WHITEPAPER | AI

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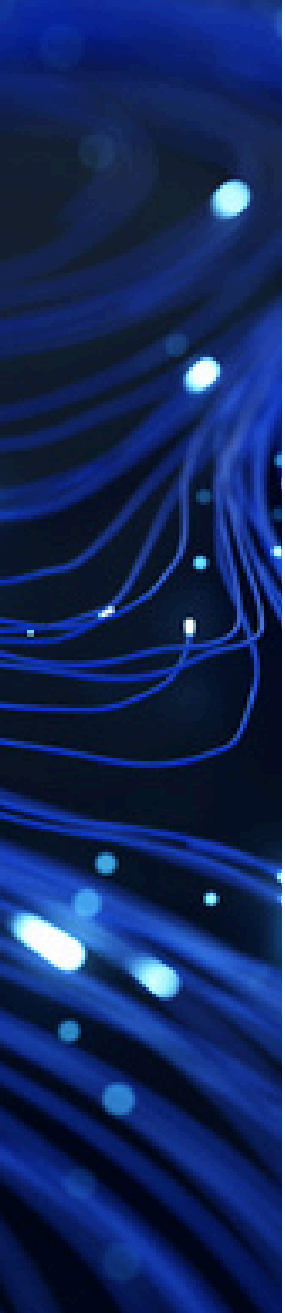
Your guide in the Era of AI.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

THE REALITY CHECK ON AI: TURNING THE HYPE INTO VALUE IN 2025



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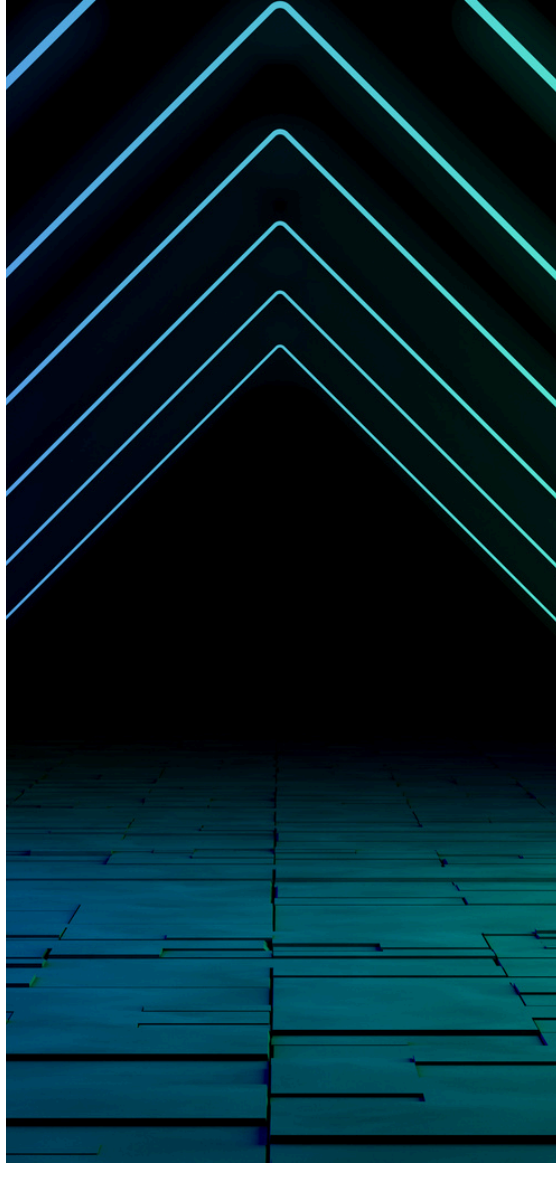
1. Standing still is not an option

After a long run-up and the rapid breakthrough of ChatGPT, followed by the rise of Microsoft Copilot, AI has become a strategic priority for many organizations. This is not a passing trend, but a fundamental shift with unprecedented impact. The potential is enormous, creating not only opportunities but also urgency and tension: those who fail to act now risk falling behind.

The past years have focused on digital transformation and the smart use of technology to work more efficiently and gain competitive advantage. Now that many organizations have optimized their data, processes, and workforce, AI presents itself as the next disruptive force. This brings both opportunities and unexpected challenges, putting pressure on existing plans and budgets. Organizations know they need to embrace AI but struggle with where and how to start. Standing still is not an option—those who do not deploy AI strategically risk being overtaken by competitors who use data and technology more intelligently.

The tip of the iceberg

The urgency to act is amplified by the way AI is fundamentally transforming work. AI not only increases productivity and optimizes processes, but also increasingly takes over "human" and creative tasks effortlessly. Writing, coding, designing, and organizing—tasks once done exclusively by people are now supported or even executed by AI. Companies like Microsoft are responding with Copilots that significantly enhance employee effectiveness and efficiency. And this is just the beginning. How can your organization make the most of these possibilities?



For organizations wanting to adopt AI, questions about privacy, security, and governance immediately become crucial. How do you protect intellectual property and ensure the safety of customer and supplier data? Do you know which data—not just numbers but also documents—is used by AI, and by whom? And how reliable are the answers AI generates? What sources does the model consult? These are essential questions without clear answers, but they do determine the success and responsible use of AI within your organization.

What should you do to accelerate with AI?
So how do you stay in control amid fast-paced AI developments? In this whitepaper, we show how organizations can adapt to this fundamental transformation. We provide concrete steps to successfully get started with AI and offer insights into what's needed to accelerate in the long run. We also highlight the ethical aspects of AI, so you move forward not only technologically but also responsibly. Our goal: help your organization deploy AI strategically and with real impact.

2. AI has been around but is developing faster

Do you see others around you embracing AI? Competitors innovating and discovering new possibilities? AI is no longer futuristic—more and more organizations are using it for predictive analytics, improved customer experiences, and more efficient processes. But what makes this development different from earlier technology trends? The breakthrough of advanced language models (LLMs like OpenAI) has rapidly accelerated AI. Programming knowledge is no longer required—computers now understand and generate language the way we do. As a result, AI is no longer just a powerful business tool, but also an increasingly present part of our everyday lives. And its potential is growing rapidly.

While many are only just getting used to “prompting” and chatting with Copilots, the next wave of innovation is already approaching: AI Agents that carry out tasks independently, ushering in a new phase of hyperautomation. This goes beyond productivity boosts—it transforms the way we work, serve customers, and develop new services.

The question is not whether you should get started with AI, but how to do it in the right way. By acting now, you can unlock the full potential of AI and stay ahead of the competition. But where do you start? We’ve outlined three concrete steps to help you move forward.

AI Agent in finance: smarter fraud detection
An international bank uses AI Agents to detect suspicious transactions in real-time. The AI analyzes huge volumes of payment data, identifies unusual patterns, and immediately blocks suspect transactions. It then informs the customer and, if needed, escalates to a human analyst. This enables faster fraud detection without disrupting the customer experience.

Step 1 – Discover and experiment
The first step is to explore AI by actively experimenting with different use cases. Don’t just focus on well-known tools like ChatGPT, Azure OpenAI, and Copilot Studio, but look for solutions that are tailored to the specific challenges and goals of your organization. Involve teams and professionals to identify bottlenecks and investigate how AI can help address them. Choose two or three concrete use cases to begin with, so you can experience the real potential of AI in practice.

Important: for many, AI is still new and abstract. That’s why it’s essential to introduce it in a familiar context—so employees become comfortable with the technology and understand its value. Once this basic awareness is in place, you can move on to more innovative, out-of-the-box applications. This phased approach increases the likelihood of successful integration and ensures that AI truly adds value to your organization.

Step 2 – Lay the foundation for AI success
By pioneering and experimenting with AI, business and IT will inevitably run into challenges. You may find that data management is insufficient, security doesn't meet required standards, or your cloud architecture and content management—structured and unstructured—aren't ready for large-scale AI use.

This phase is all about evaluation: take a critical look at your initial experiments and determine whether the foundation is solid enough to scale your AI efforts. Identify which preconditions still need work, define what's critical, set priorities, and outline the steps needed to resolve key issues. And above all: take action.

AI Agent in project management: automated workflow optimization
At a consultancy firm, an AI Agent automates the routine tasks of project managers. It gathers status updates, analyzes progress, sends reminders, and prepares meeting agendas. This saves teams valuable time and allows them to focus on strategic decisions rather than administrative tasks.

Step 3 – Embed AI in the organization
When the first experiments prove successful, it's time to take AI to the next level and accelerate. This phase is about enabling the organization to adopt new AI initiatives quickly and at scale. AI should no longer be the domain of just a few innovation teams—it needs to become a core part of how your organization operates.

Leadership and ambassadors
Strong AI vision from top management is essential. New initiatives need encouragement and direction, framed by clear strategic goals. It's also important to appoint ambassadors—employees who actively embrace AI and inspire others. They play a vital role in adoption, helping the AI mindset spread organically throughout the organization. But be aware: AI adoption is not a one-time, top-down exercise. The technology evolves quickly and requires an agile approach. Continuous learning, collaboration, and iteration are key to success.

AI pioneers at the operational level
In addition to strategic leadership, it's essential to identify employees at the operational and tactical levels who see opportunities and are willing to experiment. These early adopters bring AI to life in practice and inspire both their peers and management with tangible successes.

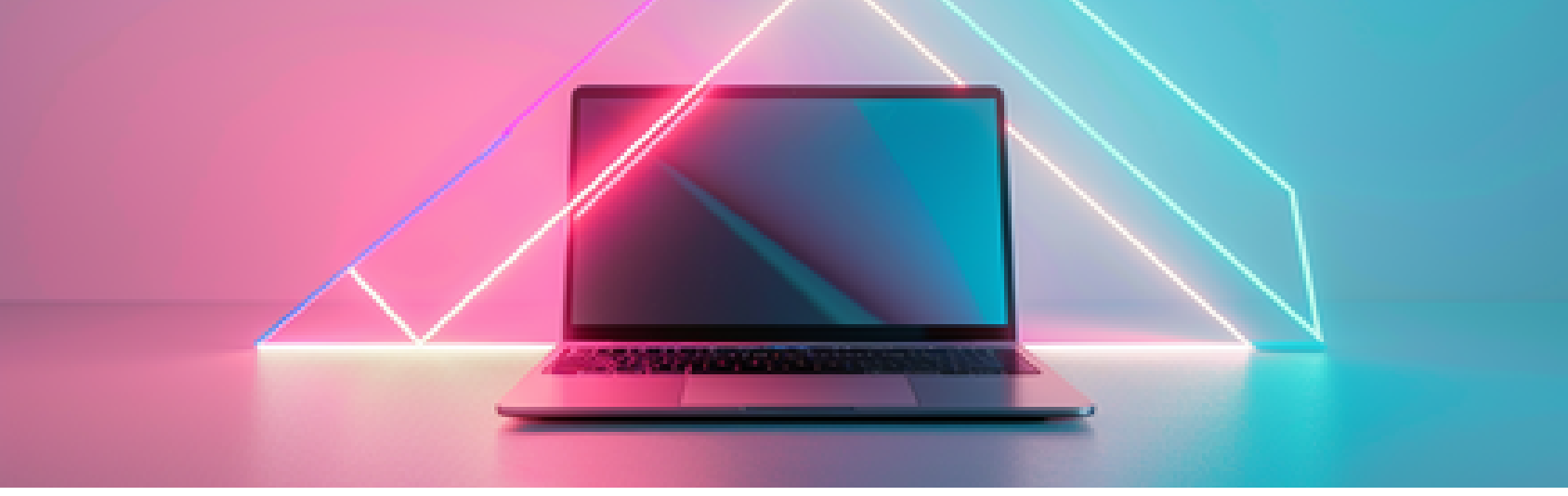
This combined approach—clear vision from the top, ambassadors across the organization, and pioneers on the ground—creates a culture in which AI is no longer something new or experimental, but a natural and essential part of day-to-day operations.

Step 4 – Scale up and secure
Successfully using AI involves more than a few promising experiments. This phase is about structurally embedding AI within the organization so that you can not only benefit from early wins, but also expand them in a sustainable way.

Build a strong governance structure
A solid foundation starts with clear agreements about data, compliance, ethics, and quality. Who is responsible for which data? How are privacy and security safeguarded? And how do you measure the success of AI applications? Governance is not a static document, but a living framework that must be continuously evaluated and adapted to the rapid developments in AI.

Establish a center of excellence
Another key step is to set up a center of excellence (CoE) for AI. This serves as an internal hub of knowledge and expertise where best practices, tools, and frameworks are developed and shared. A CoE ensures a consistent and efficient approach, helps coordinate new AI initiatives, and prevents AI from developing in silos within the organization.

Moreover, a CoE offers a platform for further innovation. It fosters a culture in which AI is no longer a stand-alone experiment but an integrated part of operations and strategic growth. With this approach, AI becomes more than a hype—it becomes a lasting and valuable force in your organization.



Step 5 – AI as a strategic spearhead
The final step is to firmly anchor AI in your business strategy. AI is no longer just a loose experiment or innovative add-on, but becomes a strategic pillar in your organization's vision for the future.

This means including AI structurally in investment decisions and having clarity on where it adds real value—for customers (through new services or better experiences), for employees (by automating repetitive tasks and developing new skills), and for shareholders (through more efficient processes and new growth opportunities).

AI in elke laag van de organisatie
To function as a strategic spearhead, AI must reach all layers of the organization—from top-level strategy to operational teams. This requires close coordination with your center of excellence and governance structure so that AI is not only implemented, but also continuously optimized and aligned with changing market conditions and business objectives.

By no longer treating AI as a "cool gadget" but as an integral part of your strategy, you can turn the hype into lasting value and future-proof your organization.

Make conscious choices
Not every AI solution contributes to your strategic goals. Focus on applications that demonstrably deliver competitive advantage and develop a clear roadmap. Define which priorities, resources, and expertise are needed to deploy AI effectively and sustainably.

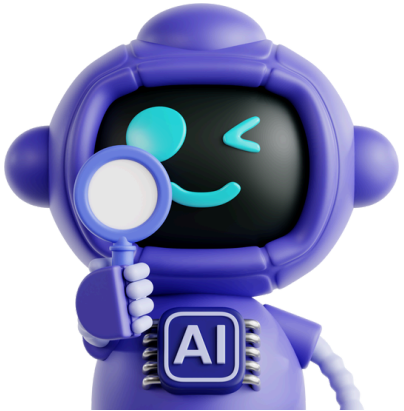
5. The AI landscape: from algorithms to intelligent agents

AI comes in many forms and applications—but what exactly are the differences? Where we once mostly dealt with algorithms helping us plan routes or suggest products, we now see powerful new technologies such as machine learning, generative AI, copilots, and AI agents. Each plays a different role and has a different impact in organizations. Here's a quick overview of the key AI types and how they differ.

Machine Learning
Machine learning is a powerful form of AI that enables computers to recognize patterns in data and make predictions or decisions based on those patterns. By learning from existing data, the system becomes increasingly accurate at spotting trends, forecasting demand, or classifying information. Think personalized recommendations in webshops or detecting fraud based on abnormal patterns. The real power of machine learning lies in its ability to process huge amounts of data at lightning speed. This gives organizations deeper insights and allows them to respond to market developments faster and smarter.

Generative AI (GenAI)
Generative AI goes beyond analyzing data—it creates entirely new content. From text and images to music and even code, this technology unlocks countless possibilities. Think automatically generated articles, prototype designs, or creative concept generation.

GenAI is not just a supporting tool—it can actually create and inspire. That makes it a powerful catalyst for innovation, but it also brings challenges. How do you deal with ownership rights? How do you ensure quality and ethics? A mindful approach is essential to use this technology both effectively and responsibly.

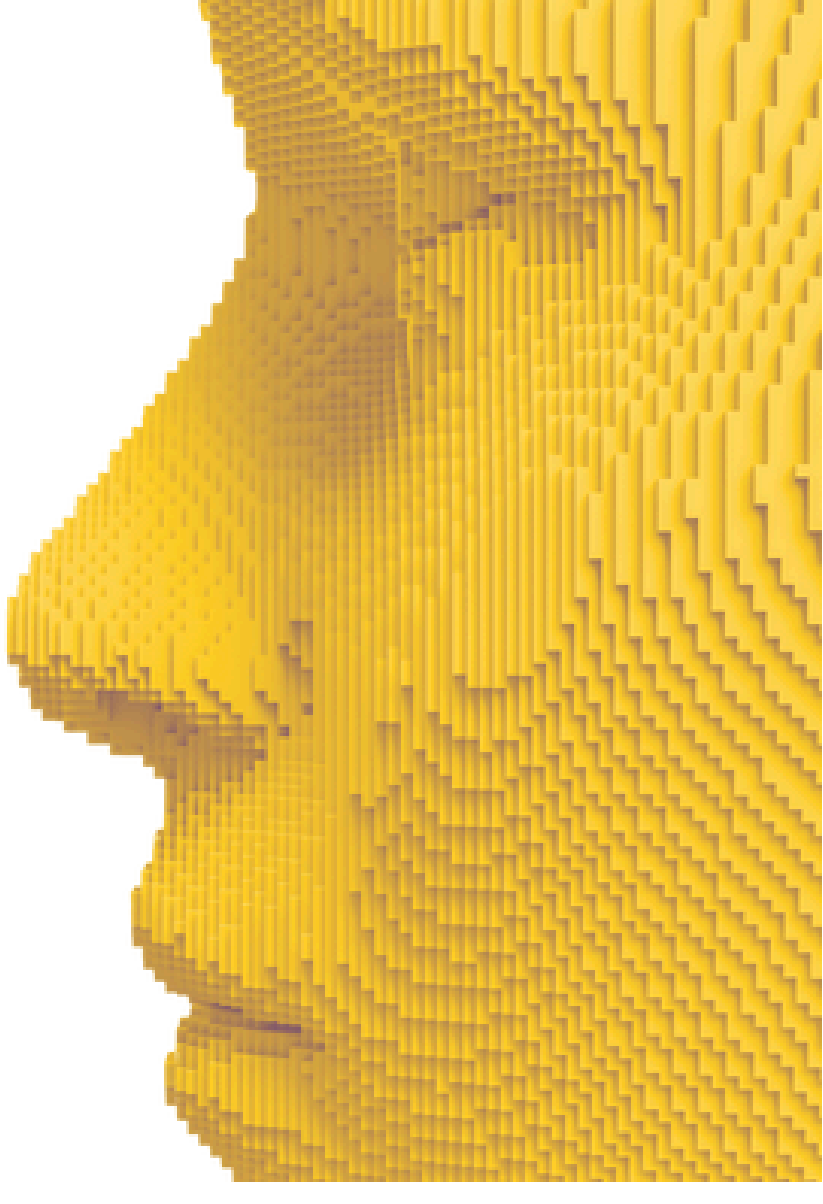


Copilot
A copilot is an AI assistant that supports your workflows and helps you carry out tasks more quickly and efficiently. Instead of taking over work, a copilot works with you—offering suggestions, generating documents, and analyzing data. Think of it as a smart colleague that never takes a break and can dive into large amounts of information instantly.

Copilots are rapidly gaining popularity, with examples like GitHub Copilot for developers and Microsoft 365 Copilot for office workers. These tools boost creativity and productivity without users needing to understand the technical side of AI.

Agentic AI
Agentic AI goes one step further than copilots and includes systems that autonomously execute tasks based on goals or instructions. Where a copilot supports you with suggestions, an AI agent can actually take action—either independently or in coordination with the user.

Imagine a virtual project manager that not only summarizes your emails but also sends meeting invites and retrieves relevant documents. This level of autonomy can lead to far-reaching automation and significantly impact how teams collaborate, make decisions, and organize their work. The challenge lies in maintaining control: clear governance and ethical guidelines are essential to keep track of the decisions AI makes.



4. The ethics of AI

DThe rise of AI is bringing a revolution—but it also sparks an important conversation about compliance and ethical implications. The ethics of AI revolve around the responsible development and deployment of intelligent systems, with attention to transparency, accountability, fairness, privacy, and inclusivity.

This presents a challenge that can sometimes conflict with the groundbreaking potential of AI. What we're seeing now is that many AI tools are developed primarily to rapidly conquer the market. On the ethics front, many of these tools are still quite immature. However, there are also players who embrace the ethical debate and are focused on generating positive impact. Our advice: experiment on a mature platform that does take ethics seriously. Microsoft is absolutely leading the way here.

OpenAI data is safe

Unlike other providers, Microsoft does not share your organization's OpenAI data. Valuable data from your company remains protected and will not end up in the hands of competitors.

Microsoft's vision on AI ethics

Microsoft has a clear and comprehensive vision on ethics in AI. Their focus lies on fostering trust, transparency, and accountability in the development and implementation of AI technologies. One of the key pillars is ensuring inclusivity and diversity in AI solutions. Microsoft aims to minimize bias and discrimination in AI and create equal opportunities for all users.

In addition, Microsoft is committed to transparency and user control over how AI processes data and makes decisions. They want people to understand how AI works and give them the ability to influence its outcomes.

Security and protection are also central. Microsoft invests heavily in detecting and addressing risks within AI systems to prevent misuse. They also work closely with governments, academic institutions, and the tech community to develop standards and guidelines that ensure responsible use of AI. Want to know more? In this blog post, they share their blueprint for the future of AI and the responsibilities of all parties involved.

Getting started

Are you curious about how your organization can best leverage the possibilities of AI? We'd be happy to help. Book a free AI Masterclass session with our experts. In this inspiring session, we'll dive into your organization's challenges and show how AI can help solve them. You'll leave the session with a prototype for an AI experiment. Time for action!

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Microsoft & Macaw: strategic partners in digital transformation

Looking for an experienced, driven, and successful Microsoft partner? For over 30 years, Macaw has been a pioneer in innovation and Microsoft technology. As your guide in the era of AI, we're committed to transforming your organization, making it future-proof, and creating strong differentiation. We help you succeed by delivering innovative strategies and solutions through the combination of data, technology, and creativity. Our team has a proven track record at companies like Heineken and VGZ.

Our experts are happy to help!

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