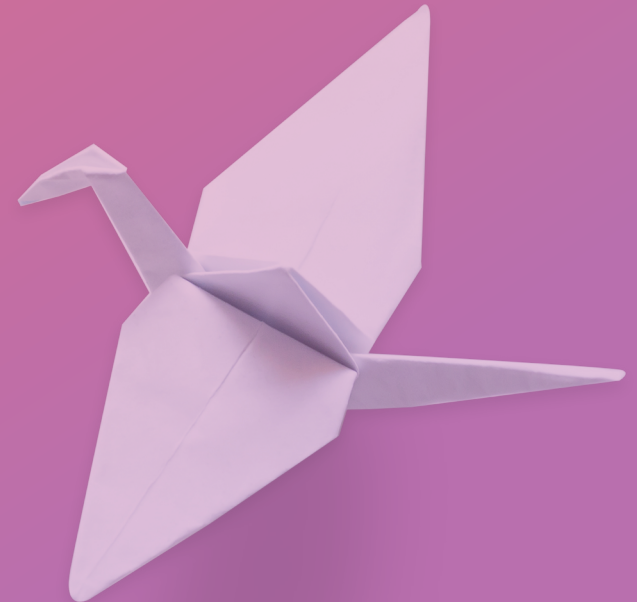


Crane Venture Partners' Annual
Enterprise Technology Survey Report

Fill in the Blank

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS AND FINDINGS FOR 2025



FILL IN THE BLANK

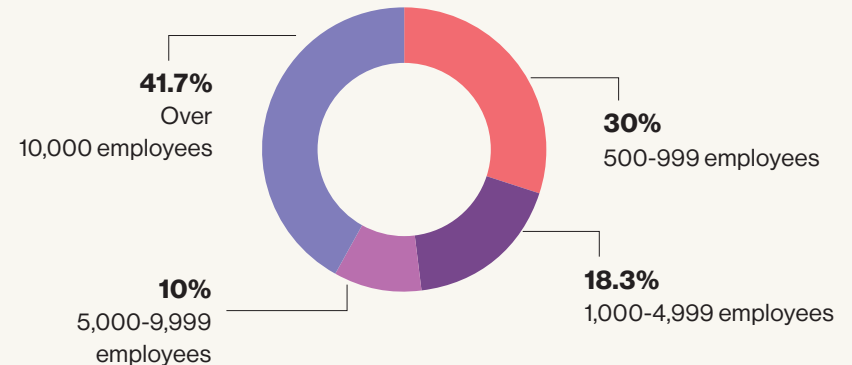
Introduction

The Fill in the Blank™ survey, conducted by Crane Venture Partners, collected responses from 60 senior executives responsible for making enterprise technology buying decisions at companies in a range of sectors—technology, financial services, healthcare, media, education, retail and more. This report captures insights into priorities, challenges, and opportunities in enterprise technology adoption, with a strong focus on artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) as transformative capabilities. The survey also highlights the importance of security, cross-functional collaboration, and the ability to unify complex data systems.

This report aims to provide a detailed understanding of the current state of enterprise software buying and adoption decision-making, focusing on the perspectives of experienced executives who drive technology and strategic initiatives within their organizations.

Respondent Profile and Estimated Buying Power

The respondents represent organizations of varying sizes:



These participants span key industries, including technology, finance, retail, media, and healthcare, with significant buying power reflective of their high-level decision-making roles.

Estimated Buying Power

Based on their seniority and the size of their enterprise, these respondents have an **annual technology buying power** conservatively estimated in the **\$3B–\$4B** range, encompassing a sizeable representation of global enterprise software spending.

A Who's Who of Global Brands and Innovators

Represented companies include: Arm Inc., Bloomberg LP, Comerica Bank, Datadog, Kohl's Corp, Microsoft, Mitie Group, NBA Basketball, NBC Universal, Procter & Gamble, Snapdocs, SumoLogic, and more.

Survey Methodology

The survey used expert sampling, drawing from the Crane Venture Partners team’s professional networks to ensure the respondents were highly relevant to the objectives. The survey design combined multiple-choice and open-ended questions to balance quantitative and qualitative data. This approach allowed respondents to rank their priorities and share their thoughts on enterprise software adoption, challenges, and future aspirations in detail.

Connecting Buyers and Builders

This Fill in the Blank survey aims to bridge the gap between buyers and builders, providing a platform for leaders in large enterprises to voice their needs and challenges directly to a leading tech startup community. Feedback enables early-stage startup founders and technology providers to align their strategies and tailor their offerings to meet the market’s demands.

“Startups should offer scalable, secure solutions that prioritize compliance and data privacy while also providing advanced AI/ML capabilities that can integrate seamlessly with our existing platforms.”

Chief Data Officer
A Leading Technology Company

Executive Summary

Key Findings and Recommendations

Overview

The Fill in the Blank survey offered senior enterprise executives a unique opportunity to share what truly matters in today's enterprise technology landscape. The findings highlight a delicate balance between overcoming operational hurdles and fostering an environment that enables sustainable innovation and collaboration.

While challenges such as **security, data integration, AI adoption,** and **scalability concerns** dominate the conversation, opportunities abound. Notably, most respondents intend to prioritize AI to drive efficiency and view advanced analytics as a cornerstone for growth.

Equally important, enterprises emphasize “clear ROI and business value” as their top priority when partnering with startups. To succeed, startups must demonstrate measurable outcomes through well-defined metrics, pilot projects, and case studies. These efforts should clearly illustrate how their solutions align with enterprise goals and deliver tangible benefits.

This summary provides key findings, quick-reference statistics, and actionable recommendations for startups and technology providers aiming to address the critical needs of enterprise buyers.

Top 5 Challenges

SECURITY AND COMPLIANCE

Ensuring cybersecurity and regulatory compliance is a top concern across all sectors, with significant implications for vendors.

COMPLEX DATA STACK MANAGEMENT

Enterprises are increasingly challenged by integrating diverse data sources across cloud and on-premise systems, impacting data quality and accessibility.

CROSS-FUNCTIONAL COLLABORATION

Siloed departments hinder efficient operations. Enterprises are seeking technology solutions that facilitate seamless collaboration.

AI AND ML SCALING CHALLENGES

AI/ML implementations are in demand but remain challenging due to low data readiness, integration complexity, and skill gaps.

INTEGRATION WITH CURRENT SOFTWARE STACK

Many enterprises struggle to integrate new solutions with their existing software stack, leading to inefficiencies and increased operational complexity.

Top 5 Opportunities for Growth (enabled by new technology)

AI AND ML AS MARKET DIFFERENTIATORS

All respondents recognize that AI/ML will impact enterprise operations in the next three to five years. They emphasize that integrating these technologies will be the difference between maintaining a competitive advantage or not.

OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY AND REDUCING COSTS

Over 60% of respondents view AI-driven process automation as a primary way to improve efficiency, streamline workflows, and reduce operational costs.

DATA-DRIVEN INNOVATION

Improved analytics and predictive capabilities are a focus for 40% of respondents. This underscores data as a core driver of innovation and competitive differentiation.

ACCELERATED INNOVATION

Enterprises view new technologies as a way to foster faster innovation cycles, allowing them to remain competitive in rapidly evolving markets.

ENHANCED SECURITY MEASURES

Leveraging advanced cybersecurity technologies is seen as a crucial growth opportunity to protect enterprise data and maintain customer trust.

Decision Making in the Era of AI

The integration of artificial intelligence into enterprise operations has fundamentally reshaped organizational decision-making. The survey reveals two critical patterns: the diversification of decision-making roles and the increasingly distributed nature of AI goals and governance across organizations.

Respondent Titles and Their Significance

Survey respondents represent an unprecedented range of senior and specialized roles, from Chief Information Officers to AI/ML Strategy Directors and Enterprise Solutions Architects. This diversity reflects a significant shift in enterprise technology purchasing, where decisions now extend beyond traditional C-suite boundaries. While CIOs and VPs remain central figures, specialized roles such as data engineers, cybersecurity leads, and cloud architects have become essential voices in the decision-making process.

This evolution reflects three key trends:

- Growing technical complexity requiring specialized expertise
- Increased focus on cross-functional alignment
- Rising importance of risk management and compliance considerations

The Fragmented Nature of AI Decision-Making

The survey reveals a distinctly distributed approach to AI governance, with responsibilities shared across multiple organizational layers. CTOs, CIOs, innovation leads, data science teams, and legal departments all play crucial roles in AI initiatives. Notably, 70% of surveyed organizations report no single leader with complete oversight of AI projects, instead operating through collaborative decision-making frameworks.

This decentralized model offers both advantages and challenges:

Advantages

- Inclusion of broader perspectives
- Enhanced risk management through multiple viewpoints
- Greater organizational buy-in
- Improved alignment with diverse business needs

Challenges

- Extended decision-making timelines
- Potential for conflicting priorities
- Complex stakeholder management
- Need for robust coordination mechanisms



Implications for Technology Providers

For startups and technology providers, this fragmented landscape presents both challenges and opportunities. Success requires:

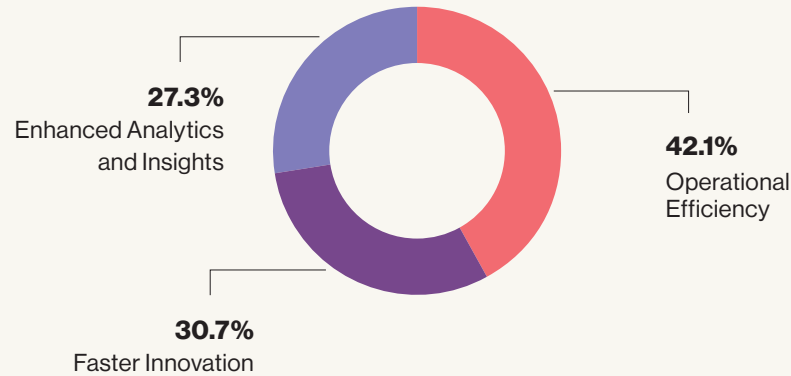
- Development of solutions that address cross-functional needs
- Creation of comprehensive stakeholder engagement strategies
- Clear demonstration of value across multiple organizational dimensions
- Support for collaborative decision-making processes

Looking ahead, organizations will need to balance the benefits of distributed decision-making with the need for efficient governance structures. This may lead to the emergence of new frameworks that facilitate coordinated AI adoption while maintaining the advantages of diverse stakeholder input.

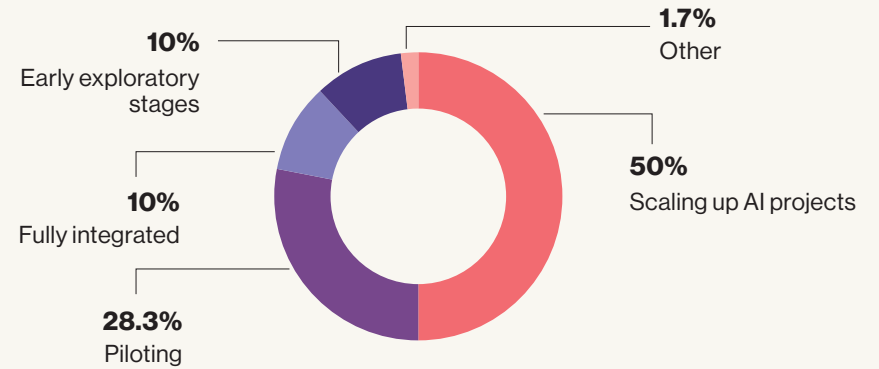
Quick-Reference Statistics

Estimated influence of technology spending: Respondents manage or influence \$3B to \$4B in annual tech spending.

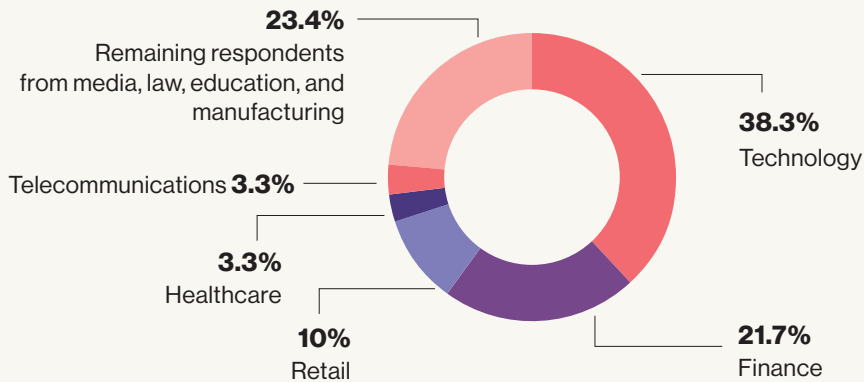
Top prioritized benefits of AI adoption



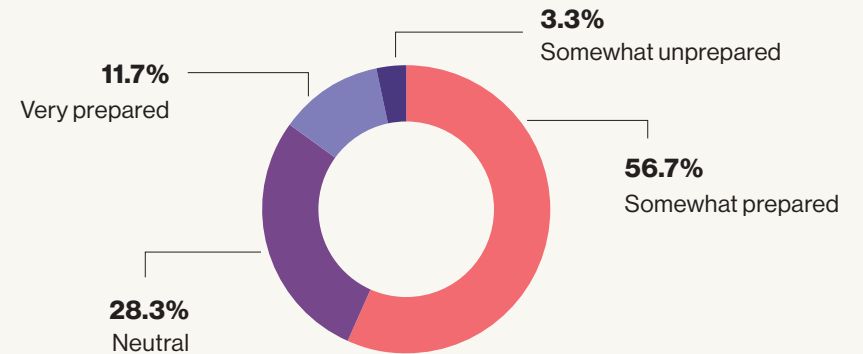
Current AI adoption stage



Industry representation



Adoption readiness for emerging technologies



Top 5 Actionable Recommendations for Enterprise Technology Providers

Startups and technology providers can align closely with enterprise objectives and position themselves as integral partners in an AI-focused, data-driven future. To do this, they will need to tailor solutions to the critical areas highlighted by the survey, including security and compliance, scalability, and cross-functionality.

1

Emphasize security and compliance

Vendors that offer advanced security features and compliance support, particularly for regulated industries like finance and healthcare, will be well-positioned to meet enterprise needs.

2

Enhance data stack integration and management

Simplify data management by providing solutions that integrate easily with current systems, improve data quality, and offer scalability.

3

Support cross-functional collaboration tools

Solutions that enable transparent communication and data sharing across departments can increase the speed of project delivery and drive alignment on company goals.

4

Create scalable AI/ML tools

Scalable AI platforms that allow for easy integration with less need for burdensome data preparation will be valuable to enterprises aiming to move beyond pilot projects and achieve enterprise-wide AI adoption.

5

User-centric design for high adoption rates

Tools with intuitive interfaces, minimal training requirements, and high usability will see faster adoption and greater user satisfaction, supporting productivity goals across the enterprise.



Report Details

A CLOSER LOOK AT FILL IN THE BLANK SURVEY RESPONSES



Top Challenges in Enterprise Technology and Solutions

The top challenges identified in the survey reflect a common theme: the tension between innovation and integration within enterprise environments.

Security and Compliance ranked highest, underscoring the non-negotiable need for robust protection in an increasingly digital and interconnected world. Next comes the **challenge of evolving data stacks** as enterprises grapple with the complexity of managing secure, scalable, and integrated data systems across diverse environments. **Cross-functional Collaboration** reveals a softer but equally critical challenge—bridging communication and operational gaps between departments to enable cohesive innovation. Meanwhile, integrating new solutions with existing software stacks highlights enterprises' technical barriers to adopting cutting-edge technologies without disrupting their operations.

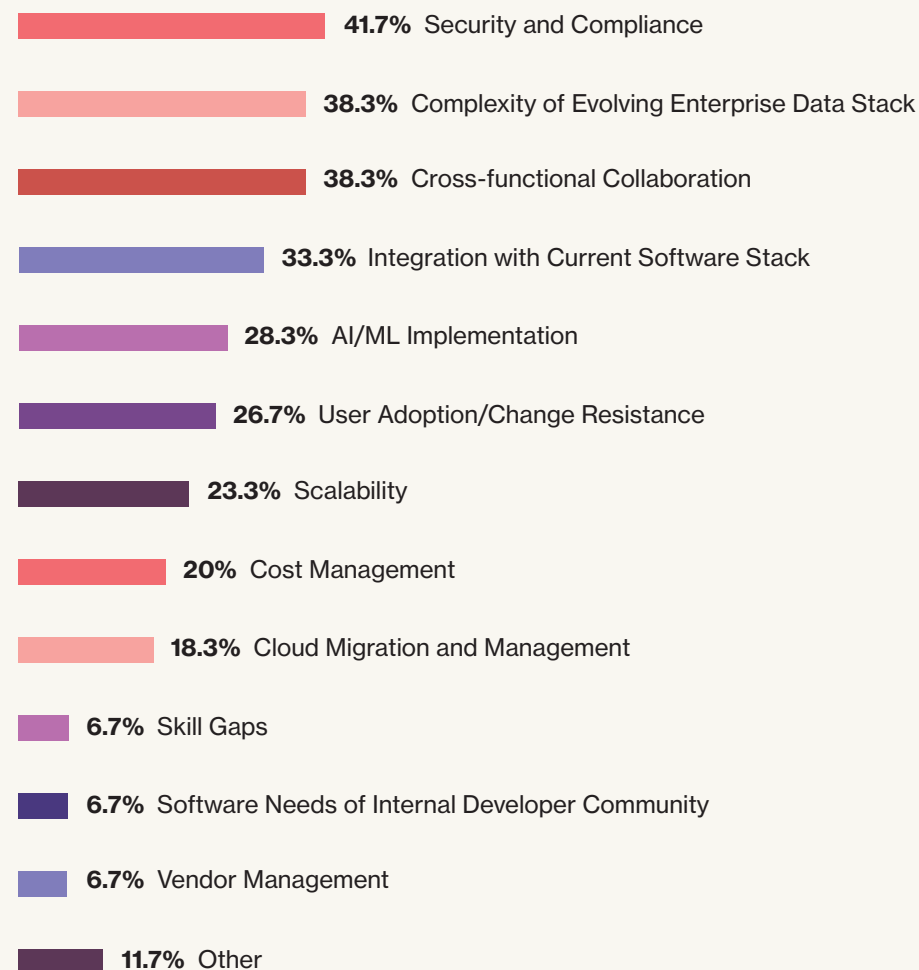
These challenges collectively emphasize that enterprises seek advanced solutions and those that seamlessly fit into and enhance their existing ecosystems, balancing operational stability with innovation.

What is the clear imperative for startups and technology providers? Solutions must address technical and organizational complexities while prioritizing usability and adaptability.

Survey Question

What are the top three challenges you face in your role related to enterprise software technology and solutions?

(select 3)



Survey Question

How do these challenges impact your organization's overall performance?

The responses to this question shed light on how the critical challenges identified—ranging from security concerns to user adoption issues—manifest in real-world organizational performance.

Direct quotes from respondents that illustrate the depth of these challenges include:

Operational inefficiency due to collaboration gaps

“Our inability to establish seamless cross-functional collaboration leads to project delays and inefficient use of resources. This impacts our ability to deliver on time and affects client satisfaction.”

Senior Director of IT infrastructure | Financial Services Company

Security and compliance impact on market trust

“Security and compliance remain the most daunting challenges. Any missteps can lead to a breach of trust with our clients and significant financial penalties. This risk affects how we plan and implement new solutions, often slowing down innovation.”

Vice President of Technology | Healthcare Organization

User resistance and productivity

“User adoption is always an uphill battle. When we introduce new systems, resistance from teams often means extended training periods and slower project launches, which hits our productivity metrics hard.”

Head of Software Engineering | Technology Company

Scalability and user experience

“Scalability is a significant challenge as we expand our digital presence globally, requiring flexible and efficient infrastructure. Integration of legacy systems with modern tech stacks impacts how quickly we can innovate and deliver seamless experiences.”

GM, Head of Product | Media Company

Top Opportunities Driven by New Technology Adoption

The top opportunities identified in the survey—both in the specific question about opportunities and across other aspects—reveal a compelling theme: the transformative potential of enterprise software technologies, predominantly driven by AI advancements with broad applicability across industries and use cases.

Increased Operational Efficiency emerged as the most significant opportunity, with 61.7% of respondents underscoring its importance. AI-powered automation tools streamline workflows, reduce manual workloads, and enhance productivity. Process optimization technologies further support resource allocation and workflow management, driving faster project completions and lowering operational costs.

Accelerated innovation was cited by 45% of respondents as a critical opportunity. Advances in AI, particularly in low-code/no-code platforms and integrated development environments (IDEs), allow enterprises to prototype and launch new products rapidly. These tools enable cross-industry applications, fostering innovative solutions that bridge organizational silos.

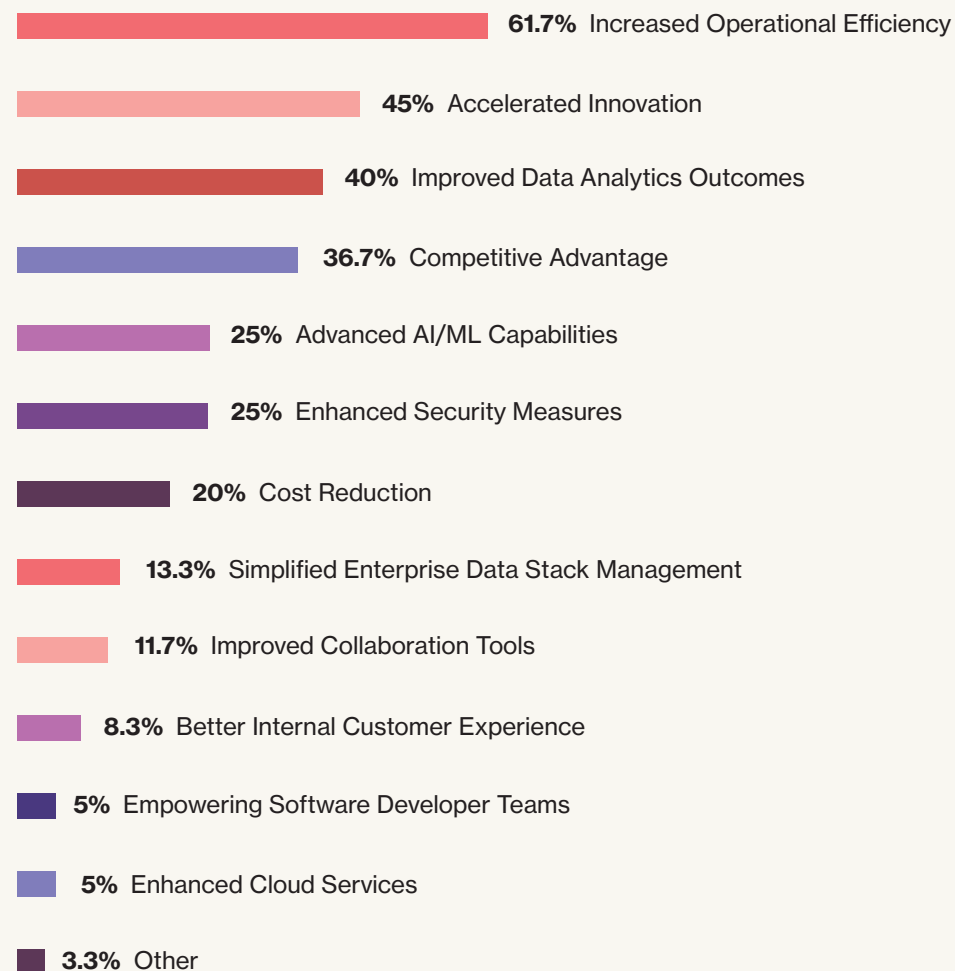
Enhanced Data Analytics stood out as a key area for 40% of respondents. AI-driven analytics tools uncover actionable insights, forecast outcomes, and refine strategies. Predictive analytics capabilities, powered by machine learning, provide a forward-looking edge for decision-making and risk management.

These opportunities underscore that AI is not just a component but a foundational enabler of transformation across enterprise environments.

Survey Question

What are the top three opportunities you see in leveraging new enterprise software technologies?

(select 3)



Survey Question

What specific capabilities or solutions do you need from technology startups to address your current challenges and leverage opportunities?

The responses to this question provide a detailed view of the capabilities enterprises expect from startups to navigate their challenges and seize emerging opportunities.

Selected direct quotes from respondents that reflect these expectations.

Streamlining Integration and Workflow Efficiency

“We need solutions that improve integration between platforms, eliminating silos and creating smoother workflows across teams. This would drastically improve our operational efficiency.”

Senior Vice President | Solutions Delivery, Healthcare Organization

Enhanced Cybersecurity for Peace of Mind

“Innovative cybersecurity solutions are essential for combating sophisticated threats while maintaining compliance with stringent industry regulations.”

Chief Information Security Officer | Media Organization

Scalable Cloud-Based Architectures

“Scalability is critical. Startups must provide flexible and secure cloud architectures capable of handling complex workloads and future growth.”

Global Tech Innovation Director | Retail Company

Simplicity wins

“We need solutions that are easy to get started with. End of story. The complexity and overhead to bring in a new technology and/or product is brutal.”

Head of Product | Major Retailer

.....
Intuitive User Interfaces to Drive Adoption

“Extremely intuitive UI and robust software are key for rapid adoption across teams. We need tools that are as simple as they are powerful.”

Vice President, Cloud Platform Engineering | Financial Services Company

.....
AI and Predictive Insights

“AI capabilities that offer predictive insights and decision-making support are a priority. Solutions should operate seamlessly across large data sets.”

Chief Data Officer | Technology Company

.....
Simplifying Access and Security

“Solutions that simplify access management across platforms are critical as we address increasing complexity in our tech stack.”

SVP, IT Infrastructure | Telecommunications

.....
Promise less, deliver more

“So many new tech stack solutions do lots of things poorly, trying to capitalize on the tool consolidation momentum. It always leaves the customer let down, failed, and with a product that’s over promised. Fix this and win.”

VP, Product Management | Technology Company



Turning Expectations Into Opportunities

Startups and technology providers aiming to meet these needs must:

- Focus on scalability and secure integration to address enterprise growth demands.
- Offer AI-powered insights and predictive analytics to unlock strategic opportunities.
- Design user-centric interfaces that drive adoption and improve operational efficiency.

By aligning solutions with these enterprise requirements, startups can become trusted partners in overcoming challenges and driving innovation.

The Most Important Factors in Deciding Which New Technologies to Invest In

The Fill in the Blank survey revealed critical factors influencing enterprise technology investment decisions, providing startups and technology providers with insights into aligning their offerings with enterprise priorities.

Business Impact emerged as the leading priority (72% of respondents made this their number one choice). Enterprises seek technologies that deliver measurable improvements in productivity, revenue growth, and customer satisfaction, backed by clear ROI and strategic alignment.

Internal Productivity Gains ranked second, reflecting the demand for tools that streamline workflows and enhance collaboration, enabling teams to operate more efficiently and reduce time spent on repetitive tasks.

Compliance and Regulatory Requirements were identified as the third priority, particularly in regulated industries like finance and healthcare. Solutions ensuring data security and regulatory adherence are essential.

Cost Efficiency ranked fourth, with enterprises favoring scalable pricing models and low total cost of ownership.

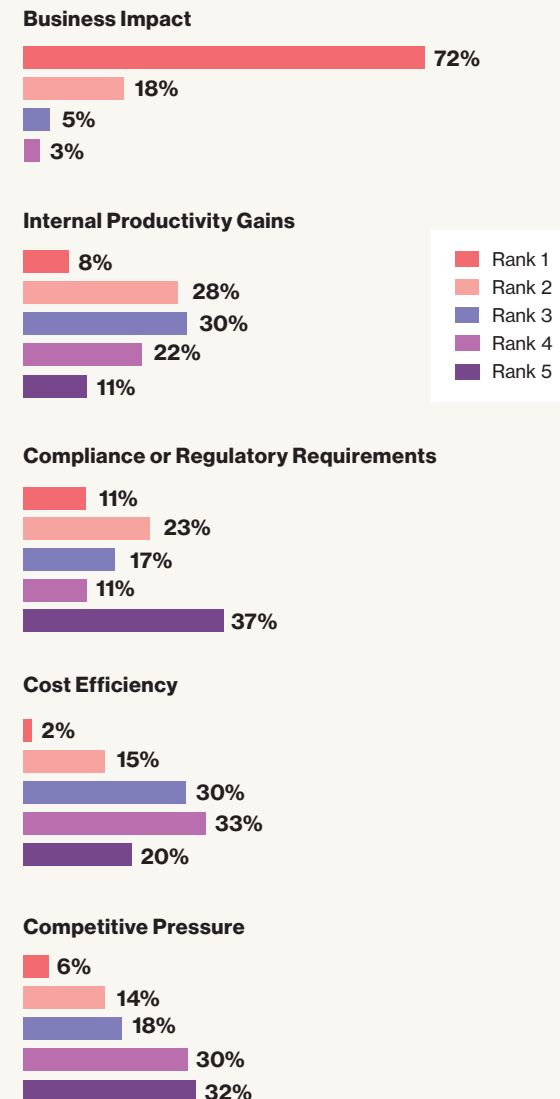
Competitive Pressure came in fifth, as enterprises strive to stay ahead by adopting cutting-edge solutions that provide strategic advantages and signal their commitment to innovation and leadership in their industry.

These factors underscore the need for innovative, scalable, and compliant solutions that deliver clear business value while supporting enterprise growth.

Respondents were asked to rank the following factors in order of importance when deciding which new technologies to invest in.

- Business Impact
- Internal Productivity Gains
- Competitive Pressure
- Cost Efficiency
- Compliance or Regulatory Requirements

Ranking Factors for Technology Investment Decisions



The Most Important Factors when Partnering with a Startup

The top factors identified in the survey reveal a consistent theme: enterprises seek partnerships with startups that combine innovation, scalability, and reliability to drive business value while minimizing risk.

Clear ROI and Business Value with 55% of respondents emphasizing its importance. Startups must demonstrate quantifiable benefits through well-defined metrics, pilot projects, and case studies that showcase how their solutions align with enterprise goals and deliver measurable outcomes like cost savings, efficiency gains, or revenue growth.

Innovative Solutions were highlighted by 45% of respondents. Enterprises value startups offering unique, cutting-edge capabilities that traditional vendors cannot provide. Adaptability and the ability to customize solutions to meet specific needs further enhance a startup's appeal.

Security and Compliance ranked highly for 43.3% of respondents. Startups must build robust security frameworks and demonstrate compliance with industry standards like GDPR or HIPAA, particularly for regulated industries.

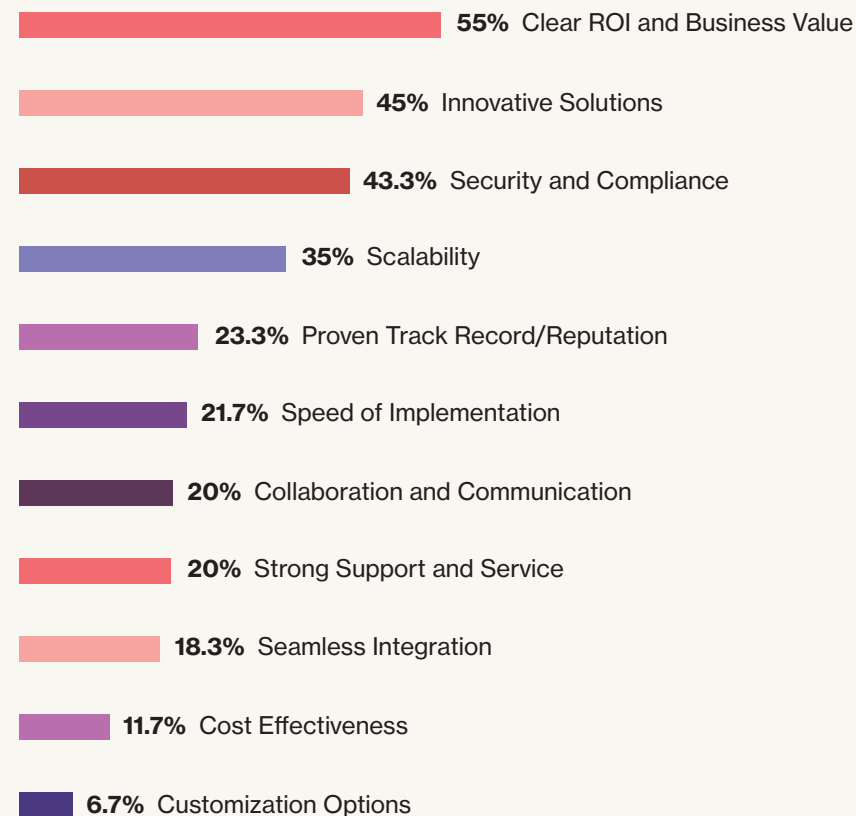
Scalability was identified as a key consideration by 35%. Enterprises look for solutions that can evolve with their business, supported by flexible architectures and a proven ability to scale in diverse environments.

These factors collectively highlight the importance of delivering innovative, secure, and scalable solutions while establishing trust and demonstrating tangible business value. Startups must prioritize these attributes to succeed in building long-term enterprise partnerships.

Survey Question

Which of the following factors are most important when partnering with a startup?

(select 3)



Survey Question

What advice would you give to technology startups looking to partner with organizations like yours?

The responses to this open-ended question contributed a level of candor and actionable insights. These themes underscore what enterprises truly value in partnerships and what technology startups must prioritize to succeed. Selected answers include:

.....
Build trust

“Give me a reason to trust you, and prove your value add early on.”

VP, Data Platform | Retail Company

.....
Make your value obvious

“Onboarding new vendors is not for the faint of heart. You have to be able to get in via a single VP’s sign off — or be offering a solution to a ‘priority one’ problem.”

Head of AI Strategy | Technology Company

.....
Be an expert and lead

“Be solutions-oriented—be an expert and say how things should be done by my company rather than overly customising the tech solution to fit every unique request.”

CFO | Telecommunications Company

.....
Focus and win

“Don’t try to solve all the world’s problems. Pick a lane and be the best at it.”

EVP & CISO | Financial Services Company

.....
Mission critical mindset

“Stay close to the realities that companies face. More often than not, each and every technology solution is ‘mission critical.’ That didn’t use to be the case, but it is now.”

Head of Product | Major Retailer

Developers: Challenges, Opportunities, and What's Top of Mind

Developers play a pivotal role in enterprise technology ecosystems. They are the architects and implementers of software solutions that drive organizational growth and efficiency. The survey results show that the following tools and technologies are top of mind for developers and software teams right now:

AI-augmented engineering is a significant focus for developers. The integration of AI into development workflows is seen as a way to boost productivity and automate code generation.

Cloud development environments (CDEs) are essential for enabling remote work. They ensure consistent development environments and improve collaboration among distributed teams.

The emphasis on **DevSecOps** reflects the growing importance of integrating security into the development process from the start.

Internal development platforms are critical for standardizing development practices, reducing friction in the development cycle, and enhancing productivity.

Collaboration and communication tools facilitate teamwork and alignment among cross-functional teams.

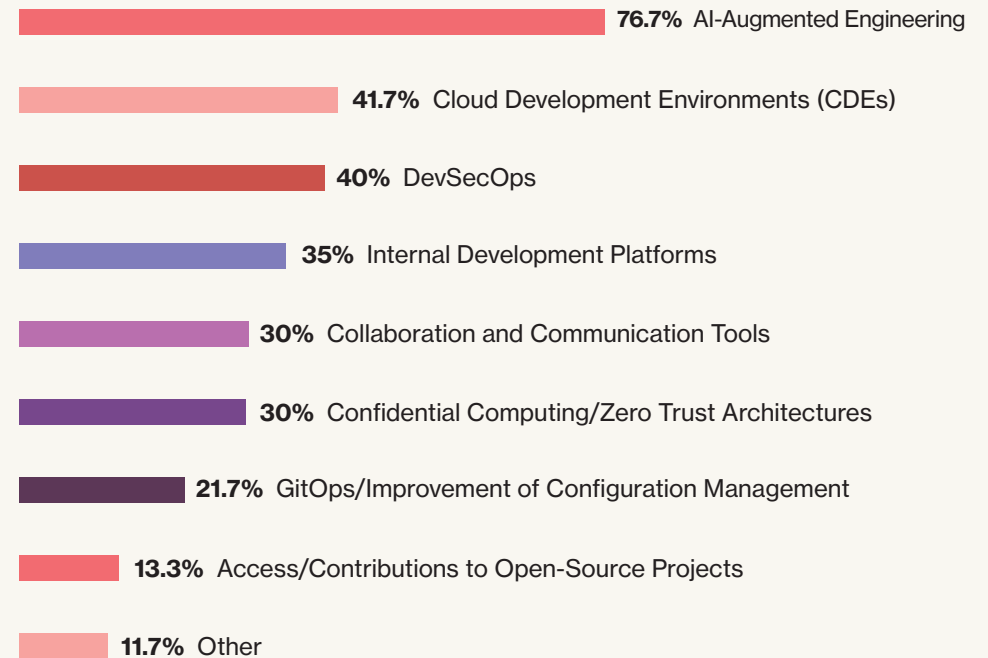
Confidential computing/zero trust architectures indicate that developers are mindful of security innovations that protect data during computation and throughout the software lifecycle.

Additionally, **GitOps** streamlines deployment, while **open-source access** keeps developers innovative and up-to-date.

Survey Question

What tools or technologies are “top of mind” for your developers and software teams?

(select 3)



Survey Question

How do the software needs impact your developers' overall productivity?

The responses to this open-ended question reveal a nuanced understanding of how current and emerging tools affect the productivity of development teams. Key themes and select answers include:

Efficiency Boost vs. Bottlenecks

“When we don’t have the right tools or when tools are outdated, it slows down development timelines and frustrates our teams. On the other hand, with the right software, we can work more efficiently and reduce repetitive coding tasks.”

Senior Architect | Retail Company

Cross-Team Integration

“Our productivity is impacted by how well different tools can talk to each other. If we have to jump through hoops just to make our tools integrate, it slows everything down and takes focus away from innovation.”

VP, Software Engineering | Financial Services Company

Learning Curves & Training

“There’s always a trade-off with new tools. While they promise greater productivity, the time spent learning and training can be a drain at first.”

Head of Engineering | Technology Company

Open-source challenges

“To gain benefits of open-source software (OSS), development processes need to change. Without that change technical debt (costs) continues to increase over time.”

VP of Software | Technology Company

Survey Question

What are the primary challenges with current tools?

Regarding primary challenges with current tools, respondents pointed to several critical issues that hinder their workflow and efficiency:

.....
Tool Compatibility and Integration

“We constantly struggle with tools that don’t integrate well with our existing tech stack. It often leads to wasted time trying to develop workarounds.”

Software Team Lead | Media Company

.....
Security Concerns

“Ensuring that all tools meet security standards is a huge challenge. It adds complexity to the development cycle and sometimes means we have to forego more innovative tools.”

CISO | Healthcare Company

.....
Performance and Scalability

“Performance issues with current tools often mean that projects slow down as they scale. This impacts not just timelines but also how our solutions are perceived by clients.”

Software Architect | Technology Company

.....
Cost and licensing limitations

“Budget constraints mean we sometimes have to choose less effective tools just because they’re more affordable. This impacts both productivity and morale.”

Engineering Director | Financial Services Company

.....

“The promise of AI and Gen AI has not played out in functional benefits for today’s workflows. Ultimately, today, AI and Gen AI have ended up as showpieces and glitzy features—not changing the business.”

VP, Product Marketing
Technology Company



Understanding What Matters to Developers

The following opportunities could set tech-providing vendors apart from their competitors:

- Integration and compatibility: Startups should focus on ensuring that their tools are highly compatible with existing tech stacks and easy to integrate, reducing friction in adoption.
- Security-first solutions: Developing tools with security and compliance as core components will resonate with enterprises prioritizing DevSecOps.
- User-friendly onboarding: Simplifying the learning curve for new tools and providing robust training resources can mitigate initial productivity dips.
- Performance and scalability: Building tools that can handle large-scale operations smoothly ensures that they can grow alongside enterprise needs.
- Flexible pricing models: Offering flexible or tiered pricing structures can make advanced tools more accessible to a wider range of organizations.

The Enterprise Data Stack: Challenges, Improvements Required, and AI

The enterprise data stack is a crucial element of modern business operations, influencing everything from decision-making to operational efficiency and customer insights, and of course, the foundational element to successful AI.

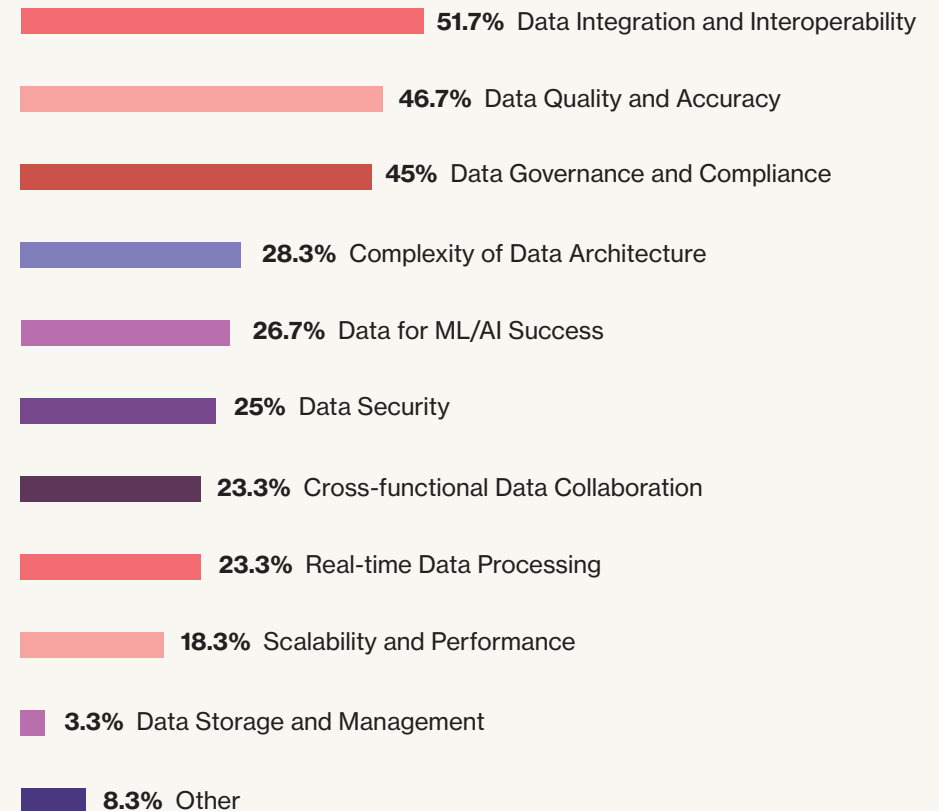
The top responses were:

- **Data integration and interoperability** for over half of the respondents represented difficulties in ensuring seamless data flow between various platforms and systems.
- **Data quality and accuracy** underscores the challenges of maintaining clean, reliable, and actionable data.
- **Data governance and compliance** appears to be an ongoing struggle to maintain compliance with data privacy regulations while ensuring data security.
- **Complexity of data architecture** is a barrier for many respondents, as they often require specialized skills and considerable time for maintenance.
- **Data for ML/AI success** demonstrates that there are gaps in data readiness and alignment with advanced analytics initiatives, making it challenging for enterprises to leverage their data for AI/ML projects.
- **Data security measures** are needed to protect sensitive data from unauthorized access and breaches.
- **Cross-functional data collaboration and real-time processing** points to difficulties in facilitating smooth data sharing across departments and processing data in real time.

Survey Question

What are the biggest challenges you face with your current enterprise data stack?

(select 3)



Survey Question

What solutions or improvements are necessary to simplify and enhance your enterprise data stack?

Answers by respondents to this open-ended question provided deeper insights into what enterprises believe is needed to improve their data infrastructure. Key themes included:

Improved data integration tools

“Integration tools that can simplify and speed up the process of merging data from different systems are critical. Right now, the complexity is overwhelming.”

VP of IT infrastructure | Financial Services Company

Advanced data management and quality tools

“We need more robust data quality management tools that can automate checks and balances. Inconsistent data is a major productivity killer.”

Head of Data Governance | Retailer

User-friendly interfaces and automation

“Automating data preparation and having intuitive interfaces would make it easier for teams to access and use the data efficiently without always needing data engineers.”

VP, Data Analytics | Media Company

Security and compliance features

“Having compliance tools integrated within the data stack is a necessity to avoid regulatory issues and streamline audits.”

CISO | Healthcare Company

Survey Question

How do you manage the integration of AI/ML models within your enterprise data stack?

Respondent answers provided insights into the varied approaches and common challenges. Selected answers and insights include:

Dedicated AI/ML pipelines

“We’ve established specific pipelines for AI/ML that allow us to test and deploy models while keeping them separate from operational data flows to minimize disruptions.”

Head of AI Strategy | Telecommunications Company

Integration complexity

“The biggest challenge we face is aligning the data structure with the needs of our ML models. Preparing data for AI/ML can be resource-intensive and requires specialized expertise.”

Head of AI Engineering | Financial Services Company

Automated model monitoring and updating

“We use automated tools to monitor model performance and flag issues in real-time. This helps us make necessary adjustments before they impact business processes.”

Chief Data Officer | Technology Company

Security and privacy concerns

“Ensuring the data feeding into our AI models is secure and complies with privacy regulations is a top priority. We use encryption and access controls to manage these concerns.”

Chief Data Officer | Healthcare Provider

“Credibility is critical—you need to be able to clearly articulate why your approach is different than everything out there and partner to discover why that matters to the business; don’t assume you already know.”

VP, Revenue
Technology Company



Opportunities for Technology Providers and Startups

Given the challenges that enterprises face and the improvements they want and need to see, there are significant opportunities for technology providers and startups to develop solutions that address these needs:

- **Unified and integrated solutions:** Startups that can offer platforms capable of integrating multiple data sources into a seamless, user-friendly system will meet a major demand.
- **AI-optimized data tools:** Developing tools that simplify data preparation for AI/ML, automate model integration, and monitor performance will appeal to enterprises looking to enhance their AI initiatives.
- **Security-first approach:** Solutions with built-in compliance and security features will resonate with enterprises in regulated industries, providing assurance that their data and AI/ML operations are secure.
- **Simplified user experience:** Emphasizing ease of use in data stack management tools will reduce the reliance on specialized roles and empower broader teams to access and use data efficiently.

Emerging Technologies and the Future of AI in Enterprises

The Fill in the Blank survey highlights the technologies expected to have the greatest impact and enterprises' readiness to adopt them. This section examines these findings, and also emphasizes AI's transformative role.

Most Impactful Emerging Technologies

Artificial intelligence and machine learning, selected by 100% of respondents, are predicted to automate processes and enable advanced decision-making across sectors. **Cybersecurity innovations** are critical as digital transformation advances, ensuring protection for complex systems. **Quantum computing**, though early in development, offers potential for solving computational challenges efficiently. **Robotics** technology is gaining relevance in automation-heavy industries like manufacturing and logistics.

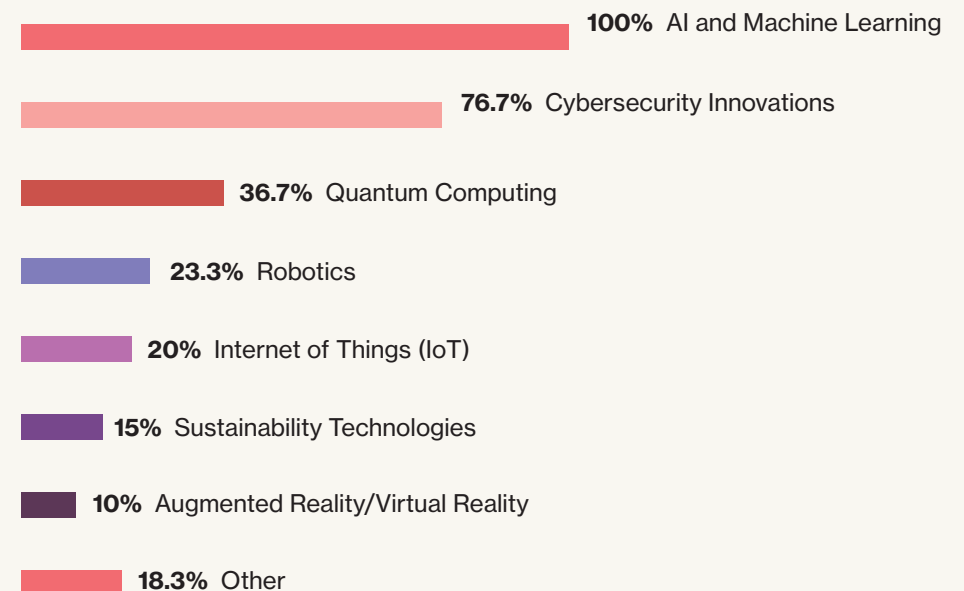
The **Internet of Things (IoT)** continues to grow, driving data collection and operational efficiencies. **Sustainability technologies** reflect a push for eco-friendly practices, while **AR/VR** presents niche opportunities in retail, training, and entertainment.

Over the next three to five years, these emerging technologies are poised to reshape business operations, decision-making, and competitive advantage, making them key areas of focus for enterprise leaders.

Survey Question

Which emerging technologies do you believe will have the most significant impact on enterprise software in the next 3-5 years?

(select 3)



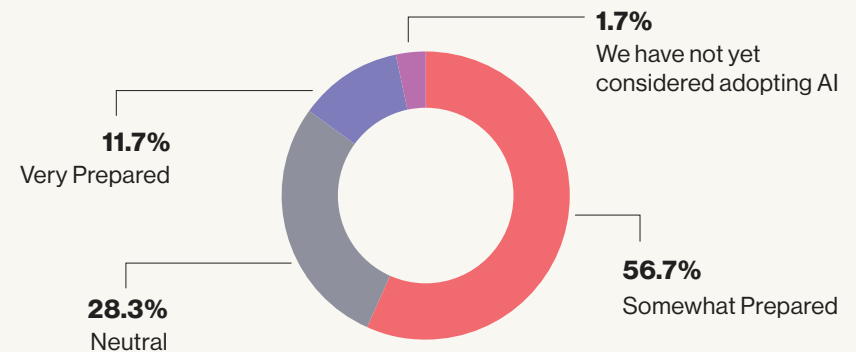
How Prepared are Enterprises for Emerging Technologies?

The survey also explored how prepared enterprises are to adopt these transformative technologies. The responses to “How prepared is your organization to adopt these emerging technologies?” were as follows:

- **Somewhat prepared:** 56.7% of respondents indicated their organizations are somewhat prepared to embrace new technologies, reflecting a state of readiness but with potential gaps in strategy, skills, or infrastructure.
- **Neutral:** 28.3% expressed a neutral stance, indicating that while there is awareness of the need for adoption, there may be a lack of clear plans or significant hurdles to overcome.
- **Very prepared:** Only 11.7% reported being very prepared, showing that a small segment of enterprises has robust strategies and frameworks already in place.
- **Somewhat unprepared:** 3.3% noted a lack of preparedness, pointing to significant challenges such as budget constraints, outdated infrastructure, or limited expertise.

Survey Question

How prepared is your organization to adopt these emerging technologies?



It is clear that some enterprises are more prepared to adopt new technologies than others. While there is widespread recognition of the importance of emerging technologies, many enterprises face obstacles to full readiness.

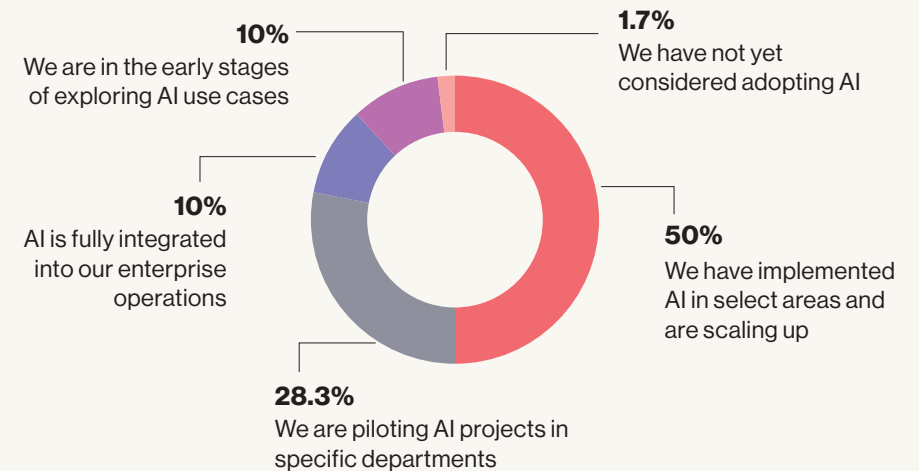
The AI Adoption Journey

100% of survey respondents believe that AI will play a significant role in enterprise software over the next three to five years. But to what degree has AI already been adopted by today's enterprises? The Fill in the Blank survey asked the question, "**Regarding AI adoption, where are you on your journey?**" The responses indicated a spectrum of progress:

- **Implemented in select areas and scaling up:** 50% of respondents reported that their organizations have implemented AI in specific areas and are in the process of scaling up. This reflects a commitment to expanding AI capabilities across more functions as confidence in its value grows.
- **Piloting AI projects in specific departments:** 28.3% are piloting AI projects within certain departments, indicating a phase of testing and learning before a broader rollout.
- **Fully integrated into operations:** Only 10% of respondents reported that AI is fully integrated into their enterprise operations and deeply embedded into their workflows and strategies.
- **In the early stages of exploration:** 10% are in the initial phases of exploring AI use cases, suggesting a more cautious approach to adoption.
- **Not yet considered:** Only 1.7% of respondents reported that they have not considered AI adoption, reinforcing the ubiquity of AI as a strategic priority across enterprises.

Survey Question

Regarding AI Adoption, where are you on your journey?



The unanimous agreement that **AI/ML will have the most significant impact** highlights the importance of this technology for enterprises. However, organizations are at various stages of adoption, with the majority still scaling up or piloting AI initiatives. This reinforces that enterprises face both opportunities and challenges in navigating the AI landscape.

Solving That One Persistent Issue

Enterprise technology is always moving at a rapid pace. Companies often shift focus toward new functionalities and innovations, leaving foundational challenges partially resolved or overlooked.

Here are the top areas the respondents identified for immediate action:

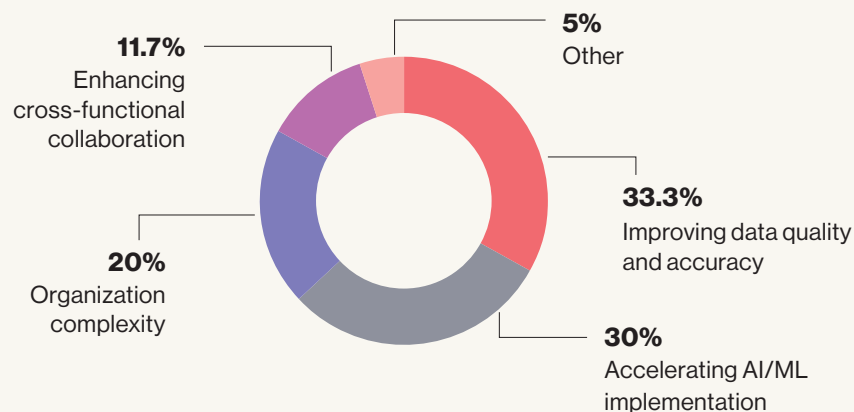
Improving data quality and accuracy tops the list despite advancements in data management technologies. Many enterprises continue to grapple with inconsistent, incomplete, or unreliable data. High data quality is foundational for accurate business insights and informed decision-making. It’s also key for effective AI/ML implementations. Poor data quality can derail entire projects, lead to misguided strategies, and waste valuable resources.

Accelerating AI/ML implementation as a priority underscores the persistent challenges enterprises face in moving from AI/ML pilot projects to full-scale, integrated implementations. Organizations frequently encounter obstacles related to data readiness, scalability, and aligning AI/ML efforts with business objectives.

Organizational complexity still persists at large enterprises—those that have perhaps grown through mergers, acquisitions, or rapid scaling—often find themselves burdened with legacy structures and processes that complicate operations. Communication barriers, overlapping processes, and hierarchical silos are common issues that impede agility and efficiency, making improving organizational complexity a key area of focus.

Survey Question

Imagine your organization has unlimited budget to address a single persistent issue. Which of the following would you prioritize for immediate action?



Enhancing cross-functional collaboration highlights the ongoing need to improve communication and workflows between different departments. Collaboration remains a challenge due to varied objectives, tools, and workflows that often create silos within the organization.

Other priorities from respondents provided specific issues that fell outside of the main options but were equally telling of enterprise pain points. These responses included:

- **Integration of legacy systems:** The challenge of integrating older, mission-critical systems with modern technology solutions was noted as a persistent issue that requires significant budget and expertise.
- **Employee training and upskilling:** For a few respondents, ensuring employees are continuously trained on new technologies and best practices is a priority.
- **Streamlined compliance processes:** Regulatory compliance was also highlighted, with a focus on automating and simplifying compliance workflows to reduce administrative burdens.



Implications for Technology Providers and Startups

For startups and technology providers, insights into these persistent issues present clear opportunities for innovation and strategic positioning:

- **Solutions for data quality:** Developing tools that automate data cleansing, standardize data governance, and enhance real-time data validation will resonate with enterprises that prioritize resolving this pressing challenge.
- **Scalable AI/ML platforms:** Creating platforms that facilitate seamless integration of AI/ML models into existing data stacks and operational workflows can help organizations move from the pilot phase to full-scale implementation.
- **Collaboration tools with integration focus:** Designing collaboration tools that integrate smoothly with other enterprise software and foster real-time, cross-departmental engagement can address the need for improved internal communication.
- **Legacy system integration services:** Providing robust services that help modernize or integrate legacy systems with new technologies can tap into the unique challenges enterprises face in balancing old and new infrastructure.

Final Chapter: Bridging Enterprise Needs and Startup Solutions

The Fill in the Blank survey has illuminated the current state of enterprise technology across various industries, highlighting the challenges, aspirations, and priorities of the senior leaders making technology decisions. From understanding the critical decision-making processes to uncovering persistent issues and opportunities in leveraging new technologies, this report presents a comprehensive look at how enterprises are navigating an increasingly complex environment.

In this final chapter, we summarize the findings and emphasize the essential partnership between senior tech leaders in enterprises and the founders of advanced technology startups.

Key Findings Recap

Top challenges in enterprise technology

Enterprises face significant challenges, including **security and compliance, data integration, cross-functional collaboration,** and **user adoption.** These pain points create obstacles that slow progress, impede innovation, and impact productivity. The persistence of these challenges points to gaps in current solutions and opportunities for targeted improvements.

Opportunities for growth

Despite these challenges, enterprises see clear opportunities to leverage new software technologies. **Increased operational efficiency, accelerated innovation, and improved data analytics** outcomes are among the most sought-after benefits. The focus on scalable, secure, and innovative technology reflects a desire for solutions that solve immediate problems and position enterprises for future success.

Adoption and integration of emerging technologies

The unanimous response that **AI/ML** will be the most impactful emerging technology underscores its critical role in shaping enterprise strategies. However, the survey also revealed varied stages of readiness and adoption. While some organizations are scaling

up their AI capabilities, others are still piloting projects or exploring potential use cases, showing a broad spectrum of AI maturity.

Persistent issues needing resolution

Enterprises would prioritize **improving data quality, accelerating AI/ML implementation,** and tackling **organizational complexity** if they had unlimited resources. Fixing these foundational issues, though often overlooked in pursuit of new functionality, is essential to achieving long-term operational success.

Top challenges in enterprise technology

The survey highlighted the specific tools and technologies that are top of mind for developers, including **AI-augmented engineering, DevSecOps, and cloud development environments.** However, developers continue to face challenges with tool integration, security, and scalability, impacting productivity and innovation.

Critical decision-making

The survey underscored that decision-making related to AI and other advanced technologies is diverse, involving CIOs, CTOs, CDOs, AI/ML teams, and cross-functional committees. This collaborative decision-making approach highlights the complex, multifaceted nature of technology adoption in enterprises.

The Importance of Partnerships with Founders

The relationship between **senior enterprise tech leaders** and **founders of advanced technology** startups is central to addressing the challenges and seizing the opportunities outlined in this report. This partnership is built on mutual needs and complementary strengths:

Enterprises need innovation and agility:

Technology decision-makers in enterprises are tasked with navigating a rapidly changing landscape where new challenges arise alongside the demand for innovation. Startups bring fresh perspectives and cutting-edge technologies. They also provide the agility to adapt solutions quickly. These attributes are invaluable for enterprises looking to enhance productivity, integrate advanced technologies like AI/ML, and solve persistent issues.

Startups need strategic guidance and scale:

Founders can benefit from partnering with enterprise leaders who provide real-world insights into complex problems and offer strategic direction. Enterprises also offer the scale and funding that startups need to mature their solutions, fine-tune their offerings, and validate their models in demanding environments.

What Enterprises Look for in Partnerships

The survey results highlighted the most important factors that enterprises consider when partnering with startups. **Enterprises prioritize clear ROI and business value, innovative solutions, security and compliance, and scalability.** They also want to see a **proven track record.** Startups that can demonstrate these attributes position themselves as attractive partners in the eyes of senior technology leaders.

Solving foundational problems: Startups that focus on solving persistent, foundational problems such as **data integration, improving data quality, and streamlining compliance processes** will find strong interest from enterprises.

Collaborative and supportive engagement:

Enterprises value startups that foster transparent communication and effective collaboration. Ongoing support is another key requirement. Startups that view partnerships as long-term engagements rather than transactional interactions can build more sustainable relationships with enterprise clients.

The Future of Enterprise–Tech Collaboration

The path forward for enterprise–tech collaboration lies in bridging the gap between persistent needs and the innovative solutions that startups offer. This involves:

Co-creating solutions: Enterprises and startups can work together to co-develop tailored solutions that address specific pain points and scale to meet future demands.

Agile experimentation and scaling: Startups are nimble and adaptable. Enterprises can leverage these characteristics to pilot new technologies quickly, evaluate their impact, and scale successful solutions.

Mutual growth and innovation: A successful partnership benefits both parties—enterprises achieve greater efficiency, security, and innovation, while startups gain invaluable experience, expand their market reach, and refine their products.

Conclusion

The Fill in the Blank survey has provided critical insights into the evolving landscape of enterprise technology. It has uncovered many challenges, opportunities, and decision-making

complexities, which highlight the importance of targeted solutions and strategic partnerships. The collaboration between **senior enterprise tech leaders** and **startup founders** is vital for solving persistent issues and driving meaningful innovation. It will also help ensure that enterprises remain competitive in a dynamic market.

For startups, understanding what enterprises need and aligning their offerings accordingly will pave the way for impactful partnerships. Meanwhile, enterprises that embrace these relationships and invest in new technologies with clear, strategic value will be able to thrive at the forefront of technological advancement and operational excellence.

These are the partnerships that will help bridge the gap between current challenges and future opportunities, creating a sustainable path toward innovation and growth.

Survey Surprises or Common Sense?

The Fill in the Blank survey revealed several insights into the enterprise technology landscape that might surprise some—but could feel like common sense to those living it day-to-day. Here are the standout findings:

AI Adoption: A Mixed Bag

AI/ML topped the list of impactful emerging technologies, but the maturity gap was striking. Enterprises are split between piloting AI projects and scaling robust implementations. This wide spectrum shows an opportunity for startups to meet enterprises at their specific stage of readiness.

Data Quality Is Still King

Amid the buzz around cutting-edge tech, improving data quality was ranked as a top priority. This underscores that even as enterprises chase innovation, foundational issues remain the bedrock for success. Startups addressing these challenges will find an eager market.

Clear ROI and Business Value

Enterprises prioritize “clear ROI and business value” in partnerships, seeking measurable outcomes like cost savings or efficiency gains. Startups must deliver results through pilot projects, case studies

and metrics, ensuring innovation aligns with enterprise goals and drives tangible outcomes.

Collaboration Over Silos

Organizational silos continue to plague enterprises, slowing innovation despite an abundance of advanced tools. Solutions that enhance cross-functional collaboration and simplify workflows could be game-changers.

Developers Need Simplicity

The complexity of tools, scalability concerns, and security gaps are taking a toll on developers’ productivity. Enterprises are looking for solutions that streamline their tech stacks and empower engineering teams to innovate efficiently.

Agility Over Legacy

While a proven track record is important, enterprises surprisingly value agility and adaptability over legacy scale. Startups that can move fast, adapt to changing needs, and demonstrate ROI will find themselves highly attractive partners.

These findings highlight a mix of surprises and common-sense truths about enterprise priorities. For startups, addressing these key areas with a fresh perspective can open the door to meaningful, and lasting success.



Crane Insights

In the following section, Crane team members share their perspectives—offering commentary, learnings, and actionable takeaways to inspire startup founders as they align their efforts with the evolving priorities and challenges of global enterprise technology buyers.

The Bridge We Must Build: Why Enterprise-Startup Collaboration is Critical for Tech's Future

By **Scott Sage** | Co-founder & Partner, Crane Venture Partners

As someone who's spent a good bit of time investing in emerging startups and lived the operational utilization of new technology in large enterprises, the Fill in the Blank survey crystallizes what I've long observed: the future of technological advancement hinges on bridging the gap between established enterprises and innovative startups. This isn't just another market dynamic—it's arguably the most critical catalyst for technological progress in our time.

The Enterprise Reality Check

Let's be candid: enterprises aren't just moving slowly—they're drowning in complexity. The survey's findings are stark: 41.7% say they're struggling with security and compliance, while 38.3% grapple with data stack management as a top issue. These aren't mere statistics; they represent billions in untapped potential and missed opportunities. What's fascinating is that 100% of respondents acknowledge AI/ML as transformative, yet only 10% have fully integrated these technologies. This gap between aspiration and execution is where the magic happens for savvy investors and entrepreneurs.

The Startup Opportunity is Massive

Here's what makes me bullish: enterprises are practically begging for innovation. When 61.7% of respondents prioritize operational efficiency, and 45% seek faster innovation, they're essentially writing an invitation to startups. But here's the kicker—it's not just about building better technology. The successful startups we've backed understand that enterprises need partners who can navigate their complexity while delivering innovation. It's a delicate dance, but the rewards are extraordinary.

The \$3B-\$4B Question

The survey respondents influence between \$3B-\$4B in annual tech spending. That's not just a market opportunity—it's a mandate for transformation. Smart money should be flowing

to startups that can thread the needle between enterprise requirements (security, compliance, integration) and innovative solutions (AI/ML, automation, data management and analytics). The winners will be those who understand that enterprise sales isn't just about features—it's about becoming a trusted partner in transformation.

Why This Marriage Must Work

Here's what keeps me up at night: if we don't get this right, we're looking at a future where technological advancement is stunted by the very organizations that should be driving it. The survey shows that only 11.7% of enterprises feel very prepared for emerging technologies. This isn't just a problem—it's an existential threat to innovation itself.

The Path Forward

For investors and founders, the playbook is clear:

- Focus on foundational problems first (data quality, security, integration)
- Build for scale but design for simplicity
- Demonstrate ROI early and often
- Understand that enterprise sales is about ecosystem building and articulating value, not just product delivery

For enterprises, the mandate is equally clear:

- Create clear pathways for startup engagement
- Invest in innovation partnerships, not just vendor relationships
- Build internal capabilities to adopt and scale new technologies
- Accept that transformation requires both internal change and external partnerships

The future of technology advancement depends on getting this relationship right. It's time we stopped seeing enterprises and startups as opposing forces and started seeing them as complementary engines of innovation. That's where the real opportunity lies, and that's where smart money should be flowing.

The Stakes Are Too High to Fail

This isn't just about market opportunity—it's about ensuring that technological advancement doesn't get bottlenecked by organizational inertia. The survey shows that enterprises know what they need; startups are building what enterprises want; the missing piece is the bridge between them.

At Crane, we've never been more excited about the opportunity this presents. The next decade will belong to those who can successfully bridge the enterprise-startup divide. It's not just about better technology—it's about better collaboration, better understanding, and ultimately, better outcomes for everyone involved.



Scott Sage

Co-founder & Partner, Crane Venture Partners

Scott Sage is Co-founder and Partner at Crane Venture Partners, where he identifies and backs ambitious founders building the next generation of enterprise technology companies. With over fifteen years of experience in venture capital, Scott brings a diverse background spanning marketing, strategy, research, and finance to his investment approach.

Drawing on his Texas roots and appreciation for humble self-starters, Scott has developed a keen eye for founders who combine technical excellence with entrepreneurial grit. He is particularly focused on the transformative impact of artificial intelligence across the enterprise technology stack, from infrastructure to applications.

The Compliance Paradox: Why Do Enterprises Treat Essential Requirements as Secondary Priorities?

Morgane Zerath | Investor, Crane Venture Partners

A fascinating paradox emerges from the Fill in the Blank survey data: while 45% of enterprises cite compliance and regulatory requirements as major operational challenges, these same factors rank surprisingly low in technology investment priorities. This disconnect begs a deeper question: Are enterprises potentially undermining their long-term resilience by treating compliance as a checkbox rather than a strategic advantage?

The Hidden Cost of “Table Stakes” Thinking

The survey reveals an intriguing psychological framework in enterprise decision-making. Compliance and cost efficiency are viewed as “table stakes”—necessary but not transformative. This mindset creates a potential blind spot: by relegating these factors to mere operational requirements, enterprises might be missing opportunities to turn compliance excellence into competitive advantage.

Consider these telling statistics:

- 45% struggle with data governance and compliance
- Yet only 36.7% prioritize compliance in new tech investments

- Meanwhile, 61.7% prioritize operational efficiency
- And 45% emphasize faster innovation

This disparity suggests a potentially dangerous assumption: that compliance and innovation exist in separate spheres. But in today’s regulatory environment, is this distinction still valid?

The Strategic Opportunity Hidden in Plain Sight

What if we’re looking at this wrong? The low prioritization of compliance in technology investments might represent one of the largest untapped opportunities in enterprise software. Here’s why:

- **Regulatory Complexity as Innovation Driver**
Instead of viewing compliance as a burden, forward-thinking enterprises could leverage it as a catalyst for innovation. Imagine compliance requirements driving the development of more sophisticated data management systems or AI governance frameworks.
- **The Cost of Reactive Compliance**
The survey suggests enterprises may be underestimating the strategic value of proactive compliance investment. When regulations tighten (as they inevitably do), reactive compliance measures often prove more expensive and disruptive than proactive ones.

• **The Competitive Edge of Compliance Excellence**

In an era where data privacy and security concerns dominate public discourse, could superior compliance capabilities become a key differentiator? The survey data suggests most enterprises aren't thinking this way—creating an opportunity for those who do.

A New Framework: From Checkbox to Checkmate

Perhaps it's time to reframe how we think about compliance and cost efficiency in technology investment decisions. Instead of treating them as baseline requirements, what if we viewed them as strategic enablers of innovation and growth?

Consider this alternative perspective:

- Compliance-driven innovation could lead to more robust, trustworthy AI systems
- Cost efficiency, when built into system architecture from the start, could enable more sustainable scaling
- Regulatory requirements could drive the development of more sophisticated data management tools

The Question for Enterprise Leaders

The real question isn't whether compliance and cost efficiency matter—clearly, they do. The question is: Are enterprises missing a strategic opportunity by treating these factors as operational hurdles rather than drivers of innovation?

For startups and technology providers, this paradox presents an interesting opportunity. Those who can bridge the gap between compliance requirements and innovation priorities might find themselves addressing a significantly underserved need in the enterprise market.

The Path Forward

The data suggests we need a fundamental shift in how enterprises think about compliance and cost efficiency. Rather than treating them as separate from innovation initiatives, perhaps it's time to integrate them into the core of technology strategy. After all, in a world where data privacy and regulatory requirements are increasingly stringent, the ability to turn compliance excellence into competitive advantage might be the next frontier of enterprise innovation.

What do you think? Are enterprises right to prioritize direct business impact over compliance in their technology investments, or is this mindset creating hidden vulnerabilities in their innovation strategies?



Morgane Zerath

Investor, Crane Venture Partners

Morgane is an investment banker turned software sales leader turned VC. She joined Crane in 2021 to invest into ambitious founders and help them navigate their GTM.

Prior to joining Crane, Morgane was the Sales Director at Tessian, one of the fastest growing Cyber companies in Europe (backed by Crane). Starting as a salesperson when the company was still 10 people, she then moved to a leadership role where she built and scaled the sales function in Europe. She spent her early years in Investment Banking, working closely with Private Equity funds on European LBOs.

The AI Decision-Making Wild West: Why Enterprise Tech's Biggest Problem is Also Its Most Fascinating

Anna Cachadiña Abelló | Investor, Crane Venture Partners

In an era where AI promises to revolutionize everything from coffee brewing to rocket science, here's something properly mind-bending: the Fill in the Blank survey reveals that enterprise AI decisions are being made by... well, almost everyone. And no one. At the same time. Welcome to tech's most fascinating organizational puzzle.

The Scattered Reality of AI Leadership

Picture this: In one enterprise, it's the CTO partnering with data science teams. In another, it's the CISO collaborating with Model Risk teams. Some organizations have their product managers calling the AI shots, while others rely on cross-functional teams with no clear leader. If this sounds like chaos, that's because it largely is.

The numbers tell a striking story: 70% of surveyed organizations report no single leader with complete oversight of AI projects. This isn't just fragmented decision-making - it's a glimpse into how enterprises are grappling with perhaps the most transformative technology of our time.

The Brilliant Mess

Here's what makes this situation particularly fascinating: while 100% of survey respondents believe AI will significantly impact enterprise software in the next three to five years, only 10% report having fully integrated AI into their operations. It's like everyone's agreed on the destination but is taking different roads, some of which might be scenic routes, others possibly dead ends.

Why This Actually Makes Sense (Sort Of)

The traditional top-down decision-making model simply doesn't cut it for AI. The technology is too complex, too pervasive, and too transformative to be managed by a single department or leader. The scattered approach, while messy, might actually be a natural evolution - enterprises adapting their structure to match AI's cross-functional nature.

The Risks are Real

When enterprises lack clear AI leadership:

- Security becomes a game of whack-a-mole
- Innovation gets diluted in committee meetings
- Resources scatter like confetti
- Strategy becomes more wishful thinking than actual strategy

A New Kind of Order

Rather than forcing AI decisions into traditional hierarchies, smart enterprises are creating new frameworks where multiple viewpoints can coexist with clear accountability. Think less org chart, more neural network.

For tech providers and startups, this fragmentation is both headache and opportunity. Solutions need to be designed for:

- Multiple stakeholder requirements (because everyone's a stakeholder now)
- Cross-functional collaboration (because that's how things actually get done)
- Clear governance frameworks (because someone needs to keep track of this stuff)
- Transparent decision-making processes (because trust is currency)

As we continue to invest in and support enterprise technology companies, we're betting on those who understand that the future of AI governance isn't about centralizing control - it's about orchestrating collaboration. In this Wild West of AI decision-making, the winners won't be the fastest guns, but the best conductors.

And honestly? That's probably exactly as it should be.

The Brilliant Future

At Crane, we reckon this fragmentation isn't just a challenge - it's one of the most fascinating aspects of enterprise AI adoption. It's forcing organizations to rethink not just how they implement technology, but how they make decisions about it.

Anna Cachadiña Abelló



Investor, Crane Venture Partners

Anna moved to the UK to pursue a degree in Computer Science. After working for a few years as a software developer at Goldman Sachs, she joined Crane to be at the heart of innovation. She enjoys diving deep into technical topics and aspires to support and learn from passionate founders.

Born and raised in Barcelona, Anna grew up in an entrepreneurial family. She enjoys spending time outdoors and is always up for a long walk or a thought-provoking conversation (ideally, both combined!)

The Power of Focus: Pick a Lane and Be the Best

Guy Bentley | Investor, Crane Venture Partners

It's been said that the path to success isn't paved with broad promises but with precise, focused solutions. This important notion, drawing from our enterprise technology survey, explores why specialisation and optimisation have become the critical components of sustainable growth and how startups can leverage these principles to build lasting success.

The Strategic Imperative of Choosing Your Niche

One of the most striking insights from this year's Fill in the Blank survey came from a senior enterprise executive who advised, "Don't try to solve all the world's problems. Pick a lane and be the best at it." That statement stuck with me because it perfectly encapsulates the encouragement we often give to early-stage founders. Success in the enterprise software market isn't about casting the widest net; it's about finding a sharp focus and executing relentlessly.

As an investor, we've seen time and again how startups try to do too much too soon. It's tempting (and the spirit admirable) to address every problem or accommodate every request from potential customers. But the reality is, this approach often backfires. Trying to solve

everything means solving nothing well. As they say, "jack of all trades, master of none." Enterprises are looking for partners who can solve specific, critical pain points with depth and precision, not generalists who dabble in many areas.

Building Trust Through Focused Excellence

The survey results reaffirmed this. Respondents overwhelmingly highlighted the need for clear ROI and measurable business value when considering new technology investments. These decision-makers, overseeing millions in technology spending, aren't interested in grand promises—they want solutions that deliver demonstrable impact from day one. As one respondent put it, startups need to "give me a reason to trust you and prove your value early."

Establishing trust early on is a recurring theme in enterprise sales, and it's here that choosing a

lane becomes invaluable. By focusing on a well-defined problem, startups can deliver results that are tangible and quantifiable. This not only earns credibility with the initial customer but lays a strong foundation for broader adoption.

From Specialisation to Strategic Growth

For example, the survey revealed that 76.7% of respondents prioritise AI-augmented engineering, such as AI-driven application development. Startups aiming to break into this space would do well to begin with a specific workflow—say, streamlining procurement or automating customer onboarding. Once they prove their solution's worth in that narrow use case, they can begin to expand their reach. Thus creating and, importantly, capturing more value.

This disciplined approach is not only effective but strategic. Enterprises are complex organisations with varied decision-makers—VPs, CTOs, CIOs, “Heads of,” and often entire committees. Trying to please everyone at once is a recipe for confusion. A narrow focus allows startups to navigate these dynamics more effectively by delivering a clear and consistent value proposition that resonates with a specific stakeholder or department.

We’ve also found that founders who embrace this mindset often discover surprising opportunities for growth. Mastering one “lane” often reveals adjacent challenges or complementary needs within the enterprise, paving the way for natural expansion. It’s

much easier to scale up when you’ve already built trust, demonstrated value, and gained significant self-confidence.

The temptation to do more is understandable, especially in a market as competitive and fast-moving as enterprise software technology. But success often comes to those who resist that urge and instead go deep rather than wide. As one executive told us, “Onboarding a new vendor isn’t for the faint of heart. You have to solve a ‘priority one’ problem.”

Our advice to founders is simple: be bold but be disciplined. Pick a lane, be the best at it, and let that excellence speak for itself. The world may have many problems, but solving one with mastery is how you’ll make the greatest impact.

In the end, success in enterprise technology isn’t about being everything to everyone—it’s about being invaluable to someone.



Guy Bentley

Investor, Crane Venture Partners

Guy is a VC, turned operator, turned VC again. He has a deep understanding of both the early and late stage, with a particular focus on performance metrics, system architecture design and operational processes.

Prior to joining Crane, he was a Business Operations Manager at Onfido, the fast growing AI digital identity company (backed by Crane) and was the 15th employee at Flatfair, an early stage fintech, working directly on the GTM before becoming the Operations Lead where he scaled the Ops function.

Guy holds an MBA from INSEAD, represented England Rugby at school boy level and is an avid chess player.

AI as the Engine of Reinvention

Krishna Visvanathan | Co-founder and Partner, Crane Venture Partners

The findings from our Fill in the Blank survey reveal a pivotal moment for organisations and society. Senior executives from leading industries emphasise AI and advanced analytics as transformative forces but grapple with challenges like integration complexity, scalability, and security. These survey insights align seamlessly with the broader narrative of AI reshaping enterprise software into a catalyst for reinvention.

Enterprise software has evolved beyond developers, SaaS models, codebases, and cloud platforms. Today, it integrates software, hardware, AI, and data to tackle industry-specific challenges. This shift drives specialised, optimised solutions that are reshaping industries worldwide, transforming how technology powers business.

The New Scope of Enterprise Software

Enterprise software now goes beyond operational efficiency and cloud-based infrastructure, addressing complex,

industry-specific problems. AI and data enable real-time decision-making, predictive insights, and automation, creating entirely new business models.

In healthcare, AI analyses genetic and historical data to recommend personalised treatment plans and predict outcomes. These tools are transforming healthcare providers, moving from reactive care to proactive, patient-centered operations.

In finance, predictive AI models assess risks, anticipate market shifts, and tailor products, enhancing efficiency and redefining personalization and speed in financial services.

Startups Driving Industry Reinvention

Startups are leading this transformation, unburdened by legacy systems and free to innovate quickly. They are creating solutions that integrate software, hardware, and data, disrupting traditional industries.

In manufacturing, startups use AI to optimise supply chains, predict equipment failures, and improve sustainability. These solutions reduce waste, lower costs, and accelerate production timelines, delivering transformative results.

In retail, AI-driven tools personalise customer experiences through dynamic pricing, virtual try-ons, and more, setting new standards for convenience and engagement.

Crane's Investment Strategy: Backing the Bold Ones

At Crane, we see this transformation as a fundamental shift, not a trend. We focus on startups that integrate AI, hardware, and data to solve immediate challenges while redefining industries. Our investment targets deep tech, fintech, healthcare, and the new infrastructure for software, sectors at the forefront of innovation.

We prioritise and connect with founders that combine industry expertise with cutting-edge technology, such as AI-powered medical devices or financial infrastructure platforms. Scalable and adaptable solutions that evolve with market needs are key to long-term success.

A New Era for Enterprise Software

We believe we're at the beginning of a fundamental shift in how enterprises operate, compete, and create value. The future belongs to those who embrace continuous reinvention—not because it's possible, but because it's inevitable. And we're here to back the ambitious visionaries who will lead the way.

Krishna Visvanathan



Co-founder and Partner, Crane Venture Partners

Krishna Visvanathan is Co-founder and Partner at Crane Venture Partners, bringing two decades of experience backing global enterprise technology founders. His investment focus spans the entire enterprise stack, informed by hands-on experience as a former deep tech startup co-founder and operator.

Born and raised in Malaysia before making the UK his home for the past three decades, Krishna brings a global perspective to technology investing. He is a committed champion of European entrepreneurship, actively working to strengthen the region's enterprise technology ecosystem.

Crane Venture Partners: First to believe. Last to Leave.

We pride ourselves on being the first to believe in ambitious entrepreneurs shaping the future of technology. We invest at inception through every flavour of pre-seed and seed, delivering the right resources at the right time and the opportunity for global success. We're people helping people dream, deliver, and win.

crane.vc