Organizations Make Progress Adopting AI, but Many Employees Feel Left Behind

CMC | Canadian Management Centre®

cmcoutperform.com

AMA | GLOBAL

Introduction

Generative AI[1] has been on quite the ride ever since ChatGPT was introduced in late 2022. Even a casual consumer of the media would conclude that AI is barreling its way into our lives and economy. Perhaps never before in history has a powerful, deeply disruptive technology proliferated with such speed.

It's easy to imagine ways that any business could benefit from AI, whether for marketing, accounting, research, brainstorming or producing meeting notes. But are they? And what about employees? How are they contending with this dramatic intrusion of the status quo?

A year ago, our first survey of AI in the workplace revealed that the vast majority of North American organizations had not leveraged AI technologies and were not prepared to do so. That changed dramatically according to this year's survey. We queried 1,252 knowledge workers in North America, including 465 individual contributors (37%), 556 managers/supervisors (44%) and 231 senior leaders (19%). As we detail in this report, by December 2024 many more organizations were leveraging AI, developing strategies and implementing governance. These initiatives were producing significant benefits.

Most respondents are anxious that their AI skills and knowledge are not up to speed.

Despite the progress, many organizations need to catch up. A considerable number have not taken steps to embrace AI or establish safeguards on its use. Perhaps most importantly, while respondents viewed the technology even more favorably than they had last year, most are anxious that their AI skills and knowledge are not up to speed. As the pace of change accelerates, nearly three-fifths (58%) considered themselves behind in keeping up with AI.

It's in the interest of both individuals and organizations to address this learning gap. After all, while AI won't necessarily take a knowledge worker's job, an individual at ease with harnessing the technology might. Similarly, an organization that capitalizes on AI's power and efficiencies may quickly steal market share from a competitor that is slow off the mark, jeopardizing the laggard and its employees.

Q. Do you consider yourself "behind" in keeping up with AI learning and knowledge?
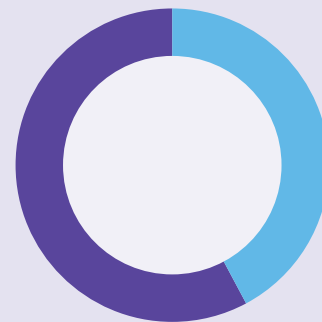

■ **58%** Yes   ■ **42%** No

---

[1] **The term "AI" covers a broad range of technologies. In this study, we assume the contemporary understanding of the term, meaning technologies such as generative AI, in which machines perform tasks typically requiring human intelligence, including language comprehension, reasoning, problem solving, analysis and decision making.**

# 2024: The Year Organizations Started to Take AI Seriously

What a difference a year can make. Our 2023 survey found a significant gap between how individuals and their organizations were adapting to AI. Individuals were enthusiastic and on board. More than four-fifths (85%) believed the technology could benefit their organization, and many (42%) were using it on their own, without a centralized approach. Yet the vast majority of their employers weren't leveraging it in any systematic way. They had not developed strategies or implemented governance, nor had they trained their people. Fewer than half (43%) said their organization even planned to use it.

That changed dramatically in 2024. Nearly three out of five respondents (57%) said their organization was leveraging AI, about twice the 2023 figure (30%). The proportion not leveraging it at all dropped from 44% to 31% and those who were unsure of AI's status in their organization fell from 26% to 12%.

Q. Does your organization leverage AI?

|	Yes	No	Not Sure
2023	30%	44%	26%
2024	57%	31%	12%
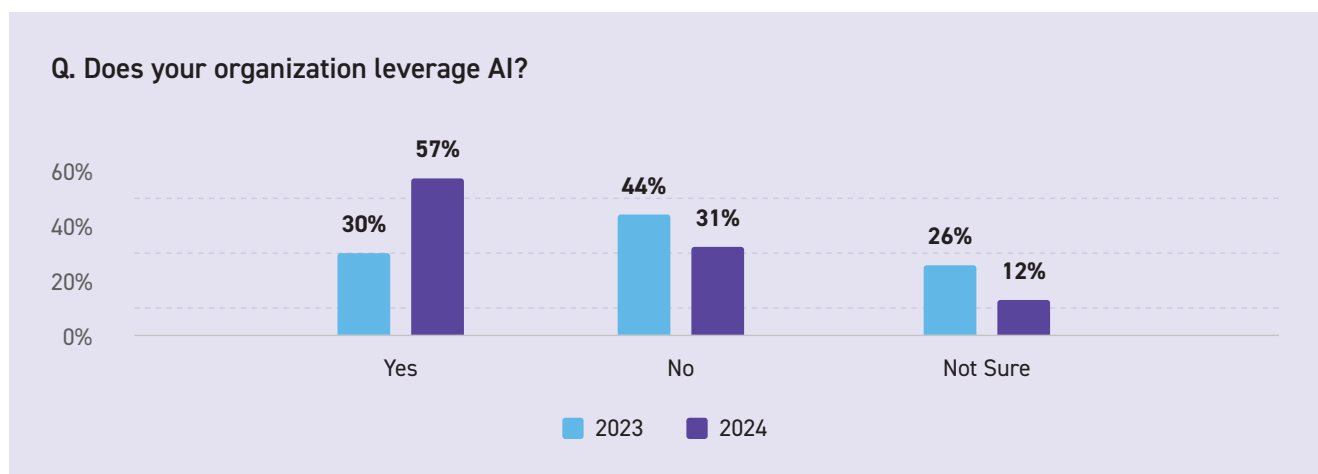
Our most recent survey found that organizations with 500 to 4,999 employees were most likely to leverage AI (70%), perhaps because businesses of this size have budgets sufficient to capitalize on the new technology, without the bureaucratic constraints of larger enterprises.

Q. Does your organization leverage AI? (By number of employees)

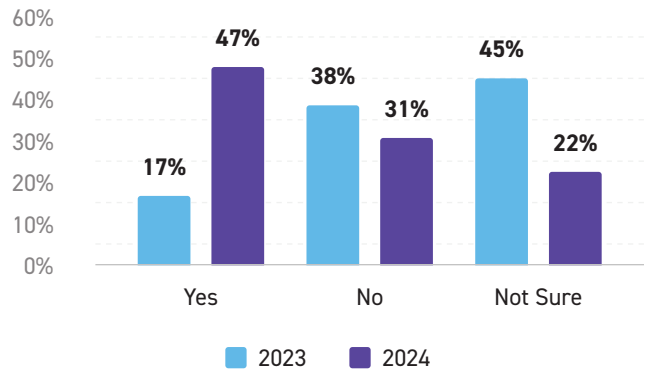|	Yes	No	Not Sure
5,000+ Employees	53%	28%	19%
500 to 4,999 Employees	70%	21%	9%
<500 Employees	51%	37%	12%
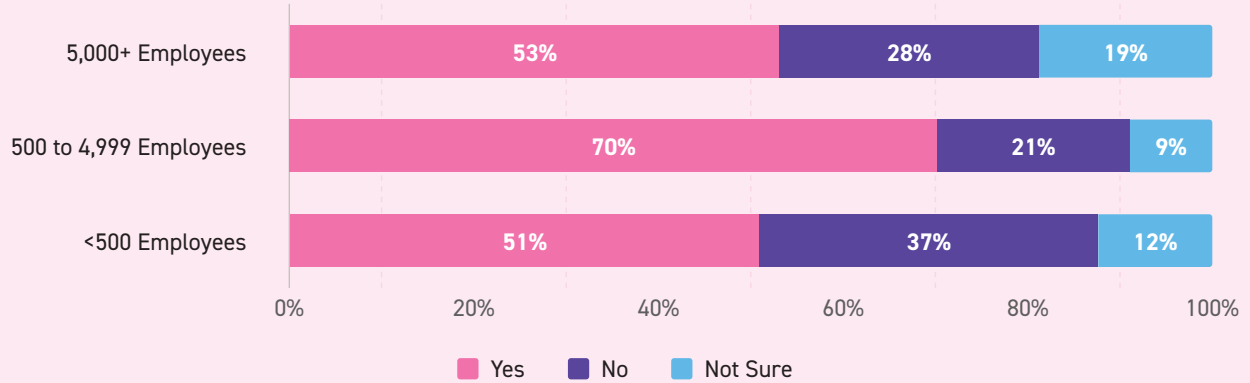
Respondents also reported a jump in their employers' efforts to centralize and control AI's use. The proportion with an AI strategy nearly tripled, from 17% to 47%—still fewer than half, but a significant step forward.

**Q. Does your organization have an AI governance policy?**

	Yes	No	Not Sure
2023	15%	48%	37%
2024	50%	31%	19%
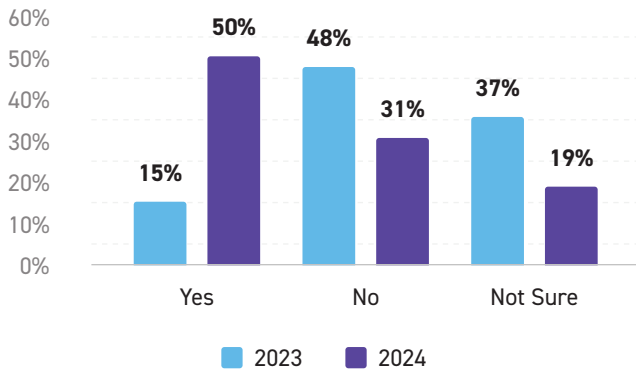
Q. Does your organization have an AI strategy?

|	Yes	No	Not Sure
2023	17%	38%	45%
2024	47%	31%	22%

The proportion with a governance policy for AI use more than tripled, from 15% to 50%. Respondents reported significantly less uncertainty over whether their organization had such a policy—19% in 2024 compared to 37% in 2023.

Most notably, the proportion receiving training on how to adopt AI jumped sevenfold, from 7% in 2023 to 50% in 2024.

Q. Have you received training on how to adopt AI across your organization?
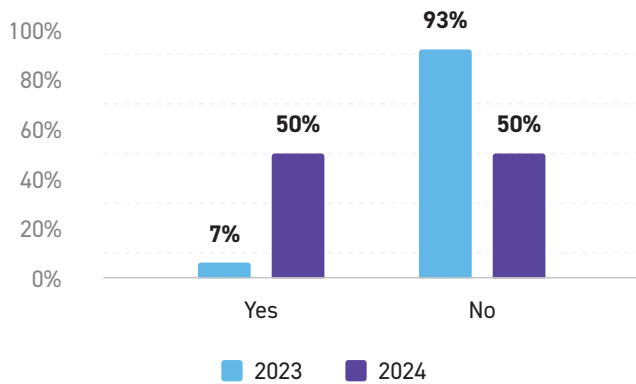

Q. Do you trust managers to utilize AI fairly and with transparency?
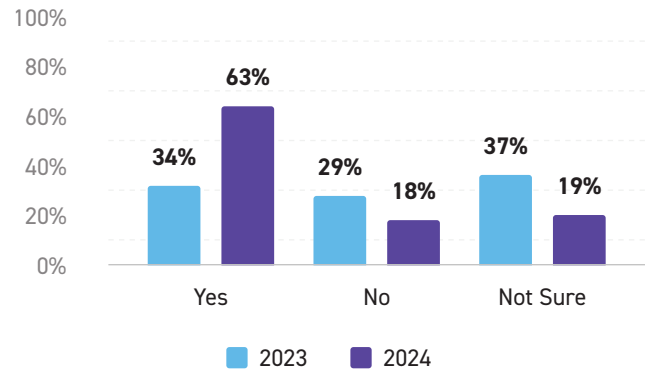
Respondents in 2024 were much more at ease with how managers are handling AI. Nearly two thirds (63%) said they trust managers to use AI fairly and with transparency, compared to about one third (34%) last year. The proportion of respondents uncertain whether they trusted managers dropped significantly, from 37% in 2023 to 19% in 2024. Those who didn't trust managers with AI dropped from 23% in 2023 to 18% this year. As we discuss later in the report, training and implementing governance appear to help improve employees' trust in AI.

Finally, far from being siloed in IT, AI is being used broadly across organizations, and particularly in customer service.

**Q. Which departments are being impacted by AI?**
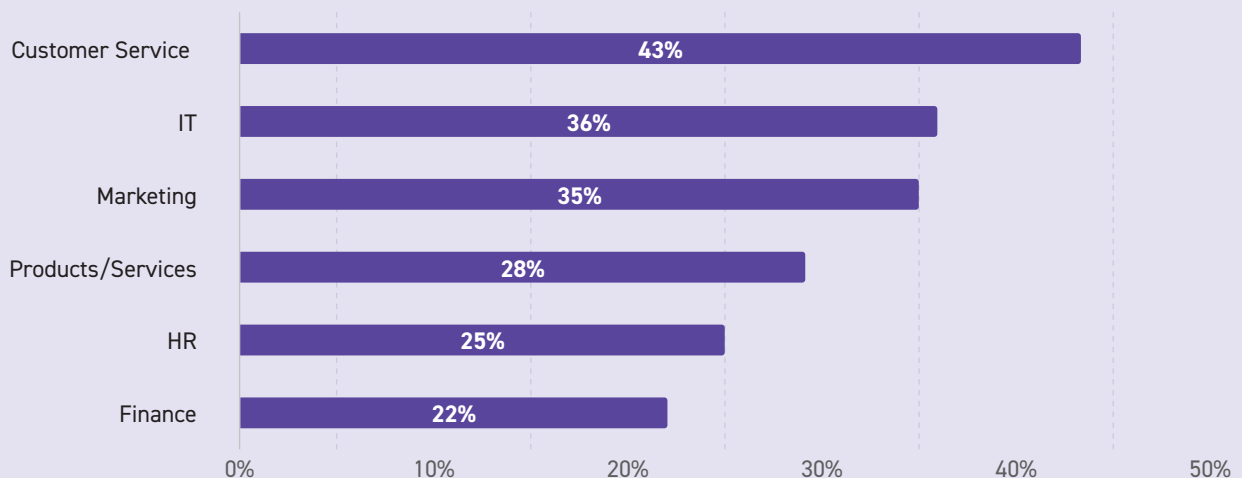
Many Organizations Still Lag Behind

The findings summarized above—on use, strategy, governance, training and trust—demonstrate that a large number of organizations have woken up to AI's transformative power. However, it is important to recognize that most organizations still have significant work ahead to prepare for the technology. About half (53%) either don't have an AI strategy (31%) or have left their employees uncertain about whether they do (22%). A similar proportion (49%) either lack AI governance (30%) or haven't effectively communicated its existence to their employees (19%). And half of respondents said they had not received training on how to adopt AI.

> **Organizations that fail to train their employees, devise strategies and build guardrails risk trailing competitors who capitalize on AI's benefits.**

For organizations that have fallen behind, the rapid adoption of AI and its disruptive potential demands swift action. Those that fail to train their employees, devise strategies and build guardrails risk trailing competitors who capitalize on AI's benefits. They may also suffer the consequences of an unsupervised approach to AI, potentially posing inefficiencies and even reputational or operational risk. Only about a third (32%) of respondents were confident that their colleagues were using AI tools in accordance with standardized parameters. Forty-four percent conceded that colleagues were using it without a centralized approach, and 24% were unsure if this was happening. By using AI without appropriate governance, a single department or employee can expose their organization to a variety of risks.

Q. Are your colleagues independently using AI tools without a centralized approach?
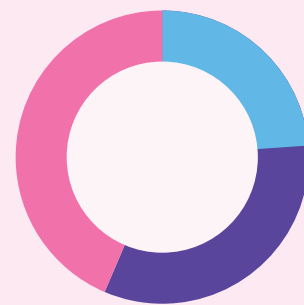
- **44%** Yes
- **32%** No
- **24%** Not Sure

AI Initiatives Deliver Positive Outcomes

On a more encouraging note, we found meaningful evidence that the initiatives undertaken by organizations have produced positive results. These initiatives correlate with increased trust and acceptance, and greater confidence in the technology's benefits.

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING FINDINGS

Strategy

In organizations that have already developed an AI strategy, 97% of respondents believe the technology would have a positive impact. This number rises to more than 99% in organizations that have effectively communicated their strategy. In those without a strategy, fewer respondents (70%) are optimistic about AI's impact.

Governance

Organizations that have established ethics, compliance and governance safeguards also report greater optimism and trust. Nearly all (96%) respondents at organizations with such safeguards said that AI would have a positive impact, compared to 70% at firms lacking them. The correlation between governance and trust was even more dramatic. Respondents whose organizations have established governance were twice as likely (84% vs. 40%) to say they trust managers to use AI fairly and transparently.

Training

As research and media reports attest, anxiety over AI is soaring. The technology has the potential to be deeply intimidating, given its unprecedented ability to mimic some of the most advanced human capabilities. Yet it is clearly here to stay and is becoming more essential by the day. In order for organizations to use it safely and harness its benefits, their employees need to accept it as a constructive partner in the workplace.

Our findings suggest that training is highly effective in achieving this. Respondents who had received training were more than twice as likely (84% vs. 41%) to say they trusted managers to use AI fairly and with transparency. Among respondents who had received AI training, 96% said that AI would have a positive impact on their organization, compared to 73% of those who had not receive training.

Clearly, the correlation between training and trust suggests that understanding breeds acceptance.

While these findings are correlations and not necessarily causations, we believe it is safe to assert that the initiatives management has implemented to ease the transition to AI are paying off.

AI Training: Strong Demand and Positive Outcomes—with a Caveat

Despite the advances in training, the survey revealed widespread demand for additional learning and development. As mentioned earlier, nearly three fifths of respondents (58%) said they were behind in keeping up with AI. That proportion rises to 63% for individual contributors.

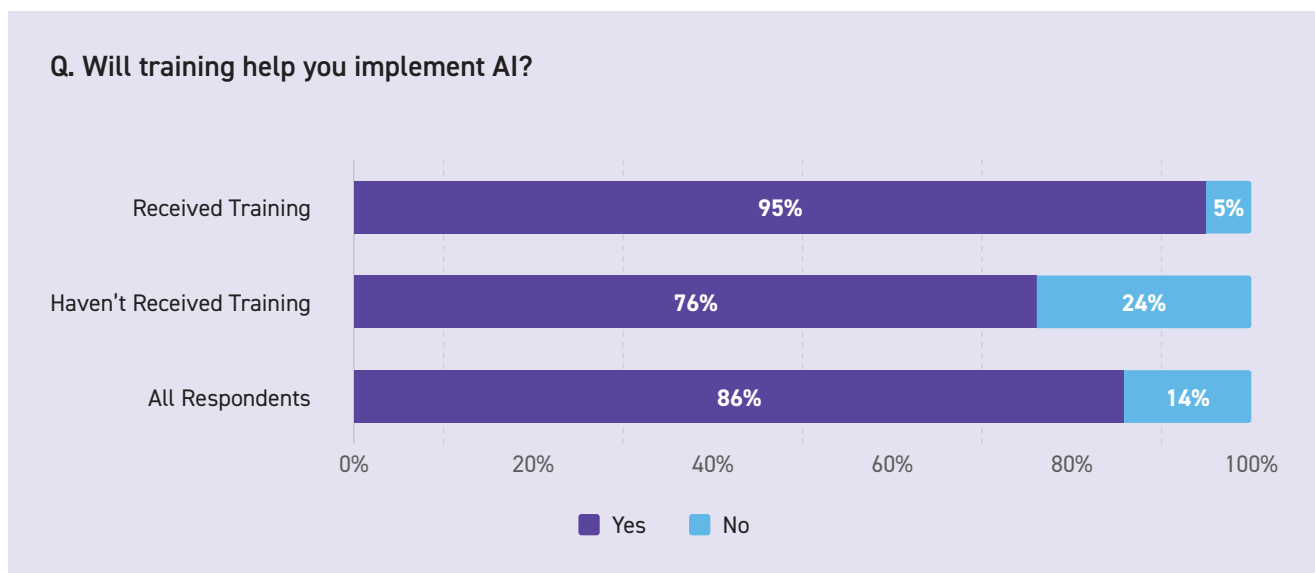**Q. Proportion considering themselves behind on AI**
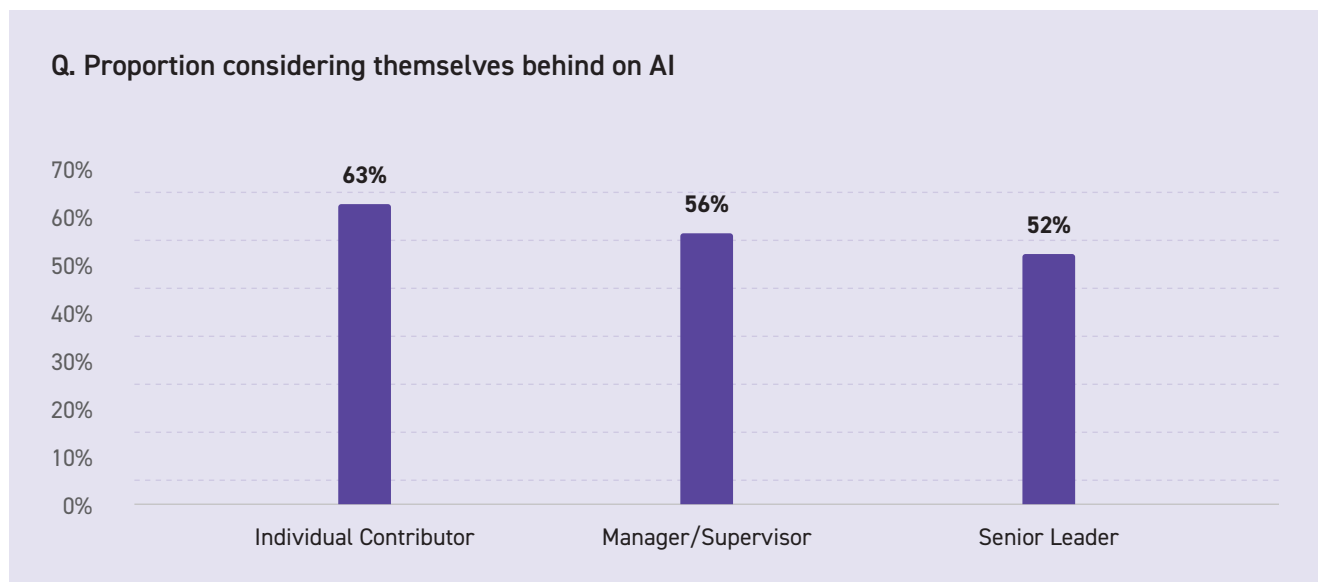
Knowledge workers appear to believe embracing AI is in their own best interest. Rather than worrying that AI will take their jobs, respondents are eager to improve their skills and learn more about it. More than four fifths (86%) said acquiring knowledge and skills was very (54%) or somewhat (32%) important to staying competitive and effective in their jobs. Senior leaders were even more likely to consider it very important (64%).

Importance of AI skills, by role

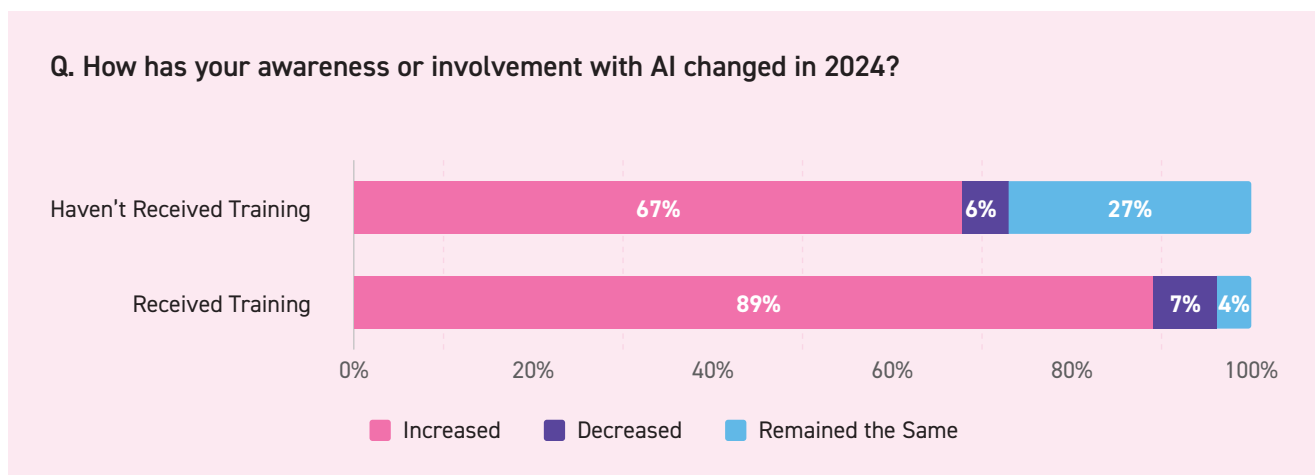Legend: Very Important | Somewhat Important | Not Important
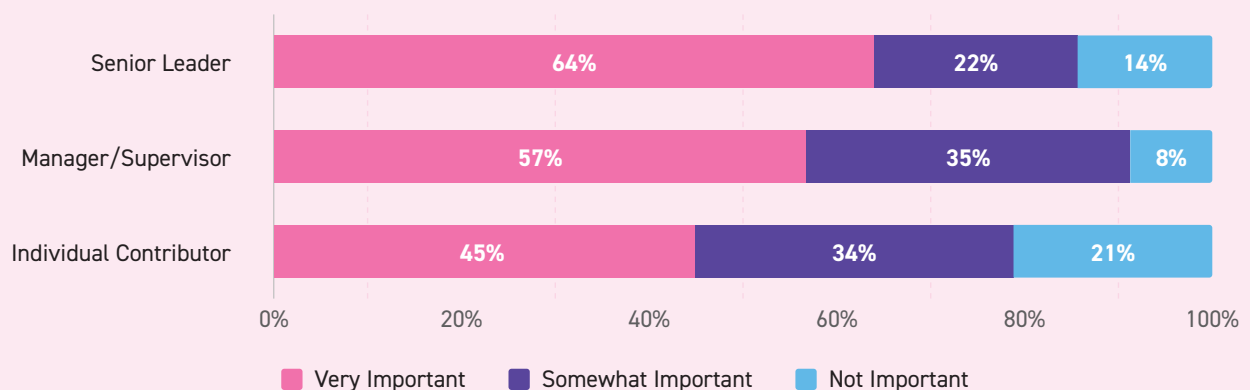
Similarly 86% said training would help their organizations implement AI, a similar number to last year (89%). That proportion rose to 95% among individuals who had received training and fell to 76% for those who had not.

Q. Will training help you implement AI?

|	
Received Training	95% / 5%
Haven't Received Training	76% / 24%
All Respondents	86% / 14%

Legend: Yes / No

Among respondents who had received training, 89% said their awareness or involvement with AI had increased over the past year, 7% said it stayed the same and 4% said it decreased, suggesting that training benefited the vast majority of participants. Significantly fewer respondents (67%) who had not yet received training reported increased awareness or involvement.

Q. How has your awareness or involvement with AI changed in 2024?

Haven't Received Training	67% / 6% / 27%
Received Training	89% / 7% / 4%

Legend: Increased / Decreased / Remained the Same

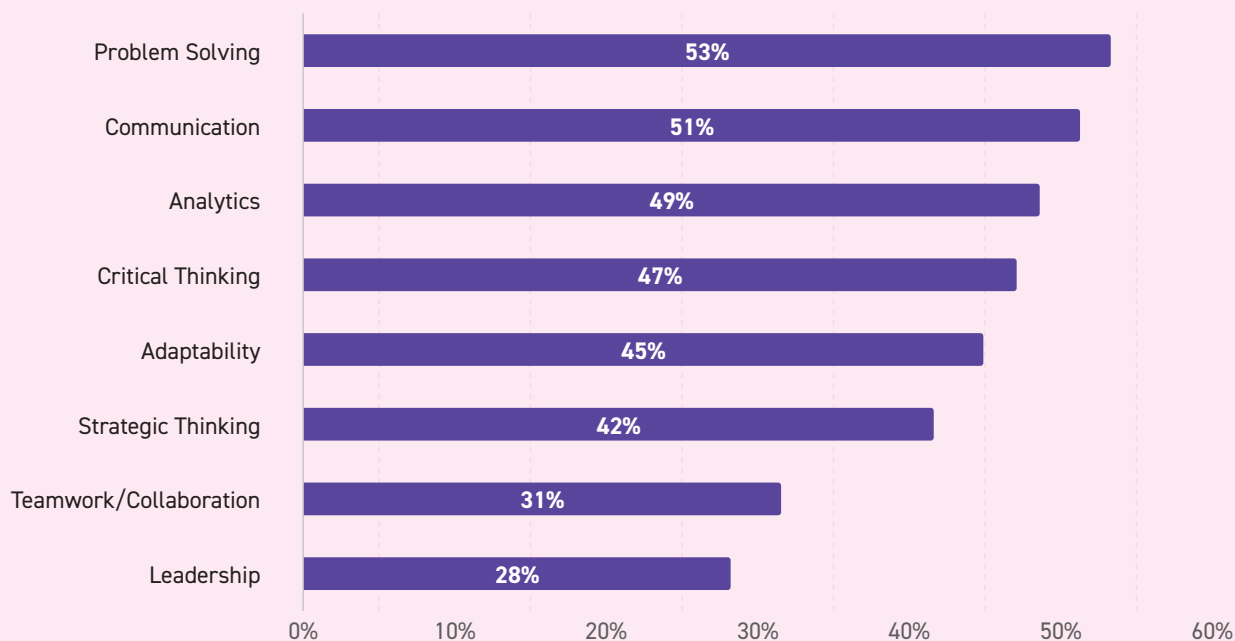**Q. What type of AI training is your organization utilizing?**
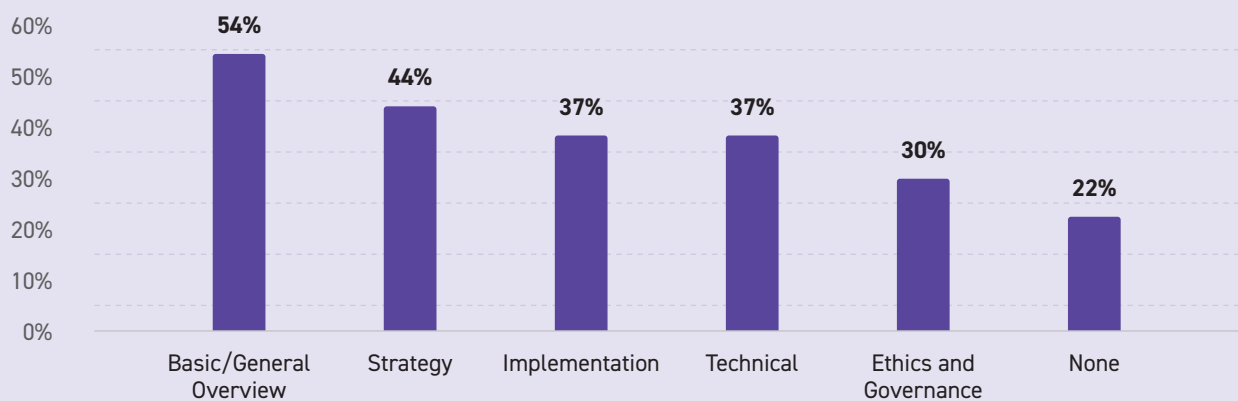
Organizations were focusing their training on a variety of topics. Most often, they offered basic training (54%), followed by strategy (44%), technical (37%) and implementation (37%).

So, what's the caveat about training? Despite its popularity and effectiveness, about half (51%) of those who have received training still considered themselves behind in keeping up with AI. This rate is better than for those who had not received training, about two thirds (65%) of whom consider themselves behind. But it could suggest that respondents need even more training, or that they need opportunities and guidance enabling them to implement what they have learned.

Alternatively, it could indicate that organizations should expand the types of AI training they offer. Like any enabling technology, it's a tool that allows individuals and organizations to undertake higher-order tasks, use their time more efficiently and work more intelligently. These new responsibilities require more advanced skills in other areas as well. Indeed, when we asked respondents which soft skills would help them apply AI more effectively, they expressed a strong interest in a broad range of essential business skills, including problem solving (53%), communication (51%), analytical skills (49%) and critical thinking (47%).

AI allows individuals to undertake higher-order tasks, requiring more advanced soft skills.

Q. What other skills would help complement the use of AI in your role?

Skill	Percentage
Problem Solving	53%
Communication	51%
Analytics	49%
Critical Thinking	47%
Adaptability	45%
Strategic Thinking	42%
Teamwork/Collaboration	31%
Leadership	28%

Takeaway and Next Steps

Last year, we concluded that organizations were not yet preparing themselves for a future powered by AI. We identified "an urgent need for a more proactive, systematic approach to handling AI, with stronger governance and centralized strategies."

This year's survey showed that a significant number of organizations have made real progress. Based on the data suggesting broad benefits from implementing a strategy, governance and training, it is likely that even more companies will act in the year to come.

Embrace AI even if it means starting small

Transforming an organization to broadly harness AI's benefits can be a major undertaking. Many organizations lack the resources or bandwidth. Their data and systems may need an overhaul, or their employees may lack the skills and understanding to use the technology effectively. Yet there are now a multitude of AI tools that can help organizations make incremental progress. Even simply using tools such as ChatGPT to brainstorm or Copilot to enhance email writing can help raise awareness, reduce uneasiness with the technology and put an organization on track to embrace the AI-fueled future.

Establish a strategy and specific AI governance policies

The survey demonstrated that AI enjoys greater acceptance and trust at organizations that establish a strategy and a governance framework. Moreover, such guardrails can help prevent rogue AI use from posing significant risks.

Invest in employees' skills

AI is powerful and widespread, and becoming more pervasive by the day. Employees need to know what it is, how to use it, and what its limitations and risks are. As our survey showed, knowledge workers are hungry for learning and development. Organizations should capitalize on this enthusiasm. Like any tool, AI is more effective and safer if its users are at ease with it and have the requisite knowledge.

Provide opportunities for employees to use their skills

Effective training is essential, but it's an ongoing process rather than a one-and-done solution. Employees need opportunities to apply what they have learned and to get granular with everyday usage. Organizations should offer resources and expertise—possibly through a center of excellence—to facilitate further learning and adoption.

These initiatives will continue to be a catalyst for readiness. Organizations that don't take proactive action risk losing top talent, and falling behind both competitively and as an "employer of choice" that meets today's AI-knowledgeable workforce requirements. By implementing these takeaways, organizations can foster confidence in using AI tools, enhance institutional knowledge and empower employees to adapt to the rapid pace of change.

CMC | Canadian Management Centre®

cmcoutperform.com