

# AI-First Culture

## The Rise of AI-Centric Organizations



**Svetlin Nakov, PhD**

Co-founder @ SoftUni

Training & Inspiration @ SoftUni AI

Co-founder @ SoftUni BUDITEL High School



<https://ai.softuni.bg>

- **AI Meetup Sofia**

- A free event, aimed to gather the business leaders who want to implement AI in their organizations
- Talks by AI leaders and CTOs from prominent companies
- Knowledge sharing, networking, technical discussions

- **The AI Association**

- We are about to establish an AI association
- NGO, aimed to promote AI adoption in business

# Speakers Today

- **Svetlin Nakov**, PhD
  - Software engineer, speaker, tech trainer, entrepreneur, AI enthusiast
  - Author of 16 books (before the AI era)
  - Co-founder of **SoftUni**, high school **SoftUni BUDITEL** + several startups
  - Co-founder of **SoftUni AI**
    - The leader in AI education in Bulgaria
  - <https://nakov.com>



# Speakers Today (2)

- **Martin Kuvandzhiev**
  - Solid experience in software development, AI automation, blockchain, fintech, and Web3
  - Founder of **Encorp.AI** – an AI business automation agency + several startups
  - <https://linkedin.com/in/kuvandzhiev>



# Speakers Today (3)

- **Hristo Hristov**

- Entrepreneur, investor, media executive
- CEO of **Darik Radio**
- Board member / advisor in startup organizations and investment funds
  - BESCO, Power of BG, Endeavor, HR Capital
- <https://linkedin.com/in/itzoitzov>





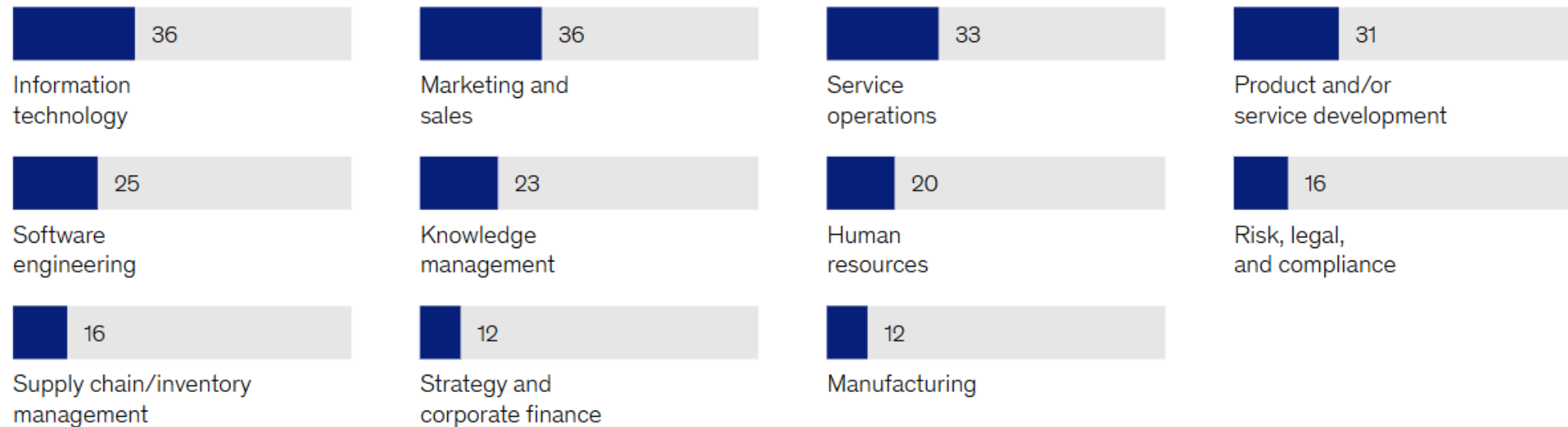
# The AI-First Culture



# The Business Already Uses AI!

- A report from **McKinsey** (March **2025**)
  - <https://mckinsey.com/capabilities/quantumblack/our-insights/the-state-of-ai>
- **78%** of global companies use AI in their business operations

Use of AI by business function, % of respondents (March 2025)



# What is AI-First Culture?

- **AI-first culture** == organizational mindset, where AI is core to:
  - **Decision-making**: planning, strategy, research
  - **Daily operations**: marketing, sales, support, dev
  - **Innovation**: new products, services, models
- **AI-centric organizations**:
  - Establish their vision, teams, processes and operations around the AI-first culture





# The Shift towards AI-First Culture

- **"Do your job with AI"** as an expectation from all employees
  - Use AI unless you prove you are more efficient the old way
- The shift towards AI-first culture is driven by highly motivated **AI-native leaders**
- Not all companies are ready to be AI-first / AI-native
  - An **AI-first culture** may feel too **extreme** to organizations lacking digital maturity or openness to change
- **AI-enabled** companies are less aggressive
  - They use AI carefully, in specific roles and processes only

# AI-First Companies – Examples


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04-07-2025 | TECH

## Shopify CEO Tobi Lütke: AI is now a 'fundamental expectation' for employees

Lütke says managers asking for new human talent will have to explain why the job can't be done by AI.

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<https://x.com/tobi/status/1909251946235437514>

## Duolingo will replace contract workers with AI / The company is going to be 'AI-first', says its CEO.

by Jay Peters

Apr 29, 2025, 2:47 AM GMT+3

180 Comments (180 New)




<https://theverge.com/news/657594/duolingo-ai-first-replace-contract-workers>

# AI-First Companies – Examples (2)



Aaron Levie  • 2nd

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Here's what I shared with Box internally last night about being an **AI-first company**. We're focused on transforming how we work with AI to ultimately move faster, iterate more quickly, get out of busy work, and serve customers better.

#### Building an AI-first company

As we've shared over the past few quarters, we are focused on building an AI-first company. Just as we ask ourselves what our product would look like if we started Box in 2025, similarly we need to ask ourselves what work would look like if we started in 2025. We are looking through every part of how we work and operate to ensure it has been reimagined for an AI-first world, and one of our Q1 OKRs was to ensure every org implements an AI strategy, and we'll be doubling down on this in Q2. We're already seeing examples every day as a company where AI is helping us move faster, make better decisions, and automate work to let us do more.

For instance, the other day I used Box AI in Notes to get a project going that saved a couple days worth of work (and plenty of meetings!). Not only did it mean that everyone's time was saved, but AI lowered the barrier to getting it started and made it more likely to move forward vs. ending up stuck in some queue that may never get worked on. This is actually the "big" upside of AI: we don't want to use AI just to do what we already do just at a lower cost; we want to use AI to come up with new ideas, move projects along more quickly, and ultimately get to work on more strategic areas.

- **Foster constant experimentation internally to find the best use-cases for AI:** just as the PC or internet changed work in prior eras in unpredictable ways, AI will do the same, on steroids. We can't always imagine what the best use-cases are for AI, and we're constantly wowed by Boxers that are coming up with their own use-cases. We will keep sharing best practices and ideas across the company, like at Friday lunches, in our OKRs, and more.
- **Upskill every employee to be AI-first over time with more education and awareness:** we want every Boxer to become proficient in AI, and we will both better enable more education on what AI can do for every role, but also encourage everyone to explore its potential through the infinite set of resources online (e.g., AI podcasts, blogs, X, LinkedIn).
- **Maintain strong governance and security practices, with human-in-the-loop still required for most areas:** data security and privacy is of utmost importance when adopting AI. For "any" use of AI with any proprietary data, we must use sanctioned tools only. Also, we expect a high degree of oversight of what AI is producing in your workflows, as you are still accountable for any output that comes out of AI (of course this will get trickier over time as AI Agents do more, but more on that later).

[https://linkedin.com/posts/boxaaron\\_heres-what-i-shared-with-box-internally-ugcPost-7323743175741792256-xl5/](https://linkedin.com/posts/boxaaron_heres-what-i-shared-with-box-internally-ugcPost-7323743175741792256-xl5/)



FASTCOMPANY

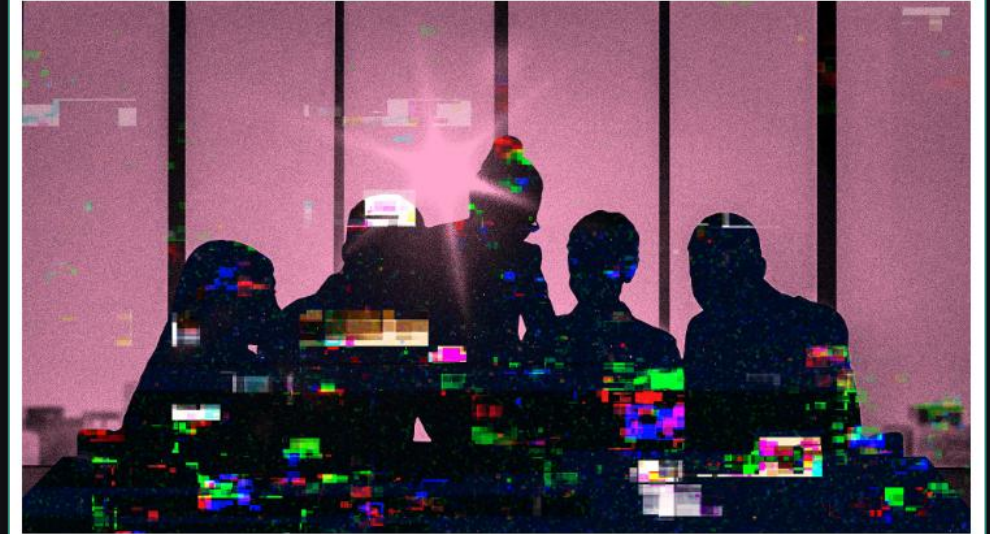
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05-12-2025 | TECH

## Going 'AI first' appears to be backfiring on Klarna and Duolingo

Klarna is hiring again after replacing employees with AI. Meanwhile, Duolingo is facing blowback on social media from its AI-first strategy.

SHARE 



<https://fastcompany.com/91332763/going-ai-first-appears-to-be-backfiring-on-klarna-and-duolingo>



# How to Implement an AI-First Culture?



# How to Implement AI-First Culture?

- Changing the **mindset** to AI-centric culture:
  - **Traditional** organization → **AI-enabled** organization → **AI-centric** organization
- The change starts from the **senior leadership**
  - Not just talking about "*AI-first culture*", but demonstrating it through their daily actions
- Establishing **AI-enabling culture** and processes
  - Internal AI trainings, recruiting talent with AI expertise, stimulate the internal AI leaders, fire AI-resistant people
  - Align KPIs and OKRs with AI-driven objectives





# Internal AI Champions & AI Consultants

- A dedicated role of "**internal AI champion**"
  - A professional dedicated to demonstrate "*How to do your job with AI*" when an employee says "*AI is useless*"
  - A leader, a problem solver, a technology navigator, an AI consultant, a collaborator, a change agent
  - It might be the CEO, the CTO or another internal leader
- Work with external **AI consultant** / **AI agency** to help you transform and automate your processes with AI
  - Example: talk with **Encorp.AI**



# Implementing AI in Business: My Experience

- Typical **stages** of AI implementation in business:
  1. Letter from management: "*Use AI, we encourage you!*"
  2. Secure a **subscription** to AI tools + establish **rules**
  3. **Employee trainings**: introduction to AI for everyone
  4. Internal **AI adoption analysis** in each department:
    - Where and how can we apply existing AI tools today?
  5. **AI automation projects** in the long term
    - Automation with **AI agents** and **AI workflows**
    - Collect data and train your **own AI models**



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educational program  
for implementing AI in  
everyday life and business

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<https://ai.softuni.bg>



# Encorp AI

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the business

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# Questions?

