

2026 Trend Outlook Reports from Leading Firms

McKinsey & Company

Report: *McKinsey Technology Trends Outlook 2025* (108-page report, published July 2025) ¹. This annual outlook identifies 13 “frontier” technology trends expected to shape business in 2025 and beyond (informing strategies into 2026) ¹.

Summary: The report provides data-driven insights into each trend’s maturity (via metrics like patents, publications, investments, and talent demand) and discusses their potential impact across industries ¹ ². McKinsey emphasizes that **artificial intelligence (AI)** stands out as a pivotal force – both as its own trend and as an “amplifier” for other innovations ². For example, the 2025 outlook folded applied AI and generative AI into a broader “AI revolution” category, highlighting the growing ubiquity of AI in combination with other technologies ³. Executives are urged to navigate rising complexity by focusing on which of these emerging tech domains align with their strategy and building the capabilities to leverage them ¹.

Key Trends Identified: McKinsey’s 13 tech trends (a “baker’s dozen”) span three groups ⁴ ⁵:

- **AI Revolution:** Agentic AI (autonomous “AI agents”), general AI applications, etc., reflecting AI’s accelerating role in automating workflows and decision-making ⁶. (McKinsey notes *agentic AI* – AI agents that act as “virtual coworkers” – as a fast-emerging trend with potentially “*revolutionary possibilities*” ³.)
- **Compute & Connectivity Frontiers:** Next-generation computing hardware like application-specific **semiconductors, quantum technologies, cloud & edge computing, advanced connectivity (5G/6G),** and **immersive-reality** interfaces ⁷. These trends address the exponential demand for computing power and new ways to interact digitally.
- **Engineering a Sustainable World:** “Future of...” innovations in **robotics, mobility (autonomous and electric vehicles), bioengineering, space technologies,** and **energy & sustainability tech** ⁶ ⁵. Each of these frontiers could transform its sector (from biotech breakthroughs to clean energy systems).

McKinsey has not issued a separate “2026” labeled outlook as of early 2026; this July 2025 report remains their most comprehensive forward-looking tech trends publication, and its insights extend into 2026. ¹

Boston Consulting Group (BCG)

Report: *The Geopolitical Forces Shaping Business in 2026* – BCG article published Dec 11, 2025 ⁸ ⁹. This outlook analyzes how macro forces and geopolitical shifts will define the business environment in 2026.

Summary: BCG argues that we are entering 2026 in an era of “*increasing multipolarity*” – a world no longer dominated by a single paradigm, but by competing geopolitical spheres and alliances ¹⁰. This transition is creating new uncertainties as well as opportunities. The report identifies *six emerging arenas of global competition* that will shape business strategy: from securing supply chains and critical technologies to vying

for talent and grappling with climate pressures ¹¹ ¹² . Companies are advised to develop foresight and resilience in the face of these disruptive forces, adjusting strategies proactively (e.g. redesigning operations and risk management) to navigate the shifting landscape ¹¹ ¹² .

Key Themes/Arenas: BCG's outlook highlights six core competitive arenas for 2026 ¹¹ ¹² :

- **Realignment of Trade and Supply Chains:** Global trade patterns are fragmenting amid tariffs and "friend-shoring." Businesses must adapt to new trade agreements, local sourcing requirements, and higher trade frictions ¹² .
- **Tech and AI Race:** Technological capabilities (especially AI) have become a geopolitical battleground. Nations and firms compete in an "AI arms race" for leadership in AI and other critical tech, with big implications for innovation and security ¹⁰ ¹² .
- **Talent Scramble:** Demographic shifts and skilled labor shortages mean competition for human capital will intensify. Access to talent (and upskilling in AI and digital skills) is a strategic priority as companies pursue automation and digital transformation ¹¹ .
- **Mission-Critical Sectors:** Industries like semiconductors, energy, and defense are viewed through a strategic lens by governments. Companies in these sectors face new industrial policies and intervention as nations seek self-reliance in critical supply chains ¹² .
- **Climate Divergence:** Climate action is proceeding unevenly. Sustainability requirements, energy transition efforts, and climate-driven regulations will increasingly shape competitive advantage – with some regions forging ahead and others lagging ¹⁰ ¹² .
- **Expanding Conflicts and Risk:** Geopolitical conflicts (and cyber conflicts) are spreading, raising uncertainty. Businesses must prepare for instability – from regional wars to economic sanctions – that could disrupt markets and operations ¹⁰ .

Together, BCG sees these forces redefining the rules of global business in 2026. Organizations that navigate these arenas with "pragmatic foresight" can both mitigate risks and seize emerging opportunities ¹¹ ¹² .

Accenture

Report: *Year-End Macro Brief: 2026 Outlook & Top 10 Macro Trends* – a special edition Accenture Strategy **Macro Foresight** brief (published Dec 16, 2025) ¹³ . This report provides Accenture's global economic outlook for 2026 and identifies ten overarching business trends.

Summary: Accenture notes that despite a degree of resilience in 2025, the backdrop for 2026 is one of "heightened divergence" and complexity ¹⁴ . Some uncertainties of 2025 (e.g. major policy shifts) may clarify, but their **lagged impacts** will intensify in 2026 ¹⁵ ¹⁶ . The brief emphasizes a few cross-cutting themes: **AI** as a key driver of growth (and divider of winners vs. laggards), persistent **gloeconomic fragmentation** (e.g. US-China tensions shaping trade and tech ecosystems), and mounting **affordability pressures** on consumers after years of inflation ¹⁷ ¹⁸ . Executives are urged to pursue two priorities in this uncertain environment: **(1)** invest in AI-driven reinvention of their businesses, and **(2)** fortify enterprise resilience (across financial, operational, and workforce dimensions) to weather shocks ¹⁹ ²⁰ .

Key 2026 Trends: Accenture's top 10 macro trends for 2026 reflect economic, technological, and geopolitical shifts ²¹ ²² :

- **Two-Speed Growth Dynamics:** Economic growth will be uneven across sectors – with AI-booster industries pulling ahead while others lag. Within countries, AI-intensive companies and sectors are expected to see productivity and profit gains, widening the gap vs. laggards ²³ ²⁴ . (In the US, for example, an “AI capex boom” is already lifting GDP, counterbalancing softer consumer spending ²⁵ .)
- **Tariff and Trade Uncertainty:** The focus shifts from how high tariffs might go to how **broad and lasting** their impacts will be. With U.S. tariffs at sustained high levels, businesses must manage knock-on effects on inflation, supply chains, and pricing strategies ²⁶ .
- **Financial Fragility:** Higher interest rates and debt burdens will test financial stability. Accenture flags risks in opaque areas like private credit – leveraged structures that could amplify losses if asset valuations (including AI-driven valuations) correct sharply ²⁷ .
- **Affordability Squeeze:** Middle-class consumers will continue feeling pressure. Persistent cost-of-living increases (from tariffs, housing costs, energy constraints, etc.) are **bifurcating** consumers – squeezing lower-income groups and tempering overall demand ²⁸ .
- **AI-Powered Productivity Divide:** Companies and regions investing heavily in AI will see outsized productivity growth, while those failing to adopt AI face rising cost pressures and competitive displacement ²⁹ . In effect, AI adoption is creating “winners” and “losers” at the firm and country level ³⁰ .
- **China's Export Offensive:** China is doubling down on export-led growth in higher-tech sectors. Its push to capture global market share (especially by exporting tariffed goods to alternate markets) will pressure Western manufacturers and regional competitors in Asia ³¹ .
- **Europe's Competitiveness Challenges:** Europe's pivot toward economic “security” (e.g. industrial policies for self-reliance) has been slow and uneven. Accenture warns that heavy intervention and regulatory burdens, without faster innovation, could further erode Europe's competitiveness by 2026 ³² .
- **Tech Sovereignty and AI Ecosystems:** U.S.–China rivalry in AI is forcing companies to choose sides or develop hybrid approaches. The race for AI supremacy is making **tech ecosystem alignment** (e.g. between American vs. Chinese AI stacks) a strategic issue for multinationals ³³ .
- **Energy “Power Crunch”:** surging AI workloads are driving **soaring energy demand**. Data centers' electricity consumption is projected to climb sharply, straining grids in markets where capacity can't keep up ³⁴ . This could lead to higher power prices and force companies to seek creative energy solutions.
- **Geostrategic Investment Hotspots:** Efforts to “de-risk” and regionalize supply chains will create winners among certain regions. Accenture expects rising investment flows into locales like Mexico, India, parts of ASEAN, and the Middle East – regions that offer supply chain diversification, energy capacity, or critical resources to help global firms reduce geopolitical risk ³⁵ .

Accenture's outlook advises companies to plan for *modest global growth* in 2026 with a “resilience-first” mindset – building agility to handle anything from AI-driven market disruption to supply shocks ¹⁹ ²⁰ . (Notably, these trends were distilled in December 2025; Accenture will update guidance if conditions shift.)

PwC

Report: *2026 AI Business Predictions* (PwC Tech Effect series, published late 2025). [\[Link\]](#) This outlook centers on how AI adoption will evolve and drive business value in 2026.

Summary: PwC observes that while many companies have experimented with AI, only a few **“AI front-runners”** so far have achieved *transformative* outcomes (such as major revenue growth or large valuation premiums from AI) ³⁶ ³⁷ . However, as we head into 2026, *“the picture’s starting to shift.”* Companies now have visible proof points of success and better frameworks to scale AI – meaning broader transformative impact is within reach ³⁸ ³⁹ . The report emphasizes moving from scattered AI pilots to an **enterprise-wide, disciplined AI strategy** led from the C-suite ⁴⁰ ⁴¹ . PwC advocates focusing on a few high-impact AI use cases, investing in the talent and governance (“AI studio” hubs, etc.) to execute them, and then scaling across the organization ⁴² ⁴³ . In short, 2026 is seen as a year when AI goes from opportunistic experimentation to **operational mainstream**, delivering tangible business returns.

Key Predictions for 2026: PwC outlines six strategic predictions for how AI and automation will unfold in the year ahead ⁴⁴ :

1. **“The Disciplined March to Value” Begins** – Companies will shift to top-down, focused AI programs aimed at *enterprise-level ROI*, rather than a jumble of ad-hoc projects. Leadership will target a few key workflows for end-to-end AI transformation (backed by the necessary resources and change management) ⁴⁰ ⁴³ . This disciplined approach is expected to unlock much greater value from AI initiatives in 2026 than the more casual approaches of past years.
2. **Proof Points and Benchmarks Drive Agentic AI** – Organizations will demand real, measurable outcomes from **agentic AI** (autonomous AI agents). In 2025, many “AI agents” were hyped but delivered little; in 2026, successful patterns will emerge. Companies will establish benchmarks (e.g. financial impact, efficiency gains) for AI agents and deploy centralized platforms to govern and scale them ⁴⁵ ⁴⁶ . In practice, this means only AI agents that demonstrably perform (with tested, monitored results) will be rolled out – bringing credible traction to agentic AI in the workplace.
3. **Rise of the AI Generalist Workforce** – A new kind of hybrid talent will gain prominence: employees who *“work alongside AI”* as collaborators. Rather than AI merely automating tasks, humans will increasingly team with AI tools (like generative AI copilots or multi-agent systems) to augment their roles. This will spur companies to train workers in AI orchestration skills and to redesign jobs to leverage AI strengths ⁴⁴ . (In other words, 2026’s competitive organizations will have AI-fluent employees who can supervise AI outputs and integrate them into business processes – blending human judgment with AI speed.)
4. **Responsible AI Moves from Talk to Traction** – After years of discussion about AI ethics and governance, 2026 will see concrete action. PwC predicts companies will operationalize **responsible AI** practices – implementing tools for bias detection, explainability, usage policies, and compliance as they scale AI deployments ⁴⁴ . This comes as stakeholders (regulators, consumers, boards) demand proof that AI systems are trustworthy. We can expect more Chief AI Ethics officers, AI audit processes, and alignment of AI projects with firm values and regulations in the coming year.
5. **“From Vibe to Value”: Orchestrating AI for Impact** – Enterprises will get serious about *AI orchestration*. In the past, many dabbled in AI (creating a “tech vibe”) but struggled to integrate it deeply. In 2026, firms will invest in the less-glamorous work of data integration, process re-engineering, and platform building to ensure AI solutions actually scale and deliver business value ⁴⁴ . The prediction playfully calls this shift “from vibe to value” – meaning AI won’t be just for show, but tightly woven into operations to **accelerate outcomes**.
6. **ROI-Driven AI for Sustainability** – As part of the broader sustainability agenda, PwC expects companies to apply AI to achieve ESG and efficiency goals – but with a clear demand for *business returns*. In practice, “AI for sustainability” projects (e.g. AI optimizing energy usage or supply chain waste) will need to prove their worth in cost savings or risk reduction ⁴⁷ . The era of

experimentation in green AI will give way to implementations that both improve environmental metrics *and* add financial value by 2026.

PwC's AI outlook is accompanied by guidance on immediate steps (e.g. have leadership “pick the spots” for AI focus, establish AI centers of excellence, etc.) ⁴⁰ ⁴³ . The overarching message is that 2026 will separate winners from laggards in AI: those that approach it as a strategic, scaled transformation will start reaping **outsized competitive gains**, while others risk falling behind.

EY (Ernst & Young)

Report: *Megatrends 2026 and Beyond: Futures Reimagined* – EY's multi-part “**Futures Reimagined**” framework and megatrends report (first chapters released November 2025, with full report publication planned in 2026) ⁴⁸ ⁴⁹ . This initiative identifies the powerful megatrends likely to reshape business and society over the coming years, including 2026.

Summary: EY frames the future in terms of a “**NAVI world**” – one that is Nonlinear, Accelerated, Volatile, and Interconnected ⁵⁰ ⁵¹ . Traditional, incremental strategies are insufficient in the face of such disruptive complexity. The *Futures Reimagined* program encourages leaders to question old assumptions and radically rethink business models in order to thrive. EY's approach starts by examining four root causes of disruption – technology, geopolitics, sustainability, and demographics – and then derives the **megatrends** emerging at their intersections ⁵² . Rather than an exhaustive list, EY presents a set of illustrative megatrends as a springboard for strategic thinking. Leaders are urged to build *future-ready mindsets* that treat disruption as an opportunity, not just a threat ⁵¹ ⁵³ . Notably, EY highlights that merely responding to change is not enough; organizations must proactively *shape* their future. (The full *EY Megatrends 2026* report will consolidate these insights – initial chapters are already available, focusing on technology's impact on work, with more to come on resources and geopolitical shifts in early 2026 ⁴⁹ ⁵⁴ .)

Key Megatrends and Focus Areas: One major theme EY explores is the “**human-machine hybrid era**.” This megatrend recognizes that advances in AI, robotics, and even neurotechnology are **fundamentally redefining work and human potential** ⁵⁵ . In this near-future world, routine tasks are increasingly automated, shifting the human focus from quantity of output to quality, creativity, and innovation ⁵⁵ ⁵⁶ . Traditional productivity metrics are being upended; companies will measure success not just by efficiency, but by how well they unleash human ingenuity in partnership with machines ⁵⁷ . EY foresees organizations evolving into “*superfluid enterprises*” – adaptive ecosystems augmented by AI agents and smart automation, where decision-making speeds up and spans across previously siloed functions ⁵⁸ . Crucially, this trend means reimagining talent management: leaders must help their people collaborate with AI, acquire new skills, and focus on uniquely human strengths. EY's report suggests that embracing this human–AI partnership will be a defining feature of resilient and competitive companies in 2026 and beyond ⁵⁵ ⁵⁶ .

Other megatrends in EY's outlook (with dedicated chapters forthcoming) include “**Resources of Tomorrow**” – examining how competition for talent, natural resources, and even new frontiers like space will intensify – and “**A World Reshaped**”, which questions whether global economic systems (capitalism, sustainability, inequality) are due for a structural realignment in the face of 21st-century challenges ⁵⁴ ⁵⁹ . Underpinning these is a geostrategic perspective: the world enters 2026 in a state of uncertainty and rapid change, where geopolitical and economic rules are in flux (echoing the NAVI themes) ⁶⁰ ⁶¹ . EY's guidance to boards and executives is to build **agency and agility** – the ability to pivot strategies, take calculated risks, and actively shape outcomes rather than passively react ⁶² ⁶³ . In essence, “*shaping the future starts with reimagining*

it”, and EY’s megatrends serve as a map of areas where bold innovation and governance will be needed in 2026 ⁶⁴ ⁶⁵ .

(Note: EY’s 2026 outlook is an ongoing series. As of now, key insights on the human-machine era are available, with further chapters on sustainability (resources) and geopolitical economic shifts scheduled for early 2026.)

KPMG

Report/Survey: *2025 KPMG CEO Outlook* (published October 2025, covering CEO perspectives for the next 3 years) ⁶⁶ . While labeled 2025, this annual survey-based report offers a forward-looking view through at least 2026. It captures the sentiments and priorities of over 1,300 CEOs globally (including 400 in the US) as they navigate current challenges and prepare for what’s next ⁶⁶ . Key findings from this edition shed light on technology, talent, and transformation expectations heading into 2026.

Summary: According to KPMG’s survey, CEOs at large companies are increasingly optimistic about growth but “*sprint*” to address immediate hurdles like supply chain resilience and cost pressures ⁶⁷ ⁶⁸ . At the same time, there is a clear recognition that mastering **artificial intelligence** is critical to prosper over the next few years ⁶⁷ ⁶⁹ . The outlook reveals an interesting dual mindset among CEOs: **confidence** in the economy bolstered by AI-driven productivity potential, coupled with **pressure** to demonstrate returns on expensive digital investments ⁷⁰ ⁷¹ . In practice, this means leaders are balancing efficiency moves (to weather near-term macro uncertainty) with bold bets on AI and tech innovation to drive longer-term growth. The survey also highlights CEOs’ views on workforce and workplace evolution through 2026 – notably, how technology and post-pandemic dynamics will shape organizational structures and talent strategies.

Key Trends/Insights:

- **AI as a Strategic Imperative:** Virtually all CEOs surveyed are focusing on AI. An overwhelming 86% of CEOs said they expect **AI “agents” to be working alongside their human employees** – effectively embedded as team members – by **2026** (the very next year) ⁷² . Many leaders have accelerated their timelines for ROI on AI projects, feeling pressure to deliver tangible results quickly ⁷³ . Furthermore, 84% predict that within the next three years, an entirely “*native AI*” company (born fully digital and AI-driven) will emerge as a major competitor in their industry, displacing at least one incumbent firm ⁷³ ⁷⁴ . In short, CEOs see AI not just as an efficiency tool but as a transformational force that could redraw industry landscapes by 2026.
- **Workforce Shaping and Upskilling:** With AI adoption rising, CEOs are contemplating the size and shape of their organizations. Over one-third (35%) of CEOs indicated they are **planning for workforce reductions** in certain areas over the next 2–5 years as a direct response to AI integration ⁷² ⁷⁵ . Many also envision a shift in organizational structure – a majority said their company may soon resemble an “hourglass” (leaner middle management, perhaps due to automation), while others predict new shapes as they embed AI throughout operations ⁷² . Importantly, even as some roles are trimmed, there is a parallel emphasis on **upskilling** remaining employees to work effectively with AI. The “future of work” by 2026 in CEOs’ eyes involves humans and AI working side by side, requiring significant training and change management. (Notably, separate KPMG research also found 6 in 10 CEOs globally expect a **full return to in-office work** by 2026, reflecting a focus on culture and collaboration alongside tech changes – this varies by region and industry.)

- **Cybersecurity and Digital Trust:** With digital transformation comes heightened risk. Cybersecurity stands out as the top risk that CEOs are worried about in both the short and long term ⁷⁶ . 46% of CEOs reported having **increased investments in cybersecurity** and data protection as they advance their AI and cloud agendas ⁷⁶ . This aligns with a broader theme across many 2026 outlooks: trust is paramount. KPMG's CEOs are prioritizing cyber resilience to safeguard the trust of customers and stakeholders as they digitize operations. We can expect continued attention to cyber defenses, regulatory compliance (data privacy), and building trustworthy AI systems as critical enablers of sustained digital growth.
- **Operational Resilience and Tariffs:** Echoing some of Accenture's and BCG's points, KPMG's survey found that supply chain resilience is the number-one operational priority for many CEOs in the near term ⁶⁸ . 89% are concerned that ongoing or new **tariffs will significantly impact** business performance, and a similar number are ready to raise prices to offset those costs ⁶⁸ . This indicates that going into 2026, CEOs remain vigilant about geopolitical risks (trade wars, inflation) and are actively redesigning supply chains (and pricing strategies) for agility. Many are centralizing procurement, diversifying supplier bases, or investing in supply chain technology to get ahead of these disruptions.

Overall, KPMG's outlook paints 2026 as a year where **CEO agendas converge on digital transformation and resilience**. Leaders aim to *"meet the moment on AI"* – i.e. quickly scale AI solutions that drive growth – while also shoring up their defenses (cybersecurity) and efficiencies (cost and supply chain management) in an unpredictable environment ⁶⁷ ⁷⁷ .

(KPMG has not published a standalone "2026 trends" report as of now, but their CEO Outlook and domain-specific analyses provide a clear view of what their clients should expect in 2026. They have also issued pieces like "Key trends impacting supply chains in 2026," which similarly stress AI scaling, digital procurement, and new metrics to maximize value in operations ⁷⁸ .)

Gartner

Report: *Gartner Top 10 Strategic Technology Trends for 2026* – unveiled at Gartner IT Symposium/Xpo in October 2025 (press release dated Oct. 20, 2025) ⁷⁹ . This is Gartner's flagship annual tech forecast, highlighting ten critical technology trends that CIOs and IT leaders should factor into their 2026 strategic plans.

Summary: Gartner's 2026 trends are heavily **AI-centric**, reflecting how rapidly AI is becoming the backbone of enterprise tech strategy ⁸⁰ . A key message is that we are entering an *"AI-first world"* for IT: from how software is developed, to how infrastructure is designed, to how organizations secure and govern their digital systems ⁸⁰ ⁸¹ . Gartner grouped the ten trends into three overarching themes – **The Architect, The Synthesist, and The Vanguard** ⁸² – which correspond to building digital foundations, orchestrating emerging technologies, and protecting/gaining trust in the digital realm, respectively. In practical terms, this means CIOs should simultaneously invest in *foundational AI-enabled platforms* (to build and scale solutions), experiment with *new AI-driven capabilities* (to create business value and innovation), and tighten *security/governance* around these technologies ⁸⁰ ⁸³ . What stands out is the degree to which **AI and security trends dominate the list** – indicating that 2026's tech agenda is about *deeply embedding AI everywhere*, while also managing the new risks and architectural shifts that come with an AI-everywhere strategy ⁷⁹ ⁸⁴ .

Top 10 Tech Trends for 2026: (per Gartner's press release and research) ⁷⁹ ⁸⁵

1. **AI-Native Development Platforms:** Tools that use generative AI to radically speed up software development and automate code creation ⁸⁶. These platforms enable small teams (or even non-programmers) to build applications quickly with AI copilots, changing how software is delivered. *Theme:* This is foundational (Architect theme) – by 2030, 80% of large engineering teams will morph into smaller, **AI-augmented teams** ⁸⁷ ⁸⁸.
2. **AI Supercomputing Platforms:** Next-gen computing architectures (combining CPUs, GPUs, ASICs, etc.) geared for AI workloads at extreme scale ⁸⁹. These enable training and running massive AI models, simulations, and analytics far faster. Gartner predicts hybrid computing (mixing classical and AI chips) will be adopted by 40%+ of leading enterprises by 2028 ⁹⁰ ⁹¹. This trend supports AI ubiquity by providing the raw horsepower (Architect theme).
3. **Confidential Computing:** Security technology that protects data in use (through hardware-based enclaves/TEEs) ⁹². It allows organizations to process sensitive data in the cloud or across parties *while keeping it encrypted* – crucial for compliance and multi-party analytics ⁹³. By 2029, over 75% of operations in “untrusted” environments will use confidential computing ⁹⁴. *Theme:* Architect (secure foundations) and Vanguard (trust).
4. **Multiagent Systems:** Architectures where swarms of specialized AI agents collaborate to perform complex tasks or workflows ⁹⁵. Rather than monolithic AI, organizations will deploy fleets of modular agents that can be reused and combined. This promises agility and scalability in automation ⁹⁶. Multiagent systems give a practical path to automate multi-step business processes and to have **people and AI agents work together** in teams ⁹⁷ ⁹⁸. (Gartner notes this can boost efficiency and responsiveness – a Synthesist theme, orchestrating AI for new value.)
5. **Domain-Specific Language Models (DSLMS):** Custom AI language models tailored to specific industries or functions ⁹⁸. Instead of using one-size-fits-all large language models, enterprises will develop DSLMs trained on their domain's data (e.g. finance, healthcare jargon) to get more accurate and compliant AI outputs ⁹⁹. Gartner forecasts that **over half of enterprise AI models will be domain-specific by 2028** ¹⁰⁰. This trend is about maximizing AI's business relevance – an orchestration/Synthesist move. (It resonated strongly in 2025, as many organizations realized generic AI often “falls short for specialized tasks” ⁹⁸.)
6. **Physical AI:** The expansion of AI from digital systems into the physical world – powering robots, autonomous drones, smart devices and other machines that *act* in the real environment ¹⁰¹. This trend highlights that AI isn't just cloud software; it's embedded in factories, supply chains, and products. It brings productivity (and safety) gains in sectors that rely on automation. It also demands new skills blending IT and engineering, and raises workforce implications (people working with intelligent machines) ¹⁰². *Theme:* Synthesist (applying AI in new domains).
7. **Preemptive Cybersecurity:** Moving from reactive cyber defense to **proactive, AI-driven security** ⁸⁴. This involves using AI for threat anticipation, automated incident response, deception technology, etc., to stop attacks *before* they hit. Gartner expects by 2030, half of all cybersecurity spending will shift to such preemptive measures ⁸⁴. Given rising threat levels, CIOs are adopting an “attack them before they attack you” stance (Vanguard theme – trust and governance).
8. **Digital Provenance:** Technologies to verify the origin, integrity, and lineage of digital assets (software, data, content) ¹⁰³. With enterprises increasingly using third-party code and AI-generated content, ensuring **trust and compliance** in what they deploy is critical. Tools like software BOMs (bills of materials), digital watermarks, and attestation ledgers will become standard to combat issues like deepfakes, supply chain attacks, and data tampering ¹⁰³ ¹⁰⁴. By 2029, firms not investing

in provenance could face huge regulatory and legal risks ¹⁰⁵. *Theme:* Vanguard (strengthening trust in digital systems).

9. **AI Security Platforms:** Dedicated platforms to secure AI systems themselves ¹⁰⁶. These provide unified oversight of all AI applications – managing permissions, preventing data leaks, defending against adversarial attacks on models, etc. As organizations scale AI, they need consistent **governance and security controls** across hundreds of models and third-party AI services ¹⁰⁶ ¹⁰⁷. Gartner thinks that by 2028, over 50% of enterprises will use AI security platforms to safeguard their AI investments ¹⁰⁸. This is a Vanguard trend, ensuring the AI revolution doesn't create new vulnerabilities.
10. **Geopatriation:** A term for bringing workloads and data back to local or sovereign infrastructure due to geopolitical risks ¹⁰⁹. In an unstable global climate, more organizations (especially in EMEA regions) will **pull out of global public clouds** and opt for solutions that keep data within certain jurisdictions or trusted zones ¹¹⁰. By 2030, over 75% of European/Middle East enterprises may “geopatriate” sensitive workloads, up from virtually none today ¹¹¹. This reflects how geopolitical fragmentation (trade wars, data sovereignty laws) is now directly influencing IT architecture decisions (Vanguard theme).

Notable Themes: Across these trends, a few common threads emerge: **AI everywhere**, delivered through new development paradigms and specialized models; a focus on **modularity and orchestration** (e.g. multiagent swarms, DSLMs) to tailor AI and tech to business needs; and a strong emphasis on **trust, security, and governance**, as organizations realize that more powerful digital capabilities also require robust control. Gartner's advice is that CIOs use these trends as a roadmap for the next 3–5 years, prioritizing those that align with their strategic goals and risk profile ⁸⁰ ⁸³. The end goal is to build **resilient, trusted digital platforms** that can leverage AI for competitive advantage while safeguarding the enterprise's values and assets.

Cross-Comparisons and Shared Themes

Across the 2026 outlooks from McKinsey, BCG, Accenture, PwC, EY, KPMG, and Gartner, a **set of common themes** is evident:

- **Artificial Intelligence as the Catalyst:** Every firm's report – whether focused on technology, economics, or strategy – highlights AI as a pivotal force in 2026. McKinsey calls AI “a *foundational amplifier*” of other trends ², and Gartner's entire top 10 tech list is essentially AI-driven ⁸⁰. PwC zeroes in on how to unlock value from AI at scale ⁴⁰ ⁴³, while KPMG's CEOs are fast-tracking AI adoption in operations and expecting AI to transform their workforce structure ⁷² ⁷³. The shared point is clear: **mastering AI (and related automation) is seen as the ticket to competitive advantage**. Firms that successfully integrate AI – through disciplined strategy, domain-specific models, or AI-augmented talent – will likely pull ahead of those that don't. Conversely, there's a warning that failing to embrace AI could leave organizations lagging (e.g., Accenture's “AI winners vs. losers” narrative ³⁰ ²⁹).
- **Digital Trust, Risk & Security:** Hand-in-hand with the AI boom is a universal emphasis on **security, governance, and trust**. Gartner dedicates multiple trends to security (preemptive cybersecurity, AI security platforms, digital provenance, etc.) ⁸⁴ ¹⁰³, underscoring that trust is a strategic imperative. KPMG's survey likewise finds cyber risk at the top of CEOs' agendas, with nearly half boosting cyber

investments ⁷⁶ . EY's megatrends speak to the need for new governance as technology and geopolitics intertwine ⁶¹ . Whether it's managing AI ethics (PwC's Responsible AI traction ⁴⁴), securing supply chains against disruption (Accenture and KPMG on tariffs and resilience ²⁶ ⁶⁸), or ensuring data sovereignty (Gartner's geopolitization trend ¹⁰⁹), **building digital trust is a unifying theme for 2026**. Organizations must not only innovate rapidly, but also maintain security, ethical integrity, and compliance to retain stakeholder confidence in a turbulent environment.

- **Workforce and Talent Transformation:** Another recurring theme is the **future of work** in an AI-augmented era. EY's *human-machine hybrid era* megatrend encapsulates the optimistic view: that empowering employees with AI can boost creativity and productivity ⁵⁵ ⁵⁶ . McKinsey and PwC similarly talk about the need to **re-skill the workforce** and create new roles (like "AI generalists" or "forward-deployed engineers") to realize AI's potential ⁴⁴ . Meanwhile, KPMG's CEO Outlook and BCG's talent scramble point out a more cautionary side: competition for digital talent will be fierce, and organizational structures may need to be overhauled as automation changes job profiles ¹¹ ⁷² . A notable data point – many CEOs expect AI to drive significant workforce changes by 2026 (from team compositions to possible headcount reductions in certain areas) ⁷² . The consensus is that *2026 leaders must navigate a delicate balance: augmenting and redeploying human talent alongside AI, rather than simply replacing it*. Companies that manage this transition well (investing in training, redefining roles, cultivating an AI-ready culture) are projected to thrive, whereas those that don't may face employee disengagement or skill gaps.
- **Geopolitical and Macroeconomic Uncertainty:** Several outlooks (BCG, Accenture, EY, and to some extent Gartner and KPMG) emphasize that 2026's business environment will be shaped by *external volatility – trade tensions, regulatory shifts, and geopolitical realignments*. BCG's notion of a multipolar world with new competitive arenas ¹⁰ and Accenture's focus on divergent regional outcomes ³⁰ ³² both convey that globalization is evolving in unpredictable ways. EY and Gartner similarly note rising geopolitical risk driving strategies like data localization (geopolitization) ¹⁰⁹ and new resource competition. For executives, a shared prescription is to build **resilience and agility**: scenarios planning, flexible supply chains, and localized approaches to markets and data. Many reports also touch on **government policy** – whether it's AI regulation (implicit in Responsible AI efforts), industrial policy (BCG on mission-critical sectors), or sustainability mandates. The overlapping message is that external change is non-linear; winning in 2026 will require monitoring the broader landscape closely and responding quickly – be it to a tariff, a new AI law, or a climate event.
- **Focus on Value and ROI:** In contrast to earlier years where "disruption" might have been pursued for its own sake, the 2026 outlooks put a noticeable emphasis on **measurable value and ROI**. PwC explicitly frames its AI trends in terms of value realization (the "march to value," "from vibe to value") ⁴⁴ . Gartner's trends, while tech-forward, come with metrics and adoption timelines that tie back to business performance (e.g. efficiency gains, cost reductions) ⁸⁷ ¹¹² . KPMG's CEOs are scrutinizing the payoff of their digital investments amid economic pressures ⁷¹ . This reflects a maturation: as digital transformation efforts and emerging tech pilots proliferated in recent years, 2026 is seen as a time to **harvest returns**. Organizations are expected to prioritize the trends and projects that drive real outcomes (revenue, profit, resilience) and perhaps prune those that don't. In practical terms, tech initiatives will likely face more rigorous business-case justification in 2026. Shared across the reports is encouragement to double down on high-impact areas (like AI in core operations) and be bold in execution, but also to track results and scale what works.

Despite these commonalities, there are **points of divergence or unique emphasis**: For instance, **McKinsey and Gartner** focus more on *technology trend specifics* (the “what” of tech, from semiconductors to multiagent AI), whereas **BCG and Accenture** weave tech into a *broader strategic narrative* about economics and geopolitics. **PwC and KPMG** bring the lens of practitioners – how to operationalize AI and what CEOs worry about – highlighting immediate priorities and challenges (AI ROI, cyber, supply chains). **EY** takes a more visionary stance on reframing the future, including sustainability and purpose-driven transformation, which is less explicitly echoed in, say, Gartner’s list.

One notable observation: **no major firm is missing an AI component in their 2026 outlook** – even the traditionally non-tech-focused perspectives (like economic or CEO surveys) have AI woven throughout. This underscores how AI and digital transformation have moved to the center of virtually every discussion about the future, from boardrooms to government policy. If anything, what hasn’t appeared prominently is a counter-narrative questioning AI’s role – most outlooks assume its continued advancement and seek to harness it rather than halt it.

Finally, regarding releases: **all the mentioned firms have put forth substantial 2026-focused insights by late 2025**, with McKinsey’s being tied to 2025 framing (and EY’s full megatrends report still forthcoming in 2026). There isn’t a glaring absence – each is actively guiding clients on 2026 readiness. If we broaden the view, another industry voice (not requested but relevant) – Deloitte – also published a “*Tech Trends 2026*” in late 2025, similarly emphasizing themes like AI, trust, and the intersection of IT with business strategy ¹¹³. This further corroborates the collective direction.

In summary, the 2026 outlooks portray a year of great opportunity tempered by great responsibility. Organizations that leverage technologies like AI, cloud, and automation – **in a focused, secure, and human-centric way** – are consistently projected to lead. Those that cling to slower-moving or fragmented approaches risk being left behind as the pace of change accelerates. Companies should prepare for a world that is at once more digital (pervasive AI), more interconnected (and yet fragmented geopolitically), and more demanding of accountability (from cyber resilience to ethical AI to sustainability). The consensus advice is to be proactive: invest in innovation *and* resilience, upskill your people, fortify trust, and be ready to pivot as the world changes. In doing so, businesses can turn the uncertainties of 2026 into opportunities for growth and renewal ¹⁹ ⁶².

Sources: McKinsey (Tech Trends Outlook 2025) ¹ ² ; BCG (Geopolitical Forces 2026) ¹⁰ ¹² ; Accenture (2026 Outlook & Trends) ³⁰ ²² ; PwC (2026 AI Predictions) ⁴⁴ ⁴⁰ ; EY (Megatrends 2026+) ⁵⁵ ⁴⁹ ; KPMG (CEO Outlook 2025/26) ⁷³ ⁷² ; Gartner (Top Tech Trends 2026) ⁷⁹ ¹⁰⁹. Each of these reports can be referenced for deeper exploration of the specific trends and data points summarized above.

¹ ² ³ McKinsey technology trends outlook 2025 | McKinsey

<https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/tech-and-ai/our-insights/the-top-trends-in-tech>

⁴ ⁵ ⁶ ⁷ The future of business: 13 tech trends that matter | McKinsey & Company

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