LUMO INSIGHTS

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AI meets reality in the workplace: fear, friction & fightback

Executive Summary

New data and events in the past 48 hours reveal that the rise of AI at work is not unfolding as smoothly as expected. From global surveys showing widespread job anxiety to employee pushback and legal battles, the narrative around AI and the future of work is growing more complex. For business leaders, the message is clear - successfully integrating AI will require rethinking people strategy as much as technology strategy.

Global anxiety over AI job disruption

A major new Pew Research Centre survey of over 50,000 people across 37 countries finds that fear of AI-driven job disruption now far outweighs optimism about new opportunities (britishwire.com [1]) (britishwire.com [2]). In a striking shift, more people globally expect AI to eliminate jobs than to create them. This pessimism is most pronounced in wealthier nations - about seven in ten adults in the United States, South Korea, and Australia believe AI will lead to job losses over the next 20 years (britishwire.com [3]). Younger workers are not more sanguine; in fact, adults under 35 in countries like Canada, France, and India are more concerned about AI-related job loss than their older counterparts (britishwire.com [4]). Researchers note that those most familiar with AI tend to be the most fearful about its impact, suggesting that greater awareness of the technology is actually feeding anxiety about workforce disruption (britishwire.com [5]).

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The great AI adoption gap

Even within companies racing to implement AI, a quiet resistance is taking hold among employees. A global study of large enterprises found that over half of workers (54%) have bypassed AI tools and done tasks manually at least once in the past month, and a further one-third haven’t used workplace AI at all (www.walkme.com [1]). This lack of grassroots buy-in points to a massive adoption gap at odds with the enthusiasm in corporate boardrooms. In fact, only 9% of employees trust AI for high-stakes decision making, versus 61% of executives - a staggering 52-point trust chasm (www.walkme.com [2]). Executives overwhelmingly believe they’ve given people the right technology, but just 21% of workers feel the same (www.walkme.com [3]). The result is ironically sluggish

productivity: while 81% of leaders think AI has boosted output, employees report losing nearly one full workday each week to tech-related frustrations - a 42% jump in lost time compared to last year (finance.yahoo.com [4]). In other words, the technology may be advancing, but without closing these human trust and skill gaps, the benefits are being left on the table.

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Employee pushback hits big tech

Stories of employee pushback underscore the importance of bringing people along in the AI journey. This month, reports surfaced that Meta was forced to abandon an internal programme designed to track employees' mouse clicks and keystrokes to gather data for AI training. The initiative - launched without employee buy-in - quickly triggered an internal revolt, as staff decried the move as an invasion of privacy and feared they were effectively being made to 'train the system that could soon replace them' (altsignals.io [1]). In the face of employee petitions and protests, Meta's leadership reversed course and rolled back the monitoring plan (altsignals.io [2]). The episode highlights the growing tension within organisations when workers feel blindsided by AI-driven changes to their roles or surveilled in the name of innovation. It's a cautionary tale that even tech giants must address cultural concerns and build trust head-on to successfully integrate AI in their operations.

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Legal and ethical storm over AI's use of human work

The clash over AI and jobs isn't only happening inside companies - it's also playing out in courts and the public arena. Over the weekend, new filings in a lawsuit by major news organisations against OpenAI and Microsoft revealed just how alarmed content creators are about their work being used to fuel AI. Unsealed internal communications showed a Microsoft director describing OpenAI's mass web-scraping of news to train its chatbot as possibly the 'largest theft of labour in human history' (onlabor.org [1]). In a memo to OpenAI's leaders, a former policy director (now an AI startup founder) similarly warned that such AI systems would ultimately 'substitute for the labour of the people that define the culture of society' (onlabor.org [2]) - in other words, displacing the creative workers who shape our media and arts. These revelations indicate that even those at the forefront of AI worry about its impact on jobs, particularly in creative and knowledge fields. They also show that the ethical debate over how AI learns - and whom it might put out of work - is intensifying. Business leaders implementing AI must be prepared to engage with these broader societal concerns, or risk severe reputational and legal repercussions.

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[1] onlabor.org — https://onlabor.org/september-20-2026/#:~:text=The%20Intercept,complied%20with%20the%20fair%20use

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Key Statistics

- Around 7 in 10 adults in the US, South Korea and Australia expect AI to cause net job losses over the next 20 years ([britishwire.com](https://britishwire.com/tech/global-survey-finds-growing-concern-over-ai-driven-job-losses/#:~:text=the%20United%20States%2C%20around%20seven,People%20who%20said%20they%20had))
- Only 9% of workers trust AI for business-critical decisions, versus 61% of executives ([www.walkme.com](https://www.walkme.com/news-releases/enterprises-lose-51-workdays-per-employee-to-technology-friction-annually-despite-record-ai-investment-walkme-global-study-of-3750-finds/#:~:text=describing%20fundamentally%20different%20companies,of%20executives))
- 54% of employees have bypassed AI tools at least once, and 33% never use workplace AI at all ([www.walkme.com](https://www.walkme.com/news-releases/enterprises-lose-51-workdays-per-employee-to-technology-friction-annually-despite-record-ai-investment-walkme-global-study-of-3750-finds/#:~:text=that%20over%20half%20%2854,at%20enterprises%20with%201%2C000%20or))

KEY TAKEAWAY

Hype aside, these developments show AI transformation is as much about people as technology. Fear and mistrust are eroding adoption, so leaders must double down on transparency, upskilling, and ethical guardrails to realise AI’s full value.

Sources

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