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The Pulse of Work in 2025: Trends, Truths and the Practicality of AI

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The Pulse of Work in 2025: Trends, Truths, and the Practicality of AI

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01 Executive Summary

In today's rapidly evolving workplace, technology is reshaping expectations and processes—but not always in the ways we anticipate. To better understand current AI trends and truths, GoTo partnered with research firm Workplace Intelligence to survey 2,500 employees and IT leaders around the globe. The survey reveals a paradox: while **62% of employees believe AI is significantly overhyped, 86% say they aren't using it to its full potential,** exposing a significant disparity between promise and practice.

Digging deeper, 82% of employees say they aren't well-versed in the practical applications of AI, yet just 49% of IT leaders believe their employees lack this level of understanding. Even more striking, findings show that optimizing AI usage could help employees reclaim 13 hours per week, potentially delivering over **$2.9 trillion in annual efficiency gains** for U.S. businesses alone.

Further analysis indicates that **54% of employees are using AI for sensitive or high-stakes decisions,** with 77% reporting they do not regret doing so—even when these use cases are against company AI policies. Meanwhile, only **45% of IT leaders report their company has a formal AI policy in place,** while a majority (81% of employees and 71% of IT) agree that improved training and guardrails are critical.

Together, these findings paint a clearer picture: there's a massive opportunity for both employees and businesses to harness AI's true benefits. Better training, stronger policies, and targeted investment—where 77% of IT leaders believe **spending $20 or less per employee per month would save one hour of productivity each day**—could unlock AI's potential for everyday work.

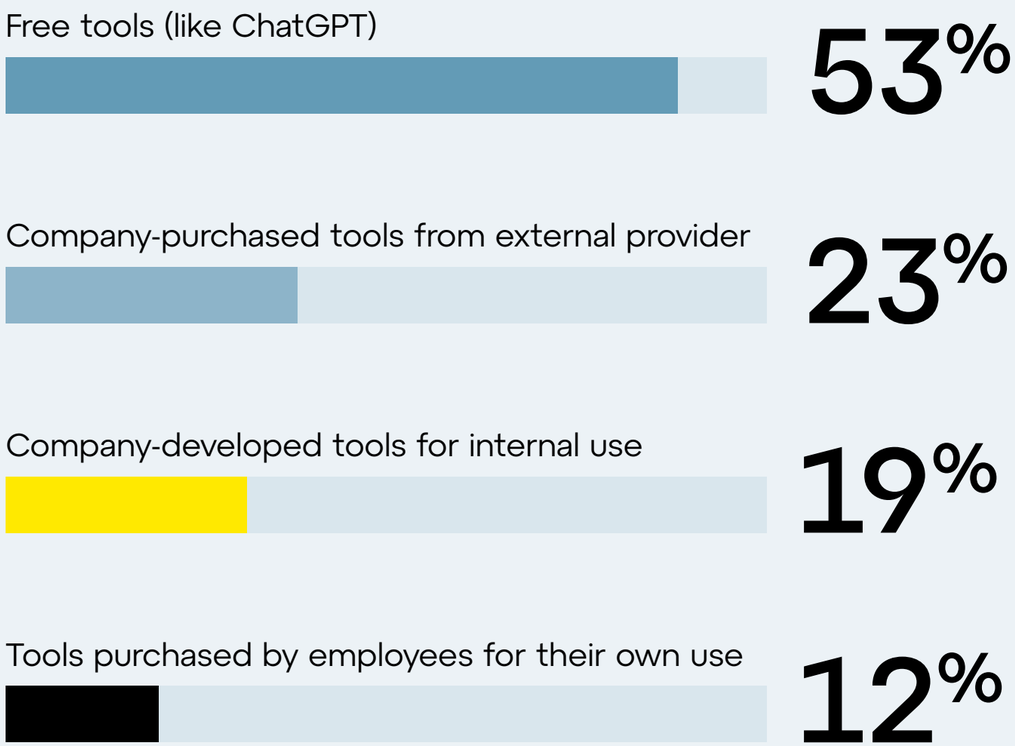
02 Employees Think AI is Overhyped

62%

of employees say AI has been significantly overhyped

Most employees—78%—are using AI technologies ranging from free solutions to specialized internal tools. Yet, many feel these tools aren't living up to their promises.

The types of AI tools employees are using:



In addition, 57% of employees believe AI's value and ROI are overstated, and 59% disagree with the notion that AI will take over everyone's jobs. Moreover, 64% caution against viewing AI as a panacea for every business problem, while 68% say AI is often misrepresented as error-free and always better than humans.

49%

of IT leaders believe AI has been significantly overhyped

On the other side of the aisle, IT leaders tend to be slightly more optimistic, with less than half believing AI has been significantly overhyped. Yet even they aren't without reservations.

The key barriers to AI adoption, according to IT leaders:

1	Security concerns	35%	2 Lack of employee buy-in or trust	26%	3 Tools aren't tailored or industry-specific	22%
4	Integration challenges	21%	5 Too expensive	20%	6 Insufficient vendor support or training	20%

All together, these findings highlight a critical tension: while AI tools are in wide use, their potential is being hindered by unmet expectations and operational barriers.

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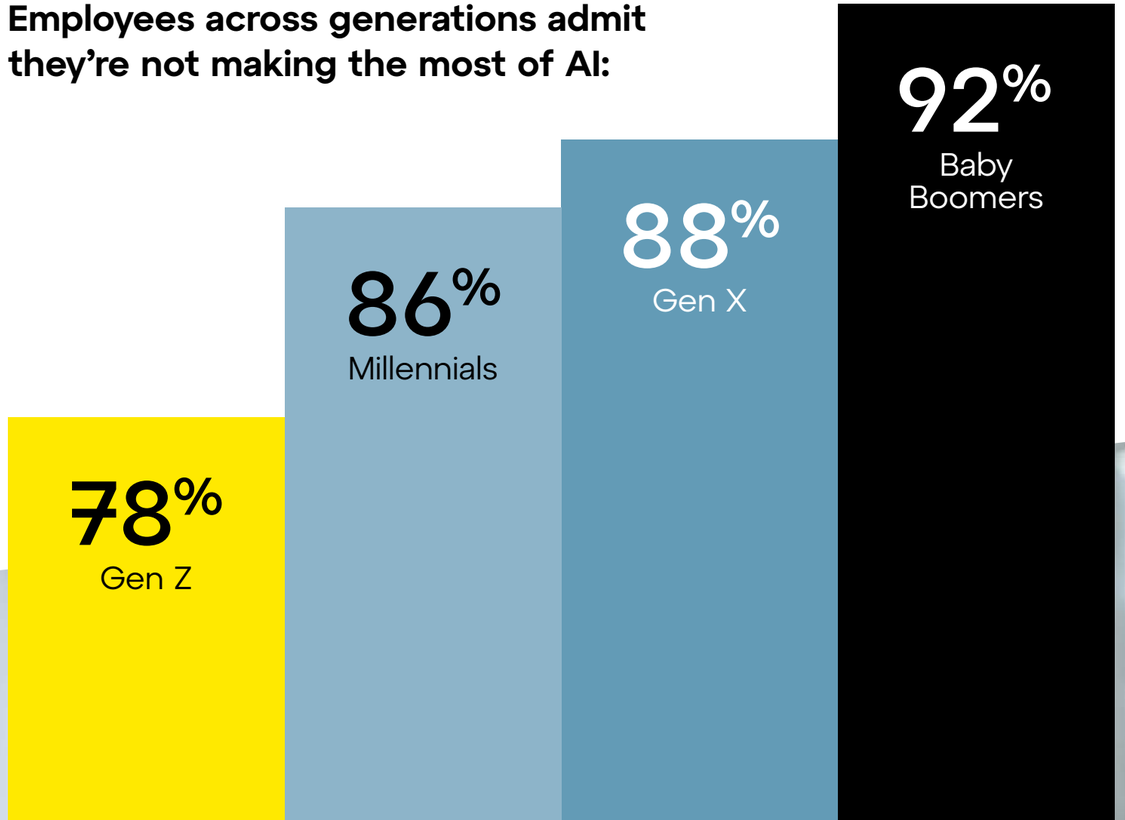
03 Overhyped or Overlooked?

The research shows that AI's promises often fall short—**not because the tools aren't powerful, but because they aren't being used to their full extent.** In fact, **86% of workers** admit they aren't tapping AI's full potential. And it's not a generational issue: across the board, from Gen Z to Baby Boomers, nearly everyone agrees that they could be doing much more with AI.

Employees across generations admit they're not making the most of AI:



61% of employees believe that investing in AI tools would boost their productivity, motivation, and engagement far more than fancy office perks ever could. In other words, advanced AI tools are seen as a key driver for a significantly better work experience.

The benefits of AI tools, according to employees:

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Across generations, employees are losing valuable time—2.6 hours per day, or 13 hours each week—to tasks that AI could handle. This highlights a significant opportunity for more efficient workflows. Even Baby Boomers, generally considered the least tech-savvy generation, admit AI could be handling more than 2 hours of their work each day.

2.6

hours per day, or 13 hours per week, employees estimate they're spending on tasks AI could handle

$2.9T

amount U.S. businesses could gain from unlocking AI's potential*

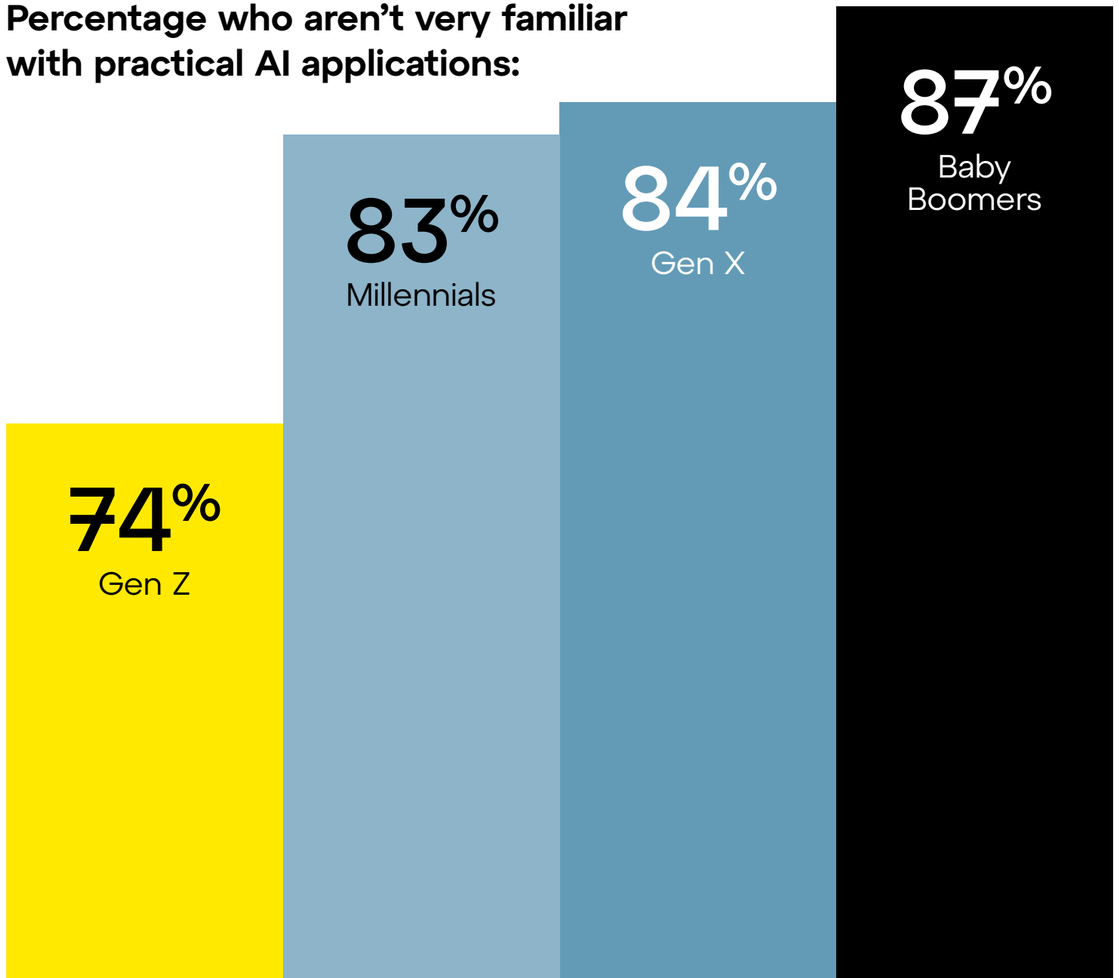
This lost time translates into a huge opportunity cost. In the U.S. alone, businesses could be losing out on over $2.9 trillion a year* in efficiency gains. If companies can unlock even a fraction of the unrealized potential of AI, both employees and employers stand to win.

* Assumes there are 102,183,000 knowledge workers in the U.S. (Source: Federal Reserve Economic Dataset) with an hourly wage of $43.85 (Source: Federal Reserve Economic Dataset), who could be saving 13 hours each week by using AI.

04 Why Employees Aren't Using AI to its Full Potential

A major hurdle to AI adoption in the workplace: many workers just don't know how to use these tools effectively for their roles. In fact, **82% of employees admit they aren't very familiar with the practical applications of AI** in their day-to-day work. Even the most tech-savvy Gen Z workers report knowledge gaps when it comes to using AI tools.

Percentage who aren't very familiar with practical AI applications:



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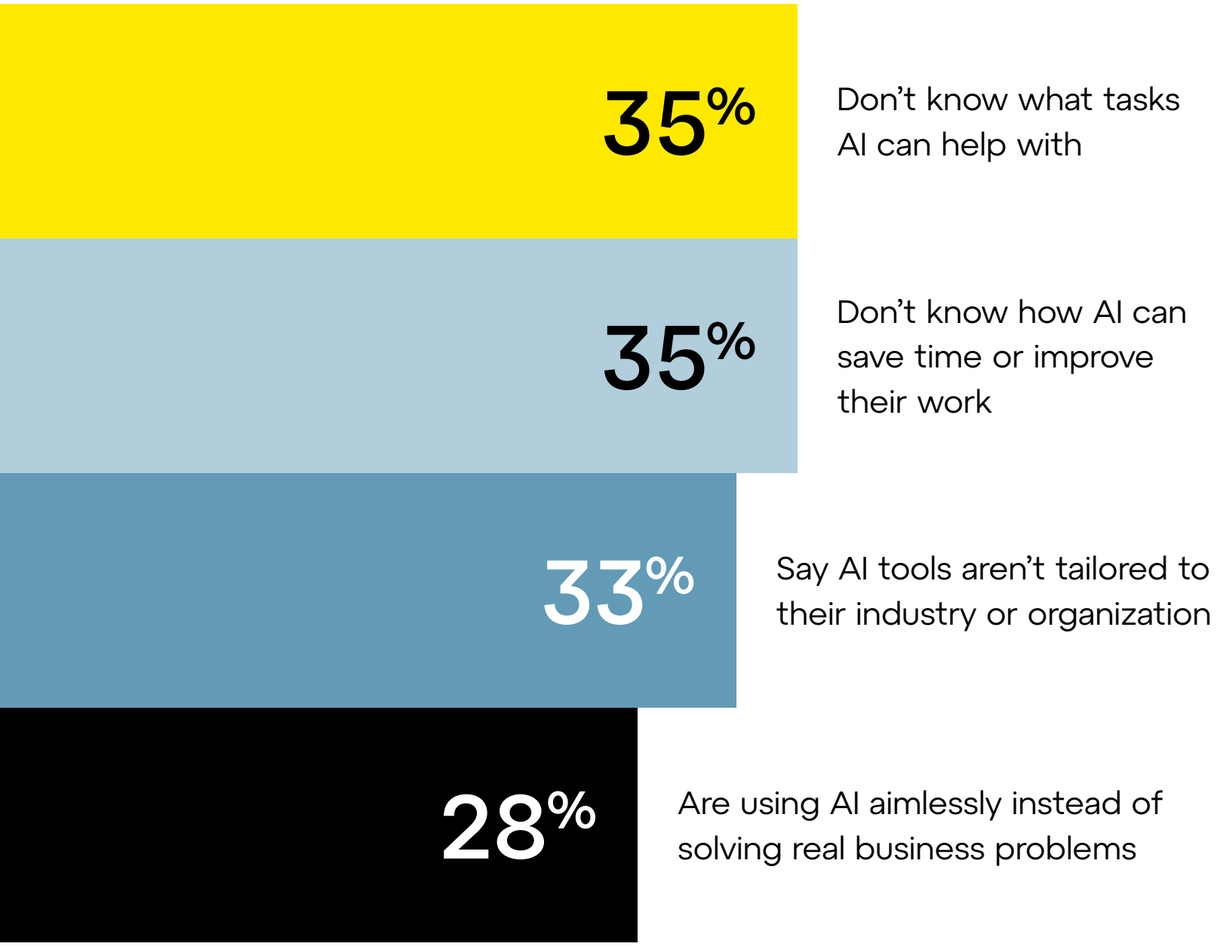
Employees are struggling to make the most of AI:

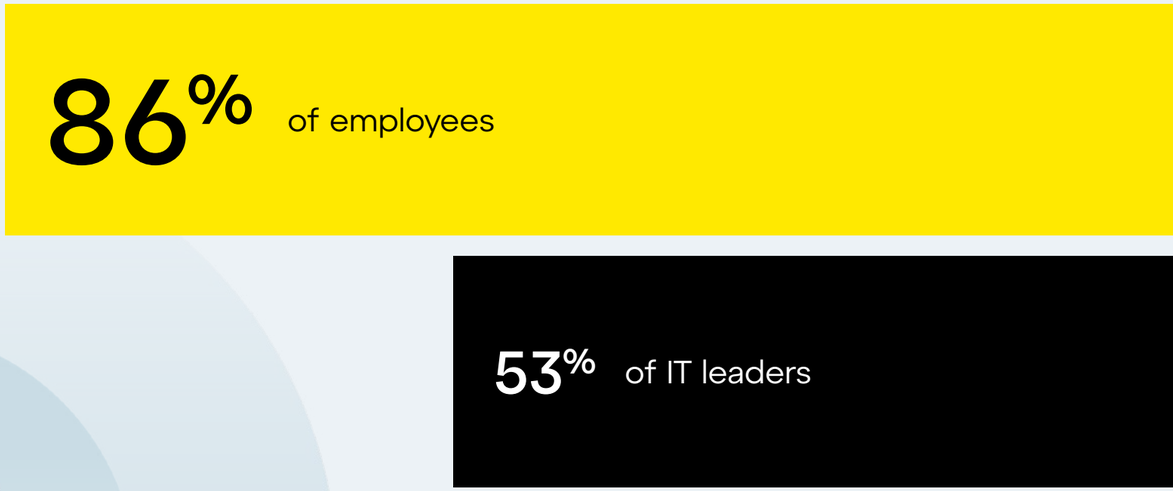


There's also a disconnect between employees and IT leadership. While 82% of employees say they aren't very familiar with AI's practical applications, **only 49% of IT leaders believe their employees are struggling to this degree.**

Trust is another concern: 86% of employees doubt AI's accuracy compared to 53% of IT leaders. In addition, more employees (76%) than IT (63%) say AI outputs often need extra refinement, with 42% of IT leaders regularly spotting errors within their own organization.

The Trust Gap

Percentage who aren't very confident in AI's accuracy and reliability:



The AI Divide

Employees
IT Leaders

There's a notable disconnect between employees and IT leadership when it comes to AI and the realities of its usage.

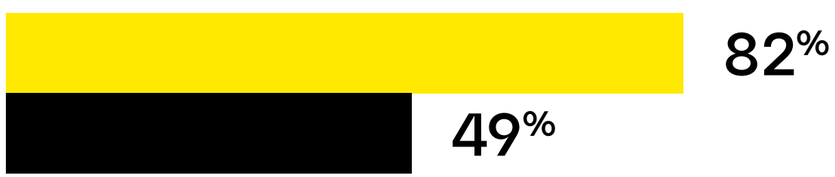
Disconnect 1

IT leaders overestimate AI usage

86% of employees admit they're not using AI tools to their full potential, yet only 58% of IT leaders think employees at their company are underutilizing AI.

Disconnect 2

IT leaders think employees are more familiar with AI



82% of employees say they aren't very familiar with AI's practical applications, but just 49% of IT leaders believe their employees lack this level of understanding.

Disconnect 3

There's a clash of confidence in AI's reliability

86% of employees aren't very confident in the accuracy and reliability of AI tools, versus just 53% of IT leaders.

Disconnect 4

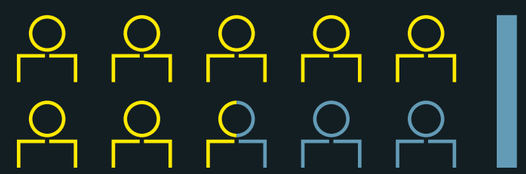
Training gaps persist

87% of employees feel most workers aren't being trained properly on AI, while only 59% of IT leaders share that view.

Small Businesses, Big Challenges

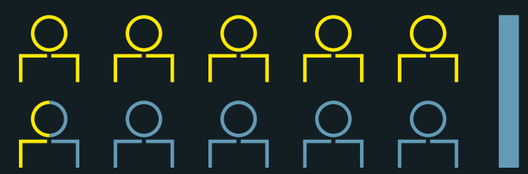
The issue deepens at smaller companies. In organizations with 50 workers or less, **only 59% of employees use AI, compared to about 80% at larger companies.** Nearly half (46%) of employees at smaller firms feel they lack the know-how to use AI to save time or improve their work—versus roughly 30% at larger organizations.

IT leaders at the smallest companies are much more likely to say their employees aren't using AI tools to their full potential:



1-50 employees

74%



501-5,000 employees

54%

51-500 employees

64%

5,000+ employees

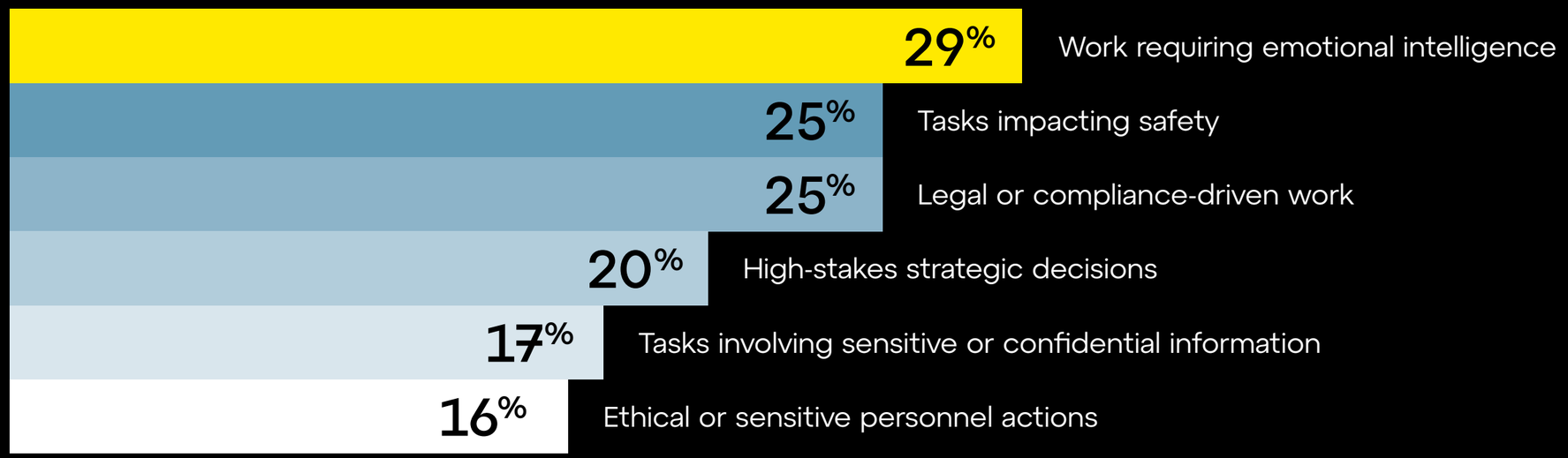
48%

This all adds up to a threefold challenge: **workers aren't fully capitalizing on AI because they're uncertain how to use it, they lack trust in its reliability, and IT leaders aren't fully aware of the extent of these struggles.** Bridging these knowledge, trust, and awareness gaps is essential for unlocking AI's full real-world value.

05 Misuse of AI

In addition, AI is handling some tasks for employees—but not the ones their bosses think. Even more striking: 77% of these employees say they don't regret using AI in this way, despite 25% acknowledging that their employers explicitly prohibit those tasks (with another 17% unsure of the rules).

54% of employees are improperly using AI at work. Here's how:



AI use is stepping into areas traditionally reserved for human judgment. Work requiring emotional intelligence might include conflict resolution, managing team dynamics, or addressing personal issues of colleagues. Similarly, when it comes to legal, strategic, or ethical decisions, employees appear willing to take the risk, even if it falls outside company policy.

This data challenges the conventional view: while bosses might expect AI to streamline mundane tasks, many employees are turning to it to navigate complex, sensitive issues.

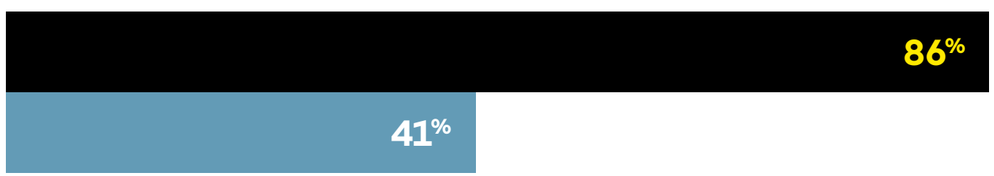
06 The Adoption Gap

It sounds simple enough: give employees the right AI tools they need, and usage will follow. Yet many companies aren't delivering. Only around 40% of employees say their organization offers the AI tools they are asking for. That figure drops to around 30% in smaller organizations, highlighting a significant gap in accessibility.

Employee access to AI tools that would benefit them:

AI Virtual Assistant:
Sets reminders, manages calendars, and other admin tasks

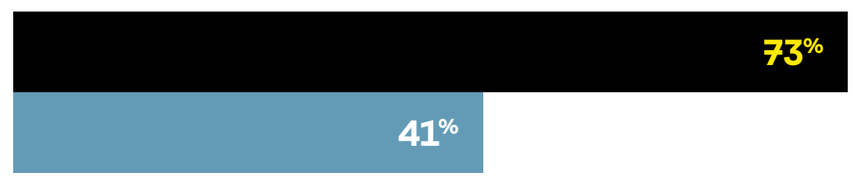
AI Automation Tools:
Enables data entry, email management, and report generation



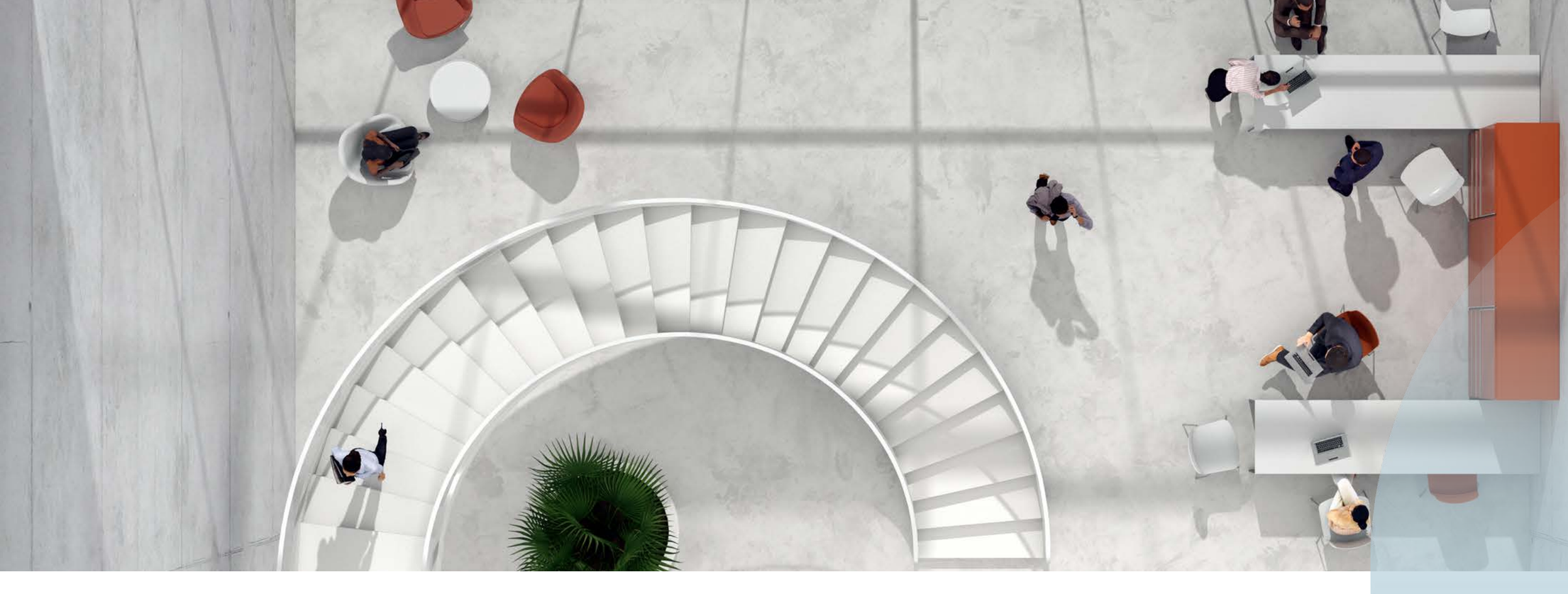
AI Communication Tools:
Provides real-time translation, transcription, and call/chat summaries

Generative AI Tools:
Writes/creates content like emails, articles, and code

AI Chat/Messaging Assistant:
Communicates with customers



Would Benefit
Have Access



Over 90% of IT leaders agree that the use cases mentioned on the previous page could be valuable, especially tools that support IT operations. **95% of IT leaders value AI that analyzes device, network, and support ticket data for improved troubleshooting**—yet only 67% report having this functionality. Likewise, **96% say AI for security monitoring and data protection compliance is essential,** but only 69% have access to it.

It's clear that both employees and IT leaders see enormous promise in AI. So: is AI really overhyped? Yes and no—its practical impact will continue to fall short without having the right tools available to drive everyday efficiency and support mission-critical functions.

07 Purposeful Implementation

For companies looking to harness AI's significant potential, a deliberate approach is key. **Purposeful implementation means not adopting or buying AI tools just because it's the trend.** Here are three practical steps organizations can take to ensure their AI investment pays off.

21%

of IT leaders admit their companies have adopted AI tools without careful consideration or a clear plan

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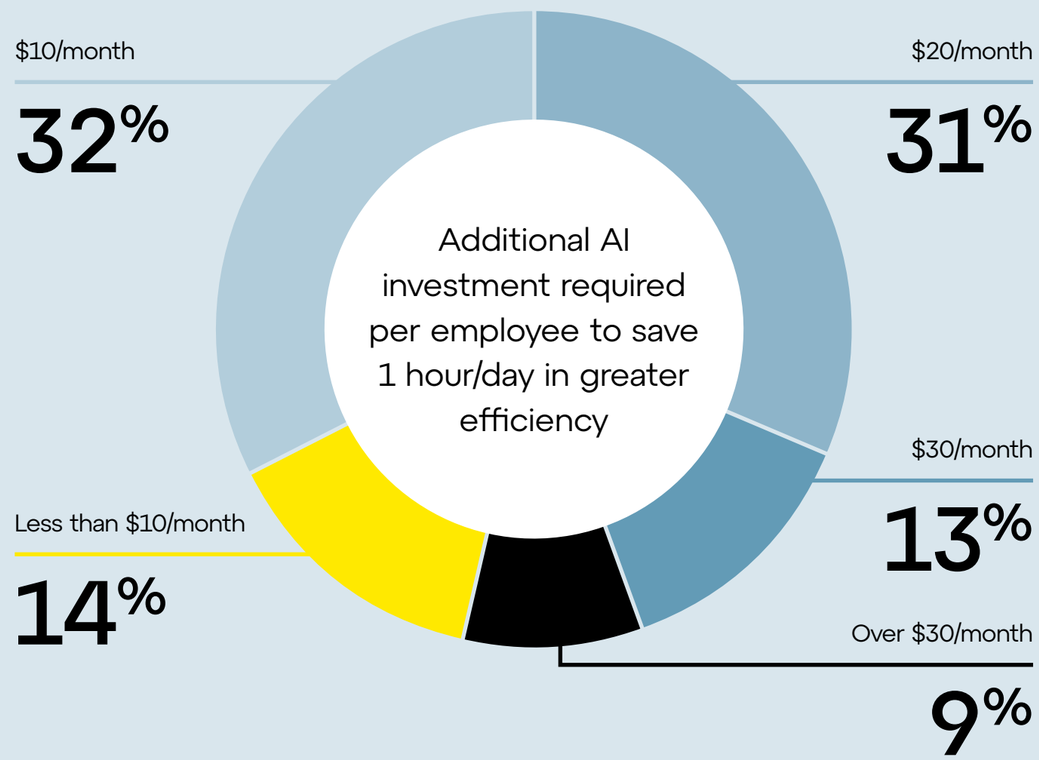
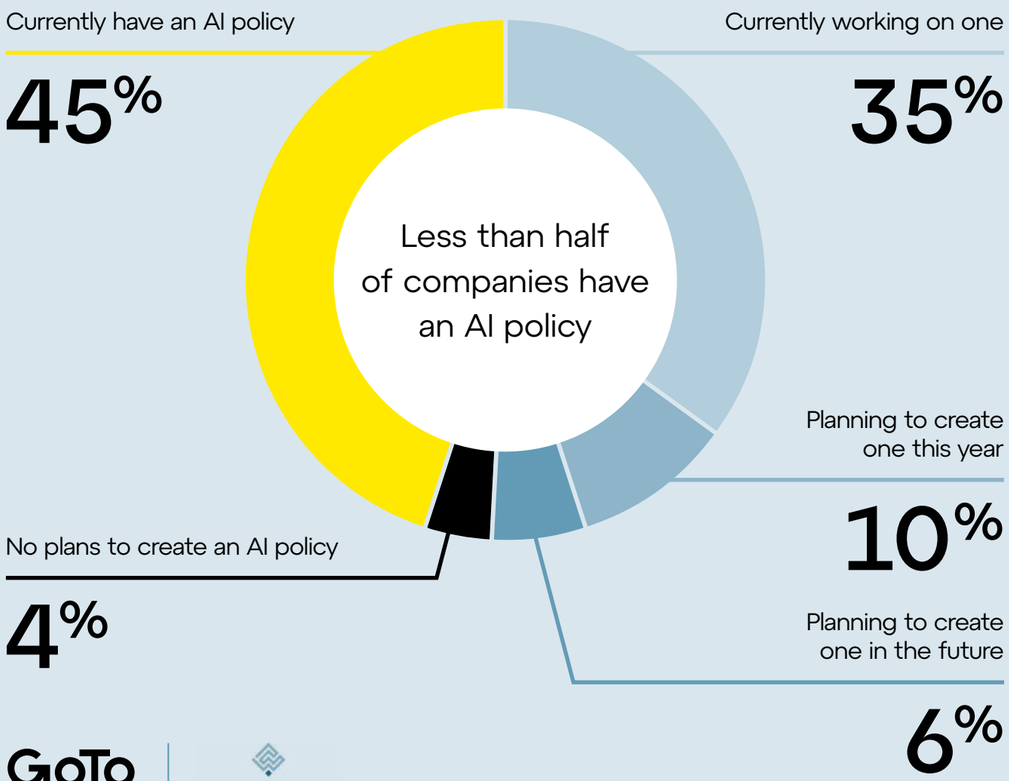
1 Remove Barriers to AI Adoption

Many IT leaders (77%) struggle to justify investments in AI that could boost productivity and collaboration. The good news is that the extra cost is minimal: 77% say spending **just an extra $20 (or less) on AI tools per month could save each employee one hour a day in greater efficiency.** That adds up to a whopping 260 hours annually, or **the equivalent of 6.5 work weeks saved per employee.**



2 Improve AI Policies

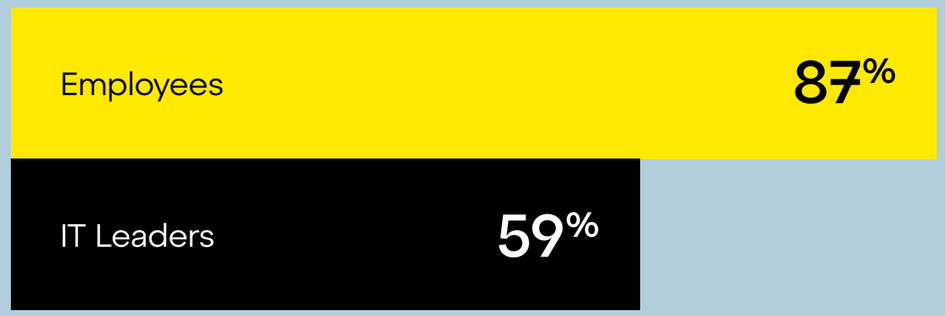
Effective AI usage requires robust policies. While 54% of employees are improperly using AI at work, **only 45% of IT leaders report their company has an AI policy in place.** Even in organizations with AI policies, **about 30% of employees are estimated to have violated their company's policy,** with 47% of IT leaders calling for improvements. Only 19% of organizations with 50 employees or less have an AI policy, compared to 59% among larger companies.



3 Provide Better AI Training

The easiest way to ensure employees know how to apply AI at work—and aren't misusing it—is to provide proper training. **Both employees (81%) and IT leaders (71%) agree that AI tools need better instructions and guardrails.** Yet 87% of employees believe most employees haven't been adequately trained, compared to just 59% of IT leaders, highlighting a disconnect in awareness.

Percentage who believe AI training is lacking:



In short, a strategic approach to AI—combining smart spending, strong policies, and effective training—can pave the way for big productivity gains.

08 Measuring the ROI of AI

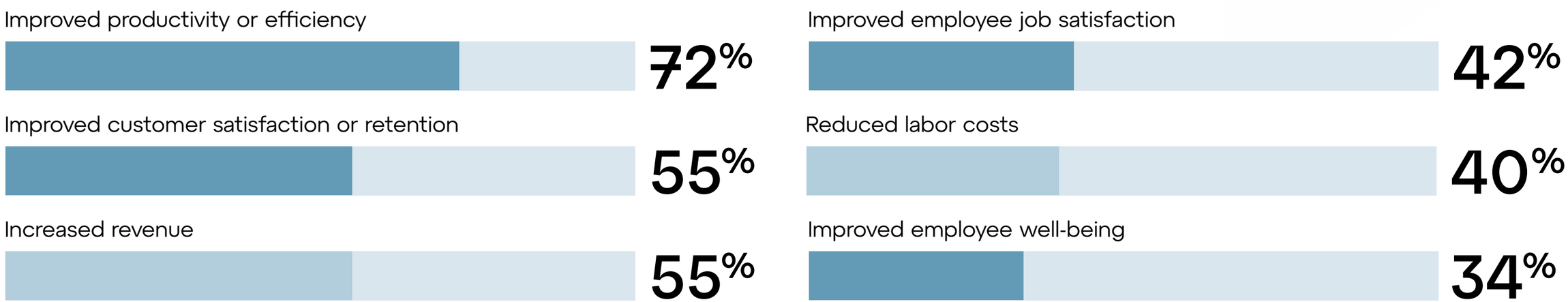
49%

of IT leaders say their company isn't measuring the ROI of AI tools very well—a figure that rises to 64% in smaller organizations

Poor measurement of ROI is likely hindering efforts to justify additional investment, even though these tools clearly offer significant benefits without a large upfront cost.

When it comes to specific metrics: 72% of IT leaders say their company measures productivity and efficiency, but far fewer track other key factors like customer satisfaction, revenue, job satisfaction, labor costs, or employee well-being.

Current ROI metrics for AI tools:



A more holistic approach to the way ROI is tracked could unlock greater support for AI initiatives—and ultimately, drive more value for the business and its employees.

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09 Conclusion

AI's role in the workplace presents a complex picture. While employees and IT leaders alike see tremendous promise in these tools, many feel the hype outweighs the perceived benefits. However, this is likely because most workers admit they're not using AI to its full potential, and access to valuable tools is lacking. Meanwhile, disconnects between IT leaders and employees around trust, training, and policy further limit AI's impact.

Yet, there's a clear path forward. By taking a purposeful, practical approach to AI adoption—removing barriers, establishing clear policies with better training, and making a strong business case for investment—companies can save time, boost productivity, and see real improvements in daily operations. Ultimately, making modest, well-planned investments in AI can yield substantial returns.

10 Methodology

These findings are based on a global survey conducted by GoTo and Workplace Intelligence between February and April 2025. A total of 2,500 respondents participated—1,250 full-time knowledge workers and 1,250 IT decision-makers. The survey reached individuals across the US, Canada, the UK, Ireland, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, India, Mexico, and Brazil.

About Workplace Intelligence

Workplace Intelligence is an award-winning thought leadership and research agency focused on the world of work. We help companies, and their executives, tell their workplace story in a meaningful, relevant, and impactful way using primary data, insights, and interviews. For more information, go to workplaceintelligence.com.

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