freshworks

REPORT

IT priorities that define 2026

How AI translates into business impact



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Foreword

By Srinivasan Raghavan, Chief Product Officer, Freshworks

For years, IT progress has often been measured by volume—more tickets closed, more tools deployed, and more workflows built. That model worked when environments were simpler. Today, that model is showing signs of strain. Complexity has become the constraint, slowing teams down and making the value of technology harder to realize.

Over the past year, I've spoken with many customers, and several patterns have emerged. Many IT organizations continue to operate reactively, responding to what appears on a screen rather than shaping how work gets done. Fragmented systems, disconnected data, and legacy operating models make it difficult to move from response to prevention.

As AI moves from pilots into production, these gaps are becoming harder to ignore. AI depends on clean data, shared context, and cohesive workflows. Without that foundation, AI may amplify complexity, noise, and effort rather than simplify work.

What's required now is a different kind of progress: the ability to manage increasing complexity without passing it on to employees. The goal isn't to do less work, but to remove unnecessary work, so people spend less time navigating systems and more time focused on outcomes. When issues can be resolved automatically, workflows run end to end, and disruptions are addressed earlier, IT is better positioned to abstract complexity rather than expose it.

This perspective has shaped how we think about products and teams at Freshworks. Across the organizations we work with, the expectation isn't simpler technology, it's technology that handles complexity on their behalf. That principle guides how we build: unifying experiences, establishing shared AI foundations, and measuring success by real-world outcomes instead of visible effort or activity.

The same lens applies to IT organizations themselves. The teams making the most progress aren't reducing scope or layering on more tools. They're increasing their ability to orchestrate—redesigning operating models around experience, autonomy, and resilience so complexity is absorbed by the system and value is delivered by default.

This report reflects what we're seeing across benchmarks, frontline teams, and IT leaders already operating this way. The five priorities outlined here aren't future-looking ideas. They reflect shifts many organizations are making to operate more effectively today.

Looking ahead to 2026, leading IT organizations may differentiate themselves less by speed alone. They'll stand out because the business runs smoother, quietly, reliably, and without friction.

A 2026 mandate for IT Leaders

Why experience increasingly sets the ceiling for IT impact.

Many of the challenges IT teams face haven't changed. Tickets still pile up. Outages still happen. Employees still lose time to friction. What has changed fundamentally is what's now possible in how those problems are solved.

Breakthroughs in AI, automation, and data fidelity are reshaping IT's role. Organizations are moving from static, after-the-fact insight to real-time intelligence that reflects what's happening in the moment. AI is no longer limited to suggesting next steps; it can act as an agent—connecting systems, executing workflows, and resolving issues as they occur. As a result, IT is shifting away from treating SLA performance as a differentiator and toward recognizing it as table stakes, with experience and productivity emerging as the true measures of success. And instead of responding after disruption spreads, leading teams are designing systems that anticipate and prevent impact altogether.

At the same time, experience is no longer confined to IT alone. Employee interactions routinely span IT, HR, Finance, and Operations, exposing the cost of siloed tools and fragmented ownership. IT's impact now depends on its ability to orchestrate work across the enterprise, not just optimize individual functions.

Together these forces are driving five irreversible shifts in how IT operates:

1. **Knowledge bases → Resolution engines**
2. **Assistive AI → Agentic workflows**
3. **SLA → XLA (Experience-level agreements)**
4. **Reactive monitoring → Proactive service resilience**
5. **Siloed functions → Unified enterprise service management architecture**

These are not isolated trends. They describe a single transformation, from IT designed to respond after disruption to IT built to remove friction, absorb complexity, and create momentum by default. In this new reality, experience doesn't merely reflect IT performance. It defines the ceiling for how much impact IT can deliver across the business.

PRIORITY 01

From knowledge bases to resolution engines

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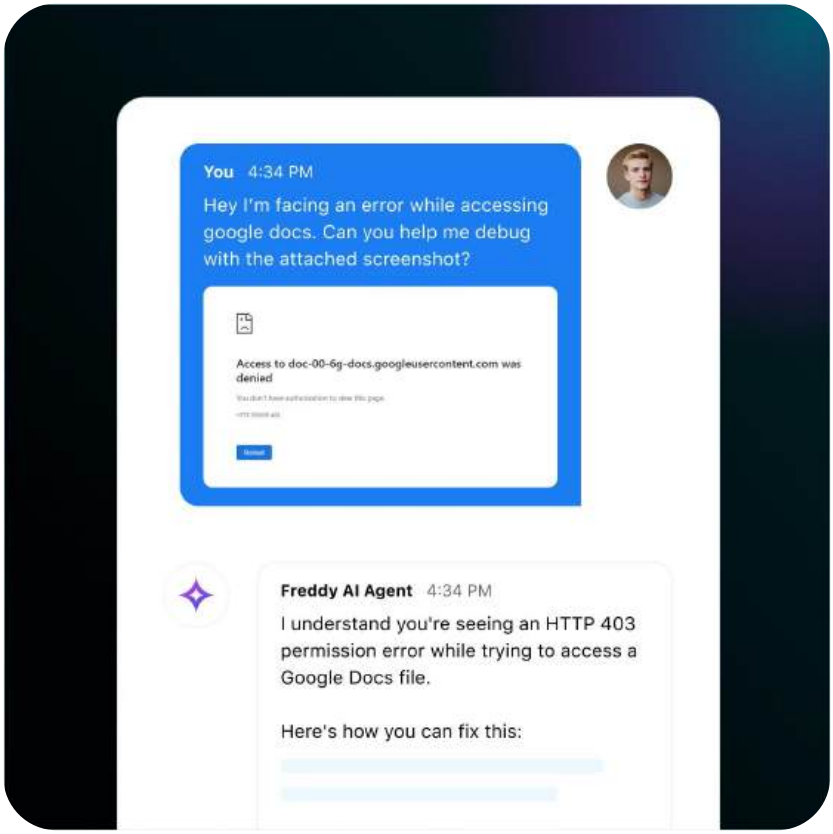
Employees don’t want answers, they want issues solved.

For years, self-service meant asking employees to do the work themselves. An issue appears. They search a knowledge base, follow steps, retry, and hope it worked. If it doesn’t, they open a ticket. On paper, this was often considered a success. In reality, it was friction disguised as efficiency.

Even with assistive AI—chatbots, copilots, suggested articles—the model hasn’t fundamentally changed. Employees are still asked to interpret information and execute fixes. Deflection improves, but the burden remains.

A new model is emerging. Instead of treating knowledge as something to be searched, IT teams are designing for resolution. These resolution engines are designed to interpret context and trigger automated actions where appropriate. An employee uploads a screenshot of an error; AI identifies the issue, checks dependencies, and triggers the right fix, often without human involvement.

That’s the shift: Context becomes the trigger for action, not search. As inputs expand from text to images, logs, and beyond, resolution becomes more autonomous and reliable, removing work from employees instead of creating it.



Customer story

- **65% ticket deflection**
- **200+ agent hours saved per month**

"Because of the AI virtual agent, we were able to deflect 65% of tickets. Copilot also helps us stay consistent and accurate in how issues are resolved—saving roughly 200 hours every month."

— **Shalindra Singh**, Director of Enterprise Applications, Five9

The results in practice*

- **65% ticket deflection with AI agents**
- **431,000+ agent hours saved annually**

**Freshservice Benchmark Report 2025*

Operating principle

"AI only earns the right to act when it's grounded in clean data, clear guardrails, and trusted workflows. Without that foundation, "self-healing" quickly turns into self-inflicted outages. Autonomous resolution ensures accountability at speed, and brings in the decisive precision that organizations need at scale."

— **Ashwin Ballal**, CIO, Freshworks

Leadership takeaway

Redesign support so problems are resolved automatically from context, before employees have to search, read, or ask for help. Start with predictable issues, make automation visible and auditable, and measure success by how much work and interruption you remove.

PRIORITY 02

From assistive AI to agentic workflows

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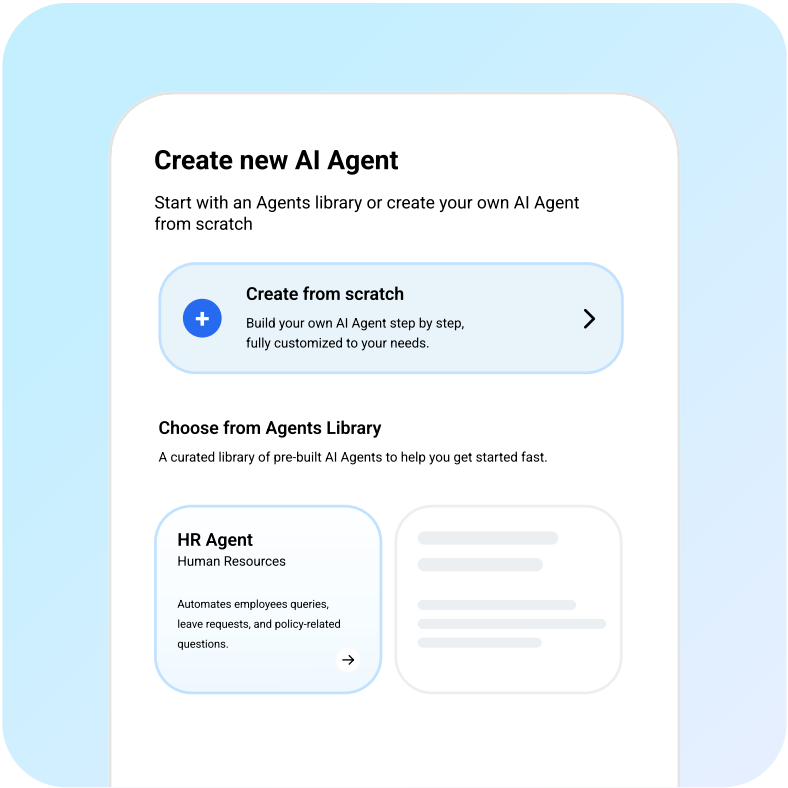
AI that helps is table stakes. AI that acts is the advantage.

Assistive AI was the first step. It helped individuals work faster by summarizing tickets, suggesting responses, or pointing to relevant information. Useful, but limited. It improved moments of interaction without changing how work actually moves across the enterprise. The real constraint wasn't AI capability; it was fragmentation. Disconnected tools, siloed knowledge, and brittle automations kept AI from seeing full context or acting with confidence.

The next evolution is already taking shape. AI is becoming grounded in enterprise-wide data through semantic search and retrieval, drawing from systems like Drive, SharePoint, and Confluence to form a trusted, unified understanding of work. From there, AI moves beyond interaction to action—connecting employee journeys across IT, HR, Finance, and other teams, and orchestrating work seamlessly across tools. The experience becomes continuous and largely invisible.

This is where agentic workflows emerge. With shared data foundations, native orchestration, and full visibility, AI agents can reason, collaborate, and take autonomous action across systems. Instead of assisting individual tasks, AI coordinates and completes work end to end, reducing handoffs, removing delays, and keeping work moving without constant human intervention.



Customer story

- **50% management time saved with summarizer**

“Summarizer in Freddy AI Copilot allows our IT support management team to quickly grasp the context of escalated issues, significantly reducing the time spent reviewing tickets and enabling faster resolutions.”

— **Deanne Lashin**, Coordinator, Technology Support

The results in practice*

- **78% higher first call resolution rate when using 6-10 integrations**
- **5% reduction in average resolution time with 50+ workflows**

**Freshservice Benchmark Report 2025*

Operating principle

“AI earns the right to act only when its decisions are explainable, observable, and controllable. That’s why agentic AI isn’t a feature upgrade, it’s an architectural choice with real operational consequences.”

— **Venkat Venkataraman**, VP Product Management - AI Platform & Strategy, Freshworks

Leadership takeaway

Shift focus from adding AI features to building the foundations that let AI act safely and at scale—unified data, orchestrated workflows, and clear guardrails—so autonomy is reliable, visible, and enterprise-ready.

PRIORITY 03

From SLA to XLA (Experience-level agreement)

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Speed is a vanity metric. Experience is the currency.

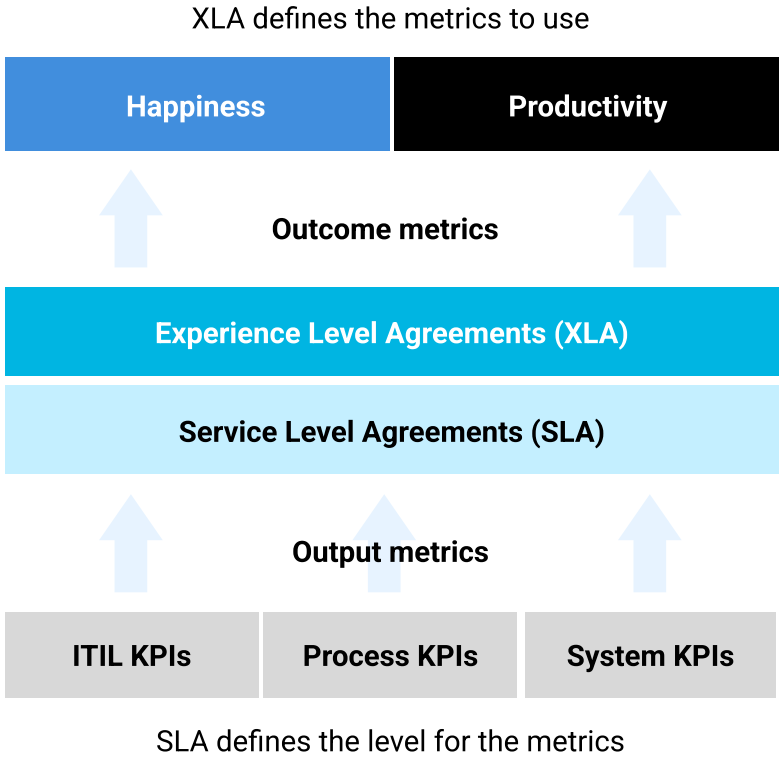
For a long time, IT success meant one thing: hitting SLAs. Speed was the goal. The faster a ticket closed, the better. But beneath that was a tougher, unanswered question: Did we actually make work easier for the employee, or just move the problem around faster?

The truth is, optimizing SLAs is no longer a competitive advantage. Every mature IT organization can meet response times. What now drives productivity and keeps employees engaged is how work feels as it gets done. Experience, not speed alone, is what determines whether IT is helping or hindering progress.

That's where the shift from SLAs to XLAs begins. Experience becomes the SLA.

It starts with visibility. Real-time signals from devices and endpoints show not just how quickly an issue was resolved, but how it affected the employee in the moment. AI then connects operational metrics—reassignments, handoffs, delays—with human signals like sentiment and frustration, revealing where workflows break down even when SLAs are met. Over time, these signals come together in a unified view that combines speed, sentiment, and productivity.

The result is a new way to measure success. Experience moves from anecdote to evidence, giving IT leaders a shared, board-visible view of value, focused not just on efficiency but on impact.



Customer story



- **98.8% CSAT**
- **3.2 hours average response time**
- **4-week implementation**

“Before, we lacked the processes and automation we needed. Today, we resolve end-user issues far more efficiently.”

— Alejandro Massuet, IT Support Services Manager

The results in practice*

- **97.83% CSAT for IT and business teams**
- **96.16% resolution SLA for IT teams**

**Freshservice Benchmark Report 2025*

Operating principle

“Experience can’t be reduced to time on task or sentiment scores. XLAs unlock real business impact when human feedback is tied to multiple operational signals—friction, flow, and outcomes—turning experience into a system you can actively improve.”

— Jason Aloia, VP Product Management, Freshworks

Leadership takeaway

Move beyond response times and measure experience and productivity together, so IT’s impact is visible in how work actually gets done, not just how fast tickets close.

PRIORITY 04

From reactive monitoring to proactive service resilience

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The best incident response is the one nobody notices.

For many IT leaders, AIOps came with real hope—predictive insights, self-healing systems, fewer incidents. What followed too often was frustration. AI layered onto fragmented monitoring tools created more noise, not more clarity: hundreds of alerts, disconnected dashboards, and teams still discovering critical issues after the business was already impacted. The pain wasn't just operational—it was the disappointment of unfulfilled promises.

That experience has reshaped expectations. Leaders don't want more alerts; they want clarity. They want to know which issues truly matter to the business and how to stop them before employees and customers feel the impact. Delivering that level of resilience requires more than AI bolt-ons. It requires resilience that is proactive by design.

This is where ServiceOps takes hold. ServiceOps is a shift IT teams have discussed for years and are beginning to implement more broadly. It brings IT Service Management and IT Operations Management together into a single, continuous lifecycle. Much like DevOps unified development and operations, ServiceOps unifies service and operations so every issue is understood and resolved in full context.

This convergence happens in three ways.

1. **Process:** Every disruption is treated as both an operational signal and an employee-facing service issue, handled end to end as one flow.
2. **Data:** Tickets, alerts, assets, dependencies, and changes live in a shared system, instead of being trapped in silos.
3. **Intelligence:** AI reduces noise by collapsing hundreds of alerts into a single, enriched incident tied to real business impact.

With this foundation, proactivity becomes practical. False alerts are filtered out, root causes surface faster, and teams can act before employees feel the impact. Incidents don't disappear, but their impact does. Outages are shorter, disruption is rarer, and IT moves from firefighting to quietly keeping the business running. This is resilience built in by design, not added after the fact.

Customer story

TATA CONSUMER PRODUCTS

- **73% faster incident resolution**
- **137.5% faster change management**
- **87% faster incident reviews**

“With Freshworks, we have revolutionized the way our distributors interact with us, engaging seamlessly through our own mobile app. This not only streamlines communication but also enhances the overall experience, reinforcing our commitment to delivering excellence at every touchpoint.”

— **Pawan Satyawali**, Global CIO

The results in practice*

- **50% fewer duplicate alerts through AI-powered alert correlation**
- **87% faster incident reviews with AI-assisted RCA**

**Freshservice Benchmark Report 2025*

Operating principle

"At scale, resilience is an architectural mandate and not an operational scramble. Adding AI to fragmented monitoring just amplifies noise. The shift happens when service and operations are architected as a single system, so intelligence is applied to business impact and prevention, not reactive detection."

— **Murali Swaminathan**, CTO, Freshworks

Leadership takeaway

Design systems to prevent incidents or resolve them early by unifying signals, understanding dependencies, and acting proactively—so disruptions are contained or eliminated before employees ever notice.

PRIORITY 05

From siloed functions to unified enterprise service management architecture

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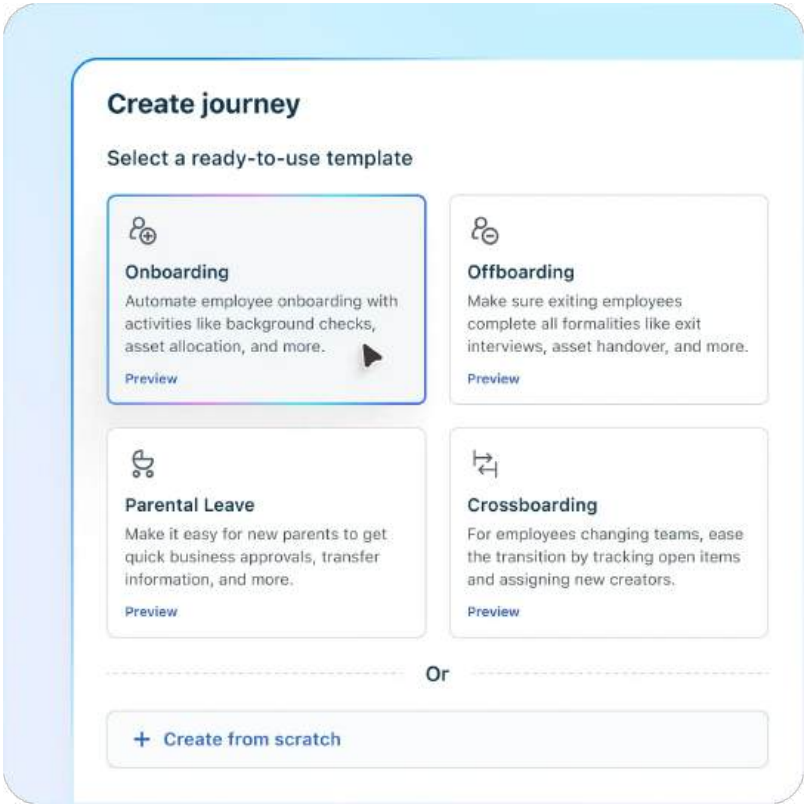
Experience breaks where ownership fragments.

Most employee experience failures don't start with broken technology. They start when ownership across the employee lifecycle is fragmented. Critical moments—joining, role changes, access updates, payroll adjustments, relocations, exits—rarely belong to a single function. They span IT, HR, Finance, Facilities, and Security. Each team may execute its part well in isolation, yet the employee still experiences delays, confusion, and repeated handoffs.

This is the hidden cost of functional silos. When every team runs its own tools, workflows, and metrics, employees are forced to navigate the gaps between them. IT becomes the default coordinator, employees become the integrators, and productivity quietly leaks away.

A unified enterprise service management architecture changes that dynamic. Instead of employees chasing departments, cross-functional services are orchestrated across teams through a shared service layer. Ownership remains distributed across teams, but experience becomes end-to-end. IT evolves from running a helpdesk to providing the connective tissue that allows enterprise services to function as one system.

This is not about centralizing control. It's about centralizing **flow**, so complexity is absorbed by the system, not pushed onto employees. And every lifecycle moment becomes connected, intentional, and predictable.



Customer story



- **23% self-service deflection rate**
- **96% customer satisfaction score**

“Consolidating from 10 different platforms down to a single intuitive one has not only improved employee experience, it has saved us a significant amount of money.”
— **Pradeep Singh**, VP of Infrastructure and Operations

The results in practice*

- **30–40% faster fulfillment of cross-functional employee requests**
- **Up to 25% reduction in request reassignments**

**Freshservice Benchmark Report 2025*

Operating principle

“Employees don’t experience IT, HR, or Finance as separate functions. They experience the gaps between them. Every handoff introduces friction, every silo slows momentum, and over time those small delays add up to a measurable tax on productivity and trust.”
— **Sriram Iyer**, VP Product Management - Enterprise Service Management, Freshworks

Leadership takeaway

Design employee services as end-to-end journeys across teams, not isolated functions. Map where work crosses IT, HR, Finance, and Operations, then orchestrate those handoffs through a shared service layer, so ownership stays local, but the employee experience remains unified from start to finish.

A practical playbook for IT leaders in 2026

Winning in 2026 takes more than new tools. It requires a shift in how IT is built, measured, and led.



Build for autonomy, not accumulation

Prioritize platforms that orchestrate work end to end. Point tools add capability in isolation, but autonomy only emerges when systems work together by design.



Shift metrics from activity to impact

Move beyond SLAs as proof of success. Measure experience, productivity, and friction removed, because those are the outcomes the business actually feels.



Design for invisibility by default

The strongest employee experiences don't announce themselves. Prevent disruption, resolve issues quietly, and make reliability the norm—not the exception.



Lead the operating model shift

Today's IT leaders aren't just technology stewards. They align systems, teams, and metrics around outcomes, translating complexity into momentum for the business.



Unify services across the enterprise

Design employee services as end-to-end journeys that span IT, HR, and business teams. Keep ownership local, but ensure the experience is unified from request to resolution.

By 2026, many organizations may define IT excellence by how smoothly the business operates, with technology working invisibly in the background.



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