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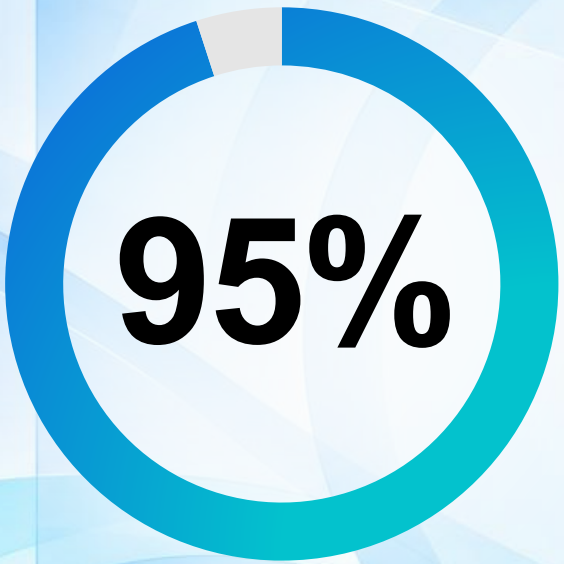
Why AI Fails Without Data Products and Data Contracts

Emma McGrattan
Actian CTO

October 2026, Boston, USA

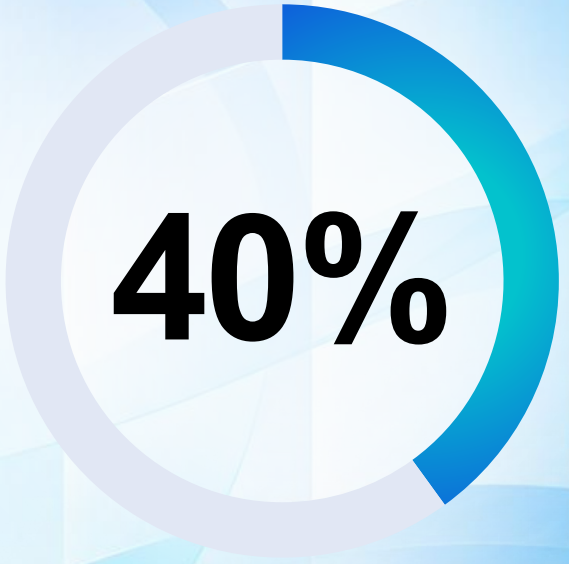
Scaling AI is Risky



Gen AI initiatives deliver zero ROI [1]



Organizations have scaled AI agents [2]



Agentic AI programs predicted to be cancelled by 2027 [3]

[1]State of AI in Business 2025, MIT
[2]The State of AI: Global Survey 2025, McKinsey
[3]"Executive Briefing on Emerging Technology: Agentic AI" by Daniel Sun, Tsuneo Fujiwara, 1 July 2025, Gartner

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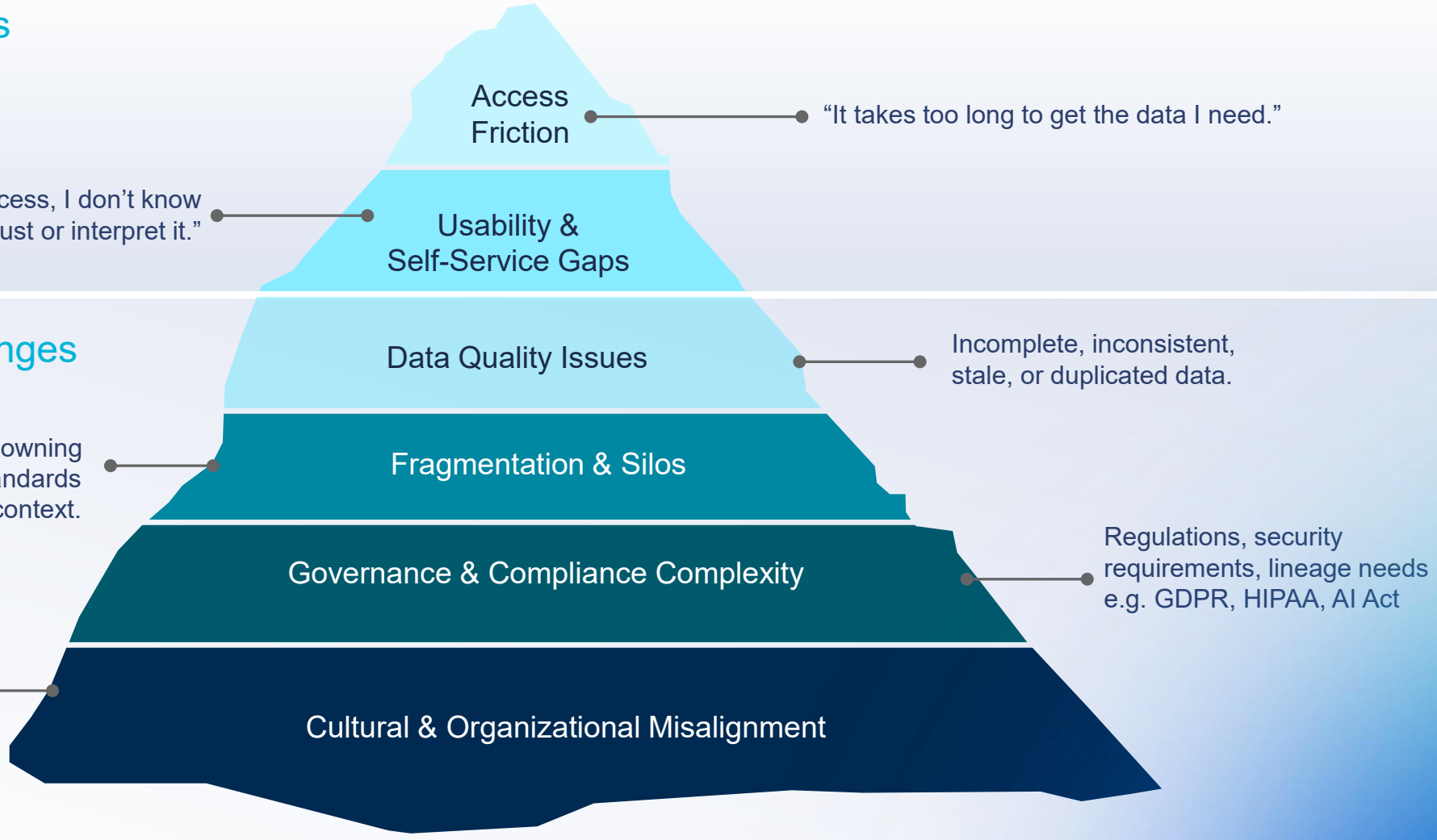
Enterprise Data Challenges

Business Challenges



Foundational Challenges

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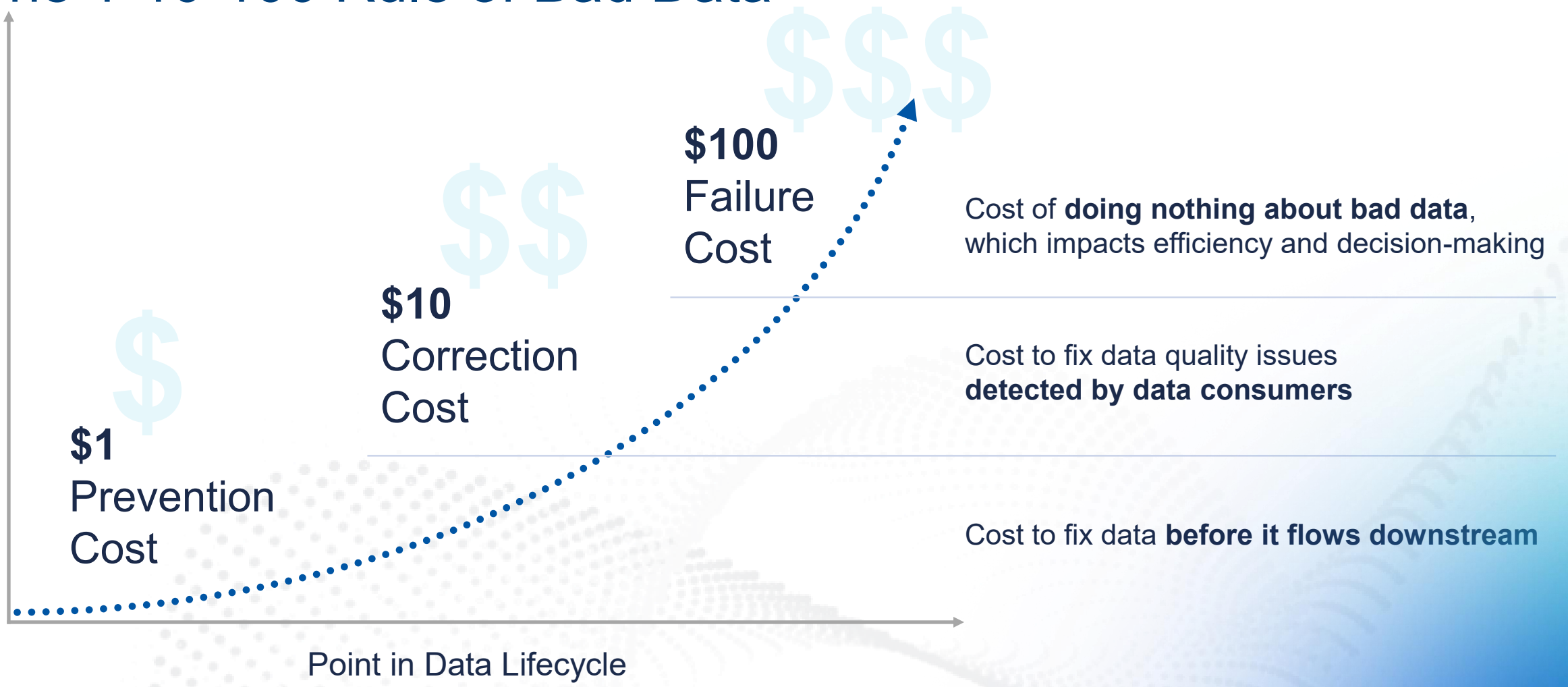
Shift-left:
The 1-10-100 Rule of Bad Data



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The Foundation for Scalable AI

Data Contracts

Formal agreement between data producers and consumers

Schema, Format and Delivery SLAs

Access Policies and Governance

Quality Thresholds and Validation

Change Management and Versioning



Data Products

Curated, reusable dataset managed as an independent asset

Defined Ownership and Accountability

Built-in Quality Guarantees

Self-Service Discoverability

Standardized Schemas and Semantics

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BARC Survey Overview

Survey Scale

300+ data leaders across industries worldwide

Respondent Profile

CDOs, VPs of Data, Data Architects, and ML Engineers at enterprise organizations

Focus Areas

Data product and contract adoption, AI deployment maturity, and governance practices

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What we **Discovered**

Data products and data contracts are one of the best ways to safeguard the success of your AI deployment at scale, especially for agentic and autonomous AI.

Think of it as an “easy button” for AI deployment.

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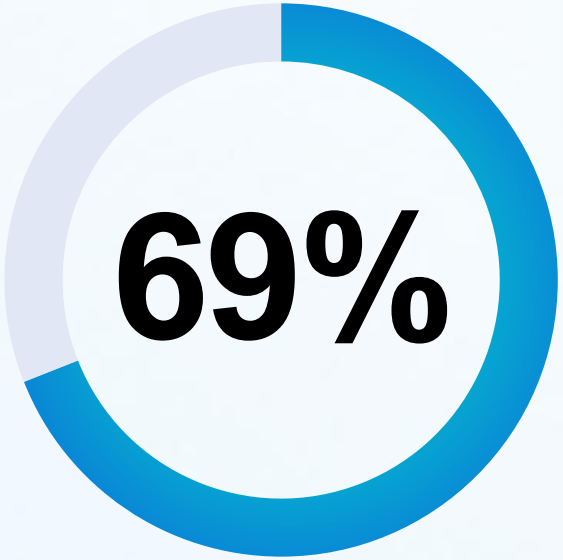
Operationalizing AI: **Data Products**



Organizations deploy data products in active operational use

Up from 48% in 2024

21% jump in just 13 months

Among Data Leaders

93% of self-identified data leaders use data products

No Longer Experimental

Data products have moved beyond theory into mainstream execution

AI Benefits Correlation

Particularly strong among **organizations already seeing AI benefits**

* BARC 2026

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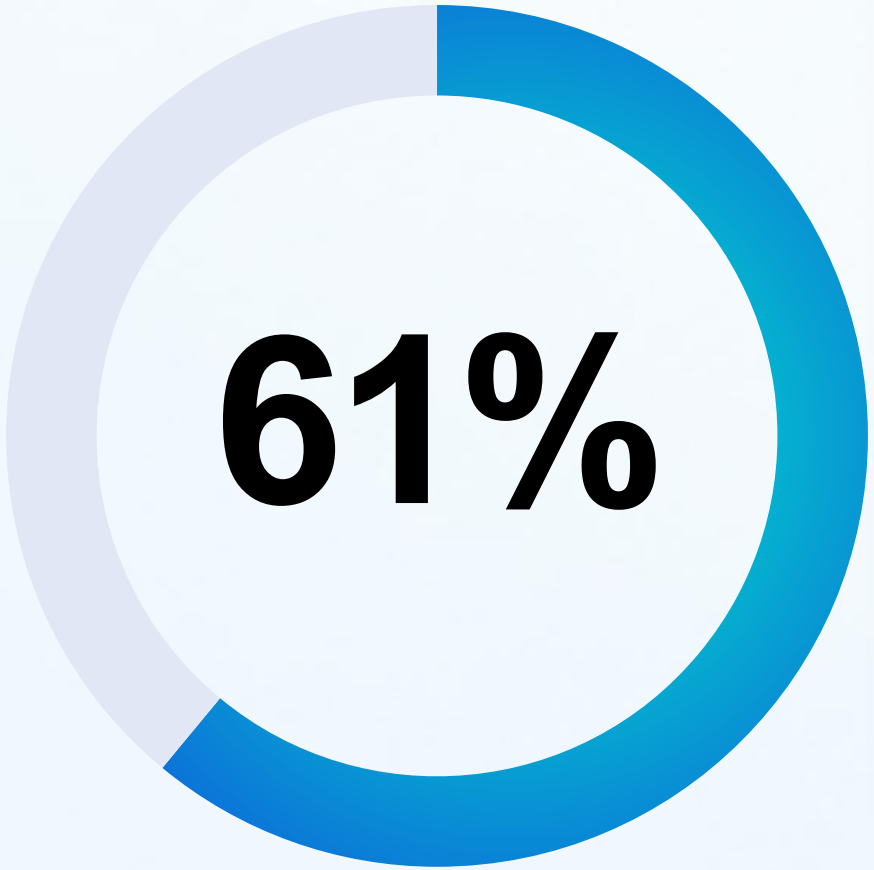
Operationalizing AI: **Data Contracts**



Respondents report using data contracts

Organizations adopting open data contract standards are significantly more likely to scale data products company-wide

* BARC 2026

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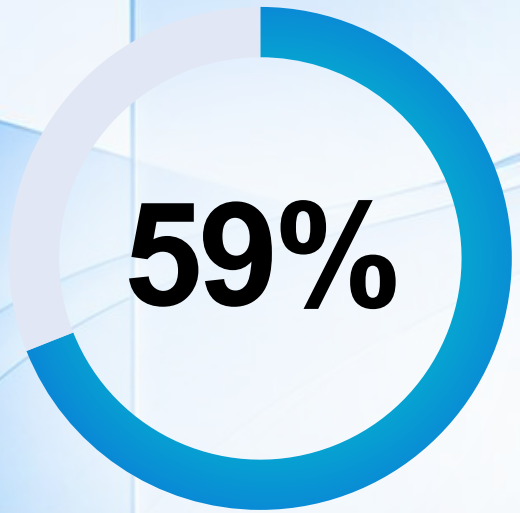
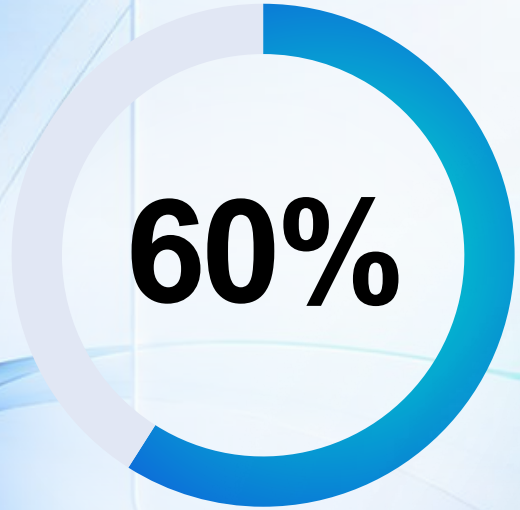
Why Organizations Implement **Data Products**



Trustworthy inputs **for decisions**



Trustworthy inputs **for AI**

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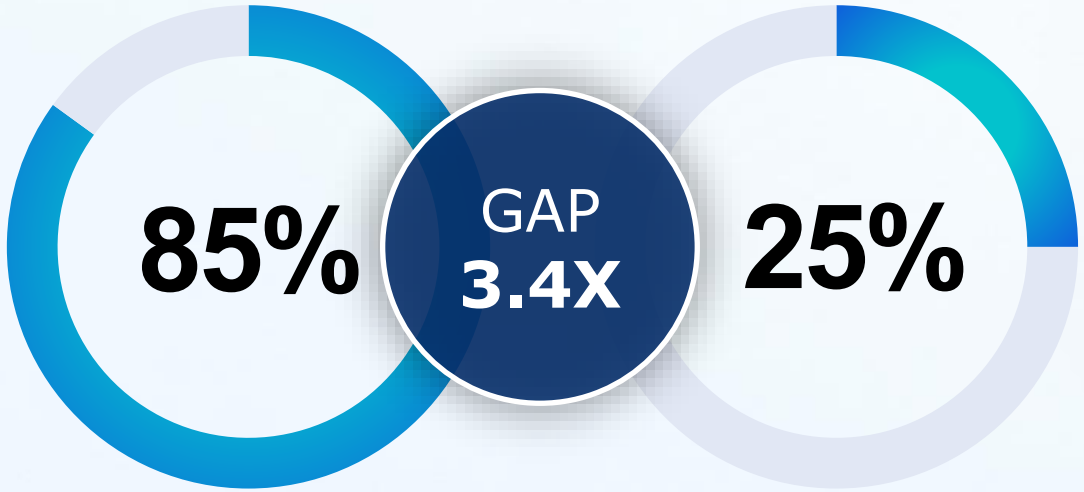
Relationship Between Data Product Maturity and AI Outcomes

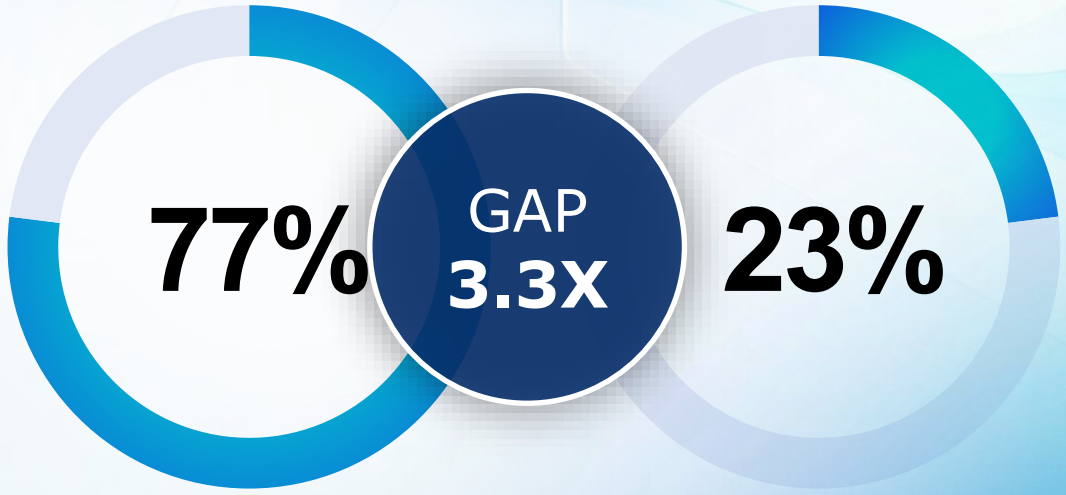
AI Projects in Production (3+)



With company-wide data products

Without data product maturity

Agentic / Autonomous AI in Production



With company-wide data products

Experimenting or not using data products

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"We have moved from a manual process to an automatic process. And when you move from… a manual to an automatic process, your data quality has to be at the highest level. Without this concept of information products that we have implemented, I don't think we would have managed to do this."

Ingard Moen, Vice President

Statnett

Source: Actian Customer Advisory Board meeting and customer survey

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"Thanks to the catalog, everyone knows where to find the data they need, who owns it, and how to get access — so we avoid endless emails and work much more efficiently."

Dr. Vincent Dekker, Head of Data Governance and Digital

AUTOMOTIVE CELLS Co

Source: Actian Customer Advisory Board meeting and customer survey

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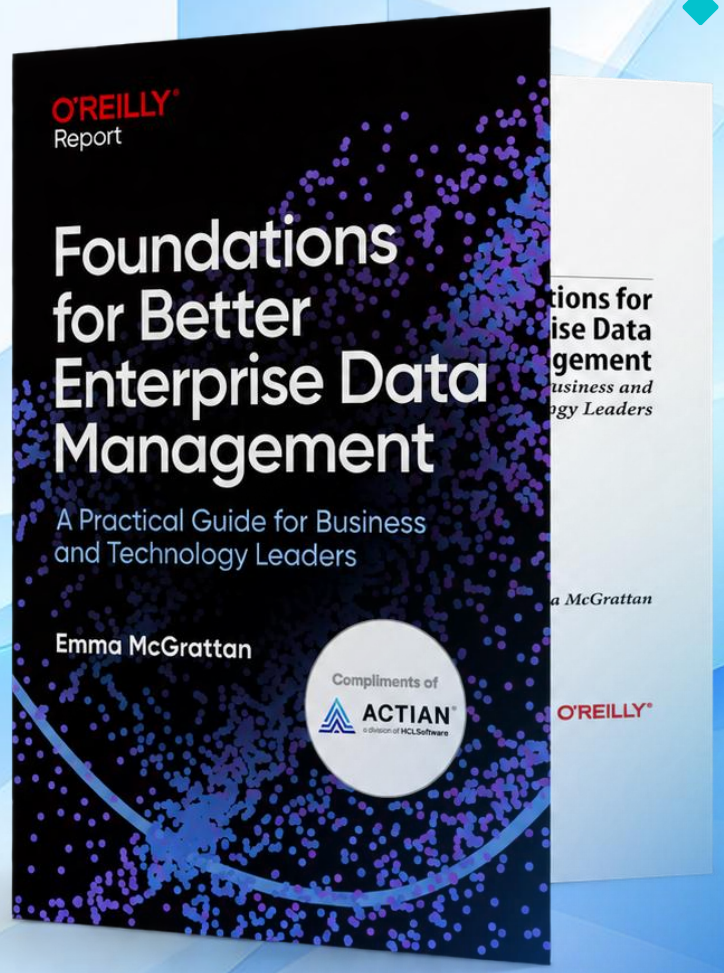
Emma McGrattan
CTO, Actian



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The Questions That Lead to Scalable AI Success

Data Products Operationalize Quality	*To what extent do you have data products across multiple teams, or do they exist only in pockets?*
Organizational Readiness Matters	*Where are you in your evolution toward operationalizing AI readiness?*
Governance Models Vary	*Where are data contracts in place, and where are expectations still implicit?*
Product Thinking Extends to AI	*Which AI systems depend on data assets without clearly defined quality, ownership, or change expectations?*

Operationalizing AI Data Governance



Self-identified data leaders use data products

Data products have moved into mainstream execution and use is particularly high in companies already seeing AI benefits

Source: 2026 Actian Survey

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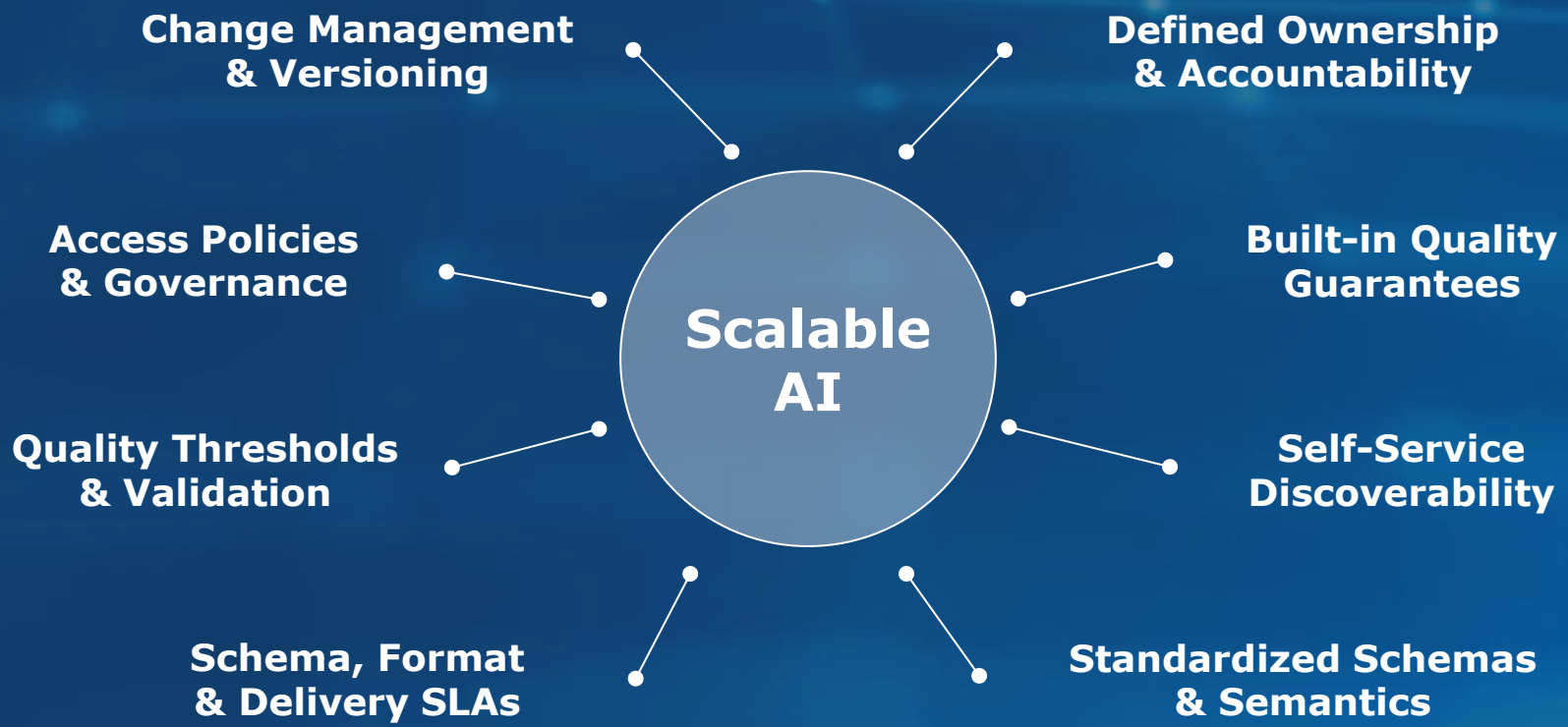

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Scalable AI

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