AMA RESEARCH

From AI Adoption to AI Impact

Building Workforce Capabilities for 2027



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From AI Adoption to AI Value; Individuals in Need of Practical Application to Stay Current

AMA's 2026 AI in the Workplace survey received 1,092 completed responses from people across job levels, organization sizes, and countries. AMA asked respondents how their organizations are adopting AI, how the technology is affecting their work, where employees need support, and how their leaders are addressing responsible use and business value.

AMA has surveyed workplace AI since 2023. This paper focuses on the 2026 findings and uses selected results from previous years to show how responses have changed. The findings reflect what respondents report about their organizations and their own work. They provide a basis for leadership decisions highlighting that reported value stacked against business outcomes.

The Leadership Challenge

2026 was the year that AI adoption turned into business outcomes and organizations effectively demonstrating AI value in day-to-day operations. Nearly half of respondents to AMA's 2026 survey said that value is now measurable across their organization. Yet adoption is still uneven; employees—especially individual contributors—want more guidance, and many feel behind in learning practical, hands-on implementation. Leaders now face a practical challenge: Turn useful applications into reliable ways of working while preserving judgment, accountability, and trust—all while trying to stay current at the exponential rate of new capability development within the AI space.

2027 requires organizations to prioritize connecting AI usage to business priorities, build capability around actual jobs, redesign workflows accounting for AI, and measure the outcomes both from an AI-assisted and AI-driven environment. What the survey demonstrates is that progress is visible, but value will not become consistent simply because more people have access to the organization's AI tools.

FOUR FINDINGS THAT SHAPE THE 2027 OUTLOOK

1 **Business value is breaking through**
In 2026, 47% reported measurable business value across their organization, while 23% told of productivity gains with inconsistent adoption.

2 **Adoption is still ahead of consistent execution**
86% of respondents said that the organization has an AI strategy significantly up from 2025, while 54% said use is common, but may differ by department.

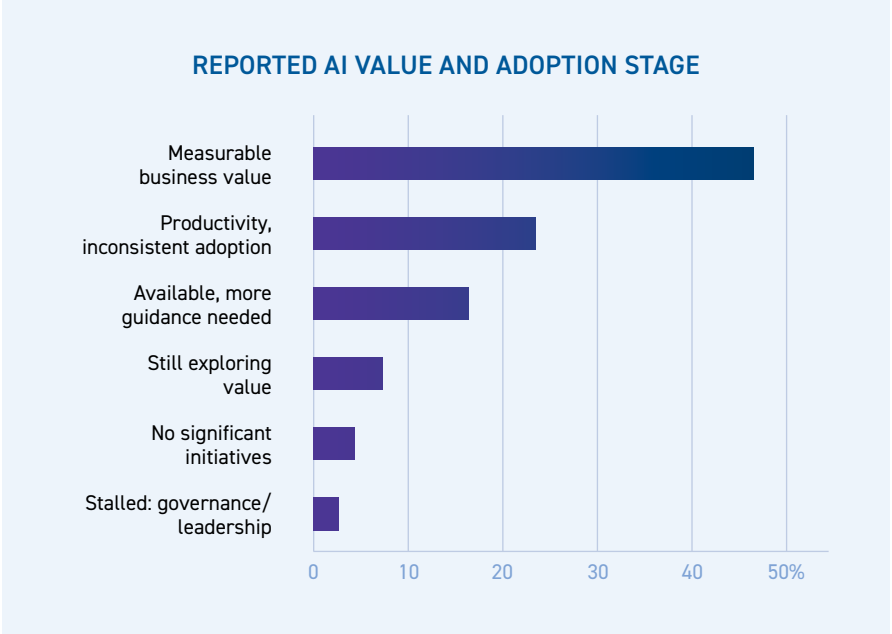
3 **Workforce capability is the next challenge**
Nearly half feel behind in AI learning, at 81% among individual contributors, while only 37% of leadership feels like they are not behind. Is this a perception amongst individual contributors based on leadership, or is this a reality to act on?

4 **Sustained value requires management discipline**
Organizations need practical skills, workflow integration, responsible-use practices, and meaningful measurement to scale AI effectively.

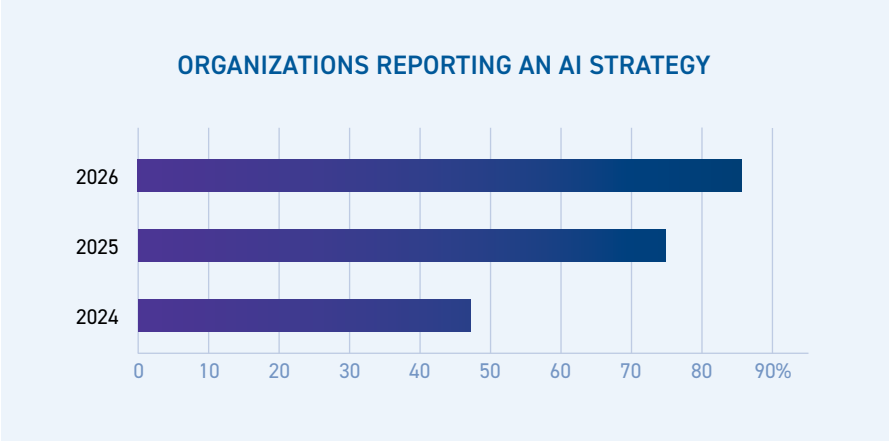
AI Value Has Crossed Into Achieving Business Value

Nearly half of the respondents (47%) said AI is creating measurable business value across their organization. Another 23% reported productivity gains with inconsistent adoption, and 16% said AI is widely available, but employees need more guidance. These findings point to a transition point over the past year: Leaders now have specific examples of useful work, and need to scale those operations to enable gains to carry across teams.

This mirrors the AI tipping point in AMA AI courses. At Level 1, people use prompts on an ad hoc basis. At Level 2, they build agents and repeatable processes for specific work. At Level 3 (the AI tipping point), organizations begin to extend effective processes across teams and departments. The levels offer a way to examine reported progress. A use case becomes scalable when it has an owner, approved inputs, tools, and—most importantly—context, human review, and an output another team can reproduce.



Leaders now have specific examples of useful work, and need to scale those operations to enable gains to carry across teams.



Strategy Is Advancing and Execution Must Catch Up

The share reporting an AI strategy rose from 47% in 2024 to 75% in 2025, and 86% in 2026. In the latest survey, 54% also said use is common, but varies by department, while 34% reported that employees mostly decide for themselves how to use AI. Among respondents at organizations with a strategy, 71% said it has been communicated effectively, while 28% felt it has been communicated somewhat effectively. Strategic direction has spread faster than consistent execution.

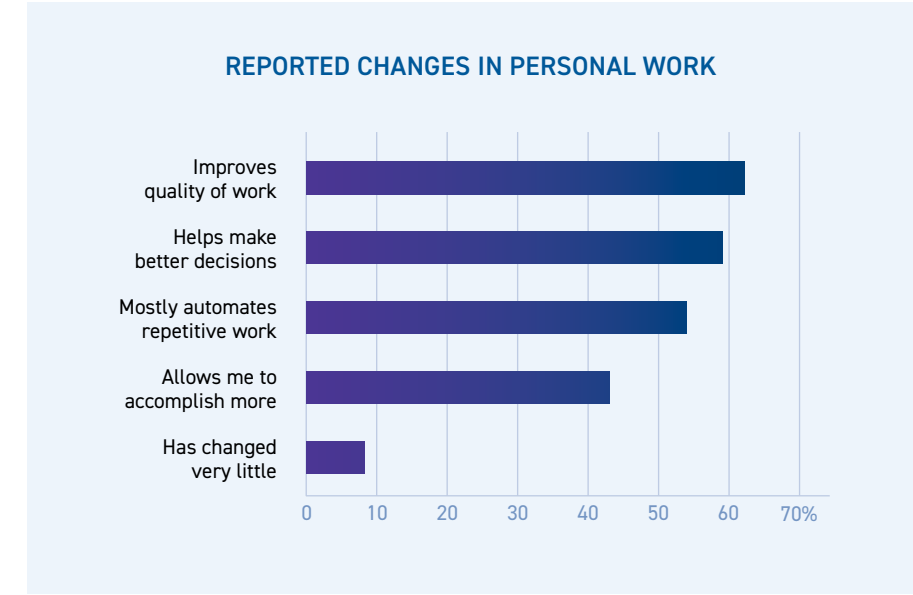
The next challenge sits with managers and teams. They must choose work where AI can make a difference, provide usable guidance for data and review, and make good practices easy to repeat across individuals of varying skill sets. Differences between departments can reflect different needs and specific workflows. They become costly when teams keep solving the same problem independently, or cannot tell whether a workflow improves the result because there is no definition of what is good enough. Success comes from streamlined standards for ownership, safeguards, and measurement, while still allowing for agility and flexibility.

Leadership must translate the strategy into approved and highlighted use cases, team actions, and clear decision authority. Leaders must understand why adoption differs across functions before expanding a rollout. Before scaling, a practical test is whether a second team can achieve comparable outputs with the same protections or if adjustments need to be made.

When a team's successful use case cannot scale to others, leadership must provide the time and environment to enable detailed dives into the workflows and system. It may be access to the right data, a missing step in the workflow, a need to introduce a human review step, or a clear outcome measure. Organizations providing the resources to address this situation is how strategic intent transitions into organizational practice.

AI Is Improving Decisions and Quality Beyond Task Automation

Respondents most often said AI improves the quality of their own work (62%) and helps them make better decisions (59%). More than half named repetitive work automation (52%), and 42.9% said AI allows them to accomplish more. These experiences widen the business case beyond time saved. They also call for verification: A faster answer is useful only if the underlying work improves.





Consider a customer service employee using AI to draft a response. The employee still checks policy, customer context, and final wording. A sound evaluation looks at accuracy, review time, rework, and customer experience as well as drafting speed. This approach examines the complete workflow and the contribution of both the person and the technology.

Readiness Gap Centers On Frontline Contributors

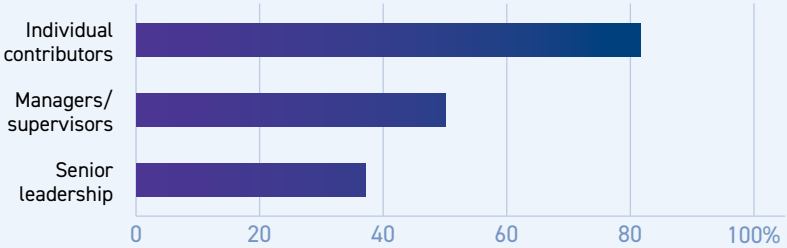
The survey showed that AI learning, and more specifically the type of learning, matters more to respondents. 73% said gaining AI knowledge and skills is very important for remaining effective and competitive in their specific job role. However, across all respondents, 49% felt they are behind. The overall results mask substantial differences across job level, and the difference is striking. Among

RISK TO OPPORTUNITY: THE AI ADOPTION CURVE



individual contributors, 81% felt behind in AI, compared with 49% of managers or supervisors and 34% of senior leaders. Across previous years, the overall feeling of being behind on AI moved from 58% in 2024 to 57% in 2025, down to 49% in 2026. However, even as that reported pressure eases holistically, it remains concentrated among individual contributors.

RESPONDENTS WHO FEEL BEHIND IN AI LEARNING



One possible explanation is the pace at which people encounter change. Contributors need to adjust frequently to new tools and features or may try to match the output of their coworkers, while leadership may not feel as behind, given that strategy, governance, and business priorities are looked at from a high level, with less focus on specific tool workflows and outputs. Note: The survey itself does not establish the causes, and feeling behind is not the same as lacking skill. However, it does show why leadership direction must be paired with practice and support in the work people actually perform.

The risk-to-opportunity J curve illustrates a possible path through that learning period. Teams may start with ad hoc prompting, build agents and repeatable workflows, and then extend what works across departments. Learning and workflow redesign can temporarily lower impact during adoption in some cases before effort produces more value than if otherwise executed manually. The curve should be viewed as a management lens leadership should consider as part of rolling AI out to teams that may not be part of the early adopters within the organization. Leaders should monitor and champion the results rather than assume every effort will recover on its own.

Build from AI Training Fundamentals to Role-Specific Application

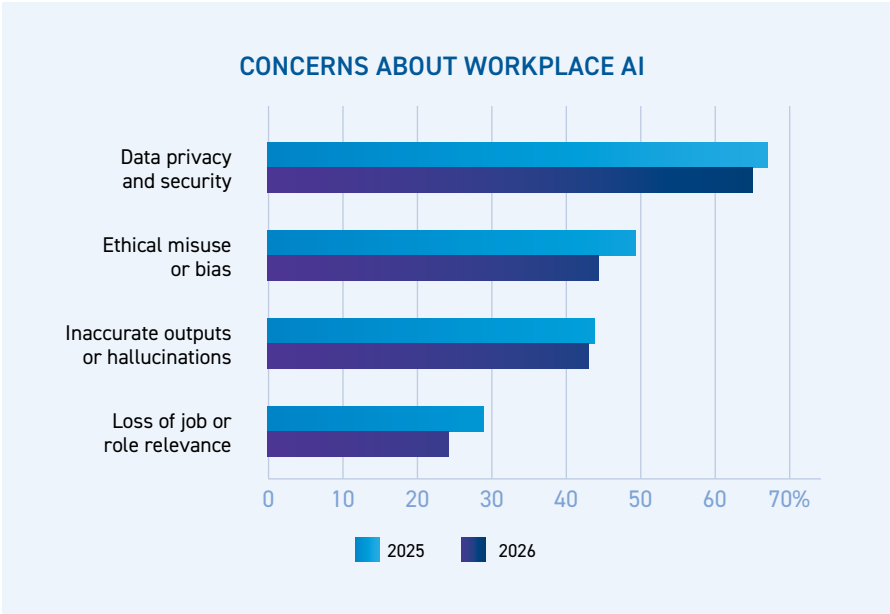
In 2026 for training, respondents reported general awareness or introductory training (51%), hands-on technical training (45%), and training tied to a business use case (27%). Foundational knowledge still matters, but a person who understands the basics needs opportunities to apply them to their own responsibilities. The next step in practical instruction is prompting for those who don't have the experience, using tools to achieve business results, championing agents, and establishing workflows each job role can thrive on.

Looking toward 2027, respondents most often identify practical AI skills for everyday work (54%) as a capability their organization needs to build. Responsible and secure use (48%), critical evaluation of output (44%), identifying valuable use cases (41%), and workflow integration (41%) also rank high. Together these priorities describe a learning path from basic use to confident judgment and role-specific application mirroring the desired training roadmaps.





Leaders can help build short cycles around approved work to support on-the-job training. They can ask employees to produce the desired output, explain what human review they performed, and improve the approach with feedback. As capability and output grow, teams may create internal systems or explore new workflows while still having an owner, a test, and a key measurable result to determine success and what is good enough.



Make Responsible AI Guidance a Discriminating Operating Capability

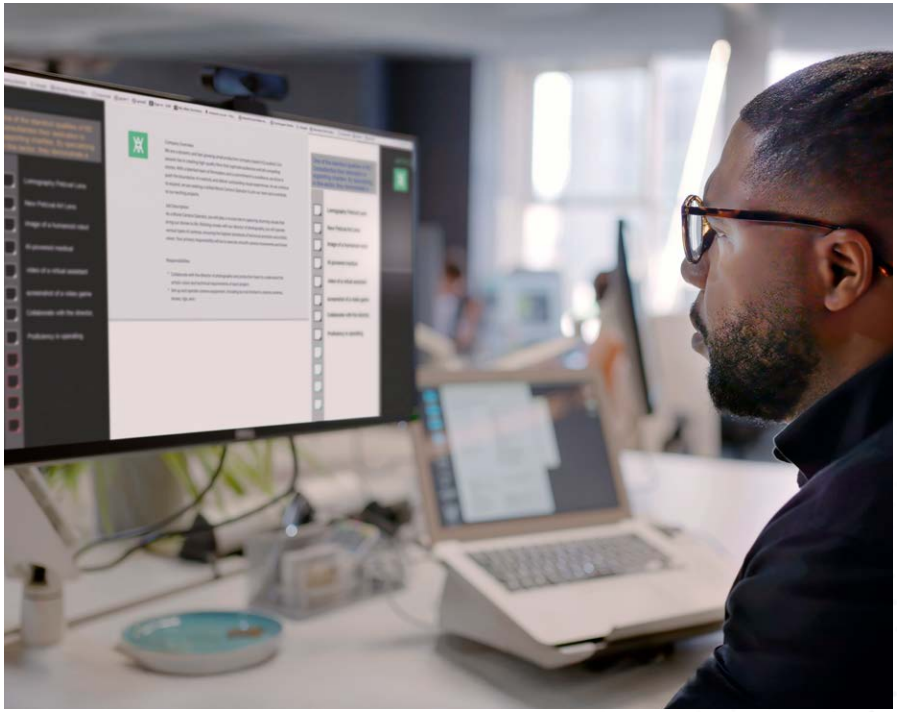
Reported guidance on responsible and secure AI use has become clearer. In 2026, 56% said their organization's guidelines are very clear, and 33% said somewhat clear, for a combined 89%—compared with 84% in 2025. This increased responsibility coupled with clearer guidance is encouraging for leadership. The measure of success ultimately is when employees can use AI when a real task presents an uncertain input, output, or decision.

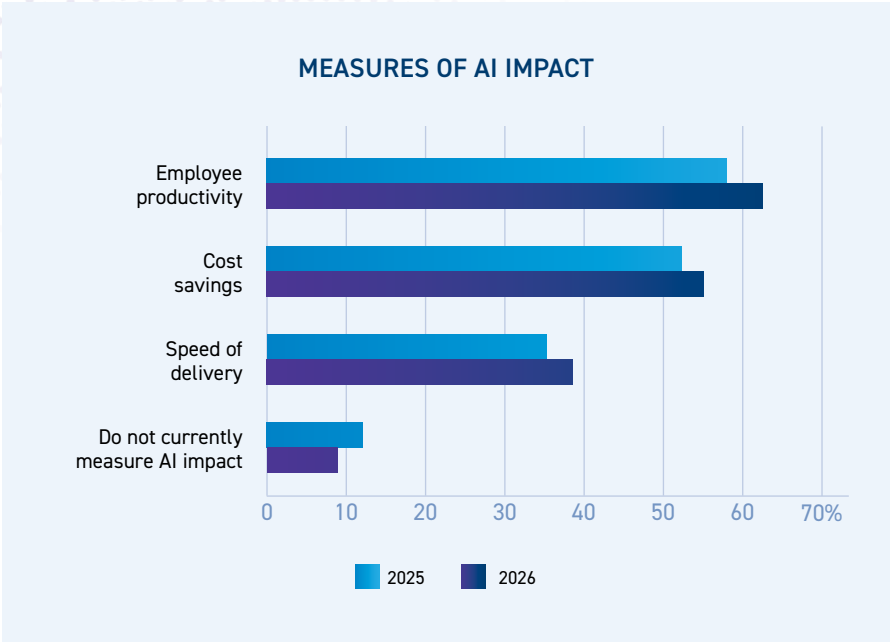
Concerns about AI in the workplace have eased by a few percentage points on several measures but remain substantial. Data privacy and security came in at 65% in 2026 compared with 67% in 2025. Ethical misuse or bias decreased from 49% to 44%, and inaccurate outputs or hallucinations went down slightly, from 44% to 43%. Concern about losing a job or role relevance decreased from 29% to 24%. These results reinforce the need for guardrails that employees can apply, and a safe

The measure of success ultimately is when employees can use AI when a real task presents an uncertain input, output, or decision.

mechanism to raise questions or ideas, given perceptions potentially coming from their personal usage or stories they hear from other sources.

Leadership can reduce concerns by providing guidance where decisions happen. With AI, one of the largest opportunities to do that is to demonstrate with examples what information can be used in approved tools, which outputs require human verification, who authorizes consequential actions, and how employees raise concerns. Ensure these workflows are exercised and followed on day-to-day operations and iteratively improve them to meet the organizational culture and values.





From AI Activity Into Business Productivity

More respondents have reported using specific business performance measurements to assess AI. Among those who saw an impact, employee productivity was indicated by 62% in 2026, up from 58% in 2025. Cost savings increased to 55%, up from 52%. Finally, speed of delivery increased to 39% from 35%.

Some describe incorporating expected AI use into project schedules and estimates. As the use of AI grows, a simple comparison of schedules that now include AI may also hide AI's contribution. Teams that are seeing results have been a part of that aforementioned J curve and inherently imply AI usage without specifically calling it out. Leaders can instead ask how comparable work performs without AI and how the output has changed with it. The baseline should include delivery time, cost, quality, rework, and employee workload. Results should be revisited after adoption, with other changes recorded so they are not automatically attributed to AI.

Managers should help their employees identify a use case with a clear purpose and an owner, and help them measure the business impact. Additionally, they should help realize the effort required to produce the output, including learning, human review, exceptions, and risk. For example, connected AI tools and agents may retrieve information and carry out approved actions instead of taking days to compile information, but their value depends on outcomes.

Budgeting for AI: Looking Beyond the License Cost

As organizations expand their use of AI and begin to see measurable business value, leaders also need to rethink how they budget for it. Early in AI adoption, budgeting could be relatively straightforward: Determine how many employees need an AI software license and calculate the annual cost. Many leaders have been shocked to realize that departments may have overrun their planned "AI annual budgets." As they have seen, as AI expands into agents, automated workflows, and business operations, the investment required to produce a scalable business outcome extends well beyond software licenses, as these pricing models shift to usage.

Depending on the application, that investment may include:

- AI tools and usage
- Data preparation and management
- Workflow redesign
- Integration
- Infrastructure
- Security
- Governance
- Employee training
- Change management
- Human oversight, monitoring and continuous improvement

As AI usage increases and organizations deploy AI more broadly, some costs may also become variable. Usage-based costs can differ substantially by use case, department, and level of adoption. A successful pilot may therefore have a very different cost profile when scaled across a department, enterprise, or customer-facing service. Leaders need to consider not only what an AI capability costs today, but what it could cost at the scale required to produce the desired business outcome.

BUDGETING FOR AI

CONNECT INVESTMENT TO BUSINESS VALUE

1. **Define the outcome** → What business problem are we solving?
2. **Estimate total cost** → What will implementation and operation require?
3. **Fund in phases** → Release funding as evidence strengthens.
4. **Measure and decide** → Compare business results with total investment.

Budget for the complete capability

- Technology and usage
- Data and integration
- People and training
- Security and governance
- Human oversight
- Operations and improvement

Leaders can approach AI budgeting in four steps

1 **Start with the business outcome.** Define the problem or opportunity before determining the budget. AI should be held to the same investment discipline as other business initiatives. Rather than establishing an AI budget and then looking for places to spend it, start with the business outcome the organization wants to achieve. Determine where AI can contribute to that outcome and what level of investment is appropriate. AI spending should increasingly be justified by the business value it is expected to create, not by adoption alone.



2 **Estimate the total costs of the capability.** Consider the complete investment required to implement and sustain the AI-enabled capability. Depending on the use case, this may include the factors listed above. Leaders should evaluate the cost of producing the business outcome, not simply the cost of acquiring the AI technology.

3 **Fund in phases:** When uncertainty is high, avoid committing the entire investment at the beginning. Establish measurable outcomes and decision criteria for each phase. Funding can progress through stages such as Experiment → Prototype → Pilot → Scale. At each stage, determine what evidence is required before additional funding is released. This allows investment to increase as evidence of feasibility, adoption, and business value becomes stronger.

4 **Measure value and reallocate investment.** Periodically compare the total AI investment with the business outcomes being produced. Financial ROI may be appropriate for some initiatives while others may be evaluated through productivity, quality, customer outcomes, revenue, capacity, speed, or risk reduction. Use those results to determine whether an initiative should receive additional investment, be improved, or be stopped. Redirect resources toward applications demonstrating the greatest business or strategic value as the portfolio matures.

Not every experiment needs to scale to create value. A disciplined approach allows organizations to learn from experimentation while concentrating larger investments on the initiatives that demonstrate the greatest potential.

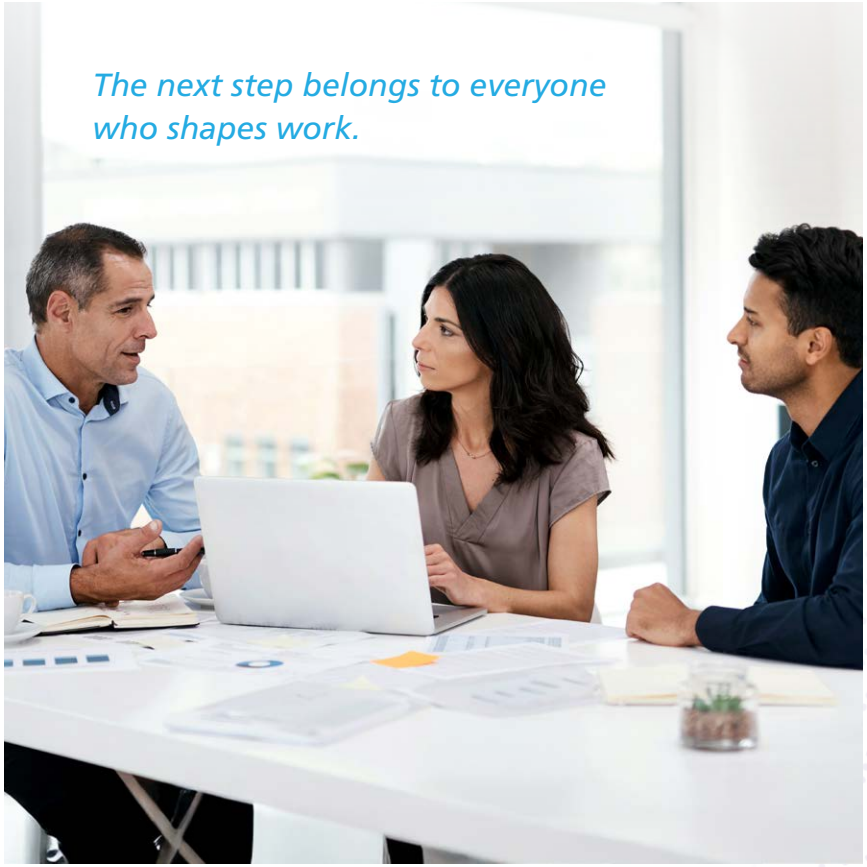
The budgeting conversation should therefore move from "How many licenses do we need, and what will they cost?" to:

- What business problem are we trying to solve?
- What level of AI investment is required to achieve the desired outcome at the intended scale?
- What measures will demonstrate whether the investment is creating value?
- What outcome is required before we fund the next phase?

From Individual Action to Organizational Value

As we look at the survey results, the next step belongs to everyone who shapes work:

- Contributors can identify valuable applications
- Team leads can share approaches that work
- Managers can redesign workflows and build capability
- Senior leaders can set priorities and safeguards for scale



Five actions connect those responsibilities

1 **Connect AI work to a business outcome.** Individual contributors should understand how their work affects quality, delivery, customers, and cost, then bring forward use cases that address a real need. Managers and business sponsors select a priority, name an owner, and define the result they expect. Teams should be able to communicate what improved in a way that fits their organization's culture and values.

2 **Build practical capability by role.** Go beyond general awareness and individual experimentation. Give team members access to approved tools, hands-on practice with their own work and through training, and feedback on the quality of the result. Team leads can document successful approaches for colleagues in similar roles, while managers can support adaptation and help effective practices spread. AI tool requirements may vary by job function, project, and department.

3 **Redesign work for human and AI collaboration.** Managers and process owners should ask how the whole workflow could change going forward rather than insert AI into every existing step. Decide what AI may draft, analyze, retrieve, or perform, where human judgment and authorization belong within the use case, and how exceptions are escalated. Focus on piloting the redesigned process, including any added review or rework and compare it to the existing approach before expanding it across teams.

4 **Embed responsible use as part of everyday workflows.** Senior leaders need to set expectations for accountability and provide security, risk, and business owners a way to keep guidance current. Managers turn the guidance into examples employees can use. Everyone needs a clear route to raise an unclear rule, unsafe output, or emerging risk without discouraging useful application.

5 **Measure business and workforce impact.** Program leaders need to establish a baseline for comparable work without AI and then measure results when AI is used. Include delivery time, cost, quality, customer outcomes, workload, employee capability, and risk where relevant. Reporting priority should be given to use cases with meaningful business benefit, opportunities to build skills, potential to relieve overloaded teams, or execute operations that otherwise wouldn't have been possible. Scale what proves useful and then revise or stop what does not ultimately prove to be beneficial.



Looking Toward 2027

Some leaders expect 2027 to bring more AI systems that can operate across software tools. The survey results show a strong interest in the adjacent capabilities: As 52% of respondents expect to use workflow automation in the next year, and 46% expect to use agents that complete work across multiple steps, 2027 may bring AI use to the forefront for most of the workforce. Organizations should prepare before enabling such systems by defining permissions, approval requirements, logging, error recovery, and measure of business value before expanding capabilities.

Where AMA Can Help

AMA can help organizations assess their AI readiness and provide training tailored to different roles, including the skills managers need to guide adoption. With that training, teams can test a new approach to a critical workflow and measure its impact. Those early gains can lay the groundwork for lasting change across the organization.

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