasing responsibility to clearly articulate its impact to CEOs, CFOs, and directors. This included an open and honest look at ROI expectations, adoption challenges, and the foundations required to scale responsibly.

This report captures the key insights from those conversations and reinforces one clear truth. Technology enables change, but people determine whether AI succeeds.





## KONVERGE AI ATLANTA ROUNDTABLE

### Atlanta **roundtable**

The Atlanta AI Leadership Roundtable, held on November 7, 2025, was a closed-door executive forum bringing together senior leaders across data, AI, technology, and business transformation. The goal was simple: create an environment for honest conversation about what's working, what isn't, and why so many AI pilots still struggle to scale.

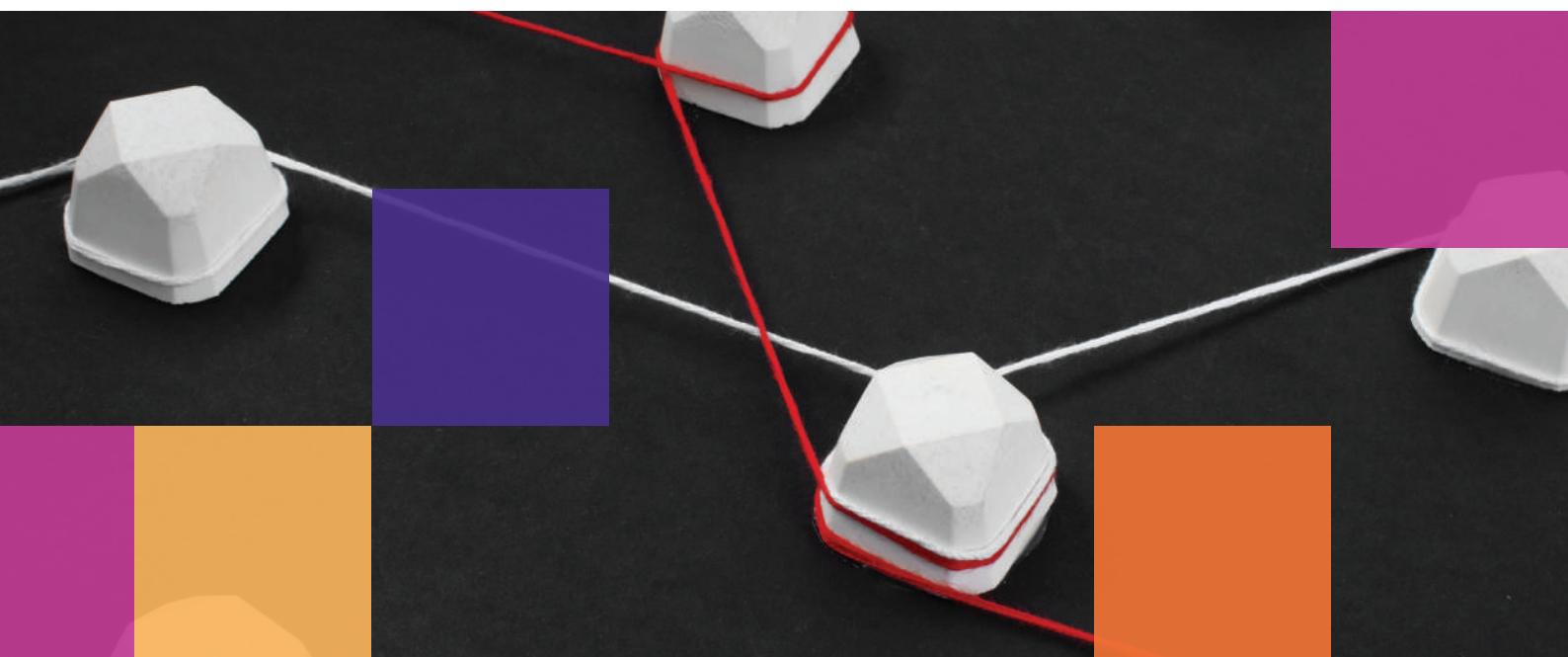
The roundtable brought together over 35 senior leaders from across industries and the agenda featured more than six focused conversations covering real-world challenges and opportunities in enterprise AI. Industry discussions mostly covered manufacturing, finance, healthcare, construction, and retail.

The audience represented a strong senior mix, with 15% CXOs, 30% vice presidents, 25% directors, 20% IT heads, and 10% senior vice presidents, ensuring a balanced and strategic dialogue across functions and leadership levels.



# AGENDA

- 1** The Hard Truth About AI Initiatives and ROI
- 2** Why AI Success in Pilots Doesn't Translate to Scale
- 3** Rationalizing AI Investments with Value-Driven Prioritization
- 4** Building the Foundations for AI at the Organizational Level
- 5** From Insight To Enterprise Execution



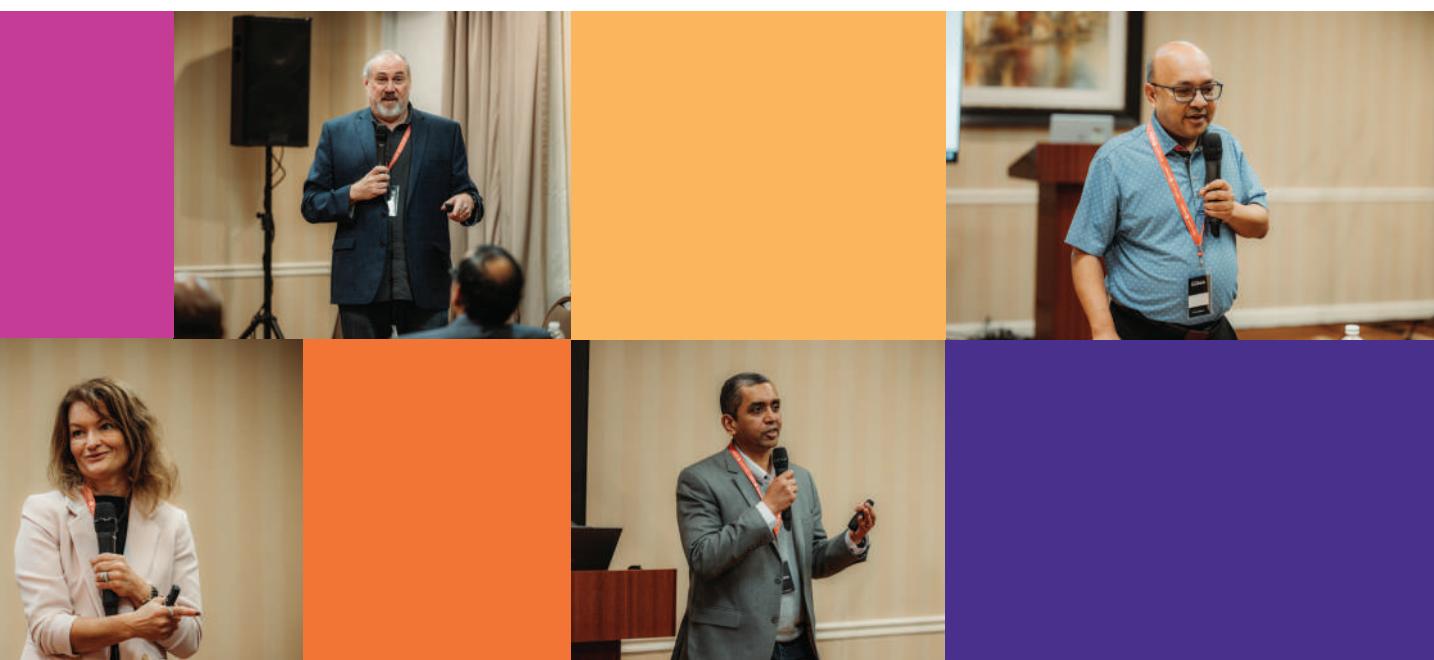
# THE HARD TRUTH ABOUT AI INITIATIVES AND ROI

Enterprise leaders at the roundtable revealed a clear pattern – while AI experimentation is happening everywhere, strategic alignment and execution maturity remain dangerously shallow. As part of the roundtable and post-event engagement, we ran four surveys whose insights reveal a clear truth: winning with AI in 2026 demands disciplined frameworks, empowered decision rights, and a decisive shift from scattered pilots to enterprise-grade operating models.

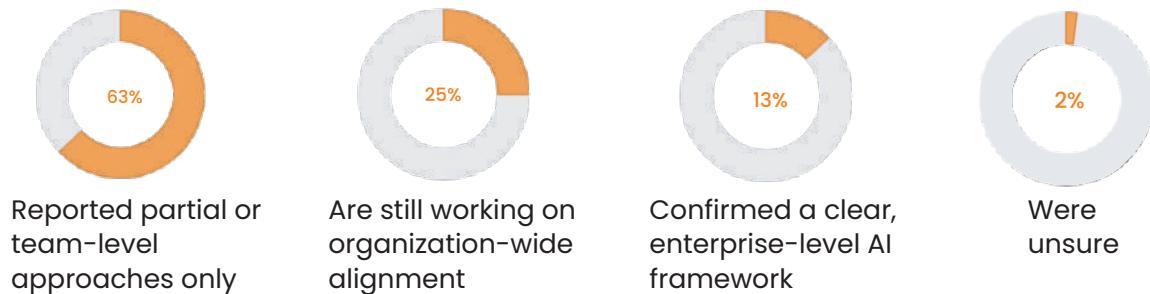
The ground level reality is that most organizations are investing in AI and have pilots in motion. But only a few organizations feel confident about their ability to scale these efforts into repeatable, enterprise-wide value. The latter part of this report covers topics like how AI leadership is evolving, why ROI conversations often break down, what it takes to build the right organizational foundations, and how to position AI effectively with CEOs, CFOs, and boards.

## What The Room Thinks – Insights from Our Event Surveys

To ground the discussion in real enterprise experience, leaders participated in live polling during the roundtable. The results reinforced many of the themes that emerged organically during conversation.



## Survey 1: Does your organization follow any AI approach or framework?

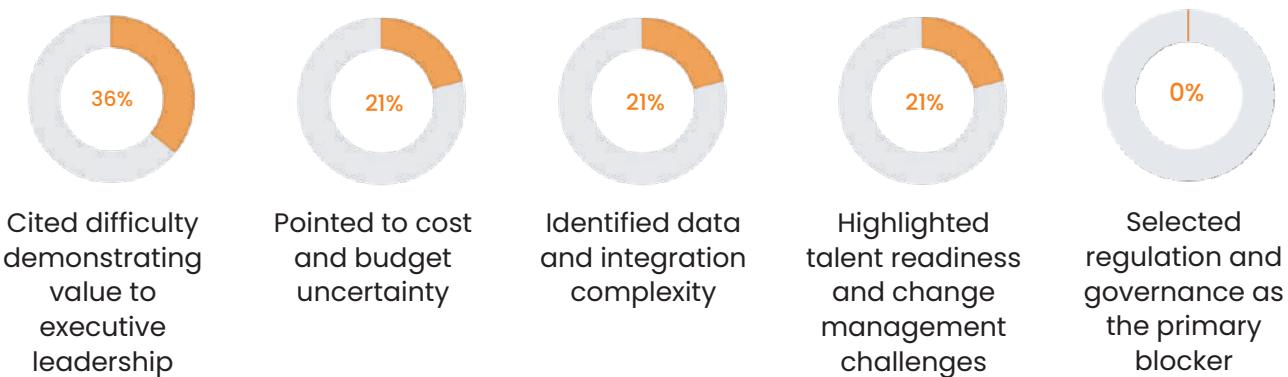


**Insights:** AI activity is widespread, but coordination and shared direction remain limited.

### Implications for CXOs

This gap signals a major opportunity: enterprises that standardize AI frameworks and decision rights in 2026 will outpace peers still experimenting in silos, shifting from fragmented efforts to scalable, repeatable impact.

## Survey 2: Why is AI ROI not adding up today?

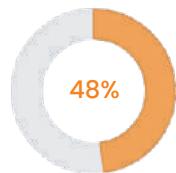


**In=sights:** ROI challenges are driven more by execution and alignment than by compliance or tooling.

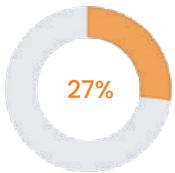
### Implications for CXOs

For leaders, this underscores the need to elevate AI from isolated technical projects to business-aligned, value-owned initiatives—where success is measured not by models deployed, but by processes transformed and outcomes delivered impact.

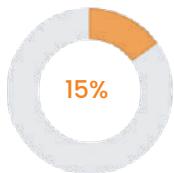
### Survey 3: Where do AI initiatives most often stall?



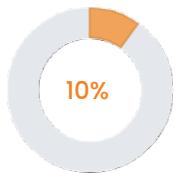
Said initiatives stall during the transition from pilot to production



Cited challenges integrating AI into core business processes



Pointed to lack of sustained executive sponsorship



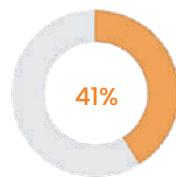
Highlighted unclear operational ownership

Insights: The “pilot-to-production” cliff remains the biggest failure point.

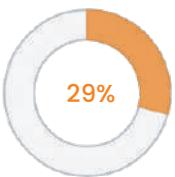
#### Implications for CXOs

Enterprises that industrialize MLOps, redefine ownership, and turn AI into an operating capability—not a series of proofs of concept—will be the ones that finally break the cycle of abandoned pilots.

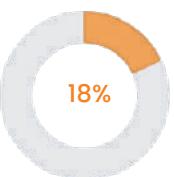
### Survey 4: What capability is most missing in enterprise AI programs today?



Selected enterprise-level prioritization and decision rights



Pointed to clear business ownership and accountability



Cited workforce AI literacy and adoption readiness



Identified platform standardization and tooling

Insights: The most critical gaps are governance clarity, ownership, and prioritization, not technology.

#### Implications for CXOs

This points to the next evolution of enterprise AI: Organizations must build an AI operating model that unifies decision authority, business accountability, and workforce readiness—unlocking scale far beyond what platforms alone can deliver.

## WHY AI SUCCESS IN PILOTS DOESN'T TRANSLATE TO SCALE

As AI moves from experimentation into core operations, many organizations are discovering that the biggest barriers are not models or algorithms, but the realities of how their enterprises are built. Leaders at the roundtable shared a consistent view. Most AI pilots work in controlled environments, but struggle once exposed to real data, real users, and real business processes.

At the foundation, data and technology constraints remain a major hurdle. Across industries, data is often unstructured or locked inside legacy systems that were never designed to support advanced analytics or AI.

### Common legacy constraints leaders described include:

- Procurement and finance running on outdated ERP platforms
- Fragmented data across business functions and geographies
- Manual reconciliations and spreadsheet driven workflows
- Operational data stored in PDFs, emails, and free text
- Limited APIs and weak system integration
- Inconsistent master data and definitions

These issues make it difficult to move AI pilots into reliable, scalable AI systems. Alongside technology, organizational challenges like gaps in skills or unrealistic leadership expectations from AI further slow progress.

### Why AI Pilots Stall and Friction Points:

Where Pilots Break Down	What Leaders Experience	What Head of AI/CAIOs Recommend
<b>Too many disconnected AI pilots</b>	Teams move fast locally but the enterprise cannot align	Establish an Enterprise AI Portfolio, enforce centralized intake and implement use case prioritization framework.

<b>No clear scale ownership</b>	Pilots succeed but no function owns rollout or adoption	Define ownership early; create a scale champion (BU leader or product owner) accountable for enterprise rollout.
<b>Difficulty proving value</b>	Teams move fast locally but the enterprise cannot align	Standardize value frameworks linked to revenue, cost, and risk; partner with Finance to validate impact models.
<b>Limited enterprise visibility</b>	Leaders cannot see all AI efforts in one place	An AI Control Tower should track initiatives, risks, owners, and ROI across the company. AI inventory analysis should be part of yearly business review.
<b>Competing priorities</b>	Business, IT, and data teams push in different directions	Cross-functional AI Steering Committee is important to align priorities and resolve conflicts early.
<b>Weak change management</b>	Users do not trust or adopt AI-driven outputs	Structured adoption is must. Create a playbook and prioritize AI literacy for executives, early user involvement, employee training, and explainability.
<b>Short-term funding models</b>	Projects are funded as experiments rather than programs	Structure your AI journey to focus on multi-year product funding for AI. Tie budgets to strategic programs rather than isolated AI pilots.
<b>Governance added too late</b>	Risk and compliance concerns appear after deployment	Embed Responsible AI, governance checkpoints, and create guardrails from day 1.

Together, these factors create friction just when AI initiatives need momentum. The result is not lack of innovation, but a widening gap between what AI can do and what enterprises can actually deploy.

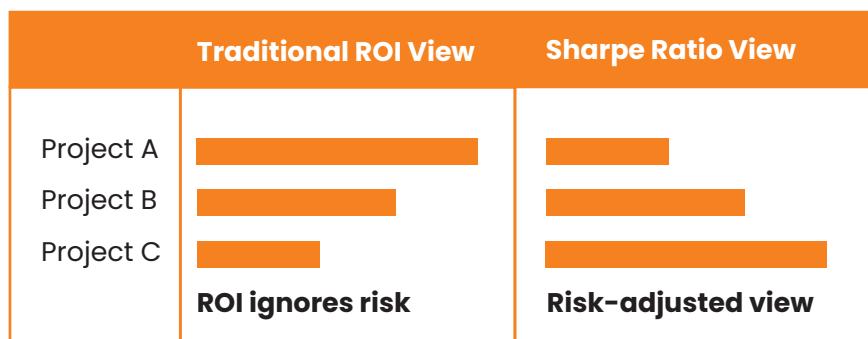
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## RATIONALIZING AI INVESTMENTS WITH VALUE-DRIVEN PRIORITIZATION

As organizations mature in their AI journey, the primary constraint shifts from technology to decision quality. Most enterprises today have no shortage of AI ideas. What they lack is a disciplined way to decide which initiatives deserve to move beyond experimentation and into the core of the business.

Leaders at the roundtable agreed that traditional ROI-based prioritization only tells part of the story. While expected returns are important, they fail to account for execution risk, which is often the real reason AI pilots stall. Initiatives that look attractive on paper frequently struggle once they encounter real data, shared workflows, and organizational complexity.

To address this gap, leaders discussed adopting a risk-adjusted prioritization lens, inspired by the Sharpe Ratio commonly used in finance. Applied to AI, this approach evaluates initiatives not just on potential value, but on the effort and risk required to realize that value in practice.



### AI Sharpe Ratio:

$$\frac{\text{(Expected AI Value} - \text{Baseline Performance})}{\text{Implementation Risk}}$$

In this framing, implementation risk includes data readiness, integration complexity, change adoption, governance overhead, and dependency on scarce skills. Leaders noted that initiatives with the highest theoretical upside often carry disproportionate execution risk. In contrast, initiatives with moderate upside but lower risk tend to deliver faster, build trust, and create reusable patterns that reduce risk over time.

This shift in thinking fundamentally changes prioritization conversations. Instead of asking which initiative promises the highest return, leaders ask which initiative offers the strongest risk-adjusted value.

However, prioritization alone is not enough. Even well-chosen initiatives can fail if they are sequenced poorly or pushed too aggressively.



The effort versus value matrix helps translate prioritization into execution. Leaders described using this view to intentionally sequence AI initiatives. Early focus is placed on Quick Wins that deliver visible business impact with manageable effort, helping establish credibility and sponsorship. As organizational readiness improves, attention shifts toward Strategic Bets, where higher effort is justified by enterprise-level impact.

Initiatives that fall into Low Impact or High Risk categories are not abandoned, but deliberately deferred until data maturity, ownership clarity, or operating readiness improves.

Together, these two lenses create a practical decision framework. The Sharpe-style view determines what is worth pursuing, while the effort versus value matrix determines when and how to pursue it. Leaders agreed that this discipline is what separates organizations that scale AI systematically from those that remain stuck cycling through promising but isolated pilots.

# BUILDING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR AI AT THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

As AI moves from experimentation into enterprise operations, organizations are realizing that technology alone is not enough. The ability to scale AI depends on leadership, operating models, governance, and people. Across the Atlanta roundtable, leaders consistently emphasized that without strong organizational foundations, even technically successful AI initiatives struggle to last.

## Why effective AI leadership is now essential

AI leadership is no longer about running a data science team. It is about bridging business ambition and execution reality. Successful AI leaders balance business value, governance, and execution. Early in the journey, they focus on value to build credibility. Over time, governance and discipline increase to make that value sustainable.

AI leaders also act as translators. They speak the language of finance and operations to CEOs and CFOs, while guiding technical teams on priorities and risk. Without this layer, organizations either move too slowly or move too fast without controls.



## When and why organizations need an AI Center of Excellence

Leaders agreed there is no fixed moment to create a CoE, but there is a clear pattern. Early on, a small central team drives quick wins and standards

As adoption grows, a formal CoE becomes essential to coordinate priorities, avoid duplication, and bring governance into the flow of delivery.

Governance is not a brake on innovation. It is what allows AI to operate safely at scale.

**ALIGN** → **BUILD** → **CAPITALIZE**

### **How operating models evolve with maturity**

Most organizations move from a centralized model to a hub and spoke structure, and then to a federated model where AI is embedded inside functions. Skipping these stages usually leads to risk and inconsistency.

### **Why workforce skilling and AI literacy are non-negotiable**

Leaders stressed that AI fails when users do not trust or understand it. AI literacy must extend beyond technical teams to finance, operations, and frontline managers. Training and communication turn AI into a working part of the business rather than a side project.

Without this foundation, even strong platforms struggle to deliver value.



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## FROM INSIGHT TO ENTERPRISE EXECUTION

The Atlanta roundtable made one point clear. Most organizations are no longer asking whether to invest in AI. They are asking how to move from early experimentation to sustained, enterprise-level value. The discussion shifted from what AI can do to how leaders can create the conditions for AI to work at scale.

Across industries, leaders agreed that progress now depends less on technology choices and more on execution discipline. The organizations that are pulling ahead are not those running the most pilots, but those that are building repeatable ways to turn pilots into operating capability.

### What leaders can do in the next 6 to 12 months

Leaders identified a focused set of priorities that matter most over the next year:

- Reduce the number of AI initiatives to those tied directly to business outcomes
- Assign clear business ownership for every AI use case
- Establish financial and operational metrics to measure success
- Invest in platforms and data foundations that support scale
- Create governance that evolves with usage rather than blocking early progress

These steps are less about adding complexity and more about creating clarity.

### Practical steps to move from experimentation to scale

Organizations that succeed do not try to scale everything at once. They select a small number of high impact use cases, prove their value, and then use those successes to build momentum.

Leaders discussed the importance of:

- Designing pilots with production in mind
- Involving business users early
- Planning data and integration needs from the start
- Securing funding that extends beyond proof of concept

This approach turns pilots into building blocks rather than dead ends.

### **Balancing speed, governance, and trust**

One of the strongest insights from the event was that speed and governance do not have to be opposites. Early value builds trust. Trust makes it easier to introduce governance. Over time, governance allows organizations to move faster with less risk.

The mistake many organizations make is trying to impose enterprise-wide controls before value is visible.

### **Creating momentum without over engineering**

Leaders emphasized that momentum comes from results, not from frameworks. Showing a working use case that improves revenue, cost, or risk does more to unlock investment than any roadmap.

### **What separates companies that scale AI**

The difference is not technology. It is leadership alignment, clear ownership, and disciplined execution.

Stuck in Pilots	→	Scaled AI
Many Small Pilots		Few High Impact Programs
No Clear Owners		Business Owned Use Cases
Unclear ROI		Measured Business Outcomes
Isolated Teams		Shared Platform and Data
Governance Added Late		Governance Built Around Value

# PATH FROM “PILOTS TO PROFITS”

The Atlanta AI Leadership Roundtable reinforced a fundamental insight that applies across industries and organizational contexts. The gap between AI pilots and profits is not a technology problem. The capabilities exist. The models work. The platforms are available.

The gap lies in leadership alignment, operating models, and execution discipline. Organizations that address these dimensions deliberately are beginning to translate experimentation into sustained business value. AI delivers its greatest impact when it is treated as an enterprise capability rather than a standalone technology initiative.

Technology will continue to evolve at a rapid pace, and organizations cannot wait for perfect solutions or complete clarity. The most effective approach is to start with achievable wins, build capability systematically, learn from each initiative, and scale what proves valuable while refining or stopping what does not.

The future belongs to organizations that can combine urgency with discipline. The insights shared in Atlanta outline a practical path forward.

The next step is execution.

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We extend our sincere thanks to the speakers and executive participants of the Atlanta AI Leadership Roundtable. Their thoughtful contributions and real-world perspectives are reflected in the insights presented in this whitepaper.

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