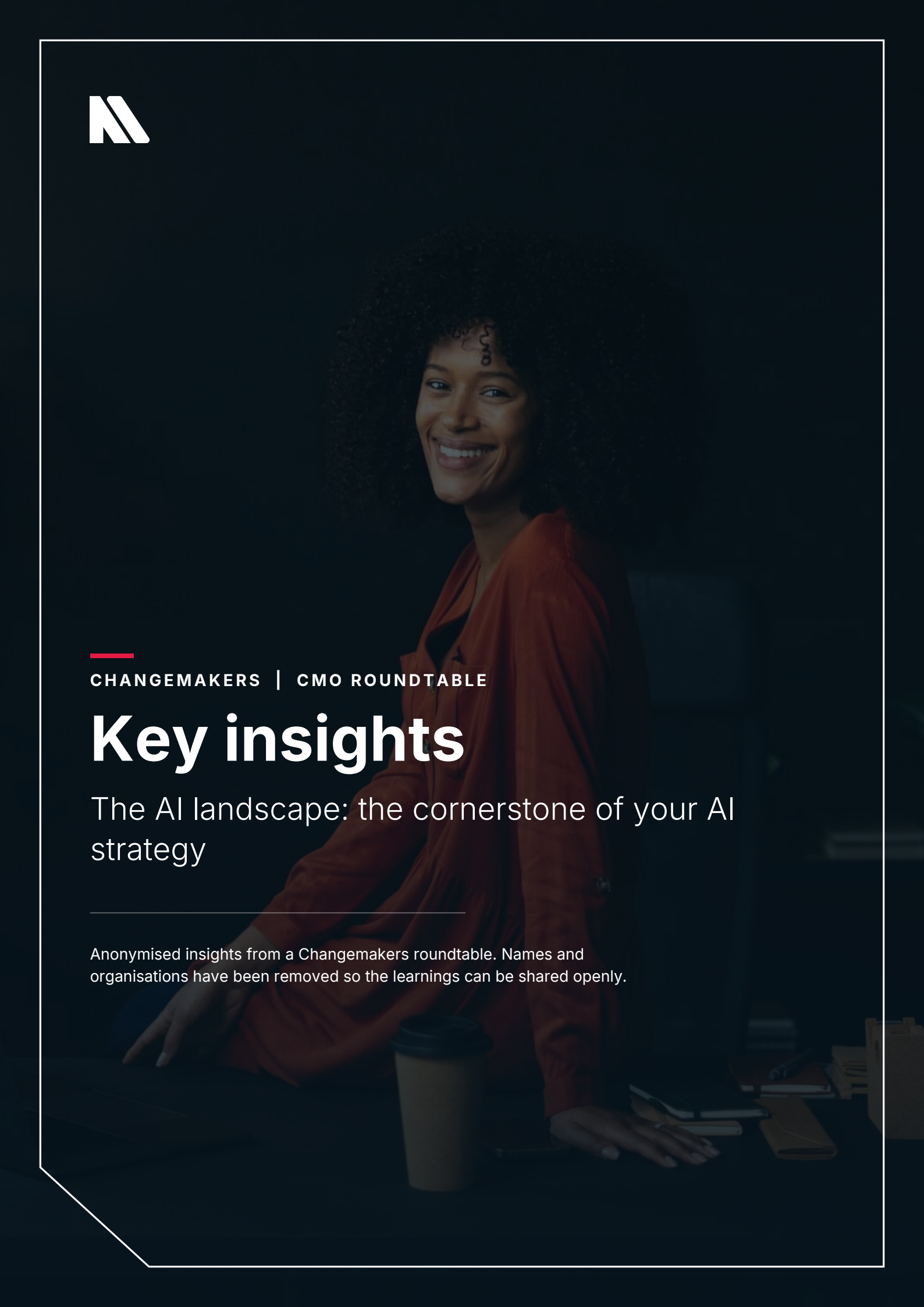


CHANGEMAKERS | CMO ROUNDTABLE

Key insights

The AI landscape: the cornerstone of your AI strategy

Anonymised insights from a Changemakers roundtable. Names and organisations have been removed so the learnings can be shared openly.

KEY INSIGHTS

From experimenting with AI to building a strategy

AI adoption has shifted from a question of when to a question of how. The economic impact is hard to ignore: organisations using AI in sales and marketing are reporting significant productivity gains, with 67% seeing direct revenue impact, according to The Artificial Intelligence Report.

Yet most businesses are still operating without a coherent strategy for capturing that value. The gap between experimenting with tools and building a structured approach is where competitive advantage is now being won and lost.

This report covers three themes: why most organisations are stuck in the messy middle, why strategy should start with problems rather than tools, and the leadership mindset that separates those pulling ahead.

IN THIS REPORT

01 **Most organisations are stuck in the messy middle**

02 **Strategy starts with problems, not tools**

03 **The mindset that separates leaders from the rest**

THEME 1

Most organisations are stuck in the messy middle

CMOs across sectors describe their AI position in almost identical terms: active experimentation, fragmented use cases, pressure from above and no clear framework for deciding what to prioritise. Formal tool policies are rarely the full picture. Teams are often using unapproved tools independently, creating ungoverned workflows that sit outside any security or data framework.

Recognise the tension between the board, IT and marketing

The structural tension is consistent. Boards push for adoption based on what they have seen through their own use of point solutions such as ChatGPT or Claude. IT and security teams carry the risk and are already stretched. Marketing leaders are caught in the middle, without a shared language for what AI strategy actually means inside the organisation.

Replace pressure from the top with an outcome-led plan

When enthusiasm from the top meets uncertainty in the middle, the result is activity without direction. Teams adopt and demonstrate AI use, but without defined outcomes or governance, it is almost impossible to know whether genuine value is being created. Organisations that break out of this pattern replace ad hoc experimentation with a deliberate, outcome-led approach.

> "Leadership are experimenting with AI, but don't have a clear roadmap or strategy to measure the impact and prioritise where it should actually drive ROI."
>
> **The Artificial Intelligence Index Report**

THEME 2

Strategy starts with problems, not tools

The most common mistake in AI adoption is leading with the technology. A more strategic approach is to start with a clearly defined business problem and ask whether AI is the right solution. That changes the measure of success: the question is no longer whether a tool works, but whether a defined problem has been solved and the impact can be measured.

Audit opportunities for time, repetition, importance and pain

A structured audit of where AI can create immediate value is more useful than a top-down strategy exercise. One example is the TRIP framework, which tests potential projects against four filters: what is consuming time, what is repetitive, what is important and what is causing operational pain. Together they quickly separate high-value opportunities from peripheral ones.

> "When you get those four pieces in play, you can start to understand where the value of the next AI project works."
>
> **Innovation and AI specialist**

Keep the first project small and scoped

There is a strong case for keeping early AI projects within a tightly defined budget, in the range of £6,000 to £30,000. A small, well-measured project produces something a large one rarely can: proof that the organisation can deliver, that it can measure the outcome, and that the investment was worth making. That proof is what tells you what to scale.

> "I really like the idea of doing ring-fenced projects that prove out the case for AI in specific use cases. Otherwise, you never really know the true benefit and what you should scale up."
>
> **CMO**



THEME 3

The mindset that separates leaders from the rest

Tools and frameworks only go so far. The other part of the challenge is how leaders think about AI. One example is the GAIN framework (goal orientation, abundance thinking, iteration and nexus thinking), which describes the mindset that distinguishes organisations building durable AI capability from those that stay in the messy middle.

Ask what matters most, not what AI can do

Shifting the question from what AI can do to what matters most to the business right now changes how projects are selected and measured. It keeps the focus on outcomes rather than technology, and it is a far more credible position to hold in front of a board.

Frame AI as a source of value, not a replacement

Fear of AI is real inside organisations, particularly among teams who see their own skills being replicated. Leaders who demonstrate AI's value at an operational level, rather than positioning it as a replacement for individual capability, are far more likely to build willing adoption. AI's analytical applications are often less threatening and more commercially powerful than its generative ones.

Build for iteration and wider impact

AI evolves faster than any five-year strategy can accommodate. Designing projects with iteration built in, and accepting that 70% is sometimes good enough, is not a compromise on rigour. It is a realistic response to a landscape that will have moved on before perfection is reached.

Every AI implementation also touches more than the immediate problem it solves. Tracing those connections through the wider organisation, including people, security and governance, is what separates considered leadership from reactive adoption.

> "AI has scrambled the logic of traditional leadership. It moves too fast, evolves in unpredictable ways, and refuses to stay within the lines of a five-year strategic deck. Effective leaders make decisions in tight feedback circles and adjust to what is happening in real time."
>
> **Innovation and AI specialist**

SUMMARY

Key takeaways

01 **Get out of the messy middle.** Replace fragmented, ungoverned experimentation with a shared view of what AI strategy means and an outcome-led plan that the board, IT and marketing can all support.

02 **Start with the problem.** Test opportunities against time, repetition, importance and pain, then prove value with small, ring-fenced projects in the £6,000 to £30,000 range before scaling.

03 **Lead with the right mindset.** Focus on what matters most to the business, frame AI as a source of value, build in iteration and trace the impact across people, security and governance.

The organisations capturing the most value from AI are not those with the biggest budgets. Research suggests 20% of organisations are capturing 74% of AI-driven returns, and the differentiator is strategic clarity.

CMOs who move from fragmented experimentation to a deliberate, outcome-led approach, built on small, measurable projects and the right leadership mindset, are already pulling away from the field.

About Changemakers

Peer-led roundtables for marketing leaders navigating change. Honest conversations, practical ideas and anonymised insights you can act on.

About Modern

The B2B marketing consultancy for marketing leaders in complex businesses going through change.

We bring focus to what matters next, and the evidence to defend your decisions.

Accountable for the outcome, not just the output. We rebuild the fundamentals, from targeting to measurement, and leave your team able to run them.

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