



Corporate AI Talent Study **2026**



2026 Corporate AI Talent Study

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Study Key Takeaways.....	4
Survey Questions/Answers/Takeaways	
AI adoption to-date and AI Adoption Stages.....	5
AI usage by function.....	6
AI usage in daily work.....	7
AI talent strategies.....	8
AI hiring by role.....	9
AI hiring difficulties.....	10
AI talent gaps.....	11
Confidence in using AI tools.....	12
Most critical skills for AI success.....	13
Types of AI training.....	14
How employees learn AI.....	15
How AI is impacting workforce.....	16
AI impact on hiring.....	17
What percentage of roles will be impacted by AI.....	18
Study Classification Demographics	19-20
Conclusion: Looking Ahead: Building the AI-Ready Workforce.....	21-22
About the AI Leaders Council.....	23

2026 Corporate AI Talent Study

Executive Summary

Artificial intelligence is rapidly changing how work gets done, but many organizations are still determining how to prepare their workforce for that shift. The 2026 Corporate AI Talent Study is based on a national survey conducted by the [AI Leaders Council](#) between June and August 2026, with more than 300 executives across North America participating. Respondents represent a broad range of industries, organization sizes, and leadership roles spanning technology, operations, and the executive suite.

The findings reveal that AI Adoption Stages™ changed since January of this year (2026), when “Absent” or no AI initiatives were 13%, and now in September 2026 are only 3%. The difference progressing to “Exploratory” AI that includes experimentation and pilots which increased by 6 percentage points, and “Operational” AI stages including limited to scaled production, which increased by 4 percentage points. However, fully embedded AI stayed the same over the time period at 3%.

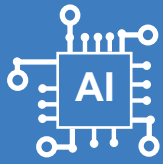
Regarding AI talent, the study identified a significant gap between AI adoption and workforce readiness. Approximately 54% of respondents report AI is already being used in production, yet 33% have no defined AI talent strategy and only 37% provide formal AI training. Rather than relying primarily on external hiring, organizations are focusing on their existing workforce, with 44% identifying employee upskilling as their primary AI talent strategy.

The skills organizations need are also becoming clearer. Business translation and use-case design ranks as the largest AI talent gap, while critical thinking and validation (65%) and automation and workflow design (61%) are considered the most important workforce skills for the AI era. Meanwhile, 38% report that AI is already changing existing roles, and 52% expect more than one-quarter of organizational roles to be significantly affected within the next two years.

The results suggest that AI talent is becoming an enterprise-wide workforce issue rather than simply a technology recruiting challenge. As adoption expands, organizations will need to place greater emphasis on structured training, practical AI skills, job redesign, and workforce planning to ensure employee capabilities keep pace with technology investment.

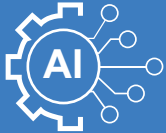
We encourage readers to use the findings from this inaugural **2026 Corporate AI Talent Study** to benchmark their AI talent strategies and workforce readiness. We also invite you to share your feedback so we can continue to track how AI skills, roles, training, and workforce strategies evolve in future studies.

2026 Corporate AI Talent Study: **Key Takeaways**



AI Adoption Outpaces AI Talent Strategy

From January to September 2026, the number of organizations with no AI initiatives decreased from 13% to only 3%, along with increased AI pilots and increased production, while fully embedded AI stalls at only 3%. Yet 33% have no defined AI talent strategy, and only 37% provide formal AI training.



Upskilling is the Primary AI Workforce Strategy

Organizations are largely looking inward to build AI capabilities. 44% identify upskilling existing employees as their primary AI talent strategy, while another 17% combine hiring with upskilling. Only 4% primarily rely on external AI hiring, and 73% are not currently recruiting any of the specialized AI roles.



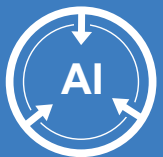
Business Translation is the Largest AI Talent Gap

The most frequently cited AI talent gap is business translation and use-case design at 31%, ahead of employee adoption and training at 24%, data readiness at 16%, technical expertise at 15%, and AI governance and risk at 14%.



Critical Thinking and Workflow Design Define AI-Ready Talent

Critical thinking and validation is identified by 65% of respondents as a critical workforce skill for the AI era, closely followed by automation and workflow design at 61%. Both rank well ahead of prompt engineering at 33%.



AI Training Remains Predominantly Informal

Only 17% of organizations provide formal company-wide AI training, with another 20% limiting formal programs to selected roles. Meanwhile, 42% rely on informal or ad hoc training and 21% provide no training. A majority 56% of employees are primarily learning AI independently.



AI is Not Eliminating Jobs Despite Widespread Reports

AI's current workforce effect is primarily job redesign rather than job elimination. 38% report that AI is changing existing roles, while only 6% report current headcount reductions. However, 33% expect AI to reduce hiring over the next two years.

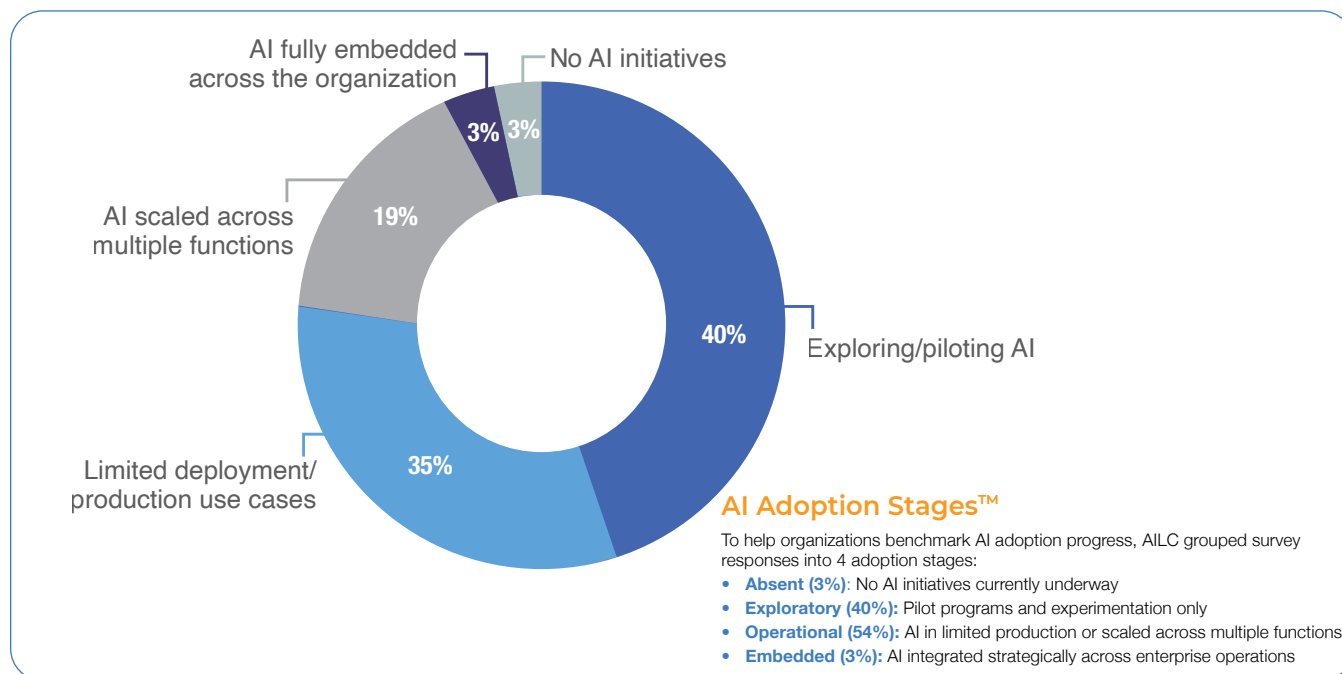


The following report details and summarizes the responses to each question, followed by respondent classifications.

How would you describe your organization's current stage of AI adoption?

The study confirms that AI has moved beyond experimentation for a majority of organizations, although widespread enterprise deployment remains limited.

A leading 40% of respondents report they are currently exploring or piloting AI, followed by 35% with select deployment and/or limited production use cases, while 19% have scaled AI across multiple functions. Only 3% report that AI is fully embedded across the organization, while another 3% indicate they have no AI initiatives underway. Together, a majority 54% of respondents now have AI operating in production in some capacity.



TAKEAWAYS

The results point to a market that has largely moved beyond the question of whether organizations will adopt AI. The more important question is increasingly how effectively they can expand early deployments across functions and integrate AI across business operations. AI Adoption Stages are a framework for identifying trends.

At the same time, the distribution illustrates how much work remains. Limited production use cases are nearly twice as common as scaled deployment across multiple functions, and fully embedded AI remains rare. For many, the next challenge will be converting successful pilots and isolated applications into repeatable capabilities supported by the right processes, governance, data, and workforce skills.

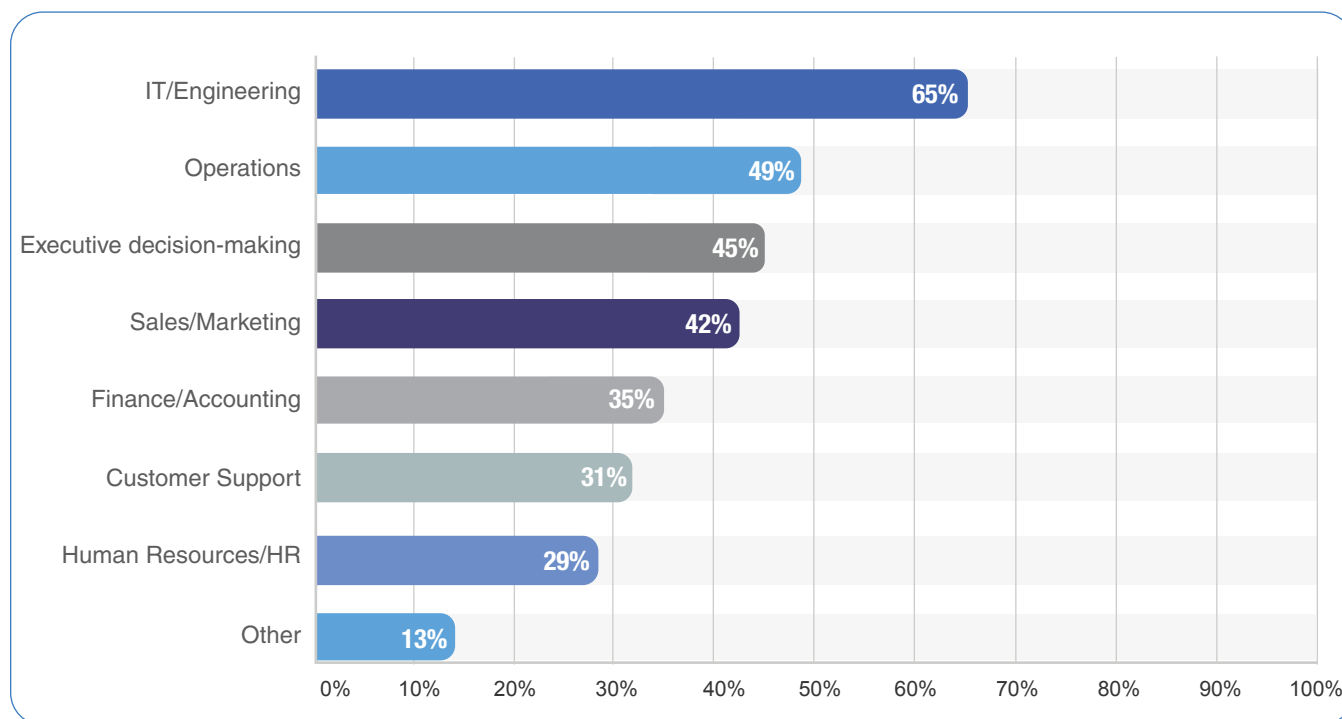
These findings are also directionally consistent with the [AI Leaders Council's earlier 2026 Corporate AI Outlook Study](#), with no AI initiatives decreasing from 13% in January to only 3% by September, and replaced by increased pilots (+6 percentage points), and AI scaled to multiple functions (+7 percentage points), and other changes. Although the studies use different respondent groups and should not be treated as a direct comparison, both point toward the same broad conclusion: production AI is becoming common, while enterprise-wide maturity remains much less developed (AI embedded only 3% in both studies).

For AI leaders, this creates an important workforce consideration. As AI moves from experimentation into production, organizations need more than a small group of technical specialists. Managers, functional experts, process owners, and employees throughout the business increasingly need the skills to identify appropriate use cases, work effectively with AI tools, evaluate outputs, and redesign processes around new capabilities.

Which functions are currently using AI?

AI usage is spreading across business functions, but technology teams continue to lead adoption. IT and Engineering ranks first at 65%, followed by Operations at 49%. Executive decision-making is also relatively prominent at 45%, followed by Sales and Marketing at 42%.

Adoption is less common in Finance and Accounting at 35%, Customer Support at 31%, and Human Resources at 29%. Another 13% identify other areas where AI is currently being used.



TAKEAWAYS

The results demonstrate that AI is no longer confined exclusively to technical teams. While IT and Engineering remain the clear leaders, meaningful adoption is occurring across operational, executive, commercial and administrative functions.

Operations ranking second is particularly notable. AI applications are increasingly moving into workflows where automation, planning, forecasting, analysis, and process optimization can produce measurable operational benefits. Similarly, the relatively high percentage of respondents citing executive decision-making suggests that AI is beginning to influence not only task execution, but also how information is analyzed and used by leadership.

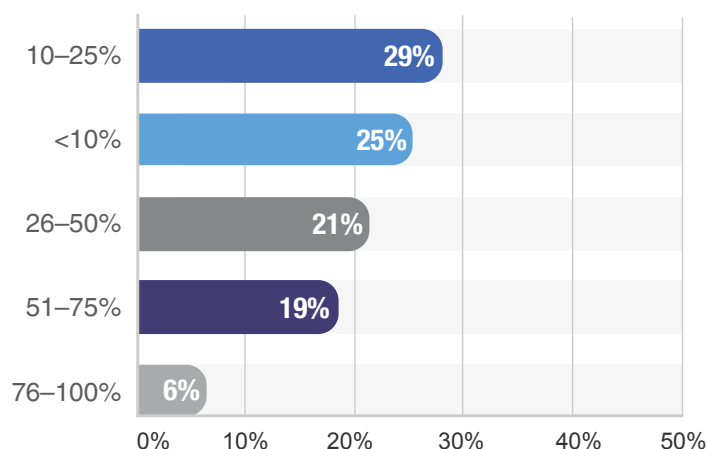
The breadth of functional adoption has important implications for AI talent strategy. Organizations cannot rely exclusively on centralized AI teams to identify and implement every opportunity. As use expands, functional employees will increasingly need enough AI fluency to understand where the technology can improve their work, while technical teams will need stronger business context to design solutions that address practical operating needs.

This makes cross-functional capability increasingly important. The organizations that scale AI successfully will likely require a combination of technical expertise, business knowledge, process understanding, and employee adoption rather than a workforce strategy centered on any single AI role.

What percentage of employees actively use AI tools in their daily work?

Despite expanding organizational adoption, daily employee usage of AI remains uneven. A leading 29% place employee usage between 10% and 25%, while 25% of respondents estimate that fewer than 10% of employees actively use AI tools in their daily work. Together, a majority 54% of organizations estimate no more than one-quarter of employees are regular AI users.

At the other end of the spectrum, 21% report that between 26% and 50% of employees actively use AI, while 19% estimate usage between 51% and 75%. Only 6% report that more than three-quarters of employees actively use AI tools in their daily work.



TAKEAWAYS

The findings reveal an important distinction between organizational AI adoption and workforce AI adoption. An organization may have AI operating in production without widespread employee usage, particularly when applications are concentrated within specific functions, automated processes, or specialized teams.

More than half of respondents report daily AI usage among no more than one-quarter of employees. This suggests that despite the rapid growth of generative AI tools and enterprise AI initiatives, broad workforce adoption remains at an earlier stage than organizational deployment.

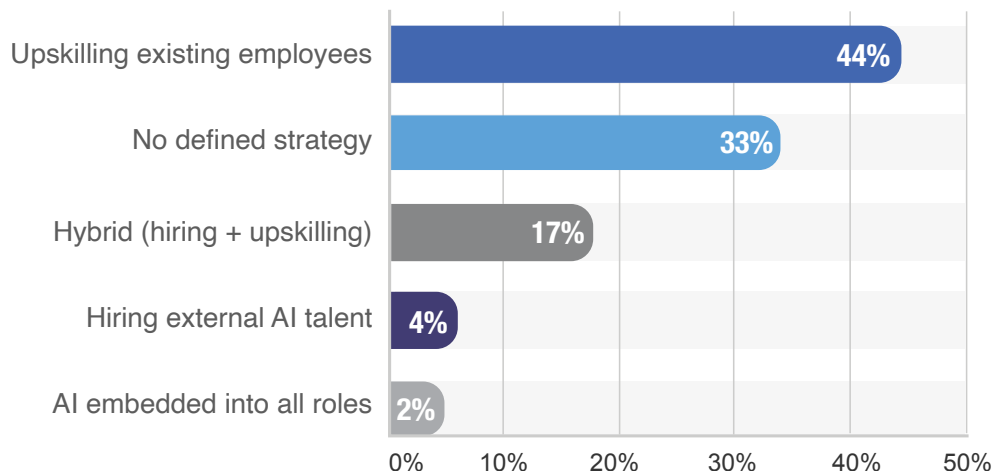
For AI leaders, increasing employee usage should not necessarily be treated as a goal by itself. Different roles will have different opportunities to benefit from AI, and effective adoption should be tied to business need rather than arbitrary usage targets. The greater challenge is ensuring that employees who can benefit from AI understand how to use it productively, and within established organizational guidelines.

As AI becomes integrated into more workflows, workforce readiness is likely to become increasingly important. Organizations should identify where AI can meaningfully improve individual and team performance, prioritize those employee populations, and provide the training, tools, process support and governance required to move from occasional experimentation toward consistent business use.

How would you describe your organization's AI talent strategy?

Upskilling existing employees has emerged as the dominant approach to building AI capabilities for 44% of respondents. While 17% are pursuing a hybrid AI talent approach combining external hiring with internal development. Only 4% primarily rely on hiring external AI talent, and just 2% report that AI skills are already embedded across all roles.

At the same time, 33% of organizations have no defined AI talent strategy, making this the second-largest response.



TAKEAWAYS

The results suggest that organizations increasingly view AI as a workforce capability that must extend beyond dedicated technical teams. Rather than attempting to build AI capabilities primarily through external recruiting, most organizations with a defined strategy are investing in the employees and institutional knowledge they already have.

This approach is practical given the breadth of AI's potential impact. As AI moves into operations, finance, sales, marketing, HR, and other functions, organizations will need employees who combine existing business and functional expertise with the ability to apply AI effectively. Hiring specialized AI professionals can complement this effort, but external recruiting alone is unlikely to create AI proficiency across an organization.

The 33% without a defined strategy represents a significant readiness gap, particularly when viewed alongside the study's adoption findings. More than half of respondents already report some level of AI in production, indicating that AI implementation is moving ahead even when a corresponding workforce strategy has not been established.

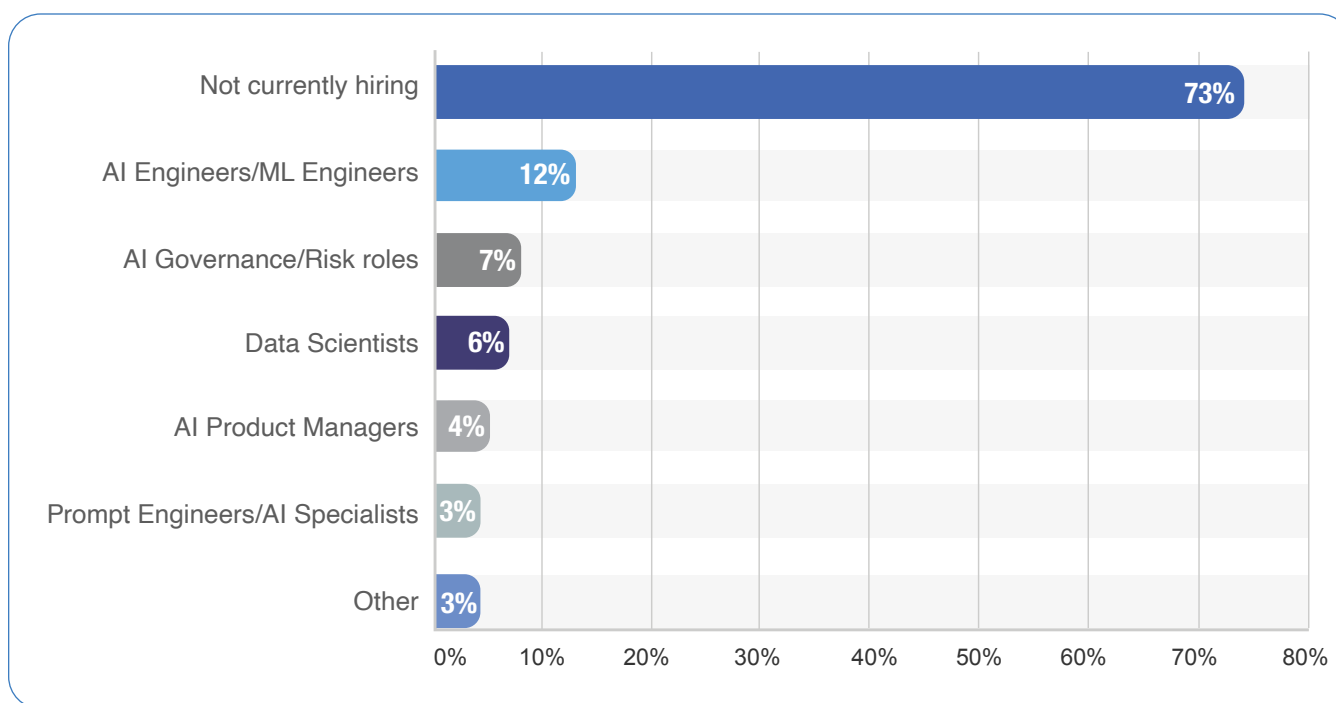
For AI leaders, talent planning should increasingly become part of AI planning itself. Decisions about new applications and investments should consider which employees will use the technology, what skills they will require, how roles and workflows may change, and whether those capabilities should be developed internally or acquired externally.

Which AI-related roles are you **actively hiring**?

Despite growing AI adoption, most organizations are not currently recruiting dedicated AI specialists.

A substantial 73% of respondents report that they are not currently hiring for any of the AI-specific roles included in the study. Among organizations that are hiring, AI Engineers and Machine Learning Engineers are the most frequently cited at 12%.

AI Governance and Risk roles follow at 7%, Data Scientists at 6%, AI Product Managers at 4%, and Prompt Engineers or AI Specialists at 3%. Another 3% report hiring other AI-related positions.



TAKEAWAYS

The relatively low level of specialized AI recruiting reinforces one of the study's central findings: organizations appear to be building AI capabilities primarily by adapting their existing workforce rather than creating entirely new AI teams.

This does not necessarily indicate weak demand for AI skills. Instead, the findings from question 4 show that upskilling existing employees is far more common than relying on external AI hiring. Organizations may also be incorporating AI responsibilities into existing technology, data, operations, and functional roles rather than creating positions explicitly labeled as AI jobs.

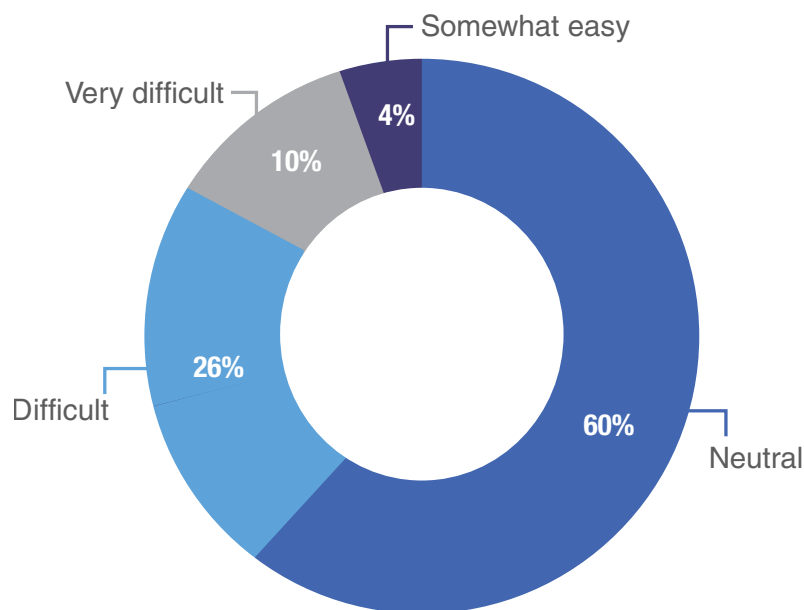
The limited demand for Prompt Engineers is particularly noteworthy. Despite considerable attention around prompt engineering as a new occupational category, only 3% of respondents report actively hiring for Prompt Engineers or AI Specialists. The broader skills findings in this study similarly place critical thinking, workflow design, and AI tool usage ahead of prompt engineering.

For employers, the emerging AI workforce may therefore be defined less by a large number of new job titles and more by new capabilities incorporated into existing positions. This places greater importance on job redesign, skills development, and identifying which roles require deeper AI expertise as adoption expands.

How difficult is it to hire AI talent?

Organizations report mixed experiences recruiting AI talent, although hiring difficulty considerably outweighs hiring ease.

A majority 60% of respondents rate the difficulty of hiring AI talent as neutral. Another 26% describe hiring as difficult and 10% as very difficult. Combined, 36% report difficulty hiring AI talent, compared with only 4% who describe the process as somewhat easy. No respondents characterize AI talent hiring as very easy.



TAKEAWAYS

The results require some context because most organizations are not actively hiring dedicated AI positions. As question 5 indicates, 73% of respondents are not currently recruiting the specialized AI roles identified in the study. The large neutral response may therefore reflect limited hiring experience as much as a balanced talent market.

Among organizations that do perceive a challenge, however, the results are much more one-sided. More than one-third describe AI hiring as difficult or very difficult, while virtually no respondents characterize it as easy.

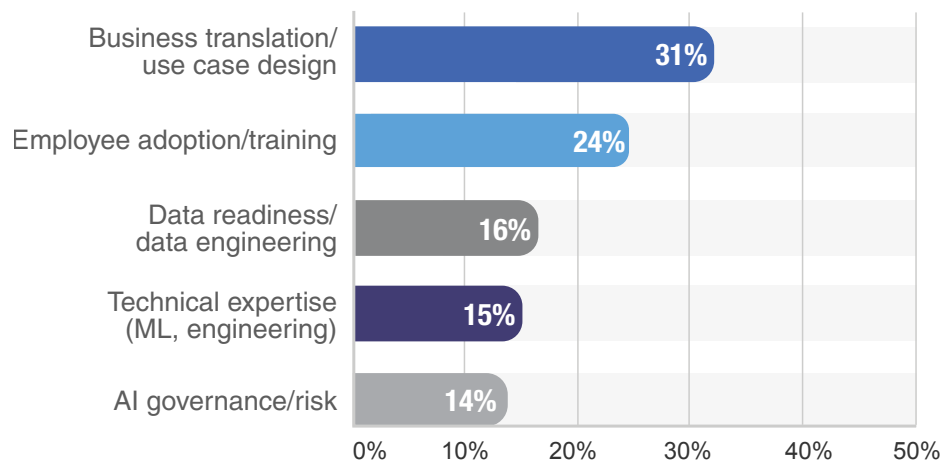
This helps explain why upskilling has become such an important component of AI talent strategy. Organizations seeking to scale AI cannot assume that all required capabilities can be readily acquired from the external labor market. Developing existing employees can preserve valuable organizational and industry knowledge while reducing dependence on a still-developing pool of experienced AI professionals.

AI leaders should consider external recruiting and internal development as complementary strategies. Highly specialized technical, data, or governance positions may require targeted recruiting, while broader AI fluency and application skills can often be developed within the existing workforce.

What is your biggest AI talent gap?

The largest AI talent gap is not technical engineering expertise. It is the ability to connect AI capabilities to business needs.

Business translation and use-case design ranks first at 31%, followed by employee adoption and training at 24%. Data readiness and data engineering is cited by 16%, while technical expertise in machine learning and engineering and AI governance and risk each account for approximately 15%.



TAKEAWAYS

This is one of the study's most significant findings. Although much of the AI talent discussion has focused on technical specialists, respondents identify a different challenge: determining where and how AI should actually be applied within the business.

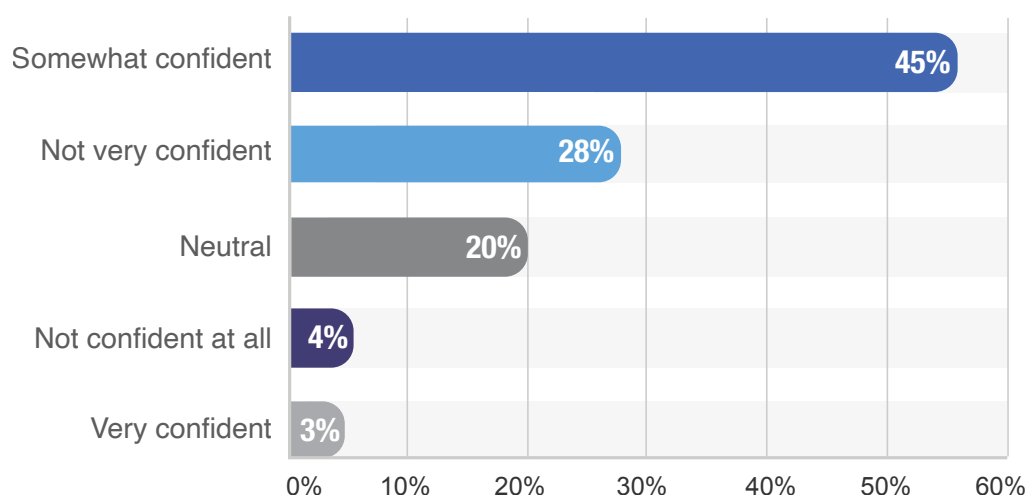
Business translation requires a combination of functional knowledge, process understanding, technical awareness, and judgement. Organizations need people who can identify meaningful problems, determine whether AI is an appropriate solution, translate business requirements for technical teams, and help redesign processes around new capabilities.

The prominence of employee adoption and training as the second-largest gap reinforces this conclusion. For many organizations, the limiting factor is no longer simply access to AI technology or technical expertise. It is developing the organizational capability required to apply that technology consistently and effectively.

This finding also provides additional context for the [AI Leaders Council's earlier Corporate AI Outlook Study](#), where lack of internal skills or talent was the most frequently cited barrier to AI adoption. The 2026 Corporate AI Talent Study helps define that challenge more precisely: the talent shortage extends beyond engineers and data scientists to employees who can connect AI with practical business opportunities.

How confident are your employees in using AI tools?

Employee confidence in AI is developing, but organizations remain divided on overall workforce readiness. 45% of respondents describe employees as somewhat confident using AI tools, while 3% report employees are very confident. Combined, approximately 48% report some level of employee confidence. By comparison, 28% say employees are not very confident, and 4% say they are not confident at all. Another 20% rate employee confidence as neutral.



TAKEAWAYS

The results indicate that basic comfort with AI is beginning to spread through the workforce, but deep confidence remains rare. Only 3% of respondents describe their employees as very confident, suggesting that even organizations with growing AI usage have substantial room to build proficiency.

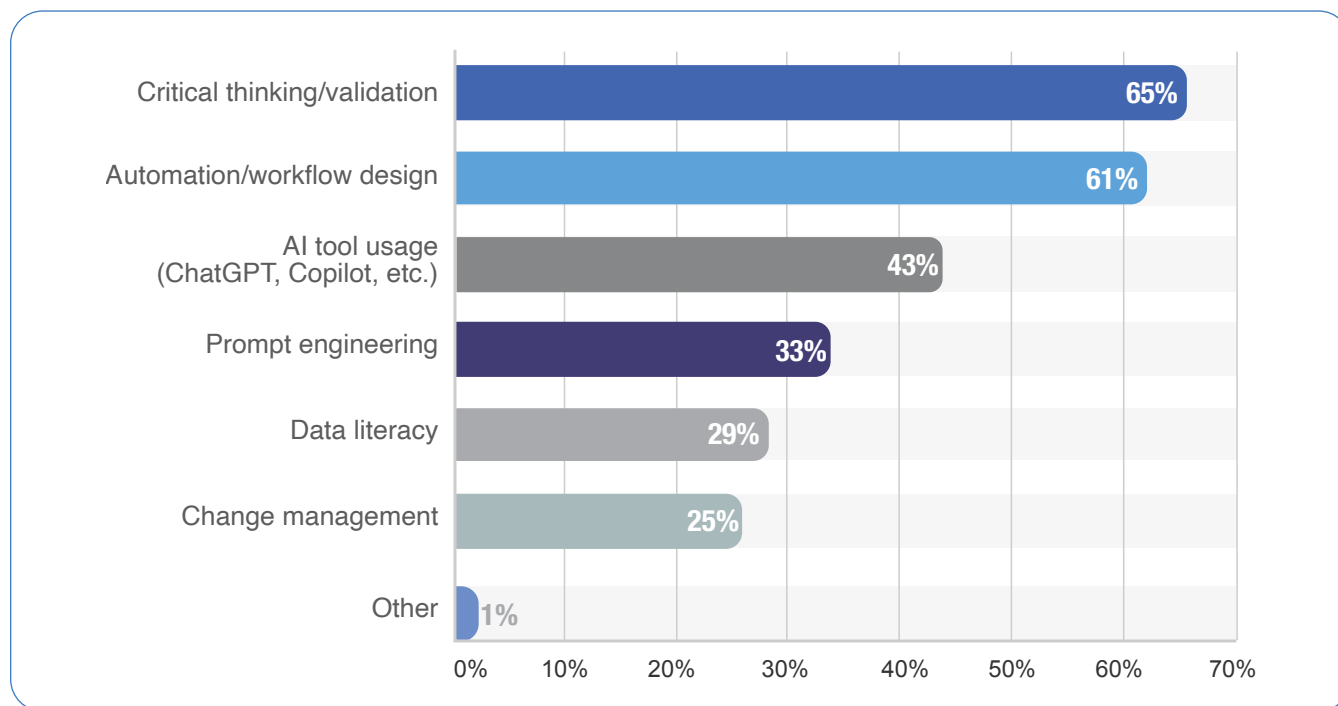
This distinction between familiarity and proficiency will become increasingly important. Employees may be comfortable experimenting with ChatGPT, Copilot, or other AI applications without necessarily understanding how to validate outputs, protect sensitive information, redesign workflows, or determine when AI should be used.

The findings also need to be considered alongside the study's training results. With formal AI education still limited and self-directed learning widespread, much of today's employee confidence is likely developing through individual experimentation rather than a consistent organizational curriculum.

Organizations should therefore look beyond adoption or tool usage as measures of AI readiness. The more meaningful question is whether employees can apply AI reliably, critically, securely, and effectively within the context of their actual responsibilities.

Which skills are most critical for your workforce in the AI era?

Organizations place the greatest value on human judgment and the ability to redesign work around AI. Critical thinking and validation ranks first, selected by 65% of respondents, closely followed by automation and workflow design at 61%. AI tool usage, including applications such as ChatGPT and Copilot, ranks third at 43%. Prompt engineering is selected by 33%, followed by data literacy at 29% and change management at 25%. Respondents were asked to select up to three skills.



TAKEAWAYS

The results provide an important picture of what an AI-ready workforce may actually look like. The two leading skills are not tied to a particular platform, model, or technical discipline. Instead, they involve evaluating AI-generated information and determining how work should be redesigned around new capabilities.

Critical thinking and validation becomes more important, not less, as AI assumes a larger role in research, analysis, content generation, decision support, and process execution. Employees must be able to recognize errors, question outputs, apply business context, and determine when human review remains necessary.

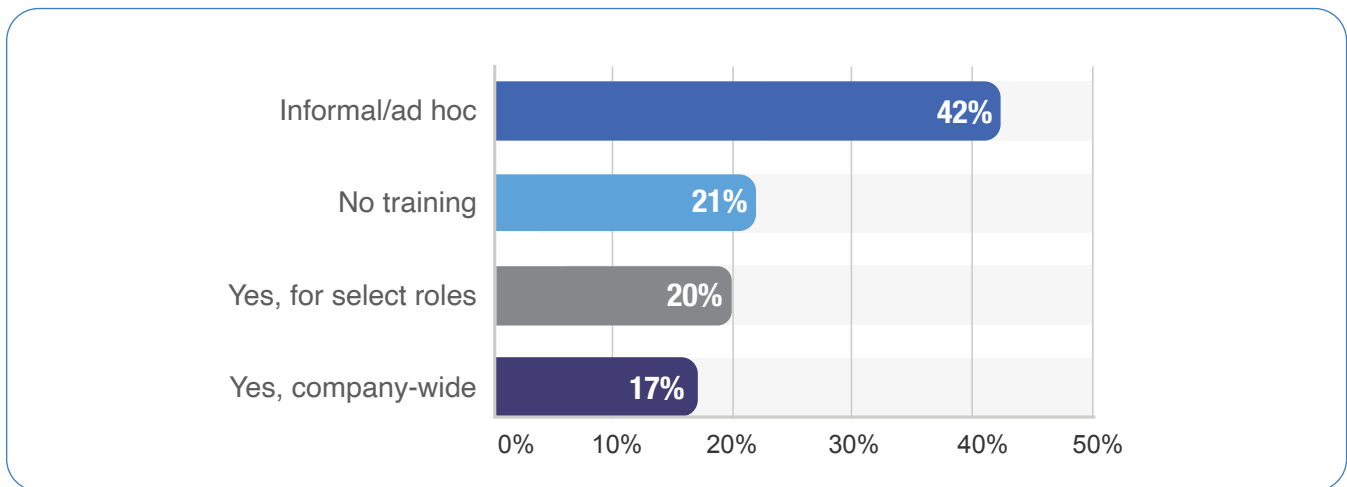
Automation and workflow design ranking a close second suggests that organizations are also moving beyond using AI as a standalone productivity tool. Greater value may come from embedding AI into end-to-end processes, which requires employees who understand how work currently gets done and how technology can change it.

Prompt engineering remains relevant, but its lower ranking suggests that employers increasingly view prompting as one component of broader AI proficiency rather than the defining skill of the AI workforce. As AI interfaces continue to become easier to use, judgment, process knowledge, and the ability to translate technology into improved ways of working may become more durable workforce advantages.

Does your organization provide formal AI training?

Formal AI training has not yet kept pace with the speed of adoption. Only 17% of organizations provide formal AI training company-wide, while another 20% offer structured training to selected roles. Combined, 37% currently provide some form of formal AI training.

The most common approach is informal or ad hoc training, cited by 42% of respondents. Another 21% provide no AI training at all. Together, nearly two-thirds of organizations currently lack a broad, formal approach to AI workforce development.



TAKEAWAYS

The results reveal one of the clearest gaps in organizational AI readiness. AI is already operating in production at more than half of respondent organizations, yet structured employee development remains considerably less mature.

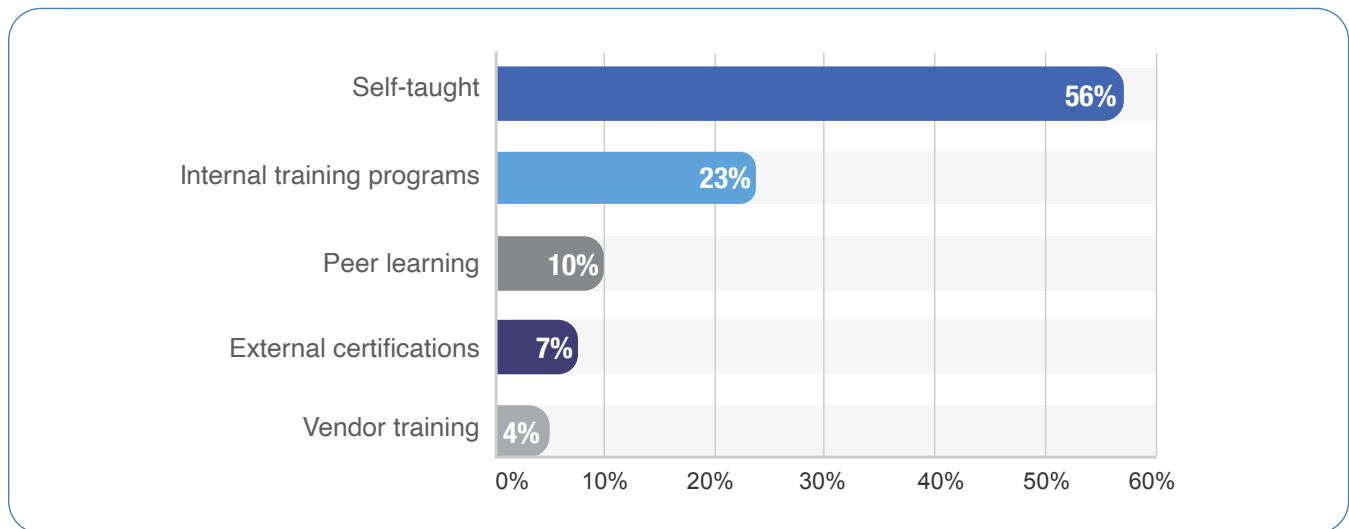
Informal learning has advantages during the early stages of adoption. It allows motivated employees to experiment, identify use cases, and develop skills without waiting for formal programs. However, reliance on ad hoc training becomes increasingly difficult to sustain as AI moves into business-critical processes.

Without structured training, employee knowledge can vary widely across teams. Organizations may also struggle to establish consistent practices around data privacy, validation, governance, acceptable use, and the selection of approved tools.

Formal training does not necessarily require teaching every employee the same skills. A more effective model may combine foundational AI literacy for the broader workforce with role-specific training for employees whose responsibilities involve deeper AI usage. The study's findings suggest that moving from informal experimentation toward more deliberate workforce development will be an important next step for many organizations.

How are employees primarily learning AI today?

Employees are overwhelmingly taking responsibility for developing their own AI skills. A majority 56% of respondents report that employees are primarily self-taught, making independent learning by far the most common approach. Internal training programs rank a distant second at 23%, followed by peer learning at 10%. External certifications account for 7% of primary AI learning, while vendor-provided training represents only 4%.



TAKEAWAYS

The dominance of self-directed learning helps explain how AI usage has spread so rapidly despite relatively limited formal training. Widely accessible tools have allowed employees to experiment with AI independently, often before their organizations have established formal education programs.

This employee initiative can be valuable. Early adopters often discover practical applications that centralized teams might overlook, and peer experimentation can accelerate organizational learning. However, a predominantly self-taught workforce also creates inconsistency. Employees may develop very different levels of proficiency and may learn techniques that do not align with organizational policies, approved technologies, or business priorities.

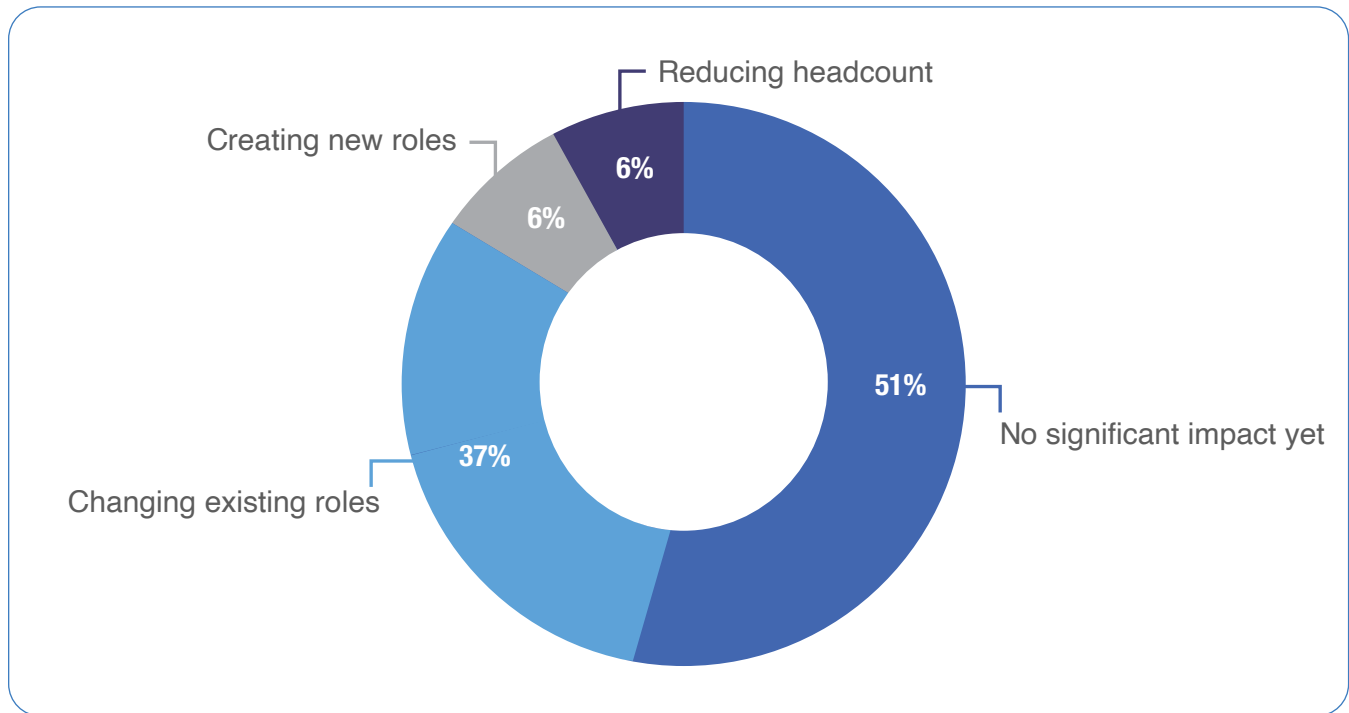
The findings suggest that organizations do not need to replace self-directed learning, but they should provide greater structure around it. Formal training, internal communities of practice, role-based learning, approved use-case libraries, and peer knowledge sharing can help convert individual experimentation into institutional capability.

With upskilling already identified as the leading AI talent strategy, organizations will need to determine whether current learning methods are sufficient to deliver that strategy. If employees are expected to develop new AI capabilities, workforce development should become more intentional than simply providing access to tools and allowing employees to learn independently.

How is AI impacting your workforce?

AI is beginning to affect the workforce primarily by changing jobs rather than eliminating them. Just over half of respondents, 51%, report no significant workforce impact yet.

However, 37% say AI is already changing existing roles, making job redesign by far the most common impact among organizations experiencing workforce change. Only 6% report that AI is currently creating new roles, while an equal 6% say AI is reducing headcount.



TAKEAWAYS

The findings provide a more measured picture of AI's current labor impact than predictions of widespread job displacement might suggest. For most organizations, AI has either not yet produced a significant workforce effect or is changing how existing employees perform their jobs.

The 37% reporting changes to existing roles is particularly important. AI adoption can alter responsibilities without eliminating the underlying position. Routine activities may be automated, analytical capabilities expanded, workflows redesigned, and employees are then expected to oversee or validate AI-generated work.

The equal shares reporting new roles and headcount reductions also illustrate that AI's workforce impact is not moving in a single direction. Some organizations may require new expertise to deploy and govern AI, while others may use productivity improvements to operate with fewer incremental hires or positions.

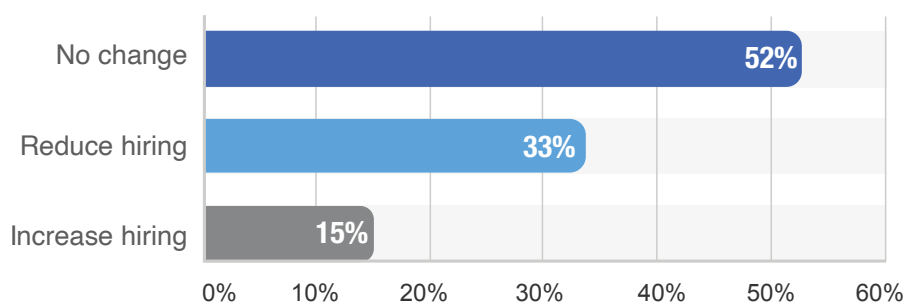
For workforce leaders, job redesign may therefore be a more immediate consideration than job elimination. Organizations should identify which responsibilities are changing, what new skills employees require, and how performance expectations and career paths should evolve as AI assumes a greater role in everyday work.

Over the next two years, how do you expect AI to impact hiring?

Most organizations do not anticipate dramatic changes to hiring because of AI, but those expecting an impact are considerably more likely to anticipate reduced hiring than increased hiring.

A majority 52% expect AI to have no overall effect on hiring during the next two years. However, 33% expect AI to reduce hiring, compared with only 15% that expect it to increase hiring.

Among respondents anticipating a change, organizations are therefore more than twice as likely to expect lower hiring requirements as higher ones.



TAKEAWAYS

The findings suggest that AI's near-term employment impact may occur partly through reduced demand for additional headcount rather than widespread elimination of existing positions.

This distinction is important. Question 12 shows that only 6% of respondents currently report headcount reductions due to AI. Yet 33% expect AI to reduce hiring over the next two years. Organizations may therefore be anticipating that productivity improvements will allow existing teams to absorb additional work, replace fewer departing employees, or support growth without increasing staffing at historical rates.

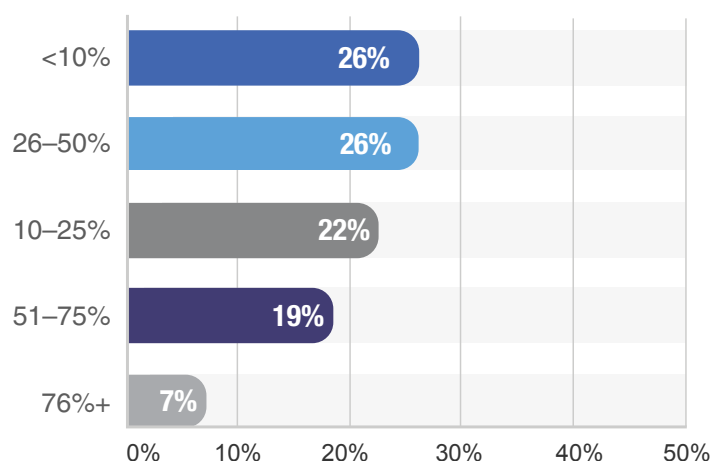
At the same time, a majority still expect no net hiring change, reinforcing that AI's effect will vary substantially by organization, function, and role. Some areas may require fewer resources for routine work while others require new capabilities in AI implementation, data, governance, process design, or oversight.

For leaders, traditional workforce planning based primarily on historical staffing ratios may become less reliable. Hiring plans should increasingly account for expected productivity improvements, changing skill requirements, process automation, and the redistribution of work between employees and AI systems.

What percentage of roles in your organization will be **significantly impacted** by AI within two years?

Most respondents expect AI to significantly impact a meaningful portion of their workforce within a relatively short period. 26% project fewer than 10% of organizational roles to be significantly affected, while another 26% anticipate that AI will impact between 26% and 50%. 22% anticipate that between 10-25% will be significantly impacted, followed by 19% to impact between 51-75%, and only 7% forecast significant impact for more than 76% or three-quarters of their organization.

A combined 74% of respondents expect less than half of organizational roles to be significantly impacted by AI within the next two years, compared to approximately 26% that expect AI to affect more than half of all roles.



TAKEAWAYS

The results demonstrate why AI talent strategy is becoming an enterprise workforce issue rather than a concern limited to technology teams. Nearly half of respondents (48%) expect significant changes to at least one-quarter of organizational roles within only two years. At the same time, the study finds that 33% of organizations have no defined AI talent strategy, only 37% provide formal AI training, and 56% say employees primarily learn AI on their own.

Together, these findings reveal a potential readiness gap. Organizations expect AI to alter a substantial share of work, but many have not yet established the workforce development infrastructure required to prepare employees for those changes.

The anticipated impact should also be interpreted as broader than job displacement. As the findings from question 12 demonstrate, AI is currently much more likely to change existing roles than reduce headcount. Significant impact may therefore include changes to responsibilities, workflows, required skills, productivity expectations, decision-making, and the balance between human and automated work.

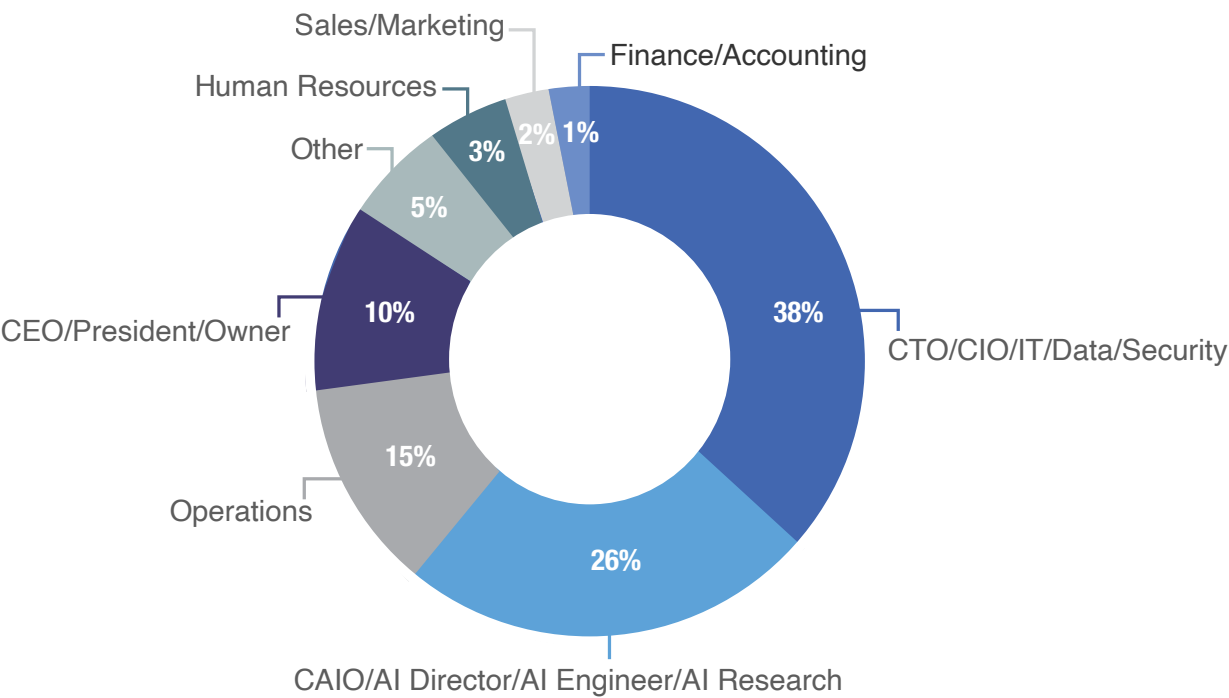
The next two years will require organizations to move from general AI awareness toward more deliberate workforce planning. Leaders should identify which roles are most likely to change, define the skills those positions will require, provide structured development opportunities, and redesign work before technology adoption outpaces employee readiness.

Classification Demographics:

As part of our 2026 Corporate AI Talent Study, the AI Leaders Council gathered demographic data from respondents to gain further insights including Title/Role, Industry, and company size (number of employees). When conducting our surveys and developing research studies, we strive to recruit respondents from a broad range of company types and sizes, this to ensure that results are representative of the business ecosystems we serve.

Title/Role

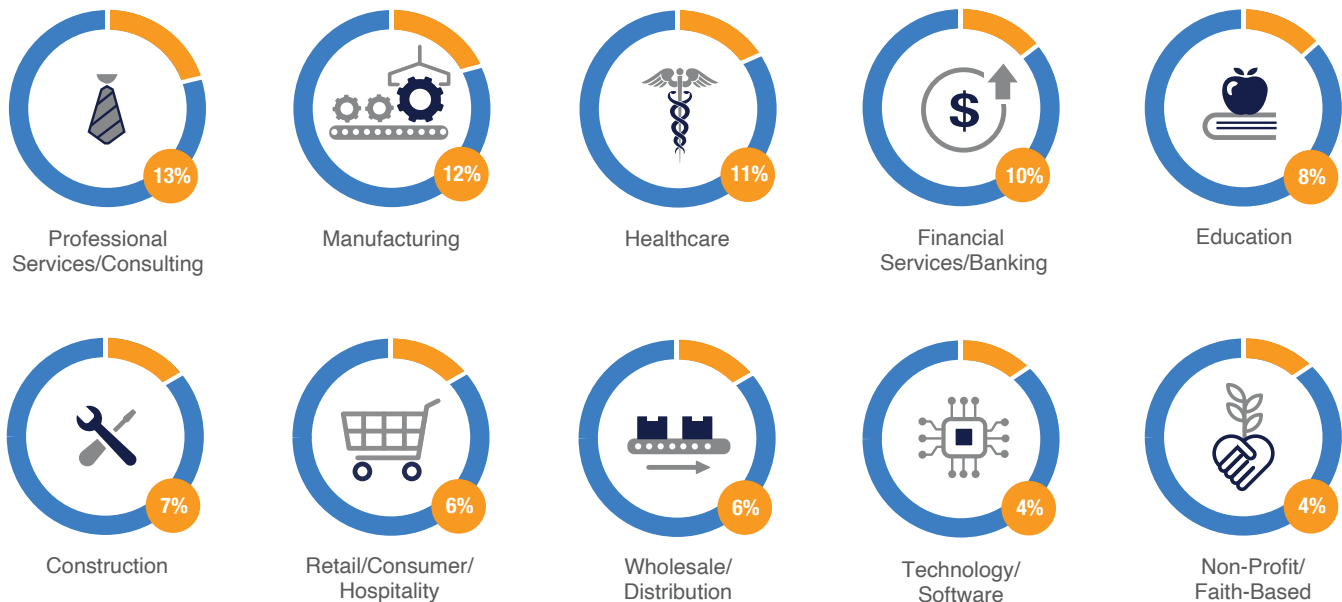
In this year’s study, 38% of respondents held titles that include CTO/CIO/IT/CISO and related security titles, and various “Data” titles. At 26%, the second largest group included AI titles: CAIO/AI Director or Manager/AI Engineer/AI Research. A lower tier of titles included various Operations titles for 15% (COOs, VP Operations, Directors, Supply Chain, Logistics). And 10% of respondents were CEOs, Presidents or Owners. Smaller percentages included Human Resources (3%), Sales/Marketing (2%), and Finance/Accounting (1%). A total of 5% were other roles.



Classification Demographics

Industry

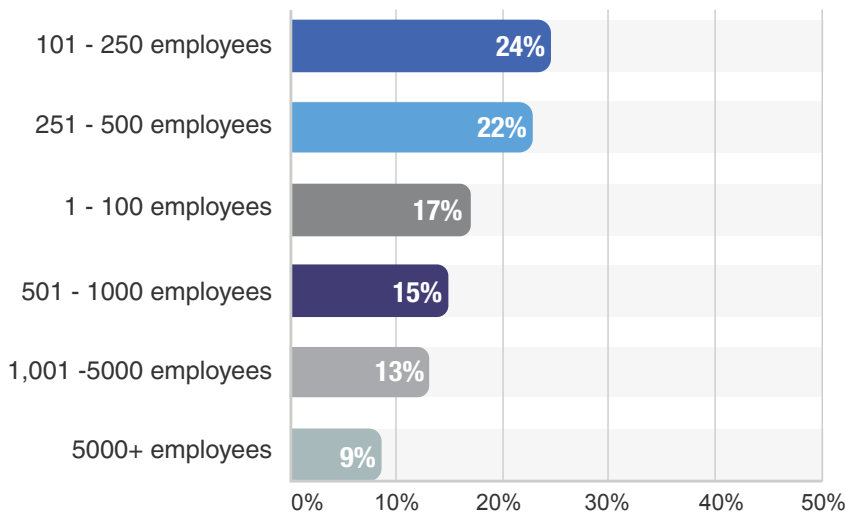
A total of 36 different industry (categories) were represented in the 2026 Corporate AI Talent Study. Following are the top 10 industries represented.



Company Size (number of employees)

In order to understand relative sizes of respondent organizations, we asked respondents to identify the total number of employees. As private companies tend not to divulge sales revenue as proprietary, “employees” is an excellent reference that can be a facsimile for revenue with common multipliers by industry.

Organizations with 101-250 employees accounted for 24% of respondents, closely followed by 251-500 employees at 22%, 1-100 employees for 17%, 501-1,000 employees for 15%, 1,001-5,000 employees for 13%, and 9% have more than 5,000 employees. In sum, all company sizes are represented.



2026 Corporate AI Talent Study

Looking Ahead: Building the AI-Ready Workforce

The 2026 Corporate AI Talent Study reveals a workforce at an important transition point. AI has moved into production across a majority of participating organizations, and its impact is beginning to extend well beyond technology teams. Yet the talent strategies, training programs, and workforce structures required to support this shift are still developing.

Perhaps the clearest finding from this inaugural study is that the AI talent challenge is broader than recruiting technical specialists. Organizations certainly need AI engineers, data scientists, governance professionals, and other specialized expertise, but relatively few respondents are actively hiring these roles today. Instead, most organizations are looking to develop AI capabilities within their existing workforce.

That strategy makes sense given where respondents see the greatest needs. Business translation and use-case design ranks as the largest AI talent gap, while critical thinking and validation, automation and workflow design, and practical AI tool usage are among the skills considered most important for the workforce. These capabilities are relevant across departments and job levels and often require business and functional expertise in addition to technical knowledge.

The challenge is that workforce development has not yet caught up with these expectations. One-third of organizations have no defined AI talent strategy, fewer than four in ten provide formal AI training, and a majority report that employees are primarily teaching themselves how to use AI. Self-directed experimentation has helped accelerate adoption, but it is unlikely to be sufficient as AI becomes more deeply integrated into business processes and decision-making.

The workforce implications are also becoming clearer. AI is currently much more likely to change existing roles than eliminate them, with 38% of respondents already reporting job changes compared with only 6% reporting headcount reductions. Over the next two years, however, one-third expect AI to reduce hiring, and 52% expect more than one-quarter of roles within their organizations to be significantly affected.

These findings suggest several priorities for organizations preparing for the next stage of AI adoption:

- **Connect AI strategy with workforce strategy.** Identify the roles, functions, and processes most likely to be affected by AI and incorporate the required skills into workforce planning.
- **Prioritize upskilling across the existing workforce.** Develop AI capabilities within employees who already understand the organization's customers, processes, data, and business requirements.
- **Move from informal learning to structured development.** Build foundational AI literacy while providing more advanced, role-specific training for employees who will design, implement, manage, or regularly use AI-enabled workflows.
- **Develop skills that extend beyond individual AI tools.** Critical thinking, validation, workflow design, business translation, and change management can provide lasting value even as specific models and platforms continue to evolve.
- **Prepare for job redesign.** Evaluate how AI may change responsibilities, workflows, productivity expectations, and skill requirements before those changes become widespread.

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The earlier [2026 Corporate AI Outlook Study](#) reported a new AI Adoption Stages™ framework to help organizations benchmark AI adoption progress, and to measure AI adoption trends over time. The new 2026 Corporate AI [Talent Study](#) used the same AI Adoption Stages framework to identify changes from less than 9 months prior (January 2026). Significantly, “Absent” or no AI initiatives decreased from 13% to only 3% by September 2026. The difference moving to the “Exploratory” stage of AI that includes experimentation and pilots increasing by 6 percentage points, and the “Operational” AI stage that includes limited to scaled production increasing by 4 percentage points. But fully embedded AI stayed the same over the time period at 3%.

In addition, the earlier 2026 Corporate [Outlook Study](#) also identified that lack of internal skills or talent was already the most frequently cited barrier to AI adoption. The new 2026 Corporate AI [Talent Study](#) provides a clearer picture of what addressing that challenge will require.

The next stage of AI progress will depend not only on acquiring technology or hiring a small number of specialists, but on developing an organization-wide workforce capable of applying AI effectively.

As the first annual Corporate AI Talent Study, these findings establish an important benchmark for measuring that transformation. Future studies will track how AI roles, skills, training, hiring, and workforce impact evolve as adoption matures.

For AI leaders, the immediate opportunity is to close the gap between AI adoption and workforce readiness. Organizations that begin preparing their people and redesigning work today will be better positioned to scale AI effectively, capture its productivity benefits, and adapt as artificial intelligence becomes an increasingly established part of how work gets done.

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