

Global Study

Elevating Human Potential: The AI Skills Revolution



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AI is everywhere and work will never be the same.

Thank goodness.

The rapid advancement of AI has ignited concerns about its impact on jobs, with many fearing automation will lead to diminished roles or even unemployment. This concern deserves careful consideration as this technological shift stands to impact everyone in some capacity—from factory workers to data analysts.

Our data shows that professionals who are familiar with AI are optimistic about how they expect it to be used in the future. AI's true potential lies in its ability to free us from systemic and intellectual constraints, empowering us to reach new levels of productivity and creativity.

For example, among several possible scenarios of AI's influence, the leading response (53%) in our recent global study—with more than double the responses of any other scenario—was “AI will augment human capabilities, leading to increased productivity and new forms of innovation.”

We limited respondents to those who are either using or planning to use AI in the near future, and 84% of them said they were “very” or “extremely” familiar with AI. And, in a separate question, almost two-thirds (59%) say their department is currently using AI while one-third (31%) of respondents are experimenting with its use.

This widespread awareness, adoption, and experimentation underscores the growing prevalence and acceptance of AI in professional settings. Nobody needs to talk anymore about whether or not AI will find its way into their business.

What we all need to talk about is what it will do for people.



Being human: revolutionary thinking.

AI has the potential to ignite a human skills revolution. This revolution is a global shift that elevates our human capacities and redefines our relationship to work. This revolution embraces an inherently optimistic view of AI and its ability to augment and empower human contributions across diverse business and societal arenas.

An optimistic view.

We believe that AI's greatest application is in making companies more human—returning their focus to the creativity, empathy, ethical judgment, and symbiotic relationships that make an organization powerful and nimble.

Although AI's value includes offloading many tasks that don't require human ingenuity—as amply validated by this study—its benefits extend far beyond automation. AI learns, processes information, and transforms what already exists into something entirely new. AI is a new way of seeing your company and its people. It is a source of powerful insights that no company, no matter how large or well-funded, could access before this technology. And it's a practical way to help every person cultivate their most meaningful and impactful contributions.

This report explores five human-centric principles—creativity, leadership, learning, trust, and collaboration—that define how businesses and their people can thrive in a future enabled by AI. These principles not only anchor this report but also serve as a roadmap for businesses to become more human-centric, worthy of loyalty and trust, relevant to consumers, and profitable.

AI isn't the new face of work. It's what allows our human talent to shine brighter.

Being human: the faces of work.

Human-centric business approaches have been part of strategic plans for years. AI makes them attainable. The next phase of AI adoption in business must elevate the skills that make us uniquely human.

Doing so is both a competitive advantage and a stark business need. The trends of recent years confirm that a company's ability to form connections, problem-solve imaginatively, and operate free from old technical constraints is the fuel for its survival and health amid constant change.

Put another way, AI isn't the new face of work. It's what allows our human talent to shine brighter.

Study insight:

Across multiple scenarios, these human-centric skills consistently ranked as the most valuable—both today and in a future driven by AI:

1

**Ethical decision-making
and moral judgment**

2

**Human networking and
relationship building**

3

**Emotional intelligence
and empathy**

Survey questions: What do you believe are the top human-centric skills that cannot be replaced by AI? What do you believe are the most valuable human-centric skills in your department today? What do you believe are the most valuable skills that humans will still need in your department? Respondents selected up to three (3) skills from a list for each question.

Summary of key findings. “

AI's human effects.

- While 82% of individual contributors agree with the statement that “employees will crave more human connection as AI usage grows,” **only 65% of managers say the same.** This is one of the starkest disconnects between workers and managers we found in this study and presents a huge opportunity for leadership to give their employees the connection they need.
- Among respondents actively using or experimenting with AI, **93% agree that it allows them to focus more on higher-level responsibilities** with 40% strongly agreeing. This highlights AI's transformative potential in enabling strategic thinking and elevating workplace impact.
 - **Confidence is consistent across job roles** with 92% of employees and 95% of leaders agreeing with the above.
- The top 4 human-centric skills deemed **least likely to be replaced by AI** are also considered the most important:
 - Ethical decision-making and moral judgment
 - Emotional intelligence and empathy
 - Human networking and relationship building
 - Conflict resolution
- **Active AI users have well-formed sentiments about the technology.**
 - **Respondents actively using AI report the highest optimism** with an average sentiment score of 4.23 (out of 5), while those planning to adopt AI within the next 12 months show the lowest optimism with an average score of 3.89.
 - There's a strong belief that AI enhances creativity and value, driving innovation.
- **There is cautious optimism about how people trust and perceive AI, underscoring the need for responsible AI (RAI), human-centric investments, and related priorities.**
 - 90% of respondents agree that AI can significantly enhance an organization's transparency and accountability, with leaders (92%) and employees (89%) closely aligned.
- **There is a clear, widespread expectation that the technology sector (54%) will lead efforts to ensure transparency and accountability in AI integration.**
 - The shared responsibility attributed to individual organizations (12%) and government (12%) reflects a broader sentiment that gaining trust in AI requires collaboration across sectors. We think this means technology firms are seen as taking the primary role with organizations and policymakers providing critical support.
- **Ethical decision-making ranked as the most valuable human-centric skill both today and in a future shaped by full AI adoption.**
 - Relationship-building, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution also ranked prominently among the most desired skills.

We are experiencing a profound transformation in how we work and connect. AI is already breaking down communication barriers, helping us find the the right words and the right tone, and bridge cultures. This is just the beginning. With the right balance of when to use technology, AI empowers us to unleash our creativity, collaborate with empathy, and tackle challenges with a renewed sense of purpose. This is the promise of AI centered on people—to not only make us more efficient but also more human.

Kathy Pham

Vice President of Artificial Intelligence,
Workday



[More from this expert.](#)

Percentage of respondents who strongly/somewhat agree by region.

Category	Statement	APAC	EMEA	North America	Global
AI sentiment	AI is fundamentally changing the skills needed to succeed in the workplace.	82%	83%	76%	81%
	AI tools support my ability to develop new skills in my role.	83%	87%	75%	83%
	AI will enhance human creativity and lead to new forms of economic value.	85%	85%	78%	83%
	Employees will crave more human connections as AI usage grows.	76%	80%	66%	76%
	The growing use of AI will make human skills more vital.	82%	85%	79%	83%
AI's role in transparency	AI can play a significant role in increasing transparency and accountability in organizations.	90%	92%	87%	90%
Confidence in using AI	I am confident using AI to assist with complex work.	93%	93%	82%	91%
Elevating workplace	Using AI has allowed you to focus more on higher-level responsibilities, such as strategy or problem-solving.	95%	95%	88%	93%



Priorities for ensuring success in an economy driven by AI.

In the study, respondents weighted various business priorities quite evenly, indicating that success requires a balanced focus on multiple pillars.

Strategic Grouping	Priorities
Collaboration and innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developing AI systems that are adaptable and scalable• Fostering collaboration on AI initiatives• Promoting collaboration
Education and workforce development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensuring human-machine teamwork to avoid job displacement• Implementing policies to support displaced workers• Investing in education and skills training
Ethics and governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensuring accountability and explainability of AI outcomes• Ensuring ethical AI development• Promoting transparency in AI algorithms and decision-making
Security and risk mitigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Building robust cybersecurity measures• Implementing robust data governance and privacy policies

Survey question: What do you believe is most important for ensuring success in an AI-driven economy?
Respondents selected one (1) option.



Principle 1: Creativity, elevated.

As mentioned above, we're going to explore the five principles that define how businesses and their people can thrive with AI.

Most companies accept that human creativity is a source of innovation and responsiveness to changing markets. The most perceptive companies see that creativity is the most important engine for their survival.

Among survey respondents, 83% agreed that AI will enhance human creativity and lead to new forms of economic value, suggesting that they already see the connection between creativity and business results. Another 83% of respondents said that individual skills such as adaptability and creativity will be somewhat or much more important in a future with AI.

So how, specifically, does AI elevate these critical human functions?

Boosting creativity.

AI enhances creativity in two core ways, as seen in its common use cases and in the data throughout this report.

AI frees humans from routine processes.

AI can manage many routine tasks quickly and efficiently. As a result, the human-AI partnership can allow people to bring their imagination to work, whatever their role or title.

One person's creative influence could come in the form of improving an administrative workflow; another person could influence development of a transformative product. Everyone on your team has the capacity for greater creativity.

AI is a creative assistant.

AI can quickly identify patterns and connections that inspire new ideas and bolder thinking among your people. Gen AI is a good example here: often its utility is in generating fast inspiration or starter outputs that users can then craft into something more ideal.

Creative outputs always flow from earlier informational inputs; for example, when AI generates imagery from a brief description, people's creative outputs become faster, more interesting, and more reliable.

Being human: decoding unspoken communication.

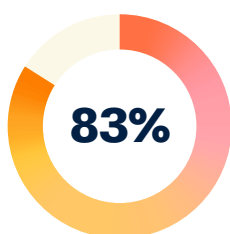
Newborns lack language but are almost immediately responsive to the faces of those around them. They instinctively locate the emotional and communicative centers of the people around them and can discern an amazing range of expressions and emotions.

As we age, many of these natural capacities go underused—or are even looked down on as overly intuitive or emotional. But today, science and technology are helping us use our ingrained abilities—our humanness—by bringing them back into our daily lives.

Similarly, AI tools have significant implications for our decision-making, self-understanding, and ability to lead professional lives with contribution and purpose.



Everyone on your team has the capacity for greater creativity.



83%
of respondents agree that AI will
enhance human creativity and lead to
new forms of economic value

Principle 2: Leadership, elevated.

In one of the less-than-optimistic findings in this study, we found that while 82% of individual contributors agree with the statement that “employees will crave more human connection as AI usage grows,” only 65% of managers say the same. This is a big disconnect and shows that managers probably underestimate the growing need for human connection as AI adoption increases—a definite blind spot in leadership strategies.

As the above highlights, leading with empathy takes much more than a good heart. It requires concrete, reliable information about employees—what they’re experiencing and what they thought they would experience, what they’re feeling, and what they want to get out of their work.

Previously, that kind of information could take months to compile and analyze, if it was attainable at all. AI—through processing summaries of team conversations and meetings—makes it available daily. It makes leaders’ most pressing responsibilities and goals more manageable.

AI also helps meet one underacknowledged need shared by leaders across industries: more mental bandwidth for time to focus.

A blind spot in leadership strategies is the growing need for human connection as AI adoption increases.

Being human: where AI mitigates our weaknesses.

Just as AI has the potential to elevate our human strengths, it also tames some of the human tendencies that are not always productive: impulsive decision-making, confirmation bias, promotions based on “vibes” instead of performance, and vulnerability to emotionally satisfying misinformation.

Previous generations might have seen these tendencies as unavoidable aspects of being a leader. More recent experiences reveal the flaws in that thinking—but mitigating the issues still often requires complicated workflows and layers of oversight.

By automating processes, surfacing previously hidden insights, and helping create more objective decisions, AI helps keep these vulnerabilities in check—without compromising efficiency or pushing aside the people involved.



Elevating leadership.

When asked how AI adoption will impact the leadership and management priorities within their department, respondents prioritized the top three ways:

- 1 Enhance data-driven decision-making
- 2 Prioritize upskilling and reskilling of staff to work alongside AI technologies
- 3 Reallocate resources to more critical areas as AI automates routine work

The equal weighting of these responses shows that AI can assist leaders within each of these critical areas, freeing them up to focus on empathy and building connections.

AI gives leaders the freedom to handle these diverse needs rather than spending their time and energy chasing down data, dealing with outdated technology, or repairing earlier errors in judgment or action.

This is timely because for many leaders, the most significant pressures center on human factors such as changing demographics, social responsibility, and the need to create vibrant cultures where everyone feels valued and heard. AI can support the needs of leaders to address these challenges, relieve their biggest pressures, and focus on what matters most—their people.

Increasing sales is one thing. Increasing belonging is another. With AI, no leader is alone.

Study insight: top three uses of AI today.

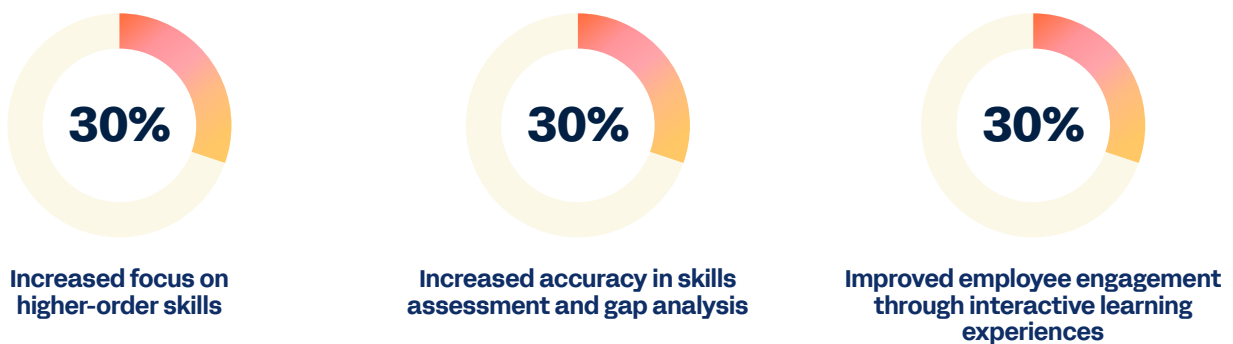


Survey question: What responsibilities is your department currently executing via AI? Respondents selected all answers that applied.

Principle 3: Learning, elevated.

The old adage is as true as ever: It's not what you know—it's how you learn. For example, in your role you've likely observed that the strongest team members aren't the ones who show up with a preexisting set of content knowledge. It's the people who know how to obtain new knowledge who rise and make their mark.

In the study responses, **3 out of the top 5 reported that the benefits of using AI to enhance productivity involved learning and building skills**, and respondents ranked them as equally important:



Survey question: What do you believe are the main benefits of using AI to enhance productivity in your department? Respondents selected up to three (3) answers from a list.

In other words, learning, whether individually or in a group, is one of the most fundamental ingredients of business agility. It's part of why the skills revolution is so necessary: our capacity for change is how we will meet the demands of a world in constant flux.

AI supports human learning and development in part by processing massive datasets—larger than any human team could ever process—to deliver previously impossible trend analysis, rapid insights, and decision guidance.

In this sense, the mechanics of learning mirror the mechanics of creativity: it all depends on the inputs.

Learning, whether individually or in a group, is one of the most fundamental ingredients of business agility.

Elevating learning.

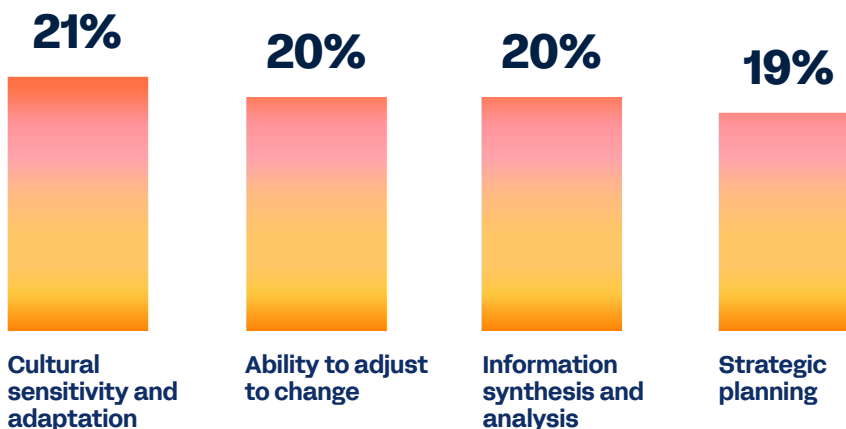
The skills that survey respondents say are lacking within their organization are soft skills such as cultural awareness, change tolerance, and strategic planning.

Building these skills requires the free exchange of information and new methods of connecting people. According to the study, 24% of respondents cite knowledge democratization as a key benefit of AI, while skills such as ethical decision-making, conflict resolution, and relationship building are cited as the most valuable skills humans will need after AI is fully adopted.

AI is a fantastic mechanism for that exchange of information and focus on new skills.

In practice, this means you'll be able to assess which skills your team members are using daily, how upskilling impacts job performance, and where your blind spots are for dealing with surges in demand or disruptions. With these insights, you'll equip your teams with the skills and knowledge they need to be ready for anything—before the “anything” shows up.

When thinking about the level of AI adoption within your department today, what are the most impactful skills missing from your department?



Survey question: When thinking about the level of AI adoption in your department today, what are the most impactful skills missing from your department? Respondents selected up to three (3) answers from a list and above are the top four (4) answers.



The right AI can help make notoriously noisy skills data actionable to empower businesses and governments to unlock their workforce and expand employee opportunities at scale. At Workday, we believe a skills-based approach to talent is critical to addressing today's pressing workforce challenges, and we see tremendous opportunity in using AI in a trusted, responsible way to elevate work.

Chandler Morse

Vice President of Public Policy, Workday



[More from this expert.](#)

Survey says: “soft” skills aren’t so soft anymore.

One of the most powerful results of our study is that it highlights the connection between skills and business value. If you’re looking for a skills roadmap for 2025 and beyond, this is it.

Skills Group	Qualities	Business Value
Adaptability and resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to adjust to changes• Cultural sensitivity and adaptation• Emotional intelligence and empathy	<p>Critical for navigating business disruptions.</p> <p>Demands emotional intelligence, empathy, and readiness for evolving workplaces.</p>
Analytical thinking and decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creative thinking and innovation• Critical thinking and problem-solving• Information synthesis and analysis• Strategic planning	<p>A prime area for AI influence: augmenting human-centric critical thinking and problem-solving, innovation, and efficiency.</p>
Interpersonal connection and collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collaboration• Communication• Conflict resolution• Human networking and relationship building• Negotiation and persuasion	<p>The most emphasized skills group in the study, highlighting the enduring importance of human connection, teamwork, and healthy conflict resolution.</p>
Leadership and guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ethical decision-making and moral judgment• Leadership and management• Mentorship	<p>Emphasizes ethical reasoning, sometimes without clear precedents to follow, as well as moral judgment rooted in shared values.</p>

Survey questions: What do you believe are the most valuable human-centric skills in your department today? What do you believe are the most valuable skills that humans will still need in your department? What do you believe are the main benefits of using AI to enhance productivity in your department? How do you believe AI adoption will most impact your department’s leadership and management priorities? For all questions, respondents selected up to three (3) answers from a list.



Principle 4: Trust, elevated.

Nobody owns trust. As AI has developed, it's become clear that building trust is a shared responsibility across industries, governments, cultures, and leading experts. There will be no single government body, no single technology leader, and no dominant consumer segment in charge of this. This means that each of us has a stake—and, in fact, some power—in developing and enforcing the norms that govern AI and how it influences organizations.

Respondents gave significant weight to many effective, trust-building applications of AI itself, with the top being:

- AI-powered fact-checking and content moderation tools to identify and flag misleading information
- Data privacy management tools to protect sensitive information
- Transparency tools for clear communication and decision-making processes
- Quality assurance systems that maintain high standards in products and services

Interestingly, although the majority of respondents (90%) believe AI can play a significant role in increasing transparency, the very small number of people who disagreed with that statement cited job displacement as the top reason AI could damage trust in organizations. This is less a technological failing or vulnerability of AI and more a sign of a prevalent cultural anxiety around AI's potential to take jobs.

With proper guardrails in place, AI is both the thing to be trusted and the thing that can engender greater trust elsewhere.



Elevating trust.

Looking ahead, AI will create new methods of sharing and discussing best practices and functionalities—often between industries and organizations that have never interacted before. Learning will come from everywhere. Imagine the benefits of this exchange, even beyond AI itself.

As stated earlier, respondents overwhelmingly agreed that the technology sector will lead transparency and accountability with AI in the workplace. But it's clear that other interested parties will exert their influence, and the smartest technology companies will prioritize the information sharing we've just discussed.

There's also an overflow effect: confidence in AI will influence confidence in organizations, institutions, and interest groups that are using AI for good. With proper guardrails in place, AI is both the thing to be trusted and the thing that can engender greater trust elsewhere.

Study insight:

While most industries showed a high level of agreement that AI enhances transparency and accountability, **finance (88%) and retail (84%)** lagged slightly behind. This suggests that these risk-aware sectors may face unique challenges in their trust-building initiatives.

Survey question: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: "AI can play a significant role in increasing transparency and accountability in organizations."



Responsible AI is not only the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do. At Workday, we've developed a culture of trust and integrity around our development and use of AI technologies, with our ethical AI principles at the center—amplify human potential, positively impact society, champion transparency and fairness, and deliver on our commitment to data privacy and protection. We understand that a responsible-AI-by-design approach speeds up innovation by clarifying guardrails to remove roadblocks and foster trust, which ultimately boosts AI adoption.

Kelly Trindel

Chief Responsible AI Officer, Workday



[More from this expert.](#)

Principle 5: Collaboration, elevated.

Cross-department collaboration is a consistent challenge in business, particularly for organizations undergoing digital transformation. Data silos continue to be the enemy of collaboration, especially in distributed work environments.

Fortunately, AI is the anti-silo. Survey respondents highlighted many operational benefits of AI, with data-driven insights and automation and efficiency standing out slightly as the most recognized. These benefits address the historical challenges of data silos and complex tech stacks that have hampered collaboration, no matter the industry or organization size.

There's another kind of collaboration at stake here: the collaboration that takes place between humans and AI. We view this as a new and promising kind of teamwork, with humans augmented and empowered by AI through a daily exchange of information, requests, and insights.

Elevating collaboration.

By definition, collaboration creates more human connection. AI removes barriers to collaboration—some of which you might not have even known were there. For example, as mentioned before, 93% of respondents agree that AI allows them to focus on higher-level responsibilities such as strategy and problem-solving. In this way, AI helps free up human capacity for meaningful and innovative collaboration. AI's system-level impacts on things such as dynamic workflows and automations lead to desirable human-level outcomes, such as renewed strategic focus, time for cultivating relationships, and more.

AI also enables organizations to address differing priorities across regions or business segments in a more meaningful way. Businesses are vast. Perhaps your EMEA team is grappling with emerging regulations around RAI while your North America team is navigating rapid scaling issues. Both can get the attention they deserve when your creative ecosystem is decluttered and honed.

AI removes barriers to collaboration—some of which you might not have even known were there.

Being human: age of AI, age of identity.

As mentioned at the beginning of this report, the most pronounced concerns around AI are that it will push humans into indistinct, passive roles—or into no role at all. These fears, especially in light of how past technological revolutions didn't spread their benefits equally, are thoughtful and worth honoring. But we see things differently.

The brilliance of AI is that it does the opposite: it frees us from systemic and intellectual barriers—often of our own making—that have already pushed us into the background.

Consider the employee—we all know someone like this—who labored for years without showcasing their most special skills because it wasn't in their job description. Today's AI-driven talent management and professional development tools can help elevate that employee to the role and influence they are destined for, celebrating and leveraging their unique capacities.

Used as it should be, AI can help us more fully express ourselves.

Conclusion.

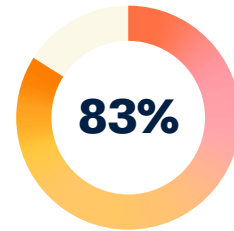
Your future, elevated.

AI is a burst of energy. Harness it now.

Our study asked respondents about six categories of human abilities—communication, creativity, empathy, ethics, judgment, and leadership—and in nearly every case, the least-selected responses were those indicating that AI will weaken or replace those skills. People uniformly believe that AI is good news for the human capabilities that will propel organizations into the future.

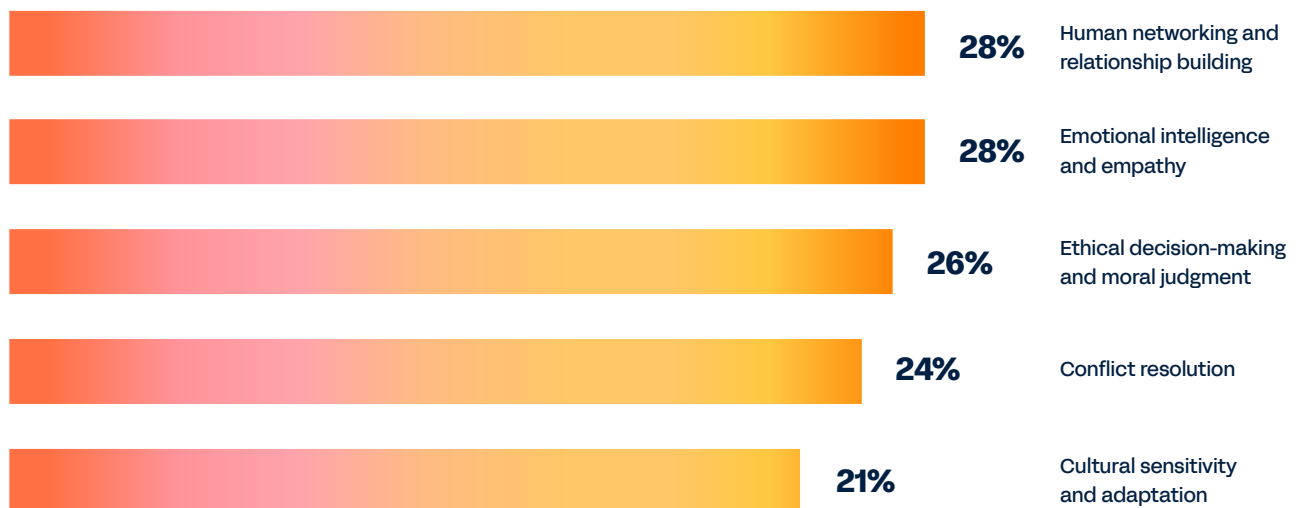
Based on the findings in this report, here's what you can do right now to make sure your organization reaps the benefits of the AI skills revolution:

- **Embrace human-centric leadership:** Focus on developing human skills such as empathy, creativity, and ethical decision-making.
- **Foster collaboration and healthy relationships:** Encourage collaboration between humans and AI to leverage their respective strengths.
- **Invest in skills development:** As part of a skills-based people strategy, prioritize upskilling and reskilling your workforce in both soft skills and AI-centric skills to adapt to the changing demands of AI.
- **Promote transparency and accountability:** Ensure that AI algorithms and decision-making processes are transparent and explainable.



83%
of respondents agree that the growing use of AI will make human skills more vital

Top 5 human-centric skills believed to be irreplaceable by AI.



Survey question: Imagine your department has fully adopted AI. What do you believe are the most valuable skills that humans will still need in your department? Respondents selected up to three (3) answers from a list.

These findings are a call to action.

We knew technology would eventually allow us to turn a corner toward more human-centered businesses. Workday has invested a great deal in that technology—including, but not limited to, AI—and as a result, we see the skills revolution arriving.

We don't use the word "revolution" lightly. It will be sudden, all-encompassing, non-negotiable, and full of possibility. Soon it will have redefined our relationship with work. Our businesses will be more competitive, relevant, and enduring because of it.

AI will require a collective effort by forward thinkers willing to reimagine growth—not by sacrificing profitability but by achieving it through more human and dependable paths.

We can't achieve this alone. At the highest level, AI will require a collective effort by forward thinkers willing to reimagine growth—not by sacrificing profitability but by achieving it through more human and dependable paths. At the day-to-day level, it will require excellent partnerships between companies and between people.

Respondents listed uncertainty about ROI, data privacy and security, and difficulty integrating AI with other systems as top challenges to AI adoption—reminding us that most companies can't do everything on their own and will need outside experts by their side as they continue their AI journey.

Ready when you are.

Learn more: workday.com/elevating-human-potential



Appendix and methodology.

This report, elevated.

We put our principles into practice with this report, using several AI tools to hone our hypotheses and gain early insights into how people viewed these topics.

For example, while the research study was in the field during November–December 2024, AI drafted the initial methodology summary, giving the report’s authors more time to strategize and plan under a very tight timeline. AI also helped forecast the potential structure of this report. Later, with data in hand, the team validated that all the preplanning aligned with the study’s objective outcomes.

Study methodology.

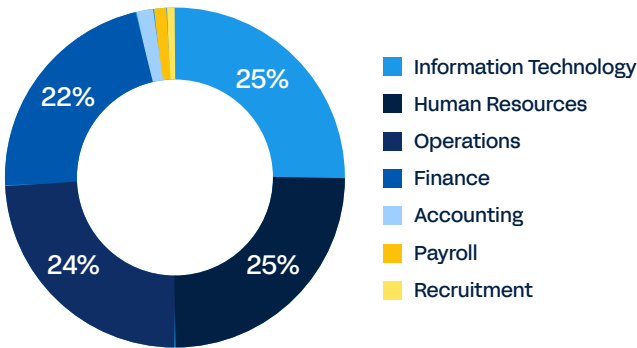
This report was commissioned by Workday and fielded by Hanover Research. The findings in this report are based on a global survey of full-time workers from a variety of industries across 22 countries spanning North America, APAC, and EMEA. A sample size of 2,500 respondents ensured representation from diverse demographics and professional experiences.

The full list of countries surveyed, with the number of respondents:

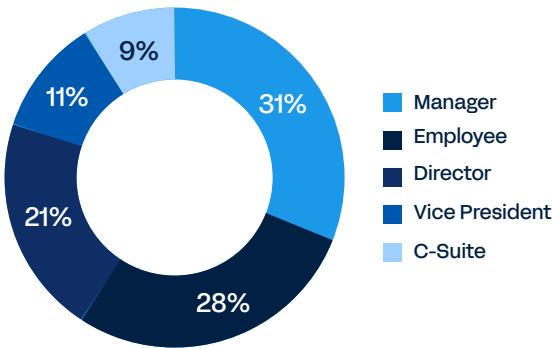
Australia	168	Netherlands	105
Austria	65	New Zealand	46
Belgium	60	Republic of Ireland	47
Canada	118	Singapore	164
France	145	South Africa	54
Germany	160	South Korea	115
Hong Kong	105	Spain	109
Italy	113	Sweden	52
Japan	159	Switzerland	58
Luxembourg	45	United Kingdom	174
Mexico	117	United States	321

The use of quotas ensured balanced representation across regions, industries, organization size, and job roles. For example, 59% of respondents identified as employees while 41% identified as leaders, including 231 members of the C-suite.

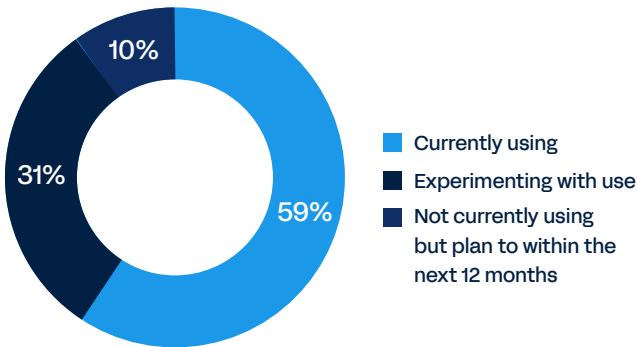
Results by department.



Results by role.



Results by AI usage.



Results by organization size.

