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2026

ASEAN BUSINESS OUTLOOK SURVEY

Advancing ASEAN into the Agentic Era



Unlock the Agentic AI Advantage

The shift to Agentic AI marks a move from simple automation to "Cognitive Capital," where digital assets reason, adapt, and scale.

In partnership with Accenture, Google Cloud's **"The New Economic Engine" guide** helps executives to navigate the rise of Agentic AI and outlines how they can break the link between headcount and growth by unlocking value.

Key Report Insights:

- **Cognitive Capital:** AI agents appreciate with data consumption, unlike depreciating hardware.
- **10x vs. 10%:** Prioritize systemic business reinvention over incremental process tuning.
- **"One-Two Punch" Strategy:** Combine precise value targeting with a digital core and responsible AI foundations.
- **Market Momentum:** 88% of early adopters report positive ROI, with 74% achieving returns within year one.

The Accenture & Google Cloud Edge:

We bridge vision and scale, moving organizations from experimental pilots to total business reinvention. Our framework centers on targeting high-impact growth and operationalizing AI enterprise-wide.

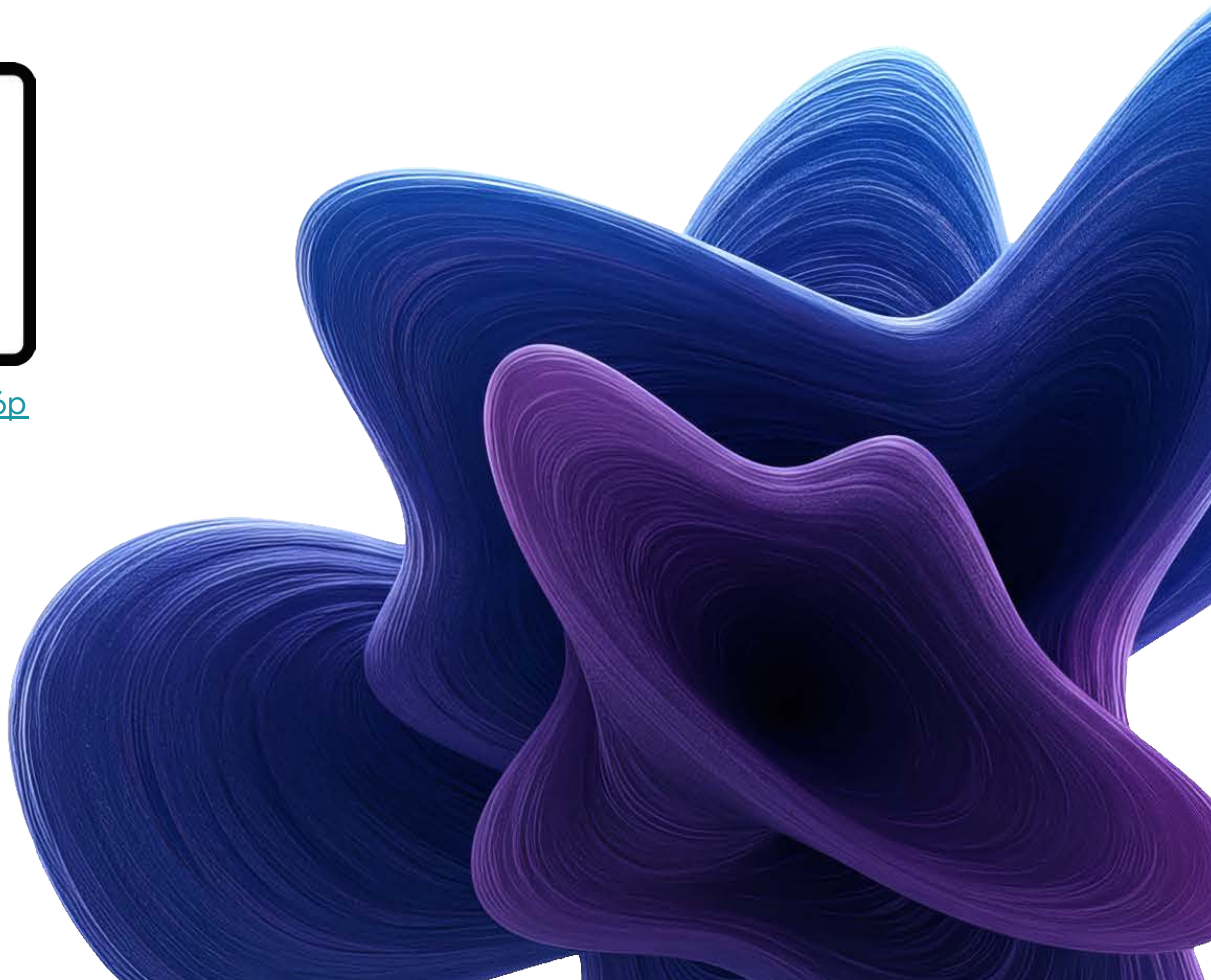
Maximize your ROI:

Read the full report to see how you can lead the transformation:

The New Economic Engine: A strategic guide for executives to maximize ROI in the agentic AI era.



<http://bit.ly/42KXu6p>





ASEAN BUSINESS OUTLOOK SURVEY:

Advancing ASEAN into the Agentic Era

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FOREWORD

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Business Outlook Survey takes the temperature of the state of business in Southeast Asia by drawing on the perspectives of American Chamber of Commerce Singapore (AmChamSG) Member Companies. This year, it also includes insights from multinational companies, regional conglomerates, local family offices and startups across the region.

In recent years, ASEAN companies have had to navigate pandemic recovery and recalibrating supply chains, balancing higher near-term friction with the region's long-term promise. In 2026, respondents are now operating in the region with greater urgency and discovering in real time that competing in the age of agentic AI across eleven diverse markets is more complex, and more consequential, than most boardroom discussions anticipated.

This year's results arrive at a moment when the gap between intention and execution has become impossible to treat as a future consideration. It is now visible in quarterly results, competitive position and the widening distance between companies building durable AI operating models and those

running pilots without the foundations to scale them.

The clearest finding is also the most important: ASEAN's diversity, often treated as the region's defining challenge, may be its most undervalued strategic asset. Companies that operate with genuine market-by-market fluency are doing more than complying with local rules or adapting culturally. They are building an operational knowledge base that cannot be replicated by competitors entering from the outside. That knowledge, accumulated through doing rather than planning, is becoming a primary source of competitive distance in the region.

AmChamSG, Accenture and Google are grateful to the business leaders, executives and owners across Southeast Asia who gave their time and candor to this survey. These insights are gathered at the regional level and reflect the collective voice of business leaders across Southeast Asia. How each leadership team interprets them, prioritizes them and ultimately acts on them will be the true measure of what this moment demands.



Mr. Adam Click
Regional Client Lead, Global Accounts,
Asia-Pacific, Google
Chairman of the Board,
The American Chamber of
Commerce in Singapore



Dr. Hsien-Hsien Lei
Chief Executive Officer
The American Chamber of
Commerce in Singapore



Ms. Bani Trehan
Managing Director, AI & Data,
Accenture
Vice Chair, The American Chamber of
Commerce in Singapore

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Advancing ASEAN into the agentic era

The 2026 ASEAN Business Outlook Survey, conducted jointly by AmChamSG, Accenture and Google, captures the state of business across a region in recalibration, making visible what many leadership teams have sensed but not yet named.

Four findings define this year's results. They do not all point in the same direction, but taken together, they describe a region of rising strategic importance, a business community recalibrating under genuine pressure and an AI transformation that is moving faster, with less accountability, than most leadership teams have acknowledged.

ASEAN is more important than ever, and the commercial environment is more demanding. The share of companies rating ASEAN markets apart from Singapore as very important rose 22 percentage points between 2022 and 2026, from 46% to 68%. But expansion intent has pulled back, cutback intent has risen to 10–12% across both Singapore and the broader region, and sentiment, while still positive, has softened. Companies are concentrating investments in markets where they already operate and focused on improving productivity in existing operations instead of building new ones.

The strategic rationale for ASEAN has shifted. Supply chain resilience and de-risking from China-concentrated operations now rival consumer market growth as the main reasons companies are investing in the region. This includes companies from the US, Europe, other regions and China itself. Tariffs are raising costs and complexity more than they are prompting strategic repositioning. AI and automation have emerged as the primary internal response, used to absorb pressure and manage cost rather than to pursue new growth.

Agentic AI deployment is widespread, but few are measuring its impact. With 87% of enterprises across all tiers already piloting or deploying agents, commercial appetite is proven. While average readiness sits at an early baseline of 42 out of 100, this creates a clear first-mover edge for the 7% leading the curve and an immense optimization upside for the rest. By establishing robust governance, operating models and direct impact tracking, organizations can readily scale early returns and transform foundational pilots into high-yield, accountable growth engines.

The gap is organizational, not technological. Culture and change management is the single biggest internal barrier to scaling agentic AI, cited by 27% of respondents, ahead of legacy IT and data readiness. The technical foundations still matter; 69% of organizations have less than half their data AI-ready. But the deeper constraint is how companies are choosing to use technology. Roughly half (46%) confine agents to low-stakes tasks that are then fully rechecked, and 37% have not changed how work is organized at all. Advanced companies score 92 on market strategy, against an average of 42, because they translate AI capability into market-specific execution.

The chapters that follow examine these findings in depth and turn them into an agenda for action.

They start with how the business outlook is reshaping investment decisions across ASEAN, then map the agentic AI stack being built across the region and who controls each layer. They assess readiness across more than 180 organizations from eight ASEAN member countries, then move to market-by-market profiles for the six priority economies. The report closes with a tier-by-tier leadership agenda that prescribes what companies should do next at every stage of the maturity journey.

The window to build a durable agentic AI advantage in ASEAN is open, but it will not stay open indefinitely. The data in this report shows how wide that window is, what it takes to move through it and how quickly it is narrowing. The leaders in this region have the reach, resources and responsibility to ensure that their companies advance ASEAN in the era of agentic AI. This report gives them a guide to how.



INTRODUCTION

Some years feel like inflection points while you are inside them. This is one of those years, not because a new technology has been announced, but because a technology that was announced is now showing up in quarterly results, headcount decisions and board conversations in ways that can no longer be deferred.

The companies responding to the 2026 ASEAN Business Outlook Survey, conducted jointly by AmChamSG, Accenture and Google, have stopped debating whether agentic AI matters. What they are wrestling with is harder: whether the deployments they have made are actually working, whether the foundations underneath them are strong enough to scale and whether their operating models are built for what comes next or for what came before.

How that gap formed, what it consists of and what it takes to close it is what this report examines. The answers are not the same in Singapore as they are for other ASEAN markets. ASEAN is 11 markets, each with its own regulatory posture, infrastructure trajectory, workforce reality and digital maturity, and the companies that have treated those differences as variables to manage rather than obstacles to route around are the ones pulling ahead.

The chapters that follow lay it out, market by market and dimension by dimension. The picture is of a region that has embraced AI faster than it has learned to govern it, measure it or build organizations capable of extracting sustained value from it. The distance between moving fast and moving well is where the next decade's competitive outcomes are being determined.

“Southeast Asia is one of the most dynamic, diverse and opportunity-rich regions in the world; and right now, AI is amplifying every one of those advantages. The question this report asks is the one every leadership team in this region needs to sit with: are we moving fast enough to matter, and carefully enough to last?”



Anoop Sagoo
CEO
Accenture
Southeast Asia

87% of large enterprises across ASEAN already have AI agents in pilot or production.

Their average readiness score is 42 out of 100.

That gap—between the confidence to deploy and the capability to deliver—is the question every leadership team in this region is now living with.

ASEAN 2026: A REGION IN RECALIBRATION

Four years is a long time in ASEAN's dynamic environment. The companies responding to the ASEAN Business Outlook Survey (ABOS) in 2022 were navigating pandemic recovery, cautious about talent and uncertain about demand. The companies responding in 2026 are dealing with something structurally different: a reconfigured trade environment, macro energy shocks and the early but unmistakable arrival of AI as an operational reality.

Compared to 2022, ASEAN has grown markedly more important to companies and the rationale for being here has deepened, while Singapore held its position as a regional anchor. Businesses are readjusting their posture without abandoning their position.

The region grows more important

As a regional hub for most of the respondents, Singapore is tracked separately from the rest of ASEAN where local priorities dominate. The results show that while Singapore's importance has remained unchanged, with 80% describing it as very or moderately important, the share of companies rating other ASEAN markets as "very important" rose 22 percentage points between 2022 and 2026, from 46% to 68% (Figure 1).

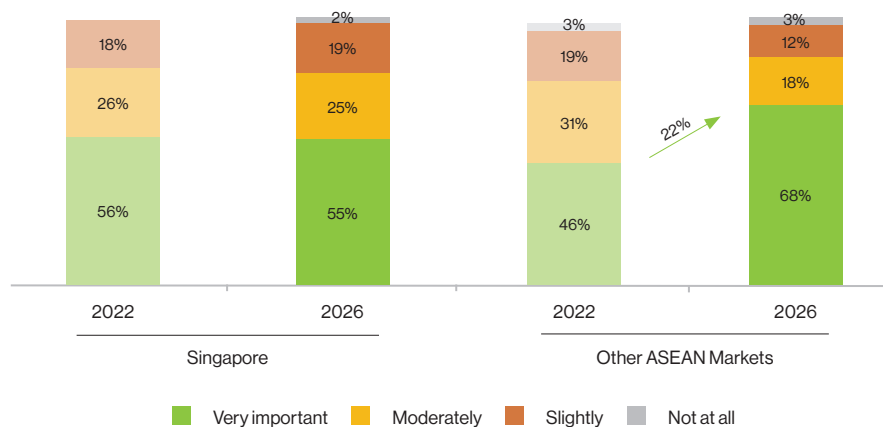
KEY HIGHLIGHT

Singapore retains importance, while the rest of ASEAN surges ahead

Figure 1
ASEAN Markets
Importance: Singapore vs
Other ASEAN Markets

How important are ASEAN markets for your company's global revenue in the next two years?

Singapore 2022 (n=34), Singapore 2025 (n=53), other ASEAN 2022 (n=115), other ASEAN 2026 (n=34)





When companies are asked why the region matters, once-common responses such as low-cost labour, cost arbitrage and land availability have given way to a more structural consideration: a growing middle class, which consistently ranks as the most important factor for businesses in both Singapore and the wider ASEAN region (Figure 2).

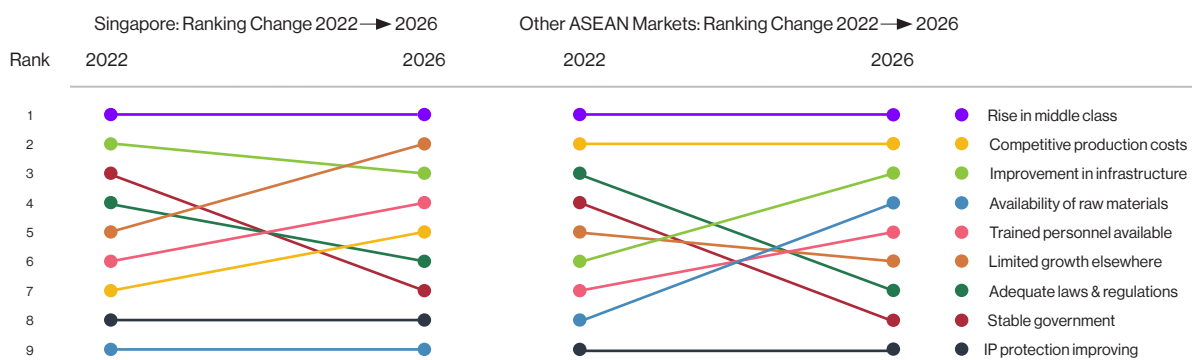
KEY HIGHLIGHT

ASEAN's attraction: Consumers and connectivity

Figure 2
Reasons for ASEAN's Growing Importance

Relative to other markets, what are the reasons why your company feels that ASEAN markets will be more important for its worldwide operations and revenues in the next two years?

Singapore 2022 (n=28), Singapore 2025 (n=43), other ASEAN 2022 (n=89), other ASEAN 2026 (n=29)



Similarly, infrastructure was the third most important factor in both Singapore and the rest of ASEAN, a signal that serving a consumer market demands logistics and digital connectivity, not just export-oriented port access.

The divergence appears in the second highest ranking reason. For Singapore, the second most common reason for its importance is "limited growth elsewhere," a push rather than a pull factor, up from sixth in 2022. Companies are partly there because alternatives have plateaued, not solely because Singapore has grown more attractive.

For the rest of ASEAN, the number two reason is competitive production costs, which ranks fifth for Singapore. The contrast reinforces a hub-and-spoke logic: Singapore as the high-value headquarters node, and the broader region as the cost-competitive production base.

The consumer opportunity firmly remains the unifying rationale across ASEAN. But the data also points to a more complex picture. Companies that still frame ASEAN only through cost arbitrage are missing the growing importance of consumers, infrastructure and market access.

Profit expectations add another layer. Although Singapore's importance remained unchanged in 2026, its profit outlook has risen significantly. The share of Singapore respondents expecting profits to increase rose 16 percentage points to 60% in 2026, while those expecting a decrease halved from 18% to 9% (Figure 3). Other ASEAN markets, by contrast, are entirely unchanged: 53% expecting an increase in both years, with no meaningful movement across any category.

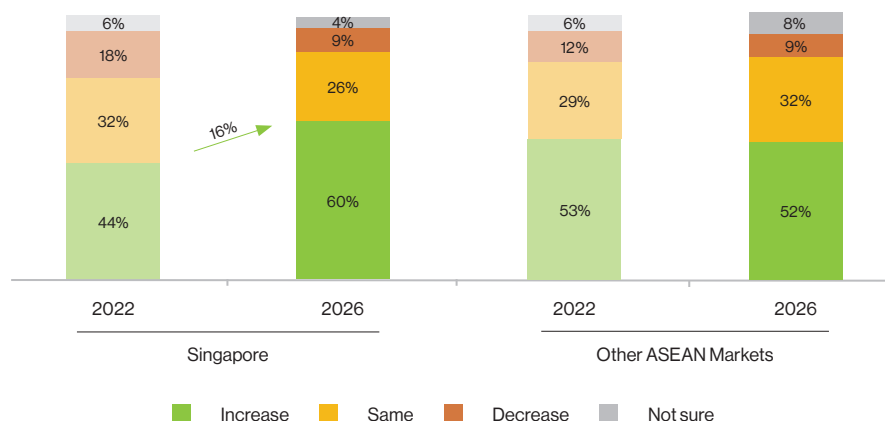
KEY HIGHLIGHT

Profit expectations rise, but only in Singapore

Figure 3
Profit Expectations:
Singapore vs Other ASEAN
Markets

Compared to 2024, do you expect your profits in ASEAN in 2026 to increase, stay the same or decrease?

Singapore 2022 (n=34), Singapore 2025 (n=53), other ASEAN 2022 (n=115), other ASEAN 2026 (n=34)



Sentiment remains largely positive, though not as many plan to expand

Despite higher profit expectation in Singapore, the share of respondents expressing positive or somewhat positive sentiment fell 10 percentage points to 78% in 2026 (Figure 4). Across other ASEAN markets the decline was comparable at 9 percentage points, bringing combined positive sentiment to 54%.

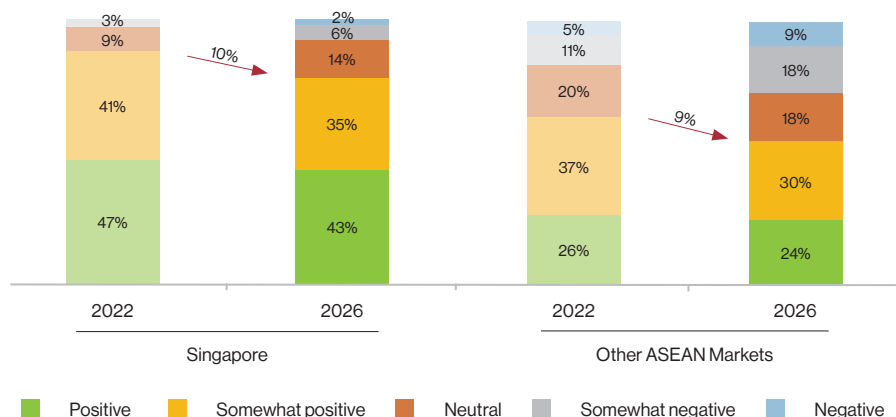
KEY HIGHLIGHT

Business sentiment declines, though majority remain positive

Figure 4
Business Climate
Sentiment: Singapore vs
Other ASEAN Markets

Which of these sentiments best expresses your overall experience with the current business climate in the country you operate in?

Singapore 2022 (n=34), Singapore 2025 (n=51), other ASEAN 2022 (n=115), other ASEAN 2026 (n=33)



The pullback is modest but broad-based. Some of the movement reflects a shift toward neutrality, particularly in Singapore, where the neutral share rose from 9% to 14%, suggesting a degree of wait-and-see amid a more uncertain external environment, including trade headwinds and uneven regional growth mentioned earlier.

Neither trend, however, signals a retreat. With nearly 80% of Singapore respondents and more than half of other ASEAN respondents still viewing the business climate positively, the underlying outlook remains positive. The softening is better read as a recalibration of expectations, rather than a fundamental loss of confidence.



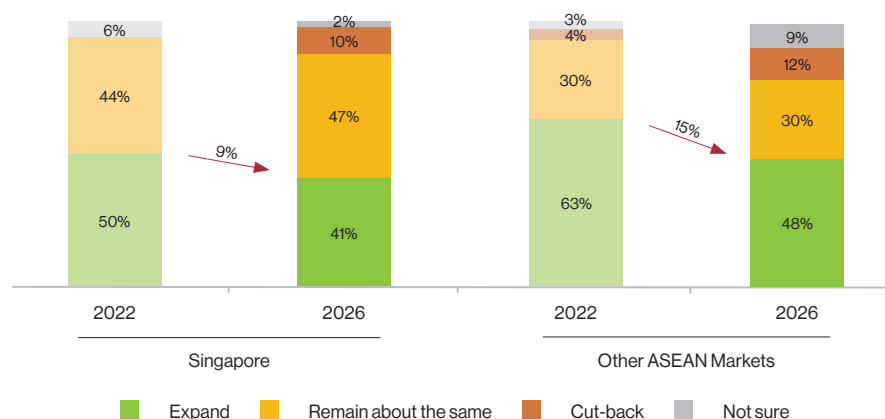
KEY HIGHLIGHT

Fewer businesses plan to expand, some are cutting back

Figure 5
Expand/Cut-back Plans:
Singapore vs Other ASEAN
Markets (2022 - 2026)

Within the country you operate in, does your company plan to expand or cut-back?

Singapore 2022 (n=34), Singapore 2025 (n=53), other ASEAN 2022 (n=115), other ASEAN 2026 (n=34)



Expansion plans have also pulled back in both geographies in tandem with weaker sentiment, down 9 percentage points in Singapore to 41%, and down 15 percentage points across other ASEAN markets to 48% (Figure 5). The sharper signal is the rise in cutbacks: Singapore moved from zero cutback intent in 2022 to 10% in 2026, while other ASEAN climbed from 4% to 12%. These remain minority positions, but the direction is clear.

In Singapore, much of the drop in expansion plans has shifted into “remain the same” rather than outright contraction, suggesting consolidation rather than retreat. Other ASEAN markets look less settled, with uncertainty rising alongside cutback intent.

Taken together with the sentiment findings, businesses aren't just feeling more cautious; they're acting on it. Expansion remains the most common response in both geographies, but the composition has shifted in ways that warrant attention.

Navigating a more contested world

For companies operating in ASEAN, the strategic context in 2026 is more complex than it was in 2022. The top challenges include navigating the great-power competition, a rapidly evolving AI landscape and a regulatory environment that is fragmenting rather than harmonizing (Figure 6).

The most commonly cited outcome of US-China tensions is not supply chain disruption or investment redirection but increased competition from Chinese companies. In ASEAN markets, decoupling is being felt less as a structural opportunity to capture relocating business and more as intensified competitive pressure from Chinese firms moving aggressively into the region.

KEY HIGHLIGHT

Geopolitics and its discontents

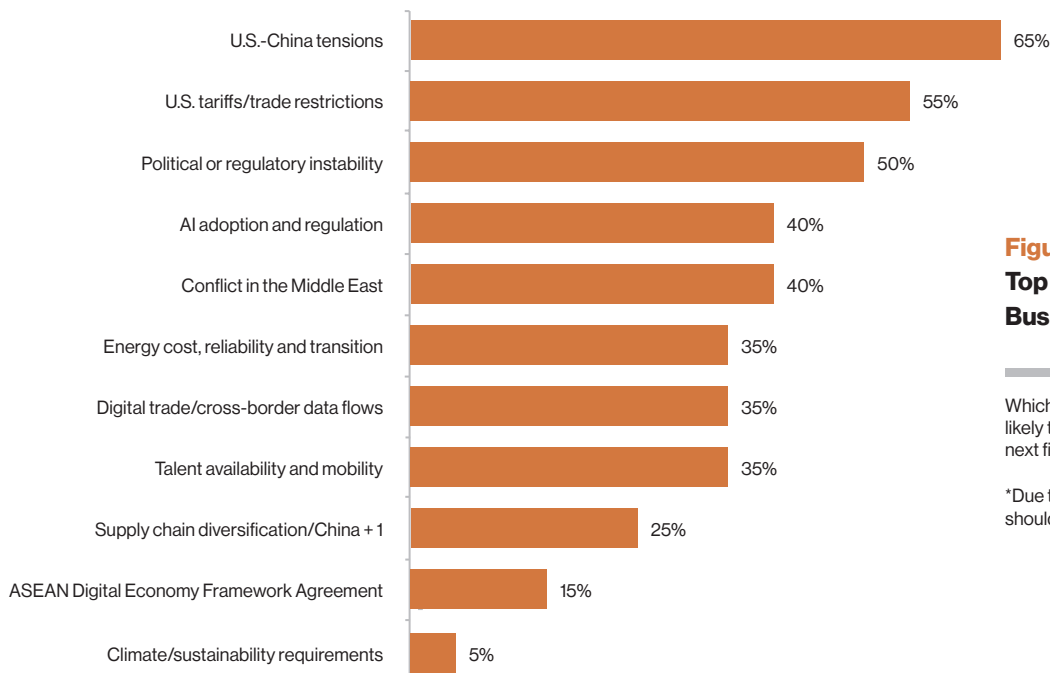


Figure 6A
Top Reasons Affecting Business

Which of the following issues are most likely to affect your business over the next five years? (n=20)

*Due to small sample size, results should be interpreted with caution.

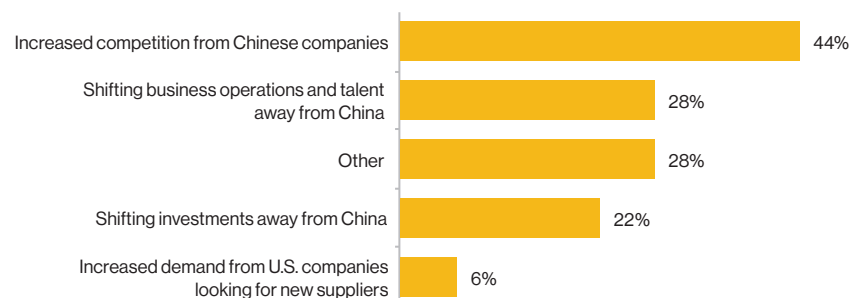


Figure 6B
U.S. China Tension Outcomes

As a result of tensions between the US and China, do you anticipate any of the following outcomes? (n=18)

*Due to small sample size, results should be interpreted with caution.



Tariffs are adding to that pressure. Their impact is registering primarily as increased costs and regulatory complexity rather than prompting strategic responses like supplier diversification or market repositioning (Figure 7).

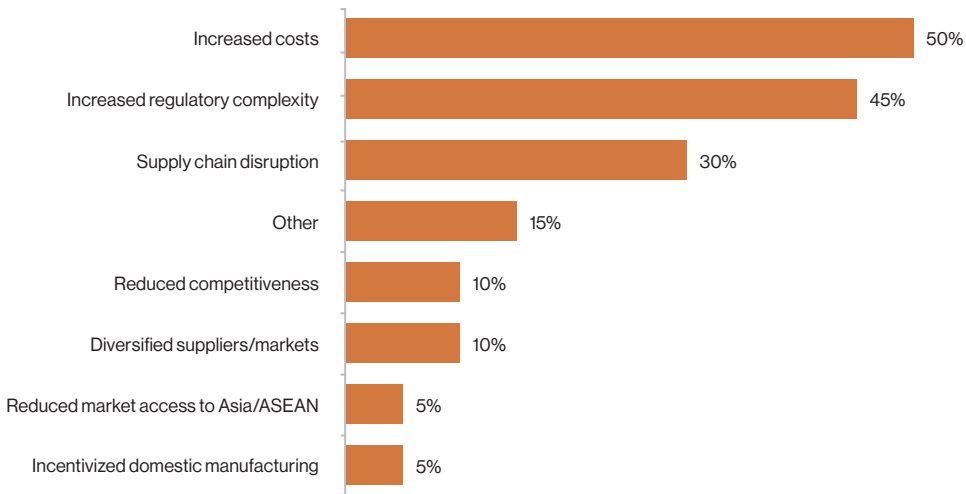
KEY HIGHLIGHT

US tariffs primarily raise both cost and complexity

Figure 7
Impact of U.S. Tariffs

How have recent U.S. tariff measures or tariff uncertainty affected your company? (n=20)

*Due to small sample size, results should be interpreted with caution.





Against that backdrop, companies are turning to AI and automation as the primary internal response. Productivity improvement leads, followed by headcount reduction and workforce reskilling (Figure 8). The pattern points to a defensive use of AI: Companies appear to be deploying it to absorb pressure and manage costs more than to pursue growth, a posture that mirrors the broader recalibration running through this report.

KEY HIGHLIGHT

AI expected to boost productivity more than raise topline

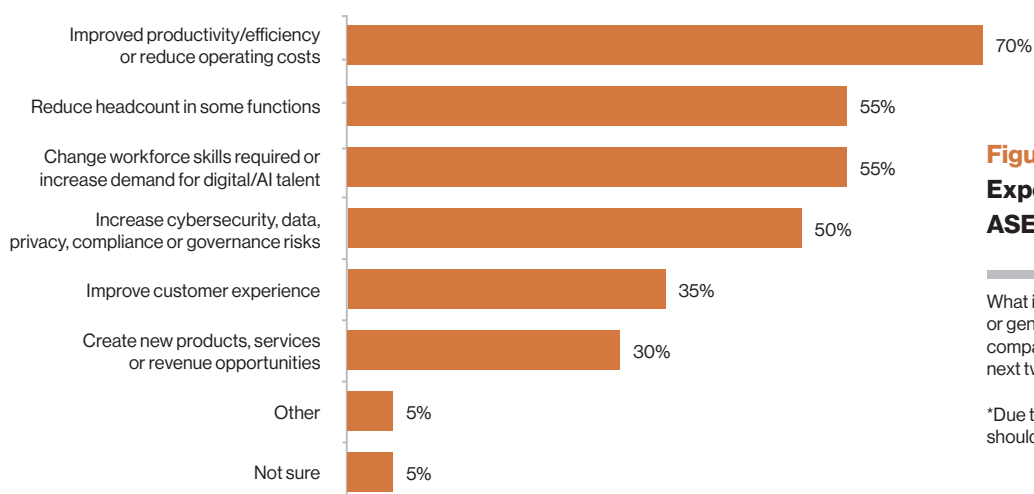


Figure 8
Expected Impact of AI on ASEAN Operations

What impact do you expect AI or generative AI to have on your company's ASEAN operations over the next two years? (n=20)

*Due to small sample size, results should be interpreted with caution.

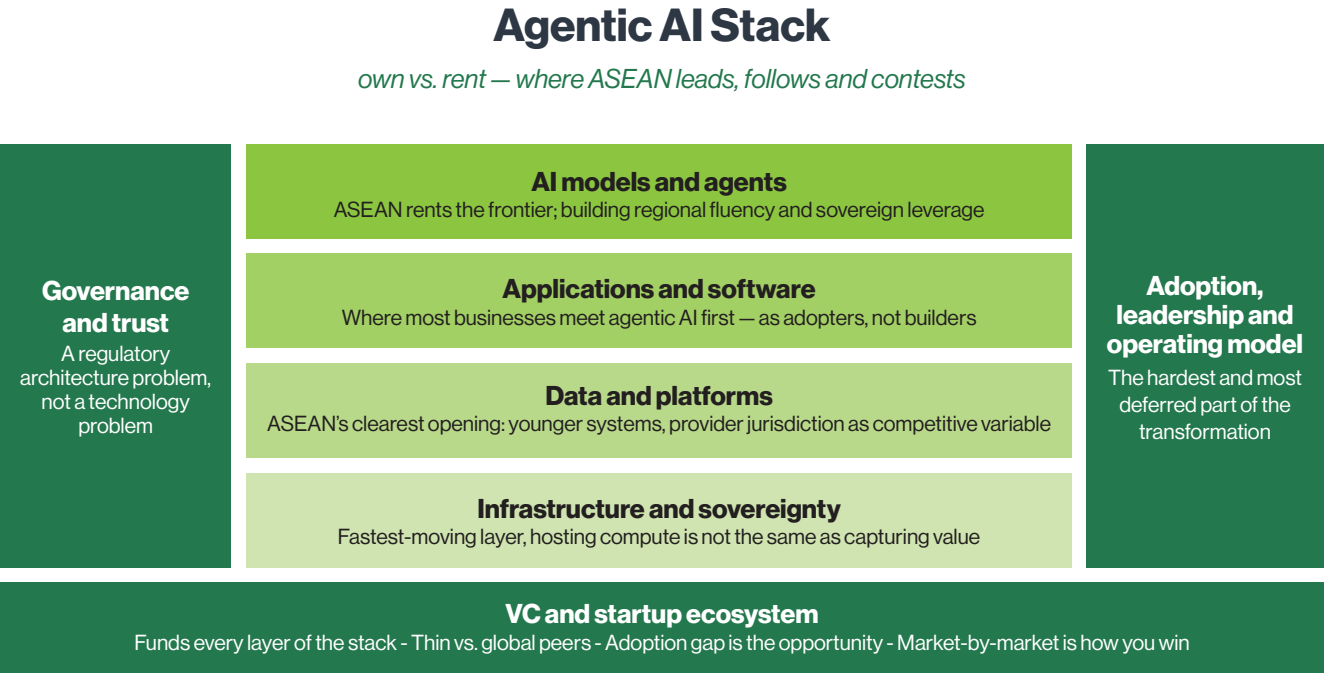
ASEAN'S AGENTIC AI STACK

The previous chapter established how much is at stake: the scale of the commercial opportunity, the size of the readiness gap and the speed at which the window is narrowing. This chapter asks a different question: what is actually being built, by whom and where does ASEAN own the stack versus rent it?

This question matters since it is the core part around independency and sovereignty. Strength in one layer, however, may still leave vulnerabilities elsewhere. Hosting infrastructure earns different returns than training models. Deploying applications built elsewhere is strategically different from writing the governance frameworks that determine how agents operate across borders. Understanding which layers ASEAN leads, which it follows and which it is actively contesting is the foundation for every strategic decision that follows.

We map the stack across seven building blocks. Four form the technical core: AI models and agents, applications and software, data and platforms, and infrastructure. Two cross-cutting enablers determine whether the technical stack converts into business value: governance and trust, and adoption, leadership and operating model. A seventh force, the venture capital and startup ecosystem, injects capital and innovation across all layers simultaneously. The sections below trace each in turn.

Figure 9

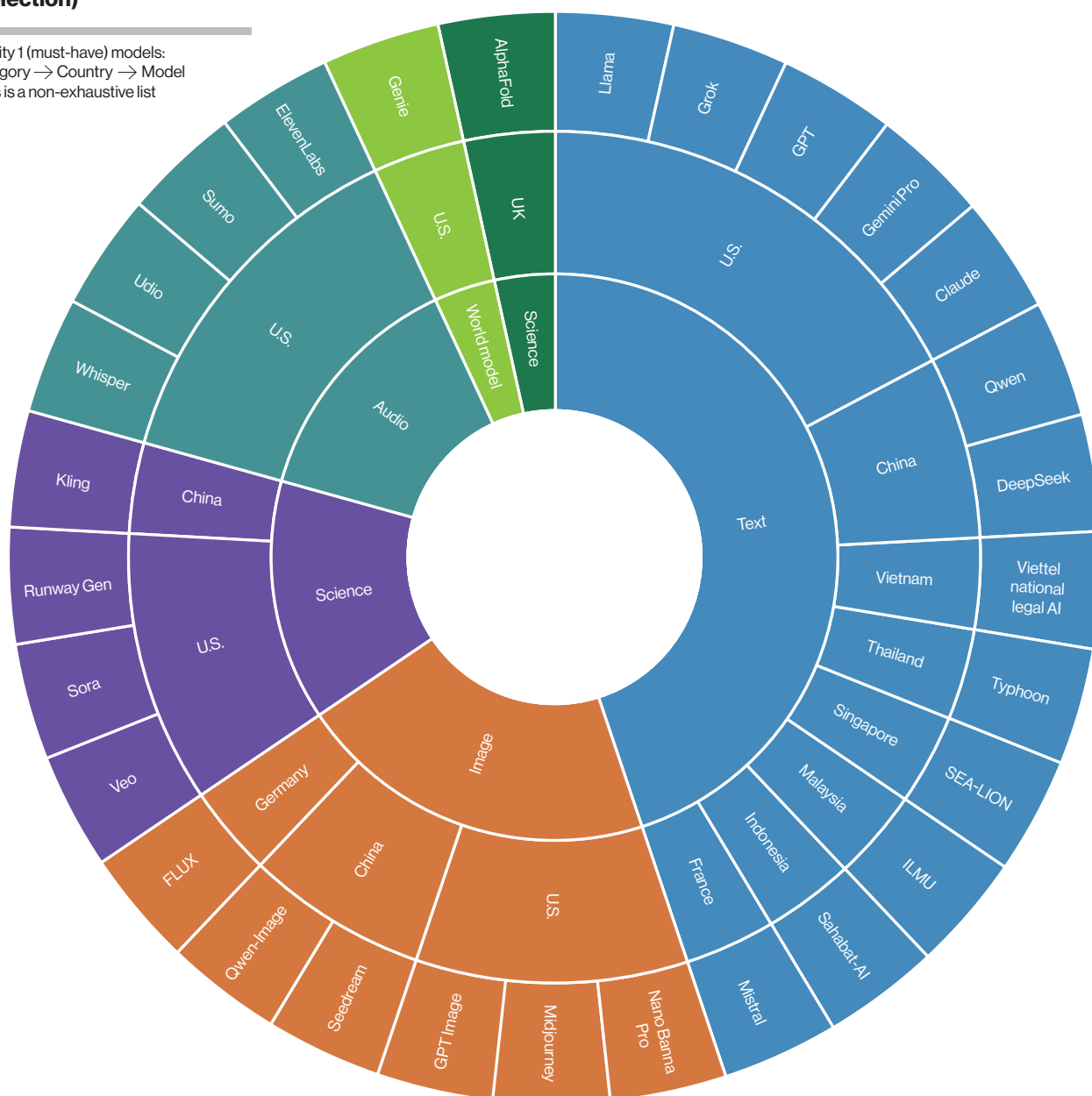


AI models and agents

More than 600 models are now in active use globally. The competitive question has shifted from whether a capable model exists to which model is right for a given use case, in a given language, at a given cost and under a given regulatory regime, a framing that suits ASEAN's structural diversity rather than working against it.

Figure 10
AI Model Overview
(Selection)

Priority 1 (must-have) models:
Category → Country → Model
*This is a non-exhaustive list



"Enterprise outcomes depend on the full system around the model, agents, business context, governance, infrastructure, evaluations and deployment support and on choosing the approach that best meets each workload's needs."



Jon Sugihara
Head of AI Success
Engineering
Asia Pacific
OpenAI

"For foundation models, the competitive situation has shifted faster than most anticipated. Chinese open-weight models are now a real alternative for enterprises evaluating agentic infrastructure. Southeast Asia does not have to choose sides, and ASEAN enterprises are increasingly in a position to use that to their advantage."



Yu Yi
Senior Managing
Director and Head of
Accenture Technology
in Southeast Asia

Foundation models remain concentrated among U.S. frontier labs like OpenAI, Google, Meta and Anthropic; major Chinese players like DeepSeek, Alibaba's Qwen and Moonshot AI; and Europe's Mistral.

ASEAN's own model-building effort is pragmatic, building on open foundations rather than attempting to match frontier capability head-on. In partnership with AI Singapore, the country's SEA-LION model aims to ensure LLMs represent Southeast Asian languages and cultural context. SEA-LION draws on Google's Gemma, Meta's Llama and Alibaba's Qwen, which in turn formed the basis of Indonesia's Sahabat-AI.¹ Malaysia, meanwhile, is pushing toward a genuinely sovereign approach with its ILMU model.²

The regional logic is this: every project deepens local AI expertise, a durable advantage that compounds regardless of how the frontier race plays out. The strategic rationale is to achieve something frontier models cannot: genuine linguistic and cultural fluency in Bahasa Indonesia, Thai, Vietnamese and the region's many other languages, while keeping the economic value AI generates within local institutions rather than remitting it to external providers. Measured against those goals instead of raw capability benchmarks, the regional model effort is both well-designed and strategically necessary.³

Chinese open-weight models have changed the competitive dynamics faster than most anticipated. On OpenRouter, Chinese models now lead by token volume, their share climbing from low single digits in early 2025 to a weekly peak of 46% by mid-2026. Priced well below leading US systems, DeepSeek, Qwen and Z.ai's GLM give regional enterprises a genuine alternative and meaningful leverage. For companies managing agentic workload costs carefully, that price competition is significant.⁴

The practical question for ASEAN enterprises is therefore a portfolio management problem: which model for which task, at what cost and sovereign risk, without accumulating technology debt that forecloses future flexibility.

Overall, open-weight or open-source models have become much more available. They can be downloaded, inspected, modified and run on infrastructure the user controls. An open letter⁵ published by more than 230 companies in July 2026 argues they widen access to the AI economy, sharpen competition and let firms match the right model to the right job at the right cost. Anthropic accepts those benefits and calls open models without dangerous capabilities a public good, but rejects the claim that openness automatically improves safety, pressing instead for pre-release testing of every sufficiently capable model, open or closed.⁶

“The enterprise AI debate in ASEAN has matured from ‘which single frontier model is best?’ to ‘how do we architect an agile, multi-model portfolio?’ Navigating this requires a true full-stack approach—spanning scalable AI infrastructure, open foundation models and robust orchestration platforms—that allows organizations to match the right model to the right task at the optimal cost and risk profile, without accruing legacy tech debt.”



Mark Micallef
Managing Director
Google Cloud
Southeast Asia

Applications and software

The application layer is where most ASEAN businesses will encounter agentic AI first, not as systems they build, but as capabilities activated inside platforms they already run. Salesforce, ServiceNow, Microsoft Copilot, SAP and Zoom are already woven into regional enterprise workflows. The shift underway is these platforms moving from AI-assisted to agentic: autonomous IT service desk workflows, agent-driven CRM operations, multilingual voice agents handling customer interactions end-to-end.

“Agentic AI will become most tangible to businesses through the tools their people already use every day.

At Zoom, that means embedding AI directly into the platform, drawing on leading models through a federated approach and connecting openly across enterprise applications.

By turning real-time conversations—including multilingual voice—into actions and completed outcomes, AI moves from a separate experiment to an integrated part of how teams get work done.”



Carlos Quaderi
Head of APAC
Zoom

“Adobe’s mission is to unlock creativity for all. And that means that job roles change in style and in composition. Adobe absolutely committed to both, our people and our customers. We treat ourselves as customer-zero and continuously consider 3 main aspects that we call ART: accountable, responsible and transparent. Every organization needs to take a breath and establish their guidelines on responsible and ethical AI usage, and then indeed act on those.”



Rochelle Tognetti
AI Strategy &
Evangelism
Asia Pacific & Japan
Adobe

ASEAN’s position as a sophisticated adopter at this layer is stronger than it appears. The volume of regional deployment gives enterprises real leverage in shaping how global vendors localize their products, prioritize language support and build compliance features suited to ASEAN’s fragmented regulatory environment. Companies that recognize this are using purchasing decisions to shape product direction, not simply to buy.

This layer also carries the most immediate data sovereignty weight. Localization rules governing where customer data may be stored and processed will determine which platforms can legally scale across ASEAN borders, creating genuine commercial space for providers able to offer enterprise-grade capability within national boundaries, a structural gap global incumbents cannot easily close.



“Our research suggests the sharpest early acceleration will come in categories where decisions are frequent and complex enough that an agent genuinely makes buying easier. When that happens, agents do more than redirect existing demand; they create incremental spending. That is what makes agentic commerce a growth story for this region's brands, not simply a channel shift.”



Patricio De Matteis
Accenture Song
Southeast Asia Lead

Commerce is where agentic AI reaches ASEAN consumers first, and the region's dominant platform has now committed to it. In February 2026, Sea Ltd, the Singapore-based owner of Shopee, expanded its strategic partnership with Google to jointly explore an AI agentic shopping prototype linking Shopee with Google services, so shoppers can discover products, interact with listings and complete purchases across platforms rather than within a single app. Shopee held 52% of Southeast Asian e-commerce in 2024, which means the prototype will set the default experience for most of the region's online shoppers. The partnership also reaches beyond the storefront: Sea's digital finance unit Monee is working with Google on the Agent Payments Protocol (AP2), an open framework for AI-initiated payment flows adapted to Southeast Asian financial services, and gaming unit Garena is applying the same tools to game development and live operations.⁷

For a region where social commerce reached \$47.6 billion in 2025 and is forecast to reach \$186.5 billion by 2030, the gap between what is now technically deployable and what most companies are running represents one of the largest untapped commercial opportunities in the region.⁸

Data and platforms

Between applications and infrastructure sits the layer that most determines whether agentic AI delivers value: where data is stored, cleaned, governed and served to the models that depend on it. An agent is only as capable as the data it draws on, making this tier simultaneously the hardest constraint and the clearest competitive opening for ASEAN.

Global platform leaders such as Google BigQuery, Amazon Redshift, Microsoft Fabric, Databricks and Snowflake hold strong positions across the region, joined by Chinese vendors AliCloud and BytePlus offering comparable stacks at competitive price points. For ASEAN enterprises, however, platform selection carries a dimension absent in most other markets: the legal jurisdiction of the provider matters as much as its technical capability.

Laws in the country where a provider is headquartered, such as the U.S. CLOUD Act or China's National Intelligence Law, can compel disclosure of data to that government even when the data physically resides within ASEAN borders. For regulated industries and government-linked enterprises, this is an active procurement risk. It creates genuine commercial space for providers who can offer enterprise-grade data management within national borders, in regional languages and under local regulatory regimes, something global incumbents cannot easily replicate at the market-specific level ASEAN requires.

“Organizations investing in AI evaluation are 6x more likely to move projects into production successfully, while those focused on governance are 12x more likely. Businesses that delay building governance frameworks risk falling behind—not because they lack access to AI models, but because they postpone developing the organizational capabilities needed to create sustained value.”



Cecily Ng
Vice President and
General Manager
ASEAN and Greater China
Databricks

ASEAN carries a counterintuitive advantage here. Many enterprise data systems across the region are younger than their Western counterparts, built in the last decade, not the last three. That means fewer legacy constraints and a genuine opportunity to build data foundations that are AI-ready by design rather than retrofitted after the fact. The region is deciding what to build, not patching a 30-year-old architecture. That decision, made deliberately, becomes a structural edge. Chapter 4 shows how far most companies remain from realizing it.

Infrastructure and sovereignty

AI needs a strong, secure and local foundation. This physical layer is where ASEAN has moved fastest and with the most committed capital. More than 2,000 data center facilities already operate across Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines, with regional investment on track to approach \$30 billion by 2030.⁹

Singapore remains the Tier 1 hub, with roughly 1 gigawatt of installed capacity and vacancy near 1.4%.¹⁰ Land and power constraints have pushed the heaviest compute to Johor, home to roughly 80% of Malaysia's operational capacity.¹¹ Hyperscaler commitments continue to grow: Amazon Web Services has earmarked approximately \$9 billion,¹² Microsoft a further \$5.5 billion,¹³ with total regional commitments exceeding \$20 billion.¹⁰ JLL projects Malaysian capacity will more than double to approximately 2,055 megawatts by end-2026, with 3,500 megawatts further in the pipeline.¹⁴ Google has committed approximately \$2 billion to Malaysia and Microsoft a further \$2.2 billion, plus \$1.7 billion to Indonesia.¹² Thailand is the next contender, using Board of Investment incentives and its Eastern Economic Corridor to compete on cost and connectivity.

"As the buildings of the future move from Automation to autonomy, one of the most common gaps is the lack of integrated building data across facilities, which limits visibility into energy performance, maintenance needs, and operational efficiency. Many organizations also struggle with scaling digital and AI capabilities across portfolios and turning data into actionable outcomes that support sustainability and business objectives."



Harsh Vardhan Bajpai
Director
Connected Buildings,
Honeywell Technologies
ASEAN, Korea & Japan

The critical distinction, one that applies across every market, is that hosting compute is not the same as capturing value from it. Malaysia paused approvals for new non-AI data centers from February 2026 under electricity and water pressure.¹⁵ The ASEAN+3 Macroeconomic Office (AMRO) warns that cooling requirements strain water resources and that limited domestic value capture means much of the economic upside can accrue to foreign cloud providers rather than local economies.¹⁶ Governments are responding with sovereign capability investments: Malaysia's 2026 budget allocates close to \$490 million to a national sovereign AI cloud designed to keep citizen data onshore.¹⁷ Whether the region captures the full economic return of its infrastructure buildout, or primarily hosts it for others, is the open strategic question this layer leaves unanswered.

Governance and trust

Governance is the cross-cutting enabler that determines whether the four technical layers can be deployed safely, at speed and across borders. It is also the dimension where ASEAN is most uneven and where that unevenness is becoming a competitive variable rather than a compliance footnote.

The regional policy landscape is covered in detail in Chapter 5 for each market. The strategic pattern that matters at the stack level is this: Singapore leads with the world's first Model AI Governance Framework for Agentic AI, published by IMDA in January 2026, setting practical controls for agent identity, audit trails and human oversight.¹⁸

Other markets are moving at varying pace: Malaysia has established a Ministry of Digital and a National AI Office; Indonesia is finalizing its roadmap. The 2026 ASEAN Digital Ministers' Meeting adopted the Hanoi Digital Declaration¹⁹ placing trust and safety at the center of the regional agenda but operative instruments remain voluntary and national approaches continue to diverge on the specifics that enterprise compliance teams must actually navigate. The result for any MNC operating across five or more ASEAN markets is a governance architecture problem and less of a technology problem.

"For many SMEs, the immediate barrier to AI adoption is not lack of interest. It is uncertainty about how to use AI responsibly, protect data and stay compliant. Clear, practical guidance is essential if businesses are to move from caution to confidence."



Mark Lee
Chairman
Singapore Business
Federation

Building that architecture jurisdiction by jurisdiction (agent permission scope, human-in-the-loop thresholds, audit trail requirements, cross-border data handling) is neither efficient nor fast enough given the pace of deployment. Experienced partners with cross-jurisdiction regulatory frameworks and implementation track records are compressing what would otherwise be multi-year buildouts into structured programs with defined milestones. The cost of under-governed deployment (regulatory exposure, failed rollouts, reputational damage) now demonstrably exceeds the cost of building the foundations correctly at the outset.

For example, the Veeva approach in Life Sciences illustrates the governance design principle that separates effective from risky deployments at this layer. Rather than extracting data into a separate AI environment, Veeva keeps data, content and agents inside the validated platform, says Tristan Theurier, General Manager at Veeva APAC Commercial. The agent inherits the exact permissions of the individual user; every consequential output remains subject to human review. Additionally, every output by the agent is logged in the Veeva audit trail for full traceability. Governance is built into the architecture from the start. Any regulated industry designing agentic workflows should treat this as a reference model before finalizing its own approach.

Adoption, leadership and operating model

Adoption is accelerating faster than the workforce can absorb it, and this readiness gap is the region's binding constraint. In JLL's 2026 Future of Work survey, Asia Pacific led global peers on several adoption measures but also reported the highest AI skills gap of any region, named by 42% of respondents as their main constraint.²⁰ Assessments across Singapore and Malaysia found that only about 20% of professionals consistently show AI ready behaviors, and while more than 70% claim advanced digital literacy, far fewer feel confident in the decision making and computational thinking needed to supervise AI.²¹ Access Partnership estimates that around 164 million workers, some 57% of the regional workforce, could be affected by AI.²²

While governance sets the boundaries, the degree of adoption determines whether companies see returns, which is in turn shaped by the operating model. The gap between aspiration and execution is widest here, and the cost of that gap shows up most directly in business outcomes.

"We are looking at the 'queen bees': leading companies in specific industries that can galvanize agentic AI adoption within their ecosystems. Once these companies succeed, the rest in the industry such as their suppliers can see the benefits of agentic AI adoption, and this can accelerate adoption."



Tan Hee Teck
President
Singapore National
Employers Federation
(SNEF)

The organizations delivering measurable agentic value across ASEAN share one distinguishing characteristic: they have redesigned work around the agent rather than bolting the agent onto existing workflows.

The skills challenge in ASEAN has a structural dimension that makes it harder than in most other regions. Southeast Asian languages make up less than 1% of most global model training corpora, which means off-the-shelf tools underperform in local contexts, and the supervisory capability needed to identify and correct that underperformance is exactly what is in shortest supply.

Leadership in the agentic era requires a different combination of qualities than those that built most regional businesses. Odgers finds that emotional intelligence and stakeholder engagement now rival technical expertise as differentiators, because the decisions requiring human judgment are qualitatively different from those an agent can handle. For ASEAN executives managing adoption across markets with vastly different workforce confidence and digital maturity, holding a coherent regional strategy while giving each market genuine operational autonomy is itself the defining executive challenge the agentic era has introduced.

Agentic AI demands operating model redesign: redrawn roles, redesigned workflows and new accountability structures. This redesign is the hardest part of the transformation and what most organizations are deferring. Partners with cross-industry and cross-market implementation experience know which sequencing decisions compound positively and which create organizational debt. That accumulated pattern recognition is the factor compressing multi-year transformation timelines into measurable programs.

“Leadership is expected to be much closer to the actual business and the people. The best leaders I’ve seen are the ones that create platforms for their people to express their ideas and their concerns in an open and trustworthy environment.”



Paul Clayson
Head of Technology and
CIO Practice
Southeast Asia
Odgers

Venture capital and startup ecosystem

The venture ecosystem is where ASEAN's applied AI energy is most concentrated, and where the structural constraints on translating that energy into sustained regional advantage are most exposed.

“Regional champions do exist and can scale globally—Grab, Zalora and Silicon Box are proof points—but the capital backing them disproportionately originates outside the region. The local VC and incubator ecosystem remains structurally thinner than the US, and the funding data confirms the imbalance: Southeast Asia’s venture funding reached US\$5.4 billion in 2025, but deal count hit a six-year low, with Singapore alone capturing 91% of all regional capital while Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines continue to lose share.”



Gianfranco Casati
Chairman
Antares Ventures

The gap reflects a specific investor caution: the risk that the next frontier model release eliminates a startup's core differentiation, a hyperscaler bundles comparable capability at no marginal cost or that local markets are not yet deep enough to monetize at the scale required for venture returns.

There is also a services gap that goes largely unaddressed. AI-native tools exist in abundance, but few players help companies navigate the adoption journey itself: mapping use cases by value, deploying solutions and integrating them into live operating workflows. The most fundable ASEAN AI startups are increasingly those solving the adoption problem rather than racing to build frontier capability.

Prantik Mazumdar, president of TiE Singapore, points to the organization's TiE Elev8 program that is run in partnership with HP Garage 2.0 and Antler, as a signal of where capital and mentorship efforts are flowing: backing ventures building model-agnostic, hybrid cloud and edge solutions for the future of work, helping them scale by bundling with HP devices and global channel partners, a model that solves for distribution alongside product, which is the constraint most AI-native startups in the region hit first. In this era, more than an MVP, what is desired is scaled distribution across markets.



Biomedical and education are where the capital logic is sharpest, according to Dr. Anand Govindaluri, Founder and CEO at Govin Capital, Singapore. Drug discovery timelines are compressing from 12 years to six; mental health issues such as dementia can now be screened in under an hour using AI-powered deep learning models; a Singapore edtech portfolio company pushed university admissions success rates from 10% to 50% by matching student aptitude to university requirements at application stage. “AI will replace doctors who don’t know AI,” he says, and the same pressure applies to any professional whose workflow depends on pattern recognition at scale. The ventures finding traction are those solving for that bottleneck with enough market specificity to matter.

Startups taking a deliberately market-by-market approach are finding traction where regionally uniform products stall. BerriBot, a Singapore-anchored talent-enablement startup, runs high-volume hiring through a network of autonomous agents, cutting one client’s hiring turnaround from approximately 20 days to a single day. Its go-to-market is tuned market by market: the Philippines’ business-process and shared-services sector for hiring volume and interview-fraud risk; higher-quality hiring automation and skilling in Singapore; multilingual and locally adaptive deployments in Indonesia and Malaysia. That granularity (market-specific product, market-specific distribution) is increasingly the pattern separating ASEAN AI startups that scale from those that plateau.

The venture ecosystem ultimately reflects the same truth as every other layer of the ASEAN agentic stack: the region’s complexity is both its constraint and its differentiation. Investors and founders building inside that complexity, with genuine market-by-market fluency, accumulate operational knowledge that cannot be acquired from the outside. That knowledge, compounded over time, is what turns a position in the stack into durable competitive advantage. The next chapter shows how far most organizations currently are from that position.

THE REALITIES ON THE GROUND: THE STATE OF AGENTIC AI IN ASEAN

The previous chapter mapped what is being built across ASEAN's agentic AI stack and who controls each layer. This chapter asks the harder question: how are companies actually deploying agentic AI and what do the results reveal about the distance between ambition and operational reality?

We surveyed more than 180 companies across five dimensions: governance, operating model, data readiness, market strategy and deployment. Based on their response, each company was classified into one of four tiers: Beginning, Exploring, Scaling or Advanced.

The picture that emerges is consistent and challenging. Ambition is high and early deployment is widespread, yet most companies lack the foundations to turn pilots into scaled value. ASEAN has embraced agentic AI but not yet rebuilt around it.

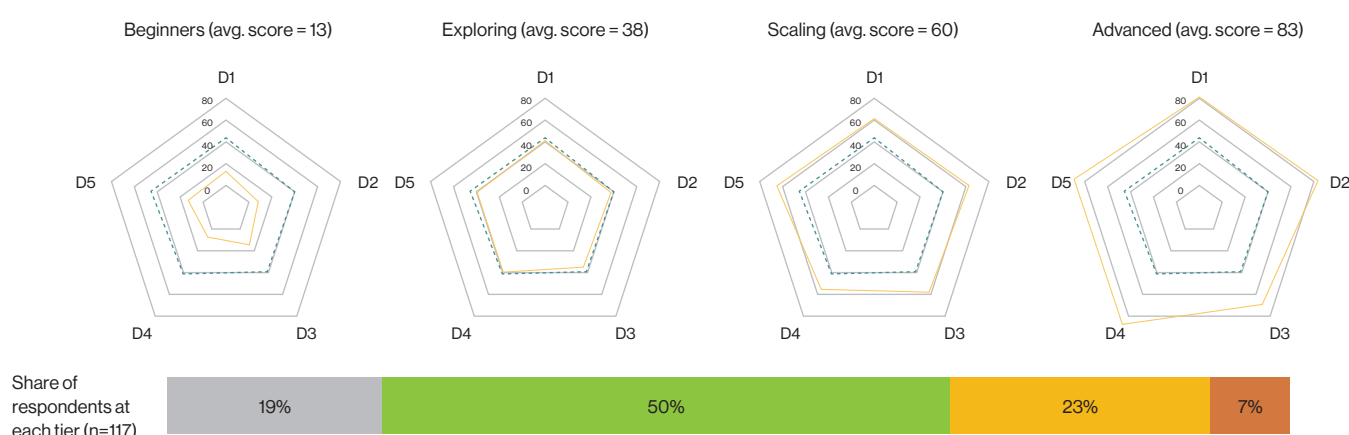
Most of ASEAN is stuck mid-journey

The average maturity score across the five dimensions is 42 on a 100-point scale, placing the typical ASEAN company firmly in the Exploring tier. Half of surveyed organizations fall into that category, while 19% remain at the Beginner stage, with either no deployment activity or activity too limited to qualify as a program (Figure 11). This makes ASEAN a middle-heavy market: Companies have put agentic AI on the agenda, but most have not yet built the capability to make it an operating advantage.

KEY HIGHLIGHT

Only 7% of ASEAN companies are ready for agentic AI

Figure 11
AI Journey Maturity Score



D1: Trust and governance		Score range	Description
D2: Operational model	Beginners	<25	Early stage or not yet started
D3: Data readiness	Exploring	25–49	Pilots and experiments underway
D4: Market strategy	Scaling	50–74	Active deployment with measurable impact
D5: Agentic deployment	Advanced	≥75	Top performers — AI-first operations, scaled deployment across ASEAN

The tier profiles show why the middle of the maturity curve is so hard to break out of. Beginners score an average of 13, with their sharpest gaps in operating model and market strategy, both scoring just 9. They have not redesigned work around AI, and they have not built ASEAN-specific playbooks. Companies in the Exploring and Scaling tiers look broadly balanced, progressing across all five dimensions without breaking through in any one area.

Advanced companies, with an average score of 83, are different in kind, not just degree. Their strongest dimension is market strategy, where they score 92. What separates them is skill at translating AI capability into market-specific execution across ASEAN's different regulatory, customer and operating environments. The path to advanced maturity runs through market fluency and disciplined execution, rather than raw deployment.

Adoption and leadership is the biggest challenge

When asked to name the single biggest internal barrier to scaling agentic AI, culture and change management topped the list at 27%, ahead of legacy IT and data readiness at 17% each (Figure 12).

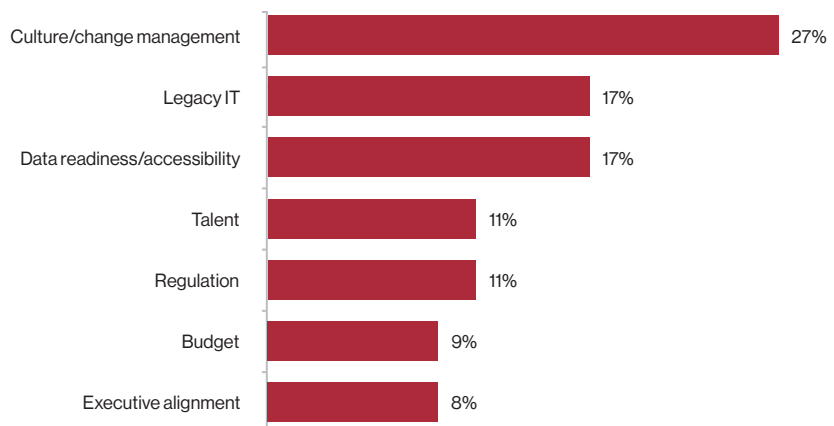
Executive alignment (8%) and budget (9%) ranked near the bottom. This suggests that the constraint is not primarily financial, most organizations have enough resources to move forward. What they lack is the organizational will to absorb the disruption that genuine operating model change requires.

KEY HIGHLIGHT

Culture and change management is the biggest challenge

Figure 12
Biggest internal barrier to scaling agentic AI

What is the single biggest internal barrier to scaling agentic AI in your ASEAN operations? (n=184)



Technical barriers like legacy infrastructure and data readiness are real, and require investment and structured remediation. Culture and change management, however, are harder to solve through spending alone. An organization that has not built internal belief in agentic AI, or that races resistance to redesigning how work gets done, cannot simply buy its way to scale.

For a market where half of companies remain in the Exploring tier, this matters. The 93% who have not reached Advanced maturity are generally not waiting for budget approval. They are waiting for something much harder to manufacture: the willingness to absorb the disruption that genuine operating model change requires.

As agentic AI deployment becomes standard among advanced players, the distance between tiers stops being a maturity gap and starts being a market position gap. Organizations that remain in exploration mode through 2026 will need to catch up on lost ground, not just close a capability gap.

The Government Technology Agency of Singapore (GovTech Singapore) offers an example of how AI can be adopted at scale across the public sector. With more than 154,000 public officers across Singapore's public service, the focus is on equipping officers with AI capabilities that enhance productivity and improve service delivery.

The goal, however, is not AI adoption for its own sake. Rather, the mandate is to make government more digital and public services more effective.

"We want every public officer to have an AI assistant that helps them work smarter, better and faster. More importantly, we need to make sure that whatever work we do makes lives better for the citizens. AI is simply a means to an end and not an end in itself."



Goh Wei Boon
Chief Executive
GovTech Singapore

"Success depends not just on technology, but also on investing in skills, change management and governance to help people work effectively and responsibly alongside AI."

Executive Vice President
Global Payments Infrastructure Firm

The governance gap and its consequences

Every prior technology wave rewarded organizations that redesigned work around the new tool, not those that bolt it on. Agentic AI raises the stakes because agents act where past tools only informed. The real test is not what companies have bought but whether they have rethought how work is organized, whether teams trust what agents produce and how that work is governed.

Across governance structures, team trust and workflow redesign, the pattern is consistent. Companies have adopted general policies, permitted low-stakes use and redesigned some workflows, but most have stopped short of making agentic AI the default way work gets done (Figure 13).

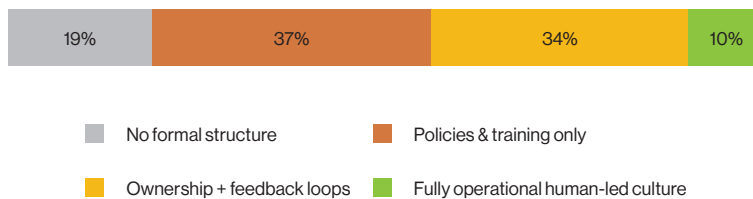
KEY HIGHLIGHT

Most companies remain at the earlier stages for governance, trust and organizational redesign

Figure 13

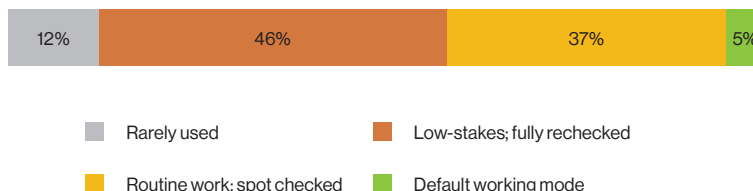
Human-led Governance

How would you describe the way your organization ensures AI agents remain human-led, trustworthy and accountable across your ASEAN markets? (n=177)



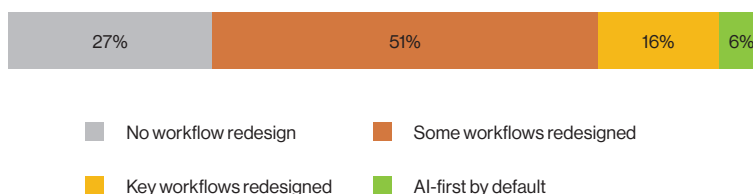
Team Trust

How much do your own teams trust and actually rely on AI agents in day-to-day work across ASEAN? (n=177)



Work Organization

How has your company changed how work is organized in ASEAN to take advantage of AI: redesigning workflows, changing team structures, reassigning roles? (n=184)



More than half report either no formal governance structure (19%) or only general policies and some training (37%). Only 10% describe their organizations as AI-augmented but still human-led. That matters because governance creates the conditions for trust. Without it, even well-performing agents operate inside a culture of caution.

That trust deficit shows up in how companies use agents. The largest group, 46%, confines agents to low-stakes tasks that are then fully rechecked. Only 5% say agents are the default way of working. This is cautious augmentation, not delegation. The human stays in the loop on nearly everything the agent does, which means the productivity gains of genuine delegation are not being captured.

Workflow redesign shows the shallowest change. About a quarter of companies have redesigned no workflows at all and roughly half have redesigned only some. Fewer than 5% of companies operate AI-first by default. Companies have acquired the tools, but much of the work look the same as it did before.

“At Micron, AI is no longer a tool—it is becoming how we operate. With AI accessible to every employee in Micron, workforce transformation has become a company-wide competitive advantage. Today, more than 99% of employees are AI fluent, 84% have achieved practitioner-level proficiency, and AI adoption has grown by over 100% in the past year.”



Cher Whee Sim

Vice President, (People Strategy, Technology and Workforce Transformation)
Micron Technology

Data readiness is a major bottleneck

Culture and change management may be the single most-cited barrier to scaling agentic AI, but technical foundations are close behind. Legacy IT and data readiness, each named by 17% of respondents, collectively outweigh culture as a constraint (Figure 12).

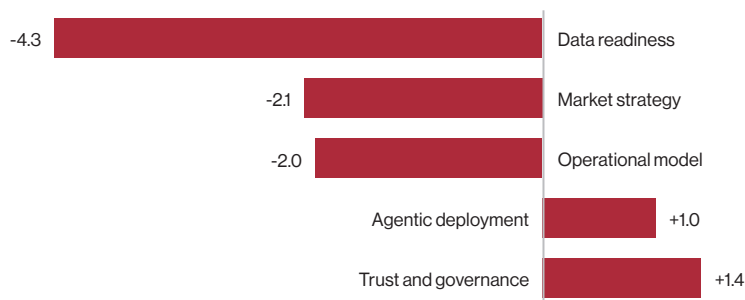
Companies score slightly above the index average on agentic deployment and governance, suggesting that many have set some ground rules and put agents in motion (Figure 14). But they score materially lower on the foundations that determine whether those agents deliver value: operating model change, market strategy and data readiness. The five-point gap between deployment and data readiness is especially consequential. Agents cannot create value from data that is fragmented, inaccessible or inconsistent across markets.

KEY HIGHLIGHT

Weak data foundations hold ASEAN companies back

Figure 14
Dimension Gap from Overall Average

Why do you see your company's level of trade and investment increasing in ASEAN over the next five years? (n = 42)

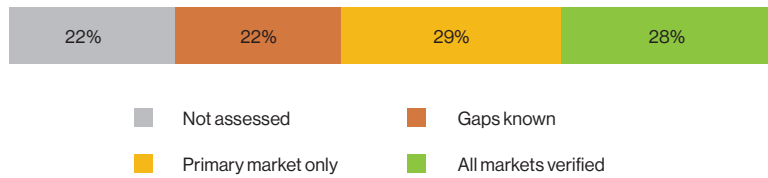


57% are confident their data storage and processing is legally compliant in their primary market, and 54% have established regional or unified data platforms (Figure 15). Those numbers look reasonable until set against the operational reality: 69% of organizations have less than half their data ready for agentic AI systems, meaning it is not structured, labeled or accessible in formats agents can act on. Only 9% report more than 80% of their data AI-ready.

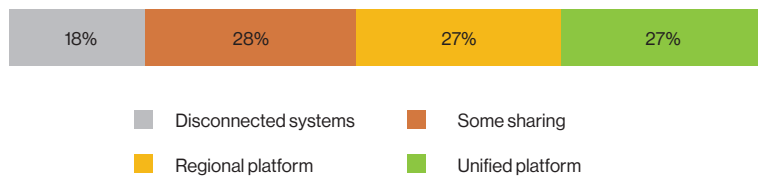
Compliance and capability are different things. ASEAN's data foundations may be largely compliant, but most are not yet capable.

KEY HIGHLIGHT**ASEAN's data foundations are mostly compliant, not capable****Figure 15****Compliance Confidence**

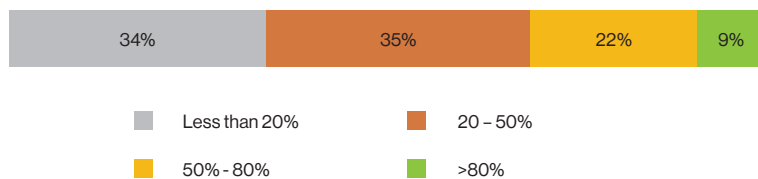
How confident are you that your data storage and processing is legally compliant with local regulations?

**Data Platform**

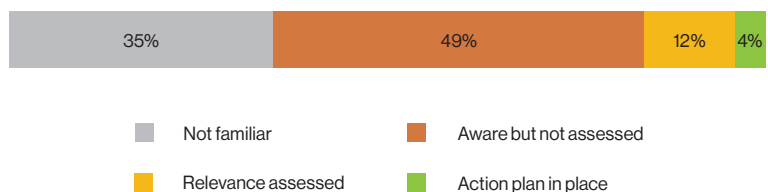
How would you describe your company's data setup across ASEAN markets?

**AI-Usable Data**

What share of your company's data would you say is currently usable by an AI system, meaning it is structured, labelled and accessible in an agreed format?

**DEFA Awareness**

How familiar is your organization with the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA) and what it means for your operations?



Far East Organization, one of Singapore's largest privately held real estate groups, addressed this directly as it expanded internationally. "We cannot assume one AI model, one process or one governance structure will suffice in all our markets," says Ng Yee Pern, Chief Technology Officer. The company's response is building a layered architecture: core capabilities such as cybersecurity standards, data governance, audit trail, and identity and access control are standardized across markets. Local requirements, including platform integration, localization and personal-data storage, are adapted market by market.

This architecture is designed to support a growing portfolio of agentic applications: generating leasing documents, reconciling financials, consolidating service reports across numerous properties spanning multiple asset classes and formulating business strategies across geographies. For Far East Organization, the challenge is creating an operating environment where agents can function consistently across markets while remaining locally responsive.

The DEFA Blind Spot

Perhaps most striking is the gap in policy awareness. For example, the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA), a regional framework to harmonize digital trade, data flows and e-commerce regulations across Southeast Asia, is set to reshape the rules of digital commerce across the region. Yet 84% either don't know about it or haven't assessed its relevance to their business. Only 4% have an action plan with an internal owner responsible for it. Companies with low familiarity are not just missing a policy conversation, they are likely making architecture and compliance decisions today that may need to be unwound when DEFA provisions take effect.

The implications for agentic AI are significant. DEFA's nine pillars—covering cross-border data flows, digital trade and AI governance—will set the regulatory environment in which AI agents operate across ASEAN. Organizations deploying agents that move data between markets, make automated decisions or interact with customers across borders will face direct operational implications.

Deployment outpaces measurement

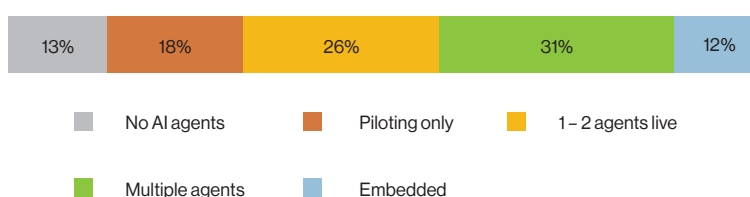
87% of companies report agents in pilot or production (Figure 16). On the surface, that looks like decisive commitment. Beneath it, the data points to a more uneven reality. Deployment has been shallow, concentrated in the lowest-complexity functions and largely disconnected from any measurement of commercial value.

KEY HIGHLIGHT

Few are deploying, even fewer are measuring and capturing value

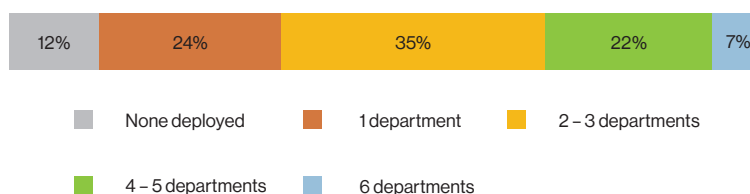
Figure 16
Deployment Stage

Which best describes your company's current stage of AI agent deployment in ASEAN?



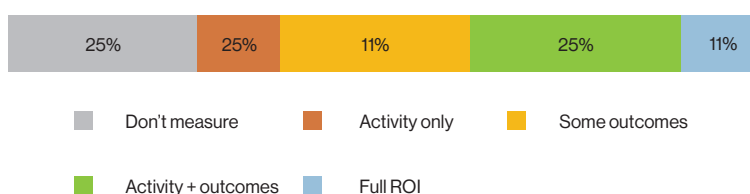
Departments

In which business area have you deployed autonomous AI agents?



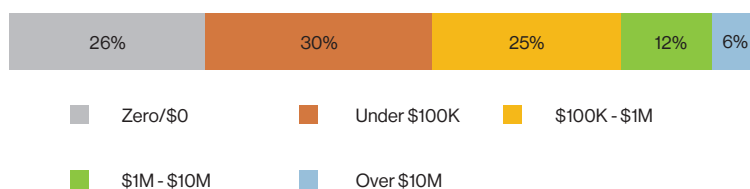
Impact Measurement

How do you measure the business impact of your agentic AI deployments in ASEAN?



Monthly Value

What is the approximate combined monthly value of transactions, decisions or cost savings that AI agents are directly executing or influencing in your ASEAN operations?



“Our approach is pragmatic: identify clear problem statements and business use cases, run focused proofs of concept, learn quickly and scale what works. Start in controlled environments, apply governance early and measure productivity, service improvements and value delivered.”



Supriya Rao Patwardhan
Executive Vice President
DHL Group
Global Head of IT Services

“We are seeing AI reshape work more than replace it. As routine tasks become automated, organizations are redesigning jobs, investing in reskilling and creating new roles that combine technical expertise, business judgment and human-centric capabilities.”



Cindy Lee
Senior Vice President
Country Manager
Singapore and Head of
Cluster for Singapore,
Malaysia, Vietnam and
Indonesia
Adecco

The majority (45%) are at the pilot stage or running only one or two live agents. Deployment has followed the path of least resistance. Marketing, customer service and sales are the top three use cases: visible, shallowly integrated and legible to leadership. Only 7% of companies have reached six or more functions, the threshold at which agentic AI starts operating as organizational infrastructure rather than a set of departmental experiments.

The measurement gap is more concerning. A quarter of companies with agents running do not measure business impact at all. Another 13% track only activity metrics such as interactions or token use which describe what agents are doing without connecting it to what the business is gaining. Over half of all respondents are either pre-deployment or generating under \$100k monthly from agents. Only 6% report agents influencing or executing over \$10M monthly.

Value that is not measured cannot be managed, and value that is not managed is not captured.

Adecco shows what becomes visible when measurement is designed properly. Across its lead markets globally, the company has seen AI contributing to a 50% reduction in time-to-deliver, fill rates exceeding 80% and true 24/7 candidate engagement, with 51% of candidate interactions occurring outside business hours, says Cindy Lee, Senior Vice President, Country Manager Singapore and Head of Cluster for Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and Indonesia at Adecco. Those figures are knowable because Adecco's agentic AI team has built the measurement architecture to capture them. For the majority still without that architecture, equivalent gains may be happening and going uncounted or may not be happening at all.

SHARED OPPORTUNITIES AND LOCAL AGENTIC ADVANTAGES

The readiness gap is now clear. This chapter shows what closing it looks like, market by market, sector by sector. ASEAN offers eleven distinct AI opportunities, each shaped by a different combination of digital infrastructure, regulatory posture, workforce capability and economic structure.

The shared opportunities described in the sections that follow reflect use cases where the commercial logic holds across the region. The country profiles show where local conditions create distinctive advantages and where they impose constraints that no regional strategy can ignore.

Across the top six ASEAN markets by GDP, one pattern holds: value concentrates where data foundations, talent and regulatory clarity are most mature. Every market has now built or backed a sovereign AI model. Access to capable AI is no longer the constraint. Readiness to deploy it accountably is.

Singapore: Local and regional operations

Singapore operates at a dual pace that no other ASEAN market replicates. As the headquarters of more than 4,000 multinational regional operations, it is simultaneously the node through which ASEAN AI strategy is set and the market where that strategy is most immediately tested. Returns on AI agents run from roughly 8 to 10 times in Singapore, well above the 1 to 2 times achievable for example in Indonesia at comparable deployment stages.²³ That spread reflects the density of decision-making authority concentrated here as much as infrastructure maturity.

The AI approach for Singapore as a high-cost, high-skill developed economy is fundamentally different from the rest of the region. The question for Singapore-based MNC leadership teams is not whether AI will change their operations but how fast they can redesign those operations before competitors do.

"In staying ahead of the evolving dynamics, AI has become central to how Citi operates to serve our clients and how we are building a bank of the future. With our global network supporting supply chain and capital flows, our strategy is to embed AI across our businesses, providing AI-powered client solutions while equipping nearly 180,000 Citi colleagues across 87 jurisdictions with the tools to create an agile, AI-enabled workforce."



Amol Gupte
Asia South Head
Citi

Use cases: MNC regional operations

Singapore's role as regional headquarters generates a distinct set of agentic use cases: cross-border, cross-function and high-stakes by definition.

Industry	Flagship agentic use cases	Case studies
Pharma and Med Tech	- Agentic sales and marketing operations - Patient services and healthcare provider transformation - Digital insight sales - Pharmacovigilance case intake, triage and reporting	Life sciences companies are experimenting with agentic AI to eliminate one of the biggest hidden costs in marketing operations: re-work. AI agents can build assets from pre-approved components, adapt a single global master for each local market and produce every channel variant from one approved source, with review guidelines and prior learnings applied before a reviewer opens the file. As the cycles between creative, content, review and production are cut down, cost and time savings flow. Today, agents assist and people decide. Within a few years, agentic marketing operations could plan, assemble, route and publish, with teams governing the exceptions rather than performing every step.
Procurement, Planning and Manufacturing	- AI powered sourcing optimization and negotiation - Agentic spend intelligence and opportunity sensing - Autonomous demand sensing and forecasting - Autonomous inventory replenishment and redistribution - Agentic AI predictive maintenance & intelligent asset management - AI-powered scheduling and optimization	A major national oil and gas company in Southeast Asia deployed AI-powered predictive analytics across its asset operations to catch equipment anomalies before they escalate, shifting maintenance from reactive to planned and reducing disruption to normal operations. The result was \$33 million saved, translating into a 20x ROI. Asset utilization improved by 0.1% per plant, with unplanned downtime reduced as a direct result.

Industry	Flagship agentic use cases	Case studies
Consumer, Retail and Hospitality	• Demand forecasting and replenishment across markets • Trade promotion execution and settlement • Route-to-market and distributor performance management • Marketing operations from brief to localized asset • Social commerce order and service handling	A global beauty brand is deploying agentic AI for topline and bottom-line impact in Southeast Asia. The VELA platform orchestrates hyperpersonalized marketing campaigns, reading real-time trends, identifying the right influencers, generating content variants and localizations, and driving smarter pricing and e-commerce promotions. With VELA, brands can go to market 25% faster on campaign and asset creation, giving companies an orchestration layer that eliminates the manual bottlenecks between insight, content and activation.
Transportation and Logistics	• Route and fleet optimization across borders • Customs and trade documentation filing • Exception management for delayed or damaged freight • Warehouse task orchestration and labor allocation • Freight rate negotiation within limits • Customer Service • Digital Sales and lead management • Customer collection and revenue leakage	A global logistics company is using an agentic AI assistant to handle customer queries via voice and chat for logistics companies—tracking shipments, answering FAQs and booking—all without human intervention. The system uses five specialized AI agents orchestrated as one to autonomously manage customs operations: handling documentation, compliance checks, duty calculations and clearance workflows end-to-end. Agentic AI also handles customer outreach, engagement and service at scale, driving higher conversion, lower churn and greater share of wallet. Real-time insights feed marketing to sharpen campaigns, content and media spend, turning every customer interaction into smarter growth.

Industry	Flagship agentic use cases	Case studies
Global Financial Services	• Agentic relationship management and client opportunity identification • Autonomous know your customer and onboarding • Financial crime Investigation and anti-money laundering • Credit underwriting and recommendation • Claims-to-settlement agent • Markets and investment research • Regulatory change monitoring and remediation • Finance and treasury forecasting • Operations exception resolution • Enterprise risk, controls and audit reporting	A global bank is using agentic AI for client lifecycle management (CLM) and know your customer (KYC), the most manual, resource-intensive and regulation-heavy part of its operations. The bank used a scalable multi-agentic platform for rapid agent design, build and deployment, with transparency, observability, guardrails and evaluation built in. On top sit a marketplace for agent discovery and sharing, an orchestration platform spanning humans and agents, and modular agents with human-in-the-loop. Wrapped around it were AI governance, operational readiness and value tracking. Within a year, agents were rolled out to 1,000+ users, achieving a 20–50% reduction in manual effort in the first pilot module, alongside automated agentic evaluations across objective, subjective and non-functional measures and a globally adopted AI-readiness framework setting go-live criteria.
Cross-functional and Shared Services	• Procurement and sourcing through to purchase order • Invoice to cash and period-close support • HR service delivery, onboarding and payroll exceptions • IT service desk resolution • Policy, privacy and AI conformity monitoring	A leading retailer in Singapore needed to move beyond experimentation and embed agentic AI into their finance, HR and IT functions. Their approach centered on one shift: moving employees away from transaction handling and toward judgment and exception management, with AI agents taking on the routine work. The impact was tangible. Seven use cases now run at scale across the enterprise, with 100+ employees working alongside AI agents as a standard part of their role.

“ASEAN’s rise as a global growth engine is being accelerated by supply chain diversification, digital trade and technological innovation. Together with the rapid expansion of e-commerce and digital payments, AI will be a key enabler of the next phase of regional integration. Greater harmonization of cross-border trade data standards across ASEAN could further unlock efficiencies, strengthen connectivity and position the region at the forefront of the digital economy.”



Bianca Wong
Regional Vice President
Southeast Asia
FedEx

“In front-end fabrication, AI-enabled technology node process improvement has accelerated our engineering cycle-of-learning—along with smart maintenance and quality management spanning faster issue containment, troubleshooting and root cause analysis. Over the past years, this has driven a 50% improvement in time-to-market, a 50% reduction in cost of non-conformance, and a 20% increase in asset utilization—delivering precision and reliability at scale.”



Koen De Backer
Corporate Vice President
Smart Manufacturing & AI
Micron Technology

Use cases: Singapore local economy

Singapore's domestically driven government, financial services, telecoms and energy sectors operate under clearly defined national AI policies, architecture standards and adoption frameworks that create a more structured deployment environment than MNC regional operations face.

"At Changi Airport, our journey from digital to AI to agentic AI has reinforced that the real transformation is not technology but re-imagining the operating model, re-thinking workflows, decision-making and future roles around AI. What is truly needed is the end-to-end process redesign, stronger data foundations and bottom-up adoption."



James Fong
 Enterprise Digital
 Ecosystem & Business
 Senior VP
 Changi Airport Group

"Agentic AI will drive new growth for DBS by creating capacity, augmenting the capabilities of our people and transforming how we serve customers. As an AI-enabled bank with a heart, we embarked on our AI journey in 2014 and have since built on years of investment in data, technology, talent and governance to deploy agentic AI responsibly and at scale."



Nimish Panchmatia
 Chief Data and
 Transformation Officer
 DBS Bank

Sector	Priority use cases
Government and Public Sector	- Smart Nation predictive urban and transport planning - GenAI assistants for citizen digital services - Defense and public-safety threat analytics
Financial Services and Insurance	- AI wealth management and robo-advisory - Real-time market and risk analytics - Insurance claims automation and underwriting - Financial crime detection and AML monitoring
Telecom, Media and Technology	5G network optimization and GenAI CX assistants - AI fab yield optimization and predictive maintenance - GenAI R&D and code assistants - Edge-AI enterprise and cloud services
Energy, Utilities and Resources	- AI grid balancing and demand response - Commodity trading and demand analytics - Predictive maintenance and ESG monitoring

Policy

Singapore runs a voluntary, principles-based regime with no comprehensive AI Act, layered over a sectoral approach. Its spine is the National AI Strategy 2.0,²⁴ the Model AI Governance Framework for Generative AI and IMDA's world-first Model AI Governance Framework for Agentic AI (January 2026), setting practical controls for agent identity, audit trails and human oversight thresholds. Similarly, the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) issued AI risk management guidelines in December 2024.²⁵ Data sits under the PDPA, with 2024 advisory guidelines on personal data in AI systems and a Privacy Enhancing Technologies sandbox.

Adoption

Singapore posts one of the world's highest AI adoption rates: 29% of adults qualify as super users, against 12% in the United States.²⁶ Sophistication drives the payoff more than frequency: technique matters roughly twice as much as how often people use AI, and super users save 4.3 hours a week versus 2.1 for light users. Interest in AI agents already exceeds 50%.

The gap sits with smaller firms. Small and medium enterprise (SME) adoption stands at 14.5% against 62.5% at large enterprises. Closing it could add S\$20 billion by 2035.²⁶ Confidence lags too: 23% of workers are unsure using AI, rising to 41% among those over 55. Singapore's AI advantage is real and measurable. The strategic priority is making it inclusive enough to be durable.

"We are investing in the region through local talent, skills and hands-on deployment support. The clearest recent step is OpenAI for Singapore, a partnership with the Ministry of Digital Development and Information (MDDI) backed by more than S\$300 million.

At its center is our first Applied AI Lab outside the United States, and we plan to create more than 200 technical roles and make Singapore one of our global hubs for forward-deployed engineers."



Jon Sugihara
Head of AI Success
Engineering
Asia Pacific
OpenAI

Malaysia: Capitalize on compute

“Our agentic AI journey has evolved from deploying AI for operational efficiency to embedding it across enterprise functions—positioning AI as a digital co-worker that autonomously supports employees, streamlines business processes and enhances customer experiences. Rather than implementing isolated use cases, CelcomDigi is building an enterprise-wide AI operating model centered on intelligent automation and AI-enabled workflows. We have deployed more than 400 automations across the organization.”



**Azuree Hydani
Bin Misri**
Head of AI & Data
Innovation Division
CelcomDigi

“The Accenture Life Sciences Hub in Malaysia is a direct response to what Pharma and Medtech MNCs need: a near-shore partner that meets them where their shared services already are — and helps them transform across IT, business, commerce and marketing with human and agent collaboration driving cost and productivity gains together.”



Bani Trehan
Managing Director, AI &
Data, Accenture
Vice Chair, The American
Chamber of Commerce
Singapore

Malaysia's AI story has two distinct chapters running in parallel. The first is infrastructure: with Johor hosting roughly 80% of operational data center capacity²⁷ and hyperscaler commitments exceeding US\$20 billion across the region, Malaysia has become ASEAN's most important compute base.¹²

The second chapter is economic value capture, and on that measure, Malaysia is still closing the gap between hosting the infrastructure and owning the returns.

Three structural advantages give Malaysia a distinctive agentic opportunity beyond infrastructure:

- The Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone brings large-scale manufacturing investment that will need AI-enabled supply chain and quality management.
- Malaysia's proximity to Singapore has made it the natural location for APAC shared services hubs across consumer goods, retail and pharmaceutical companies, creating an immediate opportunity for agentic transformation of business, marketing and IT operations.
- Malaysia's position as a regional financial hub adds a third vector. Accenture estimates that scaling AI effectively across its largest banks could generate up to US\$1.8 billion in additional pre-tax profit over three years,²⁸ demand that will need to be met with agentic solutions across compliance, credit, operations and customer engagement.

Use cases

Industry	Priority use cases
Government and Public Sector	- AI tax and customs fraud detection - Smart-city traffic and flood management
Financial Services and Insurance	Lead origination, personalized customer servicing, product development and pricing
Telecom, Media and Technology	- Predictive network maintenance - Customer churn and upsell modeling - Multilingual support automation
Energy, Utilities and Resources	- Asset-integrity predictive maintenance - AI seismic and exploration analytics - Smart-grid demand and renewable-integration forecasting
Agribusiness and Food	- AI palm-oil yield and sustainability monitoring - Supply-chain traceability (MSPO compliance)
Shared Services (MNCs)	- Cross-business data and analytics platforms - IT and business shared-services automation - Marketing operations

Policy

Malaysia relies on voluntary, non-binding guidance rather than AI legislation. The National AI Roadmap²⁹ and the National Guidelines on AI Governance and Ethics (AIGE)³⁰ set direction, with a National AI Action Plan 2026-2030 in preparation. Delivery runs through the Ministry of Digital, the National AI Office, MOSTI and MDEC, with AIGE positioned as the foundation for future regulation. The Cybersecurity Act 2024 provides adjacent data-security grounding; the PDPA is under revision and the Data Sharing Act 2025 has been gazetted.

Adoption

AI could contribute approximately \$113 billion to Malaysia's economy, representing nearly a quarter of its GDP.³¹ The country's sovereign model, ILMU, is built by YTL AI Labs and hosted entirely in-country on YTL AI Cloud. ILMU represents Malaysia's clearest signal that it intends to capture value from its infrastructure position, not merely host compute for others.

Thailand: From reserve to readiness

“What separates the winners from the losers is owning and driving technology to solve business problems. That is why we have a digital intelligence team that maps business processes, develops solutions and drives change management to ensure adoption.”



Aseem Puri
CEO
Unilever Thailand

“At ThaiNamthip, we see AI as a practical enabler of commercial excellence. By embedding AI into sales execution and eB2B, we are helping our teams make smarter decisions, improve productivity and create greater value for our customers.”



Marcelo Mayer
Senior Vice President
Commercial
Innovation & AI
ThaiNamthip Coca-Cola

Thailand presents a paradox that its leadership teams are actively working to resolve. Its consumer population is among the most AI-curious in Southeast Asia, with 62% positive about AI's impact on their own lives and 60% about its potential for the country.³² Yet its users also remain the most reserved about conversational AI and delegating decisions to agents.³³ The gap between enthusiasm and delegation is the defining challenge of Thailand's AI moment.

The economic opportunity is substantial. AI could cut the gap between Thailand's GDP per capita and the OECD average by 45% within a decade, augment 37% of workers and offset 68% of labor shortages from an ageing population.³² A robust AI ecosystem could attract an additional THB 1.7 trillion (\$47 billion) in FDI over the next decade, provided Thailand closes its skills and infrastructure gaps.³² Use cases track its three-pillar economy: agriculture, manufacturing and tourism, each sector creating distinct agentic demand.

Policy

Thailand has no AI Act yet but is moving toward one. The National AI Strategy and Action Plan 2022–2027 anchors policy,³⁴ with the Electronic Transactions Development Agency's (ETDA) draft Principles of the AI Law taken to public hearing in June 2025 and a prime minister-chaired National AI Committee established in April 2025.³⁵ Sector-specific mandatory guidelines now cover finance, insurance and capital markets, and an AI Governance Practice Centre opened in July 2025. Data falls under the PDPA which was enforced in June 2022, with Bank of Thailand AI risk management principles issued in September 2025.³⁶

Adoption

Thailand engages with AI daily, but the reservation about delegation is real and specific. While 62% are positive about AI's national potential, the conversion from enthusiasm to trust-and-delegate is lagging.³³ The path forward is sector-specific proof points: use cases where agentic output is visible, verifiable and tied to commercial outcomes that Thai business culture values: speed, quality and relationship depth. Agriculture and manufacturing offer the most immediate ground for this.

Use cases

Industry	Priority use cases
Government and Public Sector	• Thai-language e-government service agents • AI tourism and immigration flow management • Tax compliance and fraud analytics
Financial Services and Insurance	• AI-driven retail lending and credit scoring • Fraud detection for digital payments • Thai-language service chatbots
Telecom, Media and Technology	• AI network optimization and churn prediction • Thai-language gen AI media and content moderation • Fraud and scam-call detection
Energy, Utilities and Resources	• Reliability-based predictive asset management and MRO optimization • AI for trading and dynamic pricing, price forecast and portfolio optimization • Hydrocarbon value chain optimization • Emissions and energy optimization
Consumer Products, Retail and Hospitality	• AI-driven personalization and loyalty • Loyalty program integration across fragmented super-app ecosystem (LINE, LineMan, Grab, Robinhood, etc) • Demand forecasting and shelf replenishment • Route-to-market and distributor eB2B automation • Agribusiness & Food: AI crop yield prediction, food-safety and traceability analytics • Hospitality & Tourism: AI loyalty personalization across hotel, dining, spa and retail; multilingual AI concierge agents; dynamic pricing and occupancy forecasting; agentic coordination of the international guest journey
Automotive and Industrial Manufacturing	• Predictive quality control and defect detection on production lines • AI-assisted production scheduling and capacity optimization • Supplier risk monitoring and supply chain traceability • Agentic after-sales service and warranty claims management for automotive dealers and distributors

Indonesia: Where social commerce meets sovereign AI

Indonesia's AI story is about scale meeting sophistication earlier than most expected. With a population of 280 million, the world's largest archipelago and an economy growing at over 5% annually, Indonesia was expected to be a late-stage AI adopter constrained by infrastructure. The data tells a different story.

As of March 2026, only 10% of Indonesian adults are non-users of AI. Intermediate and super-users together make up 63% of AI users, against 46% in the United States. AI use in Indonesia is embedded in daily commercial practice, not shallow experimentation. The constraint is not adoption enthusiasm but the gap between large enterprises, which are deploying at scale, and the SME sector, which accounts for 97%–99% of businesses and 85% of employment but lags far behind. Matching SME usage to large-enterprise rates would unlock IDR 910 trillion (\$55 billion), equal to 3.8% of GDP.³⁷

AI is likely to impact Indonesia's resource economy first: ore-grade estimation and mine-safety monitoring in mining, crop-yield prediction and deforestation tracking in agriculture, and smelter energy efficiency in downstream manufacturing. In an economy where natural resources remain the primary export engine, agentic AI applied to extraction efficiency and sustainability compliance is a national competitiveness question.

But Indonesia's most distinctive and under-served agentic opportunity sits not in resources but in social commerce. Indonesia is the largest social commerce market in Southeast Asia, and one of the most behaviorally distinct globally. TikTok Shop and Shopee dominate consumer buying behavior in ways that have no direct equivalent in developed markets: live-stream selling, influencer-triggered purchase events and instant checkout happen at a scale and speed that overwhelms manual operations.

"Our data center providers locally host Moonshot AI's Kimi model. This ensures that data does not leave Indonesia and we adhere to local regulations. Cost per token is a key metric for us since labor cost is relatively low."



Carlos Aggio
Chief AI Officer
Saratoga Investama

Our survey data shows 67% of regional respondents managing social commerce manually or not at all, and only 2% operate fully agentic channels. In Indonesia, those numbers represent a structural gap between where consumer behavior already is and where enterprise operations have not yet followed. Agentic AI applied to dynamic pricing, live-stream inventory management, creator-commerce fulfilment and returns processing is not a future opportunity for Indonesian retail and consumer businesses but an operational necessity that is already overdue.

Use cases

Industry	Priority use cases
Government and Public Sector	- Bahasa citizen-service agents across agencies - AI targeting and fraud checks on subsidies - Automated permit and licensing document review
Financial Services and Insurance	- AI credit scoring for the unbanked - Real-time transaction fraud detection - Sovereign-fund portfolio and risk analytics - Bahasa customer-service assistants
Telecom, Media and Technology	- Network optimization across the archipelago - Churn prediction and personalized plans - Bahasa AI care assistants
Energy, Utilities and Resources	- Predictive maintenance on rigs, plants and grids - AI exploration, reservoir and ore-grade modeling - Grid load and demand forecasting across islands
Agribusiness and Food	- Satellite and AI yield and deforestation monitoring - Supply-chain traceability
Shared Services (MNCs)	- TikTok Shop and Shopee live-stream inventory and pricing agents - Creator-commerce fulfilment and returns automation - Dynamic pricing across flash- sale and live-commerce events - Bahasa-native chatbot commerce assistants - Social media trend-to-restock workflow automation

Policy

Indonesia has no dedicated AI legislation as of mid-2026 but is moving quickly on strategy. The National AI Roadmap,³⁸ led by the Ministry of Communication and Digital Affairs (Komdigi), frames the agenda, with the Indonesian Financial Services Authority (OJK) issuing voluntary AI governance guidelines for banking.³⁹ Data protection rests on Law No. 27/2022, the country's first comprehensive personal data protection law.⁴⁰

Adoption

AI-related growth in Indonesia could support 510,000 direct new jobs. Cloud and AI could lift public-sector productivity by 4%, saving 1.1 hours per worker each week.³⁷ The sovereign data imperative, illustrated by Saratoga's decision to host Moonshot AI's Kimi model locally, reflects a broader pattern: Indonesian enterprises are making deliberate infrastructure choices to keep data onshore while accessing frontier capability. As token costs continue to fall and local model capability rises, Indonesia's cost-sensitivity on AI infrastructure will become a structural advantage rather than a constraint. Indonesia is also the market where closing the social commerce deployment gap from manual operations to agentic channels offers the single largest near-term revenue upside of any ASEAN market, given the scale of TikTok Shop and Shopee penetration in the domestic consumer economy.

Vietnam: Co-create sovereign capability

Vietnam has moved faster on AI policy than any other ASEAN market and is using that regulatory leadership to signal commercial intent as much as governance intention. The Law on Artificial Intelligence,⁴¹ passed December 2025 and in force from 1 March 2026, is the first binding AI legislation in ASEAN.

It is risk-based, classifies systems as low, medium or high risk, requires mandatory conformity assessment for high-risk applications and obliges foreign providers to appoint a local representative. For multinational companies operating in Vietnam, this is an immediate operational requirement, not a future compliance consideration.

Vietnam's AI strategy is built around a clear national ambition: AI contributing 6% of GDP by 2030. The government is steering resource allocation away from fragmented pilots toward industry-ready deployments that integrate Vietnam into global value chains, not as an assembly point but as a center for applied R&D. Viettel, the state-linked telecom, has built a national legal AI on NVIDIA hardware, using global chips to grow sovereign capability and leapfrog legacy systems. That model of global chips, national architecture and local data is Vietnam's template for the rest of the stack.

"Vietnam has proposed a target for AI to contribute around 6% of GDP by 2030. The government seeks to ensure that resource allocation isn't fragmented but rather steered toward industry-ready projects. The strategic priority is to integrate into global value chains, not just as an assembly point, but as a center for applied R&D and chip design."



Ted Osius
Former President &
CEO of the US-ASEAN
Business Council
Former US Ambassador
to Vietnam (2014–2017)

Vietnam's consumer and social commerce opportunity is equally compelling—and equally under-served. Vietnam is consistently ranked among Southeast Asia's most active live-commerce markets. TikTok Shop launched in Vietnam before most of the region and remains its fastest-growing commerce channel, driven by a young, mobile-first population that has moved directly from cash to social-app commerce without an intermediate e-commerce phase. Zalo, the dominant Vietnamese super-app with over 75 million users, is evolving toward commerce and payments functionality that creates a locally-anchored alternative to global platforms.

For multinational consumer goods, retail and food and beverage companies operating in Vietnam, agentic AI applied to Vietnamese-language live-stream management, influencer-commerce fulfilment, dynamic pricing and Commerce and social listening-to-restock automation represents an immediate revenue and efficiency lever that most are not yet pulling.

Use cases

Industry	Priority use cases
Government and Legal	- National legal AI (Viettel) for regulatory document processing - E-government service automation in Vietnamese - Tax and customs compliance analytics
Manufacturing and Electronics	- PCB and electronics defect detection and production-line optimization - Closed-loop quality assurance across export-grade facilities - Predictive maintenance for high-precision manufacturing equipment
Financial Services	- Digital lending and credit scoring for underbanked segments - Real-time fraud detection for mobile payment platforms - AI-driven trade finance for export businesses
Telecom and Technology	- Network optimization across Vietnam's expanding 4G/5G infrastructure - Vietnamese-language customer service automation - Cybersecurity and threat analytics
Social Commerce and Consumer	- Live-stream inventory and pricing agents - Commerce order management and customer engagement - Vietnamese-language social listening-to-restock automation - Dynamic pricing across flash-sale and influencer-commerce events - Cross-border e-commerce fulfilment and returns for export-oriented sellers

Policy

Vietnam is the regional front-runner on binding rules. Its National AI Strategy 2021–2030 is now backed by the comprehensive Law on Artificial Intelligence, passed December 2025 and in force from March 1, 2026.⁴² The law is risk-based and requires mandatory conformity assessment for high-risk systems and obliges foreign providers to appoint a local representative. Oversight runs through the Ministry of Science and Technology, with data governed by the 2025 Personal Data Protection Law.⁴³

Adoption

Vietnam's workforce is young, digitally engaged and increasingly AI literate. The government's commitment to rolling out AI training for at least ten million workers by 2030⁴⁴ signals that workforce readiness is being treated as infrastructure, not an afterthought.

For MNCs entering or expanding in Vietnam, this creates a differentiated talent pipeline for AI-augmented manufacturing and services roles, provided the training programs are aligned to real enterprise skill requirements, which remains a gap to close.

Philippines: Scaling services and financial inclusion

The Philippines has built its modern economy on services such as business process outsourcing (BPO), shared services, remittances and domestic consumption, and its agentic AI opportunity maps almost perfectly onto that foundation. With English as a working language, deep familiarity with global enterprise workflows and a workforce that has spent two decades executing business processes at scale for multinational clients, the Philippines is positioned to move from executing services to automating them. The question is whether local enterprises and the outsourcing sector treat agentic AI as a threat to their labor model or as the upgrade that keeps them competitive.

The financial inclusion angle is equally significant. With 51% of the adult population still unbanked or underbanked as of 2025,⁴⁵ and remittances contributing approximately 9% of GDP,⁴⁶ agentic AI applied to credit scoring, fraud detection and mobile financial services is not a premium feature. It is the mechanism by which financial access reaches the majority. GCash and Maya have demonstrated at scale that digital financial services can work in the Philippines context. The agentic layer is what makes them economically intelligent.

Use cases

Industry	Priority use cases
Government and Public Sector	- Disaster and typhoon early-warning response AI - Digital national ID and benefits fraud detection - Tagalog citizen-service assistants
Financial Services and Insurance	- AI credit scoring for financial inclusion - Remittance fraud and AML detection - Chatbots for high-volume retail banking - Mobile wallet fraud prevention and personalization
BPO and Shared Services	- Agentic quality assurance and workflow automation in shared services centers - AI-assisted interview and candidate screening - HR, payroll and compliance automation via platforms such as Sprout Solutions
Telecom, Media and Technology	- Network capacity and outage prediction - AI customer-care automation - Fraud and SIM-abuse detection
Energy, Utilities and Resources	- Grid resilience and outage prediction for typhoon events - Renewable and geothermal generation forecasting - Predictive maintenance of distribution assets
Agribusiness and Food	- Weather-driven crop and disaster planning - Cold-chain and logistics optimization for agricultural exports

Policy

No dedicated AI Act exists in the Philippines yet, though an AI Governance Act is before Congress. Existing policy runs on the National AI Strategy Roadmap 2.0 and the DOST National AI Strategy.⁴⁷ The Philippines' deep outsourcing base, with homegrown platforms such as Sprout Solutions positioned in HR, payroll and customer-service automation, gives it practical enterprise-level AI deployment experience that policy frameworks are beginning to catch up to.

Adoption

Adoption in the Philippines is driven by the BPO sector's early embrace of AI productivity tools and the consumer financial services sector's aggressive digitization. The workforce is young, English-proficient and familiar with technology-mediated work, conditions that make AI adoption faster than infrastructure maturity alone would suggest. The risk is that organizations in the outsourcing sector adopt AI to defend margin rather than to redesign service models, a reactive posture that will limit the depth of transformation achievable.

Other ASEAN countries

The remaining ASEAN member states are at earlier but fast-moving stages of their AI journeys. Their momentum is rising and their policy frameworks, while nascent, reflect genuine national intent rather than compliance posturing.

Brunei operates a voluntary Guide on AI Governance and Ethics under its Digital Economy Masterplan 2025, backed by the binding Personal Data Protection Order 2025, with the Authority for Infocommunications Technology Industry (AITI) as regulator.⁴⁸

Cambodia has no AI-specific law but a draft National AI Strategy 2025-2030 within its digital economy framework, coordinated by the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (MPTC) and the Cambodia Academy of Digital Technology.⁴⁹

Laos launched a National AI Strategy in January 2026, guided by a UNESCO readiness assessment within the Digital Economy Strategy 2021-2030.⁵⁰

Myanmar has a National AI Strategy 2025-2030 in draft under its Digital Economy Roadmap, though institutional capacity is limited and no comprehensive data-protection law is yet in place.⁵¹

Timor-Leste, a full ASEAN member since October 2025, has no dedicated AI strategy or regulator yet, and is revising Timor Digital 2032 to incorporate AI following a 2025 UNESCO readiness assessment.⁵²

For MNCs with operations across these markets, the practical implication is consistent: deployment must be designed for the regulatory environment that exists, not the one anticipated. Voluntary frameworks require internal governance standards that exceed what the market mandates, and that internal standard should be set at the Singapore level, not calibrated down to the least-mature market in the portfolio.



THE LEADERSHIP AGENDA

The findings in this report raise important questions. Across governance, operating model, data architecture, market strategy and agentic deployment, the pattern is consistent. Ambition is high, the need to change is widely recognized and the gap between intent and execution remains wider than many leadership teams are prepared to acknowledge.

That gap reflects a sequencing problem, not a failure of vision. Sequencing can be fixed, but only if leaders are clear-eyed about where they stand today and disciplined about what to do next.

This chapter translates the survey findings into a practical leadership agenda, organized by maturity tier. The recommendations are grounded in the country-level findings, regional case studies and executive interviews to answer the question: Given your maturity, your markets and your operating reality, what should you do now?

Know your tier: Where you stand determines what you do next

“Leadership judgment is the variable most organizations underinvest in. Every team knows where they want to be, but few have a good understanding of where they currently stand. Getting that baseline right is where the real leverage is.”



Vivek Luthra
Senior Managing Director,
AI & Data, APAC &
Southeast Asia
Accenture

The tier a company occupies determines the sequencing of its next moves. Organizations that jump from Beginner actions to Advanced ambitions without closing the intervening gaps do not accelerate, they create organizational debt that slows everything that follows. The sections below lay out what each tier needs to do first, what success looks like and where the country context changes the calculus.

Beginners**(Score 0–24): Build the foundation before anything else**

Beginners face a specific trap: they are tempted to chase visible use cases without building the foundations that would allow those use cases to scale. The result is a scattered portfolio of experiments with no measurable value and no path to the next stage.

The priority for Beginners is foundation-setting, not more pilots.

Priority action	What good looks like	When
Name an owner for AI outcomes	A named executive with P&L accountability for agentic AI results, not just an AI steering committee, with authority to redirect budget and restructure teams when deployment stalls	30 days
Assess data readiness before deploying agents	An honest inventory of what data exists, where it lives, whether it is AI-usable (structured, labeled, accessible) and which regulatory constraints apply market by market	60 days
Choose one use case and govern it properly	A single agentic workflow with defined scope, a human-in-the-loop threshold, an audit trail and a measurement baseline, not because one is enough, but because doing one properly teaches the organization how to do the next ten	60–90 days
Set the governance standard at Singapore level across all markets	Agent permission scope, escalation protocols, audit trail requirements and cross-border data handling rules documented and applied consistently, even where local law does not yet require it	90 days

Exploring

(Score 25–49): Stop adding pilots, start converting what you have

The Exploring tier is where most of ASEAN is stuck, and for a specific reason. Exploring companies have enough activity to feel like progress but not enough accountability to know whether any of it is producing value. The measurement trap described in Chapter 4 is self-reinforcing: shallow deployment produces weak evidence, weak evidence produces conservative investment, conservative investment keeps deployment shallow.

The priority for Exploring companies is conversion, not expansion.

Priority action	What good looks like	When
Build a measurement architecture before launching the next pilot	A defined ROI framework for each live deployment, with baselines, outcome metrics and a named owner for each, tied to commercial results (revenue, cost, time), not activity (tokens, interactions)	30–60 days
Redesign one end-to-end workflow, not just a task within it	A workflow where the agent is the primary executor and the human is the exception handler, not a workflow where the human does the work and the agent assists at the margins	60–90 days
Close the data-capability gap in your top two markets	More than 50% of data AI-ready (structured, labeled, accessible) in priority markets, with a credible plan to reach 80% within 12 months. Compliant is not the same as capable, 69% of ASEAN companies have less than half their data AI-ready	6–12 months
Differentiate your market strategy by at least three markets	A strategy document that makes meaningfully different bets for Singapore, Indonesia and Vietnam, not a regional template with local footnotes. Advanced companies score 92 on market strategy; Exploring companies score 38. That gap is primarily a decision gap, not a capability gap	6–12 months

Scaling**(Score 50–74): Industrialize, turn deployment into infrastructure**

Scaling companies have real deployments, real data and real governance. Their challenge is different: how to move from a collection of successful initiatives to an operating model where agentic AI is standard practice rather than a special project. The data shows that Scaling companies are broadly balanced across all five dimensions, which means their ceiling is organizational, not technical. The workflows are working, but the organization around them has not yet caught up.

The priority for Scaling companies is operating model transformation.

Priority action	What good looks like	When
Redesign roles, not just workflows	Formal changes to job architecture (new roles created around agent supervision and exception handling, existing roles redefined to remove tasks now handled by agents), with updated performance management to match	3–6 months
Extend agentic deployment to operational and financial functions	Agents live in six or more functions, past the marketing/customer service/sales cluster where most deployments concentrate, into supply chain, finance, procurement and HR, where the commercial value per agent is an order of magnitude higher	3–6 months
Build a multi-jurisdictional governance architecture	A documented framework covering all ASEAN markets where the company operates: agent permission scope, human-in-the-loop thresholds, audit trail requirements, cross-border data handling and local law compliance, with a review cycle tied to regulatory change	6–12 months
Set a value target, not just a deployment target	A board-level commitment to agentic AI's contribution to EBIT (measurable, time-bound and reviewed quarterly) that creates the organizational pressure to move from departmental experiments to enterprise infrastructure	12–18 months

Advanced

(Score 75–100): Convert advantage into distance, move the benchmark

Advanced companies, the 7% who have reached the top tier, face a different problem than the rest. Their operational AI foundation is real. Their governance is functional. Their market strategies are differentiated. The risk for Advanced companies is losing the distance they have built by failing to extend their advantage into the areas where the next wave of value is concentrated: social commerce, SME ecosystems, sovereign AI capability and cross-border agent orchestration.

The priority for Advanced companies is compounding their lead.

Priority action	What good looks like	When
Deploy Agentic based on maximum ROI	Use AI agents to run pricing, order fulfilment and local-language customer chat across your commerce channels, and track the revenue lift. The same approach applies to customer support, business services, IT or marketing — wherever it delivers the fastest ROI	Now – 6 months
Become a queen bee in your sector	Lead industry coalitions, share deployment playbooks with suppliers and channel partners and actively pull the SME ecosystem toward agentic readiness, not as philanthropy but as supply chain and distribution channel strengthening	6–12 months
Build cross-border agent orchestration capability	A multi-agent architecture where agents operating in different ASEAN markets can hand off tasks, share context and escalate to human oversight within a unified governance framework, handling Singapore-Vietnam supply chain workflows, Malaysia-Indonesia shared services and cross-border trade documentation without requiring separate agent stacks per market	12–24 months
Set the responsible AI standard for your industry	Published responsible AI commitments, external audit of agent governance architecture and active participation in ASEAN AI governance working groups, establishing the company as the benchmark others reference when regulators ask what good practice looks like	12–18 months

The two priorities no tier can defer

Regardless of maturity tier, two priorities apply to every organization operating across ASEAN in 2026. These are foundational conditions, not sequencing choices. Without them, tier-specific recommendations cannot deliver their intended results.

Data sovereignty is an architectural decision, not a compliance checkbox

69% of ASEAN companies have less than half their data AI-ready. 57% are confident in their compliance, but compliance and capability are not the same. An organization with compliant but fragmented data foundations cannot scale agentic AI. The agent has nothing to act on.

The architectural decision every organization must make (and make explicitly, not by default) is where data lives, under whose jurisdiction and on what platform. The U.S. CLOUD Act and China's National Intelligence Law create legal compellability risk that applies regardless of where data physically resides. In regulated industries and government-linked enterprises across ASEAN, this is an active procurement risk, not a theoretical one. Organizations that have not yet made this decision explicitly are making it by default, and default decisions in this area compound into liability.

Measurement architecture is a prerequisite for the next investment decision

25% of companies with agents running do not measure their business impact at all. Over half are either pre-deployment or generating under \$100k monthly. The problem is instrumentation, not deployment.

Organizations that cannot tell their boards what their agents are worth cannot make a rational next investment decision. It is what happens when measurement architecture is built before deployment scales. The majority of ASEAN companies have the deployment. They are missing the architecture.

What the right partner looks like

The chapters of this report map a transformation journey that spans regulatory architecture, data engineering, operating model redesign, workforce reinvention and market-by-market deployment, all of it simultaneously, across eleven diverse markets, under accelerating competitive and regulatory pressure. No leadership team can sequence this alone.

A capable agentic AI partner in ASEAN in 2026 has four characteristics that distinguish it from a conventional technology implementation partner:

1. **Operating model redesign at enterprise scale.** Not workflow automation, but the harder work of redrawn roles, redesigned accountability structures and workforce reinvention programs that change how an organization's 10,000 or 100,000 people relate to agents in their daily work. This requires pattern recognition across industries and markets that only comes from having done it at scale, repeatedly, with measurable outcomes.
2. **AI-ready data architecture and sovereignty design.** The ability to assess, remediate and architect data foundations that are simultaneously AI-capable, locally sovereign and compliant across ASEAN's fragmented regulatory environment. 69% of companies have less than half their data AI-ready. Getting to 80% requires more than a data engineering team; it requires a framework for what "AI-ready" means in each market's regulatory context, applied consistently at enterprise scale.
3. **Sector-specific agentic use case depth.** Success requires more than a generic AI strategy; it demands deep libraries of proven use cases, built through deployment in industries where ASEAN's multinational ecosystem is most concentrated: pharmaceuticals, logistics, consumer goods, financial services, manufacturing and the public sector.
4. **Proven scale across ASEAN markets.** What matters is not headquarters-level expertise applied from a distance, but demonstrated deployment experience across priority markets in ASEAN. The region's complexity is part of its competitive reality: different regulations, talent pools and customer behaviors shape what works in each market. Those that build with in-market depth and differentiation are best placed to translate regional ambition into local execution.

The organizations that have moved furthest in ASEAN share a common thread: they treated the transformation as a change to the operating model, not a technology rollout, and they worked with partners who had the cross-market, cross-industry depth to help them sequence it correctly.

CONCLUSION

The window is open, but not indefinitely

This report began with a paradox. ASEAN's strategic importance is rising, its AI adoption is unusually broad and the commercial case for agentic AI across the region is strong. Yet activity has outpaced readiness. Many companies can point to pilots and deployments, but far fewer can show how those efforts create value, who is accountable for them or how they will scale.

The paradox resolves when the challenge becomes clear: Technology has advanced faster than the organizations adopting it. The models exist, the infrastructure is being built and the use cases have proof points in more mature markets. The harder work now sits inside the enterprise: redesigning how people do their jobs when an agent can handle the routine; governing an agent's decisions across multiple regulatory environments simultaneously; measuring commercial outcomes from deployments built without instrumentation; and creating data foundations that work across eleven diverse markets.

That organizational work takes longer than deploying an agent. It requires leadership conviction, disciplined sequencing and implementation experience across markets and industries. Governance has to precede scale, data capability comes before deployment breadth and operating model redesign before measurement.

The companies that turn activity into accountable capability first will build more than an early adopter advantage. They will create an operational knowledge base of what works in each ASEAN market, at what cost, under which regulatory framework and with which workforce. That knowledge compounds through execution, market by market and function by function.

ASEAN's complexity, so often framed as the region's central challenge, is the thing that makes that knowledge valuable. Eleven markets create eleven proving grounds. Companies that treat ASEAN's diversity as a laboratory rather than a liability will accumulate operational fluency that later entrants will struggle to match, even with better models or larger budgets.

The window for building that advantage is open and the data in this survey shows how quickly the window is narrowing. The next advantage in ASEAN will belong to companies that move with the discipline, urgency and accountability this moment demands.

About the Research

Data source and sample

This study draws on primary survey data collected via the ASEAN Business Outlook Survey. The survey instrument comprised 16 questions capturing organizational AI capabilities across five dimensions, administered to business leaders across Southeast Asia.

Sample composition:

- Total respondents: 184
- Complete responses (all 5 dimensions scorable): 177
- Country coverage: Singapore (n=44), Philippines (n=34), Indonesia (n=23), Malaysia (n=23), Vietnam (n=23), Thailand (n=22), Cambodia (n=6), Myanmar (n=2)
- Myanmar excluded from country-level analysis due to insufficient sample size (n=2)

A pulse of the state of agentic AI in ASEAN

We developed a composite agentic AI Readiness score (scale 0–100) to quantify organizational readiness for autonomous AI deployment. The index aggregates responses across five conceptual dimensions:

Dimensions	Questions included
Trust and governance	• How would you describe the way your organization ensures AI agents remain human-led, trustworthy and accountable across your ASEAN markets? • How much do your own teams trust and actually rely on AI agents in day-to-day work across ASEAN?
Operational model	• How do you measure the business impact of your agentic AI deployments in ASEAN? • How has your company changed how work is organized in ASEAN to take advantage of AI; redesigning workflows, changing team structures and reassigning roles?
Data readiness	• How would you describe your company's data setup across ASEAN markets? • What share of your company's data would you say is currently usable by an AI system; meaning it is structured, labelled and accessible in an agreed format? • How familiar is your organization with the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA) and what it means for your operations?
Market differentiation	• How differentiated is your AI and digital strategy across ASEAN markets; for example, does your Indonesia approach differ meaningfully from your Thailand or Vietnam approach? • How would you describe the readiness of your core business systems to support agentic AI? • How are your social commerce operations managed across the ASEAN markets where you operate? • Which best describes your current customer and partner service model across ASEAN today?
Deployment maturity	• Which best describes your company's current stage of AI agent deployment in ASEAN? • Approximately what is the combined monthly value of transactions, decisions or cost savings that AI agents are directly executing or influencing in your ASEAN operations?

Scoring transformation: Survey responses were converted to numeric scores using a standardized approach:

- 5-option scales: Mapped to 0, 25, 50, 75, 100
- 4-option scales: Mapped to 0, 33.3, 66.7, 100

Dimension and overall score calculation:

- Each dimension score = simple average of constituent question scores
- Overall score = simple average of five dimension scores (equal weighting)
- Respondents with missing data on any dimension were flagged as incomplete and excluded from tier analysis

Maturity tier classification

Respondents were segmented into four maturity tiers using conceptual thresholds based on interpretable score ranges:

Tier	Score Range	Definition	n
Advanced	75–100	Majority of capabilities at highest level; AI-first operations	13
Scaling	50–74	Above midpoint; actively industrializing AI across functions	42
Exploring	25–49	Below midpoint; experimenting with AI, pilots underway	88
Beginners	0–24	Early stage across most dimensions; limited or no deployment	34

Rationale for conceptual thresholds: We selected fixed, interpretable score boundaries (0–24, 25–49, 50–74, 75–100) rather than data-driven quartiles for several reasons:

1. Interpretability: Each tier corresponds to a meaningful capability level (e.g., “above midpoint” vs. “below midpoint”), making findings actionable for practitioners.
2. Comparability: Fixed thresholds enable longitudinal tracking and cross-study comparison. A “Scaling” organization in 2026 can be directly compared to one in 2028 using the same criteria.
3. Avoiding tautology: Quartile-based segmentation guarantees even distribution by design (25% per tier), which would obscure the actual shape of the maturity landscape. Conceptual thresholds allow the data to reveal whether ASEAN is top-heavy, bottom-heavy, or concentrated in the middle.

The resulting distribution (7% Advanced, 24% Scaling, 50% Exploring, 19% Beginners) reflects the genuine state of AI maturity across the region rather than an artifact of the segmentation method.

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Stella Soh, Chief of Staff
Alsofiena Alphonso, Senior Executive, Government Relations



Bani Trehan, Managing Director, AI & Data Lead, AmChamSG Vice Chair
Sven Boehmert, Agentic AI and Data, Senior Manager
Dr. Rebecca Tan, Accenture Research, Senior Editor
Srotoswini Roy, Senior Manager



Adam Click, Regional Client Lead, APAC, AmChamSG Chairman
Ravi Kumar Bhatta, Strategic Partnership Lead, Google Cloud
Elliot Choo, Product Marketing Manager

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For more information, contact:

Rachel Phay (Ms.)
Associate Director
Special Projects and Government Relations
AmChamSG
E: rphay@amcham.com.sg

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