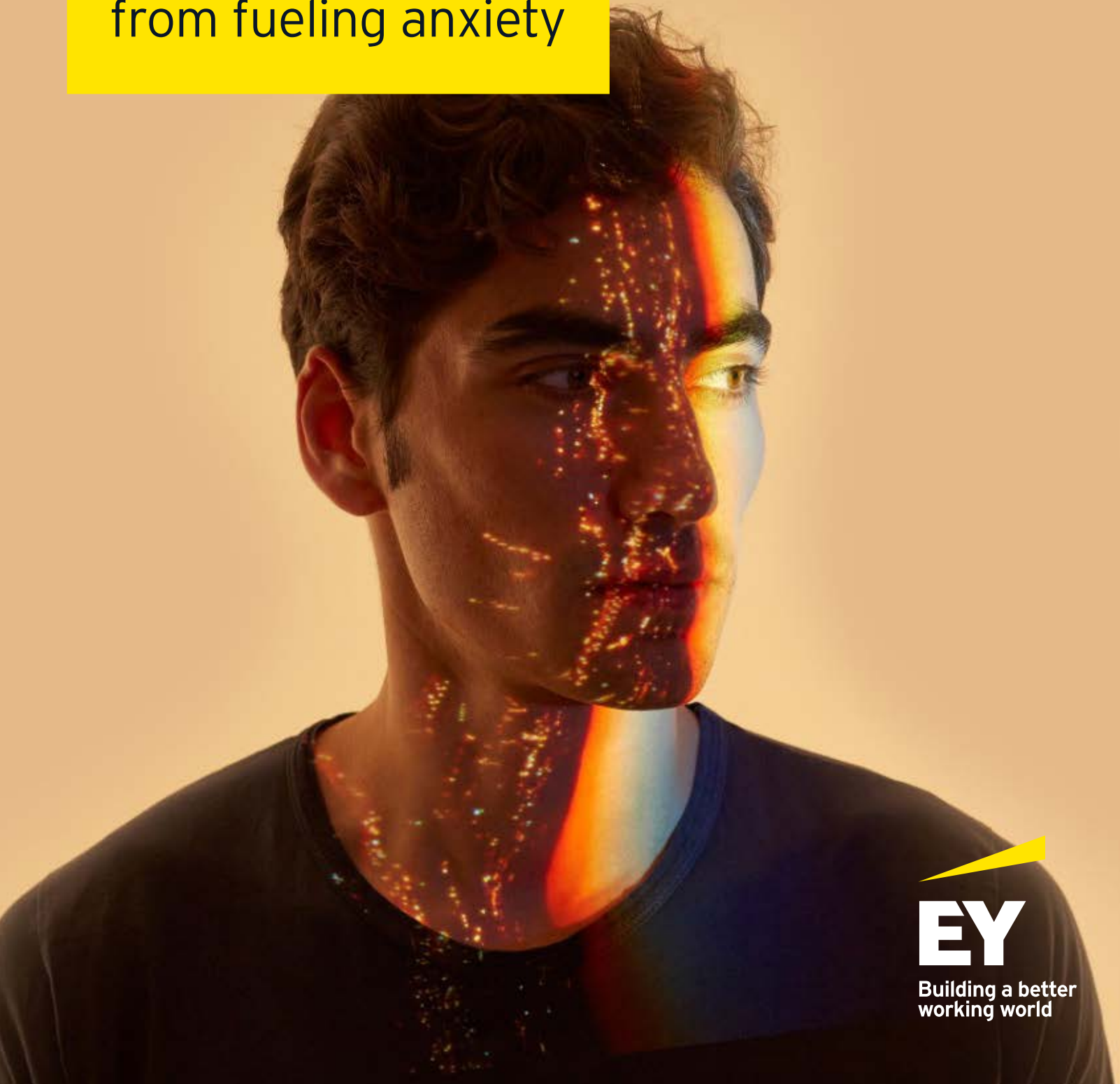


How organizations
can stop
skyrocketing AI use
from fueling anxiety



EY

Building a better
working world

People want more information on safe, responsible and ethical AI use. We identify how organizations can address AI anxiety to unlock value.

In the past year, there has been a meteoric rise in the use of [artificial intelligence \(AI\)](#) by the public and in the workplace, ignited by the introduction of generative AI (GenAI). While various forms of AI have been in use for decades, GenAI is proving a gamechanger - and the subsequent rise in AI use has triggered fears over the dangers it could pose to people's careers, business competitiveness and society as a whole.

To discover what's keeping people and business leaders up at night, we commissioned an online survey of 1000 Americans who work an office/desk job and are at least somewhat familiar with artificial intelligence across generations and industries. Here's what we found.

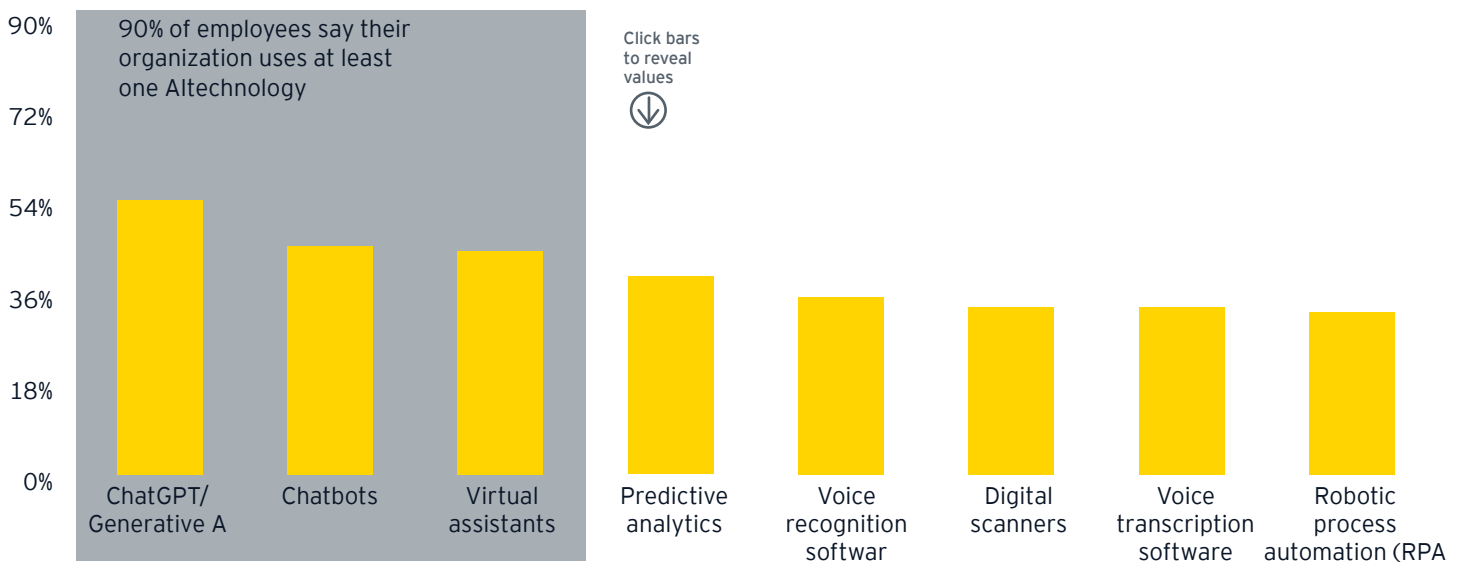
AI is now in the hands of your workforce

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The rise of GenAI has given a multitude of people direct exposure to AI, with largely positive sentiment. An overwhelming 90% say their organization uses at least one AI technology, with GenAI topping the list. In other words, regardless of how you feel about these emerging technologies, your workforce is already using them on a daily basis. This presents an urgent need for employers to communicate and train employees around the responsible, safe and ethical use of AI and GenAI in the workplace.

Figure 1: AI technologies people use at work



Most employees see value in adopting AI, believing AI will make them more efficient (82%) and more productive (81%), letting them focus on higher value work (81%).

However, concerns remain. Uncertainty surrounding AI's inevitable impact on the job market has employees and leaders alike bracing for disruptions and losses. Three in four (75%) employees are concerned AI will make certain jobs obsolete, with many (65%) saying they are anxious about AI replacing their job. The threat of displacement isn't just hypothetical: 17% of workers who are more concerned about AI today than last year say they personally know someone whose job was replaced by AI.

Employees are also concerned that AI will hurt their financial well-being and professional growth, including:

- ▶ Negatively impact salary or pay (72%)
- ▶ Losing out on promotions for not knowing how to use AI (67%)
- ▶ Falling behind if they don't use AI at work (66%)

Although 90% of employees say their organization is using AI, the research reveals significant knowledge gaps around AI initiatives within the organization and available resources. For example, 86% of senior leaders say their organization allows external open-source AI technology (i.e. Chat GPT) for work purposes compared to 53% junior level employees (74% mid-level employees). Similarly, while 84% of senior leaders say their organization is developing its own AI technology for employees, only 42% of junior employees say so (63% mid-level employees).

There is a comparable divide when it comes to working with outside vendors to use AI technology; although 84% of senior leaders say their organization does this, merely 47% junior-level employees agreed (71% mid-level).

This limited "information trickle down" to junior-level employees could explain their low levels of engagement with and positive experiences of AI. For example, while across all employees 76% say AI has already had a positive impact on their personal experience at work, this is more evident for senior leaders (85%) than junior-level employees (61%).

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Curiosity in AI does not equal confidence

While most employees say they trust AI technologies (77%), almost as many indicate concerns about AI (71%).

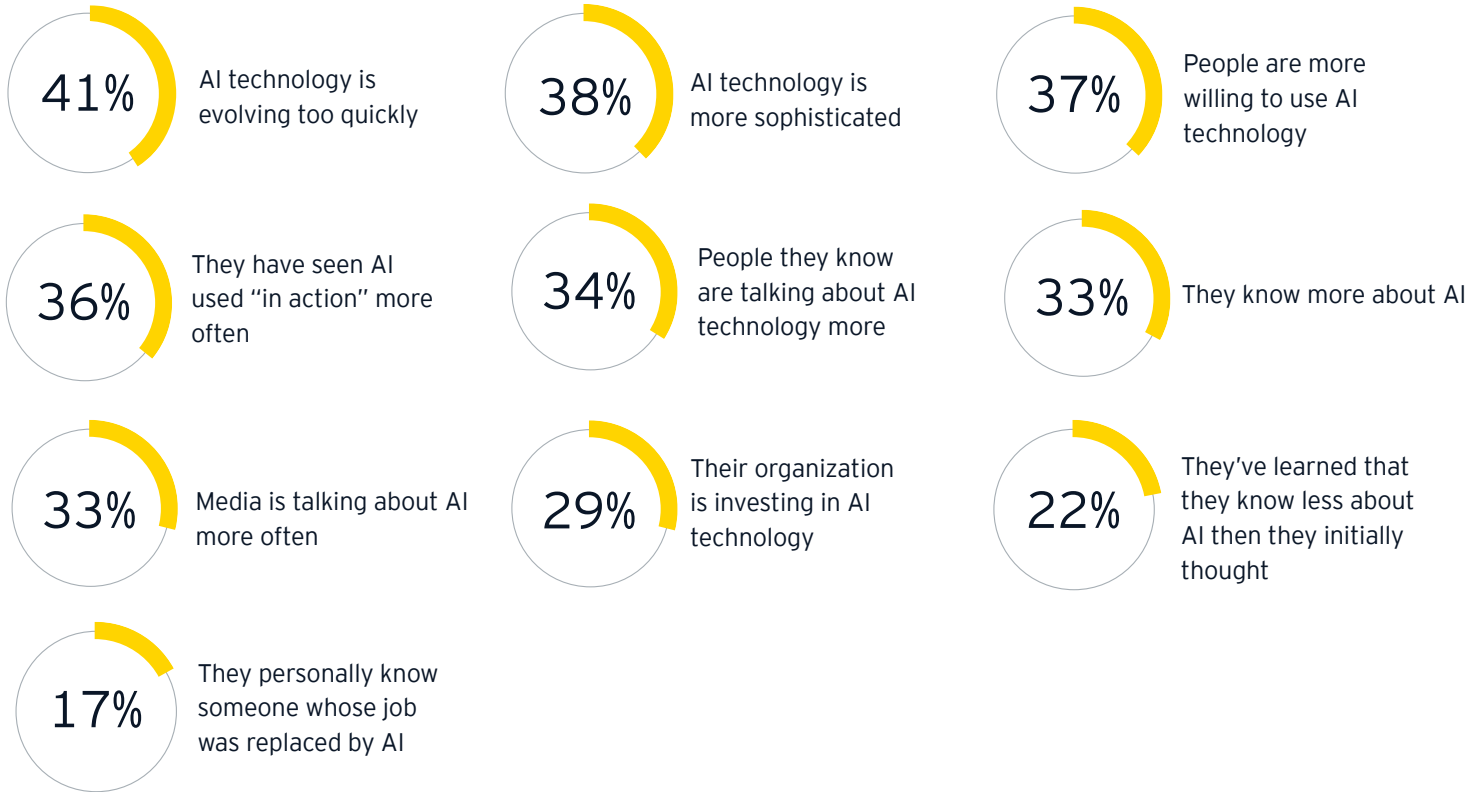
Two issues top the list of concerns: the quality of AI outputs and the speed at which AI is being adopted. In a world of rising misinformation, deepfakes and malicious hackers, people are worried about the unintended consequences of AI and feel it's all happening too quickly.

Figure 2: What is triggering AI anxiety?

Click to reveal values 

Greater exposure to AI has increased, rather than lessened, anxieties, with about half (48%) more concerned about AI than they were a year ago. Among those who are more concerned, top issues include speed of advancement, technical capabilities, greater awareness of AI in action and for some, a deeper understanding of how little they know about AI.

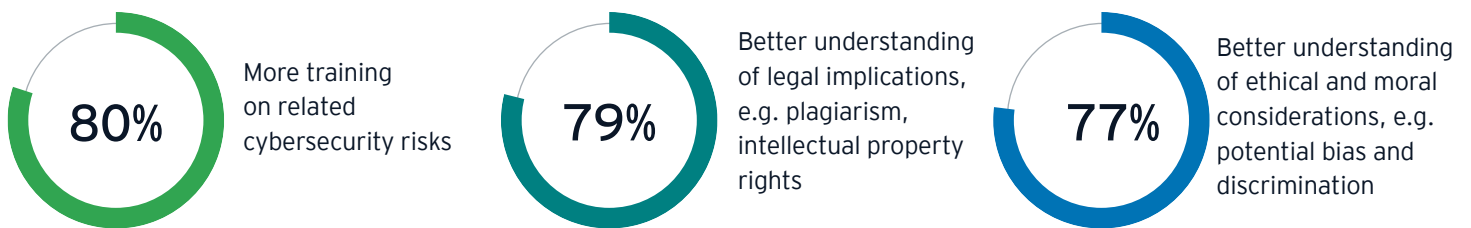
Figure 3: What is top of mind for those more concerned about AI today than they were a year ago?



There is widespread acknowledgement that AI still needs human oversight to ensure quality outputs. Most employees (84%) say human oversight will always be needed when working with AI technology. In fact, 76% indicate that work done by AI typically has to be edited/revised and 66% are concerned about the increased workload that double-checking AI outputs will require.

Employees are anxious about whether they, personally, are using AI responsibly. They want more guidance and regulation to gain a deeper understanding of AI: what constitutes responsible, legal and ethical use and what does not. Specifically, they want more training in the legal implications of AI, cybersecurity risks and AI ethics.

Figure 4: What would make employees more comfortable using AI at work?



When it comes to defining guardrails for AI, people want to see wider involvement from those developing the technologies as well as governments. While 81% of employees say AI technology organizations need to self-regulate more, about as many (78%) say the government needs to play a bigger role in regulating AI technology. (Note: this survey was completed on 16 October 2023, before the announcement of [President Biden's Executive Order](#) on safe, secure and trustworthy artificial intelligence and before December's announcement of a political agreement on the [European Union Artificial Intelligence Act](#), widely expected to come into force in early 2024).

So what constitutes [responsible AI](#)? "While definitions may vary across organizations, the principles of fairness, accountability and reliability are central, along with specific ways to measure each. Our approach to using and delivering AI ethically and responsibly builds confidence in the outcomes." Samta Kapoor, EY Americas Energy AI and Trusted AI Leader.



3 Significant generational differences could impede adoption of AI

Our research revealed some interesting generational divides between who is using AI, how much they trust it and what value they think it will bring.

Figure 5: Generational differences

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In contrast to boomers, Gen X and Millennials have had to adapt to new technologies continuously and on the fly. Gen X has had to learn and adapt to more business-altering technologies than any other generation.

Marcie Merriman

EY Americas Cultural Insights & Customer Strategy Leader

Millennials (born 1981-1996) and Gen X (born 1965-1980) emerge as more open to AI: they trust and use it at work and see value in adopting it at work.

In contrast, Gen Z (born 1997-2005) and Baby Boomers (born 1940-1964) are less likely to trust it. To add context to these results, we spoke with EY Americas Cultural Insights and Customer Strategy Leader, Marcie Merriman. “While this may come as a surprise to many, for the youngest and oldest generations in the workplace, trust in AI isn’t just about safety and security: it’s whether the technology works.”

Merriman points out that Gen Z has the highest expectations of technology. AI has been embedded into their everyday lives since birth, from facial recognition on phones to GPS navigating them through cities. If one app or platform doesn’t work easily and seamlessly, they quickly move on to others. Baby Boomers, on the other hand, started their careers with less need to be hands-on with technology. As technology gained ground in the workplace of the 80s and 90s, Baby Boomers often depended on lower-level employees, to master spreadsheets and build presentations.

As a consequence, Gen X understands the risks of not keeping up and has a greater tolerance for dealing with unreliable technology,” says Merriman. They’re more likely to work through technical challenges and appreciate the value of MVPs (minimum viable products).

What should leaders take away from these gaps? Organizations should avoid rushing AI deployments and expecting to improve it along the way if engagement by Gen Z or Baby Boomers is critical. What the middle generations embrace may not pass muster for those at either end of the generational spectrum. To win over Gen Z—and this encompasses the future workforce and consumers—organizations must be purposeful and start with robust, responsible AI that performs as promised.

They won’t get a second chance.



4

Organizations can't afford to wait

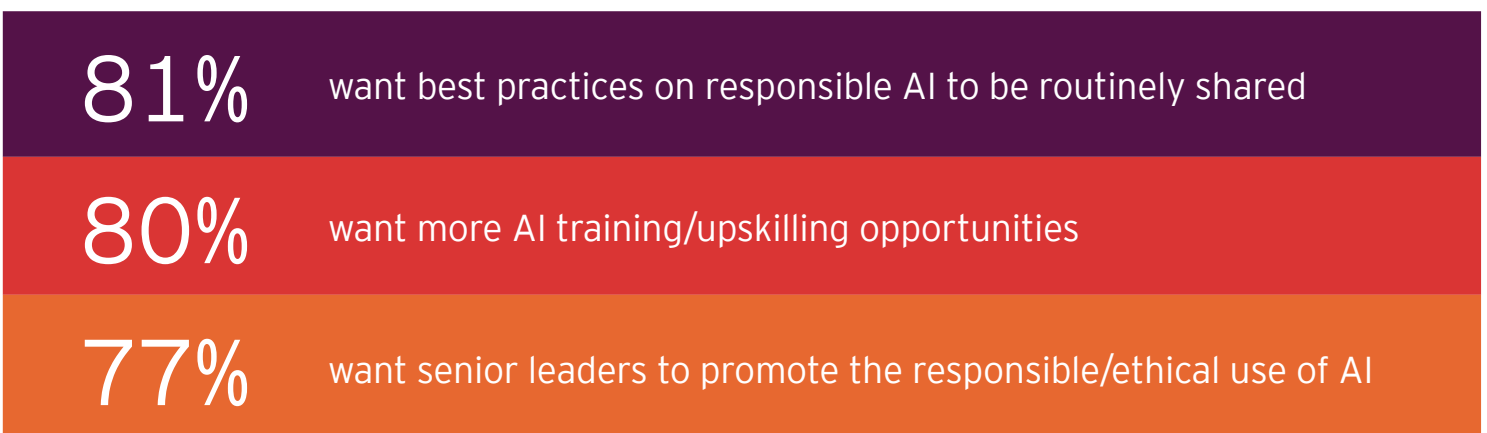
With AI already in the hands of their workforce, organizations need a clear plan for AI in action today. The good news is that there are clear steps businesses can take to reduce anxiety and help employees.

First and foremost is to train and educate the workforce. Our survey shows an overwhelming desire for more: more training on AI, more communication about best practices, more transparency on how data and AI are being used.

An overwhelming 80% of employees say they would feel more comfortable using AI at work if they were given more training and upskilling opportunities. They want a deeper understanding of best practices on AI and, given the dynamic pace of change, for these to be routinely shared. To replace uncertainty with confidence, they want to know how to use AI securely, responsibly and ethically.

They also want to know more about what the organization itself is doing: more than two-thirds would feel more positive about their employers if leaders were transparent about the organization's AI and data use, as well as getting AI applications reviewed by a third party.

Figure 6: What will make people more comfortable about using AI at work?



When it comes to viewing AI as a competitor or collaborator, it is perhaps no surprise that anxieties seem to amplify perceived threats from AI. Overall, nearly half (45%) say they see AI as a collaborator for them personally, while 27% say it is a competitor. Those who are most anxious about AI adoption in the workplace are more likely to view it as competitor (31%) compared to those who are not anxious (22%).

Despite their thirst for more knowledge and training, employees are worried that opportunities will not be available to them. When thinking of AI adoption in the workplace, 73% are concerned that there won't be sufficient AI training and upskilling opportunities, with 63% of employees expressing anxiety about not having access to AI training and upskilling.

For organizations investing in training or making training available to employees, it is clear there is no such thing as too much communication. As decisions are made on how organizations adopt and use AI, they need to continue to put people first, communicate the vision as it develops and create flexible learning and development programs to support their ambitions. Understanding common anxieties around AI can help to focus these efforts.

"Empowering employees with AI requires a people-centric approach that keeps humans at the center of the transformation agenda," said EY Americas Vice Chair of Consulting Raj Sharma. "Empathetic leadership can be a powerful tool for overcoming anxieties around AI, and leaders should focus on creating upskilling models that position AI as a collaborator, not competitor, to their workforce."



5

Top of mind, top of agendas

With the wealth of opportunities that AI brings, it also carries a new set of risks—risks that are top of mind for employees.

While the technology is prevalent, increased exposure to AI is leading to increased anxiety for many. It's important for leaders to meet employees where they are in their AI journey and add employee engagement to their AI agendas. As documented in EY research, business transformation success is rooted in human emotions, with empathy at the core. Our [Empathy in Business report](#) demonstrates how a greater sense of empathy between leaders and employees creates a safe, agile culture and improves agility, along with increasing efficiency, innovation and job satisfaction.

Figure 7: What would make people view an organization that uses AI positively?

Given how new this technology is, and the unprecedented pace of adoption and advances, it is unclear where new risks may emerge - not just from GenAI but also on the training of large language models. Transparency about when and how the organization is using AI, how data is being used and keeping humans in the loop are key to building confidence in AI.

As Steve Kurtz, EY Americas HR Transformation Services Leader, explained: "When it comes to AI, technology should do what technology does best, and people should do what people do best. The most important asset, more than systems and data, is the people who perform the work."

Armed with a deeper understanding of what is driving anxiety around AI, organizations can take the appropriate steps to work through workforce concerns and equip their people for today's, and tomorrow's, challenges.

Methodology

EY US commissioned a third-party vendor to conduct the AI Anxiety in Business Survey. The online survey among 1,000 Americans who work an office/desk job, either full-time or part-time, and are at least somewhat familiar with artificial intelligence (AI) was conducted between October 5-16, 2023. The margin of error (MOE) for the total sample is +/- 3 percentage points.

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