Performance reimagined

How GenAI transforms team performance at scale

September 2025

The better the question. The better the answer.
The better the world works.

EY Lane4
Workforce Transformation

Foreword

GenAI is not just changing how we work – it's redefining what high performance looks like. A new performance frontier is emerging, where individuals and teams use GenAI to think faster, create more, and collaborate better. This is **performance reimagined**: a shift from isolated productivity gains to integrated, team-level transformation. In this whitepaper, we explore how GenAI is reshaping work, teams and leadership – and what it takes to move from experimentation to sustained performance uplift.

GenAI is delivering significant benefits: productivity gains of 14%–55% have been reported across a broad range of fields spanning software and data, creative, customer-facing or corporate functions.[1] In our survey of 665 UK professionals using GenAI at work, the median time saving per week is six hours. Seventy-two percent agree that GenAI has increased their performance.

But these gains are uneven – not just between sectors, but within the same roles. As GenAI solutions mature, the challenges graduate from technical to organisational. Structural and emotional barriers shape the speed of AI adoption. Repeatable, scalable use of GenAI within core workflows drives maximum ROI. For most organisations, that requires a fundamental redesign of work at a team level.

Amid that complexity, support during the emotional journey – from early excitement through mid-journey frustration and beyond to delight– is highly variable, leaving individuals to navigate through their own impulses. AI learning plays a key role in moderating this journey, but only 50% of employees are receiving AI training today and less than 10% are receiving specific or advanced training.[2]

Yet the ambition remains high. Eighty-eight percent of C-suite leaders say accelerating AI adoption is a 2025 priority.[3] So, the question is no longer "if" or "when" to adopt GenAI – but what does successful GenAI adoption really take? Who holds the keys to progress? And how deep must transformation go?

This whitepaper offers answers from **organisations we call 'AI Transformers'**. These organisations are not just using GenAI. In interviews, they told us they are embedding it within redesigned, AI-first workflows to unlock a performance edge. In our survey, they report up to 2x greater overall benefits, 2.8x greater productivity gains, and over 3x more daily users than their peers.

Five organisational capabilities set AI Transformers apart. They:

- Lead with vision and humility, modelling personal GenAI use while managing the emotional journey throughout
- Team across boundaries to reinvent workflows
- Learn continuously, at speed, with humility
- Scale AI adoption with curiosity, experimentation, urgency and trust as cultural hallmarks
- Integrate AI into business strategy, operating models, and KPIs.

Each of these capabilities is essential to successful AI adoption, and buildable with the right support. Collectively, they enable people to transform their work in novel ways – giving them access to new AI collaborators that extend their knowledge, amplify their creativity and augment their potential. In shifting these work dynamics, GenAI transforms performance – but only when adoption is team-based, emotionally supported, and strategically integrated

AI Transformers prove that this path is not only possible, but repeatable. This research shares examples from multiple industries and enterprise functions, alongside practical actions to help you accelerate GenAI adoption in your own organisation. Use it to challenge your assumptions, pulse-check your progress, and plan your next steps.

With optimism,

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1 EY analysis of multiple academic studies)
2 LexisNexis (2024) How Generative AI is Shaping the Future of Work
3 LinkedIn (2025) Work Change Report

About EY Lane4

EY Lane4 is dedicated to creating environments that make high-performance inevitable.

Our purpose at EY is to construct a better working world, one where lasting value is created for our clients, our people, and society at large. We achieve this by driving business transformation through the collective power of people, state-of-the-art technology, and innovative thinking. At the heart of the most successful companies is the human element. Recognising this, we place humans at the centre of organisational strategy, operations, and the reimagining of businesses for the future.

We tap into the rich insights of sports psychology, business psychology, and behavioural science to cultivate champions in the world of business. Our approach is fuelled from the pursuit of elite performance in whichever field, from the competitive arenas of sports to the creative stages of the arts and beyond.

Our commitment to building a better working world is anchored in three key areas: leadership, learning, and culture. We equip leaders with the tools and insights to embrace paradoxical mindsets needed to effectively steer through the complexities of a rapidly evolving global landscape. We scale skill development to empower individuals at all levels of an organisation. We drive behavioural change to forge winning cultures that are not only high-performing but also diverse, equitable, and inclusive. By focussing on finding, nurturing, and retaining the finest talent, EY Lane4 sets the stage for organisations to thrive in today's dynamic business environment.

With our clients, we create leaders that are well equipped and inclusive, to build teams that are high-performing which result in improved performance for organisations during transformations.

Building a better working world where every individual has the opportunity to learn, grow, and succeed.

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Executive summary

GenAI is now part of daily workflows — reshaping how UK professionals write, analyse, design and perform. Yet adoption remains uneven with high variability in how GenAI is being used, limiting value realisation. Some organisations are transforming, others are stalling.

This whitepaper explores the journey from experimentation to transformation — and zeroes in on the organisations and individuals at the forefront of GenAI adoption. We include their lessons on what it takes to close the gap between GenAI's potential and sustained high performance.

The state of play: GenAI adoption is growing fast — but remains uneven

Our research shows that GenAI is already delivering measurable benefits for organisations that have embraced it:

- The median user in our UK survey saves six hours per week using GenAI
- 72% of surveyed users agree that GenAI improves their productivity and performance
- 70% say it enhances the quality of their work
- 56% report improved wellbeing.

Eighty-eight percent of C-suite members surveyed by LinkedIn stated AI adoption is a 2025 priority. However, adoption remains uneven — by sector, function, role and demographic. With big impacts on the search for ROI.

Four AI adoption segments: not all adoption is equal

Through interviews and survey results, we identified the characteristics of four distinct organisational segments. The four segments have common AI adoption patterns that create eye-opening results:

- **AI sceptics:** low-use, low-benefit, low-belief. Just 27% agree that GenAI has improved their performance, saving an average of four hours per week. Only 5% report significant or complete work redesign.
- **AI explorers:** curious users but inconsistent in their adoption. The majority (60%) agree that GenAI has increased their performance, but average time saved per week is limited to six hours. Only 23% of users report significant or complete workflow redesign.
- **AI scalers:** confident users realising performance benefits. A large majority (85%) agree GenAI has increased their performance, and average time saved per week increases to eight hours. However, only 32% of users report significant or complete workflow redesign.
- **AI transformers:** high-intensity, high-impact users who deeply integrate GenAI into their workflows for maximum benefit. The vast majority agree GenAI has increased their performance (98%), whilst 73% report significant or complete workflow redesign, to unlock 11 hours per week on average.

Five adoption drivers set AI transformers apart

Our research reveals five drivers that consistently underpin successful GenAI adoption:

1 AI-fluent leadership

Leaders in AI Transformer organisations don't just sponsor GenAI – they use it, model it, and shape its role in the business. In this report, we reveal three mindsets and four capabilities that AI-fluent leaders require.

2 Open teaming

Teams that learn and experiment together – especially when paired with external partners – report outsized benefits. An "open teams" case study offers insights on how to co-design GenAI-enabled workflows and accelerate time to value.

3 Continuous learning

AI Transformers invest in engaging, role-specific learning that starts with foundational literacy courses and moves into the flow of work. A featured case study shows how gamified learning courses connect upskilling to real business outcomes within a global pharmaceutical company.

4 Adaptive cultures

Culture is a force multiplier for leadership, teaming and learning interventions as GenAI transforms work. Driven by a sense of urgency, AI Transformers sustain momentum by normalising experimentation, risk-taking and innovation.

5 Strategic integration

To increase ROI and reduce risks, AI Transformers embed GenAI into business strategies, operating models and KPIs – it is not treated as a bolt-on. We offer insights from the global EY organisation's own AI transformation journey.

The journey from experimentation to transformation

There is no single path to successful GenAI transformation, but there is a pattern. The most successful organisations start with a growth mindset, build through teams, embed learning, shape culture, integrate strategy – and manage the emotional journey throughout.

This is not just a technology shift. It's performance reimagined: where scaled GenAI adoption unlocks new levels of performance, creativity and growth. To reach those levels, GenAI demands urgent attention on the human, organisational and strategic dimensions of change.

About the research

This whitepaper is grounded in a three-phase research programme conducted by EY in 2024–2025. Our aim was to understand how Generative AI (GenAI) is reshaping human performance in the workplace – and what it takes to move from experimentation to transformation. We explored not just what organisations are doing with GenAI, but how they are doing it, and what helps or hinders them along the way.

Phase 1: Literature review – discovering the landscape

We began by reviewing over 180 sources, including academic papers, industry reports, competitor insights, and EY's own use cases. This desk-based research helped us map the current state of GenAI adoption in enterprise settings, identify common barriers and enablers, and surface early evidence of productivity and performance gains.

Phase 2: Leadership interviews – exploring the human experience

To test and refine our hypotheses, we conducted 18 in-depth interviews with leaders across sectors including life sciences, financial services, consumer products, technology, government, and infrastructure. Interviewees ranged from middle managers to C-suite executives, all with direct experience of GenAI implementation. The interviews focussed on the goals and progress of GenAI adoption in the organisation, culture and change management, the role of leaders, and the approach taken to GenAI learning programmes.

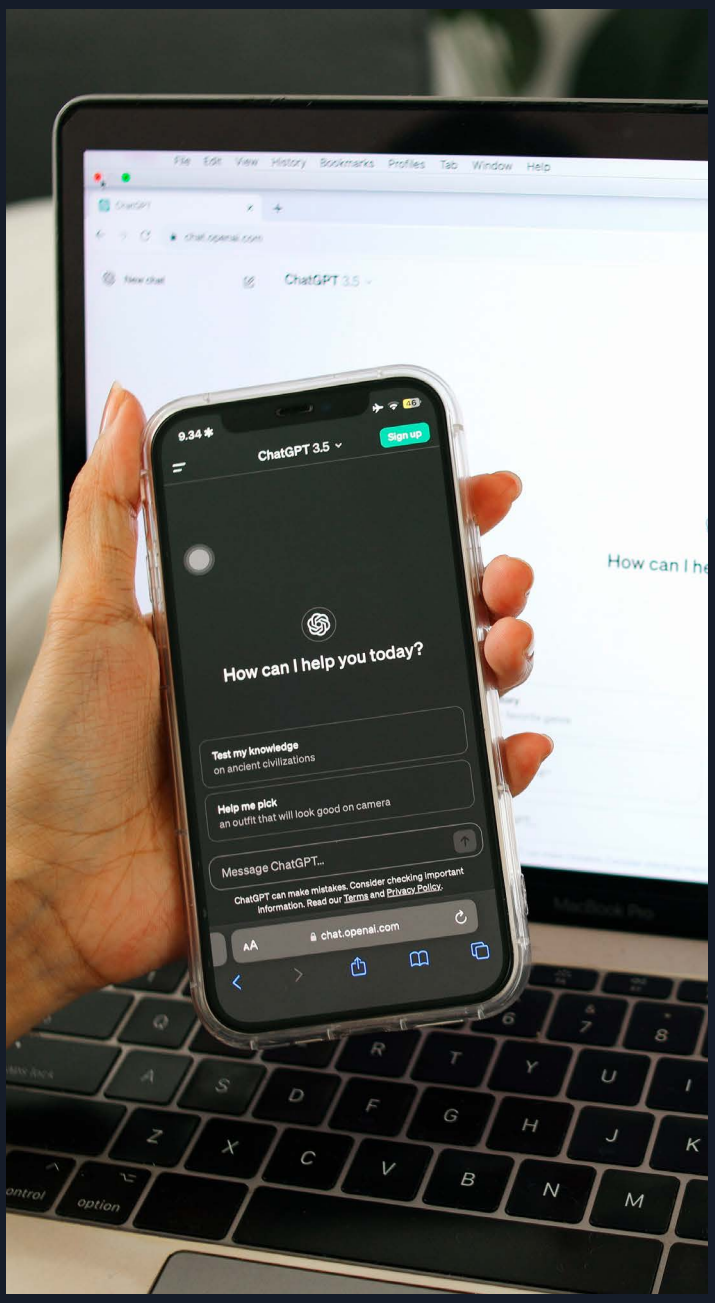
Phase 3: UK GenAI user perception study – validating at scale

Our final phase was a survey of 665 GenAI users based in the UK that have already adopted GenAI to some extent. These included users taking their first steps with GenAI to those who are actively engaging with it in their day-to-day work – from junior employees to senior leaders, and across functions including marketing, HR, finance, operations, and technology.

Rather than offering a whole-of-market view, this study zeroed in on the organisations and individuals at the forefront of GenAI adoption. We explored how they are using GenAI, what benefits they are seeing, what barriers they face, and how their experiences differ across the four adoption segments.

A note on our use of GenAI

Throughout this research, we used GenAI not just as a subject of study but as a copilot. GenAI tools supported the design of survey questions, data analysis and synthesis, the stress-testing of hypotheses, and development of this whitepaper. This allowed us to move faster, think broader, and model the very behaviours we are advocating for.



1

The current state of GenAI adoption in UK organisations

A year of momentum — and significant performance gains for some

GenAI adoption is accelerating but remains uneven — not just between organisations, but within them. Some teams are transforming how they work. Others are still watching from the sidelines.

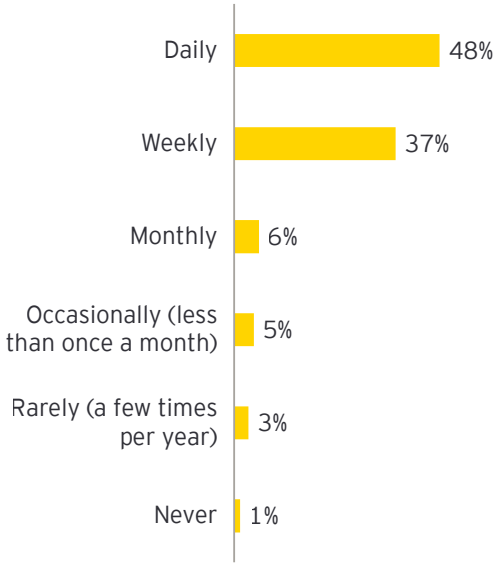
This chapter explores the current state of GenAI adoption in UK organisations, drawing on EY's proprietary research. The findings reveal a clear message: **GenAI is transforming team performance — but only where the conditions are right.**

GenAI adoption is growing fast

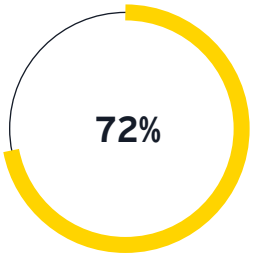
Globally, AI usage is becoming routine in the workplace – 65% of workers now use AI at least weekly, while 57% claim to be using AI agents at least weekly[4]. To understand the specific conditions for habitual GenAI use, we surveyed 665 GenAI users in the UK – 48% reported using GenAI daily, while 85% use it at least weekly. Equally impressive is the speed to routine use – 48% of UK users report that they used GenAI regularly within just three months of its introduction to their organisation. GenAI adoption is not only possible but can happen quickly.

However, GenAI is still primarily used for search and summarisation, with more advanced applications still emerging. The most common use cases are searching for information (58%), summarising documents (56%) and drafting communications (47%). Less common are brainstorming ideas (35%), writing code (23%) and managing workflows (14%).

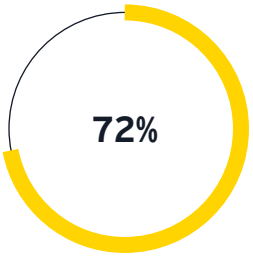
GenAI use is growing and delivering huge benefits



6 **hours per week saved**
by the median AI user – rising to 11 hours per week for advanced users

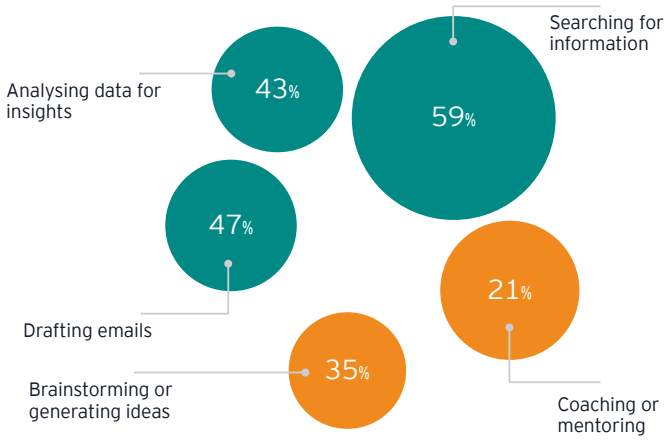


agree GenAI improves their overall **productivity**



agree that GenAI improves their overall **performance**

How employees are using GenAI at work today



The explanation? How people perceive GenAI shapes how they use it – and the benefits they gain. Some users see GenAI as a tool: a way to automate tasks, speed up research, or draft content. Others see it as a thought partner: a collaborator in ideation, decision-making and learning. This mindset shift matters. Those who view GenAI as a colleague or thought partner report higher usage intensity (+14%), greater time savings (+2.6 hours) and are more likely to report performance gains (+11% agreement).

These insights reframe the AI adoption challenge: it's not just about access or training, it's about mindset. The more expansive the mindset, the greater the return.

4 EY (2025) Work Reimagined. EY Professional Services Limited

GenAI is improving productivity, performance and wellbeing

For users who overcome the psychological hurdles, GenAI is saving time — and lots of it. Surveyed users tell us this time is reinvested in better-quality or higher-value work and, strikingly, improved wellbeing. Gains show up at individual, team and organisational levels.

Select examples from our research:

Productivity	Performance	Wellbeing
▪ The median user in our UK survey saves six hours per week using GenAI — with the top-performing segment saving 11 hours. ▪ Overall, 72% agree GenAI has increased their productivity. ▪ In Microsoft research completed in partnership with the Bank of Queensland, analysts using Copilot saved 15 minutes per analysis (50%) and communicated findings more readily[5].	▪ Overall, 72% agree GenAI has increased their performance. ▪ At the team level, surveyed GenAI users report it is driving an 83% increase in speed and efficiency, 79% improvement in team performance and 79% boost in creativity and curiosity. ▪ Academic studies show lower-skilled and less-experienced workers stand to benefit most from GenAI adoption[6],[7], signalling a fundamental shift in performance distribution.	▪ GenAI helps 65% of surveyed users better manage their workload ▪ 54% feel less likely to burn out and 55% feel more connected at work ▪ Overall, 56% report improved wellbeing. ▪ Wellbeing sentiment also extends to the task level. Microsoft's study of Copilot users found that GenAI reduces the mental effort for difficult tasks while simultaneously increasing the quality of work[8].

These are not marginal gains. They represent a fundamental shift in performance dynamics — enabling teams to work faster, elevate quality and better manage their workload. In the pharmaceutical industry, GenAI is revolutionising diagnostic and drug discovery work. One of our interviewees claimed:

For organisations that can scale, sustain and track these benefits, they deliver significant value at a speed that CFOs are unaccustomed. Select examples include:

- 51% of GenAI adopters report a revenue increase of at least 10% over the past two years.
- The fastest adopting organisations can generate $3.7 returns for every $1 invested in AI initiatives, within 14 months[9].

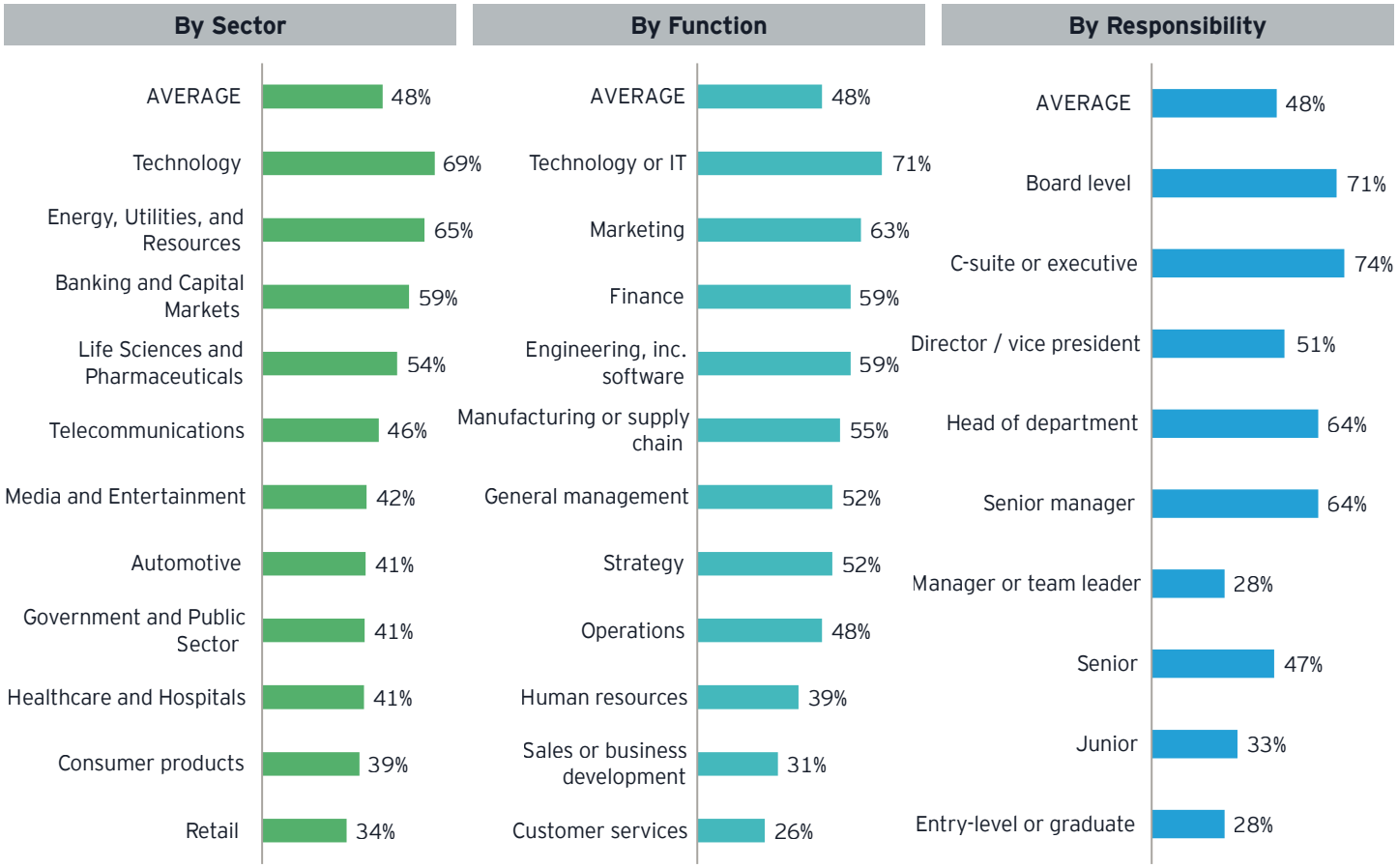
> "Previous diagnostics took 40-70 days, AI-enabled diagnostics are now taking 4-5 days — assessing and guiding patients to the correct pathway faster.
>
> GenAI is also expediting regulatory approvals — reducing the time taken to draft/curate a response from 70 hours to two hours.
>
> **Commercial, Associate Director, global pharmaceutical company**

5 Microsoft WorkLab (2025) AI Data Drop: Handling risky business in half the time
6 Noy, S., & Zhang, W. (2023)
7 Brynjolfsson, E., Li, D., & Raymond, L. R. (2023)
8 Microsoft (2025) AI Data Drop: The surprising way AI makes hard work easier
9 IDC Business Opportunity of AI Report (2024)

Scaled GenAI adoption is the key to performance gains — but it remains uneven and unequal

Despite these benefits, GenAI adoption is far from universal. Daily usage varies significantly by sector, function and level. Across eleven surveyed sectors, technology and energy lead; consumer products and retail lag. These differences are reinforced at a functional level — where technology, marketing, finance and engineering teams lead the way; while HR, sales and customer service teams lag, despite the obvious applicability of GenAI in those functions.

Percentage of respondents who use GenAI daily at work



Despite academic research indicating that lower-skilled and less-experienced workers have the most to gain, it seems that putting GenAI into the hands of entry, junior or senior level employees and developing habitual use is proving difficult, certainly by comparison to board, C-suite or senior manager levels — where access may be much easier to secure. Manager or team leader support is important to unlocking habitual GenAI use at lower levels in the organisation, yet managers in our survey reported the equal-lowest rate of daily use — just 28% are role-modelling daily use in organisations today.

Demographic disparities give further cause for concern. Employees under the age of 35 are 17% more likely to use GenAI daily compared to employees over 60, men are 20% more likely to use GenAI than women in the same occupation[10]. In our GenAI user survey, gender disparities are not as wide — 50% of men report using GenAI daily, compared with 45% of women. However, women report saving 1.5 hours per week less than men by using GenAI, likely because they are less likely to use GenAI for higher value use cases such as learning, deep research or creating content.

These disparities matter. They **risk creating a two-speed workforce** — one that is empowered by GenAI, and one that is left behind. Managerial support plays a critical role in accelerating GenAI adoption. Employees with supportive managers began using GenAI regularly 1.5 months earlier than those without. Given their impact, managers should also look to equalise GenAI access and benefits.

10 Humlum, A., & Vestergaard, E. (2025)

What's holding organisations back?

Our research identifies several barriers to GenAI adoption – both structural and emotional.

Structural barriers:

- **Access restrictions:** Many organisations still limit GenAI use to specific teams or roles, reducing opportunities for experimentation.
- **Lack of training:** 51% of organisations do not offer GenAI-related training to their workforce[11]. In our survey, a quarter of employee that have received GenAI training do not believe it is effective.
- **Policy uncertainty:** Legal, ethical, and data concerns delay choices and slow down deployments. Almost half (49%) of surveyed users experienced this at some point during GenAI implementation, of which 54% still do.
- **Fragmented use:** Some solutions require network effects or workflow integration, with pilots not providing the level of scale necessary to drive genuine value.

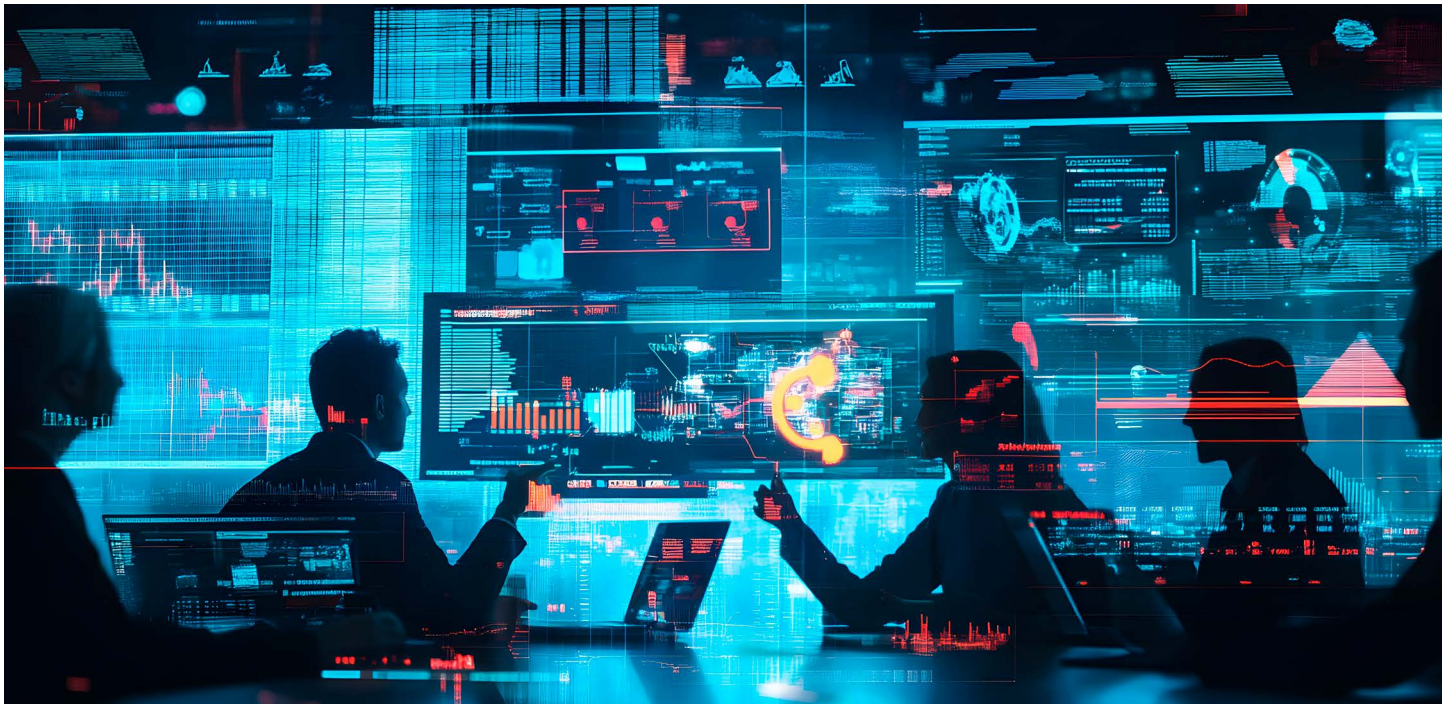
Emotional barriers:

- **Fear of replacement or diminished expertise:** up to 44% of surveyed users have experienced this during GenAI implementation.
- **Lack of trust or confidence in GenAI outputs:** 45% have experienced this during GenAI implementation.
- **Leadership caution or scepticism:** 40% have experienced this during GenAI implementation.

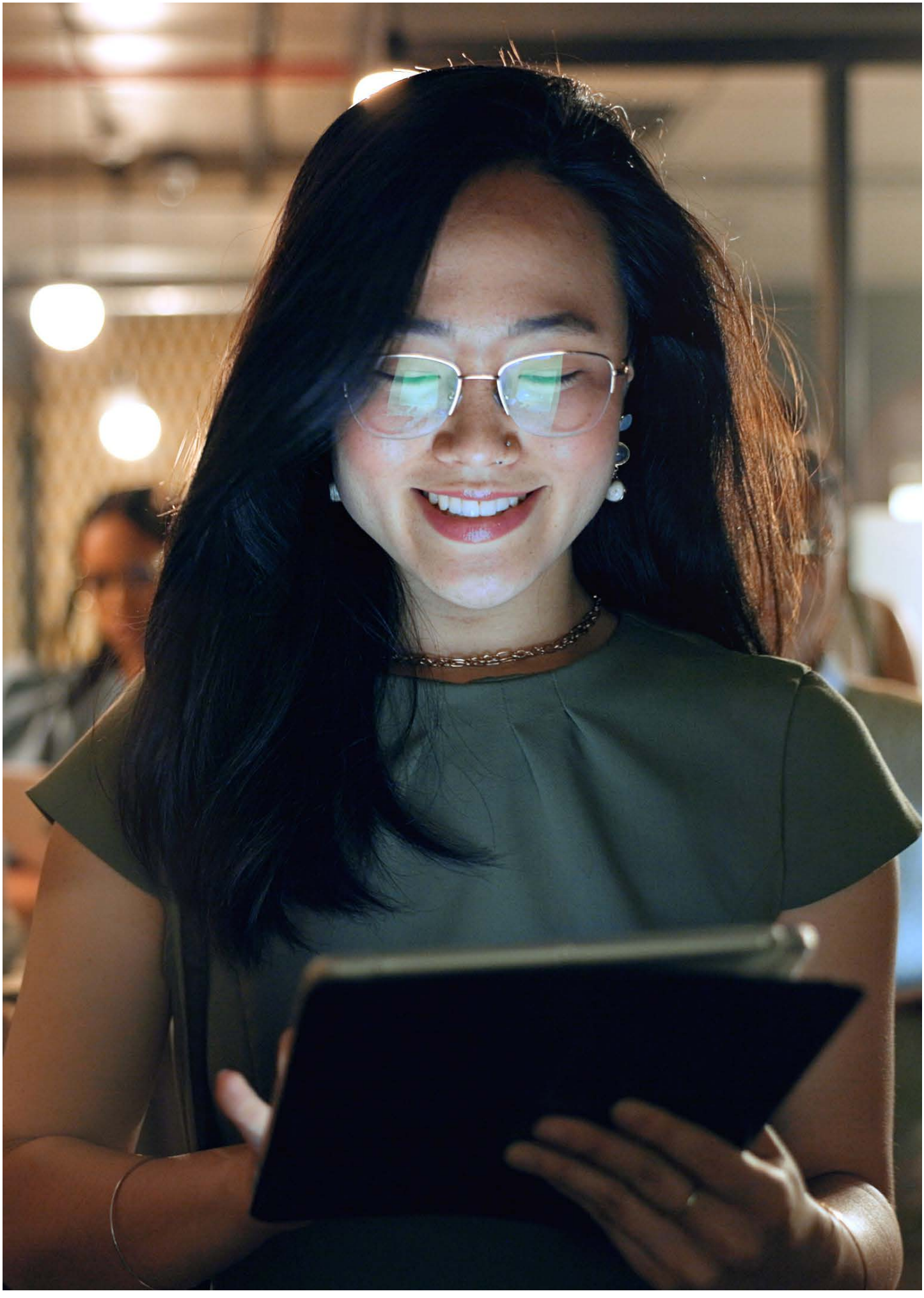
These findings reflect a broader truth: GenAI adoption is not just about access – it's about habit. Research shows that users need to save just 11 minutes per week for 11 weeks to form a lasting GenAI habit[12]. But without the right support, few make it that far. This underscores the importance of embedding GenAI into daily workflows early, before excitement fades.

Key takeaway

GenAI is augmenting human performance and enhancing wellbeing – especially when adopted with a broad mindset on what GenAI can be used for. But adoption remains uneven, and barriers persist. Progress requires more than providing employees with GenAI access. Without dedicated effort to build routine GenAI habits, we risk creating a two-speed workforce.



11 i4cp (2024) AI Workforce Readiness Survey
12 Microsoft (2024) AI data drop: The 11x11 tipping point



2

The four faces of GenAI adoption

Organisations are embedding GenAI into work at different speeds, with very different outcomes

In every organisation, GenAI adoption follows a curve. But it's not a smooth one. Instead, it's jagged — shaped by individual mindsets, team cultures, and organisational support. Some are thriving. Others are stuck. And many are still unsure.

To understand this variation, EY segmented 665 GenAI users in UK enterprises into four distinct groups based on their usage patterns, confidence levels, and performance outcomes. This chapter explores what sets these groups apart — and what would help more organisations become AI Transformers overall.

Meet the four segments

Through interviews and survey results, we identified the characteristics of four distinct organisational segments. The four segments have common AI adoption patterns that create eye-opening results:

- **AI Sceptics** — low-use, low-benefit, low-belief
- **AI Explorers** — curious users but inconsistent in their adoption
- **AI Scalers** — confident users realising performance benefits
- **AI Transformers** — high-intensity, high-impact users who deeply integrate GenAI into their workflows for maximum benefit.

The four faces of GenAI adoption:

Segment	AI Sceptics	AI Explorers	AI Scalers	AI Transformers
% of surveyed users	18%	23%	35%	24%
Typical AI usage pattern	Occasional, low integration	Regular but not embedded	Frequent, integrated into some workflows	Deeply embedded into daily work
AI confidence	28%	44%	81%	96%
% reporting significant or complete work redesign	5%	23%	32%	73%
Average hours saved per week	4	6	8	11
Performance gains	Low	Moderate	High	Very high

In AI Explorer organisations, GenAI use is sporadic. One team member might use it to draft emails, while others avoid it altogether. There's curiosity, but no shared norms. In contrast, AI Transformers treat GenAI as a team sport: prompts are shared, workflows redesigned, and GenAI is embedded in how work gets done.

Usage and integration: the AI Transformer advantage

AI Transformers are not just using GenAI; they are reimagining performance through deep integration and team collaboration. While only 8% of AI Sceptics say GenAI is "essential" to their daily work, 57% of AI Transformers do. They are also more likely to:

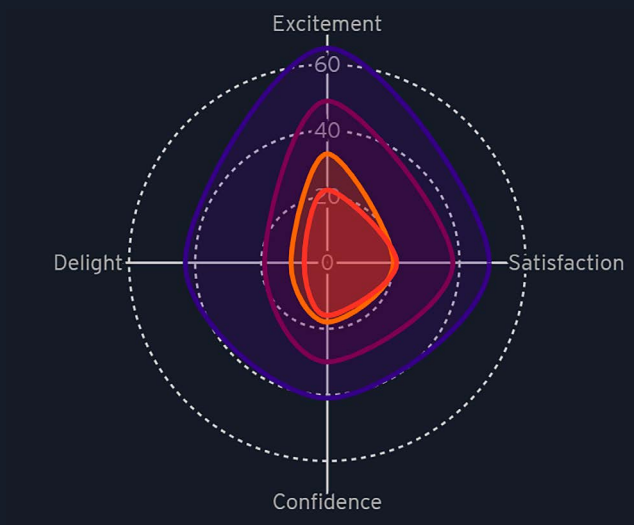
- Use GenAI across multiple tasks and tools (45% vs. 21% of AI Sceptics)
- Integrate GenAI into team workflows (57% vs. 8%)
- Receive training tailored to their role (92% vs. 22%)
- Work in teams where GenAI is a shared norm (96% vs. 20%).

This integration matters. It turns GenAI from a tool into a teammate — and from a novelty into a necessity.

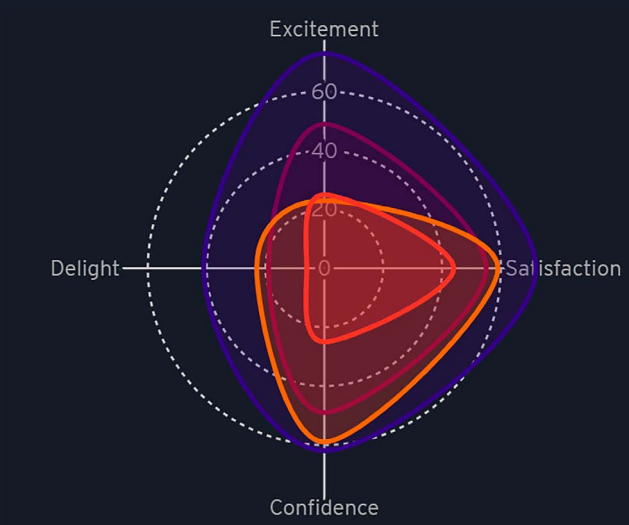
The emotional journey: why mindset matters

The difference between segments isn't just technical. It's emotional. AI Transformers start their GenAI journey with higher levels of **excitement, satisfaction and confidence** – and sustain these emotions over time. AI Sceptics, by contrast, begin with **much less positivity** and that remains so deeper into the transformation journey.

Reported emotions during the first three weeks of GenAI adoption, by segment:



Reported emotions after 4-6 months of GenAI adoption, by segment:



AI Transformers AI Scalers AI Explorers AI Sceptics

This mix of emotions is not incidental. It shapes how people engage with GenAI – and whether they persist through the learning curve. A leader within a global pharmaceutical company underlines the importance of placing as much effort on the change journey as on the technology itself:

The psychology of AI transformation

Most users perceive GenAI to be simply an assistant (67%) or a tool (59%). The AI Transformer mindset is different. Embracing the potential of GenAI, they are almost 2x more likely to see it as a **thought partner** (34%) or **collaborator** (30%). They are also more likely to:

- Understand how GenAI works (93%)
- Know how to design prompts (90%)
- Feel confident validating outputs (90%)
- Tailor GenAI to meet their needs (93%).

By contrast, only 21% of AI Sceptics know how to design prompts, and just 28% feel confident using GenAI at work. This suggests that AI transformation is as much about **mindset** as it is about mechanics. How we think about GenAI shapes how we use it.

> “The emotional journey matters. If you don’t support people early and train them at the right time, they get stuck in frustration. But if you do, they move quickly to confidence and delight.

Commercial, Digital and Innovation Associate Director, global pharmaceutical company.

Key takeaway

GenAI adoption is not binary, it’s a spectrum shaped by behaviours, mindsets and support. The most successful users are not just using GenAI, they are transforming with it. Others are falling behind — failing to manage crunch points in the emotional journey of AI adoption and watching momentum stall. The technology opportunity is clear. The human challenge is complex.

3

The five drivers of effective GenAI adoption

From experimentation to transformation

If Chapter 2 showed us that GenAI adoption varies widely across the four organisational segments, Chapter 3 asks: Why do some organisations become AI Transformers and others stall at AI Explorers? What if the real barrier to GenAI transformation isn't the technology but a lack of organisational readiness?

Our research identifies five drivers that consistently underpin effective GenAI adoption. These are not technical enablers. They are interlinked, mutually reinforcing organisational capabilities that sustain high performance in any context. They shape how people learn, collaborate, lead, and embed GenAI into their work.

The role of leadership, culture and learning

AI Transformers don't emerge in isolation. They are shaped by their environment. Compared to other segments, AI Transformers are more likely to:

- Be supported by **senior leaders and line managers**
- Work in teams and cultures that are **open, adaptive and innovative**
- Receive **engaging, role-specific training.**

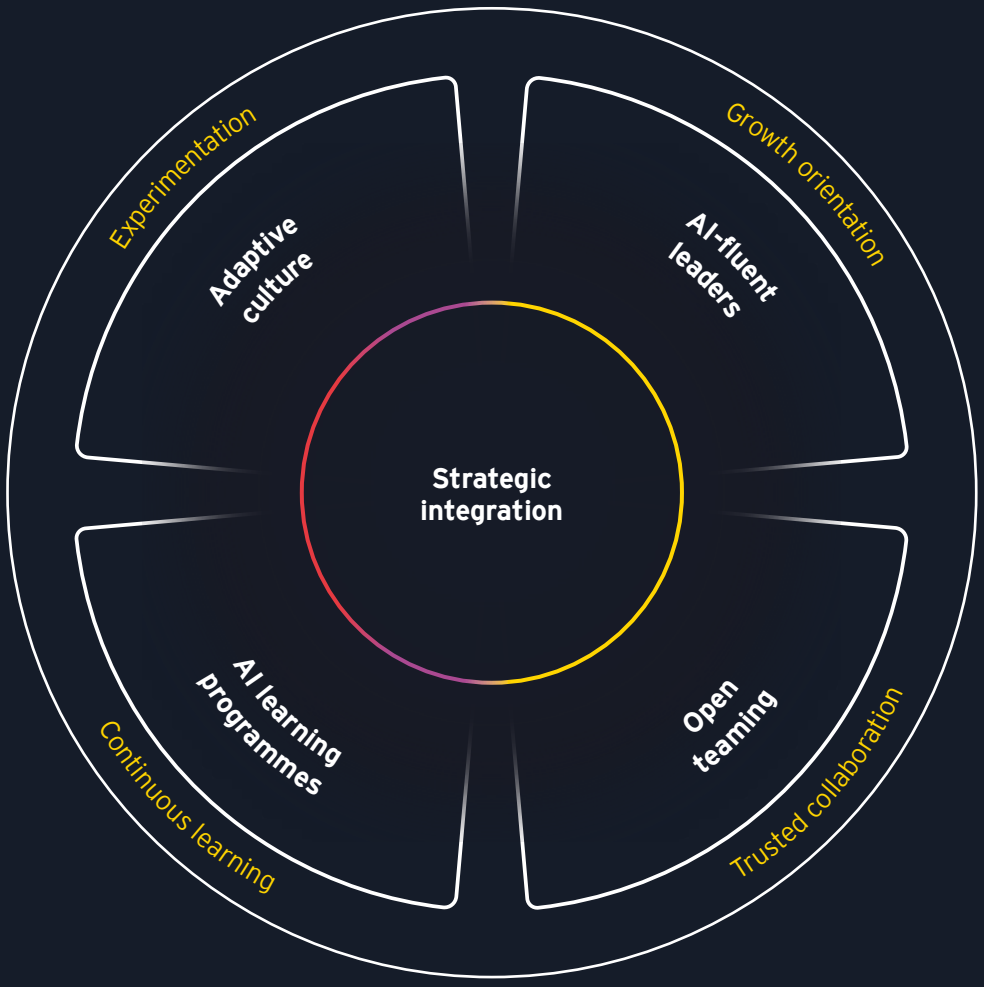
As one interviewee put it:

> "We didn't treat GenAI as a special project. We treated it as a new way of working — and our executive leaders told us what to de-prioritise to create the time and space to get it right.

SVP Brand and Marketing,
global consumer goods company

Here's the provocation: to become AI Transformers, organisations need to see AI adoption as behaviour change, not technology implementation. Change rests on five drivers of effective AI adoption. Each driver is explored below – beginning with a provocation, followed by evidence, guidance and suggested actions.

The five drivers of effective GenAI adoption



AI Transformers accelerate AI adoption by:

- Building **AI-fluent leaders** committed to personal and team growth, who set a clear and secure vision for GenAI within the company, role model their own use and create time/space for teams to experiment.
- Placing teams at the centre of work redesign, bringing partners into **open teams** to integrate GenAI into workflows and build confidence/skills simultaneously.
- Creating and implementing **AI learning programmes** tailored by role and function, providing upskilling through a core AI curriculum and series of just-in-time active learning loops aligned to GenAI pilots or work redesign activities.
- Sustaining an **adaptive culture** that responds quickly to challenges and opportunities by normalising experimentation, risk-taking and knowledge sharing.
- **Integrating** business and AI **strategies** to harness resource constraints as a driver of change rather than a blocker to GenAI investment, prioritising specialist solutions and tracking value through delivery.

3.1 AI-fluent leadership

What if your leaders envisioned transformation possibilities at the speed of GenAI?

Why it matters: AI-fluent leaders build trust, reduce ambiguity, and accelerate adoption – creating the conditions for the organisation to adopt GenAI to its fullest extent.

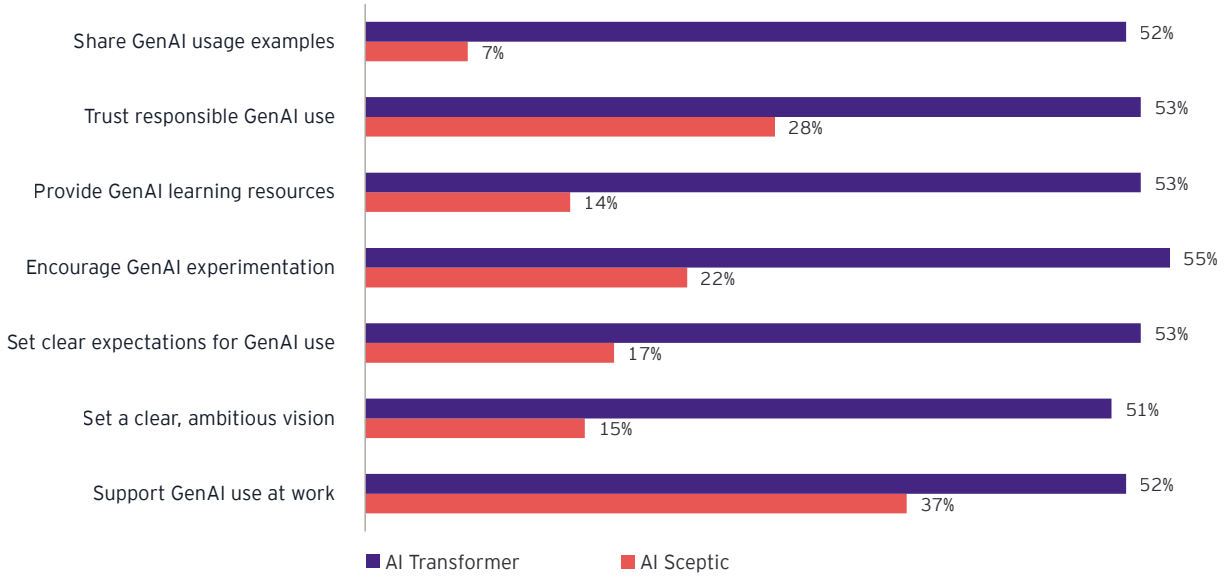
During our research, we interviewed leaders at all stages of their AI adoption journeys. Those experiencing the most success leading AI transformation display three mindsets and three capabilities, framed from GenAI adoption stories and fit for future agentic AI adoption too.

Leading AI adoption requires three mindsets, three capabilities

Mindsets		Capabilities	
Growth	▪ Commit to continuous AI learning for self-development ▪ Create AI learning opportunities for others	**Reinventing work**	▪ Envision AI possibilities, making bold choices to augment business performance ▪ Redesign existing processes and ways of working, integrating human and AI capabilities
Courage	▪ Embrace change, balancing curiosity and caution to break new ground with AI ▪ Build trust by upholding ethical guidelines – pause or alter AI projects that pose ethical concerns, regardless of delivery pressures ▪ Role model own use of AI transparently when faced with uncertainty, disinterest or scepticism	**Mobilising teams**	▪ Communicate clear guardrails describing when GenAI should be used, with aligned capabilities and decision right ▪ Inspire teams to experiment with GenAI, geating the required time and resources to give people exposure to relevant solutions ▪ Create open and psychologically safe environments, in which knowledge and learning is freely shared to advance performance
Value	▪ Take a balanced value perspective – identifying revenue growth and value creation opportunities alongside cost efficiencies ▪ Build comfort with value proofing during implementation, not having full view of ROI up front.	**Catalysing change**	▪ Empower people at all levels to address problems, challenge ways of working and embrace failure ▪ Create and harness ecosystem partnerships to bring AI development into the flow of work.

We tested the effectiveness of these mindsets and capabilities in our survey. Leaders in AI Transformer organisations show a clear edge on mindsets and behaviours (53% of users recognise AI fluent leaders, versus 20% of AI Sceptics); but still have a large margin for improvement as they try to reach a larger pool of their workforce with GenAI initiatives.

How leaders show up in AI Transformer vs AI Sceptic organisations



Leaders face a delicate balancing act to turn GenAI enthusiasm into real results at scale. Maintaining momentum is key at all leadership levels, creating the space for transformation through clear planning and prioritisation, including guidance on what work to stop in favour of priority GenAI workstreams. Leaders should not lose sight of the mixed emotions that GenAI evokes –while 60% of global workers agree AI enhances their performance at work, 40% are concerned about jobs being lost and not replaced; while 38% are concerned by AI overreliance eroding human skills, expertise and learning (EY Work Reimagined Survey 2025).

> “AI’s potential excites people as much as it concerns them. Leaders must tap into this enthusiasm whilst also addressing their concerns.
>
> **Catriona Campbell, Partner and AI Client Strategy Leader, EY**

Building the confidence of those not routinely using AI is vital to addressing the problem of uneven adoption. In the EY AI Readiness Blueprint report[13], workers who haven’t used AI at work in the past month say they aren’t confident using it (54%) or haven’t been given a clear reason/purpose to use it (42%). Line managers have a big role to play here. 45% of surveyed users in AI Transformer organisations indicated that their line manager champions GenAI adoption — defined as taking an active involvement throughout GenAI pilots and implementation activities. This reduces to just 16% of Scalers, 6% of Explorers and 5% of Sceptics.

The ask of middle managers is to activate change at every level. Some simple tactics to consider include:

- Run experiments within your team — encourage autonomy and ownership by giving personal actions and providing necessary resources or support.
- Combat cynicism in daily interactions or workflows, role modelling curiosity and reinforcing the benefits of GenAI.
- Operationalise the company strategy in key decision points (resourcing, hiring, team L&D activities etc).

How to build AI fluency and lead the transformation:

- Run intensive GenAI bootcamps for senior leaders. No opt outs.
- Role model your own use of GenAI in real work scenarios. Discuss successes and failures often to normalise GenAI use in the workplace.
- Articulate a clear, secure vision for GenAI, one that balances opportunity, risk and urgency. What is your organisation attempting to achieve by implementing GenAI? What is your expectation of every team and employee? What support is available?
- Provide reassurance, where you can — have you discussed how GenAI may impact your teams work? Even if there are no plans to automate roles, do your teams know this? Be clear, where possible, and create opportunities for dialogue.
- Create time for AI transformation by clarifying what teams should de-prioritise.

EY’s approach: Our leadership readiness programmes develop the mindsets and capabilities that define AI-fluent leaders. We help leaders move from curiosity to confidence — and from vision to value.

13 EY Studio+ (2025) The AI Readiness Blueprint

3.2 Open teams

What if your teams applied GenAI when working together, not just alone?

Why it matters: Previously, the mechanics of teamwork could be considered the (1) expertise of individuals coming together, (2) ease with which they can build collaborative trust, and (3) speed of team interactions[14]. GenAI transforms these mechanics by introducing a 24/7 copilot or agent that draws upon knowledge across any specialism and assists with a broad range of work tasks. This has the potential to shift the 'edge' of high-performing teams[15] – and our research indicates this edge is now built on experimentation, momentum and resilience.

Our survey results indicate that teams in AI Transformer organisations don't just use AI individually, they use it together – experimenting with GenAI, reviewing outputs, sharing successful prompts, and co-creating new AI-powered workflows. GenAI usage becomes a shared norm in high-performing teams:

- 98% of AI Transformers experiment with GenAI as a team, vs. 39% of AI Sceptics
- 96% have opportunities to practise GenAI skills, vs. 15% of AI Sceptics
- 95% share GenAI learning with colleagues, vs. 14% of AI Sceptics
- 85% of AI Transformers receive feedback on GenAI prompts 'often or always' (received in the solution, from colleagues and line managers, or during learning events), vs. 15% of AI Sceptics.

Teams that make GenAI usage a shared norm report significantly higher GenAI adoption benefits – saving up to seven more hours per week, with 70% more reporting performance benefits and 92% indicating that GenAI improves their overall wellbeing (vs. 9% of AI Sceptics).

The DNA of an "open" team

AI Transformers identified in interviews and survey results achieve these breakthrough levels of performance by focussing on four key areas:

- **Rituals:** Teams schedule weekly prompt swaps, agent showcases, GenAI retros – building collective experimentation into their ways of working. Clear direction from management on GenAI use helps to maintain responsible experimentation, within ethical and secure guardrails.
- **Roles:** AI-powered teams view GenAI as a teammate, not a tool; with evidence that some are starting to give GenAI the role of coach (37%) or thought partner (34%) to level-up team performance. As the complexity of GenAI's role on the team grows, clearly defined human responsibilities such as prompt curator or possibilities coach emerge.
- **Norms:** AI-powered teams sustain momentum and execution speed by establishing common expectations around experimentation, sharing feedback routinely, and taking ownership of AI outputs. Whether positive or negative, feedback on GenAI use fuels team performance. Team norms interact closely with organisational culture, particularly in relation to risk tolerance.
- **Collaboration:** Use of cross-functional teams regularly showed up as most effective in our leadership interviews and surveys, particularly when blending ecosystem partner expertise across organisational boundaries.

AI-powered teams not only bring their GenAI use into the open, but they collaborate beyond organisational boundaries to further their skills. Underscoring the importance of working directly with external partners, our research shows that it can deliver outsized benefits to teams, including:

- 80% of those working with partners are confident with GenAI, vs 43% who do not work with external partners
- 83% agreed GenAI has increased their team's knowledge of skills, vs 70%.

14 EY (2021) Teams in a disruptive age

15 EY (2021) What gives teams the edge. Edge defined as the capacity to adapt nimbly to change, perform in the face of adversity and sustain energy to drive innovation and improvement.

A leader within an AI Transformer organisation described how their team works with external partners to redesign workflows:

> We hold regular sessions with our ecosystem partner, in the flow of work, to learn from live projects and understand the most effective prompting approaches as we create new content.

SVP Brand and Marketing,
global consumer goods company

A health warning on human-AI collaboration

The forthcoming EY Work Reimagined Survey 2025 indicates that 79% of employers agree that AI adoption has increased collaboration across teams. This is somewhat inconsistent with how employees are reinvesting the time they save with AI – in the same survey, almost half (48%) of employees indicated they reinvest time to complete more work or improve the quality of their work, while only 21% reported spending more time with colleagues. Could it be that leaders are mistaking AI-powered work (higher quality, cross-functional ideas or solutions generated quickly) for increased collaboration?

Recent research from Upwork[16] offers reason for caution. 67% of AI users report trusting AI more than coworkers, and 84% say they have a better relationship with AI than their team. What if our connection with AI fractures the bonds within our teams? This risk, above all others, requires us to be intentional about how we redesign work, putting teams at the centre and maintaining rituals that promote greater connection, higher quality relationships, and mutual benefits.

How to reconstruct teams for AI-powered performance:

- Build rituals around GenAI use – weekly prompt swaps, agent showcases, and GenAI retros all help normalise experimentation and accelerate learning.
- Launch GenAI "experimentation circles" within and across teams, encouraging cross-functional collaboration. Pair teams with internal and external AI experts.
- Identify teams with high intensity GenAI users and give them additional resources to experiment faster, deeper and with the latest agentic AI solutions – extending learning programmes into practice.
- Identify workflows causing the most problems and redesign them with AI embedded at the core, leveraging the help of external partners to accelerate progress.
- Share lessons learned across the organisation.

EY's approach: We help clients run "open team" experiments – A/B testing the impact of GenAI solutions on team performance. We co-design solutions with external partners, train teams on how to use the solutions, and measure the impact of different change interventions on how effectively teams move from pilots to sustained high performance.

16 Monahan, K., & Burlacu, G. (2025)

3.3 Continuous learning

What if GenAI training was as dynamic as the technology itself?

Why it matters: Learning is one of the five key accelerants of GenAI value, but up to 50% of employees are yet to participate in any GenAI training[17]. And generic training doesn't stick.

AI Transformers don't stop learning. Their organisations provide engaging, role-specific learning embedded in the flow of work – not just one-off sessions or programmes. With time to practice their new skills and opportunities to share knowledge with their peers, GenAI expertise spreads naturally and widely. Our survey data shows that:

- 95% of learners in Transformers say their training is effective, vs. 12% of Sceptics
- 94% say it's engaging; 89% say it's tailored to their role
- In terms of learning outcomes, 71% of employees in AI Transformer organisations agree with all AI literacy statements, vs. 11% of Sceptics.

An interviewee within an AI Transformer organisation highlighted:

> "It is our belief that to use GenAI effectively and realise the full value of the solution, people need to know how to use it in the right way. Not just targeted at a group of employees but all employees, irrespective of role or function.

Commercial, Digital and Innovation Associate Director, global pharmaceutical company

In contrast, an interviewee with a leader in an AI Scaler organisation indicated the difficulties faced when learning becomes a barrier:

Throughout the course of our research, we've built a picture of what skills people need to learn – from foundational AI literacy for everyone, to tailored AI augmentation training sessions for teams (featuring role and workflow-specific learning), and specialised modules for those leading AI transformation.

What good looks like: A case study from a global life sciences company

Early into their AI transformation journey, the company created a global AI accreditation programmes in partnership with a network of universities. The programmes utilises a gamified, multi-level approach aligned closely with AI implementation timelines.

Level 1:

Minimum level for all employees, requiring four hours of time, focussed on the core components of AI literacy.

Level 2:

8-12 hours with a focus on understanding and selecting appropriate models, and AI governance.

Level 3:

25-30 hours providing exposure and experience alongside education. Focussed on driving Gen AI transformation, this level builds a strong technical foundation and includes requirements to deliver a team workshop on AI and create an AI value case based on team operations (connecting learning to team adoption and work redesign).

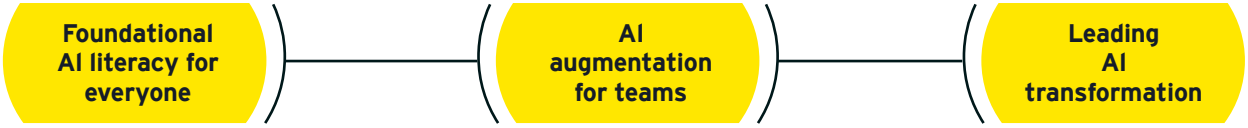
> "Learning is informal, not built into formal ways of working. We experience technical skills gaps in data science and machine learning.

Senior Director, Science and Innovation, global consumer goods company

17 LexisNexis (2024) How Generative AI will Shape the Future of Work

Creating and implementing powerful AI learning programmes

Example GenAI learning topics for individuals, teams and leaders



Foundational AI literacy for everyone

Build the skills to lead AI initiatives within the organisation and explore AI use cases for improved leader effectiveness.

- **Introduction to AI:** Explore the types of AI, current applications and history of the field
- **AI solutions:** Gain hands-on experience with common solutions, tailored to industry and role
- **Prompting:** learn how to structure and contextualise prompts to gain better quality outputs
- **AI and privacy:** Understand the implications of parsing sensitive data through AI models and learn best practices for protection
- **AI ethics and bias:** Learn how to recognise and mitigate biases within AI systems
- **Critical thinking:** Enhance critical thinking skills to evaluate AI-generated content and make informed decisions
- **Future of AI:** Explore potential future developments and their impact on work.

AI augmentation for teams

Contextualise AI within team practices and workflows to aid habit formation and performance gains.

- **AI as a collaborator:** Learn how to use AI as a thought partner for problem-solving, brainstorming, and decision making.
- **Applied AI:** Explore AI applications relevant to role, e.g. for project managers use of AI in project planning, resource allocation, and risk assessment.
- **AI-enhanced communication:** Explore use of AI tools to improve team communication, including content creation, translation and async practices.
- **AI for personal development:** Experience how AI can be used as a development partner, supporting performance management, learning and coaching processes.
- **Agent orchestration:** Live case-based exploration using AI agents to augment human-in-the-loop workflows.

Leading AI transformation

Build initial confidence and trust in GenAI by exposing learners to productive use cases and engaging in conversations about drawbacks.

- **Strategic visioning:** Immerse in the art of the possible, identify AI initiatives to advance business goals, and frame a clear, secure vision for AI.
- **AI value case creation:** Learn to identify and track the business value of AI initiatives across different departments.
- **Change activation:** Understand the best techniques to lead the emotional journey of AI transformation in various contexts
- **AI as an innovation partner:** Explore how to leverage AI to assess competitive positioning and generate new product/service/market entry ideas.
- **Strategic decisioning with AI:** Enhance leadership decision-making processes by incorporating AI-driven insights and predictive analytics.
- **Talent development in the AI era:** Learn to identify and nurture AI-related skills within teams and functions.

How to build powerful GenAI learning programmes:

- Design differentiated training by role, sector and seniority – incorporate domain-specific use cases that help learners better understand how they can apply GenAI to their own work.
- Introduce tiered learning pathways (e.g. Foundational Advanced Leading) that gradually build understanding in alignment with GenAI rollout plans.
- Leverage external partners to scale AI learning programmes.

EY's approach: We help clients build AI fluency at every level, from foundational literacy to leading AI transformation. Based on the methods EY uses internally, our AI learning programmes are structured around three loops – optimisation, innovation and reinvention.

3.4 Adaptive culture

What if your culture rewarded curiosity, not certainty?

Why it matters: Culture is a force multiplier for leadership, teaming and learning as GenAI transforms work. Driven by a sense of urgency, AI Transformers sustain momentum by normalising experimentation, risk-taking and innovation. AI Explorers and AI Sceptics often stall because of fear, ambiguity, or a lack of trust.

Our research reveals four cultural traits that consistently underpin GenAI transformation:

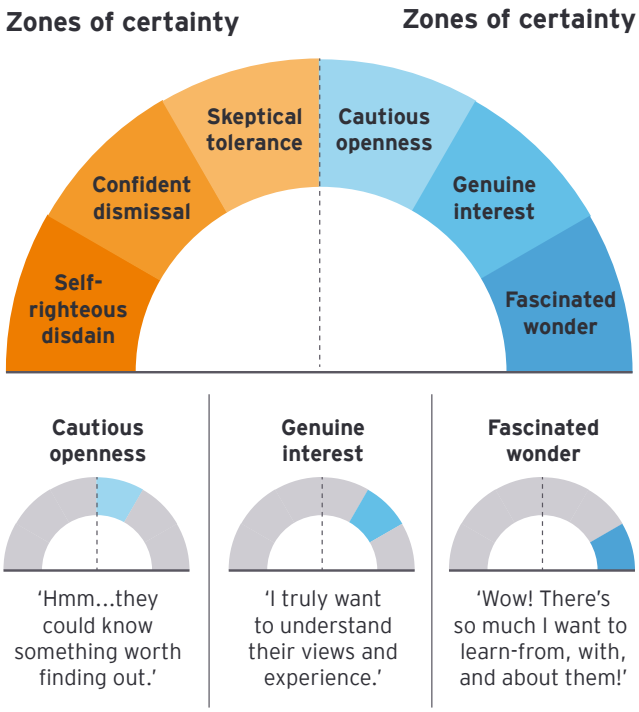
- **Curiosity** to explore initial use cases and stay curious in day-to-day GenAI interactions thereafter.
- A culture of **experimentation**, where employees are empowered to take risks with the aim of innovating processes or workflows.
- **Shared urgency** to act, often framed in a vision for growth or drive for cost efficiencies (where resource constraints force innovation).
- **Trust** as a continuous foundation, where employees trust in both GenAI solutions and leaders' motivations for implementing them.

In our survey results, users shared how organisations with AI Transformer characteristics hold the highest capacity to absorb the change that comes with AI implementation:

- 99% of AI Transformers describe their culture as innovative, vs. 32% of AI Sceptics
- 96% of AI Transformers say their culture is open to change; 97% say it acts with urgency.

Navigating the curiosity curve[18]

Curiosity sits at the heart of GenAI adoption. How open are your people and teams to receiving inputs from GenAI? Do they trust the accuracy and utility of generated content? During interviews, AI Sceptics routinely answered our questions from zone of certainty, confidently dismissing GenAI as a solution or contributor to their job tasks. AI Transformers operate from zones of curiosity, applying GenAI to help them solve problems (using GenAI to generate more marketing content in house as budgets are trimmed) or transcend disciplines (such as coding).



Of course, 'fascinated wonder' comes with its own set of risks – are people retaining a dose of healthy skepticism around results, or at risk of cognitive offloading? 'Cautious openness' and 'genuine interest' appear to be sweet spots, accelerating and improving work while maintaining space for human creativity and critical thinking.

18 Wetzler, J. (2025)

Sustaining performance improvements

Research on the AI adoption funnel within large global firms[19] indicates that while curiosity leads to initial experimentation, the journey to full-scale integration requires sustained experimentation brought about by the combination of several further mindsets: measured risk-taking, process orientation, and continuous improvement. The researchers also found that competition is particularly important from the exploitation/scaling phase onwards, determining the pace and depth of adoption.

Stage	Mindset/Behaviour	Typical Impact on AI adoption
No Experimentation	Risk aversion, status quo	No progress, missed opportunities
Initial Experimentation	Curiosity, "test and learn"	Early insights, low risk, limited scale
Validated Experimentation	Data-driven, measured risk-taking	Proof of value, stakeholder buy-in
Exploitation/Scaling	Confidence, process orientation	Rapid adoption, measurable outcomes
Embedded Practice	Continuous improvement, innovation	Sustained impact, competitive advantage

Our survey results are consistent, with 60% of surveyed AI Transformers indicating a belief that team members use GenAI more than they do, compared with 43% of Scalers, 36% of Explorers and 32% of Sceptics. Simply put, individuals feeling the heat of competition accelerate and deepen their AI adoption — and raise their performance to higher levels.

Refining culture to amplify the impact of GenAI transformation

No matter where you are on the AI adoption journey, from Sceptic to Transformer, your culture will have traits that enable AI adoption and traits that block it. Dialling up enablers and minimising blockers is essential — consider the role of incentives, feedback and trust in helping you do that.

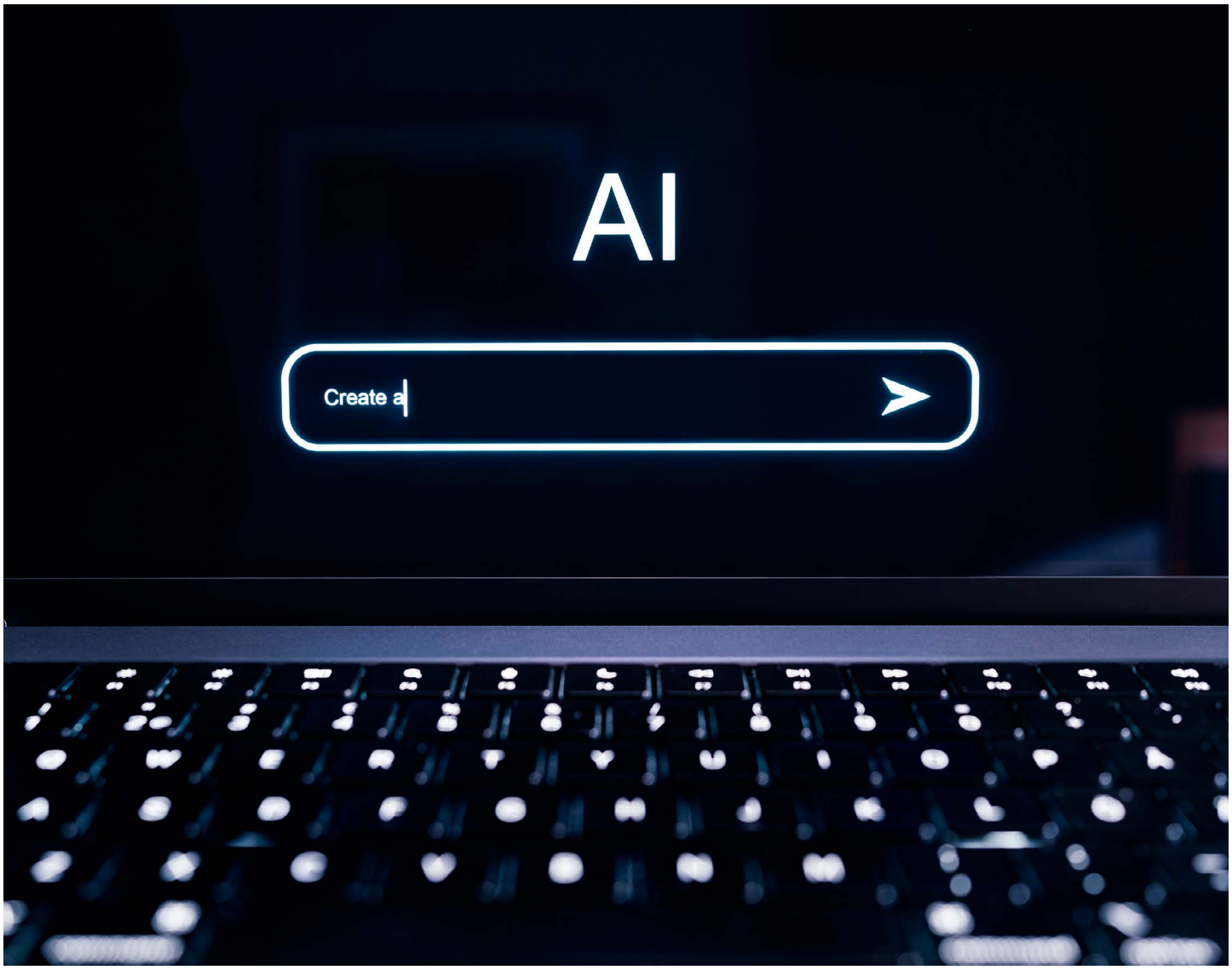
Cultural traits	AI Sceptics	AI Explorers	AI Scalers	AI Transformers
Enablers	▪ Curiosity sparked by leadership messaging	▪ Curious about GenAI ▪ Excitement can follow top-down leadership communication on AI	▪ Experimentative culture ▪ View innovation as a shared responsibility, people are encouraged to contribute ideas	▪ Growth strategies, mergers and acquisitions and carve-outs are seized as opportunities to shape or reset culture, with AI adoption made a symbol of that ▪ Commitment to continuous improvement
Blockers	▪ Fear for job security ▪ Limited collaboration or time to experiment ▪ Resistance to automation	▪ Executive caution ▪ Limited time to experiment ▪ Inconsistent incentives	▪ Excitement doesn't translate to the top — executives are P&L focussed, cautious ▪ Desire to standardise processes before GenAI experiments slows down pathways to full workflow integration ▪ Residual lack of trust in data and AI solutions	▪ Compliance drag ▪ Low failure tolerance, causing some C-suite scepticism

19 Ameye et al. (2024)

How to build an adaptive culture:

- Encourage curiosity — start small in low-risk areas where GenAI could make a difference and build towards experimentation at scale.
- Facilitate GenAI experience sharing — form regular feedback loops incorporating both successes and failures to increase or sustain risk tolerance.
- Create time for teams and particularly managers to use and experiment with GenAI
- Harness the power of competition — set team incentives around strategic goals such as growth or cost reduction and give them the license to experiment at scale (within responsible AI guardrails)
- Redefine performance expectations and KPIs to include AI adoption and related capabilities such as collaboration, creativity and continuous learning.

EY's approach: We help clients diagnose cultural blockers and design interventions that build psychological safety, shared ownership, and regular GenAI habits.



3.5 Strategic integration

What if GenAI was part of your operating model — not just your tech stack?

Why it matters: GenAI use does not equal GenAI value. ROI rests on the repeatable, scalable use of GenAI that comes from embedding it into high-impact workflows. Yet only 24% of users say GenAI is fully integrated into workflows and only 26% strongly agree that it is core to their organisation's strategy. Without comprehensive integration, GenAI use remains limited to isolated tasks, diminishing the full productivity and performance benefits.

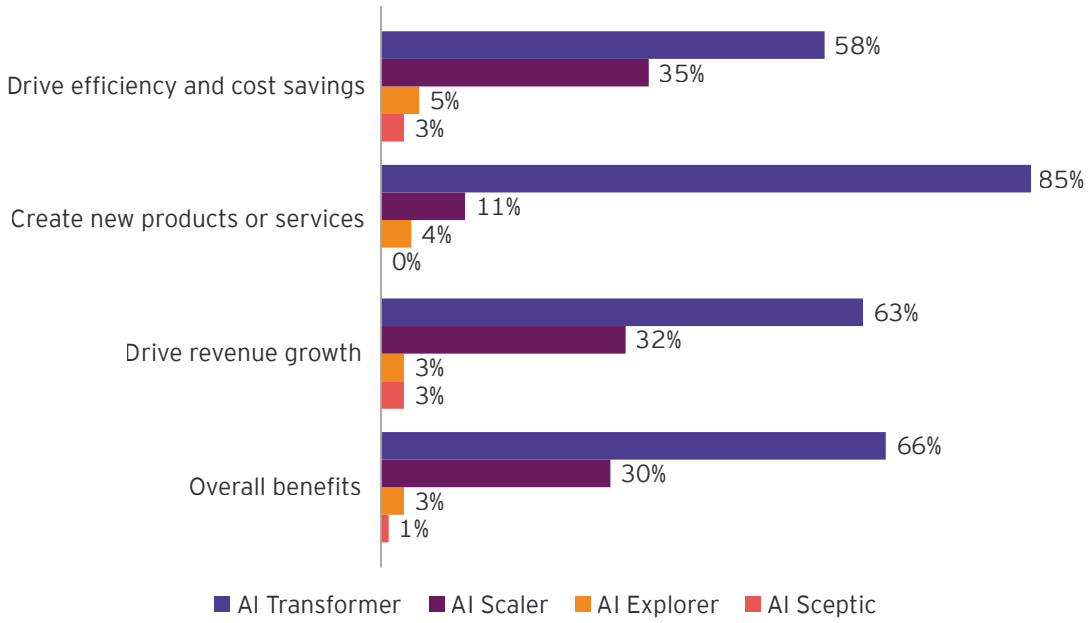
AI Transformers don't treat GenAI as a bolt-on, they embed it into business strategy and set ambitious goals that drive transformation. They also recognise the limited applicability of general purpose GenAI solutions, investing heavily in role or function-specific solutions alongside. Our survey data shows that:

- 98% of AI Transformers say GenAI is integrated into standard ways of working, vs. 17% of AI Sceptics
- 94% say that their organisation invested in specialist solutions, compared to 21% of AI Sceptics
- 93% say they use GenAI across multiple tasks and tools
- 91% say GenAI is aligned with their team's goals and KPIs.

AI Transformers turn these integration benefits into significant business value. Directors in AI Transformer organisations are at least twice as likely to report that GenAI is exceeding or significantly exceeding benefit expectations in their organisation. An adoption-value gap is visible across all other segments.

The adoption-value gap

% of directors who report that GenAI is exceeding or significantly exceeding the organisation's benefit expectations



Two major themes explain the adoption-value gap: constraints vs. abundance and change orchestration.

The power of constraint

During interviews, evidence emerged that the presence of resource constraints was a particular driver of strategic integration. In a global consumer goods company, GenAI became a central pillar of both growth and efficiency plays. The marketing function faced dual pressures – reduce agency spend, whilst also increasing marketing coverage into new channels to drive sales. A classic 'do more with less' conundrum. The team integrated GenAI into the heart of their strategies. Prioritising GenAI-powered creative agencies that could upskill their teams within the flow of work, the SVP built the skills of his team and amplified their productivity while simultaneously reducing overall agency spend. GenAI becomes a clear strategic need in this context.

By contrast, we learned that the strategic context at a life sciences company actively worked against GenAI integration. Here, an organisation under no cost pressure with an abundance of resources viewed GenAI as a sub-par competitor to under-utilised teams. With no strategic priorities or individual incentives to adopt GenAI, teams maintained the status quo with "no hurry" to adapt.

> "Embrace or get left behind — pilot quickly, practice carefully, with a supportive governance framework and phased implementation.

SVP Brand and Marketing, global consumer goods company

> "For me personally, GenAI will start to affect me and my team when it can interpret data and do all the complex data cleaning and statistical analysis required of us. Until it reaches that point, I don't think it will affect us. And our 18-month roadmap doesn't incorporate any of that functionality.

Senior Strategy Director, life sciences

These contrasting strategic contexts indicate the importance of intentionally aligning GenAI investments with business functions under pressure to deliver growth or efficiencies. The resource constraints these strategic contexts create force speed and urgency into experiments, taking teams from pilot to scaled adoption and full transformation faster than those who feel they can afford to sit and wait.

Change orchestration

This whitepaper points to compelling evidence that GenAI adoption is uneven and often unsupported. Just like the variability in the everyday interactions we have with GenAI (governed by prompt quality and structure), AI adoption and its outcomes remain highly variable within and between organisations. To cut through this variability in our own global organisation, EY built a central view of GenAI opportunities aligned to business priorities and guided investments towards a smaller number of high-impact workflows.

What good looks like: EY client zero case study

Faced with proof of concept (PoC) fatigue, scattered AI initiatives throughout the global organisation threatened to dilute focus and squander resources. To harmonise these efforts and align them with business goals (performance, experience, growth), EY teams integrated AI into the core business strategy and created an ethical governance layer to promote a human-centric approach. In doing so, here are the six lessons we learned:

1. **Lead with vision and investment:** Provide executive sponsorship, centralised funding, and a clear operating model with agile budgeting.
2. **Embrace agility and a central AI platform:** A central AI platform enables quick adaptation as the AI frontier shifts, aiding rapid execution and continuous improvement initiatives.
3. **Prioritise upskilling and transparent communication:** AI literacy is essential for all employees to effectively leverage AI in their roles; while clear and frequent communication helps to manage organisational changes that come with AI adoption.
4. **Focus on value and measurable impact:** Use a strategic framework to prioritise AI initiatives that offer clear ROI, creating a value-led roadmap for AI transformation.
5. **Commit to Responsible AI:** Establish clear AI definitions and guidelines is a priority activity. Then, integrate ethical governance and risk management into AI infrastructure to set the foundation for trust and responsible use.
6. **Co-innovate for maximum benefit:** Collaborate with ecosystem partners to create solutions that are tailored and scaled to the needs of your industry and organisation.

Honing the focus on strategic AI investments, prioritising long-term value and measurable growth, EY teams narrowed over 800 AI use cases down to 20 key opportunities, accelerating decision-making to just 8-10 weeks. With these streamlined investments, adoption of EY's flagship EYQ solution reached 81% by December 2024, and 83% of the EY workforce had completed foundational AI training by the same timeframe.

Ethical and responsible use of AI is paramount as organisational AI adoption scales up. Progress is positive: 70% of global employees and 81% of employers agree their organisation ensures responsible and ethical use of AI — operating with clear use policies, transparency, and efforts to reduce bias[4]. Furthermore, on average, 65% of employees agree their organisation complies with each of the nine principles in the EY Responsible AI framework[4]. Organisations should maintain vigilance and guard against over-confidence as pressure to demonstrate ROI increases.

Orchestrating the pathways between GenAI development, adoption and value at an organisational level will only become more difficult as the scale and complexity of GenAI solutions grow. Without a cohesive, centralised AI roadmap, there is a real risk that some areas organisations build technical debt while delivering misaligned AI pilots/PoCs. AI Transformers take steps to focus their GenAI investments through business strategy alignment, prioritising tailored solutions that maximise value and simultaneously address acute resource constraints in the business today.

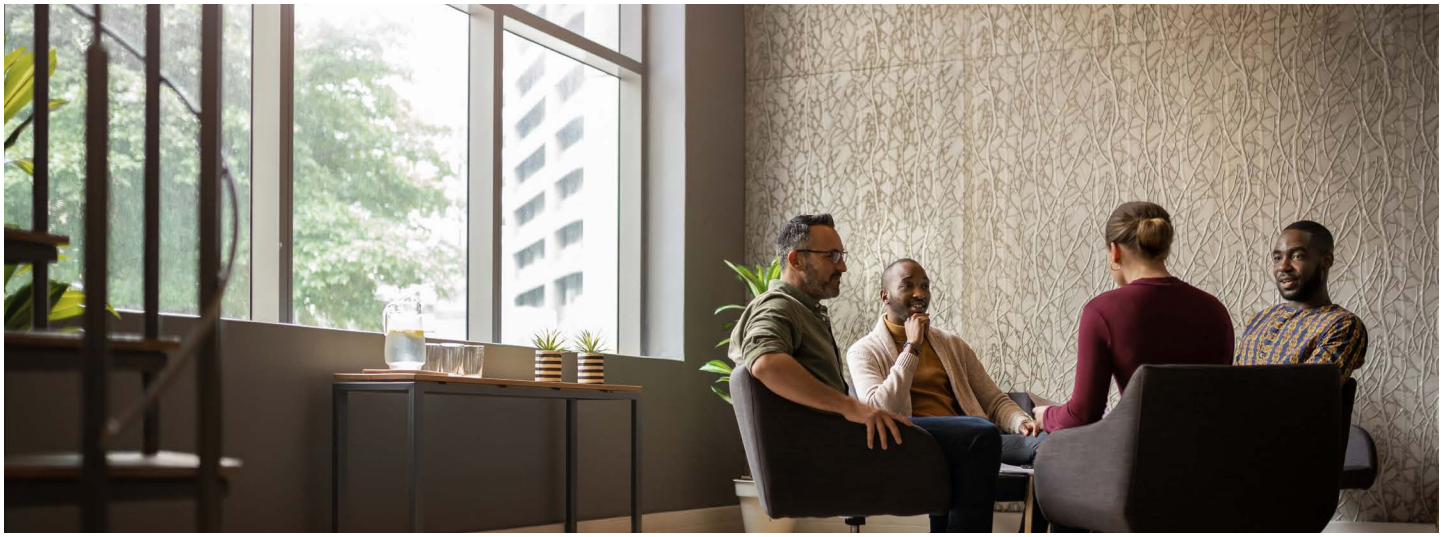
How to integrate GenAI within business strategy and operations:

- Align GenAI initiatives with business priorities and frame GenAI as a crucial lever to accomplishing goals, rather than just a 'nice to have'.
- Prioritise high-impact workflows that would benefit from being redesigned with GenAI at the core — maintain focus on a small number of priority initiatives, scaling up as capabilities grow.
- Create a rigorous value tracking methodology, making ROI the primary metric of success, not GenAI usage. Avoid requiring a time-consuming and detailed business case upfront before approving GenAI use cases. Instead, clearly define the anticipated value and align GenAI initiatives with KPIs to dynamically evaluate ROI.
- Create a TMO to coordinate GenAI strategy, development, scaling, and value tracking.

EY's approach: We help clients embed GenAI into their operating model, not just their tech stack. Our AI transformation services include vision and strategy setting, value case creation, pilot prioritisation and delivery, workflow redesign, and change management.

Key takeaway

AI Transformer organisations don't just use GenAI, they inspire, train and empower teams to reimagine performance with it. The five drivers are not optional extras; they are the foundation of GenAI value realisation.



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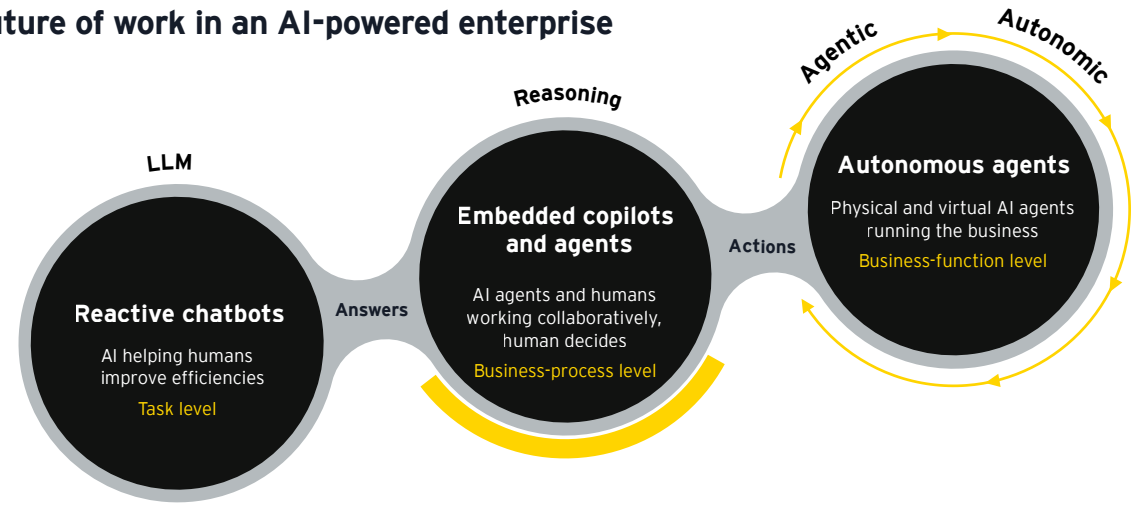
What's next? Future-focussed pathways for AI-powered organisations

AI capabilities are advancing quicker than most organisations can absorb

The pace of AI transformation is accelerating. Over the next 12–18 months, reasoning and agentic AI capabilities will move from concept to reality — introducing embedded copilots that revolutionise high-value knowledge work and autonomous agents that orchestrate entire workflows. These advancements will not only augment individual productivity but also enable us to reimagine performance — not just in terms of output, but how teams collaborate, learn and lead. GenAI is moving from tool to teammate.

The future of work in an AI-powered enterprise



But the path ahead is not automatic. This chapter presents a narrative roadmap to help organisations accelerate GenAI adoption from any start point – and close the gap between potential and performance.

Agents are ready, but are we?

As agentic AI takes centre stage at AI conferences and vendor roadshows, just 12% of surveyed UK leaders are currently prioritising agentic AI pilots. Leaders are more focussed on building organisational readiness, with 38% prioritising AI governance, 35% prioritising GenAI learning for their workforces, and 33% prioritising culture transformation to embrace GenAI. This is consistent across all four adoption segments – AI Scalers are most open to experimenting with agentic AI, but only 14% of leaders we surveyed are prioritising it.

Priorities	AI Sceptics	AI Explorers	AI Scalers	AI Transformers
#1	Develop rigorous GenAI governance practices (56%)	Scale GenAI pilots to other departments or teams (60%)	Develop rigorous GenAI governance practices (44%)	Extend or develop GenAI training to more of the workforce (36%)
#2	Extend or develop GenAI training to more of the workforce (44%)	Extend or develop GenAI training to more of the workforce (60%)	Transform organisational culture to embrace GenAI (40%)	Transform organisational culture to embrace GenAI (33%)
#3	Increase the velocity of GenAI pilots (44%)	Increase the velocity of GenAI pilots (40%)	Integrate GenAI into core business processes and workflows (30%)	Develop rigorous GenAI governance practices (32%)

Organisational readiness: A five-factor challenge

The organisations that succeed pair technological ambition with organisational readiness. And readiness is not a single capability – it is composed of five key drivers:

1. **AI-fluent leadership** that sets the vision, models use, and manages change
2. **Open teams** that make GenAI usage a shared norm and bring experts into workflows to help them reinvent their work
3. **Continuous learning** that keeps pace with evolving technologies and strategic priorities
4. **Adaptive cultures** that reward curiosity, build risk tolerance and continuously experiment
5. **Strategic integration** that embeds AI into the operating model.

These five drivers will determine whether organisations leap forward – or fall behind. The actions you should consider depend upon your start point. Determine which segment best matches your organisation's progress on the AI transformation journey and consider the recommended actions to build or sustain organisational readiness.

Driver	AI Sceptics	AI Explorers	AI Scalers	AI Transformers
Leadership	Leaders are silent or sceptical about GenAI	Leaders encourage experimentation but lack a clear vision	Leaders use GenAI and support team-level experimentation	Leaders model GenAI use, align it with strategy, and coach others
Open teams	GenAI use is ad hoc and individual	Some teams are experimenting, but no shared approach	Teams share prompts and learn together in some areas	GenAI is a shared norm – teams have rituals, roles, and workflows have been redesigned with the help of external experts
Continuous learning	No formal GenAI training programmes	Basic training exists, but not tailored to roles or workflows	Role-specific training and peer learning are in place	Tiered, engaging learning with real-world applications
Adaptive culture	Fear, resistance or scepticism dominate	Curiosity exists, but GenAI's role is unclear	Culture supports innovation and experimentation in some teams	Culture rewards curiosity, instils a sense of urgency, and treats GenAI as a catalyst of progress
Strategic integration	GenAI is not integrated into workflows or KPIs	Pilots exist, but GenAI is not embedded	GenAI is integrated into some workflows and aligned with team goals	GenAI is embedded across workflows, decision-making and the operating model
TOTAL				

Tally your scores:

- **Mostly AI Sceptic?** Jump to the Sceptics action plan to learn how to leapfrog forward.
- **Mostly AI Explorer?** See the Explorers action plan to accelerate your journey.
- **Mostly AI Scaler?** Read the Scalers action plan to become an AI Transformer.
- **Mostly AI Transformer?** Explore the AI Transformers action plan to stay at the AI frontier.

Segment action plans

AI Sceptics – Scalers: Leapfrog the learning curve

AI Sceptic organisations are cautious, low-use, and low-benefit. But they are not stuck. With bold leadership and targeted interventions, they can leapfrog two levels – from AI Sceptic to AI Scaler.

Key barriers:

- Leadership scepticism or inaction
- Lack of training and experimentation
- Cultural resistance to automation

Actions to leap forward:

- **Run executive immersion labs** to build belief and urgency among senior leaders.
- **Launch visible pilot projects** in high-friction workflows with clear ROI tracking, to demonstrate value.
- **Create a GenAI "permission slip"** – a clear policy that encourages safe experimentation. Then celebrate early adopters.
- **Appoint and empower an AI transformation leader** to coordinate efforts across functions and report to the C-suite.

AI Explorers — Transformers: Turn curiosity into embedded practice

AI Explorer organisations are curious but inconsistent. They've started the journey — but often stall due to lack of structure, support, or strategic clarity. They risk being overtaken by faster-moving peers.

Key barriers:

- Fragmented experimentation
- Limited leadership vision
- Low trust in GenAI outputs

Actions to leap forward:

- **Codify team norms** for GenAI use (e.g. when to use AI vs. when to collaborate).
- **Shift from individual to team-based learning,** including role-specific guidance on prompt design, validation and ethics.
- **Run A/B tests with specialised GenAI tools** to prove value in real workflows.
- **Pilot agentic AI in one function** (e.g. finance, HR, customer service) to demonstrate the potential of digital co-workers for end-to-end transactions.
- **Use external partners** to accelerate learning and workflow redesign.

AI Scalers — Transformers: From momentum to transformation

AI Scaler organisations are confident and high-performing — but not yet transformative. They've integrated GenAI into some workflows but haven't embedded it across the business.

Key barriers:

- Generic training that doesn't stick
- Limited investment in team redesign
- Delayed delight due to underwhelming pilots

Actions to become AI Transformers:

- Invest in team-based learning and experimentation, supported by external experts.
- Upskill managers with advanced GenAI orchestration and change management capabilities.
- Redesign high-impact workflows and update roles to reflect human-AI teaming (e.g. AI handles 60%, humans focus on orchestration and edge cases).
- Track ROI, not just usage — and align GenAI with KPIs.

For AI transformers: Sustaining momentum at the frontier

AI Transformer organisations are deeply integrated, high-impact users. But the frontier is moving. To stay ahead, they must evolve from transformation to reinvention.

Emerging challenges:

- Agent collaboration risks changing collaboration patterns within teams
- Career paths and reward systems do not incentivise AI fluency as a core competency, risking talent loss
- Early wins plateau, risking complacency

Actions to stay ahead:

- Redesign performance and reward systems to reflect AI-enabled outcomes and innovation.
- Create hybrid mentorship models (AI + human) to transform talent development.
- Continuously iterate your operating model — treating AI as a dynamic capability, not a fixed asset.

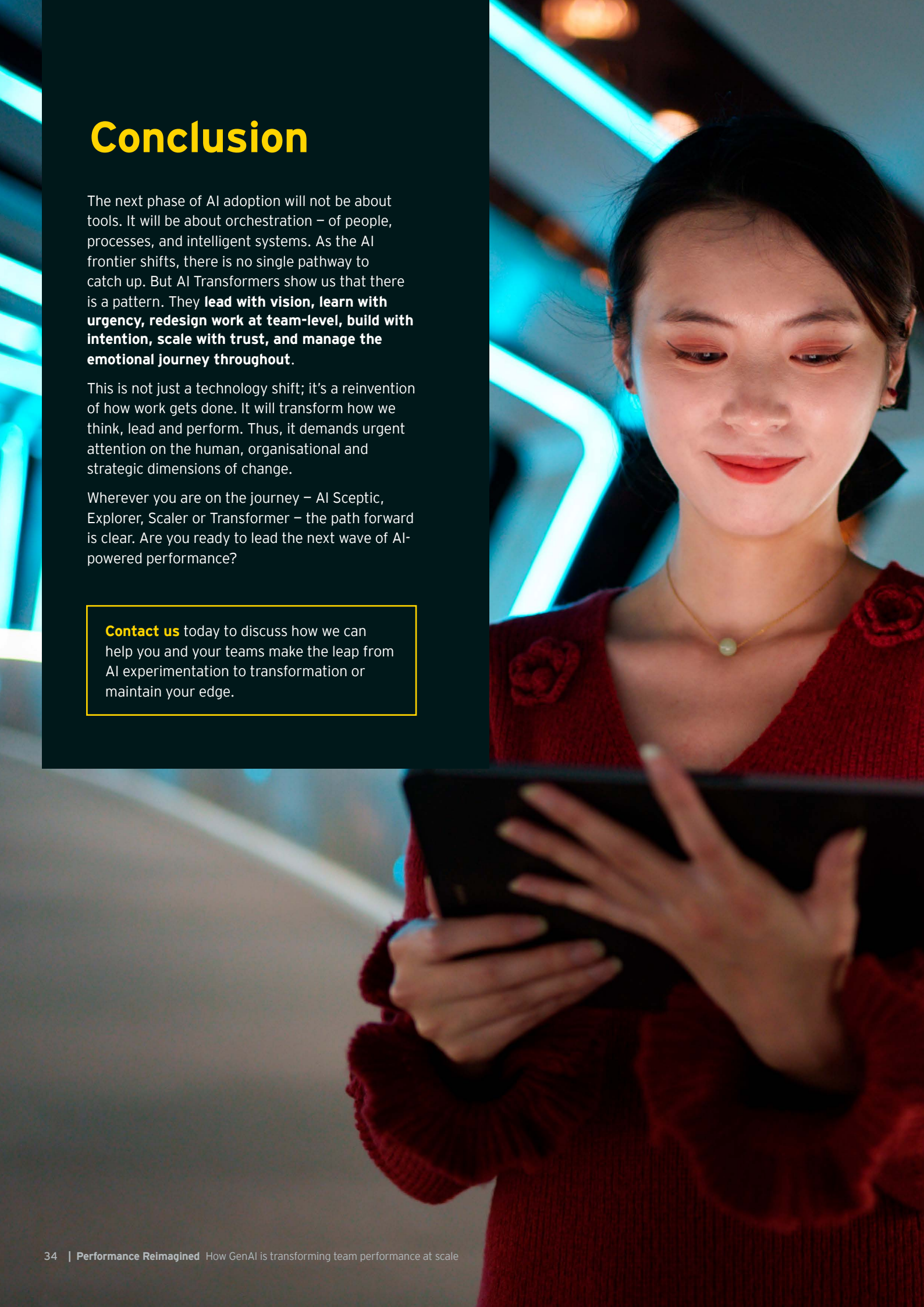
Conclusion

The next phase of AI adoption will not be about tools. It will be about orchestration – of people, processes, and intelligent systems. As the AI frontier shifts, there is no single pathway to catch up. But AI Transformers show us that there is a pattern. They **lead with vision, learn with urgency, redesign work at team-level, build with intention, scale with trust, and manage the emotional journey throughout**.

This is not just a technology shift; it's a reinvention of how work gets done. It will transform how we think, lead and perform. Thus, it demands urgent attention on the human, organisational and strategic dimensions of change.

Wherever you are on the journey – AI Sceptic, Explorer, Scaler or Transformer – the path forward is clear. Are you ready to lead the next wave of AI-powered performance?

Contact us today to discuss how we can help you and your teams make the leap from AI experimentation to transformation or maintain your edge.



More from EY

Navigating AI transformation: EY's lessons learned and strategic insights

Through its own AI transformation journey, the global EY organisation (EY) has garnered invaluable lessons that pave the way for others to follow. EY maintains that prioritising ethical practices, transparency, and oversight within a human-centred approach is essential for a successful AI transformation that benefits and advances society. This guide distils EY's journey into actionable insights, helping you to navigate your AI transformation with confidence.

EY.ai Maturity Model

The EY.ai Maturity Model integrates high level organisation and people levers alongside six additional dimensions from strategy and innovation, through customer experience and operations, to data and technology. It helps clients explore their current and aspired future AI adoption capabilities to support an organisation's AI roadmap and ambitions.

Responsible AI governance at Mott McDonald

Mott MacDonald collaborated with EY teams to transform their AI governance framework, ensuring compliance with emerging regulations like the EU Artificial Intelligence Act. By prioritising ethical AI practices and promoting transparency, they aim to build confidence and accountability into their AI systems. This proactive approach positions them as early adopters of responsible and ethical AI, enabling them to deliver tangible benefits to their clients and communities. Read more about our work with Mott McDonald here.

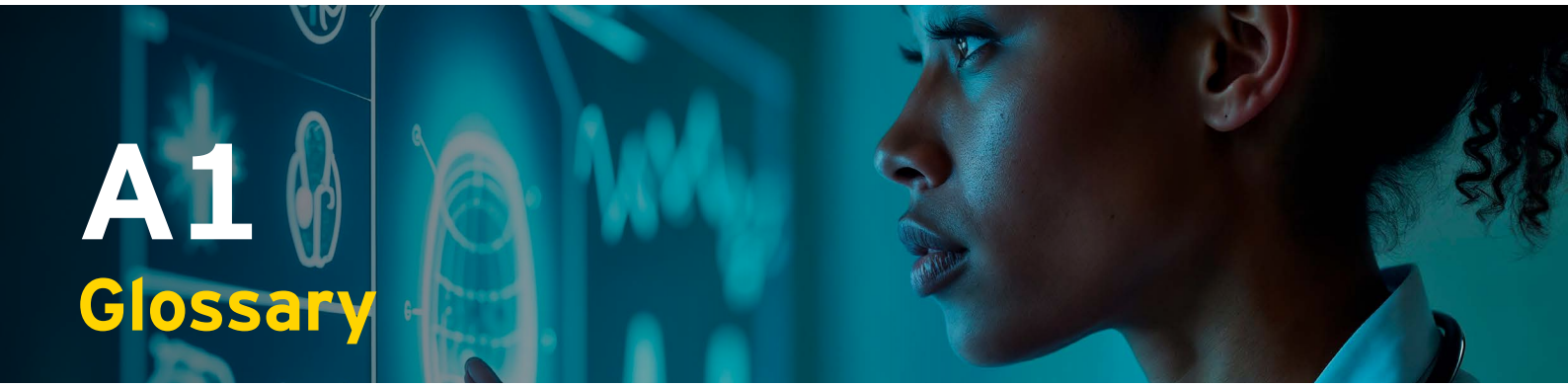
Appendix

A1. Glossary

A2. Survey demographics

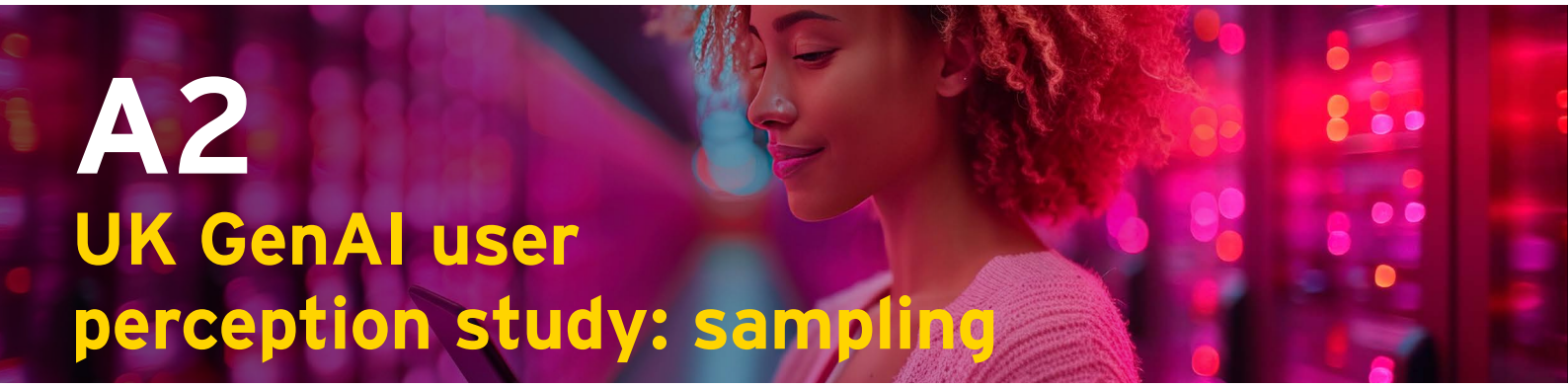
A3. AI adoption segmentation

A4. References



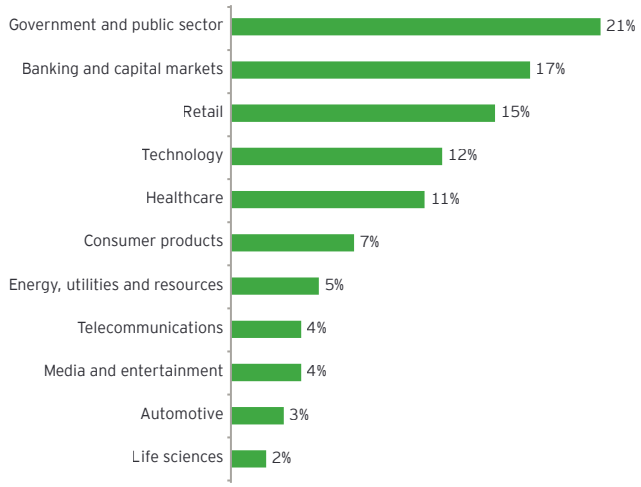
A1 Glossary

Term/Acronym	Definition
Agentic AI	AI systems that can operate with autonomy, such as initiating actions, coordinating tasks and making decisions.
AI agents	AI agents perform predefined tasks that humans design.
AI Factory	A structured approach to scaling GenAI use cases across an organisation, often involving workflow redesign and value tracking.
AI Literacy	The foundational understanding of how GenAI works, how to use it effectively, and how to validate its outputs.
AI Sceptic/Explorer/ Scaler/Transformer	The four GenAI user segments identified through latent class analysis, reflecting different levels of usage, confidence, and impact.
AI Transformer	A high-performing GenAI user or organisation with deeply embedded GenAI workflows, supported by leadership, culture, and learning.
EY.ai Maturity Model	A framework used to assess organisational readiness for AI adoption across strategy, operations, people, and technology.
Generative AI	AI systems that can create new content, such as text, images, code or audio, based on patterns learned from existing data.
Latent Class Analysis	A statistical method used to identify hidden subgroups within a population based on patterns in their responses.
Prompt Design	The skill of crafting effective inputs to guide GenAI systems toward useful and accurate outputs.
TMO (Transformation Management Office)	A centralised function that coordinates GenAI strategy, innovation, and scaling across an organisation.

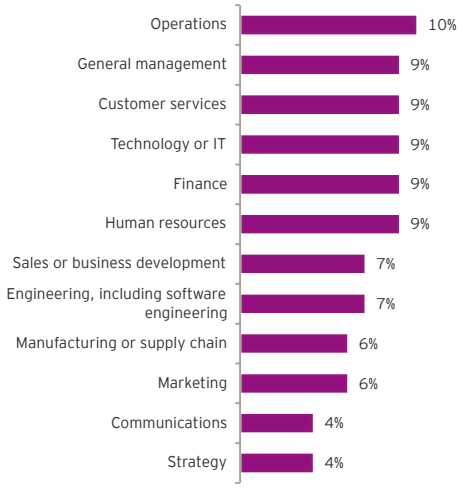


A2
UK GenAI user perception study: sampling

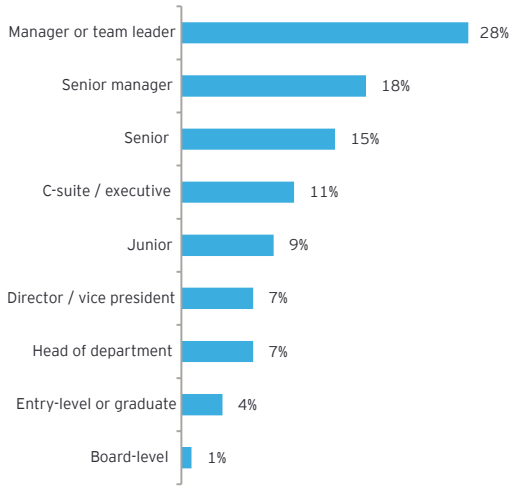
Respondents by sector



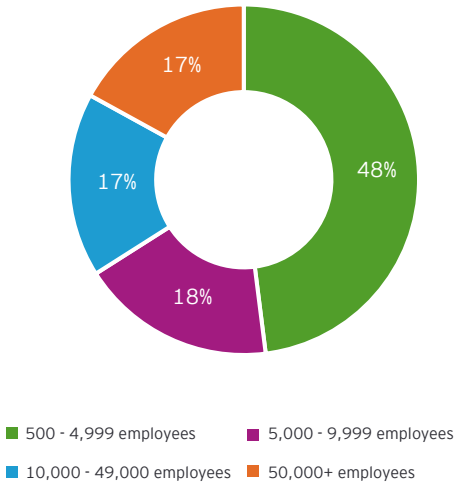
Respondents by function



Respondents by responsibility



Respondents by organisation headcount



A3
AI adoption segmentation

We followed a three-step analytical process to test hypothetical AI adoption drivers identified from Phases 1 and 2 of our research, on Phase 3 survey data.

Step 1

We used multiple regression analyses to identify 23 variables that most successfully drive AI adoption. We modelled the effect of the 23 variables on estimated time saved per week as an outcome variable of AI adoption efforts, returning an r2 value of 0.6 on 519 responses. All variables are significant at the 1% level.

The final basket of variables can be summarised into five groups:

1. **Leadership:** Extent to which they are supportive of and encourage GenAI use, provide necessary resources, and role model AI use.
2. **Teaming:** Extent to which teams consistently use GenAI, value it, and work directly with external partners/vendors.
3. **Learning:** The provision of learning resources to employees, and the extent to which they share learning from their GenAI experimentation or use with others.
4. **Culture:** The organisational environment and state of change readiness, including levels of support and trust provided to employees.
5. **Strategic integration:** Extent to which AI has been integrated into business strategy and the day-to-day work of the individual and their team.

Step 2

We then used latent class segmentation to distribute 665 employee responses using the 23 identified variables, which revealed four segments: AI Sceptics (18%), AI Explorers (23%), AI Scalers (35%) and AI Transformers (24%).

Step 3

To understand the reliability of AI adoption variables, we used random forest algorithms to test their prediction accuracy. The final basket of variables correctly predicted the segment for 85% of responses.

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