REPORT 03 · MARKET POSITION

The Competitive Advantage of Being AI-Ready

The gap between AI leaders and laggards is compounding, not closing — and readiness, not access, is what separates them.

READINESS · MARKET POSITION · DIGITAL FOUNDATIONS · 11 MIN READ

THE HEADLINE NUMBER

5x

the revenue increase AI "future-built" companies see, versus everyone else — plus 3x the cost reduction.

Source: BCG, The Widening AI Value Gap — Build for the Future 2025.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- AI "future-built" companies — 5% of firms today — post **5x the revenue increase and 3x the cost reduction** of the rest of the market.
- Industries most exposed to AI show **3x higher revenue-per-employee growth** than the least exposed, and their productivity growth has nearly **quadrupled since 2022** while laggard industries flatlined.
- Workers with AI skills now command a **62% wage premium**, up from 57% a year earlier — proof the market is already pricing readiness.
- Readiness compounds from the infrastructure up: companies that build digital foundations before layering on AI see **roughly double the return, 40% faster**.
- The gap is widening, not narrowing — which means the cost of waiting to become "AI-ready" rises every quarter.

Leaders aren't a little ahead. They're compounding.

BCG's 2025 global survey of 1,250 senior executives across nine industries scored AI maturity on 41 capabilities and split the market into three tiers: 5% "future-built," systematically generating substantial value; 35% "scaling," beginning to see returns; and 60% still capturing almost none. The future-built group isn't marginally better — it reports double the revenue growth and 40% more cost savings than laggards, on top of the underlying 5x/3x gap in absolute terms.

AI-EXPOSED VS. LEAST-EXPOSED INDUSTRIES, 2018–2024 (PWC)

Productivity growth

Headcount growth (vs. 2018 baseline)

Source: PwC, Global AI Jobs Barometer, 2025–2026.

PwC's analysis of close to a billion job ads and thousands of financial reports found productivity growth in the most AI-exposed industries (financial services, software publishing) nearly quadrupled from 7% to 27% between 2018 and 2024, while the least-exposed industries (mining, hospitality) saw growth slip from 10% to 9% over the same period. Revenue per employee is growing three times faster in the most AI-exposed industries. And by PwC's 2026 update, headcount at the most AI-exposed companies grew 52% against a 2018 baseline, versus 36% for the least exposed — AI readiness is now visibly correlated with company growth, not job loss.

"62%"

— the average wage premium for workers with AI skills, up from 57% a year earlier and as high as 118% in some sectors.

— PwC, 2026 Global AI Jobs Barometer

Readiness starts with the foundations, not the model

The recurring finding underneath all of this: readiness is mostly an infrastructure and data property, decided before AI is even switched on. Gartner traces 85% of AI project failures to poor data quality. BCG's 2026 study of private-equity portfolio companies found that businesses which modernize core digital systems *before* layering on AI achieve nearly double the return on invested capital, and get there 40% faster than those that don't sequence it that way — with digital-maturity gaps causing 5%+ valuation haircuts at exit for 40% of the investors surveyed. Access itself is uneven, too: in the least AI-mature sectors, under half of employees have access to basic GenAI tools, versus more than 70% in mature sectors.

The data

FINDING	SOURCE	YEAR
Future-built firms (5%) see 5x the revenue growth and 3x the cost reduction of others	BCG, Widening AI Value Gap	2025
AI leaders show 2x revenue growth, 40% more cost savings than laggards	BCG press release	2025
Productivity growth in most AI-exposed industries: 7%→27% (2018–24); least exposed: 10%→9%	PwC, AI Jobs Barometer	2025
Wage premium for AI skills: 62%, up from 57%; headcount growth 52% vs. 36%	PwC, 2026 AI Jobs Barometer	2026
Digital-first sequencing yields ~2x ROIC, 40% faster AI deployment for PE portfolio companies	BCG, PE Value Creation study	2026
85% of AI project failures trace to poor data quality	Gartner	2025

COMETX PERSPECTIVE

"AI-ready" gets treated like a technology purchase; the evidence says it's closer to an organizational fitness level, built over years of decisions about data, systems, and people — and it compounds in exactly the way fitness does. The 5% pulling away today were not the 5% who bought the newest model; they were the ones whose data and digital foundations could actually support one. That has an uncomfortable implication for anyone waiting to "see how AI shakes out" before investing: the readiness work — the audits, the data cleanup, the skills — is the same work regardless of when you start it, except it's cheaper and faster relative to competitors the earlier you start.

Where CometX fits

Readiness is a diagnostic and foundations problem — three CometX practices meet it directly:

01 **Applied research**

A readiness needs-assessment that benchmarks where your organization actually sits against sector norms — before you decide how much to invest.

02 **Accessibility & digital foundations**

WCAG and systems audits are, in effect, a digital-foundations check — exactly the "modernize first" sequencing BCG's research ties to faster, larger AI returns.

03

Consulting & advisory

Strategy work that turns a readiness gap into a sequenced closing plan, with a measurement note for how you'll know it's working.

Request a proposal

Explore accessibility & audits →

SOURCES

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2. Boston Consulting Group, "AI Leaders Outpace Laggards with Double the Revenue Growth and 40% More Cost Savings", 2025.
3. PwC, "The Fearless Future: 2025 Global AI Jobs Barometer", June 2025.
4. PwC, "AI Reshapes Global Labour Market into Two Distinct Paths" — 2026 Global AI Jobs Barometer, June 2026.
5. Boston Consulting Group, "Private Equity: Value Creation in Portfolio Companies", as reported by AI Assembly Lines, 2026.
6. Gartner, AI project failure and data-quality forecasts, as reported in Astrafy, 2025.

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