

● Research

AI at Work: How AI Is Reshaping Roles in Aotearoa

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About the research

This research was conducted in May 2025 and is based on responses from 829 individuals currently employed in white-collar roles across Aotearoa. Respondents came from a broad cross-section of industries, functions, and seniority levels.

The survey primarily engaged prior job seekers and hiring managers within Cultivate's network, alongside members of online communities coordinated by Diversity Works, MyCareerBrand, Weave Leadership, and NewZealand.AI.

Data was collected via an online questionnaire, and for clarity, all percentages cited in the commentary have been rounded to whole numbers.

About Cultivate

Cultivate is committed to making recruitment not just easier but also psychologically safer and more human for everyone involved. We celebrate diversity, advocate for inclusion, and are passionate about helping to develop capable, representative and thriving workplaces.

Our team are hugely experienced, with a deep understanding of their respective specialisations. We deliver white collar contract, temporary or permanent staffing solutions across Aotearoa. We're also winners of the 2023 & 2024 SEEK Medium Agency of the Year.

About NewZealand.AI

NewZealand.AI is an independent AI advisory and training organisation helping New Zealand businesses adopt and apply artificial intelligence. Founded by Justin Flitter in 2017, they offer executive briefings, team workshops, and practical AI skills training to boost productivity and confidence in using AI tools.

Their ambition is to train 1,000 AI Ambassadors, those people influencing the practical and responsible use of AI in businesses and community groups across Aotearoa through their AI Academy. Join for free at learn.newzealand.ai.

Key Findings

AI today

- 76% of respondents are feeling positive about AI in the workplace to some degree.
- Temp and casual workers are notably less positive about AI, with only 60% feeling positive and are the most likely to have witnessed an AI driven decrease in headcount.
- 44% of all respondents are already using AI tools at least daily at work. General AI assistants like ChatGPT, Claude and Perplexity are used by 82% of workers.
- Yet, only 13% of respondents have had company provided training in AI. 57% have undertaken no training at all.
- AI may not have formally changed many job titles or duties yet, but it's already starting to influence how work is carried out day to day.
- 46% of leaders are formally using AI in their teams, and a third of those leaders are measuring the impact.

Looking ahead

- 10% of respondents have already seen an AI driven reduction in headcount in their team. However, 45% of respondents expect to see a headcount decrease over the next 3 years.
- Approximately two thirds of workers believe some of their role will be automated, and further 15% believe all of their current role will disappear within 3 years.
- Just over a third of respondents and organisations were rated as under or not prepared to maximise AI. A lack of time and internal champions were the most common reasons for the lack of organisational preparedness.

The impact on hiring

- 42% of leaders have adjusted what they look for in new hires. 60% would pay a premium for AI capability.
- The skill most valued by leaders: "AI awareness, & the understanding of what AI can and cannot do in a work context" (72%).
- The behaviour most valued by leaders: "Critical thinking - the ability to question AI outputs rather than accept them at face value" (69%).
- Critical thinking also shaped leader's top AI concerns with 70% choosing "over-reliance on AI for decisions with less critical analysis" as the biggest risk.
- "Productivity, through less admin and better service" - was the top benefit of AI cited by leaders - 81%.

AI Today

Attitudes and Adoption

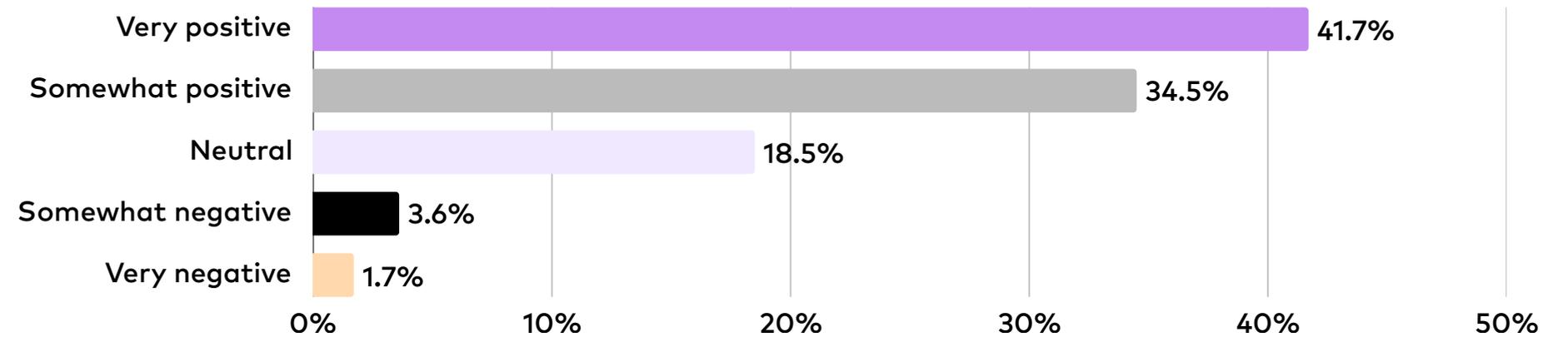
A striking 76% of respondents are feeling positive about AI in the workplace to some degree. Just 5% felt negative.

Positive sentiment was largely driven by AI's power to reduce repetitive tasks and assist with communication, creativity, and information management.



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Attitudes to AI in the workplace



Drivers of positivity towards AI in the workplace

The sentiment of the 76% who are positive about AI was typically pragmatic: AI is a valuable tool for making work more efficient and manageable. At the same time, many respondents are also excited about its evolving role, both as a learning enabler and a strategic asset for the future of work:

1. Streamlining repetitive, process-driven work

Respondents saw AI as a productivity tool for automating structured tasks like data entry, admin, scheduling, and workflows. By reducing manual effort, AI frees up time for higher-value work.

"AI handles repetitive tasks that used to take hours."

2. Supporting everyday tasks & practical assistance

AI is seen as a helpful daily companion, assisting with writing, communication, formatting, and managing information. It offers light-touch support that boosts efficiency and improves the overall work experience.

"It helps me produce documents quickly and professionally."

3. Enabling smarter thinking, creativity & learning

AI is appreciated and valued as a thinking partner that supports and unlocks new idea generation, learning, and creative or analytical work - boosting confidence and driving innovation.

"Helps me learn faster and try new things at work."

4. Fueling opportunity & transformation

Some comments reflected a broader optimism about AI's strategic potential to transform how we work - to reshape industries, redefine roles, and drive meaningful workplace change over time.

"It's an exciting tool for the future - it can change how we operate."

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Attitudes and Adoption

Insurance stood out for its low positivity toward AI - the second lowest after Retail, Hospitality, and Consumer Services - and the smallest increase in positivity over the last 12 months.

Insurance also had the highest negativity levels and was a close second in the percentage expecting to reduce headcount within 3 years.



Drivers of negativity towards AI in the workplace

Of the 5.2% concerned about AI in the workplace. There were 3 key themes driving their sentiment:

- 1. Threat to jobs and economic security**
- 2. Ethical, societal and human-centric concerns**
- 3. Environmental impact**

Respondents frequently expressed concern that AI will displace human workers and contribute to growing job insecurity. The tone reflects anxiety about personal impact and broader implications for the workforce.

"AI is replacing people and reducing opportunities."

This theme combines responses focused on misuse of AI, loss of human judgment, confidentiality, and ethical boundaries. It reflects deeper discomfort about AI's role in replacing human values, undermining trust, and being used without sufficient safeguards or accountability.

"Generative AI not only steals and copies work, it gives credit to no one."

Though less frequently mentioned, some respondents raised concerns about AI's energy consumption, sustainability, and environmental toll.

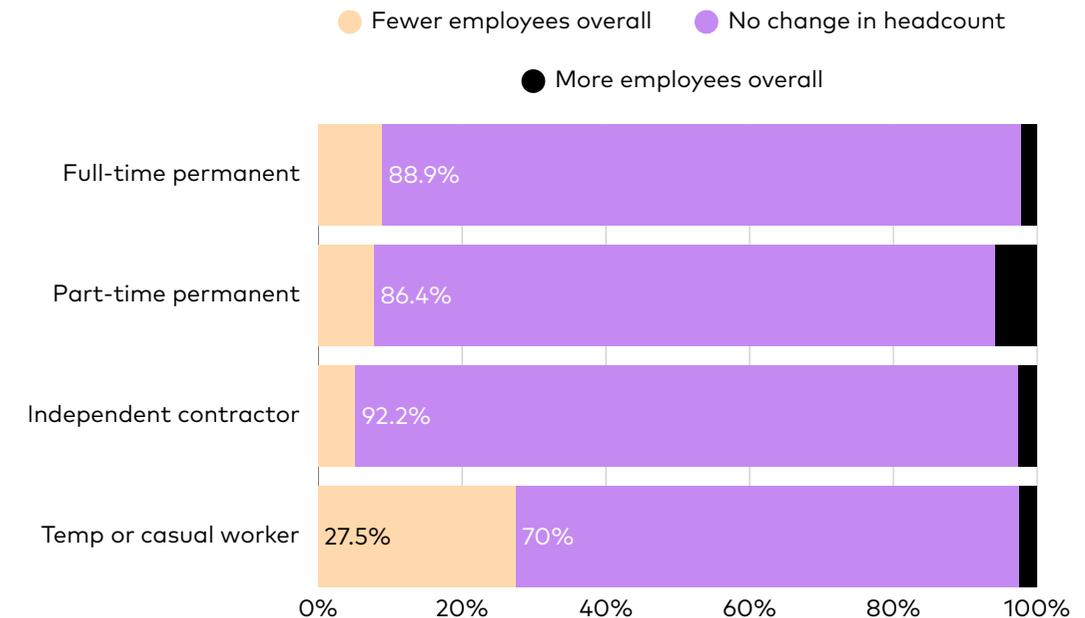
"Its environmental impact is not being talked about enough."

Casual & temp staff the most concerned

Temp and casual workers are notably less positive about AI, with only 60% feeling positive compared to 78% across other employment types (including independent contractors). This is despite similar levels of AI training.

Temps were also most likely to report an AI-driven decrease in headcount (27% vs 6% for other employment). Their concerns likely stem from first-hand experience of AI's impact on roles commonly filled by temps. In fact, 24% of casual staff believe most or all of their role will be automated, vs 13% of permanent employees. 61% of casuals also expect team headcount to drop in the next 3 years, compared to 41% of full-time permanent staff.

Has AI impacted headcount within your team?



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Attitudes and Adoption

8% are using AI hourly - a frequency that suggests a high degree of dependency on AI in the delivery of work.

There is still a third of workers using it monthly or less suggesting AI has yet to have any real impact in their role.

Smaller organisations seem more likely to 'jump in' to AI at this early stage. Is adoption in larger organisations slowed by governance policies and limited trial or pilot phases?

The AI tools we're using today

82%

General AI assistants

e.g. ChatGPT, Claude, Perplexity

53%

General productivity tools

e.g. Google Gemini, Microsoft Copilot

14%

Custom built specific solutions

e.g. internal AI chatbots or bespoke tools

13%

Specialty tools

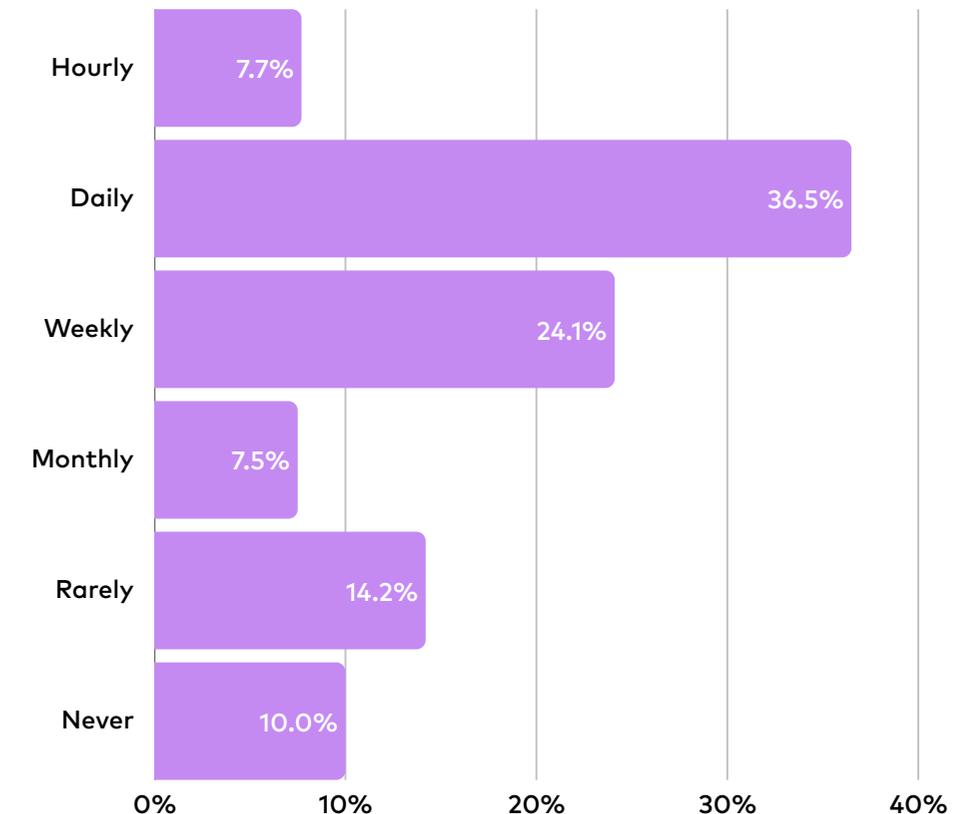
e.g. recruitment software, legal contract review

How often are we using AI today?

- 8% are using AI hourly, and a further 37% are engaging with AI daily - the most common frequency of use.
- 32% use it monthly or less, suggesting that for a third of workers AI has yet to have any real impact.

Who is using AI most often?

- Age doesn't appear to significantly impact adoption - the rate of daily AI use is consistent across age brackets up to 54, with a slight drop at 54+ and again at 65+.
- There is a clear link between seniority and regular use. However executive leaders, owners, and directors are more likely to use AI daily, likely due to their roles being less prescriptive and more exploratory.
- Smaller organisations show higher frequency of usage on average. A greater share of staff using AI daily in companies with fewer than 50 people.



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Attitudes and Adoption

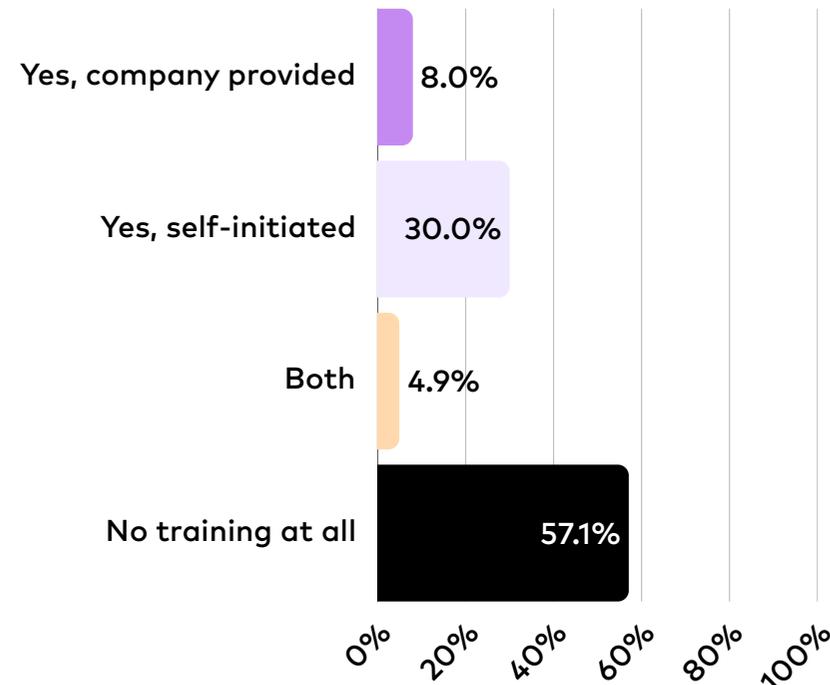
Only 13% of respondents have had any company provided training, suggesting AI adoption has been largely bottom-up to date.

57% have undertaken no training at all, representing a significant opportunity to unlock further AI benefits.

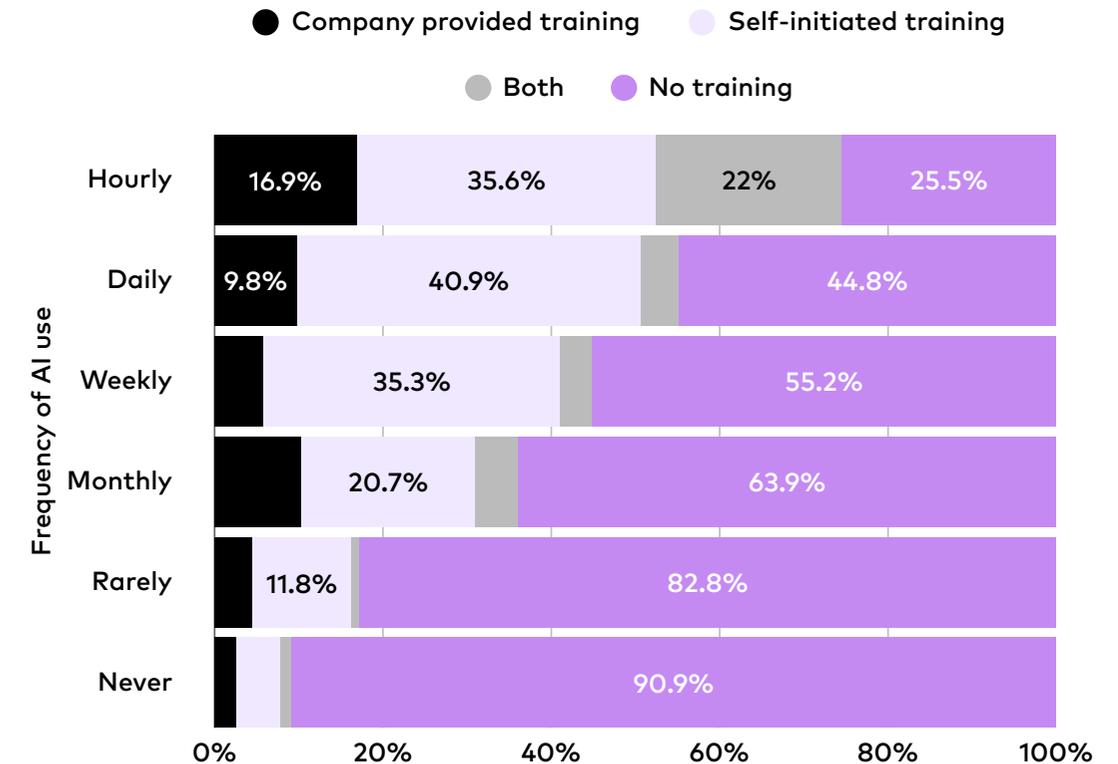
Training on AI

- Only 13% of respondents have had any company provided training on AI, yet 44% of all respondents are already using AI tools at least daily in their roles.
- 57% have undertaken no training at all in AI. This represents a significant opportunity given the strong correlation between training and frequency of AI use. Respondents that have had company training are also more likely to undertake training themselves.
- Those using AI tools hourly are significantly more likely than others to feel very prepared for an AI future (51% vs avg of 18%), both personally and when judging their employer's readiness (34% vs avg of 14%).

Have you undertaken any training on how to utilise AI at work?



The impact of training on usage



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The Impact on What and How we Deliver

While AI may not have formally changed many job titles or duties yet, it's already starting to influence how work is carried out day to day.

The degree AI has shifted how we deliver to existing responsibilities

- When asked how much AI has changed how they deliver to their responsibilities (on a scale from 0 to 100), respondents reported a moderate level of change to date.
- The average score was 34, with most responses falling between 20 and 60.
- AI is clearly already starting to influence how work is carried out day to day - streamlining tasks, changing workflows, and increasing efficiency in ways that subtly but significantly shift job delivery.

On a scale of 1-100, how much has AI changed how you deliver your responsibilities?

34

The impact on formal job responsibilities job description (jd)

- When asked how much AI has formally changed their job responsibilities (on a scale from 0 to 100), workers reported more modest levels of change.
- The average response was 18, and the majority of participants selected values clustered close to zero. A small number of outliers reported higher levels of change, but these were exceptions.
- Overall, this suggests that while AI may be assisting with work, its formal integration into role definitions remains limited at this stage.

On a scale of 1-100, how much has AI changed your job responsibilities?

18

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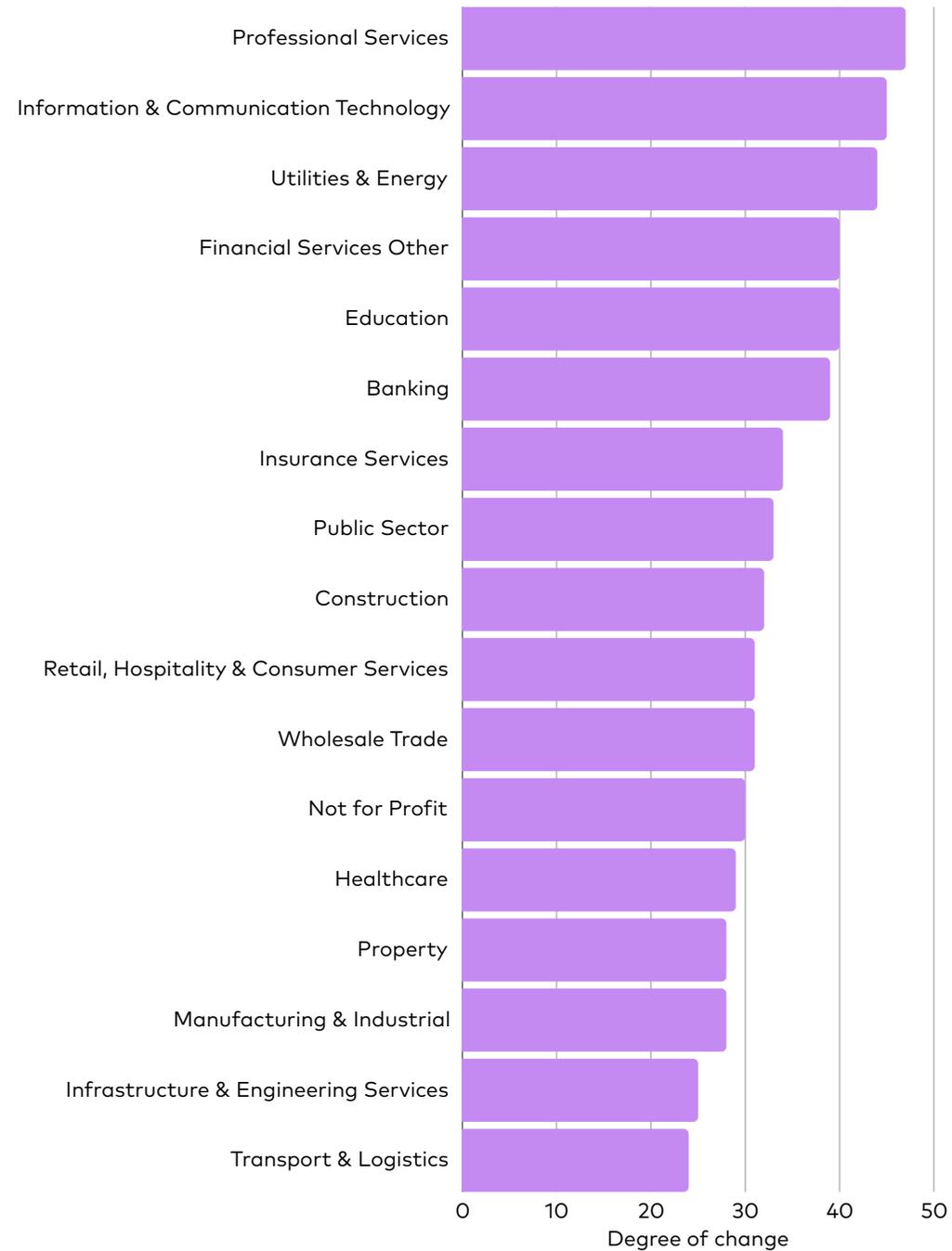
The Impact on What and How we Deliver



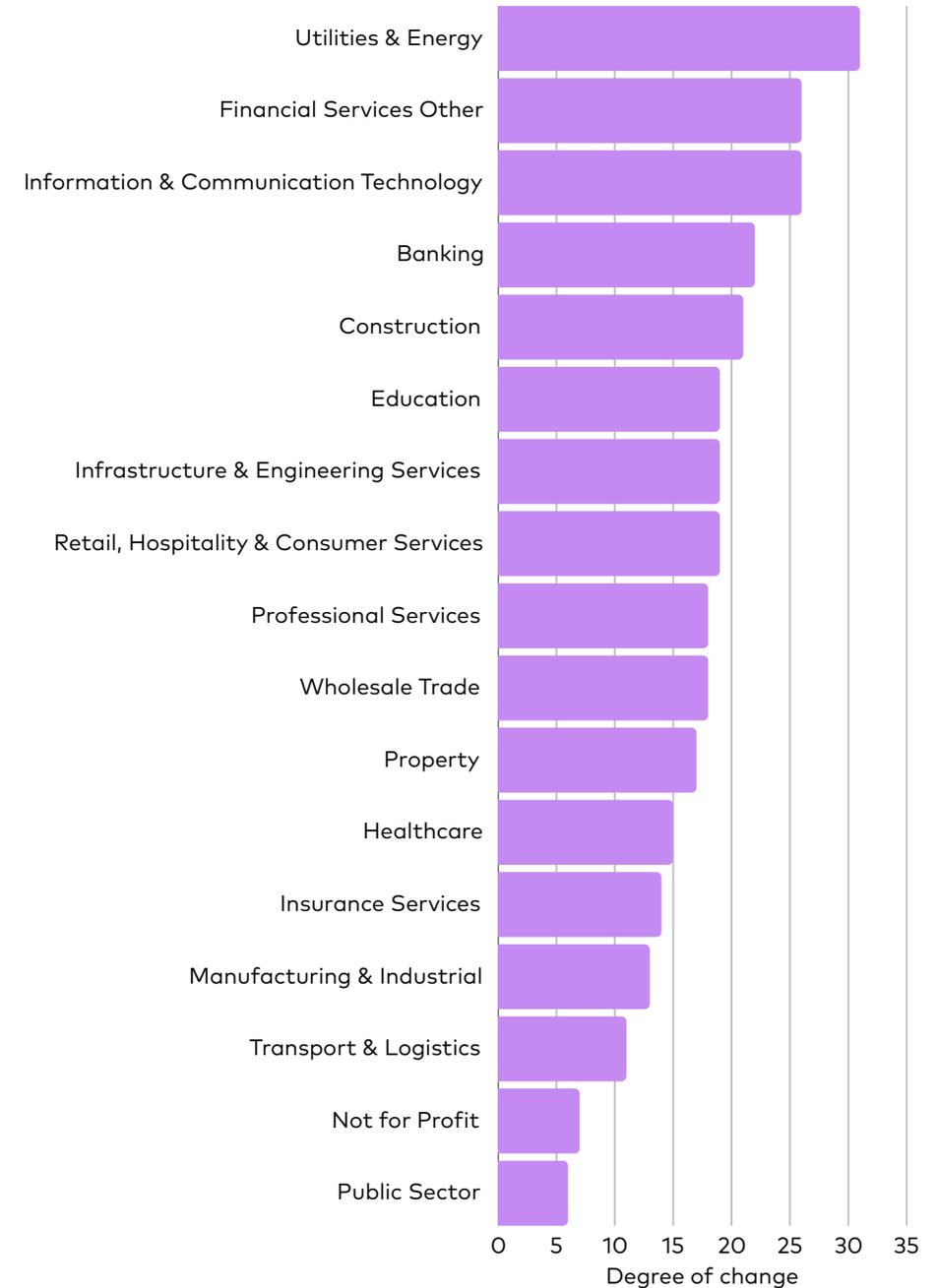
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The impact of AI by industry

Degree of change to how workers deliver to responsibilities



Degree of change to role responsibilities (jd)



*industries with ten or more respondents only

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The Impact on What and How we Deliver



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The impact of AI to date by function

Degree of change to how workers deliver to responsibilities



Degree of change to role responsibilities (jd)



*functions with ten or more respondents only

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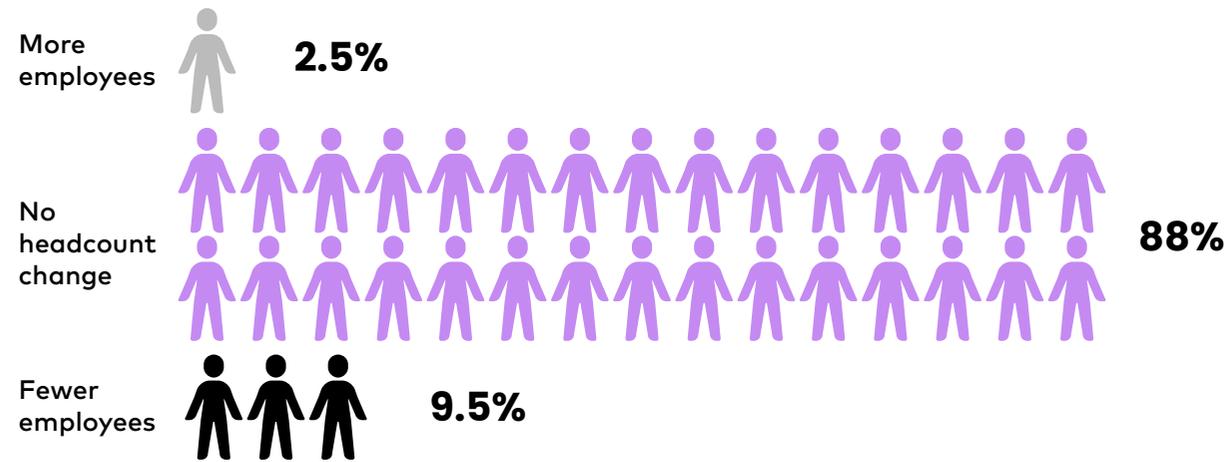
The Impact on Headcount & Hiring

10% of all respondents have witnessed an AI driven reduction in headcount so far.

46% of leaders are formally using AI in their teams, with a third of those measuring the impact.

AI has already impacted hiring, with many leaders adjusting what they look for, and a majority prepared to pay a premium for AI capability.

The impact on headcount so far



- There is no correlation between AI driven headcount change and company size. However, respondents within Utilities and Energy (33%), Property (24%) and Banking (14%) were the most likely to have witnessed AI driven headcount reductions to date.
- From a function perspective, Customer Service (25%), Design/UX/Creative and Engineering/Technical Development (20%), and Sales/Business Development (19%) were mostly like to see headcount reductions.

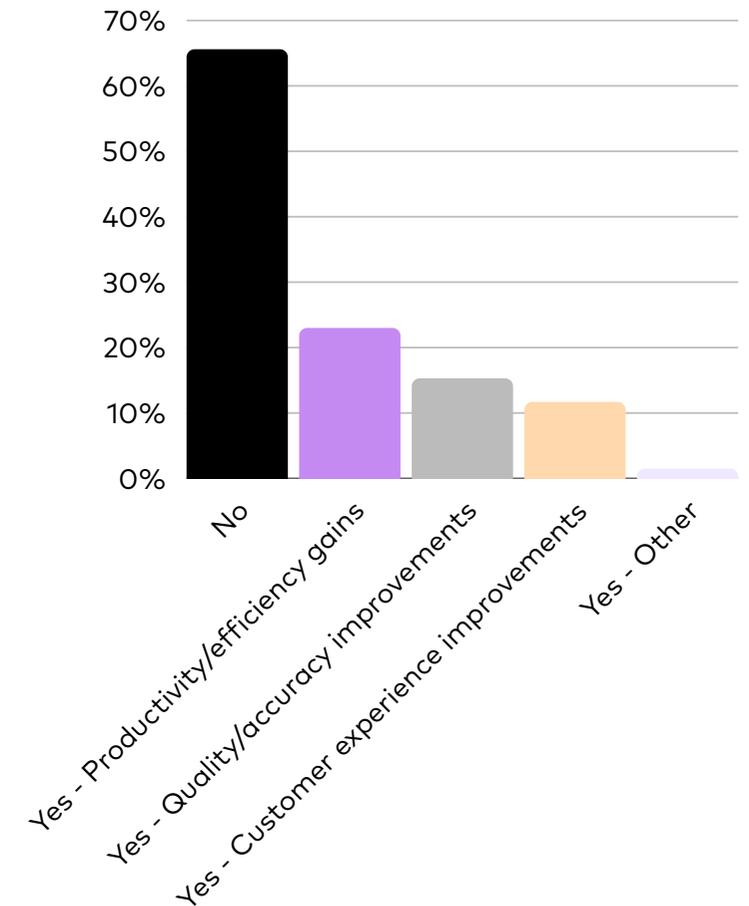
The Impact on hiring so far

- Although AI has only recently become prominent in most organisations, 42% of leaders report that it has already impacted what they look for when hiring.
- In fact, almost 60% of leaders felt that AI capability was worth paying a premium for in new hires.

Measuring the impact of AI

Almost half (46%) of leaders are using AI formally within their team.

Just over a third of those leaders (34%) are actually tracking the impact of AI. Of those that are, tracking productivity gains (23%) is the most common measure.



Looking Ahead

The Impact on Future Headcount

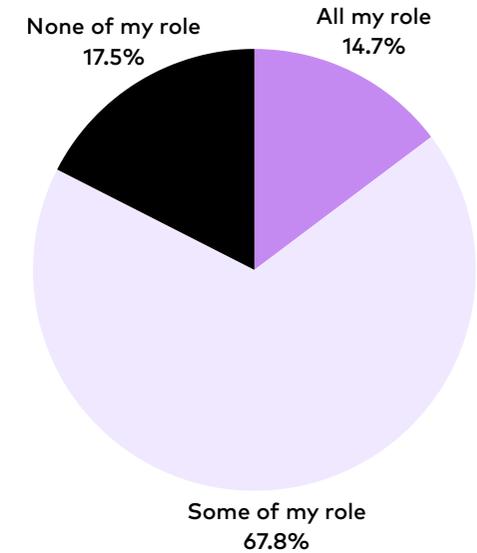
45% of workers expect a decrease in headcount over the next 3 years, while only 7% expect an increase.

Two thirds of workers believe some of their role will be automated. 15% believe all of their current role will disappear.

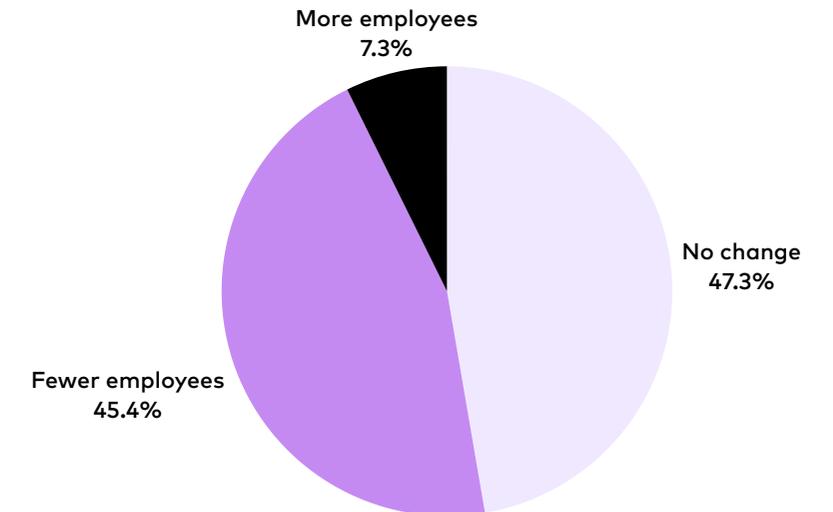
The impact on future headcount

- While less than 10% of respondents have seen AI reduce headcount so far, 45% expect headcount to decrease over the next 3 years. Only 7% expect an increase.
- Headcount reductions are most expected in data/analytics (83%), product management (67%), strategy and corporate development (63%), procurement/vendor management (60%), business operations (54%), and customer service (53%).
- Predicted decreases are lowest in research and development (17%), legal/compliance/risk (20%), and facilities/office management (21%).
- Respondents for the Utilities and Energy (60%), Insurance services (58%) and Information and Communication Technology sectors where the most likely to predict an AI driven reduction in headcount in the coming 3 years.
- Entry level (specialists) and Team Leaders /Supervisors are the most likely to believe their current role will disappear (23% and 21% respectively).

To what degree will roles be automated over the next 3 years?



How do you anticipate AI will impact headcount in your team over the next 3 years?



Looking Ahead

Future Focused Talent

Skill most valued by leaders:

"AI awareness, and the understanding of what AI can and cannot do in a work context" (72%).

Behaviour most valued by leaders:

"Critical thinking - the ability to question AI outputs rather than accept them at face value" (69%).



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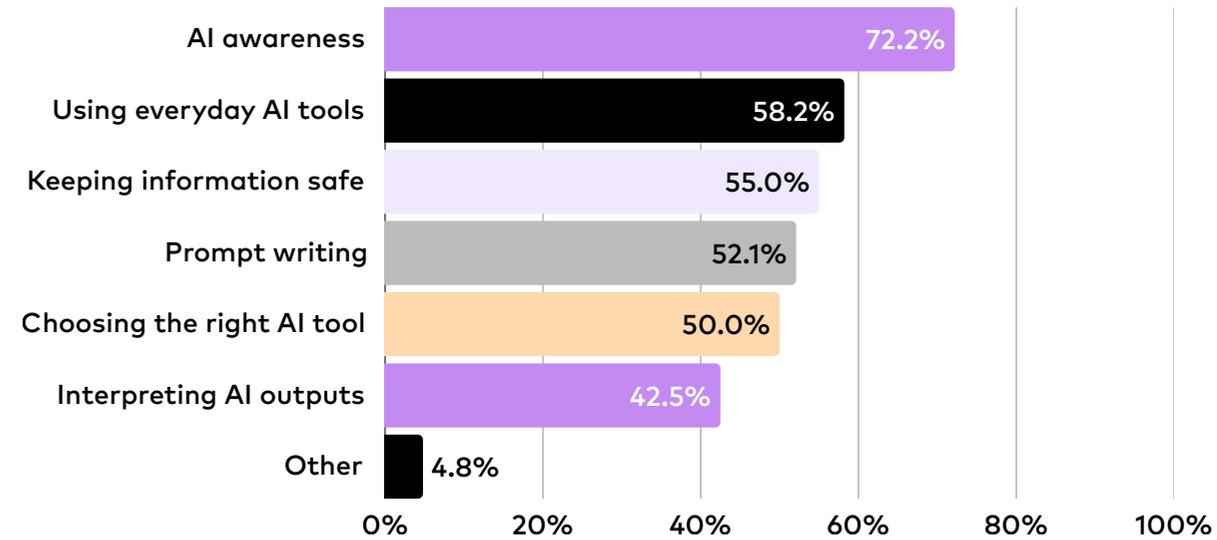
AI focused skills of the future

- Following "AI awareness" as the most critical skills for the future, "comfort using general everyday tools like Chat GTP, Co-pilot and Gemini" (58%).
- The ability to use "AI in a way that was safe and responsible" was 3rd at 55%.

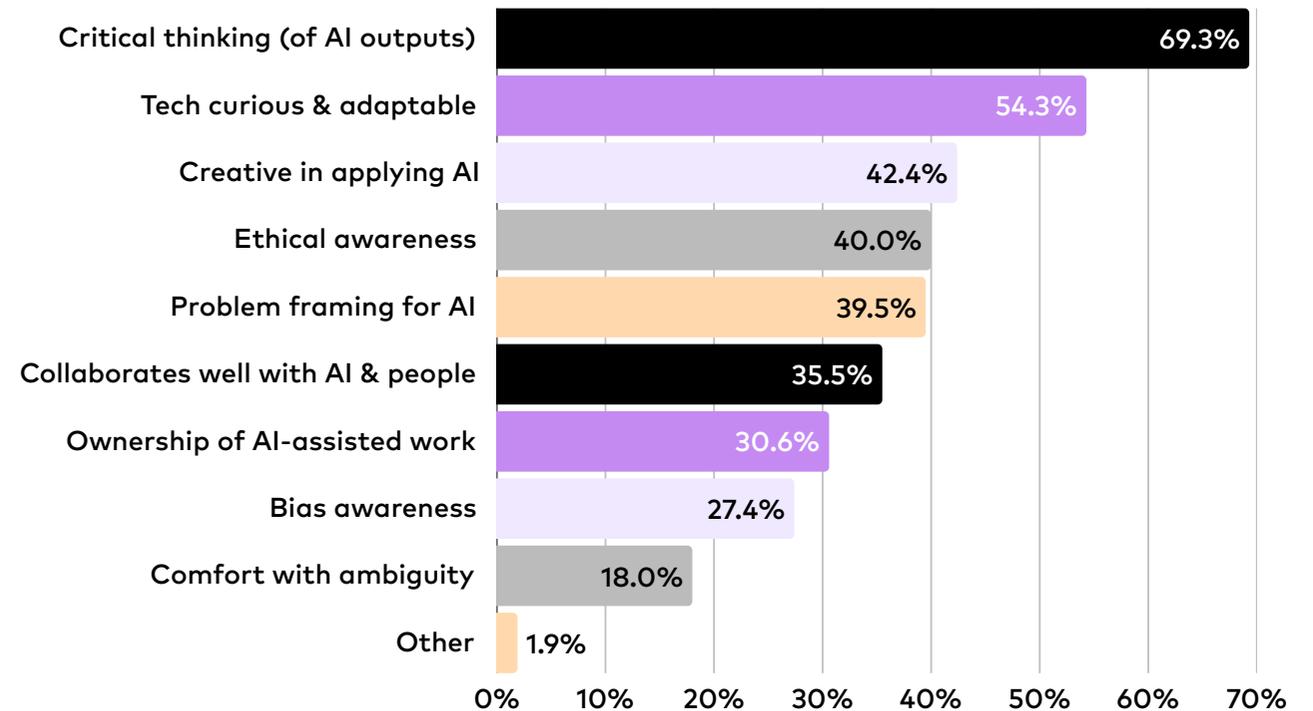
AI focused behaviours of the future

- Following "Critical thinking", "Technical curiosity and adaptability to new technologies" was the second most sought after behaviour (54%).
- This was followed by the ability to creatively apply AI to new ways to solve problems or improve work (42%).

Looking ahead, what skills will become more critical in your team to maximise the benefit of AI?



Looking ahead, what behaviours will become more critical in your team to maximise the benefit of AI?



Looking Ahead

How Prepared Are We?

Just over a third of respondents and organisations were rated as under or not prepared to maximise AI.

A lack of time and internal champions were the most common reasons driving a lack of organisational preparedness.

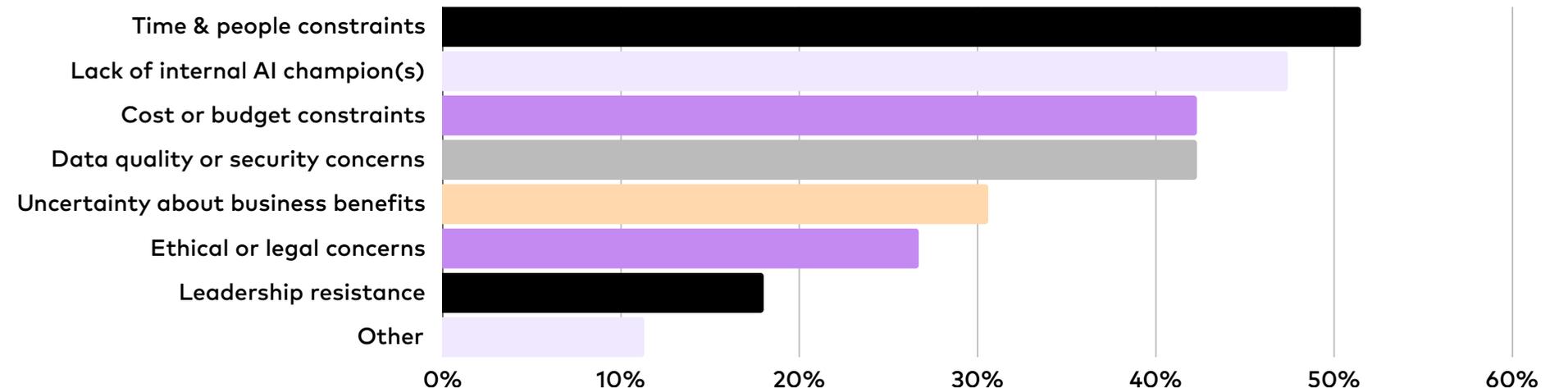
Individual preparedness

- Overall, 62% of respondents felt prepared to some degree to maximise AI use in the future. 38% however felt under or unprepared to maximise AI.

Organisational preparedness

- This story was similar when asked to rate their organisation's preparedness, with 64% rating their organisation as very or somewhat prepared. The balance (36%) rated as not prepared to harness AI.
- Of those who felt their organisation was not prepared "Time and people constraints" was the most common reason (51%), followed by a "Lack of AI champion(s)" (47%), then "Cost/budget constraints" and "Data or security concerns" (42%).
- Respondents from Financial Services other (79%), Professional Services (76%) and Information and Communication Technology (75%) were the most likely to rate their organisation as either somewhat or very prepared.
- Workers within Not For Profit (37%), Manufacturing (49%), and Construction and Healthcare (both 51%) were the least likely to feel their organisation was prepared to any degree.

Reasons for a lack of organisational preparedness



Looking Ahead

The Risks & Benefits of AI Adoption

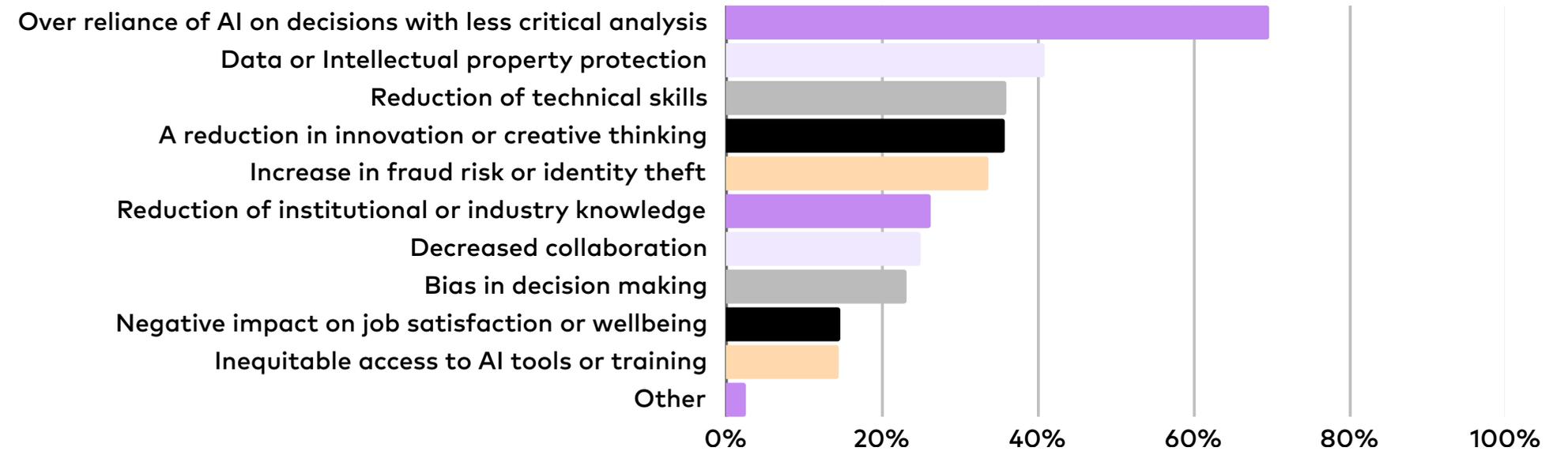
Critical thinking easily topped leader's AI concerns with 70% choosing "over-reliance on AI for decisions with less critical analysis".

Productivity, through less admin and better service - was comfortably the top benefit cited by leaders (81%).

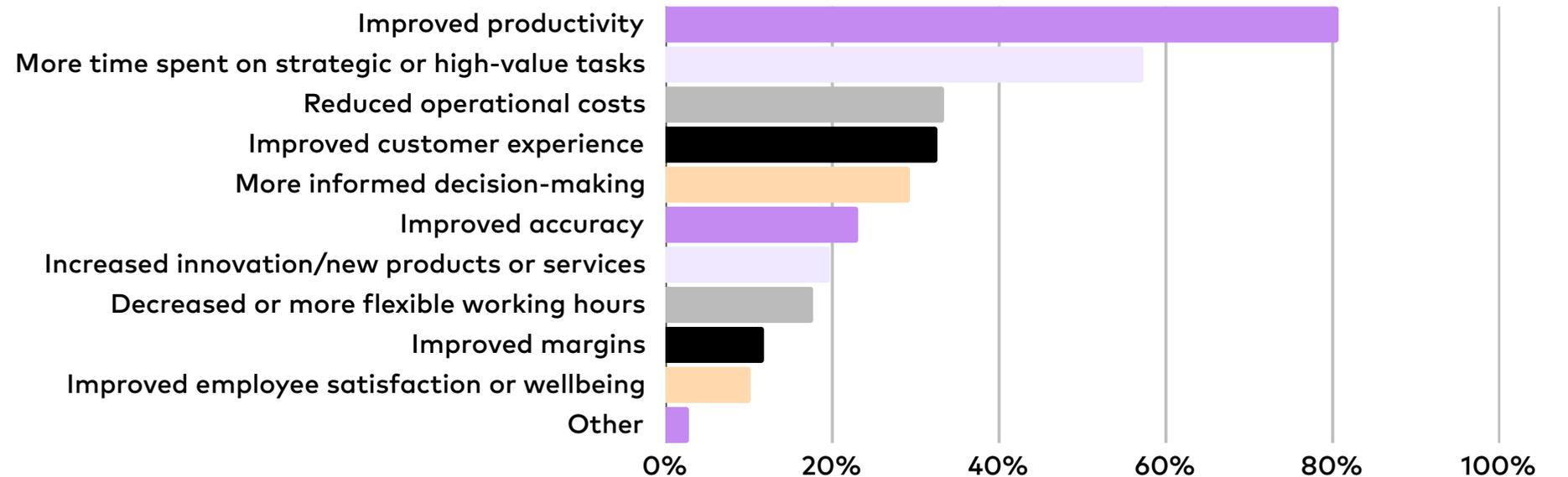
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The primary risks of AI in the workplace for leaders



The primary benefits of AI in the workplace for leaders



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Job Seeker Insights

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The impact on recruitment today

- Although AI has only recently become prominent in most organisations, 42% of leaders report that it has already impacted what they look for when hiring.
- In fact, almost 60% of leaders felt that AI capability was worth paying a premium for in new hires.

The state of training

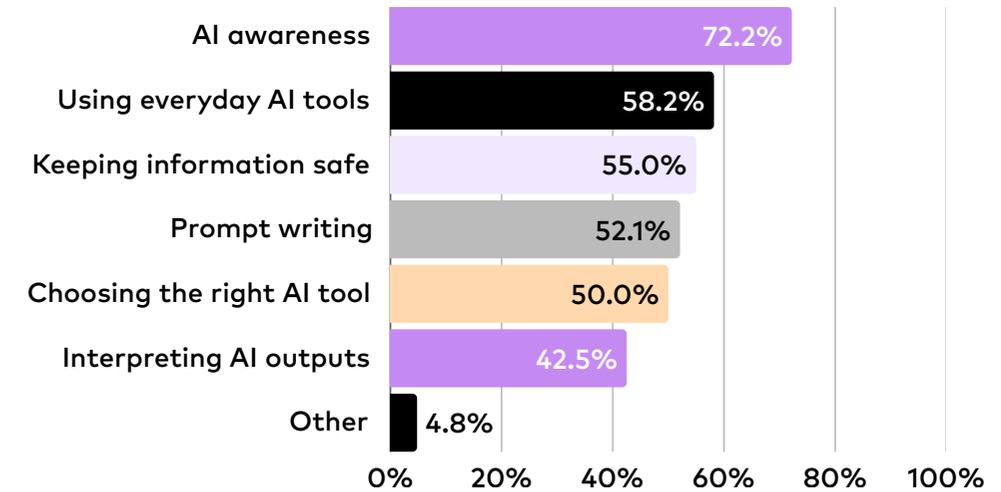
- Only 13% of respondents have had company provided training in AI. 30% undertook their own training and 5% have had both. 57% have had no training at all.

What do leaders foresee as the primary risks of AI in the workplace?

- The emphasis on critical thinking as a critical behaviour also drove leader's concerns when it can to the primary risks for AI in the workplace. "An over reliance of AI on decision making with less critical analysis" was easily the most pressing concern of leaders, selected by 70% of respondents.
- Data and IP protection (41%) , and an erosion of technical skills (36%) rounded out the top 3 concerns.

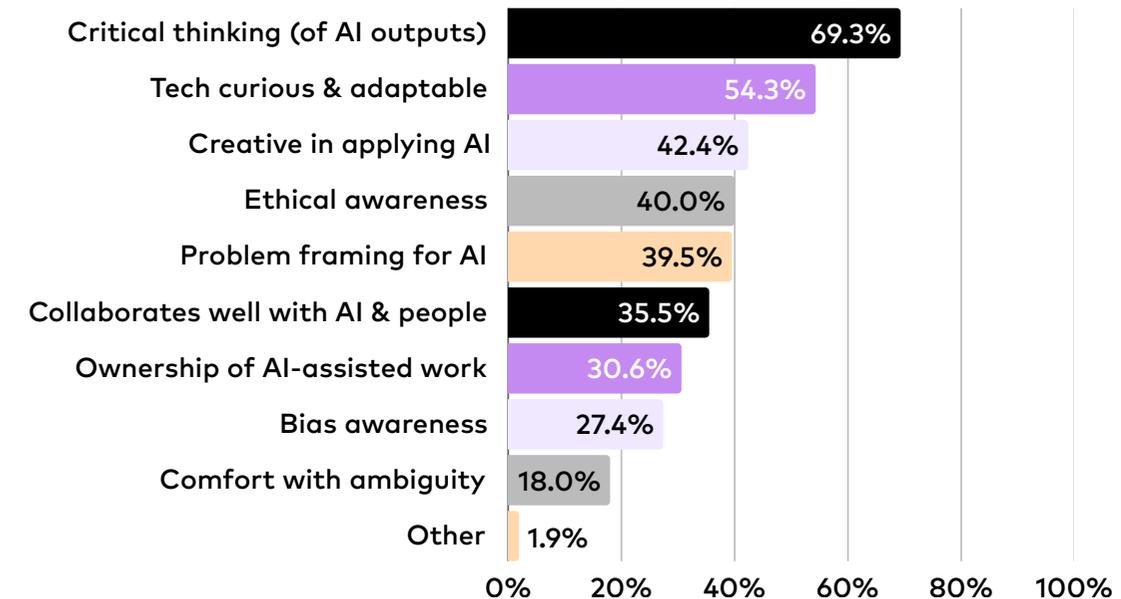
AI focused skills of the future

Looking ahead, what skills will become more critical in your team to maximise the benefit of AI?



AI focused behaviours of the future

Looking ahead, what behaviours will become more critical in your team to maximise the benefit of AI?



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Job Seeker Insights

For further job seeking insights, visit
www.cultivate.co.nz/blog

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What do leaders foresee as the primary benefits of AI in the workplace?

- Productivity (reduced administration and improved service delivery) was by far the most critical benefit recognised by leaders (81%), with the ability to focus on more strategic or high value tasks also featuring strongly (57%).

Our recommendations

You need to position yourself as ready to capitalise on the benefit AI can bring today, regardless of role. Doing so will not only future proof your employability but may also impact the salary you can command.



Skills development

We recommend taking ownership for your own training to meet the skills expectations of leaders rather than wait for company training. If you haven't yet had the opportunity to use AI regularly in your role we recommend trialling AI tools in your own time.

Standout from other applicants via evidence of your understanding of everyday AI tools and where you have previously utilised AI effectively and safely for better outcomes.



Behaviours

Leaders are hugely concerned about staff becoming overly accepting of AI outputs. You will stand out by demonstrating you not only know how to navigate the most appropriate AI tools effectively and safely, but can augment AI outputs with your own technical and contextual knowledge to ensure AI generated outcomes are accurate and fit for purpose. It is not enough to show you can prompt AI – it is critical you can prove your ability to think critically. The findings suggest blindly accepting AI outputs is no better than not using AI at all.

Beyond critical thinking, examples that demonstrate your technical curiosity, willingness and speed to adapt to new ways of working, and the application of AI to new use cases will also become more critical.

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Research Summary

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AI optimism tempered by a training gap

- While employees are largely enthusiastic about AI adoption, formal training lags behind. This gap risks leaving many behind as AI integration accelerates.
- AI is already influencing how work is delivered – with general AI tools reducing repetitive tasks and assisting with communication, creativity, and information management.

Future of work: Significant change looms

- Despite the optimism, many employees foresee AI reducing team sizes and automating some or all of their roles
- It is our view proficient AI users are transforming mundane tasks into opportunities for more meaningful, high-value work, and hence viewing AI as a tool for enhancement rather than a threat.

Recruitment priorities are shifting

- Some employers are already shifting focus, with 42% altering hiring criteria and 60% willing to pay more for proven AI skills. AI literacy and critical thinking are the top-valued AI attributes

Call to action: Upskill or be left behind

- AI literacy is quickly becoming the new digital literacy. Workers must proactively show how they integrate AI safely and creatively, alongside sound judgement.