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From early impact to enduring advantage

The intelligent superhighway you need to unlock value from AI

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A more than 30-year veteran of Accenture, Manish previously served as CEO of The Americas, the largest of Accenture's worldwide geographic markets which includes the US, Canada and Latin America. He also served as CEO of North America.

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With decades of experience in technology-led transformation, Sen has helped organizations build resilient digital cores, craft forward-looking strategies, and cultivate future-ready talent. His leadership has enabled enterprises to become AI-first—unlocking growth, streamlining operations, and reimagining business models. He is a member of Accenture's Global Management Committee.

Recognized globally as one of the top 25 leaders in Artificial Intelligence consulting, Sen holds a master's degree in operations research from Arizona State University and completed the Advanced Management Program at Harvard Business School. He is currently pursuing studies in MusicProduction at Berklee College of Music, reflecting his belief in the intersection of creativity and technology.

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Every executive today is living through some version of artificial-intelligence whiplash. The technology is moving at highway speed. Inside most companies, however, progress remains slow and uneven. Many experience the business equivalent of driving on a congested highway that blunts the speed, comfort and safety that technologically advanced vehicles were designed to deliver.

The limitation is not the technology but the roadbed. Decades of data debt, brittle systems, undocumented processes and outdated skills form a congested highway no model, no matter how powerful, can outrun. Few organizations have scaled AI seamlessly across the full enterprise because doing so requires a longer reinvention of how work, data and technology come together. Until leaders confront this reality, the gap between AI's promise and its payoff will continue to widen.

86%

of organizations plan to increase AI investment in 2026.

To take full advantage of what AI has to offer, enterprises need an intelligent superhighway. AI is advancing faster than organizations can absorb it. To capture anything close to its economic promise, companies must build modern, connected and governed internal infrastructure designed for scale. Without it, AI remains stuck in enterprise traffic.

The stakes are rising. Nearly nine in ten organizations (86%) plan to increase AI investment in 2026, and most view AI as beneficial to revenue growth. Yet only 21% report redesigning end-to-end processes with AI at the core, according to our recent Pulse of Change survey of 3,650 executives across 20 industries and 20 countries.[1] Systemic readiness has become the binding constraint.

Our research and experience across some 6,000 AI engagements reveals five truths that separate companies accelerating ahead from those stuck on the shoulder.

1. Material financial impact from AI is backloaded

The first truth is that AI's enterprise-level financial impact is backloaded. Meaningful value on the income statement follows the enterprise modernization required to support AI at scale, and that work takes 12 months or more, depending on your starting point. Early stages are dominated by sequencing efforts to clean data and fix processes so they reinforce rather than conflict.

A major regional bank illustrates the point. After more than a year of pilots in enabling corporate functions with minimal returns, it adopted a practical roadmap linking eleven priority workflows through a unified intelligence layer that sits on top of the technology stack over an 18–36-month horizon. Results now compound, with a clear trajectory toward a materially positive return.[2]

An energy provider operating in a reliability-critical sector followed a similar logic. Rather than scaling early wins prematurely, it modernized its digital core and connected codified workflows end to end. The result was a 90% reduction in analysis time and a foundation capable of supporting intelligence rather than resisting it.

Meaningful value on the income statement takes 12 months or more.

2. Most organizations are not operationally ready

70%

of technology budgets still support legacy systems.

Most organizations remain operationally unprepared for advanced AI because the way work currently moves through the enterprise is incompatible with intelligence at scale. About 70% of technology budgets still support legacy systems that slow the flow of information.[3] While standard operating procedures exist, critical decisions, process handoffs and exceptions remain opaque and unstructured, embedded in emails, conversations and tacit judgment. This lack of codification limits reliability, governance and scale.

Until decision logic and process flows are explicitly captured and integrated into systems, AI pilots perform well inside isolated tasks but falter when asked to traverse the enterprise. In practice, agentic operating procedures must increasingly mirror, and in some cases replace, standard operating procedures, often revealing where entire processes must be reimagined.

Global leader in water treatment and hygiene solutions Ecolab, for example, is redesigning its lead-to-cash workflow with utility, orchestrator and super agents that link sales, fulfillment and billing.

3. Success comes from strong foundations

The third truth is that AI delivers meaningful impact only when built on strong foundations. Companies pulling ahead are not chasing the latest model. They invest in the conditions that allow any model to perform: a reinvention-ready digital core characterized by clean data, modern architectures, disciplined governance, AI-enhanced cloud environments, semantic consistency, responsible-use guardrails, redesigned processes and a workforce equipped to partner with intelligent systems. As executives have discovered, confidence in AI outputs rises only when data provides consistent context, and better context drives better decisions.

Leading UK bank NatWest Group demonstrates this effect. By replacing fragmented systems with a single, bank-wide data platform, the bank is creating a trusted data marketplace. It feeds every part of the organization with governed, real-time data critical to better day-to-day decision-making and more personalized experiences for more than 20 million customers.

When data provides consistent context, it drives better decisions.

4. AI value depends on reinventing talent and work

1/3

of executives say their talent strategy is fully integrated with their AI strategy.

The fourth truth is that unlocking AI value depends on reinventing talent and work. Technology does not transform enterprises; people do. Yet only one-third of 1,320 executives we surveyed say their talent strategy is fully integrated with their AI strategy.[4]

Most organizations still deploy AI into job structures never designed for human-machine collaboration, leaving roles ambiguous, incentives outdated and leadership behaviors misaligned. While more than 40% of executives report upskilling employees for AI-enhanced work, fewer than 10% are redesigning roles or responsibilities.[5]

Leaders take a different approach. One financial services firm, for example, mapped work at the task level, revealing how shifting repetitive data processing to AI agents could unlock up to 30% more capacity for human creativity and insight.

5. A “future-ready” AI operating model is vital

The fifth truth is that AI cannot scale inside an operating model built for a pre-AI era. Governance, decision rights, architecture and the relationship between business and technology must be redesigned.

BBVA offers a blueprint. After unifying data, redesigning workflows, strengthening governance and restructuring roles, loan approvals fell from days to hours, personalization improved and predictive digital channels attracted millions of new customers. The breakthrough did not come from better algorithms, but from an operating model capable of absorbing intelligence at scale.

Taken together, these five truths reveal the underlying requirements for intelligence to move through an enterprise, and why so many efforts stall despite heavy investment. The returns described in the first truth are realized only after organizations complete the other four truths: becoming operationally ready, building strong foundations, reinventing work and adopting a future-ready operating model. As with any major infrastructure project, accommodating the resulting higher volumes of intelligence traveling at greater speed with reliability should follow a predictable path.

The returns described in the first truth are realized only after completing the other four.

The three-phase path to systemic AI

Progress from pilots to scale begins with **Siloed AI**, where pilots sit in pockets. Many organizations attain **Structural AI**, the critical bridge where data, platforms, workflows and governance are rebuilt to carry intelligence across the enterprise. Only then can organizations reach **Systemic AI**, where composite agents orchestrate work end to end, decisions accelerate and value compounds continuously. In effect, AI becomes embedded in the organization's operating system.

Few organizations reach this final stage. Most remain between on-ramps and unfinished roads, uncertain why progress has paused.

The intelligent superhighway is the strategic infrastructure of the next decade. Companies that build it, by codifying processes, modernizing data, workflows, governance, talent systems and operating models, will widen their lead quarter after quarter. Those that hesitate will find the cost of delay is not temporary but structural, as value, talent and customers migrate to the organizations that rebuild their roads first.

And that is the point. The technology is ready. The question is whether enterprises are. Leaders who act now will own the fast lane, gaining advantages that strengthen with every mile of progress. Those who wait will find themselves stuck in enterprise traffic, watching others define the next era of economic performance.

Organizations that persist through the early flat stretch will build the systems required for returns to compound.

AI rewards commitment, not impatience. Nobody wants a racecar in a traffic jam.

References

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3. Estimate drawn from Accenture client experience.
4. Accenture, Talent Reinventors: Delivering value with and for people in the age of AI, March 2026.
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About Accenture

Accenture is a leading solutions and global professional services company that helps the world's leading enterprises reinvent by building their digital core and unleashing the power of AI to create value at speed across the enterprise, bringing together the talent of our approximately 786,000 people, our proprietary assets and platforms and deep ecosystem relationships. Our strategy is to be the reinvention partner of choice for our clients and to be the most AI-enabled, client-focused, great place to work in the world. Through our Reinvention Services we bring together our capabilities across strategy, consulting, technology, operations, Song and Industry X with our deep industry expertise to create and deliver solutions and services for our clients. Our purpose is to deliver on the promise of technology and human ingenuity and we measure our success by the 360° value we create for all our stakeholders.

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