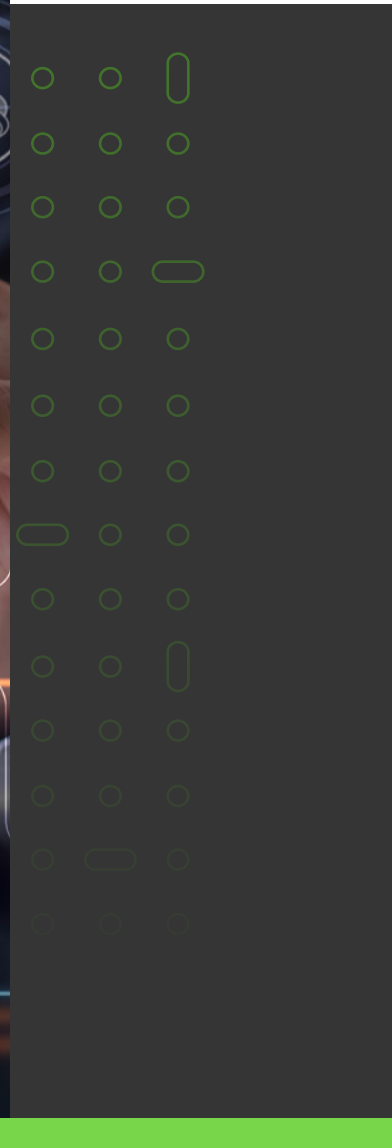


AI at Work in 2025:

How US Workers Feel About Artificial Intelligence
in Hiring, Skills, and the Future of Work



Executive Summary

Artificial intelligence (AI) is now embedded in how many of us work, learn, and get hired – but trust in how and where it’s used, hasn’t kept pace.

SHL’s AI and the US Workforce: 2025 Survey reveals a labor market divided between opportunity and unease. While younger generations embrace AI’s potential, most US workers fear it introduces bias, erodes the human element, and reshapes hiring into something less personal.

The findings paint a picture of a US workforce ready for skills-based change – but demanding fairness, transparency, and a balance between human judgment and AI precision.

Key takeaways

1. AI is reshaping trust: Employees are wary of bias and a lack of fairness, demanding transparency and human oversight
2. Employers face a credibility test: Companies that communicate transparently about AI use – and invest in skills development – will earn trust and attract talent
3. Organizations need to demonstrate how AI tools are validated and monitored for potential bias to build trust and credibility
4. Skills are the new currency in hiring: AI is accelerating the shift toward skills-based hiring and away from traditional credentials. Workers recognize this evolution but remain unsure what “AI skills” truly mean signaling a clear opportunity for employers to clarify, define, and support practical AI literacy
5. Trust will determine adoption: Employees’ willingness to embrace AI depends on how well leaders balance innovation with human oversight. Transparent, responsible, and human-centered design will separate organizations that thrive from those that face resistance
6. Fairness and transparency are the foundation of engagement: Bias and opacity are the top barriers to acceptance. Employees expect employers to audit AI systems regularly and communicate findings, treating fairness like a measurable performance goal
7. Generational attitudes shape AI readiness: Younger workers are eager and adaptable, while older generations remain cautious. Employers need tailored strategies that meet each group where they are, blending digital confidence with psychological safety and shared learning experiences.

Overview

In October 2025, SHL commissioned a national survey exploring how the workforce in the US feels about artificial intelligence (AI) in the workplace and in hiring. The study reveals a workforce torn between optimism and unease: intrigued by AI's potential yet deeply concerned about fairness, bias, and the loss of human touch.

1. The human-AI divide in hiring

- 54.6% (551) of employees in the US say they would be willing to interview with an AI agent – but 36.9% (372) would view the company as impersonal or uncaring, and 22.8% (230) would view the company as innovative and forward-thinking, and 14.9% (150) said they wouldn't take the job if it was offered to them
- 8.2% (83) of respondents prefer AI to review their job application or résumé, while 28.5% (288) favor a combination of humans and AI
- Over half of workers (56.4% | 569) prefer their job application be reviewed only by humans, citing humans' stronger ability to assess cultural fit, interpersonal skills and nuanced experiences (54.9% | 554)
- Two-thirds (66.0% | 666) believe companies should be required to disclose when AI is used in the hiring process

These findings show that US workers are intrigued by AI's potential in hiring but fear that efficiency may undermine or erode the human connection and fairness they value.

2. Trust, fairness, and the role of bias

- Over half (53.1% | 536) of US-based employees fear AI will cause a loss of human touch at work
- 58.6% (591) believe AI is increasing bias, not reducing it
- 26.0% of employees express low (106) or no trust (54) in their employer to use AI responsibly. In contrast, 47.5% (292) trust their employer somewhat, and 26.5% (163) trust them very much, signaling that trust exists but remains fragile

- Only 32.5% (328) say they are excited about AI's capabilities in the workplace
- 39.1% (395) worry AI will cause job losses and 37.8% (381) are concerned about privacy and data security issues

These findings reveal that trust in AI remains fragile with the majority of people wary of AI's use in the workplace. Worker optimism is tempered by fears of job loss, rising skill demands, and the disappearance of human oversight.

3. Learning, skills, and readiness

- Nearly half (47.3% | 291) of employees in the US have been encouraged by employers to use AI at work primarily for data analysis (59.8% | 174) and writing (50.2% | 146)
- One-in-five (20.6% | 208) feel pressured to learn new skills to keep up
- Interestingly, a significant proportion, 24.8% (250), remain unsure what AI skills actually are
- Of those attending college, 23.5% (157) learned about AI, 76.5% (511) did not
- 48.0% (484) would take online courses or certifications, while 28.6% (289) said they would be willing to dedicate personal time outside work to learning AI skills
- 44.8% (452) say they are less likely to apply to a job post that requires AI skills

US employees are cautiously engaging with AI at work, mainly for data and writing tasks. They're willing to upskill, but many lack clarity on what "AI skills" are and how to develop them, which may hold them back from applying for roles that require them.

4. AI and the employee experience

- 57.7% (582) of US-based employees want a human manager to make decisions about their job performance and careers, rather than 25.9% (261) a human and AI, or AI only (10.0% | 101)
- 44.7% (451) are uncomfortable with AI analyzing emails, calls, or messages to evaluate performance

- 50.5% (510) would feel uneasy and skeptical of leaders who rely on AI to make business decisions – arguing leaders should leverage their own expertise and judgment
- Employees are divided on coworkers' use of AI, with roughly equal shares feeling supportive (20.4% | 206), uneasy (23.5 % | 237), or skeptical (20.2% | 204), while a smaller portion remain neutral (26.1% | 263) or indifferent (9.8% | 99)
- Concerns about coworkers using AI center on fairness and skill; many feel it diminishes the true skills required to do the job (25.9% | 114), and it shifts effort away from the employee so they're not doing their job, AI is (29.5% | 130)

These views highlight a tension between productivity gains and perceived fairness, emphasizing the importance of human judgment. AI is seen as both a helper and a threat to authenticity at work, with trust and accountability remaining central to the employee experience.

5. AI's impact on the hiring experience

- Job seekers report that AI tools are about as influential in helping them secure a job (42.6% | 183) as embellishing their résumés or interview responses (42.8% | 184), with a small portion (14.7% | 63) saying neither had an impact
- During 2025, nine in 10 (88.6% | 381) US workers were asked about their skills as part of job interviews, five in 10 (47.0% | 202) were asked specifically about AI skills. Comparatively, six in 10 (61.4% | 264) were asked about their degree
- 38.1% (164) of jobseekers cited AI as helping them save time preparing resumes or cover letters. Notably:
 - 33.0% (142) believe AI helped them to secure an interview
 - 24.0% (103) stated that they took rejection less personally because they used AI to edit or write their résumé
- Jobseekers said direct applications (47.2% | 203), LinkedIn applications (34.7% | 149) and referrals (26.7% /115) were most influential for securing interviews

AI is increasingly shaping the hiring experience, helping jobseekers prepare materials, boost confidence, and even recover from rejections more easily. At the same time, job interviews are shifting away from formal credentials, with employers prioritizing skills, reinforcing that skills are the universal currency in hiring.

6. How AI challenges worker perceptions and ethics

- Interestingly, 52.1% (206) of full-time employees would feel more guilty landing a job because of AI assistance than for lying in an interview
- Most US workers want mutual disclosure:
 - 51.6% (521) believe job candidates should reveal when they used AI in preparing for the hiring process
 - 66.0% (666) believe employers should reveal when AI is used in the hiring process
- About a quarter (23.5% | 120) of employees are skeptical of its use, worrying about the accuracy or quality of AI-informed decisions
- 10.0% (101) would prefer AI to make decisions about their job performance and careers

The data reveals that AI introduces ethical considerations for both job seekers and employers, with many workers feeling conflicted about using it and emphasizing transparency during the hiring process. Overall, there's a clear expectation that AI's role in decision-making should be openly disclosed to maintain trust and fairness.

7. The job market in 2025/26

- 67.1% (677) of employees in the US believe AI is decreasing the number of job openings
- Nearly half (45% | 454) of job seekers report being “ghosted” by employers at least once during the recruitment process, with 60.4% (274) workers stating they lost interest in a company after being ghosted
- 29.1% (125) have filled out over 100 job applications in the past year, and 18.8% (81) have been applying for six months or longer
- 45.1% (194) have lowered salary expectations, and 40.7% (175) have changed industries to find work

The data paints a picture of a job market that feels tougher, less personal, with many workers feeling the squeeze from AI-driven reductions. Job seekers are adjusting expectations, changing industries, and experiencing burnout.

8. Generational divide

- 65.6% (124) of Millennials and 62.6% (117) of Gen Z are open to interviewing with an AI agent, compared with only 36.3% (69) of those 65+
- Younger workers are more comfortable with AI analyzing their work; 50.3% (95) of Millennials, 47.6% (89) of Gen Z versus 11.1% (21) of Baby Boomers
- Older generations show stronger skepticism about AI: 70.5% (134) of those 65+ believe AI increases bias, the highest among the age groups. And 70.0% (133) of this group fear the loss of human touch
- Most generations prefer AI training served to them online or through employer-sponsored programs, rather than attending conferences or seeking mentoring or coaching. Younger generations – Gen Alpha, Gen Z and Millennials – are more likely to give up their personal time outside of work to acquire AI skills
- 47.1% (89) of Millennials say AI excites them for its time-saving potential, while 40.5% (77) of older workers want to return to a pre-AI workplace

The data reveals a clear generational divide in attitudes toward AI: younger workers are more open and enthusiastic, while older generations remain skeptical, concerned about bias and the loss of human connection. Sharp variations across age groups will shape how organizations approach training and adoption.

Conclusion

AI is not a technology issue – it's a trust, capability, and culture issue.

It is reshaping every stage of the employee lifecycle – from how people apply for jobs to how they're measured and managed. But as this research shows, technology without transparency erodes trust.

There's no doubt that AI will change work, but employers now face a pivotal choice: will they implement AI to replace people or to unlock their peoples' potential and productivity.

The future of AI at work will be defined not by its capability, but by the trust it earns.

Insight to Action

1. Earn Trust – Explain the ‘Why’ Behind AI

Trust in AI starts with understanding. Employees and job candidates will be more accepting of AI when they know how and why it’s being used. Leaders should communicate openly about the purpose, limits, and validation of AI tools – particularly in hiring, promotions, and performance evaluations.

2. Keep Humans in the Loop

AI should amplify human judgment, not replace it. The data shows employees want AI-supported decisions, not AI-driven ones. Ensure human oversight remains visible at every decision-making stage of the talent lifecycle – from candidate review to development – to preserve fairness and psychological safety.

3. Reframe ‘AI Skills’ as Human + Technical Capabilities

The future of work is about synergy, not substitution. Confusion about what “AI skills” actually mean creates anxiety and exclusion. Organizations should help reframe AI literacy as a blend of digital, analytical, and social-emotional skills – curiosity, adaptability, ethical judgment, and collaboration, alongside tool proficiency. Helping to develop both behavioral readiness and the technical skills will boost confidence, and likelihood of increased productivity and efficiency.

4. Invest in Structured, Supported Learning

Capability grows when learning feels safe, not mandated. Employees want employer-led pathways, not personal pressure. Make it clear that AI is a tool for learning and boosting productivity. And rather than expecting employees to learn alone, create formal AI upskilling programs that integrate into the flow of work – supported by coaching, peer learning, and psychological safety to experiment.

5. Audit Fairness Continuously

Ethical AI isn’t a checkbox; it’s an ongoing calibration. Bias concerns and perceptions of fairness remain the biggest barrier to trust, which also impact engagement, intent to stay, and acceptance of change. Leaders should treat bias and fairness validations like financial audits – systematic, transparent, and recurring – by implementing regular bias and impact reviews across AI-enabled systems, documenting mitigation steps and sharing outcomes internally.

6. Measure Skills, Not Signals

Objective data reduces bias and rebuilds trust. When people feel AI obscures fairness, skills-based assessment restores it. HR and recruiters should shift focus from résumé filters and credentials to validated skills assessments of potential and ability.

7. Make AI an Engagement Story – Not a Compliance Project

People support what they help shape. Frame AI adoption as an opportunity for growth and inclusion, not surveillance or cost-cutting. Engage employees early through feedback, pilot programs, and storytelling that highlights success through human + AI collaboration.

8. Translate AI Use into a Clear Employee Value Proposition

Link AI initiatives to employee-centered outcomes. Explain not just what AI does, but what it does for them. Employees want to know how AI helps their career, not just the business. Communicate AI's role in creating equal access to opportunities – including skills-based assessment, personalized development insights and internal mobility.

9. Success Equals Trust, Not Just Efficiency

The success metric for AI in HR is confidence. The survey shows that efficiency doesn't equal acceptance. Monitor trust in engagement surveys – measuring how confident employees feel in AI-enabled decisions – as KPIs alongside speed or cost.

10. Build a Culture of Transparent AI

Just as algorithms need to be explainable, so should talent decisions. Whenever AI contributes to a hiring, development, or mobility decisions, explain it in human terms: what inputs were used, how they were weighted, and how outcomes are verified. Demonstrating transparency in decision-making, signals to employees that AI is being guided by shared human values.

Learn more about the survey findings and AI at Work in 2025, and access guidance on how transparent AI in talent assessment can drive internal mobility, unlock new career paths, and help close long-standing skills gaps in hiring and advancement.

Methodology

SHL's AI at Work in 2025 Survey was conducted to understand how workers in the US perceive and experience AI in hiring, development, and internal mobility. The survey explored levels of trust, perceptions, skills, and attitudes toward AI-enabled decision-making across different demographics.

- **Total respondents:** 1,009 adults residing in the US
- **Field period:** October 2025
- **Research partner:** Propeller Insights, a market research firm based in Los Angeles, commissioned by SHL
- The survey combined closed-ended multiple-choice questions with attitudinal Likert scales and limited open-text responses to capture sentiment
- **Sampling method:** Online quantitative survey using a nationally representative panel of employed, unemployed, and job-seeking adults aged 18–65+ years across the US reflecting workforce demographics
- **Margin of error:** 5 percent at the 95 percent confidence level

Respondent Profile

- **Employment status:** full-time employees, part-time workers, freelancers, students, homemakers, retirees, and military personnel
- **Generations:** Gen Alpha (18–24 years), Gen Z (25–34), Millennials (35–44), Gen X (45–54), Baby Boomers (55–65+)
- **Gender identity:** representative balance of male, female, and non-conforming respondents
- **Sectors:** professional services, manufacturing, technology, healthcare, education, retail, and public sector

Limitations

As with all online surveys, responses rely on self-reporting and may be influenced by social-desirability bias. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding or multi-select questions. The findings are intended to represent attitudes and perceptions.



SHL provides trusted Talent Intelligence that empowers organizations to make confident data-driven people decisions. Built on 45+ years of expertise, our innovative assessment solutions combine proven behavioral science, predictive analytics, and transparent AI to deliver objective, actionable insights across the talent lifecycle – from hiring and development to internal mobility. We help leaders measure skills and potential, unlock performance, and mobilize talent to drive transformation.