The Unlock:
AI Readiness Across Levels

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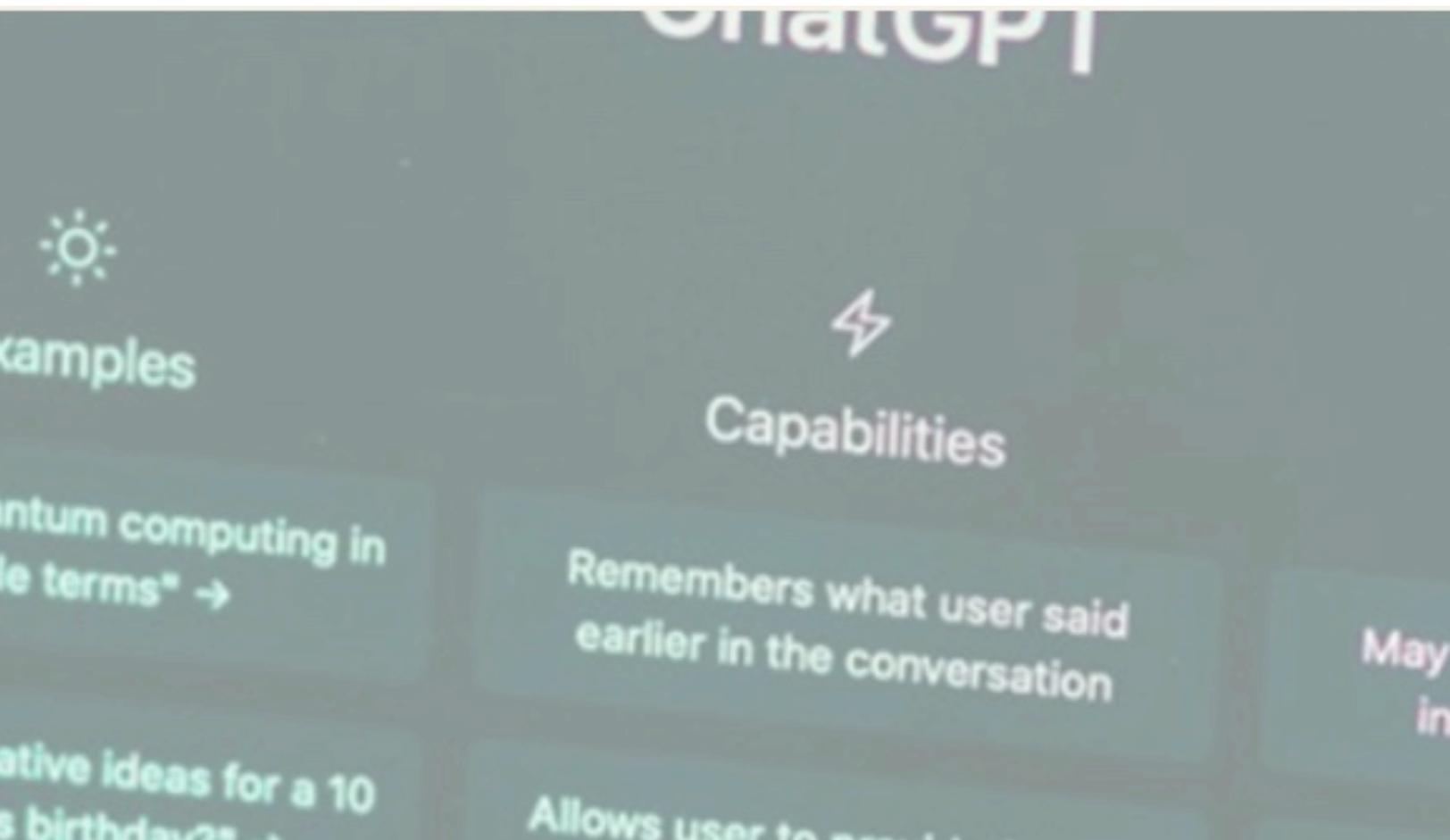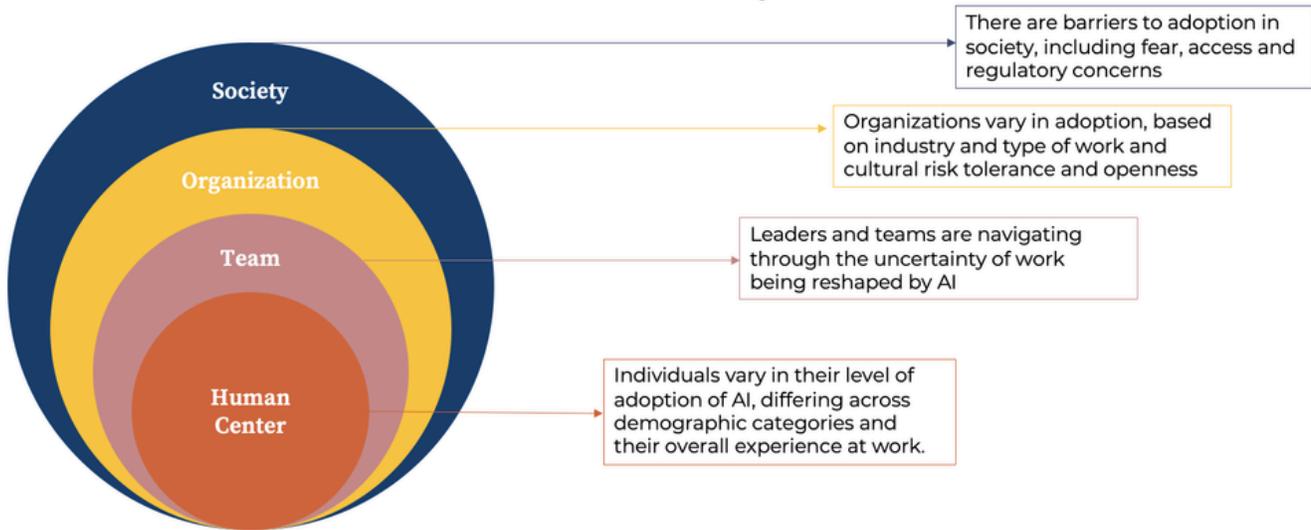
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Contents

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AI Readiness at Work: From individuals to society.

Society

Organization

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Human Center

There are barriers to adoption in society, including fear, access and regulatory concerns

Organizations vary in adoption, based on industry and type of work and cultural risk tolerance and openness

Leaders and teams are navigating through the uncertainty of work being reshaped by AI

Individuals vary in their level of adoption of AI, differing across demographic categories and their overall experience at work.

Introduction

AI adoption doesn't happen in a single leap; it's a journey through layers: the individual shaping their own habits, the leader guiding a team, the organization designing the structure, and the society setting the rules of the game. True value emerges when these layers connect, creating a balance of high performance and high humanity.

Today, individuals vary in how they embrace AI, shaped by their work experience, role, and background. Leaders and teams are navigating uncharted territory as AI reshapes workflows, decisions, and the very nature of jobs. Organizations differ in their pace and approach, influenced by industry norms, cultural openness, and risk tolerance. And at the broadest level, societal barriers, from fear and access gaps to evolving regulations, shape what adoption looks like at scale.

Individual Readiness for AI Adoption

Nearly half of the U.S. workforce is using GenAI for professional purposes. And the other half isn't. This lack of universal adoption is reflected in differences across demographic groups in their level of use.

Some individuals are more likely to feel nervous or concerned when it comes to adopting GenAI at work, especially older and white workers.

Individual adoption also differs in what tasks individuals are using AI for. Most users are tapping into GenAI's capacity to find information, while younger workers are also leaning on GenAI for brainstorming and ideation.

When considering adoption at the individual level, it is important to consider the human experience first, addressing concerns and building trust to ensure healthy adoption.

Who in your organization is resistant, reluctant or relentless about the use of AI?

- Younger workers are 56pp more likely than the oldest workers in the workforce to use AI for work/professional purposes.
- U.S. workers who earn less than $100k are more likely to leverage AI in their work than those who make more than $100k, especially for help with planning and organizing.
- Hispanic/Latino, Black, and Asian workers are significantly more likely to use AI at work as compared with white workers.
- Individuals differ in their AI usage across industries, with those in financial services are most likely to use AI at work, and those in trade/transportation least likely.

46%

of U.S. Workers use GenAI in their work/professional lives at least some of the time

Leadership Readiness For AI Adoption

Teams and leaders are uniquely positioned to elevate AI responsibly in their organizations. Leaders must be equipped to build trust in their employees while also developing and communicating responsible guidelines for AI use within their teams and organizations.

Our data shows that leaders are using AI more and have more positive attitudes about it. It also reveals that leaders who articulate clear guidelines experience more engagement and skill development on their teams:

- Leaders are more likely than non-leaders to use GenAI at work (54% vs. 40%).
- Leaders cite being more productive when they do use AI (49% of leaders vs. 35% of non-leaders).
- Leaders are also more trusting of AI and are +10pp more likely to agree AI provides trustworthy information.
- They are 12pp more likely than non-leaders to believe AI will improve communication of ideas.
- They are 10pp more likely to think it will improve delivering high-quality work
- They are 8pp more likely to see potential for AI in creative tasks.

35% U.S. workers say their companies have clear GenAI usage guidelines.

How can leaders clarify guidelines for AI use, and increase team optimism and engagement in AI adoption?

Cultural Readiness for AI Adoption

Understanding your AI readiness profile is the first step to building an AI strategy that fits your business priorities and is embraced by your workforce.

Organizations that are likely to be **hesitant to adopt AI** have the following features:
- Low trust in leadership
- Lack of skill development
- Job security and stability

Organizations that may be **slow to adopt AI but are willing to try** have the following features:
- Collaborative teammates and culture
- Trust in leadership
- Psychological safety
- Guidelines for use of AI

Organizations that are the **fastest to adopt AI** have the following features:

- High levels of trust in CEO
- Ample access to skill development, growth opportunities
- Higher levels of job insecurity

What does this mean? Understanding the context of your organization can help set you up for success in your AI adoption journey.

Contact idealis today to learn more about where you stand and how to accelerate responsible AI adoption.

Societal Barriers to AI Adoption

idealis' human-centered leadership model

U.S. workers are starting to see the benefits of AI on quality of life, though a middle ground still have trepidation.

In just two years, attitudes toward AI have shifted dramatically: optimism is up 12 points, while negative sentiment has dropped 13 points. With 43% now expecting AI to improve their quality of life and only a third anticipating a negative impact, one thing is clear:


Over the next ten years, do you expect advances in artificial intelligence (AI) to have a more positive or negative impact on your overall quality of life?

	February 2023	May 2025	Change
Positive Impact	31%	43%	+12pts
Neutral Impact	22%	23%	+1pt
Negative Impact	46%	33%	-13pts

Early fears are giving way to familiarity.

The small rise in neutral responses shows a stable middle ground of people who are no longer alarmed but haven't fully embraced AI yet. Demographic differences also exist in perceptions of impact.

This presents an opportunity for leaders to tip cautious observers into confident adopters through exposure, education, and clear demonstrations of value.
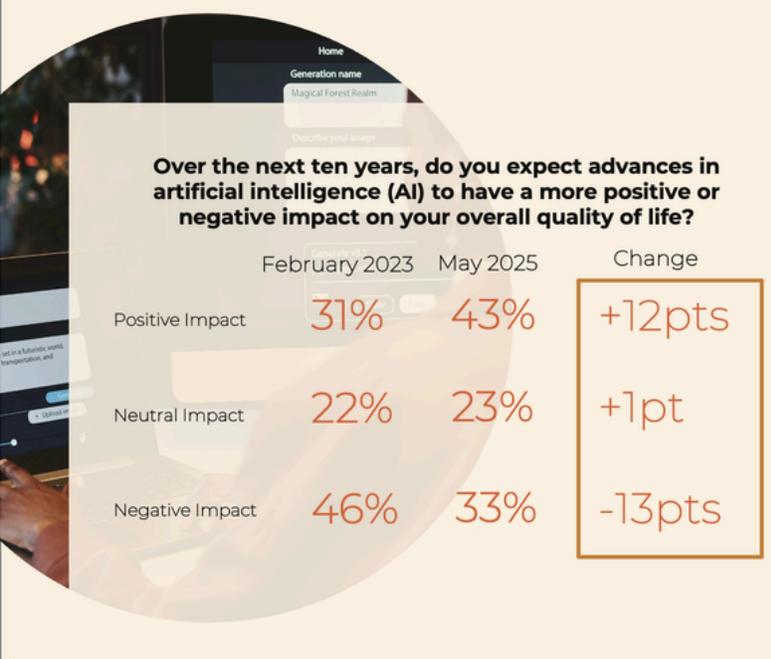
Recommendations for AI Adoption in Organizations

At every level, organizations have challenges to overcome to not only adopt but understand AI and its impact on workers and society more broadly. Knowing where you are as an individual, team, and organization can help confront those challenges and move your company to the AI age.

- **Replace fear with fluency.** Job security concerns spike with exposure to GenAI, underscoring that exposure to AI's power evokes excitement and fear. How will you create visible opportunities for education and safe experimentation, so AI becomes a tool for confidence and performance rather than anxiety?

- **Frame AI as performance infrastructure.** The opportunity is less about automation and more about augmenting human judgment and decision-making. How can you model AI as a lever to elevate quality, speed, and strategic insight rather than a replacement for human thinking?

- **Build on-ramps for adoption.**.With "all in" groups pulling ahead and others slower to engage, the gap is structural, not just cultural. What role-specific pathways can you put in place to make AI relevant to different jobs and levels, ensuring productivity gains are distributed across the business

- **Link AI policy to business outcomes.** Only 35% of workers report clear AI usage guidelines, and most companies haven't tied policy to capability. Does your organization have a governance model that pairs AI standards with measurable skill-building and clear expectations tied to strategic goals?

Complexity brings both challenge and opportunity. Leaders who pair clear guidelines with skill development can turn adoption into a catalyst for trust and innovation. Exposure fuels understanding: the more people use GenAI, the better they grasp its rewards and risks. By engaging younger workers as mentors, creating open channels for feedback, and rewarding responsible use, organizations can build a culture where AI strengthens both performance and humanity.

At idealis., we help CEOs, boards, and executive teams bridge the gaps between people, culture, and strategy so that AI adoption is sustainable and built to last. The roadmap is ready to be drawn together.

Conclusion

AI adoption is a layered journey, shaped by individuals, teams, organizations, and society. Value creation through AI adoption emerges when each of these levels are understood and addressed, with a balance of demanding high performance while upholding high humanity. Leaders who combine clear guidelines with skill-building can turn complexity into opportunity, fostering trust, innovation, and responsible use. At idealis., we help leaders bridge people, culture, and strategy so AI adoption is sustainable and built to last.

About the Pulse of the US Workforce

At idealis, we know that employee experience is closely tied to business outcomes. Yet, while financial metrics are often tracked rigorously, the workplace experience is rarely measured with the same precision. Our Pulse of the U.S. Workforce, in partnership with Civic Science, captures real-time insights from thousands of U.S. workers each month. This data gives leaders a reliable and actionable view into how their employees feel, empowering them to make informed decisions that foster engagement and growth. To explore the insights and opportunities the Pulse can provide, visit our Pulse website.

Source: Pulse of the U.S. Workforce, July 2025 Quarterly Report

"AI adoption is a boardroom topic, but what is missed is the complexity of this change: there is a human at the center, a leader guiding a team, an organization setting the conditions, and society defining the guardrails. And there is no playbook for adoption of something at this scale and speed."
Dr. Sumona De Graaf

About the Authors

Dr. Sumona De Graaf
An organizational psychologist specializing in motivation and what drives people. She has worked with founder-led businesses, family offices, venture capital and private equity companies, and boards and management teams across the public and private sector. Her work across clients has one commonality:

Sumona is called upon by Boards and C-level executives to help them navigate their most challenging human issues. As a social scientist, she uses data to draw insights, and as a career practitioner, guides her clients to redesign habits, processes and practices to create lasting impact.

Sumona is the founder and CEO of idealis. She spends her time helping clients navigate their most pressing leadership challenges, amplifying the stories of human-centered leaders, and most importantly, creating the conditions for her team of exceptional humans to thrive.

Dr. Abbey Salvas
An industrial-organizational psychologist who has been driven throughout their educational and professional career by the mission of making workplaces better for everyone.

At idealis, Abbey serves as a research lead and data expert, providing analytical support to the team to help answer our clients' most nuanced and challenging questions using best-in-class data tools and solutions. They apply human insight to hard data, answering the critical question of how to create human-centered environments that benefit everyone.

Allison Williams
An accomplished senior leader in higher education with 20+ years of strategic leadership and management responsibilities, Allison has implemented cutting edge individual and organizational leadership development initiatives with boards, executive leaders and complex organizations. She has built dynamic tools designed to ignite the leadership potential of individuals and teams to drive positive change at every level. She also teaches organizational leadership development at the graduate level and is a certified facilitator and trainer through the International Institute of Restorative Practices.

At idealis, Allison serves as our Chief Learning Officer and is guiding our growing higher education practice focused on developing current and future leaders of our world. With a deep passion for guiding others to repair culture, align vision and values, and bring forth the best in people, she couples theory and practice to offer new ways of thinking about today's most complex leadership challenges.

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To learn more about this topic or the Pulse of the U.S. Workforce, reach out to programs and products, please reach out to **pulse@idealisadvisory.com** or visit our **website**.

Follow us on **LinkedIn** to receive real-time insights on the workforce today.