

multiverse

The ROI of AI

Unlocking AI maturity through
workforce skills



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Introduction

AI looks set to upend every aspect of our working lives, if not our lives altogether.

The financial promise is huge. AI is forecast to contribute \$15.7 trillion to the global economy by 2030.

Optimism is high. Leaders have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create the first truly “AI-native” business models. Workers are already using emerging technologies to increase productivity, transform the customer experience, and unlock new product capabilities.

It’s no wonder then that adoption is continuing to accelerate; according to McKinsey, AI adoption jumped from 50% of organizations in 2023 to 72% in 2024.

But with great potential comes great pressure to deliver – and many leaders justifiably feel pressure to keep up with the rapid rate of change.

The situation has been exacerbated as upfront investment continues to pour into AI, but implementation has too often been an afterthought.

Without an intentional approach to AI, momentum can easily stall. Siloed AI pilots fail to scale further. Expensive AI tools suffer from low adoption rates and create increased risk from improper use. Underlying data quality issues go unfixed, rendering AI outputs inaccurate. It all adds up: to wasted resource and unrealized ROI.

To be able to build a truly AI-native business – where AI is baked into your organizational DNA, and delivering maximum ROI – multiple elements must work in harmony.



Tech investments need to be combined with an AI-enabled workforce. Workers must be equipped with the skills and tools to leverage AI to its full potential, not only to realize the true value of the technology, but to proactively mitigate risk.

The single biggest challenge for business leaders grappling with AI is the skilling component. And the only clear option to address this challenge quickly and in a way that engages the wider workforce (where automation is often seen as a threat), is to build capability within existing teams.

At Multiverse, we believe that workforce skills are crucial to realizing the benefits of AI, while effectively mitigating against the downsides. Only organizations that commit to upskilling their employees in both data and AI, alongside investing in new tech, will be able to truly succeed on this front.

It's time for leaders to take a frank look at their organization's place on the AI maturity scale. This will help to identify the necessary workforce skills required to deliver results from AI, before stagnation becomes a blocker to further investment.

We've analyzed the views of tech leaders and employees to create a realistic outlook on AI ROI – and assess what's truly needed in organizations for AI to deliver on its promise.

**Euan Blair,
CEO at Multiverse**



About the Multiverse ROI of AI report

As AI adoption continues to rise, we want to focus on the reality of AI implementation – the benefits, the role of workers, and where organizations sit on the AI maturity scale, to identify the gaps and barriers to full AI adoption.

We surveyed 810 tech leaders and 1,190 employees across the US and UK, to assess their experiences, challenges and future plans.



Definitions

AI vs GenAI

In order to be able to quantify AI-driven gains, we looked at AI in general so we can include a wider range of use cases beyond GenAI.

AI ROI

Quantifiable AI gains.

Workers

Junior up to middle manager.

Tech leaders

Senior managers and C-suite responsible for championing AI within their organization.

Upskilling

Giving employees opportunities to improve their skills, enabling them to perform their current role more effectively, or take on new responsibilities and advance their career.

Reskilling

When employees learn the new skills needed to move into a completely different role.

Executive summary

AI optimism is high, with leaders and workers already generating measurable results from emerging technologies.

- Four in five leaders say implementing AI has led to an increase in revenue generation.
- 98% of leaders say the benefits of AI have met or exceeded their expectations.
- Overall, 57% believe they are ahead of the competition in AI maturity.
- 83% of workers think AI skills will help them to drive more value for their employer in the next 12 months.



However, there are signs that some organizations may be overestimating their own AI maturity.

- Only a small proportion of leaders strongly agree that their organization has established best practice in providing governance structures to limit AI risk (28%).
- Less than half of leaders strongly agree that their business is ensuring responsible use of AI in business practices (43%).



Workforce skills and capability are key blockers to further AI investment and implementation.

- Tech leaders say their biggest blocker to further investment is the inability to fully use existing AI technology (63%), followed by resistance from employees to use AI (58%), and a lack of ability to demonstrate or predict tangible results (57%).
- Leaders and workers cite risk factors (50%), skills gaps (34%), and difficulty demonstrating ROI (26%) amongst their top blockers to full implementation of AI.



Businesses need to build expertise in AI, fast, but formal AI training opportunities remain in short supply.

- The majority of workers (51%) have received fewer than five hours' training on AI, with 25% opting to self-fund training.
- Most workers have gained their AI skills by playing with ChatGPT (61%), or learning on the job (59%).
- 56% of workers that describe their AI skills as “expert” have not received any formal training from their employer.



Half of organizations plan to use training to solve AI skills shortages.

- Around half of organizations who have identified skills gaps as a key barrier to full implementation of AI, plan on upskilling employees through long-term external AI training programs (56%) or ad hoc external AI training programs (50%) to address their skills shortfall.



Chapter 1

The ROI of AI



AI is already paying dividends

Leaders in the US and UK are overwhelmingly optimistic that the technology is already delivering for their organizations. The majority say the benefits of AI have either met (51%) or exceeded (46%) their initial expectations.

US leaders in particular tend to believe that AI has delivered beyond their anticipations – at 60% compared to 38% in the UK.

Customer experience and efficiency have been major benefits of AI to date, according to business leaders.

Six in 10 say their top use for AI has been predicting customer behavior and automating sales outreach – while 96% state that their customer and user experience has improved over the last 12 months due to AI.

Improved productivity and operational efficiency (96%) are another key benefit – and almost half (48%) say that AI has helped to decrease unnecessary external costs in the last 12 months.

But it's worth noting that a further 49% report an increase in internal costs, likely due to investing in AI training and development and hiring AI specialists.

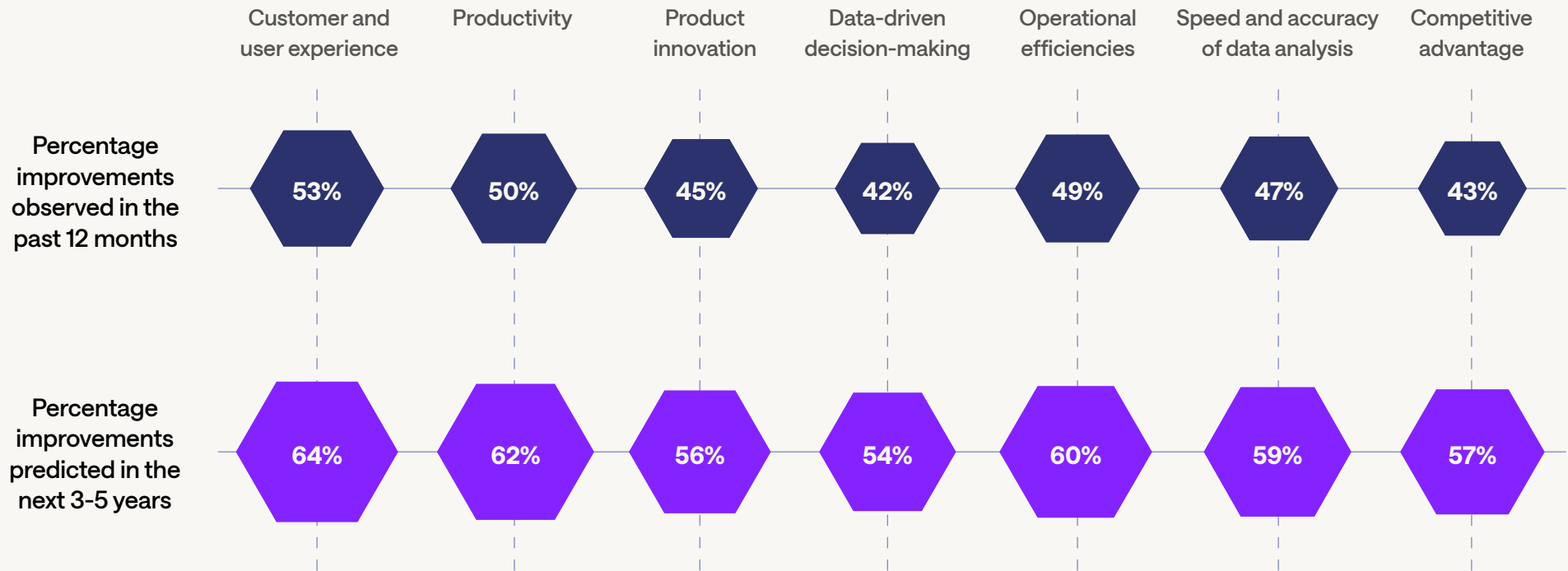
One third of firms (35%) are investing in external AI consultants as one of their top three measures to advance their AI maturity. Of those respondents, three quarters (77%) estimate that their organization has spent over \$1 million on external fees in the last 12 months – underlining the investment required to implement emerging technologies.

4 in 5

tech leaders say implementing AI has led to an increase in revenue generation.



The impacts of AI: Experiences and predictions



Leaders plan to increase investment in AI

Many tech leaders are set to increase their investment in AI:

- 45% expect to increase investment in the next six months.
- 74% expect to increase investment within 1-2 years.
- 81% expect to increase investment in the next three years and beyond.

And why is that? Over a quarter of these leaders (27%) say it's because their investments so far have delivered a significant ROI – such as increasing revenue, or reducing costs.

Tech leaders are optimistic about AI delivering financial gains in the longer term: 85% expect to see an increase in revenue generation in 3-5 years.

However, there are concerns about making the case for further investment if current AI projects stall. Failing to use existing AI technology, resistance from employees and difficulty demonstrating ROI - all are identified by leaders as potential blockers for future investment.

What are the top barriers to further investment in AI for your organization?

63%

Inability to fully use AI technology that is already available

58%

Resistance from employees to use AI

57%

Lack of ability to demonstrate or predict tangible results/AI ROI

46%

Lack of funding

43%

Lack of support from leadership

Setting out on the path to AI maturity

We asked leaders to define their organizations' AI maturity by how far their AI strategy has actually been implemented. From their own personal perspectives, leaders assessed their organizations' progress to date into one of three categories.

Most described themselves as in the early stages, making foundational investments - classed as AI Explorer. Others classify their organization as at the proof of concept stage (AI Beginner) or state that AI has been fully integrated (AI Adept).

This self-classified AI maturity in turn impacts leaders' views on their progress compared to their competitors, with AI Adept organizations most likely to consider themselves ahead of others.

22%

AI Beginner
Proof of concept

Developing pilot projects to test and validate initial concepts

51%

AI Explorer
Early stage

Integrating AI into specific business processes with foundational investments

27%

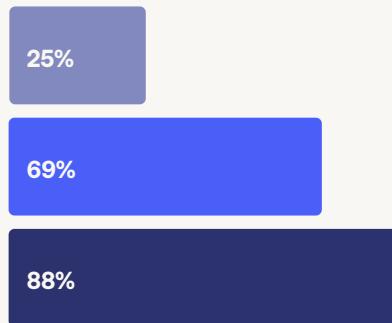
AI Adept
Fully integrated

Embedding AI throughout the organization to support strategic decision-making

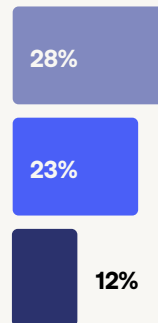
Compared with your competitors, how do you rate your AI maturity?

AI Beginner AI Explorer AI Adept

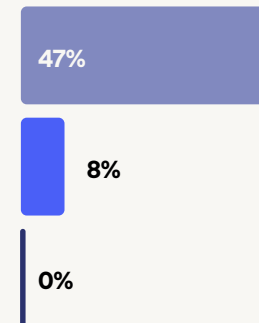
We are ahead of our competitors



We are at the same level of AI maturity



We are behind our competitors



The Multiverse take

Early results are exciting. Momentum now becomes crucial.

Many organizations are already realizing the game-changing advantages of AI.

But it's also worth taking a step back and remembering that for most, their AI implementation journey has only just begun. The vast majority of businesses are only just launching pilots or making their first foundational investments in AI.

Leaders and workers who have achieved strong initial results are right to be excited – the challenge now is to ensure they can keep the ball rolling. If results aren't visible, adoption drops off, or pilots fail to scale further, then it may be very difficult to make the case for further AI investment.

Value driven by AI needs to be tracked diligently and communicated within the organization. Leaders need to carefully consider any roadblocks that might slow momentum, and make a plan to tackle them systematically.

Gary Eimerman,
Chief Learning Officer at Multiverse



Chapter 2

AI maturity deep dive



Mature or overconfident?

There are signs that leaders are overestimating their AI maturity – with initial optimism masking the realities of what it takes to fully implement and benefit from the technology.

It's striking that 45% of the organizations who categorized themselves as “AI Beginner” – who are at the proof of concept stage – nonetheless consider that AI is fully implemented in their organization.

Key strengths are missing

True AI maturity requires the combination of multiple factors, from the business strategy to good data governance and security. In reality, leaders surveyed reported that their organization is still missing many of the hallmarks of AI excellence.

Only a small proportion of leaders strongly agree that their organization has established best practice in key areas, like:

43%

Ensuring responsible use of AI in business practices

39%

Ensuring design of AI solutions are grounded in a deep understanding of business needs

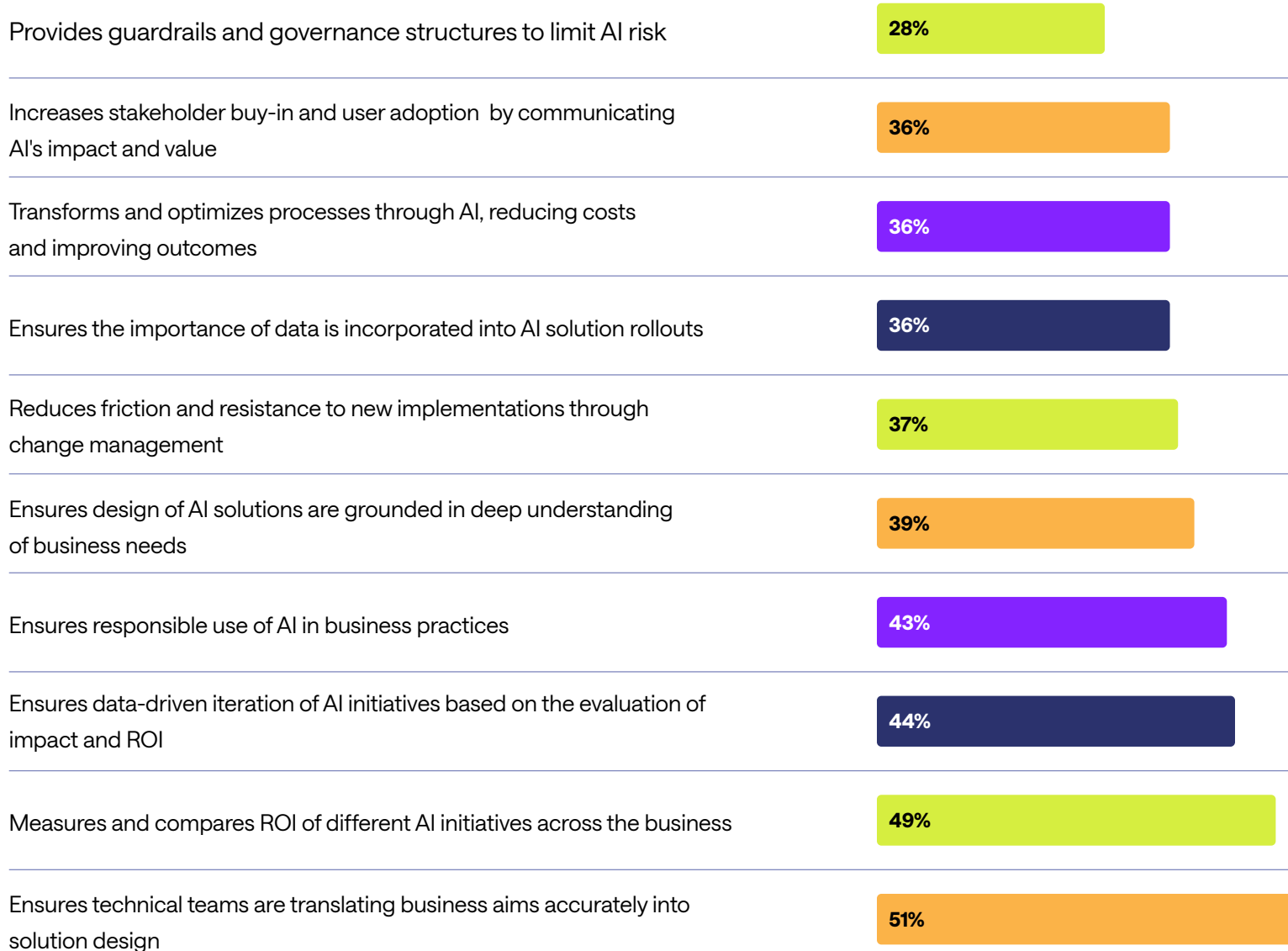
28%

Providing guardrails and governance structures to limit AI risk



AI maturity: Establishing best practice

I strongly agree that my organization:

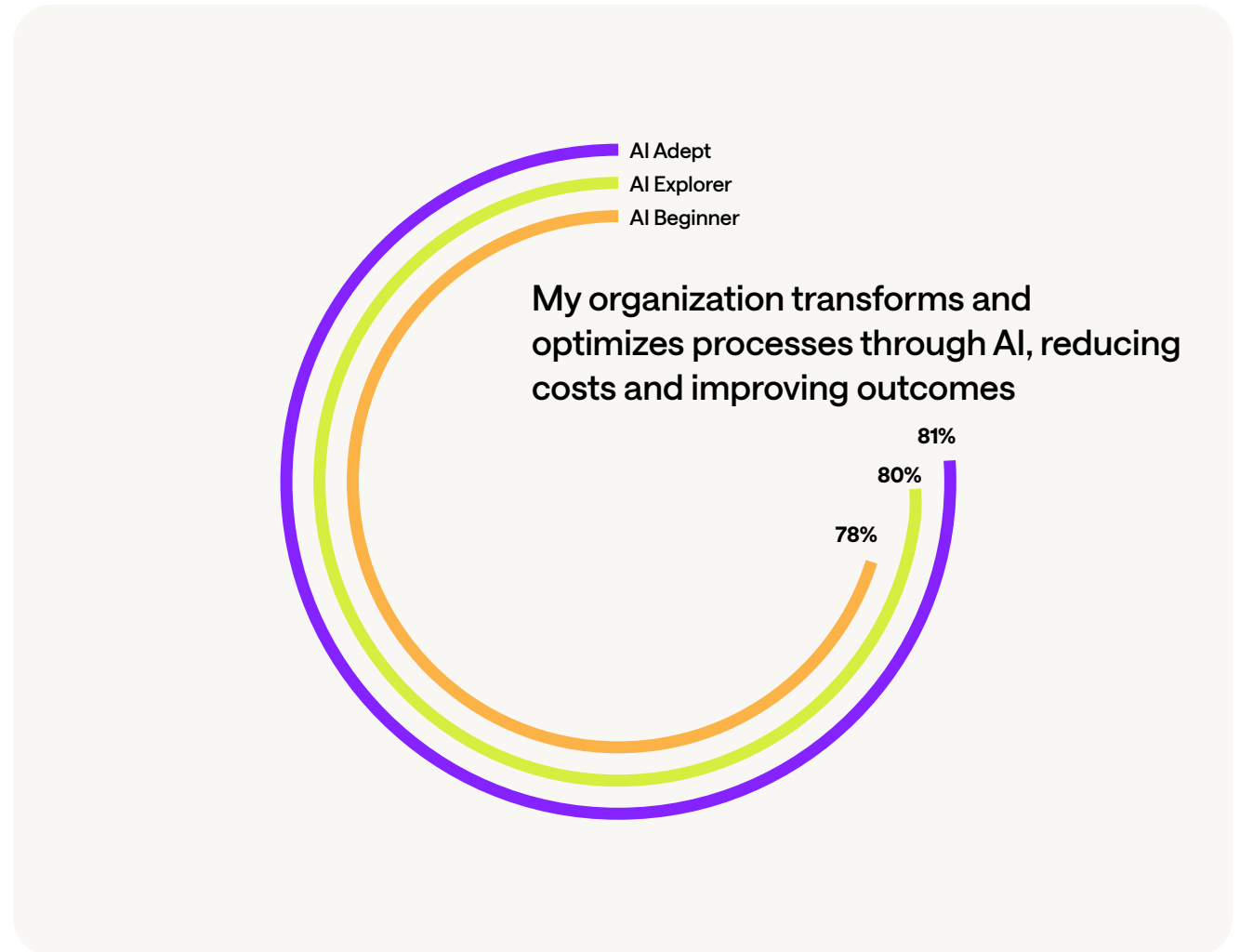


Overestimating implementation

It may be that organizations are achieving some elements of AI maturity – but then as a result overestimating how far the technology has been deployed.

Almost half of the respondents surveyed claim AI has been successfully implemented across their whole organization (46%), despite many missing the foundational elements needed. It's telling that many of the capabilities identified by respondents are fairly similar across all AI maturity groups – when in reality, there will be differences depending on each organization's progress with the technology.

This suggests organizations lack the expertise to assess their own progress with AI – and identify the further steps needed for full implementation.



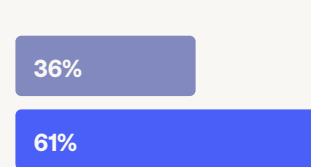
The leader/employee disconnect

There is a gap between business leaders and workers when it comes to beliefs about the maturity of the business – and AI enthusiasm more broadly.

Leaders tend to be more optimistic about how AI is being used - whether it's the progress of their organization, their maturity compared to competitors, or the benefits of AI outweighing the risks.

Comparing leaders' and workers' views

AI is fully implemented across my organization



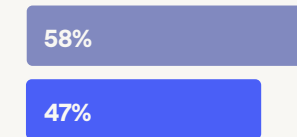
We are ahead of our competitors in AI maturity



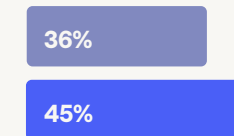
Workers Leaders

How do you rate the benefits and risks of AI?

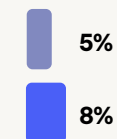
The benefits of AI outweigh the risks



The benefits and risks are equal in weight



The risks of AI outweigh the benefits



Risks and skills gaps are the biggest barriers to adoption

Risk factors are the biggest barrier identified by leaders – and workers – preventing organizations from fully implementing AI.

Leaders also raised concerns about compliance issues, and lack of ability to demonstrate AI ROI from initial investments, as critical blockers to further progress.

Workers cited a lack of relevant skills as the second highest barrier to full-scale adoption. Lack of access to tools and technologies (39%) was also highlighted as a significant barrier to using AI more effectively in their roles.

All of this underlines the importance of workforce learning and experimentation to unlocking the full potential of AI. As well as technical skills, employees will require training to understand and mitigate the risks associated with the technology, and demonstrate value generated by their use of it.

What do you believe are the main barriers stopping your organization from implementing AI across the whole business?

Tech leaders

- 01** Potential risks, such as data privacy and cybersecurity concerns (51%)
- 02** Regulatory and compliance issues (34%)
- 03** Lack of ability to demonstrate or predict tangible results: AI ROI (30%)

Workers

- 01** Potential risks, such as data privacy and cybersecurity concerns (49%)
- 02** Lack of relevant skills and capabilities (36%)
- 03** Integration with existing systems (34%)

The Multiverse take

All organizations should strive to be AI native - fully embedding and realizing the ROI advantages of AI - in the years ahead.

However, because of the newness of the technology and the pace of change, many organizations are struggling to get a clear view of their own progress. Simply put, it's hard to know what you don't know. This means best practice isn't necessarily being established - creating risks and potential missed opportunities for the future.

Using a more objective framework to benchmark progress, categorize maturity, and create a roadmap for next steps will help organizations to plan more realistically.

AI maturity requires a holistic approach: multiple elements coming together in harmony. People need to be engaged and empowered to integrate AI into their workflows.

On the organizational side, AI must be woven into business objectives and operations, complete with an infrastructure that has robust data governance and enhanced security measures.

All of this depends on a thorough understanding of AI and its wider impacts. Upskilling will help people to not only use AI, but understand the risks and opportunities associated with the technology – setting up the business for AI maturity and long-term success.

Anna Wang,
Head of AI at Multiverse

Chapter 3

Employee views on AI training



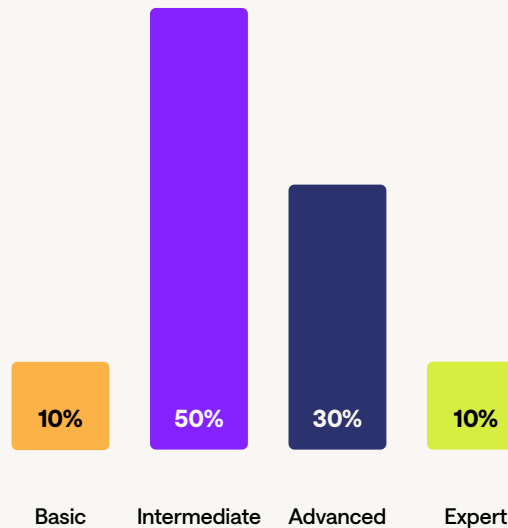
Workers back their AI skills, but lack training

AI is the number one skills gap reported by leaders – and it has been estimated that 40% of workers will have to reskill in the next three years due to AI.

As a result, millions of workers now find themselves in the position of needing to quickly develop new skillsets – to leverage AI for their own productivity and professional advantage, to enable a wider business AI strategy, or to future-proof their careers.

In our survey, workers surveyed show a high degree of optimism over their own AI skills – with eight in 10 rating themselves as intermediate or advanced.

How would you rate your AI skills?



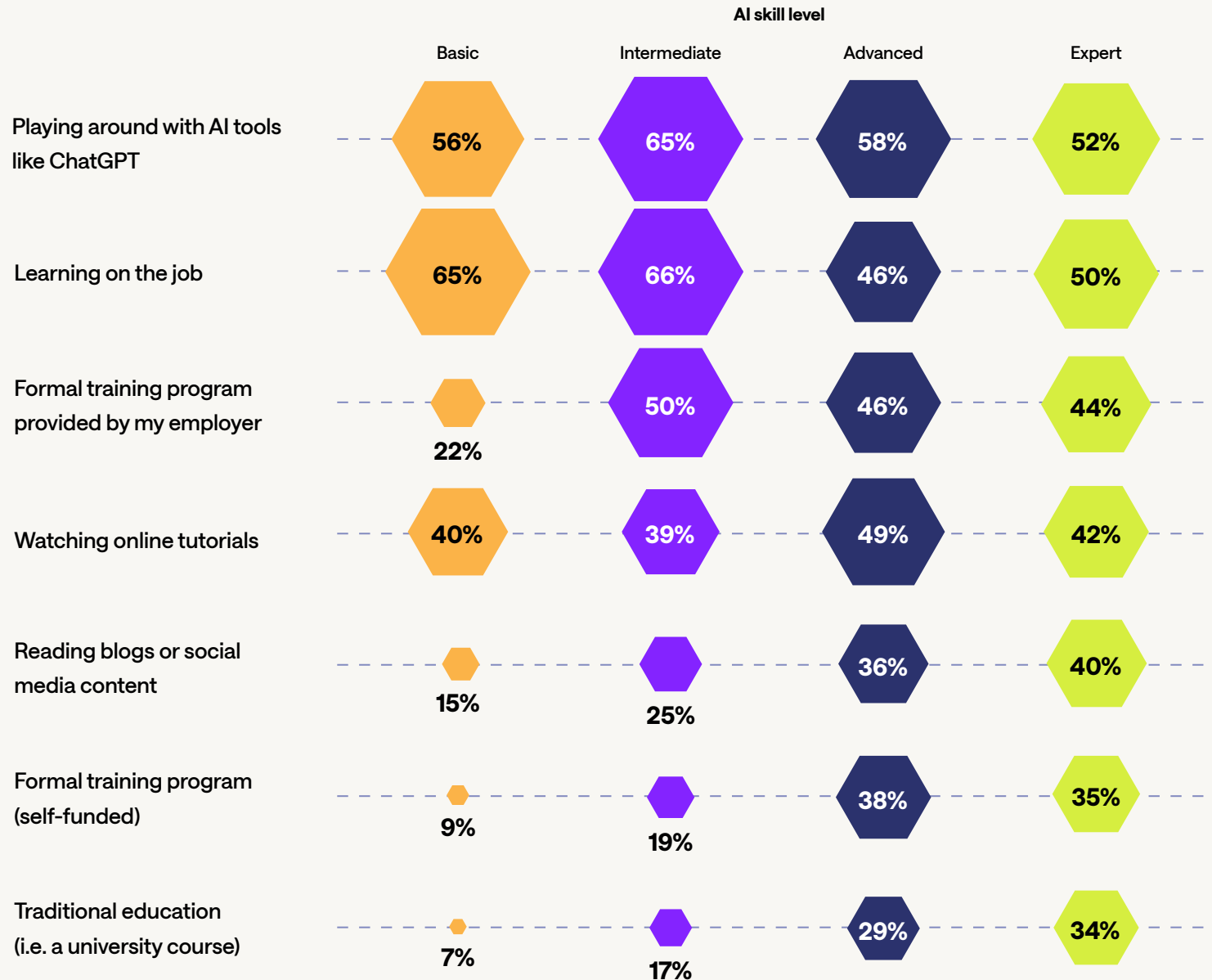
AI skills are largely self-taught

Most workers have learned informally by playing with ChatGPT (61%) or learning on the job (59%). The majority of workers (51%) have received less than five hours' training.

This may be why a quarter of workers have opted to self-fund formal AI training (25%) – rising to 37% of those who rate their skills as advanced or expert.

"56% of workers that define their AI skills as expert have not received any formal training from their employer."

How workers gained AI skills



Confidence in outcomes – but not measurement

When it comes to best practice, workers are confident that they are using AI in the right way.

Reflecting on the last time they used AI in their role:

93%

are confident they used AI ethically.

92%

are confident they delivered the expected business outcome.

90%

are confident they kept their organization's data safe.

However, given that only 45% have received formal training provided by their employer, workers may struggle to assess whether their actions were aligned to company policies or broader best practice – creating potential risks for the business.

Measurement is another area for improvement. Only 72% can identify KPIs and metrics for successful AI projects in their role.

"The strategic use of AI and ways to measure AI success are identified by workers as their biggest training needs."

Which AI skills are lacking in your organization?



The career advantages of AI

Workers are very clear that their AI skills will create value for their business – and in their careers.

83%

think AI skills will help them to drive more value for their employer in the next 12 months

76%

think AI skills will help them pursue a new career path

There is also a clear link between AI skills and salary: 56% of workers are likely to negotiate higher pay in the next 12 months to reflect their AI abilities.

Eight in 10 of this group say their salary should increase by up to 10%.

Across the board, less than half of those surveyed think AI skills will have no impact on their career advancement in the next 3-5 years.

Higher AI expertise, higher salary expectations

People with higher levels of skills are more likely to request a higher salary – with 48% of AI experts and 30% of advanced workers ‘very likely’ to renegotiate.

24% of people with expert AI skills think their pay rise should be 11-15% in the next 12 months.

The Multiverse take

There is a lack of formal, structured training taking place in organizations.

Workers are fending for themselves, either funding their own AI training or learning through trial and error. This presents challenges for both the worker and the business.

For the worker, it is difficult for them to self-assess their own knowledge gaps and learn most efficiently with their limited time.

For the business, having workers to use AI in an ad hoc manner limits the ROI of the time spent learning and can also lead to data protection issues.

Across the board, there's a need for greater nuance in our assessment of AI skills and the structure of AI training.

Anna Wang,
Head of AI at Multiverse



Chapter 4

AI outlook: Overcoming adoption barriers



Acting on the training gap

Failing to invest in AI could have significant economic repercussions. Research suggests that delays to AI rollouts could cost the UK economy £150bn by 2035 – and skills could be a significant blocker.

Investment in AI training and the development of workers is the top step organizations are taking to advance their AI maturity.

Around half of the organizations questioned are investing in long-term external training programs (56%), or short-term ad hoc lessons (50%).

"Long-term external training programs last an average of 8.6 hours' tuition for each employee."



What measures is your organization taking to address AI-related skill shortages?

56%

Upskilling employees through long-term external AI training programs

50%

Upskilling employees through ad hoc/ short-term external AI training programs

26%

Hiring AI talent

14%

Providing basic AI training in-house

The Multiverse take

Skilled people are crucial to realizing the full value of AI.

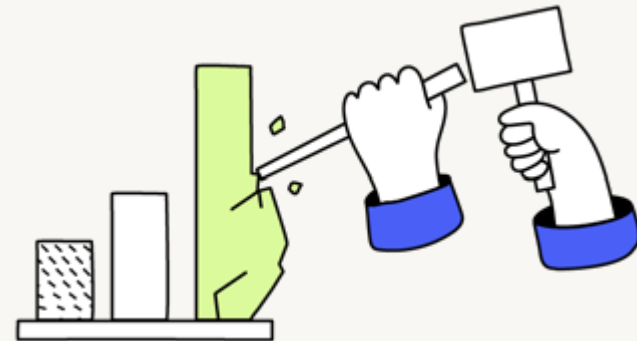
Without a thorough understanding of AI, businesses may be limiting the value derived from the technology in the long term.

It's true that upskilling isn't a simple fix, or one size fits all. There are myriad competencies associated with AI, from data analytics to managing business change.

Taking a highly specific assessment of current skills needs and gaps will enable organizations to focus their people strategy – and ensure that AI training is focused on delivering measurable ROI, just like the technology itself.

With most leaders citing workers' inability to use existing AI tools as a blocker to further investment, putting resources into comprehensive internal training will provide the best foundation for fully embedded AI adoption.

Gary Eimerman,
Chief Learning Officer at Multiverse



Recommendations for employers

AI holds incredible promise – and it is already delivering for businesses, from increased productivity to employee satisfaction.

But unless AI delivers meaningful and measurable results for businesses, internal momentum will quickly evaporate – making it difficult to justify further investments.

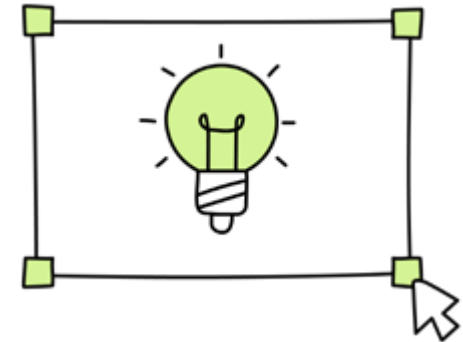
It's crucial for organizations to honestly assess their position on the AI maturity scale and identify the steps needed to properly embed the technology.

As well as business infrastructure, people are central to progression. Mature organizations will have leaders that align AI with business objectives, a culture that rewards AI-driven outcomes – and people who are adept at using AI tools and follow best practice. Upskilling will be vital for firms to advance their AI maturity.

Multiverse empowers leaders to identify, close, and prevent their most critical skills gaps.

Our AI-powered skills intelligence creates an inventory of existing employee skillsets, and helps teams reveal the critical capabilities they need to build next.

Using these data-driven insights, employees onboard onto personalized learning pathways catered to their skill level and tied to tangible business goals, ensuring that upskilling and reskilling investments drive immediate business impact, not just provide an employee benefit.



3 actions for leaders

01 Understand your true position on the AI maturity scale

- Have a clear view of your goals, including the potential ROI and risks
- Get skills intelligence insights to ensure you have full visibility over your current skills gaps
- Understand what capabilities you need to build next

02 Create a future-ready AI skills strategy

- Equip teams with skills to leverage AI through training - these skills may be different across job titles, roles and functions
- Give teams the tools they need to succeed - like clear policies, Centers of Excellence, and safe guardrails to innovate
- Measure results and share successes across your organization

03 Create new career opportunities for employees through AI skills

- Create access to AI skills, so employees aren't reliant on self-funding training that will be crucial to delivering future value
- Deploy upskilling initiatives to help workers accelerate their career progression
- Consider reskilling employees into AI specialist roles

Methodology

The survey, conducted by Coleman Parkes between July and August 2024, targeted 810 tech leaders integrating AI into their organizations and 1,190 employees. A mixed methodology, including online and P2W (phone 2 web) approaches was used, with all respondents based in the UK and the USA.



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