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# Enterprise AI Adoption Survey 2026

**34.5% of enterprise technical leaders now run AI in core production systems — not pilots, not internal tools, but production — while data privacy and governance, not model accuracy, is the single most-cited blocker to going further. This is original Code Ninety survey research: 142 completed responses from CTOs, VPs of Engineering, Chief Architects, and AI leaders, fielded January-February 2026.**

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## Key findings

- AI live in core production: 34.5% of respondents (49 of 142)
- Top adoption blocker: data privacy & governance , cited by 61.3% — ahead of accuracy risk (54.9%)
- Mean AI budget allocation: 6.8% of total IT spend
- Dominant architecture strategy: 54.2% hybrid (fine-tuned models + commercial APIs)
- Fastest-growing use case: autonomous workflow agents , 14.1% live today → 51.4% planned for 2026

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## How was this AI adoption survey conducted?

This survey was fielded from January 12 to February 6, 2026, across Code Ninety's client and prospect network of enterprise technical decision-makers. Of 185 individuals invited, 142 completed the survey — a 76.8% completion rate. Respondents were 38.0% Chief Technology Officers, 31.0% VPs of Engineering or Heads of Engineering, 21.8% Chief Architects or Technical Directors, and 9.2% Heads of AI or Data Science.

By company size, 43.7% of respondents came from organizations with 500-2,500 employees, 26.1% from 2,501-10,000 employees, 15.5% from 100-499 employees, and 14.7% from organizations larger than 10,000 employees. By industry, Financial Services & FinTech led at 28.2%, followed by Enterprise SaaS & Tech (25.4%), Healthcare & BioTech (21.8%), Retail & E-Commerce (14.8%), and Industrial & Manufacturing (9.8%). Geographically, 52.1% of respondents were based in North America, 30.9% in Western Europe, and 17.0% in Asia-Pacific.

## How many enterprises actually have AI in production?

34.5% of respondents (49 of 142) report AI live in core production systems — the highest-commitment adoption tier, meaning AI is embedded in systems the business actually depends on, not confined to internal experimentation. A further 28.2% (40 respondents) have AI live but limited to internal tools only, and 24.6% (35 respondents) are in active pilots or proof-of-concept phase. Only 9.9% remain in pure evaluation/planning, and just 2.8% report no active AI initiatives at all.

What this means: the "should we adopt AI" question is functionally over for this population — nearly 87% have moved past pure evaluation into some form of hands-on production or pilot work. The live question for most organizations now is graduation: moving from internal-tools-only or pilot status into core production, which is a governance and integration challenge more than an adoption-decision challenge, consistent with the blocker data below.

## What's actually blocking further AI adoption?

Respondents were asked to cite their primary blockers to further AI adoption (multiple selections allowed). Data privacy, governance, and regulatory compliance topped the list at 61.3% — ahead of accuracy and hallucination risk in production workflows (54.9%), integration complexity with legacy systems (48.6%), in-house AI skill deficit (42.3%), unclear short-term ROI justification (38.0%), and API/compute infrastructure cost (31.7%).

What this means: governance and compliance outranking accuracy risk is a meaningful signal — it suggests the primary constraint on enterprise AI adoption in 2026 isn't "can the model do the job," it's "can we prove to auditors, regulators, and our own risk function that we're using it safely." This tracks directly with why data residency and SOC 2 Type II -grade controls around AI systems have become differentiating factors for AI vendors and implementation partners, not afterthought compliance checkboxes. See how to scope an AI project before committing budget for how this governance-first reality should shape project sequencing.

## How much are enterprises actually spending on AI?

Mean AI budget allocation across respondents is 6.8% of total IT spend. The distribution clusters heavily in the middle: 37.3% of respondents allocate 2-5% of IT spend to AI, and 33.8% allocate 6-10%. Only 13.4% allocate 11-20%, and just 4.2% allocate more than 20% — meaning the popular narrative of enterprises making AI their dominant technology investment doesn't match what respondents actually report. 11.3% allocate less than 2%.

What this means: even organizations with AI live in core production are, on average, treating it as a meaningful but bounded line item — roughly one dollar in fourteen of total IT spend — rather than restructuring their entire technology budget around it. This is a useful calibration point for any organization benchmarking its own AI budget against peers: allocation in the 5-10% range is squarely typical, not conservative or behind.

## Should enterprises build, buy, or use a hybrid AI architecture?

A hybrid approach — combining fine-tuned models with commercial API and SaaS integration — dominates at 54.2% of respondents, more than double any single alternative. 22.5% report a buy-first strategy centered on commercial SaaS integration, 16.9% report a build-first strategy using custom RAG pipelines and proprietary models, and 6.4% rely primarily on systems integrator or outsourced development partners.

What this means: the build-vs-buy framing that dominates AI strategy discussions understates how most organizations are actually operating — a clear majority blend both approaches rather than committing exclusively to either. This is consistent with what we see in client engagements: organizations buy commercial infrastructure for undifferentiated capability (base models, vector databases, orchestration

tooling) and build custom fine-tuning or RAG pipelines specifically where domain-specific accuracy or proprietary data creates real differentiation. See RAG vs fine-tuning for enterprise LLM for how to decide which parts of a given use case warrant the build side of that hybrid.

## Which AI use cases are live today, and which are coming next?

Developer productivity copilots are the most mature use case, live at 68.3% of respondents with a further 21.1% planning adoption in 2026 — approaching near-universal adoption within this population. Customer support triage automation follows at 52.1% live, and enterprise knowledge search/RAG at 45.8% live with 38.0% more planned, making it likely to become the second-most-adopted use case by end of 2026. Automated document processing sits at 41.5% live, and predictive analytics/anomaly detection at 33.8% live.

Autonomous workflow agents stand out with the widest gap between current and planned adoption: only 14.1% live today, but 51.4% planning adoption in 2026 — by far the largest planned-adoption figure of any category measured. This makes agentic workflows the clearest "next wave" signal in the entire dataset.

What this means: the maturity curve here is informative for sequencing an AI roadmap — copilots and support automation are proven, low-risk starting points with the most peer validation, while knowledge search/RAG is the next-most-defensible investment given its adoption trajectory. Autonomous agents carry the most momentum but also the least current production track record; organizations moving into agentic workflows in 2026 should expect to be earlier in the adoption curve than the survey's headline blockers (governance, accuracy risk) would suggest is comfortable for a mature production system.

## What are this survey's methodology and limitations?

This is original primary research conducted by Code Ninety, not a compilation of third-party statistics. The survey drew its 185 invited respondents from Code Ninety's existing client and prospect network of enterprise technical decision-makers, achieving 142 completed responses (76.8% completion rate) between January 12 and February 6, 2026.

Limitations: because respondents were drawn from Code Ninety's own client and prospect network rather than a fully independent random sample, results may skew toward organizations already engaged with, or evaluating, external technical partners — a population plausibly somewhat further along in formal AI adoption planning than the broader market average. The sample also skews toward mid-to-large enterprises (500+ employees represent 84.5% of respondents) and toward North America and Western Europe (83.0% combined). Readers should treat these figures as representative of Code Ninety's enterprise client and prospect population specifically, not as a random sample of the global enterprise market. We report this methodology transparently rather than presenting the results as a broader claim than the data supports.

## How should I use this data?

Use these figures to benchmark your own organization's AI maturity against a real peer population of enterprise technical leaders, not as a universal industry average. If your organization is still in pure evaluation while 34.5% of peers already run AI in core production, that gap is worth raising directly in internal planning conversations. If governance and data privacy are stalling your own AI initiatives — as they

are for 61.3% of respondents, more than any other blocker — that's not a sign your organization is unusually cautious; it's the single most common blocker in this dataset, and worth resourcing accordingly rather than treating as a side issue to technical build work.

## Frequently asked questions

### What percentage of enterprises have AI live in core production?

34.5% of surveyed technical leaders report AI live in core production systems, not just internal tools or pilots. Another 28.2% report AI live in internal tools only, and 24.6% are in active pilots or proof-of-concept phase — meaning nearly 87% of organizations have moved past pure evaluation into some form of hands-on AI work.

### What's the biggest blocker to enterprise AI adoption?

Data privacy, governance, and regulatory compliance is the most-cited blocker at 61.3%, ahead of accuracy/hallucination risk (54.9%) and legacy system integration complexity (48.6%). Governance concerns outrank both technical accuracy concerns and integration difficulty, suggesting the primary barrier to enterprise AI adoption in 2026 is organizational and regulatory readiness, not model capability.

### How much of their IT budget are enterprises spending on AI?

The mean AI budget allocation is 6.8% of total IT spend, with the largest cluster of respondents (33.8%) allocating 6-10% and another 37.3% allocating 2-5%. Only 4.2% of organizations allocate more than 20% of IT spend to AI, meaning even AI-forward organizations are treating it as a significant but bounded portion of the total technology budget, not a wholesale reallocation.

### Are enterprises building AI in-house or buying it?

A hybrid approach dominates: 54.2% combine fine-tuned models with commercial APIs and SaaS tools rather than choosing purely one path. Only 16.9% report a build-first strategy using custom RAG and proprietary models, while 22.5% are buy-first, and 6.4% rely primarily on systems integrator or outsourced partners.

### Which AI use cases are most commonly live in production today?

Developer productivity copilots lead at 68.3% live adoption, followed by customer support triage automation (52.1%) and enterprise knowledge search/RAG (45.8%). Autonomous workflow agents are the least mature today at 14.1% live, but have the highest planned adoption for 2026 at 51.4%, suggesting agentic workflows are the next major adoption wave rather than an established category yet.

### How was this survey conducted?

142 completed responses (76.8% completion rate from 185 invited) from CTOs, VPs of Engineering, Chief Architects, and Heads of AI/Data Science across Code Ninety's client and prospect network, fielded January 12 to February 6, 2026. Full demographic breakdown and methodology limitations are documented on this page.