AI at Work: Closing the Gap Between Leaders and Employees

Rich Lesser and I have written more about generative AI (GenAI) in the Weekly Brief than any other topic this year. We have looked at the transformative technology from the perspective of the CEO and the organization, and we have examined valuable use cases.

We also wanted to understand how workers feel more broadly. BCG X, our tech build and design unit, surveyed nearly 13,000 people in 18 countries, from C-suite leaders to nonmanagement employees, to understand their thoughts, emotions, and fears about AI.

Employees Recognize Rewards and Risks

More than one-third of respondents, 36%, believe that their job will be eliminated within the next ten years. That share is even higher among leaders (45%).

Despite this concern, 71% of respondents still believe the rewards of GenAI—notably, saving time, reducing errors, and improving innovation—outweigh the risks.

The average respondent today is more optimistic and less concerned about AI than the average respondent was five years ago, when we conducted a similar survey and when GenAI was still in

the lab.

But the average disguises stark differences between leaders and employees. Compared with employees, leaders are:

- More optimistic about AI (62% versus 42%)
- More likely to use GenAI regularly (80% versus 20%)
- More likely to have received training to sharpen their skills and stay relevant (44% versus 14%)
- More likely to believe that their organization has an adequate responsible AI program (68% versus 29%)

Left unaddressed, these gaps could slow the adoption of AI—limiting its advantages for individuals and organizations overall.

What Can Leaders Do?

Encourage employees to engage in responsible experimentation. The more regularly employees use AI and GenAI, the likelier they are to recognize its benefits—as well as its limitations and risks. Selecting tools and productive initial use cases will help employees get started.

Invest in regular upskilling. Given how swiftly technology evolves, organizations must invest significantly, continually, and across all functions and levels of the organization to help employees adapt to the ways AI will change their jobs.

Build a responsible AI program. Employees want reassurance that their organizations are approaching AI and generative AI ethically.

I am optimistic about the potential of AI to improve business performance, economic opportunity, and educational achievement. But I also recognize that fears of job loss and being left behind are real.

As with any tech transformation, successful AI adoption will require a strong focus on change management, people, and culture. We need to have real conversations with our employees, listening closely and responding to what we hear.

Helping everyone get more familiar with AI will allow employees to gain confidence in its ability to improve their work and organizations to gain competitive advantage.

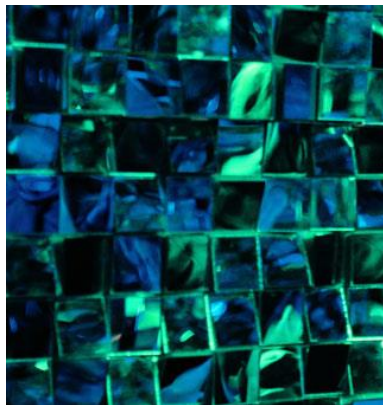Christoph Schweizer
Chief Executive Officer

Further Reading

AI at Work: What People Are Saying

How do frontline employees, managers, and company leaders who have a front-row seat for the AI revolution feel about the technology sweeping across the corporate landscape?

Read more

The CEO's Guide to the Generative AI Revolution

This powerful technology has the potential to disrupt nearly every industry, promising both competitive advantage and creative destruction. Here's how to strategize for that future.

Read more

Responsible AI Belongs on the CEO Agenda

Everyone from customers to investors wants AI done right. CEOs who take the lead in implementing responsible AI can better manage the technology's many risks.

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