

Five Major Shifts Shaping 2026 Manufacturing Tech Priorities

Rootstock survey comparison signals rising workforce pressures, evolving AI focus, and shifting ERP expectations

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-- A comparison of Rootstock

Software's 2024 and [2026 State of Manufacturing Technology Survey](#)

results reveal five significant shifts in how manufacturers are prioritizing technology investment. While digital initiatives continue to advance, the analysis shows new trends in the types of AI being deployed, the workforce barriers organizations face, the outcomes expected from ERP solutions, and the cost and planning pressures influencing tech decisions.



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Ohad Idan, VP of Product at Rootstock Software

"Technology by itself cannot solve today's complex manufacturing challenges," said [Ohad Idan](#), Vice President of Product at [Rootstock Software](#). "One of the recurring issues we see among product-based companies is that they're moving to new technology before clearly defining their desired outcomes. What's needed is alignment with core business processes and well-defined metrics for success. When this foundation is in place, advanced systems can drive measurable and lasting impact."

The five shifts that emerged from this manufacturing tech

survey comparison include:

1. **WORKFORCE PRESSURE INTENSIFIED.** When asked about the biggest barriers to digital transformation, lack of the right talent rose from 25% in 2024 to 33% in 2026 (+8 points). Manufacturers have long faced skilled labor shortages, and the latest results suggest that this is becoming a more pronounced constraint on modernization efforts.

2. **AI INVESTMENT SHIFTED SHARPLY TOWARD SUPPLY CHAIN EXECUTION.** When asked where manufacturers are deploying or planning additional AI investment, supply chain management



and planning surged from 16% in 2024 to 35% in 2026 (+19 points)—the largest application-level increase in the survey. As trade conditions and supply chain disruptions create volatility, AI investment is moving decisively into the operational core of the business to improve visibility and responsiveness.

3. PREDICTIVE AI ADOPTION ACCELERATED. When asked what types of AI are being deployed, predictive AI adoption rose from 36% to 48% (+12 points). Compared to 2024, when generative AI drew significant attention, 2026 data indicates a growing emphasis on tools that support forecasting, demand planning, and forward-looking operational decisions.

4. ERP EXPECTATIONS EXPANDED TO WORKFORCE RETENTION. When asked where cloud ERP is expected to deliver the greatest positive outcomes, employee retention increased from 18% in 2024 to 30% in 2026 (+12 points). At the same time, 45% expect ERP to improve staff productivity, signaling that ERP is increasingly viewed as a workforce stabilization tool—not just an operational platform.

5. TARIFFS AND TRADE POLICY UNCERTAINTY HAVE INCREASED OPERATIONAL COMPLEXITY. When asked how these factors affect operations, manufacturers reported higher raw material costs (39%), planned price increases for customers (37%), and increased difficulty in planning and cost forecasting (29%). Although this question was introduced in 2026, the findings align with the broader rise in predictive AI adoption, as these capabilities will help manufacturers manage cost volatility, improve planning accuracy, and make informed pricing decisions.

While many tech categories show progress and advancement, the comparison also reveals areas for improvement. In the AI maturity comparison, the percentage of manufacturers who consider themselves “far ahead” of their peers remained flat at 5% between 2024 and 2026.

“Overall confidence in AI adoption has risen, but the fact that so few manufacturers consider themselves true AI leaders tells us there is still significant room to unlock value,” said Idan. “The next phase of AI isn’t just about adoption — it’s about driving measurable outcomes and ROI.”

To review the full findings, download the complete report here:

<https://clouderp.rootstock.com/2026-state-of-manufacturing-technology-survey>

METHODOLOGY

The 2026 State of Manufacturing Technology Survey was conducted by Researchscape (<https://researchscape.com/>) and commissioned by Rootstock Software. The study surveyed 520 professionals leading digital transformation initiatives at mid- to large-sized manufacturers across North America, Europe, and Asia.

ABOUT ROOTSTOCK

Rootstock Software (<https://www.rootstock.com/>) provides the leading ERP for product companies (<https://www.rootstock.com/manufacturing-erp-software/>), empowering

manufacturers, wholesalers, and distributors to turbocharge their operations. Natively built on the Salesforce Platform, Rootstock is a modern, future-proof ERP with a fresh user experience. Users appreciate Rootstock's focus on customer success and its AI capabilities that offer a human-first approach. IT teams value Rootstock's platform as it minimizes the need to coordinate complex customizations and third-party integrations. All of these factors have contributed to delighted customers. As Rootstock continues to grow, stay tuned to the company's latest LinkedIn posts

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