

# HUMANS STILL WANTED

## THE FUTURE OF WORK IN AN AI-DRIVEN WORLD

Thought Leadership



In today’s world, artificial intelligence (AI) stands as an important catalyst for change, transforming the landscape of business operations and the future of work.

An increasing number of CEOs are recognizing the potential of AI to drive internal productivity and operational efficiency. Though the AI market is relatively young, it is on a growth trajectory that promises a paradigm shift in business models and strategies. However, within this transformation, humans continue to play a critical role.

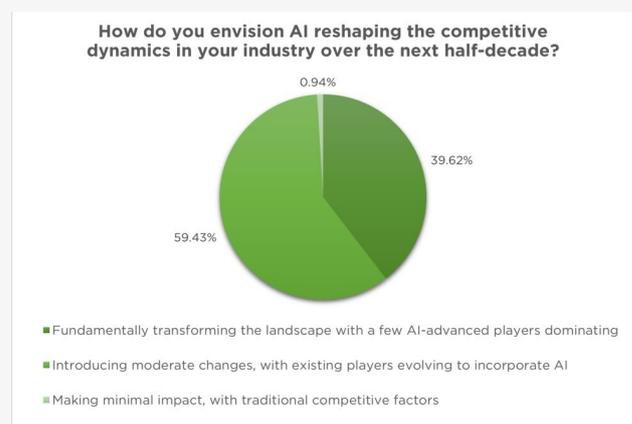
As with any emerging technology, AI is a disruption that will, in many ways, uproot the market. But one thing remains the same: the difference between success and irrelevance is an organization’s ability to adapt to change. So, to better understand how leaders are preparing for the AI shift, Korn Ferry surveyed over 240 CEOs and senior executives, representing medium to large-sized companies from around the world. Through their answers, we now have a clear picture of AI’s impact on the future of work, as well as whether organizations are ready for the changes to come. More importantly, we were able to gain insights into how AI will impact human capital—will people still matter or be automated out of a job?

Let’s explore what these leaders had to say.

### The AI-driven business is inevitable

Over the next 12 to 24 months, we expect CEOs to focus significantly on integrating AI solutions to boost performance while reducing operating expenses. Although AI is in its nascent stages, with most businesses contemplating or testing the technology, we do see a strong indication that AI integration will soon become a strategic necessity rather than a novelty. In fact, over 82% of CEOs and senior leaders we surveyed believe AI will have an extreme to significant impact on their business, with 73% closely monitoring for potential negative effects on their companies.

**Figure 1**  
Survey responses on how AI will reshape business in the future



As a result, businesses are making structural and operational changes to adapt to AI advancements. A considerable number of these changes are happening at the line-of-business level or through cross-functional working teams. With a significant majority of CEOs and senior executives planning to spend up to 50% more on AI-related strategies, it's clear that AI integration is moving from peripheral consideration to the core of business strategy.

Additionally, more than 33% of senior leaders surveyed say they are already experimenting with ways to leverage AI to boost productivity and operating efficiency. A quarter, on the other hand, report having a high area of focus on integrating AI into their products and services to create better market positioning versus the competition.

## The role of humans in the AI future

Even as AI becomes a formidable force in business, humans retain a central role. There is an understanding among CEOs that AI will automate many tasks, but humans will still play a critical part in decision-making processes based on AI inputs; over 37% of senior leaders surveyed believe the future will include people collaborating with AI. The focus, then, shifts from performing mundane tasks to utilizing human cognitive abilities for decision-making, strategic planning, and creative thinking.

However, this transition is not without its challenges. Most CEOs agree that their workforce is not fully prepared for AI integration, suggesting the need for significant upskilling and reskilling initiatives. Nearly 44% surveyed believe employees will need to develop new skills to equip themselves for the AI-driven business environment. AI integration also requires a meta-competency for change management, learning agility, and adaptability. This meta-competency, inherent to human beings, enables employees to adapt to new contextual situations using skills like emotional intelligence, trust-building, and empathy.

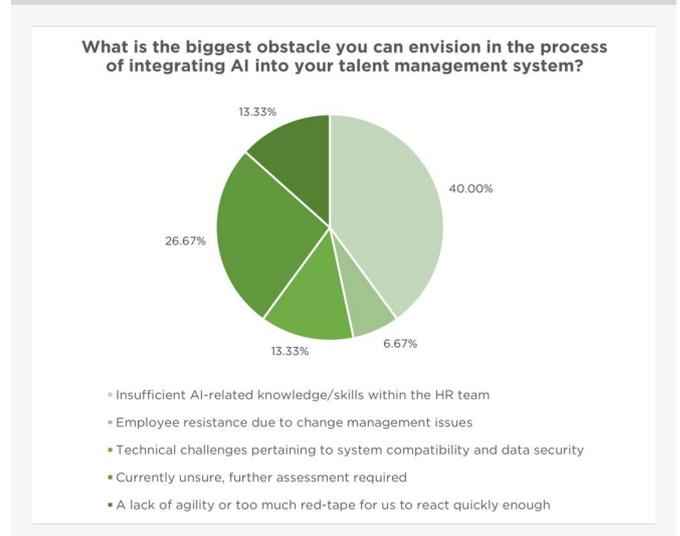
## Bridging the transformation gap

Despite the clear need for workforce preparedness, many CEOs lack specific plans to help employees adjust to AI. When asked to identify the biggest obstacle to AI integration, 40% of respondents cited a lack of AI-related knowledge and skills within their HR team, while roughly 13% named employee resistance due to change management issues. Another 27% said they were currently unsure. Given these numbers, the key focus now should be on planning and implementing an effective transformation program that closes the delta between leading a company that is ready for change and one that is unsure of whether their organization can survive this level of disruption.

Although the leaders recognize AI's potential and benefits, their uncertainty reflects a gap in their company's readiness to fully integrate AI. Bridging this gap requires concerted efforts in workforce training, fostering an AI-friendly culture, and developing strategies for AI integration.

**Figure 2**

Survey responses on the biggest obstacles to successful AI integration



A transformation program needs to encompass not only technical upskilling, but also the ability to leverage AI tools for strategic planning, decision-making, and creativity. It is vital to foster an organizational culture that views AI as a collaborator rather than a competitor. This involves encouraging a mindset where AI is seen as a tool that augments human abilities, freeing up time for more high-value tasks.

## AI & humans: Collaborators in a new world

The rise of AI in business is imminent and unstoppable. After all, AI promises immense potential—for business growth, for efficiency, and for innovation. But it's essential to remember that AI and humans are not competitors in this new world. Instead, they are important collaborators—humans will continue to play an indispensable role in the workplace, applying their unique cognitive abilities to leverage AI's capabilities.

As businesses navigate their journey towards AI integration, they should focus on developing comprehensive strategies that involve AI integration, workforce upskilling, and creating an AI-friendly culture. Together, humans and AI can redefine the future of work, ensuring success in the AI-driven world.

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