



# AI STRATEGY

2025: A Practical Guide  
to Success



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# INTRODUCTION - WHY AI NEEDS A STRATEGY

AI adoption has moved beyond hype cycles and innovation labs. It's now a top priority on executive agendas. Organisations know they need to do something with AI, but too often, they skip over the planning phase - resulting in disjointed pilots, lack of ROI, and internal resistance to change.

Recent research supports this shift. Gartner reports that business leaders expect AI to be the most transformative technology over the next five years - especially for revenue generation and operations. Microsoft's Work Trend Index shows that 75% of knowledge workers are already using generative AI, while 41% of leaders are redesigning processes from the ground up to support AI. This level of adoption means the window for experimentation is closing. A structured approach is no longer optional - it's essential.

Without a strategy, AI is just another tool. With a strategy, it becomes a driver of transformation.

This playbook is designed to help you move from intention to execution. Whether you're early in your AI journey or trying to scale from isolated use cases to an enterprise-wide capability, you'll find practical steps and decision-making frameworks throughout this guide.

## We'll explore:

- **What makes an organisation truly AI-ready**
- **How to structure your AI roadmap around business goals**
- **How to upskill teams and gain executive buy-in**
- **What it takes to execute high-value use cases**
- **How to ensure your data architecture and governance can support it all**

This guide is practical by design - focused on what works in real-world businesses, not theory.

**“The organisations seeing the most value from AI aren't the ones with the most tools. They're the ones with the clearest strategy.”**





# BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION WITH DATA ARCHITECTURE

Before you launch any AI use case, there's a critical question that needs to be answered:

**Is your data ready?**

Your data architecture is the invisible infrastructure that makes AI possible. Without it, AI is unreliable, unscalable, and often irrelevant. It's not just about storing data - it's about making data available, trusted, and usable by your teams and your models.

## What Is Modern Data Architecture?

A modern data architecture is designed to support agility, scale, and advanced analytics. Increasingly, organisations are adopting **Lakehouse Architecture** - a model that combines the flexibility of a data lake with the performance of a data warehouse.

**This hybrid approach enables you to:**

- Store structured and unstructured data together
- Enable both real-time analytics and historical analysis
- Support large-scale AI model training and inferencing

## Why a Lakehouse Matters Now

Lakehouse architecture has emerged as the preferred model for organisations aiming to unify fragmented data environments and support both analytics and AI workloads. It provides a future-proof framework without requiring businesses to abandon everything they've already built.

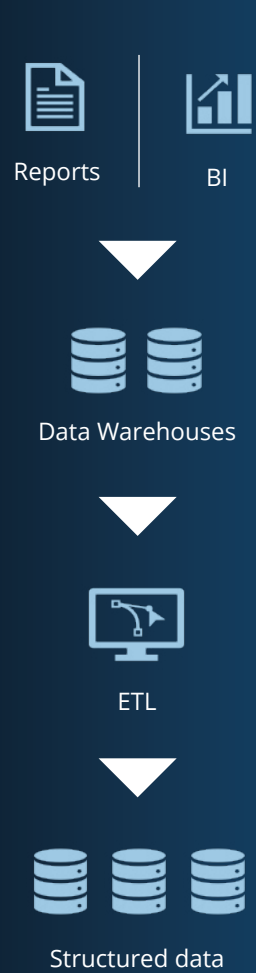
Organisations that previously invested in traditional data warehouses or data lakes now find themselves at a crossroads - needing greater flexibility, scalability, and real-time capabilities. A Lakehouse offers a way forward by building on these existing investments.



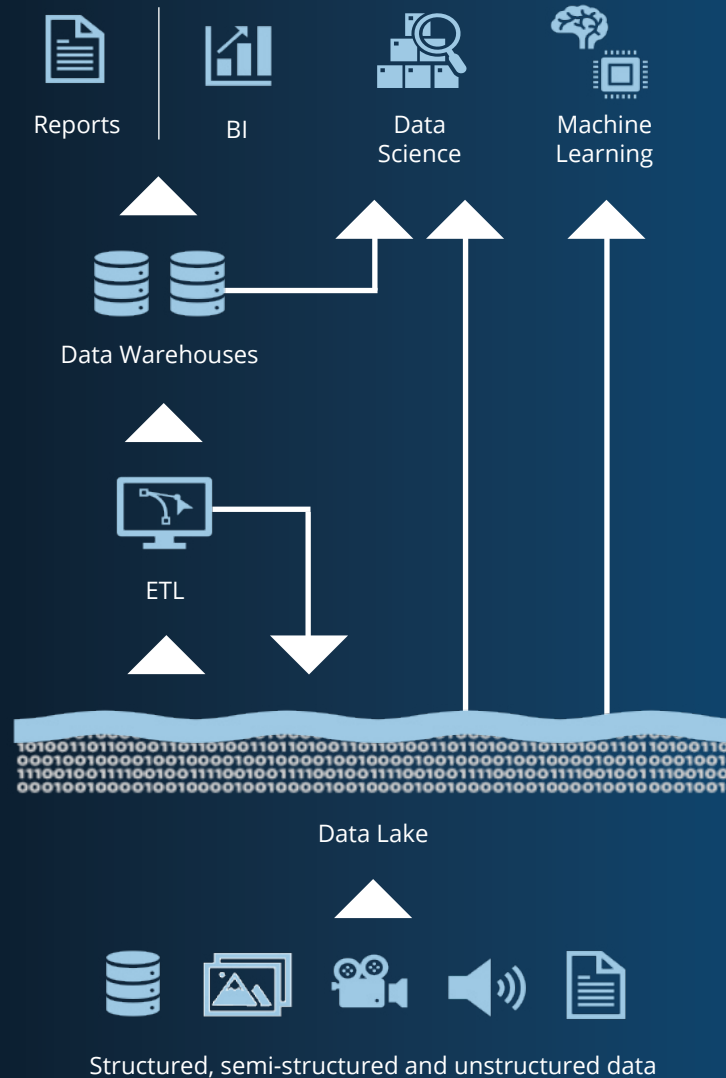


# High Level Architecture Differences

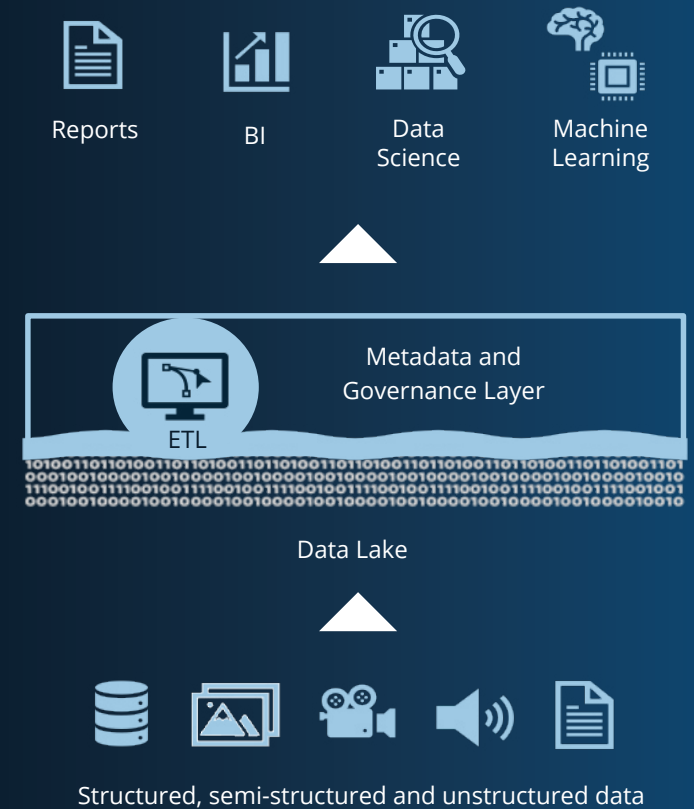
## DATA WAREHOUSE



## DATA LAKE



## DATA LAKEHOUSE



## From Data Warehouse or Data Lake to Lakehouse: What's the Gap?

Most businesses don't need to start from scratch.

Many have:

- *Relational databases or enterprise data warehouses still in use*
- *BI platforms dependent on structured data models*
- *Cloud data lakes with unstructured data but no real analytics engine on top*

The Lakehouse doesn't replace these - it complements and extends them. It allows organisations to incrementally modernise by layering in capabilities like unified governance, open table formats (e.g., Delta, Iceberg), and native support for machine learning and AI.



FEATURE / CAPABILITY	DATA WAREHOUSE	DATA LAKE	LAKEHOUSE
Data types supported	Structured only	Structured + unstructured	Structured + unstructured
Storage format	Proprietary formats	Open file format	Open table formats (Delta,Iceberg)
Performance	High for structured queries	Slower without tuning	High, optimised for mixed workloads
Governance	Strong	Weak without layering	Built-in / unified governance
AI & ML support	Limited	Requires integration	Native support for ML/AI workloads
Cost efficiency	Expensive at scale	Low-cost storage	Optimised compute + storage
Scalability	Vertical (limited)	Horizontal (high)	Horizontal + compute decoupling
Best for	BI, financial reporting	Archiving raw data	Unified analytics, BI, and AI





## Introducing the Pivot to Lakehouse Assessment

To help businesses take this next step, we've developed a Pivot to Lakehouse Assessment. This targeted engagement analyses your current architecture and provides practical recommendations for transitioning to a Lakehouse model without unnecessary cost or disruption.

You'll receive:

- *A review of your current data architecture, technology stack, and pain points*
- *A gap analysis outlining what needs to change—and what can stay*
- *An overview roadmap to help evolve your platform in a phased, business-aligned way*

“You don't have to rip and replace. A smart Lakehouse strategy builds on what's already working - and prepares you for what's next.”

Want to know if your organisation is ready?

[TAKE THE PIVOT TO LAKEHOUSE ASSESSMENT HERE](#)



## Key Components of an AI-Ready Architecture



### 01 DATA LAKEHOUSE PLATFORM

Enables a unified approach to storing, processing, and analysing diverse data types.



### 02 DATA GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

Establishes trust through data quality, lineage, access control, and compliance.



### 03 DATA INTEGRATION PIPELINES

Ensure data flows consistently from source systems into analytical platforms.



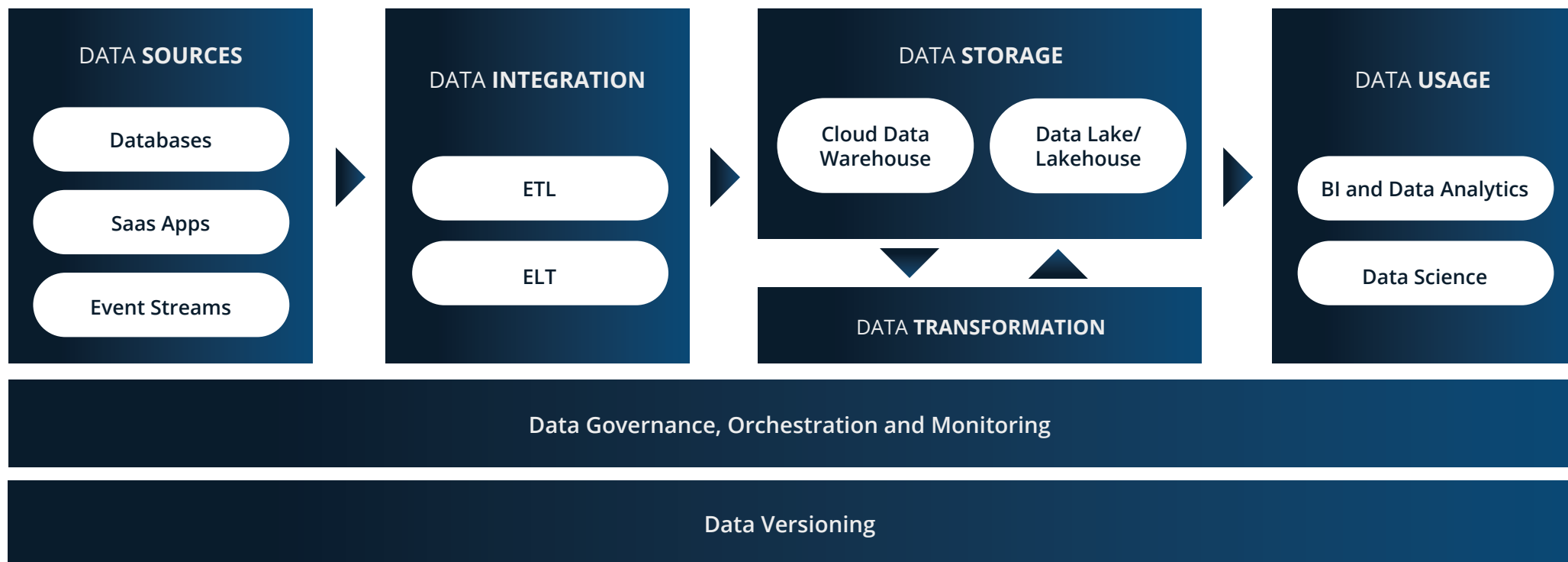
### 04 METADATA AND CATALOGING TOOLS

Help teams discover, understand, and use data appropriately.



### 05 CLOUD SCALABILITY

Provides the flexibility to scale compute and storage as needed.



## Common Myths About Lakehouse Adoption

Here are a few misconceptions we regularly hear - and the reality behind them:

**01 MYTH:** You need to rip out your data warehouse to adopt a Lakehouse.

**FACT:** Lakehouses extend your existing architecture. You can modernise without disruption.

**02 MYTH:** Implementing a Lakehouse is too complex and expensive.

**FACT:** When done incrementally and strategically, a Lakehouse can reduce long-term cost and complexity.

**03 MYTH:** Lakehouses are just another buzzword.

**FACT:** Leading platforms like Databricks, Microsoft Fabric, and Snowflake are already adopting Lakehouse principles at scale.



### Want to dive deeper into modern data architecture?

Watch this webinar on “Maximising Data Potential:  
“The Modern Data Platform Advantage”

WEBINAR

DECISION INC.

Maximising Data Potential:  
**The Modern Data Platform Advantage**

GUEST SPEAKER *OceanBasket*

WATCH NOW



# CORE PILLARS OF A PRACTICAL AI STRATEGY

This playbook is structured around the four critical components required to plan and execute an effective AI strategy. Each of these pillars builds upon the last, offering a step-by-step approach that ensures your organisation can move from idea to execution with confidence.

We'll explore each of these in detail:

## 01 AI ADOPTION ASSESSMENT

Understand where you are today, what capabilities you have, and what gaps to close.



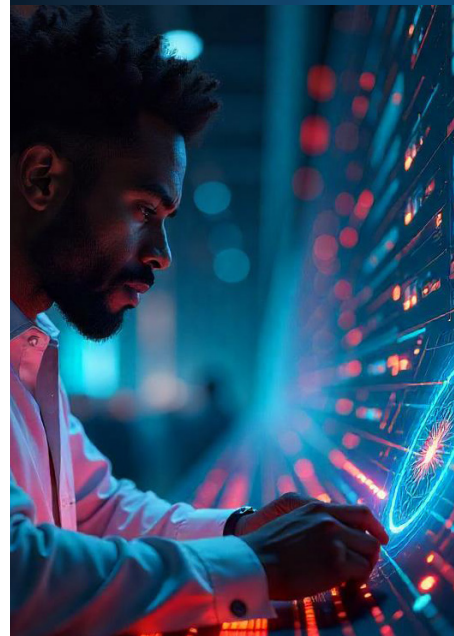
## 02 AI STRATEGY MAPPING

Define how AI aligns to your business goals, stakeholders, and use cases.



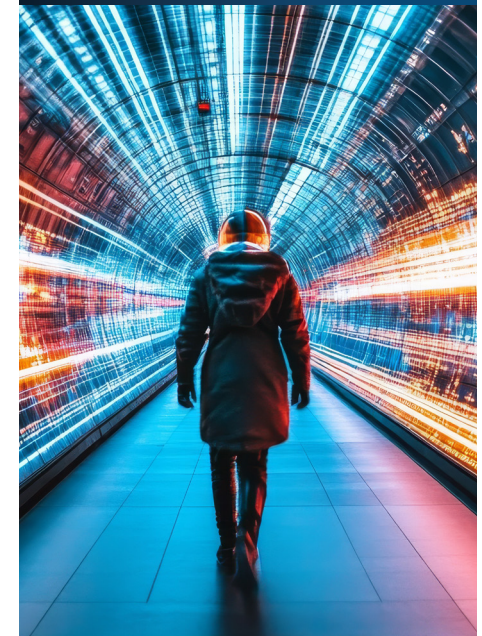
## 03 AI LITERACY ENABLEMENT

Equip your teams with the foundational understanding they need to engage with and support AI initiatives.



## 04 AI LAUNCH HUB

Identify and implement high-impact use cases through a structured, business-first execution model.





## PILLAR 1: THE AI ADOPTION ASSESSMENT

Before building your strategy or selecting use cases, it's important to understand how your organisation is currently adopting AI tools and whether this adoption is truly aligned with strategic business goals. The AI Adoption Assessment provides a diagnostic framework to evaluate where AI fits into your organisation's wider transformation journey.

### What is the AI Adoption Assessment?

This structured tool frames the conversation across four key lenses:

- **Business Objectives:**  
What are the organisation's strategic goals, and how is AI being used (or planned) to support them?
- **AI Strategy:**  
Is there a coherent AI strategy in place, or is adoption happening in silos?
- **Technology Landscape:**  
Are the platforms and tools in use supporting scalable, ethical, and governed AI?
- **Integration Across Functions:**  
Are use cases interconnected across front- and back-office operations, or are they isolated pilots?

The goal is to align current AI initiatives with long-term success metrics and uncover areas where capability, alignment, or clarity is missing.

### Why It Matters

Organisations often adopt AI reactively - plugging in tools where there's pain, without considering how these tools fit into the bigger picture. The result is fragmented investment and limited value.

“ This assessment reveals whether your AI efforts are pulling in the same direction - or working at cross-purposes. ”

### The output includes:



A heatmap of how well-aligned current efforts are to the business strategy



Gaps in governance, platform capability, or operational integration



A prioritised list of focus areas to guide your AI strategy development

Want to align your AI initiatives with strategic goals?

**TAKE THE ASSESSMENT HERE**

## PILLAR 2: AI STRATEGY MAPPING

**AI Strategy Mapping is a structured process that helps you define how AI can:**

- **Advance your core business objectives**
- **Prioritise the right use cases**
- **Serve key stakeholders across the organisation**
- **Leverage technology in a scalable, governed way**

Vision of the Business - “a powerful vision that the AI strategy supports”														
Business Objectives	Revenue Growth		Market Share		Integrated Supply Chain		Reduce Cost to Run		Empowered Workforce		On Target Planning			
Stakeholders	Managers		Sales Reps/Operations			Customers			Suppliers			Executive		
Components and Use Cases	AI Centre of Excellence				Data Science Lab				AI Hub					
	Governance & Leadership		Standards & Best Practices		Ethics		Customer Segmentation		Recommendation Engine		Predictive Maintenance		Customer Support AI Chat Agent	
	Talent & Expertise		Change Management & Adoption		Research & Innovation		Fraud Detection		Time Series Forecasting		Anomaly Detection		Computer Vision Monitoring	
Technology Platform	AI Platforms						Data Science Platforms				Data Management			
	Open AI / Lambda / Bedrock / Co-Pilot						Alteryx / Python / Dataiku				Data Catalogue Master Data Management			
	Modern Data Platforms													
	Microsoft Fabric / Databricks / AWS Redshift													
	Microsoft Azure/AWS/GCP Platform													



## Step-by-Step Approach to Mapping Your AI Strategy





### Example: Strategy Map for a Retail Firm

Based on the strategy map framework above, here's an example of what this could look like for a large national retail chain:

**Business Vision:**  
To deliver a seamless, personalised shopping experience while optimising operations across all channels.

BUSINESS OBJECTIVE	STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED	AI USE CASE	SUPPORTING TECHNOLOGY
Improve customer experience	Head of CX, Store Ops, Marketing	Personalised product recommendation engine	Azure ML, Retail 360 view
Optimise inventory and logistics	Supply Chain, Warehouse Manager	Demand forecasting and smart replenishment	Databricks, Forecasting Models
Increase basket size	Store Managers, Merchandising	Dynamic pricing engine based on real-time data	Azure AI, Pricing API Integrations
Reduce returns and complaints	Customer Service, Product Dev	AI-driven product feedback and sentiment analysis	NLP tools, Data Lakehouse
Enhance workforce productivity	HR, Store Ops	Staff scheduling optimisation using predictive AI	ML models on Azure

Each use case supports a key stakeholder’s mandate and aligns with business goals. Technology decisions are made after defining use cases - ensuring the right tools are chosen for the right purpose.

Want help building your AI strategy map?

TALK TO OUR ADVISORY TEAM

## PILLAR 3: AI LITERACY ENABLEMENT

Many AI strategies stall not because of technology, but because of uncertainty, fear, or lack of understanding within the business. AI Literacy Enablement addresses this by equipping your teams - especially business leaders and potential AI champions - with the foundational knowledge they need to confidently engage with AI.

### Why Literacy Matters

In our experience, a lack of AI literacy at the executive or operational level is a major barrier to progress. Teams may be unsure where to start, or unable to fully grasp what's possible. This creates hesitation, resistance, or disconnected expectations between business and technical teams.

“ We’ve seen many organisations stuck in pilot mode because leadership doesn’t understand what AI can and can’t do - or how it fits into their business. ”

That’s why AI Literacy Enablement is a core pillar - not a nice-to-have.

### A Catalyst for Internal Champions

AI literacy is often the spark that creates internal momentum. Once your teams understand the value and see real examples, they’re more likely to:

- Identify new use cases
- Support strategy execution
- Champion change within their departments

### What is covered in AI Literacy?



#### 01 INTRODUCTION TO AI

Learn the fundamental concepts and key technologies that drive Artificial Intelligence today.



#### 02 AI MODELS AND ARCHITECTURE

Explore the different types of AI models and their underlying frameworks.



#### 03 USE CASES IN INDUSTRY

Discover how AI is transforming various industries through real-world examples and use cases.



#### 04 INTERACTIVE SESSION - GEN AI BOTS

Engage with our AI-powered bots to see firsthand how they solve business challenges.



#### 05 CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING AI

Understand the critical factors and best practices for successful AI adoption within your business.

Want to run a literacy session in your business?

[EXPLORE OUR AI LITERACY COURSE](#)

## PILLAR 4: AI LAUNCH HUB

Once your strategy is defined and your teams are equipped with foundational understanding, it's time to take action. The AI Launch Hub is a structured, practical framework that guides organisations through the execution of their first (and future) AI use cases. It bridges the gap between strategy and delivery.

### Why the AI Launch Hub Is Critical

Getting AI right isn't just about having the best models or most data - it's about starting with the right use case, delivering value quickly, and building internal confidence.

#### The Launch Hub focuses on:

- **Identifying the best-fit use cases for your organisation**
- **Creating alignment between business and technical teams**
- **Ensuring fast, focused delivery**
- **Establishing the repeatable practices needed for scale**



### What the Launch Hub Includes

The Launch Hub is a multi-phase approach:

#### 01 VISIONING WORKSHOPS

Collaborative sessions with business stakeholders to identify pain points, opportunities, and areas where AI can deliver real value.

#### 02 USE CASE IDENTIFICATION AND PRIORITISATION

We work with your teams to define, score, and prioritise use cases based on potential value, complexity, and time to value.

#### 03 EFFORT VS. VALUE MAPPING

Each potential use case is plotted on a matrix to highlight quick wins vs. strategic investments.

#### 04 BUSINESS CASE DEVELOPMENT

Each shortlisted use case includes a tangible business case - estimated cost, anticipated impact, risks, and delivery timeline.

#### 05 PLATFORM READINESS AND ARCHITECTURE SETUP

Evaluate or implement the right cloud-based AI platform (e.g. Microsoft Azure, Databricks) with secure access to trusted data.

#### 06 MODEL DEVELOPMENT AND ITERATION

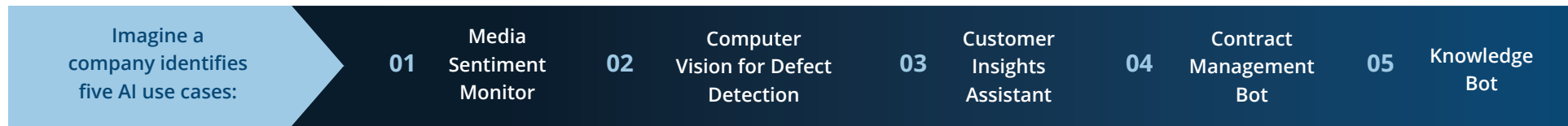
Design, train, and test the initial AI model using a repeatable development approach.

#### 07 DEPLOYMENT AND ENABLEMENT

Deploy the working AI solution to users, with support and enablement for handover and ongoing improvement.



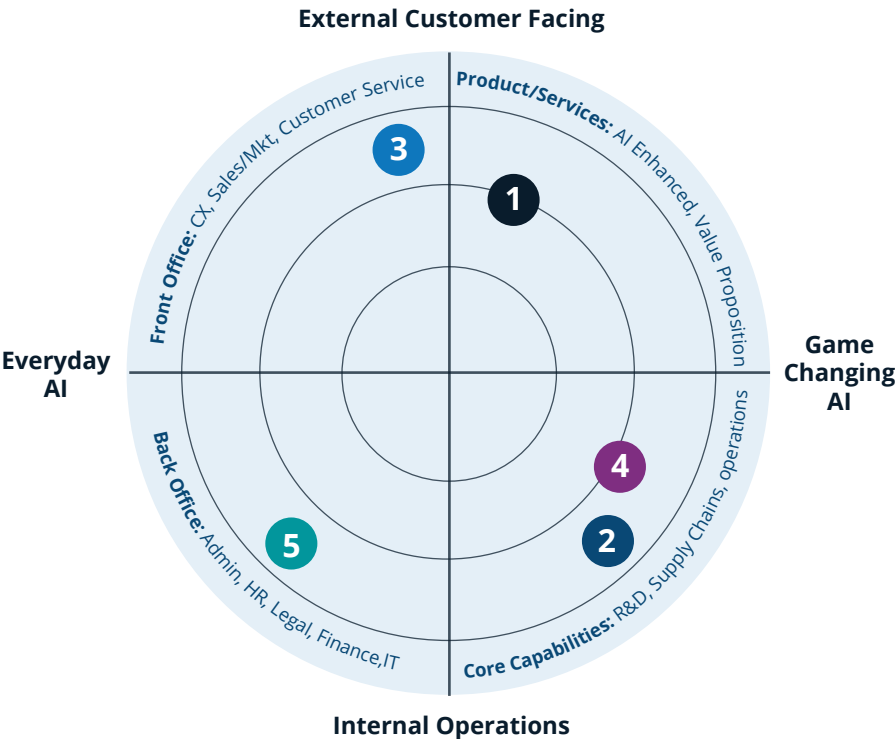
Practical Example of Use Case Prioritisation



A **Customer Insights Assistant** was identified as being a use case that can provide high business value with some but not huge investment required.

Illustrative Example

AI Solution	Description	
Media Sentiment Monitor	Monitors, captures, summarises news and media coverage using sentiment and theme analysis	1
Computer Vision for Defect Detection	Develop methods for detecting defects in the coffee beans automatically, reducing manual effort	2
Customer Insights Assistant	Analyse structured and unstructured data to derive unique customer insights	3
Contract Management Bot	Able to answer legal and contractual concerns to understand liabilities and vulnerabilities in a contract. Acts as a junior assistant to a qualified lawyer	4
Knowledge Bot	A digital 'companion' that is business, functional and context aware and able to provide user friendly support and guidance for internal teams or customers	5



The **Business Case** was then developed for the chosen use case.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW	
<p><b>Name:</b> <i>Customer Insights Assistant</i></p> <p><b>Summary:</b> <i>Develop an LLM solution to support sales and marketing teams in better understanding the current customer base as well as where they should focus.</i></p>	
PROJECT SNAPSHOT	KEY OBJECTIVES
<p>Total Cost: <i>R1.5 million</i></p> <p>Value Score: <div>High</div></p> <p>Risk Score: <div>Low</div></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Accelerate time to answer key customer questions e.g. who is my top customer</li><li>• Highlight areas for focus e.g. by revealing trends in customer feedback</li><li>• Segment customers into groups based on behaviour</li><li>• Identify customer most likely to churn</li></ul>
ASSET CLASS	KEY ASSUMPTIONS
<div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Mandatory</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Maintenance</div></div> <div><div><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Business Opportunity</div><div><input type="checkbox"/> Innovation</div></div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Customer data is accurate and value</li><li>• Sales and Marketing staff do adopt new solution</li><li>• LLM Interface is embedded in sales staff desktops/mobile devices for easy access</li></ul>
KEY STAKEHOLDERS	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
<p>Name:    Position:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1 - <i>CIO</i></li><li>• 2 - <i>Marketing Manager</i></li><li>• 3 - <i>Sales Manager</i></li></ul>	<div><p>Leading Indicators:</p><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Marketing staff reduced time on manual tasks</i></li><li>• <i>Faster reporting and answers to questions</i></li></ul></div> <div><p>Lagging Indicators:</p><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Churn</i></li><li>• <i>Customer satisfaction</i></li></ul></div>

## Why This Approach Works

### 01 QUICK WINS DRIVE BUY-IN

Focus on high-impact, achievable use cases to create early success.



### 02 CONFIDENCE THROUGH DELIVERY

Teams learn through execution. The Launch Hub upskills internal teams by involving them in the delivery.



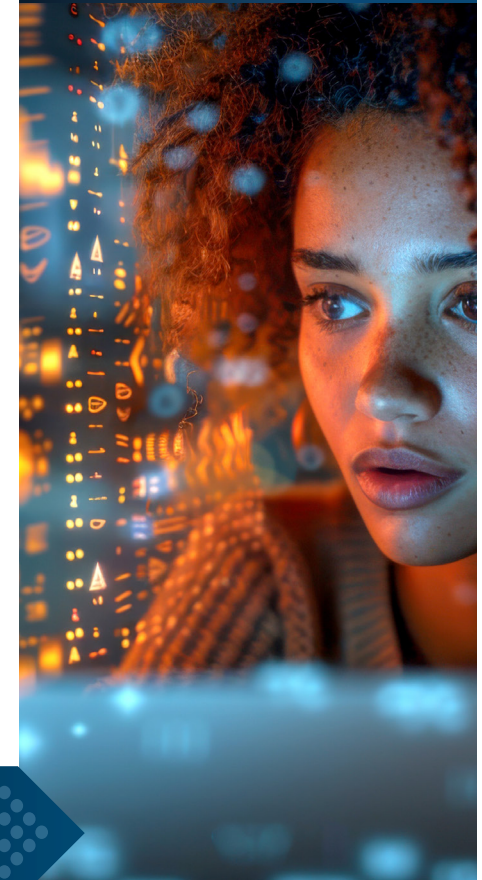
### 03 FOUNDATION FOR FUTURE SCALE

You don't just build a model - you build the people, process, and architecture to keep delivering.



### 04 INTEGRATED GOVERNANCE

The approach includes responsible AI practices, from data security to ethical considerations.



Want to find out more about the AI Launch Hub?

[EXPLORE THE LAUNCH HUB HERE](#)



# FINAL THOUGHTS: PUTTING YOUR AI STRATEGY INTO ACTION

By now, it should be clear that successful AI isn't about finding the perfect tool or chasing the most hyped technology. It's about building the right foundation and aligning every step - from planning to execution - with your business goals.

The four pillars outlined in this playbook offer a practical framework:



**Assess your adoption maturity level** so you know your starting point.



**Map your strategy** to real-world business objectives and teams.



**Upskill your people** so they're confident and empowered, not confused or resistant



**Launch with intent** by prioritising the right use case and delivering quick wins

Whether you're just beginning your AI journey or looking to scale existing efforts, starting with a clear strategy gives you the structure, support, and clarity to move forward.

## Want to See It in Action?

This playbook was inspired by our recent webinar on AI Strategy, where we unpacked the 4-pillar approach, discussed real-world challenges, and showcased examples of AI strategy mapping, readiness assessments, and more.



**WATCH THE AI STRATEGY WEBINAR ON DEMAND**

## Take the Next Step

Here are a few practical ways to take action:

**TAKE THE AI ADOPTION ASSESSMENT**

**EXPLORE THE PIVOT TO LAKEHOUSE ASSESSMENT**

**DOWNLOAD THE AI LITERACY COURSE BROCHURE**

**VISIT THE AI LAUNCH HUB**



DECISION INC.

# POWERING INNOVATION

**Decision Inc.** is a leading advisory-led technology services business with deep expertise in data, analytics, and artificial intelligence. We've helped hundreds of organisations across industries build practical AI strategies and deliver tangible outcomes.

Our approach is simple: start with business goals, apply proven frameworks, and deliver solutions that work. Whether you need support with data readiness, AI literacy, or launching your first AI use case, we're here to help.

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