Beyond the Technology: Who Really Captures

AI'S GAINS AT WORK

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INTRODUCTION

Background

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become a familiar part of daily work for most employees and a familiar strategic concern for most leaders. Today, it's no longer a question of whether AI will be part of the workforce; instead, the pressing question is how to turn widespread access into real productivity gains that reach every role, working style and age group in our multigenerational workplaces.

The key to unlocking AI's potential isn't just about introducing new technology. It depends on cultivating new work habits and behaviors. With three years of evidence at our disposal, we can now pinpoint which conditions foster these habits and drive meaningful results, and which ones only seem to make a difference on the surface.

Launched in January 2024, the *GENERATIONS HUB* at The Inclusion Initiative (TII) at the London School of Economics (LSE) partnered with Protiviti to explore the real drivers of AI productivity. Our previous reports revealed that embracing intergenerational diversity and inclusion helps unlock productivity for all employees. Last year's findings, presented in *Bridging the Generational AI Gap*, demonstrated that once employees start using AI, productivity benefits are similar across generations. The real differences lie in access and training opportunities, which differ across generations.

Building on these insights, this third annual report goes further. We investigate which forms of training make the greatest difference, which workplace conditions drive measurable productivity gains from AI adoption, how employees are responding to AI emotionally and socially, and which personal qualities help people get the most from it. Our aim is to give leaders practical guidance on the conditions to create, the risks to watch for and the people to invest in, so that organizations and the workforce they depend on can grow together as AI reshapes the way we work.

Around 72% of saved time from using AI goes back into work. Yet leaders might currently be leaving the decision about where that time goes largely to each individual employee.

"AI may be changing how work gets done. But what drives success remains unchanged. The employees who thrive will not necessarily be those who move first to adopt new AI technologies. Rather, the most successful employees will be those who keep learning, adapting and growing alongside the technology, regardless of their generation. Leaders therefore need to resist making AI a technology-only story. AI is a people story. Leaders must challenge assumptions about who is best placed to succeed with AI and create opportunities across generations to build new capabilities, and show teams where the efficiencies from AI use are best reinvested."



Dr. Grace Lordan
Founding Director of The Inclusion Initiative

"AI is creating meaningful productivity gains, but the bigger opportunity is how organizations use the capacity it creates. Simply absorbing those gains into existing workloads leaves much of AI's potential untapped. Leaders should think deliberately about where that capacity can create the most value, whether that means tackling higher-value work, improving quality, or giving employees greater space to solve problems and innovate. The goal shouldn't just be doing more work faster, but using AI to change what people are able to accomplish."



Matt Duncan
Managing Director
People & Change, Protiviti

"Deploying AI tools is relatively straightforward. The harder work comes with preparing and training people and, more importantly, redesigning how work actually gets done, because that is where AI transformation either gains momentum or stalls. The organizations that get the people side right will be much better positioned to translate their AI investments into sustainable value."



Fran Maxwell
Managing Director
Global Leader, People & Change, Protiviti

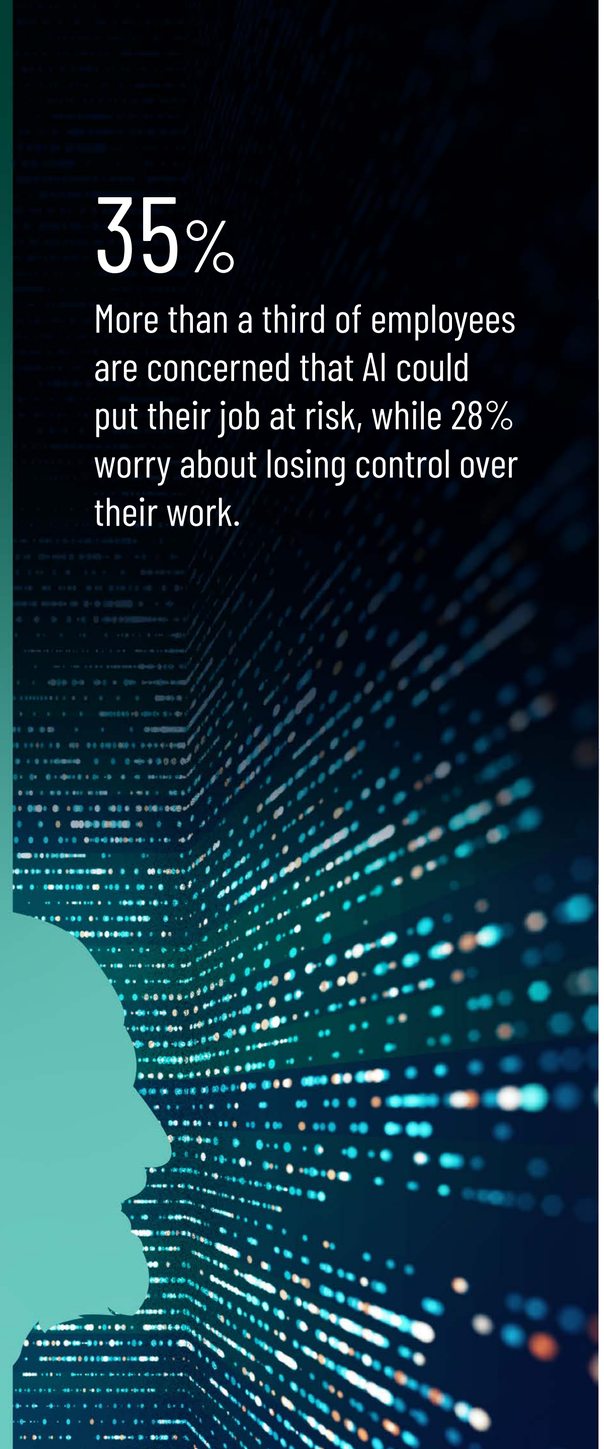
All readers of this report are invited to become involved with future *GENERATIONS HUB* research.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Three years of this research shows a consistent conclusion from different angles: As workplaces become increasingly multigenerational, the challenge for organizations is less about age and more about how they support employees and manage teams through change. The biggest change over the past three years is not how many employees use AI, but how AI is changing the experience of work itself.

When generative AI first entered workplaces, employees worried that using AI might affect how others perceived them. That concern remains. But employees are now far more likely to worry that not using AI could make them appear slow, outdated or less capable than their colleagues. The finding suggests that the AI transition is no longer solely a technological challenge. As AI becomes embedded in everyday work, it is reshaping workplace norms, expectations, and employees' sense of what it takes to keep pace with advancements in the technology and enterprise-wide adoption. The challenge for organizations is therefore not only to realize the productivity benefits of AI, but also to manage the cultural transition without creating unnecessary pressure or division.



Report highlights include:

AI is changing workplace culture as much as workplace technology.

- When generative AI first entered workplaces, employees worried that using AI might negatively affect how others perceived them. Those concerns remain, but employees are now much more likely to worry about not using AI enough. Nearly half of employees (48%) express concern about being judged for not keeping up with AI, compared with one in five (20%) who worry about being judged for using it.
- Providing AI changes more than access to technology. Where in-house AI tools are available, employees are more likely to discuss AI openly, but also more likely to feel that people are judged based on how much they use AI.
- Whether employees feel judged on their AI use is the largest AI-related factor associated with lower psychological safety and higher AI anxiety.
- AI anxiety remains substantial. More than a third of employees (35%) are concerned that AI could put their job at risk, while 28% worry about losing control over their work.
- Beliefs about which generations have an advantage with AI also differ across age groups. Gen Z employees are the most likely to believe younger workers have an AI advantage, and also are the most anxious about what AI may mean for their future careers.

Adoption has leveled off, but not evenly.

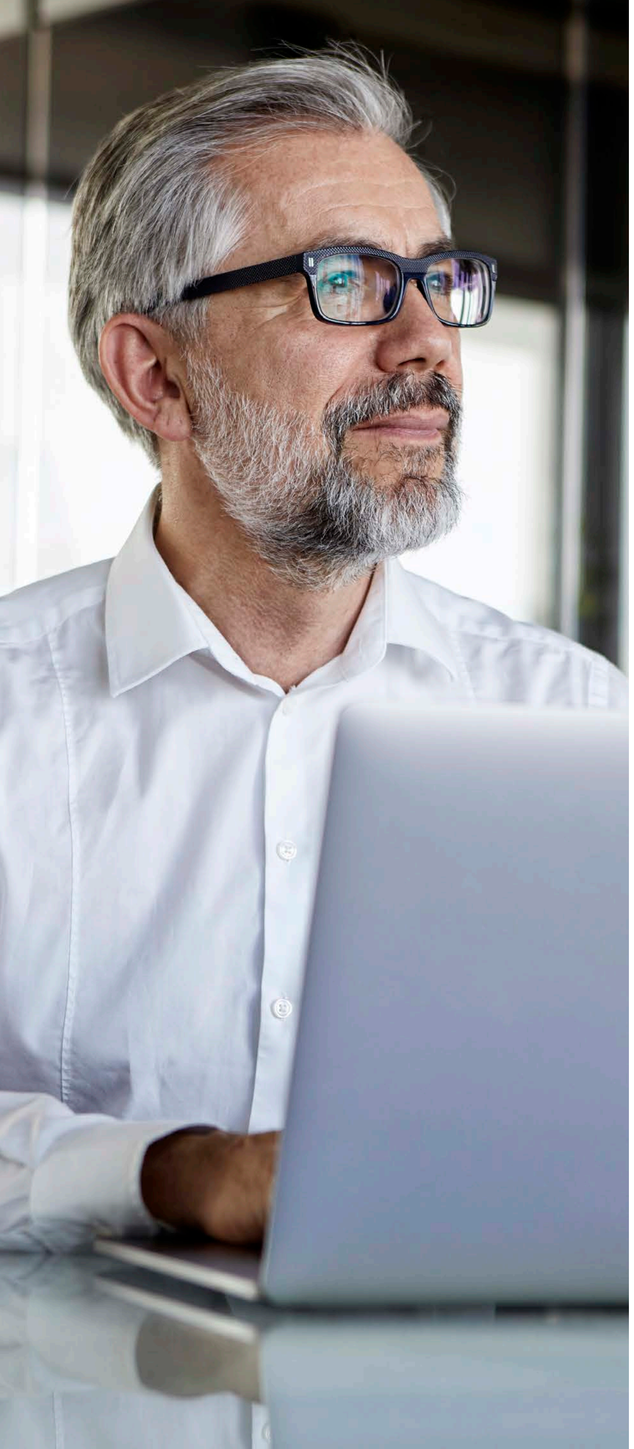
- AI adoption rose from 29% of employees in Year 1 to 70% in Year 2 and stands at 74% in Year 3. Among employees tracked across both recent waves, 69% were using AI in 2025 and 82% of the same people were doing so in 2026.
- AI-trained employees adopt AI at 93%, compared with 50% of untrained employees.
- Where employers provide in-house AI, adoption reaches 96% among trained employees and 78% among untrained employees. Either provision or training will bring most employees to AI on their own.

Training reaches younger employees far more than older ones.

- Just over half of employees, 56%, received AI training in the past year. Provision has risen sharply, from 31% in Year 1, while demand has held steady at around 60%. The gap between demand and provision has therefore narrowed considerably. Yet more than a quarter of employees who said they wanted training a year earlier had still not received it a year on.
- Access remains uneven. 66% of Gen Z employees received training of some kind, compared to 40% of Baby Boomers. For company-provided training the gap is wider still, at 37% against 19%.
- Quality of training matters as much as provision. Among employees who found their training beneficial, 92% feel confident using AI. Among those trained who did not find the training beneficial, 74% feel confident using AI, barely above the 66% who had no training at all.

Employees report real productivity gains from AI.

- Speed is the most commonly reported benefit, with 82% agreeing AI helps them finish tasks more quickly. Reduced mental effort follows at 70%, then automating manual tasks at 63% and better-quality work at 62%.
- AI users save 19% of their working week on average, though the median employee saves 13% and a minority account for much of the total.
- Time is only part of the equation. Better quality work and lighter mental effort do not show up as hours saved, so measures based on time alone understate what employees report gaining.



But the gains are uneven, and what happens to them is undirected.

- Only 39% of AI users have built AI into a standardized way of working. Those who have report saving 27% of time in their work week with AI, compared to just 14% for those who have not.
- Providing AI tools shows no association with time saved once other factors are accounted for, while training offers only a modest level of time savings. Using AI more does not equate to saving more time.
- Around 72% of saved time goes back into work. Almost nothing organizations currently do to drive AI adoption and productivity is associated with how that time is reinvested, suggesting that these decisions may largely be left to individual employees.

Performance still depends on people, not prompts.

- There is no consistent association between AI adoption, training, in-house access and workflow integration and how employees believe their performance is rated.
- The profile of a high-performing employee has changed less than many might expect. The strongest performers are conscientious, resilient, confident in handling problems, and willing to keep learning. These are not new qualities, but they remain the ones employers should be developing and supporting.

Our research reveals that the race to adopt AI is over, but the race to benefit from it has barely begun.

- The future of work remains a human-centered challenge as much as a technological one.
- AI enables the average user to reclaim nearly a full working day each week, almost three-quarters of which flows straight back into work. And the people thriving are not the heaviest AI users but instead are conscientious, resilient employees in workplaces where it feels safe to say what they do not know.

Speed is the most commonly reported benefit of AI use, with 82% of respondents agreeing that AI helps them finish tasks more quickly.

Approach

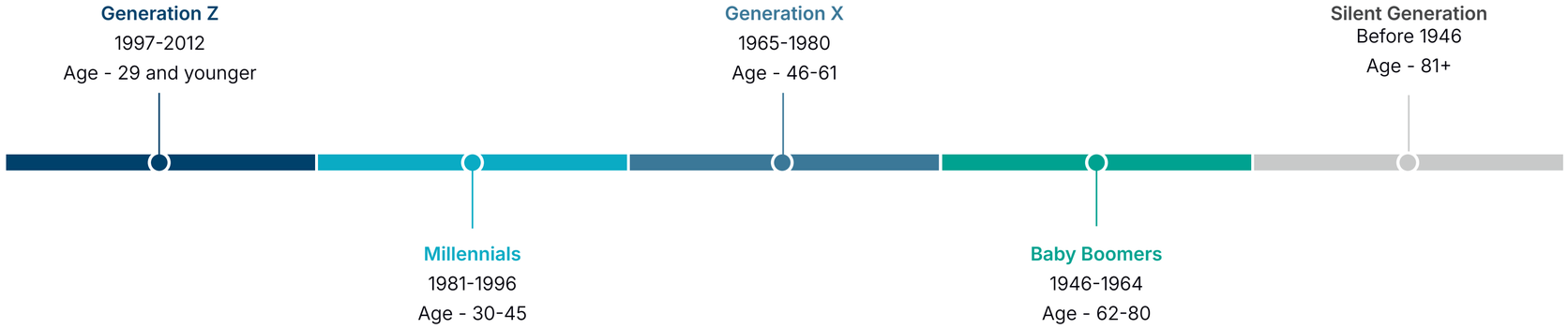
The Inclusion Initiative (TII) at LSE, in partnership with Protiviti, surveyed 3,001 professional employees globally in the third year of the GENERATIONS program. Across three annual waves, the program has now collected around 9,450 responses.[1] In addition to findings based on the 2026 Survey Sample, we also draw on data collected across multiple survey years to examine how AI adoption, training, attitudes and workplace experiences have changed over time. The three-year trend sample combines responses from all three survey years (2024-2026), while the longitudinal sample consists of more than 700 employees who participated in multiple surveys and could be matched across years. Findings based on the three-year trend sample or longitudinal sample are reported explicitly throughout the report.[2]

Generations defined: Generation Z are those born between 1997 and 2012, Millennials are those born between 1981 and 1996, Generation X are those born between 1965 and 1980, and Baby Boomers are those born between 1946 and 1964. Those born before 1946 are known as the Silent Generation.[3]

Because only one employee in our sample belongs to the Silent Generation, we report Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation as a single group.

Measures: We measured productivity in three ways: the share of weekly working hours employees save through AI use, how much of that time is reinvested into work rather than personal life, and how employees believe their manager rates their performance. We also measured the workplace conditions surrounding AI use, as well as personal attributes frequently linked to AI adoption and work productivity, from personality traits to cognitive ability. Full details of each measure are in Appendix B.

Throughout this report, we use regression analysis to examine how generation and other factors relate to AI adoption and use, the time employees save through AI, how they reinvest that time, and their perceived job performance, while controlling for relevant employee and organizational characteristics. We also examine how workplace conditions, psychosocial experiences and personal attributes each relate to these outcomes.[4]

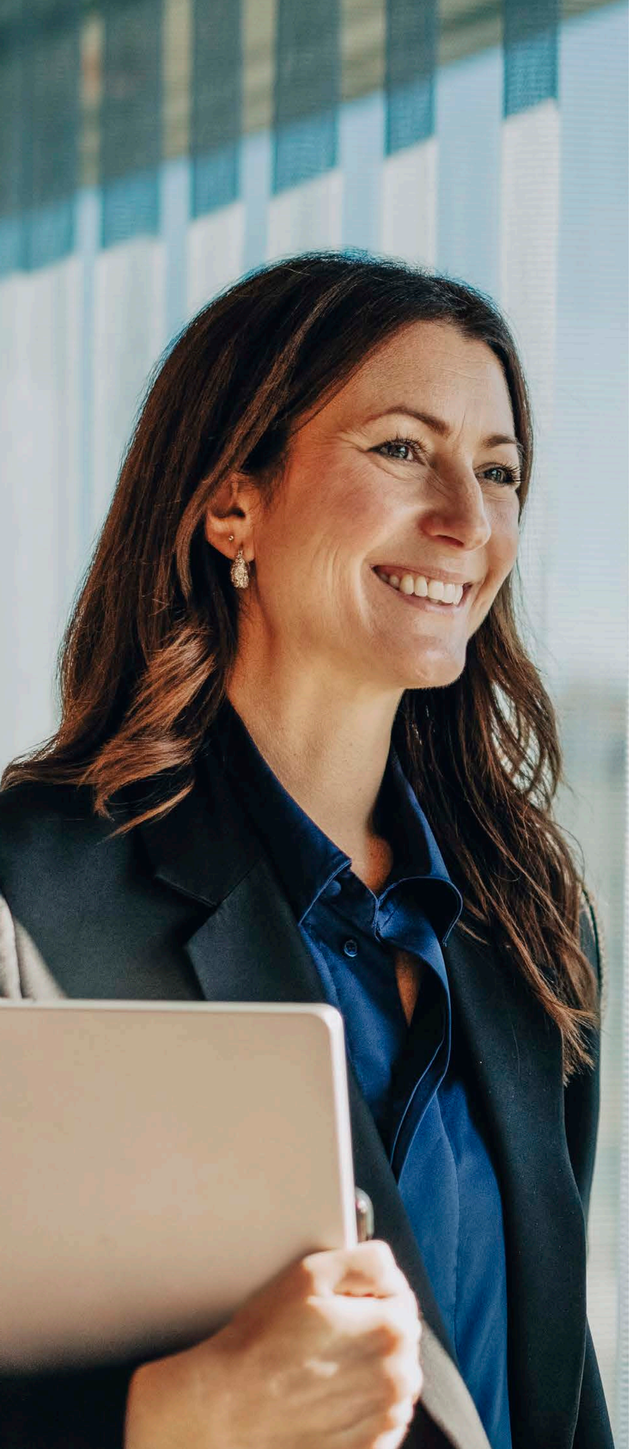


[1] Across the three years, 9,446 responses were collected in total. In Years 1 and 2, employees and executives were surveyed separately. The employee samples across the three years comprise 8,746 responses.

[2] This model uses data from a single timepoint, so we cannot conclude that these relationships are causal. For example, organizations that have rolled out AI tools internally are also more likely to provide training, so both may reflect how far an employer has invested in AI rather than the effect of training itself. See Appendix C for full results.

[3] There is no official taxonomy of generation start and end dates; however, these dates have shaped popular understanding and originate with the Pew Research Center, a US think tank. See more at [www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/]. Pew has since set out how it will use these labels in future research, cautioning against overstating differences between age groups [www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/05/22/how-pew-research-center-will-report-on-generations-moving-forward/]. We have argued that generational labels remain useful when used responsibly [cmr.berkeley.edu/2023/08/generational-divides-the-dos-and-donts-of-generational-labels/]. We therefore estimated main models twice: once treating age as a continuous variable and once using the generation groups.

[4] We estimated a series of models examining workplace conditions, psychosocial responses and personal attributes separately and jointly, followed by selected interaction tests to examine whether relationships differed across employees.



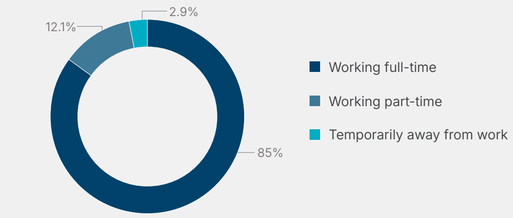
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Number of participants and employees using AI in their job (%)
3,001 employees | 73.8% AI users at work

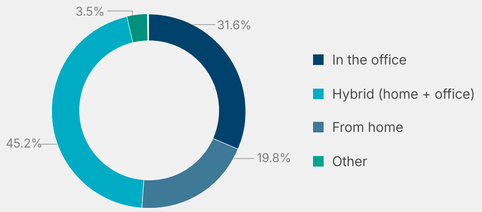
Longitudinal sample size[5]
Participants since Year 1 - 341 workers
Participants since Year 2 - 717 workers

Countries (%)[6]
Germany 36.5%, UK 29.6%, US 18.6%, Italy 5.3%, Australia 3.6%, Bulgaria 3.1%, France 1.8%, Others (< 50) 1.5%

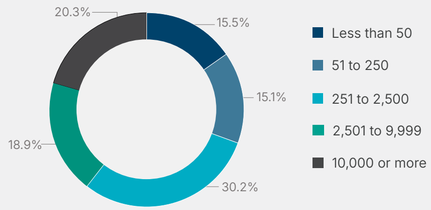
Employment Status



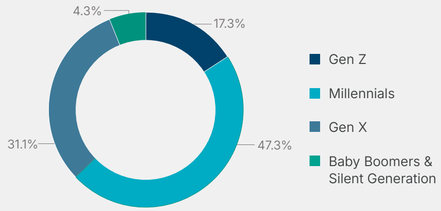
Work location (%)



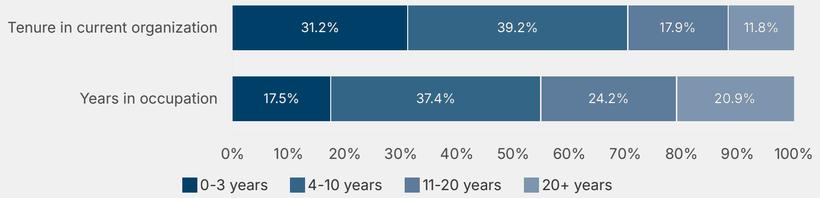
Firm Size



Generation split[7]



Organization tenure and years in occupation



Manager or non-manager (%)
Manager: 54.6%, Non-manager: 45.4%

[5] See Appendix A for how the longitudinal samples were matched and how they differ from the full sample. The overall Longitudinal Sample comprises 717 respondents observed across two years and 341 across all three years. The corresponding employee samples comprise 673 and 310 respondents, respectively. Baby Boomer results should be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size. See Appendix A for details on sample matching.

[6] The displayed information is the country of residence. Among these, 92.4% reported that their nationality matched their country of residence.

[7] We collected one response from employees belonging to the Silent Generation (aged 81+). Due to the small number of responses, they were combined with the Baby Boomer group.



SECTION 1

WHAT DOES WORKPLACE AI ADOPTION LOOK LIKE TODAY?

Over the past three years, AI has moved from a new and exploratory workplace tool to a routine part of everyday work. Between 2024 and 2025, we found that AI adoption among surveyed employees increased sharply, rising from 29% of employees in Year 1 (2024) to 70% in Year 2 (2025). In Year 3 (2026), adoption remains high at 74%, suggesting that many organizations have moved past initial AI adoption into a more mature, steady stage of AI use (Figure 1).

1.1 AI use is no longer a new workplace behavior across generations.

Three years ago, the challenge for leaders was to encourage employees to experiment with AI tools and understand their potential value. Today, AI has become a common feature of professional work. While younger employees continue to report higher rates of AI use than older employees, adoption has increased across every generation (Figure 2). Among employees surveyed in both Year 2 and Year 3, 69% were using AI in 2025, rising to 82% in 2026. AI adoption has increased among employees of every generation, with Baby Boomers and Gen Z seeing the largest increases, both rising by 15 percentage points. Younger employees continue to report higher adoption than older employees, but as in last year's report, these generational differences are negligible compared to company-specific factors, such as whether an employee has received AI training.

74%

of employees now use AI at work, up from 29% two years ago. Younger workers still adopt more, though age itself explains little of the gap.

Figure 1: Share of employees using AI at work, Year 1 (2024, 2,961 responses) vs Year 2 (2025, 2,784 responses) vs Year 3 (2026, 3,001 responses).

All survey respondents.

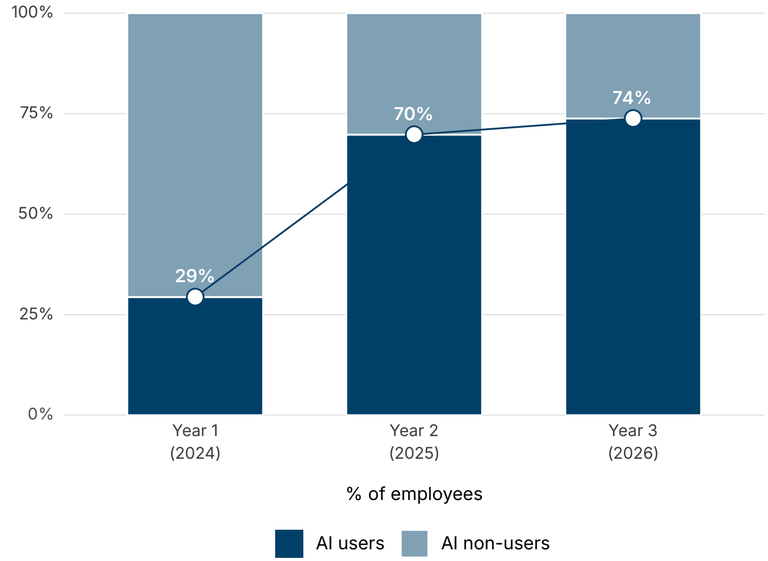
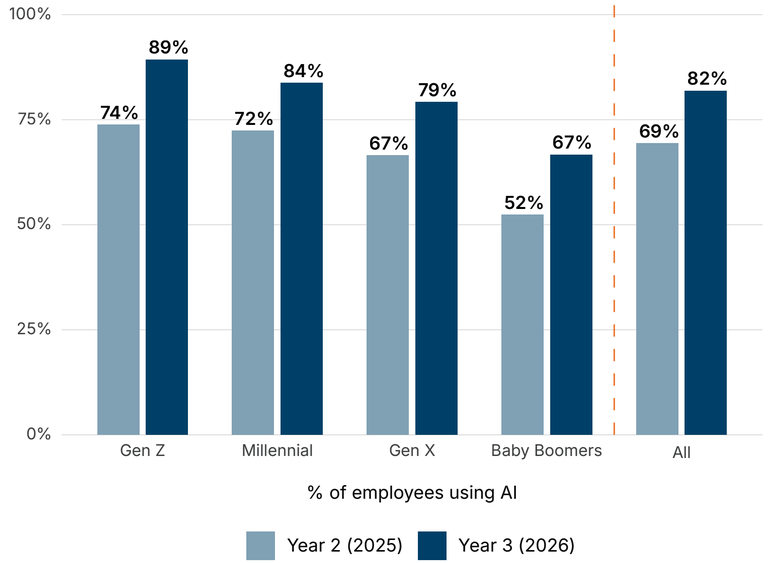


Figure 2: Share of employees using AI at work, by generation, Year 2 (2025) vs Year 3 (2026).

Change in employee responses for those who participated in both years (673 responses).



Highlights

- Employees who use AI report saving 19% of their working hours on average, close to the 20% reported last year, with no significant differences between generations.
- Understanding where AI-driven time savings are reinvested matters as much, if not more, than the size of the savings.

- With employees working faster, taking on wider responsibilities and extending their working day as a result of AI use, there is an increased risk of workload creep and employee fatigue.
- The challenge for leaders is to ensure the time savings from productive AI use is reinvested in ways that balance the needs of employees for more interesting and fulfilling work and greater work-life balance with organizational pressures to simply deliver more work.



Beyond adoption, we examined how extensively workers are using AI in their day-to-day work. On average, AI users report completing 29% of their daily work tasks with AI, broadly consistent with the 31% reported last year (Figure 3). While younger generations seem to be applying AI to a greater proportion of their day-to-day work (Figure 4), again, when accounting for other variables considering company-specific factors, employee generation is not associated with differences in AI use intensity. Employees differ substantially in how much of their day-to-day work they complete with AI, and the proportion of tasks for which an employee uses AI is not necessarily a reliable indicator of their productivity. The complexity and impact of each task in each role can vary significantly.

Figure 3: Distribution of AI use intensity among AI users, Year 2 (2025, 1,943 responses) vs Year 3 (2026, 2,215 responses).

All survey respondents using AI at work.

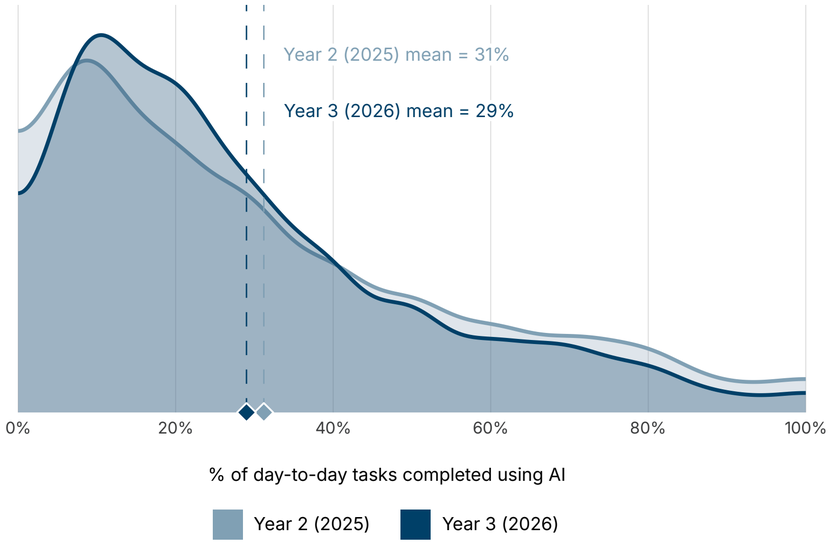
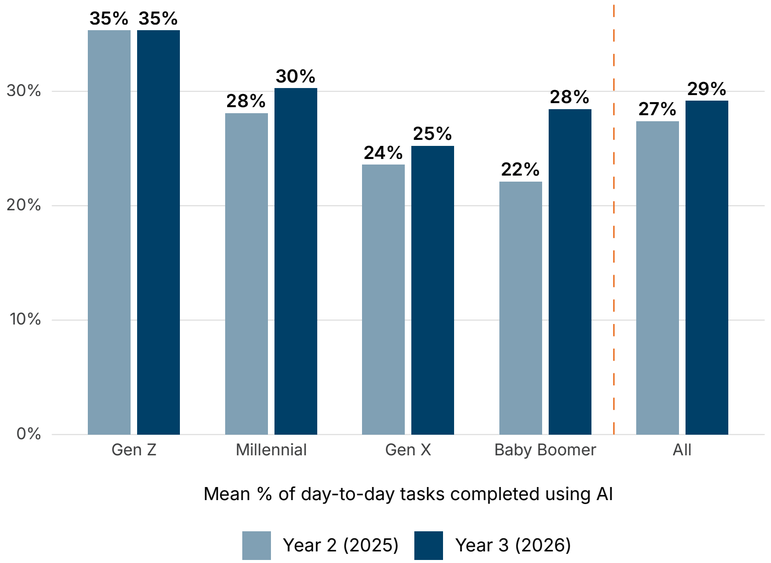


Figure 4: Mean AI use intensity among AI users, by generation, Year 2 (2025) vs Year 3 (2026).

Change in employee responses for those using AI in both years (439 responses).





1.2 AI use is becoming the norm across the workforce for all generations, but participation in AI initiatives remains uneven.

While AI use is becoming increasingly common across the workforce, contribution to AI initiatives remains more uneven. In our Year 2 (2025) report, we found that 38% of the employees surveyed reported working on AI initiatives[8], with younger generations significantly more likely to be involved.

This year's survey shows a similar picture. Overall participation is largely unchanged, at 35% of employees, and younger employees remain more likely than their older colleagues to be working on AI initiatives (Figure 5). While AI adoption has become widespread, the opportunity to work directly on AI initiatives remains concentrated among particular groups. Furthermore, looking at the same employees across Years 2 and 3 (Figure 6) suggests that participation in AI-related roles increased among Gen Z employees over time, while participation among Millennials showed relatively little change, and participation declined among Gen X and, more substantially, Baby Boomer employees.

The reasons for these shifts are not clear from our data. Organizations may be directing AI opportunities towards employees earlier in their careers, or younger employees may be more likely to seek them out. Another possibility is that as AI initiatives mature and adoption spreads, operational responsibility is delegated further down the organization, which in many firms means towards younger employees.

Regardless, the pattern raises an important question about AI use across the generations. As AI becomes embedded in products, services and workflows, who is gaining the hands-on experience associated with building, implementing and shaping these technologies? In last year's report, we found that generationally diverse AI teams were associated with higher levels of reported productivity.[9] If opportunities to participate in AI initiatives become increasingly concentrated among younger employees, organizations may risk narrowing the range of perspectives and experience involved in AI development and implementation. For leaders, this highlights the importance of monitoring not only who uses AI, but also who has the opportunity to shape the AI initiatives within the business.

AI use

Employees were classified as AI users if they reported using AI technologies in their job role, including generative AI tools such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini or similar systems.

AI use intensity

AI use intensity measures the proportion of an employee's day-to-day work tasks completed using AI technologies. Employees estimated this as a percentage of their overall work activities.

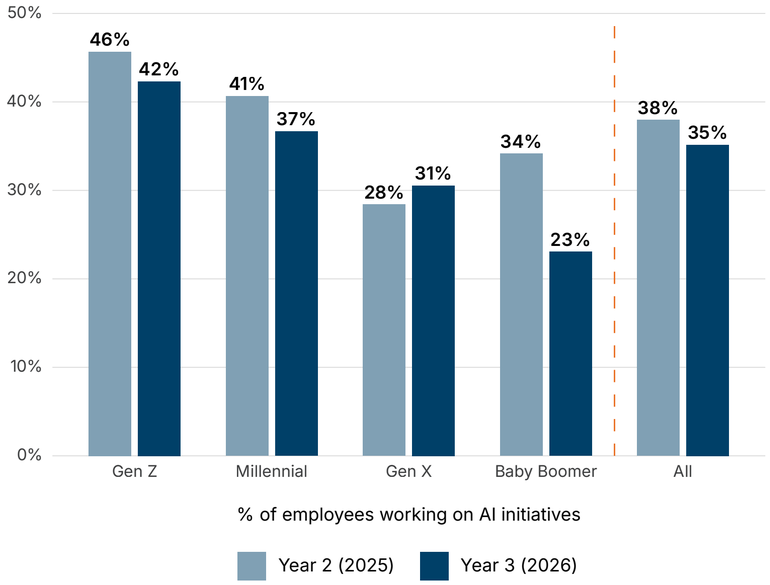
[8] Employees were asked to respond either yes or no to the question, *"Are you involved in the building, creation, sales, training or promotion of AI technologies, including generative AI, in your job role? This could be for application within the organization or as a supplier of AI products or services to other organizations."*

[9] Last year, employees were asked, *"How productive do you consider these team(s) that you work with on the building, creation, sales, training or promotion of AI technologies?"*

AI saves the average user close to a working day each week. But time is only one of the benefits, with employees also reporting that AI helps them produce higher-quality work and reduces cognitive effort.

Figure 5: Share of employees working on AI initiatives, by generation, Year 2 (2025, 2,784 responses) vs Year 3 (2026, 3,001 responses).

All survey respondents.

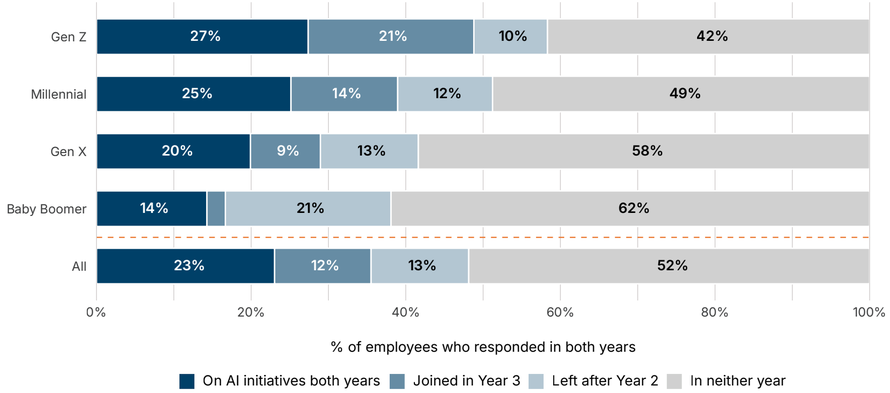


AI hours saved (%)

A measure of the proportion of an employee's typical working week that they report saving through AI use. It is calculated from employees' reported weekly working hours and the number of hours they believe AI saves them each week.

Figure 6: Share of employees working on AI initiatives, by generation, Year 2 (2025) vs Year 3 (2026).

Change in employee responses for those who participated in both years (673 responses).



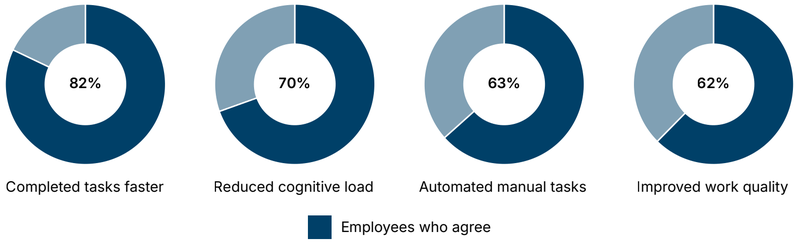
1.3 What productivity benefits is AI adoption associated with?

One of the challenges for leaders is understanding the relationship between AI use among employees and the tangible benefits it delivers to productivity. Asked about the benefits of using AI, employees pointed most often to speed: 82% agreed that AI helps them complete tasks more quickly (Figure 7). Reducing cognitive effort was the second most common benefit (70%), followed by automating manual tasks (63%) and improving the quality of work (62%). Employees appear to experience AI primarily as a tool that helps them work more efficiently and reduces some of the cognitive effort required to complete tasks.

How much time does this save? Employees who use AI report saving 19% of their working hours on average, close to the 20% reported last year (Figure 8), with no significant differences between generations.



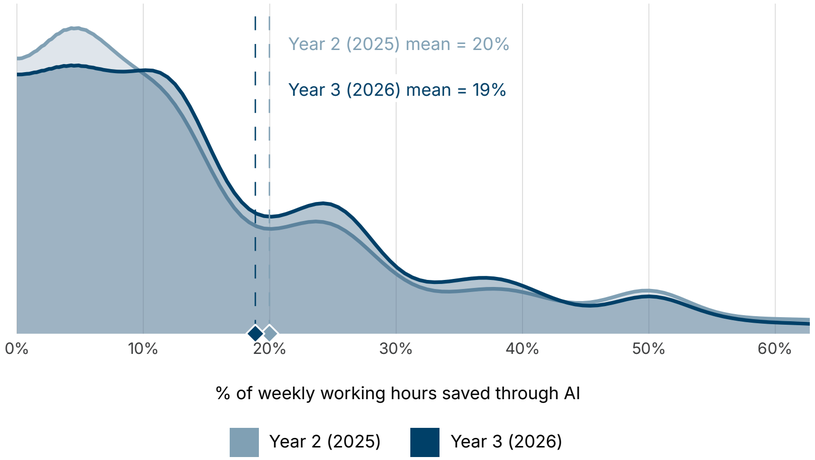
Figure 7: Reported benefits of AI use.[10]



The average, however, is pulled up by a minority of heavy beneficiaries (Figure 9). The median employee saves 13% of time during their work week, and the distribution has a long tail of employees reporting much larger savings.

On average, it does pay off, and employees who use AI for a larger share of their daily tasks tend to report saving more of their working time (Figure 10). But the relationship is loose. At any given level of AI use, some employees report saving a substantial share of their time each week, while others report saving almost none. Using AI more does not reliably save more time, though it may still improve how work is done. Faster completion is only one of the benefits employees report, and better-quality outputs or lighter cognitive effort will not always translate into hours saved. Some of the benefits may instead be experienced as reduced pressure, lower mental burden or greater flexibility in how employees manage their work.

Figure 8: Distribution of weekly working hours saved through AI, Year 2 (2025, 1,922 responses) vs Year 3 (2026, 2,194 responses). All survey respondents.[11]



[10] Respondents selecting agree or strongly agree. The lighter portion of each ring is the remainder, which includes neutral responses as well as disagreement.

[11] Among employees whose usual weekly working hours are between 10 and 80 hours. Distribution plot x-axis capped at 60%.

82%

of employees report completing tasks faster as a benefit of using AI.

AI is often discussed as a way of taking work off employees' hands, but it can also add to it.[12] Using AI productively takes skill, and writing a good prompt, judging whether an output is fit for purpose, and checking work that looks plausible but is wrong all require time and effort. For employees who are less practiced, the effort of obtaining quality results from an AI tool can outweigh what the tool saves them. This may be part of why heavier use does not translate into savings as neatly as expected.

Figure 9: Mean share of weekly working hours saved through AI, by generation, Year 2 (2025) vs Year 3 (2026).

Change in employee responses for those with valid hours in both years (435 responses).

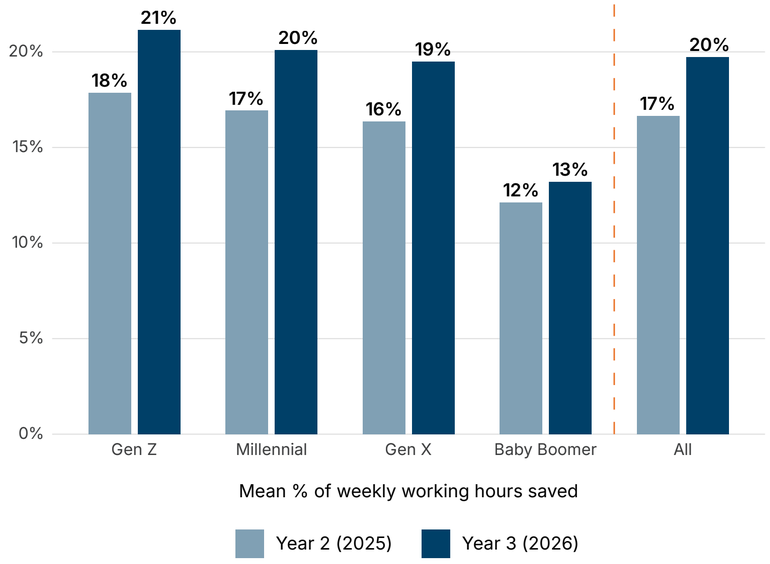
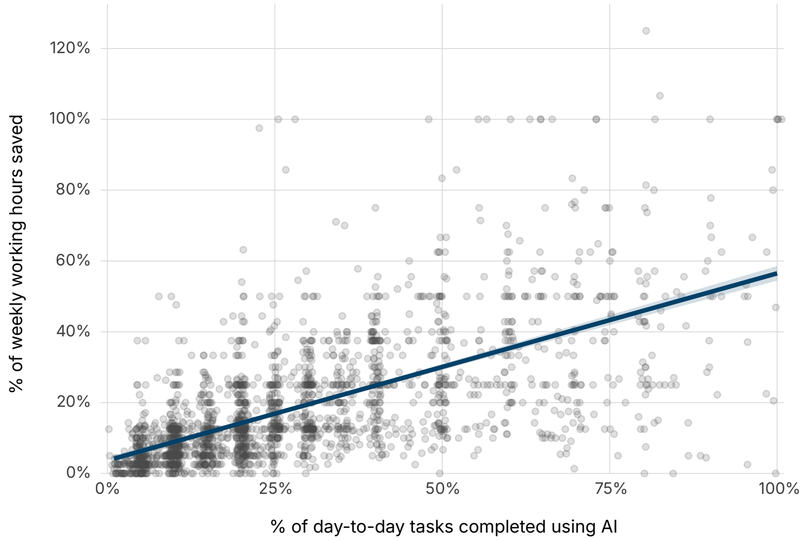


Figure 10: AI use intensity and weekly working hours saved through AI. All survey respondents.[13]



[12] Chirayath, G., Premamalini, K., & Joseph, J. (2025). Cognitive offloading or cognitive overload? How AI alters the mental architecture of coping. Frontiers in Psychology, 16, 1699320. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1699320

[13] Using AI at work with usual weekly hours between 10 and 80 (2,194 responses).



1.4 What employees do with AI-saved time.

Saving time is only part of the productivity story. An equally important question for leaders is what employees do with the time AI frees up.[14] On average, AI users report putting 72% of their saved time back into work, with the remaining 28% going to personal time.[15]

That balance shifts with the size of the savings (Figure 11). Among employees saving four hours a week or less, one-third report reinvesting all this time into work. Among those saving more than 10 hours, only 9% reinvest all the time back into work, with more than one-third splitting their time roughly evenly between work and personal life. This may reflect the size of the savings to be reallocated: Saving two hours leaves little room to reinvest in valuable new initiatives, while saving 12 hours gives more scope for projects or tasks.

For leaders, understanding where AI-driven time savings are reinvested matters as much, if not more, than the size of the savings. Importantly, employees report that higher-value work is the most common use of hours saved from AI, with around two-thirds of employees reporting that AI lets them spend at least moderately more time on activities that create greater value for the company (Figure 12). Around half report taking on new responsibilities or projects, and a similar proportion report improvements to their work-life balance.

Employees are not, then, simply using AI to finish work earlier and disengage. Most direct a substantial share of the time they save from AI back into work, often into higher-value activities or additional responsibilities, while also carving out some time for their own work-life balance.

This raises a question for leaders. If most of the time saved by employees from AI use is returned to work, then the gains accrue for the company. However, rather than accept this as the new norm, leaders must be wary of this tipping into intensification. With employees working faster, taking on wider responsibilities and extending their working day as a result of AI use, there is an increased risk of workload creep and employee fatigue.[16] The challenge for leaders is to ensure the time savings from productive AI use are reinvested in ways that balance the needs of employees for more interesting and fulfilling work and greater work-life balance with organizational pressures to simply deliver more work.

Figure 11: Allocation of AI-saved time between work and personal life, by amount of time saved.[17]

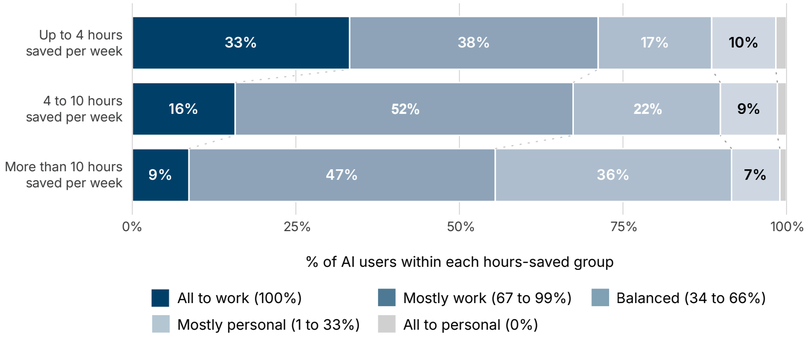
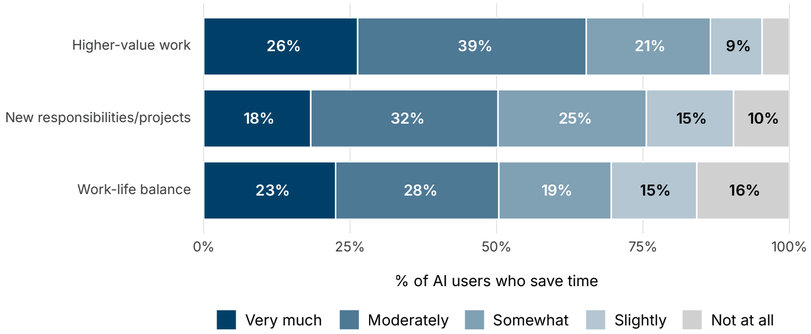


Figure 12: How employees reinvest AI-saved time.



[14] Nishimura, H., Jolles, D., Lordan, G., & Canavan, F. (2026). Why AI Training Is Driving Adoption but Not Sustainable Productivity. California Management Review. cmr.berkeley.edu/2026/10/why-ai-training-is-driving-adoption-but-not-sustainable-productivity/.

[15] Thinking about that saved time, what share do you typically spend on additional work tasks versus personal time (e.g., breaks or finishing work earlier)? (Must total 100%.)

[16] Ranganathan, A., & Ye, X. M. (2026). AI Doesn't Reduce Work—It Intensifies It. Harvard Business Review. https://hbr.org/2026/02/ai-doesnt-reduce-work-it-intensifies-it.

[17] Groups are equal sized thirds of reported hours saved. The ranges shown are the observed minimum and maximum within each third.



SECTION 2

WHAT DOES WORKPLACE AI TRAINING LOOK LIKE TODAY?

2.1 Access to training remains uneven.

Our Year 2 (2025) report, *Bridging the Generational AI Gap*, found that company training was important to AI adoption and productivity. Employees who had received AI training were far more likely to use AI than those who had not (93% compared with 57%). This year, we examined who is receiving AI training, whether access is reaching different parts of the workforce and the extent to which the supply of training is keeping pace with employee demand.

Just over half of employees, 56%, reported some form of AI training in the past 12 months. Around 30% received training provided by their company, and around half of these employees also invested in self-guided learning on top of company training. A further 25% relied on self-guided training alone. The remaining 44% received no AI training at all (Figure 13).[18]

We found that access to AI training remains unevenly distributed across generations. Younger employees are considerably more likely to have received training, with 66% of Gen Z employees reporting AI training in the past 12 months compared with 40% of Baby Boomers. The gap is widest for company-provided training, which reaches 37% of Gen Z employees but only 19% of Baby Boomers (Figure 14). Older employees are therefore both less likely to receive AI training and, when they do, more likely to have arranged it themselves. This pattern is unlikely to be explained by seniority alone. Training participation declines steadily across successive generations, suggesting that differences in access could reflect a broader combination of training opportunities, job requirements and perceptions of training need.

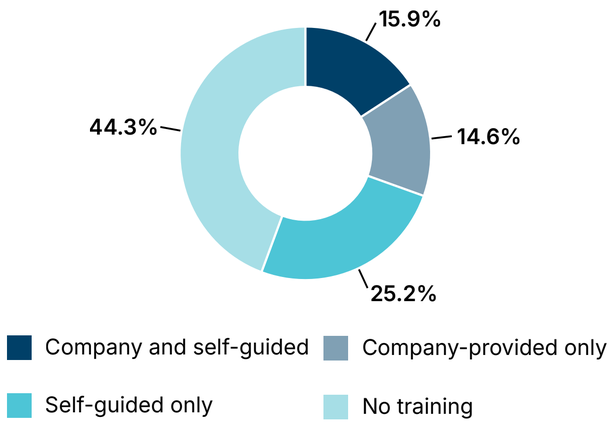
[18] Company-provided training combines employees who received only company training and those who received both company and self-guided training.

93%

of trained employees reported using AI, compared with 50% of employees who had received no training.

The difference in AI adoption between trained and untrained employees has remained substantial across all three survey years. In Year 1, adoption rates remained relatively modest even among trained employees, reflecting the early stage of workplace AI adoption and the more limited opportunities available to apply newly acquired skills. As AI became more widely available, adoption increased across all groups, but the advantage associated with training persisted. In Year 3, 93% of trained employees reported using AI, compared with 50% of employees who had received no training (Figure 15). The pattern is also remarkably consistent across generations, suggesting that training remains one of the strongest factors associated with whether employees adopt AI at work.

Figure 13: AI training received in the past 12 months.



Highlights

- Training participation declines steadily across successive generations, suggesting that differences in access could reflect a broader combination of training opportunities, job requirements and perceptions of training need.
- Training is associated with higher confidence in using AI and greater ease of use.
- Training is consistently associated with the productivity benefits employees gain from AI use. Furthermore, training quality appears to matter as much as training participation.
- Employees learning on their own can develop practical skills in using AI tools, but they are less likely to receive training on how AI should be applied within organizational processes or to have opportunities to learn alongside colleagues.
- A significant number of employees are still not using AI at work. Concerns about AI accuracy and the perception that work tasks are not suited to AI are the most commonly cited reasons for non-adoption.
- Non-adoption may reflect a lack of perceived need to change existing ways of working rather than uncertainty about AI itself.
- Trust is not something employees expect to acquire through instruction. Rather, it is something they expect organizations and AI providers to earn through how systems are governed and explained.

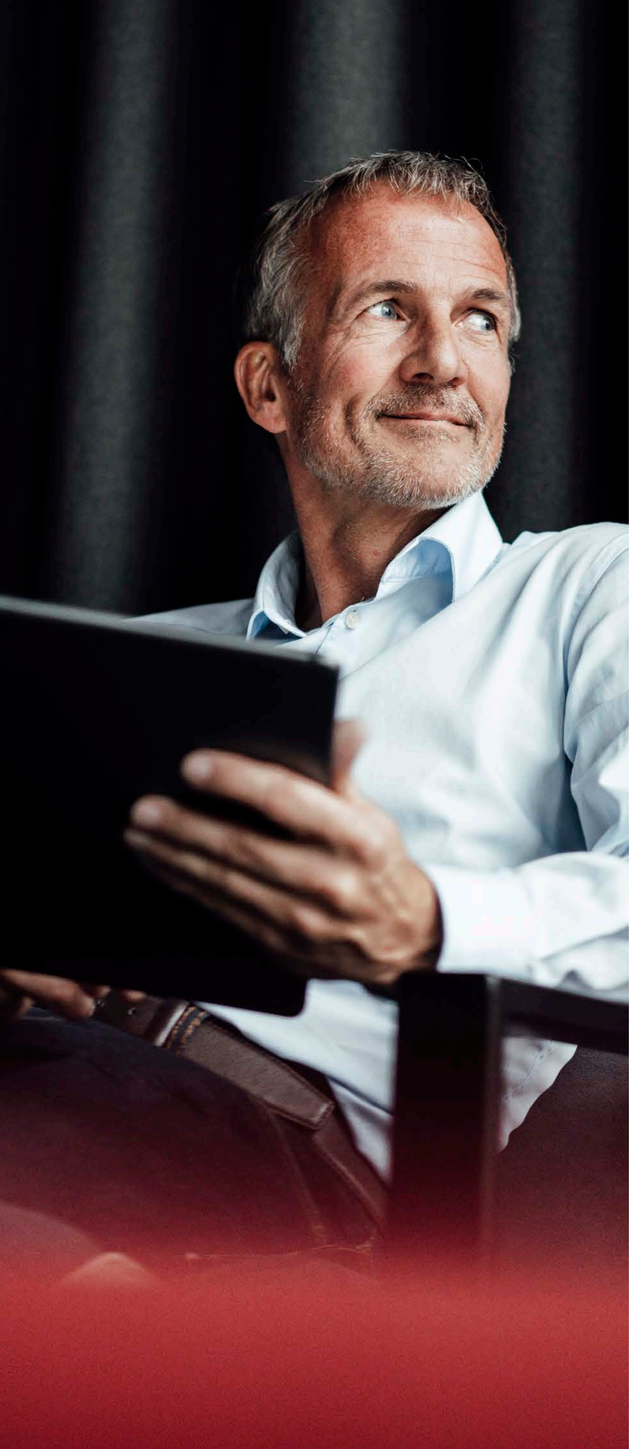


Figure 14: AI training received in the past 12 months, by generation.

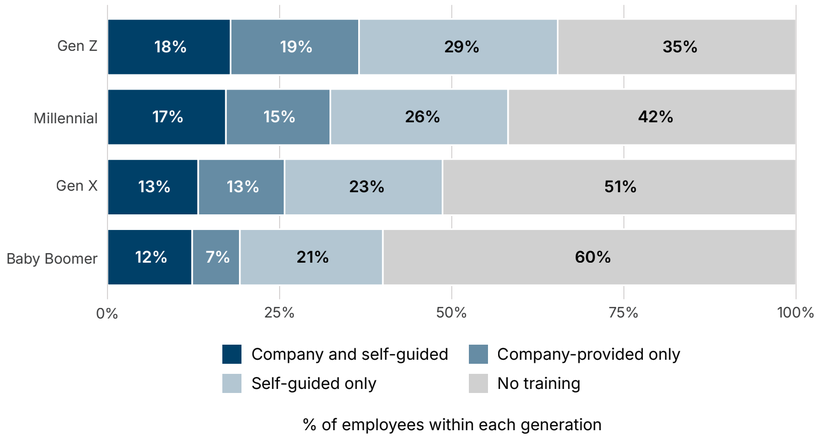
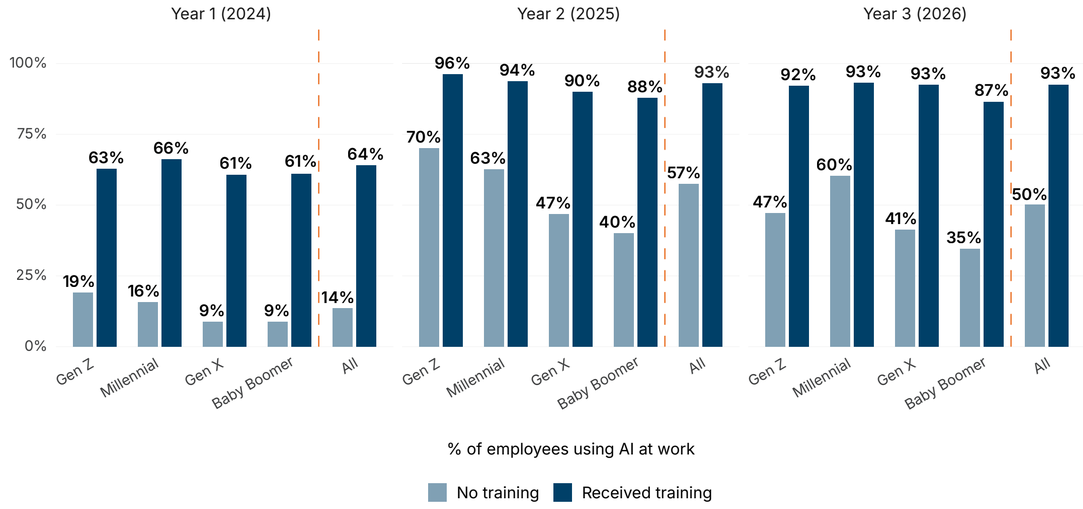


Figure 15: Share of employees using AI at work, by generation and AI training status, Year 1 (2024, 2,961 responses) vs Year 2 (2025, 2,784 responses) vs Year 3 (2026, 3,001 responses).

All survey respondents.





89%

of trained employees report being at least moderately confident using AI, compared with 66% of employees who received no training.

2.2 Training association with productivity outcomes and how they work.

Training is consistently associated with the productivity benefits employees gain from AI use. Employees who received AI training report saving 22% of their working hours, compared with 13% among those who received no training, a difference that holds across all generations (Figure 16).

What training may change is not only the productivity employees report gaining from AI, but also how they work with it. Importantly, adopting AI and integrating AI into work are not necessarily the same thing. As AI becomes easier to access, the challenge for organizations may no longer be onboarding employees onto AI, but helping them develop consistent and productive ways of working with it. This may involve establishing routines around when AI is used, identifying tasks where AI adds value, or developing repeatable workflows that employees can apply in their day-to-day work.

Among AI users who received no training, 82% report having no standardized AI workflow. Among trained employees, between 43% and 56% report having one, with company-provided training and combined training associated with higher levels of workflow integration than self-guided learning alone (Figure 17).

Confidence and ease of use may be part of this picture. We measured AI confidence as employees' confidence in deciding when to use AI, confidence in evaluating AI outputs, and how easily they can get AI tools to do what they want. Overall, 89% of trained employees report being at least moderately confident using AI, compared with 66% of employees who received no training (Figure 18).

Among trained employees, confidence falls within a relatively narrow range of 81% to 92%, whereas among untrained employees it ranges from 50% among Baby Boomers to 79% among Gen Z employees. Indeed, untrained Gen Z employees report similar levels of confidence (79%) as Baby

Figure 16: Mean percentage of weekly working hours saved through AI, by AI training and generation.

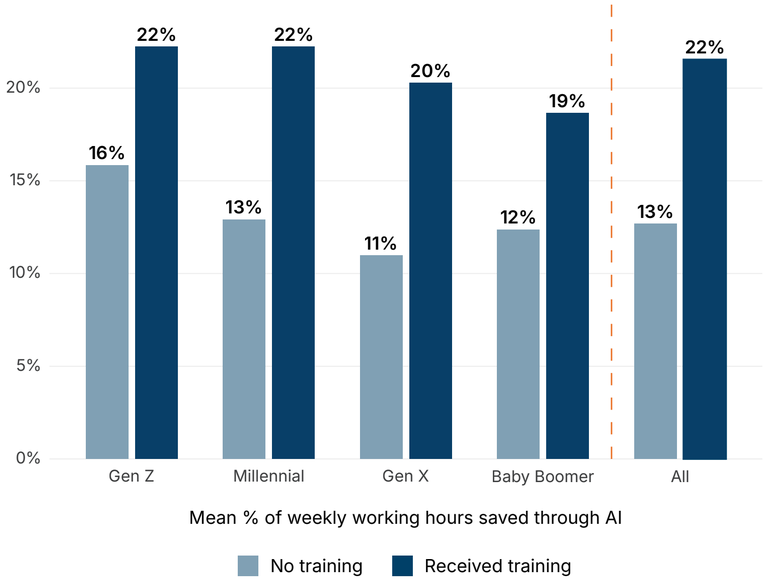
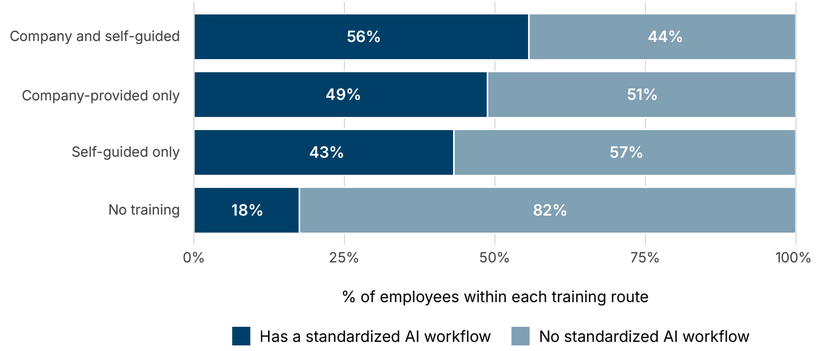


Figure 17: Share of employees with AI built into their standard workflow, by training route.





Boomers who received training (81%). Older employees without training are particularly likely to report low confidence, while employees who receive training report substantially higher confidence regardless of generation. The differences should not be interpreted as evidence that age itself determines AI confidence. Employees differ in their job requirements and opportunities to learn and use AI (see Section 2.1).

Furthermore, training quality appears to matter as much as training participation. Among employees who found their training beneficial, 92% report being confident using AI (Figure 19). Among those who received training but did not find it beneficial, confidence falls to 74%, much closer to the 66% reported by employees with no training at all. The gap between useful and unhelpful training is nearly as large as the gap between training and none, highlighting the importance for leaders of ensuring not only that employees receive training, but also that the training being provided matches what employees need.

Figure 18: Share of employees confident using AI, by generation and training status.

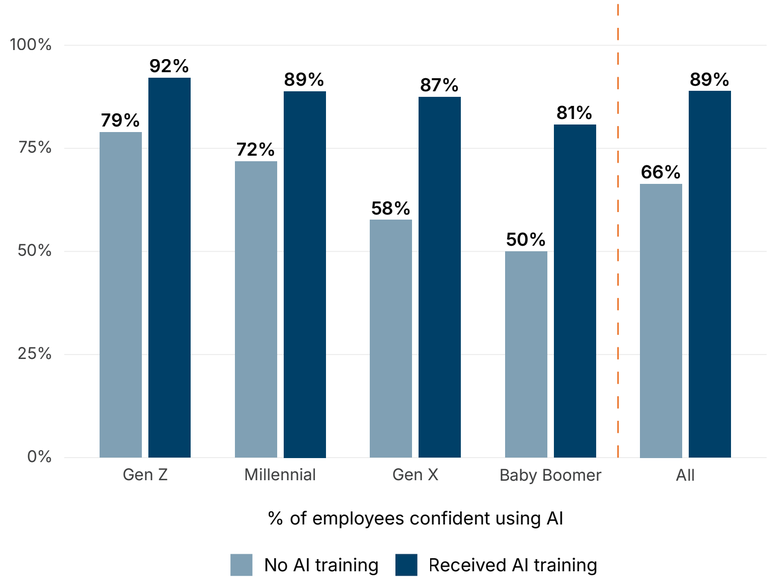
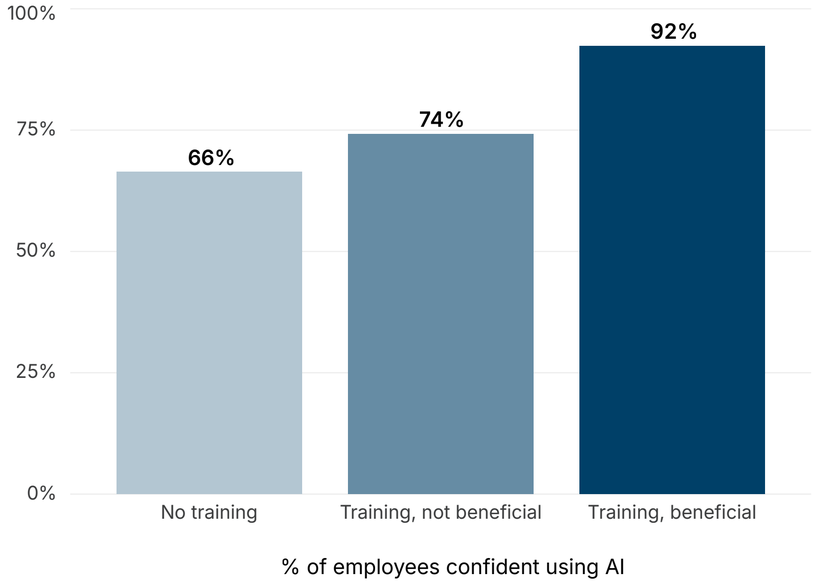


Figure 19: Share of employees confident using AI, by perceived training benefit.



Training provision has risen from 31% to 56% in three years. Yet more than a quarter of employees who said they wanted AI training a year earlier had still not received it.

2.3 Is the supply of AI training catching up with demand?

Across the three survey years, demand for AI training has held steady while supply has risen sharply. Around 60% of employees have consistently reported wanting training. The share who actually received it rose from 31% in Year 1 and 35% in Year 2 to 56% in Year 3 (Figure 20).[19] Provision is catching up with demand.

Following the same employees from Year 2 to Year 3 (specifically, employees who responded to our survey in both years) shows how well that supply is matched to who wants it (Figure 21). Among employees who said in Year 2 that they wanted training, 73% received some form of it over the following year. Among those who had expressed no prior interest, 47% received training anyway, suggesting that provision is now reaching beyond employees who actively seek it out.

The gap that remains is on the demand side. More than a quarter of employees who told us they wanted training had still received none a year later. And of those who did, a substantial share arranged it themselves: 35% of employees who wanted training received only self-guided learning, with company-provided training reaching 38%.[20] Employees are, in other words, filling the gap on their own.

[19] Employees were asked, "I want my organization to offer up-to-date skills-based training in AI tools over the next 12 months" and "Have you undertaken skills training in AI tools to enhance your job performance within the past 12 months?"

[20] Company-provided training combines employees who received company training only and those who received both company and self-guided training.

Figure 20: Demand for AI training and training provision, Year 1 (2024, 2,961 responses) vs Year 2 (2025, 2,784 responses) vs Year 3 (2026, 3,001 responses).

All survey respondents.

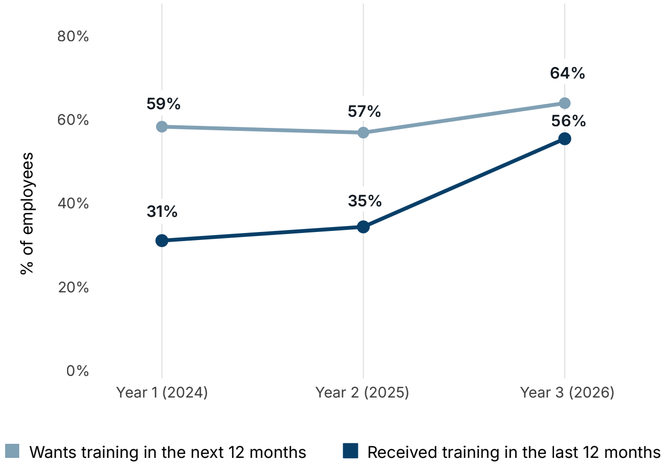
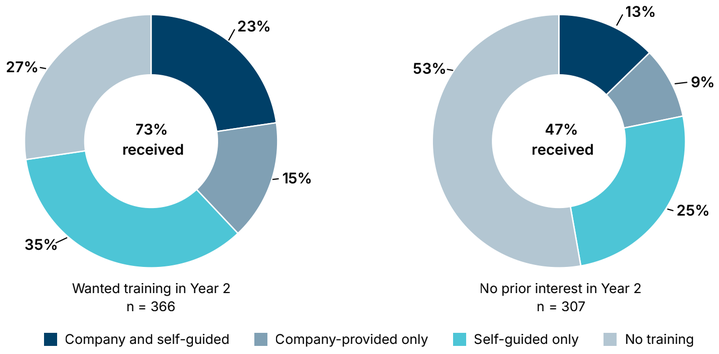


Figure 21: AI training received by Year 3, by whether training was wanted in Year 2.

Change in employee responses for those who participated in both years (673 responses).



Employees learning on their own can develop practical skills in using AI tools, but they are less likely to receive training on how AI should be applied within organizational processes or to have opportunities to learn alongside colleagues.

Whether an employee receives AI training matters, but so does what that training covers and how useful it is. Across all training types, the majority of employees rated their training positively, ranging from 77% among those with company-provided training to 88% among those with both company-provided and self-guided learning (Figure 22).

Training coverage varied by training type (Figure 23). Training type appears to shape not only what employees learn, but also the contexts in which they learn it. Employees who received both company-provided and self-guided training reported broader coverage across all nine training topics than employees who relied on self-guided learning alone. The largest differences were in applying and integrating AI tools into work (71% compared with 49%), responsible AI and transparency (60% compared with 41%), peer learning and knowledge sharing (41% compared with 17%), and evaluating AI outputs (54% compared with 35%).

These differences should not be interpreted as evidence that one training route produces better productivity outcomes than another. We found relatively little difference in reported time savings between training types. Instead, the distinction appears to lie more in how employees learn to work with AI. Employees learning on their own can develop practical skills in using AI tools, but they are less likely to receive training on how AI should be applied within organizational processes or to have opportunities to learn alongside colleagues.

That distinction relates to a finding from last year's survey, in which almost a third of AI non-users said that seeing colleagues use AI successfully would encourage them to adopt it themselves. Peer learning, evaluating outputs and troubleshooting build more than technical capability: They make effective practice visible and give employees a way to learn from one another. Broad training coverage does not mean employee needs are being met. Comparing what employees say they need with what training actually provides reveals a clear disparity (Figure 24). These may be useful areas for organizations to consider when setting future training priorities.

Figure 22: Share of trained employees rating their training beneficial, by training route.

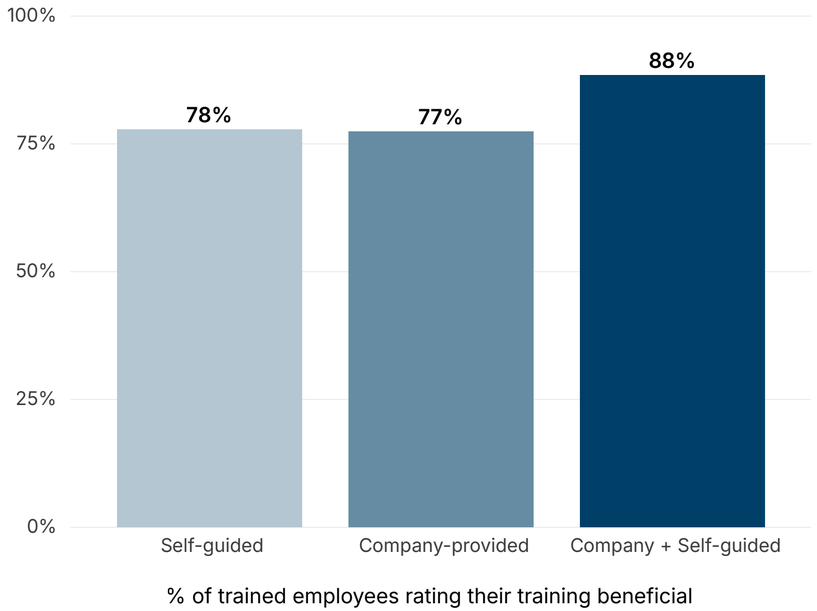


Figure 23: AI training content covered, by training type.

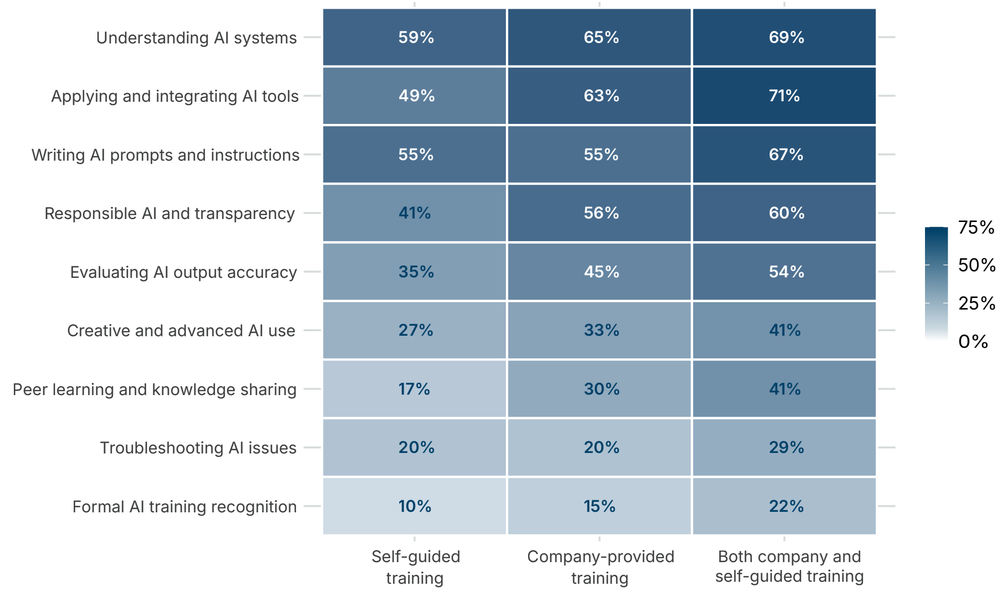
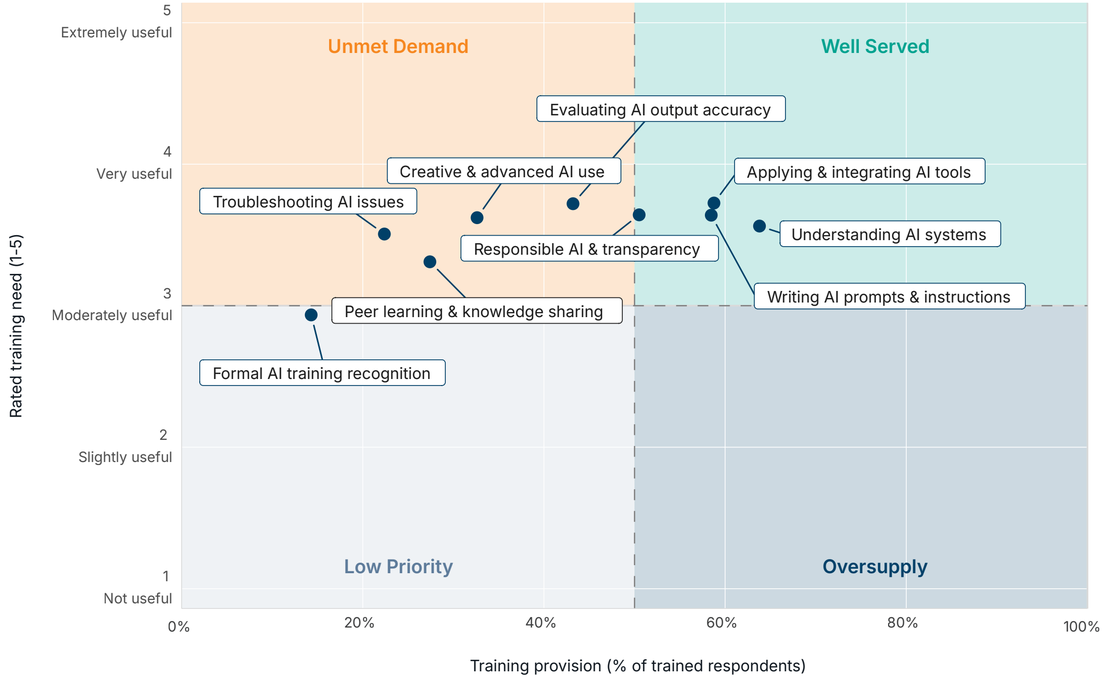
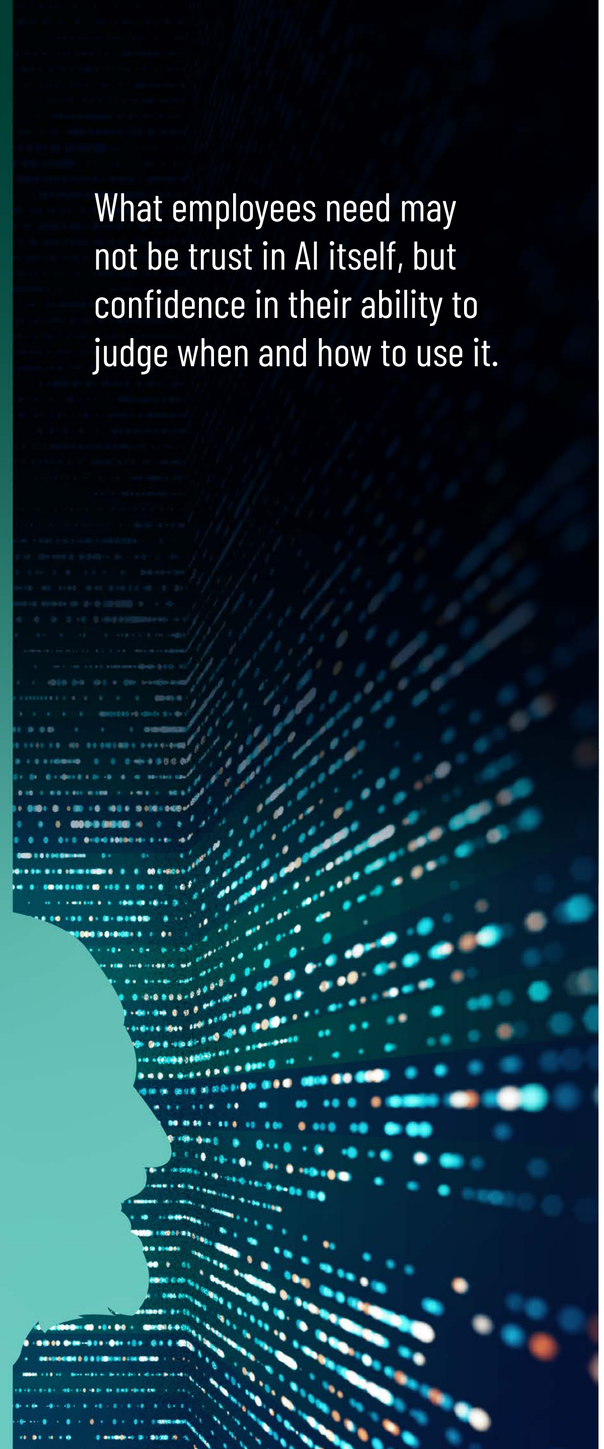


Figure 24: Rated AI training content need against actual provision.



What employees need may not be trust in AI itself, but confidence in their ability to judge when and how to use it.



2.4 Why have some workers not adopted AI?

Even as AI adoption becomes increasingly common, a significant number of employees are still not using AI at work. Concerns about AI accuracy and the perception that work tasks are not suited to AI are the most commonly cited reasons for non-adoption (Figure 25). Around two-thirds of non-users report concerns about whether AI outputs can be trusted, while a similar proportion believe that AI is not easily applicable to their work. Only one-third of respondents reported that lack of time to learn or set up AI was a barrier to adoption, which suggests that non-adoption is driven less by practical constraints and more by questions of trust and perceived usefulness.

Employees who had not received AI training (among those who want training, 63%, vs. those who don't want training, 50%) were more likely to be unsure how to apply AI to their work than employees who received AI training (among those who want more training, 39%, vs. those who don't want more training, 38%). Similarly, many of these untrained employees felt that their work tasks are not suited to AI. This suggests that one benefit of AI training is helping employees better understand where and how AI can be applied to their job role in practice. Employees who do not want AI training are much more likely to report being satisfied with their current way of working (trained, 57%, vs. untrained, 68%), compared to those who want AI training (trained and want more, 33%, vs. untrained, 44%). For these employees, non-adoption may reflect a lack of perceived need to change existing ways of working rather than uncertainty about AI itself.

Notably, concerns about accuracy persist regardless of training status or training demand among non-users. The results from last year's survey suggest why. Asked what would increase their trust in AI decision-making, employees pointed to how AI systems are governed rather than to their own preparation. Human oversight of critical decisions was the most endorsed option among non-users (47%), followed by clearer explanations of how AI reaches its conclusions (44%) and transparency about error rates (40%). Based on this evidence, trust is not something employees expect to acquire through instruction. Rather, it is something they expect organizations and AI providers to earn through how systems are governed and explained.

This distinction is important. Earlier in this section, we found that training is associated with higher confidence in using AI and greater ease of use. Employees who receive training are more likely to know when AI may be useful, how to apply it to their work and how to evaluate its outputs. Yet confidence in using AI is not the same as believing that AI will always be correct. AI systems generate probabilistic outputs rather than guaranteed answers, meaning that human judgment remains an important part of effective AI use.

Importantly, for some roles and tasks, AI may simply not be the most suitable tool. In these cases, choosing not to use AI may be a reasoned and informed decision rather than a failure to adopt. Therefore, organizations need to distinguish between informed non-adoption and constrained non-adoption. The objective is not simply to increase AI adoption rates but to ensure that employees have the skills, support and judgment needed to decide when to use AI and when not to. Where those foundations are in place, both adoption and non-adoption may represent appropriate outcomes depending on the role, task and context.

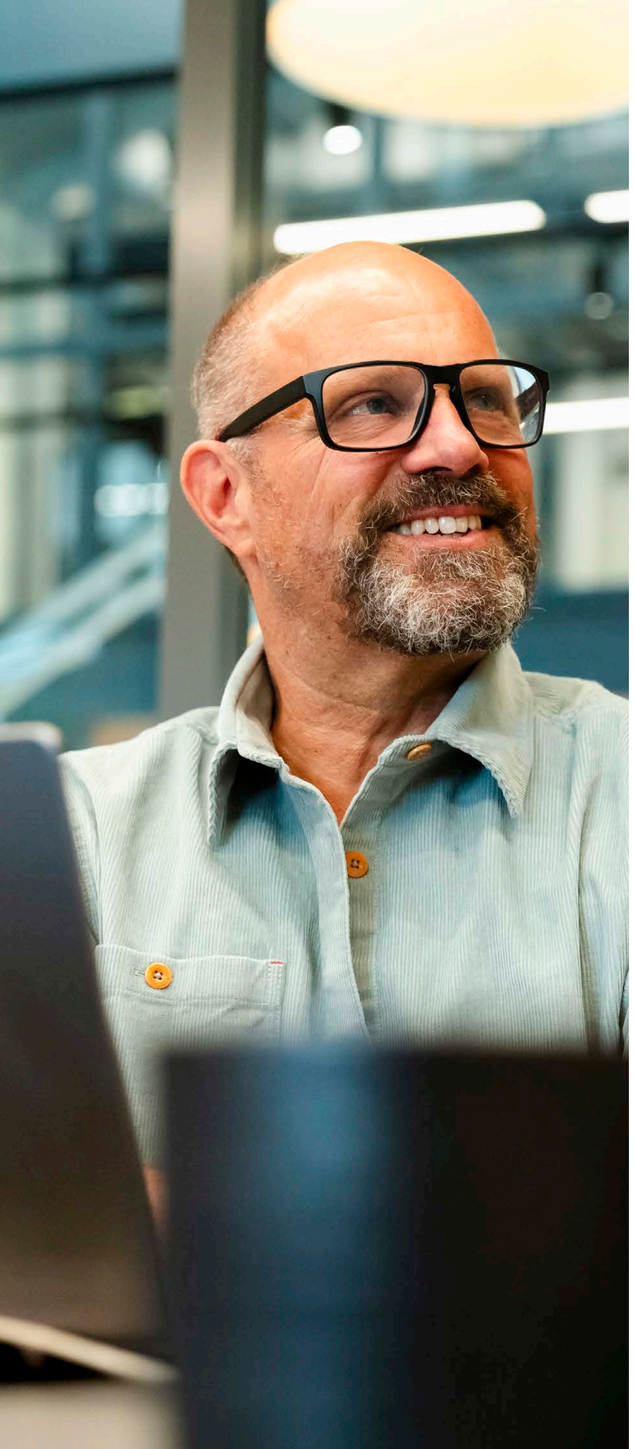
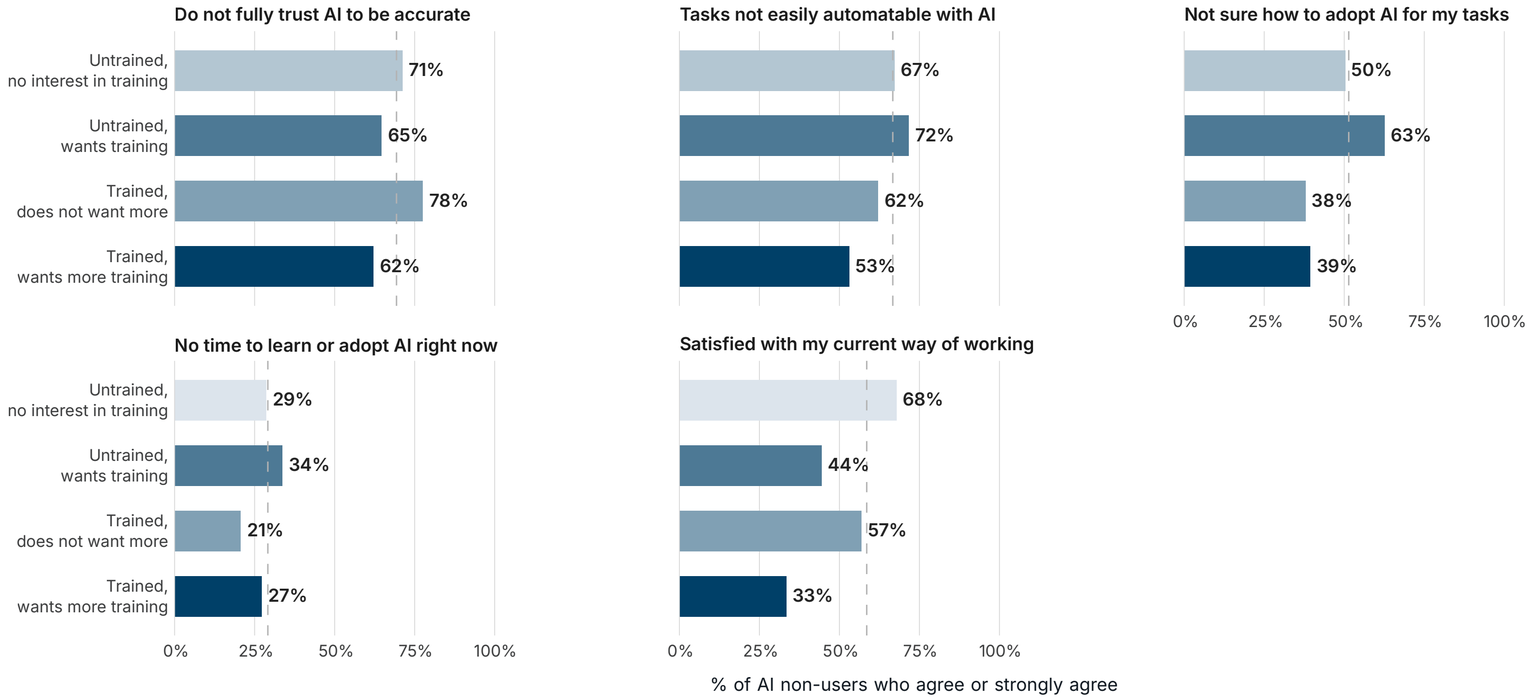


Figure 25: Reasons for not using AI, by training status and training demand.





SECTION 3

WHAT IS ASSOCIATED WITH GETTING MORE FROM AI, AND WHAT CAN ORGANIZATIONS SHAPE?

3.1 Workplace AI availability is linked to greater openness about AI use.

Often, AI adoption is not simply an individual employee decision but part of a broader company initiative. Concerns about data confidentiality and output reliability mean companies increasingly provide approved AI tools rather than leaving employees to find their own. Across our sample, 72% of employees reported that their organization provides in-house AI tools, while 22% reported that it does not and 6% were unsure.

Workplace AI use is concentrated among a small number of tools, with four platforms accounting for most reported AI use (Figure 26). In last year's survey, non-users consistently preferred AI that was built into software they already used. Rather than these tools being "better," it is likely that access, integration into existing workflows and compatibility with company systems are shaping which tools have become widely used.

Providing employees with in-house AI tools is associated with higher levels of AI adoption across every generation. Around 90% of employees with access to in-house AI report using AI in their work, compared with roughly one-third of employees without access (Figure 27). This pattern is remarkably consistent across generations, suggesting that workplace provision is also associated with AI adoption regardless of age.

Where organizations provide AI, what changes is not only access to technology, but also workplace norms and how openly AI is discussed and used.

Highlights

- Providing employees with in-house AI tools is associated with higher levels of AI adoption across every generation.
- Providing AI tools changes more than technology access. It appears to shape workplace norms around AI use. AI becomes easier to discuss with colleagues, managers and direct reports, and AI use becomes more visible within the organization.
- The more visible AI use becomes, the easier it is to identify where employees are benefiting from AI, where support may be needed and where appropriate oversight should be applied.
- Capability without the opportunity to apply it, or tools without the capability to use them, both appear to leave employees short of integrated working.
- Employees who receive AI training are more likely to report higher AI confidence and a standardized AI workflow. Both are, in turn, positively associated with the hours employees report saving through AI use.
- Uneven access to training remains a significant issue. This highlights the importance of thinking beyond access to technology and ensuring all employees have ample access to training.
- How employees reinvest the time saved from AI has little to do with AI and far more to do with employee character. From a leadership perspective, what employees do with the time saved from AI may be equally as important as how much time is saved.

Figure 26: AI tools used at work.

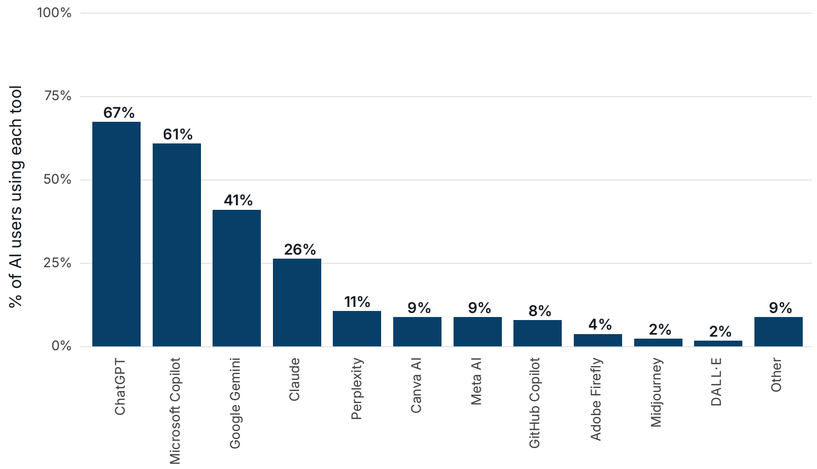
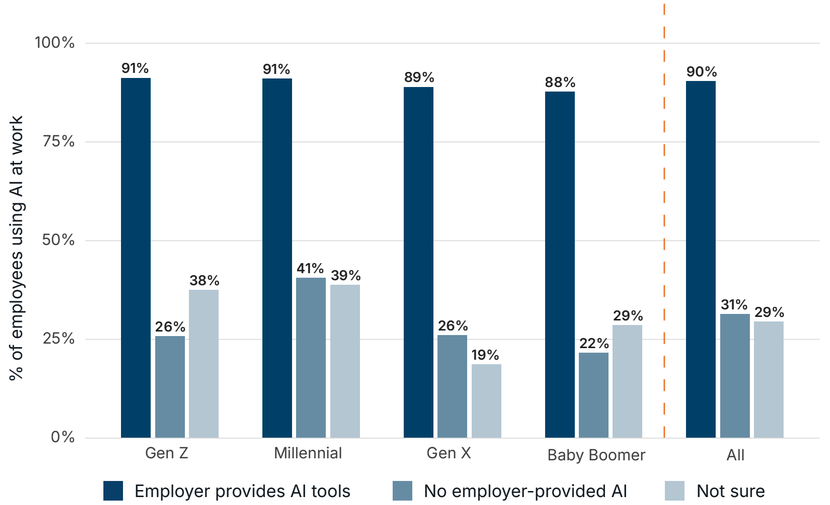


Figure 27: Share of employees using AI at work, by access to employer-provided AI tools and generation.





Yet workplace provision appears to be associated with more than adoption alone. Employees in organizations that provide AI tools report a noticeably different workplace culture around AI use (Figure 28). Where in-house AI is available, employees are substantially more likely to report that AI is openly discussed in the workplace (52% compared with 12%). At the same time, employees are less likely to report that colleagues prefer to complete tasks manually rather than use AI (45% compared with 62%).

The picture is not entirely straightforward. Employees working in organizations that provide AI tools are also more likely to believe that people are judged based on how they use AI (31% compared with 22%). In other words, workplace provision appears to make AI more visible. Employees are more likely to talk about AI, observe how others use it and develop shared expectations around its use. That visibility may encourage learning and knowledge sharing, but it may also create social pressure around how AI should be used.

Taken together, these findings suggest that providing AI tools changes more than technology access. It appears to shape workplace norms around AI use. AI becomes easier to discuss with colleagues, managers and direct reports, and AI use becomes more visible within the organization (Figure 29). For leaders, this openness has practical value. The more visible AI use becomes, the easier it is to identify where employees are benefiting from AI, where support may be needed and where appropriate oversight should be applied.

Figure 28: Workplace norms around AI use, by access to employer-provided AI tools.

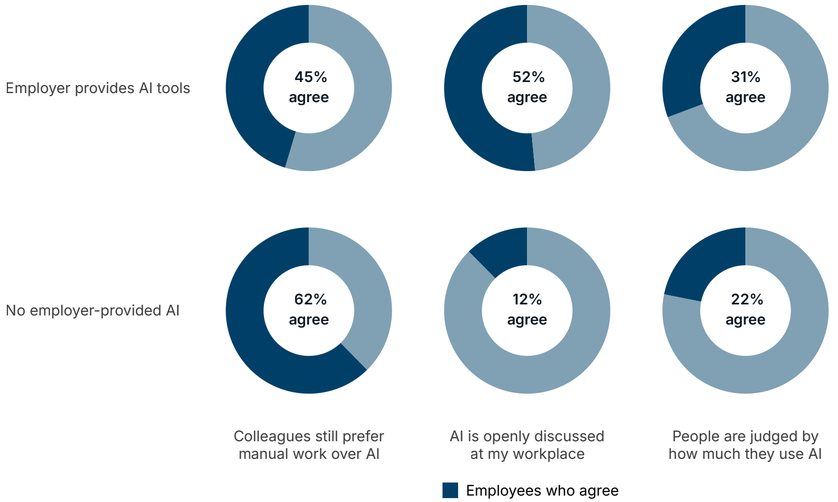
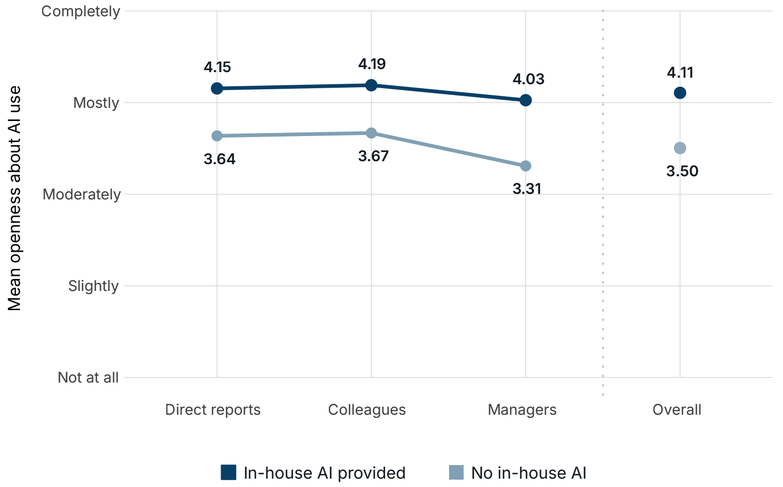


Figure 29: Mean openness about AI use at work, by target and access to employer-provided AI tools.



Employees with both AI training and employer-provided AI tools are six times more likely to have built AI into their standard workflow than employees with neither.

3.2 What matters more for AI adoption: training or workplace set-up?

AI training and workplace provision are prevalent themes in this report. Training has been linked to confidence, capability and workflow integration, while in-house AI has been linked to higher adoption. Figure 30 brings the two together, showing how likely employees are to use AI once the other factors in our model are held constant.

Each matters, but not equally. Where an organization has not provided AI, training makes a considerable difference: Adoption rises from 25% to 60%. Where AI is already provided, adoption starts at 78% without any training at all, and training adds a further 18%.

The two therefore substitute for each other more than they reinforce each other. Training does most of its work where the organization has not provided AI, and provision does most of its work where employees have not been trained. Either route results in a majority of employees using AI.

For organizations still building their AI infrastructure, these findings should be encouraging. Capability development need not wait for systems to be in place. It also means that simply providing AI will carry an organization a long way on adoption alone.

Training and workplace infrastructure appear to work together here. Employees with neither in-house AI nor training are the least likely to have an integrated workflow, at 8%. Either one on its own roughly triples that: 21% among those with in-house AI but no training, and 23% among those trained but without in-house AI. Where both are present, half of employees report a standardized AI workflow (Figure 31).

Neither condition on its own is associated with high levels of integration, and having both is associated with more than either would suggest alone. Training may help employees understand how to build AI into their work, while in-house AI gives them a stable environment in which to do it. Capability without the opportunity to apply it, or tools without the capability to use them, both appear to leave employees short of integrated working.

Figure 30: Share of employees using AI at work, by access to employer-provided AI tools and training status.

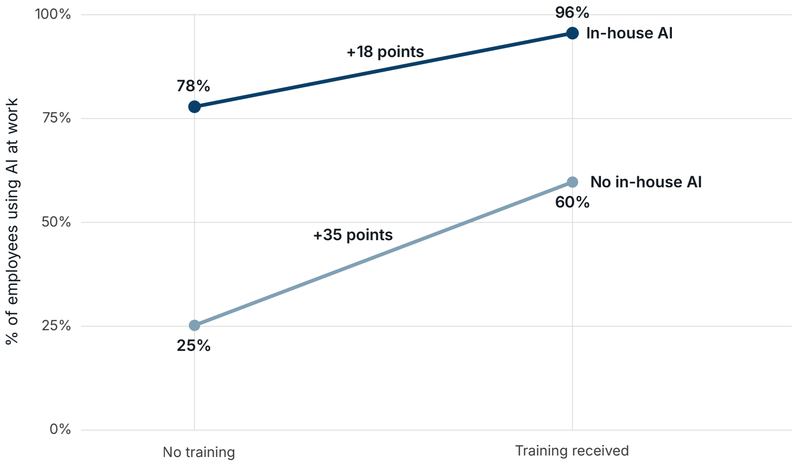
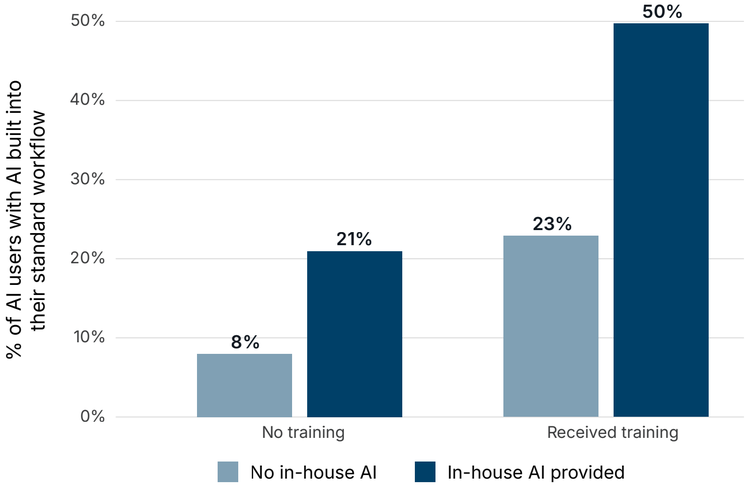


Figure 31: Share of AI users with AI built into their standard workflow, by training status and access to employer-provided AI tools.





3.3 Time savings are more closely linked to training and workflow integration than workplace provision.

If provision and training are both associated with adoption, what is associated with the time employees actually save? Here the answer is different. Among AI users without access to in-house AI, trained employees report saving 19% of their working week, compared with 11% among those without training. A similar training gap appears among employees with access to in-house AI, at 22% among trained employees and 13% among those without training (Figure 32). Although reported savings are slightly higher where in-house AI is available, this relationship does not remain significant once other factors are accounted for. Training, by contrast, remains associated with greater time savings.

What matters more is how employees work with AI. In our model, having AI embedded in a standardized workflow is the largest factor associated with time saved. Employees with a standardized workflow report saving 27% of time in their work week, compared with 14% among those without one (Figure 33). AI confidence is also strongly associated with time saved, although the relationship may run in both directions: Confidence may help employees use AI more effectively, while successful use may itself build confidence.

Employees who receive AI training are more likely to report higher AI confidence and a standardized AI workflow. Both are, in turn, positively associated with the hours employees report saving through AI use. These findings suggest that employees who have a good understanding about which of their tasks AI suits, and have a repeatable way of approaching them, may avoid much of the trial and error that makes AI costly to use. Rather than starting afresh each time in terms of what to ask for and whether the answer is usable, they can apply a tried-and-proven approach.

Beyond how AI is provided and used, two things stand out (Figure 34). The first is workplace norms around AI. Where using AI is the accepted way of working rather than the exception, and where colleagues talk about it rather than leaving it unmentioned, employees report saving more time. The second is agility, the one personal attribute that shows an association here once everything else is accounted for. Agility is less about picking up new technology quickly than about adjusting how work is done when circumstances change, and employees who score higher on it may be quicker to see where AI fits and to reorganize their work around it.

What also is notable is what does not appear. We find no association between the other personal attributes we measured, including conscientiousness, cognitive ability and growth mindset, and how much time AI saves. The differences here seem to have more to do with capability with AI and the conditions around its use than with the personal characteristics of an employee.

The generational gap looks more consequential in this light. In-house AI reaches everyone in an organization at once, so if provision of AI tools were what mattered for productivity, uneven training would be a smaller problem. But that is not where the productivity association sits. In fact, uneven access to training remains a significant issue, with 60% of Baby Boomers reporting no training in the past year, versus just 35% of Gen Z. For leaders, this highlights the importance of thinking beyond access to technology and ensuring all employees have ample access to training, which leads to equal opportunities to develop the confidence, capability and ways of working associated with greater productivity gains.



Figure 32: Mean share of weekly working hours saved through AI, by training status and access to employer-provided AI tools.

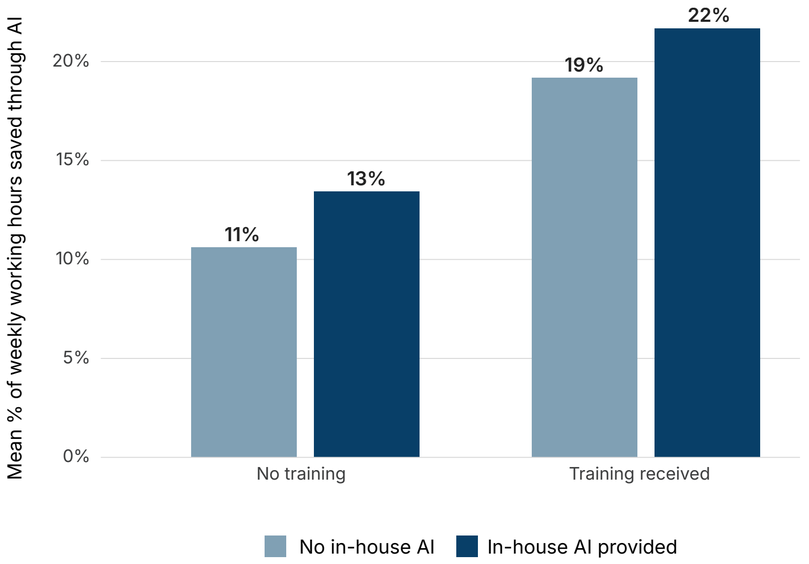


Figure 33: Mean share of weekly working hours saved through AI, by whether AI is built into the standard workflow.

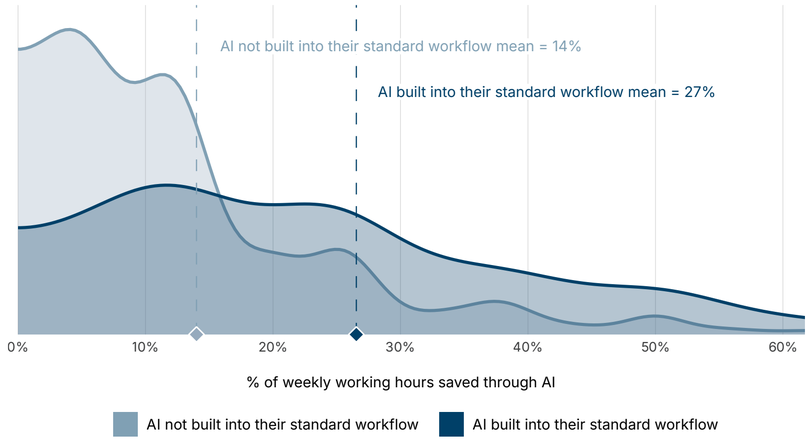
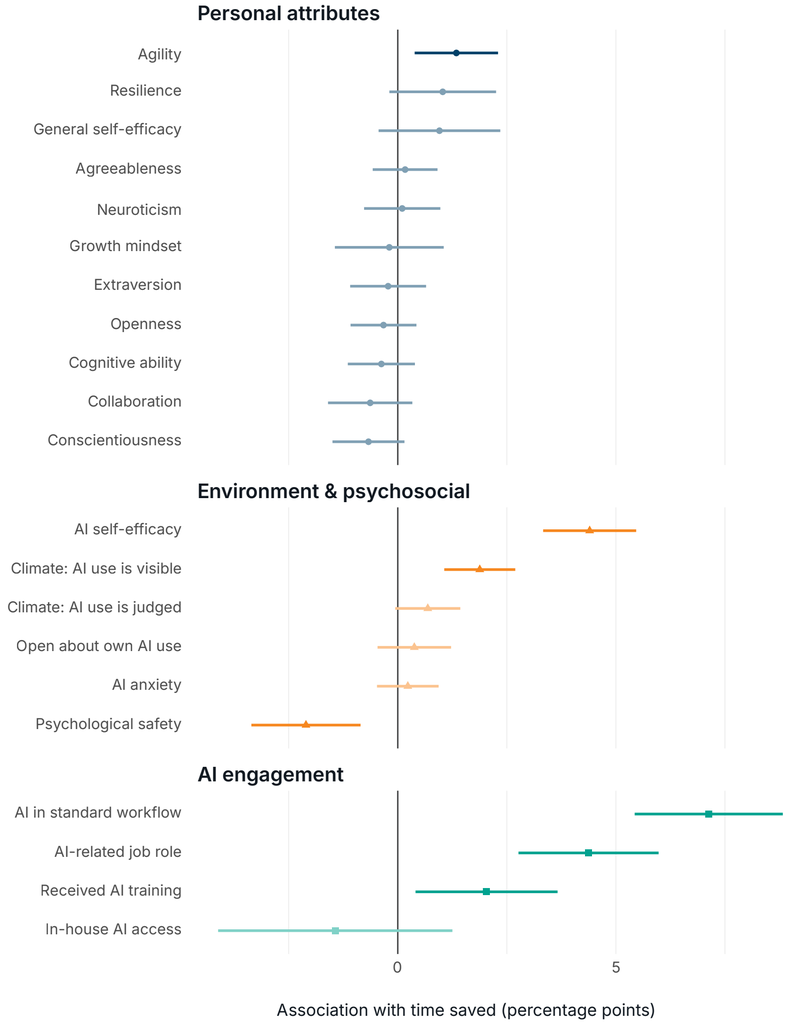
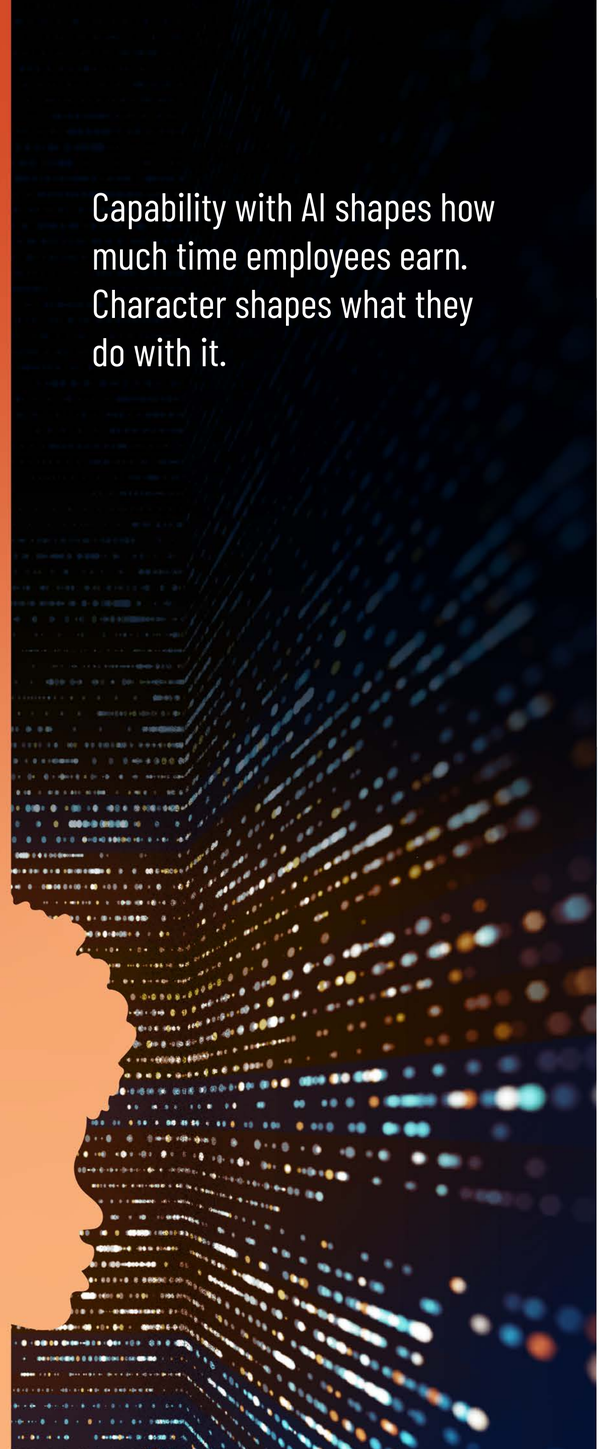


Figure 34: Factors associated with the share of weekly working hours saved through AI.[21]



[21] Solid colors indicate statistically significant associations. Faded colors indicate non-significant associations.

Capability with AI shapes how much time employees earn. Character shapes what they do with it.



3.4 What matters more for AI productivity gain: Saved time reinvestment.

While AI transformation continues to reshape the workplace, productivity remains as much a human-centered challenge as a technological one. We found that saving time from AI and reinvesting this time back into work have different predictors (Figures 34 and 35). While training, in-house provision of AI and workflow integration are all important to achieving AI productivity savings, none of these workplace factors links to how much of this saved time goes back into work (Figure 36). In other words, how AI is rolled out in a company is linked to how much time employees get back, but not what they choose to do with it.

The one workplace factor associated with how employees reinvest AI savings is how openly employees talk about their own AI use. Those who discuss it with colleagues and managers put more of their saved time back into work. Among employees saving up to four hours a week, the more open employees return 79% of saved time to work, compared with 70% for the less open employees. Among those saving four to 10 hours, it is 73% compared to 68%, and among those saving more than 10 hours, 68% against 62% (Figure 37).

This may have consequences in working life. Openness brings benefits, but it also puts AI use on display. We saw earlier (see Section 3.1) that where AI is visible, more employees feel they are judged by how much of it they use. This AI culture may create pressure to keep up, anxiety about being seen as slower, or among those who have not had the same support, a sense of being left behind. As with the association between training and hours saved, this matters most where that support is unevenly distributed. If older employees receive less training and use AI less, and their managers can see the resulting difference in output, there is a risk of these older employees being viewed as less productive and valuable relative to younger employee groups using AI more regularly.

We found that how employees reinvest the time saved from AI has little to do with AI and far more to do with employee character. Employees who score higher on conscientiousness, on collaboration and on tests of reasoning ability return a greater share of their saved time to work (Figure 35). The associations are modest but consistent, and two of these qualities are long-standing ones. Conscientiousness and cognitive ability have been among the most reliable individual predictors of job performance in research going back well before AI entered the workplace.[22] While neither conscientiousness nor cognitive ability is associated with how much time is saved by using AI, both are associated with what happens to that time afterwards.

From a leadership perspective, what employees do with the time saved from AI may be equally as important as how much time is saved. If AI-generated capacity is continually absorbed into additional work, AI adoption may increase workload and work intensity over time, even as employees become more productive.[23] Companies may therefore need to think carefully about how AI-generated capacity is expected to be used. Clear expectations around development, innovation, recovery time and workload management may become increasingly important if the benefits of AI are to remain sustainable over the longer term.

[22] Ng, T.W.H. and Feldman, D.C. (2010), Human capital and objective indicators of career success: The mediating effects of cognitive ability and conscientiousness. Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 83: 207-235. https://doi.org/10.1348/096317909X414584

[23] Ranganathan, A., & Ye, X. M. (2026). AI Doesn't Reduce Work—It Intensifies It. Harvard Business Review. https://hbr.org/2026/02/ai-doesnt-reduce-work-it-intensifies-it.



Figure 35: Factors associated with the share of AI-saved time reinvested into work.[24]

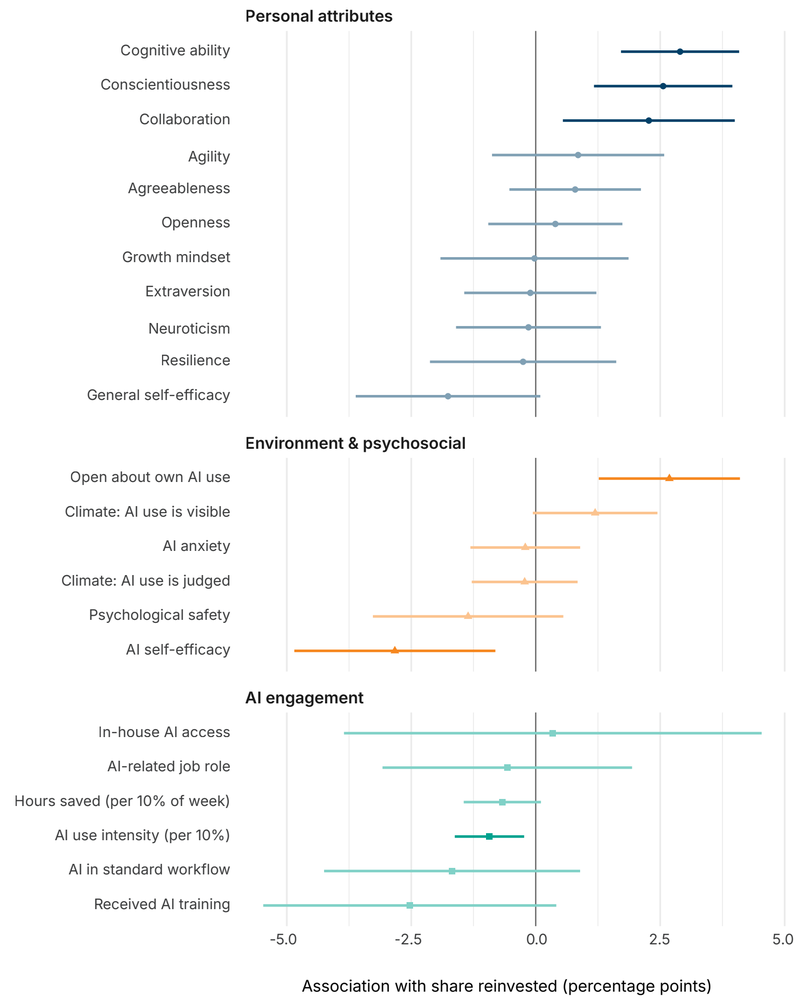


Figure 36: Mean share of AI-saved time reinvested into work, by training status and access to employer-provided AI tools.

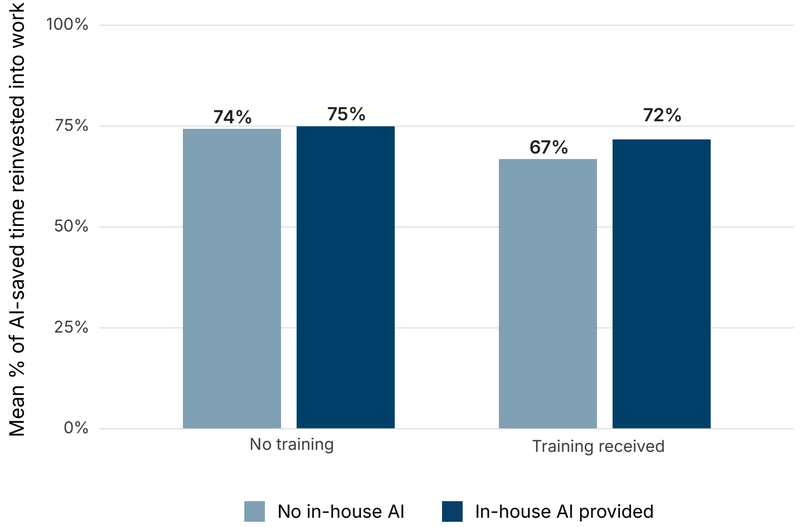
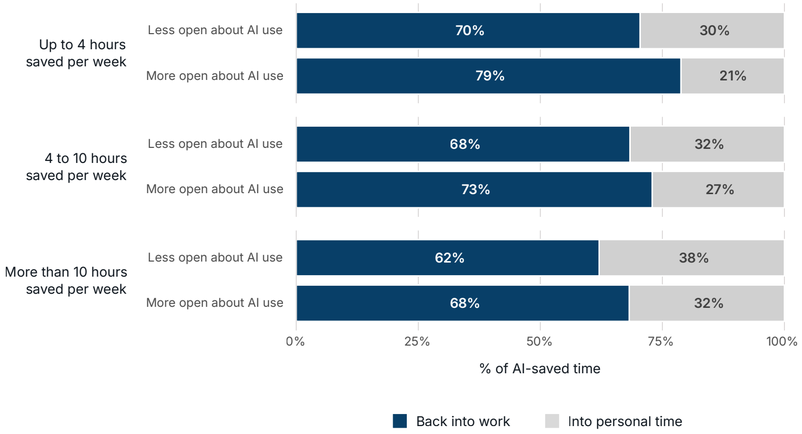


Figure 37: Mean allocation of AI-saved time between work and personal life, by openness about AI use and amount of time saved.[25]



[24] Solid colors indicate statistically significant associations. Faded colors indicate non-significant associations.

[25] Reported hours saved were divided into three groups based on tertiles. The ranges shown are the observed minimum and maximum within each group.



SECTION 4

JOB PERFORMANCE AND HOW EMPLOYEES ARE EXPERIENCING THE TRANSITION TO AI-ENABLED WORKPLACES

When organizations push for AI integration, the effects extend beyond adoption rates and productivity gains. They also shape how employees experience their day-to-day work, from the expectations they place on themselves to the way they relate to colleagues around them. As AI becomes more embedded in everyday work, employees may begin to reassess whether they are keeping up, whether their skills remain valued and how they compare with others in an increasingly AI-enabled workplace.

4.1 Perceptions of a generational AI advantage persist despite evidence that age is only part of the story.

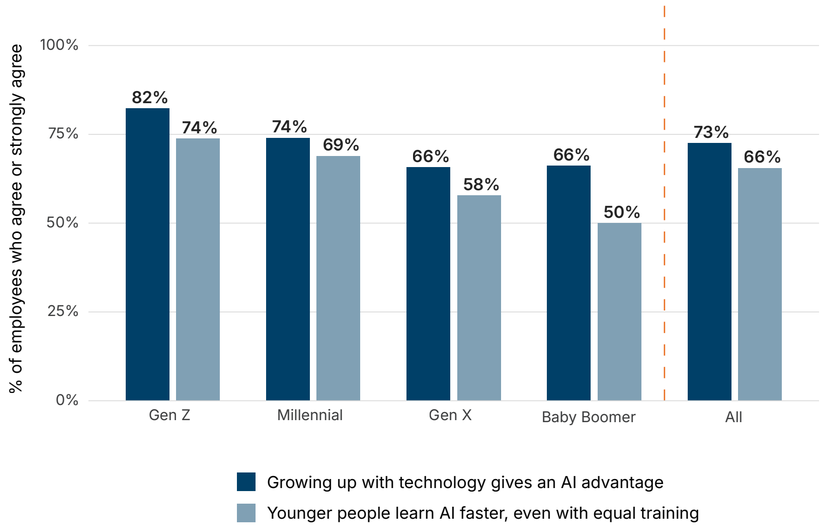
Last year's (2025) report found that younger employees were more likely to adopt AI, but much of this gap was due to younger employees getting more AI training opportunities than their older counterparts. This year, we saw younger employees report higher levels of AI adoption again. Additionally, younger employees reported greater AI self-efficacy, suggesting greater confidence using AI technologies in their roles.

Like any new technology, AI creates the risk of generational bias.[26] We measured employees' generational perceptions of AI, finding that 82% of Gen Z employees believe those who are more familiar with technology have an advantage when using AI, compared with 74% of Millennials, 66% of Gen X employees and 66% of Baby Boomers. Likewise, 74% of Gen Z employees agree that younger people learn AI faster even when training opportunities are equal, compared with 69% of Millennials, 58% of Gen X employees and 50% of Baby Boomers (Figure 38).

[26] Jolles, D., & Lordan, G. (2024). It's time to debunk the belief that tech natives are more valuable. LSE Business Review. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/businessreview/2024/10/31/its-time-to-debunk-the-belief-that-tech-natives-are-more-valuable/.

The challenge for leaders is not to help older employees "catch up", but rather to ensure that employees across all generations have access to the training, support and opportunities needed to build AI capabilities.

Figure 38: Beliefs about generational advantage in using AI.



In other words, perceived generational AI advantage (or "tech nativism") is strongest among younger employees themselves and declines with age. One possible explanation is that younger generations are more exposed to AI-related initiatives and training opportunities, making differences in AI engagement more visible in their day-to-day work. However, our research over the past two years suggests that once training and workplace conditions are in place, there is no significant difference in AI adoption or productivity between generations (see Section 2.1).

Employees clearly perceive generation-based differences in AI capability and learning, yet our findings suggest that generation alone does not explain meaningful differences in AI behaviors. Across multiple analyzes, AI training, AI self-efficacy, workplace support and workflow integration are more closely associated with AI adoption, AI use and productivity outcomes than generation alone.

Highlights

- Once training and workplace conditions are in place, there is no significant difference in AI adoption or productivity between generations.
- Employees may worry about falling behind if they do not use AI, while also wondering whether relying too heavily on AI could limit the development of the knowledge and experience that careers have traditionally been built upon.
- AI training, AI self-efficacy, workplace support and workflow integration are more closely associated with AI adoption, AI use and productivity outcomes than generation alone.
- Understanding and managing the factors that shape employees' day-to-day experiences at work may be just as important as managing the AI transformation.
- Promoting AI adoption is not the same as creating an environment where employees feel they must constantly prove they are keeping pace. The purpose of AI adoption is not solely to increase AI use, but more broadly, to help employees achieve better outcomes in their work.
- As AI becomes more embedded in everyday work, organizations may need to focus less on how much AI employees use and more on whether AI is helping them work effectively.
- The challenge is not ensuring that everyone uses AI in the same way; it is ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to benefit from AI in ways that make sense for their role and goals.



What appears to be a generational AI gap may often reflect differences in skills, confidence and opportunities to develop AI experience. The challenge for leaders is not to help older employees “catch up”, but rather to ensure that employees across all generations have access to the training, support and opportunities needed to build AI capabilities.

4.2 Inclusive workplaces and job performance.

In inclusive workplaces, employees feel able to ask questions, admit uncertainty, raise concerns and try new approaches without fear of negative consequences. It is a general property of a workplace rather than anything specific to AI, but it becomes more salient during periods of change. Research on digital transformation has found leader behaviors to be central to whether teams sustain this inclusion as new technologies arrive.[27]

Perceptions of inclusion are also related to how employees see their own standing at work. Measuring employee psychological safety,[28] we found that among employees in the lowest third, 66% rate their performance highly compared to 89% in the highest third (Figure 39). Both psychological safety and performance were reported by employees themselves, so they may reflect a general tendency to see their work situation favorably or unfavorably. However, psychological safety showed the strongest association with job performance among all measures in our survey (see Section 5).

Every AI-specific concern we measured was associated with lower psychological safety (Figure 40). Employees who worry about being judged for using AI, those who worry about being judged for not using it, and those who report higher AI anxiety all report feeling less able to speak up at work. The largest of these is the judgment climate: Where employees feel that colleagues assess them on how much AI they use, psychological safety is markedly lower. Where AI use is normalized instead, meaning colleagues talk about it and no longer default to doing things manually, psychological safety is slightly higher.

By contrast, none of the AI investments companies make are associated with psychological safety once workplace norms, AI-related concerns and individual differences are accounted for. Neither adoption, nor training, nor in-house AI access shows any meaningful association. The implication is that providing AI tools or training opportunities may be important, but these alone are not associated with employees’ sense of psychological safety. For leaders, understanding and managing the factors that shape employees’ day-to-day experiences at work may be just as important as managing the AI transformation.

[27] Papadonikolaki, E., & Morgan, B. (2026). Leading Psychologically Safe Digitally Enabled Project Teams. Project Management Journal, 57(2), 170–187. https://doi.org/10.1177/87569728251362760

[28] Edmondson, A. (1999). Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams. Administrative Science Quarterly, 44(2), 350-383.

Understanding and managing the factors that shape employees' day-to-day experiences at work may be just as important as managing the AI transformation.

Figure 39: Share of employees with high job performance, by psychological safety.

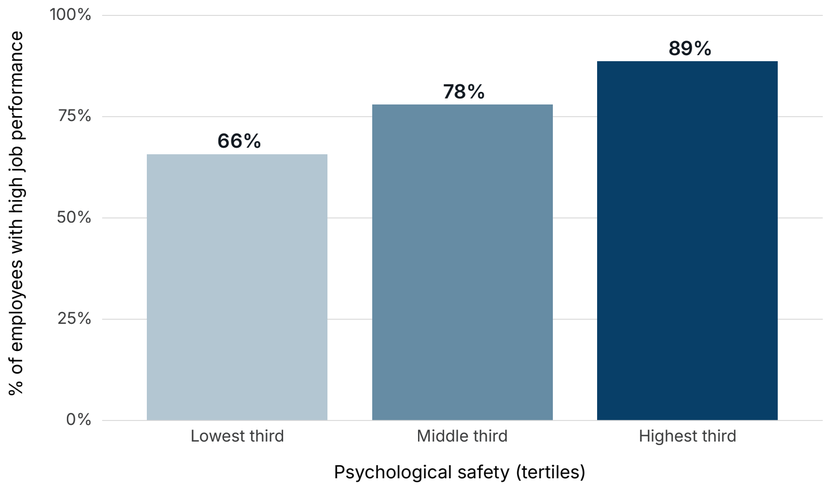
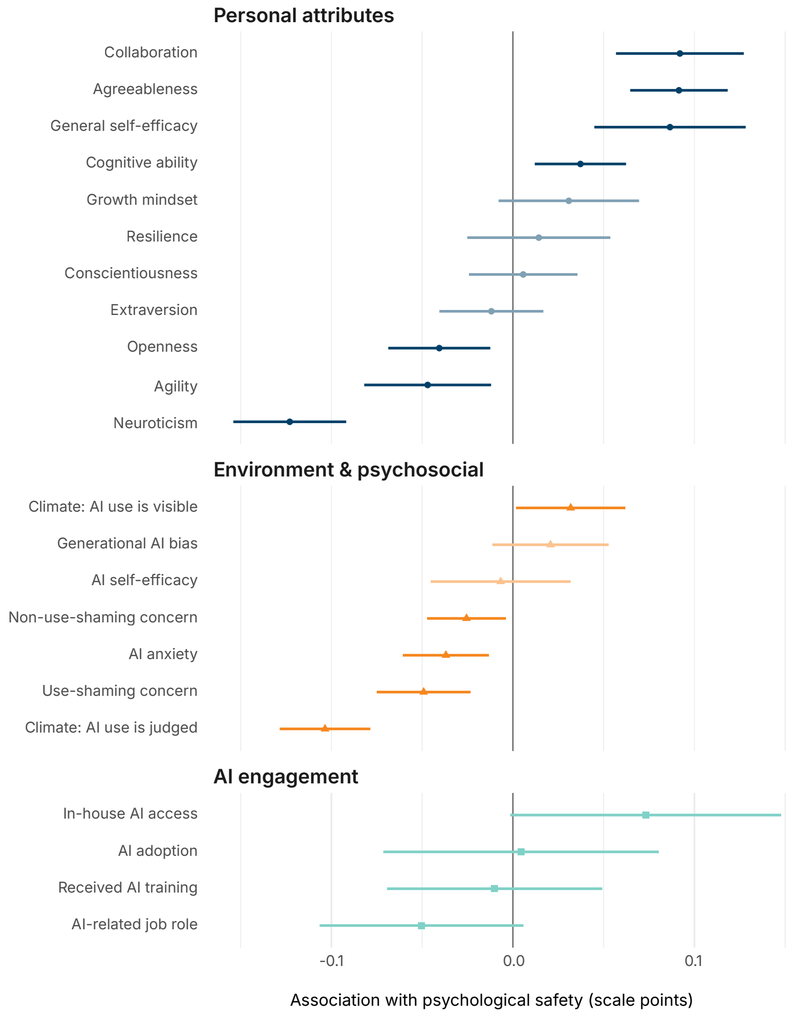


Figure 40: Factors associated with psychological safety.[29]



[29] Solid colors indicate statistically significant associations. Faded colors indicate non-significant associations.



4.3 Concerns about AI extend beyond today's work to tomorrow's role.

Psychological safety reflects how inclusive employees perceive their team's culture to be. AI anxiety is more specific. We measure it through two concerns: that AI could reduce an employee's control over their own work, and that AI could put their job at risk.

Across the workforce, 28% of employees are concerned about losing control over their work and 35% are concerned that AI could put their job at risk (Figure 41). Neither concern is held by a majority of employees, but both are substantial, with concerns about job displacement consistently more common than concerns about losing control. The generational pattern is also the opposite of what the "digital native" assumption would predict. Gen Z employees are the most anxious on both measures, with 40% concerned about their job and 33% concerned about losing control over their work. Baby Boomers are the least anxious, at 25% and 21% respectively, with both concerns declining steadily with age.

The Longitudinal Sample suggests that these concerns are not simply fixed generational differences (Figure 42). Among employees who participated across multiple survey years, concern that AI poses a risk to their job increased between Year 1 and Year 3 among Gen Z, Millennials and Gen X employees, while declining among Baby Boomers. The pattern suggests that concerns about AI's impact on work are evolving over time, rather than simply reflecting the attitudes of younger generations.

In Section 4.1, we found that Gen Z employees are the most convinced that younger workers hold an AI advantage. Yet despite their confidence in their generation's position relative to others, Gen Z employees are also the most worried about their own prospects. With longer careers ahead and less accumulated experience to fall back on, the possibility that AI could change career trajectories, alter entry routes into occupations or reduce demand for particular tasks is a reasonable concern for younger employees. These concerns may be amplified by growing public discussion about AI's ability to perform work previously considered less vulnerable to automation.

The generations at opposite ends of the workforce therefore appear to face different challenges. Older employees continue to face assumptions that their AI capabilities are limited, despite little evidence in our data to support this. Younger employees, by contrast, appear less concerned about learning to use AI than about what widespread AI adoption may mean for their future careers.

Leaders need to recognize that concerns about AI are not a single challenge affecting all employees in the same way. Employees need information, support and opportunities to adapt to changing ways of working. Some employees may need support building confidence and capability, while others may need greater clarity about how AI will affect roles, career progression and future opportunities. As AI becomes a more established part of working life, addressing concerns about the future of work may become just as important as supporting AI adoption itself.



Figure 41: Share of employees concerned about losing control over their work and about AI putting their job at risk.

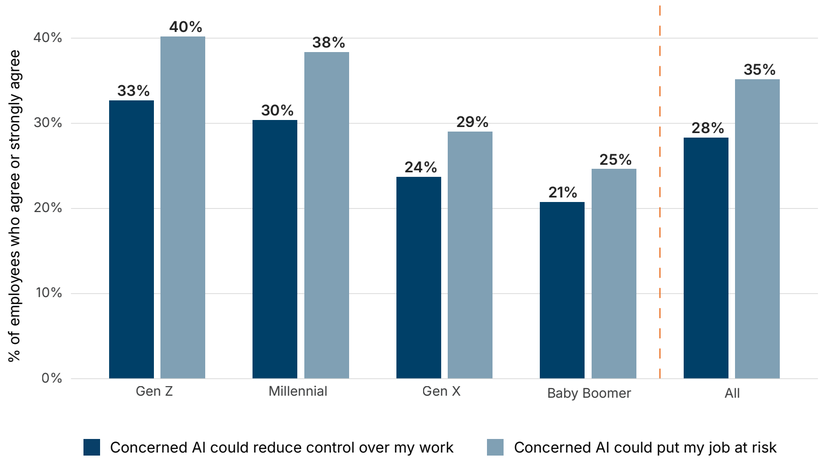
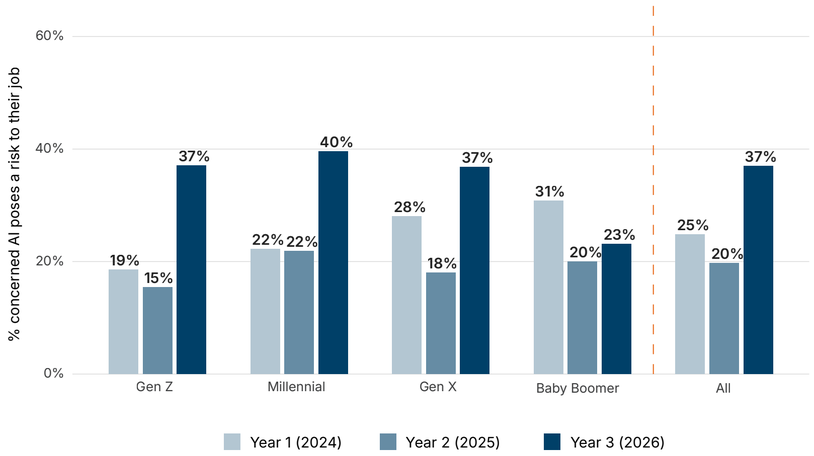


Figure 42: Share of employees concerned that AI poses a risk to their job, by generation, Year 1 (2024) vs Year 2 (2025) vs Year 3 (2026).

Change in employee responses for those who participated in all three years (310 responses).



4.4 Concerns about AI use are increasingly being joined by concerns about keeping up.

When generative AI first entered workplaces, much of the discussion focused on whether people should use it at all. Schools restricted it, organizations introduced temporary bans and employees worried that using AI might be seen as cutting corners or avoiding effort. The reflex was often to treat AI as a kind of shortcut, and the worry people carried was about being judged for using it. Our findings suggest employees are now concerned about something different (Figure 43). The worry is less about being judged for using AI than about being judged for not keeping up with it.

Close to half of employees (48%) report some concern about being judged for not using AI enough, compared with around one in five (20%) who report concern about being judged for using AI. Concern about being judged for using AI is highest among Gen Z employees (27%) and declines steadily with age to 13% among Baby Boomers and older employees (Figure 44). Concern about not keeping up is substantially higher, peaking among Millennials at 51% and remaining above one-third even among the oldest group (35%).

Part of what makes this difficult to navigate is that there is no clear answer to what “good” AI use looks like. The value of AI varies considerably across roles, tasks, organizations and individual ways of working. A level of AI use that is highly effective for one employee may be unnecessary for another. Unlike many workplace expectations, there is often no single benchmark employees can use to determine whether they are using AI appropriately.

Further, the question is not simply whether AI is used, but what it is being used for. Using AI to accelerate work that an employee already knows how to do may be viewed very differently from using it to complete work they are still learning how to do themselves. This may be particularly relevant for employees early in their careers, where they may experience two forms of pressure at once. One is the pressure to use AI in ways that improve their work while continuing to demonstrate their own capability. Employees remain accountable for the outputs that ultimately reach colleagues and

As AI becomes more embedded in everyday work, organizations may need to focus less on how much AI employees use and more on whether AI is helping them work effectively.

clients, regardless of how much AI contributed to them. The other is the pressure to keep pace with a workplace that increasingly treats AI capability as part of being productive, effective and up to date. The question is no longer whether AI should be used, but what constitutes appropriate AI use in a particular context.

This may also help explain why concerns about keeping up coexist alongside the broader anxieties discussed in the previous section. Employees may worry about falling behind if they do not use AI, while also wondering whether relying too heavily on AI could limit the development of the knowledge and experience that careers have traditionally been built upon. In this sense, concerns about AI use have not disappeared. Rather, they have evolved from concerns about whether AI should be used at all to concerns about how it should be used responsibly and effectively.

These findings point towards a wider organizational challenge. Promoting AI adoption is not the same as creating an environment where employees feel they must constantly prove they are keeping pace. The purpose of AI adoption is not solely to increase AI use, but more broadly, to help employees achieve better outcomes in their work. Employees may reach those outcomes in different ways. Some may integrate AI into a large proportion of their work, while others may use it selectively where it adds clear value.

This means that as AI becomes more embedded in everyday work, organizations may need to focus less on how much AI employees use and more on whether AI is helping them work effectively. Clear expectations, supportive norms and psychologically safe environments can help employees learn and experiment without feeling they must always operate at the frontier of AI adoption. Having one's own effective way of working remains valuable. The challenge is not ensuring that everyone uses AI in the same way; it is ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to benefit from AI in ways that make sense for their role and goals.

Figure 43: Concern about being judged for using and for not using AI.

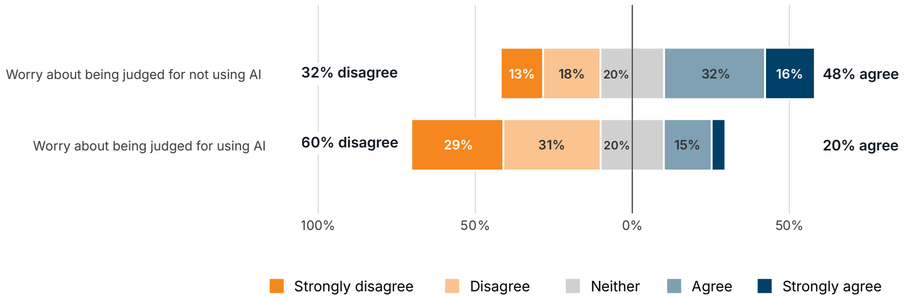
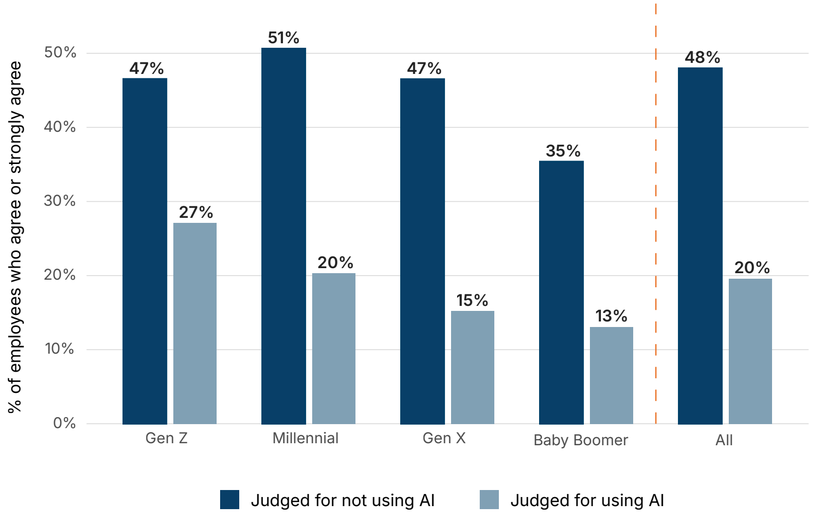


Figure 44: Concern about being judged for using AI and not using AI, by generation.



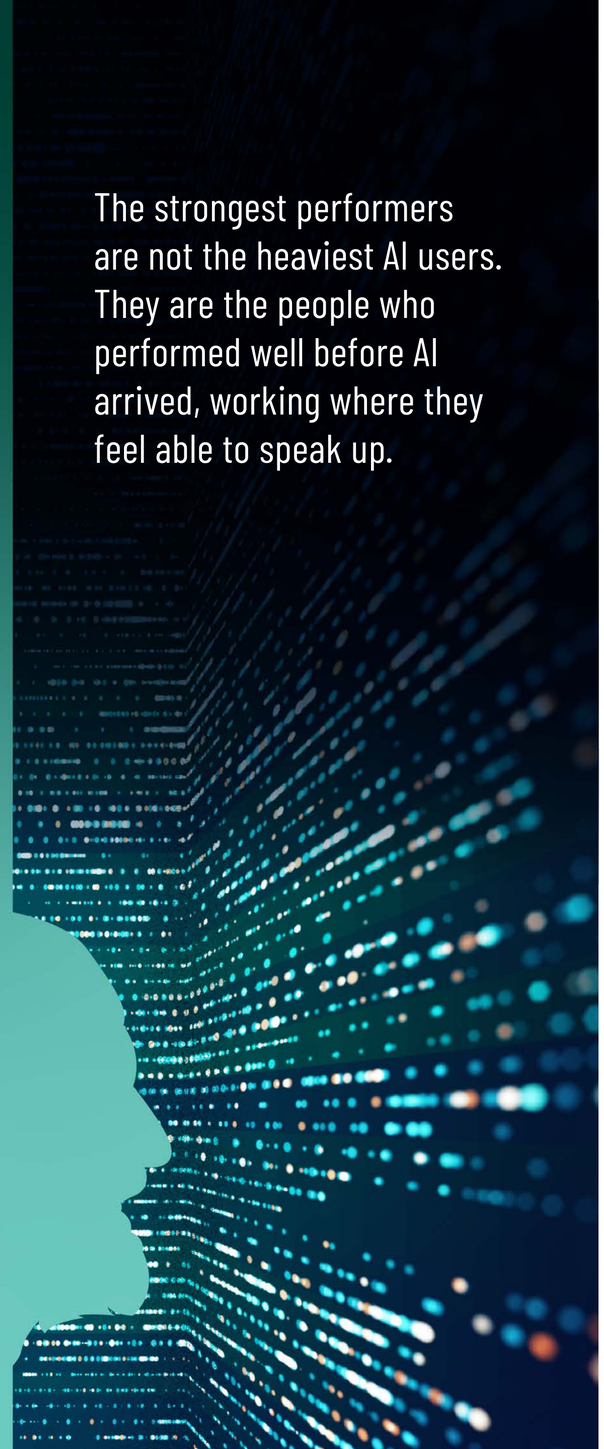


SECTION 5

CHARACTER STILL COUNTS: HUMAN CAPITAL AND JOB PERFORMANCE IN THE ERA OF AI

Productivity gains from AI are usually discussed in terms of hours saved and how that time is reinvested. Those are real. In Section 3, we showed that the amount of time employees gain is associated with confidence, workflow integration and other aspects of AI capability, while what employees do with that time is more closely associated with individual characteristics. But these describe what AI does to a task, not what makes someone good at their job. Perceived job performance offers a wider view of how employees believe their work is seen by their leaders. On that measure, AI barely registers. Whether an employee has adopted AI, been trained on it, works in an AI-related role, has in-house access or has built AI into a standard workflow shows no consistent association with how they believe their performance is rated by their manager (Figure 45).

In terms of perceived job performance, conscientiousness has the largest association of any personal attribute, in both the full sample and among AI users. General self-efficacy, resilience and growth mindset follow. None of these is an AI-related quality. They describe how someone approaches difficulty, through persistence, confidence in handling problems and a willingness to keep learning when circumstances change.



The largest association of all is not an attribute but a condition. Employees who report higher psychological safety rate their performance considerably more highly, and this holds in both samples. Among AI users, openness about their own AI use is also positively associated. Both describe the environment an employee works in rather than anything about them personally.

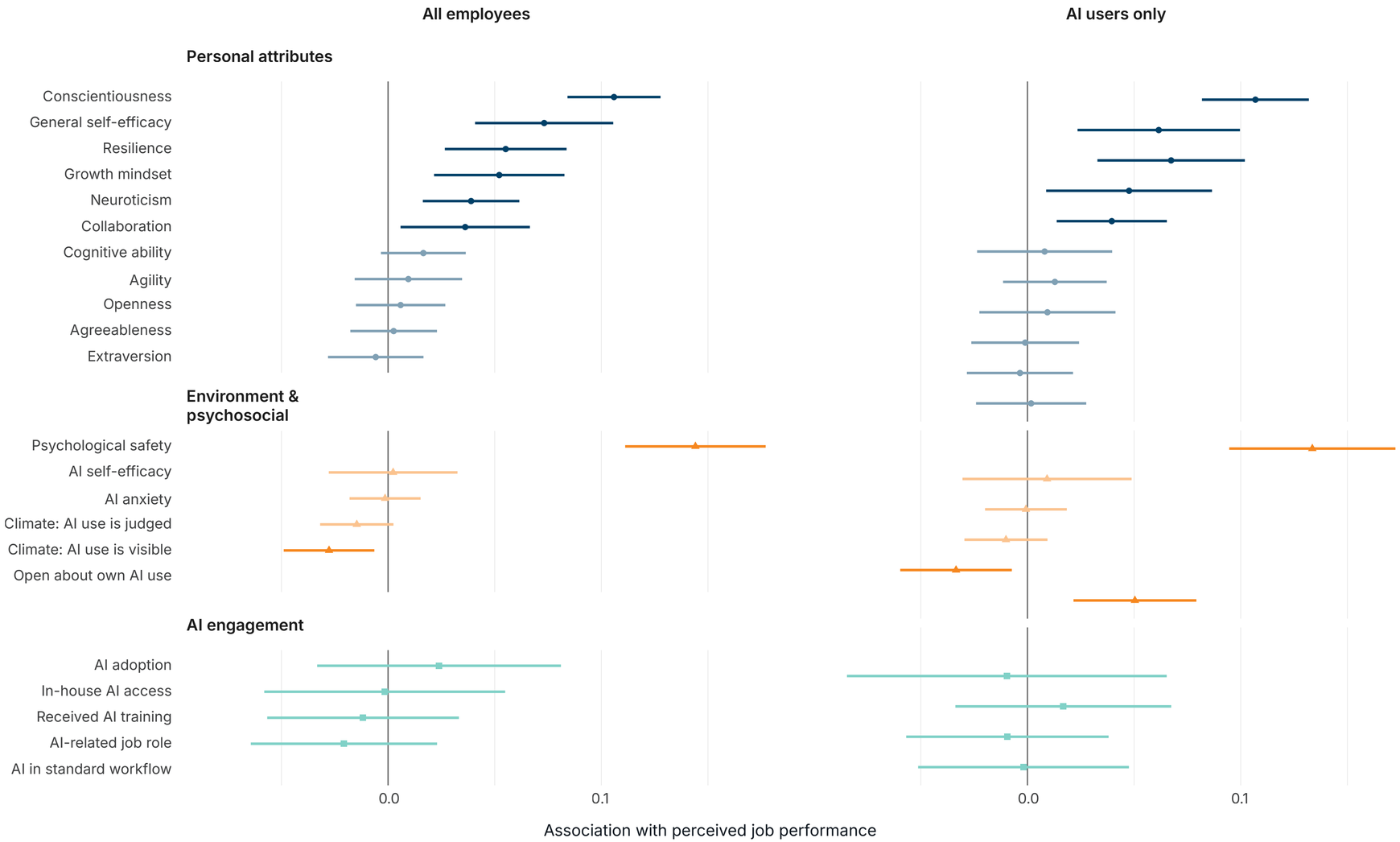
Employees who perform well are not, on this evidence, the ones using AI the most. They are much the same employees who performed well before AI arrived, working in inclusive teams where they have felt open to speak up. For companies, this reframes the question. The purpose of introducing AI was never to increase AI use. It was to improve work. If higher performance results from confidence, resilience, conscientiousness and psychological safety rather than with adoption, then an AI strategy that measures only adoption is measuring the wrong thing.

The question is not how to get more employees using AI. It is what good work looks like in a given role and where AI genuinely helps. It is how to build the confidence that lets people use it well rather than the pressure that makes them anxious about it. It is what the saved time is for, and how to develop the capabilities that make employees effective regardless of the tools they use.

Highlights

- Whether an employee has adopted AI, been trained on it, works in an AI-related role, has in-house access or has built AI into a standard workflow shows no consistent association with how they believe their performance is rated by their manager.
- The purpose of introducing AI was never to increase AI use. It was to improve work. If higher performance results from confidence, resilience, conscientiousness and psychological safety rather than with adoption, then an AI strategy that measures only adoption is measuring the wrong thing.
- The question is not how to get more employees using AI. It is what good work looks like in a given role and where AI genuinely helps.

Figure 45: Factors associated with perceived job performance rating among all employees and AI users.[30]



[30] Solid colors indicate statistically significant associations. Faded colors indicate non-significant associations.



CONCLUSIONS

Three years into this program, AI has settled into everyday work. Adoption has risen from under a third of employees to roughly three-quarters, and most of that movement happened early. The question is no longer whether employees will use AI, but what they get from it and who is getting it.

GENERATIONS was set up to ask what a multigenerational workforce means for productivity, and AI has turned out to be the sharpest test yet of that question. Nearly every organization is now running a technology transition across five generations at once, in workplaces where assumptions about age and technology are widely held and rarely examined. Following the same employees across three annual waves lets us separate what is actually changing from what only appears to be.

Younger employees do adopt AI at higher rates. But once training, workplace conditions and confidence are taken into account, age explains far less than the surface differences suggest. What looks like a generational divide is largely a difference in access to opportunities to build capability. Older employees remain considerably less likely to receive AI training. It is therefore a gap in opportunity at least as much as a gap in age.

The beliefs employees hold about AI are equally revealing. Younger employees are the most convinced that their generation holds an AI advantage, yet they are also the most anxious about what AI may mean for their future careers. Older employees face assumptions about their capability that our data do not support. Younger employees face uncertainty about what successful careers will look like in a world where AI is increasingly embedded in work. Both ends of the workforce are carrying something, but the challenges are different in kind.

Beyond adoption, simply providing AI does little for productivity on its own. What is associated with greater productivity is how employees work with AI: whether they have developed confidence using it, whether they have incorporated it into repeatable ways of working, and whether they work in environments where AI is openly discussed and supported. The social conditions surrounding AI matter throughout. Employees now worry far more about not using enough AI than about using it, yet pressures to keep up risk undermining the openness that learning requires.

All this said, the most striking finding may be what happens when we look beyond AI altogether. Productivity gains from AI are real, but the strongest performers are not the heaviest AI users. When we examine how employees believe their performance is rated by their managers, AI adoption, training, access and workflow integration largely disappear from view. What remains are qualities that have always mattered: conscientiousness, resilience, confidence in handling problems and a willingness to keep learning. The strongest association of all is psychological safety: Employees perform better where they feel able to speak up, ask questions, admit uncertainty and learn from mistakes.

This finding offers an important counterweight to growing concerns about AI. Throughout the report, employees express anxiety about keeping up, concern about job displacement and uncertainty about how work is changing. Yet the profile of a strong performer remains remarkably familiar. Success in the AI era appears to depend less on using more AI than on possessing the human qualities needed to adapt when circumstances change. In that sense, the most effective response to AI concerns may not be more AI, but continued investment in people.

For today's leader, the questions that emerge from our findings are not about technology. Who is being given the chance to build AI capability, and who is left to work it out alone? Is AI use something colleagues discuss or something they feel judged on? What is the time AI frees up actually for? Investing in AI systems is comparatively straightforward. Understanding what their arrival means for the people expected to work alongside them is harder, and it is where the difference lies. The decisive advantage in the age of AI, it turns out, is human.



GENERATIONS HUB

Protiviti is proud to partner with The Inclusion Initiative (TII) at LSE on the *GENERATIONS HUB*.

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The Inclusion Initiative (TII) leverages behavioral science insights to advance the understanding of the factors that enhance inclusion in financial and professional services firms. Located within the London School of Economics and Political Science, TII produces rigorous research and measures to help firms understand barriers to inclusion, quantify the benefits of inclusion and achieve better inclusion outcomes. Email: TII@lse.ac.uk

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Anyone using or referencing this whitepaper should cite: Nishimura, H., Jolles, D., & Lordan, G. (2026). Beyond the Technology: Who Really Captures AI's Gains at Work. The Inclusion Initiative, The London School of Economics and Political Science.