F5 regional CXO roundtable series

Dubai edition

Architecting the AI-enabled enterprise

Key takeaways | April 30, 2025

Lessons from the Dubai CXO roundtable

An actionable path to scaling AI for business outcomes
30 April 2025, Dubai

Executive summary

Enterprises want to know how to scale AI and deliver on its promised value. The struggle has been real — moving beyond pilot projects to measurable impact remains a challenge across industries. To address this, F5 convened 12 senior leaders in Dubai for a focused roundtable discussion on what it truly takes to build an AI-enabled enterprise. The session unpacked what's working, what's not, and where organizations must focus to operationalize AI in a way that drives productivity, optimizes cost, and accelerates growth.

The discussion revealed key priorities and patterns that consistently emerged across sectors. This report is structured around five focus areas that leaders must align on to move from experimentation to execution:

- **Strategic imperatives:** Embedding AI into core functions through self-funding loops, internal use cases, and modernized data infrastructure.
- **Critical challenges:** Addressing legacy systems, shadow AI, talent gaps, and budgeting misalignment.
- **Implementation approach:** Building modular, secure, and interoperable systems to scale AI effectively.
- **Success metrics:** Measuring outcomes across productivity, cost, customer experience, and compliance.
- **Next steps:** Launching pilots, reinvesting gains, aligning with regulations, and embedding governance and training.

1. Strategic imperatives for AI adoption

The roundtable outlined six essential priorities that shape the path to scalable, outcome-driven AI.

1.1 Create self-funding innovation loops

Insight: AI adoption is sustainable when innovation is funded by savings from early productivity and automation wins, reducing dependency on central budgets.

Recommendation

- Reinvest efficiency gains from AI pilots into further experimentation.
- Encourage business units to own AI initiatives by tying innovation budgets to realized benefits.

Actions

- Allocate seed funding for proofs-of-concept to demonstrate value.
- Funnel a percentage of productivity savings into innovation budgets.
- Establish joint IT-business councils to align funding with business outcomes.

1.2 Prioritize employee-facing use cases first

Insight: Internal use cases (e.g., employee copilots, forecasting tools) offer low-risk, high-impact opportunities to build trust before scaling to customer-facing applications.

Recommendation

- Start with employee-facing tools like summarizers and knowledge management systems.
- Use persona-based pilots to validate ROI before expanding to customer experience (CX) applications.

Actions

- Identify internal use cases with clear KPIs (e.g., productivity gains, forecasting accuracy).
- Roll out pilots for employee-facing tools, such as scheduling optimizers for cinemas or forecasting models for seasonal businesses.
- Scale to customer-facing use cases (e.g., chatbots) after internal success.

1.3 Treat data like code

Insight: Clean, real-time, and governed data is foundational for reliable AI outcomes, yet legacy systems and batch ETL processes hinder scalability.

Recommendation

- Govern data with version control, security, and auditability, treating it like software.
- Transition to real-time data pipelines to support dynamic AI applications.

Actions

- Assess data quality and interoperability across systems.
- Replace batch ETL with real-time pipelines using tools like Apache Kafka or Azure Data Factory.
- Align data infrastructure with national sovereignty requirements via local or regional clouds.

1.4 Leverage regional partnerships and ecosystems

Insight: Regional collaborations accelerate AI adoption by unlocking access to infrastructure, talent and regulatory clarity.

Recommendation

- Partner with local tech providers and cloud platforms to ensure compliant and scalable AI deployments.
- Engage with public initiatives and industry bodies for regulatory support and funding opportunities.
- Co-develop use cases through innovation hubs to fast-track pilots and share best practices.

Actions

- Establish alliances with regional cloud and AI vendors.
- Join government-backed programs and industry consortiums.
- Launch joint pilots in sectors like retail, financial services, or healthcare to validate outcomes.

1.5 Establish robust AI governance

Insight: Governance is a baseline assumption, requiring consistent enforcement to mitigate risks like shadow AI and regulatory non-compliance.

Recommendation

- Integrate risk, compliance, and security controls into every AI initiative.
- Deploy guardrails to manage hallucination risks and ensure data sovereignty.

Actions

- Conduct audits to identify shadow AI usage and enforce approved tools.
- Implement observability tools for real-time compliance monitoring.
- Align AI deployments with local regulations using on-prem or regional infrastructure.

1.6 Invest in role-based training with balanced scorecards

Insight: Talent scarcity and cultural resistance, including fear of job displacement, slow AI adoption, but tying AI metrics to performance scorecards drives accountability and adoption.

Recommendation

- Develop structured, role-specific training tied to live use cases.
- Foster AI literacy through internal playbooks and Balanced Scorecards to measure and incentivize adoption.

Actions

- Launch training programs for executives, IT, and business units, focusing on practical AI applications.

- Create AI playbooks documenting best practices and lessons from pilots.
- Implement Balanced Scorecards to track AI usage and productivity metrics, integrating them into employee performance evaluations.
- Execute change management to position AI as a job enhancer, not a replacer.

2. Critical challenges

Having established strategic priorities, the roundtable highlighted key challenges that must be addressed to sustain AI adoption across enterprises.

2.1 Legacy systems and data fragmentation

Mitigation: Modernize infrastructure to support real-time, interoperable data flows.

Action: Invest in middleware and cloud-native platforms to bridge legacy systems with AI workloads.

2.2 Shadow AI projects

Mitigation: Provide secure, enterprise-grade AI tools to deter unauthorized usage.

Action: Deploy approved tools like Microsoft Copilot with single-sign-on and conduct quarterly audits to detect shadow AI.

2.3 Lack of clarity in ROI assessment

Mitigation: Develop standardized ROI templates to quantify both quantitative and qualitative benefits.

Action: Track metrics like productivity gains and cost savings; include qualitative benefits like decision-making improvements as secondary metrics.quarterly audits to detect shadow AI.

2.4 Cultural resistance and talent gaps

Mitigation: Combine role-specific upskilling with transparent change management to address AI anxiety.

Action: Launch training programs and communication campaigns emphasizing AI as a productivity tool, integrated into employee scorecards.

2.5 Budgeting misalignment

Mitigation: Align budgets with business outcomes through self-funding innovation loops.

Action: Allocate seed funding for proofs-of-concept, with savings from early wins reinvested into further AI initiatives.

3. Implementation plan: scalable AI architecture

The roundtable emphasized a secure, modular, and interoperable architecture to scale AI effectively. The following outlines the components and steps to achieve it.

3.1 Design principles

Modularity : Use containerized, API-first designs to support diverse AI models and deployment environments (cloud, on-prem, hybrid).

Interoperability : Ensure seamless integration with legacy ERP, CRM, and ticketing systems.

Security : Treat AI models and APIs as live threat surfaces, prioritizing cybersecurity.

Observability : Enable compliance and explainability through real-time telemetry and auditable dashboards.

3.2 Architecture components

Data layer

- Real-time, governed data pipelines supporting high-quality, auditable datasets.
- Infrastructure aligned with data sovereignty requirements.

AI layer

- Modular models (e.g., generative AI for internal tools, predictive analytics for forecasting).
- Agentic models for AI-to-AI orchestration in complex workflows.

Governance layer

- Real-time monitoring for compliance and hallucination risks.
- Auditable dashboards for accountability and regulatory adherence.

Integration layer

- API-driven interfaces to connect AI with legacy systems like ticketing or payment gateways.
- Support for hybrid deployments to balance cost and sovereignty.

3.3 Implementation steps

- **Start with internal pilots:** Deploy employee-facing tools (e.g., copilots, scheduling optimizers) to demonstrate ROI. Example: A cinema chain implemented a scheduling optimizer, reducing manual planning time by 30% and reinvesting savings into customer-facing chatbots.
- **Modernize data infrastructure:** Build real-time pipelines and ensure data hygiene.
- **Enforce governance:** Deploy monitoring tools and guardrails for compliance and security.
- **Scale modularity:** Use containerized architectures to integrate AI across business functions.
- **Monitor and secure:** Prioritize cybersecurity and observability for autonomous AI operations.

4. Success metrics

To evaluate AI initiatives, focus on metrics emphasized in the roundtable:

- **Business impact:** Revenue growth, cost reduction, and CX improvements (e.g., optimized cinema scheduling, demand forecasting).
- **Operational efficiency:** Productivity gains and automation benefits (e.g., employee copilot adoption).
- **Compliance and governance:** Adherence to data sovereignty and regulatory requirements.

Action: Establish processes to track ROI, scalability, and compliance, using dashboards to monitor adoption and reinvest savings into new pilots.

5. Next steps

To translate these insights into action, the roundtable outlined practical next steps for CXOs.

- **Launch pilots with sustainable funding:** Start with employee-facing use cases, reinvesting savings to fuel innovation.
- **Modernize data with regional support:** Build real-time data pipelines, leveraging local partnerships for compliance and resources.
- **Embed governance and skills:** Enforce robust governance and invest in training with Balanced Scorecards to drive adoption.

The roundtable discussions offered valuable perspectives on driving enterprise- wide, strategic integration of AI.

Attendees

Name	Company	Designation
Alaeddin Khader	Core42	Director Data and AI
Isabel Fernandez Torio	AXA	Head of Data Hub
Johan Nilerud	Khazna Data Centers	Chief Strategy Officer
Leeni (Kurian) O'Connor	Landmark Group	Head of Strategy and Planning – Digital
Lloyd Gozzett	Diriyah Company	Executive Director – Technology
Mandy Oikonomopoulou	du EITC	Director, Digital & CX Program Delivery
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Oswald Golja	Siemens Energy	Head of Digital Core Business Engagement Middle East & Afri-ca
Ravi Padala	Geidea	Group Engineering Director
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