

EXECUTIVE RECAP

APPLIED AI SYMPOSIUM

June 10, 2026

Texas A&M University | College Station, Texas

Closing dinner hosted at the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library & Museum

Co-hosted by NAW Institute for Distribution Excellence (National Association of Wholesaler-Distributors), the Texas A&M Industrial Distribution Program / Thomas and Joan Read Center for Distribution Research and Education, and the Applied AI Consortium



Presenting Sponsors

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Prepared for symposium attendees and partner organizations. This recap summarizes the discussion for internal and external sharing.

Leadership Perspectives

“Wholesale distribution has always been an industry that connects manufacturers, customers, communities, and economies. The conversations at the Applied AI Symposium reinforced that AI is not simply changing technology. It is changing leadership, organizational design, workforce development, and competitive strategy. Through partnerships with Texas A&M University, the Applied AI Consortium, and forward-thinking industry leaders, the NAW Institute is helping create the knowledge, networks, and practical guidance needed for distributors to move from experimentation to enterprise adoption. This is exactly the kind of leadership our industry needs as we prepare for the next decade.”

Bart Tessel, Executive Director, NAW Institute for Distribution Excellence

“Reflecting on today’s symposium, one observation continued to surface throughout the day: AI is changing how we work. The organizations that succeed will be those willing to challenge established ways of working and redesign how value is created, decisions are made, and work gets done.”

Konrad Konarski, Trustee & Chairperson, Applied AI Consortium

Overview

The inaugural Applied AI Symposium brought together senior executives, technologists, policy leaders, and academic researchers for an afternoon of applied thinking on artificial intelligence in wholesale distribution and related industries. Held at Texas A&M University and capped with a dinner at the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, the event drew an invitation-only audience spanning distribution, manufacturing, energy, defense, and government.

One conclusion held across every session: AI is no longer a technology conversation. It is a leadership conversation, an organizational design conversation, and increasingly a business strategy imperative.

Key Themes and Takeaways

1. AI as Foundational Infrastructure, Not Another Tool

Dr. Satyam Priyadarshy, retired Chief Data Scientist at Halliburton and Trustee of the Applied AI Consortium, opened the afternoon by reframing how leaders should think about AI: not as a capability layered on top of existing systems, but as the connective tissue between finance, supply chain, customer data, and operations. His core argument was that the organizations winning this transition will not be the ones with the most sophisticated models, but the ones that start with the simplest, most explainable models tied directly to business value.

- Start with the smallest, lowest-risk problem and show a clear dollar value to leadership before scaling.
- The right success metric is not model accuracy. It is return on innovation, an exponential curve for organizations willing to build incrementally.
- Most organizations are data-rich and insight-poor. Building a data catalog is step one, not a later step.
- Agentic AI is the present conversation, not the future one. Organizations still piloting generic AI tools are already behind the framing.

“You have to think business first, technology second. An AI ecosystem is about mimicking human intellect using the relevant data in your business so that you can grow the business. It is not simply a tool. It is a system you build to improve the business, and that is why I call it an operating system.”

— Dr. Satyam Priyadarshy, Trustee, Applied AI Consortium; Retired Chief Data Scientist, Halliburton

2. Policy Is Moving Fast Enough to Matter, But Not Fast Enough to Rely On

Maxx Silvan, NAW’s Manager of Government Relations, moderated a candid conversation with Holten Stringer (Van Scoyoc Associates, former staff director of the Speaker’s Bipartisan AI Task Force) and Tony Sauerhoff (State of Texas Chief Information Officer, Texas Department of Information Resources).

- The Great American AI Act discussion draft, 269 pages covering 25 topic areas, is the clearest signal of where federal AI policy is heading. It preempts state laws on AI model development but is light-touch on usage.

- States are moving faster than the federal government. Texas has already enacted AI ethics requirements for all state agencies and local governments, including vendor contractual obligations.
- The practical guidance for industry: do not wait for federal direction before building AI readiness. Sound governance practices now will track closely to wherever regulation lands.
- Industry has more influence over federal AI policy than it realizes. The White House wants input from business sectors, and NAW is positioned to channel that input directly.

“AI is no longer a technology conversation. It is a leadership conversation. The agencies succeeding are the ones aligning AI with business strategy and integrating it into workforce development and culture.”

— **Tony Sauerhoff**, Executive Director & State of Texas Chief Information Officer, Texas Department of Information Resources

3. Organizational Design Is the Real Transformation Challenge

The afternoon's most practically grounded panel brought together distribution and technology leaders living this challenge day to day.

- The gap between what leaders intend and what teams deliver is collapsing. AI is making execution speed visible and measurable.
- The biggest organizational risk is not the technology. It is cultural resistance, particularly from mid-layer managers who feel their experience is being displaced rather than multiplied.
- Codifying tribal knowledge, embedding agents into the flow of work, and tracking improvement over time are the practical moves that compound into lasting competitive advantage.
- The trait most valued in new hires going forward: learning quotient over IQ or EQ. Curiosity and speed of contextual learning outperform pedigree.

“I think we all feel speed is becoming the dominant frame, more than people fully acknowledge. The gap between a leader expressing intent and a team delivering an outcome is collapsing. You can prototype something yourself now rather than waiting for a designer. So I look for persistence in pursuit of speed more than background.”

— **Amit Shah**, CEO, InstaLILY.ai

4. Data Readiness Is a Journey, Not a Prerequisite

The closing executive dialogue surfaced an important reframe: data will never be perfect, and waiting for it to be ready is not a strategy. Panelists pointed to the Tesla Autopilot analogy: drivers trust it enough to take their hands off the wheel because it is good enough and getting better, not because it is flawless.

- Three foundations for the next five years: human capital and talent development, disciplined technology and model selection, and data governance.
- Semantic layers and data catalogs, not data lakes, are what enable agentic AI to function reliably.
- Security governance is non-negotiable. Early adopters who did not control data boundaries found proprietary information absorbed into public models.

“The relevant question isn't ‘is this provably perfect,’ it's ‘am I comfortable enough to take my hands off the wheel.’ That's effectively the bar. The realistic target is something like a B-plus, not a hundred percent, and AI itself is part of how you get closer to that B-plus.”

— **Elias Brown**, North American Data Manager, Vallourec

“The line between information technology and operational technology, and more broadly between technical and business roles, is collapsing. The reliance on purely technical skills is shrinking relative to the reliance on soft skills like problem solving. It’s not just valuable, it’s increasingly mandatory.”

— **David Wascom**, SAP Industry Executive Advisor, Wholesale Distribution, SAP America

5. The Power of Cross-Industry Networks

Teese Murray, Chief Strategy Officer & President of Turtle and a Board Trustee of the Applied AI Consortium, closed the program with a direct challenge to the room: the companies that win in the age of AI will be those that learn fastest, and learning happens through networks. The triangulation of academia, government, and industry that defined the symposium is not a conference format. It is a model for how the industry needs to operate going forward.

“We’re in an age of discovery that I find enchanting, exciting, and a little scary, all at once. We need each other more than ever. My challenge to every executive here is to carry this conversation forward. This is a voyage into uncharted territory, and we need each other to navigate it.”

— **Teese Murray**, Chief Strategy Officer & President, Turtle; Trustee, Applied AI Consortium

Looking Ahead

This event was the first of what NAW Institute for Distribution Excellence, the Texas A&M Industrial Distribution Program, and the Applied AI Consortium envision as an ongoing convening. The NAW AI Adoption Index, sponsored by Infor and targeting a September 2026 publication, will provide the field’s most rigorous benchmarking data on where wholesale distribution organizations currently stand on AI adoption, and where they are heading next.

For more opportunities like this, including the upcoming Innovators Summit and the Executive Roundtables, please check out the [NAW Events page](#).

For information about joining NAW, please [click here to learn more](#).

Program Agenda

Time	Session
11:30 AM	Registration Opens 11th Floor, Rudder Tower, University Club
12:00 PM	Lunch
1:00 – 1:15	Welcome & Opening Remarks Dr. Malini Natarajarathinam, Texas A&M University Konrad Konarski, Applied AI Consortium
1:15 – 1:40	Fireside Chat: The Next Operating System for Industry Dr. Satyam Priyadarshy, Applied AI Consortium Bart Tessel, NAW
1:40 – 2:15	Leadership Conversation: From AI Policy to Enterprise Readiness Maxx Silvan, NAW Tony Sauerhoff, Texas DIR Holten Stringer, Van Scoyoc Associates
2:15 – 2:30	Executive Networking Break
2:30 – 3:15	Leadership Conversation: Designing Organizations for an AI-Augmented Workforce Nick Pericle, Tenexity.ai Patrick Garcia, SRS Distribution Amit Shah, InstaLily.ai Ron Dowdell, Pilko Adam Berg, TechnipFMC
3:15 – 4:15	Executive Roundtable: Architecting the Enterprise for Applied AI 5th Floor — cross-industry breakout discussions
4:15 – 5:00	Executive Dialogue: What the Next Five Years Will Require Konrad Konarski, Applied AI Consortium David Wascom, SAP America Sam Hamilton, Applied AI Consortium Elias Brown, Vallourec
5:00 – 5:10	Closing Remarks & Final Reflections Teesee Murray, Turtle Bart Tessel, NAW
5:30 – 8:00 PM	Exclusive Cocktail Reception & Dinner George H.W. Bush Presidential Library & Museum (bus departs Rudder Tower at 5:45 PM CT)

Speakers and Moderators

Name	Title	Organization
Adam Berg	Manager of Learning Solutions	TechnipFMC
Elias Brown	North American Data Manager	Vallourec
Ron Dowdell	Managing Director	Pilko
Patrick Garcia	Chief Digital, AI & Innovation Officer	SRS Distribution
Sam Hamilton	Trustee, Applied AI Consortium; Retired SVP	Visa
Konrad Konarski	Trustee & Chairperson	Applied AI Consortium
Teesee Murray	Chief Strategy Officer & President	Turtle
Dr. Malini Natarajarathinam	Leonard & Valerie Bruce Leadership Chair & Professor	Texas A&M University

Name	Title	Organization
Nick Pericle	Founder & CEO	Tenexity.ai
Dr. Satyam Priyadarshy	Trustee, Applied AI Consortium; Retired Chief Data Scientist	Halliburton
Tony Sauerhoff	Executive Director & State of Texas Chief Information Officer	Texas Department of Information Resources
Amit Shah	CEO	InstaLILY.ai
Maxx Silvan	Manager of Government Relations	NAW
Holten Stringer	Associate Vice President & AI Policy Advisor	Van Scoyoc Associates
Bart Tessel	Chief Innovation Officer	NAW
David Wascom	SAP Industry Executive Advisor, Wholesale Distribution	SAP America

Questions or follow-up: prausch@naw.org

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