

AI Fluency

The Most Important Skills Where
AI is Transforming Work Today

The AI Fluency Gap

AI has established itself as a powerful driver of economic value, yet the reality of the American workplace has not kept pace with the technology's potential. In fact, 60% of American workers are not using AI at work.¹ Even among those who have adopted the technology, true proficiency remains rare. Only 5% of the workforce is considered "AI fluent"—a group that has deeply integrated AI into their workflows and is already seeing significant gains in productivity and career growth.² This stark divide reveals that for the majority of professionals, access to tools has not yet translated to transformation. This creates a paradox in the labor market.

While 70% of managers believe having a workforce trained in AI will be critical for their organization's success, very few are actively building those capabilities. Currently, only 14% of workers nationally have been offered AI training by their employer.³ The disconnect is not simply a lack of resources; it is a lack of clarity. Employers want an AI-skilled workforce, and workers want to reap the benefits of this technology, but neither side fully understands which skills are most useful or how to acquire them. Without a shared framework to define what AI fluency actually means, organizations cannot build effective training programs.

Consequently, many employers are caught between two unproductive extremes: "scattershot upskilling," where training is reactive and lacks strategic coherence, or "hyper-narrow pilots" that work for a few specialists but never reach the rest of the company. This leaves a massive portion of the workforce without the guidance needed to bridge the gap. To move past these extremes, we must first define which skills are required, and then provide a clear roadmap for how the workforce can acquire them.



1, 2, 3 The path to AI Fluency: AI Works for America, Ipsos and Google, 2026

The Two Pillars of AI Fluency

To address the absence of a common framework, The Burning Glass Institute worked with the Skills-First Workforce Initiative, a coalition of some of America's largest employers convened by Walmart. This coalition built a shared language to define the most important skills where AI is transforming work today. The group represents a cross-sector collaboration of workforce and talent strategy leaders from Google, Accenture, Bank of America, The Home Depot, Nordstrom, PepsiCo, Verizon—organizations that are actively hiring for AI skills and deploying AI across their operations.

Our approach looked beyond what AI tools can do and focused on how AI changes the actual tasks that employees perform every day. By identifying the specific areas where AI is transforming work, we defined AI Fluency through two distinct pillars that apply across all roles and levels. These include AI Acumen, which establishes the foundational knowledge and ethical standards required to use AI responsibly, and AI Skill Domains, which identify the functional areas that are being reshaped by AI.

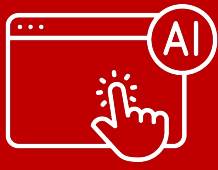


Pillar 1
AI Acumen



Pillar 2
AI skill domains

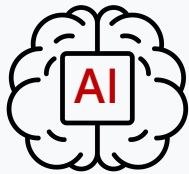
Pillar 1



AI Acumen

The Skills-First Workforce Initiative determined that specialized AI training cannot be effective without a shared, baseline understanding of how to interact with an AI model. They established **AI Acumen** as the foundational standard that every knowledge worker must know in order to unlock AI's value, while mitigating the risks posed by improper use.

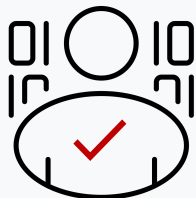
AI Acumen is built on three core areas:



Fundamental knowledge: Understanding where AI creates value and identifying tasks where it does not. This includes awareness of core categories such as text, data, images, and agents, as well as risks like hallucinations or bias.

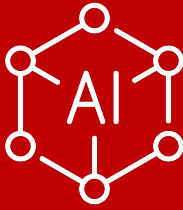


Application and effective use: Mastering the mechanics of prompting with clear context and constraints, fine-tuning model behavior, and selecting the appropriate model for a specific task.



Responsible use: Establishing that employees maintain oversight and responsibility for all outputs. This includes identifying when AI should *not* be used, such as with confidential data or situations requiring high-stakes empathy.

Pillar 2



AI Skill Domains

Beyond foundational acumen, the coalition identified six skill domains where AI is fundamentally reshaping knowledge work. These domains represent the intersection of 700+ AI capabilities like data analysis, content creation, and workflow automation with 450 existing workplace skills like writing and project management. Instead of role-specific programs, organizations can focus on these six universal domains:

AI Skill Domain	What AI Actually Does for Us	Top Skills in this Domain
Planning and Organizing	Automates the "glue work," like updates, handoffs, and reminders, to keep projects on track without the manual overhead.	✓ Project Management ✓ Time Management ✓ Resource Estimation ✓ Problem Solving
Communication	Moves us from a blank page to professional, tailored drafts in seconds, allowing us to tweak tone for any audience.	✓ Technical Writing ✓ Stakeholder Engagement ✓ Contract Review ✓ Editing ✓ Language Translation
Research & Synthesis	Scans massive amounts of info to find patterns and insights efficiently.	✓ Competitive Analysis ✓ Literature Review ✓ Information Synthesis ✓ Market Research
Data Analysis	Lets anyone "talk" to data using natural language to find trends and create visuals that make sense to decision-makers.	✓ Business Intelligence ✓ Data-Driven Decision Making ✓ Advanced Analytics ✓ Dashboarding
Content Generation	Quickly build creative assets and prototypes for storytelling, even if we aren't "designers."	✓ Presentation Design ✓ Prototyping ✓ Content Strategy ✓ Graphic Design
Workflow Automation	Empower anyone to build tools and automate workflows by describing them ("vibe coding") — no coding experience required.	✓ Debugging ✓ Test Automation ✓ Software Architecture ✓ Workflow Design

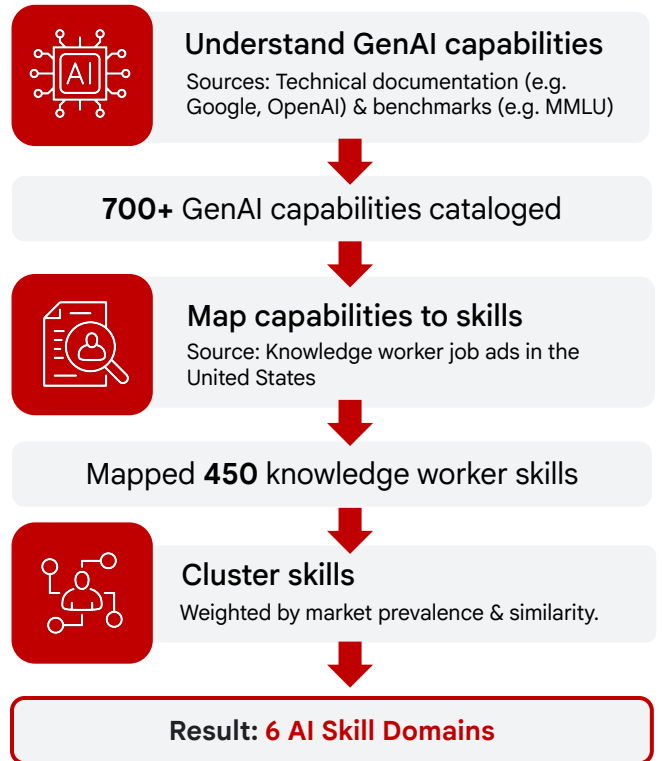
Methodology and Employer Validation

To ensure the AI fluency framework is both data-driven and practically applicable, the study combined large-scale labor market analytics from the Burning Glass Institute with real-world validation from members of the Skills-First Workforce Initiative.

Phase 1. Data-Driven Skill Mapping

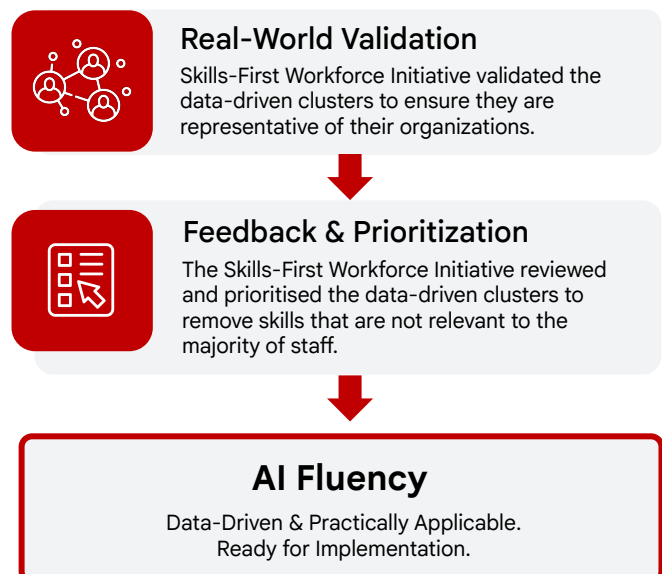
The process began by establishing a technical baseline for what generative AI can actually do, and how these capabilities transform in-demand knowledge worker skills.

- ✓ **Understand generative AI capabilities:** We cataloged over 700 specific capabilities of leading Large Language Models (e.g. Anthropic, Google, OpenAI, Meta) using technical documentation and benchmarks (e.g., HumanEval, MMLU,) to create a complete list of generative AI capabilities.
- ✓ **Map capabilities to skills:** These 700+ generative AI capabilities were mapped to 450 of the most prevalent skills found in "knowledge worker" job descriptions—jobs that involve processing and sharing information using technology.
- ✓ **Cluster skills:** The 450 skills were grouped based on their similarity and market prevalence, identifying the six "AI Skill Domains" where AI is transforming knowledge work.



Phase 2. Employer Validation

By combining labor market data with the operational reality of some of America's largest employers, we moved beyond academic theory to create a coordinated, scalable roadmap for workforce transformation. While data analysis provided the structure, the SFWI, a coalition of employers representing millions of employees, was critical in ensuring the results were actionable and high-value. These leaders pressure-tested the initial clusters to ensure they matched the AI shifts occurring within their own firms, helping us prioritize high-utility skills and remove specialized silos that do not impact the daily work of the vast majority of staff.



Conclusion: Putting the Findings into Practice

Skill cohorts to operationalize AI fluency

The traditional approach of training role-by-role (e.g., "AI for Marketers") is too slow and expensive to meet the demands of 2026. Because AI fluency is portable across occupations, organizations can achieve greater impact through cross-functional cohorts. A Financial Analyst, a Marketing Manager, and an HR lead all require the same competencies to analyze data. Training them together breaks down silos and creates a unified "AI operating system", and a set of shared baseline competencies for the entire company.

The Roadmap Forward



Build the foundation: Establish a firm-wide AI Acumen program as the essential base layer for every employee, from entry-level to the C-suite. This is the "driver's license" for the modern workforce, ensuring everyone understands the authorized AI tools available for use and the corporate policies governing them. Beyond tool access, this foundational training should cover AI strengths and limitations, effective use ("prompting"), and the ethical standards required to use these tools safely.



Prioritize what matters most: Begin with the 2–3 AI Skill Domains where the technology drives the most value for your teams' core work. For example, Product Managers should focus on Research & Synthesis, while Warehouse Managers should prioritize Organization & Planning. Once employees build skills in their priority domains, expand training to cover additional domains until comprehensive AI fluency is achieved across the workforce.



Launch "Domain Sprints": Run short, intensive cross-functional training sessions to master specific skill domains and turn AI use into a daily habit. This makes the training practical, role-relevant, and scalable.



Define "Responsible AI" standards: Establish clear protocols for when and how workers should collaborate with AI. Identify "protected activities," such as handling proprietary IP, sensitive HR matters, or high-stakes client relations, where AI use is restricted and human judgment remains the final authority.



Update performance metrics: Shift performance evaluation from tracking "AI adoption" to measuring productivity gains within a specific skill domain. For example, evaluate how AI fluency reduces cycle times and eliminates the administrative "glue work" that previously delayed projects. By measuring the specific impact on workflows, leadership can track the true ROI of their training efforts.

About the Skills-First Workforce Initiative

Promoting mobility for American workers

This effort comes as more employers embrace a skills-first approach to hiring that values workers' full set of skills and experiences rather than focusing primarily on proxies like a college degree. This kind of approach can help widen talent pools at a time when unemployment is low yet there are more open jobs than unemployed workers.

This work is the result of a first-of-its-kind collaboration some of America's largest employers, led by the [Burning Glass Institute](#) and convened by Walmart, to align on a shared language for skills and to promote mobility for American workers. Participating firms co-created each skill taxonomy with the goal of cross-recognizing skills and learning across companies.

Partners

We thank members of the Skills-First Workforce Initiative for their collaboration on this work:

 **accenture**

BANK OF AMERICA 

Blackstone





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 **PEPSICO**

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