

The AI responsibility gap: Why leadership is the missing link

An executive insight report



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Foreword



AI is revolutionizing the world, giving rise to unprecedented opportunities in technology, problem-solving and creativity. However, this rapid pace of innovation raises a critical question: How can we harness the immense potential of AI responsibly?

For this report, we set out to examine the “responsibility gap” in AI — the disconnect between the speed of innovation and frameworks for responsibility, including ethics, safety, sustainability and inclusiveness.

This gap represents one of the most urgent challenges of our time. Left unaddressed, it exposes us to risks that include security and equality issues, climate and sustainability challenges, wasted investment and delays in the transition from experimentation to the full-scale implementation of AI initiatives.

To determine how organizations are dealing with this, we interviewed more than 2,300 decision-makers and influencers from organizations spanning 34 countries around the world.

Respondents drawn from diverse roles in 12 industries — nearly 70% at the C-level — shared valuable insights into why the gap exists and how to balance innovation with accountability. They also discussed practical strategies to guide the evolution of AI, and GenAI specifically, in transformative, equitable and sustainable ways that lessen the need for costly reconfigurations over time.

The findings reveal a landscape filled with both excitement and hesitation. Enthusiasm, especially about GenAI’s potential, is tempered by concerns about how to advance AI responsibly. Among C-suite leaders, there are tensions between prioritizing innovation and focusing on responsibility. Nonetheless, there is a shared vision for bridging the gap and advancing AI in ways that align progress with accountability.

At NTT DATA, we believe the technologies we develop and deploy must remain within our capacity to guide and regulate. Rather than relying solely on external mandates or pressures, we are guided by the philosophy of “responsible reinvention” — making technology and accountability inseparable.

This approach is both our strategic north star and our constant touchstone, and I am deeply passionate about and dedicated to the framework and the dialogue that accompanies it. For every strategy and tactic we deploy — in business processes, operations, IT architecture or service offerings — I work with our global leadership to ensure adherence.

Every organization must define its own guidelines, shaped by its unique mission, vision and values. With this report, we offer a roadmap to help your organization narrow the responsibility gap and allow cutting-edge innovation and ethical stewardship to move forward together.

Let’s build a world where technology works not just for us but with us, amplifying our potential while upholding our shared humanity.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Abhijit". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Abhijit Dubey
CEO, NTT DATA, Inc.

Responsible governance

The responsibility gap is the chasm between the breakneck speed of AI innovation and the systems and frameworks needed to govern it responsibly. Based on our global research, the C-suite is at odds with itself about where this balance should lie. In all cases, however, one trend is evident: as investment in GenAI surges, the gap widens.

1 in 3

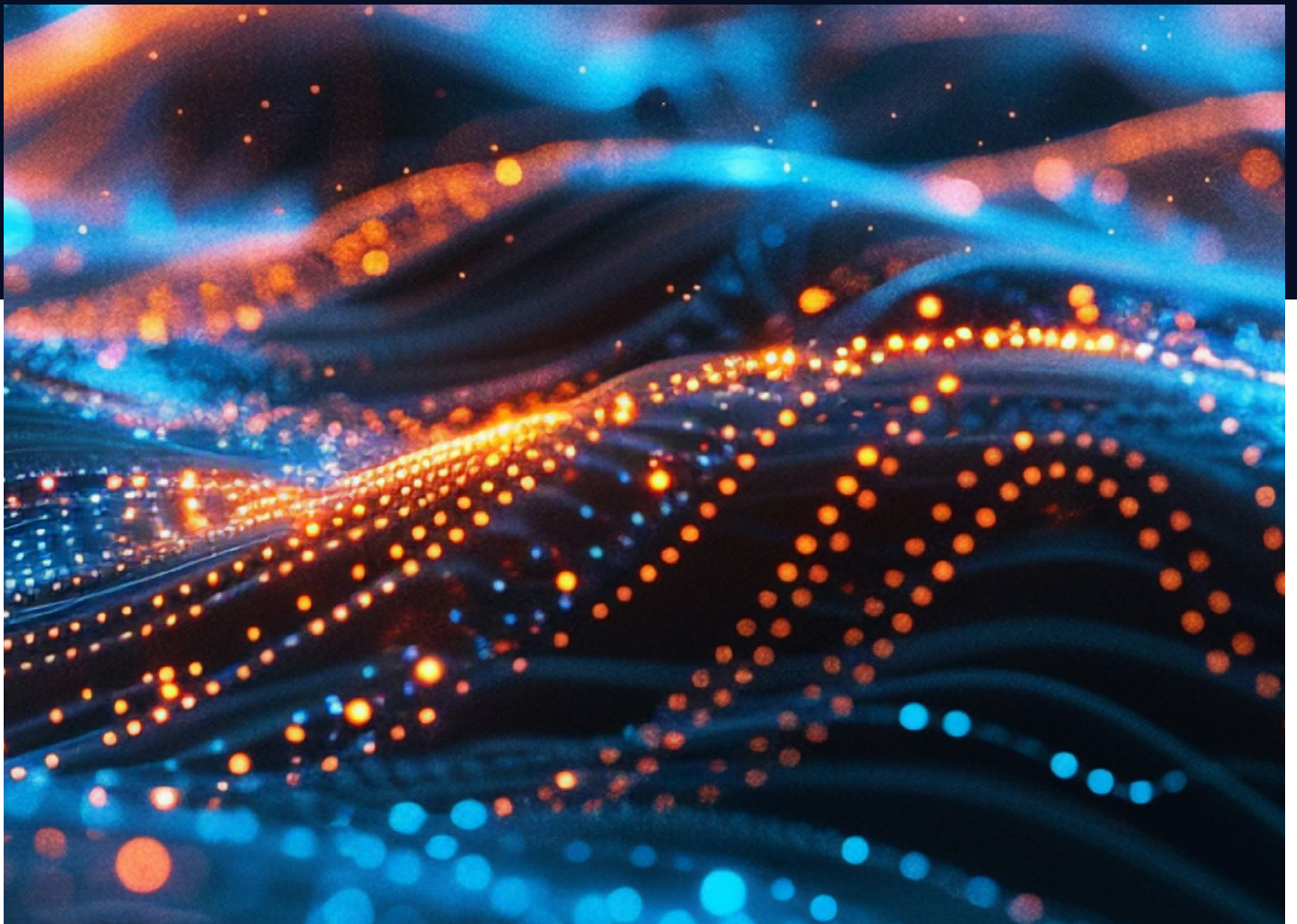
in the C-suite say responsibility matters more than innovation. Nearly 1 in 3 say innovation matters more, and the remainder say innovation and responsibility are equally important.

>60%

of C-suite executives describe the extent of the gap between innovation and responsibility as significant.

>80%

of organizations say leadership guidance on balancing GenAI innovation with ethical and moral responsibilities is very important — and the number seeing this guidance as crucial rises as investment increases.





Impact on society and business

As AI becomes part of day-to-day life, balancing responsibility and innovation becomes both a moral imperative and a strategic necessity for leaders, organizations and society as a whole. Given the trajectory of GenAI, this will affect investment decisions and the speed at which organizations implement solutions that provide true business value and return on investment.

89%

of the C-suite are very concerned about the potential security risks associated with GenAI deployments; just 24% of CISOs strongly agree that their organization follows a robust framework to balance risk and value creation.

3 in 4

of all respondents say that GenAI ambitions stand in conflict with and/or are negatively affecting sustainability goals, leading many organizations to double down on low-energy solutions as a result of GenAI investment.

43%

of C-suite members who agree that innovation matters more than responsibility say government and industry guidelines and/or policies on responsibility are unclear.

>8 in 10

of all respondents say government regulations on GenAI are unclear, which stifles innovation and hinders investment. Most expect spending on GenAI-related regulatory compliance to increase.

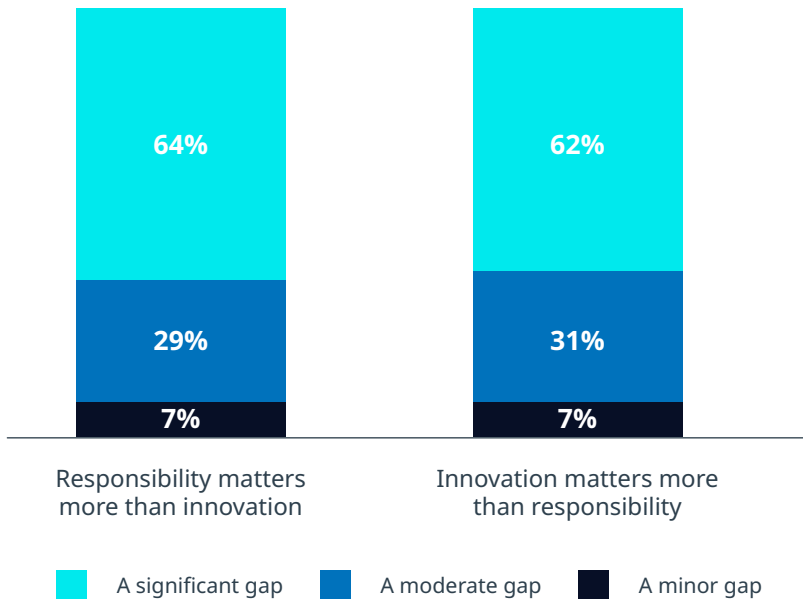
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Enthusiasm, especially about GenAI's potential, is tempered by concerns about how to advance AI responsibly.

The gap is real — and significant

C-suite executives are split on the importance of balancing innovation with responsibility. However, where there is a perceived gap between the two, most executives — no matter whether they prioritize innovation or responsibility — say that the gap is significant.

The C-suite view on the extent of the gap between innovation and responsibility

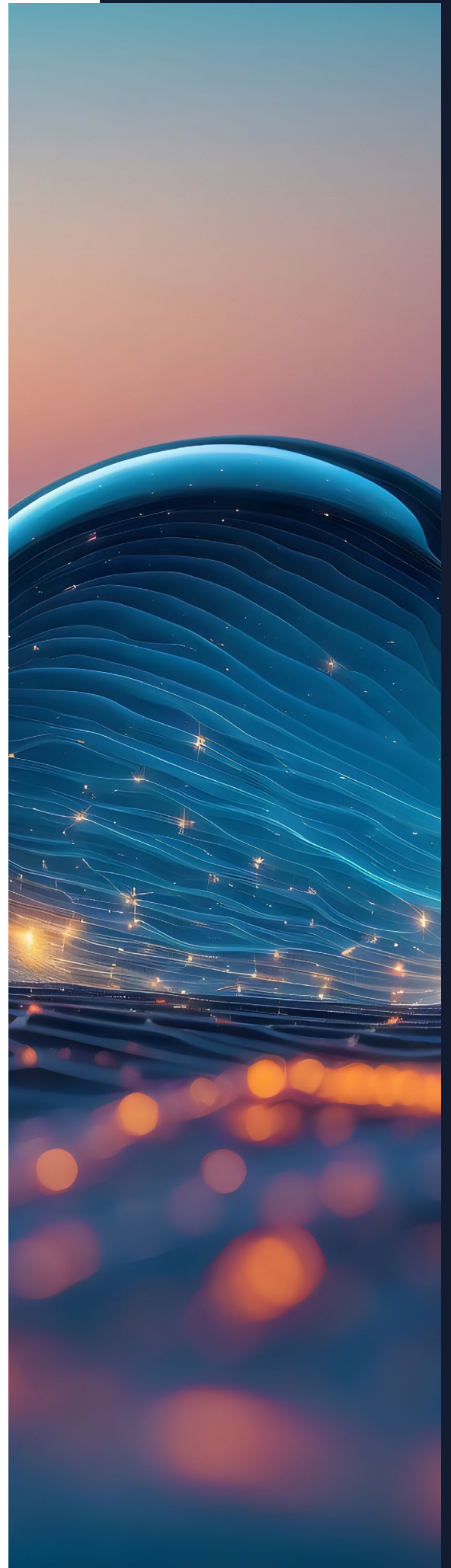


Top-performing organizations are leading the way in understanding that clear ethical guidelines for responsible governance are essential.

81%

of top-performing organizations* place a high importance on balancing innovation with responsibility (versus just 60% of all others).

* Top-performing organizations are those with more than 10% year-on-year revenue growth and an operating profit margin of more than 15% in the last financial year.



Tension at the executive level

Our research has also identified the main reasons why organizations choose to prioritize innovation over responsibility, and vice versa. For example, a greater need for business growth drives leaders' focus on innovation, while a rising insistence on responsibility swings the balance toward responsibility. The two are not intended to be exclusive, but the pressure on executives makes it feel that way.



Where innovation matters more than responsibility, it's because of:

- 1 A greater need for business growth
- 2 A lack of budget or resources to focus on responsibility
- 3 A lack of perceived risk (such as compliance or ethics)

40% of the C-suite say there is pressure to achieve rapid technological advancement.



Where responsibility matters more than innovation, it's because of:

- 1 Clear direction from leaders
- 2 A preference for a safe, established approach rather than industry disruption
- 3 A need to comply with government and industry guidelines

41% of the C-suite say they fear security risks (including external threats).

However, the message from the business community is clear: innovation without a responsibility mandate, whether through stronger regulatory frameworks or decisive leadership, leaves organizations struggling to balance opportunity with risk. Business leaders who strike this balance are better positioned to benefit fully from AI while safeguarding their organization's future — but strong, focused leadership is required.

“ Without clear leadership, the responsibility gap threatens to derail responsible AI and GenAI development.

Clear leadership is needed

Without clear leadership, the responsibility gap threatens to derail responsible AI and GenAI development, letting investment in this area go to waste and stifling progress from experimentation to implementation. Globally, the gap risks collateral damage on security, equality, sustainability and climate issues.

81%

of all respondents say it's very important that their leadership team provide guidance on balancing innovation with responsibility.

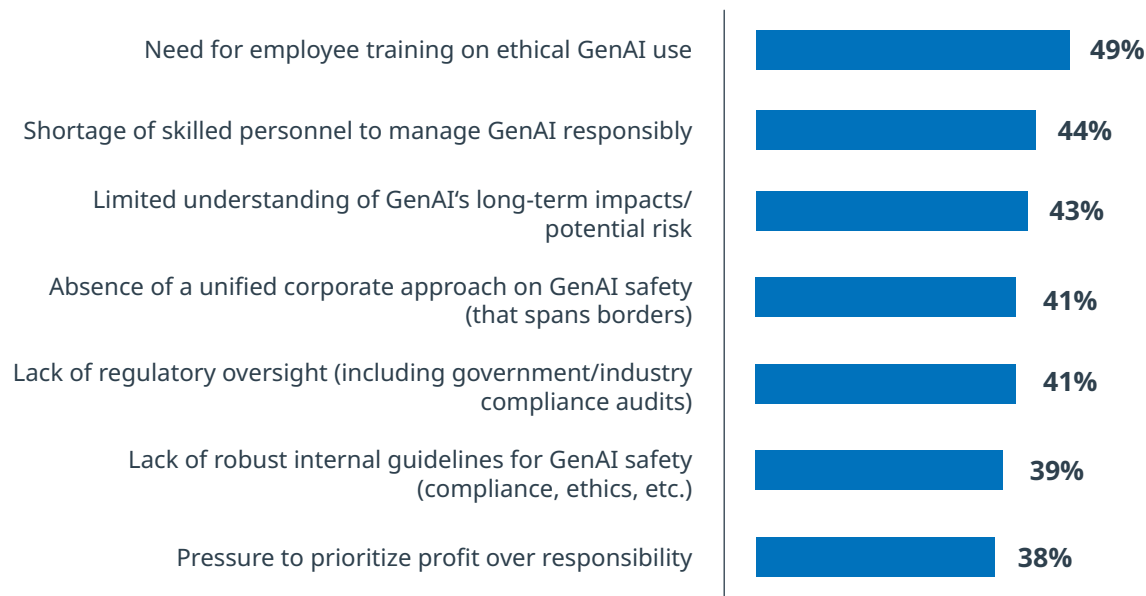
71%

of CISOs believe their organization lacks clarity from leaders on responsibility and that this shortcoming leads to innovation taking precedence.

The workforce blind spot

According to the C-suite, the top factor affecting organizations' ability to balance innovation with responsibility is the need for greater education on the ethical use of GenAI. Many organizations are adopting required training on GenAI, but not all are coupling this training with safe use of the technology. At NTT DATA, GenAI training and ethical use are inseparable.

The C-suite view on factors that most affect organizations' ability to balance innovation with responsibility

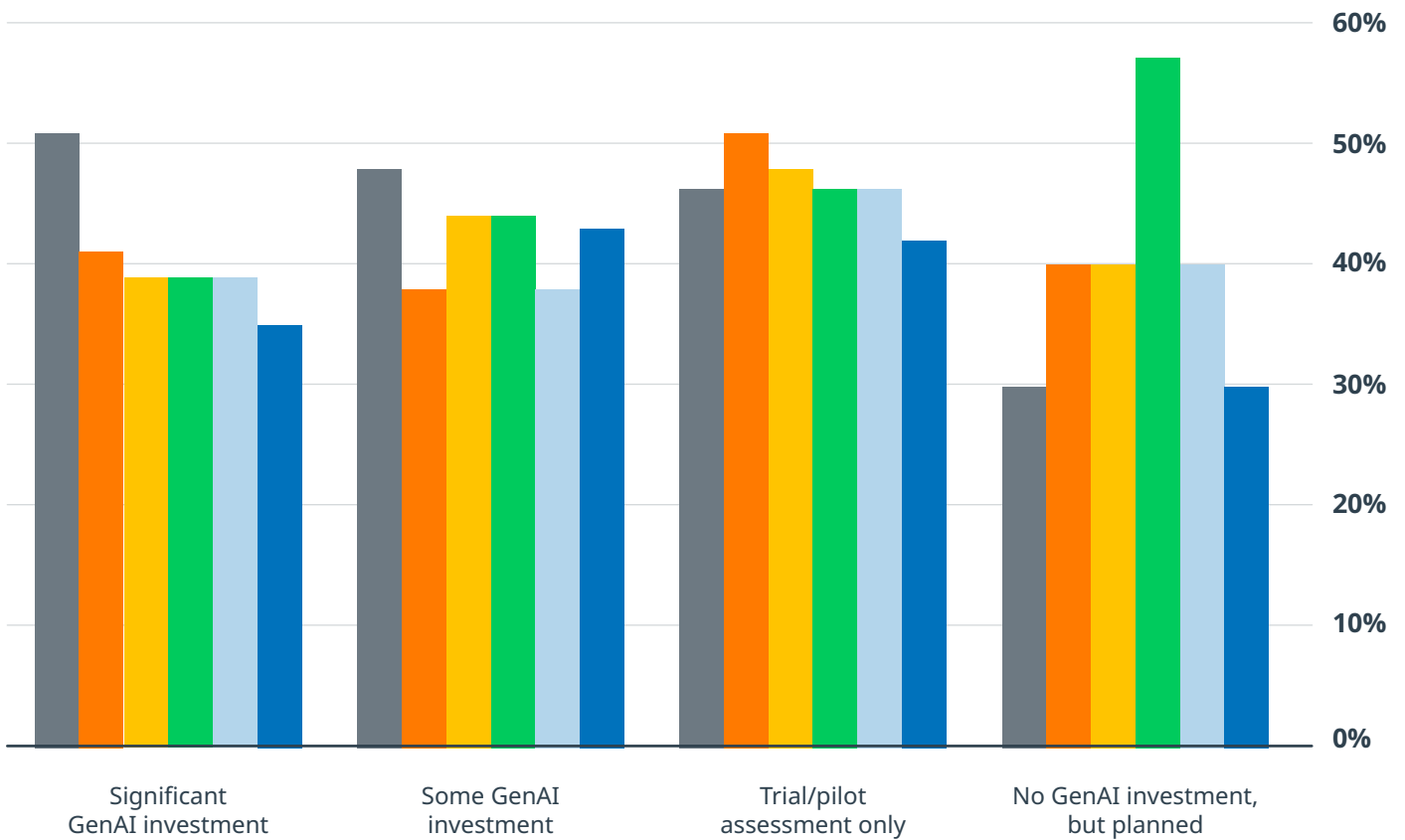


When it comes to GenAI, which of the following most affect your organization's ability to balance innovation with responsibility?

Base: All C-suite respondents, excluding "Don't know" responses (n=1,564)

And, just as the responsibility-innovation gap widens with investment unless it is addressed, the gap's impact on the workforce grows with investment, too. The larger the investment, the greater the significance of the workforce challenge in balancing innovation and responsibility.

The following graphic shows how the need for training grows as investment increases — an ongoing evolution that requires constant management. Conversely, a key challenge for organizations starting out on their GenAI journey is the shortage of skilled personnel who can manage GenAI responsibly.



- Need for employee training on ethical GenAI use
- Absence of a unified corporate approach on GenAI safety (that spans borders)
- Limited understanding of GenAI's long-term impacts/potential risk
- Shortage of skilled personnel to manage GenAI responsibly
- Lack of regulatory oversight (including government/industry compliance audits)
- Lack of robust internal guidelines for GenAI safety (compliance, ethics, etc.)

When it comes to GenAI, which of the following most affect your organization's ability to balance innovation with responsibility?

Base: All respondents, excluding "Don't know" responses (n=2,235)

Key duties of business leaders in developing responsible GenAI

Wanting to maintain human oversight, business leaders are prioritizing employee education on ethical GenAI use to help balance innovation with responsibility. Nearly half are establishing a dedicated team to oversee their responsibilities.

The main responsibilities of business leaders in GenAI development



Which of the following should be key responsibilities of business leaders in developing GenAI?

Base: All respondents, excluding "Don't know" responses (n=2,235)



Strategy alignment is an imperative

Executives — including 61% of the C-suite overall, 70% of CEOs and 68% of CISOs — are closely aligned on the high importance of achieving an equal balance between innovation and responsibility.

But

54% of CISOs say that internal guidelines or policies on responsibility are unclear (just 20% of CEOs say the same).

Closing the responsibility gap

Businesses and industries that have failed to develop the necessary knowledge and governance are being left behind by AI advances, especially in GenAI. Organizations are scrambling to catch up, but the clock is ticking. Uninformed moves can change the entire trajectory of a market.



The future of AI is not just about what the technology can do but also about who's using it, and how. Innovation and responsibility are often seen as opposing forces, locked in a tug-of-war, but they don't have to be. The most forward-thinking and high-performing organizations understand that integrating responsibility into the innovation process is both ethical and strategic. It supports sustainable progress while mitigating risk.

Without responsibility at the core of AI strategy, implementation cannot progress and innovation will stall. This isn't a corporate challenge; it's an industry-wide wake-up call, and the time to act is now.

Define what responsibility means to your organization and align it with your mission, visions and values. At NTT DATA, we are guided by the Japanese principle of *sanpō yoshi* — doing good three ways: for the buyer, for the supplier and for society. Responsibility then means our AI development must not only meet our stringent security and privacy standards but also remain transparent, fair, ethical and sustainable. The six principles that guide us in everything we do around AI are sustainable development, human autonomy, fairness and openness, security, privacy, communication and co-creation. Our approach to deploying and maintaining AI is always in lockstep with our organizational principles.

“ Our approach ... is always in lockstep with our organizational principles.

Next, we must close the responsibility gap.

Here are the 4 steps we recommend to achieve this:

01

Embrace a “responsible by design” philosophy

AI, including GenAI, must be built responsibly from the ground up and end to end. The systems, processes and workflows you develop must be ethical, inclusive and secure. The data shows that governance is critical, but governance cannot be seen only as complying with regulations and standards. It’s also about aligning your initiatives with your values, regardless of what is mandated.

At NTT DATA, we call our approach “responsible reinvention”. By successfully balancing innovation with responsibility (and governance), we’ve been able to build a resilient business poised for long-term growth.



CEO to-do: Set the tone and culture from the top. Own the narrative. Get your team to align your GenAI strategy with your business and infrastructure strategies.

02

Upskill and embrace the change

GenAI in particular will fundamentally change the workforce, not only by taking over certain tasks from humans but also by enabling entirely new ways of doing things. Upskill and reskill your teams to equip them with the knowledge and tools they need to work with GenAI and evolve their roles for an AI-led future.

At NTT DATA, we’ve embraced new training methods, including persona-based training, to ensure that those who develop and deploy AI technologies on our behalf do so responsibly. This expert oversight is also applied to our service delivery.



CEO to-do: Be the first to train up and report out. Demonstrate change and why it matters to all.

03

Employ multilevel governance

Good AI governance starts with recognizing that compliance with current laws is only part of the solution. To truly lead, organizations must go beyond legal requirements and meet the ethical and social standards set by their stakeholders. This requires a systematic approach to adhering to their core principles, always and without exception. GenAI can even be leveraged to infuse governance.

At NTT DATA, we’ve implemented a proactive approach to risk management to remain competitive with AI technology. We comply with legal regulations and deploy AI in a responsible and reputable manner. Our clients also benefit from our governance consulting services, which include our tested strategies and expertise.



CEO to-do: Keep your focus on governance agility. Help your CIO and CISO integrate technological advances, security solutions and time to market.

04

Focus on global collaboration

AI transcends borders, industries and governments. No single entity can guarantee its responsible use. Organizations must forge partnerships worldwide and work proactively with governments, academic institutions and global organizations to establish global AI standards that respect the cultural, ethical and legal nuances of individual nations.

Join us. Get involved. Begin to develop your guidelines. Accelerate your readiness in an area where doing nothing is not an option. We all have an opportunity to shape our AI destinies.



CEO to-do: Find your voice and become visible. Participate in the global conversation about AI responsibility. Closing the gap is an all-hands event. We need you.

Let NTT DATA help

Meet the mandate head-on.

Find out how organizations around the world are mastering their GenAI destiny in 2025 with your own copy of our Global GenAI Report. Learn from data-led analysis and insights on GenAI-related strategy and transformation; technology and innovation; people and culture; and safety, ethics and responsibility.

[Visit our website](#) to download the report and chart a path forward with GenAI.

About the research

The research in numbers

- A balanced sample of 2,307 GenAI decision-makers (95%) and influencers (5%)
- Coverage spans 34 countries in five regions
- 12 industry sectors
- 74% of respondents from large enterprises with more than 10,000 employees
- 68% of participants were from the C-suite; 27% were at Vice President, Head of, or Director level, and 5% were senior managers or specialists
- 42% of participants were in IT roles; 58% in non-IT roles

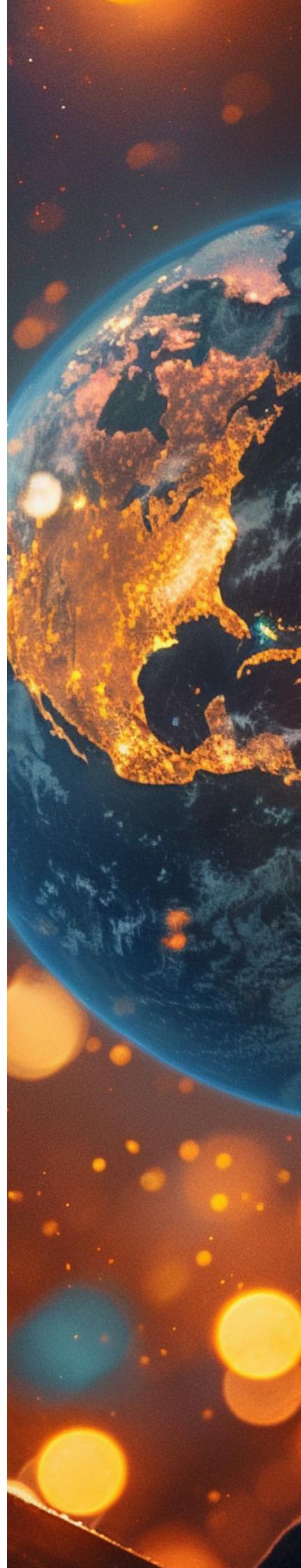
Research methodology

This report is based on independently sourced research data.

Participants were selected via random sampling on the basis that they had a direct or indirect influence on their organization's GenAI requirements, or decision-making authority in that regard.

The research data was gathered via an online questionnaire that ran in September and October 2024. Research was conducted for NTT DATA by Jigsaw Research, an international strategic-insight agency with an exclusively senior team.

Data integrity, validation and analysis were performed by NTT DATA's specialist in-house Primary Research and Benchmarking Team in conjunction with Jigsaw Research. Data and outliers were validated in accordance with standard research-industry rules, disciplines and best-practice approaches. The data is presented at a 98% confidence level with a 3% margin of error.



About NTT DATA

NTT DATA is a \$30+ billion trusted global innovator of business and technology services. We serve 75% of the Fortune Global 100 and are committed to helping clients innovate, optimize and transform for long-term success. As a Global Top Employer, we have diverse experts in more than 50 countries and a robust partner ecosystem of established and startup companies. Our services include business and technology consulting, data and artificial intelligence, industry solutions, as well as the development, implementation and management of applications, infrastructure and connectivity. We are also one of the leading providers of digital and AI infrastructure in the world. NTT DATA is part of NTT Group, which invests over \$3.6 billion each year in R&D to help organizations and society move confidently and sustainably into the digital future.



