



# The Pulse of Work in 2026:

Opportunity, Risk,  
and Responsibility  
in an AI-Driven Workplace



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# 01 Executive Summary

AI has moved from a promising experiment to an everyday workplace reality. To better understand where AI use stands today, the opportunities it presents, and the risks that emerge when it isn't responsibly managed, GoTo partnered with research firm Workplace Intelligence for the second year in a row to survey 2,500 employees and IT leaders around the globe.

We found that **nearly all IT leaders (98%) say their company uses AI, and 82% of employees report using these tools at work**—saving more than two hours per day on average. **Support for continued investment is strong** across the board: more than 9 in 10 employees and IT leaders say their company should maintain or increase its AI spending.

**Yet widespread adoption has not translated into responsible or effective use.** Employees admit to over-relying on AI tools, using low-quality outputs, and misusing AI for tasks where human judgment should prevail. At the same time, IT leaders acknowledge significant gaps in governance: fewer than half say their organization has an AI policy, and many allow AI to be used in situations that should demand human oversight.





**The result is a growing pattern of irresponsible use—one that is already generating real consequences for businesses,** including mistakes that have affected customers, disrupted operations, and impacted the bottom line. Adding to the challenge, some employees are so worried about being blamed for AI errors that they're hesitating to use these tools, creating a culture of uncertainty that limits the very productivity gains AI is meant to deliver.

Beyond the risks, there is also a significant opportunity being left on the table. **Employees estimate they spend 2.6 hours per day on tasks AI could handle,** and most acknowledge they aren't using these tools to their full potential or don't know how to apply them to their role. In the U.S. alone, **this underutilization may represent more than \$2.9 trillion\* in annual efficiency gains yet to be captured.**

This report examines these dynamics and the steps organizations can take to unlock AI's full potential—from stronger policies and better tools to smarter training and skills development. Companies that act now will be best positioned to empower employees and IT leaders alike to use AI responsibly, effectively, and with confidence.

**Ultimately, the goal isn't simply to govern AI. Instead, businesses must harness it, turning responsible adoption into a direct source of value and organizational resilience.**

\* Assumes there are 102,525,000 knowledge workers in the U.S. (Source: [Federal Reserve Economic Dataset](#)) with an hourly wage of \$44.08 (Source: [Federal Reserve Economic Dataset](#)), who could be saving 13 hours each week by using AI.



# 02 Key Findings



## AI Use and Benefits



**98%** of IT leaders say their company uses AI.

**2.3 Hours**

The number of hours AI saves the average employee each day.



## AI Overreliance



**1/2** of employees say they rely too much on AI—and 30% feel they can't function without it.



**39%** of employees—including 46% of Gen Z—say relying on AI is making them less intelligent.



## AI Misuse



**70%** of employees admit they've misused AI for sensitive or high-stakes tasks at work.



**43%** of employees have used AI outputs despite suspecting they were low quality or contained errors.



## AI Mistakes



Around **1/4** of IT leaders say AI has made mistakes that impacted customers, clients, or their company's bottom line.



**91%** of IT leaders worry that AI could make a mistake that negatively affects their company.



## AI Blame and Hesitation



**83%** of employees worry they could be blamed or fired for an AI mistake; 31% say this fear has made them hesitate to use AI.



**17%** of employees—including 30% of Gen Z—admit they've blamed AI for their own work mistakes.



## The Case for Responsible AI



**84%** of employees say their company isn't doing enough to encourage responsible AI use.



**Less than 1/2** of IT leaders say their company has an AI policy.



## Ineffective AI Use



**80%** of employees acknowledge they aren't using AI tools to their full potential.



**69%** of employees say they aren't very familiar with AI's practical applications for their role.



## AI's Untapped Value

**\$2.9T**

The amount businesses could gain from unlocking AI's untapped value.

**2.6 Hours**

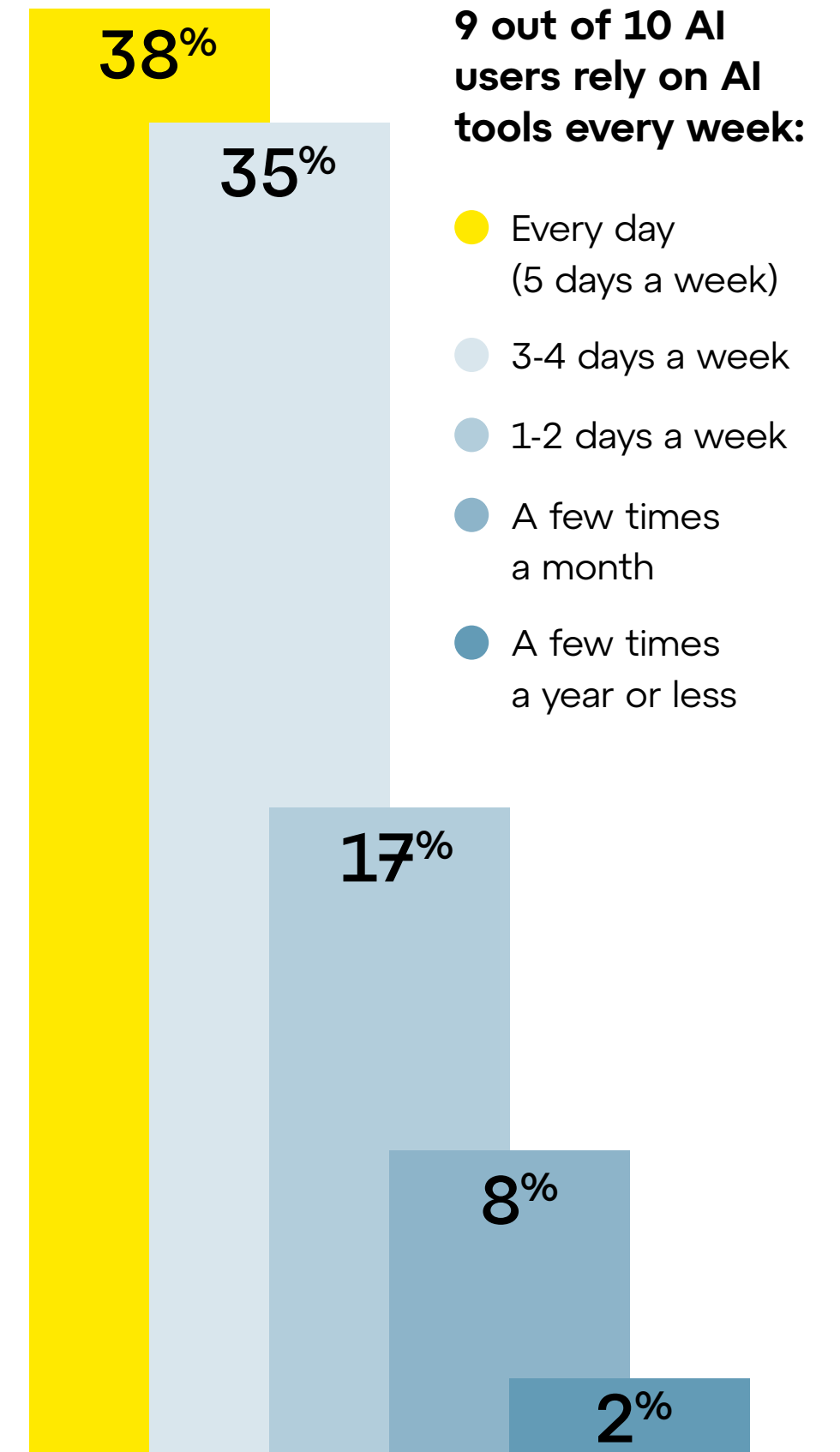
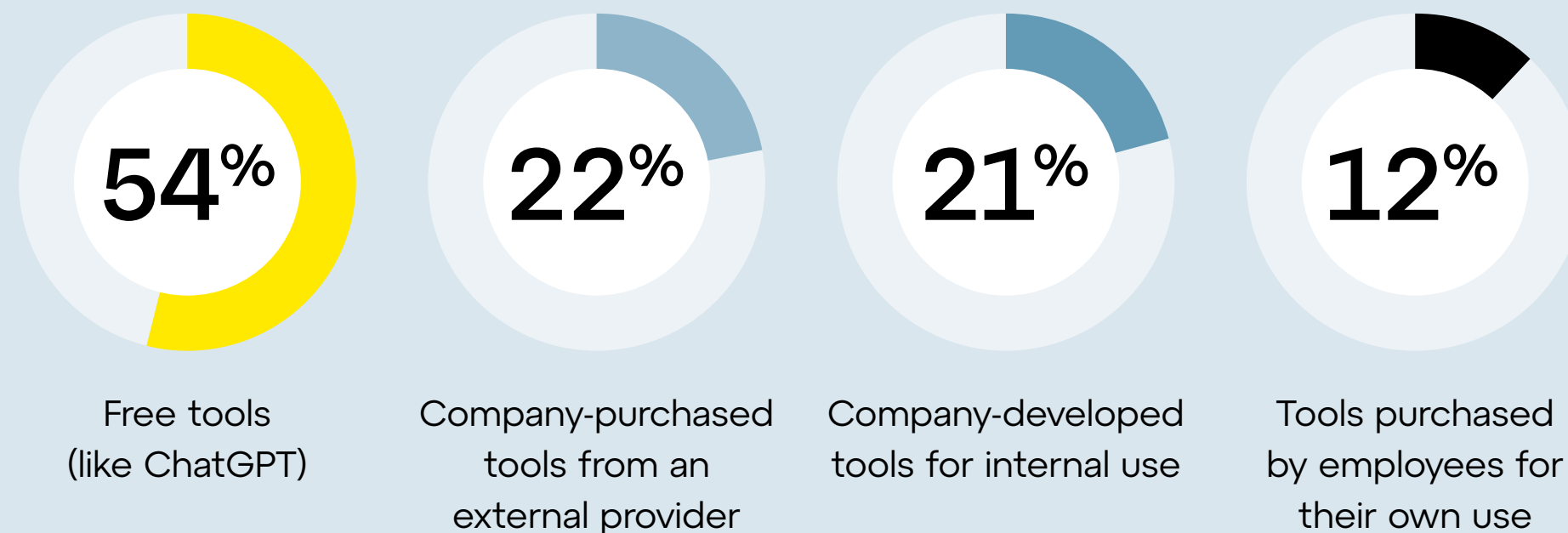
The number of hours workers are spending each day on tasks AI could handle.

# 03 AI Use is Widespread

AI has moved beyond the hype—it's now firmly embedded in the modern workplace. **Nearly all IT leaders (98%) say their company uses AI, up from 96% last year.** Over 6 out of 10 leaders say their company uses free AI tools (61%) or tools purchased from an external provider (58%), and 27% say their company has developed AI tools for internal use.

Meanwhile, more than eight in ten employees (82%) report using AI at work, up from 78% last year. Frequency of use is also increasing, with **90% of AI users saying they use these tools weekly**—an increase from 85% a year ago.

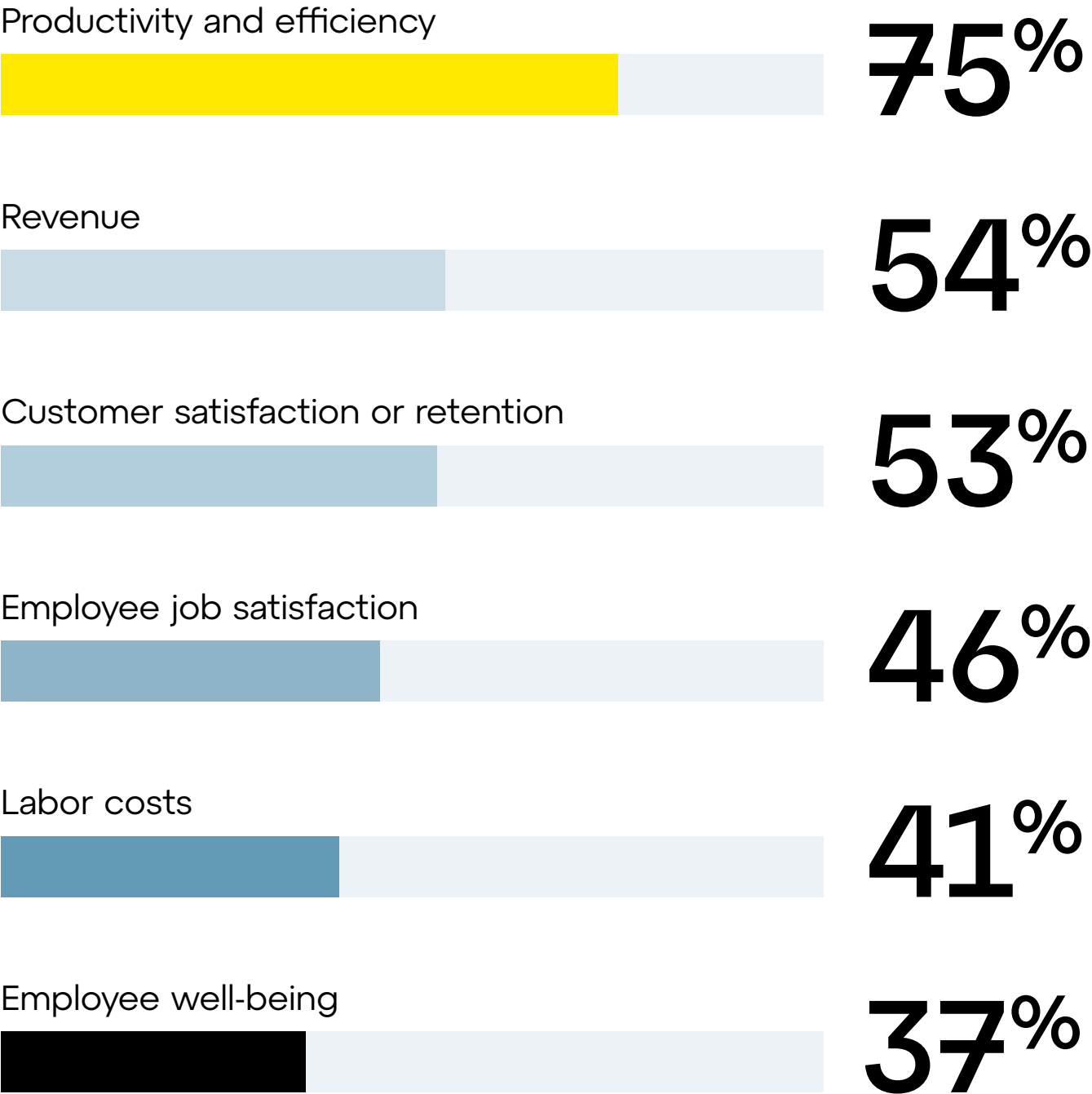
## The types of tools employees are using:



But widespread adoption hasn't translated into clear measurement. While 75% of IT leaders say their company assesses AI's impact on productivity and efficiency, fewer than half track other key factors like employee job satisfaction, labor costs, or employee well-being. **Overall, 43% of IT leaders admit their company isn't measuring the ROI of AI tools very well.**



**IT leaders are measuring AI's ROI using these factors:**





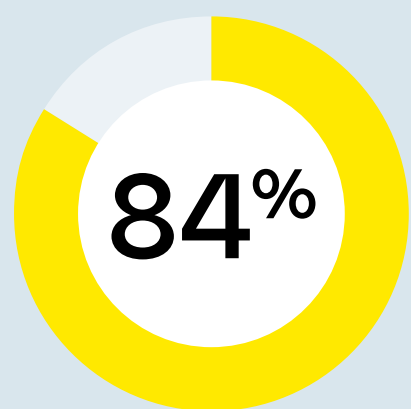
# 04 The Benefits of AI

While there's more work to do on ROI measurement, it's clear that AI's impact on workers has been largely positive. Among employees using AI, **88% say it's benefitted them**, for example by improving their productivity, allowing them to focus on higher-value work, and giving them time to develop new skills. On average, employees report that AI tools save them 2.3 hours per day.

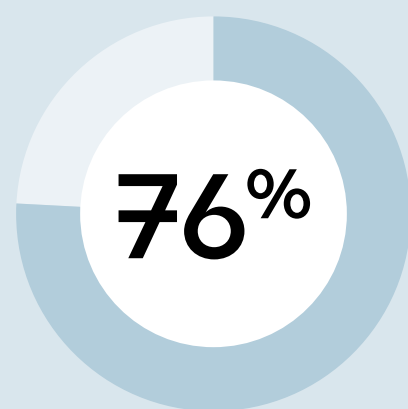
Support for continued AI investment is also strong. **More than nine in ten employees (92%) and IT leaders (90%) support their company's current investment in AI tools or feel their company should be investing more.**

Already, **nearly 2 out of 3 IT leaders (62%) say more than one-fifth of their budget is allocated to AI-related technologies or projects.** This number is up from 56% last year, highlighting a growing commitment to AI tools that goes beyond free offerings.

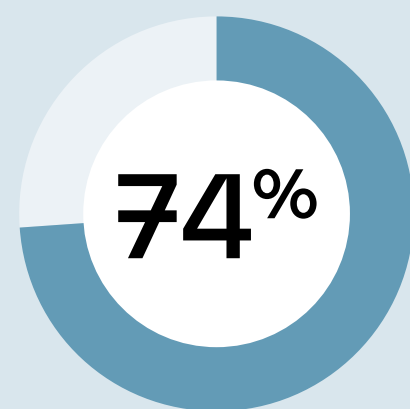
## The benefits of AI tools, according to employees:



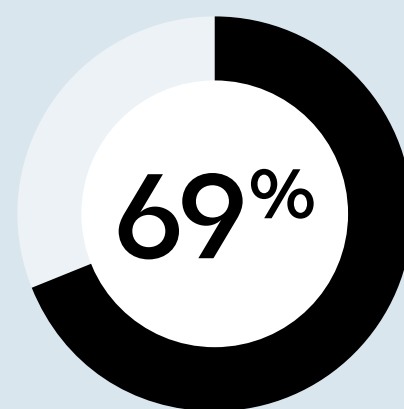
Increased productivity



Better customer support



Improved motivation and engagement



More collaboration with coworkers

Employees say AI tools are saving them

 **2.3**

hours per day

# 05 Irresponsible AI Use

Although AI offers clear benefits, **60% of employees—including 76% of Gen Z—say they feel pressured to use it to boost their productivity.** Nearly half (47%) say AI use is considered during their performance reviews, for example how well or how often they use these tools.

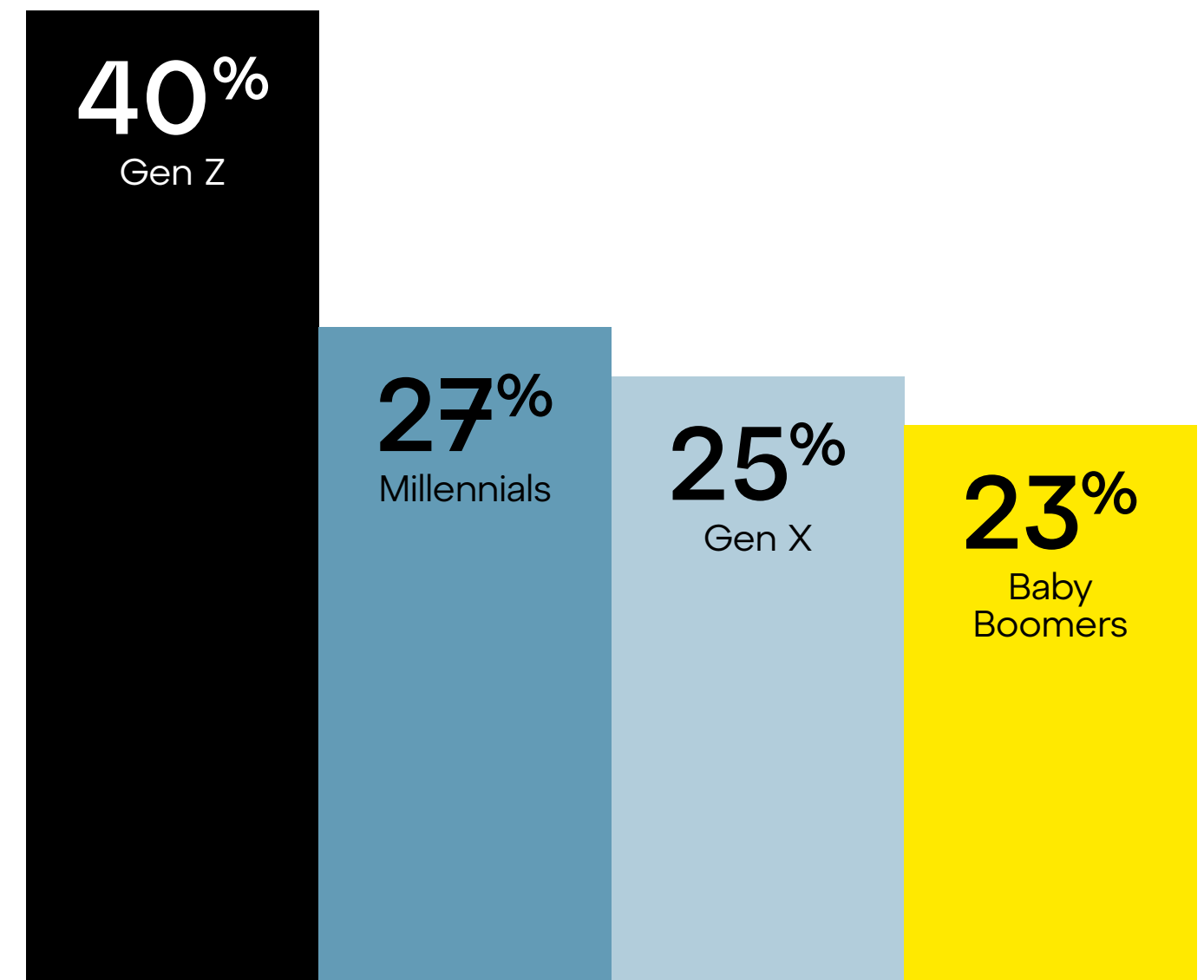
This dynamic, combined with a lack of effective training, policies, and guardrails, is leading many employees to use AI irresponsibly. For example, some workers admit they're leaning on AI too much, and for the wrong tasks. Others confess to using AI outputs without properly reviewing them or knowingly using low-quality outputs.

Let's examine how expanding AI use is shaping not only employees' behaviors, but also their sense of self-worth in an increasingly AI-driven workplace.

## AI Overreliance

41% of IT leaders admit their company encourages overreliance on AI rather than maintaining human skills and oversight. The result? **Half of employees—including 62% of Gen Z—say they rely too much on AI at work.** An alarming 30% of workers feel like they can't function without AI and worry they'd fail without it.

**Younger employees are more likely to say they can't get by without AI:**



Employees say relying on AI too much is worsening their skills, making them question their value at work, and affecting their professional future. Gen Z team members are more likely to be experiencing these career-shaping consequences, raising concerns about the future readiness and resilience of the talent pipeline.

**AI overreliance is impacting skills and career confidence—and Gen Z is feeling it the most:**

**Believe relying on AI will hurt their long-term career prospects:**



**Say AI has worsened their social skills at work:**



**Say AI is eroding their skills and making them less intelligent:**



**Think AI is doing their job better than they can:**



**Trust AI more than their own judgment:**



- Gen Z
- All employees



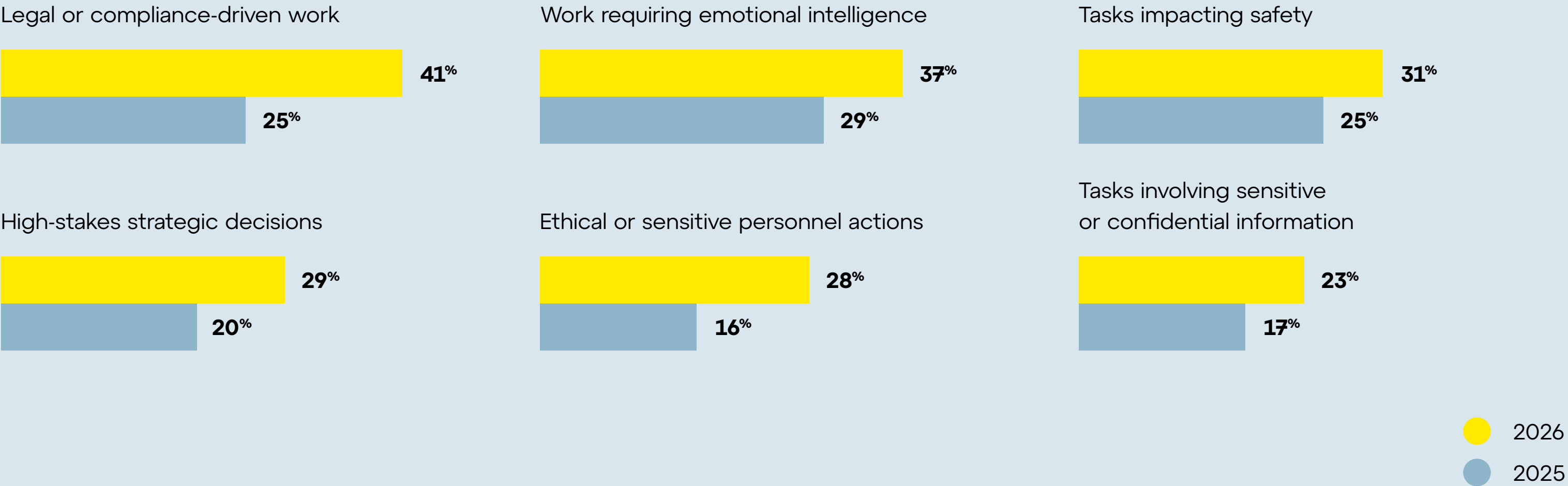
# AI Misuse

For the second year in a row, our study found that many employees are using AI for sensitive or high-stakes tasks, even though they know they shouldn't be. **In fact, 70% admit they've improperly used AI at work**—a dramatic increase from last year, when 54% admitted to AI misuse.

Nearly a quarter of these employees (22%) say they're aware their employer prohibits them from using AI for these tasks, and another 15% aren't sure of the rules.

However, IT leaders admit that lax governance plays a role: **57% say their company allows AI to be used for decisions that should involve human judgment**, and 38% say their company rarely checks AI systems for misuse.

**7 out of 10 employees are improperly using AI tools. Here's how AI misuse has changed:**



# Unchecked AI Outputs

Employees also own up to the fact that they're using AI outputs without adequately reviewing them. Nearly seven in ten (69%) say they don't always double-check AI outputs for low-stakes tasks such as writing emails, brainstorming ideas, or taking notes. **Over half (55%) admit they don't consistently review AI outputs for high-stakes work**, including client deliverables, financial analyses, or important decision-making.

Even more concerning, **43% of employees say they've used AI-generated content despite suspecting it was low quality or might contain errors or fabricated information**, such as fake sources or made-up numbers. An additional 20% say they might do this, while just 37% say they would not.

Workers of all ages admit to using low-quality AI outputs:

57%  
Gen Z

44%  
Millennials

31%  
Gen X

33%  
Baby  
Boomers

For some workers, this behavior appears to be rooted in job security concerns: 42% say they would rather risk making mistakes with AI than be seen as “slow” or “replaceable.”

Others place the responsibility on their employer. **About half of employees (49%) say their company doesn't always require human review or approval of AI-generated outputs**—a view echoed by a similar share of IT leaders (52%) who acknowledge this gap at their organizations.

# 06 The Risks of Irresponsible AI Use

As AI becomes an increasingly integral part of the workplace, it creates new opportunities but also new risks for both employees and employers. Misuse, overreliance, and lack of human oversight are leading to mistakes that affect business operations, productivity, and even job security.

This section examines these impacts in detail—highlighting the business and cultural risks that arise when AI use is not managed responsibly.

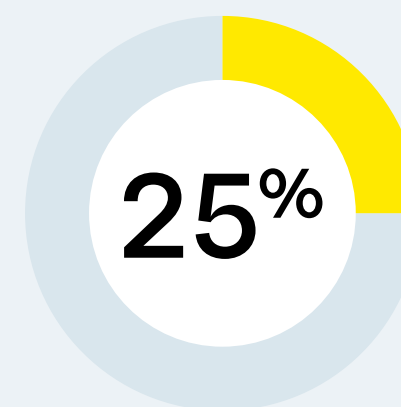
## The Business Impact

For employers, the repercussions of irresponsible AI use can be significant. Already, around one-quarter of IT leaders say AI has made mistakes that affected customers, clients, or their company's bottom line, and 16% say AI errors have disrupted business operations.

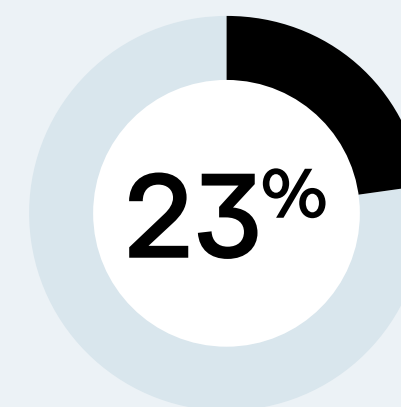
Concern about future risk is widespread: **nearly all IT leaders (91%) worry that AI could make a mistake that negatively affects their organization.**



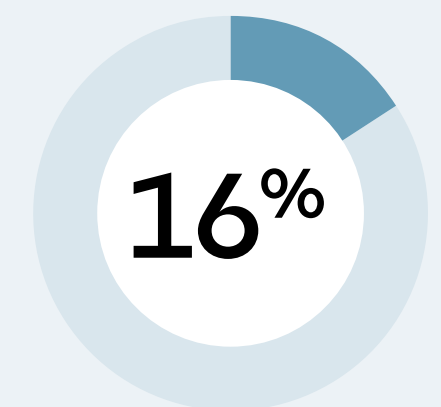
IT leaders say AI mistakes are already affecting business outcomes:



Negatively affected customers or clients



Financially impacted their company



Seriously disrupted their company's business operations

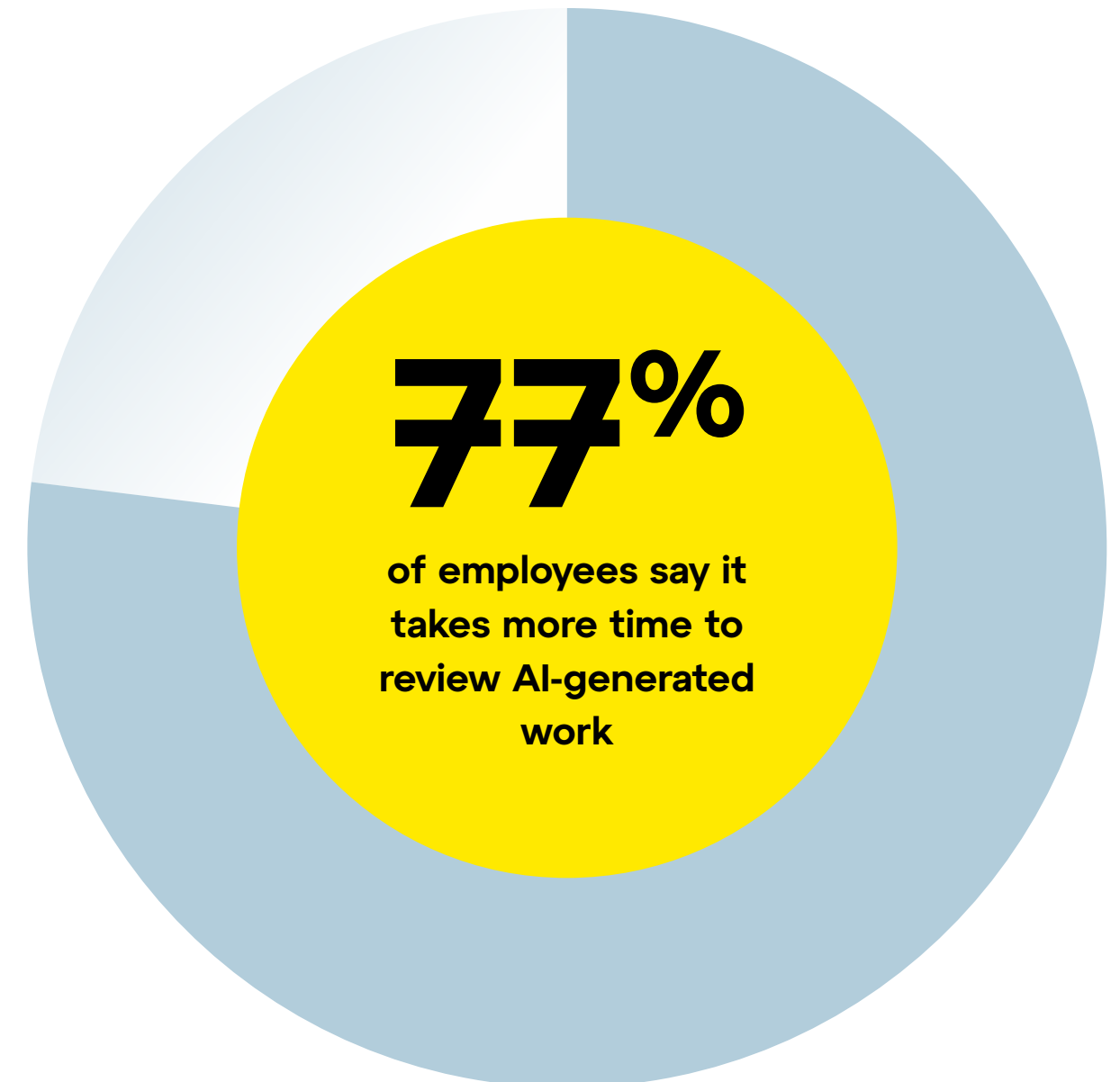
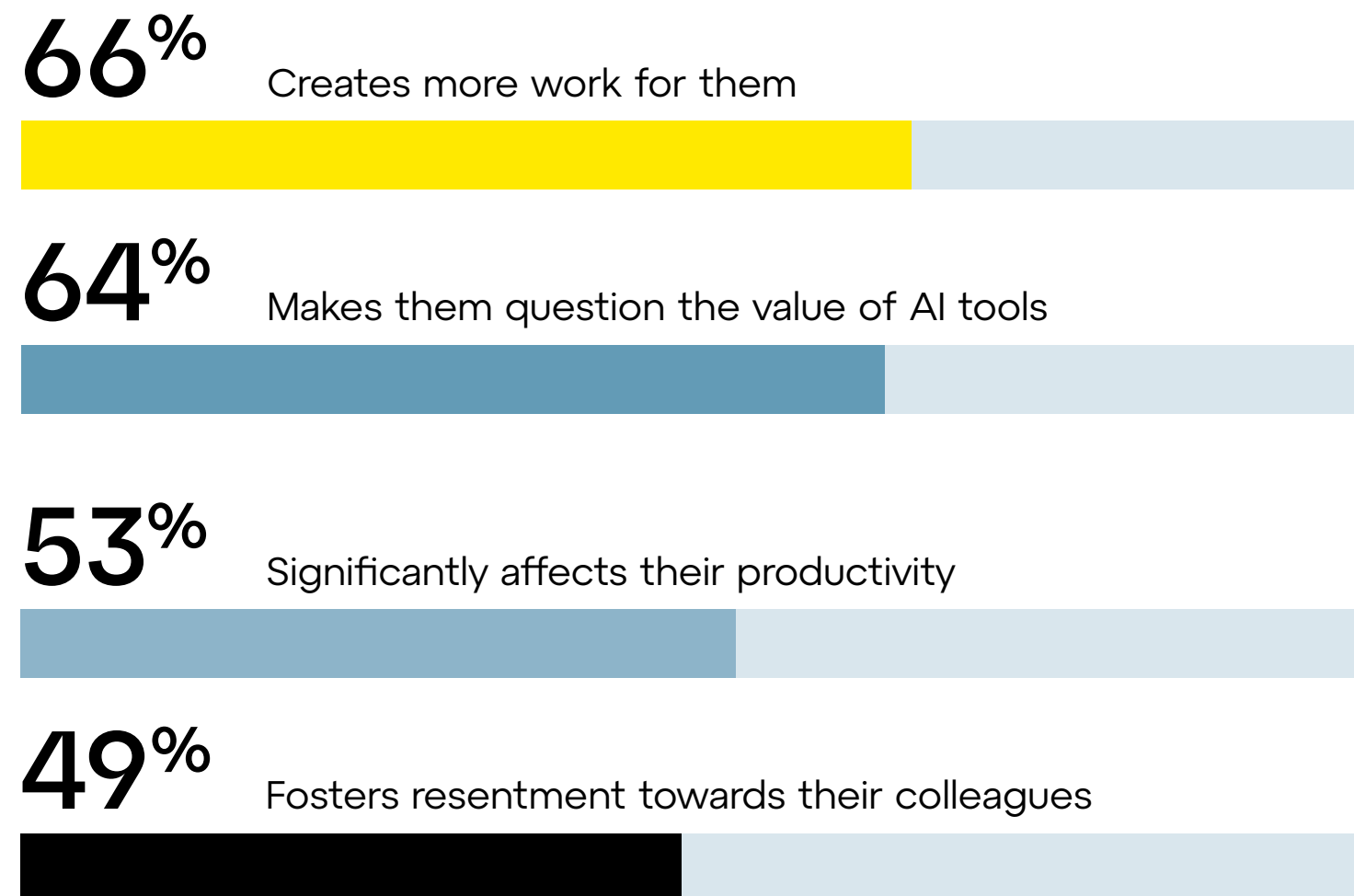


# The Productivity Impact

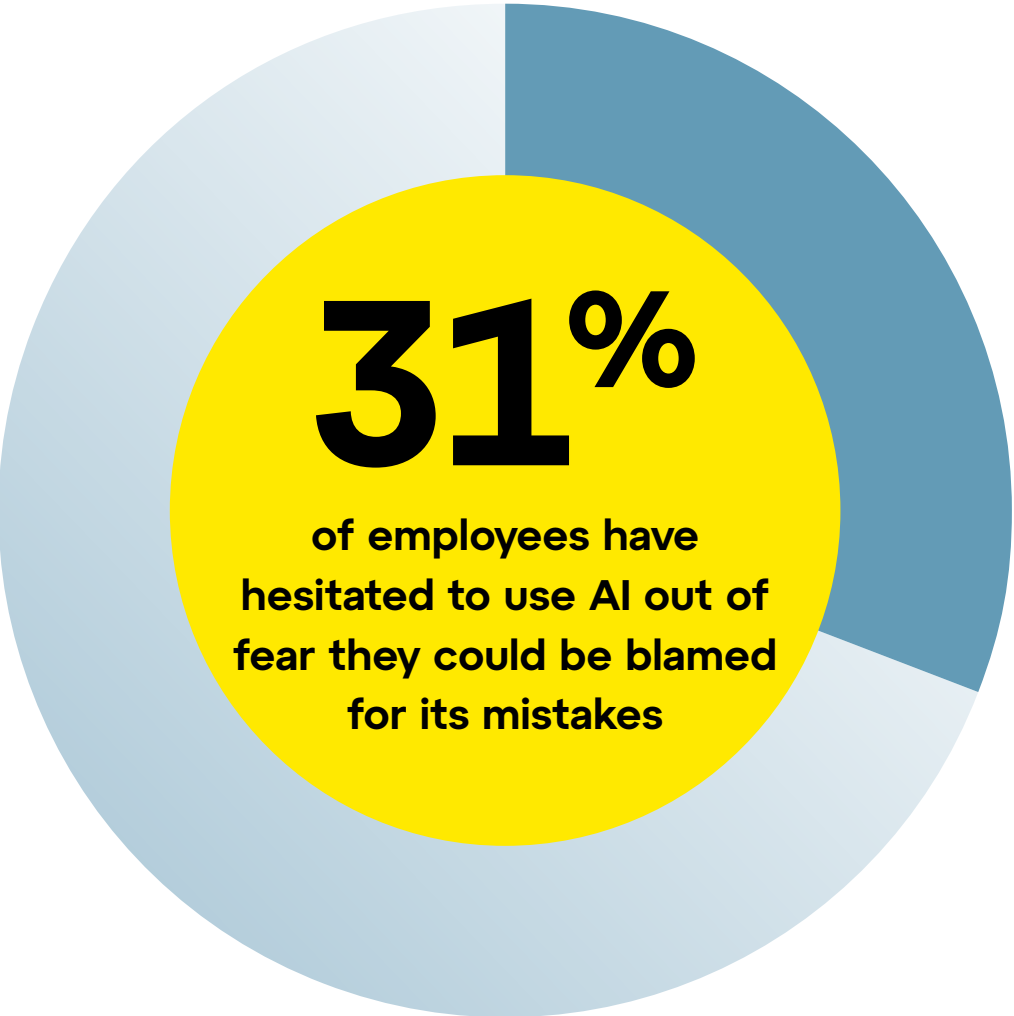
Employees aren't just encountering problematic AI outputs in their own work. In fact, **59% say they're now responsible for reviewing AI-generated content created by coworkers or direct reports**, with 50% reporting that they do this every week.

For many employees, this added responsibility is proving burdensome. Among those who review others' AI-generated work, 79% say they regularly receive outputs that are low quality or contain errors. **Most (77%) say AI-generated work takes more time to review than human work**, and two-thirds say reviewing AI "workslop" creates additional work for them.

**Employees say reviewing other people's AI outputs has several negative impacts:**







# AI Hesitation

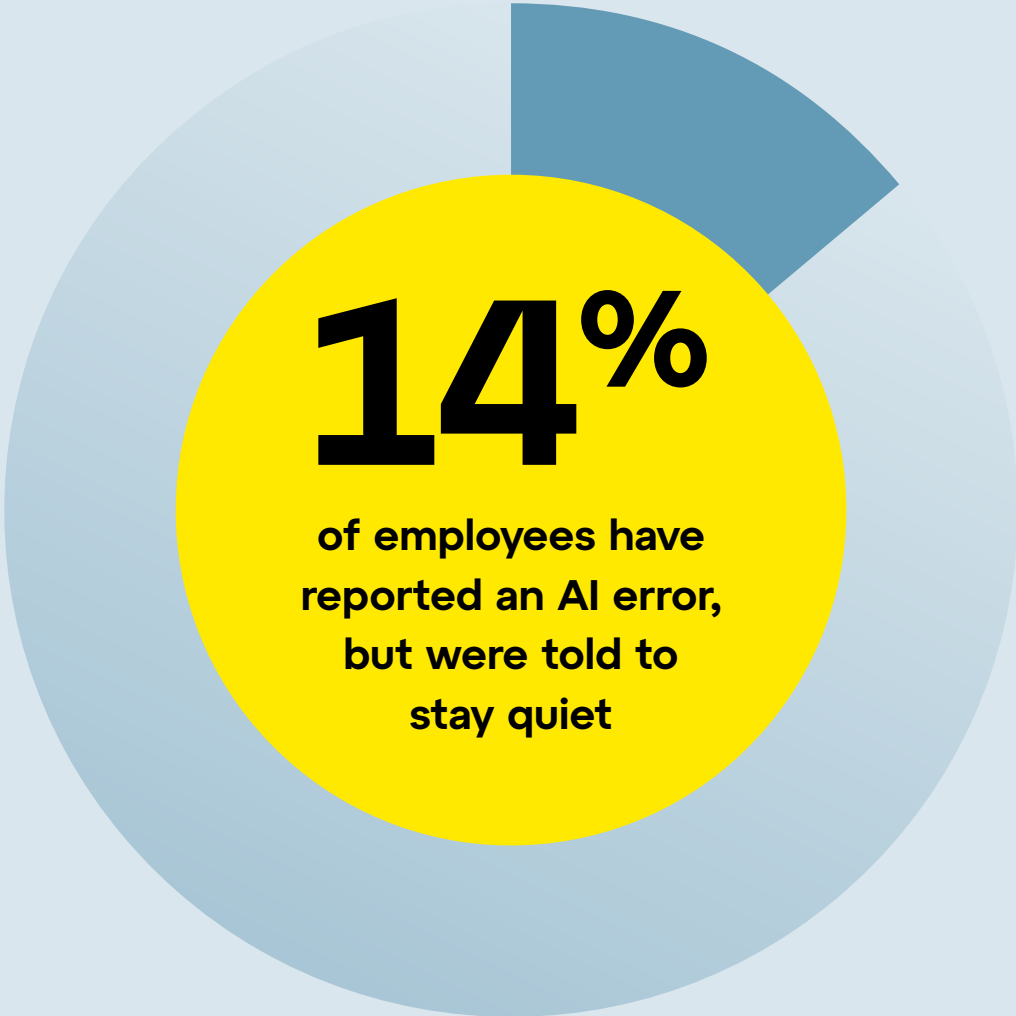
Without clear guardrails and shared accountability, employees are struggling to navigate AI-related risks. In fact, **83% worry they could be blamed or even fired for an AI mistake that negatively affects their company.**

These fears are already shaping workforce behavior, with nearly one-third of employees **(31%) reporting that they've hesitated to use AI tools because they're afraid they could be blamed for a mistake they didn't make.** This hesitation has the potential to limit productivity and innovation, reducing the substantial benefits organizations can gain from AI.

# A Culture of Silence

For some employees, the push to use AI may be undermining responsible use: **31% say there's unspoken pressure to trust AI and keep quiet about its mistakes.** Alarming, 14% of employees say they've reported AI errors to a manager or leader but were told to stay quiet.

This silence increases the likelihood that AI errors will persist, potentially exposing organizations to greater operational and reputational risk—and eroding the trust that effective AI use depends on.

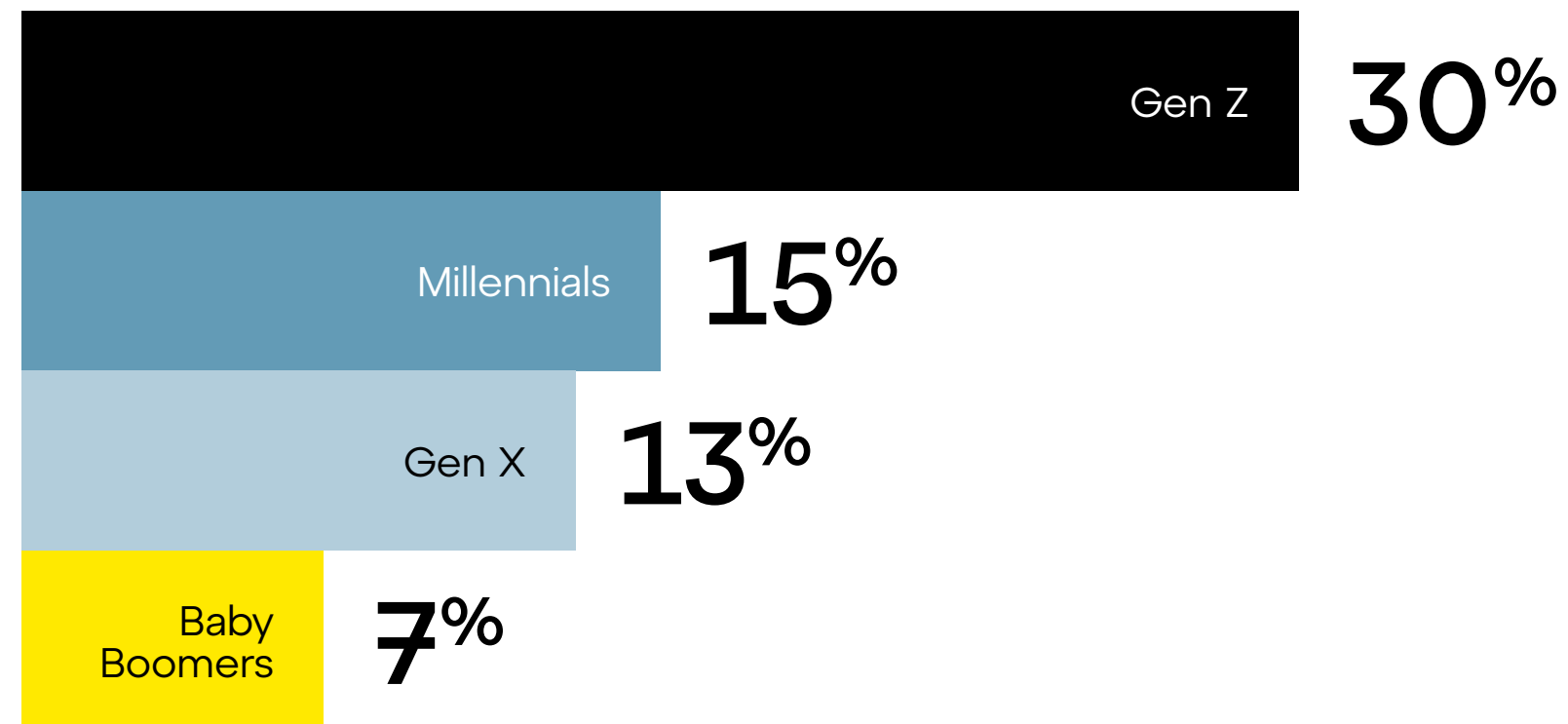


# Blame Shifting

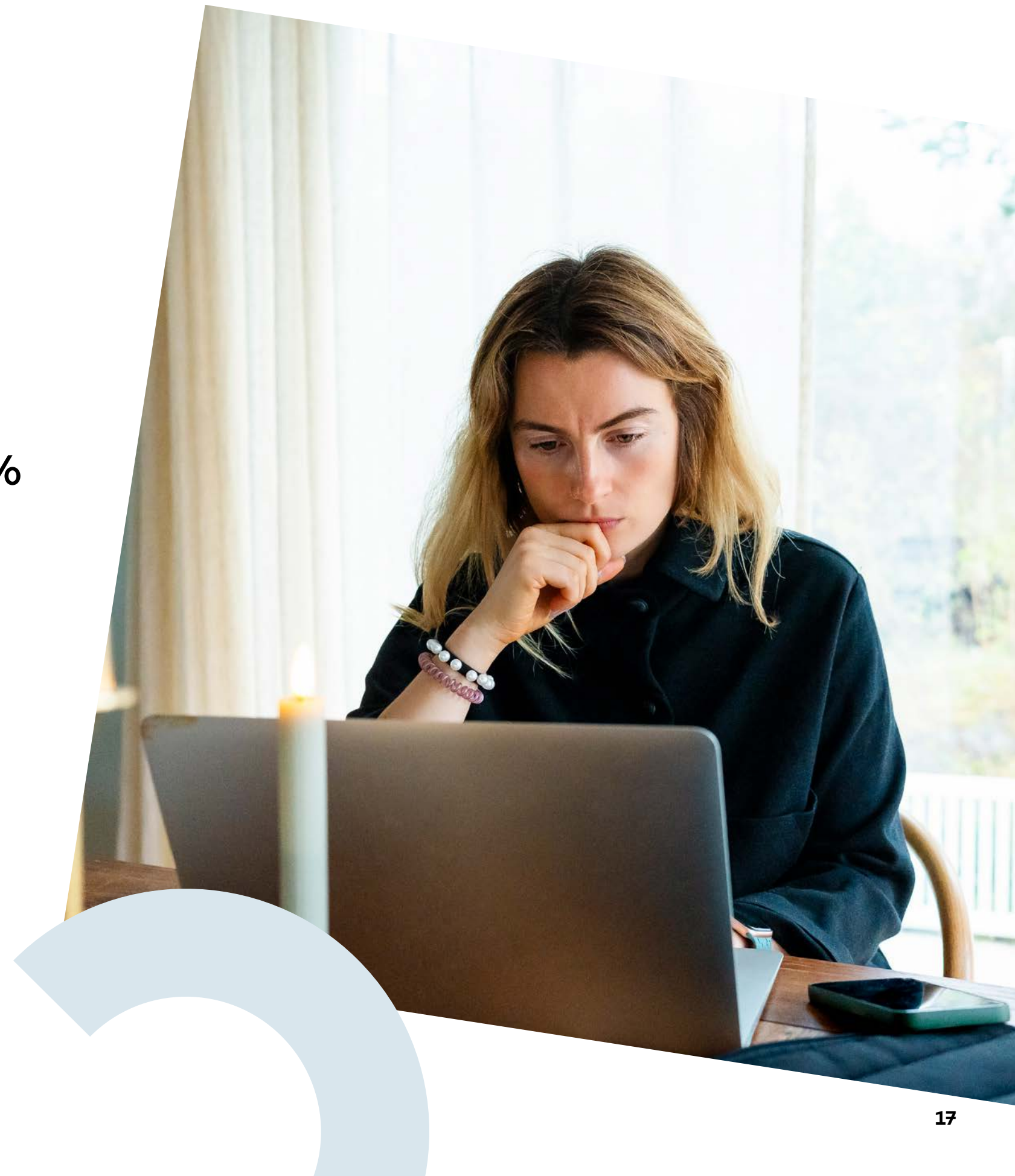
While some workers fear being blamed for AI's mistakes, others say using AI lets them avoid any real accountability at work (25%) and feel it's safer to blame AI than to admit they made an error (26%).

**Already, 17% of employees—including 30% of Gen Z—admit they've blamed AI for a mistake they made at work,** and another 24% say they might do this.

**Gen Z is most likely to pin the blame on AI for their own work mistakes:**



For companies, this dynamic poses a serious risk—weakening accountability, obscuring the true sources of errors, and making it harder to prevent future mistakes.

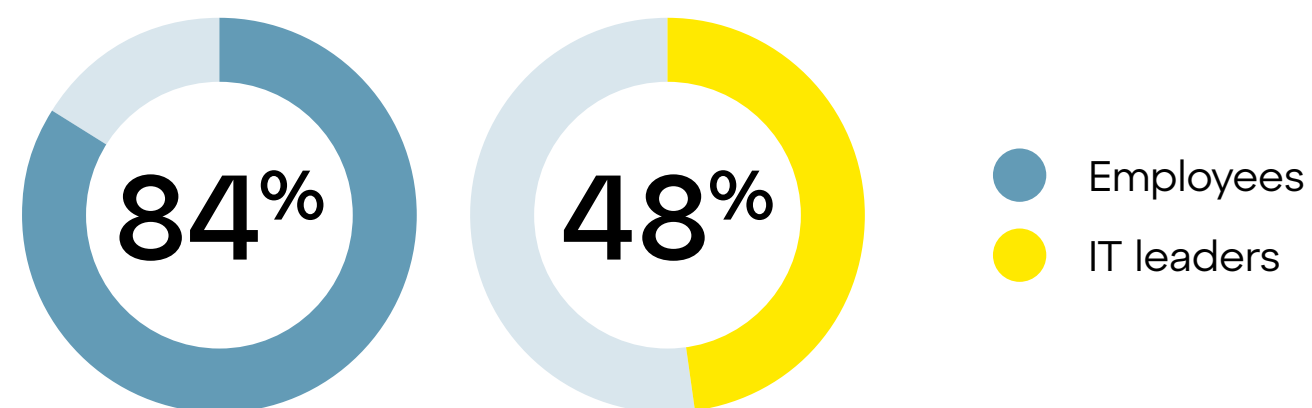


# 07 The Path to Responsible and Effective AI Use

Employers can take several steps to promote responsible and more effective AI use, but IT leaders must first recognize where improvements are needed. The research reveals a clear misalignment between employees and IT leaders around the need for stronger policies, better training, and other support measures.

One striking example is the difference in perceptions of how well companies are encouraging responsible AI use.

## The Responsible AI Use Disconnect:



**84% of employees, compared with just 48% of IT leaders, say their company isn't doing enough to encourage responsible AI use—for example, by setting clear standards and leading by example.**

**In the remainder of this report, we'll examine the steps companies can take to strengthen responsible and effective AI use, including:**



Policy improvements



Better AI tools and training



A greater emphasis on practical AI

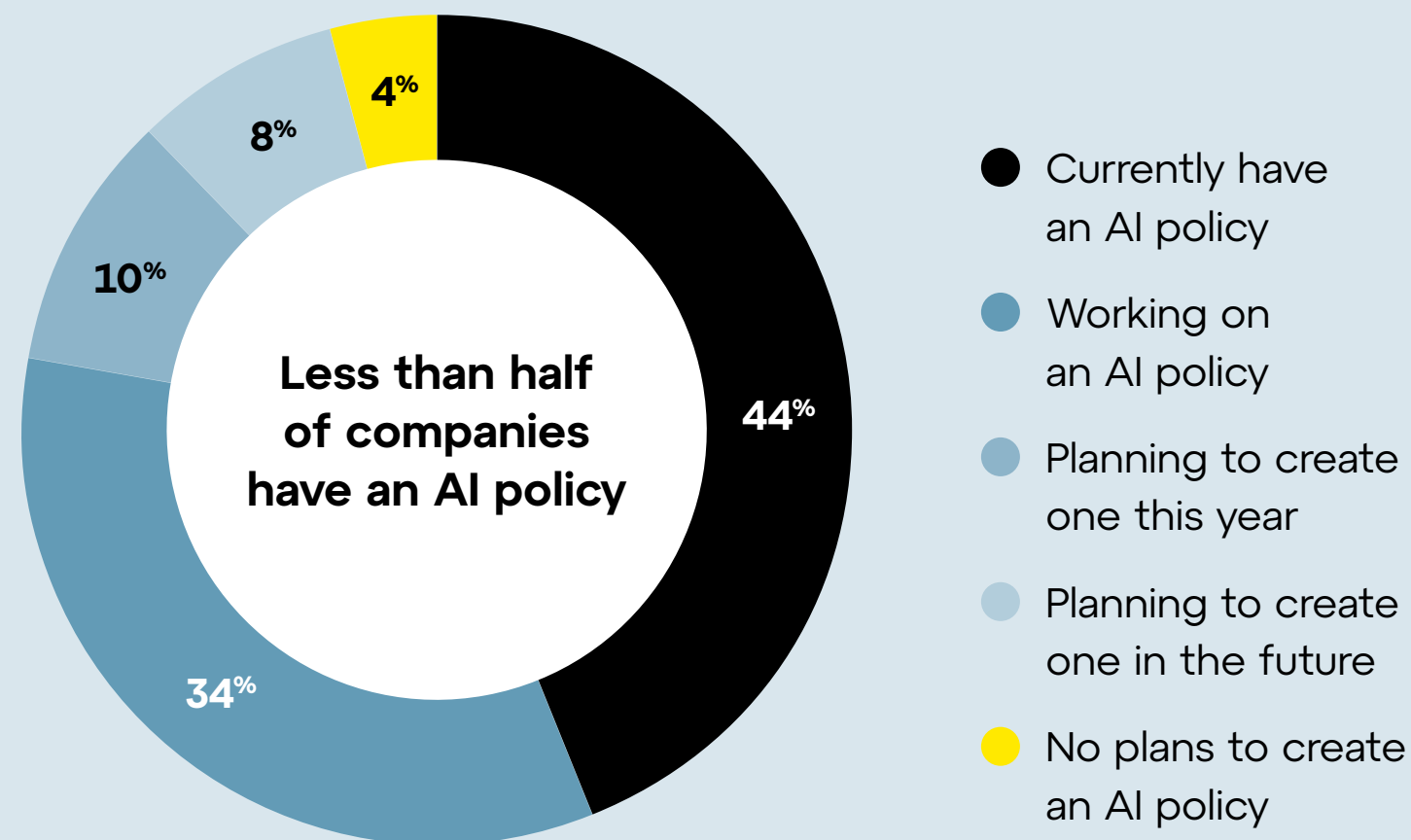


Skills development

We'll also highlight key areas where employees and IT leaders are misaligned and discuss why closing these gaps will be critical to reducing risk and realizing AI's full potential.

# 1 Policy Improvements

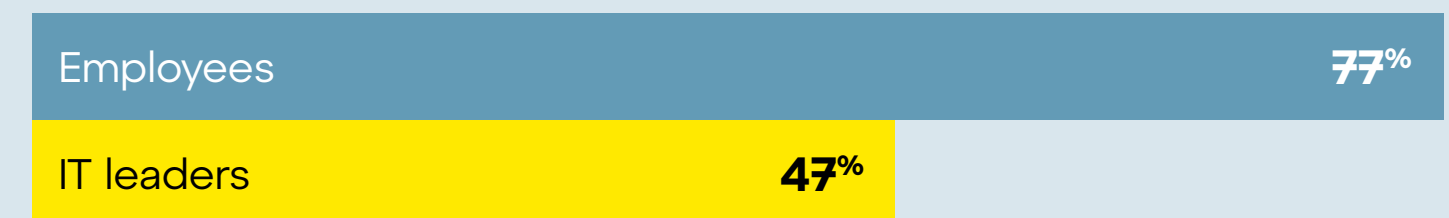
Responsible AI use requires robust policies that emphasize the importance of keeping humans firmly in the loop. However, **just 44% of IT leaders say their company has an AI policy**—virtually unchanged since last year, suggesting little progress on this front. While around one-third of leaders note their intentions to create a policy this year, others have only vague plans in-place.



Even in organizations with AI policies, 26% of IT leaders acknowledge that their policy isn't enforced very effectively. They also estimate that around 3 out of 10 workers have violated their company's AI policy.

Despite these admissions, there's a notable perception gap between workers and leaders, with employees being far more likely to recommend policy improvements at their organization.

## The Policy Disconnect



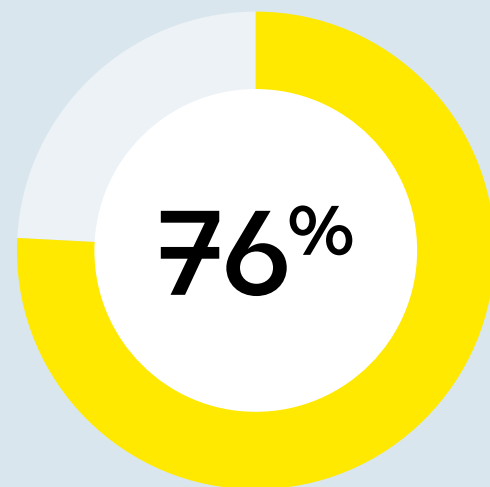
**77% of employees, versus just 47% of IT leaders, say their company needs to improve its AI policy.**



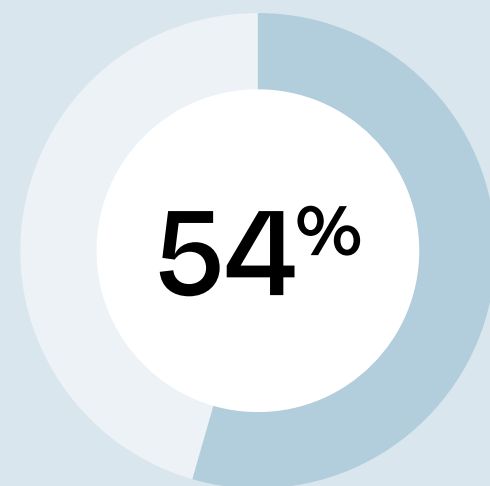
## 2 Better AI Tools and Training

Policy improvements can only go so far—companies also need the right AI tools and adequate training. **The majority of IT leaders (87%) and employees (76%) say AI tools often provide outputs that require refinement or revision.** Workers also highlight other challenges, including limited customization options, security concerns, and poor integration with other tools.

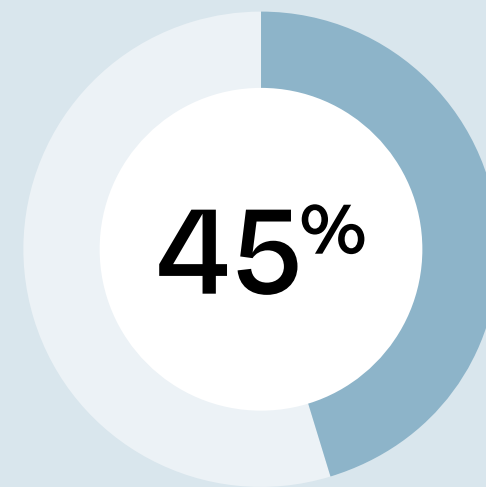
Employees say existing AI tools have several limitations:



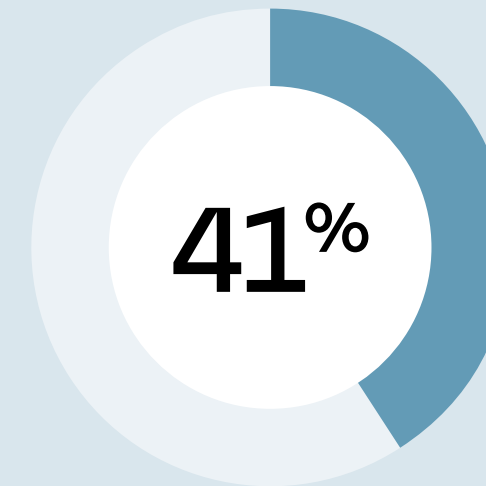
Often provide outputs that require revision



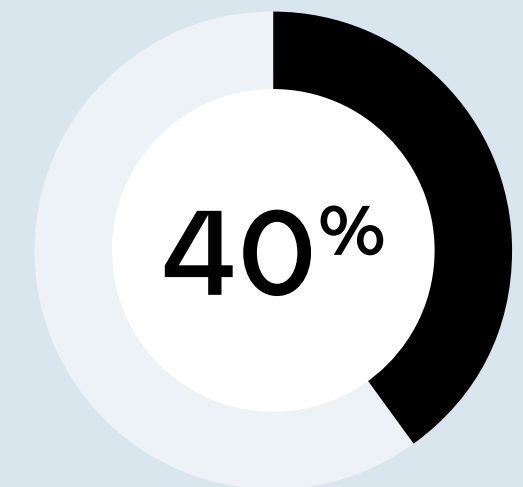
Aren't tailored to their company or industry



Often provide low-quality outputs with errors



Have security issues that create distrust



Don't integrate well with other technologies

In addition, both IT leaders (81%) and employees (78%) agree that AI tools need better instructions and guardrails for proper use. However, they aren't fully aligned on whether workers are being provided with enough training and support.

### The Training Disconnect:



80% of employees, versus just 60% of IT leaders, say most workers aren't being trained properly to use AI tools.

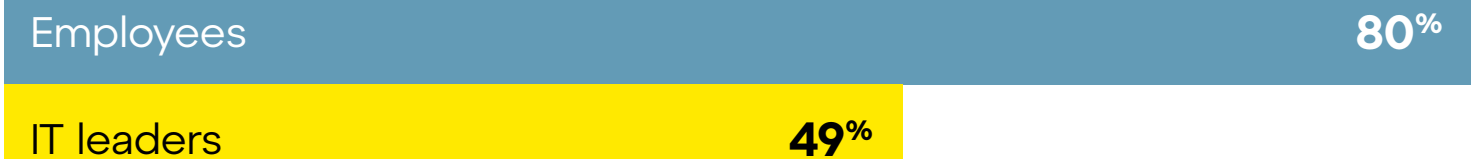


### 3 A Greater Emphasis on Practical AI

Employers should also place more emphasis on the role-specific use cases that can help employees apply AI tools effectively in their day-to-day work. While employees clearly recognize the need for more guidance, IT leaders are far less aware of this gap—creating misalignment that can slow adoption and limit productivity gains.

Without clear direction on when and how to use AI, workers may underutilize these tools or apply them inconsistently, reducing their overall impact.

#### The Utilization Disconnect:



**80% of employees admit they're not using AI tools to their full potential, yet only 49% of IT leaders think employees at their company are underutilizing AI.**

#### The Knowledge Disconnect:



**69% of employees say they aren't very familiar with AI's practical applications for their role, but just 29% of IT leaders believe their employees lack this level of understanding.**





Notably, employees' comfort with using AI has improved since last year, when 82% reported feeling unfamiliar with its practical applications. Yet there's still considerable room for improvement—**workers estimate they're spending 2.6 hours per day, or 13 hours each week, on tasks AI could handle.** This figure is unchanged from last year, suggesting that employees continue to struggle with integrating AI into their daily workflows.

Employees estimate  
they spend

**2.6**

hours per day on tasks  
AI could handle

U.S. businesses could gain

**\$2.9T**

from unlocking AI's  
untapped value\*

**These inefficiencies represent a massive, missed opportunity.** In the U.S. alone, businesses may be forgoing more than \$2.9 trillion annually\* in potential efficiency gains. By capturing even a small share of AI's untapped value, companies can create meaningful benefits for both their people and their bottom line.

\* Assumes there are 102,525,000 knowledge workers in the U.S. (Source: [Federal Reserve Economic Dataset](#)) with an hourly wage of \$44.08 (Source: [Federal Reserve Economic Dataset](#)), who could be saving 13 hours each week by using AI.



Unlocking AI’s true potential starts with providing the right tools to support employees. In particular, practical AI tools can help eliminate manual or repetitive tasks, giving employees more time to focus on meaningful work and apply the human skills and oversight that AI can’t replace. This approach also helps employees maintain their skills and sense of self-worth.

**The tools employees want:**

**AI Automation Tools:**

Tools that automate data-entry, email management, documentation, and report generation



**Generative AI Tools:**

Tools that write/create content like emails, articles, and code



**AI Communication Tools:**

Tools that support real-time translation and transcription, summarize calls/chats, and analyze discussions



**AI Customer Support Tools:**

Tools that communicate with customers and analyze how they feel during calls/chats



**AI Virtual Assistant:**

An assistant that can answer calls, set reminders, manage calendars, and perform other admin tasks



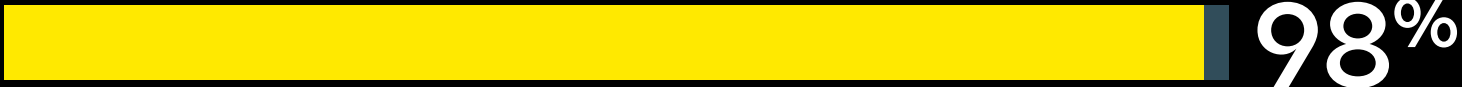
The vast majority of IT leaders—95% or more—agree that these types of AI tools are valuable for employees. However, IT teams also stand to benefit significantly from practical AI tools, particularly those that help them manage risk, optimize performance, and maintain oversight in increasingly complex digital environments.



**The tools IT leaders want:**

**Security and Compliance:**

AI that monitors for potential security threats and ensures compliance with data protection



**Performance Insights and Troubleshooting:**

AI that analyzes device, network, and support ticket data to provide insights for performance improvement and troubleshooting



**AI Analytics and Visibility:**

AI that provides real-time analytics to gain full visibility into AI outputs, ensuring transparency and identifying opportunities for process optimization



## 4 Skills Development

Beyond near-term steps like policy improvements, better tools, and more training, organizations face a larger challenge: preparing workers with the skills they need to thrive in tomorrow's AI-driven workplace. Greater investment in skills development will be essential for organizations looking to build a workforce that can leverage AI confidently and responsibly.

Right now, however, **nearly two-thirds of employees (65%) say employers are failing to equip people with the skills that will be required as AI takes over more work.** This includes the ability to work effectively alongside AI, for example knowing when to question (or trust) AI-generated work.

This shortfall may leave many workers uncertain about how to evaluate, apply, and explain AI outputs, increasing the risk of errors and limiting AI's potential to deliver meaningful productivity gains. The issue is especially concerning for Gen Z, who are early in their careers and forming foundational habits around AI use.

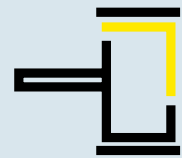
### The top skills employees should strengthen when using AI at work:

- 1 Checking AI work for accuracy and bias
- 2 Knowing when to trust or question AI outputs
- 3 Using creativity and human judgment alongside AI
- 4 Keeping up with new AI tools and best practices
- 5 Knowing how to build effective prompts
- 6 Communicating or explaining AI-driven results

In addition to offering technical AI training, employers are uniquely positioned to help employees cultivate the distinctly human skills that AI cannot replicate—the kind of judgment, creativity, and emotional intelligence that will define professional value in an AI-augmented world.

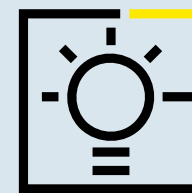
Investing in these capabilities isn't just good for employees; it's essential for building organizations that can compete long-term. Companies that prioritize skills development now will be better positioned to unlock AI's full value, driving stronger performance, innovation, and lasting competitive advantage.

Yet even as organizations invest in these capabilities, anxiety about AI's long-term effects on the workforce runs deep. **Nearly two-thirds of employees (64%) worry that AI will disrupt the future leadership pipeline by eliminating the early-career roles that have traditionally helped develop tomorrow's leaders**—raising an urgent question about where the next generation of talent will learn to lead.



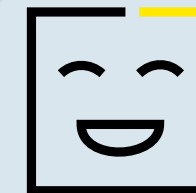
### Judgment

Knowing when not to trust AI



### Creative Thinking

Coming up with ideas AI can't



### Emotional Intelligence

Reading people, not data



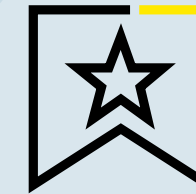
### Communication

Expressing ideas AI can't articulate



### Adaptability

Staying useful  
as technology changes



### Leadership

Inspiring humans, not machines



# 08 Conclusion

AI is now firmly embedded in the workplace, helping employees work more productively and freeing up time for higher-value tasks. As adoption continues to grow, both employees and IT leaders recognize the significant opportunity AI presents—but also the responsibility that comes with it.

**For IT leaders in particular, the path forward involves more than deploying new technologies.** It requires establishing clear policies, strengthening oversight, and ensuring employees have the right tools and training to use AI responsibly and effectively. At the same time, organizations must continue investing in the human skills that will remain essential in an AI-driven world.

**Companies that strike this balance between technology, governance, and human capability will be best positioned to unlock AI's full value.** By empowering employees and equipping IT leaders with the visibility and control they need, organizations can harness AI not just as a productivity tool, but as a catalyst for stronger performance, innovation, and long-term resilience.



# 09 Methodology

These findings are based on a global survey conducted by GoTo and Workplace Intelligence between November 2025 and January 2026. A total of 2,500 respondents participated, including 1,250 full-time knowledge workers and 1,250 IT decision-makers. The survey reached individuals across the US, Canada, the UK, Ireland, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, India, Mexico, and Brazil.

## About Workplace Intelligence

Workplace Intelligence is an award-winning thought leadership and research agency focused on the world of work. We help companies, and their executives, tell their workplace story in a meaningful, relevant, and impactful way using primary data, insights, and interviews. For more information, go to [workplaceintelligence.com](https://workplaceintelligence.com).





## About GoTo

As the leader in cloud communications and IT, GoTo is dedicated to powering a world of work without limits. The GoTo portfolio of products offers secure, reliable, AI-enabled solutions that are simple to adopt for small and midsize businesses, and scalable to enterprises worldwide. GoTo continuously improves human experiences for AI-enabled workforces across hundreds of thousands of customers.

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