LUMO INSIGHTS

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Workforce wake-up call: AI’s impact hits home in surprising ways

Executive Summary

This week’s developments reveal how the AI revolution in the workplace is deviating from the script. From employees secretly using AI tools to unions demanding a say in tech adoption, it’s clear that unlocking AI’s benefits will require leaders to focus as much on people and process as on technology. Early wins are emerging, but so are unintended consequences - and a new blueprint for leading in the age of AI is beginning to take shape.

Workers are adopting AI under the radar

Employees across industries are charging ahead with AI, often faster than their companies realise. A new survey in the UK found 63% of working adults are already using generative AI tools in their jobs (thenextweb.com [1]). Many aren’t waiting for corporate approval or budget - 17% of those using AI at work are even paying for at least one tool out of their own pocket (thenextweb.com [2]), collectively spending nearly £958 million a year on work-related AI utilities.

This enthusiasm comes with a catch: a significant number of employees are using AI in secret. According to the same 25,000-person survey by Deloitte, almost one-third (31%) of UK workers using generative AI do so without their employer’s knowledge (thenextweb.com [3]). A stigma seems to be developing around AI at work - nearly a quarter of users feel they can’t be open about it, and among those using AI weekly, 64% worry their managers might think the technology could do their job, putting them at risk (thenextweb.com [4]). In other words, the people who are most eager to embrace AI are also afraid it could make them redundant if their bosses take notice.

The result is a growing “shadow AI” economy inside organisations, where entrepreneurial employees adopt unsanctioned tools to boost productivity on their own. Cybersecurity officials warn this could backfire. Just last week, the UK’s National Cyber Security Centre cautioned that such unvetted “shadow AI” use is widespread and can expose sensitive data to external platforms (www.thestar.com.my [5]). The agency urged employers to replace knee-jerk bans with open dialogue about AI and clear guidelines for its secure use (www.thestar.com.my [6]).

Why are workers going rogue? A big reason is they don’t feel supported. Many employers have yet to catch up with their employees’ appetite for AI. In the Deloitte study, roughly half of those using generative AI at work said they’ve received no formal training or guidance on how to use it safely and effectively (thenextweb.com [7]). Deloitte’s analysts note that companies have been slow to update systems and workflows to integrate AI, even as staff quickly find everyday uses for the tech (www.thestar.com.my [8]). This misalignment leaves well-intentioned people to figure out AI on their own, often outside official channels. To truly harness employees’ AI creativity - and prevent security and ethical risks - organisations will need to proactively provide the tools, training, and trust that can

bring shadow AI into the open.

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Unions demand a role in AI decisions

It’s not just individual employees pushing for a say in the AI transition - organised labour is now on the move. At the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in Britain this week, union delegates representing millions of workers voted on motions calling for new laws to ensure employees have a voice in how AI is implemented at work (morningstaronline.co.uk [1]). They want a legal right to consultation before employers introduce AI systems that could impact jobs and working conditions. The message: no AI in the workplace without worker consent and involvement.

Union leaders argue that stronger guardrails are needed to prevent AI from becoming a tool for eroding wages, headcount, or privacy. Representatives from creative industries in particular raised alarms about AI-generated content and “deepfakes”. They urged the government to establish a “personality rights” framework to protect workers’ likeness and intellectual property from unauthorised AI use (morningstaronline.co.uk [2]). “If ministers want AI to serve the public good, they must put working people’s rights at the centre of regulation,” one union official told the gathering (morningstaronline.co.uk [3]), emphasising that without explicit protections, new technologies could be used to undermine labour rights and professional integrity.

For executives leading AI initiatives, these moves by labour unions are a clear signal that change management must be a two-way street. The drive for efficiency and innovation cannot be divorced from the human element. Proactively including employees in AI-related decisions - and being transparent about how the technology will (and won’t) be used to augment jobs - is increasingly important for maintaining trust. By working with employee representatives and addressing legitimate concerns about job security, privacy, and fairness, companies can avoid backlash and build a more sustainable foundation for AI-driven transformation.

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The productivity paradox emerges

AI is often touted as a turbocharger for productivity, and even at the macroeconomic level there are early signs of promise. In the UK, the Office for National Statistics recently noted that AI adoption is now a significant driver of an improving annual GDP growth rate of about 2.4% (www.thestar.com.my [1]). Yet for many organisations, the immediate impact of AI on day-to-day work is turning out to be less straightforward than the “do more with less” storyline would suggest.

New research is revealing a gap between expectations of efficiency and employees’ actual experience. A global survey of 16,000 workers found that while 63% say AI has made them more productive, 52% also report it has increased the number of tasks they’re expected to handle (www.journalofaccountancy.com [2]). In that same study, nearly two-thirds of respondents said their overall workload has grown in the last two years, and 61% feel they’re now performing the duties of multiple roles (www.journalofaccountancy.com [3]). The takeaway: in many workplaces, AI is automating tasks, but the freed-up time isn’t translating into lighter workloads. Instead, organisations often reallocate that time to other duties, leaving employees as busy as ever.

These unintended consequences are straining the workforce. In the Korn Ferry survey, almost half of employees said they feel “exhausted” by the pace of change at their company (www.journalofaccountancy.com [4]). One expert warned that companies risk a “super-burden” on employees if they simply layer AI on top of old processes without redesigning work. Workers who feel like they’re “permanently working two jobs” will not maintain their performance - or stay in their roles - for long (www.journalofaccountancy.com [5]). Moreover, a majority (64%) of employees perceive their organisations as more focused on using AI to cut costs and drive efficiency than to find new ways of adding value (www.journalofaccountancy.com [6]). This misalignment in priorities between top management and frontline staff can create frustration, undercutting the very productivity gains that AI promised. To truly deliver on AI’s potential, companies are realising that they must clarify how saved time and automated tasks will be reinvested into higher-value work, rather than simply demanding more output.

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Reimagining roles and skills for an AI future

Amid these challenges, forward-thinking organisations are reorienting their people strategies to harness AI in a sustainable way. A growing number of employees now consider skill development as important as salary when weighing job opportunities (www.forbes.com [1]). They know their long-term earning power depends on staying ahead of technological change. A recent analysis even suggests that a job paying less today may be seen as “more valuable” if it offers significant AI learning and growth. For instance, an employee might choose a $100,000 role that provides exposure to new AI tools and leadership opportunities over a $120,000 position made up of routine tasks, in order to become more “future-proof” in two years’ time (www.forbes.com [2]). In short, career development is

becoming a form of compensation in the AI era (www.forbes.com [3]).

Some companies are taking this insight to heart by redesigning roles and investing in their people instead of simply eliminating jobs. One manufacturing company that automated its painting process with robotic arms decided to retrain its experienced painting staff rather than lay them off (www.forbes.com [4]). Those workers were taught to operate the robot painters, and as the machines grew more autonomous, some employees even learned to programme and maintain them (www.forbes.com [5]). In the end, skilled painters became skilled robotics technicians - a win-win for the company and its people, as institutional knowledge was preserved and workers moved into more advanced roles.

The difference between organisations that thrive with AI and those that struggle often comes down to how well they integrate technology with human capital. As Deloitte's experts observed, companies that go beyond merely deploying AI tools and actively help their employees use them - with proper training, clear guidelines, and a focus on real business goals - will gain the most from the technology (www.deloitte.com [6]). Leaders who treat AI adoption as an opportunity for workforce development and collaboration will likely see greater productivity and innovation, whereas those who rush into automation without supporting their people may end up with disillusioned employees and unrealised gains.

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Key Statistics

- 63% of UK working adults use generative AI at work, and 31% of these users have adopted it without their employer's knowledge, reflecting a trend of unsanctioned "shadow AI" in the workplace ([www.deloitte.com](https://www.deloitte.com/uk/en/about/press-room/british-workers-spend-one-billion-pounds-of-their-own-money-on-gen-ai-for-work.html#:~:text=evolves%20as%20the%20technology%20becomes,are%20embracing%20the%20technology%20more)) ([www.deloitte.com](https://www.deloitte.com/uk/en/about/press-room/british-workers-spend-one-billion-pounds-of-their-own-money-on-gen-ai-for-work.html#:~:text=workers%20is%20%C2%A3958%20million,Many%20GenAI)).
- Roughly 50% of employees using generative AI have received no formal training on how to use it safely at work ([www.deloitte.com](https://www.deloitte.com/uk/en/about/press-room/british-workers-spend-one-billion-pounds-of-their-own-money-on-gen-ai-for-work.html#:~:text=using%20the%20technology%20to%20support,Yet%20for%20many%20workers%20its)).
- Uber's 2026 AI adoption drive was so rapid it exhausted the company's entire annual AI budget by April of this year ([www.forbes.com](https://www.forbes.com/sites/devpatnaik/2026/09/15/when-the-ai-bill-comes-due/#:~:text=systems%20Uber%20uses%20to%20match,something%20that%E2%80%99s%20been%20happening%20across)).
- The UK's Office for National Statistics estimates that AI adoption has become a significant driver of the nation's economic growth, contributing to an annualized GDP growth rate of 2.4% ([www.thestar.com.my](https://www.thestar.com.my/tech/tech-news/2026/09/17/uk-workers-hide-ai-

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KEY TAKEAWAY

AI adoption is not a plug-and-play productivity fix - it requires a people-centred change strategy. Leaders who train and empower their workforce, involve them in AI decisions, and realign roles to complement technology will see far better results than those who don’t.

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