

Interim Report | August 2026

The Modern Data Report

5 Emerging Trends in Enterprise Data & AI

Research from the [Modern Data 101](#) Community

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
AI is moving from experimentation to operations.	4
AI is advancing faster than trust in the data behind it.	5
Business context is becoming a given for AI.	6
Platform consolidation is moving from preference to action.	7
AI has expanded the scope of data governance.	8
The patterns behind the findings	9
About the Research	10
Contact Us	11

5 Emerging Trends in Enterprise Data & AI

Enterprise data and AI are in a period of rapid change.

Organizations that were experimenting with generative AI less than a year ago are now putting AI agents into pilots and production. Copilots have become commonplace. And the conversation is shifting from what AI can do to what it takes to operate it reliably across an enterprise.

The third Modern Data Survey is now underway, gathering input from data leaders and practitioners around the world. With more than 540 qualified responses collected so far, several trends are already emerging. **Rather than wait for the full report, we wanted to share an early look at what we're seeing and how it compares with our previous research.**

The findings point to an enterprise data and AI landscape that is moving quickly, but not always at the same pace. AI is moving into production. Organizations are actively consolidating their data environments. Yet persistent challenges around data trust, context, governance, and fragmentation remain.

As AI becomes more operational, those challenges are also becoming more consequential. The data foundation is no longer simply supporting AI experimentation; it is increasingly determining how successfully organizations can put AI into production and operate it at scale.

Following are five emerging trends that we're seeing.

About the Research

The Modern Data Survey is an ongoing research initiative from [The Modern Data Company](#), conducted through the [Modern Data 101](#) community, a global community and publication for people who work with data, including data analysts, platform builders, and data and technology leaders. The research examines how practitioners are navigating the changing realities of enterprise data, from architecture, governance, and semantics to AI and organizational design.

EMERGING TREND 1

AI is moving from experimentation to operations.

At the end of 2025, enterprise AI was still largely focused on analytics. While 82% of respondents had used AI features in their analytics or BI tools, only 19% said they used them extensively. Natural-language querying was the most common application, and we characterized most organizations as still being in an “analysis-only” phase of AI.

That is beginning to change. Early findings from the third Modern Data Survey show that 57.3% of organizations are already piloting AI agents or using them in production. Another 15.6% expect to begin within the next six months. The shift is from AI helping people work with information to AI beginning to work across enterprise data, systems, and workflows.

End 2025: AI was largely augmenting analytics.

Mid 2026: AI is beginning to participate in enterprise operations.

Putting AI into production also changes what organizations need from their data environments. Trusted data, consistent business context, governance, and clear ownership become more important as AI moves closer to day-to-day operations.

What it means

The enterprise AI question is changing from how to use AI to how to operate it reliably.

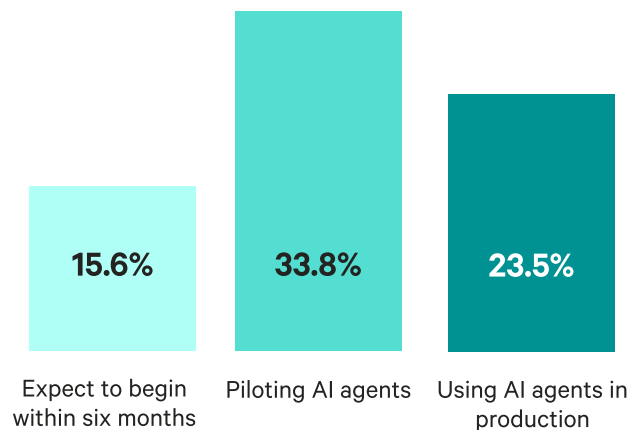
When AI primarily helps someone query data or generate an analysis, a person remains in the loop to interpret the result and decide what happens next. As AI agents begin working across enterprise systems and workflows, they increasingly need to make those determinations themselves.

That puts greater demands on the data underneath them. AI needs to know which data to use, what it means, whether it can be trusted, and what rules govern its use.

The more operational AI becomes, the more important the enterprise data foundation becomes.

AI Agents are moving toward production

Jul-Aug 2026



EMERGING TREND 2

AI is advancing faster than trust in the data behind it.

At the end of 2025, 68% of respondents said their data wasn't clean or trustworthy enough for AI. It was one of the clearest signs that AI ambitions were running ahead of the data foundations needed to support them.

That gap remains. In the third Modern Data Survey, 59% of respondents report low or mixed confidence in the trustworthiness of the data behind their AI systems. **Just 8.4% say the data feeding their AI systems is trustworthy enough for production.** Even among organizations already running agents in production, only 21.7% describe their data as highly trustworthy.

Across both surveys, the findings are consistent: organizations still lack confidence in the data supporting AI.

What has changed is where the problem is showing up. Data quality and trust now rank as the #1 barrier to putting AI agents into production, with 76% placing it among their top three barriers.

End 2025: Organizations knew their data wasn't ready for AI.

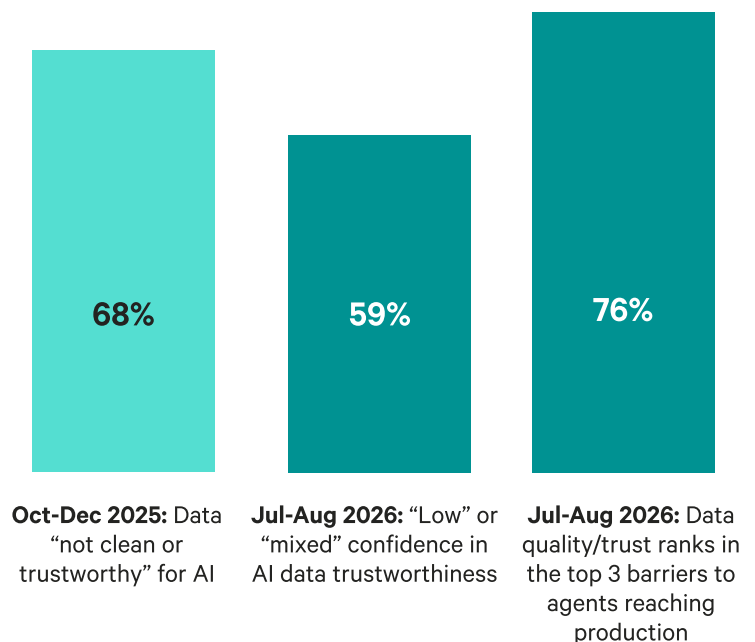
Mid 2026: They're encountering the consequences as they try to put AI into production.

What it means

As AI moves closer to operational use, organizations need greater confidence that the data behind it is accurate, current, governed, and appropriate for the task.

Trust is becoming part of the operational foundation for AI. Without that trust, organizations may be able to deploy AI, but they cannot confidently rely on its decisions and actions.

AI is advancing faster than trust in the data behind it



EMERGING TREND 3

Business context is becoming a given for AI.

At the end of 2025, 57% of respondents said missing definitions, context, or shared meaning made data difficult to interpret. Lack of business context also emerged as the largest gap respondents saw in their existing data platforms.

The need for context hasn't gone away. But AI is changing who, or what, needs it.

In the third Modern Data Survey, 61% of respondents say a reliable context layer is critical or very important for AI agents. Yet only 16% say their organization deliberately designs and engineers its context layer as a product.

For most organizations, context still lives across tools, documentation, and people's knowledge rather than as something intentionally designed, owned, and maintained.

And there is an important signal among organizations further along with AI: those with agents already in production are substantially more likely to have deliberately engineered their context layer than organizations that have not yet started.

End 2025: Context was seen as a way to make data easier for people to understand.

Mid 2026: Organizations are discovering that context is foundational to how AI operates.

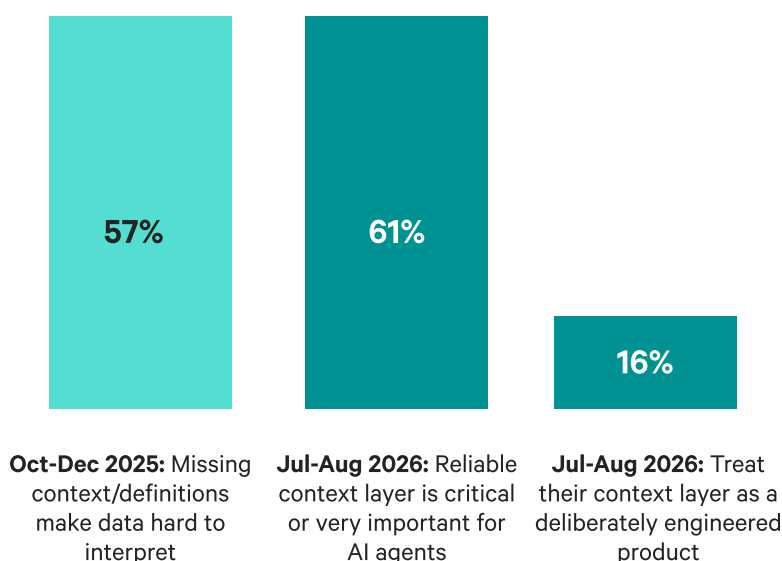
What it means

AI isn't creating the need for business context. It is changing how organizations need to manage it.

Definitions, relationships, policies, lineage, and other forms of business meaning become much harder to leave scattered across systems and people's knowledge when AI is expected to work across the enterprise.

Context is becoming part of the infrastructure required to operate AI reliably.

Organizations see the need for context, few have engineered it



EMERGING TREND 4

Platform consolidation is moving from preference to action.

At the end of 2025, organizations were already signaling a strong desire to simplify fragmented data environments. 77% of respondents strongly believed in the value of a more converged data platform.

Now we're beginning to see that preference turn into action.

In the third Modern Data Survey, 47% of organizations say they are actively consolidating toward fewer platforms, with another 17% evaluating consolidation.

The challenge is shifting as a result. Migration costs, organizational resistance, and concerns about vendor lock-in now rank as the biggest barriers. The question is becoming less about whether convergence is desirable and more about how to make it happen.

End 2025: Organizations wanted more converged data environments.

Mid 2026: Many are actively trying to build them.

Fragmentation also continues to carry a cost. 46% of respondents say more than a quarter of their team's time goes toward maintaining or integrating tools rather than delivering data, analytics, or AI capabilities.

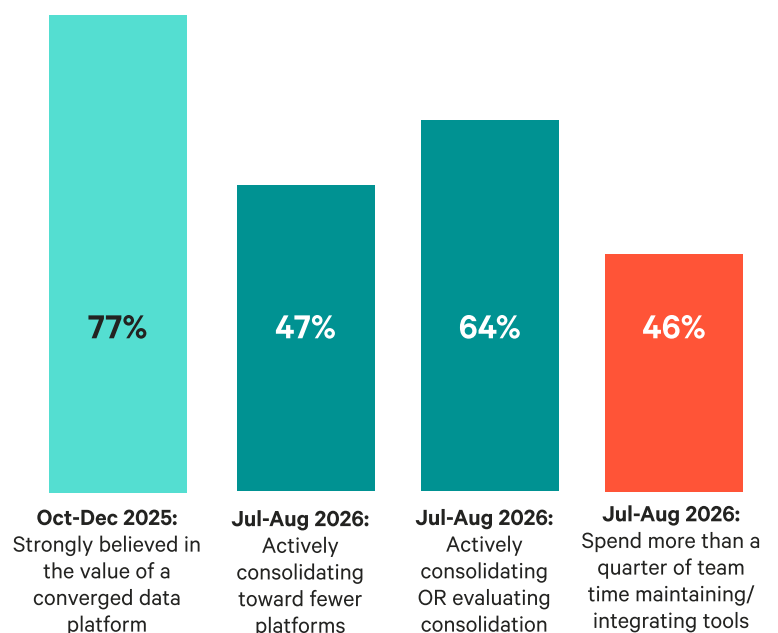
What it means

Consolidation doesn't necessarily mean replacing every specialized technology with a single platform.

Organizations are looking for ways to reduce the cost and complexity of fragmentation while maintaining flexibility and avoiding new forms of lock-in.

The conversation is shifting from whether to consolidate to how to do it successfully.

Platform consolidation is moving from preference to action



EMERGING TREND 5

AI has expanded the scope of data governance.

At the end of 2025, organizations were still grappling with the fundamentals of data governance. 53% of respondents said they had no easy way to trace data lineage, alongside persistent challenges around data ownership, access, and shared definitions.

Those requirements haven't gone away. But AI has added a new layer: governing what happens when AI uses that data.

Early findings from the third Modern Data Survey show that only 18% of respondents have a clear, documented AI accountability framework. At the same time, 62% rank security and governance concerns among the top three barriers to putting AI agents into production.

The findings point to an expanding governance challenge. Organizations still need to know where data came from, who owns it, and who can access it. As AI begins working across enterprise systems, they also need to determine what information AI can use, what actions it can take, which policies apply, and who is accountable for the outcome.

End 2025: Governance centered on controlling and understanding enterprise data.

Mid 2026: It also has to govern how AI uses that data and what it does with it.

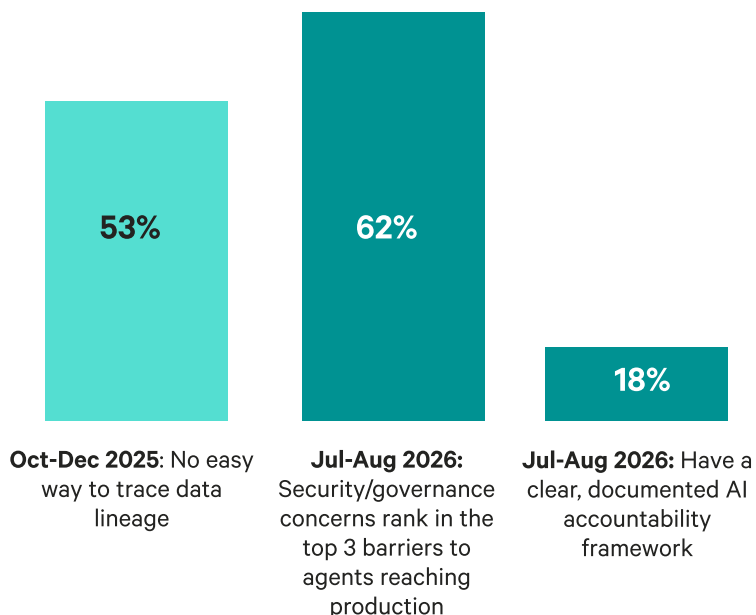
What it means

AI hasn't replaced the existing requirements of data governance. It has extended them.

Lineage, ownership, access controls, policies, and shared definitions remain essential. But those controls now need to carry through to AI systems that can use enterprise data to make decisions and take actions.

The more AI can do, the more governance has to cover.

AI has expanded the scope of data governance



The patterns behind the findings

Taken individually, these five trends describe important changes in enterprise data and AI. Taken together, they point to something larger.

Enterprise AI is moving from experimentation to operation. But the data foundation underneath it isn't advancing at the same pace. **The organizations furthest along with AI provide an early indication of what may be required next.** They are:

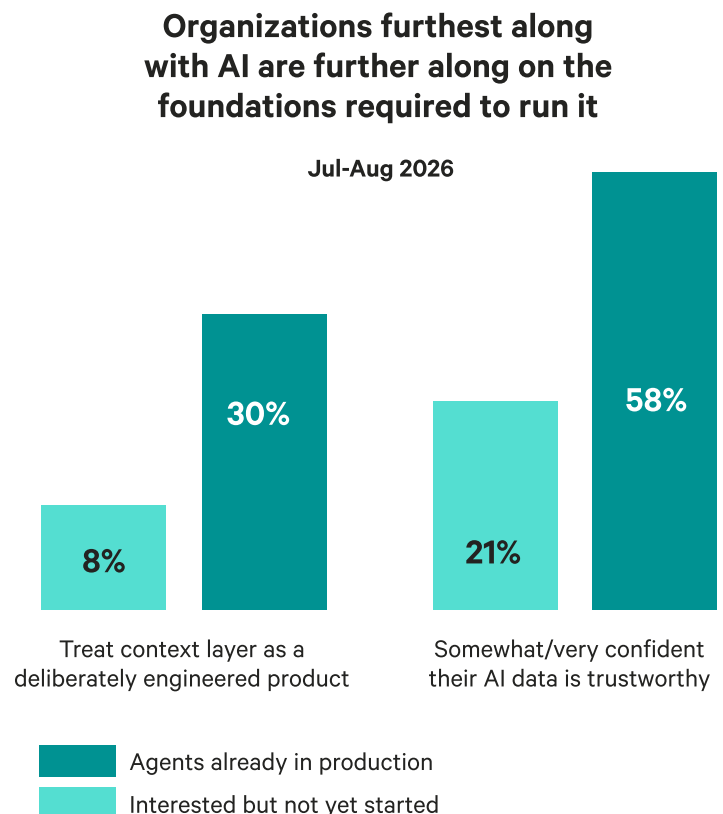
3.6x as likely to have deliberately engineered their context layer as organizations interested in agents but not yet started.

3x as likely to report being somewhat or very confident in the data behind their AI.

And they are substantially more likely to have established clear AI accountability. These relationships do not establish causation. But the pattern is consistent.

Organizations with agents already in production are also substantially further along on the foundations required to operate them.

The next phase of enterprise AI may therefore be defined less by who has access to the most AI capabilities and more by who can build the enterprise foundation required to use them reliably.



About the Research



Modern Data 101
Community

The Modern Data Survey is an ongoing research initiative from The Modern Data Company, conducted through the Modern Data 101 community. The research examines how practitioners are navigating the changing realities of enterprise data, from architecture, governance, and semantics to AI and organizational design.

The third Modern Data Survey is currently underway, with more than 540 qualified responses collected to date from data leaders and practitioners across more than 65 countries. Response collection began in late June 2026 and is ongoing as of this publication on August 19, 2026. The interim findings presented in this report primarily reflect responses collected during July and August 2026; charts therefore identify the current research period as Jul–Aug 2026.

This interim report shares five trends emerging from the research and compares them with findings from the previous Modern Data Report. The survey questions have evolved between research waves to reflect changes in enterprise data and AI. Comparisons with the previous report are therefore intended to highlight directional shifts and recurring patterns rather than changes in identical measures. Because not all respondents answer every question, the number of responses may vary by question.

Coming soon

The third Modern Data Report

A deeper analysis of the full survey findings and how organizations are building the data foundations for the next generation of enterprise AI.

[Subscribe to be notified when the full report is released.](#)

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