



# What's Keeping IT Leaders Up At Night

The IT Leaders Report

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# Executive summary

Wherever a business finds itself, odds are the mandate for IT teams is to modernize and embrace new technologies. But with that push comes new risks. Just 24% of IT leaders said they were extremely confident in their organization's ability to address security vulnerabilities over the next year. So, it's no surprise that when asked what's causing them to lose sleep, data security ranked as the biggest concern. Enterprise IT leaders recognize the challenges that await them if they want to keep up in a rapidly evolving, competitive landscape.

Two years ago, Rocket Software set out to understand where IT leaders are focusing their attention. At the time, overall IT performance was the dominant concern as businesses scrambled to get their modernization initiatives on track. But now, the complexities of data security and AI adoption have entered the fold.

As we head into 2026, Rocket Software, in partnership with Researchscape, conducted a new global survey of 276 IT leaders at companies of over 1,000 employees to gauge the realities facing enterprises today. This survey provides a refreshed look into the perspectives of global IT leaders



# Introduction

Modernization has long been the north star for enterprise leaders. The emergence of new technologies and the explosion of AI capabilities have redefined those initiatives—particularly as businesses chase greater efficiency, output, and value in the process. The pressure to meet those goals, more often than not, falls to IT leaders and professionals who find themselves at the heart of driving modernization for an enterprise organization. That amount of pressure has IT leaders facing a litany of requests from organizational stakeholders to capitalize on new opportunities without disrupting operations.

In 2023, Rocket Software commissioned a survey to understand the concerns and priorities of IT leaders. At that time, 60% of respondents said improving overall IT performance was their top source of concern. The research also highlighted strong momentum around two key focus areas, hybrid cloud and automation, as organizations looked to drive greater ROI from their technology investments.

Since then, the world facing IT leaders has undergone some major shifts. Hybrid cloud, AI, and automation have exploded in popularity, fueling a wave of transformation that has organizations pushing to capitalize on the next big expansion. Even with those seismic shifts, the underlying need for impactful modernization has remained constant. The following report examines the attitudes and priorities of IT leaders today, through the context of the transformations that have defined the last two years.



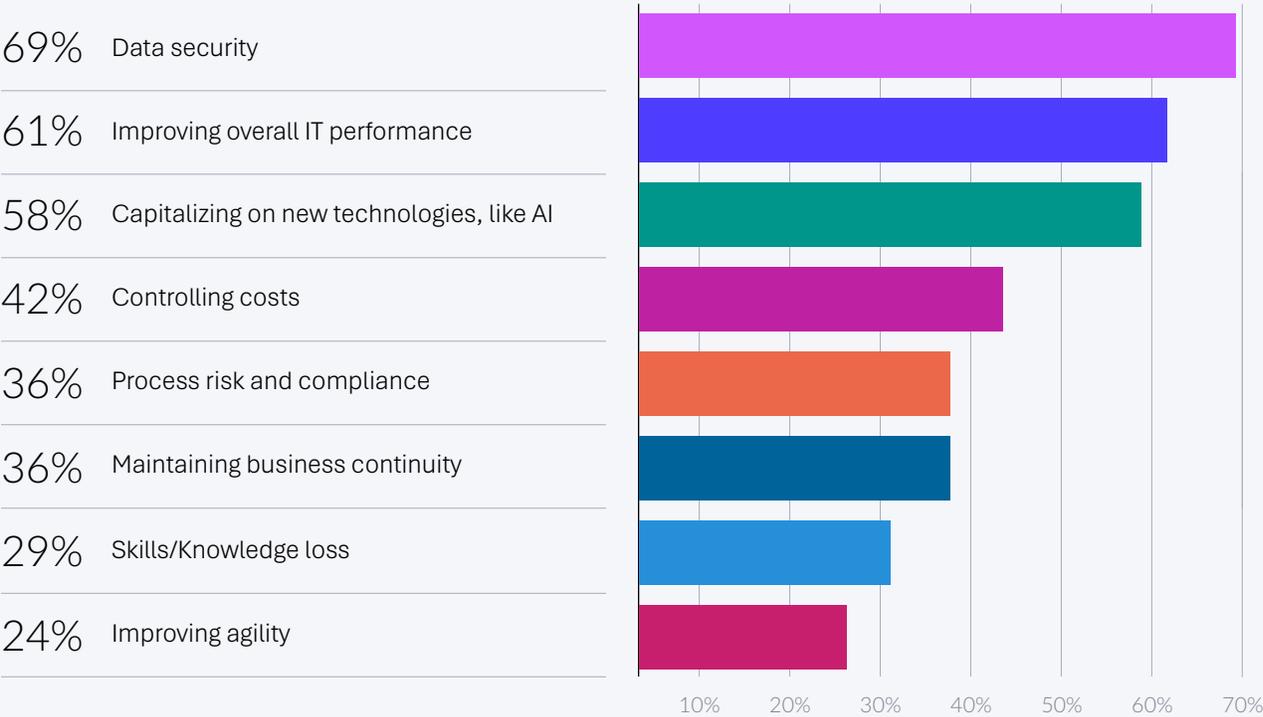
# What's keeping IT leaders up at night?

So, what risks and concerns are keeping IT leaders from getting a good night's sleep? [Last time we asked this question](#), the top response from surveyed leaders was the need to improve overall IT performance, at 60%. That was followed closely by data security at 50%.

Those responses were a reflection of the emphasis for greater efficiency, optimization, and cost reduction that have guided modernization efforts for years.

At the end of 2025, Rocket Software asked IT leaders this same question, and the results show an expansion of priorities rather than a reduction in existing concerns. Data security has emerged as the top issue, with concern rising from about half of respondents previously to more than two-thirds (69%) in 2025. The rise of AI and other emerging technologies is adding new pressure for IT leaders. At the same time, improving overall IT performance remains a consistently high concern, cited by 61% of respondents, underscoring that performance, efficiency, and reliability continue to be core priorities even as security takes the lead.

## Top concerns keeping IT leaders up at night



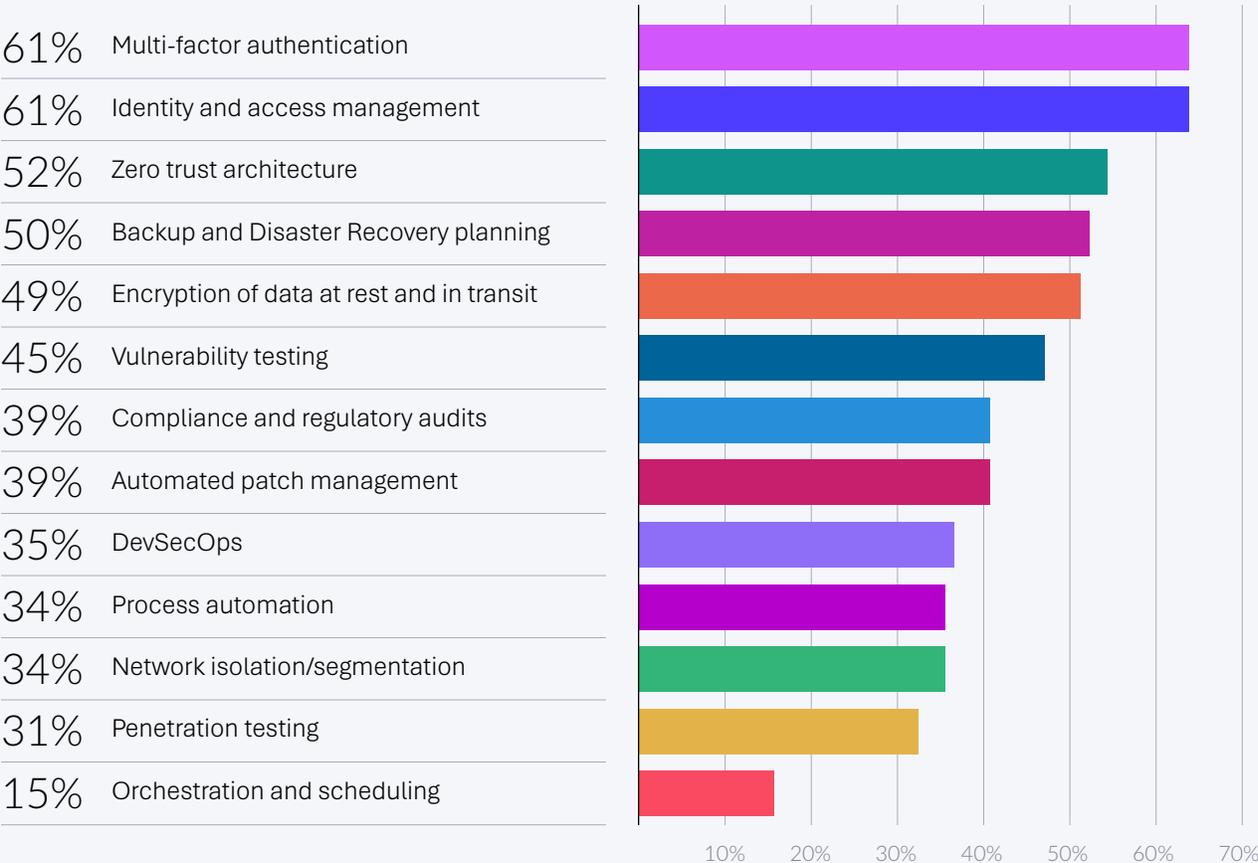
Beyond these areas, IT leaders also identified capitalizing on new technologies, like AI (58%), controlling costs (42%), and process risk and compliance (36%), as serious concerns.



# Security, compliance, and regulation

The rapid adoption of AI has pushed enterprises to rethink both their modernization strategies and the way they secure critical IT infrastructure. When tasked with securing their IT systems, the top tools that leaders turn to include AI monitoring tools (71%), data and system access (64%), and data governance and policy (60%).

## What processes and tools does your organization currently leverage to mitigate IT risk?



Even as emerging technologies and AI present new threats, most respondents signaled that they were confident in their organization’s ability to address vulnerabilities over the next 12 months. Eighty-two percent responded that they felt very confident, with nearly one-quarter (24%) indicating they felt extremely confident.

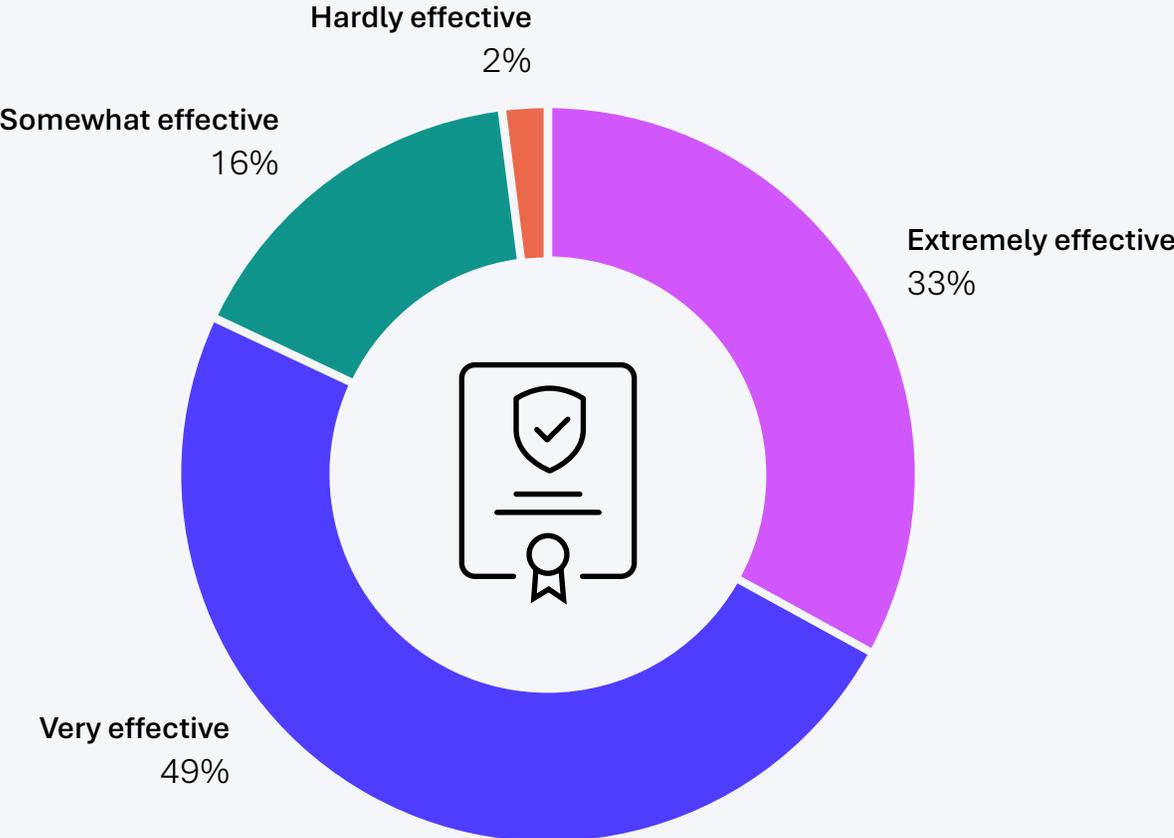


That level of confidence held steady among respondents when asked about their confidence in detecting and mitigating potential data breaches caused by insider threats. Seventy-eight percent of respondents shared they felt at least very confident, with 24% indicating they felt extremely confident in their ability.

But it's not just about security. IT leaders have an ever-expanding set of external regulations, like [23 NYCRR 500](#) and [DORA](#). On top of that, they also have a complex internal governance structure to contend with and adhere to. Looking ahead, Rocket Software's survey found that 79% of respondents were at least very confident in their ability to pass the next regulatory audit. However, of those, less than one-third (30%) said they were extremely confident.

Another important domain for compliance comes from supply chains and vendors. When asked how effectively their organization ensures compliance across these areas, 74% said they were at least very effective, with 27% saying they were extremely effective. This is a positive sign for IT leaders' efforts in keeping up with compliance needs, but signals there is still room for growth.

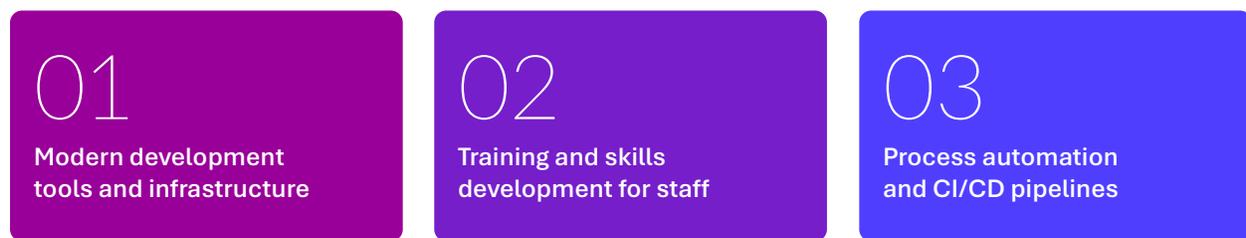
### How effectively does your organization ensure compliance with regulatory requirements and industry standards regarding security?



# DevOps and the IT skills shortage

AI has reshaped the development lifecycle, turning an area that already focuses on speed and efficiency into an even faster landscape. The success of IT teams, and specifically developers, depends on strong DevOps tools and practices to ensure everything operates effectively. Asked to rate the effectiveness of their organization's integration of DevOps practices with core systems, like mainframe and IBM® i, less than one-third (28%) said they were extremely effective.

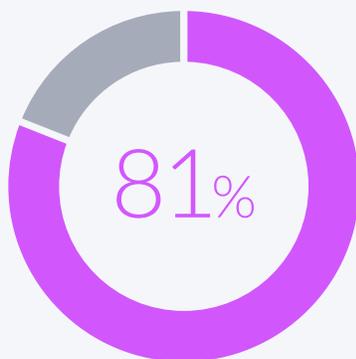
While a significant number report success with their DevOps integration, they also identified multiple priorities for improving DevOps capabilities. When asked where they felt their organization should be prioritizing investment, the top three were:



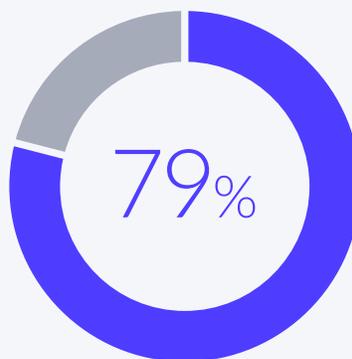
As new technologies establish themselves as developers' tools of choice, those still working with outdated systems face unique challenges. In fact, nearly half of respondents (48%) said that they still rely on outdated IT systems for critical operations. Meaning developers are increasingly struggling to find skilled personnel familiar with those outdated systems—a problem identified by over half (52%) of survey respondents.

On an organizational level, just about one-in-three (35%) respondents said their IT workforce had the necessary skills to support outdated systems effectively. These numbers reveal a clear area of weakness for IT leaders, underscoring the critical need to reskill employees.

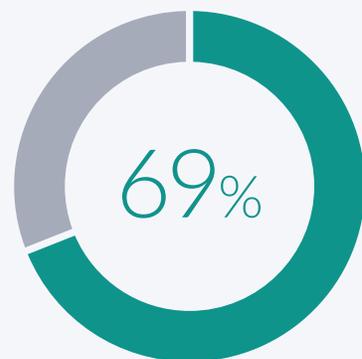
## What are you doing to actively upskill IT talent?



Allocate annual training budgets and dedicated learning hours for IT staff



Provide access to online learning platforms



Offer vendor-specific certifications



# Artificial Intelligence, hybrid IT, and the path to modernization

The race to harness the power of AI and automation has pushed businesses to explore every opportunity to transform how they operate. Respondents identified several key areas where they expected AI to have the biggest impact over the next 12 months. The top response centered around enhancing security, fraud detection, and governance (31%), followed closely by optimizing internal processes (29%), and improving customer experience (22%).

Actually finding success with AI is deeply tethered to the state of a business' IT infrastructure—as in, can the organization securely support an AI integration? For survey respondents, there's a general level of confidence in their current IT infrastructure's ability to support AI models, but only 25% said they were extremely confident.

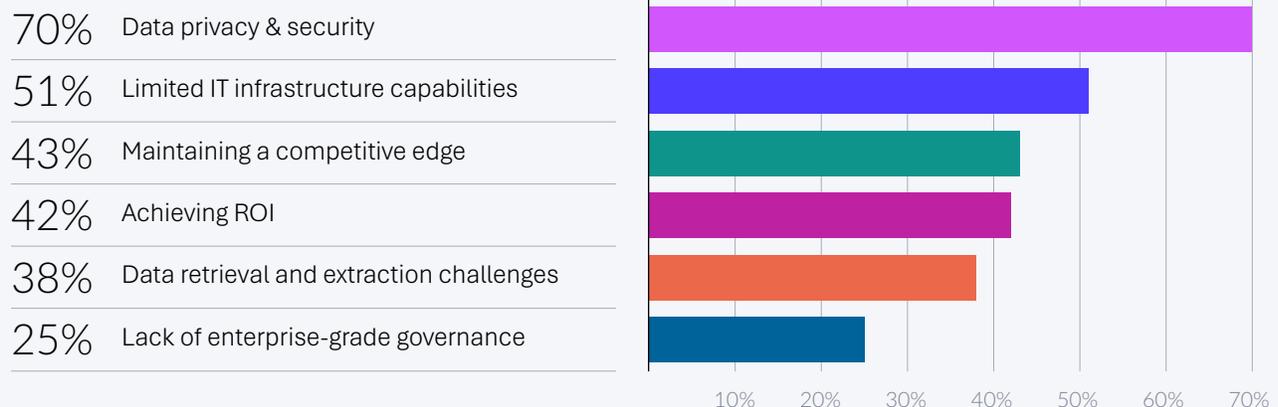
Without question the name of the game for IT leaders managing hybrid environments has come down to one thing, data. Data that is now one of the most important elements in determining whether an AI model has what it needs to generate real impact.

For surveyed respondents, 26% said they completely trust their current infrastructure to support their IT and data needs, while 48% said they trusted it very much.

Part of the reason that trust is not as strong comes from the complexity of modern IT infrastructures. Where in the past an organization may have been fully in one area, like on-premises, now they are bringing together hybrid environments with a mix of cloud and on-premises infrastructures. And that's something that many respondents indicated was a challenge. Specifically, 51% of surveyed IT leaders said that bridging the gap between cloud and on-premises environments was at least somewhat difficult.

When it comes to managing data in these environments, the biggest challenge identified was data quality, with 62% of respondents citing this issue. That was followed by access control and identity management (52%), moving data securely between environments (50%), data governance (46%), rising data storage costs (45%), data discovery (39%), and outdated integration tools (36%).

## Over the next 12 months, what are your biggest concerns for your organization when it comes to AI adoption?



# What does the future hold?

The arrival of emerging technologies, AI tools, budding skills shortages, and complex hybrid environments has redefined what it means to be an IT leader. In other words, there is a lot to lose sleep over. Looking ahead to the next few years, 66% of respondents identified data accessibility for AI as their top concern for the future. A not-too-surprising result considering how reliant AI models are on the data that trains them. Other areas of challenge included IT talent reskilling (62%), maintaining IT resilience (62%), rising data storage costs (48%), evolving regulations and compliance demands (46%), and avoiding vendor lock-in (30%).

A common thread through all of the concerns expressed by respondents looms large over everything: security. For the next 12 months, the most important priority for IT leaders is just that: improving security. The next two priorities are supporting AI initiatives and data availability. Each of these priorities are linked as IT leaders must navigate building an IT infrastructure capable of keeping data secure, but also usable for AI projects aimed at carving out a competitive advantage.

As the modern IT landscape continues to evolve, IT leaders are recognizing the need for stronger security practices and capabilities, a robust and skilled workforce, and IT infrastructures that work seamlessly across cloud and on-premises environments.

## No more sleepless nights

Take [IDC's Modernization Index](#) to find out how your organization can stay ahead of the curve.

And learn more about how Rocket Software can help IT leaders modernize critical IT systems, take advantage of AI, master hybrid IT environments, and, most importantly, get a good night's sleep.

[Learn more](#)



## Methodology

Rocket Software partnered with independent research firm Researchscape to survey 276 IT directors and vice presidents in firms with more than 1,000 employees from the U.S., U.K., France, and Germany. The survey was conducted between October 8, 2025, and October 27, 2025.

## About Rocket Software

Rocket Software is a global technology leader in modernization and a partner of choice that empowers the world's leading businesses on their modernization journeys, spanning core systems to the cloud. Trusted by over 12,500 customers and 750 partners, and with more than 3,200 global employees, Rocket Software enables customers to maximize their data, applications, and infrastructure to deliver critical services that power our modern world.

Rocket Software is a privately held U.S. corporation headquartered in the Boston area with centers of excellence strategically located throughout North America, Europe, Asia and Australia. Rocket Software is a portfolio company of Bain Capital Private Equity.



Modernization. **Without Disruption.**™

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