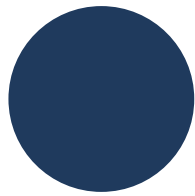


AI AND THE FUTURE OF WORK: SPRING SURVEY/ ROUNDTABLE REPORT JULY 2023

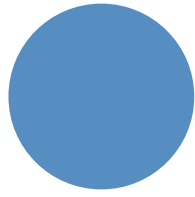
Young Advisory Committee
Future of Work Subgroup

CONTENTS



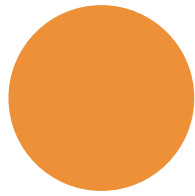
01

Key learnings



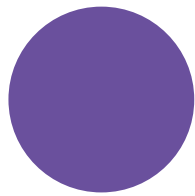
02

What are the
Future of Work
surveys?



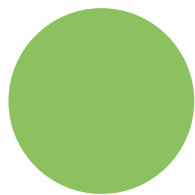
03

Member's
Foreword



04

Current uses
of Artificial
Intelligence in the
workplace



05

The Good, The
Bad and The
Indifferent

Key learnings

144

total responses to this survey

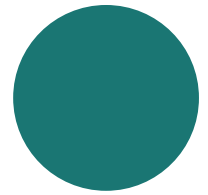
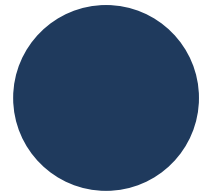
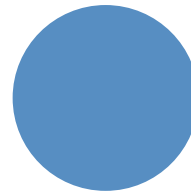
16

young professionals, senior leaders and experts in a roundtable

- The eighth survey in the Future of Work series focused on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). This short report is based on 144 total responses to this survey (120 completed) and a roundtable session with 16 young professionals, senior leaders and experts.
- Nearly half of respondents said their organisation uses AI – though we found that many were uncertain about what AI is and how it is used. Often, AI is much more embedded in our everyday lives than we realise.
- We captured a wide range of uses of AI, from those using Large Language Models (LLMs) to write reports or emails, AI design tools, AI embedded in other software like Microsoft Office or Salesforce, and those using AI designed by their employer to carry out sector-specific tasks, data handling or coding.
- Survey respondents were generally more likely to agree with positive statements about AI, such as those asserting its potential to increase productivity or free up time by automating repetitive tasks.
- For the first time, we have been able to conduct deeper analysis of our survey findings using anonymised data about our respondents. Male respondents were more likely to agree that AI could make them more productive, as were respondents who can do their jobs remotely.



- A generational divide in perceptions and comfort in using AI was a key theme emerging from our roundtable event. Those working in more senior roles were more likely to say they feel uncomfortable using AI and more likely to agree with negative statements about AI.
- Roundtable participants discussed the possible benefits of AI in work as well as potential risks, including those related to 'IP pollution', transparency and bias. Participants were clear that alongside considerations of how AI can improve productivity or automate tasks, considerations of ethics and alignment with an organisation's goals and vision are equally important.
- We identified a significant 'skills gap', with the number of young people using AI tools in their work far outnumbering those who say they have received any kind of training from their employer. There is a clear need for further training and guidance, for all employees.
- This survey and the subsequent roundtable were conducted at a time when the impact of AI not only on work but on our whole lives has become an ever-present debate. We found that younger workers in the Cambridge city region are not blind to concerns about AI, but generally see a future of work where AI acts as a tool for innovation and growth and expressed a desire to better understand it and to develop skills that will help them to take advantage of these possible benefits.



What does this all mean for employers?

- There is a significant information gap, with many younger employers uncertain about whether AI is used in their work. Employers may consider producing their own information or use existing toolkits and guides to inform their employees and allay concerns, such as those produced by the [Institute for the Future of Work](#). The Information Commissioner's Office also produce [detailed guidance on AI and data protection](#) as well as [toolkits for employers](#).
- We have also found a potential skills gap, with a sizeable minority currently using AI tools in their work but only a handful having received any kind of guidance or training from their employer. There is a need for employer-led training around the use of AI in some sectors, to clarify acceptable uses of some AI tools, mitigate risks and fully take advantage of the potential benefits.
- Employers need to be proactive in talking about AI with all staff, particularly in light of a potential generational divide in views. These conversations should incorporate not only the ways in which AI can and should be used but also ethical considerations and alignment with long-term vision, values and goals.



What are the Future of Work surveys?

The Young Advisory Committee has been asking young (18-35 year old) professionals in the Cambridge city region about their working lives since April 2020. Across eight surveys, we've received over 1,400 responses reflecting on a period of seismic and lasting change. Our insights from this work do not reflect everyone's experiences, but shine a light on what it has been

like for those in their early- and mid-careers in Cambridge's knowledge-intensive sectors from life sciences to tech. These insights are shared directly with employers in the Cambridge Ahead membership, to help build an understanding of the needs and desires of younger workers and to support recruitment, retention, and wellbeing.

Member's Foreword



Henry Stark, External Relations Manager, Marshall of Cambridge

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Some may fear that AI will replace human workers, others noted that AI has the potential to be a powerful partner. By automating repetitive tasks and providing intelligent insights, it can enable workers to become more productive and efficient.

The Spring 2023 ‘Future of Work’ survey captured the thoughts of under 35s on the impact Artificial Intelligence (AI) has had, and could have, on their work. We chose to focus on AI at a time when it is dominating international news and generating excitement and uncertainty in equal parts among employers.

We were fortunate to have the opportunity to conduct our survey shortly before the inaugural Cambridge Tech Week (CTW), which provided the perfect opportunity to host our regular post-survey roundtable alongside CTW attendees and experts. We were joined for the roundtable by a diverse group, including senior HR leaders from some of Cambridge’s largest employers, senior leadership from a large multi-academy trust, young professionals working in our booming tech sector, a researcher exploring the interaction between technology and society, and a leading expert on the skills needs of younger workers. Their reflections, alongside the key findings from our survey, are captured in this short report. This was also the first Future of Work survey we have conducted with the support of Dr Nina Jörden from the University of Cambridge’s Bennett Institute of Public Policy, providing new insights into our data.

The majority of our respondents were representative of some of the leading businesses in the Cambridge city region with the most common sectors being engineering and manufacturing, property and construction, law, accountancy, banking and finance. As a result, our data is skewed towards these ‘knowledge-intensive’ sectors.

AI is a broad term, and respondents interpreted the survey

questions through the lens of their own working life and experiences. For example, many respondents regularly handle a lot of data, and AI could help process and analyse data much faster than humans which could lead to more effective financial predictions and investment strategies. Similarly, industries like manufacturing and logistics rely heavily on automation and optimisation, and AI can play a significant role in these areas by optimising processes, predicting maintenance needs, and even identifying potential quality control issues. The use of AI varies depending on the industry and the specific tasks involved, however as technology continues to evolve, it is likely that more and more industries will find ways to incorporate AI into their operations to improve efficiency and productivity.

The overall tone of responses to our survey was generally more positive than negative. However, there was also concern about potential risks due to AI’s implementation, including around transparency and bias. While some may fear that AI will replace human workers, others noted that AI has the potential to be a powerful partner. By automating repetitive tasks and providing intelligent insights, it can enable workers to become more productive and efficient.

In this new era of work, it’s important for businesses to understand the role of AI as a tool for innovation and growth and support their employees to develop skills that complement AI technologies. With Cambridge being a hub for innovation and technology, the future of work in this area will be a dynamic and ever-changing landscape with endless opportunities for growth and innovation.

**There's a gap in the market for
more information about AI and
it's application in the workplace
— roundtable
participant**

of respondents did not know if their employer uses AI



Current uses of Artificial Intelligence in the workplace



Jacqueline Platt, Senior Manager, Deloitte and Vice Chair, Young Advisory Committee

Our survey found that a significant proportion of respondents are knowingly using AI in their work, though many are uncertain or unclear about what AI is and how it is used. We asked respondents whether their employer uses AI in any way and how often they themselves use it in their work. The questions were phrased very broadly, as we were interested not only in the use of AI but also the respondents' understanding of what AI is. Nearly half (47%) of respondents reported that AI is used in their organisation. A further 31% didn't know if their employer uses AI.

Throughout roundtable discussions this topic was further explored, and a consensus was reached among the participants that there is a general lack of understanding of what AI is and how it is being used in the workplace. Roundtable participants noted that many people who claim they don't use AI may not fully understand its pervasive presence, such as in search engines like Google. This indicated the need for more clarity of what AI is and how it is used.

"There's a gap in the market." – Roundtable Participant

In the words of one roundtable

participant, 'there's a gap in the market' for digestible information, relevant to specific industries, about the full spectrum of 'AI' and how it can be used in work. In the absence of this information, we found that respondents' understanding tended to cover the most well-publicised or controversial examples, such as ChatGPT, but overlook the many other ways it is embedded in our working lives.

For the respondents that indicated that they do use AI in their work, we asked them what tasks AI is used for. Among the most common was use of LLMs to draft emails and write reports, data analytics or modelling. A small number referred to industry-specific uses as well, including to do coding or the use of AI tools developed by their employer.

Food for thought for employers

We set out to try and understand how comfortable the survey respondents were in using AI. Approximately a third of respondents said they feel either 'fairly' or 'very' comfortable. They referred to ease of use or productivity gains but noted a

31%

didn't know if their employer uses AI

"It would be like losing a limb." – Roundtable Participant

46%

feel 'neutral' towards using AI at work

spectrum of comfort across different types of tools. However, the most common answer (46%) was that they feel 'neutral' towards using AI at work. About a quarter of respondents said they aren't comfortable using AI in work. Although our sample size is skewed towards younger employees, it indicates that junior staff may be more comfortable using AI in the workplace than more senior staff.

A common theme in these answers was a sense that younger workers feel they lack the necessary skills or understanding to use it. Some also expressed other concerns, such as worries about what senior leaders or managers might think about using AI ('lazy') and other concerns related to data protection or privacy.

"I don't know how more senior staff/managers feel about using things like ChatGPT in our work." – Survey Respondent

Common reasons given for feeling uncomfortable about using AI in work were concerns about bias (and roundtable participants identified specific concerns about diversity and inclusion), transparency, and concern about the views of senior leaders. The varying degrees of comfort and general theme of uncertainty around AI reveals a clear role for employers in clarifying approaches to and attitudes towards AI in work.

"I'd rather take the credit for the work at this stage. I'm worried that senior colleagues and clients would disapprove of me

using AI for certain tasks at work. Also, I'm worried that I might be doing myself out of a job if I did!" – Survey Respondent

Establishing workplace policies on AI may be particularly important because AI symbolises another significant generational change. One roundtable participant who uses AI regularly both in work and in their free time noted that being asked not to use it by an employer would be 'like losing a limb'.

"Read about biases in Invisible Women [by Caroline Criado-Perez] and then tell me that AI is a good thing." – Survey Respondent

They observed that a new generation of younger workers will be leaving school and further education having regularly used AI to support them and it won't be realistic for employers to expect them to stop. Employers must start thinking about the impact now and communicating this to younger employees.



60%

agreed that AI could
liberate people from
“repetitive work”

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It is most likely the
next evolutionary step
in integrating technology into
the work place. Being able to
use it effectively will become
a key employable skill.

– Survey Respondent



The Good, The Bad and The Indifferent: We're still unsure about the role of AI in the Workplace



Liam Ronan-Chlond, Head of Engagement, Socius

55%

of respondents agreed that AI can be a tool to make them more "productive"

Our first survey on the role of AI in the workplace demonstrated some divided opinions, and discovered indifference and a lack of understanding about the impact and potential of AI.

The survey explored whether younger workers agreed or disagreed with various statements about AI. Surprisingly, given the almost daily news articles published on the threat posed by AI, the survey results revealed that respondents generally held more positive views. There was almost a 50-50 split on views on whether AI was a "threat to their job in the future," and less than half agreed AI could be a "threat to humanity." Conversely, over 55% of respondents agreed that AI can be a tool to make them more "productive" and over 60% agreed that AI could liberate people from "repetitive work."

However, many people voted 'neutral' to these perception questions and answered 'don't know' elsewhere. The survey made it abundantly clear that there is a knowledge gap around AI.

For the first time, we have been able to slice the survey data in new ways. We found that respondents' views on AI differed depending on their gender, the nature of their work and degree of seniority. For

example, men were more likely to perceive AI as a threat to humanity. However, a higher proportion of men (31%) compared to women (8%) strongly agreed that AI makes us more productive.

Respondents who could perform their jobs remotely were significantly more convinced that AI could enhance productivity (30% vs. 17%). They also expressed a stronger agreement that AI would provide freedom from repetitive tasks (26% vs. 9%). This could indicate that remote workers were more likely to use AI tech more often, become more familiar with the technology and therefore better realise the benefits. Conversely, individuals unable to work remotely were more likely to perceive AI as a threat to their jobs in the future (30% vs. 19%). Moreover, this group believed that the labour market would undergo changes due to AI (34% vs. 13%). It would be interesting to see whether those who can work remotely are more optimistic about the future of their careers because of the flexibility afforded to them by their employer, in comparison to people who are more restricted in where they can work. Do remote workers feel they are more empowered, or have more agency than their workplace-based peers? Maybe not; senior staff, who should feel like they have more agency than the majority

of their colleagues, appear less comfortable with AI than their juniors, saying they were more likely to agree that AI is a 'threat to humanity'. The links between an employee's status and their views on AI is something we can explore further in future surveys and roundtables.

"I can feel uncomfortable when it feels like the software is trusted too much and not checked properly."
– Survey Respondent

There was a discrepancy between respondents who reported using AI in their work and those who received training on how to use AI tools. While approximately half of the respondents stated their organisations utilise AI, and about 40% reported personal usage, only 10% had actually received any training from their employers on AI tools. This clearly demonstrates a huge skills gap in the workforce and reinforces the expressed uncertainty and lack of knowledge surrounding AI.

Participants in our roundtable were clear that there is a need for employers to provide more

training rather than just guidelines around AI. Crucially, one participant explained that 'training' would help employees know 'what to do with AI', whilst current 'guidelines' focus more on 'what not to do with AI'. The discussion recognised the importance of training employees on how to use AI effectively, differentiate it from other tools, and engage in ethical conversations about its use. Without these interventions from employers, many young people may remain ill-prepared to grasp the opportunities, and manage the risks, associated with using some types of AI in their work.

Mind the gap

Is there a bright future for AI? Our respondents could not agree. Some demonstrated a desire to learn and develop to stay competitive, while others expressed scepticism about the magnitude of change that AI would bring.

"I feel its capabilities are often over-sold, either by claiming any form of signal processing algorithm is AI, or by ignoring the amount of human

effort involved in the training/testing of an AI system," one survey respondent was quoted as saying.

It was also clear there is both a knowledge gap and a skills gap related to AI at work.

While respondents generally held positive views about AI, variations were observed across different demographics. The findings suggest a need for addressing the skills gap through increased training and education on AI tools. Furthermore, understanding the implications of remote work and its relationship with AI usage is crucial.

"It is most likely the next evolutionary step in integrating technology into the workplace. Being able to use it effectively will become a key employable skill." – survey respondent

As AI continues to evolve, one thing is clear; the workforce must prepare to adapt to this potential revolution in the workplace, in order to remain competitive and navigate the future of work effectively.

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"I feel its capabilities are often over-sold, either by claiming any form of signal processing algorithm is AI, or by ignoring the amount of human effort involved in the training/testing of an AI system." – survey respondent



