

SONATA



SONATA SOFTWARE

The Modernization
Engineering Company

Whitepaper

Why we need to think differently about **AI**



Table of Contents

1. Executive summary ----- 3

2. Introduction ----- 5

3. The story companies have heard about AI ----- 6

4. Why the old narrative is no longer enough ----- 7

5. What thinking differently about AI means ----- 9

6. An enterprise AI agenda ----- 11

7. Leadership priorities for the next 12 months ----- 13

8. Conclusion ----- 14

9. Research sources ----- 16

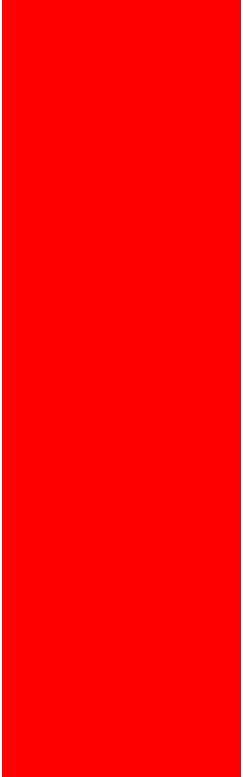
10. About the author ----- 17



Introduction

Enterprise AI is entering a decisive stage. The initial phase was defined by excitement, experimentation, and rapid access to tools that could summarize information, generate content, assist with coding, automate routine tasks, and improve individual productivity. These early gains helped organizations understand AI's potential and created momentum across functions. But they also created a new challenge: many enterprises now have widespread AI activity without a clear path to scaled business value.

This is why the conversation needs to change. AI can no longer be viewed only as a set of tools that help people work faster. Its deeper significance lies in how it can reshape workflows, decision-making, knowledge management, customer experiences, operating models, and the relationship between human and machine work. The enterprises that benefit most will not be those that simply adopt more AI tools, but those that rethink how work itself should be designed in an AI-enabled environment.



The urgency is heightened by a widening gap between experimentation and impact. Many organizations are running pilots, deploying copilots, and encouraging adoption, yet only a smaller group is translating AI into measurable improvements in revenue, productivity, risk management, service quality, and speed to market. This gap is not primarily a technology problem. It is a leadership, operating model, data, governance, and change management problem.

At the same time, the economics and capabilities of AI are advancing quickly. As models become more powerful, accessible, and cost-efficient, competitive differentiation will shift from access to AI toward the ability to integrate it meaningfully into the enterprise. Leaders must therefore ask a more strategic question: not “Where can we use AI?” but “Where can AI materially change how value is created, delivered, protected, and scaled?”

This whitepaper examines why the traditional, benefits-led narrative around AI is no longer enough. It outlines the shifts enterprises must make to move from fragmented experimentation to durable advantage: from use cases to value pools, from copilots to workflows, from general models to domain intelligence, from technology deployment to operating model redesign, and from pilots to repeatable capability building.

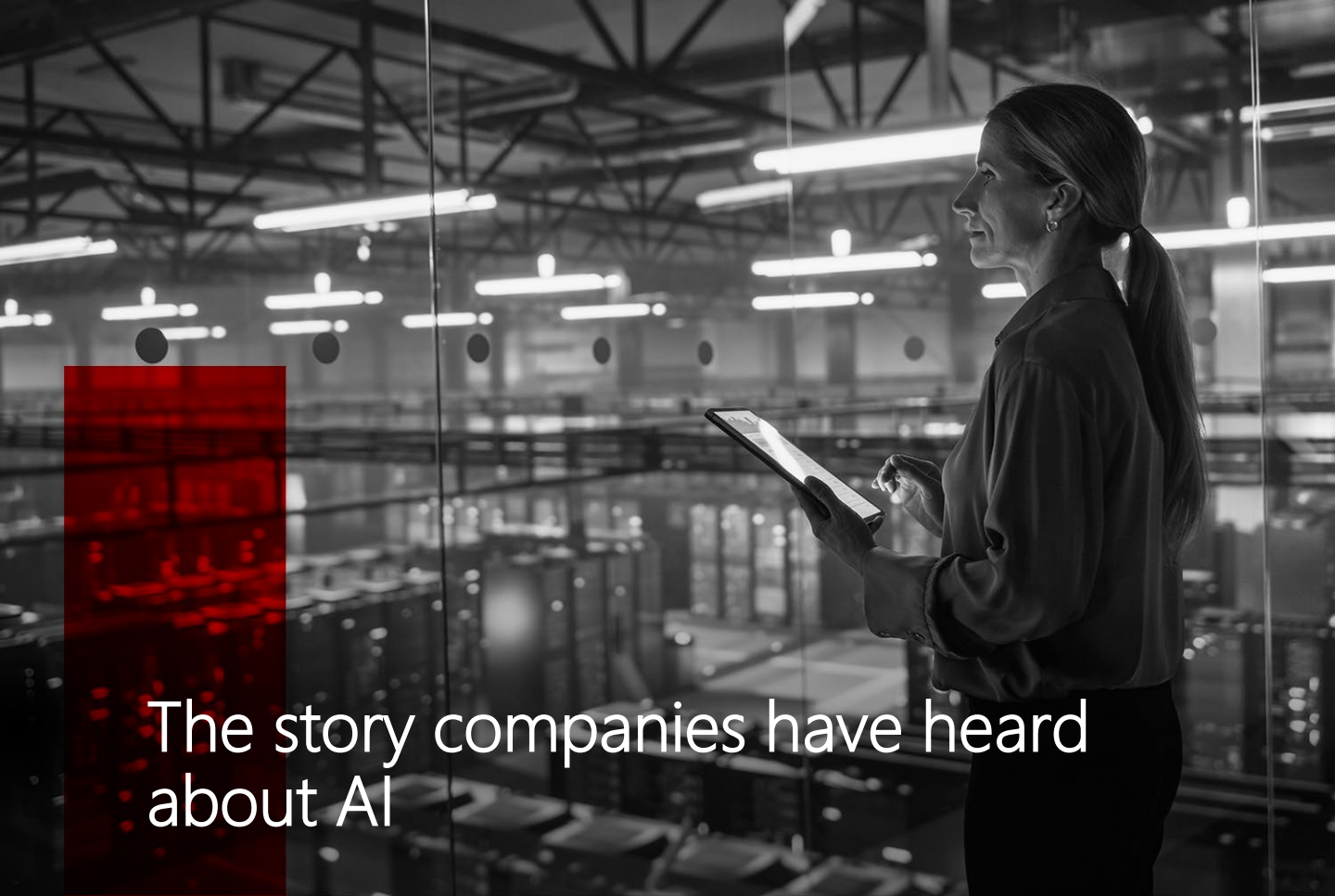


Executive summary

For many enterprises, AI entered the boardroom through a benefits-led narrative: faster content, better search, improved productivity, lower cost, and more automation. That narrative was helpful in accelerating awareness, but it is now too small for the moment. AI is evolving from a tool conversation into a business model, operating model, and workforce conversation.

The evidence is now difficult to ignore. AI adoption is broad, but scaled value is concentrated. Nearly all companies are investing, yet only a small percentage report mature deployment. Many organizations have pilots, copilots, and use cases. Far fewer have re-architected workflows, governance, data, and talent models so AI can generate durable competitive advantage.

This white paper argues that companies must think differently about AI in five ways: from use cases to value pools, from copilots to workflows, from general models to domain intelligence, from stand-alone technology to operating model change, and from experimentation to repeatable capability building. The path to value lies not in more activity, but in sharper intent, stronger foundations, and deeper business integration.



The story companies have heard about AI

The first wave of enterprise AI adoption was led by accessibility. Tools could summarize, draft, search, classify, converse, and code. The promise was immediate: save time, simplify work, and reduce friction across knowledge-heavy tasks. In this phase, AI was sold as a productivity enhancer, and for good reason—it delivered visible wins quickly.

However, benefit-led adoption typically produces a portfolio of local improvements rather than a coherent enterprise transformation. Teams launch pilots in customer service, sales enablement, software development, marketing, or internal knowledge management. The individual wins are real. But unless those efforts are connected to process redesign, governance, and operating model decisions, the organization accumulates activity without compounding value.

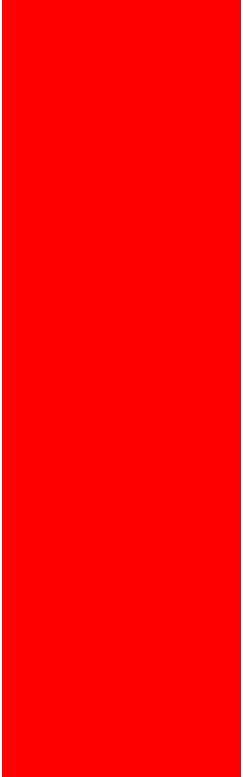
This is why so many companies report experimentation but limited scale. The technology may be advancing rapidly, but organizational change moves more slowly. A business can buy models and licenses in weeks; it cannot redesign work, data stewardship, incentives, and decision rights at the same speed unless leadership makes those changes explicit.



Why the old narrative is no longer enough

First, AI presence is not the same as AI advantage. Broad adoption figures can create false confidence. A company may have thousands of employees using AI tools and still fail to change any material business outcome if those tools remain disconnected from core workflows and enterprise data.

Second, the value gap is widening. A relatively small group of firms is generating outsized gains because they have progressed from experimentation to capability building. They invest in leadership alignment, process redesign, data architecture, and governance as seriously as they invest in models. These firms are not using AI only to lower effort; they are using it to reconfigure how decisions are made and how value flows across the enterprise.



Third, the constraint is increasingly human capacity, not just process inefficiency. Knowledge workers are overloaded, interrupted, and stretched across too many low-value cognitive tasks. AI therefore matters not simply as an automation tool, but as a way to redistribute work so humans spend more time where judgment, creativity, empathy, and domain expertise matter most.

Fourth, governance has become inseparable from value realization. As AI moves into customer-facing, regulated, and high-stakes decisions, trustworthiness, transparency, oversight, and security are no longer afterthoughts. The companies that treat governance as a design principle—not a late-stage compliance exercise—will scale more confidently and more quickly.

Fifth, the economics are moving fast. Model quality is improving, costs are falling, and capabilities are becoming more accessible. This means competitive differentiation shifts away from simple access to models and toward the enterprise disciplines that turn models into measurable outcomes: grounded data, workflow orchestration, domain tuning, controls, and adoption.

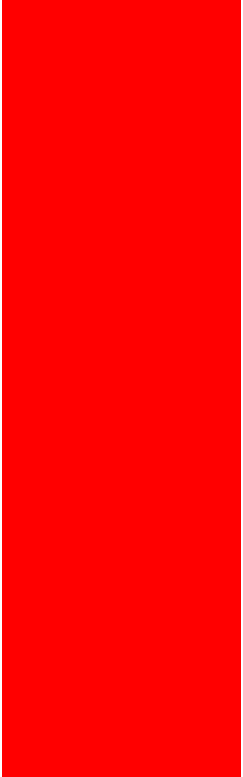


What thinking differently about AI means

Thinking differently begins with changing the unit of analysis. Instead of asking, “Which use cases should we try?” leaders should ask, “Which value pools can we materially change?” Revenue growth, service quality, cost-to-serve, risk posture, speed-to-market, and knowledge reuse are better anchors than generic lists of possible applications.

It also means moving from AI as assistant to AI in the workflow. Productivity assistants help individuals. Enterprise value emerges when AI is embedded in how decisions move, how work gets routed, how exceptions are handled, and how cross-functional processes are executed from end to end.

A third shift is from general AI to domain-specific intelligence. Value at scale comes when models understand the enterprise context: policies, terminology, customer segments, operating rules, product structures, historical decisions, and risk constraints. Generic AI can draft. Grounded AI can decide, guide, and orchestrate within the business context.



A fourth shift is from technology deployment to operating model redesign. Decision rights, accountability, metrics, escalation paths, and human oversight all need to evolve when AI becomes part of how work gets done. Treating AI as a technical implementation without corresponding organizational change is one of the clearest ways to cap value.

Finally, companies must move from experimentation to capability building. Successful enterprises create repeatable patterns for intake, prioritization, governance, model management, deployment, adoption, and benefits tracking. The goal is not more pilots. The goal is an industrialized ability to move from one value case to the next with increasing speed and confidence.

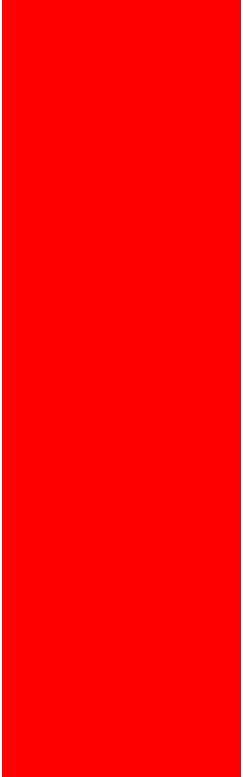


An enterprise AI agenda

A business-outcome-led, platform-enabled, domain-grounded, and responsibly scaled is an agenda that should be followed. It starts with business intent. Which outcomes must improve, and by how much? Where does the enterprise need more capacity, faster decisions, better experiences, lower leakage, or stronger resilience?

From there, the focus shifts to foundation building. Data quality, access controls, model choices, observability, risk policies, and governance are not separate workstreams; they are the structural spine of enterprise AI. Without them, pilots remain local and adoption remains fragile.

The third element is workflow redesign. This is where AI moves from novelty to operating leverage. When organizations reimagine how work flows across functions—sales, service, supply chain, finance, engineering, HR—they unlock compounding gains in throughput, responsiveness, and consistency.



The fourth element is workforce transformation. AI changes roles before it changes org charts. Managers need new playbooks, employees need new skills, and leaders need new metrics to understand the balance between human judgment and machine execution. Training alone is not enough; role design and change sponsorship matter just as much.

The fifth element is composable, industry-aware execution. The enterprises that stand out will not be the ones with the loudest AI rhetoric. They will be the ones that combine models, enterprise data, automation, governance, and domain logic into reusable platforms for business innovation.



Leadership priorities for the next 12 months

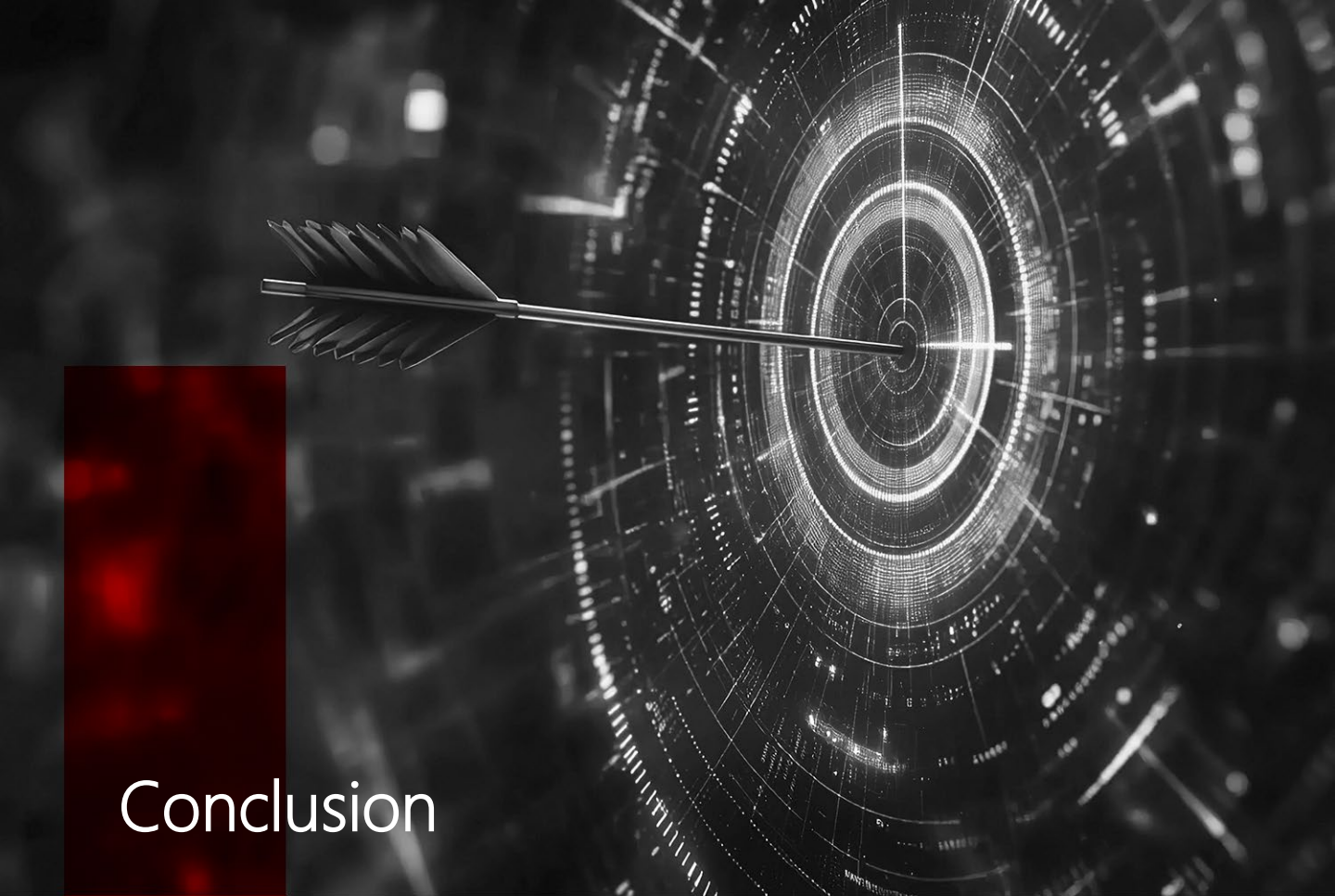
First, establish a single enterprise AI thesis tied to strategy. Avoid a fragmented portfolio of pilots with no common value architecture.

Second, choose a small number of high-value workflows to redesign end to end. Do not measure success only in minutes saved; measure throughput, customer outcomes, and financial impact.

Third, strengthen governance and trust foundations early. Embed human oversight, security, auditability, and policy controls into the lifecycle.

Fourth, invest in workforce readiness with the same seriousness as technology readiness. Managers are a critical multiplier in scaling adoption and trust.

Fifth, create a repeatable value realization engine: intake, prioritization, delivery, adoption, controls, and benefits tracking that can be reused across business domains.

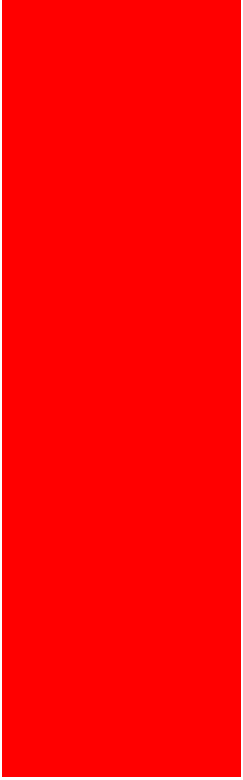


Conclusion

The first chapter of enterprise AI was defined by access – who could move fastest with the tools available, and which teams could demonstrate enough wins to sustain investment. That chapter is closing.

What comes next is a more consequential contest: not which company has AI, but which company has learned to govern it, ground it in domain context, and integrate it deeply enough into workflows that it compounds across the enterprise. The organizations pulling ahead are not doing more with AI – they are doing different things with it. They have replaced the activity-count metric with a value-pool metric. They are redesigning work, not just augmenting it. They are treating governance as architecture, not as audit.

The window for this shift is narrowing. As model costs fall and capabilities converge, the structural disciplines – data architecture, workflow orchestration, talent readiness, operating model change – will become the primary source of durable differentiation. These are harder to replicate than tool access, which is precisely why they matter.



The imperative for leadership is clear: move from an AI portfolio to an AI strategy. Anchor it in business outcomes. Build the foundations that make scale possible. Elevate people into the work that only they can do. And create the organizational muscle to move from one high-value use case to the next with increasing speed and confidence.

Thinking differently about AI is not a mindset shift alone – it is a structural one. The companies that make it will not just be faster or cheaper. They will be fundamentally better at learning,



Research sources include:

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- Microsoft WorkLab (April 23, 2025) – 2025 Work Trend Index: The year the Frontier Firm is born: <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/2025-the-year-the-frontier-firm-is-born>
- Stanford HAI (2025) – The 2025 AI Index Report: <https://hai.stanford.edu/ai-index/2025-ai-index-report>
- Deloitte (2024 year-end / January 21, 2025 press release) – State of Generative AI in the Enterprise: <https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/about/press-room/state-of-generative-ai.html>
- NIST (July 26, 2024) – AI Risk Management Framework: Generative AI Profile: <https://www.nist.gov/publications/artificial-intelligence-risk-management-framework-generative-artificial-intelligence>
- BCG (September 2025) – The Widening AI Value Gap: <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2025/are-you-generating-value-from-ai-the-widening-gap>



About the author

David P. Spencer is a Client Enablement and Growth Executive at Sonata, chartered with growing many offerings including AI-related capabilities, partnerships, the global capabilities center (GCC) space and relevant solutions for the organization.

As a veteran in the business and IT consulting industry, Mr. Spencer has served in senior executive roles for leading industry organizations as a strategic growth leader, executive advisor and client partner to global Fortune 1000 CXOs. David's domestic and international responsibilities have spanned all functional areas including Information technology, sales and marketing, operations, finance, and HR organizations.



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Sonata Software is a global IT solutions firm focused on catalysing business transformation initiatives of its clients through deep domain knowledge, technology expertise and customer commitment. The company delivers innovative solutions for Travel, Retail & Distribution and Software Product companies through IP based Platforms, Products and Services, that bring together new digital technologies such as Omni-channel commerce, Mobility, Analytics, Cloud and ERP, to drive enhanced customer engagement, operations efficiency and return on IT investments. A trusted long-term service provider to Fortune 500 companies across both the software product development and enterprise business segments, Sonata seeks to add differentiated value to leadership who want to make an impact on their businesses, with IT.