

The Human Factor

How the Industrial Workforce
Is Experiencing AI and
Automation

An Xcelerator Community
Pulse Study
July 30, 2026



SIEMENS

About This Report

A Pulse Survey Supported by Broader Industry Research

A community “pulse check” on how AI and automation are reshaping industrial work alongside the latest independent research on the same questions.

This is the second annual research effort from the Siemens Xcelerator Community, following last year's study of generative AI adoption.

This year's edition shifts the lens to the human and organizational side of that transformation:

- how leaders are managing change,
- how practitioners are experiencing it day to day, and
- where the gaps are showing up.

These findings are a qualitative “pulse check” on the SXC. We pair each finding with recent, reputable research from the broader field.

Where the community's experience matches that of the wider industry, that's a useful confirmation. Where it diverges, that's also an interesting story.

Methodology note: 46 SXC members responded. Given the sample size, percentages throughout should be read as directional signal, not precise measurement.

Who Responded

A Cross-Section of SXC Membership

A cross-section of SXC members, weighted toward Siemens employees, with meaningful representation from partners and customers.

Of the respondents:

- 57% identified as Siemens employees,
- 26% as Siemens partners, and
- 11% as Siemens customers.

Respondents spanned more than **2 dozen industries.**

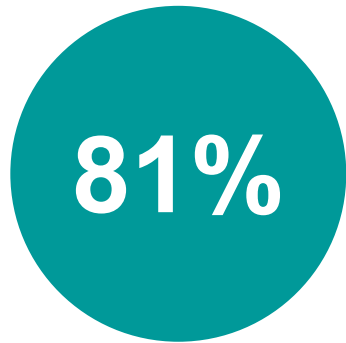
With representation from **electronics (13%)** and **food and beverage (11%)**, alongside **automotive, chemicals, healthcare, logistics**, and a long tail of specialized sectors from **cranes** to **wind power**.

That breadth means the findings reflect a genuinely cross-industrial view rather than one dominated by a single vertical, though the smaller sample means no single industry cut should be read too precisely.

The Findings in Brief

Confidence Is High, Structure Is Thin

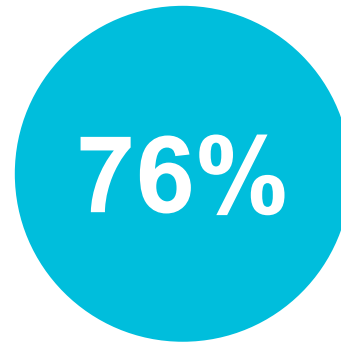
ADOPTION



are investing in or piloting agentic AI

63% say their day-to-day use of AI tools expanded over the past year, and 35% are already deploying agentic systems at scale.

SENTIMENT



say workforce sentiment has turned more positive

Outright negativity is rare; only 11% report a decline. But the optimism doesn't extend to feelings about job security. Just under half expect their workforce to shrink within three to five years.

STRUCTURE



have a formal strategy for the human side of AI

Only 26% call their organization's workforce adaptation efforts effective, and about one in five say no formal steps have been taken at all.

80% agree that the organizations that lead will be **the ones investing as much in people as in technology**.
Asked what to do first, nearly half said training, more than triple any other answer.

One Year Later: AI Use Keeps Expanding

Adoption Has Moved From Experimentation to Habit

63% of respondents say their organization's use of AI tools in day-to-day operations has expanded, significantly or moderately, over the past twelve months.

Asked to rate that change on a five-point scale (1 = pulled back or not meaningfully started, 5 = significantly expanded), respondents leaned decisively toward expansion, averaging 3.89 out of 5. Only 9% reported pulling back or not having meaningfully started. That builds directly on last year's baseline, when 87% of the community already reported some professional use of generative AI.

McKinsey's 2025 State of AI survey found 88% of organizations now use AI in at least one business function, up from 78% a year earlier, though only 23% report scaling it meaningfully. The SXC's trajectory looks consistent with that broader pattern: adoption is real and growing, but the harder work of scaling remains ahead for most.



say daily AI use has expanded in one year

The Shift Toward Agentic AI Is Already Underway

The Community Is Ahead of the Broader Curve

81% of respondents say their organization is either actively investing in agentic AI or piloting it in limited contexts.

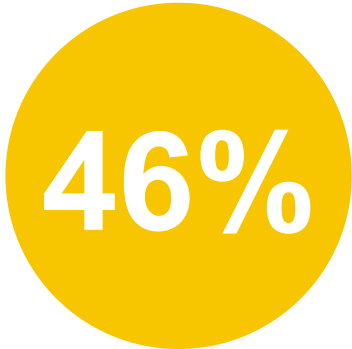
35% report actively deploying agentic systems at scale, and another 46% are piloting or experimenting. Only 6% describe their organization as cautious, skeptical, or not yet engaged.

For comparison, McKinsey's 2025 State of AI survey found 23% of organizations actively scaling an agentic AI system in any business function, with another 39% experimenting. The SXC figures land slightly higher, but the comparison should be read cautiously: this sample is majority Siemens employees, a company actively building and promoting agentic AI products, and the sample size (46) is small relative to McKinsey's nearly 2,000 respondents.



35%

**Deploying
Agentic AI
at Scale**



46%

**Piloting
Agentic AI**

How Work Is Actually Changing

Pace, Automation, and New Roles Lead the List

52% of respondents say AI has accelerated the speed of work and raised output expectations.

48% report that routine tasks have been automated to free up time for higher-value work, and 41% say new roles or skill requirements have emerged. In the open-ended responses, the single most common theme (raised by a third of respondents) was AI's role in content creation, documentation, and meeting support: drafting emails, summarizing reports, generating first drafts of presentations. Research and decision support was the second most common theme.

PwC's 2026 Global AI Jobs Barometer, based on more than a billion job postings, finds that roles where AI automates routine tasks and elevates human judgment are growing nearly twice as fast (39%) as roles where AI mainly simplifies tasks (17%). That "professionalizing" effect, AI clearing away the routine so human judgment matters more, closely mirrors what SXC respondents describe happening inside their own teams.



**say AI has accelerated
the speed of work**

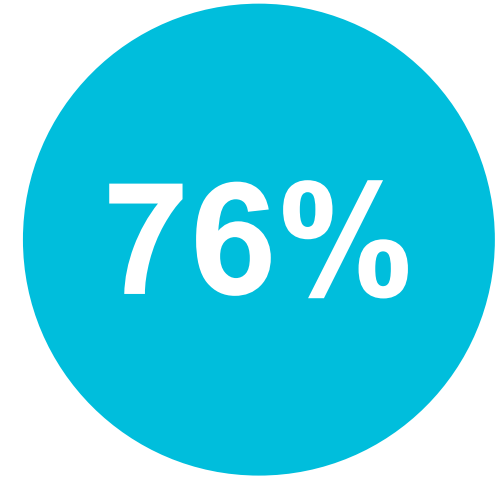
"AI significantly boosts productivity by automating repetitive tasks. It takes care of routine data analytics, consolidates fragmented data, and generates quick summaries. This gives us a clear baseline to work from."

Sentiment Is Cautiously Optimistic, and Getting More So A Brighter Mood Than the Broader Workforce

76% of respondents say workforce sentiment toward AI has become more positive over the past year; only 11% report a decline.

Regarding sentiment today, 67% describe it as either largely optimistic or leaning positive with cautious enthusiasm. Another 28% describe sentiment as genuinely divided, with meaningful optimism and concern in roughly equal measure, and 4% describe it as largely indifferent. No respondents said current sentiment was predominantly negative.

Gallup's State of the Global Workplace 2026 found that 18% of U.S. employees believe it's likely their job will be eliminated within five years due to automation or AI, rising to 23% in organizations that have already implemented AI — a reminder that job security concerns remain real even where overall sentiment is positive. As with the agentic AI figures above, this comparison should be read with caution: our SXC sample is weighted toward Siemens employees, partners, and customers more deeply engaged with AI, which likely shapes a more favorable view than a general workforce sample would produce.



**say workforce
sentiment toward AI
has become more
positive**

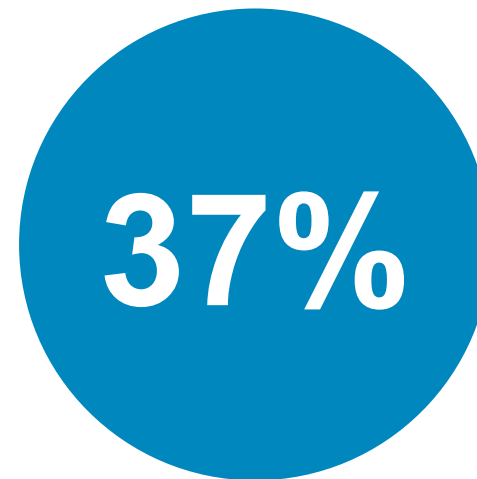
Organizations Are Investing, But Unevenly

Access Is Outpacing Structured Investment

65% of organizations have given employees access to self-directed AI learning resources; only 37% have launched formal reskilling programs.

Roughly one in five respondents say their organization has taken no formal steps at all to help workers adapt. The pattern that emerges is one of light-touch enablement (tools, access, informal encouragement) outpacing structured investment (formal programs, new roles, dedicated budget).

The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 found that 85% of employers globally name upskilling their existing workforce as their top workforce strategy for the AI transition, and that internal reskilling costs roughly 30% less than external hiring. The intent is clearly there industry-wide; the SXC data suggests the follow-through, at least in formal terms, still has room to grow.



**have launched formal
reskilling programs**

Effectiveness Ratings Are Middling

Doing Something Isn't the Same as Doing It Well

Only 26% of respondents rate their organization's workforce adaptation efforts as strongly effective; half rate them as adequate.

Asked how effective their organization's efforts to help the workforce adapt to AI have been so far, roughly as many respondents rated efforts poorly (24%) as rated them well (26%), with half landing in the middle. One nuance worth flagging: about one in five respondents said their organization has taken no formal steps at all, yet still answered this question, mostly rating it a 1 or a 3.

Deloitte's 2026 Global Human Capital Trends report, drawing on 9,000 leaders across 76 countries, found that only 8% of organizations consider their change management and learning initiatives highly effective at helping workers keep pace with AI-driven change. The SXC figures track closely with that finding, suggesting this is a broader industry pattern.



**say workforce
adaptation efforts are
effective**

Formal Strategy Remains the Exception, Not the Rule

Governance Still Lags Behind Usage

Only 13% of respondents say their organization has a formal strategy for managing the human dimensions of AI adoption; 22% aren't even sure whether one exists.

Asked whether their organization has a formal strategy or framework for managing the human dimensions of AI adoption, another 30% selected "we have informal practices but no formal strategy," and 26% selected "a strategy is in development." Combined with last year's finding that 43% of professional GenAI users had no formal usage policy at all, this points to a governance gap that has persisted even as usage has expanded.

This lines up with what multiple 2026 industry surveys are finding at a global level. Deloitte's State of AI in the Enterprise research found that while 74% of organizations plan to adopt agentic AI within two years, only 21% currently have a mature governance model in place for it. Grant Thornton's 2026 AI Impact Survey put it plainly: planning to build a strategy is not the same as building one.



**say their organization
has a strategy for
managing the human
factors of AI adoption**

Leadership Alignment Is More Common Than Not Attention to the Human Side Is Real, But Not Universal

52% of respondents say their senior leadership is aligned on prioritizing the human side of AI transformation, not just the technology; only 15% see meaningful misalignment.

Respondents were asked how aligned their senior leadership is on the importance of the human dimensions of AI transformation: communication, culture, and workforce impact, as distinct from the technology rollout itself. Just over half rated their leadership as aligned or fully aligned and actively championing it; only 15% saw real misalignment.

Deloitte's 2026 Human Capital Trends survey found a striking gap at the global level: 66% of leaders say designing effective human-AI collaboration is important, but only 6% say they're making great progress on it. Recognition of the challenge appears to be outpacing organizations' ability to act on it, a pattern the SXC data doesn't contradict.



**say leadership is
aligned on AI's impact
on employees**

What Leaders Most Consistently Underestimate

The People Challenge Wearing a Technology Costume

Asked what leaders get wrong, SXC respondents converged on one idea more than any other: this is fundamentally a people and culture challenge, not a technology one.

The next most common theme was the emotional and psychological weight of the transition on individual employees: fear, trust, and the sense of being left to navigate the change without support. A close third was the pace of change simply outstripping the guidance and readiness organizations have provided.

Deloitte's 2026 research found that 42% of workers say their organization isn't evaluating AI's impact on people at all, and only 40% of leaders say they design AI initiatives around both business and human outcomes together. The SXC responses suggest this isn't an abstract concern. It's what practitioners are actually noticing about how their own organizations operate.

What Leaders Underestimate

1. Culture challenges
2. Employee fears
3. Speed outpacing preparation
4. Loss of tacit knowledge

"AI adoption is primarily a behavior change challenge, not a technology challenge."

Investing in People Is Seen as Non-Negotiable

The Community Agrees, Almost Unanimously

80% of respondents agree or strongly agree that the organizations that will lead in the AI era are the ones investing as much in their people as in their technology.

This is one of the strongest and most consistent findings in the dataset with little disagreement. Respondents were similarly clear on what drives success: clarity of vision for what AI is meant to accomplish was the single most cited cultural factor (52%), followed closely by trust between leadership and the workforce and investment in reskilling (each 35%).

McKinsey's State of Organizations 2026 report reaches a strikingly similar conclusion from a different angle, recommending that for every dollar an organization spends on AI technology, it should spend roughly five dollars enabling its people to use it well. The framing differs, but the underlying conviction is the same.



**say leading
organizations invest as
much in people as tech**

Looking Ahead: A Mixed Outlook on Headcount

Optimism on Sentiment Doesn't Extend to Job Security

Just under half of respondents expect some reduction in workforce size over the next three to five years; only 17% expect growth.

The single most common answer (37%) was modest headcount reduction paired with meaningful role shifts, followed by stable headcount with significant role transformation (24%). Only a small minority expect AI to be a net job creator inside their own organization, a notably more cautious outlook than the sentiment data alone would suggest.

The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 projects a net global gain of 78 million jobs by 2030 (170 million created against 92 million displaced), but flags that the transition is uneven: of every 100 workers globally, 59 will need reskilling or upskilling, and 11 of those are unlikely to receive it. The SXC respondents' more cautious internal outlook may reflect a closer, ground-level view of how unevenly that transition is actually landing.



**expect a reduction in
workforce size**

What the Community Says Would Help Most Training, By a Wide Margin

Training and upskilling was, by a wide margin, the single most common answer when respondents were asked what their organization should prioritize over the next twelve months.

Nearly half of all respondents raised it, more than triple the next most common theme: open, transparent communication about strategy and impact. A smaller but notable group specifically called for trust, psychological safety, and clear governance as prerequisites for the transition to work.

The emphasis on training tracks with WEF's finding that 85% of employers globally plan to prioritize workforce upskilling as their primary AI transition strategy. What the SXC qualitative data adds is a ground-level detail those aggregate figures don't capture: several respondents specifically called for hands-on, role-specific training over generic information sessions, a distinction that's easy to miss in top-line adoption statistics.

Top Priorities for the Next 12 Months

1. Hands-on training and upskilling
2. Open, transparent communication
3. Trust and psychological safety

"Abandon the overinflated hype and provide hands-on training, not just information sessions, for realistic use cases."

Two Views of the Same Transition

Where Leaders and Practitioners Diverge

WHAT LEADERS HAVE PUT IN PLACE	THE GAP	WHAT PRACTITIONERS REPORT
<div>13%</div> <div>have a formal strategy for the human side of AI</div> <div>30% have informal practices only; 22% do not know</div>	<div>50 pts</div> <div>GOVERNANCE</div> <div>Use is running well ahead of the rules meant to steer it.</div>	<div>63%</div> <div>say day-to-day AI use expanded over the past year</div> <div>3.89 average on a five-point scale; only 9% pulled back</div>
<div>37%</div> <div>have launched a formal reskilling program</div> <div>65% offer self-directed access; one in five, nothing</div>	<div>15 pts</div> <div>SUPPORT</div> <div>Demands rose faster than the support offered to meet them.</div>	<div>52%</div> <div>say the pace of work and output expectations rose</div> <div>48% saw routine tasks automated; 41% saw new roles</div>
<div>52%</div> <div>say senior leadership is aligned on the human side</div> <div>only 15% see real misalignment; attention is genuine</div>	<div>24 pts</div> <div>GOODWILL</div> <div>The one gap running the other way. Mood is ahead of management.</div>	<div>76%</div> <div>say workforce sentiment has turned more positive</div> <div>11% report a decline; 13% say it's stayed about the same</div>

26%	call workforce adaptation efforts effective	~50%	expect their workforce to shrink within five years	80%	say leaders must invest in people as much as technology
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From Enthusiasm to Infrastructure

Where the Work Goes Next

1

Put the strategy in writing.

Only 13% have a formal framework for the human side of AI adoption, and 22% do not know whether one exists. Informal practice is not governance, and agentic deployment is outpacing the rules meant to steer it.

3

Say what you know about headcount.

Sentiment is positive, yet just under half expect their workforce to shrink within three to five years. Open communication was the second most requested priority and trust the third. Silence on the hardest question undercuts both.

2

Make training hands-on and role-specific.

Training was the top request by a factor of three, and respondents were precise about which kind: real use cases for their own job rather than general information sessions. 65% have access to self-directed resources; 37% have a formal program.

4

Start measuring readiness.

Only 26% call their organization's efforts effective, and Deloitte finds 42% of workers say their employer is not evaluating AI's impact on people at all.

What members asked the SXC for: practical guidance on structuring human-AI collaboration, and case studies of organizations that are managing the transition well.

Sources and Further Reading

What This Report Draws On, and Where to Go Next

Cited in this report

- McKinsey & Company, ["The State of AI: Global Survey 2025"](#) (November 2025)
- McKinsey & Company, ["The State of Organizations 2026"](#)
- Deloitte, ["2026 Global Human Capital Trends"](#)
- Deloitte AI Institute, ["The State of AI in the Enterprise, 2026" \(8th edition\)](#)
- PwC, ["2026 Global AI Jobs Barometer"](#)
- World Economic Forum, ["Future of Jobs Report 2025"](#)
- Gallup, ["State of the Global Workplace 2026"](#)
- Grant Thornton, ["2026 AI Impact Survey"](#)

Further reading

- Microsoft, ["2026 Work Trend Index Annual Report"](#)
Finds organizational factors account for roughly twice the AI impact of individual skill. The closest match to this report's central gap.
- Boston Consulting Group, ["AI at Work: Why Strategy Matters More Than Tools"](#)
A clear strategy lifts AI's measured impact by 25 percentage points; better tools alone lift it by five. Direct support for the first move.
- The Manufacturing Institute, ["The AI Opportunity Most Manufacturers Haven't Acted On Yet"](#)
The industrial view: over four in ten provide no AI training to frontline employees, and the near-term need is practical literacy, not expertise.
- Stanford HAI, ["2026 AI Index Report"](#)
The broadest independent baseline on adoption, economics and public opinion. Useful for sanity-checking any single firm's numbers.

Method: 46 members of the Siemens Xcelerator Community responded. Given the sample size, percentages throughout should be read as directional signal, not precise measurement.

END