
State of AI

*Canadian startups, growth companies
and mid-market businesses*

2026

EXECUTIVE BRIEFING

Introduction

What are businesses actually getting from AI, and how does their experience compare with yours? We undertook Prelia’s State of AI survey to explore that question with Canadian startups, growth companies and mid-market businesses in our network. Founders and business leaders from 121 organizations shared their experiences, helping us understand how businesses could learn from one another and apply those lessons to their own use of AI.

This briefing brings together the findings on everyday use, reported benefits and time savings, the tools businesses choose and what they spend. We also look at how businesses manage AI, where they expect to expand and what they plan to improve.

Respondents describe better output and less repetitive work, with benefits already appearing among recent entrants. Wider weekly use is associated with more reported benefits, while larger estimated time savings are associated with more reported commercial benefits. Written policies are much less common among smaller organizations, and broader use does not always come with a policy. Most respondents expect AI use to grow.

As you read, we hope the experiences shared here give you ideas about how you might get more out of AI in your own business. The [Full Report](#), available on Prelia’s website, includes additional findings and more detailed comparisons between groups of organizations. It also explains how the survey was conducted.

The findings at a glance

76%	report approved AI use or pilots in their organization From small experiments to embedded workflows.	P . 03
30%	estimate four or more hours saved per week, on average, for each employee who uses AI in their organization Overall, 68% estimate at least one hour saved per week, including the 30% estimating four hours or more.	P . 06
73%	of those whose organizations first used or evaluated AI within the past year report increased individual productivity 70% of that group report faster drafting or turnaround.	P . 07
33%	report a written AI policy in place at their organization This figure is 9% among those at organizations with fewer than 50 employees.	P . 11
89%	expect their organization’s AI use to increase moderately or significantly over the next 12 months	P . 14

In this briefing

See [page 16](#) for methodology.

AI use Page 03	Value Page 05	Tools and risks Page 08	Managing AI use Page 11	Plans and priorities Page 14
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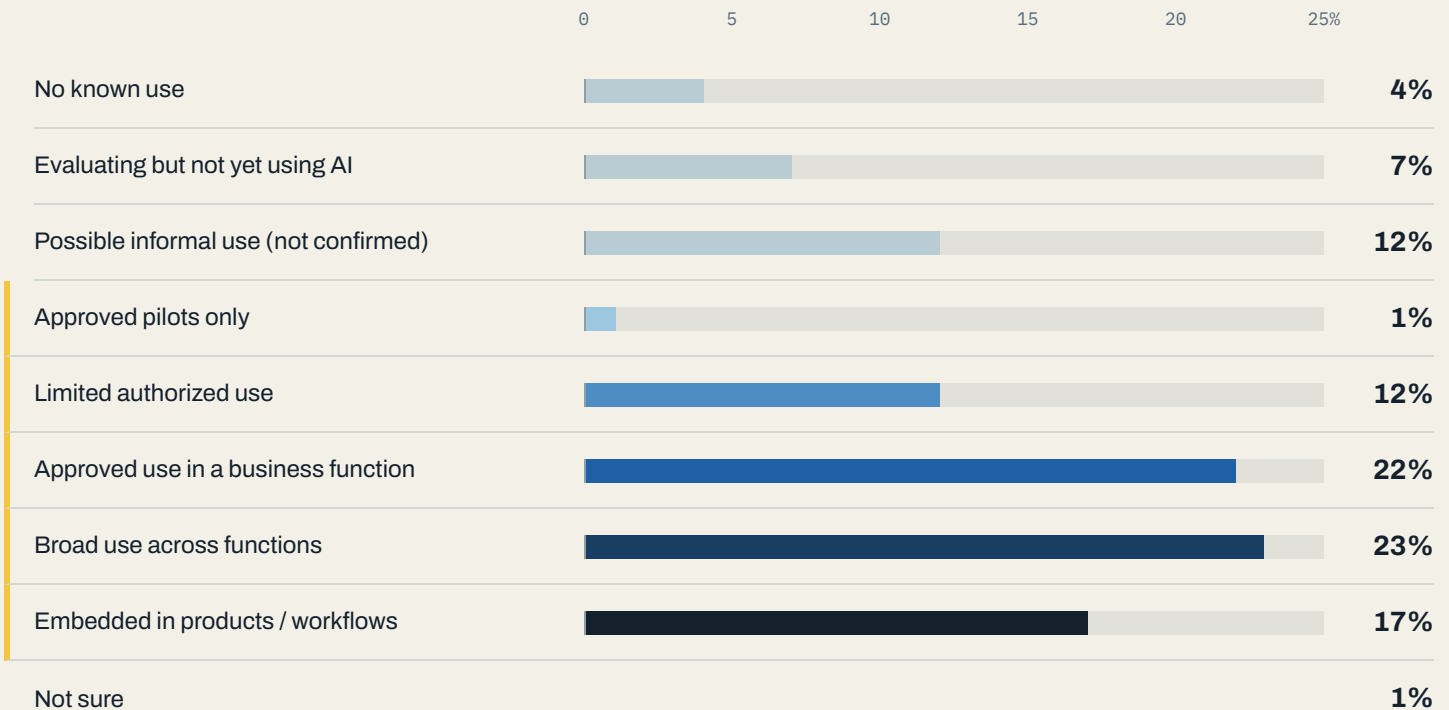
01 How far has AI reached?

Approved AI use ranges from small pilots to tools embedded in everyday workflows.

76% report approved AI use or pilots in their organization.

Furthest stage of AI use in the organization

One answer per respondent. The five stages marked in yellow make up the 76% above.



Full Report · Exhibit 04

46% say more than half of employees in their organization use AI at least weekly.

Full Report · Exhibit 05

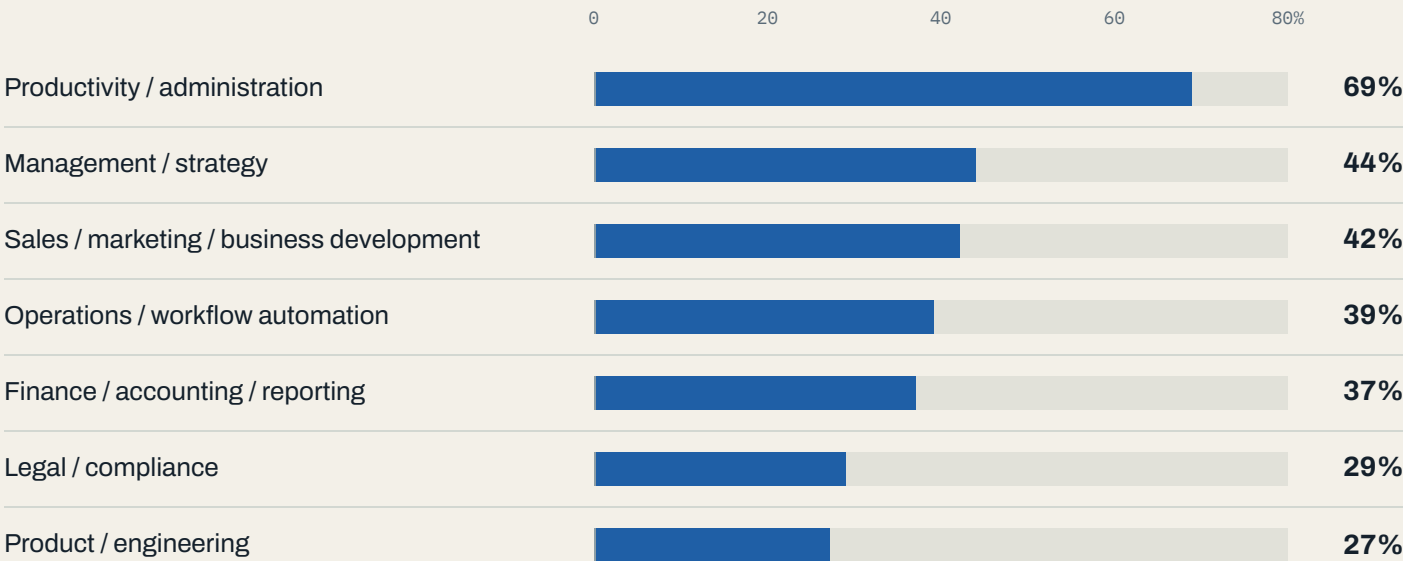
This weekly-use figure is based on responses from those reporting approved AI use, possible informal employee use or uncertainty about their organization's AI use.

Where businesses put AI to work

AI reaches across the business, with writing and research leading everyday tasks.

Business areas using or actively piloting AI

Share of respondents · selected business areas · multiple answers allowed



Full Report · Exhibit 07

COMMON TASKS PERFORMED WITH AI

88%

Drafting or editing written content

76%

Research, summarization or information gathering

70%

Meeting notes or transcription

53%

Data analysis or reporting

38%

Internal knowledge search

The figures on this page are based on responses from those reporting approved AI use, possible informal use or uncertainty about their organization's AI use. Respondents could select several business areas and up to five tasks.

Full Report · Common-task findings, p.6

62%

report AI use or pilots in at least **three** business areas

32%

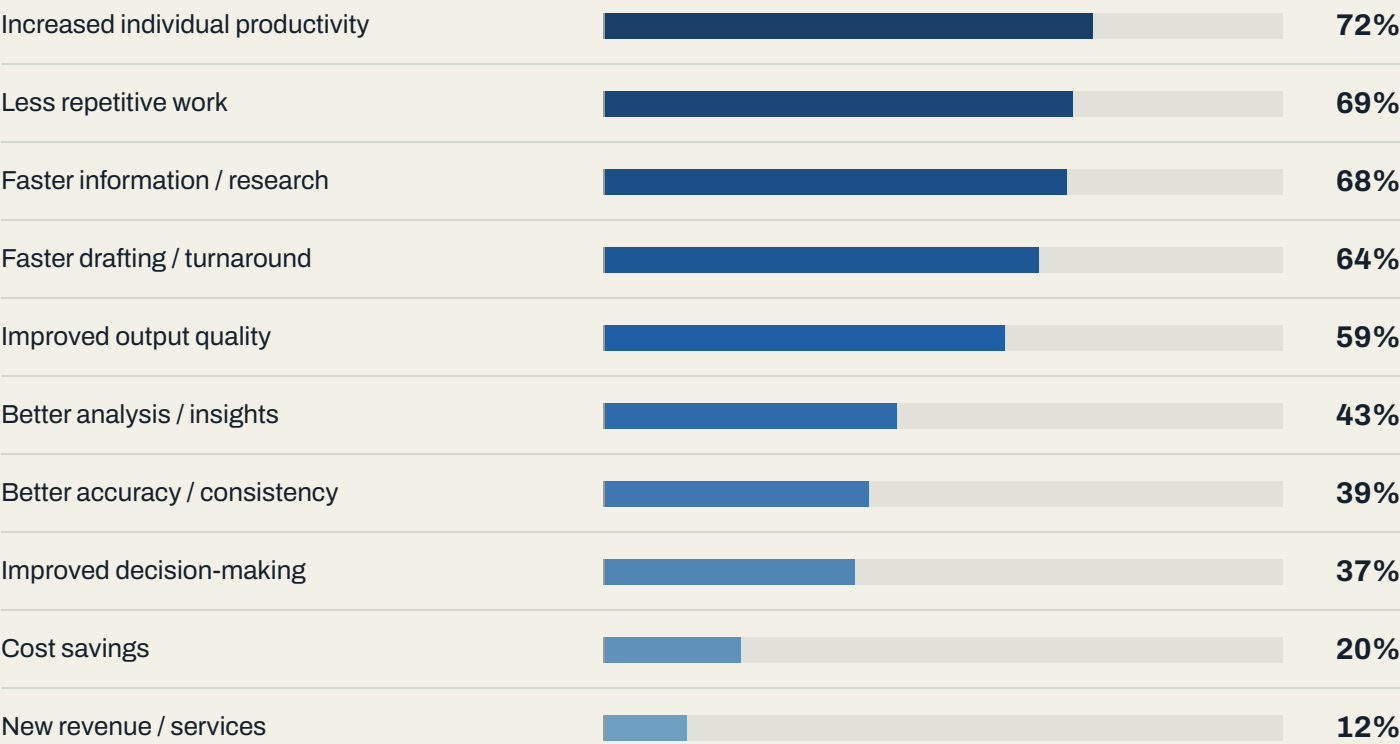
report AI use or pilots in at least **five** business areas

What businesses gain from AI

Productivity and faster everyday work lead the benefits. Improvements in quality, analysis and decision-making are also common.

Benefits organizations have experienced from AI

Percentage reporting each benefit · multiple answers allowed



Full Report · Exhibit 08

90%

report at least one speed or productivity benefit

55%

report both increased productivity and improved output quality

23%

report cost savings, new revenue or service opportunities, or both

These are self-reported benefits and do not establish measured financial returns.

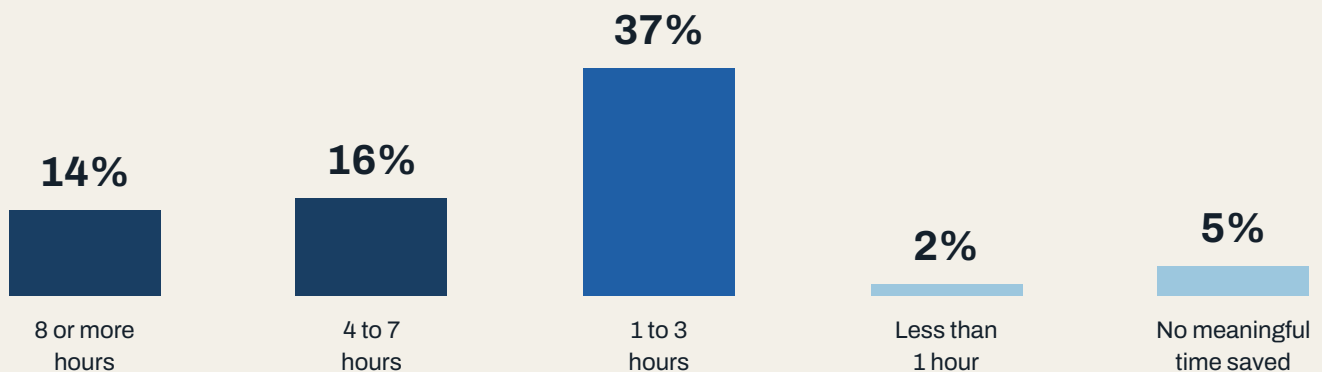
How much time does AI save?

Reported time savings vary widely. Those estimating larger savings are also more likely to report commercial benefits.

30% estimate four or more hours saved per week, on average, for each employee who uses AI in their organization.

Overall, **68%** estimate at least **one hour** saved per week per AI-using employee, including the 30% estimating four hours or more.

Estimated average hours saved per AI-using employee each week



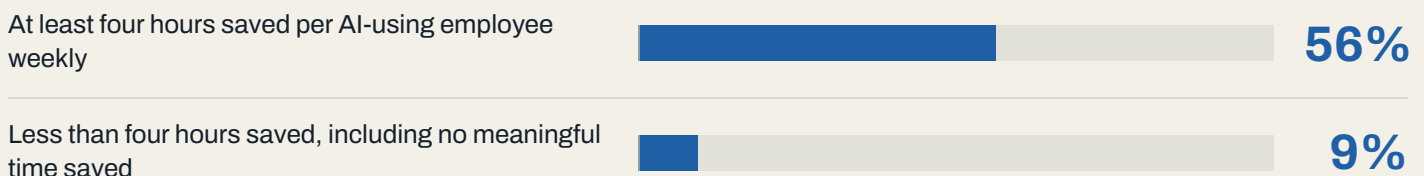
26% have not estimated the time saved or are unsure

Full Report · Exhibit 09 and accompanying findings

Larger time savings, more commercial benefits

Among respondents estimating four or more hours saved, 56% also report **cost savings, new revenue opportunities or service offerings**. For those estimating less time saved, that figure is 9%.

Share reporting commercial benefits



Full Report · Exhibit 10

Recent adopters are already seeing benefits

Those at organizations that **first used or evaluated AI within the past year** already report a range of benefits.

73%

Increased individual productivity

70%

Faster drafting or turnaround

43%

At least four hours saved per week, per AI-using employee

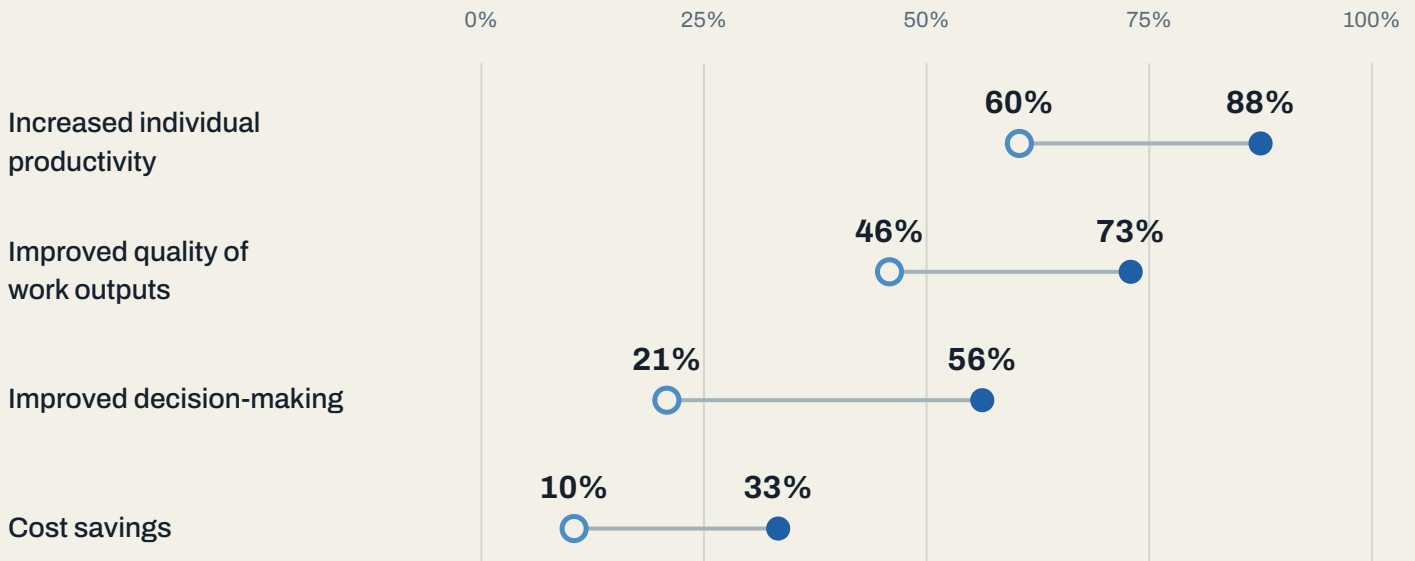
Full Report · Exhibit 11

Wider weekly use, benefits beyond productivity

Percentage reporting each benefit within each group, regardless of when AI use began.

○ Organizations where **half or fewer employees** use AI weekly

● Organizations where **more than half of employees** use AI weekly



Full Report · Exhibit 12

For businesses still getting started with AI, the findings are encouraging. Recent entrants already report benefits, while wider weekly use is associated with gains beyond productivity.

02 Businesses use more than one AI tool

ChatGPT, Claude and Copilot lead the product families reported. The mix of everyday tasks, coding and work execution differs across families.

Which AI product families are being used?

Approved or informal use · multiple answers allowed

Share reporting family use		Uses reported within each family		
AI product family	Reported use	Everyday tasks	Software coding	Work execution
ChatGPT / OpenAI	69%	89%	23%	20%
Claude / Anthropic	58%	85%	47%	52%
Copilot / Microsoft / GitHub	55%	86%	15%	14%
Gemini / Google	34%	94%	8%	11%
Grok	10%	100%	0%	-
Perplexity	7%	100%	0%	-
Meta AI	3%	100%	-	-

For example, 69% report ChatGPT / OpenAI use in their organization. Among that group, 89% report use for everyday tasks.

Work execution covers AI agents or task-execution features, including those requiring human approval. A hyphen indicates the use was not asked about for that family.

Full Report · Exhibit 14

68%

report at least two of the seven listed families

46%

report at least three of the seven listed families

21%

report another AI product beyond the seven listed families

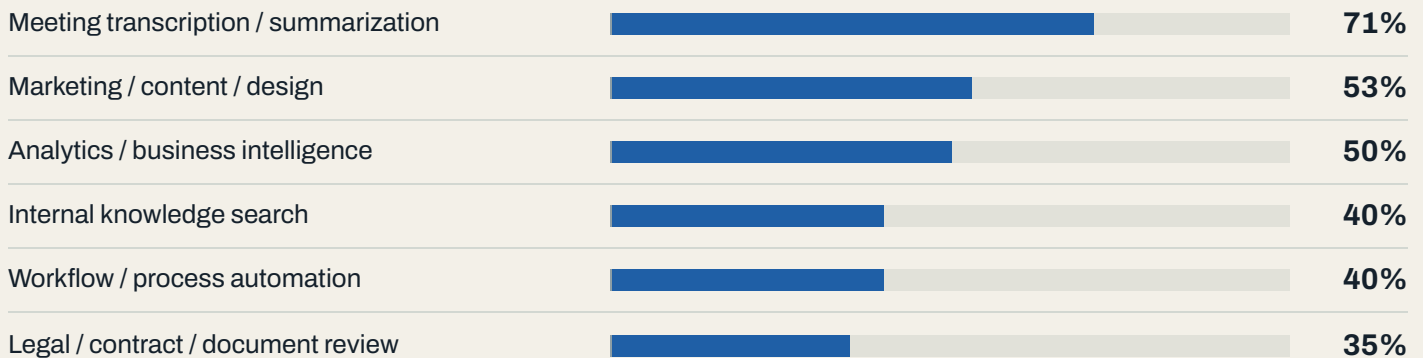
The additional-products figure combines the family question and its follow-up, counting each respondent once.

Specialized tools, accounts and spending

Task-specific tools sit alongside general-purpose AI. Company subscriptions are only part of how employees get access.

AI tools designed for a particular task

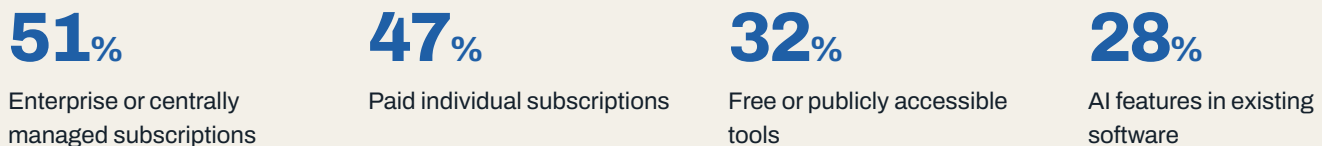
Selected tool types · multiple answers allowed



Full Report · Exhibit 15

How employees access AI

Multiple answers allowed

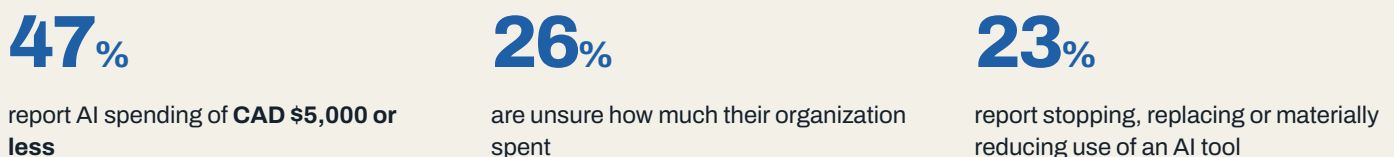


45% of those reporting enterprise or centrally managed subscriptions also report free tools or paid individual subscriptions.

Full Report · Employee-access findings, p.12

What businesses spend and what they replace

Organizational AI spending and tool changes · past 12 months



Spending includes dedicated AI subscriptions, features and infrastructure; excludes employee compensation and incidental AI in general IT spending.

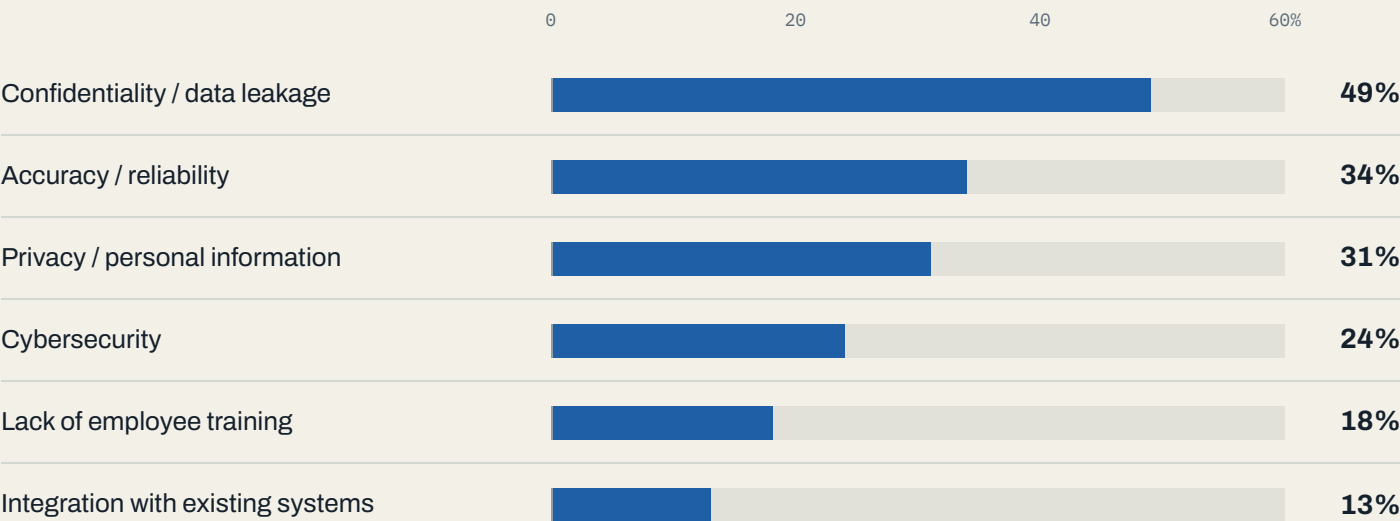
Full Report · Exhibit 17 and tool-change findings, p.14

What concerns businesses about AI?

Confidentiality and data leakage are the most frequently selected concern. Accuracy, privacy and cybersecurity also feature prominently.

Selected concerns about AI use

Includes organizations not yet using AI · up to three answers allowed



Full Report · Exhibit 13

What businesses have encountered

A separate question asked about AI issues or concerns in the past 12 months.

24%

report an AI issue or concern

39%

report no known issue or concern

37%

say it is too early to tell or are unsure

18% Minor issues or concerns only

6% Meaningful issues or concerns

All percentages are based on respondents answering this question.

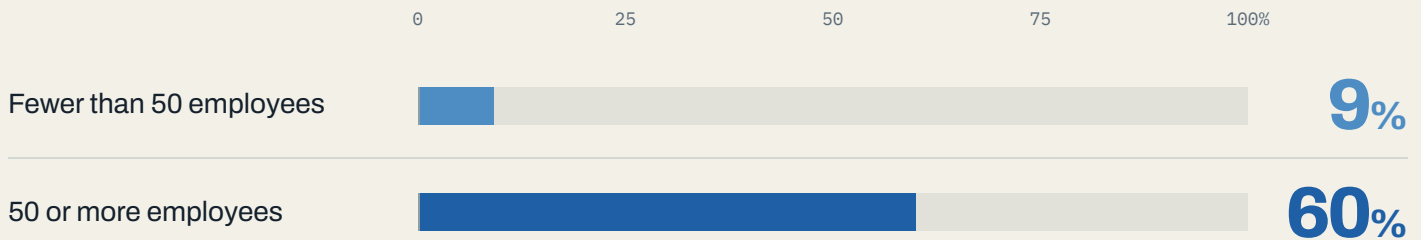
Full Report · Exhibit 30

03 Policies and oversight

Written policies are much less commonly reported at organizations with fewer than 50 employees than at those with 50 or more.

Written AI policy in place, by organization size

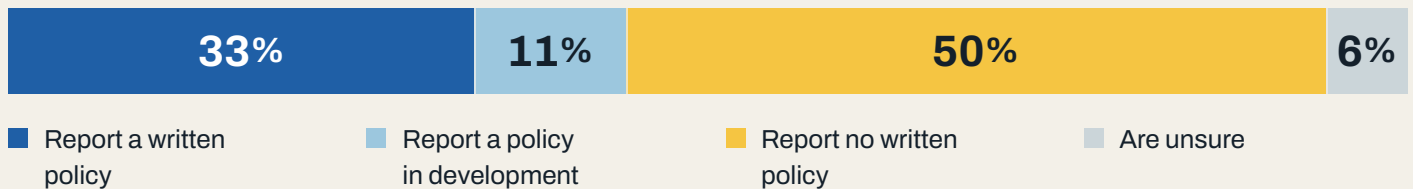
AI-specific policy or AI addressed in another company policy



Full Report · Exhibit 19

This comparison excludes respondents reporting no known AI use or evaluation without use.

Written-policy status



Full Report · Policy-status findings, p.15

40% of those reporting **broad or embedded AI use** have no written policy at their organization.

Full Report · Exhibit 22

Who oversees AI, and how do leaders stay informed?

67%

say executives, founders or owners lead AI oversight at their organization.

55%

report no formal AI updates to their organization's leadership.

Leaders may still learn about AI through their direct, day-to-day involvement.

Full Report · Exhibits 23 and 24

Choosing AI tools and reviewing vendors

Businesses most often report reviewing business need and technical suitability when adopting AI tools. Contract and data-use questions also matter when choosing a tool or vendor.

19%

select a formal approved-tool list as their approval approach

37%

report a case-by-case approval process

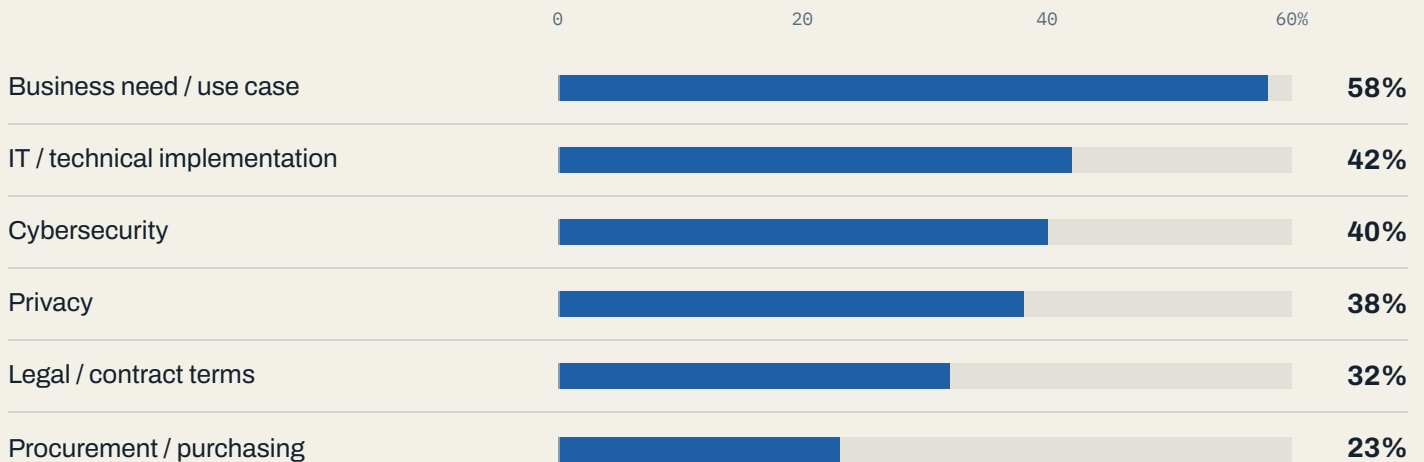
17%

report no consistent adoption-review process

Full Report · Approval-approach findings, p.19

What organizations review when adopting AI tools

Share of respondents reporting each step · multiple answers allowed



Full Report · Exhibit 25

What organizations consider when reviewing AI vendors

Selected considerations · multiple answers allowed

26%

Data location or third-party processors

26%

Confidentiality commitments

23%

Vendor use of data to train or improve AI

10%

Liability, indemnities or warranties

Full Report · Exhibit 26 and accompanying findings

An unselected option does not necessarily mean a review step or consideration is absent.

What information enters AI tools?

The information shared with a tool and the rules governing that use need to be considered together.

41%

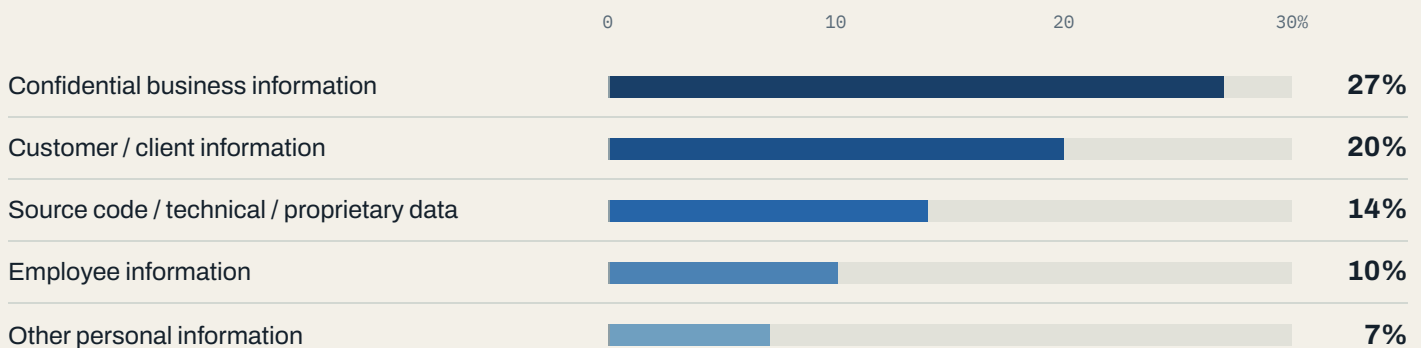
report employees sharing at least one of the five categories below with AI tools.

46%

of those reporting this sharing also report no clear information-sharing rules.

Information employees share with AI tools

Share of respondents · multiple answers allowed



Not all information in these categories is necessarily sensitive.

Full Report · Exhibit 27 and accompanying findings

When human review of AI output is required

57%

Before external-facing use

53%

Before client-facing work

46%

Before legal, financial, compliance or disclosure use

Percentage of respondents reporting that their organization requires human review before each type of use. Multiple answers allowed.

Full Report · Human-review findings, p.22

36% report AI taking actions for their organization, such as sending messages or updating records. Overall, **16%** report some actions without case-by-case approval.

Full Report · Exhibit 16

04 Where AI use goes next

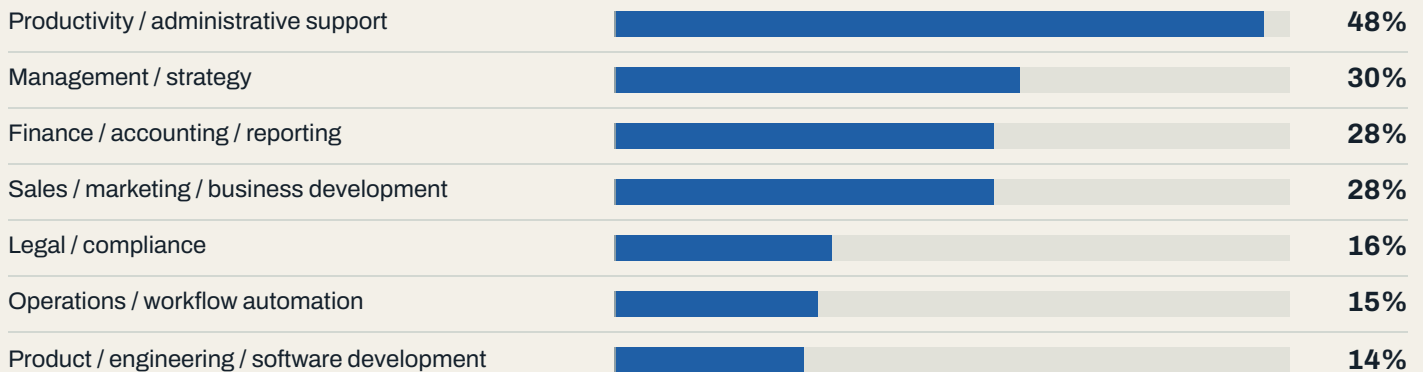
Expansion priorities often build on uses already in place. Policies and training are also prominent priorities for the coming year.

89%

expect their organization's AI use to increase moderately or significantly over the next 12 months.

Priorities for new or materially expanded AI use

For the next 12 months · up to three answers allowed · includes organizations not yet using AI



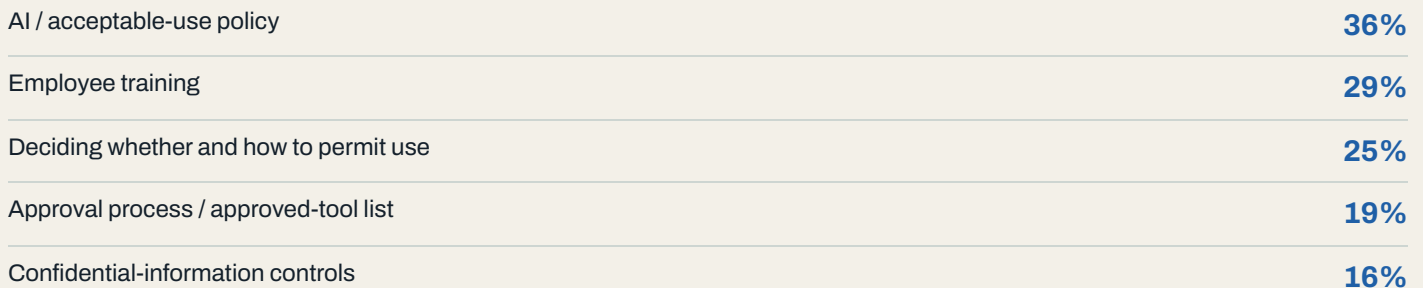
Full Report · Exhibit 31 and expected-growth findings, p.27

78% of those prioritizing productivity and administration already report use or pilots in that area.

This comparison is based on respondents who answered both the current-use and future-priority questions.

Priorities for managing AI use

For the next 12 months · up to three answers allowed · includes organizations not yet using AI



When asked which safeguards their organization already has in place, **14%** report employee training.

Full Report · Exhibits 32, 34 and 35

Five questions for leadership

These questions turn the findings into a discussion about your organization's use of AI. They are Prelia's practical considerations.

01 Where is AI creating useful value?

Identify the work it improves, the time and cost involved, and how quality and commercial outcomes will be assessed.

02 Which tools and accounts are being used?

Understand company subscriptions, individual accounts and embedded features, together with spending, permissions and approval responsibilities.

03 What information may employees share?

Match permitted information to the tool, vendor data-use rights, contractual protections, confidentiality commitments and applicable privacy obligations.

04 Which outputs and actions need human review?

Set review and approval points, especially for external work, decisions affecting individuals and actions in business systems. Identify who can stop a workflow and handle problems.

05 Who owns the next steps?

Assign responsibility for policies, vendor review, employee training and follow-up. Make the guidance usable in the work employees actually do.

Legal advice for your next move

Prelia helps startups, growth companies and established businesses make confident decisions, manage risk and pursue opportunities. From AI policies and commercial contracts to transactions, governance and disputes, we connect legal advice to your business priorities, with support for domestic and cross-border matters.

START A CONVERSATION

AI@prelia.com

For report enquiries, media requests or a discussion about your organization's AI plans. You can also contact your Prelia lawyer.

prelia.com

STATE OF AI PROJECT LEADS

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Explore the Full Report

The 30-page Full Report provides additional findings, subgroup comparisons and methodology. References in this briefing identify its exhibits or pages.

[Download the Full Report](#)

prelia.com/state-of-ai

About the survey

Who took part

The survey received 121 responses, including 113 complete and eight partial responses. Individuals answered about their organizations. Relevant partial answers are included. Each response carries equal weight.

Reading the findings

Participants were not randomly selected. Findings describe responding organizations as reported, rather than all Canadian businesses. A conventional margin of sampling error does not apply. Comparisons do not establish causes.

Time savings are respondents' estimates of the average per AI-using employee in a typical week. Spending is organizational AI spending in Canadian dollars over the prior 12 months.

How it was conducted

The voluntary online survey was offered in English and French through Prelia's client and professional contact network. Included responses date from August 3 to September 14, 2026. Most respondents' organizations are based in Eastern or Western Canada.

Reading the percentages

Percentages use the answers to each relevant question or set of questions. Some questions covered approved use, possible informal use or uncertainty about use; future priorities also include organizations not yet using AI. Rounding can affect totals. Multiple selections can exceed 100%. Combined findings count each respondent once.

Respondents could select up to five common tasks and up to three concerns or next-year priorities. An unselected option does not necessarily mean a practice is absent.

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