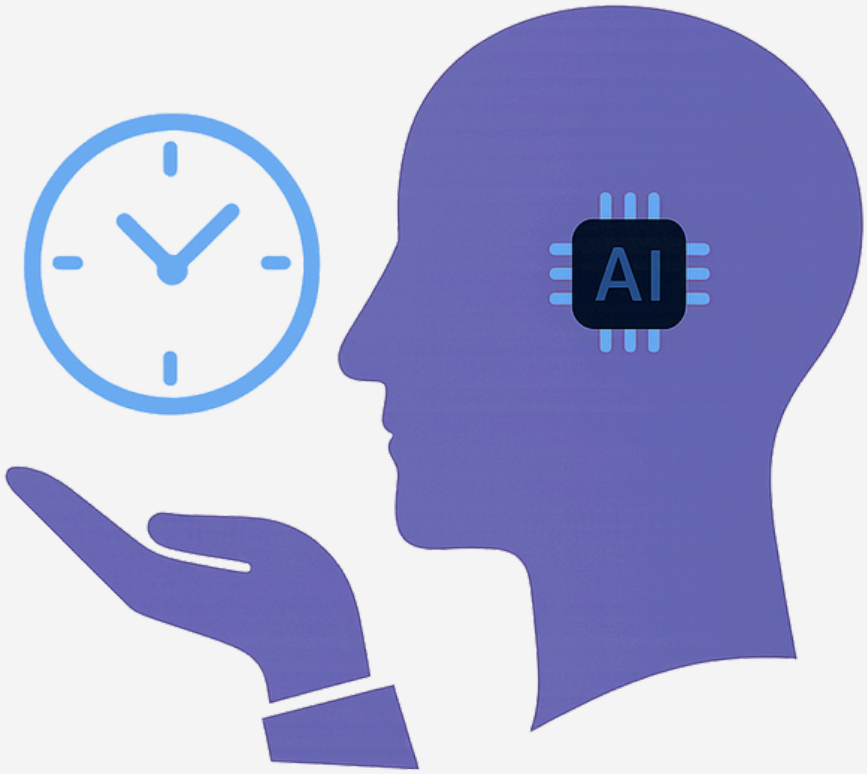
LAPIS

The 30% Solution

A Guide for Operations Leaders on Protecting Your Margins with AI



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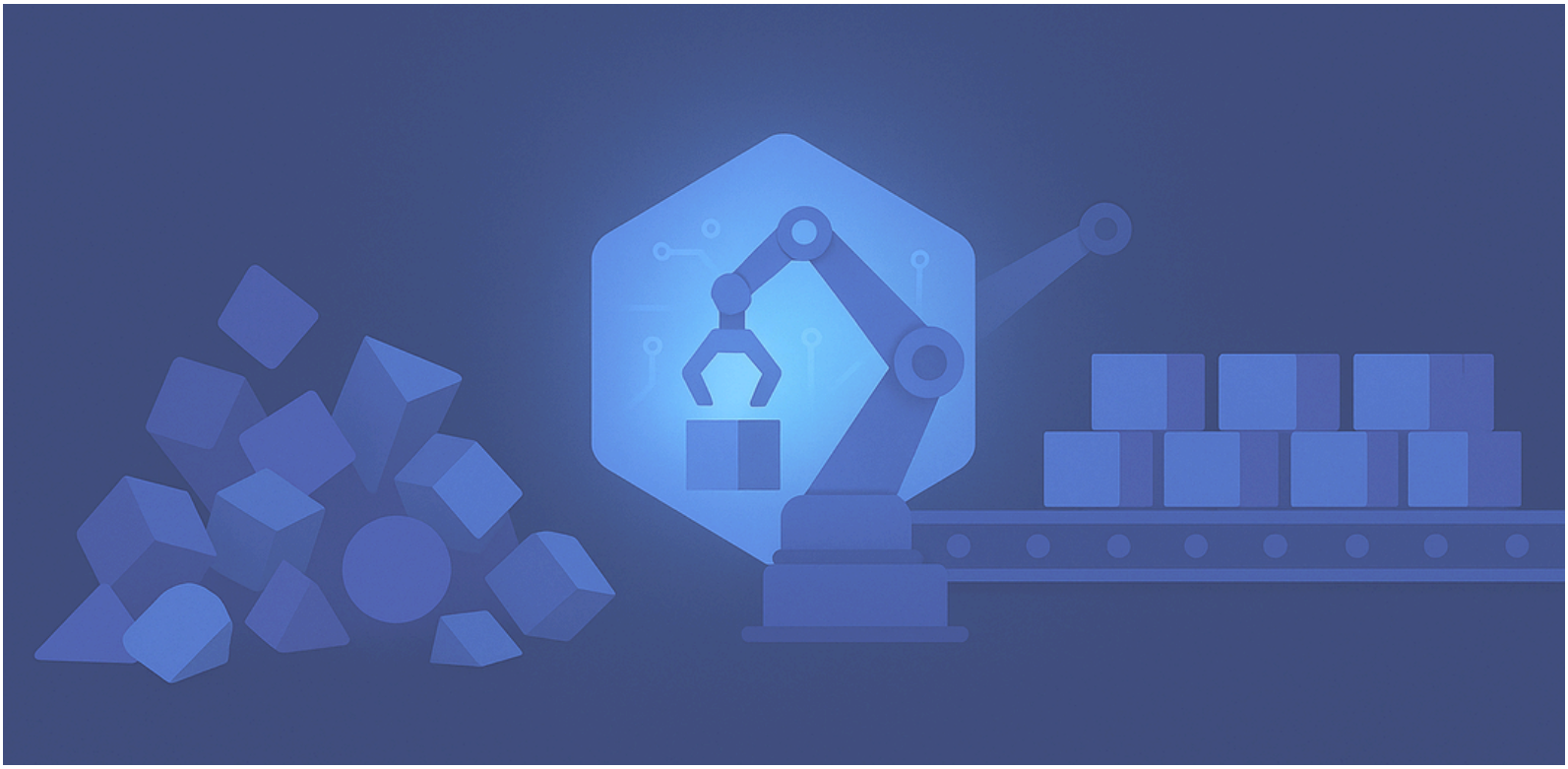

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Findings

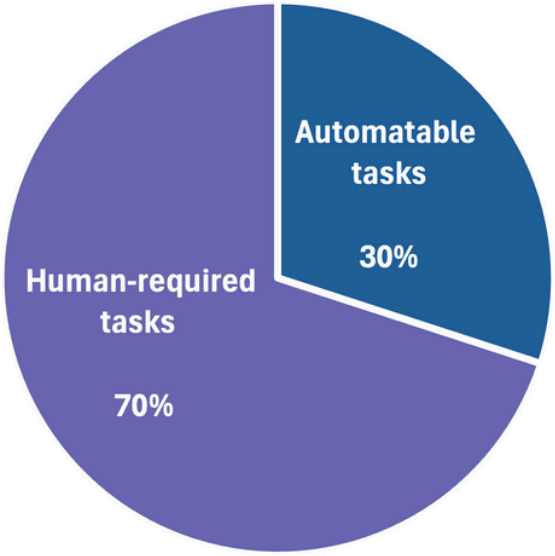
- **73%** of companies are spending excessive time on manual processes, however, **86%** are struggling to implement AI at a company-wide level and only **32%** have moved beyond basic ChatGPT usage.
- Employees spend at least **30%** of their time on administrative and repetitive tasks that AI could automate.

Opportunity

- There is a **significant gap** between AI awareness and implementation complexity, creating opportunities for solutions that bridge tactical quick wins with strategic transformation to stay ahead of competitors.

This report is based on 31 in-depth interviews with Operations leaders across 9 industries.

AT LEAST 30% OF WORK CAN BE COMPLETED BY AI



Strategies for Succcess

- **Focus on cost reduction** through automation, productivity enhancement, knowledge preservation, and selective custom AI investment.
- **Phased adoption** starting with high-impact, low-implementation-effort initiatives.

Business impact

- AI can give employees back **at least 30%** of their time, enabling companies to **slash operational and hiring costs.**

Part 1

The Case for AI Impact

The Economic Imperative for AI

INTRODUCTION

The Economy Reality Check

Experts agree the U.S. economy is sharply slowing in 2025.

BNP Paribas notes a GDP contraction of -0.1% in Q1 and projects annual growth to drop to 0.6% for the year, with an average annual rate of just 1.7%, in stark contrast to the 2.8% seen in 2024.[1]

The slowdown is attributed to deteriorating labor markets, significant policy uncertainty, and shocks from new tariffs. Vanguard has also revised its 2025 GDP forecast downward to below 1% in response to these real-time signals.[2]

Businesses will have to find ways to do more with less, and many are already doing so by implementing AI.

1. BNP Paribas Economic Research, July 2025
2. Vanguard investment Outlook, April 2025

HOW ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY CREATES ADOPTION MOMENTUM

Economic slowdowns have historically been catalysts for innovation and operational efficiency.

Today's convergence of economic uncertainty with unprecedented AI capabilities creates a unique inflection point for operations leaders willing to act decisively.

Paradoxically, economic pressure often accelerates technology adoption rather than stalling it. When faced with budget constraints and the mandate to "do more with less," operations leaders become more receptive to solutions that promise efficiency gains.

This urgency manifests in:

- **Faster decision-making cycles** as companies prioritize quick wins over lengthy deliberation
- **Willingness to pilot technologies** previously considered "too risky" or unproven
- **Cross-departmental collaboration** driven by shared pressure to optimize operations

> “You're using so much time on data entry, but these are not our high-value activities.”
>
> -Kevin M., COO, Waste Management

As Kevin M., COO of a mid-sized waste management company, observed, “I don't want just to be stuck in analysis. I need to make some things happen quickly. You're using so much time on data entry, but these are not our high-value activities."

Our research found that 27% of operations leaders report receiving more executive support for AI initiatives since economic concerns intensified.

These investments have already yielded tangible results. According to Kristina V., COO of a 25-year-old technology services and consulting firm, “Generative AI allows us to build automations and useful tools at an incredible speed, at least doubling our development speed without sacrificing quality. The capability to build digital tools that solve our specific problems on an as-needed basis has been an absolute game changer.”

“The capability to build digital tools that solve our specific problems on an as-needed basis has been an absolute game changer.”

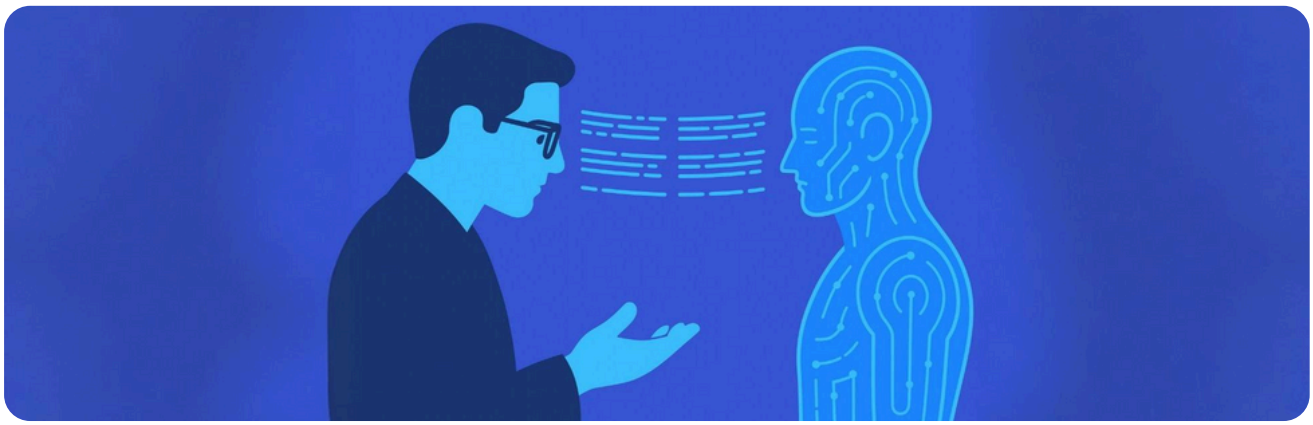
-Kristina V., COO, Technology Services

This reveals the true advantage: it's no longer about waiting for the perfect software, but about skillfully leveraging general AI to solve hyper-specific problems on demand.

AI MATURATION COINCIDES WITH ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

The timing of economic uncertainty aligns remarkably with AI technologies reaching enterprise-ready maturity.

Unlike previous economic slowdowns, where cost-cutting meant pure reduction, today's leaders have access to sophisticated AI tools that can maintain or improve quality while reducing costs.



OpenAI's API costs have plummeted an incredible 97.5% since launch

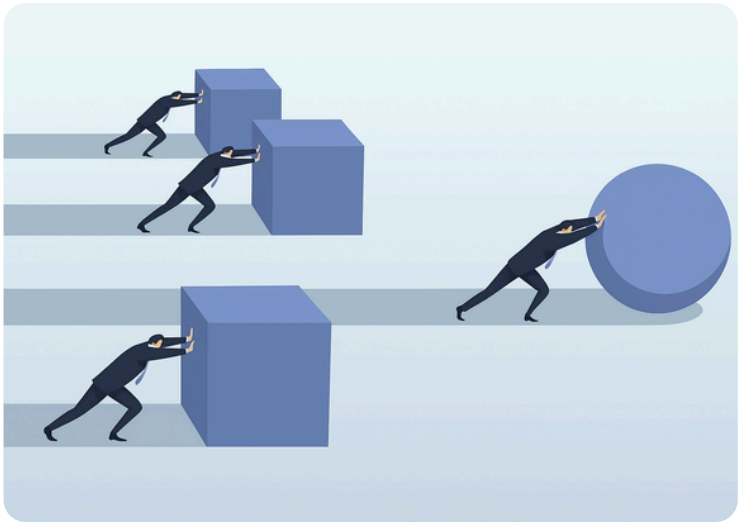
Key technological developments making AI adoption feasible include:

- **Reduced implementation complexity** through user-friendly interfaces and pre-built solutions
- **Lower barriers to entry** with a multitude of off-the-shelf solutions and lower API costs for custom-built ones
- **Proven enterprise applications** with established use cases
- **Integration capabilities** that work with existing systems rather than requiring complete overhauls

TURNING HEADWINDS INTO STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE

Forward-thinking operations leaders see opportunity where others see risk. They use economic uncertainty to double down on AI and build competitive advantages that will compound during recovery.

Companies that invest in AI during slowdowns create a compounding competitive advantage.



They emerge from economic uncertainty with

- **Optimized processes** running more efficiently
- **Enhanced data** capabilities for faster, more accurate decision-making
- **Trained workforce** comfortable with AI and ready for future innovation
- **Proven frameworks** for scaling AI initiatives as new opportunities emerge

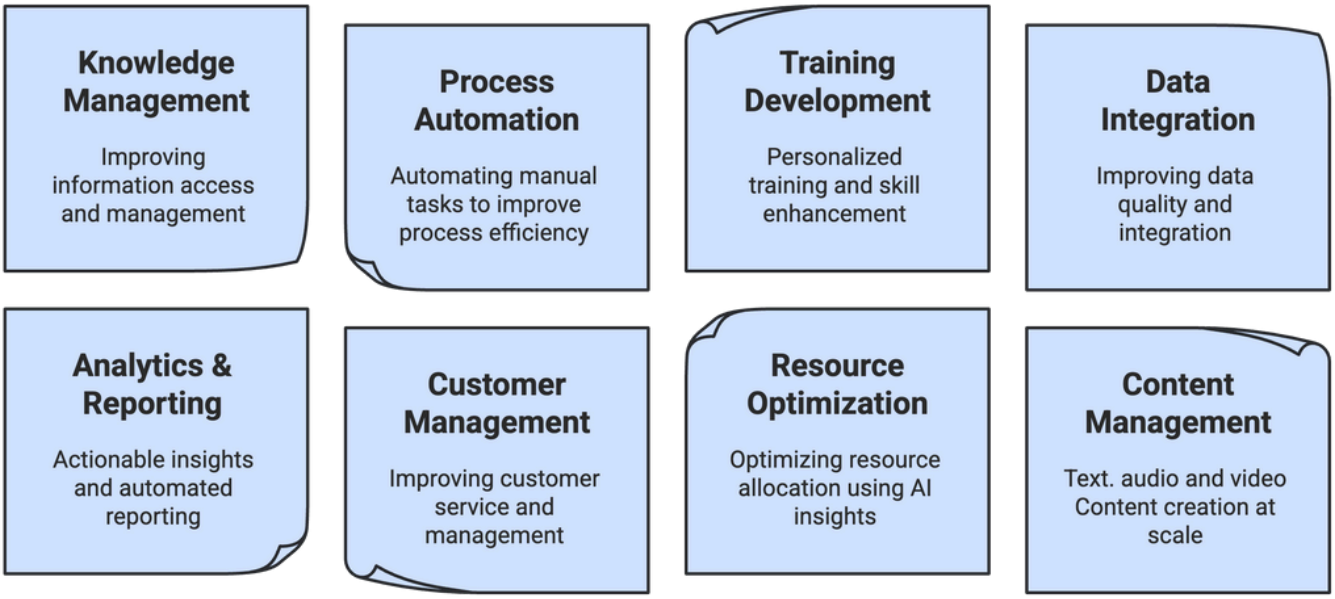
The window of opportunity is finite. Operations leaders who act now aren't just weathering the storm—they're setting the stage to dominate the recovery.

Analyzing AI in Operations

OPERATIONAL LEVERS FOR IMMEDIATE IMPACT

Instead of waiting for external conditions to improve, you can take direct action in these key operational areas to generate tangible results now.

Operational Challenges AI Solves



"I had a list of addresses that would have taken me quite some time to do [manually]. I asked ChatGPT to add Google Earth links for all locations on the list... [it] took seconds."

-Sam B., Creative Operations Director, Construction

"After implementing a basic AI voice system, we saw a 7% increase in sales. I can only imagine what an advanced voice will do!"

-Kurt M., SVP Operations, Food Services

Operations leaders consistently identified these hurdles as the biggest threats to team productivity and business growth. **Each one can be handled by proper AI/human collaboration.**

Knowledge Management and Information Access (82%)

- Scattered information across multiple systems and documents
- Difficulty accessing the right information quickly
- Time wasted searching for documents or asking colleagues

Process Automation & Manual Tasks (73%)

- Repetitive non-revenue-generating tasks
- Form filling requiring significant manual effort
- Lengthy approval process (often paper-based)

Training & Skill Development (64%)

- Long ramp-up time for new employees
- Inconsistent knowledge transfer
- Difficulty maintaining training quality at scale

Data Integration & Quality (59%)

- Disconnected systems and "data silos"
- Inconsistent data formats and entry practices
- Lack of centralized data repositories

Analytics & Reporting (50%)

- Time-consuming research and report generation
- Inability to quickly derive insights from data
- Limited visibility into metrics and performance indicators

Customer & Client Management (41%)

- Missed communication from clients
- Manual customer data entry and documentation
- Limited self-service options for routine inquiries

Resource Optimization (38%)

- Inefficient staffing and task allocation
- Poor logistics coordination
- Inefficient budget allocation and resource tracking

Content Creation & Management (32%)

- Repetitive document, sales, and marketing content creation
- Time-consuming proposal preparation
- Multiple document versions and inconsistent messaging

TRADITIONAL APPROACHES TO SOLVING OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

Operations leaders have cited the below as the most common approaches their companies have used or currently use to solve critical efficiency barriers.

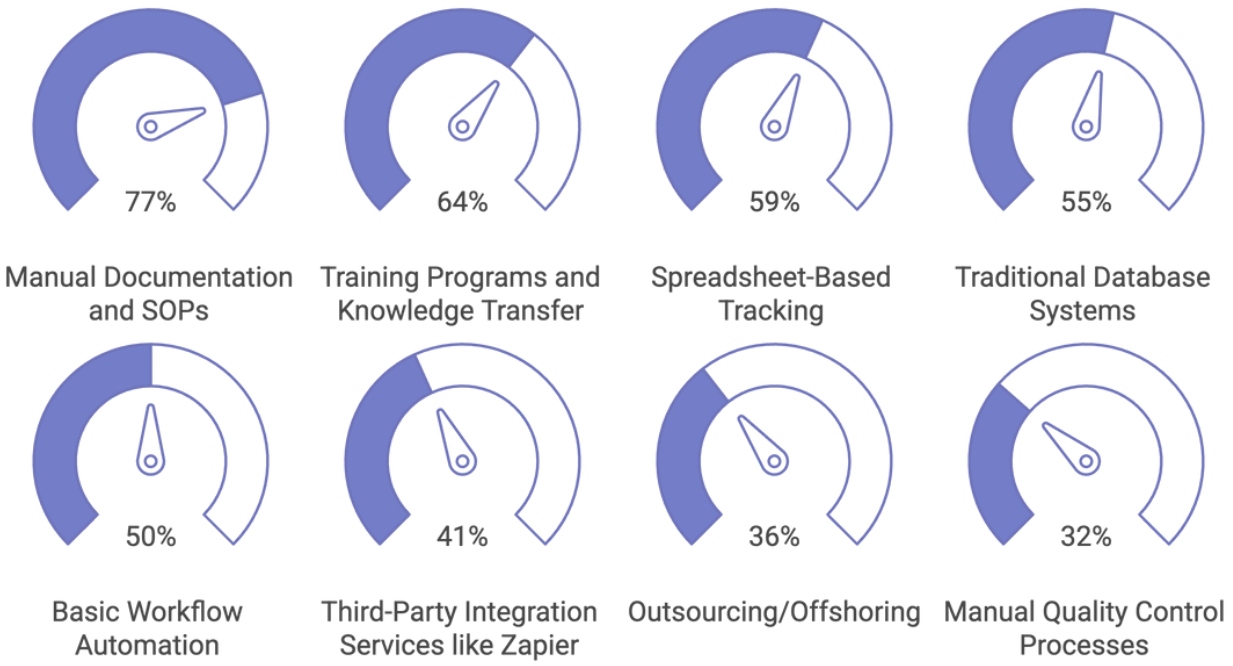
Manual Documentation and SOPs (77%): Reliance on written procedures and documentation

Training Programs and Knowledge Transfer (64%): In-person training and mentorship

Spreadsheet-Based Tracking (59%): Using Excel for data management and reporting

Traditional Database Systems (55%): Legacy database management without AI capabilities

Traditional Strategies Used to Solve Operational Challenges



Basic Workflow Automation (50%): Simple automation tools without AI components

Third-Party Integration Services like Zapier (41%): Using integration platforms to connect systems

Outsourcing/Offshoring (36%): Delegating repetitive tasks to external teams

Manual Quality Control Processes (32%): Human review and oversight of work outputs

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AI STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES BEING USED OR CONSIDERED

Economic pressure is felt across industries. Leaders are reporting increased anxiety around competition. Here is how they are solving or considering solving their challenges with AI.

Basic AI Tools Experimentation (73%): Using ChatGPT, Claude, or similar for simple tasks

Document Processing and Management (64%): AI for organizing and extracting information

Meeting Transcription and Analysis (59%): Tools like Read AI, Otter, Fireflies

Custom Knowledge Bases (50%): Building company-specific AI assistants

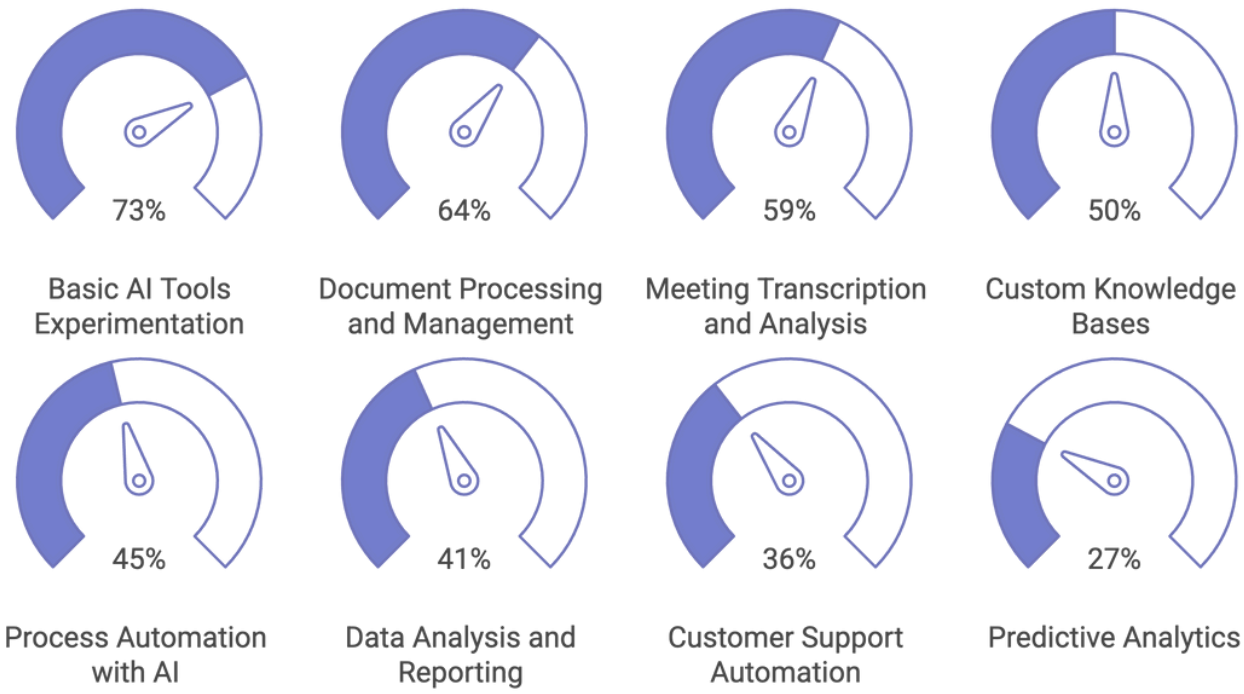
Process Automation with AI (45%): Enhancing existing automation with AI capabilities

Customer Support Automation (36%): AI chatbots and assistance systems

Data Analysis and Reporting (41%): Using AI to generate insights from company data

Predictive Analytics (27%): Early-stage implementation of forecasting capabilities

How Operations Leaders are Using/Considering Using AI



SAMPLE TASK LIST: HUMANS VS AI

Some taks AI excels in while others are best done by humans. Below is a sample list of common activities Operations leaders described and who should perform them.

Best done by AI	Best left to human
KPIs tracking / analysis	Risk assessment and mitigation planning
Basic report generation	Final report preparation
Inventory level monitoring	Physical inspection maintenance and repair
Form filling from existing data	Employee performance evaluations / staffing decisions
Proposal writing from templates	Budget planning and financial strategy
Invoice processing/categorization	Physical equipment and machinery operation
Information search	Strategic business decisions
Basic customer service	Relationship management
Tech support	On-site field service and troubleshooting
Route optimization / logistics	Complex project management
Basic document creation	Legal and compliance decisions
Employee FAQ	Team management, leadership and motivation

Quantifying the Cost of Inaction

BUSINESS IMPACT DESPITE UNCERTAINTY: SOME SIMPLE MATH

Your biggest cost isn't what you think it is

As an Operations leader, you manage budgets, track expenses, and optimize for efficiency. But what if your single greatest expense is one you can't see on a balance sheet? It's the cost of wasted time—the thousands of hours your team spends on low-value, repetitive, and frustrating tasks instead of the work you hired them to do.

Let's do some simple math

The True Cost of an Employee.

Consider a mid-level employee with a $75,000 salary. By the time you factor in benefits, taxes, equipment, and overhead, the fully-loaded cost to the company is closer to $105,000 per year.[3]

Assuming a standard 2,000-hour work year (40 hours/week for 50 weeks), you are investing $52.50 per hour for that employee's time and expertise.

So, what are you getting for $52.50 an hour?

The Foundation of Waste: Information Search (8-10%)

Every leader we interviewed agreed it is likely that an employee spends AT LEAST five minutes every hour trying to find information.

They might be:

- Searching for a document on a shared drive.
- Asking tech support how to reset a password.
- Trying to find the latest version of a customer report.
- Figuring out who handles data entry for a specific location, etc

[3] *Based on a $75,000/yr full-time salary, with a standard 1.4x multiplier applied to account for benefits and employer-paid taxes, for a total estimated employer cost of $105,000/yr.*

Five minutes seems insignificant. But it adds up to **3.33 hours per week**, which is **8.3%** of their total time.

At $52.50/hour, you are paying each employee $8,715 per year just to look for their keys. **For a team of 100, that's an $870k problem.**

Repetitive Admin Tasks (10%)

Interviewees said employees spend on average four hours per week on repetitive admin tasks such as manual data entry, processing routine forms, and updating project boards. This adds another 10% to our total.

(Though it should be noted, 23% of interviewees said admin tasks for employees can take as much as 10-15 hours per week).

Role-Specific Repetitive Tasks: 12.5%

Finally, layer on a minimum of five hours of repetitive tasks unique to each role. For an analyst, it's compiling data for reports. For a salesperson, it's logging call notes. For HR, it's answering the same policy questions.

8.3% + 10% + 12.5% = 30.8%

Your Team is Wasting Over 30% of Time

$32,340

Est. Annual cost of wasted time per employee

30.8%

Avg. time spent on automatable tasks

$3.2M+

Tot. annual hidden costs for a team of 100

Part 2
Applying the Findings

Your AI Implementation Roadmap

MAKE AN IMPACT WITH THE LAPIS IMPACTS FRAMEWORK

The Lapis IMPACTS framework ensures any AI investment you make is practical, scalable, and aligned with your operational goals.

Intent	What do you need your AI to achieve?
Meaning	How does it enhance or simplify processes?
Pricing	Does it fit your budget?
Accuracy	What degree of precision do you require?
Customization	Can it adapt to your environment?
Time	How quickly can your team adopt the AI?
Scale	Will it accomodate your growth?

CUSTOM AI DEVELOPMENT VS OFF-THE-SHELF SOLUTIONS

There are a dizzying number of AI tools on the market. It's not always possible to find one that will need all your needs.

When to Build

- Critical product features unavailable
- Can't meet the scale
- Steep learning curve
- Long-term costs outweigh upfront investment
- Require advanced integrations

When to Buy

- Existing tools meet 75% or more of your needs
- Small budget
- Small dataset
- Short time-horizon
- Unable or unwilling to allocate resources or get development partners

Regardless of whether you're building or buying, you will need to stay agile. The technology changes almost daily so it is important to keep an open mind and be pepared for change.

AI IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP

1 Start with quick wins; add incrementally

Whether you're building or buying, start with the product or features that can demonstrate value quickly, then add complexity slowly.

2 Use Lapis' IMPACTS framework

This framwork should guide your decision-making in selecting off-the-shelf AI tools or building custom solutions.

3 Get aligned

There will be no shortage of stakeholders and ideas. Make sure everyone understands what the system is/isn't intended to do, how it should be used and the timelines.

4 Measure success

Set KPIs upfront. For example, task duration for employees to measure productivity, or support tickets resolved for customer support AI Assistant effectiveness.

SAMPLE AI SYSTEMS THAT SOLVE COMMON OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

These systems show how operations teams can apply the roadmap principles to solve pressing problems.

Challenge: Knowledge Management and Information Access

AI Solutions

Knowledge Bases: Custom AI assistants access company documentation across departments

Natural Language Query Systems: Allow employees to ask questions in plain language about policies, procedures, etc.

Document Classification and Retrieval: AI automatically organizes and tags documents for easy access

Personalized Information Delivery: Context-aware systems provide relevant information based on role and task

Multimodal Information Processing: Systems search across text, images, video, and audio formats

Implementation Steps

1. Perform document inventory and centralization

2. Clean and organize data

3. Implement a knowledge hub AI system

4. Train employees on how to interact with AI

5. Gather continuous feedback for improvement

Challenge: Time-consuming Process and Data Entry

AI Solutions

Intelligent Form Processing: AI can extract information from uploaded documents to auto-populate forms

Voice-to-Text Applications: Voice-activated systems for field workers to dictate notes and reports

Automated Data Validation: AI checks data entry for errors and inconsistencies

Cross-System Data Synchronization: Intelligent systems to ensure data consistency across platforms

Predictive Input Assistance: AI anticipates form fields based on historical patterns

Implementation Steps

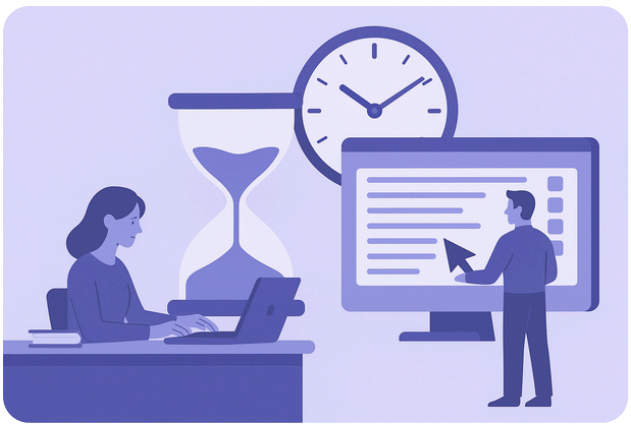
1. Process mapping to identify the highest-value automation opportunities

2. Small-scale pilot implementation for the most time-consuming tasks

3. Development of custom data pipelines between systems

4. Gradual rollout with human oversight

5. Measurement of time savings and error reduction



Challenge: Employee Training & Onboarding

AI Solutions

Personalized Learning Paths: AI adapts training content based on employee role and learning pace

Virtual Training Assistants: 24/7 available AI guides for new employees to ask questions

Simulation and Scenario Training: AI-powered scenarios replicate job situations

Knowledge Gap Analysis: Systems identify areas where employees need additional training

Just-in-Time Learning: Contextual training delivered exactly when needed during work tasks

Implementation Steps

1. Organize and digitize training content

2. Develop role-based knowledge requirements

3. Create a conversational AI interface for training delivery

4. Integrate with HR onboarding systems

5. Assess training effectiveness regularly

Challenge: Data Quality and Integration

AI Solutions

Intelligent Data Cleaning: AI systems identify and correct data inconsistencies

Automated Data Enrichment: Tools supplement existing data with additional relevant information

Anomaly Detection: AI flags unusual data patterns that may indicate errors

Smart Data Transformation: Systems can translate data between different formats and standards

Metadata Generation: AI automatically creates descriptive tags for better data organization

Implementation Steps

1. Data quality assessment across systems

2. Identification of critical data integration points

3. Implementation of data standardization rules

4. Development of monitoring dashboards

5. Establishment of data governance practices

Challenge: Reporting & Analytics

AI Solutions

Natural Language Report Generation: AI that creates narrative reports from data analysis

Custom Query Systems: Allow non-technical users to ask business questions of data

Predictive Analytics Dashboards: Interactive systems showing trends and forecasts

Scheduled Intelligence Briefings: AI-generated regular updates on key metrics

Automated Insight Detection: AI that highlights significant patterns in data

Implementation Steps

1. Identification of the most critical business metrics

2. Data source integration and cleaning

3. Development of AI analytics models

4. Creation of user-friendly interfaces

5. Training on the interpretation and utilization of insights

Overcoming Common Implementation Barriers

HOW TO OVERCOME COMMON AI ADOPTION BARRIERS

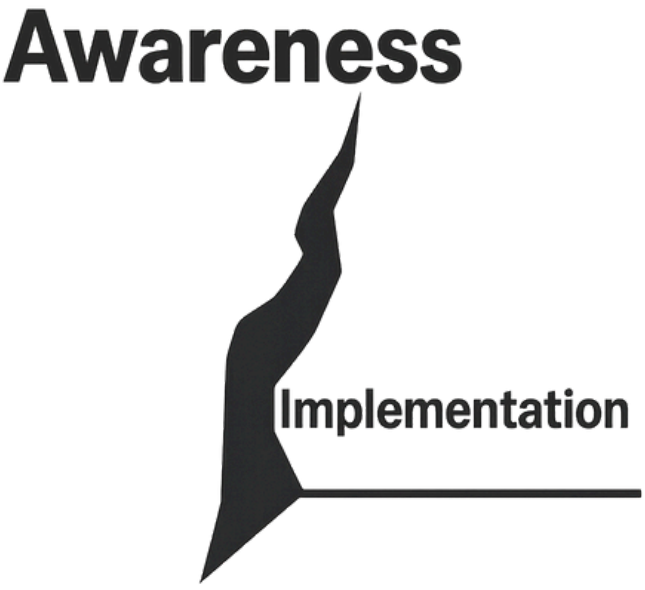
There are plenty of hurdles Operations leaders cited in implementing AI but each one has a clear path forward.

BARRIER		SOLUTIONS
Awareness vs Implementation Gap		Targeted roadmap, create cross-functional team
Experimentation Limbo		Phased implementation, quick wins
Lacking Technical Expertise		AI Coaching, external advisors, ChatGPT
Integration Concerns		System compatibility check, robust APIs
Data Quality		Targeted data cleansing, unstructured data capacity
Fear of Job Displacement		Reframe AI as augmentation, make it fun

Awareness vs. Implementation Gap (86%)

Barrier: Leaders struggle with practical implementation despite awareness of AI's potential.

How to Overcome: Start with 1-2 high-impact, low-complexity use cases. Create a cross-functional implementation team spanning operations, IT, and business units. Document early wins to build momentum, then expand incrementally based on results. Designate "AI champions" across departments to translate technical capabilities into business applications.



Experimentation Limbo (73%)

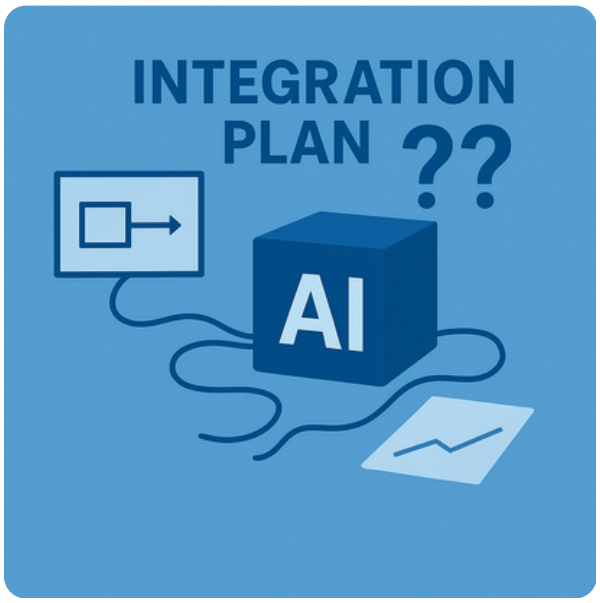
Barrier: Stuck testing basic AI tools like ChatGPT rather than deploying enterprise-scale solutions.

How to Overcome: Transform experiments into structured pilots with clear metrics. Establish an "AI innovation lab" for testing while maintaining a connection to business needs. Focus on cost-saving and efficiency applications during economic uncertainty. Implement a stage-gate process to graduate successful pilots to broader deployment and create knowledge-sharing mechanisms across the organization.

Lacking Technical Expertise (68%)

Barrier: Operations leaders must source or oversee AI solutions, yet many lack the technical expertise to evaluate them.

How to Overcome: Invest in AI literacy programs. Partner with external AI experts as trusted advisors. Create operational/technical staff tandems to bridge knowledge gaps. Leverage industry peer networks for sharing practical implementation experiences. Ask conversational AI assistants like ChatGPT for assistance in explaining the knowledge gap.



Integration Concerns (64%)

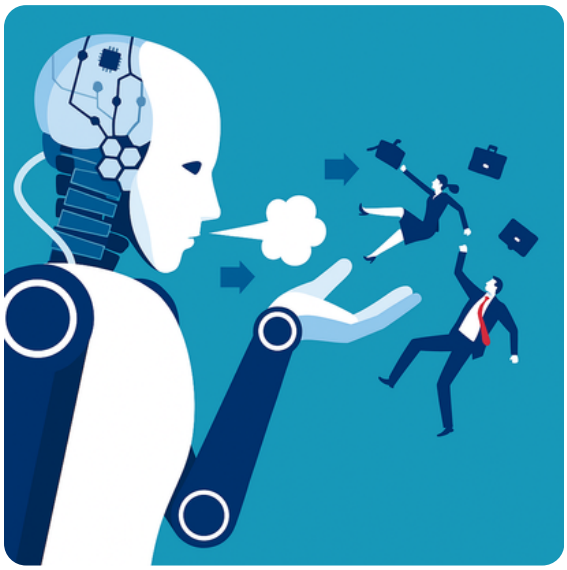
Barrier: Worries about how AI will integrate with existing systems and workflows.

How to Overcome: Conduct systems compatibility assessments before AI implementation. Prioritize solutions with robust APIs. Consider custom standalone solutions. Implement data governance practices for smooth information flow. During economic uncertainty, focus on AI solutions that enhance existing investments rather than requiring system overhauls.

Data Quality (55%)

Barrier: Awareness that AI effectiveness depends on data quality creates hesitation where data is disorganized.

How to Overcome: Launch targeted data cleansing for priority AI datasets rather than organization-wide efforts. Consider AI solutions specifically designed for messy data as entry points. Establish data governance aligned with operational realities. During economic pressure, focus on making existing data more usable rather than expensive transformations.



Fear of Job Displacement (41%)

Barrier: Concerns about AI replacing jobs create resistance to adoption.

How to Overcome: Reframe AI as an augmentation by clearly defining how it will enhance employee capabilities. Engage key employees in decision-making processes. Make AI implementation a part of employees' annual goals. Collect employee feedback early. Engage them in the dialogue. Host competitions for most creative AI use.

Driving Adoption and Managing Risk

GETTING YOUR EMPLOYEES ONBOARD

To get your employees using AI, you will first need to address their top concern: **Will AI replace me?**

Communicate AI's Role

Clearly explain that AI is a tool meant to automate repetitive and mundane tasks, freeing employees to focus on higher-value and strategic work.

Highlight Human-AI Collaboration

Provide examples of how AI can work alongside humans to improve efficiency and productivity.

Upskilling and Reskilling Programs

Invest in training programs to help employees develop new skills that complement AI technologies.

Engage key employees in decision-making processes

People are more open to change when they feel their opinion counts. Find your company's "influencers" and engage them.

Collect feedback early

You can have the best AI in the world, but if your team is not using it, it is worthless. Get the end-user feedback early to ensure its value.

Make it a part of their annual goals

If people see AI as a tool for growth, it becomes a skill to learn, not an adversary which will make them obsolete.

Host Fun Employee AI Competitions

Hold a low-pressure employee competition on who can come up with the most creative use case for AI without writing a single line of computer code.

Transparency

Keep an open line of communication about AI implementations.

Focus on Strategic Roles

Communicate AI will create opportunities for employees to take on more strategic and impactful roles within the organization.

HOW TO TAKE ON THE INHERENT RISK

All technologies carry risk and AI has its own unique set of challenges.

The goal is not to avoid risk, but to manage it strategically. By anticipating potential issues, you can secure the significant operational and financial gains that AI offers while protecting your organization.

A proactive approach should focus on the following key areas:

Data Privacy & Security

Description

The use of proprietary company data to train or interact with AI models creates potential vulnerabilities, especially with public-facing tools.

Mitigation Strategy

- Prioritize enterprise-grade AI solutions with robust security protocols.
- Establish clear data governance policies that define what data can be used and how it must be anonymized.
- Ensure all employees have opted out of model training in AI use for work (i.e. when using ChatGPT, they can access their settings and toggle the off button under “Improve model for everyone” or purchase OpenAI Entertprise tier).

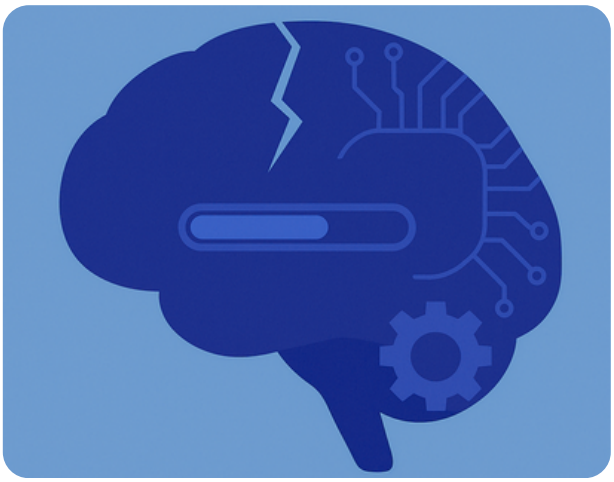
Operational Reliability & Accuracy

Description

AI models can occasionally produce incorrect, biased, or nonsensical outputs (often called "hallucinations"), which can lead to poor decisions if not caught.

Mitigation Strategy

- Implement a "human-in-the-loop" system for critical tasks, where AI generates a draft or recommendation for human review and approval.
- Start with low-risk applications to build confidence and conduct regular audits on AI performance and accuracy.



Over-Reliance & Skill Atrophy

Description

Teams may become too dependent on AI for routine tasks, potentially leading to a decline in critical thinking and problem-solving skills over time.

Mitigation Strategy

- Designate "Red Team" exercises for critical thinking tasks, where teams must solve problems without AI assistance to keep core skills sharp.
- Tie career progression to the ability to strategically leverage AI to enhance—not just replace—their core expertise.

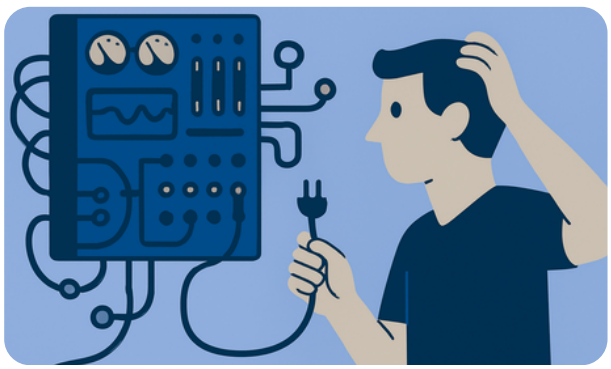
Implementation & Integration Failure

Description

AI projects can fail to deliver value if they are not properly scoped, integrated with existing processes, or aligned with business objectives.

Mitigation Strategy

- Adopt a phased implementation roadmap.
- Start with well-defined pilots that target quick wins to prove value.
- Use a clear decision-making framework (like the IMPACTS model) to select vendors or projects, and ensure KPIs are established upfront to measure success.



Ethical and Compliance Considerations

Description

AI models trained on historical data can perpetuate existing biases. Using AI without transparency can also create compliance issues with regulations like GDPR.

Mitigation Strategy

- Confirm vendor or custom-built system compliance with major regulations.
- Be transparent with customers about AI use.
- Establish employee guidelines on proper AI use cases and an accountability framework.

Your Next Move

STRATEGY TO ACTION

Your next step is to translate the insights from this report into a concrete plan for your business.

The research is clear: operational inefficiency is a significant hidden cost, but mature AI now offers a practical solution. The leaders who act on these findings will build a lasting competitive advantage.

We invite you to a complimentary AI consultation

During this 45-minute focused session:

- We'll analyze **one specific operational challenge** you're currently facing.
- **Share patterns** to similar companies at your readiness level.
- You'll receive **1-2 practical considerations** for addressing this challenge with AI.

Let's Talk AI

Lapis AI Consults
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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Below are some additional resources to help you along the way.

- How to Get Stakeholder Buy-in for AI Initiatives (article)
- Large Language Model Prompting Guide (e-book)
- Practical AI: How to Make Cross-functional Collaboration Functional (article)

ABOUT LAPIS

Lapis is a dynamic AI agency solving operational challenges through advanced language models (LLMs) and traditional machine learning (ML).

Our diverse backgrounds in technology, marketing, and product allow us to both strategize and build integrated AI solutions that drive innovation.

We create AI solutions that are both advanced and practical to meet our clients' real-world needs.

OUR SERVICES

AI Strategy | Custom AI Software | AI Coaching & Training

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