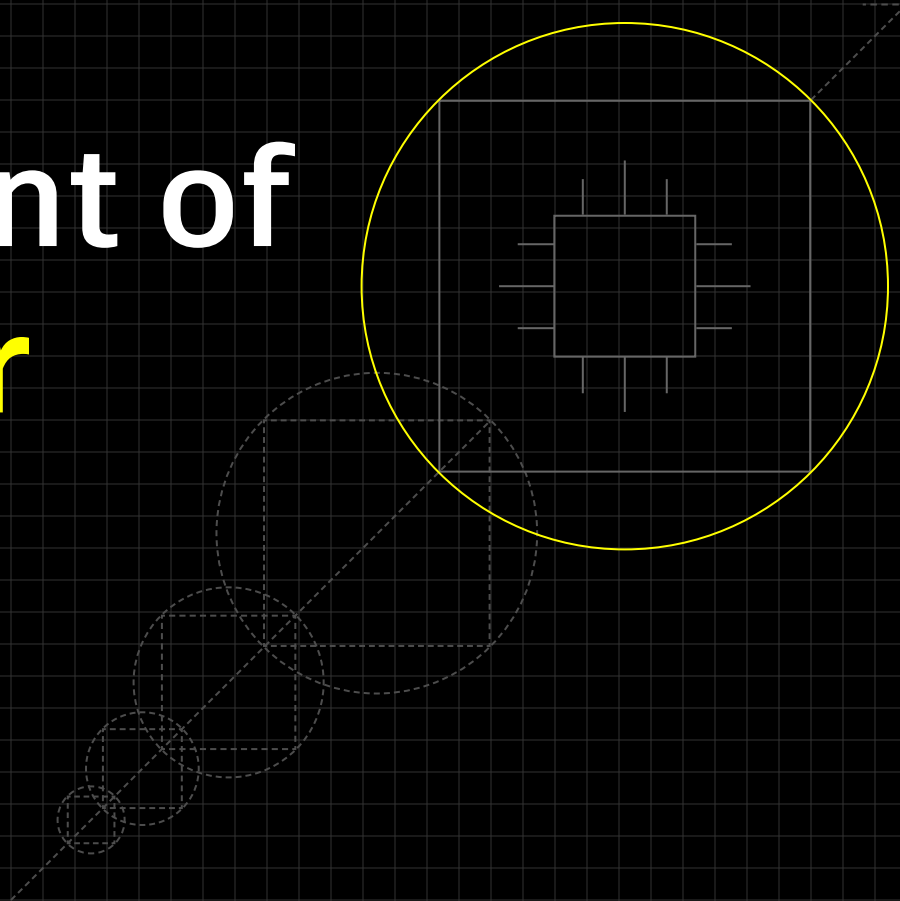# The blueprint of an AI leader

How to outperform in 5 key
areas as an AI leader in AECO

Designed to be **different**

Autodesk surveyed 1,965 industry leaders, futurists, and experts across 20 countries in the architecture, engineering, construction, and operations (AECO) industries.[1] From this research, we identified a distinct group of artificial intelligence (AI) leaders—organizations that are approaching or have successfully achieved their goals in incorporating AI technology—and compared them with those who haven't started or are still in the middle of incorporating AI.

Despite global uncertainty, AI leaders consistently outperformed their peers in five key areas.

[1] https://www.autodesk.com/design-make/research/state-of-design-and-make-2025

1 Superior performance from digital transformation

2 Greater preparedness for the future

3 Turning sustainability into advantage

4 More proactive approach to talent

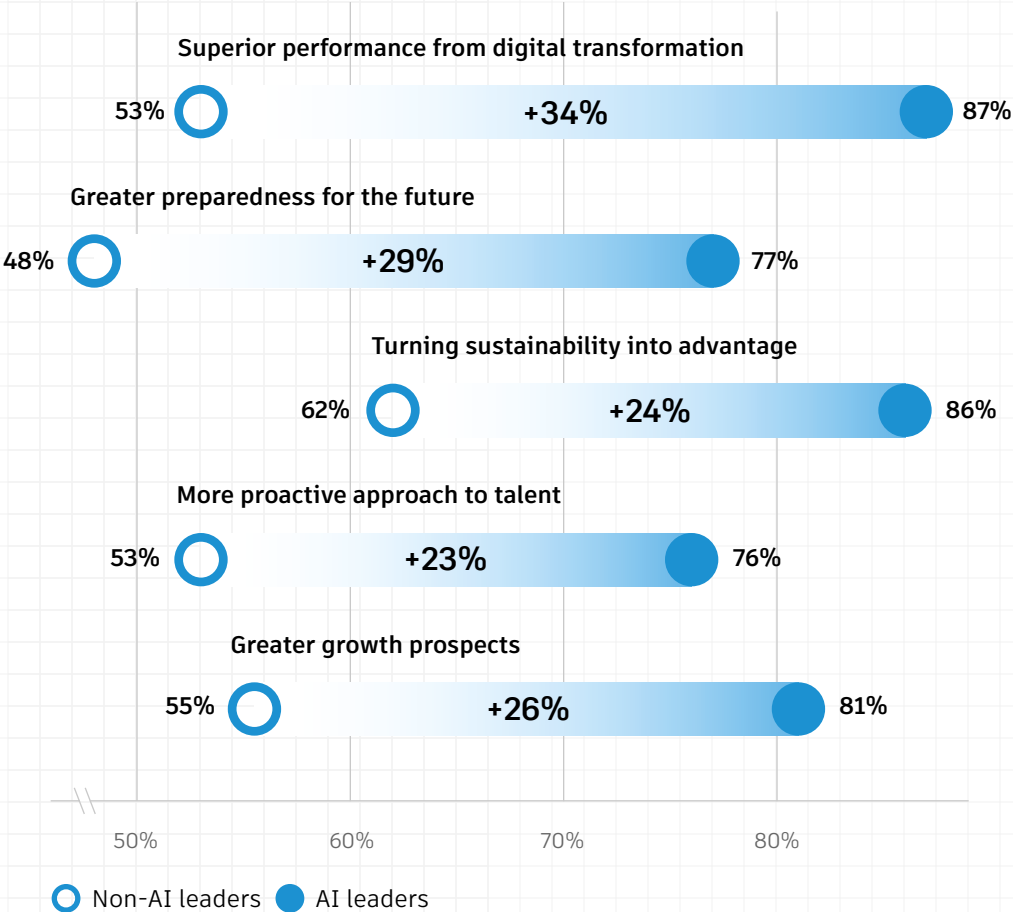**5** Greater growth prospects

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AI leaders are outperforming despite global uncertainty

AECO industries face significant headwinds: geopolitical instability, tariffs, persistent inflation, supply chain disruptions, and rising costs.

Yet Autodesk's research reveals that AI leaders are not just surviving these challenges—they're thriving.

Compared to organizations that haven't started or are still in the middle of AI implementation, AI leaders demonstrate remarkable resilience and agility. They are growing, investing confidently in the future, and consistently outperforming their peers across five critical business areas.

5 areas where AI leaders excel

Superior performance from digital transformation

53% ◯ —— +34% —— ● 87%

Greater preparedness for the future

48% ◯ —— +29% —— ● 77%

Turning sustainability into advantage

62% ◯ —— +24% —— ● 86%

More proactive approach to talent

53% ◯ —— +23% —— ● 76%

Greater growth prospects

55% ◯ —— +26% —— ● 81%

50%　　60%　　70%　　80%

◯ Non-AI leaders　● AI leaders

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# 1 Superior performance from digital transformation

The greatest difference between AI leaders and non-AI leaders is their superior performance with digital transformation efforts.

While many organizations are still at an early stage of their digital transformation journey, AI leaders who identified productivity and innovation as benefits of digital transformation are already seeing much greater improvements compared to non-AI leaders who identified the same benefits, representing a critical competitive differentiator in increasingly digital markets.

On average, when combining these two capabilities, 87% of these AI leaders demonstrated superior performance through digital transformation efforts, compared to just 53% of their non-AI counterparts, **a significant difference of 34 percentage points**.

+35%
improved productivity

+34%
improved innovation of ideas
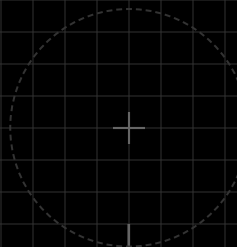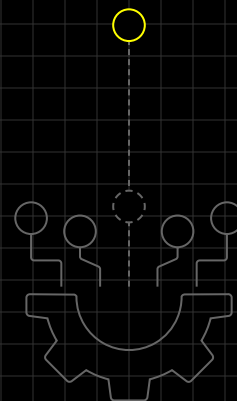
Implementing AI effectively

1. Embed AI into your workflows, not just tools: Redesign processes so AI is a natural part of decision-making and daily work.

2. Measure the business impact: Track how AI shifts tangible outcomes like design cycle times, time-to-market, or customer satisfaction.

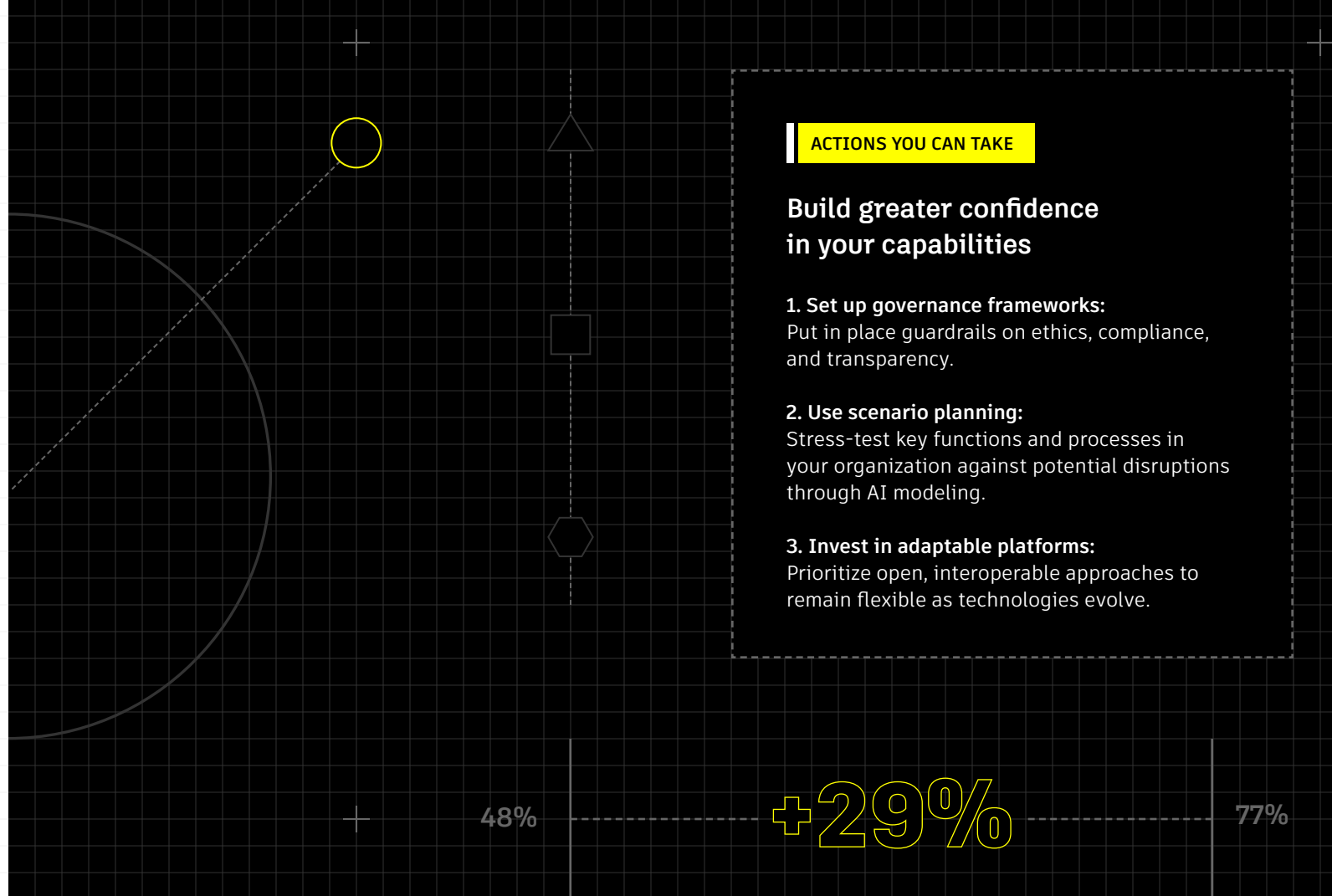**3. Scale experimentation responsibly:** Pilot high-value use cases, then scale only when return on investment (ROI) is demonstrated.

53% — +34% — 87%

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2 Greater preparedness for the future

In an era of unprecedented volatility, AI leaders demonstrate remarkable confidence in their readiness for what lies ahead, contrasting sharply with their non-AI counterparts who face the future with considerable uncertainty. This preparedness isn't just down to optimism, it reflects the genuine strategic advantages that AI leaders have systematically developed.

The confidence of AI leaders creates a compounding effect as they make bolder investments, pursue growth opportunities more aggressively, and attract top talent.

The data shows that 77% of AI leaders also feel ready for the future compared to 48% of non-AI leaders, **a difference of 29%**.

ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE

Build greater confidence in your capabilities

1. Set up governance frameworks:
Put in place guardrails on ethics, compliance, and transparency.

2. Use scenario planning:
Stress-test key functions and processes in your organization against potential disruptions through AI modeling.

3. Invest in adaptable platforms:
Prioritize open, interoperable approaches to remain flexible as technologies evolve.

48%

+29%

77%

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3 Turning sustainability into advantage

AI leaders are using technology to drive better sustainable outcomes and financial returns. They recognize the transformational potential of sustainability across their organizations and are extracting significantly greater business value from their sustainability initiatives.

The data demonstrates that AI leaders aren't just talking about sustainability, they're turning environmental responsibility into measurable business advantage.

Eighty-six percent of AI leaders believe that sustainability measures can generate more than 5% of annual revenue compared to 62% of non-AI leaders, **a difference of 24%**.
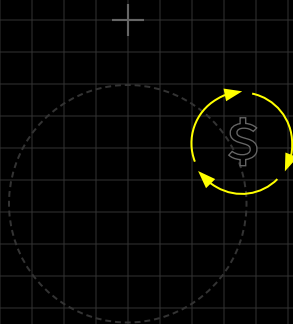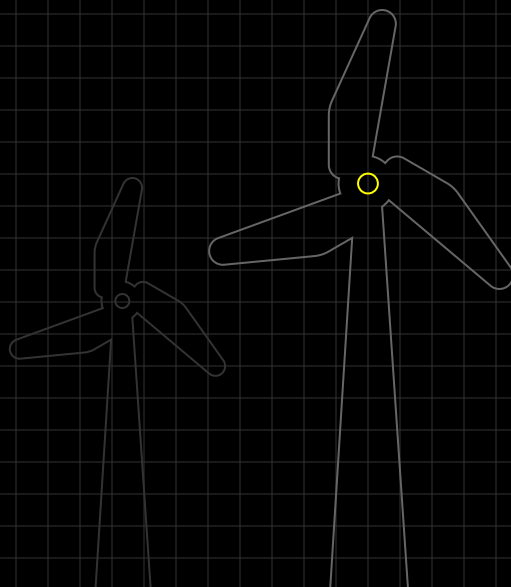
Realize the benefits of sustainability

1. Make the most of your resources:
Use AI to reduce waste, energy use, and material costs.

2. Integrate ESG goals into your workflows:
Build sustainability metrics into dashboards so teams can see real-time impact.

3. Promote industry standards:
Share AI-driven insights across networks to strengthen sustainable design and manufacturing.

62%   +24%   86%

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4 More proactive approach to talent

Rather than simply competing for existing talent in an increasingly constrained market, AI leaders are taking proactive steps to create the capabilities they need internally— a fundamental shift from reactive hiring to strategic talent cultivation— recognizing that the skills required for future success may not exist in today's workforce.

Although the search for talent is a key issue for all organizations, AI leaders are significantly more likely to implement continuous learning programs to mitigate the shortage of skilled workers. This proactive approach puts AI leaders at an advantage, building adaptive workforces that evolve alongside technological advancement, while reducing dependence on external recruitment in a competitive market.

Seventy-six percent of AI leaders implement continuous learning programs for their employees compared to 53% of non-AI leaders, **a difference of 23%**.
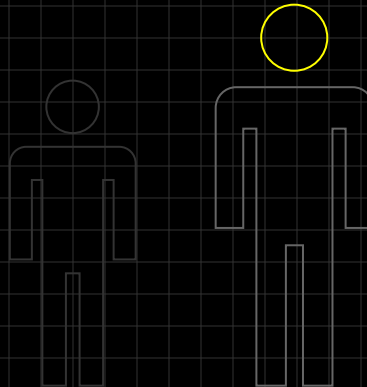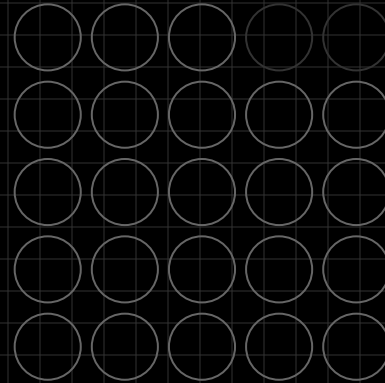
ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE

Attract and retain talent

1. Upskill teams for AI fluency:
Build literacy and role-specific capabilities.

2. Redesign jobs for human + AI collaboration:
Focus on boosting human 'skills' rather than simple automation.

3. Foster communities of practice:
Encourage peer learning and knowledge-sharing around AI applications.

53%   +23%   76%

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5 Greater growth prospects

AI leaders are more likely to invest, enter new markets and offer new services in the future.

While non-AI leaders remain cautious with capital allocation, AI leaders are positioned to capitalize on market opportunities through their superior technological infrastructure and data-driven decision-making capabilities. The combination of increased investment, market expansion, and service innovation widens their competitive advantage over traditional organizations.

Eighty-one percent of AI leaders are more likely, on average, to invest in growth opportunities overall, compared to 55% of non-AI leaders, **a difference of 26%**.

+30%
more likely to increase investments over the next 3 years

+25%
more likely to enter new markets this year

+22%
more likely to offer new services

ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE

Scale through AI

1. Dedicate budget to R&D in AI:
Allocate resources for both current use cases and exploratory pilots.

2. Build innovation ecosystems:
Collaborate with vendors, startups, and academia to accelerate progress.

3. Balance the portfolio:
Combine short-term wins with long-term bets for resilience.

55%   +26%   81%

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Conclusion

This report reveals the blueprint of an AI leader—a distinct pattern of five behaviors and capabilities that separate high performers from the rest. For organizations considering their next steps, these insights offer a window into what's possible when AI integration goes beyond tools to fundamentally reshape how an organization is operated.

While many organizations remain cautious about AI implementation, those who have successfully integrated AI into their operations are creating sustainable competitive advantages across every dimension of their business.

From achieving greater ROI on digital transformation, to being more confident about the future, AI leaders have cracked the code on turning technological capability into business performance. They're not waiting for perfect conditions or consensus, they're investing boldly, scaling thoughtfully, and building the workforce of tomorrow, today.
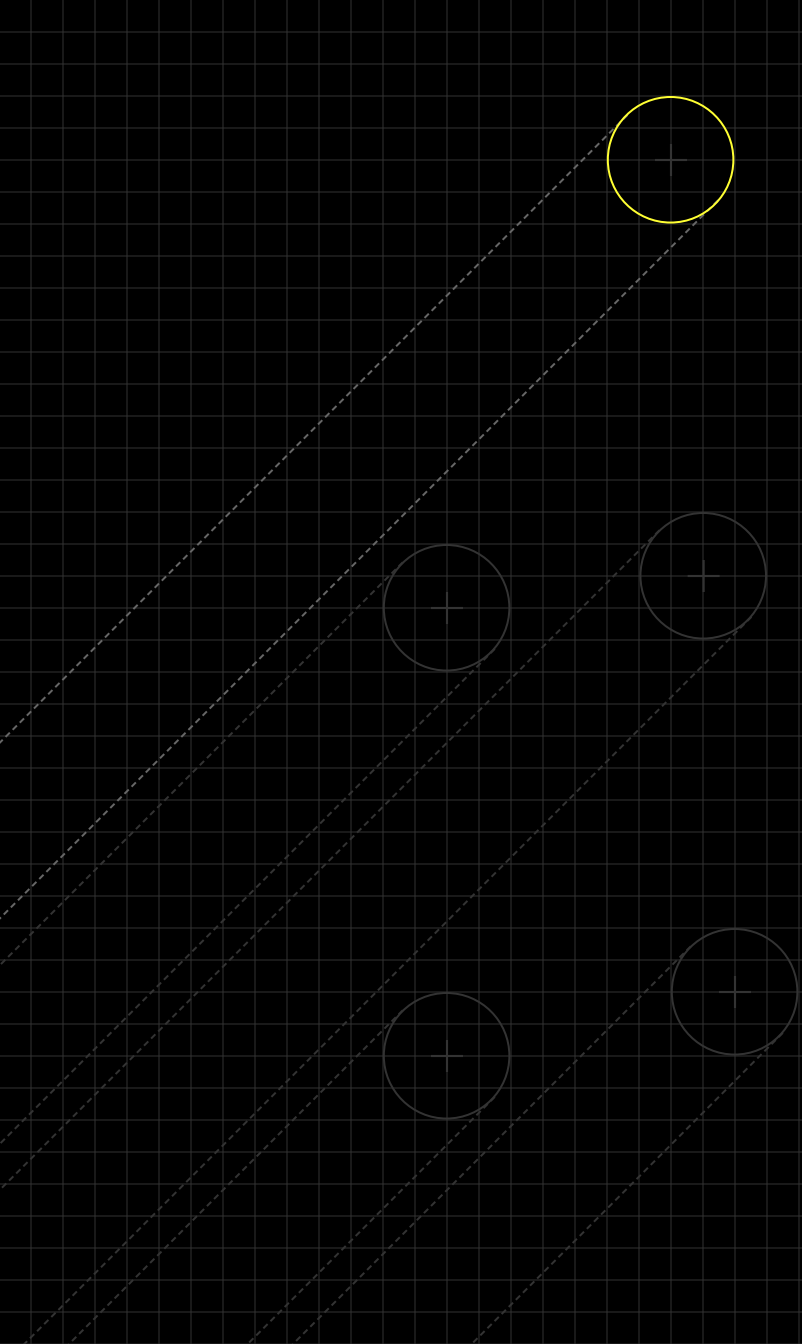
How Autodesk can help

At Autodesk, we can help you build an "AI blueprint" that enables teams to redesign workflow for greater efficiency, makes data-driven design decisions to boost sustainable practices, and helps better anticipate risk with predictive analytics. We also offer courses with certifications that highlight advanced design and make skills, and help you co-innovate with customers, partners, and Autodesk to test new AI use cases.

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