



How Culture Accelerates AI Adoption

New Top Workplaces Institute research reveals why strong workplace cultures are better prepared to turn AI investment into employee adoption.

Everyone is investing in AI. Not everyone is seeing results.

Organizations have poured billions into AI over the past two years. New tools arrive almost weekly. Executive teams expect productivity gains, smarter decisions, and faster innovation.

But one critical question remains unanswered: **Are employees actually embracing AI?**

Our research suggests the answer is *not yet*.

Employees largely understand AI's value and trust their organizations to implement it responsibly. Yet only about half regularly use AI in their work or feel optimistic about its impact.

Technology may be moving quickly. Employee adoption isn't keeping pace.

What the Research Reveals

Drawing on feedback from more than 88,000 employees at 600+ organizations, the Top Workplaces Institute study uncovered six findings that reveal what drives AI adoption — and where organizations have the greatest opportunity to improve.

INSIGHT 1

Awareness isn't the problem. Adoption is.

The AI Index measures how prepared employees are to embrace AI in the workplace. It reveals a clear pattern: employees understand AI and generally trust their organizations to implement it responsibly, but momentum begins to fade as organizations move from awareness to action. Training, optimism, and everyday usage all trail behind.

AI Index

Employee AI readiness and adoption, based on feedback from more than 88,000 employees.

DIMENSION	EMPLOYEE	FAVORABLE
AI Awareness	I understand how AI can provide value in my work.	66%
AI Trust	I trust this company to implement AI responsibly.	65%
AI Training	I have access to the training I need to effectively use AI tools.	55%
AI Usage	I regularly use AI tools to support my work.	51%
AI Mindset	I feel optimistic about the impact of AI on my work.	50%
Scores represent the percentages of favorable employee responses		OVERALL AI INDEX 57%

Most organizations have succeeded in introducing employees to AI. They've been far less successful at making AI part of everyday work.

Employees understand what AI is and generally recognize its potential value. But awareness alone hasn't translated into confidence or consistent use. Only about half of employees report regularly using AI or feel optimistic about its impact on their work.

Closing the gap between awareness and everyday adoption may be the single greatest opportunity organizations have to realize the full value of their AI investments. Understanding where employees are getting stuck is the first step toward improving adoption.



The Path to AI Adoption

The AI Index tells us *what* employees are experiencing. Our broader analysis helps explain *why*. **A strong workplace culture creates the foundation for AI success.** Awareness, trust, and training build employee readiness. That readiness shapes employees' mindset and ultimately influences whether AI becomes part of everyday work. Organizations benefit most when they measure readiness, develop managers, and reinforce new behaviors over time.

INSIGHT 2

The organizations winning with AI were already winning on culture.

One finding was impossible to ignore:

Top Workplaces outperformed aspiring organizations on every measure of AI readiness, from trust and awareness to training, mindset, and everyday usage.

AI Index: Top Workplaces vs. Aspiring Organizations

Top Workplaces outperform across every measure of AI readiness and adoption.

	AI					
	TRUST	AWARENESS	TRAINING	MINDSET	USAGE	INDEX
Aspiring	53%	56%	39%	41%	40%	46%
Top Workplaces	70%	70%	61%	54%	55%	61%

Organizations recognized for building exceptional workplace cultures aren't simply creating more engaged employees; they're creating workforces that are significantly more prepared to embrace new technology.

At first glance, those differences might appear to reflect technology investment. The data suggests something much more important.

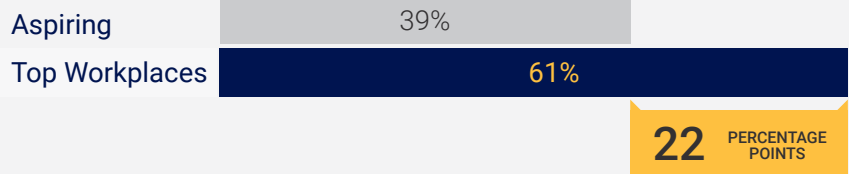
Top Workplaces don't begin by focusing on AI alone. They first create workplaces where employees trust leadership, embrace change, communicate openly, and continuously learn. Those workplace conditions create an environment where employees are more prepared to adopt new technologies — including AI.

INSIGHT 3

Top Workplaces invest in learning — and it shows in AI adoption.

The largest gap between Top Workplaces and aspiring organizations isn't awareness or trust. It's training.

AI Training



Top Workplaces outperform aspiring organizations by **22 percentage points** on AI training (61% vs 39%). This difference suggests that organizations succeeding with AI aren't simply giving employees access to new technology. They're investing in the learning employees need to use it effectively.

And the strongest organizations don't treat learning as a one-time event. They build capability over time through practice, coaching, feedback, and opportunities to apply new skills to meaningful work.

The takeaway: AI adoption isn't just a technology investment. It's a learning investment.

INSIGHT 4

Leadership sees an AI revolution. Employees see uncertainty.

Senior managers are significantly more optimistic about AI than everyone else in the organization.

AI Index by Organizational Level

Employee AI readiness and adoption scores by role.

	AI					INDEX
	TRUST	AWARENESS	TRAINING	MINDSET	USAGE	
Team member	61%	63%	54%	46%	47%	53%
Manager	71%	74%	57%	57%	58%	63%
Senior manager	85%	84%	70%	76%	74%	78%

The biggest disconnect isn't awareness — it's mindset.

Team members are far less optimistic about AI's impact on their work than the leaders introducing it. This gap represents more than a communication challenge. It highlights the importance of leadership visibility and manager involvement throughout the adoption process.

Employees rarely change the way they work because software becomes available. They change when leaders provide direction, managers reinforce new behaviors through coaching, feedback, and recognition, and employees feel supported as they learn. Managers become the bridge between executive vision and everyday employee experience.



A 41-Percentage-Point Gap Across Industries

Employees in **Information Technology** scored **81%** on the AI Index, compared with just **40%** in **Hospitality, Entertainment, Recreation & Travel**. The wide gap shows how unevenly AI readiness is developing across sectors, with the largest differences appearing in employee usage and training.

INSIGHT 5

Culture creates AI readiness. Enablement drives AI adoption.

AI adoption doesn't happen with a single initiative — it builds layer by layer. Organizations create the strongest results when they start with a culture of innovation, alignment, communication, and trust. Then, managers help employees understand AI, build confidence in how it's used, and provide practical, real-world training.

That readiness shapes a more positive mindset, encourages everyday AI usage, and creates a cycle where confidence and adoption continue to reinforce one another. Organizations make the greatest progress when they continuously measure employee experience and reinforce new behaviors through leadership, recognition, development, and coaching.

1 Foundation: Workplace Experience

Strong cultures create the conditions where employees are open to AI.



Innovation



Clued-in Leaders



Clued-in Employees



Open Mindedness



Direction

2 AI Readiness

Employees build understanding, trust, and confidence to embrace AI



AI Awareness

I understand how AI can provide value in my work.



AI Trust

I trust this company to implement AI responsibly.



AI Training

I have access to the training I need to effectively use AI tools.

3 Reinforcing Outcomes

Employees move from positive attitudes to everyday AI adoption and impact.



AI Mindset

I feel optimistic about the impact of AI on my work.



AI Usage

I regularly use AI tools to support my work.



INSIGHT 6

AI adoption is becoming the next Top Workplace advantage.

Top Workplaces have spent years building cultures grounded in trust, communication, innovation, and employee development.

Those same strengths now appear to be accelerating AI adoption.

AI is no longer simply another technology investment. It's becoming another outcome of a healthy workplace culture.

The implications reach well beyond artificial intelligence. Organizations that invest in strong workplace cultures don't just create better employee experiences — they also create workplaces that are more prepared to embrace change. While this report focuses on AI, the findings reinforce a broader lesson: organizations with strong cultures are often better positioned to navigate transformation.

AI adoption readiness is becoming another measurable outcome of healthy workplace practices.

Turning AI Insights Into Action

The organizations making the greatest progress with AI aren't necessarily buying better technology. They're building better workplaces. Our research points to five priorities for HR leaders:

1. Measure readiness, not just adoption

Before tracking AI usage, understand whether employees trust AI, recognize its value, and feel prepared to use it. A short AI readiness pulse survey — combined with ongoing employee listening — can quickly identify where employees need the most support and establish a baseline for improvement.

The most valuable surveys go beyond usage metrics to uncover barriers around trust, awareness, training, and mindset.

2. Make AI a leadership initiative

Employees take their cues from leaders, but they learn new behaviors from their managers. Senior leaders must set the vision by communicating why AI matters and how it supports the organization's strategy. Managers bring that vision to life by demonstrating how AI can improve everyday work, encouraging experimentation, answering questions, and creating a safe environment to learn. Regular check-ins create opportunities to reinforce new behaviors, answer questions, recognize progress, and identify barriers before they slow adoption.

When leaders champion AI and managers reinforce it through daily coaching, trust grows — creating stronger conditions for adoption.

3. Invest in capability, not compliance training

Teaching employees how AI works is only the first step. **Building capability means giving people opportunities to apply AI to *real work*, learn through practice, receive coaching, and share what works with colleagues.** Managers play a critical role by helping employees identify meaningful use cases, providing feedback, and reinforcing new habits over time.

Like any critical skill, AI proficiency develops through experience — not a single workshop. Organizations that integrate AI learning into employee development plans, coaching conversations, and ongoing performance discussions are better positioned to build capability faster than organizations relying on standalone training.

4. Learn from the nation's Top Workplaces

The strongest AI performers didn't build AI-first organizations. **They built people-first organizations.** High-trust cultures, strong communication, continuous learning, and employee development all create the conditions for successful AI adoption. The same practices that improve engagement, retention, and performance also help employees embrace change and new technology with confidence. Those organizations consistently reinforce these behaviors through leadership development, employee feedback, recognition, and continuous learning.

5. Remember the goal — and start small

The objective isn't simply to increase AI usage. It's to **build a workforce that's more confident, more capable, and better equipped to thrive as work evolves.** Rather than trying to transform every role overnight, start with one or two high-impact use cases that solve everyday problems for employees. Organizations that continually listen, adapt, and reinforce successful behaviors are better positioned to sustain AI adoption as technology evolves. Early successes build confidence, generate momentum, and create advocates who help accelerate adoption across the organization.

Ready to See Where Your Organization Stands?

This research shows that successful AI adoption begins long before employees start using AI tools. It starts with a strong workplace culture and grows when organizations invest in the learning employees need to embrace change with confidence.

Measure employee awareness, trust, training, mindset, and AI usage — and discover where the greatest opportunities exist to accelerate adoption.

[See Where You Stand](#)