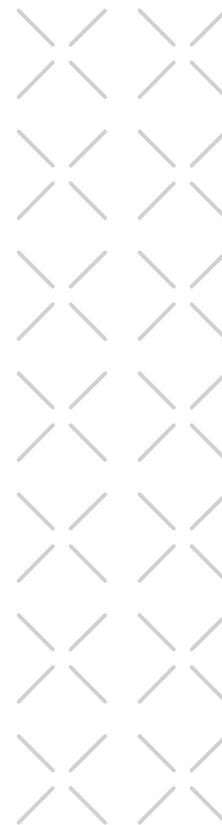




FUTURE LEADERSHIP DECODED

AI at Work

A Cross-Generational Perspective
on the Leadership Choices That
Will Shape the Value of AI at Work



About NIM and the St. Gallen Symposium

NUREMBERG INSTITUTE FOR MARKET DECISIONS

The Nuremberg Institute for Market Decisions (NIM) is a non-profit research institute at the interface of academia and practice. NIM examines how consumer decisions change due to new technology, societal trends, or the application of behavioral science and what the resulting micro- and macroeconomic impacts are for the market and for society as a whole. A better understanding of consumer decisions and their impacts helps society, businesses, politics, and consumers make better decisions with regard to “prosperity for all” in the sense of the social-ecological market system.

The Nuremberg Institute for Market Decisions is the founder of GfK.



Nürnberg Institut für Marktentscheidungen e.V.

Steinstrasse 21 | 90419 Nuremberg | Germany
phone: +49 911 95151-983
email: hello@nim.org
www.nim.org

ST. GALLEN SYMPOSIUM

The St. Gallen Symposium is one of the world’s leading initiatives for cross-generational dialogue. Our goal is to promote more responsible, long-term leadership by fostering meaningful and critical engagement between generations. Founded in 1969, the initiative is driven by a team of about 25 students, the International Students’ Committee, and a team of professionals, the St. Gallen Foundation for International Studies. Our annual main symposium brings together around 700 senior executives from business and policy with 200 young change-makers from around the world at the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland. Through various impact projects, we actively promote sustainability and long-term thinking through intergenerational leadership.



St. Gallen Symposium

Dufourstrasse 83 | 9000 St. Gallen | Switzerland
phone: +41 71 22720-20
email: info@symposium.org
www.symposium.org

About the Voices of the Leaders of Tomorrow

Buder, Fabian (2026): AI at Work – A Cross-Generational Perspective on the Leadership Choices That Will Shape the Value of AI at Work. Voices of the Leaders of Tomorrow 2026. Nuremberg Institute for Market Decisions & St. Gallen Symposium.

© 2026 by Nuremberg Institute for Market Decisions & St. Gallen Symposium
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the prior permission of the copyright holders.

Two generations. One leadership challenge.

The Voices of the Leaders of Tomorrow (VOLOT) Report brings the perspectives of emerging leaders into strategic debates that matter for business. By comparing the views of Leaders of Tomorrow with those of senior executives, the report shows where expectations of future leaders align with current leadership thinking and where important tensions are already visible.

The 2026 edition looks at one of the defining leadership questions of the coming decade: how AI should shape work, decision-making, and human capability. It asks not only what AI can do, but also what kind of organizations leaders want to build with it.

Voices of the Leaders of Tomorrow 2026

- > **Focus:** AI at Work
- > **Lens:** Comparing Leaders of Tomorrow and senior executives
- > **Method:** Global surveys conducted in January and February 2026
- > **Participants:** 585 Leaders of Tomorrow and 100 senior executives from large corporations

Editorial

Artificial intelligence (AI) is moving from a technological breakthrough to a common part of business infrastructure. As it becomes embedded in everyday work, the leadership challenge is no longer whether to adopt AI, but how to shape the conditions under which people will work with it, trust it, and benefit from it.

This transformation will be fundamentally human. The more capable AI becomes, the more important it is to define what should remain distinctly human: judgment, responsibility, creativity, and the ability to exercise meaningful control. The real strategic question is not how far AI can go, but what kind of work and what kind of organization leaders want it to create.

This report combines the perspectives of the Leaders of Tomorrow and senior executives to show where expectations already align and where important tensions are emerging. Those differences matter. They reveal not only how future leaders think about AI, but also what kinds of organizations they are likely to trust, join, and help build.

*AI will reshape work at scale.
Whether it earns lasting support
will depend on the leadership
choices that determine what AI
strengthens, how it is governed,
and who benefits from its gains.*

Dr. Fabian Buder

Nuremberg Institute for Market Decisions

Kaspar Köchli

St. Gallen Symposium

Main Results

1

**AI Strategy
Must Start with
a Human North Star**

What should AI strengthen?

Leaders of Tomorrow see AI's greatest value in facilitating better decision-making, faster learning, higher-quality output, and more meaningful work for humans. The real strategic choice is not whether to deploy AI, but what human capabilities it is meant to strengthen.

2

**Performance Gains
Will Fail Without
Legitimacy**

When do AI gains lose legitimacy?

AI is seen as highly valuable in knowledge work, analysis, communication, and routine tasks. However, support weakens when AI erodes human skills, reduces agency, or creates privacy, fairness, and legitimacy concerns.

3

**AI Adoption Depends
on Enablement,
Not Access**

What makes AI usable at scale?

Training, clear rules, redesigned workflows, and stronger capabilities for reviewing and using AI effectively are what make AI usable at scale. However, many organizations seem to lack the skills, structures, and decision safeguards needed to use them well.

4

**Trust Requires Visible
Accountability and
Human Control**

What makes corporate AI trustworthy?

Trust in corporate AI use remains conditional, especially among Leaders of Tomorrow. Trust grows when AI use is transparent, responsibility is clear, and meaningful human control remains in place.

5

**AI Productivity Gains
Must Be Reinvested
in People**

Who should benefit from AI productivity gains?

Whether AI creates lasting value will depend on how productivity gains are used. Leaders of Tomorrow reject a labor-cost logic and expect those gains to be reinvested in people through better work and credible transition support.

Chapter

1



FUTURE LEADERSHIP **DECODED**

AI Strategy Must Start with a Human North Star

Leaders of Tomorrow see AI's greatest value in facilitating better decision-making, faster learning, higher-quality output, and more meaningful work for humans. The real strategic choice is not whether to deploy AI, but what human capabilities it is meant to strengthen.

Better Work, Not Just More AI, Is the Shared Direction

AI is expected to reshape work at scale. The more important question is what organizations want AI to strengthen once it becomes embedded in everyday work.

Leaders of Tomorrow point clearly toward a human-centered answer: AI should strengthen judgment, accelerate learning, improve quality, and create more meaningful work.

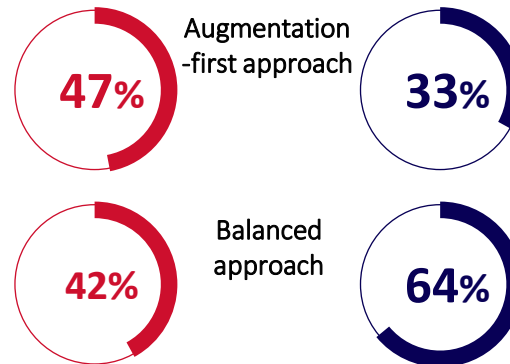
That preference is also visible in the strategic models respondents favor: augmentation-first among Leaders of Tomorrow and a balanced portfolio among senior executives.

AI will reshape work.



Leaders of Tomorrow **Senior executives**
expect a large or transformational impact.

Human-centered AI models are favored.



Leaders of Tomorrow **Senior executives**

More time for meaningful work is the clearest shared outcome.



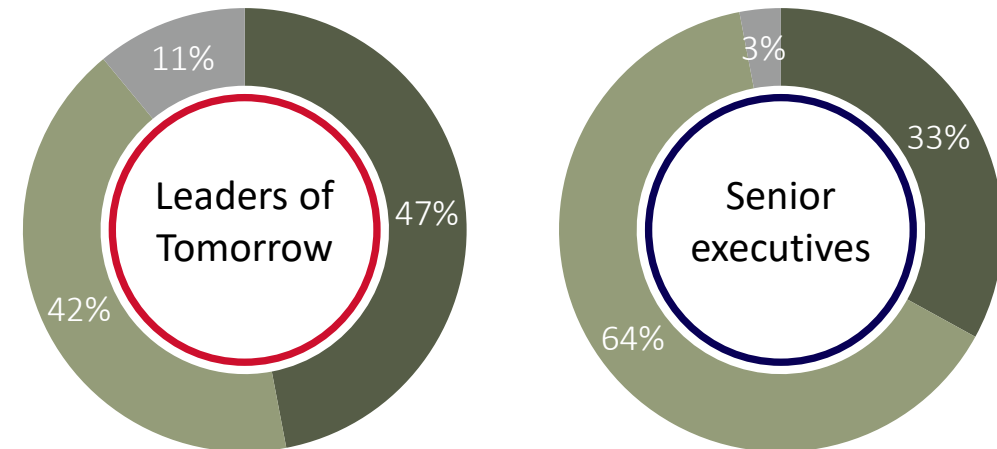
Leaders of Tomorrow **Senior executives**
favor more time for meaningful work.

Enhancing Human Capabilities Is Preferred Over Automating Work

Asked how organizations should use AI, both generations of leaders reject an automation-first model. Leaders of Tomorrow lean most strongly toward an augmentation-first approach, meaning AI is used primarily to support people and strengthen human work. Senior executives prefer a broader, balanced portfolio, combining augmentation and automation depending on task and risk. Support for automation-first, where AI is used primarily to replace human tasks wherever possible, remains limited.

The point is not resistance to AI, but a preference for AI models that keep human capability central.

Human-centered AI models clearly dominate.



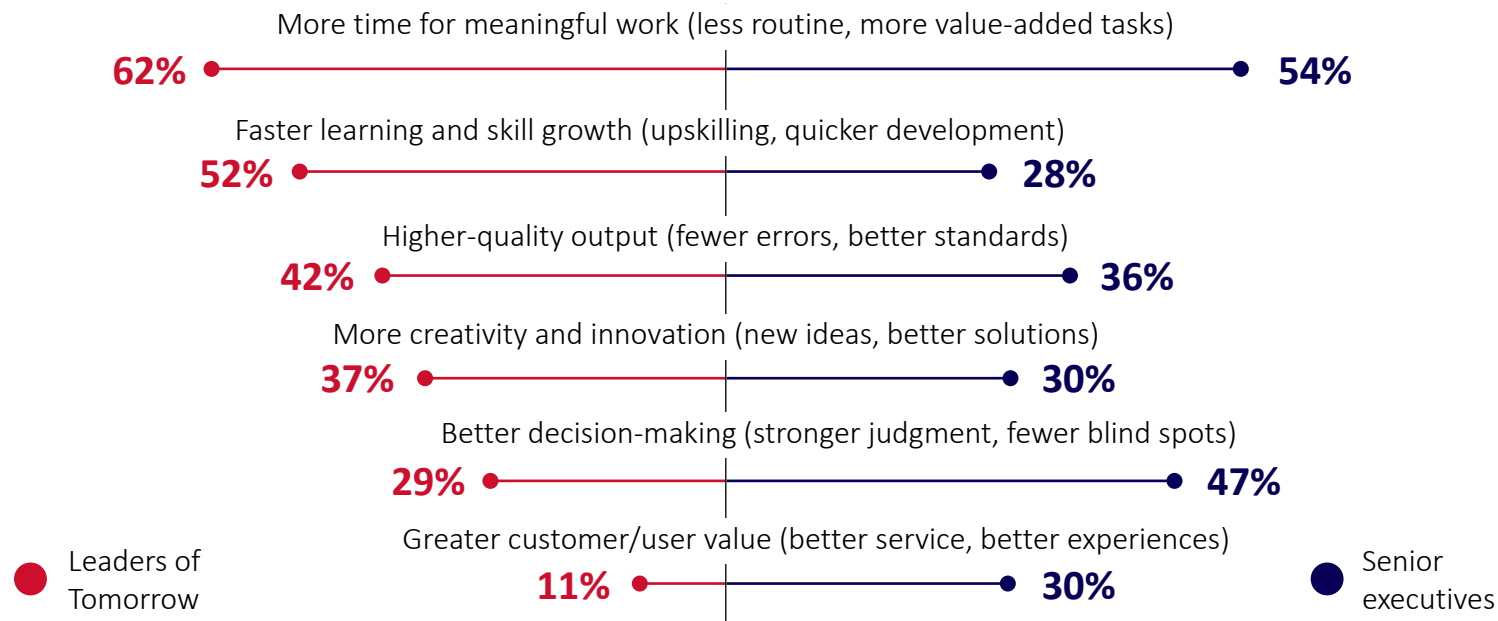
- **Augmentation-first:** AI should primarily support and enhance human work, with humans remaining the main performers and decision-makers.
- **Balanced portfolio:** AI should be used as a mix of automation and augmentation, depending on the task, role, and risk level.
- **Automation-first:** AI should primarily replace or fully automate tasks wherever feasible, with humans mainly supervising exceptions.

Leaders of Tomorrow n = 585 | Senior executives n = 100 | Voices of the Leaders of Tomorrow 2026

AI Creates the Most Value When It Strengthens Human Work ...

AI-enabled excellence means better work, not just faster work.

Which outcomes best capture what it means for AI to help people achieve exceptional results at work?



Shared priority centers on meaningful work. Generational differences appear in defining what “better work” should deliver.

Respondents do not define AI-enabled excellence as speed alone. They value AI most when it creates more meaningful work and strengthens learning, quality, judgment, and creativity.

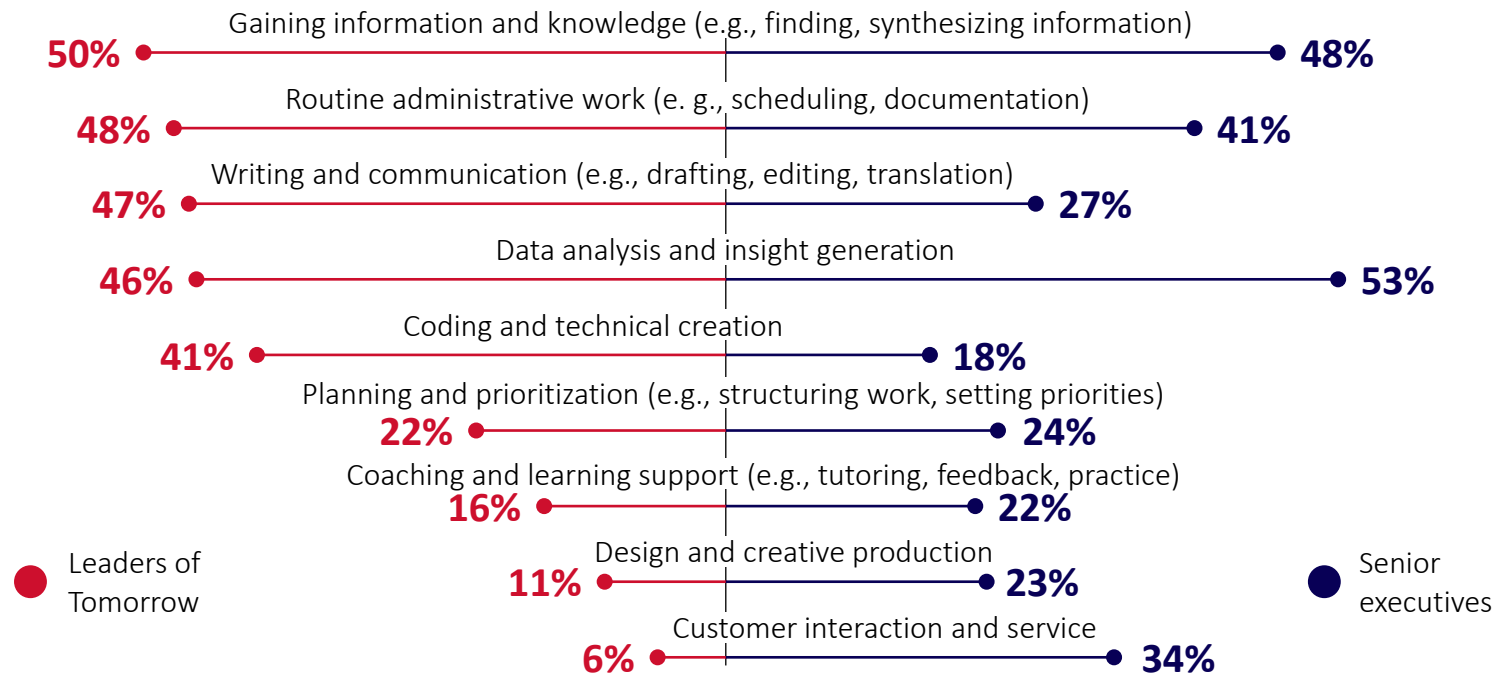
Leaders of Tomorrow emphasize learning and creativity more strongly, while senior executives place more weight on decision quality and customer value. One way to read this difference is simple: early career professionals learn with AI, while established leaders decide with it.

Share of respondents selecting each item as one of up to three outcomes that best capture AI-enabled excellence to them
 Leaders of Tomorrow n = 585 | Senior executives n = 100 | Voices of the Leaders of Tomorrow 2026

... and Expands Human Capability

AI's strongest advantages are seen in knowledge work and routine relief.

In which areas does AI have the greatest potential to enhance human performance at work?



Leaders of Tomorrow are especially positive about writing and coding, while senior executives place greater weight on data analysis and knowledge access.

Respondents see the strongest potential for AI to enhance human workplace performance by expanding cognitive work rather than replacing it.

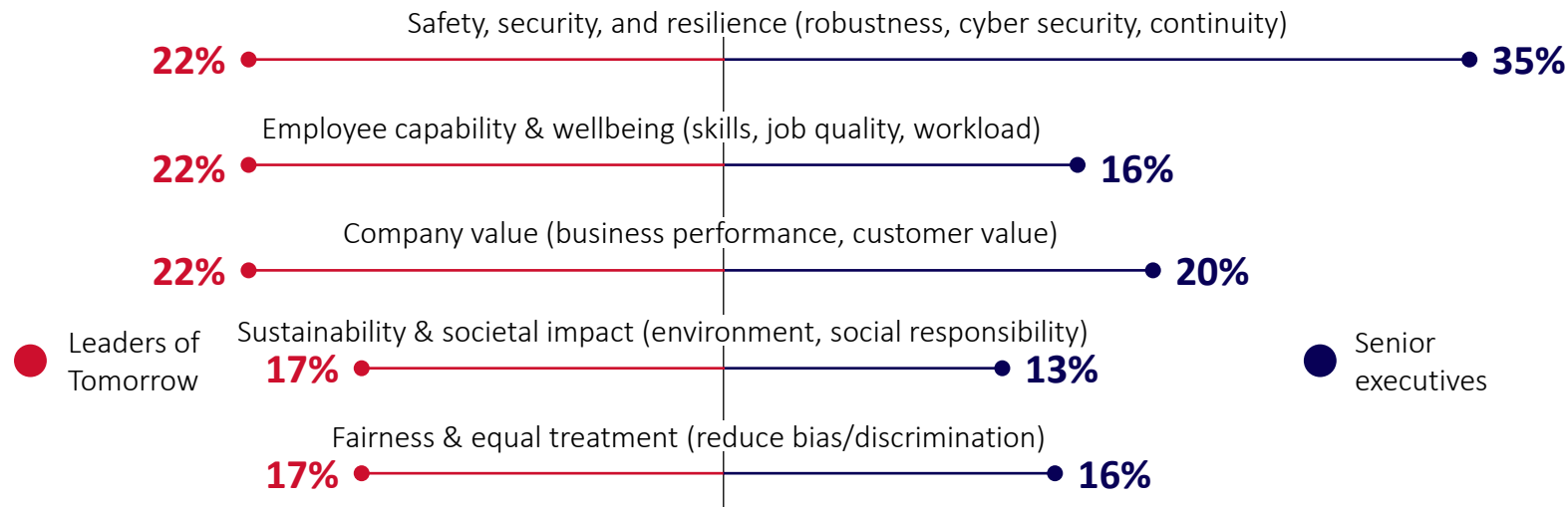
The most prominent use cases are information and knowledge acquisition, data analysis, routine administrative work, and writing-related tasks.

Share of respondents selecting each item as one of up to three areas in which AI has most potential
 Leaders of Tomorrow n = 585 | Senior executives n = 100 | Voices of the Leaders of Tomorrow 2026

Strategy for AI at Scale Is Ultimately a Question of Purpose

Which outcomes should organizations prioritize when deploying AI at scale?

Imagine a company is deploying AI broadly across its organization. How should it prioritize the following outcomes?
Please distribute 100 points across the outcomes below to reflect their relative priority.



At scale, executives prioritize resilience; younger leaders spread value across performance, people, and society.

Once the focus shifts from individual AI use cases to organization-wide deployment, the differences between the two generations become more strategic. Senior executives place the greatest weight on resilience and institutional control. Leaders of Tomorrow distribute priorities more broadly across capability, value, fairness, and sustainability.

Choosing the strategic path for the widespread use of AI is therefore not merely a technological decision. It is a decision about the purpose of AI and the goals it is intended to serve.

Fixed-sum question (100 points) | Numbers are averages of distributed points.
Leaders of Tomorrow n = 585 | Senior executives n = 100 | Voices of the Leaders of Tomorrow 2026

What Leaders of Tomorrow Are Calling For



Define Human Value

Be explicit about the human value AI is meant to create.



Prioritize Augmentation

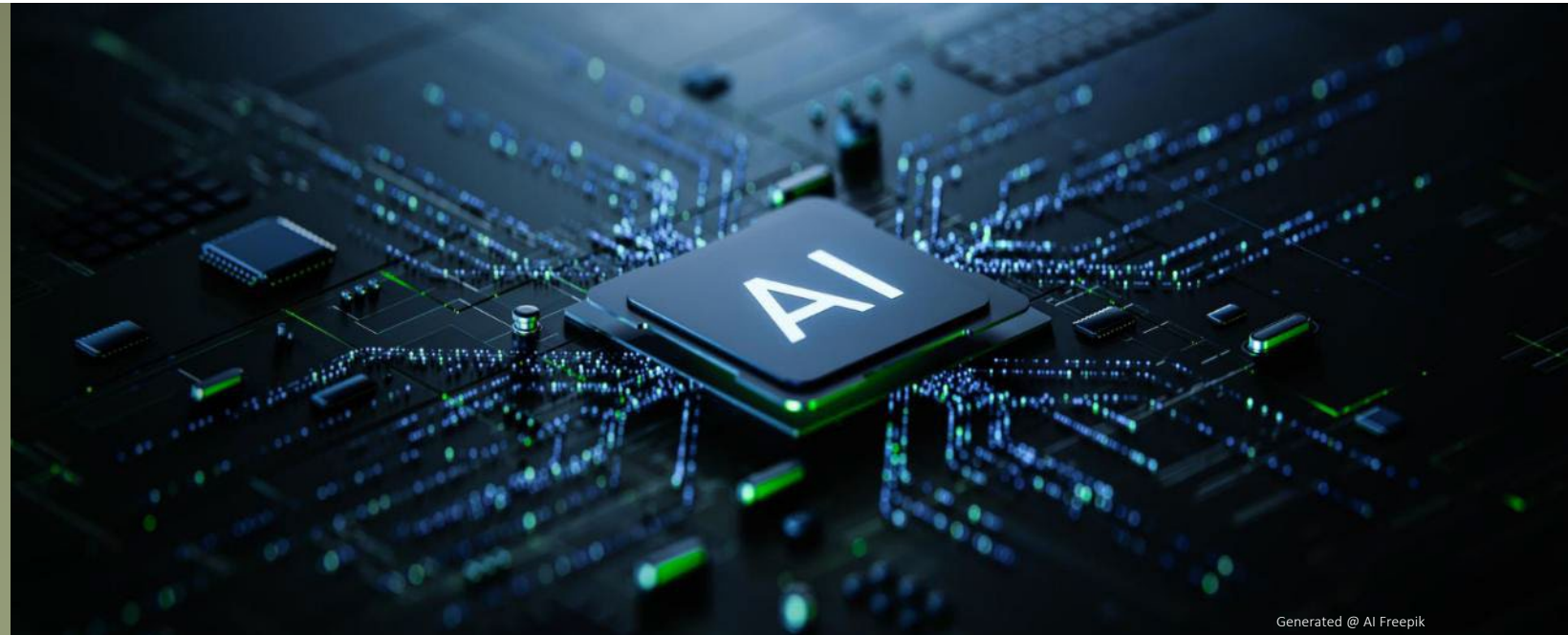
Use AI first to strengthen judgment, learning, quality, and meaningful work.



Keep Humans Accountable

Reserve human judgment where trade-offs are complex or consequences are significant.

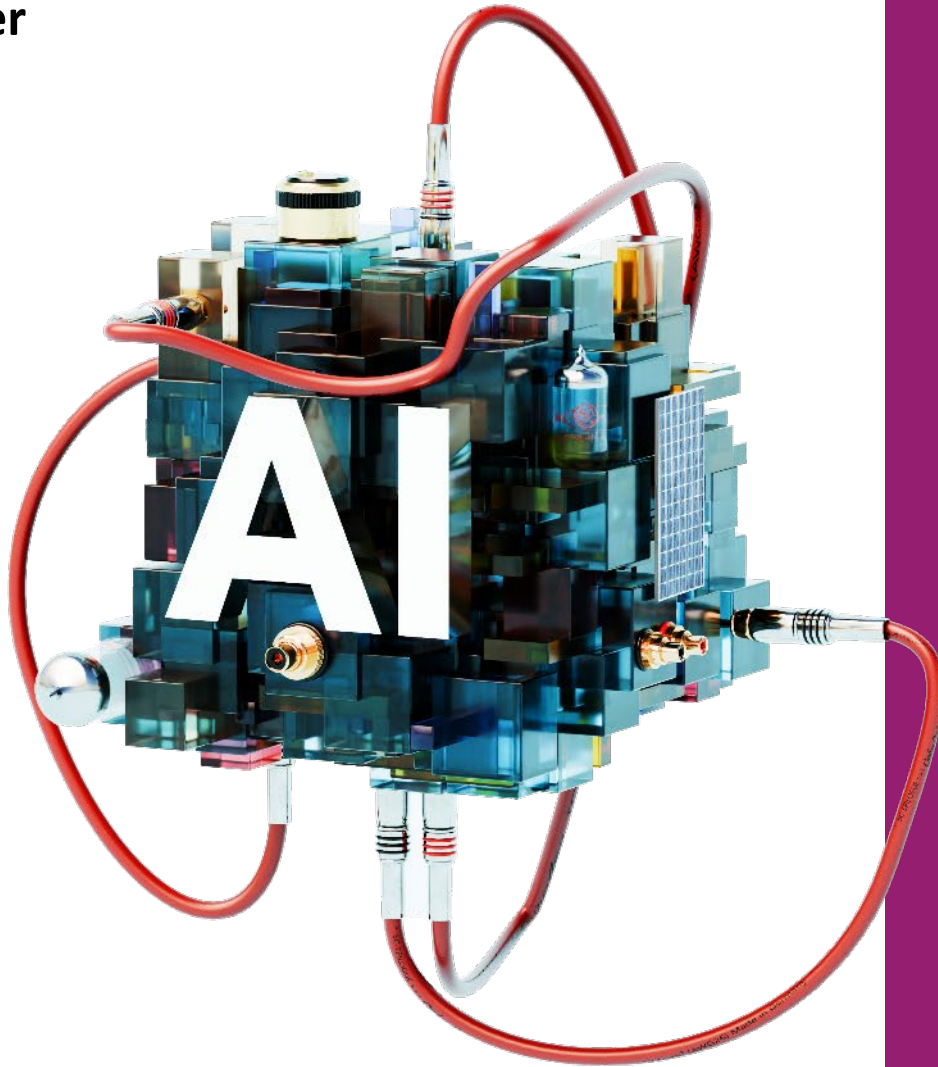
Future leaders want AI to expand human capability, not reduce human relevance. They expect organizations to use AI to strengthen judgment, learning, quality, and meaningful work; keep human judgment central where trade-offs are complex, or consequences are significant; and build that model on clear rules, explainability, and responsible deployment.



Generated @ AI Freepik

Chapter

2



Source: Gettyimages

FUTURE LEADERSHIP **DECODED**

Performance Gains Will Fail Without Legitimacy

AI is seen as highly valuable in knowledge work, analysis, communication, and routine tasks. However, support weakens when AI erodes human skills, reduces agency, or creates privacy, fairness, and legitimacy concerns.

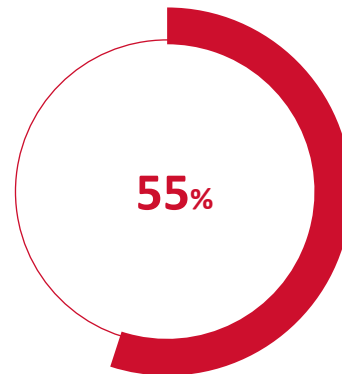
Performance Stops Convincing When Human Costs Rise

AI's performance potential is no longer in doubt. Leaders from both generations see clear value in using AI to process information, generate insight, support communication, and reduce routine burdens.

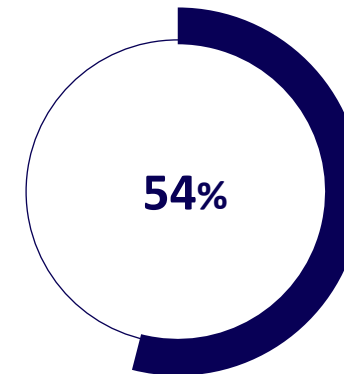
However, that support is conditional. It weakens when AI begins to erode expertise, reduce human discretion, or rely on forms of data use and decision-making that feel intrusive or unaccountable.

What could undermine acceptance?

Deskilling is the top concern for **Leaders of Tomorrow.**



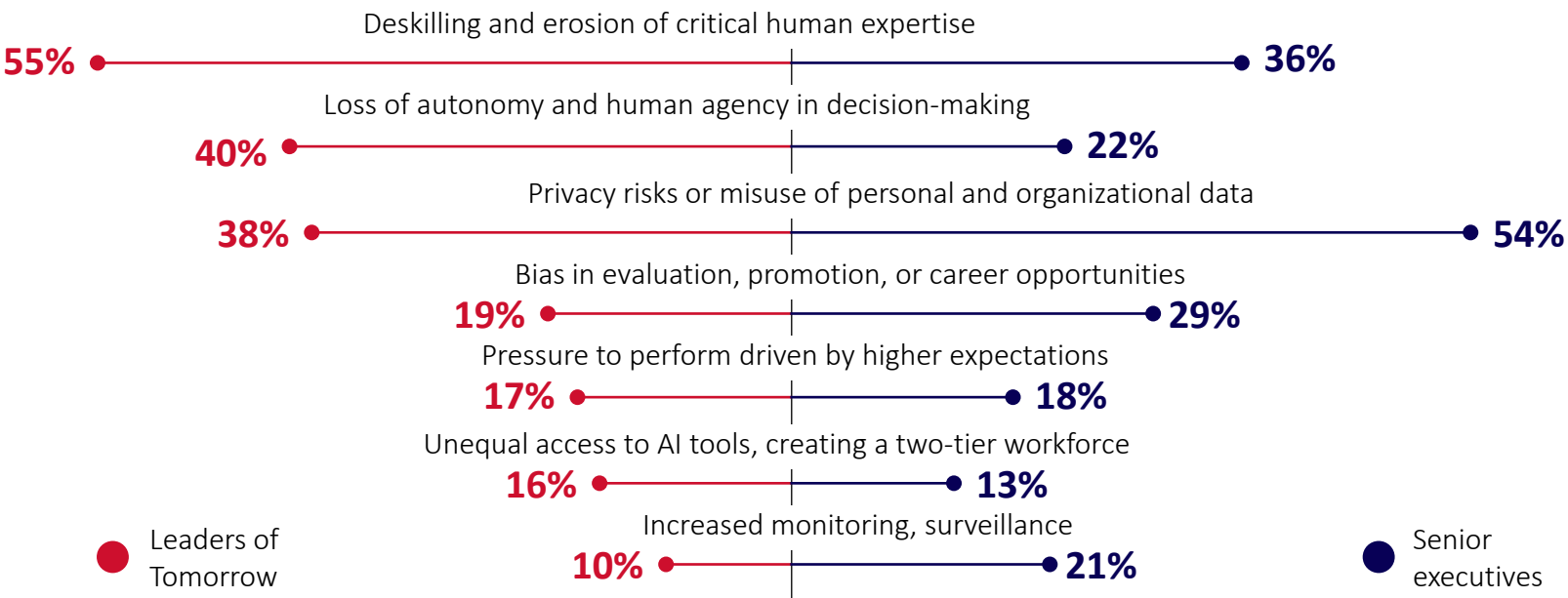
Privacy is the top concern for **senior executives.**



AI Loses Support When It Erodes Agency and Expertise

The biggest risks are deskilling, loss of agency, and the erosion of privacy.

When organizations use AI to boost employees' performance at work, what do you see as the two biggest risks?



Leaders of Tomorrow worry most about the erosion of human skills. Senior executives focus on data protection and institutional risk.

The strongest concerns are not about whether AI works, but about what it does to people at work. Leaders of Tomorrow are especially concerned about deskilling and the loss of autonomy. Senior executives focus more strongly on privacy risks and data misuse.

This points to a deeper tension. AI promises higher performance, but support for its use weakens when it imposes a human cost by eroding expertise, reducing agency, or making people subject to intrusive or unaccountable systems.

Share of respondents selecting each item as one of the two biggest risks | Leaders of Tomorrow n = 585 | Senior executives n = 100 | Voices of the Leaders of Tomorrow 2026

Human-Centered AI Requires Guardrails, Not Just Speed

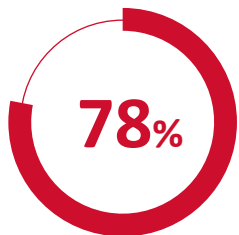
Support for AI does not come with a move-fast-at-any-cost mentality. Across all three trade-offs, both generations lean toward AI models that strengthen human skills, embed safeguards, and remain explainable.

The preferred model is not unrestricted AI performance. It is AI performance that remains governable.

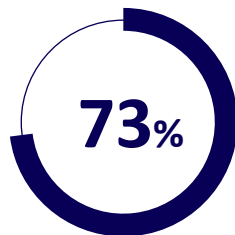
Guardrails are not a brake on AI strategy. They are part of what makes that strategy acceptable.

The preferred AI model combines human enhancement with explicit safeguards.

Redesign work so it strengthens human skills and judgment.

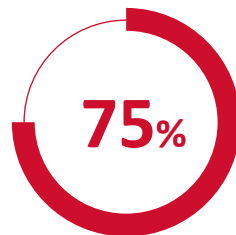


Leaders of Tomorrow

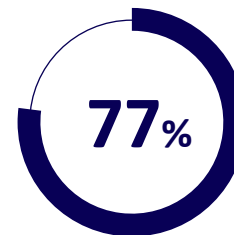


Senior executives

Put clear rules and safeguards in place, even if this slows deployment.

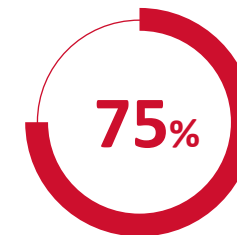


Leaders of Tomorrow

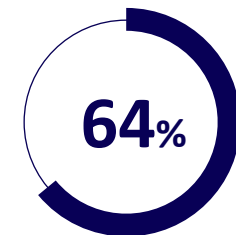


Senior executives

Prioritize explainable AI, even if this means lower peak performance.



Leaders of Tomorrow



Senior executives

Aggregated results from bipolar trade-off questions with a directional scale | Leaders of Tomorrow n = 585 | Senior executives n = 100 | Voices of the Leaders of Tomorrow 2026

What Leaders of Tomorrow Are Calling For



Protect Expertise

Prevent deskilling and keep critical human skills in active use.



Protect Agency

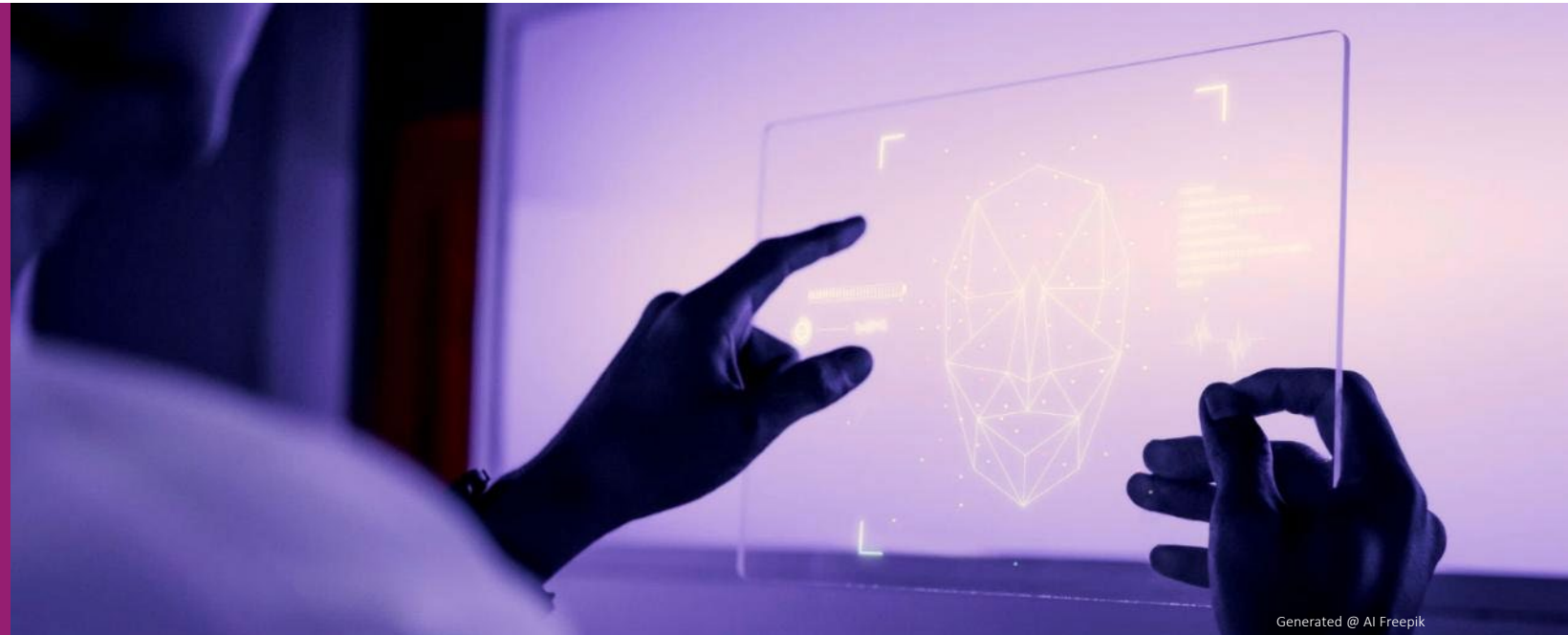
Ensure people retain meaningful discretion in how work is done and decisions are made.



Set Boundaries

Rule out intrusive, unfair, and unaccountable uses of AI.

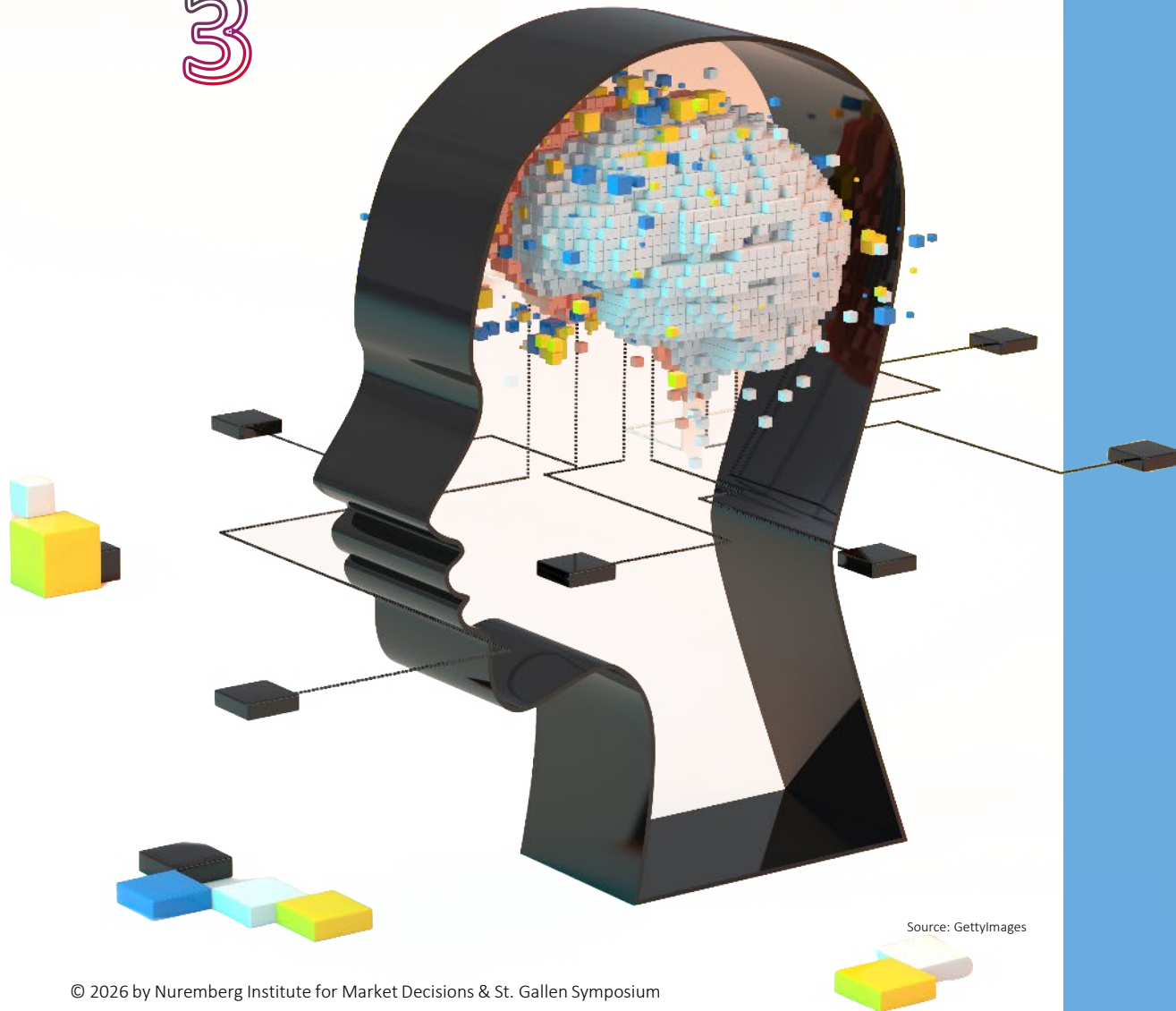
Future leaders reject AI models that weaken expertise, reduce human discretion, or expose people to unfair, intrusive, or unchallengeable systems. AI will earn durable support only when performance gains do not come at the cost of skills, agency, and legitimacy at work.



Generated @ AI Freepik

Chapter

3



Source: Gettyimages

FUTURE LEADERSHIP **DECODED**

AI Adoption Depends on Enablement, Not Access

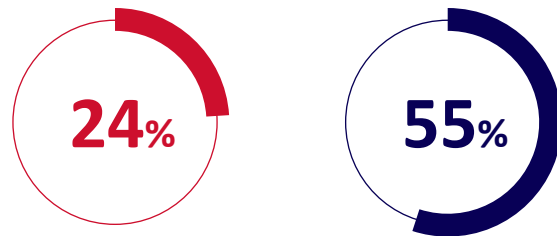
Training, clear rules, redesigned workflows, and stronger capabilities for reviewing and using AI effectively are what make AI usable at scale. However, many organizations seem to lack the skills, structures, and decision safeguards needed to use them well.

The Real Bottleneck Is Organizational Readiness

The real challenge regarding AI at work is whether organizations can create conditions that make AI tools usable, scalable, and effective in everyday tasks.

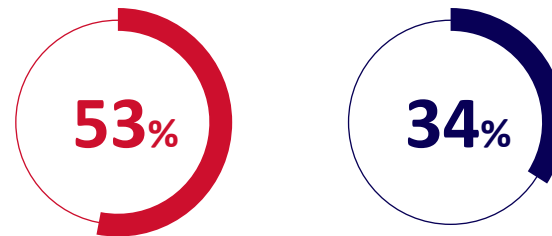
Leaders of Tomorrow highlight the importance of training, practical guidance, and workflow redesign. What the workplace lacks is not interest in AI, but the organizational setup that turns experimentation into reliable everyday use.

Overall, the next generation of leaders considers readiness to be weak.



Leaders of Tomorrow **Senior executives**
agree that organizations are ready to manage AI-supported decisions responsibly.

The biggest gap is responsible-use capability.



Leaders of Tomorrow **Senior executives**
identify the ability to detect bias, errors, or unintended consequences as one of the biggest capability gaps of today's organizations.

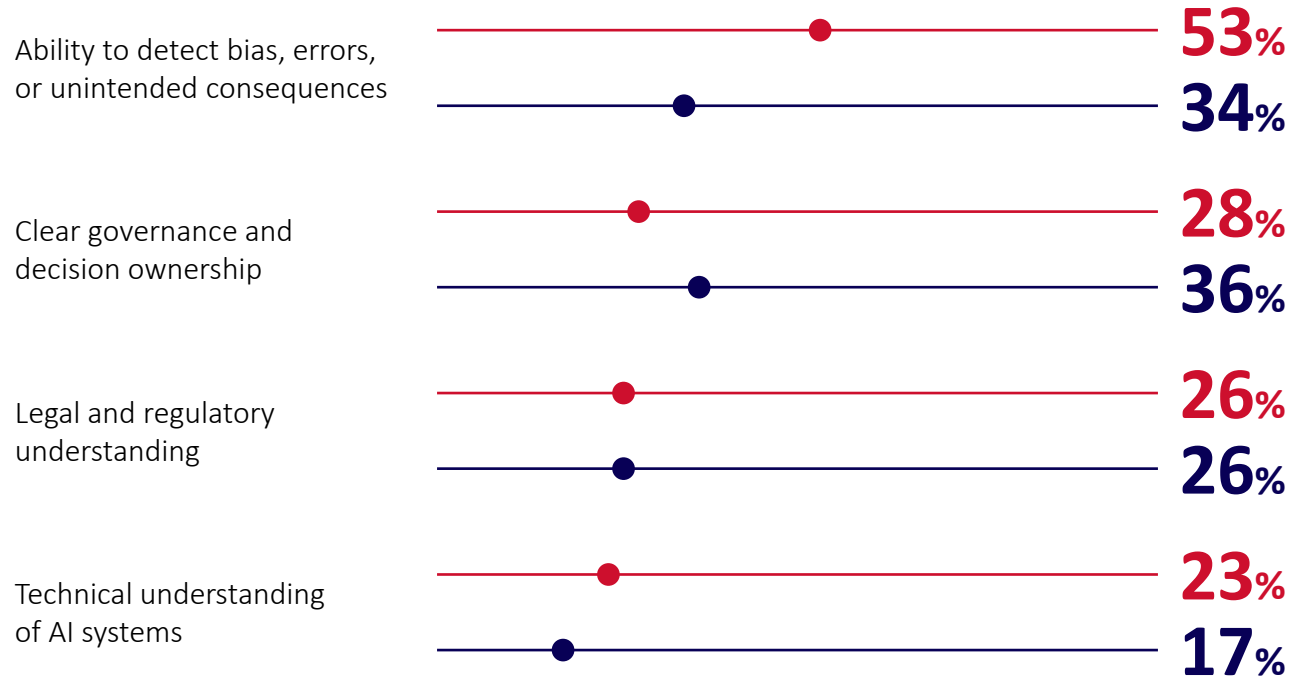
Training is the top enabler.



Leaders of Tomorrow **Senior executives**
identify training as a top enabler of effective AI use.

Responsible AI Management Capability Remains Thin

The biggest capability gaps in organizations relate to recognizing bias, errors, or unintended consequences.



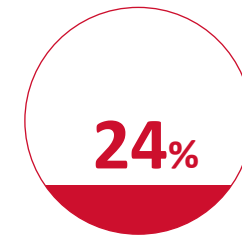
The challenge is not technical understanding of AI, but the capability to use it well, monitor it critically, and manage it reliably in practice.

Left: Share of respondents selecting each item as one of the two biggest capability gaps

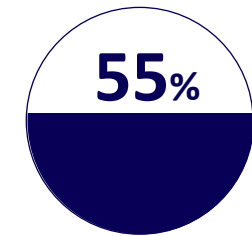
Right: Share of respondents who “Agree” or “Strongly agree” with the statement “Organizations currently have the necessary capabilities to responsibly manage AI-supported decisions.”

Leaders of Tomorrow n = 585 | Senior executives n = 100 | Voices of the Leaders of Tomorrow 2026

Only a minority of Leaders of Tomorrow believe organizations currently have the capabilities needed to manage AI-supported decisions responsibly.



Leaders of Tomorrow



Senior executives

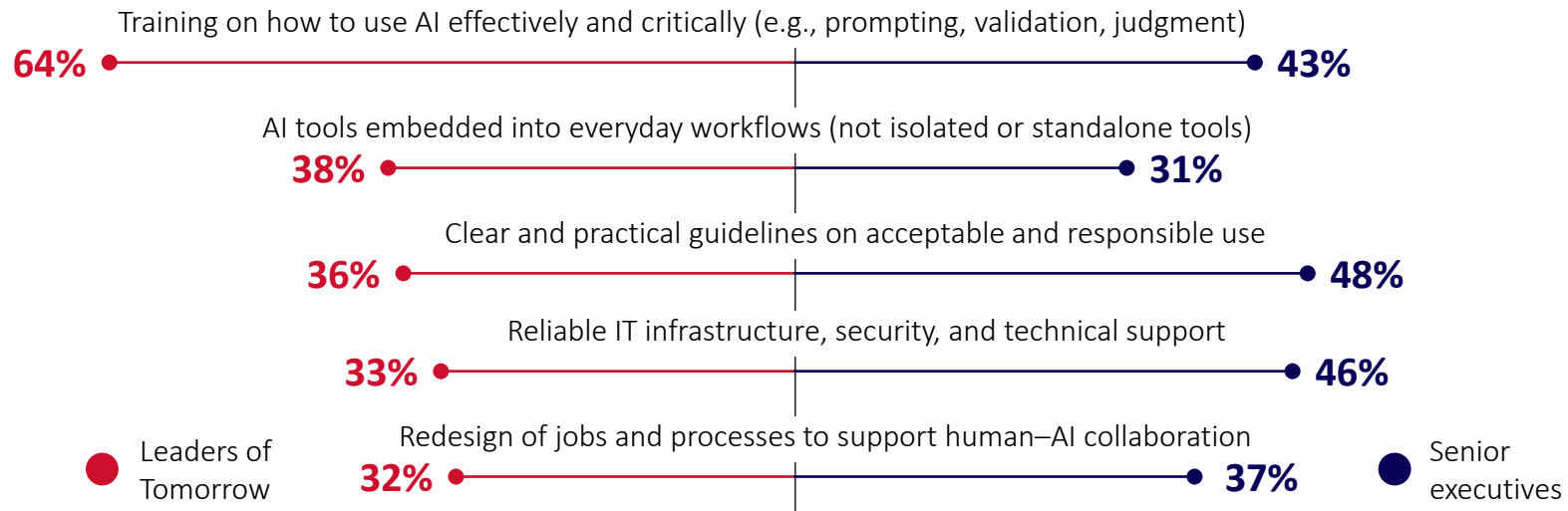
Senior executives are more confident, but even among them, confidence is far from universal.

Where future leaders see the biggest capability gaps, the solution is highly practical: organizations need to get better at detecting bias, errors, and unintended consequences; clarify governance and decision ownership; and strengthen their understanding of legal and regulatory frameworks.

Training Emerges as the Primary Enabler of Effective AI Use

Enablement starts with training, practical rules, and AI embedded into work.

Which of the following are the three most important enablers for AI to enhance people's performance at work?



Leaders of Tomorrow prioritize human capability first.
Senior executives place more emphasis on system conditions.

Leaders of Tomorrow see training for users as the single most important condition for effective AI use at work. Senior executives also rank training highly but place more emphasis on practical guidelines, infrastructure, and job redesign. Across both groups, the message is clear: effective AI use depends on concrete conditions that enable its use in everyday work.

What companies need most is a practical approach that helps employees use the technology effectively—through training, clear guidelines, and workflows designed to facilitate human-AI collaboration.

Share of respondents selecting each item as one of up to three most important enablers for AI
Leaders of Tomorrow n = 585 | Senior executives n = 100 | Voices of the Leaders of Tomorrow 2026

What Leaders of Tomorrow Are Calling For



Build Critical AI Skills

Train people to use AI effectively, verify outputs, and exercise judgment.



Embed AI in Workflows

Integrate AI into everyday routines with practical rules and guidance.



Clarify Review Roles

Define who checks outputs, validates decisions, and escalates issues.

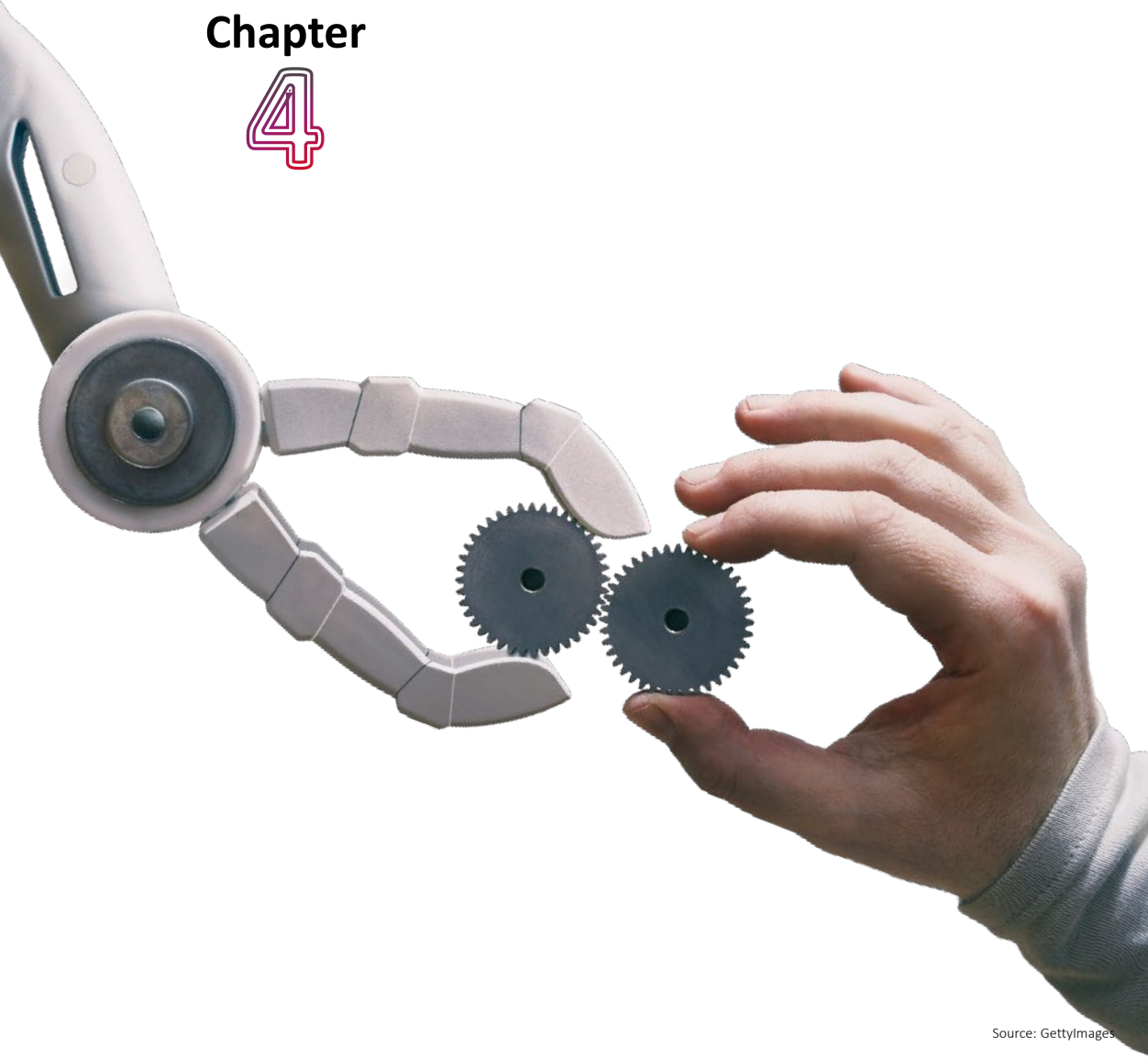
Future leaders do not see AI scaling as a tooling problem. They expect organizations to make AI usable in everyday work by building practical skills, setting clear rules for AI-supported work, and clarifying who reviews outputs, validates decisions, and escalates issues when needed.



Generated @ AI Freepik

Chapter

4



Source: Gettyimages

FUTURE LEADERSHIP **DECODED**

Trust Requires Visible Accountability and Human Control

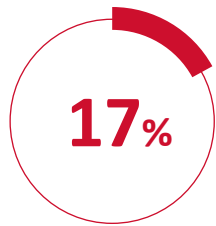
Trust in corporate AI use remains conditional, especially among Leaders of Tomorrow. Trust grows when AI use is transparent, responsibility is clear, and meaningful human control remains in place.

Trust Depends on Governance People Can Actually See

Trust in corporate AI use remains fragile, especially from the perspective of Leaders of Tomorrow. What future leaders are asking for is not reassurance in the abstract, but governance they can actually see: clear responsibility, meaningful transparency, strong privacy protection, and real human authority to intervene when needed.

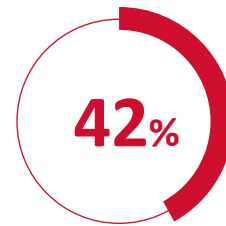
In this view, trust does not come from promises alone. It comes from visible safeguards and contestable decisions.

Trust in responsible AI use remains limited.



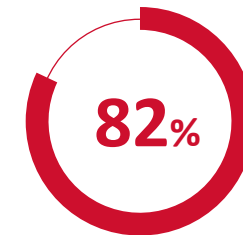
of **Leaders of Tomorrow** trust companies a great deal or completely to handle AI responsibly.

Weak safeguards undermine trust in the responsible use of AI.



of **Leaders of Tomorrow** cite weak security and privacy protection as a reason for their distrust.

Human accountability is expected.

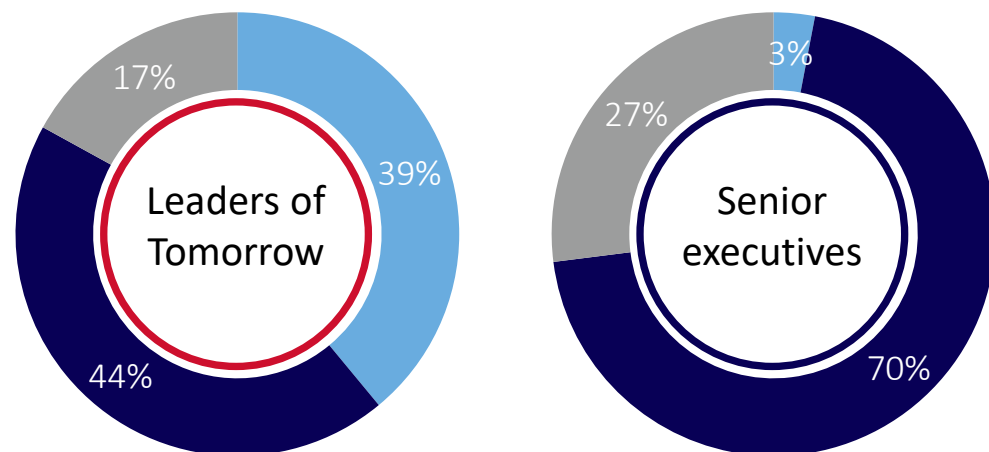


of **Leaders of Tomorrow** agree that a senior leader should be accountable and able to intervene.

Trust in Corporate AI Use Remains Conditional

Trust in corporate AI use is limited, especially among Leaders of Tomorrow.

Overall, how much do you currently trust companies to use AI responsibly in ways that affect people?



- A little/Not at all
- Somewhat
- Completely/A great deal

Leaders of Tomorrow are markedly less trusting than senior executives when asked whether companies currently use AI responsibly in ways that affect people. Only a small minority expresses high trust, while a much larger share reports little or no trust. Senior executives are more positive, but even among them, trust is far from unconditional.

Future leaders are not rejecting AI. They are withholding trust until stronger safeguards become visible.

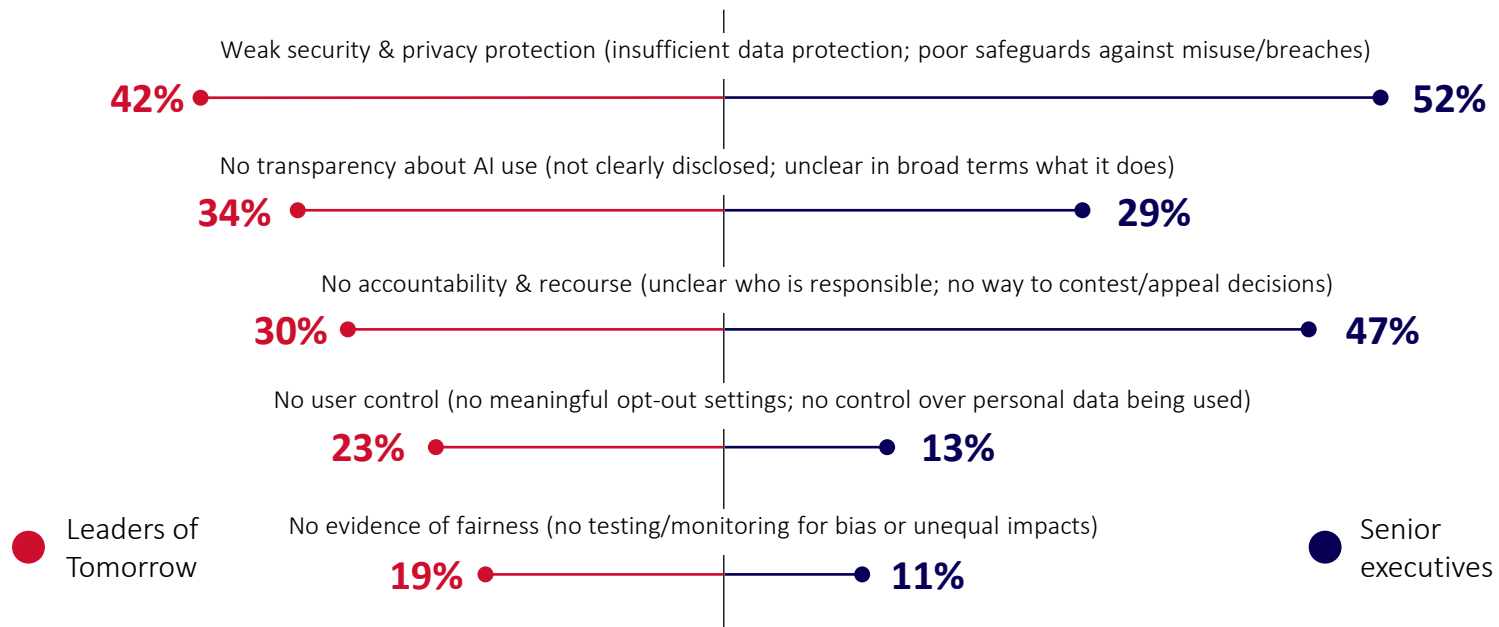
Trust is not absent, but it is clearly conditional.

Leaders of Tomorrow n = 585 | Senior executives n = 100 | Voices of the Leaders of Tomorrow 2026

Trust Breaks Down When Safeguards Are Missing

Trust depends on privacy, transparency, and the ability to contest decisions.

Thinking about companies using AI in products, services, or decisions that affect people: which two missing safeguards would most undermine your trust?



The strongest trust deal-breakers are concrete and practical. Leaders of Tomorrow focus on weak security and privacy protection, missing transparency, and the absence of accountability and recourse. Senior executives put even greater weight on privacy and accountability.

The pattern matters because it shifts the discussion away from broad trust statements. Trust rises or falls with a small set of visible protections.

The absence of control and recourse represents a clear red line; without them, trust in AI breaks down.

Share of respondents selecting each item as one of up to two most important safeguards
 Leaders of Tomorrow n = 585 | Senior executives n = 100 | Voices of the Leaders of Tomorrow 2026

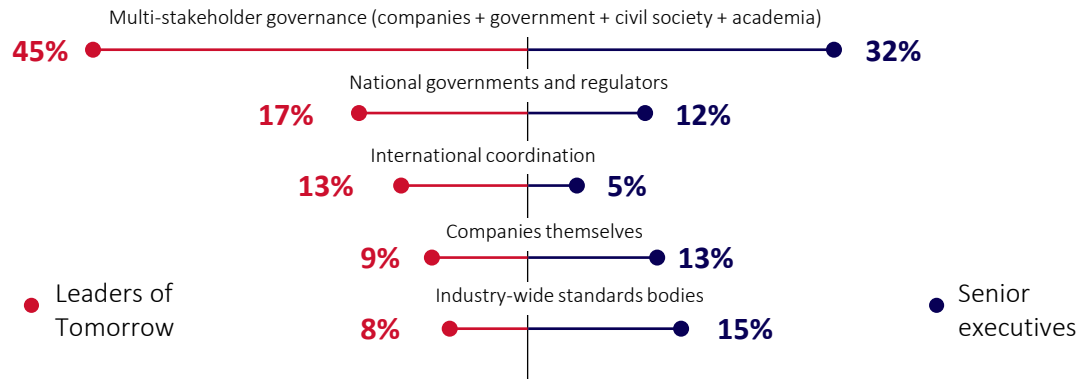
Future Leaders Want Shared and Visible Governance

Leaders of Tomorrow do not want AI governance to rest with companies alone. They most often favor multi-stakeholder governance, combining companies, government, civil society, and academia. Their preferred leadership principles point in the same direction: transparency, human agency, privacy protection, and clear accountability all rank highly. Senior executives broadly support the same direction, but with greater emphasis on privacy by design and named human accountability.

The common message is that trust needs institutional structure, not just good intentions.

Primary responsibility for AI governance

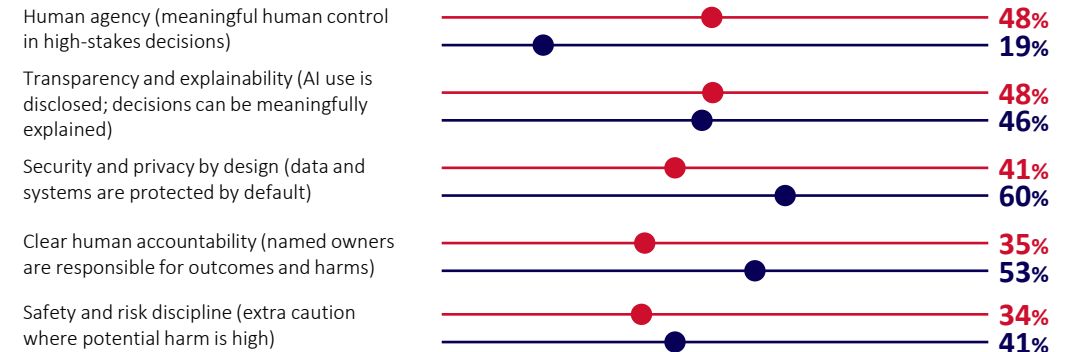
Who should bear the primary responsibility for setting and enforcing rules for companies using AI in products, services, or decisions that affect people?



Leaders of Tomorrow n = 585 | Senior executives n = 100 | Voices of the Leaders of Tomorrow 2026

Leadership principles guiding AI deployment

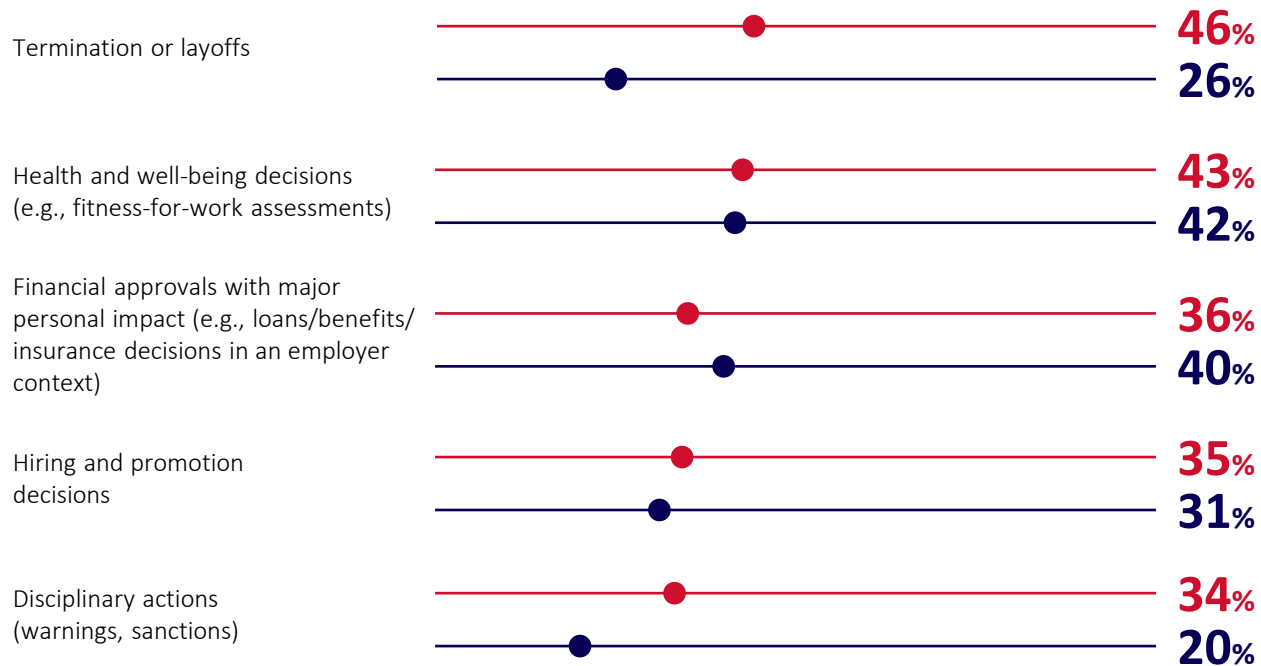
When deploying AI in organizations, which leadership principles should guide decisions, even when trade-offs are difficult?



Share of respondents selecting each item as one of up to three most important leadership principles
Leaders of Tomorrow n = 585 | Senior executives n = 100 | Voices of the Leaders of Tomorrow 2026

Human Control Must Remain Real in High-Stakes Decisions

Where humans must have the final say even in an AI world

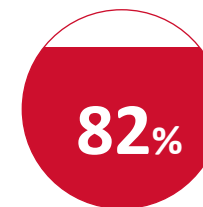


Once decisions become concrete and consequential, demand for named accountability rises sharply. For future leaders, control must remain meaningful when the personal stakes are highest.

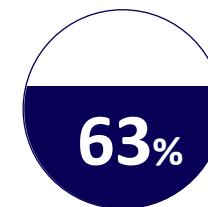
Share of respondents selecting each item as one of up to three areas where a human must have the final say
 Leaders of Tomorrow n = 585 | Senior executives n = 100 | Voices of the Leaders of Tomorrow 2026

Leaders of Tomorrow draw a sharp boundary around AI-supported decisions. A large majority wants a leader with the ability to intervene or overturn AI when necessary. They also insist that humans retain the final say in areas such as layoffs, health and well-being, and hiring-related decisions.

For AI-supported or AI-automated decisions, a senior leader should be accountable for the outcomes in their area of responsibility and have the authority to intervene or overturn the AI when needed.



Leaders of Tomorrow



Senior executives

Share of respondents answering “Agree” or “Strongly agree”
 Leaders of Tomorrow n = 585 | Senior executives n = 100
 Voices of the Leaders of Tomorrow 2026

What Leaders of Tomorrow Are Calling For



Disclose AI Use

Show clearly where and how AI is used in decisions that affect people.



Assign Accountable Owners

Make named leaders responsible for outcomes and able to intervene when needed.



Preserve Human Override

Ensure important decisions can still be challenged, reversed, or decided by humans.

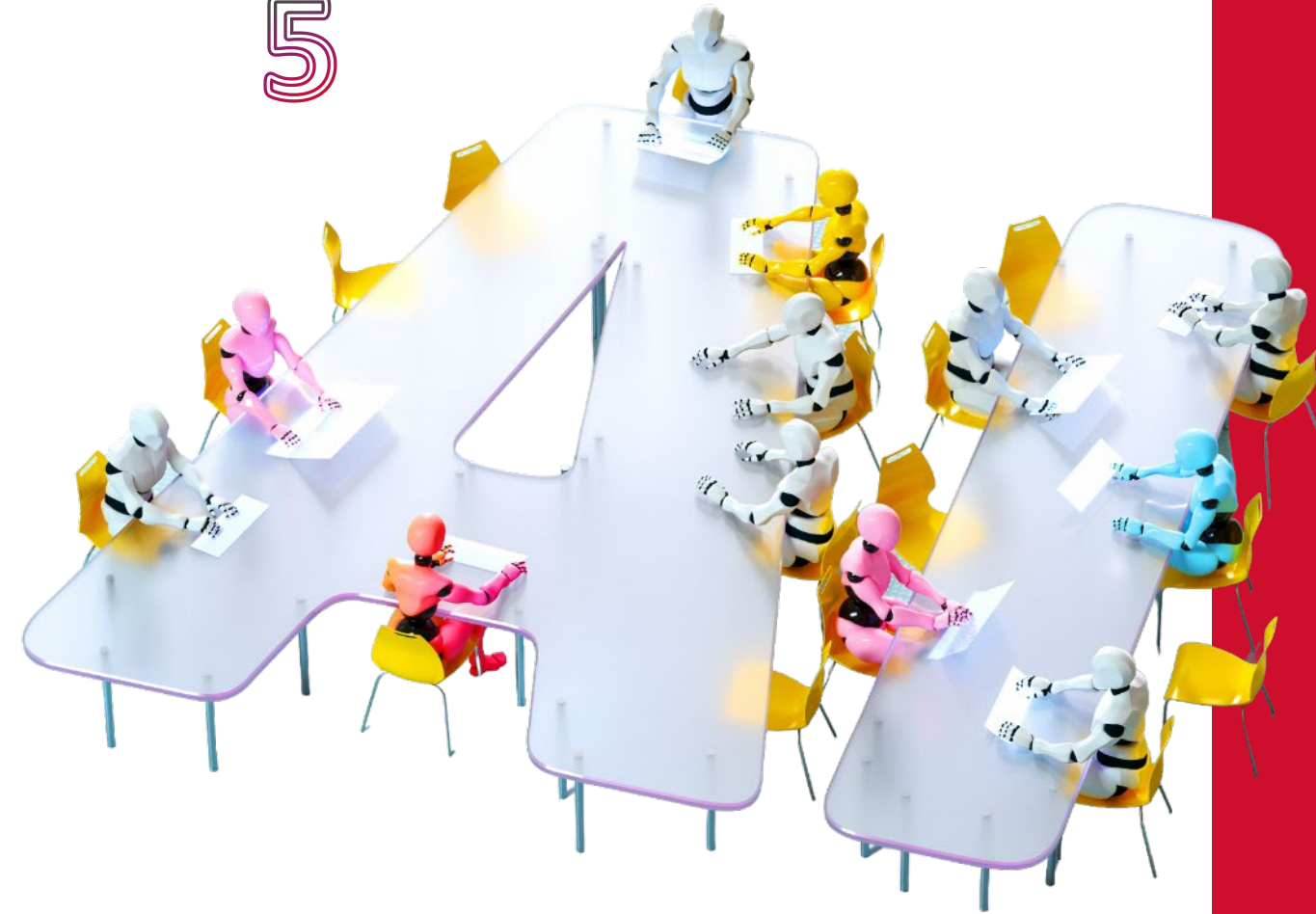
Future leaders do not ask for corporations to demonstrate trust in the abstract. They expect organizations to show where AI is used, make clear who is responsible, and preserve human authority wherever decisions affect people in meaningful ways. Trust grows when AI use is visible, responsibility is named, and important decisions can still be challenged or overturned.



Generated @ AI Freepik

Chapter

5



Source: Gettyimages

FUTURE LEADERSHIP **DECODED**

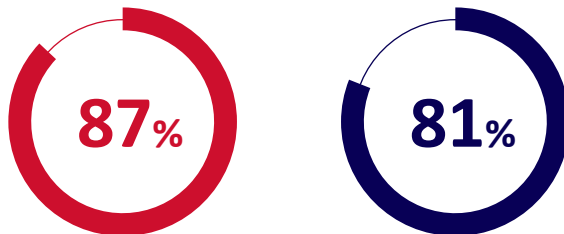
AI Productivity Gains Must Be Reinvested in People

Whether AI creates lasting value will depend on how productivity gains are used. Leaders of Tomorrow reject a labor-cost logic and expect those gains to be reinvested in people through better work and credible transition support.

AI at Work Will Be Judged by How Its Productivity Gains Are Shared

The final test begins once AI starts delivering significant productivity gains. Neither generation of leaders treats productivity gains as a license for cost-cutting by default. They expect those gains to be reinvested in people through better work, stronger mobility, and credible transition support. In this view, AI productivity gains will be judged not only by how much value they create, but by whether that value is used in ways people recognize as fair.

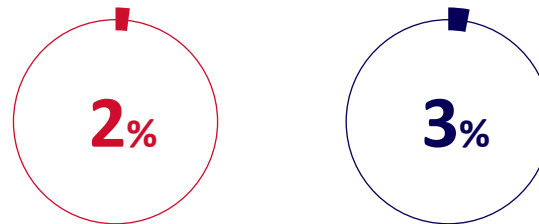
People-first reinvestment dominates.



Leaders of Tomorrow **Senior executives**

favor reinvesting in their workforce.

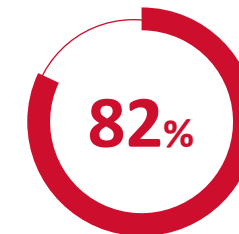
Layoffs are rejected.



Leaders of Tomorrow **Senior executives**

prioritize headcount reduction.

Support obligations are widely accepted.



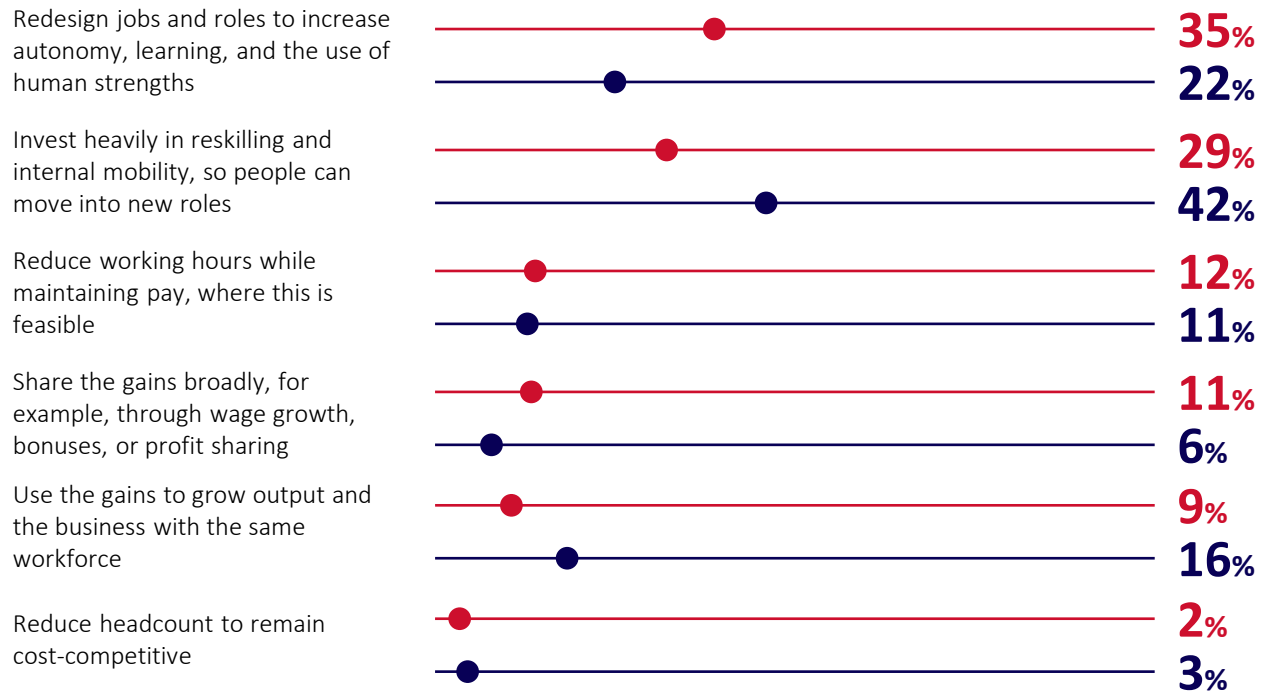
Leaders of Tomorrow

agree organizations should actively support employees affected by AI.

Future Leaders Expect AI Productivity Gains to Be Reinvested in People

Leaders are obliged to reinvest productivity gains in people.

What should leaders do first with the AI productivity dividend?



Leaders of Tomorrow emphasize better work. Senior executives emphasize workforce transition. Neither generation considers layoffs a high priority.

When asked what leaders should do first with major productivity gains created by AI, Leaders of Tomorrow most often choose job redesign that increases autonomy, learning, and the use of human strengths. Senior executives most often choose reskilling and internal mobility. Both groups ranked headcount reduction last.

People-first reinvestment¹

- Leaders of Tomorrow: **87%**
- Senior executives: **81%**

Extraction/output first²

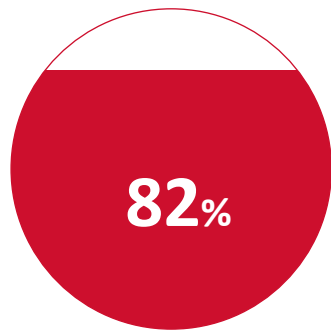
- Leaders of Tomorrow: **11%**
- Senior executives: **19%**

¹ Grouped category combining job redesign, reskilling, reduced hours, and broader sharing.

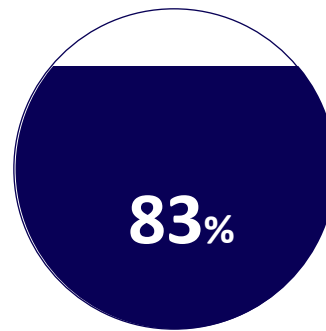
² Grouped category combining output expansion and headcount reduction.

Support for Employees Affected by AI is Seen as Crucial

Organizations should take active responsibility for supporting employees whose roles are significantly changed or displaced by AI, even when this requires substantial investment.



Leaders of Tomorrow



Senior executives

Large majorities in both groups agree that organizations should actively support employees whose roles are significantly changed or displaced by AI, even when this requires substantial investment.

This result indicates that transition support is a core expectation of responsible AI leadership rather than a discretionary benefit.

Both generations of leaders broadly agree on active support for employees affected by AI at work.

Share of respondents answering "Agree" or "Strongly agree" | Leaders of Tomorrow n = 585 | Senior executives n = 100 | Voices of the Leaders of Tomorrow 2026

What Leaders of Tomorrow Are Calling For



Reinvest Gains in People

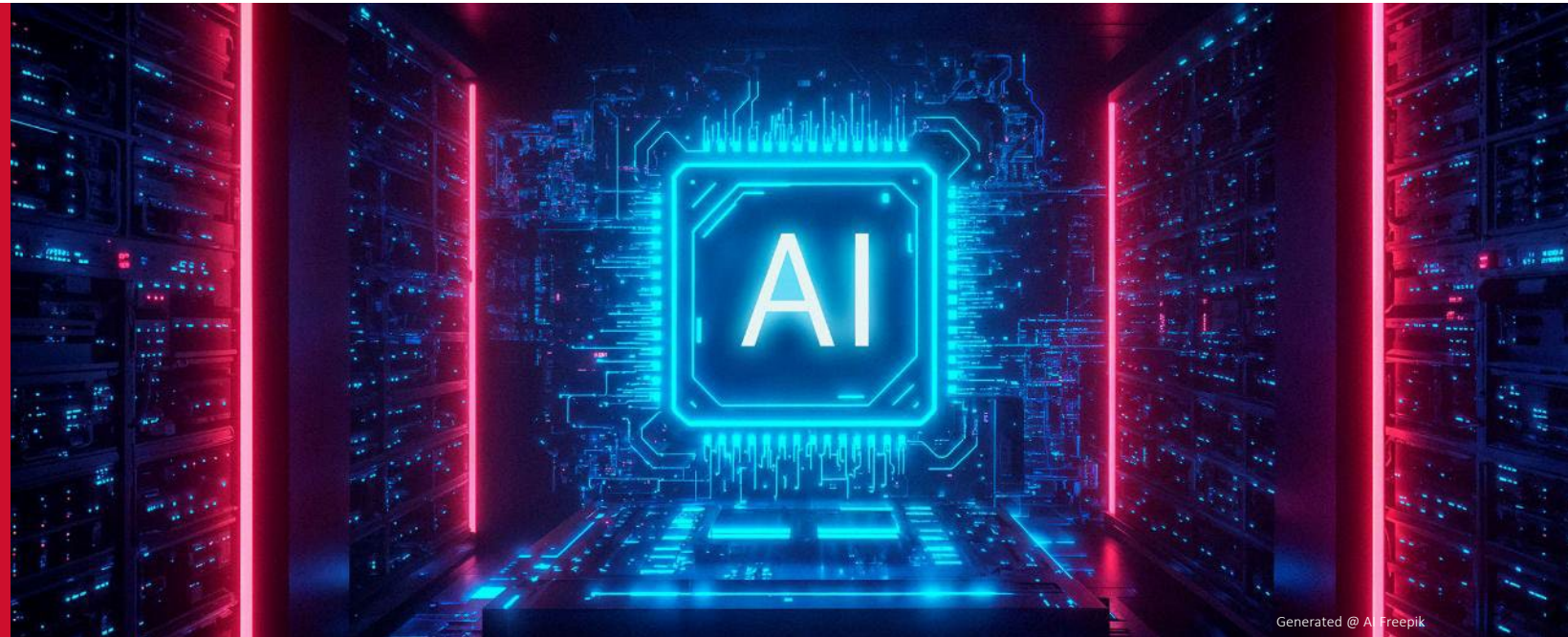
Use AI gains for better jobs, stronger skills, mobility, and broader employee upside.



Take Responsibility for Transition

Support employees whose roles materially change or disappear with credible transition pathways.

Future leaders do not treat AI productivity gains as a license for labor reduction. They expect those gains to improve work, expand opportunity, and support people through transition. Social acceptance depends not only on whether AI delivers value, but on whether that value is reinvested in ways people recognize as fair.



Generated @ AI Freepik

About the Sample

Leaders of Tomorrow

The study was targeted at the Leaders of Tomorrow—a carefully selected global group of highly promising young talent up to 35 years of age, who were invited to challenge, debate, and inspire at the St. Gallen Symposium. For this report, participants were recruited from the following communities:

- **St. Gallen Global Essay Competition Participants:** International students who competed in the St. Gallen Global Essay Competition were personally invited by the St. Gallen Symposium to take part in the study.
- **St. Gallen Symposium Leaders of Tomorrow Community:** The St. Gallen Symposium selected participants from their worldwide community of young talents who attended past symposia as Leaders of Tomorrow.

Senior executives

This study also gives voice to a global sample of senior executives (C-suite direct reports), aged 50 and older, working for companies on the Forbes Global 2000 list of the world’s largest corporations. They were recruited and interviewed by Beresford Research on behalf of the Nuremberg Institute for Market Decisions.

Conducting the surveys

Surveys were conducted in January and February 2026. A total of 585 Leaders of Tomorrow participated online, and 100 senior executives were surveyed by phone with screen-sharing to facilitate answering rating questions and overseeing lists of items.

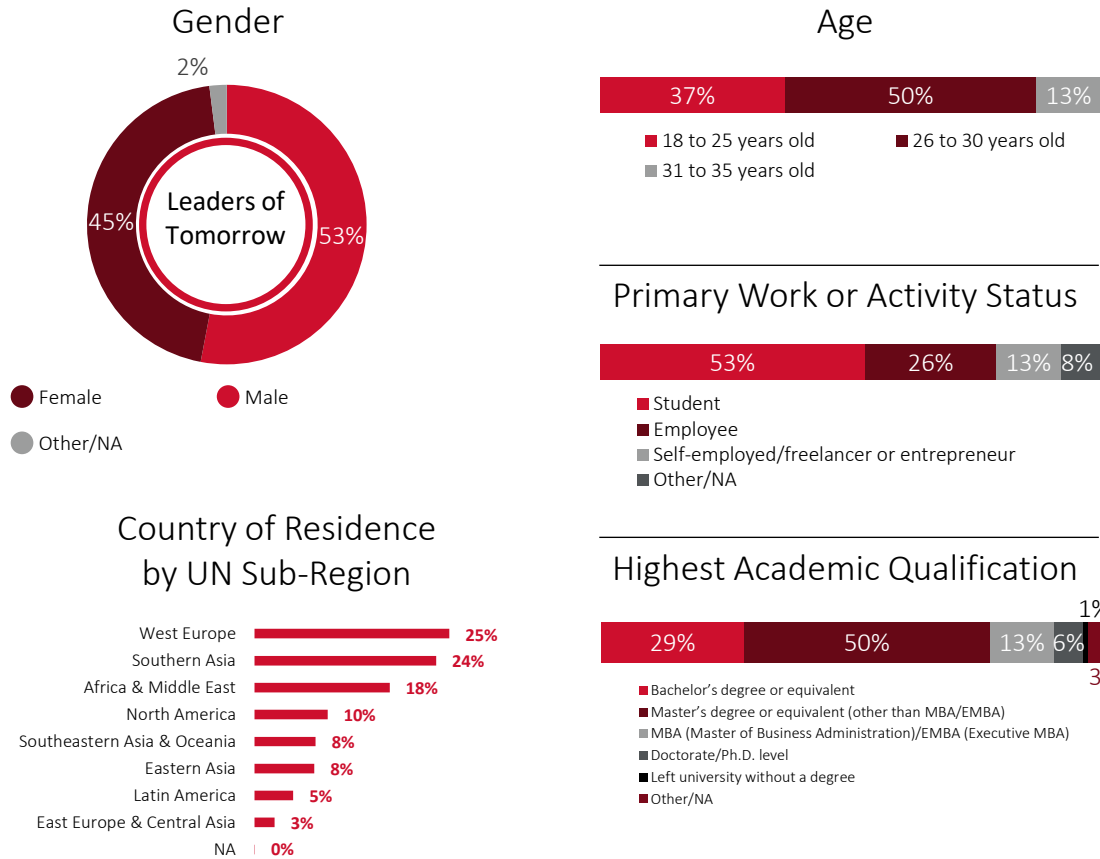
Giving a voice to a unique group of global talent

This survey is not representative in the sense of population sampling. However, we captured a broad and international group of participants that provides a unique snapshot of the opinions of young top talent and top managers around the world.

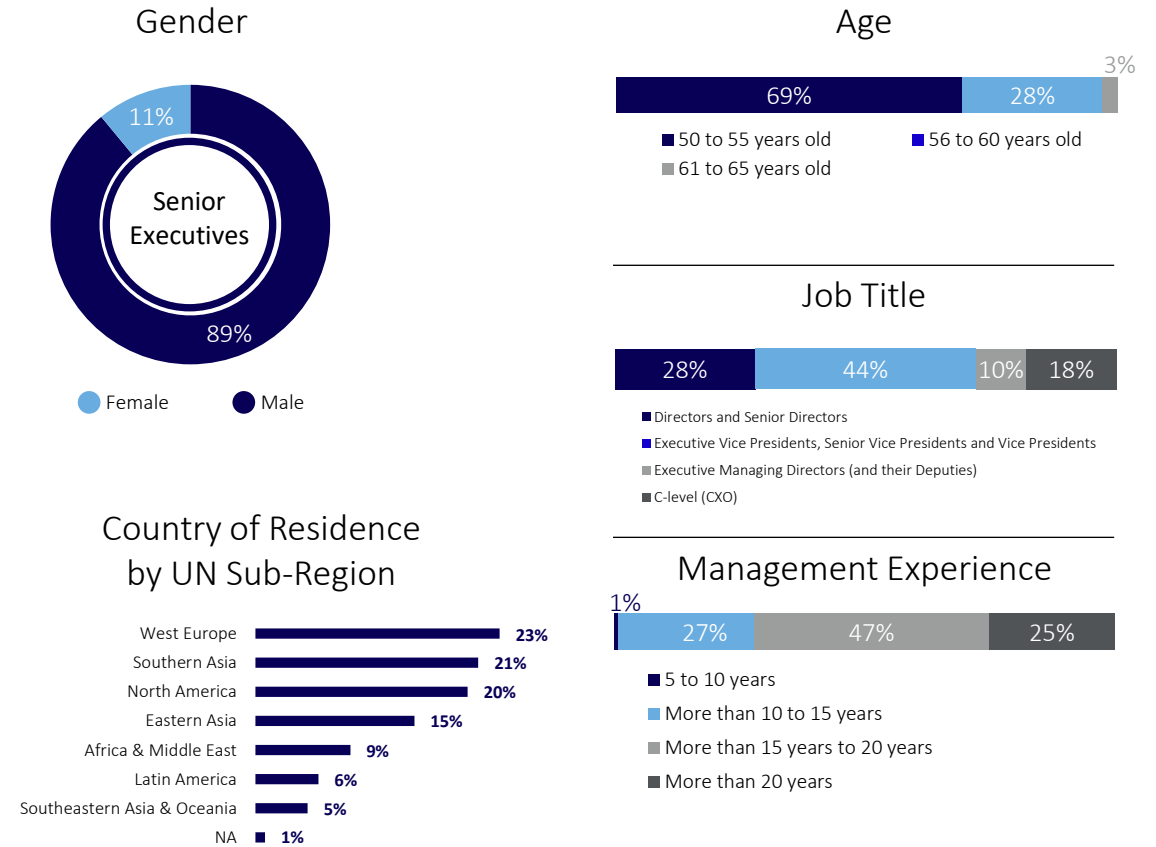
With active and vocal participants from across the globe, this study offers opinions from a culturally and economically diverse set of contexts, various regions, and both developed and emerging or developing economies. By comparing the perspectives of Leaders of Tomorrow and senior executives, the report helps leaders understand what future expectations around AI at work will mean for trust, capability, and organizational design.

Sample Overview

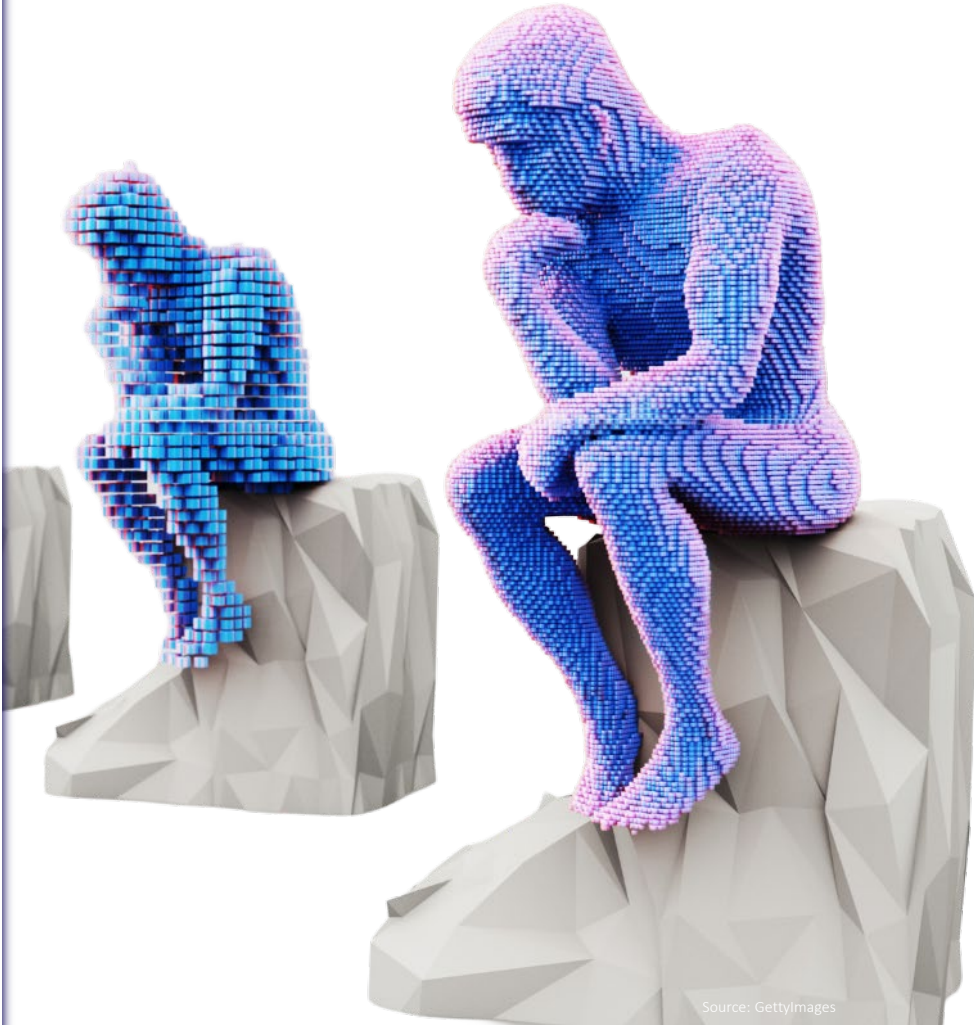
Leaders of Tomorrow (n = 585)



Senior Executives (n = 100)



Leaders of Tomorrow n = 585 | Senior executives n = 100 | Percentages may not sum to 100% because non-responses due to rounding or omitted non-responses. | Voices of the Leaders of Tomorrow 2026



Nürnberg Institut für Marktentscheidungen e.V.
(Nuremberg Institute for Market Decisions)
Steinstraße 21 | 90419 Nuremberg | Germany
hello@nim.org
www.nim.org

St. Gallen Symposium
Dufourstrasse 83
9001 St. Gallen | Switzerland
info@symposium.org
www.symposium.org

