

AI Maturity Depends on More than Technology Capability: CIO Perspectives, March 2026

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Initiatives: CxO Leadership

A lack of maturity across enterprise AI capabilities is creating friction in scaling high-value AI use cases. Realizing maximum business value from AI demands strong top-down enterprise governance of AI and CxO co-leadership to build the literacy and adoption needed to turn activity into transformation.

Insights at a Glance

Enhancing AI Maturity for Business Transformation

Enterprises are facing challenges in scaling high-value AI initiatives due to a lack of maturity in AI capabilities. Achieving significant business value from AI requires robust governance and leadership from CxOs to foster AI literacy and adoption, transforming AI activities into impactful business transformations.

Key Insights

- **AI maturity deficit:** Only 17% of organizations have high AI maturity, which is crucial for executing high-value AI use cases at scale. High maturity organizations deploy more AI initiatives and achieve faster outcomes compared to those with medium or low maturity. ¹
- **Governance misalignment:** Many organizations struggle with enterprise governance of AI due to undefined decision making, leading to fragmented practices and inconsistent value realization.
- **Leadership and literacy:** Effective AI adoption necessitates co-leadership between CIOs and CxOs, focusing on AI literacy and change management to ensure AI is integrated into business operations.

Recommendations

- **Recharter enterprise governance of AI:** Establish a cross-domain, blended governance approach to eliminate decision-making ambiguity and align AI initiatives with business outcomes.
- **Co-lead AI literacy:** Implement persona-driven AI literacy programs, ensuring training is relevant and directly tied to business problems, with each CxO taking ownership within their domain.

Organizations that fail to develop high AI maturity will face competitive disadvantages, as AI-driven performance expectations rise and the readiness gap widens.

Issue

About this report: *The Gartner CIO Perspectives report is published monthly to highlight the latest trends and priorities identified through thousands of discussions with CIOs from across the globe, representing a variety of industries. The report focuses on the leadership, management, and strategic aspects of the CIO role. Each month, it provides a timely, qualitative snapshot of a single mission-critical challenge for CIOs, serving as a valuable resource for comparing your current priorities to those of your peers.*

This March 2026 CIO Perspectives report is based on more than 3,800 CIO and technology executive interactions that took place in February 2026.

Our March conversations revealed one dominant trend: CIOs are struggling with scaling high-value AI use cases that align to the ambition of their executive team.

Deficits in the maturity of enterprise AI capabilities hinders organizations from successfully scaling high-value AI use cases

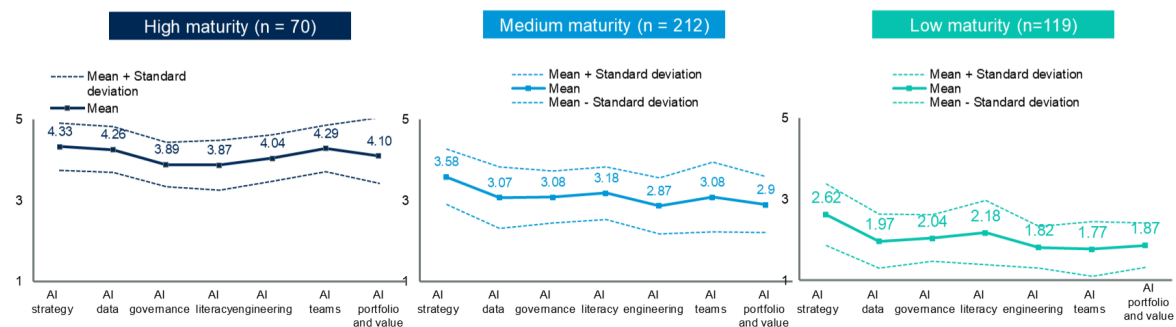
The 2026 Gartner AI Maturity and Organizational Mandates Survey shows that:

- Only 17% of organizations are classified with high maturity in AI with high scores across key enterprise AI-related capabilities that are critical to executing and delivering high value AI use case at scale. ¹ These capabilities are (see Figure 1):
 - A business-outcome aligned AI strategy recognized by the board
 - AI-ready data
 - A blended, cross-domain and integrated approach to the enterprise governance of AI
 - Persona-driven AI literacy programs
 - Advanced AI engineering practices
 - A managed network of AI teams across a mature AI operating model
 - Prioritization of use cases across a defend, extend and upend portfolio
 - An architected view to realizing AI value, with robust requirements for AI initiatives to demonstrate ROI before full investment is made

Figure 1: AI Maturity in Different Aspects of AI, Across Three Segments

AI Maturity in Different Aspects of AI, Across Three Segments

AI maturity in different areas
Mean values and standard deviations



n varies by cohort; AI leaders whose organizations deployed at least one AI use case in production who answered maturity questions from E02 to E08; Excluding Unsure/Don't know

E02-E08: Which best describes your organization's AI strategy/AI data/AI governance/AI literacy/AI engineering/AI organization/AI portfolio and value?

Source: Gartner AI Maturity and Organizational Mandates for 2026 Survey ID:

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Gartner AI Maturity and Organizational Mandates for 2026 Survey

The greater maturity in these capabilities allows these high-maturity organizations to have:

- 2x more AI initiatives fully deployed compared to medium-maturity organizations and 5.6x that of low-maturity organizations ¹
- 1.7x more AI initiatives currently being implemented compared to medium-maturity organizations and 3.4x that of low-maturity organizations ¹
- 1.8x more AI initiatives being piloted compared to medium-maturity organizations and 2.9x that of low-maturity organizations ¹

Taken together, this data shows that organizations aren't failing because of a lack of AI activity – the gap emerges upstream, in the enterprise capabilities required to scale high value AI use cases. Our analysis of CIO conversations points to two underlying factors that consistently prevent organizations from making that leap:

- The governance component of the enterprise operating model is misaligned to AI ambition, due to undefined decision-making rules, roles, structures and processes.
- AI adoption is lagging behind due to an absence of, or ineffective, CIO-CxO co-leadership of AI literacy and change management.

“Every team has their own AI pilots, but we still don’t have a coherent way to run the business with AI at the center. We’re stuck in use-case mode.”

— CIO, financial services

Impact

AI use cases are expanding across the enterprise, but only high AI maturity organizations, as defined in Figure 1, are truly able to translate this activity into realized business value. Without high maturity in enterprise AI capabilities, AI continues to advance in isolated pockets, creating inconsistent practices, fragmented value, and heightened operational and reputational risk. As expectations for AI-driven performance rise, the cost of this readiness gap grows.

Organizations with high AI maturity not only meet but are significantly more likely to exceed the outcome targets for their AI initiatives. Furthermore, they achieve these targets much faster compared to organizations with medium or low AI maturity. ¹

Enterprises that fail to develop a high level of maturity in critical enterprise AI capabilities will be at a distinct competitive disadvantage.

Implications

Actions for CIOs

In our conversations with CIOs throughout February we identified two of these enterprise AI capabilities that consistently emerged: creating a blended, cross-domain and integrated approach to the enterprise governance of AI and co-designing and delivering persona-driven AI literacy programs that embed AI literacy in the flow of value delivery.

Recharter Enterprise Governance of AI to a Cross-Domain, Blended Approach to Eliminate Decision-Making Ambiguity and Strengthen Business Outcome Alignment

Gartner's research indicates that most organizations are struggling to scale high value AI use cases, because their enterprise governance has not been adapted to make orchestrated decisions. Existing rules, roles, structures, and processes were designed for traditional IT and data, not for probabilistic, cross-domain AI systems. This misalignment leads to fragmented governance, ambiguous decision rights, and unclear accountabilities.

This governance gap stems from the acceleration of bottom-up AI experimentation but with a lack of enterprisewide AI guardrails. For example, CIOs should establish enterprise standards for AI economic viability and architectural readiness, such as forming an AI economics office with finance and operations ensuring every scaled AI initiative meets enterprise-wide performance, resilience, and cost criteria. Today, less than one in five organizations have implemented an advanced AI portfolio with AI FinOps practices. ¹

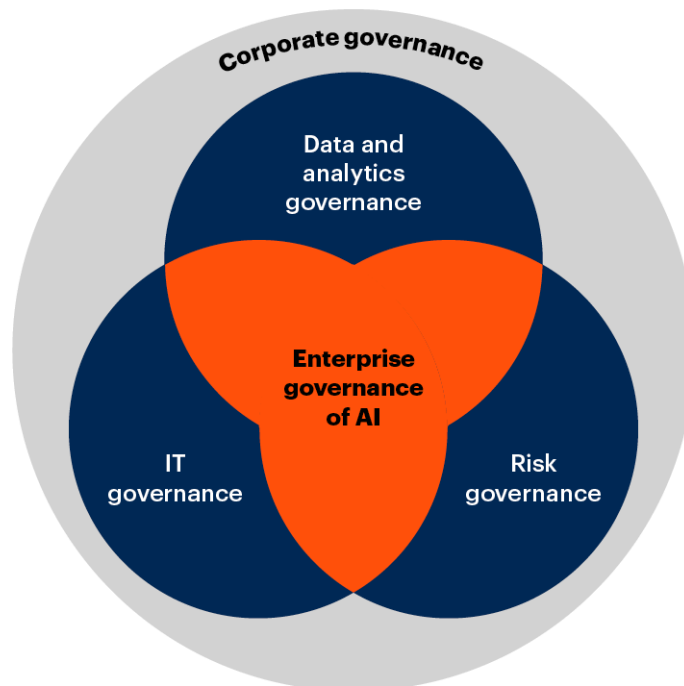
As AI becomes more distributed, governance can no longer sit within a single domain. Organizations must establish a distributed, blended business-IT and integrated governance framework. This framework needs to connect corporate guardrails, enterprise-level decision rights, and day-to-day management processes.

Without this unified structure, decision making will remain fragmented, misaligned to strategic outcomes, and AI ambition will stall, preventing responsible and consistent AI scaling across the enterprise. Figure 2 shows the blended approach to enterprise governance of AI to create decision-making capability across the three core governance domains of:

- Adaptive enterprise governance of IT
- Adaptive D&A governance
- Adaptive risk governance

Figure 2: EGoAI Demands Cross-Domain Blended Approach

EGoAI Demands Cross-Domain Blended Approach



Source: Gartner
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Recommended research:

- [Enhance AI Decision Making Through Enterprise Governance of AI](#): Clarifies how to build a cross-domain, top-down AI governance model that eliminates ambiguous decision making and aligns governance with AI ambition.

- [How to Achieve the Minimum Viable AI Governance](#): Provides the essential guardrails and governance mechanisms organizations need to safely scale AI without slowing innovation.
- [The Role of D&A Governance in Supporting AI Governance](#): Explains how data and analytics governance underpins AI governance, ensuring AI decisions rely on trusted data, consistent standards, and clear accountability.

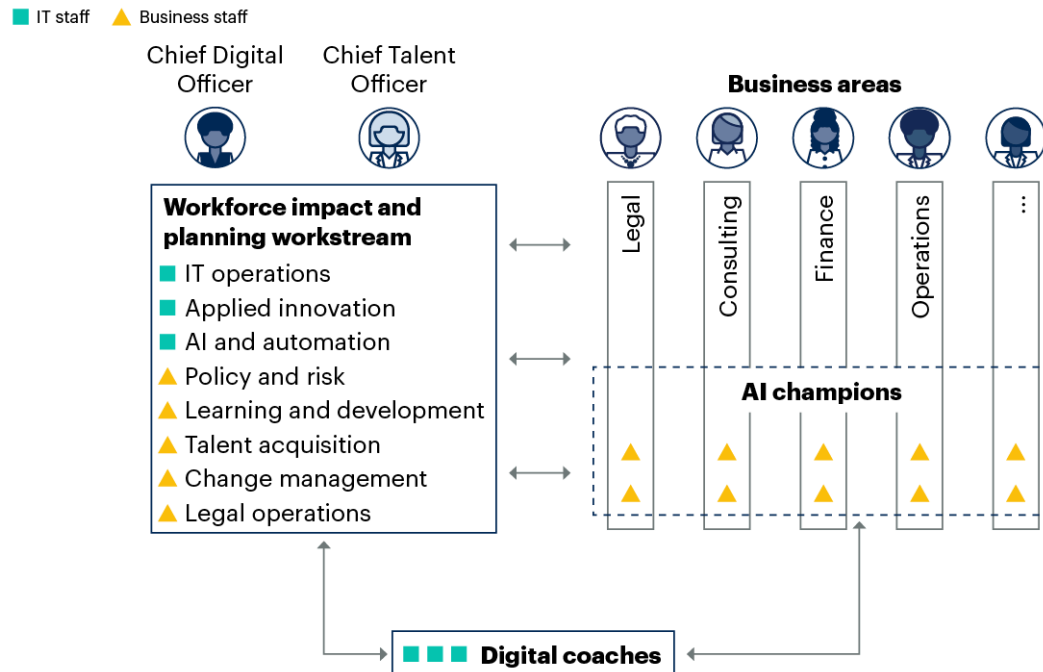
AI Adoption Requires CIO and CxO Co-Leadership

Building a co-leadership model is essential for driving the AI literacy and change management required for AI adoption. CIOs must recognize that AI literacy is not a centralized training program but a shared, persona-driven responsibility across the enterprise.

HR is a valuable partner in building broad-based programs, but they cannot carry this effort alone. Each CxO must take ownership of defining and enabling AI literacy within their domain so employees understand how AI applies to their decisions, workflows, and outcomes. This level of contextualization is critical: persona-driven AI literacy depends on domain expertise and role champions to ensure training is relevant, actionable and tied directly to the domain-specific business problems that need to be solved. Without this shared ownership, AI adoption lags and change-management challenges persist. Figure 3 below shows a deep dive into MinterEllison's Workforce Impact and Planning workstream team, focused on AI literacy and change management, and depicts the mechanism by which they drive personalized learning and change in conjunction with individual business unit leaders (see [Case Study: Building an AI-Ready Enterprise Workforce](#)).

Figure 3: Manage AI Talent Impact With IT-HR Partnership

MinterEllison's IT-HR Partnership to Manage AI's Impact on Talent



Source: Adapted from MinterEllison
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MinterEllison

Gartner

Recommended research:

- [How AI Is Changing IT Operating Models: Lessons by CIOs for CIOs](#): Explores how CIOs are leveraging co-leadership structures to strengthen ownership and accountability for achieving AI ambition.
- [Why You Need to Build AI Literacy Now \(and How to Do It\)](#): Discusses the importance of building a persona-driven AI literacy program and aligning AI learning to meaningful work and value creation.
- [A CIO's Guide to Building an AI-Ready Workforce](#): Provides practical examples of applying the 70/20/10 learning principle so that most AI learning supports real-time performance and adoption.

Please schedule an expert inquiry to discuss any of these actions and recommendations in greater detail.

For more details, refer to previous CIO Perspectives reports:

- [Become a Challenger CIO or Risk Commoditization: CIO Perspectives, February 2026](#)
- [From Delivery to Value Leadership — How CIOs Can Close the IT-Business Value Gap: CIO Perspectives, January 2026](#)
- [How to Overcome Organizational Readiness Barriers for AI and Digital Success: CIO Perspectives, December 2025](#)

Evidence

¹ **Gartner AI Maturity and Organizational Mandates for 2026 Survey.** This survey was conducted to understand how enterprises are using AI and to discover best practices to increase ROI from AI investments. The research was conducted online from 24 October through 3 December 2025 among 402 respondents from the U.S. (n = 160), Western Europe (n = 190), and India (n = 52). Quotas were established for company sizes and for industries to ensure a good representation across the sample. Organizations were required to have deployed at least one AI use case in production. Respondents were screened for C-level executives (such as chief AI officer, chief data officer, chief data scientist, chief information officer, chief operating officer, chief technology officer, or equivalent) or roles above senior director. All respondents were required to have high involvement in at least one AI initiative. Disclaimer: The results of this survey do not represent global findings or the market as a whole, but reflect the sentiments of the respondents and companies surveyed.

Recommended by the Authors

Some documents may not be available as part of your current Gartner subscription.

[Enhance AI Decision Making Through Enterprise Governance of AI](#)

[Why You Need to Build AI Literacy Now \(and How to Do It\)](#)

[A CIO's Guide to Building an AI-Ready Workforce](#)

[Case Study: Building an AI-Ready Enterprise Workforce](#)

[AI-First Unpacked: What It Means, Why It Matters, and When to Act](#)

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