HUMAN-AI READINESS PULSE REPORT

What 299 UK employees reveal about the hidden costs of AI adoption

NEURYZ RESEARCH & ADVISORY | APRIL 2026

Introduction

The challenge

Organisations are investing in AI and tracking how many people use the tools, with high usage often seen as evidence of successful adoption. This report challenges that assumption.

The Human-AI Readiness Pulse surveyed **299 UK-based employees** whose organisations have formally introduced AI tools, with representation from **six key sectors**:

- Technology
- Financial Services
- Professional Services
- Healthcare
- Education
- Government and Public Sector

The study looks beneath the usage data at the cognitive, identity and relational dimensions of how people are adapting.

Early signs of cognitive dependency already visible

This study found strong evidence of the ***cognitive impact*** of AI use on employees. These indicators show how everyday cognitive habits are changing across the surveyed workforce.

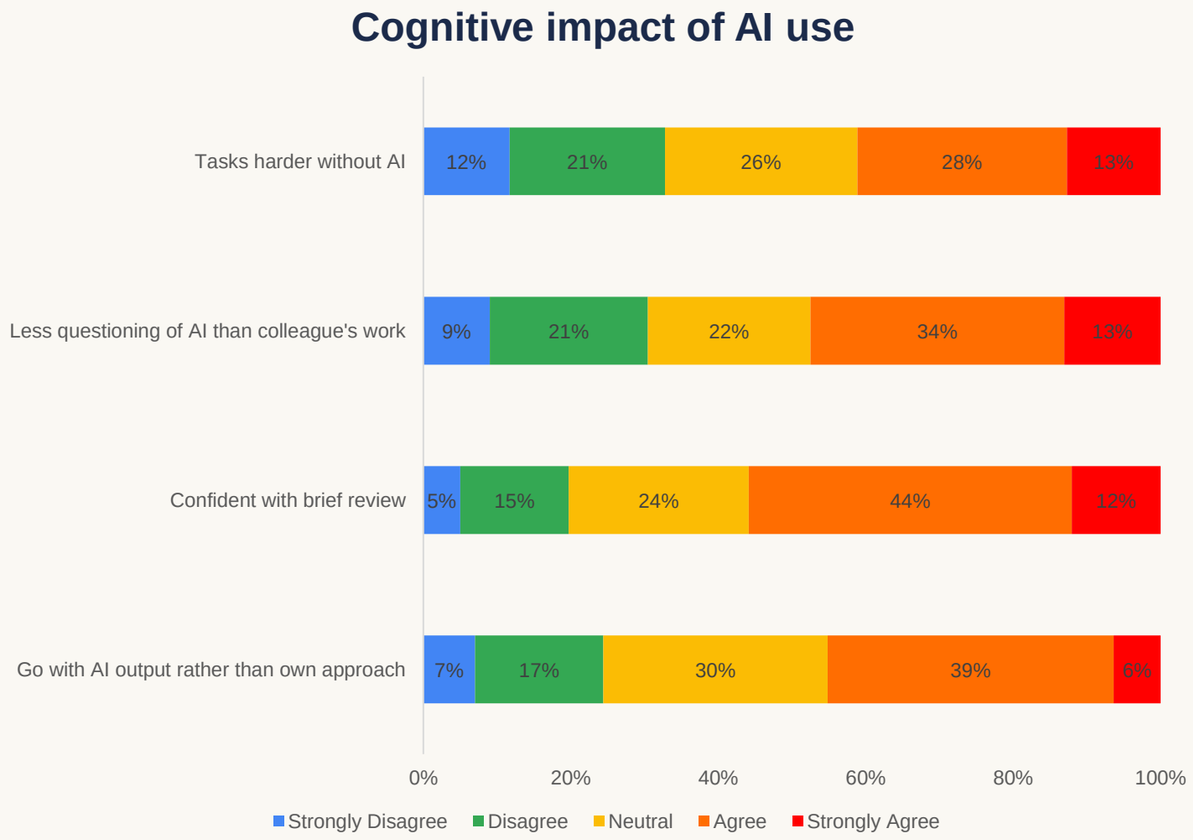
45%
go with AI output rather than their own approach

41%
find tasks harder without AI

47%
question AI outputs less than a colleague's work

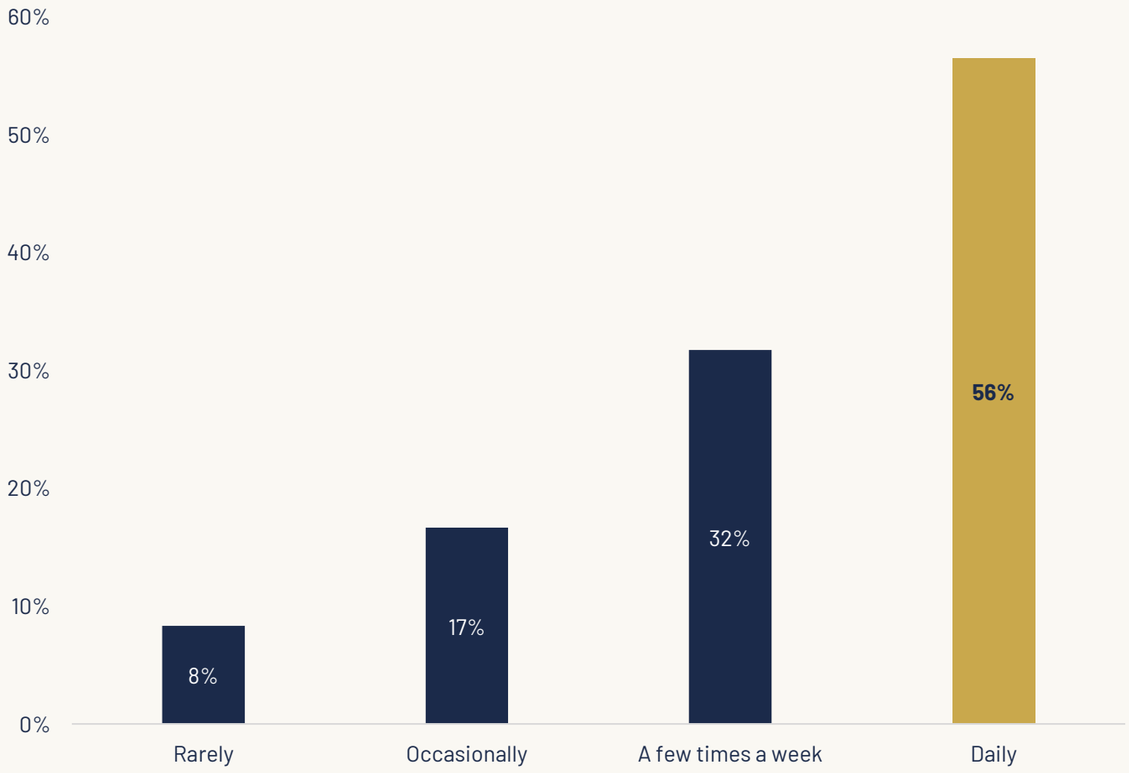
Cognitive dependency builds slowly through small, everyday habits. People start trusting AI outputs more readily and find independent work harder. Over time, these habits can begin to affect the **critical thinking** capability that work depends on.

These patterns are visible across the workforce surveyed and they are easy to miss when organisations only measure usage and productivity.



The cognitive impact deepens with usage frequency

Cognitive impact by usage frequency



The study found a strong relationship between AI usage frequency and cognitive impact. The pattern is consistent and holds across all six key sectors studied.

As tools become embedded in daily workflows, the boundary between human judgement and machine output begins to blur.

Daily users are most affected:

56%

Of **daily** users agree that tasks they used to handle independently now feel harder without AI.

69%

Of **daily** users feel confident in AI outputs they have only reviewed briefly.

Cognitive dimension differs significantly by frequency of AI use (Kruskal-Wallis $\chi^2 = 65.6$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.22$ – large effect)

Identity pressure shows up across the workforce

Around a third of employees report specific forms of **professional identity pressure** related to AI adoption, regardless of how often they use AI tools. The pattern appears among frequent and infrequent users alike, suggesting it is a response to the organisational rollout itself rather than to individual usage patterns.

These patterns show up in specific ways:

34%

feel their contribution is harder to see now that AI produces similar looking output

33%

say what counts as 'good work' has changed without discussion

33%

say they feel pressure to develop AI skills outside their core role

Where employees report **high trust** in their organisation's AI decisions and high **manager-level psychological safety**, identity pressure is significantly lower. Both buffer the effect independently.

Regression analysis indicates that both organisational trust and manager-level psychological safety are significant negative predictors of identity pressure ($\beta = -0.274$, $p < 0.001$; $\beta = -0.343$, $p < 0.001$)

Mentorship loss and identity pressure

Of all the factors examined, the loss of informal mentorship opportunities has the strongest association with identity pressure. Less than a quarter of respondents currently report this loss, so the issue is not yet widespread. But where it is felt, the link to identity pressure is the strongest in the dataset.

22% *report fewer opportunities to learn from more experienced colleagues since AI was introduced*

Informal mentorship from senior colleagues is one of the ways people build professional identity, by observing how they respond to various work-related scenarios and getting access to tacit knowledge not captured by formal training programmes.

When employees turn to AI for answers instead of colleagues or AI replaces the tasks that used to create these moments, the informal learning that builds professional confidence starts to disappear over time.

Protecting **human-to-human** learning relationships is an **organisational lever** that current adoption strategies rarely consider.

Loss of mentorship correlates with identity pressure at Spearman's rho = 0.670, $p < 0.001$

The divide is visible, but the conversation is missing

There is a **growing divide** forming between those that have adapted to AI and those who have not.

Psychological safety is high, but there is no structured conversation for people to speak into.

Feeling safe to raise a concern is only the first step. What appears to be missing is the space for those concerns to be heard and acted on across the organisation.

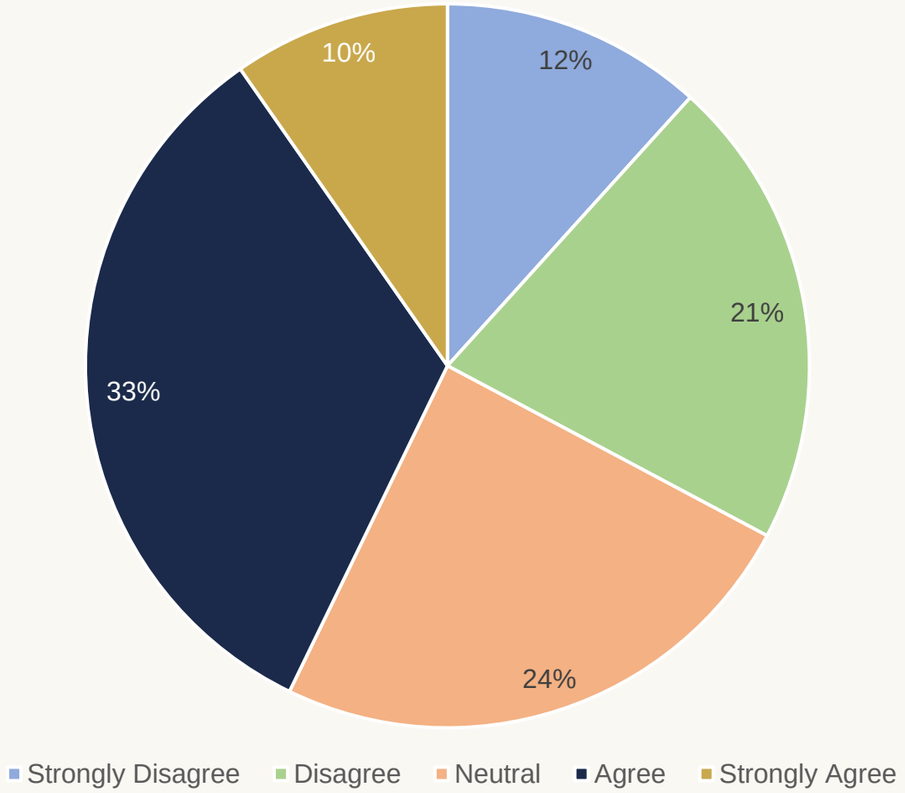
43%

See a growing divide forming between AI adapters and non-adapters

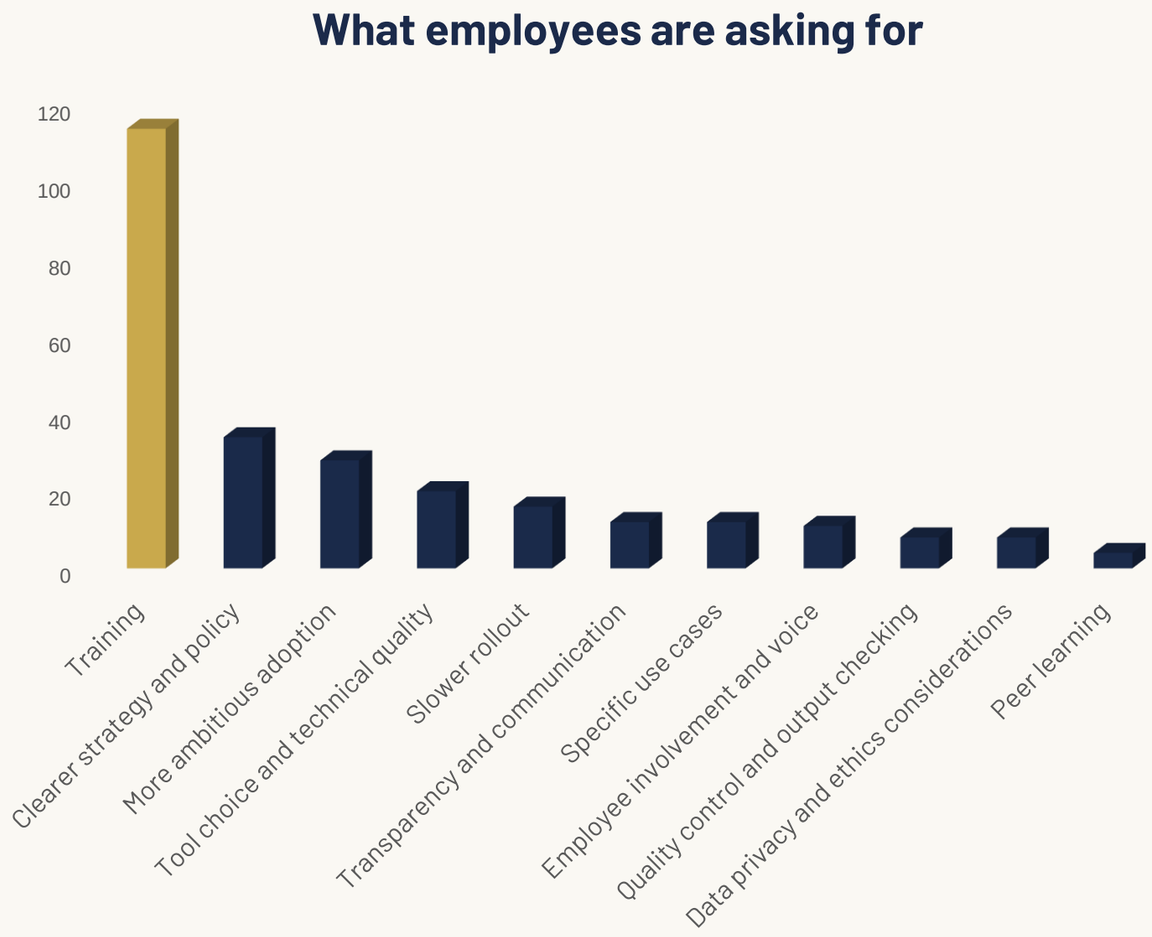
75%

Feel comfortable raising concerns about AI with managers

Breakdown of the 43% responses



What employees would change about AI adoption



When asked what they would change about AI adoption in their organisations, employees raised a mix of wanted changes (see graph) and unprompted concerns.

Training was by far the most frequent theme raised, followed by **clearer AI strategy and policy** and interestingly, **more ambitious adoption**.

AI tool choice was another common theme, with employees asking for access to a wider variety of tools and flexibility to choose what works best for their individual tasks.

Concerns raised mirror the patterns in the quantitative data:

AI over-reliance

AI output quality

Learning disruption

The training gap

Training was by far the most requested change, but only **47%** of employees currently find it relevant to their role.

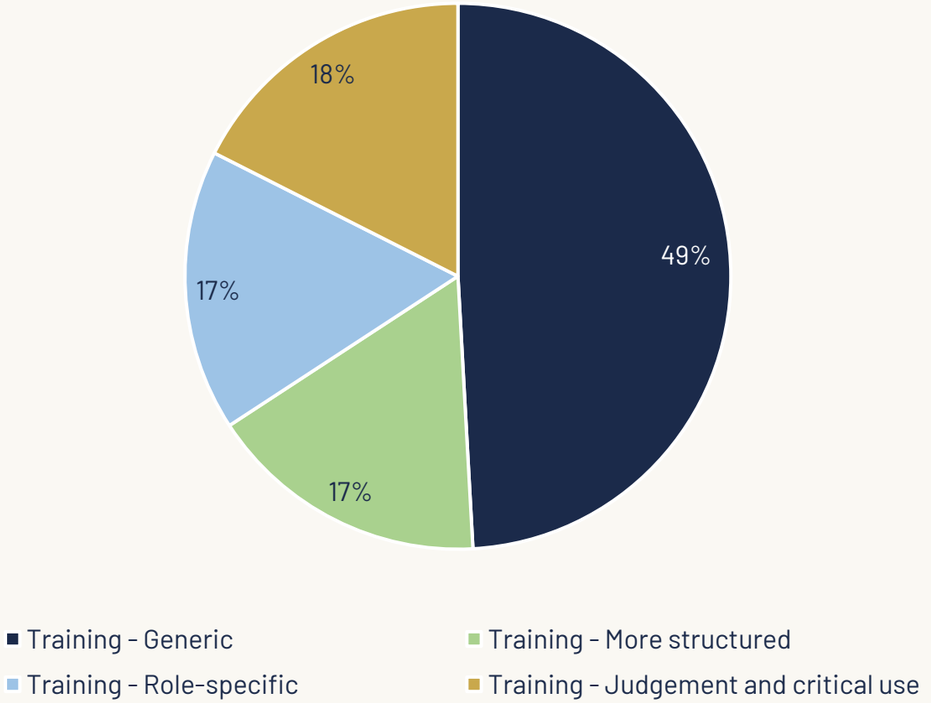
When looking more closely at what they mean when they ask for training, an interesting pattern emerges.

Around half of requests are generic – more training or better training. The rest however, are very specific:

- More structured training
- More role-specific training
- **Judgement and critical use training**

18% ask for guidance on when to trust AI outputs and when to apply their own judgement – something that current AI training programmes rarely deliver.

Training employees ask for



In their own words

What people said they would change about AI adoption in their organisations:

“As a junior 3D artist, I would prefer to be allowed the time to learn traditional workflows, rather than skip this process by using AI to get an asset prepared more quickly”

On the learning gap

"They should not only train staff on how it works, but also when to trust it too"

On the judgement gap

"Clearer communication about how work standards are changing"

On the work standards gap

"Make sure we had a clearer, organisation-wide strategy from the start, rather than lots of small, disconnected pilots"

On the strategy gap

"I would have involved employees in decisions about AI tools from the start to make adoption smoother”

On the employee involvement gap

Rethinking what successful AI adoption looks like

Current assumptions	What the findings show
High usage = successful adoption	High usage can co-exist with cognitive dependency and professional identity pressure
The only people struggling are those ‘resistant to change’	Daily users carry the highest cognitive costs; identity pressure affects about a third of the workforce, irrespective of their openness to new technology
Generic training solves the adoption problem	People ask for structured and role-specific training and importantly, for judgement guidance
Psychological safety means concerns get addressed	Manager-level psychological safety is high, but there is also a growing divide between employees. Organisation-level mechanisms to identify and act on these concerns seem to be missing.
Mentorship will continue naturally as AI takes over routine work	22% already report fewer opportunities to learn from more experienced colleagues since AI was introduced

What this means for AI adoption strategy

The human dimensions identified in this report are largely missing from most AI adoption strategies.

Addressing them means focusing on four areas:

- Build employees' ability to evaluate and challenge AI outputs, not just use the tools
- Implement guidance on when to trust AI and when to think independently, depending on workflow
- Monitor for early signs of cognitive dependency

- Identify workflows where junior employees currently learn from senior colleagues and assess how AI is changing them
- Treat mentorship and informal knowledge sharing as foundations worth protecting rather than a nice-to-have

- Start conversations on how contribution is recognised
- Review whether performance and reward systems still reflect the work being done
- Equip line managers to have conversations about contribution and AI within their teams

- Create visible forums where employees can share experiences and concerns about AI, moving beyond individual manager conversations to structured and visible organisational mechanisms
- Track the divide between employees before it becomes embedded in team dynamics

About the study

The Human-AI Readiness Pulse surveyed 299 UK-based employees recruited via Prolific, an established online research panel widely used in academic research. The survey was fielded in March 2026 and piloted twice with small sample sizes (n=10 then n=20) to refine question clarity before being rolled out to the wider sample.

The instrument consisted of 8 contextual and screening items, 16 Likert-scale attitudinal items (1-5) and one open-text question. Three screening criteria were applied:

- Currently employed
- Working in an organisation that has formally introduced AI tools
- Based in the UK

Data analysis was done using Jamovi statistical software and included item-level descriptive analysis, internal consistency tests, group comparisons using non-parametric tests, confidence intervals and thematic coding of qualitative responses. Relationships between organisational conditions and identity pressure were examined using Spearman correlations and multiple regression.

Internal consistency for the cognitive, emotional and identity dimensions were acceptable to strong (Cronbach's alpha = 0.79 to 0.88). Items under the relational theme were reported independently.

Note

While based on a targeted sample, the patterns identified by this study are statistically robust and reflect dynamics increasingly recognised in the academic literature on AI adoption in the workplace.

Suggested citation

> Seifer, R. (2026). *Human-AI Readiness Pulse Report. What 299 UK employees reveal about the hidden costs of AI adoption.* Neuryz

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Applying brain science to AI adoption

The patterns in this report are not unique to the surveyed sample. The Human-AI Readiness Diagnostic identifies the same cognitive, identity and relational dynamics in your specific organisation, providing the evidence-base for your AI adoption strategy.

We partner with organisations to build the People Strategy for AI adoption, grounded in neuroscience and organisational psychology, delivered through:

- ❑ Human-AI Readiness Diagnostic
- ❑ Leadership sense-making sessions
- ❑ Workforce readiness workshops

Get in touch to explore how this applies to your team or organisation.

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Neuryz is a research-led practice applying neuroscience to the human side of AI adoption