

AI FOR BUSINESS

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AI FOR BUSINESS

Distributed in
THE TIMES

Published in association with



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AUTOMATION

Will AI free employees or crush meaningful work?

We're often told that AI will allow us to do more meaningful work, but research shows the opposite may be true. This has huge implications for the workplace

Nick Easen

There's a common belief that AI will free workers from monotonous or low-level tasks, opening up time for more stimulating work. But research suggests this may not be the case.

Milena Nikolova, a professor in the economics of wellbeing at the University of Groningen, has looked at data on thousands of workers across 20 European countries over two decades. She found that automation in industrial workplaces actually increased repetitive and monotonous tasks for humans. Human work became more routine, not less.

Nikolova's research found that robotisation made work more intense, focusing on a dwindling set of tasks that machines could not easily accomplish. These tasks were also less interesting, with fewer opportunities for cognitively challenging work and human contact.

Workers also became more reliant on a machine's pace of work and had a more limited understanding of the full production process. The overall result was a decline in meaningful work and autonomy.

Think of a warehouse operator in a semi-automated depot: the worker still needs to be present while the robot functions. The employee depends on the machine's output and activities, while the human work is more routine-intensive, less challenging and less interactive. There's no time for 'better' work.

This research focused on low-skilled work, but we know now that AI is also taking over more cognitively challenging and creative tasks that only humans could previously perform, whether it be customer service or content creation.

"I'm not worried that people won't have stuff to do. I am worried about the actual content and quality of the jobs that are created with new technologies and the tasks left over for humans," explains Nikolova.

"Will, say, automation and AI create so-called 'bullshit' or meaningless jobs? This new wave of automation, including AI, is very different. It has the potential to affect highly skilled, highly educated and highly paid knowledge workers. This is something we've not seen before," she explains.

Don't expect entire occupations to be automated with new AI-powered solutions. Instead, more structured tasks will be taken on by machines or jobs will be restructured so they can accommodate AI.



How AI is adopted in the workplace therefore matters. We need to consider the types of tasks it takes over, whether it is human-centric in design and whether it promotes meaningful work.

According to the International Monetary Fund, AI will affect 60% of jobs in advanced economies and half of these exposed jobs could be negatively impacted. The stakes are high: the market for AI is set to reach \$184bn in 2024. Expect more firms to leverage AI in workplaces across the globe.

"Certainly AI poses a range of challenges to meaningful work," says Katie Bailey, professor of work and employment at King's College London. "There is the risk that jobs

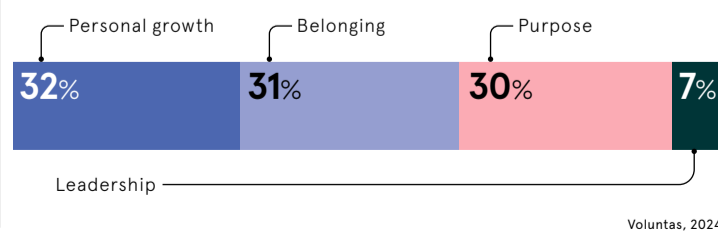
become broken up and disjointed due to AI, or that humans simply end up 'tending the machine'."

It's not all negative, of course; AI has incredible potential. But understanding the technology's mission creep on the tasks and workplace values humans hold dear is essential. For instance, AI can increase the intensity of work and put pressure on "humans in the loop" as they try to keep pace with algorithms.

There are other workplace risks too. AI-powered tools can impinge on worker autonomy, accelerate the adoption of staff surveillance systems, erode employee competencies without adequate retraining and degrade employee socialisation and human interactions.

WHAT MAKES WORK MEANINGFUL?

Employees' citing the following as the greatest contributor to meaningful work



Public and private organisations need an open and honest dialogue on how new tech tools impact employment and whether it promotes or hinders meaningful work. The adoption of AI-powered work platforms is rarely voted on by employees. At the same time, very few businesses have a framework for what dignity at work looks like with respect to AI or capture objective data on these topics.

Carl Benedikt Frey is associate professor of AI and work at the University of Oxford. He says there are lessons to be learnt from past industrial revolutions on how this new digital evolution, driven by AI, will affect meaningful work today.

Initially, in the early 1800s, the automation of human tasks in factory settings such as mills and foundries didn't lead to huge strides in productivity growth, which only came later, after a period known as Engels' Pause. Instead, it led to human replacement, unrest and a hollowing out of the labour market. It was only when old industries were reconfigured and new ones were born that meaningful work fully evolved – such as the creation of the automobile or aviation sectors.

Just like in past revolutions, it takes years to get beyond plain automation. A recalibration of industry requires human experimentation and ingenuity, which demands time and space. "Right now we're in the automation stage of AI," says Frey. "It's about increasing efficiency with respect to the tasks we're already doing in the workplace. What we should be asking ourselves is 'what is it that we can now do with this technology that we previously couldn't do?'"

When it comes to meaningful work and AI we need to move from a system focused on production, measuring how long it takes a worker to complete a task or how many clicks generates a particular output. Instead, "we need to take a more holistic approach and allow people to experiment," Frey says.

This is the opportunity: if human workers are given more autonomy and more thinking time with this new tech they could shift the dial on all sorts of industrial, economic, social and environmental issues, driving new waves of creativity and workplace happiness. If AI is used primarily to replace tasks, boost efficiencies and generally feed the machine, we are unlikely to see either huge leaps in productivity or more meaningful work.

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The rise of shadow AI – and how specialised AI could combat it

Businesses looking to reap the benefits of AI without incurring risks should consider more tailored tools

Emloyees are increasingly signing up for SaaS tools that their companies have not authorised, leaving bosses unsure of how to address the issue.

The growing use of shadow IT – where unsanctioned technologies appear within the workplace – is unavoidable, but organisations can adapt.

"It's happening, and you cannot run away from it," says David Parry-Jones, CRO at global language AI company DeepL. "Companies can shut down access to certain websites and tools, but employees will just find an alternative."

The potential dangers include the unintentional loss of confidential information and other data from within the business and, when it comes to shadow AI, there is also the risk that inaccurate information will be generated. According to 2024 research by Microsoft and LinkedIn, 78% of AI users are already bringing their own tools to work.

However, one positive impact of shadow IT is that CIOs gain insight into next-generation technology that may make their organisations more productive and profitable. This is especially true with emerging technologies such as AI, where employees' use of off-the-shelf tools can help business leaders discover viable use cases.

DeepL recently commissioned a study with Forrester Consulting, which underscores why leaders should invest in reliable and specialised AI solutions to ensure consistency, security and accuracy.

For example, organisations that rely on translated materials to improve communication between employees, clients and customers may inadvertently damage their reputation if employees use inconsistent and inaccurate translation tools.

By using specialised AI tools, organisations can exercise greater control over outputs and achieve better results. With DeepL's translation software, for example, businesses can enjoy a 90% reduction in internal document translation time, and a higher level of accuracy and personalisation.

Business leaders also need to ensure that the tools their employees use comply with regulations in different markets, such as GDPR in Europe.

There remains some apprehension around AI because the technology is disrupting traditional ways of working. These worries are understandable,



Shadow AI is adding to concerns because businesses worry about what third parties might do with their data

especially in sensitive sectors such as law, health or the public sector, where a data breach can have dire consequences.

"We saw the same concerns with cloud computing, but attitudes change over time because the benefits ultimately outweigh the risks," says Parry-Jones. "Shadow AI is adding to concerns because businesses worry about what third parties might do with their data. We have to work hard to build trust. DeepL Pro, which is designed for enterprises and individuals with regular translation needs, does not store any data inputted for translation."

He adds that education is key to conveying the benefits of using specialised translation tools.

"Internal productivity improves because people in different locations around the world can collaborate and communicate more effectively, which saves a lot of time. Previously, documents had to be sent to an external agency to get a good quality translation."

Specialised AI tools are also helping businesses in predominantly monolingual markets, such as the US and the UK, where employees must communicate professionally in the languages of local customers in different countries. There is evidence that this can deliver a considerable competitive advantage, especially for SMEs.

As trust builds around the business benefits of AI, organisations may become more willing to share their data. This will be essential if the next generation of AI tools is to provide even more accurate and personalised solutions.

"Business leaders need to understand that to get really customised AI information, whether for translation or something else, they need to give the engine some data to allow customisation. This will happen over time."

DeepL is already working with businesses to improve the translation of large files (such as multi-page PDFs) that might contain technical terms or

important product information, where accuracy is crucial.

In September 2024, the company enhanced its DeepL glossary functionality, allowing companies to translate specific terms and phrases unique to their industries. This improves global brand consistency by accounting for nuanced translations. Among the languages added to the tool are Korean, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian and Romanian.

"This is about using AI to give an industry context to a translation. An organisation defines which words used internally need to be translated in a particular way," says Parry-Jones. "If everyone is using the same sanctioned AI tool rather than their own, you get more accuracy and personalisation and avoid potential data protection issues."

Parry-Jones points out that people will always have a role, especially in sensitive sectors like law. In the legal sector, AI is used heavily for translations, but a human still runs his or her eyes over the final documents.

In other sectors, such as customer service, where online chat tools are common, the current accuracy of AI translation is arguably sufficient, Parry-Jones says. This is especially true when

there is the option for someone to speak to a human if they need to.

"The best AI is human, and it is used by people to communicate with other people," he says. "We are often asked questions about the future and whether, for example, the need to learn a language is dead. In many ways, AI translation tools that are accurate and trusted help people learn languages by accelerating their learning. This is good for business people who travel."

At a time when businesses face numerous challenges, AI can be a money and time-saving enabler. It can help organisations survive economic downturns, become more corporately responsible and remain innovative and relevant.

The challenge over the next year will be to build trust in, and knowledge of, specialised tools to minimise any threats from employees' shadow AI.

For more information please visit [deepl.com](https://www.deepl.com)



INVESTMENT

Investing in AI: CFOs' top tips

Finance leaders must assess what AI can do for their business before they commit the organisation's precious time and money. We asked three CFOs to outline their approach

Sam Birchall

As investment in AI balloons, finance leaders must determine whether the technology will deliver on its promises to accelerate growth and productivity.

Gartner predicts that AI software spending will surge to \$298bn (£228bn) by 2027, up from \$124bn (£95bn) in 2022. Most businesses assume that AI can boost their bottom line, but figuring out by how much, and how long that will take, remains a challenge. Research from

software platform Orgvue found that 82% of firms are ramping up investment in AI, despite 50% being unclear on its business impact.

CFOs control the purse strings, so they need to understand what AI can do for their business before they commit time and money to implementing it. Here, three finance chiefs share how they are assessing the cost, value and feasibility of AI projects in their organisations – and the challenges involved.

It's important to think about the ultimate goal, as opposed to progress for the sake of it

Nancy Person
CFO at Hyland, a software company

Based on the uncertainty we've seen in the economic climate in the past year, many CFOs are concentrating their efforts on AI and automation. Although most finance professionals are known for being risk-averse, it's no longer a matter of if they will be successful with AI: they now should know they need it.

The most important area to consider when assessing the feasibility of an AI project is whether your workforce is AI-ready. This means taking the time to evaluate whether your staff are equipped with the knowledge and tools to use AI technology in a safe and efficient way that complies with regulations and results in a positive return on investment. If not, this may require upskilling teams – which takes time

and money – to ensure they understand the tools available to help them to succeed.

It's always important to think about the ultimate goal, as opposed to progress for the sake of progress. A worthwhile AI project is one that enables workers to better collect, process and analyse data, resulting in faster, more meaningful insights. These insights should in turn help people to become more agile and improve their decision-making.

Some key areas we're considering for AI project implementation – and likely other companies are too – are customer communications, such as sending invoice payment reminders, and financial evaluations, such as tracking KPIs around sales, revenue growth, cash flow and expenses.

It's not about how many LLMs you're able to deploy, but rather how to get a few to do multiple jobs at once and be consistent

Dan Murphy
CFO at Commercetools, an ecommerce company

The first question on my mind as a CFO when it comes to a new AI project is, "where am I driving efficiency?" Is it improving a process internally or is it delivering value for customers? Once I identify the path or process, I need to assess the various AI tools to work out how they can help plug the gap and generate a sustainable return on investment.

It's essential to consider the specific business problem that you want to address with AI and the expected results. Then you must measure the cost of the process using set metrics: for example, the average response time for a customer service call or the average time it takes to close a ticket in HR.

Crucially, one also needs to understand the opportunity cost of not embracing AI for a given task.

At Commercetools, we've looked at tooling AI internally for a variety of processes. The biggest challenge that I have is the proliferation of these tools across different areas of the business and the lack of a consolidated view. It's not about how many large language models you're able to deploy, but rather how to get a few to do multiple jobs at once and be consistent with outcomes. Plus, you need to properly train and maintain the models as new data becomes available.

When considering implementing AI initiatives, the real challenge is

assessing whether deploying AI will save costs in one area while potentially increasing them elsewhere. I've tried to solve these challenges by asking our leaders what they are currently doing, what they are going to continue doing and what they are going to stop. This is a way of thinking about the feasibility and cost-versus-value approach to AI projects in business.

It's important to investigate the long-term role of AI in the organisation. As time goes on, AI systems accumulate a wealth of data and intellectual property, creating questions such as: is data structured in a way that allows AI to continue using it? And, how do I value this asset?

Brokering the trade-offs can be difficult. It's hard to say no to some ideas, but it will be necessary

Melissa Howatson
CFO at Vena, a fintech

When it comes to implementing an AI solution, prioritisation is key. This is as much about deciding what you will do as it is about what you will not do. As CFO, you'll need to fund and resource any new AI initiative, which means something else is not getting funded or existing expenditure must be reallocated.

Brokering the trade-offs can be difficult but rewarding. It's hard to say no to some ideas, but it will be necessary. Knowing your top priorities and goals is key.

In my experience, when assessing an AI project, CFOs and other C-suite leaders must first identify a

goal or pain point and map all the steps of the process. Once this work has been done and potential AI tools have been identified, it's time to start evaluating the technical and resource requirements.

A crucial step in all of this is the partnership between the finance and tech department. CFOs should work with CIOs and their teams to ensure the new tools and processes are easy to deploy safely, quickly and responsibly, with minimal need for specialised skills or IT, data scientists and engineers getting involved. Complexity often leads to extra costs and slower adoption.

Sometimes it can even make processes worse than before.

CFOs must also consider how to drive adoption and get buy-in throughout the organisation, knowing the nuances of each department. Don't underestimate the importance of change management in making the project a success.

At the end of the day, you will never have perfect information or a decision that is entirely without risk. Given there may not be as much certainty with AI investments, you will need to be willing to make an educated decision and determine an acceptable level of risk. ●





SKILLS

AI education: why workers need 'prompt' training

Every person thinks and asks questions differently, so prompt engineering training needs to address both diversity of logic as well as diversity of learning styles

Tamlin Magee

Even as employees express concerns about generative AI impacting their careers, many use tools such as ChatGPT and Gemini in their daily workflows. Without the proper training, that could be a problem.

Users command GenAI systems via text inputs – or 'prompts' – and the platforms use a probabilistic algorithm to return what they think the answer might be.

There's no denying the success of such tools. Since OpenAI released ChatGPT, the GenAI platform has acquired 180.5 million users as of September 2024, drawn to its simplicity. According to Cypher Learning, a quarter of employees use GenAI at work – whether their boss has signed off on it or not.

This could be a compliance nightmare. Staff might use the various AI assistants to work on confidential documents. The overly trusting, or those under intense time pressures, might turn to consumer GenAI as a source of information without properly scrutinising its output. Plus, these platforms can spit out convincing 'hallucinations' or return results with baked-in bias.

So how can organisations empower their staff to make the most of GenAI, while avoiding these pitfalls? As with developing any new skill, training is essential – but there still isn't enough of it. The Cypher report found that in organisations that have approved the use of GenAI, 57% of employees barely utilise the technology, mostly

because they haven't received training on the prompt engineering needed to use the platforms.

It's clear that companies must focus on training, ensuring their employees use GenAI prompts effectively. But perspectives differ on the ideal prompt training programme.

For a start, how much time should your firm dedicate to prompt training? A lot, according to Harshul Asnani, president and head of the Europe business at Tech Mahindra, an IT services company.

"It's the difference between a good or poor-quality outcome using AI," Asnani says.

GenAI is trained on large language models (LLMs), so it's essential to be able to use language commands to narrow your focus for a particular

outcome, he notes. "Giving examples and refining responses helps teams get the suggestions they're looking for in the shortest amount of time, which is crucial to increasing efficiency and productivity."

His company set about starting a GenAI training scheme after partnering with Microsoft and adopting the Copilot suite of AI chatbot apps.

Tech Mahindra carved training into two distinct groups: developers and information workers, the latter including sales teams, project managers and senior leaders.

Prompt engineering was a large part of this training. The education began with courses on the foundational concepts of GenAI, followed by case studies, test assignments and responsible-AI content covering data privacy and security guardrails and ensuring sensitive information isn't inadvertently disclosed.

The firm has already trained more than 45,000 employees in the basic principles of AI, with another 15,000 trained in GenAI specifically. Tech Mahindra plans to upskill all of its IT staff with AI training by 2025.

After training staff on the fundamentals and establishing sandbox environments to encourage hands-

on experimentation, employers can dive into advanced techniques.

Infosys, the tech-services firm, decided that its entire workforce of more than 300,000 employees should be AI-ready – equipped with the basic knowledge of what GenAI is, how it works and the process of crafting effective prompts.

Rafee Tarafdar, CTO at Infosys, says the company took a three-tiered approach to training, splitting staff into general consumers of AI, who would receive basic training; builders, who would use GenAI to create new products or applications; and masters, who would build a deeper understanding of GenAI for their specific domains.

Advanced AI techniques might include training employees in parameters such as 'temperature', which in the parlance of LLMs essentially means variability in results: ie high temperatures allow for more creativity and randomness in the response, while low temperatures demand safer and more predictable responses.

The company also encourages employees to experiment with other elements, such as personas: what kind of person do users want the model to consider in its outputs?

Going deeper still, developers using GenAI may need training on how to check and validate the output of the code generated. Security specialists might investigate prompt injection attacks – where GenAI is turned against itself and tricked to provide answers outside of its security guardrails – to audit the safety and efficacy of the models in use.

One of the most important factors across the board is to facilitate ongoing learning.

“Training has to cover the fundamentals, but also less-straightforward factors such as clarity and context, creativity, iteration and validation

"Prompts that work for one model will not work for another model," says Tarafdar. "You need to continuously learn to work across models and across versions."

That learning looks a little different than for traditional software. With typical business software such as a content management system or a customer-relationship management tool, the application will always work in the same way. Button X achieves task Y, for instance.

By comparison, GenAI can be inconsistent. It is only as effective as the prompts issued to it. The user must know how to get the best from the app. It is more like the effective use of search, with its requirements for critical thinking and trial and error to find what you need.

"Every person thinks and asks questions differently, so prompt-engineering training must address diversity of logic as well as diversity of learning styles to be effective and enriching," says Kathy Diaz, chief people officer at Cognizant, an IT-services and consulting firm.

"Prompt engineering is a mix of art and science, so training has to cover the fundamentals of prompting but also enable learners to think through less-straightforward factors such as clarity and context, creativity, iteration and validation to achieve optimal results," Diaz says.

This means hands-on tasks are essential. Cognizant, for instance, acquired 25,000 licences for Microsoft Copilot and set up sandbox environments so that employees could freely experiment and observe how outputs varied.

At the same time, employees receive access to practical exercises, quizzes and discussions. The idea is to combine theoretical knowledge with concrete, real-world application of their skills.

"A blended learning experience is critical to engage diverse learning styles and create deeper understanding of concepts," Diaz says. "Along with e-learning courses, we have subject matter experts to deepen conversation, provide examples and clarify concepts."

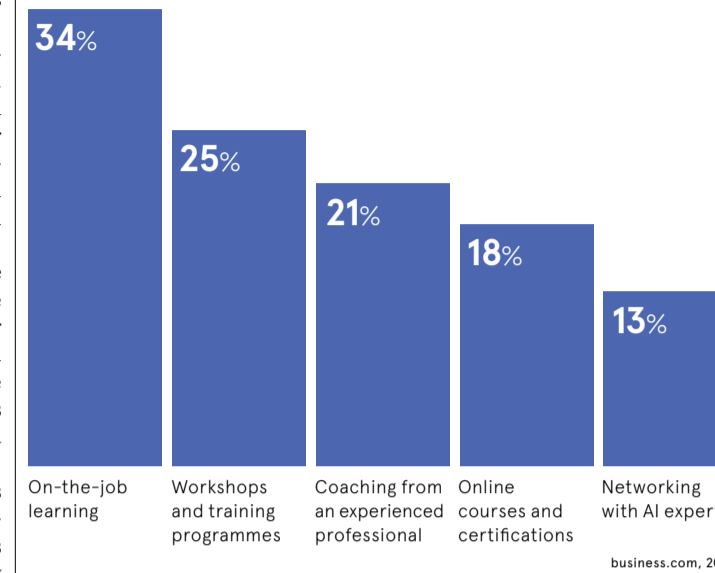
Continuous training and upskilling should always be a priority, especially around emerging technologies such as AI. But Graham Glass, founder and CEO of Cypher Learning, urges some caution in terms of training everyone on certain aspects of the technology, such as prompt engineering.

AI optimism meets organisational confusion

Firms are optimistic about AI. According to a report from Pega, an enterprise-AI company, nine in 10 businesses plan to increase the use of AI in the next five years. Three in four believe AI can add "transformational value" within the next 10 years, while one in three expect to attribute profit growth to AI in the next three years.

UPSKILLING FOR AI

Most common training methods used by employers to educate workforce on AI



“Training must address diversity of logic as well as diversity of learning styles to be effective

"There's a bit of a knee-jerk reaction from companies that think everyone needs specific prompt training when that isn't really the case," Glass argues. "While it'll be a big part of some jobs – for those who need to get under the hood and work directly with the AI – your average worker won't need to do that."

Glass expects the need for users to learn complex prompt design or prompt engineering will "largely disappear" by 2025, as AI technologies become more deeply embedded into everyday applications.

Peter van der Putten, director of the AI lab at Pega, says employees in an enterprise context won't just use chatbot-style interfaces. In many cases, GenAI will be embedded into tools, processes and workflows, with prompts hidden for end users.

"It will be more important to train employees on general GenAI principles: for instance, the fact that the output can be hallucinating or

biased," he says, adding that generally, teams should also avoid sharing sensitive information materials with GenAI. Instead, organisations should focus their training on how GenAI is being used by existing tools and systems.

Joshua Wöhle is CEO and co-founder of AI skills platform Mindstone. He thinks most firms would benefit from an outcomes-based approach. In his company's AI training programme, only one of nine hours is spent on prompt engineering, with the rest spent on discussing use cases.

"We've found that once people understand how AI can help them in their day-to-day, the tech stuff just clicks," Wöhle says. "It's about making AI relevant to what they're already doing."

Firms should examine where the AI skills gaps are and set clear goals, he advises. They could make learning about AI part of the workday, rather than an extracurricular activity. And, it's helpful to mix up the styles of learning – sometimes individual and sometimes in a group.

Organisations can monitor the success of this outcomes-based approach to training by examining team KPIs. Are sales going up? Are IT teams sorting out issues faster?

Views on precisely how to train staff on GenAI may differ, but experts agree that it's a worthwhile endeavour to demystify the tooling and ensure staff make the most of the rapidly developing technology. ●

But there's a catch: business leaders appear to be confused about the basics of GenAI. That same report asked business decision-makers if they thought they "had a good understanding of AI and how it worked". Ninety-three percent of respondents said they did. But two-thirds of those respondents failed to correctly define GenAI, picking the incorrect options from a list littered with dummy descriptions.

"In our recent AI survey, we found that 43% of decision-

makers said their organisation is using GenAI," says Peter van der Putten, director of the AI lab at Pega. However, if you include shadow IT, where employees use consumer GenAI tools such as ChatGPT on their own initiative free from company oversight, these percentages "are probably a lot higher," he says.

Van der Putten emphasises: "Education and training on the use of GenAI in organisations is key, even if GenAI is officially not in place yet in an enterprise."

INSIGHT

'The race to AI transformation is a marathon, not a sprint'

Business leaders are anxious about the perceived urgency to deploy AI tools. But a more measured approach could help to allay the anxiety and lead to long-term success

As organisations rush to invest in new AI tools, leaders are both excited and apprehensive. AI systems can provide tremendous value to organisations, individuals and society. However, the integration of AI is making humans deeply aware of the ethical responsibilities the adoption of this technology brings. Balancing the risks and opportunities requires facing up to four key fears.

1 Fear of missing out

Business leaders often worry their organisation is not implementing AI quickly enough, which creates anxiety over potentially falling behind competitors. This can lead to hasty investments made without a clear strategy, or siloed efforts across departments.

While the desire for urgent action is understandable, organisations need a more thoughtful approach. Success comes from identifying specific business problems that AI can address and aligning initiatives with core business objectives. A cohesive, enterprise-wide strategy is essential, as are strong foundational elements encompassing data infrastructure, talent development and organisational culture.

2 Fear of messing up

Leaders understandably worry about data breaches, biased outcomes and regulatory compliance.

Developing robust governance frameworks and ethical guidelines from the outset is therefore essential. Auditing for biases and focusing on employee AI literacy, can also help to mitigate risks. Many organisations find success by starting with lower-risk applications to build confidence and expertise before tackling more complex use cases.

3 Fear of moving fast

The pace of change can create inertia in the organisation. Leaders may hesitate to commit to AI initiatives because they're concerned about disrupting existing operations or making investments that may quickly become obsolete. There's also the challenge of helping the workforce adapt to new AI-driven processes.

The solution is to build a culture of agility and continuous learning. Organisations that embrace iterative development approaches can move quickly while minimising risk. Strong change-management processes and investment in training

can help to support employees through the transition. And, building flexible, scalable AI infrastructure ensures firms are able to evolve with changing technologies.

4 Fear of making obsolete

Perhaps the most personal fear is that AI will render existing skills, processes, or entire business models irrelevant.

The key to addressing this fears is to reframe AI adoption as an opportunity for augmentation and enhancement rather than replacement. Forward-thinking organisations invest heavily in reskilling at all levels, preparing their workforce for the future while positioning themselves to leverage the full potential of human/AI collaboration. Continuous reassessment and adaptation of business models ensure ongoing relevance in an AI-driven world.

The path forward

Organisations must take a strategic approach that addresses these four fears. In practice, that means prioritising responsible AI implementation, investing in talent and culture and embracing agility and continuous learning. It also requires regularly reassessing business models to ensure they're in tune with emerging trends and opportunities.

The most important lesson for digital leaders is, don't panic. By addressing these fears and pursuing a strategic approach, organisations can overcome the challenges of scaling up AI adoption and unlock the technology's full potential. Despite the pressures, the race to AI transformation will be a marathon, not a sprint. The key is to move forward with purpose and recognise that AI requires a long-term investment. ●



Professor Alan Brown
AI director, Digital Leaders

INTERVIEW

‘We decided that everybody has to become AI-aware’

Infosys, the IT-services giant, is training hundreds of thousands of staff on generative AI. Chief technology officer **Rafee Tarafdar** outlines the company’s approach

Tamlin Magee

Whatever you think of the technology, “generative AI” are the words on everyone’s lips. Tech leaders are under pressure from chief executives to deploy the probabilistic prompt-based tool at all costs, while security leaders worry about the implications.

For some, GenAI is an intriguing possibility without a compelling use case. For others, such as Rafee Tarafdar, CTO of Infosys, a global technology services business, this primordial stage in the development of GenAI is exactly the right time to double down on the technology.

While market analysts have begun to question the usefulness of GenAI – with even early cheerleaders such as Goldman Sachs expressing scepticism – Infosys has decided to upskill its entire global workforce of 340,000 people to prepare to use the technology.

“As part of our own AI-first transformation, we looked at what was required to have an AI-ready workforce and we recognised that there would be a spectrum of users and impacts,” Tarafdar explains. “But when we launched our strategy we decided that everybody, irrespective of their seniority, has to become AI-aware.”

To get started, Infosys set out to understand the organisation’s skills

“Organisations that have built the right foundation will deliver value. Where they’ve just gone with the hype, then there is an issue

landscape. Decision-makers at the firm looked at all tasks and roles and determined what could be automated, what could change with AI and which new skills would be required.

The company decided that some in its workforce would be consumers of GenAI – for instance, a sales rep using the technology to research a client or a developer who wants to write code faster. This cohort needs to understand how to make the most effective use of the technology, to create useful prompts and incorporate GenAI into their workflows with a critical eye.

Others will create with AI: their training focuses on how to code GenAI products either for Infosys or for its clients. Some roles may be a combination of the two cohorts.

The company has adopted a three-tiered approach in its AI transformation. The first stage is to make everyone “AI-aware”. This means ensuring that all employees are familiar with the basics. In the second stage, “builders” will be trained to create products using GenAI. These employees need to understand how to work with AI models or APIs: the type of staff tasked with creating AI assistants for wealth advisors, for example, or AI-enabled customer-service bots.

Stage three will focus on AI “masters”. These employees require a much deeper understanding of GenAI. Masters might specialise in safety – protecting against prompt injections or prompt hijacking – or be subject-matter experts tasked with building training models and scrutinising large sets of data for usefulness and quality.

A one-size-fits-all approach would be ineffective. To get around this challenge, Infosys has used its internal training platform, Lex, to create 66 courses on GenAI mapped to each persona. Some courses are designed to help staff become AI-aware, while others are tailored to builders or masters.

The training platform combines different approaches for learning. These include the Socratic method, which prompts users to come to conclusions on their own. The platform also adopts simulations and adaptive learning, tailoring education to the specific requirements of the individual. Hands-on workshops or training sessions are also available for leaders, employees and clients.

Tarafdar says that as a result 84% of Infosys employees – about 270,000 people – are now AI-aware. “We have a large number that are builders and masters too,” he adds. “Anybody can use this platform any time, and that’s how we’ve been rolling out this change across the company. We’re midway through right now: AI-awareness is largely done, but there’s more work to do for the builders and masters.”

Infosys must ensure that staff being trained on AI learn how to check against coding biases in its applications. Recent legislation such as the EU’s AI Act, which declares “discriminatory impacts and unfair biases” in the technology to be unlawful, make compliance an important regulatory matter.

To avoid these problems, Infosys weaved its own responsible-AI framework into its training programme. It covers explainability – so users understand what occurs under the hood, the kinds of data being used and to what end – as well as ethical and security considerations.

When Infosys began its AI transformation, it established an internal “centre of excellence” to promote the safe and responsible use of AI. It then brought in an external auditor to evaluate its responsible AI processes, before applying for the ISO 42001 standard – a commitment to establishing, implementing, maintaining and continuously improving AI management.



To track the programme’s impact, the company collects metrics around daily average users of its AI platforms and the acceptance rate of code created with GenAI.

It also encourages employees to flag issues with AI so the trainees become the trainers. For instance, if an employee notices a poorly automated translation or transcription, they can dispute the offending portion and correct it themselves, helping to teach and fine-tune the AI model.

“Where there are more fundamental issues, engineers look at feedback or disputes,” says Tarafdar. “All of this happens digitally so it becomes a process where they improve the dataset.”

Employees may balk at a broad AI system becoming integral to the firm’s daily operations. Genuinely efficient automation has historically put jobs at risk, from looms in the

industrial revolution to self-service checkouts in supermarkets.

This may explain why Infosys CEO Salil Parekh recently denied that any cuts were on the cards owing to GenAI. However, some may struggle to accept that the technology is only here to help people be more productive. Many businesses that have been the loudest advocates for GenAI have also blamed it for recent cuts.

Despite the scepticism, Tarafdar is confident that GenAI is here to stay.

“In my view, the organisations that have taken a strategic approach and built the right foundation – using the right platform, the right data, being responsible by design and having the right use cases – will deliver value,” he says. “I don’t think there’s much of an issue for people who have done those things. Where they’ve just gone with the hype, then there is an issue.”

How artificial intelligence is driving human innovation

In the rapidly evolving landscape of artificial intelligence, visionary leaders are reframing the narrative. The question is no longer whether AI can outperform humans in certain tasks, but how it can be harnessed to elevate human potential and drive innovation

What does generative AI (GenAI) excel at? And what tasks are best left to humans? As digital technology enters the mainstream, more and more businesses are asking these questions.

But if they seek answers that focus solely on productivity gains or cost-savings, they risk overlooking GenAI’s potential for enhancing human creativity and innovation.

The true promise of GenAI lies in its capacity to amplify what humans excel at, such as critical thinking, high-level strategising and managing teams while dialling down the repetitive, low-value tasks that impede this vital work.

Positioned in this way, digital technology is far from a threat to people’s jobs. It’s actually the key to improving them.

Research from Microsoft found that 84% of professionals say using AI helps them be more creative, while 83% enjoy their work more.

“Every function in an organisation has this element of ‘I have to do it because it’s my job’ and ‘I want to do it because it’s my craft,’” says Jeff Chow, chief product and technology officer at Miro, the Innovation Workspace.

“AI is going to unlock much more of the ‘I want to do it because it’s my craft’ [element],” he adds.

The potential for automation extends far beyond its support with routine tasks, serving as a wellspring of creative inspiration. GenAI can offer up a constant stream of new ideas to help people break through creative blocks.

While not every AI-generated idea warrants pursuit, the sheer volume and variety of suggestions can propel a product or project in an innovative new direction, or encourage teams to refocus on the core problem they’re trying to solve.

“When teams are digging into something very deeply, they can start rabbit-holing pretty significantly,” says Chow. “Sometimes they lose context, and AI is actually very helpful because its context is really broad.”

Becoming an AI-first organisation

To unlock these benefits, businesses need to advance from isolated, standalone GenAI experiments to cohesive, people-centric strategies that nurture business-wide ingenuity.

Miro’s journey toward becoming an AI-first organisation shows how this can be achieved. Transparency and a bottom-up approach have played a key

role in integrating the technology into existing workflows and habits across numerous functions and departments.

For example, the company sends out a regular newsletter that explores how people are experimenting with AI. Employees are also encouraged to share AI wins on a dedicated Slack channel.

“It’s about saying ‘this really saved me time’...[but] we also have an AI ‘fails’ channel, because it’s really important to keep things light – like, ‘hey, here’s something I wasn’t expecting,’” says Chow.

This culture of light-heartedly celebrating failure allows for a more natural and organic adoption of AI tools and techniques. “We’re taking a disruptive technology and lowering the threat of fear...[because] you have to get it into the critical workflows people are already [collaborating on],” Chow explains.

Along with developing its own AI strategy, Miro has embedded AI within its workspace platform. Miro AI can transform ideas on a canvas into instant briefs, summaries and diagrams, reducing what was previously hours of work down to seconds.

Furthermore, it can also be a brainstorming partner, with the ability to break down topics in mind maps with questions or ideas. Crucially, there’s no need for tool-switching as all of this happens on one canvas.

Now, users can also cluster sticky notes by theme or sentiment with one click. “Little things like that are what we would call micro wins, and they’re pretty valuable,” says Chow. “It’s the first exit ramp on the way towards unlocking [more] creativity.”

Innovating at speed

All of these features are designed to create faster, more collaborative workflows. Whereas a product manager may previously have needed a week to produce a product brief after a kick-off call, they can now generate one as soon as the call ends. Crucially, this means that feedback can be gathered when the project is still fresh in the stakeholders’ minds.

“We thought customers would say: ‘This is great, we’re going to have AI generate a product brief and that will speed us to the next phase [of the project],’” says Chow. “But they found that the real value was in the higher quality feedback loops, as they [product managers] were able to get the brief to the collaborators for review in a day rather than a week.”



Commercial feature

In short, maintaining the creative energy behind a collaboration is often just as valuable as saving time. Pointing to another example of this playing out in practice, Chow notes Miro AI’s ability to rapidly synthesise canvas ideas into a wireframe prototype.

“For the designer, it makes it more of a collaborative, cross-functional task. It’s a visual collaboration that gets you feedback from customers faster. The classic feedback loop of creating a prototype and saying: ‘Does this resonate

with you? Does this work?’ probably takes one or two weeks, whereas here it would take a day [or less].”

Instead of simply accelerating time to market, teams are using the compressed timespan of these feedback loops to carry out more product iterations with customers.

“They are saying: ‘We’re going to leverage that time to tweak, refine, tweak, refine, tweak refine, etc.’” The level of innovation is increasing.

Specialist AI agents (called AI Sidekicks) have also been introduced to the Miro Platform. They help you deliver your best work by giving feedback and suggestions on your presentation or suggesting next steps from a retrospective. These agents give you a fresh perspective from a product leader, agile coach or from the experts at the Product Marketing Alliance.

“Most teams aren’t fully funded: there are competing priorities and other things going on that lead to gaps at the micro level,” says Chow. “...[So] maybe the product leader isn’t available, but

you can call on an AI agent to weigh in and help you brainstorm.”

It’s not replacing the human employee, he explains. “But if you didn’t have much time with them, or you have to go back to the drawing board after a meeting, it can help to speed up the collaborative process.”

For leaders wanting to innovate and thrive, it’s not about whether AI can do things better than humans, but how it can be adopted to enhance human creativity – redefining what is possible for their teams.



Learn more about how Miro is helping organisations to leverage the power of AI at every stage of their work



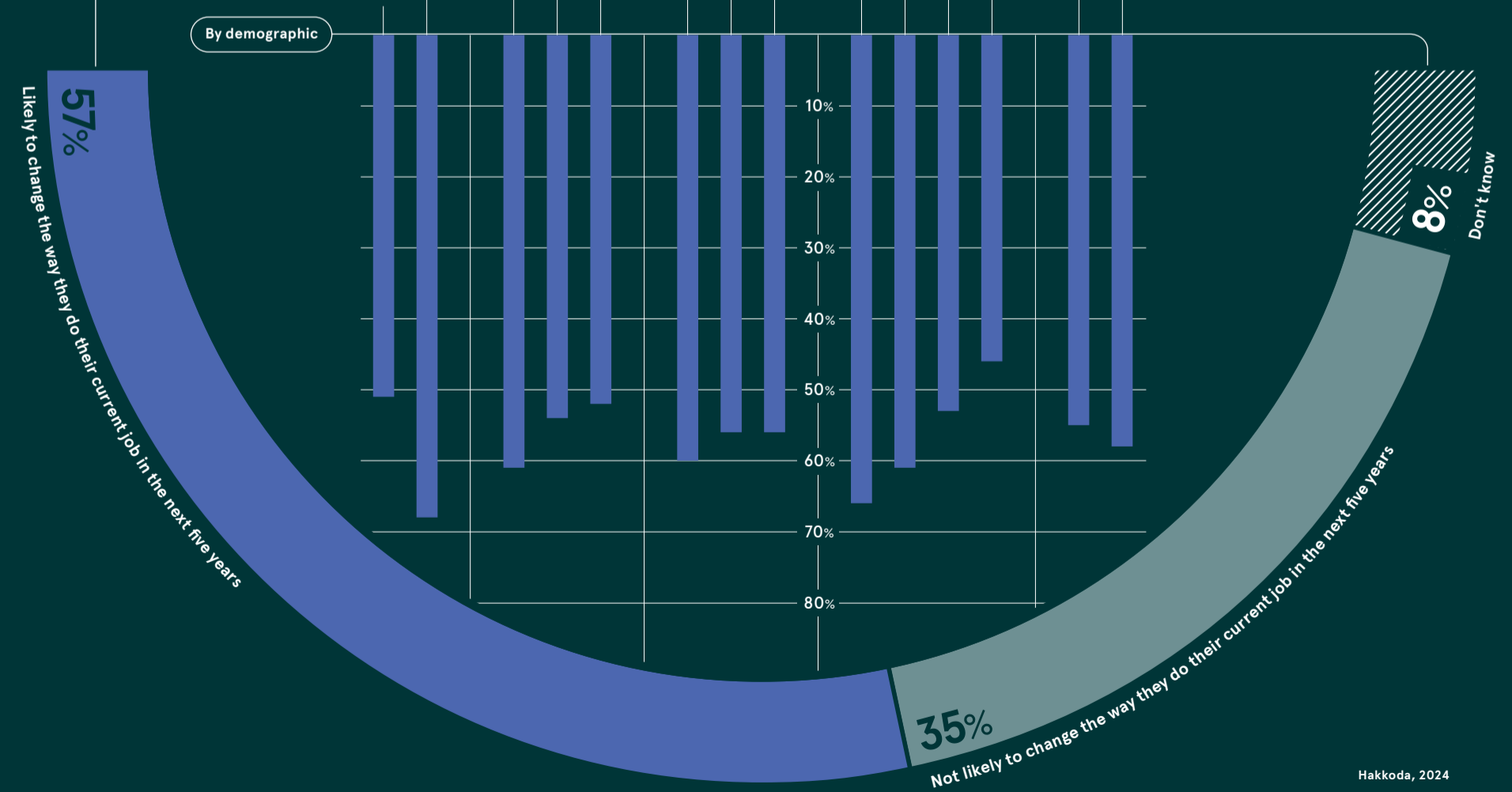
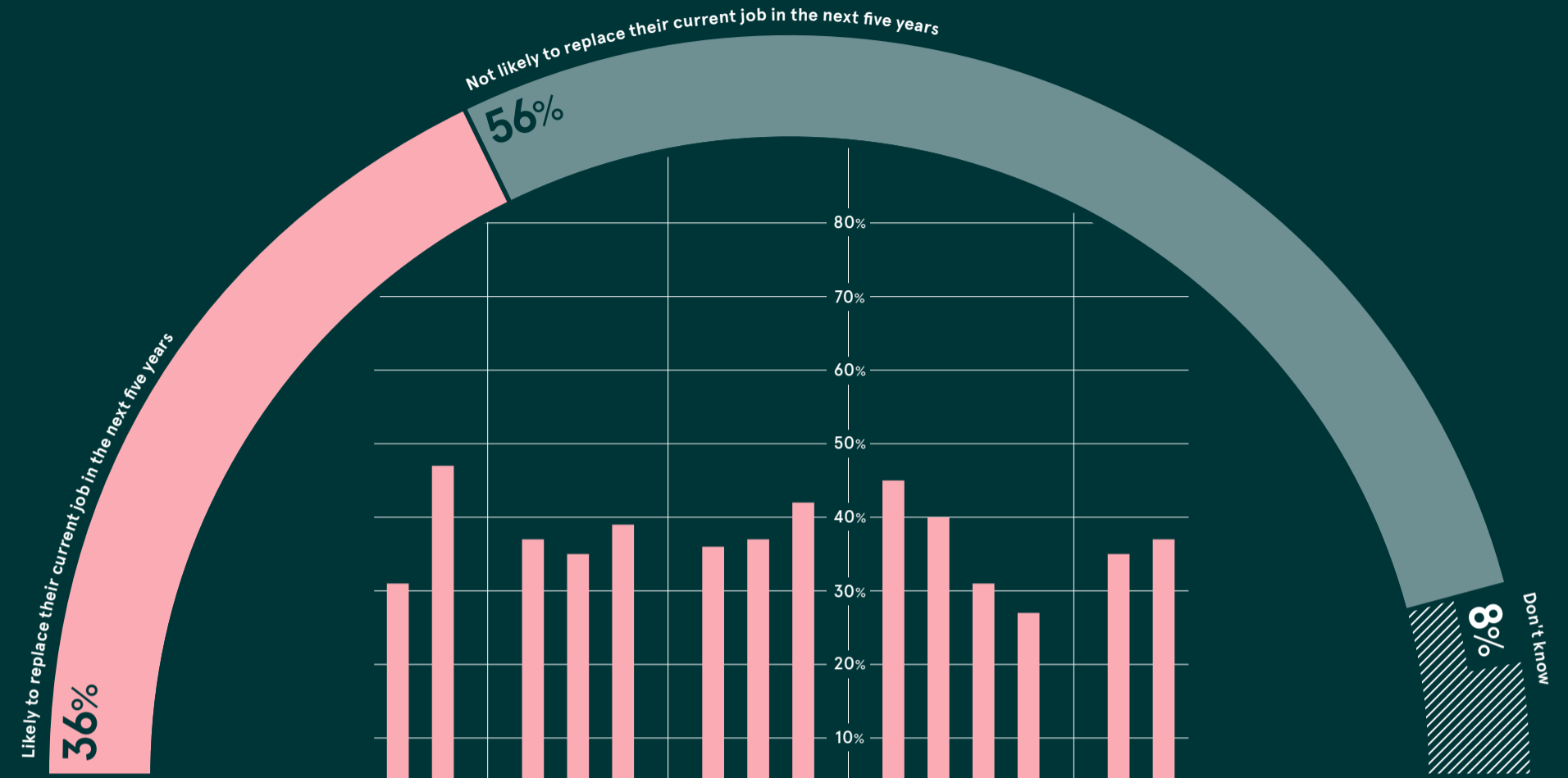
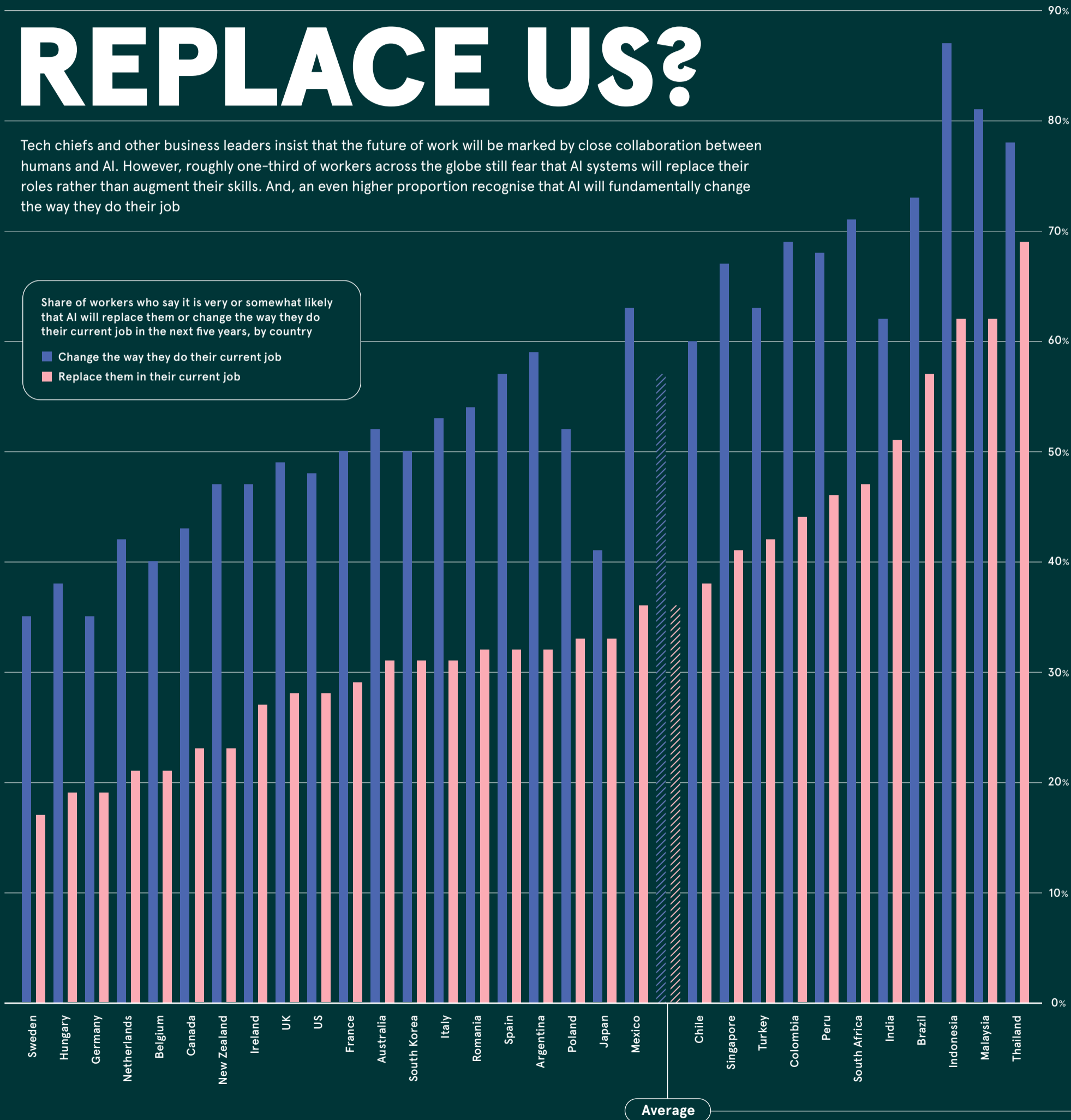
“Businesses need to advance from isolated, standalone GenAI experiments to cohesive, people-centric strategies

WILL AI REPLACE US?

Tech chiefs and other business leaders insist that the future of work will be marked by close collaboration between humans and AI. However, roughly one-third of workers across the globe still fear that AI systems will replace their roles rather than augment their skills. And, an even higher proportion recognise that AI will fundamentally change the way they do their job

Share of workers who say it is very or somewhat likely that AI will replace them or change the way they do their current job in the next five years, by country

- Change the way they do their current job
- Replace them in their current job



MARKETING

Marketing machines: inside the world of virtual influencers

Virtual influencers offer marketing heft without the risks of their human counterparts. However, companies must be careful to avoid customer scepticism and potential security risks

MaryLou Costa

Lu is an accomplished woman. With 32 million combined social media followers and yearly earnings tipped to reach \$17m (£13m), the influencer has been on the cover of Vogue Brazil, appeared in music videos, endorsed multiple name brands and even campaigned against domestic violence.

But what really sets Lu apart is that she's not real. She was dreamt up by Fred Trajano, CEO of Brazilian retailer Magalu, in 2003 as a way to bring a human face to the brand's online shopping experience through a virtual assistant. Customers soon warmed to her and began spontaneously asking her questions such as the colour of her lipstick.

Lu is now one of the company's greatest assets, according to Aline Izo, Magalu's content and social media manager. She appears in its commercials and on its WhatsApp customer service channel, while her brand partnerships are managed under MagaluAds, the company's advertising division.

The firm is also continuing to develop the AI behind her persona to create a complete conversational experience between Lu and customers and expand her ability to recommend products. "We tested, learned and this is how Lu built her reputation in Brazil," says Izo.

Lu is part of an exploding virtual influencer industry, the value of which is set to balloon to nearly \$46bn by 2030, according to research by Grand View. In the next two years, marketers are expected to divert 30% of their influencer budgets to virtual personas, according to research by Ogilvy.

The AI-generated personalities developed by agencies, tech companies and consumer brands are now commanding followings and fees to rival human influencers and are becoming a hit with marketers and consumers alike. A survey by the Influencer Marketing Hub reveals that more than three in five marketers have worked with a virtual influencer, while 58% of people on social media follow at least one virtual influencer, according to the Influencer Marketing Factory.

AI-based influencers may have added appeal for marketers. Izo argues that virtual influencers pose less of a risk than humans in terms of reliability and unpredictable behaviour. They're also constantly available and their output can be infinite. "Even though there are people behind the humanisation of the character, Lu's actions and behaviours are more controlled, which helps reduce the risk of generating a crisis or being cancelled on social media," she explains.

Virtual influencers can also be better moulded to a brand's messaging, says Lewis Davey, CEO and co-founder of Pixel Agency, which connects virtual influencers with brands. "A virtual influencer can not only front a campaign for, say, a global home appliance brand, but can also be trained to engage with followers 24/7 with flair and personality, in multiple languages. It can also deliver consistent product messaging at speed, becoming an 'always on' ambassador for that brand," he says.

But underneath the perfect appearance of virtual influencers lie some significant risks. Using AI

to communicate with real humans takes finesse in terms of characterisation and storylines and can counteract a brand's efforts to appear authentic and genuine.

Magalu has tried to make a virtue out of Lu's lack of humanity. "In her storytelling, she openly acknowledges that she is virtual. Her virtuality is a weakness for Lu, as it imposes limits on her. But by embracing this trait and highlighting it in her narrative, it becomes a strength and adds a touch of humour," says Izo.

"She plays with this concept in her stories, trying to mimic human reality in various situations and contexts, which has certainly helped build emotional and cognitive empathy with the people in her community and with the brand."

This resonates with Hyundai Morocco, which recently created campaigns with KENZA Layli, a virtual influencer created by Meriam Bessa of digital agency L'Atelier Digital and crowned the world's first Miss AI.

"One of the main challenges is overcoming scepticism about virtual influencers. Some audiences may question their authenticity or reliability. Compared with human influencers, managing the narrative and ensuring relatability can be more complex, as virtual influencers are not tied to personal stories or experiences," acknowledges Saad Bezzate, Hyundai Morocco's brand director.

"Another challenge was creating an emotional connection, as virtual influencers can feel more scripted. We had to carefully balance her interactions to maintain authenticity while also ensuring her persona aligned with the lifestyle and aspirations of our audience."

Hyundai Morocco's campaign with KENZA Layli generated 10 million views on Instagram and YouTube, with an engagement rate of 8%, compared with an average rate of around 5%. But not all brands have experienced such success with virtual influencers.

When lifestyle website Sheerluxe introduced Reem, its own virtual influencer, as part of its editorial team in July 2024, the response was far from positive. Sheerluxe fans criticised the brand for replacing a human role with an AI and for giving Reem an ethnic minority



Lu, Magalu's famed virtual influencer, models some of the brand's products

appearance, rather than actually hiring a real person from a culturally diverse background.

Reem is still active on Instagram and the move was praised on LinkedIn by Diary of a CEO host Steven Bartlett for being bold and unconventional. But the experience taught the Sheerluxe team some lessons in launching a virtual influencer.

"We chose to bring the fictional Reem character to life by announcing her as a 'new team member'. With some major companies now saying AI is enabling them to reduce their workforce, it's completely understandable that job security is front of mind when new AI initiatives are announced," says Sheerluxe's editor-in-chief, Georgie Coleridge Cole.

"We should have made it clearer from the start that, as an AI-generated image, Reem cannot write articles or fill any job role on our team, which will never be replaced by AI."

But the biggest concern around using virtual influencers may be security and privacy, warns Oli

Buckley, professor in cybersecurity at Loughborough University. "Virtual influencers rely on complex technologies and large data sets, making them vulnerable to data breaches that could expose sensitive consumer information," he says.

"If these systems were to be compromised then they could be manipulated to spread misinformation, promote fraudulent products or engage in phishing scams, which are damaging to both brand reputation and consumer trust."

Academics at the University of Portsmouth and Audencia Business School recommend the integration of digital and marketing teams and the introduction of joint, proactive data security management systems to harness virtual influencers.

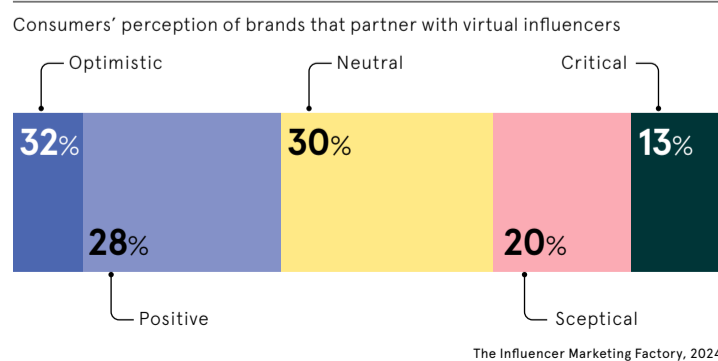
Magalu, for example, has set up a dedicated AI department which continues to develop the technology behind Lu. It has also created a structure for connecting the relevant teams and partners that are responsible for her activity and keeping her audiences safe.

"Companies must be willing to invest in dedicated teams and partners for the conception of a brand character or avatar. We must remember that it's not just about creation: sustaining it is even more complex than the creation itself," says Izo.

"The daily challenges are significant and complex, but it's possible to have a positive impact on the relationship between the brand, its customers and communities."

“It's not just about creation: sustaining it is even more complex than the creation itself”

MIXED VIEWS ON VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS



Q&A

The AI advantage: unlocking long-term value with hybrid transformation

The momentum behind digital transformation continues to build – but how should leaders effectively adopt AI infrastructure? Northern Data Group's chief operating officer, Rosanne Kincaid-Smith, explains

A Adoption is growing, as is the excitement about the business benefits it can bring. Research from Deloitte found that 91% of organisations expect generative AI to deliver significant productivity gains across their operations.

But business leaders also face the challenge of integrating AI effectively, ensuring data security, easing concerns about the impact of the technology and future-proofing investments. Northern Data Group's chief operating officer, Rosanne Kincaid-Smith, discusses how AI and hybrid cloud platforms can improve decision-making and operations, and bring long-term value.

Q How fast is the business world changing and should people be concerned?

A Things are changing very quickly. Everything is becoming focused on AI. You won't speak to anybody who says you don't need to have an AI strategy, but you won't find very many people who can tell you exactly what that is or what that means. People are taking a broad-brush approach.

Ironically, this technology has been around for a very long time. You've had Siri on your phone for the better part of a decade. The idea that this all happened because OpenAI burst out onto the scene is a bit of a fallacy. But there is a shift in the rate of change. We're not really sure what it will and won't do, and what kind of fundamental impact it's going to have. But there is beauty in not knowing because it allows you to shape things.

If it's implemented properly, AI gives people tools to do their jobs much better. It helps them stop doing things that waste time and allows for better productivity and more creativity.

Q What do you personally make of it?

A AI is creating an entirely different and new environment for everyone to thrive in and to contribute towards. Businesses are really going to benefit from that, but they need to start investing in their people.

I had a very interesting conversation with the executive of a large technology consultancy a couple of weeks ago, and he said: 'I see AI as the great leveller. I have a slightly different view on that, but it goes hand-in-hand with my point about augmenting human abilities. We will be able to close the gaps in capability and we'll be able to really step up productivity.'

Q What steps do leaders need to take to effectively adopt AI infrastructure into their business?

A Only certain companies will actually need AI infrastructure. More companies will purchase AI-based tools, which will have been created by others on their AI infrastructure.

There are two parts to this. If you're a business that is going to need AI infrastructure, the key thing is to choose your partners wisely. This technology is power hungry and it requires dedicated space. Your ESG strategy here is key, make sure that your partner is housing the AI infrastructure in the right way and operating it as effectively as possible.

The reality is people are currently very price-orientated, so for technology partners there's an accountability to ensure that we're doing things the right way. That's one part.

The second part is, if you're picking a tool, choose the high priority parts of your business that will really deliver productivity, make you more successful or help people in your organisation to be more productive. Be purposeful.

Q What is the opportunity that AI can unlock within a business when it comes to data?

A The real winners in the creation of AI will be data owners because the right dataset is crucial for good results.

All businesses are going to have data, and will be able to optimise, classify and use that data to unlock new insights. Healthcare is a very good example of this. If you're finding novel methods to treat disease,



“If you teach people how to use the tools and upskill them, you broaden your environment, and that will create long-term value”

you can process that data at record speeds. Quadrillions of algorithms can run simultaneously, so you will be able to find new insights from that data. But it's the collection and the reuse of that data which will ultimately differentiate your business.

A lot of people are worried about AI stealing data. That is a reality. Everything from deepfakes to people misrepresenting who they are in the form of identity theft. But there are also adversarial networks that fight against that.

Q Why should decision-makers consider a hybrid cloud or AI approach to their strategy?

A Hybrid gives you options. There's not really a right or a wrong answer. It's just about your business outcomes and requirements.

As an infrastructure provider, Northern Data Group can advise on the best approach for your business. We can work with you on your proof of concept, all run in our secure environment.

Q How do you evaluate if a hybrid transformation strategy has worked?

A That's the key question. Investors say: "Where are the

returns?" However, there is going to be an element of trial and error, and there's going to be a little bit of poetry over science. This harks back to my point on purpose – make sure you decide on outcomes before you implement a strategy. If you haven't decided what you want to do, you won't be able to determine the value. Seeing long-term value comes down to a defined purpose and effective implementation, rather than "We must have AI at the heart of our strategy" or "We must have on-premises hardware."

Why do you need it? What value do you want it to bring? Because that determines the long term. If you teach people how to use the tools and upskill them, you broaden your environment. And that will create long-term value.

For more information please visit northerndata.de

NORTHERN DATA GROUP



ATW/Willam via iStock

and buy-in from all C-suite executives is required. Despite the buzz GenAI has created over the past couple of years, there's still plenty of hesitation around its adoption, whether that's because leaders are stuck in their old school ways of thinking or they're concerned about the return on investment.

The key to winning over reluctant C-level executives is to show them how GenAI can solve real business challenges, argues Kristof Symons, CEO international at Orange Business. In March 2024, the company launched two GenAI products for French enterprise customers. "When leaders back AI, it sends a strong signal: this is important and we're all in this together," he says.

Paul Cardno, global digital automation and innovation senior manager at 3M, thinks GenAI must be "positioned as a strategic investment". He recommends demonstrating its value by highlighting how competitors have used the technology to improve productivity and deliver efficiencies and cost reductions. 3M is "prioritising GenAI projects that are helping individuals to do their jobs, like content creation and process automation, as these directly support our core objectives", adds Cardno.

The C-suite must also be willing to tolerate failure. Young says some executives can be "paralysed by indecision" when it comes to investing in GenAI because of the potential for a project to fail. However, he points out: "Investing in a project that fails could be damaging, but failing to act quickly enough could be more so."

In their haste to deploy GenAI, firms often rush the rollout and overlook data quality and management. This inevitably leads to some pilot projects failing to take off.

"Data quality is king," says Symons. To perform reliably, GenAI algorithms require accurate and relevant data. It is therefore essential to compile a team that's equipped with skills and knowledge in AI, machine learning and data science. Without the right expertise, firms will likely struggle to develop their initiatives successfully.

Algorithms can pose data privacy and security concerns, which could result in legal consequences if things go awry. Organisations must ensure they have a robust risk-mitigation strategy to ensure GenAI solutions comply with regulations and can be seamlessly integrated into existing systems without causing a legal headache.

“Aligning GenAI strategies with business goals means moving beyond a fascination with hype and towards a deeper understanding of how the technology can enhance the business”

Rich McEachran

Plenty of companies have big ambitions for Generative AI. Fewer have managed to turn their plans into reality.

Google Cloud research published in August found that 47% of 2,508 firms with revenue above \$10m (£7.7m) had taken GenAI from idea to rollout within six months, while 34% achieved this aim within three months. More than half of those surveyed reported at least a 6% to 10% rise in annual revenue.

The problem is that a number of companies are stuck in what Google Cloud calls "pilot purgatory". The research found that 38% of the UK-based respondents admitted that they are yet to implement GenAI in production, indicating that they're struggling to scale up the deployment.

The report argues that firms struggling to scale up the use of AI systems should focus on aligning AI strategies with business outcomes if they're to avoid pilot purgatory. But what does this mean in practice?

Dell Technologies launched its Dell AI Factory earlier this year, a

collaboration with Nvidia, the AI chipmaker to help businesses integrate GenAI applications into their operations.

"Aligning GenAI strategies with business goals means moving beyond a fascination with hype and toward a deeper understanding of how the technology can enhance the business," says Steve Young, UK senior vice president and managing director at Dell Technologies.

Or take Expedia. In the summer of 2024, the travel tech firm launched an AI assistant, Romie, on EG Labs, where users can test and play with experimental products.

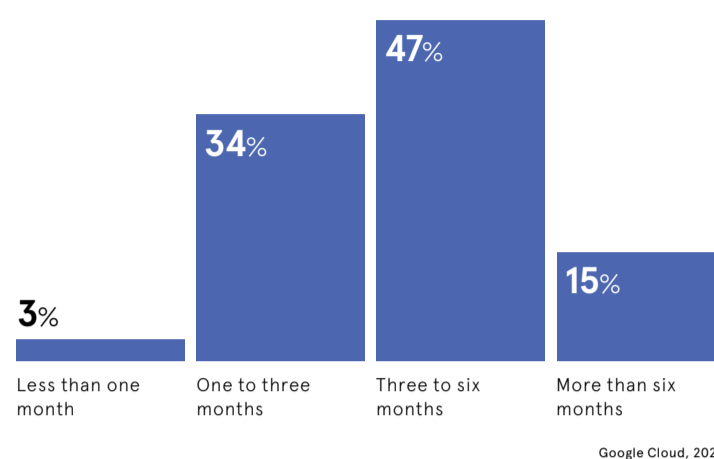
While Romie is in the first stage of testing, the company is already learning from users' feedback on how Romie's features, including AI search, can be integrated into its product offering, says Shiyi Pickrell, Expedia's senior vice-president of data and AI.

To successfully scale up a GenAI project, leaders must "build a strong test-and-learn culture", he says.

For firms to know exactly what they want from GenAI, full support

MOST AI PROJECTS ARE UP AND RUNNING WITHIN SIX MONTHS

Average time required to take an AI project from ideation to deployment, among organisations with AI tools in production



Cardno stresses the need for all those involved in a GenAI project – from the engineering team to the legal affairs department – to pull in the same direction. This requires leaders to establish a culture of trust, not just in the GenAI solution that's being built but in each other as well, he says.

If a GenAI tool is to be deployed successfully, all employees, not just engineers and data scientists, must believe in it. As Symons puts it, leaders need to "demystify GenAI and show it as a tool for everyone".

This means ensuring the technology isn't just for a select few, he says. "Democratise it. If only certain employees get access, others might feel left behind, which can create further resistance. There must be AI equity within the business, because without it you risk a disparity that may see some employees get ahead of those that don't have access."

Both Symons and Young emphasise the need for education and training to support those who aren't confident in using GenAI. By empowering employees and arming them with knowledge, they'll gain a

“It's important to acknowledge that there may be short-term trade-offs for long-term gains. There are no quick wins with GenAI”

better understanding of the benefits the technology can bring to the workplace. This will likely help pilot projects be more successful, but there may still be some pushback.

"It's important to acknowledge that there may be some short-term trade-offs for long-term gains," says Pickrell. "There are no quick wins with GenAI. It requires large quantities of high-quality data and a highly skilled team. It must be viewed as an essential part of the business infrastructure." ●

Five steps to GenAI success

Firms often hope GenAI tools will create an immediate return on investment, which can lead to projects being abandoned. Here's how to avoid pilot purgatory and take a project from idea to implementation.

Develop a clear understanding of your goals
You need to know exactly what you want to achieve by implementing GenAI. Jumping on the hype train without clear and precise targets can be costly.

Convince reluctant C-suite executives
Concerns about the cost of GenAI and the ROI can hold back adoption. You need to show hesitant leaders the tangible value that GenAI can bring to the business. Highlight how competitors have gained from implementing the technology.

Don't forget the data

Sound data and robust data management are essential to successful GenAI implementation. Ensure you build a team of engineers and data scientists with the skills and knowledge to help scale up a pilot project.

Support staff through training
All employees must feel confident that GenAI is not going to take their jobs. Training and education opportunities can empower them to understand GenAI's benefits and functionalities, as well as boosting their competence in using the technology.

Build a test-and-learn culture
As with any experimental technology, there are risks associated with GenAI. You must be willing to experiment and accept failure. Establishing a continuous learning culture helps companies adapt and respond to business and technological challenges.



Recognising those who lead.

The role of the modern-day CEO is evolving. It is no longer enough to focus solely on profit, revenue or share price. Leaders must balance financial performance with employee wellbeing and ESG concerns, finding ways to innovate and grow at a time of deep uncertainty and turmoil.

Across five categories, we hope that by shining a spotlight on the best business leaders, we can offer insights into what it takes to lead from the top and inspire the CEOs of the future.

Meet the 50 CEOs changing British business.





The digital loyalty loop: how AI can transform customer experience

How can companies harness the power of AI to truly transform the customer experience, ensuring personalisation and empathy while businesses grow?

The difference between a happy customer and a disgruntled one is often how quickly and effectively their queries are answered.

If they end up stuck on hold or waiting for an agent to respond on live chat, they may decide to take their business elsewhere. Considering that most customer questions have a simple answer, this is an unfortunate – and entirely avoidable – loss for the company. Indeed, that simple answer is probably part of the company's knowledge base. But today's busy consumers rarely have the time or inclination to trawl through FAQ sections or other brand documents.

They are, however, increasingly happy to interact with an AI chatbot, which can draw upon a company's knowledge base and provide instant answers to their queries. According to research by Servicenow, 66% of UK consumers would use chatbots for an element of customer service.

"AI's current capabilities are focused on digital deflection, and for self-service and providing customers quick answers it's an effective tool," says Dan O'Connell, CEO of the customer service platform Front. "But there are

limits to this experience. The ability of AI to solve complex workflows is challenging due to the lack of reasoning, the need for integrated systems, and the understanding of training data needed to automate complex workflows."

This means that businesses can't solely rely on AI to handle their full customer support queue. "Those limitations lead to escalations – in the form of emails, SMS, DMs on social media, or calls – all of which require the human touch of your support team," says O'Connell.

Despite their limitations, modern AI chatbots can be smart enough to mimic brand identity, values and voice, ensuring a consistent customer experience across multiple channels and touchpoints. They can even tailor chats by drawing upon a customer's CRM data, language, location or other conversation data, creating a unique and personalised experience. Front, for instance, uses "dynamic variables" which branch chatbot flows based on chat visitor attributes, and personalise chatbot message content.

"For example, if the chatbot senses the visitor's browser language is French, you can route them to French-speaking

agents," says O'Connell. "Or if your chat visitor URL ends in '/pricing', then you can direct visitors to a sales-oriented chatbot path. Similarly, if the chat visitor URL ends in '/troubleshooting', then you can direct visitors to a support-oriented chatbot path".

How to design a seamless customer experience

A seamless experience can make all the difference to customer satisfaction. The less effort and energy a customer has to put into getting answers, the more likely they are to stay loyal to the company.

Building visitor data into the chatbot flow means that the chatbot only needs

“**For AI to provide your customers accurate answers, knowledge management needs to be a top priority**

to request essential information. When a hand-off occurs due to a complex query, teams have instant access to all the details and context already gathered from the AI's interaction with the customer, helping to minimise repetition and ensure a speedy resolution.

Automatically tagging messages by topic or sentiment can give agents quick context on the customer's query, ensuring it reaches the right person as fast as possible. "Establishing seamless handoffs for issue escalation will deliver a consistent experience for customers, regardless of the team member they interact with," says O'Connell.

"Proactive service measures, like auto-assigning queries to available team members when someone is out, utilising snooze functions for when the teammate returns, and leveraging AI summarisation to quickly bring team members up to speed can also help to improve a common pain point in the customer journey."

AI can provide accurate, automated summaries of a customer's past conversations and relationship with the organisation to date, for example, so agents don't have to trawl through endless back-and-forth threads and can reclaim their time.

If a question is particularly tricky, AI can show how a similar question was successfully resolved for another customer, allowing organisations to make real-time improvements to service and responses. AI can even draw on the organisation's knowledge base to serve up draft replies to customer emails and messages. All of these capabilities help to free up agents' time so they can focus on more complex issues, and deliver exceptional service with a high degree of empathy.

But to fully unlock AI's potential, customer conversations must be accessible from one platform, rather than siloed away in separate tools. This not only enables the collaborative ways of working that

go hand-in-hand with exceptional customer service; it's essential for accessing insights and analytics that span the entire customer experience.

Another important thing to note is that the customer experiences powered by AI will only be as good as the data sources it learns from. "A help centre has long been a support team's number-one source of truth, but its importance is only growing in the age of AI," says O'Connell. "For AI to provide your customers accurate answers, knowledge management needs to be a top priority."

Creating a customer-first support model

AI-powered customer experiences are ultimately part of a broader shift toward more customer-centric business models. "Leading businesses are transitioning from a model where the frontline team is solely responsible for customer experience to one where the entire company collaborates based on insights gained directly from customers," O'Connell explains.

Through detailed analysis of resolution rates and unresolved questions, for instance, businesses can identify areas for improvement. Monitoring response times and resolution speed at scale can also help to improve performance over time.

By identifying patterns in historical data, AI can even help to identify emerging trends and predict future outcomes, such as customer churn risk. "All of the answers to your most critical business decisions lie within the conversations your support and sales orgs have with customers," says O'Connell.

Front keeps these customers at the centre of every interaction by aggregating all conversations in a single view. "Teams work together, sharing context and understanding, so they can address customer challenges swiftly and at scale," says O'Connell. "And every conversation sparks insights that create clarity and focus, and help teams better meet and anticipate customer needs."

He adds: "So much of the work that service teams do, such as escalations and handoffs, are moments of collaboration, and moments that – if done well – also address your customers' expectations around speed and quality of service."

Despite the obvious benefits that AI and collaboration can bring to customer service, the most important thing is that customers can always access clear and accurate support, with minimal effort, whenever they need it. "It's that reliability, the end result, that builds trust," says O'Connell.

And while AI is undoubtedly changing the industry, there's one thing it won't change: "Businesses that obsess over their customers and put the customer experience above all else, are the ones that will win."

For more information please visit front.com



WORKPLACE

Is AI the key to the four-day work week?

AI-driven business efficiencies could soon make the four-day work week a reality. How can companies use the technology to maintain productivity while reducing employee hours and costs?

Natasha Khullar Relph

Artificial intelligence promises to unlock a new era of business efficiency, bringing obvious productivity gains for employers. However, there are signs the technology could also benefit employees – and even lay the foundations for a four-day working week.

Already, AI has boosted performance in sectors such as software development, marketing and legal services, among others. Recent studies suggest that AI could enable businesses to maintain productivity while reducing employee hours from 40 to 32 hours per week.

For companies, this means doing more with less – less time, fewer resources and potentially lower operational costs. Could the productivity gains also make the heralded four-day week a workplace reality?

"The issue is complex because not all jobs or sectors are created equal," says Geoffrey Hamlyn, chief operating officer (COO) of Trepwise, whose four-day week benefit has contributed to the firm's 'Best Places to Work' designation for the past seven years. "A manual labourer working on an hourly basis is much less able to adapt to a shorter work week than an

accountant or a marketing director, for instance. Similarly, a law firm that bills on an hourly basis has very little incentive to reduce expectations for its team members."

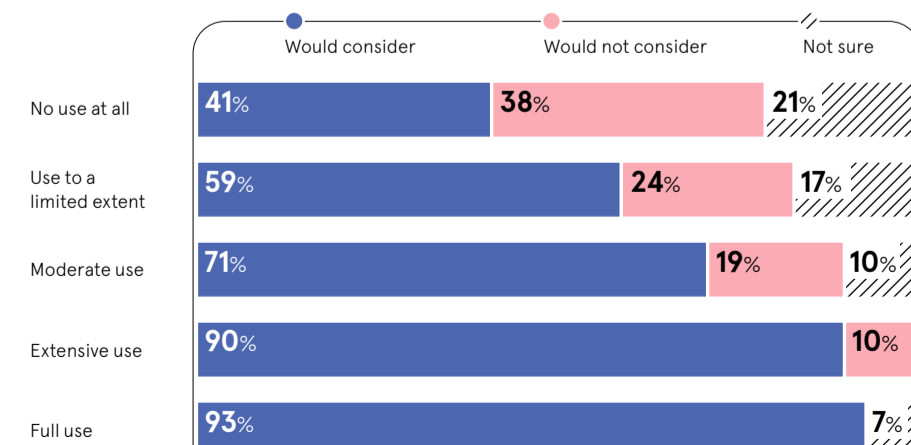
For many companies, however, the downsides of a shortened work week are considerably less daunting – and there are tangible upsides. Numerous studies have shown that employee morale, retention and productivity are positively correlated with the four-day work week. Of the businesses that have adopted a four-day week, 29% cite AI as a key factor in the transition.

AI is increasingly seen as a way to enable a four-day work week without sacrificing productivity. AI can improve worker output by an average of 14% according to a 2023 study by MIT and Stanford, while research from Goldman Sachs suggests that AI could automate up to 25% of tasks currently performed by employees. These gains allow businesses to rethink traditional work structures.

Rosi Bremec, COO of Game Lounge, an affiliate marketing company in the iGaming industry, successfully implemented a four-day work week this summer and says AI

AI USE IS DIRECTLY CORRELATED WITH WILLINGNESS TO CONSIDER A FOUR-DAY WORK WEEK

Companies' willingness to consider a four-day work week, by the current use of AI tools in the organisation



“**The inevitable march toward automation will require laws and regulations to ensure fairness**

was the key to being able to automate certain tasks. "The goal is not to replace people with AI, but to work smarter," she says. "We're being cautious about using AI for content creation, especially because we're focused on organic SEO. However, we're looking into automating other tasks like taking meeting minutes and creating reports. AI is also used for learning and development, backlog grooming and prioritising tasks for the week."

AI's potential to transform the workplace extends beyond productivity. It can also enhance collaboration and information sharing. AI tools enable employees to find relevant documents quickly, cutting down on time spent searching for information. They can also optimise team formation by pairing individuals with complementary skills, ensuring that remote teams work together more efficiently.

A 2023 report by think tank Autonomy underscores the transformative potential of AI. According to its findings, AI could reduce working hours by at least 10% for nearly nine in 10 UK workers over the next decade. The study also suggests that up to 28% of employees could transition to a 32-hour work week by 2033,

Tech.co, 2024

without losing pay. This shift, experts argue, presents an opportunity for policymakers and businesses to rethink how AI can be harnessed for the benefit of workers, not just employers.

AI holds great potential to streamline tasks, but there is still concern that the financial gains may benefit shareholders more than workers. According to Goldman Sachs, AI could disrupt 300 million jobs worldwide. Meanwhile, Harvard Law School highlights the need for protections to prevent worker exploitation in an AI-driven economy. The Harvard report's recommendations include AI monitoring in workplaces, establishing safety standards and ensuring transparency around the technologies in use.

"Just as Hippocrates implores physicians to 'first, do no harm', so too must employers carefully mitigate risks when implementing significant changes to technology or workflow," says Hamlyn. In the future, AI will reduce the need for human resources, he notes. This reality is already playing out on factory floors, in call centres and in software companies worldwide. As the power of AI grows, so will the risks to human capital.

"The inevitable march toward automation will require laws and regulations to ensure fairness," Hamlyn says. "However, in the absence of policies that dictate how businesses must operate, employers will be required to make difficult decisions that balance the wellbeing of their workforce with the potential for profits."

The right approach could boost productivity without reducing the

need for human employees. As employers gain from AI-driven efficiencies, they face a choice: share those gains with workers or focus solely on cutting costs.

For Game Lounge's staff, the challenge was how to fit five days of work into four. "Some employees were initially worried about how they could manage everything in just four days, especially since their schedules were already packed," Bremec says. "I even got pushback from some directors. But once we adjusted, they managed well."

The trick for Bremec was better planning. "One of the first changes I made was cutting meeting times from an hour to 25 minutes, leaving time for preparation and a buffer if needed," she explains. And by integrating AI into task-tracking systems to monitor workload trends, the company enabled better management of seasonal fluctuations and workflow shifts.

Still, there are limitations to how AI can be implemented in the workplace. Not every role offers eight hours of work that can be easily automated. For AI to reduce work hours, tasks need to be routine and repetitive, which is not the case for many senior or creative roles.

In an ideal world, an AI application that removes an hour of mindless work enables employees to focus on higher-level tasks, boosting their efficiency and effectiveness, says Hamlyn. You don't need to automate a full eight hours to save eight hours of work. "Mindless tasks drain productivity," he says. "Automate those, assign more meaningful work and you'll see employees thrive while saving time overall." ●



Marcus Punthi via iStock

EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

AI anxiety: how firms can ease employee fears

AI promises exciting opportunities for businesses, but many employees fear the impact on their jobs and wellbeing. How can firms allay their concerns?

Sally Whittle

A here's a rising tide of evidence that the arrival of AI in the workplace makes employees anxious. It's not just the fear that we'll be replaced by AI tools – new research has found that employees are also concerned about the impact of AI on work/life balance and the risk of burnout.

A survey from ResumeNow found that 63% of workers admit feeling worried about AI and nearly half of women (49%) believe it could negatively impact their work/life balance. While 78% of respondents are positive about using AI in the workplace, 87% of younger workers think they might face AI-related burnout.

Such fears are caused in part by the rapid pace of change in AI technologies, says Mansoor Soomro, a lecturer in the Future of Work unit at Teesside University Business School. "Many people only saw ChatGPT at the start of this year and we're now talking about AI making music, videos, even podcasts based on text source material," he says. "It's hardly surprising that people wonder if they're fit for the future and what the impact of this rapid change will be on their ability to do their job."

At Grey London, a creative agency and part of the WPP advertising group, conversations about AI are a

daily occurrence, even if the technology isn't officially being used within the company today, says Karan Tattersfield, the company's European chief people officer.

While Grey London hasn't yet deployed any corporate AI projects, the company is aware that individuals are already using online AI tools to support their jobs, as well as worrying about the future in an industry that could face huge upheaval as AI becomes more mainstream.

"There's always a conversation about how AI will change people's jobs, but the issue for us is that we aren't using AI in any corporate sense yet. We're still in the very early stages of learning about it," she says.

But some employees are still concerned about the implementation of AI in the near term, including those at Casumo, an online gambling firm. That's according to Martin Schillig, the company's chief HR officer. "Many employees are afraid that AI will eventually automate their jobs, making their current skills obsolete. But history has seen similar concerns with other techno-

“It's important for people to understand we're investing in their future, as well as the future of the company

logical advances like personal computers and robotics," he says. "The reality is that new technologies create new jobs and even industries, providing employees are adaptable and willing to learn."

When employees are worried about AI's impact on their jobs, it can impact their psychological safety, says Schillig. "This results in lower productivity and performance and potentially anxiety and burnout," he says. "HR teams need to support businesses and employees to maintain a healthy level of psychological safety during times of rapid and significant change."

How can firms allay employees' fears when even decision-makers are in the early stages of understanding AI? "It's not easy if you aren't in a position yet to have an AI strategy, but you can start to develop things like ethical AI policies and simple 'red, amber, green' tools that indicate which tools people can use safely or not," says Soomro.

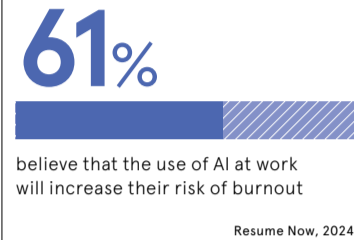
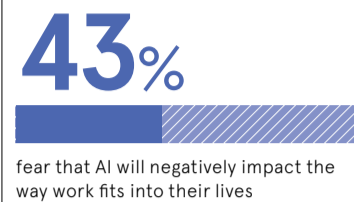
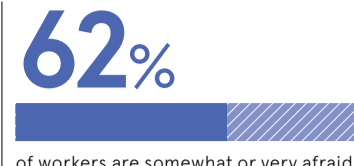
Grey London has created a set of AI guidelines for employees who are using tools in their jobs. Tattersfield explains, along with online education programmes that help people to learn the basics about AI technology. "Like any new technology, if you exclude employees from the process, they're going to be resistant and potentially undermine or sabotage the benefits that you're trying to achieve," she says. "It's critical to involve people as early as possible in our AI journey, to understand how it can help them."

Swag Drop makes branded merchandise for corporate clients; the company uses AI in several parts of its business, including supply chain management. "We have a nifty AI system that crunches data to predict demand and optimise our inventory," says Anna Petosa, Swag Drop's people operations executive. "Our procurement folks have more time to focus on building relationships and negotiating deals. It makes their roles more rewarding."

Communicating these benefits to the workforce is an essential part of the company's AI strategy, says Petosa. Swag Drop holds regular town hall events where people can ask questions to experts about the introduction of the technology.

Petosa describes a recent meeting where a customer-service representative asked whether AI chatbots would make her role redundant. "We were able to explain that AI would free up time for her team to focus on more complex, human-centric aspects of customer service. That person left the meeting feeling excited about the possibilities," says Petosa. "That's the shift in perspective we're aiming for."

Alongside open communication, Swag Drop has focused on education and reskilling. "AI is transforming people's roles. We want our team to feel empowered rather than threatened," says Petosa. The company has introduced training sessions and workshops that show how AI can be an ally rather than an adversary and help people to gain the skills they'll need to adapt. "It's important for people to understand we're investing in their future, as well as the future of Swag Drop."



Top takeaways to reduce employees' AI concerns

- Be transparent and communicate the goals and benefits of AI initiatives, ensuring employees understand how AI will be used.
- Avoid technical jargon. AI is new to everyone, so make sure you use language that employees understand.
- Involve employees in the AI implementation process to foster a sense of impact and belonging.
- Develop and implement clear guidelines and policies for the use of AI.
- Provide ongoing training and development to help staff adapt to new AI technologies.
- Offer career counselling services to help employees understand how AI may impact their roles and identify future opportunities.

Continuous upskilling and education help workers feel less unsure about AI, adds Soomro. "It's basic human psychology: if you've been doing a job for 10 or 20 years and you see this rapid pace of change like we've seen in AI, you'll wonder if you're fit for the future or will be able to do your job well enough," he says.

But it's not just about setting up a few online training courses, Schillig adds. He recommends regular company-wide meetings, anonymous surveys and one-to-one discussions to understand what issues are concerning employees and how they can be addressed. "That said, words aren't enough. Employees need to see and feel that they're supported," he says. "Invest in training and development programmes to equip people with the skills required to work with AI, along with ongoing career counselling."

Five ways Intel's AI-powered solutions can revolutionise the IT workforce

With Intel Core Ultra, the age of accessible AI-powered PCs has arrived. Learn how Intel can help enhance IT productivity, cybersecurity and device management for today's workforce



1 Hardware that fully supports the new AI ecosystem

A challenge for any IT team is to ensure the technology you're buying into the organisation can handle everything the modern workforce demands – both now and in the future. Hardware that can support the rapid rise in applications that make use of AI and ML features is essential. Intel's Core Ultra processors can run over 500 different AI models, giving teams the flexibility to pull in the particular model they need, without creating

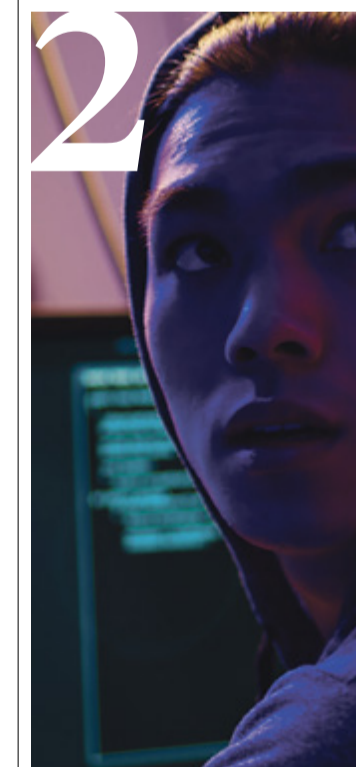
extra work to integrate something new and untested.

Bradley Jenkins, Intel's EMEA AI PC lead at Intel, points to the benefits of hardware that's optimised for such a range of functionality: "Businesses need both a rich selection of applications to choose from and to provide a good experience using them. We're making it easier for software developers to take advantage of our AI compute engines at scale."

2 Improved hardware-based security with AI PCs

Cybersecurity threats are an unfortunate fact of life for any organisation. It feels like barely a week goes by without a new cyberattack hitting the headlines. For a business' IT department, that can introduce major day-to-day overheads in terms of managing hardware and software to keep it secure, as well as lost time to dealing with incidents if and when security is breached.

Intel Core Ultra processors that support Intel vPro provide a more secure baseline for modern computing. AI can reduce the burden on IT departments, helping to detect deep fakes and phishing attempts as well as malware and ransomware. Intel's Threat Detection Technology (Intel TDT) uses algorithms powered with decades worth of telemetry data (the data automatically collected from remote sources for analysis) to detect threats faster. In tests it identified over 97% of known and unknown attacks, and organisations using Intel saw a 26% lower risk of major security events. IT teams responsible for device security saw 17% efficiency gains.



3 Easier device fleet management in an increasingly remote world

Managing disparate hardware and software across geographically-dispersed organisations is a challenge, but Intel technology introduces a variety of solutions. Whereas a 'blue screen of death' style hardware crash might once have required a support engineer to physically get to the device to diagnose the issue, Intel vPro allows remote support at a level beneath the operating system. So, even complex technical issues can be resolved quickly, as if the entire business was still based in a single office.

AI-powered security that takes advantage of Intel AI compute engines can also come into play in terms of the security and privacy challenges of



supporting users remotely. For example, enabling communication software that allows the user to get the help they need without sharing identifiable information, enabling better support in situations where it may previously have been limited by GDPR and other privacy regulations.



4 Computing without compromise

Multitasking is hardly a new concept in computing, but today's users are asking more from their computers than they may realise. It is now taken for granted that many modern workers will spend a significant chunk of

their days in online meetings on Zoom, Teams, or similar tools.

More commonly, that software now has built in AI and machine learning features – from noise cancellation and background blurring to automatic eye gaze correction. During online meetings users are also switching between productivity apps and office software that are increasingly integrating their own AI features, not to mention the apps in the background allowing access to corporate VPNs.

In a traditional PC, demand on the CPU quickly ramps up, whereas an Intel AI PC processes these workloads across the CPU, GPU and NPU (the Neural Processing Unit, dedicated to AI tasks). This can give a 58% faster AI performance than traditional processing architecture, and means that IT departments can give their organisations' workforce the power to use the tools they need, when they need them – even as those tools rapidly evolve to integrate new features unlocked by today's technology.

5 Long-term, long-time computing

A key advantage of the NPU in the new Intel architecture is that it uses far less energy than a CPU would for the same tasks. Combined with the huge efficiency improvements in the latest Intel Core Ultra processors that reduce power consumption by as much as 40%, this means that laptops with this technology can run on battery for as long as 20 hours. Not only does this improve what IT departments can offer their users, but reduced energy consumption can drive both cost savings and help to meet sustainability goals for the business as a whole.

Tech that supports such a wide range of emergent, AI-powered features as the workforce demands them, also has the added benefit of extending the device lifecycle. As Jenkins adds: "It's more important than ever for business IT to consider the impact of AI within software: making the wrong decision could be costly, shortening device life cycles and increasing hardware costs."

A few years ago, AI was barely on the radar for most organisations. Now, every aspect of a business is conscious of its impact. For IT leaders, as new



technology like Intel Core Ultra comes along with new possibilities, they must ensure their teams are empowered by the latest tech capabilities.

To find out more, please visit intel.co.uk/AIPC





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