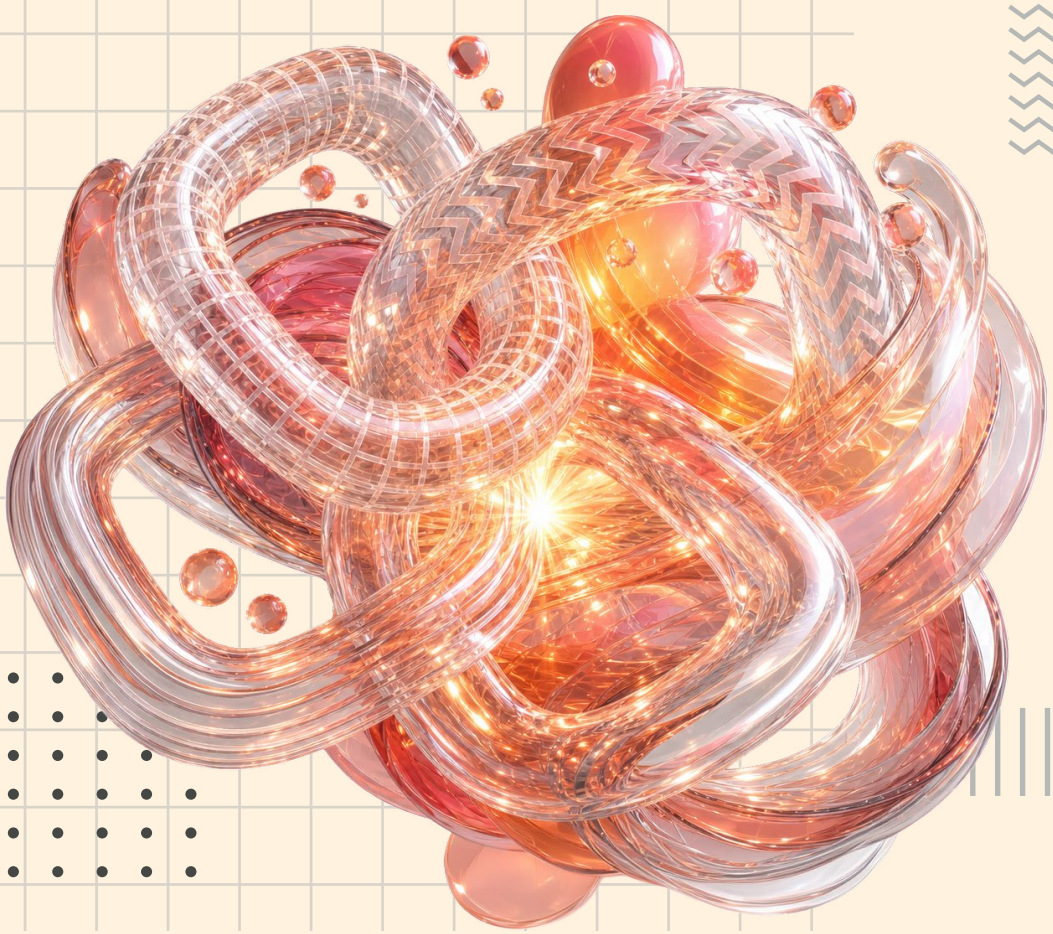
genpact | *on it* ™

The $18 trillion opportunity

Four enterprise debts will make or break your AI future



Data | Process | Technology | Talent

Genpact in partnership with HFS Research | **June 2026**

Foreword

We are at a pivotal moment in business. For centuries, the enterprise ran on a single operating model: work was done by humans and validated by humans. Every transaction, every decision, every approval moved at the speed of human attention. The rhythm of commerce was set by human capacity.

That model is being replaced. From human-processed, human-validated to machine-processed, human-validated – all wrapped in responsible AI. We call this agentic operations.

As we spoke to our clients, one thing was clear: ambition is high; readiness is low. Enterprises are working to understand how to bridge that gap, and the answer is not simply more technology. Layering AI on top of processes that were never designed for it does not unlock value.

We heard this from many client CXOs, and then we conducted formal research. Working with HFS Research, we surveyed more than 2,000 enterprise executives globally to put hard numbers behind what leaders are experiencing on the ground.

What we found is both confirming and clarifying. Realizing the full promise of agentic operations requires getting the foundations right: the processes that orchestrate how work flows, the data that feeds decisions, the technology that carries the load, and the talent that knows where human judgment still matters. These are not separate workstreams. It is rearchitecting the end-to-end workflow, including the last-mile context. This is how agentic solutions come to life and meet reality, where accountability and industry expertise determine the outcome.

This drives our core conviction: There is no artificial intelligence without process intelligence.

The companies that commit to this will not gain a few points of advantage. They will gain market share and operating leverage by a factor.

The opportunity is real. And the mandate belongs to today's leaders.

Act now or watch the gap between innovation and adoption compound.

Balkrishan "BK" Kalra
President and CEO, Genpact

There is a number in this report that should stop every enterprise leader cold: $18 trillion. That is the value sitting trapped inside Global 2000 enterprises right now, not because the technology does not exist to unlock it, but because the foundations required to make that technology work are broken.

We have spent the last two years watching the global economy place the largest capital bet in modern business history on AI, including $700 billion in hyperscaler capex this year alone. Anthropic is eyeing a $1 trillion IPO valuation. The Magnificent 7 now account for 30% of all S&P 500 capex. And yet, when HFS and Genpact surveyed over 2,000 enterprise executives for this report, we found that 85% of those same leaders admit enterprise debts actively block their AI value. The money is moving, but the enterprise foundations are not.

We designed this study to understand that contradiction and chart a path through it.

The four enterprise debts – process, data, technology, and talent – are not new. What is new is the cost of leaving them unresolved. In the agentic AI era, a broken process or a fragmented data estate is no longer an inefficiency you manage around. An AI agent dropped into a broken workflow does not fail visibly. It executes the wrong steps faster, at scale, with nobody watching. That is a categorically different risk.

Close your AI Velocity Gap. This is the distance between what your best people can do with AI on a Sunday and what your enterprise can do with it on a Monday, and it is not a technology problem; it is a leadership one.

The enterprises that come out ahead will not be the ones that spent the most on AI. They will be the ones that treated debt resolution and AI transformation as the same program, because that is exactly what they are. The 6% of proven resolvers did not have better technology or bigger budgets. They had the organizational courage to move before every condition was perfect, to own the problem at the CEO level, and to build foundations that make AI perform sustainably rather than just impressively in a demo.

The $18 trillion is not a forecast. It is an indictment of the gap between what enterprises know they need to do and what they are actually doing about it. This report tells you where that value sits, what is blocking it, and what the 6% did differently. The only question is whether you have the will to act before your competitors do.

It's time to move this needle, folks!

Phil Fersht
Founder and CEO,
HFS Research

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Executive summary

Across Global 2000 enterprises, $18 trillion in trapped value sits idle, not because of market conditions or competitive pressure, but because of four self-inflicted enterprise debts: process debt, data debt, technology debt, and talent debt. Each alone slows performance. Together, they compound to form a structural ceiling on enterprise performance. As enterprises accelerate their AI agendas, these four debts have become more consequential than ever. They are the reason AI investments fail to deliver. Those who address them unlock the $18 trillion opportunity.

Genpact, in partnership with HFS Research, surveyed more than 2,000 enterprise executives globally to put a hard number behind what's holding enterprises back from realizing their AI ambitions, supplemented by insights from a select roundtable of senior leaders convened by Genpact and HFS to surface real-world perspectives on the challenges of scaling AI.

What we found was stark: four interconnected enterprise debts (process, data, technology, and talent) are compounding into a single system failure. This report quantifies the trapped value and charts the path to unlocking it.

While 92% of senior executives at Global 2000 companies believe agentic AI will fundamentally change how work is executed across their organizations, only 13% report that agentic AI is already integrated into their operations.

The single biggest reason enterprises cannot scale AI from pilots to production is not technology debt, even though it is often named. Instead, the problem is the foundation the technology is expected to run on: broken processes, untrustworthy data, decade-old systems, and a workforce not yet prepared for a human-agent operating model. These interconnected enterprise debts do not appear on financial statements, yet they are quietly keeping agentic AI trapped in pilot purgatory.

The survey data and analysis tell a clear story in **five findings:**

1 Enterprise debts are no longer hidden

Nearly 90% of large enterprises already know their debt is limiting growth, inflating costs, and stalling AI value. This is not a narrow IT concern. It is a boardroom-level crisis that is no longer hidden.

2 This is not just a technology debt story. It never was

Fixing technology without fixing process, data, and talent is how enterprises automate inefficiency at scale. Over 40% of enterprise capacity is tied up maintaining, correcting, or working around enterprise debts. That capacity cannot drive successful transformations.

3 $18 trillion in enterprise value is at stake across the Global 2000

Resolving enterprise debts can unlock approximately 8% faster annual revenue growth and approximately 16% annual cost reduction across the Global 2000, translating to nearly $18 trillion of enterprise value. It represents the biggest untapped performance opportunity in business today.

4 Enterprise debts inhibit AI scale and value realization

Eighty-five percent (85%) of leaders say debt actively limits their AI value. Yet over 50% have no funded resolution initiative in motion. Boardrooms are pouring money into AI without fixing the broken foundations it depends on. You cannot build intelligent systems on broken processes and bad data.

5 Only 6% of enterprises have successfully resolved their enterprise debts

What separates them from the 94% that have not?

- They make debt resolution a CEO-level mandate, not an IT project
- They operate at two velocities. Velocity one includes fixing foundations and placing long-term bets. Simultaneously, they pursue velocity two, seeking near-term value by capturing the sweet spots – the high-impact moves that remove friction fastest and deliver measurable progress while the foundations are being built
- They invest in capability, not just visible pain. Proven resolvers build the muscle that prevents debt from recurring, not just the symptoms that make it visible
- They use AI to accelerate the resolution. Resolving enterprise debts enables better AI. Better AI accelerates debt resolution. Proven debt resolvers are already running this loop
- They act. The execution gap between proven debt resolvers and the other 94% is a decision, not an accident

Every dollar spent on AI atop a broken foundation is a dollar working against itself. Resolving enterprise debts and agentic AI transformation are not separate programs. They are the same program. This report quantifies where the $18 trillion unlock sits, shows why AI investments are stalling, and draws on the 6% of proven resolvers to chart the path from ambition to measurable business impact.

Enterprise debts aren't booked, but they are now impossible to ignore

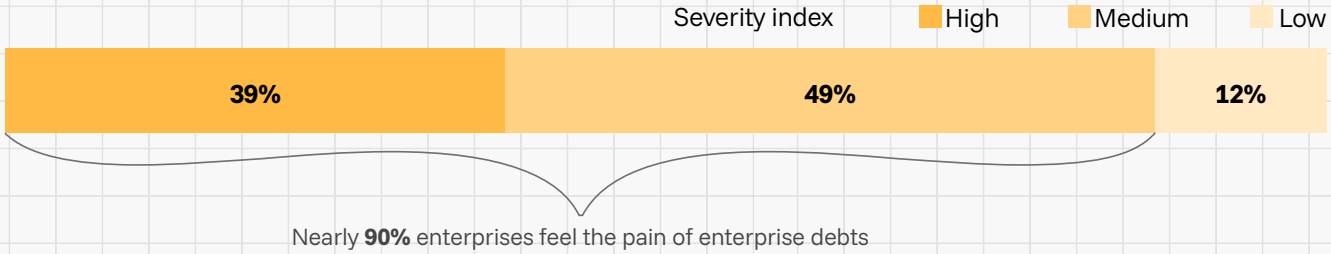
The four enterprise debts are out in the open and impossible to ignore. They compound just as ruthlessly as any financial liability on a balance sheet: slowing decision-making, inflating costs, blocking AI, and grinding down the people who battle them every day.

HFS asked more than 2,000 global executives to rate the severity of their total enterprise debt. Nearly 9 in 10 enterprise leaders feel the drag, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Enterprise debts are no longer hidden; nearly 90% see them eroding growth, inflating costs, and limiting AI value

Enterprise debt severity

Q. Which band best describes your business's overall level of total enterprise debt today?
(Percentage of respondents)



Material business impact because of enterprise debts

Operating cost	AI value	Revenue growth	Transformation impact	Product launch
34% Average operating costs impacted	**85%** Respondents say enterprise debts limit AI value realization	**~8%** Average faster revenue growth if debts are resolved	**34%** Average transformation investments fail to deliver	**~8 months** Average added to every product launch

Sample size: 2,002 global enterprise executives
Source: Genpact in partnership with HFS Research, 2026

Far from new, enterprise debts have been around for years, but the cost of inaction has changed. In the pre-AI era, legacy processes, aging systems, and patchy data were tolerable inefficiencies. In the agentic AI era, they are structural blockers. A model trained on dirty data will converge on the wrong answer. An agent dropped into broken processes will execute the wrong steps faster. An agentic system rolled out to an unprepared workforce will function and sit unused. Not failing visibly, just quietly preventing the outcomes that agentic AI was deployed to deliver. This different kind of threat demands a different kind of response.

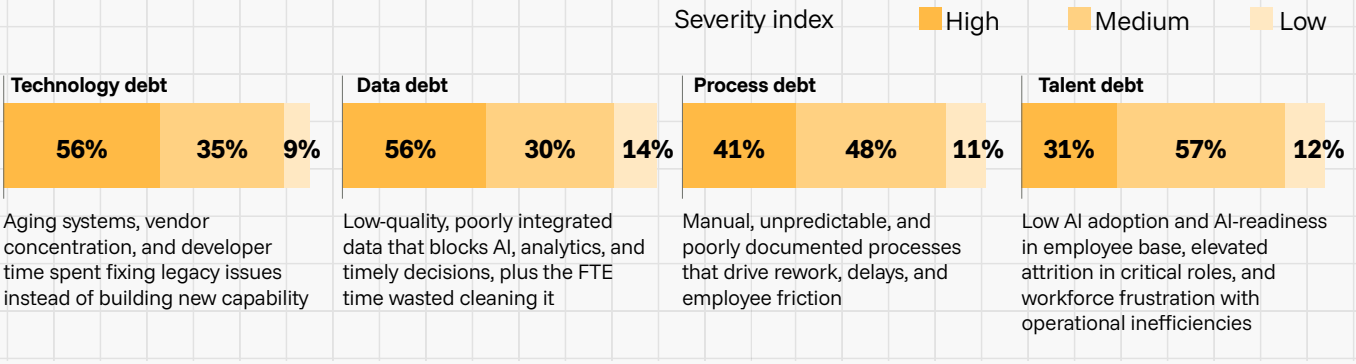
Four enterprise debts, one system failure

One of the biggest misconceptions in enterprise transformation is that technology debt is the whole story. It isn't. The research identifies four distinct but deeply entangled enterprise debts, each originating in a different place but inseparable in effect, as shown in Figure 2. Left unaddressed, they do not accumulate in parallel; they compound, collapsing into a single system failure greater than the sum of their parts. Treating one in isolation just shifts the bottleneck; it doesn't fix the system.

Figure 2: This is not just a technology debt story; it's four enterprise debts compounding into one system failure

Severity across the four debt types

Q. Which option best describes your business's overall level of debt today?
(Percentage of respondents)



Root causes of enterprise debts

Ranked by respondents

1. Legacy core systems
2. Run effort crowding out change
3. Weak engineering discipline
4. Integration complexity
5. Infrastructure and cloud complexity

1. Fragmented source systems
2. Legacy data architecture and integration limitations
3. Weak data governance and ownership
4. Low data quality management
5. Tooling and platform gaps

1. Tech introduced without process redesign
2. Siloed processes with local or regional optimization
3. Inconsistent or reactive governance
4. Cost-driven process compromise
5. Processes not keeping up with business growth

1. Underinvestment in talent development
2. Capacity shortfall
3. Capability mismatch
4. Recruiting process constraints
5. Skills gap

Sample size: 2,002 global enterprise executives
Source: Genpact in partnership with HFS Research, 2026

Technology debt

Development teams spend more than 40% of their time addressing existing technology debt, anchored in decade-old core systems

Legacy core systems, run-effort crowding out change capacity, weak engineering discipline, integration complexity, and infrastructure drag top the list of root causes for technology debt. As a result, over 40% of development team time goes to servicing these debts rather than building new capability, leaving little headroom for the transformation agenda the business expects IT to deliver.

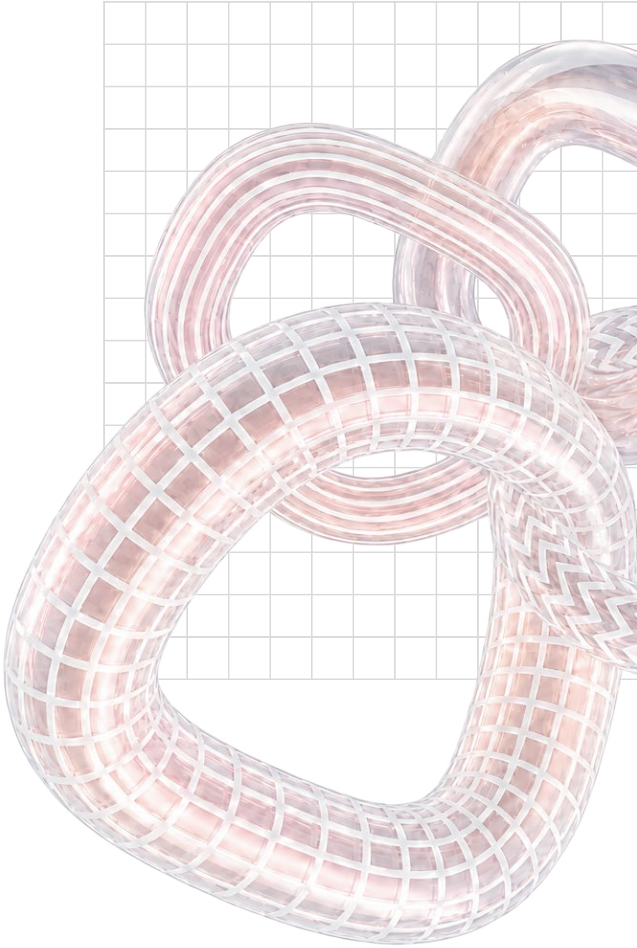
The consequences compound into higher build-and-run costs, reduced delivery speed, elevated security and cyber risk, and reduced agility. Every innovation initiative is paying a legacy tax before it starts. Every agentic AI deployment that touches a legacy core amplifies that tax.

The average age of core enterprise systems, including ERP, CRM, and core platforms, is about 10 years

Development teams spend over **40%** of their time addressing existing technology debt

Data debt

Your AI is only as good as the data it runs on, and half your enterprise data is unfit



More than **half (53%)** of functional data is rated low quality

Only **33%** of data is AI-ready

Up to **40%** of employees' time is spent on data reconciliation, correction, or preparation

Data quality failures cause **42%** of analytics and AI initiatives to be delayed, underperform, or fail outright

Data debt is where AI ambition stalls. Its roots are systemic: fragmented source systems, legacy data architectures, weak governance and ownership, poor data quality management, and tooling gaps. These are the accumulated consequences of decades of tactical data decisions and deferred action. What enterprises once tolerated as manageable inefficiency has now become a hard constraint on AI value. The constraint tightens sharply with agentic AI, where every decision in a chain inherits the quality of the data feeding it and a single weak signal upstream cascades into compounding errors downstream. Long-deferred data debt is now the binding constraint on the agentic operating model enterprises are betting their next decade on.

Process debt

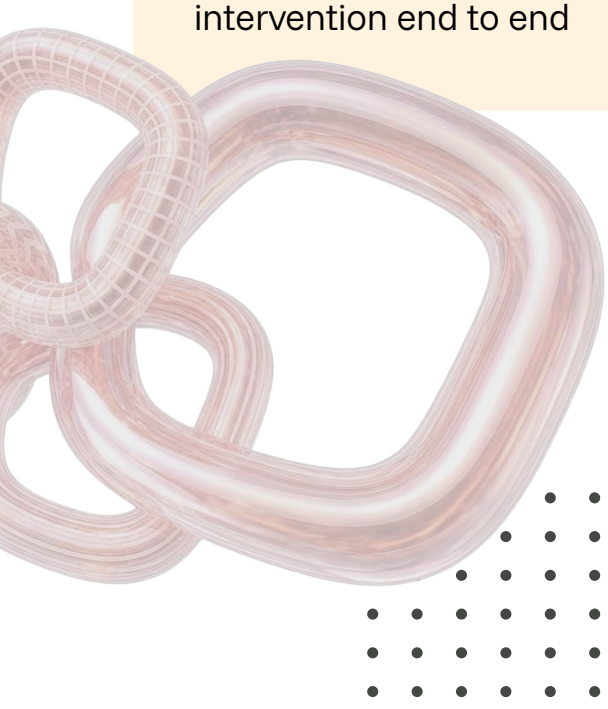
There is no artificial intelligence without process intelligence

Inefficient or manual processes consume about **40%** of employees' time in a typical week

Less than half **(46%)** of processes are formally documented and governed through standard operating procedures

Almost half **(48%)** of processes require manual or semi-manual intervention end to end

Almost half **(46%)** of processes are difficult or extremely difficult to modify without disruption

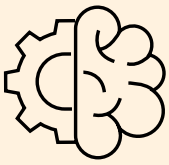


Manual, ungoverned, hard-to-change processes tax every workweek. Process debt creates a structural trap of high-cost, low-agility operating models and AI deployments that fail in production because the workflows they rely on are inconsistent and ungoverned. Process intelligence is the last mile of every agentic AI deployment.

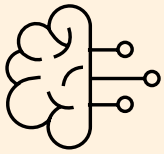
Talent debt

You hired people to think, but enterprise debts have turned them into firefighters

Talent debt does not just drain workforce expertise; it amplifies every other form of enterprise debt. High attrition bleeds institutional knowledge. Workforce frustration reduces the readiness to adopt and iterate on new tools. And low AI-readiness directly constrains the human–agent operating model, where judgment, exception-handling, and last-mile decision-making remain distinctly human. People are the engine of agentic transformation.



Half the workforce is classified as knowledge workers who are hired to think, yet up to **50%** are frustrated and disengaged from the operational inefficiencies within the organization

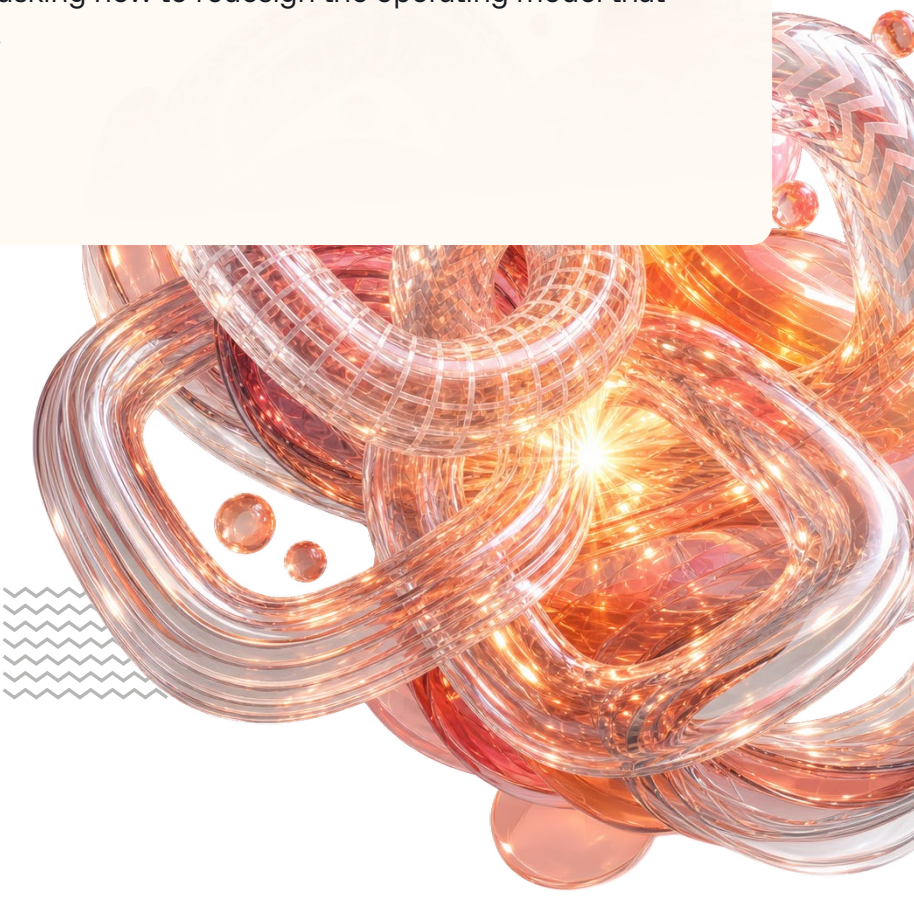


Only **32%** of the workforce is AI-ready for future systems and processes.

Fixing technology debt without fixing process, data, and talent debt is how enterprises automate inefficiency at scale

The enterprise debts cannot be fixed in isolation; they share root causes and compound one another. Legacy infrastructure constrains technology modernization while degrading data quality. Skills gaps drive talent debt and technology debt simultaneously. Unclear ownership produces data governance failures, process drift, and talent misalignment. And manual operations create both process debt and data debt through the same patterns of work.

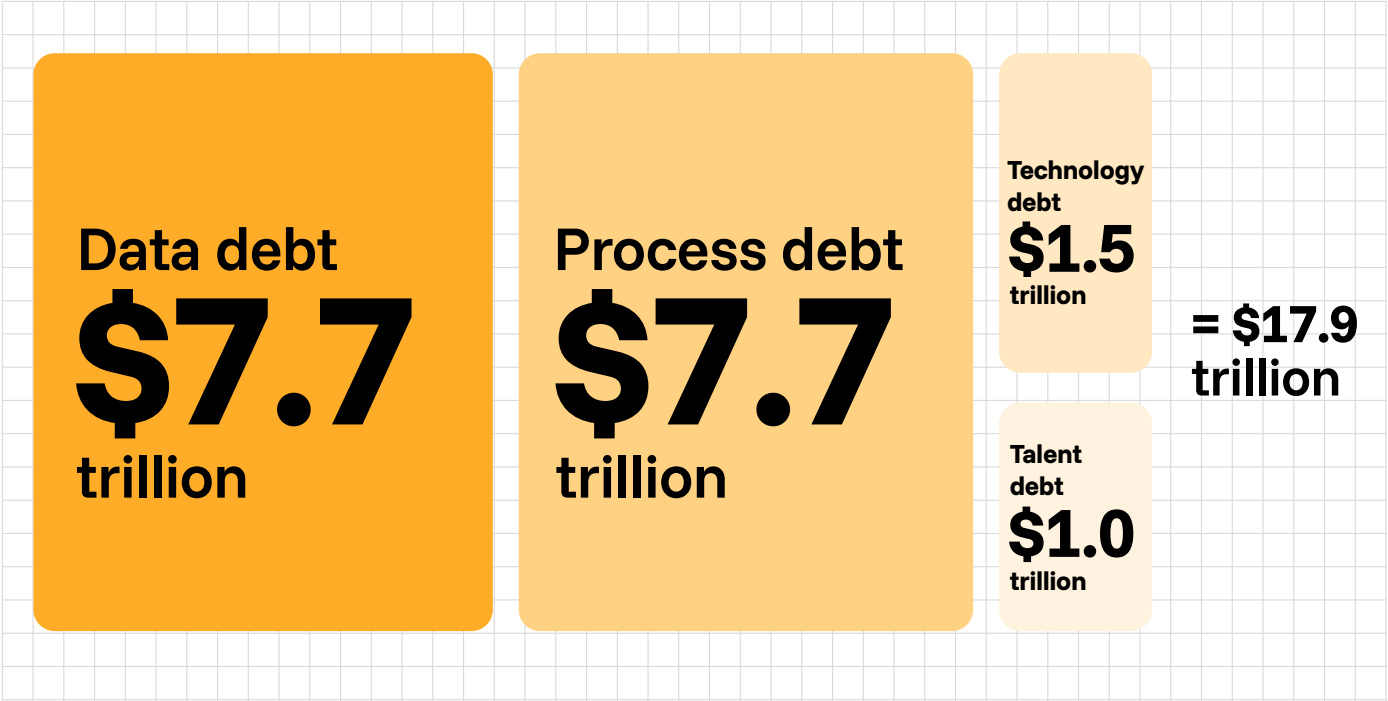
Enterprises keep failing to fix their debts, not because they lack awareness, but because they frame their problem incorrectly. When leadership frames reducing enterprise debts as a technology modernization program, they get a technology fix. When they frame it as process improvement, they get process improvements. Neither frame encompasses the whole system. The enterprise debts are interconnected because the business is interconnected. Finance's data problem is IT's integration problem is engineering's legacy problem is HR's capability problem. Leaders who understand this stop asking which debt category to fix first and start asking how to redesign the operating model that keeps generating all of them.



Nearly $18 trillion in potential value is the biggest untapped performance opportunity in business today

In this study, we calculated the aggregate value at stake for the more than 2,000 enterprises by applying respondent-reported revenue uplift and cost-reduction estimates across a combined revenue base. The number is almost too large to be intuitive: $18 trillion of recoverable enterprise value.

Figure 3: Combined, enterprise debts represent nearly $18 trillion of value at stake



Sample size: 2,002 global enterprise executives
Source: Genpact in partnership with HFS Research, 2026
Note: Read the methodology in the appendix to understand how we valued each of the enterprise debts

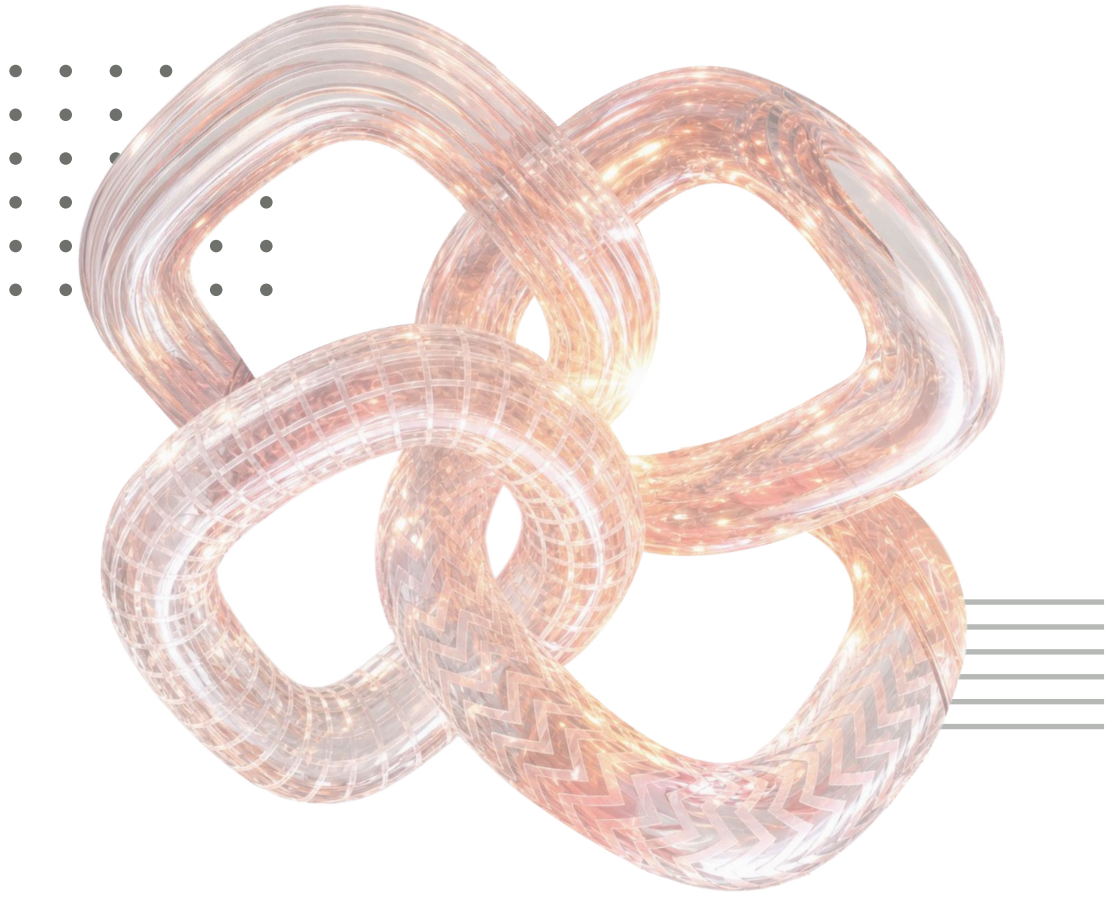
The $18 trillion figure reframes the conversation. Addressing enterprise debts has often not been recognized or treated as a coordinated enterprise-wide mandate. While pockets of capability building and modernization are happening across organizations, they are rarely addressed intentionally or holistically, and they are rarely funded with the urgency the scale of the opportunity demands.

Technology debt has historically been the most visible and widely recognized form of debt, but the data shows the real value unlock comes from addressing process, data, technology, and talent debt together.

The payback from resolving enterprise debts is clear in this research; it unlocks faster revenue growth and meaningful cost reduction. The issue is that too many enterprises are deferring action while continuing to invest in AI and transformation programs that depend on foundations that are not ready. Leaders need to treat debt resolution as a high-ROI investment in growth, efficiency, and AI value realization. Adi Shetty, SVP and Global Head of People Operations and Systems at Visa, reinforces why this cannot be treated as a technology problem alone and requires a holistic approach:

> **It's not the technology; it's organizational design, culture, people, and leadership. That's what the biggest challenge is here."**

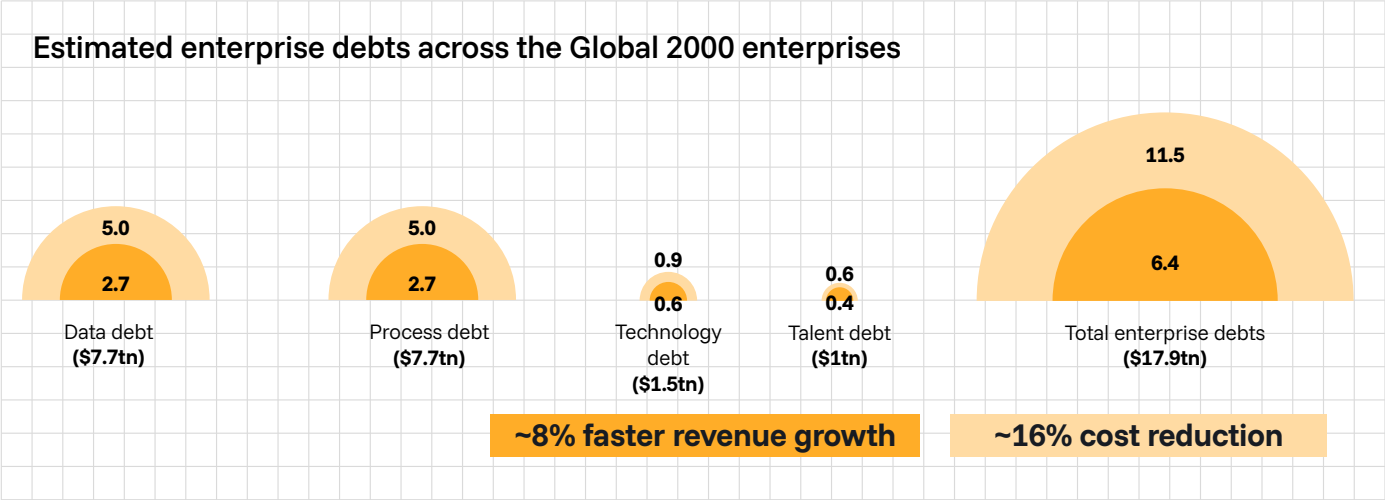
Adi Shetty
SVP, Global Head of People Operations and Systems, Visa



Paying down debts pays you back double with faster growth and lower costs

Resolving enterprise debts is a dual-return investment. When we asked respondents to estimate the value unlocked by resolving their top-two-ranked enterprise debts, the results were clear: approximately 8% faster annual revenue growth and 16% annual cost reduction across the Global 2000. These are not separate outcomes requiring separate investments. The same actions that reduce cost also unlock growth (see Figure 4). While the balance shifts by debt type, leaders who chase only one outcome risk leaving the bigger opportunity on the table; resolution is not just an efficiency play, it is what frees the enterprise to grow.

Figure 4: Fixing enterprise debts can unlock annual improvements of 8% faster revenue growth and 16% cost reduction



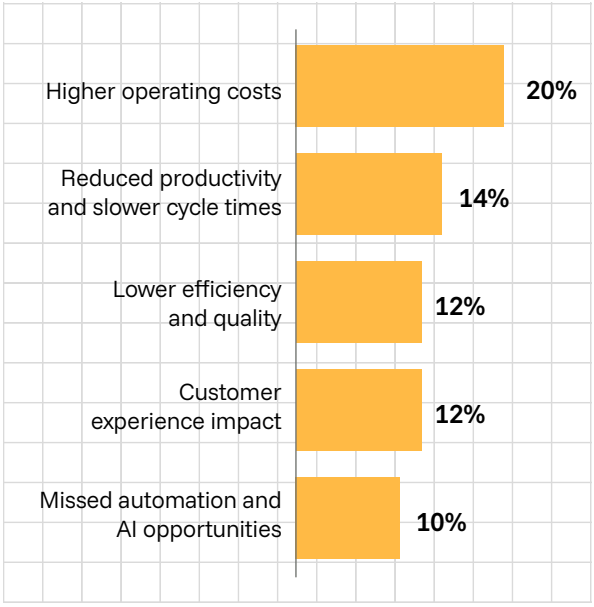
Sample size: 2,002 global enterprise executives
Source: Genpact in partnership with HFS Research, 2026
Note: Read the methodology in the appendix to understand how we valued each of the enterprise debts

Process debt represents one of the largest combined opportunities at $7.7 trillion, split between $2.7 trillion in revenue uplift and $5.0 trillion in cost reduction. The revenue opportunity is concentrated in speed, faster product launches, shorter sales cycles, and the ability to respond to market conditions without the drag that process debt adds to every major initiative. It's reflected in transformation failures and product launch delays ranking among the top value leakage survey respondents report.

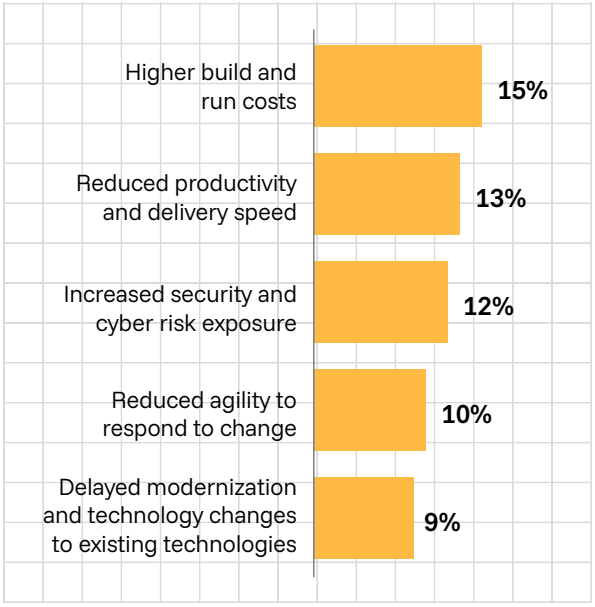
The cost-reduction opportunity is immediate, including fewer manual interventions, less rework, and lower operating costs per transaction across every function running on ungoverned workflows. It's consistent with higher operating costs ranking as the single biggest business impact of process debt (20%) and reduced productivity and slower cycle times close behind (14%), (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: The insidious buildup of enterprise debts is trapping business performance

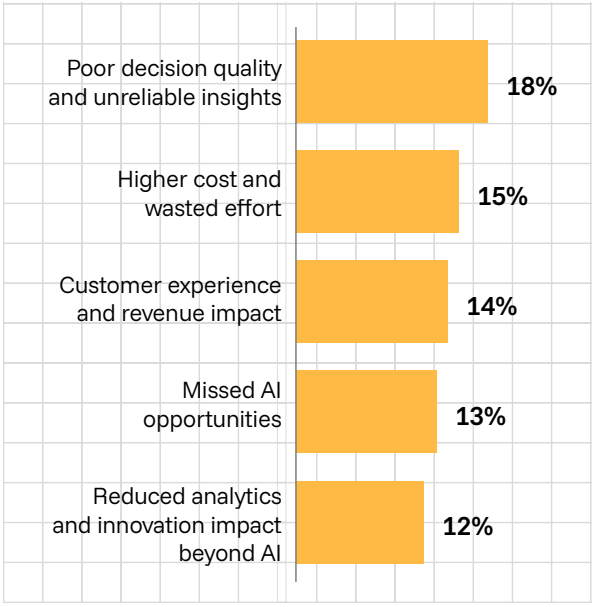
Top business impact of process debt
(percentage of respondents, Rank 1)



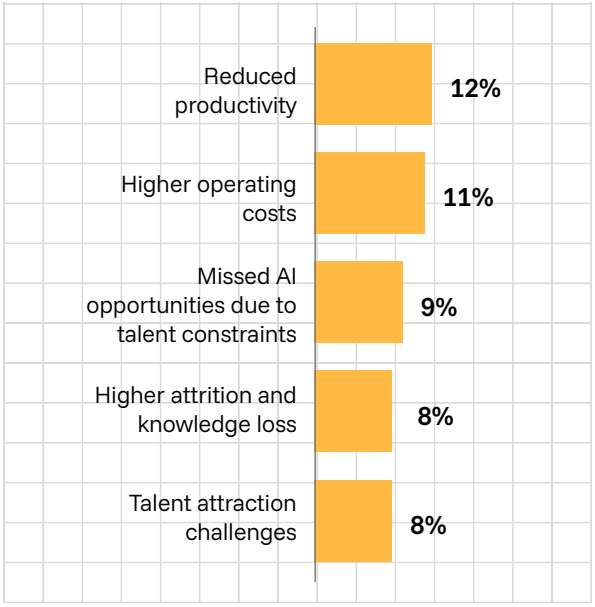
Top business impact of technology debt
(percentage of respondents, Rank 1)



Top business impact of data debt
(percentage of respondents, Rank 1)



Top business impact of talent debt
(percentage of respondents, Rank 1)



Sample size: 2,002 global enterprise executives
Source: Genpact in partnership with HFS Research, 2026

Ashish Gupta, SVP of Global Business Services, Transitions and Operations at Reckitt, captures how this process debt shows up inside enterprises and why it becomes such a barrier to AI-led productivity:

> **The struggle is real within enterprises. Anywhere between 30% to 40% of work is wasted on ineffective processes and duplication. Too many people doing the same work, too many hierarchies, everybody trying to demonstrate that they are adding value. It's a big hindrance to AI-led productivity because then you try to automate it, and what you end up doing, rather than transforming, is scaling more inefficiency and more mess in the organization."**
>
> **Ashish Gupta**
> SVP, Global Business Services (GBS)
> Transitions and Operations, Reckitt

Data debt matches process debt at $7.7 trillion total, split between $2.7 trillion in revenue uplift and $5 trillion in cost reduction. The revenue case is direct; trusted, AI-ready data enables enterprises to personalize at scale, accelerate decision cycles, and build the analytical edge that translates into market share. Delayed AI value and slower revenue growth are ranked as the top two leakage points that survey respondents attribute to data debt. The cost case is equally compelling, eliminating the data reconciliation, rework, and quality resolution that currently consumes up to 40% of employee time in data-intensive functions. This observation is consistent with higher costs and wasted effort (15%) ranking as the second business impact, following poor decision quality and unreliable insights (18%) (see Figure 5).

Technology debt contributes $1.5 trillion in total value, with $0.6 trillion from revenue uplift and $0.9 trillion from cost reduction. The revenue opportunity is primarily about capability. Modern systems unlock integrations, data pipelines, and AI deployments that legacy cores actively prevent, consequences that manifest directly in product launch delays and higher operating costs, as the leakage points survey respondents feel most acutely. The cost opportunity is the most visible, reclaiming the approximately 42% of developer time currently consumed by servicing existing technology debt and redirecting it toward work that actually generates returns. This burden surfaces as higher build-and-run costs (15%) and reduced productivity and delivery speed (13%), the two dominant business impacts cited by survey respondents (see Figure 5).

Talent debt represents a total opportunity of $1 trillion, comprising approximately $0.4 trillion in revenue and $0.6 trillion in cost reduction. AI-ready talent operating within a well-designed human-agent model closes the gap between AI investment and measurable business outcomes. This connection surfaces directly in slower revenue growth and delayed AI value as the leakage points survey respondents feel. The cost case is driven by attrition. A 15% annual voluntary attrition rate in critical roles incurs hiring, onboarding, and knowledge-loss costs that compound at scale; this is consistent with reduced productivity and higher operating costs, which respondents attribute to talent debt as the top business impacts.

Talent debt carries the smallest dollar figure in the $18 trillion breakdown, not because it matters least, but because it's hardest to visualize and measure. The cost of talent debt does not accumulate neatly in a talent ledger. It accumulates in every other type of enterprise debt. It shows up as data debt when governance programs stall due to a lack of skilled owners. It shows up as process debt when redesigns fail to stick because the workforce was never trained. It shows up as technology debt when AI deployments underperform because neither the builders nor the users were ready.

Talent debt is the silent tax on every resolution effort. Amanda Turcotte, SVP and Chief Actuary at Amalgamated Life Insurance, captures how this lack of fluency becomes a practical barrier to adoption:

> **The thing that's holding us back is generally a lack of fluency. A good chunk of our workforce doesn't have basic AI skills. Our employees aren't using AI in their daily lives at home, so it's very hard for them to make the bridge and learn something new at work."**

Amanda Turcotte
SVP and Chief Actuary,
Amalgamated Life Insurance

Within every category, cost savings outweigh revenue uplift by approximately 1.8x. A ratio that reflects the post-2023 enterprise mood, where CFOs find it easier to quantify "fix X, save Y" than "fix X, grow Z." But that efficiency framing undersells the real prize. Debt resolution unlocks value on two fronts, growth and cost, in different proportions by debt type. It is also the foundation AI needs to deliver at scale.

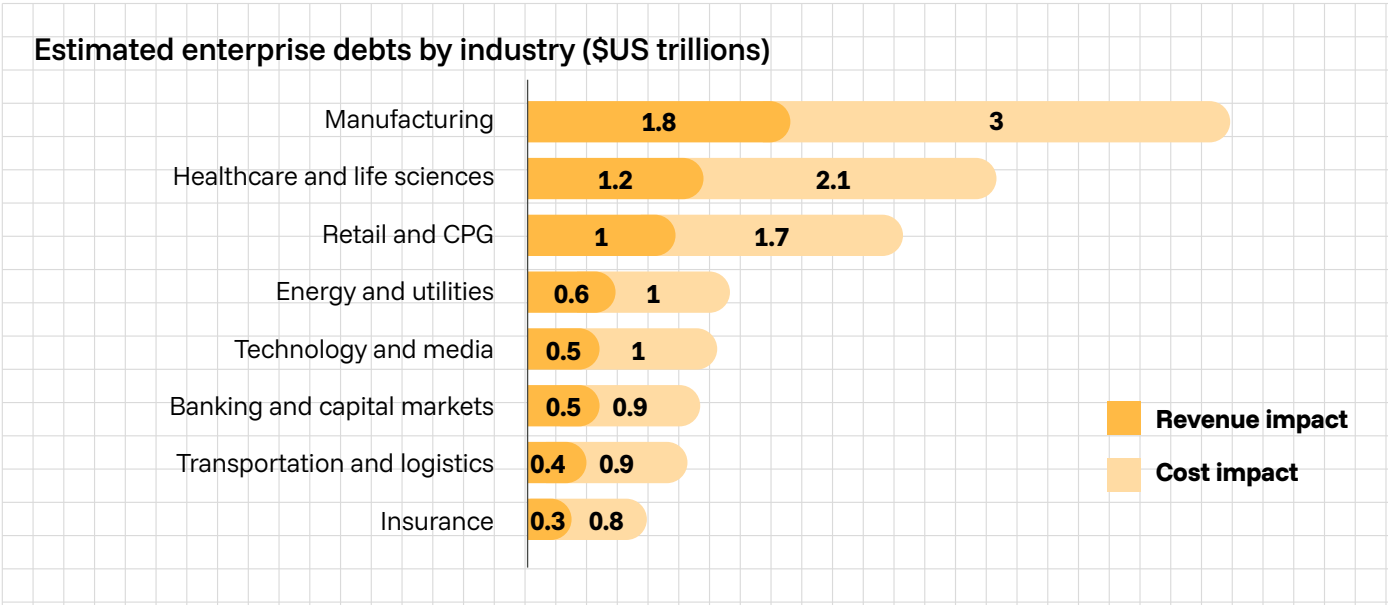
There are exceptions, though. For instance, life sciences and capital markets skew toward revenue because growth is gated by speed to market (for example, drug launches and deal velocity) rather than by operating efficiency. For them, the debt resolution case is equally compelling, just framed differently. The next section unpacks how the $18 trillion opportunity is distributed across industries.

Enterprise debts by industry

Manufacturing and healthcare hold the largest debt-resolution opportunity

Manufacturing leads with $1.8 trillion in revenue impact and $3 trillion in cost impact, the highest of any industry (see Figure 6). Healthcare and life sciences follow at $1.2 trillion and $2.1 trillion, respectively. Both sectors run the longest, most complex multiparty workflows in the global economy, meaning process debt accumulates at every handoff across supply chains, production lines, and care pathways. Their core systems (ERP, manufacturing execution systems, warehouse management systems, and electronic health record platforms) were layered in over decades without fundamental reengineering, creating technology and data debts that are structural rather than incidental, with the resolution opportunity proportionately large.

Figure 6: Manufacturing and healthcare lead the enterprise debts pack



Sample size: 2,002 global enterprise executives
Source: Genpact in partnership with HFS Research, 2026
Note: Read the methodology in the appendix to understand how we valued each of the enterprise debts

The type of debt also differs meaningfully by sector:

- Financial services carry the highest data debt. Decades of M&A and regulatory reporting have produced compliant but deeply fragmented data estates
- Physical industries, such as manufacturing, retail, CPG, and healthcare, carry the highest process debt because long, multiparty workflows accumulate handoff debt with every step
- Life sciences and technology hardware carry the highest technology debt, locked into product-embedded software bound by regulatory or certification cycles that make refactoring impractical
- Talent debt is the hidden compounder across every industry, amplifying the other three enterprise debts. Broken processes, stale technology, and unfit data wear down the workforce. Where talent debt does spike, as in CPG and energy, it flags structural transitions like direct-to-consumer (DTC) pivots and the fossil-to-renewables shift, not just hiring gaps

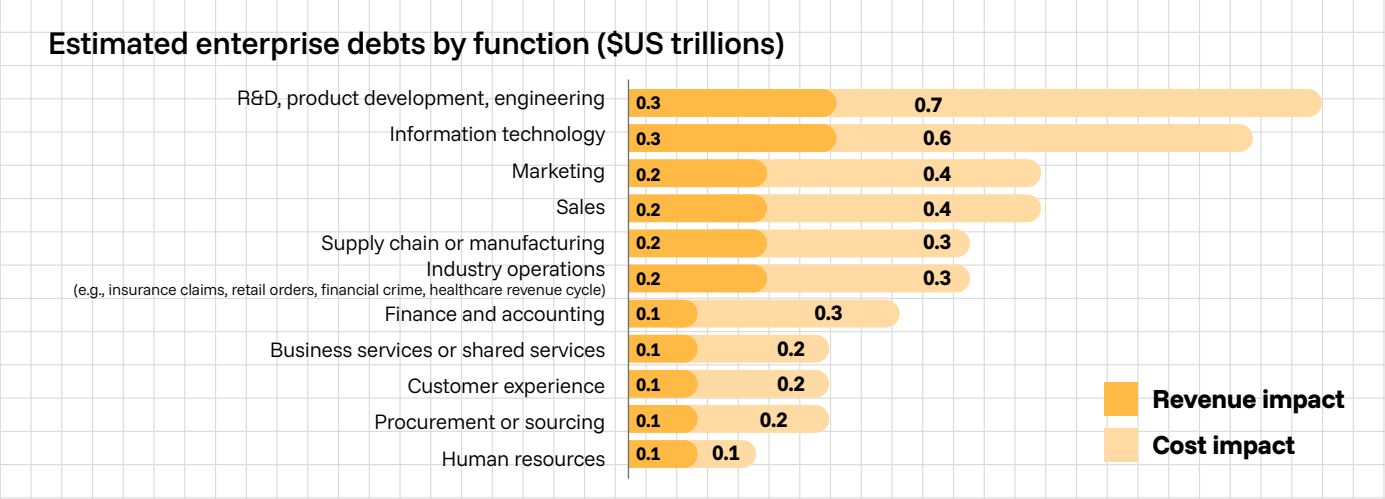
Enterprise debts by function

Engineering and IT hold the biggest functional unlock from resolving enterprise debts

Engineering, R&D, and product development have the greatest potential to unlock value from resolving enterprise debts (approximately $1 trillion), as shown in Figure 7. Engineering sits on the deepest technology stacks – continuous integration/continuous delivery (CI/CD), test infrastructure, model pipelines – and longest-lived legacy code; debt compounds at the speed of releases. Talent debt spikes here more than anywhere else because scarce specialized skills (ML, embedded, security) create an outsized drag. Enterprise debts in R&D, product development, and the engineering function throttle speed to market; resolution ROI here is a growth lever, not just a cost lever.

IT is a close second, but it is a symptom as much as a cause. IT owns both its own debt and the substrate every other function runs on. When finance has data debt or CX has process debt, IT pays for the underlying platform. Fixing IT without fixing demand-side functions yields diminishing returns.

Figure 7: Engineering and IT present the largest value opportunity across enterprise functions



Sample size: 2,002 global enterprise executives
Source: Genpact in partnership with HFS Research, 2026
Note: Read the methodology in the appendix to understand how we valued each of the enterprise debts

Growth-facing functions like sales, marketing, and CX tend to skew toward process and data debts. These functions live across customer relationship management, marketing automation platforms, customer data platforms, and too-many-to-count point tools bought tactically and never integrated. Every campaign or customer journey crosses five to ten systems, so data and workflow become the same problem. Revenue-side functions also have the strongest revenue-uplift case versus cost, and every fixed handoff converts directly to pipeline or retention.

The finance and accounting function is data-heavy because it consumes everyone else's mess. Finance pulls from every other function's system into close, financial planning and analysis, and reporting. It's the canary for upstream data quality issues. Process debt nearly equals data debt, reflecting brittle close cycles, reconciliations, and manual journal entries. "Fix finance" almost always means "Fix the data feeding finance."

Stop pouring AI investments into broken foundations

Boardrooms have made their bets. They are clear that AI is expected to drive the next decade of growth, productivity, and competitive advantage, and scaling AI across the enterprise is the number one strategic priority for 2026, as shown in Figure 8. But here is the problem. Nearly 13% of enterprise spend is now flowing into AI, while 85% of those same leaders admit that enterprise debts actively inhibit AI value. The money is moving. The foundations are not. Venkat Vagvala, a chartered financial analyst (CFA) who leads a large practice at a major global financial institution, is unequivocal about there being no shortcut to fixing what is broken:

> **Regulations of 50 years ago do not apply to today's AI world. Hard work has to be done to fix enterprise problems. Hard work has to be done to remedy it."**

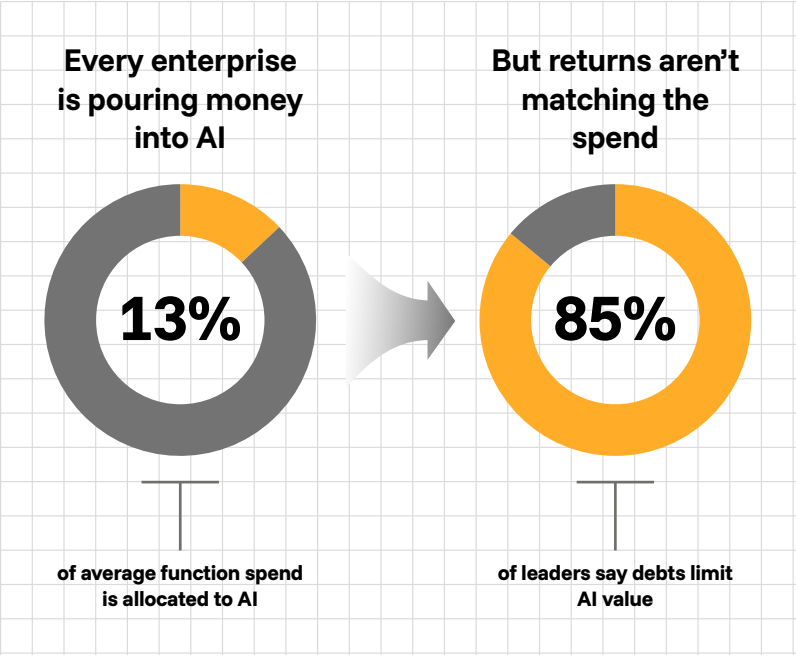
Venkat Vagvala
CFA, Major global financial institution

Figure 8: Enterprises are pouring money into AI while the foundations required to deliver value remain structurally broken

Strategy
2026 enterprise strategic priorities

Q. What are your enterprise's top three strategic priorities for 2026? (percentage of respondents)

1. Advancing AI adoption and scaling AI across the enterprise
2. Reducing operating costs and improving efficiency
3. Growing revenue with new products, services, or business models
4. Modernizing technology, data, and platforms
5. Enhancing customer experience and satisfaction



Sample size: 2,002 global enterprise executives
Source: Genpact in partnership with HFS Research, 2026

When we turn to the AI-specific debt problem, the picture sharpens considerably, as shown in Figure 9. This is a different view of the broader story of enterprise debts: narrower, more urgent, and with consequences already playing out in live deployments.

When enterprises deploy agentic AI before redefining their process workflows, building their data foundations, and preparing their workforce for a human-agent operating model, they are not accelerating transformation. They are encoding their existing inefficiencies into automated systems and running them at speed. A senior AI and data strategy leader at a major global financial institution captures the organizational trap that most enterprises have yet to confront:

> **You've still bolted on to your mess. We have forgotten the ability to unlearn. We are wedded to our rules and ways of working."**
>
> Senior AI and Data Strategy Leader, Major global financial institution

Figure 9: Why AI stalls: a debt-by-debt view

Q. Of the four types of enterprise debt, which one contributes the most to preventing you from realizing value from AI and related technologies?
(percentage of respondents)

Data debt traps AI in pilots and prevents scale	Technology debt inflates AI unit economics and slows scale	Process debt makes AI unreliable and slow to deliver	Talent debt slows AI development and limits adoption
1. AI use cases remain stuck in pilots and proofs of concept 2. Limited ability to scale AI across functions or geos 3. Higher cost to build and run AI solutions	1. Higher cost to build and run AI solutions 2. Limited ability to scale AI across functions or geographies 3. Difficulty integrating AI into core workflows and systems	1. Inconsistent AI performance or reliability in production 2. Slower time to production for AI deployments 3. Greater risk and delays due to governance, compliance, or audit requirements	1. Inconsistent AI performance or reliability in production 2. Greater risk and delays due to governance, compliance, or audit requirements 3. Talent constraints slow AI development and deployment

Sample size: 2,002 global enterprise executives
Source: Genpact in partnership with HFS Research, 2026

Data debt emerges as the single biggest AI blocker, cited by 33% of respondents. Without trusted, integrated, AI-ready data, use cases stay in proof of concept permanently. Technology debt follows at 28%, inflating unit costs and making integration into core workflows difficult. Process debt (23%) introduces inconsistency and slows time to production for every agentic deployment. Talent debt (16%) compounds all three by slowing development and throttling the adoption that would justify the investment.

The consequences are severe. Data debt traps AI in pilots. Technology debt inflates AI unit economics. Process debt makes AI agents unreliable in production because they operate inside broken workflows. Talent debt limits both the adoption and the human judgment at the last mile that agentic operating models depend on. Every dollar spent on AI above a broken foundation is a dollar working against itself.

Lisa Stump, CDIO at Mount Sinai Health System, raises the question many leaders are now asking: Can enterprises use agentic AI to leapfrog parts of the debt problem while the harder foundational work continues underneath? The answer lies in the power of "and": Use agentic AI where it can create near-term, imperfect wins, and continue the data, workflow, and integration work required for long-term sustainable value.

"There are a million projects going on in getting data in shape and changing workflows. But I wonder whether we can take a leapfrog approach instead… Can agentic AI compensate for the messy workflows…at least in the short term…Can it operate across less-than-perfect data, multiple systems, and clunky workflows while we do the hard work to clean the data and streamline the work? In essence, we need to act on both for near-term, albeit not perfect, wins and long-term sustainable value."

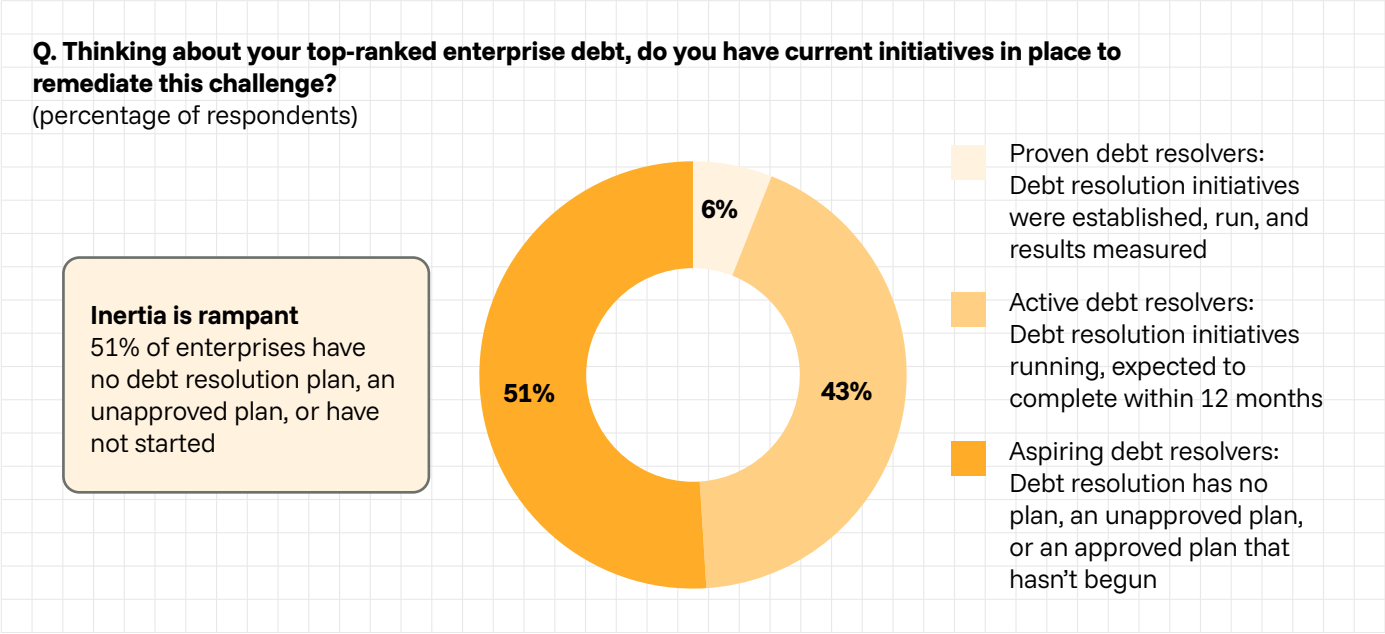
Lisa Stump
CDIO, Mount Sinai Health System

Every quarter you delay, 6% of enterprises pull further ahead

The weight of inaction is compounding the problem. More than half of enterprises have no funded debt resolution plan in place, meaning the foundation that AI depends on is not being built. Every quarter of inaction is another quarter of AI investment landing on ground that cannot support it.

A mere 6% are proven debt resolvers (see Figure 10). These are the enterprises that have established, run, and measured results.

Figure 10: Trillions of potential value to unlock, but half of enterprises have no plan to capture it



Sample size: 2,002 global enterprise executives
Source: Genpact in partnership with HFS Research, 2026

The gap between inertia and action is worth $18 trillion. The AI era has permanently changed the impact of enterprise debt. Before, debts slowed performance. Now, they prevent AI from working. That is a categorical difference. An AI deployment on bad data means wrong decisions at machine speed, at scale, with no human in the loop. Process debt that creates workflow inconsistencies can lead AI agents to behave unpredictably in production. Leaders treating debt resolution as a separate workstream from AI strategy is a compounding liability. The two programs are the same program. Address the debts, and you unlock AI value. Ignore the debts, and you waste the investment.

Only 6% of enterprises are proven debt resolvers. They are the organizations that have not only initiated resolution programs but have also seen them through to measurable outcomes. They are a small cohort, but the most instructive one in this research. They have done what the majority are still planning to do and done it at a sufficient scale to know what works and what does not.

Five dimensions separate proven debt resolvers from the aspiring majority

What separates the proven debt resolvers from the aspiring majority is not resources or ambition; it is the decisions they made differently across five dimensions that define how resolution gets done.

1. Make debt resolution a CEO mandate, or watch it fail at every functional boundary

Among the small group of proven debt resolvers, ownership is unambiguous. Resolving enterprise debts sits with the CEO and board, not within a single function. These leaders treat data, processes, technology, and talent as a single system and fund, govern, and measure it accordingly. Adi Shetty, SVP and Global Head of People Operations and Systems at Visa, captures why clear accountability is the difference between progress and paralysis:

> **The moment the solution is 'IT will solve it,' we have lost the plot."**
>
> **Adi Shetty**
> SVP, Global Head of People Operations and Systems, Visa

Debt spans all four domains simultaneously, and no single C-suite leader holds authority over more than a slice. The CHRO cannot fix the data. The CTO cannot fix the process. The CDO cannot fix the talent. Without CEO-level ownership, programs get scoped to whatever one function can control, funded at whatever survives the budget cycle, and abandoned when the next priority lands.

Agentic transformation is a board, executive, and front-line imperative. It is not an IT initiative. Nan Li, SVP of Transformation at Condé Nast, makes clear what effective governance requires:

> **Governance needs the golden triangle – people, process, and technology – and the CEO has to lean in and champion it."**

Nan Li
SVP, Transformation, Condé Nast

Proven resolvers avoid this failure mode by treating enterprise debts and AI transformation as a single, enterprise-wide mandate with shared accountability from the boardroom to the front line. Steve Taylor, EVP and CIO at Cenlar, reflects on what separates initiatives that succeed from those that stall:

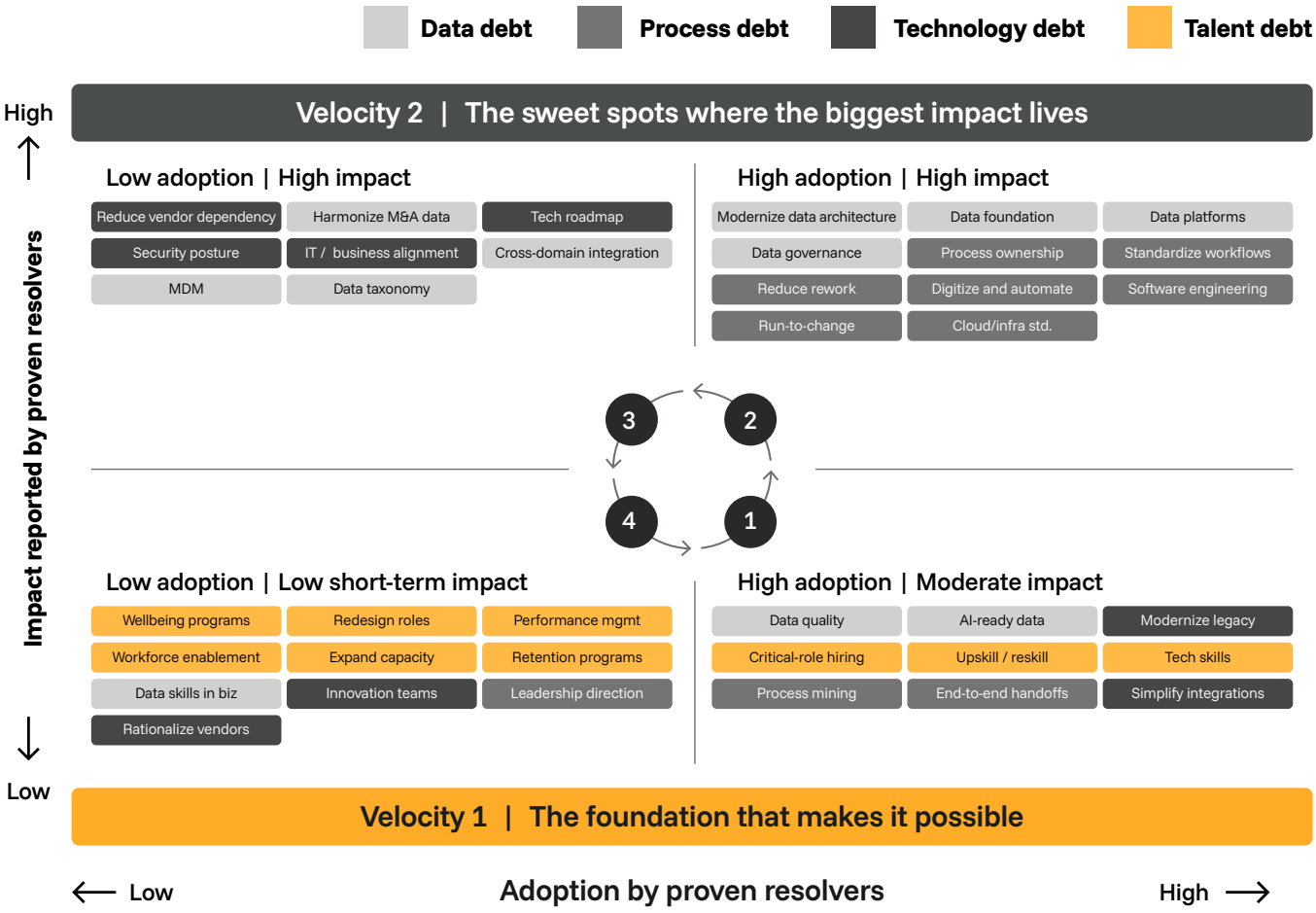
> **There is one defining force behind the success of every major initiative in an organization: someone who truly champions it. Every successful project I have been part of shared this in common: a senior leader who owned the vision and an executive team that supports the vision to ensure it is carried forward. Technology may enable the outcome, but momentum comes from executive leadership. Success is ultimately determined by who steps up to drive it, believes in it, and takes responsibility for making it real."**

Steve Taylor
EVP and CIO, Cenlar

2. Run at dual velocity: fix the foundations while hitting the sweet spots

Aspiring debt resolvers tend to focus their bets on one or two debt types. Proven resolvers, by contrast, deliberately address all four.

Figure 11: Proven debt resolvers run with dual velocities



Sample size: 2,002 global enterprise executives
Source: Genpact in partnership with HFS Research, 2026

Figure 11 maps resolution initiatives of proven debt resolvers across two dimensions: how widely adopted each is among proven resolvers, and how much impact it delivers, resulting in four zones:

01

High adoption–moderate impact
The foundation combines high adoption with steady, compounding impact. Every other initiative depends on this infrastructure layer

02

High adoption–high impact
These operational moves remove friction and build execution velocity where adoption and impact are both high

03

Low adoption–high impact
Selectively powerful initiatives with low adoption but high impact in the right context

04

Low adoption–low short-term impact
Long-horizon bets carry lower near-term impact but build the organizational durability that compounds over years, not quarters

Proven resolvers do not work through these quadrants in a single sequence. They operate at dual velocities.

Velocity 01

Fix the foundations, place the long-term bets (zones 1 and 4). Invest now in data quality, workforce upskilling, and targeted talent acquisition, the high-adoption foundation everything else runs on. Simultaneously, commit to the longer-horizon plays: role redesign, wellbeing programs, and performance management reform. These do not generate headlines in a quarter. They generate the organizational muscle that makes every other initiative compound.

Velocity 02

Capture the sweet spots and unlock the hidden gems (zones 2 and 3). Zone 2 is where high adoption meets high impact; standardizing workflows, establishing process ownership, and digitizing and automating remove friction fastest. Zone 3 is where the hidden gems live; initiatives like IT-business alignment, a strong security posture, and cross-domain integration that deliver outsized impact in the right context, but only once the foundational layer is in place.

These two velocities run in parallel, not in sequence. Enterprises that wait for the foundation to be "complete" before moving on to sweet spots will wait forever. Enterprises that chase hidden gems without a foundation underway will fail, as most aspiring resolvers do. The dual velocity model enables proven resolvers to show short-term progress while building long-term resilience, satisfying both the CFO's quarterly lens and the CEO's transformation mandate simultaneously.

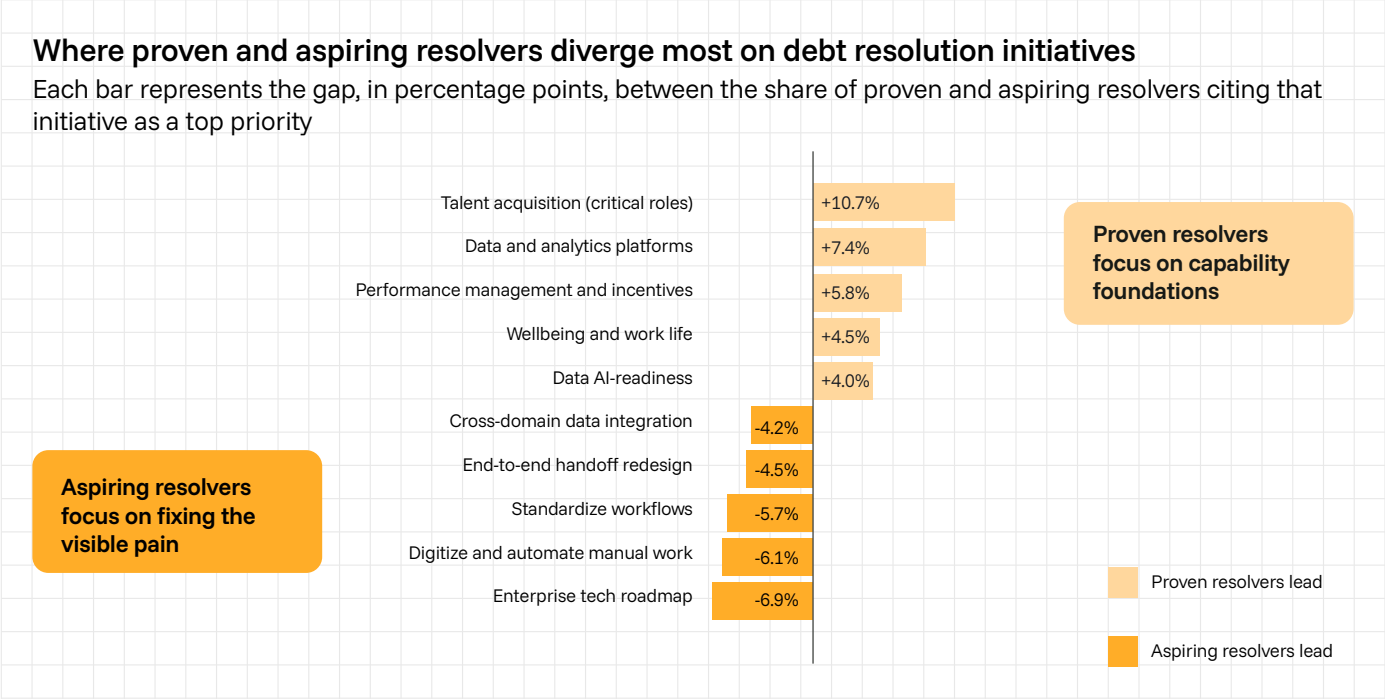
3. Build the muscle that prevents debt from recurring, not just the symptoms that make it visible

Aspiring resolvers gravitate toward what is obviously broken: digitize the manual work, write the technology roadmap, and standardize the workflows. These are the natural first instincts when a leader is staring at operational pain. Proven resolvers make a different choice. They invest in the capabilities that prevent debt from recurring, not just the symptoms that make it visible.

Companies that have completed debt resolution initiatives spend disproportionately on talent and data foundations, like hiring critical roles, upgrading data platforms, fixing performance incentives, governance, AI-readiness, and wellbeing. These are the "boring" investments that make subsequent change stick.

The data is unambiguous on where the divergence shows up across four dimensions.

Figure 12: Proven resolvers invest in capability foundations; aspiring resolvers chase visible operational pain



Sample size: 2,002 global enterprise executives
Source: Genpact in partnership with HFS Research, 2026

Capability investments don't show up immediately on a dashboard. All of them compound over time. Debt resolution is not a one-time cleanup. If you fix the surface without redesigning the underlying operating model, the debt comes back. The goal is not to reach zero debt; the goal is to build an organization capable of continuous, value-led transformation as technologies evolve and organizational learning improves.

4. Use AI to accelerate debt resolution

Proven debt resolvers are not waiting for clean data, governed processes, and AI-ready talent before deploying AI. They are using AI to accelerate the resolution:

- AI agents can crawl fragmented data estates to surface quality issues, suggest governance rules, and automate classification at a scale no human team can match
- Process mining tools powered by AI can map undocumented workflows, identify bottlenecks, and recommend redesigns in days rather than months
- Generative AI can accelerate workforce upskilling by delivering role-specific, on-demand learning that adapts to where each employee actually is
- Agentic AI can take on the repetitive reconciliation and exception-handling work that currently consumes 40% of employees' time, allowing people to focus on the judgment-intensive work that debt resolution actually requires

Debt resolution enables better AI. Better AI accelerates debt resolution. Proven resolvers are already running this loop.

5. Action beats ambition; you cannot scale what you never start

Both proven and aspiring resolvers identify broadly the same problems. The diagnostic gap between them is small, but the execution gap is enormous. This is a choice. Proven resolvers ship, measure, and iterate. Aspiring resolvers remain stuck in analysis and planning.

Speed of execution beats precision of strategy every time.

The lesson from the 6% proven resolvers is not about having a clever framework. It is about organizational character. Enterprise debt resolution and AI transformation are the same program, just seen from different angles. One looks at the liability on the balance sheet, the other at the opportunity in the AI roadmap. The enterprises that close the gap will be the ones that build the data estates, process architectures, workforce capabilities, and technology foundations to enable AI to perform sustainably at scale, with humans firmly at the center. The gap between proven and aspiring resolvers is a courage gap, not a planning lapse. As Maharaj Mukherjee, PhD, SVP at a leading US-headquartered global bank, points out, the biggest barrier is not the technology itself but the fear, reluctance, and inertia that prevent organizations from embracing new ways of working:

> **The main thing that is holding back the full promise of AI is the fear and the reluctance to adopt AI because it's something new. And once people can get over that inertia, I think we should be able to all fully realize the capacity of AI."**

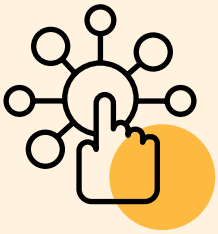
Maharaj Mukherjee
PhD, SVP,
Leading US-headquartered global bank

The bottom line: The $18 trillion unlock starts with treating AI strategy and debt resolution as one program

Every dollar spent on AI without resolving debts is a dollar working against itself. Every quarter spent planning debt resolution without acting is a quarter the 6% are using to pull further ahead.

The numbers are unambiguous:

Nearly **90%** of enterprises feel the drag



85% say debts actively limit their AI value

The unlocked value potential is **$17.9** trillion

Only **6%** have meaningfully acted

That gap between acknowledgment and action is not a strategy problem. It is a courage problem, and enterprise value is eroding inside it, quietly, quarter by quarter.

The root cause of inaction is structural. Enterprise debts span all four domains simultaneously, yet no single C-suite leader holds authority over more than a slice. The result is a collective action failure: everyone knows it is a problem, but no one has the mandate to treat it as a whole-system problem. This is why CEO ownership is not a best practice; it is the precondition.

Every enterprise carries a different mix of debt across technology, process, data, and talent, and the value lies in clearly diagnosing that mix. Proven resolvers treat debt resolution and agentic transformation as one program, owned at the top, funded as a portfolio, and sequenced to build capability, not just fix visible pain. Leadership needs to understand it holistically, solve for it deliberately, and move before every answer is perfect.

Do the diagnosis for your industry and function to assess where the debt sits, what it is costing you, and how to sequence resolution to unlock your share of the trillions on the table.

Know where your debt is heaviest. Know what the opportunity is. Know what to fix first. That is the whole plan.

Appendix

01

Methodology for calculating enterprise debts

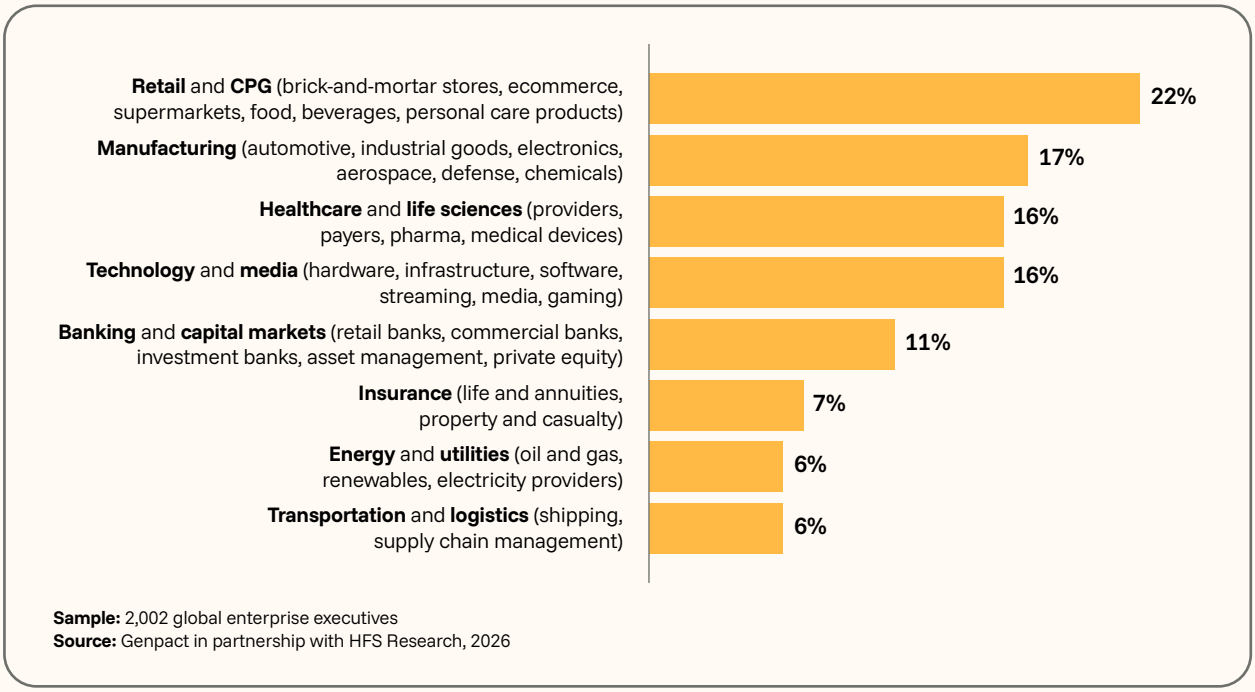
- The analysis of enterprise- and industry-level debts is based on survey responses from enterprise-level decision-makers reporting on their entire companies. The functional debt analysis is based on respondents who reported for a single function
- Each respondent estimated two types of financial impact from resolving enterprise debt:
  1. the potential percentage increase in revenue, and
  2. the potential percentage decrease in operating costs

  Both estimates were derived as the average of two independent survey questions to improve reliability
- Four categories of debt were assessed: technology, data, process, and talent. Respondents ranked these from most to least impactful. The estimated revenue and cost impacts were allocated only to each respondent's top-two-ranked debts, reflecting where they believe the greatest financial opportunity lies
- The revenue impact percentage was applied to each respondent's reported company revenue to estimate the potential revenue uplift in dollars. The cost impact percentage was applied to the company's revenue minus margin to estimate potential cost savings
- To project from the survey sample to the full Global 2000 (combined revenue of $32.4 trillion), each of the 16 industries covered in the research was assigned an estimated share of Global 2000 revenue. These estimates were derived from publicly available industry sizing data

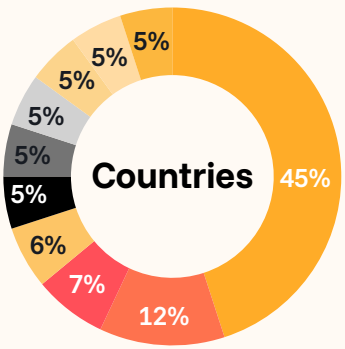
02

Survey demographics

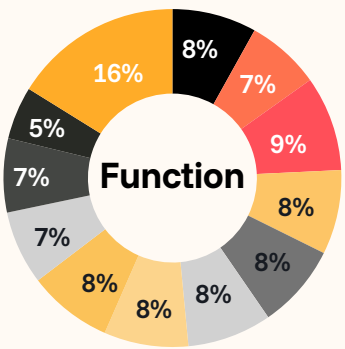
This report is based on primary research conducted by Genpact in partnership with HFS Research in 2026. The study surveyed 2,002 enterprise executives globally, spanning 16 industries and 14 primary business functions. Respondents were senior decision-makers (C-suite, EVP, SVP, VP, and director level) across IT and business at companies with annual revenues predominantly above $1 billion.



Sample: 2,002 global enterprise executives
Source: Genpact in partnership with HFS Research, 2026



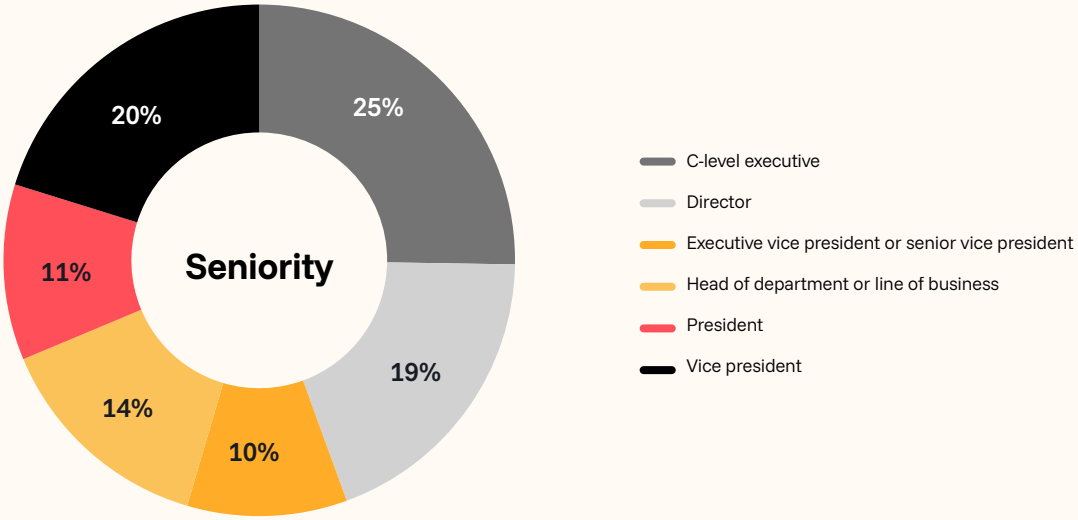
- United States
- United Kingdom
- Belgium and Netherlands
- Canada
- Australia
- France
- Germany, Austria and Switzerland
- India
- Japan
- Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland

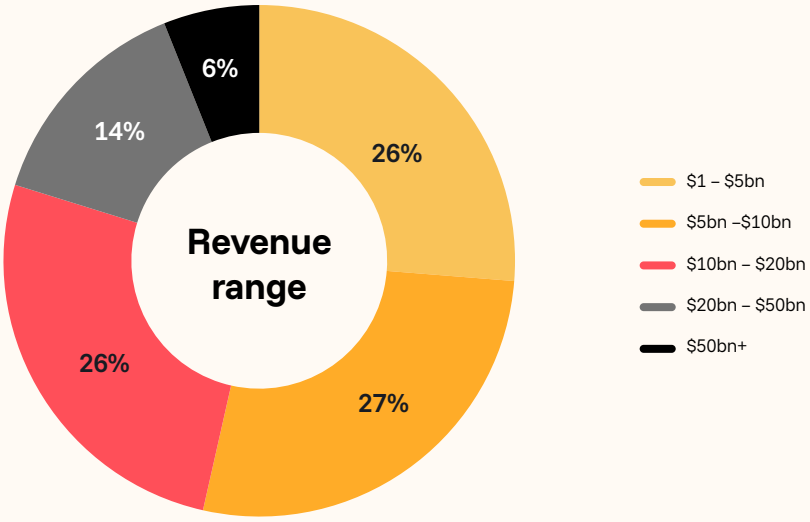


- Sales
- Marketing
- Finance and accounting
- Industry operations
- Customer experience
- Human resources
- Procurement or sourcing
- Information technology
- Business services or shared services
- R&D, product development, engineering
- Supply chain or manufacturing
- Other (compliance, strategy, risk management)

03

Survey demographics





Genpact contributors

Balkrishan "BK" Kalra,
President and CEO, Genpact

Balkrishan "BK" Kalra is the President and Chief Executive Officer of Genpact and a member of its board of directors. BK is leading Genpact through a strategic pivot to establish the company as a global leader in agentic and advanced technology solutions, building on the strengths of its Core Business Services through data and AI, digital technologies, and advisory. His leadership has helped clarify Genpact's process foundry approach as a differentiator, where the company fuses decades of deep process intelligence and industry domain expertise with AI and advanced technologies to scale best-in-class approaches and deliver business outcomes rapidly.

A core conviction drives BK's approach: "There is no artificial intelligence without process intelligence" – a belief that has shaped both Genpact's strategy and his voice on the responsible deployment of AI and digital technologies. BK also serves on the Board of Catalyst, a global nonprofit dedicated to accelerating women's advancement and building more inclusive workplaces.

Riju Vashisht
Chief Growth Officer, Genpact

Riju Vashisht serves as Genpact's Chief Growth Officer, and leader of Enterprise Services, Partnerships, and Alliances. She brings insights and a unique perspective to client CXOs that help them drive change and accelerate growth. Previously, Riju led Genpact's Transformation Services and Enterprise Sales organization, overseeing client relationships, commercial operations, and the delivery of integrated solutions across industries. She also led digital solutioning, automation, and transitions, and served as COO for Genpact's Consumer Goods, Retail, Life Sciences, and Healthcare businesses. Across these leadership roles, she helped clients drive enterprise change while contributing to Genpact's growth as a global professional services leader.

Riju was also part of the leadership team that helped guide Genpact's evolution from a GE back-office unit into a global professional services leader. Her career has included leadership roles at Unilever, Whirlpool, and Walmart India, and she holds a Six Sigma Green Belt, an MBA, and a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering.

Ajay Vasal
Global Lead for AI and Agentic Services, Genpact

Ajay is Genpact's global lead for AI and Agentic Services. His focus is to help our clients make effective use of AI and related technologies in their business operations. He has been in the industry for more than 20 years, and has deep experience in helping clients shape their AI and data strategies, build new capabilities, and design complex transformation programs. He has worked across a number of industries and brings in tremendous learnings and point of view on the future of AI and how companies should adopt it.

Genpact contributors

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VP Strategic Initiatives, Genpact

Elena leads strategic initiatives for the chief growth office, helping Genpact optimize its growth and drive client value through AI and advanced technologies. She brings more than three decades of technology-enabled professional services expertise to Genpact, serving as an advisor or services partner helping clients in industries such as financial services, high-tech, communications, retail and CPG realize business value from technology. Prior to joining Genpact, Elena served as chief research officer at HFS Research where she was widely recognized for her expertise in emerging technologies, AI and automation impact, and digital operations transformation.

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VP Communications, Genpact

Michael leads strategic communications for Genpact's Office of the CEO. In this role, he drives the company's positioning in AI-powered business and agentic solutions, while elevating CEO thought leadership and strengthening stakehold presence worldwide. He brings more than two decades of communications leadership to the role, with senior positions at Analog Devices, Fiserv, and ADP. He also serves on the board of directors at Bay Atlantic University and has taught at Rutgers and Fairleigh Dickinson University.

Zainab Andrabi
AI Programs and Strategy Analyst, Office of the CTIO, Genpact

Zainab drives AI strategy and programs within the Office of the Chief Technology and Innovation Officer at Genpact. She leads thought leadership and research initiatives, including serving as a contributor to Genpact's first primary research report, Autonomy by Design. Zainab manages key AI programs for the CTIO, using performance across Genpact's Data, Tech, and AI portfolio to guide organizational direction and strategic priorities. She also supports Genpact's growing agentic advisory practice, helping organizations assess their readiness for agentic AI, define adoption roadmaps, and build the frameworks needed to deploy autonomous systems at scale.

HFS Research authors

Phil Fersht

CEO and Chief Analyst

Phil Fersht is widely recognized as the world's leading analyst focused on reinventing business operations to exploit AI innovations and the globalization of talent. He recently coined the term "Services-as-Software" to describe the future of professional services, where people-based work is blurring with technology.

Phil identifies change agents enabling organizations to access critical data and exploit the huge global talent base. He trademarked the term "Generative Enterprise" in 2023, articulating the pursuit of AI technologies based on language models to reap huge business benefits for organizations seeking to continuously generate new ideas, redefine how work gets done, and disrupt business models steeped in decades of antiquated processes and technology.

Saurabh Gupta

President, Research and Advisory Services

Saurabh Gupta is president of Research and Advisory Services for HFS Research. He sets the strategic research focus and agenda for HFS Research, understanding and predicting the needs of the industry and ensuring that HFS maintains its position as the strongest impact thought leader for business operations and services research. Saurabh oversees HFS' global research function, managing the team of analysts and operations across the US, Europe, and Asia.

He is a recognized thought leader who is passionate about solving business problems and bringing big ideas to life. With more than two decades of experience across client, provider, advisory, and analyst roles, Saurabh brings a uniquely realistic and wide-ranging perspective to industry challenges and opportunities. He has authored more than 200 research reports, is a frequent speaker, and is regularly quoted in industry publications. Saurabh is well-known for spotting disruptive technology trends such as blockchain, Web3, metaverse, cloud, AI, and automation and predicting their implications for different stakeholders through frameworks including OneOffice and OneEcosystem.

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Joseph Montrosse
Senior Advisor

Joe Montrose is an experienced advisor with over 30 years' experience helping advanced technology executives transform operations to deliver new capabilities to the customers they serve, improve the customer experience, reduce fixed and variable costs, and optimize operating models aligned to near-term and long-term business strategy. His unique perspective and experience allow him to rapidly analyze current operations and develop opportunities to drive enhanced results for stakeholders in the organizations he serves.

Joe has worked with dozens of companies (Fortune 50 to entrepreneurial ventures) to improve EBITDA through growth enablement, cost optimization, and disruption avoidance. He has published and collaborated on multiple whitepapers and thought pieces on topics including safety, outsourcing, and insourcing trends. He has worked with the Harvard School of Public Health to create thought pieces on innovation regarding issues including social determinants of health, expanded access to digital tools, and impacts on select populations.

Divya Iyer
Practice Leader

Divya Iyer is a practice leader for HFS Research, leading industry analysis of banking and financial services and covering the intersection of technology, business, and financial services. She works closely with service providers, financial services enterprise clients, and the broader supporting ecosystem to actualize their goal of articulating the business impact and unlocking value in these relationships. In her two decades of experience, Divya has gained expertise in IT and business services and researched emerging and established digital business models, technologies, startups, and business solutions suppliers.

She focuses on the financial services industry in banking, capital markets, equity research, financial modeling, data analysis, client management, and strategic project development. Prior to HFS Research, Divya spent several years at Copal Amba, a Moody's Analytics subsidiary, covering the insurance and banking sectors for the US and Asia-Pacific markets. She also supported business development activities for the quantitative research division. She has worked with fintech start-ups, leading delivery and strategic growth for their AI solutions platforms.

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