

The path to AI implementation

Your guide to transforming ambition into action—and action into ROI.

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The promise of AI is real—but so is the uncertainty about how to begin. For many organizations, the first step toward realizing AI's potential is assessing their current state of readiness. This guide outlines what it takes to get started, build confidence, and take measurable steps toward long term value.

Charting a clear course for AI

AI is top of mind for nearly every business leader today. Whether it's the potential for process automation, intelligent decision-making, or entirely new ways of working, the opportunity feels immense. But despite all the interest and urgency, many organizations still face a common challenge: the path to implementation is unclear. For IT, finance, operations, and other business leaders, knowing they “should do something with AI” is a far cry from knowing what to do next. What does AI readiness look like? How do you connect specific business needs to meaningful AI use cases? And once you start, how do you measure progress—and know when you're actually seeing return on your investment?

This guide is designed to illuminate that path. Each section explores a key step in the AI journey, from assessing your readiness to sustaining value over time. These steps aren't theoretical—they reflect what organizations are already doing today to apply generative AI in purposeful, responsible ways.

Along the way, we'll share practical advice for aligning stakeholders, preparing your data, selecting the right tools, and scaling with confidence. You'll also find insights into how SAP helps organizations overcome common challenges at each stage. These “shortcuts to success” are here to support your journey—for both your SAP and non-SAP use cases.

The chapters ahead represent key milestones in a successful AI journey. You may already have a head start in some areas; others might still feel far off. That's okay. What matters is having a clear view of where you're headed—and how to get there.



Evaluating your AI readiness

Every successful AI initiative starts with a clear-eyed look at people, processes, and data.

To get results with AI, you need the right environment. That starts with knowing where you are today across people, data, and processes. Assessing your AI readiness helps build momentum and avoid costly missteps.

Know where you stand to move forward with confidence

AI readiness is about more than having the right technology. It's about having the right conditions for success—from aligned leadership to trustworthy data and an adaptable workforce. The goal here isn't to pass a test. It's to identify your starting point.

You're ready to move forward when you can:

- Distinguish between human readiness and technology readiness.
- Identify areas of the business where AI could enhance or automate existing processes.
- Evaluate whether your data is accessible, reliable, and actionable.
- Understand the internal capabilities you already have—and the ones you'll need to develop.
- Outline a realistic view of time and budget requirements.

This kind of early assessment helps prevent stalled initiatives later. It also supports better decision-making as you define your strategy and scope your first AI projects.

SAP shortcut to success

If you're an SAP customer, we likely already have a strong understanding of your organizational KPIs, giving you a head start in identifying where AI can add value. SAP Signavio offers an intuitive platform for modeling and visualizing your business processes—making it easier to spot AI opportunities.

You can also participate in an AI discovery workshop to explore use cases and map your organization's readiness across critical dimensions. Learn more in the [SAP Discovery Center](#).

Defining strategic AI goals and expected ROI

Aligning AI initiatives with what matters most to your business.

To turn AI into impact, your organization needs clear goals. Go beyond broad aims and define outcomes tied to your strategy. Success comes from aligned expectations, defined roles, and tracked value from day one.

Purposefully applied AI drives real-world results

AI works best when it's aligned to a clear objective. That objective should be shaped by business priorities and translated into achievable, measurable goals. Defining what success looks like early helps teams stay focused, secure buy-in, and build a case for broader adoption.

AI doesn't just automate work. It redefines how work delivers value—if you know what success looks like before you begin.

Key focus areas include:

- Setting measurable goals that align with business strategy
- Identifying specific problems or opportunities AI can address
- Collaborating with IT, finance, and operations to validate feasibility and impact
- Determining the right KPIs for success—ones that can evolve with the project
- Forecasting ROI based on known variables, but with flexibility to adjust

This step is also where cost-benefit analysis comes into play. Defining ROI isn't just about financial return—it includes time saved, improved decision-making, and increased agility across teams.

SAP shortcut to success

Get help defining and prioritizing your AI goals with SAP's AI discovery workshops. These collaborative sessions help you identify the most valuable use cases and define measurable KPIs grounded in your business needs.

SAP's [AI ROI value calculator](#) can also support forecasting expected ROI and making more confident investment decisions—grounded in the data you already manage.

Building your internal AI coalition

Success with AI starts by getting the right people in the room.

AI runs on technology, but people drive adoption. Without support and clear ownership, progress can stall. Success starts by aligning leaders, setting shared goals, and creating structures that let innovation grow.

That's why building a strong, cross-functional coalition is one of the most important early steps in your AI journey. This coalition should bring together voices from across your organization—IT, operations, finance, legal, compliance, and beyond—not only to provide input, but to share ownership of the transformation ahead.

People are the bridge between strategy and execution. Their insight helps identify use cases that truly matter, and their engagement fuels the momentum needed to move forward.

Key success factors include:

- Identifying and involving essential stakeholders from the outset—not just for feedback, but for buy-in.
- Establishing AI governance frameworks that reflect your organization's unique structure, responsibilities, and risk posture.
- Creating space for open discussion and healthy skepticism, while fostering a culture of curiosity and experimentation.
- Securing budget and time not only for implementation, but for the education, communication, and advocacy that drive lasting change.

This is also the moment to break through the “internal echo chamber.” Engaging outside experts—or even just sharing insights from resources like this guide—can help validate your direction, surface blind spots, and reframe internal conversations around opportunity, not just obligation.

SAP shortcut to success

Need help aligning stakeholders around AI? SAP's AI discovery workshops offer a collaborative space to explore potential use cases and uncover hidden value. These sessions can help unify perspectives across departments, accelerating alignment and action.

And when you're ready to scale your team's skills, [SAP Learning](#) offers tailored training paths to help every stakeholder feel empowered—not overwhelmed—by what's ahead.

Data strategy and infrastructure preparation

AI can't deliver value if your data and infrastructure aren't ready.

AI needs more than data, it needs the right data. That means real-time, high-quality, well-governed information supported by scalable, secure infrastructure. Getting both in place now helps prevent delays and missed opportunities later.

Laying the groundwork for intelligent action

Before AI can be used to interpret, recommend, or generate anything useful, it needs a solid data foundation. That means looking beyond isolated systems and toward an integrated approach—one that unifies data across environments, ensures trustworthiness, and empowers real-time intelligence.

Key actions include:

- Assessing data maturity: Is your data clean, consistent, and contextual? Can it be accessed and used by AI systems without excessive transformation?
- Evaluating governance and privacy frameworks: Are there clear policies and controls in place to support responsible data use?
- Preparing infrastructure: AI initiatives benefit significantly from cloud-based environments that support flexibility, integration, and scalability.
- Clarifying roles: IT and operations teams play a central role in ensuring systems are AI-ready—but they shouldn't shoulder the responsibility alone.
- Budgeting with foresight: Include costs for integration tools, cloud migration, data quality programs, and training.

This foundational work doesn't slow progress—it enables it. It ensures AI isn't just implemented, but impactful.

SAP shortcut to success

SAP helps you build a unified data foundation across SAP and third-party systems with [SAP Business Data Cloud](#), embedding analytics and enabling AI-supported intelligence.

If your organization is still working through system complexity or legacy infrastructure, [RISE with SAP](#) can accelerate your modernization journey. As a bundled offering that supports cloud migration and business transformation, RISE with SAP helps streamline your landscape—so your data is better connected, more accessible, and ready for AI.

SAP was named a Leader in the [Gartner® Magic Quadrant™ for Data Integration 2024](#).¹

Navigating change management and organizational impact

Empower your people to lead, not just live through, an AI transformation.

AI changes more than tools. It changes how work happens. Success depends on intention, not just communication. The best outcomes come from building skills, adapting culture, and empowering people.

AI transformation starts with human transformation

AI implementation opens doors to new possibilities—but it can also raise questions. Will roles change? Will automation shift responsibilities? Will people be ready to keep pace?

Change management is your opportunity to turn uncertainty into empowerment—and to help people see AI as a tool that enhances, not threatens, their abilities. With the right support, AI can make people feel not just prepared, but powerful—like super-charged versions of themselves.

Key areas to enable that shift:

- Workforce readiness: Identify evolving skill needs and offer clear, accessible paths for reskilling and upskilling.
- Communication strategies: Engage employees early and often, especially where AI will reshape daily tasks.
- New workflows and roles: Be transparent about shifting responsibilities and reinforce that AI is here to support—not replace—human expertise.
- Expectation setting: Help teams understand the pace of change and what success looks like along the way.
- Investment in support systems: Prioritize learning platforms, change champions, and cultural enablement—not just software and systems.

This isn't a side project. Change management is central to realizing AI's value—because empowered people don't just adapt to change. They accelerate it.

SAP shortcut to success

SAP offers curated learning paths on [SAP Learning](#) to help teams across your organization build confidence with AI and related technologies. Whether your workforce needs to understand ethical principles, hands-on tools, or new ways of working, there's training to match.

Explore SAP's [AI Ethics Handbook](#) and participate in learning journeys designed to keep your people informed, engaged, and ready for change.

Measuring success and scaling AI

From proof of concept to enterprise impact, tracking what matters, and growing what works.

Pilots show AI can deliver value. Scaling shows that value can last. After a successful initiative, the focus shifts to what worked, why it worked, and how to expand its impact. This is where measurement guides transformation.

Let results lead your next move

Measuring AI success isn't just about ticking boxes. It's about learning from real-world outcomes and building the confidence and structure needed to expand.

Key steps for this phase include:

- Establishing post-pilot KPIs: These differ from early goals. Now, you're measuring what the solution is actually doing across key metrics such as speed, cost, accuracy, and engagement.
- Calculating real ROI: How do the benefits stack up against initial projections? What unexpected value (or challenges) emerged?
- Determining scalability: Can this initiative scale to other departments or processes? What adjustments are needed?
- Planning budgets and resources for scale: Expansion brings new complexity. Make sure teams, infrastructure, and support are ready.
- Documenting learnings: Use pilot insights to create internal playbooks, support onboarding, and reduce friction in future rollouts.

Scaling isn't just about doing more. It's about doing more of what works—and knowing what that looks like.

SAP shortcut to success

SAP gives you full visibility into AI usage with a transparent consumption model—so you can track what's being used, how often, and where it's delivering value.

Use “[SAP for Me](#),” SAP's self-service portal for managing and monitoring SAP solutions, to monitor and manage AI deployments across your business. Stay focused on high impact use cases, adjust resource planning, and prepare for continued growth with clarity and control.

Mitigating risks, ensuring compliance, and responsible AI

AI that delivers value must also uphold trust.

AI can't be separated from human responsibility. Bias, errors, and data risks are business issues with real impact. As AI scales, trust, transparency, and accountability must be built in. Responsible AI is a long-term commitment.

Build trust into every outcome

Whether you're using AI to generate insights or automate decisions, it's essential to ask: Is the process secure? Is the data protected? Are the outcomes fair and explainable?

That's where responsible AI governance comes in—bringing together legal, IT, compliance, and business leaders to define how AI will be deployed, monitored, and evolved within your organization.

Key considerations include:

- Identifying potential risks: Security vulnerabilities, biased data, unintended outputs, and lack of explainability.
- Creating ethical guidelines: Define what responsible AI looks like in your organization—and how those standards will be enforced.
- Ensuring regulatory compliance: Understand and comply with global standards on data protection, AI use, and transparency.
- Building a governance structure: Assign clear ownership for compliance, ethics, and model validation.
- Budgeting for oversight: Allocate ongoing resources for audits, education, and evolving risk scenarios.

With the right guardrails, AI doesn't just deliver powerful outcomes—it does so in ways that are transparent, fair, and accountable.

SAP shortcut to success

SAP embeds AI within a unified platform, reducing the risk of data exposure across disconnected systems. Granular access controls and integrated compliance features help secure sensitive information at every level.

SAP's AI is developed with ethical principles at its core, guided by the [SAP Global AI Ethics Policy](#) and a dedicated AI ethics steering committee.

Explore [SAP Learning](#) to access AI ethics training and take part in SAP's commitment to building AI that's relevant, reliable, and responsible.

Sustaining AI value and future-proofing your organization

AI isn't a one-time initiative—it's an ongoing evolution.

Launching AI is a milestone. Sustaining value over time creates lasting impact. As technology evolves, success depends on adapting, scaling, and building on what works through learning, collaboration, and agility.

Keep your momentum and your vision moving forward

AI maturity doesn't end with implementation. It deepens through iteration, collaboration, and openness to what's next. Staying future-ready requires both a proactive mindset and the right systems to support ongoing exploration.

Key strategies to stay ahead:

- Monitor and optimize AI performance: Use data to understand what's working and where improvements are needed.
- Stay flexible: Build processes and architectures that can evolve with the pace of AI innovation.
- Engage continuously: Keep stakeholders aligned through regular updates, feedback loops, and education.
- Invest strategically: Balance quick wins with foundational investments that enable scale and innovation.
- Encourage experimentation: Give teams the tools and space to test new use cases and custom solutions.
- Revisit and repeat pilot programs: As new technologies emerge, build on what's proven. Reapply structured pilot strategies to evaluate innovations before scaling.

Sustained value comes from being adaptable—without losing focus on what AI is meant to do: enable people to work smarter and achieve more.

SAP shortcut to success

SAP for Me helps you monitor and manage your AI usage across the organization, so you can stay focused on high-impact areas and prepare for expansion.

Use [Joule studio](#) and [generative AI hub](#) to explore new use cases, build custom solutions, and extend AI across your business at your own pace. Stay connected through the [SAP Community](#) and webinars, where you can discover emerging trends, share best practices, and keep evolving.

Your AI journey starts here

The path to impact is clearer than you think.

You don't need to have all the answers to get started with AI—you just need the right plan, the right people, and the right support. The steps outlined in this guide are designed to help you move forward with confidence, clarity, and measurable results.

Whether you're identifying your first use case or preparing to scale AI across your enterprise, remember: this is a journey that evolves with you. Each milestone is an opportunity to learn, adapt, and uncover new value.

SAP is here to help you every step of the way. From workshops and tools to embedded use cases and tailored support, we offer practical guidance grounded in real-world experience. Because when you bring your people, data, and goals together—great things happen.

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