



BTS AI Pulse Survey 2026

BTS original research | May 2026

Total respondents: 388

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AI Pulse Survey 2026 • BTS original research

About the pulse survey

There is no single "AI story" unfolding inside organizations right now. Experiences vary widely depending on where people sit, how organizations are approaching adoption, and how quickly new tools are entering day-to-day work. Some teams are moving quickly, while others are still building confidence, navigating uncertainty, or trying to understand what AI will mean for the future of work.

To get a more grounded view of what is actually happening inside organizations today, BTS surveyed 388 professionals across industries and geographies in spring 2026. Respondents included leaders, managers, and employees and answered 14 questions covering AI adoption, business impact, workforce usage, training, governance, leadership behaviors, and organizational priorities.

This report highlights the most notable patterns, gaps, tensions, and points of variation emerging as AI becomes part of everyday work.

Highlights

7%

Most organizations are still early in the AI journey. Only 7% describe their organization as fully AI-native.

60%

Of respondents say senior leaders are moderately/highly enthusiastic about AI, while other employee groups are reported as less enthusiastic.

47%

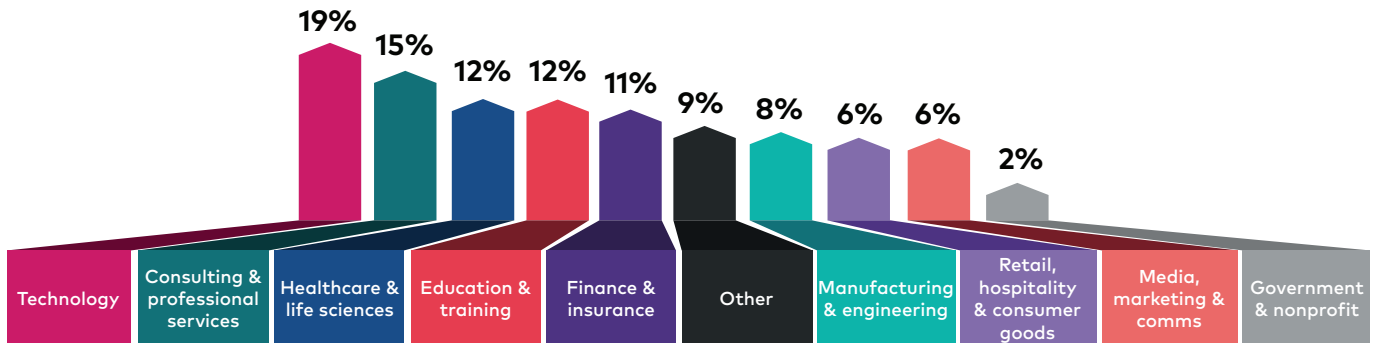
Lack of employee skills or confidence is the single most cited barrier to AI adoption.

31%

Nearly 1 in 3 respondents report employees using non-approved AI tools at least some-times.

Geographic and industry breakdown

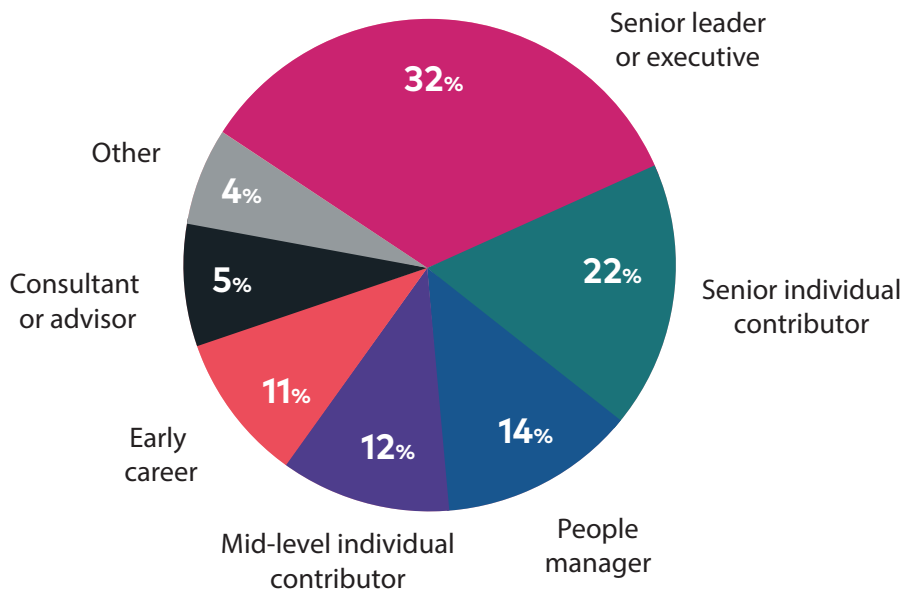
The sample spans a range of industries, though it leans toward sectors where AI adoption is already more active, which may influence how advanced some responses appear. The survey also reflects a predominantly North American respondent base.



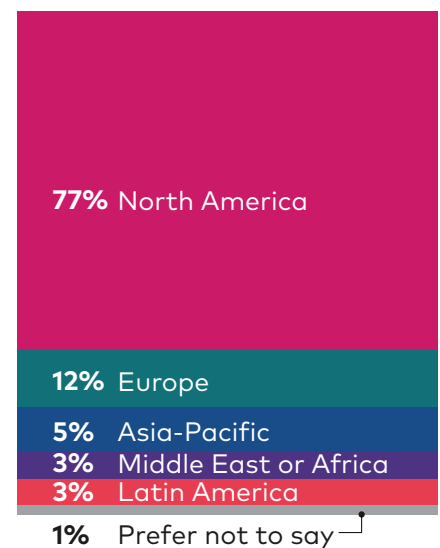
Q: Which industry do you work in?

Role level distribution

The sample is weighted toward senior roles, with 32% senior leaders and executives and 22% senior individual contributors. People managers add another 14%, meaning nearly 70% of responses come from more experienced professionals. This provides a strong view into how AI is being led and prioritized, while offering a more limited window into day-to-day frontline experience.



Q: Which of these best describes your role today?



Q: Where are you based?

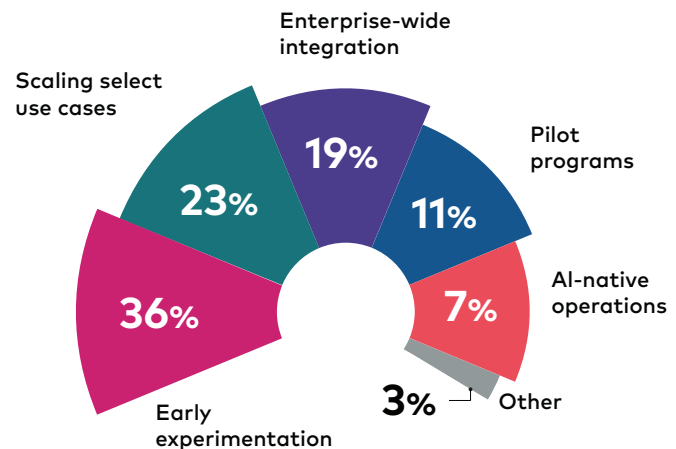
Key findings

1. Most organizations are still in early or mid-stage AI adoption.

Most organizations are still in the early stages of AI adoption. The largest group (36%) is in early experimentation, with another 23% scaling select use cases and 19% reporting enterprise-wide integration. Only 7% describe themselves as AI-native.

- Early experimentation is the most common stage
- Fully embedded AI adoption is still uncommon

Q: What stage best describes your organization's AI adoption journey?

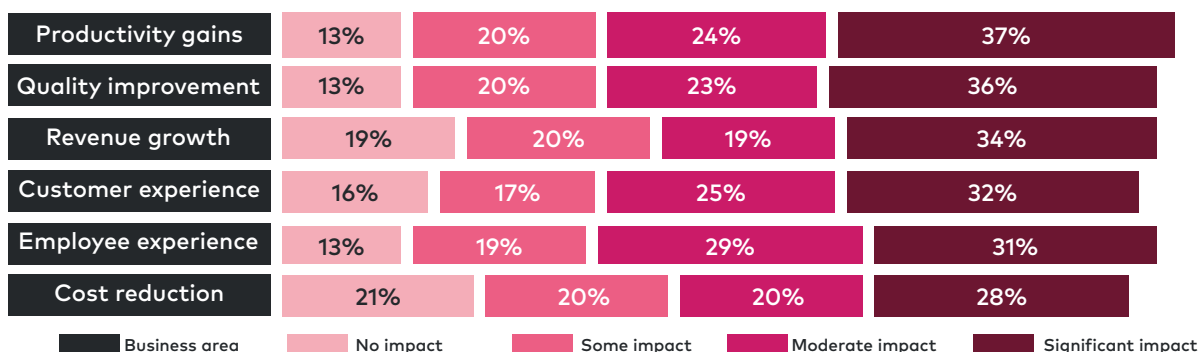


2. Operational gains are clearer than financial returns from AI.

AI is having the clearest impact on operational areas like productivity and quality, where 36–37% report significant gains. Financial outcomes are less consistent, with 19–21% reporting no impact on revenue or cost reduction.

- Strongest impact: productivity and quality
- Least consistent: revenue growth and cost reduction

AI business impact by dimension



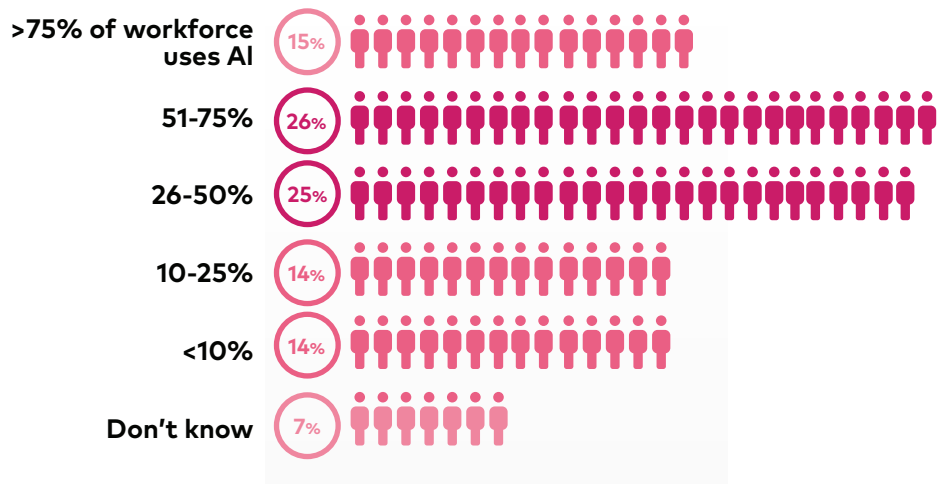
Q: To what extent has AI adoption delivered measurable business results for your organization?

3. Workforce AI usage is quite varied.

There is significant variation in how deeply AI has penetrated different workforces. The largest group (26%) say 51–75% of their workforce regularly uses AI. But a nearly equal proportion describe much lower penetration: 14% say fewer than 10% use AI and 7% don't know. This spread suggests AI deployment is far from uniform, even within a senior-skewed, technology-engaged sample.

Proportion of workforce regularly using AI tools

Q: What percentage of your organization's workforce regularly uses AI tools in their daily work?

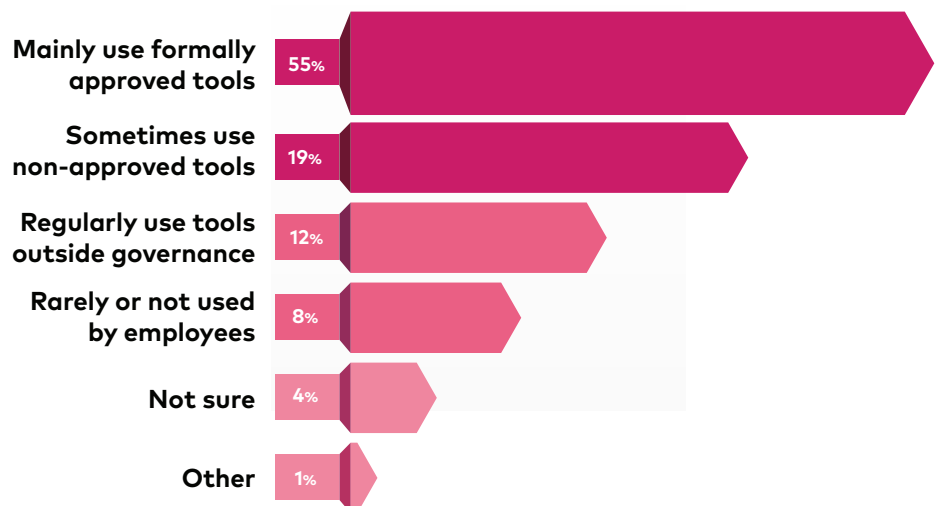


4. Governance: Shadow AI is a real and present challenge.

A majority (55%) say employees mainly use formally approved AI tools. However, nearly one in three respondents describes some level of shadow AI, employees using tools outside governance frameworks either sometimes (19%) or regularly (12%). Only 8% say AI tools are rarely or never used by employees. Together, these findings point to significant governance gaps in a meaningful proportion of organizations.

How AI tools are being used by employees

Q: Which statement best describes how AI tools are currently being used by employees in your organization?



5. Skills, training, and clarity are the most common barriers to AI adoption.

Respondents selected their top three barriers from a list. Lack of employee skills or confidence is the clear top barrier (47%), followed by insufficient training (32%). Governance uncertainty and fear of job displacement are tied at 31%. Workflow redesign challenges (21%) and technology limitations (19%) round out the top five. Notably, the leading barriers are consistently human and cultural rather than technical, pointing to a people-first adoption challenge.

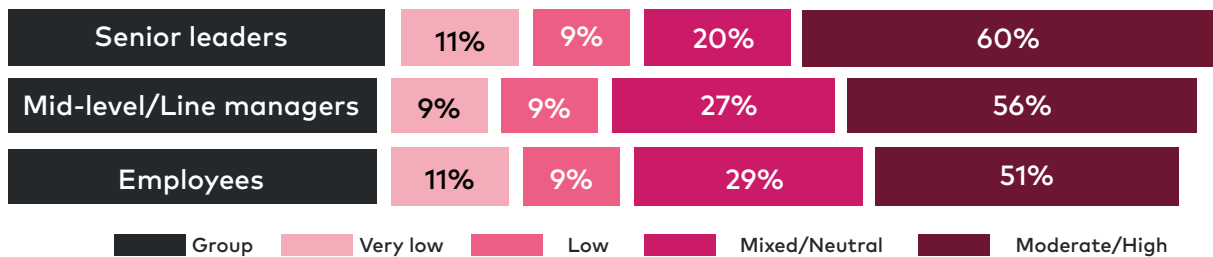
Top barriers to AI adoption



Q: What are the TOP 3 barriers to AI adoption in your organization?

6. Enthusiasm for AI is slightly higher among leaders than employees, but varies at all levels.

Respondents rated AI enthusiasm across three groups in their organizations. Senior leaders are perceived as the most enthusiastic: 60% are rated moderate or high, compared to 56% for mid-level managers and 51% for employees. This nine-point enthusiasm gap between the top and bottom of the organization is a consistent pattern. However, approximately 10–11% of respondents rate enthusiasm as very low across all three groups, indicating pockets of resistance exist at every level, not just at the frontline.

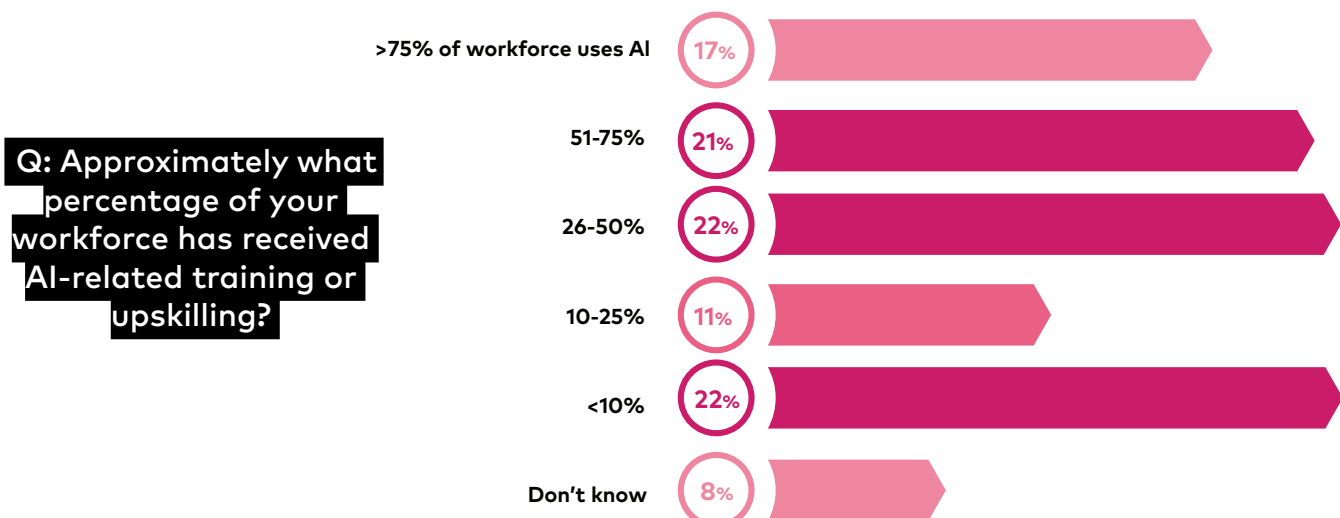


Q : How would you rate current enthusiasm for using AI in day-to-day work among the following groups in your organization?

7. Many organizations are deploying AI faster than they are training employees.

There is a striking gap between how widely AI tools have been deployed and how widely people have been trained to use them. When asked what proportion of their workforce regularly uses AI (Q3), 65% said more than a quarter. But when asked about training coverage, only 38% said more than half their workforce has received AI training and 22% said fewer than 10% have been trained. This deployment-to-training gap likely explains why skills and confidence rank as the top adoption barrier: tools are available before the capability to use them effectively exists.

Proportion of workforce regularly using AI tools

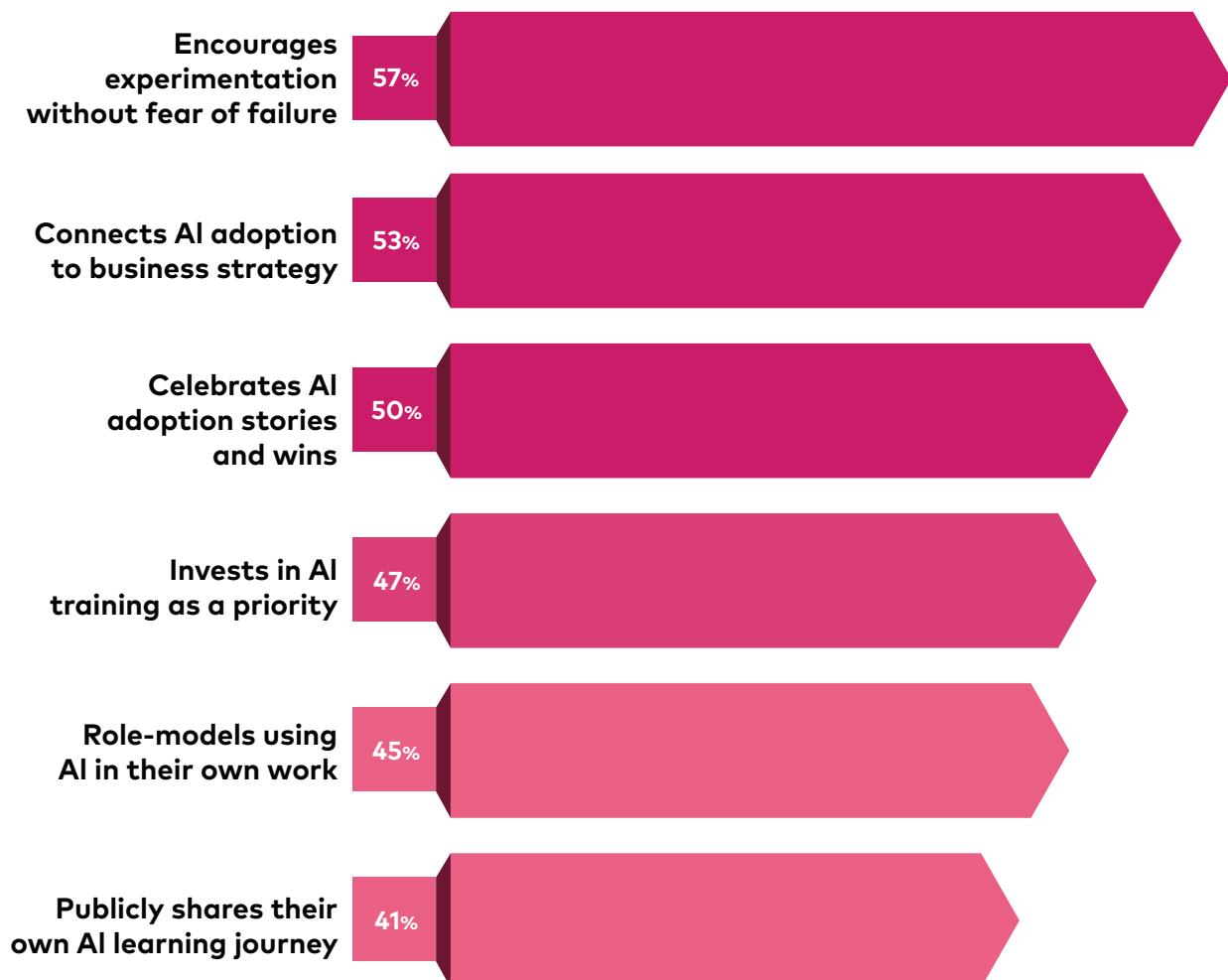


Q: Approximately what percentage of your workforce has received AI-related training or upskilling?

8. Leaders encourage AI use more often than they visibly model it.

Respondents rated how frequently they see 6 AI-related leadership behaviors. The most commonly observed behavior is encouraging experimentation without fear of failure (57% say often or consistently), a largely private, cultural signal. The least common is publicly sharing one's own AI learning journey (41%), a visible role-modelling behavior. Role-modelling AI use in day-to-day work (45%) and investing in training as a stated priority (47%) also score relatively low. Leaders appear to be creating psychological safety but not yet leading visibly from the front.

Leadership AI behaviors — seen often or consistently

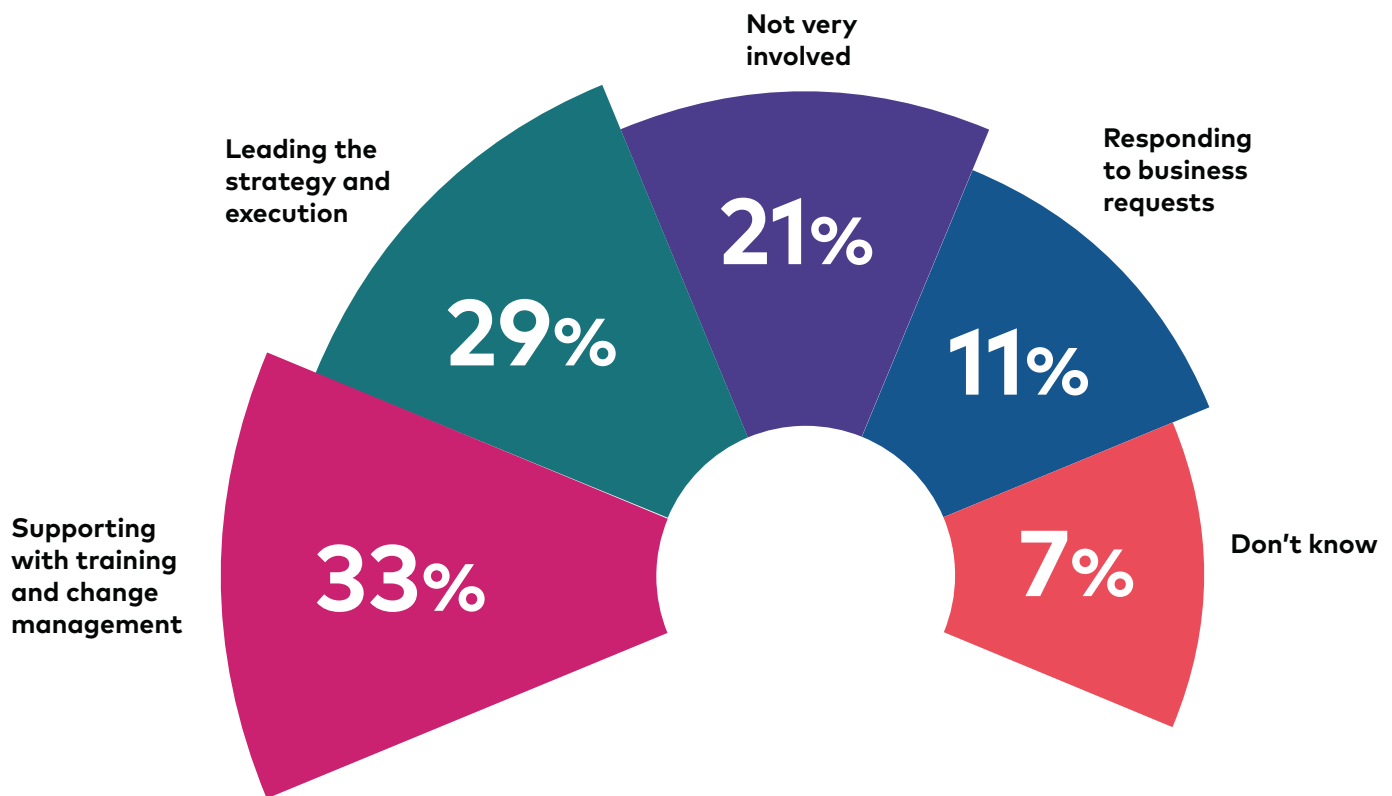


Q: Please rate how frequently you see the below leadership behaviors at your organization.

9. Some HR teams are leading AI efforts, while others remain peripheral.

HR's involvement in AI adoption varies considerably. The most common role is supporting training and change management (33%). Nearly a third (29%) say HR leads the AI strategy and execution outright. However, one in five (21%) says HR is not very involved at all. The spread from 'leading strategy' to 'not involved' suggests there is no established norm for HR's role in AI adoption and significant untapped potential in organizations where HR remains peripheral.

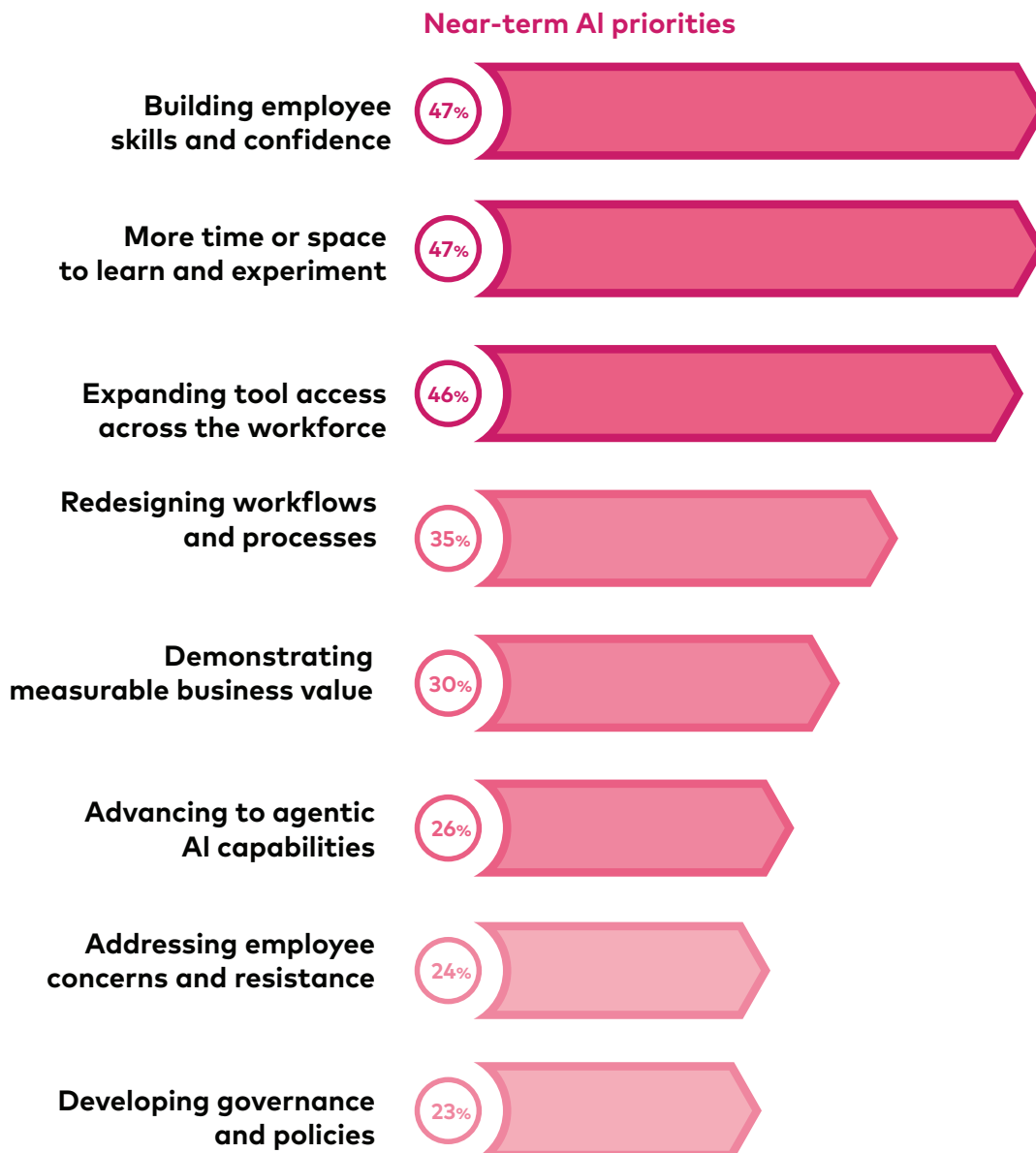
HR's role in AI adoption



Q: How would you describe HR's role in your organization's AI adoption?

10. Near-term AI priorities focus on workforce readiness and adoption.

When asked about top priorities for the coming year, respondents pointed overwhelmingly to people enablement. The top three: building employee skills and confidence (47%), creating time or space to learn and experiment (47%), and expanding tool access (46%) are tightly clustered and all focused on equipping people rather than building new technology. Redesigning workflows (35%) and demonstrating measurable business value (30%) follow. Advanced capabilities such as agentic AI (26%) and governance development (23%) rank lower, consistent with most organizations still being in early-to-mid adoption stages.



Q: Over the next 12 months, what are your organization's top priorities for AI adoption?

Strategy made
personal.

