



DECISION INC.

**POWERING**  
INNOVATION

# H2 2025 **DATA & AI TRENDS**

# FOREWORD

BY NICHOLAS BELL, Group CEO: Decision Inc.



As we move into the second half of 2025, organisations are waking up to a simple truth: AI is no longer a side project. It is redefining how companies operate, compete, and make decisions. Yet for many leadership teams, progress has been slow – not because of a lack of interest, but because the path forward feels unclear, fragmented, or risky. Across our client conversations this year, one pattern stands out. The organisations making meaningful headway with AI are the ones treating it as a business transformation priority, not a technology experiment.



They are addressing the fundamentals – data quality, governance, operating models, skills, and responsible use – and building AI into the core of how the organisation runs. Those still waiting “for the right moment” are finding themselves further behind every quarter.

What has also shifted is the tone of the executive agenda. The conversation is no longer centred on Can we do AI? but rather Are we ready to scale it safely and effectively? Boards are asking sharper questions about risk. CIOs are rethinking their data platforms to support real-time intelligence. Business leaders want practical outcomes: faster decisions, reduced operational friction, and measurable value.

Across industries, there is growing recognition that without strong governance, AI introduces exposure just as quickly as it introduces opportunity.

This report brings together three of our most-read Data & AI articles from H2 – each reflecting the issues that leaders keep returning to: *How to build a practical, executable AI strategy; why governance must come before scale; and why outdated data platforms are limiting what businesses can achieve with AI.*



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# BUILDING A PRACTICAL AI STRATEGY:

*What Every Organisation Needs to Get Right*



Many AI initiatives stall before they deliver any real impact. Not because the models don't work - but because the organisation wasn't set up to support them. The symptoms are familiar: disconnected pilots, tools no one uses, overhyped expectations, and underwhelming results. Often, teams are unsure where to begin. Business and IT speak past each other. Leaders aren't aligned. And data? It's often scattered, incomplete, or unfit for AI altogether.

## What's missing isn't capability. It's structure.

That's why we've developed a practical **AI Strategy Playbook** – a guide to help business and data leaders move from scattered experimentation to strategic progress. It breaks down exactly what needs to happen to make AI work in your organisation, and how to do it in a way that's achievable,

scalable, and aligned with real business goals.

We've worked with dozens of organisations navigating these challenges – and the ones seeing success aren't those experimenting the most. They're the ones approaching AI with purpose.



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## What a good AI Strategy actually looks like

It's not a slide deck or a list of use cases. It's a practical framework that connects your business goals with the right data, skills, and execution plan.

### It answers critical questions like:

- \* Where do we start?
- \* What data and architecture do we need?
- \* How do we upskill our teams?
- \* What's the first use case that will show value fast?

### When done right, your AI strategy should help you:

- \* Align your business and technical teams
- \* Prioritise the right problems to solve
- \* Avoid wasted investment in tools or platforms you don't need
- \* Create the internal momentum needed to scale

## Four pillars that create AI momentum

In our experience, the most effective AI strategies are built around four essential pillars:



### 01 AI ADOPTION ASSESSMENT

Understand where you are today, what capabilities you have, and what gaps to close.

### 02 STRATEGY MAPPING


Align AI to business objectives and the teams who own them. It's not about the technology – it's about solving real problems that matter. Use cases should flow from business goals, not the other way around.

### 03 AI LITERACY

Executive buy-in and team engagement only happen when people understand what AI is (and what it isn't). Without this, even the best strategy will get stuck.

### 04 THE LAUNCH HUB

You don't need to start big – just start smart. Start with one well-chosen use case that can prove value fast. That's what builds internal trust and opens the door to everything that follows.



**“AI doesn’t fail because  
the models don’t work.  
It fails because the business  
didn’t start with the right  
foundation.”**

### **Why this matters right now**

**75% of knowledge workers** are already using generative AI tools.  
Nearly half of all business leaders are redesigning core processes around AI.  
And expectations around impact – not experimentation – are growing.

If your organisation is still stuck in pilot mode, or unsure how to start, the window for slow experimentation is closing. What’s needed now is a clear strategy that ties all the pieces together – from readiness to rollout.

### **Ready to build an AI Strategy that works?**

[DOWNLOAD AI STRATEGY PLAYBOOK](#)

[WATCH AI STRATEGY WEBINAR](#)

# THE SILENT AI RISK INSIDE YOUR BUSINESS:

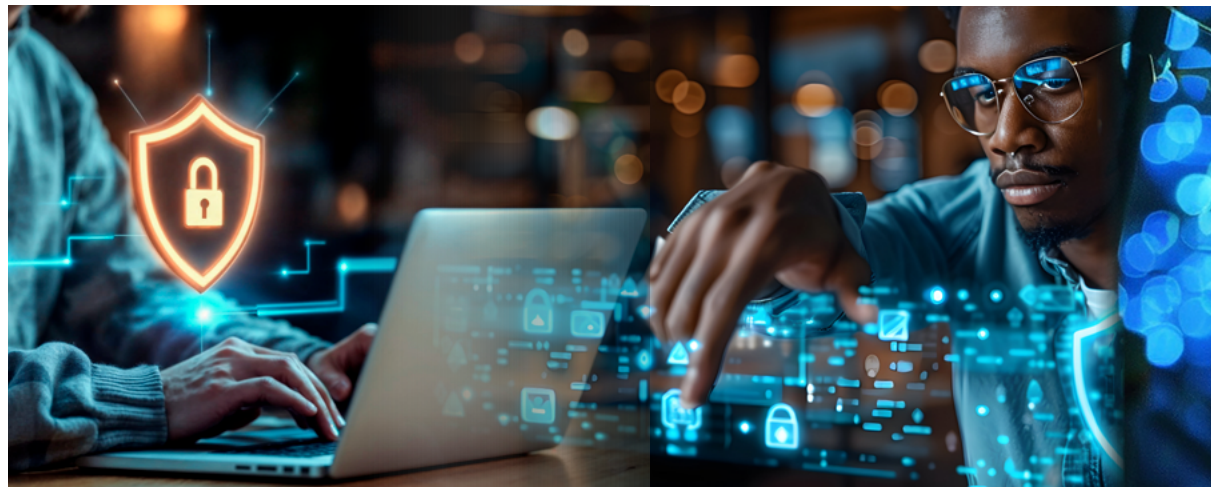
## *Why AI Governance Must Come First*

As AI adoption accelerates across industries, CIOs and other business leaders are under pressure to move fast, lead from the front, and help their organisations stay competitive. Generative AI tools like ChatGPT have unlocked powerful new possibilities for internal productivity, automation, and knowledge access. But beneath the surface lies a growing dilemma: how do you encourage innovation without compromising control?

### The risk is already inside your business

AI is already in your organisation, whether you planned for it or not. Employees are summarising reports, drafting emails, and asking AI tools for quick answers. In doing so, they're often pasting sensitive internal documents, client data, and intellectual property into unsecured platforms – with no audit trails, access controls, or oversight.

**This isn't a theoretical risk. It's a daily one.**



### Accountability is rising

CIOs and other leaders are increasingly being held accountable for how AI is used across their organisations. Boards are asking tougher questions. Regulators are closing in. Compliance and legal exposure is growing. Yet in many cases, AI use is happening informally - without policies, oversight, or permission.

### Blocking isn't the solution

Restricting access to public AI tools might feel like a fix, but it introduces new problems. It frustrates employees, stalls innovation, and often leads to shadow usage through personal devices or untracked channels.



## Build a safer, smarter foundation



To balance innovation and control, organisations need to take ownership of their AI foundation. That starts with visibility. Leaders must understand how AI is already being used, through internal audits, business unit interviews, and identifying high-impact use cases.

It continues with governance: defining acceptable use policies, access controls, and data protection standards, while also educating teams on the risks.

But just setting rules isn't enough. You need to offer a secure, sanctioned alternative that allows teams to harness AI within a framework you control.

And above all, it requires long-term thinking. AI adoption will only grow.

### Quick fixes won't scale.

A sustainable foundation must support both security and adaptability.

## InsightAI: Built for secure AI adoption

*InsightAI, a solution designed by Decision Inc. was designed for this exact challenge*

Hosted in your infrastructure and powered by Azure OpenAI or Databricks, InsightAI gives you a secure, enterprise-grade alternative to public AI tools. It's trained on your systems, governed by your policies, and fully auditable.

It's not just a safer tool, **it's the foundation of a secure, scalable AI strategy.**

If you're looking to drive AI adoption without compromising your organisation [our website](#) to learn how InsightAI helps CIOs and business leaders take control of the conversation.



# WHY YOUR DATA PLATFORM IS HOLDING BACK YOUR AI AMBITIONS

Every organisation wants to take advantage of AI. Executives are exploring where it fits, data teams are experimenting, and business units are eager to see what it can deliver. For many, progress slows before they see any real value.

The challenge isn't always with the AI tools or the people driving them. The real issue lies in the data foundation these ideas depend on. Most companies are still trying to build modern AI solutions on platforms that were designed years ago for a very different purpose.

## The risk is already inside your business

Traditional data platforms were built to answer one question: *What happened?*

They were designed for reporting and historical analysis, not for prediction, automation, or real-time decision-making. These systems still have their place, but they were never built for the kind of intelligence that organisations now expect.

They start to fall short when you need to bring together large or complex data sets, or when the business wants insights in real time. Most legacy platforms weren't designed to support machine learning models, real-time data streams, or the level of flexibility AI demands.

Data is spread across multiple systems, pipelines are slow, and governance relies on manual checks that make it difficult to trust or scale what's produced.

In practice, this looks like late reports, conflicting numbers across departments, and data teams spending more time fixing problems than delivering new insights.

Over time, that slows innovation and keeps AI initiatives stuck in planning mode instead of driving measurable outcomes.

**So, while the business is ready to move forward with AI, the data platform keeps holding it back.**



# Traditional vs Modern, AI-Ready Data Platforms

If you compare the two, the difference is clear.

TRADITIONAL PLATFORMS	AI READY PLATFORMS
Built for reports and static dashboards	Built for continuous analysis and learning
Relies on batch data updates	Operates in real time
Hard to scale and integrate	Unified across all data types
Manual governance and security	Centralised and automated controls

Traditional platforms were designed to describe what happened. AI-ready platforms are designed to predict what will happen next and to keep learning as new data arrives.

An AI-ready data platform doesn't replace analytics; it builds on it. It creates a single environment where data engineers, analysts, and AI developers can all work from the same trusted source of data, with the flexibility and speed that AI-driven decision-making depends on.

Platforms like [Microsoft Fabric](#) and [Databricks](#) play a crucial role in this transformation. Both simplify complex data landscapes by unifying engineering, analytics, and AI within a single, scalable environment. The choice between them depends on your organisation's ecosystem and goals. Fabric is ideal for Microsoft-centric businesses looking to extend Power BI and Azure investments, while Databricks offers deep flexibility and open-source compatibility for multi-cloud strategies.

## Bridging the gap with modern platforms



FABRIC SIMPLIFIES THE COMPLEXITY THAT'S BEEN SLOWING DATA TEAMS DOWN:

Microsoft Fabric brings together everything a modern data platform needs – data engineering, warehousing, real-time analytics, data science, and BI – into one unified, cloud-based environment. For organisations already using Power BI, Fabric is the natural next step. It builds on the tools they already know and extends them into a full, scalable data platform built for AI.

- \* Unifies data across business domains and systems
- \* Streamlines governance and access management
- \* Enables faster, more accurate decision-making through real-time analytics and predictive modelling





THIS COMBINATION OF DATA WAREHOUSES AND DATA LAKES, ALLOW TEAMS TO:

Databricks offers an equally powerful foundation, designed for organisations that want an open, flexible, and scalable approach to data and AI. Its Lakehouse architecture combines the reliability of data warehouses with the flexibility of data lakes.

- \* Ingest and analyse structured and unstructured data at scale
- \* Build, train, and deploy machine learning models efficiently
- \* Enable cross-functional collaboration across data engineering, science, and analytics teams

Both platforms empower organisations to move from fragmented, reactive data systems to unified, intelligent environments that accelerate AI adoption.

## What this looks like in practice

The benefits become clear once you see these platforms in action:



### FINANCIAL SERVICES

Combining customer, transactional, and risk data to improve fraud detection and credit decisioning.



### RETAIL

Unifying sales, marketing, and supply chain data to enable accurate forecasting and reduce stockouts.



### MINING AND MANUFACTURING

Helping teams stream and analyse sensor data in real time to predict maintenance issues and improve operational safety.

One example is our recent work with [NEOM](#), a global smart city initiative. By implementing Microsoft Fabric, the organisation **reduced time-to-insight by 80%** and increased **data engineering productivity by 25%**, creating a single, governed data environment that now supports their wider AI and analytics strategy.

[READ FULL CASE STUDY](#)

## How to accelerate this transition

Modernising a data platform is often a complex and time-consuming task. It can take months to design, build, and align teams before any value is realised. But there is a way to move faster.

The Decision Inc. 4-Week Data Platform Accelerator, available for both Microsoft Fabric and Databricks, helps organisations make this transition quickly and confidently.

In just four weeks, we work with your internal teams to:



**Connect a  
key data  
source**



**Set up a  
production-ready  
environment**



**Establish  
governance and  
best practices**



**Equip your people  
to manage and  
grow the platform  
themselves**

It's a focused, low-risk way to modernise your data foundation and prepare for AI without long project timelines or heavy consulting overhead.

For organisations unsure where to begin, the Accelerator pinpoints the highest-value starting point where connected and governed data can deliver visible results quickly and create momentum for broader adoption.

If you'd like to learn more about how the Accelerator works, you get all the information in our brochure.



**TAKE ME TO THE ACCELERATOR**

## About us

We are a Global Technology Services business that leverages specialist engineering and technical skills with a knowledge ecosystem across 3 continents. We are the digital partners to some of the world's most innovative brands and help them to reinvent the businesses and create new platforms for scale.

## Locations

### South Africa



### United Kingdom



### Australia



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