

AI ATTITUDES SURVEY 2024

The Emerging Role of AI on
Today's Digital Leadership

March 2024

DIGITAL
LEADERS

INTRODUCTION

Our first survey of this community in the UK sets a useful baseline for future years as well as giving a snapshot of current attitudes to AI. It offers us the opportunity of becoming an annual benchmark for many in the public sector, business and charities.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank those that support us financially without requiring their views and agendas to be given any more prominence or value than others that appear weekly on our platform.

I would also like to offer particular thanks to Professor Alan Brown at the University of Exeter and other countless members of the Digital Leaders Community who have reviewed the questions and encouraged us to do this survey.

I hope you find the findings helpful.

Robin Knowles, CEO Digital Leaders

BACKGROUND

Advances in AI technology are bringing many opportunities to accelerate digital transformation. However, the success in AI adoption requires something just as important as improvements to Technology - great leadership. Leaders, influential in their organisations and industries, hold the power to shape policies and drive AI adoption. Their attitudes and experiences impact resource allocation, investment priorities, and organisational culture.

There is so much opinion offered about AI currently online that we targeted this survey to bring an evidence-based snapshot of leaders' thoughts on AI's potential for societal and organisational transformation. After all, "Data eats opinion for lunch".

The data from this survey adds significantly to our understanding of the opportunities and challenges AI brings to digital leaders. By surveying 577 Digital Leaders about their attitudes towards AI and Generative AI we have created new insights into their perceptions, priorities, and challenges.

The survey highlights the benefits leaders perceive in leveraging AI technologies as well as their concerns and the challenges they anticipate in AI implementation, including ethical considerations, regulatory barriers, and workforce implications.

Ultimately, as AI drives us to the next wave of digital transformation, we believe that understanding more about the views of today's digital leaders on AI through this survey will help us all identify opportunities for taking a responsible approach to accelerate innovation.

Alan W. Brown, Professor in Digital Economy, University of Exeter

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



DIGITAL
LEADERS

The Digital Leaders AI Attitudes Survey provides an important landmark in understanding attitudes to AI and its adoption in organisations today. Based on 577 completed surveys from digital leaders across the UK public and private sector, it offers an important snapshot of the opportunities and challenges faced by those seeking to apply AI to drive digital transformation.

Wide scale excitement about the possibilities of AI has been heightened with the release of a new wave of Generative AI tools. As a result, the internet is filled with illustrations, case studies, and advice on the best ways to use individual AI technologies. However, it is much more difficult to find data on enterprise-level adoption of AI tools and technologies, supported by experiences of industry executives and practitioners. Indeed, there are growing concerns that a significant number of experiments with AI use do not readily transition to large scale deployment, and overall return on investment for AI projects is low.

In this context, the Digital Leaders AI Attitudes Survey brings an important contribution. While the potential of AI to revolutionise industries is undeniable, its large-scale adoption within organisations presents a unique set of challenges for digital leaders. These hurdles, if unaddressed, can impede progress and limit the transformative impact of this powerful technology.

This reinforces three important messages for today's digital leaders.

Firstly, digital leaders who responded to this survey understand that the complex landscape of data infrastructure and legacy systems often makes it difficult to seamlessly integrate AI solutions. Existing data silos, varying data formats, and outdated software can create significant roadblocks to data accessibility and analysis, hindering the training and deployment of AI models.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



DIGITAL
LEADERS

Overcoming these technical hurdles requires a strategic approach to data governance, standardisation, and infrastructure modernization.

Secondly, the ongoing fears that broader AI adoption will be stalled by a talent shortage in the AI domain poses a significant obstacle. Building and maintaining in-house AI expertise requires recruiting and retaining highly skilled professionals in data science, machine learning, and MLOps. This challenge can be further compounded by the need for ongoing training and development to keep pace with the rapidly evolving AI landscape. To address this, digital leaders must explore alternative talent acquisition strategies, such as partnerships with AI consultancies or universities, and prioritise upskilling existing workforces through comprehensive training programs.

Finally, all Digital Leaders face new issues with AI. Ethical considerations and potential biases embedded within AI models present a critical challenge for their responsible adoption. Ensuring fairness, transparency, and accountability in AI applications is crucial for building trust and mitigating potential risks. This necessitates establishing robust ethical frameworks, implementing rigorous testing and monitoring procedures, and fostering open communication with stakeholders about the limitations and potential pitfalls of AI technology. From this Digital Leaders AI Attitudes Survey it appears that much more effort is still required to align organisations' AI ambitions with the robust responsible governance that is a precursor for success.

Digital leaders must acknowledge and proactively address these challenges to unlock the full potential of AI within their organisations. By focusing on data infrastructure optimization, talent acquisition and development, and ethical implementation, organisations can navigate the uncharted waters of enterprise AI adoption and achieve transformative results.

SURVEY FINDINGS

DIGITAL
LEADERS

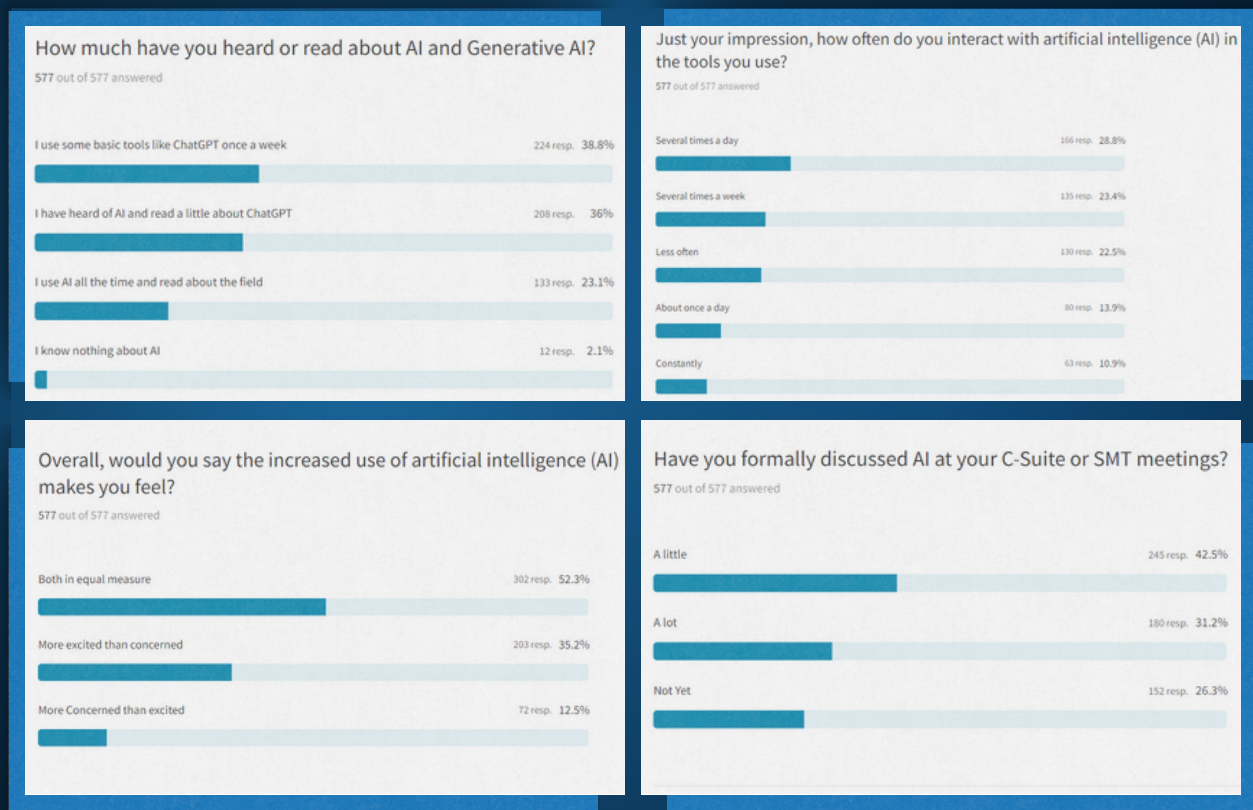
This Digital Leaders AI Attitudes Survey confirms what many of us have experienced first hand this past year: AI is a primary focus for digital leaders in all sectors and will be a major driver of digital strategies for the next few years. However, the data from this survey also highlights several of the key challenges that organisations face as they seek to institutionalise AI within their broader enterprise systems and structures.



Five key points have emerged from examining the data received from the 577 Digital Leaders who responded to the AI Survey. They are an important snapshot of our state of AI understanding and adoption in organisations.

1. AI IS ALREADY WIDELY DISCUSSED

It is no surprise to find that AI is widely discussed amongst digital leaders today. The survey found that almost two-thirds of respondents are discussing and using AI on at least a weekly basis. Furthermore, over three quarters of the respondents are interacting with AI during that period, with over a third already claiming to be using it every day. This is leading to significant discussion about AI at senior leadership levels according to almost three quarters of the respondents



“Digital Leader’s AI Attitudes Survey has established that AI is front and centre for leaders across government and all industries. I suspect that everyone with an online presence has used or interacted with AI in some form - wittingly or unwittingly. It is a powerful and now ubiquitous tool. The Digital Leaders Network is a trusted forum for professionals to come together to better understand, explore, debate, and converge on how best to responsibly harness and ensure that AI’s potential is used for good.”

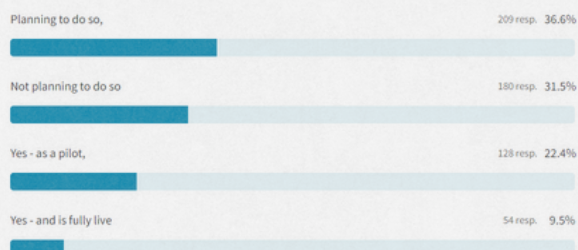
Elizabeth Vega OBE, Group CEO, Informed Solutions

2. AI USE IS A MIXED PICTURE

Despite the high degree of AI awareness, feedback from respondents on the experiences with AI reveal a more mixed picture. Almost a third claim to not yet have identified organisational AI use cases and almost two thirds have not assessed the impact of AI on their organisation. When looking specifically at Generative AI, more than four out of five organisations do not have an employee policy in place to govern its use.

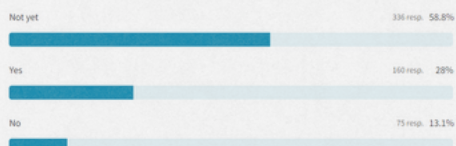
Have you deployed any Generative AI services?

571 out of 577 answered



Have you assessed the impact of AI on your organisation i.e potential increase in demand / service quality; or reduction in market competitiveness / service quality?

571 out of 577 answered



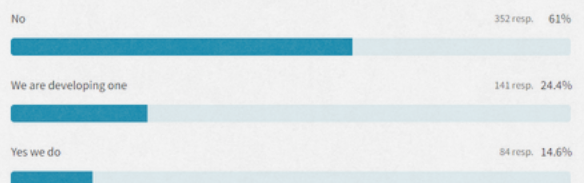
Have you identified use cases for AI within your organisation?

571 out of 577 answered



Do you have a Generative AI employee policy in your organisation?

577 out of 577 answered

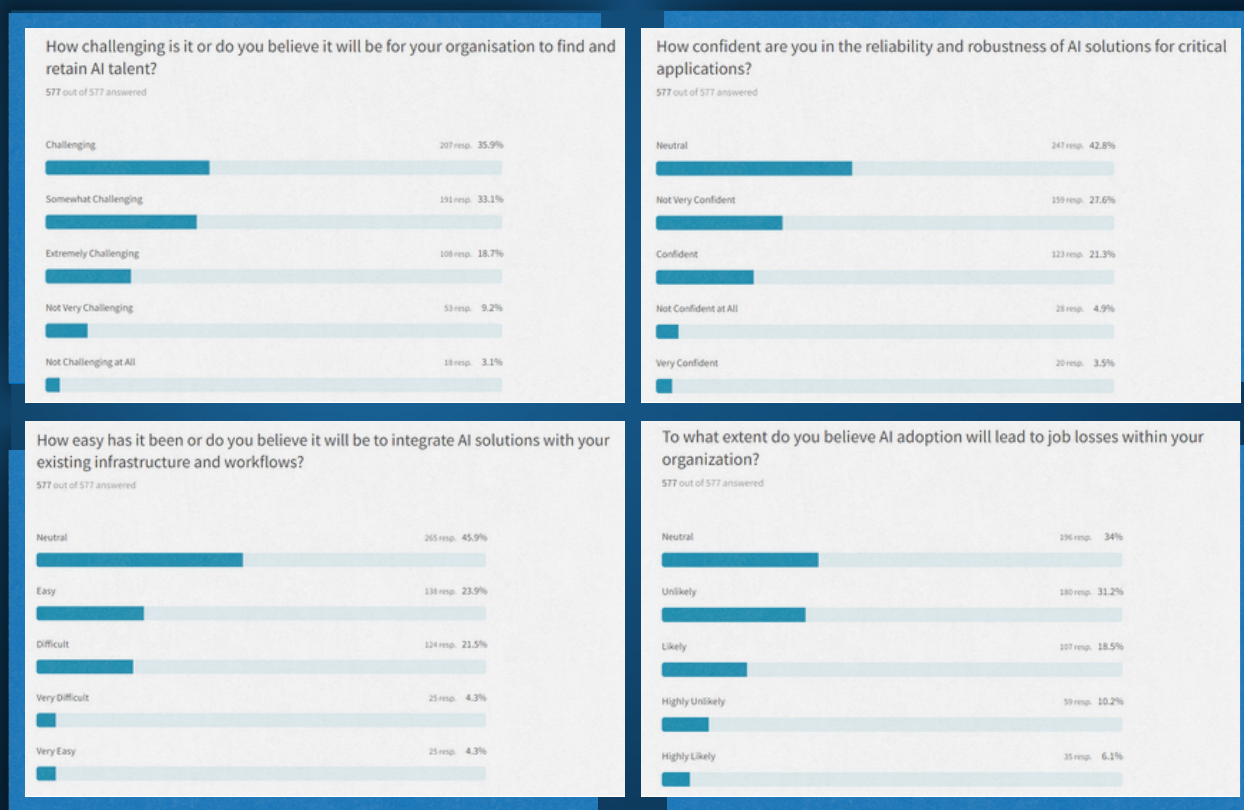


“In the evolving AI landscape, awareness alone is not enough. Uncovering untapped potential requires organisations to pinpoint AI use cases and assess impact. Particularly in Generative AI, lacking governance policies pose challenges, emphasising the urgency for strategic frameworks in navigating the uncharted realms of innovation”

Sabby Gill, CEO, Dext

3 AI ADOPTION IS CAUSING CHALLENGES

Broader institutional support for AI is experiencing challenges similar to those seen in all digital transformation efforts. When introduced across large established organisational structures and systems, almost half of the survey respondents reported that they are not confident that AI provides a positive impact on Return on Investment (ROI). Two of the main contributing factors involve difficulties in finding and retaining AI talent, and in integrating AI solutions into existing ways of working. In both cases over half of the respondents found these to be significant barriers to progress with AI. Interestingly, fear of job losses was only seen as an issue by less than a quarter of the survey's respondents.

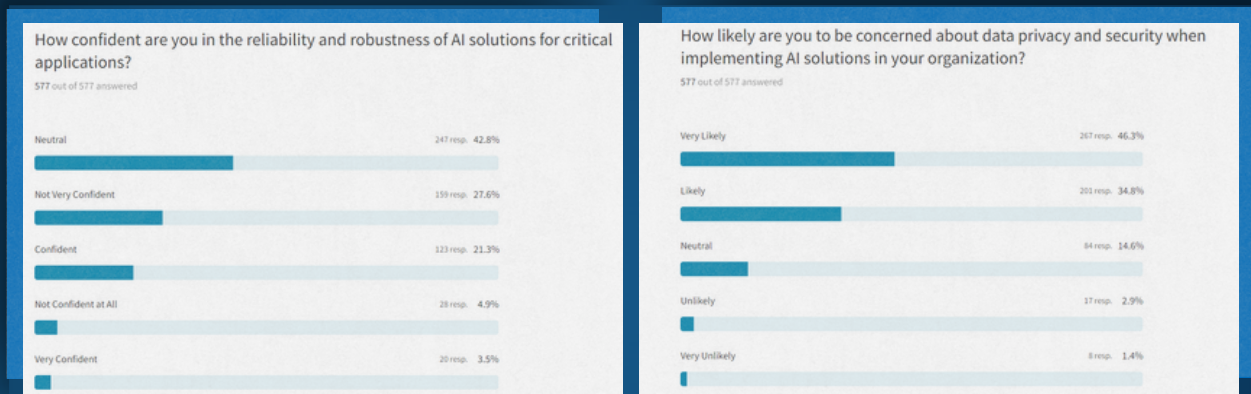


“As with all emerging technologies, AI holds the potential both to optimise existing ways of doing things, as well as to significantly disrupt them by doing something differently – or maybe even to do a different thing altogether. A mature approach to AI proceeds beyond the hype to be as clear-eyed as possible about which of these outcomes is desired, and to support them appropriately. In turn, clear strategic direction, and sponsorship, in these areas will assist in securing the right new talent, as well as upskilling and retaining existing talent, in order to make these changes a reality”.

Professor Mark Thompson

4 AI IMPACT ON SYSTEMS PERFORMANCE IS UNCLEAR

Additional concerns were raised when considering the performance of AI systems being introduced. Less than a quarter of the survey respondents had confidence in the reliability and robustness of those AI systems in critical applications. Data and privacy issues were seen to be a concern in more than nine out of ten of the survey respondents.



“Not unexpected, a key concern by respondents is that of trust. What surprised me was the scale of this level of concern (over 9 out of 10 respondents.) This continues to be an important factor for partners and collaboration in communities to surface and share how to build this trust, how to assure and ensure data and privacy concerns are surfaced, normalised in conversations and users engaged in the development of solutions”.

**Rox Heaton BME, CTO,
Macmillan Cancer Support**

5 AI BRINGS NEW LEADERSHIP CONCERNS

Given this feedback, it is unsurprising that survey respondents highlighted several areas where senior digital leaders must focus attention and build additional skills. They were almost unanimous in pointing out the importance of addressing ethics and bias issues in decision making, and in making AI systems transparent and accountable for decisions. However, in contrast, more than four out of ten survey respondents said that their organisation was not well prepared to comply with AI regulations, and less than two out of ten believed that their organisation had a framework for responsible AI in place.



"The survey highlights the leaders of today who understand that a paradigm shift in leadership is needed in this pivotal moment..We must embrace the ethical, transparent, and accountable use of AI as a core component of our strategic vision. The challenge of aligning AI with values, ethical standards and regulations is not just a compliance issue; it's an opportunity to lead with integrity and purpose, and build trust. By proactively addressing biases, ensuring transparency, and establishing robust frameworks for responsible AI, we can harness the transformative power of AI to create a more equitable and sustainable future we desire. Responsible AI is a strategic priority. Let's not just prepare for the change; let's be the architects of it."

Maria Luciana Axente, Head of AI Public Policy and Ethics, PwC



digileaders.com

