section

The AI Proficiency Report

AI investments are increasing, but proficiency is not

JUNE 2025

A letter from Section's CEO

AI is getting better, but people aren't keeping up

I speak to enterprise leaders every day about the state of their AI deployments, and the vast majority have stalled or hit roadblocks.

There's no lack of CEO support, AI FOMO, and budget in large enterprises – so why aren't we seeing more case studies on successful deployments?

Our most recent research indicates the problem: Despite some progress in company investments, there's still **way too much friction** to getting value from AI. And that friction is most prominent in your largest groups of employees – aka, middle managers and ICs.

Here's where people are getting stuck:

- Employees don't know how to use AI or what they're supposed to be using AI for
- The proliferation of AI models and tools has left employees confused, and most aren't using these new tools for advanced use cases
- Most companies have reserved the best resources (training, reimbursement, access, etc.) for directors and above, leaving ICs to figure it out for themselves
- Companies are publicly (or internally) bullish about AI, but aren't backing it up with investments or clear direction for their teams

The result: 54% of your employees think they're good at using AI. Only 10% actually are.

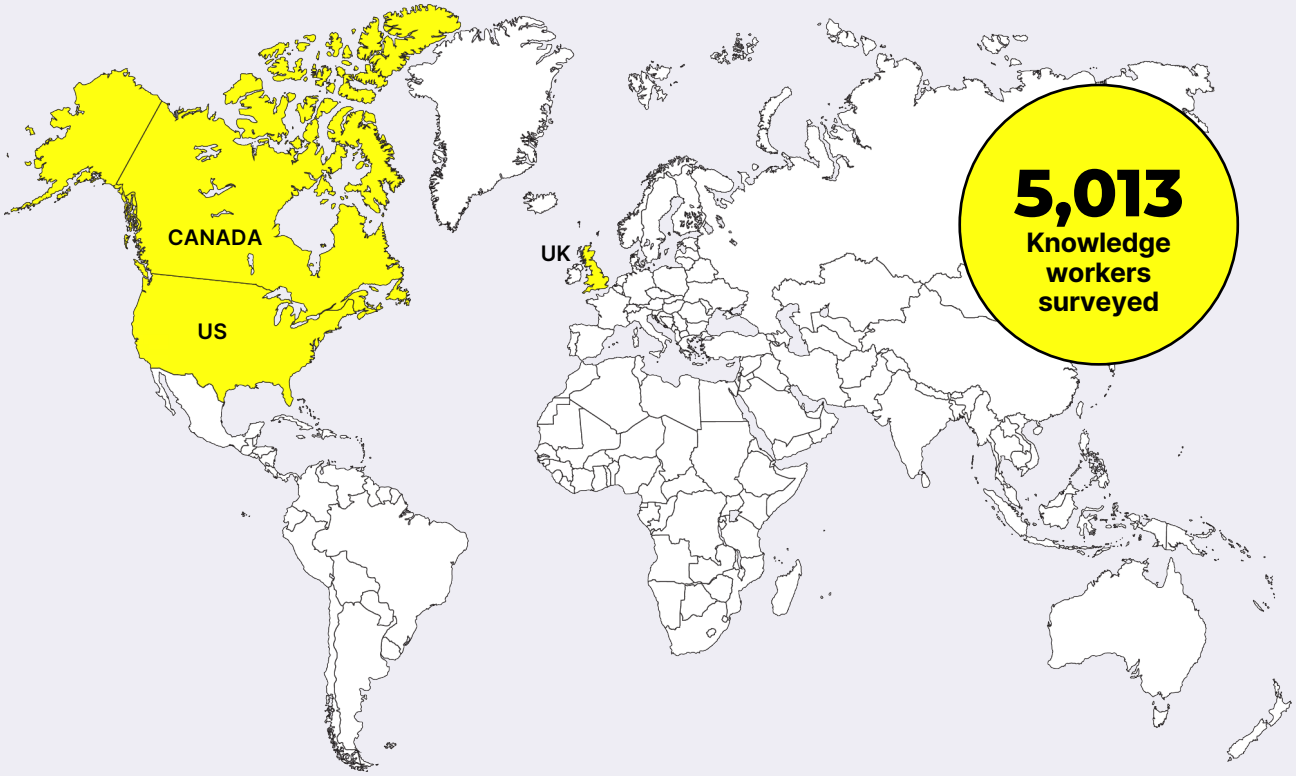
If you're a company leader, this should be highly concerning to you. The good news: you're not alone, and there's ample evidence for how to fix it. In this report, we'll share everything we found on what drives AI adoption and proficiency, how you may be unconsciously standing in the way, and what to do next.

GREG SHOVE
CEO of Section

OUR METHODOLOGY

Testing AI proficiency in the workforce

To understand the state of AI proficiency in the workforce, Section surveyed 5,013 respondents across the US, UK, and Canada in March 2025.



While most AI research focuses on usage and attitudes toward AI, we went a step further in **testing AI proficiency**. Respondents were graded on their knowledge of AI, quality of personal and professional use cases, and prompting abilities, which reveal more about employee abilities than self-reported usage.

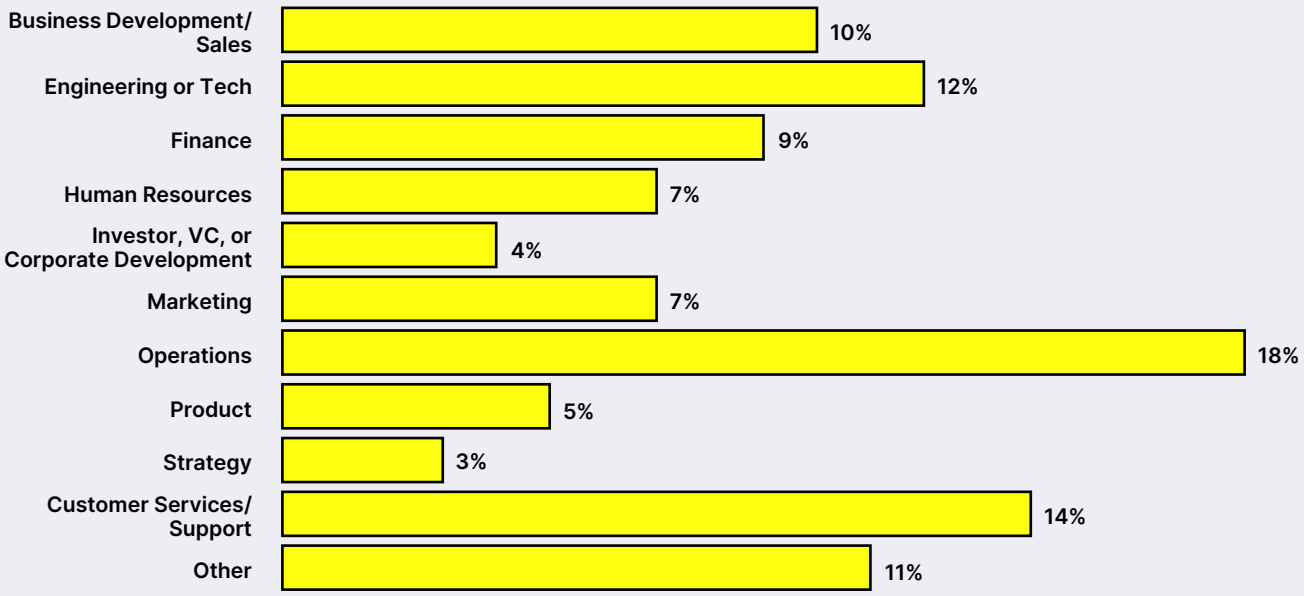
USAGE	KNOWLEDGE	PROMPTING
Self-reported usage including frequency of use, AI platforms used, types and range of use cases, and productivity gains	Multiple choice questions that test employees' understanding of AI's capabilities, limitations, and risks (including how to mitigate those risks)	Free response questions that test employees' prompting skills across multiple scenarios, including using AI as an assistant and strategist
30% of score	**30% of score**	**40% of score**

= AI PROFICIENCY SCORE

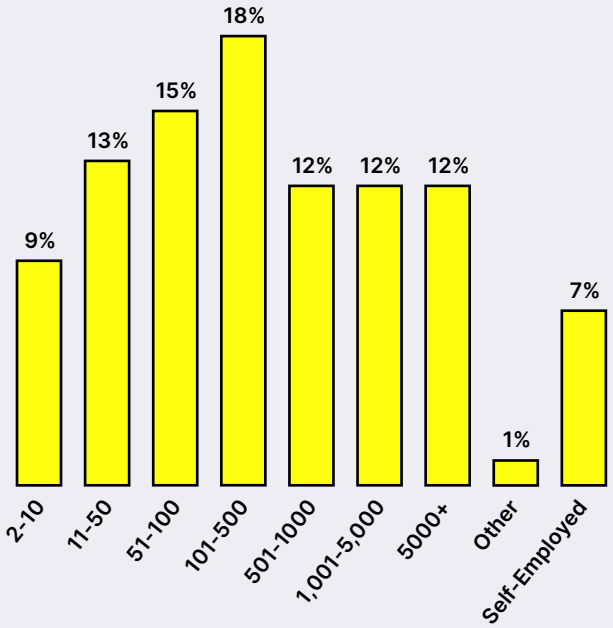
We also surveyed respondents on their companies' attitudes, policies, and approaches to AI deployment, in order to understand the company actions that drive or block AI proficiency.

Here's how the respondents broke down by role and level.

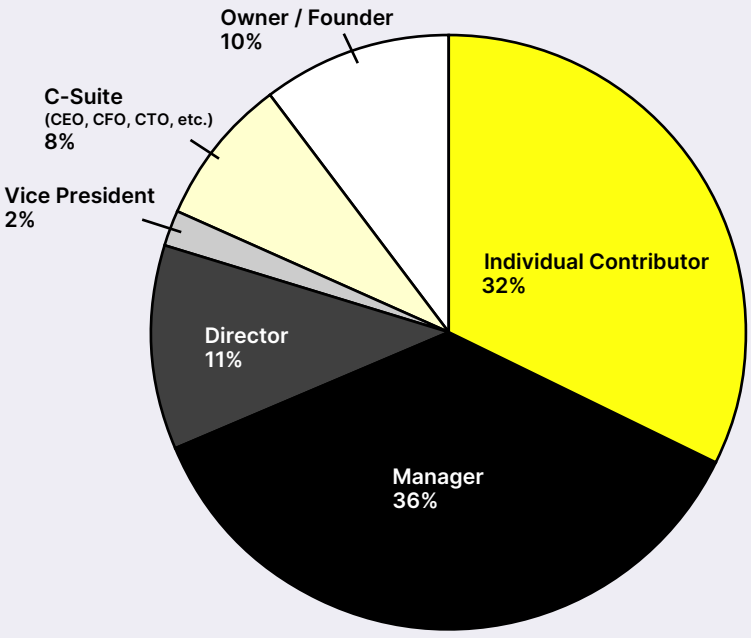
DEPARTMENT / FUNCTION



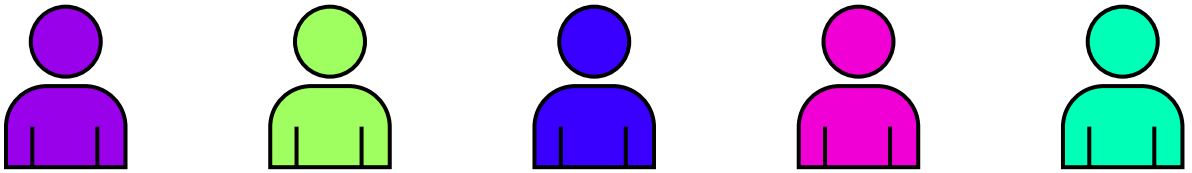
COMPANY SIZE



CAREER STAGE



The five types of AI users



AI EXPERTS

1% of the workforce AI experts are the most proficient AI users in the workforce, as well as the most bullish about AI's potential. They receive the most resources for AI development, and 31% of them are saving more than 12 hours – or a day and a half – of their work week by using AI.

Their stats
- Most likely to be C-suite
- 84 average proficiency score out of 100
- 69% are daily AI users
- 47% are saving 8-12 hours per week using AI

Their differentiators
- 94% are in companies that approve of AI
- 71% have received AI training
- 84% have managers that encourage AI
- 75% report their company having a clear AI policy

AI PRACTITIONERS

9% of the workforce AI practitioners follow fast on the heels of AI experts, with 8+ hours of weekly time savings and high levels of excitement and trust in AI. Compared to experts, they're less proficient with AI, more likely to be paying for tools themselves, and less likely to receive training.

Their stats
- Most likely to be C-suite or directors
- 67 average proficiency score out of 100
- 46% are daily AI users
- The plurality are saving 4-8 hours per week using AI

Their differentiators
- 43% have access to a company LLM
- Their managers are more likely to encourage AI use (45%) than expect it (30%)
- 53% have received company training on AI
- 60% are in companies with an AI policy

AI EXPERIMENTERS

34% of the workforce AI experimenters are significantly worse at using AI than the first two groups, though 73% think they're intermediate users. They get similar amounts of support as practitioners but only use AI for basic tasks and have higher anxiety about it.

Their stats

- Most likely to be VPs
- 48 average proficiency score out of 100
- 29% are daily AI users
- The plurality are saving 2-4 hours per week using AI

Their differentiators

- 86% have company approval to use AI, but only 34% have access to an LLM
- 53% have received company training on AI – same as practitioners
- Only 23% of managers expect AI use

AI NOVICES

44% of the workforce The most common AI type in the workforce, AI novices are more likely to be anxious and overwhelmed by AI than excited. 53% say they worry about being replaced by it, 86% don't have access to an LLM, and most say they don't know their company's stance.

Their stats

- Most likely to be individual contributors
- 30 average proficiency score out of 100
- 9% are daily AI users
- The plurality are saving 2-4 hours per week using AI

Their differentiators

- 65% have company approval but only 14% have deployed an LLM
- 40% have received company training
- Only 16% of managers expect AI use in their role

AI SKEPTICS

12% of the workforce AI skeptics rarely use AI, don't trust its contributions to their work, and report no time savings. While they may seem like hold-outs, many are simply underresourced. Their primary reasons are not knowing how to use it (56%) and not knowing the right use cases (39%).

Their stats

- Most likely to be individual contributors
- 14 average proficiency score out of 100
- 1% are daily AI users
- The plurality are saving 2-4 hours per week using AI

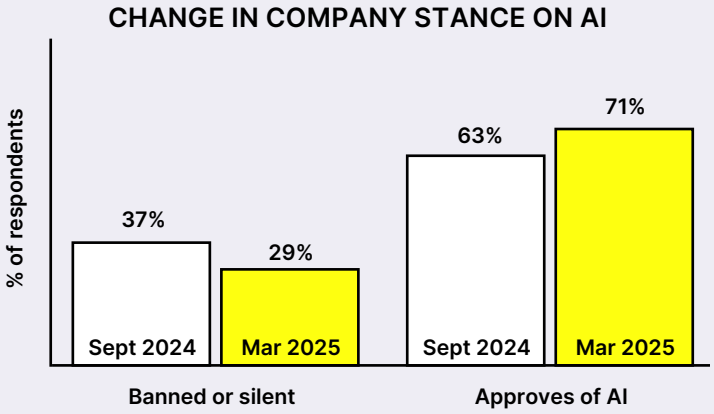
Their differentiators

- Minority (32%) are in companies that approve of AI
- 4% have access to a company LLM
- 68% are in companies who ban AI or won't take a stance on it
- Only 6% of their managers expect AI use

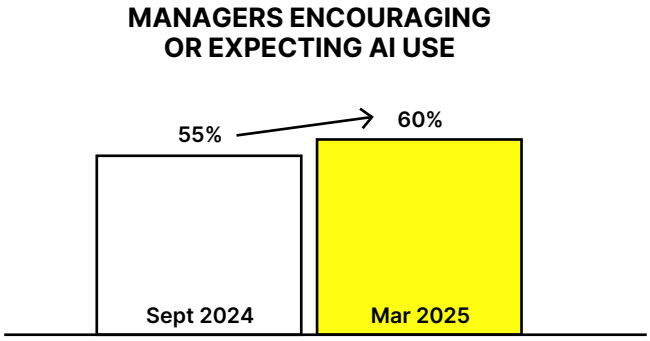
WHAT WE FOUND

Companies have stepped on the gas

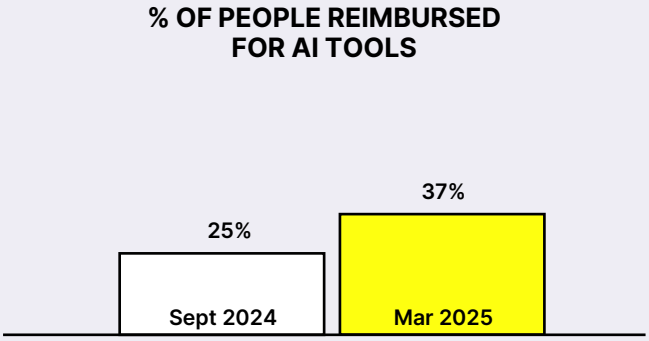
In the last 6 months, companies have become more explicit about their approval of AI use – with about half of the workforce (49%) reporting that they have received clear AI policies on how they should and shouldn't use AI in their work.



We see this support trickling down to the managerial level, with 60% of managers encouraging or expecting their teams to use AI in day-to-day tasks.



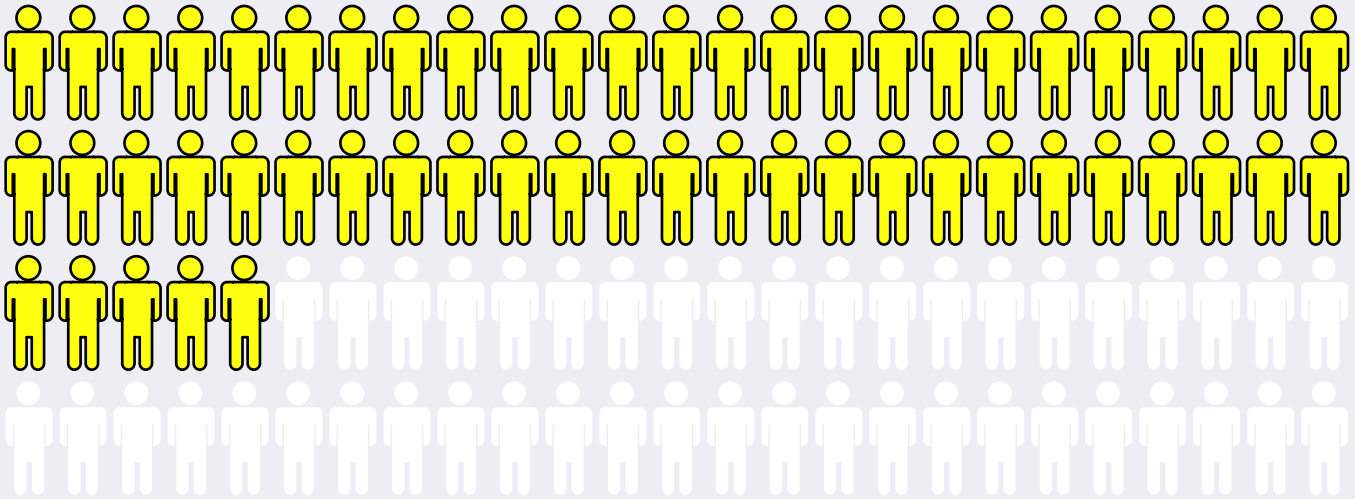
And companies are backing up this support with spend. Not only are deployments up – with 23% of the workforce reporting that everyone in their organization has access to an LLM – companies are also 12% more likely to reimburse employees for AI tools than they were in September 2024.



In addition, the frequency of AI use is trending up, with employees using it more regularly since last year.

55% OF EMPLOYEES

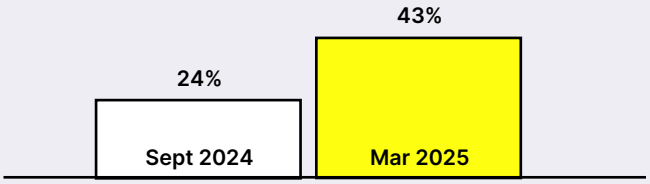
USE AI AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK, UP FROM 45% IN 2024



And nearly half of the workforce now receives AI training from their companies, up from less than a quarter (24%) last year.

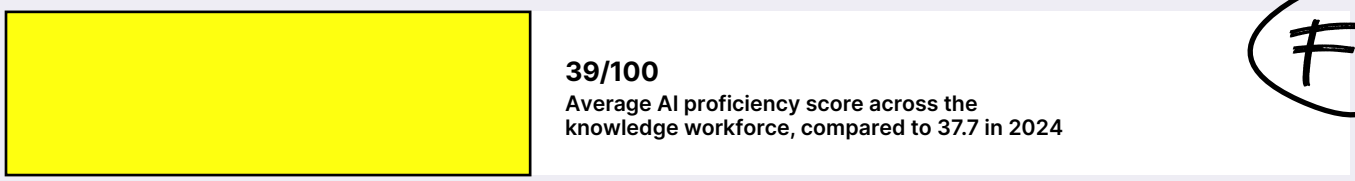
So more companies are doing the right things on paper: Investing in tools, investing in employee upskilling, and providing clarity on expectations. And more employees are getting the message and starting to use AI.

EMPLOYEES RECEIVING AI TRAINING FROM THEIR COMPANY



But these investments are not paying off

Despite increased investments, the **vast majority of knowledge workers are not proficient in AI.**



39/100

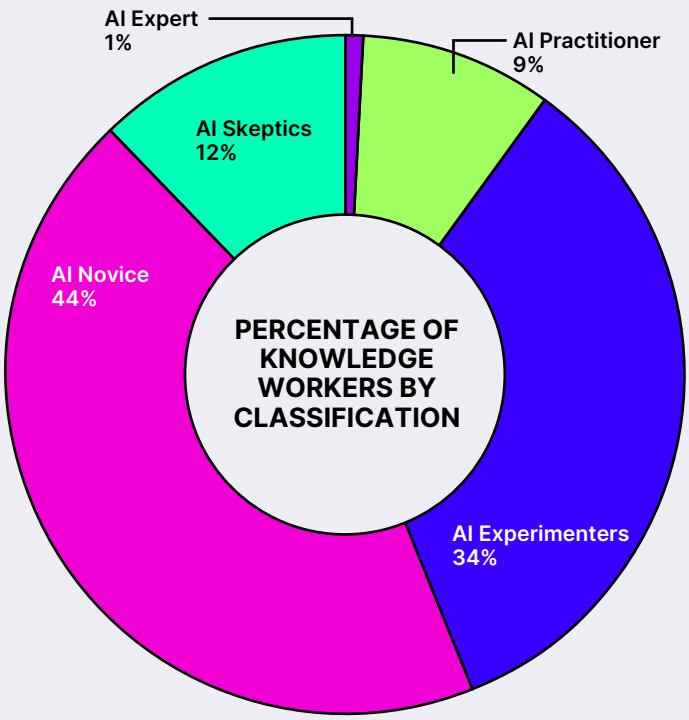
Average AI proficiency score across the knowledge workforce, compared to 37.7 in 2024

Only 10% of the workforce is AI-proficient

We broke down the workforce into five groups based on their proficiency skills.

AI Experts and Practitioners – the two groups we deem highly competent with AI – represent **only 10% of the workforce**.

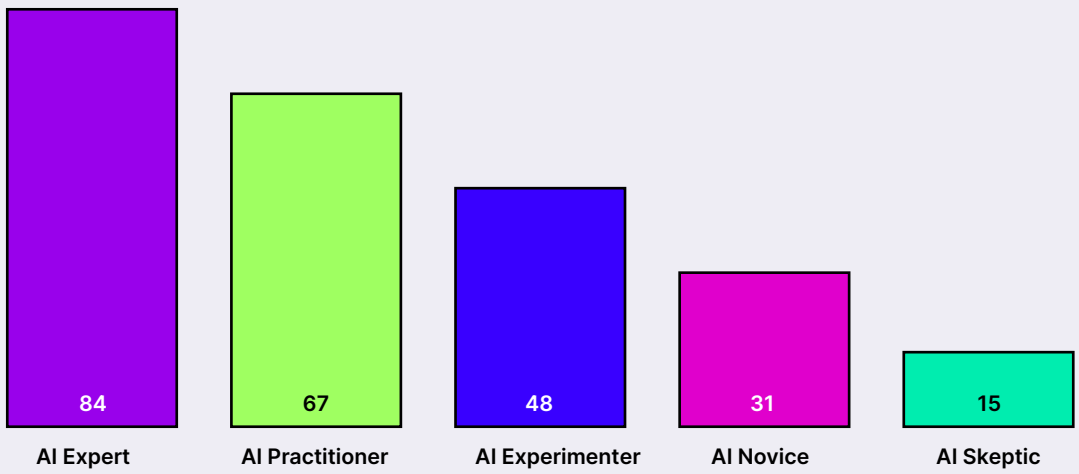
The majority are still what we call Novices and Experimenters: people who have played around with AI, but don't have the skills or knowledge to get real value from it.



In less-capable groups, AI proficiency falls off steeply

AI experimenters and novices – the majority of the workforce – score less than 50/100 in AI proficiency, and skeptics only score 15/100.

AVERAGE PROFICIENCY SCORE BY PROFICIENCY LEVEL

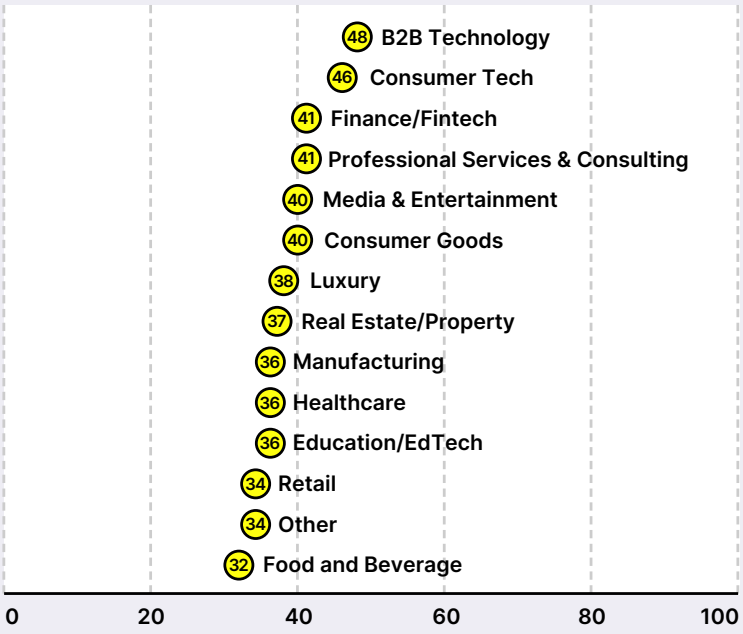


Every industry gets a failing grade – even Big Tech

B2B technology and consumer tech have the highest average proficiency scores, likely driven by tech's forward-thinking culture.

But they still score an average of 48/100 in proficiency, which suggests the majority of their employees don't know how to use AI.

AI PROFICIENCY SCORE BY INDUSTRY

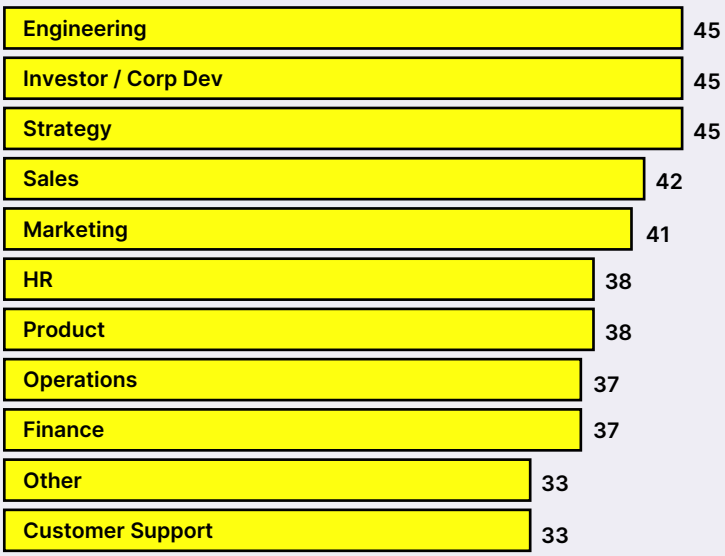


Functions with the most to gain are falling behind

Proficiency at the functional level shows significant opportunity. Marketing barely cracks the top 5, despite being prime for AI augmentation. HR are AI novices, despite being responsible for AI upskilling in many organizations.

And Customer Service and Support ranks dead last – surprising considering Gartner predicted "80% of CS organizations will be applying generative AI ... by 2025."

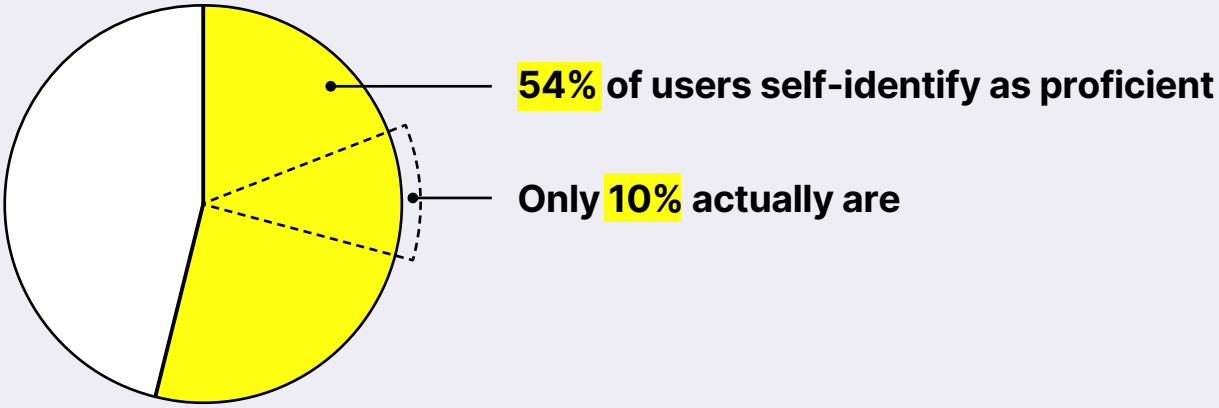
AVERAGE PROFICIENCY SCORE BY FUNCTION



Knowledge workers overestimate their AI ability

Even more concerning for companies deploying AI: The majority of knowledge workers significantly overestimate their AI proficiency.

KNOWLEDGE WORKERS' SELF-REPORTED AI SKILL LEVEL VS. ACTUAL SKILL LEVEL



And – consistent with the Dunning-Kruger effect – less-capable workers are more likely to self-identify as proficient, while experts are actually more likely to downgrade their ability.

73%

of AI experimenters rate themselves as proficient

46%

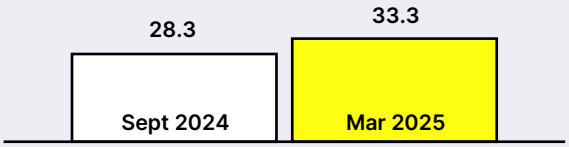
of AI novices rate themselves as proficient

Prompting skills have improved, but not by much

Of the three skills we assessed (AI prompting, knowledge, and usage), prompting has improved the most since September 2024.

But an improvement from 28/100 to 33/100 is hardly remarkable – that's still a failing grade by any measure. And in other categories, skill levels have dropped.

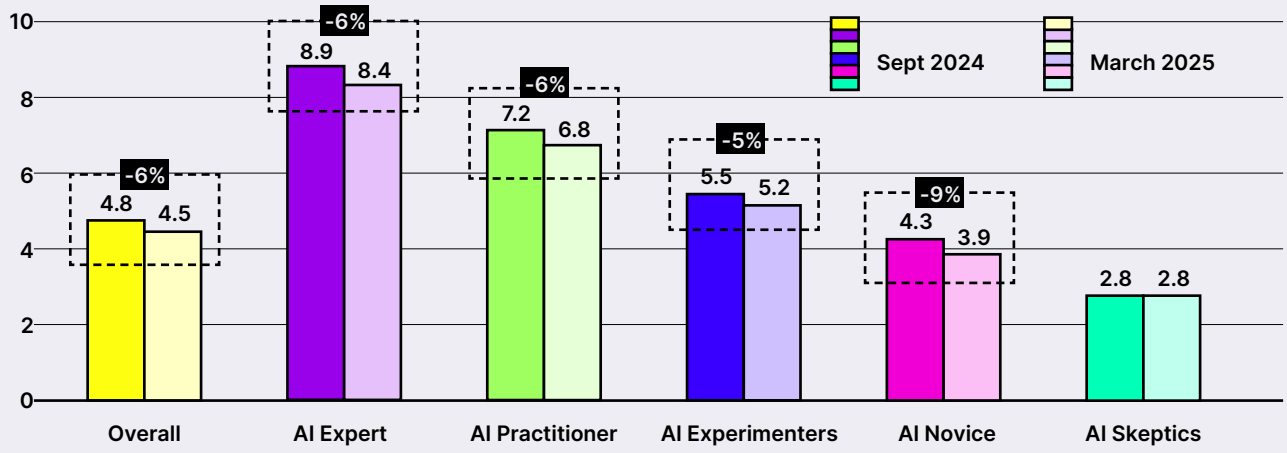
AVERAGE PROMPTING SCORE OVER TIME (OUT OF 100)



Objective knowledge of AI has dropped

Objective knowledge of AI – including how AI works and understanding of data privacy and bias has also dropped in the last six months, even among experts and practitioners.

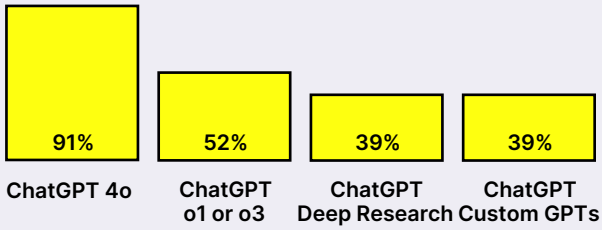
AI KNOWLEDGE SCORE BY PROFCIENCY LEVEL



This may be, in part, due to the proliferation of AI tools: OpenAI alone has launched 7 new models since the last run of this report.

In the survey, even experts said they weren't tapping into AI's full potential, with less than half of AI Experts using tools like Deep Research, Custom GPTs, and advanced models.

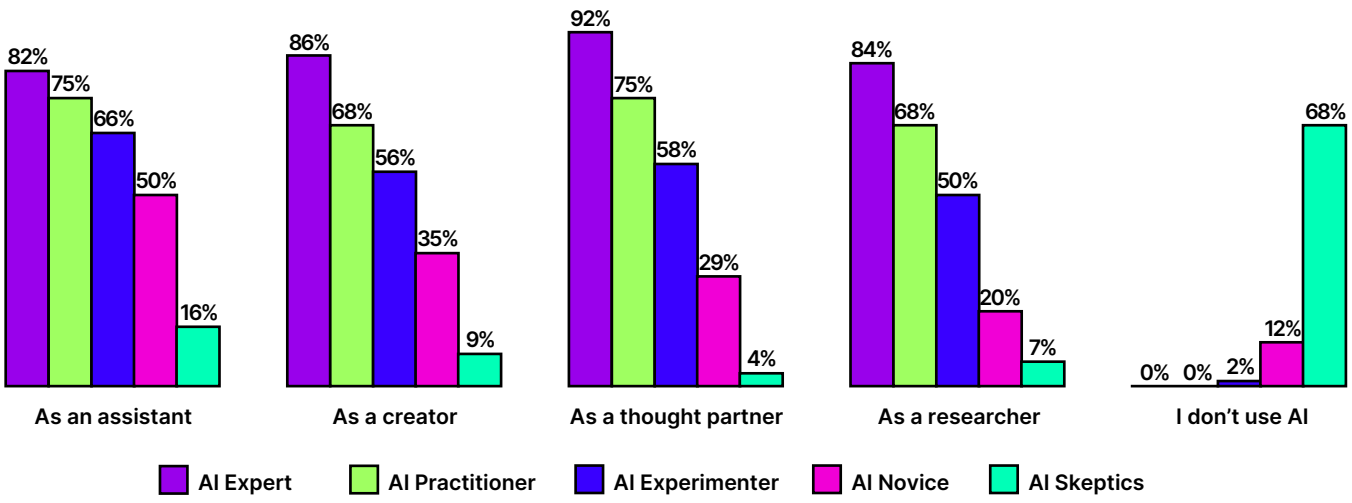
% OF AI EXPERTS USING ADVANCED AI TOOLS



Most are still using AI for its most basic use cases

Additionally, the most popular applications of AI in the workforce at large continue to be as an assistant (54%) and as a creator (42%). The more strategic workflows – thought partnership (40%) and research (34%) – are still the least common use cases for the majority of the workforce.

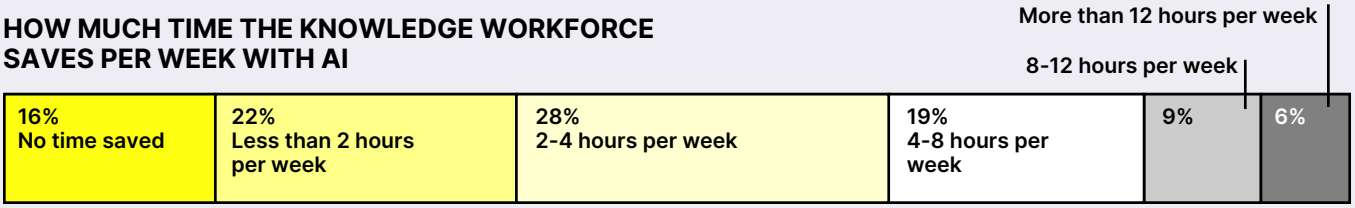
HOW ARE YOU USING AI TODAY?



The downstream effect: More AI usage, but little impact

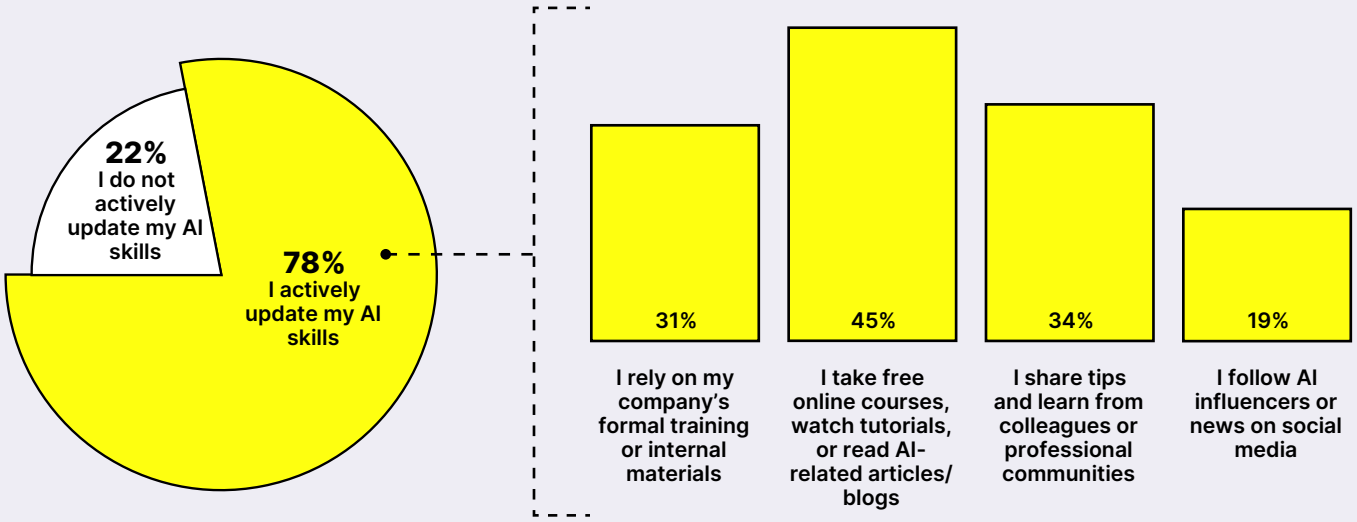
The downstream effect is that while more people are using AI, very few are seeing a significant impact on their productivity, because they're not using it correctly. 38% say they save less than 2 hours per week, far below AI's potential.

HOW MUCH TIME THE KNOWLEDGE WORKFORCE SAVES PER WEEK WITH AI



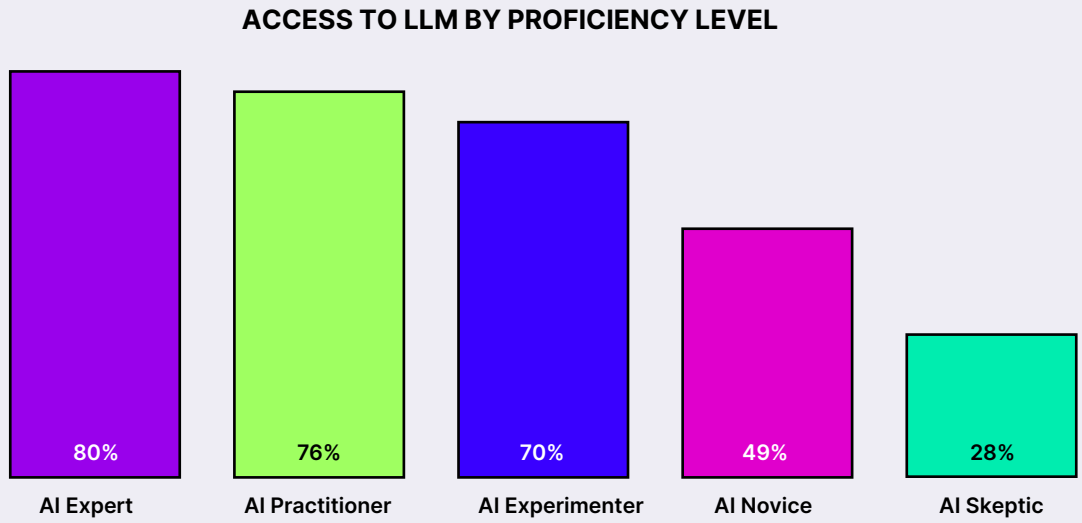
AI expertise doesn't happen organically – it must be engineered

The vast majority of employees say they try to keep their AI skills up to date. But based on low average proficiency scores, self-directed AI education isn't enough to achieve competence.



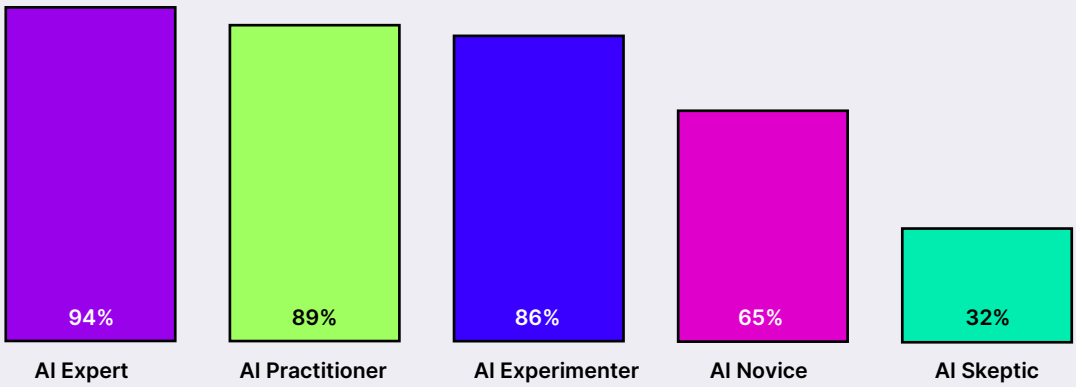
The factors that do increase AI proficiency:

1 **Tool access.** AI experts and practitioners are more likely to have access to an LLM, either provided by the company or reimbursed by their employer.



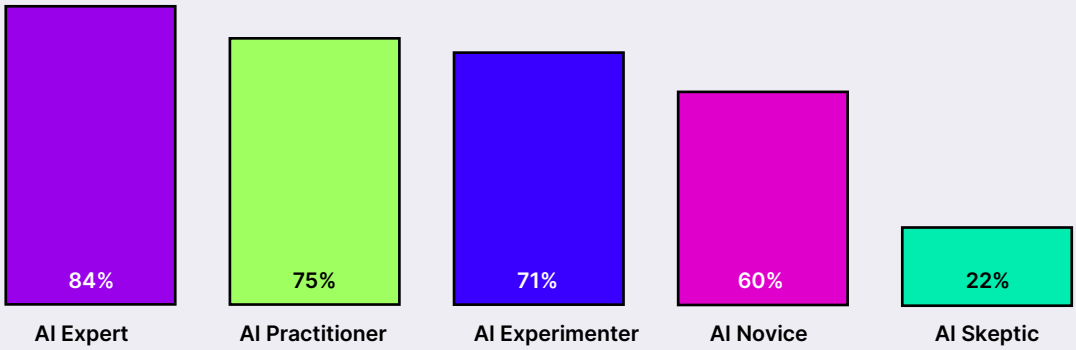
2 **Policy clarity.** AI-proficient employees are more likely to say their company approves of AI and has a clear AI policy.

COMPANY APPROVAL OF AI BY PROFICIENCY LEVEL



3 **Clear manager expectations.** AI-proficient employees are more likely to have managers who encourage or expect AI use, vs. being silent or actively discouraging it.

MANAGER APPROVAL OF AI BY PROFICIENCY LEVEL



4 **Structured training.** Unsurprisingly, structured – not self-directed – training improves AI fluency. Skeptics are the least likely to receive training, with only 10% reporting that they have.

71%
OF EXPERTS HAVE RECEIVED AI TRAINING

53%
OF EXPERIMENTERS HAVE RECEIVED AI TRAINING

10%
OF SKEPTICS HAVE RECEIVED AI TRAINING

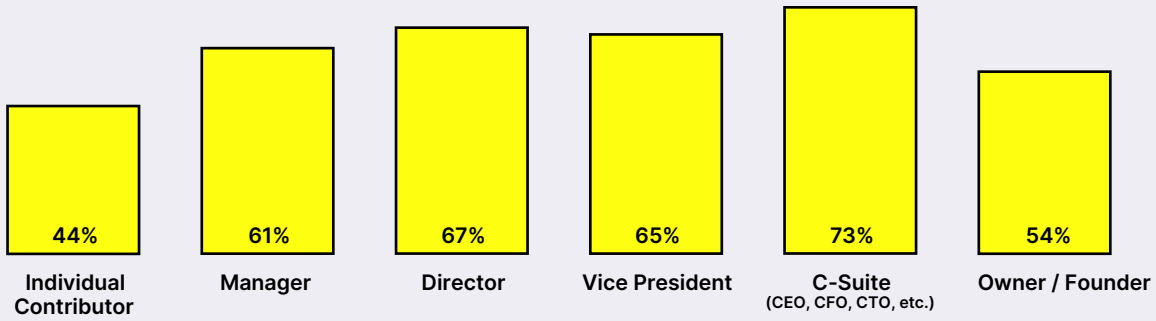
So far, AI resources are reserved for the top of the organization

It's clear from our research that employees with more resources, AI approval, and clear expectations become more proficient.

The problem: These resources are largely reserved for the top of the organization.

Individual contributors are the least likely of all groups to have access to an LLM – the C-suite is almost twice as likely to have access.

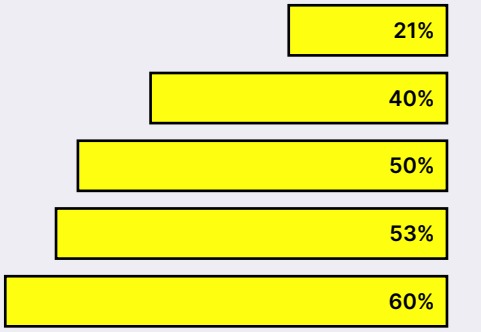
ACCESS TO AN LLM BY CAREER STAGE



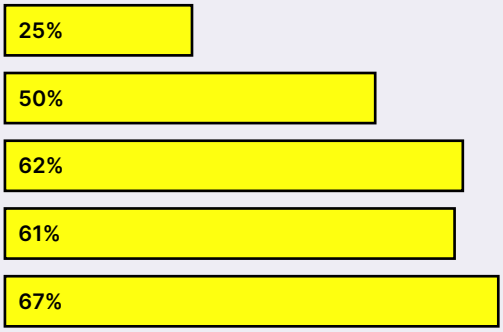
They're also the least likely to be reimbursed for paid tools that they pay for out of pocket.

And they're the least likely to have access to company-provided AI training.

COMPANY REIMBURSEMENT FOR AI BY CAREER STAGE

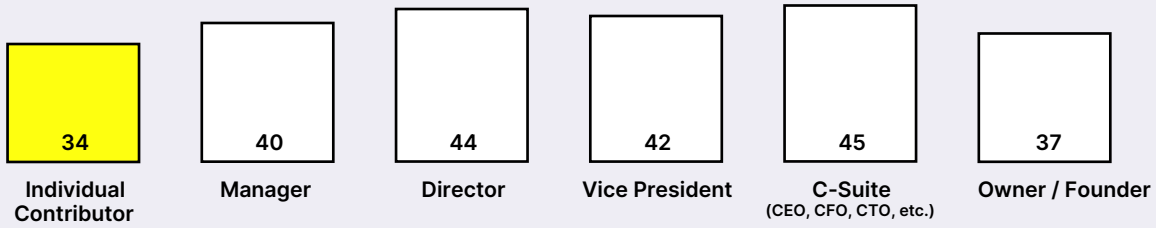


COMPANY-PROVIDED AI TRAINING BY CAREER STAGE



The result: Individual contributors lag behind other career stages in terms of AI proficiency.

AVERAGE PROFICIENCY SCORE OUT OF 100



The result is hollow progress

On the surface, we're seeing some growth in the areas that matter to AI deployments (approval, investment, training, etc.). But when we keep drilling down, we see a wealth of opportunity left on the table:

Companies are 4% more likely to have an LLM **but** only 23% have deployed to everyone

Company approval has increased by 12% **but** 25% of the workforce is afraid they'll be seen as cheaters if they use AI

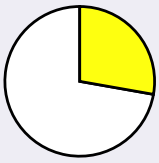
8% fewer companies ban AI or are silent on it **but** 39% of managers prohibit or don't encourage AI use

20% more people are getting company AI training **but** only 25% of ICs have access to it

Plus, despite growth indicators, the majority of companies are still falling behind:

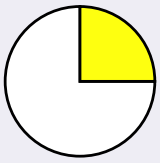
- **48%** of companies who approve of AI have not deployed an LLM
- **29%** of companies still ban AI or are silent on its use
- **57%** of companies have not provided training on AI use
- **51%** of companies have not provided clear policies on AI use, or employees don't know if they exist
- **63%** of companies are still not reimbursing for subscriptions to AI tools

The reality is that, despite good intentions, most people are failing to find real value through AI.



28%

of knowledge workers limit their AI use because they don't know how to use it.



25%

of knowledge workers limit their AI use because they don't know the right use cases to use it for.

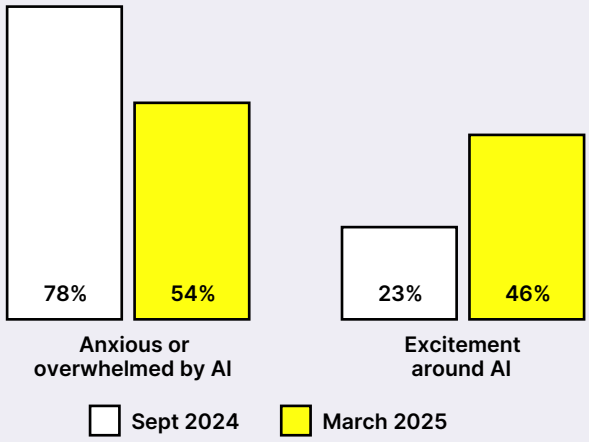
The bright side: The workforce is ready for transformation

The state of AI proficiency isn't dire (yet) – but it is in need of a major intervention. The biggest silver lining in the research is that employee sentiment around AI has become significantly sunnier.

Knowledge workers are generally excited about AI

In our last report, 78% of the workforce was anxious or overwhelmed by AI, and only 23% were excited about its implications for them.

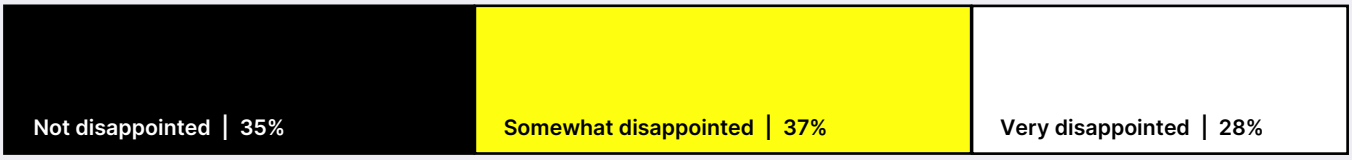
In 6 months, excitement around AI has doubled (46%) and anxiety and overwhelm has dropped by nearly a quarter (54%).



Knowledge workers *want* to use AI

65% of the workforce would be somewhat or very disappointed not to use AI in their work anymore.

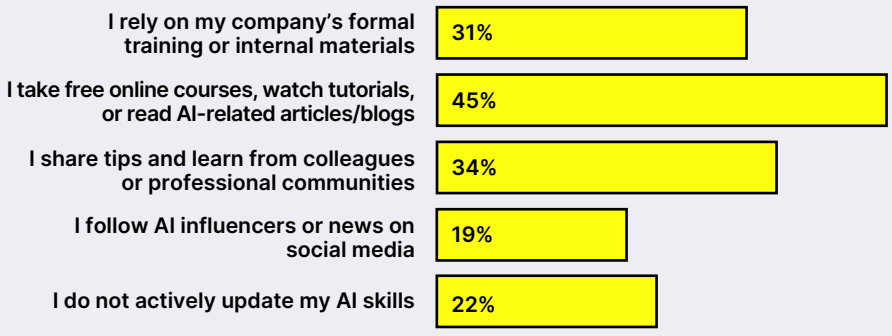
HOW KNOWLEDGE WORKERS WOULD FEEL IF THEY COULD NO LONGER USE AI



Most are finding their own ways to learn how to use AI

Even in lieu of company training, knowledge workers aren't letting their skills languish. 88% are finding some way to teach themselves how to get value out of AI.

HOW KNOWLEDGE WORKERS KEEP THEIR AI KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS UP TO DATE



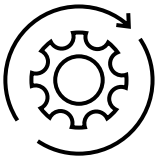
WHAT YOU CAN DO AS A LEADER

While many companies have made progress in the last 6 months, there are some critical opportunities you need to seize if you want your AI investments to pay off.

1

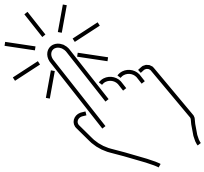
Get visibility into what's going on inside your org. Your employees think they're more skilled at using AI than they are. Functions that have the most to gain from AI are the least proficient. You need to be running diagnostics like this one within your own company so you have a pulse on where things are going right and wrong.

2



Make AI training more than a compliance checkbox. This report clearly shows that more proficient AI users get company training – but not all company training is created equally. Make sure your training goes beyond "checking the box" on compliance and reveals clear use cases that employees can put to work.

3



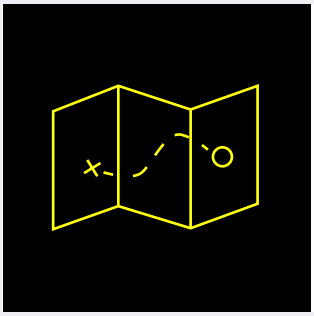
Engage your individual contributors. Your ICs are some of your most powerful AI advocates, and they're being neglected. Get a team of AI champions together – from every level of the organization – to surface new use cases, build excitement, and demonstrate progress.

4

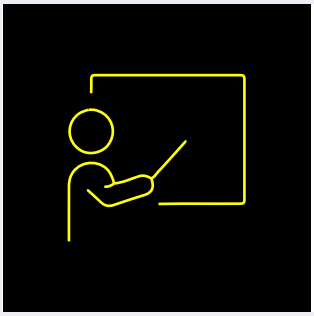
Take an active role in AI, not a passive one. AI is changing and improving too rapidly for you to just set it and forget it. If you haven't looked at your policies, training, or processes in a few months, they're likely out of date. Your people are clawing their way up the learning curve and then sliding back down. They need your help.

ABOUT SECTION

Section is an AI workforce transformation partner – we take individuals and teams who are AI-curious, and help them put AI to work in every aspect of their job.



STEP 1: DIAGNOSE AND DESIGN
Run the same assessment we used to write this report for your team, then put together a plan for AI deployment that fits your unique organization.



STEP 2: DEPLOY AND MEASURE
Upskill your team on AI in a way that sticks, and identify high-impact workflows to rebuild with AI. Then track the productivity gains and ROI you realize, to take back to your CFO.

BOOK A MEETING