

RIPPING UP THE RULEBOOK

How AI is driving
corporate reinvention

Artificial intelligence is not merely another technical tool in the executive toolbox. It is a force so transformative that it shakes the very foundations of organizational design. That bold statement is, if anything, not bold enough.

The scale and pace of AI-driven transformations are staggering. By 2030, AI is projected to create millions of new jobs, reshape millions more, displace millions of others, and contribute nearly \$20 trillion to the global economy^{1,2,3}. The majority of organizations will have AI agents as core contributors, and the net effect will be a workforce that is more dynamic, creative, and resilient than ever before.

But this transformation is not without challenges. Middle management and process- or routine-heavy roles will be reassessed for automation potential, and organizations must invest in reskilling programs focused on creative and ethical leadership. New governance models for human-AI collaboration will be essential, as will flatter organizational structures with expanded spans of control.

As we approach 2030, the “corporation of the future” will look radically different from the hierarchical, slow-moving organizations of the past. The time to adapt is now, because it is easier to change an organization before it becomes calcified. Those who cling to outdated structures risk being overtaken and ultimately rendered obsolete.

Sources:

1. World Economic Forum, “How AI Will Reshape 86% of businesses by 2030”
2. World Economic Forum, Future of Jobs Report 2025
3. IDC, “Artificial Intelligence Will Contribute \$19.9 Trillion to the Global Economy through 2030 and Drive 3.5% of Global GDP in 2030”

FROM TITANS TO TRAILBLAZERS: THE CASE FOR CHANGE











A glance at the Fortune 500 rankings over time reveals a sobering truth: corporate dominance is fleeting. Of the top 10 companies in 2000, only 2 (Walmart and Exxon Mobil) remain in the top 10 in 2025. This churn is more than a matter of market cycles; it is a reflection of how organizations respond—or fail to respond—to seismic shifts in technology, the structure of demand, and consumer expectations.

Some of those companies fell from the top ranks because disruption left them less important; others were knocked out of the top ten because of the rapid growth of new

companies—Cencora, #10 on the 2025 list, was formed by a merger in 2001. But one of the common traits of companies that failed to transform in the first quarter of the century has been an inability to adapt to required organizational and operating model changes. Rigid hierarchies and bureaucratic inertia aren't just outdated—they're dangerous liabilities in an age where AI moves faster than any human chain of command. In today's landscape, those who cling to the old playbook risk being left behind as AI-driven competitors outpace, outmaneuver, and ultimately outlast them. Adapt or become obsolete: that's the new reality.

ADAPT OR BE OVERTAKEN: 2000'S TOP 10 TITANS GAVE WAY TO 2025'S NEW POWERHOUSES

U.S. Fortune 500 in year 2000

1	 General Motors
2	 Walmart
3	 ExxonMobil
4	 Ford
5	 General Electric
6	 Coca-Cola
7	 citi
8	 AT&T
9	 Altria
10	 BOEING

U.S. Fortune 500 in year 2025

1	 Walmart
2	 amazon
3	 United Healthcare
4	 Apple
5	 CVS Health.
6	 BERKSHIRE HATHAWAY INC.
7	 Alphabet
8	 ExxonMobil
9	 MCKESSON
10	 cencora

AI: CATALYST, NOT CRUTCH

AI is not here to optimize old structures; it is here to obliterate them. Traditional hierarchies, built for an age of predictable change and incremental improvement, struggled to keep up with the transformations wrought by disruption; they are utterly unequipped to deal with the even more rapid pace of AI-driven change. This is not just about automating repetitive tasks or squeezing out marginal efficiencies. AI is enabling entirely new ways of working, collaborating, and creating value.

Already, hyper-personalized workflows can analyze individual work patterns to automate repetitive tasks (such as data entry or scheduling), freeing employees to focus on higher-value-added work. AI is also shifting organizations from reactive to proactive strategies by analyzing real-time data, reducing reliance on lagging KPIs, and empowering teams to act on foresight rather than hindsight. AI-powered

applications like Stack AI and Asana AI enable faster problem-solving and reduce dependency on centralized expertise.

New value-creation frontiers include opportunities to not only save time and money, but also accelerate innovation, shorten product development cycles, and identify new untapped revenue streams.

Organizations that treat AI as an add-on to existing processes will fall behind. Instead, the winners will be those who view AI as a catalyst for reinvention, redesigning workflows, decision-making, and even the nature of leadership itself.

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THE ANATOMY OF REINVENTION CHAMPIONS

What will set apart the organizations that thrive in this new era? Case studies from previous periods of disruption at Apple, Google, and Microsoft provide us with some clues.

All three share origins as classic Silicon Valley disruptors, but over time, they have also had to face new challenges from emerging competitors, new technologies, and a shifting marketplace. Apple, for example, by the mid-1990s, faced existential threats from mounting financial losses and fading market relevance. Founder Steve Jobs' return as CEO in 1997 marked a turning point. He slashed unnecessary projects, streamlined the product line, and refocused the company on design, user experience, and innovation.

Google is another tech giant that has reinvented itself over time, evolving from a search engine startup into a global technology ecosystem, which includes email, mapping, video, browsers, and cloud computing, among

other initiatives. Each new venture was built on Google's strengths in data, algorithms, and user-centric design. Introduced by its founders, Larry Page and Sergey Brin, Google's "20% time" policy allowed employees to spend up to one-fifth of their workweek on passion projects, which harnessed employee creativity and autonomy, fueling innovation and a spirit of entrepreneurship within the organization.

Under CEO Satya Nadella, Microsoft pivoted from a "Windows-first" mentality to a "cloud-first" and "mobile-first" strategy. He championed a cultural transformation at the organization from one of silos to one of collaboration, characterized by openness, cross-functional teamwork, and a "growth mindset." This mindset helped set the stage for Microsoft's early investments in OpenAI and other platforms and tools, positioning it well for the AI revolution now taking place.

HOW LEADING COMPANIES SUCCEED AT REINVENTING THEMSELVES



1. Strategic vision and ambition

Apple's pivot to consumer electronics, Google's "20% time," which fueled innovations like Gmail, and Microsoft's cloud-first transformation all demonstrate the power of bold, future-facing leadership.



3. Customer-centric innovation

Reinvention champions keep their focus on delivering value to customers. They embed customer needs into innovation pipelines and continuously iterate on both products and processes.



2. Cultural adaptability

These companies foster cultures where change is seen as an opportunity, not a threat.

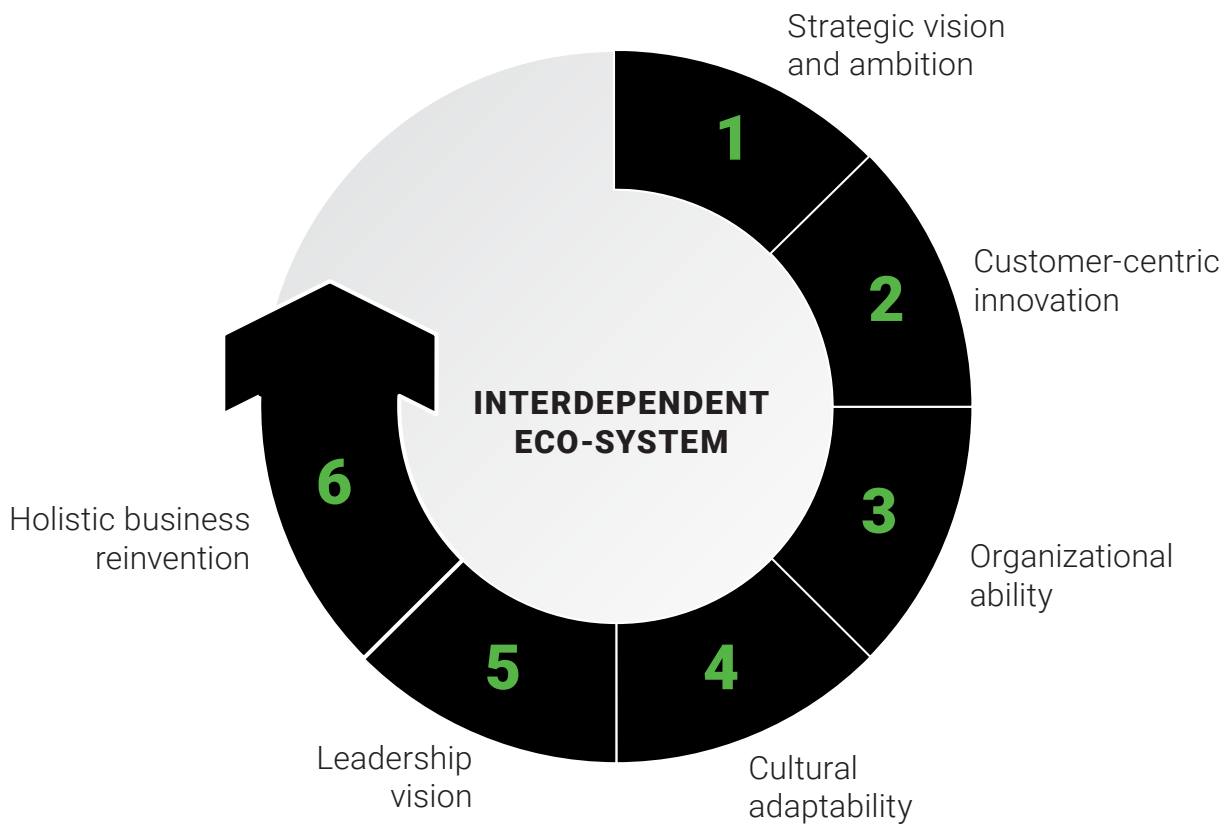


4. Holistic business reinvention

They view transformation as an ongoing journey, not a one-time event. This means balancing audacious long-term goals with iterative execution, and fostering an ecosystem in which experimentation is encouraged and rewarded.

As we will see, AI changes all four of these shared characteristics of reinvention champions: in degree (by accelerating them) and also in kind (by making new things possible).

**CORPORATE REINVENTION IS NOT A ONE-TIME EVENT BUT A
CONTINUOUS PROCESS OF ADAPTATION**



HOW LEADERS DRIVE REINVENTION



Balance audacious long-term goals with iterative execution



Embed customer needs into innovation pipelines



Foster cultures that view change as an opportunity rather than a threat

ROADMAP AND NEXT STEPS



As industries face accelerating disruption, these principles offer a **roadmap for sustained relevance**, proving that even century-old enterprises can **rewrite their futures through deliberate, courageous reinvention**



Lessons from the front lines: **AGILITY SAVES LIVES**

As AI becomes central to how organizations compete and deliver value, success increasingly depends not just on technology, but on how companies are structured to adopt and scale it. AI-driven transformation demands collaboration across domains, rapid experimentation, and decision-making that cuts across silos. Many companies have begun to rethink their operating models for the AI era and have started to implement changes to make themselves more conducive towards corporate reinvention.

The Mayo Clinic's approach to medical innovation offers a powerful analogy for corporate reinvention. By breaking down silos, co-locating labs with operating rooms, and fostering multi-disciplinary teams, Mayo has been able to accelerate treatment, eliminate waste, and drive breakthrough innovations. Hierarchies are flattened, opinions from all experts are valued, and a culture of continuous learning prevails.

Mayo explicitly states that “traditional silos and barriers don’t exist” in its environment. This is achieved through intentional organizational design, where collaboration is not just encouraged but required to meet the clinic’s sky-high standards for care and innovation. Shared resources and centralized budgeting prevent competition between departments, ensuring that all teams work toward unified goals rather than individual departmental interests.

Multidisciplinary teams—including physicians, nurses, specialists, and allied health professionals—are the norm. These teams collaborate closely, often in co-located spaces, to facilitate real-time communication and joint decision-making. For example, in complex cases such as rare cancers, Mayo brings together medical oncologists, surgeons, radiologists, and pathologists to collectively develop and execute patient-centered treatment plans.

Every decision and innovation at Mayo is filtered through the lens of what is best for the patient. This patient-first philosophy naturally encourages specialists from various disciplines to work together, as no single specialty can address every aspect of a patient's complex needs.

The corporate parallel is clear: client focus, agility, cross-functional collaboration, and a test-and-learn mindset are essential. The integration of practical AI solutions **deepens the impact and further accelerates** each of these key attributes.



THE ORGANIZATION OF 2030: FROM PYRAMID TO NETWORK

Hierarchical systems are rooted in the history of the modern corporation. Clear chains of command provide essential systems of coordination and control. Divisional structures create a means for the allocation of capital among different business units and functions. As organizations evolved over time, these pyramidal structures were seen as driving efficiency in mass production due to their supervisory aspects, along with greater productivity thanks to their division of labor. These structures made it easy to assign responsibility, ensure compliance, and maintain control through layers of middle management.

However, they also introduced a number of inefficiencies. Traditional hierarchies tend to be rigid and slow to adapt to change—a clear challenge in today's fast-moving and volatile world. Siloed and poor communication can stifle innovation and lead to missed opportunities or slow problem-solving. Cross-functional collaboration can also prove difficult, and centralized decision-making can create bottlenecks. And decision-making in hierarchies can privilege bureaucratic needs ("politics") over market signals.

Executives have bemoaned these problems for decades. However, the history of experimentation with alternative, more networked corporate structures has frequently been one of false starts. Over-matrixing at some organizations, with multiple reporting hierarchies, created decision paralysis. Eliminating managers at other organizations caused high attrition as employees struggled with self-management, and productivity dipped.

That was before AI, though, which enables workflows and entire roles to be fully automated. In an AI world, the "work to be done" will mostly be innovation, troubleshooting, and implementing fixes to the troubleshooting. Much of the rest will be automated. These particular activities lend themselves perfectly to a networked model, and this time, we have the technology to make it work. Yes, capital still needs to be allocated; yes, someone needs to determine the work that is automated; but the work of creating and adding value can now be divorced—to a much larger extent than ever before—from the execution of tasks that do not add value.

Layers of supervision and control can be eliminated through programming, allowing organizations to decentralize authority. Individuals and teams will be able to act on real-time data and insights, which was never feasible in the past.

With these AI capabilities both at the individual contributor (via AI agents) and managerial (via agents or assistants) levels, spans of control can be widened tremendously and, in some cases, will only exist for specific projects or use cases. With these project-based team structures, traditional hierarchies become less necessary.

This shift is no longer a theoretical ideal, but a practical necessity, driven by competitive pressures and enabled by technology that simply did not exist two decades ago. As a result, companies that embrace networked, adaptive structures will actually be positioned to respond faster, innovate more effectively, and thrive in an environment where agility and intelligence are paramount. This new era will demand a new organizational blueprint—one that is dynamic, decentralized, and designed for continuous evolution.

One of the reasons that our traditional view of a disruptor is a startup with few employees and little overhead is that this kind of company is nimble and lacks the legacy operating models and systems that get in the way of innovation. To paraphrase the immortal Wayne Gretzky, they are able to skate to where the puck is going. The weakness of these startups is that they lack the functional muscle to scale their innovations; but that is exactly what AI can change.

To be successful in an age when that puck is flying faster than ever, companies must fundamentally rethink how they are structured. By 2030, we believe that the traditional hierarchical pyramid will be giving way to a modern networked structure.

Key attributes of the networked organization of 2030 will include:

Decentralized decision-making

Power shifts from the center to the edge, with AI enabling rapid, data-driven decisions at all levels. Frontline employees, empowered by AI assistants, can make micro-strategic calls in real-time. CEOs and other senior leaders continue to set overall strategy and collective goals. But now they aren't just managing people, but a hybrid, agentic-enabled workforce. They no longer need to rely on backward-looking quarterly operational reviews—they can see what is happening in real time—and can devote their attention to looking ahead.

What are the control mechanisms in the absence of a layer of middle management? That entails building ethics into your AI infrastructure. Real-time "Bias SWAT teams" can replace traditional compliance functions (or perhaps whole departments), auditing AI systems continuously, assuming they are built with proper logic and rigor.

Hybrid workforce composition

A hybrid workforce becomes the norm, with humans and AI agents working side by side, enabling their combined strengths to drive productivity, innovation, and value creation. AI agents will not just be tools but active participants in teams, autonomously handling repetitive, data-driven, or administrative tasks, supporting humans so they can focus on creative, strategic, and interpersonal work.

New roles such as AI Integration Specialists, Human-AI Collaboration Managers, and Chief AI Ethics Officers will emerge, while roles like administrative assistants and data entry clerks decline. Already, today, at Databricks, AI orchestrators personalize and manage training programs, significantly speeding up course development and customization.

Fluid leadership roles

Leaders will be defined less by title and more by their ability to orchestrate teams, drive innovation, and manage human-AI ecosystems. Leadership as a service becomes the norm. Executives rotate across projects, acting more like "strategy DJs" than permanent titleholders. Teams are led by "Chief Innovation Sherpas" who blend AI tools with human imagination, prioritizing creativity over rigid process.

A focus on human-centric skills is crucial. While AI handles data analysis, automation, and routine decisions, leaders must excel in strategic thinking, the creation of decision-making frameworks, and the kind of out-of-the-box innovation that has historically driven human progress—conceiving ideas and solutions beyond the reach of today's algorithms. Leaders must also embrace emotional intelligence, empathy, relationship-building, and communication—all skills that AI cannot replicate.

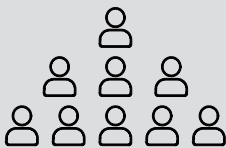
Cross-functional workflows

Silos dissolve as teams form and reform around projects, opportunities, and challenges, leveraging both human and AI strengths. Project teams are formed around problems and opportunities, not static functions. When a project is finished (the objective is achieved), the team dissolves, and the team members move back into their "home pod", where they refine and advance their expertise until they are tapped to work on their next project. UX designers and AI trainers may co-own product launches; crisis responders and AI models share "war rooms."

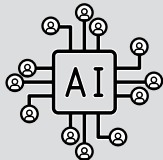
HOW WILL ORGANIZATIONS LOOK IN 2030?

HIERARCHY

Today: Traditional hierarchical pyramid



2030: Modern network structure










WHAT ELSE IS CHANGING








- Decision-making processes
- Reporting relationships
- Workforce composition
- Departmental structure
- Leadership roles

JOB ROLE TRANSFORMATION BY 2030

▼ DECLINING ROLES BY 2030

	Middle Managers
	Administrative Assistants
	Data Entry Clerks
	Bookkeepers
	Customer Service Representatives
	Cashiers and Retail Associates
	Quality Control Inspectors

▲ EMERGING ROLES BY 2030

	AI Integration Specialists
	Data Scientists
	Human-AI Collaboration Managers
	Chief AI Ethics Officers
	Digital Transformation Consultants
	AI Training Specialists
	Cross-Functional Project Leaders

THE ROADMAP TO AN AI-ENABLED ORGANIZATION

Transitioning to an AI-native organization is not a leap but a journey. Regardless of where you are on that journey, it's important to ask yourself a few important questions:

1 Are the overall objectives and metrics for AI outcomes well-defined?

If you don't know what you want to get out of the AI efforts and how you want to measure success against those goals and objectives, you are certain to fail out of the gate.

2 In alignment with the objective and metrics, are we sure we are identifying and prioritizing the highest-impact use cases?

Once you know what success looks like, use those goals and metrics to identify and prioritize the use cases that will have the highest returns.

3 Are the teams working on these use cases organized in an agile way?

Each use case will require a single "business owner", typically an executive leader, flanked by a cross functional team of business ambassadors from the key departments that touch the process. This team should be guided by a scrum master and supported by an AI development team that includes all necessary key engineers, data scientists, UI/UX, and quality experts.

4 Are we embedding the right level of governance in this from the start?

Don't interpret this the wrong way, the "right level" of governance means you cannot over-govern, nor under-govern. The key is to ensure all resources are focused on the highest-priority use cases, establish the right project goals and metrics, then let teams run toward those goals and metrics.

THE ROADMAP TO AN AI-ENABLED ORGANIZATION

1. **Assess** middle management roles for AI automation potential
2. **Develop** hybrid team structures that integrate AI agents
3. **Invest** in reskilling programs focused on creative and ethical leadership
4. **Create** flatter organizational structures with expanded spans of control
5. **Establish** new governance models for human-AI collaboration
6. **Design** cross-functional workflows enabled by AI coordination

THE ADAPTIVE FUTURE

The era of AI demands a new kind of organization—one that is adaptive, networked, and relentlessly focused on learning and reinvention. Hierarchies will become relics; agility, creativity, and collaboration will define the winners. As AI joins the org chart—not as a tool, but as a colleague and co-creator—the rulebook is being rewritten in real time.

The future belongs to those who embrace this change, who see AI not as a threat but as an opportunity to build organizations that are faster, smarter, and more human than ever before. The time to act is now. The question is not whether your organization will change, but whether it will lead or lag in the age of AI.

[Click here to learn how AlixPartners helps organizations lead in the age of AI](#)

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ABOUT US

For more than forty years, AlixPartners has helped businesses around the world respond quickly and decisively to their most critical challenges—circumstances as diverse as urgent performance improvement, accelerated transformation, complex restructuring, and risk mitigation.

These are the moments when everything is on the line—a sudden shift in the market, an unexpected performance decline, a time-sensitive deal, a fork-in-the-road decision. But it's not what we do that makes a difference, it's how we do it.

Tackling situations when time is of the essence is part of our DNA—so we adopt an action-oriented approach at all times. We work in small, highly qualified teams with specific industry and functional expertise, and we operate at pace, moving quickly from analysis to implementation. We stand shoulder to shoulder with our clients until the job is done, and only measure our success in terms of the results we deliver.

Our approach enables us to help our clients confront and overcome truly future-defining challenges. We partner with you to make the right decisions and take the right actions. And we are right by your side. When it really matters.

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