### TRENDS

# Al Trends for 2025 and Beyond

C-Suite Leaders Transition From AI Experimentation to Decision Automation and Intelligence



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Produced exclusively for Constellation Research clients

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary
AI in 2025: From Boardroom Priority to Business Transformation Imperative
Al Buyers Progress Through Five Stages of Maturity
How Strong C-Suite Leaders Plan for Al Adoption8
The AI Trend Waves To Ride in 2025 10
3 Steps To Accelerate AI Advancement
The Bottom Line: Five Questions Every Leader Should Ask Before Completing an Al Strategy 18
Endnote
Analyst Bios
About Constellation Research



### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Artificial intelligence (AI) dominated boardroom discussions across 2024 as business leaders looked to capitalize on the buzz. But 2025 will prove to be a critical year for bringing AI into production. There are early warning signs that these experiments may not stand the test of time, with just 13% of proof-of-concept (POC) AI experiments having converted into projects in 2024.

This Constellation Research report reveals and reviews key AI trends and predictions for 2025. As the demand for decision velocity gives way to the imperative for decision precision, AI leaders will focus on delivering on decision automation and decision intelligence rather than wild acts of AI experimentation.

#### **BUSINESS THEMES**



) Data to Decisions

Future of Work

**Digital Marketing &** 

Sales Effectiveness

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2 Digital Safety and Privacy

Next-Generation Customer Experience



### AI IN 2025: FROM BOARDROOM PRIORITY TO BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION IMPERATIVE

AI dominated boardroom discussions throughout 2024. Almost every organization launched multiple AI POC initiatives, with core use cases focusing on driving efficiencies and automating mundane, repeatable tasks. However, there are concerns that these experiments and big ideas will stay just that: experiments. There are warning signs that validate these concerns, with just 13% of AI POCs having converted into projects in 2024.

Organizations enamored of AI must keep their eyes on the prize, and 2025 will prove to be a critical year for bringing AI into production. Projects that deliver a tangible return on transformation investment (RTI) will focus on decision automation and not just on proving the value of AI technology. Although today's conversations revolve around copilots, assistants, and agents, successful programs are shifting to establishing systems that transform agents into advisors. The difference will start and stop with data—and 2025 will prove that data is not as abundant as some may believe.

To more fully understand how AI maturity will be shaped and challenged in 2025 and beyond, a look back is necessary. Constellation Research's conversations with AI leaders confirm a significant shift from "fear of missing out (FOMO) POCs" in 2023 to more formally budgeted AI line items in 2024 (see Figure 1). The isolated experiments of 2023, although appearing to be proactive, were little more than stopgap measures to stave off board-level curiosity fueled by headlines and waves made by generative AI (GenAI).

Although AI budgets increased in 2024, they came at the expense of other projects in cybersecurity and operations and across the entire landscape of customer experience (CX)—especially in sales and marketing. Loosely strategized experiments have led to larger POC use cases focused on improving employee productivity and addressing legacy workflows and processes.

In conversations with more than 100 C-suite decision-makers, Constellation found a wave of optimism that budgets will open, especially in what is perceived as a more business-friendly geopolitical



#### Figure 1. The AI Timeline Favors Data Collectives



Source: Constellation Research

environment. However, caution remains as C-suite leaders admit that the impact of and return for 2024 AI POC investments have not delivered the value once expected. What began as a desire to leverage AI to drive exponential growth has the unintended potential to see gains stall and organizations settle for the delivery of incremental efficiencies.

Constellation Research predicts that, should organizations stay on a path of experimentation and FOMO-driven strategy, the AI timeline will lead to an AI dark age caused by the demise of publicly available data. Far too many organizations are dependent on this data to fuel their data stores, which, in turn, drive their AI projects, putting the shift from experiment to production into further peril. What starts in 2025 as an age of data scarcity will drive a desire to curate and harness data into collectives. This collaborative data approach will aim to influence how, when, and where data is used, restricted, or driven for collective bargaining power, creating an age in which data exists within closed networks or across data collectives. In either scenario, the flow of data required to train and model large AI foundation models will be restricted, leading to the dark days of data by 2027.



This future trajectory is driving C-suite leaders, already questioning AI adoption and impact, to quickly redraw AI plans for 2025 to establish a far clearer and more sustainable AI and data strategy focused on valuable data sources, smarter points of automation, and pathways to accelerate decision-making. For 2025, savvy leaders will be pushing not for more AI but rather for improved decision automation.

### AI BUYERS PROGRESS THROUGH FIVE STAGES OF MATURITY

Constellation Research has identified five common stages of AI maturity (see Figure 2) through which buyers and users of AI technology and tools progress. What is often seen is a rush to a broad and amorphous thing called "AI," where projects often come as an all-or-nothing approach. However, lessons learned from Constellation's Executive Network (CEN) members show that a gradual, strategic, and measured approach rooted in intentional business use cases most frequently leads to a sustainable transformation arc.

Constellation sees five phases for adoption:

- 1. Augmentation. Organizations begin by finding tasks that benefit from augmenting existing workflows and learning where exceptions are needed. This is most articulated as the moment when AI can "offload" repetitive or common tasks. In this case, the focus is on workflow and automating outcomes, augmenting the traditional tasks of a human resource. Hallucinations or missteps in outputs can happen, especially in the earlier stages of utilization, data curation, model training, and fine-tuning. In this earliest stage of AI maturity, human action is purposefully and specifically augmented in limited use cases in contained and controlled environments.
- 2. Acceleration. As more data is taken into consideration and training improves, false positives and false negatives are weeded out to accelerate progress. This stage of maturity starts to turn away from the creation of "more" and focus instead on decision velocity and the precision of those decision signals. Confidence in decision automation is a critical gating point for advancing to the next phase of AI maturity.



#### Figure 2. The Five Stages of AI Maturity



Source: Constellation Research

- 3. Automation. Once a level of confidence has been achieved as more data is assimilated, organizations can proceed with confidence toward automation. This requires organizations to look beyond traditional data points and begin to enable a larger business graph that includes assimilation of both structured and unstructured data drawn from across the enterprise, its partners, and a larger data ecosystem. It also actively questions when and where human intervention—the much-discussed "human in the loop"—needs to be inserted into any automated process or experience. Although earlier phases see the insertion of "machines" into the flows of human work, the industry begins to experience humans' being inserted into autonomous workflows to ensure trusted and expected outcomes.
- 4. **Agents.** Agents take shape well beyond the rudimentary form of a chatbot or an assistant. These automated agents play a role in advancing and scaling what were once thought to be impossible tasks leveraging data, generative capabilities, and rapid real-time individualization. In areas such as CX and employee experience (EX), agents are set to work on improving personalization at scale. Data and analytics are a simple natural-language (NL) query away, and feats once thought



to be impossible involving translation, summarization, and content creation are as simple as making a request. The shift in maturity bridges the gap between the confidence in precision decisioning and agentic AI's ability to access data and training techniques that can be achieved by exacting retrieval augmentation.

5. Advisors. Advisors can provide capabilities in prevention and prediction built on the overall accumulated knowledge and insight from the business graph. This opportunity is where many transformational business leaders see the greatest promise. Advisors will not be limited to a window or a single app or user interface; in fact, agents will be embedded and distributed everywhere from documents to devices, working hand in hand, serving as advisors and actively collaborating with customers as well as employees.

CEN C-suite executives agree that a measured and deliberate approach to the adoption of AI has delivered results far beyond their initial experimental assumptions. Alignment has proven to be key, driving a consistency and alignment starting with CEOs and boards of directors through to technology implementers and frontline teams working with AI as it matures from augmented assistants to agentic advisors. Moreover, these leaders have identified where and how they expect their continuing plan for AI adoption to unfold, even if the road forward has not always been smooth or easy.

### HOW STRONG C-SUITE LEADERS PLAN FOR AI ADOPTION

In the most recent Constellation Research report on the state of AI in the enterprise,<sup>1</sup> 92% of the C-suite leaders surveyed have deployed AI in some form, noting a significant focus and drive for AI utilization. Although 79% of the executives are focused on AI's capacity to automate and eliminate manual work for their teams and employees, 58% said they are in a more "wait and see" mode, admitting that what led to the decision to implement AI was a desire to be better prepared for AI "if and when" it emerges as a competitive differentiator in their market. This skepticism could prove to be counterproductive, because 47% of these executive leaders are also looking to AI to seek out exponential growth for the organization. Growth can't afford a strategy of wait-and-see.



#### Figure 3. AI Return on Transformation Investment



#### Source: Constellation Research

Operational and functional efficiencies represent the lowest-hanging fruit for most organizations. When the respondents were asked where AI has been implemented, sales and marketing (46%), customer service (40%), IT (40%), and applications centered on innovation in product design (60%) and generalized employee productivity (57%) topped the list. In these applications, executives are measuring value and return in operational standards of efficiency, because, as 76% of the respondents admitted, this area currently represents their highest RTI (see Figure 3). Cost reductions represented the third-highest RTI. Among the leaders, 73% see revenue and growth as a top RTI, tucked in between, clearly underscoring the desire for AI to deliver on the promise of exponential growth.

The challenge lies in what executives stated they want from AI, versus where they are actively investing in and expanding AI opportunity and potential. Although the lowest-hanging fruit has been to automate or eliminate manual work, the metric of success for this will remain rooted in cost savings. Although this RTI could be considerable in the near term, this level of continuous cost reductions is not sustainable and does little long-term to fuel the exponential growth AI is supposed to deliver.



#### Figure 4. AI Resistance: How Teams Are Pushing Back



#### Source: Constellation Research

In fact, 42% of the respondents admitted that although they have deployed AI, they have yet to realize value or return from their investments. Only 3% of them believe that their AI investments of the past 12 months have reached their maximum potential, and 61% admitted that although they are satisfied with results right now, there is significant room for improvement.

Where does this leave AI investments, and how are smart leaders advancing with AI? Their gaze is turning toward data. The real challenge will be pushing beyond the hunt for mass quantities of data and instead intentionally seeking out quality AI-ready data to power the business graph.

Data will require changes across the board, from how data is curated with AI intentions to how leaders identify skills and expertise needed to manage new sources of knowledge and intelligence. When it comes to data quantity, confidence is already fairly high. Among the respondents, 33% are confident that they have the data they need in order to power their current AI efforts and 58% admitted that they have access to good data but that there is room for improvement.



There are signs that data is not in ideal shape and will only be "good enough" for the demands of early AI maturity but could have a limited runway for longer-term AI success. In fact, 45% admitted that a key point of resistance in AI success is a lack of quality data that is curated for accuracy and performance (see Figure 4). It is reasonable to link the core points of resistance back to data or, more specifically, to a lack of data. A significant 55% of the respondents admitted that stakeholders lack a fundamental trust in data, not believing that AI will perform tasks as specified.

### THE AI TREND WAVES TO RIDE IN 2025

Judging from the insights from Constellation Research's executive network conversations and interactions, the following three key trends will drive business leaders in the year ahead:

#### 1. Data Scarcity Needs To Be Overcome in an Age of Data Abundance

Thanks to Al's voracious appetite for data and intelligence, early AI applications in functions such as customer service and marketing will prove that although functional leaders feel as if they are drowning in data, they actually are dying of thirst, lacking the quality of data required to reach a level of precision. This juxtaposition of scarcity and abundance will push teams to seek out new sources of data to expand and enrich the corpus of data that pushes connected and aligned business decisioning.

Existing repositories of content and assets from quotes and contracts, transactional documents, customer chats, and transcripts of customer conversations will become a treasure trove of realtime conversational intelligence that is culled, curated, and transformed into high-fidelity signal and sentiment derived from customer voice. Thanks to AI's establishing trends and predictable patterns across years of quotes, contracts, and profitable transactions, recommendations for intentional growth can be automated. These sources of data must be curated in real time and not require manual intervention to interpret. This is where AI tools with document- and asset-creation capabilities are critical. Everything from an email to a chat transcript should be considered a source of data.

Although conventional norms in data collection will focus attention on managing, sorting, and storing massive quantities of data, AI-ready data means quality data that moves quickly to power real-time



decision velocity. Smart leaders looking to work this trend and reach for data abundance will not limit thinking to the data that can be stored and will begin thinking about where customer data can be generated that purposefully drives decision precision that can drive trust. Data must do double duty by training and delivering AI outputs while also honing accuracy to build trust in AI.

#### 2. Augmenting Knowledge Is the Next AI Frontier

Early applications and implementations of GenAI have centered on operational efficiencies and the elimination of repeatable workflows. This is especially true of workflows that involve content creation and document generation. GenAI has ushered in an age of content velocity where personalizing and contextualizing content at scale is within reach for many organizations. Engaging in real time doesn't just utilize data and intelligence: It also creates personalized outputs and content. This mountain of contextualized answers can flex and scale, based on the nuance of an individual's circumstance, but it can also exponentially grow into a mountain of knowledge.

The next phase of AI will ask how quickly this vast repository of knowledge can be extracted while it simultaneously expands. This will require a rearticulation of what organizations consider content and knowledge, turning both into a more fluid and dynamic matrix. AI will curate content from across the enterprise, bridging gaps between repositories, assets, and documents. As AI sets to work streamlining workflows and processes across everything from contracts to web content, the data, metadata, and historical knowledge once locked within communications and interactions will be unleashed and turned into critical data to power decisions and AI precision. Today knowledge can be managed within functional silos that are aligned with where and how that knowledge is utilized and distributed. For example, for some organizations, formal "knowledge" solutions may call the contact center home, and it is focused exclusively on curating and creating knowledge repositories that can be used to accelerate an agent's ability to resolve customer issues. Increasingly, these repositories are being leveraged as a source for self-service interactions, enabling customers to self-triage issues and challenges. However, these repositories often do not spread beyond the contact center, so they fail to



curate knowledge from across the enterprise to enable employees to triage in a similar manner that customers can via bots and AI-powered experiences.

The new frontier of knowledge will unlock these silos to enable data and its knowledge outputs to flow across the organization and better facilitate customer, partner, employee, and market collaboration. Knowledge will be highly searchable; extend well beyond single functional silos; and be empowered to talk back to users, thanks to GenAI interfaces. From summaries to real-time content creation, knowledge will become a bidirectional conversation in which the lines between human thought and AI capacity will blur and take on a new collaborative motion.

#### 3. Trust Orchestration Is Established To Augment Humanity

Successful AI advancements will augment human intelligence, just as machines have successfully augmented physical capabilities. Early fears of machine takeovers have long been abated, and trust has been established by increasing degrees of precision and accuracy over time. By enabling reduction of errors, improving speed of decisions, identifying demand signals, predicting outcomes, and preventing disasters, AI has now graduated to an assumed level of "trust," but challenges remain as organizations look to turn assumed trust in the smaller, lower-risk points of decision automation into earned trust.

Trust will be not just in the data being used to train models and refine outputs but also in the automation itself. As in real life, however, trust will need to be earned, requiring intentional orchestration of engagements with AI where trust can be established and reinforced. These moments of trust will need to be orchestrated—delivered in the moments from which both user and machine can extract value. New questions regarding where and when human intervention should be added into automated processes will need to be asked as part of this trust dynamic.

Al and agentic processes will also demand that organizations establish and orchestrate updated strategies for the security of both data and infrastructure. Although traditional security postures forged in the Digital Age demand that wherever employees, data, or systems can reach, security



perimeters must be identified and fortified. Business practices such as remote work and distributed operations and branches brought heightened security and governance protocols, but this Age of AI will bring a new age of security discussions. How secure is our data? How secure is the infrastructure? How secure is our content? How much trust can we put in the content being created by AI and the documents distributed and shared thanks to AI? Each file, each email, and each asset will represent a new opportunity to add to the earned-trust value chain.

### **3 STEPS TO ACCELERATE AI ADVANCEMENT**

Organizations have coalesced around the following three-step best practice:

### 1. Learn When To Design for Machine Scale or Human Touch

The rush to incorporate AI into processes often requires a deeper examination of which services should be AI-enabled in the first place. As noted earlier in this report, the lowest-hanging fruit has been in CX and EX functions looking to automate key points of engagement and interaction. Now is the time to strategize beyond these initial opportunities for functional optimizations, operational savings, and performance improvements. Now is the time to set a path to mapping when the demand for machine scale is most appropriate, versus when the focus, skill, and compassion of the human touch are the key to growth and success.

Constellation's latest framework for augmenting humanity encompasses seven factors (see Figure 5).

- Repetitiveness. The more often a process is repeated, the more likely the process should be Al-powered. One-offs and custom processes with minimal repetition are lower-priority candidates for Al.
- 2. **Volume.** When the volume of transactions and interactions exceeds human capacity, the smart service should be AI-powered. Volumes within human capacity will remain human-powered.
- 3. **Time to complete.** High time-to-market requirements favor AI-powered approaches. Lower time-tocompletion requirements will remain human-powered.







- A Nodes of interaction Simple interaction nodes will lean toward
- 4. **Nodes of interaction.** Simple interaction nodes will lean toward being human-powered. Al serves best for complex and high-volume nodes of interaction.
- 5. **Complexity.** Good candidates for AI-powered automation include those where the level of complexity has driven success beyond human capabilities. This may involve pushing systems to connect or data to align and intersect. It is important to note that complexity may exist because of the scale or the sheer quantity of processes or tasks. Even simple tasks can become complex when there are thousands in real time. These are the complex situations where these simple tasks can be optimized by AI.
- 6. **Creativity.** The cognitive processes required for true and durable creativity continue to reside with humans, at least today. Higher creative endeavors will be less likely to be AI-powered. However, with advancements in cognitive learning, one can expect creativity to improve with AI-powered approaches over the next decade.
- 7. **Physical presence.** Processes that require a heavy physical presence will most likely require humanpowered capabilities. Processes where human perception drives someone to prefer physical



presence over digital intervention should still be identified and respected. However, it is not unreasonable to note that processes that could put lives in jeopardy should serve as candidates for more AI-powered decisioning and automation.

### 2. Intentionally Design for Better Decisions

The path of AI maturity requires a holistic approach that begins with creating an abstraction layer on transactional systems to include data, customer journeys, and user experiences. Most organizations have worked hard to relegate these transactional systems to a standardized maintenance mode while adding context, identity, security, and intelligence in order to create the foundation blocks for intelligent orchestration.

The result has been a flurry of activity to build customer data platforms (CDPs) and tie them to intelligent processes and experience hubs to form intelligent orchestration services. These services enable organizations to form the business graph and multimodal models that will power decision automation (see Figure 6).



#### Figure 6. The Endgame of AI Is Not More AI but Better Decisions

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Source: Constellation Research

By achieving a state of decision automation, organizations can deliver on personalization, AI, decision engines, and situational awareness. The traditional goal of 360-degree customer views can be achieved via decision automation, as can tangible effects on your bottom line.

### 3. Plan for Precision Across Decision Automation and Decision Intelligence

Decision automation applies business rules, data analysis, workflows, and AI to automate the decisionmaking process in both operations and strategy. This could be knowing when to change pricing for dynamic discounting, send follow-up texts for upselling/cross-selling, resend updated sales quotes based on new market conditions, or check in on customer satisfaction after a new purchase. The goal for every AI business is to take every end-to-end process and reimagine the following five steps toward automation and cognition (see Figure 7):

1. Learn. Replicating the five senses, AI systems will collect contextually relevant information around them, including time, location, process, weather, business-process context, heart rate, and eye tracking.



Figure 7. Building Precision-Automated Decisions Takes Five Steps

Source: Constellation Research

- 2. **Understand.** Applying some level of reasoning, systems will take into account the current environment and compare past interactions with future predicted interactions to find some level of understanding in the business graph.
- 3. **Recommend.** Studying past behavior and adjusting for current conditions, systems will make a series of recommendations that will create dynamic signals to be used in future learnings.
- 4. Act. Acting on decisions takes the decision automation lifecycle into reality and enables systems to determine the consequences of an action.
- 5. **Refine.** When systems understand the consequences of an action, they take the last step of decision automation: seeking to mitigate the false positives and false negatives of a decision outcome.

### THE BOTTOM LINE: FIVE QUESTIONS EVERY LEADER SHOULD ASK BEFORE COMPLETING AN AI STRATEGY

The demand for AI has just begun. Now is the time to establish durable strategies that differentiate between businesses that choose to invest in AI versus AI businesses that choose to invest to accelerate their maturity. The following are the five questions to ask to complete an AI strategy.

- 1. Where and when do you insert a human? Most operational aesthetics focus on when and where to automate. Determining when human judgment is required will provide a more effective and efficient design point. With the mundane managed, attention can turn to accentuating human creativity with machine efficiency for the modern digital partnership.
- 2. Can you operate at machine scale with humans? Machines are making thousands of decisions per second. Humans might not be able to catch up, so how do you harmonize human scale with machine scale? Leading-edge organizations are not making a choice of one or the other but instead are leaning into augmented-humanity scenarios where machines amplify human capacity by working hand in proverbial hand.



- 3. Do you have enough data (from the right data sources) to get to precision decisions? Achieving precision decisions requires internal and external data sources. For some organizations, advancing precision may not be critical. For example, 85% accuracy in CX may be OK, but 85% accuracy in finance means trouble. But as discussed earlier in this report, AI advancement will depend on trust in output and on accuracy. So how do we achieve accuracy? The answer to this question will never be, "We need more AI" but rather, "We need more sources of data without creating more obsolete exhaust."
- 4. Whom do you partner with to create the last mile or last inch of data? Organizations will have to partner for more and more data across value chains to achieve a high level of comfort and trust. Organizations will also need to unlock previously untapped data from across their document, content, and asset stores. Data that drives analysis will not be enough, pushing leaders to seek out data both from and for decisions.
- 5. Who or what needs to be secured? Can data be held accountable? Are humans held to account for security breaches caused by AI? Where is the new security perimeter when AI and autonomous workflows continue to shift and move the boundaries of where data can be connected? Smart leaders are keenly aware that the old standards of security will not suffice but that new opportunities for humans with AI innovations in security could be a new differentiation for the business. Organizations are establishing acceptable-use criteria, updating user access and identity protocols for a human-plus-agentic workforce, and sparking debate about autonomous vulnerability management and security observability.



### ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> R "Ray" Wang and Hannah Hock, "Constellation Research's Q3 2024 AI Survey," Constellation Research, October 3, 2024. https://www.constellationr.com/research/constellation-researchs-q3-2024-ai-survey



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Liz Miller is vice president and principal analyst at Constellation focused on the business demands on today's chief marketing officer, the evolution of customer engagement, and the rising requirement for a new security posture that accounts for the threat to brand trust. A 27-year marketing veteran, Miller offers guidance on the leadership, business transformation, and technology requirements for today's marketing organizations and how to effectively transform business models to stay competitive in the shifting digital landscape. She examines the key trends modern CMOs face, ranging from the realities of engagement in the trust economy to how marketing has become enterprise security's greatest threat and critical champion.

Prior to joining Constellation, Miller oversaw research, programs, and content for the Chief Marketing Officer Council, developing thought leadership agendas for CMOs around the globe. Miller also counseled numerous organizations on core messaging and competitive advantage, working with marketing, advertising, and security solutions. Miller is a skilled moderator, facilitator, and speaker, engaging C-suite executives in hundreds of industry webcasts and roundtables, keynote presentations, and panels around the globe.

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A background in emerging business and technology trends, enterprise apps strategy, technology selection, and contract negotiations enables Wang to provide clients and readers with the bridge between business leadership and technology adoption. Wang has been recognized by the prestigious Institute of Industry Analyst Relations (IIAR) as Analyst of the Year, and in 2009 he was recognized as one of the most important analysts for enterprise, SMB, and software. In 2010 Wang was recognized on the ARInsights Power 100 List of Industry Analysts and named one of the top influential leaders in the CRM Magazine Market Awards.

Wang graduated from Johns Hopkins University with a B.A. in natural sciences and public health. His graduate training includes a master's degree from Johns Hopkins University in health policy and management and health finance and management.

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#### Organizational Highlights

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