Workforce Transformation

VISIER

AI USAGE AT WORK: "PERFORMATIVE AI" STEMS FROM LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN LEADERS

The truth behind how employees are actually using AI at work



INTRODUCTION

AI in the workplace seems to have turned everything upside down in recent years, and along with this chaos comes anxiety, frustration, excitement, setbacks, and of course, trials and errors. At the organizational level, there have been confusing reactions from business leaders, all while entire generations of young professionals seemingly dislike AI.[1]

But business leaders across all industries still seem to be pushing the same narrative, encouraging employees to "use AI" with increasing urgency, even though AI's true impact remains unclear. A new working paper[2] by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) revealed that roughly 90% of companies report no measurable productivity gains or job impacts from AI.

Under the guise of AI workforce transformation, organizations are already making major workforce cuts[3] and restructuring decisions based on anticipated returns of AI rather than proven results.

To set the story straight, we set out to take the pulse on how employees are actually using AI in their daily work and their honest perspectives on their organizations' AI strategy.

For this report, we surveyed 1,000 US full-time employees to gauge their everyday lived experience with AI, and conducted in-depth reviews with employees across core domains such as Healthcare, Finance, HR, and more.

Here's what we discovered.

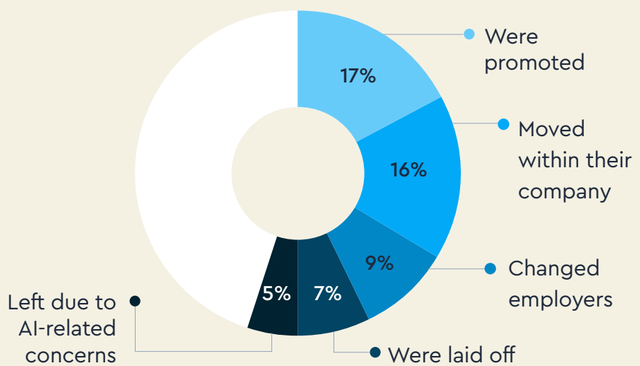
1. Boyne, A. (2026, August 19). Bloomberg. Bloomberg.Com; Bloomberg. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-08-19/young-americans-become-more-hostile-to-ai-fearing-job-losses **2.** Duggan, M. (2026, May 1). Global evidence on business use of AI. National Bureau of Economic Research. National Bureau of Economic Research. https://www.nber.org/digest/202605/global-evidence-business-use-ai **3.** Duarte, F. (2025, December 19). List of companies announcing AI-Driven layoffs – programs.com. Programs.com. https://programs.com/resources/ai-layoffs/

KEY FINDING #1

EMPLOYEES ARE LIVING THROUGH AI DISRUPTION EVERY SINGLE DAY

More than half of employees surveyed (54%) say their roles or careers have significantly changed due to AI in the past two years, while 44% say AI has not influenced their careers or roles.

Of those who experienced role changes:



AI Impact on Daily Workflows Presents a Mixed Reality

Even though AI impacts on jobs and role changes appear to be moderately spread out across the employees in our survey, the **day-to-day workflow has significantly or moderately changed for 51% of employees due to AI**, with the rest seeing only slight or no changes at all.

But, as our additional findings pulled directly from interviews with employees across job domains show, everyone's experience is drastically different.

We identified three themes in how AI tools change workflows, showing that AI can act as either an accelerator or a barrier depending on the role:

Delivery Speed

While some employees produce AI-accelerated output that outpaces stakeholders' workflows, others feel pressure to work faster because of AI-driven expectations from business leaders.

Collaboration

Some employees experience increased cross-team collaboration due to AI, while others see a reduction in the collaboration their roles require.

Mixed Emotions

A segment of employees experience excitement around the new possibilities presented by AI, while others report burnout, stress, and anxiety.

AI HAS CHANGED THE WAY EMPLOYEES WORK

THE POSITIVES

A SOFTWARE LEAD CAN DELIVER A 10-MINUTE TASK IN SECONDS.

"Being able to have AI to get [a task] done very quickly is fantastic."

AN ENGINEER SEES NEW CAREER OPPORTUNITIES BECAUSE OF AI'S IMPACT.

"It's made me a better engineer. It's made me a better tester. It's made me more employable."

AN HR LEADER REPORTS AN INCREASE IN TEAM CONNECTION AND A DECREASE IN MEETING LENGTH.

"I find we collaborate a lot more and a lot more closely. And the reason we collaborate a lot more is that we can iterate that much quicker."

THE NEGATIVES

A REGISTERED NURSE WORRIES ABOUT THE SENSITIVITY OF THE INFORMATION BEING SHARED AND ABOUT POTENTIAL SCAMS.

"Fear of the unknown, and fear that I could do something wrong...it could come back to not be good for the company."

A SOFTWARE LEAD IS UNDER PRESSURE TO DELIVER MORE, FASTER.

"The question of, 'why didn't you just have AI do it...that ask for expedience, I think, can be a lot of pressure on people, especially those who are still learning the tools and need that space to explore.'

AN AI ENGINEER IS CONCERNED ABOUT AI BURNOUT.

"[It makes] some aspects of the job easier, because you're not coding everything by hand, but also you're expecting to do more in the same amount of time."

KEY FINDING #2

PERFORMATIVE AI AT WORK IS THE NEWEST COPING MECHANISM

Employees facing change without clear guidance perform visible AI compliance rather than genuine adoption and worry about job security in the process.

Nearly half of our survey respondents (45%) agree they feel pressure to use AI at work even when they're not confident in how to use it effectively.

The end result? Exaggeration and performative AI.

48% of employees say they have exaggerated their AI usage or expertise to colleagues or leadership some of the time.

48%

OF EMPLOYEES SAY THEY HAVE EXAGGERATED THEIR AI USAGE OR EXPERTISE TO COLLEAGUES OR LEADERSHIP SOME OF THE TIME.

Our survey found that the majority, or 7 in 10, employees express concern about AI's current or potential negative impact on their careers.

Among those concerns, they worry about:



KEY FINDING #3

EMPLOYEES DON'T TRUST THAT LEADERS HAVE A PLAN

Performative AI use seems to line up with a trust gap: employees are unsure of the organization's AI plan and unconvinced that leaders understand it themselves.

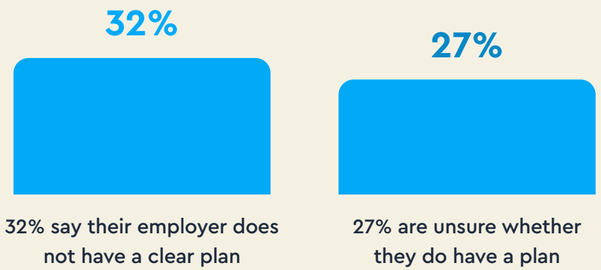
In a previous study,[4] we found that while business leaders know what matters, many admit that they can't deliver on it. At least, not yet.

- 87% of leaders say aligning workforce and business strategy, including AI initiatives, is their top business need, yet only 29% admit their organization is actually good at that kind of planning.
- Similarly, 56% call addressing AI-driven skill shifts business-critical, yet just 15% admit their workforce planning is keeping pace.

There's a startling disconnect between what's important for business leaders and what's actually being delivered.

4. Strategic Workforce Planning in the AI Era, Visier Inc. 2025. https://www.visier.com/lp/new-research-strategic-workforce-planning-ai-era/

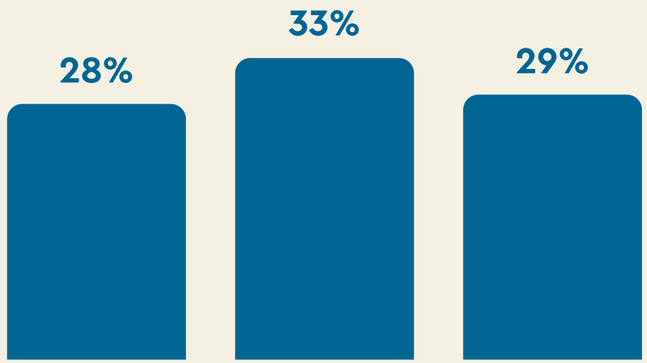
59% of employees do not believe, or are unsure if, their employer has a clear plan for how AI affects employees and jobs within the organization:



32% say their employer does not have a clear plan

27% are unsure whether they do have a plan

Employees rate their leaders' understanding of their AI experience quite low:



Only 28% say their leaders fully understand how employees are using AI today

Only 33% think their leaders truly understand how much training and support employees need

Just 29% believe their leaders recognize employees' concerns about AI

87% ALIGNING WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS STRATEGY (INCL. AI) IS A TOP BUSINESS NEED

29% ADMIT THEIR ORGANIZATION IS GOOD AT THAT KIND OF PLANNING

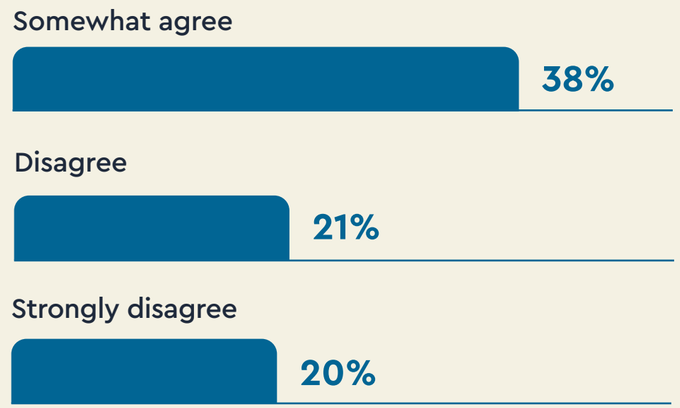
56% CALL ADDRESSING AI-DRIVEN SKILL SHIFTS BUSINESS-CRITICAL

15% ADMIT THEIR WORKFORCE PLANNING IS KEEPING PACE

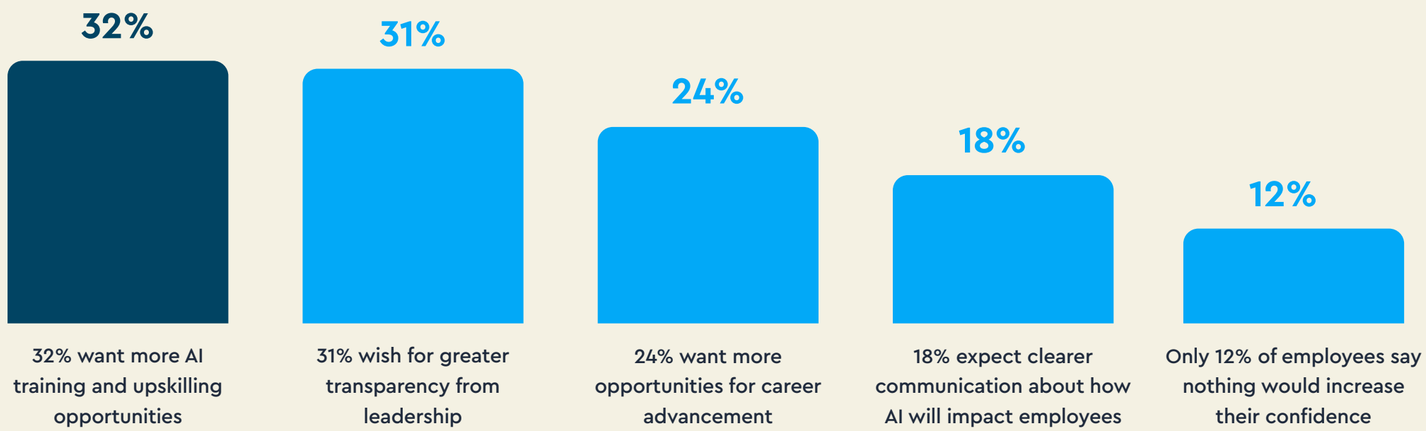
How to actually bridge the AI trust gap

Training and transparency outrank job security and career advancement for employees. Employees are asking to be equipped and informed on AI strategy and trained to make the most of AI use; they're not just looking for job protection.

Employees' assessments of the support they currently receive are mixed. Only 21% of respondents strongly agree their employers are providing the training, resources, and support needed to adapt to AI-driven workplace changes:



Employees are asking for practical forms of support:



These results point out that upskilling employees with AI training and upskilling programs is important, but just the start of how employers can best support (and retain) their employees.

Building AI skills also requires clear career paths, so employees can see a future with the organizations reshaping their jobs, roles, and tasks. That shift brings new demands for talent management leaders.

THE WAY FORWARD STARTS WITH ONE SIMPLE STEP

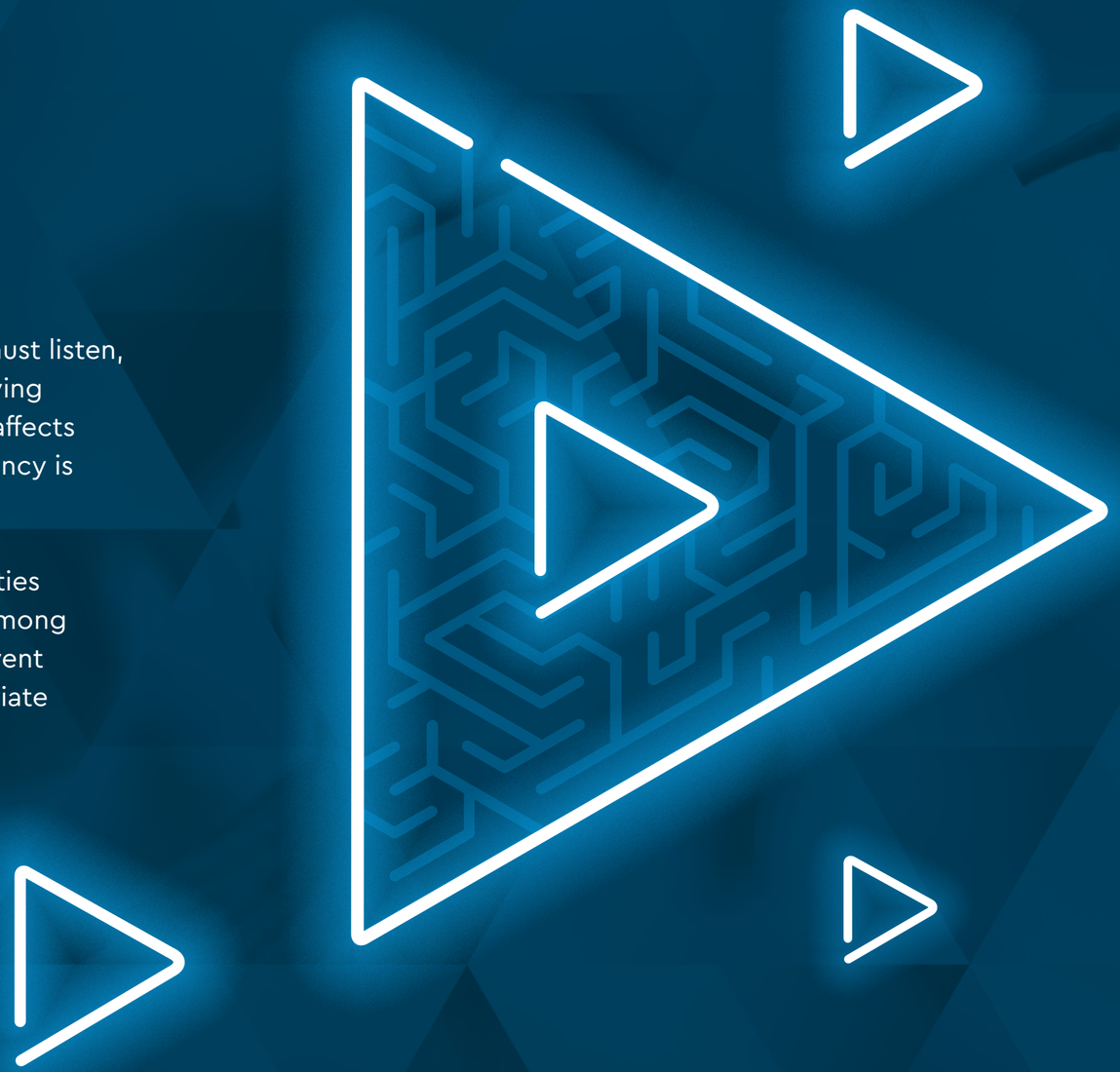
Our top recommendation for business leaders navigating AI in the workplace is an easy one: Listen to your people.

What do they really need, and what are they really saying? How can you communicate with employees more consistently and more clearly? How can you, as a leader, help mitigate fears and uncertainties and take steps to retain the talent crucial for your business?

As you can see from our report, experiences vary widely, and each organization's leadership needs to treat AI usage (and mandates) delicately to keep employee trust high.

As AI reshapes the workplace, leaders must listen, connect, and align with employees, staying transparent about how the technology affects work, jobs, and organizations. Transparency is what builds trust.

By providing employees with opportunities to upskill, learn, and share knowledge among colleagues, leaders can proactively prevent performative AI behaviors and help alleviate workforce anxiety.



About Visier

Visier Workforce AI gives leaders, business executives, and managers the trusted insights and contextual guidance to make confident workforce decisions and lead workforce transformation at scale. The company's award-winning technology expands beyond analytics, connecting insights to action during the workforce decision moments that matter most to an organization.

Our mission is to help businesses lead with insight at scale while continuously transforming in a rapidly changing workforce landscape.

Founded in 2010 by the pioneers of business intelligence, we have over 85,000 customers in 75 countries—including enterprises like Dick's Sporting Goods, Domino's Pizza, Experian, Amgen, eBay, and Ford Motor Company.

Discover more at **visier.com**.





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