CBINSIGHTS

Here's how leading strategy teams are successfully driving generative AI adoption in their organizations

We surveyed 50 senior strategy leaders to understand their genAI implementation tactics — and why some teams are seeing better results than others.

Generative AI is the #1 tech priority for strategy teams across industries in the next year.

But implementation has lagged, with only 32% of corporate strategy leaders we surveyed with active genAI deployments at their organizations.

This report delves into how leading strategy teams navigate genAI adoption, their key challenges, and the tactics separating successful implementations from stalled initiatives.

You can download the survey response data here.

Note: we define success as deploying at least one genAI solution that delivers measurable business outcomes, such as reduced operational costs or improved customer satisfaction.

The strategy team playbook for genAI adoption

We surveyed 50 strategy team leaders to identify pain points and success stories for genAI adoption

All respondents' key pain points

46%
cite security & privacy risks as a significant headwind to genAI adoption

42%
have competing internal priorities that are inhibiting genAI adoption

40%
say legal & regulatory concerns are slowing their progress

The strategy teams driving successful genAI projects...

Start with **customer-facing applications** to build confidence and demonstrate measurable value

customer service AND **marketing**
see the highest rates of genAI deployment

These departments deploy genAI solutions that:
- personalize content
- reduce wait times
- provide instant analytics

Focus on **addressing security concerns** by

Partnering with established companies that have **robust security frameworks**

Creating **systematic data protection controls with clear guidelines** for secure AI access and usage

Asking for case studies, customer feedback, and referrals from other industry players to **demonstrate a successful track record**

Choose **external solutions** versus building in-house

85%
of teams choose to work with external companies rather than build genAI solutions

Citing...

01 security/ risks
02 lack of expertise
03 costs to build

as why they chose to partner

Note: we define success as deploying at least one genAI solution that delivers measurable business outcomes, such as reduced operational costs or improved customer satisfaction.

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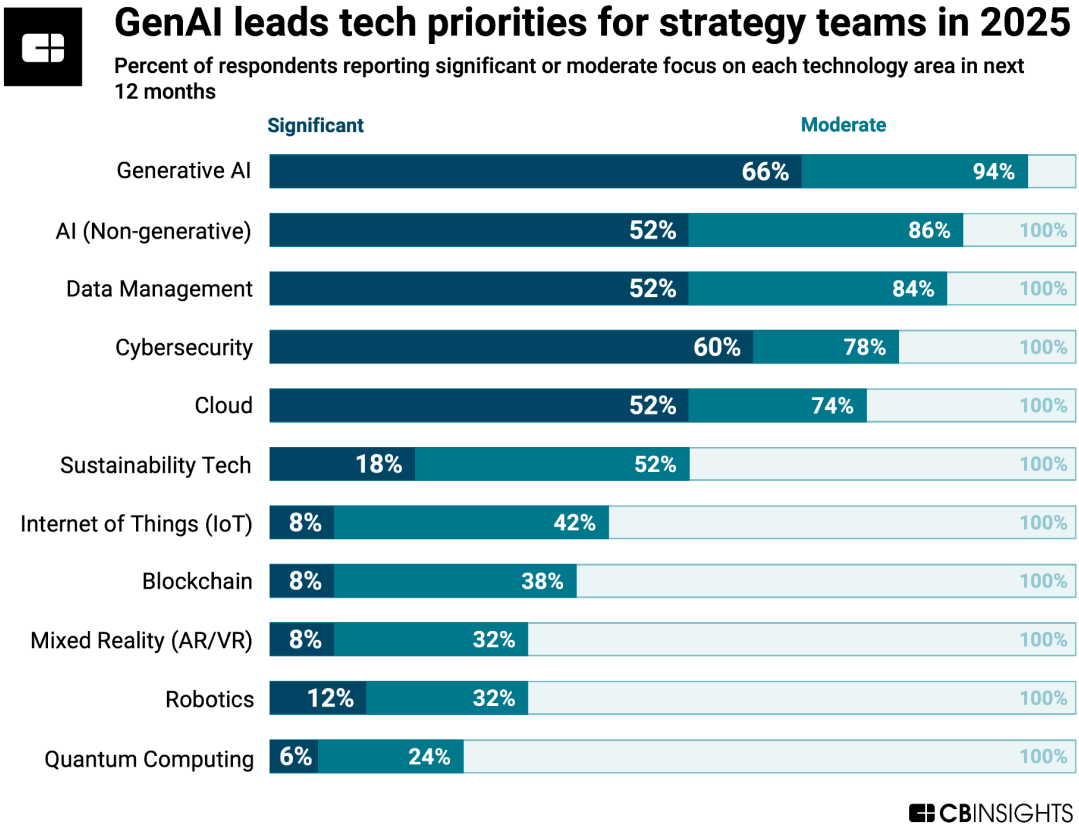
HOW STRATEGY TEAMS ARE PRIORITIZING GENAI

Enabling secure enterprise AI usage emerges as the primary strategic focus

Strategy teams rank generative AI as their top technology priority for the coming year, with 94% of respondents mentioning generative AI as a significant or moderate focus. General AI development is also a top priority (86%).

This was closely followed by data management (84%) and cybersecurity (78%), both of which are required to enable the safe use of genAI within organizations.



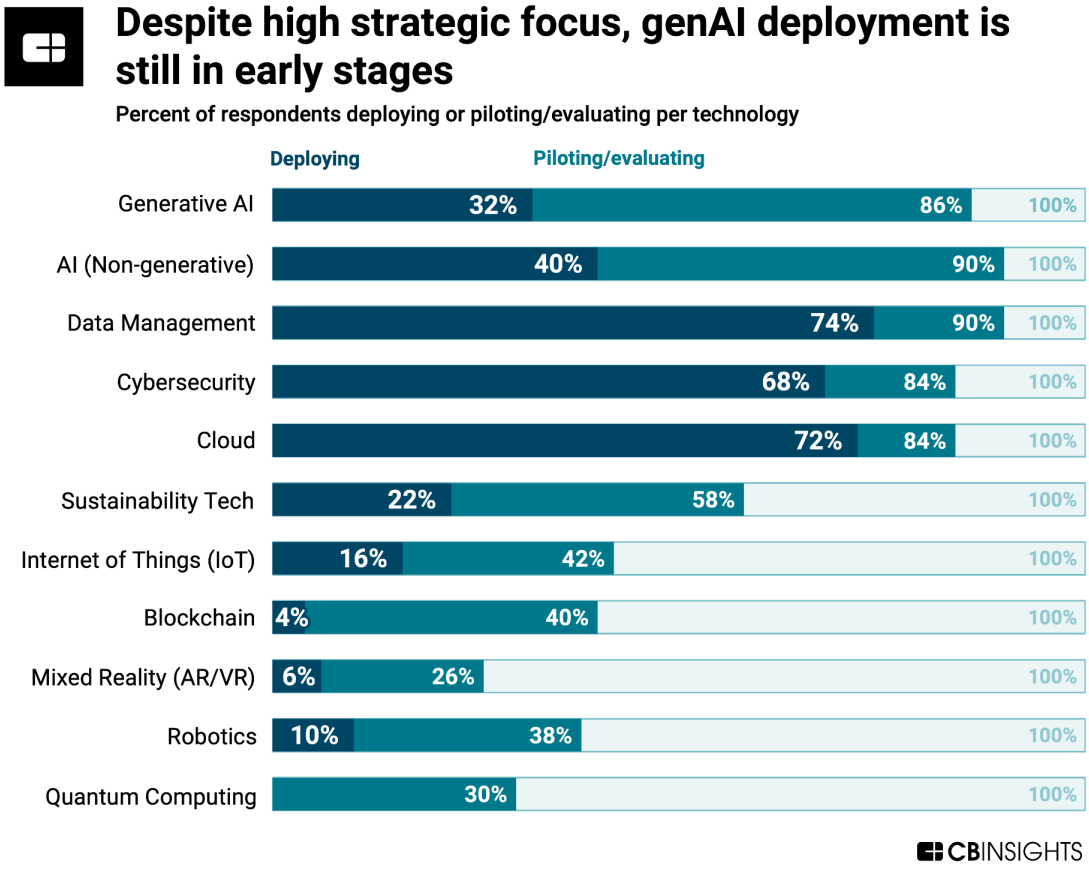
When asked what market or technology is most underrated today, a leading financial services firm said genAI remains underrated:

"Generative AI has the potential to replace, reimagine, and re-create much of the way we interact with technology today. I think we need to spend much more resources, investments, and time evaluating and building AI capabilities." — Director of Strategy at a leading financial services firm

GenAI deployment lags behind other technologies

Generative AI is still in the early adoption phase. Only 32% of respondents have already deployed genAI, and another 54% are in the pilot or evaluation phase.

By comparison, over two-thirds of respondents have already deployed more mature technologies such as data management, cybersecurity, and cloud.



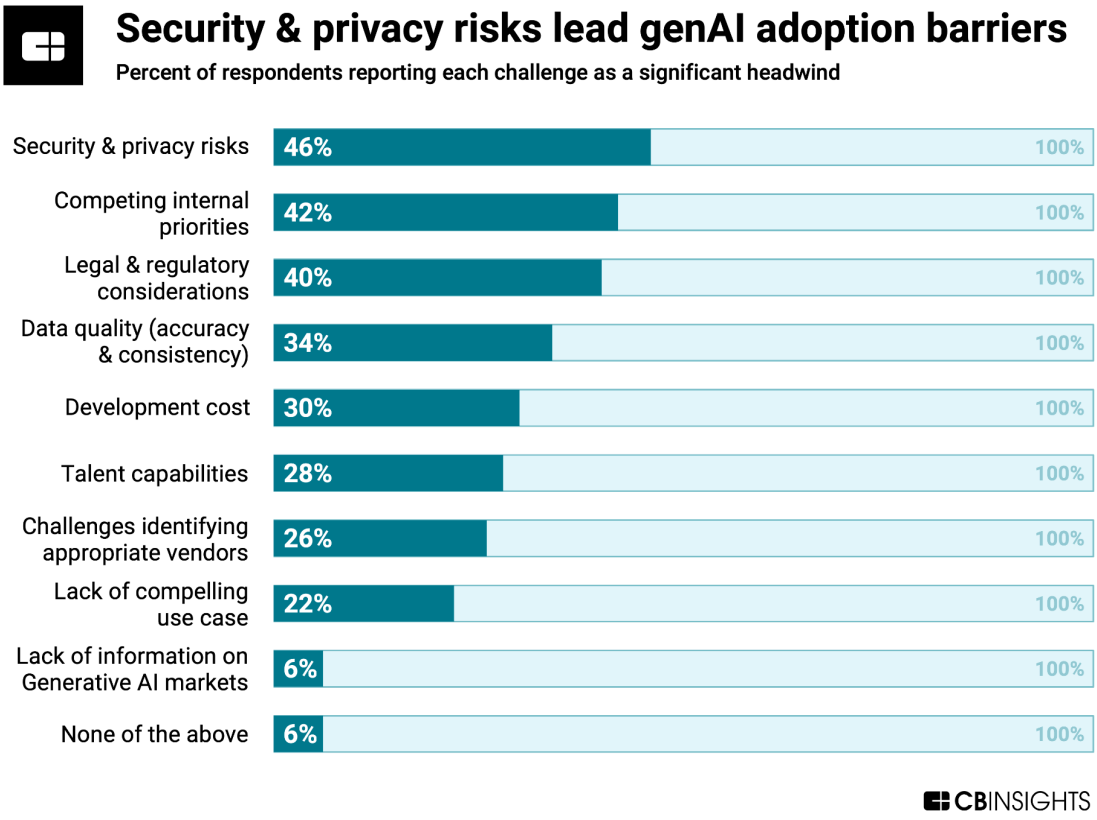
THE MOST COMMON IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

Security and regulatory concerns dominate

Security is the dominant concern for strategy teams implementing genAI, with 46% citing it as a barrier to their organization's adoption. Teams also grapple with competing internal priorities (42%) and legal & regulatory considerations (40%).

Technical and infrastructure challenges like development cost and talent capabilities rank notably lower among implementation barriers.

"There have been a lot of pain points around the use of genAI. If there's anything that could potentially lead to any sort of security breaches or vulnerabilities, that is a huge concern and pain point. We haven't seen anything roll into a production environment on that front, but that's a constant reminder of why we need to pace this very carefully." — SVP at a major financial institution



Strategy teams operating in the financial services and healthcare sectors, which manage highly sensitive customer data, report the highest levels of security concerns. 78% and 73% of respondents in those industries identify either security and/or regulatory issues as significant obstacles to genAI adoption, respectively, compared to only 57% of overall respondents.

Competing internal priorities and resource constraints outweigh technical hurdles

Strategy teams face difficult tradeoffs in allocating limited resources to genAI initiatives, with 42% citing competing internal priorities as a significant barrier to genAI adoption. With computing power, talent, and budget all in high demand, teams must carefully prioritize which genAI projects move forward.

Financial considerations shape these decisions. One tech leader notes: *"Shareholders and investors typically don't want companies to invest heavily in generative AI when the ROI isn't*

definitive and likely to not materialize for many years." This creates tension between long-term innovation goals and short-term resource constraints.

To address these challenges, companies are taking structured approaches to project prioritization. One financial services executive describes their solution of using tiger teams:

"We created a team to put together a playbook for generative AI applications... Some of the pain points have been addressed using tiger teams where you have a small set of experts that are deployed where they're needed. That has made a very big difference."

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND MARKETING ARE THE GO-TO DEPARTMENTS FOR GENAI ADOPTION

Our survey reveals a clear pattern in genAI deployment across business functions: organizations are focusing first on customer-facing departments where use cases are well-defined and outcomes can be clearly measured.

Next, organizations are targeting internal efficiency and process automation in operations and finance departments — both of which show the highest levels of pilot activity.

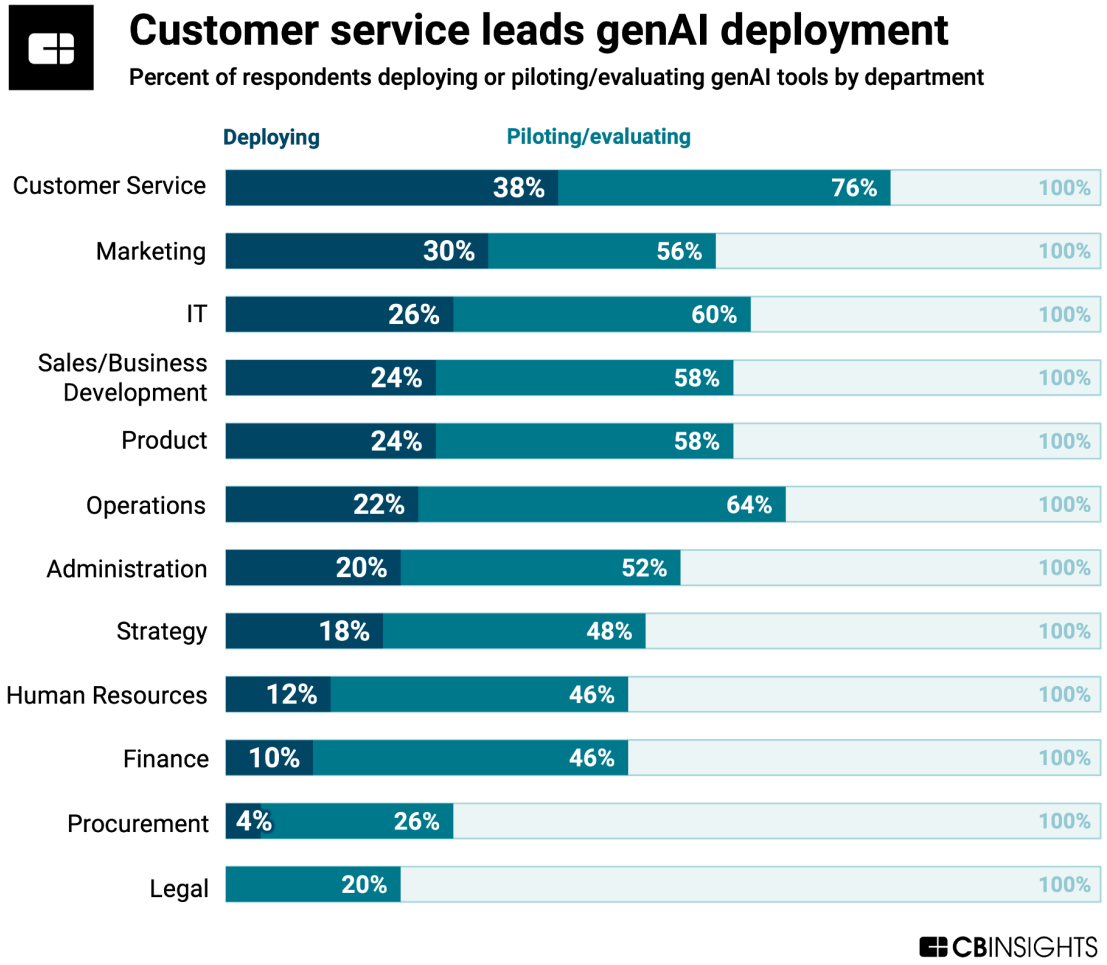
Customer-facing applications lead the way

Customer service (38%) and marketing (30%) lead current genAI deployment.

In customer service, teams implement solutions that improve response times and satisfaction metrics while gathering valuable interaction data. For example, one financial services executive is using genAI to enhance customer support through predictive analytics: *"We're more targeted in how we collect on customer debts…being predictive to identify customers whose change in behavior may indicate the need for a credit solution."*

Marketing departments are deploying genAI for content personalization, campaign optimization, and customer insight generation.

The emphasis on measurable outcomes in these departments — from improved response times to increased engagement rates — provides organizations with clear proof points to support broader adoption.



Operations and back-office functions emerge as the next frontier

While customer-facing departments lead current deployment, operations departments show the highest level of pilot activity (42% of respondents), with finance (36%) following closely.

This shift reflects growing confidence in genAI's capabilities for internal process optimization.

As one financial services executive explains: *"Over the next 12 months, we're going to prioritize regulatory AI. We want to automate compliance checks and generate accurate regulatory reports…[to] reduce the amount of effort that we put into that."*

Early pilots demonstrate efficiency gains across sectors. Healthcare organizations report improvements in clinical documentation and regulatory reporting, while finance teams focus on invoice processing, compliance automation, and risk assessment.

This measured expansion to internal operations indicates organizations are successfully scaling genAI through specific, well-defined use cases rather than broad transformational initiatives.

STRATEGY TEAMS PRIORITIZE EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS TO ACCELERATE GENAI IMPLEMENTATION

Strategy teams favor external partnerships, with 85% opting to partner with or buy from external providers rather than build internally. This approach is particularly effective in regulated industries, where security and compliance requirements present significant adoption barriers.

Security considerations shape implementation

40% of teams cite risk management as their primary vendor selection criterion.

Organizations prioritize providers like Microsoft, AWS, and IBM for their established security frameworks and compliance protocols — capabilities that would require years to develop internally.

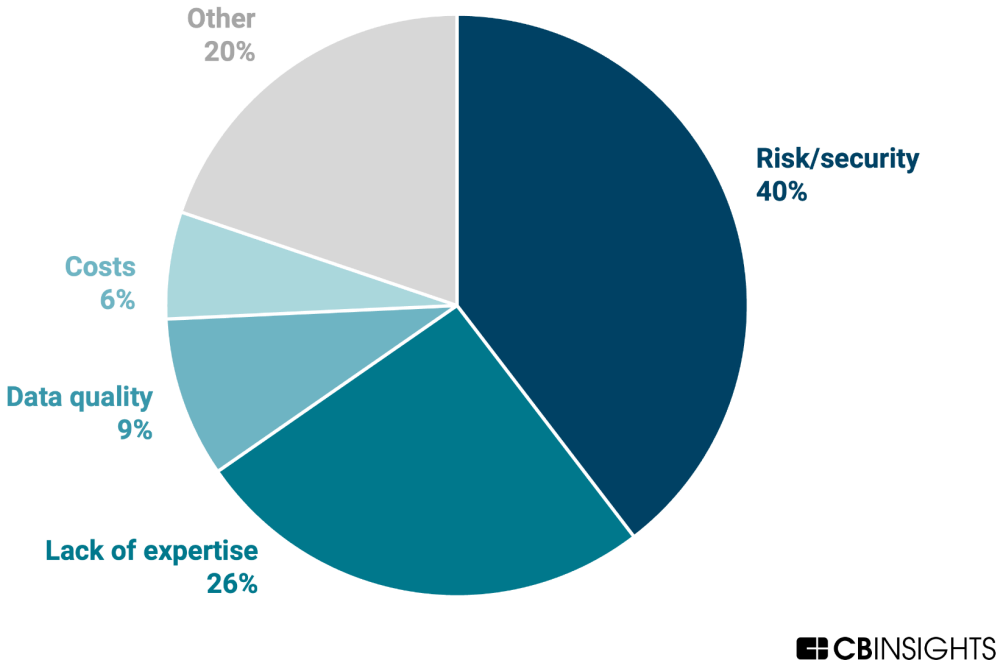
Teams also scrutinize potential providers' data governance frameworks, seeking detailed protocols for data handling, model training transparency, and continuous monitoring of AI outputs.

"Our IT and security teams are very highly involved as they need to clear the teams and the products and the platforms that we have access to, so we try to contain it fairly well." — Director of Strategy at a leading healthcare provider.

This measured approach enables organizations to accelerate deployment while maintaining robust security controls, particularly in sectors managing sensitive customer data.

Security & expertise drives preference for external solutions

Factors driving organizations to choose external genAI solutions (by percentage)



Partnership results

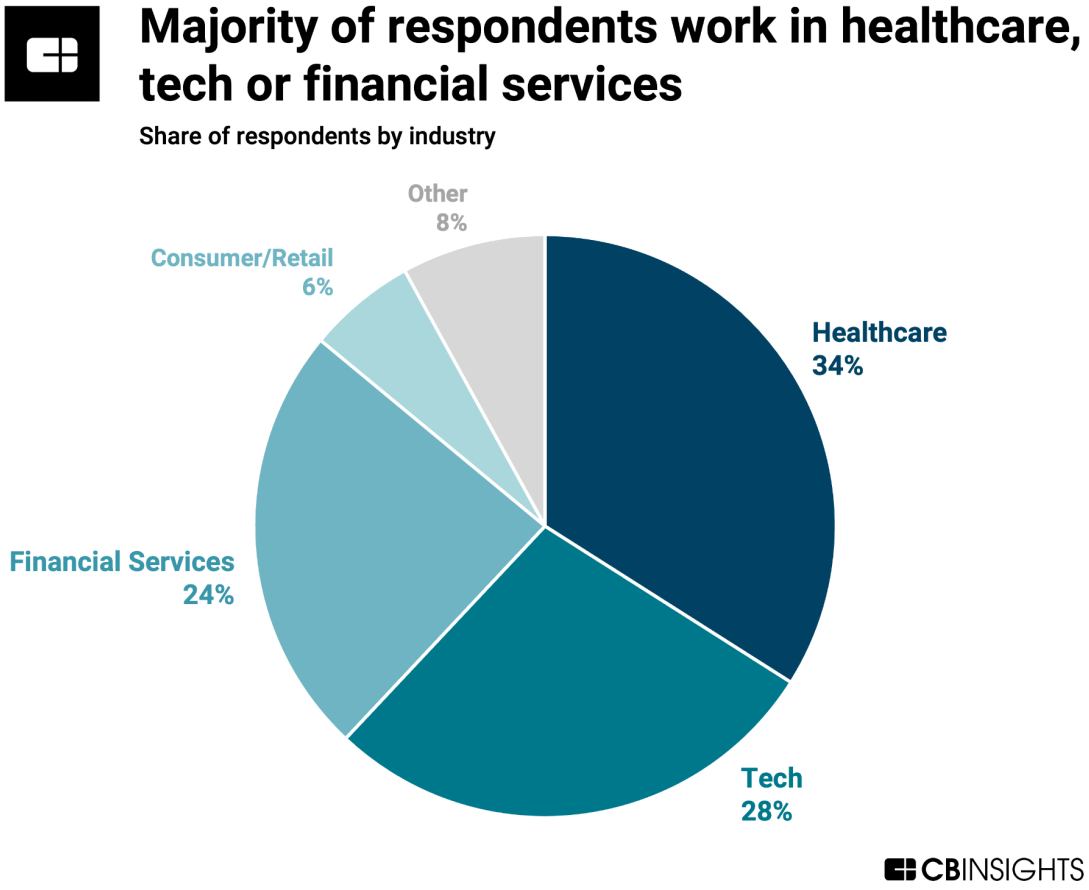
Organizations partnering or buying from external vendors to implement genAI solutions highlight measurable returns, for example:

- One financial services firm reports "somewhere between 30 to 50 percent in savings" through automation and enhanced productivity
- A leading healthcare provider documents customer satisfaction improvements of 30% in departments implementing genAI solutions
- Another financial services company mentioned a 15% reduction in HR administrative time

These examples, combined with the data above, suggest that external partnerships are accelerating time to value while helping organizations manage risks effectively.

APPENDIX: WHO ARE OUR RESPONDENTS?

In August 2024, we surveyed 50 corporate strategy leaders — Director-level or above — working at companies with 200+ employees, both private and publicly listed. This includes titles such as Director of Strategy, VP of Strategy and Corporate Development, and SVP of Strategy and Innovation, among others.

54% of them work at companies generating over $1B in revenue, with the largest company generating close to $80B in revenue.

Of the respondents, the largest cohort works in the healthcare industry (34%), followed by tech (28%) and financial services (24%).