



 IT Trends Report

AI: Friend or Foe?

2024



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IT Trends Report

AI: Friend or Foe?

Nearly **700 IT professionals** on how they view the risks, rewards, and challenges of AI and AIOps.

Introduction and Executive Summary

It's a question that has fascinated tech professionals and the general public for decades: will artificial intelligence (AI) be a friend or a foe to the humans that develop it? Over the decades, our perceptions of AI have been shaped by a blend of fantastical portrayals and concrete scientific advancements. From the wild automations of the 1973 film *Westworld* to the tangible breakthrough of ChatGPT, the evolution of AI has always prompted imaginative speculation, even as IT professionals scramble to leverage its practical advantages.

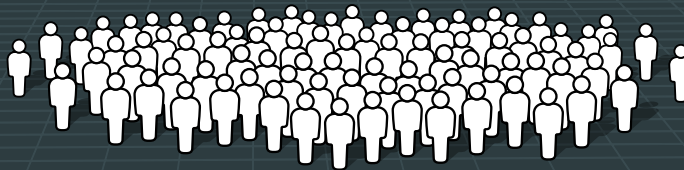
For now, IT leaders have little to fear from cinematic AI boogymen like *The Terminator's* Skynet or *The Avengers'* Ultron. Instead, they're exploring how AI affects security, data integrity, and decision-making processes to determine whether it will be a friend or a foe in achieving organizational goals.

SolarWinds partnered with **UserEvidence** to conduct the 2024 IT Trends Report to gauge the IT industry's perception of AI today.

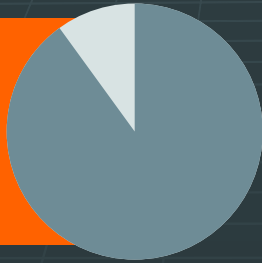
Are IT professionals optimistic or apprehensive about this innovative technology?

Is AI set to make our lives easier, or will the changes promised only increase stress?

What are organizations' primary concerns, and what barriers are they encountering in integrating AI into their operations?



THE RESULTS ARE IN:



Out of the nearly 700 IT staff and leaders surveyed, **90% said they have a positive opinion** of artificial intelligence. They're investing their budgets in AI, creating new AI processes, and envisioning future use cases and benefits.

However, any change this dramatic also comes with its share of growing pains:



Increased data needs. Only **43%** of respondents said they're very confident their company's databases can meet performance expectations in light of increased data needs associated with AI.



Data quality concerns. Just **38%** of IT professionals surveyed are very trusting of the data quality and training used in AI technologies. Data quality is the second most significant barrier (16%) to successfully integrating AI tech.



Security and privacy risks. Security is the single most significant barrier (23%) to AI integration reported, while nearly half (**47%**) said negative AI experiences happen because of privacy concerns.



These valid concerns don't negate AI's bright future within IT, but they should motivate IT leaders to get proactive about planning for risks. The IT pros surveyed also shared insights into how enterprises can get AI adoption right, surfacing these basic ABCs:

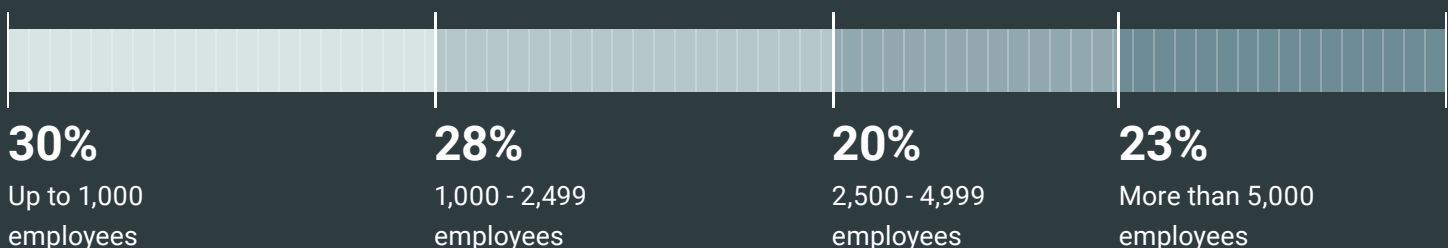
- **Adopt AIOps to improve efficiency and operations.** Integrating AI into IT teams is not just about filling gaps with new technology but also understanding how it can align with existing workflows. Organizations already using AIOps reported substantial benefits such as improved data analytics (68%), automated routine tasks (67%), and increased efficiency and productivity (70%).
- **Build on an ethical, secure foundation.** Frameworks like [AI by Design](#) that prioritize the ethical and secure development of advanced AI go a long way towards establishing AI as a reliable ally—thereby boosting productivity, efficiency, and teams' capacity for innovation.
- **Continue to evaluate and improve.** The majority (53.6%) of IT pros surveyed recognize the potential benefits of AI but want more tangible proof of its impact. For this reason, organizations should establish well-defined metrics and policies for evaluation, applying feedback, and continuous improvement from the outset.

As organizations continue to adopt AI in search of the productivity it promises, they also need to embrace an AIOps approach that helps them protect, secure, and optimize their data.

METHODOLOGY

SolarWinds partnered with UserEvidence to survey nearly **700 IT staff members and leaders** from global enterprises.

Respondent organizations spanned a variety of sizes:



We spoke with directors, senior managers, VPs, and staff members in development, IT ops, IT service management, and other fields. More than half (54%) of respondents came from the technology industry. The remainder were drawn from diverse fields, including manufacturing (7%), finance (6%), telecommunications (5%), and healthcare (5%).

Key Insights

1 AI improves efficiency and productivity in IT teams

For IT organizations, AIOps—or AI as applied to IT operations or digital operations—is a powerful right-hand tool to help teams do more and face the challenges of a complex, software-driven infrastructure.

Thirty-one percent of IT pros surveyed most commonly anticipate that AIOps will help them automate repetitive tasks, while close to half (46%) of respondents identify **increased efficiency as the main driver of AI investments**.

[MORE DETAILS](#) →



The main driver of AI investments:

☒ **46%** Increased efficiency

2 Confidence in AI adoption and implementation is strong

Most of the IT professionals surveyed said their organizations are embracing the benefits of adopting and integrating AI—nearly nine in every ten (88%) companies surveyed have **already adopted AI or plan to**.

Two-thirds (65%) of organizations have invested more than \$5 million in AI technology, with 31% investing \$25 million or more. Even so, 56% of IT professionals surveyed **want their companies to invest more in AI**, and 46% **wish their organizations would implement AI faster**.

[MORE DETAILS](#) →



☒ **88%** Already adopted AI or plan to do so



☒ **56%** Want their companies to invest more in AI



☒ **46%** Wish their organizations would implement AI faster

Key Insights

3 Security and privacy concerns run high

AI's benefits to IT teams come with costs and risks. Nearly half (47%) IT professionals surveyed said they've had negative experiences with AI—privacy and security concerns top their lists.

To address these issues, nearly two-thirds (64%) of respondents' organizations have **developed internal frameworks to navigate the AI challenges**. But 88% say they still believe that the government should increase AI regulation, especially in high-sensitivity areas like security and privacy.

[MORE DETAILS](#) →



✓ **64%** Developed internal frameworks to navigate the AI challenges

4 IT pros only somewhat trust data quality

As excited as IT professionals are about AIOps, its real-world impact is still uncertain. They're not sure how much they can trust its decision-making, how much human oversight is needed, and which safeguards they should implement.

For instance, 40% of surveyed IT leaders and teams who have had negative AI experiences cite algorithmic errors, which can signal data quality issues surrounding AI's input and output. More than half of respondents (54%) **believe government regulation should play a role in combatting misinformation**, which is also a data quality issue.

[MORE DETAILS](#) →



✓ **54%** Believe government regulation should play a role in combatting misinformation

Key Insights

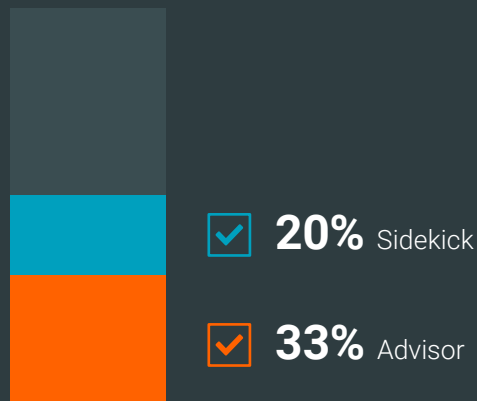
5 AI is a wise advisor, not a final decision-maker

As much as AI can do on its own, a human should always be in the loop, and transparency is essential to keep AI in check.

IT professionals see AI as an advisor (33%) and a **sidekick** (20%) rather than a solo decision-maker. Their excitement around AI adoption and integration is matched by an even greater need for compliance, governance, and human oversight.

[MORE DETAILS →](#)

IT professionals see AI as a:





KEY INSIGHT 1 — DETAILS:

AI improves efficiency and productivity in IT teams

Most companies now have more tools and more data than they know what to do with. While these tools aid productivity at every level, they also spell huge headaches for CIOs, especially in the following areas:



Environments are too complex.

The sprawl in tools, services, and digital workload types complicates their roles, impacting employee and customer experiences.



Processes are too costly.

The dangerous combination of complexity and slowdowns drives up costs. But like everyone else in the C-suite, CIOs contend with shrinking budgets, and don't have money to throw at the problems.



Workflows are too slow.

With increasing workloads comes more data, and a greater volume of data often leads to siloes. Data insights become harder to uncover, and the insights that do surface aren't always accurate. So, where technology aims to speed up organizations, CIOs ultimately see the opposite outcome.



Data is not secure.

Cyber threats only get more sophisticated over time. So, it's a real problem that CIOs don't have the visibility into their environment, networks, and data they need to identify security risks and threats. IT leaders worry about the security of their systems—and rightfully so.

This sentiment from CIOs is common: The proliferation of software and data is quickly becoming too much for humans to handle, and IT teams pay the price.

However, AIOps can be a powerful partner in combating complexity by stepping in to:

- Process data
- Reveal insights
- Forecast and help prevent issues
- Uncover anomalies in the system
- Identify the root cause of problems

Armed with the strengths of AIOps, IT teams and leaders see outcomes like fewer incidents, faster resolution, greater visibility, and reduced alert noise. AIOps is the key to overcoming IT's toughest challenges and unlocking the efficiency CIOs are searching for.



AI—in particular, AIOps—can be a very strong ally to process a lot of data, provide insights, and forecast issues before they happen.

AIOps has a broad set of capabilities that come into play and help out with some of these challenges.

— Krishna Sai, SVP Engineering, SolarWinds

THE BENEFITS OF AIOPS

We asked IT professionals how the integration of AIOps will affect their job experience. The most common response (31%) was that it would **enhance their experience by automating repetitive tasks**. This means they'll have more time to focus on complex and creative problem-solving tasks, making their jobs more enjoyable and fulfilling.

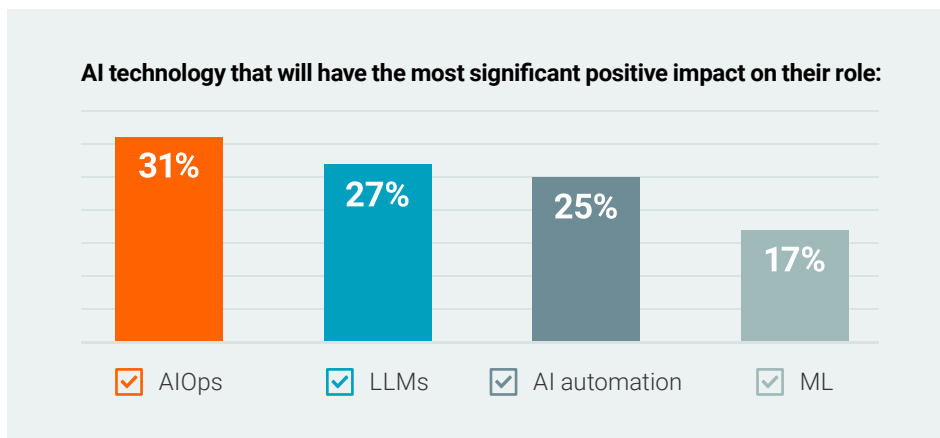
One of AI's greatest strengths is its capacity to review large amounts of data—both as a one-time exercise and on an ongoing basis. What takes humans minutes, hours, or days to tackle, AIOps can complete in seconds, from analyzing traffic patterns to monitoring changes in the IT infrastructure over time.

Another 27% of respondents said that AIOps will **streamline their job experience by providing real-time insights and predictive analytics**, allowing IT teams to identify the root causes of issues in record time.



☒ **31%** AIOps enhances their experience by automating repetitive tasks

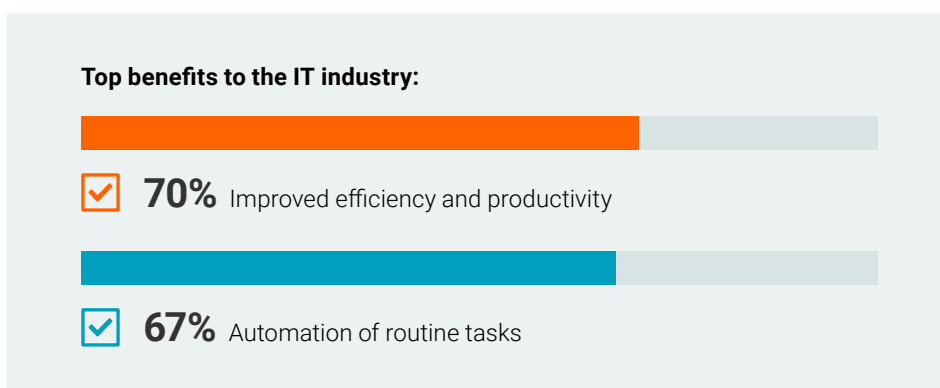
☒ **27%** AIOps streamlines their job experience by providing real-time insights and predictive analytics



These benefits, among others, set AIOps apart from other AI technology. Respondents cited **AIOps as the AI technology that will have the most significant positive impact on their role** (31%), ranking above large language models (LLMs), machine learning (ML), and AI automation.

Efficiency isn't just one outcome of AIOps. It's the critical outcome companies look for when investing in AI. Nearly half of respondents (46%) named **improved efficiency as the most significant driving factor in their plans to implement AI technologies**, ranking it above data analysis (22%), cost savings (20%), and predictive decision-making (12%).

AI-driven efficiency benefits IT organizations internally—but how do they think about AI's benefits for the broader IT world? Here, too, doing more work in less time comes out on top, with 70% of respondents saying that **improved efficiency and productivity will be most beneficial to the IT industry**. Close behind, two-thirds (67%) of IT professionals surveyed point to the automation of routine tasks as a top benefit.

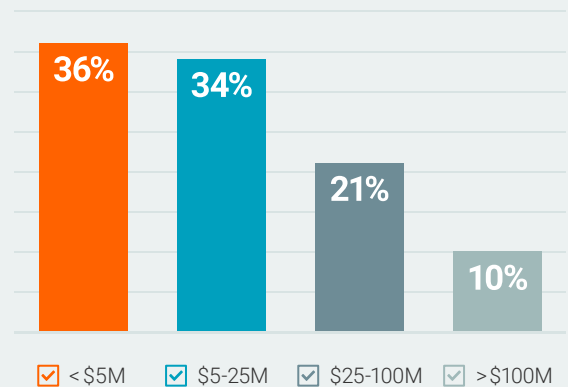


AIOps can streamline operations and improve efficiency—from the day-to-day database details to the biggest of big-picture plans for scaling—to eliminate the roadblocks between your teams and drive innovation.

KEY INSIGHT 2 — DETAILS:**Confidence in AI adoption and implementation is strong****AI is evolving rapidly, but investment from enterprise organizations is keeping up.**

Our research found that nearly two-thirds (65%) of companies have already invested \$5 million* or more in AI technology, including 31% that have invested more than \$25 million* in AI. This spending is consistent with strong confidence in AI's current and future state, as well as in employees' ability to use AI effectively.

Respondents voiced similar sentiments. When asked how prepared their company's employees are to use AI, more than half (55%) of IT professionals said their colleagues are well-prepared and understand the technology.

AI investments:

Companies aren't just spending millions on AI for its own sake, of course. They anticipate real-time results that serve the bottom line of the business—including benefits that span their entire organization. For a start, AI in functions such as customer support are already driving outcomes like:



**Lower costs
per interaction**



**Faster median
response times**



**Higher median customer
satisfaction scores**

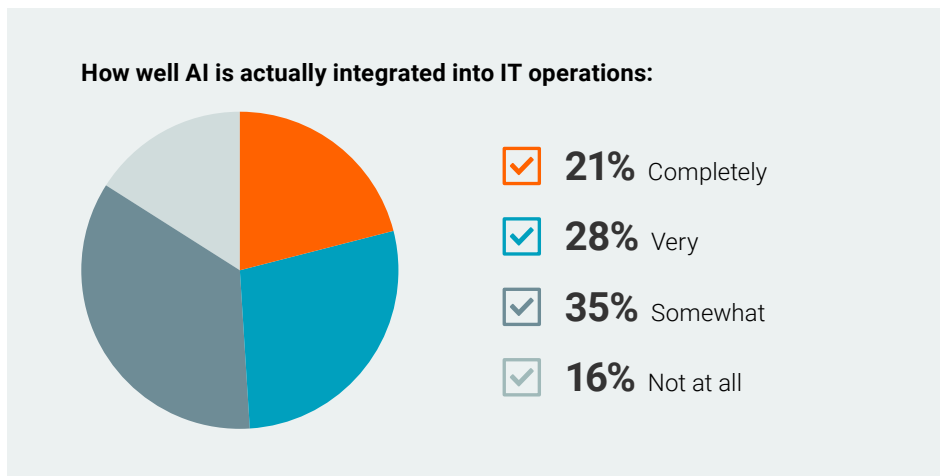


These companies' rapid AI adoption kicks off a virtuous cycle: The more budget and time they invest in AI, the faster they can implement it—and the better results they'll get.

OPTIMISM AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR AIOPS

Of the respondents we surveyed, 38% of companies already use AI to make IT operations more efficient and effective, with 49% planning to in the future. Said another way, **nearly nine in ten (88%) organizations embrace AI Ops and its power to transform IT.**

To dig deeper, we also asked IT professionals how well AI is actually integrated into IT operations. The largest group of respondents (35%) said that AI is only somewhat integrated into IT operations, and just 21% said that AI is completely integrated.



Organizations may have good intentions of prioritizing AI Ops for IT, but implementation is still in its early stages. As a result, IT professionals wish for more from their organizations when it comes to AI Ops:

- Nearly half of respondents (46%) said they want their company to **move faster** in implementing AI—they're eager for the benefits this technology promises.
- Although companies are already investing in AI, most IT professionals (56%) said they want their organizations to **invest more**.

IT teams and leaders see clearly how AI Ops can benefit their workflows and output—they're just waiting for their organizations to catch up.

The more organizations invest in AI (and the faster they move to implement it), the better results they'll achieve, freeing up more time and resources to reinvest in AI and IT operations.



KEY INSIGHT 3 — DETAILS:

Security and privacy concerns run high

Despite IT pros' high levels of optimism toward AI, not all of their feelings are positive. AI's rapid advancement brings its fair share of concerns—and at the forefront are privacy and security.

We asked IT teams and leaders about their challenges with AI, and four out of 10 (41%) said they've had negative experiences. Of those, nearly half (48%) cited privacy concerns. Security risks came in second (43%).

Across every industry using AI—not just IT—this new technology raises questions like:

How does the AI model work, and how does it arrive at results?

What data is used to train these models?

How do LLMs interpret contextual data?

How can organizations using AI protect customer and proprietary data from leaks and breaches?

“While the potential and opportunities unleashed by AI are magnificent and powerful, the security pitfalls and risks are real, and it's important to build in guardrails as you think about AI. We embrace a framework that's secure by design.

— Krishna Sai,
SVP Engineering, SolarWinds

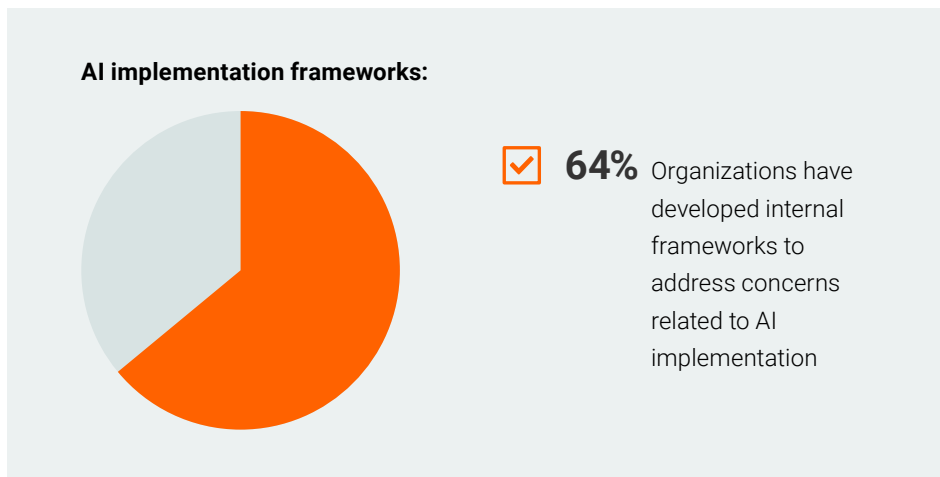
These questions shouldn't be afterthoughts—they're major concerns and risks. That's why, as IT organizations adopt AIOps, teams must be intentional to seek and invest in visibility into their systems and processes.



REGULATIONS AND ACTION STEPS FOR AI SECURITY

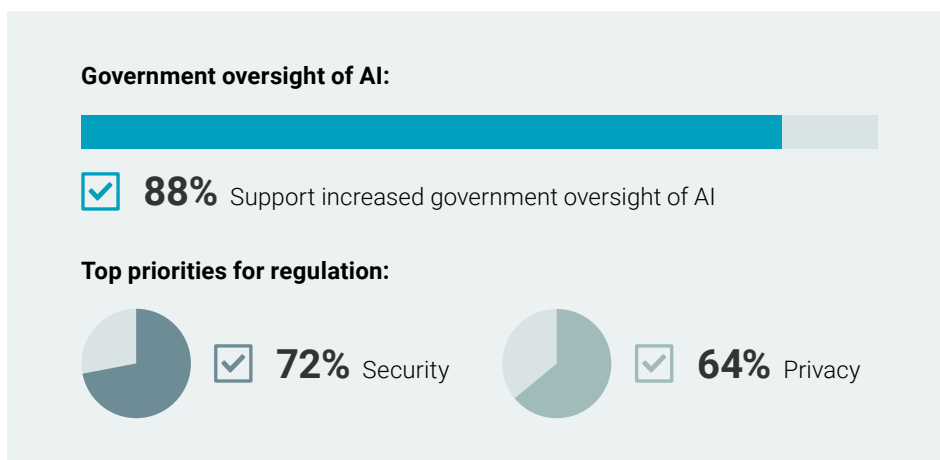
IT professionals surveyed know that AI isn't risk-free. But what are their organizations doing to respond to the security challenges it poses?

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of respondents' organizations have **developed internal frameworks to address concerns related to AI implementation**. While this majority is a clear step in the right direction, every company using AI should focus on implementation that follows the principles of AI by Design. This way, you're harnessing the very best AI has to offer while minimizing potential downsides.



Whether companies prioritize internal frameworks or not, most are waiting for outside intervention—especially government regulation—to steer the technology in the right direction.

Nearly nine out of 10 (88%) respondents said they support increased government oversight of AI. **Their top priorities for regulation? Security (72%) and privacy issues (64%).**





WHAT'S NEXT AND WHAT COMPANIES CAN DO

It's not yet clear how governments will adapt to uphold security, privacy, and other areas of high risk. A community approach based on public-private partnership is critical to ensuring cyber resiliency for governments and enterprises alike.

Yet simply anticipating and supporting future regulation isn't enough. IT organizations also need to take charge of their own AI and AIOps security by building internal frameworks and adopting solutions with security, transparency, and visibility at the forefront.



It will be interesting to see how these foundational models and the companies offering them—either open-source or commercially—will adapt to a lot of this regulation. It's going to be pretty challenging.

— Krishna Sai, SVP Engineering, SolarWinds

A focus on security doesn't have to slow AI adoption. **Best practices can help you stay secure** while also introducing AIOps at the speed you crave:



Start with a foundational framework

for AI adoption—like the [SolarWinds AI by Design principles](#)—to ensure sustainable implementation.



Create an AI adoption review team

to ensure approval of AI use cases and consideration of privacy and security as adoption occurs.



Invest in training and education

for your teams to keep up with the latest changes as the AI landscape rapidly evolves.



KEY INSIGHT 4 — DETAILS:

IT pros only somewhat trust data quality

Security and privacy aren't the only AI concerns IT pros' have. They also have uncertainty around data quality—and when the business is on the hook for the output of its AI systems, quality really matters.

Of the IT leaders and team members who have had negative experiences with AI, 40% point to algorithmic errors as a key factor. These errors tangibly hold organizations back from AI implementation, too—respondents said that poor data quality is the second most significant barrier (16%) to successful AI integration.

When AI models are trained on poor-quality, unhygienic, biased, or insufficient data, the result is error-prone AI decisions and low-quality output. As they say, “Garbage in, garbage out.”

In practice, this can manifest as failed efforts by AIOps to find anomalies or issues within the IT infrastructure.

Solving the problem of low-quality AI output, of course, starts with its input—a model is only as good as its training data. **Organizations should rely on the following foundations of data engineering:**

- **Data cleaning**, including removing duplicates, correcting errors, and identifying missing values.
- **Data validation** like having well-defined quality criteria such as range checks, pattern checks, and uniqueness validations.
- **Anomaly detection** to find outliers and anomalies in the data.
- **Data provenance**, may be required for auditing and governance.

These principles and processes can help IT organizations enhance the accuracy of their AI models, enabling reliable results that the business can trust.



QUALITY CONTROL THROUGH REGULATION

Much like security and privacy, IT professionals surveyed hope that government regulation will play a role in overseeing data quality issues—and the wider problems that result from faulty AI output.

**55%**

For instance, more than half of respondents (55%) said **combating misinformation** is a key area that needs AI government regulation.

Misinformation is a data quality issue. AI results are far more likely to be skewed or entirely inaccurate when training data is biased, incomplete, or poorly maintained. The new accessibility of generative AI tools like ChatGPT means that misinformation doesn't just affect business decisions. It can also spread inaccuracies to the general public—with implications that remain difficult to predict.

**50%**

Half of the respondents (50%) said that **transparency** needs government regulation. The training of AI models—including data quality—is a matter of ethics and security.

In its early stages, much of AI technology remains a black box, with limited insights into how it's trained and how it makes decisions. Increased transparency will allow for greater protection of both proprietary and customer data. It will also help organizations more quickly identify bias in their models to ensure AI output is equitable and accurate.

For AIOps to have the most beneficial possible impact on IT, organizations need to build on a foundation of trust and transparency—**which starts with data quality**.

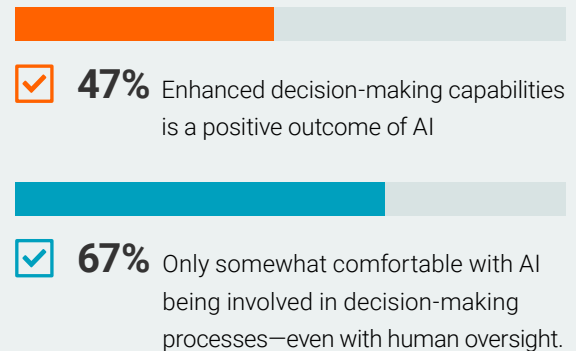
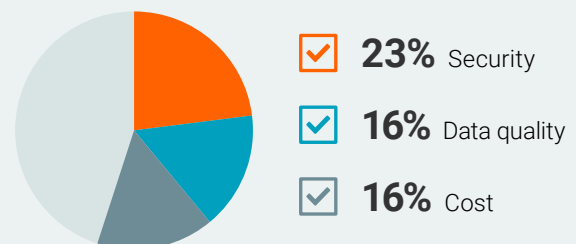
KEY INSIGHT 5 — DETAILS:**AI is a wise advisor, not a final decision-maker**

If the industry is going to reap the rewards of AI while mitigating its risks, organizations need to lean into AI's strengths—processing data, identifying patterns, and uncovering issues—without blindly trusting it to make decisions. IT pros widely agree that human oversight is non-negotiable, but they aren't yet sure how early AI should be involved in the process.

WHY AI SHOULDN'T MAKE THE FINAL CALL

IT professionals are split on AI's role in decision-making. Just under half (47%) cite enhanced decision-making capabilities as a positive outcome of AI. However, a majority (54%) said they're only somewhat comfortable with AI being involved in decision-making processes at their company—even with human oversight.

These findings signal that decision-making is an area where excitement may be outpacing execution. The hesitance of IT pros likely stems from the same data quality concerns we have explored. To reiterate, as a barrier to AI technology integration, data quality (16%) ranks second only to security (23%) and ties with cost (16%).

AI's role in decision-making:**Barriers to AI technology integration:**

While there is widespread excitement about the potential for AI to transform certain tasks and workflows, IT professionals are still figuring out how much they can trust this technology. As long as data quality and output reliability present question marks, the role of AI in decision-making *and* its overall impact will be limited.

Additionally, AI should function as a supportive tool in decision-making, with humans at the forefront—not just in its initial phases but long into the future.

WELCOME TO THE TEAM

Whether an advisor or a sidekick, AI doesn't have carte blanche to make decisions in isolation. For the sake of security, privacy, and output quality, **IT leaders should welcome AI into their teams' workflows while prioritizing two principles:**



- 1. Keeping a human in the loop.** When a human is involved, they can regulate the decisions that AI makes, identify and address negative experiences, uphold ethical governance, and mitigate bias to prevent breaches. The “human in the loop” principle is central to upholding trust, safety, and fairness with this new technology.
- 2. Continuous refinement:** Organizations that utilize AIOps should establish mechanisms to monitor system output to improve consistency and effectiveness over time.

At SolarWinds, we lead with these two principles, both in building our own tools and in working with IT organizations to implement AIOps. Human oversight and continuous improvement are foundations for building trust in AI and its impact—not just within IT organizations but for their colleagues and customers.

Our research found that IT professionals are still making up their minds about the impact of AIOps on their organizations. Yes, a third of respondents (31%) said they're very confident that AIOps is supporting their organization's needs by significantly improving operational efficiency. However, most (54%) remain only somewhat confident about its impact—they see the benefits but want more evidence.

If AI systems are to deliver on their transformative potential, transparency and trust are critical. Those core principles will pave the way to true impact and lasting results.

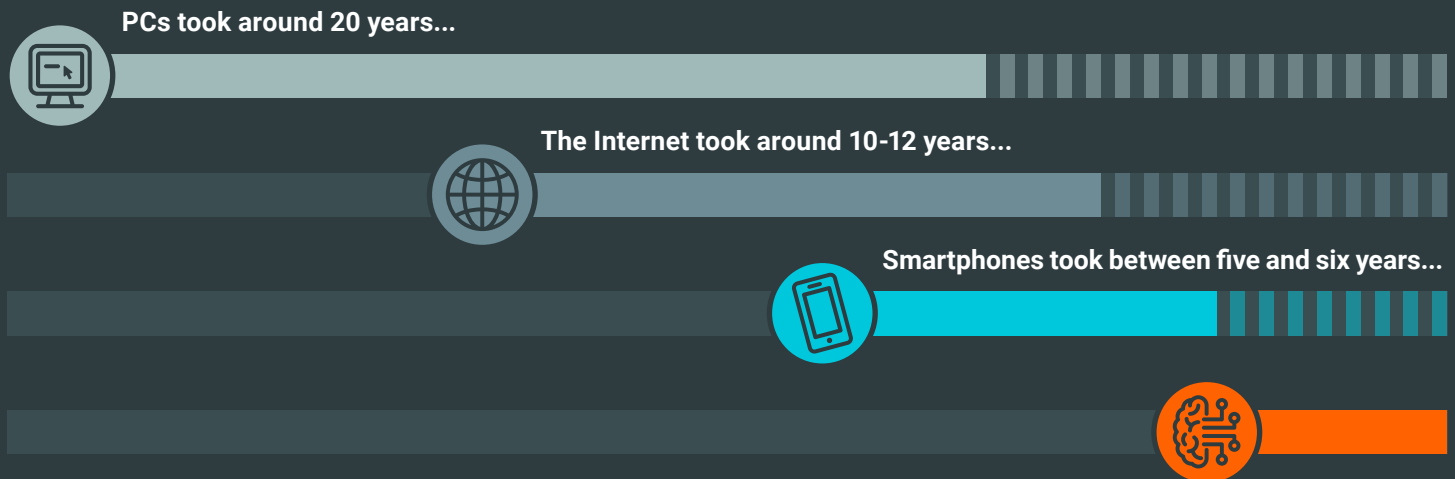


Small AI-powered experiences go a long way in building trust. But also make sure there's always a human in the loop to address issues—both small mistakes and biases that are built into systems.

— Krishna Sai,
SVP Engineering, SolarWinds

Here's Where AI Is Headed

AI is only beginning to impact organizations, but momentum is already building. Historically, adaptation to shifts in digital technology has accelerated with each new innovation:



We anticipate that generative AI will become a major part of our daily routines within the next two to three years. Just look at the trajectory of Chat GPT, which gained its millionth user in the span of a work week and reached 100 million weekly users in its first year.

Enterprises that have adopted AI early already see its benefits for functions like customer support and incident management. They report outcomes like lower costs per interaction, shorter median response times, and higher customer satisfaction. And the quoted improvements are far from nominal—they tend to range from 30-50% or more.

These results, along with further productivity enhancements, only fuel AI adoption.

Even amidst uncertainty, when organizations arm themselves with a secure-by-design mindset and place AIOps in its proper place as advisors, IT's future appears bright.

“ I'm excited that there is enough momentum across the community of vendors to think about AI issues to build security carefully and proactively rather than having to deal with it later on.

— Krishna Sai,
SVP Engineering, SolarWinds



Where to go from here

Every day, CIOs and their departments feel the pressure of having too much to do with never enough time (or people) to handle it all.

IT teams could potentially accomplish so much more with the support of a right-hand AIOps solution. With AI-powered algorithms and analysis as an ally, IT teams become more effective and efficient at detecting and resolving problems — and more engaged with addressing more complex challenges.

Are you ready to embark on an ethical and sustainable journey into the world of AIOps? Opt for a solution that prioritizes security, maintains transparency, and involves human oversight. The future of AI in IT is built on strong pillars of compliance, governance, and human involvement.

Learn more about our [AI by Design principles](#), or [connect with our team](#) to explore how SolarWinds can help you solve your biggest challenges faster with AIOps.



ABOUT USEREVIDENCE

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These principles guide all research efforts at UserEvidence—whether working with a vendor’s users for our Customer Evidence offering, or industry practitioners in a specific field for our Research Content offering. The goal of these principles is to give buyers trust and confidence that you are viewing authentic and verified research based on real user feedback, without interference, bias, and spin from the vendor.

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In every study we conduct, UserEvidence independently verifies that a participant in our research study is a real user of a vendor (in the case of Customer Evidence) or an industry practitioner (in the case of Research Content). We use a variety of human and algorithmic verification mechanisms, including corporate email domain verification (ie so a vendor can’t just create 17 gmail addresses that all give positive reviews), and pattern-based bot and AI deflection.

2. Significance and Representation

UserEvidence believes trust is built by showing an honest and complete representation of the success (or lack thereof) of users. We pursue statistical significance in our research, and substantiate our findings with a large and representative set of user responses to create more confidence in our analysis. We aim to canvas a diverse swatch of users across industries, seniorities, personas - to provide the whole picture of usage, and allow buyers to find relevant data from other users in their segment, not just a handful of vendor-curated happy customers.

3. Quality and Independence

UserEvidence is committed to producing quality and independent research at all times. This starts at beginning of the research process with survey and questionnaire design to drive accurate and substantive responses. We aim to reduce bias in our study design, and use large sample sizes of respondents where possible. While UserEvidence is compensated by the vendor for conducting the research, trust is our business and our priority, and we do not allow vendors to change, influence, or misrepresent the results (even if they are unfavorable) at any time.

4. Transparency

We believe research should not be done in a black box. For transparency, all UserEvidence research includes the statistical N (number of respondents), and buyers can explore the underlying blinded (de-identified) raw data and responses associated with any statistic, chart, or study. UserEvidence provides clear citation guidelines for clients when leveraging research that includes guidelines on sharing research methodology and sample size.



ABOUT SOLARWINDS

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