

REPORT 01 · ORGANIZATIONAL CAPABILITY

The End of the AI Pilot

Why organizations must build AI capabilities — because running one more proof of concept is no longer a strategy.

ADOPTION VS. VALUE

PILOT PURGATORY

ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS

12 MIN READ

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- AI adoption is now near-universal — **88% of organizations** use it in at least one business function — but **roughly two-thirds remain stuck in pilot or experiment mode**, never reaching enterprise scale.
- Independent research converges on the same order of magnitude: **88–95% of enterprise AI pilots never reach production.**
- The blockers are almost never the model. They are data quality, workflow rigidity, operating-model inertia, and the absence of a way to measure value.
- Abandonment is accelerating, not stabilizing — the share of companies scrapping most of their AI initiatives **jumped from 17% to 42% in a single year.**
- The fix is capability, not another pilot: high performers invest in workflow redesign, measurement discipline, and people — not just tools.

88%

USE AI IN ≥1
FUNCTION

~66%

STILL IN PILOT /
EXPERIMENT MODE

6%

ARE "AI HIGH
PERFORMERS" (5%+
EBIT IMPACT)

88–95%

OF PILOTS NEVER
REACH PRODUCTION

Adoption solved itself. Value didn't.

McKinsey's 2025 State of AI survey — 1,993 respondents across 105 countries, fielded June–July 2025 — found that 88% of organizations now use AI in at least one business function, up from 78% in 2024. Generative AI use specifically jumped from 33% to 72% year over year. On paper, the adoption question is closed.

What isn't closed is the value question. The same survey found that nearly two-thirds of organizations have not yet begun scaling AI across the enterprise — they are still running experiments in isolated pockets, without deep integration into workflows. Only about 6% qualify as "AI high performers," defined as seeing more than 5% EBIT impact from AI. BCG's parallel research puts it even more starkly: 60% of companies are generating "hardly any material value" from AI despite real investment, and only 5% qualify as "future-built" — organizations systematically capturing substantial value.

THE FUNNEL FROM ADOPTION TO IMPACT



Source: McKinsey, The State of AI in 2025.

Pilot purgatory, by the numbers

"Pilot purgatory" is the term analysts now use for a specific organizational state: a project has cleared feasibility testing but never advances to production — not cancelled, not resourced, not scaled, just perpetually pending. Three independent research streams converge on roughly the same scale of the problem, measured at different points in the same lifecycle:

- **IDC**, in its research with Lenovo, found that for every 33 AI proofs of concept an enterprise launches, only about 4 reach production — an 88% failure rate.
- **MIT's NANDA Initiative** put GenAI pilot failure even higher, at 95%, concluding the cause is "not primarily the model technology... but the integration into workflows, organisational alignment, and underlying data readiness."
- **Gartner** forecasts that 30% of generative AI projects will be abandoned outright after the proof-of-concept stage, and traces 85% of AI project failures to poor data quality.

And the trend line is worsening, not improving: S&P Global Market Intelligence found the share of companies abandoning most of their AI initiatives rose from 17% to 42% in a single year.

"It is not primarily the model technology that is failing, but the integration into workflows, organisational alignment, and underlying data readiness."

— MIT NANDA Initiative, on why enterprise GenAI pilots fail to scale

What separates the 6% who scale

The organizations that do convert pilots into enterprise value don't run better pilots — they run a different playbook. McKinsey's high performers set growth objectives (not just efficiency targets), fundamentally redesign workflows around AI rather than bolting it onto existing processes, deploy across functions rather than in isolated pockets, and invest at a different order of magnitude: 20%+ of digital budgets, against a much smaller share for everyone else. BCG's AI at Work 2025 survey of over 10,600 workers found the same pattern from the ground up: companies unlocking AI's full potential invest heavily in people — training and change management — and only 25% of frontline workers say their leaders provide enough guidance on AI in the first place.

That reframes the whole exercise. A pilot answers "does this work?" Capability answers "can we do this repeatedly, safely, and profitably at scale?" — a question about data governance, workflow design, measurement, and people, not about which model to buy next.

The data

FINDING	SOURCE	YEAR
88% of organizations use AI in ≥1 function; only 6% are "high performers" (5%+ EBIT impact)	McKinsey, State of AI	2025
For every 33 AI POCs launched, only ~4 reach production (88% failure rate)	IDC / Lenovo, AI CIO Playbook	2025
95% of enterprise GenAI pilots fail to reach scaled adoption	MIT NANDA Initiative	2025
85% of AI project failures trace to poor data quality; 30% of GenAI POCs will be abandoned	Gartner	2025
Share of firms abandoning most AI initiatives rose from 17% to 42% in one year	S&P Global Market Intelligence	2025
60% of companies capture "hardly any material value" from AI; 5% are "future-built"	BCG, Widening AI Value Gap	2025
Only 25% of frontline workers say leaders give enough guidance on AI	BCG, AI at Work	2025

COMETX PERSPECTIVE

Every one of these numbers describes the same failure at a different altitude: organizations keep testing whether AI works, when the technology has already answered that question. What's untested is whether *the organization* works — whether its data is governed well enough to feed a live system, whether its workflows can be redesigned rather than merely automated, and whether anyone is measuring the result against a business outcome rather than a demo. A pilot is a diagnostic. Mistaking it for a strategy is why two-thirds of organizations are stuck. Building the underlying capability — evidence about what's actually broken, a workflow and measurement redesign, and the internal skills to sustain it — is a different, much less glamorous project than launching another pilot. It's also the only one that has ever gotten anyone out of pilot purgatory.

Where CometX fits

Escaping pilot purgatory is a capability-building problem, and it maps onto three of CometX's five practices directly:

01 Applied research

A rapid evidence review or needs assessment that diagnoses exactly why your stalled pilots aren't scaling — data readiness, workflow fit, or something else — before you spend another budget cycle guessing.

02 Consulting & advisory

An evaluation framework and theory of change that turns "we ran a pilot" into a monitored capability build, with the measurement note that tells you in six months whether it worked.

03 Training & capacity building

Data literacy and facilitation training that builds the internal fluency to run and interpret AI initiatives — the missing layer behind most abandoned pilots.

[Request a proposal](#)[Explore applied research →](#)

SOURCES

1. McKinsey & Company / QuantumBlack, "The State of AI in 2025: Agents, Innovation, and Transformation", 2025.
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3. Boston Consulting Group, "AI at Work 2025: Momentum Builds, But Gaps Remain", June 2025.
4. IDC / Lenovo, "AI CIO Playbook 2025," as reported in SoftwareSeni, 2025–2026.
5. MIT NANDA Initiative, GenAI enterprise pilot research, as reported in UNBPO Quarterly, 2025.
6. Gartner, generative AI project abandonment and data-quality forecasts, as reported in Astrapy, 2025.
7. S&P Global Market Intelligence, AI initiative abandonment rates, as reported in SoftwareSeni, 2026.

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