LexisNexis®

Future of Work Report: 2026

Generative AI: Tool, Colleague, or Liability?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Artificial intelligence (AI) is embedded in daily work across most organizations. As adoption becomes the norm, the challenge for leadership has shifted from convincing employees to use generative AI (genAI) to ensuring it is used and governed responsibly.

Recent studies show leaders believe they are ahead of the curve in their AI journey. Yet, our research among 1,400 professionals across over 20 industries worldwide offers a different perspective: Teams are often less sophisticated and more exposed than they think.

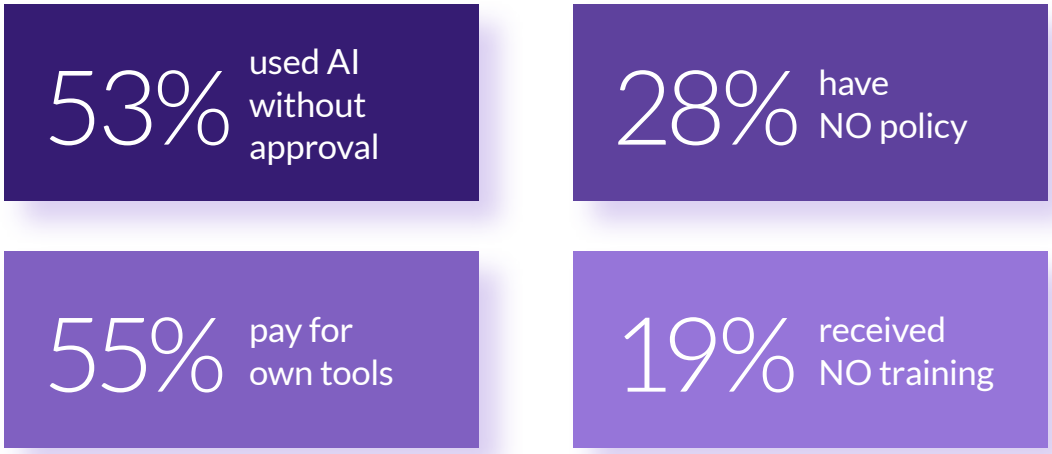
The LexisNexis 2026 Future of Work report asks a critical question:

> *Is the development of AI governance, training, and education keeping pace with how quickly genAI is being adopted and maturing?*

Increasing Governance Risk

Whether organizational leaders like it or not, generative AI (genAI) adoption is growing. While half of professionals surveyed report at least frequent genAI use, the infrastructure to support this hasn't kept pace. Specifically, 53% have used genAI without formal approval, 28% report their company has no genAI policy, 55% pay for their own genAI tools (with 60% of those using them for work), and 19% received no genAI training whatsoever.

The Governance Crisis



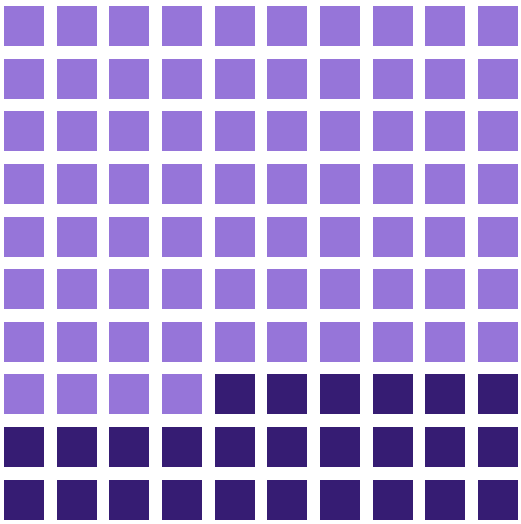
Overconfidence as a Liability

Most (64%) professionals claim to be very or extremely confident using genAI responsibly. These high confidence levels, combined with low understanding of risks, can create significant liability risk. Employees trust genAI outcomes but don't understand the process, extending trust appropriate for brainstorming to high-stakes deliverables without proper validation.

Professionals are using genAI more than ever, but many don't fully comprehend the data sources, logic, or ethical safeguards behind the tools on which they rely. They trust outputs they can't consistently verify, creating legal, security, and reputational risk for their organizations.

Training Itself Isn't Enough to Escape Risk

While 82% of professionals receive some form of training (up from 72% in 2025), training without adequate tools may be accelerating shadow AI* adoption. Those with mandatory training show higher unauthorized usage rates than those with no training, indicating frustrated employees seeking solutions outside inadequate official channels. In addition to mandated training, organizations should leverage only credible, approved tools that are both secure and provide clear validation of outcomes.



74%

of professionals with mandatory training used genAI at work without formal approval

The professional workforce as a whole appears ready and eager to adopt genAI, but leaders within these organizations simply haven't kept pace with governance frameworks and training opportunities.

The defining shift of 2026 is the evolution from asking *"Can genAI do this?"* to **"Should we trust how it does this and are we protected?"**

*Shadow AI refers to employees using generative AI tools for work without formal approval, governance, or oversight.

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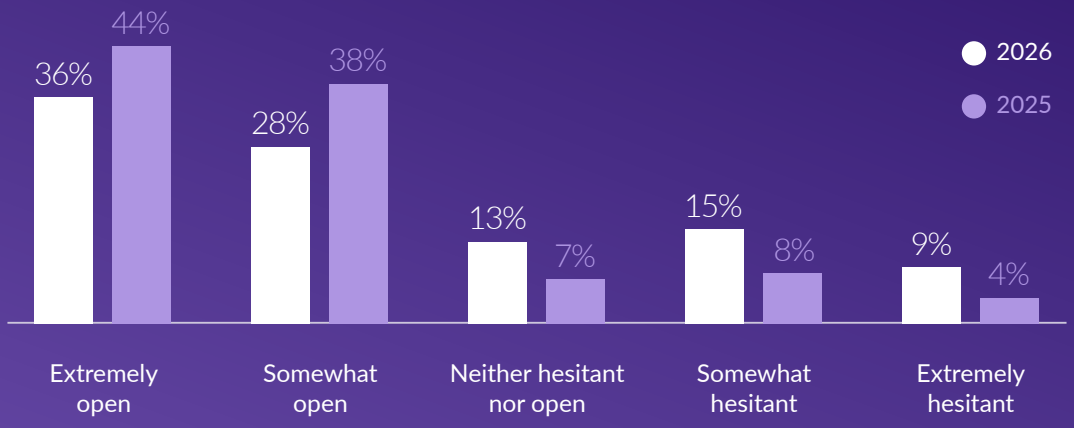
2025 VERSUS 2026: CAPABILITY TO CREDIBILITY

Workplace Adoption

Enthusiasm for genAI has softened year over year, with an 18-point decline from 2025 to 2026 in those open to its use. While a majority remain receptive to its benefits, increased awareness of how models are trained and how data is stored or reused has led to greater scrutiny of genAI governance and responsible use.

Adoption Sentiment Patterns



Confidence Levels

The 2025 report examined respondents' confidence levels in genAI's capabilities. As usage has increased over time, safety and accuracy concerns rise with it. This year, the survey's focus reflected increasing emphasis on governance and ethical application. Respondents were asked to reflect on their own ability to use genAI responsibly.

2026 Confidence in Responsible GenAI Usage

64%

very or extremely confident using genAI responsibly

25%

rely on genAI to take over entire tasks

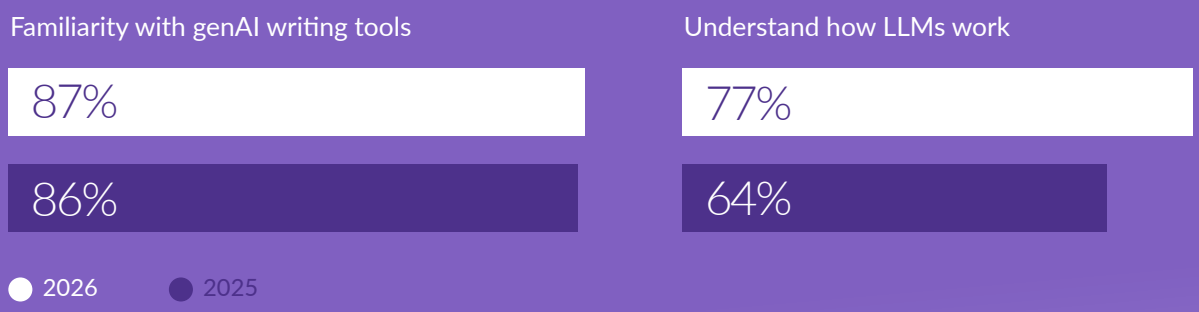
11%

not confident in using genAI responsibly

Technical Understanding

Technical understanding of genAI fundamentals has grown significantly year over year, with knowledge of how large language models (LLMs) work jumping from 64% in 2025 to 77% in 2026, suggesting employees are moving beyond surface-level familiarity to grasp underlying mechanics.

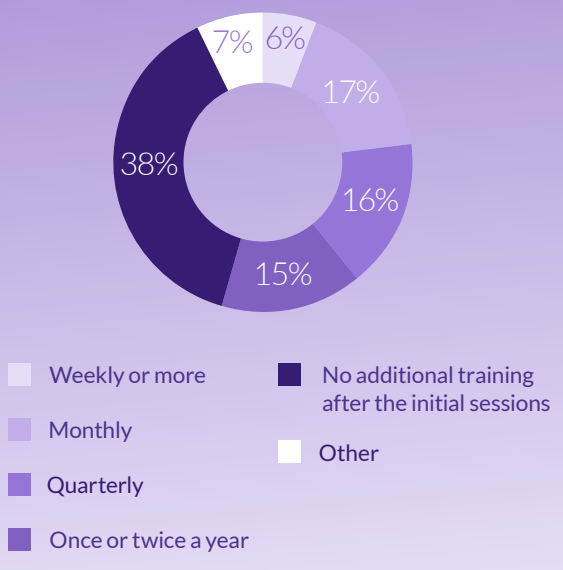
GenAI Comprehension



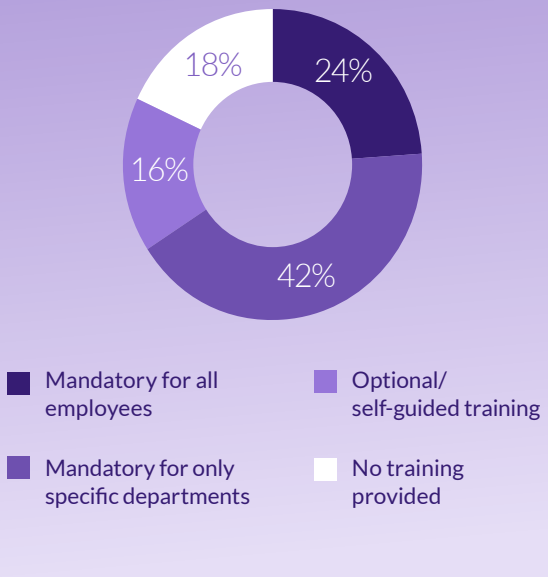
Training

While the 2025 survey measured how often employees receive genAI training and the 2026 survey examined the formats used to train employees on genAI tools and their use, both sets of results point to continued variation in how organizations approach genAI workforce enablement. Across both years, a meaningful proportion of organizations offered structured or ongoing employee genAI training, while a smaller (yet notable) segment provided minimal or no training on AI at all.

2025 Employee GenAI Training Frequency



2026 Employee GenAI Training Formats



KEY FINDING 1

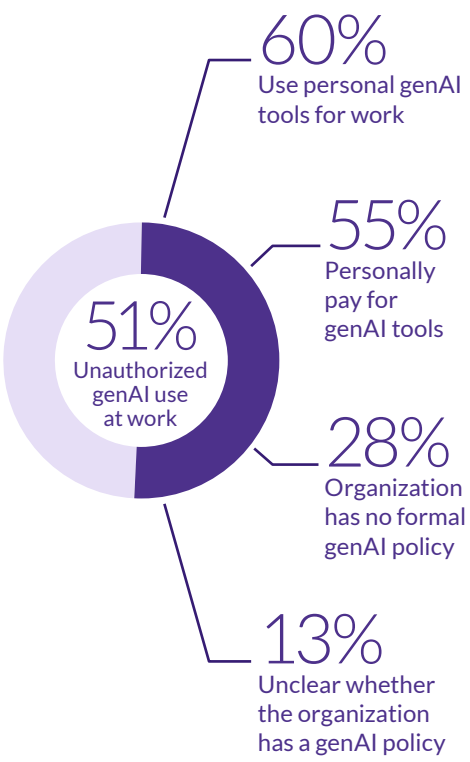
The Governance Crisis:
Leadership's Biggest Blind Spot

The Shadow AI Problem

Many organizational leaders underestimate the use of shadow AI* among their employees. Employees are not waiting for their company to provide them with the formal genAI tools they need for productivity. As a result, a majority are using their own paid personal tools for work. A concerning number (42%) also say their company either has no genAI policy whatsoever or is uncertain of one exists.

> *We need to limit its use and availability until it has been properly vetted and deemed trustworthy… and does not impinge on the privacy of the constituents in our database."*
>
> *Response from* LexisNexis Future of Work Survey 2026

The Shadow AI Problem



The industries with professionals stating the lowest confidence in their abilities to safely use genAI are PR, media, and communications (only **32%** reporting confidence).

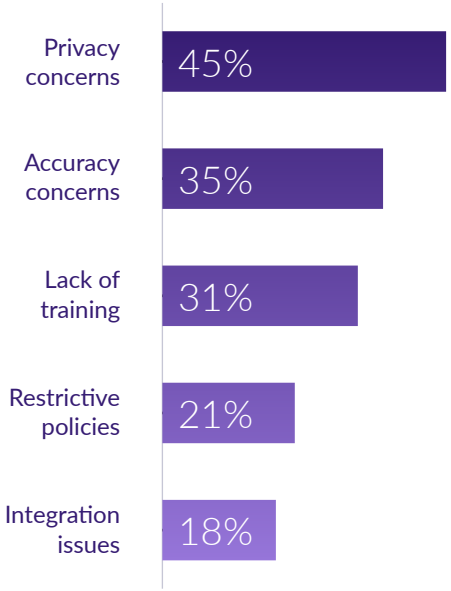
*Shadow AI refers to employees using generative AI tools for work without formal approval, governance, or oversight.

The Readiness Gap Creates the Risk Gap

The top barriers to adoption are organizational challenges, rather than technical limitations. The obstacles employees cite include:

- Leadership gaps to provide secure alternatives
- Validation protocols
- Training investment
- Tools that integrate with workflows

Top Barriers to GenAI Adoption



> *Adopting its (genAI) use has been a huge time suck, particularly since it really can't do what we expect, need, or want it to do."*
>
> *Response from* LexisNexis Future of Work Survey 2026

Most professionals (83%) are willing to embrace genAI at work, but they're doing so without training, approved tools, or governance frameworks. The result: maximum risk exposure with minimal institutional control.

The U.S. professionals in our survey are at the lower end of usage and adoption, with **39%** still in the early experimentation phase. Among those who have adopted it, **41%** report authorized usage. For their UK counterparts, **56%** say they more frequently or always use AI, especially for faster decision-making.

LEADERSHIP ACTIONS TO TAKE NOW

Half of your workforce could be operating genAI outside your control, using unvetted tools, processing data they can't protect, and creating outputs they can't validate.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

Below are **10 action steps** leaders should take now to move towards responsible, governed genAI usage.

STEP 01

Acknowledge Shadow AI as a Reality

Recognize that employees are already using unvetted genAI tools to meet unmet productivity needs. Treat this not as defiance, but as a signal that current resources and guidance are insufficient. Visibility is the first step toward governance.

STEP 02

Create an AI Governance Council

Set up a cross-functional group empowered to make timely decisions about genAI use. This body should set standards, review new tools, maintain policies, and coordinate risk mitigation across legal, IT, security, HR, and operations.

STEP 03

Conduct an Immediate Audit of GenAI Use and Risk Hotspots

Map where genAI is already in play, including which tools employees are using, what data is being exposed, and where governance gaps pose the highest risk. Use this insight to prioritize near-term interventions and inform your governance strategy.

STEP 04

Publish a Clear, Accessible GenAI Policy

Develop a concise, practical policy that employees can easily understand and apply. Outline approved use cases, prohibited practices, and examples that illustrate expectations. Communicate it widely and revisit it frequently.

STEP 05

Fast-Track Deployment of Approved, Secure Tools

Provide sanctioned genAI tools that meet real workflow needs. Accelerating access to vetted solutions is one of the most effective ways to reduce shadow AI use and improve organizational control.

STEP 06

Introduce Rapid-Response Validation Protocols

Build lightweight processes employees can use to verify AI-generated outputs. Tailor guidelines to varying risk levels and create clear escalation pathways for higher-stakes work.

STEP 07

Invest in AI Literacy and Skill Enablement

Shift training from a long-term aspiration to an immediate organizational priority. Focus on practical competencies: responsible use, prompt refinement, model limitations, and data protection principles.

STEP 08

Integrate AI Into Existing Workflows

Choose tools and processes that support how employees already work. Governance succeeds when it reduces friction and enhances productivity, rather than introducing parallel or burdensome processes.

STEP 09

Establish a Secure Innovation Sandbox

Provide a controlled environment where employees can safely explore and experiment with genAI technologies. This encourages innovation while maintaining appropriate safeguards.

STEP 10

Define Success Metrics and Iterate Regularly

Track progress through measurable indicators such as reduced shadow AI usage, adoption of approved tools, policy comprehension, and risk incidents. Review governance performance frequently and adapt as technologies evolve.

KEY FINDING 2

The Overconfidence Risk: Are Employees as Ready as They Think Are? Probably Not.

The Confidence-Competence Disconnect

Most professionals claim they're confident in using genAI responsibly. Yet this confidence is undermined by those who also use non-approved, personal tools for work without fully understanding security risks. This could mean professionals aren't confident in their personal tool's security (e.g., ChatGPT), but they're perhaps overconfident in their ability to navigate that risk. Even more concerning is the lack of trust; while employees demonstrate high confidence in their ability to use genAI, they simultaneously express significant doubts about outputs.

Trust Gaps in GenAI Outputs

Even among employees who report confidence using genAI, trust in accuracy, transparency, and usage remains uneven.

Percentages reflect responses across multiple survey questions.

Confidence vs. Understanding

Employees are confident in their usage but uncertain about the outputs they're relying on—a dangerous disconnect where professionals make decisions based on genAI recommendations they don't fully trust or understand.

> *We are expected to use it, yet there [are] no guidelines for its use or demonstrative value that makes its use worthwhile."*
>
> *Response from* LexisNexis Future of Work Survey 2026

AI Agents Are Scaling Faster Than Employee Understanding

Employees demonstrate high confidence in their ability to use genAI, yet simultaneously express significant doubts about the reliability and transparency of outputs they receive. This disconnect of trusting their own judgment while questioning the tool's process, creates risk when employees don't adjust their approach based on the stakes of their work. Leaders should consider that their productive teams might be sacrificing accuracy for efficiency.

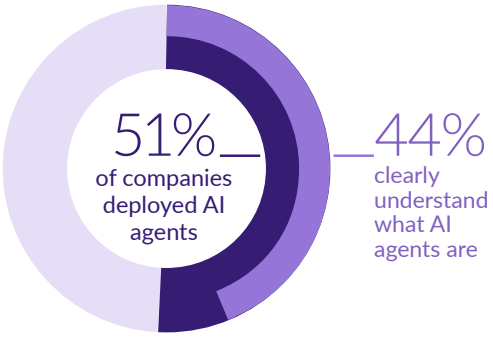
One of the most tech-savvy regions among our survey respondents is Brazil, which could also become the riskiest. Most (**78%**) of professionals report they use personal genAI tools without approval. Organizational leaders should prioritize providing vetted genAI tools to their employees.

The overconfidence problem extends to other emerging technologies like AI agents, which are autonomous systems capable of executing multi-step workflows.

Organizations use AI agents for critical workflows including data analysis (44%), research and customer support (40% each), and scheduling (33%). Yet deployment has outpaced understanding.

While **51%** of respondents say their organizations have launched internal AI agents, only **44%** of employees clearly understand what AI agents are. The governance gap widens dramatically when autonomous agents operate without adequate employee understanding or organizational oversight **26%** have minimal/poor understanding of AI agents and **13%** don't know if company has agents.

AI Agent Deployment-Understanding Gap



LEADERSHIP ACTIONS TO TAKE NOW

Both executive and technology leadership should reevaluate how their teams are claiming to understand genAI, instead of just how they're using it.

Redefine "AI competence" to include knowing when not to trust it, understanding agents versus assistants, and recognizing when validation is required.

Train on limitations including what genAI can't do reliably, how to recognize errors, when human expertise is required, and critically, the difference between genAI tools and autonomous agents.

Implement risk-tiered validation with low-stakes work requiring spot checks, medium-stakes work requiring source verification, high-stakes work requiring expert validation, and critical-stakes work demanding multi-layer review.

Measure actual competence through scenario-based testing and work audits, not self-reported confidence.

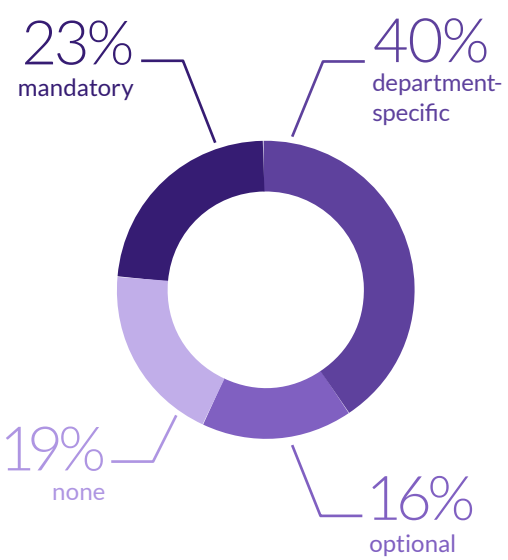
KEY FINDING 3

Training Builds Confidence, But Access Remains Uneven

The Training Landscape in 2026

The percentage of employees receiving no genAI training dropped from 28% to 19% in the past year, signifying a positive change in access to training. However, there's still more ground to cover, especially considering the increasing pace of genAI usage levels. Only 23% of professionals received mandatory genAI usage training for all employees. The majority say AI training is limited to just certain departments, creating inequality and inconsistency across the organization. Another 16% received only optional or self-guided training, which proves inadequate for organizational readiness.

AI-Specific Training Coverage Breakdown



German survey respondents report high confidence (**68%**), but **42%** say one of their biggest challenges in genAI adoption is the lack of training available. High self-confidence in genAI use appears to coexist with a training deficit, signaling reliance on informal learning rather than structured organizational guidance.

France combines strong expectations for responsible AI with uneven governance. While **80%** value human oversight of AI-generated outputs, **53%** report using genAI at work without formal approval, pointing to a gap between intent and execution.

With 52% of professionals reporting they use genAI frequently or always, leaders should be concerned that only 23% report receiving mandatory training over the past year.

Where Training Exists, Confidence Increases, But So Does Unauthorized Usage

Training has a measurable impact on employee behavior and attitudes toward genAI. Professionals who received mandatory AI training demonstrate significantly higher confidence levels (79% report being very or extremely confident) compared to just 22% of those with no AI training.

> However, the gap between training and governance compliance reveals an alarming risk: **74%** of AI-trained employees report instances of unauthorized AI usage, compared to just **17%** of untrained employees.

This counterintuitive finding reveals an important dynamic: AI training increases both confidence and usage, but without corresponding policy enforcement and adequate approved tools, it accelerates adoption outside official frameworks. AI-trained employees understand genAI's potential and want to use it productively. When organizational tools are inadequate or policies are restrictive, these knowledgeable employees find their own solutions rather than remaining unproductive.

The AI Adoption Curve in Organizations

AI adoption within organizations increasingly mirrors the classic innovation adoption bell curve. A small group of innovators and some early adopters (roughly 23–40%) receive formal training, grasp both the capabilities and limitations of AI tools, and confidently leverage them to improve productivity. The majority, representing some early and late majority (about 60–77%) receive limited or no structured AI training, have lower confidence, and either avoid genAI entirely or engage with it through inconsistent, self-taught experimentation. Both segments introduce risk: early adopters often bypass official policies or controls (74% report unauthorized usage), while the slower adopters miss out on efficiency gains or apply genAI ineffectively.

> The academic and nonprofit industry reports one of the lowest rates of AI training (**33%** say they received none), which contributes to their large concern over genAI misinformation (**56%**). In order to build trust within this industry, leaders need to provide the ability to allow users to verify and validate data.

Professionals in the more risk-averse industries tend to have genAI policies in place, like those in professional services. For example, **78%** of respondents in the professional services industry say their organization has a policy in place, most likely due to their largest cited concern lying in data security (**52%**).

LEADERSHIP ACTIONS TO TAKE NOW

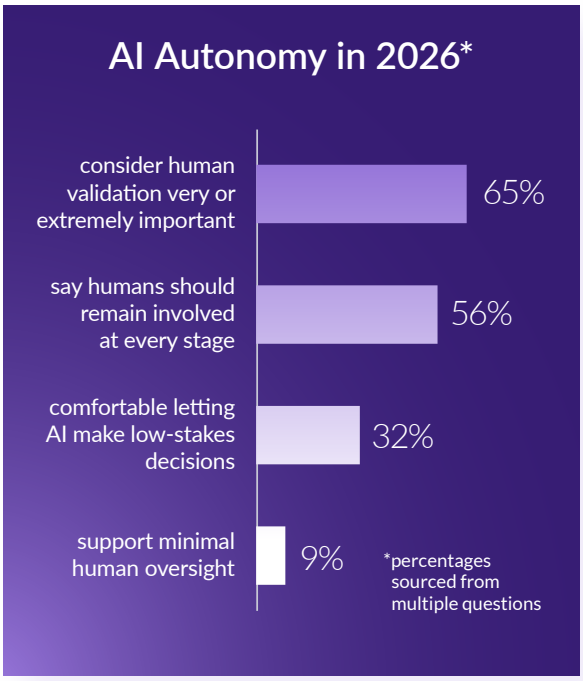
Organizations should make ongoing AI training mandatory for every role, seniority, and department. Additionally, develop role-specific advanced AI training for at least half of your workforce, prioritized by risk exposure. Training without approved tools creates informed rule-breakers instead of uninformed rule-followers. Give them the tools to do what you taught them, or they'll find their own.

Organizations need five integrated elements working together:

Human Judgment Remains Essential

Is your organization defining "low-stakes" consistently, or is each employee deciding individually? Thirty-nine percent of professionals treat genAI as a collaborator or partner, representing an evolved relationship where genAI has a "voice" in decisions. Another 32% use it for basic assistance only, maintaining clear human control. Yet most agree human validation is imperative when using genAI.

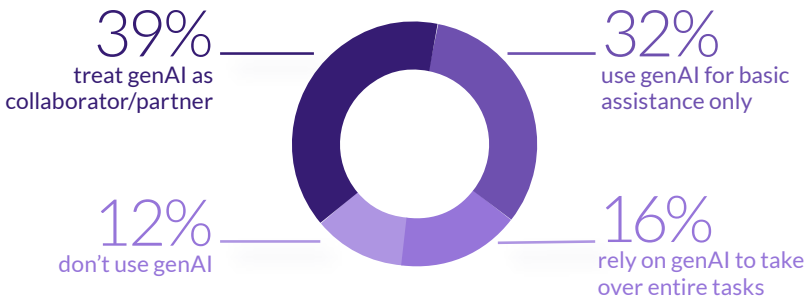
> *It's important to have human interaction at every stage. The more we use it and see desired results the more likely we are to take small steps back with human auditing, but there will probably have to always be some human interaction, especially at final stages."*
>
> *Response from* LexisNexis Future of Work Survey 2026



These patterns raise critical questions for leadership:

- Do you know which 16% of your workforce is using genAI for entire tasks?
- Have you explicitly defined which tasks in your organization can be safely automated?
- Are any of these employees using full autonomy in high-stakes areas without organizational awareness?
- What happens when a fully automated task encounters an edge case or novel situation outside its training?

How Professionals Work With GenAI



Looking Forward: **2027** and Beyond

Credibility Is Now Crucial for Both Employees and Those You Serve

The data in this report reveals professionals are embracing genAI's capabilities, but organizations haven't caught up with governance, transparency, or credible tools to support the increased usage. This gap between adoption and accountability will define 2026 and determine who leads in 2027.

The question professionals, clients, regulators, and boards are asking has evolved significantly:

2025

"Can AI do this?" — proving technical capability through pilots

2026

"Should we trust how it does this?" — proving safety through deployment with guardrails

2027

"How do we scale trusted genAI across the enterprise?" — proving credibility at scale

Organizations with answers to the 2027 question will lead. Those still asking 2026 questions will fall behind, not because they lack capability, but because they can't prove credibility when it matters most.

The Widening Divide

Organizations are splitting into two groups based on AI governance maturity:

Mature frameworks: Those with comprehensive AI policies (**72%**), universal AI training, enterprise genAI tools meeting employee needs, board-level oversight, and transparent data sourcing.

Immature frameworks: The organizations with no AI policy (**28%**) or AI training (**19%**), and those whose employees operate outside approval processes (**53%**) and pay for personal genAI tools (**55%**) because official options are inadequate.

The gap between these two groups will widen exponentially throughout 2027. Organizations with mature frameworks can innovate faster because governance enables rather than restricts. They can say "yes" to genAI use cases that others must prohibit.

Those with immature frameworks face mounting risks:

- Compliance failures as regulatory oversight tightens
- Client trust erosion as buyers demand demonstrated genAI governance
- Talent exodus to better-equipped competitors
- Competitive losses to organizations that can prove credibility alongside capability.

What type of AI Adopter are you? Take the **AI Capability Quiz** to evaluate your organization's ability to innovate faster in 2027 and beyond.

Predicted 2027 Priorities: *What Leading Organizations Are Planning*

Based on this data and emerging market demands, leading organizations are focusing on five critical areas:

Universal AI literacy as core professional competency through mandatory and regular training

Human oversight embedded in automated workflows through structured validation and audit processes

Investment in credible, enterprise-grade AI tools with built-in validation

Security and compliance infrastructure as the foundation for AI implementation

Governance maturation to match usage reality and industry-specific standards and accountability

The Bottom Line

We're at the precipice of an exciting and dramatic shift in how organizations leverage artificial intelligence. 2026 is the year AI becomes less about capability and more about credibility. Success in 2027 depends on matching governance maturity to adoption speed. Organizations acting decisively in Q4 2026 will have 18-month governance maturity advantage by mid-2027.

Will your organization lead by both capability and credibility, or scramble to catch up after a crisis forces your hand?

Learn how LexisNexis can support your genAI journey.

Help your organization make the most of genAI. Talk to a specialist today about our AI-enabled solutions and extensive data universe including data approved for genAI use cases.

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APPENDIX

Explore Industry-Specific Insights and Next Steps

Access industry-specific reports to understand what the Future of Work means for your organization, assess genAI readiness, and continue learning with practical guidance.

Industry Reports

Each report builds on the core findings of this study, highlighting adoption patterns, risks, and opportunities by sector.

- Management Consulting
- Financial Services
- Media & PR

Access your industry report

Discover Your AI Persona

Organizations are at different stages of adoption. Take the AI Capability Quiz to understand where your organization stands and identify potential next steps.

AI Capability Quiz

Additional Resources

Continue learning with research, blogs, and practical guidance tailored to your industry, including best practices for responsible AI use, governance, and AI output validation.

See what to explore next

Methodology

To examine how generative AI is influencing the modern workplace, we conducted a global survey designed to capture current behaviours, challenges, and attitudes toward AI adoption. The research explored how professionals use genAI in their daily work, how organizations are responding, and where gaps persist in governance, training, and responsible use.

The survey ran from 8–17 September 2025, collecting responses from 1,400 professionals across more than 20 industries worldwide.

Participants were recruited through Sago, using random sampling methods to ensure a diverse and representative mix of regions, sectors, and seniority levels.

All responses were gathered in full compliance with GDPR standards, with stringent measures in place to protect confidentiality and ensure transparent handling of personal data.

Survey Design and Measures

Questionnaire focused on:

- GenAI adoption, sentiment, and frequency of use
- Governance frameworks, policies, and "shadow AI" behaviour
- Training access, type (mandatory, department-specific, optional), and impact
- Confidence, technical understanding, and risk perception
- Use and understanding of AI agents/agentic AI

Mix of single- and multi-select questions, Likert-scale confidence and sentiment measures, and open-ended qualitative responses

Key Metrics & Comparative Data (2025 vs. 2026)

- Adoption sentiment (extremely open, somewhat open, hesitant segments)
- Usage frequency (frequent/always vs. occasional vs. non-users)
- Understanding of LLMs and familiarity with genAI writing tools
- Training exposure (mandatory, department-specific, optional/self-guided, none)
- Confidence in using AI responsibly (new in 2026 vs. 2025 baseline)

Governance & Risk Indicators

Governance "crisis" indicators:

- 53% used genAI without formal approval
- 28% report no genAI policy
- 55% pay for their own AI tools; 60% of those use them for work
- 19% received no AI training

Shadow AI and readiness gap measures, including:

- 51% unauthorized usage
- 42% unsure whether a policy exists in their organization

Training vs. unauthorized usage:

- 74% with mandatory training report unauthorized use
- 17% of untrained employees report unauthorized use

Confidence, Understanding & AI Agents

Confidence vs. behaviour indicators:

- 64% very or extremely confident using AI responsibly
- 60% use paid personal tools for work, but only 50% trust those tools' security

Trust in outcomes and validation needs:

- 52% want improved accuracy to build trust
- 48% want transparency in how AI reaches conclusions
- 36% least confident in understanding data sources
- 34% least confident knowing when not to use AI

AI agents deployment–understanding gap:

- 51% say their organization has launched internal AI agents
- 44% clearly understand what AI agents are
- 26% report minimal/poor understanding
- 13% don't know if their company uses agents

Training Landscape & Adoption Curve

Training coverage in 2026:

- 23.75% mandatory for all employees
- 41.50% department-specific
- 16.39% optional/self-guided
- 18.36% none

Relationship between training, confidence, and shadow AI:

- 79% of those with mandatory training are very/extremely confident
- Training correlates with higher usage and higher unauthorized usage
- Conceptual adoption curve: innovators/early adopters vs. late majority and non-users, and associated risk patterns

Regional Highlights

United States

- 39% still in early experimentation phase
- 59% report AI policies in place
- 41% report unauthorized usage

United Kingdom

- 56% frequently or always use AI
- Top motivation: faster decision-making (52%)

Germany

- 68% very/extremely confident
- 42% cite lack of training as a top challenge
- 52% list data security as their biggest concern

Brazil

- 78% use personal tools without approval
- 81% pay for personal tools they use for work
- 70% say they use these tools "all the time"

France

- 62% are familiar with agentic AI, but only 7% have used AI agents at work
- 80% value human oversight of AI-generated outputs
- 82% say a vendor's AI Code of Ethics is important
- 53% report using genAI at work without formal approval

How Professionals Work With AI

- 39% treat AI as a collaborator or partner
- 32% use AI for basic assistance only
- 16% rely on AI to take over entire tasks
- 12% do not use genAI

Autonomy and oversight views:

- 65% consider human validation very or extremely important
- 56% say humans should remain involved at every stage
- 32% comfortable letting AI make low-stakes decisions
- 9% support minimal human oversight

Definitions & Terminology

- Shadow AI: Use of non-approved or personal AI tools for work without formal authorization
- Agentic AI/AI agents: Autonomous systems capable of executing multi-step workflows with limited human intervention
- Unauthorized usage: Any use of AI tools not covered by organizational policies or conducted without formal approval
- Low-, medium-, high-, and critical-stakes work: Internal classification used to frame levels of validation and oversight required

Limitations

- Online survey sample may over-represent digitally active professionals
- Self-reported confidence and behaviour may be subject to bias
- Some segments (e.g., PR/media/comms) have smaller sample sizes and are noted as such
- Cross-sectional data reflects perceptions and behaviours at the time of fieldwork (8–17 September 2025) and may evolve rapidly as AI adoption accelerates
- Different questions from previous years