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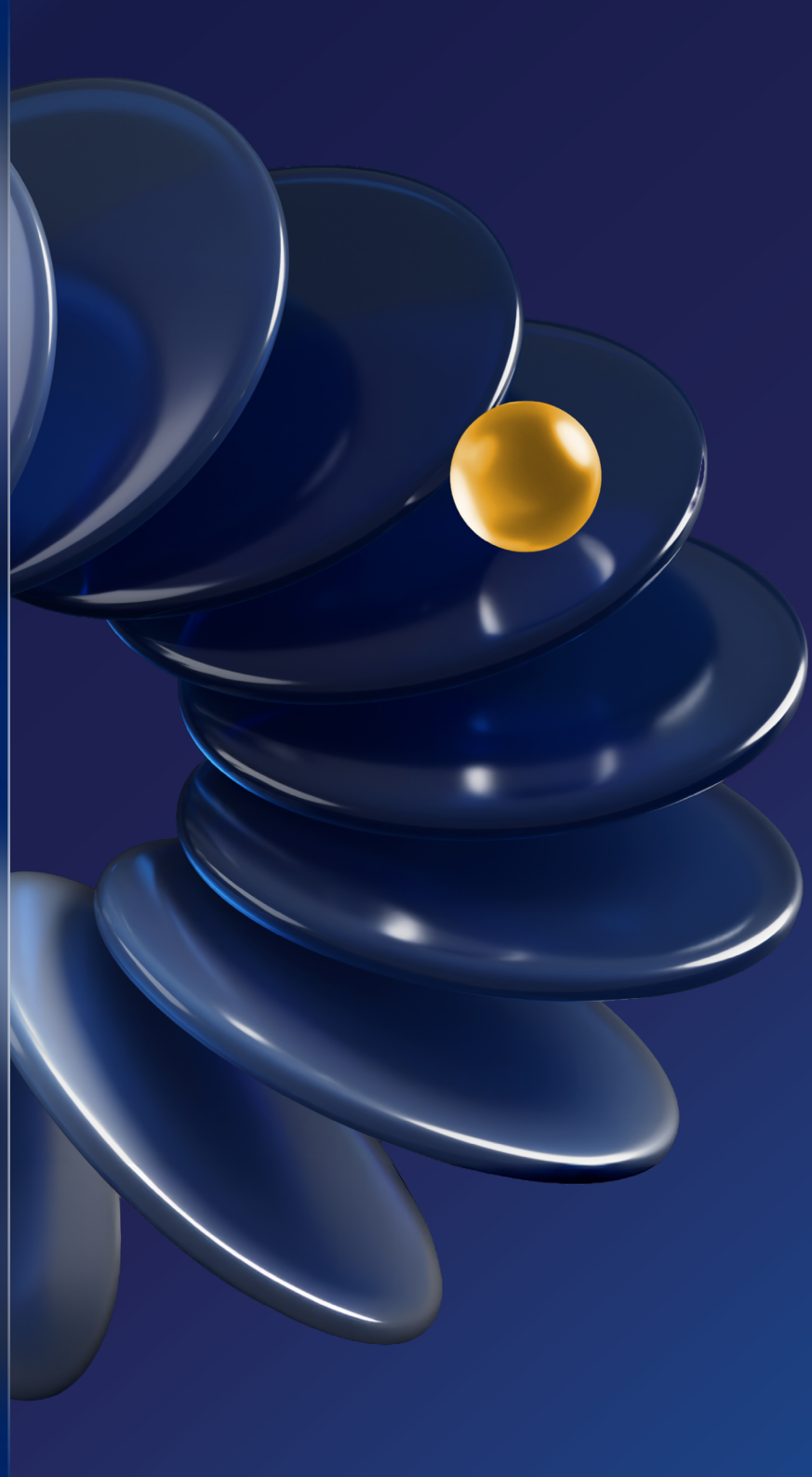
AI in M&A Due Diligence and Integration Planning

Corporate acquirers are thinking big and finding their own path



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Contents

Executive summary

Page 3

Introduction

Page 5

Methodology

Page 7

01

Growing AI adoption in M&A due diligence and integration

Page 8

02

AI and team productivity take priority over headcount reduction

Page 12

03

Corporate M&A faces AI deployment barriers and limited tool control

Page 15

04

AI adoption has tripled, and trust is improving

Page 18

05

Agentic AI is gaining traction alongside generative AI

Page 20

Looking ahead

AI is transforming due diligence and integration planning

Page 22

Executive summary

The Transaction Advisors Institute engaged with mergers and acquisitions (M&A) leaders at public and large private corporate acquirers to understand the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in M&A due diligence and integration planning, and how that role has changed.

The research found:

- AI has significant and increasing penetration in M&A due diligence and M&A integration planning. Virtually all (93 percent) corporate acquirers are using or piloting AI in M&A during these phases. Two-thirds (63 percent) use it regularly for multiple use cases, and some (12 percent) use it regularly for more than 10. Acquirers reported more than 17 intended benefits with 23 specific use cases. However, penetration varies widely.
- Exploring potential and delivering more value with existing teams are the main priorities. The highest-priority objective is to explore what is possible with AI (87 percent). Following closely behind are efficiency objectives, including both reducing workload (83 percent) and driving staff to higher-value tasks (85 percent); and identifying risks and exploring reasons synergies won't be delivered (78 percent). Reducing headcount is at the bottom of the list.
- There are significant headwinds to deployment, and experimentation is difficult for corporate M&A teams. The pace of AI deployment has been slowed by compliance challenges (68 percent), managing access controls (50 percent), confidentiality concerns (57 percent) and a lack of trust in AI-generated work products (55 percent). Most AI decisions are made by corporate IT departments, with little latitude for M&A teams to experiment with new tools or suppliers.

Most AI decisions are made by corporate IT departments, with little latitude for M&A teams to experiment with new tools or suppliers.

- Penetration has tripled in the past two years, and trust, while minimal, is improving. Corporate acquirers are using AI in due diligence to: review legal agreements (79 percent), manage diligence workstreams (50 percent) and review financials/ quality of earnings (QoE) (49 percent). Only nine percent of acquirers view AI work product as consistently reliable or only requiring spot-checking. However, seventy-five percent expect reliability to improve in the next few years.
- Autonomous agents (agentic AI) are gaining traction. While many think of generative AI platforms like ChatGPT and Copilot, one in four (24 percent) corporate acquirers already use autonomous AI agents for contract review. A further two-thirds expect to be using it soon. More than half expect the automation of QoE to arrive soon, followed by predictive deal-outcome analysis and buyer-seller matchmaking.

This research on corporate acquirers' AI practices in M&A due diligence and integration planning shows that much has changed over the past two years. This continued reinvention of the corporate processes driving M&A is the new normal. As AI capabilities continue to expand, deployment has become an iterative and never-ending process.

Corporate acquirers are developing comprehensive plans and taking significant steps to leverage AI within their organizations, including AI LLMs (large language models) like Copilot and ChatGPT, purpose-built, AI-powered platforms for M&A, and third-party AI tools bolted onto legacy M&A technology. While corporate acquirers may have taken longer to get going, they are learning from earlier adopters, avoiding missteps others have made. Their comprehensive planning processes, with coordinated stakeholders across these large, complex organizations, may ultimately deliver greater benefits from AI.

Introduction

The Transaction Advisors Institute, in partnership with SS&C Intralinks, conducted a research project to understand the state of AI adoption among corporate acquirers in the North American market for M&A due diligence and integration planning, specifically within public and large private corporate acquirers.

Broadly, the research was designed to explore how corporate acquirers regularly use AI, what benefits are being delivered, what the struggles of those deploying these capabilities are, what's being piloted and what's in their roadmaps.

Prior Transaction Advisors Institute research into M&A due diligence practices in 2024 showed:

- Only five percent of corporate acquirers reported deriving value from AI in M&A due diligence, while a further thirty-two percent were experimenting and learning.
- Roughly two-thirds (63 percent) were not using AI in due diligence at all.
- The review of legal agreements was the use case with the highest penetration (29 percent were using or experimenting) and the only one delivering value to (5 percent of) acquirers.
- Eleven other use cases for AI in diligence were identified, but all were in experimentation and not yet delivering value to their organizations.

It's commonly understood that over the past two years, a wide range of AI capabilities have come to market. There has been extensive press coverage of the significant changes and opportunities enabled by AI. But what specifically are these corporate acquirers doing today, and what are they planning for the future?

This research project was designed to answer that question by delving into the following specific topics in the M&A due diligence and integration planning phases:

- What are the intended benefits and outcomes corporate acquirers are expecting from their investment in AI efforts?

- What is driving them to fund and put resources into AI projects?
- What specifically are corporate acquirers doing and how much penetration has there been?
- Are they used regularly, in pilot mode, in their roadmap or not even being discussed?
- Which use cases are active in integration planning and how much penetration do they have?
- How are AI tools budgeted, and which teams decide what AI platforms are purchased and deployed?
- How are AI projects governed, and how are priorities set?
- What are the headwinds to deploying AI in these large organizations?
- What trust level is there in work product produced with AI?
- How do acquirers expect trust in the AI-produced work product to evolve?
- What's the status of autonomous agents (agentic AI)? What's there now, and when is further deployment expected?
- Have regular legal agreements incorporated the reality of AI?
- What processes have evolved or been rethought based on the capabilities of AI?

In summary, the research found that there has been a rapid evolution over the past two years in how public and large private corporate acquirers use AI in M&A due diligence and integration planning. The AI in use comprises multiple technologies, including LLMs like Copilot and ChatGPT, purpose-built, AI-powered platforms for M&A, bolted-on third-party AI tools to legacy M&A technology and workflow technologies enabling agentic AI deployments.

While other research suggests corporate acquirers are realizing AI benefits more slowly than PE firms and investment banks, this research shows they are adopting AI differently, with distinct objectives and priorities. The corporate acquirers have ambitious plans, are prioritizing AI deployment and are now seeing benefits.

Methodology

This report is based primarily on a 2026 survey of members of the Transaction Advisors Institute, building on and expanding a 2024 M&A due diligence survey. Some questions were refielded to allow the research team to identify changes in how AI is being used in M&A due diligence across the periods.

The respondents were primarily senior corporate development professionals at public and large private corporate acquirers active in the U.S. market, as well as other senior corporate leaders focused on delivering value through M&A. Most of the companies represented have annual revenue of greater than USD five billion, operate across multiple world regions and are serial acquirers, often executing multiple deals per year. Respondent companies operate across multiple industries, including Industrials, Professional Services, Technology, Software, Chemicals, Manufacturing, Business Services and others.

This research project was conducted using the research.net online survey platform, which managed the survey and ensured a consistent experience for all respondents. The survey was fielded from March to April 2026, and results were compiled in May 2026.

In addition to collecting information from senior M&A leadership, qualitative interviews were conducted with experts on the role of AI in M&A due diligence and integration planning to inform the survey design; and desk research was conducted to provide background for the analysis.

The following Transaction Advisors Institute and SS&C Intralinks research was used as background and foundational research for the findings in this paper:

- M&A Diligence Survey, Transaction Advisors Institute (2024)
- *AI in M&A Dealmaking: A Benchmark Study, SS&C Intralinks produced with Reuters (2026)*

01

Growing AI adoption in M&A due diligence and integration

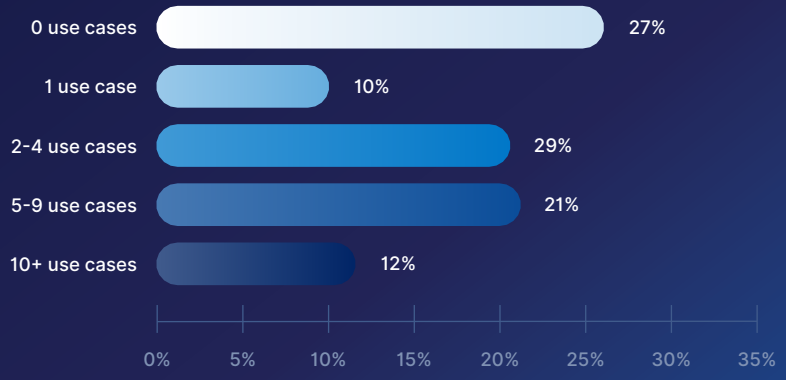
The research found that AI is widely used by corporate acquirers. Virtually all (93 percent) corporate acquirers are using or piloting AI in M&A due diligence and integration planning, up from 37 percent in 2024.

While some are still piloting, two-thirds (63 percent) use it regularly for multiple use cases, and some (12 percent) use it regularly for more than 10 use cases.

Almost all corporate acquirers are using or piloting AI for use in M&A due diligence and integration planning.



Roughly two-thirds of acquirers regularly use AI for multiple use cases, with some using it for more than 10 use cases.

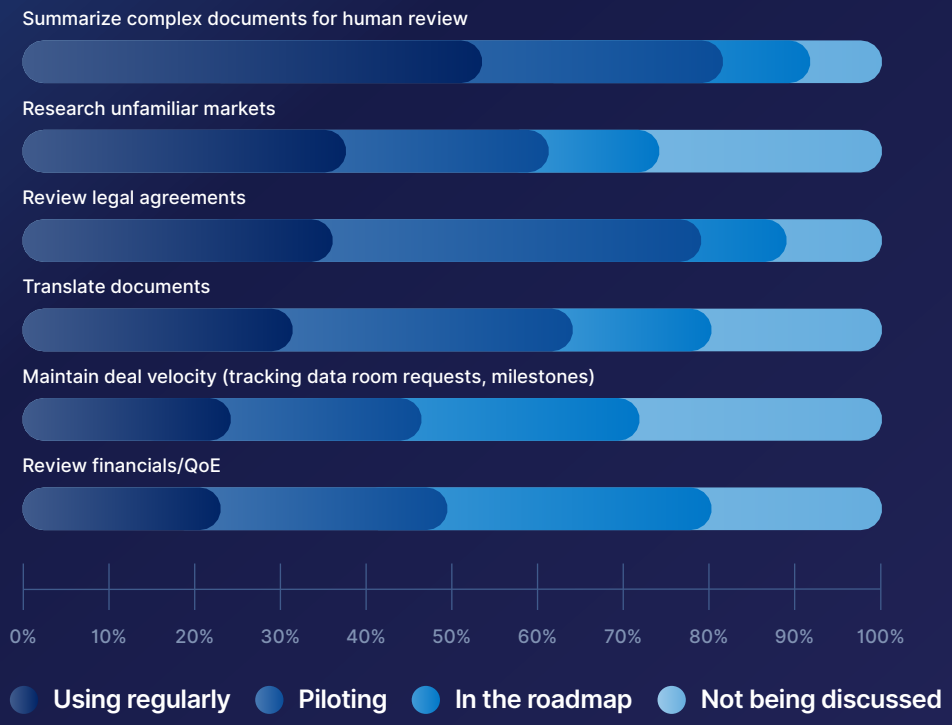


Source: Survey of public and large private corporate acquirers by the Transaction Advisors Institute. Produced in association SS&C Intralinks (2026).

Thinking about AI within corporate acquirers is both broad and deep, encompassing tactical and strategic considerations. Twenty-three specific use cases were identified, up from 11 in 2024. The top six use cases can be found in the following table.

Document review and researching unfamiliar markets are the most common uses of AI in diligence (1 of 4).

During diligence, we use AI to:



Source: Survey of public and large private corporate acquirers by the Transaction Advisors Institute. Produced in association SS&C Intralinks (2026).

In addition to the top six, 17 other use cases were identified and are contained in the following three exhibits.

A range of other diligence use cases have some traction by acquirers, with just as many piloting (2 of 4).

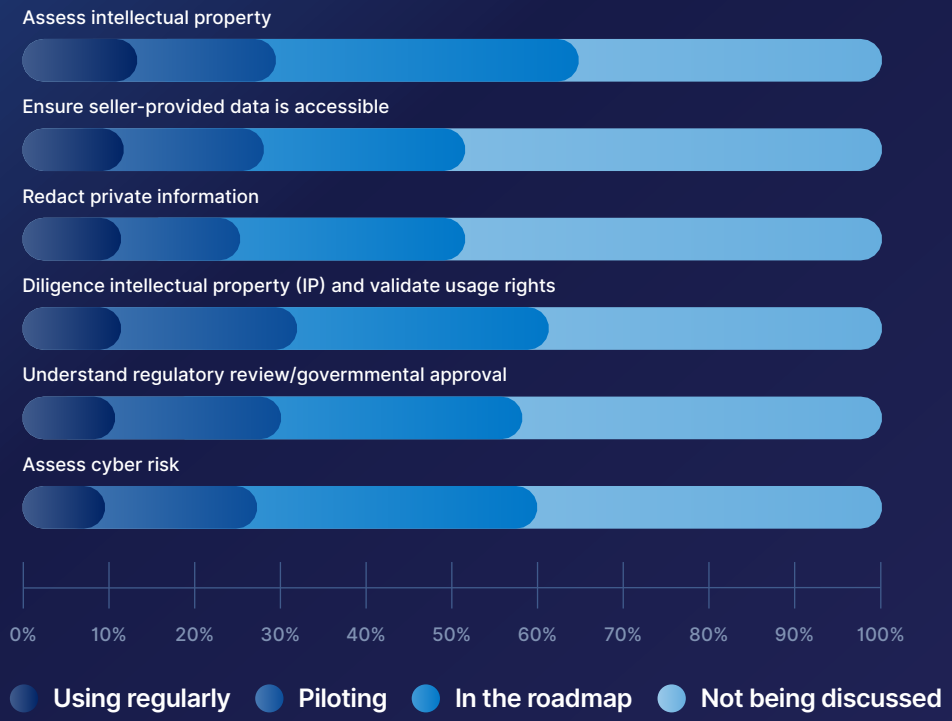
During diligence, we use AI to:



Source: Survey of public and large private corporate acquirers by the Transaction Advisors Institute. Produced in association SS&C Intralinks (2026).

A range of other diligence use cases have some traction by acquirers, with just as many piloting (3 of 4).

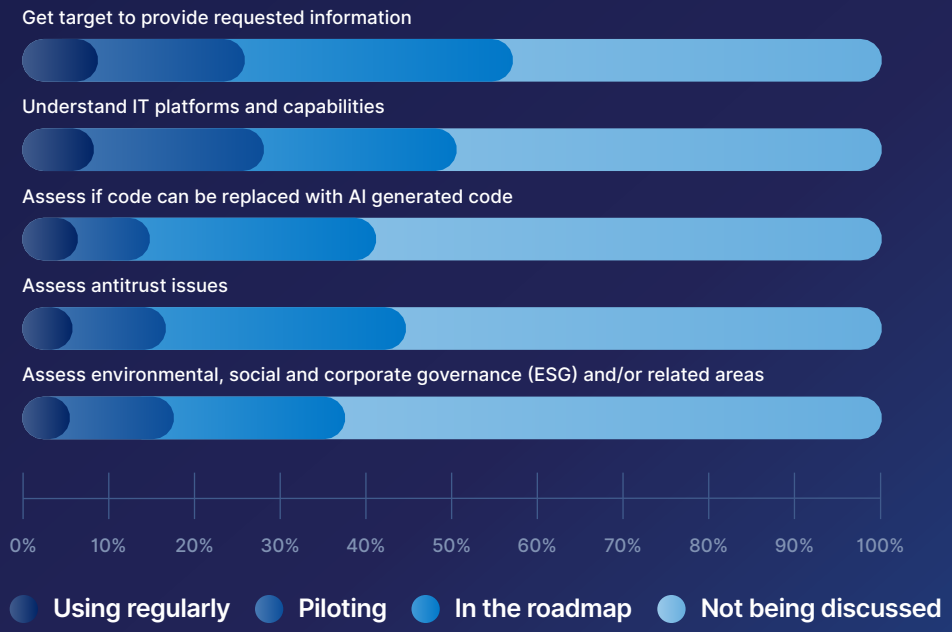
During diligence, we use AI to:



Source: Survey of public and large private corporate acquirers by the Transaction Advisors Institute. Produced in association SS&C Intralinks (2026).

A range of other diligence use cases have some traction by acquirers, with just as many piloting (4 of 4).

During diligence, we use AI to:

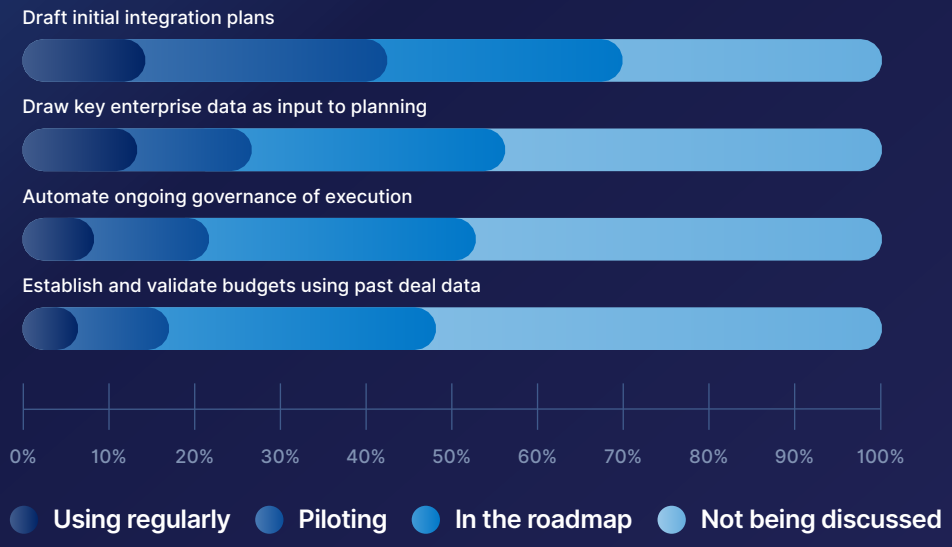


Source: Survey of public and large private corporate acquirers by the Transaction Advisors Institute. Produced in association SS&C Intralinks (2026).

AI is also used to support integration planning, with just under half of acquirers using/piloting AI to draft initial integration plans (42 percent), and a quarter (26 percent) drawing on key enterprise data as input to the plans. Some (21 percent) are also using AI to monitor execution in their governance programs during post-merger integration (PMI).

Drafting is the highest use of AI in integration planning, but few are using it regularly.

During diligence, we use AI to:

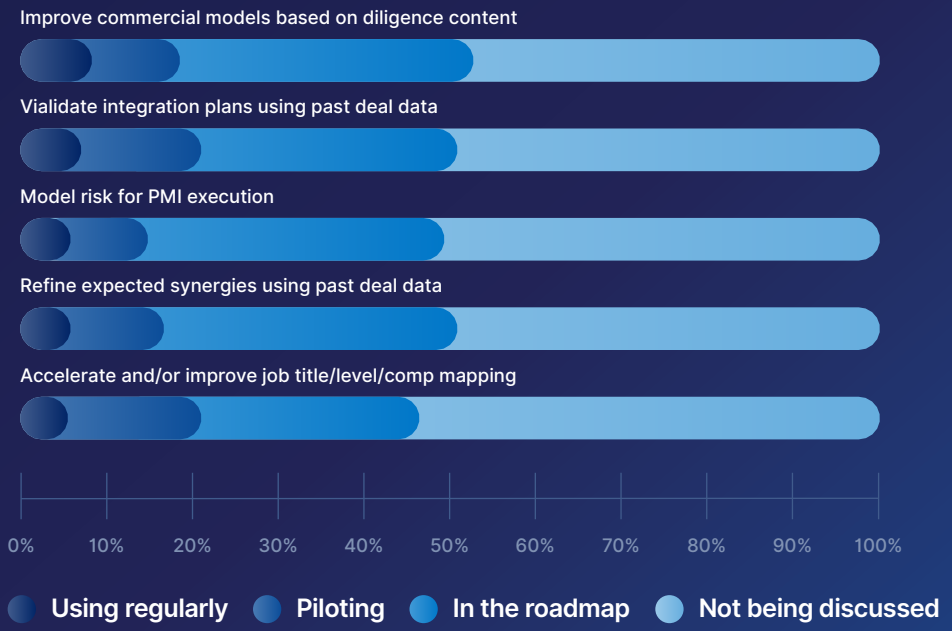


Source: Survey of public and large private corporate acquirers by the Transaction Advisors Institute. Produced in association SS&C Intralinks (2026).

Additional emerging use cases in M&A integration planning include: validating budgets (17 percent), improving commercial models based on diligence content (18 percent), modeling risk (15 percent), refining synergies (16 percent) and job/title mapping (21 percent).

Some acquirers are exploring a range of other AI use cases to support integration planning.

During diligence, we use AI to:



Source: Survey of public and large private corporate acquirers by the Transaction Advisors Institute. Produced in association SS&C Intralinks (2026).

02

AI and team productivity take priority over headcount reduction

The research identified 17 intended outcomes that corporate acquirers aim to achieve through their AI initiatives across four broad categories:

- Strategic value and growth
- Risk management
- Efficiency and cost reduction
- Organizational and governance

Of these 17 intended outcomes, nine were prioritized by more than half of the acquirers, showing that a majority are thinking broadly about the impact of AI. The highest-priority objective of current AI initiatives is to explore and learn what is possible with AI (87 percent). Following closely behind are:

- Efficiency objectives, including both reducing workload (83 percent) and driving staff to higher-value tasks (85 percent)
- Identifying risks and exploring reasons synergies can't be delivered (78 percent)

While there is much discussion in the press about reducing headcount through AI, the data show that corporate acquirers' priorities are quite the opposite. Reducing headcount was at the bottom of the list of intended benefits, with only a quarter of acquirers (23 percent) identifying it as a high/moderate priority. It appears that corporate AI initiatives (at least for now) are meant to drive efficiency within existing teams, not reduce their size.

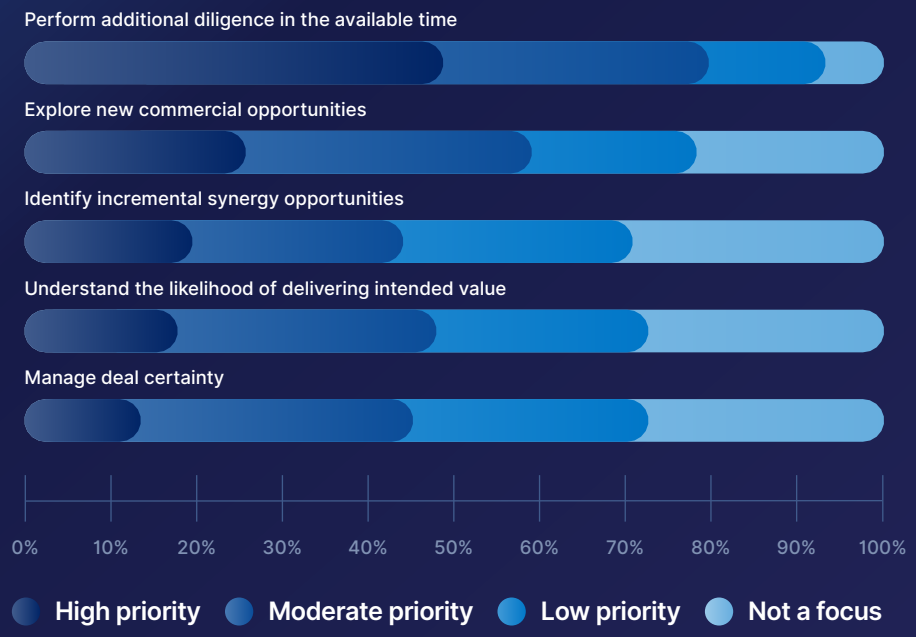
Interestingly, reducing the elapsed time spent on M&A diligence (77 percent) was a high priority for many acquirers, but it was not in the top five.

AI AND TEAM PRODUCTIVITY TAKE PRIORITY OVER HEADCOUNT REDUCTION

In the strategic value category, enabling teams to complete more M&A due diligence in the limited time available is the highest priority, with almost four out of five (79 percent) of acquirers listing it as a high or medium priority. Other high or medium priorities include: exploring additional commercial opportunities (59 percent), finding incremental synergy opportunities (44 percent), understanding the likelihood of delivering intended synergies (47 percent) and managing deal certainty (45 percent).

The highest priority intended outcome for AI is doing more due diligence in the time available.

We are using AI to support these strategic value and growth objectives:

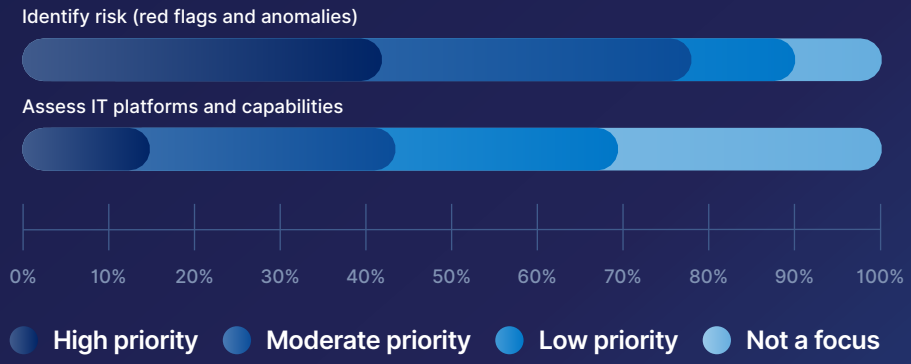


Source: Survey of public and large private corporate acquirers by the Transaction Advisors Institute. Produced in association SS&C Intralinks (2026).

From a risk perspective, almost four out of five acquirers are prioritizing AI capabilities to help identify risk (79 percent prioritize it as high or medium) and just under half (44 percent) are using AI to assess IT platforms.

Most acquirers prioritize using AI to identify risks and many use AI to assess IT platforms.

We are using AI to support these risk management objectives:



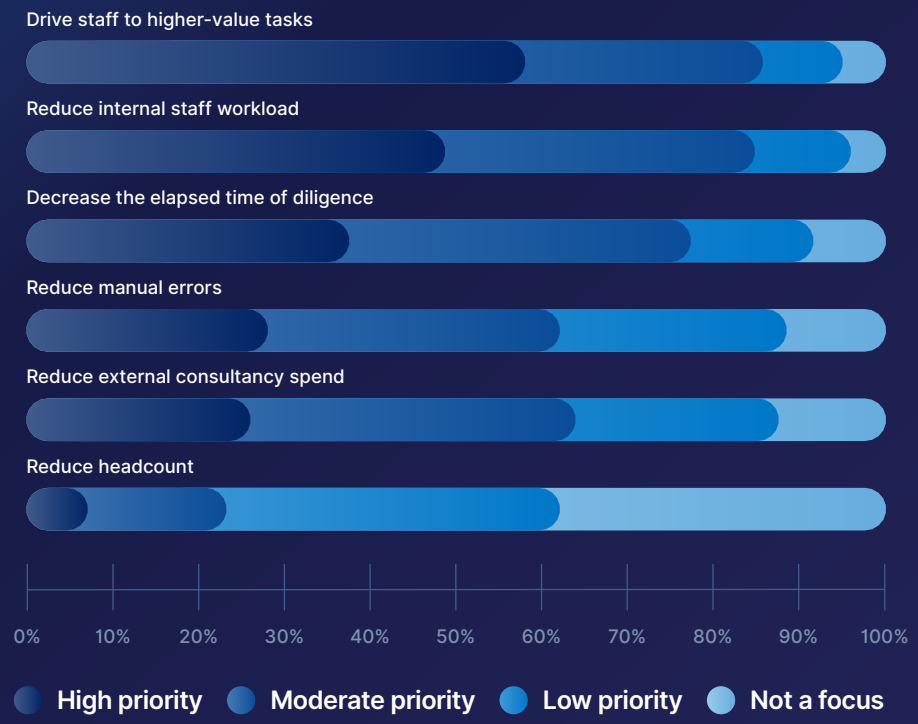
Source: Survey of public and large private corporate acquirers by the Transaction Advisors Institute. Produced in association SS&C Intralinks (2026).

AI AND TEAM PRODUCTIVITY TAKE PRIORITY OVER HEADCOUNT REDUCTION

While reducing headcount is low on the list, with fewer than 10 percent of acquirers identifying it as a high priority, there is significant interest in driving staff to higher-value tasks (85 percent as high or medium priority) and reducing internal staff workload (84 percent as high or medium priority). Decreasing the elapsed time for diligence was reported by roughly three-quarters (76 percent) as a high or medium priority, but only a third (37 percent) viewed it as a high priority.

Corporate acquirers' highest priority for AI is to reduce staff workload and drive staff to higher-value tasks.

We are using AI to support these efficiency and cost reduction objectives:

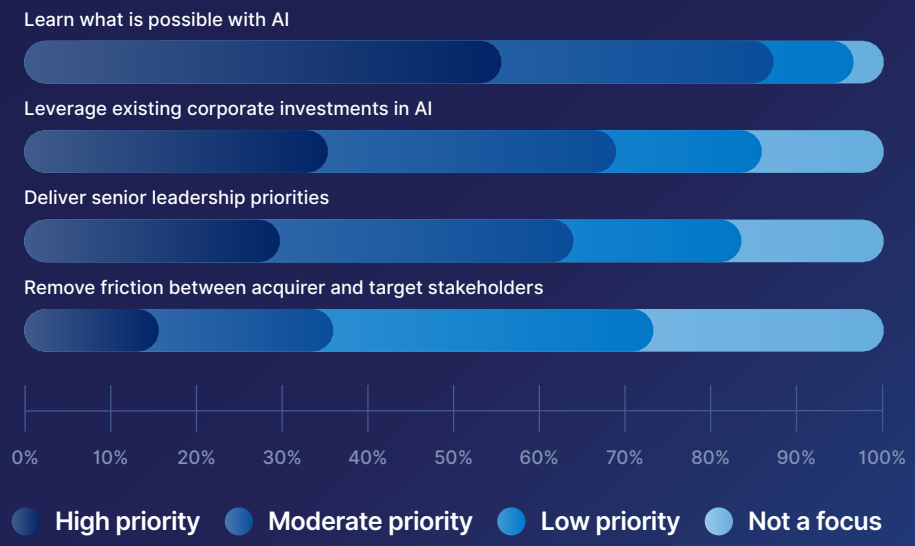


Source: Survey of public and large private corporate acquirers by the Transaction Advisors Institute. Produced in association SS&C Intralinks (2026).

Supporting organizational priorities rounds out the categories, with most (88 percent) identifying "exploring AI possibilities" as a high or medium priority. Helping companies get value from their AI investments and delivering on senior leadership priorities were identified as high priorities by roughly two-thirds (69 percent), while removing friction between the acquirer and target stakeholders was identified as a high or medium priority by only 36 percent.

Virtually all acquirers are prioritizing learning what is possible with AI.

We are using AI to support these organizational and governance objectives:



Source: Survey of public and large private corporate acquirers by the Transaction Advisors Institute. Produced in association SS&C Intralinks (2026).

In summary, corporate acquirers are pursuing a wide set of possibilities and expect significant outcomes from their AI investments.

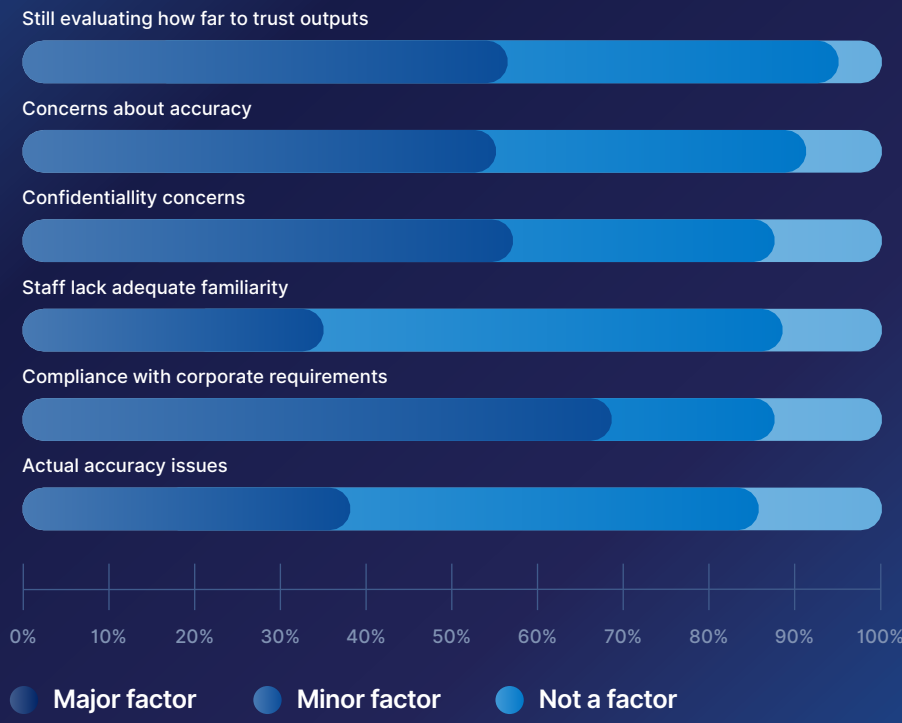
03

Corporate M&A faces AI deployment barriers and limited tool control

Driving change programs in large organizations is always difficult — and deploying AI across them is no different. At corporate acquirers, the pace of AI deployment has been slowed by compliance challenges (68 percent), managing access control (50 percent), confidentiality concerns (57 percent) and issues building trust in AI-generated work products (55 percent).

Compliance challenges and concerns about accuracy are the biggest reasons AI deployments are slowed down (1 of 3).

Our pace of AI deployment is slowed by:

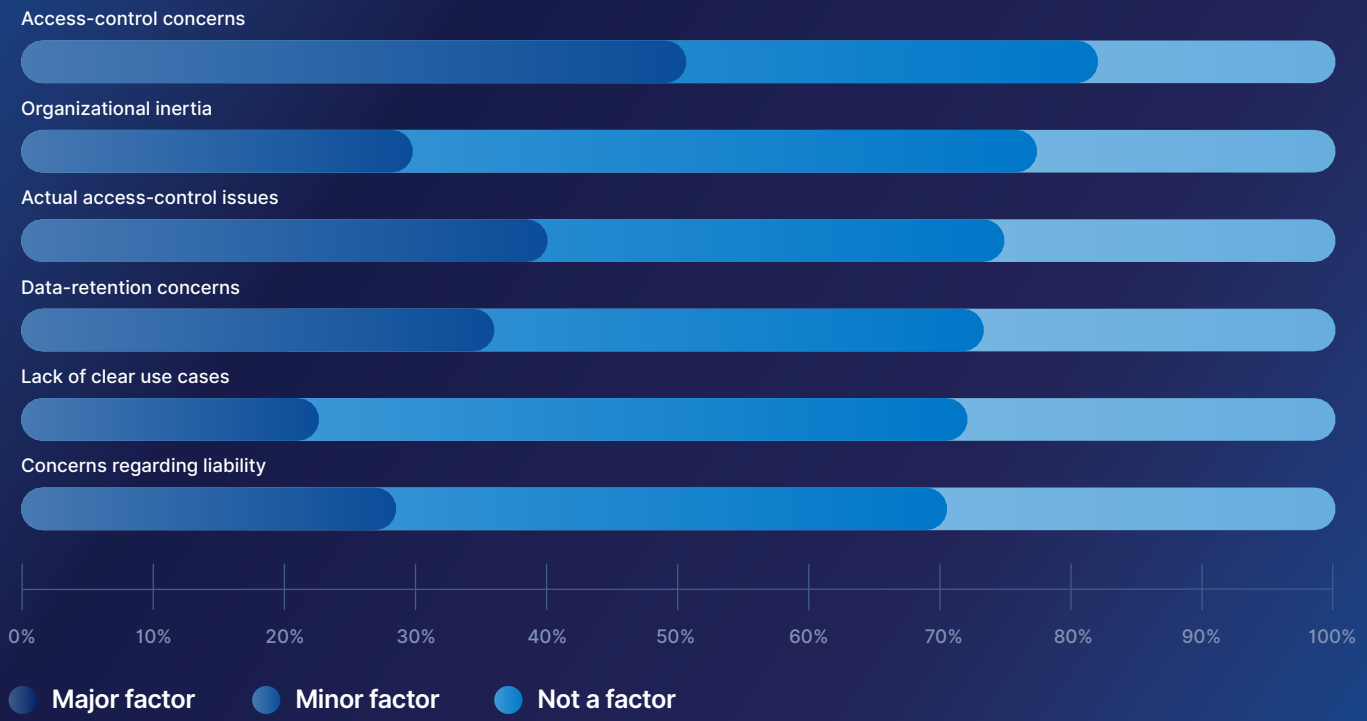


Source: Survey of public and large private corporate acquirers by the Transaction Advisors Institute. Produced in association SS&C Intralinks (2026).

In addition to the top six challenges, 13 additional challenges vex corporate M&A teams as they push forward their AI initiatives, identified in the following two figures:

A range of other challenges impact AI deployment at many acquirers (2 of 3).

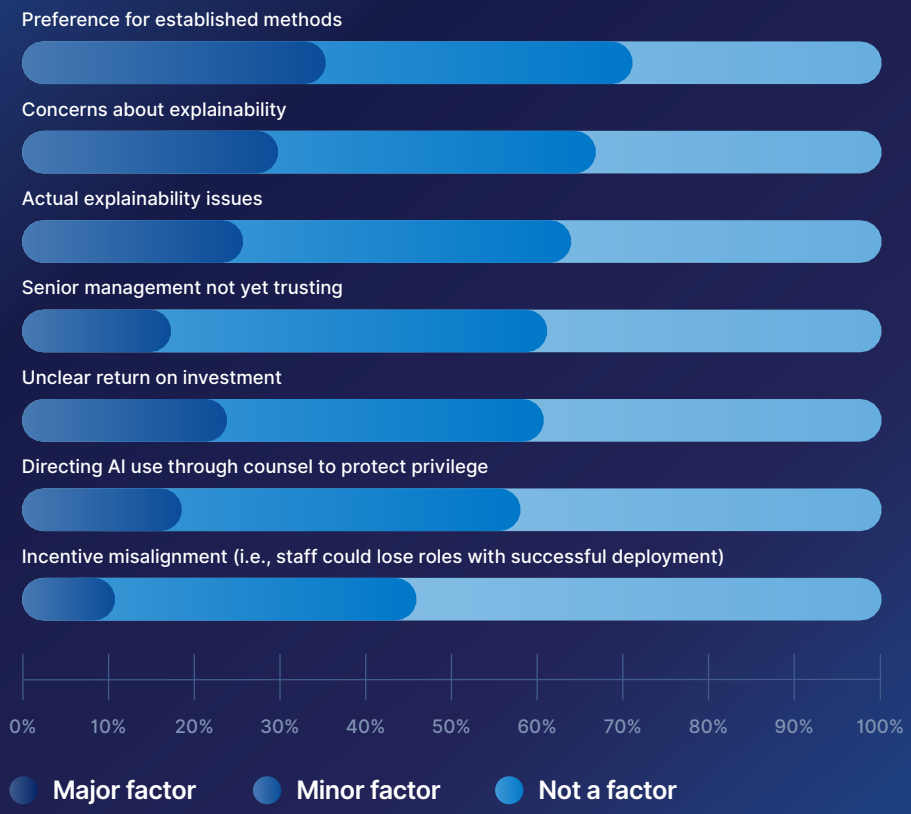
Our pace of AI deployment is slowed by:



Source: Survey of public and large private corporate acquirers by the Transaction Advisors Institute. Produced in association SS&C Intralinks (2026).

A further range of challenges impacts the pace of AI deployment at acquirers (3 of 3).

Our pace of AI deployment is slowed by:

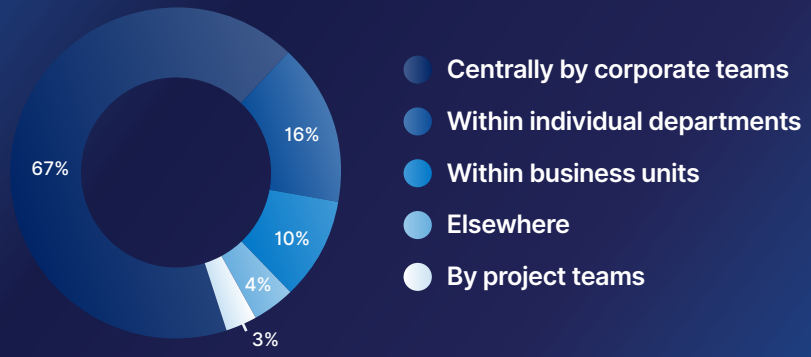


Source: Survey of public and large private corporate acquirers by the Transaction Advisors Institute. Produced in association SS&C Intralinks (2026).

A major impediment to M&A teams' experimentation is that few corporate acquirers allow individual teams to select and experiment with new technologies or suppliers; the majority of AI budgets (67 percent) are centrally controlled by corporate teams. This greatly reduces the latitude corporate teams have to experiment and try new ideas.

M&A teams are rarely in control of AI tool budgets.

In our organization, the budget for AI tools is managed:



Source: Survey of public and large private corporate acquirers by the Transaction Advisors Institute. Produced in association SS&C Intralinks (2026).

04

AI adoption has tripled, and trust is improving

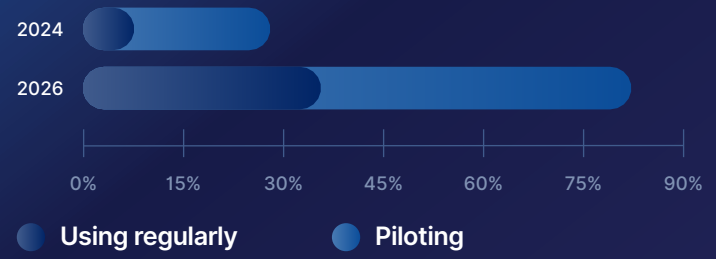
The most traction with AI among corporate acquirers is primarily in core diligence workstreams, with a focused effort to use automation and AI capabilities to improve speed and quality beyond human capacity.

Corporate acquirers are using AI regularly or piloting AI to review legal agreements (79 percent, up from 29 percent).

Half are using or piloting AI capabilities to manage diligence workstreams (50 percent, up from 13 percent).

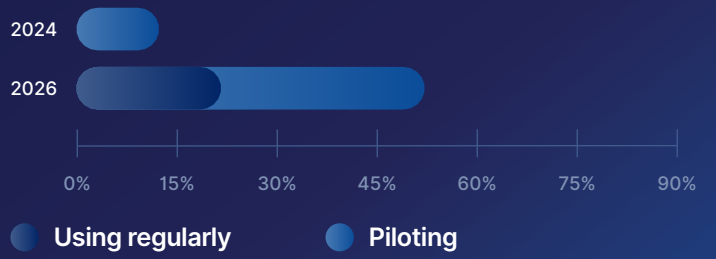
Most acquirers are using AI to review legal agreements, up from two years ago.

During diligence, we use AI to review legal agreements:



Half of acquirers are using AI to manage due diligence workstreams, far more than two years ago.

During diligence, we use AI to manage review by diligence workstreams:



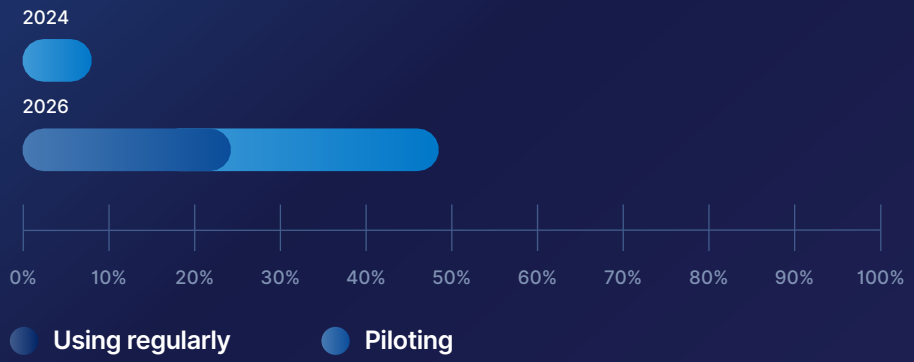
Source: Survey of public and large private corporate acquirers by the Transaction Advisors Institute. Produced in association SS&C Intralinks (2026).

AI ADOPTION HAS TRIPLED, AND TRUST IS IMPROVING

Just under half are using AI to review financials and perform QoE analyses (49 percent, up from five percent).

Roughly half of acquirers are using AI to review financials, up from a handful two years ago.

During diligence, we use AI to review financials/QoE:



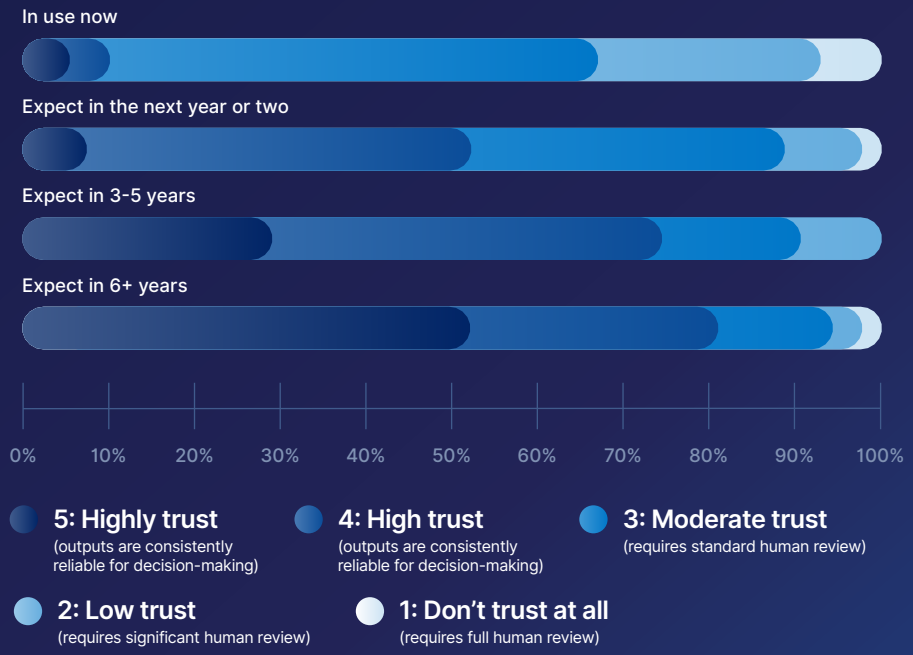
Source: Survey of public and large private corporate acquirers by the Transaction Advisors Institute. Produced in association SS&C Intralinks (2026).

Other emerging use cases with more traction than two years ago are: identifying incremental commercial opportunities (36 percent, up from 11 percent), understanding regulatory approval challenges (30 percent, up from 5 percent), assessing IP (29 percent, up from 3 percent), assessing IT systems (28 percent, up from three percent) and assessing cyber risk (27 percent, up from 6 percent).

While AI penetration has greatly expanded, trust remains minimal; few (nine percent) say AI-generated work products can be mostly trusted, despite virtually all acquirers using the technology.

While trust is minimal now, most corporate acquirers expect AI capabilities will earn trust in the next few years.

How much do you trust current AI capabilities in M&A-related work on a scale of 1 to 5?



Source: Survey of public and large private corporate acquirers by the Transaction Advisors Institute. Produced in association SS&C Intralinks (2026).

Most acquirers (88 percent) expect this to change in the next year or two, building to at least moderate trust as capabilities improve.

Agentic AI is gaining traction alongside generative AI

05

While generative AI has much of the mindshare and many AI discussions center on using available internal and external data to generate work product, autonomous agents (agentic AI) are gaining traction across a growing set of use cases.

Acquirers are optimistic about the possibilities of removing human steps with agentic AI. Nearly a quarter of acquirers (24 percent) already use agentic AI for contract review, and two-thirds (68 percent) expect to conduct full contract reviews within the next year or two. A few have automated QoE analysis (six percent), and 51 percent expect to have it within the next year or two.

Other emerging use cases for agentic AI include predicting deal outcomes during planning, matching buyers with sellers, completely autonomous diligence agents and end-to-end orchestration platforms. While these use cases for agentic AI are only being explored by one in five acquirers, that is up from none in 2024.

Regardless of the initiatives in place for generative AI, agentic AI requires a fresh planning and visioning exercise to assess and capture the possibilities.

Agentic AI already has traction in M&A due diligence for some use cases and is expected to gain more in the future.

When do you think autonomous AI agents (agentic AI) will remove human steps in your deals for:



Source: Survey of public and large private corporate acquirers by the Transaction Advisors Institute. Produced in association SS&C Intralinks (2026).

Actions for readers to consider based on the research

The following tips and recommendations were gleaned from respondents and are intended to help those planning or replanning their AI initiatives.

01

Balance detailed and big-picture use cases:

Start with AI initiatives that free up time, then expand to bigger-picture possibilities. Make sure the repetitive, detailed work is pushed to AI platforms, and challenge your teams to focus on incremental, measurable benefits.

02

Formalize your AI learning agenda:

Treat AI deployment as an iterative, continuous process. Dedicate resources to a formal experimentation agenda to embrace the possibilities.

03

Embrace governance and compliance challenges:

Proactively address significant deployment headwinds — especially those related to compliance, confidentiality and trust building. Supporting governance and compliance requirements is essential for improving penetration of all AI use cases over the next few years.

04

Balance core and emerging use cases:

Start with high-penetration use cases, such as legal agreement review, to build immediate traction. Simultaneously, dedicate resources to emerging, high-value areas such as QoE assessments, identifying incremental commercial opportunities and assessing cyber risk to drive competitive differentiation.

05

Challenge budget boundaries:

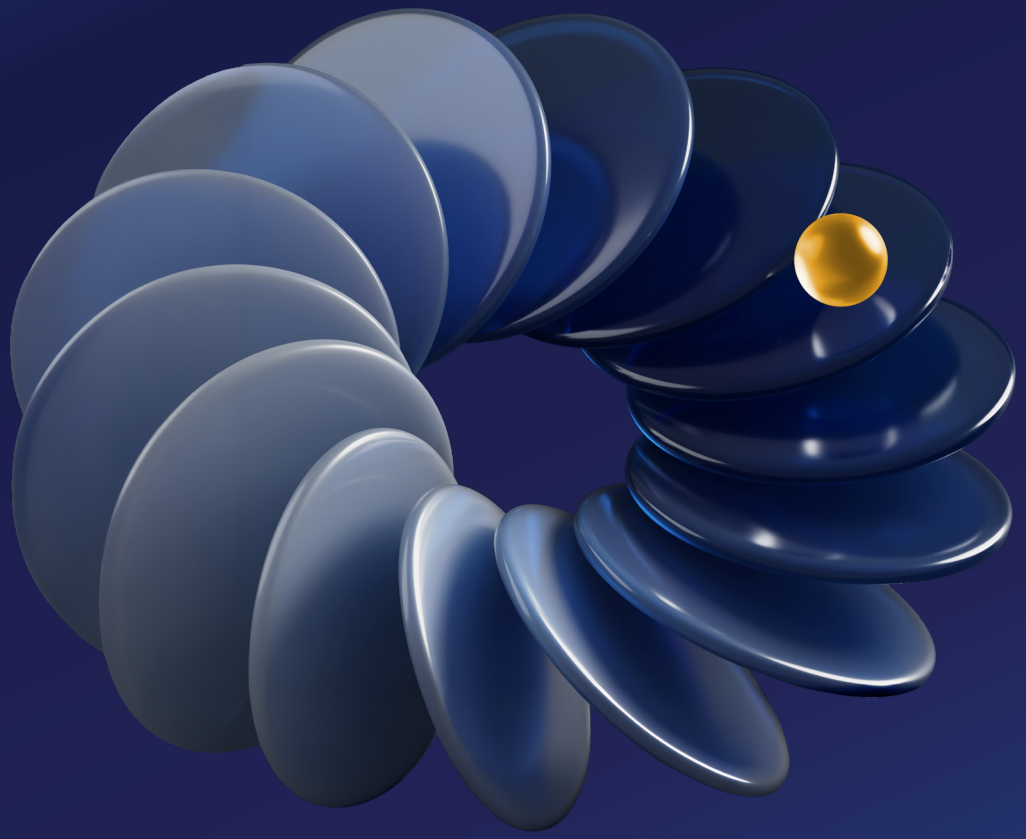
While the centralized control of AI budgets is a reality, explore what is possible. Empowering M&A teams with a dedicated budget and some latitude can accelerate local experimentation.

06

Plan separately for autonomous agents:

Do not treat autonomous (agentic) AI as merely an extension of generative AI. Initiate a new planning and visioning exercise to capture the possibilities of agentic technology, which is expected to automate key areas such as contract review and QoE analysis within the next few years.

Looking ahead



Diligence and integration planning practices are evolving significantly among corporate acquirers as AI capabilities are being implemented and deployed. This continued reinvention of the corporate processes that drive M&A is the new normal, and as AI capabilities expand, deployment becomes an iterative and neverending process.

Corporate acquirers are developing comprehensive plans and are taking significant steps to benefit from AI in their organizations. There is much discussion in the press about how AI will replace armies of people, but for now corporate acquirers are taking a different path: using AI to complement human teams for a better, more comprehensive and forward-thinking M&A process.

While corporate acquirers may have taken longer to get going, it doesn't mean they will always be behind. They are learning from earlier adopters, avoiding missteps others have made, and, with continually improving AI technologies, all players need to be consistently reimplementing. The comprehensive planning processes, with coordinated stakeholders across these large organizations, may ultimately deliver greater benefits from AI.

Future research should be executed to monitor this situation as capabilities develop and the influence of AI capabilities on M&A outcomes becomes clearer. It's now evident that AI can reduce costs and effort, improve the quality of work products and leverage prior corporate experience in current M&A better than humans. But do AI initiatives drive shareholder outcomes? Time will tell.

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