

The AI Value *Breakdown*

What 10,000+ Workforce Data Points
Reveal About What Makes AI Work



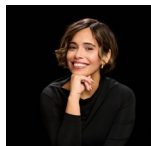
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Talent Solutions for Better Workplaces

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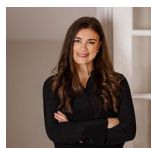
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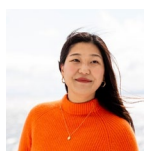
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Gina Greenwalt is Director of Culture, People Development, and People Analytics at Twitch, where her work spans culture, learning and development, coaching, and workforce insights. One of her current priorities is helping teams build capability close to the work, especially as AI changes how employees learn, collaborate, and solve problems. She brings expertise in leadership development, organizational enablement, and the conditions that help teams turn emerging practices (including AI) into better ways of working.



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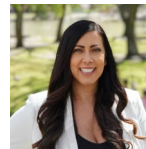
Colby Kennedy Nesbitt is Senior Manager of Employee Listening at Netflix. Her work focuses on how organizations understand employee experience, measure impact, and use workforce data to make better decisions. She brings expertise in industrial-organizational psychology and people analytics and has served in lead talent and people science roles at Lattice, Twitter, and Human Resources Research Organization.



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Executive Overview

AI adoption has moved from experiment to expectation. Most organizations are no longer asking whether employees will use AI. They are asking why so much AI use has produced so little enterprise value.

The answer is not only in technology. It is also in workplace culture: the everyday conditions through which employees experience change, including manager support, trust, psychological safety, workload, clarity, and access to opportunity. Microsoft's [2026 Work Trend Index](#) makes that gap clear: Organizational factors such as culture, manager support, and talent practices account for twice the reported AI impact of individual effort alone.¹

Adoption tells leaders whether employees are using AI. Workplace conditions determine whether that use becomes value.

AI is changing the implicit deal between organizations and employees. Employees are being asked to learn continuously, adapt faster, work with automated systems, validate machine output, and remain accountable for work AI may now partly produce.

Organizations, in return, must offer a credible path through the change: clear direction, redesigned work, practical manager guidance, permission to question and experiment, and fair access to the opportunities AI creates.

This paper identifies three places where AI value commonly breaks down:

1. **Work gets faster without getting better.** AI can accelerate production while employees absorb more review, rework, coordination, and accountability.
2. **Enterprise strategy does not reach daily work.** Employees experience AI through managers who set expectations, define quality, manage workload, and decide when human judgment must prevail.
3. **Access to AI does not become access to opportunity.** AI-enabled growth still flows through the sponsorship, visibility, trust, and bias that shape advancement today.

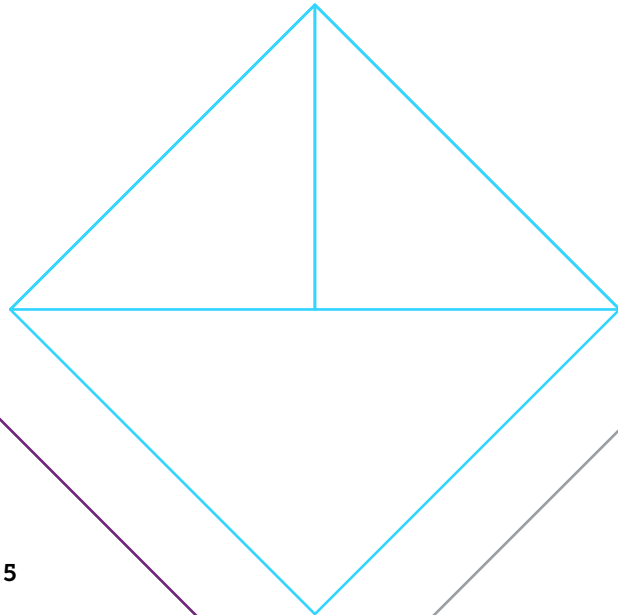
Seramount's Employee Voice Session (EVS) data shows that many organizations are entering this change with uneven foundations. **Only 32% of employees understand what it takes to succeed. Only 41% feel comfortable taking risks.** Employees who report having a sponsor are far more likely to have influential networks and believe they will advance.

Leaders can strengthen those foundations through five workplace conditions:

Condition	What Leaders Must Do
Clarify	Make changes to work, success, and opportunity visible.
Redesign	Change the work and decide how saved time will be used.
Expand	Connect AI fluency to learning, sponsorship, and opportunity.
Equip	Help managers translate enterprise strategy into daily expectations.
Protect	Make it safe to question, challenge, and escalate AI-supported work.

Together, these conditions turn an abstract AI strategy into an employee experience people can understand, trust, and help improve. They also give talent and inclusion leaders a practical agenda: Define how work is changing, prevent AI from becoming another layer of pressure, create fair pathways into higher-value work, prepare managers to lead through uncertainty, and protect employee voice.

Organizations should continue to measure AI use. But use alone cannot show whether transformation is taking hold. Leaders must also determine whether work is improving, whether managers on the ground can advise in new workspaces, and whether employees can see a future in the change.



SECTION 1

Why AI Is Rewriting the Conditions of Work

AI is moving from functioning as a tool employees use alongside their work to being the work itself. It drafts and analyzes, recommends decisions, triggers next steps, and increasingly acts across workflows. That shift changes more than productivity. It changes what employees are responsible for, how they learn, what managers must explain, and who gains access to valuable work.

Culture becomes especially visible in moments of ambiguity:

- when an AI output looks plausible but may be wrong,
- when an employee does not know whether to disclose AI use,
- when saved time becomes more work,
- when a manager cannot explain the new quality standard,
- or when someone sees a risk but is unsure whether speaking up will matter.

In those moments, culture is not an abstract value statement. It is what employees have learned about how work actually gets done: what leaders reward, what managers tolerate, whether questions are welcome, whose judgment is trusted, and whether opportunity feels open to them. The following analysis documents three workforce trends surrounding how organizations are currently moving through transformation that leaders must consider.



*"AI doesn't
create culture.
It reveals it."*

Nehal Jani

Productivity Is No Longer Enough

Productivity dominated the first phase of AI workforce conversations. Leaders needed immediate use cases and a way to justify investment. But productivity is too narrow a measure for the phase organizations are entering now.

Seramount's [AI Productivity Paradox research](#) showed how faster output can coexist with heavier review cycles, greater coordination pressure, and inconsistent execution when organizations add AI to work that has not been redesigned.² The 2026 Microsoft Work Trend Index points to the same underlying problem: The environment around employees is more strongly associated with reported AI impact than individual effort is.¹

These gaps show why leaders cannot treat people as an afterthought. Once AI enters the workflow, workforce strategy becomes part of technology strategy, an area Peter Fasolo says receives **“very little discussion.”** Reviewing corporate AI governance processes, Daisy Auger-Domínguez identified a question too often overlooked by governance policies: **“Where’s the people side of it?”**

Peter argues that transformation conversations should not begin with the question, **“How much productivity can we extract?”** They should begin with the business outcome the organization is trying to achieve. Once leaders define that outcome, the workforce question becomes sharper: **“Which capabilities should they build, buy, borrow, or bot?”**

Taylor Sullivan makes a related point: **“AI transformation should not be the outcome. AI transformation should be the means to an end. And the leader’s job is to clarify and set a vision around what that end looks like.”**

AI Adoption vs. Business Improvement

“Set aside the obsession with AI usage and focus on this question: Is the work getting done in a way that’s better than it was before?”

Colby Nesbitt

The leaders interviewed for this paper did not dismiss productivity. They argued that productivity alone cannot carry the transformation. AI is forcing organizations to answer questions they should have answered already: what work matters, what quality is required, how people learn, how managers translate change, and who gets access to opportunity.



Research Snapshot

Adoption Is Not Transformation

AI use is widespread. AI redesign remains limited.

- ▶ **88%** of organizations report regular AI use in at least one business function.
- ▶ Only about **one-third** have begun scaling AI programs.
- ▶ **30%** are redesigning key processes around AI.
- ▶ **37%** are using AI at a surface level with little or no change to existing processes.

Usage shows where AI is spreading. Redesign shows whether transformation is taking hold.

Source: McKinsey, 2025 State of AI³; Deloitte, 2026 State of AI in the Enterprise⁴

Jobs Are Changing Inside Existing Roles

AI disruption is often described as a story of job loss. That story is incomplete. Some roles will shrink or disappear, and new roles will emerge. For many employees, however, the more immediate shift is happening inside the job they already have. The title may stay the same while the tasks, skills, decision rights, quality standards, and advancement pathways underneath it change.



Research Snapshot

Skills Are Moving Under Employees' Feet

The job title may stay stable while the work changes underneath.

- ▶ The average role has seen about **one-third** of its designated capabilities change in three years.
- ▶ **25%** of jobs have seen **75%** skill turnover.
- ▶ Skills in the most AI-exposed jobs are changing more than **2x** as fast as skills in the least-exposed roles.
- ▶ New tasks relying on empathy, judgment, and creativity are being added **2.5x** faster in AI-exposed jobs.

Employees need a map of what is changing, not just a mandate to adapt.

Source: Lightcast, *Speed of Skill Change*⁵;
PwC, *2026 AI Jobs Barometer*⁶

Lightcast finds that 32% skills are being replaced or expanded between 2021 and 2024, and that one in four jobs experienced 75% skill turnover.⁵ PwC's 2026 AI Jobs Barometer finds that skills in the most-AI-exposed jobs are changing more than twice as fast as skills in the least-exposed roles. New tasks added to AI-exposed roles are also 2.5 times more likely to rely on empathy, judgment, and creativity.⁶

Employees need an honest view of what is changing, what remains uncertain, and what capabilities will matter next.

Several interviewees described a fear that extends beyond job elimination: Employees worry that AI will remove the experiences through which people learn, fail, grow, and become leaders.

"Employees are not afraid of AI itself. They're afraid of becoming irrelevant."

Nehal Jani

Leaders cannot reassure employees out of that fear. Rather, they need to show how work and career paths will change together. AI should not only remove tasks. It should create room for learning, stretch work, customer exposure, judgment, and advancement. Auger-Domínguez describes how that transparency can reduce some of the fear that employees' jobs will become obsolete. The message shifts toward **"I'm skill building. I'm creating space for skill building here."**

Fasolo maintains that the message must not be: **"Your job will stay the same."** Leaders need to offer a more credible explanation: **"Here is how the work is changing. Here is what we know. Here is what we do not know yet. Here is where new value is moving. And here is how you can build toward it."**

IBM offers one example. The company is expanding entry-level hiring while redefining early-career roles for an AI-first workplace. Those roles are shifting away from repetitive execution and toward analysis, problem-solving, responsible AI use, systems thinking, customer interaction, and oversight of AI output.⁷ The example matters because entry-level work is not only a source of production. It is where employees develop the judgment they will later be expected to exercise.

Accountability Has a New Machine Layer

As AI systems take on multistep work in the agentic era, employees increasingly inherit a chain of machine activity they must understand well enough to use, explain, or reject.⁸

Colby Nesbitt described the accountability risk clearly. AI can produce analysis that **"spits back what it thinks you want to hear,"** may apply the wrong inference, or may claim causation where the evidence is only correlational. But once that work reaches an executive, **"'AI did it' is not a good excuse,"** she cautions. **"You are personally standing in front of what you produce."**

Employees increasingly manage AI-supported work rather than simply produce it.

The accountability problem is also a performance problem. Desiree Therianos described the challenge this way: **"We never defined that bar and what excellence means."** If AI changes how work is produced, leaders must define the bar again. They must explain what good AI-assisted work looks like,

what requires human review, and when judgment must override speed. Therianos also described the leadership work as pushing **"in those moments where it's ambiguous or not well-defined."** That is where HR, talent, and inclusion leaders become essential. They help the organization name the standards before ambiguity turns into inconsistent practice.

With that said, not every AI question is about standards. Some are about presence. Gina Greenwalt asks: **"What interactions with an employee or with a teammate need to be witnessed?"** Conflicts, coaching moments, learning experiences, and consequential decisions often depend on another person seeing the work, reading the context, and responding with care.

Leaders need clear answers to five human questions inside AI-supported work:

- **Accountability:** Who owns the output when AI helped produce it?
- **Excellence:** What does good work look like now?
- **Judgment:** Which decisions require human review or override?
- **Presence:** Which interactions still require human attention, context, and care?
- **Growth:** How should saved time be reinvested into work that AI makes more valuable?

Where AI Breaks Down in Culture

As companies begin looking beyond AI adoption to assess AI's value, they need to address the culture that shapes how employees navigate the ambiguity and uncertainty that have become commonplace. How employees react in these moments determines whether AI produces better work, hidden risk, quiet compliance, disengagement, or uneven opportunity.

The evidence points to three predictable risks. Each can remain hidden when leaders focus on use alone.

Hesitation Becomes Quiet Compliance

When employees hesitate around AI, leaders may hear resistance. But hesitation often signals unanswered questions: Why are we using this? How will it change my role? What standards apply? Can I question an output or admit I need help? Will AI help me grow—or will it make me easier to replace? Those questions are useful. The greater risk is that employees will stop asking them.

Employees may use AI because they feel expected to do so while hiding uncertainty, avoiding disclosure, withholding concerns, or disengaging from the change. That compliance can look like adoption on a dashboard even as risk is bubbling underground. Gallup's 2026 research on Gen Z and AI shows why leaders should not mistake skepticism for resistance. Younger workers are still using AI, but their trust is fraying.⁹ Employed Gen Z workers are more likely to say AI's risks outweigh its benefits, and they report greater confidence in work completed without AI than in AI-assisted work.

Psychological safety is central. A 2025 three-wave study of 381 employees found that organizational AI adoption was associated with lower psychological safety and higher reports of depression, while ethical leadership softened the relationship between AI adoption and psychological safety.¹⁰ The study does not prove that AI inevitably harms employees. It does suggest that unmanaged adoption can weaken employees' willingness to ask questions, acknowledge errors, and raise concerns.

The employees best positioned to advance will not simply be those with access to tools. They will be those with agency: the permission, confidence, support, and practice to experiment, test use cases, ask questions, and learn in public. Sullivan argues that employees need to believe AI will benefit them, that experimentation is **"safe and endorsed,"** and that **"they have the skills, tools, and resources to use it well."**

Visible leadership matters here. Sullivan argues that leaders must model responsible use: **"The leaders have to be the first to be loud, be proud, be very visible in their usage."**

Visible endorsement matters, but enthusiasm without clear answers can feel like pressure. Greenwalt cautions leaders against treating hesitation as irrational. Executives may see AI transformation as **"a no-brainer,"** but for employees doing the work, **"it shouldn't be a no-brainer."** Employees need their **"critical thinking hat on."**

The most dangerous AI culture may not be resistance. It may be silence.

The Quiet Compliance Risk

The most threatening characteristic of an AI culture may not be resistance. It may be silence.

Ask teams regularly:

- Where is AI helping?
- Where is it creating rework?
- Where are expectations unclear?
- Where do employees feel pressure to use it?
- Where might disclosure carry risk?
- What do employees need permission to ask, challenge, or learn?

Saved Time Becomes More Work

AI is often introduced as a way to save time. But time saved is not the same as value captured.

Glean's 2026 Work AI Index reports that 87% of digital workers use AI and say it saves them 11 hours a week, but only 13% say their organization is performing significantly better because of it. Workers spend an average of 6.4 hours each week on "botsitting": feeding AI context, checking outputs, fixing mistakes, and cleaning up confident but incorrect answers.¹¹

The point is not that AI is failing. Rather, the work has shifted. AI may reduce time spent on production and search while increasing the need for validation, integration, judgment, coordination, and escalation.

BCG found a similar reinvestment gap. Among frontline employees who regularly use AI, 42% say they save at least eight hours a week. Yet 66% receive limited or no guidance on what to do with that time, and more than half do not redirect it toward more strategic work.¹²

Alison Campbell's concept of "**innovation capacity**," coined in her research with Danielle Hartigan and the Center for Health and Business at Bentley University, gives leaders a better frame than productivity alone. She defines it as "**the cognitive and strategic bandwidth required to turn effort and ideas into high-quality sustained value.**"

"Are we reserving space for new innovation, new thought, new ideas? Or are we just backfilling with more?"

Alison Campbell

Leaders must decide what saved time is for before urgency decides for them. It can be reinvested in customer value, strategy, learning, collaboration, recovery, and better decisions. Without clearly defining and then supporting its choices, the organization may automate routine work and immediately refill the calendar, queue, and dashboard.

Workday's 2026 Human Connection Workplace Index adds an important caution. Among active AI users, 62% say their stress or burnout risk has decreased, and 86% feel more productive. At the same time, the research points to a growing connection deficit as more interactions move toward AI and away from colleagues.¹³ AI can ease task strain while weakening the relationships through which people learn, build trust, and grow. Greenwalt describes how AI can be **"a bit isolating"** unless teams intentionally make it a **"team sport."** Work redesign therefore has to protect both capacity and connection.

Time Saved Is Not Value Captured

87%

Digital workers who use AI

11 hours/week

Time workers say AI saves

13%

Workers who say AI significantly improves organizational performance

AI saves time. Leaders need to define how to reinvest that time into value-added work.

Source: Glean, 2026 Work AI Index¹¹

AI May Raise the Floor. Culture Decides Who Climbs.

AI can expand who is able to write, code, analyze, and use knowledge that once required specialized experience. That promise is real. It is also incomplete.

In a study of 5,179 customer support agents, Erik Brynjolfsson, Danielle Li, and Lindsey Raymond found that a generative AI assistant increased productivity by 14% on average and by 34% among novice and lower-skilled workers. The tool helped less-experienced workers adopt practices used by more experienced colleagues.¹⁴ AI can spread tacit knowledge and raise the performance floor.

Organizations still determine whether that gain becomes opportunity. Leaders decide who receives training and access to pilots, whose AI use is encouraged and trusted, who gains visibility through AI-related work, and who receives sponsorship into higher-value roles.

Lean In's 2026 research shows how quickly differences can compound. Their research finds that men are 22% more likely than women to use AI daily or constantly at work. Among employees who had used AI on the job, men were 27% more likely to be praised by management for doing so and 23% more likely to be encouraged by their managers to use AI.¹⁵

The gap is not solely about use. It is also about how AI use is judged. In a 2026 study led by Zehra Chatoo, founder of Code For Good Now, in which AI-generated résumés were identical except for the candidate name: Emily Clarke or James Clarke,¹⁶ James's résumé received a 97% approval rating, while Emily's identical résumé was rated strong by 76% of respondents. Reviewers of Emily's résumé were more likely to question trustworthiness than reviewers of James's, and Gen Z men were 3.5 times more likely to describe Emily's résumé as "weak."

The inclusion risk is not limited to interpersonal judgment. A large-scale Stanford study followed 3.4 million people who submitted four million applications across 150 employers. It found that 26% of Black applicants and 15% of Asian applicants applied to positions where the AI screening system discriminated against their racial group. Shared dependence on one vendor also increased the likelihood that the same applicants would be rejected across employers.¹⁷

These distinctions matter because AI use is becoming a signal of future readiness. If AI fluency becomes a marker of leadership potential, existing gaps in recognition, sponsorship, manager encouragement, and advancement will shape who benefits. Sullivan puts the stakes plainly: **"Women are about a quarter of the AI workforce, but only around one in eight of its researchers. The people deciding how this technology gets built are overwhelmingly not women, and women aren't adopting it as widely either. If we don't get more involved, it's going to evolve in ways that create real problems for us."**

Responsible AI is therefore not only a governance, privacy, or compliance question. It is also an inclusion question. Leaders must examine who is encouraged, trusted, recognized, sponsored, and able to challenge an AI-assisted decision.

The Next Broken Rung May Be AI Fluency

If AI fluency becomes a marker of leadership potential, the same systems that shape advancement today will shape who benefits tomorrow.

Culture System		What Leaders Need To Watch
Encouragement	→	Who is encouraged to use AI and given time to learn?
Recognition	→	Who is praised for AI use, and who is judged for the same behavior?
Disclosure	→	Who feels safe disclosing AI use, and who risks a competence or trust penalty?
Sponsorship	→	Who is invited into visible AI projects?
Performance	→	Whose AI use is seen as strategic, and whose is seen as cutting corners?
Mobility	→	Who gains a pathway into the work AI makes more valuable?
Recourse	→	Who can challenge an AI-assisted decision and reach a human decision-maker?

Five Workplace Conditions for AI Value

EVS does not measure AI adoption. It measures the workplace conditions that influence whether major transformation is successful.

Across the data, employees often describe supportive teams and direct managers while reporting unclear advancement, opaque decisions, structural distance from senior leaders, and uneven access to opportunity. That distinction matters. Managers deliver change locally, but they cannot compensate indefinitely for unclear enterprise decisions, overloaded work, or inequitable talent systems.

The five conditions below give leaders a practical way to diagnose and strengthen the employee experience around AI.

Condition	What Leaders Must Do	EVS signal
Clarify	Make changes to work, success, and opportunity visible.	Only 32% understand what it takes to succeed.
Redesign	Change the work and decide how saved time will be used.	34% cite excessive workload as a career difficulty.
Expand	Connect AI fluency to learning, sponsorship, and opportunity.	Sponsored employees are more than nine times as likely to have a high-impact network.
Equip	Help managers translate enterprise strategy into daily expectations.	64% have some form of advice for their manager.
Protect	Make it safe to question, challenge, and escalate AI-supported work.	Only 41% feel comfortable taking risks.



Clarify: Make Change and Opportunity Visible

Employees cannot adapt to a future they cannot see.

► *What EVS Shows*

Only **32%** of employees understand what it takes to succeed. When employees describe barriers to career progression, **47%** cite structural barriers and **25%** cite unclear progression.

► *Why It Matters for AI Value*

AI changes how employees complete work, which capabilities matter, how performance is judged, and where opportunity may move. Employees cannot adapt with confidence if leaders leave them to infer what success now requires.

Clarity does not mean predicting the future perfectly. It means giving employees a directionally honest account of what is changing now, what remains uncertain, which skills will matter, how roles may evolve, and when they will hear more.

The failure pattern is easy to recognize: Employees use AI but do not know whether that use will help them advance, increase their visibility, or place their roles at risk. The organization changes the work while leaving employees to guess what the change means for them.

► *Recommendations*

- Define how AI changes tasks, decision rights, quality standards, and performance expectations by role or function.
- Make advancement criteria explicit as work and skill requirements change.
- Show where AI is creating learning and opportunity, not only efficiency.
- Communicate what is known, what is uncertain, and when employees will receive an update.

Diagnostic Question: Can employees explain how AI is changing their work, what success looks like now, and where opportunity is moving?



Redesign: Turn Saved Time into Better Work

AI speed becomes pressure when leaders add it to work that is already overloaded.

► *What EVS Shows*

When employees describe what is difficult in their careers, **34%** cite excessive workload, **22%** cite shifting priorities, and **16%** cite insufficient support.

► *Why It Matters for AI Value*

AI cannot create lasting value when leaders layer it onto work responsibilities that employees already regard as unsustainable, unstable, or under-supported. Speed becomes pressure when no one defines what employees should stop doing, what requires review, when to escalate, and who owns the outcome.

Work redesign starts with tasks, decisions, relationships, handoffs, and outcomes. It also extends to careers. If leaders remove developmental tasks without creating new ways to learn judgment, employees may experience AI as a narrowing of their future rather than an improvement in their work.

The failure pattern is more output with no corresponding improvement. AI saves time in one part of a workflow but creates review, rework, ambiguity, or escalation elsewhere. Unmanaged capacity is quickly absorbed by more work and tighter deadlines.

► *Recommendations*

- Map the work by task, decision, handoff, and outcome; define what AI supports and what people retain.
- Create “stop doing” decisions alongside “do faster” expectations.
- Clarify review, escalation, and ownership rules for AI-assisted work.
- Decide how saved time will be reinvested, then track workload, rework, quality, and role clarity alongside use.

Diagnostic Question: Has the organization redesigned the work or simply added AI to an already strained system?



Expand: Connect AI Fluency to Opportunity

AI opportunity will not distribute itself.

► What EVS Shows

Employees who report having a sponsor are more than **nine times as likely** to have a high-impact network and more than **four times as likely** to believe they will advance to a senior role.

Access to sponsorship is uneven. Fifty-six percent of women of color report having no sponsor, compared with 48% of White women, 40% of White men, and 38% of men of color.

A sponsor is a senior or otherwise influential leader who actively advocates for an employee's advancement, increases the employee's visibility, and connects the employee to career-building opportunities and decision-makers.

► Why It Matters for AI Value

Training alone is not enough. Employees need the discernment to use, question, verify, and explain AI output, and they need opportunities to apply those skills in consequential work.

A course catalog may increase tool use, but it does not automatically create sponsorship, stretch assignments, customer exposure, or access to visible AI projects. If AI fluency becomes a marker of leadership potential, existing differences in recognition, manager encouragement, and sponsorship will shape who benefits.

Learning also needs to happen close to the work. In fast-moving environments, the best practices may emerge first among employees who are experimenting responsibly. Leaders should help those employees share what they are learning and make the path into new work visible to others.

"Effective workplace learning happens through the people closest to the work. The job right now is finding those people operating at the leading edge, equipping them to bring others along, and making it worth their time."

Gina Greenwalt

► Recommendations

- Build role-specific learning pathways around real workflows, judgment, verification, ethics, and escalation.
- Track access to pilots, stretch assignments, and visible AI projects by employee group.
- Create sponsorship pathways for employees least likely to have sponsors.
- Audit whether comparable AI use is encouraged, disclosed, recognized, or penalized differently across groups.

Diagnostic Question: Are employees only learning to use AI, or are they gaining access to the work AI makes more valuable?

4

Equip: Help Managers Translate the Change

Employees will experience AI strategy through their managers, not through enterprise slides.

Equip: Help Managers Translate the Change

Employees will experience AI strategy through their managers, not through enterprise slides.

► What EVS Shows

Sixty-four percent of employees have some form of advice for their manager. Thirty-six percent want more active dialogue, and 25% want more relational connection.

Employees with inclusive managers are about **four times as likely** to receive adequate feedback and more than **four times as likely** to feel valued and respected. In Seramount's EVS analysis, inclusive managers are those whose words and actions invite and value employees' contributions and who demonstrate openness, accessibility, and availability.

► Why It Matters for AI Value

Executives may set AI strategy at the top, but managers turn it into daily expectations. They explain what is changing, what remains uncertain, what the organization rewards, what support is available, and what decisions or choices still require human judgment.

Managers need to normalize responsible use without making employees feel replaceable, encourage experimentation without inviting

"We never defined that bar and what excellence means."

Desiree Therianos

careless use, and define what good work looks like when AI becomes part of the workflow. They also need permission to say what they do not yet know.

The failure pattern is an enterprise announcement that managers cannot translate. Employees fill the gap with rumor, hidden use, uneven experimentation, or performative compliance.

► Recommendations

- Give managers plain-language guidance on what is changing, uncertain, permitted, and required.
- Equip managers to discuss workload, fairness, role change, and career implications.
- Establish team norms for disclosure, review, escalation, quality, and accountability.
- Measure manager confidence and consistency, then update guidance as tools and policies change.

Diagnostic Question: Can managers explain how AI changes the work, what good looks like now, and where employees can go for support?



Protect: Make It Safe to Question and Escalate

The opposite of a healthy AI culture is not resistance. It is silence.

Protect: Make It Safe to Question and Escalate

The opposite of a healthy AI culture is not resistance. It is silence.

► What EVS Shows

Only **41%** of employees feel comfortable taking risks without fear. Among employees who described why they did not speak up, **54%** cited fear of retaliation and **38%** cited the belief that speaking up would not make a difference.

► Why It Matters for AI Value

Employees are often the first to see when AI creates rework, produces false confidence, amplifies bias, shifts accountability, or generates an unsupported recommendation. Their questions and concerns are an essential source of quality control.

If employees fear job loss, surveillance, judgment, retaliation, or unfair evaluation, they may protect themselves by staying quiet. A dashboard may show adoption while risk moves out of view.

Psychological safety makes it possible for employees to ask basic questions, challenge flawed output, name biased recommendations, admit uncertainty, and raise concerns before errors become failures. Employees also need human recourse: a clear way to challenge an AI-assisted decision and reach someone with the authority to review it.

*"It starts with permission
We're giving permission."*

Desiree Therianos

► Recommendations

- Create protected, well-publicized channels for AI-related questions and concerns.
- Normalize challenge, escalation, human review, and recourse in team routines.
- Include employee perspectives in AI governance and impact assessments.
- Measure psychological safety, willingness to report errors, and confidence that speaking up leads to action.

Diagnostic Question: Can employees question, challenge, and escalate AI-related concerns without fear or exclusion?

From Adoption Metrics to Workplace Metrics

Organizations should keep measuring AI adoption. But use alone does not indicate whether transformation is taking hold. If measurement stops at usage, leaders are measuring motion, not transformation.

AI success ultimately has to show up in business outcomes: better quality, innovation, customer value, speed to market, risk reduction, revenue, and sustainable performance. Workplace measures help leaders see whether the organization is building the conditions required to reach those outcomes.

Do not stop at measuring ...	Also measure ...
Tool use	Whether work quality, customer value, and decision speed are improving
Time saved	How saved capacity is reinvested and whether workload or rework increases
Training completion	Role-specific judgment, verification, and escalation
AI use by employee group	Differences in encouragement, recognition, disclosure, and access to visible work
Manager enablement	Whether managers can explain what is changing and what good work looks like
AI governance	Employee voice, human recourse, inclusion, psychological safety, and trust

Conclusion: Culture Will Decide What AI Becomes at Work

AI transformation will succeed or fail through workplace culture: the everyday conditions that shape how employees understand change, respond to uncertainty, use judgment, and see their future in the organization.

Technology can accelerate work. It cannot decide what employees should stop doing, how saved time should be reinvested, what good work looks like, whose potential will be recognized, or whether people feel safe enough to challenge a flawed output. Those are leadership and culture choices.

That is why AI belongs squarely on the people agenda. Leaders must make change and opportunity visible. They must redesign work before speed becomes pressure. They must connect AI fluency to sponsorship and growth. They must equip managers to lead through uncertainty. And they must protect trust, psychological safety, employee voice, and human recourse.

As Colby Nesbitt puts it: **"It's easy to think of this technology as an inevitability. I think we underestimate the power of HR leaders and employees themselves to shape the norms of what's acceptable. We're shaping that right now."**

The organizations that get these conditions right will not only realize more value from AI. They also will become places where employees can understand the change, help shape it, grow with it, and want to stay.

The leadership task is not simply to implement AI. It is to decide what kind of workplace AI will help create.

About the Research

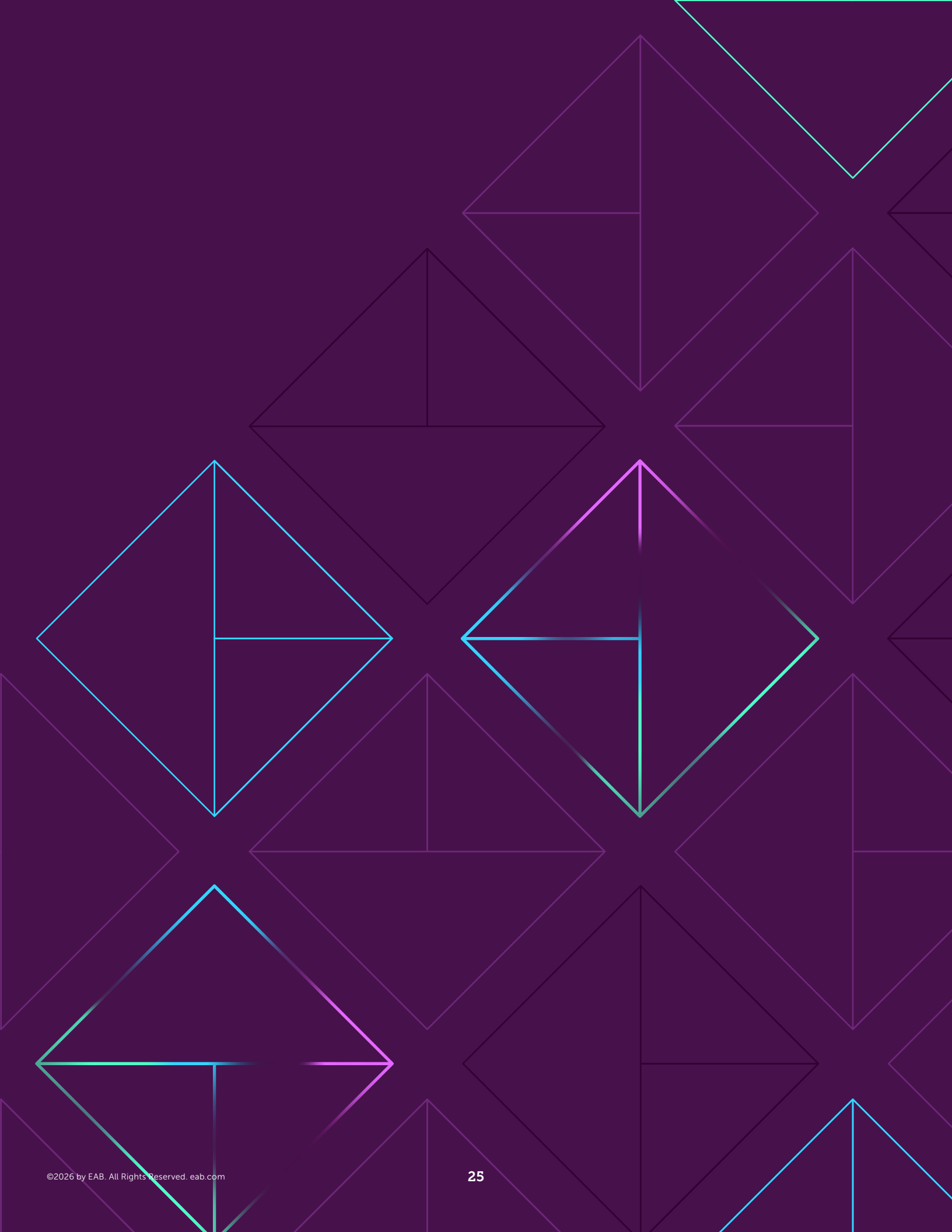
This paper draws on three evidence streams. Each plays a different role in the argument.

Market research provides context on AI adoption, work redesign, skill change, workload, psychological safety, and unequal access to opportunity. The paper prioritizes recent academic research and large workforce studies where available. These findings establish patterns and pressure points; they do not, by themselves, prove that a particular workplace condition causes an AI outcome.

Practitioner interviews show how leaders are experiencing and responding to those pressure points in real organizations. Eight HR, talent, learning, culture, and people analytics leaders contributed perspectives on the business outcomes AI should advance, the work leaders need to redesign, the standards managers must translate, the decisions that require human judgment, and the opportunities employees need to see. Quotations reflect the contributors' own views.

Seramount's Employee Voice Sessions (EVS) show whether the workplace conditions major transformation depends on are already strong enough to support change. The EVS data analyzed in this paper includes more than 10,000 qualitative and quantitative employee responses collected from 2021 to 2025 across multiple industries and companies and weighted according to 2024 Bureau of Labor Statistics benchmarks. EVS examines inclusion, belonging, leadership, advancement, psychological safety, feedback, workload, and employee voice.

EVS does not measure AI adoption or AI maturity. In this paper, it serves as a diagnostic of the workplace conditions that influence whether employees can absorb and shape major change. Quantitative percentages reflect weighted survey responses. Qualitative percentages reflect coded themes among respondents answering a specific open-ended question. Likelihood comparisons are based on regression analysis. The findings reflect employee perceptions and should not be interpreted as proof that these conditions cause AI outcomes.



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