seramount
Talent Solutions for Better Workplaces

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AI at Work: Employee Experiences Across the Workforce

Why Trust, Governance, and Inclusion Will Determine AI's Workplace Impact

The AI Revolution Is Here—and Organizations Aren't Prepared

AI's impact is impossible to miss in the corporate world. In April 2026, U.S. organizations expected to invest $207 billion in AI over the next year. Nearly 80 percent of CEOs reported spending at least 5 percent of their total capital budget on AI, and 41 percent are spending at least 10 percent. Such large spending makes sense given what AI technology and tools promise. An estimated $4.7 trillion in profits is at stake within the next decade, and everyone wants to get a piece of it.

But for all of this spending and excitement, AI's potential has yet to materialize. Many leaders haven't even seen evidence of AI's most straightforward and practical claim: greater productivity. In fact, a global study of companies in the U.S., Europe, and Australia found that 89 percent of businesses estimated that **so far, AI has had no impact** on their labor productivity.

Some of these disappointing results reflect the J-curve of adoption: The adoption of any new technology may initially reduce productivity as employees get up to speed and begin to incorporate it into their workflows. It takes time for the benefits to appear. But Seramount's new data reveals that these disappointing results reflect something else as well.

The fact is, organizations are still figuring out how to use AI to drive growth. Most have encouraged their employees to adopt AI tools and integrate them into their workflows, but they haven't necessarily provided the training, support, and easy access required to make the transition a seamless one.

Seramount's first-of-its-kind national survey of white-collar workers at large companies uncovered the problem at the heart of why organizations are still struggling to realize the promise of AI adoption: **They've invested in AI tools and technology, but they haven't invested in the human elements needed to make AI adoption successful. Moving from AI adoption to true AI acceleration requires implementing strong governance, promoting the trust needed to foster meaningful experimentation, and foregrounding inclusion.**

Methodology

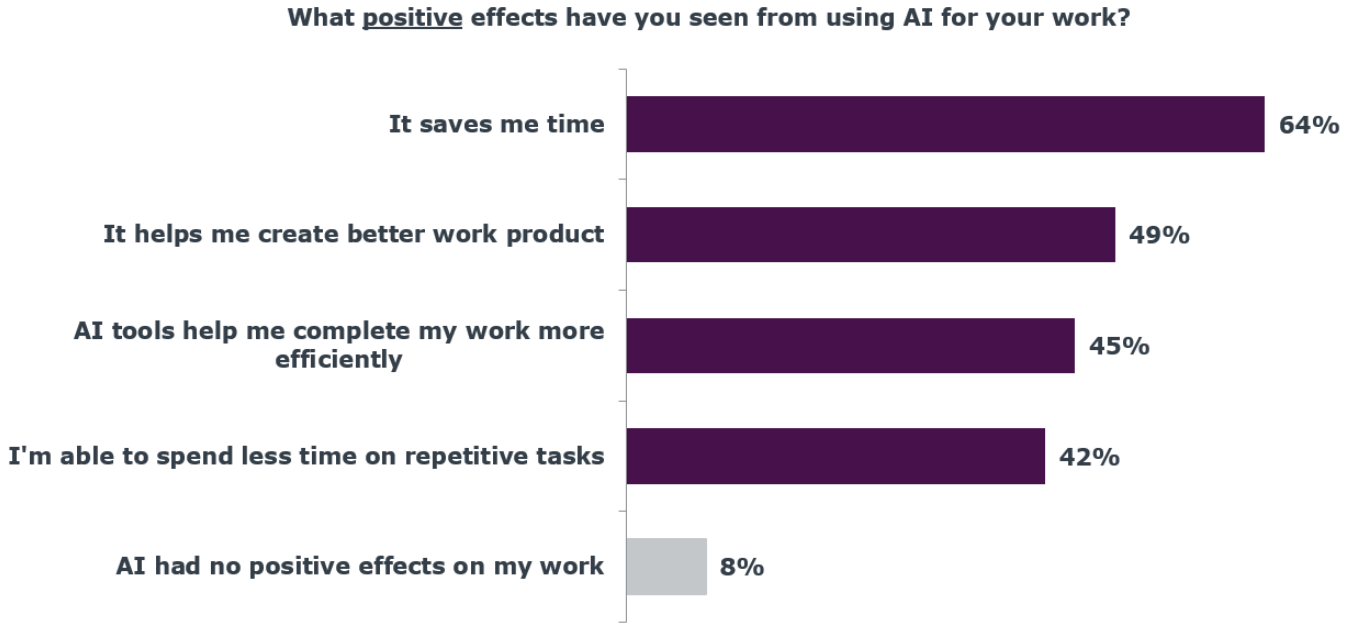
Fielded in June 2026 through NORC's industry-leading AmeriSpeak panel, Seramount's AI at Work survey gathered insights from more than 1,800 U.S. white-collar employees at companies with at least 500 workers. The study ensured representative sampling across race/ethnicity, geography, gender, age, job level, and other key demographics.

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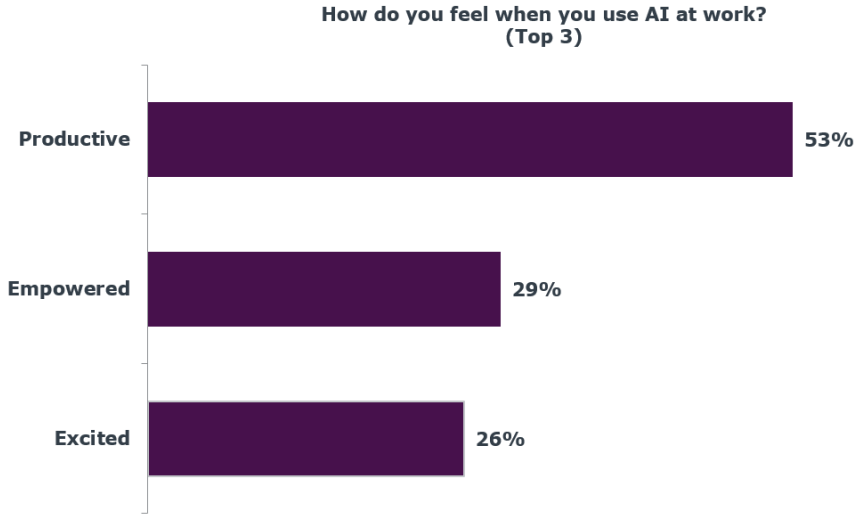
Employees Are Using AI, and Most Are Happy About It

Seramount's data reveals that organizations have largely been successful at promoting AI adoption: **63 percent** of employees in our national survey of white-collar workers shared that they use AI in their current role. Among those, **60 percent** are using it daily.

And despite headlines trumpeting employee backlash to AI, **more than 9 in 10** indicate that they've seen positive effects from using AI for their work, from saving time and completing work more efficiently to producing higher-quality work.



And most employees *feel* good when they use AI. Asked how they felt when using AI at work, 78 percent of employees shared that they experienced one or more positive emotions. The most common emotions employees reported feeling when they use AI at work were *productive, empowered,* and *excited.* For many employees, AI represents an opportunity to fill skills gaps, expand their existing toolkit, and gain access to information more quickly than ever before.



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But Corporate Governance Is Still Catching Up

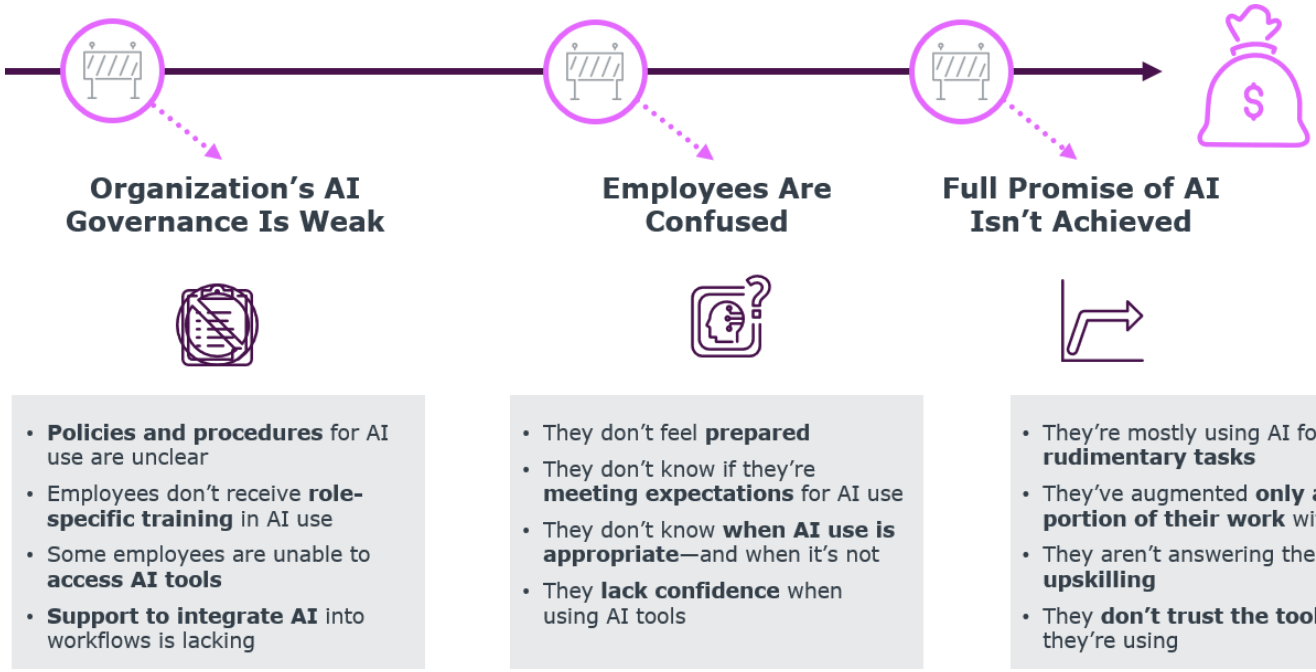
Across industries, employees identified clear gaps in their organization's approach to AI governance. For example, only 38 percent of employees believe that their organizations have clear policies and procedures for AI use. Even more concerning, less than one-third of employees have received training on how to use AI.



Poor governance creates a myriad of challenges and risks for organizations. A lack of clear policies and procedures for when and how to use AI—and when not to use it—leaves companies vulnerable to everything from poor client or customer outcomes to legal risk. An organization that doesn't ensure that all employees have equal access to AI tools is creating an inequitable work environment.

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Poor Governance Leads to Limited Capabilities…



Weak governance practices don't just create inequities. They have real effects on employees' ability to use AI tools to generate business value.

Employees don't feel prepared.

Only **24 percent** of employees believe their organizations have prepared them very effectively to use AI at work.

Employees don't know if they're meeting expectations for AI use.

While 62 percent of employees believe their organization encourages AI use, only half believe they're meeting their company's expectations for AI use. A full **40 percent** are unsure if they're meeting expectations.

Employees don't know when AI use is appropriate—and when it's not.

Only about half of employees believe it is appropriate to use AI at work for basic tasks, such as summarizing documents (52 percent) and editing drafts and editing drafts (48 percent). AI skepticism increases when it comes to more controversial use cases like idea generation (41 percent), content creation (39 percent), coding (34 percent), and customer interactions (13 percent).

Employees lack confidence when using AI.

Only **38 percent** of employees feel very confident using AI for work tasks.

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… And Even More Limited Results

Unsurprisingly, this lack of preparation and confusion means that employees aren't nearly as advanced in their AI usage as many organizations would like.

Employees are mostly using AI for rudimentary tasks.

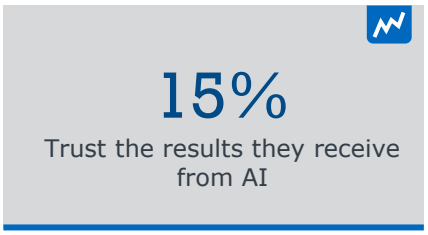
The most common uses of AI at work include editing draft emails and other content (52 percent), summarizing documents (50 percent), and research (46 percent). More challenging but impactful use cases such as coding and automating repetitive tasks are much less prevalent; only 26 percent of employees report using AI for each.

Employees have augmented only a small portion of their work with AI.

More than half of employees (55 percent) believe that AI has enabled them to augment only 1—24 percent of their work product—far from the transformational results organizations are looking for.

Employees aren't answering the call for upskilling.

Despite the clear need for upskilling in AI, most employees simply aren't interested. Only 35 percent of employees agree with this statement: *I want to develop or improve my AI skills.* In other words, even if strong role-specific training were implemented at all organizations, employees may not participate.



Employees don't trust the tools they're using.

Only 15 percent of employees trust the results they receive from AI. A healthy level of skepticism about AI results is wise. But such low levels of trust levels may signal an unwillingness to stand by the results of the technology, even when they're obliging their companies by using it.

These results mean that companies and employees may be **destined to be stuck in the J-curve for much longer**, struggling to achieve the productivity increases and improved products that AI has promised.

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The Workplace Trust Chasm Comes for AI

Employees' lack of trust in the results they receive from AI tools is a major concern for organizations leveraging AI to better serve their clients or customers. But Seramount's survey uncovered an even bigger problem for trust and AI adoption: **Employees don't trust their workplaces to let them experiment with AI, to learn by doing, and maybe even to fail.**

When it comes to AI in the workplace, organizations are truly "building the plane while flying it"—establishing policies and regulations around AI use while instructing their employees to actively use AI to drive value. In a corporate climate with few guidelines and even fewer experts and role models, employees are urged to "try it out." But with the threat of AI-driven layoffs looming, trying things out without guardrails is more daunting than ever.

Seramount's previous research on employees' experiences of inclusion in their workplaces has sounded the alarm on levels of psychological safety among U.S. employees: They're low, and they've gotten even lower in the past two years. Our AI survey found further evidence of this. For example, when it comes to sharing ideas:

- Only **58 percent** of employees are comfortable sharing their ideas with colleagues who are at the same organizational level.
- Only **55 percent** of employees are comfortable sharing their ideas with their direct manager.
- Only **39 percent** of employees are comfortable sharing their ideas with colleagues and leaders at higher levels.

Although low levels of trust in the workplace are nothing new, AI adoption is a prime example of how trust gaps can manifest in ways that directly undermine organizational results.

Seramount's AI survey identified three ways in which a lack of psychological safety directly undermines AI execution:

- **Only 44 percent of employees feel comfortable admitting they used AI for a work task.** When employees aren't clear about AI expectations, sharing use cases becomes even more challenging.
- **Only 26 percent feel comfortable asking colleagues for help using AI tools.** When learning is informal, peer collaboration is vital.
- **And 12 percent worry that using AI might make others think they lack skills.** When employees don't understand that using AI is a job skill on its own, fear increases.

A Research-Informed Playbook to Help Leaders Cultivate Psychological Safety and Drive Stronger Team Performance

Ask your Relationship Director for the toolkit



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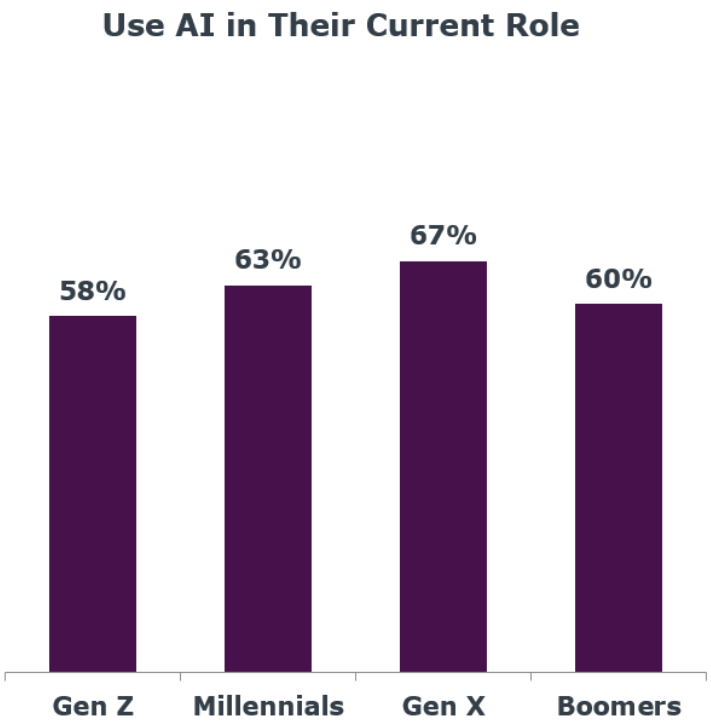
There Is a Generation Gap—and It Isn't the One You Expect

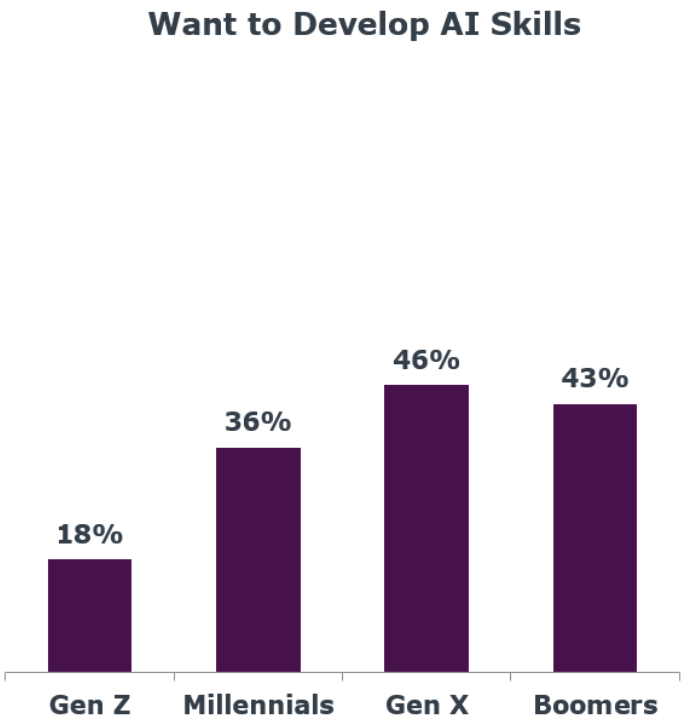
Seramount's 2024 research report, *Gen Z Decoded: New Data on How Your Youngest Employees Want to Experience Work*, identified and debunked five myths about the Gen Z workforce. AI has created yet another myth: that Gen Zers (those aged 29 and younger) are eager to be early adopters of AI, both in and out of the workforce.

Far from being early and eager adopters, Seramount's AI survey revealed that **Gen Z employees are the most reluctant users of AI**. Across the four generations currently dominating the workforce, Gen X (those aged 45–59) is the generation with the largest percentage of AI adopters, at 67 percent. Millennials (those aged 30–44) and Baby Boomers (those aged 60 and older) are close behind. Only 58 percent of Gen Zers are currently using AI at work.

Gen Z's lagging AI usage could be partially explained by more junior employees having less of a business need to leverage AI. Perhaps as they advance their careers, they'll gain both greater access to enterprise AI tools and more reasons to use those tools.

The much bigger concern for talent and inclusion leaders is that Gen Zers are the least likely to want to develop their AI skills: Only 18 percent of them indicated this—half the percentage of Millennials and a little more than one-third of the percentage of Gen Xers who want to develop their skills. Baby Boomers, **the generation closest to retirement is significantly more interested in honing their AI skills than the youngest employees in the workplace are.** This reluctance to develop the skills needed to distinguish themselves raises important questions about Gen Z's ability to advance their careers in an AI-driven workplace.





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Gen Z Employees Are AI Negatives, Not AI Natives

Across virtually every question in Seramount's survey, members of the youngest generation in the workplace were more negative toward AI.

Gen Z employees are less sold on AI's benefits.

Compared to every other generation, fewer Gen Zers believe AI tools help them complete their work more efficiently: 30 percent vs. about 50 percent of other generations. Similarly, fewer agree that AI helps them create better work product: 41 percent versus 48 percent of Gen Zers and 56 percent of Gen Xers.

Gen Z employees are more negative about their company's approach to AI.

The lack of consistent organizational governance around AI has hit Gen Z harder than any other generation. Only 31 percent of Gen Z believe all employees at their organizations have equal access to AI tools, compared with 40 percent of Millennials and 38 percent of Gen X. Fewer Gen Zers agree that their organization provides support to help them integrate AI into their work: 27 percent of Gen Z agreed, compared with 38 percent of Millennials and 43 percent of Gen X.

Gen Z employees are less comfortable using AI.

Like the governance gaps, the trust gaps in corporate AI adoption have fallen heavily on Gen Z. The percentage of Gen Z employees who feel comfortable admitting they used AI is substantially lower than the corresponding percentages for other generations: 27 percent vs. 47—53 percent for other generations. Conversely, twice as many Gen Z worry that using AI might make others think they lack skills: 22 percent of Gen Zers fear this, compared with only 10 percent of Millennials and Gen X and 8 percent of Baby Boomers. Making matters even worse, fewer feel comfortable asking colleagues for help using AI tools: 18 percent of Gen Zers feel comfortable asking for help, compared with 27 percent of Millennials, 29 percent of Gen Xers, and 34 percent of Baby Boomers.

Taken in conjunction with the finding that only 18 percent of Gen Zers want to develop their AI skills, these lower levels of comfort are an alarm bell**. Gen Z is uncomfortable with AI, *and* they're not interested in taking advantage of opportunities to become more comfortable with it.**

Inequitable AI adoption creates disproportionate challenges for many key employee groups. But right now, **Gen Zers are the most at risk of being left behind by the AI revolution**.

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Gen Z's AI Concerns Aren't the Buzzy Ones

Gen Z employees have more negative feelings when using AI.

At the most basic level of AI sentiment, fewer Gen Z employees experience positive feelings when using AI for work. Only 71 percent of Gen Z report experiencing one or more positive feelings, such as feeling productive, empowered, or excited to use the new technology. By contrast, about 8 in 10 of their colleagues experience these emotions when using AI.

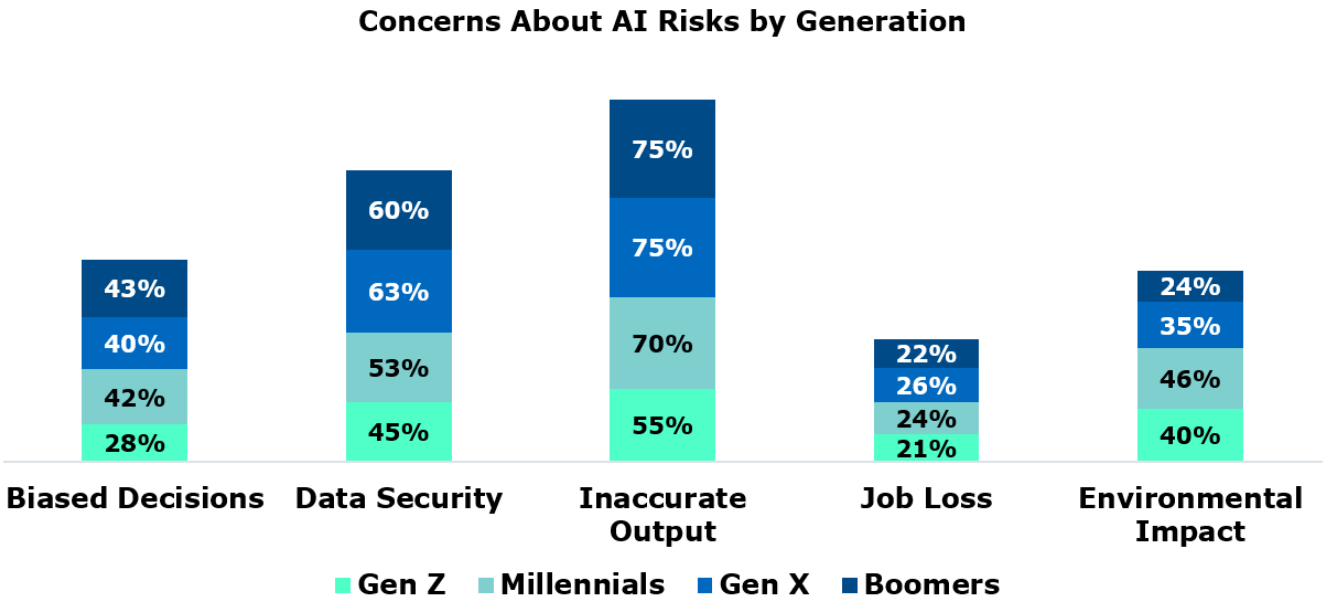
And Gen Z's concerns about AI *aren't* the ones we expect.

This report has already established that employees' trust in AI output is alarmingly low, with only 15 percent of employees indicating that they trust the results they receive from AI. Interestingly, this data point doesn't vary significantly across the generations. What differs is the nature of the concern about AI use in the workplace and in society at large.

Seramount's AI survey addressed five of the most common concerns around AI output: biased decisions, potential data security issues, inaccurate output, job loss, and AI's negative environmental impact.

Despite media claims that AI could mean "the end of entry-level jobs," Gen Z is no more concerned about the possibility of being replaced by AI than their older colleagues. And they're the generation that's least concerned about biased decisions, data security, and inaccurate output. Finally, more Gen Zers are concerned about AI's potential negative impact on the environment than Gen Xers or Baby Boomers—but Millennials represent the largest proportion of employees who are expressing this concern.

In other words, Gen Z's issues with AI aren't driven by risk aversion, and they can't be addressed by simple risk mitigation.



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Where Inclusion Leaders Should Help

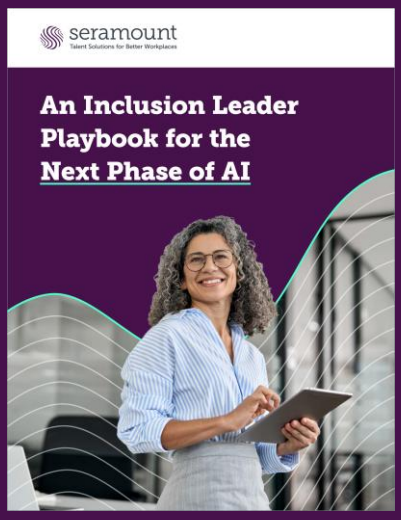
As generative AI was first entering the workforce, Seramount encouraged Chief Diversity Officers and their teams to leverage this new technology as a catalyst for inclusion. Organizations are now at a crossroads in their AI approach. They are moving from AI adoption and into AI acceleration and the role of inclusion teams is more important than ever. But as the results of this study have demonstrated, many employees risk being left behind.

Inclusion leaders are in a crucial position to ensure that organizations govern AI at work successfully, especially as it reshapes organizational design, workplace access, and institutional trust.

To move from AI adoption to AI enablement and to truly drive the enhanced productivity and improved work product that organizations are seeking, inclusion leaders must take an active role in developing the AI governance that is still in its nascent stages at most organizations. They need to ensure that their organizations strengthen the human conditions that enable successful AI adoption, such as trust, psychological safety, and learning. And they need to ensure that key talent groups such as Gen Zers aren't left behind by the AI revolution.

Learn How Inclusion Leaders Can and Should Shape the Next Phase of Workplace AI

Ask your Relationship Director for the toolkit



Explore More Resources

Ready-to-Use Tools

Practical tools and guides for turning action plans into measurable impact.

Consultative Conversations and Presentations

Guided session to align your action plans with Seramount's best practices.

Pass-Through Report for CEOs and Boards

Short, executive-friendly summary on how to operationalize action plans.

Ready to take action? **Contact us** to get started.

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