OPERATIONAL AI IN TELECOM: FIVE CONVERSATIONS THAT WILL SHAPE THE NEXT PHASE OF TRANSFORMATION

Conversations at DTW Ignite 2026 revealed an important shift in how telecom leaders are approaching artificial intelligence. More importantly, they revealed what comes next.

AI HAS ENTERED ITS OPERATIONAL ERA

Artificial intelligence has dominated telecom conversations for several years. At conferences, in boardrooms, and across transformation programmes, the discussion has largely centred on possibility - what AI could do for customer experience, network operations, enterprise sales, or service delivery. That conversation is evolving.

But what is Operational AI?

Operational AI refers to the use of artificial intelligence within day-to-day telecom operations - not as a standalone application, but as an intelligent layer embedded across customer engagement, CRM, OSS, BSS, network operations, fulfilment, and enterprise workflows. Its purpose is to connect data, automate decisions, and improve operational outcomes rather than simply generate insights. Unlike generative AI, which focuses on creating content or answering questions, Operational AI applies intelligence directly to business processes - supporting decisions, orchestrating workflows, and improving how telecom operations run every day.

Discussions with telecom operators, architects, technology leaders, and transformation teams during **DTW Ignite 2026** pointed to a noticeable shift in priorities. The excitement surrounding AI remains, but the focus has become considerably more practical.

The questions are no longer centred on whether AI belongs in telecom. Instead, operators are asking:

- How do we integrate AI into existing OSS and BSS environments?
- Which operational challenges should AI solve first?
- How do we govern AI responsibly?
- How do we create measurable business value rather than isolated proofs of concept?
- What does it actually take to operationalize AI?

Those questions inspired this point of view. This is not intended to be a recap of DTW Ignite, nor is it a summary of every conversation that took place. Instead, it reflects five themes that consistently emerged across discussions with telecom leaders and aligns them with the broader direction of the industry, supported by research from organisations including **TM Forum, McKinsey,** and **Gartner**.

Taken together, these conversations suggest that telecom is entering a new phase of AI adoption. The industry is moving beyond experimentation. It is beginning to operationalize intelligence.

AI HAS BECOME AN OPERATIONAL CONVERSATION

Perhaps the biggest shift in telecom isn't that operators are investing in AI. It's the nature of the conversations they're having about it. One observation from the event captured this change particularly well:

> *There's been a lot of conversations around AI... separating hype from reality. The discussions are much more focused and technical now.*

That statement reflects a broader industry transition. Just a few years ago, many AI discussions revolved around exploration. Organizations were evaluating Generative AI, experimenting with copilots, and assessing where large language models might fit into their business. Today, those questions have become far more operational.

Instead of asking "**Should we adopt AI**?", operators are asking:

- Which processes should AI improve first?
- How do we integrate AI into our existing architecture?
- How do we demonstrate measurable operational value?

- How do we deploy AI without increasing operational complexity?

Answering these questions requires a different approach to AI adoption. The next phase is no longer about deploying more models; it is about redesigning operational workflows. AI delivers sustainable value only when it becomes part of end-to-end business processes, enabling faster decisions, intelligent orchestration and continuous optimisation across functions. Whether improving order fulfilment, reducing service assurance costs, accelerating revenue realisation, optimising field operations or enhancing customer support, AI must operate across multiple domains rather than within isolated functional silos. McKinsey describes this evolution as AI becoming an "execution layer" capable of reshaping entire workflows rather than automating individual tasks.

Organisations across industries are moving from isolated AI experimentation towards enterprise-wide implementation focused on measurable business outcomes. Success is increasingly defined by improvements in productivity, operational efficiency, customer experience, and decision-making

rather than by the number of AI initiatives launched.

For communications service providers, this evolution carries even greater significance. Telecom environments are among the most operationally complex in any industry. Legacy BSS platforms, multi-vendor OSS ecosystems, evolving network architectures, regulatory obligations, and decades of accumulated operational processes mean that AI cannot simply exist as another standalone technology layer. It has to work within the reality operators already manage.

This also changes the role of technology partners supporting CSP transformation. Operators increasingly require partners that understand both telecom operations and enterprise AI implementation - bringing together deep expertise in OSS/BSS modernisation, systems integration, API-led architectures, workflow orchestration, automation, data engineering, AI governance and telecom domain knowledge. The objective is not to introduce another standalone AI platform, but to embed intelligence into existing operational ecosystems, enabling AI to coexist with legacy investments while progressively modernising the enterprise.

This is why conversations are becoming more grounded. Rather than asking what AI could do someday, operators are increasingly focused on what AI should improve today. That subtle shift changes everything. It moves AI from being a technology initiative

to becoming an operational capability.

And that is where the next phase of telecom transformation begins. The transition toward operational AI naturally raises another question. If AI is becoming part of everyday operations, how can operators deploy it responsibly without introducing new operational risks?

Achieving this requires several foundational capabilities.

- **Operators need AI-ready operational architectures** that connect business systems, operational systems, network data and enterprise knowledge through open standards and composable integration. AI cannot reason effectively when information remains fragmented across disconnected applications. Unified access to trusted enterprise data and business context becomes essential for intelligent decision-making.
- **AI initiatives** need to be organised around business outcomes instead of individual use cases. Many CSPs have successfully demonstrated AI pilots, yet relatively few have achieved enterprise-wide value because initiatives remain disconnected across functions. The next wave of transformation focuses on orchestrating AI across customer journeys, service lifecycle management and operational domains, enabling measurable improvements in productivity, cost-to-serve, service quality and customer experience.
- **Successful AI adoption** depends as much on operational change as on technology. Leading operators are redesigning operating models, redefining workforce roles, embedding AI into day-to-day decision-making and establishing governance structures that continuously monitor business outcomes. AI creates lasting value only when people, processes and technology evolve together. Organisations that treat AI as solely a technology implementation risk creating additional operational complexity rather than reducing it.
- **Governance** must become an inherent part of AI deployment rather than an afterthought. As AI systems increasingly participate in operational decision-making, operators need mechanisms that ensure transparency, explainability, human oversight, policy enforcement and regulatory compliance. Trustworthy AI is rapidly becoming as important as intelligent AI, particularly in environments where decisions directly affect network performance, customer experience and commercial operations. This emphasis on governance and responsible AI was one of the defining themes across DTW Ignite 2026.

That brings us to the second conversation.

OPERATIONAL AI BEGINS WITH GOVERNANCE

As AI adoption accelerates, another topic has become impossible to ignore. Governance. Across discussions with operators, one concern surfaced repeatedly. The challenge isn't simply the cost of deploying AI.

It's the responsibility of operating it. As one participant summarised:

> *Customers are talking about the cost of AI - not just the cost to run AI, but the business cost to support AI. They're also talking about data security and governance.*

This reflects one of the most important realities facing telecom leaders today. Deploying an AI model is only the beginning. Operating AI at enterprise scale introduces an entirely new set of considerations.

Questions around explainability, accountability, regulatory compliance, data privacy, and human oversight quickly become operational requirements rather than technical preferences.

- Who validates AI-generated recommendations?
- How should customer data be protected?
- What happens when AI influences operational decisions?
- How do organisations maintain trust while increasing automation?

These questions are becoming central to every serious AI strategy. Industry research points in the same direction.

TM Forum continues to position trustworthy AI and governance as foundational capabilities for AI-native telecom operations. Likewise, **Gartner**

predicts that AI governance will become a defining investment area as organisations move beyond experimentation and into production environments.

For communications service providers, these concerns are amplified. Operators manage national infrastructure, sensitive customer data, complex charging and billing environments, and mission-critical services where every decision carries operational and regulatory implications. Introducing AI into this environment requires more than technical capability - it demands operational confidence.

That confidence comes from robust governance: clear accountability, policy-driven controls, explainability, human oversight, and continuous monitoring to ensure AI operates safely, transparently, and in compliance with regulatory and business requirements. Governance should not be viewed as a constraint on innovation; it is the foundation that enables AI to scale responsibly across the enterprise.

Equally important is having a transformation partner that combines deep telecom domain expertise with AI, data, integration, and automation capabilities. Embedding governance into existing OSS/BSS landscapes, orchestrating AI across complex workflows, and aligning intelligent automation with business outcomes requires more than deploying AI models - it requires operationalising AI within the realities of telecom. With that foundation in place, the conversation naturally shifts again. Because governing AI is only one part of the equation. The next challenge is enabling AI to understand the operational context of the business itself.

OPERATIONAL AI REQUIRES CONNECTED OPERATIONS

For telecom operators, this means intelligence flowing seamlessly across CRM, product catalogues, order management, OSS, BSS, billing, field operations, and customer service. If governance establishes the foundation for operational AI, the next challenge is enabling AI to understand how a telecom business actually works. In practice, the biggest obstacle is not just fragmented information, but the lack of integrated process orchestration across domains.

Across conversations with telecom leaders, a common frustration emerged. AI is advancing rapidly. Operational data isn't. As one participant observed:

> *Customers are saying they hear a lot about BSS, but they're not seeing enough with OSS. There's still a gap.*

Another conversation expanded on that challenge:

> *How do we bridge between the two... stitch the correlative data together... and provide the answers operators are looking for?*

These comments point towards a structural issue that has existed long before AI entered the conversation. Over the past two decades, operators have modernised different parts of their technology landscape at different times. CRM platforms evolved. Digital channels evolved. Billing platforms became more sophisticated. Network inventory systems expanded. Service assurance matured. Field operations adopted new tools. Each initiative delivered value.

Collectively, however, they often created operational silos. Commercial teams understand customers. Network teams understand infrastructure. Operations teams understand fulfilment. Finance teams understand revenue.

Very few systems understand all of them together. Yet this is precisely the context AI requires. Artificial intelligence cannot reason across information it cannot see. A language model may understand a billing query. It cannot determine whether a delayed enterprise order is the result of missing inventory, network capacity constraints, incomplete service design, or a provisioning dependency unless those operational domains are connected. Many operators are beginning to view AI differently. Rather than asking how AI replaces existing systems, they are asking how AI can create intelligence across them.

Let's consider the enterprise order workflows below:

- The AI-Isolated Workflow: An enterprise order is captured in CRM. It sits in a queue. A separate system triggers network provisioning. If the network capacity check fails in a downstream OSS system,
- the order stalls. Human intervention is required to bridge the gap between CRM and OSS, leading to delays and revenue leakage.
- The Operational AI-Connected Workflow: AI monitors the end-to-end process. As the order is entered, AI proactively validates network capacity against OSS inventory in real-time. If a constraint is found, the system alerts the agent during the quoting process, offering alternative configurations. The AI

orchestrates the decision, eliminating the need for manual intervention between domains.

- This shift mirrors **TM Forum's AI-Native Open Digital Architecture (ODA)** vision, which positions AI not as another application, but as an intelligent capability embedded throughout telecom operations using interoperable APIs, shared information models, and connected operational processes.
- Operational AI creates value when information and processes flow seamlessly across enterprise systems. By aligning AI with the broader operational context, operators move from automating individual tasks to orchestrating end-to-end outcomes - such as faster fulfilment, improved first-time resolution, and greater visibility. Success depends on deep expertise in OSS/BSS ecosystems, open digital architectures, and end-to-end workflow automation, enabling operators to move beyond isolated automation to enterprise-wide operational intelligence.

TRUSTED AI DEPENDS ON TRUSTED DATA

Artificial intelligence has often been described as the engine of digital transformation. Data is its fuel. If that fuel is fragmented, inconsistent, or incomplete, the quality of every AI-driven recommendation suffers. This reality surfaced repeatedly throughout discussions with telecom operators.

Trusted AI has been a key topic... getting the data together... making better decisions... understanding how AI is going to help with that.

This observation reflects one of the most significant shifts currently taking place across enterprise AI. For years, organisations have invested heavily in collecting more data. Today, the emphasis has shifted. The competitive advantage no longer comes from possessing more information. It comes from creating information that AI can trust. Within telecom environments, this challenge is particularly pronounced.

Customer records, product catalogues, network inventory, service topology, billing systems, assurance platforms, field operations, and partner ecosystems often evolve independently. Each system maintains its own view of reality. Artificial intelligence is expected to reconcile all of them. Without trusted data, AI can only automate uncertainty.

Research from **IBM** has consistently identified data quality and governance as among the most significant barriers to enterprise AI adoption. Likewise, **TM Forum** continues to position trusted data as a prerequisite for autonomous operations, recognising that explainable, reliable AI depends on transparent and well-governed information.

For operators, trusted data delivers benefits that extend well beyond AI. It improves operational visibility. It reduces manual investigation. It enables faster issue resolution. It supports more accurate billing. It strengthens customer interactions.

Most importantly, it allows AI to generate recommendations that operational teams are willing to act upon. Trust, therefore, becomes cumulative. Teams trust AI because they trust the data. Customers trust operators because operational decisions become more accurate. Leadership trusts AI because outcomes become measurable.

Building trusted data is not simply a technology exercise - it is an enterprise transformation effort. It requires a partner with the ability to unify data across OSS, BSS and network domains, establish robust governance and metadata frameworks, implement interoperable data architectures, and embed data quality into operational processes rather than treating it as a one-time initiative. By creating a trusted, business-ready data foundation, operators can move from fragmented insights to AI-driven decisions that are transparent, explainable and capable of delivering measurable business value at scale.

This is where operational AI begins to mature. Not through increasingly sophisticated algorithms. But through increasingly reliable operational knowledge. Once organisations establish connected systems and trusted data, a final challenge remains. Where should they begin? Because every operator has dozens of AI opportunities - but only a handful will create transformational value.

OPERATIONAL AI SCALES THROUGH PRIORITISATION, NOT PROLIFERATION

One of the most refreshing aspects of this year's conversations was the honesty. Few operators questioned whether AI would become part of their future. Most accepted that as inevitable. The real debate centred on execution. As one discussion highlighted:

> *There are a lot of use cases. The challenge is prioritisation... how do they scale that up... and choose the right use cases that deliver return on investment?*

That statement captures one of the defining leadership challenges facing telecom organisations. There is no shortage of ideas. Enterprise quoting. Revenue assurance. Contract analysis. Customer support. Network planning. Service fulfilment. Fault management. Field operations. Billing analytics. Fraud detection.

The list continues to grow. The challenge is not discovering another AI opportunity. It is deciding which opportunities deserve investment first. Industry research supports this reality. Studies from **McKinsey** and **Accenture** consistently show that while organisations continue to increase investment in artificial intelligence, relatively few have successfully scaled AI across the enterprise. The difference is rarely technical capability.

It is disciplined prioritisation. Successful organisations identify a limited number of operational challenges where AI can produce measurable business value. They solve those problems well. They build organisational

confidence. Only then do they expand. This disciplined approach creates momentum. Every successful implementation improves trust. Greater trust encourages wider adoption. Wider adoption generates stronger business outcomes.

Those outcomes justify further investment. Operational AI scales through success - not through volume. That may be the most important lesson of all. The organisations that succeed over the next decade will not necessarily be those deploying the most AI. They will be those deploying AI where it matters most. And that is precisely where the next phase of telecom transformation begins.

WHAT COMES NEXT FOR TELECOM LEADERS

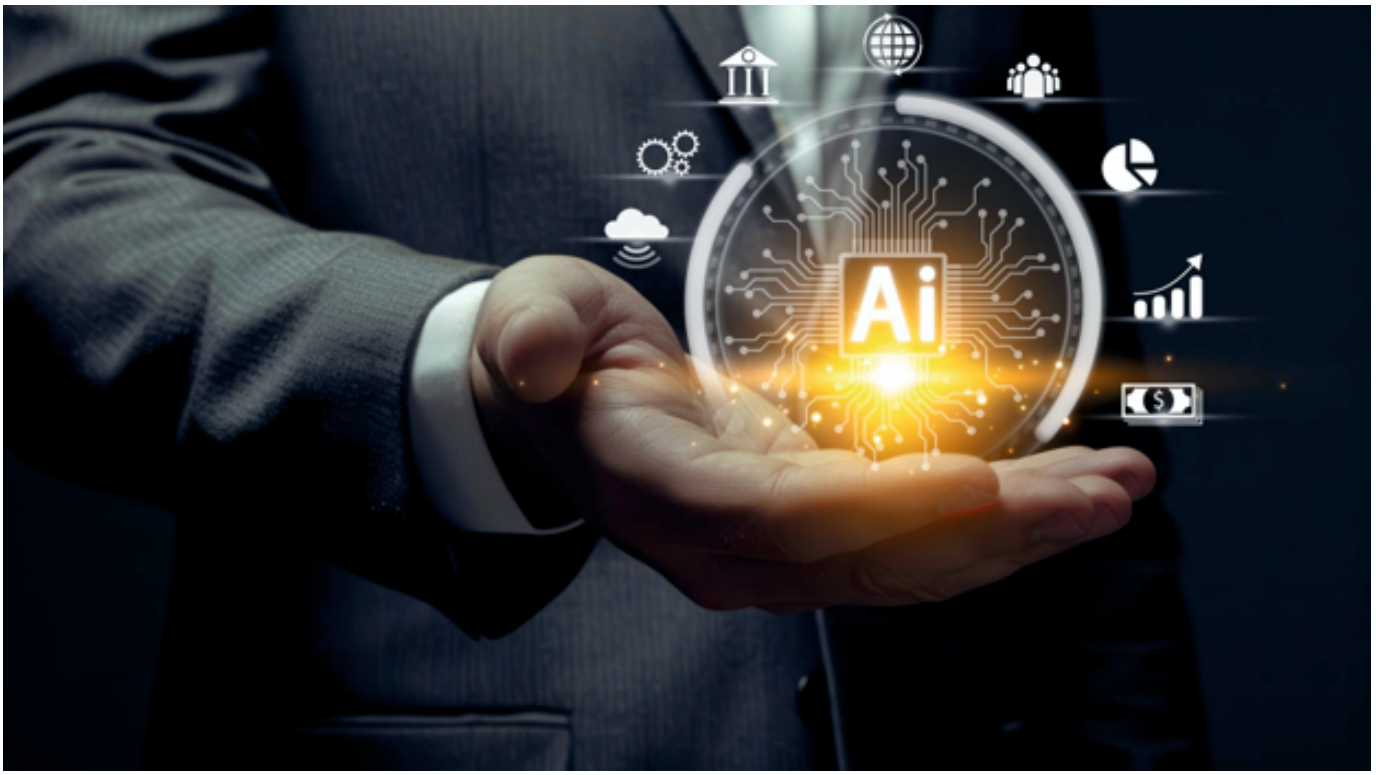
The conversations highlighted throughout this article point to an industry entering a new phase of AI adoption. The challenge is no longer discovering where artificial intelligence can be applied. The challenge is operationalising it responsibly, integrating it into existing environments, and ensuring it delivers measurable business outcomes.

Every operator is on a different transformation journey, shaped by its architecture, market dynamics, regulatory environment, and investment priorities. Yet despite those differences, the direction of travel is becoming increasingly clear. The next phase of telecom AI will be defined by five priorities.

1/ START WITH OPERATIONAL OUTCOMES

Artificial intelligence should never become the objective. Business outcomes should. Whether the goal is accelerating enterprise quoting, improving fulfilment readiness, strengthening revenue assurance, reducing contract review times, or providing greater operational visibility, the starting point should always be the operational challenge - not the technology itself.

This approach creates alignment across business, technology, and operations teams from the outset. Before launching a new AI initiative, telecom leaders should ask three simple questions:



- Which operational problem are we solving?
- How will we measure success?
- What business outcome should this initiative deliver?

Answering these questions early creates a far stronger foundation for long-term success than beginning with technology selection alone.

2/ INTEGRATE AI INTO EXISTING OPERATIONS

Few operators have the opportunity or the appetite to replace years of investment across OSS, BSS, CRM, ERP, and network platforms.

Nor should they. The future of telecom transformation is more likely to be evolutionary than revolutionary. Operational AI should enhance existing systems, making them more intelligent, more connected, and easier to use.

It should simplify decision-making. It should reduce manual effort. It should help operational teams respond faster to changing business conditions. Most importantly, it should work within the operational reality operators already manage every day.

3/ TREAT GOVERNANCE AS AN ENABLER

Governance is often perceived as slowing innovation. The opposite is increasingly true. Without clear governance, organisations struggle to build trust in AI-generated insights and recommendations. Without trust, adoption slows.

Responsible AI requires clear ownership, transparent decision-making, robust data protection, and appropriate human oversight. These capabilities should not be viewed as compliance exercises. They are what enable organisations to deploy AI with confidence and scale it responsibly across the business. Governance does not limit innovation. It creates the conditions for innovation to succeed.

4/ BUILD A CONNECTED OPERATIONAL DATA FOUNDATION

Industry's AI journey is becoming impossible to ignore. Artificial intelligence is only as effective as the operational knowledge it can access.

Customer information. Service inventory. Network topology. Billing. Product catalogues. Order management. Service assurance. Each provides valuable context.

Together, they provide operational intelligence. Connecting these domains allows AI to move beyond answering isolated questions. It begins supporting decisions that span commercial, operational, and network functions. For telecom operators, this connected operational foundation may become one of the most valuable long-term investments they make.

5/ SCALE DELIBERATELY

The pressure to demonstrate AI progress is understandable. But progress should not be measured by the number of pilots launched or use cases identified. It should be measured by operational impact. The operators creating the greatest value are focusing on a smaller number of high-impact initiatives before expanding further.

Each successful implementation builds confidence. Confidence accelerates adoption. Adoption strengthens business outcomes. Business outcomes create momentum. Scaling AI is not about moving faster than everyone else. It is about building the organisational capability to scale sustainably.

Bridging the Gap: Moving from Strategy to Execution

For much of the past three years, the telecom industry's AI conversation has centred on possibility.

- What AI could automate.
- What AI could predict.
- What AI could transform.

The conversation is changing. The next phase will be defined less by technological capability and more by operational execution. The operators that create lasting advantage are unlikely to be those deploying the largest language models or announcing the greatest number of AI initiatives.

The five conversations outlined here define a clear roadmap for the industry:

- Prioritize operational outcomes
- Integrate AI into existing workflows
- Embed governance as a core enabler
- Build connected data foundations
- Scale with discipline.

However, understanding the destination is only the first step. The true challenge for telecom leaders lies in execution - specifically, finding the right strategic partner to bridge the gap between abstract AI strategy and measurable operational reality. Success requires a transformation partner that does not simply introduce new AI layers but instead unlocks the latent value within existing OSS and BSS ecosystems to make intelligence actionable, scalable, and secure. The question is no longer whether AI belongs in telecom. The question is how effectively operators can turn intelligence into operational advantage. Those who succeed will not simply adopt AI. They will operationalise it.

ENABLING THE NEXT PHASE OF TELECOM AI

If one message emerged consistently from DTW Ignite, it is that operators are looking for pragmatic transformation rather than disruptive replacement. They want to modernise enterprise sales without rebuilding their commercial stack. They want greater operational visibility without introducing yet another disconnected platform. They want AI that works across existing OSS, BSS and network environments - not alongside them.

This is precisely where Aarav Solutions helps communications service providers accelerate their AI journey.

Our approach is built on a simple principle: operationalise AI by operationalising the enterprise. That means connecting

Our approach is built on a simple principle: operationalise AI by operationalising the enterprise. That means connecting fragmented systems, unifying operational data, embedding

intelligence into business workflows, and enabling AI to make context-aware decisions across the telecom value chain. Rather than replacing existing investments, we help operators unlock greater value from them through intelligent integration, automation and orchestration.

Whether it is enabling faster and more accurate enterprise quoting with **OmniTel360°**, strengthening operational intelligence and revenue assurance through **InsightForge**, or delivering AI-enabled digital engagement with **Vei-Rise**, every solution is designed around a single objective - turning enterprise AI from isolated capability into measurable operational outcomes.

For us, AI is not another application to deploy. It is an enterprise capability that should improve how operators sell, serve, operate and grow. Success is measured not by the number of AI models in production, but by faster order fulfilment, better customer experiences, higher workforce productivity, improved revenue realisation and more informed operational decisions.

The future belongs to operators that can embed intelligence into the fabric of everyday operations. *At Aarav Solutions, we help make that future achievable - connecting technology, data and business processes so AI becomes trusted, actionable and scalable across the enterprise. Because the true value of AI is realised not when it exists as a standalone capability, but when it becomes an invisible part of how the business runs every day.*

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WHY AARAV

Aarav Solutions provides comprehensive digital transformation services, leveraging our deep expertise in the Oracle Communications stack and Odoo. Our competencies include Oracle BRM, OSM, UIM, and Salesforce, complemented by industry-specific knowledge in Telecom, Finance, eCommerce, and Public Services. This unique combination has proven invaluable for our clients and partners.

Our rapid deployment methodology ensures a quick go-live, while also establishing scalable foundations for future growth. We prioritize technical excellence and offer continuous support, including 24/7 hypercare and extensive training, to ensure successful adoption and deliver long-term business value.

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