

5 Questions Leadership Teams Should Ask About AI

A practical discussion guide for moving from AI interest to intentional leadership

25%

of CEOs say they feel fully prepared to deploy AI organization-wide

63%

of companies name the need to adjust workflows as a leading barrier to AI adoption

42%

of companies abandoned the majority of their AI initiatives in 2025, up from 17% in 2024

Sources: Kearney and The Futurum Group; S&P Global Market Intelligence; as reported in Harvard Business Review, January–February 2026. Full citations on page 4.

“We should use AI” is not a business objective.

AI is already changing how organizations work. In some companies, leaders are actively setting direction. In others, individual employees and teams are experimenting on their own.

Either way, the leadership challenge is bigger than choosing the right tool. Leaders need to understand where AI can create value, how it should be used, and what needs to happen next.

These questions can help your leadership team start that conversation.

The five questions

- 1 Do we know where AI could create meaningful value?
- 2 Are our leaders giving the organization consistent direction?
- 3 Have we decided how AI should be used, and where human judgment still matters?
- 4 Are we prepared to change the work, not just add the technology?
- 5 Do we know how we will tell whether AI is creating value?

1 Do we know where AI could create meaningful value?

Leaders do not need to become AI experts, but they do need enough practical understanding to recognize where AI could make a difference in the business.

TRY THIS

Look across a few areas of your business and ask, “Where are people spending significant time searching, summarizing, predicting, deciding, creating, or repeating work?” Then explore which of those activities connect to business problems or opportunities that actually matter.

2 Are our leaders giving the organization consistent direction?

The goal is not to control every AI experiment. In fact, some of the best ideas may emerge organically from employees and teams closest to the work.

But there is a difference between organized organic and chaos.

Leaders need to create enough shared direction, boundaries, and priorities that experimentation can happen without everyone inventing their own rules.

TRY THIS

Ask your leaders separately, “What are employees encouraged to do with AI today?” Then compare the answers. If they are meaningfully different, your employees may be hearing mixed messages too.

DATA POINT Only 25% of CEOs say they feel fully prepared to deploy AI organization-wide, and 62% of companies cite poor cross-functional fit as a leading barrier.¹

3 Have we decided how AI should be used — and where human judgment still matters?

AI can help analyze, recommend, create, and automate. But leaders still need to decide where AI can act on its own, where it should support a person, and where a human must remain accountable.

TRY THIS

Choose one real AI use case in your organization and ask, “What can AI do on its own? What should a person review? What should always require human judgment or approval?” Then compare that answer to how the work is actually happening today.

4 Are we prepared to change the work — not just add the technology?

AI creates the most value when organizations rethink how work gets done, not when they simply layer a new tool onto an old process.

That may mean changing workflows, roles, responsibilities, or the skills people need.

TRY THIS

Ask your team, “If AI works as well as we hope, what will people stop doing, start doing, or do differently?” Then consider what that means for roles, skills, expectations, and how work is managed.

DATA POINT 63% of companies name the need to adjust workflows as a leading barrier to successful AI adoption.¹

5 Do we know how we will tell whether AI is creating value?

AI activity is not the same as AI value. Leaders need to define what improvement they expect, measure whether it happened, and use what they learn to decide what to change, stop, or expand.

TRY THIS

For one AI effort, ask, “What should be better if this works?” Then choose one or two measures that would show whether it did — and decide in advance what you will do if the results are weaker, different, or better than expected.

DATA POINT 42% of companies abandoned the majority of their AI initiatives in 2025, up from 17% in 2024, and only about one-third report significant ROI from AI.²

AI leadership requires both adaptive and technical work

AI success depends on more than selecting the right tools. It requires leaders to set direction, establish guardrails, rethink how work gets done, and create the conditions for people to use AI well. It also requires the technical foundation underneath it — the right data, technology, governance, and expertise.

At Cornerstone Data, we work across both sides of that challenge. Our Data & AI Maturity Framework helps organizations understand not only whether the technical foundation is in place, but whether leadership, people, processes, and decision-making are prepared to turn AI into business value.

If these questions surface areas your leadership team wants to explore further, we can help you assess where you are today and determine what needs to happen next.

Interested in how we can help?

Tell us a little about your team and we'll follow up within two business days.

cornerstonedata.com/5-questions-leadership-ai



Scan to reach the interest form

1

Bring the five questions to your next leadership meeting.

2

Run one “Try this” exercise and compare the answers.

3

Tell us what surfaced. We can help you assess where you are today and what needs to happen next.



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SOURCES

1. Survey by Kearney and The Futurum Group, as cited in C. Bouquet, C. J. Wright, and J. Nolan, “Match Your AI Strategy to Your Organization's Reality,” Harvard Business Review, January–February 2026.
2. S&P Global Market Intelligence (2025) and Writer enterprise survey of 1,600 leaders and employees, as cited in the same article.