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Executive summary

The 2024 Eraneos study on generative Al (GenAI) in the European telecommunications (telco) industry evaluates the current landscape, strategic importance and future potential of GenAl. This study is based on structured interviews with C-Level and SVP-Level executives from eight leading European telco companies. These structured interviews were both quantitative and qualitative and were evaluated using exploratory content analysis. The report reveals widespread recognition of GenAl's strategic significance, along with significant disparities in implementation and scaling across the industry. However, the interviews also showed that many companies entered the GenAl space with overly euphoric expectations, which have led to uncoordinated efforts and inconsistent results.

One key finding is the critical importance of having a robust data infrastructure as a foundation before implementing Al solutions. Companies often face significant challenges due to an unclear system architecture and disconnected systems, such as multiple ticketing systems.

Additionally, there is significant variation in the strategic approach among companies in the telco industry. Larger companies are making substantial investments to build strong partnerships and/or develop their own solutions, while smaller companies tend to adopt a more opportunistic approach by integrating existing GenAl solutions from suppliers into their systems. Despite these efforts, an industry-wide reality check has started to take place in 2024 as it becomes clearer that even the most well-prepared companies face substantial challenges in moving from PoCs to full-scale implementations.



Executive summary



Key findings:

- Strategic recognition: All companies surveyed recognized GenAl as strategically important, with 100% of them having identified use cases for GenAl.
- Widespread application: 88% of the companies are already applying GenAl in marketing, IT and customer service.
 Specifically, 75% of companies are using it for support functions such as automating repetitive tasks, while 63% have implemented GenAl in product management.
- Proof-of-concept (PoC) status: Every company (100%) has initiated PoCs, but only 25% have moved beyond PoCs to scaled applications in regular operations. This means there is a significant gap between initial experimentation and full-scale implementation, largely due to technical hurdles and organizational resistance.
- Core process integration: Only 25% of the companies surveyed have fully integrated GenAl into their core processes, reflecting the complexity and challenges associated with scaling GenAl initiatives. This suggests that while the potential of GenAl is widely recognized, its full realization remains elusive for many organizations.

- R&D investments: Investment in GenAl varies widely across the industry, with some companies committing three-digit million euros to GenAl R&D while others allocate more modest budgets of €10-15 million annually. Some companies report dedicating 100+ FTEs in specialized hubs for GenAl, which attests to the significance of these initiatives in terms of financial commitment.
- Organizational structure: 88% of companies have unified AI organizational units, bundling both predictive and generative AI competencies, while 12% have established separate units specifically for GenAI.
- Technological adoption: 75% of companies are using GenAl for customer service through chatbots and Contact Center as a Service (CCaaS) solutions, and another 75% are using it for IT-related purposes, including coding and central value creation.

Our research also shed light on the ongoing debate over centralized versus decentralized Al governance within companies. Centralized governance ensures consistent Al tools, data practices, compliance and alignment with corporate strategy. Decentralized approaches offer flexibility but may cause duplicated efforts, integration challenges and uneven resource allocation.

About this study

Purpose

The primary purpose of this study is to explore the status and potential of generative AI (GenAI) within the European telecommunications industry. This research seeks to provide telecom companies with a detailed understanding of the strategic importance of GenAI, its current applications, challenges in scaling and future opportunities. By analyzing the experiences and perspectives of leading industry players, the study aims to offer actionable insights that can guide telcos in effectively leveraging GenAI for competitive advantage and operational efficiency.

Methodology

This research is grounded in structured interviews with C-Level and SVP-Level executives from eight major European telecom companies. These interviews combined both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gather comprehensive data on the adoption, implementation and strategic positioning of GenAl in the telecom sector. The evaluation of these interviews was carried out using exploratory content analysis.

Scope

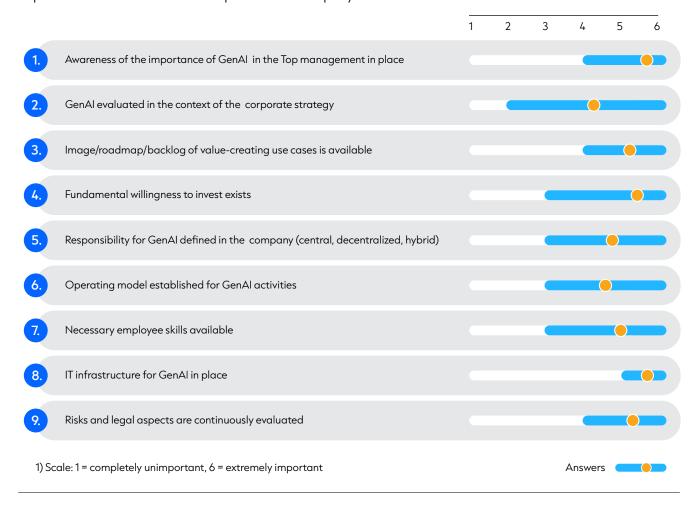
The scope of this study encompasses the entire lifecycle of GenAl within the telecom industry, from initial recognition and use case identification to full-scale implementation and integration into core business processes. The interviews cover a broad range of topics, including the strategic importance of GenAl, main applications, current implementation status, challenges in integration, operating models, skills development, technological infrastructure, role models and future outlook. This study also explores the impact of company culture and internal organization on the success or failure of Al implementations, as well as the role of system architecture and data infrastructure.

Chapter 1 Introduction: The strategic importance of GenAl

The study reveals that 100% of the companies surveyed recognize the strategic importance of GenAl. This suggests that all companies share a belief in GenAl's potential to drive significant transformation across various business functions. This widespread recognition shows that the industry is aware of the competitive pressures

and the need to innovate in an increasingly datadriven market. However, despite this awareness, the interviews revealed that many companies approached GenAl with overly euphoric expectations, which have sometimes led to uncoordinated and fragmented implementation efforts.

Participants consistently see a high level of importance in GenAl aspects - Top management, willingness to invest and infrastructure central Importance of individual GenAl aspects in the company



Introduction: The strategic importance of GenAl



Euphoric expectations vs. practical implementations

Despite the unanimous recognition of GenAl's importance, the study also highlights a major gap between the initial euphoric expectations and the realities of practical implementation. Many companies entered the GenAl space with high expectations, driven by the technology's perceived potential to revolutionize customer experiences, optimize operations and foster innovation.

However, the study shows that these expectations often run into practical challenges, such as regulatory hurdles, the complexity of

integrating GenAl into existing systems and the need for specialized skills. Scalability is another major obstacle, especially among companies that lack a clear system architecture or use disconnected systems (such as multiple ticketing systems for customer support).

While 100% of companies have identified use cases for GenAl and initiated PoCs, only 25% have succeeded in scaling these initiatives into full-fledged applications that are integrated into their core business processes. This suggests that many companies stop at the PoC stage due to the major challenges of moving beyond initial experiments, especially when they lack a strong foundation in data architecture and system integration.

For almost all individual GenAl aspects, the current status of the implementation and the importance of the respective aspect differ widely Maturity level and importance of individual GenAl aspects in the company





Overview of GenAl activities launched

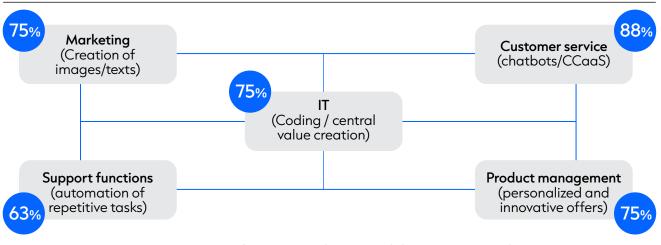
The study provides an overview of the wide range of GenAl activities launched by European

telecom companies. These activities can be categorized into three main areas: enhancing customer experiences, improving internal efficiencies and driving innovation.

GenAl has already been used in many (mostly customer-facing) areas since 2023 - companies usually organize all Al activities holistically

Company perspective: What are the most important areas of application for GenAl?

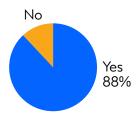
Areas of application



Percentage of companies that named this organizational unit

Differentiation between AI organizations





"We have a large data hub in which all Al competencies are bundled. Predictive and generative must be bundled in one organization"

> "Yes, we have our own unit for GenAl established"

- 1. Questions: "What are the most important business units/organizational units in which GenAl is used?", "Do you differentiate in the organization between GenAl and other Al-form
- 2. Includes all supporting areas, such as HR, Legal and Finance

Chapter 2

Main applications of GenAl

Enhancing customer experiences:

- Majority of companies are using GenAl to enhance customer experiences, primarily by deploying Al-driven chatbots and personalized marketing campaigns.
 These initiatives aim to improve customer satisfaction and retention by delivering more tailored and responsive customer interactions.
- There is some skepticism among companies regarding whether end customers see the added value of Al solutions for themselves, and Al truly enhances customer experience, as this impact is harder to quantify compared to cost savings and efficiency gains

Improving internal efficiencies:

Majority of companies are leveraging GenAl to improve internal efficiencies by automating repetitive tasks and streamlining processes. For instance, GenAl is being used to automate document generation, assist with coding and optimize network management through predictive analytics.

- Some companies are planning future projects that will explore new use cases for GenAl, such as network optimization and API-driven business process management.
- The focus on cost efficiency and ROI remains a primary driver for these initiatives, as companies seek to justify their AI investments by demonstrating clear financial benefits.

Driving innovation:

 More than half of companies are focusing on using GenAl to drive innovation, particularly in developing new products and services. This includes initiatives such as creating Al-driven mobile devices with virtual assistants and offering Al-based services to B2B customers.

Despite the diversity of these activities, many remain isolated efforts rather than part of a coordinated, enterprise-wide strategy. Smaller companies tend to take an opportunistic approach, adopting Al tools based on immediate availability and ease of integration, in contrast to the more strategic, coordinated efforts seen in larger firms. This lack of integration poses a risk to the long-term sustainability and scalability of GenAl initiatives.

Main applications of GenAl



The companies reported a wide range of GenAl projects, many of which are already fully implemented. The activities all fell into three broad categories: enhancing the customer experience, boosting internal efficiency and driving innovation. Below, we describe many of the specific use cases where the companies are leveraging GenAl in these areas or use cases

which they have already made concrete plans to explore in the near future. These applications provide a sense of GenAl's vast potential for improving core functions in virtually every area of a telco's business. However, as we will discuss further below, key factors must be in place in order for these initiatives to reach full implementation.

The experts see three overarching trends in how GenAl is influencing the industry and creating new potential for business

Market prospects and trends: where is the greatest potential?



Creation of individual Customer experiences

- Personalization of the offer (Conception of individual offers in the context of Next Best Experience)
- Automation of customer service (individual dialog generation through service/chatbots)
- Increase in customer satisfaction/retention (development of targeted approaches in retention management)



Realization of internal Increased efficiency

- Use of GenAl as a smart everyday helper (support with content creation/internal chatbot)
- Automation of routine tasks (generating texts/knowledge management)
- Conception of training requirements on the basis of Error analyses (Identification of individual measures for weak points)



Possibility for completely new Innovations

- Expansion of the product portfolio (e.g. own mobile device with Al Companion instead of apps)
- Development of new offers (Sale of LLM-based services to B2B customers)
- Code migration/transfer (Fully automated documentation of legacy systems and further development in new environments as a service)
- 1. Questions: "In which areas of the telecommunications industry do you see the greatest potential in terms of GenAl?"
 - "Are there any specific trends or innovations in GenAl that you are particularly focused on?"



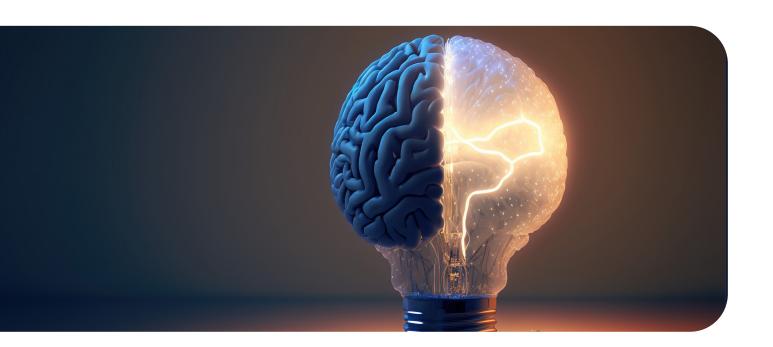
Personalizing the customer experience

The study found 88% of companies are already using GenAl in customer-facing roles, especially in customer service and marketing. One of the main focuses in these areas is to tap into GenAl's potential to enrich user experiences with measures like these:

Al-driven customer service: Many companies have implemented Al-driven chatbots that are capable of handling a wide range of customer inquiries, from simple requests to more complex troubleshooting. These chatbots use natural language processing (NLP) to understand and respond to customer queries in real-time, providing a more personalized and efficient customer service experience. In addition, some of the companies use Al to evaluate customer interaction data, which reduces the amount of manual work required (for example, using GenAl to automatically generate call logs/tickets instead of requiring customer support reps to create call logs/tickets manually).

Personalized marketing campaigns: GenAl is also being used to create personalized marketing campaigns that are tailored to individual customer preferences and behaviors. By analyzing customer data in real-time, GenAl can generate targeted offers and recommendations that are more likely to resonate with the customer.

Next-best experience (NBX) initiatives: A growing trend among telecom companies is the use of GenAl to drive next-best experience (NBX) initiatives. These initiatives aim to anticipate the next best action or offer for each customer based on their past behavior and preferences. GenAl is uniquely capable of efficiently analyzing very large volumes of customer data and identifying patterns that can be used to make more informed and timely recommendations.





Increasing internal efficiency

The study found that some of the companies already use GenAl to automate tasks, improve knowledge management and optimize internal processes. Some companies also reported they are planning future projects to explore further use cases in these areas. Current and planned activities include:

Automating routine tasks: One of the most common applications of GenAl in the telecom industry is the automation of routine and repetitive tasks. This includes tasks such as document generation, data entry, and report creation, which can be time-consuming and prone to human error. By automating these tasks, companies can free up their employees to focus on more strategic and value-added activities. Some companies are also exploring the use of GenAl for automating more complex processes, such as quality management and root cause analysis of problems and vulnerabilities.

Digital assistants: Some of the companies have deployed intelligent bots to serve as digital assistants for their employees. These help employees, for example, to quickly locate internal information and follow procedures more efficiently.

Knowledge management: GenAl is also being used to improve knowledge management within telecom companies. By analyzing large volumes of data and documents, GenAl can identify key insights and trends that can be used to inform decision-making and strategy development. Some companies are also using Al to analyze errors among employees and identify knowledge gaps, so they can provide more effective training.

Network optimization: Some of the companies showed interest in using GenAl to identify potential for optimizing their networks, though these initiatives are still in the planning stages. API-driven business process management: Another planned project involves developing an AI-driven BPM solution that connects the company's various systems via APIs.

API-driven business process management: Another planned project involves developing an AI-driven BPM solution that connects the company's various systems via APIs.

Driving innovation

Companies are already focusing on leveraging GenAl to develop innovative new products and services, including activities like these:

Al-driven products: Some companies expressed their interest in using GenAl to develop entirely new product offerings. These might include innovations such as new mobile devices that can be operated using an Al companion rather than individual apps.

B2B AI services: Some companies are exploring the potential of offering LLM-based services to their B2B customers. This could include services such as advanced analytics, decision support and automation solutions.

Code migration and transfer: Currently, some companies are already using AI to perform code migration and transfer tasks. This includes fully automated documentation of legacy systems and further development in new environments as a service.

Chapter 3

Current status of GenAl initiatives

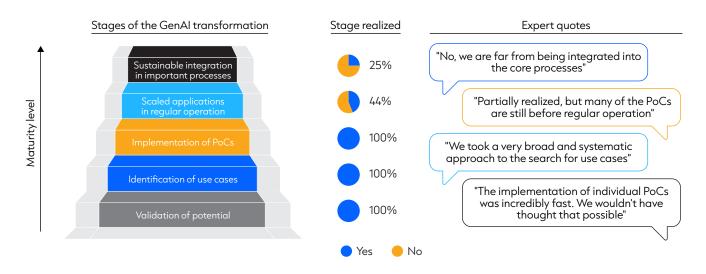
The survey reveals significant variation among the companies when it comes to successfully developing, implementing and scaling GenAl initiatives. In the sections below, we explore how companies are devoting resources to GenAl-related activities, along with factors that influence the viability of these projects. We conclude with some specific recommendations for best practices that have proven effective in getting GenAl projects past the PoC stage and on the path towards large-scale integration.

Evaluating systematic use cases

The study shows that all surveyed companies have systematically evaluated potential GenAl use cases and identified areas where GenAl can add significant value, such as in customer service, marketing and network management. This indicates that there is universal awareness of the potential for GenAl to improve operations across various business functions.

All companies are already implementing a wide range of PoCs. However, only a few companies are already operating scaled and integrated GenAl applications

Company perspective: What is the current status of the GenAl transformation?



1. Questions: "In which phase do you currently see your company in the GenAl transformation?"



Proof-of-concept (PoC)

In addition to researching use cases, all companies have also initiated PoCs, but results vary. Only 25% of companies have successfully transitioned POCs into scaled applications integrated into core business processes. As such, there remains a significant gap between experimentation and full implementation.

Transitioning from PoCs to full-scale applications remains a challenge due to technical hurdles, organizational resistance and the complexity of integrating GenAl into existing systems.

Disconnected systems and a lack of clear system architecture complicate scaling PoCs into fully-fledged applications.

Full GenAl integration

The study identifies only two companies that have fully integrated GenAl into their core business processes. These companies have developed robust Al operating models, ensuring the sustainability and scalability of their GenAl initiatives. By embedding GenAl into their operations, they stand to achieve significant operational efficiencies, cost savings and enhanced customer experiences.

Challenges and barriers to full integration

The study highlights several challenges and barriers to fully integrating GenAl into core processes, including technical, organizational and regulatory hurdles.

Technical challenges: Integrating GenAl into existing systems is complex and resource-intensive, often involving data integration, system compatibility and scalability issues.

Organizational challenges: Resistance to change within organizations is another significant barrier, with employees reluctant to adopt new technologies that they perceive as threats to their jobs. Additionally, companies may lack the necessary skills and expertise to effectively implement and manage GenAl initiatives.

Regulatory and compliance challenges:

Regulatory issues, particularly related to data privacy and security, pose significant barriers to GenAl integration. The EU Artificial Intelligence Act, imposing strict regulations on Al use, presents particular challenges for telecom companies operating in Europe, such as ensuring compliance with stringent data privacy standards, navigating the complexities of Al system transparency and explainability, and managing the risks associated with deploying high-risk Al applications in critical network operations.



Operating models for Al activities

Operating models for AI activities are crucial for telecom companies as they determine how AI initiatives are structured, managed and scaled across the organization. These models play a significant role in ensuring that AI efforts are aligned with business objectives, resources are efficiently utilized, and innovations are effectively integrated into core operations. By adopting the right operating model, telecom companies can overcome the challenges of fragmentation, enhance cross-functional collaboration and drive the successful deployment and scaling of GenAI initiatives.

Importance of an integrated target operating model (TOM): The study found that 88% of companies are striving to achieve an integrated TOM for their Al activities. This means they are seeking to integrate GenAl into a unified Al framework, ensuring efficient resource use and alignment with broader business objectives.

Unified Al strategy: The majority of surveyed companies (88%) have adopted a unified Al strategy, integrating both predictive and generative Al competencies. This approach leverages synergies between different Al technologies and ensures alignment with overall business strategy.

Avoiding fragmentation: An integrated TOM helps avoid fragmentation in Al initiatives, preventing inefficiencies, duplication of effort and misalignment with business objectives.

Analysis of current operating models

The study provides an analysis of current Al operating models, with the hub-and-spoke model being among the most common. This model allows flexibility while maintaining coherence in Al strategy.

Hub-and-spoke model: A central Al hub is responsible for coordinating and managing Al activities across the organization, providing strategic direction, resources and support.

Centralized vs. decentralized models: The study also examines centralized and decentralized Al operating models. Centralized models offer consistency and streamlined processes, while decentralized models provide flexibility, allowing departments to tailor Al tools to their needs. However, this flexibility can lead to inefficiencies and higher costs.

Current status of GenAl initiatives



Best practices and recommendations for successful implementations

Based on the practical experiences shared by the companies we surveyed, we can identify seven best practices for successful GenAl implementations:

1.

Set realistic expectations: Clearly define and communicate realistic timelines and economic impacts for GenAl implementation to manage stakeholder expectations effectively.

2.

Foster a lab environment for exploration: Maintain and expand the experimental lab environment to explore diverse use cases and short-term proof-of-concepts (PoCs). This approach helps generate enthusiasm and buy-in across the organization.

3.

Build a strong bridge from POC to scale: Develop a robust process for converting PoCs into scalable business cases with tangible economic value, ensuring that innovative ideas are not lost in the transition from the lab to full-scale deployment.

4.

Implement an integrated AI operating model: Prioritize the establishment of an integrated AI operating model, such as a hub-and-spoke structure, to avoid wasting resources and to maintain a unified approach to GenAI initiatives.

5.

Balance internal and external resources: Ensure a balanced approach by investing in the training and development of internal talent while also strategically sourcing external expertise as needed.

6.

Leverage cloud-based platforms: Focus on using advanced cloudbased platforms rather than developing in-house solutions for infrastructure and models. Invest in custom pipelines and frontends instead of proprietary large

language models (LLMs).

7.

Stay agile with technological developments: Continuously monitor and test new technological advancements, maintaining flexibility to adapt to the rapidly evolving landscape of Al technologies and pricing models.

As the companies continue to explore new use cases and launch new GenAl projects, they widely agree that their future success in these areas will rely on two key factors: the necessary skills and adequate infrastructure.

Developing internal skills and leveraging external expertise

As the companies continue to integrate GenAl into their business operations, their need for specialized skills will also grow. Some of the companies reported challenges in developing the necessary expertise to implement and manage GenAl effectively. The most effective approach is to develop internal talent while also leveraging external expertise to remain innovative.

Internal skills development: Recruiting the right talent and developing internal skills is crucial for GenAl success, including continuous training in areas such as Al technologies, data science and machine learning.

Leveraging external expertise: In addition to internal development, companies should leverage external expertise by partnering with GenAl technology providers and consulting firms to access the latest insights, technologies and best practices.

Establishing robust GenAl IT infrastructure

In addition to advanced skills, companies need a robust IT infrastructure to successfully implement and scale GenAl solutions. Many of the companies said they are investing in scalable cloud platforms and cutting-edge Al technologies, but building and maintaining this infrastructure remains complex. Cloud platforms are essential for large-scale data processing and machine learning, with companies increasingly turning to providers like AWS, Google Cloud and Microsoft Azure to support their GenAl initiatives.

Chapter 5

GenAl role models

When asked which companies they considered role models for their own GenAl initiatives, the telcos pointed a wide range of different success stories, including:

Global hyperscalers: AWS, Google, Microsoft

Companies widely regard Al innovators like AWS, Google and Microsoft as the primary role models for GenAl in the telecom industry. These companies have developed robust GenAl solutions and platforms that serve as the backbone for many Al-driven initiatives across industries, including telecommunications. Their ability to scale AI applications quickly and effectively, combined with their leadership in AI research and development, makes them a source of inspiration and a key resource for telecom companies aiming to leverage GenAl for competitive advantage. These companies are not only platform providers but also exemplify best practices in integrating Al into their operations, from customer service to process optimization to product innovation and beyond.

Telecom pioneers: Elisa, SK Telecom, Airtel

Within the telecom sector, certain companies have established themselves as leaders in GenAl adoption. Their GenAl activities focus mainly on customer support. Finland's Elisa is widely recognized for its innovative use of GenAl, particularly in releasing Annika, one of

the industry's first advanced Al-driven customer service chatbots, in 2018. The company continues to expand its GenAl capabilities, making it a benchmark for other telecom companies.

South Korea's SK Telecom is also widely seen as a role model for GenAl innovation, particularly because of its joint venture with Deutsche Telekom which focuses on building telcospecific large language models (LLMs). These models are used to train digital assistants for customer service. India's Airtel is also highly regarded within the industry, particularly for its collaboration with NVIDIA to develop an automatic speech recognition (ASR) solution for customer management.

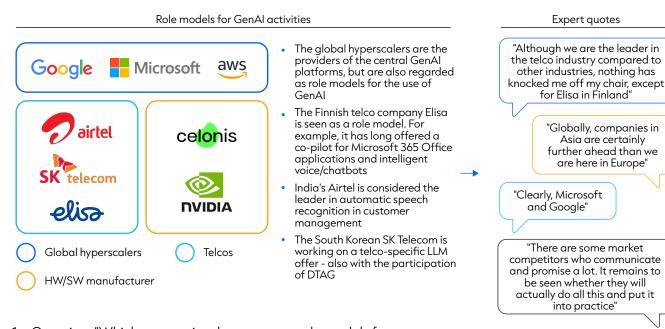
Software and hardware producers

In addition to these leaders, the companies also look up to various hardware and software manufacturers who are helping to push further innovation in the field of GenAl. Companies like NVIDIA, for example, provide the computing power necessary for processing vast amounts of data, which is essential for the effective deployment of GenAl solutions. Swisscom, for example, has just recently entered a partnership with NVIDIA. Meanwhile, specialized software vendors offer tools that enable telecom companies to implement and manage their Aldriven initiatives more efficiently.



The global hyperscalers are seen as the primary role models for GenAl, followed by a selective selection of telco companies

Market prospects and trends: Who are the biggest role models for GenAl?



 Question: "Which companies do you see as role models for GenAl activities? (also outside your industry)"

Why telcos see themselves as GenAl leaders

Our interviews also revealed that many telecom companies see themselves as uniquely positioned to benefit from GenAl. This is due to their vast data resources and direct access to customers. These factors provide telecom companies with a competitive edge in delivering personalized experiences and optimizing operations through Al. As a result, many telco leaders believe their industry has higher potential than other industries when it comes to integrating GenAl into their operations.

Chapter 6

Reality check and future outlook

After gaining initial experiences with GenAl over the past two years, the companies we spoke with reported having developed a more realistic view of the technology's potential, limitations and obstacles for implementation. The euphoria of the early days of GenAl has now settled into a "reality check" in which companies are learning from past mistakes and making more pragmatic decisions about how to move forward.

Expected developments and future investment plans

The coming years are expected to bring more visible and economically impactful results from GenAl initiatives, with companies planning to continue investing heavily in scaling successful PoCs and integrating them into core business processes.

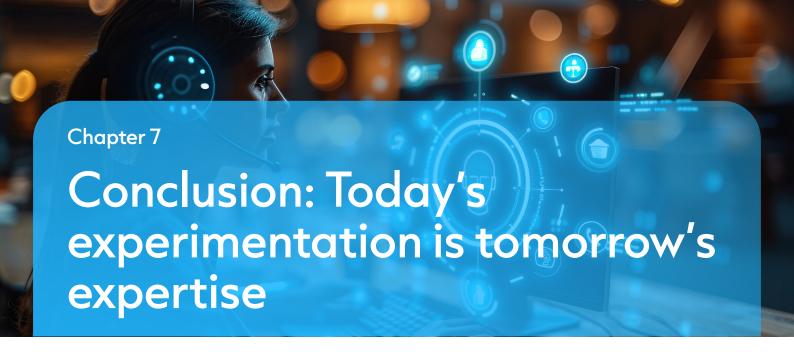
Scaling successful PoCs: A key focus for telecom companies will be scaling successful PoCs into full-scale applications, requiring significant investment in infrastructure, skills development and organizational change management.

Integration into core business processes:

Companies will need to invest in developing robust AI operating models, building scalable IT infrastructure and overcoming organizational resistance to successfully integrate GenAI into core operations.

Potential visible effects in the coming years

As telecom companies continue to prioritize GenAl, the next few years should bring demonstrable improvements in customer experiences, operational efficiency gains and new product innovations, positioning these companies to capitalize on their early investments.



Our study reveals the universal awareness within Europe's telecom industry about GenAl's transformative potential. All companies are now actively exploring use cases and launching PoCs. Though telecom leaders are eager to leverage the new capabilities that GenAl offers, they are also increasingly mindful of the significant challenges that hinder successful implementation. The companies still face a major gap between launching PoCs and implementing solutions at scale. Only a minority (25%) of companies have succeeded so far in fully integrating GenAl solutions into their core business functions.

To fully leverage GenAl, companies must adopt a unified strategic approach, invest in infrastructure and skills and remain agile in their approach to developing solutions. Now is the time to reflect on lessons learned, apply best practices, set pragmatic investment priorities and define realistic strategies moving forward. GenAl will rapidly become the standard solution in the key areas of customer service, process optimization and product innovation. Those who invest now will gain valuable experiences that translate to competitive advantages in the years ahead.

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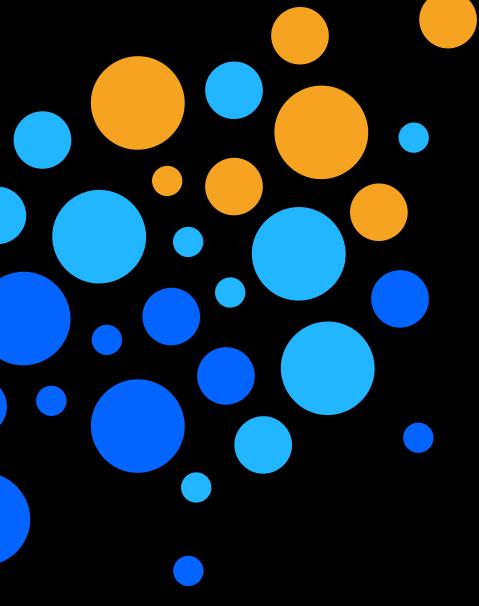
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