



From Hype to Human

The Truth About Leadership, Trust, and AI Adoption

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“AI adoption is ultimately about human behavior change, not technology. Most AI initiatives fail not because of tech, but because humans don’t adopt them.”

— Leader36, Change Leadership Consultant

The Gist

Artificial intelligence (AI) arrived within organizations as a technology challenge but has quickly manifested as a human one. People are being asked to change how they work, how they communicate, and in some cases how they understand their own professional identity, at a pace that makes thoughtful adaptation genuinely hard. It has become the ultimate leadership challenge, and whether employees adapt or resist depends less on the tools available than on the actions of leaders around them. This study went to the source: 24 leaders and executive coaches who are living that tension in real time.

We interviewed 24 leaders and executive coaches about how AI is reshaping leadership credibility, communication, and adoption. Five findings stand out: using AI and using AI well are two different things; intentionality separates real value from noise; the primary credibility risk is careless AI output, not AI use itself; the most productive mindset is shifting from “first drafter” to “first reviewer”; leadership modeling is the single most powerful adoption lever; and fear, especially fear of replacement, is the dominant emotional barrier, named by 83% of participants. The deciding variable throughout is the quality of human judgment applied to AI output.

Five Things Every Leader Should Know

The data across all three sections of the study converge on five findings that merit broad attention. Each is discussed in detail in the body of the report.

1. Using AI and using AI well are two different things. Leaders who describe the best outcomes are not the heaviest users: they are the most intentional ones. The mindset shift matters more than the tool: thinking of AI as a thought partner rather than a shortcut, a first drafter rather than a ghostwriter, a collaborator rather than a replacement. Ubiquity without intentionality is a liability, not an asset.
2. The credibility risk of careless AI use is large and vivid. Obvious AI output, recognized by 58% of participants as a distinct, cringe-inducing phenomenon, is the primary reputational threat. The corrective is not to avoid AI; it is to edit ruthlessly, maintain your voice, and never distribute something you cannot stand behind and explain.
3. What AI cannot do is as important as what it can. Human judgment, emotional presence, and the ability to make meaning in ambiguous situations are not features AI can replicate; they are what makes leadership leadership. As AI raises the floor on analytical, drafting, and research tasks, distinctly human capabilities become the differentiator. The leaders in this study were clear: the more AI handles, the more human the leader must become.

4. Leadership modeling is the single most powerful adoption lever available. When leaders visibly use AI, talk about it openly, and share their experiments with honesty, both wins and failures, their teams follow. When leaders are absent from the conversation, adoption stalls.
5. Fear is the baseline emotional state, and it deserves a direct response. 83% of participants named fear as an adoption barrier. The most effective antidote is not minimizing the fear but addressing it directly: naming the anxiety, separating augmentation from replacement, and demonstrating, through action, that AI is making the work better rather than making the worker obsolete.

“The biggest lesson is that AI magnifies what’s already there. If a leader is clear, curious, and inclusive, AI makes them more effective. If they’re disconnected or performative, AI exposes that too. AI is a mirror; it reflects your strengths and your gaps.”

— Leader34, Head of Organizational Effectiveness

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Findings at a Glance

The sharpest findings from this study organize around four themes: the gap between using AI and using it well; what remains irreplaceably human as AI takes on more tasks; how AI reshapes leadership credibility; and what it actually takes to bring others along. Percentages indicate participant breadth: the share of the 24 interviewees who raised the theme. References point to the full discussion in the body of the report.

Finding	Participants	Reference
THE INTENTIONALITY GAP		
Using AI and using AI well are two different things; intentionality separates value from noise	83%	Sec 1.2
Daily or constant AI use is now common, but not yet majority practice	42%	Sec 1.2
WHAT AI CANNOT REPLACE		
Human relationships, judgment, and emotional presence remain irreplaceably human	63%	Sec 2.5
Communication is the leadership capability most enhanced by AI	54%	Sec 2.5
LEADERSHIP CREDIBILITY		
The biggest credibility risk is distributing obvious, unedited AI output	58%	Sec 2.2
Authenticity and voice are under visible pressure; leaders fear being “blanded”	29%	Sec 2.4
DRIVING ADOPTION IN OTHERS		
Leadership modeling is the single most powerful adoption lever	83%	Sec 3.4
Fear, especially of replacement, is the dominant emotional barrier	83%	Sec 3.2
Efficiency and time savings are the most reliable on-ramp to adoption	54%	Sec 3.2
Experimentation and piloting is the most-cited enablement approach	83%	Sec 3.1
Transparency about wins and failures builds more trust than polished success stories	38%	Sec 3.4

Introduction

The hardest part of AI adoption is not the technology. It is the human experience of being asked to do something different and uncomfortable: to change how they work, how they communicate, and in some cases how they understand themselves as professionals. This study was designed to understand that experience from the inside.

The ActivateAI research program recruited 24 participants for semi-structured, 45-minute interviews covering three topic areas: their own use of AI at work, the impact of AI on leadership credibility and influence, and their efforts to promote AI adoption within their teams and organizations. Participants included four executive coaches with broad visibility into C-suite behavior, and twenty organizational leaders spanning HR, learning and development, organizational effectiveness, change management, technology, communications, product marketing, and sales. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and processed through a hierarchical qualitative coding system yielding 1,190 coded comment snippets and 249 defined codes across three sections.

Two percentage metrics are reported for each theme: (1) the share of all 1,190 snippets carrying that code, and (2) the share of the 24 participants who raised that theme. These can diverge meaningfully. A theme with high snippet frequency but low participant breadth signals that a few people feel intensely about something; a theme with high participant breadth but low snippet frequency signals that something is widely acknowledged but not deeply elaborated. Both patterns matter analytically.

The report is organized to mirror the interview guide: Section 1 describes participant context and AI use; Section 2 addresses AI's impact on leadership effectiveness; Section 3 covers the dynamics of driving AI adoption in others. A full methodology discussion sits after the findings, before the appendices.

A note on evidence strength. Findings marked “thin evidence” are supported by fewer than three participants (less than 12.5% of the sample) and should be treated as qualitative observations rather than patterns. Where a finding is presented without this flag, the evidence base is at or above three participants.

“One fundamental thing about leadership is that it takes place in a relationship. I’m troubled by how much people are going to depend upon AI. I think there’s a social cost to that.”

— Coach02, Executive Coach

Section 1: Context

Who are these leaders, what are they wrestling with, and how are they using AI? The answers provide the foundation for everything that follows. This section draws on 236 snippets (19.8% of the total dataset) coded from questions about current roles and AI usage.

1.1 Current Roles and Work

The sample is deliberately heterogeneous, but united by proximity to the human side of organizational life.

Participants hold titles ranging from Chief People Officer to VP of Recruitment Process Outsourcing, from Head of Global Change Practice to freelance product marketing consultant. What they share is proximity to talent, communication, culture, and change. This is a group that thinks carefully about how organizations function, which makes their observations about AI's effect on leadership unusually nuanced.

Personal Challenges: Alignment, Pace, and Complexity

The most prevalent challenge, raised by 46% of participants, centered on alignment and the relentless pace of change. Competing priorities, message fragmentation, and the difficulty of getting leaders to personally own initiatives rather than delegate them were recurring frustrations.

"Biggest challenge is competing priorities. Everyone chasing different metrics or goals, creates internal tension. People are pulled in conflicting directions because organizations often don't clearly distinguish between what's most important and what's not." — Leader28, Head of Digital Leadership & AI

"Constant change is the challenge. If we guessed what the world would look like in a year, we'd be fooling ourselves. We can't control for the future as much as we want to." — Leader39, Head of Enterprise Learning & Development

Resource and authority constraints were also notable, particularly among leaders working across global, matrixed organizations. As one change practitioner described, much of her influence depends on voluntary participation, a fragile foundation for driving any transformation, let alone one as technically novel as AI adoption.

What Energizes These Leaders

On the energizing side (29% of participants), the dominant theme was impact through problem-solving, the satisfaction of translating complexity into clarity, and helping clients and teams move forward. Partnership emerged as a secondary energizer: being positioned as a strategic contributor rather than a cost center.

"Opportunity to be real partners to the business. Executives look to L&D to be an engine of possibility to drive change in a positive direction. That positions us as a business partner and not just a cost center, which is a really exciting place to be." — Leader39, Head of Enterprise Learning & Development

Leadership Philosophy: Human Augmentation Over Replacement

Six of 24 participants articulated an explicit leadership philosophy, and a consistent thread ran through them: the goal is to augment human capability, not replace it. This philosophy would re-emerge throughout Section 2 as a framework for how AI should, and should not, be used in leadership contexts.

“The goal is to augment human capability, not replace it.” — Leader08, Chief People Officer

“Instead of being primary creator, become the editor.” — Coach02, Executive Coach

Organizational Context: Complexity and Uneven Adoption

Organizational complexity was the single most prevalent code in the entire first section (28 snippets, 67% of participants). Leaders are operating across global matrices, multi-layered hierarchies, and communities of practice where they influence without formal authority. Within these complex structures, AI adoption is highly uneven, acknowledged by 21% of participants, with technical teams often racing ahead while other functions remain hesitant or skeptical.

“Different functions adopt at different rates. Tech teams faster, others slower.” — Leader09, Head of Digital Transformation

“Organizations figuring it out have made it an organizational objective, as opposed to decentralized effort where each department tries to figure out how to use what is largely just another tool.” — Coach06, Executive Coach

“My challenge is getting consistent adoption across a diverse global team.” — Leader17, Head of Global HR Transformation

1.2 How Leaders Are Using AI

100% of participants, every single interviewee, described using AI in their work. This is not a study of adopters versus skeptics.

By the time someone reaches this conversation, they are at minimum an occasional user. The question is not whether they use AI, but how, how thoughtfully, and with what mindset.

What They Are Actually Doing With It

Writing and communication assistance is the most common specific application (46% of participants). This ranges from drafting emails and polishing communications to generating LinkedIn posts and summarizing transcripts. Research and learning follows closely (25% of participants), using AI to digest large documents, prepare for meetings, and accelerate topic mastery.

“Use AI all the time: ideating, brainstorming, editing, co-creating. The most affected part is communications.” — Leader26, AI Strategy Consultant

“Use it for writing assistance, summarizing documents, preparing for meetings. Also for brainstorming and thinking through problems from different angles.” — Leader08, Chief People Officer

“If I have a meeting with somebody, I’ll say give me a brief on who this person is. Throw LinkedIn link into Copilot to summarize their background.” — Leader01, Head of AI Learning & Development

Daily or constant AI use was reported by 42% of participants, a substantial share, though not yet a majority. A further 17% described AI as integrated into their regular workflow, even if not quite daily.

ChatGPT (21% of participants), Microsoft Copilot (8%), and a variety of other tools including Claude, Gemini, Grammarly, and NotebookLM were named as platforms of choice.

Mindset: The Shift to “First Reviewer”

AI produces the raw material; the human’s job is to shape, edit, personalize, and own it.

This mindset theme is among the richest in the entire study (83% of participants). The most memorable formulation: a shift from “first drafter to first reviewer.”

“We talk about shifting from being first drafter to first reviewer.” — Leader28, Head of Digital Leadership & AI

“You have to spend time up front making sure prompts are literally the right tool for the tool. Avoid work slop people are complaining about.” — Coach01, Executive Coach

Several participants framed AI as a thought partner, sounding board, or co-creator rather than a passive tool. But the dominant mindset, across both coaches and leaders, was pragmatic: AI is another instrument in the toolkit, valuable when applied to the right problems with the right inputs.

“As an operator, have to look at AI as another tool. Requires practice and refinement.” — Coach01, Executive Coach

“Garbage in, garbage out. When we don’t provide the right prompts, the output reflects that.” — Coach01, Executive Coach

Benefits: Efficiency, Time, and Amplification

The benefit themes are consistent across participants (42%). Efficiency and time savings lead (33% of participants), getting things done faster without sacrificing quality. Amplification and quality improvement appear as secondary benefits: AI helps some participants do better work, not just more work.

“AI gives us more time to be more focused.” — Coach01, Executive Coach

“AI amplifies my creativity and speed. Lets me stay focused on high-value thinking instead of executional drag.” — Leader28, Head of Digital Leadership & AI

“Use it to learn; digest 40 pages into a 1-pager with the themes. Gives me a starting point.” — Leader06, Head of People & Organization

Concerns and Limitations (Evidence Is Modest)

Only 17% of participants raised concerns or limitations about AI directly in this section. Replacement anxiety, the worry that AI might threaten their own positions, was mentioned by 13% of participants, though far more participants raised this as a concern about their teams and employees in Section 3. Quality and trust limitations were mentioned by 8%. Notably, the coaches were more likely than leaders to flag the risk of over-reliance and the loss of human coaching skills, a finding that makes intuitive sense given their professional stake in the question.

Section 2: AI Impact on Leadership Effectiveness

This is where the research delivers its sharpest and most actionable findings. Drawing on 445 snippets (37.4% of the total dataset), Section 2 addresses how AI affects the credibility and influence of leaders, for better and, perhaps more illuminatingly, for worse.

2.1 – 2.2: Credibility Enhanced and Damaged

Stories of damage are more vivid, more specific, and more frequently mentioned than stories of enhancement. The contrast is itself a finding.

How AI Enhances Credibility

Three pathways to credibility enhancement were coded: better preparation and insights (25% of participants), innovation and thought leadership (17%), and transparency and accessibility (17%). Together these point to a simple model: AI helps leaders show up more informed, more forward-thinking, and more open, all of which build trust.

“Using GenAI tools, I was able to research and understand a specialized role deeply within minutes. That allowed me to speak confidently about the position, explain why it was hard to fill, show data that supported my recommendations. Built trust immediately because I could walk the walk with credible insights rather than generalities.” — Leader30, VP, Talent Acquisition

“Two years ago I made an AI-generated video that impressed people and built my reputation as the “AI guy.” Boosted my credibility around innovation and digital leadership.” — Leader28, Head of Digital Leadership & AI

“CEO of energy company shared assessment results with 300 employees. Created transparency, set expectations, promoted shared responsibility. Everybody’s talking about it.” — Coach01, Executive Coach

“He gave Gemini a prompt about what impact tariffs could have on the company over the next five years. The result was mind-blowing, like nothing he’d ever seen from management consultants or agencies. After distilling it, he shared the report with the C-suite, and it helped them formulate a game plan.” — Leader40, Head of Sales

“AI magnifies what’s already there. If a leader is clear, curious, and inclusive, AI makes them more effective. If they’re disconnected or performative, AI exposes that too.” — Leader34, Head of Organizational Effectiveness

Executive coaches described seeing leaders gain credibility simply by being early adopters, visible, willing to experiment, and publicly modeling a growth mindset around AI. One coach noted that leaders are now perceived as “thought leaders” by their organizations just for demonstrating curiosity and openness to the technology.

How AI Damages Credibility: The Problem of Obvious AI Output

The dominant risk to leadership credibility is not using AI; it is distributing obvious, unedited AI output. 58% of participants recognized this pattern.

This is the largest participant breadth of any single code in the credibility sections, and it is not close. Participants recognized “AI tells” with what amounts to pattern-recognition fluency: certain word

choices (“certainly,” “delve”), excessive em dashes, generic sentence structures, inflated lists, and, most damaging, content that misses the human context entirely.

“Colleague would send it with AI tells. People would go ‘AI’ and roll their eyes. Impacted credibility.”
— Leader06, Head of People & Organization

“There is a voice, there is an authenticity. What happens when there’s so much AI that we are all speaking the same speak? We are being blanded.” — Coach02, Executive Coach

“Credibility damaged when people include the tells, extra emojis and em dashes, or they include the ‘Do you want me to write this as an email draft?’ at the bottom.” — Leader26, AI Strategy Consultant

One executive coach recounted a consultant firm that produced 410 pages of an AI-generated report, and billed it accordingly. A legal case involving Air Canada’s AI chatbot giving incorrect bereavement flight policy was cited as a cautionary tale about what happens when inadequate review meets consequential decisions. The through-line: if you put your name on it, you own it, including its errors.

“You have to have real understanding first. If someone asks a question about what you wrote, you better be able to answer it.” — Leader26, AI Strategy Consultant

“If AI causes you to make more mistakes, it’s detrimental. If it helps make fewer mistakes, it could bolster credibility.” — Leader01, Head of AI Learning & Development

“That experience made me realize how quickly credibility erodes when leaders don’t personalize or review AI output.” — Leader31, Director of Product Marketing

Inadequate review and missing the mark were secondary damage pathways (21% of participants). A memorable story from Leader02: a colleague compiled leadership offsite feedback through AI and presented the output, which landed with a thud: generic, stripped of nuance, and greeted with confusion. “We had to start all over again. Was very funny and like a disaster.” A lack of underlying knowledge or understanding (the “if someone asks, you can’t answer” risk) was mentioned by only one participant, thin evidence, though thematically compelling.

2.3 – 2.4: Communication and Perceptions as a Leader

AI provides consistent benefits in structure and refinement, but concerns about authentic voice are mounting.

Communication: Structure, Clarity, and Efficiency

Structure and refinement is the dominant communication benefit (42% of participants). AI helps leaders organize ideas, create polished first drafts, and ensure their messages are logically coherent before sending. Workflow efficiency follows (13% of participants), primarily through meeting transcription, summarization, and faster turnaround on written communication. Tone and audience tailoring were mentioned by only one participant (thin evidence).

“For more critical communications, I use AI to review and refine my messages. Check clarity, tone, and structure. Before, I only did that for highly important communications. Now I can afford to do it even for less critical ones because it’s fast.” — Leader27, Head of Global Change Practice

“GenAI helps me consolidate my thoughts, tailor messages efficiently, refine tone, especially to balance warmth and professionalism. The result is communication that’s more deliberate, aligned, and authentic.” — Leader30, VP, Talent Acquisition

“Now I feed notes into AI with format and timing requirements and it produces a structured draft I can personalize and refine. Saves me hours of prep and stress while letting me focus on delivery and impact.” — Leader28, Head of Digital Leadership & AI

One participant described a meaningful behavioral change that AI made possible: using meeting transcription tools freed her to be fully present in one-on-ones rather than divided between listening and note-taking. The paradox she named is worth flagging: AI made her communication “more human, not less.”

Perceptions: Authenticity Under Pressure

Leaders fear that AI will homogenize leadership communication, producing voices that all sound the same.

Authenticity and voice concerns were named by 29% of participants, the largest code in this subsection. Several participants described what the research literature would call identity threat: the experience of having a core professional self-concept challenged by a tool, particularly for leaders whose sense of self is bound up in skills like writing and communication.

“It does lead to a loss of authenticity. Whatever it generates is blended, overly wordy, and doesn’t say as much.” — Leader01b, Learning & Development Leader

“I actually changed how I write now. No emojis, and I used to use dashes quite a bit, but now I just don’t, because it makes it look like AI wrote it.” — Leader26, AI Strategy Consultant

Several participants described active countermeasures: dictating voice memos before using AI to ensure the underlying thoughts are genuinely theirs; iterating between multiple AI tools to stress-test the output; and re-reading everything aloud to check whether it still sounds like them.

Enhanced capabilities and effectiveness were named by 13% of participants: feeling more prepared, more strategic, and more productive. Role and identity positioning, being seen as a technologist or thought leader due to visible AI adoption, was raised by 8% of participants. This is a thin finding quantitatively, but it is qualitatively significant: early adopters are already accruing a leadership premium from being visibly AI-curious.

2.5: AI and Leadership Identity

The broadest question in Section 2 produced the richest data: 355 snippets across all 24 participants. What stays human?

AI Applications and Impact: What AI Is Actually Doing for Leadership

AI Applications and Impact is the largest code cluster in the entire study, capturing 70% of Section 2 snippets across all 24 participants. Within this cluster, specific applications and examples dominate (100% of participants). Communication capability is the most-cited leadership function affected by AI (54% of participants); problem-solving follows closely (50% of participants); and innovation and creativity are named by 21%.

“Communication is the easiest because you can edit together, don’t have to stare at a blank page. Can change tone or who you’re writing for very easily.” — Leader26, AI Strategy Consultant

“Problem solving: people who figure out how to use it for problem solving will do better and go further.” — Leader06, Head of People & Organization

“AI amplifies my creativity and speed. Lets me stay focused on high-value thinking instead of executional drag.” — Leader28, Head of Digital Leadership & AI

“AI raises the floor on IQ tasks; EQ becomes the differentiator.” — Leader21, Head of Organizational Effectiveness

“You want stakeholders to understand you put time and thought into something, versus just put this into ChatGPT and here’s the end result. It goes back to having your own ideas first.” — Leader31, Director of Product Marketing

There is a nuanced finding embedded here: AI does not merely help leaders do existing tasks faster; it is beginning to reshape which tasks leaders tackle at all. Meeting preparation, stakeholder research, performance narrative drafting, and communication tailoring are tasks that were previously constrained by time. AI is removing some of those constraints, redirecting leader attention toward judgment, presence, and relationship.

Leadership Mindset and Concerns: The Worriers Are Not Wrong

All 24 participants contributed to the Leadership & Mindset cluster (73 snippets). AI mindset and philosophy was discussed by 71% of participants; concerns and risks by 54%; leadership role and modeling by 38%.

Social costs and critical thinking erosion were raised by 21% of participants, reflecting the worry that leaders who over-delegate thinking to AI will gradually lose the very capacities that make them effective.

“At what point are we over-delegating to AI? At what point are we not critically thinking about it?”
— Coach02, Executive Coach

“One fundamental thing about leadership is that it takes place in a relationship. I’m troubled by how much people are going to depend upon AI. Think there’s a social cost to that.” — Coach02, Executive Coach

Emotional intelligence concerns were named by 8% of participants, and skill loss by another 8%. These are modest percentages (thin evidence), but the underlying logic is coherent: if AI removes the friction from certain tasks, it may also remove the practice that builds certain capacities. This is a genuine empirical question, one that longitudinal research will need to address. Evidence at this point is weak; these are predictions, not demonstrated outcomes.

“If we get so dependent on AI, are people going to even have skills to know how to develop a relationship? Already see that with dating apps.” — Coach02, Executive Coach

Leadership modeling as a self-conscious responsibility was raised by 17% of participants, an important bridge to Section 3.

“For leaders to influence with credibility, at minimum they have to advocate for AI, and ideally have to be some form of role model for it.” — Coach06, Executive Coach

Human-AI Integration: What AI Cannot Replace

The final identity cluster, Human-AI Integration (63% of participants), gets at the existential question underlying the whole study: what stays human? The answer from participants is consistent. Human

relationships, judgment, emotional presence, and the ability to make meaning from ambiguous information remain distinctly and irreplaceably human.

“I’m piloting the plane. AI is not the autopilot. Or if it is, I’m always at the controls.” — Coach08, Executive Coach

“Leadership is about human connection. Can’t outsource that to AI.” — Leader08, Chief People Officer

“It’s only an aggregation of all knowledge that already exists. None of it is new, none can be called wisdom or grace. Just putting it into a frame.” — Coach08, Executive Coach

“As AI handles more routine tasks, human skills matter more.” — Leader25, Head of Talent Development

“You can’t lead others through change without first leading yourself through it.” — Leader36, Change Leadership Consultant

On the question of ownership, specifically who is accountable for AI-generated content, 13% of participants explicitly stated that the human must own the output. The Air Canada case, cited earlier, is the legal illustration of this principle. The practical implication: a leader who cannot answer a question about something they distributed, because AI wrote it, is a leader whose credibility is at risk.

“You own the output even if AI helped create it. Can’t blame AI for mistakes. Your name is on it; you’re responsible.” — Leader09, Head of Digital Transformation

“AI is a mirror: it reflects your strengths and your gaps.” — Leader34, Head of Organizational Effectiveness

Section 3: Influencing AI Adoption of Others

The largest section of the study (509 snippets, 42.8% of the total dataset) addresses a question that preoccupies nearly every leader in this sample: how do you actually get your people to use AI? And what gets in the way?

3.1: The Role Leaders Play in Driving Adoption

Adoption requires deliberate structure, but experimentation is what actually moves the needle.

All 24 participants contributed to this section, yielding 287 snippets. The dominant story is one of strategy, structure, and enabling resources, with experimentation and piloting emerging as the most effective on-the-ground mechanism.

Structure and Strategy: Playing the Long Game

Structure & Strategy captured 61% of snippets from 100% of participants. Within this cluster, the most prevalent sub-theme is a general approach to driving adoption, reflecting the reality that leaders are still figuring this out in real time. Implementation strategy (46% of participants) and governance (21%) were secondary themes.

“Done a poor job creating excitement around it. If you just make it available, people don’t use it.” — Leader01, Head of AI Learning & Development

“We use change management principles...AI is just another change. People need to know why, want to change, know how, be able to, and be supported.” — Leader21, Head of Organizational Effectiveness

“The real opportunity is to reinvent how work gets done, not just automate old tasks. Most AI initiatives fail not because of tech, but because humans don’t adopt them.” — Leader36, Change Leadership Consultant

“You can have a cart path through a field that’s winding and over hills. But then that’s the path that gets paved, still a terrible path. You want to have the plan before you start.” — Leader26, AI Strategy Consultant

A recurring insight is that adoption cannot be simply mandated or left entirely to individual initiative; it requires deliberate structure, specific use-case guidance, and organizational scaffolding. One participant offered a pointed self-assessment: the organization gave everyone access, offered some loose guidance, and hoped for the best. Unsurprisingly, uptake was uneven.

Programs and Resources: Training, Tools, and Use Cases

Programs & Resources was raised by 79% of participants. Training and learning programs were the most-cited resource (58% of participants), though participants were candid about their limitations: programs designed by technical teams often miss the human side of change, are too heavy and lengthy for people with full-time client commitments, and measure attendance rather than actual behavior change.

“Participation is limited. Structure is too heavy: twelve-week programs and long technical modules. People already working full-time for clients can’t dedicate that much time.” — Leader27, Head of Global Change Practice

“Revisiting how success is measured. Attendance rates aren’t meaningful if people take a course but don’t use the tools.” — Leader27, Head of Global Change Practice

Tools and resources (42% of participants) and use case development (33%) were important complementary investments. Concrete, role-specific use cases appear to be underutilized relative to their potential; several participants identified this as a critical gap in their organizations’ adoption strategies.

“Golden goose has been meet and greets with people to give them good use cases.” — Leader01, Head of AI Learning & Development

“Organizations need to provide a version of the tool they’re advocating for. Otherwise, you will have people go rogue.” — Coach06, Executive Coach

“Think of AI like another member of your team. As a leader you have to decide what work you give to your A team vs. B team vs. C team.” — Leader38, Head of Marketing & Communications

Engagement and Enablement: Experimentation Is the Key

Experimentation and piloting is the single most frequently cited enablement approach. Seeing the value creates the momentum.

Engagement & Enablement (83% of participants) tells the most instructive story. Experimentation and piloting, captured across 35 snippets from 83% of participants, is the single most frequently cited enablement approach. Leaders consistently describe a pattern: people who try AI in a low-stakes, permission-giving context tend to discover value, and discovery of value creates momentum.

“Once people see the value, it creates some lift. Their eyes light up.” — Leader01, Head of AI Learning & Development

“Leaders who spark curiosity and give people freedom to experiment tend to drive adoption more effectively.” — Leader27, Head of Global Change Practice

AI Champions networks, peer advocates who share what works and what does not, are cited by multiple participants as an effective grassroots complement to top-down strategy. The mechanism is social proof: seeing a trusted colleague succeed with AI is more persuasive than any training module.

“One of the biggest successes has been our AI Champions initiative, which started with my team and scaled across the organization.” — Leader30, VP, Talent Acquisition

“Home Depot gave AI to their factory workers and didn't put any constraints on it. Employees on their own figured out how to solve inventory issues. That was a beautiful thing to see...it shows what you get back when you give AI to people and let them experiment.” — Leader40, Head of Sales

3.2: Factors Motivating and Demotivating Adoption

Fear, especially of replacement, is the dominant emotional barrier to adoption, named by 83% of participants.

Fears and Concerns: The Dominant Emotional Reality

Fears & Concerns were raised by 83% of participants, the highest participant breadth of any code in Section 3. Within this cluster, fears and anxieties were expressed by 83% of participants (45 snippets).

General fear and anxiety without a specific focus were most common (42% of participants). Accuracy and mistake concerns followed (29%), with replacement fears (25%) and job security worries (21%) rounding out the top specific concerns.

“Anxiety around AI because people are worried it’s gonna replace humans. From Maslow’s hierarchy perspective, people worried about losing their job.” — Coach01, Executive Coach

“Fear of losing a job; job loss itself is not necessarily scary; it’s the consequences. The loss of security. So how do you address that?” — Coach01, Executive Coach

“People are concerned about job security. We say it’s to help, not replace.” — Leader06, Head of People & Organization

“It takes change management and communication to help people move away from the fear of AI.” — Leader40, Head of Sales

Ethics and appropriate use (13% of participants), privacy and data concerns (13%), and psychological safety concerns (4%, thin evidence) were additional fear dimensions. One participant offered a structural observation worth heeding: when organizations frame AI adoption primarily in terms of cost efficiency and headcount reduction, they are essentially validating the replacement fear. The framing of the message matters enormously.

“You’re telling me I gotta use this, and why? Will make job easier, faster, higher quality. But if it replaces me, why do I want to do that?” — Coach02, Executive Coach

Positive Motivators: Efficiency Leads

Positive Motivators (67% of participants) tells a simpler story. Efficiency and time savings are the dominant motivators (54% of participants mentioned efficiency specifically). Quality improvement was cited by 17%. The practical implication is clear: the most reliable on-ramp to AI adoption is demonstrating time savings on tasks that people find tedious.

“If you tell someone you worked eight hours today and AI can help you do that in six, that’s an easy sell.” — Leader27, Head of Global Change Practice

“Motivating: they feel they can engage with tools, be part of the solution, not the victim.” — Leader02, Head of Content & Communications

The WIIFM principle, “What’s In It For Me,” was explicitly named by 17% of participants as the critical framing challenge. Leaders who lead with organizational benefits rather than personal benefits consistently find lower adoption rates than those who find the specific use cases most relevant to each individual’s daily work.

“Most important piece: the Department of Defense calls it WIIFM, What’s in it for me. Becomes critically important. Show the benefit, don’t demand. The more you tell somebody they must do something, the further you get from them ever doing it.” — Coach02, Executive Coach

“It’s kind of like going to the dentist; it’s not that fun but you know you have to do it and you’ll be better for it.” — Leader40, Head of Sales

3.3: The Influence of Organizational Culture

Thirty-two snippets from 19 participants, thinner data than other sections. Culture's influence is widely acknowledged but harder to operationalize.

Barriers: Structure and Resistance

Barriers & Structure (50% of participants) was the dominant theme. Organizational structure and risk aversion create friction: hierarchical approval processes, compliance requirements, and the sheer complexity of multi-stakeholder environments all slow AI experimentation. Compliance concerns, particularly around data privacy, emerged as a structural barrier in regulated industries.

"Lot of conversation around what are the ethical guardrails we want to put around AI. Are we stealing other people's work? Is this going to be used in ways people did not intend?" — Coach02, Executive Coach

"In my social circles, people are using AI to build new things. But here it's the opposite; if you use it, it's a sign of weakness or incompetence. That attitude is coming from the broader culture." — Leader38, Head of Marketing & Communications

An unexpected finding: in some technical organizations, IT and engineering teams are among the most resistant adopters, because they believe they could build something better themselves, but lack the time to do so. The result is a credibility gap that leaves their teams without any AI tools at all.

Enabling Factors: Growth Mindset and Innovation Culture

Enabling Cultural Factors (25% of participants) points to growth mindset and comfort with learning as critical enablers (17%). Organizations with a pre-existing culture of experimentation, psychological safety, and continuous learning adapt faster. Innovation culture (13%) was a secondary factor. Values and support systems (13% of participants) is a thin finding but worth attention: when leaders explicitly connect AI use to shared values such as efficiency, integrity, and growth, adoption feels less threatening and more aligned.

"Culture where you can experiment and learn; those places are more conducive to AI adoption." — Leader26, AI Strategy Consultant

"If you believe in innovation and continuous learning, AI seems like it would resonate." — Leader01, Head of AI Learning & Development

"Organizations that value a growth mindset adapt faster. The ability to learn and adapt is more valuable than specific knowledge." — Leader18, Head of Enterprise Learning & Development

3.4: Leadership Behaviors That Promote Adoption

Leadership modeling is the single most powerful adoption lever available, cited by 83% of participants.

If there is one section of this study with immediate, high-confidence practical implications, it is this one. The behaviors that drive AI adoption are specific, observable, and well-supported by participant consensus.

Visible Leadership: Modeling Is Everything

Visible Leadership captured 70% of Section 3.4 snippets from 83% of participants. Within this cluster, modeling and demonstrating was the dominant sub-theme (63% of participants). Leaders who use AI

visibly, reference it in conversations, and demonstrate its value in context create permission and momentum for their teams to follow.

“For leaders, you’ve got to lead by example. You will use it for meeting notes; this is not optional. When leaders don’t use it, nobody’s gonna use it.” — Leader01, Head of AI Learning & Development

“Would have executives model it, reference it, say things like: ‘I had Copilot help me think through this problem.’” — Leader01, Head of AI Learning & Development

“Leaders need to lead by example. If I’m using it and adding value, telling people about it; that’s helpful.” — Leader06, Head of People & Organization

“Leadership support is critical; top-down encouragement helps. But you also need grassroots adoption; you can’t just mandate it.” — Leader17, Head of Global HR Transformation

“Curiosity is contagious; when leaders model it, others follow.” — Leader34, Head of Organizational Effectiveness

Specific modeling behaviors that participants highlighted: modeling curiosity (13% of participants), modeling openness (8%, thin evidence), and leading by example in a general sense (17%). The wellness movement was offered as an analogy by one executive coach: just as Chief Wellness Officers had to “advocate and role model” to shift organizational culture around employee wellbeing, AI adoption requires analogous visible leadership.

Transparency: Sharing the Wins and the Fails

Leaders who are publicly honest about both the promises and pitfalls of AI build more trust than those who only share polished success stories.

Transparency and openness was the second most prevalent visible leadership behavior (38% of participants). This finding is particularly worth highlighting: leaders who share what did not work invite more experimentation than those who only share wins.

“I try to be open about my use of it, good and bad; when it helped and when it didn’t. That transparency helps people feel comfortable trying it themselves.” — Leader06, Head of People & Organization

“Those are learning opportunities too. Making sure visibility is there, transparency in using AI or how it’s being used.” — Leader26, AI Strategy Consultant

Sharing and storytelling, including using champions and advocates and displaying vulnerability and courage in public AI experimentation, was raised by 21% of participants.

Enabling and Empowering: Courage to Permit Failure

Enabling & Empowering (46% of participants) centers on psychological safety. Specifically, the courage required to give employees explicit permission to experiment and fail was raised by 38% of participants. This is a meaningful finding: the act of enabling AI adoption requires leaders to model the very behavior they are asking their teams to practice.

“Employees have to feel like they have a voice in it, an opportunity to weigh in. Have to be given permission to make mistakes.” — Coach02, Executive Coach

“CEO energy company: at core of sharing freely is vulnerability, transparency, and courage. You can do that with AI.” — Coach01, Executive Coach

3.5: Leadership Challenges in Promoting AI Adoption

The challenges are not primarily technological; they are human.

People and Adoption Challenges: The Human Variable Is the Hard Variable

People & Adoption Challenges (58% of participants) is the dominant challenge cluster. Within it, a residual category captures the heterogeneity of individual resistance patterns, philosophical objections, and inconsistent motivation. The diversity of adoption barriers means that leaders cannot apply a single solution; they need to diagnose and tailor their approach to different types of resistors.

“People say it’s not my fault, AI wrote it. Thought of printing buttons that said: It’s not AI’s fault, it’s mine.” — Coach02, Executive Coach

“Some people are philosophically opposed to it; think it’s not right, not interesting, or scary. Some tried a couple things, it doesn’t do exactly what they want; looking for it to write the perfect email and it’s not going to do that.” — Leader01, Head of AI Learning & Development

Scale, Pace, and Sustaining Momentum

Scale & Pace Challenges (17% of participants) captures the organizational challenge of moving from isolated pockets of enthusiastic adoption to consistent, enterprise-wide use. Pace of change was raised by 8% of participants and sustaining momentum by another 8% (thin evidence for each specific sub-theme). Leaders describe an adoption lifecycle that is encouragingly self-reinforcing once it starts; but reaching critical mass in the first place is the challenge.

“In many ways it’s changed the world exponentially and hardly anyone has actually really noticed the actual real impact.” — Coach08, Executive Coach

Knowledge and Value Gaps

Knowledge & Value Challenges (21% of participants) points to two underappreciated gaps. Knowledge and expertise gaps (13%) reflect the reality that many leaders feel uncertain about AI’s actual capabilities and limitations, making it hard to confidently advocate for or against specific use cases. Demonstrating value and ROI (8%, thin evidence) is a related challenge: organizations are asking for proof of impact before they will commit resources, but the evidence base is still emerging.

3.6: Final Advice

Start small, pick one use case, share what you learn, and let momentum build. That is the consistent message.

Participants were asked to offer final advice for leaders trying to drive AI adoption. Only 7 snippets from 24 participants were coded to this subsection, suggesting that most actionable advice had already been embedded in earlier sections. Treat the following as a summary of principles rather than a new finding.

Start Small, Then Build

Action-oriented advice, specifically the guidance to start small and experiment, was the dominant final theme (5 snippets, 21% of all participants). The advice is strikingly consistent across participants who gave it: pick one use case, try it, share what you learn, and let momentum build from there.

“Biggest advice: acknowledge two things: the benefit of utilizing AI and the fears that people have. If you don’t do either, people will make that information up for themselves.” — Coach01, Executive Coach

“Start small, experiment, learn. Don’t try to boil the ocean. Find one or two use cases to start.” — Leader08, Chief People Officer

“Block one hour on your calendar every day as AI playtime: no agenda, just experiment. I’ve done this for six months, and it’s been transformative.” — Leader36, Change Leadership Consultant

“We’ve created sandboxes for people to experiment safely.” — Leader18, Head of Enterprise Learning & Development

Stay curious / keep learning was the mindset advice of one additional participant, and focus on the human element was the people-centered advice of another. The thin evidence base for these two codes means they are better treated as qualitative observations than as pattern findings.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a semi-structured qualitative interview design to explore how organizational leaders and executive coaches experience AI's impact on leadership credibility, influence, and adoption. Twenty-four participants were interviewed, including four executive coaches and twenty organizational leaders across a range of industries, functions, and levels of seniority. Each interview ran approximately 45 minutes and was guided by a three-domain protocol covering (a) the participant's current leadership context and personal use of AI, (b) AI's impact on leadership effectiveness, including credibility, influence, communication, and identity, and (c) the participant's role in influencing AI adoption within their team and organization. The interview guide was shared with participants in advance to allow reflection, while the semi-structured format preserved latitude for participants to introduce examples, stories, and topics the protocol had not anticipated.

Analytic Approach

Transcripts were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2022), applied in a hybrid inductive–deductive mode consistent with the approach described by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006). The three interview domains served as deductive top-level analytic containers, organizing the dataset into Context, AI Impact on Leadership Effectiveness, and AI Adoption, while all codes within those containers were developed inductively from the data itself rather than imposed from an existing theoretical framework. This combination is well-suited to applied organizational research, where the research questions have a defined scope but the substance of what participants say should not be prejudged.

Coding proceeded through the six phases outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The analysis resulted in a hierarchical codebook with up to three levels of coding, with the depth of coding calibrated to the density of content in each subsection, a proportional approach in which richer subsections received finer-grained coding and sparser ones remained at higher levels. This hierarchical, codebook-oriented orientation draws on the broader template-analysis tradition within organizational qualitative research (Brooks et al., 2015), which treats the codebook as a structured but living document refined iteratively as analysis proceeds.

This study does not claim to generate a substantive or formal theory in the grounded-theory sense (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014). The three-domain structure was established a priori from the research questions and the interview protocol, and the sample was fixed at 24 participants rather than pursued through theoretical sampling to saturation. The appropriate characterization is hybrid thematic analysis with a hierarchical codebook: a disciplined, replicable organization of qualitative evidence oriented toward practical insight for leaders navigating AI integration, rather than toward the development of new theoretical constructs.

Dual Frequency Metrics

Two frequency metrics were tracked for every code: (1) the number of snippets coded, reflecting the overall volume of discussion devoted to the theme across the dataset, and (2) the number of participants who contributed at least one snippet, reflecting the breadth of the theme across the sample. These dual metrics distinguish themes raised extensively by a small number of participants,

suggesting depth of engagement among a subset, from themes mentioned briefly but by many participants, suggesting widely distributed salience. Both patterns carry analytical value, and reporting both prevents either pattern from being obscured by the other. A total of 1,190 coded snippets were analyzed across the 24 transcripts, yielding 249 distinct code definitions organized within the three-section structure.

Methodological Notes and Limitations

Findings should not be generalized to all leaders or all organizations without caution. The sample skews toward leaders already engaged enough with AI to participate in AI-focused research, which may create a selection bias toward more favorable or reflective perspectives. The coding scheme is hierarchical and analyst-developed; while designed for consistency, qualitative coding always involves judgment. Percentage figures reported throughout this document describe the distribution of themes within this specific sample and should be read as indicators of relative salience, not as population-level prevalence estimates. Where participant breadth for a finding falls below three (12.5% of the sample), this is flagged as thin evidence.

How We Built the Dataset: From Conversation to Snippet to Code

A qualitative dataset does not arrive pre-organized. It begins as 45 minutes of conversation, transcribed verbatim, and then requires deliberate analytical work to become usable evidence. This section explains how raw interview responses were transformed into the 1,190 coded snippets that underpin this report.

Step 1: The Interview

Each participant completed a semi-structured 45-minute interview following a common guide. Questions were open-ended, designed to elicit stories, examples, and reflections rather than yes/no answers. A single question, for example, “Describe a situation where you have seen a leader’s credibility damaged through the use of AI,” might produce two to ten minutes of spoken response touching on multiple distinct ideas. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Step 2: Segmenting Transcripts into Snippets

Transcripts were read carefully and divided into “snippets,” the smallest meaningful unit of thought that could stand on its own analytically. A snippet captures one distinct idea, observation, claim, or example. It is not a sentence (some ideas span several sentences) and not a paragraph (most paragraphs contain multiple ideas). The example below shows one spoken passage transformed into three snippets. The passage is drawn directly from an interview transcript:

“I saw a training video created with AI that missed the mark completely. The topic was serious, how to handle workplace conflict, but the execution was dull and generic. It was an oversimplified, vanilla example that didn’t help anyone. Made me question why they even used AI for that purpose. Humans could have done a better job just role-playing it live. AI can really hurt credibility when it’s used just for the sake of using it, without purpose or creativity.” — Leader28, Head of Digital Leadership & AI

This passage was segmented into three independent snippets:

- Snippet 1: “Saw training video created with AI that missed the mark completely; topic was serious, how to handle workplace conflict, but execution was dull and generic”
- Snippet 2: “Oversimplified, vanilla example that didn’t help anyone; made me question why they even used AI for that purpose”
- Snippet 3: “Humans could have done better job just role-playing it live; AI can hurt credibility when used just for sake of using it, without purpose or creativity”

Step 3: Assigning Codes

Each snippet was assigned up to three hierarchical codes (Code1 → Code2 → Code3), moving from the broadest thematic category to the most specific sub-theme. Code3 was assigned only in subsections with sufficient data density, ensuring fine-grained distinctions were made only where the data could support them. Using the snippets above as examples:

- Snippet 1 was coded: Code1 = 1 (Obvious/Unedited AI Output), within Subsection 2.2
- Snippet 2 was coded: Code1 = 1 (Obvious/Unedited AI Output), within Subsection 2.2
- Snippet 3 was coded: Code1 = 2 (Inadequate Review/Quality), within Subsection 2.2

The full coding scheme was developed iteratively and documented in a 249-definition codebook providing the operational definition of every code. All percentages in this report describe the distribution of themes within this specific 24-participant sample.

Appendix A: Code Reference — All Level 1 Codes

The table below lists all 39 Level 1 (Code1) codes organized by subsection. Each code represents the broadest thematic category assigned to a snippet. Full definitions for Level 2 and Level 3 sub-codes are available in the complete codebook (249 code definitions across 3 sections).

Subsection	Code (Level 1)	Definition
SECTION 1: CONTEXT		
1.1 Role & Work	Team & Org Context	Team composition, organizational dynamics, stakeholder landscape, cultural factors shaping the leader’s work.
	Personal Experience & Perspective	Leader’s personal experience of role: what energizes, challenges, leadership philosophy, career transitions.
	Role & Work Content	Formal role, current work, strategic priorities, transformation initiatives.
1.2 AI Use	Personal AI Practice	How individuals personally use AI: frequency, specific applications, tools.
	AI Impact & Value	Value, benefits, philosophy, and learning associated with AI use.
	AI Challenges & Strategy	Concerns, limitations, organizational deployment, advanced applications of AI.
SECTION 2: AI IMPACT ON LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS		
2.1 Credibility Enhanced	Better Preparation & Insights	Leaders enhanced credibility through better preparation, deeper insights, confident data use.
	Innovation & Thought Leadership	Leaders enhanced credibility by being forward-thinking, early adopters, innovators, or thought leaders.
	Transparency & Accessibility	Leaders enhanced credibility through transparency, sharing, vulnerability, accessibility.
2.2 Credibility Damaged	Obvious/Unedited AI Output	Credibility damaged by obvious AI tells, unedited output, generic content, cringe-worthy material.
	Inadequate Review/Quality	Credibility damaged by inadequate review, wrong information, missing the mark, using AI without purpose.
	Lack of Knowledge/Understanding	Credibility damaged when leaders cannot answer questions about AI-generated content.
2.3 Communication	Structure & Refinement	AI helps structure messages, refine content, organize ideas, create polished drafts.
	Workflow & Efficiency	AI changes communication workflows, saves time, increases speed, improves efficiency.
	Tone & Audience Tailoring	AI helps adjust tone, tailor messages to audiences, ensure clarity, increase inclusiveness.
2.4 Perceptions	Authenticity & Voice	Maintaining authentic voice; concerns about loss of authenticity or being “bland.”

Subsection	Code (Level 1)	Definition
	Enhanced Capabilities & Effectiveness	Feeling more capable, strategic, efficient, productive; improved quality and effectiveness.
	Role/Identity Positioning	Being positioned as technologist or thought leader; AI as leadership skill; modeling for team.
2.5 Identity	AI Applications & Impact	How AI impacts leadership capabilities, practical applications, future implications.
	Leadership & Mindset	AI mindset/philosophy, concerns and risks, leadership role modeling and advocacy.
	Human-AI Integration	How to use AI effectively, human element required, integration and balance.
SECTION 3: INFLUENCING AI ADOPTION		
3.1 Role in Driving Adoption	Structure & Strategy	Strategic approach, implementation strategies, organizational structure for driving adoption.
	Programs & Resources	Training programs, tools, resources, use case development supporting adoption.
	Engagement & Enablement	Communication, experimentation, champion networks to engage and enable users.
3.2 Motivators/Demotivators	Fears & Concerns	Fears, anxieties, concerns that demotivate or create resistance to AI adoption.
	Positive Motivators	Benefits and positive factors that motivate people to adopt AI.
	Attitudes & Responses	General attitudes, responses, curiosity, resistance patterns.
3.3 Culture	Barriers & Structure	Cultural barriers, organizational structures, hindering factors.
	Enabling Cultural Factors	Growth mindset, learning culture, innovation, psychological safety.
	Values & Support Systems	Organizational values, ethics, collaboration, support structures.
3.4 Leadership Behaviors	Visible Leadership	Modeling, demonstrating, transparency, visible leadership actions.
	Enabling & Empowering	Encouraging, supporting, listening, creating space for experimentation.
	Communication & Recognition	Communicating purpose, recognizing efforts, celebrating wins.
3.5 Challenges	People & Adoption Challenges	Challenges related to individual differences, resistance, adoption patterns.
	Scale & Pace Challenges	Challenges with pace of change, scaling, sustaining momentum.
	Knowledge & Value Challenges	Challenges with expertise gaps, balancing tensions, demonstrating value.

Subsection	Code (Level 1)	Definition
3.6 Final Advice	Action-Oriented Advice	Practical advice on getting started, starting small, experimenting.
	People-Centered Advice	Advice focused on people, relationships, human elements.
	Mindset & Approach Advice	Advice on curiosity, transparency, purpose, overall mindset.

References

Entries are organized alphabetically by first author within each category. Academic sources follow APA 7th edition format; practitioner and popular press sources are listed separately.

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Practitioner Sources

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Microsoft. (2024, May 8). *AI at work is here. Now comes the hard part* (2024 Work Trend Index Annual Report). <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/ai-at-work-is-here-now-comes-the-hard-part>

Renner, M., & Chaban, M. A. V. (2026, April 22). *1,302 real-world gen AI use cases from the world’s leading organizations*. Google Cloud. <https://cloud.google.com/transform/101-real-world-generative-ai-use-cases-from-industry-leaders>

Finding: The credibility risk is careless, unedited AI output (not AI use itself)

Constantino, T. (2025, March 28). *Can you trust AI search? New study reveals the shocking truth*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/torconstantino/2025/03/28/can-you-trust-ai-search-new-study-reveals-the-shocking-truth/>

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Finding: The productive mindset shift is “first drafter” to “first reviewer” (human-in-the-loop ownership)

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Finding: Authenticity and voice are under pressure; leaders fear being “blanded”

Beerends, S., & Aydin, C. (2024). Negotiating the authenticity of AI: How the discourse on AI rejects human indeterminacy. *AI & Society*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-024-01884-5>

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Finding: Leadership modeling, experimentation, and peer enablement are the strongest adoption levers

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OpenAI Academy. (2026, April 20). *Grow a network of internal champions*. <https://academy.openai.com/public/clubs/champions-ecqup/resources/grow-a-network-of-internal-champions>

Finding: Fear (especially fear of replacement) is the dominant emotional barrier

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